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People of India

A note on the Series, People of India – Anthropological Survey of India, there exists a huge information gap on a very large number of communities in India, and the information that exists on them is scanty or needs to be updated. The Anthropological Survey of India (A.S.I.) launched a project on the People of India on 2 October 1985. The objective of the project was to generate a brief, descriptive anthropological profile of all the communities of India, the impact on them of change and development processes and the links that bring them together. This was in accordance with the objectives of the A.S.I., established forty-five years ago in December 1945. The A.S.I. has been pursuing bio-cultural research among different population groups from its eight regional centres. Its objectives have been redefined in the policy resolution adopted in 1985, which commits this organization to the survey of the human surface of India. The identification of the communities and their listing have a long genealogy starting from the early period of our history, with Manu. Regional lists of communities figured in Sanskrit works. Medieval chronicles contained a description of communities located in various parts of the country. Listings in the colonial period were undertaken on an extensive scale after 1806. The process gathered momentum in course of the censuses from 1881 to 1941. In our compilation of the lists of communities of India under the People of India project we drew upon ethnographic surveys, the lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes drawn up by the Government of India, the lists of backward classes prepared by Backward Classes Commissions set up by various state governments, and the list that exists in the Mandal Commission Report. We were able to put together about 6748 communities at the start. This list was taken to the field,



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tested and checked, and finally 4635 communities were identified and studied. Unlike surveys in the colonial period, which covered British India and a few princely states, our project covers the whole country, bringing within its ambit such parts as had not been ethnographically surveyed earlier or where the survey had been done in a perfunctory way. Each state and union territory was treated as a unit of study. It was decided to start with an investigation of the least-known communities, and then move on to a field- study of the lesser-known and better-known ones. Investigators for the survey were identified for each area on the basis of their experience and expertise. Teams of investigators of the Survey, as well as local scholars, were set up for each state and union territory to plan the surveys, seek the co-operation of local scholars, generate and evaluate findings, etc. etc. Later, editorial boards consisting of local scholars-one or more of these were nominated as co-editors for each local volume-were set up for each state and union territory. We sought the co-operation of the state governments in implementing the project, and this we received in ample measure, particularly from the welfare and backward classes departments of state governments, local officers of the Census of India, tribal research 'institutes, university departments of anthropology, other departments of local universities, etc. Local scholars participated enthusiastically in our project as well as in the discussion at seminars held by us. The progress in the investigation and coverage of communities from 2nd October 1985 to 31 March 1992 was steady and impressive. To repeat, we were able to identify, locate and study 4635 communities in all the states and union territories of India, out of the 6748 listed initially. As many as 600 scholars participated in this project, including 19,' from 26 institutions. About 100 workshops and rounds of discussions were held in all the states and union territories, and in these about 3000 scholars participated. The investigators spent 26,510 days in the field, which works out to 5.5 days per community studied, in the various states and union territories of India. Our scholars interviewed a large number of people, out of whom we have recorded only the key informants, i.e. 24,951. This works out to about 5 `informed' informants per community. Of the informants, 4981 were women. Our instruction to the investigators was to study a community at two or three places, and in at least two or three cultural regions into which the larger states of India are divided. Interviews were conducted in connection with the study of the communities in 3581 villages, mostly multi-community villages, and in 1011 towns and cities spread over almost all the districts of India, i.e. 421 districts and 91 cultural regions. We were able thus to study on an average a community at about two places. It should be noted that most of the smaller communities could be studied at only one place since they are not located in more than one area. A major achievement of this project was the preparation of cartographic maps showing the distribution of the



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communities and the location where they were studied. About 4000 maps were prepared. Yet another achievement was the visual documentation of the people of India as part of the field operations. About 21,362 photographs were generated, most of them in black & white, and a substantial number in colour, by amateur photographers. At an early stage of our project in March 1985 we decided to transfer the data to a computer. We were subsequently able to develop probably the first software in the country-and one of the first in the world-in ethnography, in close collaboration with the National Informatics Centre. After May 1988 we started transferring the quantitative data collected in computer format to floppies. Simultaneously, the transfer of descriptive data (abstracts etc.) onto the computer also started at almost all the regional centres. We succeeded in computerizing an enormous mass of data and also in producing the first results of univariate analysis, by March 1990. The descriptive material, running into 120 manuscript volumes, and the quantitative data contained in 257 diskettes, were released on 1 October 1990 by Sri Chimanbhai Mehta, Minister of State for Human Resource Development, in the presence of a distinguished audience in Delhi for use by scholars at the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, and at eight regional centres of the A.S.I. The phase of more elaborate analysis started in July 1991, in collaboration with the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. This resulted in a voluminous output of analysed data, which have been presented in a comprehensive matrix consisting of the four categories of populations, the constitutional, religious, occupational and locational. These sets of data, together with a map were released by Shri Arjun Singh, Minister of Human Resource Development, on 24 December 1991. The last workshop on the People of India project was held at the Indian Institute of Social and Economic Change in Bangalore, where the preliminary results of the analysis presented by the A.S.I. were discussed by distinguished scholars. It should be noted that the study of the communities has been inducted in 3581 villages and 1011 towns situated in 421 districts of the states and union territories of India. The information was collected from about 25,000 informants by our scholars, 500 of them over the period 1985 to 1992. Therefore, the observations relate to this limited time frame and to the universe of the ethnographic project titled People or India. The percentages relate strictly to the responses made by the Informants to the questionnaire contained in the schedule guideline and computer format, and to the queries made by the investigators at the places of investigation. We are presenting the material published under the People of India project in two parts which are interrelated. The first consists of the eleven volume national series, which contains an abstract on all communities across the length and breadth of the country. The data generated in this respect has been

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strengthened by the addition of information from census and other secondary sources. The volumes include two on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, prepared as part of the celebration of Dr B.R. Ambedkar's birth centenary; three on all the communities of India; and two containing data on the languages and biological structure of India's population. The remaining volumes contain the quantitative profile, social segments, listings of communities, etc. The second part comprises the state: union territory volumes based on a detailed write-up on each community of India. The contributors to the national volumes on the SC. ST and all communities are listed in Volume VI. The Glossary given in Volume VI is common to all the national volumes. At the end of each account -we have given references to the texts from which we have quoted, or references for further reading. This is only illustrative. An exhaustive bibliography appears at the end of the national volume, Volume VI. The Oxford University Press is publishing the national volumes. A consortium of publishers has been set up to publish the material on the states and union territories. Seven volumes each for the northern states, southern states and the islands, the central and, western states are being published respectively by Messrs 1lanohar Publishers and distributors (New Delhi), Messrs Affiliated East-`Vest Private Limited (Madras) and Messrs Popular Prakashan Private Limited (Bombay). The eleven volumes on the north-eastern and eastern states are being published by Messrs Seagull Books Private Limited (Calcutta), which has already published the introductory national volume. I hope and trust that this series on the People of India, based on a comprehensive anthropological survey of the country, will be found useful by all sections of our people, including students, researchers, teachers, social activists, administrators and political leaders. I hope we have laid the groundwork for a comprehensive ethnography of the people of India which needs to be continually updated and built upon by Successive generations of researchers and scholars. K.S. Singh. (https://web.archive.org/web/20201110143406/http://ansi.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/List_of_Communities.xls)

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