

## Social, Economic and Educational Status of Tribal Women in India: Some Issues



### Social Science

**KEYWORDS :** Tribal women in India, Challenges, Social, Economic and Education

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### ABSTRACT

*The objective of the paper is to analyse social, economic and educational status of tribal women in India. The analysis is based on secondary data of Census of India, 2011. The Scheduled tribes constitute a small proportion of the total population of the country and they are marginalized from the society in many respects. Provisions made in the Constitution have brought about changes in their position but still they are confronted with a number of challenges. Tribal women in India are hardworking than tribal men and they contribute significantly towards their family income but their income generating sources are limited. Low income necessitates more hands in labour as a result they are reluctant to send their children to formal schools. Moreover due to general low level of education their awareness level is also low and so they tend to ignore the basic conditions of health. Status of tribal women in terms of education, employment and health is low not just compared to tribal men but also in comparison to women belonging to the general population. The tribal women, constitute like any other social group, about half of the total population. Tribal societies generally view gender as complimentary and egalitarian, where each role is defined but complimentary to the other. Men focus on cultivation and women plant and gather the foods, thus both roles are necessary and complimentary in the holistic relationship of the family/community. Traditionally, tribal women and men had equal access to lands, animals and resources, and this was beneficial to the collective. However, as a result of the integration and assimilation efforts of dominant culture, capitalistic systems and the ideal of individual ownership, tribal women in particular experience fewer opportunities to access their natural resource and lands. As a consequence Gender relations within tribal society have been changing. The percentage of literacy of tribes was only 8.54 per cent in 1961 which has increased to 63.1 per cent in 2011.*

### INTRODUCTION:

The gender relations in a tribal society seem to be relatively egalitarian with women enjoying quite a high social status and economic value compared to their non-tribal counterparts. Role of women is not only of importance in economic activities, but her role in non-economic activities is equally important. The tribal women work very hard, in some cases even more than the men. The tribal women have a freedom, and a self-expression. With the onset of development programmes economic changes are taking place, which affect men and women differently. This inequality arising from the development process calls for a detailed scrutiny because it has resulted in not only inequality between tribals and nontribal but also among tribals on gender basis. Majority of the tribal societies are patriarchal. Women are not equal to men as such, but had higher status vis-a-vis non-tribal women. Both their relatively high status and children's upbringing depended on abundant resources and partial control that they exercised over them. In other words, tribal women owed their relatively high status both to the abundance of resources and a clear division in their societies between the family and the social sphere. The man represented the family in the society and woman as the main decision maker in the family economy, production, and social relations. Tribal women enjoy a greater social status with regard to control over resources. This ensures their active participation and decision-making with regard to land utilization, agriculture and powers over cash flow in a tribal economy.

### OBJECTIVES:

- The main objectives of this paper are –
- To find out the social- economic and educational status of tribal women in India.
- To analyze the challenges faced by tribal women.
- To suggest some strategies for handling the challenges faced by tribal women in India.

### 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.

### Social and economic status of tribal women in India:

The term status means position of a person in a society. Status has been defined by R.Linton (1936) as a position in a social system. The term role is closely linked to the notion of status. It refers to the behavior expected of people in a status. The status of a person or a group in a society is determined mainly by the educational status, health status, employment status and decision making ability. All these factors are closely related to one another. The higher level of education will generate health awareness, employment opportunities and decision making ability among these groups. The status of women in a society depends to a large extent on the social structure and the type of society. In Indian social context, there is a predominance of patriarchal family structure where males predominate in all settings and social contexts.

### Problems faced by tribal women:

Most tribal's faces a number of challenges which they need to overcome in order to improve their status in society. The researcher intends to discuss here the issues faced by tribal women in particular. Absence of any fix livelihood: Various literature studies reveal that although work participation among tribal women is higher compared to scheduled caste and general population but the livelihoods of the tribal people are neither permanent nor fixed. Most of them do not have a regular source of income, and they live below the poverty level. Tribal people residing in the rural areas pursue diverse low level activities for fulfilling their basic needs. Mostly they are engaged in agricultural activities. Apart from that, they are engaged in pastoral, handicrafts and at times as industrial labourers. Tribal women are mainly not engaged in any kind of continuous work and much like their male counterparts are found to work in agriculture. A meager number of tribal men and women are engaged in government services. Economic conditions of households are related to other aspects of their life.

### Status of Tribal Population in India:

The tribal population constitutes a majority in the north-

eastern states of Mizoram and Lakshadweep (94.4 per cent), Meghalaya (86.1per cent), and Nagaland (86.5per cent). The states with no Scheduled tribe groups are Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, Delhi and Pondicherry. India has total tribal population of 10.43 crores (Table-1) which is 8.6 per cent (Table-2) of total population of India as per 2011 census.

**Table-1 ScheduledTribepopulationand decadalchangeby residence in 2011**

	Scheduled Tribe population2011			Decadal change2001-2011		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
India	104,281,034	93,819,162	10,461,872	23.7	21.3	49.7

Source - Census of India, 2011

During 2001 and 2011, the decadal change in the scheduled tribe urban population is 23.7 per cent where as it is 49.7 per cent in urban area and 21.3 per cent in rural area. The urban India has only 2.8 per cent ST population but Rural India has 11.3 per cent ST population. (Table-2)

**Table-2 Percentageof ScheduledTribesto totalpopulation in India: 2001-2011**

	Percentageof Scheduled Tribes2001			Percentageof Scheduled Tribes 2011		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
India	8.2	10.4	2.4	8.6	11.3	2.8

Source - Census of India, 2011

**Literacy Trends of tribes in India:**

Literacy is an important indicator of development among tribal groups. The trend of literacy of tribes in India from 1961 to 2011 is shown in table – 3. The percentage of literacy of tribes was only 8.54 per cent in 1961 which has increased to 63.1 per cent in 2011. But female literacy of tribes is only 54.4 per cent compared to male literacy of 71.7 per cent. During the post-Independence period, the Indian government implemented legislation and allocated funds to facilitate access to enrollment in primary education (grades I-V) in India. As a result, both literacy rates and gross enrollment ratios of boys and girls across the general population have increased substantially during the past 50 years.

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Year	Male	female	Total
1961	13.83	3.16	8.54
1971	17.63	4.85	11.39

1981	24.52	8.05	16.35
1991	40.65	18.19	29.60
2001	59.17	34.76	47.10
2011	71.70	54.4	63.1

Source: National Commission for SCs & STs, Fifth Report & Census, 2011

The literacy rate among ST boys is 71.7 per cent and among girls is 63.1 per cent. So there is significant improvement in ST literacy from 1961 (8.54 per cent) to 2011 (63.1 per cent).

**Enrolment Ratio of ST students:**

Gross enrolment ratio of ST boys is more than ST girls in all classes. The gross enrolment ratio is higher in class I to V which is 137.2 for ST boys and 136.7 for ST girls but it is only 90.7 and 87 in class VI to VIII. It implies that the tribal enrolment declines significantly in higher class.

**Table-4 Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)**

Classes		ST (Boys)	ST (Girls)
Classes I – V	(6 - 10 Years)	137.2	136.7
Classes VI - VIII	(11 - 13 Years)	90.7	87
Classes IX – X	(14 - 15 Years)	57.1	49.1
Classes XI – XII	(16 - 17 Years)	32.7	24.8
Classes I - XII	(6 - 17 Years)	96.8	92.8

Source-Statistics of School Children, 2010-2011

Gender Parity Index reflects the enrolment of girls in school in comparison to boys. The index for ST children is almost same as all categories of children except for class XI to XII. (Table-5)

**Table-5 Gender Parity Index in Education**

Class	ST	All
Classes I - V	1.00	1.01
Classes VI - VIII	0.96	0.95
Classes IX - X	0.86	0.88
Classes XI - XII	0.76	0.86
Classes IX - XII	0.82	0.87
Classes I - XII	0.96	0.96

Source- Statistics of School Children, 2010-2011

The dropout rate of ST children is higher as compared to all children in India.

**Table-6 Dropout rate among ST boys and girls**

Class	ST( Boys)	All (Boys)	ST( Girls)	All(Girls)
Classes I - V	37.2	28.7	33.9	25.1
Classes I - VIII	54.7	40.3	55.4	41.0
Classes I - X	70.6	50.4	71.3	47.9

Source: Statistics of School Education 2010-2011

**Problems of Tribal Education:**

There are many critical issues and problems in the field of tribal education. They are as follows:

**Medium of language:** Language is one of the important

constraints of tribal children which prevents them access to education.

**The Location of the Village: The physical barriers creates a hindrance for the children of a tribal village to attend the school in a neighboring village.**

**Economic Condition:** The economic condition of tribal people is so poor that they do not desire to spare their children or their labour power and allow them to attend schools.

**Attitude of the parents:** As education does not yield any immediate economic return, the tribal parents prefer to engage their children in remunerative employment which supplements the family income.

**Teacher Related Problems:** In the remote tribal areas the teacher absenteeism is a regular phenomenon and this affects largely the quality of education.

**Lack of Proper monitoring:** Proper monitoring is hindered by poor coordination between the Tribal Welfare Department and School Education Department.

#### **Suggestions:**

Some suggestions for improvement of tribal education are as follows:

**Literacy campaign** - Proper awareness campaign should be organized to create the awareness about the importance of education. Extensive literacy campaign in the tribal dominated districts may be undertaken on a priority basis to literate the tribal.

**Attitude of the tribal parents** - The attitude of the tribal parents toward education should be improved through proper counseling and guidance.

**Relevant study materials in local languages** - All study materials should be supplied in local languages of tribes.

**Appointment of Local teachers and female teachers** - It is suggested to appoint more tribal teachers and female teachers in the tribal areas. The ecological, cultural, psychological characteristics of tribal children should be considered carefully by the teachers in tribal areas.

**Stipends and various scholarships** - Since higher education among the tribes is less, special ST scholarships should be provided to the tribal students perusing higher education, particularly in medical, engineering, and other vocational streams.

**Residential schools** - More residential schools should be established in each states and districts and extended up to PG level in tribal areas.

**Social security**- Social security of students, especially of adolescent girls is of great concern in residential schools.

**Proper Monitoring** - Higher level officials should check the functioning of schools frequently relating to the teaching methods, working hours, and attendance registers.

#### **Conclusion:**

In spite of various constitutional provisions and policies for the tribals, it is a hard reality that the tribal women still are lagging behind in many respects and they have to face many challenges. The study emphasized the need for tribal development in India. Their low level of economic activi-

ties, social backwardness, low level of literacy, poor health conditions makes it vital for a systematic process of tribal development. They work very hard and contribute significantly towards the economic condition of the family, but they are still in poverty mostly because no proper efforts are oriented towards them. During the plan periods, various programmes are taken up for the development of the Scheduled Tribe population and a lot of betterment has been already done, but still, a lot more requires to be done. The families need to have a sufficient income to enable them to cross the poverty levels. Since economic status determines other aspects of life and living conditions, it is of utmost importance. Education for tribal women is an essential aspect of development. Education is a vital instrument to bring about a change in the cultural norms and patterns of life of the tribal women and to change their outlook and made them economically independent. It would help them to organize themselves to analyze their situations and living conditions and be aware of their rights and responsibilities. Education will enable them to take up jobs so that they can improve their situation. Social and economic status of the scheduled tribe to a large extent depends on the educational attainment. Educated women will be able to face the present day society better than earlier times. In the present context, no one can remain completely isolated, but they are influenced by the growth of modern society and culture. Government is providing a lot of support and grant for the education of Tribal students. This will help to increase the literacy rate and it will lead to the right way to development. The health status of the tribals is explored to assess their awareness regarding their health. Sometimes they lack the essential nutrients. Many times they suffer from various diseases as there is a lack of health and hygiene awareness. Thus increasing the literacy rate and providing opportunities for gainful employment for tribal women will be instrumental in bringing about a change in the status of tribal women in India and to handle to challenges successfully.

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