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Rajya Sabha passes Bills to include Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups of Odisha, A.P. in ST lists

Tribal Affairs Minister claims 9 of 75 PVTGs were never added to the ST list explicitly and that this work is only now being done, taking a dig at previous non-NDA governments

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Union Minister Arjun Munda speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi. File. | Photo Credit: PTI

Rajya Sabha on Tuesday passed the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order Amendment Bill, 2024 and Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Order Amendment Bill, 2024, clearing the way for the addition of several new communities to the Scheduled Tribes list of Odisha and the inclusion of synonyms and phonetic variations of existing tribes in the ST lists of both Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. Both Bills received support from MPs across party lines.



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Among the additions were notably seven Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) (a subset of STs) — four in Odisha and three in Andhra Pradesh — whose independent names had been specifically added as synonyms or sub-tribes of communities already on the ST lists of these States.

While replying to the discussion on the Bills for Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, which were taken up together, Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda took a dig at previous non-NDA governments for considering the most vulnerable STs — the PVTGs — as tribals just in name but never thinking about including them as entries in the ST lists.

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Mr. Munda claimed that at least nine of the 75 designated PVTGs were never explicitly included in the ST lists of their respective States. “But it is our government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that is bringing legislation like this, and laying the groundwork for real inclusion by prioritising the most backward communities and people in society,” he said.

In Odisha, the PVTG communities added are Pauri Bhuyan and Paudi Bhuyan as synonyms of the Bhuyan tribe; the Chuktia Bhunjia as a synonym of the Bhunjia tribe; the Bondo as a sub-tribe of the Bondo Poraja tribe; and the Mankidia as a synonym for the Mankirdia tribe. In Andhra Pradesh, the PVTG communities included were Bondo Porja and Khond Porja as synonyms of the Porja tribe and the Konda Savaras as a synonym for the Savaras tribe.

The other two PVTG communities were in Maharashtra and Manipur, Mr. Munda said, adding that the respective State governments had clarified how these communities were being included in the ambit of benefits. “But we realised that for the other seven in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, the inclusion in ST list was necessary to take benefits to them,” the Minister stated.

While these seven communities were already counted among the 75 PVTGs of the country when the designation was created, their individual community names (which qualify as either synonyms, sub-tribes, or phonetic variations of existing tribes) were not mentioned specifically. Now, these individual community names have been added as synonyms, sub-tribes, and phonetic variations of existing tribes, giving them access to ST status under their specific tribe names.

“There are 75 PVTGs which are spread from Andaman Island to the mainland. The government has started a scheme and worked in mission mode with a target to reach them

in the far-flung area in which they reside,” said Mr. Munda, adding that their government has been consistently following up with respective State governments over the declining populations of several PVTG communities across the country.

Other additions and changes

In addition to this, the Bill to amend Odisha’s ST list also shifted two entries — Tamadia and Tamudia — from the Scheduled Castes list to the Scheduled Tribes list. The Bill also added synonyms, phonetic variations and sub-tribes of at least eight existing communities in the State’s ST list.

Further, Odisha’s ST list was expanded by adding two communities to it as new entries. These are the Muka Dora community (and synonyms) in undivided Koraput District which includes Koraput, Nowrangapur, Rayagada and Malkangiri districts; and the Konda Reddy (and synonyms) community.

While the Bills did receive support from across party lines, some members of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha accused the BJP-led government of being anti-tribal and against the interests of backward caste people and women, with CPI Member Binoy Viswam saying they seek support of these communities only during elections.

L. Hanumanthaiah of the Congress, meanwhile, asked why the government was bringing small Bills to amend SC and ST lists every session, and suggested that all such communities left out should be included in one shot in one Bill — a suggestion quite often brought forward by members of the Opposition.



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