

Tribes of India

A tribe is a group of people sharing common ancestry and culture and prefer to live by themselves in a closed society. The tribes of India are the indigenous or native people who are widespread throughout the country.

Tribes comprise a significant part of the Indian population, and tribal culture is an integral part of our intangible national heritage. Hence, we must know about some of the important tribes of India.

The Tribal Population of India

The tribal population is scattered all across the Indian mainland- in nearly all the states and union territories, in several pockets. The places with maximum tribal settlements are Mizoram (94.4% of the population), Lakshadweep (94%), Meghalaya (86.1%), and Nagaland (86.5%). Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Assam and West Bengal, too, have important tribal settlements. With a broader view, the scheduled tribes make up 8.6% of the total population in India. These proportions and distributions will be helpful for people who are studying about the tribes of India for UPSC.

The Tribes of India

The most commonly known tribes of India are Gonds, Bhils (or Bheels), Santhal, Munda, Khasi, Garo, Angami, Bhutia, Chenchu, Kodaba, and the Great Andamanese Tribes.

Of all these tribes, the Bhil tribal group, as per the 2011 census, is the largest tribe in India. It constitutes a staggering 38% of the country's total scheduled tribal population.

The Bhils have their own language named after them, but most members also speak Marathi and Gujarati, and the official state language where they are based. The tribe has its roots in Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, parts of Gujarat, Rajasthan, and even some parts of Tripura, making it the biggest tribe in India.

Additionally, Bhil is one of the very few scheduled tribes in India that is famous for its art form called the Bhil Art. The purpose of these artworks is to portray the everyday life of the tribe members. They make various items using twigs and branches of the Neem tree as brushes and natural colour pigments derived from different leaves and flowers.

Bhil Art is also unique in its way of depicting their deities and ancestors in the form of dots painted over the background of the painting in various colours and patterns, giving it a unique look. Questions on Bhil Art and its purpose frequently come in the IAS exam papers.

The Gond Tribe

The Gond tribe is second only to the Bhils in terms of population size. Called the **second-largest tribe of India**, the tribe of Gond is spread across states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Bihar, and Orissa. Standing at a massive population of over four million tribal members, the Gond constitutes a major percentage (35.6%) of the country's total tribal population.

Literacy among the Tribal People of India

The overall literacy rate is an important factor in recognising how developed a country is. The literacy rate among the tribes of India, as recorded in 1961, was as low as 8.5%. To improve the scenario, the Government of India introduced many reservation schemes. Following the implementation of these widescale measures, the literacy rate has jumped to 63.1% as of the 2011 census. The census also found that male members of the tribal people are more literate, standing at 71%, than the female members who have a literacy rate of around 54%. One of the primary reasons for this massive jump in figures is certainly the measures taken by the government in the post-independence era aimed at the upliftment of the tribal population.

However, there are still certain areas of complication and difficulty that majorly slow down the rate of progress of literacy among the tribal people. Some of these challenges are:

1. The tribal people are usually very weak in terms of their economic conditions. Thus, the parents usually refrain their children from going to schools as they require more earners to run their family and to survive.
2. The tribal people live in very remote and secluded areas with very few or no means of transportation. Hence, they are deprived of the light of education.

Currently, many NGOs and groups are coming forward to work in this field. If you are a UPSC 2022 candidate, you must acknowledge the initiatives of these groups. They are trying to build schools in remote tribal villages, where the children cannot only study in their own languages, but also stay and have a square meal daily. They are also helping the tribal adults to earn their living by teaching them a few basic farming and handicraft skills.

Furthermore, tribal people are a very important part of the Indian culture. Therefore, the government should take more steps to preserve them and uplift their living conditions by providing them with proper education.