CHAPTER – 1
INTRODUCTION

India has the second largest tribal population of the world next to African
countries. As many as two hundred and fifty tribal groups live in isolated regions of the
country. These tribal groups are speaking about 105 dialects and 225 subsidiary
languages1.

‘Tribe’ is a term used to describe certain human social groups. The encyclopedia
of America describes the tribes as, “Tribe, trib, a group of families who have a feeling of
community through occupying a common territory and following similar customs”2.

The first use of the word ‘tribe’ in English was referred to the Hebrews. Until
about 1000 BC the Hebrews were loosely organised into 12 groups each of which traced
its descent to one of the 12 sons of Jacob. These tribes were, called the twelve tribes of
Israel. The term tribe was soon extended to mean any group of families who traced
themselves to a common ancestor3.

Tribal members usually have a feeling of being related to each other and of being
separate and distinct from other tribes. A tribe is generally composed of small groups
such as families, clans, bands, or villages. Tribal organisations exist mainly among
primitive people, people without writing or technological advances. Primitive tribes live
mainly in remote areas of South America, Africa, Asia, Australia and the islands of the
central and southern Pacific Ocean4.

The word ‘tribe’ is derived from a Latin root meaning the three divisions, into
which the early Romans were grouped5. Etymologically the term ‘tribe’ derives its origin
from the word ‘tribing’ meaning three divisions.

Many European nations established colonies in Africa, Asia and North and South
America in the beginning of 1400s. The Europeans described the people of these areas as
tribes. In course of time the word tribe acquired the broad meaning of ‘Primitive Group’.
An idea of the term ‘Primitive’ can also be heard from the societies studied by the
anthropologists. These are by and large characterised by absence of written language,
relatively simple technology, social institutions being cast in a simple mould, small in number, relative isolation and slower rate of change.

Anthropologists have added other characteristics for definition of tribe, though different scholars emphasise different features. Many define a tribe as a group with a sense of shared identity and ties of ancestry, customs, language and territory.

In prehistoric times, people lived in small groups such as families and bands. Tribes probably developed as groups in the same territory joined together, usually to fight against the enemies and to hunt. As civilisation developed tribes were gradually organized into large formal political units such as the city states, empires, and nations for example Ainu as Eskimo, Dyaks as Zulus and Bushmen as Pygmies.

It is believed that India derives its name Bharat from the mighty, Bharata tribe. The Aryans entered into India from the Northwest had conflict with the non-Aryans, who were living there, and called them as ‘Dasyus’. A section of non-Aryans who escaped from the Aryans continued to live independently in the remote hills and forest. They are believed to be the forerunner of the various tribes in India.

It is clear that the aborigines of the Indian sub continent do not form an uniform race. They entered into India from various regions of Asia, and they belonged to different races. The later Vedic period is marked by working of the twin process of emerging Hinduism, Aryanisation of the tribes and tribalisation of the Aryan. The two great epics Ramayana and Mahabharatha refer the tribes such as the ‘Sudras’, ‘Abhiras’, ‘Dravidians’, ‘Pulindas’ and ‘Sabaras’ or ‘Savras’.

In the Mauryan period, Atavik Rajyas of forest kingdoms were in existence. Samudragupta is said to have brought under his rule a number of such people. Some of these communities were defeated by the advanced people and driven to the hills and forest area. These communities were called as tribal castes by Hutton.

The tribals are believed to be the earlist among the inhabitants of the country. Ancestors of most of the inhabitants of our country came from outside. The Negrioe, Proto-Austroloid, Indo-European and Mongoloid are the few races that entered into India and later they mingled together for centuries and laid the foundation of Indian culture.
These tribes lived in isolation for centuries with culture, tradition and belief called 'tribals'. They are known in different names such as 'Vanyajathi', 'Vanavasi' and 'Adivasi'.

In 1901 census the indigenous people were classified as 'Animists', in 1911 census as the 'tribal Animists' in 1931 census as "Tribes" and 1941 census as 'Tribes'. Apart from these a few communities in some of these census were enumerated as 'Criminal Tribes'⁹.

Racially the tribal communities in India are classified into three groups viz Negritos in South India, Austroloids in Central India and Mongoloids in North and North Eastern part of India.

There are three main zones of tribal concentration in India. The first extends from the borders of Gujarat up to Orissa. It has two thirds of the entire tribal population of the country. The other zone is located in North, it co-terminous with our borders with Nepal, China, Burma and Bangaladesh. In the third zone, South India, their numbers are very small and are comparatively very backward¹⁰.

During the British rule the government largely maintained a policy of isolation towards the tribals, as the British administrators did not want the tribal communities to mingle with others, because they could join with the National movement. The British, followed an indirect rule in the tribal area. Under this policy the areas predominantly populated by the tribes were brought under special provisions, for protecting the tribes from the unequal competition of their neighbours, to allow them to lead their lives in their traditional pattern without any disturbance. Some British officers sincerely believed that tribals lived in better and happier life than that of a so called civilised Indians and so need not be disturbed¹¹.

But after independence the isolation policy was neither positive nor desirable. Being citizens of free independent India, the tribals also enjoy the adult suffrage and were able to demand more attention to themselves.
According to the Important People of India study done by the Anthropological survey of India under the leadership of K.S. Singh, out of 2800 communities of India 461 are scheduled Tribes.

Jawaharlal Nehru the first Prime Minister of independent India had a great regard for tribal life ways, for him the tribal institutions had to be respected and encouragement to be given to the development of the indigenous art and crafts. No restrictions and reforms were to be imposed on them. He wanted to protect their rights, land and forest.

The information relating the tribes was collected in the 1951 census and tribal development programmes were implemented from 1961 census onwards. It was planned to provide special welfare schemes on social, economic, demographic and educational development.

The President issued the Constitution order on 6th September 1950 by giving a list of tribes to be called Scheduled Tribes in different states.

Articles like 15, 16, 17, 19, 23, 25, 29, 35, 46, 244, 275, 330, 332, 334, 335, 338, 339, 341, 342, 36, 371, A, B, C and fifth and sixth schedules regarding the safeguards for the tribals implemented in free India under the direction of our constitution.

The Constitution of India defines Scheduled Tribes as ‘Tribe’ or ‘tribal community’ or part of a group within such or tribal communities as are deemed under article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes.12

To protect the interest of the tribes Jawaharlal Nehru, prepared the principles of ‘Panchshila’.

1. People should develop along the line of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional acts and culture.
2. Tribal rights in land and forest should be respected.
3. We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. We should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.
4. We should not over administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through and not in rivalry with their own social and cultural institutions.

5. We should judge results not by statistics of the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved\(^1^3\).

The fifth schedule part B, paragraph four provides for the compulsory setting up of Tribes Advisory Council in each state having scheduled areas containing Scheduled Tribes. This council is to be the only platform where and through which all their major elements like the workers both tribal and non-tribal can operate together.

The 1993, International year for the World's Indigenous People was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly to strengthen international co-operation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous communities in areas such as human rights, the environment, education and health.

To sustain the constitutional safeguards meant for tribals, a number of commissions, and committees were formed to uplift the social and economic status of the Scheduled Tribes. The earliest such committee was the Elwin committee, set up in 1956. It recommended reduction in the number of projects for tribal areas and simplification of administration in these areas. In 1960, Dhebar Commission was setup to know the development in the scheduled area of the tribal people. It noted that the pace of development in tribal area was slant and investment and other protective measure were inadequate, and it emphasised the need for urgent attention. Another committee to review the tribal development programmes was appointed in 1969 under the chairmanship of Shilu. A. This committee viewed that the main problems of tribals were independence, land alienation, economic backwardness and lack of communication\(^1^4\).

The tribal communities are mostly living, in the hilly forest regions. In India forest area accounts for 75 million hectares that is approximately 22% of the total land area. The total area under forest in Tamilnadu is 21,072 sq.km of which 17,264 sq.km is
reserved land. This covers 16% of the total geographical area of the state. The total area under forest in Coimbatore District is 69,347.72 hectares.


Between 10° 10′ and 11°30′ North latitude and 76° 40′ and 77° 30′ East longitude on the globe lies 7,469 sq.kms of South India, that is Coimbatore District. The Nilgiri District and a part of Erode district are on the Northern boundary of the Coimbatore District. On the southern boundary, is the Kerala state and on the eastern boundary is the Erode district.

The Rivers flow in Coimbatore District are Aliyar, Nirar, Sholayar, Uppar, Amaravathy, Noyal, Thirmurthi and Bhavani. The Coimbatore district receives rain both from South West and North East monsoon. The North-East monsoon is accounting for 328.8mm while the South-West monsoon contributes a significant 158.3mm. Land in the district has high agricultural potential and the total cultivated area of the district is 3,48,576 ha, while the net sown is 3,26,283 ha. Dairy farming in a high growth area of the district contribute to the nation’s white revolution with 203.4 lakh litres in the flush season and 153.76 lakh litres in the lean season. Industrial activity in the state involves large, medium and small scale units. There are 3333 registered factories and 299 large and medium scale industries. Coimbatore district is known as the ‘Manchester of South India’. Being the heart of spinning, weaving, and textile mills, the district is also known for its high quality hosiery produce from the town of Tirupur, called as “The Japan of Tamilnadu”.
According to a popular legend the name ‘Coimbatore’ is derived from ‘Konvanputhur’ after a Irula chief who had ruled over this region. Epigraphically evidences claim that history could be traced back to the period not later than the 14th century AD. Irulas were no doubt the aboriginals of this region. The deity named ‘koni’ is certainly of Irula origin.16

Coimbatore District is a mixture of contrasts. The city is industrially advanced and it has all the modern amenities, communication and transport. It is an important centre of learning. It is the seat of several universities and many colleges. On the other side the district has a tribal population of 29103 scheduled tribes, as 14738 males and 14365 females. Scheduled tribes population in Coimbatore District is only 0.68%17.

Coimbatore district is divided into four zones, as Coimbatore North, South, East and West zones Coimbatore District is comprised of one Corporation, four Municipalities, nineteen Panchayat Unions, fifty-nine Panchayats and 389 village Panchayats.

In Coimbatore District both Primitive Tribes and Dispersed Tribes are living. Primitive Tribes viz. Irulas are living in Coimbatore Division. Most of the Irulas are living in Thondamuthur, Perianaickenpalayam, Karamadai and Madukkarai Panchayat Union areas. Similarly the Dispered Tribes, Malai Malasar, Kadar, Eravalan, Muduvar and Pulaiyar are living in Indira Gandhi wild life sanctuary area in Pollachi Division.

Tribal habitations in the seven-panchayat unions are as follows:

The demographic characteristic of the tribal population in Coimbatore district is of great topical interest and regional importance. Population is the pivotal element from which resources derive their significance. The following statistics shows the tribal population of Coimbatore region since 1950.
Table 1
Demography of tribal population in Coimbatore District since 1950:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>12502</td>
<td>12486</td>
<td>24988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>10313</td>
<td>9830</td>
<td>20143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>13463</td>
<td>12558</td>
<td>26021</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>11596</td>
<td>10762</td>
<td>22358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>13456</td>
<td>12702</td>
<td>26154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>14738</td>
<td>14365</td>
<td>29103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Census Hand Book – Coimbatore District 1951 - 2001

Objectives:
This study aims at the following objectives.

1. To find out the different tribal groups in the study area.
2. To analyze the role and social status of tribal women in these regions.
3. To focus on the economic status of tribal women, their economic rights, their participation in management, their access to employment.
4. To deal with their education, both formal and non-formal and its implications in their life.
5. To document the developments of tribal women in the fields of society, economy, education and general empowerment.
6. To analyse, and record the various tribal area schemes of the Governments and NGOs
7. To assess the impact of the development schemes, especially on the tribal women.
8. To investigate the employment and training household trap of the tribal women.
9. To know about the changes in attitudes, behaviour, character and other aspects among the young women.
10. To study the various forms of social, physical and economic exploitation.
11. To discuss and suggest the remedial measures.

This study focuses on the impact of social, economic, religious, cultural, educational and political development of tribal women in Coimbatore District.

Born and brought up in Coimbatore District, the author has evinced keen interest in doing the research work on Coimbatore District to explore the development of tribes through the ages with special reference to women folk who is moving towards the main stream.

The first chapter ‘Introduction’ deals with the topography of the Coimbatore District, its people, history, the tribal habitations etc.

The second chapter is devoted to give an account of history of various tribes in Coimbatore District with reference to their social customs, conventions and cultural practices, and changing patterns in their marriages, family life and religious practices.

The third chapter covers the educational development among the tribals particularly women by various government schemes such as Tribal residential schools, Adult Literacy Programme and Sarva Siksha Abiyan.

The fourth chapter focuses on the role of tribal women in improving their economy equal to men in forest work, as coolie and Self Help Group schemes introduced by the state government and role of NGOs in improving their economy.

The fifth chapter describes the role of tribes in politics. Their traditional system and well as the part played by tribal women in their Panchayat organisations.

This study has different approaches like anthropological, sociological and historical repertory. As regards the materials, the information is gathered from both the documentary and field sources through various techniques such as observation, interview schedule, questionnaire, photography, case study and life history. The Government Orders, Government Records, Census Reports, Records from Adi Dravida and Tribal Welfare Department of Coimbatore District, Demographic Department Records, DRDA
Records, Civil Supplies Department of Coimbatore District Records, Forest Department and Education Department of Coimbatore District Records and books, journals, periodicals and internet were consult to complete.

The Indian constitution came in to force in the year 1950. Till then the tribal community was neglected and isolated by the society. Since 1950, Indian Government took different measure to safeguard and promote the interest of the tribals.

It is imperative that women play a vital role in the progress of tribes. A good knowledge of their socio-economic background is required for a better comprehension of their development. There is no doubt that the tribal women involve themselves in the upliftment of their own community in the near future.

Hence an attempt is made to trace and document the social and economic condition of tribal women in Coimbatore District from 1950-2005.
REFERENCE – Chapter-1

6. Ibid, p. 16.
11. Ibid.
15. Ibid.