



EMPOWERMENT & GENDER EQUALITY AMONG TRIBAL WOMEN

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ABSTRACT:

Empowerment and gender equality are crucial for the socio-economic development of any community, especially the tribal communities in India. Tribal women face multiple challenges such as low literacy, poor health, lack of access to productive resources, and violence. They also have limited participation in decision-making and political processes, despite their significant role in collecting and managing minor forest produce. To address these issues, various policies and measures have been taken at the national, state, and local levels, but there are still gaps between policy and practice. The patriarchal structure of the society and the household hinders the empowerment of tribal women and their agency. Therefore, there is a need for affirmative action and equitable progress to ensure that tribal women have equal opportunities and rights in all spheres of life. This paper reviews the existing literature on the status and role of tribal women in India, the nature and dimensions of change in their lives, and the challenges and prospects for their empowerment and gender development. The paper also suggests some recommendations for enhancing the empowerment and gender equality of tribal women in India.

Keywords: *Empowerment, Gender Equality, Patriarchal Structure of Tribal Society, Policy for Tribal*

INTRODUCTION:

India is a country with diverse cultures, languages, religions, and ethnicities. Among these, the tribal communities constitute about 8.6% of the total population, according to the 2011 census. They are spread across different states and regions, and have their own distinct traditions, customs, and lifestyles. However, they also face various problems such as poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, displacement,

exploitation, and discrimination. These problems are more acute for the tribal women, who are doubly marginalized by their gender and social identity. They have to bear the burden of domestic work, child care, agricultural labor, and forest-based activities, without getting adequate recognition or remuneration. They also suffer from low self-esteem, lack of awareness, and limited access to education, health care, legal aid, and other basic services. Moreover, they are

often subjected to violence, harassment, and abuse at the hands of their own community members as well as outsiders. Empowerment and gender equality are essential for improving the quality of life and well-being of tribal women. Empowerment refers to the process of enhancing the capabilities and choices of individuals or groups to achieve their desired goals. Gender equality means that women and men have equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities in all aspects of life. Empowerment and gender equality are interrelated and mutually reinforcing concepts. They can help tribal women to overcome the barriers and challenges that they face in their personal and public spheres. They can also enable them to participate actively and effectively in decision-making and governance processes at various levels. Furthermore, they can contribute to the socioeconomic development and environmental sustainability of their communities and the nation. This paper aims to explore the issues and prospects of empowerment and gender equality among tribal women in India. It will review the existing literature on the status and role of tribal women in India, the nature and dimensions of change in their lives, and the challenges and prospects for their empowerment and gender development.

STATUS AND ROLE:

It also examines the diversity and complexity of tribal women's experiences across different tribes, regions, and contexts. The book covers

various aspects of tribal women's lives, such as kinship, marriage, family, religion, culture, economy, politics, education, health, and human rights. The report "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in India" presents the findings of a comprehensive analysis of gender equality and women's empowerment in India using data from various sources. It covers various aspects of gender equality and women's empowerment, such as demographic characteristics, health status, education attainment, economic activity, decision-making power, exposure to media and information technology, domestic violence, fertility preferences, family planning use, maternal health care utilization, child health outcomes, nutritional status, HIV/AIDS knowledge and behavior. The report also provides some policy implications and recommendations based on the findings.

STATUS AND ROLE OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA:

India's tribal women, or Adivasis, form 8.6% of the country's population, according to the 2011 census. They belong to 705 different scheduled tribes, which are officially recognized by the government as having distinct cultures, languages, and traditions. They mostly reside in the central and north-eastern parts of India, such as Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, and Meghalaya. These regions are rich in natural resources, but also face various challenges, such as poverty, conflict,

displacement, and environmental degradation. Tribal women have a rich and diverse culture, and they are strongly connected to their lands and communities. They have valuable knowledge and skills in various fields, such as agriculture, forestry, medicine, art, and sports. They also have a crucial role in preserving and promoting their indigenous languages, traditions, and practices. However, tribal women also encounter many problems and disadvantages due to various factors, such as poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, health conditions, geographic isolation, and lack of access to services.

According to a report by the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, the poverty ratio of the scheduled tribes (STs) was 45.3% in 2011-12, compared to the national average of 21.9%. Tribal women also suffer from illiteracy and low education levels. According to the 2011 census, the literacy rate of ST women was 49.4%, compared to the national average of 65.5% for women. Tribal women also face malnutrition and poor health outcomes. According to the National Family Health Survey 2015-16, the prevalence of anemia among ST women was 62.5%, compared to the national average of 53% for women. The infant mortality rate among STs was 44.4 per 1000 live births, compared to the national average of 37.9 per 1000 live births. Tribal women also face discrimination, exploitation, violence, and marginalization by the dominant groups and institutions in the society. They are often treated as inferior,

backward, and uncivilized by the mainstream culture and media. They are also vulnerable to abuse, harassment, and assault by the nontribal men, especially in the areas where they work as migrant laborers, domestic workers, or sex workers. They also face atrocities and human rights violations by the state and non-state actors, such as the police, the army, the paramilitary forces, and the armed groups, especially in the regions affected by conflict and insurgency. They also face displacement and dispossession due to the development projects, such as dams, mines, industries, and roads, that encroach on their lands, forests, and water resources without their consent and compensation.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA:

Empowerment and gender equality are two interrelated concepts that are essential for the development and well-being of any society. Empowerment refers to the process of enhancing the capabilities and choices of individuals and groups, especially those who are marginalized or oppressed. Gender equality refers to the state of equal rights, opportunities, and outcomes for women and men, girls and boys, in all spheres of life. Empowerment and gender equality are not only human rights, but also key drivers of economic growth, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Tribal women in India,

who constitute about 8.6% of the country's population, according to the 2011 census¹, face multiple challenges and disadvantages that hinder their empowerment and gender equality. These challenges and disadvantages are influenced by various factors, such as:

Geographical Location:

Tribal women mainly live in the central and north-eastern regions of India, which are often remote, inaccessible, and underdeveloped. They lack basic infrastructure and services, such as roads, electricity, water, sanitation, health, education, and communication. They also face natural disasters, such as floods, droughts, and landslides, that affect their livelihoods and security.

Educational Status:

Tribal women have low levels of literacy and education, compared to the national average and other social groups. According to the 2011 census, the literacy rate of tribal women was 49.35%, while the national average for women was 65.46%. The dropout rate of tribal girls was also high, especially at the secondary and higher levels. The reasons for the low educational status of tribal women include poverty, distance, language barriers, cultural norms, early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and lack of quality and relevant education.

Social Status:

Tribal women belong to the Scheduled Tribes (ST), which are officially recognized as socially and economically disadvantaged groups by the Constitution of India. They are often discriminated, exploited, violated, and

marginalized by the dominant groups and institutions in the society, such as the upper castes, the state, the market, and the media. They also suffer from the erosion of their customary rights and entitlements over land, forest, and water resources, due to the encroachment of external forces and interests. They have limited opportunities and resources to participate in decision-making and development processes that affect their lives and livelihoods.

Cultural Factors:

Tribal women have a rich and diverse cultural heritage, and they are deeply connected to their communities and ecosystems. They possess valuable knowledge and skills in various domains, such as agriculture, forestry, medicine, art, and sports. They also play a significant role in preserving and promoting their indigenous languages, traditions, and practices. However, some of these cultural factors also pose challenges and constraints for their empowerment and gender equality. For example, some tribal communities practice patriarchal and patrilineal systems, that give preference and authority to men over women in matters of inheritance, property, marriage, and leadership. Some tribal communities also practice harmful customs, such as child marriage, polygamy, witch-hunting, and dowry, that violate the rights and dignity of women. These factors, along with others, such as health, nutrition, violence, and migration, affect the empowerment and gender equality of

tribal women in India in various ways. They limit their access to and control over material, human, and intellectual resources, such as land, credit, information, technology, and education. They also restrict their agency and voice in the public and private spheres, such as politics, governance, economy, and family. They also influence their well-being and happiness, such as health, safety, and self-esteem.

CONCLUSION:

Empowerment and gender equality among tribal women are crucial for the social, economic, and environmental well-being of India. Tribal women face multiple challenges and barriers, such as poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, violence, and lack of access to basic services and opportunities. Therefore, it is important to address these factors and their interrelationships, in order to empower and promote the gender equality of tribal women in India. This requires a holistic and integrated approach, that involves the participation and collaboration of various stakeholders, such as the government, the civil society, the private sector, the media, and the tribal communities themselves. It also requires a recognition and respect for the diversity, vitality, and potential of tribal women, and their unique perspective and vision for a

more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development. By empowering and supporting tribal women, India can harness their untapped potential and contribution, and achieve its national and global goals of human rights, social justice, and environmental protection. Therefore, it is important to address these factors and their interrelationships, in order to empower and promote the gender equality of tribal women in India. This requires a holistic and integrated approach that involves the participation and collaboration of various stakeholders, such as the government, the civil society, the private sector, the media, and the tribal communities themselves. It also requires a recognition and respect for the diversity, vitality, and potential of tribal women, and their unique perspective and vision for a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development.

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