

## Empowerment of Tribal Women and Gender Development in India

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### ABSTRACT

*Empowerment of Tribal Women For the enhanced socioeconomic development of any community, the active participation of women is essential. In a social set up like India's, their participation has to be ensured through concrete measures, taken at various levels, which result in their empowerment in the real sense. Empowerment of women is one of the concepts that has developed in connection with improving their status. Empowerment includes higher literacy levels, education, better health care, equal ownership of productive resources, increased participation in economic and commercial sectors, awareness of rights and responsibilities, improved standards of living, self-reliance, self-esteem and self-confidence. Mostly women and children do collection of minor forest produce. However, tribal women are still disregarded and underprivileged group in Tribal society. Gender equality among tribal groups is a complex phenomenon that needs to be addressed in the context of various issues of tribal life. The gender dimension of the tribal communities of India also has a bearing on the need for tribal development. This paper focuses on the nature and dimensions of change in the lives and status of tribal women in India. The paper also focuses how the socioeconomic changes during the last few decades have introduced new gender and class issues into the purportedly democratic society of the Tribals. The present study will based on secondary source of data collecting from various sources.*

### Keywords:

*Empowerment, Gender equality;  
Gender discrimination;  
Tribal community; Development;  
Tribal women in India.*

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### Introduction

Tribal development as a subject has remained an important area of study in the social sciences. In recent years tribal development acquired greater significance

both at the national and international level in the context to raise their Educational status so as to bring them out of the clutches of poverty. The term Tribe means the poor or the masses. It is a community of persons claiming descent from a common ancestor. We can say



that a tribe is a group of people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development acknowledging the authority of a chief and regard themselves as having common ancestors.

Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban/rural), educational status, social status (caste and class), and age. Policies on women's empowerment exist at the national, state, and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence, and political participation. However, there are significant gaps between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level. One key factor in the gap in the implementation of laws and policies to address discrimination, economic disadvantages, and violence against women at the community level is the largely patriarchal structure that governs the community and households in much of India. As such, women and girls have restricted mobility, access to education, access to health facilities, and lower decision-making power, and experience higher rates of violence. Political participation is also hindered at the Panchayat (local governing bodies) level and at the state and national levels, despite existing reservations for women.

### **1. Need and Importance**

Empowerment is based on the idea that providing employees, skills, resources, authority, opportunity, motivation, as well holding them responsible and accountable for outcomes of their actions, will capability and satisfaction. Social empowerment is understood as the process of developing a sense of autonomy and self-

confidence, and acting individually and collectively to change social relationships and collectively to change social relationships and the institutions and discourse that exclude poor people and keep them in poverty. The empowering activities are those which reflect the changes that women have effectively achieved to make their lives better by resisting the existing norms of the society.

Jawaharlal Nehru, 1958 said People should develop along the lines of their genius and should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture...We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will no doubt be needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory...We should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved. In the past, many tribal groups were forced to assimilate into the dominant culture of the country. But some groups, such as the Bhils, Gonds, Santals, Oraons, Mundas, Khonds, Mizos, Nagas, and Khasis resisted change and assimilation to maintain their cultural identities and languages. According to many Indians, their continued isolation poses problems of national integration. Under the banner of national unity, the government is now bringing these minority groups into the national mainstream. The main question is whether tribal societies can enter the national mainstream while preserving their distinct social, cultural and political beliefs. Education is in fact, an input not only for economic development of tribes, but also for inner strength of the tribal communities which helps them in meeting the new challenges of life. It is an



activity, or a series of activities, or a process which may either improve the immediate living conditions or increase the potential for future living. It is the single most important means by which individuals and society can improve personal endowments, build capacity levels, overcome barriers, and expand opportunities for a sustained improvement in their well-being. Professor Amartya Sen recently emphasized education as an important parameter for any inclusive growth in an economy. So, education is an important avenue for upgrading the economic and social conditions of the Scheduled Tribes. Education is in fact, an input not only for economic development of tribes, but also for inner strength of the tribal communities which helps them in meeting the new challenges of life. Literacy and educational attainment are powerful indicators of social and economic development among the backward groups in India. Currently, the tribes lag behind not only the general population, but also the Scheduled Caste population in literacy and education.

## **2. Tribal Women in the society**

1. Women in a tribal society play a vital role in their social, cultural, economic and religious ways of life and are considered as an economic asset in their society. But they are still lagging far behind in the different walks of life like education, employment, good health and economic empowerment etc. Though they are industrious, they have limited control over resources and economic activities. Therefore, there is a need for economic empowerment of tribal women in order to overcome inequality, discrimination and exploitation and to achieve their all round development in the society. Economic empowerment of marginalized groups involves not only the process of creation of social-political space for these groups by the state and civil

society, but also it is a process of liberation from man-made bondage through sustained struggle and resistance. It also represents the realization of hopes and dreams of relegated groups in a social environment, free of inequalities which affect them politically, socially and economically. The issue of economic empowerment is also linked with aspects like equality, liberty and fraternity. Thus the concept of “Economic Empowerment” of tribal women is quite new and it has been contextualized and acquires a new connotation in recent years among social scientists, policy makers, and development activists. So to overcome all the obstacles of the economic empowerment of tribal women, the scientific research is an urgent need. There are a good number of studies, explaining the causes and consequences of women's disempowerment. Such studies are related to a general inquiry of women exploitation and dependency. These studies have identified lack of education, absence of skills and training, lack of property rights, social isolation and segregation and male control over resources and reproductive rights as responsible for women's disempowerment. These factors in different degrees are applicable to the disempowerment of different socio – economic groups of women who are socially heterogeneous groups like White women versus Black women, educated and uneducated women, high caste women and low caste women, Christian, Muslim and Hindu women. These socially discriminated women face different degrees and various types of obstacles for empowerment (Becker 1956; Boserup 1970; Sen 2001). Further economically, women are classified into high income, middle income, and low income groups (like men).



- Mortality Inequality
- Natality Inequality
- Basic Facilities Inequality
- Special Opportunity Inequality
- Professional Inequality
- Ownership Inequality
- Household Inequality

These seven types of gender inequalities explained by Amartya Kumar Sen do not apply to women in tribal society. These gender inequalities apply in varying degrees in rural and urban society which are generally modernizing and industrializing. However the mortality inequality, Natality inequality, basic facilities inequality is more pronounced between women of rural and urban societies vis-à-vis tribal societies. Sen has referred to gender inequalities of different kind between men and women. However to understand and measure the disempowerment magnitude of the tribal women and their overall position, that has to be compared with the women of urban and rural society and not with their poor male counterparts.

### **3. Status of Tribal Women**

The status of women in a society is a significant reflection of the level of social justice in that society. Women's status is often described in terms of their level of income, employment, education, health and fertility as well as their roles within the family, the community and society. In tribal communities, the role of women is

considerable and crucial. They constitute about half the total population, but in tribal society women are more important than in other social groups, because they work harder and the family economy and management depends on them. Even after industrialization and the resultant commercialization swamped the tribal economy, women continued to play a significant role. A collection of minor forest produce is done mostly by women and children. Many also work as laborers in industries, households and construction, contributing to their family income. Despite the exploitation by contractors and managers, tribes are more sincere and honest than non tribal.

### **4. Gender Equity and Empowerment of Tribal Women**

2. Empowerment of women is one of the concepts that have developed in connection with improving their status. Empowerment includes higher literacy levels, education, better health care, equal ownership of productive resources, increased participation in economic and commercial sectors, awareness of rights and responsibilities, improved standards of living, self-reliance, self-esteem and self-confidence. Raising the status of tribal women is not just a moral imperative, but also a strategic one. Within the framework of a democratic policy, our laws, development policies, plans and programs have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as a central issue in determining their status. Tribal women, while being a disadvantaged and vulnerable group are, nevertheless, better placed, in many respects, than their counterparts in the general population and are, in certain areas, more empowered.



## **5. Role of Tribal Women**

### **Decision Making**

The power to take decisions is extremely important from the view point of empowerment of women because it is often seen that their voice is not properly listened. The decision making power of women should not be ignored. The real development cannot take place without active participation of women. So in the present study, the involvement of women in decision making in the economic and social spheres, both at the household and community level was examined.

### **The Relationship between Socioeconomic Status and Autonomy among Women**

The status of women in any society and women empowerment is closely associated with each other. The status of women is determined by an interplay of various socioeconomic factors. Hence the following section attempts to compare the autonomy of females with respect to their socioeconomic characteristics.

### **Employment**

The critical analysis of the nature of employment helps to understand the economic liberty of the females. Economic self-independence empowers the women to take its own decision. The family and society give due respect to their opinion and looks upon them in all matters. The study reveals that only 46.7% of the female population are employed, out of which 80 percent of them work as agricultural labor and thus have seasonal employment, 11 percent are self employed (selling hand, and forest product). And the rest 9 per cent is daily wage

labor. Income Women's share in household income throws light on the fact that it is a crucial factor that affects the decision making role of women. Impact of income in women's autonomy could be visualized in that particular area very effectively. For the present study income is calculated not only on the basis of payment made for employment, but also, the house rent, allowances, pension etc. are also taken into account.

### **Marital Status and Age**

Marital status indicates whether a person is married, unmarried or a widow and this is one important factor that determines the level of autonomy among females in any community. A majority of widows who lost breadwinners of the family have taken the entire responsibility upon themselves. They have to take face insecurities, non-cooperation etc. In the study area the widows have more decision making powers in comparison to others. The unmarried females also have high decision making role in comparison to married females. Married females have to take decision pertaining to their family members and in-laws.

### **Women's Security**

The multiple forms of violence experienced in the household, at the community level, and in some instances by the state, threaten women's security in India. In many parts of North India son preference is a widely practiced phenomenon. Son preference has direct linkages to sex-selective abortion (illegal across India; however, enforcement by both police and some doctors is still lacking), and discrimination of girl children in access to health, nutrition, and education.



**Objectives of the Study:**

**6. Development and Status of Tribal Women**

The strategy for tribal development, and especially women, needs improvement, betterment, development and upliftment to affect their empowerment. Tribal women have adjusted themselves to live a traditional lifestyle in the local environment and follow occupations based on natural resources. Undoubtedly, the programs, oriented towards the empowerment of tribal, particularly women, have improved their socioeconomic conditions and status. However, there are wide variations across regions and tribes in terms of work participation, sex ratio, economic productivity and social life. The impact of development planning needs to be evaluated in terms of desired and unanticipated consequences. The development process should be perceived as an involvement and a reorganization mechanism of not only the socioeconomic system but the entire eco-system.

One major consequence of these developments is the growing gender disparity among tribes, a phenomenon quite un- heard of in the traditional setup. As such, settled or plough cultivation has marginalized the traditional role of women in agriculture because they now face a taboo on handling the plough. On the other hand, too much crowding on the restricted amount of jhum land available forced particularly those Jhumias who live in remote forests to eke out a bare living. Both these factors have negatively influenced the work participation rates, particularly among rural tribal women.

**The main objectives of this paper are:**

- a) To highlights the Gender roles among Tribal society.
- b) To find out the role and status of Tribal women in development.
- c) To focus on the nature and dimensions of changes in the lives of tribal women in India.

**Methodology:**

The present study has been undertaken based on secondary source data. The Secondary data include books, journals, newspapers, Governmental report, Census report, and websites.

**Conclusion**

Empowerment for women in India requires a crosscutting approach and one which addresses the diversity of social structures that govern women's lives. Identity politics in India is a very critical political instrument, which is both used and abused throughout political and social institutions. There are numerous social movements fighting for the rights of the marginalized, such as the Dalit rights movement, the tribal rights movement, etc. These movements have achieved many gains in assuring representation of the traditionally marginalized communities into mainstream society. Women's rights within these movements are largely unarticulated and thus reinforce inequalities within the very structures from which they are demanding inclusion. Empowerment approaches for women, therefore is not only about providing services, but also about recognizing their lived realities of multiple layers of discrimination that hinder their access to services.

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