



## EMPOWERMENT AND EDUCATION OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA

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### Abstract

*The tribal population in India, that constitutes 8.6% of India's total population (per the 2011 census), is amongst one of the most disadvantaged due to a host of factors, such as poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, health problems, geographic isolation and lack of access to services. Tribal women, comprising 47% of India's tribal population, are deeply connected to their communities and possess a profound understanding of their ecosystem. Time and again, they have established their ability to effect behavioural change on the ground and proven to be powerful community influencers. Studies have shown that tribal women, as culture keepers and archivists of ancient tribal practices and traditional knowledge, also possess valuable insights on larger issues such as the climate crisis, forests, and sustainability. The tribal communities all over India have been subjected to various forms of deprivation such as alienation from land and other resources. The fact remains that a large number of tribal women have missed education at different stages and in order to empower them there is a great need of providing opportunities so as to enable them to assume leadership qualities for economic self-reliance and even social transformation. Education is an important human activity. It enriches the tribal women in the self development and as well as the society as a whole. Especially the tribal women, though they are away from the main stream of national life, but they are not kept away from the impact of socio economic changes effecting the society in general. In this process of change, the tribal woman is forced to adhere to certain norms which may even take away her freedom, her control over the traditional productive system, her house, family and children and even her own life. This paper discusses the empowerment strategies among tribal women.*

**Key words:** Empowerment, Education, Tribal Women.



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## **Introduction**

*“A tribe is a social group of simple kind, the members of which speaks a common dialect and act together in such common purpose as warfare”*

A tribe is a group of people, usually staying in jungle areas, in a small locality, absolutely illiterate poor, hardly clad in clothes, usually dark and frail, fully living within their own community whose marriage always takes place among themselves, engaged in hunting and searching for roots, shoots and fruits as their veg food and roasted animals as non-veg food, completely oblivious of the country’s political and economic condition, resisting all efforts of development and have a strong dislike for strangers and educated modern community. The sources of subsistence and livelihood are varied so far the Indian tribal’s are concerned. Starting from the pure and simple parasitic habit of the nomadic hunters and food-gatherers who depend mostly on nature for the sources of subsistence to the settled agriculturists and the group of industrial laborers.

Scheduled Tribes (STs), the socially and educationally disadvantaged groups are one of the most exploited and deprived sections of the population in Indian. Tribal women are deprived of education which is the integral part of life. The Indian Tribal family organisation makes discrimination between the sexes regarding education and empowerment. Needless to say, that exclusion from fruits of development has adversely affected the quality of life of the tribal people. And Tribal children are no exception. So, the Tribal society is marked by inequality, discrimination, exploitation, domination and deprivation. This paper examines issues concerning school access and equity for Women of Scheduled Tribe communities and also highlights their unique problems, which may require divergent policy responses. There are several studies available on various aspect of socio-cultural anthropology of tribal people. But very few attempts have been made to study on Socio-cultural Tradition and Women Education in tribal society in the study area. The tribal communities all over India have been

subjected to various forms of deprivation such as alienation from land and other resources. The fact remains that a large number of tribal women have missed education at different stages and in order to empower them there is a great need of providing opportunities so as to enable them to assume leadership qualities for economic self-reliance and even social transformation. Education is an important human activity. It enriches the tribal women in the self development and as well as the society as a whole. Especially the tribal women though they are away from the main stream of national life, but they are not kept away from the impact of socio – economic changes effecting the society in general. In this process of change, the tribal woman is forced to adhere to certain norms which may even take away her freedom, her control over the traditional productive system, her house, family and children and even her own life. The status of women is not similar in all the primitive societies. It is determined by the functions allotted to them, the social attitudes towards them, the behavior of males and the social contribution of the women. These ideals and functions are, however, not universal. This paper speaks about the role of education in the empowerment of tribal women.

The tribal communities live in about 15 per cent of the country's area, in varying ecological and geo-climatic conditions, plains, forests, hills and inaccessible areas. Tribal groups are at different stages of social, economic and educational development. They have their presence in the States and Union Territories except Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Pondicherry. The predominant tribal-populated States of the country, i.e. those with tribal population of more than 50 per cent of the total population of the States are: Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Union Territories of Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Lakshadweep. If a comparison is made amongst ST population alone, more than half the ST population of the country is concentrated in the States of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Gujarat. The largest number of tribes (62 per cent) is in

the State of Orissa. Tribals have been living in and around forests for centuries. These are their original habitats for generations from time immemorial. These Forest-Dwelling Scheduled Tribes (FDSTs) are integral to the forest biosphere. Unfortunately, however, the traditional rights to these FDSTs over the land occupied by them were not adequately recognised and recorded at the time of consolidation of State forests during the colonial period and subsequently, after independence too.

A number of research reports were referred regarding women education. Mohanty, P. (2009) conducted a study on potential correlates of academic achievement of rural SC girls from class IV and V of four blocks of Haryana. His result reveals (i) significant difference and positive relationship between academic achievement and socio-economic status of high-achieving girls (ii) no significant relationship was found between high-achieving rural SC girls and home environment (iii) no significant relationship was found between high-achieving rural SC girls and school environment. Gosh, S and Sushmita, (2012) studied on domestic violence against women in Hugli district, West Bengal and suggested that women need to be educated to change their attitude and self-confidence.

Patil, A.K., and Chandhar, Samita, V (2009) studied on improving women's status through lifelong learning, a case study in Raigad District of Maharashtra, the study found that women educational status is directly reflecting on the profession, employment and income of the family, it also revealed that dropout from the formal women education system and further education classes they have obtained do not fulfil the requirements of their life, providing lifelong learning programmes can provide the opportunities to enhance their status in several aspects.

Nayar, Usha (1992) conducted study to analyze the causes for non-enrolment and dropout of girls in rural areas and to suggest local-specific intervention strategies and found that the— (i) drop-out and never enrolled girls belonged to below subsistence level households. Pointed

out that women education was not cost-free and they found it difficult to meet non-tuition cost like uniforms, books and money, (ii) Domestic work and sibling care were the chief reasons for girls not attending school, (iii) The demand for women teachers was strong in Mewat as also the need for an Urdu teacher, (iv) The drop-out girls, however, expressed their willingness to return to school. Parents were apathetic and had lower women educational and occupational aspirations for daughters compared to sons, (v) Drop-out was negligible in the age-groups 6-8 years and was maximum after class V, (vi) The study recommended rationalization of teachers between rural and urban areas to ensure at least one women teacher in every primary school. Opening of junior primary school, incentives like free books, uniforms and stationary to all girls in poverty groups should be provided regardless of caste, creating a positive climate for girls and educational development, breaking the cure of low valuation and poor status of women in a materially prosperous state.

### **Social and Economic problems**

The tribal communities all over India have been subjected to various forms of deprivation such as alienation from land and other resources. Tribal's have their own Social and Economic problems. They are traditional and custom-bound. They have become the victims of superstitious beliefs, outmoded and meaningless practices and harmful habits. Child marriage, infanticide, homicide, animal sacrifice, exchange of wives, black magic and other harmful practices are still found among them. They believe in ghosts and spirits. They have keen desire to maintain all these practices in general, and their individual tribal character. The tribal people are economically the poorest people of India. Majority of them live below the poverty line. The tribal economy is based on agriculture of the crudest type. The innocence, illiteracy and helplessness of the tribals are exploited by the outsiders. The British policy, in particular, had led to ruthless exploitation of the tribals in various ways as it favoured the zamindars, landlords, money-lenders, forest contractors and excise, revenue and

police officials. About 90% of the tribals are engaged in cultivation and most of them are landless and practise shifting cultivation. They need to be helped in adopting new methods of cultivation. The tribals possess uneconomic holdings because of which their crop yield is very less. A very small percentage of the population participates in occupational activities in the secondary and tertiary sectors. A good portion of the land in the tribal areas has been legally transferred to non-tribals. Tribals demand that this land should be returned to them. In fact the tribals had earlier enjoyed much freedom to use the forest and hunt their animals. They are emotionally attached to the forests for they believe that their gods, spirits live in forests.

### **Social Isolation**

The tribals of India are in a way geographically separated from the rest of population. Some of them are living in the unapproachable physical areas such as deep valleys, dense forests, hills, mountains, etc. It is difficult for them to establish relations with others, and hence, socially they are far away from the civilized world. This kind of physical as well as social isolation or seclusion has contributed to various other problems. Majority tribes live under poverty line. The tribes follow many simple occupations based on simple technology. Most of the occupation falls into the primary occupations such as hunting, gathering, and agriculture. The technology they use for these purposes belong to the most primitive kind. There is no profit and surplus making in such economy. Tribal government programmes have not significantly helped the tribals in raising their economic status. The British policy had led to ruthless exploitation of the tribals in various ways as it favoured the zamindars, landlords, moneylenders, forest contractors, and excise, revenue and police officials. Banking facilities in the tribal areas are so inadequate that the tribals have to depend mainly on moneylenders. Being miserably bogged down in indebtedness, tribals demand that Agricultural Indebtedness Relief Acts should be enacted so that they may get back their mortgaged land. About 90 per

cent of the tribals are engaged in cultivation and most of them are landless and practise shifting cultivation. They need to be helped in adopting new methods of cultivation. Educationally the tribal population is at different levels of development but overall the formal education has made very little impact on tribal groups. Earlier Government had no direct programme for their education.

### **Deprived of education: Tribal women**

Scheduled Tribes (STs), the socially and educationally disadvantaged groups are one of the most exploited and deprived sections of the population in Indian. Tribal women are deprived of education which is the integral part of life. The Indian Tribal family organisation makes discrimination between the sexes regarding education and empowerment. Needless to say, that exclusion from fruits of development has adversely affected the quality of life of the tribal people. And Tribal children are no exception. So, the Tribal society is marked by inequality, discrimination, exploitation, domination and deprivation.

#### *Government Schemes: Educational Programmes*

- i) Early Childhood Education for 3-6 Age Group Children
- ii) Post Matric Scholarship for Scheduled Tribe Students
- iii) Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship for Scheduled Tribe Students
- iv) National Overseas Scholarships for Scheduled Tribe Students
- v) Scheme to Upgrade Merit of Scheduled Tribe Students
- vi) Central Sector Scholarship Scheme for Scheduled Tribe students
- vii) Scheme of Strengthening Education among Scheduled Tribe Girls in Low Literacy Districts
- viii) Scheme for Assistance to Voluntary Agencies for adult education
- ix) Scholarships Scheme by Centre for Cultural Resources and Training
- x) Scheme of Pre-Matric Scholarships to the Other Backward Classes for Studies

Even after 75 years of independence and in spite of various measures taken to improve the level of education in the country, literacy levels among backward classes, particularly among women, continues to be extremely low. The number of steps have already been taken by the Government and considerable progress has been achieved in improving the level of literacy and education during the last 75 years, but there is still a long way to go before respectable levels of literacy are achieved, It has been recognized now that education and economic support for backward Classes has not been adequate and there is disparity between them and the non-backward sections of the population at every level. In view of the same, it is felt that earnest efforts are required to introduce various new schemes specifically for these target group i.e. backward classes to provide them a level playing field in comparison to non-backward sections of the population. The position of women in terms of literacy among OBCs population is also a cause of concern. A scheme of Pre-matric Scholarship for the benefit of children belonging to Weaker Section amongst OBCs has been formulated with the object in view.

**Adivasi Shiksha Rrinn Yojana (ASRY):** This scheme provides soft loans to tribal students to meet expenditure for pursuing technical and professional education including doctorate courses. Loans up to Rs. 10.00 Lakhs per eligible family is provided at concessional rate of interest of 6 % per annum.

***Few other government schemes are:***

- ❖ Central Sector Scholarship Scheme of Top Class Education for Scheduled Caste Students
- ❖ Corpus Fund Scheme to Maulana Azad Education Foundation
- ❖ Post-matric Scholarship Scheme for minority students
- ❖ Scheme of Post Matric Scholarships to the Students belonging to Scheduled Castes
- ❖ Scheme of Vocationalisation of Secondary Education



- ❖ Model School scheme
- ❖ Adolescence Education Programme
- ❖ Scheme of Restructuring and Re-organisation of Teacher Education
- ❖ Setting up of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs)
- ❖ National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education
- ❖ National Means-Cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme
- ❖ Scheme to Provide Quality Education in Madrasas
- ❖ Scheme of Financial Assistance for Appointment of Language Teachers

### **Empowerment of Tribal Women**

Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of social status of tribal women, the traditionally underprivileged ones in the society. Empowerment of tribal women not only refers to economic liberalization but also access to opportunities, right to decision-making and access to education, health services and information. Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of women to participate in negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. Since poverty is multidimensional, women need a range of assets and capabilities at the individual level (such as health, education, and housing) and at the collective level (such as the ability to organize and mobilize to take collective action to solve their problems). Empowering women requires the removal of formal and informal institutional barriers that prevent them from taking action to improve their well-being individually or collectively - and limit their choices. The key formal institutions include the laws, rules, and regulations upheld by states, markets, civil society, and international agencies; informal institutions include norms of social solidarity, sharing, social exclusion, and corruption, among others.

**Role of Empowerment of Women in India:** Empowering women is essential to the health and social development of families, communities and countries. When women are living safe,

fulfilled and productive lives, they can reach their full potential and contribute their skills to the workforce and can raise happier and healthier children.

**Benefits of Empowering Women in India:** With higher literacy rates and equal pay for equal work, women are able to thrive economically and rise out of poverty. Protecting women and girls from violence and abuse while challenging the stigmas against reporting crimes would overall create a much safer society. Women must find ways to empower themselves to fight imbalance in society, and to participate equally in the ongoing process of development. When women feel they can operate in society on the same terms as men, then we can call women empowered.

**Role of Tribal Women in India:** Tribal women play a major role in the management of their natural, social, economic resources and agricultural development including crop production, livestock production, horticulture and post-harvest operations but they remain backward due to traditional values, illiteracy, superstitions.

**Adivasi Mahila Sashaktikaran Yojana (AMSY):** Under the scheme, Scheduled Tribes women can undertake any viable income generation activity costing upto ₹ 1 lakh per unit. Micro Credit Scheme for Self Help Groups: The Corporation provides loan ₹5 Lakhs per Self Help Group (SHG) and upto ₹50,000/- per member.

**National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC)**, an apex Organization under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in 2001 was brought into existence with the sole aim of economic upliftment of the Scheduled Tribes in the country by way of extending concessional financial assistance to the target group under its various schemes.

*The prominent schemes of NSTFDC are*

- ❖ Term Loan, Adivasi Mahila Sashaktikaran Yojana – an exclusive scheme for Scheduled Tribe women,
- ❖ Adivasi Shiksha Rinn Yojana – Education Loan scheme,
- ❖ Micro Credit Scheme for Self Help Groups (SHGs) – comprising Scheduled Tribes as its members,
- ❖ Tribal Forest Dwellers Empowerment Scheme and

❖ Teak Growers Scheme.

The appointment of Droupadi Murmu, an outstanding Santhali woman from Mayurbanj, a tribal district of Odisha as the President of India, provides hope for millions of tribal women. It is also an opportunity to bring tribal health and nutrition issues to the centre of the national discourse. The trajectory of India's growth can be shifted significantly when tribal communities with tribal women are placed at the centre of solutions. With India entering its 'Amrit Kaal' (the 25 years leading up to the centennial of Independence), this will prove to be a game-changer.

**Conclusion**

For the development of a society, there is the need of an inclusive progress of all the sections of the society, and for this perspective, it is imperative to bring the deprived, marginalized and weaker sections of the society such as tribal women to the forefront of educational revolution in India. This is important for equitable growth of human resources and overall development of the nation. Education imparts knowledge, knowledge of self and infuses a sense of confidence, courage and ability among the tribal women to know and overcome their problems associated with exploitation and to avail socio-economic and political opportunities extended to them. Although there is a significant increase in the literacy of population of all categories in India, the tribal women are far behind from the national increase, both in terms of national average and women literacy. Despite the opportunities, special initiatives and care by the government for tribal education, the achievement of tribal women education is not as per expectations due to several factors. To overcome these situations and to have an independent role in society, women's empowerment is needed. Empowering women is the fundamental right of women. They can have equal rights to participate in education, society, economics, and politics.

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