



## Empowerment of tribal women in India

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### ABSTRACT

Empowerment of Tribal Women For the accelerated socio-economic 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 tangible 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 healthcare, 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.

### KEYWORDS

Tribal women in the society, status of tribal women, role of tribal women in decision making, the relationship between socio-economic status and autonomy among women, employment, income, marital status and age, women's security.

### Introduction

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 for the gap in 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.

The tribal population is an integral part of India's social fabric and has the second largest concentration after that of the African continent. It is more than the total population of France and Britain and four times that of Australia. The population of tribal communities scheduled in the Constitution of India and known as Scheduled Tribes (STs) was 8.43 crore (1 crore = 10 million) as per 2001 census and accounts for 8.2% of the total population. 4.26 crores are men and 4.17 crores are women, accounting for 8.01% and 8.40% respectively. They are scattered over all the states/UTs, except Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and the UTs of Pondichery and Chandigarh. Tribals have traditionally lived in about 15% of the country's geographical areas, mainly forests, hills and undulating inaccessible terrain in plateau areas, rich in natural resources. They have lived as isolated entities for centuries, largely untouched by the society around them. This seclusion has been responsible for the slower growth, dissimilar pattern of their socio-economic and cultural development and inability to negotiate and cope with the consequences of their involuntary integration into mainstream society and economy. Tribals continue to be socio-economically backward.

### Tribal Women in the society

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 socio-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 realization of hopes and dreams of marginalized groups for 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 disempowerment. Such studies are related to a general enquiry 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 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).

The tribal women being economically poor and socially backward live at a low level of scale of the quality life. Thus the tribal women often face the problems of food insecurity, malnutrition, lack of access to health care services and education and the victim of domestic violence and rape. Unlike the well organised modern communities, the tribal communities and tribal women lag far behind in social networking. This is the nature and dimension of socio-economic disempowerment problem among the tribal women in India. Sen has advocated

human capabilities approach to the development process. The human capabilities include social, economic, cultural and political capabilities of the human beings. Sen (2001) has identified the following seven types of gender inequalities in his public lecture delivered at Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University in 2001. They are:

- 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 modernising and industrialising. However the mortality inequality, natality inequality, basic facilities inequality are 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.

### 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 substantial 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. 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 exploitation by contractors and managers, tribals are more sincere and honest than non tribals.

### 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 household and community level was examined.

#### The Relationship between Socio-Economic 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 interplay of various socio-economic factors. Hence the following section attempts to compare the autonomy of females with respect to their socio-economic characteristics.

### Employment

The critical analysis of 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 for all matters. The study reveal that only 46.7% of the female population are employed, out of which 80 percent of them work as agricultural labour and thus have seasonal employment, 11 percent are self employed (selling handia, and forest product). and rest 9 percent are 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 bread-winners 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.

### 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.

### REFERENCES

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3. The salt march Was a form of protest, lead by Gandhii through-- out India To initiate the boycotting English Made salt and to symbolize the move towards nationalizing India's Commodities and hence Independence From the colonial rule. 37 | 4. <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/newloksabhaillhavemostwomenmpsever/465283/38>
5. Panchayats Are local level councils, directly elected by the people. The Council governs the village's social, political and economic issues. |