

POLLUTION CONTROL INITIATIVES BY TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

In India, tribal women actively participate in livelihood activities in addition to managing their homes and families. Despite putting considerably more effort than their male counterparts and significantly increasing their families' wealth, Indian tribal women have few options to make a living. Not only when compared to the status of tribal males, but also when compared to the status of women in the general population, tribal women have terrible conditions in terms of education, employment, and health. Tribal women are still far behind despite several economic, political, and social advancements. This paper explores the situation of tribal women nationwide and discusses significant government initiatives aimed at advancing tribal women. This article highlights the traditional knowledge, sustainable methods, and obstacles faced by tribal women in India as it examines their crucial role in preventing pollution. Through initiatives like organic farming, water conservation, and forest management, tribal women have played a crucial role in environmental conservation. They face several challenges despite their enormous contributions, such as social marginalization, economic hardship, and a lack of education. The government's efforts to empower Indigenous people and include them in environmental governance are also examined in this article. India can strengthen its efforts in sustainable development and environmental protection by fusing traditional methods with contemporary pollution control techniques and empowering tribal women via engagement in policy and education.

KEY WORDS: Scheduled Tribes, Tribal Women, Pollution Control, Measures, Challenges

INTRODUCTION

"It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing." — Swami Vivekananda

Despite making up a sizeable portion of the country's population, India's tribal community is numerically a small portion of the entire population. Scheduled Tribes make up 8.6% of the overall population of the nation, according to figures from the 2011 Census. The majority of Scheduled Tribe residents reside in rural areas, making up 11.3% of the nation's rural population. The term "scheduled tribes" initially appeared in the Indian Constitution, which granted certain constitutional protections and advantages to a population that was deemed to be underprivileged and backward. The tribal

communities have been accurately characterized as the victims and refugees of the nation's development (Davis and Sunitha, 2009). The tribe is defined as "a collection of families or a group of people occupying the same territorial region, speaking their mother tongue, and adhering to certain optimistic regulations and religious taboos regarding marriage, professions, and occupation" by Dr. D.N. Majumdar in his book "Race and culture of India." Additionally, they have created a structure of obligation and reciprocity that has been carefully evaluated (Majumdar, 1944). Tribal women are still not treated equally in a number of areas, including their place in society, their economic standing, their education, their health, etc. The great majority of women who live in rural or tribal communities still struggle with social injustices and poverty. These weak women fight for both gender equality and

their own survival (Khan and Hasan, 2020).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present paper is descriptive in nature. It is based on secondary data collected from the published and unpublished records, reports, and contributions of several institutions and organizations in India. Specifically, the secondary sources consist of the Annual Report of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, Census Data released by the Government of India, Economic Survey, and other journals, books, and websites.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

10.43 crore people are identified as tribal in India as per the 2011 census, which is 8.6 percent of the overall population (Table 2). Meghalaya (86.1%), Nagaland (86.1%), and Mizoram & Lakshadweep (94.4%) are some of the northern states with the highest percentages of tribal people (86.5 percent). Only six Indian states-Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, Delhi, and Pondicherry-do not have any Scheduled Tribes.

Between 2001 and 2011, there was a decadal change of 23.7% in the urban population of scheduled tribes, compared to 49.7% in urban areas and 21.3% in rural areas. India's urban population is only 2.8% ST, however, the ST population in rural India is 11.3%. (Table 2).

Section I: Status of Tribal Women in India

Education

To prevent tribal girls from advancing as quickly as other girls and boys in their community, this fundamental right is purposefully denied to them.

Economic constraints, financial sluggishness, poverty, humiliation, early marriages, uneducated mindsets, and limited perspectives on girl education among parents and other family members worldwide are the causes of the barrier. Regarding schooling, a tribal girl has little choice but to speak. The choice is entirely up to the parent (Suresh and Rajasenani, 2014). It's possible that some indigenous societies seek to educate their women and girls. They are somewhat less, though. While some parents wished to send their daughters to school, others believed that it was pointless to educate girls (Goel, 2004). They are aggressively urged to participate in labour-intensive activities and contribute to the household's financial stability. They only take their girls to school for three to four years in order to complete their primary education and teach them how to write and read their names before withdrawing them from it. Parents have strong feelings about gender inequality and want to provide their daughters with every opportunity while giving males more precedence in the educational system (Mitra and Singh, 2008) (Musavi, *et al.*, 2020).

Table 3 illustrates the disparity in literacy rates between Indigenous men and women by gender. It displays a growing tendency over each year rather than a downward trend. The gender disparity in ST literacy was only 10.67% in 1961. But as of now, in 2011, it increased to a rate of 28.18%. However, when looking at the entire population, the literacy rate exhibits a different pattern. It was 25.05 % in 1961, but just 16.3 % in 2011.

Occupation

In order to contribute financially to the household economy, tribal women have been working side by side with tribal men. They frequently perform more

Table 1. Scheduled Tribe population and decadal change by residence in 2011

India	Scheduled Tribe population 2011			Decadal change 2001-2011		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
	104,281,034	93,819,162	10,461,872	23.7	21.3	49.7

Source - Census of India, 2011

Table 2. Percentage of Scheduled Tribes to total population in India: 2001-2011

India	Percentage of Scheduled Tribes 2001			Percentage of Scheduled Tribes 2011		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
	8.2	10.4	2.4	8.6	11.3	2.8

Source - Census of India, 2011

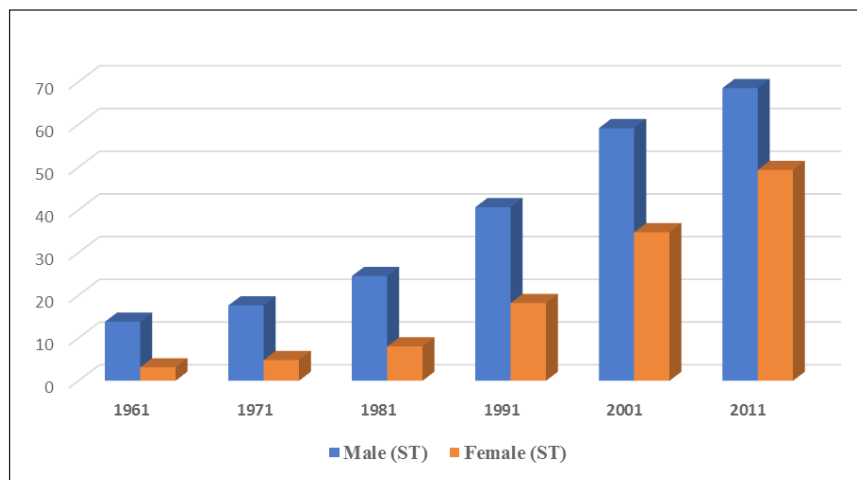


Fig. 1. Gender differences in literacy rates of ST (%) in India

physical labour than the Indigenous males do on their agricultural fields and forests. The status of indigenous women mostly depends on the jobs they perform in the economy. Indian tribal women hardly have any influence in either the social or political realms. By engaging in economic activities on an equal basis with men, they positively contribute to the economy. Nearly 90% of the tribes work in agriculture, with the remainder involved in food-collecting (including hunting and fishing), pastoral work, handcraft production, trade and commerce, and industrial labour. They rarely work solely in one profession (Deshpande and Sharma, 2015). Tribal women enjoy great freedom and are allowed to work outside the home as the needs of the community dictate. However, there are some states or situations where women are prohibited from working. Tribal women typically work in less formalized environments, such as agricultural labourers, in the care of animals, and the home (Muhammed, 2019). They manage their household affairs on their own. Due to the absence of gender

discrimination and partiality in informal zones, they collaborate as co-partners in the farming industry (Pole, 2017).

Health

Women's socioeconomic condition has been improved, and numerous noteworthy efforts have been undertaken to safeguard their security and safety. They are still far behind, and in tribal regions in particular, women have been dealing with a variety of concerns related to hygiene, sanitation, and a lack of safe drinking water, which has led to serious health problems like diarrhea, malaria, filariasis, TB, anemia, and others. In addition, the absence of prenatal and postpartum care facilities, the difficulty of accessing hospitals in tribal areas, the irregularity of postnatal check-ups, and subpar nutrition standards pose a serious threat to the health of infants and significantly increase the IMR (infant mortality rate) and MMR (Maternal mortality rate) (Ramya 2018).

For instance, as seen in Table 4 from the NFHS 3

Table 3. Literacy Rates (%) in India from 1961 to 2011

Year	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Persons (ST)	8.53	11.30	16.35	29.60	47.10	58.96
Male (ST)	13.83	17.63	24.52	40.65	59.17	68.53
Female (ST)	3.16	4.85	8.04	18.19	34.76	49.35
Gender gap in Literacy Rate (ST)	10.67	12.78	16.48	22.46	24.41	28.18
Persons (All)	28.30	34.45	43.57	52.21	64.84	73.00
Male (All)	40.40	45.96	56.38	64.13	75.26	80.90
Female (All)	15.35	21.97	29.76	39.29	53.67	64.60
Gender gap in Literacy Rate (All)	25.05	23.99	26.62	24.84	21.5	16.3

Source: Office of the Registrar General of India.

and NHFS 4, the infant mortality rate among tribal women was higher than it was for the nation as a whole. 2005-2006 IMR was reported as 62.1 for the fiscal year and 44.4 during 2015-2016. Overall, it was at a rate of 57 and 40.7, respectively, among the entire population. In India, tribal women are known to marry young, have scant prenatal care, deliver most of their babies at home, and are less knowledgeable of maternal health issues than other tribes.

Table 4. Infant Mortality Rate (%)

Report	Persons (All)	Scheduled Tribe
NFHS-3 (2005-06)	57	62.1
NFHS-4 (2015-16)	40.7	44.4

Source: National Health Family Survey-4

Major Government Measures for Tribal Women in India

- Reservation of seats and relaxation in marks in the admission to educational institutions, scholarships
- Van Bandhu Kalyan Yojana focuses particularly on providing tribal families with high-quality, long-term employment, as well as on enhancing the standard of living in tribal communities and raising the standard of health and education.
- Single Window System for obtaining market information on Minor Forest Produces,
- Setting up of Ekalavya Model Residential Schools, & Tribal Research Institutes, which undertake intensive studies of tribal arts, culture, and customs.
- Access to marketing, ex: women's part-time job is to collect minor forest products like honey, resins, herbs, etc. has brought income security among many tribal
- Infrastructure facilities like providing toilets.
- Stand Up India Mission which is dedicated to SCs/STs and Women would fetch good opportunities.
- Democratic Decentralization in Tribal areas would ensure their participation at the political level.

The mainstreaming of tribal peoples into the economy is crucial for inclusive development. A focus on women's issues can aid in achieving this objective. Therefore, when making plans, Indigenous women's issues should be taken into account.

Section II: Tribal Women and Pollution Control

Tribal women's lives in India are impacted by environmental degradation and various types of pollution in several ways that are specific to their unique socio-economic and cultural circumstances.

Role of Tribal Women in Environmental Conservation

In India, tribal women have long been integral to preserving their natural environment. Their sustainable methods and indigenous knowledge are essential to preserving the natural equilibrium (Debata, 2018) (Menon, 2016). They engage in several activities, including:

Forest Management: Tribal women are involved in the protection of forests, which are considered as carbon sinks and support reducing pollution, especially air pollution. They actively participate in activities like forest protection, afforestation, and forest management, guaranteeing that these resources are conserved and sustainably used (Agarwal, 2009).

Water Conservation: Tribal women are managing resources wisely and conserving water through the use of conventional techniques.

Traditional Knowledge and Practices: Indigenous women frequently depend on long-standing practices that support the preservation of the environment. These practices naturally lower pollution levels, including organic farming, forest management, and water conservation.

Organic Farming: Many indigenous societies engage in organic farming by eschewing the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. As the major agricultural laborers, tribal women are essential to the upkeep of these environmentally friendly farming methods that reduce pollution of the land and water resources.

Waste Management: In several tribal communities, women spearhead programs aimed at efficiently managing waste. By recycling and composting, they drastically cut down on the quantity of waste that pollutes the land and water.

Impact of Pollution on Tribal Women

Women in tribal groups are particularly affected by pollution's severe effects on their health and way of life (Debata, 2018). Among the noteworthy effects are:

Water pollution: Both agricultural output and the quality of drinking water are impacted by

contaminated water sources.

Air Pollution: Industrial activities release airborne pollutants that can lead to respiratory disorders and other health concerns.

Soil Degradation: Chemical runoffs and industrial waste deteriorate soil quality, impacting food security and agricultural production.

Challenges Faced by Tribal Women in Pollution Control

Tribal women in India face various challenges in contributing to environmental management and pollution prevention (Premi, 2016). They are:

Lack of Education and Awareness: People's ability to participate in official environmental activities is limited by their lack of access to education and awareness programs.

Economic Pressures: Reliance on natural resources for subsistence may result in actions that don't always adhere to contemporary environmental regulations.

Social Marginalization: Tribal women frequently have little say in decisions about environmental policies because they belong to marginalized populations.

Lack of Recognition: The mainstream environmental debate frequently fails to recognize their contributions.

Limited Resources: There is a lack of access to resources and modern instruments for better pollution management strategies.

Tribal Engagement and Government Initiatives

The following government programs are designed to reduce pollution and involve tribal people in environmental preservation:

Forest Rights Act of 2006: By acknowledging tribal groups' rights to forest resources, this act empowers them.

The Clean India Mission, or Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, promotes waste management and sanitation practices.

National Green Tribunal: Offers a forum for resolving complaints about the environment, especially those that concern tribal regions.

Empowering tribal women through education and training programs, ensuring access to clean energy, sanitation facilities, and sustainable agricultural inputs, and involving tribal women in community-based projects and decision-making bodies to leverage their indigenous knowledge are crucial for effective pollution control.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between pollution control and tribal women's lives in India emphasizes how crucial it is to incorporate traditional knowledge and ways of life with contemporary environmental management techniques. Achieving sustainable development and efficient pollution management in India requires acknowledging the roles of tribal women, empowering them, and tackling the obstacles they encounter. In practically every area of life, discrimination is experienced by tribal women. In some tribal societies, there are a number of taboos that discriminate against tribal women by implying impureness and low rank. In contrast to social behaviour, which is at its height, they are the least privileged groups and are very adrift in a number of areas, including employment, education, healthcare, and political representation. The fact that they are restricted to their original forest habitats and practice agriculture and other related occupations is one of the main causes of their suffering. However, the tribal people were granted a significant place in the 1950 Indian Constitution by its creators. They continue to work for the community's welfare and advancement even today. They continue to be India's most marginalized ethnic group, nonetheless. Empowering elements for protecting Indigenous women include access to education, work, social inclusion, and the effective application of current laws.

Conflict of Interest - None

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