

## **CHAPTER – 3**

### **A PERSPECTIVE ON THE EVOLUTION AND LOCATION OF TRIBES IN HILLY ENVIRONMENT**

*“All our science, measured against reality is  
primitive and childlike – and yet it is the most  
precious thing we have.”*

*– Einstein*

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A perspective on the evolution and location of tribes focuses on the possible perceptions of man about the environment and role of environment his reactions, in the process of evolution and location of man and their process of settlement in specific locations. It is presumed to be necessary to detect and understand the causes of mutuality between man and environment, various catalysmic events and behaviour of transforming environment in the space–time continuum. The objective of attaining sustainability necessitates to explore the past and restoring the lost virtues and pave the way for sustainability.

The issue of defining tribe being an open question and necessity of clarity of concepts for a scientific study facilitates opportunity to discuss, speculate and explain the perception about the process of evolution and location. Some of the radiating facts about tribes, such as non–correspondence of Indian tribes with those of a paradigmatic identity outlined from study of the rest of world; the possibility of evolution from the state of primordial tribalism in the course of centuries of social evolution; rhythmic mobility and adjustment dependent on natural cycle of reproduction and proliferation of environment; the possibility of fusion, fission confrontations, assimilation, deviations and bifurcations of groups due to random mobility and natural barriers; the possibility of communitarian mode of life; the possibility of breaking harmony with the environment prone to transformation and lack of uniform pattern directs the need to focus on the process of evolution and location of Indian tribes (Ahmad, 1999, 115–174).

#### **3.1 EVOLUTION OF TRIBES:**

Man being nomadic in the beginning and tribes upto the recent past, it is difficult to know their genetic antecedents. Many evidences explain the interaction of tribes with other people and expose them as either procreation of miscegenation or laggards of the civilized population of similar origin as a secondary formation (Guha, 1997). Some of the significant facts are necessary to explicate the reality about origin of tribes. Such as the fifth and twenty seventh hymns of Chapter–3 and hymn–82 of Chapter–2 of Rig-Veda and fifth hymn of Chapter–3 and third hymn of chapter–5 of Sam Veda explicitly explicate the presence, interaction and confrontation

between the indigenous and approaching population (towards India). The hill environment, characterized by rich endowments of water and forest resources, remained the abodes of the tribes.

The above description explains the presence of varying class of people designated with varying functions. And more importantly indicates the presence of many functional classes in a hilly environment endowed with water bodies like ponds, rivers, forests and riverine fields possibility of interactions and thence miscegenation (Choudhary, 1977).

2. Manusmriti too explains the procreations of miscegenation in Vedic Aryan Society and evolution of multi-tier society from a pure society of four classes (ibid).
3. Availability of similar implements, weapons and earthen utensils do prove some kind of relationship between tribes and non-tribes living in geographical regions especially plains (Vidyarthi, 1982).
4. Similarly in appearance, traditions, religious beliefs, robes, ornaments etc. between the tribes explain their common descendency (Ahmad, 1999; Choudhary, 1977; Vidyarthi, 1976).
5. Some other ethnic characteristics like language being similar to the surrounding non-tribals indicate their close association or affiliation (ibid).

*"We may trace the origins of social differentiation and link it to this process of incoming cultural streams at different stages of social evolution and their subsequent isolation and placement in different segments of geographical space. The physical framework – relief features, altitude, climate and more importantly, water supply – supported in a neatly defined manner the scope for the plurality of forms of culture, with the new elements co-existing with the old, the archaic and the primitive simultaneously, and surviving over time. While the newest elements were assimilated by the groups living all along the main route of migration, the continuity of the old, the primitive and the archaic elements distinguished the isolated regions in the backyard of this arena. One cannot dismiss this historical evidence easily" (Ahmad, 1999, 71).*

Above evidences provide enough ground to conclude that there is least possibility of their distinctive genetic and ethnographic descendency. The seven human skeletons of Negroid characteristics of micro-lithic culture, depiction of Negrito racial tribes in the Gupta and post-Gupta art (AD 320 to 750) in the Ajanta frescos and presence of Bhils, the descending class of Aryan society belonging to Caucasoid race, explicate the presence and interactions between the people of different race over time and possibility of miscegenation (Hasnain, 1992; Guha, 1999).

Beside above mentioned facts, it is worth discussing the natural turbulence and its role in the evolution of tribes. Natural turbulence of varying magnitude is an *ex cathedra* of any time and space. Even the Vedic literature, epics, archaeological, geological and historical explanations mention about it. Above all, a natural law of mobility of every mass, irrespective of shape and size, dictate the on-going eternal turbulence of the spatial phenomena. It is mentioned here to suggest that a series of intermittently occurring catastrophical turbulences might have caused the dispersal of mankind of same origin to different directions and unison of diverse people at various margins and nodes. Moreover, the temporal, structural and qualitative variation in geographical phenomena or environment might have brought genetic variations within the organisms or living beings. Therefore, in such a mobile spatial system or environment it is different to think of the existence of pure distinctive races but the possibility of some distinctive remnant characteristics cannot be denied (Ahmad, 1999; Singh, 2003; Guha, 1999; Vidyarthi, 1976) (Figure 3.1).

### **3.2 LOCATION OF TRIBES:**

The diverse ecological setting in India has distinct ecological niches for the survival of varied modes of economics ranging from tribal, pastoral to agrarian. While the agrarian mode spread horizontally in the river valleys, the inter-fluvial tracts were favoured by the nomadic pastoralists. Higher up on the plateau surfaces or in isolated hills and mountain ranges of the country, tribes lived in their own exclusive world displaying strong tendencies of clustering and concentration. This leads to the following two broad generalizations:

(a) either the tribes have generally preferred to live in areas which are by and large adverse to sedentary agriculture; or

(b) they have been pushed into these enclaves by the peasant groups.

Today their way of life, including mode of economy, is intrinsically linked with the ecological base of their present habitat (Ahmad, 1999, 122).

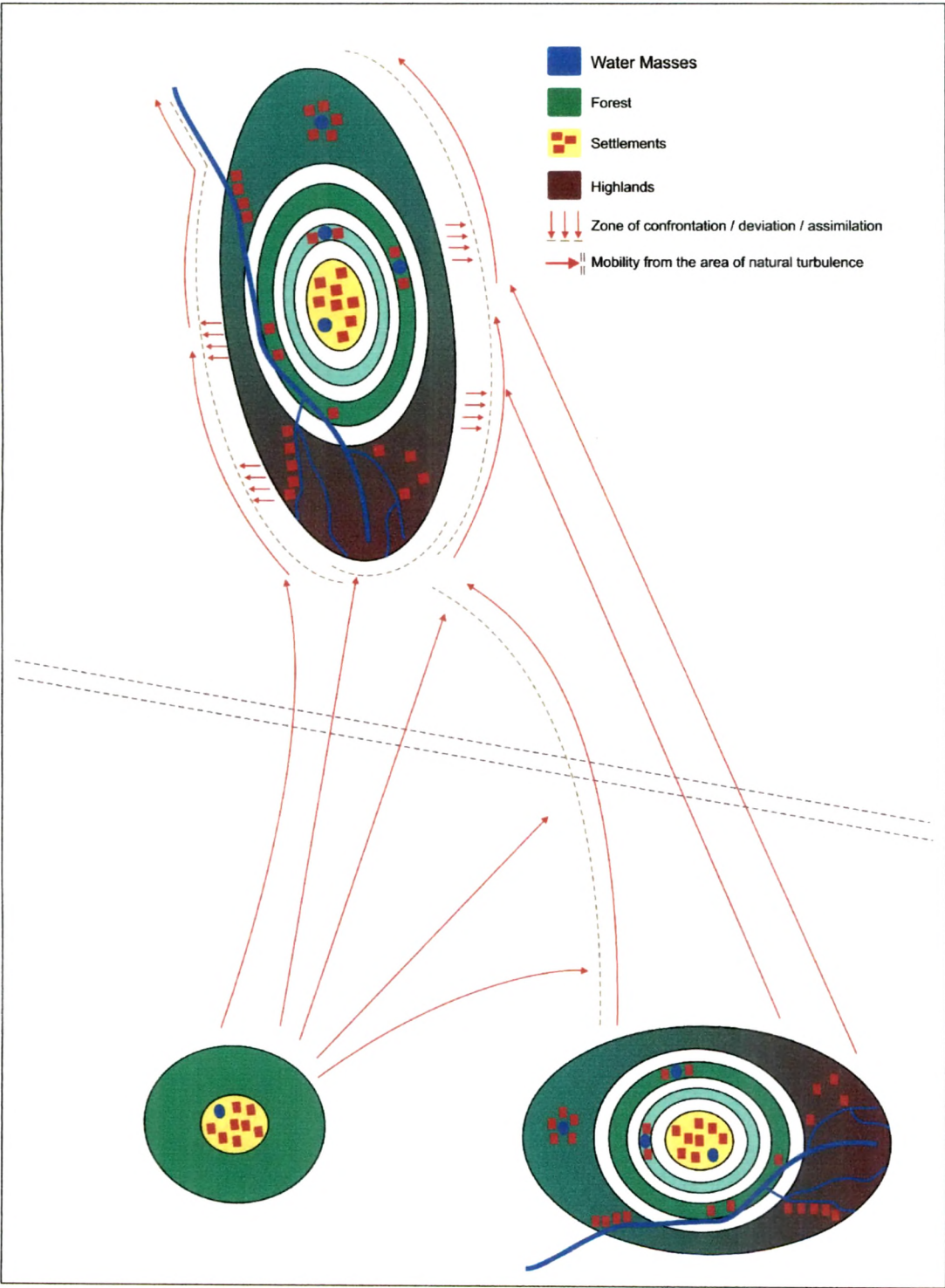


Figure 3.1: Human Turbulence determined by Natural Turbulence

Law of gravitation and magnetism is applicable in the inhabitation of any space. The life supporting potentiality of any space is the basis of inhabitation of any geographical space. And variation in the potentiality in space–time continuum is evidently a natural phenomenon and directly affects the patterns of life. From this it could be concluded that –

- (i) Potentiality of man–environmental system decide the evolution, patterns of life and future of the society and culture,
- (ii) Contemporary inhabited spaces must have had rich life supporting systems,
- (iii) The study area was evidently a rich life supporting system. It signifies that hilly environments inhabited by tribes were once rich resource centers with rich biodiversity.

It is concluded that tribal spaces have been sufficiently rich resource systems to support the inhabitants. Especially they possessed rich biodiversity. This could be the probable reason for the location of tribes in hilly environments. But it is worth to discuss it elaborately.

### **3.2.1 Self – Regulating Random Location:**

The location and survival of any living being is solely dependent upon the environment. Man having comparatively more abilities is efficient in adapting to varying environmental conditions. Because of this ability of adaptation he kept on making efforts to fulfill the needs. The history of civilization reveals that initially due to the lack of advancement and technical skill, man was merely gatherer and hunter. In the trophic level of any eco–system his life was equally at stake as that of other organisms. But gradually, he developed his skills by exploiting his abilities and emerged as supreme. Undoubtedly, he could succeed in winning over other beings and partially modifying environmental conditions for his survival, but due to the simultaneous growth in the population, sense of possession and security and deterioration in the environmental resources led to the struggle among human groups for resource rich environments like riverine, mountainous, coastal, forest etc. These prolific food supplying environments in favourable climatic zones became the matter of struggle for early man who did not have the abilities to produce but to grab or gather. In the lack of knowledge they might have perceived these environments as abodes for their survival and struggle at various level started to increase or propagate their domain. On the other hand, erratic behaviour of environment did not allow them to settle at one space permanently.

The struggle for existence or survival was certainly tripartite. It was a struggle between man to man and with environment also. This was not a struggle between mental strength or skill but physical power. The strongest men occupied the most ornamented spaces. This signifies that hilly environments might have also been occupied by the strongest people of then and later plains must have been occupied by the most efficient i.e. mentally strong men. Historical evidences and contributions of many scholars describe such spaces as resource rich or biodiversity rich spaces. If this dictum of physically and mentally strong occupation is correct then why do contemporary men living in the plains, forest and hills of hilly environment are in backward state? This might be because of shifting of most efficient inhabitants from such environment to more appropriate spaces like plains after learning the art of domestication and cultivation (Ahmad, 1999).

Contrary to above philosophy, in case of mass movement or recession of strongest or most efficient from hills, forests and riverine plains might have opened corridors of opportunity for less competitive or struggling people. The inefficient might also have been dislocated from the plains and were enforced to live in partially exhausted spaces. With the passage of time this partially exhausted resource systems might have lost life supporting potentiality due to exponential exploitation by a growing population and later on by administrative agencies. Besides inefficiencies and exhaustion of resources, their non-interacting or reflexive tendency might have also restricted them to foster their knowledge and skill, develop their technology, cultivate opportunities and project their future (Ahmad, 1999, 71).

### **3.2.2 Induced Location – Geographical and Historical Causes:**

Ethnic and other similarities between the contemporary tribes and non-tribes reflect that tribals concentrated in hilly environment are not natural inhabitants of this environment. Meaning thereby, they might had been forced to live in such environments for their survival. It is worth mentioning the causes which impelled to cogitate in this direction.

Firstly, the availability of similar social structure and culture – both material and non-material, indicate the branching out or dispersal of man from common centers in varying directions. If we consider the stage of development then it becomes clear that the hilly environments were probably not the original breeding centers of technological advancement. If it would have been, then must have flourished further. The inhabitants of this environment might have carried the knowledge, skill and technology with them prevalent in the original centres of emigration. They might have carried grains, utensils, ornaments, implements and

domesticated animals with them for convenience (Ahmad, 1999; Vidyarthi, 1976; Choudhary, 1977; Guha, 1999).

Secondly, instinctive resemblance in religious beliefs, social structure, traditions and ethical values confirm their common descendancy and separation from original centers of inhabitation (ibid).

*Possibilities for Their Location in Hilly Environment–*

1. Consecutive flow or influx of people and invasions on Indian subcontinent through north–western corridor and southern sea–routes might have forced indigenous inhabitants to recede from the riverine fecunds to either inaccessible forests or forested mountains or hills. Such confrontations between indigenous and foreigners are even mentioned in Rig-Veda and there after in many historical documents. The invasions are mostly described as plundering typhoons which not only plundered the wealth but also ethical values and self respect. This might have pushed them to hide into inaccessible spaces (Ahmad, 1999; Vidyarthi, 1976).
2. However, over a period of time, the agrarian and non–agrarian modes got located in their respective ecological niches maintaining by and large a harmonious relationship with each other (Roy Burman, 1992). Even during the Mughal period, the rich economic resource base of the tribal areas did not get disturbed (Guha, 1982).
3. Imperialism and colonialism had the common characteristics of despotism or suppressing tendencies. These regimes least cared for the welfare of the commons. There are evidences of proliferating ecosystems in the Indian subcontinent till the earlier phase of British rule. The colonial rulers exploited resources for their own prosperity and maintenance of their army. The British administration forcefully used the tribal labour to exploit the forest and mineral resources. These common people in the process might have been squeezed like other resources in exploitation and transportation of resources and there after, left behind with a completely depleted economic resource base. This population irrespective of caste, religion or class might have grown into a new class of economically, socially and culturally backward class presently known as tribes (Ahmad, 1999).
4. Tribes might have also fled further inferior as suppressed tenants or peasants because of inability to pay revenues against their produces. It is notable that earlier the crops were based on erratic geographical conditions. Mughal administration was aware of the same and had introduced a different system

of revenue collection based on ecological conditions of specific regions and erratic climatic situations (Ahmad, 1999).

5. Also, due to marginal or distant location of hilly terrains from the administrative centers (and if in close vicinity then also) might have been kept reluctant and aloof from the main-stream of interactive functions and development processes. It reflects these spaces must have been socio-economic and cultural shadow regions (Ahmad, 1999).

### ***Ancient Society and Culture Monitored Spatial Location:***

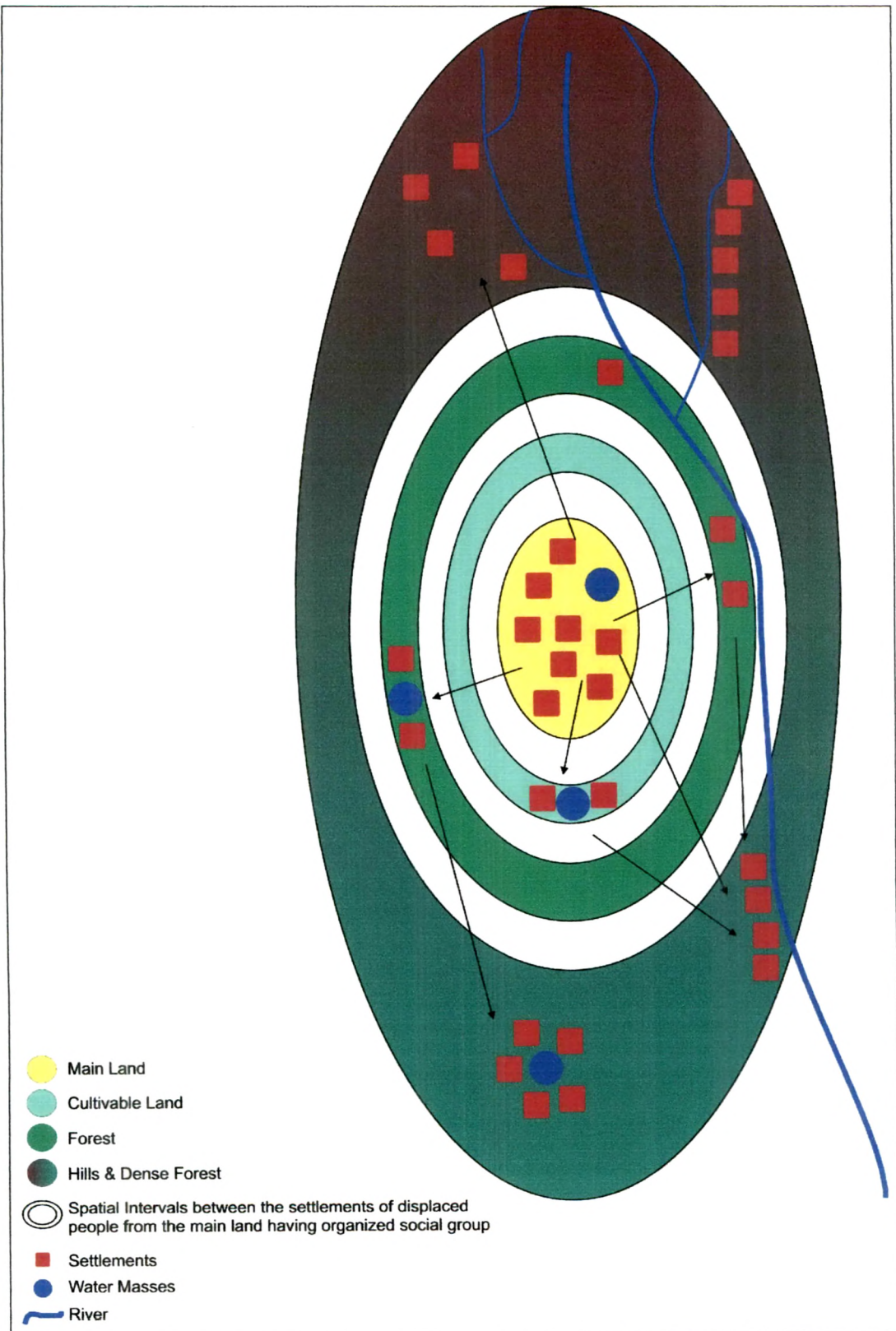
The possibility of evolution from the state of primordial tribalism during the course of centuries of social evolution dictates initial fission, fusion and division of randomly moving groups confronting among themselves and with the natural barriers. This also explains the probability of fission, fusion and division of organized social groups. The possibility of presence of mobile and settled organized groups can not be denied. The separation of a part of such organized groups must have been in the form of spatial displacement from the main land i.e. from the perennial nuclear locations. Fission, fusion and division of socio-cultural groups seem to be a universal fact and therefore, it is necessary to explore the probable causes in the Indian context. Moreover, the possibility of its roots in the antecedent of such social groups directs to explore the past (Ahmad, 1999, 115).

Vedic literature, Manusmruti and epics well describe the origin and location of tribes. Derivations from some excerpts of these literatures enable to reach the conclusion that initially (during Vedic period) whole mankind was divided into four classes on the basis of performing functions. But that was egalitarian and pure society having same origin. Hierarchies in the disciplined society evidentially arrived due to the misdeeds of people or breaking of the discipline. Those who broke the discipline or norms of Aryan civilized society used to be displaced from the mainland. But they too were allotted some specific functions to perform for their survival and remain indirectly in contact to the originating centers. Those procreations of discipline brokers or miscegenation were considered as mean or lowly descendents. The people were of the belief that procreations of miscegenation and crime oriented people might not prove to be epidemic and malign the true nature of society. Actually they were considered as social evils and so did not give close space to such evils. It is notable; the social-evils if got involved in any further crime such as miscegenation then the born child and committer both were treated more inferior and used to get lower hierarchy. So, in this way hierarchies in the society grew and on the basis of hierarchy they were allotted the function and space to settle. The miscegenation of

first order got closer spaces and in this way with the increasing order they got more distant spaces to settle. Marginal or isolated location of hilly spaces signifies the location of very low order. But hilly environment comprised of even intercepted lowland plains and rivers create the possibility of location of main society in lowlands and lower orders in the forests and hills. Most striking is geographical essence in such social, functional and spatial set-up (Ahmad, 1999, Dash, 2004) (Figure 3.2).

The prevailing rigid and strict system seems to be an unending hierarchy. The most significant aspect is the settlement location and process. The procreation of miscegenation or social evils had to live out of the main society and mainland. They had to live in the fields, forests, near ponds or rivers and in mountainous regions. Nishads or sailors had to live in the fields or beside rivers, non vegetarians, herders and hunters had to live in jungles or peripheral lands or far off spaces, fisherman had to wander from one water source to the other, Kirats had to live in caves, evil persons in mountainous region, Bhils had to guard the land of dark soils or denser forests along with their dogs and Dheevars had to look after the ponds. This is further certified in Manusmriti with the mentioning of Andhra, Med, and Chunchu as miscegenated descendents of Vaidehak male and nishad female and Vaidehak male and Kalawar female. And so they had to hunt wild animals for their survival. It is also verified that the societal structure and spatial functional placement of tribes and non-tribes is mostly similar in many parts of India.

The geographical phenomenon has laid great impact on the initial evolution and thereafter on the transformation of the tribes and their environmental system. The available literary explanations explain the magnetic influence of proliferating favourable geographical environment. The concentration or settlement of tribes at specific locations might have been the resultant effect of physiographical and socio-cultural elements. The socio-culturally mobilized or regulated masses might have selected resource rich natural abodes like forests, water bodies and inaccessible areas for their security and survival. This process of inhabitation and settlement can be related to both voluntary and involuntary motives of the tribes. Voluntary, inhabitation could have been regulated by inherently generating demands and priorities, whereas involuntary ones could have been due to pressure of society, culture or natural factors such as biodiversity and climatic conditions.



**Figure 3.2: Hierarchical displacement of Population from the Organized Society of Main Land**

A perspective on the evolution and location of tribes indicates that there was least possibility of distinctive genetic and ethnographic descendancy, rather miscegenation and human turbulence might have been caused due to political or cultural turbulence. In spite of, human turbulence the possibility of partial seclusion cannot be denied. This could have been due to geographical barriers creating inaccessibility, escaping tendency to avoid confrontations and feeling of satisfaction in a sustaining environment. Therefore, it was felt necessary to analyze the causes of their settlement in a specific environment. So the causes of tribal location in forest rich environments or inaccessible geographical entities are explained through generalized theories, such as, self regulating random location, and induced location caused due to geographical and historical reasons including socially and culturally monitored spatial location.

The process of man's perception, interaction and centripetality to the environment for their survival, settlement and location signify the magnetic behaviour of proliferating environment. Derivations direct to study the role of transforming mutuality between the man and environment, in space-time continuum, in the evolution of contemporary environment. Moreover, the dictating association of man and environment in ad-infinitum necessitates such endeavours for reviving and creating environment favouring sustainable development.