

## **THE STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA**

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### **Abstract**

This article discussing The tribal people have remained untouched by modern developments since they mostly live in rural and remote areas. They have lost their land, resources and rights due to increasing industrialization, urbanization and modernization. These processes have posed series of threats to the peaceful coexistence of tribes in India. A tribal women occupies an important place in the socio-economic structure of her society.

The tribal women are also exploited in many ways. A comprehensive reviews of educational, health, employment and development status of tribal women presents a pathetic picture. The tribal women are known for ignorance, ill health, mal nutrition, unemployment and other complexities of development. There has been a good deal of studies on the status, problems and prospects of tribal women in India and abroad. The tribal women also lack significant leadership positions in tribal economy and political sectors even though they played an active role in tribal movement.

**KEYWORDS:- Communication support for tribal women empowerment, Status of tribal women, Status of women in tribal society of India,**

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## INTRODUCTION

Social stratification has also affected the tribal society since the tribal people are subjected to rapid alteration, addition and adjustment due to structural and cultural change across the country. Modern activities like tourism promotion, mining and commercialization have resulted in a complex tribal stratification which has affected gender justice and equality in tribal community. The traditional patterns, dimensions and processes of social stratification have changed in the modern times due to the forces of modernization and urbanization. Empirical studies carried out by Parkins (1972-01), Goldthrope (1983-02), Crompton and Mann (1986-03), Mirchall Mann (2004-04), Myers Diana Tietiens (1987-05) and others have reported that the topic of gender has been relatively neglected in the mainstream stratification theory and research which has brought about the oppression of tribal women.<sup>1</sup> Studies have also reported the tribal women do not constitute a collectivity in modern society.

Mahaswetadevi fought for the empowerment of tribal women in India and noted that tribal women are subjected to two-tier exploitation as a labourer and also as instrument of sexual gratification to the new controllers of economy. Devi also presented the politics of oppression hatched by the newly formed mafia group which is responsible for the saddening state of affairs of tribal women in India. The process of tribal society in general and status of tribal women in particular. The new forces of modernization have drastically affected the indigenous systems and their culture, tradition, social practices, occupational pattern and so forth according to Bodra (2008-10). The implications of social change, modernization and development on tribal women are scientifically analyzed by the anthropologists. They have reported that the penetration of alien culture in the age of globalization has adversely affected the status of tribal women. The emergence of new market economy has increased the control of market forces over tribal communities and reduced the status of tribal women.

The changes in tribal land structure and dispossession of the movable and immovable property from the hands of tribes and the ownership of non-tribal affluent classes have severely affected the status of tribal women. In the market economy, tribal women have been taken for granted since they have not learnt the art of managing commercialization of economy. The division of

labour among tribal communities in the new millennium has brought about the exploitation of tribal women who are considered only as workers and commodities by the market forces.

### **COMMUNICATION SUPPORT FOR TRIBAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

Communication is rightly viewed as an instrument of development. Many scholars have studied the role of communication in the process of development in India and abroad. The essence of the ideology of development communication is the creation of a new society on the basis of equality and justice. The media intervention packages and programmes are required to popularize the beneficial effects of various development projects and to enlist the active participation of the beneficiaries in the process of development. Media and development are interrelated systems. The maximum responsibility lies on the media to make the development activities clear and accessible to the common people.

The Mac Brode commission (1982-11) observed that communication component in all development projects should receive adequate funding. Systematic media intervention is necessary to accomplish successful communication to bridge the gap between the development programme and target group. Scholars have advocated that an entirely new orientation to development in which education as a critical input is inescapable. Guru (1997-12) noted that development support communication includes the integration of planned, organized and specific communication package into development planning and programme implementation at various levels. Scholars have also proposed pedagogy of the oppressed on the basis of human values and distributive justice. Experience has shown that media when used without concomitant changes in the structure of the society and economy could lead to the strengthening of the status quo.

Tribal communities are deprived of right to information, participation and development due to several factors in a pluralistic society like India. Tribal development demands an effective media strategy which should be considered as a subsystem of overall tribal development process. Media have a social obligation to fulfill the development aspirations of the people in general and tribal communities in particular. All schemes, programmes and services meant for the uplift of tribes are not adequately communicated by the media especially at the tribal community level. The

media have not provided proper feedback to the policy makers and implementers regarding the effectiveness of various tribal development projects according to empirical studies.<sup>2</sup>

A comprehensive policy of communication related to tribal development goals is not formulated to facilitate meaningful media intervention for tribal development over a period of time. “The transition of the tribal people from their tribal economy to national economy. From their tribal organization to national political organization, must be planned and piloted in the due consideration to the social groups concern”, observes majumdar. The newer perspectives to tribes development do not deny the role of mass media in the process of tribal development. It is important that the view pint of tribal people should be considered primarily through constant dialogue between the tribal people and development administration it is here that the supportive role of media becomes a matter of profound significance from the point of view of tribal development.

The role of communication in the process of development is widely debated all over the world. However, doubts are also expressed as to the wanton devaluation of the tribal life and its core values. Literally, the information underclass has become powerless. This is very much true especially in tribal areas where people are alienated from the mainstream of national development. Tribal women are lacking, computer literacy, development literacy and so on. If tribal women are to play a vital role locally, regionally and nationally access to communication media and technologies becomes absolutely essential in this age of communication revolution. The use of various communication media-for popularizing the beneficial effects of various tribal development programs has been on the national agenda for over three decades in India. The Indian space research organization (ISRO) carried out several progressive communication experiments in order to enlist the active participation of tribes in the process of development.

The policy makers have also encouraged the media institutions to undertake joint projects with user agencies to facilitate satellite based operational systems to support education and development in rural and tribal areas. Communications media including television and social media are expanded in the tribal areas. The print media. Electronic media and new media have increased their space, time and resources on order to reach out to the unreached tribes.

Communication support for tribal development is crucial in the present times.<sup>3</sup> Participatory approaches to tribal development communication are required to open up new vistas of empowerment of tribal women. The Jhabue Development communication project (JDCP) of Madhya Pradesh facilitated the installation of community television station and disseminated various tribal development programmes for the benefit of tribal women in the project area.

The state has a constitutional obligation to create informed citizenry in the tribal areas. Studies have emphasized that it is imperative to formulate a national policy on tribal development at this juncture. The communication media should also educate organize and motivate tribal women as a matter of corporate social responsibility. The central government agencies, State government bodies, tribal development research institutions, universities, media institutions, non government organization are required to coordinate the tribal women empowerment programmes in tribal areas. Tribal women specific media programmes should be organized in order to enlist the active participation of tribal women in the process of development. The non-government organizations and media institutions should function as pressure groups to force initiation of action where none exist with respect to empowerment of tribal women in India.

The media professionals are called upon to assume pro-active roles as catalysts of tribal women empowerment in the country. Tribal development communication management in general and tribal women empowerment oriented media intervention in particular are enduring areas of research in India. The future agenda for media organizations must deal with the expansion of communications media programmes and evaluation of the impact of media on tribal women. The media institutions have to work in close collaboration towards designing tribal women empowerment centered communication programme at this juncture.

## **STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN**

India as a whole is characterized by sharp gender disparities, although women's status varies considerably by region. On virtually all frontiers of human societal pursuits-economic, educational, scientific, legal, political, official, political and religious sphere Indian women suffer profoundly.

For all time there are socio-cultural factors, which validate for the status of women in particular society. It is always culture (a set of collective experience of ideas, norms, values and beliefs associated with a people) with its gender role inequalities and socialization (the intricate process through which culture is transmitted from one generation to another) determiners the position of women in a society. Gender roles are socially constructed. The family structure in India is patriarchal, Patrilocal and Patrilineal.<sup>4</sup> Patriarchy denotes a culture of power relationship that promotes man's supremacy and women subjugation.

It encompasses institutional endorsement of man's ascendancy within the family and other social structures. It justifies the normative process pertaining to the recognition and sustainability of his dominance in society. Consequently a boy is looked upon as the perpetuator of the family line, and a girl 'a bird of passage'. The Indian family organization makes discrimination between the sexes. It promotes a hierarchy of classification in which man centered issues take dominance where as women derive their personalities from their fathers', husband', brothers' and son with a secondary status, women play but a submissive role in social life. Despite several economic, political and social changes, women, are still far behind. One of the most unflattering statistics concerning India's girl child shows that the preference for a son runs across rich as well as poor households, educated as well as illiterate families. Widespread use of modern technology, a joint failure of medical ethics and failure to shed concept of a male heir has pushed female foeticide to high proportions. Female foeticide is just one side of the vast anti-women behavioural range in India. The tragedy is that even women, who have the choice, opt for a male child. They feel that only with a birth of a son, they will achieve higher status.

The status of any social group is determined by its levels of health-nutrition, literacy-education and standard of living. The tribal women, constitute like any other social group, about half of the total population. However, the health of tribal women is more important because tribal women work harder and family economy and management depends on them. Higher infant mortality rate in the tribal compared to national average; low nutritional level of the tribal; lower life-expectancy in the disease and glucose -6- phosphate enzyme deficiency in same tribal societies; and higher fertility rate in tribal women compared to the national average have been reported by various studies.

The factors which influence the health status of the tribal population in general, are also applicable to tribal women more so. It has been reported that illiteracy, in tribal as well as non-tribal population, is positively correlated to health. The tribal women, as women in all social groups, are more illiterate than men. The low educational status is reflected in their lower literacy rate, lower enrolment rate and their presence in the school. Like others social groups, the tribal women share problems related to reproductive health. United Nations has defined the status of women as the “conjunction of position a woman occupies as a worker, student, wife, mother.....of the power and prestige attached to these positions, and of the right and duties she is expected to exercise”. To what extent, do women, compared with men, have access to knowledge, to economic resources and to political power, and to what degree of personal autonomy do these resources permit in the process of decision-making and choice at crucial points in the lifecycle?”. Women make up only 6 per cent of India’s work force and the numbers get skewed as you go the corporate ladder. Only 4 per cent women are at the senior management level and almost none in a leadership role. Status of women is generally measured using three indicators: - education, employment status and intra-household decision-making power. In general women with higher education tend to have a better position. In some cases, however, education alone may not be sufficient to enhance status unless it engages employment as well. In addition women’s ability to communicate with and convince their spouses or other members of the family indicates their decision-making autonomy. Women with great decision-making power are supposed to have a higher status in the household.

In India women are discriminated due to several historical, religious and other reasons. A girl child is suppressed from the moment she is born in terms of personal development, she is made to undergo the feelings of being inferior and feeble. She is denied the prospects for personal expression. It was reported during women’s workshop (1987) that women’s sexuality is suppressed., their labour exploited, their property and other basic human rights denied to them and their humanity demolished”.<sup>5</sup> The so called ‘national movement’ has further “displaced and marginalized women while at the same time, it has turned them into commodities, not just in terms of being used as machines for producing children, doing household work and even doing jobs outside but always controlled by men to whom they belong”.

There are various hypotheses about why women have relatively high or low status. The common premise is that women status is high when they contribute substantially to primary subsistence activities. Women position is low in the societies where food getting is entirely men's job like hunting, herding or intensive agriculture. In the historical times when warfare was essential, men were more esteemed than women. Likewise in the centralized political systems men had subsistence activities, as women have infant and child care responsibilities. However, women contribute substantially to primary subsistence activities that depend heavily on gathering and horticulture and in which men are away on labour or pastoral duties while subsistence work has to be done. When primary and secondary subsistence activities are counted. Women work more than men.

Additionally, lots of myths like their childbearing state, emotions, monthly ups and downs, inability to carry heavy weights, lack of self-confidence, paucity of imagination and real creativity female and other genders are culturally constructed categories, associated with culturally defined expected patterns of thought and behaviour that are subjected to hierarchical distinctions, advantages and disabilities. In India the low status of women derives from a lack of control over material or social resources and from a lack of choice in the unfolding of one's destiny.

This started with men maintaining their monopoly over the use of ox-drawn plough used for breaking the dry. Hard packed soils. Men achieved this monopoly for essentially the same reasons that they achieved over the weapons of hunting and warfare.<sup>6</sup>

Their greater bodily strengths enabled them to be more efficient than women. However a single measure cannot be used to assess the status of women; rather a multi-dimensional cluster of variables is required to indicate the status. Status is not a fixed rigid concept it changes over time. Women occupy different positions in the social structure as they pass through the life, and the very basis upon which the community ascribes power, privilege and prestige also changes.

Tribes societies have been by and large characterized as egalitarian societies especially in relation to the hierarchical character of caste society. However, it cannot be said of women



status, status of women varies in different societies. All societies offer its children the presence of two genders and related roles, according to kinship, sexuality, work, marriage and age. It also supplies the broad guidelines for undertaking these roles through a body of attitudes, specifications, metaphors and myths. In the present study an effort has been to describe the status of women in four different ecological regions, with different socio-economic conditions and cultural backgrounds. As suggested by the altitudes, these areas have different ecologies and consequently diverse economies. The Ladakhi Bodhi women and Bhutia women of Lichen and Lachung in North Sikkim profess Buddhism while Gaddi women of Bharmour in Chamba district own up Hinduism, and the religious sphere of Bhil women of Rajasthan represent different spirits gods, goddesses deities worship fear, awe, reverence etc. The Bhils believe in witchcraft, once identified, the witches meet a severe treatment.

### **STATUS OF WOMEN IN TRIBAL SOCIETY OF INDIA**

As regards the status of the women in tribal society, anthropologists have expressed different and opposite views. They are divided into two groups with opposite views some of them say that women in these societies enjoy a very high status. Others express the view that women are generally a depressed group.<sup>7</sup>

This divergence in views is due to the organizations of Indian tribes.

One of the important determinants has been the type of society, matriarchal or patriarchal ones. The status of women is expected to be higher in matriarchal societies, than the patriarchal societies.

In patriarchal societies, husband enjoys the dominant position. The status in patriarchal tribal society is not as high as it is in the matrilineal societies.

In patriarchal societies, patriliney, patrilocal residence and inheritance through male line give more privileges to men. The status of women is mainly determined on the basis of various taboos attached to women.

## CONCLUSION

Most of the tribal societies recognize that the impurity of women arises out of pregnancy, menstruation, child birth etc. On all such occasions women are prevented from coming into contact with sacred places and objects. For example, the Doda women are found unsuitable for the religious ceremonial life related to the salvaged buffalo diary.

In the patriarchal Ho society, the husband does not always play a dominant role. Similarly Gond women enjoys equal status and freedom with male in some aspects of social life. She enjoys the right to choose her husband and seek divorce. But as regards the other spheres of life. Women continue to be a depressed group. They work for their husband as labourers. Although the Tharu are having patrilocal system of residence, men are dominated by their wives, who are experts in sorcery and witchcraft, theoretically, the Kondh women is accorded with high status. But practically the situation is just the reverse. She is subjected to physical and mental torture. She is mostly burdened with household and child rearing tasks. She is considered polluted during her menstruation.

The status of Juang women is not uniform in all the spheres of life. She assists her husband, takes care of children and looks after the 'family in the domestic spheres, she usually takes part in the decision-making process. But she is not consulted at the time of taking important decisions.

In most of the patriarchal tribes of central India, women almost enjoy more or less the same rights along with the male members. But, this does not necessarily equalize the status of both male and female. Most of the times a tribal women has to endure the merciless behaviour of her husband. She is vulnerable to ill-treatment, cruelty and desertion by her husband.

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