

tribal kings with the famous lineages of Hindu myths and legends.

In this ecology of varying cultural developments, certain tribes took up the role of bridge by promoting exchange between various cultural levels, and some tribes acted as buffers for reducing conflicts. Where the tribes living at the low techno-economic level could not evolve such symbiotic relationships, head-hunting and war flourished, as happened among the Nagas and some Mizo tribes.

Rice is the staple food of these tribes. Most of them live in raised platform houses made of bamboo, wood, and thatch; prepare rice-beer in their homes; and chew areca nuts. Bride-price, an age-grade system, and youth dormitories are widespread social institutions. Except in three matrilineal tribes, organization is patrilineal. Social structures are based on clan and lineage, and the segmentary system extends up to phratry and dual organisations among some Naga, Mizo, and Arunachal tribes. A few tribes are organised into separate divisions. In the marriage system, mother's-brother's-daughter marriage, levirate, and sororate are common. Among some tribes of Arunachal and Mizoram, stratification based on internal class divisions is present. Slavery was prevalent in many areas. Broadly, there are two types of polities, based on chiefdom and democratic council of the village elders. Tribal households possess looms and weave colorful cloth, and specialisation is nearly absent. Like clothes, bamboo crafts, masks, and wood carvings are popular artistic traditions.

Belief in traditional religion persists in spite of large-scale conversion to Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist faiths. Monpas and Sherdukpens have been influenced by Māhayāna Buddhism from Tibet, and Khamptis and Singphos by Hinayāna Buddhism from Burma. Belief in a supreme being (creator or principal), ancestral and natural spirits, and minor deities characterizes traditional religion. Priests and medicine men control and appease them. Divination, spirit-possession, and oracle-telling through ritualistic dances are widespread. The most elaborate system of taboo, called *genna*, is observed by the Nagas for prosperity. Change in religions on the model of bigger religions is also observed, such as in the Heraka faith of Zeliang Nagas and Donyi-Polo (the sun and moon) worship of the tribes of central Arunachal.

Modernisation of the tribals began first in the colonial period and then increased after Independence. Extension of networks of market, politics, and education has transformed many tribals into peasants. Historical patterns of continuum have been disrupted and mobilisation of the tribes on ethnic lines has taken place. In this process folklore is playing an important role.

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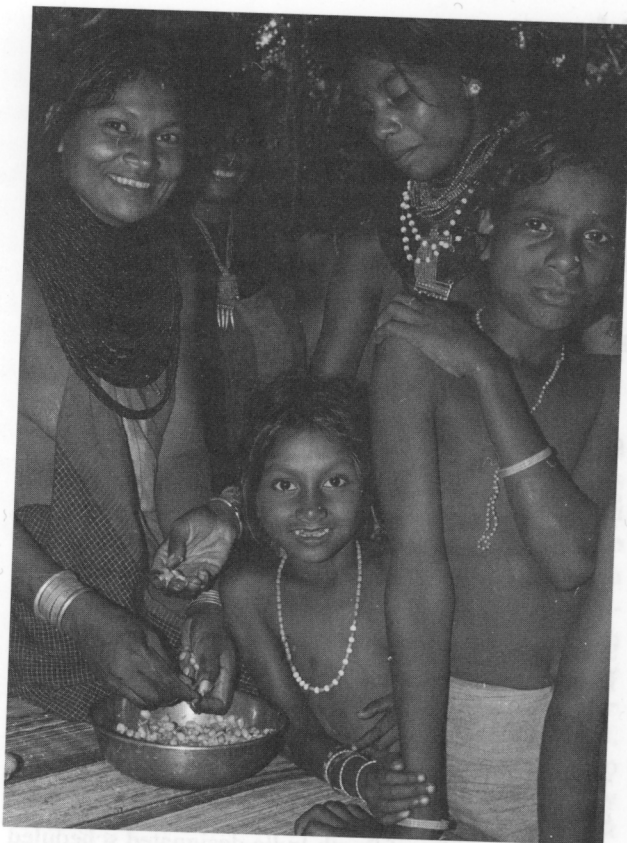
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 Bangladesh

TRIBAL COMMUNITIES, SOUTHERN INDIA

The communities of South India designated scheduled tribes share many of the same socioeconomic and cultural characteristics and face many of the same problems as those found throughout India. Unlike the tribes of central and northern India, who speak languages of Austro-Asiatic, Indo-Aryan, and Dravidian origin, almost all of the tribes of South India speak Dravidian languages. Most of them speak dialects of major languages such as Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannda, and Tulu. Others, often small populations such as the Kotas (roughly 1,500) and Todas (roughly 1,200) of the Nilgiris, speak distinct languages that appear to have split away from ancient Tamil as early as two thousand or more years ago.

South Indian tribals employ a variety of terms for self-description, including the English word tribe, the Hindi word *ādivāsi* (original inhabitant), and regional language terms that variously translate as hill people, ancient people, and so forth. Tribal terms for their own communities usually differ from those imposed by outsiders. Some of these terms indicate a base-level "us-them" distinction common also among north Indian tribals. Todas, for example, call themselves *O·I*, or "men"; Nāyakas call themselves "our own." Others have names for themselves that may have once had lexical meaning but now exist simply as proper names. For example, Kotas call themselves "ko·v."



Women in a tribal community, © Mimi Nichter

Some tribal societies have incorporated into their own self-representation what now appear to be widely held stereotypes of so-called primitive peoples, introduced in part during the colonial period. Stereotypically, tribals are cast as, for example, hunter-gatherers or practitioners of ecstatic rituals who are comparatively egalitarian and sexually uninhibited. There are other stereotypes as well; some, for example, attribute to tribals laziness and childlike innocence. Only certain attributes are singled out for tribal self-representation. Symbols of hunting such as the spear or bow and arrow, and of traditional music like frame drum and oboe types, are popular emblems for modern intertribal organizations and often appear as sacralized artifacts associated with tribal deities.

In fact, the cultural characteristics of tribals are highly diverse in South India. Since some tribes self-identify as Hindus, they are in many cases virtually indistinguishable from nontribals. There are some seventy-five distinct tribal populations in South India that appear in recent cultural surveys, such as Hockings's (1992), varying in number from only five (the Arandan in 1971) to nearly 160,000. Census lists do not always correspond with ethnographically determined cultural entities, and some tribal communities

argue that they have been historically undercounted. For example, whereas ethnographic literature suggests Kerala hosts at least forty-eight distinct tribal populations (25 percent of them represented in Kozhikode district), the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act of 1976 listed thirty-five. The same census schedules list forty-nine tribes in Karnataka, thirty-six in Tamilnadu, and thirty-three in Andhra Pradesh. Out of about 165 million people in the four southern states, about six million (3.5 percent) were listed as belonging to scheduled tribes.

Of the roughly seventy-five tribal populations described in the recent cultural survey, about twenty-five of these communities subsist almost entirely as cultivators or farm laborers; an additional twenty-five or so are cultivators or laborers who either are reported to have once been hunter-gatherers, or who continue to supplement their income/subsistence by hunting or collecting forest produce. It is common for tribals most closely connected to forest life to be employed as mahouts, or elephant drivers, especially, if not exclusively, in wildlife sanctuaries. Some tribals, castelike, specialize in particular occupations or engage in a lifestyle that features stone masonry, smithing, weaving, carpentry, animal husbandry, pastoralism, toddy-tapping, and even wrestling. Some tribals are nomadic; of these, a few still sleep in, or ritually employ, rock shelters. Other nomadic tribes, like certain Hindu castes and Muslim communities, wander the countryside, begging, telling fortunes, and acting as astrologers.

The ways in which tribals interact with each other and with surrounding Indian populations are diverse. Although tribes stereotypically are egalitarian, with weakly articulated pollution ideologies and strongly articulated forms of social solidarity, there are tribes such as the Todas in which gender divisions as well as grades of purity and pollution are strongly marked. Communities such as the Kotas perform rituals signifying unity of clan, village, and tribe, based frequently on demonstrating unity of the male population—men and women also dance separately from one another. This strongly contrasts with the practices of larger tribal populations in North India, such as the Mundas, among whom men and women participate in communal dance. Several tribes in South India, such as the Nāyakas (or Jēnu Kurumbas) and Malapaṇṭāram, are characterized by individual autonomy and focus on the conjugal family as the relevant corporate unit; in some cases, brothers tend to avoid one another and do not cooperate in subsistence activities.

Tribal/nontribal relations also vary. In the Nilgiri hills, for instance, one may observe a great deal of social and cultural interaction between Irula plantation workers and Tamilians of low caste who have been imported

as laborers from the plains. This has led to an "ever-increasing diffusion of Tamil non-Brahmin, low caste, or Harijan cultural traits among the Irulas . . ." (Zvelebil 1988: 83). Among more affluent tribes such as the Todas and Kotas, who have been able to secure land rights, diffusion of cultural traits has certainly occurred, but social relations are decidedly different. Kotas, for example, may hire untouchable laborers to till their fields; in some cases, they may also work side by side with them. Kotas do not ordinarily inter-dine with or invite these laborers into their houses. They also tend to limit the degree to which and times during which non-Kotas may enter their villages. But like the Gonds of Andhra Pradesh, restrictions on accepting food from outsiders and allowing them to enter their villages and homes have decreased in recent decades.

It has been suggested that, unlike scheduled castes, scheduled tribes are not considered to be polluting to other Hindus. Part of this stems from the custodial role some tribals have long played in remote temples; another reason may be the popular association of tribals with the oldest inhabitants of India—thus, as it were, bestowing a sort of sacredness on a presumed primevality. Śiva worship and Goddess worship are believed by some to be tribal in origin; thus, tribal priests at temples devoted to what are now explained to be manifestations of Śiva or Śakti appear to be "natural." However, tribals such as the Irulas of the Nilgiris also serve as priests for Vaiṣṇava temples. Inscriptions suggest that Irula temples for Rangasami and a variety of goddesses came under Irula control and were not, as it might be assumed, primordially Irula.

One of the more fascinating features of tribal social organization is the local system of interaction in a predominantly tribal area. Perhaps the most well known of these traditional systems is found in the Nilgiris, where well into the twentieth century there was an integrated, hierarchically arranged, sociocultural system in which Toda pastoralists provided milk products, hereditarily linked Badagas (an immigrant *jāti* cluster from what is now Karnataka) provided grain, and Kotas, their services as artisans (providing tools, jewelry, music, etc.). These communities occupy the Nilgiri plateau; less directly involved in the system were the Kurumbas, hunter-gatherers who live on the Nilgiri slopes. They provided services as magicians, watchmen, and providers of forest products. All of these ties were articulated and meaningful, ritually as well as socially. Thus, for example, until recent times, Todas felt a funeral was not proper unless accompanied by Kota music. Changes in demography, industrialization, and the homogenizing forces of a monetary economy, along with other factors, eventually led to the demise of this system, but traces of it still exist.

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SEE ALSO

Character Stereotypes

TRIBAL FOLKLORE, CENTRAL INDIA

The term "tribe" applied to certain ethnic groups in South Asia is a controversial one, originating as a product of British administrative jargon and nineteenth century orientalism. Tribal peoples are also referred to as "aboriginals" (*ādivāsīs* in Hindi-Urdu), implying that they are descendants of the original inhabitants of the land, those who occupied the Indian subcontinent before Aryan immigration from central Asia beginning about 1500 B.C.E. In India the term tribe has also received a certain bureaucratic legitimacy in the form of "Scheduled Tribe," as identified in Article 342 of the