

TRIBAL STUDIES IN INDIA: INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES

Lecture3

Lecture 03: Introduction: Indigenous People, Adivasi, Janjati

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Thank you. Good afternoon everyone. Today we will continue from where we stopped in the last two lectures. In the last two lectures, all of you must have recalled that we started with the concept of trying to understand the meaning of tribes, particularly in the context of India. And then at the same time, we try to also look at the different ways in which the category tribe has evolved over time, starting from the colonial period and up to now.

So, in continuation of what we have studied in the last two lectures, today we will also look at the different categories that are used to refer to tribal communities in India, which are indigenous people, Adivasi and Janjati. Now, all these terms and categories are not without contestations, but at the same time, it is also important to understand what they actually mean when we are using them in the context of India. So, my lecture will primarily focus on the way in which tribal communities have been understood and also the way in which tribal communities themselves have internalized these different categories. And how it continued to operate, you know, in terms of the socio-political life world of tribal communities in India. So we will begin with the term indigenous people.

Now the term indigenous is not an Indian-specific term in the sense that it is globally used, particularly from the 1990s onwards. But then the history of the term is quite old in the sense that the term was used to broadly refer to colonized populations. So even in India, as well as globally, the meaning of indigenous has

evolved over time. And this, the way in which it evolved also has been, you know, quite in response to how the meaning of indigenous category itself has been defined and redefined globally. So to give some historical context, the Berlin Africa Conference from 1884 to 1885 marked one of the first instances where European powers used the term indigenous to differentiate between colonizers and the colonized in Africa.

So now we can see that the term indigenous was much in use since the late 19th century. And then in 1938, the Pan-American Union redefined indigenous by linking it with Indian, that is Native American, to describe descendants of America's original inhabitants. Now, we know that this term has a lot of appeal, particularly in the West as well. So, the Pan-American Union, the redefinition of indigenous is also something which is very, very prominent even till today. So, the transformation of the term over a period of time reflects the changing political and historical perspective on identity and rights.

Now, why do I say that the changing political and historical perspective on identity and rights is primarily because the claim of being indigenous is not only about claiming an indigenous identity? But then it is also about taking a kind of position socially, economically, and politically, and then claiming rights by groups who are asserting or who are claiming an indigenous identity. Now, at the international level, it was first used by the International Labour Organization convention in 1957. It gained global popularity from there in 1993, which was also declared as the International Year of the Indigenous People. Now, today, at the international level, the United Nations has played a very, very significant role in terms of popularizing the term indigenous people.

Sometimes the indigenous people all over the world are known as the fourth world. We know the first world, the second world, the third world. Now, indigenous people are known to inhabit the fourth world. Now, the first world, definitely, you know, all of us know that it is primarily used in reference to the global north or the west, developed countries. The second world, primarily, you know, countries which are developing.

And the third world, mostly, you know, underdeveloped countries. All the indigenous people all over the world are referred to as inhabiting the fourth world. So, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted in

2007, and it has reinforced the global recognition of indigenous rights. Now, how does the ILO define indigenous people or indigenous population? Now, there are specific parameters or specific criteria which the ILO has used, particularly given that the ILO was one of the first international bodies to actually come out with this, defining who is an indigenous person or who are indigenous people.

So, the criteria that they have laid down are particularly important. One is that they are tribal or semi-tribal communities who trace their ancestry to a region's original inhabitants before colonization or conquest. So basically, it implies that indigenous people are those who lived before the colonial period or colonialism. Their classification is independent of legal status and is based on historical continuity. The communities maintain social, economic, and cultural traditions that align more closely with their ancestral way of life than with modern institutions of the nation they belong to.

Now, most indigenous communities are known to have continued to follow their specific customs, their specific traditions, political institutions, and so on, as compared to the wider national or dominant community or culture. Now, the role of the ILO and the United Nations is particularly important because they have given some kind of platform for indigenous people all over the world to come together, giving a global platform to highlight voices that have been submerged all over the world. So the role of the ILO and the United Nations is very, very important when one talks about the rights of indigenous people. And in many countries, even in South Asia, including India also, the UN declaration of the rights of indigenous people was enthusiastically received with a lot of enthusiasm among the indigenous people or tribal communities as well as in India. Likewise, in neighboring countries like Bangladesh also, their tribal communities, primarily inhabiting the Chittagong Hill Tracts, have significantly embraced the idea of indigenous people to claim their rights and recognition.

So, however, indigenous people today all over the world are very, very diverse. And, you know, this is a point that I have reiterated, you know, in my last two lectures as well, that even in India, most of the time, the term indigenous or indigeneity or indigenous is being used to refer to the tribal communities. So in that sense, the communities are very, very diverse. It is a very, very heterogeneous population. We are talking about communities which have a very, very distinct culture.

You know their distinctiveness in terms of culture, in terms of societies' cultural traditions, norms, and values, varies from community to community, even at the international level. So it is important to remember that when we are talking about indigenous people, we are talking about a very diverse group of people. And the experience of marginalization, the experience of discrimination, the kind of issues that indigenous people experience, whether it is in the United States, Canada, Australia, or whether it is in Thailand, or whether it is in India, or elsewhere, varies from country to country, region to region. So in that sense, indigeneity does not mean the same thing. And the definition of indigeneity may vary from one region to another.

So, because the particular social, cultural, political, and historical context of different places greatly influences the way that indigeneity is conceptualized and practiced. So, therefore, the modern concept of who is an indigenous people is quite established in some parts of the world, but not so in others. So, for example, indigeneity as a concept is widely accepted in countries like Canada, countries like the United States, because there it is very clear that the Native Americans are the original inhabitants of the United States, much before the arrival of the immigrant population, particularly from the West. Likewise in Canada as well as in Australia. Now in this kind of countries you will see that there is a general acceptance among the population and the political leadership that Native Americans are the original inhabitants of these countries.

Now, but in the context of many other countries, it is very difficult to neatly, clearly, or confidently say that these are the original inhabitants or tribal communities are the actual, original inhabitants of this country. So, while it is relatively clear who should be considered indigenous in the parts of the world subjected to significant levels of European settler colonization, including the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand, the concept is much fuzzier in other parts of the world. Now, these other parts of the world are primarily in Asia and Africa. So, many, many national governments in Asia and Africa also recognize the existence of indigenous people in other parts of the world. Now, for example, some countries in Africa may accept that Native Americans are the original inhabitants of the United States, but they may not necessarily agree to any kind of indigeneity in their own countries.

Or sometimes they will say that the concept of who is actually the original inhabitants or who came first is not easy to define, or it's not easy to demarcate as to what will be the historical timeline of defining who is indigenous and who is not. So, this has significantly influenced the way in which indigeneity is understood even in Asia. So, therefore, you know there is some confusion in terms of how the concept of indigeneity is being used and applied in the context of countries like India as well. In the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, during the colonial era, the term 'indigenous' was primarily used in Asia and Africa to distinguish between European colonizers and non-European natives. Now in this understanding, it is very clear, the boundaries that separate the indigenous and the non-indigenous are very clear, in a sense that the people who are coming to colonize Africa or Asia are clearly non-indigenous.

Now, everyone who was colonized, irrespective of their class, irrespective of their caste, religion, region, you know, is indigenous. So, this use dominated Asia, in Asia even during the 1960s and 1970s, until the new global concept of indigeneity began to be advocated through various networks. Now, what is the new concept of indigeneity that was advocated from the 1960s and the 1970s? So this new concept emphasized the idea that indigenous people are the first people or original people associated with particular places. Now, in this understanding, there is a strong link made between the idea of the term indigeneity or the idea of indigenous people and territory, in the sense that

Whenever we talk about indigeneity, whenever we talk about indigenous people, we try to associate them with the first people who have settled in the place or the country that they are being associated with. So this idea is definitely very clear, like I said, in the context of the United States or in the context of New Zealand. But in the context of India, countries like India, which is very, very diverse, where we have multitudes of communities who have been coming into the country for a long period of time. So sometimes it is very difficult to delineate who the first people are or who the original people are. So in that sense, many of the most persecuted ethnic minorities in Asia are not actually the first people in the places where they presently live.

So if you look at many of the communities who are claiming this indigenous status, you will see that they may not be the first to arrive at the place where they are inhabiting today. Therefore, many countries, many national governments in

Asia and Africa have actually rejected the use of the term indigenous to apply to any specific communities in their respective countries. Now, that is something that is not strange, even in India. That is the standpoint of the government as well, in the sense that they cannot actually accept any community to be specifically indigenous because, more or less, at some point in time, all of us have migrated to this place. So a new understanding that has been developed, particularly in the context of India, is to understand indigenous people in Asia as colonized people or people who have been oppressed by other ethnic groups over history rather than simply first people.

Now the idea of first people is very problematic when it comes to Asia and Africa. So therefore, there are several scholars and activists who propagate or try to redefine the concept of indigeneity, particularly in the context of Asia, by saying that indigenous people are people who are colonized or who have been oppressed by other ethnic groups. It's not that the other ethnic groups may not necessarily be people from, you know, the experience of colonialism, particularly from the west, but a form of colonization even within their own countries by other dominant ethnic groups. Now, in India, needless to say, the term indigenous is often equated with tribal communities.

And this has, in many ways, evoked a lot of response and debates. And today, it is sometimes very, very complicated because this claim of being indigenous is intricately connected to the issue of recognition and identity. Now, why is this complicated? One is that there is this long history of migrations of various linguistic, racial, cultural, and religious groups which have taken place in India over the last thousands of years. And the communities who were identified as tribes in every part of India have been part of this significant historical migration that took place.

So, therefore, it is a kind of, almost an impossible task to determine any community as, you know, indigenous on the basis of first settler, even in the context of India. And these challenges also arise in the context where there is continuous intermixing of populations across regions within the country. Another challenge as to why it is difficult to designate communities who are recognized as tribes to be indigenous is that tribal communities, while the anthropological notion suggests that tribal communities in many parts of India have lived in geographical isolation, many sociologists and historians have actually outlined that they have

lived in close interaction with non-tribal populations as well. So, in this sense, the interaction between tribal communities and non-tribal communities has led to assimilation into the larger Hindu society as well. So, it is not that tribal communities always live in geographical isolation.

Some communities, by virtue of the fact that they may live in somewhat more geographically remote regions or maybe they have been constantly migrating. The larger tribal communities, if you look at tribal communities in central India, then you will see that they have been in close interaction with the larger Indian society. Now, different indigenous tribal communities also tend to identify themselves as Adivasis particularly the use of the term Adivasi, which is quite popular among tribal communities in mainland India, or indigenous people. Now, many communities in Central India, in Jharkhand or Chhattisgarh, definitely embrace the idea of Adivasi. But in Northeast India, this term, particularly among the tribal communities, does not find a lot of purchase or relevance.

Because communities in the North East, tribal communities in the North East do not necessarily identify with the term Adivasi. So, sometimes in place of Scheduled Tribes or tribes, they would prefer to be identified as indigenous people. So, while this term has been in use and the communities who are identified as such, particularly the tribal communities, have embraced the concept of indigenous people. Now today you will see that many tribal communities in India have representations even in the United Nations. They'll go to different conferences and different global meetings to attend events related to indigenous people.

So across the country and across the world. So it is not without opposition, and this opposition has not only come from people or the government but also from academicians themselves. There is a lot of divide even among academicians who are very, very skeptical about the use and applicability of the term indigenous, particularly in the context of India. So, there are scholars like J. J. Roy Burman, André Beteille, and Alpa Shah who have argued against using the term. They are fine with using the term Adivasi, but not necessarily referring to tribes or Adivasis as indigenous groups in India.

So, however, the sociologist Virginius Xaxa have significantly dealt with the debate surrounding the idea of indigenous people. So, I wanted to deal more

extensively with what Professor Virginius Xaxa has to say about Why and how tribal communities in India have used indigeneity and how his arguments may be useful to understand the specific way in which the idea of indigeneity is being articulated by tribal communities. Now one is that every community in India is a victim of conquest and colonization, and this is also true for tribal communities, and prior to colonization it was argued that the relationship between tribals and non-tribals was of mutual existence rather than subjugation or domination. So definitely there can be some kind of warfare between kingdoms, between, you know, tribal chieftains themselves, but

It was not always a relationship defined by hierarchy and stratification or between a relationship that was defined singularly in terms of subjugation or domination. However, tribals are victims of British colonization and face marginalization from their own brethren as well. Now, one of the key arguments that Xaxa has highlighted in this work is that there is a peculiar thing about colonialism in India, which is that tribal people face dual colonialism. One of the colonialisms definitely is from the British, but another form of colonialism the tribe also faces is from their own brethren. So that is what Xaxa has argued, in the sense that the exploitation faced by the tribal is coming from two broad dominant groups.

One is from the British and one from the Indians themselves. Now, one of the reasons as to why many sociologists and anthropologists are not very comfortable with the idea of indigeneity is because, like I said in the beginning of my lecture, many communities in India have been migrating and have migrated over a period of time. Now, it is very difficult to clearly give a historical timeline as to who came first and who came later, right? At the same time, it is also very difficult to put a historical timeline as to who should be considered indigenous and who should not. So, in that context, Xaxa argues that there is a need to make a distinction between settlement in the context of the country, India being the reference point as a whole, and settlement within its parts or regions.

Now, this is an important point. In fact, this is an important argument in the sense that when we talk about indigeneity or the use of indigenous people or even if tribes are claiming that they are indigenous people in India, they are not saying that the entire India belongs to them. The point, I think, that Xaxa has tried to raise through his work is that most of the time the claim of indigeneity is very, very specific, particularly in regions and territories where the tribes have lived.

Now, if we talk about, say, some communities in the northeast, such as the Mizos or the Kukis, they may have migrated and inhabited the region that they inhabit today after the Aryan migration, because the Aryan migration is sometimes taken as a historical timeline. But then it does not negate the fact that they are the original settlers of the territory they inhabit today.

So they may come much later than the Aryans. But this is not to say that Mizos who are living in Mizoram are not indigenous to the territory that they inhabit. So therefore, sometimes in the context of countries like India, it is important to understand that when we are talking about tribes as indigenous people of India, the claim is not that tribes are the only communities who are indigenous to the entire nation. They are specifically talking about being indigenous to the specific regions where they are currently living or inhabiting. At the same time, one also has to be careful in the sense that just because a community is recognized as a tribe does not mean that they are indigenous everywhere.

Now, this applies to tribal communities themselves. Now, for example, there are several tribal communities, such as the Santhals and the Oraons and many other tribal communities, who were involuntarily taken to Assam to work in the tea plantations. Now, today, they might have lived in Assam for generations, you know, after generations, but then the tribal communities. Who have lived in Assam such as the Bodos actually contested the claim made by the tribal communities who were being involuntarily taken to Assam to work in the tea plantations as indigenous people of Assam. They contest that kind of claim.

So this kind of inter-tribal contestation is also a reminder as to why it is important to be very specific when we use the term or when we equate tribe with indigenous people in India. So, in such contexts, claiming indigenous status by virtue of being a tribe may not be justified and is disputed by other tribes and non-tribal groups in the state. In the context of India as a whole, identification of indigenous communities is problematic. However, communities over time have developed a special relation with the territories they now inhabit. So, this was my point.

So, for example, when I talk about the Mizos, when I'm talking about the Mizos and the Kukis, who are ethnically quite related. So I'm talking about the migration of the communities, which may be much later than the Aryan migration. But then

over a period of time, they have, you know, made today Mizoram their home. They have been settling in the state for years and years, decades and decades, and for centuries and centuries. Now in that sense Mizoram has developed a very, very special relation with the territories they now inhabit.

So the claim of indigeneity, therefore, is largely in response to the loss of cultural and resource rights. And it is the non-recognition of rights and privileges by the dominant sections of the Indian society that has led to the increasing articulation of the idea of indigenous people by the tribal people. Now, this is an important point to understand, particularly in the context of Central India. You will see that most of the areas which are inhabited by tribal communities are resource-rich regions. Now, over a period of time, what we have seen is that there is a continual dispossession of tribal communities from the resources, whether it is water, whether it is land, whether it is forest resources.

And many of the tribal communities are extensively dependent on these resources. Now, what happened is that there is continual dispossession of tribal communities from these spaces, from the regions that they have been living in for a long period of time. Now, the claim of being indigenous, like I said in the introductory part of my lecture, is significantly tied to recognition, not only as recognition as an indigenous community, but recognition of their rights. Now, in that context, the claim of indigenous people by tribal communities is closely or integrally linked to the demand for recognition of their socio-cultural and economic rights. So, we will come to the next important category, which is widely used in the context of India today, that is the term Adivasi.

Now, again unlike, there is a significant difference between the term Adivasi and the term indigenous people, not only in India, but largely in South Asia. So, even in countries like Bangladesh, the tribal communities are referred to as Adivasi. Now, even in India, you know, many of the communities, particularly in Central India, the tribal communities have identified themselves as Adivasi. So, there is a significant difference between the term indigenous people and Adivasi in the sense that indigenous people is a term which is quite external. But when it comes to Adivasi, it is considered to be something which is internal, a category which is coming from within the community.

So, I think there is this very important distinction one has to remember. And it is not to say that just because the term is external, the term does not have any vernacular meaning or vernacular roots; it does not mean that the use of the term indigenous should be discarded. But the point is that, yes, indigenous, the term indigenous, you know, has been widely accepted by communities belonging to the tribal communities. But then there is another term which has become very, very popular in the last few years, which is the term Adivasi. Now, Adivasi is a term used by indigenous people in South Asia.

It first came into use in 1938 with the formation of Adivasi Sabha in Jharkhand, and today the term is closely associated as a marker of identity articulation and assertion, thus having strong socio-political connotations. One is that, you know, Adivasi as an identity. That is, you know, one part of it. Second part of it is that Adivasi as a political identity in the sense that the community who claim and identify themselves as Adivasis are increasingly using it to advance their political rights, political claims. Now, therefore, it is in relation to the identity of Adivasi that tribes are increasingly differentiating themselves from the non-tribal population.

Now today, you will see that tribal communities, particularly in central India, as well as in the south also, you will see that there is this increasing claim of being an Adivasi, and that identity is being used to distinguish themselves from the non-tribal population. So why is this claim happening in India? Why is it that communities who are already recognized as Scheduled Tribes, particularly, are increasingly claiming themselves to be Adivasi? What are some of the things that one has to know behind the rising popularity of the term Adivasi and why have communities accepted this category? So many of the communities who are identified as Adivasis are facing increasing misery, injustice, and exploitation due to loss of rights over natural resources.

Now, just to give you an example about the loss of rights. Since post-independence India, we know that India has achieved phenomenal success when it comes to industrialization, when it comes to trade, when it comes to its economy, when it comes to human development, and so on. But if you look at the condition of tribes in India today, you will see that the vast majority of poor people, the vast majority of illiterate people, the vast majority of people who are still living under the poverty line belong to the tribal communities. Irrespective of,

you know, which community they are. But this is particularly true for the case of tribal communities in mainland India.

Now, in northeast India, the scenario is a little different, primarily because many of the tribal communities have their own tribal states. For example, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh. Now, in this kind of states, you will see that the socio-economic development and the political rights of the tribal communities are being quite protected and safeguarded. But when one talks about the issue of tribal communities in Central India, you will see that there is a lot of injustice and exploitation. and this loss of rights over natural resources has happened quite significantly in the last 70-75 years of India's independence.

And there are scholars who have actually said that the number of people who are displaced by development projects. Tribal communities constitute about 40% of it. When one looks at the total number of the actual population of tribal communities in India, which is only 8.6%, the number of people who are displaced by infrastructure projects is very high when it comes to the tribal communities. So, this experience of injustice and exploitation and the loss of rights over the nature of resources have prompted the communities to articulate belonging as an Adivasi. Second, there is a lack of legal powers and rights, which has led to the emergence of a new identity among tribal communities.

and it is in this context that the term adivasi is gaining significance as a unifying identity across different tribes, languages, and regions. Now, this is important because the communities who are recognized as Scheduled Tribes, you know, again, are very, very diverse. Now, Adivasi, in some sense, give a kind of identity that transcends specific tribal identities. Now, through this assertion of Adivasi identity, Oraons, Santhals, Mundas, or even Scheduled Tribes who are in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, or Maharashtra could find a kind of commonalities across regions and across communities. Which the term Scheduled Tribe or tribe itself, you know, may be unable to do.

So the term Adivasi enables them to articulate a politics of belonging that transcends specific tribal identities. So therefore in this sense the Adivasi identity extends beyond constitutional classifications. Encompassing a broader spectrum of indigenous communities. Now you will see that this idea of Adivasi is deeply rooted in the consciousness of tribal communities in Jharkhand, in Kerala, even

in Assam as well, particularly from the communities who have been, who have migrated to Assam. Definitely, it was an involuntary migration.

But then today, there is this increasing assertion of belonging to the larger Adivasi identity. So, the term Adivasi, therefore, goes beyond tribes to encompass the other marginalized communities as well. Who share lack of political representation, economic deprivation, and cultural discrimination. Now, by virtue of being identified as a Scheduled Tribe, they definitely already share certain commonalities. But then, when one looks at the term Adivasi, it allows these tribal communities to go beyond the specific identity of belonging to a specific tribe.

Now, there is this shared sense of marginality. The idea of Adivasi essentially tries to bring these communities who have experienced similar forms of marginalization, not only in the past, but also in the present. So, today, tribes view themselves in the sense of belonging to the same community, irrespective of whether a group or a segment of it is listed or not listed in the constitution. By virtue of this bond of emotion, they are also adivasis or indigenous people, though the constitution does not recognize them as tribes. Now, this is what I was trying to explain in the sense that there is an attempt to transcend the specific identities which are being recognized under the Constitution of India.

So, the term Adivasis actually allows them to create a pan-tribal kind of solidarity among different tribal communities all over India. Now, at the same time, scholars have also made the distinction between tribe and adivasi. Now, when we use the term tribe, in the last two lectures, we have quite extensively talked about how the term tribe or tribal communities denotes two things. One is tribe as a particular kind of society, and second is tribe as a stage of evolution. In a sense, human society evolved from traditional society to modern society or from primitive society to modern society.

Tribal society represents the lowest form of human evolution, that is, the traditional society. so, in that kind of evolutionary understanding of societies, tribes occupy the lowest rank. So, our use and understanding of the tribes. Is still largely influenced by these evolutionary connotations and thus tribal communities are marked by primitivism and backwardness. Whereas, Adivasi largely connotes identity shared on the basis of similar historical experiences with moneylenders,

traders, and landlords in forests and led to subsequent encroachment of land and rights.

So, the way in which tribes and the way in which Adivasi is understood are very, very different. Now, one way in which we can actually understand tribe is that it is more of a political administrative category, right? Which is used by the colonial state and then inherited by the post-colonial Indian state to classify and categorize very, very heterogeneous populations. But when we use the term Adivasi, it is quite different in the sense that it emerged from this very shared experience of similar historical injustice in the hands of different actors and agents over a period of time. So, over time, the term is being increasingly associated with a territorial regional identity, which coincides with the scheduling of tribal-dominated areas.

Now, the term Adivasi is largely associated with those inhabiting the fifth schedule areas in eastern, central, western, and southern India. The difference in the pan-India Adivasi identity stems from the fact that the communities belonging to geographically diverse regions have experienced development differentially. Now, this is one of the points that I wanted to stress: despite the fact that, to put it another way, not all communities who are identified as tribes in India embrace or accept the term Adivasi. And this is very, very evident among tribal communities in Northeast India. Many, many communities, whether it is the Kukis, the Mizos, you know, all of the Naga tribes, or even the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, whether they are the Khasi, the Jaintia, the Garos,

Whether the Asumi or the Angami, they will not relate themselves with the term Adivasi. So, therefore, its use is mostly associated with tribal communities who inhabit the Fifth Schedule areas in eastern, central, western, and southern India. So, in some sense, what this means is that there is a limit of the category Adivasi as well. So, however, the aspect of original inhabitants of the region acts as a link between the specially and developmentally differentiated communities. Now, in terms of development also, like I said, the experience of tribal communities in, mainly in India, and the experience of tribal communities in Northeast India is very, very different.

Now, in Northeast India, the rights of the communities are recognized under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. And till today, you will see that many of these

resources, whether it is land, water, or forest, continue to be with the community. Whether it is formally recognized or informally recognized through customary norms and practices. But in the context of Central India, what we are seeing is that there is this continual experience of dispossession and marginalization which has taken place. And this experience has created a sense of commonality among communities who are being identified as tribes in mainland India.

Now, the third term that I wanted to discuss, and which I will not take much time discussing, is also used in reference to tribal communities: *Janjati*. Now, *Janjati* is another official term that was recognized by the Indian Constitution for the Scheduled Tribes under Article 342. Now, it is used in Constitutional administrative context, including in census and government policies, particularly in North India, particularly in states like Uttarakhand, where I am. So, you will see that these terms are quite popular, and they are being used by the communities who are identified as Scheduled tribes. Now, the significance of the term *Janjati*, therefore, is that it implies recognition by the state and it is often linked with provisions like reservations and welfare schemes.

Janjati

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- Implies recognition by the state, often linked with provisions like reservations and welfare schemes.
- The term is limited to the officially recognized tribes and varies by state.



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So, however, the term is limited to the officially recognized tribes and varies from state to state. The term *Janjati* is different from the term *Adivasi*, as *Janjati* is a legal term. So, it is something which is legally recognized while *Adivasi* is self-asserted. It is not, you know, legally recognized, but it is a self-asserted term for cultural identity. So, in that sense, *Adivasi* is a self-identification term used by tribal communities, meaning original inhabitants.

It carries historical and political connotations often linked with indigenous identity and struggle against displacement. Now, for today's lecture, lecture number 3, I

have used several references, and these are some of the references which I think will be very, very helpful in trying to understand the complexities and contestations surrounding the different categories that are being used in relation to tribal communities in India. Or the category indigenous you know as a whole nationally or globally. So in this lecture, what we tried to do was follow from the first two lectures where we looked at the category Scheduled Tribes, its history, by trying to understand, you know, the etymology of the term tribe itself. So today we have come to specifically look at three other categories that are being used widely in India.

One is indigenous, the second is Adivasi, and the third is Janjati. So, all of these terms, you know, have their own significance. All of these terms are very important when it comes to understanding tribal communities in India. Now, however, all of these terms have specific connotations, specific meanings, and they are used in a very, very specific way. Now, if you go to, say, places like northeast India, if you ask anyone, are you indigenous?

More than indigenous, the category tribe may be more pronounced. People may identify themselves easily with tribe, not necessarily with indigenous in their everyday life. The tribal identity, because that gives them recognition and validation from the government, may be more important or may be more prominent. But then when it comes to asserting their identity or claiming rights and recognition, in that kind of scenario, you will see that the term indigenous is more preferred. Now, the role of the United Nations, the role of international bodies like the International Labour Organization is particularly important, and they play a very, very instrumental role in terms of trying to give recognition to the many indigenous people all over the world.

And that was very, very important because in the post-1990s, all over the world, what we have seen is that many, many communities who have been, whose voices were unheard by more dominant forces began to be heard. So it is a kind of the emergence of indigenous voice at a global level. and the United Nations continue to play a very, very pivotal role. Now, in the context of India, specifically in the context of India and Asia in general, We also see that many national governments refuse to identify any community inhabiting their country as indigenous.

But this is not to say that the communities who claim to be indigenous, particularly the tribal communities, have refused and discarded that. Not only national governments, but even within academia and within social science, there is a lot of debate in terms of, and there are a lot of scholars who have expressed their uncomfortable feeling about this use of the term indigenous. Now, however, you will see that many of the communities have used it as a way to claim their rights, as a way to claim recognition of their identity. So in that sense, it is very important to really tease out the complexities and contestations associated with the term indigenous.

Now, coming to Adivasi, unlike indigenous, which is something that is more global, you will see that Adivasi is something that is more rooted in the context of India. Of course, like I said, indigenous people in Bangladesh also identify themselves as Adivasi. But then in the case of India, you see that Adivasi identity on one hand is a cultural identity, a form of assertion of a specific socio-cultural identity. But on the other hand, it also enables the different communities who are identified as tribes or who are tribes but not officially identified as tribes to assert a belonging that transcends their specific identities, specific tribal identities. But then it is not without contestations.

Tribal communities in the north east, particularly like the Bodos, you know, or the Rabhas or even the Mizos, the Kukis, the Nagas or tribal communities in Arunachal Pradesh, do not necessarily identify themselves with Adivasi. And they have their own reason as to why they don't want to identify themselves as Adivasi. They may identify themselves as indigenous, but not as Adivasi. So there is also a limit to, you know, the category Adivasi as well. The third is the category Janjati, which is also widely used in the context of India.

In social science literature, not so much, but then it is a very, very important category when it comes to the northern part of the country in particular, where you will see that many tribal communities identify themselves as Janjati. And it is important because it gives them special provisions and special rights, preferential treatments in the state where they belong and where they live. So in that sense, all these categories, in a way, have been accepted across regions by different communities, but at the same time, all these categories are not without contestations. Communities that are tribal themselves have contested these

categories. But overall, what we see is that there is no singular way to define tribal communities in India.

So one has to acknowledge and appreciate the differences, the diversities within the communities, and the kind of identities in which they want to identify themselves. Thank you so much.