

Important Tribes of India

Based on the criteria defined by Chanda Committee, 1960 (Geographical Isolation, Special Culture, Characteristics of Tribes, Backwardness, and Shyness) any tribe is defined as Scheduled Tribe under the article 342 of the Constitution of India. Presently there live around 461 tribal groups in the country out of which 424 tribes constitute Scheduled tribes.

According to the Population Census of India, 2011, the people from Schedule tribe constituted around 8.6 per cent of India's population and distributed all across the country with the highest population living in the Indian state of Mizoram (94.5 per cent) and minimum in the state of Goa (0.04 per cent).

Major Tribes of India:

Based on the distribution and diversity of tribal population India can be divided into seven tribal zones, i.e. (1) North zone, (2) Northeast zone, (3) Eastern zone, (4) Central zone, (5) Western zone, (6) Southern zone and (7) Island region. The following table highlights the major tribes of each of these tribal zones along with a few of the issues these tribal groups have to face.

Zone	Region Includes	Tribes in the Region	Common Features of the Tribes	Challenges associated
North Zone	Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Himalayan regions of Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar	Bhotia, Bhoksa, Buxa, Gujjars, Jaunsari, Khampa, Kanauta, Lahul, Lepcha, and Tharu	They all belong to the Mongoloids racial group.	The primary issues of the tribes of this zone are inaccessibility, lack of connectivity to mainland India, poverty, illiteracy, and land alienation.
Northeast Zone	Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and	Lusai, Kuki, Garo, Khasi, Jayantia, Mikir, Naga, Lepcha, Bhutia, Limbu, Tamang, Chakma, Lusai,	They all belong to the Mongoloids racial group.	The primary issues of the tribes of this zone are inaccessibility, lack of connectivity,



	Tripura	Liang, Santhal, Dafla, Khampti, Singpho, Boro, Kachari, Lalung, Hajong, Meities, and Pangals		and poverty. Along with that due to the missionary activities during the colonial rule, these tribes mainly got converted to Christianity, which led to the loss of their ethnicity and traditions.
Eastern Zone	Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha and Bihar	Bhumij, Birhor, Juang, Kharia, Khond, Munda, Ho, Oraon, and Santhal	They belong to the Austric language family and speak Kol and Munda languages.	The primary issues of the tribes of this zone are land alienation, illiteracy, poverty, and lack of connectivity with remaining India. This zone forms a susceptible area due to their volatile tussle with the government.
Central Zone	Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and northern Andhra Pradesh	Gond, Baiga, maria, and Abujhamaria		The primary issues of the tribes of this zone are land alienation, illiteracy, poverty, and lack of connectivity



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Western Zone	Rajasthan and Gujarat	Bhil, Garasia, Mina, Banjara, Sansi, Saharia Mahadeokoli, Bali and Dabala		The primary issues of the tribes of this zone are illiteracy and poverty. These tribes are well connected with the rest of the country.
Southern Zone	Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and other regions of Western Ghats	Toda, Kota, Bagada, Kurumba, Kadar, Paniyan, Chenchu, Allar, Nayak and Chetti	They belong to the Dravidian racial group.	The primary issues of the tribes of this zone are illiteracy and poverty. These tribes are well connected with the rest of the country.
Island Region	Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep	Shompen, Onge, Jarwa, and Sentinal	They belong to the Negrito racial group	They do not mingle with other people and love to live in isolation. It, along with prevailing illiteracy, has brought these tribes at the verge of extinction.



Issues faced by Tribal in India:

Land Alienation: Tribal population mainly depend on natural resources for their livelihood. However, during the colonial rule after the discovery of minerals and other resources in the tribal regions, they were forcefully displaced. After independence, these regions came under state control, which negatively impacted the tribal way of life. They lost their forest rights, which resulted in tribal people trapped in the hands of money lenders and landlords. Indebtedness increased, and their livelihood lost.

Identity Crisis: Displacement of these tribes from the mining areas and for development of industries in these regions has forced them to live either on the periphery of these industrial pockets or to move to urban centres in search of livelihood. Disconnect from their homeland and unawareness and unpreparedness to the urban lifestyle have led to an identity crisis for these people. This gave birth to various psychological issues like depression, low self-esteem, low confidence, a feeling of un-belongingness, etc.

Illiteracy: According to the Population Census of India, 2011 the literacy rate for ST is 58.96 per cent (literacy rate for the male is 68.53 per cent and for female is 49.35 per cent) which is lower than the national average of 74.04 per cent (for male 82.14 per cent and female 65.46 per cent). Their traditions and customs, prevailing poverty, the tendency of isolation, nomadic lifestyle, and lack of necessary infrastructure and teachers suitable for their needs.

Gender Issues: Despite better sex ratio of 990 females per 1000 males of the Scheduled tribes in India (While the national average is 943 females per 1000 males) women of the community also have to face various challenges. Due to their sudden exposure to the urban lifestyle and their inability to adapt to the changes that occurred as a result of their forced displacement post-independence, women of society became more vulnerable. Consumerism and commoditization of women have weakened their position in society.

Issues with Health: Prevailing poverty, financial insecurity along with illiteracy has resulted in various health problems among the tribal population. They generally reside in slums and live under unhygienic conditions which make them prone to diseases. Their inability to purchase and consume healthy food products and buy supplements to fulfil the nutrient requirement, they are likely to malnutrition and associated challenges including anaemia, high infant mortality rates, etc.

Measures that were taken for Development of Tribal Population in India:

Special Central Assistance (SCA) to Tribal Sub-Scheme (TSS)

Provision for Grants-in-aid under Article 275(1) of the Constitution



Development of PVTGs, Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups: It aims at the development of tribal groups for the activities like housing, land distribution, land development, agricultural development, animal husbandry, construction of link roads, installation of non-conventional sources of energy for lighting purpose, social security including Janashree Bima Yojana or any other innovative activity meant for the comprehensive socio-economic development of PVTGs.

TRIFED: Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Ltd. (TRIFED) is a multi-State Cooperative under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. Its objective is to support marketing and provide all necessary infrastructures for the development of livelihood for them.

Van Bandhu Kalyan Yojana: It is aimed at the overall development of tribal people by ensuring the benefits of the various programmes/schemes of Central and State Governments reach them by way of appropriate convergence.

Van Dhan Vikas Karyakram: It is a training and development of value chain components of the scheme of Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) and Development of Value Chain for MFP.

For Education and Literacy: Various schemes have been launched by the government for ensuring quality education and increasing the literacy rate among the tribal community.

- Pre-Matric Scholarship to ST students of class IX and X
- Post Matric Scholarship to ST students of class XI and above
- National Overseas Scholarship for ST students studying abroad
- Scholarship for Higher education for ST students
- Fellowship (earlier known as Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship) for ST students
- Scheme of Strengthening Education among ST Girls in low literacy districts
- Scheme of Grant-in-aid to Voluntary organizations working for the welfare of ST
- Vocational Training in Tribal areas
- Support to Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs)

The data from the Population Census of India, 2011 reflects that the status and overall condition of the Tribal population living in India has improved since the Population Census of India, 2001. However, much scope for improvement is still there. Government is working in the direction to ensure better, respectful, and inclusive life for the tribal people but, that alone is not enough. Each citizen of the country should also contribute and help them in bridging the gap.

