


A person on the margin of a situation or a group has very little power, importance or influence. To marginalise means to make a person or a group of people unimportant and powerless in an unfair way. In the social environment certain groups of people or communities have the experience of being excluded or not acceptable or marginalised. Marginalisation can be because of poverty, stereotypes, difference of customs, or religions. This sense of difference and exclusion leads to communities not having access to common resources and opportunities. They experience a sense of disadvantage and powerlessness socially, economically and politically.

The caste was initially the name of the occupation of a person. Gradually, some people emerged as rulers. These rulers and their advisors made the divisions of higher and lower castes. Members of the so-called lower castes were deprived of basic human rights. Being poor and powerless they were moved to the outskirts of the villages or forests. Thus, they became backward and ignorant. The people who have been denied social and economic rights have been recognised as **marginalised** and the Indian Constitution makes special provisions for their benefit and progress and some special privileges have been provided to them.

### Marginalised Groups

The marginalised groups in our country are the Scheduled Castes (SC), the Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC) and minorities. There is an official list of each. A person's status as an SC, ST, OBC or minority will be recognised only if the name of his/her caste, tribe, class or religion features in the respective list. Each list has been amended from time to time. According to the census of 2001 the SC were about 16 percent and ST about 8 percent of the total population of India. The other name for Scheduled Castes is Dalits and for Scheduled Tribes is Adivasis. People who are not covered in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes list, even though they are weaker sections of the society and have been subjected to discrimination are known as Other



Backward Classes. The Mandal Commission (1980), extended them as 52 percent of the total population of India. Minorities may be of various types—religious, linguistic etc. They are those communities who have less number of their own sect and religion in a particular region or regions. According to the census of 2001, they are about 18 percent of the total population of India. In this chapter, you will read about two communities — Adivasis and Minorities — that are considered marginalised in India today. You shall read about more marginalised groups, like dalits and women in the next chapter.

### **Scheduled Tribes or Adivasis**

---

Scheduled Tribes is the term used for Adivasis by the Indian government in various official documents. There is an official list of tribes. The term 'Adivasis' literally means 'original inhabitants'. These are communities who lived, and may often continue to live, in close association with forests. Adivasi societies are radically different from communities organised around principles of jati-varna (caste) or those that were ruled by kings. They practise a range of their tribal religions. They worship a number of different kinds of spirits. The village-spirits are often worshipped at specific sacred groves within the village boundary while the spirits of the ancestors are usually worshipped at home. Besides, nature-spirits like mountain-spirits, river-spirits, animal-spirits residing in various sites in the landscape are also worshipped. Adivasi religions have influenced dominant religions of the empire around them and, in turn, are influenced by them. For example, the Jagannath Cult of Orissa and Shakti and Tantric traditions in Bengal and Assam. During the nineteenth century many Adivasis were converted to Christianity.

Adivasis are not a homogeneous population : there are over 500 different Adivasi groups in India. Adivasis have their own languages. Santhali language has the largest number of speakers. Many books have been published in Santhali language. Most of Adivasi languages are radically different from Sanskrit. They are possibly as old as Sanskrit. Adivasi languages have often deeply influenced the formation of 'mainstream' Indian languages, like Bengali.

#### **Adivasis : The Forest People**

Adivasis have been often called 'the forest people'. Forests covered the major part of our country till the eighteenth century and the Adivasis had a deep knowledge of, access to, as well as control over most of these vast tracts at least till the middle of the nineteenth century. Metal ores like iron and copper, and gold and silver, coal and diamonds, invaluable timber, most medicinal herbs and, animal products (wax, lac, honey) and animals themselves (elephants — the mainstay of imperial armies), all came from the forests. Adivasis used around 10,000 plant species —approximately 8000 species for medicinal purposes, 325 as pesticides, 425 as gums, resins and dyes, 550 as fibres, 3500 as food. This meant that they were not ruled by

large states and empires. Instead, all empires and settled civilisations heavily depended on Adivasis for the crucial access to forest resources essential for development.

### Processes of Marginalisation

**Stereotyping** : The settled people always thought themselves as civilised and the Adivasis as exotic, primitive and backward. Because of this prejudice, Adivasis are portrayed in very stereotypical way—in colourful costumes, headgear and through their dancing. Because of difference in dress and culture people often create stereotypes about them. They are believed to be resistant to change or new ideas. Stereotyping these communities leads to people discriminating against them.



*Different tribal communities at social functions*

**Development of the Country at the Cost of the Adivasis** : Forest lands have been cleared for timber and to get land for agriculture and industry. Adivasis have also lived in areas that are rich in minerals and other natural resources. These are taken over for mining and other large industrial projects. Many of India's most important mining and industrial centres are located in Adivasi areas — Jamshedpur, Rourkela, Bokaro and Bhilai among others. More than 50 percent of persons displaced due to mines and mining projects are tribals. Huge tracts of their lands have also gone under the waters of hundreds of dams built in independent India.

In the North-east, the tribal lands remain highly militarised and war-torn. Indian government has declared many forest areas as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. India has 54 national parks and 372 wildlife sanctuaries covering 1,09,652 sq km. The tribals originally lived in these areas but were evicted from. If they continue to stay in these forests, they are encroachers legally. Forest policies and political force applied by the State and private industry have increasingly forced Adivasis out of their traditional homelands. Losing their lands and access to the forest means that tribals lose their main sources of livelihood and food. They also lost their traditions and customs—a way of living and being. They lost their farming land, cremation grounds, temples, wells and ponds. All government and private industries became possible because of the cheap labour of the Adivasis.



*Plucking tea leaves*

**Adivasi Labourers at Very Low Wages** : Forced to migrate and live as workers in plantations, construction sites, in industries and as domestic workers they are employed for very low wages. They, thus, get caught in a cycle of poverty and deprivation. They do not get nourishing food. And they cannot pay their children's school expenses. 45 percent of tribal groups in rural areas and 35 percent in urban areas live below the poverty line.



*The British directing the labourers to work*

From the 1830s onwards, Adivasis were deceived by sending them to plantations in India, Mauritius, the Carribean and Australia. The story of this



migration is full of extreme hardship, torture, heartbreak and death. For example, in the nineteenth century alone five lakh Adivasis had perished in these migrations. Continuous work for long hours, abuses, beating and other forms of torture, very low wages, these were just a part of their pains.

I shall strive for a Constitution, which will release India from all thralldom and patronage ..... I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people, an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. There can be no room in such an India for the curse of untouchability or the curse of the intoxicating drinks and drugs. Women will enjoy the same rights as men..... I shall be satisfied with nothing else.

— Mahatma Gandhi

### Minorities and Marginalisation

The term 'minority' is most commonly used to refer to communities that are numerically small in relation to the rest of the population. Minority may be religious or linguistic. The culture of the majority influences the way in which society and government (executive) might express themselves. In such cases, small number can be a disadvantage and lead to marginalisation. Thus, safeguards in the Constitution are needed to protect minority communities against the possibility of being culturally dominated by the majority. They also protect them against any discrimination and disadvantages (political power and access to sources) that they may face. The Constitution provides these safeguards because it is committed to protecting India's cultural diversity and promoting equality as well as justice.

According to the census of India, 2001, the percentages of various religious communities in India are — Hindu 80.5, Muslim 13.4, Christian 2.3, Sikh 1.9, Buddhist 0.8, Jain 0.4, All other 0.6, No religion 0.1. However, Muslims are considered to be a marginalised community in India today because in comparison to other communities, they have over the years been deprived of the benefits of socio-economic development with regard to basic amenities (pucca houses, electricity and piped water), literacy and public employment. In 2005, committee chaired by Justice Rajindar Sachar reported that on a range of social, economic and educational indicators the situation of the Muslim community is comparable to that of other marginalised communities.

Marginalisation is a complex phenomena. No one is marginalised all the time in exactly the same way. There are different reasons for each of these communities being marginalised. Each experiences marginalisation in different ways. Marginalisation results in having a low status and not having equal access to education and other resources. Marginalised communities want to maintain their cultural distinctiveness while having access to rights, development and other opportunities. Yet, the lives of marginalised people can and do change. It requires a variety of strategies, measures and safeguards to redress the situation of marginalisation.

 **Key Words**

- » Marginalise : to make a group of people unimportant and powerless in an unfair way.
- » Adivasis : original inhabitants.
- » Mainstream : people, communities considered to be dominant or powerful group and their language.
- » Displaced : forced or compelled to move from their homes for big development projects including dams, mining etc.
- » Militarised : an area with considerable strength of the armed forces.
- » Nourishing : food having all the elements of nutrition in suitable quantities.

## SUMMARY

- ▶ In the social environment, certain groups of people or communities have the experience of being excluded or not acceptable or marginalised.
- ▶ Marginalisation can be because of poverty, stereotypes, difference of customs or religions.
- ▶ The people who have been denied social and economic rights have been recognised as marginalised and the Indian Constitution makes special provisions for their benefit and progress and some special privileges have been provided to them.
- ▶ The marginalised groups in our country are the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and Minorities.
- ▶ Adivasis are communities who lived, and may often continue to live, in close association with forests.
- ▶ There are over 500 different Adivasi groups in India. They have their own languages.
- ▶ Adivasis had a deep knowledge of, access to, as well as control over most of the vast forests at least till the middle of the nineteenth century.
- ▶ The empires and settled civilisations depended upon the forests and Adivasis for metal ores (iron, copper, gold, silver), coal and diamonds, timber, medicinal herbs, wax, lac, honey and elephants.
- ▶ Adivasis were displaced in large numbers as their lands were acquired by the government for mining, building dams, military camps, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries.
- ▶ From 1830s, Adivasis were deceived by sending them to plantations. There they had to work non-stop for long hours, at very low wages with abuses and torture.
- ▶ Muslims are considered to be a marginalised community in India today because they have been deprived of the benefits of socio-economic development.

## Exercise Time

### A. Fill in the blanks :

1. Marginalisation can be because of poverty, stereotypes, difference of customs or \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Minorities may be of various types—religious, \_\_\_\_\_ etc.
3. The village-spirits are worshipped at specific sacred groves within the village \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Most of Adivasi languages are \_\_\_\_\_ different from Sanskrit.
5. Adivasis are believed to be \_\_\_\_\_ to change or new ideas.

### B. Match the Following :

- |                            |                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Sachar Committee Report | a. Scheduled Castes |
| 2. Mandal Commission       | b. Muslims          |
| 3. Dalits                  | c. Scheduled Tribes |
| 4. Adivasis                | d. Minority         |
| 5. Sikh                    | e. OBC              |



**C. Write true (T) or False (F) against the following statements in given brackets :**

1. Minorities in India are not marginalised groups.
2. Marginalised means excluded or not acceptable.
3. Adivasis had a deep knowledge of and access to the vast forests.
4. Adivasis migrated because of their illiteracy.
5. Adivasis were displaced because of building of dams, mining projects etc.

**D. Define the following :**

1. Marginalised
2. Adivasis
3. Displaced
4. Minorities

**E. Answer in one word or one phrase :**

1. How many different Adivasi groups are there in India ?
2. Which Adivasi language has the largest number of speakers ?
3. What is the official name for the dalits ?
4. Which committee reported on the condition of the Muslims in India ?
5. Which commission reported about the OBC ?

**F. Answer these question briefly :**

1. What is marginalisation ?
2. How were Adivasis marginalised ?
3. Why Adivasis are becoming increasingly marginalised ?
4. What stereotyping is created about the Adivasis ?
5. Who are Adivasis ? How are they different in their religious beliefs ?

**G. Answer these questions in detail :**

1. Describe the different marginalised groups.
2. Describe the process of marginalisation of the Adivasis.

## PROJECT WORK

1. In your own city or village, list the sub-castes whom you would think marginalised groups.
2. List five products that you use at home which come from the forest.