

DEFINITION AND CLASSIFICATION OF TRIBE

For long solution to the problem of definition of a tribe has been colluding the administration. Anthropologists and sociologists have attempted different definitions.

W.J. Perry defines tribes as a group speaking a common dialect and inhabiting a common territory.¹

Bogardus defines tribes as a tribal group based on the need for protection, on ties of blood relationships and on the strength of a common religion.²

D.N. Majumder defines a tribes as a collection of families or group of families bearing a common name members of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain taboos regarding marriage, profession or occupation and have developed a well assigned system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligation.³

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay defines a tribe as a social group usually with a definite area, dialect, cultural homogeneity and unifying social organisation. It can include several sub-groups.

Dictionary of Anthropology defines a tribe as a social group usually with a social area, dialect, cultural homogeneity and unifying social organisation. It may include several sub-groups such as Sibs or villages. The tribe ordinarily has a leader and may have a common ancestor, as well as a patron deity. The families or small communities making up the tribe are linked through economic, social, religious, family or blood ties.⁴

Different authors have given importance to different aspects or characteristics and there is no universally accepted definition of a tribe. The International Labour Organisation in its Reports of 1953 stated that, "There can be no standard which can apply to all indigenous or aboriginal groups throughout the world".⁵

Classification or Division of Tribal Population in India

For the sake of convenience and study the tribal people of India have been broadly classified on different bases.

Geographical or regional distribution forms the first base. On this basis the following five regions are considered.

(1) North-Eastern Region :

It consists of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. The tribes in this region include the Garo, Kuki, Mizo, Khasi, Monda, Sema, Nagas, Riyang, Miri, Apatani etc.

(2) The Sub-Himalayan Region:

It includes north and northwest India, Himachal Pradesh, the major tribes being Gurjar, Gaddi, Theru, Jaunsari etc.

(3) The Central and East India:

It consists of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. The tribes covered are: Baiga, Bondo, Joang, Kol, Khond, Santhal, Uraon, Ho, Munda, Lepcha, Karwa, Bhils, and Pahadiya etc.

(4) South India:

This includes the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The main tribes included are the Tod, Kol, Kadar, Chenchu, Koya, Gonds, Cholanaiken, Godaba etc.

(5) Western India:

Includes Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra and the tribes included are the Bhils, Ganasia, Gonds, Kolams, Pardhans, Korku, Koli, Thakar, Katkari, Warli, Pawra, Munda, Kol, Khond, Dubla etc. (Tribal Administration and Development, p. 10).⁶

Classification based on Language:

Another classification is based on the language spoken which is assigned to various language groups. These are: 7

1. Austric Language Group :

The tribes speaking languages from this group include Kol, Munda, Khasi, Nikobari, Korku, Santals, and Gadaba etc.

2. Tibeto-Chinese Language Group:

For example, the Naga, Khasi, Kuki, Mismi, Mizo etc.

3. The Dravidian Language Group:

The Gond, Toda, Koya, Pradhan, Uraon etc.

4. The Indo-European Language Group:

The Bhils, Warlis, Thakurs, Koli etc.

Classification Based on Ethnic Roots:

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One more classification is based on the ethnic roots of the tribes. The more predominant are as follows:

1. The Mongoloid Origin:

The Nagas, Mizo, Sema, Jaunsari, Apa-Tanis, Tharu etc.

2. Proto-Austroloid :

This group usually speaks the so-called Kherwarian or Kaularian languages and includes the Munda, Ho, Bhils, Paradia, Korku, Korwa, Baiga, Gonds etc.

3. The Negrito:

Whom we usually recognize as being of Dravidian origin and include Toda, Kola etc.

According to another usage the tribes from the south like the Gonds, Kolam, Toda, and Koya etc. are called Dravidian in origin though they are considered a part of the Austroloid group. Herbert Risley has also mentioned Indo-Aryan, Aryo-Dravidian, Mongolo-Dravidian, Sitho-Dravidian and Turki-Iranian as mixed ethnic roots.⁹

Among the numerically most important tribes in India are the Gonds of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh and include the Koitvrs, Koyas, Marhia/Madiya, Murhias, Raj-Gonda, Pardhans, Dhurve, Khatulwars, Parajas.¹⁰

The second largest group of tribals includes those tribes described as Kavlarian tribes and includes the Santhals, Munda and Ho spread over in Bihar, Orissa and Bengal as well as the Bhils and Korwas from Rajasthan, Gujarat and the Korkus in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. This group speaks the "so-called" Kherwarian or the Kavlarian group of languages, which includes the Munda group of dialects and is supposed to be of pre-Dravidian origin.¹¹

G.A. Grierson in his *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. IV *Munda and Dravidian Languages* (First Reprint 1967) gives references hinting at links between the Munda and Dravidian group of languages (pp. 167-182). Hodgson classed the languages under the head of Tamolian. Ho, Santhali, Bhamji, Kurakh and Mundari (all from Munda family) were considered as dialects of Kol languages. Logan also followed Hodgson and called them as North Dravidian. Grierson quotes Max Muller stating, "... I can see many coincidences between Uraon, Rajmahali and Gondi on the one side and Sinbhum, Santhal, Bhamji and Mundala words on the other both two different races ... came in contact in these regions. With ethnic name 'Munda'. This analysis helps us in understanding that there were cultural contacts amongst the tribal groups which are dispersed in different parts and are assigned different ethnic origins and dialects. The similarities in many cultural traits found in distant tribal groups in India can be interpreted on this basis.¹²

Some Modern Definitions of Tribe:

A Tribe is a collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory

and is not usually endogamous, though originally it might have been so.
Published in – Imperial Gazetteer of India.¹³

Again, it may be defined as a group of people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding themselves as having a common ancestor ... Oxford Dictionary.

In its simplest form the tribe is a group of bonds occupying a contiguous territory or territories and having a feeling of unity deriving from numerous similarities in culture, frequent contacts, and a certain community of interest.¹⁴

... Ralph Linton.

Again it has been defined as an independent political division of population with a common culture ... Lucy Mair.¹⁵

Ideally, tribal societies are small in scale, are restricted in the spatial and temporal range of their social, legal, and political relations, and possess a morality, a religion, and world-view of corresponding dimensions. Characteristically too, tribal languages are unwritten, and hence, the extent of communication both in time and space is inevitably narrow. At the same time, tribal societies exhibit a remarkable economy of design and have a compactness and self-sufficiency lacking in modern society ... I.M. Lewis.¹⁶

It may further be defined as a group, united by a common name in which the members take a pride by a common language, by a common territory, and by a feeling that all who do not share this name are outsiders, 'enemies' in fact....G.W. Huntingford.¹⁷

The concept of tribe has further been defined as a social group with territorial affiliations, endogamous, with no specialization of functions, ruled by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect, recognizing social distance with other tribes or castes, without any social obloquy attaching to them, as it does in the caste structure, following tribal traditions, beliefs and customs, illiberal of naturalization of ideas from alien sources, above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration.¹⁸

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