



“The Classification Of Adibasis/Aboriginal People/ Tribal People Of India And The Question Of Their Identity And Existence: An Assessment And Discussion”

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Abstract

This paper assesses the constitutional framework, historical evolution of tribal classification, and contemporary challenges affecting Adibasi Communities in India. It discusses the implications of state policies, judicial interpretations, and socio-economic changes on their identity and existence. The study argues that a more inclusive and participatory approach to classification and policymaking is essential to ensure social justice, protect cultural diversity, and uphold the constitutional rights of Adibasi peoples. By critically examining these issues, this paper contributes to the ongoing discussions on indigenous identity, recognition, and the future of Adibasi groups in India. Urbanization has been emerged as one of the dominant forces of socio economic changes in India. Among indigenous communities, its impacts can be profound.

This article explores how urbanization, industrialization, policies of ancient, medieval, British period, and the policies of Indian Government influence the Tribes. Traditionally Tribes were engaged in food gathering, agriculture that has been affected through economic transformation, cultural shifting and social adaptation. Using field interview as primary data and secondary data the study reveals a complex interplay of opportunity and challenge.

Aboriginal people should not be classified on the basis of occupation, language, social organization, regional diversity. Instead they should be unclassified for the sustainability of Tribalism because of their internal index/ physical index like Races, Gene (L3mn), Blood group (O), Totem & Taboos, Colour (White), Status of landed property (Communal), Physical Structure, gentleness/ decency, External index – Nature worship/ Physiolatry, no idol/ deity worship. No Dowry system revelry they pay to Bride for social honour. In such occasions, the using of Sal, Mahua, and other trees in marriage ceremony, and also in other social and cultural activities by the Tribal Communities are over all same. Religiously Tribal people follow Adibasi/Sarna Dharam. Now, their sustainability is in the face of question due to the impacts of Industrialization, urbanization, migration, growth of new settlement, impact of other people (imitate/ mimic), diffusion of religion, culture, societal diffusion, marriage system, lack of self awareness, depersonalization, inferiority complex that are seen in the tribal society.

Discussion

Expansion of the Tribal Classification Rates makes Tribalism toxic in India. Traditionally, the expansion of the Tribes (Scheduled Tribes, 1950) list and the inclusion of new groups are viewed on the basis of social & cultural diffusion. But division of the Tribes should be indexed on the basis of their ethnicity, totem & taboos, blood groups, Races (Proto-Austroliod) Gene (L3mn) and Physical structure.

However, this study argues that the increasing official tribal classification rates actually functions as an institutional mechanism to decrease polarizing the tribalism. Utilizing a mixed method of approaches – combining legal analysis of Article- 342, historical administrative data, and regional case studies – the research demonstrates how state recognition dilutes radical identity politics.

Findings reveal that by expanding the classification sourced from net archives this reduction has come through two primary pathways. First, it democratizes the access to constitutional safeguards, thereby alleviating the resource scarcity and economic precarity/insecurity that fuel hostile, defensive tribalism. Second, the integration of diverse subgroups into a unified broader legal framework fractures insular, chauvinistic ethnic, totem & taboos, blocs, replacing militant functionalism with tribal bureaucratic & expert integration.

The research concludes that the increasement of data-driven-diverse structures in tribal classification do not balkanize the nation, rather, they de-escalate identity-based conflicts by transitioning communities from volatile identity politics to institutionalized civic participation.

Keyword: - Tribal classification, Tribalism, Scheduled Tribes, Identity politics, Constitutional Safeguard.

Increasing rate of the no of classification of Indian Tribes:

Before Buddhist: - (before 6th BCE)

- i. Proto-Austroliod (Austic) ethnic group – Hunter, food gatherer, Cattle-herding early agricultural. Occupied the deep forests, plateaus of central, southern & eastern India.
- ii. Himalayan non goloid Tribes
- iii. Dravidian in south

Tribal politics – Sixteen Mahajanapadas.

During Buddha (563 to 483 BCE) :- Shakyas, Lecchavis, Mallas, Kolias, Naga, Bhutia & Lepoha, Monpas, Sherdukpens, Chakma (Buddhism imparted Tribal cultures & administration).

After Buddhist (483 BCE):- Bhils, Gonds, Bhutia, Jarwa, Sentinclese.

Morya (321 to 185 BCE): – Nishadas, Magadhas, Chandalas, Kambojas, Kathas.

Portuguese (1505 to 1961):- Goam, Gawdas, Kunbis, Veleps, Varlies, Koknas, Dhodias, Dublas, Siddis.

During Mughal (16th to 18th centuries):-

Gond, Bhils, Balochis, Gakkhar & Khokhars, Gaddis, Ahoms, Checros, Santhal & Mundas, Kolis, Berads, Koragas, Vetars, Maravars.

(Socio economic transformation into settled agriculturists)

British (1757 to 1947) :- Agricultural tribes, Criminal Tribes (Act of 1871), Frontier Tribes (Nagas, Khasis, Lushais), Santhal, Mundas, Gonds, Kolis, Banjaras, Ramoshis, (Hunter- Baigas, Todas) 1871 - Aboriginal tribes, Animist, nomadic, criminal Tribes (04 types)

2011 – 700 tribes

1947 – 128 tribes (over 200 distinct tribes in 1931 census)

Major Tribes – Gond, Bhils, Santhals, Mundas, Khasis, Bhutias.

Criminal tribes – Bazigar, Sansi, Bauria.

Primitive word is introduced by J.H. Hutton, Anthropologists. Presently (ST) more than 700 tribes are there in India.

Ministry of Tribal Affairs: Presently Major Tribes – Bhils (17million), Gonds (15 million), Santhals (08 million), Mundas (04 million), Naga (03 million) (Mahali from – Munda & santhal)

On the basis of my study Division of the Tribes should be on the basis of their ethnicity, totem & taboos, blood groups, Races (Proto-Austroliod) Gene (L3mn) and Physical structure. It may sustainable their society as the Aboriginal society in India.

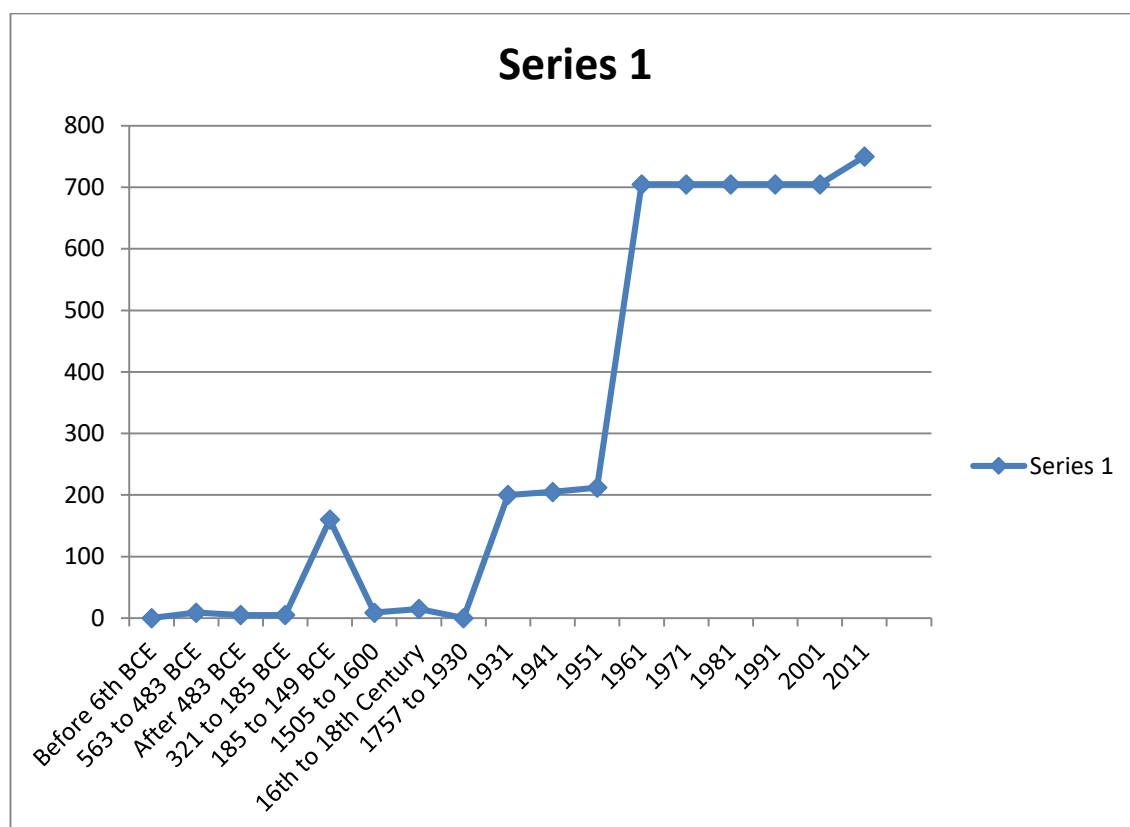
1. Communal ownership of Land”
2. British administrators first categorized to the adivasi in 1872 census as the Aboriginal Tribes to build geographical knowledge & solidity colonial rule.

Initial design by Venkayya on 31st March & 1st April, 1921 at Vijayawada (All India Congress Committee) Red - Hindu, Green – Muslim & White – Tribes & others. Tribal colour is White (Marang Buru is also Worshipped / sacrificed white cock for all Tribes).

Data shows the Increasing rate of classification of Adibasi (Before 06th BC TO 2011)

Year	Types of Tribes
Before 6 th BCE	Hunter, food gatherer, cattle hearding – 16 Tribes
563 to 483 BCE	09
After 483 BCE	05
321 to 185 BCE	05
185 to 149 BCE	160 (Period of Pushyamitra Sung)
1505 to 1600	09
16 th to 18 th Century	15
1757 to 1930	15 – 128 (British Period)
1931	200
1941	205
1951	212
1961	705
1971	705
1981	705
1991	705
2001	705
2011	750

Linear Graph Showing the increasing rate of classification of Tribes in India.



Anthropological classification:

Races - proto – Australoid – central east India.

Negrito – N.E. India – Naga, Mizo, Bodo. 'O' blood group is the most common among many Indian tribes & often has the highest frequency.

- O>B>A>AB &
- Gene – L3mn

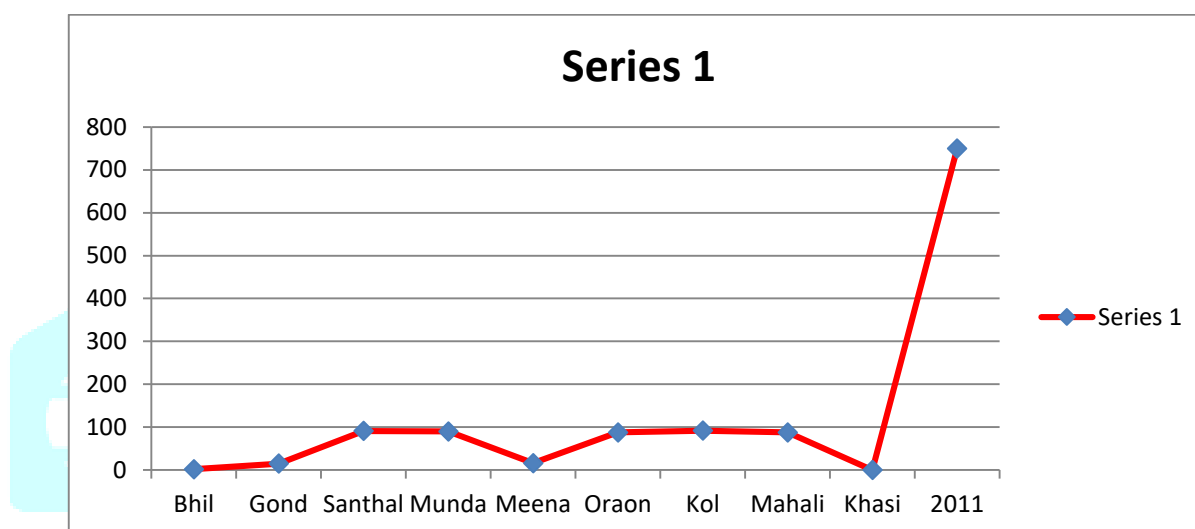
Aboriginal people/ Tribal People/ Indigenous people should not be classified on the basis of occupation, language, social organization, and regional diversity. Instead they should be unclassified for sustainability of Tribalism because of their internal index/ physical index like Races, Gene (L3mn), Blood group (O), Totem & Taboos, Colour (White), Status of landed property (Communal), Physical Structure, gentleness/ decency, External index – Nature worship/ Physiocracy, no idol/ deity worship. In such occasions, the using of Sal, Mahua, and other trees in marriage ceremony, and also in other social and cultural activities by the Tribal Communities are over all same. Religiously Tribal people follow Adibasi/Sarna Dharam. Now, their sustainability is in the face of question due to the impacts of Industrialization, urbanization, migration, growth of new settlement, impact of other people (imitate/ mimic), diffusion of religion, culture, societal diffusion, marriage system, lack of self awareness, depersonalization, inferiority complex that are seen in the tribal society.

Due to lack of education, poorness, superstition/ blind faith, distance from own native land/ Society they are about 50% diffused in all aspects. Their basic tribalism is being eroded and fallen in question mark. On the basis of Races, ethnology, Totem & Taboos, Blood group, Gene, physical structure they must be considered as one Tribe.

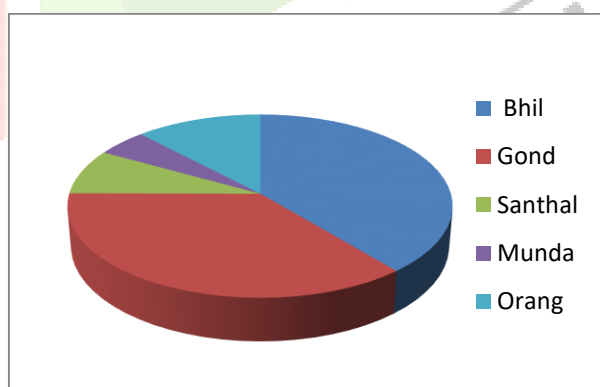
Religiously, converted tribes among Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Buddha, Sikh, Jain and others:

Sl.No	CASTE	%of Religiously Converted
01	Bhil	97%
02	Gond	90%
03	Santhal	20%
04	Munda	12%
05	Oraun	30%

Linear Graph Showing the converted rate of Religion among the Tribes.



Pie Graph Showing the religiously, converted tribes among Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Buddha, Sikh, Jain and others:



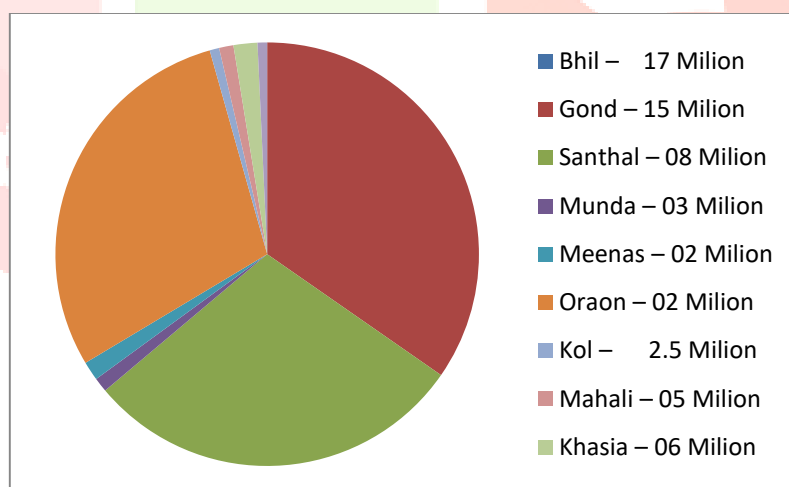
Religious Structure of major Tribes:

Population	Religion %					
	Hindu (Converted in %)	Christian	Muslim	Buddha	Jain	Sarna/ Adibasi (not converted in %)
Bhil – 17 Milion	95	2	0.5	0.5	0	2
Gond – 15 Milion	80	4	1	0	0	15
Santhal – 08 Milion	3	5	1	0.1	0	91
Munda – 03 Milion	4	6	0	0	0	90
Meenas – 02 Milion	80	4	0	0	0	16
Oraon – 02 Milion	2	10	0	0	0	88
Kol – 2.5 Milion	3	5	0	0	0	92
Mahali – 05 Milion	5	6	1	0	0	88
Khasia – 06 Milion	2	98	0	0	0	00

Data shows that 03 major Tribes i.e. Bhil, Gond, and Meena are converted into the Hindu by 95%, 80% , 80% respectively. Causes are social, cultural and religious diffusion of locality, historic impact and Government policies also.

91 % Santhal, 90 % Munda, 88% Oran, 92 % Kol, 88% Mahali, etc are followed Adibasi/ Sarna Religion. We can say that these are unchanged.

Pie Graph Showing the Religiously converted Tribes in India



Methodology:

Sampling:

Tolls:

- Structured interviews. Focus Group Discussion (FGDS). Participant observation. Secondary Sources (Census, NSSO data)

Data Analysis:

Data Presentation & Analysis:

- Economic adaptation (employment, income, variation). Cultural shift (festivals, language, traditional continuity). Social change (Family structure, youth aspirations). Urban challenges (discrimination, housing, livelihood)

Overall Assessment:

- Urbanization, industrialization, Government policies, historical impacts has brought economic opportunity and education exposure but it has also caused cultural erosion, occupational displacement, forgetting of totem & taboos, Social pluralistic/ mixed society or cosmopolitan culture. Diverse population or mixed up with various others groups of localities.
- Conversion of Religion, Culture, Society, Conversion of Residential place.
- Majhi, Pargana, PESA, Protection and proper use of the Landed property of Ancestors,

Language Composition of Tribes:

1. Austro-Asiatic Family: Munda Branch - Santhali, Mundari, Ho, Khasia, Khasi – Jaintia Branch, Khasi
2. Dravidian Family: Gondi, Kurukh (Oraon)
3. Sino – Tibetan/ Tibeto – Burman Family: Bodo, Naga, Kuki, Garo
4. Indo Aryan Family: Bhili, Halbi, Gujar
5. Andamanese Family: Shompen, Onge, Jarwa, Santenies.

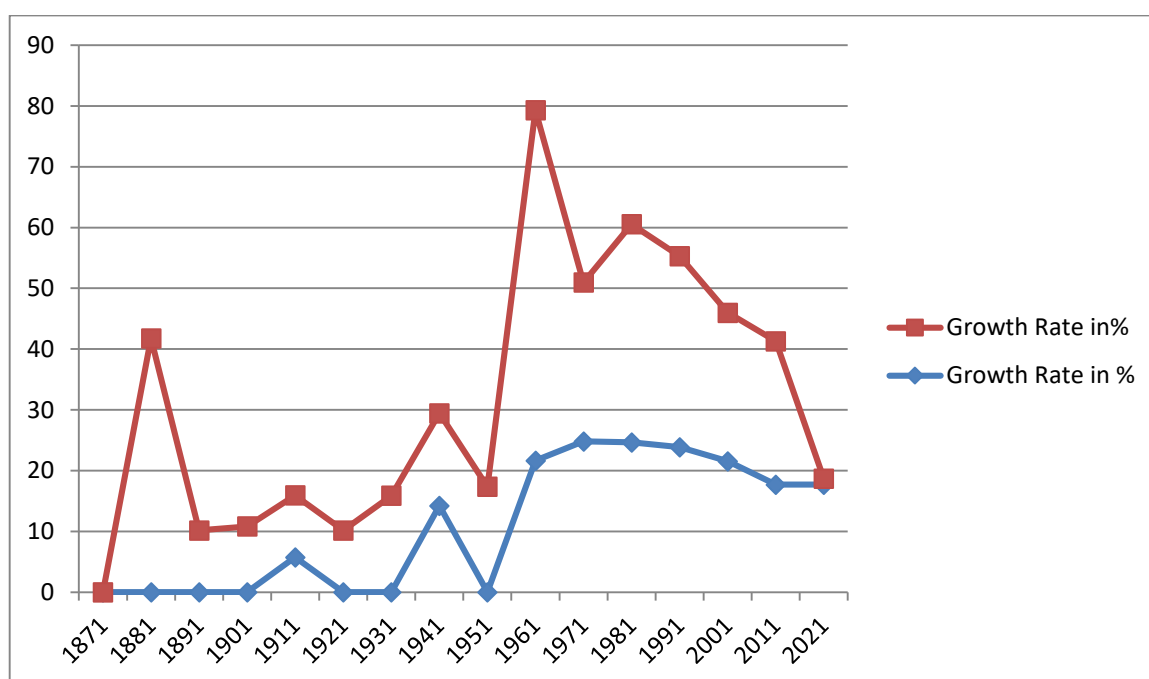
Decadal General Population Growth Rate in India (1871-2021):

Census year	Growth Rate in %
1871	NA
1881	NA
1891	NA
1901	NA
1911	5.75
1921	-0.31(Big divide line)
1931	11.0
1941	14.22
1951	13.31
1961	21.64
1971	24.80
1981	24.66
1991	23.87
2001	21.54
2011	17.70
2021	17.70

Decadal Tribal Population Growth in India (1871-2021)

Census Year	Growth Rate in%
1871	0.0
1881	41.78
1891	10.17
1901	10.84
1911	10.18
1921	10.17
1931	15.89
1941	15.22
1951	17.35
1961	57.65
1971	26.16
1981	35.87
1991	31.42
2001	24.45
2011	23.60
2021	00.97

Linear graph showing the descending growth rate of ST population (1871-2021)



Red Line shows ST population growth rate and Blue line shows General population growth rate.

Census report in India shows that ST population growth rate is in descending order. Causes of the descending growth are as follows:

Government policies, Social diffusion, Social, Cultural, Religious and Political activities, Conversion of Caste and Religion of ST people. Due to less growth rate their reservation percentage decreases in the field of services.

Conclusion:

“Adibasis are one.” “Adibasis are one group.” “Adibasis are one people’.

I refute, contradict, disprove, Rebut, Deny the concept of Sir Herbert Hope Risley, “The Tribes & Castes of Bengal” – 1891 also the views of Dalton 1870.

Tribes are under one ethnic group.

Totem (Sacred symbol, animals/ plants) & Taboos (strict social or religious prohibition against harming, naming or eating).

Impact of Historical Raja, Maharaja, British Rule:

Radically divided & governed through policies of administrative isolation, economic exploitation and arbitrary labelling of nomadic & martial groups as criminal.

- 1873 Eastern Frontier Regulation Act- 1873
- Non Regulation Provinces – directionary power.
- Scheduled District Act 1874 – Chotanagpur separate administrative rules.
- Hereditary Criminality (Richard Dugdale)

Economic exploitation & land Alienation. Anthropological classification:

Races - proto – Australoid – central east India.

Negrito – N.E. India – Naga, Mizo, Bodo. ‘O’ blood group is the most common among many Indian tribes & often has the highest frequency. O>B>A>AB Gene – L3mn

Some changes are seen due to impact of Industrialization, urbanization, migration, growth of new settlement, impact of others people (imitate/ mimic) Diffusion of religion, Culture, Society profession, marriage system, lack of self awareness, Depersonalization, interiority complex are seen in the tribal society.

Classification of Adibasis in India remains a significant issue in the country's social, political, and constitutional discourse. Although the Indian Constitution recognizes certain Tribes to provide affirmative action and legal protections, the process of classification has often been influenced by historical, administrative, and political considerations. This has generated debates regarding the authenticity of tribal identities, inclusion and exclusion from official lists, and unequal access to constitutional safeguards.

The question of Tribal identity and existence extends beyond legal recognition to encompass issues of culture, land, language, self-determination, and historical marginalization. Rapid industrialization, displacement, environmental degradation, and cultural assimilation have threatened the survival of many Adibasis, raising concerns about the preservation of their distinct identities. At the same time, movements for recognition and autonomy have highlighted the importance of respecting indigenous knowledge systems and protecting traditional rights.

Suggestion for Tribal Sustainability:

Tribal marriage is a union between two individuals from different indigenous, culture or ethnic tribes.

a. Cultural integration. B. Social Cohesion C. Modern Shifting.

“Inter – tribe marriage strengthens the unity and bonding among different tribal communities by encouraging cultural exchange, mutual understanding and cooperation. It helps preserve peace, reduces division and promotes solidarity while respecting each tribe’s unique traditions.”

“I also refute/ Deny the term upajati” we do not want to divide among upajati. We all are “Adivasi”.

I support Lokur Committee (1965) & the books of Archar “Tribal Law & Justice” but not the term “upajati”.

- Dry state/ Dry area or zone for ST people:
Liquor ban, prohibition (40% tribes but 14% others)
- Worship, adoration or prayer ceremony: (All ST)
“Community puja & prayer ceremony”, “collective Religious Ceremony”, “Group Devotional Event”, “Public worship & scripture Recitation”, “Mass worship or Worship in a place” Article – 21A, 15, 29, 46, 16, 335 – equal opportunity 7.5% for ST. No discrimination among all tribes.

“All The tribal communities, with their different languages, cultures and religions, symbolize diversity which we see as a threat to our identity. We believe that there should be only one language – Mundari/ Austro-Asiatic & Dravidian

One religion – Tribal Religion (Adibasi Dharma) (Sarna, Sari, Gondi, Bhili etc)

And one culture – Tribal culture”

“During British rule, the British & their collaborators, along with some kings and princes, conspired to eliminate tribalism and tribal religions. They divided them into many fragments.”

Historical Claim:

“It is claimed that during British rule, the British administration, their local collaborators, and some princely rules sought to weaken tribal identity and indigenous tribal religions by dividing tribal communities into different categories.”

1. “Tribes are not 705 but merely one”
2. British rule – radically divided & governed through policies of administrative isolation, economic exploitation and arbitrary labelling of nomadic & martial groups as “Criminal”.
 - 1873 Eastern Frontier Regulation Act – 1873

- Non Regulation Provinces – discretionary power.
 - Scheduled District Act 1874 – Chotanagpur separate administrative rules.
 - Hereditary Criminality.
 - Economic exploitation & Land Alienation.
3. Marriage - Inter -tribal marriage is a union between two individuals from different indigenous, culture or ethnic tribes.
- a. Cultural integration
 - b. Social cohesion
 - c. Modern shifting.

The Tribal community share many common characteristics and challenges. Therefore, they should be considered as one collective group while formulating and implementing development initiative, a unified and inclusive approach is essential to protect their identity, and strengthen their sense of belonging and contribution to the nation.

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