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Q4(c)

Critically examine the concept of Scheduled Tribe (ST) and mention the limitations of administrator's criteria

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Anthropology GS 2 · 15 marks · Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization

1.1 Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization-Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic), Protohistoric (Indus Civilization). Pre-Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan cultures. Contributions of the tribal cultures to Indian civilization.

Core demand of the question

- State how anthropology and the Constitution understand tribe
- State the administrator's criteria for Scheduled Tribe
- Show their limitations with examples
- Bring in courts, Xaxa and the ST list process

Revision summary

ST is a constitutional list under **Article 342**, not a defined scientific type.

- **Lokur criteria:** primitive traits, distinctive culture, isolation, shyness, backwardness.

They fail urban and mining STs, insult communities, and overlap other backwardness lists.

State-wise lists and court limits on portability create border anomalies.

Xaxa, PESA, FRA and Niyamgiri treat tribe as a rights-bearing community, which is the better concept.

Introduction

Scheduled Tribe is a **constitutional and administrative name**, not a scientific species. Anthropology's tribe is a type of society - often kin-based, historically outside or beside caste - that never matched the list one-for-one. The gap between concept and criteria is the question.

Body

Concept

Colonial ethnography (**Risley, Elwin, Ghurye, Hutton**) argued over isolation, animism and "backward Hindu". **Article 342** lets the President, after consultation, specify STs for a state; Parliament amends the list. The word in the Constitution is not defined by a section of traits. **Article 366(25)** only points back to the specified list. Fifth and Sixth Schedules add area to people.

Anthropologically, Indian "tribes" include foragers, jhum cultivators, peasants and urban workers. **Bailey's continuum** and **Sinha's tribe-caste** already said the boundary is historical.

Administrator's criteria

- **The Lokur Committee (1965) criteria, still the administrative gospel, are: indication of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact, and backwardness.** The **Xaxa Committee (2014)** quoted them and showed how they insult and misfire. Earlier, the **Dhebar Commission (1960-61)** and **Renuka Ray**, and later **Bhuria**, talked of development and autonomy more than of "shyness".

- **Listing is political:** a community is ST in one state and OBC or unlisted across the border (Gonds, Bhils, tea-tribes of Assam). **PVTGs** are a further administrative layer inside ST, born from Dhebar's primitive tribal groups.

Limitations

- **Primitive traits** is a colonial leftover. A laptop and a clan god can sit in one house.
- **Isolation** fails for tea-garden, mining and city STs. **Shyness** pathologises people who avoid a hostile thana.
- **Distinctive culture** is real but not unique to STs; every jati claims it.
- **Backwardness** overlaps OBC and SC. It cannot tell a tribe from a caste by itself.
- **State-specific lists** create border injustice. Courts have generally refused to let a person carry ST status across states as a personal portable race (**Marri Chandra Shekhar Rao**; later **Bir Singh** on similar SC/ST portability logic).
- **Inclusion politics:** groups campaign with dressed folklore. **Nomenclature fights** (tea tribes, Gorkha, some Rajasthan claims) show criteria cannot be applied like a blood test.
- **FRA and PESA** need a territorial community; a listed ST in a city may have the certificate and not the forest.

Samata, Niyamgiri (Orissa Mining Corporation, 2013) and **Wildlife First** FRA litigation show that the live legal tribe is a **community with Gram Sabha and hill or forest rights**, which Lokur's adjectives never described.

Xaxa asked to drop "primitive" and to use **livelihood, historical injustice, relative isolation where it exists, and self-identification** with safeguards against fraud. The administrator's five tests remain because they are easy to photocopy, not because they are true.

Flow diagram

Anthropological tribe -> Kin land history
 Lokur five tests -> ST list Art 342
 ST list Art 342 -> Xaxa critique
 ST list Art 342 -> Gram Sabha FRA PESA

Conclusion

Tribe in anthropology is a social-historical formation. ST in law is a list under **Article 342**. Lokur's five tests are narrow, colonial and unevenly applied. Courts and Xaxa point toward community, history and area, not shyness.

Facts & figures

Article 342

President specifies Scheduled Tribes for each state; Parliament amends the list by law.

Lokur Committee 1965

Five administrative tests still cited in ST identification files, criticised by Xaxa as outdated.

Niyamgiri 2013

Supreme Court required Gram Sabha consent for mining that would affect Dongria Kondh religious and forest rights.

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