



Tribes in India

This editorial is based on [“Madam President: On Droupadi Murmu’s election as India’s 15th President”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 22/07/2022. It talks about the election of Droupadi Murmu as India’s 15th President and rights of tribes in India.

For Prelims: Presidential Election in India, Scheduled Tribes, Living Root Bridge, Joint Forest Management, Fifth and Sixth Schedule of Consitution, TRIFED, Digital Transformation of Tribal Schools ,Development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups ,Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana

For Mains: Safeguards Provided by Indian Constitution for Scheduled Tribes, Problems Faced By Tribes in India, Empowerment of Tribes in India

The election of **Droupadi Murmu** as **India’s 15th President** is rich in symbolism. She will be the **first person from a [tribal background](#) to take the office.**

Ms. Murmu’s election is a **milestone in the journey of tribal empowerment**. Her election to the highest office of the country comes 101 years after two tribespeople were elected to legislative bodies in colonial India.

Although, the founding figures of the Republic of India were acutely cognisant of the disadvantageous position of the tribespeople and made special provisions such as the [Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution](#), there have been growing concerns among tribal activists about a **systematic erosion of protections accorded to tribals**, harassment and **suppression by the police**, and a general **intolerance towards tribal autonomy by the state.**

What are the Essential Characteristics for a Community to be Identified as Scheduled Tribe?

- **According to Lokur Committee (1965), the essential characteristics are:**
 - Indication of Primitive Traits
 - Distinctive Culture
 - Shyness of Contact with the Community at Large
 - Geographical Isolation
 - Backwardness

What are the Basic Safeguards Provided by Indian Constitution for Scheduled Tribes?

- The [Constitution of India](#) does not endeavor to define the term 'tribe', however, **the term [Scheduled Tribe](#) was inserted in the Constitution through Article 342 (i).**
 - It lays down that 'the **President may, by public notification, specify the tribes or tribal communities** or parts of or groups within the tribes or tribal communities or parts which shall, **for the purposes of this Constitution, be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes.**
 - The **Fifth Schedule of the Constitution** provides for the setting up a [Tribes' Advisory Council](#) in each of the States having Scheduled Areas.
- **Educational & Cultural Safeguards:**
 - **Article 15(4):** Special provisions for advancement of other backward classes (it includes STs)
 - **Article 29:** Protection of Interests of Minorities (it includes STs)
 - **Article 46:** The State shall promote, with special care, the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes, and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.
 - **Article 350:** Right to conserve distinct **Language, Script or Culture,**
- **Political Safeguards:**
 - **Article 330:** Reservation of seats for STs in [Lok Sabha.](#)
 - **Article 332:** Reservation of seats for STs in [State Legislatures](#)
 - **Article 243:** Reservation of seats in [Panchayats.](#)
- **Administrative Safeguard:**
 - **Article 275:** It provides for the **grant of special funds by the Union Government to the State Government** for promoting the welfare of Scheduled Tribes and providing them with a **better administration.**

What are the Recent Government Initiatives For Scheduled Tribes?

- [TRIFED](#)
- [Digital Transformation of Tribal Schools](#)
- [Development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups](#)
- [Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana](#)
- [Eklavya Model Residential Schools](#)

What are the Problems Faced By Tribes in India?

- **Loss of Control over Natural Resources:** As India industrialized and natural resources were discovered in tribal inhabited areas, tribal rights were undermined and state control replaced tribal control over natural resources.
 - With the concepts of [protected forests](#) and **national forests gaining currency,** the **tribals felt themselves uprooted from their cultural moorings** and with **no secure means of livelihood.**
- **Lack of Education:** In tribal areas, most schools **lack basic infrastructure,** including **minimal learning materials** and **even minimal sanitary provisions.**
 - Due to **the lack of immediate economic return from education,** tribal parents prefer their **children** to be **engaged in remunerative employment.**
 - Most **tribal education programs are designed in [official/regional languages.](#)** which are alien to tribal students.
- **Displacement and Rehabilitation:** Acquisition of tribal land by the government for the development process of core sectors like **huge steel plants, power projects and large dams** led to **large scale displacement of the tribal population.**
 - The tribal pockets of [Chotanagpur region,](#) **Orissa, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh** suffered the most.
 - The [migration](#) of these tribals to the urban areas **causes psychological problems** for them as they are not able to adjust well to the urban lifestyle and values.
- **Problems of Health and Nutrition:** Due to **economic backwardness and insecure**

livelihood, the tribals face health problems, such as the prevalence of disease, like **malaria, cholera, diarrhea and jaundice**.

- Problems associated with malnutrition like iron deficiency and **anemia, high infant mortality rates**, etc. also prevail.
- **Gender Issues:** The degradation of the natural environment, particularly through the destruction of forests and a rapidly shrinking resource base, has its **impact on the status of women**.
 - The opening of the tribal belts to mining, industries and commercialization has **exposed tribal men and women to the ruthless operations of the market economy, giving rise to consumerism and to commoditization of women**.
- **Erosion of Identity:** Increasingly, the **traditional institutions and laws of tribals are coming into conflict with modern institutions** which create apprehensions among the tribals about preserving their identity.
 - **Extinction of tribal dialects and languages is another cause of concern** as it indicates an erosion of tribal identity.

What Should be done to Empower Tribes in India?

- **Improvement in Healthcare Facilities:** Mobile medical camps to improve outreach in remote tribal populations would play a major role.
 - Provision of **emergency transportation for pregnant tribal women** to health facilities for obstetric care is one of the major necessities of the tribal women.
 - Health workers from tribal communities may become **the link between the healthcare facilities and tribal communities to guide patients, explain doctors' prescriptions**, help patients take advantage of welfare schemes, and **counsel them on preventive and promotive health behaviors**.
- **Improvement in Food and Nutrition Facility:** Large scale opening of **Mini-Anganwadis with much relaxed norms** and **expansion of Village Grain Banks** to tribal areas are some of the strategies that can be adopted to **'Reach the Unreached'** in the tribal areas.
- **Employment and Income Generation:** Employment and income generation opportunities should be ensured for tribal areas, **either through wage or self-employment** to raise their economic status and thus **liberate them from the shackles of poverty and indebtedness**.
 - Efforts should also be made to **extend micro-credit for self-employment ventures** and implementation of **mirror schemes of MNREGA** when no work opportunities are available.
 - Collection of **minor forest produce** and their marketing also needs to be encouraged.
- **Management of Water Resources:** There should be a more effective operationalization of the **National Water Policy in tribal areas**, so as to cover extension of irrigation facilities and provision of drinking water with a special thrust on:
 - **Watershed management, rain water harvesting** and water saving practices
 - **Mass education and public awareness** amongst the rural and tribal population for **effective water resource management** and protecting the water resources from pollution.
- **Empowering Tribal Women:** Effective measures should be taken to improve the lot of tribal women through:
 - Promoting **leadership role in Joint Forest Management and Panchayati Raj Institutions**
 - **Legal and administrative measures to check the practice of victimizing women suspected of witchcraft**, along with a massive campaign for **social awareness and rehabilitation** of victimized women, preferably through women's organizations.
- **Inclusion of Tribal Population:**
 - **Cultivation of Medicinal Plants: India tops in the world in exporting generic medicines.** The tribe should be encouraged to collaborate with the government for identifying and collecting medicinal plants from the wild and also cultivate suitable species for their self-consumption as well as for sale.
 - The **Government of India** has decided to take advantage of this trade and has set up a **National Medicinal Plant Board**.
 - **Infrastructure Development:** The government can collaborate with tribal groups for infrastructure development in their local areas.
 - **Meghalaya is known as a living root bridge.** They are **grown by trained Khasi and Jaintia tribes** who have mastered the art of growing root bridges across raised banks of streams running through the dense woods of Meghalaya.

- **Social Inclusion: Social exclusion** experienced by the tribal people are largely due to discrimination at social and institutional level, it has led to their isolation, shame and humiliation and in turn to **self-exclusion among tribes**.
 - There is a strong **need for awareness among the non-tribal population of India to recognize the ability and dignity of tribes** so as to ensure the **unity and integrity of the country** and **spirit of brotherhood**.

Drishti Mains Question

Throw light upon the status of tribal population in India. Present some solutions for their empowerment.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. Under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, who shall be the authority to initiate the process for determining the nature and extent of individual or community forest rights or both? (2013)

- (a)** State Forest Department
- (b)** District Collector/Deputy Commissioner
- (c)** Tahsildar/Block Development Officer/Mandal Revenue Officer
- (d)** Gram Sabha

Ans: (d)

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