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Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups

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Why is in news?

The Union Cabinet has approved the wide-ranging Rs 24,104-crore tribal welfare scheme announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi earlier this month. The Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN) is one of the largest Central schemes and the largest targeting the tribal community in terms of outlay.

About the scheme:

The scheme aims to **provide a number of facilities** to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

These include **housing, drinking water and sanitation, access to education, health and nutrition, road and telecom connectivity, and sustainable livelihood opportunities.**

The scheme provides for around 4.9 lakh pucca houses at a cost of Rs 2.39 lakh per house; 500 hostels at Rs 2.75 crore per unit; 2,500 Anganwadi centres; installation of mobile towers in 3,000 villages; and 8,000 km of road connectivity, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs said.

The Union Cabinet cleared the scheme with the Centre's share is Rs 15,336 crore and states will contribute Rs 8,768 crore. Nine ministries will be involved in carrying out the interventions.

The government will make Rs 15,000 available under the **Development Action Plan for Scheduled Tribes** to implement the mission over the next three years.

The mission was **first mentioned in Union Budget speech of 2023-24.**

It also entails the Ministry of Ayush setting up wellness centres in these areas as per existing norms, and the extension of Ayush facilities to PVTG habitations through mobile medical units. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship will also enable skill and vocational training in PVTG habitations.

The norms of certain schemes will be relaxed to cover these remote habitations.

In **addition to the 11 interventions**, saturation of **other government schemes** such as PMJAY health insurance scheme, the Sick Cell Disease Elimination programme, TB Elimination programme, 100% childhood immunisation, PM Surakshit Matrutva to ensure free of cost antenatal care to all women, PM Matru Vandana Yojana for cash benefit to mothers, PM Poshan, and PM Jan Dhan Yojana.

PVTG:

PVTGs, earlier known as primitive tribal groups, are a sub-classification of the Scheduled Tribes (STs) or a section of STs who are considered more vulnerable than regular STs.

The PVTG list was created by the government with the **aim to improve on priority the living standards** of endangered tribal groups.

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According to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, **75 PVTGs are spread across 18 states and Union Territories of Andaman and Nicobar** Islands have been categorised as PVTGs, which are backward in social, economic and education indicators.

The 75 PVTGs, with a population of about 28 lakh, live in 22,544 villages across 18 states and Union Territories in India.

As **per the 2011 Census**, India has a total Scheduled Tribe population of 10.45 crore.

Odisha has the largest population of PVTGs at 8.66 lakh, followed by Madhya Pradesh at 6.09 lakh and Andhra Pradesh (which then included Telangana) at 5.39 lakh.

The PVTGs are the more vulnerable groups among tribal communities and they usually have distinctive culture, live in geographical isolation, and are shy of contact with other communities.

Criteria for identification of PVTGs:

Government of India follows the following criteria for identification of PVTGs.

Pre-agricultural level of technology

Low level of literacy

Economic backwardness

A declining or stagnant population.

Dhebar Commission:

The **Dhebar Commission (1960-1961)** stated that within Scheduled Tribes there existed an inequality in the rate of development.

During the **fourth Five Year Plan** a sub-category was created within Scheduled Tribes to identify groups that considered to be at a lower level of development.

This was **created based on the Dhebar Commission report** and other studies. This sub-category was named "Primitive tribal group".

In 2006, the Government of India renamed the PTGs as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

PVTGs have some basic characteristics -they are mostly homogenous, with a small population, relatively physically isolated, social institutes cast in a simple mould, absence of written language, relatively simple technology and a slower rate of change etc.

Issues Faced by PVTGs:

Insufficient baseline surveys: The Anthropological Survey of India observed that out of 75 PVTGs, baseline surveys exist for about 40 groups, even after declaring them as PVTGs. This has hindered implementation of welfare schemes directed at the communities.

Outdated PVTG list: It has led to overlapping and repetition of names. For instance, the list contains synonyms of the same group such as the Mankidia and the Birhor in Odisha, both of which refer to the same group.

Population: Quite a few PVTGs still face stagnation in population growth such as the Birhor in central India. Some are declining like the Onge and Andamanese.

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Loss of their traditional livelihoods, habitats and customary resource due to industrial projects, tourist activities, the apathy of forest bureaucracy, climate change, deforestation and so on.

Poverty: It is a common phenomenon among most of the PVTGs which lead to hunger, malnutrition, ill-health, illiteracy etc.

Education: The educational status of these groups especially women is very low compared to other tribal groups.

Health: The health indicators such as Infant Mortality Rate (IMR); malnutrition; and certain chronic diseases like Leukemia, Skin disorders etc. are very high and common.

Infrastructure: Lack of safe drinking water, poor sanitary conditions, difficult terrain and unavailability of health and nutritional services.

Non-recognition and lack of awareness of their rights have made them more vulnerable.

Government Schemes for PVTGs:

As a developmental intervention by the government, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs administers the “**Development of Especially Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)” Scheme**, only for PVTG Tribes. It intends to provide comprehensive support for the socio-economic betterment of primitive tribal groups.

It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** having a provision of **100% Central assistance to 18 states and Union territory of Andaman & Nicobar Islands**.

The scheme of Development of PVTGs **aims at socio-economic development of PVTGs** in a comprehensive manner, while retaining their culture and heritage.

As a part of the scheme, State Governments undertakes projects that are tailored to cater to sectors like education, health and livelihood schemes for the PVTGs.

Additionally, PVTGs are given preference under the **Special Central Assistance (SCA) to Tribal Sub-Scheme (TSS)**, Grants under **Article 275(1)** of the Indian Constitution, Grants-in-Aid to Voluntary Organizations working for the Welfare of Schedule Tribes, and Strengthening of Education among ST Girls in Low Literacy Districts schemes.

Legislation associated with PVTGs:

The **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA)** has a special section regarding the 75 PVTGs and the Act recognises forest and habitat rights of PVTGs.

The **Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA)**: It extends Scheduled Areas of India under the purview of national framework of Panchayat. However, this act is not applicable to Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram and certain other areas including scheduled and tribal areas.

The Sentinelese and other aboriginal tribes of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands are protected under **The Andaman and Nicobar (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956**

Under the **Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, 1963**, the Andaman & Nicobar Islands are a “Restricted Area” in which foreigners with a restricted area permit (RAP) can stay.

The habitats of the PVTGs of Andaman and Nicobar Island is protected Tribal Reserve under the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956

International Conventions:

Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO): It advocated integrationist approach for development of tribal communities. **India ratified the convention.**

Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), **1989**: The convention advocated non-intervention approach for protection and conservation of tribal communities. **India has not ratified the convention.**

About Scheduled Tribes (STs):

STs constitute **around 8.6% of the India's total population** and almost 11.3% of the total rural population.

Despite the increase in literacy rate among STs from 8.5% in 1961 to 59% in 2011, and the fact that the **Right to Education Act, 2009** makes it mandatory that all children between the age of 6 and 14 be provided free and compulsory education, the literacy rate in STs is still below the national average of India.

In the case of tribals, dropout rate (leaving school in between) is still very high – 35% in Classes I to V; 55% in Classes I to VIII; and 71% in Classes I to X in 2010-11.

As per the **2014 UNICEF-sponsored South Asia** regional study report named “All Children in School by 2015”, economic and socio-cultural factors are the reason behind the low education in certain groups in India, especially SCs, STs and Muslims.

The **India Human Development Survey** shows that the incidence of poverty is highest among the STs (50%), followed by the SCs (32%), and then the Muslims (30.5%).

Constitutional and Legal Provisions related to Tribes in India:

Constitutional Provisions:

As per Census of 1931, Schedule tribes were **termed as "backward tribes"** living in the "Excluded" and "Partially Excluded" areas.

The **Government of India Act of 1935** called for the 1st time for representatives of "backward tribes" in provincial assemblies.

The **Constitution does not define the criteria for recognition of Scheduled Tribes** and hence the definition contained in 1931 Census was used in the initial years after independence.

However, **Article 366** of the Constitution **only provides process to define Scheduled Tribes**: “Scheduled Tribes means such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purpose of this Constitution.”

Article 342(1): The **President may** with respect to **any State or Union Territory**, and where it is a State, **after consultation with the Governor, by a public notification**, specify the tribes or tribal communities or part of or groups within tribes or tribal communities as Scheduled Tribe in relation to that State or Union Territory.

The **5th schedule of the Constitution** lays out the provisions for Administration and Control of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes in states other than Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

The **6th schedule** deals with the administration of the tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

Legal Provisions:

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Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 against untouchability

Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989

Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996

Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006

Conclusion:

Each of the 75 PVTGs has an innate connection with their land and habitats. So, protection of their land and resources must be at the very heart of any policy or development initiatives concerning PVTGs. Some of them are even on the verge of extinction such as Shompens and Jarawas of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Abhuj Maria of Chhattisgarh etc. Thus, the PVTGs are in need of special and undivided attention on priority for their protection and support in view of their fragile living conditions; prevailing socio-economic vulnerability and diminishing numbers.