



Protecting the Tribes

For Prelims: Tribes, Amazon rainforest, Article 342, Article 330, Article 332, Article 243

For Mains: Issues Related to SCs & STs, Government Policies & Interventions

Why in News?

Recently, the **last known member of an indigenous tribe in the Amazon rainforest has died** after living alone for decades.

- The unidentified man from an uncontacted Indigenous tribe in Brazil was known as the '**man of the hole**' because he was often spotted taking shelter in pits dug in the ground.
- His death has **now resulted in a lot of discussion among activists**, once again bringing to spotlight the need to protect the indigenous people.

What is the Status of Tribes in India?

- In India, most of the tribes are collectively identified under **Article 342 as “Scheduled Tribes”**.
- Since independence, the **share of tribal population in the country has continuously been increasing census by census**.
- In the current time, the **tribal population of India is approaching around 9% of the total population of the country**.

What are the General Concerns of the Tribal Community?

- **Dwindling Population:**
 - Indigenous communities are **facing a dwindling population**.
- **Poverty:**
 - The majority of these indigenous communities live in extreme poverty. They suffer from malnutrition and lack access to basic education and health facilities.
- **Degradation of the Forest Areas:**
 - **Unrestrained development in forest areas** has led to the degradation of the forest areas which account for the major basis for the survival of the tribal community.
- **Failure to Recognize the Rights:**
 - Inability to recognize indigenous communities' rights to forest resources is also a concern.

What is the Significance of the Indigenous Communities?

- **Safeguarding Biodiversity:**
 - While Indigenous peoples own, occupy, or use a quarter of the world's surface area, **they safeguard 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity**.
 - They hold **vital ancestral knowledge and expertise** on how to adapt, mitigate, and reduce climate and disaster risks.

- **India's ethnic people have played a vital role in preserving the biodiversity** of several virgin forests and have conserved flora and fauna in sacred groves of tribals.
- **Preserving Languages:**
 - With 370-500 million indigenous peoples representing the majority of the world's cultural diversity, they speak the greater share of almost 7000 languages in the world.
- **Contributing to Zero Hunger Goal:**
 - The crops grown by indigenous people are highly adaptable.
 - They can **survive drought, altitude, flooding, and any kind of extremes of temperature**. As a result, these crops help create resilient farms.
 - Also, quinoa, moringa, and oca are some of the native crops that have the ability to expand and diversify our food base. These would contribute to the goal to attain Zero Hunger.

In India, What Problems are faced by Tribal Groups?

- **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 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 should be the Way Forward?

- **Time to treat them as First-class Citizen:**
 - The **benefit of development like education or technology should reach them** but at the same time they should not be turned into second-class citizens.
 - They are **first-class citizens and they should remain first-class citizens** so their confidence, their empowerment and their autonomy and their self-respect must be protected at all cost and this applies to all the tribal communities including the centenarians.
- **Ensure Adequate Budget Allocations:**
 - The **governments both at the Centre and States must recognize improvement in the health status of the tribal population** as among the topmost priorities from policy point of view and ensure adequate budget allocations made including under the National Tribal Plan.
- **Preserving Heritage and Culture:**
 - The efforts **should not only be directed at protecting the population of the tribals** by ensuring access to quality nutrition and health resources, efforts are also needed to preserve their heritage, culture, language, art, traditions and sensibilities.
- **Economic Upliftment:**
 - **Steps need to be taken to alleviate the position of the tribals** by taking measures to ensure the economic upliftment of the tribals.
 - The **policies and programmes for the development of the tribals** should be tailored to the unique character of the community and should be need-based.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Under which Schedule of the Constitution of India can the transfer of tribal land to private parties for mining be declared null and void? (2019)

(a) Third Schedule

- (b) Fifth Schedule
- (c) Ninth Schedule
- (d) Twelfth Schedule

Ans: (b)

Exp:

- Grant of mineral concessions in Scheduled Areas is guided by the provisions contained in Article 244 along with Fifth and Sixth Schedules to the Constitution relating to administration of the Scheduled Areas and Tribal Areas and the provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 or any other relevant statutory acts protecting the interests of tribals.
- Under the Fifth Schedule, the Governor may by public notification, direct that any particular Act of Parliament or of the Legislature of the State shall or shall not apply to a Scheduled Area or any part thereof in the State.
- Thus, under Fifth Schedule, transfer of tribal land to private parties for mining can be declared null and void. **Therefore, option (b) is the correct answer.**

Mains

Q. How do you explain the statistics that show that the sex ratio in Tribes in India is more favourable to women than the sex ratio among Scheduled Castes? **(2015)**

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