Chapter - IV

Indian features of primitive tribes, castes, scheduled tribes, ethnic groups...

4.1. The evolution of the tribe

It is common knowledge in anthropology that the first humans on the planet were hunter-gatherers. Early humans obtained their food by hunting wild meats, fowl and fish, and gathering produce from the forest like nuts, seeds, fruits and vegetables, edible leaves and grasses. When, due to natural calamities (like disastrous meteor hits or catastrophic earthquakes, which occurred about ten thousand plus years ago), the forests and jungles dried up, jungle tribes migrated towards watering holes or rivers. There, they domesticated grasses like wheat, rice and maize, which account for fifty percent of all food eaten on the planet by humans, and also took up stock breeding – taming goats, cattle, llama, reindeer, horses, and wolves (the ancestors of today’s dogs), and cats. With domestication of plant and animal, a few people were able to provide food for a large number of people leaving the rest free for other work. Human civilization and culture evolved and went to the next level after mankind became expert in stockbreeding and agriculture. The stage after hunter-gatherer to domestication of plants and animals allowed more people to be supported on less land with less labor, and led to the growth of villages. Villages that had many tribes were the first social organization that sprung up after the forests dried up. A tribe may cover several villages, or districts, much like the Koragas who reside in the two districts of Udupi and Kasargod. And the same tribe may have divisions like clans (bali) as the Koragas have. From the villages, there evolved many complex forms of civic organization leading to urban cultural centers like towns and cities, and nations. Tribe is the go-between stage from family, to clans and larger groupings. Every tribe
on this planet has come under some form of government, and some tribal institutions may have evolved due to state power, or activities of nation states.

4.2. History of the tribe

Historically, the term ‘tribe’ is from ancient Rome, where the word *tribus* indicated a division within the state (specifically the tripartite division of Romans into Latins, Sabines and Etruscans). It later was used to refer to small cultural or ethnic groups encountered through European exploration and colonization. According to *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary* (1996), a **tribe** is a group of primitive families or communities, linked by social, religious, or blood ties, and having a common culture, dialect and a chosen leader. A **tribal** is a member of a tribe. Apply this definition to the Koragas, a community of families, who traditionally were involved in the profession of basket making, for which they were dependent on the forest for their raw material. Features of their common culture included drum beating, and flute playing for ceremonies, the eating of beef and pork, knowledge of local dialects – plus their own unique language, and sun worship. They qualify as a tribe.

4.3. Indian tribal scenario – the Census of 2001 and primitive tribes

The 1991 Census mentioned that India had 427 tribes (excluding Jammu and Kashmir). The 2001 Census mentioned 461 tribes. Seventy four tribal groups are categorized as ‘primitive tribal groups’. These ‘primitive’ tribal groups were educationally and technologically backward. Government programs in implementation address the problem of backwardness.

The definition of **PRIMITIVE** includes the following traits:

1. Not derived from something else; primary or basic.

2. a. Of or relating to an earliest or original stage or state; primeval.
b. Being little evolved from an early ancestral type.

3. Characterized by simplicity or crudity; unsophisticated.

4. Anthropology of or relating to a non-industrial, often tribal culture, especially one that is characterized by a low level of economic complexity:

4.4. **Primitive tribe in the 1990s**

Vasudevan C. authored a book on the Koragas in the 1990s based on decades of experience with the Koragas. Since that time, the winds of change (like nationalization and globalization) have made their impact on the tribe. Some of the textbook characteristics that the Koraga embody as a tribe are slowly undergoing a change. The characteristics of a primitive tribe (as covered by Vasudevan in the 1990s) include the following:

1. Speaking a distinct dialect
2. Possessing a common culture that distinguishes them from other people
3. Known by definite names – unique nomenclature rules
4. A few dependent on hunter-gatherer modes of subsistence
5. Not organized like an advanced society
6. Untouched by the influence of civilization
7. Practice witchcraft
8. In addition, being aboriginals, also classified a tribe as primitive. Aboriginal (according to *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary*) means ‘indigenous, inhabiting a land from the earliest times, before the arrival of the colonists.’ In the case of the Koragas, the colonists were probably Aryan settlers of the northwest.

The first three characteristics of a primitive tribe are so general they can also apply to other groups. In many cases there are overlaps.
4.5. What is a tribe, today? Defining characteristics…

*Tribe*, in anthropology, is a form of human social organization based on a set of smaller groups having temporary or permanent political integration, and defined by traditions of common descent, language, culture and belief systems.

**Groups who qualify as tribes have these defining characteristics:**

- Common territory
- Collection of interrelated families
- Sameness of race
- Sameness of marital practices
- Common names and naming practices
- Common languages (dialects spoken or learnt)
- Common ancestors and myths about a common history
- Common religious practices and beliefs
- Unified identity based on race, place of origin, language, etc.
- Participation in the same economic activities
- Organization of clans (*balis* among the Koragas)
- Common culture

4.6. India’s tribes – a note

India’s tribal people settled in the country tens of thousands of years ago. Many live lifestyles unchanged for centuries, and may be even millennia. Many are, we think, far removed from the impact of modern civilization, and thus, the influence of globalization. Whether the Koraga have truly escaped the influence of globalization, or if there is strong differentiation between ethnic group, nationalization and globalization is the subject of this study.
Many tribal groups in India may still be at the stage of hunter-gatherer today in keeping with their original state when they first settled in India. They live within or on the periphery of forest, and for both food as well as occupation are dependent on the forest or the nearby rural or agrarian settings. They have not yet made the complete transition to owning farms and stock breeding. Recently, though, the tribals are being incorporated into the mainstream within India, not by holding on to their old prehistoric culture, but by assimilation into the mainstream regional or national culture, which has percolated to every nook in this country. It is in nationalization, that we find the seeds or fruits of globalization. And it is in regionalization that we see signs of the state (as in Karnataka) handling the issue of ethnicity. Education in local schools follows the three language formula - English, Hindi, and Kannada. How successful Koraga children in school are we do not exactly. Exposure to the outside world through education makes the tribal children adept at coping with the world outside, but at the same time may alienate them from the Koraga culture. Ethnicity is tied up with identity. But identity is either very evident (as in the mother tongue, Koraga language), or difficult to pin point exactly.

4.7. The tribal Diaspora of India

India is a country of multiracial stock. Different groups, who migrated into India at different times, occupy different parts of India and have their own cultural characteristics and levels of development. The tribals are regarded as the first inhabitants of India, some of their ancestors having entered India as early as sixty thousand years ago. Because of successive waves of migration to, and conquests of, India, the country has a widely diverse human gene pool – the second largest in the world – and multiracial stock.
Diaspora is a forced dispersion of a religious or ethnic group after a calamity of sorts – in the case of the Koragas, the assassination of ancestor king Hubbashika. This incident – the killing of Hubbashika – lives on in collective memory, lasting from century to century, generation after generation. Diaspora (waves of dispersion and migration) is part of globalization. The tribes of today’s India can then be, technically, the product of thousands of years of Diaspora. Sometimes one people will have different homelands – like the Palestinians of today, or the Jews before World War II. A group becomes a Diaspora only after long term generational survival of their heritage. In the case of the Koragas, it is a ‘victim’ Diaspora. Today, the Koraga dispersion is a ‘labor’ Diaspora. *(The word Diaspora was originally used to describe the dispersion of Jews after their exile from Israel in 538 B.C.E.)*

4.8. The Koragas as tribe

The tribe occupies the intermediate stage between family and larger social groups. Among the Koragas, this intermediate tribal stage is headed by a *Gurukira*, the headman, settled in a village or heading a group of homes in a rural setting. The Koraga community extends to over two districts – Udupi and Kasargod, of the states of Karnataka and Kerala - both coastal areas. They speak Koraga as well as other local Dravidian languages like Kannada, Tulu, Malyalam (in Kasargod), etc. Their weddings, either arranged by parents after both groom and bride have reached maturity, or through self-choice, are officiated by the *Gurukira*, the headman, or as is increasingly being observed, through registration. Following the traditional occupations of mat making and basket making, some of them depend on the forest for the raw material to make baskets; they play special tribal drums, or flutes, and have a symbiotic relationship with their environment. *(Symbiotic means ‘mutually advantageous association between two parties’, for example, tribals and forest.)*
However, the dependence on the forest is not at the same level it was a century ago, as verified through data. Regionalization is slowly taking over. Regarding their mastery of percussion (drum beating), Dr. Shivaram Karanth wrote a book, which was later made into an award winning movie of the same name, *Chomona Dudi* (the drum of Choma).

4. 9. Other definitions of a tribe

An almost unvarying and historic cultural evolution sets apart members of a tribe who may share a name and a neighborhood territory; and who work together in cooperative endeavors in trade, agriculture, house construction, warfare, and ceremonial activities. A tribe may be spread out over smaller local communities such as villages. In addition, on the other extreme, they may be aggregated into higher-order clusters, such as nations.

D.N. Majumdar says, ‘A tribe is a collection of families bearing a common name, members of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain taboos regarding marriage, profession or occupation and have developed a well assessed system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligation.’

The *Imperial Gazetteer of India* defines a ‘tribe’ as ‘...a collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not usually endogamous, though originally it might have been so.” With a common tag, Koraga, occupying only two parts of South India – coastal Kerala and Karnataka – formerly being only basket or mat makers, and drummers, speaking the Koraga language, subsisting off the forest, the Koraga earned the right to be called a tribe. Whether they continue in the same vein, with the
constant exposure to regional influences, TV programs, school education in schools that follow the three language formula, remains to be seen.

S.C. Dube says, ‘**Tribe** is an ethnic category, defined by real or putative descent and characterized by a corporate identity and a wide range of commonly shared traits of culture.’ Connecting the Koraga to their putative, common lineage as descendents of the group who were once upon a time ruled by their chieftain Hubbashika, dressing the same, speaking the same language, with the same customs, also qualifies them as a tribe.

An Internet definition says, ‘**Tribe** is a social group bound by common ancestry and ties of consanguinity (consanguinity is ‘a state of being related by blood or descended from a common ancestor’), with a common language, and settled close together in the same territory. Anthropological stereotypes about tribes say that they are cohesive, and that members of many tribes may speak the same language, or, members of a tribe may speak different languages; both hold true, for the Koragas not only speak Koraga, but also have fluency in Kannada, Tulu (and within Kerala), Malayalam. However, the Koragas marry within their own community.

The definitions above identify typical characteristics of tribes applicable to the Koragas.

### 4.10. The Scheduled Tribes - Constitutional history

The term ‘**Scheduled Tribe**’ was given post Independence, and is an administrative coinage, used to hand over constitutional privileges, security and benefits in Independent India. Before Independence, ST and SC were known as the Depressed Classes. In 1935, the British Government passed the Government of India Act 1935, to give Indian provinces greater self-rule. Seat reservation for the
Depressed Classes was part of the Act, which came into force in 1937. The term "Scheduled Castes", defining the group as "such castes, races or tribes or parts of groups within castes, races or tribes, which appear to His Majesty in Council to correspond to the classes of persons formerly known as the 'Depressed Classes', was first used in this Act.

Tribes in India are generally referred to in the language of the Indian Constitution as ‘Scheduled Tribes’ - ST. The Constitution of India has a framework of laws, which protect Scheduled Tribes.

To upgrade STs and SCs, the Constitution set up a tripartite strategy, which includes protective measures such as laws like The Untouchability Practices Act of 1955, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe, (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, and The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993. Affirmative action, which countries like the US follow for Native (Indian) American and disgruntled African American youth, is the buzzword for tribal welfare. Similar to many countries whose original inhabitants (indigenous people) are in the doldrums and require governmental affirmative actions to pull them out of the sloughs, India too has its version of affirmative action, called reservation. To integrate them into the mainstream and bring them on par with other forward communities, the government has incorporated several measures. One such example is the distribution of Smart Cards for the Koragas, and autorickshaws for unemployed Koraga youth, such measures being implemented in the twenty-first century.

Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar – Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution – preferred using the term ‘Scheduled Tribe’ for its specific subtext. After Independence, (the Scheduled Castes - SC, Scheduled Tribes - ST and Other Backward Classes who constitute about 60 percent of India's population) were given
reservation. In his fight for the improvement of the poor and marginalized communities of India, Ambedkar worked on making the reservation policy an integral part of the Constitution after he participated in the Round Table Conferences. Thanks to him, the Constitution contains general principles of affirmative action (reservation) for SC and ST, and specific responsibilities for administration of the scheduled areas via programs, administration and legal aspects.

Post Independence, the Constituent Assembly continued the older definition of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, giving (via articles 341 and 342) the President of India and governors of states a mandate to compile a full listing of castes and tribes (with the power to edit it later). The complete list of tribes was made via the order: The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950.

The history of rights and affirmative action for STs and SCs are embedded in the original Constitution, where according to Article 338, the Commissioner was given the power and responsibility to monitor the implementation of constitutional and legislative safeguards for SCs and STs and reported to the president. Seventeen regional offices were established all over India.

The Commissioner was replaced with a committee in the 48th Amendment to the Constitution, making a change to Article 338. The Ministry of Welfare then established the first committee for SCs and STs, who took over all the functions of the Commissioner in August 1978.

In September 1987, committee functions were extended to include advising the government on broad policy issues and the development levels of SCs and STs.

In 1990, Article 338 was amended again for the National Commission for SCs and STs with the Constitution (Sixty-fifth Amendment) Bill, 1990 (65th Amendment).
The first commission under the 65th Amendment, constituted in March 1992, replaced the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and the Commission established by the Ministry of Welfare's Resolution, 1989.

In 2003, a Constitutional Amendment divided the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes into two commissions: the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.

Most recently, in 2013, the GOI constituted a High Level Committee (HLC) under the umbrella protection of Ministry of Tribal Affairs to prepare a position paper on the present socioeconomic, health and educational status of STs.

Article 366 (25) of the Indian Constitution says that Scheduled Tribes are the tribes or tribal communities or parts of, or groups within such tribes or tribal communities, which the Indian President may specify by public notification under Article 342(1).

4.11. National Commissions

To effectively implement the various safeguards built into the Constitution and other legislation, Articles 338 and 338A provide two statutory commissions: the National Commissions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, with the chairpersons of both commissions sitting in on the office of the National Human Rights Commission.

4.12. The Scheduled Tribe in the twenty-first century

In the twenty-first century, the term ‘Scheduled Tribe’ has different connotations. To an administrator, it means a group of citizens who are the special
responsibilities of the President of India. To an anthropologist, it indicates a special field for study of a social phenomenon.

Today, it is preferable to use, within India, the term ‘Scheduled Tribe’ rather than Dalit, Adivasi or Harijan, as each of these terms has begun to have derogatory associations.

4.13. Demographic information about Scheduled Tribes

The geographic territories of the Scheduled Tribes in India are the central, northeast and southern regions of India. In all, six hundred and ninety eight Scheduled Tribes exist in India (according to 2013 data). The following three paragraphs have demographic information about Scheduled Tribes, dating from 2011.

From 2001 to 2011, the percentage of Scheduled Tribes to total population is calculated here. In 2001, the total percentage of ST to India’s population was 8.2, with rural being 10.4, and urban being 2.4%. In 2011, the total percentage of ST to India’s total population was 8.6%, rural being 11.3%, and urban, 2.8. The two studies done ten years apart show a slight increase in the percentage of ST to the general population, from an 8.2 to an 8.6%.

From 2001 to 2011, the Scheduled Tribe population and change of residence was a total (during 2011) - 104,281,034, with rural areas having 93,819,162, and urban areas having 10,461,872; the percentage of change from 2001 to 2011 was 23.7% for all India total, 21.3% for rural total, and 49.7% for the urban areas.

From 2001 to 2011, the Scheduled Tribe population by sex and residence was a total (during 2011) for males - 5,24,09,823, with rural areas having 4,71,26,341, and urban areas having 52,83,482; the Scheduled Tribe population by sex and residence
was a total (during 2011) for females - \textbf{5,18,71,211} all India total, \textbf{4,66,92,821} for rural total, and \textbf{51,78,390} for urban areas.

\textbf{4.14. The Koragas as Scheduled Tribe}

The Koragas are called a Scheduled Tribe. The \textit{Scheduled Tribes} are the second largest group of ‘backward’ classes, backward meaning here, slow to develop or progress or have progressive attributes compared to the mainstream populations of the neighboring regions where the STs are residing in India. Many \textit{Scheduled Tribes} still hold on to pre-agrarian, hunter-gatherer ‘technology’, have low levels of literacy, and usually have a stagnant population.

To be considered a Scheduled Tribe, the following attributes are a necessity:

- Continuing a traditional occupation of a definitive geographical area (basket making and mat-making in Udupi and Kasargod)

Culture specific traits such as:

- Specific language competency (Koraga plus Kannada/ Tulu and/or Malayalam)

Customs such as:

- Traditions (one-fourth of marriages are through choice, the remaining three fourth is arranged through the parents or other elders)

- Religious beliefs like \textit{Bhoota} worship

- Arts and crafts (basket-making, playing their tribal drums and flute playing, both declining over the past decade)

- Archaic traits portraying occupational pattern (sanitation works, which they still continue, but historic occupations like manual scavenging and dry latrine work are now prohibited by law)
• Economy and economic development (the dependence on the forests for raw material to make their traditional baskets and mats is undergoing a change due to paucity of material and lesser number of skilled workers)

• Lack of education, and being illiterate (this may change by the next generation as both the state government and NGOs are pushing children into schools and awarding them scholarships)

4.15. The Koraga evolution

The Koragas have evolved from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, and the Center as well as the states has put in place many rules to raise the Koragas from their status as backward Scheduled Tribes.

Anthropologists have often stated that all members of a given tribe hardly ever unite in any important political or economic activity. However, through governance, the Constitution of India has a framework of laws which protect Scheduled Tribes as a unified whole. Anthropologists have recorded that every known tribe has been in contact with states, and suggest that tribal institutions may be adaptations to the greater state power, or are direct consequences of the activities of states. (Historically, the kingdoms of the past were replaced by the states of today.) This is true as the country and the state (India and Karnataka, respectively) define how Indian tribes like the Koragas are looked after, developed, emancipated; how their freedom is protected by the legal machinery of the state. But besides and outside nation-state machinery, the Koragas maintain a distinct identity even though they are now spread out in two states – Karnataka and Kerala.
4.16. India’s tribal communities

India’s tribal communities represent an important social category of Indian social structure. At present, we have the second largest tribal population in the world next only to Africa. Tribes in India are commonly found in many parts of the country and are said to be the original inhabitants of India. The 1991 Census mentioned that India has 427 tribes (excluding Jammu and Kashmir). The 2001 Census mentioned 461 tribes. Seventy four tribal groups are categorized as ‘primitive tribal groups.

4.17. Ethnic group

As an anthropological term, the word tribe fell out of favor in the latter part of the 20th century because tribe acquired negative connotations in the colonial context. Today, anthropologists use the designation ethnic group to refer to a group of people with a common ancestry and language, a shared cultural and historical tradition, and an identifiable territory. The term ethnic is from the Greek ‘ethnos’ which means heathen. The term ethnicity became official and found in The Oxford English Dictionary only in 1972. Ethnic group can refer to a community, where one’s identity and claims to land ownership may depend on one’s ties to one’s natal village or region of origin. An ethnic group is a socially defined category of people who identify with each other based on a shared social experience or ancestry. Membership in an ethnic group tends to be associated with shared cultural heritage, ancestry, history, homeland, language, and symbolic systems such as religion, mythology, and ritual, cuisine, dress style, and appearance. Ethnic groups are not closed and isolated, but are absorbed into larger states or nation states. Ethnicity refers to groups that live in mutual contact rather than in isolation, but were different from each other – this is the baseline characteristic agreed upon all over the world. Historically, ethnicity has its
origins in inequality (Lewellen: 108), and comes forth in relations between the ethnic group and the mainstream.

Ethnicity can be a self-aware group identity, that emphasizes a specific or multiple attributes including skin color, language, religion, place of origin, ancestry, descent and territory. Though ethnicity has certain definitive features, many scholars view it as a relation to power, a class struggle, wherein many groups are pitted against each other, and the dominant group monopolizes access to means of production and rights to share production returns.

Both ethnology and ethnography have been used to study the Koraga. Ethnology according to The Pocket Oxford Dictionary is the study of peoples. Ethnography is qualitative research design aimed at exploring cultural phenomena, and the resulting field study... reflects the knowledge and system of meanings in the lives of a cultural group. Ethnography is the scientific study of the races of the earth or individual cultures; ethnology is the comparative study of different cultures. The Koraga have to be studied not only on their own merit but also in comparison to other people around them to judge what level of development they are in.

4.18. ‘Slavery’ in India

According to The Pocket Oxford Dictionary, a slave is one who is owned by and serves another. According to The World Book Encyclopedia, slavery is a practice in which people own other people. A slave is the property of his master, and works without pay. The master provides his slave with clothing, food and shelter.

Bonded labor or slavery in India was a ‘side-effect’ of the caste system, and did not resemble the practice of slavery in the West. That is even when ‘slavery’ was at its zenith, the so-called slaves had certain rights such as choosing a site in the
landlord’s land for their stay, right to the products of the trees on their land, which were raised with their help, regular wages (though meager), financial and other assistance at the time of marriage of their children and also on other occasions. In fact, when a slave was transferred from one master to another, mostly along with the land sold, he had the right to choose a plot for his stay and this was done by taking a handful of earth and throwing it at a particular spot. This is clear proof that under Indian conditions, the ‘slaves’ were meant for work connected with lands, even if their services were also extended to cover the personal comforts of their masters. Within India, there was region-specific slavery and this has been covered in *The Arthasastra* where four types are mentioned.

**4.19. A brief history of slavery**

The earliest accounts of slaves come from Sumeria (in ancient Mesopotamia or today’s Iraq) from 3500 BCE. Slavery was also practiced in Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt and Persia, and to a lesser extent in India and China. Slavery reached its peak in Greece and the Roman Empire in Europe, and after centuries again in the New World (North and South America) in 1500s and 1600s. In Rome, slavery was so widespread, that even poor people owned slaves.

The system in the Western countries involved slaves who were brought to the market place and sold like merchandise. Even as late as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, slaves were transported from Africa to countries like the U.S.A. to work at their cotton plantations so the owners could export the cotton and import necessities with the money. Further, there were sharp racial and cultural constraints. While the masters in U.S.A. (and in South America) were white Caucasian Christians, culturally complex and advanced, the slaves belonged to an entirely different race (Negroid), country (different parts of Africa), practiced a belief system that was poles
apart from their masters and owners, and were originally from what was then called the Dark Continent (Africa).

4.20. Could the Koragas be slaves in the past?

The word ‘slave’ is defined as a person who is owned by and serves another. Here, within India, it would be more apt to use the word ‘bonded labor’ rather than slave for the Koraga, since the so-called slaves of India were not trafficked like slaves from Africa who were sold like merchandise in the 1500s and 1600s. Human bondage in India was an offshoot of an exploitative caste system unlike in other countries where slaves were kidnapped or purchased, transported and sold like produce, with no freedom at all, being sometimes even kept in chains as were the galley slaves.

Slaves were not, most of the time, “sold” in India, as was done in Africa and the West. On the other hand, they were transferred along with lands from one owner to the next. Sometimes, they went as dowry with a bride to her new home. Besides, whenever ‘slaves’ in India worked, they were paid wages – even if a pitance – for their service. As the caste system evolved in India, those born to families at the bottom of social hierarchy were at the beck and call of higher castes, at whose mercy they worked and earned their livelihood. The absolute dependence of the employed on their employers got so rigid in course of time that it ended up in a system of bonded labor, akin to slavery.

In The Arthasastra, Kautilya makes several references to the *dasa*, who remained in a condition of ‘unfree’ labor - a man or a woman who enjoyed lesser rights than other categories of employees. Kautilya uses several terms to indicate the different aspects of this occurrence – *dasa* (slave), *dasabhava* (the state of being a slave, and *dasakalpa* (the rules regarding slavery). The Arthasastra also mentions four
kinds of slaves or *dasas*: born in the house, inherited, bought, or obtained as gift or captured.

But, in the same time frame and country, Megasthenes – the Greek historian in the court of Chandragupta Maurya (300s BCE) – mentions that not one Indian was a slave, and that though the population was divided into castes, it accepted these divisions as natural and tolerable. We can conclude here from these contradictory descriptions, that the Indian *dasa* was of a different category than the Greek *doulos* or *helot*.

For a couple of centuries, the Koragas were dominated by their landlords and neighbors, and reduced to the level of practical slavery or bonded labor, through indebtedness or other social customs. There were valid reasons why Vormika called them a slave caste in his *Memoirs*.

### 4.21. Caste system origins and prevalence

The English word "caste" originated in the Spanish and Portuguese *casta*, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* quotes John Minsheu’s Spanish dictionary (1599) to mean, "race, lineage, or breed.” During the time the Spanish colonized the New World, ‘casta’ meant "clan or lineage." The Portuguese employed *casta* in the modern sense when they applied it to the many in-marrying hereditary Hindu social groups they encountered on arrival in India in 1498. The use of the spelling "caste," with this latter meaning, is first attested to in English in 1613.

Caste is a form of social stratification characterized by endogamy, hereditary transmission of a lifestyle which often includes an occupation, ritual status in a hierarchy and customary social interaction and exclusion based on cultural notions of purity and pollution. Its paradigmatic ethnographic example is the division of Indian
society into rigid social groups, with roots in India's ancient history and persisting until today. The economic significance of the caste system has been declining as a result of urbanization and reservation programs.

Historically, the caste system in India had thousands of endogamous groups, sometimes called Jatis. Scholarly Brahmans classified society into four Varnas:

The first were the Brahmans who officiated as fire priests, scholars and teachers. They were also the Gurus, who helped the rulers. The second are the Kshatriya who are warriors, administrators and law enforcers, and were usually the rulers in ancient times. The third are the Vaishyas who were agriculturists, cattle raisers and traders, and ran the economy. The fourth are the Shudras who were service providers and artisans, and also did a lot of work that put them on the periphery of Aryan society.

People left out from these four caste classifications, in certain places, were called Panchama (literally, the fifth). Regarded as untouchables, these people lived as outcastes in society. All the Jatis were clubbed under the varna categories during the Census of 1901.

Upon independence from the British rule, the Indian Constitution listed 1,108 castes across the country as Scheduled Castes in 1950, for reservation. In 2001, the proportion of SC population was 16.2 percent of India's total population.