

# Status of Women among Tribes of India



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## Abstract

Adivasis constitute a major part of India's population. The word tribal means native. In the ancient writings, the tribals have also been called Atvika and Vanvasi. The term Scheduled Tribes has been used for the tribals in the Constitution. The tribes live in areas where there is minimal access to basic amenities. So they are facing a lot of problems. Even today, a large section of tribal communities are illiterate so that they do not understand the common language. What schemes of the government are for these sections, they are not even aware of this, which is the biggest reason for their social backwardness.

The status of the Indian tribal woman is not satisfactory despite the fact that several schemes and awareness programmes have been started for their upliftment. No doubt, the modern tribal woman is ready to change her destiny and to make herself free from the shackles of gender discrimination, still she finds herself dependent on the male-members of the family.

We can pay compliments to ourselves only when all the women including the tribal women find themselves at liberty to do what they please. Being hardworking and facing all the challenges that come across them, they are waiting for some angel to assist them prove their potential in the various fields where the women other than the tribal ones have already reached.

Designed on the secondary data collected from the modern secondary source internet, the paper is a descriptive study and falls in the category of qualitative research. The research paper is a mirror to reflect the current status of the tribal woman in India with a special focus on her hidden potential that she fails to prove due to her over-involvement in her family, community and society at large. The paper also reflects the changing picture of the Indian tribal woman who is eager to join the main stream of development.

**Keywords:** Tribe, Tribal World, Kinship, Tribal Woman, Job-Oriented, Awareness, Transformation

## Introduction

India is a land of several small and big tribes that contribute to the total population of India. The contribution of each of the tribes of India to the Indian culture is so immense and invaluable. Though there are several tribes that live in remote and unapproachable areas in close association with nature, at least some of them are known to the people and need discussion on them. Bhils, the Gonds, the Santhals, the Minas, the Oraons, the Mundas and the Khonds with around 10 lakh population each, are some of the major tribes of India that are found in the various states of India. Let us discuss the specific socio-cultural and socio-economic features of these tribes one-by-one.

### The Bhils

Of the various small and large Indian tribes, the Bhils form the largest tribal community in India. They are found in almost each of the Indian states that are popular for their tribal communities. Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Tripura are states where the Bheel tribe can be traced and seen exercising its distinct culture. However, the fact that the main centre where the largest population of the Bhil tribe inhabits, is the western M.P. The legendary character Ekalavya who offered his own thumb to his spiritual mentor is said to be their ancestor. Literally known as bowmen, they earn their livelihood through agriculture, and enjoy the festivals, such as, holi, wabani, nivasa etc.

### The Gonds

The second largest tribal community that forms the Indian tribal world, is the Gond tribe which is said to be Dravidian. The states of India, such as, M.P., Orissa, A.P. Maharashtra, W.B., Gujarat, Karnataka etc. are known for the Gond tribe. They live in jungles and agriculture is their main

occupation. Thus, for their survival and existence, they depend on agro-forest economy.

#### **The Santhals**

The Santhals have been in the various parts of India since the pre-Aryan period. As the third largest tribe of India its members are found in the states like Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Tripura. The family system of the Santhals is patriarchal, and all the decisions are taken by the headman 'Jogmanjhi'. It is he who has a sole control over the family. He performs his family duties through the assistance of the village priest Parmanik Naik and the messenger called Gorait. All the important meetings of the Santhal tribe are held at the Majithan. The festivals the Santhals enjoy and celebrate include- Soharae, Durga Pooja, Holi, Baha, Maghsin, Eroksin, Karan. The worship of the sun god Singbonga is very common among the Santhals. Era, Monika and Maragburu are the other Santhalian deities who are worshipped by them.

#### **The Minas**

A popular tribe in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, the Minas are very hardworking and religious minded. In Rajasthan, they form about 50 per cent of the total tribal population of the State. Being the descendants of the Matsya tribe, they are said to be skilled in various arts and crafts. Agriculture is their main occupation which helps them survive through hard work. The Minas associate themselves with Hindu religion, and hence, they worship all the major Hindu deities, such as, Lord Shiva, Rama, Krishna, Hanuman, Kaila Devi, Amba Mata etc. Holi, Deepavali, Durgra Pooja, Janmashtami etc. are some of the festive occasions for the Minas when they enjoy themselves so enthusiastically.

#### **The Oraons**

Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and West Bengal are the states of India where the Oraon tribe is traced. The credit of introducing plough cultivation in Chhotanagpur Plateau goes to the members of the Oraon tribe. They are found in the merry-making mood on the occasion of the festival Sarhul and Karma. They enjoy these festivals with dancing, drinking and feasting.

#### **The Mundas**

Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Tripura and West Bengal in India are popular for the Munda tribe. Agriculture is their main occupation, and the festivals that make them hilarious include- Garam Dharam, Maghe Parab and Sarhul. Halachar.

#### **The Khonds**

A tribe of the Dravidian stock, the members of the Khond tribe are found in Orissa, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. They add a lot to the Indian culture through their specific cultural features.

#### **The Status of the Indian Tribal Woman**

The Constitution of India gives all Indian women equal rights (Article 14), no discrimination by the state (Article 15 (1)), equality of opportunity (Article 16), equal pay for equal work (Article 39 (d)) Guarantees. Further it allows special provisions to be made by the state in favor of women and children (Article 15 (3)), to abandon abusive practices for the

dignity of women (Article 51 (a) (e)) and also allows for the preparation of provisions by the state for securing appropriate and humane conditions of work and for maternity assistance. However, the status of the Indian tribal woman requires a serious concern, a concern that can link all the tribal women of India with the main stream of education, employment, women empowerment and self-dependence.

#### **Review of Literature**

S.K. Basu (1993), in Health Status of Tribal Women in India, discusses the health status of the tribal women in relation to sex ratio, age at marriage, fertility, mortality, life expectancy, nutritional status, maternal and child health care practices, sexually transmitted diseases, genetic disorders, etc. the health status of tribal women is found to be lower than that of the Indian women in general on most of these aspects.

Virginus Xaxa (2004), in the research paper on Women and Gender in the Study of Tribes in India, surveys that Concern for a focus on women in tribal studies has been very recent. It emerged out of general interest and concern with women's issues the world over. The value system governing larger Indian society has been in the process of change. With this there has been a shift in the image of tribal women who are thus invariably portrayed as enjoying a better social status than their counterparts in the larger Indian society. Tribal society in the post-Independence era has been witness to unprecedented change, which has been most marked in respect of culture, modes of making a living and social differentiation. Their bearing on women's status in society and gender relations has been far-reaching.

Veena Bhasin (2007), in the research paper Status of Tribal Women in India, holds that the tribal women, constitute like any other social group, about half of the total population. The tribal women, as women in all social groups, are more illiterate than men. Like other social groups, the tribal women share problems related to reproductive health. When primary and secondary subsistence activities are counted, women work more than men. Status of women varies in different societies. The conceptual framework to analyse women's status comprise the seven roles women play in life and work: - parental, conjugal, domestic, kin, occupational, community and as an individual. In order to appraise the social status of women in these diverse ecological areas, the findings have been divided in to subsequent categories: - (a) a girl; daughter; a unmarried woman; (b) a married woman; (c) a widow; (d) divorcee; and (e) a barren woman. Role of women is not only of importance in economic activities, but her role in non-economic activities is equally important. The tribal women work very hard, in some cases even more than the men. All the tribal societies in the study area are patriarchal in which men dominate in public sector.

Sunita Reddy (2008), in Health of Tribal Women and Children: An Interdisciplinary Approach, finds that the health of tribal women and children is not good due to the prevailing poverty, malnutrition, ill-socialization and unsystematic upbringing, overwork

of the women, ignorance and unawareness to the health issues and standards.

Anil Kumar Mohapatra (2009), in the research paper *Theory of Feminism and Tribal Women: An Empirical Study of Koraput*, observes that in the mainstream culture to identify oneself as a "feminist" has been a fashion. Feminism covers all issues degrading and depriving women of their due in society vis-à-vis male members and it has started a crusade against atrocities on women across the globe. It is therefore regarded as synonymous with a movement and revolution to defend and promote issues involving women. However, the concerns that feminism raises do seem alien to tribal inhabitants in the Koraput district of Orissa, because, unknowingly, they are its champions. Its principles are ingrained in their very culture. They practice and follow feminism as a matter of habit that has come to them down the ages. They do not follow it out of fear, compassion, enlightenment, education or compulsion; it is a necessity that comes quite naturally to them. It has been spontaneous and indigenous.

Gargi Das (2012), in her dissertation on *Autonomy and Decision Making Role of Tribal Women: A Case Study of Santoshpur Village in Sundergarh District of Odisha*, observes that traditionally women have always been subjugated. True development of a nation is not possible if one half of the population is ignored or marginalized. Therefore the Constitution of India has many rights and acts in favor of them. The tribal women enjoy autonomy at their household level, especially in social aspects and enjoy equal rights along with their husbands in economic matters but their community participation is passive and autonomy level is very low. The major reason behind this is low literacy rate and unemployment. The development of tribal community can not be accelerated without women participation. Therefore the government should focus on developing the literacy rate among the tribal women which would facilitate their economic upliftment. This would surely result in their qualitative participation and decision making among all aspects of their living.

Shivakumar S. Sangan & Suryakant S. Sonnad (2014), in their study *Cultural and Educational Status of Tribal Women in India*, find that the status is customarily defined by social scientists as a recognized social position or socially defined position of an individual or a community within a society. In recent times many attempts have been made to understand the status of women in the tribal society. Robert Lowie (1920) has suggested four different criteria to determine the status of women in a society i.e (i) actual treatment, (ii) legal status, (iii) opportunity for social participation and (iv) character and extent of work. Mujumdar and Madan (1956) state that "expressed, some of which take a stand that primitive society women are generally a depressed group". For this reason Robert Lowie has stated that any general statement regarding relation of women to the society must be taken with caution. The women in the tribal community are about half of the tribal population. Their role in the tribal society is even more important

than in other social groups in India, because the tribal women, more than women in any other social group, work harder and the family economy and management depends on them.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To produce the glimpses of the tribal world in general
2. To reflect the common features of the various tribes of India
3. To study and interpret the man-woman relationship in the tribes of India
4. To mirror the life and ways of working of the women in the tribal world of India
5. To make the reader realize the puppet-like existence of the tribal woman
6. To introduce the tribal woman of India as the preserver of the ancient tribal culture
7. To reflect the tribal woman as a being ready to shoulder the responsibilities of the male members of the family
8. To peep into the role-conflict element in the tribal woman
9. To let others be familiar with the transformation in the tribal society of India through education, reservation, career, and self-dependence of the women
10. To explore and produce the causes of the changes in the tribal women
11. To find out the positive and negative effects of the changed status of the tribal woman of India.

#### **Hypothesis**

1. India is a home and shelter to many tribes that live in the various parts of India
2. The tribal world is different from the world known to the educated and advanced people
3. The tribes live in remote and unapproachable areas in close association with nature
4. The tribes have their own culture
5. The status of the tribal woman is better than the woman other than the tribal one
6. The Indian tribal woman is illiterate, ignorant, superstitious, hardworking, preserver of culture, religious and traditional
7. With the introduction of modernity, government policies meant for the welfare of the tribal people, the tribal woman is ready to change her destiny
8. She is ready to accept the new horizons as challenges
9. The tribal woman is proving her potential in all the walks of life
10. The tribal woman is divided between her home and her work whether in the fields, market-place or in any office.

#### **Methodology**

The methodology adopted for the present research paper is characterized by the following features-

1. Scientific study
2. Use of both subjectivity and objectivity
3. Hypothesis-based
4. Objectives-oriented
5. Review-based
6. Internet and its various sites-source of data collection

7. National and international journals- the source for the research papers selected for the study
8. The researches carried out in India and abroad- the source of contents found suitable for the study
9. Content analysis
10. Focused on data collection, classification and interpretation
11. Systematic study and interpretation of the problem

**Findings**

1. The tribals constitute a large proportion of 8.6% (100 million) of India's population.
2. The major tribal communities of India are Kirat Dhanka Gond, Munda, Khadia, Ho, Bodo, Bhil, Koli, Funat Sahariya, Santhal, Meena, Oraon, Lohra, Pardhan, [Bhil] Birhor, Pardhi, Andhra, Takanakar etc.
3. Tribals are mainly found in Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, in Banswara, Dungarpur, Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Bhilwara, Sirohi, Jalore, Pali, Ajmer, Tok, Sawaimadhopur, Jaipur, Karauli, Dhaulpur, Alwar, Dausa, Bharatpur, Sikar, Kota, Bundi, Banra, Jhalawar of Rajasthan.
4. All tribal communities in India have their own specific languages.
5. Dravidian, Austric and Sino-Tibetan are three language families of the tribal societies in India.
6. 'Bhili' has the highest number of speakers while 'Gondi' is second and 'Santhali' in third place.
7. The tribals associate themselves to some religion.
8. They are nature worshipers and worship forests, mountains, rivers and the sun.
9. They adopt Hindu, Christian and Islam religions as a result of forced contact.

10. The Indian tribal woman is full of potential, abilities and capabilities
11. The Modern Indian tribal woman is ready to change her destiny through the government policies that allow her special reservation in education, job, and politics.
12. Despite being whole-heartedly dedicated to socio-cultural and institutional values, the Indian tribal woman fails to enjoy a good status.

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