UNIT 1 : CONCEPT OF DIFFERENCE AND INEQUALITY

Structure

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying the unit you should be able to:
- Understand the concept of difference of equality, inequality and difference among tribals;
- Know how differences become a factor in creating inequality in tribal context; and
- Analyze how above process produces discrimination of tribes in India.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will try to understand the concepts of equality, inequality and difference in relation to tribal problems and issues. Tribes in Indian are socially and culturally different from others. Accommodating the tribal demands for cultural recognition and continuity within the Indian nation state has been a challenge to the government and civil society for almost six decades. Many unresolved issues in tribal identity and related problems can be better understood by studying these concepts and their practice.

It is only by creatively using these concepts that tribal issues and problems can be understood and subsequently attempts could be made to resolve them.

1.2 THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY

Equality is a foundational value of all modern societies. The principle that everybody should be treated legally equal regardless of their caste, religion, region race or

language is accepted by majority of the nations. The effectiveness of the implementation of this principle varies from nation to nation. Even those nations that do not grant equality to certain groups or sections of society would claim that their interpretation of the principle of equality is different from other interpretations and that they too adhere to the principle in their own way.

It is also true that modern nation-states are characterized by a great degree of diversity. These diversities are often seen as a problematic issue. 'Equality' means that everybody is treated in the same way (similarly) while diversity means that there are considerable, definite social and cultural differences among the population. Often treating different types of individuals and community equally (similarly) would result in some communities being treated unfairly, which in turn violates the principle of equality.

It is only the modern society that valued equality, as a value and as a principle, to organize societies. Traditional societies are characterized by social order based on hierarchy – groups and individuals are placed in superior – subordinate positions according to a criterion. In pre-modern India, the caste system which divided the society into lower caste and higher caste was based on the criteria of ritual purity and pollution. The upper castes were ritually purer than the lower caste and therefore placed above them in the social hierarchy. Medieval Europe had the estate system- the population was divided into three divisions- clergy, nobility and commons.

However, it can be argued that the idea of equality existed in a limited and nascent form even in these societies. Islam and Christianity did recognize the equality of its adherents before their one true God. Even in Hinduism, with its hierarchical caste system, scholars have identified a certain degree of equality for all, though other worldly, for all members regardless of their present positions. Everybody had an equal opportunity to perform his /her *karma* which, satisfactorily performed would enable the person to get into a higher stage in his/ her next life. Moreover, there have been a number of social movements, like the *bhakti* movement, in Hinduism challenging the supremacy of the Brahmins and getting social equality for the lower castes. Similar movements for greater equality are found in Islamic and Christian history also. But none of these movements were successful in making equality an organizing principle for medieval Hindu, Christian and Islamic societies. In other words, while equality was recognized in a metaphysical sense, it was not seen as a principle to guide state policy and decisions. Traditional Indian society is seen as an unusually hierarchical society. (Beteille, 2004; 197)

Structural inequality was also the mechanism used to manage different communities in a society. Not all traditional societies were as pluralistic as modern societies, but there were different communities which coexisted in one society. These communities had their place in the social structure and their interaction with others depended on their relative positions in the hierarchy.

Furnivall describes the situation in a colonial society in the following way "Each group holds its own religion, its own culture, its own ideas and ways they meet only in the market place different sections of the community live side by side, but separately within the same unit"(Furnivall quoted in Oommen, 2004; 45)

Thus inequality between communities and differential treatment for some communities at the cost of others did not cause a major problem, as these societies did not accept equality or democracy as a value. The role of the state was to maintain the social order. Thus, it had a harmonic system of stratification in which the dominant values in society and the existing situation were congruent. Though pre-modern societies were pluralistic with many communities coexisting. Each of these communities had a particular position in the society which determined their rights and duties, and how they interacted with others and social inequality was accepted as value and principle in pre-modern societies. The role of the state was to preserve the social order rather than change it.

Equality in the Modern Period

The idea of equality evolved in Europe with the revolutions in France, England and United States. The French Revolution and the American War of Independence were violent expressions of revolt against the traditional social order. The French Revolution attacked and removed the privileges of the aristocracy and the clergy. According to the new system, every individual was treated equally and no one, regardless of his position in society, had special rights and privileges. Similarly, the American constitution after the War included the Bill of Rights which ensured equality to its citizens. It separated the Church (religion) and State (government) mainly to avoid the government from discriminating its citizens because of their religion (or denomination) being different from the majority religion (or denomination).The French revolution and the American Constitution heralded a new period in history where equality was accepted as a fundamental principle. But it was only a beginning of a long process where the idea of equality would be clarified, expanded and made part of state policy. Firstly, the idea of equality was seen here in a limited form- legal equality and the abolition of privileges to certain privileged groups like the aristocracy. It did not say anything about existing equalities which were reflected in the unequal social and economic condition of the people. Secondly, there were large sections of society that were excluded from the ambit of equal treatment-women, slaves, colonized people and outsiders. These sections had to wait for many, many more years or even centuries to be recognized as being worthy of equal and fair treatment. Women had to struggle till the early twentieth century to get voting rights and the Afro Americans became equal to their white compatriots only after the Civil War. Needless to say discrimination of these sections continues to happen on a smaller scale in the society even after these monumental events.

In the nineteenth and twentieth century, there was an expansion in areas in which the principle of equality was applied. It was felt that inequality in the social and economic spheres of lives should end or at least be reduced. Political and legal equality without social and economic equality was futile. It was only when these important areas of an individual life are brought into the ambit of the principle of equality, that the ideal will be fully realized. Another important aspect of equality was the recognition of the need for special protection of minority groups. The genocide of Armenians in Ottoman Empire and Jews during the World War II brought about the realization that communities as a whole are often discriminated as they belong to a particular religion or ethnic group. Thus, community based discrimination need to be addressed. More recently, there are demands for equality and recognition to be given to sexual minorities to stop discrimination.

Equality as a policy was seen earlier as "static' in the sense that the state's role in merely ensuring legal equality, changed to a 'dynamic' one in which the state took efforts in ensuring equality in opportunity, outcome and conditions. The state formulates laws, policies and programmes to ensure that inequality is reduced. The emergence of welfare state is an important outcome of this commitment. Thus, the concept of equality has changed and broadened to include new areas of life of individual and community. It increased the state responsibility in ensuring that equality as a principle works in the society.

Check Your Progress I
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1) How has the concept of equality changed over time?
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1.3 DEFINITION OF EQUALITY

It is very difficult to define equality as a concept. Ernest Baker says that "Equality is a protean notion; it changes its shape and assumes new forms with a ready facility". Equality does not simply mean similar treatment to all. Treating unequal equally will be as much injustice as treating equals unequally. But then individuals possess different capacities and produce different outcomes. Harold Laski says 'the purpose of society would be frustrated at the outset if the nature of a mathematician met with identical response with that of a bricklayer'. Hence it would be wrong to relate equality with the same treatment for all.

Baker describes the principle of equality in these words "Just as each person, because he is a person, is free agent in the scheme of the State, so also each person, because he is a person, as all other persons, has an equal standing, and counts equally as a legal factor, under the scheme". Similarly "…..means that what ever conditions are guaranteed to me, in the form of rights, shall also, and to the same measure, be guaranteed to others, and that whatever rights to others shall also be given to me". Thus equality is only the basic condition that is provided to all; how they make use of it is up to them. Thus the principle of equality gives the same starting point to all but how they finish depends on the individuals. "Law is giver of legal capacities and of legal capacities only. Burke's dictum that "All men have equal rights but not to equal things" is applicable here.

The principle of legalistic equality had limited impact in societies with a history of gross social inequality. For example, it would be unreasonable to expect two individuals from different social background to be treated equally- an individual raised in privileged family with all facilities will be more meritorious than an individual raised in family with minimal or no facilities. There should be a certain degree of equality of opportunity if the principle of equality has to be realized.

Harold Laski gives a broader idea of equality with the following characteristics :

i. No special privileges for any individual or group;
ii. Equal opportunity for all as it gives everybody opportunity to educate and equip himself. Further, he can use his skills and talents to get the desired things in life;
iii. Equal access to social benefits for all and no restrictions based on any extraneous factors; and
iv. Absence of economic and social exploitation.

According to this definition, the principle of equality should have not only legalistic equality but also equality of opportunity and equal access to social benefits. An even broader definition of equality then emerged. Bryan Turner in his work 'Equality' has given the following characteristics:

i. Fundamental equality of persons,
ii. Equality of opportunity,
iii. Equality of conditions where there is an attempt to make the conditions of life equal, and
iv. Equality of outcome of results.

The principle of equality includes – equality of conditions and equality of outcomes. It is not enough that there is legal equality and equality of opportunity but also equality in conditions in society and equality of outcomes or results. Equality of outcomes is the achievement of a given set of positive circumstances for a particular

group or category. Thus, various communities and groups in a society should not experiences vast differences in their standard of living. The state should take proactive steps including progressive taxation and other measures to redistribute wealth.

The various dimensions of equality are : (1) Political equality (2) Economic equality (3) Legal equality, and (4) Social. Equality as we have seen is a widely accepted idea. Yet inequality in different dimensions persists in all societies. The United States of America has wide range of social inequalities in terms of income levels; Afro Americans on an average earn less than their white Americans. Similarly, in France the birth place of the popular slogan 'Equality, Liberty and Fraternity" the Black, Muslim migrants and their successive generations experience discrimination. Like in USA, their average income levels are much lesser than their white counterparts.

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1) What are the dimensions of equality?
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1.4 INEQUALITY AND DIFFERENCE

Every society is divided into different categories based on a quality or set of qualities. Primitive communities, which were essentially large kinship groups, had minimal differentiation based on the criteria of sex and age. Modern communities have greater differentiation based on a number of criteria- income, race, ownership, sexual orientation etc.

In itself these different categories do not reflect any hierarchy or any superior subordination relationship. They simply show that people can be grouped together on a common basis. They share some elements of their social and economic lives with others and there are other people with whom they do not share these particular elements. For example, language can be a criterion for grouping people. People who speak Hindi can be one group and people who speak Bengali can be another. It is only a grouping of people who are different in one way or another. There is no hierarchy with one group being superior to another. Members of one group do not attain more power, prestige or income simply because they belong to one group and not another.

However when differences are evaluated according to a set of qualities and then different groups are placed in a hierarchy, these differences becomes a basis for inequality. Consequently, there are groups that have a subordinate or superior relationship with other groups. Again, there will be differential rewards and obligations attached to the groups occupying low and high positions. Groups which are placed higher than others enjoy greater prestige, income and power. They have easier access to things that are needed for a good quality of life.

Not all social differences are valued according to qualities and set in a hierarchy. The type and nature of quality decided for valuation depends on the nature and type of society. For example, pre-modern societies valued aged people for their wisdom and experience while modern societies neglect them by attributing negative qualities of lack of energy and low updation of knowledge etc. Many social differences are also ignored or not even seen as being worthy of notice. They may later on in a different situation become socially important. In USA dark skin (Black) was seen as ugly till the 1960s when change in ideas of beauty altered and the concept of 'Black is Beautiful' emerged. A change in social perspective had brought about a revaluation of a quality which produced different results.

Social Inequality and Natural Inequality

Many of the criteria for judging a group's value and justifying social inequalities are thought to be found in nature-biological differences. It is argued that biological differences results in biological inequalities which in turn result in social inequalities. No one can deny that individuals are endowed with different natural abilities and capacities. Jean Rousseau, political thinker, states of two types of inequality:

"I conceive that there are two kinds of inequality among the human species; one, which I call natural or physical, because it is established by nature, and consists in a difference of age, health, bodily strength, and the qualities of the mind or of the soul: and another, which may be called moral or political inequality, because it depends on a kind of convention, and is established, or at least authorized by the consent of me".

Thus according to Rousseau, the first type of inequality is natural and therefore is given; while the second type is socially created and therefore will benefit a few over the majority.

*Sociologists point out that natural and moral equality are not completely unrelated. For example, intelligence is measured by Intelligence Quotient (IQ). IQ Tests in the United States have found that Whites on an average have higher score than Blacks. Does that mean that Whites are **naturally** more intelligent than Blacks? Can the*

income gap between the communities be explained by the higher intelligence of the White? But this has been explained by the following facts (1) Intelligence is the product of both genetic and environmental factors. The social background of the individual influences his IQ scores. Deprived social backgrounds will negatively influence the scores (2) Intelligent tests are not really objective. They are based on white middle class knowledge and skills (3) The tests only measure only part of the mental capacities of the individuals and therefore are not universally valid.

Biological differences do not readily become social inequalities. Andre Beteille points out "natural inequality is based on differences in quality, and the qualities are not just there, so to say in nature; they are as human beings defined them, in different societies, in different historical epochs." Further, he says that the identification as well as the gradation of qualities is a cultural and not a natural process. Béteille (1983: 8) writes, "Nature presents us only with differences or potential differences. With human beings these differences do not become inequalities unless and until they are selected, marked out and evaluated by processes that are cultural and not natural." In other words, differences become inequalities only with the application of scales; and the scales with which we are concerned in talking about inequalities in a social context are not given to us by nature, but culturally constructed by particular human beings under particular historical conditions.

Dipankar Gupta points out that "differences in language, religion, race or sex are differences that are in themselves and, do not contain the property of inequality. This may not however, be the popular understanding of these differences." (Gupta, 1996: 9). He says that 'though differences cannot be placed in a hierarchical order they are not allowed to retain their horizontal statuses'. "They usually tend to get hierarchised in popular consciousness. This is where prejudice takes over. Men are deemed to be superior to women, certain linguistic groups are held to be less civilized and cultivated than others, and religious bigotry prevails, all because most of us are not conditioned to tolerate difference qua difference." (Gupta, 2004:120-121).

Some of the groups which are discriminated because of their natural differences are:

1. Men and Women
Apart from the fact that men are generally physically stronger than women, there is no biological evidence to show that women are incapable of doing the tasks that men do. Yet it is often held that men are better suited to manage outside work while women are better suited to do household work and care for their children.

2. Racial differences
The European justification for colonization of other people was mainly based on the fact that the white race was more advanced and evolved than other races and therefore had a role in civilizing them. Pseudo scientific theories based on Darwinism was used to justify the oppressive rule of the natives.

Culture and Inequality

Clearly, the qualities used to judge the relative position of groups vis-à-vis other groups are defined by social and cultural processes rather than scientific facts. It is also clear that the qualities that are selected and used to make these judgments will be derived from the existing body of knowledge of that society. But knowledge production in any society depends largely on the position of the producer in the social structure. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in the Communist Manifesto say the "The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class." According to a prominent contributor to the Sociology of Knowledge, Karl Mannerheim-all the knowledge and ideas, although to different degrees, are "bound to a location" within the social structure and the historical process. Likewise, Oommen advocating the need for 'a perspective from below' says that "the process of production of knowledge and advantages and disadvantages emanating one's location in the social structure is linked". It is not to suggest that all knowledge is partisan in nature rather to show that knowledge is not always 'objective' and factual.

It is not only academic knowledge that is affected by these biases and partisan attitude. Common people's everyday experiences with members of other communities colour and reinforce these biases and then they become established as facts. These everyday experiences take place in common places- like in the street, workplace, markets, educational institutions, during political activities. People do not consciously give much importance to these interactions but nevertheless are influenced by them. It is not often understood that it is pre-existing biases in the observer that influenced his perception and his conclusions has merely reinforced his bias.

1.5 INEQUALITY AND DIFFERENCE IN INDIA- TRIBAL CONTEXT

Indian political leaders after India's independence from British rule very well understood the challenge of creating an egalitarian social order in a deeply hierarchical society. India's diversity in religions beliefs, value systems, customs, and traditions made the task even more difficult. While the Western societies had become egalitarian over a long period of time, the Indian state had to achieve an equitable order in a much shorter period. Dr. Ambedkar, the architect of Indian constitution thus described the challenge Indian democracy faced:

The third thing we must do is not to be content with mere political democracy. We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social

democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy…….On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value….

Indian States response to tribal situation

The Indian government recognized that the tribes are socially, culturally and economically diverse from other categories of Indians and therefore needed a different approach. Some of the policies/ approaches that reflect this concern are as follows:

Provisions for equality
- Constitution Articles art. 14. 15 and 16; and
- Grant –in –aid specific to Scheduled Tribes.275(1).

Provisions for preventing discrimination of tribes:
- Protective Articles of the Indian Constitution;
- The National Commission for Schedule Tribes - a Constitutional body to protect the rights of the Schedule tribes; and
- Protective legislations like Prevention of Atrocities against SC/ STs.

Provisions for recognizing and preserving differences:
- The Panchsheel or the Five point approach formulated by Verrier Elwin and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to tribal situation which advocated minimal governance and autonomy, and the right to develop according to their own way;
- Schedule V and Schedule VI of the Constitution which gave limited autonomy to the tribes to govern themselves; and
- The Panchayat Extension Schedule Areas Amendment which gave additional powers to the Panchayats to govern tribal majority and areas and administer land use.

Indian market and civil society's response to tribal situation

Tribes are no longer isolated from non-tribes. Contact between the tribes and non-tribes are increasing due to migration and forced displacement. Everyday

experiences in interacting with others are as important as government legislations ensuring equality and protection, in defining tribal perception of themselves and non-tribes.

Tribal and non-tribal interactions takes place in rural as well as urban area. In rural area, a number of studies have shown that the tribal experience has been largely negative. It has increased tribal alienation and, caused frustration and anger among them. Raja Kanti Das (Das in Pfeffer, Georg and Deepak Kumar Behera, 1997) studied of Oraons in Midnapore showed that the Oraons were adopting certain elements of Hinduism from their neighbours as an adaptive measure while striving for maintaining their identity and community organizations. But inspite of these steps, the Oraons were losing their jobs to the new migrants to the town. P. K Bhomick (Bowmick in Pfeffer, Georg and Deepak Kumar Behera, 1997pp 109-115) study of the 21 Lodha villages in the Midnapore show that frustration is driving them towards crime. There have been a number of studies that show how tribes have been brought into the Hindu fold by incorporating tribals' Gods into the Hindu pantheon. The assimilation, if successful, makes the tribe a caste within the caste system. The study of Pattanaik (Pattnaik in Pfeffer, Georg and Deepak Kumar Behera, 1997 pp317-329) of Sabara tribe in Orissa shows their gradual adoption of Hindu customs and becoming an untouchable caste. Local power equations play an important role in determining the ritual status and position of the caste. Historically such tribes are placed in the lower positions in the caste hierarchy though they have been instances of tribes being accepted as Kshatriyas.

Christian methods to convert tribes have been more direct and involve a break from their earlier animistic beliefs. Both these process have often resulted in the loss of tribal identity. While in many cases the assimilation into larger community might have given the tribal community greater security, in many cases it has caused violent conflicts between the tribes and non-tribes and between tribes itself. There have been instances of forceful rejection of Hindu and Christian beliefs and a return to traditional beliefs.

In urban areas, the nature of contact between the tribal and non-tribal has been different because of the relative anonymity prevailing in the cities. However we see here too people's perception about tribal has negatively influenced the interaction patterns. Stereotypes about tribes are found in the language, representations and nature of interactions of everyday situations.

Popular stereotypes about tribals:

1. Tribals especially from the North East who have Mongloid features are not Indians. They are Chinese and therefore called "chinky". Recently a Chief Minister of a North- Eastern State complained that he is questioned whether he is an Indian almost every time he comes to Delhi for official work. This is a common problem for

many people, tribals and non-tribals, from North East India. By calling them 'Chinese' even in a lighter vein, we delegitimize the very existence of tribals in their own country.

2. Tribal women are considered physically strong and sturdy. At the same time they are seen as docile and obedient to their patrons. These rare qualities are seen as making them suitable for becoming good domestic workers. This widely accepted belief has contributed to creating a huge demand for tribal domestic workers in all major cities leading to large scale trafficking of women from tribal areas to urban areas. It can be argued that this is a positive quality seen by others in tribal women and that tribal women are employed because of this stereotype. However this belief also essentialises the tribal women by relating them to one low prestige, low income jobs.

3. Women have been seen as the cultural emblems of their community.(Chaudhuri Maitrayee in Sharma and Oommen(2000)pp 118). Tribal women are seen as promiscuous. Women body is seen as a site for cultural domination in a patriarchal society. Not surprisingly then, men have seen the 'Other's women as being sexually promiscuous and their own women as being virtuous and modest.

4. Popular representations in film and plays almost always show tribes in negative or comic roles. They are portrayed as irrational ; the outsider (the hero or heroine) is often captured by the tribes in the forest and is going to be killed and very next instant becomes sacred and holy due to completely unrelated silly occurrence which convinces the simple minded tribes); Tribes are depicted as wearing minimal clothes and interested mainly in drinking and dancing.

5. Everyday language (phrases and usages) reinforce stereotypes. Often, tribes and their supposed characteristics used as figures of speech to indicate negative traits in the individuals. It is common to find in all Indian languages phrases and usages which compare negative traits like foolishness, laziness, unhygienic habits and unkempt looks to certain tribes. For example, "Why are you looking dumb like a .....(name of a tribe)? You smell like ..... name of a tribe)?

6. North eastern men and women are often not recruited for jobs that have public profile- hotel management; modeling and airlines are some examples. A lack of "Indian Looks" is cited as the reason. Dovai, Nikita(2009: 80)

The examples that are found in every day situations reflect the nature of tribal and non tribal interaction in civil society.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Give an example from your observation of everyday life how differences in human beings result in differential treatment and discrimination.

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1.6 LET US SUM UP

Tribal communities in India are in many ways culturally and socially different from others. The degree and areas in which these differences are manifested differ from tribe to tribe and from region to region. The reason is that the tribes are not one homogeneous community as was thought of earlier. Also they are part of the dynamic social and cultural process that takes places in every society.

However these characteristics of tribes must not be seen by others as a end of differences between tribes and non tribes. The differences are real and tangible. Non-tribes people often wonder why the tribes do not join the "mainstream" especially since they are given a lot of privileges like reservations, special grants etc. They do not often realize that what they demand is the assimilation of tribal population into the majority population. The "mainstream" imagination of India often is narrow. According to them, the social and cultural criteria for an Indian is very much their own culture and social characteristics. In reality they view only themselves and people like them, to be the mainstream. Therefore they want the tribes to be like themselves. This is not acceptable to the many tribes who want to maintain their distinct culture and lifestyle.

The Constitution promises Equality of status and of opportunity(Preamble of the Indian Constitution).The government has passed a number of legislations and formulated programmes to move towards equality: How is it only when social perceptions undergo a change that the goal of equality of all will be closer. The so called mainstream Indians will have to better understand the much quoted but not well understood words "unity in diversity" if they want a better India.

Béteille proposed a distinction between harmonic system (in which society is divided into groups that are hierarchically placed and the ordering is considered as appropriate) and disharmonic systems (in which there is no consistency between the order in which groups are arranged and the natural scheme of things i.e., there is a discrepancy between the existential and normative orders). He explained the

disharmonic system in terms of one which upholds equality as an ideal but practices inequality.

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UNIT 2 : ETHNIC RELATION, CONFLICT AND CHANGE

Structure

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying the unit you should be able to:
- know about the concept of ethnicity;
- understand the dynamics of ethnic relations; and
- discuss the causes of ethnic conflicts in tribal areas.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept 'Ethnicity' is often used in relation to tribal problems and the tribal situation. Conflicts between tribes and non-tribes are explained by saying that they are ethnic problems. It is therefore very necessary that the meaning of ethnicity and its applications be understood. Then we will apply it to the tribal situation in India and draw insights from it.

Some times the word is used in a derogatory sense- it is as if the tribes have remained backward in their thinking and remained strongly attached to their primordial ties while the others have moved on to become modern Indians and even global citizens. Thus, according to this view, the lack of modern consciousness has left the tribes backward and there lies the main cause for tribal problems. People of the so called mainstream often shake their heads and blame the tribes when they hear about violence in tribal dominated area.

2.2 THE CONCEPT OF ETHNICITY

The word 'ethnic' comes from the Greek word 'ethnos' meaning "nation". However it does not mean a political community but people of common descent or kinship. Later the word entered the Latin vocabulary as *ethnicus* which meant outsider and somebody who did belong to the majority community. (Cornell and Hartmann, 2007; 16)

Max Weber defined ethnic groups as "that entertains a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration". According to Weber the main characteristics of "ethnicity" are (1) it is based on the real and assumed common descent and blood ties (2) people's belief in the common descent makes it irrelevant whether it is real or false (3) The commonality of the ethnic people maybe any one of criteria- physical appearance to common historical experiences, and (4) the common belief produces a strong bond between the people.

Anthony Smith describes an "ethnic community" as "a named human population with a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, and cultural elements; a link with a historic territory or homeland; and a measure of solidarity":

Ethnicity and Nationalism in India

Ethnicity and Nationalism are often interchangeably used. Yet they are seen differently here. Penguin dictionary of Sociology defines Nationalism as 'an ideology based on the belief that people with common characteristics such as language, religion and ethnicity constitute a separate and distinctive political community'. Nationalism demands that the group is given the right of self determination and that they govern themselves. Ethnicity describes communities that have renounced, voluntarily or involuntarily the demand for independent statehood and co-exist with other ethnic communities within a single state.

Indian Nationalist even before Independence has always insisted that the basis of our Nationalism is the Indian civilization not any particular linguistic or religious community. It was therefore different from the European model of Nationalism whose basis was the homogeneous community. The civilization model of nation would accommodate the enormous diversity of the Indian sub-continent. It is believed that "Indian civilization has evolved through many stages providing a network of institutions and ideologies which offer unity in plurality (Singh (1996).

Tribal populations are part of the diversity of India. But it was recognized that tribal situation was very unique and a different approach was needed to deal with this

issues. As you would have already read there were mainly two approaches (1) Isolationist and (2) Assimilationist.

The isolationist approach by Verrier Elwin and others advocated that the tribes should be isolated from the mainstream population and efforts made to restrict the contact of tribes and the outsiders. This would preserve tribal identity and their way of life. On the other hand, the assimilationist approach favoured by Ghurye and Thakkar Baba advocated the assimilating of the tribes into the mainstream. They argued that most tribes were anyway part of India culturally and socially, and hence should be made part of the Indian mainstream. Majumdar's model advocated that the mainstream and tribes can learn from each other cultures, leading to better quality of life. For example, the tribes can learn how to manage their assets and money while the mainstream society can learn certain aspects from tribes like delayed age of marriage. However the advocates to these approaches were non tribes who had experienced tribal life from the outside.

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Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Define Ethnicity.
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2.3 ETHNIC RELATIONS IN INDIA: TRIBAL CONTEXT

Milton Yinger (1997) gives a framework to understand ethnicity and its impact on society. He says that there are at least four major types of multiethnic societies in the contemporary world:

- A society built out of formally equal ethnic groups.
- A society with a major national cultural group and other ethnic communities separated by highly permeable boundaries.
- One or more ethnic groups can be strongly oriented toward an outside society.
- One or more ethnic groups disadvantaged within the larger society.

These models are typologies and no society can completely fit the model. But these typologies help us to understand that ethnic relations are not only about cultural differences but there are factors like power, outside orientation that influence the ethnic relations.

There are two broad possibilities which take place when two or more ethnic communities live in proximity.

1. Assimilation- a process of boundary reduction that can occur when members of two or more societies, ethnic groups, or smaller groups meet. At the end of the process if it is successful, there is no major social and cultural differences between the communities.

2. Dissimilation – a process whereby intra societal differences are maintained and created around sub-cultural groups.

Assimilation and Dissimilation are continuous processes. They are reversible also. There are rare cases of complete assimilation and complete dissimilation. Often after assimilation there exist traces of the community's earlier social and cultural practices.

Yinger gives twenty variables that affect the extent and speed of assimilation of an ethnic group which means that the presence or absence of these variables will increase or reduce the rate of assimilation and dissimilation.

Assimilative influences	Mixed or neutral influence	Dissimilative influences
1. Small group (relative to total population)	X	Large groups
2. Residentially scattered	X	Residentially concentrated
3. Long term residents (low proportion of new comers)	X	Short term residents (high proportion of new comers)
4. Return to homeland difficult and infrequent	X	Return to homeland easy and frequent
5. Speak the majority language	X	Speak different language
6. Share the majority religion	X	Different religion
7. Same race as majority or dominant group	X	Different race
8. Entered voluntarily	X	Entered by conquest or forced migration
9. Come from society culturally similar to the present society	X	Come from society culturally similar to the present society
10. Repelled by political and economic development in homeland	X	Attracted by political and economic development here

11. Diverse in class and occupation	X	Homogeneous in class and occupation
12. High average education	X	Low average education
13. Experience little discrimination	X	Experience much discrimination
14. Targets of little prejudice	X	Targets of much prejudice
15. Residents in open society	X	Residents in closed society
16. Unequal sex ratio	X	Equal sex ratio
17. Live in expanding economy	X	Static or contracting economy
18. Strong outside threats to society	X	Weak outside threats to society
19. Little shared memories of former statehood – historical and/or mythical	X	Vivid memories of former statehood
20. Full legal and political status as citizens	X	Limited or no status as citizens

Source: Milton Yinger (1997; 53-54)

These variables are useful in understanding the tribal relation with others in India. However, some of the variables are not relevant (Point 4, 10, 16 18 and 20). These points are more relevant for an immigrant society like USA than India. Indian tribes are, in majority of the cases, the older, if not the oldest communities of a place. Some tribes have been forcibly displaced either for forced labour or due to developmental projects; in which case the tribes have been uprooted from their original dwelling places.

2.4 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN ETHNIC CONFLICTS

Ethnic conflicts have taken place throughout the world. Social scientists have identified different causes for the occurrence of ethnic conflicts.

Horowitz (1998) has given us ten explanations which more or less covers all the theoretical perceptive on ethnic conflicts:

1. Ethnicity is due to primordial affiliation which is described as being part of a tradition and hence being indispensable for most communities. The self consciousness of the community members gives it unity, but at the same time draws boundaries with other communities. Thus, traditional notions of who we are and who others are lead to conflicts.

2. Ancient hatreds produce conflicts. According to this explanation also, conflicts are the result of long standing hatred between communities. These hatreds become part of the collective memory of the community members and show itself at different situations.

3. Ethnic clash is a cultural clash. Different communities have different value systems. What is sacred to one is profane to the other. These different value systems produce conflicts. Religious conflicts can be a value conflict.

4. Modernization brings about ethnic conflict. Modern values of equality, liberty and fraternity are incompatible with traditional values. Traditional societies which experience modernization are often ill equipped to deal with changes brought by it. For example, open competition for resources which were earlier marked for a particular section can lead to conflict. Competition for the political positions can lead to conflict between different ethnic groups.

5. Ethnic conflict is caused due to the economic competition between ethnically differentiated segments of the working class or ethnically differentiated traders and customers. The son of the soil movements which are demanding that locals get preference in jobs while 'outsiders' entry to jobs are regulated, is an example of this type of conflict.

6. Ethnic networks are used to exchange goods and services in societies where there are often cheating in the exchanges. Ethnic affiliations may prevent individuals from cheating their own extended kinsmen. This situation creates a polarized society where two or more groups restrict economic interaction to their own ethnic group.

7. The reduction in transaction costs make it cheaper for people to interact with their own kinsmen while restricting the interaction with others. But sometimes there is 'accident' in the processes when groups interact. This accident leads to conflicts between communities.

8. According to some theorists, elite interests are the cause for ethnic conflicts. The 'elite entrepreneurs' make use of their ethnic affiliations and cause ethnic conflicts to serve their political and economic interests.

9. Theorists using rational behavior theory have given an innovative approach to study ethnic conflicts. They claim that conflict happens in situations where insecurity prevails. Each group is unsure of how the other group will behave and this feeling of uncertainty causes conflicts. In a situation of limited information and uncertainty communities have to choose the best available action; at times it is conflict with other communities.

10. Ethnic conflicts are based on the need for survival of the groups. The solidarity the groups develop helps the group to cooperate with other members. It helps the groups to survive and at times the struggle for survival leads to conflict. These conflicts help the better organized to survive at the cost of others.

These ten principles give us a wide range of perspective on ethnic conflicts which are given below: The historical explanations (No.1 and No.2), Sociological explanations (No.3 and No.4), the economic and rationality based explanations (No.5, No.6 and No.7), elite based explanations (No.8), Rational choice theory explanation (No.9) and evolutionary based explanation (No.10)

Michael Brown (1997) reviews the various causes identified for ethnic conflicts. (1) Systemic explanations which identifies close proximity, weak regional, national and international authorities and the lack of security as major reasons. Communities are often caught in a "security dilemma" when they resort to mobilization and conflict (2) Domestic explanations which identifies the causes as lack of effectiveness of the state in addressing the demands of the communities, the impact of nationalism on inter-ethnic relations, and the impact of democratization, and (3) Perpetual explanations that focus on false history that communities have about themselves and others.

Check Your Progress II
Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Describe any one of the explanations for ethnic conflict.
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2.5 TRIBAL CONFLICTS IN INDIA: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

According to Sahni, tribal conflicts are of three types:
1. Tribal conflicts with other tribal communities,
2. Tribal conflicts with non-tribes, and
3. Tribal conflicts with state agencies including police and military.

However this is not a clear classification, as the situation on the ground is complex. Often the conflicting parties involve an overt or covert alliance between two or more parties against others. The alliances are between tribes and non tribes or between

tribes. It is also alleged that state agencies are also covertly aiding one group against others. In other situations it is the actions of the non-tribal community that have pushed tribes into conflict.

A. The major issues of tribal and non tribal conflict have been

i) Land issues

Tribes in India have come in contact with outsiders throughout history. However it was during the colonial period that the contact became common resulting in several conflicts Tribal land has been often communally owned rather than individually owned. However under the colonial law land had to be owned individually. Tribal land was alienated and unfortunately the process has continued even after India became independent.

ii) Settling of Outsiders on Tribal Land

Outsiders (Non tribes) have increasingly settled in tribal areas. The main reasons for this are the following (i) tribal land is rich in natural resources (ii) Mining and development activities have increased job opportunities (iii) increase population and pressure on land, and (iv) the perception that tribes are gullible and can be exploited.

In many states like Jharkhand and Tripura the tribes have become a minority because of the influx of migrants. Outsiders have gained enough political and social power to marginalize the tribes. This has built up resentment and hatred in the tribes towards the outsiders. The Outsiders called the *dikus* in the local dialect is seen by the tribes as the main cause for their impoverishment and their problems. Myron Weiner in *Sons of the Soil; Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India* gives us an idea of tribal perception of the tribal themselves on the outsiders. They feel that the outsiders are not part of their community and are exploiting them.

There have been numerous attempts to deal with the problem of outsiders. One of the major demands of the Assam movement was to identify the foreigners and prevent them from becoming citizens illegally. However these measures have not been successful because of the problems in identifying foreigners *(Frontline November 6 1992).*

iii) Forced Migration of Tribes for Labour

The colonial government allowed plantation owners to forcibly move tribal communities from their native lands to different parts of country where cheap labour was needed. The British left 60 years ago but the tribal communities have remained. The "local population continues to be indifferent if not hostile to these communities. Politically these communities are marginalized and remained outsiders". "The 'tea tribes' of Assam is an example of tribal communities marginalized after being forced to migrate from central India.

iv) Development Projects and Special Economic Zones

It is estimated that millions of people have been displaced due to development projects after Independence. The Planning Commission in one of its reports put the number of displaced people at 21.3 million among which 8.54 million which is about 40 percent were tribals. Only 2.1 million have been reported to be rehabilitated and the remaining 6.4 million are still to be rehabilitated.

The development projects might have helped the nation to progress, but it has been at the cost of the tribes. The tribal populations were asked to move from the native lands for greater common good but they never benefitted.

Tribes are increasingly being negatively affected by the governments to initiate Special Economic Zones which it claims will boost the economic growth of the country. Here again, farmer lands and tribal lands are being taken away using the Land Acquisition laws.

Amita Baviskar (1995) asserts that the conflict between the state and the tribes are not only a right to livelihood but is also a clash of cultures. A culture which sees land and environment as assets to be exploited for development and the tribal culture that has learnt to live with nature harmoniously.

v) The Rise of Modern Nation States of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh

India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are three nation states born of British India. The division of colonial India into two countries was based on the criterion of religion the Muslim majority regions became Pakistan. In 1971, Pakistan itself was divided and a new nation emerged – Bangladesh.

The boundaries of these nations have divided many ethnic communities and placed them under different nation states. Members of these communities feel strongly that all their members should live together under one nation state. For example the Nagas are found in India and Burma. One of the demands of Naga separatists is that all Nagas unite under one state. Similar demands have been made by other separatists groups also.

vi) States Reorganization and Federalism in India

A Federal system of governance is a way of managing India, a vast country with its diversities. It is also a strategy to manage regional aspirations some which in the early days after independence had separatist tendencies. The main principle for awarding statehood is the linguistic basis- common language. The Government of India, reorganized Assam and created Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya (1972), Mizoram (U.T. in 1972 and full-fledged statehood in 1987) and Manipur (1972).

But often many areas in these regions are inhabited by more than one group which causes problems. The tribal areas are even more pluralistic with a number of

communities' co-habiting in the same area. It is impossible to divide regions according to one community and grant statehood. For example, in Manipur, the hills are dominated by the Nagas and the plains by Meiteis. The Nagas want to integrate their areas to the state of Nagaland. But the division of the Manipur will anger the people of the plains and some smaller non-Naga communities of the hills. Similarly, the Santals are divided between the states of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Bengal and Chattisgarh. In such situation the state official language and medium of instruction in schools are in non-tribal language leading to alienation of tribes.

The complex situation cannot be solved easy as granting of statehood to the dominant often creates more problems than it addresses. The example of division of the State of Assam into smaller states did not solve all problems of that region.

vii) Administrative Arrangements, Inefficiency and Insensitivity
Tribal communities during the British rule were given considerable freedom to manage their own affairs. The autonomy given to these areas allowed the British to claim these areas as being under their control without using their administrative and military resources.

Separatists in North-East often justify their demand for a separate nation state by claiming that the accession of the tribal areas was not legal and properly done. The consent of the people was not taken when it was determined whether these areas should join the Indian union.

Administrative inefficiency and insensitivity have contributed to the alienation of the tribal people. The use of armed forces to quell militancy has resulted in the complaints of human rights violations *(Frontline March 25 April 7, 1995)*. The Special Forces Act which gives the security forces unlimited powers to search houses and arrest suspects is particularly unpopular in the North-East.

viii) Lack of Economic Development
The tribal areas have been exploited as they are rich in natural resources. However, the tribal people and the regions remain backward. According to the Planning Commission over 80 percent of the total workers, both rural and urban, are engaged in primary sector, of whom 45 percent are cultivators and 37 percent are agricultural labourers. The corresponding figures for all workers are 31.65 percent cultivators and 45 percent agricultural labourers. This indicates that STs are essentially dependent on agriculture. They have not largely benefited from the growth of the service sector especially the banking and IT sectors.

Similarly the incidence of poverty in STs is 45.3 percent in rural areas and 24.1 percent in urban areas compared to the figures of 25.4 percent and 13.7 percent for total population (Tribal Committee Upon, 2014). The Human Development Index for STs is estimated at 0.270 which is lower than HDI of SCs and general population.

Similarly the Human Poverty Index is estimated at 47.79 which are higher than the SCs and general population (UNDP, India, 2007).

ix) Plurality of Militant Groups
Many militant groups claiming to represent these two communities were fighting among themselves for a long time. The major overt objective of these groups is to gain territory exclusively for their community by driving out the 'outsiders'. Covertly some of these groups are engaged in illegal activities like extortion, kidnapping, smuggling and gun running. These activities are major source of revenue for these groups. They fund the political activities of the group which helps it gain legitimacy. Given that there is a lot of money to be obtained from these activities it is not uncommon to find conflicts between groups that represent the same community. The plurality of the groups is itself a cause of major troubles.

Government negotiations with one group are often seen as betrayal by the other groups and often the agreements are not accepted. Often clashes between groups takes place which costs lives. Various factions of NSCN fought over NSCN (IM) peace talks with the government *(Frontline July 30, 1993).*

However, the plurality of militant groups has not prevented many of them from cooperating with each other on common issues *(Frontline September 9 1994).* Tripura All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) is an example of the same.

x) Tribal and Forest Rights
Another major issue that creates problems is the issue of tribal access to forests. Tribal dependence on forest and food is still very high. Forests are largely under the control of the Forest department which restricts access to the forest under the guise of protecting the forests. According to Forest Survey of India, 2011, almost 60 percent of the forest over of the country in found in tribal areas namely, in the 188 tribal districts of the country. About 4.3 million people mostly tribes continue to inhabit in the forest areas designated as National Parks and protected areas.

xi) Covert Support from External Agencies and Government
Many groups receive funding and training from neighbouring countries and their secret services. It is alleged that China used to aid the NSCN and the Pakistani secret services the ISI helps militant groups *(Frontline, February 11, 1994).* Bangladesh has been either indifferent or unable to control the use of its land as safe sanctuaries for various militant groups. The support of these countries has ensured the sustainability of the militant groups especially when Indian security forces have acted against them.

xii) The Role of the Ruling Parties in Centre and National Level Politics
The National parties in the Centre have not been free from blame. Often the governments in the Centre have used their power to further their party interests at the

cost of creating instability in the States. Elected governments are destabilized and puppet leaders installed *(Frontline, March 22, 1996).* It is not uncommon to find that the leaders of tribal dominated parties switching sides after a change of power in the Centre. These unpopular changes have made the central government lose legitimacy in tribal dominated states.

xiii) Shortsighted Decisions and Policies
Governments both at the state and central level have made shortsighted policy decisions that have hurt the people of these states especially the tribes. Since tribal voices are not adequately represented in the decision making bodies many of these decisions have affected them adversely.

For instance in Orissa-The decision to grant permission to set up industries in tribal dominated areas without proper consultation has been the major cause for tribal unrest. Tribal population accounts for 22.21 percent of total population. 73 percent of the tribes are estimated to be below the poverty line. Yet tribal people have resisted moves by the government and private entrepreneurs to set up industries as their experience shows that they do not benefit at all while losing their lands. One of the recent incidents happened in Jaipur District where the government is setting up an industrial complex. *(Frontline Vol 23, NO 2 January 28 - February 10 2006).*

In **Kerala** - Large scale migrations have taken place from mainly central Kerala to the districts of Waynad and Idukki. Many of the migrants have settled down illegally on forest land. The number of such migrants has now become large and has become a powerful pressure group. Their major demand is that they be given land rights. All major political parties support these demands. This has led to clashes between the tribes and the settlers, who are backed by the police. In 2003, the government decided to grant land rights to the settlers in Waynad. It led to clashes between the tribes and the settlers and subsequently between the tribes and police which left many dead.

In 1975, the Kerala Legislature had unanimously enacted the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction of Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act. The Legislations primary purpose is to restore alienated land to the tribes. However, it was not notified till 1982 and tribes could not benefit from the legislation. In 1982 the various rules under the Act was formulated and notified. However the law was not implemented on the ground. A public litigation was filed in the Kerala High Court in 1988. Again only three of the 8088 cases were finally restored and only 1201 case orders were passed. The High Court in 1993 ordered the government to dispose all pending cases within six months. Again the government was not willing to act. The tribal land issue remains unresolved.

In **Manipur -** The Central government has a ceasefire agreement with the NSCN (IM). The NSCN (IM) demanded that the ceasefire be extended to Naga inhabiting

areas in Manipur also. The Center ordered the cease agreement to be applicable in Manipur also. This move by the Central government enraged the Manipur Meiteis who saw it as a move to appease the Nagas at their costs. Massive protests and violence followed. The assembly hall was burned down and houses of ministers attacked. The violence forced the Central government to rethink. This time the Nagas were angry that the Central government had reneged on their decision. They enforced a blockade on the Valley and did not allow the movement of goods. Though the blockade was eventually lifted it had an adverse effect on the already strained relationship between the Meiteis and the Nagas.

In **Chhattisgarh -** Naxal groups inspired by Maoist thoughts are fighting the government and the landed class. The main element in their strategy is the use of violent means to attain their objectives. They are particularly active in the states of Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Orissa, Maharastra and Andhra Pradesh. Increasingly the Naxal groups are recruiting from tribal communities who have suffered land alienation and lack of development.

The State governments in these states have had limited success in combating the naxal problem. In Chhattisgarh, an organization called Salwa Judum has been formed by a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) with the support of the State government. It consists of volunteers (often paid as Special Police Officers) mainly from tribal communities who are trained in guerrilla warfare and then used against the Maoist. The strategy of using armed civilians against Maoists has been criticized as delegating state responsibility to private organization. More importantly, from the tribal community point of view the Salwa Judum has divided communities and even families. Often members of the same communities are pitted against each other. The resultant violence has left many dead and many more displaced. Independent observers have stated that the violence has had a negative impact on the communities.

xiv) Cultural Hegemony of the so called Mainstream
It is not just the material deprivation that has caused conflicts between the tribal and non-tribes. Often the mainstream culture identifies the national culture with their own culture values and lifestyles. Other cultures are sidelined or even discriminated. In the national level the twice-born Hindus inhabiting the Indo-Gangetic plain, the mainstream, look upon the emergence of peripheral cultural nationalism with disapproval and disdain. (Oommen, T.K. 1986)

At the State level too, there are deliberate attempts to sideline the culture of the minority linguistic groups. It often finds expression in the language policy and the education policy of the State. Education and Language policy are emotional issues and people are easily provoked. The division of Assam into the smaller states was in response to the demands that the culture of the non Assamese Tribal communities was under threat.

Cultural Insensitivity is also seen when tribes are expected to move away from their traditional lands for often inadequate compensation and even more importantly without understanding the role of the nature and their surrounding in their culture. Amita Baviskar (1995) points out that for the tribal community the land was central to their culture and it was difficult to imagine their lives without the landscape.

xv) Tribal Religion and Conversion

Tribal religion was often animist and nature worship. But many have converted to Christianity and many have been Hinduised. Some tribes have converted to Islam. These new identities have often changed the tribal perception of themselves and others. Conversion to Christianity has enabled greater access to education and greater awareness about their situation. For example, the many founders of Jharkhand movement were Christians. Their education and exposure gave them the ability to articulate the demands of their communities effectively.

However, in other times the identities exacerbated the conflict between communities. In Orissa (2008) and in Gujarat (2002) religious identity played an important role in causing riots and conflicts.

xvi) Separatist and Secessionist Movements

The cultural alienation and lack of development in tribal areas has produced numerous separatist and secessionist movements. Demands for a separate Statehood and sometimes, a separate Nation, have been made by various tribal groups. Nagaland, Meghayala, Mizoram, Tripura, Arunchal Pradesh in the North East, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh are states which have been formed to address the demands of tribal movements.

The longest separatist movement is the Naga movement. In 1926, the Naga Club submitted a memorandum to British demanding sovereignty. Nagaland National Council (NNC) under the leadership of Angami Zapu Phizo started an insurgency and demanded a sovereign Naga state. The Council held a 'referendum' in which it claimed that 99 per cent of the Naga people supported independence for Nagaland. Phizo created an underground government called the Naga Federal Government (NFG) and a Naga Federal Army (NFA). After Phizo, the NSCN has split on tribal line into many factions- NSCN (Isaac-Muviah) and NSCN (Khaplang). Negotiations with the Indian government are held periodically to resolve the problems.

Check Your Progress III
Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) What are some of the causes for tribal conflicts in India?
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B. Tribal Conflicts – An Overview

Tribes have engaged in major conflicts that have taken place between the tribes and non tribes and between tribal communities themselves.

Some of the ethnic conflicts that have taken place in the North-East are:
1. Bodo – non Bodo conflict in Assam,
2. Anti outsider movement in most states in North-East and particularly in Meghalaya and Assam,
3. Naga-Kuki clashes,
4. Kuki-Paite Clashes, and
5. Tripura- Bengali clashes.

C. Naga Kuki Clashes

The two tribes Nagas and Kukis share common territory mainly in parts of Manipur and Nagaland. A long struggle has taken place between the groups for the control of these areas. The Kuki groups are demanding that the Kuki dominated areas of Churachandpur, Senapati, Chandel and Tamenglong to be recognized as Kuki land. This demand has been opposed by the major Naga militant group, The National Socialist Council of Nagaland NSCN (IM). The Kukis militant groups include the Kuki National Army (KNA). The conflict escalated in 1992 when Kuki militants asked the Nagas to leave Moreh, a town near the Indo-Myanmar boundary. Moreh is a known center for smuggling and distribution of heroin which comes in from Myanmar. Kuki militant groups control the trade and have made major profits. The NSCN demanded 'taxes' which the Kuki group refused. They then demanded that Kuki leave these areas. The clashes between the Naga-Kuki left numerous dead and many more displaced *(Frontline, January 1, 1993).*

D. Bodo – Non Bodo Clashes

Bodos are one of the largest tribes living in the plains of Assam. They dominate the Kokrajhar and Bongaigoan districts. The Bodos are demanding a state for themselves which will be craved out of Assam. The All Bodo Student Union (ABSW) and later the National Democratic Front of Bodoland lead the agitation. The agitation for Bodoland was started in 1987 and became increasingly virulent in 1988 and 1989. An accord known as the 'Bodo Accord' was signed in February 1993, and the Bodo Volunteer Force (BVF), the armed wing of the ABSU, laid down arms, paving the

way for the establishment of the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC). However, one section of the BVF rejected the Accord and formed the Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF) (now known as Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT)) in 1996. This organisation remained active in the districts of Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Nalbari, Barpeta, Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Dhemaji until its cease-fire agreement with the Indian government on March 29, 2000. But even the accord could not be implemented. The territory under the BAC could not be demarcated and its powers clearly defined *(Frontline January 26, 1996).*

E. Tripura Bengali Clashes and Assamese Bengali Clashes

Migration from North India and Bengal was constantly taking place. But after the creation of Bangladesh the problem became very acute. Bangladesh has been facing numerous cases after it became a separate nation. Economic problems, frequent disasters and ethnic conflicts have made life difficult for the people. There are large scale migrations from the border areas of Bangladesh to the North-East especially Assam and Tripura.

In Tripura, the tribal population dropped from 64 percent in1874 to 29 percent in 1971. The Bengali population became 68 percent of the population. Large tracts of land were transferred from tribal hands to the migrants. Relations between the communities deteriorated and a violent clash occurred in Mandia leading to loss of lives and property (Singh B.P; 1987).

2.6 LET US SUM UP

Tribal issues and tribal conflicts are issues that are related to a wide variety of social, political and cultural issues. Looking at these issues from a narrow perspective- as a purely administrative problem or a law and order issue is likely to confuse rather than clarify the dynamics of the problem. The problem is related to the issues of Indian nationhood and distributive justice.

Modern India is rightly proud of the economic and technology progress it has made after Independence and especially in the last two decades. However the condition of tribes is a blot on the record of India. Seeing the problem of tribes as being purely an economic or administrative one is missing the point and solutions from this point of view are not likely to succeed. The problem has cultural and social dimensions. The government of India has acknowledged the problem and is working out different ways to address the issues.

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UNIT 3 : TRIBAL IDENTITY IN THE MODERN WORLD

Structure

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying the unit you should be able to:
- know what are identities and its relevance;
- know the difference between identity formation in the modern world and traditional world;
- know the issues important for tribal identity; and
- understand the consequences of tribal identity.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In simple words, identity is how we see ourselves and the social environment around us. It determines how we look at important events in our life, how we attach meaning to them and how we react to them.

The loss of identity is considered as a major problem confronting the tribal communities and for that matter all indigenous communities in the modern world. The loss is seen as a shattering of the tribal world view without any modern world view to replace it. Along with the rapid alienation from their natural resources, the loss of community identity is seen as the main cause of tribal problems. It is also being recognized that the tribal world view is not backward and it need not evolve naturally into a modern world.

In this unit, we attempt to understand the concept of identity, tribal identity and the reasons why there is an erosion of traditional tribal identity in the modern world and its consequences.

3.2 IDENTITY A ND IDENTITIES – SOME IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS

"Identity" is a concept which occurs in a number of different academic disciplines including, particularly, psychology, social anthropology, sociology and political science. (Rex in Goulbourne (ed.); 2001:232). Identity can be seen at different levels- individual identity, group identity, community identity. Secondly there can be types of identities – political identities, social identities and professional identities.

I) Levels of Identity

A. Individual Identity

Individual identity emerges out of the unique experiences that the individual has in her life and her response to it. Individual identity is the product of both, how an individual views himself and how he is viewed by others. Individual experiences are unique and consequently individual identity is also unique. That is why social workers remind themselves often that every client is unique. However, human beings are social by nature. They live in groups and communities and not in isolation from each other. This condition requires that individuals cooperate and share with one another. The level of dependence of the human beings especially at their young age is very high. They are taught to be members of communities and this life-long process is called socialization. Hence, both these aspects are important for the individual identity; the unique aspects of the person and those aspects that are common with others in the community. Thus, individual identity differentiates an individual from others as well as integrates to others.

Eriksson, the psychoanalyst who made seminal contribution towards understanding the concept described identity as "a subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image". Eriksson saw childhood and adolescence as period which is crucial to the formation of the individual's identity. It is during this period that the identity forms through incorporation of specific objects of identification and subsequent mastering of tasks in later life (Rex, ibid). Thus, the basic world view is formed in the early stage of an individual's life, after which the individual that seeks further understanding of the world through that world view.

As mentioned earlier, an individual identity is formed and expressed socially; in relation to others in society. Typically an individual interacts most of the time with his family, and then later on with his peer groups, school mates and friends. These interactions have a significant influence on his identity. Sociologist G.H. Mead differentiated 'the significant others' and the 'generalized others' in the process of the emergence of the individual's identity. The significant others are the child's

parents while the generalized others are the community at large. Similarly the 'looking glass self' of C.H. Cooley describes the evolution of an individual's personality as 'being as product of his perception, the perception of others and his perception of the others perception.

B. Community identity

Individual identity and group identity are influenced by their community identity. Community values and culture play an important role in determining group's values and belief. It is the community at higher level (nation or ethnic group) that determine upto a large extent the value orientation of the family.

At the community level, history has an important role to play in the formation of identities. It is a form of collective memory. Collective memory is the foundation of self identity. In pre-modern societies, history was recorded in the form of myths, folklore and songs which were transmitted from generation to generation through the word of mouth. Modern societies have written histories and often claimed that to be scientific and objective. Nevertheless history writing, in all forms, is to vary degrees, an exercise in selective and partisan understanding of the past. It is very much what and how people or the elite want to remember about themselves and what they want to forget.

II. Some Salient Features of Identities

i) Stable and Changing
While social identities are important because they are fairly stable, it is also true that they change over time. No identity remains fixed when there are major changes happening inside the individual, community and in the wider society.

Bhargava (1999; 5) says that "to have an identity is to recognize the presence of something stable in the midst of change and diversity. It is to be located somewhere, to possess a tangible sense of being at home in the world. More importantly, this sense of being anchored obtains from identifying with something else that, on the face of it, appears different, but is as same as me".

ii) Identities are Products of Imposition as well as Self-created
Many identities are often given- ascribed. The individual or community has no choice in determining these types of identities and is bound to it for ever. Often such identities are psychologically and socially oppressive in nature. There is social and state coercion in maintaining status quo in these identities. The power matrix of the society compels communities and individuals to retain their identity even against their will. The dalit identity in traditional India is an example.

However in other situations when historical and social conditions allow, identities change. Thus, in these conditions, identities are not simply given – they are made by the conscious efforts of the people. State Action, social movements and reform movements are some of the means used to change social identities.

iii) Voluntary Change in Identity

Communities and individuals can change their identities on their own volition. Often these decisions are made after evaluating the pros and cons of the existing conditions. For example, individuals and families may change their religion through conversion to another religion. Families may migrate to another country, get its citizenship and thereby change their nationality.

iv) Involuntary Change in Identity

Sometimes, these changes may be involuntary or even be forced. A community is conquered and made slaves. When slavery was practiced it was common for conquered people to make captives and sold them in slave markets. Similarly during ethnic cleansing people are driven out of their homelands and become refugees in other country.

Even seemingly permanent identity may change when other identity is adopted or forced to other community. Caste membership is by birth but there have been numerous instances where castes *Sanskritized* for upward mobility. At times these attempts were successful.

Similarly there has been fusion and fission taking place in the caste system leading to caste groups attaining new statues. Mandelbaum (1998; 500-516) gives numerous instances where separate castes come together and subsequently are seen as one caste. The fusion of castes usually takes place in democratic societies to increase caste membership and improve bargaining power with the state.

v) Multiple Identities

Another important aspect of identity is that every individual has multiple identities. The reason is that an individual is a member of many communities each of which describe in one particular way. Sometimes multiple memberships can create tension in the person if the value orientations of the communities are contradictory. For example, belonging to an atheistic political party and having religious beliefs may cause tension in the individual. It may not be so, if he is a marginal member in both or one of these communities.

There are latent and manifest identities. Manifest identities are open and the individual is conscious about those identities. Latent identities are unknown to the individual or may not be given much significance. In some situations, these latent identities emerge. For example, Indians who go abroad suddenly have an intense

feeling of 'Indianess' which they felt in India. Hence, the emergence and significance of identities are situational.

vi) Identifiers and Markers

Identity tends to crystallize around symbols or cues (Horowitz; 1975; 120). They can be external and/or internal markers. Markers are symbols and values which distinguish communities from one other. They can be external and tangible; body, dress, language, worship systems. It can be internal and intangible, beliefs, values, etc.

vii) Identity Crises and Loss of Identity

The change in conditions within the community or outside it may lead to an identity crises and loss of identify. Social identities can be *'lost'*. "….to lose one identity is to be disposed of one's bearing and the ability to see where one stands, to be unhinged, detached and to feel insecure. It is to fail to choose or discover something that is one's own, to be unable to find sameness with anything". This can happen when there is assimilation and integration of diverse communities into one homogenous community, something people cannot relate to.

Check Your Progress I
Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Describe the characteristics of 'Social Identity'.
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3.3 TRIBAL IDENTITY CRISES AND THE MODERN WORLD

Modern industrial communities differ significantly from primitive and simple communities. Emile Durkheim distinguishes them by the type of solidarity that exists in these societies. Mechanical solidarity based on similarity of all members is found in primitive and simple societies whereas organic solidarity, based on interdependence is found in complex industrial societies. He envisaged a breakdown in norms when society undergoes rapid changes from one society to another. The result is anomie which leads to an increase deviant behavior including suicides and crimes. Another well known sociologist Weber described the modern world as characterized by the emergence of the rationality in different spheres of life. He did appreciate the positive aspects of rationality but also warned that it would lead to an end of imagination. He feared the decline of the supernatural and the end of imagination. He described the modern rational world as being 'iron clad'.

Herbert Blumer (1964; 129) points that there are five different ways in which a traditional society can respond to modernization: (1) Rejective response-a traditional society may reject the process of modernization and strive to maintain traditional order. (2) Disjunctive response-this type of response is characterized by the persistence of traditional and modern elements without any *open conflict*. There are in some spheres of community life where modern elements prevail and there are other areas where traditional values and practices prevail. (3) Assimilative response-this response consist of an absorption of modernization process by the traditional society without major changes in social order. (4) Supportive response-the society accepts the modern values and it increases the power of traditional social order, and (5) Disruptive response-the tradition order is challenged and destabilized at various points by the response.

We understand the tribal communities' reaction to the changes in the last two centuries with certain limitations. Firstly, there is a great diversity in the tribal communities. Social, economic and cultural characteristics differ from community to community and consequently changes affect tribal communities in different ways. Secondly, identities are dynamic and changing. Thirdly, perceptions on tribal identity differ widely depending on the location of the observer and that leads to contradictory observations.

i) Tribal Identity - Individual and Community

Modern society promotes a social identity based on professional competence, wealth and other achievements of the individual. In fact, one of the major achievements of modem society is the freedom from ascribed status- individuals are judged by their achieved status. Modern identity is based on values of achievement orientation and individualism. Tribal societies are less individualistic and have communitarian approach to life. Kinship ties are important sources for material and moral support (Berhera; 189 in Behara and Peffer; 2005). This is not to say that tribal communities are not socially differentiated and hierarchy is totally absent. But only to stress that community life plays an important role in tribal life than it does in the modern society.

ii) Tribal Identity and Colonialism

Indian society's contact with the Western rationality was under colonial rule. Administrative, legal system and education systems were modeled on these values. It was forced by the colonizers on the natives without their consent. However over a period of time the Indian society absorbed these values and institutions. But the impact on tribal population was varied.

Administratively, the traditional forms of self-governance were replaced by a political system that operated far away in the state capital and in Delhi. A centralized bureaucratic system with no popular control was put in place to govern the tribes. The personnel for the administrative service were chosen from all communities, not necessary from the local communities. Traditional tribal communities had self governing systems which were procedurally open and participatory. For example, see Vashum's discussion on Naga tribe (Vashum; 200 in Behar and Peffer; 2005) It was male dominated and at times biased, but it was also community based administration. It relied on customs and conventions rather than on formal systems of law. Modern administrative systems thus, took away the autonomy of the tribal communities to govern itself.

The new legal system, enforced by the administration also dislodged the traditional legal system of the tribes. The main effect of these steps were on property rights, especially land rights. Traditionally, tribal land was communally owned and there was no concept of individual property rights: a foundational principle of modern legal system. Consequently, no official documents exist to record property rights. Tribal lands were easily alienated to the government and to non-tribes and many of them became landless. Furer-Haimendorf (1982: 321) writes, "....in the streets of Ranchi one can still see Munda and Oraon rickshaw-pullers who not long ago were independent cultivators tilling their own land".

The modern legal system had negative impact on the family relationships also. Traditionally, the women had an important role in the economic activities of the family. After the tribes lost their common land the role of women lost its significance and with it, her status declined. The tribal women became dependent on the male and this adversely changed the equal status she previously enjoyed.*(For a detailed discussions see the section on women in Pfeffer, George and Deepak Kumar Behera 1997, Contemporary societies; tribal Studies, Volume One, Structure and process,. pp115-206).*

The economic system of the tribes was adversely affected when common property resources especially the forests were put under control of the government. Again the colonial law was that all land not privately owned was government land. The British looked at the forest and common lands as resources that had to be managed and exploited for commercial purposes. British forestry policies was inherited by the Government of Independent India and implemented towards the service of the State's primary goals of repaid industrialization. The National Forest Policy 1952 underlies continuity of the colonial policy. It reinforced the claim of the State to exclusive control over forest protection and production. Significantly, this policy identifies shifting cultivation as one of the main threats to State forestry to be dependent on forest resources. While there were some changes in the post Indian forest policy later on, the overall impact has been very much the same. Therefore

tribal alienation from forest and common property resources has increased not decreased.

The factor which most adversely affected the tribal was the development induced displacement (DID). It is estimated that around 20 million people have been affected due to the DIDs out of which 40 percent are tribes. (Tribes constitute only 8 percent of India's population). Programmes to rehabilitate the displaced have been less than satisfactory. As per the information readily available, a population of 21.3 million have been displaced between 1951 and 1990 in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Maharastra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Orissa. Of whom, 8.54 million (40 per cent) are tribals and of those only 2.12 million (24.8 per cent) tribes could be resettled, so far. Even those settled through rehabilitation programmes are not fully integrated into the new situation.

It is not the state alone that has altered the conditions for the tribes; it is also the civil society. The relations between non-tribal and tribal communities are to be seen in the superior- subordinate relationship. Being poor in resources to cope with the "modern world", the tribes are forced to accept subordinate positions in the society. In rural areas, they are landless labourers and in urban areas they became unskilled labourers. Educational backwardness and limited access to resources results in inability to cope with the situations. These factors make them vulnerable to exploitation and alienation.

iii) Tribal Identity and Environment

In the age of globalization being geographically mobile is seen as an advantage while tribal communities often see their immediate surrounding environment as an important constituent of their identity. Amita Baviskar says "Hills, trees, stones are imbued with spiritual power and actively intervene in people's lives at the same time. The supernatural world of the spirits is also the extension of the social world of the lineage, populated as it is by the invisible presence of ancestor guardians and evil spirits (enemies of the lineage who sometimes assume the human form of *dakkans* and possess married women)" (Baviskar,2004: 161).

Modern knowledge systems categorize tribal beliefs as superstitions which have to be replaced by scientific knowledge. However, these beliefs are important part of the tribal identity because: (1) They attribute meanings to their social and physical environment, (2) these meanings are shared among all members of the community and thus unite the community, and (3) these shared meanings are the basis for any form of collective behavior. Community rituals and social practices are done based on these commonly held meanings. Similarly protests and violence ensues when others act in violations of these values.

Tribal relationship with the forests is not entirely supernatural. Many of the food items and energy sources are obtained from the forests.

iv) Tribal Identity and Christianity

Christianity was adopted by the North-Eastern tribes while many other Indian tribes did not convert to the faith. Converting to Christianity provided tribes opportunity to be part of the global religious system and gave them a new identity. Christian schools and colleges provided modern education which exposed them to modern ideologies and values. It is also observed that tribes that have converted have relatively higher literacy rate than others.

The increased educational opportunities lead to many changes – modern political leaders, tribal scholars and intellectuals who could articulate tribal view points and demands. It was not accidental that the first set of modern political leaders in Chotanagpur (present day Jharkhand) mainly came from the Christian community.

The new political leadership was different from the traditional leaders. The traditional tribal leaders acquired their legitimacy from religious sources. Often traditional leaders got their direction for political actions from spirits and gods while the new leaders knew modern forms of political activity. They were aware of need for democratic and representative governance- elections, voting and party system. They understood the importance of advocating tribal demands and getting concessions from the government to help tribal communities.(Troisi in Rao, 2000;338-364).

Christianity became an important factor in fusing desparate tribal groups into larger tribal communities. According to Sanjib Baruah, the single most important development that made the imagining of Nagas as a collective group was their conversion to Christianity. Today, Christianity is an essential part of Naga identity. The Christian identity which marks the Nagas apart from the mostly Hindu and Muslim population of the Indian heartland has been partly an act of cultural resistance that parallel the political and armed resistance. (Baruah, Sanjib, 2003 : 321-338).

Christian principles often differed with tribal beliefs and value systems. They discouraged the widespread beliefs of tribes in witchcraft and black magic. The tribal youth hostels were looked upon as sinful and evil. The church and the priests became the centre of Christian tribal life. In this way Christian belief replaced traditional beliefs. Christian missionnaries played an important role in the standardization of tribal languages. A number of tribal languages had no script. Each language had significant linguistic differences even within it which made it difficult for them to communicate with different communities within one language group. The local tribal languages were standardised. Often the Roman alphabet along with accent was used

to write the language. Dictionaries of the local languages were compiled. Prayer services were translated into the tribal language. Tribal languages became a part of the identity of the tribes.

Verrier Elwin, a former missionary, himself criticized the Christian missionaries for converting the tribes. He was critical of the imposition of Christian morals and values which were contrary to tribal values.

v) Tribal Identity and Hinduism

Tribals have always been in contact with Hindu civilization. In fact, Ghurye, a prominent sociologist called Indian tribes "backward Hindus". Others have disputed this contention by pointing out that there are significant differences between the Hindus and the tribal religions. It is difficult to determine this issue conclusively because of the following reasons: (1) Hindu religion does not have any set of criteria to determine an individual's membership into the religion. There is no common ritual, prayers or belief system which all Hindus adhere to, (2) it does not have any church or an *ummah* whose membership can identify the individual as a member of a particular religious groups, and (3) the diversity in tribal religions makes the process of identifying individual tribes who are significantly Hinduized and who are not, extremely difficult.

Mutually influencing interaction between the tribes and Hindu civilization existed from early times. Historians say that Indian civilization is itself a product of a series of accretion of tribes at different times. Beteille (2004; 71-72) quotes D.D Kosambi who says that "The entire course of Indian history shows tribal elements being fused into the general society. This phenomenon, which lies at the foundation of the most striking Indian feature, namely caste, is also great basic fact of ancient Indian history". A known example of the transformation of a tribe into a caste is the Ahoms of Assam who were originally from outside India and after a length of time become a fully integrated caste group within the Hindu caste system. Similarly, the Khasi regarded as a tribe has certain Hindu features.

The process got accelerated with the colonial period with greater movement of people around the country. Increased contact lead to increased interaction between tribes and Hindus. Changes were observed in many tribal communities. The Todas of Nilgiris Hills in TamilNadu is an example. They are substantially influenced by the Dravidian Hinduism which immigrants from other parts of South India have brought with them. Pictorial representations of Hindu gods and goddesses have found an honourable place in many Toda households. However, there has not always been a decline in their indigenous tribal rituals. Both the ritual systems are practiced with fervor and enthusiasm. Walker (1986: 288) says that the Todas has accepted the "efficacy of two parallel ritual systems: his own and that of popular South Indian Hinduism".

Unlike Christianity, Hinduism did not demand that the tribes completely stop their former worship practices. The tribal Gods and worship systems were integrated in to the Hindu belief systems at the local level. The tribes were given a position in the caste system which often was low and if they wanted to improve the status they had to Sankritize- they had to adopt the values, beliefs, lifestyles of the dominant community. The dominant caste was most often a twice born caste- Brahmin, Kshatriya or Vaishya. They had to stop eating beef and pork – both of which were sources of ritual pollution. Women were stopped from doing work outside the house and restriction put on their movements.

vi) Tribal Identity and Industrialization

Industrialization and urbanization are two important features of a modern society. Traditional values and institutions undergo major changes when industrialization and urbanization takes place. In some situations, traditional institution gets strengthened and in other situations it gets weakened.

The tribes in the Chotanagpur area experienced industrialization and urbanizations when industries were set up in the mineral rich areas,. However, due to the lack of education the tribes could not get good jobs in the industries. Non-tribal outsiders got the lucrative jobs while the lowly paid menial jobs were given to the tribes.

vi) State and Nation Building

The Indian state that replaced the British colonial state was a liberal, democratic and modern state. One of the main tasks of the state was nation building- the political leaders felt that loyalties of people were predominantly with their own community and not to the nation state. In order to make a nation it is important that terminal loyalties of its citizens lie in the nation state. At the same time it was realized that a large number of people experienced inequality and discrimination because they belonged to certain groups- Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes. Ending the discrimination and integrating communities into the mainstream was seen as important goal for independent India.

The leading ideas of the political leadership after independence can be summarized under the following heading; sovereignty, unity, order, a strong state, secularism, democracy and parliamentary, economic self sufficiency, and the need for social and economic reform. A key principle was that no secessionist movement would be entertained and would be smashed with armed force, if necessary.

The British administered the largely tribal areas by designating them as "Partially excluded Areas" and "Excluded Areas" which meant less of British administration and more of self governance. When the British exited from India the princely states

were given option whether to join the Indian Union or the newly created state of Pakistan or remain Independent. Princely states depending on their population and territorial position were integrated with the Indian Union.

Many tribal secessionist claim that the option to remain independent was available to them and tribal leaders had opted out to remain independent. But these claims are not recognized by the Indian Government. Rebellions by tribes have been dealt with the help of armed forces. The Indian government's response to tribal demands for increased self governance has been to in the following ways: (1) Create new states when feasible within the Indian federal system. However not all demands for statehood has been accepted by the Centre, (2) Create autonomous councils with limited powers within the existing states. The plain tribes of Assam Bodo have got a Bodo Autonomous Council which governs the Bodo dominated areas, and (3) the extension of Panchayat Raj System to tribal areas (PESA) with additional powers and responsibilities. The aim of these structures is to satisfy demands for greater control of resources and protecting their unique life style.

Tribal identity has been significantly influenced by the post Independence politics. Some of the significant changes have been the following: (1) New identities have been created by the tribal communities by merging previously separate tribe, and (2) Political mobilization by one community has led to counter mobilization by the other community and vice versa. At times, these mobilizations have lead to violent conflicts sharpening tribal identities. A number of states were created in the North-East in response of tribal movements for separate states. In some cases, the formation of a new state has satisfied the demands of the dominant community while minorities are unsatisfied. In other cases the demands for statehood have been only partially met. For example, it was after a long struggle that the demand for Jharkhand has been accepted and it consists of areas belonging only to Bihar. Areas in West Bengal and Orissa which are tribal dominated have not been included in Jharkhand.

The idea of nationalism and democracy support homogenizing of cultures. Often communities with different culture are seen as threat to the majority community.

Are tribes' nations?
T. K Oommen surveys the popular academic opinion on tribal nationalism. Academicians prefer to use terms like 'sub-national movements' (N. K. Bose) and 'sub-national' and 'proto-national' movements (Roy Burman) to describe tribal aspirations for autonomy. Tribes are denied the right of being nations and always seen as being part of the larger nation. Oommen argues that tribes especially the larger ones have fulfilled the criteria for being called a nation and should be seen as such. Jaganpathy points out that the term "tribe" itself is a nomenclature introduced by colonialists. He points out that tribes were earlier were treated like "nations" before they were subdued and made part of the colonial empire. (Sharma, S.L. and T.K.Oommen (2000) Nation and National Identity. Orient Longman, New Delhi)

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Describe the relationship between tribes and Hindu.

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3.4 TRIBAL REACTION TO LOSS OF IDENTITY AND CHANGE

Tribal communities have been exposed to large attack on their culture and identity. The response has been diverse and observable at different levels. Needless to say there is clash between the tribal world view and the modern view which when played out in an unequal condition has led to widespread unrest and violence.

B. K. Roy Burman identifies the following parameters as the causes for tribal unrest:

1) Response to threats of privacy of habitats, (2) Response to threats to access and control resources, (3) Response to disruption of traditional roles in the total interaction set up, (4) Search for new meanings of the relationship between man and nature, (5) Search for new meanings of the relationship between individuals and society, (6) Search for new frontiers of identity, (7) Search for a more satisfactory system of control of resources, and (8) Search for more satisfactory system of organization of community power at all levels.

i) Deviant Behavior

At the individual and group level, increase in deviant behavior among the tribes have been observed in the communities in India. In some cases, deviant behavior is observed in following ways: (1) Increase in committing theft and robberies. Tribes that have faced rapid change in their traditional roles and facing problems of survival have often taken to committing thefts and robberies. In traditional tribal societies stealing was improper but due to value changes tribes began to commit these crimes. B.K. Roy Burman gives an example of the Banjaras who rendered commissariat services to the armies in the middle ages became redundant after the railways and modern communication technology arrived. Many of them, unable to adapt to the new situation took to crime. R. C. Verma mentions how British government and Rajputs rulers in Rajasthan declared the entire Mina tribe as notified criminal tribe. While some tribesmen may have been participating in criminal behavior (just like

members of any community more or less) the whole tribe was declared as criminal tribe in order to humiliate the community. Here again it was the loss of their kingdoms that the Minas engaged in the criminal behavior. Similarly, cases of tribes indulging in theft, robberies and dacoit have been reported in other areas. James Scott in his influential book calls these acts of banditry as a form of social protest against the powerful that dispossessed them of their property.

2) Alcoholism: It is observed that tribal men and women are increasingly becoming addicted to alcohol. There always existed in many tribes the habit of drinking traditional drinks socially. The consumption of these drinks was controlled by the community. Tribes, removed from their traditional settings, have increasingly become alcoholics. The prevalence of alcoholism is higher in communities which were displaced and not successfully rehabilitated.

3) Disintegration and disappearance of tribal communities is also one of the consequences.

ii) Revivalism of Language and Culture

The process of nation-building is centred on the majority culture and language. The majority language is often made the official language. The majority community then has numerous advantages over members of other communities. According to Charles Taylor, the minorities have three basic options: (i) they can accept integration into the majority culture, although perhaps attempt to renegotiate the terms of integration; (ii) they can seek the sorts of rights and powers of self-government needed to maintain their own societal culture i.e. to create their own economic, political and educational institutions in their own language. That is, they can engage in their own form of competing nation building; (iii) they can accept permanent marginalization (Taylor, 1997; 37).

It is in reaction to this marginalization that tribes have begun to see themselves as being separate from the others, the mainstream. They insist that they be identified by their membership in the tribe (Adivasis) and that their identity not be subsumed by the larger regional and national identity. They claim that they are the indigenous people of the territory they reside and therefore have the first right over the natural resources. Thus, there is use of Adivasi identity imposed on them by others to further their claims to the state (Xaxa, 1999).

Any attempt by the so called mainstream at the government level and the civil society level to foster "integration" is responded with even more aggressive declarations of being different from "mainstream". There has been a significant movement towards revival of past religious practices of the tribes. Hinduized tribes have been asked by their leaders to again start eating beef which was prohibited by

the Hindu community. Some tribes which had converted to Christianity have also taken up their tribal beliefs and rejected Christian beliefs. There is also a significant process of 'tribalization' of Christian rituals and practices under the broad term of indigenization.

iii) Fusion and Fission in Tribes

Modernization and democracy often leads to changes in social identity of people. A number of originally distinct tribes have come together to form larger federation to form new tribal union. But these processes are not without controversy and acrimony.

Dattaray(1989), describes the process of naming and renaming of tribes by tribes themselves and by outsiders. He gives an example of Thadou and Kukis. Many in these tribes feel that they are distinct from each other while others feel that they are one and the same. There is even a denial of the name of the tribe by claiming that the term *'thadou'* is not the name of the tribe but of their ancestor. Similarly, there are attempt in Assam to change the name of the tribe by the tribes themselves as they feel that the name is derogatory and given by others.

Check Your Progress III
Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) List five issues which causes tribal unrest.
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3.5 LET US SUM UP

Tribal political and social identity are important issues in the future. Often, the issue is seen as limited to one or two issues- political autonomy, displacement and ecology. As we have seen tribal identity problems are often much larger than these issues.

The situation is also dynamic. The society and the tribal population are undergoing numerous changes consciously or unconsciously. Thus the problem of identity is related to social and cultural change. It is different type of modernity which has to emerge in the tribal communities. In democratic societies these problems cannot be resolved through authoritarian means and participatory ways have to be found to

resolve these issues. Social workers are deeply engaged in the society and its different processes.

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