

TRIBAL STUDIES IN INDIA: INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES

Lecture2

Lecture 02: Introduction: De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes; PVTGs

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Thank you. Welcome back again. So in the first lecture we have tried to understand the concept and the meaning of tribes and particularly communities who are identified and designated as scheduled tribes. and we understand that the concept of tribe, particularly in the context of india, became popular with the coming of the british. And in many ways it was the colonial state which has played a very very important role in terms of identifying, in terms of studying communities whom today we know as scheduled tribes.

Now, in India, it is a known fact that India in itself is a very diverse country. And the communities who are identified as Scheduled Tribes themselves, you must have already seen and heard as well that they are very, very diverse in terms of their culture, their language, lifestyle, their customs, and their traditions. Now, Scheduled Tribe is definitely one of the very, very important categories when it comes to tribes. But today we will also try to understand a different category that is the Denodified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes and the Primitive Vulnerable Tribal groups in India. So, in the study of tribes, most of the time, we are talking about the communities who are identified as Scheduled Tribes.

There is, you know, another important category. Today, we know it as de-notified nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes. So, these specific groups are being identified by the government. On the basis of the specific histories and vulnerabilities

associated with them. However, the category, you know, denotified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, has some kind of similar history.

One has, again, to go back to the colonial period to really understand how this category began to be used, how it was used, and why it was used. Now, the communities today who are identified as denotified, nomadic, and semi-nomadic tribes were first identified as criminal tribes, you know, by the colonial state with the introduction and the passing of the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. Now, under the Criminal Tribes Act, there were several communities that were given the tag criminal. So, they are considered to be hereditary criminals and therefore they are subjected to strict surveillance, confinement, and gross discrimination. Now, why is it that the British feel the need?

Why do they think that some communities need to be identified as a criminal tribe? Now, I don't have to explain the fact that the term 'criminal' is something that is negative, in the sense that it has a lot of negative connotations. Criminal is someone—the first thing that comes to your mind when anyone uses the term criminal is that they are doing something bad. They are committing a crime; they are indulged in, you know, certain activities which are harming or impacting someone or something negatively. Now in India, we know that in many ways, particularly during the colonial period, community life or social backgrounds in terms of, you know, caste and occupations are deeply interlinked.

Now, in that kind of scenario, the Britishers think that there are certain communities in India who are habitually addicted to committing crimes. Therefore, they identified these communities as criminal tribes and made it an administrative category with the passing and/or the introduction of the Criminal Tribes Act in 1871. Now, what are the provisions under the Act? What are some of the things that are very important to understand when it comes to the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871? The first is that communities or tribes who are declared as criminal were required to register with the police.

Second is that due to the fact that they are involved in crime or indulge in activities that harm or affect the state or other communities, there were a lot of restrictions imposed on them in terms of their movement and mobility. Now, even if they want to move out of their village, even if they want to move out of the areas where they live, they are required to acquire a permit. So the third is that

there was a forced settlement in designated areas which will enable the police or the state to maintain a close and strict surveillance. And the third is that children belonging to these communities, children coming from these families who are identified as criminal tribes, were often separated and placed in reformatory settlements so that they don't practice or continue with what their parents or their grandparents are practicing. Now the Criminal Tribes Act of 1911 is a kind of reincarnation of the, you know, original 1871 Act.

Now what the Criminal Tribes Act of 1911 does is add more tribes to the list and impose more or severe restrictions and surveillance so that these communities are closely monitored and surveilled and they don't indulge in criminal activities. Secondly, the members of the notified tribes had to register themselves with local authorities. Now all the families, all the communities belonging to the group who are identified as such have to register themselves with the police or with any local authorities. They have to regularly go and, you know, do check-ins, which were made mandatory. Their mobility in terms of moving, migrating, or traveling was severely restricted.

There were forced settlements, forcibly settled in specific areas and under constant watch. The traditional lifestyle of the people, particularly in terms of making a living, was significantly affected. So these colonial legislations were introduced specifically to communities whom the colonial state thinks are habitual offenders. They are communities who survive and live on stealing property. Theft or indulging in burglary or any other activities which they considered harmful to individuals or against the economic interests of the colonial state.

Now, the Act remained in force until 1952, that is, in post-independent India. So, this law or this Act was repealed after independence. Now, to give a little bit of context, why these communities are being identified as criminal tribes is that the colonial state, like I said, has these stereotypical assumptions about any communities, not only the criminal tribes, but any communities that they were colonizing, that they colonized, for instance. Now, in India also, we know that the British think that they are racially superior, and it is their superiority that made them rule over India, right? And they treat us, India, as second-class citizens.

They were subjects. We are subjects. We are not even citizens. We are subjects of the colonial state. Now, so the prejudice is that, or the belief is that, there is

this genetic transmission of criminal tendencies or the tendency that there are some communities who are addicted to committing crime.

So these communities are primarily semi-nomadic or nomadic. And these are communities who have these cultural systems, you know, of migrating from one place to the other because of their occupation, because of their way of life. So nomadic groups were practicing trade by traveling from village to village. Traditionally, denotified and nomadic and semi-nomadic communities practice a range of occupations. For instance, pastoralists and hunter-gatherers, mainly sephards, cowherds, and hunters of small game, goods, and service nomads, such as blacksmiths, stone workers, weapon markets, and salt traders.

There are also entertainers, dancers, acrobats, snake charmers, and monkey trainers. There are also religious performers, ascetics, devotional singers, minstrels, and astrologers. Now, like the category Scheduled Tribe that we discussed in the first lecture, in this case also, communities are identified as criminal tribes or denotified tribes in the context of India today. They are also very, very diverse. It is not that they belong to one set of people or one set of community.

They belong to a diverse set of people who have a diverse set of cultural practices, who practice different kinds of economic activities to maintain their living. Now, one of the reasons why the British colonial state was very uncomfortable with this community is their way of life. Because they considered that, you know, restlessness and mobility as a sign of criminality in a society wherein sedentary living was associated with respectability. Now, this idea, all of us today, you know, we follow a sedentary lifestyle in the sense that we have a settled life. Most of us have homes, for instance, that we go back to after work.

Most of us have fixed occupations. I am a teacher, for instance. That is what I do every day. I have a home. That is where I go back every day.

So my life, the nature of the occupation that I do is something which is closely associated with a very, very sedentary lifestyle. But in the context of the criminal tribes, what is important is that there is a lot of mobility. And this mobility in a sense that they keep on migrating from one place to the other. Now if they are a community of pastoralists, they may move from one region to another. If there is winter, then they will go to an area where there is summer.

They have the possibility of maintaining their livelihood. They have the grazing fields for their goats, for instance. So therefore, mobility, movement, was something that was intrinsic or integral to the way of life of this community. But then that was seen as a sign of criminality by the colonial state. So what the Criminal Tribes Act tried to do was that it tried to create settlements.

Fixed settlements so that these communities no longer move from one place to the other to reform and cure the criminal propensities, the tendency to do or indulge in criminal activities. Now, we have a lot of, say, we have some communities who are quite semi-nomadic, even in Uttarakhand, we have communities who are quite semi-nomadic in Jammu and Kashmir as well, who migrate seasonally at times. Who migrated, you know, according to the changing weather, for instance, right? So, for them, you know, their way of life is defined by this continual movement from one place to another. Now, in the post-independent India, there was the All India Criminal Tribes Inquiry Committee, which was established in the year 1949.

And it was from this that the criminal tribes came to be known as the denotified tribes, and this happened after the removal of the Criminal Tribes Act from the Constitution of India. Now, there is another category that one has to know, which is the particularly vulnerable tribal groups. Now, in the case of India, many of the tribal communities in India have done quite well in terms of socioeconomic and political development. But generally, tribal communities in India are the ones who have lagged behind when it comes to, you know, various indicators of development. And this does not spare any region or state.

For instance, you know, in Orissa, there are a significant number of poor people in the state who belong to the tribal communities. And likewise, even in states like Madhya Pradesh and other states in India. Now, if you look at the national level as well, you will see that tribes, Scheduled Tribe communities constitute one of the largest numbers of poor people in India. So, but Beyond the Scheduled Tribes, there are specific communities known as PVTGs, particularly vulnerable tribal groups, whose socio-economic conditions are far worse than those of the communities belonging to the Scheduled Tribes.

Now, mostly tribal communities live in forest and hilly terrains, maintaining distinct socio-cultural and economic practices. More or less, they have a

subsistence or self-sufficient economy based on shifting cultivation, hunting, gathering, and handicrafts. They had autonomous governance structures and little interaction with mainstream agrarian societies. Now, who are these PVTGs? PVTGs are tribal groups who are considered highly vulnerable based on the following criteria.

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

- Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) are tribal groups which are considered as highly vulnerable based on following criteria-
 - Forest dependent livelihoods
 - Pre-agricultural level of existence
 - Stagnant or declining population
 - Low literacy rates
 - Subsistence based economy



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Now, this is one way of identifying who the PVTGs in India are. One is the forest, but they are mostly forest-dependent livelihoods in a sense that, you know, they rely on forest produces to maintain their living, their everyday needs. Pre-agricultural level of existence, many of them, therefore, live on the forest resources. Stagnant or declining population, you will see that many of the PVTGs, you know, there is a fear of extinction in the sense that their numbers are significantly low, with very, very low literacy rates. Now, in India, post-independence, you know, India as a country has achieved phenomenal success when it comes to literacy, right?

States like Tripura, states like Kerala, or even Tamil Nadu, many states in the Northeast, despite the fact that, you know, they are predominantly inhabited by tribal communities, The literacy rate of these states is exceptionally high and comparable to many of the developed countries in the world. But then if you look at the literacy rate of these PVTG communities, you will see that their literacy rate is far below the national average. More or less, they follow the subsistence-based economy. Now, in 1975, the government of India identified 52 tribal groups as primitive tribal groups based on their extreme socioeconomic vulnerability.

Later on, it was changed; the term 'primitive tribal groups' was changed to 'particularly vulnerable tribal groups,' with 75 communities or groups now

recognized across 18 states, with a population of 27,68,322 as per the 2011 census. Now, scheduled tribes, the PVTGs communities, are also quite spread out. You know, they are in 18 states of India. And within them also, again, it is important to remind ourselves that there are significant variations in terms of their social life, in terms of their cultural habits, cultural norms, their values, their traditions, their political systems, as well as their socioeconomic level of development. However, the majority of PVTG lives in the six states, namely Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Now, the state of Odisha has the highest number of PVTGs for any state in India. Much of the issues faced by the communities are, first, extreme poverty and malnutrition. Second is the lack of education and health care. Third is the loss of traditional livelihoods due to deforestation and land displacement. Fourth is social discrimination and cultural erosion.

Now what makes them particularly vulnerable, you know, all of these factors contribute to their vulnerability. Now, so, like I said, their literacy level is significantly lower than the national average. Their life expectancy is also relatively shorter, you know, than the national average. And due to the increasing modernization and urbanization and other associated changes that have happened in the last 70 or more than 70 years. These communities are also facing a lot of threats to their traditional livelihoods, particularly due to deforestation and land displacement.

And socially as well, they face a lot of discrimination because of their identities, because of their cultures, and because of their belonging as well. Now, these are some of the communities who are identified as PVTGs across states. Say in Andhra, in Bihar, in Gujarat, in Karnataka, in Kerala, in Madhya Pradesh, including Chhattisgarh, in Maharashtra, in Manipur, in Odisha, in Rajasthan, in Tamil Nadu, in Tripura, in Uttar Pradesh, including Uttarakhand, in West Bengal, and in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Now you can see that their numbers are quite significant in the sense that they are quite spread out as well. So, these communities more or less have similar challenges, in terms of their vulnerability, and this vulnerability encompasses their social, cultural, development, and economic aspects, as well as in the realm of policy and politics.

Andhra Pradesh	Bodo Gadaba, Bondo Poroja, Chenchu, Dongria Khond, Gutob Gadaba, Khond Poroja, Kolam, Kondareddis, Konda Savaras, Kutia Khond, Parengi Poroja, Thoti
Bihar (including Jharkhand)	Asur, Birhor, Birjia, Hill Kharia, Korwa, Mal Paharia, Parhaiya, Sauria Paharia, Savar
Gujarat	Kolgha, Kathodi, Kotwalia, Padhar, Siddi
Karnataka	Jenu Kuruba, Koraga
Kerala	Cholanaikayan, Kadar, Kattunayakan, Koraga, Kurumbas
Madhya Pradesh (including Chhattisgarh)	Abujh Maria, Baiga, Bharia, Birhor, Hill Korwa, Kamar, Sahariya
Maharashtra	Katkaria (Kathodi), Kolam, Maria Gond



So with this, I am going to conclude my second lecture. So what I tried to do in this lecture is to briefly outline the issue of Scheduled Tribes in India, and particularly in this lecture I focus on the denotified and the criminal tribes who were known as the criminal tribes of India. And also the particularly vulnerable tribal groups in India. Now, it is important again to understand that even among the tribal communities, there are significant variations. And these variations again I wanted to stress because many of the tribal communities have fared economically well in today's context, particularly in Northeast India, you will see that there are states which have, you know, are predominantly tribal.

And in these states, tribal communities have also done quite well in terms of education, in terms of health care, and in terms of livelihood. They have occupied important positions, not only in the state, but at the national level as well. They have expanded or diversified in terms of their occupations as well. Many of the tribal communities today have moved away from, you know, agriculture. They have moved into the service sector.

They have migrated not only within different metropolitan centers of India, but also globally. they are an important workforce when it comes to the service sector as well. But then there are other communities within these tribal communities who are known as the particularly vulnerable tribal groups. And these groups are very, very vulnerable in terms of the demography, in terms of their culture, in terms of their economy, in terms of their everyday lifestyle. Now, it is also very easy to make them out, you know, by just trying to understand their socioeconomic life, or in a sense that they are, again, quite distinct from many of the communities who are identified as Scheduled Tribes.

So, in a nutshell, what I wanted to outline today is the history in which communities in India are identified as tribes, criminal tribes, and later on denotified, notified, and semi-nomadic tribes, and particularly vulnerable tribal groups. One has to go back to history in terms of really trying to understand how these terms, how these categories were introduced by the colonial state and how they have been adopted and internalized by the communities who are identified as such. Now, even with, you know, primitive tribal groups or particularly vulnerable tribal groups, it is important to understand that many of these communities in some states are identified as PVTGs or denotified tribes, but in some states, They are also identified as scheduled castes or under different categories. So, like the anomalies that we talked about in the first lecture, there are also anomalies even within the de-notified tribes as well.

Some communities may be identified as de-notified tribes in Maharashtra, but they may not be in Madhya Pradesh or in Karnataka. Some communities may be identified as, you know, denotified tribes in Uttarakhand, but not in, you know, Jammu and Kashmir, and so on. So, administratively, it is very convenient to identify and club, you know, different people, different communities under one category. But at the same time, while this identification is very helpful, it has its own set of problems in terms of the lack of uniformity and coherence, and therefore, we continue to face the challenges of Really defining and outlining how to categorize communities, how to categorize people.

And this problem continues to persist in the context of the way in which we try to identify and recognize communities belonging to Scheduled Tribes, particularly vulnerable tribal groups. Thank you so much.