

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF SCHEDULED TRIBES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Social and economic justice, equality of status and opportunities, assurance of the individual's dignity are insured by the Constitution of India for all the citizens among other things. The term status means position of a person in a society. The constitution of India is enriched with several provisions for schedule castes and schedule tribes to safeguard and promote their cultural, social, educational, and economic interests in order to bring them in the mainstream of the nation. The Scheduled tribes constitute a small proportion of the total population of the country and they are marginalized from the society in many respects. There is a need to put more attention on educational aspects of scheduled tribes, where this only can motivate them for future life. This paper addresses the socioeconomic status of the scheduled tribes in India.

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Introduction:

The tribal population in India numerically constitutes a small segment of the total population of the country but is a significant part of the population. Certain communities in India have historically remained disadvantaged. Isolated from the main stream, they have long suffered social and economic marginalization. The term 'scheduled tribes' first appeared in the Constitution of India, to confer certain constitutional privileges and protection to a group of people who are considered disadvantaged and

backward. In the Constitution of India, Article 366 (25) defines Scheduled Tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or part of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to the scheduled Tribes (STs) for the purposes of this Constitution" The Constitution lays down various provisions for protection and upliftment of these communities. The Scheduled Tribes communities in India are characterized by economic and social marginalization, primitive existence, geographical isolation and educational backwardness.

Availability of sound data base on various aspects related to these communities is crucial to framing of effective policies for their socio economic upliftment. Over the years, it has been recognized that there is a paucity of comprehensive data covering various aspects of these communities. As a step in this direction, the working group on Labour Statistics (Fourth Plan) in its interim report in the year 1964 recommended, inter-alia, collection of data on certain aspects of working and living conditions of Labour belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes communities to assess the ways and means to be adopted for their welfare and for improving their working & living conditions.

The Government of India is under constitutional obligation to protect the interests of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes communities and to uplift them socially and economically. In order to do so, the working group on Labour Statistics (fourth plan) in its interim report in the year 1964 recommended, inter-alia, collection of data on certain aspects of working and living conditions of Labour belonging to Scheduled Castes and Schedules Tribes communities to assess the ways and means to be adopted for their welfare and improving their working & living conditions.

The scheduled tribes are the segregated and isolated communities and are largely concentrated in the states of Orissa, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan where they constitute about 80 per cent of the scheduled tribe population of India. In some of the North-Eastern states also they form more than 80 per cent of their population, and mostly live on the hillsides and forests. They are isolated from the rest of the society due to poor transportation and communication facilities and have remained as educationally, culturally, economically and socially disadvantaged sections. Scheduled tribes have been considered to be lowest in the social hierarchy. Being mostly illiterate, they have been subjected to all kinds of exploitation – social, economic and political. They comprised about 6.87, 6.82, 7.76, 8.08 and 8.60 per cent of India's population in 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 Census of India respectively.

Social and economic status of tribal 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. In Indian social context, there is a predominance of patriarchal family structure where males predominate in all settings and social contexts. Their health status is also related to economic and educational aspects. Their lack of ability to participate in the industrial economic activities of modern societies has deteriorated their living conditions. The tribals are mostly engaged in occupations which do not generate much income such as hunting, crafts making, agriculture. Industrialization and urbanization has brought about a change in the life and living of the tribals by uprooting them from their day to day activities and making them dependent on the vagaries of non tribals.

Even today, widely pervasive reality in respect of tribal communities in India is that most of them are geographically isolated, economically weak, socially ignorant, politically indifferent, culturally rich, behaviorally simple, trustworthy and leading their life in the lap of nature. They are facing problems, which force them to lead a life at bare subsistence level. Most of them are in the situation featured with poverty, deprivation, disadvantages which are difficult to be tackled effectively on their own and making the

government in particular and society in general to intervene in a planned manner to solve the miseries of tribes and facilitate their development process. A large number of tribal communities continue to be extremely backward and some of them are still in the primitive food gathering stage, whereas some others have progressed fairly in terms of economic and educational advancement. In Visakhapatnam district, the growth rate of tribal population from 1981 to 2001 is 57 per cent. For Andhra Pradesh and India it is 58 and 63 per cent respectively. This indicates that growth rate of tribal population in Visakhapatnam district is less than that of state and national average respectively. The share of tribal population in the total population of Visakhapatnam increased marginally from 13.74 to 14.55 from 1981 to 2001, the same for Andhra Pradesh and India stands at 5.93 to 6.59 and 7.6 to 8.20 respectively.

Problems faced by tribal's:

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's.

Absence of any fix livelihood:

Various literature studies reveal that although work participation 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 laborers. Tribals 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.

Lack of access to education:

Most of the tribal's work outside their homes and are engaged in various activities. They work in order to earn money for their family. The women's work involves daily labour, agricultural work. Even young children and girls go for work along with their mothers. Most of the time they do not go to school regularly or become drop outs from school. Even the parents in very poor families don't always want to send the children to school because then their helping hands in work would be reduced. Effect of patriarchy could be strongly seen in most tribal groups and so whatever money women get from their work they give it to their husband and the husband very often spends the money on activities like drinking. Household works are done by the female members of the

family. Household work involves cooking, cleaning, washing utensils and clothes, collecting fuel for cooking. The government has announced free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years, which nowadays encourage parents to send their children to schools with the hope that if their children receive proper education, then their conditions will improve. The children are given free school uniforms, books and mid day meals. However, the girls don't continue school at a stretch. Sometimes they go to school, some other times they do not go to school and stay at home and go to work with their mothers and help their mothers at household work. As a result, they tend to forget what they have learned in school. After the girl child attains teenage the parents stop sending them to schools.

Poor condition of health:

Lack of awareness about nutritional requirements mostly leaves the tribal women weak, anaemic and they suffer from various diseases. During pregnancy, special attention is required to be given to women otherwise that will affect the health of both the mother and child. Educational level, employment status, health status and decision making ability helps to measure the status of women in society.

Conclusion:

In spite of various constitutional provisions and policies for the tribal's, it is a hard reality that the tribal's 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 activities, 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 tribals is an essential aspect of development. 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. The health status of the tribal's 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 tribals will be instrumental in bringing about a change in the status of tribal's in India and to handle to challenges successfully.

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