

# **TRIBAL STUDIES IN INDIA: INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES**

## **Lecture31**

### **Lecture 31: Tribes in Post Colonial India I: Constitution Making and the Role of Tribes: Part II**

Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. Today, we will be starting with our lecture number 31, and we are going to continue with the lecture that we covered in the last class on the tribes in post-colonial India, constitution-making, and the role of tribes. So, as I mentioned in the last class, the making of the constitution is a very important event in the history of India. Now, from the 1940s onwards, particularly, it was very evident that the British were losing their grip due to the kind of anti-colonial or nationalist mobilizations.

It was no longer possible for the British to continue their rule and stay in India. So, to ensure a swift transfer of power, what they essentially tried to do was to create a path for the future political course. So, in that light, the making of the constitution is a very important chapter in Indian history, and it is significant because it is the foundation of India today. Now, when one looks at or discusses issues pertaining to the constitution, at times, we think that this is primarily the preserve of very educated, elite intellectuals. And many times, we also assume that people or local communities, particularly uneducated individuals or those inhabiting remote and isolated regions, may have little knowledge or may not have contributed in a very significant way to the making of the constitution.

Now, this is one of the assumptions about tribal communities as well. So, therefore, in this lecture, we will try to examine how tribal communities have actually engaged and participated in the making of the Indian constitution. And, as I mentioned, since it is a very important chapter in the history of India, it is crucial for us to understand how these communities have engaged with the modern Indian state and, you know, contributed to the making of modern India. Now, in the last class, you know, we talked about two divergent positions. On the

one hand was the integrationist, and on the other hand was the isolationist approach.

Now, we will continue to examine this. But at the same time, we will look at, you know, what the standpoint of tribals themselves is. Now, we already know that the integration approach was largely taken by anthropologists and sociologists like G.S. Ghurye, whereas isolation was a position that was more or less taken by anthropologists like Verrier Elwin or the larger colonial state. The Britishers, even at the dawn of India's independence, were in favor of keeping tribal communities isolated. Now, many times when we talk about this integration-isolationist debate, we often miss the perspective or the opinion of the tribal communities themselves.

Now, we will start from the integration approach and then gradually come to understand, really understand, what the attitude, the opinion, and the kind of voices that tribals raise, particularly on matters pertaining to democracy. You know, their future, their political future after the departure of the British. So in post-colonial India, the integration approach was largely the determining factor because India, being a very vast geography, one of the primary concerns of the nationalist leaders was essentially how to integrate this vast geography with divergent cultures and languages. Look at any criteria, any parameters. One thing about India is that it is extremely diverse—religiously, linguistically, culturally, regionally, and so on.

There are more than a thousand communities in India. Therefore, the primary agenda or the primary thing in the minds of the nationalist leaders was how to unite the people inhabiting these very diverse regions. So, in the context of tribal communities, the integration approach was more or less the standpoint taken by the larger nationalist leaders. The integration approach was also known as the power solution approach, primarily focusing on ensuring political representation and affirmative action for tribal communities through reservations in government jobs and educational institutions. Now, for those leaders who advocated the integration approach, they also realized that there was something distinct and different about tribal communities.

But for them, the solution to the tribal issue was not to keep them in further isolation. The future was about how to bring tribals into the national mainstream.

Therefore, the idea or belief was that tribal communities would be given an opportunity to integrate into mainstream society. For that, it was important and necessary to introduce political representation and regulations in the form of affirmative action, enabling the community to integrate into the national mainstream. Now, leaders like Shibban Lal Saxena, Brajeswar Prasad, Rohini Chowdhury, and K.M. Munshi put forward the national integration to oppose provincial autonomy.

The integration approach emerged in response to much of the demand for the continuation of colonial policies. When discussing colonial policies, it is important to remember that they were largely about keeping tribes in isolation or administrative isolation. In the post-colonial period or at the dawn of India's independence, many tribal communities believed that colonial policies had helped them protect their culture and identity. Therefore, many tribal communities demanded the continuation of these autonomy provisions, which they wanted inserted into the Constitution of India. The integration approach opposed the continuation of any provision for tribal autonomy.

For instance, Shibban Lal Saksena viewed the presence of Scheduled tribes and Scheduled areas as a stigma and expressed hope that their development would progress rapidly in order to integrate them with the broader population. Now, this idea—for someone like Shibbanlal Saksena—he thinks that this idea of scheduling a community or a region is actually a stigma and works against their favour. So, for him, what is necessary is that these communities should be allowed to develop themselves. And over a period of time, through development and modernization, they will gradually integrate into the national mainstream. Now, likewise, nationalists and anthropologists like Biraja Sankar Guha also support the idea of integrating or assimilating the tribal communities.

So, for instance, Guha emphasized that the primary focus for tribal leaders should be preserving tribal life and traditional authority. Additionally, any future policies pertaining to the tribes should encourage their participation and support their gradual integration into broader society. So, integration—by the term itself—shows that you are trying to bring together two different things, or three different things, or multiple things that may be different, not extremely different, or slightly different, right? You are integrating something. So likewise, in the context of tribal communities, the idea essentially was that yes, they are different, they are

distinct, but at the same time, that distinctiveness should not be the sole reason to keep them isolated.

They may be distinct and different, but then we should also allow them, give them a possible way, open up possible doors to actually enable tribes to participate or get assimilated into the larger Indian society. Therefore, there was strong opposition against the colonial policies of administrative isolation. And towards this, an important association in the form of the All India Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas Association was established under the leadership of the Indian National Congress. Now, why did this AIEPEAA come into force? Why did it come into existence?

- Nationalists put forward the views of Indian anthropologist Biraja Sankar Guha to support their argument for tribal assimilation.
- Guha emphasized that the primary focus for tribal areas should be preserving tribal life and traditional authority. Additionally, any future policies should encourage the participation of indigenous tribes and support their gradual integration into the broader society.
- Moreover, to oppose the ring-fencing or scheduling of the tribal dominated areas, All India Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas Association (AIEPEAA) was established.



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Now, it essentially came into existence because it was mandated to oppose the provisions within the Government of India Act 1935. that specified excluded and partially excluded areas under sections 91 and 92. So basically, in short, one can say that this organization, this association, was essentially established with the sole motive to oppose the continuation of colonial policy in respect to tribal communities in India. So, we already talked quite extensively about the Government of India Act 1935, and it was the Government of India Act 1935 that actually declared areas inhabited by tribal communities as partially excluded and excluded areas. Now, in partially excluded areas, you know, because of the term 'partially' itself, some amount of, you know, some level of provincial legislation laws were being enforced.

But in the case of excluded areas, like in tribal-dominated areas in Mizoram, Nagaland, or Arunachal Pradesh, there was no scope for any kind of, you know, implementation of provincial legislation. At the same time, communities that were

under excluded areas were not allowed to participate. There was no scope for any kind of political participation. So for anyone who was to visit these excluded areas as well, they needed to acquire special permits from the commissioner. So it was something that actually acted almost like a wall.

There was no wall, but actually these laws and regulations which were being enforced. Through which the colonial state was governing this tribal population in excluded areas served as a kind of, you know, wall where people, non-outsiders, including the British themselves, were not allowed to move freely. And the people who were living within the excluded areas were also not allowed to move freely outside of the specified regions. So, the AIEPAA tried to influence the advisory committee on tribal areas to drop the idea of scheduling in the constitution-making. So, during this period, there was a lot of discussion about the future of communities, the future of different communities, what would be their stake, you know, in independent, free India.

So, one of the things that, you know, this association tried to essentially achieve was to make sure that, you know, this association the politics of scheduling or the idea of scheduling was dropped. Therefore, they argued that instead of maintaining the existing barriers laid down by the colonial state within the court, they advocated for the abolition of these barriers so that the so-called aboriginal races would be in common with their other countrymen, working out the destiny of a greater and happier India. So, essentially what they were arguing is that these legislations actually prevented tribal communities from coming outside and interacting, socializing, or being in contact with the larger Indian society. Now, for the larger mainstream society also, because of these laws and legislations, they were not allowed to, you know, have closer interaction, closer contact with tribal communities. So, therefore, this association was totally opposed to the continuation of this administrative isolation, a policy which was being introduced and set up by the colonial state.

Now, resultantly, the advisory committee, particularly on matters pertaining to tribal areas, in its final stance on the isolation policy, noted that the idea of national parks or complete isolation was based on an exaggerated perception of the need to protect tribal interests. Now, the argument which was always made by the colonial state essentially was that since tribes are distinct, they are fewer in number and they continue to follow a primitive and backward way of life. So,

therefore, if they are mixed without any kind of legal provisions, it will destroy the tribal communities, it will destroy their way of life. Now, the advisory committee was also against this idea, and they think that, you know, the position which was being articulated by, you know, someone like Verrier Elwin is actually an exaggeration. So, therefore, they are totally against this, you know, putting tribal communities in isolation.

So, towards this, the nationalists began to organize a sustained opposition to the extra-constitutional framework, arguing that it was motivated by the British policy of divide and rule. Now, in the last lecture also, we have briefly talked about it—how the nationalists viewed the British, you know, policy towards tribes. For them, this is nothing but, you know, a kind of continuation of the colonial policy of divide and rule, where Indians, you know, are being divided along community lines, along identity lines. So, therefore, the nationalists actually were totally against any form of political arrangement that would keep certain communities isolated, that would keep certain communities away from the national mainstream. So, the Indian National Congress, you know, has passed, you know, resolutions actually against this—one in Faizpur in 1936 and another one in Haripura in 1938.

So, therefore, you can see how much importance the Indian National Congress, the national movement, or the nationalists were giving to the kind of position they were actually taking, and how serious they were when it comes to the issue of tribal cohesion in India. So, that is one side of the story, where the integrationists, who largely came from the nationalists, were actually opposed to any form of administrative isolation. Now, what about people who have different perspectives? So, in academic literature, sometimes they are known as identity-based perspectives, and there are renowned stalwarts like B. R. Ambedkar, Gopinath Bordoloi, and Jaipal Singh Munda, who actually vouched for or debated autonomous governance for the tribal-populated areas. So, they were not actually arguing for, you know, the continuation of colonial policy.

What all these, you know, thinkers, all these intellectuals, different people, different individuals who spoke for the continuation of some form of political autonomy for tribal communities—what they were advocating essentially was not perpetuating a new kind or perpetuating the colonial policy of isolation. What they were actually demanding was that some form of political autonomy should be

granted to the tribes. So, for instance, a very important leader—or someone we cannot miss when discussing the issue of tribes in the making of the Indian Constitution—is Jaipal Singh Munda. Jaipal Singh Munda was a tribal leader from the Chotanagpur region who was very vocal about tribal autonomy and land rights, and he was also a member of the subcommittee on tribal affairs. Therefore, he was one of the early educated tribal leaders.

He was a prominent figure and played a key role in popularizing the term 'Adivasi.' We will discuss this further later in the slides. What is important is that individuals like Jaipal Singh Munda, who came from the community, took a strong stand on the future of tribes in India. Through this, he made significant contributions to all tribal communities in India. To a large extent, he can be credited with the framing of the Fifth Schedule, which was incorporated into the Indian Constitution.

Needless to say, despite his contributions, the role Jaipal Singh Munda played is often overlooked and erased. Unfortunately, even today, beyond his immediate community and region, many people remain unaware of his contributions, life, and achievements for the larger community. One important speech he made continues to resonate today and inspires many tribal communities in India. I will quickly read this out. During a Constituent Assembly debate, he delivered a powerful speech.

He said, "I rise to speak on behalf of millions of unknown yet important warriors of freedom—the original people of India, who have been called backward tribes, primitive tribes, criminal tribes, and worse. Sir, I am proud to be a Junglee. That is the name by which we are known in my part of the country. As a Junglee, as an Adibasi, I am not expected to understand the legal intricacies of the resolution. You cannot teach democracy to the tribal people." "You have to learn democratic ways from them." Now, many a times, you know, the term tribe, adivasi, or even, you know, many of the ways in which tribes are, you know, understood, they are all very, very stereotypical with very, very strong negative connotations. But what Jaipal Singh Munda said was that he actually embraced identity without any shame. He says that, you know, as a jungli, I am a jungli.

That is the name, you know, by which we are known as an Adivasi. So, he actually created a positive sense, you know, gave a positive meaning to the term

tribe. He gives a lot of, you know, positive meanings to the term jungli as well. And he actually embraced it, you know, without any shame. So, therefore, it resulted in a kind of pride, not only for him, but also for the vast majority of people who look up to him, particularly at the dawn of India's independence.

Now, what is the specific contribution of Jaipal Singh Munda? One is that you know he was the president of the very important political party known as the Adivasi Mahasabha, and he was part of the constituent assembly for the constitution drafting, and while being part of the subcommittee, Munda was also known to have dissented on excluding certain areas from partially excluded areas. So, many times, he was a very significant contributor by raising his voice in the Constituent Assembly, particularly on issues pertaining to the tribes. Now, he was one of the lone figures, the single voice, you know, that actually represented, you know, the vast majority of tribal communities, particularly in mainland India. Therefore, he constantly argued and pushed that tribal communities in India deserved an autonomous future in the newly established independent nation that is India.

So why did he say so? Why did Jaipal Singh Munda strongly advocate or was a staunch supporter of tribal autonomy? Essentially, he argued that Adivasis, for a long period of time during colonial rule, had been gradually dispossessed of their land by settlers, who actually took away their lands, took away the forests, and took away the natural resources on which they lived. But then for him, he argued that, you know, these land rights are inextricable. You cannot take, you know, this land, these forests away from the tribal communities, and they are non-negotiable.

But what he had actually witnessed, you know, as an Adivasi himself, was that all these resources which were under their control had been gradually taken away from them. So, to actually give some sense of justice to the tribal communities, Munda thought that a solution towards that would be through the provision of autonomy under the constitution of India. So, for instance, on 20 January 1939, during the second session of the Adivasi Sabha, Jaipal Singh Munda was appointed its president where he gave his presidential speech. So, I'll just quickly read his presidential speech. "The Adivasi movement stands primarily for the moral and material advancement of Chhotanagpur and the Santhal Parganas, for economic and political freedom of the aboriginal tracts, and in sum, for the

creation of a separate governor's province comprising roughly of Chhotanagpur and the Santhal Parganas, with a government and administration appropriate to its moods, we suffered by being appended onto Bihar."

So basically he was advocating for a separate state for the tribal communities. In separation alone lies the salvation of Chhotanagpur. We will be content with nothing less than an existence of our own, a separate province, a separate government, a separate administration. We must help ourselves. Our great future is in our own hands.

So, this is what he said. So, therefore, people actually rally around him. People were, you know, in strong support of what Jaipal Singh Munda have to say. And he is also credited, you know, for the formation of Jharkhand state because he has actually laid the foundation for what was to come, you know, much, you know, after, you know, maybe 60 to 70 years. So, likewise, you know, he was already a member of the concert and assembly.

So, therefore, he was playing a very, very important role, a leading role as an Adivasi representative inside the concert and assembly, while also, you know, he was looked up, you know, by everyone in his home region in Chhotanagpur. So, the impact of, you know, Jayapal Singh Munda in terms of mobilizing the Adivasi, the tribal populations, you know, particularly in Chhotanagpur region, continue to see, you know, political, you know, political outcomes as well. For instance, in the district board elections, which were held barely two months after his election, the Adivasi Mahasabha fielded candidates only in the districts of Singhbhum and Ranchi, which are in today's Jharkhand. Now, they won 16 out of 25 seats in Ranchi and 22 out of 24 seats in Singhbhum. Now, you can see that under the leadership of Jaipal Singh Munda, the Adivasi Mahasabha has actually come a long way in terms of political mobilization.

And he was already a force to reckon with. The nationalist leaders could no longer ignore the voice of Jaipal Singh Munda, and they had to really listen because he represented the tribal communities, he represented their aspirations, and he represented what kind of future they were envisioning. However, in the Constituent Assembly, which was largely dominated by members of the Congress Party, the viewpoints and demands of someone like Jaipal Singh Munda were not given much importance for a long period of time. So, therefore,

instead of using terms like Aborigines and Adivasis, which were preferred by Jaipal Singh Munda himself and the Adivasi Mahasabha, the assembly chose the term Scheduled Tribes. Now, despite the popular use of Adivasi in everyday language, when it comes to the legal classification or legal categorization of communities,

It is the Scheduled Tribes that were inserted in the Constitution of India. So, on the one hand, Jaipal Singh Munda actually advocated the use of Adivasi because the term tribe is limited and it creates fragmentation in the community, whereas Adivasi is pan-tribal. It encompasses everyone who associates themselves with the people, with the community. So, it is not specific to a tribe, it is not specific to a clan. So, as a result, tribal communities were now mainly seen as needing state support due to their backwardness, which reduced their role to that of passive recipients rather than active agents of change.

Now, whenever we use the term tribe, the impact is that the communities designated as tribes were actually categorized as tribes, and we constantly view them through one singular lens, that is backwardness, a community that needs help, a community that needs the support of the state to improve themselves, to improve their socio-economic conditions. So, for Jaipal Singh Munda, the Adivasis are the original inhabitants of the subcontinent who face continuous exploitation and dispossession by the newcomers. Whether it is a colonial state or any other community, whoever goes into the lands inhabited by the tribal communities, the Adivasis, they go there to exploit them, dispossessing them from their habitats and taking away their resources. So he wanted that development of tribal people should happen, but it should happen according to their own genius and in accordance with the distinctive culture and the way of life. The development should happen in tribal areas.

Tribal communities should industrialize and modernize themselves. But then that should be without compromising the distinct culture. That should be without destroying their way of life. As such, he was in favor of schedules. He was actually in favor of scheduling the tribes.

And he was also advocating for reservation of seats for tribal communities in the legislatures and government jobs. So, some of the other important standpoints that he took were that, you know, he was against the tribal advisory council,

which was recommended by the advisory committee with powers to decide on the questions of applicability of laws in the tribal areas. He was actually opposed because this advisory committee will, you know, have say over, you know, what kind of laws and legislations will be made applicable in tribal areas. So, towards that, Jaipal Singh recommended that the Tribal Advisory Council should be made only an advisory board with actual powers at the discretion of the governor while framing the Fifth Schedule. Along with this, he urged the inclusion of Mundari, Gondi, and other languages to be recognized as official languages in Schedule 7A, now Schedule 8 of the Indian Constitution.

So, in many senses, you can see that Jaipal Singh Munda was a very farsighted leader. He wasn't only thinking about the tribal present. He was thinking about the future of the tribes. Therefore, he constantly advocated not only for acquiring or gaining political autonomy but also for advancing the culture and language of the tribes. Moreover, special provisions were proposed to retain the system of separate land reserves established by the British.

The aim was to prevent the alienation of tribal land in independent India, as well as cultural identity, which was deeply tied to land ownership and protection. Now, we already know that when we talk about resource rights, particularly in relation to land, water, and forests, we have seen that these resources are not only understood as resources from which a community should economically profit. On the contrary, tribes have a lot of symbolic values attached to these resources, particularly when it comes to land, water, and forests. Therefore, Jaipal Singh understood that and advocated that to actually protect the interests of the community, what is of utmost importance is that a separate land reserve needs to be established. He is saying that because he understands that the land relations between tribes and their natural habitats are not only economical but also emotional.

It has a spiritual dimension. It has an emotional dimension. Now, during the colonial period, another problem was that there was massive land alienation taking place. Therefore, to curtail and stop this land alienation from continuing, he actually advocated separate land reserves. Now, important figures like Gopinath Bordoloi from Assam and Ambedkar—all of us know who B.R. Ambedkar is—supported the scheduling of tribal areas to preserve their culture and maintain tribal distinctiveness.

Ambedkar supported the scheduling of tribal areas to preserve their culture and maintain tribal distinctiveness. Therefore, the advisory committee suggested the removal of partial exclusion on the grounds that the representation of the partially excluded areas was not impactful in bringing any change, resulting in the subordination of tribal interests. Therefore, the larger committee suggested that the tribal advisory committee was of the view that, in certain subjects, the provincial legislature should not automatically apply in tribal-dominated regions. Now, what we see is that individuals like Jaipal Singh Munda played a very important role, and to a large extent, he was responsible for the framing of the Fifth Schedule. But at the same time, we see the kind of tensions and contestations.

And, you know, opinions were quite divided among Indian nationalist leaders themselves. There was a section of them who were actually against the continuation of anything that was done by the British. This was particularly in relation to tribal areas because the colonial policy was very much aligned with their divide-and-rule policy, as they had kept the tribes away from the national mainstream. Now, in areas like excluded areas, as I said, people cannot come out. People can go out, but they need to acquire a special permit.

Therefore, that restricts communication from happening. You need to acquire a special permit. So, therefore, that restricts the communications to happen. That restricts the kind of economic, political, and social contact that can happen among Indians. Now, what happens is that the communities become very insular and inward-looking.

But at the same time, there are individuals like Jaipal Singh Munda who argue that while we should not continue with colonial policies, tribal communities in India still need some protection and provisions to maintain their autonomy or be granted a level of autonomy in their everyday governance. So, in that respect, one cannot ignore the role and contribution of Jaipal Singh Munda, who was largely responsible for framing the Fifth Schedule, which remains part of the Indian Constitution to this day. Now, I will stop here. In the next lecture, lecture 32, we will examine another important chapter in the history of tribal communities in India: the framing of the Sixth Schedule. Again, the story is very similar to what we have discussed in this lecture and the previous one.

That is, there have always been contestations. Not everyone was always in favour of isolation. Not everyone was in favour of integration. So, there was always some middle ground being sought or taken. Now, in the context of tribal communities in Northeast India as well, we will examine the debates, contestations, and differing positions taken by leaders and thinkers.

So, I will stop here. Thank you so much. We will meet again in Lecture 32.