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Position of Tribal Women in India

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ABSTRACT

Scheduled Tribes (ST) account for around 8.6% of India's population, or approximately 10.4 Crore people. Over 730 Scheduled Tribes have been notified under Article 342 of the Indian Constitution. Tribal women make up around half of the population overall, much as any other social group. Women from tribal communities and other walks of life also have lower levels of schooling than males do. Reproductive health issues cause tribal women just as they do other ethnic groups. Because there are more women than males working in primary and secondary subsistence jobs, women's status may vary on the community. This article will discuss will discuss the position or the status of tribal women in their community and the nation by recalling their roles, socio-economic conditions, literacy, crimes against them, and their role in economic, social, and political sphere. This article will also recall the shift in a tribal women's life in terms of the above mentioned factors to understand the importance of implementing new policies and measures to mitigate the issues.

Keywords: Tribal women, Socio-economic conditions, Literacy, Crimes against women, Economic empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION

Scheduled Tribes (ST) constitute around 8.6% of India's overall population of over 10.4 million people.² Notwithstanding the fact that there is a wide body of social and cultural literature defining the characteristics and variations throughout India's many tribes, rare cross-disciplinary research has been performed with regard to the status of women among India's tribal people.³ On the other hand, like any other social group, tribal women make up around half of the total population. In primary and secondary subsistence labour, women outnumber men.⁴

The position of tribal women is mostly determined by the responsibilities they conduct in community. The system of descent determines each person's position to a significant measure. The families attempt to pass on their land through the line of descent. The system of descent is

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² Year End Review 2022: Ministry of Tribal Affairs Press Information Bureau, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1887716> (last visited Sep 28, 2023)

³ Aparna Mitra, *The status of women among the scheduled tribes in India*, 37 *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 1202-1217 (2008)

⁴ Veena Bhasin, *Status of tribal women in India*, 1 *Studies on Home and Community Science*, 1-16 (2007)

also used to determine family surnames. In a unilinear system, inheritance is traced through either the male or female line. A matrilinear system is one in which the descent is traced through the mother's line, whereas a patrilinear system is one in which the inheritance is recorded through the father's line. The majority of Indian tribes adopt a patrilinear system.⁵

A woman's position is heavily influenced by the type of family the woman is born into. In a shared family arrangement, the eldest woman typically has a reserve in decision-making. The form of family varies greatly depending on the type of marriage popular in the culture. The most prevalent form of family in India's tribal cultures is a family with no children formed through monogamy. The prolonged form of family is also extremely popular, with girls leaving their native house after marriage to live in faraway regions. The older boys, too, leave their parents after marriage to establish new houses in the neighbourhood. Even after marriage, it is usual for the youngest son to live with his parents.

Several international human rights instruments have direct application to persons. The international community has developed a number of international legal documents that are advantageous to tribal women, such as Declarations, Covenants, and Resolutions. In addition to the specific provisions in the Indian Constitution of 1950, these instruments are also important in the Indian context. Articles 51 and 253 of the Indian Constitution of 1950 are significant in international law.⁶

Considering these regulations and practises, it has been observed that tribal women in India are more industrious than tribal men and therefore contribute significantly to the earnings of their families, regardless having been told that their revenue-generating prospects are limited.⁷ Families are apprehensive about sending their children to traditional schools since the economy requires more hands in the labour force. In addition, due to a widespread lack of education, their awareness is limited, and many opt to ignore their most fundamental health problems. The dire living conditions of tribal women are poor in accordance with employment, education, and health, not just in order to tribal males but also for women in a whole.

II. THE VIEW ON INDIAN TRIBAL WOMEN

*Scheduled Tribe (Female) Population in India 2022*⁸

⁵ J.J. Roy Burman, Status of Tribal Women in India, Mainstream Weekly, Mar. 13, 2012

⁶ Pragma Rakshita, Tribal Women of India: International and national safeguards— A comparative study, 47 Commonwealth Law Bulletin, 143–174 (2020)

⁷ Pujasree Chatterjee, Social and Economic status of tribal women in India – The challenges and the Road Ahead, 2 International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies, 55–60 (2014)

⁸ Scheduled tribe population in India Scheduled Tribe (ST) Population in India, <https://www.census2011.co.in/scheduled-tribes.php> (last visited Sep 28, 2023)

No_HH	Population	Males	Female	Child(0-6)	Literacy	Sex-Ratio
21,511,528	104,545,716	52,547,215	51,998,501	16.01 %	58.95 %	990

Women make up almost 50% of the tribal population, just as they do in other groups. The survival of the tribal society like that of any other group, is heavily dependent on the standing of its women. The general image and opinion of tribal women is that they have it better than non-tribal peers.⁹ There is no such thing as child marriage or becoming a widow. A tribal women has the right to choose her own marriage, for example. Instead of dowry, there is a bride price, which indicates the indigenous woman's high social rank. A tribal woman can simply divorce and remarry. It has been observed that a tribal women is so monetarily autonomous to a certain degree. Nevertheless, there are other indicators that point to the indigenous woman's poor position. A tribal women does not, for example, have property rights unless she lives in a matrilineal community, which accounts for a small part of the people who live in tribal areas. For the same work, a tribal women is paid less than her male counterpart. Several taboos exist in specific tribal cultures that discriminate against tribal women, signifying impurity and low rank. Tribal women are not permitted to hold the post of priest. Menstruation is frowned upon, just as it is in non-tribal groups. The Kharia women are not permitted to use a plough or assist with home roofing. The women of Oraon are also barred from operating a plough. Todas in the Nilgiri Hills will not approach a menstruating woman for fear of ruining the harvest. Several cultures confine ancestor worship to men alone. The Toda and Kota women of southern India are forbidden from entering temples. The Santal ladies are unable to attend collective worship.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITION OF INDIAN TRIBAL WOMEN

A person's social standing is referred to by the words position or condition. The idea of role is intrinsically linked to the idea of prominence. It refers to the normal conduct of people in an individual's position.¹⁰ The educational attainment, physical well-being, position in the workforce, and capacity for action of an individual or community establish how they are viewed by others. These factors are all inescapably connected. College and graduate school will boost these people's health consciousness, job opportunities, and ability to make informed choices. A community's status in society. for women is profoundly influenced by the social

⁹ Amar Kumar Singh & C. Rajyalakshmi, Status of Tribal Women in India, 23 Social Change, 3–18 (1993)

¹⁰ Supra note 6, 56.

dynamics and kind of civilisation which are in.. Traditional systems of family life thrive in Indian sociocultural scenarios, with males being predominant in numerous cultural and social situations. Matriarchal households were discovered to predominate in many local cultures. Women have a better status in matriarchal families than in authoritarian ones. It has also been discovered that the Garo and Khasi tribes of North East India give women a considerably greater status due to their traditions of matrilineal ancestry, maternal residence, and the transmission of property through the female line. Women's status, however, is not as high in some tribal societies that adhere to patriarchal traditions as it is in matriarchal society. For certain other tribes, such as Ho and Gond, the spouse is not usually the prominent figure. In many elements of their social lives, Gond women have the same status as their male counterparts. These tribes enjoy more freedom and a greater social rank. This suggests that tribal women's status varies depending on tribal group and cultural context rather than being uniform. Nonetheless, tribal women are perceived to be far more important than women of any other ethnic or racial group in tribal societies because tribal women tend to be very entirely devoted and in the vast majority of tribal communities they participate in revenue-generating labour in roughly equal numbers with men or work more diligently than men, and the family economy and earnings also rely on women. Health issues have an impact on position as well. Tribal groups have a lower standard of living than the overall populace. They have poor sanitation, a low supply of clean drinking water, a high infant death rate, a greater fertility rate, and a general lack of awareness about epidemics and health care settings. Chronic illnesses and afloat pathogen-related disorders, and deficient diseases plague many tribal groups in India. Babies died at a very high rate alongside other tribes. The general state of wellness of children who are indigenous has been adversely impacted by a nationwide malnutrition among them. It makes an individual more susceptible to infection and can lead to chronic sickness, which can sometimes harm the brain. Their health is also linked to economic and educational factors. Their inability to have an active role in modern societies' industrial economic activity has harmed their living situations. The tribals are largely involved in low-income occupations like as hunting, crafting, and agriculture. Industrialization and urbanisation have altered tribal communities and their way of life by removing them from their daily occupations and making them dependent on the whims of non-tribals. The significance of education especially among the tribes is low, and formal education has had barely any impact on tribal civilizations. In most Indian states, indigenous people have a very low literacy rate. The government's reservation policy has resulted in certain modifications in educational standing. One of the primary causes for low literacy is that they place a low value on formal education. The school curriculum and

education system do not pique their attention; instead, a curriculum that is more practical in nature would be beneficial to them. Furthermore, because the tribes live in poverty, they do not prefer to send their children to school because they are seen as extra helping hands for creating cash. After analysing the socioeconomic status of Scheduled Tribe women in West Bengal in comparison to scheduled caste and non-scheduled women. The primary findings were that only 5.01 percent of Scheduled Tribe females were literate, compared to 13.70 percent of Scheduled Caste women and 37.43 percent of the non-scheduled population. In relation to the overall rate of female literacy, this level of proficiency was quite low.¹¹ It has been also seen that Economic hardship has a direct impact on involvement. Scheduled tribes' employees work in agricultural and non-profit organisations. Given their education, economic status, and health, indigenous women's positions were far from adequate. Demography, health, education, and work status of tribal women have all been examined. The Indian Constitution has provided several protections to the indigenous population since independence. Tribal women do not have property rights, and their literacy rate is lower than that of the scheduled caste and the general population. Tribal women are unhealthy, suffering from malnutrition and a variety of ailments.

IV. LITERACY AMONG TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA

A vital criterion of a tribal community's rise is its level of education. In 1961, 8.54 percent of tribe members had concluded school; by 2011, that number had risen to 63.1%. However, the percentage of learn tribal women is 54.4 percent, as a result of 71.7 percent for males. After independence, the Indian government got policies and a budget to spike the number of students enrolled in elementary schools (grades I through V). These changes have led to an unprecedented increase in the general population's gross participation ratios for both boys and girls as well as literacy rates during the last 50 years. ST females had literacy rates of 63.1%, while ST guys have rates of 71.7 percent. Consequently, from 1961 (8.54%) to 2011 (63.1%), there was an a significant rise in ST literacy.

The Indian government has developed multiple gender-specific initiatives as well as programmes with the long-term goal of boosting girl literacy at many different points in time. As a means of supporting girls' education, the government has provided scholarships to students at each of the pre-matriculation and post-matriculation stages, and it has also provided boarding and hostel facilities for females, bicycles for ladies, and specialised schools for girls from marginalised areas. The government decided to put a particular focus on instructional and other improvements to infrastructure for educational institutions in tribal and economically

¹¹ Ibid, 57.

deprived areas through various projects with the aim to improve enrollment rates and minimise dropout rates among underprivileged children.¹²

One of the main aims of promoting scheduled tribe women and girls to pursue careers in education is to change their conventional ways of living, in order to render them more self-sufficient economically, to motivate them to take responsibility for their own health, to inform these individuals on their rights and obligations, to come to terms with the social environment in which they live, to assess the challenges they face, and to supply them with possibilities to participate drastically in their own growth as a wholly indigenous people. ISTs make up a sizable proportion of the population in certain states of the country, but not in others. Female literacy rates have risen dramatically in both urban and rural areas during the past four decades. In addition, the overall number of Schedule Tribe girls pursuing higher levels of study has gradually increased.¹³

V. VIOLENCE AGAINST TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA

One of India's most ardent deficits is still crime against women. Between the ages of 15 and 49, one-third of women declared having had physical abuse, and 10% reported sexual abuse. 35% proved victims of sexual or physical abuse at all. Millions of women have endured and are going to continue misery at their own price, at the expense of their husbands and other family members. The various sorts of violence against women are as follows: Bride burning, acid flinging, and ironing of the breasts Dating Abuse, Domestic violence and pregnancy control Dowry abolition, Feticide, female infanticide Foot binding, compelled feeding, involuntary abortion, forced marriages, coerced pregnancy, and sexual slavery are all examples of human rights violations. Human trafficking, the murder of pregnant women, sexual assault on college campuses, collective sexual violence, rape and pregnancy, sexual servitude, and so on are all examples of sexual violence. Fighting with a woman is also considered acts of violence towards women.

Some tribal women are able to defend themselves from their husbands' threats and assault. Violence tends to be employed to establish relationships with family members in ways that comply with predetermined behaviours rules, with a general sense of male power and authority. Women's violence has been described as occurring "in the socioeconomic and political environment that pertains to power relations," and these should include "exploitation, unfair treatment, the perpetuation of disparate financial and social frameworks, the establishment of

¹² Jyotirmayee Mohapatra, Literacy Among Tribal Girls And Women- "An Overview," India Education, Aug. 14, 2020

¹³ Supra note 14.

a hostile environment of terror, danger, or retribution, and other types of religion-cultural and controversial aggression." Nonetheless, it seems as though the violence suffered by women of other castes and ethnic backgrounds in the sense of female foeticide and infanticide does not exist among tribals.

Tribal women's status is largely influenced by the roles they play in the community. To a considerable extent, the process of inheritance governs each person's status. Members of a family try to pass down their ownership of the property through the generations. The familial chain of inheritance can also be employed to figure out surnames in families. In a unilineal system, ownership is passed down either through the male or female line. A matrilinear system is one in which descent is traced through the mother's line, whereas a patrilinear system records inheritance through the father's line. The patrilinear system is used by the majority of Indian tribes.¹⁴

A woman's position is heavily influenced by the family she is born into. In a shared family setup, the eldest woman is frequently reserved in decision-making processes. The model of family life varies greatly depending on the specific kind of marriages that is widespread in community. A solitary household with no children is probably the most prevalent type of family in India's tribal tribes. Having a larger family is also extremely well-known, with many girls leaving their ancestral home after marriage to live in faraway regions. The older males, too, leave their parents after marriage to establish new houses in the neighbourhood. Even after marriage, the youngest son frequently continues to live with his parents.¹⁵

Pursuant to an analysis of NCRB data, atrocities against tribal populations are expected to go up by 6.4% in 2021. Violence against tribal women has also grown in recent years, with numerous incidences documented around the nation in recent years. At the same time, rape against tribal women and girls accounts for 15% of all occurrences. The summary of the findings contained specific data on assaults on women, including kidnappings, which accounted for 26.8 percent of cases involving indigenous women. On the basis of the report, 12,159 incidents of atrocities against STs are currently under investigation, with 42,512 cases scheduled for trial. The enormity of the crisis becomes clear when the data is evaluated over an extended period of time. Crimes against STs, for instance have risen over the two decades from 1991 to 2021. At precisely the same time, violence against ST people grew 111.2 percent between 1991 and 2021, as reported in a study conducted by the Dalit Human Rights Defenders Network in partnership with the Human Rights Law Network and the National Council of

¹⁴ Brinda Karat, *When Rape Becomes A Weapon Against Tribal Women*, NDTV, Jan. 17, 2017

¹⁵ *Supra* note 17.

Women Leaders.¹⁶

(A) Role of tribal women in economic sphere

The economic aspect that characterises everyday living is typically carried out through a gender-based division of labour in social systems that lack a market system. The labour distribution in the subject matter area is predominantly among herding and agribusiness. All other responsibilities in village life, such as crafts, the building of houses and watermills, and boundary wall labour, are distributed among men and women. Men in the family of Gaddis and Bhutias are shepherding, while women cultivate crops for food. It is also true in Bhils and Bodhs, where men are abroad working on different duties while women cultivate crops for subsistence.

Nevertheless, because of duplication and divergence from the rule, the line of demarcation are not easily discernible. There are periods of time when the rule is unbreakable and occasions when it is feasible to change. Apart for ploughed (which needs to be done by men) in fields close to homes or in far areas, the majority of the agricultural work is done by women who weed, hoe, plants, the harvesting process, and smash. Additional duties for women include caring for their families, children, and animals. Women are in charge of food being prepared and cooked. Women are first and foremost accountable for livestock, water, fuel, and fodder, with the assistance of children. This allows them to spend a significant amount of time away from home and the hamlet.

When children are not confined to their homes, they are free to talk to anybody they wish, male or female, of any caste or creed. As a consequence, male-female interaction is just as robust as male-male connection.¹⁷ Tribal women are especially resilient and self-sacrificing when it comes to coping with environmental limits, as evidenced by their travelling and career paths in the face of harsh environmental constraints. A number of research on agrarian communities demonstrate that the status of women in such cultures is not particularly favourable, owing to the fact that genuine livestock care and economic matters are completely male spheres. Although Gaddis and Bhutia women do not materially participate in livestock interacting with, they are responsible for looking after their husbands throughout migrations.

(B) Role of Tribal Women in Social Sphere

The participation of tribal women in research is critical not just in economic but also within non-economic pursuits. Women are in charge of establishing and maintaining the family hearth

¹⁶ Supra note 19.

¹⁷ Supra Note 6.

and household. Women play extremely important functions as wives, mothers, organisers, and as the starting point for other elements of social life as well. Because males are away on agricultural tasks among Gaddis, integration of children generally falls to the mother, or so it appears in the early years of life.

The Gaddi family becomes mother-centered with regards to the kids, with a number of key choices lying under the scope of women's participation. Village life revolves around women's roles in birthing, burials, and fairs and festivals. In tribal regions, women are the transmitters of centuries-old knowledge in spite of the lack of written records. They are crucial in ensuring the safeguarding and transmission of this sort of information. They are not only competent of being agricultural workers and cleaning staff, but they are also keepers of rich oral cultural heritage from their communities.

(C) Role of Tribal Women in Political Sphere

At the Beijing Conference (1995), the importance of gender equality in establishing a society of excellence was underlined. Women's power over the economy in the home does not translate into societal influence. They are not ignored in the family, but they are not given the respect and attention they belong at the decision-making level. Women's superiority is confined to the home, not in the wider social or political realms. It is important to point out that, notwithstanding it being the case that every village Panchayat by tradition has a female member, the lady never hurries to be present at meetings or exhibit part in participating in Panchayat activity. Sikkim has had a long tradition with participatory decision-making through the Dzumsha system.

Women, on the other hand, play no significant role in traditional institutions, and Dzumsha is solely composed of men. In the event of the departure of a male member, a female could choose to represent her family unit. If a male head fails to attend a Dzumsha meeting, the individual is reprimanded; nonetheless if a female head attends, the individual is obliged to pay half the amount for the absence of the female head.

This indicates how women are marginalised in the public sphere and decision-making in the community. Women are commonly disregarded and marginalised, either due to a lack of basic abilities or through their enormous and insatiable family responsibilities render taking part in meetings and getting involved in decision making impossible. Men are more likely to take over the more lucrative tasks.

VI. CONCLUSION

In India, individuals from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SCs and STs) have constitutional disadvantages. They have been known by different names throughout the country's history, dating back to the introduction of the Hindu caste system. People from the Scheduled Castes are at the bottom of the caste structure. This minority was described to as "untouchables" and "depressed classes" prior to 1935 because of their employment of cleaning public spaces, which was deemed polluted and unclean.¹⁸ Thus, it could be concluded that the government of India and the state governments must promote and increase awareness among the community to report crimes. Meanwhile, the government must look after the proper implementation and practice of the international policies and laws regulated by the United Nations, UDHR, and other international bodies for the welfare of the tribal women. Similarly, there are a bunch of laws and policies enacted by the government for the safeguard, welfare and development of Scheduled Tribes that will help to mitigate the issues faced by the tribal women in the nation. This paper has discussed the position or status of tribal women in the society as well as in their family. It has been seen that despite of having the options of prevailing multiple policies they still face discrimination based on sex, literacy, and financial status. Thus, the issue must be solved to boost the educational and financial development among the tribal women that will gradually help to develop a better status in the community as well as in the nation.

¹⁸ Dalits and adivasis in India Statista, <https://www.statista.com/topics/4946/dalits-and-adivasis-in-india/> (last visited Sep 28, 2023)

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