



SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF TRIBALS IN SCHEDULED AREAS OF MAHARASHTRA

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Abstract

The tribals of Maharashtra, primarily residing in scheduled areas, face a plethora of socio-economic challenges despite governmental efforts for their upliftment. This paper explores the multi-dimensional problems faced by the tribal communities in these areas, including economic marginalization, social exclusion, and inadequate access to education, healthcare, and infrastructure. The study also critically examines the effectiveness of policies and interventions aimed at addressing these issues. Through an analytical framework, this paper underscores the need for sustainable, community-driven solutions to promote holistic development.

Introduction

Scheduled Tribes (STs) are among the most marginalized and vulnerable sections of Indian society. Maharashtra is home to several tribal communities, including the Bhil, Warli, Gond, Koli, and Mahadev Koli tribes. These communities predominantly inhabit scheduled areas, designated under the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution to ensure their socio-economic and cultural development. Despite constitutional safeguards, tribals in Maharashtra grapple with pervasive issues rooted in historical neglect, socio-economic disparities, and environmental challenges.

Objectives of Research Paper:

- Identify the socio-economic challenges faced by tribal communities.
- Analyse the impact of government schemes and policies in alleviating these issues.
- Propose actionable recommendations for sustainable development.

Socio-Economic Profile of Scheduled Tribes in Maharashtra

1. Demographic Overview

In India, 10 states are included in the scheduled area as per the 5th schedule of the constitution. Maharashtra is one of them, the scheduled areas of the state of Maharashtra are spread over 13 districts covering 59 tahsils. These comprise of 5706 villages and 40 towns covering an area of about 35109.73 sq. kms. The 2011 Census total tribal population of Maharashtra is 105.10 lakh, out of which 43.72 lakh Tribal population live in the Scheduled areas and 61.38 lakhs (58.40%) of the tribal population lives outside the scheduled areas of the state. Bhil, Mahadev Koli, Warli, Kokna, Katkari, Thakar, Gavit, Kolam, Korku, Andh, Malhar Koli, Dhodia, Dubla, Madia Gond, Pardhan, Pardhi castes are some major tribes in Maharashtra. Major tribal belts include districts like Thane, Palghar, Nandurbar, Gadchiroli, and Chandrapur.

2. Economic Characteristics

The tribal economy is predominantly agrarian, with subsistence farming and forest-based livelihoods being the primary sources of income. Non-timber forest products (NTFPs),



such as tendu leaves and honey, supplement their earnings. However, economic activities are often disrupted by land alienation, poor market linkages, and the depletion of natural resources.

Key Social Problems

1. Education

- Literacy rates among Maharashtra's tribal communities remain significantly lower than the state average.
- High dropout rates are prevalent due to poverty, cultural alienation, and language barriers.
- Infrastructure in tribal schools is often inadequate, with poorly equipped classrooms and a lack of qualified teachers.

2. Healthcare

- Tribals face limited access to healthcare facilities due to the remoteness of their settlements.
- Malnutrition, maternal mortality, and communicable diseases are widespread.
- Traditional healing practices persist, often leading to delays in seeking modern medical care.

3. Social Exclusion

- Tribals experience systemic discrimination in accessing public services and employment opportunities.
- Cultural marginalization and the loss of traditional knowledge systems are ongoing challenges.
- Gender disparities are pronounced, with tribal women facing heightened vulnerabilities.

Key Economic Problems

1. Land Alienation

- Encroachment and forced displacement due to development projects and industrialization have led to widespread land alienation.
- Poor implementation of the Forest Rights Act (2006) has hindered tribal ownership of ancestral lands.

2. Unemployment and Underemployment

- Seasonal migration for work is a common phenomenon, exposing tribal laborers to exploitative conditions.
- Limited access to skill development programs and formal employment restricts economic mobility.

3. Poverty and Inequality

- Tribal communities face chronic poverty, with a significant proportion living below the poverty line.
- Inequitable distribution of resources and inadequate government support exacerbate economic disparities.

Government Policies and Interventions

1. Key Initiatives

- **Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP):** Allocates funds for tribal welfare in various sectors, including education, healthcare, and livelihoods.



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- **Forest Rights Act (2006):** Recognizes individual and community rights over forest land.
 - **Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP):** Focuses on improving infrastructure, employment, and socio-economic conditions in tribal areas.

2. Challenges in Implementation

- Misallocation and underutilization of funds.
- Bureaucratic delays and lack of community participation in policy formulation.
- Corruption and inefficiencies in the delivery mechanisms of welfare schemes.

Recommendations for Holistic Development

1. Education

- Introduce culturally relevant and bilingual education systems.
- Strengthen school infrastructure and incentivize teacher postings in tribal areas.
- Implement community-driven initiatives to reduce dropout rates.

2. Healthcare

- Expand mobile healthcare units and establish primary health centers (PHCs) in remote areas.
- Train tribal health workers to bridge the gap between traditional and modern medicine.
- Address malnutrition through integrated child development schemes and targeted interventions.

3. Livelihoods and Land Rights

- Ensure effective implementation of the Forest Rights Act to secure land tenure.
- Promote agroforestry, NTFP-based enterprises, and skill development programs.
- Create market linkages for tribal produce and encourage micro-enterprises.

4. Social Empowerment

- Foster tribal participation in governance through Panchayati Raj institutions.
- Preserve tribal cultural heritage through documentation and promotion.
- Address gender disparities by empowering tribal women through self-help groups (SHGs) and microfinance initiatives.

Conclusion

The socio-economic problems of tribal communities in Maharashtra's scheduled areas are deeply intertwined with systemic neglect and structural inequalities. While government initiatives have made some progress, persistent gaps in policy implementation and a lack of community engagement hinder transformative change. A multi-stakeholder approach involving government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and tribal communities is essential to achieve sustainable and inclusive development. By prioritizing education, healthcare, livelihoods, and social empowerment, Maharashtra can pave the way for the holistic upliftment of its tribal population.

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