

7. A Study on Tribal Women and Their Socio-Economic Development

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Abstract:

This research illustrates the connection between economic empowerment and the increased engagement of women, particularly tribal women. It looks at how women are dressed, how they earn a living, and how they compare to other socioeconomic groups. While Indian tribal women labour just as hard as their male counterparts, they have less opportunities to earn money outside the home. Due to the family's financial situation, they feel they cannot afford to send their children to school.

In addition, they tend to overlook the most fundamental health requirements because of their generally poor level of education and awareness. If we compare tribal women to both other women and to women in the general population, we see that they are not just at a disadvantage compared to tribal men, but also to women in the general population. The goal of this theoretical study is to identify some of the unique difficulties experienced by indigenous women and to propose some potential solutions. The findings may be used to better their disadvantaged condition by developing projects.

Keywords:

Women Empowerment, Economic Development, Tribal Women, Socio-economic Status, Population, Labor, Education, Scheduled Tribes, Challenges, Status of tribal women.

7.1 Introduction:

Even though they make up only a small percentage of India's total population, India's tribal communities are vital to the country's culture and identity. There are 8.2% of Indians who belong to Scheduled Tribes, and tribal women play a significant role in their society's economic and political systems, as shown by data from the 2001 census¹.

As a barometer of social fairness, a society's treatment of women is instructive. It is common to talk of a woman's "status" in terms of her finances, career, health, and social standing.

The standard of living of a region can be gauged most accurately by looking at its level of socioeconomic development. Economic growth, social fairness, and quality of life are all bolstered when social and economic services are distributed fairly.

In order to truly empower women in tribal communities, the current approach for tribal development needs to be refined, improved, and elevated. The process of liberation from man-made bondage via prolonged struggle and resistance is an essential part of the socio-economic empowerment of marginalised groups.

This includes not just the process of creating socio-political space for these groups by the state and civil society. It's also symbolic of the achievement of underrepresented groups' aspirations for a society devoid of the political, social, and economic disparities that have long plagued it.[2]

7.2 Classification of Tribes:

There are six basic categories that can be used to categorise tribal tribes, based on factors such as occupation. The classification also takes into account ecological factors, traditional economics, superstitious beliefs and behaviours, as well as the impacts of the recent past.[3] These six types are –

A. Forest-Hunting Type: It comprises the indigenous communities which live in woods and are exclusively dependent on forests for their subsistence. They live in shelters fashioned of the materials found in the woodlands. Their life centres round the forest with primitive technology, limited skills and deep traditional and ritual customs.

B. The Primitive Hill Cultivation Type: To identify these groups, one must look no further than their distinctive methods of shifting agriculture. They also engage in the activities of hunting and gathering food. Slash-and-burn agriculture is a major part of their way of life.

C. Plain Agricultural Type: Agriculture is the mainstay of the tribal economy, with other subsistence activities including hunting, gathering, and fishing serving as supplementary means of support. Throughout the monsoon season, they focus on a single crop. Spiritism and the observance of agricultural and seasonal festivals characterise their way of life.

D. Simple Artisan Type: This group of people relies on their ability to create art for a living, and their products span from bamboo baskets and iron tools to spun textiles and wrought metalware.

E. The Pastoral and Cattle Breeder Type: The Gujjars, Bakarwals, Goddess, and Jodhs are all nomadic pastoral communities located in the north-eastern Himalayas. They herd their sheep, goats, and cattle to higher altitudes in quest of better grazing. These indigenous groups have adapted in a wide variety of ways to their varied natural environments.

F. Urban Industrial Worker Type: Since they were not explored by Europeans during the British reign, India's tribal regions, and the middle India tribal regions in particular, are a treasure trove of untapped mineral and metal deposits.

7.2.1 Problems Faced by Tribal Women:

Almost all tribal people have significant obstacles they must overcome to advance socially. [4]

A. Absence of any fix livelihood:

Different studies show that tribal women have a higher rate of employment than those in the scheduled caste and the general population, but that this does not mean that tribal people have secure or stable livelihoods. Almost all of them are poor since they do not have a reliable source of income. Those of the tribal population who make their homes in rural locations engage in a wide variety of low-stakes pursuits. They work primarily in agricultural fields. Additionally, they work in pastoral activities, handiwork, and occasionally in the industrial sector. Most tribal women, like their male counterparts, are found working in agriculture, but unlike the men, they are not engaged in any form of continuous employment. Not many people from indigenous backgrounds work for the government. There is a connection between a household's economic situation and its other areas of life.

B. Lack of access to education:

Most women in tribal communities have paid jobs or other outside-the-home responsibilities. They need to support their families, so they go to work. The majority of women in the workforce are engaged in agricultural labour. Young girls and boys often accompany their mothers to the workplace. They tend to either intermittently attend school or eventually give up on formal education altogether. Even in low-income households, sending kids to school isn't always prioritised because it

means fewer people to help with chores. The women in the household are responsible for taking care of the house and its needs. Domestic duties include food preparation, cleaning, laundry, and fuel collection. Girls in elementary school don't learn much since they don't study either at school or at home.

C. Poor condition of health:

Most tribal women are frail, anaemic, and prone to a wide range of illnesses because of a lack of education about proper diet. Pregnant women need extra care because their health and that of their unborn child are at stake. Measures of women's empowerment include their degree of education, employment, health, and the ability to make important life decisions. A focus on women's education that leads to gainful work is essential. As a result, women will have more agency in decision-making. Women's decision-making skill is reflected in their capacity to interact with and persuade other family members. When women are given more say in family matters, they are given more power.

7.3 Review of Literature:

Low levels of formal education have had minimal effect on tribal communities, and most tribal members lack even a high school education. In many parts of India, the tribal population has an extremely low literacy rate. The Government's Reservation policy has resulted in several shifts in the academic landscape. They place a low value on education in general, which is a contributing factor to the low literacy rates. They aren't engaged by the current educational system, but would benefit from a more practically oriented curriculum. The tribes' low standard of living means that they view their children less as future consumers and more as potential sources of revenue, which means that they are less likely to send them to school. Using a comparative framework with scheduled caste and non-scheduled women, Chowdhuri(1988)[5] tried to investigate the socio-economic status of Scheduled tribal women in West Bengal.

To a considerable part, a society's social structure and the type of society it is determine the position of women within that community. Patriarchal family structures are common in Indian society, with men holding most positions of authority. Many tribal societies, however, were characterised by the prevalence of matrilineal families. Matriarchal households, in contrast to patriarchal ones, give women more respect. There is evidence from several sources (Mitra, 2007; Burman Roy, 2012)[6] that the matrilineal ancestry, matrilineal residence, and succession of property through the female system is responsible for the significantly elevated roles assigned to women in the Garo and Khasi tribes of North East India. Women do not enjoy the same level of respect in patriarchal tribal cultures as they do in matriarchal ones. In some societies, such as the Ho and the Gond, the spouse does not always play a central role in family life. When compared to men, Gond women are treated no differently than men.

According to Hutton's (1921)[7] research on Naga women, they have greater independence and a more prestigious social position than men. This suggests that the position of women within different tribal groups and social orders varies from location to place. However, in tribal societies, tribal women are more significant than women in any other social group. This is because tribal women work extremely hard, and in almost all tribal communities, they participate in economic activities almost equally with males or work harder than men. The state of one's health is another factor in establishing one's standing. When compared to the overall population, the tribal group's health state is worse. They suffer from a high infant mortality rate, a high fertility rate, and a general lack of knowledge about health issues, medical care, clean water, and sanitation. The tribal population of India is disproportionately affected by endemic infectious diseases, water-borne illnesses, and nutritional deficiencies. Some of the tribes had an extremely high rate of infant mortality. The general health of the young people in the tribes has been negatively impacted by the prevalence of malnutrition among them. It makes people more susceptible to infections and causes chronic diseases, some of which can have neurological consequences. Their health is

connected to their financial and educational standing as well. Their living conditions have deteriorated since they are unable to take part in the industrial economic activities of contemporary societies. Tribal peoples typically spend their time hunting, manufacturing crafts, and farming, none of which bring in a substantial revenue. The advent of industrialization and urbanisation has altered the way of life of the tribal people by displacing them from their traditional ways of life and making them more vulnerable to the whims of non-tribal people.

In a 1993 study, Singh and Rajyalaxmi[8] examined the demographic, health, educational, and occupational status of indigenous women. The Indian Constitution has provided certain safeguards for the country's indigenous tribal peoples ever since the country gained its independence. Some of the realities of tribal labour were brought to light by the study, including the fact that tribe women receive equal compensation to men but are often sexually exploited for their efforts.

Women in tribal communities have a lower literacy rate than those in the general population and the scheduled caste, and they lack the right to own property. As a result of malnutrition and other health issues, many tribal women are in poor health. The research showed that if tribal women want to see change, they need to work to better the lives of tribal girls.

Women can benefit greatly from formal training in communicating with and pitching investment ideas to informal financiers. Relevant here is the training programme created by the "European Ready for Equity! Piacentini, (2013)[9] describes the venture as a "initiative that targets both entrepreneurs and angel investors. For a variety of reasons, SHGs have shown to be a superior source of credit for financially disadvantaged women (Somasekhar, K.). (2005)[10]. Microfinance programmes and women's empowerment in Bangladesh; lessons from the margins to the mainstream, by Gita Sabharwal (1990)[11].

7.4 Objectives:

- a. To find out the social and economic status of tribal women in India.
- b. To analyze the challenges faced by tribal women.
- c. To suggest some strategies for handling the challenges faced by tribal women in India.
- d. To study the socio-economic background of tribal women
- e. To examine the economic empowerment of tribal women
- f. To examine the nature and characteristics of socio-cultural conflicts faced by the tribal women.

7.5 Research Methodology:

This is a theoretical research paper, where secondary information produced by different authors and researchers has been used. For obtaining necessary information, various books, journals as well as websites have been explored by the researcher which has been mentioned in the reference section.

7.6 Result & Discussion:

Women's empowerment has gained prominence as a pressing topic in recent years.

Women's economic independence is increasingly seen as a prerequisite to national development, making this an issue of critical relevance to reformers. In light of these factors, this research makes an attempt to evaluate the tribal women respondents' economic and social standing .[12]

Table 7.1: Socio-Economic Factors:

Category	Frequency	Percentage
1. Age Group		
18-25 (years)	54	18.0
26-35	123	41.0
36-45	73	34.3
<46	50	16.7
2. Education		
Illiterate	155	51.7
Primary level	70	23.3
Secondary level	52	17.3
Degree level	17	5.7
Degree & Above	6	2.0
3. Marital status		
Married	269	89.6
Widow	28	9.2
Divorced	3	1.0

4. Type of Family		
Nuclear	251	83.7
Joint	49	16.3
5. Size of Family		
> 3 members	97	32.3
4-6	183	61.0
7-9	17	5.0
<9	3	1.0
6. Decision Making		
Wife	188	62.7
Husband	110	36.7
Son(s)	1	0.3
Daughter (s)	1	0.3

7. Income Particulars		
<Rs.5000	80	26.7
Rs.6000-10,000	102	34.0
Rs.11,000-15,000	54	18.0
>Rs.16,000	64	21.3
8. Saving Particulars		
LIC	24	8.0
Chits	3	1.0
Banks	12	4.0
Post Office	3	1.0
SHGs	9	3.0
No Saving	249	83.0

Information about the sample women's socioeconomic status is provided in Table 7.1. According to the data, the majority of respondents are between the ages of 26 and 35, while 24.3% are between the ages of 36 and 45, 18.3% are between the ages of 18 and 25, and 16.7% are older than 46.

Women's empowerment is a revolving door that opens to political, economic, social, and cultural authority. This is the distribution of power where women have the same say as males.

According to the Christian philosophy, and as a beneficial agent of change. Educating women and helping men realise that females are full members of society should help shift power away from men and toward them.[13]

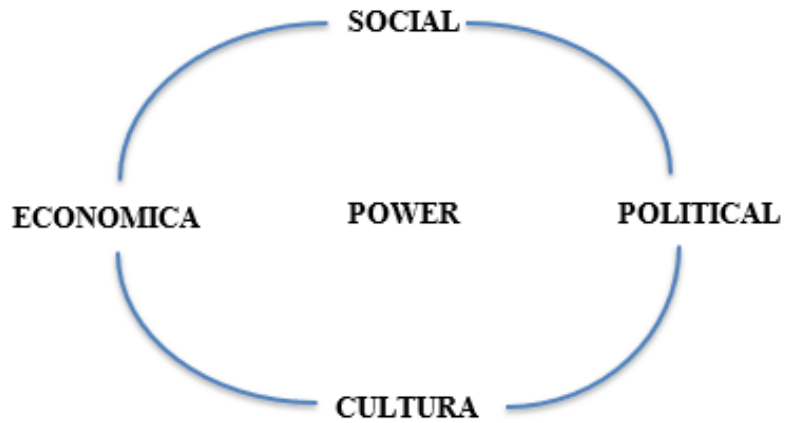


Figure 7.1: Multi-Dimensions of Women Empowerment

Status of Tribal Population in India:

The majority of the population in the northern states of Mizoram and Lakshadweep (94.4%), Meghalaya (86.1%), and Nagaland (86.1%), is tribal (86.5 per cent). The only Indian states without any Scheduled Tribes are Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, Delhi, and Pondicherry. There are 8.6 percent of India's overall population who identify as tribal, making up 10.43 crore people as per the 2011 census (Table-3).[14]

Table 7.2: Scheduled Tribe population and decadal change by residence in 2011

	Scheduled Tribe population 2011			Decadal change 2001-2011		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
India	104,281,034	93,819,162	10,461,872	23.7	21.3	49.7

The scheduled tribal urban population grew by 23.7% between 2001 and 2011; the overall urban population grew by 49.7%; the rural population grew by 21.3%. There are only 2.8% of STs living in urban India, but 11.3% living in rural areas. (Table3)

Table 7.3: Percentage of Scheduled Tribes to total population in India: 2001-2011

	Percentage of Scheduled Tribes 2001			Percentage of Scheduled Tribes 2011		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
India	8.2	10.4	2.4	8.6	11.3	2.8

7.7 Conclusion:

The research highlighted the importance of empowering India's tribal communities. It is crucial for a methodical process of tribal development due to their low level of economic activity, social backwardness, low level of literacy, and poor health conditions. A family's income must be high enough to lift them out of poverty. It is crucial to one's well-being because one's financial standing impacts so many other areas of daily life and the quality of one's home. Tribal women's access to education is crucial to progress. Education is a powerful tool for empowering and transforming the lives of indigenous women. It has altered their worldviews and given them newfound economic independence. Researchers investigate tribe members' health knowledge. They don't always get enough of the right nutrients. Because of a general lack of knowledge about the importance of health and hygiene, individuals often fall victim to a wide range of illnesses. The status of tribal women in India can be improved and they can better cope with adversity if the literacy rate is raised and they are given access to economic possibilities.

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