

# WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

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## ABSTRACT

<sup>1</sup>India is a home to many tribal groups. The majority of these people live in the forest, where they have spent the most of their lives. These people are not exposed to the outside world. Their situation in India has improved since before independence, but it would be incorrect to suggest that they live in the same way as everyone else in urban and rural regions. Tribal communities suffer a variety of issues, some of which do not affect the rest of the people in this country. They are deprived of the most basic necessities, and for these people, expensive things are unimportant; what matters is survival. When it comes to the status of women in tribal groups, they are in worse shape than women in urban or rural regions. Women in indigenous societies confront issues such as health, education, and sexual exploitation. All these women want is to live in peace, without having to fear for their lives. All women, whether urban or tribal, encounter issues in their daily lives, but the situation of women in tribal areas is even worse since they are not given with basic necessities and must work harder to survive. This research paper will examine the current state of women in tribal societies and how they are battling to live in today's society.

## INTRODUCTION

History bears evidence to how much women have endured in the past, and the sad reality is that they continue to suffer. No matter how much a country advances, if it fails to provide women with protection and equality, it fails as a country. Consider the women who are members of the tribal tribe. What these women go through on a daily basis is something that no human can ever understand. Their situation is far worse than we can comprehend. Tribal communities face many challenges, but this did not stop some women from battling for what they thought was rightfully theirs and could not be taken away. Everyone who is a citizen of India, including tribal people, has the right to live their life as they want. These individuals are the forest's eyes and ears, thus it is crucial that their rights be upheld. No matter how much these women want to change their lives, they cannot because they have no one helping them out. These women are left on their own. Everyone wants to live a nice life and buy costly items. However, these tribal women only consider a life where they can survive and feed their children and themselves at the end of the day. They lack comfort in their life, and they must work hard every day just to get by. Because so many people are still unaware of the difficulties faced by indigenous women, it is crucial to research their situation, learn about it, and identify strategies to assist them.

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## WHAT IS A TRIBE?

A <sup>2</sup>tribe is a collection of individuals who have a similar culture and lineage and who depend on the land for their survival. They like living in a restricted society where they are shielded from the outside world. These are isolated groups that each have their own culture. They make up the population's oldest ethnic group. They pursue traditional techniques of vocations such as hunting, harvesting of small forest produce and hence they are backward economically as well as educationally. Adivasis is another name for a tribe in India.

## SCHEDULED TRIBES

The <sup>3</sup>Constitution's drafters recognised that some areas in the nation were experiencing severe socioeconomic backwardness as a result of their traditional way of life, isolation from the rest of society, and exploitation by the favoured class.

**Article- 366(25):** Scheduled Tribes means such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this Constitution;

**ARTICLE- 342:** It states that only such communities will be taken into account as scheduled tribes if they have been designated as such by the President by an initial public announcement or through a subsequent amending act of parliament.

According to the 2011 census, 10.42 billion Indians—or 8.6% of the nation's population—were classified as "Scheduled Tribes" (ST). The 645 different tribal communities in India are recognised by the constitution.

## MORE ABOUT TRIBAL GROUPS IN INDIA

When it comes to geographical distribution, tribes may be found in the hilly, northern, and Northeastern, as well as the southern region. They represent the most marginalised group in society. These individuals have long been the targets of societal prejudice, violence, and impulses towards servitude. They fall behind in the advancement of humanity. They continue to practise their ancient traditions of interacting with nature. Tribals have both constitutional as well as legal rights. Despite of having these right they continue to suffer. Although everyone in this segment of society has issues, including men, women, and children, the focus of this research paper will be on the women in these areas.

## THE IMAGES OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA

There is a frozen picture where it is believed that the <sup>4</sup>tribal people only live in forests, have tattoos on their bodies, wear less clothes and more Jewellery. The general impression and belief about tribal women is that they are more fortunate than their non-tribal counterparts, that they are free to do whatever they want and have the

<sup>2</sup> TRIBAL GROUP, <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/tribes/tribal-life-in-india-defining-structure-and-other-details/35161#:~:text=The%20tribes%20are%20backward%2C%20particularly%20in%20regard%20to,their%20lands%20to%20establish%20industries%20in%20tribal%20areas.> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> SCHEDULED TRIBES, <https://www.iasepress.net/tribal-rights-in-india-constitutional-legal/> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> TRIBAL PEOPLE, <https://nyaaya.org/guest-blog/rights-of-tribals-and-indigenous-persons-in-india/> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

freedom to choose their partner and can move to other places and earn as they desire. Sadly, throughout the colonial era, this idea was glorified, and now that we are in the post-colonial era, this idea has been re-asserted. Nonetheless, a number of data point to indigenous women's poor status except in matrilineal societies, which make up a minor percentage of tribal civilization. Now in present, these women have no property rights. For the same amount of labour that she does, she receives a lower salary than her male equivalent. In certain tribal cultures, there are also a number of taboos and discriminations that indicate women are of low rank and impure. Women and men in this community used to be treated equally at one point, but things have changed. Forests and other natural resources, on which women had previously relied for their subsistence, began to be depleted throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods, and their land rights were compromised. Women's community rights were removed, and males were regarded as the land's true owners.

## **STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN: HEALTH, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT .**

Because tribal women put in more effort and are largely responsible for managing the family's finances, tribal societies in India place a greater value on women than other social groups do. From the perspective of empowering women, the process of decision-making is crucial since it is frequently seen that their voices are not effectively heard. Women have the ability to make decisions, and meaningful growth cannot occur without their<sup>5</sup> active participation.

### **ROLE**

In tribal civilization, women are fundamental to the social, cultural, economic, and religious practises. They are regarded as a social and economic resource. Despite making up half of the population, women in tribal societies are more important than any other social group because they put in more effort and are responsible for managing the finances and management of their families. However, these women are still lagging behind in many areas of life, including education, employment, good health, and economic development.

### **HEALTH STATUS**

If we discuss the<sup>6</sup> health of indigenous women, we find that their infant mortality rate is greater than the national norm. Poor nutrition, particularly among women, sickle cell disease, glucose intolerance, and other enzyme deficiencies are more common in some tribal communities, and fertility rates in tribal populations are greater than the national average. Maternal depletion is one problem that indigenous women deal with. Lack of proper medical care and facilities, poor diets, early marriages that result in premature pregnancies, and an excessive amount of work are the causes of maternal depletion. The rate of maternal morbidity and death is another effect of maternal depletion. Another important problem for the indigenous women is anaemia, whether it be from maternal depletion or another cause. According to research, 68.5% of indigenous women have anaemia of some kind. This has psychological repercussions as well since women become less able to withstand exhaustion, experience

<sup>5</sup> GENDER ISSUES, <https://www.sociologygroup.com/gender-issues-faced-by-tribal-women-post-independence-india/> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> HEALTH OF TRIBAL WOMEN, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345869721\\_Constitutional\\_Status\\_of\\_Tribal\\_Women\\_in\\_India](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345869721_Constitutional_Status_of_Tribal_Women_in_India) LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

weariness, and find it difficult to handle a large job. The rising spread of STDs, particularly HIV/AIDS, is another problem that indigenous women must deal with. The tribes in Nagaland express grave worry over the spread of AIDS among tribal women. The levels are so high that Manipur's neighbouring region is likewise in grave danger. International finances rely heavily on the weak research capabilities of NGOs to address this issue since there has been a dearth of research and public financing in this specific sector. A Gond woman from Bastar area who had a sexual encounter with a non-tribal person, was exiled from her society, and eventually contracted AIDS is one such particular example.

A tribal clan living in <sup>7</sup>Jammu and Kashmir was interviewed. It was determined that the low literacy rate and lack of sex education severely harm this tribe's women. Women can't discuss birth control with their spouses. These ladies must give birth at a very early age and are married at such a young age. The age difference between their kids is not too great. Hence, try to envision what these ladies go through and how this impacts their physical and mental well-being. . According to a University of Kashmir study titled "Assessment and Understanding of Gujjar and Bakerwal Women's Health in Jammu and Kashmir," Gujjar and Bakerwal women face dangers during pregnancy and childbirth in areas with high fertility rates and a lack of access to basic maternity care. Women incur a larger burden from unsafe sex, which includes diseases and the consequences of unintended pregnancy, due to their reproductive biology and poorer socioeconomic status. The government has implemented several programmes including the National Health Policy 2017, Mission Parivar Vikas, and others, however this tribal community has not been able to take use of their services or benefits because many of them are not even aware that these programmes exist. The government should not just concentrate on planning and infrastructure, but also on raising awareness of its programmes. Although this was a medical issue, women of these tribes are unwilling to discuss birth control with their husbands, which is a societal issue that can only be resolved by sex education and government programmes.

## EDUCATION

If we look at the educational level of indigenous women, we can see how bad it is by looking at their low literacy rates, low enrolment rates, and high dropout rates. Even when we compare it to the population of scheduled castes, the literacy rate of tribal women is lower than that of the general population. Among all categories, rural tribal women have the lowest literacy rates. Women's education is just as important as men's. It encourages women to choose the best path for growth. In the majority of the country, indigenous women still live in ignorance and superstition, with males ruling over their fate.

The main goal of <sup>8</sup>education is to alter tribal women's cultural practises and behavioural patterns to help them become economically independent, organise themselves into powerful groups to analyse their circumstances and living conditions, understand their rights and obligations, and be able to take part in and contribute to the advancement of women and the entire society. In certain jurisdictions, the number of STs is relatively great, whereas in other states, there are no STs. Tribes in Andhra Pradesh have relatively low literacy rates, according to several census records. Education is regarded as a key indication for every social development process. The

<sup>7</sup> KASHMIR TRIBES, <https://www.kashmirtribes.in/kashmir/> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> EDUCATION, <https://www.iasepress.net/tribal-rights-in-india-constitutional-legal/> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

schedule tribe had an unacceptable literacy rate of 29.6%, which included 40.65 percent men and 18.19 percent women, as reported by the 1991 Census. Indian Constitution has included explicit provisions in Articles 15(4) and 46 for encouraging education among Scheduled tribes in recognition of the value of education. Even after the development and execution of several programmes, only an increase in literacy rates appears to have made considerable progress in this area. Another key factor in why parents choose to avoid schools is the unsuitability of the school's curriculum. However, the female and male literacy rates of the tribes are showing a little bit improvement during last two periods. Still the female literacy rates of the tribes are recorded very low when compared to male literacy rates. Moreover, the percentage of Schedule Tribe girls in higher education has been gradually increasing. The fact remains that a large number of tribal women in rural areas might have missed educational opportunities at different stages and in order to empower them varieties of skill training programmes have to be designed and organised. The skill could be for assuming political leadership or for economic self-reliance or even social transformation. It's not like the government is doing nothing to help these folks get an education. Schools have been established, but the tribal people hold the belief that if they allow their members, particularly women, to attend classes outside of the tribe, they would be seen as misfits and outsiders in their own society. The relationship between the instructor and the student is problematic since teachers are frequently outsiders who are unfamiliar with their culture, history, and language. Before they can begin learning their regional language, these people must first be taught in their own language. Every state in India is required to offer suitable facilities for teaching children in their mother tongue, according to Article 350A of the Indian Constitution. The Gonds, Bhils, Santals, and other tribal communities in Odisha are receiving education in their native tongue thanks to the state government and civil society organisations' encouraging efforts. Educationists claim that tribal youngsters are responding favourably to these cutting-edge programmes. Throughout time, the literacy rates of the Koyas, Santals, Bhuyia, Bhatudi, and Bhumiji have all increased.

## **EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN**

According to studies, women are more vulnerable to forest degradation and deforestation because they depend more heavily on the forest <sup>9</sup>economy for both their survival requirements and income. As a result, dependence problems arise and women are prevented from being independent. Tribal women frequently find themselves serving as the main driver of the tribal forest economy due to a lack of alternative work possibilities in the official sector. In addition to having fewer income options overall, women endure discrimination and receive lower pay than males for the work they do have. The problem of seasonal unemployment has increased in recent years as a result of the migration of 40–75% of women to the plantation industry. These migrating tribal women work without receiving any compensation or social security, and they may even experience harassment at work. The challenge of hiring indigenous women is Tremendous. So the tribal society has historically been excluded from many facets of the country's mainstream development. As a result, poverty is now mostly concentrated in tribally focused communities, and it is particularly noticeable among women. Hence, indigenous people should be shielded against the occupation of and appropriation of their territory. Tribal women in particular are being removed from their century-old occupations and homes as a result of liberalisation. They are being employed

<sup>9</sup> EMPLOYMENT OF TRIBAL WOMEN, <https://www.ijser.org/researchpaper/EMPLOYMENT-OF-TRIBAL-WOMEN-IN-INDIAS-INFORMAL-SECTOR.pdf> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

more frequently as a feeder agency or as inputs for massive production and profit enhancement. The original exploitative realm of the Indian economic and social system is progressively giving way to the new arena of mercerization and globalisation as tribal women and men. Thus, the government should play a proactive role in preventing these negative factors and expanding the area of entitlement for the tribal people in order to promote the growth and employment of tribal women and tribal culture. Hence, the only way to guarantee tribal women's empowerment and employment is through a multiplicative programme for human development, especially one that focuses on employment.

## **INHERITANCE OF PROPERTY**

There is no reason why a tribal woman should not be entitled to an equal portion in her father's property if a non-tribal woman already has that right. There is no mention of tribal women's property rights. Some women are adopting or converting to Hinduism in order to gain the advantages provided by Hindu Law. It is true that the STs are not covered by Section 2(2) of the <sup>10</sup>Hindu Succession Act. It does not imply that one must become a Hindu or practise Hinduism in order to receive the advantage provided by Hindu Law. The Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act of 1956 and the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 are similarly not applicable to STs unless they are specifically stated to be so by the national government. Some regions of the nation, like Jharkhand, forbid indigenous women from inheriting or owning land. The Meghalaya Succession to Self-Acquired Property, 1984, which was passed by an all-male legislative body, merely gives women with a nominal authority; the true power and authority is in the hands of the man, even in matrilineal communities like the Khasi. For instance, the Supreme Court ruled in *Labishwar Manjhi v. Pran Manjhi and Ors* on July 19, 2000 that the Hindu Succession Act would apply to the inheritance of property when the evidence showed that the parties belonged to the Santhal tribe and were following <sup>11</sup>Hindu customs rather than Santhal customs. A unique legislation controlling the inherited property rights among the STs should be developed, applying the idea of justice rather than putting the tribals under the purview of Hindu laws that are specific to Hindus

## **IMPACT OF DISPLACEMENT ON WOMEN**

Research on the experiences of such displaced women in India have revealed that they face early marriage and a vulnerability to abuse. They are getting married young because their parents want to relieve them of their load because they are already dealing with a lot due to being uprooted after having everything stolen from them. As these women are no longer able to support themselves,<sup>12</sup> displacement has a negative impact on their health. They were formerly dependent on agriculture, but now that they are homeless and must find means of subsisting, they are subjected to abuse and exploitation. Kinship connections and community networks serve as the main channels via which rural and Adivasi women utilise the little resources that are available to them. They include information access, help with health issues or illnesses, child care, financial aid, and a number of additional social support

<sup>10</sup> INHERITANCE PROBLEM FACED BY TRIBAL WOMEN, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/sc-bats-for-law-tweak-to-give-tribal-women-property-rights/articleshow/96119450.cms> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> HINDUISATION, <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/governance/how-tribal-women-in-india-are-subjected-to-hinduisation-to-be-able-to-access-right-to-inherited-property-87033> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

<sup>12</sup> DISPLACEMENT, <https://voxdev.org/topic/labour-markets-migration/impact-displacement-impact-marriage-outcomes-women-evidence-partition-india> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

networks. Due to this, the challenges of displacement worsen the Adivasi women's disproportionately high rates of morbidity and death.

## **PROBLEM WITH RESERVATION FOR STS**

The <sup>13</sup>reservation programme was established to aid members of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, but it is currently being abused. Instead of getting to the people who actually need it, it is being used by those who don't deserve it to gain employment and admittance into educational institutions. It was created in the past as a result of the prejudice that members of lower castes used to experience, but because it is now less prevalent than it was then, this policy has to be revised. Reservations should be made available to all individuals who are economically and socially vulnerable and unable to care for themselves, not only to these specific categories. The caste system exists if there is a reservation policy. Reservations must be made, but not at the expense of deserving applicants. Reservations shouldn't be fully eliminated; instead, they should be modified to reflect the most recent data and circumstances. Because to their lack of access to the outside world, those who are members of scheduled tribes have been unable to use reservations effectively. The government wanted them to utilise it responsibly, but they were unable to do so. Hence, instead of giving them reservations, provide them access to the chances and resources that will help them do better. What sense is it to give these individuals a reserve if they don't even have a permanent home or access to appropriate healthcare and are always battling to survive.

## **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND SCHEMES INTRODUCED FOR THE TRIBAL WOMEN**

Rani Durgavati, a tenacious monarch of the Gondwanan kingdom, bravely resisted the Mughal army and lost her life in the conflict. As the Queen of Kittur and the first monarch to oppose British authority, <sup>14</sup>Rani Chennamma spearheaded the struggle to drive out the colonial occupiers from Nagaland and Manipur. Dayani Barla, Kuni Sikala, Jamuna Tudu, Neidonuo Angami, and Soni Sori, to mention a few tribal and Adivasi women activists, have inspired many young women to stand out for their rights. Sports have seen the success of brilliant indigenous women like Dutee Chand, Mary Kom, and Dangmei Grac.

Tulsi Munda, a strong lady who herself was a victim of child labour, was awarded the Padma Shri for her outstanding contributions to the area of education, particularly for the creation of schools for tribal children. Tribal women have left their imprint on art and culture in addition to social spheres. Around 50,000 devotional songs have been written and produced by Purnamasi Jani, an Odisha tribal poetess also known locally as Tadisaru Bai. She writes in Odia, Kui, and even Sanskrit. On January 2021, she received the Padma Shri honour. In addition to receiving the Padma Shri, Lakshmikutty Amma, a 75-year-old tribal poison healer from Kallar, Kerala, was recognised for her amazing work in the field of traditional medicine.

<sup>13</sup> RESERVATION, <https://www.drishtias.com/to-the-points/Paper2/reservation-in-india> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

<sup>14</sup> TRIBAL WOMEN MOVEMENTS, <https://feminismindia.com/2021/03/05/tribal-womens-movement-modern-india/> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

**DRAUPADI MURMU, PRESIDENT**

Our <sup>15</sup>President Draupadi Murmu is the finest illustration of what a tribal woman can accomplish or do if given the proper opportunity. Murmu was born into a Santhal tribal family in the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. Her family had to fight against poverty because they lived in one of the state's most impoverished areas. Notwithstanding the challenging circumstances her family was through, she graduated from Bhubaneswar's Ramadevi Women's College. Since 2022, she has been the 15th president of India. She is the second woman to occupy the position after Pratibha Patil and the first member of a tribal group to do so. Her position as president encourages women, particularly those from indigenous communities, to believe that their voices can be heard and have the same weight as those of males.

**INITIATIVES TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT**

Low levels of economic activity and living circumstances below the poverty line have been mentioned as a significant issue for indigenous women. Offering women the knowledge and training that would enable them to form self-help groups is a feasible solution to this issue. An initiative to empower these women can raise awareness. <sup>16</sup>TRIFED has undertaken several initiatives, including the Van Dhan Yojana, which distinguishes out due to the effect it has able to produce. <sup>77</sup> Van Dhan Vikas Kendras in the state of Manipur, where these start-ups have flourished and benefitted more than 25,000 tribal gatherers, mostly women, are one example. Another significant ongoing project of TRIFED is the work being done in Barwani, Madhya Pradesh, where the second batch of Bagh print training began in December 2020. This project aims to train and enhance the lives of tribals, and women in particular. To better the situation of women in India, special programmes including the National Commission for Women, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, women in local self-government, and the National Policy for <sup>17</sup>Women's Empowerment have been established. But, simply proposing these programmes is insufficient; they also need to be properly implemented.

**CONCLUSION**

There's no doubt that tribal women's conditions have improved, but more work still needs to be done before these women may enjoy lives comparable to those of other women. They merit a life free from everyday <sup>18</sup>hardship and laborious effort just to get by. Education is the only way to help these women. A woman's life is not complete without education since, in the modern world, women must be capable of taking care of herself without the assistance of others. The government is making the best efforts they can, but more would be appreciated. It's true what they say: If you teach a man, you educate a person. But if you educate a woman, you educate a nation. It is time for these women's voices to be heard and for them to have the chances they so well deserve. The first step is having a female tribe president, which gives tribal women optimism that their time will come and that they will be heard.

<sup>15</sup> PRESIDENT, <https://www.firstpost.com/india/droupadi-murmu-from-a-life-full-of-struggles-to-becoming-the-first-tribal-woman-nominated-for-president-10821301.html> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

<sup>16</sup> TRIFED, <https://www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1703035> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

<sup>17</sup> PROGRAMMES, <http://www.ijims.com/uploads/3765dbde1a96580628d3D10.pdf> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.

<sup>18</sup> EDUCATION, <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/governance/education-for-tribals-bottlenecks-and-the-way-forward-74751> LAST VISITED ON 5 MARCH, 2023.