

Kudmis' Agitation in Bengal and Jharkhand for Scheduled Tribe Status

April 16, 2023 • vajiramandravi.com



What's in today's article?

- Why in news?
- Process of granting ST tag in India:
- What are the Criticisms of the existing criteria for granting ST status?
- Steps taken by the government to develop new set of criteria
- News Summary: Kudmis' agitation in Bengal and Jharkhand for Scheduled Tribe status
- Who are the Kudmis?
- When were they excluded from the ST list?

Why in news?

- The Kudmi community had been sitting on protest in the areas of West Bengal and Jharkhand.

- The community was demanding Scheduled Tribe (ST) status and the inclusion of their language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

Process of granting ST tag in India:

- **Constitutional provision:** Article 342 of the Indian Constitution –
 - **The President** may with respect to any State/UT and where it is a State after consultation with the Governor, may notify the STs in relation to that State/UT.
 - **The Parliament** may by law include or exclude from the list of STs specified in a notification issued.
- **The process:**
 - **It begins at the State or UT level**, with the concerned government seeking the addition or exclusion of a particular community from the SC/ST list.
 - Following this, the proposal is sent to the **Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs**, which sends it to the **Registrar General of India** (RGI), after examination.
 - Once approved by the RGI, the proposal is sent to the **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes** (NCST), following which the proposal is sent back to the Union government, which introduces it (after inter-ministerial deliberations) in the Cabinet for final approval.
 - **The final decision rests with the President's office** issuing a notification specifying the changes under powers vested in it from Articles 341 (for SC) and 342.
 - **The inclusion or exclusion** of any community in the ST/SC list come into effect **only after the President assents** to a Bill that amends the Constitution (STs) Order, 1950, after it is passed by both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.
- **Criteria to begin the process:** To establish whether a community is a ST, the government looks at several criteria, including its –
 - Ethnological traits,
 - Traditional characteristics,
 - Distinctive culture,
 - Geographical isolation and
 - Backwardness.

What are the Criticisms of the existing criteria for granting ST status?

- **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?

Steps taken by the government 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.
- 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.
- **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.

News Summary: Kudmis' agitation in Bengal and Jharkhand for Scheduled Tribe status

Who are the Kudmis?

- Kudmis are mainly a peasant community, with their population concentrated in the Junglemahal areas or the Chota Nagpur plateau of West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha.
- During the British rule, **they were in the Scheduled Tribe or Aboriginal community list.**
 - They were regarded as a primitive tribe, like the Munda, Oraon, Bhumij, Kharia, Santhal, and others.

When were they excluded from the ST list?

- After 1950, when the Scheduled Tribe list was prepared in independent India, Kudmis did not find a place on it.
 - During the British rule, some affluent Kudmis wanted to elevate their social status as kshatriya in the Hindu caste hierarchy, while other members opposed this sanskritisation.
 - Sanskritisation refers to a process whereby people of lower castes collectively try to adopt upper caste practices and beliefs, as a preliminary step to acquire higher status.
 - Based on this, the government argued that this community had become “Hinduized” and were no longer eligible for ST benefits.
-

Q1) What is Sanskritisation?

Sanskritisation is a socio-cultural process in India where a lower caste group or community adopts the customs, beliefs, and practices of a higher caste group or community, with the aim of improving their social status and upward mobility. This process often involves the adoption of vegetarianism, caste-based restrictions on food and drink, religious practices, and language, among others. The term was coined by sociologist M.N. Srinivas in the 1950s.

Q2) Who maintains the ST list in India?

The list of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India is maintained by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. The list is updated from time to time based on the recommendations of the Registrar General of India and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes. The inclusion of a community in the list of STs provides them with certain constitutional safeguards, such as reservation in educational institutions and government jobs, and special provisions for their development.

Source: [Behind the Kudmis' agitation in Bengal and Jharkhand for Scheduled Tribe status](#)

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/kudmis-agitation-in-bengal-and-jharkhand-for-scheduled-tribe-status/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.