

Competitive Exams: Tribal Society and Practices

Translate

According to Ralph Linton tribe is group of bands occupying a contiguous territory or territories having a feeling of unity deriving from numerous similarities in culture, frequent contacts and a certain community of interests. Ghurye calls the tribal of India as imperfectly segment of the Hindus. D. N Majumdar defines tribe as a social group with territorial affiliation endogamous with no specialization of functions ruled by tribal officers hereditary or otherwise united in language or dialect recognizing social distance with other tribes. A large section of tribal population depends on agriculture for survival.

The examples of agricultural tribes are: Oraons, Mundas, Bhils, Santhals, Baigas, and Hos etc. The Toda furnish classic example of pastoral economy. Their social and economic organization is built around the buffaloes. They obtain their living through exchange.

In some parts of India the tribal people are engaged in shifting cultivation. It is known by different names-Nagas call it Jhum, Bhuiya call it Dahi and Koman, Maria of Bastar call it Penda, Khond refer to it as Podu and Saiga call it Bewar. Many subsidiary occupations like handicrafts are undertaken in the various tribal zones. These include basket-making, spinning and weaving.

For e. g. Tharu depend upon furniture making, musical instruments, weapons, ropes and mats. The Korw and Agaria are well known iron-smelters producing tools for local use.

Characteristics of Tribal Society

The tribe inhabits and remains within definite and common topography. The members of a tribe possess a consciousness of mutual unity. The members of a tribe speak a common language. The members generally marry into their own group but now due to increased contact with outsiders there are instances of tribal marring outside as well.

The tribes believe in ties of blood relationship between its members. They have faith in their having descended from a common, real or mythical, ancestor and hence believe in blood relationships with other members. Tribes follow their own political organization which maintains harmony.

Religion is of great importance in the tribe. The tribal political and social organization is based on religion because they are granted religious sanctity and recognition.

Tribal Practices

- Joking relationships prevails in Matrilineal Hopi, Matrilineal Trobriand Islanders, Oraons and Baigas

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- Group marriage prevail among Marquesans and Todas
- Couvade is practiced mainly in Khasi, Toda, Ho and Oraon
- Teknonymy in Khasis
- Ultimogeniture in Khasis
- Uxorilocal in Garos
- Matrilineal societies are present among Moplahs, Hopi, Nayers
- Polyandry practices tribes are-Todas, Ladaki Botas and Nayers
- Polygamy is found among Eskimo tribes, Crows of North America
- Levirate marriages are found in Ahirs in Haryana, Kodagus of Mysore and Jats and Gujars of UP

Profiles of some of the selected Indian tribes

Bhils

- Constitute the largest tribal group in India.
- Found mainly in Madhya Pradesh (Jhabua, Dhar, Kahnwa) and east Gujarat.
- Martial race; primarily agriculturalist.
- Badwas are witch finder, Pujaro are priests and Kotwal are drummers, Tadni is village headman.
- Generally endogamous
- Practice polygamy also.

Gonds

- Second largest tribal group in India.
- Dravidian background
- Found mainly in Madhya Pradesh
- Some of the tribal groups are Bastai, Marias, Murias, Prajas, Bhatras
- Dependent mainly on agriculture, cattle rearing second main occupation.
- Divided into exogamous sects or clans.
- Speak Gondi dialect.
- Lineage is traced through male lines.

Santhals

- Third largest tribal group in India believed to be of Pre-Aryan origin.
- Mainly in Santhal Paraganas of Bihar, West Bengal etc.
- Speak Santhali language.
- Naik is the village priest, Gorait is the messenger, Jogmanjhi is the headmentribal council is Parganait.
- Singlonga or Sun God is the main deity.

Todas

- Found mainly in Nilgiri Hills of South India.
- Classic example of polyandry.
- Call themselves Tora
- Badaga, Kota, Kurumbaand Irula tribes
- The word Toda is derived from Tundra, name of sacred tree of Topdas.
- Divided into two moieties called Taratharal and Teivaloil. These are endogamous units. All the sacred herd and cattle are owned by Tartharal thus they occupy a higher status.
- The clans are divided into families locally known as Kudupeli.
- Fraternal polyandry found.
- Divorce freely allowed.
- Todas have classificatory type of kinship calling many relatives or friends by some designation.
- Females have low status.
- People are governed by council of five elders called as Naim. Three members of this council come from Tarthar clans, two from Teivali clans and one from Badagas.
- Two of the main deities are Teikirizi and On.

Chenchu

- Mainly found in Andhra Pradesh on the river Krishna.
- They are mostly settled cultivators and very much influenced by neighboring plains people.
- They speak dialect of Dravidian origin.
- Now they have started living in semi-permanent huts.

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- They are divided into exogamous clans and have animal totems.
- Divorce is common.
- Chenchus have traditional leader Peddamanshi.
- Bhaivov and Garelamaisama are popular local deities.

Khasis

- One of the matriarchial tribes of world.
- Have a rich economy influenced by industrialization and urbanization.
- They are mainly in Jaintia hills of Assam.
- Divided into four main sub-groups-Khynrian, Pnar, War and Bhoi.
- They speak a dialect that belongs to the Mon-Khmer branch of Austric family.
- Each of the sub-tribes is divided into a number of clans known as Kurs.
- Marriage within the clan is prohibited.
- Khasis are characterized by matrilineal descent.
- The clan is further sub-divided into sub class known as kpoh composed of descendents of one grandmother.