

Unit 17

Tribe, Territory and Common Property Resources

Contents

- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 Early history
- 17.3 Mixed economy and the commons in India
- 17.4 Population growth and impossibility of commons?
- 17.5 Culture of the commons
- 17.6 Conclusion
- 17.7 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After going through this Unit, you will be able to know:

- Historical development of the concept of 'commons';
- Relationship of 'commons' and mixed economy in India;
- Population growth and 'commons'; and
- Culture of 'commons'.

17.1 Introduction

The notions of territory and common property resources are very closely associated with the notion of tribe. In fact, one cannot imagine of tribes, at least in classical sense, without being identified with territories that have sustained them from time immemorial. Tribes are also known for practising 'common property resources', which among others, provides livelihood and binds them socially and emotionally. Thus, we see the notions of 'commons' (also known as 'common property resources') and tribes as inextricably linked with each other. In fact, 'commons' is one of the significant features in the lives of tribals. Therefore, we shall understand the concept of 'commons' and related aspects with special reference to tribes in India.

But what does 'commons' mean? The 'commons' is not easy to define- it is neither private property nor public property: neither is it a commercial farm nor a communist collective, nor a business firm nor a state utility, nor a jealously guarded private plot nor national or city park. The accepted understanding is that the *'commons' is natural resource shared by the local community that decides who uses it and how*. Our concern here is with understanding the principles that defines and determines the use of the commons with special reference to tribes in India.

17.2 Early History

The Romans distinguished between three types of property: *res privatae*- things capable of being possessed by an individual or family, *res publicae* - things built and set aside for public use by the state, such as public buildings and roads and *res communes*- natural things used by all, such as air, water and wild animals. This was codified in the Institutes of Justinian, the grand summation of Roman law, which said: "By the law of nature these things are common to mankind – the air, running water, the sea, and consequently the shore of the sea."

During the Middle Ages in the United Kingdom, the commons were shared lands used by villagers for foraging, hunting, planting crops and harvesting wood. In 1215, the Magna Carta established forests and fisheries as *res communes*, resources available to all. Several states declared in their constitutions that natural resources belong to the people and that the government acts as the people's trustee. In this understanding, commons is defined with respect to community.¹

Beginning with the industrial revolution in 18th century when labor became a commodity and enclosure were put around land to demarcate the commons, the notion of community changed. This was the earliest form of privatization, first by the landed gentry and gradually by industrial corporations and subsequently by the two together. This alliance promoted the development through the open competitive market. Parallel to this there evolved another path of development under the patronage of the State.

These regimes differed in the way they regulated access. These worked differently in different parts of the world. Our concern is here with India.

17.3 Mixed Economy and the Commons in India

India took the path of the mixed economy-there was the private sector and public sector. In India the colonial state recklessly used natural resources uprooting a large number of local communities especially the tribal forest dwellers. After India became independent the state and private sector continued to recklessly use natural resources. This was justified for industrial development. Several tribal and peasant movements protested.

However, in the sixties when the recklessness began to undermine the natural resource base for industry the state changed its policy. On the one hand enclosures were made of 'reserves of nature' such as wild life sanctuaries, national parks and biosphere reserves. These were designed primarily to conserve biodiversity for industrial production. Further, the state allowed natural resource mining as well. On the other hand community rights such as *nistari* rights (for subsistence use) over some natural resources were recognised in some of these reserves. This resulted in the displacement of several millions of people, without being adequately and appropriately compensated. Several local communities suffered because the resource base for their livelihoods was taken away from them.

Research showed that a large number of these communities were deprived of their commons. For instance, N S Jodha has pointed out that common property resources have been degraded and their productivity is much lower today than in the past. Consequently, the rural rich depend very little on them. It is not worthwhile for them to collect and use meager quantities of products from these resources. On the other hand, the rural poor (small farmers and landless labourers) with limited alternatives increasingly depend on low pay-off options offered by such resources. In the villages studied by Jodha, 84 to 100 percent of the rural poor depended on common property resources for fuel, fodder and food; the corresponding proportion of rich farmers did not exceed 20 percent (except in very dry villages of Rajasthan); and intermediate categories of farm households depended on these resources more than the rich.²

Madhu Sarin pointed out that "The impoverishment and alienation of forest-dependent villagers resulted in widespread forest destruction and state forest departments being in perpetual conflict with forest communities. In fact, it was the acceptance of the states' inability to control access by impoverished and alienated forest dwellers to state-owned forests that culminated in the birth of Joint Forest Management. State forests account for 23 percent of

India's land area and represent the country's largest land-based common property resource. Joint Forest Management has a particular significance for the majority of the country's 54 million tribal people and other disadvantaged forest communities, particularly women, as they continue to depend primarily on forests for their livelihood and subsistence needs."³

The 73rd amendment seemed to be a turning point. It enabled the local communities to manage their common resources according to their tradition. Through this measure the state gave legitimacy to community's responses to the scarcities and stresses created by market driven and state sponsored development- namely a rapid decline in their area and productivity. Common property resources constitute an important component of community assets in different ecological areas of India (and other developing countries) and are one of them. They are sources of a range of physical products; offer employment and income generation opportunities and broader social and ecological benefits.

These measures were taken to ensure efficient use of resources for industrial production of goods, facilitate capital accumulation, ensure cheap labor and protect community rights whenever possible. Commons were defined as common property resources. These included fisheries, wild life, surface and ground water, ranges and forests. The use of these resources was a function of 'excludability' and 'subtractability'. Excludability refers to the fact that controlling access over the physical nature of the resource by potential users may be costly and in the extreme, virtually impossible. This explains the second aspect; In this case, the user is capable of subtracting from the welfare of the others.

This process of industrial development (which was a combination of the private and the public sectors) accelerated on account of globalization. This is, as it has been argued, was necessary to cope with the needs and demands of a growing population. The result of this development was to the contrary; it impoverished those who lost access to the commons and enriched those who take possession of it. In other words, it colonized the commons. This is an instance of 'excludability' and 'subtractability'.

Box: 17.1: Industrial growth and 'commons'

As population grew exponentially industrial production diversified and intensified replacing the natural component in the products with a quantum of human labor. In the process it colonized along with the non-human nature in the external world, three gifts of nature that make us human beings, namely mind, body and spirit. This process of colonization developed nuclear-military operations to ensure control over commons- natural resources. On the one hand as nuclear military power increased, national security steadily decreased. On the one hand as population increased the carrying capacity of earth decreased.

Population growth and speedy heavy industrial development determined the progressive degeneration of the commons. From being available to a few, there has arisen a situation where they are gradually becoming inaccessible to all because not only have they depleted; they have also lost the capacity to regenerate. All the realms of nature defined by the five elements of nature- earth, air, water, fire and space are getting lost irrecoverably.

There are natural things such as air and water that are needed by all. These were polluted by the industrial world and other groups of people not engaged in the polluting production processes suffered the consequences of this pollution. This led to the commodity packaging air and water. That is to say what once belonged to many now belongs to just a few.

This entire process extracted resources from nature at a rate several times faster than the rate at which nature can regenerate itself. Nature here includes

not only natural resources in the external world but also of nature internal to human beings. This contributed to the diminishing nature's capacity for recovery and regeneration. This manifest itself in the 'acquired immuno-deficiency syndrome' (AIDS) at various levels-there were AIDS patients, the susceptibility to illnesses increases and inner resources to deal with the demands of a sped-up production process depleted. In other words, our vulnerability increased-the food we eat was either not clean, or, it was low in nutrients. It started to affect our gene code. Our food security was gradually being undermined, not only because of the insufficiency of food grain production,⁴ but also because the quality of food that was available was not appropriate for sustainable health.

17.4 Population Growth and Impossibility of Commons?

Garrett Hardin (1968) in his 'The Tragedy of the Commons'⁵ discusses the impossibility of sustaining commons under conditions of rapid population growth. The main points of his argument are summarized here. I quote relevant passages from Hardin's text.

"The tragedy⁶ of the commons develops in this way. Picture a pasture open to all. It is to be expected that each herdsman will try to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons. Such an arrangement may work reasonably satisfactorily for centuries because tribal wars, poaching, and disease keep the numbers of both man and beast well below the carrying capacity of the land. Finally, however, comes the day of reckoning, that is, the day when the long-desired goal of social stability becomes a reality. At this point, the inherent logic of the commons remorselessly generates tragedy. As a rational being, each herdsman seeks to maximize his gain. Explicitly or implicitly, more or less consciously, he asks, 'What is the utility *to me* of adding one more animal to my herd?'"

"This utility has one negative and one positive component.

- 1) The positive component is a function of the increment of one animal. Since the herdsman receives all the proceeds from the sale of the additional animal, the positive utility is nearly + 1.
- 2) The negative component is a function of the additional overgrazing created by one more animals.

Since, however, the effects of overgrazing are shared by all the herdsmen, the negative utility for any particular decision making herdsman is only a fraction of - 1."

"Therein is the tragedy. Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit – in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all."

"The National Parks present an instance of the working out of this tragedy of the commons. The parks themselves are limited in extent. , Whereas population seems to grow without limits. The values that visitors seek in the parks are steadily eroded. Plainly, we must soon cease to treat the parks as commons or they will be of no value to anyone."

"In a reverse way, the tragedy of the commons reappears in problems of pollution. Here it is not a question of taking something out of the

commons, but of putting something in — sewage, or chemical, radioactive, and heat wastes into water; noxious and dangerous fumes into the air; and distracting and unpleasant advertising signs into the line of sight. The calculations of utility are much the same as before. The rational man finds that his share of the cost of the wastes he discharges into the commons is less than the cost of purifying his wastes before releasing them. Since this is true for everyone, we are locked into a system of “fouling our own nest,” so long as we behave only as independent, rational, free enterprisers.”

“The tragedy of the commons as a food basket is averted by private property, or something formally like it. But the air and waters surrounding us cannot readily be fenced, and so the tragedy of the commons as a cesspool must be prevented by different means, by coercive laws or taxing devices that make it cheaper for the polluter to treat his pollutants than to discharge them untreated. We have not progressed as far with the solution of this problem as we have with the first. Indeed, our particular concept of private property, which deters us from exhausting the positive resources of the earth, favors pollution. The owner of a factory on the bank of a stream — whose property extends to the middle of the stream — often has difficulty seeing why it is not his natural right to muddy the waters flowing past his door. The law, always behind the times, requires elaborate stitching and fitting to adapt it to this newly perceived aspect of the commons.”

17.01 Action and Reflection

Bring out the argument of Garrett Hardin on unsustainability of ‘commons’ under the conditions of rapid population growth.

At a very basic level, given that air and water are fluid all human beings can be expected to suffer pollution, some more and some less depending on one’s life situation-time and place of residence, wealth and means to either deal with problems that arise from pollution. Similarly loss of forest cover, extinction of several plant and animal species is likely to affect different groups of people differently- they may result in disasters (both man made and natural) such as floods, earthquakes, illness and diseases...etc.

There is another side to this phenomenon namely; more often than not those who suffer are not responsible for the problem (they have no control over access). In principle everyone has a right to life and for this reason to air and water cannot be owned or rather no one should be denied air and water. It is no solution to bottle clean mineral water or create oxygen cubicles for these can be used by those few who can pay for it and the rest have no access to clean air and water and have to depend on medications to deal with their sufferings. Efforts are also being made to create environmentally friendly technology as well and also formulating disincentives for polluters and incentives for non-polluters. This does not solve the problem because these measures cannot be universalized and their benefit cannot be shared by all of human kind.

It is clear that the right to commons is not confined only to community rights over property to ensure livelihood for the poor. More than this it is concerned with protection and sustainable use of natural resources for the good of all. In other words, those who have control over access have to understand that the consequences of misuse can extend to those who have no access (these people may be in the vicinity of the resource or they may be placed at some distance from it).

If we accept the goal to be “the greatest good for the greatest number” as Bentham said, then it is clear that this could not be achieved in the free market economy as Adam Smith had suggested in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) that an individual who “intends only his own gain,” is, as it were, “led by an invisible hand to promote...the public interest.” According to Hardin ‘Adam Smith did not assert that this was invariably true, and perhaps neither did any of his followers. But he contributed to a dominant tendency of thought that has ever since interfered with positive action based on rational analysis, namely, the tendency to assume that decisions reached individually will, in fact, be the best decisions for an entire society. If this assumption is correct it justifies the continuance of our present policy of *laissez faire* in reproduction. If it is correct we can assume that men will control their individual fecundity so as to produce the optimum population. If the assumption is not correct, we need to reexamine our individual freedoms to see which ones are defensible’. Hardin argues, “The evils of overpopulation cannot be overcome either with technological solutions or without relinquishing the privileges the industrial system provides. For instance, farming the seas or developing new strains of wheat will not solve the problem. Further, maximizing population does not maximize goods.”

Can the state then ensure ‘greatest good for the greatest number’? We have seen that the state has become the primary promoter of violence especially when it concerns natural resources. The State waged wars and has created conditions of terror: we are very familiar with displacements on account of construction of large reserves of nature, large dams, industries, military stations, roads, etc. In these and other similar cases the state perpetrates in the name of public interest, which refers to larger common good for the population within the territorial boundaries of the nation-state. These terms (public interest and common good) are defined as national security and increases industrial production.

Thus neither the state nor the market alone can ensure the greatest good for the greatest number. This is because they both hold monopolies over natural resources. They bring many benefits with a runaway engine that has no internal regulator to tell it when to stop depleting the commons that sustains it. They in fact compete over natural resources and they differ in the way they design options for the poor who in fact lose control over natural resources and thus are without any livelihood-the state and the market can offer only jobs which are very difficult to generate. With the idea of creating more livelihood opportunities for the poor especially in non-urban settings, the notion of community-based commons was instituted.

Hardin concludes:

“... The commons, if justifiable at all, is justified only under conditions of low-population density. As the human population has increased, the commons has had to be abandoned in one aspect after another... The freedom of breeding will ruin to all... The only way we can preserve and nurture other and more precious freedoms is by relinquishing the freedom to breed, and that very soon... Only so, can we put an end to this aspect of the tragedy of the commons.”⁷

Box: 17.2: Subsets of problems on man

There has developed in the contemporary natural sciences recognition that there is a subset of problems, such as population, atomic war, and environmental corruption, for which there are no technical solutions. There is also an increasing recognition among contemporary social scientists that there is a subset of problems, such as population, atomic war, environmental corruption, and the recovery of a livable urban environment, for which there are no current political solutions. These two subsets contain most of the critical problems that threaten the very existence of contemporary man.⁸

The relinquishing of the freedom to breed is meaningful only in a limited sense namely to exercise restraint on reproduction. It cannot be interpreted in an absolute sense because this would be tantamount to annihilation not only of the reproductive processes but also of the deeper sense of sociality that defines our sense of being in the world with a future. The recognition of the impossibility of a technical solution suggests that perhaps we should try to formulate the problem in a different way that is, with different terms of reference.

For instance, we should consider that the natural world, which is an expression of the work of nature, is meant to be shared because it is not the product of any one's labor. Further, that sharing is not possible without determining what one's share is and how it can be used for the production and reproduction of goods. For this purpose natural resources are defined as 'property' by law and custom⁹. In other words, what is it that can be shared?

'Greatest good for the greatest number' defines the modern industrial system and is in turn defined by it. This objective is unattainable because the industrial systems, structures and processes of production and reproduction need a large population of cheap labor to sustain itself. Furthermore, greatest good cannot be standardized. What is greatest for one may be the lowliest for the other. To attain this goal, thus, requires standardizing, which is again impossible because it will undermine the freedom of which it is an expression. It then becomes a fetish. There is no technical solution to fetishism.

17.5 Culture of the Commons

A sense of sharing and exchange is implicit-something that is shared is common. One way of sharing is by means of exchange and the other way is to be part of a similar circumstance. Different communities have defined this relation from the standpoint of their respective cultural world-views.

Shifting cultivation is sustainable because it defines relations to land and forest in terms of individual rights and collective responsibility. Briefly, shifting cultivation is a system of clearing patches of forest in succession for husbanding crops and then leaving the clearing fallow for forest regeneration. In the best example of the system any family will move from one clearing to another once in two years, over at least twenty four clearings. The internal logic of the system is that a clearing is husbanded for one year and fallow for forty-eight years. In these forty-eight years the clearing is re-forested. It is important to note that at any point in time different clearing are at different stages of regeneration. The family or the group of people (could be from different families) have a right to their produce depending on the amount of work they have done. When a clearing is left fallow then it becomes the commons from where firewood, roots and other forest produce can be taken by members of the group. This system allows for regeneration time. One reason why the clearing in fallow becomes the commons is because the recovery of the forest is a collective responsibility. In other words there is no right over land. There is only right to use the product of labor and along with it there is the obligation to restrict use of the commons to forest produce, and allow for regeneration.

The worldview underlying this system amongst the Koirs of Abujmarh in Bastar, Chattisgarh, is that the forest belongs to Talurmuttee (mother earth). The territorial boundary of a settlement is in fact the same as the area over which a particular Talurmuttee has jurisdiction. That is to say, without Talurmuttee's consent it is not possible to make a clearing for settlement. The Koirs observe that whenever this is not done there is no peace in the settlement-people fall ill, there is crop failure and animals from the forest such as the tiger and the cobra enter the settlement and disturb everyday life. Furthermore, a settled social life can be sustained by continuously fulfilling

one's obligation to Talurmuttee. This entails making offerings before beginning a new cultivation cycle and before eating the new harvest of crops and fruits like mango, tamarind. Any disturbance in the relation with Talurmuttee results in disturbance in social life.

The institution of the kaser gayata maintains this relation. There is person from a particular clan who is known as the kaser gayata. He is a caretaker on behalf of the settlement and Talurmuttee. He knows the sacred geography of the settlement-this is constituted of the sacred places within the boundaries of the settlement. These places circumscribe the place for work. Of these sacred places the most important is the sacred grove where the shrine of Talurmuttee is located. Here no activity can be undertaken.

Among the Warlis, "the farmer refuses to put poison bait for the rats which are devouring the crop. 'But the rat has the first right to share of the crop' the Warli farmer would tell ..." When a tiger or a leopard takes away a goat or a calf from the herd the elders would say: "whatever is edible will be eaten, the animals also go hungry."¹⁰

According to the labor theory of value commons, that part of the world we live in is where human labor has not been invested. Thus human beings cannot own it. This includes the realm of nature-both human and non-human. This realm has been created by 'the work of nature' which is independent of the labor or the work of man. The scale of time and space required for self-regulating processes in nature to workout extends over several thousands of years. These processes have creatively and continuously added to the abundance and diversity in nature. It constitutes nature's capacity for self-regeneration.

Over approximately four hundred years of history of the industrial revolution we have observed that the time and space for creative self-regulatory processes has shrunk. On account of which variations and plentitude are no longer infinite and inexhaustible. This has undermined not only the survival of species but also the basic conditions of life itself. At various levels of our existence we suffer the depletion of the capacity to recover and regenerate.

17.02 Action and Reflection

Is the idea of 'commons' linked with freedoms of mind, body and spirit? Justify your answer.

To overcome this crisis the relation between man and nature needs to provide for the time and space required for nature to recover its creative capacity. This work of nature can be protected from the work of man by recognizing rights of nature to time and space and according design systems of use that do not violate these rights. Indeed human beings must take from nature only that much which will not only leave enough for others at a given point in time but will also give time and space for creative processes in nature to work out.

17.6 Conclusion

The self-regulatory capability of nature is a gift. It is the condition for the possibility of human existence. How could there be time and space for the work of nature when human relation to nature is mediated through groups?

The idea of commons is not limited to property but to other freedoms of the mind, the body and the spirit that are linked with it. The first thing we have in common is freedom without which there is neither the mind nor the spirit. These three are gifts of nature. We cannot be free until we cooperate with each other. This is because no one can live by himself in absolute freedom.

However with the cooperation of others he can. That is to say my freedom is linked to the freedom of the other. To be free one condition is independence. In this the highest form of freedom is the freedom from 'self'. Without this the other cannot be free. Property relation could be designed to ensure that there is no other in the process of using it for production. Such property relations constitute the commons for forest dwellers in India. The sacred groves are one instance. The commons is the source of regeneration and revitalizations. What makes sacred groves commons is the capacity for self-regeneration or self-reproduction. This capacity cannot be valued; it is valueless because its scale of time and space is far beyond the human scale. A realm of nature that cannot be measured is thus left untouched. It is inaccessible.

There are no technical solutions to this problem, that is to say no technology or technique can measure it. This makes it the commons. The commons are indispensable and for this reason people have a relationship with it. The struggles for the recovery of the commons are thus not confined to the restoration of community ownership. It must be based on an understanding that nature has as much right to expression, and this is our freedom. The cultural systems described are only illustrations of what exists on the ground in many parts of India. From them we learn alternative principle of organizing the economy. These may not be universalisable. However, for that reason they should be given space for self-expression and not be transformed into either private property or public property.

17.7 Further Reading

Prabhu, Pradip. 2003. *Nature, Culture and Diversity: The Indigenous Ways of Life*. In Smitu Kothari, Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld, eds., *The Value of Nature-Ecological Politics in India*. New Delhi: Rainbow Publishers.

Singh, Chahatrapati. 1986. *Common Property and Common Poverty- India's Forests, Forest Dwellers and the Law*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Endnotes

1 <http://www.friendsofthecommons.org/index.html> last accessed on 1 August 2005

2 N.S. Jodha Common property resources and dynamics of rural poverty in India's dry regions in *Unasylva* - No. 180 - Vol. 46 - 1995/1

3 M. Sarin Joint forest management in India: achievements and unaddressed challenges in *Unasylva* - No. 180 - Vol. 46 - 1995/1

4 "Declining food grain production and access to food remain the two biggest problems confronting the country. There must be something terribly wrong with the way we look at agriculture. With more than 70 percent of the population still engaged in agriculture and allied activities and an equal percentage of farmers tilling an average of 0.2 hectares of land and somehow surviving against all odds, time has come to set the balance right..." Devinder Sharma *Politics of Diversity and Food Security* in Smitu Kothari, Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld, 2003. ed *The Value of Nature-Ecological Politics in India*. New Delhi, Rainbow Publishers.

5 "The Tragedy of the Commons," Garrett Hardin, in *Science*, 162(1968):1243-1248.

6 The word "tragedy" following the philosopher Whitehead: "The essence of dramatic tragedy is not unhappiness. It resides in the solemnity of the remorseless working of things." He then goes on to say, "This inevitableness of destiny can only be illustrated in terms of human life by incidents which in fact involve unhappiness. For it is only by them that the futility of escape can be made evident in the drama."

7 "The Tragedy of the Commons," Garrett Hardin, in *Science*, 162(1968):1243-1248

8 Beryl Crowe (1969) *The tragedy of the common revisited* reprinted in Garrett Hardin and John Baden *Managing the Commons* W.H. Freeman, 1977

9 Property is classified into two generic types: private and the common. Within private property, only an individual and his family have legal rights to the benefits arising from its resources and capital. Within common property, access and utility are not limited to an individual and his family but are shared commonly by many people. Common property can be further classified as being of two distinct types: that which is the product of organised labour, and that, which is the product of nature's labour. In the former class feature public transport, entertainment places, service offices, hospitals etc. etc. These things are now generally called public property. In the latter class fall natural forests, ponds, streams, ores, minerals, fuels, sand, mud, limestone and other types of stones and salts in Chahatrapati Singh Common Property and common Poverty-India's Forests, Forest Dwellers and the Law. Oxford University Press Delhi.1986 p 1.

Pradip Prabhu. Nature, Culture and Diversity: The Indigenous Ways of Life in Smitu Kothari, Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Reifeld, 2003. ed The Value of Nature-Ecological Politics in India. New Delhi, Rainbow Publishers.. p 77



Unit 18

Tribe and Caste

Contents

- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Transformation to castes
- 18.3 Sanskritisation
- 18.4 Hinduisation
- 18.5 Language
- 18.6 Basis for misconstruction
- 18.7 Tribe as community
- 18.8 Conclusion
- 18.9 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to understand:

- The nature of tribal transformation to castes;
- The processes of sanskritisation and hinduisation vis-à-vis tribes;
- Language as a unique factor of tribal identity;
- Bases of misconstruction of tribal identity;
- Community life of tribe.

18.1 Introduction

In the post-independence period not only does one find greater concern but also more systematic efforts towards distinguishing tribe from caste. And yet, till today scholars have not been able to arrive at a systematically worked out criterion. In general they have tried to distinguish one from the other on the basis of a number of criteria. It has generally been assumed that the two represent two different forms of social organizations. Castes have been treated as one regulated by the hereditary division of labour, hierarchy, principle of purity and pollution, civic and religious disabilities, etc. Tribes on the other hand have been seen as one characterized by the absence of features attributed to the caste. The two types of social organizations are also considered as governed by the different set of principles.

It is said that bonds of kinship govern the tribal society. Each individual is hence considered to be equal to others. The lineage and clan tend to be the chief unit of ownership as well as of production and consumption. In contrast inequality, dependency and subordination is an integral feature of caste society. It is also said that tribes do not differentiate as sharply as caste groups do, the differences between the utilitarian and non-utilitarian function of the religion. Caste groups tend to maintain different forms, practices and behaviour pattern for each of these two aspects of the religion. Tribes in contrast maintain similar forms, practices and behaviour pattern for both function of the religion. Tribes and castes are also shown to be different in respect of the psychological disposition of its members. Tribes are said to take direct, unalloyed satisfaction in pleasures of the senses whether in food, drink, sex, dance or song. As against this caste people maintain certain ambivalence about such pleasures.

Further, in the 'jati' society, the village is expected to be culturally heterogeneous, with each jati following a unique combination of customary

practices. Tribesmen on the other hand expect their society to be homogeneous or, at least, not necessarily heterogeneous (Mandelbaum, 1970: 577). From attempt such as these and some others, certain images and propositions have been developed with respect to the concept of tribe in India. These include such facets as absence of exploiting classes and organized state structures; multi-functionality of kinship bonds; all pervasive religion; segmentary character of socio-economic unit; frequent cooperation for common goals; shallow history; distinct taboos, customs and moral codes; youth dormitory; low level of technology; common name, territory, descent, language, culture etc. (Pathy, 1992: 50).

Paradoxically however these sets of denominators in terms of which tribes are differentiated from the non-tribes, that is, castes are not subscribed to by a large number of groups identified as tribes in India. And even groups, that do subscribe these attributes, hardly stand in the same or similar relation to each other, in respect of these attributes. At one end there are groups that subscribe to these features in *toto* and the other end are those that hardly show these attributes. The large majority of them however stand somewhere in between subscribing to the attributes referred above to a greater or lesser degree. Assumptions associated with the tribes more often than not have therefore been misleading and fallacious to a considerable extent. Notwithstanding such differences among groups in relation to subscription of such attributes they have however all been identified as tribes. The only thing they however seem to share in common is, as Beteille puts it, that they all stand more or less outside of Hindu civilization. And since the identification of tribes is also linked with the administration of political and administrative considerations, little effort has been made to critically examine it. Rather they have been uncritically accepted among the social scientists.

18.2 Transformation to castes

In the colonial ethnography, the concern shown by the British administrator-scholars to mark off tribe from caste also gave rise to a particular conception of a tribe. That is, tribes were one which lived in isolation from the rest of the population and therefore without any interaction or interconnection with them. In contrast the main concern in the post-colonial ethnography has been to show close interaction of the tribes with the larger society or the civilization. The relation has, of course, been differently conceptualized. Sinha (1958) views tribes as a dimension of little tradition that cannot be adequately understood unless it is seen in relation to the great tradition. In contrast Beteille (1986: 316) sees tribes more as a matter of remaining outside of state and civilization in contexts where tribe and civilization co-exist, as in India and the Islamic world. Thus, though the distinction is maintained, the two are treated not as isolated but in interaction with each other. Even when tribes have been conceived as remaining outside the state, which has been most often the case, they have not been treated as falling outside the civilization influence. Hence, tribes have been viewed as being in constant interaction with the civilization. Consequently the tribal society has not been seen as static but in a process of change.

One of the dominant modes in which the transformation of the tribal society has been conceived is in terms of tribe moving in the direction of becoming a part of civilization by getting absorbed into the society that represents civilization. Both historians and anthropologists have made such observation in the context of the past. Kosambi (1975) has referred to tribal elements being fused into the general society. Similarly, N.K.Bose (1941) makes reference of tribes being absorbed into the Hindu society. Such a claim has not gone abetted. A large number of anthropological works of the post-independence era still point to phenomena such as tribes being absorbed or assimilated into Hindu society or tribes becoming caste. Tribes are said to have accepted the

ethos of caste structure and absorbed within it. Hence they are treated as hardly differentiable from those of neighbouring Hindu peasantry. Some of the well-known tribes in this category are said to be Bhils, Bhumijis, Majhi, Khasa and Raj-Gond. In fact, much of the social anthropological discourse on tribes has been primarily couched in terms of tribes being transformed to caste. Nowhere is this better reflected than in the classification of tribes provided by the eminent anthropologists. Different scholars have of course made the classification differently; but all invariably refer to a stage of incorporation into the Hindu society. Some of the classifications in vogue are referred below.

Roy Burman (1972) in his earlier work classified tribes as (1) those incorporated in the Hindu society, (2) those positively oriented to Hindu society, (3) those negatively oriented and (4) those indifferent to the Hindu society. Vidyarthi (1977) talked of tribes as (1) those living in forest, (2) those in rural areas, (3) semi-acculturated, (4) acculturated and (5) assimilated. Elwin (1944) categorized tribes into four categories. These were (1) purest of the pure tribal groups, (2) those in contact with the plains and therefore changing but still retaining the tribal mode of living, (3) those forming the lower rung of the Hindu society, (4) those adopted to full Hindu faith and living in modern style. The criteria of classification used by Vidyarthi suffer from the lack of logical consistency. Elwin even went to the extent of writing that the whole aboriginal problem was one of how to enable the tribesmen of the first and the second classes to advance direct into the fourth class without having to suffer the despair and degradation of the third. Dube too classifies tribes along almost the same lines as those of Elwin. There are also many others including Bose, Fuchs etc. who have not made specific classifications but do make mention of tribes occupying either the lower or the higher rung by getting absorbed into the Hindu society.

There are of course scholars who caution us from such conception of transformation of the tribes. Roy-Burman (1983,1994) in his later writings points out that if the transformation of tribe into peasant is not to be taken for granted, the transformation of tribe into caste in the Indian context can also hardly be taken for granted. This he does by providing a critique of the Bose and Srinivas models. He points to lack of protection from caste for the Hinduised tribes, the rationale for transformation of tribe into caste in Bose's model and empirical reality of contra- Sanskritic movements against Srinivas' model. Pathy (1992:50-51) questions the dominant trend of understanding tribal transformation into caste on account of lack of historical and contextual evidence. Yet he endorses quite approvingly the observation of Kosambi when he says that the entire course of Indian history shows that tribal elements are being fused into general society.

18.01 Action and Reflection

Is there process of tribal transformation into caste? Give answer to your statement.

The transformation of the tribes into castes is conceived to occur through certain methods that have again been diversely conceptualized. Kosambi (1975) considers adoption of technology of the Hindu society by the tribes to be the major method of getting integrated into the Hindu society. Bose (1941) talks of the Hindu method of absorption that takes place under the system of the organization of the production. He says that tribes are drawn into the system because they find protection within the system, the system being non-competitive. Sanskritisation is also seen as a kind of method through which tribes are absorbed into the Hindu society. The other significant method of the tribal absorption into the Hindu society is what Sinha (1962, 1987) calls as the state formation. He states that the process of acculturation, Hinduisation and social stratification within the village could not be properly understood

unless the data were examined in the broader context of the formation of the principality. He further writes that the formation of the state provided the decisive socio-political framework for the transformation of the tribal system into the regional caste system.

18.3 Sanskritization

As noted earlier it has generally been held that tribes in contact with the non-tribes have been undergoing change and change has been in the direction of absorption in the Hindu society through complexity of social processes. Scholars have conceptualized the processes at work diversely. This is evident from the range of terms that have been used to capture the processes, the most common being the terms of Sanskritisation and Hinduisation. At times anthropologists have also made use of such specific terms as Kshatriyisation and Rajputisation in place of Sanskritisation. These terms describe different social processes at work though in actual empirical reality these processes coincide and overlap. Notwithstanding this there has been tendency among the social scientists to use them interchangeably or synonymously. More often than not the difficulties arising from the use of such terms are overcome by use of such generic terms as acculturation, assimilation, absorption etc. However the main processes through which transformation of tribe into caste is understood are Hinduisation and Sanskritisation.

The question is whether such processes as Hinduisation, Sanskritisation etc. that occur in the tribal society lead to the dislocation of tribal society and pave the way for its absorption in the Hindu society? Does tribe by virtue of getting acculturated cease to be tribe and becomes caste? In fact, almost all scholars referred to earlier tend to think so. To these scholars, tribes eventually cease to exist as entities independent of the caste society from which they were earlier differentiated. The fact of the matter is that while this may have been the case in the past, it is no longer true of India after independence.

Since acculturation of tribes to Hindu society or transformation of tribes to caste is attributed to the process of Sanskritisation/ Hinduisation, it is imperative at the very outset to examine the appropriateness of these terms and concepts especially of Sanskritisation. Sanskritisation is seen as a process whereby the communities lower down the rung emulate the life-style of the dominant caste of the region. By this process of emulation, the castes lower down the rung would move up in the ladder of the caste hierarchy. At times, more specific terms such as Kshatriyisation or Rajputisation have been used to describe such a process. Now this process was used to understand the dynamics of social change within caste society. Sociologists and social anthropologists have however also extended this term and concept to describe certain process of change that has been going on the tribal society. Is this extension valid to describe transformations being witnessed in the tribal society? In my view the extension, in the sense in which it is used, is far from appropriate in the context of tribal society. It is inappropriate because it assumes that tribes are first of all part of Hindu society and second that they are part of the caste society. Tribes have however been conceived as tribes precisely because they are outside the Hindu as well as the caste society. That is, tribe is a society that remains outside the caste-Hindu society. Can there be a process of Sanskritization as it has been conceived without tribe's first becoming part of the caste Hindu society? The process demands that tribes first must enter the Hindu society.

18.02 Action and Reflection

Does Sanskritisation exist among Tribals? Discuss.

The question that arises is whether Hinduisation is the same as Sanskritisation. The two are, of course, interrelated but it may be more appropriate to describe the processes involved in the context of tribes as Hinduisation rather than Sanskritisation. This is so because climbing up the hierarchy is not the overriding concern among the tribes. Of course it is not possible to conceive of Hindu faith and practices outside that of caste organization. Hinduisation thus invariably entails assuming some caste status. But the caste status that is accorded to the tribes is said to be one of 'low caste status'. If this is the case, where is the process of social mobility in the case of the tribes? What is it that tribes gain through this process? Neither have they made claim for higher status (Hardiman, 1987: 158-159). Rather it is outsiders who impose such a status on the tribes. In fact, even after Hinduisation tribes by and large remain outside the hierarchical structure of the Hindu society. If at all there have been such claims, these have been made, as we shall see only after they have been drawn into the larger social structure of the neighbouring Hindu and linguistic community.

The problem with the concept of Sanskritisation in the case of the tribes does not end there. In fact, there is also a problem of the reference group. It is far from clear from the literature as to which of the caste groups, tribes (barring those belonging to royal or chiefly lineage) emulated in their respective region. The royal/chiefly lineage has invariably emulated the Rajputs and has entered into matrimonial alliance with them. Thus whereas the upper strata of the tribal society got integrated into Hindu caste society, the subjects continued to live outside Hindu society though there may have been a process of Hinduisation among them. Climbing up the ladder of hierarchy had been not their main concern. Given this, it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of Hinduisation than of Sanskritisation in the context of tribes in India. Further, if at all tribes consider some castes as superior, it is not because of their caste status but because they happen to be jagirdars, thicadars, lambadars, etc.

The question that may be asked then is why tribes Hinduism themselves even though they attain no higher status? Do they want to be absorbed into the larger society? Well, this may have been the case in the past but it is no longer the case today. Today, the process of acculturation into ideas, values and practices of the dominant community is more of being like the dominant community than one of being part of that society by assuming some caste status.

18.4 Hinduisation

It is thus apparent that tribes have been described as caste more for the aspect of Hinduisation than sanskritisation. Indeed this seems to be the most often than not the basis for describing tribes as caste in the social anthropological literature. And yet can they be described as castes just because they have become hinduised? Is the process of Hinduisation sufficient enough for designating a group as caste? Is it not possible for a tribe to be handiest and yet remain outside the caste system viz., to be governed by the social organizational principles of a tribe rather than of caste? Aspects such as these have either not been given sufficient attention to or have been overlooked in studies where tribes have been modeled on the caste or the civilization framework. If Hindu society cannot be understood outside caste society, then transformation of the tribe into caste or Hindu society as the scholars have been arguing is problematic. Indeed the whole argument of the transformation of tribes into caste seems to be misplaced and even erroneous.

Theoretically it is possible to become Hindu in the sense of embracing a form of Hindu faith and practices without becoming part of the Hindu society in the sense of Hindu social organization viz. caste. If on the other hand Hindu

society and caste organization are inseparable, then Hinduisation alone cannot account for the transformation of the tribe into caste. In fact there are other aspects, to which sociologists and social anthropologists need to give some attention to. These are aspects such as whether tribes actually become part of the structure of caste society after they have taken to the process of Hinduisation/ Sanskritisation? What caste name do they bear and what definite position they occupy in the caste hierarchy? It is also not clear whether groups involved in the process occupy the same position or there is hierarchical arrangement among them as has been the case with the untouchables. Also what caste roles do they assume, say in villages where both tribe and castes inhabit, as in most villages of Chotanagpur where caste groups like Banias, Brahmin, Rajputs and others live in the same village as the tribals? In fact, the nature and kind of interaction tribes enter into with the caste members of the society is governed more by market and economic interdependence than that of purity-pollution. Further their life in the village continues to be grounded on the principle of kinship bonds and absence of hierarchical ordering. In short, tribes do not enter into any kind of social, cultural and ritual dependence with the caste structure of the society even after acculturation into the Hindu belief system and practices. It is doubtful then if it is appropriate to study people described as tribes from the perspective of the caste structure? This is precisely however what the anthropologists have done. They have tried to find caste where it does not exist.

Box 18.1: Paradox of Hinduisation of Tribes

Tribes have not moved into processes like Hinduisation or Sanskritisation as a whole group. The general pattern among them is that only a section of them move to a new pattern of life provided either by Christianity or Hinduism or Islam etc. If this is the case more often than not, can we describe some people of the same group as caste and others as tribe? Can one and the same group become caste and tribes at the same time? The empirical reality of a village where tribes form a minority and are absorbed into the Hindu society is extended to villages and regions where they may not be minority and where even if there is process of Hinduisation, they may not abandon their old affinities and identity. Where, however, tribes have taken to Hinduisation as a whole, they have to a great extent molded themselves along caste lines. They have even identified themselves as caste and others too have addressed them as castes rather than as tribes. The Koch-Rajbongshis of Assam and West Bengal referred to above may be taken as a case in point. But the phenomenon of the group as a whole moving to a different value system is rather rare. But even where such thing has happened, it has not given rise to a hierarchical caste structure. The group as a whole tends in general to belong to the same strata. Neither is the group adequately integrated into the caste structure of the neighbouring regional community.

In examining the question of the transformation of tribe into caste, it is not enough to limit the discussion only to the relationship between tribes and the caste society. There is also a need to look into how tribes themselves perceived, identified and related themselves with the caste society. How did tribes perceive themselves after they have taken to certain aspects of Hindu beliefs and practices? Did they perceive and identify themselves as tribes or as castes? The important ways through which tribes took recourse to the process of Hinduisation or Sanskritisation are what anthropologists have described as the 'religious / cultural movement'. The movement has been more popularly described as the Bhagat movement among the tribes. In fact despite the process of Hinduisation/ Sanskritisation, tribes do not set aside a section of them as caste and another as tribe. They are not treated as those having moved away from the status of the tribes. Rather tribes are categorized into different groups depending on the type of religious values they have taken recourse to mould their life. They are therefore differently described such as Christians, Bhagats, Sarnas, etc.

It is interesting to note that tribes even when they have been hinduized do not describe themselves as Hindus but as Bhagats. It is outsiders, census officials and anthropologists who have tended to describe them as 'Hindus'. Anthropologists have even been prone to describe them as castes. Tribes however do not identify and designate themselves as belonging to different castes in the sense used and understood by the outsiders and the social scientists. Nowhere is this aspect of distinctive identity, more glaring than in the movements launched by the tribes especially pertaining to autonomy, land, forest and employment. In these movements the divide between caste and tribe has been relatively sharp. And yet tribes that have been hinduised have shown solidarity with groups described as tribes as against those of the caste categories. In short, the process of Hinduisation is necessary but not sufficient for tribes to be integrated into the structure of the Hindu society viz. the caste society. To be integrated, tribes must be drawn to the social organization of the caste system, that is, by and large, not an empirical reality.

18.5 Language

The discussion above points to the fact that it is not possible to become a caste without being first integrated into the structure of Hindu society. Where such integration did occur, a very important process has been the acculturation of the tribes into the language of the regional community. It is significant to note that castes as a social organization are operative only within a linguistic community. Hence it is possible for tribe to become caste only after it has been assimilated into the regional linguistic community such as the Bengali or the Oriya or the Assamese community. This process of acculturation that is so central to integration in the regional community and therefore caste society has unfortunately been glossed over by the sociologists and social anthropologists. In fact, it is not possible to get integrated into the caste society without first getting integrated into the linguistic community. Correspondingly tribes were not only differentiated in opposition to castes but also in opposition to the dominant community of the region. The dominant community was invariably a linguistic community. Besides representing different language it also represented different religion, customs, social organization and the way of life.

This raises an interesting question viz. whether tribes after they have become handiest and even 'caste-like' are to be treated either as castes or as tribes if they continue to maintain their language? After all, as noted earlier, tribes have also been conceived in opposition to language or the linguistic community. Can they be both tribes and castes at the same time? This seems far from tenable, as the two not only constitute a different linguistic community but also two contrasting types of social organizations. Are then tribes to be treated as castes just because there has been process of Hinduisation among them? Do tribes by Hinduising and Sanskritising become castes while retaining on the other hand their language, culture, custom, social practices and so on? What is important to note is the influence of the Hinduism or the Hindus on tribes. This however does not make them the Hindus. To be Hindus they need to be drawn into the structure of the Hindu society, which is possible only by getting drawn into the structure of the regional linguistic community. Tribes are differentiated from non-tribes not on the basis of religion alone. That is what the colonial ethnographers did.

Anthropologists have differentiated tribes from others however on more than one criterion. Of these the most important have been language and the social organization of the caste. Tribes have been thus treated as tribes precisely because they have been outside the dominant regional community and thereby outside the complex of civilization. However even with changes at the level of culture including religion and language one is still not sure if tribes could

be said to have become castes. Much, of course, was dependent on the nature of their linkage with the social structure of the regional linguistic and Hindu society. Indeed what seem to me to be the most crucial feature for integration of tribes into the structure of the regional community are not only religion and language but also the organizational structure of the regional community.

Of the aspects of acculturation, acculturation into language is to my mind more important than of religion though the latter is not altogether unimportant. Unfortunately sociologists and anthropologists have never given language the place it deserves in understanding the transformation of tribes into caste. And yet without going into these questions anthropologists have jumped to the conclusion that tribes are becoming caste or getting integrated into the Hindu society.

It is also to be noted that being drawn into a larger society does not mean that tribes cease to interact as a society. Do they then by virtue of cultural change within society cease to be society? Does Bengali society cease to be a society in the wake of the process of westernization and modernization within it? The paradox is that nobody ever denies the existence and identity of the Bengali society but if the same process occurs in tribal society, the general trend is to negate its existence. That tribes exist as a society as much as the other societies exist is unfortunately denied to tribal society when it undergoes change in the context of its encounter with the larger society. Anthropologists have been swift to incorporate them into the larger society at the slightest sign of change in them. In their zeal to emphasize change or the acculturation process, the aspect of continuity about which anthropologists so fondly talk about in the context of the larger Indian reality has been completely overlooked in the context of tribal social reality.

What the discussion points to, is that the conclusions such as ones reached by sociologists/ social anthropologists are based on inadequacy of ethnography, concept and even logic. There is hardly any inquiry into the ways in which the Hinduised tribes are linked with the castes and the ways in which they relate with their original group. Also no effort whatsoever has been made to ascertain if the acculturated tribes were regulated by the principle of caste organization or of the organization of tribe? Issues such as these that are central to the argument in support of transformation of tribe into caste has unfortunately not been adequately looked into and examined. Not only that but even the concepts such as Sanskritisation and Hinduisation used for understanding the transformation into caste are inadequate for advancing argument in support of such transformation.

18.6 Basis for misconstruction

The concepts of caste against which the tribes have been studied have invariably led scholars as noted above to state or conclude that tribes are becoming caste. What this in effect means is that tribes by virtue of moving to this have become like other segments of the Indian society and as such cease to be tribes. There is in fact nothing left in them of what had gone into the making of the tribes. What this has led to, is a kind of conception whereby tribes/ tribal societies by becoming caste, peasant or socially differentiated cease to be tribes or tribal societies. There is then something teleological involved in the study of tribes/ tribal society in the Indian context. Before we begin studying, we already know the direction in which the tribal society is moving. Nowhere is this more obvious than the contrasts against which tribal societies have been studied. Elsewhere in the world where tribes are not linked with the civilization complex, such problems does not arise as tribes there are studied in their own rights and against the backdrop of process at work in those societies. They are not studied against the end point represented

by the communities that are part of civilization as has been the case with India. Hence whereas elsewhere the focus of study has been on how tribes are changing and becoming nationalities or nations in the process, the focus in India has been on how tribes are becoming castes, peasants and stratified.

It follows as a corollary then that tribes cease to be tribes or the tribal society. And since these are the features with which the general Indian society is characterized, tribes are viewed as absorbed into the general Indian society. As a corollary what follows is that tribes through these processes cease to be tribes and thereby cease to constitute and maintain a separate society and identity. Tribes are primarily being studied from the perspective of how they are getting drawn into mainstream of civilization. The end result is that the reality of caste remains intact but that of tribe disappears and this will increasingly spread as tribal societies come in intensive contact with the outside world. Such an empirical and conceptual scenario in the study of tribes exists in India precisely because of the way (1) tribes have been conceptualized in the anthropological literature and (2) the reference in terms of which they have been investigated. In nutshell, tribes have not been studied in their own right but only in relation to the general Indian society, which was marked by overriding features of caste, peasant and social differentiation.

Now in the conceptualization of tribes in anthropology, three distinct but interrelated elements are intertwined. To begin with, tribes in anthropology are first of all invariably seen as society. It is a society like all other societies. That is, it is made up of people; it has boundaries (people either belonging or not belonging to them) and that people belong to society in virtue of rules under which they stand, and which impose on them regular, determinate ways of acting towards and in regard to one another. The characteristic of tribe as a society is related through its boundaries. At the same time, boundaries of tribes have been defined- linguistically, culturally and politically by anthropologists. Boundaries set certain limit of interaction in the legal, political, economic and social relation of its members.

Secondly tribes are also seen as a type of society, a society that is different from other types of societies. Godelier (1977: 30) for example, sees tribal societies as being characterized by certain positive and negative features. The negatives are marked by absence of the positive traits of the modern society viz., non-literate, uncivilized, non-industrialized, non-specialized etc. The positives are those absent from the modern societies viz. social relations based on kinship bond, all pervasive religion, frequency of cooperation for common goal etc.

Thirdly tribes are also seen, as representing a particular stage in the socio-political formation and with passage of time will move to new stage such as nation, nationality or the nationhood. Now while these three distinct aspects have gone in the making of the concept, the last two have overshadowed the first to which the tribes owe their separate and independent existence. What has however happened in the process is that tribes have been primarily seen as a stage and type of society. They are seen as representing a society that lacks positive traits of the modern society.

To put it differently, they constitute primitive, simple, illiterate, and backward societies. With changes in the features that constitute its specific features due education, specialization, modern occupation, new technology etc. tribal society is no longer considered as a tribal society. If the transformation is in the direction of caste then it is described as having become caste society. If the reference is peasant then it is posited as the peasant society and if the general direction of transformation is social differentiation, then it is described as a society socially differentiated. The end result is that tribal society is no

longer considered a tribal society and rightly so if it is thought in terms of stage and the specific features. But as said earlier tribe is also society, similar to any other kind of society but even this comes to be denied with the denial of tribal society as such on account of the changed situation. With this the very existence of tribe as an independent and separate living entity is put to stake. What has happened in the process is that anthropologists and other social scientists have overlooked the context in which the term tribe came to be used in Indian society.

18.03 Action and Reflection

Do you think that tribes in India have not been studied in their own rights but in relation to the general Indian society? Justify your statement.

In the Indian context tribes were identified and described primarily in terms of them being outside the civilization. There is then something clumsy about the use of the concept 'tribe' in describing the Indian social reality. Such problems may not arise when tribes do not coexist with the non-tribal societies. Indeed problems of the type referred above could be overcome by the use of the term 'indigenous' people but not without giving rise to problems of a different dimension. Such a problem is rooted in the concept and conceptual framework that have been used to understand transformation in the tribal society in India. There is then something clumsy and basically wrong with the use of the term tribe in the Indian context.

18.7 Tribe as community

In view of this what is suggested as the term of reference for the study of tribes in India is the terms that tribal people themselves use to identify themselves and as they are known and addressed as, by the other people surrounding them. It is common experience that groups and communities brought under the broad category of tribe do not identify themselves in terms of tribes, (except by the educated) but by their tribes' name such as the Santhals, the Oraons, the Khasis or the Garos, etc. Even in history this was how groups identified as tribes now were being identified and addressed. Ray (1972: 8-10) points to this in his introductory essay on the volume in Tribal Situation in India. He writes that we know that there were janas or communities of people like the Savaras, the Kullutas, the Kollas, the Bhillas, the Khasa, the Kinnaras and a countless number of many others whom today we know as 'tribes', bearing almost the same recognizable names. Yet the term and concept by which they were known to the multitudes of people were not 'tribes' but jana meaning 'communities of people'.

Hence the point being made here is to study tribes in India in reference to the actual communities they belong to and represent, that is, as the Santhals, the Khasis, the Gonds, etc. If tribes are studied as such, then the kind of problems we are confronted with, when we use the term tribe will be overcome. Transformation occurring in the tribal society either in the direction of caste, peasant, social differentiation, or religion becomes meaningful without in any way affecting the identity of the group concerned. The transformations become meaningful precisely because tribes besides being a type of society and the stage of society are also societies. This means that the terms of reference in the tribal studies are not to be categories as caste, peasant or social heterogeneity but groups or communities such as those of the regional communities- the Bengalis, Assamese, Gujratis, etc.

The counterparts of tribes are not castes or peasants as has been the case so far but communities or societies incorporating castes and peasants, for the latter are not the whole society but only an element of the whole. Tribes on the other hand are whole societies like any other society with their own

language, territory, culture and custom and so on. Hence, as societies they must be compared with other societies and not 'castes' as has been the case in the sociological and anthropological writings. Of course, the perspective may not be useful in case of small tribal groups like the Halpatis, the Dublas, etc.

18.8 Conclusion

The idea of 'tribe' and 'caste' are differing social categories. The two differing social categories are often held wrong by sociologists and anthropologists by and large, by considering tribes in India as a part of larger categories of Indian societies. Till today scholars have not been able to arrive at a systematically worked out criterion towards distinguishing tribe from caste. In general they have tried to distinguish one from the other on the basis of a number of criteria.

It has generally been assumed that the two represent two different forms of social organizations. Castes have been treated as one regulated by the hereditary division of labour, hierarchy, principle of purity and pollution, civic and religious disabilities, etc. Tribes on the other hand have been seen as one characterized by the absence of features attributed to the caste. The two types of social organizations are also considered as governed by the different set of principles.

Therefore, there is a need to understand these two categories in proper perspective. In other words, the terms of reference in the tribal studies should not be considered as categories as 'caste, peasant or social heterogeneity', but they must be studied as 'groups' or 'actual communities' they belong to and represent, such as, those of the regional communities'. It is common experience that groups and communities brought under the broad category of tribe do not identify themselves in terms of tribes, (except by the educated) but by their tribes' name such as the Santhals, the Oraons, the Khasis or the Garos, etc. This truth also necessitates to understand in proper perspective the notion and process of tribal transformation, Sanskritisation and Hinduisation, language factor in tribal identity, the issue of misconstruction of tribal identity, and community life of tribes.

18.8 Further Reading

Bailey, F.G. 1961, 'Tribe' and 'Caste' in India. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (5).

Beteille, A. 1960. ' The Definition of Tribe', *Seminar*,(14).

Ghurye. G.S. 1963. *The Scheduled Tribes*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.

V. Elwin. 1944. *The Aborigines*. Bombay: Oxford University Press.

Unit 19

Elwin and Ghurye's Perspectives on Tribes

Contents

- 19.1 The framing of the tribal question: Elwin and Ghurye
- 19.2 A History of the tribal voice
- 19.3 Nationalist freedom struggle and tribals
- 19.4 Constituent Assembly debate and tribal people
- 19.5 Conclusion
- 19.6 Further Reading

Learning objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to understand:

- The framework of tribal question;
- Historical background of tribal voice;
- Nationalist freedom struggle and tribals; and
- Constituent Assembly debate on tribal affairs.

19.1 The Framing of the Tribal Question: Elwin and Ghurye

The autonomy and independence of tribal people in India is circumscribed by the legal regime laid out in the fifth and the sixth schedules of the Constitution of India. Their population is distributed over all states, except Chandigarh, Delhi, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Laccadive, and Pondichery. A large percentage inhabits a large contiguous geographical belt that divides India into the Northern and Southern parts. This belt extends from the North East Frontier region into the Santal Parganas and the Chotanagpur plateau in West Bengal and Bihar into Orissa and Andhra Pradesh in the Southeast into Madhya Pradesh in Central India up to Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra in Western India. Outside this belt there are pockets inhabited by tribal people in North and South India.¹

The tribal population is socially, culturally, economically and politically differentiated on account of the different histories of interaction between them and the non-tribal people. There are only a few places where tribal people dwell in deep-forest, and continue to practice shifting cultivation for instance, in Abujmarh in Bastar (Madhya Pradesh) and in Koraput and Phulbani (in Orissa). A majority of them however, live on wastelands, in settled agriculture regions, in towns and cities. Their mode of earning livelihood varies from teaching in schools and colleges to white collar jobs to running small shops to industrial entrepreneurs. Economically, a large number are poor because either they are landless labour or they are cultivators with small unproductive land holdings. Some are rich and some belong to the middle class.² The tribal workforce is distributed over the following categories: cultivators, agricultural workers, livestock, forestry workers, mining and quarry workers, construction workers, workers in the trade and commerce sector, workers in the transport, storage and communications sector, and workers in other services (this includes white collar jobs, schoolteachers, etc.).

Culturally, the tribal languages of India can be grouped into four major families: the Austric, the Tibeto-Chinese, the Dravidian, and the Indo-Aryan.³ Grigson's *Linguistic Survey Of India* recorded 179 languages and 544 dialects. Of the 179 languages 116 were enumerated as tribal languages and dialects, the tribes of

Nagaland alone spoke 55 dialects.⁴ As regards their linguistic skills are concerned they are bilingual if not multi-lingual. Over years of interaction with the non-tribal people a large majority has converted either to Hinduism or Christianity or Buddhism or Islam and have also moved away from their tradition of work. This has influenced not only their linguistic ability but also their thought patterns. Modern development has created conditions on the one hand that discourage the use of their mother tongue and on the other hand to use the mother tongue as a medium of education. It is not uncommon to observe that converted tribal people use their mother tongue to communicate the content of religions they have adopted. Only those, who live in deep-forest continue to practice their own religion. Unlike those who have converted, their mother tongue is also the language of their thought.

The legal regime laid out in the 5th and 6th schedules has its origins in the Act of 1935, which created, excluded and partially excluded areas where a different set of laws will govern the life of tribal people. Elwin pointed out:

"Section 52 and 92 of the Act provided for the reservation of certain predominantly aboriginal areas (to be known as Excluded or Partially excluded areas) from operation of Provincial legislature. The executive of authority of provinces extends to 'excluded' and partially excluded areas therein', but the administration of excluded areas is under the governor at his discretion and partially excluded areas are administered by the ministers subject to the special responsibility for their peace and good government imposed on the governor by the section 52(e) of the Art. Thus the governor is given the power to control the application of legislation whether of the Federal or Provincial Legislature, and make regulations in both these areas."⁵

After the Act Ghurye formulated the tribal question. There are three views on the tribal situation: no change and revivalism; isolation and preservation; and finally assimilation.⁶ This was a reflection of how he saw the tribal situation in 1943. He saw them divided into three classes:

"First, such as the Raj Gonds and others who have successfully fought the battle, and are recognized as members of a fairly high status within Hindu society; second the large mass that has been partially Hinduized and has come into closer contact with Hindus; and third the Hill sections, which "have exhibited the greatest power of resistance to alien cultures that have pressed upon their border."⁷

In this classification he missed out on Christian influence.

In Elwin's view, "The second class has suffered moral depression and decay as a result of contacts from which the third has been largely free."⁸

Elwin was anti-missionary and pro Hindu as regards the future of the tribal people.

In 1944 he wrote:

"Missionaries should be withdrawn from the Partially Excluded areas; we insist that all education in these areas should be taken over by the Government. We demand that the Government should do twice as much as the missionaries have achieved. We have no interest in keeping these people backward. If they are to take their place as Kshatriyas in the Hindu social system then they must be trained in the arts of liberal thinking and educated to courage and traditions of honor."⁹

Like him Ghurye said:

"To enable the so called aborigines to live their lives according to their traditions and customs without active interference from non-aborigines is certainly a desirable end as natural as the grant of responsibility in their administration

to other people. But to exclude these tracts from the operation of the full institution for this purpose implies that the facilities for such a life are likely to be denied by a general community, if the so called aborigines are placed under the same administrative and political machinery. This is not borne out by history."¹⁰

It is clear that both Elwin and Ghurye argued for assimilation into the Hindu fold.

In 1950 after debate in the constituent assembly the partially excluded and the excluded areas became the fifth and the sixth scheduled areas. Tribal development programs were initiated and the Ghurye-Elwin position remained unquestioned. On the ground, tribal people has no choice other than to become part of the mainstream and get assimilated into the Hindu fold or become part of Christianity.

Today for NGOs and political activists primarily in the fifth schedule areas the Bhuria Committee Report and the subsequent Act of 1996 is an important step towards the realization of self-rule for tribal people in India. These concerns resonate the demand for Tribal autonomy in the sixth schedule areas in the Northeastern frontier regions of India. The Act of 1996 emphasized that "Traditional tribal conventions and laws should continue to hold validity. Harmonisation with modern systems should be consistent herewith. The committee felt that while shaping the new Panchayati Raj structure in tribal areas it is desirable to blend the traditional with the modern by treating the traditional institutions as the foundation on which the modern suprastructure should be built."¹¹

To what extent does this legal regime equip the tribal people to move towards self-rule? What does self-rule mean when there are only few tribal people who have not become what they are not, that is have not adopted non-tribal religions and cultures? What part of their tradition remains that can harmonize with modern systems?

Perhaps the answer to these questions is not possible with the Elwin-Ghurye framework. Because, firstly, the tribal people are classified into three mutually exclusive classes, Secondly, the tribal relation with the non-tribal people is looked at from the point of view of the state. Finally, there is no effort to hear the voice of tribal peoples as it is articulated through their struggles before the Act of 1935 was passed. In other words, Gharry's view gives legitimacy to the legal regime set up by the State. It in fact is a form of counter- insurgency because it upholds the value of tradition but takes away its existential ground of sustainability- the forest life world.

Tribal forest-dwellers and other communities have been part of contiguous geographical space and their interaction has enriched the civilization culture of the sub-continent. For instance, the cult of the mother goddess and of Shiva was enriched, and knowledge of medicinal plants was gathered and compiled. With the historical beginnings of Hinduism in medieval India there emerged a notion of ritual hierarchy between man and god, between individual and collective, between self and society, between being in the world and being in the presence of god, between reason and religious belief.

This hierarchy was a feature of sedentary agricultural communities, amongst both Hindu and Muslim. Tribal societies in contrast were pastoral and nomadic in their movement. The nature and frequency of interaction between them was not frequent. The sedentary and pastoral people were distributed over three different kinds of human settlements: the plains, the cities and towns, and the forests. In the plains and in the cities dwelt the Muslims and the Hindus, and in the forests lived the tribal people. There was no notion of the

center and the frontiers. There was no notion either of the dominant and the mainstream, nor the marginal and the peripheral. This latter notion developed on account of colonialism.

Box 19.1: Western view of tribal situation

People in Europe and Great Britain lived in cold temperate areas; the forest dwellers lived in distant tropical areas. Accordingly, the nature of social distance between the forest dwellers and the outsiders was conditioned by the geographical proximity in case of India, and by geographical distance in the case of Europe and Great Britain. This contributed to difference in the way the strangeness of the tribal forest dwellers was viewed by the non-tribal people. This had a methodological implication. It determined the selection of the categories and perspectives deployed to understand the forest dwellers.

When the British and the Europeans discovered the aborigines in Australia, the Pacific in the 16th century, it presented the problem of cultural discontinuity to the Western conscience in a sudden and dramatic manner. By the 18th century "the problem was set in purely historical and sociological terms... authors agreed ... that it is possible to compare those societies which would today be called primitive with Western civilization... moreover, they doubted that cultural discontinuity exists as the apparent witness and last vestige of a once common development."¹²

This view of historical development emerged at a particular point in the history of Europe¹³ (Uberoi, 1978). From the 17th and 18th century onwards natural sciences determined thinking about 'nature' and about man's place in the world.

The natural science methodologies were mechanically adopted by social sciences. For instance, this led to "anthropology... establishing its claim to be regarded as a study which has an immediate practical value in connection with the administration and education of backward peoples". This raised the question: "What sort of anthropological investigations are of practical value in connection with such problems of administration? What is the "historical and functional interpretation of culture in relation to the practical application of anthropology to the Control of Native Peoples."¹⁴

Colonial rule in conformity with this thinking compared forest dwellers in India with the aborigines in Australia Africa and the Pacific islands and were described as 'backward', 'primitive' and 'uncivilised' tribal people. After India became independent, this colonial understanding continued the debates and discussions in the center. Nehru's 'Panchsheel' was formulated around this understanding. It stays with us even today.

These discontinuities have so far been arranged and understood in the framework of linear historical development and in conformity with the normative order of industrial production. Accordingly social formations progress from simple to complex, from primitive to modern technologies; from savage to civilized social life, and from irrational to rational and reasonable modes of thinking and codes of conduct.

19.2 A History of the Tribal Voice

There is another way of understanding the tribal situation. They were the first to protest against British encroachment into their life. There were two important consequences of these long years of resistance to pressures from the Hindus and Christians, and from the state to adopt their development programs. A class structure developed within the tribal people. Ghurye's class differentiation can be read to understand the different responses to the non-tribal world and the State evolved its instruments of governance.

The first class of tribals like the Raj Gonds and others joined mainstream and were assimilated. They got recognized as members of a fairly high status within mainstream society and have had a tendency towards revivalism and preservation. They over time became the tribal elite.

In contrast the third class the Hill sections according to Ghurye exhibited the greatest power of resistance to alien cultures that have pressed upon their border and were marginalized. Today they dwell in deep-forest, and continue to practice shifting cultivation for instance, in Abujmahar in Bastar, Madhya Pradesh, in Koraput and Phulbani in Orissa.

The large mass of second-class tribal peoples, some Hindu and some Christians suffered from development. A majority of them are the middle class with the little or no land. A larger number became poor.

A brief history of the development of State instruments of governance begins when the East India Company established its first factory in 1650-1.¹⁵ A flourishing trade soon developed. Until 1757 the year of the battle of Plassey "India went on receiving silver supplies on an increasing scale (the East India Company's treasure exports in 1750 amounted to £1.10 million) but now these stopped altogether, as the English Company financed its purchases from revenue raised from here...¹⁶ In 1765 they acquired from the Mughals the right of diwani (revenue collection) in Bengal.¹⁷ Four years later the Bengal famine of 1769-70 "destroyed one third of the population including artisans and cultivators and one third of land was rendered waste. This hurried on the financial crisis of 1772, which led to state interference in the Company's affairs."¹⁸

Warren Hastings came to India (for the second time) in 1772 as Governor General. In 1773, parliament passed Regulating Acts, "which helped the Company avert bankruptcy and a council was formed to assist him."¹⁹ He was to deal with a situation created by "a generation of rapacious Company servants, known as the Clive generation, who in search of quick profits had unabashedly ravaged Bengal and left the once fertile province a confused heap as wild as the chaos itself."²⁰

He developed a cultural policy aimed at "creating an Orientalised service elite competent in Indian languages and responsive to Indian traditions.... not only at the level of social intercourse but also on that of intellectual exchange. That is, Indian culture as the basis of sound Indian Administration as Percival Spear said."²¹ In this year the first contact with the tribal people was also made when "Captain Camac, an officer of the company's army, exchanged turbans with the ruler of Chotanagpur... who acknowledged the suzerainty of the British."²²

This step was taken to lay down a strong cultural-intellectual foundation for governance.²³ It led to the setting of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784-1838 and later College Fort William in 1800-1813. The former promoted research in the area of Indology and the latter introduced universal education. The education system created a middle class that was utilized by the British to run the administration. The Asiatic society prepared the ground for research and writing the settlement reports that were the basis for settling tax. The people who benefited were people of the reading and writing tradition- the twice born caste Hindus and the rich Muslims. A large section of the population who were people of the oral tradition-the occupational castes was excluded.

These steps were taken to overcome the crises resulted in formulation of the intellectual-cultural framework for the States to position and interpret the tribal voices that were expressed through their struggles that followed.

After the formulation of the cultural policy, the Pahariyas revolted in 1778 against the "company's attempt at charting postal route, which was viewed

by them as act of encroachment."²⁴ This was followed by the Koli disturbance (1784-1785), the revolt in Tamar of Chotanagpur (1789-; 1794-1795). To earn revenue the British undertook land and revenue settlements in the form of Permanent Settlement (1793). It transformed subsistence agriculture into commercial agriculture for growing cotton and indigo for textile mills in Manchester. There after there were at least forty recorded events of confrontation-acts of minor protest and major revolts- by tribal people in different parts of India until 1857, which was the year of the Great Santhal rebellion in 1857²⁵ and the Indian Mutiny.²⁶

The state responded on the one hand with a separate Santhal district, prohibition of intermediaries between the Santhals and the Government, abolition of the Kamitai bonded labour system...and on the other by formulating the Queens Proclamation of 1858, which granted each community a right to its own culture oblivious of bilingual attributes that is the history of interaction between communities.

It defined non-interference, with regard to cultural differences, as the principle of governance. It was stated,

(i) All people in India shall alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of law; (ii) all subjects of whatever *caste, tribe, race or creed* shall be freely and impartially admitted to offices in British services; (iii) in framing and administering the law, due regard will be paid to the ancient rights, usage and customs of people belonging to different castes, tribes and races in India; and (iv) the British Government will not interfere with the religious belief or worship of any of the British subjects (highlights are my emphasis).²⁷

This was the first political expression of the cultural policy. The underlying social theory on diversity can be read from 'the 1880s books on India- 'there is not and never was an India or even a country like India, possessing, according to European ideas any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious. There were only natural regions that people of these regions should ever think of themselves as Indians, that they should feel they belong to one great nation.'" It was further said' India was a creation of the British imperial power and that it was essentially artificial with its existence dependent on careful exercise of power.²⁸ It laid the framework for a mode of self-determination one that was not possible without State patronage.

Between 1858 and 1935 there were twenty-eight recorded events of confrontation.²⁹ During this period the Forest Act 1858 created reserved forest and forest villages were allowed within the reserved areas. By 1895 several forest villages were established. The acquisition Act 1894 prepared ground for the next stage. The stopping of shifting began in 1890 when "the forest village regulations were issued" (Prasad, 1994). There was compensation for the land taken over by the state- by 1895 the permanence of these villages was sufficiently established to settle them as ryotwari tracts (Prasad 1994:147).

Various orders were passed for ameliorating the conditions of tribals of the East Godavari Agency population were ultimately consolidated in law known as the Agency Tract's Interest and Land Transfer Act 1917. It formed a model for similar legislation in other tribal areas. The most important feature of this Act was that it restricted transfer of land from tribals to outsiders.³⁰

The need for special protection of aboriginal tribes was not confined to the areas notified by the agencies, and in 1919 an act known as the Government of India Act 1919, provided "that the Governor General in Council may declare any territory in British India to be a 'Backward Tract' and that any act of the Indian Legislature should apply to such Backward Tracts only if the Governor-General so directed". This legislation of 1919 was a forerunner to the

Government of India Act, 1935, and the government of India (excluded and partially excluded areas) order, 1936. "Excluded Areas" were backward regions inhabited by tribal population to which acts of the Dominion legislature or the provincial legislature were to apply only with the governor of the province. The intention of this provision was to prevent the extension of legislation designed for advanced areas to backward areas where primitive tribes may be adversely affected by laws unsuitable to their special condition.³¹ All uprisings were the last resort of tribesmen driven to despair by the encroachment of outsiders on their lands and economic resources.

In the mode of colonial governance illegal extortions and the oppressiveness of corrupt police were the immediate cause of Rampa Rebellion, which started in March 1873 in the East Godavari district.

The most significant ones were the Birsa Munda (1895-1900) and the Tana Bhagat Movement (1913-21). "The amendments made by the government consequent upon the Santhal Rebellion in 1856-57 were not extended to the Mundas, although they were facing similar problems.... The consequent alienation of land dealt a cruel blow to all that the tribals cherished in their life. The Birsa movement aimed at complete independence. The Tana Bhagat movement was anti missionary and anti British.... They sought to rid the tribal people of vices and weaknesses, and they refused to pay rent on the ground that they had cleared the forest and as such were the masters of the land. They demanded self-government, abolition of kingship, no rent payment, perfect equality between man and man."³²

As a consequence of these movements came into being tribal improvement societies, institutions designed to introduce reform and stimulate development.³³ These movements have been characterized as revivalist-backward looking as it were.³⁴ "The Simon commission and the government sought solution to the tribal problem within the existing political structure. The policies framed were unrealistic... Most funds meant for tribals were cornered by the non-tribals. Thus the government failed to assuage the feelings of the tribals."³⁵

The government responded with the Government of India Act of 1935, which prepared the legal foundation of the coming to being of the modern State in India and its structure of Governance. In keeping with the spirit of the Queens Proclamation (which as pointed out earlier was in consonance with Warren Hastings Cultural policy) it constituted the excluded and partially excluded areas for forest dwellers and tribals setting them apart from the mainstream.

19.01 Action and Reflection

Discuss the various tribal assertions and the response of the British-India government?

The character of the tribal movement changed under the Government of India Act of 1935 and the first ever elections held in 1936. Pan-tribal organizations emerged to make their voice heard. For instance, the Chotanagpur Catholic Sabha, Chotanagpur Adivasi Mahasabha. In 1949 this Mahasabha was wound up and the (Jharkhand Party) new regional party created.³⁶

19.3 Nationalist freedom struggle and tribals

The nationalist freedom struggle was not rooted in the tribal and peasant movements. The Indian National Congress questioned neither the repressive legislation nor the cultural policy. It could not draw upon the heritage of these movements because it had internalised this cultural policy: it did not reject the way tribals were being thought of and talked about, as backward and

primitive people. Nor was any question asked as to whether regulative state control was absolutely necessary. Congress justified protection and criticised exclusion. This, it was observed, later prepared the way for development programmes. It was expected that these would enable the tribal people to absorb the normative order of industrial modernisation.

The Congress clarified its position on the exclusion of forest communities in its 1936 Faizpur Resolution:

"This Congress is of the opinion that the separation of excluded and partially excluded areas is intended to leave out of the larger control, disposition and exploitation of the mineral and forest wealth in those areas and keep their inhabitants apart from India for their career exploitation and suppression."³⁷

In accordance with the spirit of this exclusion policy it was further stated that,

"... The adivasis' interest would be best served through their exposure to modern influences (like education) and the implementation of conservation laws. The industrialisation of forest produce may be considered essential for the progress of *adivasi* society."³⁸

Tribal protest was considered an indication of their inability to adjust, adapt and change. Those who argued for their assimilation subscribed to the norms of mainstream development under the British regime. They were unaware of the contribution the tribal forest dwellers could make to the struggle for freedom and independence. Questions concerning their knowledge and its relation to their way of life were ignored even though they were highlighted by tribal protests.

This was in agreement with what Jawaharlal Nehru thought on the tribal position. He said at the opening of the first session of the 'Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Areas' Conference in 1952:

"For half a century or more we have struggled for freedom and achieved it. That struggle, apart from anything else, was a great liberating force. It raised us above ourselves... We must remember that this experience of hundreds of millions of Indians was not shared by the tribal folk."³⁹

It is clear that they struggled and protested against British domination but there was no pathway to exchange their experience with other Indians, because on one hand, they were politically marginalised in excluded areas and on the other, they were social outcasts of the so-called dominant societies. They were thus outsiders. The position of the tribals cannot any longer be understood from the standpoint of this mainstream mode of governance.

19.4 Constituent Assembly Debates and Tribal people

The Constituent Assembly debates too did not question the validity of both 'excluded' and 'partially excluded areas', or the view that tribals were backward. Nor did they draw upon the traditions of tribal and peasant movements to find out their mode of participation in the making of Independent India. They sought to deal with a problem that arises from a situation where cultural pluralism and politico-economic inequality are co-present and co-exist, namely, of social justice in an iniquitous social structure without re-examining the secularist policy of non-interference on questions of social and cultural differences. Article 16(4) and Article 335 were formulated to deal with this problem (this will be discussed later). The debates on this and other related issues were within the theoretical framework of the liberal political tradition of governance left behind by the British.

The constitutional provisions for tribal people were formulated as a part of this debate. It was argued that the principles of political and economic democracy would create appropriate conditions for justice. These were incorporated in the Directive Principles of State Policy. In the discussion on the Directive Principles Dr B.R.Ambedkar said:

As I stated, our Constitution as a piece of mechanism lays down what is parliamentary democracy. By parliamentary democracy we mean 'one man one vote'... The reason why we have established in this Constitution a political democracy is because we do not want to install by any means whatsoever a perpetual dictatorship of any particular body of people. While we have established political democracy, it is also the desire that we should lay down our ideal of economic democracy. We do not want merely to lay down a mechanism to enable people to come and capture power. The Constitution also wishes to lay down an ideal before those who would be forming the government. That ideal is economic democracy, whereby, so far as I am concerned, I understand to mean 'one man one vote'. The question is: Have we got any fixed idea as to how we should bring about economic democracy? There are various ways in which people believe economic democracy can be brought about; there are those who believe in individualism as the best form of economic democracy; there are those who believe in having a socialistic state as the best form of economic democracy; there are those who believe in the communist idea as the most perfect of economic democracy.

Now, having regard to the fact that there are various ways by which economic democracy may be brought about, we have deliberately introduced in the language that we have used, in the directive principles, something which is not fixed or rigid.⁴⁰

One-man one vote is the principle underlying political and economic democracy. A vote, therefore, is an instrument to assert and define the political right to economic equality. This is described in the right to property (Article 300A). Together they determine the economic and the political infrastructure of the industrial production process and the productive capacities for modern industrial work and enterprise. The democratic character of this infrastructure and of the process can be judged from its attitude to other traditions of work: they had no space for the coexistence and enrichment of plural modes of earning a livelihood with which people were familiar. In fact it prescribes its annihilation.

The nature of economy defined by this principle is not based on the work culture and the productive capacities of people. Does this enrich the skills to be productive and ensure a minimum subsistence? This principle thus needs to be recast. Productive capacity is not just the capability to do a job and be employed. It is the preparedness to cope with the traumas of alienation, anomie in the social sphere and with the uncertainties of living in the modern world of free liberal markets, without either subjugating anybody or being subjugated. Such preparedness is the most essential requirement of self-rule. The political and economic dimension of democracy is more than just 'one man one vote'. It is concerned with a condition for such preparedness. To understand their larger meaning we need to consider the link between the political and economic rights and the productive capacity on one hand and the capacity to work and plural ways of life on the other. It is these links that constitute the idea of common good.

Seen from this perspective the directive principles do not resolve the contradiction between Article 16(4) and Article 335. The former Article upholds equality of opportunity for all citizens in an iniquitous social structure where power and goods are concentrated in the hands of a few. The latter supports the claim of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to services and posts. Debates on Article 335 focused on whether or not there should be job

reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Some *excerpts* are reproduced here.

Shri Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava: ...There is absolutely no provision for reservation so far as members of the Scheduled Castes And Scheduled Tribes are concerned. The safeguard given by law to this class is contained in article 335 which says: "The claims of the members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes shall be taken into consideration, consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of administration, in the making of appointments to services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of a State." Therefore, one thing is absolutely clear, that no reservation was meant to be made for the members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as such. I remember that in the Sub-Committee of the Minorities Committee, this matter came up and then we decided that there should be no reservations at all. Now, as if by the backdoor, by smuggling, this reservation for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is being inserted in clause (4) of Article 320. My submission is when there is a positive command of the Constitution to the members of the Public Service Commission which they must obey that the claims of the members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes must be considered consistently with the maintenance of the efficiency of the administration, this provision would be useless, and also, in a manner, I should say, this takes away the effect of article 335 to an extent. I am, therefore, anxious that so far as the Scheduled Castes and Tribes are concerned, their claims must be considered with regard to all appointments and not only with regard to reserved appointments. Because, if they are reserved, it means that their claim will be considered. The livelihood is that their claims will be confined only to the reserved posts and in regard to other posts, their claims will not be considered.

Now as the House knows, the provision contained in article 16 clause (4) is a sort of a negative provision to counterpoise the equality of opportunity for all citizens, some of whom are very much developed and others not so developed, and provision is made that the State is not prevented from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts. Supposing no posts are reserved, the provision will neither benefit the backward classes nor any other class. When the House has not decided reservation of post, I do not think we are justified in having in this clause (4) a contingency for which reservation could be made. When the House has decided once for all that no reservation is to be made, then these words (clause 4) give rise to the impression that reservation is possible.⁴¹

Shri T.T. Krishnamachari: Will the honourable member please say how article 335 could be implemented?

Shri Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava: Can it only be implemented by reservation? If that is so, why did we not so decide?⁴²

Shri R .K. Sidhva: Mr President, ... I have had the view that if anybody deserves protection or special rights or privileges, it is the Scheduled Castes only ... for the reason that I frequently stated that we have done certain injustice to that class and for the purpose of undoing that injustice, we specially gave them this protection.... I do not approve of my friend Deshmukh's proposal to introduce the words 'backward class', ... I strongly oppose it... Although the words 'backward class' are there, I am obliged to reluctantly accept it, and if I had my way, I would have said that there shall be no such thing as "backward classes."⁴³

Shri Mahavir Tyagi: Why introduce the communal virus into another article... That representation of the Scheduled Castes shall be so and so, the manner of giving it shall be such and such, that the rules of giving this representation in the services or posts to the Scheduled castes shall not be made in

consultation with the Public Service and so on. All this, I say is absolutely unnecessary, and surely it does not benefit the Scheduled Caste people at all. Some of us felt that the special reservation was forced against their wishes. But then we were told that it was only a directive article, and that it directs the policy of future governments.⁴⁴

In these debates the question of protection was addressed without reference to the larger question of the nature of the economy and the place of the marginalized people in it. There was no stocktaking of either the state of the economy that the British rulers left behind or of the reserves of material and cultural capital with the people. For this reason it was not possible to discuss the path of self-reliant development and progress India was to follow. The welfare that the directive principles seek to promote defines individual and collective well being without considering its relation to the work culture and productive capacities of people.

For instance, laws that prevent the alienation of land amongst tribals are not sufficient for economic and political democracy. In addition what is required is the freedom to define land and other means of production in accordance with their tradition of work and in the context of the industrial production system. Accordingly, tribal protest can be seen as an assertion of their right not only to land but also to the universe of the forest as their living space, to their work culture, an important component of which is shifting cultivation, and to their world-view. These rights are a precondition for a sense of belonging, which is most essential for their democratic participation in constructing a future. It is not dependent on whether this mode of cultivation conforms to standards of scientific rationality and development.

The idea of welfare and social justice is premised on the right to property, which cannot ensure a sense of belonging. It is thus of crucial importance to understand the form and content of the notion of political and economic democracy itself. In pursuance of the 'Directive Principles of State Policy' Article 300A says that the State can acquire land to promote public interest:

Persons not to be deprived of property save by authority of law. No Person shall be deprived of his property save by law.

In the 'draft constitution' this was Article 24. In the discussion around this Article the justification and implications of this Article were spelt out:

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: If property is required for public use it is a well established law that it should be acquired by the State, by compulsion if necessary and compensation is paid and the law has laid down methods of judging that compensation... But more and more today the community has to deal with large schemes of social reform, social engineering etc., which can hardly be considered from the point of view of that individual acquisition of a small bit of land or structure. Difficulties arise – apart from every other difficulty, the question of time. Here is a piece of legislation that the community, as presented in its chosen representatives, considers quite essential for the progress and safety of the State and it is a piece of legislation which affects millions of people. Obviously you cannot leave that piece of legislation too long, widespread and continuous litigation in the courts of law. Otherwise the future of millions may be affected; otherwise the whole structure of the State may be shaken to its foundations... We are passing through a tremendous age of transition... How are you going to protect the individual? I began by saying that there are two approaches – the approach of the individual and the approach of the community. But how are we to protect the individual today except the few who are strong enough to protect themselves? They have become fewer and fewer. In such a state of affairs, the State has to protect the individual right to property. He may possess property, but it may mean

nothing to him, because some monopoly comes in the way and prevents him from the enjoyment of his property. The subject therefore is not a simple one... because the individual may lose that right completely by the functioning of various forces both in the capitalist direction and in the socialist direction⁴⁵...

Shri Damodar Swarup Seth: It is not clear whether the words "acquisition of property for the public purpose" includes socialisation of land and Industries or compulsory transfer of property from one set of persons to the other. It may well be argued that these words mean acquisition of property only for the general use of Government, local self-governing bodies and other charitable and public institutions and cannot be allowed to be stretched to nationalisation or socialisation. The subject therefore needs clarification, and that clarification in my humble opinion, is not possible unless we discard the idea or I should say the theory, that man has natural rights in property and also the idea that property is a projection of personality. And any invasion on property is an interference with the personality itself... Man has no natural right in property. Claim to property is acquired by law recognised by community. The community... has always reserved to itself the right to modify laws with respect to property and acquire it from its owners in the common, social and economic interest of the people. Property is a social institution and like all other social institutions, it is subject to regulations and claim of common interests.

...The property of the entire people, it must be understood, is the mainstay of the State in the development of national economy and the right to private property cannot be allowed to stand in the way or used to the detriment of the community. The State must have the full right to regulate, limit and expropriate property by means of law in the common interests of the people. The doctrine of compensation as a condition for expropriation cannot be accepted as a Gospel truth. Death duty is a form of partial expropriation without compensation and it forms an essential feature of financial systems of many a progressive country in the world...

It is almost universally recognised that full compensation to the owners of properties will make impossible any large project of social and economic amelioration to be materialised. It is impossible for the State to pay owners of property in all classes and at market value for the property requisitioned or acquired in times of emergency or for the purpose of socialisation of big industries with a view to eliminate exploitation and promoting general economic welfare. Partial compensation is, therefore, suggested... as a *via media* which will neither hinder socialisation nor at the same time will it deprive a large number of persons of means of livelihood.⁴⁶

Prof. T.K.Shah:.... Acquisition of lands for public purpose, acquisition of any form of property, movable or immovable, for any public purpose including the working of that enterprise for the benefit of the public is, I think, an inherent right of the sovereign community which should not be subject to any exception...

I have therefore, suggested that any such property to be acquired can be acquired for public purpose without defining what is exactly meant by 'public purpose' subject to such compensation if any... Not all property is deserving of compensation nor should the Constitution recognise categorically without qualification or modification the right to compensation as appears to be the case⁴⁷...

The congress did not question the way tribals were being talked about, as backward and primitive, neither was any question asked as to whether regulative state control was absolutely necessary and whether 'excluded' areas was the way to do so? The debate got involved with justifying or criticizing exclusion,

having lost sight of the fact 'exclusion was a consequence of protest against British rule.

'Exclusion' was an expression of a social and cultural attitude towards people who lived in a forest. Those who argued for assimilation either upheld the norms of mainstream development under colonial regime and they were unaware of the forest-dwellers contribution to the struggle for freedom and independence.

19.02 Action and Reflection

Bring out the salient features of the constituent assembly debates on tribal affairs.

Today there are three positions left, center and the right. All are agreed that as forest dwellers, a people living in a state of nature, tribal people had no future. The difference between them was with regards to the process of becoming a part of the mainstream and their place and position in it. Correspondingly their definitions of the key terms differ.

19.5 Conclusion

Today all tribal people are not forest dwellers. They are a microcosm of the macrocosm that is India. DD Kosambi has described the larger social context in which the tribal people are located in India. "Cultural differences between Indians even in the same province, district or city are as wide as the physical differences between various parts of the country. Modern India produced an outstanding figure of world literature in Tagore. Within easy reach of Tagore's final residence may be found other illiterate primitive peoples still unaware of Tagore's existence. *Some of them are hardly out of the food-gathering stage.* (Emphasis mine) An imposing modern city building such as a bank, government office, factories or scientific institute may have been designed by some European architect or by his Indian pupil. The wretched workmen, who actually built it generally, use the crudest tools... The very idea of science (*the dominant one*) is beyond the mental reach of human beings who have lived in misery on the margin of over cultivated lands or in the forest. Most of them have been driven by famine conditions in the jungle to become the cheapest form of drudge labour in city."⁴⁸

Protection under the fifth and sixth schedules seeks to safeguard forest-dwellers rights as citizens of India. The totality of rights that individual-citizen derive from the description of sovereignty of the Indian-Nation-State. These derive substance from the land acquisition Act of 1894. The rights of citizen cannot transgress the rights that the Sovereign state has over the citizen. In other words the powers to direct its social and cultural rights make the state sovereign and an individual its citizen.

The act 1894 prevents/stands in the way of creations appropriate condition. For instance, land acquired under this was most cases people 'commons'. In the way cultural rights are annulled for the commons are not only replemishable reservoirs of materials necessary for subsistence, they are also inscribed with a set of 'meanings' which replenish the processes of social and cultural reproduction. Sacred groves, grazing grounds, waterways, rivers, hills, are some instances of such 'commons'. A question arises here! What cultural rights remain when the right to commons is always under threat of being annulled? And what is the significance of these 'remaining cultural rights for the political rights? This is described in the constitution under articles on 'Fundamental Rights': These are derived from the way the Indian nation-state is defined article/this definition provides legitimacy to the act 1894 and this act in turns executes one aspect of this definition-namely territorial unity and

sovereignty over the geographical area which is also the territory over which the state has its jurisdiction. In other words this act shows the character uniformly. That is it allows differences only in so far as it does not undermine uniformity.

The land acquisition Act of 1894 is crucial. While on the one hand the act is premised on a notion of good defined as public interest, on the other hand it is itself the premise of a particular interpretation of Nation-State and of who is a citizen.

According to the Eight Report of the "standing committee on Urban and Rural Development (1994-95) of the Tenth Lok Sabha on land Acquisition Act, 1894, "For the acquisition of land needed for public purpose, developmental work and public institutions and for determining the amount of compensation to be made on account of acquisition the first land Acquisition Act was promulgated on the first day of March, 1894'. However, it has been amended from time to time to suit the needs of post-independence era. It extends to the whole of India except the state of Jammu and Kashmir. While in Nagaland the assembly has not adopted it for its empowerment in the state."

The land acquisition Act requires him to sacrifice land for the sake of the well-being of the collective. Accordingly 'territoriality' which is what makes the Nation-State is to be understood as that area (has) protected by the state machinery over which the State has sovereign rights' in the name of public good, and the State's exercise of this right is sanctioned by the 'land acquisition of 1894.' In other words a citizen is one from whom land can be taken and to whom land can be given. This is an obligation and a duty of being born within the boundaries of nation-state.

The 1894 land Acquisition Act created a political environment that transformed the cultural and social processes of acculturation of forest-dwellers, into a political arena. This act is of crucial importance for defining the Nation-State as a territorial unit. Accordingly, a Nation-State covers contiguous geographical area over which it has control. Within this territory the government has the right to take any land for the sake of public interest, provided it gives equivalent compensation (in lands). The declaration of areas inhabited by forest-dwellers as 'protected Areas', the declaration that all forest that does not yield revenue as Wasteland, and the promotion of permanent settlement by encourage plough settled cultivation in place of shifting cultivation are instances of political activities encouraged by the 1894 land acquisition Act.

A more telling example of the conflict of the political and the cultural is the land Acquisition of 1894. Public interest which this act seeks to uphold is defined very clearly in schedule of the constitution. The land acquired for activities listed in this schedule have more often than not been commons or common property for a particular commonly or a group of people. Here, there are two nations of 'good'- one defined by the state and the other defined by the commonly- the identity of a 'nation state' is premised on sacrifice of cultural rights of commonly, for the sake of constitution a political entity-the nation state. However from the standpoint of commonly rights in commons, it can be argued that the political identity of a nation-state stand firm provided commons and community right/cultural rights are strengthened and diversified. Historical experience has shown that the list of activities, in fact have done more harm than good to people at large. In the light of this experience it can be argued that the identity of Nation-State which is expressed through the land acquisition Act 1894 and which, this act seeks to strengthen, in fact produces results to the contrary: it corrodes the ground on which a Nation-State stands-this ground is its people, their culture and their community.

It is therefore, necessary to reexamine the act 1894 such that it becomes possible to create conditions for the political and cultural nation of good to define complimentary political and cultural rights. On way is to see that cultural rights become the basis for political rights. So far political 'right' has determined cultural rights. This is a necessary condition for 'self-rule'.

The unfolding of these assumptions and implications of the 1894 act took place right through the Nationalist struggle, through the constituent assembly debates up to the present times right through this unfolding the cultural notion of good was subservient to the political notion. Power is a function of meaningfulness; ideas are meaningful only when they generate a sense of certitude.

Box 19.2: Understanding forest dwellers vis-à-vis mainstream

The position of forest-dwellers cannot be understood with reference to the mainstream any longer. Accordingly, the question of a uniform civil code needs to be replaced with a notion of civil society. The assumptions of this suggestion are: so far the idea of a uniform civil code has been derived from contrast between the mainstream and the forest-dwellers and that a uniform civil code does not constitute a civil society; on the contrary it promotes the normative order of the mainstream.

To demonstrate the ground assumptions it will suffice to say that in article of the constitution of India, tribes are not even mentioned in the list of peoples of India; they are clubbed as 'minorities. Further Articles 25, 30(i), 25(2) read in this sequence suggests: "All minorities whether based on religion or language shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice [Art 30 (i)]". However, on the one hand nothing prevents the state from regulating or restricting any economic, financial or other secular activity, which may be associated with religious practices [Art 25(2)]. On the other hand the state would provide for "social welfare and reform and throw open Hindu religious institutions of public interest to all classes and sections [art 252(b)]."

In other words, the Hindu religion is unquestioned; it serves public interest in the same way as acquisition of land by state serves public interest. It is therefore, the norm that promotes public interest and is therefore the duty of the state to make it uniformly accessible. From here derives the content of the uniform civil code. In criticism of the tendency of this civil code towards Hindu normative order, it may be said that it partakes of the colonial asymmetry between the cultural and the political aspect of right; that for these reasons it overlooks the relation between religion and a work culture and that instead of facilitating a process of exchange and cooperation to generate civil society where a plurality of cultural and social traditions are coextensive with political and economic inequality on the contrary it accentuates differences and generates conditions of violence and terror in social lives of people.

The problem is: what social arrangements enable the emergence of such cultural norms that would promote cooperation and exchange amongst people who, by the logics of the social positions they occupy, are torn apart by conflicting forces that emanate from cultural and social differences in a politically and an economically unequal world. Such social arrangements are an important part of the structure of civil society.

19.6 Further Reading

Furer-Haimendorf, Christoph. 1992. *Tribes of India-The Struggle for Survival*. Delhi: Oxford University Press,1992.

Ghurye, G S. 1963. *The Scheduled Tribes*, 3rd edition (First Published as 'The Aborigines so-called and their Future' 1943). Bombay: Popular Press.

Vashum, R. 2005 (2000). *Nagas' Right to Self-determination: An Anthropological-Historical Perspective*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications (2nd Edition).

End Notes

1 For details see Moonis Raza and Aijazuddin Ahmad. 1990. An Atlas of Tribal India. New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company.

2 In as many as 92 districts, more than 95 per cent of the tribal workers are engaged in primary economic activities such as cultivation, agricultural labour, fishing, hunting and other allied activities and mining and quarrying. They form a contiguous cluster over the mid-Indian tribal belt. This region includes 11 districts each in Rajasthan and Maharashtra, 28 adjoining districts in Madhya Pradesh, 6 districts each in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, 3 districts in West Bengal and 1 in Orissa. (Moonis Raza 1990: 381-82)

3 The linguistic regions can be divided as follows: The Austro-Asiatic Family Region has two divisions, the Mon-Khmer and the Munda. The Tibeto-Chinese has two divisions, the Tibeto-Himalayan and the Tibeto-Burmese. The third is the Dravidian family region. The Fourth is the Dravido-Munda region. The fifth is the Indo-Aryan region and the sixth is the Aryo-Dravidian region. (Moonis Raza 1990:40-42)

4 Moonis Raza 1990:226.

5 Elwin: Loss of Nerve (0).

6 G S Ghurye. The Scheduled Tribes 3rd edition (First Published as The Aborigines so-called and their Future 1943). Popular Press, Bombay 1963 (p173)

7 G S Ghurye. The Scheduled Tribes 3rd edition (First Published as The Aborigines so-called and their Future 1943). Popular Press, Bombay 1963 (p 24)

8 G S Ghurye. The Scheduled Tribes 3rd edition (First Published as The Aborigines so-called and their Future 1943). Popular Press, Bombay 1963 (p 23)

9 Archana Prasad Against Ecological Romanticism-Verrier Elwin and the Making of Anti-Modern Tribal Identity, Delhi Three Essays Collective 2003 (p 91-92)

10 (Ghurye 1944 Aborigines-so called and their future).

11 Does the Bhuria Committee report address the life-situation of forest tribal forest dwellers? The Bhuria Committee Report seeks to argue that the extension of the Panchayati Raj Act 1992 (the 73rd amendment of the Indian Constitution) to tribal scheduled areas will strengthen the ground for and promote self-rule. The question here is not whether the 73rd amendment (Panchayati Raj Act 1992) can with suitable modifications as suggested by the Bhuria Committee, create appropriate and adequate conditions for the promotion of self-government and self-rule amongst tribal forest dwellers in various parts of India. The more important question is whether the Constitutional framework, which Bhuria Committee calls to attention is, appropriate and adequate for this purpose under the changed conditions of their life.

The report suggest that the following principles be used to extend the 73rd Amendment to scheduled areas

a) "Traditional tribal conventions and laws should continue to hold validity. Harmonisation with modern systems should be consistent herewith. The committee felt that while shaping the new Panchayati Raj structure in tribal areas it is desirable to blend the traditional with the modern by treating the traditional institutions as the foundation on which the modern suprastructure should be built [Report: p 6 (13.1)]".

An example of this blending according to the report is as follows:

b) "The land acquisition Act 1894 is premised on unrealistic ground. The basic lacunae in the Act have to be removed. the consent of the local village community should be obligatory. The rehabilitation package should be operated with the consent of the local village community.[Report: p9(v)]".

c) "The Gram Sabha should exercise different functions as traditionally prescribed. More specifically management of land, forest, water, air ..etc., . resources should be vested in it. This right should be deemed as axiomatic, in the functioning of Gram Panchayats [Report: p8 (21.ii)]".

This Report on the one hand seeks to give Gram Sabha axiomatic rights over natural resources and on the other hand it allows for displacement of tribal people by not questioning the land Acquisition Act of 1894. This contradiction shows that the participation of tribal people sought through giving powers to Gram Sabha is rhetorical, meaningless and without any substance. The variety of functions and powers described by the Report will lead to more bureaucratisation. This, historical experience has shown will only accentuate their marginalized position. It also draws attention to the larger political framework of a Nation-State which legitimises this Report. The act 1894 operationalises one aspect of this framework, namely, territoriality and sovereignty. This will be examined in a separate section of this essay.

The 'tradition' being referred to, is neither clearly defined nor is it described. Several studies have shown the deforestation, impoverishment and acculturations define the social context of forest-dwellers. A comparison of their life situation when the Constituent Assembly framed the constitution with what it is now shows clearly that forest-dwellers traditions of work have increasingly come under pressure of modernization: on the one hand there is deforestation, a politically centralized industrial production process which speedily depletes natural endowments and in the process undermines their access to nature and on the other hand there is sanskritization and westernization which depletes the social and cultural capital.

12 Claude Levi-Strauss. 1977. Structural Anthropology Vol II. Translated from French by Monique Layton. Great Britain: Allen Lane. (p313)

13 J P S Uberoi. 1978. Science and Culture. Delhi: Oxford University Press

14 A.R Radcliffe-Brown. 1958. Method in Social Anthropology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.(p 39-41)

15 Vincent Smith. The Oxford History of India 4th ed Edited by Percival Spear. Delhi, Oxford University Press 1981(12th impression) (p465).

16 Shireen Moosvi , The India Economic Experience 1600-1900: A Quantitative Study. In K N Pannikar, Terence J Byres and Utsa Patnaik ed Making of History Essays Presented to Irfan Habib. Delhi, Tulika, 2000 (p343).

17 Romila Thapar and Majid Hayat Siddiqi, Chotanagpur: The Pre-colonial and the colonial Situation. In R D Munda and Sanjay Bosu Mullick. Jharkhand Movement-Indigenous Peoples Struggle for Autonomy in India, IWGIA Document No. 108. Copenhagen, 2003 (p 44).

18 Vincent Smith. The Oxford History of India 4th ed Edited by Percival Spear. Delhi, Oxford University Press 1981(12th impression) (p502).

19 David Kopf. British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance-The Dynamics of Indian Modernization 1773-1835. Berkeley, University Press, 1969 (p 16).

20 David Kopf. British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance-The Dynamics of Indian Modernization 1773-1835. Berkeley, University Press, 1969 (p 13).

21 David Kopf. British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance-The Dynamics of Indian Modernization 1773-1835. Berkeley, University Press, 1969 (p 17).

22 Romila Thapar and Majid Hayat Siddiqi. Chota nagpur: The Pre-colonial and the colonial Situation. In R D Munda and Sanjay Bosu Mullick. Jharkhand Movement-Indigenous Peoples Struggle for Autonomy in India, IWGIA Document No. 108. Copenhagen, 2003 (p 44).

23 The steps taken to over come these problems drew upon British orientalism, utilitarianism and enlightenment social theory.

24 Shachi Arya.Tribal Activism-Voices of Protest. Rawat Publications. Jaipur and New Delhi, 1998 (p -138).

25 Shachi Arya.Tribal Activism-Voices of Protest. Rawat Publications. Jaipur and New Delhi, 1998 (p 137-167; 216).

26 Shachi Arya.Tribal Activism-Voices of Protest. Rawat Publications. Jaipur and New Delhi, 1998 (p 151-152).

27 (quoted in Mehta 1991: 73).

28 (John Stracthey. India London 1888 in Embree 1989:9-13) Another expression of the idea was "the cause of the innumerable political Sub divisions which characterized the history of the subcontinent before the unification brought about by the British power was obviously the variety of races, languages, religions manners and customs only rarely had a paramount power ever seceded in creating political unity and then only for a few years 'when no such power existed, the states, hundreds in member might be likened to a Swarm of free, mutually repellent molecules in a state of incessant movement. How could such bewildering diversity movement be made intelligible as a history of India, rather them as histories of ephemeral regional principalities (Embree 1989:11)"

29 Shachi Arya.Tribal Activism-Voices of Protest. Rawat Publications. Jaipur and New Delhi, 1998 (p 216).

30 (Furer-Haimendosf 1992:38-39)

31 Furer-Haimendorf, 1992:39

32 Shachi Arya.Tribal Activism-Voices of Protest. Rawat Publications. Jaipur and New Delhi, 1998 (p 144-146)

- 33 Shachi Arya. Tribal Activism-Voices of Protest. Rawat Publications. Jaipur and New Delhi, 1998 (p 150)
- 34 Shachi Arya. Tribal Activism-Voices of Protest. Rawat Publications. Jaipur and New Delhi, 1998 (p 149).
- 35 Shachi Arya. Tribal Activism-Voices of Protest. Rawat Publications. Jaipur and New Delhi, 1998 (p 151)
- 36 K S Singh. Tribal Autonomy Movements in Chotanagpur in R D & S Bosu Mullick. The Jharkhand Movement-Indigenous Peoples' Struggle for Autonomy in India, IWIGIA Document No. 108, Copenhagen 2003 (p 91)
- 37 Prasad 1994: 249-250.
- 38 Prasad 1994 250-251.
- 39 (Prasad 1994: 256-257)
- 40 CAD Vol VII 19 Nov 1948: 494.
- 41 CAD Vol X 14 Nov. 1949: 495.
- 42 CAD: ibid 496.
- 43 CAD: ibid 498.
- 44 CAD: ibid 499.
- 45 CAD Vol. IX 10 Sept 1949: 1192, 1194-95.
- 46 CAD Vol IX 10 Sept 1949: 1200.
- 47 CAD ibid 1218.
- 48 Kosambi 1986:2.



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

Unit 20

Social Differentiation among Tribes

Contents

- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Definition of social differentiation
- 20.3 Types of social differentiation
- 20.4 Social differentiation among tribes
- 20.5 Conclusion
- 20.6 Further reading

Learning objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to understand:

- Concept of social differentiation;
- Definition of social differentiation;
- Types of social differentiation;
- Social differentiation among tribes with special reference to India;
- Various principles and bases of social differentiation, such as kinship and descent, sex, age, rank and hierarchy, occupation, education, religion, language, among others.

20.1 Introduction

All human beings, in the course of its social processes and historical destiny, have always been associated and identified with one (basic) group or another—voluntarily or involuntarily. The combined influences of the individuals shape the nature and type of the group in which they live. At the same time, the group so formed, shape the total behaviour of the individual members. This is how we find various types of individual personalities and groups that differ from one another. We also find range of groups from simple egalitarian societies to highly stratified and complex societies. Yet even among the egalitarian societies, we still observe elements of role differentiation and stratifications. All this differentiation is what we generally call 'social differentiation'. The process of social differentiation generally occurs when inherited and socially acquired personal differences come to be used as the basis for accomplishing social tasks and filling social positions.

Social differentiation is a broad concept. It is a pervasive process too. The outcome of social differentiation can be seen in two main ways— as 'the complex of roles (and associated statuses) comprising a society's institutions' and as 'the complex of roles intersecting the institutions' (Stebbins, 1987). Some of these roles are division of labour, social stratification, sex, gender, age, and ethnicity. These roles operate both at the core as well as at the periphery of the institutions. The differentiated roles may be *ascribed* or *achieved*.

The ascribed roles are gained or inherited from birth or at certain age. The roles of sex, age, race, nationality, majority and age are examples of ascribed roles. The achieved roles are those which are earned by a person or a group in the course of one's life or period. Examples of achieved roles would among others include power, gender, social class and occupation. For instance, individuals earn the role of a feminist, a Prime Minister, rich man or woman.

Social differentiation is among others closely related to the concepts of division of labour and social stratification. But they are not the same concept either. Therefore, the differences of these concepts merit brief statement for due clarity. Social differentiation is a broader concept than the division of labour as generally understood in modern sociology. In the analysis of social division of labour, the focus is thrust on the group and organisational functions of the society. Whereas, the analysis of social differentiation would include even the aspects of cross—institutional roles such as deviance, age, and community status *inter alia*.

Again, social differentiation may be distinguished from social stratification by defining the latter as a hierarchical system in which social inequalities are institutionalized, and are generally passed down from generation to generation. Social stratification models look at people's opportunities in life and their relationship with one another which are largely based on class, gender, ethnicity, race, occupation, age, prestige, power, religion, polity, location and so on. However, the concept of social differentiation is considered as a broader term than social stratification.

20.2 Definition of Social Differentiation

Social differentiation has been defined in many ways by different scholars. We shall first of all acquaint with some of the definitions. According to Eisenstadt, social differentiation is "the situation that exists in every social unit, large or small, by virtue of the fact that people with different characteristics perform different tasks and occupy different roles...(which tasks and roles) are closely interrelated in several ways."

Ritzer *et al* (1979) defines social differentiation as a "hierarchical system in which inherited and socially acquired personal differences come to be the basis for accomplishing social tasks and filling social positions... (which process) is a precursor to social inequality and social stratification."

Stebbins (1987) defines social differentiation as a "broad social process in which people are distinguished from one another according to age, sex, deviant, ethnic, and social stratification roles."

Sorokin (1962; 1972) defines social differentiation in terms of two broad basic categories, namely, *intragroup differentiation* (differentiation within a group) and *intergroup differentiation* (differentiation between and among two or more groups). According to him, intragroup differentiation is manifested in the nature of division of the group into sub-groups that perform different functions in the group. The division of labour in a family between husband and wife is an example of intragroup differentiation. When the sub-groups are ranked as 'higher' and 'lower' or 'superior' and 'inferior', then the intragroup are said to be stratified. Intergroup differentiation on the other hand, is a broader concept that exemplifies differentiation of social groups or social systems. These groups would include smaller social groups such as high school football clubs and large social groups such as world religious organizations.

Herbert Spencer (1967) feels that in the process of the growth of a society from relatively simpler to more complex societies, the individual components become differentiated but are mutually interdependent. On the functional principle of the process of social differentiation, Spencer (1967:8) opines:

"As [society] grows, its parts become unlike: it exhibits increase of structure. The unlike parts simultaneously assume activities of unlike kinds. These activities are not simply different, but the differences are so related as to make one another possible. The reciprocal aid thus given, causes mutual dependence of the parts. And the mutually dependent parts, living by and for another, form

an aggregate constituted on the same general principle as is an individual organism.”

20.3 Types of social differentiation

Social differentiation has been classified into many different ways. Here, we shall consider a few classifications as found in sociological literature. Durkheim's conception of 'division of labour' in the society is a kind of social differentiation. He explains this phenomenon with the nature of solidarity that exists in the society. He classifies two kinds of solidarity among the members of the society, namely, *mechanical solidarity* and *organic solidarity*. By 'mechanical solidarity', is meant, the phenomenon generally observed in the smaller and non-literate societies characterized by homogeneity of values, beliefs and behaviour, loyalty to tradition and kinship, simple division of labour and roles, little specialization of functions and little tolerance of individuality. 'Organic solidarity' on the other hand is a kind of societal solidarity which is found in modern industrial society, wherein unity is based on complex division of labour, cooperation, and highly specialized roles and functions. This kind of solidarity is called 'organic solidarity' because of its similarity to the functional unity of a biological organism.

Svalastoga (1988) identifies four major forms. They are: (1) Functional differentiation or division of labour; (2) Rank differentiation; (3) Custom differentiation; and (4) Competitive differentiation. According to Svalastoga, functional differentiation exists to the extent that people perform different jobs or occupations. Rank differentiation exists in the society due to differential distribution of scarce and desired goods and services, status, prestige, power etc. He opines that the fundamental character of systematic rank differentiation is implied by its presence in all known human societies and in a wide range of animal societies as well. By custom differentiation is meant the outcome brought about by given situation where rules for proper behaviour differ from one another. Competitive differentiation exists to the extent that the success of one individual or group causes the failure of others.

Sorokin's (1962; 1972) classification of social differentiation is said to be one of the most comprehensive classifications. He classifies social differentiation into 'unibonded' and 'multibonded' groups. In the following, we shall consider his classification to have a fair view of the scope of discourse of social differentiation.

20.4 Sorokin's classification of social differentiation

Sorokin's classification of social differentiation may be presented in a simplified form as the following. Sorokin classifies social differentiation into two broad categories based on the nature of its bonding and differentiations, namely, *Unibonded groups* and *Multibonded groups*.

l) *Unibonded groups*

Unibonded groups are those whose members are bound into a solidary system by one main value or interest. They are mainly of two kinds-

- a) Groups organised (semiorganised, or as if organised) around biosocial values, such as,
 - (1) race; (2) sex; (3) age.
- b) Groups organised (semiorganised, or as if organised) around specified socio-cultural values, namely,
 - 1) kinship groups;
 - 2) groups, such as neighbourhoods, based on territorial propinquity;

- 3) national and ethnic groups, based on community of language, culture, and history;
- 4) state (that is, governmental) groups;
- 5) occupational groups;
- 6) economic groups;
- 7) religious groups;
- 8) political groups;
- 9) ideological and cultural groups (science, philosophy, the fine arts, ethics, education, sport, and so on);
- 10) a nominal group consisting of the elite (individual man and woman of genius, eminent leaders, and historical personages).

l) Multibonded groups

These groups are formed by the amalgamation of two or more unbonded values:

- a) The main types of family formations (embracing all families of the same type);
- b) clans and tribes;
- c) nations;
- d) castes;
- e) social orders ("estates");
- f) social classes.

20.1 Action and Reflection

Discuss Sorokin's classification of social differentiation.

20.4 Social differentiation among tribes

Social differentiation among tribes is mainly based on descent groups, sex, and age. The pattern of social differentiation among tribes is not the same for all societies (tribes). There are variations of social differentiation from tribe to tribe in accordance with their social system, tradition and belief systems. A matrilineal society depicts different system than those of the systems and practices in the patrilineal and patriarchal societies. Again, there are also variations in the mode of differentiation within both the matrilineal and patrilineal societies. Therefore, while considering social differentiation among tribes, it does not imply a uniform pattern. In the following, we shall discuss a few forms of social differentiation among tribes, with special reference to India.

20.4.1 Social Differentiation by Kinship and Descent Groups

Kinship and descent groups are most basic and important bases of social differentiation among tribal societies. The status of a person, its rights and duties is largely determined by the rules of the systems of kinship and descent. The phenomenon can also be understood in terms of *ascribed roles and statuses*. This sense of ascribed roles and statuses is very much relevant to the traditional lives of the tribals.

Kinship refers to those that are related by blood or by marriage. In the words of Rivers (1914), kinship is 'a social recognition of biological ties'. The members who are related by birth or blood are known as *consanguineal relatives* (one's/ ego's *cognates*), while members related through marriage are known as *affinal*

relatives (one's/ego's *affines*). Kinship systems help people to distinguish between different categories of kin, their rights and obligations and for organizing themselves as social groups or kin groups. *Descent* is a narrower term that refers to the rules of a culture that establishes affiliations with one's parents. Descent groups are social groups of relatives whose members/descendants are related lineally through a common ancestor. In the other words, the status of a person is, by and large, determined by genealogical relationships. The members of a primary social group are linked by kinship.

Kinship system may be broadly classified into two categories- *classificatory* and *descriptive* (after Morgan, 1871). Classificatory system of kinship is a system of describing kinsmen by a terminology that has more than one meaning and for a varying degree of relationship. For example, the use of the terminology, such as, 'father', 'mother', 'brother', 'sister' for many people outside one's own immediate family. Descriptive system, on the other hand, is a system where specific terms/terminologies are used for specific relationships. For instance, the terms 'father', 'mother', 'brother' and 'sister' that is used for one's immediate family members only.

Descent groups may be two main types- unilineal descent group and cognatic (or non-unilineal) descent group. Unilineal descent refers to the type of group where ancestry is traced through either the father's line or mother's line. The unilineal groups where the ancestry is traced through the father's line are called *patrilineal descent* groups, while, those whose ancestry is traced through the mother's line is called *matrilineal descent* groups. Unilineal descent groups are classified into four further types: *lineages*, *clans*, *phratries*, and *moieties*. In terms of magnitude, the four types may be arranged in ascending order, as, lineages - clans - phratries - moieties.

A *lineage* refers to a unilineal descent group which traces ancestry upto about ten successive generations. Lineages may be of two types- patrilineages (descent traced through male line) and matrilineages (descent traced through female line). In some societies, lineages have segments (sub-divisions) and sub-segments and sub-sub segments. A clan is a unilineal descent group which usually consists of ten or more generations. The members of a clan believe that they are descendants of a common ancestor. In certain tribal societies, we do have clans consisting of two or more lineages.

A *phratry* comprises of two or more clans. In India, phratry is more commonly found among the tribes of North-Eastern Himalayan region and also in central region. The Ao Nagas, the Raj Konds and Murias are some of the tribes that have phratry system.

Box 20.1: Models of social differentiation in India

There is no agreement on the nature of the form of social differentiation in India. This is due to the various forms of tribal social formations in India. However, there are some forms that are most prevalent among the tribal societies in India. The following prevalent models put forward by different anthropologists (as reviewed by Vidyarthi and Rai (1985) are reproduced below (*italics mine*).

It has been suggested by T.C.Das (1953) that tribal organization in India reveals seven types. He bases this classification on the difference in the types of spheres or units. The seven types may be illustrated as under:

- 1) Family – Local Group - Tribe
- 2) Families - Clans - Tribe
- 3) Families - Moieties - Tribe
- 4) Families - Clans - Phratries - Tribe
- 5) Families - Clans - Phratries - Moieties - Tribe

6) Families - Clans - Sub-tribe - Tribe

7) Families - Sub-clans - Orthogamous Clans or Selected Clans - Tribe.

But Dube (1971) opines that in India tribal design consists of family, then clan, phratry and finally tribe. The minimum sphere for an Indian tribal design will include in itself four spheres, i.e., individual forming families, families forming clan or local group and clans forming the tribe.

A *moiety* (French, *moitie*, 'half') consists of two unilineal descent groups. The Moyon Nagas of Manipur for instance has this kind of moiety system. It is also known as 'dual organisation'. They may be exogamous, agamous, or endogamous. The practice is found among many Indian tribes, such as the Todas of Nilgiri Hills in Tamil Nadu, the Nagas (Ao, Anal, Moyon and Monsang, etc.) of North East region, the Tharus of Central Himalayan region, and the Bondos of Eastern region (in Orissa). Among the Anal Nagas, the society/tribe is divided into two exogamous divisions (moieties)- *mochal* and *moshum*. The members belonging to the same moiety group cannot intermarry. They do have phratries within each moiety. The agamous kind of moiety is found among the Ao Nagas. The two moieties of the Ao tribe- *mongsen* and *chungli* are further divided into several clans. In the level of the clan, there is a system of exogamy.

20.4.2 Social Differentiation by Sex

The most elementary basis for social classification is based on the biological division of human beings into male and female. Every society has some form of division of roles based on sex. A woman is generally expected to engage most of her labour and time in domestic affairs. This is mainly so for the fact that women bear and suckle children and nurture them. As we observe in many societies, women are generally expected to perform lighter works while leaving the heavier works to men (males), as men is considered to be physically stronger than women. However, some of these observations could be wrong for some societies where women even outdo men in performing heavy duties, while men would remain as consumers and dependents of women in many areas of existence.

In subsistence agricultural societies where people get their food and other needs by their labour from their immediate environment, women have a large share of the work of agriculture and domestic roles. Women rear children and nurture them; perform household chores, such as cooking and serving them to the family members, bounding of paddy, etc.; collect water and firewood; carry out clearing and tilling of land/ground; plant saplings and weed them; harvest and carry the produce to their granaries. She is also engaged in growing vegetables and crops, usually in the nearby house and courtyards. Some women also sell their horticultural and agricultural produce in the nearby market or in the village markets. Thus, a woman is found to engage all the time in one work or the other throughout the day and through out the year. The workload is hectic indeed.

Men are expected to perform heavier works which is generally outside home, such as warfare, hunting, fishing, and herding cattle. Nearer home, he is also engaged in many roles such as cutting firewood, ploughing agricultural field, clearing jungle for *jhum* (*swidden*) cultivation (in many societies), and doing irrigation canals. Men are also engaged in carpentry works, trade and commerce. At home, men carry out *jural* authority that concerns with rights and obligations. Men are the policy and law-makers in the village. They are also decision makers of the village. This tradition also percolates down to the level of the family where husbands exercise authority in the family and is expected to be the decision makers of the family. Men also run the administration of the village. A woman by virtue of her sex is not supposed to be part of the village council or administration.

The roles of men and women also overlap in many areas of labour. For example, women also do fishing in river. They also engage in clearing of jungle for jhum cultivation. Women also participate in doing irrigation canals. Likewise, men also carry firewood and participate in plantation and harvest.

Apart from such social differentiations, we also observe in many tribal societies segregation of members on the basis of sex. For instance, among the Tangkhul Nagas (located in North Eastern India and North Western Myanmar), there is a tradition of youth dormitory systems for boys and girls known as *mayarlong* (boys' dormitory) and *shanaolong* (girls' dormitory).

20.4.3 Social Differentiation by Age

All societies have some division of its population on the basis of age. This is due to the fact that every individual does not have the same physical and mental strength and maturity at a given point of time. There are phases of human development, viz., from childhood to adulthood, and again to old-age phase. A child will not be able to perform what is expected of an adult member. In the same way, an old-aged person does not have the needed physical strength to carry out the tasks that is expected of an adult member. In this sense, one finds, the idea of dependency of the child and the aged members on the adult members.

Among the tribes, by and large, there is a process of the phases of life. A child has to undergo certain rituals to enter into the next stage of life, viz., adulthood stage. The ritual basically means for formal recognition of the boys and girls by the community for taking up the role of an adult according to the customs and tradition of the society. Such ritual is generally known as '*rite of passage*' or '*rite de passage*'. We have finest cases of age group differentiations among the Nagas. In Box 1.2 supplied, we shall see age and sex based grouping ('dormitory system') among the Nagas. There are almost similar systems found among other Indian tribes as well (not to be discussed here).

Box 20.2: Naga dormitory system

The Naga dormitory system is a traditional learning institution based on age and sex. There are two dormitories - *boys' dormitory*, and *Girls' dormitory*. But in general, we find only one dormitory system that combines of both the systems. To be part/member of the system, a person has to fulfill certain age criteria. Among the Tangkhul Nagas, the system is called *long* (boys' dormitory, *mayarlong*; girls' dormitory, *shanaolong*). The Ao Nagas called them *arichu*. In the following we shall consider the age grouping system and the arichu system of the Ao Nagas.

The Ao Nagas had a tradition where a young child (especially male child) has to go through certain processes for attaining adulthood (manhood). A boy who has attained about 15 years is entitled to be registered in the traditional *arichu* system. Prior to the entry into the system, a boy is expected to have learned basic knowledge from his parents and grand parents. Generally, there are five to seven age groups or stages.

Tzuir is the first stage of the arichu system. This is the stage of physical test with rigorous training for the new entrants. *Tenapang Yhanga* age group (viz., blooming age) is the second stage. Their main duty is to teach the younger members. Most members marry at this stage. *Tekumchet Yhanga* or *Tepui Zunga* (*tepui*, 'escaped from certain compulsion') is the third stage where the members become the masters of the organization. They are exempt from hard work and punishment. *Juzen* or *Chuzen* (matured stage) age group comprises of the senior members. They take care of the overall situation of the arichu system. *Pener* or *Bencha* age group (old age group) is the last stage of the system. From this stage, a member can enter into the affairs of village administration. A man who leaves the arichu is considered to be equipped with and capable enough of shouldering any given responsibility that an average Ao man is expected of.

[Refer: *Imchen, 1993; Vashum, 2000*]

In many societies, 'marriage' during adulthood stage is another important phase of life. A married person is expected among others by the society to perform certain roles and expectations that are not obligatory or entitled to his age group members who are unmarried. Among the Nagas, a person becomes eligible for a membership in the village council by virtue of his marriage.

20.4.4 Social Differentiation by Rank and Hierarchy

In tribal world, there are practices of recognising certain members and/or families by way of heredity. They are ascribed status on the basis of descent. This concept of differentiation is known as 'rank' system or 'ranking' system. The notion refers to a kind of hierarchy in the society where certain lines of descent are considered as superior to others, and are entitled certain respects, status, and privileges.

In many societies, members of the higher rank are regarded as 'royal' families and those in the lower rank are commoners. But there may be still hierarchical order even among the commoners. Among the Nagas, by and large, the chief of the village was regarded as having the highest status. He is also entitled with certain privileges apart from being the head of the village, such as, free and voluntary service of the villagers to help in cultivation of agriculture or construction of residential house from time to time. Again, even among the families of a clan or phratry, there are rankings of family on the basis of seniority of the descendants (male descendants). The Konyak Nagas is an apt example of social ranking system. Such kind of ranking is also found among the Bhatias and Tharus of the sub-Himalayan region, the Andhs of Andhra Pradesh, and so on.

Among the Tharus, the community (tribe) is divided into two sections- the 'higher' and the 'lower'. The higher section has several endogamous subdivisions called *kuries*. The five kuries, namely Batha, Birtia, Dahait, Badvait and Mahtum which group is called *Rana Thakur* consider themselves superior to other groups of the Tharu community. The groups even restrict themselves from intermarriage and interdining.

The Andhs of Andhra Pradesh also have the notion of hierarchical order within the community. Of the two sub-tribe divisions, namely, Vartati and Khaltati, the former considered themselves as superior to the latter (viz., the Khaltati). The two groups also restraint from intermarriage.

20.4.5 Social differentiation by occupation

We can understand the kind of differentiation of roles in tribal societies in two but overlapping ways- the traditional and the modern trend. In the traditional sense, we see the role of the family as a crucial factor based mainly on production and consumption of resources. Such differentiation in terms of occupation in the familial traditional set up, are again, largely based on sex, age, expertise and other statuses such as being a father, a mother, son, or daughter and so on. In this context, every individual is expected to perform one's respective roles in accordance with the norms of the society. They are, however, not well-defined occupations specific to the members in many cases. This is simply because a person who is good in one occupation is also found to be performing in some other occupations and roles. For example, an agriculturist is also a good artisan and vice versa. Likewise, in a village level too, there are role differentiations in terms of certain roles and statuses recognized by the villagers, particularly in religious and political aspects. The chief of the village is expected to play certain roles according to the status (ascribed) he holds. He is regarded as the founder of the village and the first citizen (inhabitant) of the village. He performs specific roles and functions after his position. In return he is also given recognition and given certain roles

due to him by the villagers, be it, in terms of giving service in agricultural works from time to time and other services due to him.

In the modern times, many of these traditional norms would not be seen. The old practices have been eroded and have given way to modern practices. Modern education, modernization, and the need for diversification of occupations and specializations have demanded for a more elaborate and differentiated roles and occupations. Today, an educated tribal would hardly be seen in the agricultural work or other manual traditional occupations. S/he would go out and look for decent jobs outside the village and opt for decent jobs in town or city. There are tribals who have even succeeded in going overseas and find fortune for themselves. These educated tribals who have gone out of their village for their fortune, temporary or otherwise, experience change in their way of life and attitude. The longer they isolate from the village life, there are more chances of cultural erosion and connectivity to their village roots. For many of these educated tribals, the village situation would not quite fit their lives anymore. This trend is also true for those unskilled and semi-skilled tribal labourers. Thus, differentiation by profession and/or occupation has also been much prevalent in modern tribal situation. This kind of differentiation of occupations and professions has also led to emergence of a kind of class system in tribal societies.

20.4.6 Social Differentiation by Education

Education is a significant factor for social differentiation in the modern days. This is for the fact that 'education' most directly affects occupational attainment or upward occupational mobility in the contemporary world. The truth is substantiated by studies conducted across countries where the influence of education on occupational mobility and attainment 'transcend the direct effects of occupational inheritance' (Ramirez et al, 1980; Porter, 1979). However, education should not be construed as a neutral and independent factor. Education has always been affected by the backgrounds of class, ethnicity, race and even locality. The phenomenon is also quite true in the context of the tribals and indigenous peoples in various parts of the world.

Social differentiation among tribals in India, by and large, show that the educated tribals as they go out of the village and look for decent jobs find themselves in a different situation which gradually leads them to adapt to the environment and adopt the norms and culture of the new environment, be it of town or of city in one way or another. In course of time, they (tribals) found themselves different or differentiated from the original community life, be it in terms of habit, attitude and even worldview *inter alia*. This trend is most true with those tribals who have taken jobs outside the village and have settled in the new locality where they work. The second generation (children) of these educated tribals would have already missed most of the cultural values and norms of their community. There are still others who have even remained quite detached from the community. Thus, the factor of education in effecting social differentiation among tribals has become very prominent in most of the tribal areas.

20.4.7 Social Differentiation by Religion

In tribal societies, we can see two kinds of social differentiation in terms of religion which are based on factors of 'the ascribed' and 'the achieved'. In traditional societies, we would find role differentiation due to ascribed positions and statuses. There are variations of such differentiation from tribe to tribe. However, the underlying principle seem to suggest that every tribe recognizes roles of certain members, be it eldest or youngest, man or woman, etc. who performs religious roles. For example, among the Tangkhul Nagas, the head of

the clan has religious obligation. Likewise, the chief of the village too perform religious roles, be it for starting agricultural cycle (tilling the field), seed sowing, harvest, etc. by performing rituals to the almighty god for a good harvest.

In the modern times, trend social differentiation has become very complex and much differentiated even among the tribal societies. The existence various religious groups and denominations have diversified the roles and differentiation of the tribals. A tribal group may be well differentiated from another tribal or non-tribal group who profess different religion. Even among the same religious group, different denominations or sects have created social differentiations. Among the Christian tribals, differences of denominations, be it, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Church of Christ, Seven Day Adventists, etc. have their own organizations within the community set up and outside the community. This necessitates for maintaining different organizations and associations of different religious denominations in a village and larger set up. A village or tribe of multi-denominations would carry out different roles and functions under different organizations and affiliations. This practice results in social differentiation of believers of different religions and/or faiths. Likewise, in a broader scenario, a social group of certain beliefs system, be it sect, denomination or religion, differentiate from each other according to their belief systems and religious practices. For instance, a Christian would be differentiated from a Hindu, a Sikh from a Buddhist, a Muslim from a Hindu and so on. This kind of social differentiation based on dissimilarity of religions also takes place among the tribals.

20.4.8 Social Differentiation by Language

Language also plays a major role in bringing about social differentiation in tribal societies. There are various trends in this phenomenon based on language differences. There is a general tendency that people speaking the same tribal language seem to be closer as they identify themselves as being a fellow tribal on the basis of ethnicity. We find differentiations of social groups based on among other criteria, language, be it from tribe to tribe or from tribe to non-tribal communities.

Social differentiation also takes place within the same tribal group in a multi-dialectic situation. There are certain divisions which are maintained on the basis of similarity and dissimilarity of dialects among other things. They would primarily identify their association and loyalty with the cultural and dialectic zone they live in and to which they are a part of. Along with language differentiation, every village also maintained their own entity and affairs of life. Every village has their own self-governing mechanism (government) that takes care of the welfare and security of the village and the villagers. They have head (chief) of the village, representatives of the various clans and the commoners in the village set up. They consider the system as a democratically run mini-government based on a kind of socialism. The Tangkhul Nagas is an apt example of this kind of situation. Hence, language and/or dialect differentiation also plays significant role in social segregation and social differentiation.

20.4.9 Social Differentiation by Association

Among tribal societies, formation of associations for one kind or another is largely based on kinship and affinity. Clan associations which are usually spread over in one or more villages are generally prevalent in most of the societies. These associations are mainly launched for cooperation and/or protection in any circumstances called for. Tribal societies do have associations beyond kinship and affinity obligations such as political affiliations and allegiance for achieving certain goals and interests. People also become part of an association by way of being a follower of some icons and participation in rituals. Sometimes, they

are called *cult* associations, because, the members or followers participate in rituals addressed to a particular divinity. They are also called 'secret societies' because the divine power, or craft and knowledge they acquire and possess through divine revelations and power are generally not revealed to other members outside the congregation.

There are also associations based on sex and age. For instance, there are women societies for secular and/or also religious purposes. Again, based on age groupings, there are youth associations for unmarried men and women as well, called 'youth club' in many tribal societies of North East India. Yet in some societies, there are associations based on marital status. For instance, among the Tangkhul Nagas, we observe, associations of married men known as '*gahar long*' (married men council) which objective is to assist in the general welfare and development of the village.

People also launch associations for economic purposes in the form of 'credit association' or 'cooperatives'. According to the system, the members of the association subscribe a fixed sum of money periodically and withdraw the money over time in turn which is decided by lot or some other ways. Among the tribals of Manipur, the system is known as '*marup*' (meaning 'friendship' or 'cooperation').

20.4.10 Social Differentiation by Territory and Physical Environment

Territorial or geographical social differentiation is one of the unique characters of the tribal societies. The notion of territorial differentiation is prevalent from simplest tribal societies like the Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh to relatively more advanced tribal groups like the Mizos and Nagas. The notion of territoriality is observed even among transhumant-pastoral societies like the Gaddis of Himachal Pradesh. The idea of territoriality and its perceptions, however, would differ from one tribal group to another. Among the Nagas, there is a unique tradition of territorial differentiation through village formation. A Naga village is either a republic or a monarchy which has all the elements of an independent and self-contained set up. The systems function through the principles of democracy and socialism. A village has a well demarcated and strict territorial jurisdiction among other things. No village has the right to encroach on the jurisdiction of another village. Several villages constitute a larger social group called 'tribe'. In some of the Naga tribes, there is a kind of dual division of tribe like moiety system but maintaining territorial differentiation. For example, the Rengma Nagas and Konyak Nagas have dual territorial divisions. Such divisions are also found among various tribes in India.

Sometimes, new villages are also founded from the parental villages for one reason or another. A parental village may even have over three to four tributary and independent villages. Again, in some tribal societies, a village has subdivisions or localities. Generally, each locality or unit is exclusively occupied by one clan or at least dominated by a clan. For example, among the Naga villages, there are distinct localities where a clan is concentrated. They call these localities '*khel*' or '*tang*' by the Angami Nagas and Tangkhul Nagas respectively. Each *khel* or *tang* is indeed a mini-village despite being part of a village. However, in the recent years, such tradition is gradually eroding due to various external influences. Such kind of territorial local groups are also observed among other Indian tribes such as the Kamars of Chhatisgarh, the Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh among others.

In almost the same principle, roles are differentiated on the basis of climate, etc. There are varying climates in a society that gives rise to differences in the nature of the work they perform at different seasons. Even in societies

with little variation of climate, they would have some seasonal variations which makes them differentiate their roles. Thus, climate variation also play role in giving rise to social differentiation.

20.2 Action and Reflection

What are the various types of social differentiation found among the tribals? Discuss them briefly.

20.5 Conclusion

Human society has always been divided into societies from time immemorial. These societies seek to represent society in general and strive for solidarity within the members of a society and among societies as well. Social differentiation is a process by which different statuses, roles, strata, and groups exist within a society. Social differentiation has been classified into many different ways.

In this Unit, we have considered Pitirim A. Sorokin's comprehensive classification of social differentiation. Sorokin classifies social differentiation into two broad categories based on the nature of its bonding and differentiations which he terms '*Unibonded groups*' (group bound into a solidary system by one main value or interest, such as, race, sex, age, kinship groups, ethnic groups, occupational groups, economic groups, religious groups, political groups, etc.) and '*Multibonded groups*' (group formed by the amalgamation of two or more unibonded values, such as, clans, tribes, castes, nations, classes, etc.).

Social differentiations among tribes and simple societies are mainly based on descent, sex, age, rank and hierarchy *inter alia*. The patterns of social differentiation among tribes differ from one another according to variations in their social system, tradition and belief systems. There are also variations in the mode of differentiation within a society. The various tribes in India are no exception to this variation.

20.6 Further Reading

Bowles, S. 1971. Unequal education and the reproduction of the social division of labor. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 3:1-30.

Malinowski, Bronislaw 1960 (1944). *A Scientific Theory of Culture, and Other Essays*. Oxford University Press.

Tonnies, Ferdinand 1957 (1887). *Community and Society*. Translated and edited by Charles P. Loomis. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.