

## DEVELOPMENT OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN SOCIETY

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### ABSTRACT

*A woman's standing in society can be judged by the level of social justice meted to them. This significantly portrays their position in society. Generally, status is very often evaluated in terms of income, occupation, education, health, and fertility. Moreover, for women, the responsibilities they hold within their family, their part in society, and the role in a community, all play a part. In respect to tribal communities, women have an important role to play. Their role is not just significant and is also vital as many a time they toil harder and the family's economy and management depend on them. However, among tribal women, socioeconomic development is poor. The difficulties faced by tribal women and tribal men are more or less similar. Nevertheless, tribal women in society are considered more industrious than tribal men, being contributors of a substantial part of their family income. However, their sources for making money are limited. Moreover, with low-level of education, their awareness level is also low, thereby ignoring various basic health issues. As a result, tribal women are challenged to get a sustainable livelihood to maintain a decent life. Various explanations have been put forward to explain the low levels of literacy among the scheduled tribe girls. The accomplishments, inspiration, and credit orientation have been found to be mediocre among schedule tribe girls. The approach toward tribal development in general, and especially for women, needs to take on an improved updated outlook in order to further the upliftment of these women and empower them. This paper examines the socioeconomic status of tribal women in society and identifies the challenges faced by them. In addition, the paper highlights the approach that can be considered to successfully overcome these challenges.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Socio-Economic Development, Empowerment, Tribal Women, Scheduled Tribe*

### INTRODUCTION

As per the 2011 census data, the total population of Scheduled Tribes in India is 8.6 percent of the total population, with a major share being represented by the States of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Karnataka. According to the area of habitation, the tribal population has been identified to dwell in most of the underdeveloped areas of the country. Throughout history, they were not only geographically isolated but also socially. However, each tribe belongs to a unique race, with varied cultural features, languages, and religions. In addition, these tribes redistributed across several ecological zones. Mostly, the parents itself are reluctant to send their wards to school, because then, their helping hands at work would be reduced. However, with the Government promoting free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years, parents, nowadays, are more emboldened to send their children to schools.

Such parents usually hope that if their children are imparted proper education, then their economic and social conditions might improve.

Another significant problem facing scheduled tribes is their poor health condition. Lack of awareness about the nutrition results in the tribal women being weak and anemic. Most usually suffer from some disease or other. Special attention must be given during pregnancy, or else, it would impact the health of both the mother and child. Educational level, employment status, health status, and decision-making aptitude help to gauge the status of women in society for scheduled tribes.

#### **The Main Objectives of this Paper are as Follows**

- To realize the social and economic status of tribal women in society;
- To examine the varied challenges faced by tribal women; and
- To propose certain strategies for facing the numerous challenges confronted by tribal women in society.

Nevertheless, this study takes on a theoretical research approach, with secondary data extracted by previous authors and researchers employed. The data were obtained from various books, journals as well as websites. Details with regard to this is mentioned in the reference section.

#### **Social and Economic Status of Tribal Women in Society**

The term status signifies the position of a person in a society. R. Linton (1936) defined status “as a position in a social system.” The phrase role is directly associated with the concept of status. It discusses the manners anticipated of people in a status. The status of a person or a group in a society is estimated predominantly by educational level, health status, employment position, and decision-making skills. All these aspects are interrelated. Better education will promote health awareness, employment prospects, and decision-making adeptness among these groups. The status of women to a large extent depends on the social structure and the type of society. A study on the Naga women by Hutton (1921) pointed to their considerable freedom and higher social status. This specifies that the status of tribal women cannot be considered similarly, with variation according to the tribal group’s social structure. However, in tribal societies, tribal women are more important than women in any other social groups because tribal women are not only very industrious but in almost all the tribal communities, they contribute significantly toward a family’s economy. This is usually on par with men. Very often they work harder than men. Moreover, their status is also determined by health conditions. The general health of the tribal groups is poor compared to that of the general population. This is primarily because education level among the tribal population is low and formal education has made a very little impact on tribal groups. The level of literacy among the tribal’s in most states in India is very low. The reservation policy of the Government has made some transformations in the educational status. One of the main causes for the low level of literacy is because most lack formal schooling. Work participation among scheduled tribe women is higher as compared to others, mainly because of their poor economic condition. Scheduled tribe workers are involved in agricultural and in non-gainful occupations. Since independence, various protections have been given to the tribal population by the Constitution of India.

### **Problems Faced by Tribal Women**

Most tribes face a number of challenges. They must overcome these in order to improve their status in society. A major aspect noted is that most tribes do not have any fixed livelihood. Various literature studies reveal that although work participation among tribal women is higher compared to scheduled caste and the general population, the livelihoods of the tribal people are neither stable nor secure. Without a regular source of income, most live below the poverty level. Tribal people dwelling in the rural areas engage in varied low-level jobs for fulfilling their basic needs. Most are employed in agricultural activities. The economic conditions are reflected in other aspects of their life. A significant problem is lack of access to education. Most tribal women are engaged in work outside their homes, usually as daily laborers and in the agricultural sector. Even young children and girls accompany their mothers to work. Most of the time, they either do not go to school frequently or drop out. Very often, the parents themselves, especially in very poor families, do not always want to send the children to school because then their helping hands at work would be reduced. Household work is the responsibility of the female members of the family. Household work includes cooking, cleaning, washing utensils and clothes, and gathering fuel for cooking. The young girls who attend primary level hardly learn anything in school. Neither do they study at home. The Governments provides free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years and encourages parents to send their children to schools. They emphasize that if their children receive the proper education, then their circumstances would improve. In school, the children are given free school uniforms, books, and mid-day meals. During pregnancy, special attention needs to be given to the women otherwise it will affect the health of both the mother and child. Educational level, employment standing, health status, and decision-making skills determine the status of women in society. Women's education has to be channelized to employment opportunities. This, in turn, will increase the decision-making ability of women. Women's aptitude to communicate with other family members and to be able to influence them indicates the decision-making ability of women. When the decision-making ability is higher, women can have a higher status in the household.

### **Challenges for Promoting a Change in the Status of Tribal Women in Society**

As previously asserted, low living and economic conditions is a major problem faced by the tribal women. A practical approach would be to provide skills and training to women. This would help them in empower their lives. This has been initiated by various self-help groups. Awareness can be generated by their empowerment. Various NGO's can come forward to deliver essential training which will help them become empowered and create a livelihood. If the economic aspect is taken care of and awareness generated, then the tribal children can attend the school which will help them to develop a strong base for their future. Education would help prepare them for the future with substantial skill sets. However, tribal children need to be continuously motivated regarding the reasons to have the education. It would not just help them make money but also improve their decision-making ability. The health of the tribal women is another feature which wants consideration because the tribal women slog very hard and the income of the family hinges on the tribal women's labors. Tribal women are usually nutritionally deficient. They have a lower life expectancy than the national average because they do not take the required amount of food and rest. Numerous studies have pointed out that illiteracy is the primary reason for the lack of awareness about health.

If economic, educational, and health features are given adequate attention, then these aspects may contribute to an increase in the decision-making abilities of the tribal women. If they are persuaded about the significance of financial institutions, and if the banks extend their co-operation to these women, then their security about financial matters will be boosted. Moreover, if efforts are made to make them literate, then they may face the outside world in a confident manner, which in turn will augment their lives.

## CONCLUSIONS

In spite of numerous constitutional stipulations and policies for the tribals, it is a bitter truth that the tribal women still lag behind in many aspects and continue to face many challenges. The study highlighted the need for tribal development in India. Their low level of economic position, social backwardness, low level of literacy, and poor health conditions makes an organized process of tribal development vital. Though they work very hard and contribute considerably, they continue to remain in poverty. This is by large because no proper policies are focused on them. During the plan periods, various programs were initiated for the development of the Scheduled Tribe population; with significant improvement are their conditions. However, still, much more requires to be done. The families need to have adequate income to empower them to overcome their poverty levels. Since economic status regulates other features of life and living conditions, it is of utmost importance that they become economically stable. Education for tribal women is an indispensable facet of development. Education is a vital tool to bring about a change in the cultural norms and to change their viewpoint and made them economically independent. Education would impart skills to organize them, thereby improving their situations and living conditions. Moreover, educated women tend to be better aware of their rights and responsibilities. Moreover, with the newly acquired skills that education provides, they will be able to take up better employment that can improve their situation. Social and economic status of the scheduled tribes to a large extent depends on educational realization. Educated women are better adapt to face the numerous challenges. The government provides a lot of support and grant for the education of tribal students. This will help to upsurge the literacy rate, which is the right way to development. The health status of the tribals is explored to evaluate their cognizance regarding their health. Sometimes they lack essential nutrients. Many times, they suffer from various diseases as there is a lack of health and hygiene awareness. Thus, increasing literacy rates and opportunities for gainful employment for tribal women will be influential in bringing about a change in the status of tribal women in India and help them to handle challenges successfully.

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