
UNIT 2 DEVELOPMENT OF SCHEDULED TRIBES

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Meaning of Scheduled Tribe
- 2.3 Constitutional Status of Scheduled Tribes
- 2.4 Tribal Social Structure
- 2.5 Levels of Socio-Economic Development of Scheduled Tribes
- 2.6 Nature of Development Strategies
- 2.7 Unresolved Issues and Persisting Problems
- 2.8 The Path Ahead
- 2.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.10 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this Unit is to acquaint you with the various aspects related to the development of Scheduled Tribes. Tribal people have a unique and significant place in Indian society. Since Independence, various efforts have been made for their upliftment and development. After having learned this unit, you should be able to:

- differentiate between the concepts of ‘Tribe’ and ‘Scheduled Tribe’;
- describe the Constitutional status of Scheduled Tribes;
- understand the basic elements of Tribal social structure;
- identify the levels of their socio-economic development in different parts of the country; and
- appreciate the nature of developmental efforts that have been made for the upliftment of Scheduled Tribes.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The tribals are believed to be the original inhabitants of India. Due to series of invasions by alien communities and relentless pressure from more powerful neighbouring communities, they were driven to forests, hills and other inhospitable regions. In their isolated existence, these communities developed their own distinct culture, traditions, languages and administrative structure. While some of them are settled cultivators, many others continued to depend on shifting cultivation, hunting, food gathering, etc. In Government of India Act of 1935, most of the areas inhabited by the tribals were declared as Excluded or Partially Excluded Areas. After independence, such areas were renamed as Scheduled Areas and were included in Schedule V and Schedule VI. The essential

characteristics for recognition as a Scheduled Tribe are primitive traits, geographical isolation, distinctive culture, shyness of contact with outsiders and economic backwardness.

As per 1991 census, the population of Scheduled Tribes was 6.77 crores, representing 8.05 per cent of country's population. This 8% of the population inhabit more than 20% of the geographical area of the country, which contains about 70% of country's total natural resources. While the Scheduled Tribes are spread throughout the country, their main concentration is in Central India in the States of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa, where more than 82% of the country's tribal population is concentrated. Another pocket of tribal concentration is the North-Eastern region where 12 per cent of the country's tribal population live. The remaining tribal communities are concentrated in the areas adjoining Nilgiri Hills in the South and in the North-Western Himalayan regions.

The tribal communities represent diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic groups. There is no uniformity in their levels of development; while in Mizoram, they are close to 100 per cent literacy, the Jarawas and Shompers in Andaman and Nicobar Islands are still living in the state of nature. However, the common features found among all the tribal communities are their strong cultural traditions, kinship, remoteness of their habitats, lack of infrastructure facilities and low level of technological advancement.

According to the 1991 Census, STs inhabit all the states except Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh, Delhi and Pondicherry. While the highest concentration of the ST population is found in the North Eastern states of Mizoram (94.8 per cent); Nagaland (87.7 per cent); Meghalaya (85.5 per cent); and Arunachal Pradesh (63.7 per cent and in the UTs of Lakshwadeep (93.2 per cent); and Dadra and Nagar Haveli (79.0 per cent), there are high concentrations in the states of Madhya Pradesh (23.3 per cent); Orissa (22.2 per cent); Gujarat (14.9 per cent); Assam (12.8 per cent); Rajasthan (12.4 per cent); Maharashtra (9.3 per cent); Bihar (7.7 per cent); and Andhra Pradesh (6.3 per cent) and Andaman & Nicobar Islands (5.5 per cent).

2.2 MEANING OF SCHEDULED TRIBE

In order to understand the various developmental aspects relating to Scheduled Tribes, it is of paramount importance for you to know the difference between a 'Tribe' and a 'Scheduled Tribe'. Let us begin with the discussion of these concepts.

Concept of Tribe

A Tribe is an anthropological concept. It is referred to by certain authors as 'Animistic' or 'Aboriginal'. The term 'Adivasi' has gained popularity while referring to the tribe in recent years. Tribals are thought of as semi-civilised people residing in hills, forests or considered as special groups of agriculturists. A tribe is generally defined as a social group usually living in a definite area, having a dialect, cultural homogeneity and unified social organisation.

Tribe is also defined as a 'social group' usually comprising a number of sibs, bands, villages or other special groups and is normally characterised by the

possession of a definite territory, a distinctive dialect, a homogeneous and distinctive culture; it is either a unified political organisation or, at least, has some sense of common solidarity vis-a-vis outsiders. Thus, a tribe is a territorial group with its own language, religion, culture and unified social organisation.

Now, as the tribal communities living in different parts of the country have reached different levels of socio-economic development, there are very few among them, which strictly fulfil the requirements of the above definition. For instance, we have the tribes like Onge and Andamanese of Andaman & Nicobar Islands, the Birhor of Bihar or the Kattunayakan of Kerala, which are very backward and, even today, eke-out an existence through hunting, fishing and food gathering. On the other hand, there are tribes like the Khasi or the Lushai or Meghalaya, which are fairly advanced both economically and educationally. The tribes, such as Bhumij of West Bengal, Dhodia of Gujarat or the Mina of Rajasthan are hardly distinguishable from their neighbours in regard to their way of life.

Despite these cultural and economic disparities, a tribe as a social entity continues to be a reality. Its characteristic features, as indicated in the above definition, still, by and large, make it distinguishable from the general population.

Composition and Location

Tribal people constitute roughly eight per cent of the nation's total population, numbering nearly 68 million people according to the 1991 census. One concentration lives in a belt along the Himalayas, stretching through Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh in the West, to Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland in the Northeast. Another concentration lives in the hilly areas of Central India (Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and, to a lesser extent, Andhra Pradesh); in this belt, which is bounded by the Narmada River to the north and the Godavari River to the Southeast, tribal people occupy the slopes of the region's mountains. Other tribals, like the Santals, live in Bihar and West Bengal. There are smaller number of tribal people in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, in Western India in Gujarat and Rajasthan, and in the Union Territories of Lakshadweep and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The extent to which a state's population is tribal varies considerably. In the Northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland, more than 90 per cent of the population is tribal. However, in the remaining Northeast states of Assam, Manipur, Sikkim, and Tripura, tribal people form between 20 and 30 per cent of the population. The largest tribes are found in Central India, although the tribal population there accounts for only around 10 per cent of the region's total population. Major concentrations of tribal people are found in Maharashtra, Orissa, and West Bengal. In the South, about one per cent of the population of Kerala and Tamil Nadu are tribal, whereas about six per cent in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are members of tribes.

There are some 573 communities recognized by the government as Scheduled Tribes and, therefore, eligible to receive special benefits and to compete for reserved seats in legislatures and schools. They range in size from the Gonds (roughly 7.4 million) and the Santals (approximately 4.2 million) to only eighteen Chaimals in the Andaman Islands. Central Indian states have the country's largest

**Development of Scheduled
Castes, Scheduled Tribes and
Other Under-privileged Groups**

tribes, and, taken as a whole, roughly 75 per cent of the total tribal population live there.

Apart from the use of strictly legal criteria, however, the problem of determining, which groups and individuals are tribal, is both subtle and complex. Because it concerns economic interests and the size and location of voting blocs, the question of who are members of Scheduled Tribes rather than Backward Classes or Scheduled Castes is often controversial. The apparently wide fluctuation in estimates of South Asia's tribal population through the twentieth century gives a sense of how unclear the distinction between tribal and non-tribal can be. India's 1931 census enumerated 22 million tribal people, while in 1941, only 10 million were counted, but by 1961, some 30 million and in 1991 nearly 68 million tribal members were included. The differences among the figures reflect changing census criteria and the economic incentives that the individuals have to maintain or reject classification as a tribal member.

These gyrations of census data serve to underline the complex relationship between caste and tribe. Although, in theory, these terms represent different ways of life and ideal types; in reality, they stand for a continuum of social groups. In areas of substantial contact between tribes and castes, social and cultural pressures have often tended to move tribes in the direction of becoming castes over a period of years. Tribal people, with ambitions for social advancement in Indian society at large, have tried to gain the classification of caste for their tribes; such efforts conform to the ancient Indian tradition of caste mobility. Where tribal leaders prospered, they could hire Brahman priests to construct credible pedigrees and, thereby, join reasonably high-status castes. On occasion, an entire tribe or part of a tribe joined a Hindu sect and, thus, entered the caste system en masse. If a specific tribe engaged in practices that Hindus deemed polluting, the tribe's status, when it was assimilated into the caste hierarchy, would be affected.

Since independence, however, the special benefits available to Scheduled Tribes have convinced many groups, even Hindus and Muslims, that they will enjoy greater advantages if so designated. The Schedule gives tribal people incentives to maintain their identity. By the same token, the Schedule also includes a number of groups whose "tribal" status, in cultural terms, is dubious at best; in various districts, the list includes Muslims and a congeries of Hindu castes whose main claim seems to be their ability to deliver votes to the party that arranges their listing among the Scheduled Tribes.

A number of traits have customarily been seen as establishing tribal rather than caste identity. These include language, social organisation, religious affiliation, economic patterns, geographic location, and self-identification. Recognized tribes typically live in hilly regions, somewhat remotely located from caste settlements; and they generally speak a language recognized as tribal.

Unlike castes, which are part of a complex and interrelated local economic exchange system, tribes tend to form self-sufficient economic units. Often they practice shifting cultivation clearing a field by slash-and-burn methods, planting it for a number of seasons, and then abandoning it for a lengthy fallow period—rather than the intensive farming typical of most of rural India. For most tribal people, land-use rights traditionally derive simply from tribal membership. Tribal

society tends to be egalitarian, its leadership being based on ties of kinship and personality rather than on hereditary status. Tribes typically consist of segmentary lineages whose extended families provide the basis for social organisation and control. Unlike caste religion, which recognizes the hegemony of Brahman priests, tribal religion recognizes no authority outside the tribe.

Any of these criteria can be called into question in specific instances. Language is not always an accurate indicator of tribal or caste status. Especially, in regions of mixed population, many tribal groups have lost their mother tongues and simply speak local or regional languages. Linguistic assimilation is an ongoing process of considerable complexity. In the highlands of Orissa, for example, the Bondos – a Munda-language-speaking tribe – use their own mother-tongue among themselves. Oriya, however, serves as a lingua franca in dealing with Hindu neighbours. Oriya as a prestige language (in the Bondo view), however, has also replaced the native tongue as the language of ritual. In parts of Assam, historically divided into warring tribes and villages, increased contact among villagers began during the colonial period and has accelerated since independence. A pidgin Assamese developed, while educated tribal members learned Hindi and, in the late twentieth century, English.

Self-identification and group loyalty are not unfailing markers of tribal identity either. In the case of stratified tribes, the loyalties of clan, kin, and family may well predominate over those of tribe. In addition, tribes cannot always be viewed as people living apart; the degree of isolation of various tribes has varied tremendously. The Gonds, Santals, and Bhils traditionally dominated the regions in which they have lived. Moreover, tribal society is not always more egalitarian than the rest of the rural populace; some of the larger tribes, such as the Gonds, are highly stratified.

Practices

The influx of newcomers, disinclined to follow tribal ways, has had a massive impact on social relations and tribal belief systems. In many communities, the immigrants have brought about nothing less than the total disintegration of the communities they entered. Even where outsiders are not residents in villages, traditional forms of social control and authority are less effective because tribal people are patently dependent on politico-economic forces beyond their control. In general, traditional headmen no longer have official backing for their role in village affairs, although many continue to exercise considerable influence. Headmen can no longer control the allocation of land or decide who has the right to settle in the village; a loss of power that has had an insidious effect on village solidarity.

Some headmen have taken to leasing village land to outsiders, thus enriching themselves at the expense of the rest of the tribes. Conflict over land rights has introduced a point of cleavage into village social relations; increased factional conflict has seriously eroded the ability of tribes to ward off the intrusion of outsiders. In some villages, tribal school teachers have emerged as a new political force, a counterbalance to the traditional headman. Changes in landholding patterns have also altered the role of the joint family. More and more couples set up separate households as soon as they marry. Because land is no longer held and farmed in common and has grown more scarce, inheritance disputes have increased.

Hunters and gatherers are particularly vulnerable to these far-reaching changes. The lack of strong authority figures in most hunting and gathering groups handicaps these tribes in organising to negotiate with the government. In addition, these tribes are too small to have much political leverage. Forced settlement schemes also have had a deleterious impact on the tribes and their environment. Government-organised villages are typically larger than traditional hunting and gathering settlements. Forest reserves limit the amount of territory over which tribes can range freely. Larger villages and smaller territories have led, in some instances, to an increase in crime and violence. Traditionally, hunters and gatherers “settled” their disputes by arranging for the antagonists simply to avoid one another; whereas new, more circumscribed villages preclude this arrangement.

Tribal beliefs and rituals have altered in the face of increased contact with Hindus and missionaries of a variety of persuasions. Among groups in more intense contact with the Hindu majority, there have been various transformations. The Gonds, for example, traditionally worshipped clan gods through elaborate rites, with Pardhans organising and performing the necessary rituals. The increasing impoverishment of large sections of the Gond tribe has made it difficult, if not impossible, to support the Pardhans as a class of ritual specialists. At the same time, many Gonds have concluded that the tribal gods were losing their power and efficacy. Gonds have tended to seek the assistance of other deities, and, thus, there has been widespread Hinduization of Gond beliefs and practices. Some tribes have adopted the Hindu practice of having costly, elaborate weddings – a custom that contributes to indebtedness (as it has in many rural Indian families) and subjects them to the cash economy on the most deleterious of terms. Some families have adopted a traditional marriage pattern—that of capturing a bride – to modern conditions, using the custom to avoid the costly outlays associated with a formal wedding.

Christian missionaries have been active among sundry tribes since the mid-nineteenth century. Conversion to Christianity offers a number of advantages, not the least of which is education. It was through the efforts of various Christian sects to translate the Bible into tribal languages that those tongues acquired a written script. Christian proselytizing has served to preserve tribal lore and language in written form; at the same time, it has tended to change drastically the tribe’s cultural heritage and belief systems. In some instances, the introduction of Christianity has driven a wedge between converts and their fellow tribal members who continue to adhere to traditional beliefs and practices.

Scheduled Tribe – A Constitutional Concept

A ‘Scheduled Tribe’, on the contrary, is primarily an administrative and constitutional concept. It refers to a tribal community, which is enlisted under Article 342 of the Indian Constitution. According to the Indian Constitution, a tribe alone can be specified as Scheduled Tribe. But at the same time, the word tribe is nowhere defined in the Constitution. Furthermore, the Constitution is also silent about the principles or policies to be adopted for specifying a “tribe” as a scheduled tribe. According to Article 342 of the Constitution, “The President may, with respect to any State or Union Territory and where it is a state, after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification specify the tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities,

which shall, for the purpose of this Constitution, be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes in relation to that State or Union Territory, as the case may be.”

Thus, Article 342 only clarifies that for any ethnic group to become eligible to be specified as a Scheduled Tribe, it should necessarily be a tribe in the first place. In other words, non-tribal castes or communities are not eligible to be specified as Scheduled Tribes.

Despite the difficulties, which stood in the way of identification of tribes as Scheduled Tribes, there has been complete awareness about the extreme social, educational and economic backwardness of the tribal communities among the policy makers, planners and administrators of the country. But before introducing protective and amelioratory measures, there was a need to draw a list of such tribal communities as required care and protection for their growth and development. The first list in this regard was drawn in the year 1931 under the name “Primitive Tribes”. Subsequently, under the Government of India Act, 1935, a list of “Backward Tribes” was specified for the provinces of India. In fact, the list of tribes specified under the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 was drawn by making additions to the list of “Backward Tribes” under the Government of India Act, 1935.

In regard to the identification of tribes which qualify to be specified as Scheduled Tribes, the Backward Classes, the Commission, in the preamble to their questionnaire, has observed:

“The Scheduled Tribes can also be generally ascertained by the fact that they live apart in hills and even where they live in plains, they lead a separate and excluded existence and are not fully assimilated in the main body of the people. The Scheduled Tribes may belong to any religion. They are listed as Scheduled Tribes because of the kind of life led by them.”

Similarly, the Advisory Committee on the Revision of the lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, popularly known as the ‘Lokur Committee’ has taken primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the society at large and backwardness as the important criteria for testing the eligibility of a tribe as Scheduled Tribe.

Thus, in short, for specification of a tribe as a Scheduled Tribe, it should fulfil the following criteria:

- It should have its distinct language, religious beliefs and culture, which should qualify to be considered as primitive.
- It should have an isolated existence. In case it lives in close proximity to other castes or communities, it should not have assimilated with them.
- It should be extremely backward both educationally and economically.

It may be noted that the concepts of ‘Tribe’ and ‘Scheduled Tribes’ are often complementary and not contradictory.

Check Your Progress I

Note : a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the text.

1) Define the Concept of Tribe.

.....
.....
.....
.....

2.3 CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS OF SCHEDULED TRIBES

In this section, we will acquaint you with the Constitutional status of Scheduled Tribes in India. You will learn about the various legal provisions and safeguards, which have been adopted in the Constitution for the protection and amelioration of Scheduled Tribes. We will also discuss the meaning and importance of ‘Scheduled Areas.’ You will also learn that tribals in these scheduled areas enjoy considerable socio-cultural and political autonomy.

Constitutional Provisions and Safeguards

The provisions in the Constitution make it incumbent on the State to “take care” of STs. In articles 15 and 16 (which refer to fundamental rights of citizens) exceptions are made to ensure that what is needed to be done for STs is done. For example, though equality of opportunity is the policy of the State, an exception is made for reservations. Article 244 enables the State to make special arrangements for the development of STs. Article 275-1 enables the State (the Central government particularly) to set aside financial provisions to be used for tribal development. If there are any schemes from the State government and the Central government approves it, then the Central government is bound to finance the scheme. So, we get all ingredients for the State in terms of the legality and financial arrangements. The State cannot have any excuse that they are not empowered enough. The Vth Schedule is a unique aspect of the Constitution – it empowers the Governor of a State to suspend any act of Parliament or State legislature if he thinks that it is not in the interest of the STs. This, he can do even with retrospective effect. A similar aspect is not found anywhere else in the Constitution. The VIth Schedule enables an autonomous district level body to be formed where there is a large percentage of tribal groups. This has been formulated especially for Northeastern region, which is unique in many respects. Districts in the Northeast can be mini-States – they have a lot of financial, legislative, executive, and judicial powers.

The Constitution of India provides for a number of safeguards for the Scheduled Tribes mainly to facilitate the implementation of the ‘Directive Principle’ contained in Article 46 of the Constitution, which reads as follows:

“The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.”

The important safeguards provided in the Constitution include Article 46 (Promotion of Educational and Economic Interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections); 244 (Administration of the Scheduled Areas and Tribal Areas); 275 (Grants from the Union to certain States); 330 (Reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the House of the People); 332 (Reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assemblies of the States); 335 (Claims of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to Services and Posts); 338 (Special Officer for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, etc.); and 339 (Control of the Union over the Administration of Scheduled Areas and the Welfare of Scheduled Tribes).

Article 46 empowers the State and Union Territory Government to frame necessary rules that are required to promote the educational interest of Scheduled Tribes including reservation of seats in professional colleges.

Article 164 provides for a Ministry of Tribal Welfare in each of the State of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa which have large concentration of Scheduled Tribes population. These Ministries are required to look after the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes in their respective States.

Article 244 provides for the inclusion of a Fifth Schedule in the Constitution for incorporating provisions for the administration of Scheduled Areas and Tribes of the States which have sizeable tribal population (other than those of Assam).

Article 275 provides for the grant of special funds by the Union Government to State Government for promoting the welfare of Scheduled Tribes and providing them with a better administration.

In pursuance of Article 338 of the Constitution which lays down, that “there shall be a Special Officer for the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes to be appointed by the President”, a Commissioner for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes is required to be appointed by the Union Government. The Commissioner investigates all matters relating to the safeguards provided for the Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution. He also submit annual reports to the President on the implementation of these safeguards. His reports are discussed in each House of the Parliament. To assist the Commissioner in his task, Deputy Commissioners have also been posted in various States.

In most of the States which have tribal population, there are separate departments to look after the interest of Scheduled Tribes. These are, however, mostly coordination departments which formulate schemes for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes. The welfare schemes are generally implemented by the Department of Education, Health, Industry, etc. depending upon the nature of the scheme.

Scheduled Areas

‘Scheduled Areas’ have been declared in the State of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan. The scheme of administration of Scheduled Areas under the Fifth Schedule visualizes a division of responsibility between the state and union governments. The state governments have been given the responsibility of screening the legislation which are unsuitable for extension to the tribal areas.

**Development of Scheduled
Castes, Scheduled Tribes and
Other Under-privileged Groups**

They are also responsible for framing regulation which are necessary for the protection of the tribals' land and for prevention of exploitation of the tribals by the money-lenders. It implements schemes for the welfare of the tribals living within its boundary.

The Union Government provides guidelines in regard to the administration of Scheduled Areas. It also provides necessary funds that are required to raise the standard of administration and for the improvement in the quality of life of the tribal communities. The Union Government also have the power to give direction to the State Governments about matters relating to the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes.

The Governors of those States which have Scheduled Areas are empowered under the Fifth Schedule with the right to modify Central and State laws so as to make them applicable to tribal areas. They may also frame regulations that are essential for the care and protection of tribal communities. As per para 5 of the Fifth Schedule, the Governor is required to submit an annual report to the President of India regarding administration of Scheduled Areas. According to para 4 of the Fifth Schedule Tribes' Advisory Councils have been set up in those States which have Scheduled Areas or which have large concentration of tribal population (as is in the case of West Bengal). Its function is to advise the Governor on matters which relate to the welfare and protection of the Scheduled Tribes in the concerned State. At least $\frac{3}{4}$ th members of the Council are representatives of the Scheduled Tribes which are drawn from Legislative Assembly of the State/or from other representatives of the tribal communities.

Socio-Political Autonomy of Tribal Areas

The Sixth Scheduled of the Constitution attached to Article 244(2) and 275(1) grants considerable degree of social, cultural and political autonomy to the tribal areas of Assam. This has been achieved through the creation of Autonomous Districts and Autonomous Regions with District Councils and Regional Councils respectively. These Councils make laws related to land allotment, use of forests and canal waters, regulation of shifting cultivation, establishment of Village or Town Committees and their powers, marriage and other social customs. The Councils also administer justice under the All India Civil and Penal Codes, as modified by social customs. They can establish primary schools and raise funds by assessing and collecting land revenue and by imposing taxes. These councils issue licenses for the purpose of extracting minerals. The District Council can regulate money-lending and other trading activities by non-tribals. Regional and District councils can also prohibit or restrict the application of Parliamentary or State laws to their areas.

The tribals in India have some sort of traditional councils or bodies in a village or a group of villages. Their functions in many places are primarily to decide social, economic and religious matters in the light of their customary laws. In some areas, they also decide judicial matters on the basis of the consent of the tribal people. Some tribes have elected chiefs while others have hereditary chiefs for presiding over the council meetings. The powers of chiefs vary from tribe to tribe.

These councils were quite powerful institutions in the past. But now, in most cases, this institution is languishing and it mainly deals with matters pertaining to social and religious affairs of the tribe. In some case, as in Arunachal Pradesh

where the Tribal Councils function within the general framework of the Assam Frontier and Administration of Justice (Regulation of 1945) Act, these traditional councils are quite powerful. Nagaland has recognised Village Councils, Range Councils and Tribal Councils, which have wide powers related to administration, developmental matters and cases involving breaches of customary laws and usages.

In most of the tribal areas, statutory panchayats are functioning at village levels, which discharge administrative, economic and social functions.

2.4 TRIBAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Clan

Normally, every tribe is divided into a number of units. The inter-relation between these units provides the framework of their social organisation. In fact, regulation of marriage is the most important function of these units.

Among the Toda of Nilgiri Hills, the tribe is divided into two groups or **moieties** called Teivaliol and Tartharol. This type of social set up is called dual organisation. Among the Toda the first moiety is again divided into six smaller groups or clans and the latter into 12 clans. Sometimes as in the case of the Garo of Meghalaya, two or more clans are combined to form a **phratry**.

The members of a clan are required to seek marriage alliance outside their own clan. In other words, a clan is described as exogamous, whereas a tribe within which its members are required to marry is described as endogamous. The members of a clan believe that they are the descendants of a common ancestor and are, therefore, bound by a feeling of unity. The ancestor's symbolic existence is perceived in an animal or a plant or any other object and it is generally referred to as totem. The attitude of the clan towards totem may differ from tribe to tribe. The names of the clans are derived from the concerned totem. The members of the clan are forbidden to cut down totemic plants or kill totemic animals. They may mourn the death of their totem. Religious ceremonies may be held to pray for the growth and spread of the totemic species.

But this does not mean that the existence of a clan is an essential feature of the tribal social structure. For instance, among the Andaman Islanders, a tribe is divided into several local groups, each comprising several families. Thus, each group mainly consists of close relatives. Unlike clan, marriage within the group is permissible, but marriages between close relatives are avoided. The local groups maintain friendly relations with each other and meet on festive occasions. A man or a woman belongs to the local group in which he or she was born. A similar type of social structure is found among the Kadar of Kerala.

Sometimes, the tribe is divided into social or economic classes. For instance, the Gond tribe is divided into aristocrats, tenants and labourers. Similarly, the Khasi are divided into four classes like the royal, the priestly, the minister and the plebian clans.

Marriage

Among the tribal communities, different types of marriages are in vogue. Normally, marriage takes place with the consent of the relatives of the boy and the girl. Such marriages are accompanied by a ceremonial feasting and merry-

making. Such parents of girls as cannot afford heavy expenses on marriage allow their daughters to be captured by boys who like to marry them. This method is generally adopted with the prior knowledge of the relatives of the bride and the groom. In such cases, the capturing of the girl does not lead to any conflict between the two parties. Sometimes, the boy and the girl who love each other, run away from their homes and stay elsewhere till they are accepted back. A boy who is unable to meet the marriage expenses, including the customary bride price, may serve at the household of his would-be wife and finally succeed in marrying her.

Widow marriage is generally practised by all tribal communities. If a widow is married to her deceased husband's brother, then the practice is called levirate. Sometimes, after the death of a woman, her husband may marry his wife's sister. Such a practice is described as sororate.

Among most of the tribal communities, a man keeps only one wife (monogamy) at a time. But there are tribes like the Gond, the Baiga, the Naga, etc. wherein a person marries more than one woman. This is described as polygyny. The custom of one woman marrying more than one husband is called polyandry. It is practised by tribes like the Toda, the Kota, the Bhot and so on.

Family

Marriage leads to the formation of a family. After the marriage, the husband and wife have to stay together at some place. In majority of cases, the wife stays after marriage with her husband's parents. This arrangement is called patrilocal residence. The reverse of this is called matrilocal, whereby the husband moves to stay with his wife, i.e., in the household of her parents. Among the Khasi, the family is usually formed by the woman, her husband, her unmarried children (male and female) and her married daughters and their husbands. In this type of family, the property is inherited through the female line i.e., from mother to daughter, from daughter to grand-daughter, and so on. This arrangement is called matrilineal inheritance. In the families of partrilocal residence, inheritance is followed through male line, i.e, from father to son, from son to grandson, and so on. This is known as patrilineal inheritance.

The smallest social unit among the tribals is the nuclear family. It is constituted by a man, his wife and unmarried children. Sometimes, two or three more closely related persons with their spouses and their children live together, thus making the unit an extended family. In an extended family, like that of the Kurichchan of Kerala, the number of members may exceed more than 50 at a time.

The family among the tribals is a production-cum-consumption unit. All members, including women and children, participate in the economic activities of the family and share food from the same kitchen.

Kinship Structure

The children born to a couple usually have two sets of relatives – one set related through father and the other through mother. Besides, the brothers and sisters born of the same parents are related to each other as siblings. Persons are said to be kin to each other if the relationship can be traced genealogically. But here also, there are two types of kin. In the first type are included the kin who are generally identified as blood relations, i.e., consanguineous kin. These kin

can be traced through descent from like father, father's brother, father's sister, father's father, father's father's sister or father's father's brother, sister, son or daughter, son's son or son's daughter, etc. The second category called affinal kin includes those kin who are related through marriage and descent like wife, brother's wife, sister's husband, father's sister's husband, son's daughter's husband, etc.

The bond of kinship is very strong among the tribal communities. Important kins are required to play significant roles at the time of different socio-religious functions. The relatives with whom marriages are to be avoided are decided on the basis of kinship. This may include not only near kins but also others like the members of a clan with whom it may not be possible to trace relationship genealogically.

Associations and Dormitories

Besides family, clan, etc., of which people become members by birth, the members of a tribe may form associations on the basis of age or sex. In these associations, normally, people belonging to specific age-groups alone are admitted. Such associations may organise their own youth houses called dormitories. Usually, unmarried boys and girls will have their separate dormitories, but combined ones are also found. The dormitory members organise group activities which may be related to economic, cultural or recreational aspects of the tribe. They may also help individual households in house construction, cultivation and other activities. In such cases, they are normally served with good food.

Among the Konayak Nagas the boys' dormitory is called morung and the girls' dormitory, yo. The Bhotias in North Uttar Pradesh call it rangband. The Mundas and the Hoz call it gitiora and the Gonds refer to it as gotul.

The youths spend their nights in the dormitories and engage themselves in singing, dancing and story telling. The activities of the dormitories are controlled by the senior boys or girls, or elders among the youth. The junior members do all menial work, such as cleaning, collecting fire-wood, lighting fire inside the dormitory, etc. They also attend to other work as directed by their seniors.

In many places, the men's house is used as a guest house. Sometimes, the officials who visit the village use the men's house for doing their official work. These days community radios are also kept in these dormitories.

Law and Justice

Among the tribes, code of conduct is regularized by customs. Customary laws are followed for settling disputes and for punishing the guilty. Tribals have their own code of conduct, and rules to regulate inheritance of property and to decide a person's right to an office relating to religious or political position. Breaking customary laws is considered as an offence and the guilty is punished suitably. A person accused of committing a serious offence is punished by social boycott. Petty offences are not viewed very seriously and such matters are left to be punished by supernatural powers. Keeping sex relations with close kin, adultery, witchcraft, etc. are considered as major offences and the wrong-doers are punished accordingly. Often cases are settled by asking the offender to give compensation to the victim or he is pardoned after he gives a penal feast.

The maintenance of law and order is largely a collective responsibility. This responsibility is handled by specific agencies among certain tribes. Among the Naga, the tribal chief is an important functionary who settles all kinds of disputes. The chiefs are generally helped by the village elders.

Among the Kamars of Madhya Pradesh the “local Panchayat” formed by the village elders is responsible for settling disputes. The decision of Panchayat is usually unanimous or represents the point of view of the majority. There also exists a superior agency for appeal against the decision of the Panchayat. The Panchayat gives hearing to both sides, while the accused person is given a chance to prove his innocence.

In Minicoy, an important island in the Union Territory of Lakshadweep, the agency responsible for the settlement of disputes is the Panchayat. The residential area is divided into villages and each village has got a headman called Moopan. Each Moopan represents his village in the Panchayat. Only Moopans are allowed to have contact with people from outside the island. Community work in the village is done by these tribals under the leadership of the Moopan. Moopan is also authorised to give suitable punishment to the guilty. Pre-marital and extra-marital relations are viewed very seriously and such cases are sternly dealt with the Panchayat. The guilty are publicly whipped.

Religious Beliefs

Every tribal community has its own religious beliefs. They believe in the presence of supernatural powers, ghosts and spirits. Different rituals are performed to have the blessings of spirits. Since the faith in spirits and supernatural powers is an important aspect of tribal religion, it is called animism.

The tribals believe that thunder, lightning, flood, rain, etc. are produced by supernatural powers. Similarly, they also believe that every object, such as forest, river, mountain, etc. has got its guardian spirit. Even after death people exist through their souls or are reborn as offsprings. They believe that the spirits of the dead ancestors have power, which decide their destiny. The diseases are thought of as the evil influence of spirits. They believe that suitable rituals help in the eradication of diseases.

In Western India, the Bhils believe that soul continues to exist as spirit after death. The Todas also worship their ancestors. They beat the buffaloes to death with a belief that they may join the spirit of a dead person.

Worship of nature is another important aspect of tribal religion. The Santals, the Mundas, the Hos and the Birhors of Bihar call the Sun as Sing Bongs, i.e., Supreme God. The Garo consider the Sun, the Moon and the stars as spirits residing in the heaven. The Kanikkars of Kerala also worship the Sun as God by keeping a lighted lamp, some fruits and rice in front of their huts.

Among certain tribals, the women are not allowed to touch certain objects and are forbidden entry into holy places. This sacred belief is called taboo. They believe that the breaking of a taboo may bring disaster to the tribe.

For instance, the Kharia women are not allowed to touch a plough. They are also not permitted to do thatching. The Todas of Nilgiri Hills do not permit women’s entry into the dairy area. The women are also not allowed to do any

work relating to dairy products, since these products are considered as sacred objects.

There are separate persons for the performance of religious ceremonies. They are known by different names. Among the Kharia, the headman of the village and the religious head are one and the same person. The religious activities among the Ho are carried out by Deuri—the religious headman. He offers sacrifices to the chief village deity. The evil spirits are dealt with by Deonura—the spirit doctor. The Munda and the Oraon call their religious headman as Pahan. The village is looked after by the village headman called Mahato. The duty of the Pahan is to serve the village deities in order to keep away diseases and misfortunes.

2.5 LEVELS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF SCHEDULED TRIBES

According to the Indian Planning Commission, people below the poverty line among STs are 30-35 per cent (down from 50-60%). But Dr. Singh¹ found in Udaipur, Rajasthan that its about 50 per cent or even 70 per cent. One should take the 'sarkar's' figures with a pinch of salt.

Most tribes are concentrated in heavily forested areas that combine inaccessibility with limited political or economic significance. Historically, the economy of most tribes was subsistence agriculture or hunting and gathering. Tribal members traded with outsiders for the few necessities they lacked, such as salt and iron. A few local Hindu craftsmen might provide such items as cooking utensils. The twentieth century, however, has seen far-reaching changes in the relationship between tribals and the larger society and, by extension, traditional tribal economies. Improved transportation and communication have brought ever deeper intrusions into tribal lands; merchants and a variety of government policies have involved tribal people more thoroughly in the cash economy, although, by no means, on the most favourable of terms. Large areas fell into the hands of non-tribals around 1900, when many regions were opened by the government to homestead-style settlement. Immigrants received free land in return for cultivating it. Tribal people, too, could apply for land titles, although even title to the portion of land they happened to be planting that season could not guarantee their ability to continue shifting cultivation. More important, the notion of permanent, individual ownership of land was foreign to most tribals. Land, if seen in terms of ownership at all, was viewed as a communal resource, free to whoever needed it. By the time tribals accepted the necessity of obtaining formal land titles, they had lost the opportunity to lay claim to lands that might rightfully have been considered theirs. Generally, tribals were severely disadvantaged in dealing with government officials who granted land titles. Albeit belatedly, the colonial regime realized the necessity of protecting tribals from the predatory outsiders and prohibited the sale of tribal lands. Although an important loophole in the form of land leases was left open, tribes made some gains in the mid-twentieth century. Despite considerable obstruction by local police and land officials, who were slow to delineate tribal holdings and slower still to offer police protection, some land was returned to tribal people.

¹ Dr. Bhupinder Singh, former Commissioner of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes and former Advisor to the Planning Commission, has had extensive experience in government programs for tribal development. In addition, he has academic qualifications in that area and currently heads an NGO focused on tribal development.

In the 1970s, the gains that tribal people had made in earlier decades were

eroded in many regions, especially in Central India. Migration into tribal lands increased dramatically, and the deadly combination of constabulary and revenue officers, uninterested in tribal welfare, and sophisticated non-tribals, willing and able to bribe local officials, was sufficient to deprive many tribals of their landholdings. The means of subverting protective legislation were legion: local officials could be persuaded to ignore land acquisition by non-tribal people, alter land registry records, lease plots of land for short periods and then simply refuse to relinquish them, or induce tribal members to become indebted and attach their lands. Whatever the means, the result was that many tribal members became landless labourers in the 1960s and 1970s, and regions that a few years earlier had been the exclusive domain of tribes had an increasingly heterogeneous population. Unlike previous eras in which tribal people were shunted into more remote forests, by the 1960s, relatively little unoccupied land was available.

Improved communication, roads with motorized traffic, and more frequent government intervention figured in the increased contact that tribal people had with outsiders. Tribes fared best where there was little to induce non-tribals to settle; cash crops and commercial highways frequently signaled the dismemberment of the tribes. Merchants have long been a link to the outside world, but in the past, they were generally petty traders, and the contact they had with tribal people was transient. By the 1960s and 1970s, the resident non-tribal shopkeeper was a permanent feature of many villages. Shopkeepers often sold liquor on credit, enticing tribal members into debt and into mortgaging their land. In the past, tribes made up for the shortages before harvest by foraging from the surrounding forest. More recently shopkeepers have offered ready credit, with the provision that loans be repaid in kind with 50 to 100 per cent interest after harvest. Repaying one bag of millet with two bags has set up a cycle of indebtedness from which many have been unable to break loose.

The possibility of cultivators growing a profitable cash crop, such as cotton or castor-oil plants, continues to draw merchants into tribal areas. Non-tribal traders frequently establish an extensive network of relatives and associates as shopkeepers to serve as agents in a number of villages. Cultivators who grow a cash crop often sell it to the same merchants, who provide consumption credit throughout the year. The credit carries a high-interest price tag, whereas the tribal people's crops are bought at a fraction of the market rate. Cash crops offer a further disadvantage in that they decrease the supply of available foodstuffs and increase tribal dependence on economic forces beyond their control. This transformation has meant a decline in both the tribes' security and their standard of living.

In previous generations, families might have purchased silver jewellery as a form of security; contemporary tribal people are more likely to buy minor consumer goods. Whereas jewellery could serve as collateral in critical emergencies, current purchases simply increase indebtedness. In areas where gathering forest products is remunerative, merchants exchange their products for tribal labour. Indebtedness is so extensive that although such transactions are illegal, traders sometimes "sell" their debtors to other merchants, much like indentured servants.

In some instances, tribes have managed to hold their own in contacts with

outsiders. Some Chenchus, a hunting and gathering tribe of the Central hill regions of Andhra Pradesh, have continued to specialize in collecting forest products for sale. Caste Hindus living among them rent land from the Chenchus and pay a portion of the harvest. The Chenchus themselves have responded unenthusiastically to government efforts to induce them to take up farming. Their relationship with non-tribal people has been one of symbiosis, although there were indications in the early 1980s that other groups were beginning to compete with the Chenchus in gathering forest products. A large paper mill was cutting bamboo in their territory in a manner that did not allow regeneration, and two groups had begun to collect for sale the same products that the Chenchus sell. Dalits settled among them with the help of the Chenchus and learned agriculture from them. The nomadic Banjara herders, who graze their cattle in the forest, also have been allotted land there. The Chenchus have a certain advantage in dealing with caste Hindus; because of their long association with Hindu hermits and their refusal to eat beef, they are considered an unpolluted caste. Other tribes, particularly in South India, have cultural practices that are offensive to Hindus and, when they are assimilated, are often considered Dalits.

The final blow for some tribes has come when non-tribals, through political jockeying, have managed to gain legal tribal status, that is, to be listed as a Scheduled Tribe. The Gonds of Andhra Pradesh effectively lost their only advantage in trying to protect their lands when the Banjaras, a group that had been settling in Gond territory, were classified as a Scheduled Tribe in 1977. Their newly acquired tribal status made the Banjaras eligible to acquire Gond land “legally” and to compete with Gonds for reserved political seats, places in educational institutions, and other benefits. Because the Banjaras are not scheduled in neighbouring Maharashtra, there has been an influx of Banjara emigrants from that state into Andhra Pradesh in search of better opportunities.

Tribes in the Himalayan foothills have not been as hard-pressed by the intrusions of the non-tribals. Historically, their political status was always distinct from the rest of India. Until the British colonial period, there was little effective control by any of the empires centered in peninsular India; the region was populated by autonomous feuding tribes. The British, in efforts to protect the sensitive northeast frontier, followed a policy dubbed the “Inner Line”; non-tribal people were allowed into the areas only with special permission. Post-independence governments have continued the policy, protecting the Himalayan tribes as part of the strategy to secure the border with China.

This policy has generally saved the northern tribes from the kind of exploitation that those elsewhere in South Asia have suffered. In Arunachal Pradesh (formerly part of the North-East Frontier Agency), for example, tribal members control commerce and most lower-level administrative posts. Government construction projects in the region have provided tribes with a significant source of cash – both for setting up businesses and for providing paying customers. Some tribes have made rapid progress through the education system. Instruction began in Assamese but was eventually changed to Hindi; by the early 1980s, English was taught at most levels. Both education and the increase in ready cash from government spending have permitted tribal people a significant measure of social mobility. The role of early missionaries in providing education was also crucial in Assam.

Government policies on forest reserves have affected tribal people profoundly.

Wherever the state has chosen to exploit forests, it has seriously undermined the tribes' way of life. Government efforts to reserve forests have precipitated armed (if futile) resistance on the part of the tribal people involved. Intensive exploitation of forests has often meant allowing outsiders to cut large areas of trees (while the original tribal inhabitants were restricted from cutting), and ultimately replacing mixed forests capable of sustaining tribal life with single-product plantations. Where forests are reserved, non-tribals have proved far more sophisticated than their forest counterparts at bribing the concerned local officials to secure effective (if extralegal) use of forest lands. The system of bribing local officials having the duty of enforcing the reserves is so well established that the rates of bribery are reasonably fixed (by the number of ploughs a farmer uses or the amount of grain harvested). Tribal people often end up doing unpaid work for Hindus simply because a caste Hindu, who has paid the requisite bribe, can at least ensure a tribal member that he or she will not be evicted from forest lands. The final irony, notes Von Fürer-Haimendorf, is that the swidden cultivation many tribes practiced had maintained South Asia's forests, whereas the intensive cultivation and commercial interests that replaced the tribal way of life have destroyed the forests.

Extending the system of primary education into tribal areas and reserving places for tribal children in middle and high schools and higher educational institutions are central to government policy, but efforts to improve a tribe's educational status have had mixed results. Recruitment of qualified teachers and determination of the appropriate language of instruction also remain troublesome. Commission after commission on the "language question" have called for instruction, at least at the primary level, in the students' native tongue. In some regions, tribal children entering school must begin by learning the official regional language, often one completely unrelated to their tribal tongue. The experiences of the Gonds of Andhra Pradesh provide an example. Primary schooling began there in the 1940s and 1950s. The government selected a group of Gonds who had managed to become semiliterate in Telugu and taught them the basics of written script. These individuals became teachers who taught in Gondi, and their efforts enjoyed a measure of success until the 1970s, when state policy demanded instruction in Telugu. The switch in the language of instruction both made the Gond teachers superfluous because they could not teach in Telugu and also presented the government with the problem of finding reasonably qualified teachers willing to teach in outlying tribal schools.

The commitment of tribes to acquire a formal education for their children varies considerably. Tribes differ in the extent to which they view education positively. Gonds and Pardhans, two groups in the Central hill region, are a case in point. The Gonds are cultivators, and they, frequently, are reluctant to send their children to school, needing them, they say, to work in the fields. The Pardhans were traditionally bards and ritual specialists, and they have taken to education with enthusiasm. The effectiveness of educational policy likewise varies by region. In those parts of the Northeast where tribes have generally been spared the wholesale onslaught of outsiders, schooling has helped tribal people to secure political and economic benefits. The education system there has provided a corps of highly trained tribal members in the professions and high-ranking administrative posts.

Many tribal schools are plagued by high drop-out rates. Children attend the

first three to four years of primary school and gain a smattering of knowledge, only to lapse into illiteracy later. A few who enter continue up to the tenth grade; of those who do, a few manage to finish high school. Therefore, very few are eligible to attend institutions of higher education, where the high rate of attrition continues.

General Features

The tribal population in India represents a unique form of society, which is distinct in several respects from the general population. The Scheduled Tribes numbering 51.63 million (excluding Assam) today constitute 7.76 per cent of the total population of the country. Barring Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Chandigarh, Delhi and Pondicherry, the Scheduled Tribes comprising about 260 communities are found in all States and Union Territories. They are, however, unevenly distributed in terms of sheer numbers. Madhya Pradesh, with more than 11 million, accounts for the largest concentration of Scheduled Tribes in India. In regard to their proportion to the total population, their percentage is very high in Nagaland, Lakshadweep and Orissa. While some tribal communities like the Bhil, the Munda and the Santal are found in more than one State, a few like the Kannaurs of Himachal Pradesh or the Siddis of Gujarat reside in specific areas.

Tribal communities also show a great deal of variation in their numerical strength. While Bhil and the Gond number more than seven million, there are tribes like Arandan, Kochuvelan, Andamanese, Onge etc., which have a population of less than 100. The tribals follow a number of religions like Buddhism, Christianity, Jainism, Islam and other distinct religions of their own. Many have their own distinct languages. In fact, in the 1981 census, over 250 tribal mother tongues were returned.

The tribals are also at different stages of social, economic and educational development. The largest number of tribal population depends on agriculture. A significantly large number of tribals also depend for their livelihood on occupations related to hunting, fishing, food gathering and cottage industries. Occupations like mining, plantation and animal husbandry are also practised by tribals. Many tribal communities are settled within well defined geographical boundaries, but there are others like the Bhot of Himachal Pradesh or the Birhor of Bihar who are either nomadic or semi-nomadic.

The more backward among them like the Onge, the Jarawa and the Andamanese of Andaman Islands, the Birhor of Bihar, the Malai Pandaram and the Arandan of Kerala are practically at the food gathering and hunting stage of economy. On the other hand, communities like the Lushai and the Khasi of Meghalaya are fairly advanced and have made significant progress in the field of economic and educational development. The Dhodia and the Dubla of Gujarat and the Mina of Rajasthan are hardly distinguishable from their neighbours in respect of agricultural practices and other ways of life.

Most of the tribals are patrilineal, but there are a few like the Khasi and the Garo of Meghalaya and the Lakshadweep Islands who have matrilineal traditions.

There are four major geographical areas or zones in the country where there is concentration of tribal population. The tribal communities living in each of these zones, by and large, have common racial, linguistic, cultural and even

economic characteristics. The four zones, which are thus distinguishable, are the North, North-Eastern, the Central; the Western and the Southern.

The Branded Tribes of India

The social category generally known as the Denotified and Nomadic tribes of India covers a population approximately of six crores. Some of them are included in the list of Scheduled Castes, some others in the Scheduled Tribes, and quite a few in Other Backward Classes. But there are many of these tribes, which find place in none of the above. What is common to all these Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) is the fate of being branded as 'born' criminals.

The story of the DNTs goes back to the early years of the colonial rule. In those times, whoever opposed the British colonial expansion was perceived as a potential criminal. Particularly, if any attempts were made to oppose the government by the use of arms, the charge of criminality was a certainty. Many of the wandering minstrels, fakirs, petty traders, rustic transporters and disbanded groups of soldiers were included by the British in their list of criminal groups. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the tribes in the North-West frontier were declared 'criminal tribes'. This category became increasingly open ended and by 1871, the British had prepared an official list of Criminal Tribes. An act to regulate criminal tribes was passed that year. For instance, Bhils who had fought the British rule in Kandesh and on the banks of Narmada and were convicted under section 110 of the IPC, were to be recognised as criminal tribes. The CT Act made provisions for establishing reformatory settlements where the criminal tribals could be kept in confinement and subjected to low paid work. They were required to report to the guardrooms several times every day, so that they did not escape from the oppressive settlements.

By 1921, the CT Act had been extended to cover numerous other tribes in Madras Presidency, Hyderabad and Mysore. Thus, about the time Indian politics saw the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as the leader of the freedom struggle, the Indian society mutely witnessed the emergence of a new class of people who were branded as born criminals.

Soon after Independence, the communities notified as criminal tribes were denotified by the Government. This notification was followed by substitution of a series of Acts, generally entitled 'Habitual Offenders Act'. The HOAs preserved most of the provisions of the former CT Acts, except the premise implicit in it that an entire community can be 'born' criminal. Apparently, the denotification and the passing of the HOAs should have ended the misery of the communities penalised under the CT Act. But that has not happened. The police force as well as the people in general were taught to look upon the 'Criminal Tribes' as born criminals during the colonial times. That attitude continues to persist even today. One does not know if the police training academies in India still teach the trainees that certain communities are habitually criminal; but surely the CT Act is a part of the syllabus leading to the discussion of crime-watch. The result is that every time there is a petty theft in a locality, the DNTs in the neighbourhood become the first suspects. The ratio between the arrests and the convictions of the DNTs needs to be analysed to see the extent of the harassment caused by the police to these most vulnerable and the weakest sections of our society. The land possessed by the criminal tribes was

already alienated during the colonial rule. After independence, various state governments have done little to restore their land to them. Schemes for economic upliftment do not seem to have benefited them. The illiteracy rate among the DNTs is higher than among the SCs or the STs, malnutrition's more frequent and provisions for education and health care almost negligible since most of the DNTs have remained nomadic in habit. And above all, there is no end to the atrocities that the DNTs have to face.

Being illiterate and ignorant of the law of the land, the DNTs know very little about the police procedures, and so, often get into difficult situations. The onus of proving innocence rests with them. I have known many of these people who are scared to wear new clothes for the fear of being arrested and, therefore, spoil them before using them. Mob-lynched, hounded from village to village, starved of all civic amenities, deprived of the means of livelihood and gripped by the fear of police persecution, the DNTs of India are on the run. Freedom has still not reached them.

It is time that the Census authorities take up the work of deciding on a procedure to count the DNTs as a distinct category in the next Census. Similarly, the police training academies will have to make special efforts to sensitise the new trainees to treat this unfortunate lot with less brutality and greater understanding. They will have to be brought under the provisions made for the STs in the Tribal Sub-plans. Moreover, the people of India will have to raise their voice and alert the authorities at local and national level to the kind of silent genocide that the DNTs are facing. It is then that, some day, these first freedom fighters of our country will receive the benefits of independence for which they have carried the stigma of being branded for over a century.

Denotified and Nomadic Tribes of India

The so-called denotified tribes of India are among the lasting victims of British imperialism. Originally "notified" by the government as criminals in 1871, the DNTs should have enjoyed the freedom of independence that came to the rest of India's people in 1947. Instead, they have languished as the most handicapped community in the nation, with health, literacy, and employment levels far below the average.

The British labeled them criminals because they pursued a nomadic way of life. The nomadic tribes traditionally carried important commodities, such as salt and honey between the coasts and the inland forests. The British relied on these networks to establish their own trading relationships and to guide their armies through unknown regions. Indeed, these traders and transporters of goods were crucial informants for the new rulers, who benefited from tribal knowledge of flora and fauna, transportation and communication.

As railways and telegraphs were built in the 1850s, such networks became redundant. The colonial authorities grew nervous about people who moved around, carrying intelligence they could not control directly. In the aftermath of the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, these former allies were seen as potential enemies. In 1871, an Act was passed for "the notification of criminal tribes." Hundreds of tribes that traditionally collected food from the forest became criminals with the stroke of a pen. When they could not be forcibly settled, they were sometimes shot at sight. Those who were settled were subjected to a pass

Development of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Under-privileged Groups

system to control their movements and were rehabilitated through rigorous labour.

These criminal tribes were properly denotified in 1952 after India's independence. But they were reclassified as habitual offenders in 1959. The stigma of the criminal label still follows them to this day. Many laws and regulations in various states prohibit certain communities of people from traveling; others must still register at police stations in the districts they pass through. This close association with authority makes nomadic tribes especially liable to suspicion when crimes actually occur. The percentage of DNTs in custody and under investigation is greatly disproportionate to their population.

Check Your Progress II

Note : a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the text.

1) Write short notes on :

i) Religious beliefs of Tribes

ii) Branded Tribes of India

.....
.....
.....
.....

2.6 NATURE OF DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Scheduled Tribes have not attained the same level of development throughout India. Different levels of development exist in different geographic regions. There are variations in terms of social and cultural patterns, population density, economic pursuits, educational attainment, and so on.

In the 60s tribal development groups were set up. They proceeded slowly with target-oriented schemes. The Vth plan was a special plan where the steps laid down were: identify areas where tribals are concentrated, identify what natural resources are there in those areas, make a project report, and find financial resources for them and implement them.

The central belt from Gujarat to Andhra Pradesh accounts for 80 per cent of the tribal population. This belt is rich in mineral resources. There are a variety of tribes (about 250 in number) and they vary widely in term of culture and economy. Some are advanced (for example, Nagas and Mizos) and have a high literacy rate. At the other end, the Andamanese, Onge, Jarwas are some examples of tribes who had no contact with the outside world, were 'backward', not settled agriculturists, lived in the stone age, etc. The Government of India identified 75 such 'primitive' tribes.

In the VIth plan, 180 integrated development projects with a four-fold thrust: health, education as a key to economic development and infrastructure sectors were established. The tribal supplant strategy was worked out and it was specified to involve MPs, MLAs, and other tribal leaders in various communities. But people's involvement existed only conceptually, not in reality. The total

outlay so far has been Rs. 10,000-20,000 crores. And there has been an Herculean effort. But the benefit is not proportional to the money and effort put in it, its far from satisfactory.

Some Negative Features of Development

In sparsely populated tribal areas, there are some huge complexes: Rourkela, Durgapur steel plants are some examples. The plants flourish in their mineral rich locations, but it is at the cost of the tribals. They have been displaced and there has been no worthwhile rehabilitation. Being neither skilled nor literate, they are unable to take part in that 'development'. The development effort has brought harm to the tribals. Can we not have "smaller" developmental projects, such as smaller dams?

The human rights of the tribals have been trampled underfoot. A reappraisal is necessary from many points of view. There are five parties in tribal development: government, both Central and State, which are bound by constitutional provisions, political parties who have not fulfilled their promises and, instead, themselves exploit the tribals, 'mainstream' civil society, which is indifferent to the tribals in their mind the tribals are on the periphery), the bureaucracy, which is apathetic, and the tribal groups themselves – some want to be left alone, some are unconcerned, some are mute, some are stoic, and some are grim.

Role of the State in the Development of Scheduled Tribes

Western democracies are fortunate – the people are educated, they are conscious, and this is what makes democracies stick to the issue. In India, literacy is very low, the percentage of illiterate, poor, and backward people so large that the functioning of democracy is difficult. So the non-government organisations, with a focus on education, has a very important role to play.

The Constitution was written by the founding fathers who were very conscious of the real state of the country – they were aware of the people who form Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Backward Classes and the social problems associated with them. That is why they included special provisions for the rights of these groups. We have to consider the Constitution, the UN Human Rights Declaration, IRO Commission 106, 169, and other relevant statutes to understand the situation in India. The Constitution also laid down guidelines, which the State must follow in regard to these backward groups. In Article 46, the Constitution has said that the State shall protect SCs, STs and provide means for their development and has laid down means for doing so.

Development was meant to touch various aspects of the life of the people – agriculture, animal husbandry, infrastructure, such as road building, dams, mining, industries, social issues, such as health, etc. To implement these development tasks, blocks of 100 villages (or in some cases less, blocks of 50 or so) were created. Involvement of people was sought for various committees. This has been going on for decades. Even in the initial stages, it was found that those, who were the members of these committees, were those who were from the powerful and affluent sections of society, the upper castes mostly. They could "channelize" development for themselves. In the 70s, it was thought that the generalized direction prevalent for development projects was not good,

and focus was necessary. The focus was to identify target groups, identify plans, which suited them, so that development schemes would not peter out or be appropriated by affluent sections. Both community and target development are still in vogue but to what effect?

One major flaw was that the people were not included. Collusion between bureaucracy and influential sections led to feathering their own nests. Bureaucratic efforts were not sympathetic to the people's cause in most cases. We have not reached the stage where the influence of bureaucracy has lessened or the benefits are reaching the people as expected.

In the Rajiv Gandhi era, the 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendments changed the government tier from central-state-district-block (at the lowest tier the block was simply an appendage of the state govt. with no real power) to bring about a radical change by having Panchayats at three levels: village (Panchayat), groups of villages (Panchayat Union), district (district Panchayat) purported to have elected representatives. In some states they have come into being, but in some other states they have not.

In the following section, we will discuss various developmental efforts which have been made, particularly after independence, for the upliftment of Scheduled Tribes in India.

Background

The Government has special concern and commitment for the well-being of the Scheduled Tribes (also referred to as STs/Tribals) who suffer as a group due to their social and economic backwardness and relative isolation. According to the 1991 Census (data of 2001 is not yet available), they account for 67.76 million and represent 8.08 per cent of the country's total population. Of these, 1.32 million (1.95 per cent) belong to the Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) whose conditions are even worse than those of the rest of the tribals. In the absence of the data of 2001 Census, population of STs is estimated to have reached 88.8 million by 2001, representing 8.6 per cent of the country's total population (projected on the basis of the trend of decadal growth rate of STs).

Efforts made from the beginning of the Planned Era (1951) through various developmental plans, policies, special strategies and programmes, have registered a definite quantifiable improvement in the socio-economic status of the tribals. However, the progress made by them could not bring them anywhere nearer to the mainstream society, as the gap in their socio-economic status continued to prevail, not only as a matter of prime concern, but also as a task to accomplish during the Tenth Plan. Achievements and the persisting gaps under the three core sectors of education, health and economic development are detailed below:

Since Independence, the country has achieved considerable progress and prosperity through planned development. The First Five Year Plan was launched in 1952. Since most of the population of India has been living in villages, special emphasis was laid on rural reconstruction in each Five Year Plan. This was however, sought to be achieved initially through Community Development Programs. To achieve this objective 52 Projects were started in 1952 in the First Five Year Plan. But the developmental inputs included under

the Community Development Programs were of intensive nature. It was soon realised that it would not be possible to bring the entire rural areas under the ambit of these projects within a reasonably short period. It was, therefore, decided to adopt a comparatively less intensive and modest model of Community Development Blocks for the rapid development of rural areas.

It was envisaged that the Community Development Blocks would create a new thrust for development and self-sustained growth in rural areas. Therefore, every aspect of community life was brought under the purview of this programme. The Community Development Blocks initiated a wide spectrum of services for the development of agriculture, animal husbandry, education, health, communication, cottage industries, etc. in rural areas. But at the same time, all the geographical areas, which were brought under the purview of Community Development Blocks, had not yet reached the same level of development. Therefore, for each Block, such development plans had to be drawn as matched with the specific needs and economic potential of the Block. To give proper directions to the Blocks for drawing and implementation of different schemes, and to ensure involvement and participation of people in the process of development, District Advisory Committees were formed.

The primary objective of the Community Development Programme was to achieve rural development. This was envisaged by making available the required services at the doors of the people. But remote areas were inaccessible and there was almost total absence of additional infrastructural facilities. Therefore, special efforts and greater financial investment were required to extend the services available under the Community Development Programme to tribal areas. In keeping with this view, it was decided in 1954 to extend the programme of Community Development Blocks to tribal areas. Initially 43 such Blocks were selected for this purpose. Soon it was realised that it would not be possible to sustain such an intensive development approach for long. It was also realized that it may not be possible to bring other areas under the purview of the new programme within a short period.

Tribal Development Blocks

Thus, a less intensive and more practical view of Tribal Development Block, which was comparable with the Community Development Blocks, was introduced for the development of tribal areas. The Tribal Development Blocks were, however, required to serve smaller geographical areas and lesser population, than the Community Development Blocks. All those areas with two-third tribal population were to be brought under the purview of Tribal Development Blocks. By the end of the third Five Year Plan, there were more than 500 such Tribal Development Blocks serving around 40 per cent of the total tribal population in the country. Other areas of concentration with less than two-third but more than 50 per cent tribal population were continued to be served by the Community Development Programme. But no further expansion of the Tribal Development Blocks to other areas of tribal concentration took place after the Third Five Year Plan.

The progress achieved in rural areas during the first two decades of planned development after independence, especially in specific fields like agriculture, animal husbandry, education, public health, etc. has been quite spectacular. There was also an imperative need to make the country self-sufficient, with

regard to foodgrains with the result that most of the developmental programmes introduced in earlier decades were oriented towards agriculture. This approach, obviously, benefited the rich farmers who owned most of the available agricultural land in rural areas. The rich farmers became economically better than the small or the medium farmers. The landless agricultural labourers suffered adversely. The disparity between 'haves' and 'have-nots' became more pronounced than what it was before the introduction of Development Blocks. This unhealthy situation, however, could not be continued indefinitely, hence posing the need for just and equitable measures.

A Reconsideration

The approach and strategy for tribal development was reviewed comprehensively on the eve of the Fifth Five Year Plan. A Committee popularly known as the Shilo Ao Committee was already appointed for this purpose by the Planning Commission during the Fourth Plan. The Committee had already recommended that the Tribal Development Blocks, as instruments of tribal development, were unsuitable to tackle complex problems of tribals. It also noted clearly that no single programme was adequate to resolve their problems. Furthermore, the situation in tribal areas, in terms of resources, target groups, infrastructural facilities, local priorities, etc., was entirely different from non-tribal areas.

Even within the tribal areas, developmental problems faced by all the tribal people were not of uniform nature. The problems of those areas, which have more concentration of tribals are different from other areas having dispersed tribal population. An important distinguishing feature of the areas having tribal concentration and those inhabited by dispersed tribal groups is the ownership of resources. In the areas having tribal concentration, the contact with the external world has increased over the years because of better communication and other facilities. This has also partially affected their ownership pattern of economic resources. In case of tribal groups, which live in remote areas in a dispersed fashion, their command over economic resources has become extremely limited because of different checks and controls introduced by the Government.

In case of dispersed tribal groups, it was envisaged that various schemes of growth and development should be drawn, keeping in view the tribal community or the family as the unit of development. Further, since most of the dispersed tribal groups are either landless labourers or unskilled labourers, their development should be based on non-agricultural activities. Most backward of these dispersed tribal communities, such as the Onge, the Birhor or the Abujhmara are still in a pre-agricultural level of economy and survive through hunting, fishing or food gathering. The population size of such tribal communities is also comparatively very small and they are generally considered as pre-literate. Such extremely poor and backward groups, therefore, naturally required special assistance in the tribal development efforts.

Tribal Sub-Plan

To tackle the above-mentioned problems effectively, a comprehensive programme of development called Tribal Sub-Plan was prepared under the Fifth Five Year Plan. Accordingly, all areas with more than 50 per cent tribal population were treated Sub-Plan areas. Industrial and urban enclaves were, however, excluded from the purview of this new scheme. A development block

was taken as the smallest unit of development under this new strategy. The Tahsil (generally comprising a number of blocks) was taken as the basic unit for planning and development. This program is known as the Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP).

There has been practical difficulties for the delineation of Sub-Plan areas. This difficulty stemmed from the differences in the pattern of concentration of tribal population in different states and Union Territories. For instance, in the States like Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Bihar, it was possible to bring a substantial tribal population under the Sub-Plan areas. But in most of the other States and Union Territories, there were only a few areas, which could be delineated as Sub-Plan areas, i.e., having more than 50 per cent tribal population. Therefore, for such areas, the criteria of 50 per cent and more tribal population had to be modified while demarcating Sub-Plan areas. In states like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Assam, a minimum tribal population of 20,000 was accepted as the smallest unit of development. In states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh, this norm was further relaxed to 10,000 tribal population. In the case of West Bengal and Tripura, the criteria were further relaxed whereby villages with tribal concentration were identified for introducing this special development programme. In Karnataka and Daman, because of the absence of villages with tribal concentration, the programs, which were drawn for the development of dispersed tribal communities, had to be initiated.

The work relating to the delineation of areas of tribal concentration was taken up in the beginning of the Fifth Plan and completed by the end of 1976. The Tribal Sub-Plan concept became the main programme for tribal development. This programme covered 17 States and two Union Territories, namely Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Manipur, Orissa, Rajasthan, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Goa, Daman and Diu. The programme covered 26 districts fully and 97 districts partially. In tribal majority States and Union Territories of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Lakshadweep, this programme is not in operation as their respective Plans are primarily meant for the development of the local tribal population.

The Tribal Sub-Plan approach includes:

- i) Integrated Tribal Development Projects comprising generally administrative units like Sub-Divisions/Districts/tahsils/taluks with 50 per cent or more Scheduled Tribe population.
- ii) Pockets of tribal concentration having a total population of 10000 or more and a Scheduled Tribe population of 50 per cent or more.
- iii) Primitive Tribal Group Projects: During the Seventh Five Year Plan, clusters having a total population of 5000 with 50 per cent or more Scheduled Tribe population were identified. Till 1986-87, 47 such clusters covering a total tribal population of 1.7 lakhs were covered in Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Rajasthan.

The Tribal Sub-Plan has remained the main instrument, in recent times, for the development of Scheduled Tribes. The Sixth Plan attached primary importance to poverty alleviation among the Scheduled Tribes. It was envisaged that with

**Development of Scheduled
Castes, Scheduled Tribes and
Other Under-privileged Groups**

the massive developmental efforts under the Tribal Sub-Plan, it would be possible to raise at least 50 per cent of the tribal families above the poverty line. It had sought to achieve this objective by providing adequate infrastructure, elimination of exploitation and removal of illiteracy. The major objectives of tribal development have remained as follows:

- a) to take up family oriented beneficiary programmes in order to raise productivity levels of the beneficiary families in the fields of agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, small scale industries, etc.
- b) to liberate tribals from the exploitation of land grabbing, money-lending, debt-bondage, forest-labour, etc.
- c) to improve the quality of life through education and training programmes.
- d) to provide infrastructural facilities in tribal areas.

The Tribal Sub-Plan is financed through the resources drawn from:

- a) State Plans;
- b) Special Central Assistance of Ministry of Home Affairs (now Ministry of Welfare);
- c) Central and Centrally sponsored programs; and
- d) Institutional Finance.

The Tribal Sub-plan has been able to cover more than 75 percent of tribal population living in about 19 States/Union territories. The problems related to the overall development of Scheduled Tribes are complex and manifested. The development of tribal people is an ongoing process and much more needs to be done in the future.

Policies and Programmes

The Constitutional commitments, referred to above, prompted the policy-makers and the planners to accord high priority to the welfare and development of STs right from the beginning of country's development planning, launched in 1951. Accordingly, the First Plan (1951-56) clearly laid down the principle stating that 'the general development programmes should be so designed to cater adequately to the Backward Classes and special provisions should be used for securing additional and more intensified development for STs'. Unfortunately, the same could not take place. The Second Plan (1956-61), which laid emphasis on economic development, gave a special focus on reducing economic inequalities in the society. Further, development programmes for STs have been planned for, based on respect and understanding of their culture and traditions and with an appreciation of their social, psychological and economic problems. In fact, the same was planned in tune with 'Panchsheel'— the philosophy of tribal development as enunciated by the first Prime Minister of the country. An important landmark during the Second Plan was the opening of 43 Special Multi-purpose Tribal Blocks, later termed as Tribal Development Blocks (TDBs). Each TDB was planned for about 25,000 people as against 65,000 in a normal Block. The Third Plan (1961-66) continued with the very same principle of advocating reduction in inequalities through various policies and programmes to provide equality of opportunity to STs. The Fourth Plan (1969-74) proclaimed that the 'basic goal was to realise a rapid increase in the standard of living of the people through measures, which also promote equality

and social justice'. An important step in this direction was the setting up of six pilot projects in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa in 1971-72 with a separate Tribal Development Agency for each project. The Fifth Plan (1974-78) marked a shift in approach as reflected in the launching of the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) for the direct benefit of the development of tribals. The TSP stipulated that funds of the Centre and the States should be quantified on the population proportion basis with budgetary mechanisms to ensure accountability, non-divertability and utilization for the welfare and development of STs.

The Sixth Plan (1980-85) sought to ensure a higher degree of devolution of funds, so that at least 50 per cent of the tribal families could be provided assistance to cross the poverty line. In the Seventh Plan (1985-90), there was substantial increase in the flow of funds for the development of STs, resulting in the expansion of infrastructural facilities and enlargement of coverage. Emphasis was laid on the educational development of STs. For the economic development of STs, two national-level institutions were set up, viz. (1) Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation (TRIFED) in 1987 as an apex body for State Tribal Development Cooperative Corporations, and (ii) National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC) in 1989. The former was assigned to provide remunerative prices for the forest and agriculture produce of tribals, while the latter was intended to provide credit support for employment generation. In the Eighth Plan (1992-97), efforts were intensified to bridge the gap between the levels of development of STs and the other sections of the society. The Plan not only emphasised elimination of exploitation, but also paid attention to the special problems of suppression of rights, land alienation, non-payment of minimum wages and restrictions on the right to collect minor forest produces, etc. However, attention on priority basis was continued to be paid on the socio-economic upliftment of STs.

The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) aimed to empower STs by creating an enabling environment conducive for them to exercise their rights freely, enjoy their privileges and lead a life of self confidence and dignity, at par with the rest of society. This process essentially encompassed three vital components, viz. (i) Social Empowerment; (ii) Economic Empowerment; and (iii) Social Justice. To this effect, while ST-related Ministries and Departments implement general development policies and programmes, the nodal Ministry of Tribal Affairs implements certain ST-Specific innovative programmes, as per the details given below:

2.7 UNRESOLVED ISSUES AND PERSISTING PROBLEMS

Tribal communities continue to be vulnerable even today, not because they are poor, asset-less and illiterate compared to the general population; but often their distinct vulnerability arises from their inability to negotiate and cope with the consequences of their integration with the mainstream economy, society, cultural and political systems, from all of which they were historically protected by their relative isolation. The requirements of planned development brought with them the dams, mines, industries and roads, all located on tribal lands. With these came the concomitant processes of displacement followed by a

conflict between development and protection of tribal rights and interests. Tribal institutions and practices were forced into uneasy co-existence, which paved the way to market or formal State institutions. Also, the tribals found themselves at a great disadvantage in the face of an influx of better-equipped outsiders into tribal areas. The repercussions for the already fragile socio-economic sustenance base of the tribals were devastating, ranging from the loss of livelihoods and land alienation on a vast scale to hereditary bondage.

As the tribals grapple with these tragic consequences, a small clutch of bureaucratic programmes could do little to resist the precipitous pauperization, exploitation and disintegration of tribal communities. As a result of this, the tribals continue to suffer and bear a number of 'Unresolved Issues' and 'Persisting Problems', which require immediate attention of the Government. The following paragraphs explain the seriousness of some of the Unresolved Issues and Persisting Problems:

Displacement of Tribals

Displacement or forced/Voluntary eviction of tribals from their land and their natural habitats and subsequent rehabilitation has been a serious problem that remains to be addressed by the Government. As per the information readily available, a population of 21.3 million have been displaced between 1951 and 1990 in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Orissa. Out of them, 8.54 million (40 per cent) are tribals and of those only 2.12 million (24.8 per cent) tribals could be resettled, so far. Displacement took place mainly on account of development projects, which include – large irrigation dams, hydro-electric projects, open cast and underground coal mines, super-thermal power plants and mineral based industrial units. In large mining projects, tribals lose their land not only to the project authorities, but even to non-tribal outsiders who converge into these areas and corner both land and the new economic opportunities in commerce and petty industry. The incomplete rehabilitation of the displaced tribals has further compounded their woes as they are pushed into a vortex of increasing assetlessness, unemployment, debt bondage and destitution. Women and children, as ever, are the worst affected.

Tribal Land Alienation

Land is not only the most important productive resource base for the tribals, but also occupies an important place in their psyche as the mainstay of their social and religious practices. Over a period of time, this resource base of the tribal communities has tended to get eroded not only through acquisition for public purposes but also through fraudulent transfers, forcible eviction, mortgages, leases and encroachments. As per the information available with the Ministry of Rural Development, as many as 4.65 lakh cases of alienation of tribal land, covering an area of 9.17 lakh acres, were registered in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tripura in January, 1999. Against this, only two lakh cases were disposed of in favour of 1.56 lakh tribal families covering an area of 5.31 lakh acres. Of these, the States affected by large scale tribal land alienation include Andhra Pradesh (2.79 lakh acres), Madhya Pradesh (1.58 lakh acres), Karnataka (1.20 lakh Acres), and Gujarat (1.6 lakh acres).

Various studies have pointed out that the lack of political and administrative will continues to be the cause for the perpetuation of the problem of land alienation amongst the tribals as reflected in the reluctance to amend legal provisions and plug the existing loopholes and swift administrative action to identify alienated land, and restoring it to the tribals with delivery of possession.

Indebtedness

The problem of indebtedness amongst tribals is not only an indication of their poverty, but also reflects the wider economic malaise, i.e., lack of education, low purchasing/bargaining power and lack of resources for engaging in gainful activity and meeting emergent expenditure. Therefore, the problem continues to persist with increasing menace as indebtedness pushes the tribals further into extreme conditions of poverty and forces them to dispense with their meagre resources, including the small bits and pieces of land to pay off the loans at exorbitant rates of interest. The initiation of commercial vending of liquor in tribal areas has started impoverishing the tribal population, making them victims of indebtedness and exploitation. Although the States and UTs have broadly accepted the Guidelines (relating to the Excise Policy in Tribal Areas, 1975, issued by the Ministry of Social Welfare), effective follow-up action is not taken for their implementation. Under the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution, the Governors of states with Scheduled areas were given powers for making regulations and for placing restrictions on money-lending activities in the Scheduled Areas. Relevant Laws/Regulations exist in 16 TSP states/UTs to regulate the business of money-lending and to give debt-relief. However, the legal measures to curb the activities of money-lenders and traders have failed to have much impact on the severity of the problem due to the ineffective enforcement machinery and lack of alternative sources of credit for meeting the tribals' consumption and productive needs. Lack of a sound policy to support consumption credit to tribals has tended to make them dependent on usurious money-lenders, resulting in debt-bondage. The problem of tribal indebtedness often gets aggravated and compounded with the government subsidy-cum-loan schemes, which further lead the tribals into deep indebtedness.

Shifting Cultivation

Shifting Cultivation, which is not ecologically sound, is still being practiced by the tribals living on the higher slopes of hilly areas of the country. As estimated, more than six lakh tribal families in the North Eastern states, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh practice shifting cultivation on a continuous basis. This shifting cultivation is integrally linked to the tribal economy in the areas where it is practised and their socio-economic activities and rituals are also centred around this practice. The problem of shifting cultivation is a very complex one, involving economic, social and psychological aspects of the tribal communities. Although, shifting cultivation is one of the prime sources of living for the tribals, yet the same has been severely restricted. The Ministry of Agriculture has implemented a scheme for control and transformation of shifting cultivation in the North Eastern states, but the pace of its implementation has been very slow.

Deprivation of Forest Rights

Forests and Tribals share a symbiotic relationship. Tribals continue to live in

forest areas, though in isolation, yet in harmony with environment. Recognizing this dependency, the National Forest Policy, 1988, stipulated that all agencies responsible for forest management should ensure that the tribal people are closely associated with the regeneration, plantation, development and harvesting of forests so as to provide them gainful employment. Despite these special safeguards, tribals continue to struggle for mere survival, as they face formidable problems and displacement due to the development of national parks and wild-life sanctuaries and other environmental restoration projects, lack of development in forest villages, etc. The protection of rights of tribals in forests is key to the amelioration of their conditions.

While the 'Un-resolved Issues' need to be attended to on a priority basis, the on-going efforts, along with new initiatives for empowering the tribals, will continue simultaneously with added thrust so as to mitigate the 'Persisting Problems' in the critical areas of education, health, livelihood, poverty, vulnerability, violence, unrest, etc. so as to accelerate the process of empowering STs towards accomplishing the task of raising their status at par with the rest of the society. Prominent amongst such Persisting Problems requiring the most concerted and time-bound efforts are discussed below:

Low Literacy and High Drop-out Rates

Despite the programme of Universalisation of Primary Education, which has been in effective operation since 1986, the literacy rate of STs remained as low as 29.6 per cent, while the general literacy rate reached 52.2 per cent in 1991. Similarly, the female literacy rate of STs stood at 18.2 per cent, which is also much lower in comparison with 39.3 per cent in respect of general category. As the 1991 Census data reveals, there are tribal districts like Korapul in Orissa where the literacy rate of STs is as low as 8.9 per cent, while there are districts like Aizwal in Mizoram with as high as 88.8 per cent literacy rate. Similarly, there are districts like Jalor in Rajasthan with as low as 0.6 per cent of ST female literacy rate, while Aizwal in Mizoram has female literacy rate as high as 85.7 per cent. Further, the gap between the general population and that of STs was also found to have widened from 19.9 per cent to 22.6 per cent between 1981 and 1991 as discussed earlier. Added to this are the problems of intra and inter-state/district and inter-community variations in the literacy rates of STs. Although, the drop-out rates have shown a declining trend amongst STs in Classes I to VIII from 78.6 per cent in 1990-91 to 72.8 per cent in 1998-99, yet the same is still very high when compared to 60.9 per cent and 56.82 per cent for general categories, respectively for the same years, indicating a gap of 17.7 and 16.6 per cent.

Inadequate and Inaccessible Health Services

Although the National Health Policy, 1983 accords high priority to extend organised services to those residing in the tribal, hilly and backward areas as well as to the detection and treatment of endemic diseases affecting tribals, yet the tribals continue to be one of the fragile population, mainly due to their poor health and nutritional status. Tribal health is one of the important areas for action in the health sector. The major contributors to the increased disease risk amongst tribal communities include: i) poverty and consequent under-nutrition; ii) poor environmental sanitation, poor hygiene and lack of safe drinking water,

leading to increased morbidity from water and water-borne infections; iii) lack of access to health care facilities, resulting in increased severity and duration of illnesses; iv) social barriers and taboos, preventing the utilisation of available health care services; v) vulnerability to specific diseases like G-6 PD deficiency, yaws, and other endemic diseases like malaria, etc. Also, the tribal population being heterogeneous, there are wide variations in their health status, access to and utilization of health services.

Nutritional Deficiencies and Diseases

Malnutrition is fairly common amongst the tribals, especially among their children and women, debilitating their physical condition and lowering their resistance to disease, leading, at times, even to permanent brain impairment. As most tribal women suffer from anaemia which lowers resistance to fatigue, this affects their working capacity and increases susceptibility to diseases, particularly for those having closely-spaced, frequent pregnancies. The nutritional status of tribal women directly influences their reproductive performances and the birth weight of their children, which is crucial to the infant's chances of survival, growth and development. Almost all the tribals in the country do not have a satisfactory dietary pattern, as their diets are frequently deficient in calcium, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Riboflavin and animal protein. The tribals are, thus, caught in a vicious cycle of malnutrition and ill-health.

Lack of Adequate Irrigation Facilities

Tribals in India primarily depend upon agriculture for their subsistence, which constitutes their mainstay. According to the 1991 Census, 42 per cent of the ST population are Main Workers. Of these, 54.5 per cent are cultivators and 32.7 per cent agricultural labourers. Thus, more than 87 per cent of the tribal main workers are dependent on agriculture. Further, while 42.9 per cent of the operational holdings of tribals belong to the category of marginal farmers with less than one hectare, 24.1 per cent are of small farmers category with one to two hectares; and only 2.2 per cent STs have large or operational holdings with more than 10 hectares. The tribals generally live in most inhospitable terrain and practise shifting cultivation on higher slopes and dry-land cultivation in plains and lower slopes where productivity and output are very low. Lack of proper irrigation facilities, decline in soil fertility, and risks and uncertainties involving damages caused by the wild animals, pests, cyclones, droughts, etc. have further deteriorated the agricultural yield. The growing tribal population and the declining agricultural productivity have become a serious threat to the subsistence base of the tribal communities, endangering their self-supporting food security system.

Extreme/Abject Poverty

The impact of various poverty alleviation programmes put into action during the last two developmental decades has, no doubt, brought down the poverty levels among STs from 51.94 per cent in 1993-94 to 45.86 per cent in 1999-2000 in rural areas and from 41.14 per cent to 34.75 per cent in urban areas over the same period. But, it is much higher when compared to 27.09 per cent in rural and 23.62 per cent in urban areas in respect of general categories during 1999-2000. Therefore, there has been an increasing unrest amongst the tribals and also in tribal areas in the recent past. Radical/Extremist movements are

already operating in some parts of the country; the root cause for all these is the perceived dissatisfaction with the existing conditions and failure to receive benefits and facilities promised to them. Therefore, there is an urgent need to critically review the approach adopted so far for tribal protection and development, and reorient the same, wherever needed, so as to ensure the flow of development benefits within a definite time-frame and restore the faith of the tribals in the capability of the government to deliver.

Endangering of Intellectual Rights

Having lived closely with forests and also interacting constantly with various flora and fauna, the tribals have developed invaluable indigenous knowledge. This indigenous knowledge amongst the tribal communities is passed on from generation to generation through the medium of oral tradition, folklore and practice, which find a place in various life-cycle events including treatment of diseases/ailments, without any codified text or rights to accredit their legitimate ownership. As tribal communities have a very close dependence on biological resources, their livelihood and life-style often depend upon and are shaped by these resources. Therefore, their survival and sustenance is closely linked to conservation and utilisation of these resources. Corporate protectionism in terms of patents and Intellectual Property Rights, arising out of various international treaties/instruments on trade and common property resources, such as the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) under the World Trade Organisation (WTO), represents a real threat to the economic livelihood of these communities. They are also a source of potential exploitation of the tribal resource base, as bio-diversity expressed in life forms and knowledge is sought to be converted into private property and treated as an open access system for free exploitation by those who want to privatise and patent it. There is an urgent need to provide appropriate legal and institutional arrangements for recognising and acknowledging the rights of tribal communities to such resources and knowledge.

Neglect of Forest Villages

As the 5,000 identified Forest Villages are located in the remote interiors, and are declared revenue villages, the 2.5 lakh families who inhabit these villages, are deprived of even the basic minimum services available to the residents of Revenue Villages. While the forest resource base, on which inhabitants traditionally depended, is fast eroding and adversely affecting the very survival of the tribals, alternative sources of income extended through the implementation of various social forestry activities of the Department of Forests are also not ensured throughout the year. Some of the major problems faced by the Forest Villages include lack of infrastructure facilities, viz. approach roads, electricity, drinking water, schools, hospitals, and irrigation tanks; lack of fair price/food-grain shops; lack of stable land tenure system; and lack of proper credit facilities and bank loans, as the villagers do not have the papers, which are necessary in getting the loans sanctioned. This is due to the fact that the land has the status of Reserved Forests attracting the Indian Forest Act, 1927 and especially the Forest (Conservation) Act 1980; and the departmental rivalry between the Forest and Revenue Departments resulting in the exploitation and negligence of Forest Villages.

Check Your Progress III

Note : a) Use the space provided for your answers.

b) Compare your answers with the text.

1) What do you mean by Tribal Development Block?

.....

2) Write a short note on shifting cultivation.

.....

2.8 THE PATH AHEAD

In the context of the above-mentioned un-resolved Issues and the Persisting Problems becoming not only a challenge of the day, but also getting manifested into movements of tribal unrest, the best approach to the Tribal Development in the Tenth Plan will be to tackle these issues and problems on a time-bound basis, besides providing adequate space and opportunity for the Tribals to empower themselves with the strength of their own potentials. Thus, the Tenth Plan approach towards ‘Resolving the Un-resolved Issues’ and ‘Solving the Persisting Problems’ will be as follows:

Resolving the Un-resolved Issues

Displacement of tribals and their rehabilitation being a matter of great concern, the Tenth Plan will try to expedite the finalisation of the National Policy for Rehabilitation of the Displaced Persons with special focus on the displaced tribals, ensuring that there is no deterioration in their living conditions by providing them ‘land for land’ and ‘item for item’—last possessed before displacement. Further, towards protecting the interests of the tribals who are under the threat of displacement, effective steps need to be ensured as per the provisions of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution on Scheduled Areas and the PESA Act, 1996.

Solving the Persisting Problems

The basic necessities for a normal living, viz – food and nutrition, safe drinking water, education, health care and productive assets, at least at the level required for survival and sustenance, could not be assured for the tribals even till today due to obvious reasons like physical isolation and lack of social and economic ability to avail of/acquire these basic minimum needs. Therefore, the tribals, especially women and children are subjected to deprivation and consequential hazards of backwardness. Hence, efforts in the Tenth Plan will be not only to identify the priority groups requiring the basic needs and living in different

geographical regions with varied socio-economic conditions, but also to attend to the same in an accelerated manner with added inputs in solving the persisting problems on a time bound basis.

Research, Evaluation and Monitoring

Research and Evaluation, both at the Central and State levels, has been an on-going activity in the field of Tribal Development. At the Centre, while the research and evaluation studies are being carried out through various Universities/Colleges and through some independent agencies, at the State level, the STRIs located in 14 major states have been actively engaged in diagnostic research on various problems related to tribals. As the state of affairs in the existing 14 Research Institutes is not very encouraging, the Tenth Plan will commission a review of the working of all the 14 STRIs and attempt to re-activate these Institutes, especially those, which are not carrying out the duties and responsibilities originally entrusted to them.

As Monitoring has been the weakest link in the whole process of Tribal Development, the Tenth Plan will attempt to develop an Information Network System in collaboration with National Informatics Centre (NIC), through which a regular flow of Information is ensured both vertically and horizontally on the implementation of all the Tribal Development schemes, especially the two mechanisms of TSP and SCA to TSP. The Central Tripartite Committee set up at the Centre and the State Committees, which are now coming up, will have to work in close co-ordination to ensure that funds released under SCA to TSP and under Article 275(1) are utilised properly and with no diversions. Thus, the Tenth Plan will take the responsibility of streamlining the on-going activities of research, evaluation and monitoring of Tribal Development.

Implementation Mechanisms

The exclusive Ministry of Tribal Affairs set up in 1999, as mandated, will continue to play the role of a nodal Ministry in ensuring the well-being of STs. In executing this special task, it will continue to receive assistance from the National Commission for SCs and STs, which will be re-activated to act as a watch-dog and keep a close vigil on the protection of the rights and interests of tribals besides investigating into the individual complaints. While an exclusive National Finance and Development Corporation for STs has already come into action in 2001, the Tenth Plan may also see, if necessary, the emergence of an exclusive National Commission for STs. The National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation, along with the State-level Tribal Development Corporations, will continue to assist the Ministry in supporting various income and employment-generating activities for the economic betterment of the tribals. Towards strengthening the State sector, efforts for the empowerment of tribals through setting up of exclusive Departments and Directorates for Tribal Development in all the States will be contemplated in the Tenth Plan.

Voluntary Action

Recognizing the catalytic role played by the Voluntary Organisations in the upliftment of STs, one of the major strategies in the Tenth Plan will be to promote voluntary action in the far-flung and inaccessible tribal areas, as voluntary organisations are the only medium to reach the un-reached and experiment/develop alternative models to match the local tribal people and their needs. The

Voluntary Organisations will be encouraged in the functional areas of education, health, nutrition, women and child development, awareness generation, environment, human rights, employment generation, techno-vocational training, promotion of cooperatives, culture and sports, strengthening traditional Panchayats and social values to assist in countering militancy and promoting national integration, etc. with necessary safeguards and with a particular focus on those areas, where voluntary action is still thinly spread.

2.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed some of the fundamental aspects related to the development of scheduled tribes. However, before dealing with the nature and content of various development efforts, we have explained to you the meaning of the concept of 'Tribe' and 'Scheduled Tribe' and the Constitutional status of Scheduled Tribes. Further we have discussed the basic elements of tribal social structure in India.

We have also discussed the different levels of socio-economic development of scheduled tribes belonging to various parts of India. We also discussed the general features of the tribal population, the Branded Tribes of India and the denotified and nomadic tribes of India.

While deliberating on the nature of development strategies, we have dealt with issues pertaining to negative features of development, role of state in the development of schedule tribes, tribal development blocks, tribal sub-plan, and policies and programmes. Some of the unresolved issues and persisting problems discussed include: displacement of tribals, tribal land alienation, indebtedness, shifting cultivation, deprivation of forest rights, low literacy, inaccessible health services, lack of adequate irrigation facilities and neglect of forest villages.

2.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

Chaudhari, B (Ed) (1982), *Tribal Development in India, Problems and Prospects*, Inter-India Publication, Delhi.

Raha M.K. and Coomar, P.C. (eds) (1989), *Tribal India Vol I and II*, Gian Publishing House, New Delhi.

Pati, R.N. and Jena, B. (1989), *Tribal Development in India*, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi.

Singh, K.S. (1985), *Tribal Society in India*, Manohar, Delhi.

India, National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, *A Handbook 1997*, New Delhi.

India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (2001), *Scheme for OBCs*, New Delhi.

Annual Report 2003-04, India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, New Delhi.

Ramashray Roy (1999), *Dalits Development and Democracy*, Shipra Publication.