

Lokur Committee: Criteria for Scheduling of Tribes

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Why in news?

- An RTI enquiry revealed that the Office of the Registrar-General of India (RGI) is following the set of criteria set out by the Lokur Committee to define any new community as a Scheduled Tribe.

- The Office of the RGI's nod is mandatory for the inclusion of any community in ST lists, as per the procedure for scheduling tribes.

Why was Lokur Committee set up?

- The term 'Scheduled Tribes' first appeared in the Constitution of India. However, the Constitution does not define the criteria for recognition of Scheduled Tribes.
 - **Article 366 (25)** defined scheduled tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this constitution."
 - **Article 342**, simply, prescribes procedure to be followed in the matter of specification of scheduled tribes.
- As a result, during initial years after independence, the definition contained in 1931 Census was used to categorise Schedule Tribes.
 - Census-1931 termed Schedule tribes as "backward tribes" living in the "Excluded" and "Partially Excluded" areas.
- Against this backdrop, the Govt of India set up an Advisory Committee on the Revision of Lists of Schedule Casts and Schedule Tribes, also known as Lokur Committee, in 1956.
- One of the mandates of this committee was to revise the list of SCs and STs in a rational and scientific manner.

What were the criteria set out Lokur Committee for a community to be recognised as ST?

- The criteria set out by the Lokur Committee for defining a community as a tribe are:
 - indications of primitive traits,
 - distinctive culture,
 - geographical isolation,
 - shyness of contact with the community at large,
 - backwardness.

Why these criteria are being criticised?

- **Obsolete criteria**
 - These set of criteria set were out by the Lokur Committee nearly 60 years ago and hence may have become obsolete considering the process of transition and acculturation over the time.

- Acculturation is cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture.

- **Condescending in nature**

- Terms like primitive and the requirement of primitivity to be a characteristic of Scheduled Tribe indicates a condescending attitude by outsiders.
- What we consider primitive is not considered by the tribals themselves.

- **Rigid and dogmatic approach**

- Many experts believe that the committee followed a rigid and dogmatic approach while setting out the criteria.
- E.g. – with respect to the geographical isolation criterion, they point out that as infrastructure development continued across the country, how can any community remain in isolation?

Has the government taken any step to develop new set of criteria?

- The government task force on Scheduling of Tribes was constituted under the leadership of then Tribal Affairs Secretary, Hrusikesh Panda in February 2014.
- While concluding that the criteria fixed by Lokur Committee may have become obsolete, the task force had recommended changes to the criteria in May 2014.
- Based on this, the Tribal Affairs Ministry had, in June 2014, prepared a draft Cabinet note to overhaul the criteria and procedure for scheduling of new communities as STs.

What are the new set of criteria for scheduling of tribes which are under the government's consideration?

- The new criteria under the government's consideration included:
 - **Socio-economic**, including educational, backwardness, vis-a-vis, the rest of the population of the State;
 - **Historical geographical isolation** which may or may not exist today;
 - **Distinct language/dialect**;
 - **Presence of a core culture** relating to life-cycle, marriage, songs, dance, paintings, folklore;
 - Endogamy, or in case of exogamy, marital relationship primarily with other STs
 - This criterion is for scheduling of a community as ST and not for determining ST status of an individual.
- The draft Cabinet note also proposed, Communities which have adopted a 'Hindu' way of life will not be ineligible merely on this ground.
- It further recommended considering the population of the new community in relation to the existing ST population of the State.
- It further added that all these criteria had to be **looked at holistically** and none should take precedence over another.

News Summary: Criteria for Scheduling of Tribes

- An RTI enquiry revealed that the Office of RGI continues to follow the criteria set out by the Lokur Committee in 1965.

What is the current process followed by the Office of RGI for determination of a community as ST?

- The Office of the RGI has said that it relies on census publications, which go back to 1891, along with materials provided by the nodal Union ministry and State governments.
- After that, It decides whether a community can be categorised as ST based on the Lokur Committee criteria.
- Experts point out that there are inconsistencies in census records dating that far back.
 - For instance, the 1891 census described tribes as people with a tribal religion; the 1901 and 1911 censuses described them as tribal animists; in 1921, they were called hill and forest tribes.

Q1) What are the criteria for Scheduled Tribes in India?

Government of India has adopted the following five criteria for inclusion in the ST list for inclusion in the ST list (i) Primitive traits (ii) Distinctive culture (iii) Geographical isolation (iv) Shyness of contact with the community at large (v) Backwardness.

Q2) Which Indian state has the largest population of scheduled tribes?

According to Census 2011, Madhya Pradesh has the maximum Scheduled Tribe Population -15316784. It is followed by Odisha - 9,590,756.

Source: [Office of Registrar-General of India follows 'obsolete' criteria for scheduling of tribes](#) | [Tribal Ministry](#) | [Vikaspedia](#)

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