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# UNIT 1 DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESS: ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DIMENSION

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- 1.3 Development Discourse of Tribes
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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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Tribal people in India are experiencing unprecedented changes in their lifestyle and living conditions due to many forces of social change. In this unit, you would gain weight into some of the social changes impacting lives of tribal population. After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the concept of tribe and their livelihood;
- Discuss the development discourse of tribes in India;
- Explain the government's developmental programmes and constitutional provisions of tribals; and
- Highlight the impact of development discourse on the livelihood of tribal people.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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India has the largest proportion of tribals in the world after Africa. As per 2011 census, groups/ communities described as tribes have been estimated at 104.2 million representing 8.6 percent of country's population. Though they constitute only 8.6 percent of the total population, they represent an enormous diversity in terms of size, language and linguistic traits, ecological situations, physical features, extent of acculturation, modes of making a living, level of development. Most of them live in concentrations, clusters and large pockets. The distributions of ST populations vary widely across India's states and territories. The concentration of tribal is found in belt along the Himalaya stretching through Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand in West, to Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland in the North-East. Another concentration of tribal has been reported in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala in South India; Gujarat and Rajasthan in Western India; Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand

and Lakshadweep and Andaman Nicobar Islands in the Union Territories. In Mizoram and Lakshadweep, STs represent close to 95% of the population whereas in Uttar Pradesh STs represent only 0.6% of the population. And in states and UTs like Haryana, Punjab, NCTG Delhi, Chandigarh and Pondicherry do not have any tribal population. There are around 700 different tribes living across India, predominantly in remote areas: forests, hills, and rough terrain in plateau areas.

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## **1.2 WHO ARE TRIBES?**

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Groups and communities described as tribes are enormously diverse in nature. They are diverse in terms of their size, physical traits, territory they occupy, language they speak, mode of making living; stage of social formation, etc. Their identification as tribes has been based on both differences and similarities. Differences have been posed in relation to larger Indian society and similarities in relation to groups identified as tribes. Anthropologists conceive tribe as a society, it represents all the features and characteristic of a society. Though they may be small in size, all their distinct features go into the making of a society. The other term of tribe has been referred as ‘Adivasis’. Adivasis, (literally “original inhabitants”) is an umbrella term for a heterogeneous set of ethnic and tribal groups believed to be aboriginal or indigenous population of India. They comprise a substantial indigenous minority of the population of India. Tribal societies have not been static. Change has been in general, however, slow and gradual. With the contact and incorporation of tribes into the wider economy and society, there has been acceleration of social change among them. This is visible in all domains of their societal lives. The tribal world has been witness to phenomenal and far reaching change after they were incorporated into the colonial State to begin with, and then with the process of national reconstruction in post-independence India.

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## **1.3 DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE OF TRIBES**

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### **i) Pre-Independence Period**

Up till Independence the tribal population lived in comparative isolation from the national scene and lived almost a self sufficient life in the remote and rugged frosted tracts. They had their own diverse forms of political organisation in ‘tribal’ societies where they had a simple system of a ‘traditional’ administration directed by a headman. With the rise of British rule the situation changed with the introduction of new and uniform civil and criminal laws as well as administrative structures that were imposed on ‘tribal’ traditions and ethos. The interactions of the colonial administrative machinery with the tribes in India were largely of authoritarian and exploitative nature. The colonial rule identified them as primitive, backward, hostile and criminal and put them on a scheduled list. They dealt with the Indian tribes in accordance with their bias and prejudice which was behind the formation of that dossier. British anthropologist Verrier Elwin had proposed a policy of ‘development in isolation’ to the British government in 1939. He advocated the policy of isolation on the basis of his pamphlet ‘Aboriginals’ (1943) in which he highlighted the idea of a National Park for protecting tribals from the outside world. His philosophy then was of development by isolating tribals from contact with the outside

world. Thus, colonial administrative were largely interested to let them remain isolated and had no intention to integrate them with mainstream of national life. Without considering their ambivalent colonial origin, arrangements made for the administration of the 'tribal' areas during the British period were by and large continued in the post-Independence era.

## **ii) Post-independence Period**

When India became Independent in 1947, tribes in general and hill tribes in particular lived in isolation and social, educational and economic backwardness. They found themselves increasingly losing control over their and land resources as the tribal areas were integrated with the larger society through network of roads and railways on the one hand and trade and commerce on the other. All these open up the floodgate for influx of people from outside in the areas like government officials, traders, merchants, moneylenders and even land hungry peasants and cultivators. Thus, not only laws, regulations and administration but also through land, labour and credit market as well roads and railways they were included into one larger economic and political system. A special concern was shown for tribes in this post-Independence period. Even the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru proposed the five principles called as Nehru's Tribal panchsheel 'to allow people to develop along their own cultural lines, to respect land rights, to train tribal for the administration of the schemes, to work through tribal social institutions, and to judge results not by statistics and expenditure, but by the quality of human character that is evolved' (Tripathi 1988).

## **iii) Constitutional Safeguards**

The Indian Constitution adopted many provisions to provide them with special status and parliament through various protective legislations made conscious efforts to safeguard their interest. These include among others their statutory recognition (Article 342) as the 'Scheduled Tribes,' so that special administrative measures could be addressed to them. Among these are a proportionate share (quota) in state employment and proportionate representation (quota) in the national parliament and in the state legislative assemblies (Articles 16 (4), 330 and 332). There is also a restriction on the right of the ordinary citizen to move and settle in tribal areas or acquire property there (Article 19 (5)). The Constitution has also a clause that enables state to make provision for reservation in the general (Article 14(4)) and in jobs and appointments in favour of tribal communities in particular (Article 16(4)). The Constitution also ensures protection of the 'tribal' languages, dialects and culture so that their distinct identity and tradition can be maintained (Article 29). There is also the Directive Principles of the Constitution that requires that the educational and economic interest of the weaker sections of the society including tribes is especially promoted (Article 46). Furthermore, the Constitution acknowledges the postcolonial continuation of a special administration of 'tribal areas' in the form of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule Areas. The 5<sup>th</sup> Schedule Area provides for the establishment of Tribal Advisory Councils in 'tribal' dominated areas of mainland India and the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule Area provides for the Autonomous District Councils which operate in the North Eastern Region of India. Tribal Advisory Councils consist of members of which three quarters are to be representatives of the Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assembly of the respective federal state.

The function of the council is to advise the federal government on matters pertaining to welfare and interests of the 'tribes' in the state. Autonomous District Councils on the other hand provide 'tribal' communities space for a certain legal and administrative autonomy, a form of self-governance. Thus, a clear and strong legal framework exists, anchored in the constitution of India, within which the national state's agenda for the social, economic and political 'upliftment' of 'tribal' people. Notwithstanding these extensive provisions, 'tribal' people have not gained a lot from them. The cause of this is that despite claims to the 'protection' and 'upliftment' of disadvantaged 'tribes,' national development is the key to the state agenda of post-Independent India (Xaxa, 1999).

**Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) List the socio-economic development discourse of tribes in the Post-Independence period.

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**iv) Governmental Programmes and Policies for Tribal Development**

After Independence, the government adopted many development approaches for tribal development. But the approach to Tribal development is again rooted in British colonial policy, at least in as much as it had to deal with its legacy. Initially, under the first and second Five Year Plans, Tribals were not given separate consideration in development efforts, other than Scheduled status, being subsumed instead under the nation-wide programme of community development programmes. It soon became clear that this approach was failing, and programmes aimed specifically at Tribal groups were initiated, starting with a few projects in 1954 to supplement the community programme in some areas. During the Third Five Year Plan this became a general programme of Tribal Development Blocks; the Fourth Plan saw the creation of six Tribal Development Agencies in states with high tribal populations; and the Fifth included a Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) covering Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDPs) in areas of high tribal concentration, and a Modified Area Development Approach for small pockets of tribal population for the rapid socio-economic development of tribal people. This structure remains today. These moves, however, seem to have been a response to the failure of the community programmes in tribal areas, and were not a shift towards colonial-style protectionism, but an attempt to bring this section of the population up to speed with the rest of the country in its modernisation effort. Thus, even under the more flexible model for tribal development in the Fifth Five-Year Plan, project designers were told to keep in mind the underlying aim, 'to arrest the nomadic character of the 'tribes' and provide them wherewithal to lead a settled life' (Sanyal, 1988). It's also seen that the Five Year Plans aimed at tribal development through emphasis mainly on general welfare

activities. Though there has been substantial increase in the flow of funds for the development of STs from 4.2 in the Fifth Plan to 9.3 in the Ninth Plan, there is little progress. It is found that the literacy rate for overall population has increased from 68.84 percent to 72.99 percent between 2001-2011. In case of Scheduled Tribes, the increase in literacy has been from 47.1 percent to 58.96 percent. The female literacy rate among tribal during the period 2001 to 2011 increased from 34.76 percent to 49.3 percent which is lower by approximately 16.16% as compared to literacy rate of the females of the general population.

Looking at the tribal health, the tribal people, however, in the course of their isolated existence, have developed alternative systems of medicines. They have a rich store of knowledge of various herbs, plants, insects and animals, which have medicinal value. These drugs and practices have sustained the tribal communities for generations. Now due to change in medical system, the modern method of medicine has also made inroads into the tribal areas. But the tribals being rooted to their culture, generally prefer to have their own system of medicine and only when they find that it is ineffective, they go in for the allopathic system of medicine. As there is non-availability of doctors and other paramedical personnel, the tribal face problems in accessing the health services. Thus, the health problems of the tribal has been seen by various health indices like low birth-weight, life expectancy, maternal mortality rate, infant mortality rate and prevalence rate of various communicable diseases, genetic disorders, alcoholism and drug addiction.

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## 1.4 IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE ON TRIBAL LIVELIHOOD

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The development programmes in the name of national development has primarily been envisaged in terms of large scale industrialisation, mineral exploitation and infrastructure development (dams, irrigation and power projects) that directly and indirectly affects the livelihood of tribal people. Some of the issues are highlighted below:

### **i) Displacement and Rehabilitation of Tribal**

The tribal communities constitute 8.6 percent of the total population of the country, yet over fifty percent of those displaced belong to this section of our population (Hasnain, 1999). Development projects and displacement of the tribal became a crucial issue in the context of past experience because most dams being planned are in the tribal areas where the Common Property Resources (CPRs) are the norm. Displacement dismantles the production system, disorganises physical and social aspects of human residence, disrupts natural resources and degenerates community resources. All these are associated with risk factors such as landlessness, homelessness, joblessness, marginalisation, food insecurity, loss of access to Common Property Resources (CPRs), increased morbidity and social disarticulation which often culminate in material impoverishment and social disintegration of displaced families.

The study on development-induced displacement in Assam 1947-2000 (Fernandes and Bharali, 2006), indicates that all the projects together have used around 15 lakh acres of land, two thirds of which belongs to CPRs. Around 20 lakh persons have been deprived of their livelihood. Besides these

irrigation and hydroelectric projects, the other pioneering grand public projects like coal and other mines, steel plants, other industries, wildlife sanctuaries and parks have evicted large numbers of tribal population. Walter Fernandes and his associates (1989) have done an elaborate study of the displaced populations and estimated that over one-third of the tribals (nearly 40%) have been displaced due to the above reasons. In Madhya Pradesh, 29 per cent Project Affected Families (PAF) are tribals and belong mainly to 'Bhilalas' and 'Thils'. In Maharashtra, 100 percent PAFs are tribals who belong to Tadvi, Vasawa, Pawra, and Nayak tribal groups. In Gujarat, 97.4 per cent PAFs have tribal affiliation, namely, TadvilDhanka, Tetaria, Bhil, Rathwa, Nayak and Dungri Bhil. The rehabilitation effort is estimated to have taken care of only about 25 per cent of these Project Affected Persons (PAPs). Even the Land Acquisition Act (LAA) 1894, its legal premises, its apparent incompatibility with the constitutional frame of the Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy and Special Provisions for Scheduled Castes/Tribes and weaker sections failed to provide any compensation except cash and it is not being applicable to a large category of weaker sections in the rural polity.

**Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) In your own words write about the Displacement and Rehabilitation of the tribals.

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**i) Identity and Development**

Identities need not always be centred on a particular caste, religion or sect. Identities can also take the form of something material that we associate with. Tribal economy has been integrated into the wider market economy. There has been a tightening incorporation of the tribal people in the larger economic and political processes of the Indian State. The changes in the name of development have brought about displacement. Such large-scale development-induced displacement has affected the identity of tribes in a very significant way. One of the marked sources from which tribal have drawn their identity is in their mode of making a livelihood which is associated with land and forest. Any dislocation from their modes of livelihood and from the land and forest uproots them from their very existence and hence affects their identity in a very fundamental way. Displacement from their existing modes of living snaps them off from the core of their social and cultural lives. In the process an important marker of their identity gets eroded. Displacement dislocates them from their territory and homeland leading to erosion of their identity. Thus, dislocation from their territory and homeland and fragmentation of the community lead not only to loss of various aspects of their culture and ways of life but also to loss of their language and territorial identification from which they derive their identity of being a distinct people.

### iii) Land and Customary Laws

Centralised administrative institutional control, complete bureaucratic hold on natural resources, rigid forest legislations offers little space for people's participation which is definitely major constraints in the revival of customary laws. Land and customary laws of the tribal are closely linked and most tribes continue to treat their customary laws and the community ethos as intrinsic to their identity. For instance, in the Northeast, most tribes of the region run their civil affairs according to their community based customary law, but the individual based land law of the country is superimposed. Most often, these tensions and conflicts between the state law and the customary law, which question their livelihood, are transformed into movements and acts of insurgence against the State.

### iv) Tribal Movement

There is growing unrest among the tribal belts and activities of left wing extremists in the region are adding new dimensions to the tribal issues. The dialectical processes of protection and the erosion of resources and identity work with greater ferocity in the tribal belt. For instance the tribes, mainly peasants who were fraudulently deprived of their lands and means of livelihood by the machinations of the landlords started naxal movements in Andhra Pradesh. It soon spread to Telangana and Rayalseema districts. The movement got a fillip when Kondapalli Seetharammiah (KS) formed the PWG on April 22, 1980. The group made rapid progress in a short time encashing on people's anger and resentment and spread its wings beyond Andhra to Orissa, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Karnataka. In recent times, the organisation has a presence in Bihar, West Bengal, Haryana, Delhi and Kerala.

Tribal have continually fought for their rights and against their natural, social, economic and cultural resources being appropriated increasingly by outsiders and the State. Combined with the search for political autonomy, it has assumed rebellious and militant forms in various regions, particularly in the Northeast. Demands range from creation of separate states, as in the case of Jharkhand and Bodoland to outright separation such as in Nagaland and Mizoram.

#### Check Your Progress III

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Describe concept of the tribal movement in your own words.

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## 1.5 LET US SUM UP

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Despite the various interventions from the government to address the tribal development issues, through Constitutional safeguards and interventionist Five Year Plans, empirical studies indicated that tribals remained in a state of exclusion, exploitation and marginalisation. In the past decades, development policies and programmes designed to improve the welfare of the tribals had usually been paternalistic, ignoring the strengths of the indigenous institutions and knowledge. The reasons are structural that is the issues taken up under development schemes have often been the results of the kind of measures pursued under national development. Hence, until the tribal problem is seen as one linked to national/regional development, the solution to the problem suffered by tribes is going to be partial and inadequate. In fact, development schemes have been acting more as a safety valve for the situations and condition created by national and regional development, rather than as truly development measures. In this pattern of development, socio-cultural and economic rights of indigenous communities are no longer valued as important. In the race to becoming strong and developed, one forgets the importance of tribal communities in protecting and preserving in the 'name of development'. Thus, the government programmes and policies should strengthen the customary laws and Local Self-Governance according to their necessary and felt needs. There is a need for legal recommendations that the existing laws on non-transfer of tribal land to non-tribal must be strictly adhered to and provisions of the Scheduled Tribe and Other Forest Dwellers (Reorganisation of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 should be implemented in all tribal areas at the earliest. Before starting of any project, legislations should be passed for a complete 'rehabilitation' recognising land for land as the 'right'. Protection of indigenous people and continuation of their habitation in the natural environment should also be linked to larger implications of factors related to climate change and environmental degradation. In order to protect the socio-economic and cultural rights of indigenous peoples India must ratify International Labour Organization Convention. Tribal participation in the policy making is strongly recommended so that it can help in deciding to what extent their ways of life and being needs to be changed, so as bring them at par with the others in the fast changing world.

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