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Intersection of Hinduism and tribal societies in India: exploring the impact of Savarkar's nationalism

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Abstract
This paper investigates the complex intersection between Hinduism and tribal societies in India through the lens of V.D. Savarkar's Hindutva driven nationalism. It examines how Savarkar's conceptualization of Hindutva as a civilizational, cultural, and political identity, influenced efforts to assimilate tribal communities into the broader Hindu fold. Beginning with an outline of Savarkar's ideological framework, the study delves into the traditional religious practices of tribal communities and the dynamics of their long-standing interactions with Hindu society. Through a historical and sociopolitical analysis, the paper evaluates Savarkar's role in redefining the tribal question, not as peripheral subjects but as potential co-participants in the imagined Hindu nation. Using case studies, the paper demonstrates how his ideology inspired various state and non-state actors to undertake cultural assimilation projects in tribal areas, often framing such efforts as national integration. The discussion is further situated within the theoretical frameworks of integration and tribal development, analysing whether these initiatives fostered inclusion or inadvertently led to cultural erasure. The paper also engages with contemporary critiques of Hindutva's homogenizing tendencies, especially in light of the pluralistic and diverse nature of India's tribal religious identities.

Keywords: Hinduism, Tribal Societies, Savarkar's Hindutva, Hindu Nationalism, cultural assimilation, religious identity

1. Introduction

Adivasis, or Indian tribes, are a large group of tribal people who live in India. Adivasis make up a substantial part of India's population. Tribal groups have been a part of Indian civilization since the times of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. They have their own distinct ways of living and customs, as well as a rich history, legacy, and traditions. Even though these tribes come from different parts of the world, they all have the same trait, which is, they live in areas that are mostly cut off from other social groupings and are mostly self-sufficient. A tribe is a group of people who share a language, culture, and way of life that brings them together. It could have a common ancestor and gods that rule over it, as well as various sub-groups, like villages or sibs. Kingship bondage, which is a type of social, economic, religious, or blood relationship, connects their families or small communities. They tend to live in places that are hard to get to, including mountains, woodlands, and deserts. The greatest tribal group in India is Bhil, as per the 2011 census (Census of India, 2001).

According to Article 342 of the Indian Constitution, there are more than 500 tribal tribes spread out over different states and union territories of the country. Odisha has the most tribal communities. Most of the tribal people in India live in the central and north-eastern provinces. The states where most of the people are tribal (more than 50% of the total population) include Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and the Lakshadweep Islands. Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, and Rajasthan are all states where a lot of tribal people live (Lalitha, 2014) [16].

What does "Hinduism" mean? The most common answer is that Hinduism is a religion, but what does it actually mean is important to understand. According to the most common definition, 'religion' is made up of things like believing in God or gods, seeing God in the shape of text or scriptures, and acting on these scriptures.

A prototype model of Hinduism might be seen of as a permeable social, economic, and cultural totality, with the Brahmanical hierarchical caste system's cultural and social-economic portions being the most important but not always present. This means that there might be a lot of different combinations and variations within what is currently called Hinduism.

Savarkar's Hindutva came about in the early 1900s as a response to colonial rule and threats to Hindu identity. His work focused on a single Hindu country that included Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs but not Muslims or Christians. This exclusionary stance has a big effect on how indigenous tribes were seen in the wider framework of Hindutva. He gives a definition of a Hindu as-

> "A Hindu, therefore, to encapsulate the conclusions reached, is an individual who perceives the territory that stretches from Sindhu to Sindhu from the Indus to the oceans-as the ancestral land of his forebears, his Fatherland (Pitribhu), who possesses the lineage of that ethnicity whose initial recognizable origin can be traced back to the Vedic Saptasindhus and which, through its progressive journey, has incorporated various elements while also ennobling much that it has absorbed, has come to be recognized as the Hindu populace, who has inherited and claims as his own the cultural legacy of that ethnicity as articulated primarily in their shared classical language, Sanskrit, and embodied by a unified history, a collective literature, legal systems and jurisprudence, rituals and rites, ceremonies and sacraments, fairs and festivals; and who, above all, regards this territory, this Sindhusthan, as Holyland (Punyabhu), the domain of prophets and visionaries, of revered spiritual leaders and gurus, the land characterized by piety and pilgrimage. These parts make up the basics of Hindutva: a shared nation (Rashtra), a common ethnicity (Jati), and a shared culture (Sanskriti)" (Savarkar, 1923) [21].

In sum, he says that a Hindu is someone who sees Sindhusthan as both his Fatherland and his Holy Land. He must follow a religion that started in this area in order to call it his Holyland. Because of this, someone whose Holyland is outside of this area is no longer a Hindu. He also adds another criteria to his description that has to do with civilization or Sanskriti. This encompasses all of the ceremonies, rituals, conventions, practices, and sacraments. These different parts come together to make a Holyland. So, those who live outside of this culture are not considered Hindus. So, he gives a name to a group that includes all the sects that call themselves Hindu, as well as those that have formed their own sects but yet have their origins in this area. He also leaves out those who don't satisfy these standards.

Thus, analysing the relationship between 'Hinduism' and 'Tribal Culture' is necessary in this regard. Some people think of Hinduism as one religion, but it is actually a complicated mix of many different social and cultural groups, including tribal practices. Political changes, ideological movements, and social and economic contacts have all played a role in the diffusion of Hindu cultural traditions into tribal communities over time. Among these movements, Savarkar's Hindutva movement, which wanted to change Indian identity to fit Hindu cultural ideals, stands out as a strong one. The objective of the study is to investigate how Savarkar's nationalism affected tribal societies and how they interacted with Hinduism.

2. Savarkar's Ideology of Hindutva Nationalism

Hindu nationalism, which emerged in the late nineteenth century, is a complex and evolving socio-political movement. In general, it is a set of beliefs that tries to imagine or build a community (i.e., a nation) based on a shared culture that is shaped by a certain way of seeing at Hinduism (Zavos, 2000) [30]. It has changed the idea of a country through the 'narratives of ancient Hindu civilization,' which is a time in history that is thought of as a Hindu golden era (Bhatt, 2019) [2]. Hindu nationalism is based on the concept that there was a golden period in the past (Jaffrelot, 1999) [13]. The idea of Hindutva, which VD Savarkar spoke about in his book *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu (1923)*, is considered the most important expression of Hindu nationalism. Hindutva is the main ideology of Hindu nationalism in modern India. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is in power, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a very powerful volunteer group that is strongly tied to the BJP, both follow Hindutva (Guha, 2024) [9]. Savarkar tries to figure out what Hindu writings mean and how to tell Hindu men apart from other Indians.

He says, *"Hindutva is not a word but a history. Not only the spiritual or religious history of our people as at times it is mistaken to be but a history in full. Hindutva embraces all the departments of thought and activity of the whole being of our Hindu race"* (Savarkar, 1923, p.04) [21].

Savarkar believed that history teaches us things about the present and the future throughout his life. He was sure that history should be examined in light of what had happened before, especially when it came to revolutions and revolutionaries. His first important book, *Indian War of Independence of 1857*, told the tale of a very controversial period in Indian history in an entirely different way. Savarkar says that the 1857 uprising, which the British called a 'mutiny' to downplay its political importance, was actually the first step in India's fight for independence. In his study, he talks about these ideas briefly, and they mostly come from sacred Hindu books, Hindu mythology, and stories. Savarkar talks about rivers in the book as being important to Indian territory, using the 'Sindhu' river as the line that separates Hindu India from other parts of the continent. Savarkar says, "the day the patriarchs of our race have crossed that stream they cease to belong to those same people they had truly left behind and lay the basis of a new nation" (Savarkar, 1923) [21]. He quickly uses facts from the Bhavishya Purana, which is another Hindu holy book, to back up this claim. Savarkar writes in this essay about a Royal Decree made by King Shalivahan that made the Indus River the boundary between India and its neighbours. Savarkar's nationalist worldview starts with the question *"Who is a Hindu?"* When he says "Hindu," he means the whole Hindu movement, not simply the religion. Savarkar says, "Our nationalist vision is shaped by our ancient cultural heritage, not just by India's geographical or political identity". This idea is what makes us believe in "cultural nationalism", which is the basis of Hindutva. We think that is what makes our old country Bharatvarsha unique. Savarkar downplays the importance of religion in his description of a Hindu by saying that Hinduism is just one of the traits of Hinduness (Jaffrelot, 2005) [14]. Savarkar said that a nation was a political group that had its own national

identity and lived in an area that was big enough and connected to other nations. This community was bound together by shared racial and cultural connections. He thought that the Hindus had come together as a country because they all possessed these attributes. To make the Hindu country stronger, Savarkar called for full social changes and the eradication of the caste system. He supported a modernist agenda for social transformation that relied on technology, science, and reason.

3. Tribes in India and their religious exchange with Hindus

Over the years, commerce, migration, and government have all had a role in shaping the connection between Hinduism and indigenous people. According to historical traditions, tribes have been connected to Hindu neighbours for a long time. They have different ecosystems, economies, religions, and social structures. Hinduisation is when tribal people in India start to embrace Hindu cultural traditions and engage with Hindus. Some of these people became Christians instead. This mix of cultures led to the rise of many kinds of tribes, each with its own level of adaptation.

Ghurye put them into three groups: People having a high standing in Hindu society, such raj Gonds; People who have partially adopted Hindu culture; People who live in the hills. In terms of anthropology (Ghurye, 1963) [8]. Bose talked on how tribes were lured to society by working with non-tribal people, which gave them safety and security. Bose called this process the "Hindu Mode of Absorption" (Bose, 1941) [3] and said that these tribes became part of the larger Indian civilization. Srinivasa talks about Sanskritization, which is when people from lower castes change their lives to be more like those of higher castes in order to move up in the caste system. Sanskritization is the term used to describe the process of moving up in society. Roy and Burman have put tribes into groups based on how they fit into the Hindu social structure. They say that there are four groupings. First, they thoroughly assimilated and became part of the Hindu social hierarchies. The Raj Gonds of Mandala, the Bhumij of West Bengal, the Ahoms of Assam, and the Bhills of Rajasthan are all tribes. Second, they were positively included in Hindu social hierarchies. These tribes have taken in the Hindu society's symbols, values, and beliefs. Tribes such as the Santhal, Oraons, and Munda. Third, there are tribes that fully adopted another faith, like Christians. These tribes are the Nagas, Mizos and Fourth, some of the tribes did not convert to either Hinduism or Christianity. They are distinct and don't know much about the Hindu and Christian communities (Roy and Burman, 2001) [19].

It was not a set of common ideas or rituals that made Hinduism different from tribal societies; it was the fact that these two cultures lived in the same place. Sontheimer says that these two landscapes are Vana (forest), which is linked to tribal cultures, and Kshetra (made up of more populated areas like cities and villages), which is linked to what may be called Hinduism (Sontheimer, 1994) [24]. For Sontheimer and a few others, Hinduism was a continuity of components from the Vana to the Kshetra, but with some changes. Hinduism includes what seem to be tribal gods, stories, and rituals, such the worship of Jagannath or the story of Chenchu Lakshmi from Andhra Pradesh. This shows the diversity of Hinduism. Ethnographic studies of different tribal groups show that the way they interacted with adjacent populations varied from being completely cut off to fully integrating. The Tharu (Srivastava, 1958) [27] and the Khasa (Majumdar, 1962) [17] are two well-known Himalayan tribes in North India that are instances of tribes who have completely assimilated or became Hindu. These tribal groups have combined their identity with high caste Hindus by taking on Hindu caste identities, wearing the holy thread, and becoming friends with people in nearby Rajput and Brahmin communities. Majumdar talks on the idea of transculturation among the Ho people of Singhbhum. This shows how tribal culture and local Hindu castes have affected each other. Hutton said that Hinduism and tribal faiths have a lot in common (Hutton, 1931) [11], while Bose said that the tribal people of India have helped shape Hinduism (Bose, 1975) [4]. It is important to note that the tribal communities have also been affected by their neighbours, such as Buddhists and Muslims. Buddhism is the main religion of the Bhot tribes in upper Lahaul and the Ladakh area. The Gujar of the North-Western Himalayan area and the Bhil of Rajasthan also have close relations to Muslim groups and are affected by their beliefs and behaviours (Ali, 2023) [1].

Hinduism does not support conversion and is not a religion that tries to convert others. A Hindu family might adopt someone or someone can be born a Hindu. Even if someone doesn't believe in God, they can still call themselves Hindu. An atheist can also call himself Hindu. The first way that tribal people and Hindus interacted was through a technique called borrowing or syncretism. For example, some indigenous groups have added Hindu gods to their spiritual beliefs. For example, the Oraons believe that Dharmesh, a higher being, controls the cosmos. This being is symbolized by things like the earth (dharti), the moon (chando), and the sun (bin), which is why they adore these natural elements so much. At the same time, they honour Mahadeo Bhagat, who is a form of the Hindu Sanskritic god Shiva and the monkey god Hanuman. The Oraon thinks that Anjani, which is in the Gumla area, is where Hanuman was born. They put up a flag to honour him during ceremonies. They think that their own religion and Hinduism can coexist together without any problems. Hindus had a big impact on the tribes since they were the main religious group and the ones that tribal people interacted with the most. "Bringing back people to the Hindu fold" or "purifying them" (which means "making them pure", or "Shuddhi") is another way of interacting that is very different from this sort of engagement and syncretism.

4. Savarkar's role in assimilation of tribes in Hinduism

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar used various tactics and methods to bring tribal groups into Hinduism and make the country one. His methods were varied, but they always focused on bringing people from different cultures together, making social changes, and getting people involved in politics. There are several ways to look at how Savarkar's nationalism affected tribal tribes. This is looked at in a point-by-point way.

First, via Cultural Assimilation, tribal communities often adopted parts of Hindu culture while still being true to who they were. You can see this mix in the rituals, festivals, and gods that tribes honour that are based on Hindu traditions but do not totally get rid of their own beliefs. Savarkar said that Hindu and tribal tribes had a cultural tradition that brought them together. He said that tribal communities,

even though they were called animists, had historically been part of Hinduism via cultural and genetic mixing. He thought these tribes were important to the Hindu nation because of their connection to the soil, which he called "Punya Bhumi" (Savarkar, 1923) [21]. Savarkar said that some people are hesitant to use this phrase because they are afraid that it would make them look like Hindus who follow and practice Hindu beliefs. He makes it clear to these people that "That a man can be as truly a Hindu as any without believing even in the Vedas as an independent religious authority is quite clear from the fact that thousands of our Jain brethren, not to mention others, are for generations calling themselves Hindus and would even to this day feel hurt if they be called otherwise" (Savarkar, 1923) [21]. This point of view was meant to help indigenous groups feel like they were a part of the broader Hindu community.

Savarkar also had a big impact on Social Reforms. He wanted a society without classes and worked to end caste prejudice and untouchability. He thought that caste distinctions made the country less united and wanted to create a place where all Hindus, including Dalits and tribal people, could live together in peace. His building of the "Patit Pavan Mandir" at Ratnagiri, which allowed all Hindus to enter regardless of caste, was a clear symbol of what he wanted for a society without castes. Savarkar was good in putting together frameworks. He said that the 'Chaturvarna' and the rank structure were both very harmful for the unity of Hindu society. There was no logical reason for the Chaturvarna to exist; it was based on holy books and historical customs. This led to a cruel act of exclusion. This caused systematic unfairness, divided Hindu society into several groups, and made Hindus hate and look down on one other. The caste system affected indigenous groups when they interacted with Hindu civilizations. Many tribes were forced to follow hierarchical structures set up by powerful caste groups, which led to conflicts and disagreements about identity. Hindus had specific beliefs about cleanliness and impurity that kept them from being free. Hindus must fix all the problems in their society if they want their country to stay stable on Earth.

Third, he brought the tribes into the Hindu fold through Political Mobilization. Savarkar stressed the need for Hindus to come together politically to protect themselves from perceived threats from the outside, notably from Muslim populations. He said that Hindus needed to get involved in politics to protect their rights and identities in a rapidly changing political and social climate. This included fighting against missionaries' attempts to convert people and pushing for Hindu educational initiatives in tribal areas to help people feel more connected to their culture. The Hindu Mahasabha and other groups, who were influenced by Savarkar's ideas, wanted to bring together Hindus from all backgrounds, including tribals. He wanted a strong Hindu nation that would survive and grow even when other nations were having a hard time. Because of this, Savarkar said that "nation" was a cultural term while "state" was a political category. The nation included all Hindus. Non-Hindus may not have been members of the country, but they were part of the Indian state. So, Savarkar saw the Hindu nation as a part of the Indian state and not the same thing as the Indian state.

Fourth, Savarkar's Resistance against conversion includes fighting against missionary efforts to convert native people. He worked with leaders like Thakkar Bapa to open Hindu schools in tribal regions in order to avoid conversions and protect the Hindu character of these groups. Even though they have been told to do so, several indigenous communities have fought against fully integrating into Hindu society. They have kept control over their religious and social systems and have often fought against attempts to force them to convert or "purify." This pre-emptive step was part of a bigger effort to keep Hinduism at the top of education and culture.

Fifth, he was very interested in inter-caste marriage since his views on it had a big effect on how indigenous people joined the Hindu society. Savarkar thought that marriages between people from different castes would 'unite the Hindu race' and spread a Pan-Hindu way of life. He said that these kinds of marriages would help break down the stringent caste system, which he thought was bad for Hindu unity and progress in society. By pushing for relationships between people of different castes, he wanted to encourage biological mixing among Hindus, which would establish a shared identity that went beyond caste differences. His support for marriages between people of different castes was based on his larger goal of creating a strong Hindu identity, which he thought was important for the strength and unity of the country. Savarkar's views on marriage between people of different castes had a big impact on how tribal people joined the Hindu society since he pushed for societal change that would break down caste barriers. His focus on biological unity and gender issues helped Hindutva embrace tribal identities more, which in turn helped make Hindu society more unified while also dealing with India's complex cultural landscape.

Last but not least, his ideology was very important. Savarkar's worldview was based on Hindutva, which he described as a religious identity and a broad cultural nationalism. He thought that tribes needed to become Hindus in order to create a single national identity that crossed regional and ethnic lines. By presenting past battles as fights between Hindus and non-Hindus, his writings have strengthened the concept of a single Hindu kingdom. In short, Savarkar's idea of Hindutva has had a big impact on tribal tribes in India by pushing for cultural integration into a single Hindu identity while also pushing non-Hindu components to the side.

5. Impact of Savarkar's Nationalism on tribal societies: Case study

V.D. Savarkar did not work directly on tribal development, but his ideas about Hindutva, especially the vision of a culturally unified Hindu country, had a big impact on how Hindu nationalist groups treated tribal people. The Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) were two groups that put these beliefs into action. They worked to uplift tribal people by helping them fit in with mainstream culture. Savarkar did not have any concrete plans for helping tribal people, but his idea of Hindu unity gave connected parties the ideas they needed to start the 'Sanskritization' and assimilation efforts. A lot of the time, these attempts were meant to improve the lives of indigenous people by bringing them into the Hindu cultural framework.

Researchers like Christophe Jaffrelot have shown how the Sangh Parivar, which was influenced by Savarkar's ideas, tried to tribalize Hindus by building temples, reaching out to schools, and changing the meanings of tribal gods to Hindu gods (Jaffrelot, 1996) [12]. Even though these initiatives were

called ‘upliftment’, they often ignored the unique identities, traditions, and spiritual freedom of indigenous people. Kanungo says that the objective was twofold: it sought to civilize tribal people by teaching them Hindu values and to make them the leaders of Hindu nationalism in areas where people were afraid of converting to Christianity (Kanungo, 2002) [15]. This method made tribal identities more political and changed them in ways that fit with Savarkar's goal for constructing a country.

These stories illustrate clearly how Savarkar's nationalism affected tribal tribes and how vital his ideas were. The cases are:

5.1 The case of dang, a district in the state of Gujarat

The Dang district in southern Gujarat is a great illustration of how Hindutva has affected tribal populations. It was mostly tribal and became a centre for Hindu nationalist mobilization in the 1990s and early 2000s. The VHP and other groups that worked with them used Savarkar's ideas to start a planned campaign of cultural integration and religious conversion, known as "ghar wapsi", to "reconvert" tribal Christians back to Hinduism. Pralay Kanungo says that the tribal world of Dang was targeted because there were so many Christian missionaries there, which was viewed as a danger to Hindu unity. The RSS and VHP built schools (Ekal Vidyalayas), health camps, and temples, and pushed for events like "Vanvasi Kumbh" to help tribals feel like they were part of the Hindu community. Critics say that these programs were more about spreading ideas than helping tribes. (Kanungo, 2002) [15].

"The VHP sees the tribals not as 'others' but as 'our own people' who have been cut off from us because of missionary work and need to be brought back into the Hindu fold." (Kanungo, 2002, p. 560) [15].

These actions did make it easier for people to get to services, but they also caused problems amongst religions and weakened traditional tribal traditions. Savarkar thought that a shared sanskriti (culture) was necessary for nationhood, thus tribal gods were renamed as avatars of Hindu gods, and oral tales were rewritten to fit with the Ramayana or Mahabharata.

5.2 The Bastar district in the state of Chhattisgarh

Another important example is the tribal area of Bastar in Chhattisgarh, where right-wing forces connected to the RSS have tried to change native customs to fit with mainstream Hinduism. At first, the Danteshwari temple in Bastar was a place for local tribes to worship. Over time, it became part of the broader Hindu Shakti peeth tradition. This was done with the help of cultural groups that followed Savarkar's idea of a united Hindu ethos. The Ramayana has been widely promoted here through theatre and folklore that has been changed to appeal to tribal people. In this interpretation, local heroes like Hanuman and tribal chieftains are turned into legendary figures who safeguard Hindu dharma. This is similar to Savarkar's approach of combining mythological historical stories with nationalist aspirations.

But this integration hasn't gone without a fight. Researchers like Nandini Sundar have written on how tribal groups have pushed back against this cultural change because they regard it as a threat to their independence and spiritual practices. Hindutva organizations frequently say that they are improving culture, but this often means that indigenous belief systems are pushed to the edges and people lose their ability to choose what they know (Sundar, 2006, p.78) [28].

These case studies show how Savarkar's nationalism, even if it wasn't based on tribes, set up the ideas that made tribal people seem like imperfect Hindus who needed to be brought back into the fold. The language of upliftment is present in both Dang and Bastar, but there is also a risk of cultural erasure. This makes the convergence of Hindutva nationalism and tribal communities a very controversial and politically delicate area.

6. Theories of integration and development of Tribals

There has been a long-standing intellectual discussion about how to integrate and develop tribal populations in India. These debates can mostly be broken down into three main theoretical models: Isolationist, Assimilationist, and Integrationist. These theories show different levels of cultural independence, government involvement, and ideas about constructing a nation. They are generally based on colonial legacies, nationalist goals, and ideas about development.

6.1 The Isolationist Approach

Verrier Elwin, an anthropologist who worked for the Indian government on tribal issues, was the first to use the isolationist method. It stressed keeping the unique culture and way of life of tribal populations. Elwin said that tribal regions should be kept safe from outside economic and cultural pressures since forcing them to modernize would upset their harmony and ability to be self-sufficient. His seminal book *The Philosophy of NEFA (1957)* made his perspective clear. In it, he said, "The tribal people should be allowed to live according to their own genius. Don't force them to do anything they don't understand or that could get in the way of their normal growth" (Elwin, 1957, p. 11) [6]. This concept had a big impact on the early policies of independent India, especially when Prime Minister Nehru was in charge. He agreed with Elwin's ideas and stressed growth "without disruption".

6.2 The Assimilationist Approach

The assimilationist concept, on the other hand, claimed that tribals should be included in the mainstream Hindu or Indian culture. This paradigm was often in line with nationalist ideas, including those put out by VD Savarkar and later by Hindu nationalist groups. The assimilationist stance sees tribal identities as unimportant or incomplete, and they should be assimilated into the Indian nation's wider cultural unity. Encouraged integration by mixing religious and cultural groups. Groups like VHP started ghar wapsi initiatives to ‘reconvert’ indigenous Christians back to Hinduism. People erected temples, connected tribal gods to the Hindu pantheon (like Hanuman), and set up Vanvasi Kumbhs. People thought of it as ‘upliftment’, yet it often hurt tribal religious freedom and caused problems amongst groups. People have said that this strategy hurts tribal sovereignty and spiritual traditions by replacing them with a single national culture (Jaffrelot, 1996) [12].

6.3 The Integrationist Approach

The integrationist concept, which was eventually made official in the policy frameworks of independent India, notably in the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission Reports, tried to find a balance between

isolation and assimilation. It wants to include indigenous people in economic and political progress while also maintaining their traditional rights.

The Dhebar Commission (1961) is an example of this strategy. It stressed how important it was to include tribal people in the national development process without making them feel cut off from their origins. The Commission suggested that tribes should rule themselves and improve their social and economic conditions without having to adopt foreign values (Government of India, 1961, p. 45) [7]. Nehru also talked about the Panchasheel Principles for tribal development. These principles stressed respecting tribal culture, not interfering too much, and allowing people to have a say in government (Singh, 1993) [22].

6.4 Contemporary Perspectives

Recent research has pushed for a participatory and rights-based approach to tribal development. This includes recognizing tribal knowledge systems, legal rights (such the Forest Rights Act of 2006), and decentralization through the PESA Act of 1996. It came from integrationism but puts greater focus on decentralization, legal entitlement, and empowerment. People don't perceive tribals as passive recipients of aid; they see them as active agents of change. Giving people more control through land rights (FRA, 2006), local self-rule (PESA, 1996), and valuing traditional knowledge systems. Scholars like Virginius Xaxa have said that we should move away from welfare and protectionist policies and toward empowerment and agency-based models. Xaxa said, "Integration should not mean erasure of identity but recognition of pluralities within the nation-state framework" (Xaxa, 1999, p. 365) [29].

So, the ideas of tribal integration and development show a range of options, from protection to absorption to respectful inclusion. Early Indian policy wavered between isolation and integration, but today's discussions about development increasingly Favour models that support tribal autonomy, land rights, and participatory development. However, tensions with assimilationist ideologies like Savarkar's remain present in nationalist narratives.

Table 1: Comparison Table: Theories of Tribal Integration and Development in India

Theory	Philosophy	Key Proponents / Sources	Policy/Ideological References	Case Study	Critiques
Isolationist	Preserve tribal culture by minimizing external influence and Development without disruption.	Verrier Elwin (1957) [6] and Jawaharlal Nehru	The Philosophy of NEFA (1957), Panchasheel Principles	NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh): Preservation of tribal governance and lifestyle.	Led to economic neglect, limited infrastructure, and administrative isolation.
Assimilationist	Tribals seen as 'incomplete Hindus', to be absorbed into mainstream Hindu culture.	V.D. Savarkar (1923) [21] and Sangh Parivar	*Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1923), RSS/VHP activities	Dang (Gujarat): Ghar-wapsi, temple-building, reinterpretation of tribal gods.	Erodes indigenous identities, promotes cultural homogenization, fuels religious tension.
Integrationist	Balanced inclusion in nation-building with respect for cultural rights.	Dhebar Commission (1961) [7] and Indian Constitution	Dhebar Commission Report (1961), PESA (1996), FRA (2006)	Bastar (Chhattisgarh): Decentralization, self-governance	Often fails in implementation, struggles amid conflict zones and lacks consistent support.
Participatory / Rights-Based	Empower tribals through land rights, legal recognition, and participatory development	Virginius Xaxa and modern tribal rights scholars	Forest Rights Act (2006), PESA (1996), SC judgments	Niyamgiri Hills (Odisha): Dongria Kondh stop Vedanta mining through FRA.	Effective when legally supported, but ignored in mainstream development, prone to political sabotage.

*Compilation based on interpretation of primary and secondary sources including Elwin (1957) [6], Savarkar (1923) [21], Kanungo (2002) [15], and Xaxa (1999) [29].

7. Criticism and Contemporary Debates

Critics say that Savarkar's nationalism could have erased the diverse culture of native societies by making them more similar. Gyanendra Pandey says that these kinds of stories try to make all of India's internal variety fit into a single national culture, which leads to "routine violence" against marginalized communities by ignoring their differences (Pandey, 2006) [18]. Partha Chatterjee has also said that these kinds of nationalist talks typically picture the nation as being unified, which doesn't leave room for tribal differences or disagreement (Chatterjee, 1993) [5]. Savarkar's nationalism sees the tribal as something that needs to be changed and integrated, not as an independent political agent.

Savarkar's nationalism didn't openly talk about tribal difficulties, but its cultural logic based on assimilation and religious homogeneity had an effect on how tribal upliftment was thought of in postcolonial India. The intersection of Hinduism and tribal societies in India is characterized by a complicated interplay of cultural exchange, political ideology, and social forces. Savarkar's Hindutva has markedly influenced these relationships by championing a vision of a unified Hindu identity that frequently diminishes tribal uniqueness. Comprehending this connection is essential for understanding contemporary concerns tied to identity politics in India. Since they reside alongside caste Hindu communities, and engage in feasible social and economic interactions with them, numerous tribal groups have gradually adopted Hindu characteristics and lifestyles, often resulting in their becoming a jati. Frequently, the assimilation into Hindu religion and society has been driven by mixed economic, social, and cultural motivations. A prominent trait of Hinduism is its inclusiveness. It has not only welcomed various communities but also their symbols, beliefs, customs, rites and rituals, and material aspects. In conclusion, it would be justifiable to advocate for the distinctiveness of what is now recognized as Hinduism's engagement with tribal cultures, characterized by accommodation, assimilation, and coexistence of tribal cultures within the broader Hindu community. Moreover, the uniqueness arises from the nature of Indian traditions, which facilitated the processes of

assimilation, incorporation, and coexistence to operate, rather than from the processes themselves. In modern political anthropology and postcolonial studies, people are still arguing over what these policies will mean in the long run.

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