UNIT 1 TRIBAL STUDIES: EVOLUTION, NATURE AND SCOPE

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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.

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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;
- 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.

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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.

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


