

## ORIGIN AND IDENTITY OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN TAMIL NADU

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### Abstract

*Traditional the tribal have depended on the word of mouth and legitimacy by the community. Similarly in contrast to the formal litigation based system, truth in their culture was unambiguous. They have developed settled agriculture and did not depend exclusively on such common property resources got around 50% of their food from forest. It also met their other needs like fodder, medicinal herbs and fertilizers. They too got legitimacy from the community. As such, their system is in sharp contrast to the individual based culture of the formal society. The first contradiction arises from that the individual and the written word are the basis of its legitimacy. The tribal regions, being administratively neglect, had neither the physical nor social infrastructure was developed adequately, consequently, literacy is low among the trials. Against the national literacy average of more than 50% among tribal man it is below 30% and among women around 15% as such, a written ownership documents rarity. The administrative apparatus is controlled by the traditionally powerful classes and powerless trials are denied access to it. Besides, much of their economy had depended on the barter system till a generation or two ago. Monetary economy is recent phenomenon. Though more than two thirds of the trials depend on forests for an important part of their livelihood, forest management in India is state centered. In this framework, the process of development has come to be equated with the channelizing of an ever more intense volume of resources, through the intervention of the state apparatus and at the cost of the state exchanger, to sub serve interests of the urban and rural elite, as a results, state subsidies have become a central element of the development process in independent India. Thus they deprived of their basic needs, the trial's feel into hands of the merchants and money lenders who accompanied the industrial agent. Slowly their land was alienated to the money lender and some of them became bonded laborers.*

*For centuries together the human grew to become what he/she is now. It is a great achievement. We have a complex system of scientific and technological improvement at our disposal. These discoveries have simplified the entire life of human beings. A vast change can be seen between the lives of the nomadic Pre-historic man and the civilized and culture human of today. One may think that prehistory is a myth and a set of conjectured stories. Today we can find a human with Pre-historic semblance. It is not a hard task to find such human beings, today. The hills tribe who are scattered in countries all over the world more or less resemble the Pre-historic human beings. It at all there are differences between these two groups it is this that the present day hill tribes have a language, established customs and traditions and better livelihood than the Pre-historic human. But their improvements are not quite satisfactory. When compared to the civilized human of today, the trials are for backward. They are yet to shed some of their age-old customs and manners which make them akin to the Pre-historic people.*

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### Introduction

Sociologists and Anthropologists have been doing a lot of researches inquiring into the customs and traditions of hill tribes. With the exception of a few areas We have a number of hill tribes in India, each are distinct from one another Tamil Nadu is also a state where we come across a number of hill tribes. The word hill tribe denotes the fact that these tribes live in mountainous regions. Where the British began to write on the Indian Society, the term tribe was used in general parlance in more than one sense in reference to a group living in a primitive conditions The former usage has a longer history then the one which become prevalent after the colonial rule. Yet it is the sense that developed later that the term tribe has come to be mainly conceptualized in anthropological writings. India has the second largest tribal population of the world next to African counties. As many as 250 tribal groups live in isolated regions of the country. They constitute 7.76 per cent of the total populations of the country. The group speak

about 105 languages and 225 subsidiary languages. Sri GovindBallabha pant also gave more importance to the tribal people. In his own words he says. India is a vast country with a rich variety culture and our tribal brothers occupy a very important place. According to the census of 1981 out the total population of 68, 51, 84, 692, in India, 4, 98, 30, 435 belong to category of scheduled tribes and they constitute about 7 percent of the population of the country. These tribes are the indigenous people of India because they have settled in different parts of the country before the Aryan settlements India. The tribal people play a vital role in the Indian social set-up because they belong to a weaker section of the society and greatly suffer of poverty. These trials are the most backward people of the country.

### **Ethraicity of Tribal people in Tamil Nadu**

‘Tribe’ is a group of people with a common ancestry, language, culture, historical tradition and identifiable territory. Tribe is a group of human social organization based on small groups defined by traditions of common on descent and having temporary or permanent political integration above the family level and a shared language, cultures and ideology. The term ‘tribe’ is derived from Latin word ‘tribe’ meaning one third which originally referred to one of the three people who united to found Rome before 24113.c. The English word ‘tribe’ is the first to refer the Hebrews. The word suggests simple folk living in the hills and forest. The term ‘tribe’ has been widely used in Anthropology, but there is no general consensus as to its precise definition or appropriate application. The Roman word ‘TRIBUA’ means a political unit, and was used to refer to social groups defined by the territory they occupied.

“Tribe is a social group in which there are many clans, nomadic bonds villagers or other sub grounds which usually have a definite geographical area, a distance culture and either a common political organization or at least a feeling of common determination again strangers”. The word ‘tribe’ is derived from the Middle English which has Latin roots that refer to the divisions of the early romans. The English word tribe has the following five different meanings. The word is derived from Latin language for the clans of romans were termed as tribes: The word also refers to similar division, either natural or political: This relates to a unit for taxonomy and the word is used for large number sociologist and anthropologists do not normally differentiate between the aboriginals and tribal win nick is of the view that ordinarily, a tribe has a leader and may have a common ancestor as well as patron. The families or small communities making up the tribe are linked through economic, social, religious, family or blood ties. According to the oxford dictionary, a tribe is a group of people in primitive or barbarous stage of development acknowledging the authority of chief and usually regarding themselves as having common ancestor this is enough as far as it goes by it does not go far enough. In life sciences the meaning of ‘tribe’ is very different. It refers to a taxonomic category (family). It does not refer even to a subspecies or race which is an artificial division of species. As defined in the imperial Gazette of India, a tribal is a collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and which have been if they are not endogamous. Barbarous the tribe is a group of person having a common definite territory common dialect common name, common religion and culture. They are united by blood relationship and have peculiar political organization.

Etymologically, the term derives its origin from the word tribe meaning three divisions namely the Negritos, the mongoloids and the Mediterranean or the proto Astrolodis. The Negritos are believed to be the earliest inhabitants of India living in central region. The tribes of sub-Himalayan region represent the Mongoloids. The Mediterranean’s live in the peninsular India. Morgan (1877) defined the tribes as a group which possessed social institutions but not political ones. Maine (1861) characterized it as a group in which legal relations were based on the principle of status rather than that of control. In this sense of a pre-political or pre - contract society The

term passed into general usage as a synonym for a primitive social group. Their roots in the soil date back to a very early period if they are not the original inhabitants, they are at least some of the oldest inhabitants of the land. They live in the relative isolation of the hills and the forests. There are two ways of setting about in search of a definition of the 'tribe'. The first is to examine the existing definitions which have been worked out on general consideration. The second is to analyze the specific conditions in India and to find out the attributes, which are distinctive of groups conventionally regarded as tribes". A 'tribe' is a collection of individuals sharing a common culture a clear linguistic well-defined political and cultural boundaries. 'A tribe is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous with no specialization of functions, rules by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united language or dialect, recognizing social distance from tribes to caste but without any stigma attached in the case of a caste structure following tribal tradition, beliefs and customs, liberal of naturalization of ideas from alien source and above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration.

Although tribe, caste, sect, racial groups and class are the various types of social groups and class are these the various types of social groups found in India, it is the tribe and the caste, which dominate the former among primitive communities and later in Hindu society. Much confusion has arisen in the past due to the indiscriminate use of these two words; they have been described as castes while a number of castes have received tribal designation. The word suggests simple folk living in the hills and forests; to the people who are little better informed, it signifies colourful folk famous for their dance and song to an administrator it means a group of citizens who are the special responsibilities of the president of India; to an anthropologist it indicates special field for study of a social phenomenon. At present the term 'tribe' according to western writers, generally means as ethnic group, geographically isolated or semi-isolated, identified with one particular territory and having distinct social, economic and cultural traditions and practices. In the Indian context, the term has undergone further change, particularly in post independent period. Robert Redfield an expert in tribal studies has put forward four qualities for describing the tribes. They are distinctiveness, smallness homogeneity and self-sufficiency. The tribes are recognized as social groups. These groups are presumed to form the oldest ethnological sect having the following features via a definite territory or who claim to occupy a common territory a common nature, a common dialect, a common culture, behavior of an endogamous group, common taboos, existence of distinctive social and political systems, full faith in their leaders and self. Sufficiency in their distinct economy

The term 'tribe' is an introduction of the British in India. For the first time, the attempt to have classified information about the tribes was done by them. In the census report of 1891 J.A.Bains, the commissioner of census classified the caste according to their traditional occupations. Under their category of agricultural and pastoral caste he formed a sub-heading called 'Forest Tribes'. In the census report of 1901, they were classified as 'Animists' and in 1911 as tribal animist' or people following tribal religion. In census reporting 1921 they were specified as "hill and forest tribes" and their number was estimated to be 16 million, 1931 census described them as primitive tribes. The Government of India act, 1935 specified the tribal population as 'Backward Tribe'. However, in the census report of 1941, they were classified as tribes only some distinguished anthropologists have put forth the various terminologies for describing these groups. Riley, Elwin, Martin, Sedgwick, A.V.Thakkar and others have described or aboriginals. Hutton called them primitive Tribes. Dr.Ghurye described them as 'Advises' while others designated them as 'submerged humanity further T.B.Nayak emphasized the following criteria in identifying a tribe in Indian situation. He himself analyses a tribe should have the least functional inter depends with in community is should be economically backward, which means the full import of monetary economics is not understood by its members. There are primitive means of exploiting natural resources the tribe's economy is in an under developed state; and it has multifarious economic

pursuits. There should be a comparative geographical isolation of the people with others. Culturally the people of the tribes should have a common dialect though they may be subject to regional variations a tribe to be the tribe should be politically organized and its community panchayats should be an influential institution. The tribe members have the least desire to change. They have a sort of psychological conservatism to stick to their old customs. The tribe should have customary laws, and its members might be suffering because of these customary laws in the law courts. Dr.P.C.Mehta, in his article who are scheduled 'tribes a proposal to solve a constitutional puzzle', derived the following characteristics to identify a tribal group in Indian situation; their roots in the soil date back to a very early period. If they are not the original inhabitants, they are at least some of the oldest inhabitants of the land They live in the relative isolation of the hills and the forests. The sense of history is shallow for, among them, the remembered history of five or six generations tend to get managed in history. They have a low level of technological economic development. In terms of their cultural ethos language institutions, beliefs and customs, they stand out from the other sections of the society. If they are not egalitarian, they are at least non-hierarchical and in differentiated scheduled.

Tribal communities reside in about 15 percent of the country's areas, in various ecological and geo-climatic conditions ranging from plains, forest hills to inaccessible areas. Tribal groups are at different stages of social economic and educational development, while some tribal communities have adopted the main stream way of life. At one end of the spectrum, there are 75 primitive Tribal groups (PTGs) at the other who are characterized by: A re-agriculture level of technology, stagnant or declining population, extremely low literacy and a subsistence level of economy. In spite of a number of definitions given by eminent scholars, D.N.Majumdar, in his *pace and cultures of India* (Bombay: 1958) observes "A tribe is a collection of families bearing a common name, members of which belong to the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain taboos regarding marriage professions or occupation and have developed a well assessed system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligation. Thus the word 'tribe' denotes certain common features like humans belonging to the same race or group, having the same history and tradition and having the same aspirations and living in and around the same land.

### **Tribes in India**

Since pre-historic times, India has been a country of multi-racial stocks. Its different parts are occupied by the various groups of people having their distinct cultural traits and levels of development. Among them, a number of groups are still in primitive stage and are called aboriginals. India's mythological accounts describe that Aryans invaded this country and came in contact with the aboriginal people of this country. According to Sri.L.M.Shrikhat there are a plenty of indications in the mythological stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata and even in the pre-Christian era that the indigenous people had to resist the impact of foreign culture. But in the course of time, those races mixed into one composite whole. The modern form of Hinduism comprises many elements of such cultural administration. But apart from this fact, there are groups of people representing the primitive stage of life.

Therefore, people representing these stages are called aboriginals. In the Indian constitution they are termed as scheduled tribes. The census of India 2001 indicates that there are 8, 43, 26,240 scheduled tribal population in India. In a recent survey under, the people of India project conducted by the Anthropological survey of India, 461 tribal communities have been identified all over the country. Scheduled tribes have been divided into three groups based on their distribution in three well-defined zones, viz. The Southern the central and Northern zones. Southern zones consists of the part of the peninsular India, south of the river Krishna and living in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka Lakshadweep Andaman and Nicobar Island and part of Andhra Pradesh belong to the southern zone. The tribes in this zone appear to be the most ancient inhabitants of India and

are now represented by the toolar, pariyans, kurumbas, kotas, sholigas, Malaya lees, Kodars, Kaanikars, Muthuvans, Mannadiyars, Uralic, Malaipantarams, kayas, Yandi's, Yerevs, Chenchus etc. A Negritos strain is found among some of the more primitive and isolated tribes, like the Kadars, the Irulas, the pariyans and the Uralic. Their life center around hunting and food gathering and the village headman adjudicated the disputes. The structure of the society is on the matriarchal basis. Central zones have provided refuge for the aboriginal population from time immemorial and mountain belts between the Indo Gang etic Basin of the Krishna River and the south. The central ozone comprises part of AndhrapradeshMaharasta, Gujarat, Orissa, Rajasthan, Bihar, Madoff Uttar yaprdes and part of Uttar Pradesh. The santhasGpds, Bhils, Munds, Birbors, Bhuiyas, Saoras, Khonds, Bali gas and kols are the majortribesfound in this region. They confirm the pattern of austroloid characters shifting cultivation is the prevalent form of food production. Community life is organised0 with a village comcils under a headman. Contact with people living on the plain and other non-tribal population of the surrounding areas has led to considerable degree of assimilation of Indian ideas and religious rites among these tribes. Northern zone consists of the sub-Himalayan negionand the hills and mountains ranges of north eastern India, of the Tista Valley and Jammu-Padma Portion of the Brahmaputra valley. Tribal communities within Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland,MmachalPraesh, Jammu ananipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir part of Uttar Pradesh and parto west Bengal belong to the Northern zone. The main tribes found in this zone are the nagas, khasis, garor, mishnis, limbos, lepchas, daslas, abors, mikirs and bodor. They show characteristic mongoloid features and there is among them as sub-stratum of megalithic culture with pronounced development of matriarchy.

According to the 1941census, the population of the scheduled tribes in the composites state of Madras was 5-6 lakhs and in 1951 it was 6-4 lakhs. But after reorganization of states the population of the schedule tribes in Tamil Nadu was reduced to 2-5 laksh in 1961. As per the 1961 census, the scheduled Tribes in our state form only .8 percent of the total scheduled tribe's population in India and .75 percent of the total population of TamilNadu. The total population of scheduled tribes in the 1971, was 31,515 constitute .76% and in the year 1981. There were totally 52,2,26 constitute 1.08% in 1991 the scheduled caster were 558946 refers 1.3% in 2.01 there were 651321 refers 1.02% It is evident that the above table explains that there were 5, 74,194 persons belonging to schedules tribes in Tamil Nadu when compared to the total population of 5, 5946 in 1991. They constituted 1.03% percent of the total population of the state in 1991. They constituted 1.03% percent in 1981. Through there is a drop in the ratio of scheduled tribes to the total population in 1991. Registering a growth rate of 1.37 percent during the decade. The Malayalam forms the biggest tribe with 53.7 percent and next to it is the Irular with 33.9 percent. The schoolgirl, the Kattunaykans and pariyans are also fairly appreciable in strength the well-known tribes of Todas, kotas, Kadars and Muduvar to be minor ones from the point of view in their numbers. They are each last than in number. The larges tribal population is centre in Salem district, where it forms 2.64 percent of the population of the area. The largest tribal group according to the report of the ministry of education and social welfare is that of the adiyans. Next come to mudugr or mud van. Among the districts, Nilgiri district has the highest tribal population where the ratio is 3.53 percent Salem and Thirvannamalai districts are the other two districts with a comparatively higher population of scheduled tribes and the ratio in these distiricts is also more than 3 percent. The tribal population ranges between 1 and 2 % in four districts they are changelpaatu 1.24% North Arcot 1.65% Dharmapur 1.96% and South Arcot 1.19%.

## Conclusion

In India the word primitives is attributed to the people who live from time immemorial. Parimelazhar mentions that he was born in the family that lived. Howsoever underestimated or grossly overlooked the contradiction between the shundra backward castes and the non-caste

dalits may be, in the village setting where precisely the caste problem is to be confronted, the shudra caste came to share the mantle of Brahmanism in relation to dalits. This is basically strengthened by the economic contradictions between these former castes and dalits who are the farm laborer dependent on them. This legacy of Manu could neither be overcome by the powerful non-Brahmin movement of Mahatma Phule, who had certainly shown how to bring them together during his life time; nor by the dalits movement despite its significant for bringing about broad unity of all the laboring people during Ambedkar's time. The majority from the shudra castes as marginal or small farmers or artisans laboring in the Jajmambalutedari (Client-pattern) system is variously exploited and is poor. A majority of as big farmers and middle farmers were well off. Some of them were vested with traditional powers of village administrators. These people of the former castes came to take up the role of exploiter in the village setting. During the post-Independence period the imperatives of electoral politics provided the motive force for consolidation of the middle castes. These castes received disproportionate benefits from the policies and programmes implemented during this period. The most significant have been the land reforms that sought to restore the lands to tenants and later the green revolution that channeled significant investments into agriculture and raised its productivity. The former could not reach real tenants who in most cases were dalits because the government machinery would not know that there operated a layered tenancy in villages as a dalit tenant could not be dealt with by the high caste landlord directly. So, by default it recognized the intermediaries as the legal tenants who invariably belonged to these former castes. Many of the benami transfers also went to them, as they were the confidants of the former landlords. The green revolution, as the numerous studies concluded, clearly benefited the bigger farmers, who again belonged to these castes. The empowerment of a section from these shudra castes impelled them to create formidable constituency for themselves in nexus with the capitalist class and to wield significant political power. The contradiction between them and the Brahmins that impelled the non-Brahmin movements during the colonial times were overcome in this process which enabled them to assume the hegemonic role in the rural setting. All the castes under this generic shudra caste-group were not well off economically and equal socially. Many of them, the artisan and service castes, were as poor as dalits and lay at various rungs in the caste terms and economically as farmers as most of them had land. The caste divisions between them were really imperceptible in hierarchical terms. In relations to dalits, however, they were placed socially and culturally clearly apart as the caste Hindu. Their superiority perception in relation to the increasingly assertive dalits was possibility of their making common cause with dalits. All these shudra castes came to pose as a single in opposition to dalits for mainly two reasons, one, their superiority in the caste hierarchy to dalits lent them power over them to extract more and more economic surplus and two the assertiveness of the majority dalits caste induced by their political consciousness (through the dalits movement) and their economic betterment (through reservation policy) make them vulnerable and defensive. This dynamics achieved two things for the rural rich one, it provided them request mass base to claim political power. While the caste identity consolidated the middle castes into a powerful block, the same identity was used to catalyze disablement of dalits by dividing them into various caste groups.

Historically, all dalits castes were not economically, equal. Most of them had specific caste calling and so had a reason to perceive a stake in the system. But there was a caste engaged to do low skilled miscellaneous village jobs, by virtue of which it came to be relatively more populous and remained economically most vulnerable. Paradoxically, they constituted the interface between the villages and town, which enabled them to acquire self-identify as humans particularly during the alien rule, with nothing to lose they therefore was thus the first to rebel against the caste system. There is enough evidence that the other dalits castes also initially made common cause with this anti-caste movement. But, with the advent of electoral politics the ruling class could easily engineer their detachment from the dalits mainstream movement. Later, the

contradiction between the middle caste hegemony and the dalits struggle accentuated this division and put a cap on the prospects of Dalit unity. The debacle embodied larger debate relating to class vs. caste and the concomitant question of how to wage class struggle and also how to annihilate castes. Insofar as the working class in India collectively come from the dalits and shudra castes, it is important that they come together to become a class. In the same manner, the question of annihilation of castes is intimately linked to coming together of the dalits and lowering shudra caste against the upper caste hegemony in every share of power. The class notion subsumes economic exploitation, which cannot be isolated from the notion of social hierarchy in the semi feudal setting of Indian villages, and is thus essentially intertwined with the notion of caste. Insofar as the shudra castes largely represent the class of have nots together with the dalits castes and simultaneously functions as a nearest representatives of Brahmanism and also as the exploiting class, the need apply a class filter to it cannot be over emphasized. The same principle is applicable to dalits insofar as there is an evidence of class formation among them. It therefore needs to be understood that the more caste identity is not only going to be inadequate but also is going to prove the usage of caste idiom may bring it temporary electoral gains to the parliamentary players but it can never bring the real social change desired by the revolutionists. The prerequisite for this to happen is both, a strong dalits movement which while fighting the remnant Brahmanism is capable of orienting itself as a class assimilating the toiling masses from all the other castes, and a strong communist movement which incorporates into its class struggle the agenda of the struggle against social and cultural discrimination.

Inasmuch as it is a phenomenon associated with the capitalist development the pre-capitalist caste has to be antithetical to the concept of nation. The dalits movement by squarely posing this problem has indeed contribution to India's nation building efforts. The Indian national congress, which spearheaded the national struggle for Independence, represented emerging Indian bourgeoisie's drive from over all political and economic control whereas the dalits movement under Ambedkar's sought to strengthen the most disadvantaged people in the Indian society and set in the process of internal consolidation of the Indian nation. The second question is about the struggle against the British imperialism. It is a common feature of the anti-caste movements that they did not support the freedom movements and to some extent saw the colonial rule in congenial terms vis-à-vis their objectives of eliminating caste disability and gaining due share of power. It is a fact that the dalits and the down-trodden castes had certainly favored the alien rule to the oppressive Brahmin rule even before they expected anything positive from the former. In most of the decisive battles that established the British colonialism in the country dalits soldiers had played heroic role. It was not from any lone for dalits that the colonial rulers did favorable things to them most of it sprang from their strategic imperative and somewhat from a sense of superiority victors. They did not hesitate reverting them when these reforms spelt impediment in their colonial interest. As for the anti-caste movements, it would be wrong to say that they were for the continuance of colonial rule. Though the anti-caste movement in general and the dalits movement in particular acknowledged positive aspects of the colonial rule and tactically sought to make use of their contradiction with the bourgeoisie nationalists to exert pressure on the latter to agree for desired reforms and devolution of power to the lower castes, it never was so overwhelmed as not to see its long term interests lying in the demise of alien rule.

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