# BSW-041

UNDERSTANDING TRIBALS

## Block 1

### TRIBAL STUDIES

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Certificate in Tribal Studies is a unique programme started by the School of Social Work, IGNOU. In this course BSW-041: ‘Understanding Tribals’ you will be learning about the evolution of Tribal studies in the Indian context. In other words, there has been an attempt to develop a full course on the understanding of the tribals both within the Indian as well as the International domain.

There are three blocks in the course comprising twelve units which have been prepared by experts on the subjects.

Block I deals with ‘Tribal Studies’ in the Indian context. It throws light on the evolution of tribal studies and tries to define the tribes and at the same time attempts to provide various perspectives of tribes. The block also draws the discourse that has been on-going in regards to tribals and its study. It also highlights the debate on tribal indigenous entity at the national and international level.

Block 2 is on ‘Tribal Policies and Legislation’. It deals with the historical perspectives of tribal policies from the pre-independent period to the post-independent period. It also speaks about the Constitutional provisions and Acts for the Tribals. The block also provides meaning to the tribal territories and Common Property Resources and at the same time also includes the International Conventions and Covenants in respect to the tribals.

Block 3 on ‘Development of Tribals’ highlights the tribal situation in India and the problems faced by them. It also talks about the Government Schemes and Policies on Tribal Education while at the same time emphasizing on the health and nutrition status of the tribals. It also deals with the policies and frameworks with respect to the empowerment of the tribals.
BLOCK INTRODUCTION

The ‘Tribal Studies’ block consists of four units and each of the unit talks about tribal studies in different feature. It throws light on the evolution of tribal studies and tries to define the tribes and at the same time attempts to provide various perspectives of tribes. The block also draws the discourse that has been on-going in regards to tribals and its study. It also highlights the debate on tribal indigenous entity at the national and international level.

Unit 1 ‘Tribal Studies: Evolution, Nature and Scope’ gives the meaning and concept of tribal study, its genesis as well as the nature of tribal studies that are available. It further tries to explain the scope of tribal studies in social work and its relevance in today’s context while at the same time highlighting the challenges ahead.

Unit 2 is on ‘Tribal Studies: Definition and Perspectives’. The unit tries to define the Tribal and at the same time draws the various perspectives of tribes touching the historical, gender and even demographic perspective among others.

Unit 3 is about ‘Tribal Discourse in Social Sciences’ There has been an attempt to stress on the Policy of Isolation in Pre-Independence period, Policy of Assimilation, Policy of Integration in Post Independence period and also the Contemporary debates and the Policy of Neglect in regards to the tribes of India in this unit.

Unit 4 talks about ‘Tribal Indigenous Entity’. It provides definition and criteria of Indigenous People and the International bodies take on Indigenous people. It also highlights the argument for Tribal People as Indigenous People and the argument against Tribal People as Indigenous People.
UNIT 1 TRIBAL STUDIES: EVOLUTION, NATURE AND SCOPE

Structure
1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Meaning and Concept of Tribal Study
1.3 Evolution and Genesis
1.4 Nature of Tribal Studies
1.5 Tribal Studies as a Discipline
1.6 Relevance of Tribal Studies in Today’s Context
1.7 Challenges Ahead
1.8 Let Us Sum Up
1.9 Further Readings and References

1.0 OBJECTIVES
Scheduled Tribe is one of the most backward classes in India. They are also known as adivasis; a heterogeneous set of ethnic and tribal groups claimed to be the aboriginal population of India. They are also known as indigenous population in India. Scheduled Tribe is the most backward classes in India in many aspects e.g. social, economic, etc, and they constitute nearly eight percent (8%) of India’s total population. The Government of India is trying to bring these tribes at par with the rest of the population in the country in terms of mainstream development.

After reading this unit you will able:

- To understand the evolution and genesis of Tribal Studies in India;
- To develop an understanding of the tribes, their problems and issues affecting the development process in India;
- To acquaint the learners with the field of tribal studies and how it influence the development process; and
- To gain an insight into development perspective with regard to tribes and those residing in the far flung areas in particular.

1.1 INTRODUCTION
As we know, anthropology has various fields of study such as physical anthropology, linguistic anthropology, cultural anthropology and social anthropology. Tribal study has strengthened social anthropology to a great extent since its inception. Since the Independence of India, there are sustained efforts of the government to bring the tribal at par with the rest of the people in India in every sphere of their life. Tribals are the most backward classes in India and they represent the poorest of the poor among the weaker sections. They have their own distinct system of
culture, social structure, polity, economy, education, etc., which needs to be upgraded in the age of modernization and globalization. As a result they are far behind in every spheres viz. education, health, polity etc. There is a need to develop those tribes in education, health and other programmes at par with the rest of the population in India. After Independence, India started experiments related to the welfare and development without much success. At present, efforts have been made to empower the tribals through various projects and plans. They have been involved in various projects as stakeholders and their participation is ensured by the Government of India and other state Governments. There is a need to train and orient them towards the technological advancement and development initiatives of the government and they should be involved in training, action research, extension, documentation and dissemination for their betterment, which in turn would ensure the overall development of our country. The nation also should involve endeavoring and facilitating them with a valuable environment and work towards developing their natural potential so that they can be a part of nation building.

However, it is not possible to study them meaningfully without a qualitative appraisal and understanding of their limitations, especially in a field of tribal studies. Several studies were conducted which revealed that there were many issues related to tribals, that needed attention. Some of these are:

- They lacked organizations in groups and consequently isolated;
- They had no access to credit or resources;
- They lacked education, vocational training and skills to earn to livelihood;
- Adequate medical facilities were not available, leading to high mortality;
- There is lack of good roads for speedy transportation;

In case of life situations, social support measures are inadequate in tribal areas, e.g. widowhood or disability etc.

1.2 MEANING AND CONCEPT OF TRIBAL STUDIES

The concept of tribal studies emerged in the colonial period in India; but the practice of tribal studies was continuing as a part of anthropology since its inception. The growth of tribal studies has different dimensions and it is inter-disciplinary in character. It strengthened to understand the issues relating to tribal development from different angles in this era of globalization. The process is understood by integrating history, political sciences, economics, social work, sociology and anthropology to the study of tribal in the present day context. The ‘other culture’ is a core area of tribal studies. It can be broadly understood by the concept of rationality of western ideology that broadened the scope through the study of tribal community.

According to Andre Beteille, people having their own dialects that separates them from non-tribes, practice and follow their own religion and beliefs which are not common in Hinduism. Language is a criterion of difference as tribes speak their local dialect for example Mundas and Oraons of Chota Nagpur speak different dialects but Bhumij have lost their tribal dialect and speak dominant language of the area.
Max Weber emphasized that social structure where when an Indian tribe loses its territorial significance it assumes the form of an Indian caste. But tribe is a local group whereas caste is a social group. According to D.N Majumdar, the tribe come across Hindu ritualism as foreign and extra-religious even though pander to it as in the worship of God and Goddess whereas in the caste these are necessary part of the religion.

The term “tribes” is used as synonymous of Indigenous peoples. It includes the people, communities, and nations who claim a historical continuity and cultural affinity with societies predating contact with Western culture. They themselves consider their local cultures to be definitely separate from modern cultures and many continue to assert their autonomy and right to cultural self-determination.

However, terms for indigenous people include aborigines, aboriginal people, native people, first people, fourth world cultures and autochthonous. “Indigenous peoples” is the most recent and neutrally-worded term, and it is the preferred term in use by the United Nations and its subsidiary organizations.

The tribal studies undertake extensive studies on tribals and their problems with the sole object of supplementing the efforts of Government of India and the state Governments in the sphere of socio-economic development of tribals in this area of their predominance which is an embodiment of tribal problems.

The main objectives of tribal studies are to formulate and undertake projects and programmes on tribal studies and research for promotion of tribal art, culture, tradition and heritage and their preservation and promotion; to undertake projects for improving agricultural and horticultural productivity of tribal people; to organize training programmes for economic empowerment of the tribal people, particularly tribal women and organize seminars/workshops/conferences on the problems and issues of the tribal people and disseminate the same.

1.3 EVOLUTION AND GENESIS

A tribal study is a part of anthropology since the inception of anthropology. During the pre-Independence India, the colonial realm has given emphasis to study the tribal with the aim of proper administrative functions and conversion. Many colonial rulers have tried to document their culture, social structure, beliefs and value system of the society and the term tribal study has been conceived. But there is not much academic interest shown for the growth and development of the concept during the period.

After Independence of India, many universities were established to expand the higher education and anthropology became one of the important subjects of specialization in higher education. And tribal studies are one of the important areas of anthropology discipline. Added to this, welfare and development of tribals has been an important intervention of the Government in India. Therefore, various Government and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) have shown interests in research on tribals and highlighted the various problems that exist in their society (ies). But during the period of 1990s, many Indian Universities have established the department for tribal studies. For instance the establishment of Tribal Studies Department at Hampi, Himachal Pradesh University in 1994, Kannur University in 1996, The Council of Analytical Tribal Studies (COATS), Koraput, Orissa in 2002 were established with the support of Government of India and University
Grant Commission (U.G.C). These departments aim to undertake and offer tribal studies and research including Ph.D. Programmes; to contribute towards education, welfare and development of the scheduled tribes, to contribute towards the socio-economic empowerment of Scheduled Tribes and work for integrating tribal life into the main stream of society; to undertake research studies on tribal art, culture, traditions and their traditional medicinal system with a view to recognize their richness and relevance and to contribute towards formulation of a National Policy for Tribal Development and for its periodical review. These studies highlight the impact of rapid growth, process of modernization and globalization of the world economy on the tribal life. Anthropologists and other social scientists had been engaged in scientific studies based on intensive field work. These studies attempt to remove our ignorance on many aspects of tribal world and it has concentrated and dealt with the definitional problem of the term ‘tribe’. The study also address various issues concerning tribal development, development issues, transition and change, changing cultural patterns, social networks, the concept of tribal society, migration and tribal health etc.

In fact, tribal study has aided in development and strengthening of knowledge and broadening the scope of social anthropology. Various core areas of social sciences like sociology, anthropology, political sciences, economics, social work, etc have developed research and theoretical base on tribal life but much more efforts needs to be put forth to strengthen the development of tribal studies as an independent discipline. During the last century, many Indian Universities have started tribal study as a discipline under which Master Degree; M.Phil and Ph.D degrees are conferred to the students. The students and activists undertake studies on issues concerned with the development of tribals and or various issues pertaining to their existence and livelihood.

There is a great demand for the’ tribal study’ in India and almost all the social science disciplines have entered in the field of study and it is being evolved as inter disciplinary in character. Notwithstanding, there is a great challenge to it establish as an independent discipline. In present day context there are various challenges regarding how it be developed as an independent discipline.

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Briefly describe the evolution of tribal studies.

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### 1.4 NATURE OF TRIBAL STUDIES

Tribal studies, as explained earlier are a part of the subject of anthropology. However, presently all the social sciences disciplines are involved to study about tribes and their development and it is considered as inter disciplinary subject.
Though much research work is carried out, tribal studies have yet to become a full-fledged discipline in the university system.

Tribal study is a systematic and critical investigation of tribal life. It is interdisciplinary in nature and approach. From psychology point of view, tribal study deals with behavior of tribal through detail study of feeling, reacting, thinking etc. Socio-cultural dimension looks into the tribals as isolated from the mainstream culture/society, polity and economic activity. The conditions and influences surrounding the tribal constitute the socio-cultural environment. It is interesting to note that tribal study emphasize on critical research of their society, culture, various traits and attributes, social norms, various practices in their daily lives, etc. To know every detail about them is a great challenge but also crucial to uplift them at par with the people of the mainstream.

It may be noted that tribal society is highly heterogeneous with various sub-groups having their differential and unique social, cultural patterns and systems. As every tribal folk had own set of qualities they can not be generalized. There is a need to understand the uniqueness and differences among various tribal communities through the research angle. It requires a systematic structure of investigation.

**Characteristics of tribal study**

The tribal study is a new field of study under the social sciences; as it is more on application oriented so the relevance of social work is very crucial. However the salient features of tribal study are: objectivity, precision, design and verifiability. Let us discuss in detail those characteristics.

**Objectivity:**

Tribal study is a field of study about the tribals and their culture, society, norms and values etc. Through the study, it makes deliberate efforts to eliminate personal preference resisting the temptation to seek only such data that supports the hypothesis. The emphasis is on how tribal people interpret their world rather than testing hypotheses. It emphasizes logic and suspends personal judgment and biases. Objectivity is achieved through standardization of research instruments, choosing appropriate research design and analytical tools and ensuring dependability of data.

**Precision:**

Precision can be achieved through the proper uses of statistical methods and techniques in tribal studies. As we know the conclusion of any study is conveyed to the readers are the most precise expression in quantitative research which explains the truth. Precise language describes the study accurately so that the results may be understood correctly in the field of tribal study.

**Design:**

In tribal study, specific research design is carried out to investigate. Through the proper uses of scientific process, the same can be simulated for verifications. This will imply that any scientific inquiry will, in general undergo the following steps:

- Defining of the problem;
- Statement of the hypothesis;
Tribal Studies

- Collection of data and analysis of data;
- Testing and confirmation or rejection of hypothesis; and
- Reporting of the results.

However, many scholars and academicians maintain that qualitative research design is preferred over the quantitative one while undertaking tribal studies. Qualitative approach focuses on understanding the perceptions and interpretations of tribal people rather than highlighting materials, cultural facts.

Verifiability:

This is a vital element in tribal study. It follows the research methods and findings presented to the professional community to analyze, confirm or reject them in social research. As we know, research is a social enterprise and its information is open for public scrutiny. The verifiability is related to the criteria of objectivity and precision. Through further investigation or replication of studies can the results of a single study be confirmed or revised. Verifiability is achieved through various approaches viz. (i) analyzing the same data on the same sample through alternatives analytical tools i.e. statistical methods and (ii) replicating the study on a different sample.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) What is scope of tribal studies?

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1.5 TRIBAL STUDIES AS A DISCIPLINE

Tribal Studies has been considered as an important part of social and cultural anthropology and contributed immensely to the growth of knowledge in academics. In fact the origin and growth of the discipline of anthropology has its main root in tribal studies.

According to Singh (1991), the overall tribal study is in fact, proportional method to study culture, considering the religion as syncretism, including micro-studies to understand the modification of human behavior in a perspective of diverse reality. Stated otherwise, approval to diversities, pluralism, etc., is branch of studying others’ culture which in fact is the study of tribal communities. Studies of the tribal people have significantly improved our understanding of Indian pluralism. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was the studies of tribal societies that made us aware of our diversities.

In the era of modernization the tribal studies have been used mainly in the perspective of development and human rights. During colonial periods, the study of tribes carried self-image of the researcher into it and gradually it established ideological base over a period of time and built up on the notion of the racial superiority.
Malinowski emphasized that the mentality and attitude was reflected both in words and actions; tribes were tagged as primitive, savage etc. and converted to Christianity what the civilized people thought of as means and ends of civilization.

There was no tribal scholar in tribal studies as a result the understanding was poor in the perspectives. However, in the post colonial periods, the mindset of superiority is no more given a free ride in the study of tribes. The involvement of the tribal scholars has developed the interest in them in their own studies and in accommodating the perspectives as they feel right for them. There was a gap with the tribal and non-tribal scholars who study tribes from a different perspective form the one which was the core of colonial understanding of the tribes (Mibang, Tamo and Behera, 2007).

In the era of globalization tribal studies have not remained in the restricted domain of anthropologists’ interest. Almost all disciplines of social sciences have shown the interests in tribal studies in academics. Various analytical tools of disciplines have been applied to tribal studies thereby expanding the frontiers of tribal studies and at the same time incorporating inter-disciplinary character into the discipline. For example, a social worker while intervening in poverty of tribals is required to study the social and cultural aspects of the tribals in order to have a deeper insight into the problem for which the intervention is required. He combines his social work knowledge and theory with an anthropological insight to the study.

The discipline of tribal studies have been developed by the scholars from western countries and based on the western concept of rationality. They ignored various indigenous concepts as irrational in the research and actions. The early scholars did not find any rational justifications to most of the practices in tribal communities. This has led to the evaluation of tribal communities as backward within the expansion and recognition to the knowledge base beyond western concept of rationality. The western oriented scholars considered those as primitive thoughts and practices.

The tools and approaches from social science disciplines applied to tribal studies usually enrich the knowledge by dispelling many misconceptions about tribes and their culture. Sometimes scholars of a discipline address an issue within the disciplinary boundary focused objectives but study is viewed and compared with studies of other disciplines, then the study in question presents wider perspectives beyond the discipline outline. Through the involvement of inter-disciplinary nature the methodological support deepened the tribal studies. The tribal studies as a discipline is becoming holistic in approach, the tribal life is better understood in relation to other aspects of tribal life that define the culture of tribe as a whole.

The whole gamut of tribal studies has contributed to the origin and growth of the discipline of anthropology to a great extent. Over the period of times the discipline has also got diversified, surrounding themes and communities pertaining to the tribe. However, the importance of the study of tribes has not been abridged with the diversification of the discipline of anthropology. But the inter-disciplinary nature in the study have been escalating and evolving what we considered as tribal studies mainly in development perspectives. The various initiatives have been taken to a comprehensive exploration of the dynamics of tribal studies. The strength of the tribal studies originated from the growing implication and emerging attention to the distinct analytical issues and empirical findings in the field of tribal studies. However, tribal studies will broaden the scope among the NGO activists, planners, bureaucrats and social scientists in general and the students of tribal studies in
particular to practice through which the expanding functions of knowledge in the realm and in contextualizing the dynamics of perspectives and methodological issues.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) In your own words justify the need for tribal studies as a discipline.

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1.6 RELEVANCE OF TRIBAL STUDY IN TODAY’S CONTEXT

According to Constitutional provisions of India, the Government is providing for the protection and promotion of the interests of the scheduled tribes and other down trodden people. Since after Independence of India, a large number of programmes have been initiated to ensure social and economic development of scheduled tribes. However, the result is not proportionate with the efforts given by the Government. Due to approach in modernization and globalization there is a need to address the problems of scheduled tribe in the spheres of socio-economic, infrastructure and technological development. There is a need to formulate appropriate policy so that various problems related to tribal development can be dealt with towards right directions.

Besides, there is a need of scientific and independent research for evolving strategies for research, monitoring and evaluation of the development policies and programmes for schedule tribe. The process of training should be initiated for capacity building of human resource through action research and extension services for the overall social, economic, political and cultural development of the Scheduled Tribes of India.

There is a need to provide through research based latest information, knowledge, strategies to the government machinery, top executives, middle level managers and various other functionaries involved in the formulation of policies and programmes for tribal development. The involvement of professional in the field of tribal development should be encouraged and strengthened towards the existing ground realities by making available to them the research findings. The youth should be educated and sensitized about the available opportunities, the new avenues of employment, the areas of knowledge to pursue and so on for their growth and development.

1.7 CHALLENGES AHEAD

Due to impact of globalization, the tribals have also become victims of the process and they are trying to cope with various kinds of problems on their own. It has
been realized that the tribal folk need assistance from the professionals who could help them in adjusting with the situation. There are still some important issues which need to be addressed. They are:

i) Proper orientation about the challenges arising due to globalization to the social scientists in general and the social worker in particular;

ii) Dissemination of information/issues about tribals and involve the development professionals for interventions;

iii) The impact of globalization to the tribal society;

iv) Recognition of tribal studies as a discipline in the realm of social science under the University Grant Commission.

The growth of the tribal studies as a discipline has a tough tasks ahead in the era of globalization. It had long association with the anthropologists and now it has emerged as inter-disciplinary in character which tends to be a major threat.

Check Your Progress IV

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Highlight the challenges in tribal studies.

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1.8 LET US SUM UP

The tribal study is a new discipline in the realm of social sciences. It has its origin in social anthropology and association with it since its inception. Over a period time, it has emerged as an inter-disciplinary concept but the need of independent discipline has been conceived for its proper growth and development. The core areas from various social sciences disciplines have been adopted to strengthen its knowledge in the forum of academician.

It clarifies various concepts about the schedule tribe, tribe(s) and indigenous peoples. The study of their culture, social structure, polity, economic system, education etc. has been addressed through the research from the field. The salient features of tribal studies are objectivity, precision, design and verifiability.

It has highlighted its broad nature and scope of the tribal studies. The study also enriches the field of social and cultural anthropology but over a period time it has established its independent field of study. The outline has also been drawn to its relevance in today’s context and taken various emerging challenges as a discipline.
1.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES


UNIT 2 TRIBAL STUDIES: DEFINITION AND PERSPECTIVES

Structure
2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Definition of Tribe
2.3 Various Perspectives of Tribal Studies
2.4 Let Us Sum Up
2.5 Further Readings and References

2.0 OBJECTIVES
This Unit has the following objectives:

- To understand the concept of Tribe,
- To understand tribal studies within the broader Social Science framework, and
- To discuss and analyse various perspectives of tribal studies.

2.1 INTRODUCTION
A large number of tribal people with diverse cultural and biological identity in diverse environmental and geographical conditions inhabit India. The tribals with diverse ethnic and cultural identity have been living in different parts of the country for centuries. They adjusted themselves with peculiar ecological conditions of the area and started the way of life suited in their respected eco-system (Sahu, 2006). Tribal studies have been carried out in India since the British rule by the British administrators and there after it was taken up by the missionaries, tourists, welfare workers and anthropologists (Behari, 1978). Now, the area of tribal studies has gained the status of inter-disciplinary relevance. It draws different disciplines together into a commonly scholarly quest for understanding of different aspects of tribal studies/societies.

Oral History on Tribal studies
India, as is well known, has been treated as a country of palaces, kings and temples by historians. Historical sciences (if regarded as science) in India has always tended to be elitist. The historical documentation of the kings, their palace, lifestyle, and dynasty has been a part of history writing in India. Even when attempts were made to document the socio-cultural and economic history of the people in a given era or during the reign of a particular king the main focus, unfortunately, has been the palace and its surroundings. Since the documented part was supposed to be found in around the palace, it was erroneously believed that the undocumented phenomena will be explained by the documented one. This diachronic attitude, as one can imagine, defeated the very purpose of such ventures. However, whatever the outcome of such studies, one thing was very clear that even these studies did not cover tribal populations. Reasons are obvious. In
extending the historical frame to the tribals, the documented referent was missing
and in the absence of any other similar frame it was considered wise enough to
drop the tribal population altogether from the chapters of Indian history. In the
present world, it is wrong on the part of some scholars to believe that the tribal
history is of no significance. This attitude stems from the feeling that tribal people
themselves are of no significance. What can be more absurd and more disgusting
for the Indian intellectuals than being the victims of this terrible stereotype (Handoo,

2.2 DEFINITION OF TRIBE

The term tribe, derived from the ‘Latin word *tribus* (from *tri* and *bru*), denotes
an inhabited place. The word *tribus* was first used to imply three divisions amongst
the early Romans. It was rendered into Greeks who used the word with reference
to the tribes of Israel. In English language, the word was used in the 16th century
implying the original Roman meaning as used in the Bible and it denotes a group
of persons forming a community and claiming descent from a common ancestor.
As for example, it has been assumed that each of the twelve divisions of the
people of Israel would claim descent from the twelve sons of Jacob.

The word *tribe* implies an aggregate of stocks. A stock implies an aggregate of
persons, who are supposed to be kindred. It may also denote an aggregate of
families which form a community usually under a Government or a Chief. The
Chief may possess an autocratic power over the members of the tribe. This might
be recognised as an earliest picture of a community. The term *tribe* also signifies
“a primary aggregate of people in a primitive or barbarous condition under a head
or a ‘chief’” (Chaudhury, 1971: 6).

Strictly speaking, no precise or specific definition of a tribe can be given. Various
definitions of a tribe have been given by the social scientists but none of them is
universally accepted. Followings are two of the definitions of tribe given by
different scholars which may be examined for clarification:

1. Maine contends: “The tribes themselves, and all subdivisions of them, are
   conceived by the men who compose them as descended from a single male
   ancestor”. By this definition, Maine has given a one-sided picture of the
   family i.e., patrilineal family. But family is really bilateral and includes
descendants from both male and female lines. Maine has also observed: “In
   some cases, the tribe can hardly be otherwise described than as the group
   of men subject to someone chieftain.” But there is no hard and fast rule
   among the different communities of tribe that they should be governed by one
   chieftain only (Choudhary, 1971).

2. According to W. H. R. Rivers, tribe is “a social group of a simple kind, the
   members of which speak a common dialect, have a single Government, and
   act together for such common purposes as welfare” (Choudhary, 1971).

Definition of tribe keeps changing along with the change of the socio-economic
and political environment within which they are placed and with the subsequent
interpretation of the scholars. On the issue of paradigm shift in tribal affairs, B. K.
Roy Burman said, “at the time of India’s independence, tribal people in central
India were seen as backward, superstitious, native and poor. Even well meaning
people concentrated on relief and improving their physical conditions. But right
after Independence, the approach towards this community was completely changed.
After 1947, the so-called mainstream had a more intensive contact with the tribal society. The focus shifted to development, protection and participation. There was an assimilative approach to ‘mainstream’ the ‘backward’ (Roy Burman, 1994).

Exploring the constitutional paradigm, the Constitution of India does not define Scheduled Tribes (STs) as such. Article 342(1) refers to STs as “the tribes or the tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribe or tribal communities, after the consultation with the Governor thereof, which the President may specify by public notification.” This ambiguity sometimes leads to confusion in classifying and identifying a tribal population for declaring it ST. Thus, the first specification of STs in relation to a particular state/union territory is by a notified order of the President, after consultation with the state government concerned. These notifications can be modified subsequently through an Act of Parliament [Article 342(2)]. In 1951, the Commission for SCs and STs proposed common elements to the definition of ‘who the tribals are’ as “tribal origin, primitive way of life, remote habitation and general backwardness in all respects.” The criteria for determining tribal character was set up in 1965, by the Lokur Committee, are: indication of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large and backwardness.

Xaxa points out the complexities associated with the conceptualization of tribe: ...tribes have come to be primarily studied in relation to features and characteristics of the larger society. The focus is on how tribes are getting absorbed into the larger society, the so-called mainstream, by becoming caste, peasant, and class and so on. With such conceptualization, the identity of the tribal group or community is indeed put at risk. This is because of the way tribes have been conceptualized in anthropological literature and the reference with which tribal society in India is studied.

Tribes are primarily seen as a stage and type of society. They represent a society that lacks positive traits of the modern society and, thus constitutes a simple, illiterate and backward society. With change in these features on account of education, modern occupation, new technology, etc. tribal society is no longer considered to be tribal. If transformation is in the direction of caste society then it is described as having become a caste society. If the reference is peasant then it is posited as peasant society and if the general direction of transformation is social differentiation, then it is described as differentiated or stratified society, and thus ceases to be a tribal society. In the process, it is forgotten that tribe, besides being a stage and type of society, is also a society alike and similar to any other kind of society, say Oriya or the Bengali (Xaxa, 2008: 29).

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**Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Define the concept of tribe.

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2.3 VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES OF TRIBAL STUDIES

Tribal studies provide a relevant frame of reference for the diverse perspective and experience of tribal people with the Indian nation. Diverse perspectives are not only entertained but also encouraged to study the tribal issues. It is extremely difficult to understand the complete and clear-cut perspectives of tribal studies/society, but it can be analysed under the following sub-heads.

**Historical Perspective**

Historical perspective means understanding the social, cultural, intellectual and emotional settings that shaped people’s lives and actions in the past. At any point, different historical actors may have acted on the basis of conflicting beliefs and ideologies. So understanding diverse perspectives is also a key to historical perspective-taking. Das Gupta examines the historical perspective of tribes, where she points out that the perceived tribal characteristics, a body of specific attributed characteristics were products of history, a history in the making of which the colonial officials, the anthropologists and Christian missionaries have participated since the early decade of the nineteenth century (Das Gupta, 2003: 15). A range of differences, across and within communities, thus receded to the background as administrators, anthropologists and missionaries created the tribe. The colonial experience of governance converged and conflicted to constitute the quintessential image of tribe (ibid: 16). She also points out that theorization by historians studying tribal protests have remained constricted within the sharp realm of supposition inherited from colonial times.

Historical perspective generally deals with the colonial perspective of tribal society. It deals with various aspects of tribal society, culture, economy, tribe-caste interaction, land rights, historical forces, changing social institutions etc. This approach examines the socio-economic and political conditions during the British period. Regarding the terminology, the British did not define, who the tribal is, rather they used different terminology to denote the tribal communities of India in different census reports. Colonial administration identified the tribal people in different names, such as ‘Animist’ (Census Report of 1901), ‘Tribal Animists’ or ‘people following tribal religion’ (Census Report of 1911), ‘Hill and Forest Tribes’ (Census Report of 1921), ‘Primitive Tribes’ (Census Report of 1931), ‘Backward Tribes’ (Government of India Act, 1935) and ‘Tribes’ (Census Report of 1941) [Verma, 1990: 10].

The British had developed different attitudes towards the tribal communities and they had enacted number of laws and Acts to administer the tribal areas. The introduction of money economy at the advent of the British period and the imposition of licensing policies over forest and agricultural produces has resulted in a heavy burden for tribal societies in India. These policies were directly or indirectly resulted in the exploitation of tribal society by different means. So, the British realized the necessity of protecting the tribal people from the outside and from different forms of exploitation. So, they developed the policy of isolation to keep the tribal people away from the mainstream society on the ground that isolation would protect the tribal people against hostility and exploitation. They had also kept the tribal areas out of the purview of the general laws and brought under the administration of the collector and adopted separate protective legislation to protect the interests of the
tribal people. P. L. Mehta, while talking about tribal administration in India in the historical perspective, contests that Simon Commission realized the need for granting tribal population not the right for self-determination or rapid political advancement but for experienced and sympathetic handling and protection from economic subjugation by their neighbours (Mann, 1996: 60).

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Discuss the historical Perspective of tribal studies.

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Institutional Perspective

Institutional perspective aims to study the different dynamics of tribal society within the broader framework of the established institutions. This perspective focuses on the approach of different institutions towards the tribal people and vice-versa. Supporters of the institutional perspective believe that government social policies should cover everybody and provide universal benefits and social services for all (Midgley, 2006: 2) including the tribal people. They favor extensive government intervention in both the economy and social affairs, and they believe in universal coverage and the long term provision of benefits. A clear delineation of institutional perspective may also furnish a basis for a focused comparative study of competing perspectives. For instance, the view point of tribal community denied different rights despite the existence of legal protection accentuate the gap between legal image and reality (Ross, 2001: 75). The institutional perspective also deals with the representation of tribal people in different institutions. From an institutional perspective, the problem has been typically defined in terms of their low representation in different institutions. From the perspective of the tribal people, however, the institution is viewed as a hostile environment which does not respect them for who they are and is rigid and resist the tribal way of life.

Development and Planning Perspectives

This approach basically deals with how the tribal issues have been addressed by different plans. The Government of India shows that it is committed for the welfare and development of tribal communities. Accordingly, it has adopted number of planned actions at different stages. Consequently, the different challenges of the tribal communities have been addressed by the planning efforts of the government. It basically aims to address the problems of low standards of living, hunger, starvation, malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, poor sanitary condition, housing etc. The tribal communities have been subjected to exploitation for centuries by people like, money lenders, contractors, officials etc. Within this broader framework, the Government of India has initiated special schemes and plans for the development of tribal areas. They can be broadly grouped into four headings: communication;
education and culture; development of tribal economy; and health, housing and water supply. To carry out these programmes, tribal development blocks were established on the lines of the community development blocks.

The planning process of the government tries to address every aspect of the tribal society including generating employment opportunities for the tribal communities at different levels. This perspective addresses the glaring and unacceptable gaps between the economic and human resource development status of the tribal and non-tribal population through different plans and policies such as Special Central Assistance, Five Year Plans, Integrated Tribal Development Agency, Micro-Projects for Primitive Tribes, Modified Area Development Approach, Tribal Sub-Plan etc. Never before, in the history of Indian tribes, the change has been as fast as during the last four decades. More of it can be attributed to post-Independence era when planned or induced change came into more prominence. Even the unplanned forces and sources of change in the phase got more active as the communication network expanded fast paving way to intensive cultural contact.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Examine the development and planning perspective of tribal studies.

Integration Perspective

Integration perspective is an important perspective in tribal studies. It focuses on the full integration of tribal society to the mainstream society within the broader framework of the cultural pluralism of the tribal society. The integration approach to the tribal society has been followed by the then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru by advocating *Panchsheel*, the five pillars of tribal development. The five fundamental principles (*Panchsheel*) are as follows: (i) tribal people should be developed along the lines of their own genius and nothing should be imposed upon them; (ii) respect for tribal rights on land and forest; (iii) minimum investment of outsiders (non-tribal people) in their administration and development; (iv) administration and launching of multiple schemes should be avoided and effects should be made within the framework of their social and cultural institution; and (v) evaluation of results should not be by statistics but by the quality of life (Vidyarthi and Roy, 1985: 419). These principles gave importance to tribal pluralism and aim to integrate the tribal population with the mainstream society.

The integration perspective also includes cultural integration. Understanding of Indian culture demands inclusion of tribal heritage which has been so wide and rich in terms of diverse parameters. In the requirement of holistic framework, the cultural components (sociological, ideological or ideational and technological) need to be reviewed in inter-connectedness to arrive at the depth of culture. Art, overtly
speaking, is an integral part of material perspective of culture. This is supported through various expressions, illustrations and other surface reflexes. But then the other inner core of art, especially when we search for symbolic meanings has most of the time its root in sociological and ideological dimensions of a way of life. It is in the above context, Leonhard Adam (1954) stated that primitive art, and where tribal art is well-included, is a part of culture, linked up with the history of culture and the people. It has been observed that ‘art is the faculty to express conscious processes by means created by the artist himself in such a manner that they may be perceived by our sense organ. In this general sense language, song, music and dance are art, just as well as painting, sculpture and ornamentation. The graphic and plastic arts in the narrow sense of the term result from ability of making conscious processes visible in permanent materials’, (Mann, 1993:122). In other words, when one intends to explain cultural change, the elements and forms of art cannot be ignored. Thus, art and culture are inseparable when we try to review and understand them in their totality and within such a background art has close relevance to integration (Mann, 1993:123).

Integration perspective rejects any kind of imposition on tribal society from the outside and encourages the maintenance of the notion of unity in diversity. It illustrates that as part of the integration policy for Indian tribes, we have to help them to develop socially, economically and culturally. Nothing is to be imposed on the tribals. Imposition from the outside on tribal society will amount to disorganisation and disintegration in many facets of tribal life and culture. Their value, feelings and emotions are not to be hurt. The tribals are to develop along the lines of their own genius and mind. In other words, the best among them is to be retained and encouraged.

**Stratification Perspective**

The other framework of reference in terms of which tribes in India have been addressed and studied is the social stratification perspective. This perspective explores the internal differentiation of tribal society as well as their relation with the caste and mainstream society. In case of tribes, the position and nature of stratification are significantly different than the one observed among the caste society. Certain ethics of caste ideology are basically missing in case of tribes. But the growing situation of cultural contact has made the members of many tribes aware of the new rules and ways of social stratification. Making castes as their ‘reference groups’, these people have imbibed certain additional norms determining social distance, interaction and relationship. Such a trend has given rise to new social formations and socio-economic arrangements of the people. The factors born of cultural contact reshaped the social behaviour in the tribe-caste and inter-tribe and intra-tribe perspective. Comparatively more hold of conventional rules, however, seems to operate in the intra-tribe situation. Therefore, two broad dimensions of stratification in tribal society can be delineated. Firstly it is to be seen in the background of caste versus tribe and tribe versus tribe and secondly in the relevance of intra-tribe setting (Mann, 1993:129). To put it differently, the tribal society is not organized on the basis of the endogamous structure of the caste that is prevalent in the Hindu society. The tribal social system, on the contrary, is structure on the basis of inner differentiation among the tribes themselves.

This perspective believes that the tribal society no more remained static. As a result, tribal society has moved from homogeneity, the hallmark of tribal society,
Tribal Studies

to considerable heterogeneity (Xaxa, 2008: 24). The tribal society has been differentiated in terms of their occupation, as some tribes practice agriculture or in trade and commerce and others work as landless agricultural labourers, quarry and mine workers, stone crushers, and plantation and industrial workers, and some of them also work as government servants, politicians, etc. There have also been differences of religion, ideology, values, political orientation, way of life, etc. among members of tribal community.

Gender Perspective

Concern for a focus on women in tribal studies has been very recent. It emerged out of general interest and concern with women’s issues the world over. The value system governing larger Indian society has been in the process of change. With this, there has been a shift in the image of tribal women who are thus invariably portrayed as enjoying a better social status than their counterparts in the larger Indian society. Tribal society in the post-Independence era has been witness to unprecedented change, which has been most marked in respect of culture, modes of making a living and social differentiation. Their bearing on women’s status in society and gender relations has been far-reaching (Xaxa, 2008).

Studies on tribal women have been few, and these lack depth and comprehensiveness. In 1987, the Indian Anthropological Society published a region-wise survey of tribal women. The survey points out that the subject of tribal women has generally been ignored, and when studies do exist, they are brief or disposed off summarily. Except in some of the works of Elwin, Furer-Haimendorf and some others, there has been no explicit discussion of the status of women in tribal society. Even in these works, the assessment of the status of women has been far from uniform. While some say that tribal society is generally assigned high status to women, others argue that women’s position in tribal society is the same as in other societies (Xaxa, 2008:113). In other words, this perspective examines the position, involvement, participation and role of tribal women in various dynamics of tribal life.

Administration Perspective

This perspective deals with the approach to administer the tribal communities and tribal areas. It has been believed that the term ‘ST’ is a colonial construction (Xaxa, 2008: 1) and is an administrative and legal category. It has taken as an administrative practice and endowed it with its own socio-political meaning in the Independent India. Early interest in tribal studies had, among other things, a politico-administrative need by colonial administrative scholars. Within this broader framework, the colonial Government as well as the post-independent government has adopted number of provisions for the administration of tribes as well as tribal areas. For instance, the colonial government enacted separate laws for the administration of tribal areas in the pretext of protecting the tribal people from exploitation. In the same vein, the post-Independent government has also declared certain areas as schedule areas for the sound administration.

Anthropological Perspectives

Despite various elite and political definitions of tribes, it is well known that tribal studies have been and still remain the main domain of the anthropological studies in India. However, the bias in anthropological theory in general and tribal studies
in particular, has in recent times, not only raised questions about the relevance of anthropological theory itself, but also its futility for tribal studies (Handoo, 1992). The word “tribal” in the Indian context, as most of us are aware, seems to be a misnomer. It has political and racial connotations. Nonetheless, whatever the racial and ethnic affiliations and the origin of the present state of these tribals, the question remains that do the theories and methods devised by the anthropologists really work to gauge the tribal conditions. It is these and other misconceptions and the role of oral traditions, particularly folklore, which can play in correcting them.

Anthropological perspective maintains that ‘a tribe is a social group the members of which live in a common territory, have a common dialect, uniform social organisation and possess cultural homogeneity having a common ancestor, political organisation and religious pattern. But perhaps it would be very difficult to find many tribal groups in India who possess all these characteristics. Again, a number of tribal groups are recognised by the government and they are the Scheduled Tribes. But since all the tribal and analogous social formations are not considered, it always refers to Scheduled Tribe population which is recognised by the government, the number of actual tribal population must be much more than what is mentioned as Scheduled Tribe population (Chaudhuri, 1992: vii). In this context, C.V.F. Haimendorf has rightly developed the perspective in which he held that Indian anthropologists have the important task of interpreting tribal culture to their fellow countrymen and to create thereby a climate of public opinion favourable to the growth of the tribal life (Patel, 1994:17-18).

**Comparative Perspective**

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Comparative perspective also forms an important approach to understand tribal society. Comparative approach of studying tribal society aims to understand the different aspects of tribal society in a comparative way. It aims to examine the commonalities and differences of tribal society with other sections of the society as well as the indigenous people of the different countries of the world. It studies heterogeneous cultures like tribal and non-tribal cultures, tribal culture and culture of converted/proselytized tribal and tribal communities. The comparative perspective here does not mean to refer to a cross-cultural study alone; it also refers to the perspective gained from the study of other aspects of life of the tribal communities. It also makes an attempt to study the tribal society in a comparative perspective to see how the present day tribal communities differ from the description contained in the old ethnography.

Ethnographic Perspective

Much of the tribal ethnography has the underlying assumption that the tribal social formation always represents a primitive-an inferior exchange of human existence. Godelier (1977) who considers tribe to be a type of society and a stage of evolution both suggests that the term ‘primitive features a combination of both positive and negative traits. “The negative traits include the absence of positive traits found in Western societies (non-literate, uncivilized, arrested in development, non-industrialised, non-urban, lacking economic specialisation) or the presence of these traits to a lesser degree (less civilized, low level of technological achievement, traditional, simple tools, small-scale). In both cases ‘primitive societies are considered to be those absent from civilized societies (societies in which social relations are based primarily on kinship, with all pervasive religion in which co-operation for common goals is frequent.’ But in India, where tribal social formations (i.e. social formations unaffected by caste ideology and organisational framework in varying degree and having little or only tangential relations with state-like political institutions primarily based on organised and ideologically legitimated coercive power) co-existed with non-tribal social formations, the primitive image does not always hold good (Roy Burman, 1994: 96).

Demographic Perspective

Demographic perspective of tribal studies is largely based on the demographic characteristics of the tribal society. Tribal demography is the science of tribal population which is mainly concerned with the size, distribution, structure and change of tribal population (Bhattacharya and Bhattacharya, 1996: 11). Size refers to the number of units or persons in the population. Distribution is the spatial arrangement of the population in given time. Structure refers to the distribution of population among its sex and age groups. Change refers to the growth or decline of the population or one of its structural units. The components of change are birth, death and migration.

Inter-Disciplinary Perspective

This perspective suggests the inter-disciplinary relevance of tribal studies. The scope of tribal studies is not confined to a particular discipline. It has widened up its horizon to different disciplines across the academia. This is based on the fact that the past decade has witnessed the proliferation of scholarship around the topic ‘tribes’. Tribes have been the mutual interest of anthropologists, historians, political scientists and other disciplines in modern scholarship. In recent years,
they have discovered fruitful opportunities for intellectual exchange and even collaboration in their effort to understand continuity and change in tribal societies. Historians and political scientists have turned to the concepts and tools of anthropology to examine certain questions that are directly or indirectly related to understand the diversified democratic nature of the tribal society.

It is evident from the above analysis that it is extremely difficult to study the tribal society from a particular perspective rather it is essential to explore the various perspective to understand the tribal society in India. It is also important to mention here the complexities associated with the ranking of these perspectives as they are relevant in studying the tribal society in their own way.

### Check Your Progress IV

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Discuss the inter-disciplinary perspective to tribal studies.

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### 2.4 LET US SUM UP

The definition of tribe has been given by different scholars differently looking at the different dimensions of tribal society. But there is not a single definition which is comprehensive and more appropriate to address and define this community since it is very difficult to bring out an appropriate meaning and definition of tribe which would be applicable universally. In simple term we can say, ‘tribe is a community, who has developed their distinct social and cultural identity’. If we compare and contrast various perspectives of tribal studies, the anthropological perspective has provide base to the tribal studies and it could be considered as parent perspective among all other perspectives since it is the oldest and broader perspective compared to all other perspectives of tribal studies.

### 2.5 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES


Mann, R.S. (1993), Culture and Integration of Indian Tribes, New Delhi: MD Publication Pvt Ltd.
UNIT 3 TRIBAL DISCOURSE IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 Policy of Isolation in Pre-Independence Period
3.3 Policy of Assimilation
3.4 Policy of Integration in Post Independence Period
3.5 Contemporary Debates and the Policy of Neglect
3.6 Let Us Sum Up
3.7 Further Readings and References

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you to understand how the issues of tribal development have been approached at various points of time—from Independence to the present times. There exists vast amount of literature on tribal development in India. This unit helps to bring together numerous studies together to present a coherent view on tribal development and form a narrative on tribal discourse. The unit examines the theories developed by social scientists, anthropologists and policy makers on issues related to tribal development. You would also be able to locate the wider debates on inclusion and exclusion of the tribes from the larger sections of the society.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Scheduled Tribes comprise a substantial indigenous minority population of India. They consist of 700 (Annual Report 2008-2009, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, pp. 47-58) groups. Among them about 80 percent live in the ‘central belt’, extending from Gujarat and Rajasthan in the West and across the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa to West Bengal and Tripura in the East. The north eastern states constitute 20 per cent of tribal population. Among the southern states Andhra Pradesh has the largest tribal population.

The tribes of India have been undergoing process of incorporation and separation into the wider community. The process is not new and is ongoing. The process has been a result of poverty, exploitation and underdevelopment among the tribal communities. With the very low rate of literacy combined with acute and abysmal poverty the tribes have been majorly located outside the larger Indian society. This has led to a debate on what approach to adopt with regard to the tribal development. The discourse on tribal development in India has been shaped by two inter-related issues. First, how to percolate the fruits of development and eradicate poverty among the tribal populations and second relates to effects of socio-cultural integration of the tribals as citizens of the nation-state and protection
of tribal language, customs and culture. These two issues have occupied centre stage of the policy making related to tribal development.

The discourse on the development of the tribals could be studied in four phases. These four phases are:

1. Policy of Isolation or ‘Leave them Alone’ approach adopted in pre-Independence period by the British.

2. The Policy of Assimilation or detribalization approach of G.S. Ghurye

3. Policy of Integration and Development adopted soon after Independence. The approach is mainly associated with J.L. Nehru and

4. The contemporary debate on the neglect of tribes.

Each of these phases has been examined in detail in the subsequent section.

### 3.2 POLICY OF ISOLATION IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

The use of the term ‘tribe’ to describe people who were different from those of the mainstream civilization has been viewed as a colonial construction (Beteille 1995; Singh 1993). Before the advent of the colonial rule the use of term to describe the tribal population on the whole was absent. References to terms like ‘communities’, ‘vana’ and ‘jana’ could be found in ancient texts to describe aboriginals living in the forests. However, the official recognition to the adivasis as a category distinct from the rest is found in the census during the British rule, mainly because the tribal did not conform to the general pattern of the Hindu caste structure and religious belief system (Encyclopedia of ST: 167). Both the terms—adivasis and tribes highlight the secluded character of the tribal community.

The colonial policy of exclusion of tribal areas was largely an outcome of the work of ethnographers, anthropologists, sociologists, historians and Christian missionaries studying tribal cultures in India. The most important of these works includes that of Verrier Elwin. Elwin’s study on Baiga (1939) made him realize that exploitation of these tribes was severe and this community hopes to have a Baiga Raj, where they have their own ruler and no interference and exploitation by the others. This study led Elwin to adopt ‘leave them alone’, ‘national park approach’ or ‘isolation approach’.

In simple words the approach came to mean letting tribes live in their own way, not infringing on their economic space and allowing them to develop in their own self-created development design. Elwin’s ‘National Park Policy’ of keeping the tribals as “museums, specimens became the model for administration. The British adopted two broad approaches on tribal development. The first approach advocated by the British was to isolate tribes from the larger society and, therefore, separate tribal areas from the purview of normal administration. This model treated tribal communities as ‘isolates, tribes as ‘Noble Savage’ and the primitive condition as ‘Arcadian Simplicity’ (Singh, 1985: 1). The tribal communities were seen as too subdued and innocent to understand the socio-economic processes and much more prone to the exploitation by the non-tribals and the moneylenders. Practically, the policy of isolation adopted by the British further alienated the tribals living on
the hills, in forests and in other remote areas. The tribal remained unaffected by
the benefits of the developmental measures initiated for the rest of the society. The
current lack of development among the tribal needs to be understood in this
historical perspective.

The second point of view saw tribes as animists, on the ground that they belonged
to a religious tradition other than that of major religions of India. Thus, they were
a society unto themselves and constituted a society different from the larger society.

The concept of protecting the tribal communities from too rapid integration into
economy and polity was born out of the direct nature of the British rule. It was
a product of calculation on the part of British on two major issues:

a. Administration of the far-flung tribal areas would be difficult, and
b. The isolation would also keep tribals away from political movement developing
   at that point of time.

Within the larger framework of the policy of isolation, legislations were enacted.
For instance, the British promulgated Inner Line Regulation in 1873 that aimed to
minimize tribal-non-tribal contact by controlling tribal industries and trade in the
tribal areas of northeast. The protection and the preservation of the tribal life and
culture were also ensured by the enactment of the Scheduled District Act, 1874,
that provided for special tribal administration. By the implementation of the Act of
1919, the reconstruction of the tribal areas into backward tracts was made. The
backward tracts were divided into two types: the first included those backward
areas excluded from the scope of reformed legislatures and the constitutional
reforms. The governor general-in-council was the sole legislator for such areas
and elected ministers had no responsibility for them. The second type of the
backward areas included those areas that were represented in the legislatures, but
the representation was neither effective nor adequate. By the Act of 1935, the
provisions of the previous Act were made more stringent by converting the backward
tracts into Areas of total or partial exclusion (Danda 1989; 10). This helped the
British to achieve two-fold objectives-secluding the tribes from the larger society
in ‘the aspiration of the freedom movement’ (Raha, 1989: XXIV) and second it
further restricted the process of development among the tribes.

As a result of the isolation approach, even though the tribal areas remained un-
interrupted, the enactment of legislations like India Forest Act, 1878 and Land
Acquisition Act, 1894 establishing absolute propriety of the colonial state over the
forests land led to massive discontent among the tribals and resulted in rebellions
in various parts of India.

The isolationist model was, indeed, criticized as it was severely compromised on
the ground that the colonial state’s objective of revenue extraction made it adopt
the policy as the tribal regions were richest in terms of endowments of forest and
mineral wealth. A few roads were constructed for security reasons and to allow
the British to exploit the forest produce. The policy of isolation did nothing for the
welfare and development of tribals. Thakkar Bapa criticized the isolation theory
in the following words “to keep these people confined to isolation in their accessible
hills and jungles is something like keeping them in glass-museum for the curiosity
of purely academic persons”. (Thakkar, 1944).
Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) What do you understand by Policy of isolation?

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3.3 POLICY OF ASSIMILATION

In another strand of thinking, the distinction between the tribes and the non-tribes as made by the colonial state is overlooked. The lineage to this line of approach could be traced to polemical works of G.S. Ghurye. Ghurye criticized the national park approach, countering the argument that the Hindus were responsible for creating poverty among the tribes. Ghurye instead recognized the British to be solely responsible for tribal exploitation. The individual property rights in land, creation of a land market, laws restricting the use of forest resources and an exploitative excise policy were all British creations. (Govinda Chandra Rath: 75). He specifically writes about the loss of land among the tribes soon after the introduction of the British system of revenue and law. Ghurye argued that Hindu castes had been in a symbiotic relationship with tribes since ancient times and they both remained intrinsic parts of the Indian civilization, which British wanted to break by their isolationist approach (1994).

His writings on tribes ‘The Aborigines ‘So called’ and Their Future made a case for the complete assimilation of the tribes with rest of the Indian population. In fact Ghurye was of the opinion that it is misleading to call the tribes as aborigines as they were actually only backward Hindus and the solution to their economic, cultural and social problems lay in the overall assimilation of the tribals into the Hindu society. Based on this argument, Ghurye divided the tribes into three sections—(i) those who are properly integrated, (ii) loosely integrated and (iii) those not more than touched by Hinduism.

Describing tribes as Hindus, he says ‘only proper description of these people that they are imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society and that they are in reality backward Hindus. He makes this argument on the ground that there was much similarity between Hindu religion and the animistic tribal religions and that the two could not possibly be distinguished from one another. This point so made was based not on fieldwork but on the observations and comments of some of the census commissioners between 1891 and 1931 where they had expressed their dissatisfaction over the fact that tribes were described as animists. It is, of course, an open truth that Ghurye made his observation on very inadequate data and very selective use of the comments and observations of the census commissioners [Ghurye 1963:1-22].

The approach was criticized on the fact that complete assimilation is difficult. It would be difficult for the tribals to give up their traditional tribal-belief, practices and ideas. Assimilation of tribals into dominant sections of society would lead to a situation of caste conflict -as non-tribal caste society is based on the principle
of homo-hierarchicus, whereas tribals live in the society that is based on the principle of equality or egalitarianism. It was widely recognized that tribal socio-economic structures, culture and value systems were completely different from the other non-tribal sections of the society and, therefore, any attempt to force assimilation in long run could lead to serious repercussions. In this sense, policy of assimilation is seen as having aggressive and violent overtones.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) What is the main criticism of the policy of assimilation?

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3.4 POLICY OF INTEGRATION IN POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

The policy of isolation and policy of assimilation came to be widely debated. The need to evolve a more comprehensive approach for tribal development soon after Independence came to be widely recognized. Contrasted with British policy, the Government of India’s primary concern was to focus on overall Tribal Development. Whether to isolate or assimilate the tribes into the process of development came to be widely debated in the Constituent Assembly. As the Government of India Act, 1935, framed by the colonial state formed the model for Independent India, it was widely accepted that the Constituent Assembly debates were to be based on colonial propositions.

During the Constituent Assembly debates three important groups debated on the strategy of the tribal development. The assimilationists favored the absorption of the tribal society into the larger dominant society, the Liberals argued for self-autonomy for the tribals. The group represented by Shri Biswanath, made a case for leave alone the tribes. Shri Biswanath said “‘[W]e want that the Scheduled Tribes in the whole country should be protected from the destructive impact of races possessing a higher and more aggressive culture and should be encouraged to develop their own autonomous life. They should not be isolated communities or little republics to be perpetuated forever” (Constituent Assembly debates: 1949).

The Constituent Assembly set up a sub-committee under the chairmanship of Thakkar Bapa. The most important finding of the sub-committee related to establishment of welfare and development of the tribals. The policy of integration, i.e. policy to integrate the tribal society into the national mainstream gradually, was concretized by Jawaharlal Nehru. The Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, headed by U.N. Dhebar (1960) later endorsed and elaborated this policy of integration as attempting not to disturb the harmony of tribal life and simultaneously work for its advancement, not to impose anything upon the tribals and simultaneously work for their integration as members and part of Indian family (quoted in Ratha, 1990:140).
Nehru approached the problem of tribal development in a broader perspective. Nehru’s interaction and exposure to the tribes of North East led him to view that tribal problems should be viewed in their own context, as the tribal economy could not be separated from cultural disposition and sovereignty (Rath, 2006: 66). Nehru expressed his opinion on the tribal development in the following words “I have no doubt that development and change and so called progress will come to them, because it is becoming increasingly difficult for any people to live their isolated life cut-off from the rest of the world. But let this development and change be natural and be in the nature of self-development with all the help one can give in the process (Nari Rustomji quoted in Rath 2006:88). Nehru did not favour permanent isolation of the tribes from the mainstream civilization but suggested their protection from exploitative nature of the larger Indian society. After Independence the struggle of the Nagas for independence came to be viewed as a struggle for land, nationality and cultural autonomy. These developments transformed the outlook of Nehru towards the tribes and solve their problems through the policy of integration. Integration needs to be distinguished from assimilation. While assimilation is partial and involuntary subservience, integration in contrast is a respectful merger with the mainstream, staking a claim to an equal share of power and resources as citizens (Rath, 2006:76).

Though influenced by Elwin, Nehru advocated the principle of avoiding two extremes. In a Foreword to the second edition of Elwin’s book, A Philosophy for NEFA in 1959, Nehru spelt out his “PanchSheel” or five cardinal principles concerning the Government’s attitude towards the tribals in order to prevent the loss of identity and culture, and also for their development:

- People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.
- Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.
- We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, is needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.
- We should not over administer these areas or overwhelm them with multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to, their social and cultural institutions.
- We should judge results, not by statistics of the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is involved.

Nehru’s development policy came to be seen as based on the value of gradualism and passive interference of the State alongside all other philanthropic overtones (Gavit and Chand, 1989: 154). In accordance with the policy of integration, 43 sub-multipurpose projects were established and a committee appointed under the Chairmanship of Elwin to examine the programmes of these blocks. Further a Dhebar committee was appointed in 1960 to report on the administration of the scheduled areas. The Elwin report and the Dhebar committee report exemplified the five fundamental principles advocated by Nehru for tribal development. Since then tribal development has been based on two-pronged approach:
a. Promotion of development activities to raise their level of living.
b. Protection of their interests through legal and administrative support.

Several provisions confirming to the above principles came to be adopted in the Constitution for the upliftment of the tribal societies. Government of India made it practical through Constitutional guarantees under fifth and sixth schedules of the Indian Constitution. The Constitution of India has come to include several provisions for tribes including proportional representation in legislatures, right to use their own language, culture and customs, provision of reservation for educational and job opportunities. The tribal sub-plan, adopted from the Fifth Five Year plan onwards, is a major instrument of socio-economic development for the tribals. The main objective of the tribal sub-plan was to bridge the development gap between the tribes and non-tribal communities and to improve the quality of life of tribal people.

The Nehru–Elwin policy followed in first decade of Independence came under severe criticism as it was widely recognized that the administration of the northeastern tribal areas was not satisfactory and that there was too much focus on the political and administrative development while the economic development of tribes was ignored. Panchsheel was in disagreement with the policy of industrialization for the rest of India. Since tribal areas are also the most resource rich areas, the process of industrialization was brazen with regard to tribal rights on land, water and forests (Arya 1998, Das 1992, Lorduswamy 1997, Singh 1972). The Nehruvian approach could not retain its inclusive zeal and most of the development programmes introduced by Nehru caused massive displacement. The approach also came to be criticized on the ground that there remain gaps between the development model and the protection policy for the tribals. Thus, the Nehru-Elwin policy of gradual integration was replaced by the policy of progressive politico-economic and cultural integration of the tribal people in order to speed up their socio-economic development (Das, 2001: 348). In order to achieve this Government of India pursued the agenda of modernization of backward tribal areas.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) How is the policy of integration different from policy of assimilation?

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3.5 CONTEMPORARY DEBATES AND THE POLICY OF NEGLECT

With the onset of the liberalization era in 1980’s the Government of India further enhanced its support to the tribal areas. Within the ambit of ‘development model’ the subsequent governments pursued the policy of earmarking funds to the tribal regions to address the problems of underdevelopment and improving system of
Tribal Studies

Formulated in the above context the Sixth Five Year plan envisaged a four-fold policy for the tribal development:

a. Integration of the services at the delivery point of beneficiary
b. Development of the service from the bottom upwards
c. Development of the skills to diversify occupations
d. Introduction of the latest technology based on local materials and local skills.

There has been general agreement among the scholars studying tribal development that the Indian State has failed to bring basic structural transformations among the tribal communities as envisaged. Major problems that the tribes face today relates to distortion introduced in their socio-economic life due to recent economic development. The ever increasing interactions of tribals with the non-tribals have led to increasing exploitation and discrimination of the tribes.

Despite the policy of Integration, and the wide array of protective legislations, the Indian State has failed to protect tribal communities from exploitation. The reservations have benefitted few tribal communities by providing jobs. Even though the process of decentralization has expanded the scope of tribal participation in politics, land alienation, migration, educational backwardness and indebtedness continue to remain major obstacles for their development. Development induced development has become a major human-rights issue as it has resulted in marginalization of tribal families. The State has been indifferent to these problems that have led to emergence of dependence and disadvantage among the tribes. Underlying this assertion is the discriminatory treatment meted out to the Indian tribes during the course of development. The new economic regime has led to privatization and marketisation of economy and it has been treated as a powerful threat for the tribal communities (Singh, 2008). Currently the Scheduled Tribes continue to suffer from all the disadvantages associated with ethnic/minority community.

While on the one hand, the forces of globalization have posed renewed threats to the livelihoods of one of the most marginalized sections of Indian society such as STs. On the other hand, the State has not been able to provide livelihood security to the tribals. Several cases of tribal destitution and loss of access to land and livelihoods have been coming from the state of Orissa and West Bengal, mentioning few. Guha shows that first the colonial British state (Forest Policy, 1894) and then Independent India (Forest Policy, 1952) have laid bare vast tracts of forest and turned them into agricultural land, impoverishing and subordinating the tribals and simultaneously creating ecological disaster (1994: 21-34). In addition, different state governments have also adopted number of legislations to evacuate the tribals from the forest.

The achievements of the State remain limited to protecting the civil and social rights of the tribals; the State continues to face difficulties in protecting the tribal culture, which forms the main principle of policy of integration. Policy of integration has been met with criticism as it has focused on absorption tendencies rather than integrating the tribes. Separateness and exclusion continue to remain the principal characteristics of the tribal communities. Noting on the process Xaxa advocates “there has been aggressive incorporation of tribes into the language and religion of the dominant community. Yet in respect of providing tribals access to the fruits
of development such incorporation on the whole have been avoided and even resisted” (2005:1369).

As the functioning of democratic forces has become stronger, a resentful local leadership has emerged among these communities sponsoring movement for either a separate state, or political economy or even separation from the Union (Oommen, 1997).

### 3.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you studied about the development of tribal discourse in India. Tribal discourse has been understood in four phases. In the pre-Independence period, policy of isolation was adopted that focused on keeping the tribals away from the dominant non-tribal society. The Policy of Isolation came to be criticized by the policy of assimilation, which is also an important discourse on tribal development. The shortcomings of policy of isolation and policy of assimilation came to be recognized by the policy makers in Independent India, who envisaged the policy of Integration for the tribes. The policy of Integration, unlike policy of isolation and policy of assimilation, focused on integrating the tribes with larger sections of society in the process of development. The policy of integration, however, fell short in meeting its objectives. Of late, the discourse on the tribal development centers on issues of development of tribal identity resulting from continued exploitation, indebtedness, and development induced displacement and land alienation.

The discourse on Tribal identity has been shaped on two issues-the integration of the tribals into the nation state and the larger sections of the society and their assimilation into the Hindu fold. The debate is ongoing. Even though a large number of welfare policies and Constitutional provisions have been enacted by the Government of India, it is widely accepted that the tribal communities continue to live in poverty subjected to exploitation and discrimination. The integration approach adopted by Independent India has its own limitation. As a result, the tribes continue to face socio-economic deprivation. In recent times, there has been emergence of movements among the tribes based on identity and revolving around the issues of livelihood. This emergence has to be understood in the context of isolation, assimilation and integration that defined the relationship of the tribes with respect to the State at various points of time. It is the last and continuing phase of neglect where the tribes benefitted from the reservation and other policies have questioned and staged a revolt against the State.

### 3.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

• Ghurye 1943: The Aborigines-So called and their Future, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Poona.
• Ghurye 1959: The Scheduled Tribes, Popular Book House, Bombay.
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UNIT 4 TRIBAL INDIGENOUS ENTITY

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Definition and Criteria of Indigenous People
4.3 Indigenous People and International Bodies
4.4 India and Indigenous People
4.5 Let Us Sum Up
4.6 Further Readings and References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The present unit has the following objectives:

- To understand the concept of ‘indigenous people’,
- To identify the characteristics of indigenous people,
- To explore the relationship between the different international bodies and indigenous people, and
- To understand the concept of indigenous people in the Indian context.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of ‘indigenous people’ has not only been a hot topic of debate within academic circle, it has been met with skepticism if not outright rejection among representatives of government, especially in India. The major concern for the indigenous people was developed both at the national and international level due to their past experience of discrimination, dispossession, marginalisation and subjugation. From the simple fact that more and more people are claiming the indigenous slot, we can assume that indigeneity resonates well with the experiences and aspirations of many marginalized people in the present-day nation-state system. The increasing recognition of the concept in the international law and by international organizations and some national governments lead to a situation in which it is unavoidable to address the problem of identifying the people to whom the respective laws and policies apply.

4.2 DEFINITION AND CRITERIA OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

The concept of indigenous people is a truly complex and contentious topic. There is little agreement on precisely what constitutes indigenous people or how to measure it. Indeed, there is not even a consensus on appropriate terms. There is no universally accepted definition of indigenous people, although several attempts at defining indigenous people have been made by scholars, development
practitioners and legal experts. The universal definition is also not necessary or desirable due to the existence of diversities among the indigenous people. So, these regional and national approaches differ from each other on the basis of their respective social context. This notion has been emphasized by the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of the Indigenous People (UNDRIP) (preamble), where it has been pointed out that there is a need to take into consideration the existing national and regional particularities while defining the concept of indigenous people.

The etymological meaning of ‘indigenous’ is the native, belonging naturally to the soil. It means those whose ancestors were the original inhabitants of lands and later colonized or settled by others. The dominant issue of indigenousness revolves around the fact of who came first, or who occupied the territory first. In settlers’ colony, there exist a clear distinction between indigenous people and those who came in later waves of migration. The term ‘indigenous people’, indigenous ethnic minorities, tribal groups and scheduled tribes describe a social group with a social and cultural identity distinct from the dominant society that makes them vulnerable to being disadvantaged in the development process. Indigenous people are the poorest segment of the society, whose economic activities range from shifting agriculture in or near forest to wage labour or even small scale market oriented activities. To put it differently, different national and international institutions and organizations have developed their own understanding of the concept of indigeneity or indigenous people in their own respective context, which can be clearly examined under different heads in the following pages.

Considering the diversity of indigenous people, an official definition of “indigenous” has not been adopted by any United Nations-system body. Instead the system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on the following: self-identification as indigenous people at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member; and historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies. This international body has adopted both working as well as operational definition of indigenous people (Das, 2001: 21-25). The working definition runs as, “Indigenous populations are composed of the existing descendants of the people who inhabited the present territory of a country wholly or partially at the time when persons of a different cultures or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts of the world, overcome them and by conquest, settlement or other means, reduced them to be non-dominant or colonial condition; who today live more in conformity with their particular social, economic and cultural customs and traditions than the institutions of the country of which they now form part, under a state structure which incorporates mainly the national, social and cultural characteristics of other segments of the population which are predominant.” The operational definition of the UN states that, “Indigenous communities, people and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sections of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continuous existence as people, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.” So, the indigenous people are those who have a historical continuity and consider themselves ethnically different from others and they are the non-dominant group.
Erica-Irene Daes, Chairperson of the UN working group on Indigenous People, acknowledged the existing diversities among the social groups and defined certain people as indigenous due to the following features (Hughes, 2003: 16):

- Because they are descendents of groups, which were in the territory of the country at the time when other groups of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived there.
- Because of their isolation from other segments of the country’s population, they have preserved almost intact the customs and traditions of their ancestors, which are similar to those characterized as indigenous, and
- Because they are, even if only formally, placed under a state structure which incorporates national, social and cultural characteristics alien to theirs.

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous People has not adopted any official definition of indigenous people rather it has developed a modern understanding of the term based on the following features:

- Self-identification as indigenous people at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member.
- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies.
- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources.
- Distinct social, economic or political systems.
- Distinct language, culture and beliefs.
- Form non-dominant groups of society.
- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive people and communities.

The Convention 169 of the ILO defines indigenous people as who “… on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of the present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions.” The less favorable living conditions and the lower social, economic and cultural status of such people prior to conquest or colonization are considered as the major criteria of indigenous status. To put it differently, it has focused on both objective as well as subjective criteria for defining indigenous people. The objective criteria of understanding of indigenous people acknowledge the importance of their distinct social, cultural and economic conditions. Their status need to be regulated fully or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations. The subjective criteria of defining the concept of indigenous people based on the development of their self-identity, where it has been underlined that ‘self-identification shall be regarded as a fundamental criterion for determining the group’. This is based on the fact that a person is accepted as a belonging to a particular indigenous or tribal people and a person identified as belonging to a particular indigenous or tribal people.

The World Council of Indigenous People, 1993, came up with its own definition:

“Indigenous People are such population groups as we are, who from age-old times have inhabited the lands where we live, who are aware of having a character
of our own, with social traditions and means of expressions that are linked to the country inherited from our ancestors, with a language of our own and having certain essential and unique characteristics which confer upon us the strong conviction of belonging to people, who have an identity in ‘ourselves’ and should be, thus, regarded by others.”

According to World Bank, indigenous people can be defined by some or all of the following characteristics (Hughes, 2003: 16):

- A close attachment to ancestral territories and to the natural resources there.
- Self identification and identification by others as members of a distinct cultural groups.
- An indigenous language, often different from the national one.
- Having customary social and political institutions.
- Primarily subsistence producers.

Based on the above definitions and characteristics, it can be stated that the claim for indigenous status demands some essential requirements as well as relevant indicia (Dash and Pati, 2002: 9-10). The essential requirements are: (i) self identification as a distinct ethnic group, (ii) historical experience of, or contingent vulnerability to severe disruption, dislocation and exploitation, (iii) long connection with the region, and (iv) the wish to retain a distinct identity. The relevant indicia include: (i) non-dominance in the national or regional society, (ii) close cultural affinity with a particular area of land or territories, (iii) historical continuity, especially by descent, with prior occupants of land in the region, (iv) socio-economic and socio-cultural differences from the ambient population, (v) distinct objective characteristics such as, language, race, material or spiritual culture etc., and (vi) regarded as indigenous by ambient population or treated as such in legal or administrative arrangements.

The centrality of defining indigenous people is the attachment of the indigenous people to their territories. Another key element of the definition of indigenous people is ‘the dimension of a relationship of dispossession of subordination in relation to another group that arrived later (Perera, 2009: 17). In short, indigenous people are ethnic groups that are defined as indigenous according to one of the various definitions of the term, there is no universally accepted definition but most of which carry connotations of being the “original inhabitants” of a territory. The political sense of the term indigenous people, defines these groups as particularly vulnerable to exploitation and oppression by nation states. Indigenous people are the descendants of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. The new arrivals later became dominant through conquest, occupation, settlement or other means. Thus, there are three aspects which are central to the conceptualization of indigenous people. First, the indigenous are those people who live in the country to which they belong before colonization or conquest by people from outside the country or the geographical region. Secondly, they have become marginalised as an aftermath of conquest and colonization by the people from outside the region. Thirdly, such people govern their life more in terms of their own social, economic and the cultural institution than the laws applicable to the society or the country at large (Xaxa, 1999: 3590).
Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is meant by the concept of ‘Indigenous People’?

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2) List the different characteristics of indigenous people.

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4.3 INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND INTERNATIONAL BODIES

It has been widely acknowledged that the indigenous people are socially discriminated, economically exploited and politically marginalised. They have been experiencing different forms and magnitude of discrimination and marginalisation in their respective social context. They have been witnessing the increasing evidence of non-recognition of their identity and growing erosion of their culture and other rights with the initiation of nation-building process in different parts of the globe. To put it differently, the history of the indigenous people is one of marginalisation, discrimination and subjugation. Given this complexity and nature of the problems of indigenous people, different international organizations and institutions have initiated their efforts to address the growing problems of the indigenous people across the globe, which can be discussed in the following way.

International Labour Organisation and Indigenous People

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) was the first international body to work on the issues of indigenous people. The ILO started to work on the issue of indigeneity since its inception in 1920s. In 1926, it enacted number of conventions and recommendations related to forced labour and recruitment process of indigenous people. It adopted the Convention Concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries (Convention 107 of 1957), which worked towards the promotion of social and economic conditions of indigenous people.

This Convention first speaks of tribal and semi-tribal populations and then of indigenous population, as a population of special category analogous to the tribal and semi-tribal populations. Members of tribal and semi-tribal social formations are, according to article 1(a) of the Convention “populations whose social and economic conditions are at a less advanced stage than the stage reached by the other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or
partially by their own customs or by special laws and regulations.” Article 1(b) speaks of “members of tribal and semi-tribal populations in independent countries which are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belong, at the time of conquest of colonization and which, irrespective of their legal status, live more in conformity with the social, economic and cultural institutions of that time with the institutions of the nation to which they belong.”

The Convention 107 of the ILO interpreted the indigenous people as the tribal or semi-tribal populations of a special category who inhabit a particular geographic region and have a specific historical experience. This was the first international instrument which addressed the situation of indigenous people as a separate category from non-self-governing territories or minorities (Perera, 2009: 3). In other words, it applies only to economically and culturally distinct groups living within the borders of the independent states-in particular, indigenous people that pre-existed the state and its dominant population, and tribal groups that have existed on the margins of dominant societies throughout history. The interpretation of Convention 107 has not been abrogated but is in the process of being supplanted by the definition in the ILO Convention 169. The Convention 169 of the ILO on Indigenous and Tribal People affirms that no state or social group has the right to deny the identity to which an indigenous people may lay claim, and places responsibility on states for ensuring with the participation of indigenous people, their rights and dignity. Article 13 of the Convention 169 states that: “In applying the provisions of the Convention, governments shall respect importance of the cultures and spiritual values of the people concerned of their relationship with the lands or territories, or both as applicable, which they occupy or otherwise use, and in particular the collective aspects of this relationship” (Perera, 2009: 16). In other words, this convention recognizes the distinct cultural traditions of indigenous and tribal people and places them on equal footing in terms of their contribution to the world’s culture.

**World Bank and Indigenous People**

Historical relationships between the World Bank and indigenous people have often been tense and characterized by lack of trust. This is because of the serious negative social and cultural impacts inflicted upon the indigenous communities by past-World Bank financed infrastructure, extractive and industrial projects. Most of the World Bank projects did not involve the indigenous communities in the formulation as well as implementation of the projects. The engagement between the World Bank and the indigenous people happened for the first time in 1987, at a time when the then new World Bank President Barber Conable, had finally admitted that many of its projects had resulted in negative impacts on indigenous people and their environment (Griffiths, 2005: 3). To put it differently, the World Bank recognizes the vulnerabilities and risks that indigenous people encounter in development interventions. It has developed safeguard policies to ensure that the development projects it supports will take place in indigenous lands or territories only if the affected indigenous people are consulted and participate.

**United Nations and Indigenous People**

Over the decades, the UN has become the pivotal forum where indigenous people’s rights are given shape and expressed in declarations, covenants and other
instruments. The universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the UN in 1948, where Articles 22 and 25 set forth the seminal protection of economic, social and cultural rights of all human beings. A major turning point emerged in 1970s when the UN Human Rights sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities emphasized the need of detailed study on the discrimination of indigenous people by appointing Martinez Cobb as a Special Rapporteur to conduct a broad study on the problem of discrimination against indigenous people. This Commission recommended for different national and international measures for eliminating discrimination against indigenous people. The report addressed different range of human rights problems, which included the definition of indigenous people, the role of inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, the elimination of discrimination, and basic human rights principles, as well as special areas of actions in field such as health, housing, education, language, culture, social and legal institutions, employment, land, political rights, religious rights and practices, and equality in the administration of justice and realization of their rights.

The sub-commission also created the UN Working Group on Indigenous Population in 1982, which focused on the issues related to indigenous rights within the UN system. The working group prepared Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and submitted to the UN for consideration. The preamble of the Draft stated that all indigenous people are free and equal in dignity and rights. It also emphasized that there is an urgent need to respect and promote the rights and characteristics of indigenous people, especially their rights to land, territories and resources, which stem from their history, philosophy, cultures, spiritual and other traditions as well as from their political, economic and social structures. The Draft’s operative paragraph proclaims that the indigenous people have the right to: (i) be protected from genocide, (ii) maintain their distinct ethnic and cultural identities, (iii) use their own languages, (iv) own and control their traditional and, (v) be consulted on development projects affecting them, and (vi) participate on ‘equal footing’ in political, economic, social and cultural life.

Within this broader framework, the UN General Assembly on December 18, 1990 adopted resolution 45/64 and proclaimed the year 1993 as the International Year of the World’s Indigenous People. The Indigenous People’s Year called for a new partnership to be created among indigenous people, governments and the UN and it was expected that this will help to address their needs, promote an understanding of their cultures and incorporate indigenous communities into the decision-making process (Dash and Pati, 2002: 4). It also aimed to strengthen international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in the areas of human rights, environment, development, education and health. To encourage the new partnership, the year stressed on the need to foster: (i) participation of indigenous people in the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects affecting their future and living conditions, (ii) knowledge about international standards, developed over the past several decades by UN bodies for protecting the rights of indigenous people, (iii) public awareness of the situation of the indigenous people and the threat to their existence, through special observances, meetings and other promotional and cultural activities as well as media coverage (Das, 2001: 3-4). Besides these, the UN General Assembly in its resolution 48/163 of December 21, 1993, has proclaimed the International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People 1994-2004.
UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

With an overwhelming majority of 143 votes in favour, only 4 negative votes cast (Canada, Australia, New Zealand and United States) and 11 abstentions, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People on September 13, 2007. Les Malezer, Chair of the International Indigenous People' Caucus, welcomed the adoption of the Declaration in a statement to the General Assembly: "The Declaration does not represent solely the viewpoint of the United Nations, nor does it represent solely the viewpoint of the Indigenous People. It is a Declaration which combines our views and interests and which set the framework for the future. It is a tool for peace and justice, based upon mutual recognition and mutual respect. The Declaration emphasizes the right of indigenous people to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue their development in accordance with their aspirations and needs (Minde, Eide and Ahren, 2007). It recognises putative international norms and evolving human rights standards pertaining to Indigenous people. While some of the rights elaborated in the text do not constitute accepted legal standards, the genesis of the Declaration was the need to arrest the protection gap that exists in international human rights law in relation to Indigenous people.

4.4 INDIA AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Tribal People versus Indigenous People

Examining the issue of indigenous people in Indian context, the pertinent question needs to be asked is: whether the term ‘indigenous people’ could at all be considered applicable in the Indian context? If the answer is affirmative, is it possible to consider all the tribal communities of India as indigenous people? India has constitutionally recognized tribal people or scheduled tribe. But the concept ‘tribe’ is not defined anywhere in the Indian Constitution. But it states in Article 342 that the scheduled tribes are ‘tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities’, which the President may specify from time to time by public notification. The tribals in India are also refer to, and refer to themselves as Adivasis, a Sanskrit deviation meaning ‘original settlers’, in other words, the indigenous people. To put it differently, the term Adivasi (‘adi’ means oldest and ‘vasi’ means inhabitant) is commonly used to designate them. The ILO Convention 107 held at Geneva on June 5, 1957, classified these people as indigenous (Behura, 1996: 1). The World Bank also considers that the indigenous people mean Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India (Roy Burman, 1994: 7). So, both the concepts STs and indigenous people have been used interchangeably in India.

Different views have been emerging to take different position on the question of indigeneity. The indigenous question in India seems to be problematic as the indigenous people of India have difficulties in gaining adequate recognition. In some regions, cultural, social and physical features commonly associated with indigenousness are absent or hard to recognize or indigenous as a concept is rejected or contested by the Indian state. The struggle of indigenous people for recognition and protecting their rights ranges from resisting subjugation, territorial acquisition, resource exploitation, the destruction of tradition, and infringement of customs and life styles, to fighting inhuman treatment, abuse and deprivation of human rights.
Argument for the Tribes as Indigenous People

In 1993, Ram Dayal Munda, the President of Indian Council of Indigenous and Tribal People, conceded in the forum of the UN that all tribal communities of India as whole are indigenous (Roy Burman, 1994: 14), where he stated that, “In the Indian context unless definitionally specified, everyone could be called ‘indigenous’ after the British colonisers left the country in 1947. Independent India is developing indigenous locomotives, indigenous rockets and so on. Non-specification of the term has led to our government’s refusal to equate the Scheduled Tribes with the Working Group intended for indigenous people.” Consistently during the last seven years, the term “tribal people though considered somewhat pejorative among Indo-European speaking countries, is relatively more acceptable in India for this purpose.” Proceeding further he said, “We therefore strongly suggest that the expression “indigenous and tribal people” form a single segment when it comes to defining the people concerned, particularly in the Indian and Asian context” (Roy Burman, 2010: 9-10).

In the present context, the issue of marginalisation and discrimination are built upon the definition of indigenous people. Only those people that have been subject to domination and subjugation have come to constitute the component of indigenous people. In this context, the tribal communities of India can be considered as indigenous people since they have experienced different forms of marginalisation, subjugation and discrimination for centuries. They have been victims of conquest and colonization and hence share all the attributes of colonized people such as ethnic identity, loss of control over customary territorial resources, cultural annihilation and powerlessness. The tribes remained outside the politico administrative structure of the larger society (Xaxa, 1999: 3593). In this context, in order to integrate the tribal communities, the government of India favored the concept of ‘indigenous people’ deliberated in the Convention 107 of 1957 due to the fact that the Convention had articulated the need of integrating the indigenous and tribal people into the larger social and political structure.

Xaxa (1999) argues that the root cause of the tribals’ demand for indigenous people’s status is their complete loss of power over natural resources. This demand is based on the extreme discrimination faced by tribal communities and their many experiences of dispossession by the dominant groups. Even the most cursory consideration of this history of discrimination and dispossession against tribal people demonstrates the degree to which they are denied the rights enjoyed by other groups constituting dominant section of the society. That this remains a contemporary problem demonstrated by continuing attempt to dispossess them of their land and resources, and severe widespread pressure for cultural assimilation. To put it differently, by using the legal concept of indigenous people and indigenous rights, they seek recognition for their collective rights to land and their livelihood strategies within state structures that otherwise systematically discriminate against them (Kenrick and Lewis: 2004: 6). In this context, the tribal communities of India can be considered as indigenous people.

Argument against Tribes as Indigenous People

B. K. Roy Burman criticizes the position of the Indian Government on the Convention 107 of the ILO and further proposed the new definition of indigenous people, which has no direct relation to the people categorized as STs (Karlsson, 2000:137). He was strong critique of the composition of very weak representation
of Asia. Since about 80 per cent of the indigenous people belong to Asia, only one person represented this continent. In relation to the UN working group, Asia was first represented by the Chinese and later on by the Japanese. Needless to mention here that, none of them belonged to indigenous category. To put it differently, it widens up the debate on, who represents the indigenous people? Should the non-indigenous people represent the indigenous community? Who will be able to represent the needs and expectations of indigenous people in an effective and desirable way? In short, he proposes that the interests and rights of indigenous people should be represented by their own members. It is believed that his/her own community than other people would be in a better position to comprehend the problems faced by the indigenous communities because our interests will be better protected when we are represented by those who share our experience and interests and that this similarity of condition is far better indicator than whether people might share our rather shaky opinions. He further argues that there is a clear ‘Eurocentric bias’ and even contends that behind the humanistic cover, there are global hegemonic forces at work, forces that are trying to undermine the newly independent countries in Asia and Africa (Karlsson, 2000: 137). Substantiating his argument about global hegemonic forces, he cited the World Bank’s definition of indigenous people, where the World Bank stated that the STs are the indigenous people of India, which is a symbol of hegemonic force at work: ‘transgressing the sovereignty of India’.

It has been argued that the definition of indigenous people as ‘original settlers’ is problematic in the Indian context. Xaxa (1999) acknowledges the conceptual as well as empirical complexity in defining indigenous people of India. Unlike in America, Australia and New Zealand with a recent history of conquest, immigration and colonization, identification of indigenous people is not easy in the Indian context. How far back should one go in history to determine people who are natives and who are immigrants. Indeed, any demarcation is going to be arbitrary and hence extremely contentious (Xaxa, 1999: 3591). The Indian experience is different from that of the new world where it was marked by conquest, subjugation and even discrimination. The coming of the Aryans has been invariably taken as the decisive historical factor to determine the indigenous people of India. If we accept this as the cut-off point for defining indigenous people in India, all the tribal communities cannot be considered as indigenous people. Because, there are tribes in India especially in the north-east whose settlement in the territories they inhabit today is an even later phenomenon than the settlement of many non-tribes in other parts of India. For instance, it is observed that the Nagas believed to have come later than the coming of the Aryans.

Andre Beteille (1998) questions the categorization of Indian tribal people as indigenous. To him, the designation of any given population in a region as ‘indigenous’ acquires substance when there are other populations in the same region that can reasonably be described as settlers or aliens. For him, it is extremely difficult to distinguish between tribal and non-tribal population in India due their co-existence for centuries and millennium. In India, the history of interaction between tribal and non-tribal populations has been a long and complex one in which both populations have undergone many transformations through usurpation, miscegenation and migration. By the middle of the 19th century, what are called tribes today had on the whole been either subordinated or marginalized economically, politically and socially. The idea of indigenous people must have some basis in the territory
inhabited by them in the past and the present. The problem arises when they become dispersed over large areas within and sometimes across national frontiers. In many of the multi-caste agricultural villages of West Bengal, people of tribal origin have come from elsewhere and settled down to work as sharecroppers and agricultural labourers. Their economic and social conditions are for the most part abject and miserable, and they are subject to discrimination and exploitation of the most oppressive kind. But that still does not justify their being described as ‘indigenous people’ in the context of their present context (Beteille, 1998: 190).

The Government of India has made both practical as well as policy argument related to the difficulties of indigenous people (Kingsbury, 2008: 124-125). Building on the notion of indigenous people as the people who can be first (or at least earlier than the others who are now dominant), representatives of the government of India in the Working Group on Indigenous Population have made the practical argument that the concept cannot apply there because, after centuries of migration, absorption and differentiation, it is impossible to say who came first. Thus, the government of India commented that most of the tribes in India share ethnic, racial and linguistic characteristics with other people in the country. Prescription of ethnicity by administrative fiat or self-designation involves numerous problems and is open to much criticism, and there are difficult cases under any approach. Nonetheless, it has proved possible as a practical matter to enumerate detailed lists of the STs under the fifth and sixth schedules to the Indian Constitution; these constitutional categories have provided a practical starting point for identification of groups to whom policies of international agencies relating to ‘indigenous people’ have been applied in India.

In relation to the policy argument, the Indian government’s position contains an implied argument that a forensic inquiry into who appeared first in India would be unhelpful and undesirable for two reasons. First, some groups meriting special protection would be excluded, while others not in need of such protection might be included. Second, recognition of special rights and entitlements for having been the earliest or original occupants might spur and legitimate chauvinist claims by groups all over India, many of which might be very powerful locally while in some sense non-dominant nationally. It is also important here to mention that the scheduling tribe may be scheduled in one state and not so in another state. For instance, Konda Kapus is a group listed as STs in Andhra Pradesh but not in the neighbouring state, i.e., Orissa (Galanter, 1984). In effect, if some people are indigenous to a place, others are vulnerable to being targeted as non-indigenous, and groups deemed to be migrants or otherwise subject to social stigma may bear the brunt of a nativist indigenist policy. Once indigenousness or sons of the soil becomes the basis of legitimating for a politically or militarily dominant group, restraints on abuses of power can be difficult to maintain.

In other words, it is extremely difficult and contentious to define the indigenous people in India. India is a ‘melting pot’ and a country of migration where it is impossible to establish who the original settlers in a particular place or region are. The term ‘indigenous people’ is therefore claimed to be inapt on the Indian subcontinent; sometimes with the conclusion that there are no indigenous people in India or, alternatively, that all Indians are indigenous (Karlsson, 2003: 407).
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### 4.5 LET US SUM UP

The unit began to understand the meaning and characteristics of internationally much debated concept ‘indigenous people’. It examined the relationship between some of the selected international bodies such as the ILO, the UN and the World Bank and the indigenous people. It also traced the debate surrounding the issue of indigenous people in the Indian context mainly whether the concept of indigenous people at all can be applied in the Indian context. To conclude, it can be stated that the concept of indigenous peoples does not have any universal understanding and it has been examined and defined in the respective social context taking the regional particularities.

### 4.6 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES


