UNIT 1 TRIBES OF MADHYA PRADESH AND CHHATTISGARH

Structure
1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Descriptions of the Tribal Areas and Major Tribes in M.P. and Chhattisgarh
1.3 Origin of the Tribes of M.P. and Chhattisgarh
1.4 Socio-Economic and Cultural Aspects of the Tribes of M.P. and Chhattisgarh
1.5 Distinctive Features of Different Tribes of the Region
1.6 Present Status of the Tribes of the Region
1.7 Let Us Sum Up
1.8 Further Readings and References

1.0 OBJECTIVES
This unit gives a description of the tribes of M.P. and Chhattisgarh States which are a part of Central India. It provides information about their origin, social, cultural and economic characteristics and their present status with the object of developing an understanding in the learner about the distinct features of the tribes located in the heart of the nation. After reading this unit you, you should be able to:

- describe the tribal areas of M.P. and Chhattisgarh;
- trace the origin of the tribes;
- understand the different tribes of the region and their social, economic and cultural characteristics; and
- Outline their present status in terms of literacy, occupation, etc.

1.1 INTRODUCTION
‘Adivasis’, ‘vanavasis’, ‘aboriginals’, ‘primitives’, ‘animists’ and ‘girijans’ are the different names given to the tribal people. After the Constitution of India listed them in a schedule, now they are commonly referred to as the ‘Scheduled Tribes’. The word tribe conjures up an image in the minds of the common people of simple folk living in hills and forests, famous for their dances and songs, animists in their beliefs, following a traditional and backward way of life and in general resistant to change or fearful of adopting the modern way of life. This description is based on the fact that, although 414 main tribes are listed in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes lists, each with its own cultural identity, common threads of their lives make them a homogenous group and starkly different from the non-tribal world. Regional dissimilarities may occur among the same tribes who are inhabitants of different areas, for example the Bhils of M.P. have practices which are different from those of Bhils of Rajasthan, regional similarities also do occur between different tribes of the same area. This unit attempts to give a description of the
dominant tribes of M.P. and Chhattisgarh, their common features as well as distinctive practices of some predominant tribes.

1.2 DISCRIPTIONS OF THE TRIBAL AREAS AND MAJOR TRIBES IN M.P. AND CHHATTISGARH

The Central Zone that includes the areas of M.P. and Chhattisgarh has been the abode of the tribes or the ‘aborigines’ since many decades. “The tribal groups of the central zone are scattered all over the mountain belt between the rivers Narmada and Godavari” (Shankar Rao, 2006, p. 616) Madhya Pradesh (M.P.) holds the distinction of being the most populous tribal state since independence. “The undivided M.P. consisted of states of Madhya Bharat, Vindhya Pradesh and Bhopal. On 1 November 2000, the 26th state of Chhattisgarh was carved out from M.P. Now M.P is made up of 50 districts grouped onto 10 divisions, whereas Chhattisgarh has 16 districts with Raipur as its capital.” (www.wikipedia.org) Chhattisgarh is considered as a predominantly tribal state with 31.8 per cent of its population comprising Scheduled Tribes according to the statistics of 2001 census report.

Madhya Pradesh (undivided) had about 43 Scheduled Tribes. (ST) Out of these, 7 tribes are most backward and are identified as primitive tribes, (Tiwari, 1984) based on their pre-agricultural level of technology, low level of literacy and stagnant or diminishing population. These primitive tribes are Saharias of Chambal division, Barinas of Patalkot, Baigas of Baigachak area, Hill Korbas and Birhors of Sarguja, Kamars of Raipur and Abujhmarias of Bastar. (Rao and Singh)

Tribal Areas and Major Tribes of M.P. (as per 2011 census)

The S.T. population of the state of M.P. is 15,316,784 which constitute 21.08 per cent of the total population of the State (72,626,809). The State has a total of 43 Scheduled Tribes which are overwhelmingly rural with 93.6 per cent residing in rural areas. At district levels, Jhabua has the highest proportion of STs followed by Barwani, Dindori and Mandla districts. Bhind district preceded by Morena and Datia has the lowest proportion of STs.

A Brief Description of the Tribal Areas of M.P.

“About half of the tribal areas of M.P. are covered with forests of which nearly half are on an altitude between 1000 -2000 feet, one fifth lies between 2000 – 3000 feet and only one fourth area is below 1000 feet. The terrain which the tribals usually cultivate is hilly and undulating. With the increasing pressure on land, undulating area and steep slopes have been brought under cultivation with consequent loss of fertility and soil erosion. In addition to this no irrigation facilities are available. Agriculture is carried out under these conditions and circumstances. Sparseness of population, scanty and difficult communication makes it even more difficult to extend the benefits of the development programmes to a majority of the tribals living in interior area.” (www.1upIndia.com)

The major tribes found in M.P., their size and distribution as per 2011 census are given below in descending order according to their predominance.
Table No. 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Name of the tribe</th>
<th>Population range</th>
<th>Percentage to total S.T. Population</th>
<th>Districts inhabited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bhil</td>
<td>5,993,921</td>
<td>39.13%</td>
<td>Jhabua,Dhar,Barwani, West Nimar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gonds</td>
<td>5,093,124</td>
<td>33.25%</td>
<td>Chhindwara, Mandla, Betul, Seoni and Shahdol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kol, Korku, Sahariya and Baiga</td>
<td>1167,694</td>
<td>7.62%</td>
<td>Rewa, East Nimar, Shivpuri, Shahdol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Korku</td>
<td>730,847</td>
<td>4.77%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sahaqiya</td>
<td>614,958</td>
<td>4.01%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Baija</td>
<td>414,526</td>
<td>2.70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table no. 1 reveals that out of forty three (43) STs, Bhil is the most populous tribe having a number of 5,993,921, constituting 39.13 per cent of the total ST population. Gond is the second largest tribe, with a population of 5093124 constituting 33.25 per cent. Four other STs in the descending order are Kol, Korku, Sahariya and Baiga, which make for 19.1 per cent. Along with Bhil and Gond, the six tribes constitute 91.48 per cent of the total ST population of the State. Pardhan, Saur and Bharia Bhumia have a population ranging from 123742 to 193230; together, they form 3.16 per cent. Four tribes, namely Majhi, Khairwar, Mawasi and Panika having population in the range of 50655 to 109180 account for another 2.17 per cent of the ST population; remaining thirty along with the generic tribes constitute the residual 3.19 per cent of total ST population. Tribes having below 1000 population are thirteen in number. Of them, nine tribes, namely Andh, Birhul, Parja, Saonta, Majhwal, Kalam, Kondh, Kurku and Nagesia each have less than 500 populations.

**Tribal Areas and Major Tribes of Chhattisgarh**

The tribal population of Chhattisgarh State is 7,822,902 which accounts for 30.62 per cent of the total population of the State. The State holds 8th position among all States and Union Territories in terms of the proportion of scheduled tribes population to the total population. It has 43 scheduled tribes with 94.7 per cent of them residing in rural areas. At the district level Dantewada has the highest percentage of scheduled tribes to the total population followed by Bastar, Jashpur and Janjgir – Champa.

**A Brief Description of the Tribal Population of the State of Chhattisgarh**

‘Chhattisgarh’ the name owes its origin to an explanation that it denotes the number of forts i.e. 36 in the region. The demand for a separate state was first raised in the early twenties. Since then such demands kept cropping up at regular intervals through various forums, rallies and movements. Finally in 2000, with the acceptance of Uttarakhand and Jharkhand, the demand for Chhattisgarh too was accepted leading to the birth of a new state. There were many factors which led to the demand of a new state, chief among them being a clear acceptance, within and outside the regions, of a distinctive socio-cultural identity evolved over centuries. A sense of relative deprivation also led the people to believe that a separate state was imperative for development to take place in the region. (www.chhattisgarh.gov.in)
The state is richly endowed with natural resources. There are 16 rivers with Mahanadi and Tundla irrigating maximum areas of Raipur, Dhamtai, Durg, a rich fertile red, yellow, black and laterite soil conducive to the growth of rice which covers 82 per cent of the area of Chhattisgarh making it the ‘rice bowl’ of India, 29 mineral resources, besides tropical deciduous forests which cover 43.85 per cent of the total land. (Status of human rights in Chhattisgarh – A PAIRVI Report)

Table No. 2 presents the major tribes of State of Chhattisgarh their size and distribution (as per 2011 census) in descending order with the predominant tribe at the top:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Name of the tribe</th>
<th>Population range</th>
<th>Percentage to total ST Population</th>
<th>Districts inhabited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gond</td>
<td>4,298,404</td>
<td>54.94%</td>
<td>Bastar, Dantewada, Kanker Surguja, Raipur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kawar, Oraon, Halba, Bhattra</td>
<td>213,900-887,477</td>
<td>28.44%</td>
<td>Jashpur, Durg, Surguja, Raigarh, Bastar and Korba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Binjhwar, Korwa, Sawar</td>
<td>119,708-130,709</td>
<td>4.85%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bharia Bhumia, Nagesia, Baiga, Kharia</td>
<td>44,032-114,532</td>
<td>4.69%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sonr, Damor, Karku, Andh, Bhil, Mina and others</td>
<td>7.08%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of forty three (43) tribes, Gond is the most populous tribe with a population of 4,298,404 constituting 54.94 percent of the total ST population. Four other STs in descending order are Kawar, Oraon, Halba and Bhattra. Along with Gond, the five STs constitute 83.38 per cent of total ST population of the State. Binjhwar, Korwa and Sawar have a population ranging from 119,818 to 130,709. Together, they form 4.85 per cent. Ten STs, namely, Bharia Bhumia, Nagesia, Baiga to Kharia having population in the range of 49032 to 114532, constitute another 4.69 per cent of total ST population; remaining twenty five (25) STs along with generic tribes constitute the balance 7.08 per cent of total ST population. Eleven (11) tribes have below 1000 population. Of them, five tribes, namely Sonr, Damor, Karku, Andh and Bhil Mina are very small having population less than 100.

At the district level, Gonds have registered their high population in Bastar, Dantewada, Kanker Surguja and Raipur districts. Kawar are mainly concentrated in Surguja, Raigarh and Korba districts. Other three major tribes, Oraon, Halba and Bhatta have the highest concentration in Jashpur, Durg and Bastar districts respectively.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Give a brief description of the tribal areas and the tribes of M.P.
2) Give a brief description of the tribal population of the State of Chhattisgarh.

1.3 ORIGIN OF THE TRIBES OF M.P. AND CHHATTISGARH

Many anthropologists and experts are of the view that the tribal population of Central and South Western India are the original inhabitants of the country. This view has its origin in the theory that “the whole of ancient India was inhabited by the tribal people but that Indo Aryans and other hordes of immigrants into the Indo Gangetic basin were stronger in physique, numbers, organs and arms and hence succeeded in imposing their will on the weaker groups, compelling the latter either to surrender to complete absorption or to escape to the inaccessible areas in the vastness of the forests and mountains. This is the possible explanation for the biggest concentration of tribals in Central and South Western India. These people are truly Indian in the sense that racially they do not seem to be akin to people from other parts of the world.”(Taylor, 1965, p.6)

A similar view exists about the Gonds of Malwa in M.P. The Malwa region is postulated to have been occupied by the predecessors of the Bhils, Gonds and other tribes, who had to confront the Aryans. The Aryans who were stronger pushed the tribal inhabitants to the South of the Vindhyas. The tribals of Vindhyas gained control of Malwa after the decline of the Mughals in 1690 (www.webindia123.com)

Puranic legends indicate that the inhabitants of the Vindhya Mountains were born from the thigh of the King Vena. Their appearance was described as dark as charcoal or as black as a crow with flattened faces. They were also described as being innately and hopelessly vicious, because “Nishada was so born that he bore away from the body of Vena all the sins for which that monarch had previously been notorious and bequeathed them to his offspring, leaving his Majesty free from all taints and ready for Heaven.”(Thomas, Taylor, 1965, Pg 57) This and similar legends indicate that there was in Central India, an intensely dark race who must be the aborigines of this belt!

From the above description, the aborigines of this area seem to belong to the Negritos stock. The Negritos were also considered by Dr.Hutton – the Census Commissioner for 1931 as the earliest inhabitants of India. The Commissioner for SCs and STs in his report for the year 1952 says that the tribals belong to one of the three stocks – Negritos, Australoids or Mongoloids. According to Dr. Hutton the Proto Australoids, Austro Asiatic, the Dravidians and the Rig Vedic Aryans or Indo Aryans are all immigrant people who settled in India, with the Indo Aryans being the last ones.
1.4 SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE TRIBES OF M.P. AND CHHATTISGARH

As already mentioned, though the different tribes belong to various races, speak different languages, have their own distinctive customs, the tribes of a particular region or state are not totally insulated from their external surroundings. They live within the culture of the non tribal world hence the social, economic and cultural features of their lives often show adaption of the regional peculiarities though not in totality, but only in glimpses. Some tribes are more adaptive and receptive to change and so might show more reflection of their neighbors’ way of life while those living in remote or interior areas retain their originality. Certain common features found in the socio-economic aspects of various tribes of the region followed by a description of the predominant tribes are given below.

Economic aspects

In 1951, about 90.5 per cent of the tribals throughout the country were engaged in agriculture. Agriculture still remains the predominant feature of tribal economy. The tribals are also known to depend on the products of forests, hunting on land and fishing for their food. The methods and tools used by them are also age-old and primitive, e.g. shifting cultivation by the slash-and-burn method, known as bewar or dahiya in M.P., is widely practiced by the tribals. In this method, the trees and jungles in the forest slopes are cut and burnt and the lumps of charcoal and stones removed. After some rains, the seeds are sown in the ash covered soil. Good crops like paddy are produced only in the first year, with millets and maize grown in the next year. “From the third year onwards, the place is left fallow for some years and the cultivator shifts to other clearings and this cycle continues in rotation.”(Taylor, 1964, p.79)

This method was widely criticized because of the belief that it caused soil erosion and excessive deterioration of cultivable land. However the modern view holds this practice as an organic response to certain geophysical conditions – such as undulating terrain, steep slopes which make it difficult to prepare bunds in steep slopes. Ploughing is done either by bulls and ploughs or by digging with hoes and cow dung is used as manure. However some tribes have invented certain indigenous methods of irrigation like constructing bunds on mountain streams to irrigate their fields and terraces. Rice remains the predominant crop grown by tribals of M.P. along with some kinds of millet and maize.

The 2011 census shows that ‘cultivators’ and ‘agricultural labourers’ together constitute 74.67 per cent of the total tribal workers in M.P. and Chhattisgarh. This shows that there has hardly been any change in the means of livelihood of the tribals since 1951 and ‘agriculture’ still remains their predominant occupation.

Socio-cultural aspects

The fundamental structure of the social organization in M.P. and Chhattisgarh is particularly caste-based. Despite the cultural diversity, the state presents an interesting account of Adivasi and non-Adivasi customs and traditions.

1. Religion

The original religion of the tribal people is Animism – the attribution of a soul to natural objects and phenomena. According to it, all objects both animate and inanimate are permanently or temporarily inhabited by spirits or souls. Many experts are of the view that ‘animism’ is nothing but ‘Hinduism’ in its primitive form. Sir Herbert Risley, described
Hinduism as ‘Animism more or less transformed by philosophy’. Similarly Dr. J.H. Hutton, the Commissioner of the Census of 1931 considered modern Hinduism to be the result of an amalgam between pre Aryan Indian beliefs and Mediterranean inspiration and religion of Rigveda. Hence most of the tribes are considered ‘Hinduised’ but at different levels of conversion. As regards the tribes of the Central belt, it appears that by the time of the writings of the Puranas, most of them had already been Hinduised” (Taylor, 1965, pg.57) As in the case of other tribes, the tribes of this region also have an idea of a Supreme Being who is responsible for bringing creation into existence. This Supreme Being controls all other spirits but he is apart and different from them and does not belong to the class of natural or human spirits. Totemism, magic, witchcraft and sorcery form an integral part of the religious beliefs and practices of these tribes. The tribal people were influenced by the Christian missionaries and Islamic invaders as a result of which few accepted Christianity and Islam.

Presently, the tribal religion is not considered as a separate religion and is included in Hinduism. According to the 2011 census, 95.25 per cent of STs in M.P and 88.62 per cent in Chhattisgarh are Hindus. Tribes following ‘other religions and persuasions’ are 3.81 per cent in M.P and 6.23 per cent in Chhattisgarh; Christian tribes constitute 0.57 per cent in M.P and 4.92 per cent in Chhattisgarh whereas Muslims account for 0.21 per cent in M.P and 0.10 Chhattisgarh both.

2. Kinship

Kinship terms used by different castes and groups are almost the same all over the state except with little difference in their pronunciation. Kutumb (family) is the smallest unit that shares the common rituals and mores of the clan. All the members of the family unit are bound by a kinship tie. Patriarchal system prevails in the state; hence, the elder son inherits the father’s right and property making the tribals no exception to this common practice. The position of a wife in a kutumb depends upon her husband and that of the mother is recognized in relation to her children. Sex, age and supporting capacity of an individual are the deciding factors which govern his role in the family.

Without a male child a family is considered incomplete. Widows and divorced daughters of a family are accepted as liabilities. Separation from a Kutumb in the same village or town is not encouraged. It is contrarily taken improper if somebody ventures to break the ties with a joint family. Among the Bhils, however, no sooner a boy and a girl get married, the couple is separated as a part of convention. Other than the birth links, people are also linked through ritual acts. One of such kinships is the kinship of ritual brothers and sisters known as gurbhai and gurbahen, which is acquired through a common teacher. This type of kinship is regarded more serious than the dharma sambandha - the relation sanctioned by religion. The duties attached to this form of kinship are mostly the same as performed in real kin ties. (www.webindia123.com)

3. Community Law

On the birth of a child or the death of a person there is always the community law that works to keep the perpetuality of rites and rituals. It is the social system wherein the caste has to submit without questioning. The importance of the Panchayat is obvious in relation to customs and traditions. It is theGunia or Waddai or Gaita or Badwa, whose strange ways of ritual performance sometimes create an atmosphere of awe, who holds a final word among the Adivasis. The unlettered rural audience has to bow heads before all such things which are thrust upon through this institution. Only in certain cases the Panchayat happens to do away with evils of some age-old practices. (www.webindia123.com)
4. **Birth**

The male child gets preference over the female child as the birth of a male child is regarded as fulfillment of an obligation due to the ancestors. The announcement is made by beating a thali. If it is a male child, conventional designs symbolizing the foot mark of the child and toys, etc. called Paglia, are drawn on a piece of paper and sent through a village barber to the nearest kins living in other villages as a mark of good news and in return the barber brings back clothes and ornaments for the mother and the newly born child. On the ninth or the eleventh day after the child’s birth, the Sun God is worshipped by the mother and the child is brought out to see its rays. The ritual is called Suraj Puja. (www.webindia123.com)

5. **Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage**

Marriage is considered as an obligation on part of all individuals as through it the important task of perpetualisation of patriarchal line becomes possible. Marriage among tribals is usually within an endogamous group and violation of this rule often leads to excommunication. Exogamy is permitted only in the same village. Among the same gotra, marriage is possible in the agricultural communities of Central M.P. although not within a close link, e.g. two brothers could marry two sisters or a brother and sister could marry a pair of sibling. Marriage and cohabitation together are rare except among some animistic tribes. Premarital relations are possible within certain tribal groups like the Muria and that too in their Ghotul premises. But when the relations reach to assume marital position, the wedding ceremony becomes absolutely necessary through the elders.

Marriage takes place among different tribes in different ways eg. Bhagoda in Bhils, Kgitivari in Murias, Dudh Lotana in Gonds or Paithu or Paisa Mundi in which a girl goes on her own to her lover’s house to live with him and various other types which are discussed later. Among the enlightened sections, marriage is arranged either by willing couples or by their elders. The actual marriage ceremony ranges from the most lengthy and elaborate practices to very simple ones, but the essential rites are the same like use of turmeric and oil and perambulation of the sacred fire or the pole. The feast depends on the availability of funds and on customs and traditions of the respective groups. (www.webinida123.com)

Divorce is convenient among the tribals and remarriage of a widow or a divorced woman is not a problem. Remarriage is done through natra – a conventional device for the remarriage of divorced women and widows. Biyah or lagan (first marriage) is the approved ceremonial form of marriage. There is a good deal of difference in the social and ceremonial aspect of biyah or lagan (first marriage) and natra. A widow may marry the younger brother of her dead husband, which is not a taboo in many tribes and agricultural communities.

The dissolution of marriage is done by mutual settlement and in consultation with caste elders by both the parties. A paper required to be signed by the surrenderer of claims is a customary practice. The paper is called faragati, meaning disengagement. (www.webinidia123.com)

6. **Death**

Among the Gonds, the deceased is buried, but the Raj Gonds prefer to burn the corpse. Sanyasis and infants are given the earth. The cremation takes place by the stream and the ashes are submerged in sacred waters. The death of an elderly person is mourned.
by all the relatives. The close ones are expected to show extra respect to the dead by shaving off their heads.

7. **Ornaments**

Brass/zinc or tin ornaments are common amongst the tribals. Traditional peasant jewellery not only fascinates the women but also indicates her marital status. Even the poorest woman wears some sort of ornaments. Head-bands or earrings with pendants of red, blue and white beads or cowries and bead-belts with bells suspended are desired by the Adivasi women. Men wear bracelets in their wrists and Mundri in the fingers. (www.webindia123.com)

8. **Dress**

Dhoti is the regular outfit for the peasants of this region. A white or a black jacket called bandi or mirzai is in vogue in Bundelkhand and Malwa. Safa is worn on the head in the eastern parts of the state and pagri or paga (turban) is preferred in the western regions. Women wear coloured lehnga and choli. A piece of cloth known as orni or lugra is used to cover the head and the shoulders. In the central region they prefer red and black colours, while yellow, blue and green are admired by the Chhattisgarhi women. Kanchali is stitched out of coloured pieces of cloth. It is a sort of bodice used for covering the breasts only by tying it at the back with strings, called Kasana in the Malwi dialect. (www.webindia123.com)

**Check Your Progress II**

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Trace two practices pertaining to divorce and remarriage among the tribes of M.P.

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

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

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

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


1.5 **DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE DIFFERENT TRIBES OF THE REGION**

1. **Gonds**

The Gonds are the biggest group of the STs in number and the most populous tribe in Chhattisgarh. They are also unique due to the fact that for some centuries they had a kingdom which they ran successfully, after which a part of the country for a long time was known as Gondwana. They made a valiant attempt to preserve their political power and the Hindu faith against the onslaught of the Muslims. The districts of their chief concentration during the 19th century were Betul, Chhindwara, Senoi, Mandla, Chhattisgarh, Chanda and Bastar.

**Occupation** - They are distinguished by their great liking for woodcraft and for sacrifices and eating bullocks. It is reported by experts that the Gonds adopted newer and improved methods of paddy sowing which was a complete departure from their old bewar cultivation. They had also adopted cotton cultivation and taken to rearing cattle. Small shop keeping was another line which the ‘Gonds had adopted for gainful activity.
Tribals of the Central India

1. **Tribals of the Central India**

   **Language and culture** - The Gondi language is a Dravidian language. The Chhattisgarhi Gonds had even adopted the language, mode of dress and even culinary practices of their neighbors. In certain parts where the Gonds lived in common villages with Hindu castes, they not only associated themselves more with these castes but strived to differentiate themselves from such scheduled and allied castes as the Kamars and the Bhumjias. (Ghurye, 1963)

   The Raj Gonds have adopted the Hindu ceremony of marriage. The most distinctive feature of a Gond wedding is that the procession usually starts from the bride’s house and the ceremony is performed at that of the bridegroom’s. When a Gond wishes to marry his children he first looks to his sister’s children, whom he considers entitled to demand for his own; such a marriage is called ‘bringing back the milk’. It is also known as dudh lotana. The Gonds wear ‘bali’ in the upper or middle part of the ears and ‘lurki’ in the lobes, toe-ring called ‘chutka’ is common. (www.webindia123.com)

2. **Bhils**

   The Bhils are the most populous tribe in M.P. They are distinguished from most other STs due to their long connection with the Rajputs. They were described as courageous huntsman, skilful in snaring games and clever fishermen.

   **Occupation** – Their original occupation was agriculture. The Bhils of this region had a fixed abode with majority of them being agricultural labourers. Some had also taken up the work of village watchman. (Ghurye, 1963)

   **Language and culture** – The Bhils are believed to have had a Mundari language. They speak the dialect known as Bhil which is Malwi or Nimadi – a dialectical specimen of the language of the locality in which they are found. They observe untouchability, and the principal Hindu festivals. Marriage by elopement is still prevalent in the Bhils of the Vindhyas, but it is confirmed only after the bride-price is ceremonially paid off. Among the enlightened section, marriage is arranged either by willing couples or by their elders. (www.webindia123.com)

3. **Kols**

   The Kols of Jabalpur Rewa region after whom the Munda speaking tribes – the Hos and the Santals- were formerly called the Kolarians, provide a specimen of a group, which in days gone by had a culture similar to the culture of Hos and Santals- who inhabit very restricted and confined areas. The Kols made excellent workers and formed the bulk of cheap labour in many industrial centres. They are more adaptable to changes and more accommodating and better inclined towards improving their living conditions. (Ghurye, 1963)

4. **Oraons**

   They reached Central India from the South. They are found in Raigarh and Suguja districts. They are less tenacious and more submissive unlike the Mundas who are rebellious.

   **Occupation** – Their main occupation is agriculture. Plough culture was introduced by them in the Central Province. They grow cotton and their women hand-spin it. They are also good in carpentry

   **Language and culture** – Oraons speak a Dravidian Language and are basically animists in their belief like all the other tribes. The Supreme Being who is responsible for bringing creation into existence is called Dharmes in Oraon. Dharmes is the one who is worshipped and to whom sacrifice is offered even by the laymen. Prayers and sacrifice of eggs or
white fowl are offered to Dharmes so that he might save the individual and family from evil.

The Oraons have an ancestral pit – Kundi – in which the bones and remains of the dead are gathered and drowned at the annual Harbari or the ‘great marriage’ – as they believe that the spirits of the ancestors will help the living members of the family in difficult moments. (www.webindia123.com)

5. The Murias, Marias and Abujmurias -

The Murias of North Bastar are associated with institution of Ghotul. The bison – horn Marias or the sing – Marias are settled to the south of the Indrâvati. They have very little communication with the Murias of the North. The Raja Murias or the Jagdalpur Murias consider themselves superior to other tribes. The Abhujmurias have a strong wild appeal in their look as compared to the Murias of the plains. They occupy the wild and more primitive interior of Bastar in the west of Narayanpur Tehsil.

**Occupation**-Agriculture remains the predominant occupation of the above tribes, where ploughing is done either by bulls and ploughs or by digging with hoes and cow dung is used as manure. The Marias of M.P. as an exceptional case has invented certain indigenous methods of irrigation by constructing bunds on mountain streams to irrigate their fields and terraces.

**Culture**-The Ghotul is a unique institution for the unmarried boys and girls of the Muria tribe. A brief description of the Ghotul is given below, since it is a unique feature of this particular tribe.

The Ghotul – a village dormitory is a large hut or a group of huts with a compound around where the Muria youngsters assemble after sunset. This institution which is traditionally sanctioned by the tribal customs, serves as a centre of social and emotional activities, instills group feeling and discipline among the Muria boys and girls of Bastar, helps them to rise above jealousy and possessiveness, serves as a preventive measure of crime, provides the right place for acknowledging feelings of love and fostering feelings of friendliness, unity and sympathy.

The boy member of the Ghotul is known as Chelik and the girl member as Motiari. The relation between Chelik and Motiari are governed by the type of Ghotul to which they belong. In the older classical type of Ghotul, boys and girls paired off in a more or less permanent relationship which lasts till marriage. In the modern form of Ghotul, such exclusive associations are forbidden and partners must constantly be changed.

The male members begin to arrive anytime after sunset at the Ghotul with their belongings such as sleeping mats, tobacco pouches and such other things. The boys gather round a fire, or scatter about the compound or puff their chongis -the country cigarettes under the thatched roofs of the open huts. As the girls start coming, an atmosphere of music and dance livens up followed by a dance song called Rela. After an hour or two, storytelling around the fire starts during which the girls and boys join together freely. At fairly late night Belosa, the leader of the girls and Sirdar, the leader of the boys decide how the couples shall be paired based on a romance mixed with duty and charm.

**Ornaments, clothing and eating habits**

The women of the bison horn Maria tribe wear brass fillets on their heads as crowns when they go for dancing. Men wear head–gears decorated with plumes of feathers, horns and chains of cowries as a dancing outfit. Men also wear bracelets in their wrists and Mundri in the fingers.
The bead work done by the Murias is treated as a work of art. A Muria girl who cares for her brass rings with bells attached and wears all kinds of ornaments with her colored skirt and wimple is known as a Sigarimugari Muria girl. The women of the bison-horn Maria tribe wear brass fillets on their heads as crowns when they go for dancing. As a dancing outfit, men wear their headgears decorated with plumes of feathers, horns and chains of cowries. The dancing-stick of the Maria girl is also considered valuable.

The Abhujmarias eat red-ants and rats with great pleasure. Women are generally bare-bosomed and men wear just a loin cloth. Only during festivals they add some more items to their dress. Boys put on all kinds of finery. They wear red or white ‘pagas’ (turbans) with feathers tucked in their folds.

**Marriage** - As regards marriage in the Abhujmarias the boy’s parents visit the parents of the girl and present a pot of mahua liquor. If the pot is accepted, the boy and girl are declared betrothed.

Among the Murias, the Kgitivari form of marriage which is an extension of cross-cousin marriage is common where the sister’s children are given first preference. Remarriage is done through a ceremony called Pani-bihao.

The bison-horn Marias has many strange customs of observing death. If a child below the age of five dies, he is buried in an erect position. A corpse is laid down with his head to the east. Women put a pinch of tobacco in his mouth and weep bitterly, very often falling upon his bamboo bier. The master of the funeral ceremony is conventionally the Giata, but it is the son of the deceased’s sister who has to do many more things. He takes a stick and measures straight upwards from the corpse’s chest to the roof, poking the stick through the thatch. Then he climbs up to the roof and makes a hole which is intended symbolically to allow the message of death to spread throughout the world. He puts his dhol drum above the hole, waves a stick thrice round his head and then beats his drum. (www.webindia123.com)

6. **Dhurwas (Parjas)**

Dhurwas are the third largest Adivasi group in Bastar following the Marias and the Murias. The tribe is mainly concentrated in Dantewara and Konta. They border on most Tehsil of M.P. in the South. In addition to the usual customs commonly followed by the tribes of this region as mentioned above, the Dhurwas perform a ceremony after ten days of a man’s death known as Khilawan in which a ‘leaf earring’ is given by any earning member of the family or an outsider of the widow. If it is given by the younger brother of the deceased the woman has to go with him as his wife. (www.webindia123.com)

7. **Baigas**

The Baigas are a class of priests among the Gonds. They are the people who know all about evil spirits and can avoid them by performing magical rites. In Mandla district there is a small tract called Baiga Chak known for its Baiga settlement. The Baigas are considered by many experts as the original inhabitants of the Central Province. (www.webindia123.com)

Baigas’ economy mainly depends on agricultural pursuits and collection of minor forest produce. The other employment opportunities are unskilled labour and work in forest. They also love to work in the baris (land attached to the house) and grow maize, mustard, vegetables, roots and bulbs. Maize, Kodo, Kutki and Ramtila are the main crops grown by the Baigas. Maize and millets form the major foodstuffs consumed by
the Baigas. These are consumed in the form of ‘Pej’, often supplemented by vegetables. (Rao and Singh)

8. The Pradhans and the Korkens

The Pradhans are the musicians of the Gonds and the Baigas. If a Baiga is unavailable to a Gond, a Pradhan is called for performing the rites.

The Korkens are confined to a small portion in the Narmada valley; some of them have taken to work in the coal-mines around Chhindwara. Among the Korkens, marriage takes place in the following typical manner—the father of the girl brings home a capable boy called Lamsena. If the Lamsena likes the girl, he has to (1) serve as a household servant for 6-12 months (2) He has to prove his manhood. If the girl does not become pregnant within a year, the Lamsena is made to flee and a new one is caught.

There is another tradition among the Korkens, when the girl gets into the house of her fiancé. If the boy agrees to marry, the marriage is settled. Otherwise the boy has to leave his house and the village/tribe and whole of his property becomes that of the girl. A similar tradition is that the father of the girl sends the daughter away to search for a life companion. Among some Korkens, the father of the girl selects a boy himself. After getting a suitable boy, the terms of payment are settled and the father of the boy takes away the bride. (www.webindia123.com)

9. Others

The Savaras occupy Sheopur (Morena district), Isagarh, Narval(Gwalior district) and Bhilsa. This group also combines Saharia and Sour. Among others are the Bharias of Patalkot and the adjoining areas in Chhindwara and the Binjhwars of Bilaspur.

From etymological point of view Saharia mean companion of tiger (Sa - companion, haria- tiger). Their total population is over 2 lacs, and is one of the poorest primitive tribe of Madhya Pradesh. Most of the Sahara families are landless, and the area is geographically often prone for draught hence drinking water is one of the major problem in the area. Their economy lies mainly on minor forest produce. Because of unemployment the young people migrate to nearby district or town in search of employment especially during summer.

The economy of Bharias depends on ‘Baris’ attached to their hutments. Maize, Jowar, Kodo and Kutki are the commonest crops grown in their ‘Bari’. Minor forest products like Mahua, Amla, Harra etc. are also a source of income. Preparation of deo-baharis (brooms) and selling them in the local market is an important source of cash income. Though the valley is said to be very rich in medicinal plants, they are yet to be exploited as a source of income by the tribe. Maize is the staple diet along with coarse millets like Jowar, Kodo and Kutki, which are consumed in the form of ‘Pej’. Green vegetables are scanty. Vegetables like gourds and vejra are grown in their baris. ((Rao and Singh)

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What are the distinctive features of the Bhil tribe of M.P.?

..................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................
1.6 PRESENT STATUS OF THE TRIBES OF THE REGION

In this section we throw light on the present status of the tribes of the region in terms of literacy rate, sex ratio, work participation ratio and nature of work as per 2001 census report.

**Literacy rate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chhattisgarh</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>58.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.P.</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that the literacy rate of STs in Chhattisgarh is not only higher than that in the last census, but is slightly also higher than that at the national level. The male as well as female literacy rates (69.7% and 48%) are similar to those at the national level (68.53% and 49.35%). Whereas in M.P. there is an increase in literacy rate from 2001 census it is lower than that of all STs at the national level. Male and female literacy rates are also lower in comparison to those at the national level.

In M.P. among the major tribes, only Gonds have registered a higher overall literacy as well as female literacy in comparison to the national average. In Chhattisgarh, Halba, Oraon and Kawar have registered overall higher literacy level than that of all STs at the state level.

**Sex Ratio**

The overall sex ratio of the ST population in Chhattisgarh is 1020 females per 1000 males which is higher than the national average of 990 for total ST population, whereas in M.P. it is 984 females per 1000 males which is lower than the national average.

**Work Participation Rate**

The WPR in M.P. for ST population is 49.9 per cent which is slightly lower than that of STs at the national level (53%). In Chhattisgarh the WPR of the ST population is 52.8 per cent with a marginal decennial decline of 0.6 per cent in the WPR.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic category</th>
<th>STs of M.P.</th>
<th>S.Ts of Chhattisgarh</th>
<th>National average of all STs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultivators</td>
<td>3.51%</td>
<td>1.29%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural laborers</td>
<td>68.71%</td>
<td>73.38%</td>
<td>59.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household industries</td>
<td>15.64%</td>
<td>28.91%</td>
<td>23.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other workers</td>
<td>9.55%</td>
<td>6.09%</td>
<td>14.76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Census, 2011 in both the states around 70 per cent of the tribals are engaged in agriculture which still remains the predominant occupation of the tribals. In 1951 nearly 90 per cent of the tribals were engaged in agricultural activities, which indicates that there is hardly any change in the economic aspects of the tribals even though at the national level the percentage has come down to 81 per cent.

After independence, the Government of India adopted the ‘integration’ approach to bring the tribals into the national mainstream. ‘Integrating them into the national mainstream’ meant to make available to them the advantages of education, technological advancements, economic and social development, of which they had been deprived since ages due to their secluded existence, without threatening their rights to preserve their culture. At the same time the Constitution of India prescribed protection and safeguards to them with the object of removing their social disabilities and promoting their varied interests. On March 1992 the National Commission for SCs and STs was given a constitutional status. Further the Government has also increased the size of the investment in every successive five year plan. The tribal sub-plans which were started during the fifth five year plan (1974-79) are implemented through Integrated Tribal Development Programs covering 75 primitive tribes. The amount allocated for the tribal sub-plans increased from the fifth 5 year plan to the 8th five year plan by nearly 15 times.

According to Hindustan Times report, 4th August 2009 by Rahul Naronha, “M.P. is the second highest beneficiary of Central funds for financing schemes for uplifting tribal’s economic and social status. In 2008-09 it was the second highest receiver of GOI funds under the ‘Special Central Assistance to tribal sub plan’ for employment-cum-income generation activities and the infrastructure incidental thereto.

In spite of this, as per information placed in Parliament by Union Tribal Affairs Minister – Kantilal Bhuria, 58.58 per cent of the rural tribal population lives below the poverty line and there is only a marginal increase in their economic condition on moving to an urban center where 44.65 per cent of tribal population is found to be living under BPL. This makes M.P. the second highest state, in percentage terms, for tribals living below poverty line. In comparison Chhattisgarh is relatively better off, with tribal population between 54.74 and 41.04 per cent living below poverty line in rural and urban areas respectively. These figures are based on a study conducted by NSSO during 2004-05 for the Planning Commission.

The report indicates that there are leakages at various levels which lead to the siphoning of the funds meant for tribal welfare. Corruption, lack of interest on part of the officers at the administrative level, apathy, lack of accountability and scores of other reasons are responsible for the deplorable condition of the tribals of the state.

Chhattisgarh, the home to some of India’s most culturally distinctive tribes and coveted natural resources, is in the grip of a brutal civil war between the Indian state, the Naxals...
Tribals of the Central India

and the counter-Naxal Salwa Judum. According to Hindustan times report by Chitrangada Choudhary, 19 August 2009, the war claims at least one life every day and steadily widens a traditional gulf between government and people, as it shrivels options for negotiations.

The challenges before the government, both at the State and the Central level are enormous. It is indeed a matter of deep concern that even after 69 years of independence, we have not been able to achieve the aim of integrating the tribals into the national mainstream; their problems seem to have only increased. With the struggle to keep up with globalization and achieve the status of a developed country, we cannot afford to ignore 8 per cent of our population and keep them deprived or exploited by their own fellow countrymen. In conclusion it can be said the tribals need our concern, our respect and need to be treated as equals. The following lines by Rigoberta Menchu, Guatemala Nobel Peace Prize Winner, 1992 should serve as a reminder regarding our duties towards our tribal people – ‘We are not myths of the past, ruins in the jungle or zoos. We are people and we want to be respected, not to be victims of intolerance and racism’.

Check Your Progress IV

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Review the present status of the tribes of M.P. and Chhattisgarh in terms of literacy rate and sex-ratio.

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

1.7 LET US SUM UP

The word tribe conjures up an image in the minds of the common people of simple folk living in hills and forests, famous for their dances and songs, animists in their beliefs, following a traditional and backward way of life and fearful of adopting the modern way of life. This unit attempts to give a description of the dominant tribes of M.P. and Chhattisgarh, which are a part of Central India, their common features as well as distinctive practices. The tribal groups of the central zone are scattered all over the mountain belt between the rivers Narmada and Godavari Madhya Pradesh holds the distinction of being the most populous tribal state since independence.

Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh together have about 46 Scheduled Tribes. (ST) Out of these, 7 tribes are most backward and are identified as primitive tribes based on their pre-agricultural level of technology, low level of literacy and stagnant or diminishing population. These primitive tribes are Saharias of Chambal division, Barinas of Patalkot, Baigas of Baigachak area, Hill Korbas and Birhors of Sarguja, Kamars of Raipur and Abujhmarias of Bastar. Agriculture still remains the predominant pattern of tribal economy. The tribals are also known to depend on the products of forests, hunting on land and fishing for their food. While the Bhils are the most populous tribe in M.P., the Gonds are the biggest group of the STs in number and the most populous tribe in Chhattisgarh. The overall sex ratio of the ST population in Chhattisgarh is 1020 females per 1000 males which is higher than the national average of 990 for total ST population.
whereas in M.P. it is 984 females per 1000 males which is lower than the national average. The literacy rate of STs in Chhattisgarh is not only higher than that in the last census, but also higher than the national level. Marriage takes place among different tribes in different ways eg. Bhagoda in Bhils, Kgitivari in Murias, Dudh Lotana in Gonds or Paithu or Paisa Mundi in which a girl goes of her own to her lover’s house to live with him. Divorce is convenient among the tribals and remarriage of a widow or a divorced woman is not a problem.

1.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

4. Rao, Chakma and Meshram Singh, Health and Nutritional Profile of Tribes of M.P. and Chhattisgarh,