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Socio-Economic status of the Baiga tribe of Chhattisgarh in India

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Abstract

The Indian Constitution assigns special status to the Scheduled Tribes (STs). Traditionally referred to as aboriginals, van dwasis, tribes, or tribals, STs constitute about 8% of the Indian population. There are 573 Scheduled Tribes living in different parts of the country, which are different from the mainstream people of the State where they live. Baiga tribe is a primitive tribe found in central provinces of the country such as Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand. The largest number of Baiga is found in Baiga-chuk in Mandla district and Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh. Baiga are connected to Indo-Aryan Dravidian tribes who have unique socio-economic status and life style. The major part of Baiga earning is spent on food and clothing. In Baiga community, the family is small, but the kinship structures are quite strong. They follow strict marriage rules, such as incest is a taboo, no marriage with outsiders is permitted, and monogamy is the general rule. The Baiga have expertise in medicine and the priests have their special importance. Baigas lived in the forests and carry out shifting, slash and burn cultivation for thousands of years without any influence or competition from other Indian residents. The second largest grouping of the Baigas lives in Bilaspur, Kabirdham and Surguja districts of Chhattisgarh which was formed on 1 November 2000, by partitioning 16 Chhattisgarhi districts of Madhya Pradesh. It is also the 10th largest state with an area of 135,190 km.

Keywords: Tribe, Baigas, Socio-Economic Status

Introduction

Adivasi is a term for schedule tribes, an assorted set of racial and tribal groups believed to be the indigenous population of India. Adivasi societies are present in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan etc.

According to Dr D. N. Majumdar, "A tribe is a social group with territorial attachment, endogamous, with no specialization of function, ruled by tribal officers, genetic or else, united in language or vernacular, recognizing social distance from other tribes or castes but without any disgrace attached in the caste structure, following tribal tradition, belief and customs, intolerant of naturalization of ideas from alien sources, above all conscious of a homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration. The word tribe as generally understood in the literature on anthropology is a social group speaking a distinguishing language or vernacular and possessing a distinct culture that makes it off from other tribes"^[1].

Scheduled Tribes in India

The tribal communities in India are extremely diverse and assorted. There are wide range diversity among them in respect of languages spoken, size of population and mode of livelihood. The number of communities that find their place in the list of the Schedule of the Indian Constitution is reflective of this diversity. The Government of India, in its Draft National Tribal Policy, 2006 records 698 Scheduled Tribes in India.

Adivasi is officially documented by the Indian government as "Scheduled Tribes" in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India, which is eligible for certain confirmatory action procedures. The Constitution of India, Article 366 (25) defines Scheduled Tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or part of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to the scheduled Tribes (STs) for

the purposes of this Constitution"^[2].

The Indian Census of 2011 enumerates the total population of Scheduled Tribes (ST) at 10, 42, 81,034 persons, who constitute 8.6 per cent of the population of the country. As per the Census of India 2011, the number of entity groups notified as Scheduled Tribes is 705. While it is not possible to provide comprehensive descriptions of the demographic features and socio-economic status of each of these tribal groups, this section attempts to map out the broad contours of the Scheduled Tribes of the country in terms of their demography and geography. Scheduled Tribes consist of 11.3 per cent of the Indian rural population and 2.8 per cent of the Indian urban population. In 2001, the proportion of STs to the total population was 8.2 per cent, while the proportion was 10.4 per cent in rural areas and 2.4 per cent in urban areas. The total male ST population according to the 2011 census is 5, 24, 09,823 of which 4, 71, 26,341 are residing in rural areas and 52, 83,482 are in urban areas. The total female Schedule Tribe population is 5, 18, 71, 211 with 4, 66, 92,821 in rural areas and 51, 78,390 in urban areas^[3].

The decadal population growth of the tribal's from Census 2001 to 2011 has been 23.66% against the 17.69% of the whole population. The sex ratio for the overall population is 940 females per 1000 males and that of Scheduled Tribes 990 females per thousand males^[4].

In terms of the total tribal populations found in each State of the country, Odisha has the largest number of notified STs (62) followed by Karnataka (50), Maharashtra (45), Madhya Pradesh (43) and Chhattisgarh (42). Sikkim has the least with four tribes followed by Nagaland, Daman and Diu and Uttarakhand with five each. Among the South Indian States (without any Scheduled Areas), Karnataka has the largest number of Scheduled Tribes (50) followed by Tamil Nadu (36) and Kerala (36)^[5].