

## 6. Separate PVTG Census – Polity

To address the unique challenges of India's most marginalized tribes, the government is pushing for a separate census of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). This will provide precise data to better implement targeted schemes like PM-JANMAN, aiming for their socio-economic upliftment and protection.

### Introduction – The Case for a Separate PVTG Census

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) has formally requested the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India (RGI) to conduct a separate enumeration of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in the upcoming Census. This move is driven by the need for precise, disaggregated data to effectively design and implement targeted welfare schemes like the PM-JANMAN mission, ensuring that development reaches the most marginalized communities.

### Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

PVTGs are a specific sub-category within the Scheduled Tribes (STs) that are recognized as the most vulnerable and marginalized. Their identification is based on a set of distinct characteristics –

1. **Pre-agricultural Technology** – Their livelihoods often depend on outdated and simple technologies, primarily relying on hunting, gathering of forest produce, and shifting cultivation.
2. **Stagnant or Declining Population** – Many PVTG communities face the critical threat of diminishing numbers. A stark example is the Sentinelese tribe in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, whose population was recorded as just 15 individuals in the 2011 Census.
3. **Extremely Low Literacy Rates** – Their literacy levels are significantly below the national average, with female literacy being particularly low, creating barriers to socio-economic mobility.
4. **Subsistence-level Economy** – Their economic activities are largely non-market-oriented and are focused on bare survival, with limited integration into the mainstream cash economy.
5. **Geographical Isolation** – They typically reside in remote, inaccessible terrains with poor infrastructure, which isolates them from public services and development initiatives.
6. **Economic Backwardness** – High levels of poverty and a heavy dependence on natural resources for survival are common features.

### Historical Context

The concept of identifying the most vulnerable tribal groups was first recommended by the Dhebar Commission (1960–61). Based on these recommendations, 52 groups were initially identified as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) in 1975. The list was expanded in 1993, and the total number of identified groups reached 75. In 2006, the nomenclature was changed from PTGs to the more dignified Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). Odisha is home to the highest number of PVTGs, with 13 distinct groups.

### Constitutional and Legal Protections

A robust framework of constitutional provisions and legal acts is in place to protect the rights and promote the welfare of PVTGs as part of the broader ST category.

#### Constitutional Provisions

**Article 16(4) & 16(4A)** – Provide for reservations in government jobs and promotions for underrepresented backward classes, including STs.

**Article 15(4)** – Allows the state to make special provisions for the educational advancement of STs.

**Article 21** – The fundamental right to life and personal liberty is interpreted to protect PVTGs from exploitation and ensure a life of dignity.

**Article 29(1)** – Guarantees the right of citizens to preserve their distinct language, script, and culture.

**Article 46** – A Directive Principle that mandates the state to promote the educational and economic interests of STs and protect them from social injustice.

**Article 275** – Provides for special grants from the Union to states for promoting tribal welfare, particularly in areas under the Fifth and Sixth Schedules.

**Fifth Schedule** – Governs the administration of scheduled areas in 10 states (like Odisha, Madhya Pradesh), empowering Tribal Advisory Councils and protecting tribal land and forest rights.

**Sixth Schedule** – Facilitates autonomous governance in the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram through Autonomous District Councils (ADCs), which have legislative powers over land, forests, and local customs.

**Article 244A** – Inserted by the 22nd Amendment (1969), it allows for the creation of an autonomous state within Assam to meet the aspirations of tribal populations.

#### Key Legislation

**Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA)** – Empowers tribal communities in Fifth Schedule areas with self-governance by giving Gram Sabhas significant authority over natural resources and local development. However, its implementation faces challenges from bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of awareness.

**Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989** – A stringent law that protects STs from hate crimes, discrimination, and violence through special courts and penalties. Better enforcement is needed to address the rising number of reported crimes.

**Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA)** – A landmark act that corrects historical injustices by granting individual and community rights to PVTGs over the forest lands and resources they have traditionally depended on.

**Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024** – Periodically amends the list of STs to include more communities, ensuring they get access to reservations and welfare. For example, it added tribes like Bondo Porja and Khond Porja in Andhra Pradesh.

#### Major Socio-Economic Challenges

**Health and Nutrition** – PVTGs suffer from high rates of malnutrition, communicable diseases like tuberculosis (prevalent among the Saharias of Madhya Pradesh), and genetic disorders such as sickle cell anemia. Limited access to healthcare facilities worsens these conditions.

**Education** – Low literacy, high dropout rates, and language barriers in formal education systems hinder their development.

**Livelihood Disruption** – Deforestation, mining, and displacement due to large development projects destroy their traditional food sources and habitats, leading to severe food insecurity (e.g., the Baigas in Chhattisgarh).

**Reproductive Health** – Lack of access to contraceptives, skilled birth attendants, and safe maternal care contributes to high maternal and infant mortality rates.

**Discrimination and Exclusion** – They often face social exclusion, humiliation, and discrimination, leading to psychological trauma and alienation.

#### Separate Census Enumeration – Importance and Challenges

##### Importance

**Targeted Policymaking** – Precise data will enable the government to design and implement highly focused schemes like PM JANMAN.

**Effective Resource Allocation** – It will ensure that funds and benefits are directed specifically to these most marginalized groups, rather than being broadly distributed among the larger ST population.

**Cultural Preservation** – A separate census can capture unique demographic data, languages, and cultural practices, aiding in their preservation.

**Progress Monitoring** – It will provide a crucial baseline to accurately measure the impact and success of welfare programs over time.

##### Challenges

**Logistical Issues** – Reaching remote and inaccessible habitations poses a significant logistical challenge.

**Risk of Stigmatization** – Care must be taken to ensure that separate enumeration does not lead to further stigmatization or labeling of these communities.

**Outdated Criteria** – The criteria for identifying PVTGs, such as geographical isolation, may need to be updated in the modern context.

### Key Government Schemes for PVTGs

**PM JANMAN (Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan)** – A comprehensive mission focusing on 11 critical interventions across 9 ministries to provide housing, clean water, sanitation, road connectivity, healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities.

**Sickle Cell Anemia Elimination Mission** – A targeted health initiative to create awareness, conduct universal screening of 7 crore people (ages 0–40) in affected tribal areas, and provide counseling.

**Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)** – High-quality residential schools for tribal students, with a **5% reservation** in admissions specifically for PVTG students in every EMRS.

**Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojna (PMAAGY)** – A scheme to transform villages with a significant tribal population into "Model Villages" by providing them with all necessary infrastructure and services.

**Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM)** – Focuses on creating sustainable livelihoods by promoting the procurement of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) at a Minimum Support Price (MSP) and establishing Van Dhan Vikas Kendras for value addition.

### The Way Forward – Actionable Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Law Implementation** – Establish dedicated state-level task forces to monitor the execution of crucial laws like the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, and PESA, 1996.
2. **Pilot the Census Enumeration** – Launch pilot surveys in PVTG-dominated areas using modern technology like AI, GIS mapping, and mobile apps to refine methodologies for accurate data collection.
3. **Enhance Awareness** – Run community-based awareness programs in local languages to educate PVTGs about their legal rights and available schemes.
4. **Update Identification Criteria** – Form an expert committee with anthropologists and tribal representatives to revisit and modernize the criteria for PVTG classification set by the Dhebar Commission.
5. **Address Health Gaps** – Expand Mobile Medical Units under PM JANMAN to ensure 100% coverage of PVTG villages.
6. **Promote Sustainable Livelihoods** – Scale up Van Dhan Vikas Kendras and MSP for MFP schemes to create viable economic opportunities.
7. **Ensure Gender-Inclusive Policies** – Amend laws to grant tribal women equal property rights and promote their participation in decision-making bodies like Tribal Advisory Councils.
8. **Integrate Technology for Monitoring** – Develop a centralized digital dashboard to track the progress of all PVTG welfare schemes in real-time.
9. **Protect Cultural Heritage** – Partner with institutions like the Anthropological Survey of India to document and preserve PVTG languages, traditions, and indigenous knowledge.
10. **Strengthen Community Participation** – Involve PVTG leaders and community members in the design, implementation, and monitoring of all development projects.

### Conclusion

PVTGs represent some of India's most vulnerable communities, possessing unique cultural heritages that are at risk. A dedicated and sensitive approach is required for their socio-economic upliftment. A separate census enumeration, if conducted with transparency and community involvement, could be a transformative step, providing the precise data needed to craft impactful policies that secure their rights, dignity, and a place in India's growth story.

Source – <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/particularly-vulnerable-tribal-groups-pvtg-census-10229611/>

