



Socio Economic Change Among the Tribal Women in Jharkhand

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ABSTRACT

Tribal women in Jharkhand play a crucial role in the social, economic, and cultural life of their communities. Over the past few decades, significant socio-economic changes have occurred due to education, government welfare schemes, industrialization, urbanization, and the influence of globalization. This article examines the nature and extent of socio-economic changes among tribal women in Jharkhand, focusing on education, health, employment, political participation, and social status. The study highlights both progress and persistent challenges, emphasizing the need for inclusive and sustainable development policies.

Introduction

Introduction The Indian population includes different castes, communities and racial groups. A social group is usually identified by a common territory, dialects, cultural- homogeneity, social and political organization. It may include several sub- groups. The term 'Tribe' is derived from the Latin word 'tribes' meaning the 'poor or the masse'. Tribals in India have an important place. They are among the most backward people in the country. These people are known by various names. Risley, Sobert, Martin and others used the term 'aborigins' for these people. Hutton called them 'Primitive tribes'. Sir Baines used the term 'Hill tribes'. Elsewhere he called them as 'Jungle people' 'Forest tribes' or 'folk'. Article 341



and 342 of the Constitution of India vested the power with the President of India to specify certain groups as scheduled tribes. Article 366 (25) of the Constitution has defined ‘Scheduled tribes’ as ‘such tribes or tribal communities or parts or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be scheduled tribes for the purpose of this constitution.

Objective

- To analyze the educational status of tribal women.
- To find the challenges and problems faced by the tribal women.
- To examine changes in education, health, and employment
- To assess the impact of government schemes on tribal women

Methodology

The study is based on secondary data collected from government reports, census data, research articles, books, and NGO publications. Some qualitative observations from field-based studies conducted in tribal regions of Jharkhand have also been considered.

Review of earlier studies

Mitra (2007) [6] has analyzed the status of women among schedule tribes in India with comparison to main stream Hindus, in term of social and cultural practices. The study shows that tribal women in their community has high status and absolutely no gender discrimination in tribal communities.

Bhasin (2007) [1] has carried out her study about tribal women in different geographic region i.e. Ladhak, North Eastern Region, Rajasthan and she found that tribal women possess a lot of importance in tribal communities. Tribal communities do not look upon the birth of a girl child a curse. Dowry system is not there and girl possesses the right to choose her husband, divorce are easy and secured. Women play vital role in economic activities. They take joint decision along with the male counterparts. Women power is not extended to societal or political sphere. Their economic power is not translated in to corresponding community authority. Women supremacy is restricted with household domain and due credit and importance is not given at official level. Women have secondary importance in public affair and community decision making.



Tribal women and their status

Traditionally, tribal women actively participated in agriculture, forest-based activities, and household decision-making. They enjoyed relative freedom in social life, marriage, and mobility. However, their economic contribution often remained unrecognized and undervalued.

The Dhebar Commission Report (1961) mentions that the tribal women are not drudge or a beast of burden, she is found to be exercising a relatively free and firm hand in all aspects related to her social life than non-tribal societies. Generally, the tribal women in comparison with other castes, enjoy more freedom in various walks of life. Traditional and customary tribal norms are comparatively more liberal to tribal women. Role of women is not only of importance in social and economic activities, but her role in non-economic activities is equally important. The tribal women works hard and in some cases even more than the men. Bhasin (2007) [1] 'in their world, the tribal women have a freedom, and a self expression'. The tribal have been equal partners with tribal counterparts in the contribution to household as well as agricultural field. Tribal women do more physical labour in their agricultural farm, house and forest than that of tribal men. They do household activities like cooking, cleaning, collection of fuel and fodder, looking after the child and old members of the family. They also manage to work outside the house as labour in farm as well as in the construction work, brick kiln etc. They are free and independent in marketing of agricultural products. They use to go local market to sale the vegetables, forest produce and handmade products. Tribal women have usually enjoyed a higher social status in their own communities than Indian women in general. Tribes like Khasi, in Mizoram and Meghalaya are matrilineal enjoyed higher status in their community.

Social Status of Tribal Women

The tribal women enjoy the right to decide about her marriage. Instead of dowry, there is bride price which indicate a high social status of the tribal women. Tribal women are independent with regard to economic status. Among the tribal society, birth of a girl is not looked down upon because they are considered as economic assets. They participate in all agricultural operation (except ploughing) and work all sectors of indigenous cottage industries, tribal art and production of artifacts. Women in tribal community enjoy lots of freedom before and after marriage. The wife may divorce her husband on the grounds of cruelty, impotency, incompatibility, poverty, infidelity or negligence. Traditionally, the practice of divorce exists and divorce is granted by the Village Panchayat. In case of excess, the wife may even divorce her husband and enter other man's house as per her choice. The tribal women may leave her husband's house with /without intimation to her husband. Although she enjoys full liberty to choose her



life partner and also to break the marital bond and marry with another person, for the tribal men it is not possible to cause harm to the modesty of a married women. Severe penalties and punishments are inflicted on man in all such cases. The women thus enjoy an almost equal status with men except in the sphere of rituals.

Socio-Economic Changes Among Tribal Women

- Education

There has been a gradual increase in female literacy among tribal communities due to government initiatives such as residential schools, scholarships, and hostels. Despite this progress, dropout rates remain high due to poverty, early marriage, and lack of access to higher education.

- Economic Participation

Tribal women are increasingly engaged in wage labor, self-help groups (SHGs), handicrafts, and small-scale enterprises. Programs like MGNREGA and livelihood missions have enhanced income opportunities, though job security and fair wages remain concerns.

- Health and Nutrition

Improvement in healthcare services has reduced maternal and infant mortality rates. However, malnutrition, anemia, and limited access to quality healthcare facilities continue to affect tribal women, especially in remote areas.

- Political Participation

Reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions has increased women's participation in local governance. Tribal women are now more visible in leadership roles, though real decision-making power is often constrained by social and familial pressures.

- Social Status and Empowerment

Awareness about rights, education, and legal protection has led to positive changes in self-confidence and social participation. At the same time, issues such as displacement due to mining, domestic violence, and exploitation persist.

Conclusion

Socio-economic change among tribal women in Jharkhand is a dynamic and ongoing process. While development initiatives have created new opportunities, deep-rooted structural problems continue to hinder inclusive growth. Empowerment of tribal women requires a holistic approach that integrates



education, healthcare, livelihood security, and cultural sensitivity. Strengthening grassroots institutions and ensuring women's active participation in decision-making are essential for sustainable development.

The tribal women has greater freedom and independence in household and agriculture field. However, there are certain areas where men continue to dominate such as political and religious sphere. With the development programs, economic changes, the tribal women remain traditional in their dress, knowledge, language, culture, tools and resources. Modernization and globalization is bringing changes which affect the tribal women status as it changes the mindset and ideology towards women. Education play a significant role to change the status of tribal women through improving their knowledge, skill, awareness about rights and provide wider opportunities in various sector.

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