
UNIT 4 TRIBAL LANGUAGES, ART AND CULTURE

Structures

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit gives a description about the language, art and culture of the tribes which are a part of India. Every tribal society in India is very rich in terms of their tribal language, culture as well as their art forms which are not only vibrant but also conventional. Tribal language, culture and art generally reflect the creative energy found in the tribal areas among the tribal people. This unit attempts to provide information about their origin, social and cultural characteristics and their present status with the object of developing an understanding in the learner about the distinct features of the tribal language, culture and art. After reading this unit you, should be able to:

- trace the origin of the tribes in India;
- understand the different tribal languages in India;
- feel the tribal culture that has been a part of the Indian society; and
- trace the growth and development of tribal art.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

India, as we know, is a land of multicultural diversities. Defining India has never been an easy task with respect to its cultural plurality and diversity. India encompasses millions of cultural and linguistically diverse languages and dialects. If one tends to define a particular culture or a part of India, it would still be incomplete in the sense that, it would still lack the knowledge of another scholar or researcher in that particular field. Hence, the task of defining and understanding India in one specific arena becomes a researcher's plight.

The primary objective for us, then remains, that it should concentrate on the objective factual findings and not subjective conclusions since terms such as 'culture' or 'tribes' has to be dealt carefully and with much contemplation. India, a country with 29 States and 7 Union Territories consists of people and traditions which vary from each other from one state to the other.

In this chapter we shall try and study the various tribes of India with special attention to their languages and cultures.

4.2 TRIBES IN INDIA

The word 'Tribe' according to sociology means, "A unit of sociopolitical organization consisting of a number of families, clans, or other groups who share a common ancestry and culture." Hence, the term 'Tribe' can be traced back to the 13th Century medieval English where 'tribe' was meant to be the biblical connotation of "the twelve tribes of Israel". The word is from Old French *tribu*, in turn from Latin *tribus*, referring to the original tripartite ethnic division of the Roman state : Ramnes (Ramnenses), Tities (Titienses), and Luceres.

In India, on the other hand, it seems 'tribes' has inhabited the Indian sub-continent for a very long period of time. The species known as *Ramapithecus* was found in the Siwalik foothills of the northwestern Himalayas. The people of India belong to different anthropological stocks. According to Dr. B. S. Guha, the population of India is derived from six main ethnic groups:

- 1) **Negritos**: The Negritos or the brachycephalic (broad headed) from Africa were the earliest people to inhabit India. They are survived in their original habitat in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. For example the Andamanis tribe in India.
- 2) **Pro-Australoids or Austriacs**: After the Negritos, the Austriacs came to inhabit India. They represent a race of people, with wavy and curly hair plentifully distributed over their brown bodies, long heads with low foreheads and prominent eye ridges, noses with low and broad roots, thick jaws, large palates and teeth and small chins. Austriacs tribes, which are spread over the whole of India, Myanmar and the islands of South East Asia, are believed to "form the bedrock of the people". They were the main builders of the Indus Valley Civilisation.
- 3) **Mongoloids**: The Mongoloids are the people who have features that are common to those of the people of Mongolia, China and Tibet. These tribal groups are located in the Northeastern part of India in states like Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Meghalaya and also in Ladakh and Sikkim.
- 4) **Dravidian**: The Dravidians spread all over India, surpassing the population of the first two peoples Negoritas and Austriacs. It is believed that they are the group of people who formed the backbone of the Harappan and the Indus Valley civilisation. This group comprise of the whole of Mediterranean. This group constitutes the bulk of the scheduled castes in the North India. This group has a sub-type called *Oriental* group.

- 5) **Western Brachycephals**: There is not much information on this particular group. But it is believed that the Parsi population of India belongs to this group.
- 6) **Nordics**: Nordics or Indo-Aryans are the last immigrants into India. They comprise the group of Indo-Iranians. Their first home in India was western and northern Punjab, from where they spread to the Valley of the Ganga and beyond. Many of these tribes belong to the “upper castes”.

Apart from the origins of these tribes in the Indian Sub-continent, they are now, in present day, divided into several units of tribes having different cultures and languages. We shall now look into a list of tribal languages in India which constitutes much of the linguistical data in India.

Indian languages have evolved from different sets of stocks and are closely related to the different ethnic groups in India. Broadly the Indian languages can be divided into six groups such as:

1. Indo-Aryan
2. Dravidian
3. Sino-Tibetan
4. Negroid
5. Austric
6. Others

4.3 TRIBAL LANGUAGES IN INDIA

Languages of India, like the culture and tribes of India are numerous. It is often believed that in one set of tribe, there is also another dialect spoken within the same tribal group. These tribal languages are initially considered to be folk languages spoken by a particular group of tribe. Indian tribal languages can be defined as essentially “folk” languages, spoken by people of ethnic groups who prefer to live in relatively isolated groups. Indian tribal languages can simply be defined as the traditional languages utilised by the tribal folk. ‘Folk’, in its simplest of definition means “group of people”, these languages emerge from the tribal languages spoken during time immemorial. Since the languages of the Indian tribes are complex and vary from one another they are preserved orally in the form of songs, folktales and legends. The tales of the folk mainly comprise of these languages and dialects.

Some of the tribal languages prevalent in India are Abujmaria, Garo, Aaria and Tsangla, Saurashtri etc. The Garo Language is spoken by the tribal communities residing in and around Garo Hills, Meghalaya, Tripura, Western Assam and Nagaland. Several dialects of this language include Megam., Chisak, Atong etc. Another tribal language is Abujmaria which is spoken by the people of Abujmar hills in Bastar district. The Paite, Thadou, Hmar, and the Tangkhul languages are some of the tribal languages spoken in most of the north eastern parts of the Indian sub-continent. Some of the leading tribal language speaking groups comprise: Garo Tribes, Chakma Tribes, Naga Tribes, Gond Tribes, Mizo Tribes, Santhali Tribes, Khasia Tribes, Oraon Tribes and Manipuri tribesmen.

Apart from these tribal languages, there are some other tribal languages namely, Gadaba spoken by the people of Koraput district of Orissa, Ariya spoken by the tribal communities of Madhya Pradesh, Tsangla which is spoken in some villages of Arunachal Pradesh.

Indian Tribal languages are extremely orderly and well organised, owing to a developed past and the enlightened educational interference. Garo and Chakma languages have a slight Chinese hint to their diction. There lies an elementary similarity between the Garo and Magh Languages, as both tribes belong to the same origin. Munda, Santhali, Kol, Khasia, Garo and Kurukh are interrelated languages. Munda and Karukh regarded as equivalent languages, due to the syntax and verbs of both are almost identical. Munda, Santhali and Kol languages are even more ancient than the Indo-Aryan languages. These tribal languages further belong to Austro-Asian, Indo-Chinese, and Chinese-Tibetan, Tibetan –Burman or Dravidian Families. As these tribal groups have mostly migrated from places mentioned, they have adapted their languages principally from those nations.

Some of the popular languages spoken by the tribes of India are as follows:

Bhatri, Bhilli, Bhunjia, Chakma, hhatigarhi, Dhanki, Dhodia, hundhari, Gadiali, Gamit/Gavti, Garasia / Girasia, Gojri / Gujjari, Gujarati, Hajong, Halbi, Harauti, Hindi, Jaunsari, Kachchi, Konkani, Marathi, Mavchi, Mewnri, Nagpuri, Naikadi, Nimari, Oriya, Rathi, Sardohi, Shina, Tharu, Wagri, Warli among many others.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) List the different tribal languages prevalent in India.

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The Indo-Aryan Tribal Languages

From time to time, the number of the tribal languages varies. Indo-Aryan tribal language speakers are distributed and scattered over a huge geographical territory of the country. The speakers of this family of tribal language comprise over a total population of almost 491 million people. The northern, eastern, western and central portions of India are full with people who speak the Indo-Aryan languages. More than 574 mother tongues comprise of this family of tribal language in India (Ishtiaq, 1999). Some of the languages are supposed to have great literary traditions and activities. In the family of Indo-Aryan tribal languages there is actually no dearth of literature.

Among the tribal languages spoken under the Indo-Aryan families the three main languages are Bhili language, Khandeshi and Halabi. These three languages

have been categorized as tribal languages. They are mainly spoken in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Khandeshi group of language in the Indo Aryan family of tribal languages comprises almost five main mother tongues. This language is spoken by a total of almost 1.2 million people.

Kawari and Katkari languages belonging to the Indo Aryan tribal language family are spoken by people of areas of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra. It is spoken by the tribes of some parts of Gujarat and Maharashtra. Tribes of the state of Jammu and Kashmir speak Kishtwari, belonging to the Indo Aryan group of tribal languages. Koch is spoken by tribes of Tripura and Assam and in Cooch Behar district of the state of West Bengal. Konkani and Goanese are two very popular Indo Aryan tribal languages that are spoken in coastal areas of Maharashtra and Goa. Hence, looking at the number of states which speaks these tribal languages shows us that there can be no one specific area identified to a particular tribal language, which, on the other, brings us to understand that the people in the past had migrated and immigrated from time to time over centuries, hence proving an amalgamation of cultures.

The third main language of this group of tribal language that is the Halbi or Halabi is spoken by over 5.25 Lakh people in the states of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh (Ishtiaq, 1999). Thus, 26 per cent of the total population of the country speaks these major tribal languages belonging to the Indo-Aryan family of languages.

Hence, it is proved by the fact that the major regions where the Indo-Aryan tribal languages are spoken include states of eastern, central and western India.

Tibeto-Burman Tribal Language

This family of language is mainly spoken in the northern and north east regions of India. Since the languages spoken by this family of tribes is also similar to that of the language spoken in Myanmar (earlier Burma) hence the name, Tibeto-Burman. Nine languages of the Bodo sub-family of the Tibeto-Burman language family constitute the largest group of tribal languages in the country. These major nine languages of this sub-family are Bodo, Garo, Tripuri, Mikir, Rabha, Dimasa, Lalung, Deori and Koch. These languages are spoken by over half of the tribal population spread in the Brahmaputra valley, North Cachar Hills in Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. Languages that are belonging to other sub-groups of the Tibeto-Burman tribal language family are spoken by smaller number of populations. Like for instance, twenty four languages of Naga group forms 19 per cent in the states of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and North Manipur Hills; twenty five languages of Kuki-Chin group forms 15 per cent in the states of Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura. Here the prominent languages are Lushai/Mizo, Thado and Paite. The Tibeto- Burman tribal language family has been divided into three separate branches and these are Tibeto Himalayan, Assam Burmese and North Assam. Further, Tibetan and Himalayan groups are two of the major groups of this family.

Two other prominent tribal communities of the North-East, those belonging to the Naga group and to the Kuki-Chin group (Lushai/Mizo), have after a long-

drawn agitation, succeeded in acquiring a degree of autonomy in the federal set up. But the most numerous tribe speaking Bodo, along with Mikir, and other allied languages like Rabha, Dimasa, Lalung, etc. in the same sub-family of the Tibeto-Burman tribal language family constitute only five to six per cent of the total population in the entire state of Assam.

Among the tribal communities that belong to the Bodo ancestry, Garo speakers form the majority in four districts of the state of Meghalaya and Tripuri speakers along with their allied communities (Reang, Noatia, Jamatia) are concentrated in Tripura itself. But with the continued emigration of the Bengali speaking population in these areas, the region has seen a tremendous decrease in the language spoken from 40 to 20 percent.

Many of the languages belonging to the Tibeto-Burman tribal language family have been affected by the Indo Aryan languages and are restricted to the valleys only. However, Tibeto-Burman tribal languages are spoken by huge tribal population of the country extending from Ladakh to north eastern region of the country. This language is also a sub family of the Sino – Tibetan family of tribal languages

Examples: On the western, northern and the southern borders of the country, Garo tribal people speak either Bengali language or closely connected dialect of Assamese language. The influence of Bengali language is generally strong among the Gar tribal community of Bangladesh as in this country, the mode of all primary education is Bengali. The impact of Bengali as well as English language over Garo language generally comes with the borrowed words. Bodo language is written by using the Devanagari script. It also has a history of using Roman script. Bodo language shares some common salient features with the other languages belonging to the Bodo group.

Bodo language is one of the popular Indian tribal languages. This language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family, which is a sub-group of the Sino-Tibetan language group. It is mostly spoken by the Bodo people residing in the north-eastern region of India and also by the people of the neighbouring country that is Nepal. Bodo language has got the status of one of the official languages of the state of Assam. Bodo language is closely associated with the Dimasa language of the state of Assam and with the Garo language of the state of Meghalaya. This particular language of this Tibeto-Burman family is due to Bodo struggle of the tribes of north eastern part of India. It has attained numerous recognition and it is now also used as one of the official languages in India. The language also has post graduate diploma courses in the state of Assam.

Garo language is one of the most popular languages of India. It is spoken by majority of the people residing in Garo Hills in the state of Meghalaya. Garo language is also popular in several districts of the state of Assam like Dhubri, Goalpara, Kamrup, and the Darrang. This popular tribal language is also spoken in the neighbouring country of Bangladesh. Garo language uses Latin alphabets. This language also has a close association with Bodo language, the language is spoken by the Bodo tribal community, which is one of the most prominent communities of the Indian state of Assam. Garo language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. Garo tribal language does not

comprise any tones. Interestingly, the syllable structure of this language is very similar to that of other Asian tone languages. Syllable boundaries in Garo language are phonologically very sharp except in the borrowed words.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Describe in brief the distinction between Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman Tribal Language.

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Dravidian Tribal Language

This family of language spoken in the Indian sub-continent mainly comprises of the tribal languages spoken in the southern parts of the country. In the states of Chennai, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, etc. the group of Dravidian tribal languages is spoken by near about 158 million people. They account for a total of 24 per cent of the total population of the country. In the Dravidian language group there are basically four prominent literary languages and these are Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada and Tamil. Some of the initial languages in this family such as Kudu are not considered to belong to this family of languages since it has been merged with the Kanada language. A lot of the languages have been included as mother tongues and the most important among them are Kolami, Kui, Konda, Koya, Gondi, Oraon/Kurukh, Parji and more. Little information is available regarding the Dravidian tribal languages. Thus, it can be said that the Dravidian tribal languages are mainly **Kaikadi** that is another major Dravidian tribal language that is spoken by the Kaikadi tribes in several parts of Karnataka and Maharashtra. Another Dravidian tribal language is **Kanikkaran** that is spoken in Ernakulam, Thiruvananthapuram and Kozikhode districts of Kerala and Tirunelveli district of the state of Tamil Nadu.

Konda-Dora is another Dravidian language and it is spoken in several areas of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. Koraga is spoken in parts of Kerala. Kota is another hugely spoken Dravidian language. It is mainly spoken in parts of Tamil Nadu. Koya is spoken in several parts of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Its main dialects are Podia, Malakanagiri Koya, Chintoor Koya, etc.

Kamar is another tribal language belonging to the Dravidian family and spoken by the tribal communities in areas of Rewa district of the state of Madhya Pradesh and in Raipur district of the state of Chattisgarh. It is also spoken in parts of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra and Orissa.

Austro-Asiatic Tribal Language

Here are the details of a few of the Austro-Asiatic tribal Languages. These languages are spoken mainly in states of West Bengal, Jharkhand and in some parts of the north eastern states of India.

Kharia language is an Indian tribal language that refers to a tribal or ‘adivasi’ group of the country. This language belongs to the Austro-Asiatic language

family and is mostly spoken by the tribal people living in the states of Jharkhand and Orissa. The other major Kharia speaking states are southern Bihar, northern Orissa, Assam, and eastern Madhya Pradesh.

Santhali is an Indian tribal language that belongs to the Santhali sub-family of the Austro-Asiatic language family. This language is very closely associated with Ho and Mundari languages. It is also spoken in neighbouring countries of India like Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan. In India, this language of the Austro-Asiatic language family is spoken in the states of Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa and Tripura. Santhali language is mainly spoken by the Santal tribal community. This tribal community is the largest tribal community of the country and the people of this tribal community are considered as quite backward. Most of the people of Santal tribal community work in coal mines or steel factories of Jamshedpur and Asansol. Santhali language is basically a dialect of Munda tribal language.

It is generally believed that Santhali Language is much older than the Aryan language. Currently, the Santhali tribal language is not much in use anymore. The Santhali pundits use the language for literary works and religious documents. This Language is very famous for its numerical classifier which is alien to those of the Dravidian family of languages.

Khasi language, a popular Indian tribal language, belongs to the Austro-Asiatic tribal language family and is spoken mainly by the tribal people of the state of Meghalaya. This language is a part of the Khasi-Khmuic group of languages. Khasi language is vaguely connected with the Munda branch of the Austro-Asiatic group of languages that is mainly found in east-central region of India. In India, most of the speakers of the Khasi language are found in the state of Meghalaya. However, this language is also spoken by huge number of people of the hill districts of the state of Assam. Quite a few speakers of Khasi language are found in the neighbouring country of Bangladesh. Khasi language is tremendously rich in legends and folk stories. Interestingly, this language had no script of its own in the past.

To conclude, it can be said that the various dialects of Khasi language, namely standard Khasi, Langrin, Bhoi, Nongtung and Lyngngam show the extent of diversity found amongst them mainly from the word order point of view. Among the five varieties, standard Khasi, Langrin and Lyngngam are similar whereas Bhoi and Nongtung are very different. Lyngngam though is similar to the first, is quite different in various other aspects

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Describe briefly the distinction between Dravidian and Austro Asiatic tribal language in your own words.

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4.4 TRIBAL CULTURE IN INDIA

Having discussed the various families of languages in the Indian Sub-Continent, the cultures of India are as diverse as that of the languages. ‘Unity in diversity’ is one of the most spectacular features amongst the population of India. Tribal culture of India, their traditions and practices interpenetrate almost all the aspects of Indian culture and civilisation. From the Aryan, Dravidian to the Indo-Tibetan languages, Indian tribal culture has also seen a tremendous merging of cultures within its own people.

It is considered to be very important to live within the tribal cultures of India, in order to understand their ways of life. Some of the tribal communities share similarities and yet are diverse in their religious and traditional beliefs. Some are prominent worshippers of the Hindu deities while others follow the path of the Christian missionaries. Animism and all forms of pagan worship are still prevalent in these communities. The festivals in these communities are also much of a delight to see with its colourful and joyous celebrations; the tribes in India indeed form the very basis of incredible India! The societies by which these tribal communities survive are very patriarchal in their outlook although some tribal communities have gradually inherited the modern forms of society where each one is respected for his or her own set of views and beliefs.

A lot of the tribal population in India is still backward. They lack education and literacy policies are yet to dawn in a few rural and tribal areas of the Indian –Sub-continent. There are tribes who still practice witchcrafts and tantric forms of religion. The different tribes in India if ever counted can move up to a mind boggling number, with all their ethnicities and impressions. In India a new dialect can be witnessed almost each new day; culture and diversification amongst the tribals can also be admired from any land direction. These various tribes still inhabit the different parts, especially the seven states of the North-eastern region and almost each and every nook of the country. The specialty of the Indian tribes lies in their customs, cultures, and beliefs and, in particular, the harmony in which they survive in unanimity with nature. Tribal living perfectly portrays a well-balanced environment, a procedure that in no way upsets the ecological balance.

The tribal population of India is over 104 million according to 2011 Census. Each of the tribes is a distinctive community, either migrated from a different place or the original denizens of the land. All in all, the tribes of India encompasses the real and colourful traits of India that the whole world knows. Since it is from the tribes that some of the tribal languages developed to become official languages, we can be safe in saying that the cultures which are considered to be “developed” also has their roots in the Indian tribal cultures.

Tribal people generally firmly cling to their identity, despite external influences that had threatened tribal culture, especially after the post-independence chaotic period. However it is observed that Christianity has brought about a change that can be termed as a ‘total transformation’ in tribal lifestyle and outlook, particularly in the North-eastern states of India.

In discussing a few tribal cultures of India, we shall try to cover the widely prominent cultures of north, east, west and southern tribes of India. Since it would be a remarkably tedious and an acutely impossible task to study all the

tribes of India, we shall take one or two tribal cultures from each of the prominent four regions in India.

Northern Regions

The tribes of Himachal Pradesh have marked their own charts in the Indian sub- continent and are known for their distinct tribal cultures. Tribes of Himachal Pradesh are scattered in different parts of this state and have occupied a considerable percentage of India. Dancing, musical melodies, festivals, fairs etc. bore evidence to it. They are as such nomadic people and their physical appearances make them distinctly visible from each other.

The tribes of Himachal Pradesh belong to the famous Indo-Aryan family group. As far as the physical appearances are concerned, these tribes of Himachal Pradesh also have got identifiable features of that of an Indo-Aryan or Mongoloid.

The major tribes of this region include **Kinnaura tribe**, **Lahaule tribe**, **Gaddi tribe**, **Gujjar tribe**. As far as the occupations are concerned, these tribes of Himachal Pradesh have taken up the occupations including cattle rearing and also much of the tribal population works for raising of wool. Since it is situated in the cold northern region of the Indian subcontinent, raising of wool is considered to be one of the main occupations of the tribes. There are quite a handful of tribes of Himachal Pradesh who have adapted to occupations like cultivation and also horticulture.

Dresses that these tribes of Himachal Pradesh wear also are quite exquisite to look at. The male dresses include long coat and woolen pyjama, and the women of Himachal Pradesh have a woolen saree, popularly known as Dhoru as their attires. Shoes that are made up of wool and goat hair protect their feet. It is also a known fact that the dresses are similar to those of the people in Jammu and Kashmir states of India, since these two states have a similar geographical existence.

Although these tribes of Himachal Pradesh celebrate all the important festivals, these tribes of Himachal Pradesh also have added fervor to the festive season by incorporating their own traditional customs and beliefs. Since they are a number of tribes in the region, each tribe follows its own sets of beliefs. One of the major tribes in Himachal Pradesh is the **Gujjar tribe**. Gujjar tribal community has developed the practice of carrying on conversation in numerous languages namely, Urdu, Hindi. They have also adopted the religion of **Islam**. Since the existence of this tribe is dated back to the 6th century, these tribes have been a result of all cultural diversities from then on. Another tribal group, **Kinnaura tribal** community, is one of the Scheduled tribes of Himachal Pradesh state. Their language is called Kinnauri and it is considered to be one of the most beautiful dialects in the state. It has been assumed that the Kinnaura people belong to the Kinner group who got mentioned in Mahabharata. Their physical stature bears some similarities with the **Aryans**. The people of the **Lahaule tribal** community of Himachal Pradesh converse in the beautiful language of Pattani. They are the inhabitants of Lahaul and they are the amalgamation of Munda tribes and Tibetans. Their societal structure is divided into upper and low castes and this tribal group are followers of Buddhism.

The Gaddi tribes of Himachal Pradesh dwell in districts like Chamba, Kangra etc. the people of this tribal group are not nomadic in nature and they have their own villages where they reside in a cluster. The notable thing about the Gaddi tribe is their costumes. Most of the people of this community are shepherds hence, they wear a cloak like dress in order to keep them warm from cold however some are engaged in other occupations too.

Major Tribes of Madhya Pradesh

Bhaina tribe is one of the most ancient tribes which has resided mainly in the forest areas of Madhya Pradesh. These tribal groups are reckoned as scheduled tribes and are found in the Bilaspur District in the state, which is presently included in the state of Chhattisgarh.

Gond tribe stands first in terms of population not only in the state but also among the other major tribes of India. Although, the tribal people inhabit almost entire area of Madhya Pradesh, yet, they are mainly found in Vindhya hills and Satpura mountain range.

Bhil tribe is third largest tribe in India and second in Madhya Pradesh. The habitat of Bhil tribes is found mostly in Dhar district, Jabua district and West Nimar district. This tribe follows the Hindu form of religion and mainly practice cultivation.

Bharia tribe is found in the Patalkot valley and its adjoining areas in this state. The people of this tribal community are known for their usage of medicinal plants to treat different kinds of diseases.

Binjwar tribe, the costumes of this tribal community deserve appraisal and the people of this group are adept in making jewellery from cane, grass, or beads. Sometimes the tribes also use silver as a metal.

Other major tribes in Madhya Pradesh are **Boneya tribe**, **Damaria tribes**, **Dhanwar tribe** who engage in all forms of Indian art and crafts. They form the Rajput families of Madhya Pradesh. They lead nomadic lives and rear cattle. This tribal group has developed its own cotton industry for its own betterment.

The other known and important tribe in this state is the **Kawar tribe** and they are thought to have descended from the family line of the Kaurava rulers. The Kauravas were the religious characters in the book of Mahabharata who fought with the Pandavas.

Another tribal group of this state is the **Kharwar tribe**. They fall into the Dravidian family group. It is believed that they are also in the family line of Suryavanshi Rajputs.

A multitude of **Kolam tribe**, also identified as Kolamboli, Kulme and Kolmi, has settled down in every corner of the state of Madhya Pradesh. They were workers as Priests in the villages of Madhya Pradesh. Their main form of occupation was food collection through farming. Another tribe which constitutes the line of tribal families in Madhya Pradesh is the Majhi tribe, who make boats in order to sustain their livelihood. Their facial features and physical appearance is similar to the Mongoloid tribes and they practice the tantric religion. It is a form of witchcraft in the Hindu religion.

The **Majhwar tribe** celebrates various colourful festivals throughout the year in the state of Madhya Pradesh. They also celebrate different festivals which enrich the whole of the state.

Another is the **Mina** tribe which has settled down in various places of the region and also has got an inheritance of festivals, fairs, dancing and also singing.

Other major tribes of Madhya Pradesh are the **Pao tribes** and the **Saharia tribes** who engage in the beliefs of Hinduism. Their main deity is Lord Vishnu. They celebrate all the Hindu festivities. Mouth-watering dishes, multihued festivals as well as variety of religious exercises are what comprise the rituals and culture of these Saharia tribes. The society of this tribe is divided in several sub groups.

Fairs and festivals of tribes of Madhya Pradesh

Mainly at the time of festivals and other joyful social occasions, the tribes of Madhya Pradesh deck up in quite colourful dresses. Ornaments worn by the tribal women also add to their glamour and beauty.

With the building up of tempo, spectators start to join spontaneously. Every year the tribal groups celebrate variety of festivals with lots of merry making, dancing and singing. Exquisite dresses both for males and females have become the style statement of these tribes.

Infact, fairs and festivals form the basis of the tribes of Madhya Pradesh. The fairs of the tribes of Madhya Pradesh display a colourful spectacle with celebration by the entire community. The fairs which in the Hindi language are called 'Mela' fill the whole of Madhya Pradesh with colour and joy during the festivities. Dancing and singing are not limited to a selected few. The government of Madhya Pradesh have launched many developmental programmes for their development. The tribes of Madhya Pradesh have thus maintained their unique characteristics and have preserved their traditions even if they have been or are being exposed to a great extent to the influences of other cultures. They have succeeded in preserving their own separate identity with time.

Tribes of Madhya Pradesh are the true representatives of the state. The culture of the tribes of Madhya Pradesh is distinguished by the composite remains of the Scythian and Dravidian culture. Very much similar to a number of tribal communities of the Indian subcontinent, the tribes of Madhya Pradesh are widely oriented towards religion and spiritualism. Their prevalent religion is Animism. Although much of the tribal population in Madhya Pradesh is influenced by the Hindu religion, some of the other prevalent religions are Jainism, Christianity and Islam. The tribal population of Madhya Pradesh has carried on the practice of farming and cultivation. In order to supplement their income, some of these tribal groups become labourers in factories, industries etc. No wonder, the enrichment of the culture of these tribes of Madhya Pradesh largely has been possible due to its efforts to preserve it. In Madhya Pradesh, it is a known fact that the tribal population inhabits at least 50% of the districts, although the number varies from place to place.

Western Region

There are over 6 million Adivasis or tribal people in Gujarat. They mainly inhabit the terrain adjoining the Aravalis (LN, 1996). The Adivasis consist of numerous different tribal groups, the term 'Adivasi' meaning the 'original inhabitants'. Tribals such as the Siddhis, Rabari tribe, Padhar tribe, Mers and Bharwads live in the coastal Saurashtra districts of Junagadh, Jamnagar and Kutch. They work as casual labourers, cattle breeders and find employment in the ports. The Siddhis are known to have come to India from East Africa and they have a distinct feature similar to that of the negroids. The Australoid Adivasis (who have Australoid features) live in two different regions. One group lives in the river valleys of the Surar, Broach and Bulsar districts and are known as the Voknas, Varlis and Gambits. They have Konkan features. The other group lives in the hill tracts along the state's eastern border and comprise of the Bhil Garasias, Dungri Bhils, Ratwas, Naikas, Dangi Bhils and others.

In the plains of the Surat, Broach and Bulsar Districts, there are also other tribals, such as, the Dhodias, who might have migrated from the Dhulia region of Maharashtra. The festival of light, Diwali, has also been adopted by the Hindus, which was originally the festival of the aborigines. It is also believed that the Hindu religion borrowed the worship of Lord Shiva and Paravati from the Adivasis of Gujarat. The tribes of Gujarat are engaged in different occupations. In olden days, the Bhils depended on the slash-and-burn cultivation system under which they cleared thick forests by cutting trees or burning them and cultivated crops in this land for a few years until the natural fertility of the soil was exhausted. They then moved on to new forests, leaving the land fallow for it to recover its fertility. Their occupation was hunting, forest remains and fishing. Most of the Adivasis depend on agriculture either as landowners or as farm workers.

The social set up of the tribes in Gujarat is quite different from that of a usual Hindu community. The women in these communities have more freedom than their Hindu counterparts in matters of marriage, divorce and remarriage. Besides this, the customs and lifestyle of the tribes vary as well. The colourful costumes of the tribal people of Gujarat add charm to the onlooker. The tribes of Gujarat also enjoy various festivals and celebrate fairs, festivals with much gaiety and joy.

Eastern Region

Tribals of Nagaland constitute a major percentage of the total population of the state. Angami tribe, Ao tribe, Chakhesang tribe, Chang tribe, Khiamniungan tribe, Kuki tribe, Konyak tribe, Lotha tribe, Phom tribe, Pochury tribe, Rengma tribe, Sumi tribe, Sangtam tribe, Yimchungru tribe and Zeliang tribe are the prominent tribes of Nagaland. Even the tribes like Angamis, Aos, Konyaks, Lothas, and Sumis are predominant. The tribal communities of Nagaland are scattered over a large portion of the state. One of the significant aspects of the culture of tribes of Nagaland is the distinctive character and identify of each tribe in terms of indigenous traditions, customs, language and dresses. The tribes of Nagaland have their own distinctive language. In Nagaland, the different tribes speak around 60 different dialects, which belong to the Sino-Tibetan language family. Traditional songs and dance forms are an integral part and parcel of the rich culture of the tribes of Nagaland. The costumes

of tribes of Nagaland are very colourful. Interestingly, some of their dresses are designed as per the different occasions. Tribal dances are performed during the celebration of the festivals and marriage ceremonies. They also wear colourful jewellery.

Nagaland is a land of festivals. All the tribes celebrate their distinct seasonal festivals with a pageantry of colour and a feast of music. They regard their festivals sacred and participation in these celebrations is compulsory. Most of these festivals revolve around agriculture, being the mainstay of the tribal society of Nagaland. Although some religious and spiritual sentiments are interwoven into secular rites and rituals, the pre-dominant theme of the festivals is offering prayers to the Supreme Being having different names in different Naga dialects. The tribal festivals are celebrated all over the state. Like for instance, Nazu festival is one of the most popular festivals of Pochury tribe of the state. This festival is celebrated for 10 continuous days in February. These festivals are celebrated with glitter and gaiety.

Tribes of Manipur

The Paite tribe, originally, belong to the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group. This group hails from the Tibeto-Burman family. In Manipur, the Paite tribes are considered to be one of the scheduled tribes, mainly located in Lamka Town of Churachandpur district. The Paite tribe, originally known as belonging to the KUKI family of tribes in Manipur gained their recognition of a separate tribe in the early 1950's, hence, they are now recognised by the constitutions as Paite. From then on they were known by their present name. The word Paite also has got etymological significance. If one dissects Paite in to two terms, 'pai' stands for marching, while 'te' means people. As a whole, Paite means "a group of people marching." Besides Manipur, the Paite tribes also inhabit Mizoram. The Paite tribes are pious and religious minded. Majority of Paite tribe are the followers of Christianity. Most of them were converted to this religion in the nineteenth century due to the intervention of British missionaries. They also worship their Gods, "Pathian". Just like many of the Paite tribal communities, they were known to have originated from the mountain caves, known as Khul.

Dance, songs, tales, all linked to every day chores of the life of these Paite tribe is one of the very interesting features of this particular tribe. *Zangtalam* is a popular dance style performed by this community. Both Paite males and females folks actively take part in it. These Paite tribe converse in a dialect, popularly known as Paite.

By nature the Paite tribe are timid, recluse people who are truly committed to whatever they do. Although the Paite tribe are mainly agriculturists, many of them have achieved remarkable fetes. Apart from the Paite tribe in Manipur, the state has more than 20 tribes currently. Some of them are Thadou, Kuki, Simte, Zou, Hmar, Tangkhul Naga, Kom, Zeite and many more. The lifestyles and ways of living of these tribes are of no much difference to one another but due to the different tribal languages, they form different tribes and communities.

Southern Region

Tribes of Goa form an integral part of the rich cultural heritage of the state. Tribal communities of Goa have managed to retain their ancient and indigenous

ways of life and traditional practices, customs and way of living. The chief tribes of this smallest state of India are Gowdas tribe, Kunbi tribe, and Dhangars. Like some other states of India, Goa too was invaded by the **Aryans**. Some of the tribes of Goa are considered as the original settlers of Konkan region much before the invasion of the Dravidians. There are no concrete records regarding the origin or how they have migrated to Goa. Goa has the lowest proportion of Scheduled Tribes that accounts for around 0.04 percent of the total population.

Gowdas tribe is the largest tribal group inhabiting the interior villages of this state. In their society, women enjoy a high status and rights. Further, they also play a prominent role in the economic matters. The major tribal communities of Goa live in isolated villages. Their indigenous lifestyles, traditions, ceremonies, customs, religious beliefs, practices and superstitions form a significant part of the culture of the state. The tribes of Goa differ from one another in terms of dress pattern, rituals and customs. The region of Goa being a very important aspect of colonisation, the tribes in Goa do share an element of the colonial powers. Besides the English form of protestant Christianity which was prevalent during the centuries of colonisation, the tribes in Goa had to adapt also to the different French, Portuguese and Dutch colonial settlements. Since during those times there were a lot of inter culture marriages, the tribes in Goa can be considered to have one of the most diverse cultures in the Indian sub-continent.

Tribes of Tamil Nadu

Tribes of Tamil Nadu are mainly prevalent in the district of Nilgiris. Of all the distinct tribes, the Kotas, the Todas, the Irulas, the Kurumbas and the Badagas form the largest group, who mainly had a pastoral existence. The men from this family of the tribes are occupied in milking and grazing their large herds of buffaloes and pastoral farming. This tribe is distinguished by its traditional costume, thick white cotton cloth having stripes in red, blue or black, called puthukuli worn by both women and men over a waist cloth. They settle mainly in Munds comprising of five-six typical wagon shaped, windowless split bamboos, reeds and thatch huts. They do not worship any god and their consciousness is cosmic.

The Badagas belong to the backward class and are not classified as tribals. They comprise of an agricultural community and settle near Nilgiris of Tamil Nadu. They are engaged in tea cultivation and potato growing. They speak a language which is a mixture of Tamil and Kannada language. They form the largest group of tribes and boast a rich oral tradition of folktales, songs and poetry. These tribes are Hindus and belong to the Shiva sect. The Badagas celebrate the hindu festivals such as diwali and one among the very famous festival celebrated by this group is Pongal.

The Kotas are mainly concentrated in the Tiruchigadi area in the Nilgiris Hills. They are distinguished by their colourful folk dances and are basically musicians. They are mainly engaged in producing handicrafts. This tribe of Tamil Nadu are expert iron smiths, potters and carpenters. Their population is very small and they live in huts that have a living and sleeping area and a place of worship. Their language is similar to that of the Badagas. They speak Tamil and a form of Kanada language.

The Kurumba tribe of Tamil Nadu inhabit the intermediate valleys and forests in villages. They were mainly known for their black magic and witch craft. They use to hunt and gather for living in the past, but they have shifted their cultivation into coffee and tea plantation.

The Irulas tribe of Tamil Nadu occupy the lower slopes and forests at the base of the Nilgiri Hills. They constitute the second largest group of tribes after the Badagas and they are largely similar to the Kurumba tribe of Tamil Nadu. This tribe produces honey, fruits, herbs, roots, gum, dyes etc., and trades them with the people in the plains. This tribe is famous for snake catching and removing the venom. They are also gradually changing from the earlier ways of hunting to a more modern form of life.

Check Your Progress IV

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) How would you, in your own words, describe the tribal culture in India.

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4.5 TRIBAL ART

Another field in which the tribes of India have gained recognition is in the field of arts. Tribal art has been prevalent since centuries from the time India came into existence. In the earlier civilizations, such as the Indus Valley civilization or the Mohenjodaro civilizations, art as a whole, has been a part and parcel of tribal life, society and culture.

Indian tribal art is rich in its expression and have a sense of sensitivity and creativeness. Traditional Indian tribal art tries to wholly recreate the immortal charisma of Indian tribal life. Through solemn efforts, the Indian tribes try to keep alive a culture that is thousands years old, comprising music, traditions, rituals and art. They live in complete harmony with nature by preserving their resources and blending with the environment. Tribal paintings usually belong to the remote tribal regions, in forests or high up in the mountains.

The tribal art has developed to gain significance in the modern world encompassing several dimensions. Its rich, exotic and intense forms of art can be seen not only in the gond, Kurumba or Saura paintings but also in the daily woven shawls or other forms of art such as pottery, home-decorations, handicrafts and ornaments.

The rural folk paintings of India bear distinctive colorful designs, which are treated with religious and mystical motifs. Some of the most famous folk paintings of India are the Madhubani paintings of Bihar, Patachitra paintings from the state of Orissa, the Nirmal paintings of Andhra Pradesh, and other such folk art forms.

Tribal art with its full energy and life, ethnic, vibrant and colorful in its forms has gained significance in the mainstream art forms. Tribal dance, tribal music, tribal handlooms, handicrafts and paintings have become a daily product of most of the Indian households today.

Check Your Progress V

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Discuss in brief the Tribal Art in India.

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4.6 LET US SUM UP

As mentioned earlier, to encompass the cultures and traditions of each and every tribe existing in India is a tedious task since they are numerous but the overwhelming fact remains that India, being the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious country, shares a very important sense of unity in its diversity. It is believed that languages form community, communities form a society and a society forms a nation-state, hence, the Indian tribal languages being diverse in its kind, forms the basis of the Indian Democratic, Sovereign, Federal and Republic Constitution. Amidst several languages, cultures, traditions, religion and socio-politico conflicts it still remains a country of diverse qualities and the largest democracy in the world.

4.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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