



The Religion of the Adivasis in Western India: A Historical Perspective

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Abstracts

The idea is critical for comprehending Adivasi's claims to be indigenous people and the existence of their religion. From a historic perspective, it is argued that the Adivasis of India are the country's "original people" and that their religion is unique from all others. Adivasis are pushed to control their marginal status both politically and religiously. They are continuously demanding the right to choose Adivasi or Indigenous religion as an option in the census or any other form. Although there has been a long debate about the religion that Adivasi communities follow. In the Census Report of 1871 'Aborigine', 1881 'Aborigine', 1891 'Aboriginal', religion was a separate category 1901 they were classified as 'Animism' and in 1911 as 'tribal animists or people following 'Animism'. In the Census Report of 1921, the heading 'Animist' has been changed to 'Tribal Religions' and in the 1931 census they are classified as 'Primitive Religion'. However, the Census Report of 1941 described them as 'Tribes' only. Thus, the term 'tribe' was designated by the British for these people. In 1951 when the first census in independent India was being conducted, 'tribe' was available as the ninth option under the column for religion. It was later removed. The Adivasi representatives allege that its removal has led tribes to be counted under different religions. This paper describes the indigenous status and religion of Adivasis in India.

Key Words: Adivasis, Indigenous, Original people, Religion.

Introduction

By Adi-dharma, the term "Adivasis" refers to the foundation, origins, and beginnings (*Adi*) of the spiritual practices of India's first settlers. The following terms are used to refer to these ideologies: "animism, animistic religion, primitivism, primitive religion, aboriginal religion, nature religion, *Adivasi or janjati dharam, sarna dharam, sari dharam, sansari dharam, jabera dharam, bongaism, etc*" (Munda, 2014).

The Adivasis believe that some mysterious supernatural forces either control their fate by nature or are based on the mercy or goodwill of these forces. Because they deal with their day-to-day life with hills, gorges, tocks, streams trees, wild animals, etc., they believe in these things of nature, especially the spirits or souls of unusual objects of nature. These souls are believed in different forms, some of them are benevolent spirits which are not abstract concepts. On the other hand, they consider the soul to be a replica of the body. Some also believe that the soul is the body's shadow. Many of them believe that after the death of a human being, the soul goes to the land of the dead, where conditions are similar to those on Earth (Singh, 2012).

Edward Tyler the idea of animism as a claim to the "religion of savages" was originally put forward by him. He claims that the concept of "Animism" refers to the idea that the natural world's eventual end may be advantageous for one's own life. For instance, mythology, philosophy, religion, and the arts and culture. Animism became known as Tyler because of her work. This idea holds that religion developed through the theology of spirits, which appears as an organic reflection on the dream of death and clarifies a more comprehensive conception of spirits. Adivasis have a superior creator, a kind parent, and a father-God memory. He asserted that animism is a more naturally developed worldview than monotheism (Ratnapalan, 2008).

Enthoven revealed a stage of religious development beyond animism. Thus "They worship female deities known as *Matas*, represented by symbols rather than images, by wooden posts, earthen pots, toy horses, wicker baskets and winnowing fans". The wicker basket likely had a powerful and animated origin. Following that, it evolved into a representation of Mother Earth, a form of devotion for several different peoples, and particularly a component of the Dravidian cult. A specific role for ancestor worship is also played, and different strengths, enormous objects, such as tigers, trees, and large, oddly shaped stones, are revered as deities (Enthoven, 1922).

The main objects of worship of the Adivasis are spirits and ghosts. In the forest, or anywhere near an old tree or well, they are placed in the place of a horse made of clay for ghosts and spirits and that horse is kept as a replica of the deity. Those horses are bee-shaped. In honour of most of these spirits, and they also raise wooden beams, sometimes twelve feet long, built on two heights. At the same time, they offer them goats and roosters, and the wine of *Mohuva* is also offered. And many Adivasi later eats sacrificial animals and drink *Mohuva*. The animal most commonly worshiped by the Adivasis as a symbol is the horse. If prayer is allowed, they often make small horses of mud. The major event in many of their legends relies on the aid or advice of honoring the dead. The peculiar deities are *Raniyadev*, or the forest God, *Dungardev* or the Hill God, *Waghdev*, or the Tiger God, and *Nagdev*, or the Serpent God. *Ghatdev* or the waterfall God, *Gamdevti* or the Boundary-God, *Himaryadev* or the agricultural God, *Gomaadev* or the House-God and any other related *Himaryadev*. The Bhils living in Gujarat did not give any information and respect to their knowledge and mystery about the tribal deities to

the Brahmins. The Adivasis believe in the moon, but mainly worship ghosts, for which every village has its own god yard, with wooden benches for the ghosts to perch on. *Bhagats*, *Modvis* and *Badvas*, devotee exorcists. Belief in magic and witchcraft is universal. If someone falls ill without a clear reason, then *Badwa* is called upon to eliminate the bad effects at work and to trace the origin of the disease. He usually showed it to some old people in the sick man's village. However, that type of practice is now dying. The idea is that *Bhagwan* represents the highest type of God known to Bhils. *Parmeswar* the great god, *Nibhava wavalu* supporter *Kharu dhani* the true principal, *Annadata* the giver of food, and *Modu rakhavliyu* the righteous great keeper man. However, the religion of the Adivasis is a splash of the moon rather than the solar motive. The Lord of the Bhil Tribals appears to be free from the lunar and solar inherited traits and to represent it and the other honours a sui common high god (Naik, 1956).

Identification of Adivasis by British Authors

Adivasis were seen as a collection of diverse communities located across the subcontinent when they were invaded by India. In the process, they created an ideological union that the Adivasis never joined. And those who were single tended to live in the more isolated mountains and forest areas where they had made it through extensive hunting and gathering or primitive agriculture. They were referred to as "aboriginals" or "early tribes", and among other things, were noted for their clan-based kinship systems and "animistic" religious beliefs. They occasionally made it apparent where they lived, referring to themselves as "jungle tribes" (Hardiman, 2006).

In the Memorandum of the Census of British India of 1871–72, the tribals were identified as 'Aboriginals' or 'Aborigines'. The Gazette of Bombay Presidency Volume Six, Rewa Kantha, Narukote, Khambhat, and Surat State (1880) in Rewa Kantha villages tribal settlements whose huts spread far and wide were identified as 'Aboriginal tribes'. In the General Report on the 1891 Census, Census Commissioner Baines described the tribals as Aboriginal or non-Hindu tribes.

The original inhabitants are different tribes of Bhil, Cols, Gond, Meena, and Chooars who are still essentially living in nature. In the Sone, Nerbudda, and Muhanudde forests as well as the Surgooja and Chota Nagpur hills. He has maintained Adivasi customs, religion, and his original simplicity of language throughout all these revolutions that have shaken India. They appeared to have a simple dialect, faith, and manners (Thompson, 1895).

Tod¹ says that the separate Bhil groups are fascinatingly touched upon by their rituals, traditions, and undeveloped state in a brief geographic sketch of the Aboriginal territories. They enjoy a life of complete independence, let alone their own subject, if it is proven, safeguard fifteen thousand bows can be gathered. They are surrounded by high mountains, protected by various impurities and forests, and nearly highly resistant to the body of soldiers. In fact, we can claim that they are still semi-wild, as they are certainly an aboriginal race, whether we look at their superstitions, their habits, or their language, although Sanskrit has much more derivation later. but their terminology is different. The Bhils, Kolis, Gonds, and Meenas are only a few examples of the wild tribes in India that may be thoroughly studied to reveal key connections in the physical history of man. Even in those areas, form and lineage, customs, and superstitious practices serve as the most significant identifiers of distinction (Tod, 1839). Tod, one of the first British Officials to write about Bhils, reports the various names by which they are called: Vanputra ("Children of the Jungle"), Bhumiputra ("sons of the earth"), Mairote ("born of the mountain"), Gond ("lord of the caves"), and pal Indra ("lord of the pass") (Tod 1914).

George Abraham Grierson had served in the "Indian Civil Service" but an interest in linguistics inspired him to study India's languages and folklore. According to him, it often happened that a local tribal language was replaced by an Indo-Aryan language. Similarly, outsiders have given many names to the Bhils to identify them. Because of their dark skin, they were known as *Kaliparaj* or black people. However, Bhil, Sanskrit 'Bhila' is the only comprehensive name. From an ethnographic point of view, they are sometimes called Dravidians, and they are also called Mund (George, 1907).

Grigson omitted all references to figures of the Adivasi religion as being meaningless. According to him, it is impossible to say when a person's religion stops being tribal or starts being Hindu. The percentage of aboriginals who returned as animists or tribals based on religion fluctuated in different censuses in different districts. It was also not an accurate index of the degree to which the Hinduisation of tribal religion was taking place. Much depended on the approach to this question by different enumerators (Grigson, 1944).

The idea of 'Animism' was developed by anthropologist Edward Burnett Tyler in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871). In this work, he defined it as the general principle of spirits and other spiritual beings in general. According to Tyler, animism often includes the idea of desire in wider life and part of nature (Tylor, 1871).

In 1871, Census Commissioner, Henry Waterfield classified the "Aborigine". And they had the characteristics of the tribe, who is said to have worshiped demons or some local deities such as the village god, agriculture, and goddesses of the forest, and found in the provinces among the Aborigine races, different Aborigines are specified. Their cultural life is seen differently from the rest of the people, such Aborigine people are mostly found in the hills and forest area (Waterfield, 1875).

The Census Commissioner for India, W. Chichele Plowden identified as "Aboriginal" in 1881, The Aboriginal communities follow the primitive creed of their ancestors, as the representative of the deity, under various forms or images chosen by them, to be given first place in all their customs by the Aboriginals. As far as the religious title is concerned, "Aboriginal." W. Chichele has formed an Aboriginal under this area. If there is a serious flaw, then

¹ Lieutenant-Colonel James Tod (1782–1835) was an officer of the British East India Company and an Oriental scholar. He was also the political agent of the western Rajput states. Based on the information he collected throughout his travel in western India, he published several academic publications concerning the history and geography of India, most notably the *History and Antiquities of Rajasthan*.

it is in the purity of the number of people who are true worshipers of nature, because every work is done with the character of nature, which is why the community living a natural life is an Aboriginal race (Plowden, 1883).

The way of life of the tribals living in the forests and hills live with this world, they cannot live apart from each other. That is why it was inhabited in a land from the earliest times or before the arrival of the colonists. That is why it is necessary to show what it means here. As it is the "Aboriginal" name used by the 1891 Census Commissioner, Jervoise Athelstane Baines (Baines, 1893).

In 1901, Census Commissioner Herbert Risley named "Animism" and defined it as the belief in the existence of spirits or animists. The aboriginal community is the one who brings souls first in all festivals, from the work of agriculture to their ancestors. Spirits, of which only the powerful, on which man himself feels dependent, and before he stands in awe, attain the rank of divine beings, and become the object of worship. These souls are imagined as moving freely through the earth and air (Risley and Gait, 1903).

1911 Census Commissioner E.A. Gait identified "Animist" and "Animism communities" of different parts of India have been referred to as the same name and traditional identity, with that community naturally showing a different identity. Honouring the different dialects, regions, customs, nature and lifestyles of the animism community is their way of life and their livelihood (ibid).

In 1921, the Census-by-Census Commissioner J.T. Martin was changed to "Tribal religions". Tribal inhabitants have been divided into a large number of poor independent communities, each with its own social organization, customs, social norms and tribal social contexts such as priests performing rituals in birth, marriage and death. Their beliefs have been described as animist type (Marten, 1923).

In 1931 Census Commissioner J.H. Hutton, has identified it as a "primitive religion". Such primitive religions, when they fall within the Hindu system, are often discouraged by them, largely since they have no prejudice towards businesses and food which is prohibited for Hindus. On the other hand, some upper castes are often able to assert themselves in the Hindu system as are *Rajputs* or *Kshatriyas*. However, in some cases, a complete primitive has succeeded in retaining its claim. Under these circumstances, therefore, non-Hinduism is excluded from the total castes of the hill and wild primitives. (Hutton and Singh, 1933).

In the 1941 Census Commissioner M.W.M. Yates identified the names given in the earlier census and classified them as "Tribal". And tribal groups were measured in areas where they were regional groups. Aboriginal groups usually live in the hills and forests of the country. Most of the tribal people speak the Bhili language and do not have a written script (Yeatts, 1943).

Attempts to Destroy Adivasi Identity, Culture and Existence

The Indian Constitution recognizes tribal people as a separate cultural group, at least for a significant portion of them; yet, they have a distinctive religious identity. They have the choice to returning their religious affiliation as others in the census report, which is completed every ten years. Adivasi communities who do not identify as Christians, Muslims, or Buddhists are hence compelled to returning as Hindus. It is equally wrong to have Adivasi be welcomed back as Hindus if they are effectively losing their Adivasi identity by joining other religious communities (such as Christians, Muslims, or Buddhists). But this has been the trend. In trying to become a platform for upward mobility, Adivasis are failing miserably by acting in this manner. His standing in that endeavour is considerably worse than last-born (Antyaj) 'Harijans.' The attraction of the mainstream is misleading. If the Aboriginal people entered, they would be accepting slavery for all time. Adivasi s are becoming engaged in this interest as a result of years of mental abuse that has caused them to lose sight of their distinctiveness and illustrious past (Munda, 2014).

The Sangh Parivar and all those who belong to Hindutva as an ideology are the only groups that fall outside of this more or less universal rule. The word of choice for them is *Vanvasi* (forest dweller) as opposed to Adivasi (first people of India). An important component of *Sangh Parivar's* ideological mission is their attempt to change Adivasi into forest dwellers. His plan for a *Hindu Rashtra* is fundamentally in jeopardy because Hindus assert that India is an indigenous people and like any other applicant to that slot, are Adivasi people, applicants for that slot. Using everything from violent attacks to riots in the name of national security, the *Sangh Parivar*, which has boasted of its power to control Adivasi people's lives, is conducting a huge effort to convert Adivasi back to Hinduism (Outlook, 2022).

Historically, Adivasis have been marginalized from the mainstream of Indian society through the caste system. Adivasis are traditionally considered outside the caste structure. Adivasi communities, in turn, regard themselves as separate from most other organized forms of religion along with India's majority Hindu population. In post-independence India, the state has marginalized Adivasis in the name of development through a systematic process of alienating their land and resources (ibid).

The notion of mainstream Hindu society is changing to the tribals. Once in Gujarat, "*Kaliparaj*" (black-skinned people) were called, they were seen as "*jungali*" (uncivilized). Even M. K. Gandhi called him "*Ranipraj*" (living people with wild animals) (Shah, 1999). The amendment to the Indian Constitution needed them as "Scheduled Tribes." Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) ideologue M. S. Golwalkar rejected the word to the tribals and called them *Vanvasi* backward Hindus need Hindus in their search for a united Hindu identity, the Sangh Parivar felt the need to bring tribals into Hindutva. However, this became a daunting task because Christian missionaries were actively working with Adivasis as well as being dependent on them for education and health mainly from the colonial period (Kanungo and Joshi, 2009).

G. S. Ghurye, was a proponent of assimilation programmes before the country's independence in 1943. According to a book he wrote, India's "so-called Aboriginal" might be defined as "backward Hindus." Ghurye presented evidence that the line between animism and Hinduism was blurry, and that "so-called Animists" and "so-called Aboriginals" have always converted to Hinduism. The tribals had long been thought to have strong ties to Hindus. As a

purist and reformer, the conclusion is that the true categorization of these tribes should be based on or close to their position in Hindu society, rather than their eurocentrism. "The so-called Animists and Aborigines are best described as "Backward Hindus" (Ghurye, 1943).

Since the British colonial era, attempts by dominant religions to convert people have significantly weakened Adivasi groups. To reclaim and defend the land, people gave up their old religion in the early years of colonization and accepted a new one. However, the later privatization of land and the advent of feudalism, as well as the state's isolation of the forest from the people, created a sudden storm of Sanskritization. The zamindars emerged as aggressive Brahmanical missionaries throughout the colonial era, replacing the medieval states as the religion's outsiders. The Adivasi communities developed into a system where both "Christianization" and "Hinduization" were freely practiced; unfortunately, the situation has not improved even after independence. The fact that the country's Indigenous population practices religion is an extremely regrettable situation for the largest democracy in the world. Adivasis are denied the constitutional protections of the "right to religion" since they are categorized in the census report as nameless others (Munda, 2014).

The hill peoples of Bangladesh and Burma were the first Asian delegates to take part in the "Working Group on Indigenous Populations" (WGIP) in the 1984 session. A year later, the Anti-Slavery Society, a well-known "human rights organization" with offices in London, and "Lokayan, an Indian" NGO, released a joint statement in which they discussed the situation in India. This claim is important because it raises the question of whether "indigenous people" may be used in the context of India. The term "indigenous people" was applied to refer to the "indigenous tribal people of India" in the anti-slavery/localization proclamation. These people are today "reduced to a colonial situation and are dominated by a system of values and institutions maintained by the ruling groups of the country." The "so-called Scheduled Tribes" of India and any other group of people cannot be identified as indigenous people, according to the Permanent Indian Delegation to the UN. In the Indian subcontinent, it is therefore argued that the term "indigenous people" is incorrect, often leading to the conclusion that there are no indigenous peoples in India or, alternatively, that all Indians are indigenous (Karlsson, 2003).

Activities of Hindutva and Christianity among the Adivasis

The Adivasi religion is animistic, with spirits like grain, as well as deities that take the form of plants, trees, and mountains, as well as elements of nature like rain, wind, and ghosts. They are the result of regional circumstances (The Milli Gazette, 2006). When it comes to religious ceremonies like *Punj*, *Saka*, and *Dev*, as well as birth, marriage, and death, Adivasis perform them in their own unique ways. The Adivasis use their own term, "shaak padna," instead of the term worshipping, to describe the *puja*. In western India, Adivasis worship their "Kuldevi" (traditional goddess). The majority of traditional goddesses are known as "Koni" which means grains of food (Vasava, 2006).

British colonial administrators inspired missionaries to serve among the Adivasis for practical and instrumental reasons in the late nineteenth century. Adivasis were exploited by landlords, usurers and liquor merchants throughout the colonial period. The tribals were facing many problems. It was at this point that Christians first entered this tribal area. Many organizations have worked in the tribal areas and to keep them connected, both Catholic and Protestant groups have worked in various ways (Hardiman, 2002).

Today Adivasis are facing a different problem since they are getting trapped in the process of development. Adivasis are trapped in a kind of paradoxical situation. On the one hand, they are forced to displace and migrate in the name of development. On the other hand, the culture of Adivasis is being destroyed through different mediums. The Adivasis are facing the problem of existence. Adivasis are being mainstreamed through religion. They are being misled in the name of religion and diverted from their culture. The influence of Hindu and Christian religions is growing among Adivasis. Religious thinking is imposed on Adivasis through various newspapers and organized ways. The media is playing an important role in this process. Adivasis are forgetting their own traditional and indigenous culture and imitating the other's culture. The imitation of Hindu and Christian culture is happening on the large scale. Both religions are trying to propagate religious thinking and try to make communal disputes among the religions. It is a one-way proliferation of both religions in regions. Converted Hindu and Christian Adivasis are being compelled to fight among each other in the name of religion. Due to the influence of these religions, Adivasis are leaving behind their culture and practicing Hinduism and Christianity on the large scale (Lobo, and Mekvan, 2002).

In 1995-96, Swami Ashim Anand, who preached anti-Christian and presented the work of Christian missions as a threat to both Hinduism and nationalism. He went from village to village and spread propaganda against Christian missionaries and Islamic jihadis. The so-called re-conversion to Hinduism, the *Gharvapsi* (or homecoming) was also propagated among the Adivasis. Christian missionaries working in Adivasi area for over a century are misled Adivasis with organized and violent attacks on them by Hindutva organizations. During the year 1998, 38 cases of anti-Christian violence were registered, especially attacks on places of worship. Adivasis are used in such violent cases directed against Christians and partly against Muslims. The slogan of these pamphlets is *Hindu Jago, Kristi Bhagao* (Arise Hindus, throw out the Christians). by referring to converts among the innocent tribal people as foreigners. "Bajrang Dal" held the Trishul Diksha event on December 6, 1998. In Ahwa, the "Hindu Jagran Manch" (HJM) organized a protest on December 25, 1998, in honour of Christmas. Attacks on churches in various areas and Christians leaving prayer gatherings occurred on the same day. The HJM, "Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram" (VKA) and "Vishwa Hindu Parishad" (VHP) asserted that it was a naturally occurring way for the local *Vanvasis* to vent their resentment (The Milli Gazette, 2006).

12 Christian villagers were forcibly reconverted to Hinduism on January 27, 1999, under threat of losing the ability to use the community well and having their homes destroyed. Youths working with Swami Ashim Anand, a Hindu engaged in reconverting local Adivasi people, carried out the reconversion. The villagers, however, claimed that they had not previously been Hindus before becoming Christians (Outlook, 2022).

In 2020, while talking to The Indian Express Sadhvi Yashoda said, “We have not forced anybody to change their religion. Since long the Christian missionaries are converting Hindu tribals into Christianity. We will continue holding similar drives to bring more tribal Christians back to Hinduism” (The India Express, 2020).

The strategy of Hinduism is to replace Adivasi places of worship such as ancestral stones and agricultural rituals (*Dungar deva*) with small temples next to them. The Adivasis did not at first understand the conspired nature of this apparently innocuous act. Eventually, the Adivasi deities in the temple were incorporated into the Hindu pantheon of deities, which over the years have been perceived by the Brahminical leadership of the *Sangh Parivar* to suit the religious status of the tribes. They say that the Shabari legend is in line with this family’s view of the tribal culture. Shabari, Hanuman and such mythological characters were loyal and submissive to higher deities like Rama of the higher caste (The Milli Gazette, 2006).

The primary goal of these organizations is to culturally indoctrinate Adivasis as Hindus. Hindu traditions are being compared to Adivasi nature worship. The Adivasi places of worship, often sacred stones under a tree, are being expropriated by Hindutva activists. Animal sacrifice and home-brewed alcohol are traditional ways to honour the gods, but due to new influences, these rituals are progressively changing to conform to more Brahminical practices. They eventually turn vegetarian, and it is asserted that they are regional variations of popular Hindu deities like Shiva. Adivasis worship the local god Borkhal Dev, to whom they offer wine and the hen. He has been transformed into the vegetarian non-drinker god Datta Bhagvan (ibid).

VHP is working aggressively in the Adivasi region. Hindu festivals have been revived, idols of Hindu gods have been distributed, and *Aarti* (prayer ceremonies) have been held, among other things. In the entire Adivasi area, a well-planned campaign for the Hinduization of the tribal people is in full operation. The development of VHP and Bajrang Dal units in each Adivasi region, Swami’s frequent visits and speeches, the building of Adivasi temples, etc. are all priorities. As a result of this initiative, there have been attacks on Christian churches, disruptions of prayer services, and violent abuse of Christians (Human Rights Watch, 2002).

Demand for Recognition of the Sarna Religion

In such a situation, the question arises why did the Adivasis who worship nature need religion? Hinduist organizations like RSS and VHP have been accusing Christians of conversion to Adivasi. On the other hand, Christian organizations have been rejecting it outright. Adivasi has been demanding the implementation of ‘Sarna Dharma Code’ for years. The Jharkhand government has also passed the ‘Sarna Adivasi Dharma Code’ bill, but it is stuck with the central government for approval. There is a large section of Adivasis who do not consider themselves to be Hindus. Among them, Jharkhand has the largest population of Adivasis (Dutta, 2020).

March 2021 for the “National Adivasi Indigenous Religion Coordination Committee’s” sixth protest event, where they demanded a separate column for “tribal religion” in the census. Hemant Soren, the chief minister of Jharkhand, said that “Adivasis were never Hindus, neither they will ever be.” at a conference organized by Harvard University. “Adivasis are nature worshipers, their culture, religious rituals, and lifestyle is entirely different from Hindus” he continued (Tank, 2021).

The Jharkhand government called a special assembly meeting in November 2020 to approve a resolution recognizing the “Sarna religion” and designating it as a separate code for the census of 2021. The federal government has not recognized this yet. However, when discussing the concept, state chief minister Hemant Soren remarked that because “Sarna Dharma” is about worshipping nature, forests, and mountains, it has much to teach a world dealing with issues like pollution and environmental degradation. The concept has revived the discussion over whether Adivasi religion is only a set of beliefs or a distinctively ecological way of living. Adivasi religious practices are frequently asserted to be an ecological representation of their existence that sustains a close connection to nature (Kukreti, 2020).

Sarna Dharma “followers of Sarna faith believe pray to nature.” *Jal, Jungle, Zameen* (Water, Jungle, Land) is the golden standard of the religion, and its adherents pray to the hills and trees in the belief that the forested areas will be preserved. Many Adivasis follow Hinduism, although some have also converted to Christianity. As stated by many Adivasi organizations, this has led to a demand for a unique identifier “to save religious identity” One of the major aspects of the Adivasi is the preservation of their history and language (Bhargava, 2022).

Between 1871 and 1951, the indigenous people had their separate code. It was altered, though, in 1961-1962. According to experts, it is wise for Sarna to become a religious code because this religion's core values are to preserve nature and the environment at a time when the entire globe is focused on reducing pollution and safeguarding the environment (Kukreti, 2020).

Support For Separate Adivasi Religion Codes in Western India

Adivasi leader Chhotubhai Vasava, the founder and head of the “Bhartiya Tribal Party” of the western states, suggested that instead of the code name ‘Sarna Dharma,’ one should think of a name that is acceptable to the Adivasis across the country and only the Sarna community. Instead of representing all the Adivasi communities of the country (Niazi, 2020).

The “Vishwa Adidharma Parishad” from Navapur, Maharashtra, demanded an ‘Adivasi Dharam Code’ (religious) Code for tribal people in a letter to the president of India in 2012. The Prime Minister, President, Governor, and Chief Minister received an appeal letter from “Vishwa Adidharma Parishad” in 2016 regarding the demand for ‘Adi dharma’ from Ahwa Gujarat. After that, starting in 2017, “Vishwa Adidharma Parishad” sought in a letter from Gujarat that a separate column be included for ‘Adi dharma’ tribals in the census 2021 (Vasava, 2017).

Rajkumar Roat, an MLA for the Bhartiya Tribal Party from Banswara, claimed that up until 1950, no religion had any involvement in India's Adivasi people. "We were included in the Hindu faith in the 1951 census. The attempt to identify us with an existing faith has blown of our cultural identity. Our demand in this election will be to create a religious code for us and give us the independence to embrace it" (The Times of India, 2019).

Gopal Meena of the Congress Party and Ramkesh Meena of the Independent Party claimed, "We are Adivasis not Hindus." Ganesh Ghoghra, state president of the Youth Congress, brought up the subject of forcing Hinduism on tribal people in the assembly, and both Congress and independent Meena MLAs came out in favour of him. The Meena MLAs publicly announced during the Rajasthan "Adivasi Meena Seva Sangh" conference that they had taken steps to establish a special religious code for the Adivasis (Pradhan, 2021).

According to the *Bhil Parivar Sangathan's* and *Bhil Mukti Morcha's* demands, there was no mandatory census of the tribal community in Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism from 1872 to 1941 and 1951 as there were separate Adivasi religion column codes. Today there is a great threat to the identity and existence of the tribals. The "tribal religion" column code was there in 1931, but it should be restored. The government should make a law to stop the activities of the destruction of culture like hatred and jealousy being spread by Christianity and Hinduism in the Bhil region. Efforts to change the tribal marriage custom-worship-place of worship must stop (Bhil Pradesh Mukti Morcha, 2022).

Adivasis Claim to be Indigenous People

Most of India's indigenous peoples call themselves Adivasis, which literally translates to "Original inhabitants." These groups have long coexisted with forests and frequently still do. Adivasis are referred to as tribes/tribal in basically all public discourse, including in textbooks, newspapers, government documents, bank accounts and academic scholarships (Outlook, 2022).

Between 1985 and 1990, the first indigenous delegates from India began attending WGIP conferences. The state's position was to be challenged during that time. On the other hand, the Adivasi people had to claim their status as indigenous. The Government of India today mainly recognizes those earlier referred to as Adivasis as Scheduled Tribes. One of the most crucial objectives was to translate the Indian word 'tribal people' and the Indian word 'Adivasi' with the new international term 'Indigenous people.' Five indigenous representatives from various Adivasi communities reportedly went to Geneva in 1987 to express their "unity and solidarity" with all indigenous peoples around the world. He challenged the state's legitimacy by claiming that they were indigenous peoples who had originated separately from other peoples since prehistoric times. He claimed that they were now subject to a "system of values and institutions maintained by the dominant ruling group" and that they had been "reduced to a colonial situation." In order to return "land and forest rights to their people," he claimed, they must establish a "collective right of self-determination and thus restore." The delegation was there on behalf of the newly formed World Council of Indigenous Peoples affiliate group known as the "Indian Council of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples" (ICITP). Professor Ram Dayal Munda is a significant person in ICITP (Karlsson, 2003).

The Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from June 3 to 14, 1992, with goals that were similar to those of the 'Adivasi Ekta Parishad' (AEP) when it was founded. At the same time as this Summit, a conference of Adivasi activists from 68 nations around the world was convened at the same location. As a member of the 'Adivasi Ekta Parishad,' Ashokbhai Chaudhary also attended the conference. There was discussion in this convention on protecting the Adivasi community's legacy, art, culture, and wisdom, and a voice was raised in protest of the world's horrors and oppression of Adivasis. At that time people around the world realized for the first time that only the Adivasi lifestyle and culture can save the earth and biodiversity. During that time, numerous Adivasi activists from the Bhil region expressed their concerns about the Adivasis, and they attempted to change the situation. The first 'Adivasi Ekta Parishad' *sammelan* (Convention) was conducted in Gujarat on January 1st, 1993. In addition, there are also various groups in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan that were carrying out similar campaigns at that time. They were also associated with this ideological movement of AKP. Apart from the first Convention, the annual Convention of the AKP is held every year on the 14th and 15th of January at various locations around the Bhil region. The intellectuals of the AKP believe that the earth's direction would change on this day. Similarly, on this day, the AKP movement presents a fresh direction to a world that is being destroyed by the mainstream (Vasava, 2022).

Ram Dayal Munda believes that the message Adi-dharma conveys to humanity is precisely what it needs at this time to continue being. Adivasis will play a significant historical role in providing an alternative lifestyle and set of beliefs that can protect the world and its inhabitants from the impending threat of anthropogenic disasters. We are shown a way of living by the Adi-dharma that is founded on egalitarian values, the continuity of nature, ancestors, and humans, as well as synergy between the human and animal kingdoms (Munda 2014).

The AKP is dedicated to establishing Adivasi rights as outlined in the United Nations declaration. Additionally, the Adivasis are informed of Supreme Court decisions that are relevant to them from time to time. The courts have made numerous judgments in which they have recognized the rights and existence of Adivasis while directing the constitution's provisions. AKP human liberation is nature itself and nature is an organization without a constitution working with the goal of liberation. The AKP was founded primarily to combat discrimination. Gradually, his ideological role in him grew greater, and this conflict eventually led to nature's liberation. The AKP is fighting a problem that has arisen in the face of the entire biology. Adivasi values and beliefs are at the heart of this conflict. Taking the initiative to save the environment. Similarly, it is aiming to develop leadership among the Adivasis. By promoting Adivasi principles, this organization seeks to re-establish humanity, coexistence, companionship, love, humility, equality, fraternity, liberty, collectivism, compassion, and connection with nature (Vasava, 2022).

Separate strategy discussions for Asian and Indian participants were organized at the 2001 WGIP session in Geneva. As a result, representatives are socialized to learn a specific language or to use indigenous idioms, such as trying to describe their relationship with nature as spiritual "Mother Earth" and, most importantly, emphasizing indigenous peoples' right to self-determination, which is critical to their overall independence and development. The

2001 WGIP session in Geneva included separate strategy sessions for delegates from Asia and India. On 9, August World Indigenous Peoples' Day, the importance of indigenous peoples' right to self-determination, which is essential to their independence and development as a whole, is recognized (ibid).

When an ethnic identity is erased through identification, it almost invariably results in revenge, resurgence, or reincarnation of that identity by different groups. The Adivasi territories of western India have been claiming their Adivasi groups for about three decades. *Jai Adivasi*, *Jai Bhil*, *Aap Ki Jai*, and *Jai Johar* slogans have begun to be raised and heard loudly in numerous areas. Cultural features, objects, and aesthetics have been revived in greater numbers. Cultural programmes at the national level, such as "Adivasi Ekta Parishad," "Adivasi Parivar," and "Bhil Autonomous Council," have begun. Programs such as Adivasi social awakening have also begun to take place at the national, state, district, *taluka* and village levels (Lobo, 2010).

Conclusion

Aboriginal culture is intrinsically linked to the economic, social and environmental aspects of tribal life. Through their art form, the Adivasis' silent message is clear. They want forests, wild animals and birds that have inspired them to live and sustain them for centuries. Every song, dance and other art of the tribals speaks of the circle of life and harmony. The lives of tribal people are simple and courageous and often difficult. But he has a rich cultural heritage, a marriage, myths and legends that are interesting. Adivasis like to relate to or listen to their history stories. They usually have emotional reactions to their environment.

India's many indigenous populations are making advanced efforts to preserve their religious identities. The difficulties and issues that the country's Adivasis deal with are diverse and can take on a supernatural proportion. The indigenous people are taken out of their land, water, and forest habitats. First by the people of the British colonies, then by immigrants, encroachers, the land mafia, and government development programmes. The indigenous people's social and cultural lives have declined significantly. Even in the absence of political consciousness, their lack of political awareness and economic and educational advancement force them to remain unemployed. Politically, territorially and religiously, tribes are divided, and eventually, their rights are taken away. In India, the issue of religion is alive. One of the most pressing issues facing the country's Adivasi population is religious conversion. He has suffered significant consequences as a result of the adoption of structured religion into his life. It has a significant impact on their communities, their surroundings, and their ecosystems in addition to changing their lives.

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