



# Tribes and Tribal Cultures Reconsidered

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## Article Info

Volume 3 Issue 3  
Page Number : 156-163

Publication Issue :  
May-June-2020

## Article History

Accepted : 20 June 2020  
Published : 30 June 2020

## Abstract

People in today's society are interested in a variety of things, and they have differing perspectives about the nature of the cosmos and the things that exist within it, as well as how those things are related and work. These elements influence people's perspectives in such a way that any universally applicable understanding of the world order is unlikely. It is difficult for a metro dweller to picture trees and their utility because one's perception is limited by the surroundings to which one is exposed. Despite these variances, there is a common cultural classification. Each culture has its own set of economic, social, and political institutions, as well as religious beliefs, marriage and etiquette standards, and language and technology. No one goes hungry as long as food is accessible everywhere within a predetermined kinship circle, according to the oxiom.

Keywords : Social Development, Habitat Establishment, Progenitor, Generation, Communicate.

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1. According to palaeoanthropology, the earth was the exclusive province of full-time hunter-foragers until about 10,000 years ago, who nourished themselves with meat, fruits, seeds, roots, and tubers from the forest, and wore fibres and skins for clothing and shelter. Domestication of plants (agriculture) and animals (animal husbandry) marked the end of this period, which was built on millennia of human experience in planting the right kind of seeds in the right place, at the right time, and in the right way; storing seeds for consumption and future plantation for the right duration and in the right method; and rearing the right kind of animal. This period of cultural transformation is known as the "Neolithic revolution" by archaeologists (Childe 1936). These two activities, dubbed "the double barreled acquisition" by Kroeber (1923/1967 690), not only allowed humans to break free from their parasitic dependence on nature and become food producers, but also ushered in a period of social development, non-forest habitat establishment, and non-forest economies. Before Ethnography could document the process, it was completed in Europe. However, in a large part of the world, the process is still underway, and some people continue to cling to their hilly and forest habitats, viewing the forest as a safety net against food insecurity, in conjunction with their small and marginal farming as permitted by their habitats' geomorphological constraints. These are the individuals who have earned the moniker "tribes."

2. "There are tens of billions of known kinds of organic molecules," according to biology. However, only around fifty of them are used for life's necessities. For various functions, the same patterns are used cautiously and ingeniously over and over again. And at the very heart of life on Earth – the proteins that control cell chemistry and the nucleic acids that transmit hereditary instructions – we find that these molecules are largely same in all plants and animals. We share a common progenitor if we go back long enough" (Sagan 1980:24)

3. Nonhuman primates have no apparent dividing line between them and humans, according to research. Instead of isolating *Homo sapiens* from other mammals, their ability to learn, communicate with one another, transmit acquired behaviour from generation to generation, and possession of social as well as biological heredity binds them together. The distinctions between humans and animals in all of these areas, while significant, are primarily quantitative rather than qualitative. The human situation is such in each of these areas that it may rationally be expected to come from the orderly working out of subhuman tendencies (Linton 1936;78-79)

The current genetic and archaeological evidence, as well as findings from mitochondrial DNA research, suggest a single origin of modern humans in East Africa (Stringer 2003, Liu et al 2006 Balter 2011)

1. A region's social history, such as that of India, also appears to hint to a common human ancestor. For example, according to Manusmrti's social history of India, the first Indian civilization was made up of Brahmana Ksatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra, who were claimed to have manifested from the corpse of a "Purusa" (Rgveda X.90). Each was given the name varna. Varna membership was initially and ideally based on the quality and calling of persons in organisations, rather than on birth (guna and karma; Gita IV.12). The varnas solidified into isogamous but functionally interdependent groups as time passed. As a result of intermarriage among the varnas, the offspring's social position was decreased, leading to the development of new groupings known as sankara varnas. The formation of additional sankara varnas resulted through further intermarriage between the varnas and the sankara varnas, as well as among the sankara varnas (Manu: chapter X). Chandala, for example, is the offspring of a sudra father and a vaisya mother (Manu: X.12). In modern-day Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Odisha, and Tamilnadu, the chandala is a scheduled caste (GOI 2001: 5,22,47,58). The Adi Andhra community was founded as one of the scheduled castes of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Kerala, Odisha, and Tamilnadu (IBID: 5,22,27,47,58) may trace their ancestors back to a hypogamous union of a vaisya man and a Brahmana woman, resulting in the sankara varna vaideha (X.11), and then between a Vaideha father and a Nisada mother (X.36), the Nisada being the progeny of a hypergamous (Manu x.8). Meda (IBID 36, 8 and 13), a modern scheduled tribe in Karnataka, is the offspring of a vaideha father (a hypogamous offspring of vaisya father and Brahmana mother) and a Karavara mother (GOI IBID: 26). The origins of a chenchu community among Andhra Pradesh's major scheduled tribes could be traced back to cunchu forefathers who hunted (Manu ibid 48). Andhra and Meda were required to live on the edges of a village (x.36), and their occupation was hunting (x.48). Thus, among the communities listed in Manu, we find names of social structures that have been known as castes, scheduled tribes, and scheduled castes in modern times.

India (Bharata) is described as one country and one people in a poem in the Vishnu Purana (II:3.1):

2. As a result, most Indian societies, whether tribes or castes, can be viewed as socio-genetic extensions of the varnas. Throughout its lengthy history, Indian society has taken on the shape of a jumble of interdependent

isogamous groupings. As the name varna lost its strength and was eclipsed by Jati, each group became known as Jati. Until 1950, no Indian language had a counterpart for the word tribe.

3. Modern research appears to indicate to a shared heritage for the whole human population on the planet on all counts. As a result, there is no biological foundation for dividing humans into tribes and non-tribes. "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (Notes 2), a two-word remark made centuries ago by an Indian, has finally been proven by science.

1. As members of the same species, all human beings are physically identical. Individually, each person, on the other hand, has an own personality. Despite their differences, human beings are discovered to live in groups, overcoming their distinctions and each occupying a defined position in a web of inter-personal interactions. Culture is what holds them together as a group and distinguishes them from other similar groups.

2. Simply put, culture refers to a group of people's shared way of life. It is a set of beliefs and attitudes, as well as shared understandings and behavioural patterns, that facilitates peaceful group living and distinguishes a group from others. Culture is what distinguishes some Indians from Americans; Odias from Malayales; tribes from non-tribes, one tribe from another, or one community from another. Culture can be defined in a variety of ways. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) compiled 160 cultural definitions and discussed their applicability to anthropology. For more than a century, the finest definition of culture employed in anthropology has been a Tylor definition (1891). "Culture is that complex whole which comprises knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, conventions, and any other capacities and habits acquired by man as a member of society," the definition states. Three notions are intertwined in the definition: "a complicated totality," "acquired by man," and "as a member of society."

Culture is "a complicated totality," an integrated unit, not a collection of disparate elements. Material or physical or tangible (housing, equipment, clothing, etc.) and non-material or intangible (art, morals, law, conventions, and any other capacities and habits) components of any civilization constitute a whole, an integrated entity. All of this is founded on belief and knowledge. They are reflected in the persons in the group to which they belong's inter-personal behaviour.

Culture is "acquired by man," according to the second part of the definition. It implies that culture is unique to humans, that it is taught behaviour, and that it is not passed down via the generations. This is the reason why individuals act the way they do. One who was born and nurtured in an Odia-speaking family in Kataka speaks Odia differently than one who was raised in Brahmapur or Bhawaipatna. There is no biological basis for such differences.

"As a member of society" is the third section of the definition. It suggests that culture is shared among group members, and that culture is learned inside the group. As a result, culture is a collective phenomenon in which the individual is only a small role.

1. All living beings, including humans, are influenced by their physical, biotic, and social environments. Climate, rainfall patterns, and geomorphologic features are all part of the physical environment. All plants and animals are included in the biotic section. Interactions with members of one's own species are part of the social environment. The human part of the environment in each given location must adapt to these various environmental variables in order to preserve its survival. The conscious or unconscious plans of action carried out by individuals of a population in response to their surroundings, in order for all aspects of the environment to remain connected in a complex and systematic manner. The action plan represents a flexible strategy (Moran 1979:325 referred to by Howard 1989:8). Adaptive strategies are both biological and non-

biological. They can be temporary or permanent. Humans sweat when the temperature rises. This is a short-term plan. Long-term biological strategies entail changes to a population's physical traits as a whole. Organic evolution refers to changes that occur throughout generations.

2. Natural selection is the central mechanism of organic evolution. Natural selection, a process in which the best-adapted members of a population gain genetic dominance and are better able to survive and reproduce, is what connects biological changes with environmental changes. It is an important part of most species' adaptation strategies.

3. Physical alterations are not always required for pleasant living in a place. Humans have the ability to change their living habits, such as clothing, food, and shelter, to create a comfortable microenvironment for oneself. Some environments may be simpler to adapt to than others. It is not always easy to find a pleasant working atmosphere. But, unlike any other organism, culture allows humans to adapt to practically any earthly environment and survive almost everywhere. Human societies have learned to utilise specific environments/surroundings for survival and wealth through adaptation tactics. Technology, social organisation, and ideology are three interrelated characteristics of culture that they rely on.

The skills and knowledge that humans use to shape or manufacture objects and use resources are the most visible components of an adaptive strategy. The manner in which people organise themselves socially are also crucial. An important social factor of an adaptation strategy is gender and age division of labour. The division of labour in a community reflects the society's adaptive strategy and available resources. The ideological component of adaptive strategy is made up of a people's values and beliefs, as well as a cultural area that directs individuals on how to live in a world that is not based on observable facts. People's interactions with the environment are influenced by their beliefs about the nature of the cosmos. Many societies around the world, particularly those known as tribes, emphasise harmonious relationships with their natural environment in their religious beliefs. Mine diggers and industrialists are unconcerned when such communities encourage the well-being of plants and animals in their neighbourhood.

4. People in today's world have a wide range of interests; they hold differing viewpoints on the nature of the cosmos and its contents; and they hold differing viewpoints on how those things are related and work. These elements influence people's perspectives in such a way that any universally applicable understanding of the world order is unlikely. The circumstances in which one is exposed restrict one's vision. Forests and their value are difficult to imagine for a city resident. Despite these disparities, civilizations share a common denominator. Every culture has its own economic, social, and political structures, as well as religious beliefs, marriage and etiquette standards, and language and technology.

5. The environment's deterministic role in shaping culture is universal. As a result, any civilization is constrained by time and location. Communities that live near hills and woods and augment their food supplies through hunting, fishing, and foraging have a worldview that sees them as inextricably linked to nature. They feel obligated to protect the natural order because they are a vital part of it.

1. What distinguishes tribal cultures from other cultures? Yes, they are similar in the sense that each culture is distinct from the other, as each is a product of its unique environment. Despite their disparities, certain cultural universals exist. Murdock (1945:123) offers a list of cultural universals, or solutions to life's difficulties that can be found in one form or another in all civilizations (Note 3).

2. Do tribal cultures have a disadvantage over non-tribal cultures? The answer is a resounding "No." Similarly, no culture is superior or inferior to any other. The context of a culture's occurrence must be considered when

evaluating it. Franz Boas (1858-1942), Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University in the United States (1899-1942), is credited with liberating anthropology from ethnocentric moorings and advocating for all civilizations to be treated equally, each as a unique entity with its own integrity. Each culture's history, according to Boas, is unique. Whatever a culture is today, it was formed as a result of its own evolution. As a result, it cannot be compared to a civilization with a different history. Culture is ever-changing. Every culture evolves over time, some more quickly than others. Some cultures change as a result of external pressures that others do not. As a result, each civilization has its unique story to tell. As a result, cultures cannot be compared on a scale of excellence when ranks are determined by a single culture's norms. There is no set model to which a culture must adhere. No culture is superior to, inferior to, or even equal to another. Each culture, tribal or non-tribal, has its own distinct character, which is effective in the framework of its own existential situation.

3. As a result, there is no way to categorise cultures as tribal or non-tribal. Every culture has a community and/or geo-ethnic foundation. Tribal cultures, on the other hand, have specific characteristics that draw admiration and respect.

Kinship, a system of classifying and categorising one's own relatives, is the foundation of all societies. It suggests that the group's main relationships are organised in a methodical, regular, and predictable manner. In all societies, it is the foundation of social organisation. Tribal societies, on the other hand, are "kinship oriented," with kinship serving as the guiding factor in all social relationships. "... it can be used to underpin economic interactions like as food distribution and task assignment, as well as political interactions such as the allocation of authority over other members of society....Kinship can refer to a group of people's relationship with the land they live on, as well as the manner in which land and other goods are handed from one member of the group to another. It has the power to determine who is eligible to marry whom. It offers the context in which new members are educated about the culture of the society. ....kinship has an impact on all aspects of social conduct....." (IBID:220-21 fried) No one goes hungry among the Karbi of Assam as long as food is available everywhere within a recognised kinship circle (Note 4)

In tribal societies, the effect of plants and animals can be plainly seen. The majority of tribal communities consider their physical surroundings to be alive. They don't distinguish between human-human, human-plant, and human-animal relationships. This kinship is expressed in the tribal idea, known as totemism, that natural objects, both animate and inanimate, are viewed as ancestors. A totem can be a living thing, such as a plant or animal, or even an inanimate object. Groups that identify with them make sure they are not harmed. The group's well-being is linked to the well-being of the totemic object. This idea is critical in keeping flora and animals in a certain area, hence preserving eco-diversity (Ratha and Behera 1990). The Kutia and Dhulia tribal people, for example, spread over the Andhra Pradesh-Odisha border, regard their physical landscape as a constellation of Gods and goddesses. The hill, the forest, and the river are all gods. The Naga tradition opposes indiscriminate tree felling. The wood used to construct houses is not used as a source of energy (Hutton 1921:190). South Odisha's Sora never harms edible fruit-bearing plants.

Agricultural operations and house construction are cooperative ventures within the village in some communities. When someone requires assistance, a worker from each household is dispatched. The participants are treated to a drink of rice beer by the mistress of the household once the assignment is completed. The ritual is known as Husari among the Assamese Bodo Kachari (Ratha 1969). It is known as rida among the Kandha of Kandhamal, Odisha.

Women in tribal communities have a great deal of autonomy. A matrilineal and matrilineal communal property goes from mother to daughter chosen by the parents among the Garo of Meghalaya. The youngest daughter inherits the home property among the Khasi and Jaintia.

Children are also lavished with attention. The Sora custom forbids physical punishment of the child.

Tribal communities, whom the pompous ethnocentric English speakers refer to as savages, have such a value orientation.

Notes :

1. Uttaram yat samudrasya, himadreshchaiva daksinam !  
Varsam tad Bharatam nama Bharati yatra santatih !!

(Bharat is the name of the country to the north of the sea and south of the Himalayas, and Bharati is the name of its progeny.)

The following aphorism from Barhaspathya sastra, written in the Middle Ages, conveys the same sentiment.

Himalayam samarabhya yavadindu sarovaram

Tam devanirmitam desham Hindusthanam prachaksate !!

2. Ayam nijoparveti gananam laghu cetanam  
Udaracaritanantu Vasudhyaiba Kutumbakam

(Mean-spirited people are only interested in differences. The world is one family for the kindhearted)

3. Different types of behaviour shared by all human beings, regardless of where they originate from.

1. Age grading, 2. Athletics, 3. Bodily adornment, 4. Calendar
5. Cleanliness training, 6. Community Organization, 7. Cooking
8. Cooperative Labour, 9. Cosmology, 10. Courtship, 11. Dancing 12. Decorative Art, 13. Divination, 14. Division of labour
15. Dream interpretation, 16. Education, 17. Eschatology, 18. Ethics 19. Ethno botany, 20. Etiquette, 21. Faith healing, 22. Family,
23. Feasting, 24. Fire making, 25. Folklore, 26. Food taboos,
27. Funeral rites, 28. Games, 29. Gestures, 30. Gift giving
31. Government, 32. Greetings, 33. Hair styles, 34. Hospitality
35. Housing, 36. Hygiene, 37. Incest taboos, 38. Inheritance rules 39. Joking, 40. Kin groups, 41. Kin terminology 42. Language 43. Law, 44. Luck superstitions, 45. Magic, 46. Marriage,
47. Meal times, 48. Medicine 49. Modesty, 50. Mourning,
51. Music, 52. Mythology, 53. Minerals, 54. Obstetrics
55. Penal sanctions, 56. Personal names, 57. Population Policy
58. Post natal care, 59. Pregnancy usages, 60. Property rights,
61. Propitiation of supernatural beings, 62. Puberty customs

63. Religious ritual, 64. Residence rules, 65. Sexual restrictions, 66. Soul concepts, 67. Status differentiation, 68. Surgery  
69. Tool making, 70. Trade, 71. Visiting, 72. Weaning,  
73. Weatsher control

4. In October 1964, as a lecturer at Anthropology at Gauhati University, Dr Krushna Chandra Panda was conducting field work training for a group of students in a village called Pan Ingti Gaonl, near Howrahghat in Assam's Karbi Anglon district, which is home to the Karbi alias Mikir tribal community. They used to visit the village in the mornings from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m., and in the afternoons from 3-6 p.m., from our camp in the Block Development Office, some two kilometres away. While assisting a student in interviewing an informant in his courtyard, He noticed a middle-aged guy entering the courtyard with an empty basket. When the informant, the owner, and the head of the household saw the man, they saluted him and brought him inside the house. They left shortly after for the camp and returned at 3 p.m. to the same location. He saw the guest leave, followed by the mistress of the household carrying the basket (provided by visitor) filled with paddy, as they continued with the conversation stopped in the morning. As they leave the house, she hands the basket to the visitor and bows respectfully. The basket is carried away by the visitor.

When they inquired further, they discovered that the guest was an affinal relative. It is common in the community for someone who is short on food to go to a relative who has more resources and bring an empty basket to show that the visitor is in need of food. It is not necessary to express it verbally. The visitor is handled with respect and fed a delicious meal. The visitor's basket is packed with paddy as he prepares to leave. Outside the house, the mistress of the household carries it and respectfully passes it over to the visitor, bowing down as they part. "No one goes hungry as long as food is available anywhere within a defined kinship circle," the axiom states.

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