

# SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE TRIBALS

M.A.(HISTORY) SEM-4 PAPER ELECTIVE COURSE(EC):1

MD. NEYAZ HUSSAIN  
PROFESSOR & HOD  
PG DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
M.B.R.R.V. PRASAD SINGH COLLEGE  
VKSU, ARA (BIHAR)

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- ▶ Rural India had been inhabited by the tribal population from the beginning. The tribal communities lived in relative seclusion and isolation for centuries and in varying states of economy. In spite of their contacts with the non-tribals, they maintained their separate identity. Each tribal community maintained its own socio-religious and cultural life and its political and economic organisations.
  - ▶ Until the arrival of the British in the tribal areas, the main means of production and subsistence of or the tribals



were land and forests. The forests were of great significance for the tribals all over India. They had customary rights to use the minor forest products. Firewood, flowers, fruits, leaves, honey, housing material, edible nuts, medical herbs etc. formed the essential items of the daily requirements of tribals. They used forest products for food, constructing houses and shifting cultivation. They grazed their cattle in the forests. The forests provided them with security. About the significance of the forests for the tribals Kr. Suresh Singh says: "They (Tribal communities) can, therefore, subsist on



conditions in which members of these more civilized race could not exist. When the crop fails, jungle fruits and vegetables of all kinds (sag) are valuable reserve. With the help of these they succeed in teething over the period of stress which could play havoc. “

- ▶ In addition, the tribals practised weaving, basket making, fishing, hunting and food gathering. Their instruments of labour and livelihood were not very developed. Bows and arrows were the main instruments of self-defence and hunting.

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- ▶ The tribal communities had their respective chiefs and clan councils (panehayat) to look after them and manage their social, religious, economic and political affairs. Each tribal paid some amount of land produce to his respective chief. But it was not a legal right; it was a moral requirement. The chiefs were given voluntary contribution in kind and a few days of free labour every year by the people.