
ON VOICES FROM THE MARGINS: INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON TRIBAL ISSUES IN INDIA

Dr. Dhanbanti Chanchal

Assistant Professor Sociology, Govt. PG College, Fatehabad, Agra

Abstract

The majority of tribes are economically and educationally disadvantaged. Every region of India has a different scenario. The indigenous people of the area are acknowledged as tribal. The customs, rituals, and tribal culture of India have permeated practically every sphere of Indian civilisation and society. This article discussed the problems that the tribal people confront, the Constitution's provisions and actual practices, and how urbanisation and globalisation have gotten worse in India. This review underscores the need for a human-centered, interdisciplinary approach to address tribal challenges in India, including displacement, marginalization, and gender inequities, emphasizing inclusive development, cultural preservation, participatory governance, and anthropological insights to enhance well-being and social equity.

Keywords: Tribal Issues, Major Problem, Challenges, Tribal Communities, Economic Marginalization, Constitutional Provisions, Globalization and Urbanization.

I. INTRODUCTION

The world's second-largest tribal population resides in India. According to the 2011 Census, around 9% of India's overall population is tribal. Despite their extremely small numbers, India's tribes are widely dispersed throughout the nation and are said to have been the first people to live on this landmass [1]. Their unique cultural traditions and preservation of their natural resources—Jal, Jungle, and Jameen—are what define them. Regarding their ethnicity, place of habitation, environment, economy, oral history, religion, and other sociocultural institutions, tribes in the Indian setting show notable differences. Disparities in ethnicity and sociocultural contexts among India's tribal communities preclude the emergence of a unified tribal identity within the existing social framework [2]. However, given their common historical, social, and political experiences within the Indian setting, it is theoretically conceivable to see the tribes as a single coherent unit [3], [4].

Different viewpoints on their identity and integration in mainstream society were discussed throughout the preparation of policies for their upliftment, taking into account their unique way of life. Over the years, psychological integration has not been entirely attained, despite political unity. Tribes in India face extreme social marginalisation, second only to scheduled caste communities. In comparison to many other castes, scheduled tribes and castes in Indian society have extremely low economic, social, political, and educational standing [5]. "Scheduled tribes, Scheduled castes, women", and other backward classes are often viewed as weaker groups, and all of these social groupings inevitably deal with the issue of social exclusion on a daily basis. Certain groups of individuals in our culture are socially excluded in situational and contextual ways [6], [7]. For example, women from all social categories, as well as Dalits, Adivasis, and Bahujans. Additionally, the degree of social exclusion varies among social groups according to their status and social standing within the region and society as a whole. The distribution of India's tribal population demonstrates the segregation and geographic isolation characteristics that are strongly linked to the nature of social exclusion [8].

A. Issues Faced by Tribals in India

Significant obstacles are making life tough for the Indian tribal people.

- The overuse of their natural resources is one of the main issues. The traditional tribal perspective on resource use is at odds with the government's liberalisation and globalisation objectives, which place a higher priority on exploiting resources for economic growth. As a result, resources have been taken from tribal lands, harming the environment [9].
- Forced relocation brought on by significant development projects is another problem. These projects have occupied a large number of tribal territories, and the displaced populations frequently face difficulties in receiving adequate rehabilitation [10].
- The issues that different indigenous societies face are diverse. For example, some people have poor health, with greater prevalence of disorders like sickle cell anaemia and shorter life expectancies. Conflicts between tribes often arise over territorial control and access to natural resources [11].
- The welfare and safety of the indigenous people are frequently subordinated to the objectives of commercial forces. Numerous tribes are left jobless or compelled to labour in low-wage, exploitative occupations [12].

- The problem has gotten worse due to globalisation, which has made the vulnerable tribes more vulnerable and socially excluded. Subnational movements calling for more autonomy or respect for tribal regions have even resulted from this [13].
- Tribal women are especially disadvantaged since corporate exploitation of their lands frequently has a direct effect on them. Many young women from tribal communities come to metropolitan areas in quest of employment due to poverty, where they encounter exploitation and subpar living circumstances [14].
- Tribal traditions and environments have also been endangered by construction projects and the inflow of foreign labourers. Some remote tribes, such as the Sentinelese, require protection from outside intrusion since they are hostile to outsiders [15].

B. Major challenges faced by the tribal communities in India

- **Displacement and Land Rights Issues:** Displacement from ancestral grounds is a major problem for Indian tribal tribes. Urbanisation, mining, and industrial undertakings are common causes of this. Numerous tribes thus lose their homes and customs. A fight for economic stability and cultural identity results from land loss.
- **Access to Education and Healthcare:** Access to healthcare and education is frequently restricted for native groups. Low literacy rates result from the inability of many indigenous youngsters to attend school. Only 59% of Scheduled Tribes were literate, according to the 2011 Census. Tribal inhabitants also have greater rates of illness and hunger as a result of frequently insufficient healthcare services.
- **Economic Marginalization:** Another urgent problem is economic marginalisation. Larger companies compete with many tribal populations that depend on traditional means of subsistence like agriculture and handicrafts. Poverty and a lack of economic possibilities are frequent outcomes of this. Tribal families have additional difficulties because a sizable portion of them are impoverished.
- **Gender Issues:** Women's status has been impacted by the deterioration of the natural environment, especially the loss of forests and a fast depleting resource base. Tribal men and women were exposed to the brutal workings of the market economy as the tribal belts were opened to mining, industry, and commercialisation. This led to the growth of consumerism and the commoditisation of women.

- **Erosion of Identity:** Tribals are becoming increasingly concerned about maintaining their identity as a result of the clash between their traditional laws and institutions and contemporary institutions. Tribal languages and dialects going extinct is also concerning since it shows that tribal identity is eroding in some places.

Table 1: Major challenges faced by the tribal communities in India

Challenges	Description	Examples
Land rights and displacement	Many tribal communities have been displaced from their traditional lands due to development projects, mining, and other activities. This has led to losing their livelihoods, homes, and cultural heritage.	Sardar Sarovar Dam in Gujarat has displaced thousands of tribal people from their ancestral lands.
Exploitation and marginalization	They are often exploited and marginalized by powerful groups, such as government officials, landlords, and businessmen.	Adivasi population in the state of Odisha have been facing exploitation by the mining companies, who have taken over their land and resources.
Lack of education and healthcare.	They have limited access to education and healthcare, which has a negative impact on their overall well-being and development. Lot of health issues, such as malnutrition, lack of access to proper health care, and a high incidence of infectious diseases.	The literacy rate among the tribal population is lower compared to the national average and the healthcare facilities in tribal areas are inadequate. As per census 2011 the literacy rate was 59%.
Loss of culture and tradition	Lost their traditional customs, languages, and arts due to modernization and the erosion of their traditional way of life.	Due to impact of globalization and modernization traditional practices and rituals of the Great Andamanese tribes are on the verge of extinction.
Economic marginalization	Engaged in traditional forms of livelihoods, such as agriculture, forestry, and hunting, which are becoming less viable in the face of modernization and globalization.	The traditional livelihoods of the Munda tribes in Jharkhand are under threat due to the decline in the availability of forest resources and the impact of mining.
Political marginalization	They are not well represented in the political process and their voices are not heard in the policy-making process.	Tribal communities of the Northeast region of India have not had a fair representation in the political process and their issues are not fully addressed by the government.

C. Constitutional provisions Vs Actual practice

The guarantees provided by the constitution, legislation, and statutes differ significantly from the actual situation. There are frequently discrepancies between what is planned and assured and what is carried out. Similar to Indian tribal communities, these disparities are especially noticeable when the beneficiaries are uncooperative, oppressed, illiterate, and outnumbered [16]. Therefore, the kindness of the main Indian society, especially its leadership, will determine their future. In terms of their ability to exercise their constitutional rights—whether civil, political, or social—tribes have by no means been placed or acknowledged on an equal basis with the rest of society [17]. Although post-independence India created significant and beneficial laws and measures for the protection, well-being, empowerment, and progress of the tribal people, the real practices contradict these aspirations. Tribes currently deal with injustice, bigotry, exploitation, repression, and shortage in practically every aspect of existence. The government's response to the struggles and problems of the tribes has been either indifferent, hostile, or unenthusiastic [18].

D. Globalization and Urbanization: the Problems Faced by Tribals in India

The issues that Indian tribal people confront have been made worse by urbanisation and globalisation. These procedures typically result in environmental damage, cultural deterioration, and the loss of tribal lands, all of which further marginalise these groups [19].

Market forces have taken over as a result of globalisation, taking advantage of tribal resources. For example, mining in Bastar, Chhattisgarh, causes environmental factors to be destroyed and land to be alienated. Tribal people's traditional and sustainable development is typically at odds with market-oriented development programs. They worsen cultural identity loss and economic instability [20].

Cities have grown into tribal territories due to urban expansion, which is fuelled by the rural population's desire for better prospects. This leads to forced relocation and the loss of conventional means of subsistence. The Santhal and Dongria Kondh tribes, who were driven from their ancestral lands in Jharkhand and Odisha, have suffered as a result of urbanisation [13]n.

These dynamics endanger tribal groups' cultural legacy as well as their socioeconomic stability. These issues necessitate inclusive policies that uphold tribal communities' rights and customs, guarantee their involvement in decision-making, and safeguard their natural resources [21].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

(Rukshana, 2025) [22] study of the issues and difficulties within tribal societies, focussing on governmental policies and proposed solutions in the Indian context. Including indigenous history, culture, and folklore in the curriculum can boost tribal children's self-esteem and increase the importance of education in their life. One essential component of tribal life is music and dancing. Thus, it is crucial to promote storytelling, theatre, art, music, and dance performances. It might help explain why more Indian tribes are becoming literate. Similarly, sports like football, archery, and other popular local pastimes are very beneficial and calming for kids and should be promoted. A specific health strategy is necessary for a tribal civilisation. The demands of indigenous inhabitants should guide the development of a health strategy.

(V. Subramanyam et al., 2025) [23] gives information based on an empirical anthropological research about the influence and effect of development schemes among PVTGs in the state of Andhra Pradesh. However, certain sluggish advancements in the fields of education, health, and agriculture were noted in the habitats of the PVTGs under study. Konda Reddy, one of the six PVTGs under study, is making more development than the other PVTGs in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Due to a lack of natural resources and food, the Chenchus, Kondh, and Porjas continue to struggle to make a living. The Gadabas who live in plain landscapes and valleys have better living conditions than those who live in deep woods, on top of hills, or on slopes. The horticultural programs helped a few households in the Konda Reddy and Savara tribes. The impact and effect development plan among PVTGs is revealed in the research, along with how to develop them going forward using efficient development strategies and programs that take into account both etic and emic views.

(Kumar, 2024) [24] explains the issues that members of Indian society's tribal population encounter. Including local history, folklore, and culture in the curriculum helps boost tribal children's self-esteem and make learning more applicable to their daily life. Tribal life revolves around music and dancing. Thus, it is important to support performances of theatre, dance, music, art, and storytelling. It could contribute to an increase in the literacy rate among Indian tribes. In a same vein, children should be encouraged to participate in popular local activities like football, archery, and others since they are very soothing and useful.

(Zabir, 2024) [25] The growth and well-being of tribal tribes in Jammu & Kashmir are hampered by a number of socioeconomic issues. This study looks at the socioeconomic

problems that tribal communities in the area face and makes policy suggestions to deal with these problems in a thorough manner. The goal of the article is to aid in the development of evidence-based policies that support inclusive growth and improve the welfare of tribal communities by investigating the underlying causes of these issues and pointing forth viable remedies. Policymakers can promote inclusive growth and improve the well-being of tribal communities by enacting specific policies centred on economic development, infrastructure improvement, education, healthcare, advocacy for land rights, cultural preservation, women's empowerment, and participatory governance. However, consistent dedication, sufficient funding, and genuine interaction with tribal stakeholders will be necessary for the effective execution of these programs.

(Aahire & Tiwari, 2023) [26] There are several different types of tribal people living in the state of Chhattisgarh in central India. The many tribal communities that exist in the state will be covered in this essay, along with a brief overview of their culture, way of life, and difficulties, as well as the welfare programs that the Chhattisgarh government offers to the tribes. To address these problems and improve the lives of the tribal populations, the Chhattisgarh government has put in place a number of social programs and laws. These programs emphasise livelihoods, empowerment, healthcare, education, and cultural preservation. The government is working to build a more inclusive society where indigenous tribes may prosper by giving them access to high-quality healthcare, education, and skill development. In order to strengthen these communities and maintain their distinctive identity, it is also crucial to acknowledge and defend land rights, manage resources sustainably, and preserve tribal customs and practices. The focus on representation and involvement in decision-making processes guarantees that tribal voices are acknowledged and their viewpoints are considered.

(Rai & Pallavi, 2023) [27] aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the ways in which tribal identity affects political participation, including the challenges they face, the level of representation they obtain, and the impact of their involvement on the formulation of public policy. Additionally, the study explores how tribal groups impact governance, policy-making, and larger political narratives. It investigates situations in which national political agendas and tribal interests have overlapped or diverged, as well as the resulting effects on policy decisions. The research evaluates the tactics used by tribal groups to make their demands and goals known by examining historical incidents, current case studies, and the

testimonies of tribal leaders. The study's findings highlight how important it is to recognise tribal identity as a significant component of Indian politics. Addressing historical injustices, increasing educational opportunities, and increasing political process understanding are all steps towards promoting more equal political participation.

(Sahal, 2023) [28] Based on a thorough literature research, analyse the many challenges and concerns that tribal women in India confront. There is extensive discussion of the primary concerns of "tribal women's education, health and nutrition, employment, and involvement" in agriculture. It is impossible to raise the status of indigenous women until all of these problems have been resolved. To strengthen "the social, cultural, educational, economic, and political standing" of tribal women in India, a comprehensive strategy is needed. Planning for tribal development must be more "human-centered," with an emphasis on giving women access to health care, education, and capacity building within the parameters of land-use and sustainable ecosystem policies. In order to address the concerns and difficulties experienced by tribal women in the Indian setting, it finds that a more humane approach is required.

(Dhanjal & Sharma, 2022) [29] carried out a research among the tribes in Chhattisgarh's Surguja area, emphasising their ideas about their traditional knowledge system and attitudes towards health and sickness. One noteworthy finding from this study is that, in contrast to the Hill Korwas, the Gonds have their own method for categorising illnesses. The categorisation of sickness causes into two categories—physical/natural and cultural—is a common belief shared by both tribal societies. Both tribal societies exhibit differences in the causes of sickness. There are some similarities as well as variances in how people see health and sickness. Similar to this, these tribal tribes virtually always seek medical attention.

(Jhotham & Kumaran, 2022) [30] Studying tribal issues, especially in the Indian setting, involves a variety of viewpoints. It will be assumed that comprehending the many viewpoints of tribal studies is quite challenging. The anthropological approach gives tribal studies a foundation, despite its inherent flaws. Because it is the oldest and most comprehensive perspective, it will be regarded as the parent perspective. It is well known that due to flaws in the current approaches and procedures used in tribal studies, a systematic approach is still required.

(Shipra, 2022) [31] examines the various challenges that the indigenous people face and the steps taken to help them grow and progress while maintaining the current state of

development programs. Actually, the only individuals benefiting most from the program are the politically and economically influential members of the indigenous groups. The Indian government's agencies do not technically observe or evaluate the tribal development strategy. There is currently no effective system in place at the local, state, or federal levels to ensure that the benefits of tribal development reach the target groups' associates. It is imperative that tribal development and empowerment take a multifaceted approach. India's tribal people desperately needs a range of programs; there is no other choice. All around the country, policies and initiatives for indigenous development must be continuously evaluated and enhanced.

(P. V Subramanyam, 2020) [32] created using secondary source information from "research project reports, published research articles, and books" written by anthropology researchers, as well as the author's thirty years of empirical research among the Andhra Pradesh tribes. It is mostly descriptive, offers qualitative data, and includes scientific and semantic explanations that are pertinent to anthropology. In India, tribes are regarded as one of the socially marginalised groups. One of the reasons why tribes in general and especially disadvantaged tribes in particular are developing slowly is the issue of social isolation. Geographical isolation, segregation, marginalisation, poverty, illiteracy, and economic suffering are some of the ways that tribal people deal with this issue. In conclusion, tribal development is closely linked to the issue of social exclusion. Tribal development administrators must consider the problem of social exclusion in various tribal communities in order to eradicate it through intervention and ensure that the tribal people are fully included in the country's continuous development process.

(Khanday, 2019) [33] examines how globalisation has affected India's tribal population, how tribal uprisings and displacement have occurred, and how government measures have contributed to the improvement of the country's tribal population. The gap between the majority and the underprivileged has widened as a result of globalisation. Multinational corporations are expanding their access to tribal lands, while indigenous tribal groups are being denied their fundamental rights, which keeps them in poverty. Many of these indigenous people are compelled to become nomadic jobless labourers. In the event that land and additional natural resources designated to tribal communities are appropriated for industrial purposes or relinquished due to development initiatives, the communities reliant upon these resources inevitably become the immediate and direct casualties of such projects.

The interests of the underprivileged and disenfranchised segments of society are not served by technological advancements that reduce the need for human labour and strain natural resources. For the impoverished and marginalised tribal people to gain from development, this situation must be governed and controlled. In addition to strengthening their social capital foundation and enabling people to support one another amid unanticipated crises and disasters, their commitment to their homes, land, and local resources creates a natural link.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- (i) To study the issues and major challenges faced by tribals in India.
- (ii) To study the constitutional provisions vs actual practice related to tribals.
- (iii) To study the Problems Faced by Tribals due to globalization and urbanization.
- (iv) To study the various literature's perspective on tribal issues in India.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The review paper adopts a qualitative, exploratory research methodology, focusing on an interdisciplinary analysis of tribal issues in India. Relevant literature was systematically collected from academic journals, books, and credible online sources, covering anthropological, sociological, economic, political, and environmental perspectives. The study employed thematic analysis to identify key challenges faced by tribal communities, including displacement, marginalization, limited access to education and healthcare, gender inequities, and impacts of globalization. Comparative insights from case studies and policy analyses were integrated to evaluate existing interventions. The methodology emphasizes a critical, holistic approach, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of tribal issues and their interconnected social, cultural, and economic dimensions.

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of this review highlight the critical importance of recognizing tribal identity as a central element in Indian politics and development planning. Tribal communities in India continue to face multidimensional challenges, including displacement from ancestral lands due to industrialization, mining, and urbanization, restricted access to education and healthcare, economic marginalization, and social inequities—particularly affecting women. Addressing these issues requires a holistic, human-centered approach that integrates economic development, infrastructure, education, healthcare, land rights, cultural preservation, women's empowerment, and participatory governance. Anthropological

perspectives remain foundational for understanding tribal contexts, offering insights into their social, cultural, and economic realities. Furthermore, globalization and technological advancement have intensified vulnerabilities, often displacing tribals and undermining their livelihoods. Sustainable and inclusive development policies, grounded in meaningful engagement with tribal stakeholders and equitable resource distribution, are essential to strengthen their social capital, preserve cultural identity, and improve overall well-being, ensuring that progress benefits rather than marginalizes these communities.

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