

Spatial Distributions of Tribes in India: An analysis of Sanskritization and Modernization in Post-modern discourse

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Abstract: The dictionary definition of Tribe asserts it as a group of people who have the same language, customs and culture that have a leader (a chief). But historically and practically speaking the horizon of the word Tribe hold much larger width. The ideal definitions of a 'Tribe' is limited to some well-formed notions i.e., the tribal society is culturebound, non-stratified, casteless, classless, territorially bounded, isolated, and homogenous society. But in this modern era of social change where people are competing for advancement, 'tribes' of an ideal type can be hardly found. In the present times tribes are no more independent and isolated social groups. In this regard commonly encountered problem is socio-cultural change Tribes are one of the most affected indigenous groups in the country who are facing the problems arising out of the socio-cultural change and struggling with issues of their identity. This paper presents a brief account of the processes and patterns of the socio-cultural change among tribes of Telangana in India as evident by several available studies in the context. This paper is divided into three parts, first part is introduction, dealing with the origin of Tribes, their demography and distribution pattern in the country and with focus on the available secondary literatures, second part is dealing with the processes and patterns of socio-cultural change among Tribes and last part deals with the observations and concluding remarks.

Key Words: Tribes, Change, Development, Modernization, Sanskritization, Hinduization

INTRODUCTION:

India is a country of multi-ethnic groups and tribes constitute a main part of them. They are largest and one of the oldest communities by origin. They are generally cultivators and peddlers. They speak their own local language known as "Tribal languages and script is Devnagiri for many tribal languages and for communication purpose many of them speak Hindi as well. A common definition for a **tribe** is a group of people that all have common

ancestry, or a common ancestor, a common culture, and live in their own enclosed society. Other names for a tribe are a clan, which is used in some European countries, and family.

The idea of a tribe goes back to ancient times when Rome would create divisions within society due to class, family, and money. These divisions were tribes. This term has evolved while the people it describes may not have.

Many tribes and tribal communities are in areas that lack industry. They live and create homes that do not accept the conveniences and behaviors of the present day, like the Aborigines in Australia who live in the wilderness of the Outback.

They choose to be close to the land and follow the rules and lifestyle of their ancestors.

However, other tribes like the Native Americans in the United States do accept some of the modern conveniences while still following and carrying out the beliefs of the past.

India is also known for their immense population of tribal communities with over 84 million people that are part of tribal communities. Out of the 84 million, they are divided up over a mere 50 different tribes.

Tribal Characteristics:

There are a variety of characteristics that make up a tribe. It's important to note that not all these characteristics are present in all tribes. Each community is unique.

The first characteristic is that of unity. Tribes share a unity with each other, their past, and the land they live on. Many tribal communities are completely self-sufficient and do not depend on the state or government for money or politics.

They live off the land, make money by selling their goods that they make, and then use that to keep their community going.

Another characteristic that many tribal communities have is that of a common totemic ancestor. Many tribes have a **totem**, which is an object that carries an importance for the people.

Since tribes may have a shared ancestor, they will create a totem to represent the one person who started their original tribe. There also may be a faith-based worship of the totem due to its value to the people.

Many tribes live in a specific territory, whether that is a reservation in the U.S. or as a territory that spans divided areas in India. The tribes know their land and stay upon it as much as possible. This keeps industry from encroaching on their way of life.

Additionally, even if the tribes are surrounded by other tribes, they still have the common respect to stay within their own space, unless there are warring factions.

Distribution of tribes in India:

The tribes in India are spread over the length and breadth of the country.

About 2/3 of the total tribal population of the country are found in the five states – Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

The tribes live all over the country from the foot-hills of Himalayas to the land tip, of Lakshadweep and from plains of Gujarat to the hills of North-East.

There are the tribals in Chamba and Mahasu; and in Dehradun and Darjeeling.

The peninsular region has Bhils, Gonds, Santhals, Ho, Kols, Kondh, Kharia and Mundas among the prominent. In the North-Eastern region the prominent tribals are Nagas, the Mizos, Mikris and Kukis.

Dr. B. S. Guha has divided the country into three tribal Zones:

- ✓ 1. The North and North-Eastern Zone,
- ✓ 2. The central or the Middle Zone and
- ✓ 3. The Southern Zone

North-North-Eastern Zone:

Eastern Kashmir, Eastern Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Northern Uttar Pradesh, Nagaland, Assam etc. constitute this zone.

The Aka, the Mishmi, the Chulikata and the Naga are some of the tribes of this zone.

Central Zone:

It consists of Bihar, Bengal, Southern U.P., Southern Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa.

The Kondh, the Santhal, the Bhil, the Gond, the Muria and the Baiga are only a few of the large number of tribes of this zone. The bulk of the tribal population lives in this zone.

There is a very high concentration of tribal population in central India. Over 85 per cent of the total tribal population inhabits the eight States that constitute this zone.

Southern Zone:

The Southern zone is consisted of four Southern States Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala.

The Toda, the Chenchu, the Kadar and the Koraga are some of the important tribes of this zone.

C. B. Mamma has added to this list the fourth zone consisting of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The Small Zone consisting of Andaman and Nicobar Islands:

Besides these main zones, there is another isolated zone constituting the Andaman and Nicobar Island in the Bay of Bengal.

The Jarawa, the Andamanese and the Nicobarese are the important tribes of this zone.

B. K. Roy Burmandivides the tribal population of the country into five geographical regions taking territorial, ethnic and socio-cultural relations into account.

1. **The North-East India** comprising Assam, NEFA, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura. Some of the tribes of this area are: the Ahoms, Garos, Khasis, Mizos, Nagas, Kukis, etc.

2. The sub-Himalayan region of North and North West India -comprising Northern Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh and as a whole. Some tribes of this area are: Gujjars, Boddh, Kinnours, Swanglia, etc.

Central and East India comprising West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Some tribes of this area: the Santals, Ho, Munda, Oraons, Gonds, Chenchu, Koya, Kolam, etc.

South India comprising Madras, Kerala and Karnataka. The tribes of this area are Irula, Kurumba, Kadar, Hakki Pakki, Jenu Kuruba, Kadu Kuruba, etc.

Western India comprising Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. Some tribes of this area are: Mina, Bhils, Kumbhis, Mario Gonds, Mahadev Kolis, Gonds, etc.

Specific Tribes of North zone:

The Tribal tribe got the status of scheduled tribes with four other tribes (Buksa, Bhotia, Jaunsari and Raji) in Uttar Pradesh through the constitution (Scheduled Tribes) (Uttar Pradesh) order, 1967.2 Population wise, Tribals are most populous group among all existing five tribal groups in Uttar Pradesh. Most of the population of Tribal community exists in the Bhabhar Tarai region at Indo-Nepal border (Srivastava, 1958).3 Tribals are mainly inhabited

in UdhamSingh Nagar District of Uttrakhand, Lakhiempur Kheri, Bahraich, Basti, Gonda, Balrampur, and Gorakhpur districts of Uttar Pradesh and Champaran District of Bihar.⁴ Total population of Tribal tribe in Uttrakhand is 91,342 and 1,05,291 in Uttar Pradesh.⁵ Tribal people worship various gods and Goddess as their local deities. They are adherents mainly of Hindu religion, but also hold Islamic, Animist and Buddhist beliefs.⁶ Tribals in Nepal called their local deity 'Gor-Raja'.⁷ They also believe in animal sacrifices to pacify their traditional local god. The main occupations of this community are fishing, hunting and agriculture. Tribal people do not partake in the national level politics but they are active in local politics as 'Pradhan' and 'Guruwa' (head of the traditional Panchayat). Though they are practicing the patriarchal and patrilineal notion of the Hindu caste society, the status of women in the Tribal community is relatively better and they enjoy considerable amount of freedom. "Tribal women dominate in decision making and managing the affairs of the family"⁸ although they are not educated.

While studying the origins of great civilizations and cultures a writer can be fall back upon available secondary literatures on the topic. Unfortunately it is not the case with Tribal tribes; scholars have to contend with the arbitrary knowledge sources of the tribes, mainly oral traditions, which makes it difficult for the sociologists and social anthropologists to study the community. Recurrent ongoing argument about origin of the term "Tribal" is denoted to the "Thar Dessert" in Rajasthan. A number of scholars put forth this argument without any considerable evidence that the Tribal people have migrated from the Thar Dessert in the 13th to 15th century to other regions of the country.⁹ According to a folk story, in the remote past when the king was defeated by the forces of an invader, the woman of the royal palace rather than fall into the hands of foe fled into the jungles with the Sais and Chamars (menial castes)

belonging to the palace. This assertion gets further support as it is observed that women among Tribals dominate.¹⁰ Women dominance of the Tribal community is explained by the tradition that the Tribals are off springs of mixed marriages between Rajput women and their servants, Sais and Chamars.¹¹ W.Crooke (1896) is of the view that the origin of the Tribals can be traced to the word "Tribal" signifying a 'wine bibber'.¹² It is believed that this name has been given to the Tribals by one of the Khastriya Rajas of the plains seeing the Tribal's thrust and capacity for drinking wine. D.N.Majumdar (1944) described that the Tribals have

mongoloid racial affiliation and they cannot claim their origin to Rajputs on the basis of blood group tests or serology. They do not have any known distinctive characteristics which relate them to Rajputs of Rajasthan in their cultural or racial practices.¹⁴ Srivastava (1965) talks about Tribals that they have mongoloid physical appearances, which are profitably merged with non-mongoloid race as well.¹⁵ Social change can be defined as a process by which the existing orders of any society, it can be material civilization, and spiritual, social and cultural is transformed into another cultural society. According to Malinowski "cultural change is the process by which the existing orders of the society, thus is, its social, spiritual and material civilization is transformed from one type to another".¹⁶ Nesfield, V.K. Kochar, D.N. Majumdar, T.N. Madan, R.P. Srivastava,

Sameera Maiti, R.C. Verma, Nadeem Hasnain, Narendra S. Bisht & T. S. Bankoti, Mary Ann Maslak, Amir Hasan, C.T. Hu, S.K. Shrivastava. B.S. Bist, Jagdev Sinsh and many others have contributed in the study of the socio-cultural change among Tribal community. These scholars have also dealt with the reasons behind the change; the main reason being the contact with non-tribal communities, developmental schemes and education. The adoption by the Tribal communities of the changes occurring due to the above mentioned factors are different from processes such as modernization, Sanskritization and Hinduization.

SOCIO-CULTURAL STATUS OF TRIBES IN INDIA:

The socio-cultural aspect includes several factors such as traditions, customs, education level, rituals, religious practices, etc. According to Tribal traditions, the joint family system used to be the norm, but due to the changing practices some of them are moving to a nuclear family system. In social tradition every family member contributes in earning livelihood. It is observed that, the joint families in Tribes are more contributive and productive, than nuclear families in order to carry out their traditional work of agriculture. But now because of the continuous migration in Tribal society the agricultural land is divided and it's affecting the working traditions of the joint family. In regard to other professional skills of the Tribal people, they are highly skilled in making of fishing nets, traps, household utensils and other crafts. The Tribals do not have single language but the language spoken by them are part of schedule 8 of the Indian constitution. Many of the languages do not have script also. Most Tribal languages are related to the Indo-Aryan group of languages. But, as a matter of fact, it

is believed that they used to speak great mixture of languages which is commonly used in the region they live.

They (Northern Tribes) usually use to speak the mixture of the Bojpuri, Awadhi, Maithli and other regional languages.¹⁷ Beliefs, superstitions and supernatural practices among Tribals are bound by some social beliefs and practices. They perform puja or jadutona as commonly known among the tribal people. Different beliefs connect to social harmony and make them unique.

3. SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGE AMONG TRIBALS:

The socio-cultural change among the Tribals has taken place after independence due to the continuous developmental programs taken up by the government and increased contact with non-tribal communities in the area. discourse of socio-cultural change emerged in the end of 19th century and initial period of the 20th century with the imagination of how societies engaged with their initial primitive life. Charles Darwin propounded the Theory of Evolution. That was also the time when numerous ways of analyzing the change or transformation of human society were theorized by sociologists such as Auguste Comte, John Stuart Mill, Karl Max and Herbert Spencer etc.²⁶ Tribes in India are very rich in the terms of their traditional culture and customs. They practice unique type of culture and traditions. Their culture is very much related to the natural environments in the area where they inhabit.

They have their own territories in which tribal communities live together with the common notion of surviving. A.C. Sinha describes that the tribal communities “are isolated in ecology, demography, economy, politics and other ethnical groups. Such historical image differentiates the tribal communities from the non-tribal and provides them tribal identity”.²⁷ But these specific characteristics has been greatly affected with the continuous interruption of so call civilized people. Due to the continuous interruption of non-tribals into Tribal culture, changes have taken place. With the passing of time, their amazing culture and traditions have started losing importance among the tribal people. A general uneasiness is felt within the community as they are going through this transition phase.

4. EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Educational development of any society or tribe is associated with the access to education, so that they can equally compete with the rest in other developed societies. It is a matter of concern that the tribes are less aware about education. During the past decades, Tribal people were not interested in gaining the knowledge to read and write. Only family education for different situations in life was given to children by parents, so that they can understand their responsibilities in the society. Children help their parents in everyday work and gradually learn how to handle economic tasks. That's why, education in a formal way stands null for Tribal tribe. But now there is increased awareness about education among the Tribals and an understanding that education is essential for bright future. Many social workers local as well as from outside have been struggling for improving the educational standards among the Tribals. Regarding the establishment of the educational institutions, "The first school to be established here was an Ashram Type School (A.T.S.) which was started as part of the Third Five Year Plan. Concrete steps in the direction of educating the Tribal began only after they were declared a Scheduled Tribe in 1967. At present there can be a boost of a number of primary school, and a few secondary and ashram type schools".²⁸

Tribals are one of the many Indian communities who are not aware about educational institutions even in the area where they inhabit. There are a number of educational organizations and institutions but the percentage of educated people in the community is very low. The educated among the Tribals want an early job, that's one reason why they don't opt for higher education.²⁹ There may also be another reason behind this notion, that they are economically not very strong.

5. MODERNIZATION:

Modernization as a discourse emerged in India during the national movement for freedom from British regime.³⁰ The regulative and architectural ideals were, the rebuilding of the country to make it an economically developed and socially egalitarian. The idea was greatly debated and eventually cherished in the Indian constitution.³¹ Modernization theory was used as a tool to explain the shift from a traditional society to a modern one. This concept arose during 1950s and emerged from the western intelligentsia. The theory of modernization has been used to denote the process of social change and changes occur in clusters, not in

isolation, for instance economic modernization. “Economic modernization (increasing division of labour, manufacture for commercial markets, improved technology, professional management) brings with it urbanization, literacy and a decline in traditional authority”.³² A good relation between

social aspects and economic aspects of modernization is acknowledged in the different editions of the World Value Survey, which find a common firm connection between growing individualism and growing prosperity.³³ Regarding the social change of the Tribal society, S.C. Verma says that, youths are very important for any society, they play very important role in all arena of the development of any stream in the society. Tribal youth too are very progressive in this manner. Some of them are working as school teachers, in police service and some are interested in politics at the village level. Even though they are aware about developmental programs, they are not involved with any of the mainstream developmental projects directly. According to Verma, they have neither advancement nor the awareness about their tradition and culture. Large number of youths from Tribal community wants change, so they are neglecting their traditional cultural values. This kind of notion of change in Tribal society is due the influence of modernization.

6. SANSKRITIZATION:

M.N. Srinivas has proposed the concept of Sanskritization as the process of social change or acculturation among the Hindu castes of India. He puts forth this concept to explain some of the features of social change in Indian society, culture and religion. According to Srinivas, Sanskritization process is also occurring among some of the tribal communities such as Bhils and Oraons. Sanskritization as defined by M.N. Srinivas in his book *Social Change in Modern India* (1966) is “the process by which a low Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently, “twice born” caste”.³⁵ Basically these changes are chased by an assertion to achieve a high position in the social hierarchy in comparison to historically accepted claimant position or caste by the local communities of area. It is a time taking process, usually it takes a long period of time, indeed, a generation or more, before the time of ‘appearance’ is accepted. Generally, this change of claimant position is not acceptable by the existing neighboring castes but by the time, by the gap of one generation or two, claimant’s position gets conceded by the

neighboring castes. It shows the social and cultural mobility among the established framework. The process of sanskritization, usually affects the position of a group which is trying to achieve a high position in the local social hierarchy. Srinivas also affirmed that this concept is also pertinent in connection to the tribals and semi tribal groups e.g. the Bhils, Oraons of central India and the Paharis of Himalayan regions. According to Verma, the problems are arising because of social change within their community itself as they are following the life style of other mainstream societies for the betterment of their own life style. Here, it can be said, the process of sanskritization is still active within the Tribal society. Many Tribal youth are trying to mimic other cultures under the influence of modernism and educational development. They are ignoring their own cultures and losing their traditional values.

7. HINDUIZATION

Hinduization has been a dominant phenomenon in the tribal communities for a long time in Uttar Pradesh as well as in other parts of India. Tribal tribes of Uttar Pradesh are not an exception to this. They are living in the state where Hindu castes are dominant numerically and Tribals are surrounded by Hindu and Muslim communities. The tribes of U.P. have expanded their networks with the neighboring non-tribals. Thus, the process of Hinduization is more dominant in the area. Prime reason of tribal's attraction towards Hinduism may be Hindu ceremonies, rituals and beliefs which is modified from the culture and practices of tribes. Hindus were the earliest immigrants into the tribal spaces. Social change among tribals started in twentieth century especially among hill tribes. Census of India, 1901, Madras stated as following: "The forest and hill tribes, however, are well-known to be undergoing a slow process of Hinduizing, or rather Brahmanization, as a result of their contact with the Brahmin customs of their neighbors on the plains, and to often pay a sort of reverence to the Hindu gods while they simultaneously worship their original spirit deities".

8. CONCLUSION

The culture of Tribal tribe is amazing as it is very much related to nature and represent a good kind of social life. They respect their women and family. There is a close bond among them and a great respect for their elders. They live in the lap of nature, so their religious practices

are very much related to nature. They strongly believe in nature, supernatural power, spirits, soul, and ancestors. Their festivals are very eco-friendly but due to influence of Hindu culture they also celebrate Hindu's festivals like Holi and Diwali. They are mainly agriculturist and live in permanent villages. Socio-economic condition of Tribal women is very good. Men and women of the family are engaged in agriculture work. Women of Tribals enjoy more freedom than women from non-tribal communities. But with the passing period of time and due to the modernization, educational development and continuous contact with non-tribal neighbours in the area they live, they have started losing their original socio-cultural norms and values and they are facing the problem of social change through the process of Sanskritization and Hinduization. Increasing influence of Modernization and Hinduization have significant impact on the traditional culture on the Tribal Tribes. So in conclusion we can say that such influence of acculturation made the Tribal culture very dynamic in nature and with period of time it is influenced by the dominant culture of Hindus too. Tribals are closely associated with nature but due to influence of Hindu population their cultural practices have undergone sea change.

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