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# UNIT 1 TYPES OF TRIBES —MIGRANT, HUNTING-GATHERING, CULTIVATING

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- identify and understand different definitions for the term 'tribe';
- identify characteristic features of a tribe;
- examine current debates on the nomenclature of a tribe;
- examine the distribution patterns of tribes in India;
- classify tribes on the basis of types of activity -migrant, hunting-gathering and cultivating; and
- develop an understanding of the lifestyles and subsistence patterns of tribes in India.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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India is a country with vast cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic diversity. Diversity gives India her unique character in terms of cultural wealth. An important feature of Indian society is its stratified structure that organizes society into hierarchic caste groups, solely determined by birth.

However, there is another large section of population which falls outside the purview of the caste-based structure of society. This section consists of 'tribals' or 'indigenous people' – a term that is widely used and accepted in international circles. In India, tribals are popularly known as *Vanajati/ Vanvasi* (forest dwellers), *Pahari* (hill dwellers), *Adimjati* (original inhabitants), *Adivasi* (first settlers), *Janjati* (folk people) and *Anusuchit Janjati* (scheduled tribes).

In this Unit you will be introduced to the nomenclature 'tribe'. We will begin by examining various definitions of this term and delineate characteristic features of tribes and discuss current debates on this nomenclature 'tribes'. In the second section of the Unit we will study distribution pattern of tribes on the basis of various criteria and finally, we will discuss the broad classification of tribes on the basis of subsistence patterns, economy and modes of livelihood.

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## 1.2 DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRIBE

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Over the centuries, a host of anthropologists, sociologists, administrators and social workers have put forward various definitions for the term 'tribe'. However, there is a lack of consensus regarding the concept and definition of this nomenclature. Some of the prominent definitions are discussed below.

The Imperial Gazetteer of India states that "a tribe is a collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and not usually endogamous, though originally it might have been so."

Piddington defines tribe as "a group of people speaking a common dialect, inhabiting a common territory and displaying certain homogeneity in their culture."

Hoebel defines tribe as "a social group speaking a distinctive language or dialect and possessing a distinctive culture that marks it as different from all other tribes. It is not necessarily organized politically."

E.B. Taylor in the Dictionary of Anthropology defines tribe as "a social group usually occupying a definite area, with a dialect, cultural homogeneity, and unifying social organization. It may include several sub-groups such as 'sibs' or villages. A tribe ordinarily has a leader and may have a common ancestor, as well as a patron deity. The families or small communities making up the tribe are linked through economic, social, religious, family or blood ties".

D.N. Majumdar defines tribe as "a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous, with no specialization of functions, ruled by tribal officers, hereditarily or otherwise united in language or dialect, recognizing social distance

with other tribes or castes without any social obloquy attaching to them, as it does in the caste structure, following tribal traditions, beliefs and customs, and above all conscious of a homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration.” He opines that a tribe has a traditional territory and emigrants always refer to it as their home. Even though all the members of a tribe may not be related by blood to each other, kinship operates as a strong regulative and integrating principle. Politically, the tribes of India are under the control of the State governments, however, within themselves there exist many self governing bodies. Joint ownership of property and the presence of ‘dormitory institutions’ are some of the unique features of tribes of India.

Ralph Linton defines tribe as “a group of bands occupying a contiguous territory or territories and having a feeling of unity derived from numerous similarities in culture, frequent contact and a certain commonality of interest.”

I.M. Lewis states, “Ideally, tribal societies are small in scale, are restricted in the spatial and temporal range of their social, legal and political relations, and possess a morality, a religion, and world-view of corresponding dimensions. Characteristically too, tribal languages are unwritten and hence, the extent of communication both in time and space is inevitably narrow. At the same time, tribal societies exhibit a remarkable economy of design and have a compactness and self-sufficiency lacking in modern society.”

Thus we see that the standardization of the definition of ‘tribe’ is next to impossible.

### 1.2.1 Characteristic features of tribes

From the definitions given above, the characteristic features of a tribe can be inferred as a social unit with:

- a definite territory or a claim to occupying a common territory
- a common name
- a common dialect
- a common culture
- a shared behavioral pattern of an endogamous group
- common taboos
- existence of distinctive social and political systems and
- economic self-sufficiency

T.B. Naik tried to enumerate the criteria and indices of tribal way of life in the Indian context. He stated that, “a tribe should have the least functional interdependence within the community, should be economically backward, should have a common dialect, should be politically organized, should have customary laws, should be geographically isolated and should have the least desire to change.”

Efrenfels used the term ‘self-sufficient’ instead of ‘economically backward’ and disagreed that tribes should always be politically organized. He observed that they may have a single chief or a few elders who may wield more power within the community. He also preferred to substitute the last characteristic by stating

that the members of a tribe should have a feeling of belonging to a particular group.

Tribal communities in India have lived along with non-tribal communities belonging to different religions and cultures for several centuries. Often, the characteristic features between the two overlapped and distinctions blurred.

### 1.2.2 Tribe as a ‘Colonial Construction’

Some anthropologists opine that the nomenclature ‘tribe’ is a ‘colonial construction’. They are of the view that the character of this group was consolidated by the British through the process of classification and enumeration. It is not that groups corresponding to what we today call as ‘tribes’ did not exist in the pre-colonial period, but that the British placed these groups under the category of ‘tribe’.

Though there is a considerable amount of literature on castes from the pre-colonial period, the study of groups, later described as ‘tribes’, began with the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1874. Inventories of castes and tribes were published in the form of handbooks, monographs, administrative reports and gazetteers. The terms ‘tribe’ and ‘caste’ were used as synonyms in writings of the 18th century and later as cognates in administrative and ethnographic accounts. Despite this, the British treated the tribes as different from the rest of the Indian population and had different administrative set-ups for the two. The administrative domains were termed as scheduled areas and excluded or partially excluded areas.

The criteria for identifying a group as tribal were often inexplicit and blurred. This is evident in the census survey carried out in 1891 when the term ‘forest tribe’ was used under the broad category of agricultural and pastoral castes. Subsequently, the 1901 census described them as ‘groups which practiced animism’; the 1921 census described them as ‘hill and forest tribes’ and that held in 1931 described them as ‘primitive tribes’. Thus, although consecutive census surveys attempted to arrive at definitive criteria for tribes, they were often either ambiguous or inadequate. In the writings of the British, a ‘tribe’ is referred to as a group claiming descent from a common ancestor or one which lived in primitive and barbarous conditions.

### 1.2.3 Tribe as defined in Independent India

In light of the above, it can be said that the category of ‘tribe’ was introduced in modern consciousness by British colonial rule and further consolidated by administration in the post-independence era.

Post-independence period literature on tribes was mainly derived from three sources— the Anthropological Survey of India, the Tribal Research Institutes established in the 1950s and University Departments.

In anthropological literature, tribes were viewed as a composite society, more or less homogenous— with common language, culture, customs, government, etc. Tribal societies were often viewed as one amongst many stages in the evolution of society. They were also viewed in terms of segmented features, in as much as, tribes in spite of their limited spatial dimension and the temporal range of their socio-political and legal relations did possess a definite structure.

However, in the Indian context, it is the administrative rather than the anthropological concept of tribes that exists today. 'Tribes' are those communities which have been enumerated in the Indian Constitution in the List of Scheduled Tribes. The Constitution defines Scheduled Tribes as 'a community or part of, or groups within such communities, as is deemed under Article 342 to be a scheduled tribe.'

It is evident that the above definition is based on enumeration and has little to do with the anthropological concept of tribes. It is found that there is little scientific basis on which the categorization of Scheduled Tribes can be defended. Rather, it is linked to the extension of administrative and socio-political concessions to the groups concerned. The exclusion or inclusion of a particular group in the list reflects political mobilization rather than an anthropological notion of the same. This list of Scheduled Tribes had its genesis in the administrative practices of the colonial period.

In the post-Independence period several concerted efforts were made to arrive at a consensus on the status of a group as a 'tribe'. In 1950, the Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes sought the views of different regions and states regarding the criteria for defining tribes. The most common criteria suggested were, physical characteristics, linguistic affiliation, cultural contact, economy, and ecological considerations. On the other hand tribal dialects, animism, primitive occupation, and living in inaccessible areas were also determining criteria used to define tribes. But, again, some of these criteria were not considered adequate to define tribes. For instance, G. S. Ghurye pointed out that religion, occupation and racial features were not adequately valid criteria to differentiate tribal from the non-tribal.

Thus defining a tribe in the Indian context is not an easy one and there is no single universally accepted definition for the nomenclature 'tribe'.

**Check your progress 1**

- Note:** 1) Your answers should be about 200-300 words each;  
2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit or in the section concerned.
- 1) Enumerate and explain the different definitions for the term 'tribe' and list out the characteristics of tribes.

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2) Critically examine what is meant by Scheduled Tribes of India? Enumerate prominent tribes and state which tribes fall in this category in different states of India.

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3) “Tribe is a colonial construction”. Explain.

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4) What are the current debates on the definition of the nomenclature ‘tribe’?

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### 1.3 DISTRIBUTION OF TRIBES IN INDIA

As already discussed, there is no single criterion for defining and classifying tribes in India. Different categorizations have been made of tribes on the basis of geography/ territory, language, physical/ racial attributes, size, economy or subsistence patterns and the degree of assimilation into mainstream society. These are discussed below:

#### 1.3.1 Geographical distribution

Geographically the tribes of India have been divided into the following geographical zones: the *The Himalayan region; Middle India Region; Western India Region; South India Region* and the *Island Region*.

The tribes inhabiting the Himalayan region are the Akas, Daflas, Apatanis, Mishmis, Khamptis, Singphos, Kukis, Khasis, Garos, Lepchas, Bhotias, Tharus, amongst others.

The Juangs, Kharia, Khonds, Bhumijis, Baiga, Muria, Marias, Mundas, Gonds, Santhals, Oraons, etc. inhabit the Middle India region.

The Western India Region - Tribes inhabiting this region include the Barodias, Bharwads, Bhils, Damors, Dhanwars, Dhodias, Girasias, Gonds, Katkaris, Koknas, Kolis, Minas, Siddis and the Warlis.

Tribes like the Chenchus, Irulas, Paniyans, Kurumbas, Kadars, Todas, Badagas, Kotas, etc. inhabit the South India Region.

The Island Region is inhabited by the Jarwas, Onges, the Great Andamanese, North Sentinelese, amongst others.

### 1.3.2 Linguistic distribution

Tracing the linguistic map of India, we can see that diverse groups of tribes in India speak different languages in various regions. Some of the language families found among the tribal communities of India are:

The **Dravidian** language family used by tribes of southern India and in some pockets in central India including the Gonds, Oraons, Kandh, Todas, Palliyans, Irulas, Chenchus, Kadars, etc.

The **Austro-Asiatic** language is spoken in some pockets in the north-eastern Himalayan region of Meghalaya, in Nicobar Islands and in most part of central India by tribes like the Khasis, Jaintias, Mundas, Santhals, Hos, Saoras, Bondos, Korkus, etc.

**Tibeto-Chinese** languages are spoken in the entire Himalayan region. The Tai group of people (Khamptis, Phakials), Bhotia, Khampa, Memba, Akas, Miri, Lepchas, Totos, Mishmis, Nocte, Sulung, Tagin, Kachari, Dimasa, Garo, Lotha, Konyak, Hmar, Koirang, Paite; Vaiphei, use this family of languages.

The **Indo-Aryan** group, including the tribes of Gujarat, Rajasthan and the Indo-Gangetic Plain converse in languages belonging to this family. Some of the languages belonging to this group includes Chattisgarhi, Gujarati, Marathi, Assamese, Oriya, etc.

There is yet another language family spoken by the tribes of the Andaman Islands by tribes such as the Great Andamanese, Onges, Jarawas and the Sentinelese. They speak what is loosely called the **Andamanese** language family.

### 1.3.3 Racial distribution

The racial composition of the tribes of India can be grouped into the following categories:

The **Proto-Australoids** with dark skin colour, short to medium stature, low forehead, sunken nose, dark complexion and curly hair. The tribes of middle India like the Mundas, the Oraons, the Hos, the Gonds, the Khonds, etc. belong to this group.

The **Mongoloids** with straight hair, flat nose, prominent cheek bones and almond shaped eyes with the epicanthic fold present, yellowish skin colour, medium stature, high head and medium nose. The tribes of north-eastern India and the Himalayan region belong to this category.

The *Dravidians* include tribes of South India, like the Kadars, the Irulas and the Paniyans.

The Great Andamanese, Onges, Sentinelese and the Siddhis form yet another racial category.

### 1.3.4 Demographic size

In India tribal groups vary greatly when we consider their size in terms of total population. On one hand, we find tribal communities like the Gonds, Bhils, with a population of about forty lakhs. The Santhals too have a population size of over thirty lakhs. On the other hand there are more than forty tribes in India which have a population ranging from one to five lakhs. And then, on the extreme end of the spectrum, we have tribal communities like a few Andamanese groups who are even less than hundred in number.

### 1.3.5 Degree of assimilation into mainstream society

Tribal and non-tribal communities in India have co-existed for centuries, influencing each other in different ways and to varying degrees. The degree of assimilation of the tribal population into non-tribal, caste-based Hindu society varies greatly and tribes have also been classified according to this criterion. The following classifications are based on the basis.

*Tribal communities* includes those tribes which have confined themselves to their original habitats and maintained their distinct traditional pattern of life. Examples of these are the hunting-gathering and hill cultivating tribes of India.

*Semi-tribal communities* include those tribal communities who have mostly settled down in rural areas and have adopted agriculture and other allied occupations as a source of livelihood. An example of these is agriculturist tribes.

*Acculturated tribal communities* includes those tribal communities who have migrated to urban or semi-urban areas and are engaged in the industrial sector and adopted the cultural traits of the rest of the population, for example, industrial labourers including Santhals and the Hos.

*Totally assimilated tribal communities* includes those tribes which have been assimilated and are an integral part of the new social order. The Bhumjhis, Majhis, Raj Gonds are examples of such assimilated tribal communities.

### 1.3.6 Mode of livelihood or subsistence pattern

Yet another categorization has been made on the basis of mode of livelihood or the subsistence pattern of tribes in India. These categories are as follows:

#### Food gatherers and hunters

The economic activities of such tribes include hunting, fishing, gathering and collecting food. Examples of this category include the Chenchus, Challa Yanadi, Malaya Pandaram/ Hill Pandaram, Cholanaickan and the Great Andamanese.

#### Horticulturists

These tribes extract resources from a given area of land and consequently make a greater impact on the environment.



**Pastoralists**

Pastoralist tribes have adopted herding as either their primary or secondary source of livelihood. The Bakarwals, Bharwads, Drogpas, Gujjars and Todas are examples of such tribes.

**Hill cultivation tribes**

The people inhabiting the hilly areas have adopted shifting cultivation methods to sustain themselves. The Adis, Akas, Birjhias, Bondos, Chakmas, Chirus, Gangtes, Hmars, Jamatias, Juangs, Dimasas, Karbis, Mijis, Mishmis, Aos, Konyaks, Phoms, Paites, Riangs, Tangsas, Wanchos are examples of this category.

**Agriculturists**

Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for most of the tribal population of India. Tribal communities like the Apatanis, Cheros, Deoris, Miris, Hos, Jaintias, Khambas, Kharias, Khasis, Kolams, Tiwas, Rabhas, Kinnauras, Bhumijis, Santhals, Mundas, Oraons, Kharwas, Baigas, Gonds, Bhils, Minas, Warlis, Koyas belong to this category of people.

**Simple artisans**

There are a number of tribes in India who subsist on traditional craft traditions and cottage industries like basketry, wood craft, weaving, iron smelting, rope making, etc. Except in few cases, these are usually subsidiary occupations. For example, the Asurs, Goduliya Lohars, Agarias are iron smiths; the Birhors are rope makers; the Garas are blacksmiths; the Kotas and the Tharuas are potters; and the Sauntas and the Mahalis are basket makers.

**Folk artists**

There are certain tribes in India who are traditional singers, dancers, bards, acrobats and snake-charmers. Some of the tribes belonging to this category are the Nats, Saperas, Kelas, Pardhans, Ojhas, Pamulas, Kalbelias, Mons, Paradhist etc.

**Labourers /industrial workers**

Some of the tribes which traditionally subsisted on agriculture or were artisans have become wage labourers. They work as daily wage labourers on agricultural fields or in the non-agricultural sector like the industries on a casual basis.

**Skilled workers and white collar jobs**

In the post Independence era, the Constitution of India has helped in creating job opportunities for tribals by reserving seats in different services. As a result we find tribal people employed in offices, hospitals, administrative jobs, etc.

(The Distribution of Indian tribes on the basis of the above mentioned categories will be dealt in details in the next Unit i.e. Course 4: Block1: Unit2. See Section 2.2 in this Unit for the same.)

**Check your progress 2**

**Note:** 1) Your answers should be about 500 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

1) What are the different categories of distribution of the Tribes of India? What are the sub-categories within each of these?

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2) Match the following

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|-------------|-------------------|
| 1) Kalbelia | A) Pastoralist    |
| 2) Birhor   | B) Food Gatherer  |
| 3) Khasi    | C) Folk Artist    |
| 4) Chenchu  | D) Rope Maker     |
| 5) Bharwad  | E) Austro-Asiatic |

**1.4 TYPES OF TRIBES – CLASSIFIED ON THE BASIS OF SUBSISTENCE PATTERN AND ECONOMY**

In this section we will discuss three different types of tribes of India with an emphasis on the subsistence pattern and economy of each of these.

**1.4.1 Migrant**

The phenomenon of population movement into the Indian subcontinent started around the second half of the second millennium B.C. and continued till about the nineteenth century. This shaped the culture, social structure and political systems in the region. The earliest known population movement is those of the Aryans who migrated to India in around 1500 B.C. from Iran via Afghanistan. This was followed by the Greeks led by Alexander the Great in the fourth century; the Scythians known as the Sakas in India from the West and Central Asia; the Yue-Chi from Central Asia; the Arabs from Baghdad in the eight century; the Turks of Afghanistan in the thirteen century; the Central Asian invaders under Babur in the sixteenth century, laying the foundation of Mughal rule in India and finally by the Europeans.

Migrant communities came to India as merchants, traders, religious practitioners, rulers, and even as slaves.

Interestingly, migrant communities who came to India subsequently became a part of the Indian mosaic and were absorbed into the Indian population whilst still being able to retain their identity.

The largest single movement of population to India took place at the time of Partition in 1947 which was due to religion compunctions. Since 1947 approximately 35 to 40 million people have crossed borders between India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan.

Other examples of migration are the Bhotias, a name given to several groups of people inhabiting the Himalayan ranges. They migrated from Tibet and have settled in Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, West Bengal and Sikkim. The Banjaras are said to be descendants of the Roma gypsies of Europe, who migrated to India through the rugged mountains of Afghanistan and finally settled down in Rajasthan. Again, the Siddis are believed to be of African origins who were brought to India by the Portuguese towards the end of the seventeenth century. At present, they are distributed along the western coast of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

In the post-independence period, population movement took place for a variety of socio-political, economic reasons and also as a result of conflicts.

### **Causes of migration**

Over the centuries, most of the causes behind the movement of people have not been clearly established. A number of factors may have led to migration of people. Some of these are as follows:

#### **Economic**

Search for livelihood is one of the main causes for people to migrate. These may have been either forced, as in the case during colonial rule, or voluntary. For instance, the Mahali or Mahli; the Nagesias, Oraon, Mundas and the Santhals migrated during colonial rule to work in tea and indigo plantations. Some Kabui Nagas migrated to the Naga Hills during the British colonial period to work as porters. A section of the Kols of Maharashtra moved to Madhya Pradesh as migrant labourers.

#### **Ecological change/ natural calamities**

Ecological changes in the region and other natural calamities may also have forced people to migrate. For instance, the Khairwars, a catechu manufacturer community inhabiting the Brindavan area of Uttar Pradesh migrated to Madhya Pradesh due to the decrease in the number of catechu trees in the former. The Lodhas migrated to West Bengal and to Orissa due to deforestation in their territory. A group of the Khamyangs, migrated from Assam to Arunachal Pradesh following the great earthquake in Assam in 1950. The Santhals began migrating to the Birbhum and Santal Pargana in 1770 after their original homeland was affected by famine.

#### **Socio-religious causes**

Sometimes certain social-religious reasons caused people to migrate. For instance, the Kurichians of Kerala were ex-communicated following their conversion to

Christianity. These ex-communicated Kurichians formed a separate sub-group called Anchilla Kurichian and migrated further north.

### **Conflicts**

Due to various socio-political, economic or religious factors, conflicts arose in the society which resulted in the migration of a community or a group of them. For instance, the Chakmas from Bangladesh felt threatened when purchase of land in the Chittagong Hill Tracts was closed by the non-Chakmas till 1964; and again, when thousands of Bengali families settled in this area in the late 1970s and 80s. The Chakmas asserted their rights and demanded regional autonomy but were turned down. When their demands were not met, problems accelerated leading to an armed insurrection. As a result many Chakmas fled across the international border towards Tripura and Mizoram in India.

### **Development schemes**

Displacement of people also takes place due to implementation of various developmental schemes. For instance, under the Land Acquisition Act, the Government can acquire land for public purposes. These include construction of dams, creation of forest reserves, sanctuaries and national parks, construction of canals, highways, etc. As a result, many people are displaced and are compelled to migrate. The tribal communities are often the worst affected as they depend on land and forests for their livelihood.

Migration leads to many changes in the immigrant communities in the new ecological setting. Acculturation as well as assimilation takes place between them and the neighbouring communities. As a result, many new traits creep into the cultural mosaic of the immigrant communities and many other traits also die out.

As an example, in order to communicate, many migrant communities converse in the local language of their new habitat which facilitates inter-group communication. They use their original language only amongst themselves. Many communities have given up their traditional occupation and taken up new forms of livelihood. Changes are also observed in other aspects of the socio-cultural life of immigrant communities, such as in their food habits, attire, religious practices etc.

(The Migrant tribes of India will be dealt in detail in Course 4: Block 2: Unit1)

## **1.4.2 Hunting-gathering**

Until about a few thousand years ago, human societies followed hunting and gathering practices as a pattern of subsistence. Today, only a handful of communities around the world, follow this subsistence pattern as their main or subsidiary form of livelihood.

The principal economic activity of the hunter-gatherer or foraging communities consists of hunting, fishing, gathering or collecting food as they have little or no regular access to cultivable land. Since the foods foraged are unevenly distributed over large stretches of land they need to be highly mobile.

The forest, rivers and the sea is the main source of food. As such communities exercise little or no control over vegetation and animals on which they depend,

they have to adapt themselves to seasonal and annual fluctuations in resources. The entire pattern of life and world view revolves around the forest and is in complete consonance with their eco-system.

With their primitive knowledge, they have developed indigenous technology, skills and time-tested, traditional practices, which support their way of living. The technology that foragers employ is limited and they have invented unique solutions to problems faced by them in hunting, gathering and foraging food. They use indigenous implements like digging sticks, knives, traps, harpoons, snares, traps and hooks and various baskets to collect food.

Hunting-gathering tribes lead a semi-nomadic life. They move out in groups for hunting or gathering and camp in the open or live in leaf shelters or under overhanging rocks. When they do find an area which affords them a plentiful supply of food, they make small settlements and live in thatched huts.

Many hunting-gathering tribes eventually created a systematic method of gathering marketable forest produce like resin, wax, honey and a variety of medicinal plants which they supplied to forest contractors in exchange of grain, clothes and other essential commodities.

Men usually hunt and women gather food either individually or in groups. For example, Onge women are especially adept in digging wild roots, tubers, fruits and collecting firewood; Sentinelese women use small round nets to fish in shallow waters. Hunting and honey collection is generally carried out by the men of the community.

Interestingly, within the group, hunting-gathering and foraging tribes are extremely supportive of each other. They share some or all of what they obtain with other members of their community. As a result, few if any, go hungry as they ensure that there is adequate food for all; nor does any one have to work continuously on a daily basis.

As mentioned earlier, hunting and gathering societies live in small, semi-nomadic groups which expand and contract according to the seasons and adapt themselves to variable availability of resources in different places at different times. This is especially pertinent as the environment that they subsist on often cannot support a large concentration of people on a daily basis. The foragers have, therefore, devised equally ingenious social solutions to problems of living on scattered and variable resources. For instance, in communities like the Chenchu or Kadar, the man has the right to reside, hunt and gather not only in his paternal territory but also in his maternal territory. Even after marriage the man acquires similar rights over the territory of his wife. This grants him exclusive rights to territory and gives him wider access to available natural resources.

Most of the hunting-gathering or foraging tribes of India are situated in the Southern part of the country as well as in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. They include the Chenchus and the Challa Yanadi of Andhra Pradesh; the Kadar, Malaya Pandaram or Hill Pandaram and Cholanaickan of Kerala; Hakkipikkis of Karnataka; the Great Andamanese, Onge, Sentinelese and the Jarawas of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands .

(The Hunting-gathering tribes of India will be dealt in detail in Course 4: Block 2: Unit3)

### 1.4.3 Cultivating

Cultivation is the major source of livelihood of the tribes of India. In fact, about two-thirds of the tribal populations are agriculturists. There are mainly two types of cultivation-Hill Cultivation and Plain Agriculturist.

#### Hill cultivation type

The people inhabiting the hilly areas have adopted three ways of cultivation. These include: i) slash-and-burn cultivation carried out with the help of digging sticks; ii) hoe-and-burn cultivation; and iii) terrace cultivation in the 'terai' areas aided by natural irrigation sources.

Hill cultivation is a seasonally-regulated procedure designed to open up and bring a patch of land under cultivation. After one or two seasons of cropping, the land is left fallow for several years with the aim of restoring fertility to the soil. Following this period, land is again cleared and burnt and another cycle of cultivation begins on a similar pattern. Simple implements like the digging stick (with a metallic end), spade, sickle, hoe, and axe are used.

Hill cultivation is known by various names like *Jhum* in Assam, *Kurwa* or *Khallu* in Santhal Parganas; *Podu*, *Rema*, *Dahi*, *Gudia*, *Bringa* in Orissa; *Penda*, *Dahiya*, *Bewar* in Madhya Pradesh; *Kondapady* in Andhra Pradesh and so on.

Hill cultivation is widely practiced throughout India. Tribal communities inhabiting the hills of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh use this type of cultivation. Tribes like the Adis, Akas, Birjhas, Bondos, Chakmas, Chirus, Gangtes, Hmars, Jamatias, Juangs, Dimasas, Karbis, Mijis, Mishmis, Aos, Konyaks, Phoms, Paites, Riangs, Tangsas, Wanchos practice hill cultivation methods.

Even though the process of hill cultivation is varied, the stages followed in general are: i) selecting the hill slope ii) worshipping iii) cutting the jungle growth and spreading it to dry iv) collecting firewood v) setting fire to the shrubs vi) preparing the field for sowing vii) sowing seeds with the help of digging sticks and hoes viii) weeding ix) watching and protecting the crop x) harvesting and storing xi) worshipping and thanksgiving xii) merry-making xiii) fallowing.

#### Plain agriculturist type

Agriculture is the most popular economic activity of the tribal population of India. A large percentage of the tribals are supported by agriculture who practice it as their primary source of livelihood. In a rudimentary form this involves cultivating the land by ploughing it with two animals and basic implements such as the plough, spade, axe, sickle, etc. The fertilizer used is cow-dung, though chemical fertilizers are now being adopted by tribals. Usually ploughing starts in May-June, transplanting in July-August and harvesting in November-December

An important feature of tribal agriculture is cooperation among relatives and among the villagers on a reciprocal basis during the different stages of agricultural activity.

All the major tribes of India practice agriculture as their main source of livelihood. Tribal communities practicing agriculture include the Apatanis, Cheros, Deoris,

Miris, Hos, Jaintias, Khambas, Kharias, Khasis, Kolams, Tiwas, Rabhas, Kinnauras, Bhumijis, Santhals, Mundas, Oraons, Kharwas, Baigas, Gonds, Bhils, Minas, Warlis, Koyas; the list being endless.

(The Cultivating tribes of India will be dealt in detail in Course 4: Block 2: Unit 4)

**Check your progress 3**

**Note :** 1) Your answers should be about 300 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

1) What are the causes for migration of tribes in India?

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2) Describe the way of life of the hunting/gathering tribes of India.

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3) What are the types of cultivation methods practiced by various tribes in the country? Describe each method and substantiate your answer with examples.

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**1.5 LET US SUM UP**

As we conclude this Unit, you are now conversant with definitions, characteristics, broad classifications and a variety of criteria which help us categorize indigenous communities or tribes in India. You would also have gained a thorough understanding of their way of life and subsistence patterns, the language groups they belong to. You would also have become acquainted with the migrant, hunting-

gathering and cultivating tribes of India; the sub-classifications within each category and the names of tribes which belong to these specific groups.

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## 1.6 ACTIVITY

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- 1) Locate a film/video library in your town/city and see films on tribes of India.
- 2) Watch TV programmes on National Geographic /Discovery Channel, Prasar Bharti which telecast informative programmes on tribes in India and in other countries in the world.
- 3) Carry out a comparative analysis of any one type of tribe (migrant, hunting-gathering or cultivating) found in India and in any other part of the world.
- 4) Carry out audio and visual documentation and research of a tribe in your city/town/state or region. Study their subsistence pattern, lifestyle, social, cultural and religious beliefs and norms.
- 5) Carry out interviews with a tribal community of your choice and document the art, music, customs and festivals with special emphasis on changes which have taken place in their society through a research surviving generations in any one family from that community.

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## 1.7 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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- Von Furer-Haimendorf, C. 1985. *Tribal Populations and Cultures of the Indian Subcontinent* in B. Spuler et al., eds, *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, II. Abt. Vol 7. Leiden/Cologne: E.J. Brill.
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## 1.8 GLOSSARY

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- Endogamous** : When one is governed by the rule that requires the person to marry within a specific social group of which he/she is a member
- Fallow** : The process of leaving ploughed land unseeded in a growing season
- Obloquy** : Ill repute or condemnation
- Taboo** : A prohibition which, if violated, leads to an automatic penalty inflicted by magic or religion.



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## 1.9 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : POSSIBLE ANSWERS

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### Check your progress 1

Questions 1 and 2 : Read Section 1.2

### Check your progress 2

- 1) Read all sections of Section 1.3
- 2) (1-C; 2-D; 3-E; 4-B; 5-A)

### Check your progress 3

- 1) Read Section 1.4.1
- 2) Read Section 1.4.2
- 3) Read Section 1.4.3