

HANDOUT- MODULE -1

To be marginalised is to be forced to occupy the sides or fringes and not to be at the centre of things. In the social environment too, groups of people or communities are being excluded.

Marginalised groups are viewed with hostility and fear. This sense of difference and exclusion leads the communities to not have access to resources and opportunities and unable to assert their rights, thus leading them to experience a sense of disadvantage and powerlessness.

In this chapter we study two groups which are marginalized.

TRIBALS

Tribals are also referred to as Adivasis. Adivasis—literally means 'original inhabitants', communities who lived and continue to live, in close association with forests.

About 8% of India's population is Adivasi and most of the country's mining and industrial centres are located in Adivasi areas like Jamshedpur, Rourkela, Bokaro and Bhilai, among others.

There are over 500 various Adivasi groups in India. They are numerous in states like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and in the north-eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. 60 different tribal groups in Odisha.

They are distinctive because there is often very little hierarchy among them and this makes them radically different from communities organised around principles of jati-varna (caste) or those that were ruled by kings.

Adivasis practise a range of tribal religions- different from Islam, Hinduism and Christianity- worship of ancestors, village and nature spirits, the last associated with and residing in various sites in the landscape – 'mountain-spirits', 'river-spirits', 'animal-spirits', etc.

Adivasis-influenced by different surrounding religions like Shakta, Buddhist, Vaishnav, Bhakti and Christianity. Adivasi religions-influenced dominant religions of the empires around them, for example, the Jagannath cult of Odisha and Shakti and Tantric traditions in Bengal and Assam.

During the 19th century, substantial numbers of Adivasis converted to Christianity, which has emerged as a very important religion in modern Adivasi history.

Adivasis have their own languages (most of them radically different from and possibly as old as Sanskrit), which have often deeply influenced the formation of 'mainstream' Indian languages, like Bengali. Santhali has the largest number of speakers and has a significant body of publications including magazines on the internet or in e-zines.

Adivasis and Stereotyping

Adivasis are portrayed in very stereotypical ways – in colourful costumes, headgear and through their dancing. Besides this, we seem to know very little about the realities of their lives. This wrongly leads to people believing they are exotic, primitive and backward

Adivasis and Development

Forestlands-cleared for timber and to get land for agriculture and industry. Adivasis-lived in areas that are rich in minerals and other natural resources, which were taken over for mining and other large industrial projects. Powerful forces collude to take over tribal land forcefully and procedures are not followed.

In the Northeast, their lands remain highly militarized . India has 104 national parks covering 40,501 sq km and 543 wildlife sanctuaries covering 1,18,918 sq km. These are areas where tribals originally lived but were evicted from. When they continue to stay in these forests, they are termed, encroachers. Losing their lands and access to the forest means that tribals lose their main sources of livelihood and food. Having gradually lost access to their traditional homelands, many Adivasis have migrated to cities in search of work where they are employed for very low wages in local industries or at building or construction sites.

Adivasis are caught in the situation of poverty and deprivation. 45% of tribal groups in rural areas and 35% in urban areas live below the poverty line leading to deprivation in other areas- malnourished tribal children- low Literacy rates- When Adivasis are displaced from their lands, they lose much more than a source of income-lose their traditions and customs – a way of living and being. There exists an interconnectedness between the economic and social dimensions of tribal life. Destruction in one sphere naturally impacts the other. Often this process of dispossession and displacement can be painful and violent.