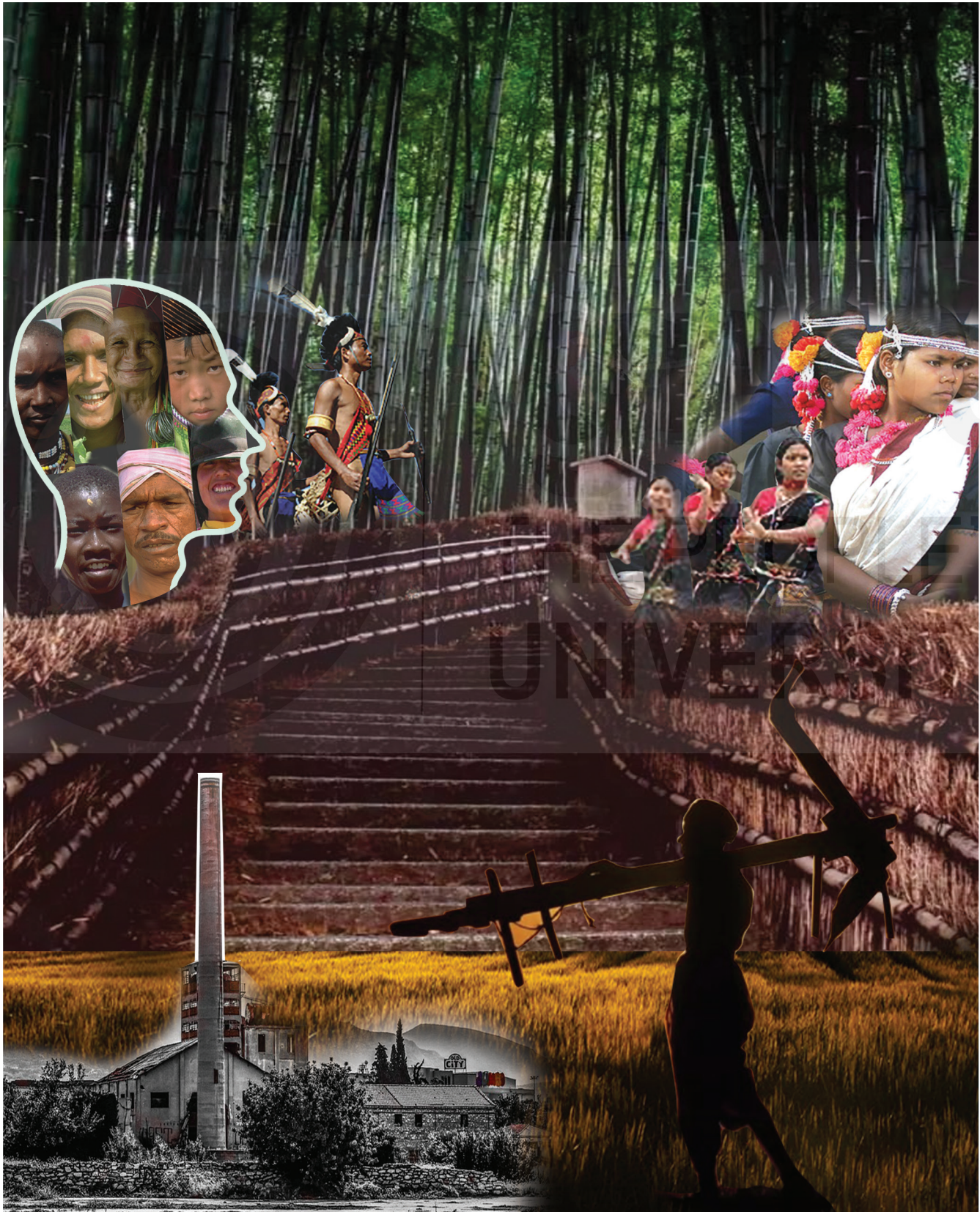


BANE - 146

ANTHROPOLOGY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE



**ANTHROPOLOGY OF
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**

**School of Social Sciences
Indira Gandhi National Open University
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Course Contents

	Pages
Course Introduction	7
Block I: Introduction to Indigenous Peoples	
Unit 1: Concept, Meaning and Definition	11
Unit 2: Global Distribution of Indigenous People	31
Unit 3: Indigenous Peoples of India	53
Unit 4: Classification of Indigenous People	73
Block II: Physical and Biological Variation among Indigenous Population	
Unit 5: Major Morphological and Anthropometric Characteristics	89
Unit 6: Serological and Biochemical Variation	98
Unit 7: Dermatoglyphics and Other Biological Traits	108
Block III: Cultural Change among Indigenous People	
Unit 8: Cultural Contact and Change	121
Unit 9: Education and Social Transformation	133
Unit 10: Tribe-Caste Continuum in India	145
Block IV: Indigenous Knowledge and Natural Resource Management	
Unit 11: Indigenous Knowledge and Natural Resources	159
Unit 12: Indigenous Methods of Conservation of Natural Resources	176
Unit 13: Forest Policy and Tribal Rights	189
Suggested Reading	

COURSE INTRODUCTION

Indigenous and tribal people constitute 5,000 distinct peoples with a population of more than 370 million, spread over 90 different countries in the globe. Whereas in India 705 ethnic groups with a population of 104.3 million are notified as Scheduled Tribes spread across different parts of the country. According to 2011 census they comprise 8.6% of the total population of India. Indigenous and tribal people have been major focus of the anthropology since it emerged as scientific discipline. Anthropologists have spent their professional lives working with indigenous and tribal peoples by writing about culture, which is considered the public domain of anthropological study. The aim of this course is to provide a complete understanding of tribals and indigenous people in terms of their conceptualization, distribution and, demographic feature, social and cultural change with the help of illustration from tribal society in India. Further, the course also provides a comprehensive understanding on racial classification, Bio-genetic variability, nutritional status and archeology of indigenous people. Apart from this the course discusses the issues of tribal problems and Development Strategies, and cultural dimensions of natural resource management.

Learning Outcomes

- Understand the issues related to definition, concept, classifications and distribution of Indigenous people;
- Be familiar with Physical and Biological Variation among Indigenous Population;
- Know the indigenous population of India from socio-cultural point of view;
- Study the cultural change among indigenous people of India
- Acquaint with the practices of Indigenous Knowledge and Natural Resource Management of Indigenous People;
- Understand the contemporary issues of indigenous population of India.

Course Presentation

The course has been divided into four blocks. Each block has been thematically arranged by thirteen units. Now let us discuss about each block in detail.

Block 1: The first block will acquaint the learners with the basic understanding of the definition, concept, classifications and distribution of Indigenous Population on the basis of racial, linguistic, cultural, geographical, and economic features.

Block 2: The second block deals with the study of physical and biological variation among Indigenous Population. The block presents major morphological and anthropometric characteristics of indigenous people and their serological and biochemical variation. Further the block discusses about dermatoglyphics and other Biological Traits.

Block 3: In the block three the learner would be introduced about cultural change among Indigenous People. The block described the concepts like tribe-caste continuum in India, cultural change and social transformation among indigenous people.

Block 4: The block fourth presents indigenous people knowledge about natural resources, conservation practices of natural resources, forest Policy and their rights.

Hope the course material act as a guide for you to achieve your goals. All the Best.



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BLOCK I
Introduction to
Indigenous Peoples

UNIT 1 **CONCEPT, MEANING AND DEFINITION***

Contents

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Meaning and Definition of Indigenous Peoples
 - 1.1.1 Meaning of the Term “Indigenous”
 - 1.1.2 Defining Indigenous Peoples
- 1.2 International Organisations and the Concept of Indigenous Peoples
- 1.3 History of Indigenous Peoples’ Rights and International Law
- 1.4 Summary
- 1.5 References
- 1.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- identify who are indigenous peoples;
- understand the meaning and definition of “indigenous people”;
- comprehend the concept of indigenous peoples in the context of rights;
- be familiar with the emerging international policies and laws for the protection of indigenous peoples; and
- learn about the rights of indigenous peoples under international law.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since anthropology emerged as a scientific discipline in the nineteenth century, indigenous and tribal people have been its major focus. Many anthropologists have spent their professional lives working with indigenous and tribal people whose traditions, language or ways of life differ from those of people from politically dominant ethnic groups.

According to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues there are more than 370 million indigenous people spread across 90 different countries worldwide. Most of the indigenous people live in remote areas of the world. Out of 370 million indigenous people, about 70% live in Asia. They occupy only 20% of the world’s land but consist of and nurture about 80% of the world’s cultural and biological diversity. In the world, there are over 5,000 ethnic cultures of indigenous peoples ranging from the forest people of the Amazon to the tribal people of India, from the Inuit of the Arctic to the Aborigines of Australia. Indigenous people are characterised by the distinctiveness of their unique traditions. They have their own social, cultural, economic and political

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institutions that are distinct from those of the dominant and larger societies in which they live.

Some examples of indigenous peoples are:

- the Lakota in the USA,
- the Mayas in Guatemala,
- the Aymaras in Bolivia,
- the Inuit and Aleutians of the circumpolar region,
- the Saami of northern Europe,
- the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia and
- the Maori of New Zealand. `

Some of the indigenous peoples in Asia are:

- hill tribes of Thailand,
- scheduled Tribes of India,
- numerically small people of the North Siberia,
- national minorities of China,
- cultural minorities of Philippines,
- isolated and alien people of Indonesia,
- aboriginal tribes of Taiwan,
- aborigines of Malaysia, and
- natives of Borneo.

According to Colchester (1995), most of these groups now claim to be 'indigenous', for the term is less prejudicial than the aforementioned labels and it links them all in a common struggle.

These and most other indigenous peoples have retained their distinct characteristics which are different from those of other segments of the national populations. Spread across the world, they are the descendants – according to a common definition – of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. The new arrivals later became dominant through conquest, occupation, settlement or other means.

Indigenous peoples often have much in common with other neglected segments of societies. Like them, they

- lack political representation and participation,
- are economically marginalised and poor,
- lack access to social services, and
- face discrimination.

Despite their cultural differences, diverse indigenous people share similar problems related to the protection of their rights. They strive for recognition of their identities, their ways of life and their right to traditional lands, territories and natural resources. Contrary to other ethnic minorities, that struggle to protect their rights on individual level, indigenous people have always stressed the need to recognise their collective rights.

Despite some positive developments, the rights of indigenous peoples as a whole have traditionally been ignored. As a global reality, efforts of indigenous peoples to have their rights recognised or further developed are relevant in both developing and developed countries. Indigenous peoples suffered from historic injustices due to colonisation and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, preventing them from exercising their right to development that meets their own needs and interests. In general, indigenous people are disproportionately represented, even among the poorest of the poor, in both industrialised and developing countries (Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, 2001).

The rights of indigenous peoples are recognised through various international declarations or conventions such as:

- The 1989 International Labour Organisation Convention No. 169 concerning the indigenous and tribal people in independent countries,
- The 1992 United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, and
- The 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted in September 2007 by the General Assembly, is the most comprehensive and advanced of international instruments dealing with indigenous peoples' individual and collective rights. It is the latest addition to a growing body of international human rights law. UNDRIP is comprehensive in the sense that it covers the full range of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights under international law. The Declaration not only elaborates on these rights but also imposes obligations on states and international organisations and inter-governmental bodies as well (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, <http://www.iwgia.org/culture-and-identity/identification-of-indigenous-people>).

In the context of this framework, the present unit deals with the most disadvantaged and vulnerable group of people in the world today, the Indigenous peoples. The unit is divided into three parts: The first part will describe the background, meaning, definitions and concept of indigenous peoples, while the second and third parts focus on the legal context of the rights of indigenous peoples, including an analysis of the content of the Declaration.

1.1 THE MEANING AND DEFINITION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

In this section, the meaning and different definitions of indigenous people put forth by scholars and international organisations will be introduced.

1.1.1 Meaning of the Term “Indigenous”

Etymologically, the term “*indigenous*” derives from the Latin word “*indigena*” made up of two words, namely *indi*, meaning “within” and *gen* or *genere* meaning “root”. In other words, the term “indigenous” refers to “born in”, “something that comes from the country in which it is found”, “native of”, or “aborigine”, in contrast to “foreign” or “brought in” (see Albert Kwokwo Barume: 2010, 2014).

The word ‘indigenous’, used in a purely adjectival sense, has the common meaning of “from” or “of the original origin” or group or culture regarded as coming from a given place. Anthropology defines the term ‘indigenous’ as referring to someone or something that is native or originating from a given place or the original inhabitants of a specific geographical area.

The word *Indigenous* was adopted by aboriginal leaders in the 1970s after the emergence of indigenous rights movements around the world as a way to identify and unite their communities and represent them in political arenas, such as the United Nations. *Indigenous* was chosen over other terms that leaders felt reflected particular histories and power dynamics, or had been imposed by the colonisers. The word “peoples” is used instead of the word “population” because this term recognises the existence of organised societies with an identity of their own rather than mere groupings sharing some racial or cultural characteristics (ILO: 1998).

Since the 1980s the term indigenous and indigenous people has evolved beyond its specific empirical reference. Combined with the term knowledge and people, it has come to signify a social science perspective as well as a philosophical and ideological position, which rests on recognition of the role of knowledge in the power relations that have come into being by the expansion of Europe.

Activity

Define the term ‘indigenous’.

Indigenous peoples are peoples, communities and nations who claim a historical continuity and cultural affinity with societies endemic to their original territories that developed prior to exposure to the larger connected civilisation associated with the Western culture.

While the term “indigenous peoples” is used in international instruments, these people are often known as

- tribes,
- natives,
- original,
- first people/nations,
- aborigines,
- ethnic groups,
- adivasi, janajati,

- indios,
- pueblos originarios,
- original population,
- hunter-gatherers,
- nomads,
- hill people.

Having been politicised, the term indigenous is a highly contentious term and it is still far from clear.

During the late twentieth century, the term indigenous people evolved into a legal category, which refers to culturally distinct groups that had been affected by the processes of colonisation. To reach its current understanding in international law, the meaning of the term “indigenous” seems to have evolved through several distinct phases (see Albert Kwokwo Barume; 2010, 2014).

Activity

Identify various generic terms used for indigenous people.

1.1.2 Defining Indigenous People

The term indigenous or its equivalent has been used in anthropology to describe groups called tribes for quite some time. However, there is no universal agreement on the definition of the word “indigenous peoples”. Many prominent scholars have developed their definitions with different elements to characterise indigenous people. However, there is no consensus on the definition of the term “indigenous people” in international law. This is because it is almost impossible to create one simple definition to describe a large number of very different communities, each existing within unique social, political and geographical situations.

In her acclaimed work, *The Indigenous Voice in World Politics*, Ranke Wilmer examined the global historical process of moral exclusion undertaken by Western powers against indigenous peoples. She defines indigenous as peoples:

- with tradition-based cultures;
- who were politically autonomous before colonisation;
- who, in the aftermath of colonisation and/or decolonisation, continue to struggle for the preservation of their cultural integrity, economic self-reliance, and political independence by resisting the assimilation policies of nation-states.

Anthropologist John Bodley developed an even more inclusive definition of indigenous people by simply describing them as a group of people who identify themselves with a specific, small-scale cultural heritage.

In 1972 the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) accepted as a preliminary definition a formulation put forward by Mr. José Martínez Cobo, Special Rapporteur on Discrimination against Indigenous Populations.

Box:1

“Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural, social institutions and legal systems.”

The limitations of the definition were subsequently noted by the organisation. The definition applied mainly to pre-colonial populations, excluded other isolated or marginal societies. In 1983 the WGIP enlarged this definition (E/CN.41Sub.2/1983/21Add paragraph 3. 79) to include the following criteria:

Box:2

- (a) they are the descendants of groups, which were in the territory at the time when other groups of different cultures or ethnic origin arrived there;
- (b) precisely because of their isolation from other segments of the country's population they have almost preserved intact the customs and traditions of their ancestors which are similar to those characterised as indigenous;
- (c) they are, even if only formally, placed under a state structure that incorporates national, social and cultural characteristics alien to their own.

In 1986 it was further added that any individual who identified himself or herself as indigenous and was accepted by the group or the community as one of its members was to be regarded as an indigenous person (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1986/7/Add.4.para.381). The draft Universal Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous peoples prepared by the DWIG does not provide a specific definition of indigenous peoples or populations. According to the Chairperson, Ms. Erica Irene Daes, Rapporteur of the Working Group, this was because “historically, indigenous peoples have suffered, from definitions imposed by others” (E/CN.4/Stib.2/AC.4/1995/3, page 3) (Sylvie Motard, 2007).

There is no universal definition of indigenous and tribal peoples, but ILO Convention No. 169 takes a practical approach to the issue and provides objective and subjective criteria for identifying the peoples concerned (see Article 1 of the Convention). These criteria can be summarised as:

Table 1.1: Objective and subjective criteria for identifying the peoples concerned

Box: 3	Subjective criteria	Objective criteria
Indigenous peoples	Self-identification as belonging to an indigenous people	Descent from populations, who inhabited the country or geographical region at the time of conquest, colonisation or establishment of present state boundaries. They retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, irrespective of their legal status.

Tribal peoples	Self-identification as belonging to a tribal people	Their social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community. Their status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations.
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Concept, Meaning and Definition

Source: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/indigenous-tribal/WCMS_503321/lang--en/index.htm

A description of indigenous people given by the World Bank (operational directive 4.20, 1991) points out that,

Box:4

Indigenous Peoples can be identified in particular geographical areas by the presence in varying degrees of the following characteristics:

- a) close attachment to ancestral territories and the natural resources in these areas;
- b) self-identification and identification by others as members of a distinct cultural group;
- c) an indigenous language, often different from the national language;
- d) presence of customary social and political institutions; and
- e) primarily subsistence-oriented production.

As can be seen, no universal definition of indigenous peoples exists and because of the history of political repression, discrimination, and assimilation policies by states, indigenous peoples usually reject to be defined by external agencies. In order to identify rather than “define” indigenous identities, most of the researchers use the working definitions provided by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169 (Tomei and Sweptson, 1996) and the Draft UN Resolution on Indigenous Rights. Both approaches emphasise that self-identification by indigenous peoples should be used as the main criterion, while at the same time underlying the following commonalities shared by indigenous identities, including

- i) historical continuity with pre-colonial societies;
- ii) strong link to territories;
- iii) distinct social, economic, and political systems;
- iv) distinct language, culture, and beliefs; and
- v) self-identification as different from national society.

From an indigenous perspective, the right to self-identification is essential to ensuring that they are respected as peoples with their own identities, cultures, languages, worldviews, and religions (Stavenhagen, 2002).

International organisations more closely follow IWGIA’s (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs) definition in their work programmes. The International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations (UN), and the World

Bank also use the above definition in their work programmes with indigenous peoples. The World Bank further recognises that because indigenous people live in various contexts, there may not be a universally accepted definition for indigenous peoples. Therefore, the World Bank also recognises minority groups that governments have labelled as “indigenous ethnic minorities,” “aboriginals,” “hill tribes,” “minority nationalities,” “scheduled tribes,” or “tribal groups,” to be indigenous communities or peoples.

Check Your Progress

- 1) Discuss the meaning of Indigenous Peoples.

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1.2 INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND THE CONCEPT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

As noted earlier, since there is no universally accepted definition of indigenous peoples, it leads to varying interpretations by states. As a result, UNDRIP (2007), though regarded as an authoritative declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, does not provide any form of formal definition of the term ‘indigenous peoples’. It identifies “indigenous peoples” as being the beneficiaries of the rights contained in the Declaration, without defining the term. Considering the diversity of indigenous peoples, an official definition of “indigenous” has not been adopted by any UN system/body. Instead, the system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on the following criteria:

Box: 5

- self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member;
- historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies;
- strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources;
- distinct social, economic or political systems;
- distinct language, culture and beliefs;
- form non-dominant groups of society; and
- resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.

Source: United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Indigenous peoples

According to the United Nations the most fruitful approach is to identify rather than define indigenous peoples. This is based on the fundamental criterion of self-identification as underlined in a number of human rights documents.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has adopted a definition of the concept of indigenous peoples on two occasions: the statements of coverage of Convention 107 (1957) and Convention No. 169 (1989). When treaty law is examined for a formal legal definition of indigenous peoples, we see that Article 1 of the 1989 ILO Convention 169 provides some clarity (see Box: 3).

Indigenous and tribal peoples are often known by national terms such as native peoples, aboriginal peoples, first nations, adivasi, janajati, hunter-gatherers, or hill tribes. Given the diversity of peoples it aims at protecting, the Convention uses the inclusive terminology of “indigenous and tribal peoples” and ascribes the same set of rights to both groups. In Latin America, for example, the term “tribal” has been applied to certain afro-descendent communities.

The ILO definition includes both historical disruptions caused by colonisation and situations outside that context during the formation of the present state boundaries. This definition could apply to both European settler states as well as Asian or African states. Nevertheless, according to treaty law, this definition applies only to those states who are party to the convention. As of June 2012, ILO Convention 169 was ratified by only 22 countries and the only Asian state that remains a party to this Convention is Nepal, which joined this treaty regime in the year 2007 (ratification ILO C169). Therefore, this definition cannot be termed as established within international law. At the most, it applies only to those states which are party to the convention.

Further, in the earlier ILO Convention 107 (1957), Article 1(b) provided that: “members of tribal or semi-tribal populations in independent countries which are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation and which, irrespective of their legal status, live more in conformity with the social, economic and cultural institutions of that time than with the institutions of the nation to which they belong”. Here the definition of indigenous refers to populations who are descendants of those who inhabited the region at the time of colonisation. The convention remains in force for only 17 countries including a few Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Therefore, this definition also cannot be taken as standard within international law. At the most, it applies only to those who are party to the convention.

The description of “indigenous peoples” in Convention No. 169 contains several elements which are not found in its description of “tribal peoples”:

- *historical continuity* (pre-conquest/colonization societies);
- *territorial connection* (their ancestors inhabited the country or region at the time of conquest/colonisation/creation of the state); and
- *distinct social, economic, cultural and political institutions* (they retain some or all of their own institutions).

However, these conceptual dissimilarities have no legal implications under Convention No. 169 as far as the actual rights of these two groups are concerned; both groups are entitled to the same rights under the Convention. This however may not be the case in the application of other international instruments; in particular the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples.

The statement of coverage of Convention No. 169 is largely based on criteria developed by José Martínez Cobo, whereas Convention No. 107 identifies indigenous peoples as a sub-category of “tribal”; the two groups are separate in Convention No. 169. Moreover, article 1 (2) of Convention No. 169 – similar to the Cobo definition - establishes self-identification as indigenous as a fundamental criterion for determining the groups that are to be identified as indigenous peoples.

Convention No. 169 also describes indigenous peoples as ‘people’ – whereas Convention No. 107 identifies them as ‘populations’.

Article 1 (3) of Convention No. 169 specifies that the use of the term peoples in the Convention shall not be construed as having any implications as regards the rights which may be attached to the term under international law. The objective of this reservation is to avoid challenging international legal questions related to the concept of ‘people’ – in particular the right to self-determination, which under international law is acknowledged as a right of ‘all peoples’. This reservation, or the application of the other provisions of Convention No. 169, shall not – according to article 35 of the Convention – affect the rights of the peoples concerned pursuant to other international instruments or national legislation (UN Document A/61/L.67 12 September 2007). The reservation in article 1 (3) demonstrates the close link between the problem of finding an international agreement on how indigenous peoples should be identified and legal issues.

Although there is no general agreement on the need for a definition, there are several definitions that are widely accepted as guiding principles for the identification of indigenous peoples, including the Cobo definition, and the statement of coverage of the ILO Convention No. 169 (article 1).

While conducting a special study on the problem of discrimination against indigenous peoples, the Special-Rapporteur of the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, José Martínez Cobo, 1986, formulated a working definition of indigenous peoples (see Box 1).

Though this definition was the result of a comprehensive study conducted by the Special Rapporteur on the problem of discrimination against indigenous populations under the recommendation of the Sub-Commission, it was merely a recommendation report (For Cobo’s report, see *supra* note 52) submitted to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations and therefore could not be called a legal document. As shown in chapter 6, there is no apparent and uniform state practice and *opinio juris* concerning this definition; accordingly, the definition of Martínez Cobo cannot be said to have attained the status of customary law (José Martínez Cobo 1986).

The Special-Rapporteur outlined a number of factors that may be relevant for identifying indigenous peoples. This emphasises their historical continuity, for an extended period reaching into the present, and includes:

- occupation of ancestral lands;
- common ancestry with the original occupants of these lands;
- culture;

- language; and
- residence in certain parts of the country, or certain regions of the world.

The Special-Rapporteur included self-identification as ‘indigenous’, as a fundamental criterion:

An indigenous person is one who belongs to an indigenous peoples through self-identification as indigenous (group consciousness) and is recognised and accepted by the group as one of its members (acceptance by the group).

According to Benedict Kingsbury, Cobo’s approach to the definition was controversial due to its requirement of “historical continuity with the pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories.” This approach reflected the classical European case of colonial settlement in the western settler states such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. This requirement did not reflect the reality in many Asian and African countries where there was no clear cause of historical disruption by colonial settlement. The views of Asian states and groups (claiming to be indigenous) greatly differ from Cobo’s definition of indigenous peoples.

Many Asian states opposed the application of the concept of indigenous peoples within their territories and endorsed the definition laid down by Cobo. China, for example, agrees with Cobo’s definition while claiming that “the question of indigenous peoples is the product of European countries’ recent pursuit of colonial policies in other parts of the world” (UN Doc. E/CN.4/WG.15/2 (1995). Here China affirmed the test of ‘Salt-Water’ colonialism, which was a standard test of determining ‘Colonialism’ during the time of decolonisation and self-determination in the 1960s.

India and Bangladesh also denied the status of indigenous peoples within their territories by claiming that “indigenous peoples are descendants of the original inhabitants who have suffered from conquest or invasion from outside.” Asian groups continue to claim recognition and status of indigenous peoples within their countries despite strong oppositions from governments. Thus they tend to go beyond Cobo’s narrow definitional requirement of colonial disruption or conquest. As a result, there is no consensus on the definition laid down by Cobo.

However, this draft definition was not adopted as Martinez Cobo’s definition later became the working definition of the UN Working Group (Copenhagen: IWGIA Document No. 80, 1996). Even though this earlier definition is not legally binding, it can be said to have reflected the intent of the working group members at the time to make the concept of indigenous peoples more universal and applicable beyond classical western colonisation. Alternately, one could also conclude that since this definition was replaced by the latter, it does not reflect the consensus of the group members.

With regard to general principles of law as a source of international law on the definition, there is no literature available presently that argues the possibility of any particular principle of law lending its force, in order to determine a definition of indigenous peoples. Likewise, judicial decisions and scholarly writings, as subsidiary means of determining law, do not point to the existence or emergence of a particular definition as established in international law.

An additional source that provides a definition of indigenous peoples is the World Bank's *Operational Policy 4.10* on indigenous peoples (see Box: 4). This definition can also not be termed as binding in international law because the policies of the Bank are considered more of an internal policy guideline than a binding norm of international nature. Also, the application of the Bank policies are to be observed (in good faith) only by states funded by the Bank. Therefore, the World Bank definition of indigenous peoples cannot be termed as binding in international law.

It is clear that there is no universally accepted and binding definition of the term "indigenous peoples" in international law. With regard to the Asian context too, there is no agreement among states and groups within these states claiming to be indigenous, on the definition.

As discussed earlier, declarations of the UN General Assembly, per se, do not have the binding effect of law. Nevertheless, the significance of the UNDRIP cannot be understated, as it was adopted after decades of consultation and participation from both state parties and indigenous peoples in a legitimate process of norm-building in the field of indigenous rights. Therefore, such a declaration, having been solemnly adopted by the majority of member states of the United Nations, may arguably have a formal status nearing that of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to James Anaya:

Box: 7

It is possible, at least arguably, to understand the Declaration as related to legal obligation within standard categories of international law. First, the Declaration is a statement of rights proclaimed by the vast majority of U.N. member states, through the General Assembly, within the framework of the general human rights obligations established for states by the U.N. Charter, a multilateral treaty. With this status, the Declaration can be seen as embodying or providing an authoritative interpretation of norms that are already legally binding and found elsewhere in international human rights law, including in various human rights treaties.

According to Siegfried Wiessner and James Anaya, indigenous peoples' "right to demarcation, ownership, development, control and use of the lands they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used" has attained the status of customary international law. Thus, it is crucial to examine the customary status of these rights in order to understand the implications of their eventual application to a wider world of indigenous peoples.

Check Your Progress

2) Define the concept of indigenous peoples.

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3) Describe a few definitions of indigenous peoples.

**Concept, Meaning and
Definition**

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1.3 HISTORY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted on 10 December 1948 is still working on to ensure freedom, equality and dignity for all. The universal ideals contained in the Declaration’s 30 Articles range from the most fundamental – the right to life – to those that make life worth living, such as the rights to food, education, work, health and liberty. Emphasising the inherent dignity of every human being, its Preamble underlines that human rights are “the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” (see <https://www.standup4humanrights.org/en/article.html>).

Though the issue of indigenous peoples seems to have received greater attention after World War II in literature, a number of writers describe a long tradition of recognition of the status and rights of indigenous peoples within international law. According to early writings, the contemporary emergence of indigenous rights is not so much the progressive development of new law, but rather the restoration of rights previously existing and recognised.

The international community has shown increasing concern for the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples. Conventions and declarations of the international community provide a broad framework, as well as specific statements regarding the protection of indigenous peoples and their interests, cultures, ways of life, cultural survival and development. It may be noted that some international instruments relating to indigenous peoples have not been ratified by large numbers of the international community.

The emergence of the concept of “indigenous peoples” was a long process. From the year 1920 indigenous peoples have tried to raise the issue of their marginalisation and discrimination. The first international organisation to deal seriously with indigenous peoples’ rights issues was the International Labour Organization (ILO). Within its framework, the ILO Convention Concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries (ILO Convention No. 107) was adopted in the year 1957. It was the first binding document in the field of indigenous peoples’ rights protection.

Convention 107 contained important provisions on land use and inheritance, social security, health and the right to education. After 30 years, ILO Convention No. 107 was revised by the Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal peoples in Independent Countries (ILO Convention No. 169). Convention 169 makes the first attempt to define indigenous peoples based on their descent from the population which inhabited the country or geographical region at the time of conquest or colonisation.

Ever since then, the prominence of indigenous peoples and their rights in international law has progressively increased. At the beginning of the 1970s, the United Nations began examining the issues concerning indigenous peoples in a more detailed way. More and more indigenous peoples' organisations started to receive consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This allowed them to participate within the United Nations' system alongside other non-governmental organisations.

Beginning in the 1970s, non-governmental organisations in Geneva launched ad hoc initiatives on specific human rights issues concerning indigenous peoples. But gradually, the human rights bodies of the United Nations started to look more seriously at the problem as well.

In the Year 1971, the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities appointed a Special Rapporteur (Mr. José R. Martínez Cobo of Ecuador) to undertake a study of the problem of discrimination against indigenous populations. Martínez Cobo concluded that existing human rights standards are "not fully applied" in the case of indigenous communities. It is stated in the report that self-determination must be one of the basic pre-conditions for indigenous peoples' rights as well as the right to keep the territories they possess.

In 1982, ECOSOC created an ad hoc subsidiary organ of the Sub-Commission devoted to indigenous peoples: the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. The aim of the working group was to review the existing standards on indigenous rights protection and contribute to their development. The working group, composed of representatives of governments as well as indigenous peoples and organisations, is one of the largest human rights forums in the U.N. system, bringing in its fold more than seven hundred participants regularly. Its tasks include the building of dialogue between governments and indigenous peoples, reviewing national situations, and developing international standards concerning the promotion and protection of indigenous peoples' rights.

The next landmark in the history of indigenous rights recognition is the Draft Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, produced in 1993-1994 based on eight years of documentation of reports to the working group. Among its major achievements, the working group developed a Draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples, which is being submitted to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (through another ad hoc working group of the latter). The working group consists of more than 200 indigenous organisations which participate and meet once a year. The process should lead to the adoption of the Declaration by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

Another declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples is also being developed at the regional level, within the Inter-American system.

In the year 1985, the UNGA established the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations to enable representatives of indigenous organisations to attend the sessions of the relevant U.N. bodies dealing with indigenous issues. The 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), commonly referred to as the Earth Summit, was a turning point for indigenous peoples.

Not only were they recognised as a “major group” of civil society but, for the first time, they were able to participate and influence processes relating to the environment.

Agenda 21 adopted by the UNCED in 1992 recognises the actual and potential contribution of indigenous and tribal peoples to sustainable development. The 1992 Convention on Biodiversity calls on contracting parties to respect traditional indigenous knowledge with regard to biodiversity and its sustainable use. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action emerging from the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights recognise the dignity and unique cultural contributions of indigenous peoples, and strongly reaffirm the commitment of the international community to the economic, social, and cultural well-being of indigenous peoples and their enjoyment of the fruits of sustainable development.

As a sign of the increasing importance of indigenous issues, August 9 was proclaimed International Day of the World's Indigenous peoples by the United Nations, first in 1994, to promote and protect the rights of the World's Indigenous population. This day also commemorates the achievements and contributions that Indigenous peoples make in the world. August 9 also marks the first time the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations met in Geneva in 1982. Its goal was to facilitate the General Assembly's adoption of the Declaration by 2004. In 1995, it launched the International Decade of the World's Indigenous peoples (1995-2004). The International Day of the World's Indigenous peoples is observed on August 9 every year during the International Decade of the World's Indigenous peoples (resolution 49/214).

The period of 1995-2004 was proclaimed as the International Decade of Indigenous peoples with the theme “Indigenous peoples: partnership in action”. In 2001, a “Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples” was appointed to receive information and communications on violations of indigenous peoples' rights.

A U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has also been established (as an advisory body to ECOSOC) in order to focus on global issues related to indigenous peoples, especially in the fields of human rights, economic and social development, culture, education, health, and the environment. After taking more than 20 years to draft and to accept the draft, The Declaration was adopted by UN General Assembly in September 2007. It establishes the rights of Indigenous peoples to the protection of their cultural property as well as the rights to education, employment, health, religion, language, and more. The adoption of the Declaration caused controversies, especially regarding its regulations relating to land rights for indigenous communities. However, it represents a global instrument of indigenous peoples' rights protection.

Moreover, apart from ad hoc initiatives and instruments, the diversity of indigenous peoples has been taken into account by other general instruments on human rights, as well as within the realm of international environmental law and cultural diversity. The process of drafting engaged the representatives of indigenous communities who got the possibility to promote their own views on the rights that should be granted to them (Alessandro Fodella 2006).

The Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples: This is the most comprehensive statement of the rights of indigenous peoples to date, establishing collective rights to a greater extent than any other document in international human rights law. It establishes the rights of indigenous peoples to the protection of their cultural property as well as the rights to education, employment, health, religion, language, and more. It also protects the rights of the indigenous peoples to own land collectively.

The Declaration testifies to the commitment of the international community to the protection of both the individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples. It emphasises their right to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue their development in accordance with their aspirations and needs. It has become a major tool for Indigenous peoples to defend themselves against discrimination, racism, oppression, marginalisation and exploitation.

Among the human rights the Declaration defines and protects, the following are of particular importance to indigenous peoples:

- The right to self-determination.
- The right to collective rights.
- The right to development.

The full text of the draft Declaration, consisting of 46 Articles, was divided into 9 parts as given below.

- Part 1. Fundamental Rights: Non-discrimination, equality, self-determination (Articles 1-3)
- Part 2. Life and Security (Articles 4-7)
- Part 3. Culture, Religion, and Language Laws (Articles 8-13)
- Part 4. Education, Media, and Employment (Articles 14-16)
- Part 5. Participation and Development (Articles 17-24)
- Part 6. Land and Resources (Articles 25-29)
- Part 7. Self-Government and Indigenous peoples (Articles 30-36)
- Part 8. Implementation (Articles 37-42)
- Part 9. Minimum Standards (Articles 43-46)

Many human rights advocates regard Article 3, the right of self-determination, as the most significant feature of the Declaration, with all other rights supporting that essential freedom. The complete text of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples can be downloaded at <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instate/declaration.html>.

The issue of the rights of indigenous peoples has thus slowly but steadily gained importance for the international community. This has led to an international legal framework that is comprised of individual and collective rights stemming

from general and ad hoc instruments, deriving from different sources, and belonging to different areas of international law.

Concept, Meaning and Definition

Check Your Progress

- 4) Name the organisations that contributed to the rights of indigenous peoples.

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- 5) Explain briefly about the definition related problems in international law.

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1.4 SUMMARY

There are approximately 370 million indigenous peoples in the world, belonging to 5,000 different groups, in 90 countries. Indigenous peoples live in every region of the world, but about 70 per cent live in Asia. Indigenous peoples have historically been among the poorest and most excluded demographic group in the world. They have not only faced serious discrimination in terms of their basic rights to their ancestral property, languages, cultures, and forms of governance, but also in terms of access to basic social services (education, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, housing, etc.) and the essential material conditions for a satisfying life.

Presently, there is no universally accepted definition of the word “indigenous peoples.” However, many development agencies and institutions have developed their own definitions with different elements to characterise indigenous peoples. Considering the diversity of indigenous peoples, any specific definition may have the effect of excluding some indigenous groups from the category. A strict definition may also serve as an excuse for governments not to recognise indigenous peoples in their jurisdiction. Hence, no legal definition of indigenous peoples is either necessary or desirable, remains a prevailing view.

As a global reality, efforts of indigenous peoples to have their rights recognised or further developed are relevant in both developing and developed countries. Indigenous peoples suffered from historic injustices due to colonisation and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, preventing them from exercising their right to development that meets their own needs and interests.

In general, indigenous peoples are disproportionately represented among the poorest of the poor in both industrialised and developing countries. The rights

of indigenous peoples are significantly recognised through various international declarations or conventions, such as

- The 1989 International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 concerning the indigenous and tribal peoples in independent countries,
- The 1992 United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity,
- The Draft UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples, and
- The 2007 United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples.

The above international laws are particularly relevant to the recognition and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples.

The landmark document ‘The 2007 United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the culmination of decades of drafting and negotiations by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in which more than one hundred indigenous organisations and thousands of indigenous individuals participated. The Declaration testifies to the commitment of the international community to protect both individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples. It emphasises the right of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures, and traditions and to pursue their development in accordance with their aspirations and needs. It has become a major tool for indigenous peoples to defend themselves against discrimination, racism, oppression, marginalisation and exploitation. Among the human rights the Declaration defines and protects indigenous peoples, these are of particular importance to indigenous peoples.

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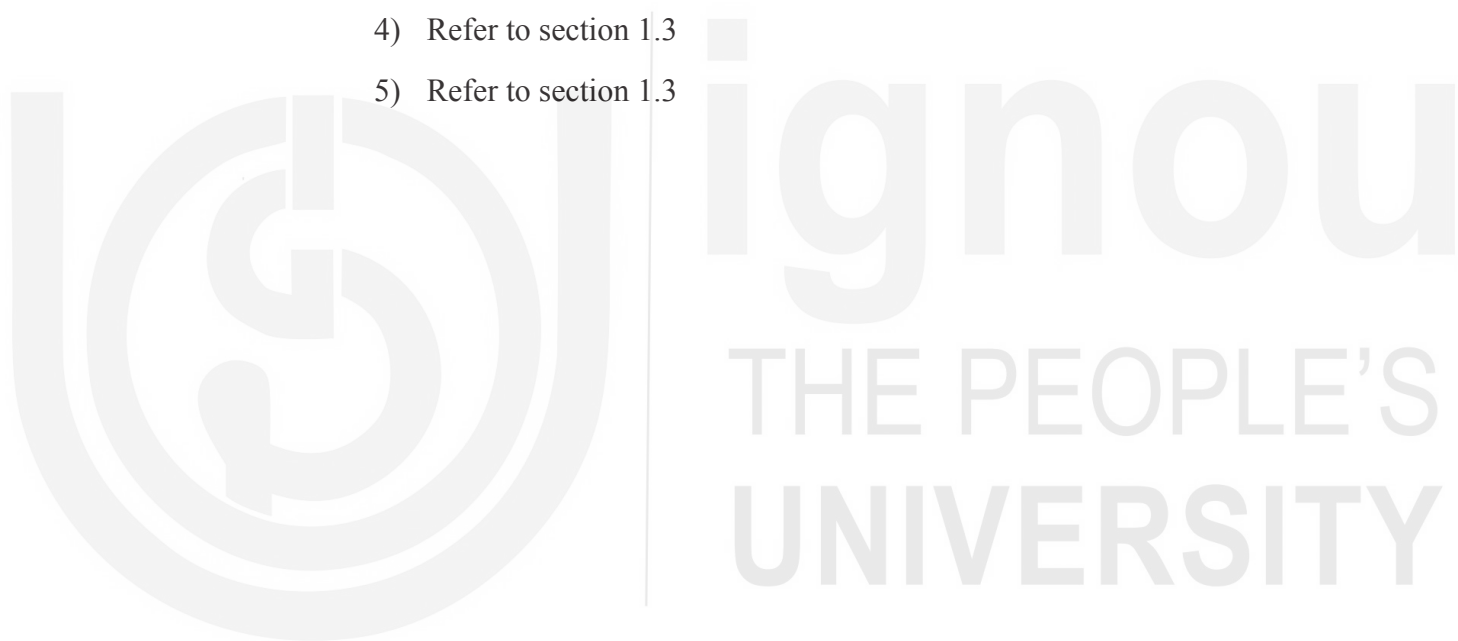
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1.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Refer to sub-section 1.1.1
- 2) Refer to section 1.2
- 3) Refer to section 1.2
- 4) Refer to section 1.3
- 5) Refer to section 1.3



UNIT 2 GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES*

Contents

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Biological and Cultural Diversity
- 2.2 Estimated Population and Distribution
- 2.3 Global Overview of Indigenous Peoples
 - 2.3.1 Asia
 - 2.3.2 Africa
 - 2.3.3 Latin America
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 References
- 2.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the biological and cultural diversity of indigenous people;
- explain how indigenous people are deprived of their rights;
- elucidate the estimated numbers and distribution of the indigenous population in the world; and
- explain the global overview of indigenous people types and the recognition of their rights.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

In the global arena indigenous peoples are difficult to define or classify. Indigenous peoples include heterogeneous cultures, religions and forms of social and economic organisation. They may be organised in tribal societies or be mobile peoples, may live in remote areas of states which contain valuable natural resources, practice various means of livelihood, such as hunting and foraging, shifting agriculture, pastoral nomadism and so on. Colonialism has influenced the lives and practices of many indigenous peoples in varied ways and to different extents, however, some isolated tribal peoples have still not been affected by colonialism, for example,

- the Amazonian Yanomami tribes,
- the Penan tribe of Sawarak (East Malaysia),
- the Dani tribes of Papua (discovered in 1938) and

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- a Papuan tribe discovered in 1993, who never had contact with the outside world.

Some indigenous peoples have maintained their traditional lifestyles and practice their ancient religions, whereas some others have been influenced by religions alien to them, like Christianity, Islam or Buddhism. Some indigenous peoples may be said to be living on the peripheries of so-called high cultures, whereas others have been assimilated in cities and towns. Some of their members have graduated from universities while others are considered as social underdogs or victims of alcoholism (Pritchard 2001). The global distribution of indigenous peoples makes a significant contribution to the world's cultural diversity.

There are indigenous peoples in every continent, representing thousands of cultures, languages and unique backgrounds. International organisations, including the UN, acknowledge that there are currently approximately 30 'uncontacted' peoples in countries such as Brazil, Peru and Papua New Guinea, known only through anthropological evidence.

2.1 BIOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Each indigenous culture has its unique tradition. Despite the enormous diversity among indigenous people, there are some features that indigenous peoples, from a more general perspective and to varying degrees, have in common. This section attempts to highlight such features.

According to the United Nations Permanent Forum about Indigenous peoples, it is estimated that there are more than 370 million indigenous people spread across 90 different countries worldwide. Indigenous peoples, also called tribal, aboriginal or autochthonous peoples, national minorities or first peoples, are best defined by using several criteria applicable in different countries. Indigenous peoples from various parts of the world may have all or part of the following attributes:

- 1) are the descendants of the original inhabitants of a territory which was overcome by conquest;
- 2) are "ecosystem peoples", such as shifting or permanent cultivators, herders, hunters and gatherers, fishers and/or handicraft makers, who adopt a multi-use strategy of appropriation of nature;
- 3) practice a small-scale, labour-intensive form of rural production which produces little surplus and has low energy needs;
- 4) do not have centralised political institutions, organise their life at the level of community, and make decisions on a consensus basis;
- 5) share a common language, religion, moral values, beliefs, clothing and other identifying characteristics as well as a relationship to a particular territory;
- 6) have a different world-view, consisting of a custodial and non-materialist attitude to land and natural resources, based on a symbolic interchange with the natural universe;
- 7) are subjugated by a dominant culture and society; and

8) consist of individuals who subjectively consider themselves to be indigenous.

Global Distribution of Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous peoples are characterised by their distinctively unique traditions. They have their own social, cultural, economic and political institutions that are distinct from those of the dominant and larger societies in which they live. There are over 5,000 different languages and ethnic cultures of indigenous peoples ranging from the forest peoples of the Amazon to the tribal peoples of India and from the Inuits of the Arctic to the Aborigines of Australia (see Map below).

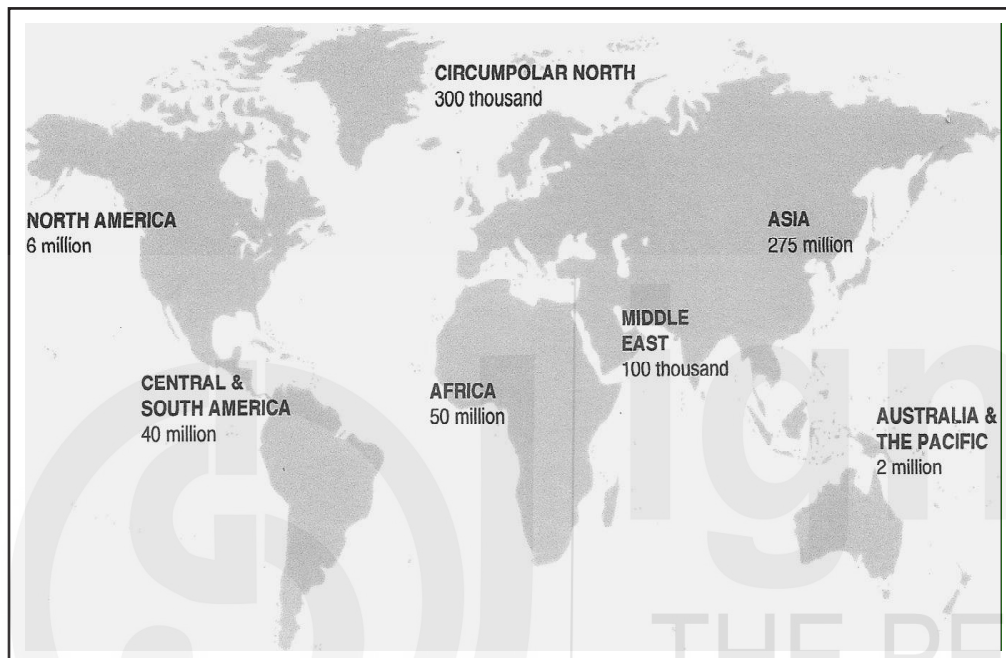


Fig. 2.1: World Map of Indigenous Population

Source: <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB7/Chapter%202%20P7-P14.pdf>

Activity

Write a few general criteria of the world's indigenous peoples.

Even though today many indigenous peoples have moved from forest to urban areas, due to loss of forest and agricultural land and poor living conditions, many still live traditional lifestyles in their territories. We can distinguish the following different lifestyles among the indigenous peoples:

Box: 1

- **Pastoralists:** who are mainly dependent on keeping cattle for own consumption, clothing and shelter, also for trade and barter. These people often lead nomadic or semi-nomadic life. Many nomadic peoples in Africa, such as the Tuareg, and the Van Gujjars in India, are pastoralists.
- **Hunter-gatherers:** who hunt for game, fish and bird and gather fruits and insects from the forest for own consumption, also for trade and barter. Non-timber forest products are used as medicine, stimulants, poison and pesticides. Many indigenous peoples of the Amazon, the Penan in Malaysia and the Ogiek in Kenya, Chenchu and Birhor of India are hunter-gathers.

- Farmers: the so-called shifting cultivators, who farm on a small scale to provide for the basic needs of the family, with often nothing left to trade. Farming is usually complemented with hunting, fishing and gathering. The indigenous peoples of the highlands of South America, such as the Aymara, and many of the tribal peasants in India are subsistence farmers.

It is possible to find indigenous peoples carrying out many different useful activities, at the same time managing the planet's ecosystems:

- as forest-dwellers in the tropical lowlands or mountains,
- as pastoralists in Savannas and other grasslands, or
- as nomadic or semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers in forests, prairies and deserts.

Fishing is the principal economic activity and source of food for several million coastal and island dwellers, as well as many indigenous peoples inhabiting the margins of rivers (Victor M. Toledo).

The above lifestyles of indigenous peoples make it possible for them to survive in harsh conditions, sustainable living in diverse natural environments, using their indigenous knowledge system. For indigenous peoples, land means life, not only because they depend on it for their daily subsistence, but because their whole cultural, social and spiritual identity is connected with it. It is widely recognised that indigenous peoples, due to their ways of life, their attitude towards nature and their ecological knowledge have played a crucial role in the conservation of biological diversity on the globe.

For indigenous peoples, land and in general nature have a sacred quality that is almost absent in Western thinking. The land is revered and respected and its inalienability is reflected in virtually every indigenous cosmo vision. Indigenous people do not consider the land as merely an economic resource. Under indigenous cosmo visions, nature is the primary source of life that nourishes supports and teaches. Nature is, therefore, not only a productive source but the centre of the universe, the core of culture and the origin of ethnic identity. At the heart of this deep bond is the perception that all living and non-living things and natural and social worlds are intrinsically linked.

For indigenous peoples, spirituality and cultural identity cannot be separated from the natural environment. Their ceremonies not only regulate and confirm the relationship between individuals, clans, societies and nations but also between all lives on earth. They are also practiced for the transmission of norms and values and for educating the youth. Cultural objects, which play an important role in these ceremonies, can be physical objects, but they can also be a part of a landscape, such as a mountain or a waterfall. That is why the dispossession of many of these objects, by private collectors or museums, or through loss of land, has eroded indigenous cultures significantly.

Indigenous peoples have their administrative structures, customary laws and justice systems that may differ completely from the often western-based systems which now prevail in most countries. Some people were able to preserve these

structures and systems over time, but many have disappeared under the pressure of the now dominant structures and systems. In some countries, however, such as Ethiopia and Colombia, traditional justice systems are acknowledged. They coexist with the national justice systems, which is referred to as legal pluralism. In other situations, such as in Mindanao in the Southern part of the Philippines, indigenous peoples are working to revive their legal structures and customary laws.

According to a study from World Wildlife Fund (WWF) by Gonzalo Oviedo, there is a strong correlation between areas with high biological diversity and areas with high cultural diversity. Eighty percent of the Global 200 eco-regions (areas identified as richest in biological diversity) are inhabited by one or more indigenous people(s). In their long history of managing the environment, indigenous peoples have accumulated vast amounts of indigenous ecological knowledge, which is embodied in their culture and languages. Indigenous knowledge is unique to a given culture or society, which is an important part of the lives of the people. It is a social capital for them to sustain their life in food security, human and animal health, education, and natural resource management. According to the United Nations Environmental Programme, up to eighty percent of the world's indigenous populations rely on indigenous knowledge systems for their sustenance (UN document UNEP/GC.23/INF/23, p.18.).

A key characteristic for most of them is that the survival of their particular way of life depends on access and rights to their traditional lands and the natural resources thereon. They suffer from discrimination as they are regarded as less developed and less advanced than other more dominant sectors of society. They often live in inaccessible regions, often geographically isolated, and suffer from various forms of marginalisation, both politically and socially. They are subjected to domination and exploitation within national political and economic structures that are commonly designed to reflect the interests and activities of the national majority. This discrimination, domination and marginalisation violates their human rights as peoples/communities, threatens the continuation of their cultures and ways of life and prevents them from being able to genuinely participate in decisions regarding their future and forms of development (ACHPR and IWGIA:2006)

Activity

Briefly describe the traditional occupations of indigenous people.

Check Your Progress

- 1) Describe the criteria on which indigenous people are defined.

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- 2) Write briefly about the different lifestyles of indigenous people with examples.

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2.2 ESTIMATED POPULATION AND DISTRIBUTION

International Labour Organisation, Survival International and the International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs have estimated that the overall indigenous population ranges between 300 and 500 million, spread across some 90 different countries worldwide, which represent the larger part of the world's cultural diversity. Given a global population of just under 6 billion in early 2000, the indigenous population would make up about 5 per cent of the total population. A more recent figure claims this number to be as high as 370 million indigenous people. The World Bank has widely disseminated a rough estimate that 60 million of the 350 million people living inside or close to dense forests, and largely dependent on forests for subsistence and income. Thus, by considering characteristics other than language, it is possible to enlarge the number of indigenous peoples in the contemporary world.

It is also estimated that up to 15 per cent of the world's poor, and up to one-third of the rural poor, are indigenous (UNPFII). Most of the indigenous people live in remote areas of the world. Out of 370 million indigenous people, about 70% live in Asia. Based on studies it shows that more than half of the world's indigenous are in China and South Asia. They occupy only 20% of the world's land surface but consist of and nurture about 80% of the world's cultural and biological diversity.

Nations with a strong presence of indigenous peoples are:

- Papua New Guinea (77%),
- Bolivia (70),
- Guatemala (47),
- Peru (40),
- Ecuador (38),
- Myanmar (33),
- Laos (30),
- Mexico (12) and
- New Zealand (12).

On the other hand, considering the absolute number of people recognised as indigenous, India and China can be identified as nations with a high indigenous population.

Table 2.1: Indigenous Population by region (IWGIA 2008) in millions

China	105.23
South Asia	94.90
Former Soviet Union	0.40
Southeast Asia	29.84
South America	19.53
Africa	21.98
Central America/Mexico	19.07
Arabia	15.41
USA/Canada	3.29
Japan/ Pacific Islands	0.00
Australia/New Zealand	0.46
Green Land/Scandinavia	0.10
Total	310.21

**Global Distribution of
Indigenous Peoples**

Source: Compiled from IWAGIA 2008 by authors

**Fig. 2.2: Indigenous Peoples World Map**

Source: <https://www.slideserve.com/china/indigenous-peoples-carlos-motta-2009> ppt free download-ID1909791

Measured by spoken language, the entire world's people belong to anywhere between 5,000 to 7,000 cultures. It is estimated that 4,000 to 5,000 of these are indigenous cultures. Thus, indigenous peoples account for as much as 80 to 90 per cent of the world's cultural diversity. Based on the inventories done by linguists, we can draw up a list of the regions and countries with the greatest degree of cultural diversity in the world.

According to Ethnologue, the best existing catalogue of the world's languages, of the 6,703 languages (mostly oral), the percentage of languages found by regions are:

- 32% in Asia,
- 30% in Africa,
- 19% in the Pacific,

- 15% in the Americas and
- 3% in Europe (Grimes, 1996).

Only twelve countries account for 54 per cent of human languages. These countries are Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Nigeria, India, Australia, Mexico, Cameroon, Brazil, Zaire, Philippines, USA and Vanuatu.

Indigenous peoples occupy a substantial share of the world's little disturbed tropical and boreal forests, mountains, grasslands, tundra and desert, along with large areas of the world's coasts and near-shore waters, including mangroves and coral reefs (Durning, 1993). The importance of indigenous territories to biodiversity conservation is therefore evident.

In fact, indigenous peoples control, legally or not, immense areas of natural resources. Among the most remarkable examples are the cases of:

- the Inuit people (formerly known as Eskimo) who govern a region covering one-fifth of the territory of Canada (222 million hectares),
- the indigenous communities of Papua New Guinea whose lands represent 97% of the national territory, and
- the tribes of Australia with nearly 90 million hectares area.

Although numbering just above 250,000 only, the Indians of Brazil possess an area of over 100 million hectares, mainly in the Amazon basin, distributed in 565 territories. Nearly 60% of the priority areas in central and southern Mexico recommended for protection are also inhabited by indigenous peoples and half of the 30,000 rural communities are distributed in the ten most biologically rich states of the Mexican territory. In summary, on the global scale, it is estimated that the total area under indigenous control probably reaches between 12 and 20 percent of the earth's land surface.

The best example of notable overlaps between indigenous peoples and biologically rich areas is the case of tropical humid forests. In fact, there is a clear correspondence between areas of remaining tropical forests and the presence of indigenous peoples in Latin America, the Congo Basin in Africa, and several countries of tropical Asia, such as the Philippines, Indonesia and New Guinea. The strong presence of indigenous peoples in Brazil, Indonesia and Zaire alone, which account for 60 per cent of all the tropical forest of the world, is remarkable.

In Latin America, this geographical relationship has been strikingly verified for the Central American countries by a National Geographic Society map produced by a project headed by Mac Chapin in 1992. The same pattern can be found in the tropical humid areas of Mexico inhabited by 1.6 million indigenous people, and in many regions of the Amazonian basin. It has been estimated that in Amazonian, over 1 million indigenous people of eight countries possess over 135 million hectares of tropical forests (Davis & Wall, 1994).

Many temperate forests of the world also overlap with indigenous territories, for example, in India, Myanmar, Nepal, Guatemala, the Andean countries (Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia) and Canada. Similarly, over two million islanders

of the South Pacific, most of who are indigenous peoples, continue fishing and harvesting marine resources in high biodiversity areas (as coral reefs).

Activity:

Identify and name the top five countries according to the population of indigenous peoples.

2.3 GLOBAL OVERVIEW OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

In this section, we will outline the indigenous peoples and communities of the world with regard to their identity of rights. More than 70% of people in Asia identify themselves as belonging to indigenous people.

2.3.1 Asia

Asia has the highest concentration of indigenous and tribal peoples in the world. United Nations has estimated that two-thirds of the world's indigenous peoples live in Asia, which is home to more than 2,000 civilizations and languages. There are 260 million indigenous peoples in Asia with India alone accounting for over 90 million, making it the most culturally diverse region in the world. Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal also have substantial indigenous and tribal populations living within their borders. They are the “aboriginal” or “native” people of the lands in which they live. Most of the indigenous people in Asia are small in numbers. Some have populations of just a few thousand, or even just a few hundred. Even though they are in small numbers, they have their distinct language, culture, customary laws and social and political institutions that are very different from those of the dominant ethnic groups in their countries. While there exists an enormous diversity among indigenous peoples, some aspects common to them are the strong cultural attachment to and the dependence of their livelihoods on land, forests or the sea, and the natural resources therein.



Fig. 2.3: Images of Asian Indigenous Peoples

Source: <https://www.landcoalition.org/en/explore/our-work/indigenous-peoples/>

In the Asian context, people with indigenous attributes are known by different names, such as:

- ‘scheduled tribes’ or ‘janajati’ in India,
- ‘tribes’ in Bangladesh, Nepal and Malaysia,

- ‘nationalities’ in China, and
- ‘cultural communities’ in the Philippines.

For the indigenous people of Asia, the above names are foreign and it is difficult for them to translate these into their own languages. Traditionally, they used names given to them by their ancestors. In many cases, the indigenous people feel that the names given to them by other people are derogatory, and resent them, since they often imply notions of cultural inferiority, being “primitive” or “backward”. Some of these names are:

- *Chuncheat* (meaning “ethnicity”, or literally “national people” in Cambodia),
- *upajati* (“tribal”) in Bangladesh,
- *sakai* (literally meaning “slave”) used in Thailand for some hunter-gatherer groups, or
- *fan* (“primitive people”) introduced by the Han Chinese settlers when they came to the island of Taiwan.

However, in some countries, the popular or official terms have come to be accepted and are now often used (like “tribal” in India).

Since it has been said that almost two-thirds of the world’s indigenous peoples live in Asia with high cultural diversity, generalizations about these peoples are likely to result in over-simplifying the situations of these complex and diverse peoples (See IWGIA). Irrespective of their legal status or the terminology used, many indigenous peoples of Asia experience non-recognition of their cultural identity, exclusion and marginalisation.

Table 2.2: Common external designations of ethnic groups

Country	Common external designations	Number of ethnic groups	Estimated total population
Bangladesh	Pahari, Jumma, Adivasi, Tribal	45	1.7 - 3.7 m 1.2 - 2.5%
Burma/Myanmar	Ethnic Minorities	135	14.4 - 19.2 m 30 - 40%
Cambodia	Indigenous Minorities	19-21	101,000 - 190,000 0.9 - 1.4%
China	Ethnic Minorities	400 (grouped into 55 officially recognised “ethnic minorities”)	105 m 8.5%
India	Scheduled Tribes, Adivasi, Janajati	622-635 (622 recognised “Scheduled Tribes”)	84.32 m 8.3%
Indonesia	Masyarakat Adat	over 700	50 - 70 m 20 - 29%
Japan	Indigenous Peoples (now officially applied to the Ainu)	2	Ainu: 50,000-100,000 (0.04 - 0.08%) Ryukans: 1.3 m (1%)

Global Distribution of Indigenous Peoples

Country	Common external designations	Number of ethnic groups	Estimated total population
Laos	Ethnic Minorities	ca. 200 (49 officially recognised “ethnic minorities”)	2.4 - 4.8 m 35-70%
Malaysia	Orang Asli, Natives, Orang Asal	97	3.4 m 12%
Nepal	Adivasi, Janajati, Indigenous Nationalities	over 80 (59 recognised “Indigenous Nationalities”)	10.6 m 37.1%
Pakistan	Adi vaas, Tribal People	20	35 - 42 m 21 - 25%
Philippines	Indigenous Cultural Communities/ Indigenous Peoples	110 officially recognised Indigenous Peoples	6.9-12 m 10-15%
Thailand	Ethnic Minorities, Hill Tribes, Hill/ Mountain People	over 25 (10 officially recognised “hilltribes”)	over 900,000 1.5%
Vietnam	Ethnic Minorities	over 90 (53 officially recognised “ethnic minorities”)	10 m 13.8%

Source: Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) Chiang Mai 2010

India

India, the second-largest tribal-dominated area after Africa, is one of the most fascinating nations from an anthropological point of view. India ratified the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107) in 1958. The term “indigenous peoples” is not officially recognized or used in India. The position of the Government of India with regard to the usage of the term as understood in the United Nations is that all Indians are indigenous to India (Bijoy, C.R., and Tiplut Nongbri, 2013). For practical purposes, however, those sections of people declared as falling within the administrative category of “scheduled tribes” are often considered to be indigenous people (Bijoy, C.R., Shankar Gopalakrishnan, and Shomona Khanna, 2010). The total population of those falling within the scheduled tribe category, as per the 2011 census, is 104.3 million, constituting 8.6 per cent of the total population of the country.

Scheduled tribes are recognized in 30 states and union territories of India and a total of 705 distinct communities designated as scheduled tribes speaking a plethora of different languages. As a legally recognised social group, they are referred to as Scheduled Tribes (STs) and as such are accorded special status in the Indian Constitution on account of their deprivation and centuries of exclusion. While the government of India avoids the terminology ‘indigenous’ to refer to these communities, they are popularly known as Adivasis (meaning original inhabitants). Along with being geographically and socially isolated, the Adivasis have been historically politically under represented and the regions

they inhabit, are economically underdeveloped. As different tribal groups are viewed by the Government as being at different stages of social, economic and educational development, 75 groups within the scheduled tribes category have further been categorized as “particularly vulnerable tribal groups”.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is home to around 3 million indigenous people (Adivasis and Jumma), from 45 different ethnic groups, who between them speak over 30 different languages. They are located predominantly in the North and South-eastern parts of the country, with the majority found in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), where there are 11 distinct groups of indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples in Bangladesh are among the most marginalized and excluded groups in society. This fact is also reflected in the national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), which includes a section on Adivasi/ Ethnic Minority Groups.

Nepal

Nepal is home to 59 officially recognised groups of indigenous peoples (known as Adivasi-Janajatis), with distinct cultures, languages and belief systems. Collectively they comprise about 40 % of the population. Indigenous peoples are found across the country, in the mountains, hills and plains; the largest concentration is found in the east. Although indigenous peoples of Nepal range from small hunter-gatherer communities to those with an advanced urban culture, they are predominately concentrated in remote rural areas and mainly rely on subsistence farming for their livelihood.

Pakistan

Estimates suggest that the population of indigenous/ tribal people in Pakistan is about 15% of the total population of 126 million. As in other parts of the world, indigenous and tribal peoples in Pakistan are among the most marginalized and excluded groups in society, although considerable diversity exists between the different groups. Pakistan is also home to a significant number of smaller indigenous and tribal peoples, such as

- the Kihals and Mors, indigenous peoples of the Indus,
- the Buzdar from the Suleiman Mountains and
- the Kailasha people in Chitral.

These smaller groups, many of whom are semi-nomadic boat people or pastoralists, are often not accounted for in National Census figures. In many cases, their vulnerability is further exacerbated by mainstream development processes.

Cambodia

Cambodia is a multi-ethnic society with a large majority of ethnic Khmer. The National Population Census 1998 identified 17 indigenous groups in Cambodia based on their spoken language. According to this source, the total number of indigenous peoples was about 101,000 or 0.9% of the then total population of 11.4 million. The indigenous populations constitute close to one percent

of the total population and are often called hill tribes or highlanders (Khmer Loeu) because most of these peoples live in the four north-eastern provinces of Monduliri, Ratanakiri, Stung Treng and Kratie, which are considered upland areas.

Philippines

It is estimated that 12-15 million indigenous people inhabit the Philippines (approximately 15-20% of the total population), speaking around 170 different languages and belonging to 110 ethnic communities. According to the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the majority (61%) of indigenous peoples in the country live in Mindanao, while a third (33%) are in Luzon, and the remaining (6%) population are in the Visayas.

Activity

Write the names of a few indigenous peoples from each Asian country.

Check Your Progress

3) Short notes on Asian indigenous people.

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2.3.2 Africa

Africa is home to a large proportion of world indigenous peoples. These peoples identify themselves and are identified by others, according to a range of criteria, which may vary from country to country, as well as within countries. However, despite the great diversity of situations and characteristics of indigenous peoples in the Africa region, they also have many commonalities between themselves, as well as with indigenous peoples the world over.

According to the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWAGIA), it is estimated that there are around 50 million indigenous people in Africa. As per the conceptualization of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and international mechanisms dealing with indigenous peoples' rights, many indigenous peoples in Africa are generally understood as mostly nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists and hunter/gatherers as well as small-scale farmers.

The indigenous people of Africa practice different cultures; they have different social institutions and observe different religious systems. Some examples of hunter-gatherer communities who identify themselves as indigenous peoples are:

- The *Pygmies* of the Great Lakes Region,
- The *San* of southern Africa,

Introduction to Indigenous Peoples

- The *Hadzabe* of Tanzania and
- The *Ogiek*, *Sengwer* and *Yakuu* of Kenya

Examples of pastoralist communities are:

- The *Pokot* of Kenya and Uganda,
- The *Barabaig* of Tanzania,
- The *Maasai* of Kenya and Tanzania,
- The *Samburu*, *Turkana*, *Rendille*, *Endorois* and *Borana* of Kenya,
- The *Karamojong* of Uganda,
- The *Himba* of Namibia
- The *Tuareg*, *Fulani* and *Toubou* of Mali, *Burkina Faso* and *Niger*.

Additionally, the Amazigh of North Africa also identify themselves as indigenous peoples. However, this is becoming increasingly difficult due to pressure on their lands, non-recognition of their ways of life and traditional occupations, and discrimination, among other things.

The concept of indigenous peoples in the African region is relatively controversial. However, recently, a number of countries in Africa have begun to address indigenous peoples as a specific group with specific needs and rights, demonstrating that indigenous issues are highly relevant for the African continent. While the debate on a definition is still ongoing, many consider that it is neither necessary nor desirable, to attempt to define indigenous peoples within the regional context.



Fig. 2.4: Images of African Indigenous Peoples

Source: <https://www.africanbudgetsafaris.com/blog/african-tribes-african-culture-and-african-traditions/>

In 1999-2001 The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR or African Commission) established a Working Group of Experts on Indigenous Populations (WGIP). The mandate of the Working Group is primarily to examine the concept of indigenous peoples and debate about the human rights issues faced by these peoples. The Working Group published a report on this subject in 2003, which paved the way for furthering the discussion on indigenous issues in the African region.

The Central African Republic ratified the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) to research the constitutional and legal protection of the rights of indigenous peoples in Africa, with specific reference to the African Charter (for further information please see: <http://www.ilo.org> ; <http://www.ohchr.org> ; <http://www.ipacc.org.za>).

Burundi

As with other countries in the Central African region, Burundi is home to indigenous peoples, the so-called Pygmies, although most consider this term to be pejorative, preferring to be referred to by the name of their ethnic group (Batwa). As with other countries in the region, the number of indigenous peoples in Burundi is unknown, although it is thought that they represent approximately 30,000-40,000 people, or 0.45% to 0.6% of the total population. The Batwa do not reside in particular areas, but are scattered throughout the country, and are primarily hunter-gatherers where local conditions still allow.

The situation of the Batwa of Burundi is very similar to that of their neighbours in Rwanda. They share the same problems of marginalisation, prejudice, discrimination, land rights and extreme poverty.

Cameroon

Cameroon is home to several groups who identify themselves as indigenous peoples. The first groups are the so-called Pygmies (Baka, Bagyéli, Bedzang and Bakola) who make up approximately 0.4% of the national population.

- The first and largest is the Baka. This group numbers close to 40,000 people, occupies about 75,000 km² and is situated to the south-east of the country.
- The Bakola, number about 3,700 people and occupy about 12,000 km² in the southern part of the coastal region, more precisely in the Subdivisions of Akom II, Campo Bipindi, Kribi and Lolodorf.
- The Bedzang, with less than a thousand people, live to the north-west of Mbam in the region of Ngambe-Tikar. They are traditionally semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers, but with increasing insecurity of land tenure, they are gradually being forced into a more sedentary lifestyle, although many still practice the semi-nomadic lifestyle.

Other groups include the Mbororo, who belong to the group of Fulani, one of the largest ethnic communities in Central Africa. The Mbororo population in Cameroon is 1.85 million with about 120,000 to 130,000 living in the grass field plateau of Bamenda in the North West Province. They are found in almost all provinces of the country.

Congo

As with other countries in the Central African region, the Republic of Congo is home to several groups of indigenous peoples, the so-called Pygmies, their original ethnic groups being the Babenga, Baka, Babenjele and Bambendzele and so on. The number of indigenous peoples in Congo is unknown, as is the exact number of groups that could be considered “indigenous” in accordance

with generally accepted criteria, including that of self-identification. They do not reside in specific areas, and it is thought that indigenous peoples in Congo live in most of the regions of the country, and are primarily semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers, where local conditions still allow.

Kenya

Most indigenous peoples in Kenya live in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) which include almost the majority of wildlife parks and reserves and protected forests. The indigenous peoples in the ASAL areas are predominantly pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, as these areas are mainly suitable for livestock grazing due to low and erratic rainfall. These areas present the highest incidences of poverty (over 60 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line) and the lowest level of access to basic services in the country. In Kenya, working under the framework of a partnership between the ILO, the WIPO and the Maasai Cultural Heritage Foundation (MCH), aim at improving the Maasai community's capacity to protect and increase ownership of their cultural heritage and natural resources.

Morocco

The Amazigh people identify themselves as indigenous peoples in Morocco. The Amazigh people may make up anything up to 60% of the population of Morocco, although figures are regularly contested. They are otherwise known as Berbers. Where it is still possible, the Amazigh people still practice a nomadic way of life.

Namibia

As with other countries in the Southern Africa region, Namibia is home to the San peoples. An estimated 38,000 San live in Namibia. Although linguistically and culturally heterogeneous, the San are collectively distinguished from other minorities by a shared history. Their traditional reliance on hunting and gathering as the primary mode of subsistence, their socio-economic marginalisation in the countries they live and the dispossession of their lands form the basis for an emerging collective San identity in the region.

Activity

Write about the organisations which recognise the rights of indigenous people.

Check Your Progress

- 4) Discuss the number and types of African indigenous people.

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2.3.3 Latin America

There are approximately 40,000,000 people in Latin America and the Caribbean that belong to the almost 600 to 642 indigenous peoples of the continent, with a population fluctuating between 30 and 50 million and growing. Many of them are in Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, Bolivia and Ecuador.

In Bolivia and Guatemala, the indigenous form a majority of the population. In Mexico, there are approximately 11 million indigenous. According to World Bank figures, 12.76% of the entire American population and approximately 40% of the rural population is indigenous. The circumstances of each people are unique, but as indigenous peoples, they also face common problems and challenges.

Indigenous peoples pre-date the States in which they live and, despite subjugation policies aimed at their destruction, they are still managing to uphold and rebuild their identity, language and culture, as well as their traditional social, legal and political systems, or a large part thereof. The continent's history and very essence are rooted in the cultural and social foundations of these indigenous peoples.

Throughout history, indigenous peoples have developed different forms of resistance and currently, having gained strength, indigenous movements are reclaiming their land rights, respect for their cultural values, languages, customs and institutions and the right to decide their development priorities and how it will take shape. Indigenous movements in Latin America have grown markedly in recent decades and have increased their organisational capacity as political actors, demanding increasingly higher levels of participation.

There have been significant changes in the recognition of their legal rights. After the recent ratification of Convention 169 on the part of Chile and Nicaragua, few countries in the region (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela) and almost all party States have carried out constitutional and legislative reforms that, in one way or another, include provisions on indigenous peoples. The effective application of some of the rights that emanate from its provisions is, however, postponed. The struggle between the indigenous peoples and the governments regarding the right to be consulted in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent, another manifestation of the right to self-determination, exhibits the gap between the recognition and enforcement of indigenous rights.

In Peru, Brazil, Colombia, Nicaragua, Guatemala and other countries, the lack of political will to carry out consultations before initiating large-scale projects with expected impacts have led to a series of conflicts not only with the indigenous peoples but also with the international institutions in charge of monitoring compliance with human rights. Further more, public programmes and policies to improve the situation of indigenous peoples have been developed and carried out in many of these countries. Nonetheless, the region still faces major hurdles in the implementation of the Convention, which guarantees the participation of indigenous peoples and the effective enjoyment of the rights recognised in the Convention.

Argentina

It is estimated that there are a total of 600,329 native persons living in Argentina (INDEC, 2007) from more than 30 different indigenous groups scattered across the country's provinces. These groups include the Mapuche, Kolla, Toba, Wichí, Mocoví, Pilagá, Guaraní, Chiriguano, Chané, Chulupí, Chorote, Tapiete, Tehuelche, Diaguita, Calchaquí, Huarpe and Ona, the majority of which live in communities on rural settlements. They account for approximately 3% to 5% of the country's total population, but in some provinces, the indigenous population is between 17% and 25%.

In 1994, Argentina modified its constitution written in 1853, introducing important advances in the rights of indigenous peoples, such as

- recognition of the pre-existence of indigenous peoples,
- the right to consultation and participation in decisions that affect them,
- respect for identity,
- the right to bilingual and intercultural education,
- recognition of the legal status of indigenous communities, and
- communal possession and ownership of their traditional lands.

Bolivia

Bolivia has the highest percentage of indigenous peoples in Latin America (62% according to UNDP, 2006). Of the indigenous peoples, it is estimated that the majority are Quechua (50.3%) and Aymara (39.8%). To a lesser degree, although distributed across extensive territories, are lowland peoples such as the Chiquitano (3.6%) and Guaraní (2.5%). The departments of La Paz, Cochabamba, Potosí, Oruro and Chuquisaca have the highest indigenous concentration.

More recently, in 1938, the constitution began to formally recognise indigenous communities. The agrarian reform of the 1950s was designed to put an end to the system of large estates, or latifundios, in the Andean high plateau, but at the same time encouraged the penetration into the territories and dispossession of Eastern peoples. Bolivia ratified Convention No. 169 in 1991, and in 1994, the constitution recognised the “multiethnic and multicultural” nature of the Republic. The constitutional reforms of 2004 recognised indigenous peoples' right to present candidates directly, recognising them as political and social actors in their own right. Other national regulations recognise rights such as:

- indigenous rights to their native communal lands,
- rights to a share of natural resource profits,
- rights to be consulted.

Bolivia also made the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples binding as national law. The 2006-2007 constitutional process included a high level of indigenous participation. Indigenous peoples have demanded the inclusion of First Nations in the State's new pact, defining Bolivia as a multinational State.

Notwithstanding the legal changes, the political scene in Bolivia is highly complex, as certain sectors are staunchly resistant to the effective implementation of indigenous rights. This is why it is very important to initiate sweeping intercultural dialogue so that together, society can reach democratic agreements on plural coexistence.

Indigenous groups have gained strength in recent decades, reclaiming their identity as indigenous peoples and First Nations, and increasing their levels of organisation and participation. There are currently 5 major indigenous centres grouping the lowland and highland peoples, landless peasants and women.

Guatemala

Guatemala's population is comprised of 11.2 million (INE, 2003) people from Mayan indigenous tribes, the Xinca people, the Garifunas and the Mestizos. According to official statistics, the Maya account for 48.6% of the population, comprised of 22 linguistic communities: Achi', Akateko, Awakateko, Ch'orti', Chuj, Ixil, Itza', Kaqchikel, K'iche', Mam, Mopan, Poqomam, Poqomchi', Popti', Q'anjob'al, Q'eqchi', Sakapulteko, Sipakapense, Tektiteko, Tz'utujil and Uspanteko.

Guatemala is notable for being mostly rural; almost two-thirds of its inhabitants live in rural areas and a large majority of the indigenous work under exploitive conditions on agro-export farms.

As far as a legal framework goes, the 1985 Constitution recognises, respects and protects the cultural diversity, languages, culture and customs of ethnic groups and indigenous communities, but does not, however, recognise them as peoples. Nevertheless, from a peace process point of view, Guatemala ratified Convention No. 169 in 1996 and subsequently made the Peace Accords legally binding, among them the Accord on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2005). The law recognises indigenous languages as national languages and encourages their use publicly, and discrimination is now categorised as a crime. To implement the Peace Accords, the following institutions, among others, were created to protect indigenous rights:

- the *Defensoría de la mujer indígena* (DEMI),
- *Fondo Indígena*,
- CODISRA, a presidential commission against discrimination and racism.

Although Guatemala's years of conflict are behind it, serious social and economic problems persist that mostly affect the indigenous population. There is a need for policies reflected in the effective improvement of the situation of indigenous peoples, particularly concerning access to land, social and labour rights, public services and the effective recognition of the administration of indigenous justice. Constructive social dialogue is also necessary among indigenous peoples, other stakeholders and the government.

Activity

What activities have been undertaken by organisations in support of indigenous people

Check Your Progress

- 5) Explain about the various concerning international organisations and their activities.

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2.4 SUMMARY

According to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues it is estimated that there are more than 370 million indigenous people spread across 90 different countries worldwide. Indigenous peoples, also called tribal, aboriginal or autochthonous peoples, national minorities or first peoples, are best defined by using several criteria applicable in different countries. Indigenous people are characterized by their distinctly unique traditions. They have their own social, cultural, economic and political institutions that are distinct from those of the dominant and larger societies in which they live.

There are over 5,000 different languages and ethnic cultures of indigenous peoples ranging from the forest peoples of the Amazon to the tribal peoples of India and from the Inuits of the Arctic to the Aborigines of Australia.

Based on the total identified population of indigenous peoples the world over, nations with a strong presence of these peoples are:

- Papua New Guinea (77%),
- Bolivia (70),
- Guatemala (47),
- Peru (40),
- Ecuador (38),
- Myanmar (33),
- Laos (30),
- Mexico (12) and
- New Zealand (12).

Within the international legal framework for the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples, the ILO has adopted two legally binding international instruments that specifically address indigenous and tribal peoples:

- The Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107), and
- ILO Convention, 1989 (No. 169), which outlines possible forms of action to be taken to promote the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples.

The Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107) was the first attempt to codify international obligations of States in respect of indigenous and tribal populations and was the first international convention on the subject, and was adopted by the ILO at the request of the UN-System. With the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the UN as a whole has taken a major step forward in the promotion and protection of indigenous and tribal peoples' rights throughout the world.

The provisions of the Declaration and Convention No. 169 are compatible and mutually reinforcing. While the Declaration does not provide for a specific mechanism to monitor its implementation, it provides for a specific role of UN agencies to support the realization of its provisions (Articles 41 and 42).

In particular the ILO, as the agency responsible for the only legally binding international instrument on the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples, has an important role to play in this context.

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2.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Refer to section 2.1
- 2) Refer to section 2.1
- 3) Refer to sub-section 2.3.1
- 4) Refer to sub-section 2.3.2
- 5) Refer to section 2.3



UNIT 3 INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF INDIA*

Contents

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Terminology and Definition
- 3.2 Demographic Status and Distribution
- 3.3 Problem of Identification of Tribes as Indigenous People
- 3.4 Summary
- 3.5 References
- 3.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- define various terms and aspects of tribes and indigenous people;
- describe the demographic profile and population distribution of indigenous people;
- understand the problem of identification of tribes as indigenous peoples; and
- understand the concept of indigenous people in the context of India.

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Cultural diversity being a reality of Indian society, India has been perceived more in terms of differences than similarities. The multiple identities in terms of which the differences have been perceived are:

- religion,
- territory or region,
- language and
- caste.

These categories were reinforced during the British rule through the decennial enumerations and classification of the population into groups and categories. One of the major intellectual and administrative preoccupations of the colonial state was to reinforce these categories and turn them into groups. To these existing categories, a new social category was added during this period. This was the category of the tribe, which gradually took the form of a group.

The study of groups that later came to be described as tribes began with the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1874 (Xaxa, V. 2005). From then on scholars-administrators wrote general works on the land and people of different regions in which references were made to castes and tribes. They also made inventories of castes and tribes in the form of handbooks, monographs, and

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gazetteers. Post-independence, anthropology was introduced as a curriculum in Indian universities; this resulted in a flood of literature on tribes. The literature came particularly from three main sources:

- Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI),
- Departments of Sociology and Anthropology in universities, and
- Tribal population.

In India, the term ‘indigenous people’ is often used interchangeably to mean tribes and other traditional forest dwellers. In fact, some people consider the term ‘adivasi’ to be more apt in the Indian context. The intention behind these terms is to use them to mean a certain category of people. However, over the last few decades, the term has been a source of contention and political movements, with many people belonging to certain lingual and regional groups laying claim to these terms.

According to the Judgment of November 28, 2007, of Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the case of the Saramaka People v. Suriname, tribal people may not be indigenous to the region (they inhabit), but must “share similar characteristics with indigenous peoples, such as having social, cultural and economic traditions different from other sections of the national community, identifying themselves with their ancestral territories, and regulating themselves, at least partially, by their own norms, customs, and traditions”.

This definition is in accordance with the provisions of Article 1.1 (a) of ILO Convention No. 169. Traditionally indigenous peoples are understood to be those who were victims of European colonial settlements. Internationally, the issues of the definition and rights of indigenous peoples emerged strongly culminating in 2007 with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. But in India, till today the question of definition and identity of ‘indigenous people’ remains uncertain and indeterminate. The idea of ‘indigenous people’ is an issue of considerable contention in India (Virginius Xaxa, 1990).

3.1 TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITION

In India, people with indigenous characteristics are known by many names, such as ‘scheduled tribes,’ ‘tribes,’ ‘adivasi,’ ‘janajati,’ ‘girijan,’ ‘vanvasi,’ ‘vanyajati,’ and ‘hill tribe’. The tribal people of India are called ‘Scheduled Tribes’ in the Indian constitution. The question of tribes in India is closely linked with administrative and political considerations. Many groups and communities are increasingly demanding their inclusion in the list of scheduled tribes of the Indian constitution. That partly explains the steady increase in the proportion of the scheduled tribe population in India especially in the period between 1971 and 1981.

Though indigenous people are called by names such as natives, uncivilized people, aboriginals, first peoples/nations, adivasis, tribals, the indigenous people of India prefer calling themselves *Adivasi* (original inhabitants). The word *Adi* means first, original or earliest time, and the word *Vasi* means dweller, inhabitant, resident of. This self-identification as *Adivasi* corresponds to the modern concept of indigenous peoples.

The International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) thus states: As adivasis, “we are people with distinct historical, political, and cultural identities. We are united by our histories as distinct societies, by our languages, laws, traditions, and unique spiritual and economic relationships with our lands and territories” (IWGIA 2000). The details of the tribes of India are given in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Major Tribes in India

States	Main Tribes
Andhra Pradesh	Chenchu, Gond, Kolam, Kondas, Pardhan, Lambadis, Sugalis
Assam	Boro, Kachari, Mikir (Karbi), Lalung, Rabha, Dimasa, Hmar, Hajong
Bihar & Jharkhand	Asur, Banjara, Birhor, Korwa, Munda, Oraon, Santhal.
Gujarat	Bhil, Dhodia, Gond, Siddi, Bordia.
Himachal Pradesh	Gaddi, Gujjar, Lahuala, Swangla.
Karnataka	Bhil, Chenchu, Gond, Kuruba, Kammara, Kolis, Koya, Mayaka, Toda
Kerala	Adiyam, Kammara, Kondkappus, Malais, Palliyar.
Madhya Pradesh & Chhatisgarh	Bhil, Birhor, Damar, Gond, Kharia, Majhi, Munda, Oraon, Parathi
Maharashtra	Bhil, Mhunja, Chodhara, Dhodia, Gond, Kharia, Nayaka, Oraon, Pardhi, Rathwa.
Meghalaya	Garo, Khasi, Jaintia.
Orissa	Birhor, Gond, Juang, Khond, Korua, Mundari, Oraon, Santhal, Tharu
Rajasthan	Bhil, Damor, Garasta, Meena, Salariya.
Tamil Nadu	Irular, Kammara, Kondakapus, Kota, Mahamalar, Palleyan, Toda
Tripura	Chakma, Garo, Khasi, Kuki, Lusai, Liang, Santhal.
West Bengal	Asur, Birhor, Korwa, Lepcha, Munda, Santhal.
Mizoram	Lusai, Kuki, Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Mikir.
Arunachal Pradesh	Dafla, Khampati, Singpho.
Goa	Dhodi, Siddi (Nayaka)
Daman & Diu	Dhodi, Mikkada, Varti.
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	Jarawa, Nicobarese, Onges, Sentineless, Shompens, Great Andamanese
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	Dhodi, Mikkada, Varti
Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal	Bhoti, Buxa, Jaunsari, Tharu, Raji, Nagaland Naga, Kuki, Mikir, Garo.
Sikkim	Bhutia, Lepcha
Jammu & Kashmir	Chaddangpa, Garra, Gujjar, Gaddi

Source: Annual Report, 2011-2012, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India

Anthropology as a discipline came into existence to study the indigenous people of Africa, Asia, Australia and the New World. According to D.N. Majumdar,

“Tribe is a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name, members of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain taboos regarding marriage, profession or occupation and have developed a well-assessed system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligations.”

According to R.N. Mukherjee,

“A tribe is that human group, whose members have common interest, territory, language, social law and economic occupation.”

Roy Burman describes nominalistic, evolutionary, structural and normative approaches for conceptualising tribes (Roy Burman B.K., 2003).

The term “tribe” originated around the time of the Greek city-states and the early formation of the Roman Empire. According to The Oxford English Dictionary, the word “tribe” is derived from the Latin term “tribus” which means “a group of persons forming a community and claiming descent from a common ancestor”. With the growth of nationalism in Europe, the term “tribe” came to denote a race of people living within a given territory. Western writers in India known as Orientalists used this term with the same connotation and argued that the tribes of India belonged to three stocks—the Negritos, the Mongoloids and the Mediterranean (for details see Unit 4).

The word “tribe” is generally used for a “socially cohesive unit, associated with a territory, the members of which regard them as politically autonomous” (Mitchell, 1979: 232). Often a tribe possesses a distinct dialect and distinct cultural traits. The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1911, defines a tribe as a “collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not usually endogamous though originally it might have been so”.

The conception of the tribe was obvious from the use of criteria that were adopted. Some of these features were:

- geographical isolation,
- simple technology and condition of living,
- general backwardness,
- the practice of animism,
- distinct language, and
- physical features.

The problem, however, lay in the fact that they were neither clearly formulated nor systematically applied. One set of criteria was used in one context and quite another in another context. The result is that the list includes groups and communities strikingly different from each other in respect of not only the size of the population but also the level of technology and other characteristics (Virginus Xaxa, 1999).

The term, however, has gone through a lot of changes. It originally meant a political unit consisting of a number of clans. A tribe occupied a definite geographical area. The permanent settlement gave a geographical identity to a tribe. For that reason, tribes were often named after the area. States such as Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura are named after the Mizo, Naga and Tripuri tribes, respectively. The Gondwana region is named after the Gonds. The range of meanings, however, has grown even further over the years, for example, “any of various systems of social organisation comprising several local villages, bands, districts, lineages, or other groups and sharing a common ancestry, language, culture, and name” (Morris, 1980). Morris also notes that a tribe is a “group of persons with a common occupation, interest, or habit,” and “a large family.” Today, the range of groups referred to as tribal is truly enormous.

The terms used for tribes in the following Asian countries are:

- Bangladesh, Nepal and Malaysia: tribes,
- China: nationalities,
- The Philippines: cultural communities.

According to the indigenous people of Asia, these terms are foreign to them and it is difficult to translate them into their languages. Many indigenous people feel the terms given to them are derogatory, and resent them as they often imply notions of cultural inferiority, with the indigenous people being seen as “primitive” or “backward”. Some example of these terms are:

- *chuncheat* (“ethnicity”, or “national people”) in Cambodia,
- *upajati* (“tribal”) in Bangladesh,
- *sakai* (“slave”) in Thailand for some hunter-gatherer groups,
- *fan* (“primitive people”) introduced by the Han Chinese settlers when they came to the island of Taiwan.

However, in some countries, the popular or official terms have come to be accepted and are now often used by the tribes themselves.

In India, the early ethnographers were not very clear about the distinction between caste and tribe. In the 18th and early 19th century writings of administrators and scholars showed synonymous use of the term tribe with caste. A systematic effort was made towards distinguishing tribe from caste in the post-independence period (Virginus Xaxa, 1999).

Activity

Define the term “tribe” and list out various alternative terms for tribe and indigenous people

Check Your Progress

- 1) What is the definition of indigenous people as given by international organisations?

.....

- 2) Describe various terms used for tribes and indigenous people and their meaning.

3.2 DEMOGRAPHIC STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION

India has the largest concentration of tribal population in Asia and the second largest in the world. Article 366 (25) of the Constitution of India refers to scheduled tribes as those communities, who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. This Article says that only those communities who have been declared as such by the President through an initial public notification or a subsequent amending Act of Parliament will be considered to be Scheduled Tribes.

Article 342 provides for the specification of tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which are deemed to be for the Constitution the Scheduled Tribes in relation to that state or union territory. In pursuance of these provisions, the list of Scheduled Tribes are notified for each state or union territory and are valid only within the jurisdiction of that state or union territory and not outside.

A scheduled tribe is state/ union territory-specific; a community declared as a scheduled tribe in a state need not be so in another state. The inclusion of a community as a scheduled tribe is an ongoing process. The essential characteristics, first laid down by the Lokur Committee, for a community to be identified as scheduled tribes are:

- 1) primitive traits;
- 2) distinctive culture;
- 3) geographical isolation;
- 4) shyness of contact with the community at large; and
- 5) backwardness.

Tribal communities live in various ecological and geo-climatic conditions ranging from plains and forests to hills and inaccessible areas. Tribal groups are at different stages of social, economic and educational development. While some tribal communities have joined the mainstream, some are the poorest of the poor. The latter were identified for the first time in 1975-76 and thereafter

in 1993. They are 75 in number and known as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), who are characterised by:

- 1) pre-agriculture level of technology;
- 2) stagnant or declining population;
- 3) extremely low literacy; and
- 4) subsistence level of the economy.

The scheduled tribes (ST) are notified in 30 states and union territories; 705 ethnic groups are notified as scheduled tribes. The tribal population of the country, as per the 2011 census, is 10.43 crore, constituting 8.6% of the total population. A major part (89.97%) of them live in rural areas and only 10.03% live in urban areas. The decadal population growth of the tribals from Census 2001 to 2011 has been 23.66% against the 17.69% of the entire population. The sex ratio for the overall population is 940 females per 1,000 males and that of scheduled tribes is 990 females per 1,000 males. The trend in the ST population has increased since Census 1961. From 30.1 million in 1961, the ST population has increased to 104.3 million in 2011.

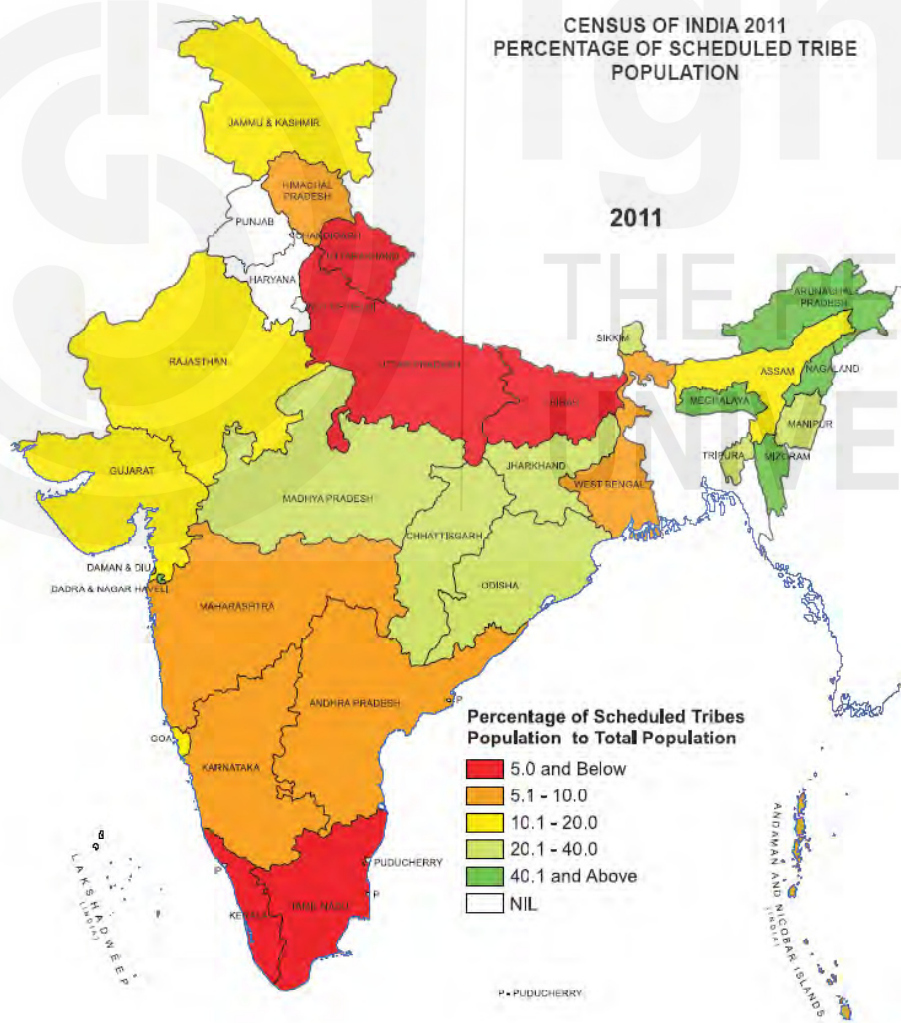


Fig. 3.1: Census of India 2011, percentage of Scheduled Tribe population

Source: Presentation “Scheduled Tribes in India, Census 2011” by Registrar General of India, May 2013

According to the Anthropological Survey, out of 4,635 communities found in India, 705 are tribal communities. The largest concentrations of indigenous peoples are found in the seven states of north-east India, and the so-called “central tribal belt”. More than half of the Scheduled Tribe population is concentrated in Central India, i.e., Madhya Pradesh (14.69%), Chhattisgarh (7.5%), Jharkhand (8.29%), United Andhra Pradesh (5.7%), Maharashtra (10.08%), Orissa (9.2%), Gujarat (8.55%) and Rajasthan (8.86%).

The other distinct area is the North East (Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh). The State with the highest proportion of Scheduled Tribes is Mizoram (94.5 %) and the Union Territory with the highest proportion of ST is Lakshadweep (94.8 %) (2011 Census). Many tribes are present in more than one state. The largest numbers of ST are in the state of Orissa (i.e. 62). Tribals in India live in the following five territories:

- 1) The Himalayan belt: (Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, hills of Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh).
 - 2) Central India: Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh (55% of the total tribal population of India lives in this belt).
 - 3) Western India: Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa, Dadra and Nagar Haveli.
 - 4) The Dravidian region: Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
- 50 Andaman, Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands.

Due to the diversity of factors and the complexity of the problems involved, it is not very easy to classify the Indian tribes into different groups. However, the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes classifies the tribes of India from the rest of the population on the basis of the following geographical area:

- 1) The North and North-eastern Zone Tribes.
- 2) The Central or the middle Zone Tribes.
- 3) The Southern Zone Tribes.
- 4) The Western Zone Tribes.

GI.2: Distribution of Scheduled Tribe Population by States - 2011 (In %)

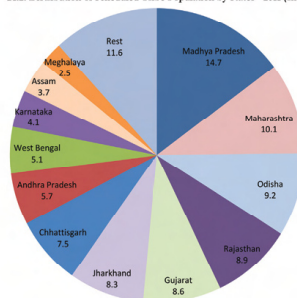


Fig. 3.2: Distribution of Scheduled Tribe population by State.

Source: Presentation “Scheduled Tribes in India, Census 2011” by Registrar General of India, May 2013

India has people having different religions, castes, creeds, races, and above all, following different ways of life, having their own cultures and ethnic identities. Such a country is culturally plural. The tribal people living in different sub-cultures in different parts of India follow different ways of life, live differently and think according to cultural patterns adopted by them. Thus cultural pluralism also gives rise to the concept of cultural diversity. Cultural differences set apart one group of people with one culture from another. Each group may be characterised by their language, history or ancestry, religion, style of dress or adornment. The cultural characteristics of tribal groups are socially inherited (socially transmitted) from one generation to another rather than being learnt in one generation alone.

Mandelbaum (1970) mentions the following characteristic features of Indian tribes:

- kinship as an instrument of social bonds;
- a lack of hierarchy among men and groups;
- absence of strong, complex, formal organisation;
- communitarian basis of landholding;
- segmentary character;
- little value on surplus accumulation on the use of capital and on market trading;
- lack of distinction between form and substance of religion; and
- a distinct psychological bent for enjoying life.

Tribal people are essentially an aboriginal community residing in India, possessing their own customs and languages.

Indian tribal languages can be defined as essentially folk languages, possessing no literary specifications of their own and spoken by people of ethnic groups who prefer to live in relatively isolated groups. They are traditional languages utilised by the tribal folk. The languages used by tribal communities in India are complex, but priceless relics of India's past and nearly overshadowed glory. This is why they are preserved orally in the form of songs, legends and other tales.

Some of the leading tribal languages are:

- Garo,
- Chakma,
- Naga,
- Gond,
- Mizo,
- Munda,
- Santhali,

Introduction to Indigenous Peoples

- Khasia,
- Oraon,
- Manipuri.

Tribals in India originate on the following basis of language families, i.e.,

- Dravidian,
- Tibeto-Burman,
- Austro-Asiatic,
- Tibeto-Chinese,
- Andamanese.

Tribals who belong to different language families live in distinct geographic settings.

For example, in South Odisha languages originate from the following families:

- Central Dravidian family,
- Austro-Asiatic (Munda) family, and
- Indo-Aryan family.

In the Jharkhand area, languages originate from the following families:

- Indo-Aryan family,
- North Dravidian family, and
- Austro-Asiatic family.

Bhili and Santali, both tribal languages, each have more than 4 million speakers. Gondi is spoken by nearly 2 million people. The tribes of India can be classified on the basis of race into the following:

- Turko-Iranian,
- Indo-Aryan,
- Scytho-Dravidian,
- Mongoloid and
- Dravidian.

Each of the tribal groups has preserved its socio-cultural identity through a code of conduct of its own and distinct institutions to enforce the code. In view of their variegated habitat and cultural values, there is a bewildering diversity of various tribes in India. There are wide variations in the socio-economic and religious activities of tribes.

Tribes have a distinct social structure, clan system, language and specific territorial distribution that differentiate them from others as members of a distinct cultural group. Their social organisation is generally based on totemic

clans. Various tribal groups claim mythical affinity with certain animate and inanimate objects of nature which are regarded as their ancestors. These totemic objects are considered sacred.

The main function of the clan is to regulate marital alliances through a system of clan exogamy. Nuclear type of families is predominantly found among all the tribal groups while joint families are rarely seen. Monogamy is mostly found although polygamy is also seen. To acquire mates, the following practices are in vogue among tribal groups:

- marriage by negotiation,
- marriage by capture,
- marriage by service,
- marriage by elopement, and
- marriage by exchange.

Of these, marriage by negotiation is the preferred type of marriage. Divorce and widow remarriage are permitted in tribal societies.

Activity

Describe essential characteristics of scheduled tribes.

The forest occupies a central position in tribal culture and economy. The tribal way of life is very much dictated by the forest from birth to death. The tribal populations represent some of the most marginalized and poorest peoples in India and over 94% live on or near forestlands. The relation between forests and tribals is intimate and is age-old. Appropriately referred to as Vanyajati (forest community) and Girijan (people of the hills), the tribals are known for their association with forest and hills (Rao 2001).

Since the tribal habitat is surrounded by forests, there exists a symbiotic relationship between forests and tribals both of whom are inseparable and the development of one depends on the other. Forests provide numerous edible roots, tubers, fruits, leaves to tribals for consumption throughout the year and they draw their sustenance largely from the forests. Besides, several items of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) like tamarind, honey, gum, myrobalan, adda leaves, soapnuts, shekakai, broomsticks, nux-vomica, and mohua flowers are abundantly available in the forests which provide supplementary income to the tribals. They collect the above items and sell them in weekly markets. All aspects of their socio-cultural-economic and religious life are intricately interwoven around forests, hills and other animate and inanimate objects

The tribals believe that the forests and hills are the abode of their gods and goddesses and hence they are considered sacred. They propitiate the forest gods and goddesses so that they are not harmed by wild animals in the forest. It is customary among the scheduled tribes of the state to abstain from consuming new fruit and food grains. Before consuming fruits or food grains of the forests, they offer fruits and grains to their gods and goddesses in a ritual. Violation of these food taboos is believed to result in health hazards or attacks of wild animals. They organise rituals and ceremonies connected with the first eating

of new food grains or fruits only after these crops/fruits attain the stage of maturity and ready for consumption. Such types of taboos contribute to higher production and also orderly utilisation.

The sources of subsistence and livelihood of Indian tribals are varied. Based on subsistence, we can classify Indian tribals into six broad economic clusters:

- 1) **Hunting and Foraging:** Nomadic and Particularly Vulnerable Groups such as the Andamanese, Onge, Jarwa, Kadar, Kharia, Chenchu, Birhor, and Lodha.
- 2) **Shifting Hill Cultivators:** A section of the Konda Reddi, Kolam, Naga, Kharia, Juang, Riang, Khasi, Garo, and Savara practice primitive cultivation by “slash and burn” method. This cultivation is known by different names in different areas. The Assam tribes call it Jhum and the Konda Reddi Podu.
- 3) **Pastoral People:** The Bhotia of Almora, Van Gujjar of Uttarakhand, RaikaRebbari of Rajasthan and the Toda of the Nilgiri hills of South India live on a pastoral economy.
- 4) **Permanent Settled Cultivators:** The Oraon, Munda, Gond, Bhumij, Ho, and Santal are efficient cultivators and do permanent settled agriculture. They practice wet cultivation by transplanting method.
- 5) **Craftsmen:** Some tribals still retain their traditional crafts along with the principal sources of subsistence. The Naga and the Khasi are experts in coloured hand-loom products and the Lohar are traditional blacksmiths.
- 6) **Agriculture and Non-agricultural Labour Group:** A substantial portion of the tribals has become landless labouring class owing to the economic hardship which they are facing at present. They earn their livelihood by selling their manual labour in different vocations.

Check Your Progress

- 3) Depict the demographic profile and distribution of the population of Indian tribes.

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3.3 PROBLEM OF IDENTIFICATION OF TRIBES AS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The Anthropological Survey of India under the project ‘People of India Project’ identifies 461 ethnic groups as scheduled tribes of India, and these are considered to be India’s indigenous peoples. In mainland India, the scheduled tribes are usually referred to as Adivasis. There are, however, many more ethnic groups that would qualify for scheduled tribe status but which are not officially recognised. Estimates of the total number of tribal groups are as high as 635.

India has several laws and constitutional provisions, such as the Fifth Schedule for mainland India and the Sixth Schedule for certain areas of north-east India, which recognise indigenous peoples' rights to land and self-governance.

The laws aimed at protecting indigenous peoples have numerous shortcomings and their implementation is far from satisfactory. Indigenous peoples continue to face

- civil and political rights violations,
- land alienation,
- displacement and
- false prosecution for accessing minor forest produce.

As India's booming economy requires more resources, land and resources belonging to indigenous peoples have been grabbed, resulting in a strong sense of alienation among them and further exacerbating conflicts. India has a long history of indigenous peoples movements aimed at asserting their rights (Paritosh Chakma, 2008).

With the internationalisation of the rights and privileges of indigenous people, the use of the term indigenous has come to be critically examined or even challenged in the Indian context. The meaning and definition of the term used earlier and today are not identical though they overlap in some characteristics. The term indigenous to be used in such a case for tribes or other groups and communities would overcome some of the inherent conceptual problems. The definition of indigenous people as given by the ILO convention of 1989 and the Working Group on Indigenous Population set up by the Human Rights Commission of the UNO are conceptualised in three aspects.

- 1) They are those people who lived in the country to which they belong before colonization or conquest by people from outside the country or the geographical region.
- 2) They have become marginalized as an aftermath of conquest and colonization by the people from outside the region.
- 3) They govern their life more in terms of their own social, economic and cultural institution than the laws applicable to the society or the country at large.

This definition looks at indigenous people as victims of conquest and colonisation.

This term 'adivasi' has been used effectively to mean tribes for more than a century now to describe people who differ from others in features, culture, language, social organisations, etc. Ghurye (1963) uses the term 'aborigines' to define tribes with the contention that tribes would be autochthonous to India if not to the exact geographical location. Today only those who have been historically subjected to domination and subjugation are said to comprise the category of indigenous people.

Thus hardly any unease was felt by scholars in the use of the term to refer to these groups of people. No effort whatsoever was made to dispel the myth associated with the term then. The term however did not remain confined to only the scholars, administrators, politicians and social workers; it percolated down also to the people. Indeed, it is social workers, political activists, administrators who took the term and along with it all the prejudices and conjectures to the masses (Sengupta 1988). The term thus came to be widely used to refer to the tribal people. It was hardly questioned, let alone debated. So long as it had not assumed a political dimension, it had remained an accepted term of description and designation of a certain category of people.

Activity

What are the three aspects which are central to the conceptualisation of the indigenous people?

Yet the use of the term adivasi (indigenous) to designate a certain category of people and not the other category reveals that these aspects were not altogether lost sight of. Earlier also the term was used to delineate people who were backward and cut off from the mainstream civilisation. The basic mark of differentiation was between those who were part of the civilisation and those who were not. Hence, the use of the term 'adivasi' to describe tribal people seems to have some validity even in the sense of marginalisation. Historical antiquity may have been more distant criteria, but the most immediate and proximate seemed to be the fact that they were not part of the civilisation. In a certain sense then there was the aspect of marginalisation that was taken note of while designating a group as 'adivasi'.

The government of India had not objected to the use of the term when it was deliberated upon in the ILO convention in 1957 and was tied to covenant 107. This was so because the term then had not raised such issues as empowerment and rights; rather it had articulated the need of integrating the indigenous and tribal people into the larger social and political system. By contrast, the focus had shifted from integration to one of rights and empowerment by 1989. And no sooner had the issue shifted then the argument ensued that a category such as this does not hold in the Indian context.

The Indian Chapter of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples was formed in 1987. Its first National Convention, scheduled to be held at Rourkela, November 3-6 1988, was postponed to 1989. The formation of this Council and the holding of the convention are themselves important landmark because the official Indian government delegation has denied in Geneva the very existence of indigenous peoples in the country. A meeting of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations was held in Geneva on 6 August 1987. Sri Jayanta Prasad stated on behalf of the delegation of India that it would be a difficult task to say which section of India's population was indigenous and which was not. Against this backdrop with the help of eminent scholars review has taken place on the reports of international groups, while commenting on the situation of the indigenous peoples in general (B. K. Roy Burman).

There is a continuing debate in India about the appropriateness of the use of the phrase "indigenous peoples". Some scholarly work tends to support it while others are sceptical of the use of the term in the context of India.

The arguments against the use of the term “indigenous peoples” for tribal peoples in India are diverse. It is argued that it is not easy to identify indigenous peoples in India. For there have been continuous waves of movement of populations with a different language, race, culture, religion going back centuries and millennia. There was a lot of discussion and debate among the scholars regarding the tribes of India questioning whether they are natives, migrant, or settlers before the arrival of Aryans. Most of the scholars are of the view that tribes could hardly make a legitimate claim that they are the only natives of India.

In India, the coming of the Aryans is taken as the historical factor for determining the original people of India. However, those belonging to the Dravidian language-speaking group have not been considered as indigenous people, even though it is recognised that they were the inhabitants before the coming of the Aryans owing to their non-marginalisation. There can be claims by several groups of people who are now absorbed in the mainstream Hindu society, as much as by other groups who were pushed out of areas they first settled in and could not find shelter elsewhere. Also, the migratory nature of traditional tribes makes it difficult to limit the definition to people settled and expanding in a particular geographical locale for a considerable period to classify them as natives of that particular place. Many tribes in the north-east as the Nagas, the Mizos and the Kukis are said to have arrived much later than the other non-tribes (Xaxa, 1999). This poses the problem of including all tribes as earlier settlers before the Aryans and hence concluding that all tribes are indigenous and non-tribes are not.

Roy Burman (1992) points out several groups as recently being autonomous in terms of politico-legal structures and a self-regulated economy and hence belonging to the indigenous identity. However, since most of such groups today are brought under administrative control, this definition does not succeed in defining such people as indigenous people as even many groups with even simple technology were integrated with the wider society (Burman, 1983).

In general, in India politicisation and administrative constructions are stronger today for the identification of indigenous people and has come to be understood more in terms of oppression and marginalisation. The need to define these groups comes from the territorial and linguistic insecurity of the ‘others’ in terms of resources and share of power. This is the precise reason that various regional groups have tried to raise the theory of the sons-of-the-soil across various spaces of time to maintain the domination of the groups in power against the marginalized in the manipulation of the concept of indigenous people, denying groups, especially tribes of their own cultures and beliefs, control over natural and mineral resources. They are denied the privileges and rights over their habitats, providing constant ground for contest and exploitation.

The question of the definition and identity of indigenous peoples largely remains uncertain and indeterminate in international law. There is no universally accepted definition of indigenous peoples, which in turn leads to varying interpretations by states. As a result, UNDRIP (2007), though regarded as an authoritative declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, does not provide any form of formal definition of the term ‘indigenous peoples’. Nevertheless, it does suggest that certain characteristics are common to all indigenous peoples such as:

Introduction to Indigenous Peoples

- the experience of historic injustices as a result of colonization and dispossession of their lands and resources;
- the existence of a spiritual relationship with traditionally owned lands and resources; and
- the importance of the preservation of their distinct cultural heritage (UNDRIP, 2007).

Ronald Niezen (2003), an anthropologist, says there are three basic approaches to the definition of indigenous peoples, namely,

- legal/analytical;
- practical/strategic; and
- collective/ global.

According to Christian Erni, there can be four dimensions to understanding indigenous peoples of Asia, namely,

- geographical,
- economic,
- socio-political and
- ideological dimensions.

In terms of geography, indigenous peoples of Southeast Asia, such as the Philippines, Taiwan, Southwest China, Peninsular Malaysia and many areas in India are highlanders (hill peoples) as against lowlanders of the majority/dominant cultures. In Indonesia, indigenous people are inhabitants of the outer islands as against the inner majority cultural group islanders.

In terms of the economy, they are mostly engaged in agriculture or hunting and gathering in the upland hill areas.

In terms of socio-political organisation, they lived in “comparably egalitarian band or segmentary societies, or in petty chiefdoms, in which villages were politically, and to a large extent economically, autonomous units.”

Finally, in terms of ideological or religious beliefs, indigenous peoples retained their own traditional belief systems, unlike the majority/dominant societies that followed traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam (See IWGIA).

Erni believes that, for those peoples who claim to be indigenous peoples, attempts of military subjugation by a foreign power were already a pre-western colonial reality (See IWGIA). The majority dominant societies or cultures had always invaded and taken control of the fertile portion of the lands and resources belonging to these peoples, and driven them far into the peripheries of the state in remote hills and forests. So in some sense, many of these indigenous peoples of Asia were already colonized peoples before European colonization of Asia. But such acts of invasion are not recognised as a colonial project by the Asian states as they were not perpetrated by European powers. These Asian states,

having once lived under European colonialism and having refused to see their internal aggressions as colonial, continue to recognise Europe as the centre and perpetrator of colonialism.

Even though India does make efforts to maintain and protect its tribal peoples or Adivasis, India has never recognised the application of the international legal concept of ‘indigenous peoples’ within its territory. It denies the existence of particular indigenous groups within its boundaries by maintaining that it regards the entire population of the country at the time of its independence in 1947 and its successors as indigenous (James Anaya 2010).

Throughout the meetings of the UN Working Group, India maintained the position that the concept of indigenous peoples does not apply within its boundaries (Lakshmi Puri 1983). It linked the concept to European colonialism, where India strongly argued that “indigenous peoples are descendants of the original inhabitants who have suffered from conquest or invasion from outside” (Kingsbury 1999). India claimed that it is impossible to determine who came first in its territories due to centuries of migration and absorption of different cultural groups. The representative of India in the Working Group (in 1991) further commented that “most of the tribes in India share ethnic, racial, and linguistic characteristics with other people in India (Prabhu Dayal 1991) and it could, therefore, be difficult to determine the indigeness of the groups.

Furthermore, during the adoption of UNDRIP, Indian representative Ajai Malhotra stated that the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination does not apply to India. He argued that the provision on self-determination applies only to people under foreign domination and not to those living in independent states (GADRIP: 2007).

The UN Special Rapporteur (James Anaya), in response to India’s stand, clarified that:

In the Asian context, the term indigenous peoples is understood to refer to distinct cultural groups such as “tribal peoples”, “hill tribes”, “scheduled tribes” or “adivasis”, who are indigenous to the countries in which they live and have distinct identities and ways of life, and who face very particularized human rights issues related to histories of various forms of oppression, such as dispossession of their lands and natural resources and denial of cultural expression (James Anaya 2010).

With these facts in mind, we can say that the Government of India’s position on the definition of the term ‘indigenous peoples’ is reflective of Niezen’s legal/ analytical approach due to its strict criteria that requires original inhabitancy and an act of colonization. Further, no evidence suggests India’s reliance on the other two approaches. India also makes definitional, practical and policy-oriented arguments as proposed by Kingsbury to deny the application of the term within its jurisdiction. Second, India may be more comfortable relying on the term ‘tribal people’ within its system because the term ‘tribal’ has not been recognised as a legal category within international law.

Check Your Progress

- 4) Why the term 'indigenous people' is contested in the Indian context? Briefly discuss.

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- 5) What are the essential characteristics of a scheduled tribe?

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3.4 SUMMARY

In India, people with indigenous characteristics are known by different names. They are called 'scheduled tribes,' 'tribes,' 'adivasi,' 'janajati,' 'giriyan,' 'vanvasi,' 'vanyajati,' and 'hill tribe,' etc. The tribal people of India are called 'scheduled tribes' in the Indian constitution. The question of tribes in India is closely linked with administrative and political considerations.

The Scheduled Tribes are notified in 30 States/ UTs in which 705 individual ethnic groups are notified as Scheduled Tribes. The tribal population of the country, as per the 2011 census, is 10.43 crore, constituting 8.6% of the total population. 89.97% of them live in rural areas and 10.03% in urban areas.

The term 'indigenous people' is often used interchangeably to mean tribes and other traditional forest dwellers in the Indian context. In India, the term 'adivasi' is also argued to be more apt to mean indigenous people. Over the last few decades, the term has been a source of a lot of contention and political movements. Many people belonging to certain lingual and regional groups have started claiming this status for themselves.

There is a continuing debate in India about the appropriateness of the phrase "indigenous peoples". The politicisation and administrative constructions are stronger today for the identification of indigenous people and have come to be understood more in terms of oppression and marginalisation.

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3.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Refer to section 3.1
- 2) Refer to section 3.1
- 3) Refer to section 3.2
- 4) Refer to section 3.3
- 5) Refer to paragraph 1 of section 3.3



UNIT 4 CLASSIFICATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES*

Contents

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Who are Indigenous Peoples?
- 4.2 Understanding the Term “Indigenous”
- 4.3 Development of Concept of Racial Elements in Indian Population
- 4.4 Classifications of the Population in India
 - 4.4.1 Classification of Sir Herbert Hope Risley (HH Risley)
 - 4.4.1.1 Turko- Iranian Type
 - 4.4.1.2 Indo- Aryan Type
 - 4.4.1.3 Scytho- Dravidian Type
 - 4.4.1.4 Aryo- Dravidian Type (Hindustan Type)
 - 4.4.1.5 Mongolo- Dravidian (Bengali Type)
 - 4.4.1.6 Mongolian Type
 - 4.4.1.7 Dravidian Type
 - 4.4.2 Classification of Biraja Sankar Guha (BS Guha)
 - 4.4.2.1 The Negrito
 - 4.4.2.2 The Proto-Australoid
 - 4.4.2.3 The Mongoloid
 - 4.4.2.4 The Mediterranean
 - 4.4.2.5 The Western Brachycephals or The Western Broad-headed People of Brachycephals
 - 4.4.2.6 The Nordics
 - 4.4.3. Classification of S.S. Sarkar
- 4.5 Summary
- 4.6 References
- 4.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- understand who are indigenous peoples;
- describe the concept of racial elements in the Indian Population;
- discuss the racial classification of the Indian Population; and
- also be able to explain the characteristics of each racial group.

4.0 INTRODUCTION

India is a melting pot of races. It is an ethnological museum. The ancestors of the majority of the present population have migrated to India from surrounding territories across the Himalayas. Indian population is constituted of major races of the world. We find people of different races in India.

4.1 WHO ARE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES?

It is estimated that there are more than 370 million indigenous people spread across 70 countries worldwide. Practising unique traditions, they retain social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live. Spread across the world from the Arctic to the South Pacific, they are the descendants – according to a common definition – of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. The new arrivals later became dominant through conquest, occupation, settlement or other means.

Among the indigenous peoples are those of the Americas (for example, the Lakota in the USA, the Mayas in Guatemala or the Aymaras in Bolivia), the Inuit and Aleutians of the circumpolar region, the Saami of northern Europe, the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia and the Maori of New Zealand. These and most other indigenous peoples have retained distinct characteristics which are different from those of other segments of the national populations.

4.2 UNDERSTANDING THE TERM “INDIGENOUS”

The term indigenous is derived from the Latin etymology meaning “native” or “born within”. It is defined as a body of persons that are united by a common culture, tradition, or sense of kinship, which typically has common language, institutions, and beliefs, and often constitute a politically organized group.

Considering the diversity of indigenous peoples, an official definition of “indigenous” has not been adopted by any United Nation system body. Instead, the system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on the following:

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

Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous peoples are peoples defined in international or national legislation as having a set of specific rights based on their historical ties to a particular territory, and their cultural or historical distinctiveness from other populations that are often politically dominant. The concept of indigenous peoples defines these groups as particularly vulnerable to exploitation, marginalization and oppression by nation-states that may still be formed from the colonising populations, or by politically dominant ethnic groups. As a result, a special set of political rights under international law have been set forth by international organizations such as the United Nations, the International Labour Organisation and the World Bank. The United Nations have issued a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to guide member-state national policies to collective rights of indigenous peoples – such as culture, identity, language, and access to employment, health, education, and natural resources. Although no definitive definition of “indigenous peoples” exists, estimates put the total population of post-colonial indigenous peoples who seek human rights and discrimination redress from 220 million to 350 million.

Check Your Progress

- 1) Who are Indigenous Peoples? Describe their important features.

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4.3 DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPT OF RACIAL ELEMENTS IN INDIAN POPULATION

The populations of India and other South Asian countries offer great opportunities to study socio-cultural and genetic variability. Perhaps, nowhere in the world people in a small geographic area are distributed as such a large number of ethnic, caste, religious and linguistic groups as in India and other South Asian countries.

All these groups are not entirely independent; people belong concurrently to two or more of these groups. People of different groups living side by side for hundreds or even thousands of years trying to retain their separate entities by practising endogamy.

India is a multicultural country. Anthropologists are committed to grasping the dynamics of communities and populations. As anthropology combines the premises of a biological as well as socio-cultural study, it looks at the diverse sections of human beings with dual perspective, one derived from its branch called biological/physical anthropology, and the other from social/cultural

anthropology. How communities and populations continue to retain their identity, in social and cultural terms on one hand and biological on the other, and how they acquire the characteristics of the others because of cultural borrowing or interbreeding are the questions anthropologists systematically investigate.

India with about more than 1000 million people has the second largest population in the world and it is one of the world's top twelve mega diversity countries and has a vast diversity of human beings, fauna, flora and environmental regimes. Its present population includes food-gatherers, hunters, fisher-folk, shifting cultivators, peasant communities, subsistence agriculturists, nomadic herders, entertainers, as well as those engaged in mechanized and chemicalised agriculture, mechanised fishing, tapping offshore oil and natural gas, running atomic power plants and producing computer software. India has been peopled by human groups carrying a diversity of genes and cultural traits. We have almost all the primary ethnic strains Proto-Australoid (skin colour-dark brown), Mediterranean (skin colour-light brown), Mongoloid (skin colour-yellow), Negrito (skin colour-black) and a number of composite strains. It is the homeland of over 4000 Mendelian populations, of which 3700 endogamous groups are structured in the Hindu caste system as 'Jatis'.

Outside the preview of the caste system, there are thousand-odd Mendelian populations which are tribal autochthones and religious communities (Bhasin et al., 1994; Bhasin and Walter, 2001). Like any other plural society, India offers a cauldron where the processes of unification, as well as fragmentalisation, are unceasingly taking place. This presents a situation of cultural, biological and environmental richness and diversity, and one where the constant interactions between communities are aiding the formation of bridges, thus creating a sense of unity. It is in these terms that India offers an ideal case for examining unity in diversity both biological and socio-cultural perspectives.

Check Your Progress

- 2) Write a descriptive account of the racial classification of the people of India.

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- 3) Describe the concept of racial elements in the Indian Population.

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4.4 CLASSIFICATIONS OF THE POPULATION IN INDIA

Classification of Indigenous Peoples

There are different ethnic elements in the Indian population. As regards these ethnic elements opinions of anthropologists differ. At different times different anthropologists attempted to analyse the ethnic elements present in the Indian population. Of these who have made a note-worthy contribution on this aspect and are included in our syllabus, are Risley, Guha and Sarkar.

4.4.1 Classification of Sir Herbert Hope Risley (HH Risley)



H. H. Risley, (Colonial Administrator and Ethnologist)

Source: The People of India (2nd edition, 1915) London: Thacker, Spink & Co.

Sir Herbert Hope Risley

H. H. Risley was a British ethnographer and colonial administrator, a member of the Indian Civil Service who conducted extensive studies on the tribes and castes of Bengal. He is notable for the formal application of the caste system to the entire Hindu population of India in the 1901 census, of which he was in charge. Risley was influential in the 20th century revival of the hierarchical Varna system as a structure for social order in India. Risley also became President of the Royal Anthropological Institute.

In India, the schematic classification of races was first attempted by Sir H.H. Risley in 1886-88. Based on physical characters and based on nine anthropometric measurements of 5784 individuals, Risley classified the Indian population into seven racial types. They are:

4.4.1.1 Turko- Iranian Type

Characteristics of this type – broad head, medium nose sometimes long and prominent. They are fairly tall and the stature is average, varies from 162cm to 172cm. Plentiful hair on the face and eyes are generally dark, fair complexion. They live in Baluchistan Province. This type is represented by Baluchis Brahuis, Afghans and North-Western Frontier Province. They are formed by the inter-mixture of Turki and Persian.

4.4.1.2 Indo- Aryan Type

Characteristics of this type – long head, long nose, narrow and prominent. They markedly differ from Turko-Iranian. Fair complexion and have dark coloured eyes.

This type is represented by the people who live in the regions of Rajasthan, Patna, Punjab and the valley of Kashmir were included in this group.

4.4.1.3 Scytho- Dravidian Type

Characteristics of this type – medium to a broad head and medium nose. Fair complexion. Scanty hair on the face and body. Stature is medium. They differ from Turko-Iranian Type in larger heads, flatter faces, higher noses and shorter stature. This type is an inter-mixture of Scythians and Dravidians. They are found in Gujarat and Coorg regions.

4.4.1.4 Aryo- Dravidian Type (Hindustan Type)

Characteristics of this type – long heads with a tendency towards the medium. The nose is medium but broad. Skin colour varies from light brown to dark. Their stature varies from 159cm to 166 cm. They differ from Indo-Aryan type with a shorter and dark nose. This type is represented by the people found in Uttar-Pradesh, Rajputna, Bihar and is an inter-mixture of male Aryans and female Dravidians.

4.4.1.5 Mongolo- Dravidian (Bengali Type)

Characteristics of this type – broad head with a tendency towards medium and nose is medium. Their skin colour is dark. They have plentiful facial hair. Stature is medium and short sometimes. They differ from Indo-Aryan type in broadheads. It is an inter-mixture of Mongolians and Dravidians. In the population of Bengal and Orissa, this racial type is most prominent. Bengali Brahmins and Kayasthas form the largest percentage.

4.4.1.6 Mongolian Type

Characteristics of this type – broad head and nose vary from fine to broad. Stature is short or below medium. Broad Mongolian face with Oblique eyes showing epicanthic fold. Their skin colour is dark. Scanty body with hair on the face. This type is found in and around Assam, Nepal and Burma.

4.4.1.7 Dravidian Type

Characteristics of this type: They are short-statured people with a long head and broad nose, sometimes depression seen at the root of the nose. Skin colour is very dark and eyes are dark coloured. Hair is dark in colour and tends to curl. They were the true aborigines of India. They are found in the regions from Ceylon to the Ganges covering the whole of south-eastern India.

The Paniyans of South India, the Santals of Chota Nagpur, etc. are some of the best examples of this type. According to Risley, they are the true aborigines of India and now they have been modified by infiltration of Aryan, Scythian and Mongoloid elements.

The Dravidian race, as mentioned by Risley, like the Aryan, is a linguistic group and not a racial group, says Majumdar. Most Indian anthropologists are not inclined to accept the racial classification of the Indian population presented by Risley.

There are many criticisms on this classification particularly from different authorities in respect of dravidian, scythio - dravidian and mongolo - dravidian types. The Points are based on preconceived notions.

Check Your Progress

- 4) Explain in detail the racial classification of H. H. Risley.

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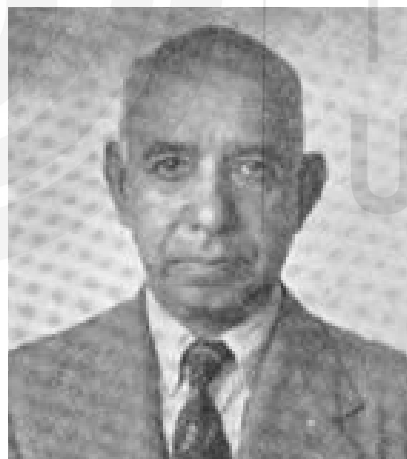
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4.4.2 Classification of Biraja Sankar Guha (BS Guha)

Later, the reliability and standardization of measurements were emphasised by the authorities. In 1931 the task was then undertaken by Dr. B.S. Guha of the Zoological Survey of India. His work was published in the Census of India (1931, Pt. III) based on an analysis of 29 characters and 63 crude coefficients of the racial likeness of different measurements of 2511 persons belonging to 34 groups. His survey was claimed to have the great advantage of standardization of the anthropometric techniques of the International Agreements of 1906 and 1912. This was regarded as a very important landmark in the racial history of Indian Anthropology. His extensive applications of Karl Pearson's coefficient of racial likeness proved very useful for biological relationships among the different populations of India.



Biraja Sankar Guha

Source: American Anthropologist, Volume 65, Issue 2, pages 382–387, April 1963

Biraja Sankar Guha

Biraja Sankar Guha was an Indian physical anthropologist, who classified Indian people into races around the early part of the 20th century. Although the concept of race has been rejected by evolutionary scientists, Guha's theories are of historical interest. Apart from Indian tribes, he also did some research on North American Indians. He was the first Director of the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) (1945–1954).

B. S. Guha has divided the Indian racial elements into the following groups:

4.4.2.1 The Negrito

Characteristics of this type: They are considered to be the first comers and the true autochthonous of India. Their physical characteristics are — head is small; it is round, medium or long; the nose is straight, flat and broad; stature is very short or pygmy stature; skin colour is dark brown to dark; hair is woolly; forehead is bulbous; supraorbital ridges are smooth.

This type is represented by the Kadars, Pulayans (Cochin and Travancore), Irular and Particular Vulnerable Groups tribes of the India.

In respect of the head form and hair structure, the Indian Negritos are closer to the Melanesian Pygmies than to the Andamanese.

4.4.2.2 The Proto-Australoid

Characteristics of this type: They are characterised by the dolichocephalic head; markedly platyrrhine nose, which is depressed at the root; short stature; dark brown skin colour; wavy or even curly hair. Their limbs are delicate.

The forehead is less developed and slightly retreating. Supraorbital ridges are often prominent. They are closely akin to the Australian tribes. They markedly differ from Negritos in having wavy hair instead of the frizzly or woolly of the latter.

This element is found in the Pulayan women (Travancore), Urali (Travancore), Baiga (Rewa), etc. The tribes like the Chenchu, Kannikar, Kondh, Bhil, Santal, Oraon, belong to this group.

4.4.2.3 The Mongoloid

Characteristics of this type: The Mongoloids are distinguished by scanty hair growth on body and face: obliquely set eyes showing epicanthic fold, flat face with prominent cheekbones and straight hair. The Mongoloid peoples entered India probably through the north-eastern routes in successive waves of migration.

The Mongoloid comprise two types namely, the **Palaeo-Mongoloid** and the **Tibeto-Mongoloid**.

i. Palaeo-Mongoloids

The Palaeo-Mongoloids have again been subdivided into the long-headed type and broad-headed type.

a) Long-headed type

The long-headed type possesses a long head, medium nose, and medium stature. Their cheekbones are prominent; skin colour is dark to light brown; the face is short and flat; supraorbital regions are fairly developed.

They inhabit the sub-Himalayan region. This type is found in the tribes of Assam and Burma Frontier. The Sema Nagas of Assam and the Limbus of Nepal are said to be true representatives of this type.

b) **Broad-headed type**

The other subdivision of the Palaeo-Mongoloid, the broad-headed is represented by the Lepchas of Kalimpong. Their characteristic features are broadhead, round face, dark skin colour, and medium nose, obliquely set eyes which show marked epicanthic fold.

This type is found in the hill tribes of Chittagong, like the Chakmas, the Maghs, etc.

ii. **Tibeto-Mongoloids**

Among the Tibeto-Mongoloids the head is broad and massive; the face is long and flat; stature is tall; the nose is long or medium; eyes are oblique having marked epicanthic fold: body hair and facial hair are markedly absent; skin colour is light brown.

The Tibetans of Bhutan and Sikkim have these characteristics.

4.4.2.4 The Mediterranean

They have been categorised into three different racial types:

a) **The Palaeo-Mediterranean**

Characteristics: They are the most ancient people and in many characters they resemble the Proto-Egyptian type. Their distinctive characters are long and narrow head with bulbous forehead, projecting occiput and high vault; small and broad nose; medium stature. The face is narrow; the chin is pointed; the body is slightly built. Their skin colour is dark and the hair on the face and body is scanty.

At present, the Dravidian- speaking people of South India show the preponderance of this type. The Tamil Brahmins of Madura, Nairs of Cochin and Telugu Brahmins form the best example.

b) **The Mediterranean**

Characteristics: They are characterised by a long head with arched forehead; long face; narrow and prominent nose; tall to medium stature; light skin colour. Chin is well-developed; hair is dark; eyes also have dark brownish to dark colour. They possess plentiful facial and body hair; and slender-built body.

They are found in Uttar Pradesh, Bombay, Bengal, Malabar, etc. The true representatives are the Numbudiri Brahmins of Cochin, Brahmins of Allahabad, and Maratha ladies of Indore. The Bengali Brahmins also show this type of characteristic.

c) **The Oriental of Fischer or the so-called Oriental Subtype of the Mediterranean**

Characteristics: They very closely resemble the Mediterranean in almost all the characters except the nose which is long and convex in the former.

This type is found in the Punjab, Sind, Rajputana, etc. The typical representatives are the Punjabi Chettris and the Pathans.

4.4.2.5 The Western Brachycephals or The Western Broad-headed People of Brachycephals

These are divided into three types:

a) **The Alpinoids**

Characteristics: Skin Colour - Light; Hair - Dark Brownish to Dark Colour and Form - Wavy; Head Form - Broad (Brachycephalic) with rounded occiput; Face Round; Eye – Dark Brown; Nose - Prominent; Stature - Medium and body thickly set.

The representatives of this group are Bania of Gujarat, Kathi of Kathiawar, and the Kayasthas of Bengal among others.

b) **The Dinarics**

Characteristics: Skin Colour - Darker; Hair - Dark in Colour; Head Form - Broad (Brachycephalic) with rounded occiput and high vault; Face - Long; Eyes - Dark in Colour; Forehead - Receding; Nose Form - Very long and often convex, Stature – Tall height.

This type is represented among Brahmans of Bengal; Kanarese Brahmans of Mysore and the inhabitants of Bengal, Orissa, and Coorg. The Alpino - Dinaric people are considered to enter India through Baluchistan, Sind, Gujarat, and Maharashtra into Kannada and then Sri Lanka (Ceylon). This type has been observed in the Indus Valley site, Tinnevely, Hyderabad.

c) **The Armenoids**

Characteristics: The Armenoids are having most of the morphological features similar to Dinaric. They are having a more prominent, narrow and aquiline nose and the occiput is more marked.

The best representative of this group is the Parsis of Bombay.

4.4.2.6 The Nordics

Characteristics: Their head is long with protruding occiput and arched forehead; they are tall statured people with a long face, strong jaw and powerfully built body. The nose is fine, narrow and straight; the complexion is fair. Eyes often have a bluish tinge.

This element is found sporadically in different parts of Northern India, especially in the Punjab and Rajputana. The Kho of Chitral, the Red Kaffirs, the Khatash are some of the representatives of this type.

The Nordics came from the north, probably from South-east Russia and South-west Siberia, through Central Asia to India.

Check Your Progress

5) Give a descriptive account of the racial classification of B. S. Guha.

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4.4.3 Classification S. S. Sarkar

S. S. Sarkar has divided the Indian population into six ethnic elements:

- 1) **The Indo-Aryan:** They inhabit Indus Valley to Gangetic Valley of Western India and also spread to Bihar among higher caste groups.
- 2) **The Mongolian:** They inhabit North-eastern India and the Foothills of the Himalaya.
- 3) **The Irano-Scythian:** Irano-Scythian entered India from the north-west and they moved south word along the Indus Valley to reach Gujarat, Maharashtra and towards, Mysore and Deccan. From the western side the Irano-Scythian move towards eastern India following the rivers Narmada and Son.
- 4) **The Australoids:** The representatives of this group are some tribes of South India, namely - Urali, Kannikar, Malapantarram, Paniyan, Kadar, etc.
- 5) **The Mundari-Speakers:** They are inhabitants of Chota Nagpur, Orissa Hills and Madhya Pradesh. They show some Mongoloid affinities. The people are Santhal, Juang, and Savara, etc.
- 6) **Far Eastern:** is observed in certain populations particularly along the Tuticorin-Tirunelveli coast in the extreme south and along the coast of Chittagong hill tracts.

So many classifications on the people of India have been reported and almost all seem to make some sense. An attempt has been made to evaluate the distribution of various racial traits/elements present in the peoples of India and this is represented in figure 1 (This figure has been drawn while taking into consideration the classifications reported by Guha and others).

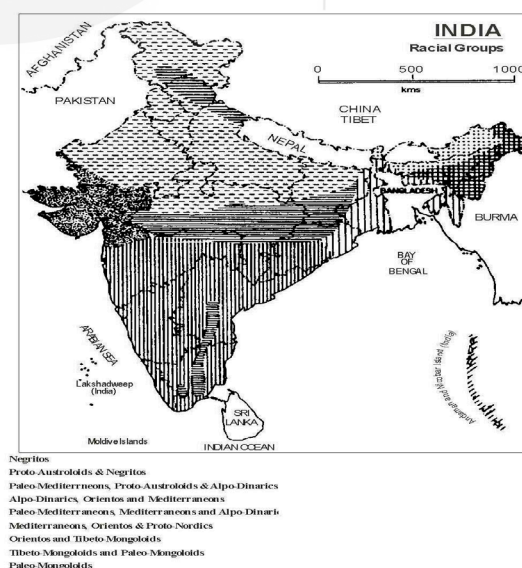


Fig. 4.1 Distribution of Various Racial Strains present in the Peoples of India

Source:

Check Your Progress

6) Write short notes on:

a) Aryo - Dravidian Type

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b) Mongolian Type

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c) Dravidian Type

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d) The Negrito

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e) The Mediterranean

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f) The Nordics

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4.5 SUMMARY

The Indian population in general, however, depicts the presence of some more racial strains. These are Mediterranean races including Alpine, Dinaric and Armenian. Alpine are found in Gujrat, Dinaric in Orissa, Kathiawar, Kannada and Tamil region. Armenian element is present among the Parasees of Bombay.

According to B.S. Guha, the population of Northern India depicts the racial strains of Alpine, Dinaric, Armenian, Nordic and Mongoloid races. According to Risley, the racial strain in the population of north India are Turko Iranian, Indo Aryan, Scytho Dravidian and Aryo-Dravidian. In the end, it should be remembered that there is no unanimity of views on this issue since different races have so much intermixed that it is not easy to trace their original strains in India.

Therefore, India is almost a museum of races. One may find broadheads from Balochistan to Burma. On the western coast from Gujrat to Coorg, one may find Alpine traits. The cranial index in India is 78.98 in Bengal, 74.9 in Nagpur, 75.7 in Bihar, 77.31 in Orissa, 80.27 in Gujrat, and 77.59 in Maharashtra.

The nasal index varies as follows: 80.0 in Bihar 87.4 in Chota Nagpur, 78.7 in Bengal, 82.7 in Darjeeling and 70.2 in Punjab. The average height is the maximum in Punjab and has gradually diminished up to Assam. In centimetre, it is 168.4 in Punjab, 165.5 in Uttar Pradesh, 164.04 in Bihar, 163.0 in Bengal and 161.05 in Assam.

It is clear from the above description that the Indian population depicts almost all varieties of racial characteristics since almost every race came to this most ancient and, mixed with the local population and this left its influence.

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4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Refer to section 4.2
- 2) Refer to section 4.3
- 3) Refer to section 4.3
- 4) Refer to section 4.4.1
- 5) Refer to section 4.4.2
- 6)
 - a) Refer to section 4.4.1.4
 - b) Refer to section 4.4.1.6
 - c) Refer to section 4.4.1.7
 - d) Refer to section 4.4.2.1
 - e) Refer to section 4.4.2.4
 - f) Refer to section 4.4.2.6