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**ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF TRIBES IN INDIA –
A STUDY**

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Abstract: *Scheduled Tribe is a heterogeneous group scattered in different regions of India. The differences are noticed in language, cultural practices, socioeconomic status and pattern of livelihood. The Scheduled Tribes are confronted with problems like forced migration, exploitation, displacement due to industrialization, debt traps and poverty. Based on the regional classification with diverse socio-cultural issues, the present paper focuses on the profile of the tribal population through an analysis of the socio-economic indicators like literacy, work participation, livelihood, occupational pattern, health, poverty and migration. The impact of industrialization and urbanization on the Scheduled Tribe population residing in different regions has been highlighted. The paper deals with relevant suggestions with implications for policies with a focus on region-specific issues. The paper has also analysed the issues related to literacy, work participation, livelihood, occupational pattern, health, poverty and migration; the impact of industrialization and related consequences among Scheduled Tribes in specific regions. Relevant suggestions and recommendations are included in the concluding section of the paper.*

Keywords: Tribal Population, Regional Variations, Challenges

Introduction

As per the Census, 2011 Scheduled Tribes population is 104.2 million, which is 8.6% of the total population of India. Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Karnataka are the states having a large number of Scheduled Tribes. The overall areas inhabited by the Scheduled Tribes constitute a significant part of the underdeveloped areas of the

country. About 93% of them live in rural areas and are engaged in agriculture and allied activities. The socio-demographic figures reveal the disadvantaged position of the STs compared to another category of the population. According to the NSSO (2010) in its report, the literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribes in India is 63.1%, which is lower than the national literacy rate i.e., 72.8%. The dropout rate among the Scheduled Tribes is 70.5 which is much higher than the dropout rate of all categories i.e., 49.15%. The sex ratio among the Scheduled Tribes is 990 which is relatively better than the general population i.e., 940. The infant mortality rate among the Scheduled Tribe children is 62.1 which is 57 for the other social groups. The child mortality rate among the tribes is 35.8 which is much higher than the other social groups i.e., 18.4%. As per the Xaxa Committee report (2012), the workforce participation rate (WFPR) is 60 among the ST population and that is higher than the total population i.e., 53%. The WFPR indicates that the majority of the STs are engaged in the unorganized sector without any job security.

The demographic figures reveal that the tribal population is the most disadvantaged, exploited and neglected lot in India. Despite certain constitutional provisions, they are backward compared to the general population, even their situation is worse than the Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes. The majority of the tribes used to reside in the remote forest areas, remain isolated, untouched by civilization and unaffected by the development processes. This situation has changed to a great extent over the years. As long as the tribes have access to resources generated from the forest, they have no difficulties in satisfying their basic needs. In turn, they have an interest in preserving the forest as it is their life support system. But large-scale industrialization, urbanization and exploitation of natural resources due to deforestation to meet the urban and industrial demands have greatly affected the livelihood pattern. This trend has been responsible for displacing a large number of tribes from their habitations.

The initiation of developmental projects and rapid industrialization has not made much difference in the socio-economic status; rather in some instances, the situation of Scheduled Tribes has become worse. The widespread poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, absence of safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation facility, poor living conditions, ineffective coverage of maternal, child health and nutritional services has made their condition more vulnerable. The subsequent section has focused on the regional variation of tribes residing in different parts of India.

Tribal Population and Regional Variations

The Scheduled Tribes of India are scattered all over the country depicting the heterogeneous culture and socio-economic status. It is interesting to know the different types of tribes residing in different geographical locations and confronting the different situations. According to the Annual Report of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2012-13),

there are about 700 tribes (with overlapping categories in some States/UTs) as per notified Schedule under Article 342 of the Constitution of India. Classifications of the tribes in different regions depict a diverse picture in India.

The total number of tribes, Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups and list of major tribes in different states and UTs in India reflect the heterogeneity among them. There are about 75 such groups identified as Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups located in 17 States and one UT. Many tribal communities are having a stagnant or declining population with a low level of literacy and poor socio-economic condition. Most of these groups are small in number and generally inhabit remote localities having poor infrastructure and administrative support. Many of them are socioeconomically underprivileged and have not benefited much from developmental projects and other initiatives. The Scheduled Tribes and Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups have been divided broadly into seven regions residing in different states and islands.

North Eastern Region

North East India comprises the states like Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. The region is surrounded by foreign territories like Bhutan, Tibet-China, Burma, and Bangladesh on the north-south and the east. The long narrow passage in the west connects the region with West Bengal and the rest of India. It represents a kind of ethnological transition zone between India and the neighbouring countries. This region is the homeland of about 145 tribal communities of which 78 are larger groups; each with a population of more than 5000 persons. They constitute around 12% of the total tribal population of India. In Mizoram, the tribes constitute 94.75% of the total population of the state. According to the Census 2011, the percentages of STs to the total population in the states like Assam, Manipur and Tripura, is 12.4%, 35.1% and 31.8% respectively. The Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups in Tripura include Riang and Maram Naga in Manipur. This region depicts extreme heterogeneity in terms of the distribution of tribal populations in different areas including their social structures and culture.

Literacy among the tribes of the north-eastern region is relatively higher compared to other regions. In the ranking of the Scheduled Tribe literacy rate (per 1000 persons among 5 years and above) states like Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim and Manipur occupy 1st, 2nd, 4th, 6th and 8th position respectively. It is interesting to note that the literacy rate of these states is higher than the national literacy rate. Scheduled Tribe of Assam, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh ranks 9th, 11th and 13th position respectively concerning the literacy rate. The sex ratio in the states like Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland and Manipur is much higher compared to other regions. Literacy among the tribes of the north-eastern and island regions is relatively higher than tribes in other regions. Scheduled Tribes residing in north-eastern states are more urbanized as compared to other regions. Scheduled Tribes children in the north-

eastern states didn't come under the malnourished category as compared to all Indian levels. These findings support that the Scheduled Tribes in the north-eastern states are in a better position than the tribes residing in the other parts of India.

Exposure to urbanization and educational expansion has changed the economic and socio-cultural systems in the North-eastern states. It is reported that the benefits of state-sponsored development have been concentrated particularly among the educated and urban tribal elites. Under demographic compulsion, rural natives and particularly women confront with challenges like hardship, poverty and unemployment. Despite the high literacy rate in this region; the dropout rate is much higher compared to other regions. States like Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Manipur and Assam exhibit high infant mortality rates among the Scheduled Tribes. The rate of landless households is higher in a state like Mizoram (19.5%), Arunachal Pradesh State (11.2%) and 8.3% in Manipur. Availability of power supply and transport linkages within the region and with the rest of India is still primitive.

Eastern Region

Eastern India comprises West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and Jharkhand. The diversity of East India is evident from its population, nature and the types of tribes residing in this region. Multinational corporations are attracted to exploit the natural resources and reserves at the cost of tribal livelihood. This is leading to the involuntary displacement of people from their homeland. Development projects in eastern India particularly in the state of Orissa are initiated in the areas with tribal-dominated populations due to rich natural resources. Due to these projects, the tribal lands continue to be passed on to the hands of non-tribals in Orissa and some of the investors in the area of Niyamgiri hills in the Rayagada district. The same trend is witnessed in other districts like Kalahandi, Koraput, Malkangiri, Kandhamal and Balasore district. Tribals are alienated from their land and land alienation is one of the important reasons for poverty and dispossession of tribals in Orissa). Consequently, some other problems exist like deforestation, loss of agricultural land, environmental degradation, and marginalization of the Scheduled Tribes. There is a low pace of development in Jharkhand, at the same time the state has one of the richest mineral reserves in India.

As per the NSSO (2010) survey, the literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribes in this region is found to be lower compared to other regions of the country. In the ranking of the literacy rate of the Scheduled Tribes (per 1000 persons among 5 years and above); West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Orissa occupy 19th, 24th, 25th and 27th positions respectively. The major tribes in Orissa are Birhor, Gond, Juang, Khond, Korua, Oraon, Santhal, Tharua, etc. and the tribes like Asur, Birhor, Korwa, Lepcha, Munda, Santhal, are found in West Bengal. The major tribes in Bihar are Banjara, Birhor, Korwa, Munda, Oraon, Santhal, etc. and the tribes like Biga, Banjara, Chero, Chik Baraik, Gond, Ho, Kisan, Kora, Lohra, and Santhal etc. are found in Jharkhand. Santhal is the common and most populated tribe in the eastern region.

It is important to note that the maximum number of tribes i.e., 62 in Orissa and a large number of Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups reside in eastern India; with 13 Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups in Orissa, 9 in Bihar and Jharkhand and 3 in West Bengal. The Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups in Orissa are Chuktia, Bhunjia, Birhor, Bondo, Didayi, Dongria Khond, Juang, Kharia, Kutia Khond, Lanjia Saura, Lodha, Mankirdia, Paudi Bhuyan and Saura. Many Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups live entirely on forest resources but have adopted settled agriculture for more than a decade. Shifting cultivation used to be their main economic pursuit but now their livelihood source has been transferred to stable farming and noticed among Chuktia Bhunjia. Some of these Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups are losing their identity and even some of them are getting extinguished due to rapid urbanization. Due to industrialization and development projects more land is being acquired to encourage investment by Indian and foreign investors. They are targeting mining land and land with rich natural resources in Jharkhand and Orissa. Tribal displacement is the major issue in this region. The low productivity in agriculture and poor infrastructure are the major reasons for high rates of poverty in Bihar, Orissa and Jharkhand.

Central Region

The central India tribal belt is rich in natural resources. Stretching from Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, it is one of the poorest regions of the country. More than 90% of the Scheduled Tribes belong to a rural area and they are directly or indirectly dependent upon agriculture. Though some of them have small land holdings, agricultural practices are quite primitive and productivity is low. According to the NSSO (2010) in the ranking of the literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes (per 1000 persons among 5 years and above) Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh occupies 16th and 23rd position respectively. The major tribes in Chhattisgarh are Gond, Baiga, Korba, Abhuj Maria, Muria, Halba, Bhatra and Dhurva and the tribes like Bhil, Birhor, Damar, Gond, Kharia, Oraon, Parahi, etc. are found in Madhya Pradesh. The Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups in Chhattisgarh is Abujmaria, Birhor, Hill Korwa, and Kamar; while Bharia and Sahariya are the Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups residing in Madhya Pradesh. Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups like Baiga reside in both states.

The Planning Commission Report (2010) stated that the Scheduled Tribes in this region are facing multiple problems due to natural calamity, crop failure, poverty, illness, reduced access to land and lack of employment opportunities leading to debt and migration. Further, the NSSO (2010) survey also revealed that the poverty rate is extremely high among the Scheduled Tribes residing in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The central region also depicts a high rate of infant mortality among STs and the situation is worse among the Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups like Birhor, Korwa, Abujmaria, Kamar and Baiga in Chhattisgarh.

Western Region

The states like Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and UTs like Daman & Diu, Dadra & Nagar Haveli represent the Western part of the country. Bhil is a common tribe found in all three major states of Western India. The other tribes found in Gujarat are Dhodia, Gond, Siddi, Bordia, etc. The major tribes in Rajasthan are Damor, Garasia, Meena, Sahariya etc. The common tribes residing in Maharashtra are Bhunjia, Chodhara, Dhodia, Gond, Kharia, Nayaka, Oraon, Pardhi and Rathwa. The Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups in Gujarat is Kolgha, Kathodi, Kotwalia, Padhar and Siddi. Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups residing in Maharashtra are Katkari/Kathodi, Kolam and Maria Gond. According to the NSSO (2010) survey, the ranking of tribal literacy (per 1000 persons among 5 years and above) Maharashtra is placed in 18th position. Gujarat and Rajasthan occupy the 20th and 26th positions respectively. Daman & Diu indicates a better literacy rate and ranked at 3rd position; Dadra & Nagar Haveli occupies the 17th position.

The tribal handicrafts are specialised skills that are passed on from one generation to another and these handicrafts are the means of livelihood among the artisans in Rajasthan. In some instances, the Scheduled Tribes with such skills migrate for alternative livelihood. This age-old activity may disappear if they are not facilitated to retain their traditional skills. The livelihood of Scheduled Tribes in Maharashtra and Gujarat includes agricultural activities, wage labour, collection of forest products, animal husbandry. There are very few job opportunities for the Scheduled Tribes in the organized sector. As per the NSSO (2010), Maharashtra from the western region depicts a high poverty rate among the Scheduled Tribes. The main problem faced by Scheduled Tribes in Gujarat is migration due to lack of sustained employment and scarcity of water in some tribal regions that affect the agricultural and allied activities.

Northern Region

North India includes states like Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand (previously known as Uttaranchal). The tribes found in Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal are Bhoti, Buxa, Jaunsari, Tharu, Raji, etc. The major tribes found in Himachal Pradesh are Gaddi, Gujjar, Lahuala, Swangla, etc. and tribes in Jammu & Kashmir are Chhaddangpa, Garra, Gujjar and Gaddi. The Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand are common and they are Buksa and Raji. On the ranking of literacy of Scheduled Tribe population (per 1000 persons among 5 years and above) Himachal Pradesh occupies 23rd position; Uttaranchal and Jammu & Kashmir occupy 15th and 30th position respectively. Uttar Pradesh occupies the 28th position in the ranking of the Scheduled Tribe literacy rate. The gross enrolment ratio of Scheduled Tribe students is quite low in Jammu & Kashmir.

Uttar Pradesh & Uttaranchal from the northern region indicate a high poverty rate among Scheduled Tribes. A large number of landless households i.e., 9.1% are found in Himachal Pradesh. Livelihood in north India is based on agriculture. Wood carvings are important handicrafts of Uttarakhand due to the availability of wood as

raw material from nearby forest areas. At present, the high costs of raw materials due to deforestation compel the Scheduled Tribes to migrate for livelihood.

Southern Region

States like Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana), Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are included in the Southern region. The main occupations of the tribes in the Southern region are settled agriculture, Podu (shifting) cultivation and collection of Non-Timber Forest Produce. The tribes in Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana) are Bhil, Chenchu, Gond, Kondas, Lambadis, Sugalis etc. The major tribes in Kerala are Adiyam, Kammrar, Kondkappus, Malais, Palliyar, etc. The common tribes residing in Tamil Nadu are Irular, Kammara, Kondakapus, Kota, Mahamalar, Palleyan and Toda. The tribes residing in Karnataka are Bhil, Chenchu, Goud, Kuruba, Kammara, Kolis, Koya, Mayaka, Toda, etc. A higher number of Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups resides in southern India; with 12 Pv TGs (Chenchu, Bodo Gadaba, Gutob Gadaba, Dongria Khond, Kutia Khond, Kolam, Konda Reddi, Kondasavara, Bondo Pooja, Khond Porja, Parengi Porja, and Thoti) in Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana), 5 in Kerala, 6 in Tamil Nadu and 2 in Karnataka. Literacy among the Scheduled Tribes of this region is lower than the national level literacy rate of the general and tribal population in India except for Kerala which ranks 7th position in literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes (per 1000 persons among 5 years and above). Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana) occupy 21st, 22nd and 28th positions respectively concerning literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribes. In Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana), the livelihood of Scheduled Tribes is based on the occupations like making toys, baskets, mats, local cosmetics and collection of leaves, honey, medicinal plants etc.

Tribes were displaced at the cost of private gain for mining in the Narayangiri Hills near Lanjigarh; Araku Valley and Jerrela Hills of Visakhapatnam district in Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana). Various factors are responsible for the slow development among the Scheduled Tribes in this region like poor irrigation facilities for agricultural land, displacement and migration and slow pace of resettlement and rehabilitation. The percentage of landless households is higher in Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana) (7.9%) compared to the southern region. The poverty percentage is moderate in the states like Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana) and Karnataka.

Island Area

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands is the largest archipelago in the Bay of Bengal, consisting of 306 islands and 206 rocky outcrops; covering an area of about 8200 sq. kms. Hunting is the main source of food and livelihood for the ST population in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. They also grow vegetables and run poultry farms for their livelihood. The excellent craftsmanship of the Scheduled Tribes in Lakshadweep has made them popular across the globe. Some of them own land on these islands while others work as labourers. The majority of the Scheduled Tribes in Lakshadweep

follow Islam as a religion. Lakshadweep ranks 5th position, followed by Andaman & Nicobar which occupies 10th position in the literacy rate (per 1000 persons among 5 years and above) among Scheduled Tribes. The ST literacy rate in the island region is comparatively higher compared to other regions. Despite that, the gross enrolment ratio among Scheduled Tribe students in class I-VIII is quite low in the island region. The common tribes residing in Andaman & Nicobar Islands are Jarawa, Nicobarese, Onges, Sentinelese, Shompens and Great Andamanese etc. The tribes residing in Lakshadweep are Amindivi, Koyas, Malmis and Malacheries. The Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups in Andaman and Nicobar Islands are Great Andamanese, Jarawa, Onge, Sentinelese and Shom Pen. Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups like Andamanese follow a peculiar cultural practice that can prove the capacity of the young boys to hunt and gather by a prescribed norm that can help in negotiating a marriage with the father of the selected partner. There are no Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups in the Lakshadweep islands. Unemployment is high among the Scheduled Tribes in this region. Poor infrastructure and inadequate water supply is the main problem and this is due to the topography of the islands.

Challenges

The level of socio-economic development varies considerably between tribal and non-tribal populations, between one region to another region; between one tribe to another tribe; and even among different tribal sub-groups. These disparities and diversities make tribal development more challenging and demanding. In India, 52% of the Scheduled Tribes belong to the category of Below Poverty Line and 54% of them have no access to economic assets such as communication and transport. Issues like literacy, work participation and livelihood, changes in occupation pattern, poverty, displacement, migration and health issues are the major areas of concern among the Scheduled Tribes.

Literacy among the tribes of the northeastern and island regions is relatively higher but despite that high dropout rate and infant mortality rate is also observed in the northeastern region. In the western region; Gujarat and Maharashtra are high on infant mortality among the Scheduled Tribes. Child and infant mortality rates are higher among the Scheduled Tribes in Orissa as compared to other states. Large scale displacements and unsatisfactory compensation and rehabilitation are confronted by the Scheduled Tribes in India. The eastern region is facing large displacement due to industrialization and development projects. The northeastern region still faces the problems like poor infrastructure, inadequate transport connectivity and less power supply.

Dependency on agriculture, natural calamity, crop failure, reduced access to land and lack of employment is the contributing factor for poverty in the states like Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The poverty rate is extremely high in states like Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh of the central region and a large part of ST dominated eastern region consisting of states like Bihar, Orissa and Jharkhand. Rates of unemployment

are high in the tribals of the island region. Presently the tribes are caught in a situation where they are losing command over the natural resources, and are unable to cope with the new pattern of work and resources for living. The majority of them are dependent on daily wages or labour work because of landlessness. The percentage of landless households is high in some north-eastern states and Himachal Pradesh from the northern region. There are efforts from different organizations and governments for the development of Scheduled Tribes. However, the initiatives are not enough and tribal issues as discussed require intensified efforts from all segments and stakeholders.

Conclusion

Tribal population depicts heterogeneity at the national, state and even district level having differences in language, cultural practices and pattern of livelihood which influence their socio-economic status. Their problems differ from area to area even within their groups. There are different types of tribes residing in different parts of the country. The tribes in different regions of India are different in terms of their rituals and customs and literacy level; economic conditions and diverse occupational patterns.

Many organizations and governments have made substantial efforts to bring positive changes and resolve the problems faced by the Scheduled Tribes. Because of such initiatives progress has been made but still, a lot needs to be done. A region-specific approach is required to bring positive change among the tribes. For example, the unemployment problems of the island region can be resolved by developing the fisheries and tourism industry at a large scale. There are multiple reasons for the vulnerable status of STs. In some regions (States like Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh including Telangana) where the literacy level of Scheduled Tribes is low; are not fully aware of the schemes available for them. Such information is not disseminated to them. Their access to benefits is less. The main reason for lesser beneficiaries is the complicated procedure of the sanctioning of the schemes and poor implementation. Awareness generation to avail the existing schemes and programs targeted for the tribal community is very much required. In the states with a low rate of literacy; special camps can be organized to make them aware of the schemes meant for educational development. The strategic planning with a special focus on the problems and issues of the tribes residing in different regions should be implemented; where a particular segment of the population remains to be underprivileged for many decades. To cope with the requirement of the existing labour market one has to be well equipped with basic skills imparted through education and training from the very beginning. Starvation deaths had been reported among tribes and Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups in several states including Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. The implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has changed the situation of tribes in Rajasthan to a certain extent but the situation is not changed in other states. According to the needs of the labour market, training programmes may be implemented targeting the migrated, displaced and unemployed Scheduled Tribes, especially in the central and eastern region.

Among the Scheduled Tribes, the practice of traditional agriculture needs to be encouraged. The farmers and artisans should be given financial assistance and capacity building training to sustain their skills and expertise. Access to credit and banking facilities should be made simpler that can benefit the tribes. Access to forest products among forest dwellers should be facilitated in a positive direction. Only improvement of literacy status may not be sufficient. Vocational and professional education using the locally available resources needs to be encouraged. Support mechanisms and collaboration between government, Non-Government Organizations, Community Based Organizations, corporate sectors and Self-Help Groups need to be strengthened.

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