

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

Anthropology Optional Tribal Situation in India: Characteristics and Problems

Paper 2 · Unit 5

What a tribe is in India (a schedule, not a concept), where the tribes are and how they are classified, and the chain of problems, from land loss to displacement, that connects it all.

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UPSC SYLLABUS

Tribal situation in India: bio-genetic variability, linguistic and socio-economic characteristics of tribal populations and their distribution. Problems of the tribal communities: land alienation, poverty, indebtedness, low literacy, poor educational facilities, unemployment, underemployment, health and nutrition. Development projects and their impact on the displaced tribal communities and their rehabilitation.

Defining and Identifying the Tribe

Everything else in the unit rests here, and the honest answer is uncomfortable: no sociological definition of tribe survives contact with the Indian evidence. What India has is a legal list with a colonial parentage and administrative tests, not a concept.

- The classic administrative definition, from the Imperial Gazetteer of India (1911): a collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory, and not usually endogamous though originally it might have been so. The hedges (professing to, not usually, originally) show the definition doubting itself.
- D.N. Majumdar's often-quoted definition adds reciprocity: a tribe is a collection of families bearing a common name, members of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language, and observe certain taboos regarding marriage, profession or occupation, and have developed a well-assessed system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligation.
- Every diagnostic trait fails somewhere. Isolation: the Bhil and Meena have been in dense contact with peasant society for centuries. Distinctive religion: many Santhal and Gond are recorded by the census as Hindu. Egalitarianism: the Toda and the Naga are not equally stratified. Primitive economy: most Indian tribes are settled cultivators. Distinct language: several tribes speak Indo-Aryan tongues.
- The Constitution does not define tribe. Article 366(25) says only that Scheduled Tribes are those deemed so under Article 342, which is circular by design: an ST is whoever the President has notified for that state. The category is a schedule, not a definition.
- The tests actually used are the Lokur Committee criteria (1965): indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness. None of these five is in the Constitution, and each is a matter of degree, so scheduling is an administrative judgment, not the recognition of a natural kind.
- Andre Beteille's resolution ('The Definition of Tribe', 1960; 'The Concept of Tribe with Special Reference to India', 1986): in India a tribe is definable only negatively, by its relative distance from the caste-peasant civilization around it, and the term is political and administrative before it is sociological. Groups fight to enter the schedule because scheduling brings reservation, land protection and Fifth Schedule cover, which is exactly what a neutral sociological category should not be an object of.
- The exam-safe verdict: open with the definitional problem, not a confident definition. Say that tribe in India is an administrative-legal category with a colonial origin and no stable sociological content, and that the criteria used (Lokur, 1965) are relative and contestable.

KEY TERMS

Article 342 — The President specifies the Scheduled Tribes for each state or UT by public notification after consulting the Governor; only Parliament may thereafter add or remove a tribe by law.

Lokur Committee criteria (1965) — The five administrative tests used to schedule a tribe: primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact, and backwardness. Administrative, not constitutional.

Diku — The Santhali and Mundari word for the outsider trader, moneylender or landlord who entered tribal areas under colonial land settlement; the human face of land alienation and debt.

Bio-genetic, Linguistic and Socio-economic Characteristics

The syllabus asks for bio-genetic variability, language and socio-economic profile together. Handle the biological part with care: the old racial typology is part of the discipline's history but is scientifically dead, and the examiner rewards you for saying so.

- The racial classification is historical, not current science. B.S. Guha's classification (1935) sorted the Indian population into six racial elements: Negrito, Proto-Australoid, Mongoloid (Palaeo- and Tibeto-Mongoloid), Mediterranean, Western Brachycephals (Alpinoid, Dinaric, Armenoid) and Nordic, with tribes drawn largely from the Negrito, Proto-Australoid and Mongoloid stocks. Cite Guha for the history, then state plainly that fixed racial types have been abandoned: human variation is clinal and populational, not typological.
- The living, defensible bio-genetic point is population genetics: tribal populations show distinctive gene frequencies and a high load of certain genetic markers, notably sickle-cell haemoglobin and glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase deficiency, both linked to endemic malaria, and the ABO and Rh distributions vary between tribal groups. This is variability by breeding population, not by race.
- Linguistically, Indian tribes span all four language families: Austro-Asiatic or Austric (the Munda group, Santhali, Mundari, Ho, and the Mon-Khmer Khasi); Dravidian (Gondi, Kurukh spoken by the Oraon, Toda); Tibeto-Burman within Sino-Tibetan (most Northeast tribes, Naga, Mizo, Bodo, Garo); and Indo-Aryan (Bhili, Hajong). That some tribes speak Indo-Aryan is itself proof that language cannot define the tribe.
- Socio-economically, the recurring features are a subsistence base (hunting-gathering, shifting or settled cultivation), community or lineage ownership of land and forest rather than private property, relatively egalitarian and kin-organized social structure, animist or nature-spirit religion often overlaid with Hindu elements, and comparative backwardness on the standard development indicators. Each feature has exceptions, which is the point.
- The demographic profile, from Census 2011: the ST population is 10.43 crore, 8.6 per cent of India, close to 90 per cent rural, spread over more than 700 notified communities. The tribal sex ratio, about 990, is more favourable than the national ratio, and 75 groups are classed as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. Treat these as census figures and label them as such.
- The correct framing is that tribal characteristics are a family of tendencies, not a checklist. No single biological, linguistic or economic marker is shared by all Indian tribes, which is why the category is administrative and why bio-genetic variability, real at the level of populations, cannot be turned back into race.

Tribal populations by language family

Family	Sub-group	Example tribes	Main region
Austro-Asiatic (Austrie)	Munda; Mon-Khmer	Santhal, Munda, Ho (Munda); Khasi (Mon-Khmer)	Central-east India; Meghalaya
Dravidian	-	Gond, Oraon (Kurukh), Toda	Central and south India
Tibeto-Burman (Sino-Tibetan)	-	Naga, Mizo, Bodo, Garo	Northeast India, sub-Himalaya
Indo-Aryan	-	Bhil (Bhili), Hajong	Western India; Northeast fringe

KEY TERMS

Sickle-cell trait — A haemoglobin variant carried at high frequency in several central-Indian tribes; a genuine, population-level bio-genetic marker linked to malaria resistance, and a public-health burden.

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) — 75 groups identified (from 1973, on the Dhebar Commission's recommendation) by pre-agricultural technology, stagnant or declining population, very low literacy and subsistence economy; formerly Primitive Tribal Groups, renamed in 2006.

Geographical Distribution and Regional Classification

The distribution is not a map of tribes so much as a map of where the state drew its lines, but the standard regional schemes are asked directly, so hold the three main ones and their authors apart.

- The bare distribution, Census 2011: the largest absolute ST population is in Madhya Pradesh; the highest proportions are Mizoram among states (over 90 per cent) and Lakshadweep among Union Territories. The largest single tribe is the Bhil, then the Gond. Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Puducherry and Chandigarh have no notified Scheduled Tribes at all, which by itself shows the schedule is administrative, not ethnographic.
- B.S. Guha's threefold zonal classification is the classic geographical scheme: (1) a North and Northeastern zone, (2) a Central or Middle zone, and (3) a Southern zone. Simple, widely cited, and the baseline others expanded.
- L.P. Vidyarthi's classification (in 'The Tribal Culture of India', with B.K. Rai) works from principal regions: the Himalayan region, subdivided into Northeastern, Central and Northwestern Himalayan; the Middle India region along the Chotanagpur plateau, by far the largest; and the Southern region below the Krishna, with the Western region and the Island region (Andaman, Nicobar, Lakshadweep) added. Present it as three main regions plus the Western and Island tracts, not as a rigid three.
- B.K. Roy Burman, the leading tribal demographer, gave a territorial classification into broader zones (Northeast India; the sub-Himalayan belt of north and northwest India; central and eastern India; southern India; western India; and the island regions) and, separately, classified tribes by their degree of incorporation into the wider economy. His name attaches to demographic and distributional analysis rather than to a single tidy list, so attribute with that care.
- Whatever the scheme, the Middle India or central belt is the analytically loaded zone: it holds the largest tribal populations, the country's mineral wealth, the densest forests, most of the development-induced displacement and the Maoist conflict. That overlap is the political economy of the whole unit in one sentence.

- The category is contested from both ends. Groups outside the schedule agitate to enter it for the benefits, while inside it better-placed tribes such as the Meena capture a disproportionate share, the tribal version of the creamy-layer problem.

The main regional classifications of Indian tribes

Scheme	Author	Divisions	Note
Threefold zonal	B.S. Guha	North and Northeastern; Central/Middle; Southern	The classic baseline scheme
Regional	L.P. Vidyarthi (with B.K. Rai)	Himalayan (NE, Central, NW); Middle India; Southern; plus Western and Island	Three principal regions, with the Himalayan subdivided
Territorial and by contact	B.K. Roy Burman	Zonal (NE, sub-Himalayan, central-east, south, west, islands); also by degree of incorporation into the economy	Demographic and distributional emphasis

KEY TERMS

Central tribal belt — The Chotanagpur-plateau and central-Indian zone (Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, MP) holding the largest tribal populations and overlapping with mineral wealth, forest, displacement and insurgency.

Classification by Economy, Language and Degree of Assimilation

Besides region, tribes are classified by livelihood, by language and by how far they have been drawn into wider society. The last of these, the assimilation classification, is Elwin's, and it feeds straight into the policy debate that follows.

- By economy, the standard ladder runs: forest hunter-gatherers (Birhor, Kadar, Chenchu, Onge); shifting or jhum cultivators (many Northeast tribes, the Baiga); settled agriculturists, the great majority (Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Gond, Bhil); pastoralists (Toda, Gujjar, Bakarwal, Bhotia); artisans and craft groups (the Asur and Agaria iron-smelters, the Lohar); folk artists and entertainers; and, increasingly, plantation, mine and industrial wage labour and a small salaried tribal middle class. The ladder is also a rough sequence of incorporation into the market.
- By language, tribes fall across the four families set out above (Austro-Asiatic, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman, Indo-Aryan), so language cross-cuts region and cannot serve as an independent definition of the tribe.
- By degree of assimilation, Verrier Elwin ('The Aborigines', 1943) offered a fourfold classification by how much tribal culture had been retained or lost through contact.
- Elwin's four classes: first, the tribes of the deep interior, most isolated, who have kept their culture, language and organization almost intact; second, those in contact with the plains but still vital, retaining their tribal culture while adapting; third, the larger, more advanced tribes that have lost much of their tribal culture, partly Hinduized and functioning almost as depressed or backward classes, such as many Bhil and Santhal; and fourth, the tribal aristocracy, noble families claiming Rajput or Kshatriya rank and largely absorbed into Hindu upper-caste life, such as some Raj Gonds.
- The value of Elwin's scheme is that it makes assimilation a variable, not a yes-or-no, and it sets up the policy question directly: if tribes stand at different distances from the wider society, what should policy do about the distance, protect it, close it, or manage it? That is the isolation-assimilation-integration debate.

- A caution on attribution: several fourfold acculturation schemes circulate in the literature and are sometimes credited to different authors, so anchor the one above to Elwin and 'The Aborigines' (1943) rather than floating it.

Elwin's classification of tribes by degree of assimilation (The Aborigines, 1943)

Class	Description	Cultural state	Example
Most isolated	Deep interior, minimal contact	Tribal culture almost intact	Remote hill and forest groups
In contact but vital	Contact with plains, still adapting on own terms	Tribal culture retained	Many hill tribes at the junction
Advanced, partly Hinduized	Large tribes losing tribal culture, functioning as backward classes	Much tribal culture lost	Sections of Bhil, Santhal
Tribal aristocracy	Noble families claiming Kshatriya rank	Largely absorbed into Hindu upper-caste life	Some Raj Gonds

Isolation, Assimilation, Integration: The Great Debate

The heart of the unit: a policy argument that doubles as a theoretical one, still live every time a Fifth Schedule mining lease is signed. The attributions are routinely swapped, so fix them and note who changed his mind.

- The isolationist position is associated with the early Verrier Elwin. In 'The Baiga' (1939) and 'The Aborigines' (1943) he argued that contact with plains society had brought the Baiga land loss, debt, disease and cultural collapse, and he proposed a National Park, protected zones where tribes could be left largely alone until able to meet the plains on their own terms.
- The crucial correction most candidates miss: Elwin abandoned isolationism. In 'A Philosophy for NEFA' (1957) he argued for development along the tribes' own lines, run by their own people. The real debate is early Elwin against late Elwin, and Ghurye was attacking a position Elwin had already left.
- The assimilationist position is G.S. Ghurye's. In 'The Aborigines So-Called and Their Future' (1943), reissued as 'The Scheduled Tribes' (1959), he argued that tribes are imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society, or in the phrase he is remembered by, backward Hindus. They differ from the Hindu poor in degree, not kind, so the answer is assimilation into the mainstream, not a special status that preserves them as museum exhibits. He charged that isolationism served the colonial project of separating tribes from the Indian nation.
- The integrationist position is Nehru's, set out as the Tribal Panchsheel in his foreword to the second edition of Elwin's 'A Philosophy for NEFA' (1959). Its five principles: (1) people should develop along the lines of their own genius, and their traditional arts and culture should be encouraged; (2) tribal rights in land and forest should be respected; (3) a team of their own people should be trained for administration and development, avoiding too many outsiders; (4) do not over-administer or overwhelm them with schemes, but work through, not in rivalry with, their own social and cultural institutions; (5) judge results not by statistics or money spent but by the quality of human character evolved.
- Nehru's gloss: tribes should be neither placed in a museum (isolation) nor forced to assimilate, but integrated, joining the national economy and polity while keeping their cultural distinctiveness. This is the doctrine written into the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution.

- The honest verdict, and a strong closing line: the doctrine is Nehru's, but the practice has too often been Ghurye's. The principles least observed are the second (land and forest rights) and the fifth (human, not statistical, outcomes), which is exactly why displacement, land alienation and the Forest Rights Act dominate the unit today.

The three positions on tribes and the nation

Position	Chief exponent	Diagnosis	Prescription	Standard criticism
Isolation	Verrier Elwin, early work (The Baiga, 1939; The Aborigines, 1943)	Contact with plains society brings land loss, debt, disease and cultural collapse	National Parks: protected zones, controlled entry, slow exposure on tribes' own terms	Freezes living societies as specimens; economically impossible; echoed the colonial Excluded Areas. Elwin himself dropped it.
Assimilation	G.S. Ghurye (The Aborigines So-Called and Their Future, 1943)	Tribes are backward Hindus, already partly inside Hindu society; the problem is poverty, not difference	Absorb into the mainstream through education, land and development, as with any backward class	Treats a distinct culture as a deficit to be cured; assumes the mainstream is neutral; ignores who gains from the land that absorption frees.
Integration	Nehru's Panchsheel (foreword to A Philosophy for NEFA, 2nd edn, 1959); Elwin's later position	Neither isolation nor absorption; the tribe must join the nation without ceasing to be itself	Development along their own genius, land and forest rights respected, their own personnel, minimal administration, judged by human outcomes	The most quoted and least implemented; the Governor's Fifth Schedule powers and the Tribes Advisory Councils have stayed largely unused.

KEY TERMS

Tribal Panchsheel — Nehru's five principles of tribal development in his foreword to the second edition of Elwin's A Philosophy for NEFA (1959): own genius; land and forest rights; their own personnel; minimal administration; judged by human character, not statistics.

National Park (Elwin) — Early Elwin's proposal for protected zones insulating tribes from destructive contact; the isolationist prescription he later abandoned.

Tribal Problems I: Land Alienation and Indebtedness

The problems of tribal India form a chain, and land is the first link. Lose the land and debt, poverty, poor health and displacement follow. Colonial law made the land alienable; independent India has struggled to make it inalienable again.

- Land alienation means the passing of tribal land to non-tribals, the diku, through mortgage, sale, encroachment, benami transfer, fraud and state acquisition, despite protective law. Its colonial root is legal: settlements from the Permanent Settlement of 1793 onward imposed private, revenue-paying property on land held by lineage, and where corporate tenures such as Munda khuntkatti or Santhal tenure had no revenue-payer, the state manufactured one, and outsiders became landlords over the people who had cleared the land.
- Protective land law in India was largely written under duress, after revolt: the Santhal Parganas Tenancy Act (1876) followed the Santhal Hul, and the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908) followed Birsa Munda's Ulgulan,

recognizing khuntkatti rights and restricting transfer to non-tribals. Independent India added Fifth Schedule land-transfer regulations, PESA (1996) and the Forest Rights Act (2006).

- The courts intervened where law failed. *Samatha v State of Andhra Pradesh* (1997) held that government and forest land in Scheduled Areas cannot be leased to non-tribals or private companies for mining, only to tribals, state undertakings or tribal cooperatives; the ruling has since been narrowed in practice by state amendment. The point for the exam is that alienation continues despite a strong legal shield.
- Indebtedness is land alienation's twin. The tribal economy runs on small surpluses and sharp seasonal need, so the moneylender-cum-trader advances grain and cash at ruinous interest, takes the harvest and forest produce, and in the last resort takes the land or the debtor's labour as bondage. Debt is the mechanism through which land actually changes hands.
- The two feed each other: debt forces the mortgage or distress-sale of land; landlessness forces further borrowing and wage dependence. Break in at either point and the tribal household slides toward the next problems, poverty and displacement.
- The scale of alienation is contested and should be flagged. There is no single reliable national figure for tribal land lost, estimates vary widely, and much alienation is informal and unrecorded precisely because it is illegal. Say that alienation is large and continuing, but do not quote a spurious precise percentage.

KEY TERMS

Land alienation — The transfer of tribal land into non-tribal hands through debt, sale, encroachment, fraud or acquisition, in breach of protective law; the first link in the chain of tribal problems.

Khuntkatti — The Munda system of corporate lineage ownership of land by descendants of the original clearers, recognized in the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908); its erosion is the classic case of alienation.

Bonded labour — Servitude in which a debtor works off a loan that never clears; the extreme outcome of tribal indebtedness, formally abolished in 1976 but persistent.

Tribal Problems II: Poverty, Literacy, Health and Nutrition

These are the human indicators of the land and debt problem, and they are where the figures live. Use Census and official data, and flag every number as an estimate rather than a fixed fact.

- **Poverty and livelihood:** tribal households are concentrated at the bottom of the income and consumption distribution, dependent on rain-fed and shifting agriculture, minor forest produce and casual wage labour, with high underemployment and seasonal out-migration. Poverty here is structural, following directly from landlessness, debt and the collapse of forest access, not from any cultural deficiency.
- **Literacy and education:** Census 2011 puts ST literacy at about 59 per cent against roughly 73 per cent nationally, with tribal female literacy lower still, around 49 per cent, and very low figures in the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. The causes are practical: schools far from scattered hamlets, instruction in an alien language rather than the mother tongue, poverty that pulls children into work, and high dropout. Ashram and residential schools address it unevenly.
- **Unemployment and underemployment:** with land shrinking and industry displacing rather than absorbing, tribal labour is pushed into casual, footloose work, plantation and construction migration, and mine and quarry labour, with little of the salaried employment that reservation was meant to secure. The tribal middle class remains thin.
- **Health and nutrition:** tribal populations carry a double burden, communicable disease (malaria, tuberculosis) and genetic disorders (sickle-cell anaemia, G6PD deficiency), on top of chronic undernutrition.

Maternal and child malnutrition, anaemia and higher infant mortality are widely documented, worsened by remoteness from health facilities, loss of the forest food base, and displacement. Cite these as officially recorded patterns rather than exact rates.

- The demographic backdrop, Census 2011: 10.43 crore STs, 8.6 per cent of the population, about 90 per cent rural, sex ratio around 990. The relatively favourable sex ratio is one indicator on which tribal India does better than the national average, and it is worth noting to avoid a wholly deficit picture.
- The unifying analytic point: these are not separate afflictions but one syndrome. Land alienation and debt cause poverty; poverty causes low literacy and poor health; low literacy and poor health entrench poverty. A good answer presents them as a cycle, not a list.

Selected tribal socio-economic indicators (Census 2011; treat as estimates)

Indicator	Scheduled Tribes	All India	Reading
Share of population	8.6%	100%	Roughly one in twelve Indians is ST
Literacy rate	about 59%	about 73%	A persistent gap of roughly 14 points
Female literacy	about 49%	about 65%	Gender and tribe disadvantages compound
Rural share	about 90%	about 69%	Overwhelmingly rural and forest-based
Sex ratio	about 990	about 943	One indicator on which STs do better

KEY TERMS

- Double burden of disease** — The coexistence in tribal populations of communicable disease and undernutrition with inherited disorders such as sickle-cell anaemia; a distinctive tribal health profile.
- Minor forest produce** — Non-timber forest goods (tendu leaf, mahua, honey, bamboo) that are a mainstay of tribal subsistence and cash income; rights over them are recognized by the Forest Rights Act (2006).

Development, Displacement and Rehabilitation

The last and most contested link: the dams, mines and industries built on tribal land have made tribes the largest single group of India's development-displaced, and rehabilitation has rarely matched the loss. This is where the integration doctrine breaks down in practice.

- The paradox is structural: the central tribal belt holds the country's coal, iron, bauxite and forest, so the projects that power national development, dams, mines, steel plants, wildlife sanctuaries, are sited disproportionately on tribal land. Development for the nation has meant displacement for the tribe.
- The scale is large but uncertain, and must be flagged. There is no census of the development-displaced. The most cited estimate, from Walter Fernandes, puts tribals at roughly 40 per cent of all persons displaced by development projects since 1947, against a population share under 9 per cent. Quote it explicitly as an estimate, not a fact.
- Colonial forest law prepared the ground. The Indian Forest Acts (1865, 1878, 1927) reclassified customary rights of shifting cultivation, grazing and gathering as privileges granted by the state, and criminalized them. This is the historical injustice named in the preamble of the Forest Rights Act (2006), unusual in Indian law for admitting the state was correcting a wrong.
- The rehabilitation record is the weak point. Displacement has typically meant cash compensation for the few with recorded title, nothing for the majority with only customary or common rights, and resettlement that

severs the tribe from forest, kin and livelihood at once. Rehabilitation has lagged behind acquisition, and successive resettlement policies and the 2013 land-acquisition law have improved the paper position more than the field one.

- The constitutional and legal shield: the Fifth Schedule (protective administration under the Governor), the Sixth Schedule (autonomous councils in the Northeast), PESA (1996), which makes the Gram Sabha the authority to be consulted before acquisition and to own minor forest produce, and the Forest Rights Act (2006), which recognizes individual and community forest rights. The recurring gap is between consultation and consent: PESA gives the Gram Sabha a voice, not a veto.
- The one case where the veto operated: Orissa Mining Corporation v Ministry of Environment and Forests (2013), the Niyamgiri case, where the Supreme Court referred the question of religious and community rights to the affected Gram Sabhas, and all twelve rejected bauxite mining. It is the exception that proves how rarely the tribal voice is decisive.
- The authoritative official audit is the Xaxa Committee (2014), chaired by Virginius Xaxa: protective law is widely unimplemented, Tribes Advisory Councils are moribund, displacement without genuine rehabilitation is routine, and the Governor's Fifth Schedule powers are essentially unused. Cite it to close any answer on tribal problems or development.
- The synthesis line: the tribal situation is one problem seen from many sides. A colonial legal order made tribal land and forest alienable; alienation and debt produced poverty, illiteracy and ill-health; development then displaced without rehabilitating. Nehru's integration promised the opposite, and the distance between that promise and the record is the substance of the unit.

The constitutional and legal architecture for tribes

Instrument	Provision	What it does	The gap
Fifth Schedule	Article 244(1)	Protective administration of Scheduled Areas by the Governor, with a Tribes Advisory Council	Governor's powers and the TAC largely unused (Xaxa, 2014)
Sixth Schedule	Articles 244(2), 275(1)	Autonomous District and Regional Councils with real legislative and judicial power (Northeast)	Confined to four Northeastern states
PESA	Act of 1996	Gram Sabha to be consulted before acquisition; owns minor forest produce	Consultation, not consent; weakly enforced
Forest Rights Act	Act of 2006	Recognizes individual and community forest rights; corrects 'historical injustice'	Community forest resource rights least granted

KEY TERMS

Development-induced displacement — Uprooting of communities by dams, mines, industry and protected areas; tribals are its largest single victim group, an estimated 40 per cent (Fernandes) of the total since 1947.

Consultation vs consent — The pivotal weakness of PESA: the Gram Sabha must be consulted before land acquisition but its refusal does not bind, so the tribal voice is procedural, not decisive, except where courts have read in a veto (Niyamgiri, 2013).

Xaxa Committee (2014) — The official high-level review chaired by Virginius Xaxa, the authoritative verdict that protective tribal law is widely unimplemented and displacement routinely un-rehabilitated.

Last-mile revision

- Tribe has no stable sociological definition in India; it has a schedule. Article 366(25) is circular, and the Lokur criteria (1965), primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact, backwardness, are administrative, not constitutional.
- Beteille: tribe is definable only negatively, by distance from the surrounding civilization, and it is political and administrative before it is sociological.
- Bio-genetic: Guha's racial types (1935) are history, not science; the real variability is population-genetic (sickle-cell, G6PD). Four language families; socio-economic profile is a family of tendencies, not a checklist.
- Census 2011: 10.43 crore STs, 8.6 per cent, about 90 per cent rural, 700-plus communities, 75 PVTGs, sex ratio about 990. Bhil the largest tribe, then Gond. No STs in Punjab, Haryana or Delhi.
- Regional classifications: Guha's threefold (NE, Central, Southern); Vidyarthi's regions (Himalayan subdivided, Middle India, Southern, plus Western and Island); Roy Burman's zonal and by-contact demographic scheme.
- Classification by economy (hunter-gatherer to wage labour), by language (four families), and by assimilation, Elwin's fourfold (isolated; in contact but vital; advanced/Hinduized; tribal aristocracy) from The Aborigines (1943).
- The debate: early Elwin isolation (National Parks), Ghurye assimilation ('backward Hindus'), Nehru integration (Tribal Panchsheel, 1959 foreword to A Philosophy for NEFA). Late Elwin agreed with Nehru; Ghurye attacked a position Elwin had left.
- Panchsheel in order: own genius; land and forest rights; their own personnel; do not over-administer; judge by human character, not statistics. The doctrine is Nehru's, the practice has been Ghurye's.
- Problems as a chain: colonial law made land alienable, alienation and debt cause poverty, poverty causes low literacy (ST about 59 per cent, 2011) and poor health (double burden), development then displaces.
- Land: Santhal Parganas (1876) and Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908) written after revolt; Samatha (1997) barred non-tribal mining leases; alienation continues, scale contested, do not quote a false precise figure.
- Displacement: tribals an estimated 40 per cent (Fernandes) of the development-displaced against under 9 per cent of population; rehabilitation chronically inadequate. Label the 40 per cent an estimate.
- Legal shield: Fifth Schedule protects, Sixth Schedule governs, PESA gives consultation not consent, FRA (2006) recognizes forest rights and names a 'historical injustice'. Niyamgiri (2013): the one working Gram Sabha veto. Xaxa (2014) is the official audit.

Common errors to avoid

- Defining 'tribe' confidently in the first line. The definition is the question, not the preliminary; open with the definitional problem and the Lokur criteria.
- Presenting Guha's racial classification as current science. Fixed racial types are abandoned; the live bio-genetic point is population-level variation (sickle-cell, gene frequencies), not race.
- Attributing the classifications to the wrong authors. Threefold zonal is Guha; the regional Himalayan-Middle-Southern scheme is Vidyarthi; the fourfold assimilation classification is Elwin (The Aborigines, 1943).
- Making Elwin a lifelong isolationist. He proposed National Parks in the early 1940s and had moved to development along the tribes' own lines by A Philosophy for NEFA (1957). Saying so earns a cheap mark.
- Attributing the Tribal Panchsheel to a committee or a policy document. It is Nehru's foreword to the second edition of Elwin's A Philosophy for NEFA (1959).
- Confusing the three positions. Isolation is early Elwin, assimilation is Ghurye ('backward Hindus'), integration is Nehru. Swapping them, especially crediting Ghurye with protection, is the classic error.
- Swapping the Fifth and Sixth Schedules. Sixth Schedule councils legislate and adjudicate (Northeast); Fifth Schedule areas have a Governor and an advisory council and no self-government.
- Claiming PESA requires Gram Sabha consent for land acquisition. It requires consultation, and a recommendation for minor minerals. The gap between consultation and consent is why the Act underdelivers.
- Quoting displacement or land-alienation figures as hard census facts. There is no count of the displaced; Fernandes' 40 per cent is an estimate, and no reliable single figure for total tribal land lost exists. Label them.
- Writing the tribal problems as an unconnected list. They are one cycle: land alienation and debt cause poverty, poverty causes low literacy and poor health, and all of it is deepened by displacement.
- Painting a wholly deficit picture. Note the relatively favourable tribal sex ratio (about 990, 2011) and the community strengths, so the answer is analytical rather than merely a catalogue of misery.