

## 1. Details of Module and its structure

Module Detail	
Subject Name	Sociology
Course Name	Sociology 03 (Class XII, Semester - 1)
Module Name/Title	Adivasis and adivasi struggles – Part 3
Module Id	lesy_10503
Pre-requisites	Sociology, caste and tribes, stratification
Objectives	After going through this lesson, the learners will be able to understand the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adivasi struggles</li></ul>
Keywords	Indian society, social stratification, social inequality, caste, tribes, social exclusion, marginalization, adivasi struggles, social movements

## 2. Development Team

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In this modules, we will be focusing on Adivasis, women & differently abled as they as they have been facing challenges over the period of history & continue to face inequalities even in the present times.

Social inequalities have existed for different sections of society especially the backward and disadvantaged.

According to the definition of world directory of minorities, The Adivasis (original inhabitants) is the collective name used for the many tribal peoples of India. Officially they are termed "Scheduled Tribes" but this is a legal and constitutional term which differs from state to state and area to area and therefore excludes some groups who might be considered tribal. Adivasis are not an homogenous group — with over 200 tribes speaking over 100 languages, which vary greatly in ethnicity, culture and language; however there are similarities in their way of life and generally they have a unique or distinct life style as compared to mainstream culture within Indian society. According to 2011 census, Adivasi make up 8.6% of India's population or 104 million.

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 be the scheduled Tribes (STs) for the purposes of this Constitution".

In Article 342, the procedure to be followed for specification of a scheduled tribe is mentioned. However, the Article does not contain the criterion for the categorisation of any community as a scheduled tribe. Tribes are defined on the basis of certain identifiable attributes such as:

- Geographical isolation— they live in cloistered, exclusive, remote and inhospitable areas such as hills and forests.
- Backwardness— their livelihood is based on primitive agriculture, a low-value closed economy with a low level of technology that leads to their poverty. They have low levels of literacy and health.
- Distinctive culture, language and religions— communities have developed their own distinctive culture, language and religion.
- Shyness of contact— they have a marginal degree of contact with other cultures and people.

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**According to Andre Beteille** The tribe as a mode of organization has always differed from the caste-based mode of organization in India. But tribes are not always easy to distinguish from castes particularly at the margins where the two modes of organization meet. One can observe a tribe-caste continuum. The distinctive condition of the tribe in India has been its geographical isolation mainly in the interior hills and forests. But it has remained isolated in the frontier areas also. By and large the tribal communities are those which were either left behind in these ecological niches or pushed back into them in course of the development, process of modernity and expansion of state and civilization but their isolation always has been a matter of degree. Some tribes have been more isolated as compared to others. In the interior the bulk of the tribal population is residing and all of them have free from the influence of civilization. Their isolation whether self-imposed or imposed by others blocked the growth of their material culture but it also enabled them to retain their distinctive modes of speech. One of the most significant factor that distinguishes tribe and caste is the language. Every caste speaks one or the other of the major languages; each tribe has its own distinctive dialect which might differ profoundly from the local or regional language spoken by mainstream population. But sometimes this distinction does not work as there are many tribes in western India including the Bhills who do not have any language of their own and have adopted the main language spoken in the region.

### **ADIVASI STRUGGLES**

Like the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes are social groups recognised by the Indian Constitution as specially marked by poverty, powerlessness and social stigma. Let us understand the struggle put up by adivasis or tribes in detail.

A large number of tribal struggles have taken place in india which span over 3-4 centuries. Some of the major tribes involved in revolt in the 19th century were Mizos (1810),Kols(1795&1831),Mundas (1889),Daflas (1875),Khasi and Garo (1829),Kacharis (1839),Santhals (1853),Muria Gonds (1886),Nagas (1844 & 1879) and Konds (1817). Tribal movements or Adivasi Struggles can be categorised into three different categories.

- Struggles due to exploitation of the outsiders.

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- Struggles due to economic deprivations
  - Struggle due to separatist tendencies

These struggles have their roots in the general feeling of isolation from the mainstream society or exploitation and loss of tribal culture, livelihood, autonomy etc. Adivasi Struggles **can also be classified on the basis of their orientation or quest of struggle into four types:**

- Movements seeking political autonomy and formation of separate state.
- Agrarian movement
- Forest -based movements
- Socio-religious movements

The *jana* or tribes were believed to be ‘people of the forest’ whose distinctive habitat in the hill and forest areas shaped their economic, social and political attributes. However, ecological isolation was nowhere absolute. Tribal groups have had long and close association with Hindu society and culture, making the boundaries between ‘tribe’ and ‘caste’ quite porous.



In the case of adivasis, the movement of populations from one area to another further complicates the picture. Today, barring the North-Eastern states, there are no areas of the country that are inhabited exclusively by tribal people; there are only areas of tribal *concentration*. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, non-tribals have moved into the tribal districts of central India, while tribal people from the same

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districts have migrated to plantations, mines, factories and other places of employment.

In the areas where tribal populations are concentrated, their economic and social conditions are usually much worse than those of non-tribals. The impoverished and exploited circumstances under which adivasis live can be traced historically to the pattern of accelerated resource extraction started by the colonial British government and continued by the government of independent India. From the late nineteenth century onwards, the colonial government reserved most forest tracts for its own use, severing the rights that adivasis had long exercised to use the forest for gathering produce and for shifting cultivation. Forests were now to be protected for maximising timber production. With this policy, the mainstay of their livelihoods was taken away from adivasis, rendering their lives poorer and more insecure. Denied access to forests and land for cultivation, adivasis were forced to either use the forests illegally (and be harassed and prosecuted as ‘encroachers’ and thieves) or migrate in search of wage labour.

The Independence of India in 1947 should have made life easier for adivasis but this was not the case. Firstly, the government monopoly over forests continued. If anything, the exploitation of forests accelerated. Secondly, the policy of capital-intensive industrialisation adopted by the Indian government required mineral resources and power-generation capacities which were concentrated in Adivasi areas. Adivasi lands were rapidly acquired for new mining and dam projects. In the process, millions of adivasis were displaced without any appropriate compensation or rehabilitation. Justified in the name of ‘national development’ and ‘economic growth’, these policies were also a form of internal colonialism, subjugating adivasis and alienating the resources upon which they depended. Projects such as the Sardar Sarovar dam on the river Narmada in western India and the Polavaram dam on the river Godavari in Andhra Pradesh will displace hundreds of thousands of adivasis, driving them to greater destitution. These processes continue to prevail and have become even more powerful since the 1990s when economic liberalisation policies were officially adopted by the Indian government. It is now easier for corporate firms to acquire large areas of land by displacing adivasis.

Like the term Dalit, the term Adivasi connotes political awareness and the assertion of rights. Literally meaning ‘original inhabitants’, the term was coined in the 1930s as

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part of the struggle against the intrusion by the colonial government and outside settlers and moneylenders. Being Adivasi is about shared experiences of the loss of forests, the alienation of land, repeated displacements since Independence in the name of ‘development projects’ and much more.

In spite of the heavy odds against them and in the face of their marginalisation many tribal groups have been waging struggles against outsiders (called ‘dikus’) and the state. In post-Independence India, the most significant achievements of Adivasi movements include the attainment of statehood for Jharkhand and Chattisgarh, which were originally part of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh respectively. In this respect adivasis and their struggles are different from the Dalit struggle because, unlike Dalits, adivasis were concentrated in contiguous areas and could demand states of their own.

### **BOX 5.5**

#### **In the Name of Development — Adivasis in the Line of Fire**

The new year brought death to Orissa. On 2 January 2006, police opened fire on a group of adivasis, killing twelve and injuring many others. For the past 23 days, the Adivasis had blocked the state highway at Kalinganagar, peacefully protesting against the take-over of their farmlands by a steel company. Their refusal to surrender their land was a red rag to an administration under pressure to expedite industrial development in the state. The stakes were high — not only this piece of land but the entire policy of accelerated industrialisation would be jeopardised if the government were to entertain the adivasis’ demands. The police were brought in to forcibly clear the highway. In the confrontation that followed, twelve adivasi men and women lost their lives. Many of them were shot in the back as they were trying to run away. When the dead adivasis’ bodies were returned to their families, it was found that the police had cut off their hands, the men’s genitals and the women’s breasts. The corpses’ mutilation was a warning — we mean business.

The Kalinganagar incident, like many horrors before it and after, briefly made the headlines and then disappeared from public view. The lives and deaths of poor adivasis slid back into obscurity. Yet their struggle still continues and by revisiting it, we not only remind ourselves of the need to address ongoing injustice, but also

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appreciate how this conflict encapsulates many of the key issues in the sphere of environment and development in India today. Like many adivasi-dominated parts of the country, Kalinganagar in Jajpur district of central Orissa is a paradox. Its wealth of natural resources contrasts sharply with the poverty of its inhabitants, mainly small farmers and labourers. The rich iron ore deposits in the area are state property and their 'development' means that Adivasi lands are compulsorily acquired by the state for a pittance. While a handful of local residents may get secure jobs on the lower rungs of the industrial sector, most are impoverished even further and survive on the edge of starvation as wage-labourers. It is estimated that 30 million people, more than the entire population of Canada, have been displaced by this land acquisition policy since India became independent in 1947 (Fernandes 1991). Of these, almost 75 per cent are, by the government's own admission, 'still awaiting rehabilitation'. This process of land acquisition is justified as being in the public interest since the state is committed to promoting economic growth by expanding industrial production and infrastructure.

It is claimed that such growth is necessary for national development. To these arguments has been added a new justification. Since 1990, the Indian government has adopted a policy of economic liberalisation — divesting the state of its welfare functions and dismantling the institutional apparatuses regulating private firms. Economic policy has been re-oriented to maximise foreign exchange earnings, with concessions and subsidies given to Indian and foreign firms to encourage them to invest in production for export. Kalinganagar's iron ore attracted increased interest due to the booming international demand for steel and spurred a steel company, which had bought land from the Orissa state government, to start work on a new steel plant by building a wall enclosing the factory site. It was the construction of this wall that sparked off protests leading to the killing of adivasis. The state government had forcibly acquired this land from them years ago by paying them a few thousand rupees per acre. Since the meagre compensation did not enable adivasis to invest in an alternative livelihood, they had continued to live in the area and cultivate the land that legally no longer belonged to them (after acquiring the land, the administration had not put it to any use). The move in December 2005 to enclose this land directly deprived adivasis of their sole source of livelihood. Their desperation was fuelled by

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anger when they learnt that the state government had sold the acquired land to the steel firm at a price roughly ten times the compensation amount paid to the original owners. Adivasis took to the streets, refusing to give up the land that they survived on. The struggle of adivasis in Orissa and its violent reprisal highlight how conflicts over land and related natural resources remain central to the challenge of India's development. Kalinganagar is now marked along with Narmada, Singrauli, Tehri, Hirakud, Koel Karo, Suvarnarekha, Nagarhole, Plachimada and many other sites, on the map of environmental conflicts in India. Like the others, its contours too reflect the deep social and political divides that characterise contemporary India.

To read more about the Kalinganagar issue see: Frontline, v. 23, n.1, Jan 14-27, 2006 or the People's Union for Civil Liberties report at <http://www.pucl.org/Topics/Dalit-tribal/2006/kalinganagar.htm>