

**Structure**

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**25.0 OBJECTIVES**

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In this unit we are going to introduce to you the concept of tribe in the Indian context and discuss some of the most characteristic external features of the social structure of the Indian tribes. After you have studied this, you should be able to

- indicate what is meant by social structure in relation to the tribes in India
- describe important external features of their social structure
- provide suitable examples from Indian tribes illustrating the external features of their social structure.

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## 25.1 INTRODUCTION

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Block 6 on Tribes in India aims at familiarising you with various aspects of tribal life in our country. In this unit, we have described external features of social structure of the tribal groups. For this purpose, the unit first discusses in general the concept of social structure and then examines the concept of tribe in the Indian context. Next, the unit classifies tribes in India by their geographic distribution, racial and linguistic affinities and demographic features. It also discusses the issue of isolation from and interaction with other groups. Further it describes economic pursuits followed by various tribal populations. These external features of their social structure act like boundary markers and give the tribals identity. Finally, the unit also describes the socio-economic changes, affecting social structure of these groups.

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## 25.2 SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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Social structure is one of those concepts in social sciences, which has been discussed at length and often the views of the different authors differ significantly. The concept is important enough so that it cannot be given up. Whether by social structure we mean actually existing relations among persons, or consistent constant groups in society, or a system of expectation, or a set of ideal rules or a mental construct, we agree that social structure refers to what is persistent and tend to recur in the society. For example, if we meet a stranger on the road and ask for some information, that relationship with the stranger will not be considered a dimension of structure but our relationship with our parents, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts will be and so also our rights, duties and obligations arising out of those relationships. If these are infringed, curtailed and violated then there has to be some mechanism to bring things to order.

Without order no social structure can work. In the process of restoring order some changes may occur. For example, among the Khasi, a tribe of Meghalaya, the clan title runs from mother to daughter. It is the youngest daughter who is the custodian of family property and it is the mother's brother who should manage the property and look after his nieces and nephews. But now the social context in which the Khasi life has changed. The Khasi people come in contact with many other people with different customs and practices and are exposed to modern communication media, knowledge and institutions. Thus the Khasi men like other **patrilineal** groups would also like to have property and manage their own family rather than that of their sisters. The result is that the Khasi **matrilineal** system is changing.

In other words, although a person is born into a given social structure, it is not static. In order that a social structure is able to maintain itself, its members should be replenished, old will die, young should take their places. There should be some mechanism through which knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, customs and practices of the community are transmitted to the young ones. As we have seen in the case of the Khasi, there is internal dynamics but there is also a pressure of external factors on their social structure. Although geographical, racial and linguistic factors are external they continuously interact with the internal factors of the social structure in complex ways and so also is the case with the size of the population and the way people earn their living. How far a people are isolated from others and what

is the nature of their interaction with others are equally important factors. The factors, both those, which are within and without, are continuously in interaction with one another in a variety of ways. Such is the dynamic concept of social structure. Let us now turn to the concept of tribe in the Indian context.

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## 25.3 TRIBES IN INDIA

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In India, 427 groups had been recognised as scheduled tribes in the year 1981. They formed approximately 8.08 per cent of the total Indian population. In absolute numbers, according to 1981 census, their population was 51,628,638. By 1991 their number reached 67,758,000, around 8.10 percent of the total population. Their decadal growth during 1981-1991 was 31.64 percent, which was higher than the national growth (23.51 percent) (Census of India 1991, Final Population Totals). In the year 2003, there are 533 tribes as per notified schedule under Article 342, with largest of them being in Orissa (62) (Annual Report, Ministry of Rural Development). Who are these people?

The term tribe is derived from the Latin word 'tribus'. Earlier Romans used this term to designate the divisions in the society. Later use suggests that it meant poor people. The present popular meaning in English language was acquired during the expansion of colonialism particularly in Asia and Africa. The present popular meaning of a 'tribe' in India is a category of people, included in the list of the scheduled tribes. Tribal populations are relatively isolated and closed groups, forming homogeneous units of production and consumption. Being backward in economic terms, they were and are exploited by the non-tribals. Let us examine how the category of people, known as the scheduled tribes, came into being.

### 25.3.1 In Ancient and Medieval Periods

In none of the Indian languages there was a term for tribes. In earlier times, they were known by their specific names such as the Gond, the Santhal, the Bhil etc. In modern Indian languages, new words like *Vanyajati*, *Vanvasi*, *Pahari*, *Adimjati*, *Adivasi*, *Anusuchit jati*, have been coined to designate the people called as tribe. Though much work on the history of tribes has not been done, the names of tribes like the Kurumba, the Irula, the Paniya in South India; the Asur, the Saora, the Oraon, the Gond, the Santhal, the Bhil in Central India; the Bodo, the Ahom in North-East India, occur in old classical Indian literature. Some of the tribal populations, like the Gond in Central India, the Ahom in North-East India, had large kingdoms. The Banjara, a nomadic trading community, covered a wide tract in Western and Central India. In brief, in ancient and medieval periods of India it appears that the so-called tribal populations interacted with other populations in a variety of ways in the region of their habitation.

### 25.3.2 During the British Rule

The modern phase of the tribal history begins with the advent of the British. The British were keen to establish their rule in all parts of the country and were also looking for resources for their industries. In the process, vast areas of India were opened up and brought under centralised administration. They not only levied new rents for land but also made new land settlements. The areas, which were relatively secluded but rich in natural resources, experienced entry of a new variety of people, namely forest contractors, labourers, officials, neo-settlers, moneylenders etc. In

many places the indigenous populations resented new regulations, new levies and new settlers in their areas and they rebelled.

At this stage for a variety of reasons, the British thought of protecting the indigenous populations by bringing a regulation in 1833. Certain parts of Chotanagpur were declared as non-regulated areas, which meant that normal rules were not applicable on such areas for example, outsiders were not allowed to acquire land in these areas. The administrators of such areas acquired vast discretionary powers. Later on this policy was extended to other areas too. In 1874, the British passed Scheduled Area Regulation Act and in due course the idea of a distinct and special arrangement in such areas got accepted. In the meanwhile, the concept of a tribe as a social category was emerging, which was meant to distinguish them from the Hindu, the Muslim, and other organised religious groups through an over simplified assumption that the tribes were animist while the latter were not. By the Act of 1919, the idea of wholly excluded area and partially excluded area emerged for some of the areas where tribal populations were concentrated. These areas were excluded from the application of normal rules. The 1935 Act incorporated these provisions and a policy of reservation emerged for the people so notified for it.

While these policies were emerging, the British Government was still not sure how to classify the people, who were neither Hindu nor Muslim. Their confusion is apparent from the terms they used to classify tribal populations in their decennial censuses. In different censuses the terms used were animists, hill and forest tribe, primitive tribes, and tribe.

### 25.3.3 In Independent India

Following Independence, the policy of protection and development for the population identified as tribe has been made into a constitutional obligation. A list of tribes was adopted for this purpose. In 1950, this list contained 212 names, which was modified by successive presidential orders. In 2003, the list contained 533 names. The Constitution, however, does not provide a definition of a tribe. The people who have been listed in the Constitution and mentioned in successive presidential orders are called scheduled tribes. This is the administrative concept of a tribe. In February 2004, the Government of India circulated a Draft National Policy on Tribes. It has now become a subject of debate among scholars.

About the geographical distribution, racial and linguistic features and demographic characteristics of tribes we will discuss in sections 25.4, 25.5 and 25.6. Here, we will now turn to the views of scholars who have studied tribal populations in India.

#### Activity 1

What is the word for 'tribe' in your language? Write at least five names of Indian leaders who belong to tribal groups. Give reasons for their fame.

### 25.3.4 Understanding of the Concept of Tribe by Some Scholars

Academics too have been making their efforts to define tribe. Tribes have been defined as a group of indigenous people with shallow history, having common name, language and territory, tied by strong kinship bonds, practising endogamy, having distinct customs, rituals and beliefs, simple social rank and political organisation, common ownership of resources and technology. Such definitions are not very helpful because when the situation of tribes is examined carefully not

only do we find a lot of variations in their life styles but also many of these features are shared by the caste people. This raises the problem as to how to distinguish them from castes.

There have been other conceptual attempts to define tribes. They have been considered as a stage in the social and cultural evolution. Some others have considered that the production and consumption among the tribes are household based and unlike peasants they are not part of a wider economic, political and social network. Bailey (1960) has suggested that the only solution to the problem of definition of tribes in India is to conceive of a **continuum** of which at one end are tribes and at the other are castes. The tribes have **segmentary, egalitarian** system and are not mutually inter-dependent, as are castes in a system of organic solidarity. They have direct access to land and no intermediary is involved between them and land.

Sinha (1965) too thinks of tribe and caste in terms of a continuum but his ideas are more elaborate and he brings in the concept of civilisation. For him, the tribe is ideally defined in terms of its isolation from the networks of social relations and cultural communications of the centres of civilisation. In their isolation the tribal societies are sustained by relatively primitive subsistence technology such as shifting cultivation and hunting and gathering, and maintain an egalitarian segmentary social system guided entirely by non-literate ethnic tradition (Sinha 1982: 4).

It has been suggested that wherever civilisations exist, tribes can be described, defined and analysed only in contrast to that civilisation which it may fight, serve, mimic or adopt but cannot ignore. In India, there are numerous examples of tribes transforming themselves into the larger entity of the caste system; others have become Christian or Muslim. They also join the ranks of peasantry and in modern times become wage-labourers in plantations, mining and other industries. Thus, in our concept of tribe we should not overlook these changing aspects.

Having briefly discussed the various issues involved in defining tribes, for our purpose, we will take here those people as tribes who have been termed as scheduled tribes.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Write, in one line, the modern terms for tribes in Indian languages.  
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- ii) Write, in five lines, how the idea of scheduled tribes emerged in India?  
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- iii) Discuss, in ten lines, how different scholars have defined the term tribe?  
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### 25.4 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

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Considering the widespread distribution of tribes all over the country it is necessary to group them into broad geographical regions. On the basis of ecology, it is possible to group them into five distinct regions namely, Himalayan region (with tribes like the Gaddi, the Jaunsari, the Naga etc.), Middle India (with tribes like the Munda, the Santal etc.), Western India (with tribes like the Bhil, the Grasia), South Indian Region (with tribes like the Toda, the Chenchu etc.) and the Islands Region (with tribes like the Onge in Bay of Bengal, the Minicoyans in Arabian Sea). The following map (figure 25.1) shows the location of some of the tribal groups in India.

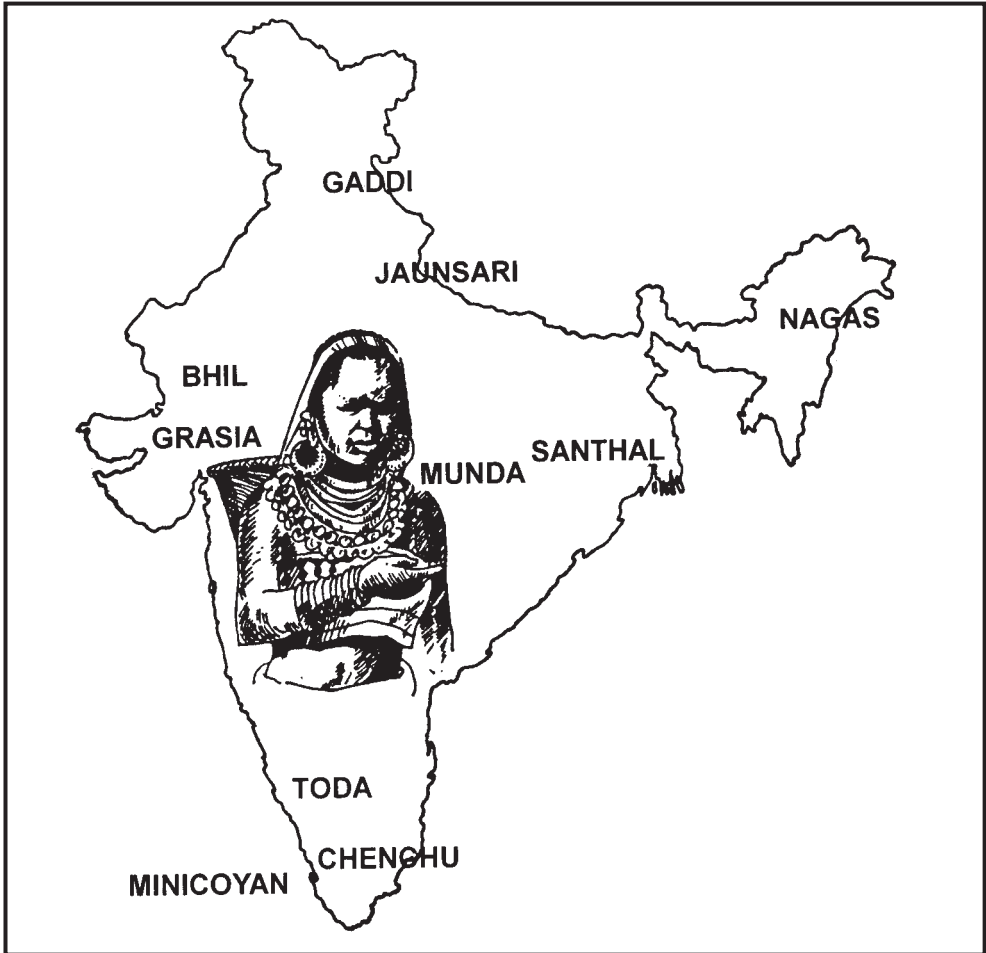


Fig. 25.1: Location of some tribal groups in India

## 25.5 RACIAL AND LINGUISTIC AFFINITIES

The tribal populations in India have a long history. They have migrated to distant places in pre-historic and historic times and therefore, we find that almost all races of the Indian population are represented among them. Physical features do indicate the stock to which a population belongs and may also throw some light on their migration, the route they may have taken, and the traditions they carry with them.

### 25.5.1 Three Main Racial Divisions

Here, we discuss, in broad and general terms, the racial features and linguistic affiliations of Indian tribes.

On the basis of racial features, Guha (1935) considers that they belong to the following three races.

#### a) **The Proto-Australoids**

This group is characterised by dark skin colour, sunken nose and lower forehead. These features are found among the Gond (Madhya Pradesh), the Munda (Chotanagpur), the Ho (Bihar) etc.

#### b) **The Mongoloids**

This group is characterised by light skin colour; head and face are broad; the nose bridge is very low and their eyes are slanting with a fold on the upper eye lid. These features are found among the Bhotiya (Central Himalayas), the Wanchu (Arunachal Pradesh), the Naga (Nagaland), the Khasi (Meghalaya), etc.

#### c) **The Negrito**

This group is characterised by dark skin colour (tending to look like blue), round head, broad nose and frizzle hair. These features are found among the Kadar (Kerala), the Onge (Little Andaman), the Jarwa (Andaman Islands), etc.

### 25.5.2 Linguistic Affiliations

Linguistically the situation is far more complex. According to a recent estimate the tribal people speak 105 different languages and 225 subsidiary languages. This itself indicates what great variety is found among them. For languages are highly structured and in many ways reflect the social structure and the values of the society. However, for the purpose of clarity and understanding, the languages have been classified into a number of families. The languages spoken by the tribes in India can be classified into four major families of Languages. These are, with examples, as follows:

- 1) **Austro-Asiatic family:** There are two branches of this family, namely, Mon-Khmer branch and Munda branch. Languages of the first branch are spoken by Khasi and Nicobari tribals. Languages of Munda branch are Santhali, Gondi, Kharia etc.
- 2) **Tibeto-Chinese family:** There are two sub-families of this type, namely Siamese-Chinese sub-family and Tibeto-Burman sub-family. In extreme North-Eastern frontier of India Khamti is one specimen of the Siamese-Chinese sub-family. The Tibeto-Burman sub-family is further sub-divided into

several branches. Tribals of Nagaland and Lepcha of Darjeeling speak variants of Tibeto-Burman languages.

- 3) **Indo-European family:** Tribal languages such as Hajong and Bhili are included in this group.
- 4) **Dravidian family:** Languages of Dravidian family are, for example, spoken by Yeruva of Mysore, Oraon of Chotanagpur.

This broad classification does not necessarily mean that there is mutual intelligibility among the speakers of different languages within a family. For example, among the Naga there are at least 50 different groups, each one of them has a speech of its own and quite often the speakers of one speech do not understand the speech of others.

Let us now turn to the population-size of tribes in India. But before discussing demographic features, complete Activity 2.

### Activity 2

- a) Identify the racial division to which you belong. Are people in the area of your domicile from the same or different racial group? If different, describe their physical features.
- b) Identify the stock of language to which your language belongs. Do people in the Area of your domicile speak the same or different language? If different, name the stock of language to which their languages belong.

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## 25.6 DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES

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Social structure is closely related with the size of the group. An optimum size is absolutely necessary for a group to replicate itself socially and biologically. A group must produce enough number of people to replace its members of either sex and of different age groups. This would ensure physical continuity of the group but it also needs human beings for maintaining its social structure. The human beings have knowledge and skill for production, values, beliefs, and the ability to relate to the nature as well as to human beings; norms and customs to lead an organised life and many other concerns. All this can be maintained, replenished and transmitted if there are enough human beings but it must also have adequate balance between sexes and age groups. At one time, the Toda of the Nilgiri were facing biological and social crisis because their number had fallen to a mere 475 and there were not enough females in reproductive age. Biologically it was facing extinction, socially it could not maintain its various institutions. It is like in a football game a team not having enough players to man the different positions. The game cannot go on. In the same predicament are the Great Andamanese in Andaman Islands. Their total population is just in two digits.

On the other side, there are tribes like the *Gond* of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, the Bhil of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh and the Santal of Bihar, Orissa, and West Bengal whose population runs into lakhs. There are a very large number of groups which fall in the intermediate category like the Dubla in Gujarat, the Chenchu, the Irula in South, the Boro-Kachari in the North-



East. Then there are small tribes like the Toda and the Kota in the Nilgiris, the Birhor in Bihar, etc. The larger tribal groups are spread over into a number of states and, therefore, the same group is subjected to different policies and programmes, which ultimately influence their social structure. For example, the Kurumba, a small tribe in south are distributed in Kerala, Tamilnadu and Karnataka states. Not only are they called by different names in different states but also are exposed to different development programmes. In each state they are given education in the official language of the State. In Kurumba's case it is Malayalam, Tamil and Kannada in respective states. Their own language has become less important. This has far reaching consequences for their society. Besides many other changes, they have become endogamous, that is, they marry within the Kurumba group of the State of their habitation. Clearly the factors of isolation and interaction are quite crucial in describing social structures of tribal populations.

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## 25.7 ISOLATION FROM AND INTERACTION WITH OTHER GROUPS

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The issue of isolation and interaction is of critical importance in understanding social formation among the tribes. The idea that the tribes have always remained isolated is not based on history. Migrations in India were frequent for political, economic and ecological reasons. We have already stated that some of the tribes had formed large kingdoms. Even the most isolated groups were part of a wider network of economic relations.

### Some examples of Interaction

- i) The Jenu-Kuruba, a food gathering tribe of Karnataka, were adept in catching and training elephants and perhaps were the main suppliers of elephants to the temples as well as to the armies of different states. Many of them supplied various kinds of forest goods within their region and in return took the goods of their necessity. Many of them paid taxes, rents or whatever was levied on them. Some also participated in the regional religious practices. (For more details on Jenu Korba see the video program, 'simple societies' produced by the Electronic Media Production Centre of IGNOU).
- ii) The Toda of the Nilgiri in Tamilnadu worshipped the deity at Nanjangud in Karnataka, some 140 km away across dense forest. Those who practised settled cultivation had varying degrees of contact with neighbouring peasants and castes.
- iii) The Munda in the nineteenth century were socially and economically integrated with the neighbouring populations.

Ghurye (1943) calls the tribal populations of India as imperfectly integrated segment of the Hindus. Bose (1971) discusses how the Hindus absorbed the tribal population in their fold. There are tribes, which are fully integrated with the wider social, economic, political and religious framework, and others are so integrated in varying degrees. Then, there are tribes playing the role of bridge and buffer to their neighbours. Let us see what this means.

### The Role of Bridge and Buffer

In North-East India, the tribes played the role of bridge and buffer to their neighbours. That is some tribes allowed two powerful neighbours to interact through

them, that was the role of a bridge. In some other cases they kept the two powerful groups separated, that was the role of buffer.

The Apa Tani of Arunachal Pradesh practised highly specialised terraced cultivation. They were also good in making swords, knives and in weaving. The Dafla, a neighbouring tribe, took rice, swords, knives and textile from them and in return gave them pigs, dogs, fowls, tobacco, cotton, etc. Often they fought because of uneven exchange for the goods they transacted.

There are only a few tribes, which are totally isolated like the Jarwa and the Sentinelese in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. In their case, too, it appears that their isolation is a later development, as they are not the original settlers of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Thus, if we take a long view of the history we find that the tribal populations have been interacting within their regions in a variety of ways. They also developed regional patterns of interaction. In the process of interaction they contributed to the development of Indian civilisation.

For a people geographical distribution gives a sense of space and belonging to it; features like racial, linguistic, demographic, and a group's interaction with others give them an identity, which distinguishes them from others. These are elements that shape the structure of a society. After discussing these features, we will discuss economic activities of tribal populations in India.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Give geographical distribution of Indian tribes. Illustrate each zone with suitable examples. Use six lines for your answer.

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- ii) Classify Indian tribes in terms of their physical features and languages spoken by them. Use seven lines for your answer.

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- iii) Why demographic factor is important in considering social structure of a population? Use ten lines for your answer.

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iv) Give two examples of relatively isolated tribes, which are part of a wider network of economic relations. Use ten lines for your answer.

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## 25.8 ECONOMIC PURSUITS

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How a group satisfies its material needs has far reaching consequences in almost all aspects of life. Some scholars would say that it has determining qualities. In order to satisfy material wants, resources have to be located and means to exploit them have to be designed. For this appropriate technology and organisation are required so that with minimum efforts maximum products can be obtained on a continued basis. Also the product so obtained has to be appropriately controlled and distributed. People develop rights and claims over the resources and products; these eventually provide basis for social and political power. However, there are always constraints on resources and ecology, which technology tries to resolve. For example, those who live entirely on food gathering require larger land base to support themselves than those who live on coast. The sea offers immense store of food. Similarly those who live on higher altitude cannot practice settled agriculture. They have to be nomadic because of the severity of the climate and have to be traders like the Bhotiya or pastoralists like the Gujjar. Such groups cannot also sustain large populations. In comparison to them, the settled agriculturists have the

capacity to produce more than they require. The surplus they produce can be exchanged for various other goods and services and may lead to specialisation in various activities. These may eventually develop into elaborate rules for exchange.

On the basis of their economy, the tribes of India can be classified into the following seven categories.

### **25.8.1 Food Gatherers and Hunters**

Food gathering, hunting and trapping animals were the first adaptations mankind made and it lasted for thousands of years before being taken over by animal husbandry and agriculture and then by industrialisation. The changes in human society were very rapid once human being learnt to produce food. The pace of these changes got accelerated with industrialisation. Now there are very few tribes on the mainland who live exclusively by food collection and hunting. However, the Cholanaicken of Kerala present a classical example of this kind of economy.

### **25.8.2 Shifting Cultivators**

Several specialised techniques are used in this form of cultivation. Essentially, it means selecting a plot of forest land, cutting the trees and plants on it allowing them to dry and burning them, after which the seeds may be sown. This way a plot may be cultivated for a few years and then may be abandoned for several years. Such cultivation is widely practised in the tribal regions of North-East India. The Khasi of Meghalaya practise this form of cultivation. Of course, now they engage themselves in several other occupations. Shifting cultivation is practised by many tribes in Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, but as the restrictions on forests have increased and there is not enough land to shift, this form of cultivation has decreased considerably.

### **25.8.3 Settled Agriculture**

Settled agriculture is practised by a majority of tribal population in middle, western and southern regions of the country. It is the primary source of subsistence for them. However, the technique of cultivation practised by the tribes is generally simple. The tribes having a tradition of agriculture are being increasingly drawn into the economic, social, political network of the wider society.

### **25.8.4 Artisans**

The number of tribes subsisting on crafts like basket making, tool making, spinning and weaving is small. Such tribes either combine these occupations with agriculture or may totally depend upon craft. Either way, they have to exchange their products for food articles through market or by establishing exchange relations with some other tribes. The Kota of the Nilgiris has exchange relations with the Badaga for agriculture products. The Birhor of Bihar make ropes and in the past were nomadic. The population of such groups is small. The members of the group learn the skill of the craft in the process of growing up. The craftwork is done at the family level but raw material may be collected at the community level. For example, the basket makers may go collectively for obtaining bamboos but basket making may be a family enterprise.

### **25.8.5 The Pastoralists and Cattle Herders**

The classical examples of the pastoralist tribe are the Toda in the Nilgiris and the Gujjar, the Bakarwal and Gaddi in Himachal Pradesh. Although the Toda have a

fixed abode, in certain season they move their buffaloes for pasture. The buffaloes are individually owned but certain tasks related to the buffaloes and their dairies are collectively done. Like artisans they too exchange the dairy products for other items of their use particularly agriculture products. In the past, the Toda had exchange relations with the Badaga.

### 25.8.6 The Folk Artists

There are a variety of groups who carve out a living for themselves by performing acrobatic feats, entertaining people and providing some services to their patrons. Some of them lead nomadic life and others inhabit villages but periodically move out to their clients. Movements are planned and organised. Movement is always performed in small units comprising a few families, closely related to each other. The essential feature of their economy is that their resource base is other groups of human beings. The Pradhan, a tribe of Madhya Pradesh, are the official genealogists to the Gond. Their women act as midwives to the Gond and also tattoo Gond girls. The Pradhan are dependent upon the Gond, but the visit of a Pradhan to his patron's house is an occasion for rejoicing, for recollecting the events of the intervening period since his last visit, recording of births etc. The Pradhan sing, recite poetry and are experts in story telling. They regale their patrons with ready wit.

#### Activity 3

Describe various economic pursuits of the people in your district. Take help of section 25.8 in grouping these activities in appropriate categories.

### 25.8.7 Wage Labourers

At the turn of the present century large chunks of tribal territories came under plantations. Mining and industrial development also increased in tribal areas. Many of the tribal people had to leave their traditional occupations and seek employment in these enterprises as wage labourers. The tribals of Chotanagpur were taken to North-East India to work on tea plantations. The Santhal have been employed in coal mines of Bihar. This was indeed a major change. From a subsistence economy they were pushed into cash-oriented industrial economy which had its impact on their society.

### 25.8.8 Recent Economic Changes

The economic scene in the tribal regions has been changing. The economic changes may be listed as follows:

- i) Forest resources have dwindled and forests have been increasingly brought under reservation. They are no more under the control of the tribal people except in certain areas of North-East India.
- ii) Tribal people have lost a lot of land to more experienced agriculturists, to industries, and for big projects like hydro-electric reservoirs
- iii) A number of big industries like steel plants have been established in their areas. So, on the one hand, they have been displaced by such projects and, on the other, they have been given employment as wage labourers.
- iv) Penetration of market economy resulted in the tribals producing for market rather than for meeting their own needs.

- v) Development measures are designed to promote settled agriculture and intensive cultivation.

All these and several other factors have made the tribal people more and more a part of the wider economic network. They now produce commodities for market and not for self-consumption. In the process their traditional skills, technology and organisation of labour have become redundant. They must learn new skills, have new technology and should have capital to produce. They are now less of a self-reliant people. All this requires different organisation of economic activities.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) How would you classify Indian tribes on the basis of their economy? Use five lines for your answer.

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- ii) Write, in three lines, the major steps in shifting cultivation.

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- iii) Give, in one line, an example of a pastoralist tribe in India.

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- iv) What is the resource base on which the Pradhan, the folk genealogists, depend? Use two lines for your answer.

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**25.9 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit we have discussed the following five points:

- i) The concept of social structure has been variously defined but it is a useful concept and is dynamic. In order that a social structure is able to function, its members should be continuously replenished. These members carry and transmit the essential knowledge of the society to others. The social structure does not operate in isolation. It has its internal and external factors, which interact in a complex manner to give it a shape.
- ii) ‘Who are the tribals in India?’ has been an interesting and vexing question. None of the Indian languages have appropriate term for tribe. The concept of tribe emerged in India with the coming of the British. The problems for the British were how best to protect the tribal areas for the ‘time being’ and how

to distinguish them from castes. Gradually the concept of reservation emerged and through that emerged the idea of scheduled tribe in independent India.

- iii) Scholars have tried to define the term tribe by enumerating their characteristic features, by considering them as a stage in the evolutionary framework, by distinguishing them from castes and by considering them as a part of Indian civilisation.
- iv) Tribes in India can be classified by their geographic distribution, racial and linguistic affinities, demographic features, isolation from and interaction with other groups and their economic pursuits. These features act like boundary markers and give them identity. They are also elements in giving shape to their social structure.
- v) The tribal scene has been changing. They have lost control over their resources such as forest and land. There has been change in their economy. All round development efforts too have made their impact on their social structure.

This unit has given you an idea of the concept of social structure and tribe. Then, it has discussed the external features of social structures of tribal population in India.

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## 25.10 KEYWORDS

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<b>Continuum</b>	Anything that is continuous and does not show sharp distinction of content except by reference to something else.
<b>Egalitarian</b>	A system in which all sections of the people have equal rights and privileges.
<b>Matrilineal</b>	It is a system in which descent is traced through the mother.
<b>Patrilineal</b>	It is a system in which descent is traced through the father.
<b>Segmentary</b>	It is a system in which a tribe or a section of tribe is considered to be complete in itself. The opposite of it is organic in which a group may be tied up with other group in various kinds of relations.

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## 25.11 FURTHER READING

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## 25.12 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) *Vanyajati, Vanvasi, Pahari, Adimjati, Adivasi, Anusuchit jati, etc.*
- ii) To provide resources for their industries, the British administration began to reach different parts of Indian territory. In the process they faced rebellious protests on the part of tribal populations. In order to protect such groups, in 1833, they declared certain areas outside the limits of normal rules and regulations. In 1874, the British passed Scheduled Area Regulation to administer such areas. By 1919, people of these areas began to be recognised as different from the Hindu, the Muslim and other religious groups. The Act of 1935 provided a policy of reservation for the people notified as Scheduled Tribes. The Constitution of Independent India also maintains a list of Scheduled Tribes.
- iii) The scholars have tried to define the term 'tribe' by describing their characteristics. Such definitions do not take care of variations in tribal lifestyles. They do not also explain the differences, which the tribals have from the caste people. Some scholars consider tribes as a stage in the process of social and cultural evolution of mankind. Some others consider household based production and consumption as a main feature of tribal life. Bailey suggested that tribes should be conceived as one end of a continuum, which has castes at its other end. For Bailey, tribes have segmentary and egalitarian social system and they are not mutually inter-dependent as are castes. Also, they have direct access to land without an intermediary between them and land. Sinha described tribes as systems isolated from the networks of social relations and cultural communications of the centres of civilisation. Such systems are maintained by primitive subsistence technology and these egalitarian, segmentary systems are guided by non-literate ethnic traditions.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) On the basis of ecology, geographical distribution of Indian tribes can be grouped into five regions, namely (a) Himalayan region, with the Gaddi, the Jaunsari and the Naga tribes, (b) Middle India, with the Munda, the Santhal etc., (c) Western India, with the Bhil and the Grasia etc., (d) South Indian region, with the Toda, the Chenchu etc, (e) the Islands region, with the Onge and the Minicoyan etc.
- ii) In terms of their physical features Indian tribes can be divided into three racial divisions, namely, the Proto-Australoids, the Mongoloids and the Negritos. Examples of the first type are the Gond, the Munda and the Ho, of the second type are the Bhotiya, the Wanchoo, the Naga and the Khasi and of the third type are the Kadar, the Onge and the Jarwa.

Languages spoken by Indian tribes can be classified into four major families of language, namely, Austro-Asiatic family, Tibeto Chinese family, Indo European family and Dravidian. Examples of the speakers of the first type are the Khasi, Santal and Nicobari, of the second type are Khampti, Bhotiya, Kachari, Dimasa, Angami and Singpho. The examples of the third type are Hajong and Bhili and of the fourth type are Yeruva, Toda, and Oraon.



- iii) The size of the group or the demographic factor is important in the context of social structure of a population because it provides an essential external basis for the very existence of a group. An optimum size is absolutely necessary for a group's physical continuity. Secondly any group to survive has to continue socially also. For maintaining a group socially, it needs human beings with knowledge and skill for production, values, beliefs, norms and customs. With adequate balance between sexes and age groups, people can carry on the business of maintaining, replenishing and transmitting social life of a group. So we can see how in order to examine its social structure, it is important to take into account the demographic factor of a group.
- iv) One example of a relatively isolated tribe using wider economic network can be that of the Jenu-Kuruba of Karnataka. This is a food-gathering tribe, which also specialises in the art of catching and training elephants. This tribe supplied elephants to temples and armies of different states. It also supplied other forest products and in return received the foods of their necessity. A second example of this kind can be that of the Apa Tani of Arunachal Pradesh. This tribe practised highly specialised terraced cultivation and made swords, knives and woven cloth. It had economic relations with the neighbouring tribe, the Dafla who gave pigs, dogs, fowls, tobacco and cotton in exchange of rice, swords, knives and textile from the Apa Tani.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) On the basis of economic pursuits, Indian tribes can be classified into the following groups: (a) Food gatherers and hunters, (b) shifting cultivators, (c) settled agriculturists, (d) artisans, (e) the pastoralists and cattle herders, (f) the folk-artists and (g) wage labourers.
- ii) Steps in shifting cultivation are
  - a) a plot of forest land is selected
  - b) trees and plants on it are cut and allowed to dry
  - c) dried plant trees are burnt down and
  - d) seeds are sown in the plot
  - e) after cultivating a plot for a few years, it is abandoned
  - f) the cultivator may select the same plot after several years for repeating the above process.
- iii) The Gaddi in Himachal Pradesh is an example of a pastoralist tribe in India.
- iv) The Pradhan, the folk genealogists, depend on the Gond tribe of Madhya Pradesh. The Pradhan men make genealogies of the families of their Gond patrons and the Pradhan women act as midwives to the Gond and tattoo Gond girls. Thus, the Pradhan men and women derive their economic well being from their dependence upon the Gond.