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## Socio-economic status of tribal women of Jharkhand

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### Abstract

Women in a tribal society play a pivotal role in various sphere of social, economic, religious and economic ways of their life. Tribal women enjoy higher status than the non-tribal women. The status of women is measured by using indicators such as education, health status, employment status and household decision making power. They are co-partner with men in decision making at house and outside and enjoy higher status than the non-tribal women. But from the materialistic development point of view, tribal women are still deprived from educational and decent standard of living. The tribal girl and women are considered economic asset and have equal status with their counterparts in their society.

**Methods:** The study is based on the secondary data which is obtained from government documents, books, journals, research articles, and websites.

**Objective:** The main objective of this paper is to study the role and socio-economic status of the tribal women in Jharkhand.

**Findings:** The tribal women play a distinctive role in their tribal society and they face less discrimination than women of non-tribal society. The study revealed that low literacy rate and education, poor health status, lack of employment opportunities, traditional belief and lower political participation, technological backwardness are the main obstacle in the development of tribal women status.

**Keywords:** Tribal, social, status, empowerment, education, political

### Introduction

The Indian population includes different castes, communities and racial groups. A social group is usually identified by a common territory, dialects, cultural- homogeneity, social and political organization. It may include several sub- groups. The term 'Tribe' is derived from the Latin word 'tribes' meaning the 'poor or the masses'. Tribals in India have an important place. They are among the most backward people in the country. These people are known by various names. Riskey, Sobert, Martin and others used the term 'aborigins' for these people. Hutton called them 'Primitive tribes'. Sir Baines used the term 'Hill tribes'. Else where he called them as 'Jungle people' 'Forest tribes' or 'folk'. Article 341 and 342 of the Constitution of India vested the power with the President of India to specify certain groups as scheduled tribes. Article 366 (25) of the Constitution has defined 'Scheduled tribes' as 'such tribes or tribal communities or parts or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be scheduled tribes for the purpose of this constitution.

### Objective

- To study the social and economic status of tribal women in Jharkhand.
- To analyze the educational status of tribal women.
- To find the challenges and problems faced by the tribal women.
- To suggest some measures to improve the status of tribal women.

### Methodology

Descriptive research design has been adopted for this study. The main objective of this research design to describe the status and problems related to socio-economic background and to get new information about the tribal women. The present study has been undertaken based on secondary sources of data. The Secondary data includes published and unpublished document of government departments, research reports, books, Census reports, research papers, journals, newspapers and website, etc.

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## Literature of Review

Many studies have concentrated on the socio-economic status of women in tribal society. The review of literature for the study has been referring to different journals and studies done by individuals to show relevance to the current study.

Mitra (2007) <sup>[6]</sup> has analyzed the status of women among schedule tribes in India with comparison to main stream Hindus, in term of social and cultural practices. The study shows that tribal women in their community has high status and absolutely no gender discrimination in tribal communities.

Bhasin (2007) <sup>[1]</sup> has carried out her study about tribal women in different geographic region i.e. Ladhak, North Eastern Region, Rajasthan and she found that tribal women possess a lot of importance in tribal communities. Tribal communities do not look upon the birth of a girl child as a curse. Dowry system is not there and girl possesses the right to choose her husband, divorce are easy and secured. Women play vital role in economic activities. They take joint decision along with the male counterparts. Women power is not extended to societal or political sphere. Their economic power is not translated in to corresponding community authority. Women supremacy is restricted with household domain and due credit and importance is not given at official level. Women have secondary importance in public affair and community decision making.

## Tribal population in Jharkhand

Jharkhand, the 28<sup>th</sup> State of India was carved out of the

southern part of Bihar State and brought into existence by the Bihar reorganization Act on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2000. The state is famous for its rich mineral resources and forest which occupy more than 29 % of the state's area. According to the 2011 Census total population of country is 1,210,854,477 crores where the share of tribal population is 8.6 per cent. Jharkhand contributes 26.30 per cent of ST population to the total ST population of the country. Among all States/UTs, Jharkhand stands 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> rank in terms of the ST population and the percentage share of the ST population to the total population of the state respectively.

The tribal people are highly concentrated in the district of Ranchi, Lohardaga, Gumla, West Singhbhum, Dumka, and Pakur where more than 40 per cent of tribal population of the states resides. According to Census 2011, there are 32 tribes in Jharkhand, among which Santhals are most numerous accounting for one third of the total tribal population followed by Munda, Oraon, and Ho contributing more than 10 % to the total tribal population. Other tribes of share as Lohra, Kharwar, Bhumij and Kharia have share of less than 3 % each while Mahli, Mal Paharia, Chero and Bedia have share of 1-2 % each. The tribes Karmali, Gond, Chick Baraik, Kisan, Sauria Paharia, Korwa, Kora, Pahaaria, Binjhia, Asur and Birhor constituting less than 1 percent. The most marginalized tribes with less than 0.01 % are Savar, Birjia, Gorait, Baiga, Bathudi, Banjara and Khond (Census 2011). Eight out of 32 tribes of Jharkhand fall under Primitive Tribal Group (PTG). They are Asur, Birhor, Birjia, Korwa, Savar, Paharia, Mal Paharia and Sauria Paharia.

**Table 1:** List of Scheduled tribe in Jharkhand

Sl No.	Name of Tribe	Total population	Literacy rate			Sex ratio	Child sex ratio
			Total	Male	Female		
	All scheduled Tribe	86,45,042	57.1	68.2	46.2	1003	976
1	Asur, Agaria	22,459	46.9	58.0	35.4	958	956
2	Baiga	3,582	36.7	43.3	29.6	958	1104
3	Banjara	487	40.3	55.4	25.6	1012	939
4	Bathudi	3,464	51.2	63.1	39.2	975	866
5	Bedia	1,00,161	58.0	69.0	46.9	995	1023
6	Binjhia	14,404	56.3	68.9	43.4	968	928
7	Birhore	10,726	34.5	41.3	27.4	960	968
8	Birjia	6,276	50.2	61.7	38.4	977	997
9	Chero	95,575	63.6	76.2	50.4	956	947
10	Chick Baraik	54,163	64.5	75.3	53.6	997	960
11	Gond	53,676	59.8	71.0	48.6	994	971
12	Gorait	4,937	62.0	72.6	51.0	968	988
13	Ho	9,28,289	54.0	67.0	41.4	1021	992
14	Karmali	64,154	62.4	73.7	50.3	932	912
15	Kharia, Dhelki Kharia, Dudh Kharia, Hill Kharia	1,96,135	65.9	73.0	58.9	1019	990
16	Kharwar	2,48,974	56.4	68.2	44.2	964	983
17	Khond	221	62.4	76.0	48.4	939	778
18	Kisan, Nagesia	37,265	49.5	60.2	38.5	974	989
19	Kora, Mudi-Kora	32,786	55.5	68.5	46.4	989	955
20	Korwa	35,606	37.9	45.8	29.7	978	1002
21	Lohra	2,16,226	56.2	67.1	45.1	977	962
22	Mahli	1,52,663	54.2	66.0	42.4	992	983
23	Mal- Paharia, Kumarbhag Paharia	1,35,797	39.6	49.1	30.2	1003	997
24	Munda, Patar	12,29,221	62.6	72.9	52.4	1001	973
25	Oraon	17,16,618	67.0	75.9	58.1	1007	967
26	Paharia	25,585	33.1	41.5	24.3	958	988
27	Santal	27,54,723	50.8	62.9	39.0	1009	975
28	Sauria Paharia	46,222	39.7	48.9	30.6	1012	1034
29	Savar	9,688	33.7	43.3	24.0	992	1019
30	Bhumij	2,09,448	56.7	70.4	43.0	996	968
31	Kawar	8,145	64.3	76.9	51.7	995	981
32	kol	53,584	47.7	60.3	34.8	982	1013

Source: Registrar General of India

### **Tribal women and their status**

The term status means position of an individual or a community within a society. Robert Lowie (1920) has suggested four different criteria to determine the status of women in a society: (1) actual treatment, (2) legal status, (3) opportunity for social participation and (4) character and extent of work. Women's status in any society is a significant reflection of the level of social justice in that society. The United Nations (1975) has defined the status of women as – “Conjunction of position a woman occupies as a student, daughter, wife, mother, worker,... of the power and prestige attached to these positions, and the right and duties she is expected to exercise”. Women's status is often described in terms of their *education, level of income, employment, health and fertility* as well as their *role within the family, the community and society*. In tribal communities, the tribal women is important and crucial. Tribal women has important place in their society as they constitute about half of the total population in tribal society. They are very hard worker and work more than 14 hours in family as well as in agricultural field. The family economy, field and environmental management depend on them. Tribal women work as partner of the men in house and agriculture. They are center of the family as all the activities undertaken by them whether social, economic, cultural and religious sphere. Without tribal women participation in all these spheres, the development of tribal community is meaningless. The tribal women are playing significant role, work hard for the livelihood of family, still they live a poor and miserable life. The estimate of poverty made by Planning Commission for the year 1993-94 shows that 54.91% rural and 41.4% urban Scheduled Tribes were still living below the poverty line. Some tribes are engaged in various occupation like hunting shifting cultivation to settled agriculture and rural crafts.

The Dhebar Commission Report (1961) mentions that the tribal women are not drudge or a beast of burden, she is found to be exercising a relatively free and firm hand in all aspects related to her social life than non-tribal societies. Generally, the tribal women in comparison with other castes, enjoy more freedom in various walks of life. Traditional and customary tribal norms are comparatively more liberal to tribal women.

Role of women is not only of importance in social and economic activities, but her role in non- economic activities is equally important. The tribal women works hard and in some cases even more than the men. Bhasin (2007) <sup>[1]</sup> ‘in their world, the tribal women have a freedom, and a self – expression’. The tribal have been equal partners with tribal counterparts in the contribution to household as well as agricultural field. Tribal women do more physical labour in their agricultural farm, house and forest than that of tribal men. They do household activities like cooking, cleaning, collection of fuel and fodder, looking after the child and old members of the family. They also manage to work outside the house as labour in farm as well as in the construction work, brick kiln etc. They are free and independent in marketing of agricultural products. They use to go local market to sale the vegetables, forest produce and handmade products. Tribal women have usually enjoyed a higher social status in their own communities than Indian women in general. Tribes like Khasi, in Mizoram and Meghalaya are matrilineal enjoyed higher status in their community.

The tribal girl and women are considered economic asset and have equal status with their counterparts in their society. But, from materialistic development point of view, tribal women are still deprived from education and decent standard of living. The literacy rate among the tribal's and more so in case of tribal women is quite low and this is also associated with poor nutritional and health status among the tribals.

### **Social Status of Tribal Women**

The tribal women enjoy the right to decide about her marriage. Instead of dowry, there is bride price which indicate a high social status of the tribal women. Tribal women are independent with regard to economic status. Among the tribal society, birth of a girl is not looked down upon because they are considered as economic assets. They participate in all agricultural operation (except ploughing) and work all sectors of indigenous cottage industries, tribal art and production of artifacts. Women in tribal community enjoy lots of freedom before and after marriage. The wife may divorce her husband on the grounds of cruelty, impotency, incompatibility, poverty, infidelity or negligence. Traditionally, the practice of divorce exists and divorce is granted by the Village Panchayat. In case of excess, the wife may even divorce her husband and enter other man's house as per her choice. The tribal women may leave her husband's house with /without intimation to her husband. Although she enjoys full liberty to choose her life partner and also to break the marital bond and marry with another person, for the tribal men it is not possible to cause harm to the modesty of a married women. Severe penalties and punishments are inflicted on man in all such cases. The women thus enjoy an almost equal status with men except in the sphere of rituals.

### **Economic role of tribal women**

Tribal women are contributing highly towards economic development by participating equally with men folk. In tribal society both women and men are the co-partner in life as the support each other in family and farms. In nomadic hunter –gatherer tribes, men do hunting while women collect fruits, edible roots, tubers, firewood and other household necessities. In some tribes, women may also involve in supplementary occupations, like rope-making among the Birhors. Women also cook, wash cloths and utensils, look after the children and manage all household affairs. In the pastoral tribes, looking after the cattle is the exclusive duty of men folk. The bulk of the tribal people in India subsist on agriculture. In tribes, Mundas, Oraons, Santhals, Hos, Kharias, Gonds, etc., women look after harvesting, transplanting, threshing and winnowing. Men are responsible for ploughing, levelling and watching over the crops. In some tribal society ploughing and thatching roof is restricted for women and doing this may call social sanction for them. The tribal women also domesticate livestock like chicken, goats, pigs, pigeon, duck etc. and sale proceeds of the domesticated animals are retained by the themselves and she makes purchases of her own choices for herself and for the family. She also sale the vegetables, fruits and forest product in the weekly local market (Hatia/Hat). When relatively free from household duties and agriculture, women also prepare liquor and *Rice beer* (Handia) and sale for earning.

Generally, in patrilineal tribes, property is transmitted from father to son and women have no right to inherit or own property. In matrilineal societies like the Khasi and the Garo tribes of Meghalaya, property is transmitted from mother to daughter. A widow may enjoy her husband’s property as long as she is alive. A daughter may enjoy the property in the absence of son in the family. But her children will never inherit it and it will ultimately revert to her father’s lineage. In some tribes, women are given a small portion of their father’s land when their husbands divorced them. This arrangement is to ensure them economic protection and the land reverts to the father’s lineage after their death.

**Cultural role of tribal women**

The cultural life of tribal communities is very rich and diversified. Music, dance and song occupy a pivotal place in their culture. Girls are free to participate in social events, dancing and other recreational programme. They have community entertainment with total village participating and the men, women, boys and girls all participate at equal level. They freely sing and dance with each other and joking, laughing goes on freely specially on occasion of marriages and on festivals like Sarhul, Karma, Sohrai, Baha, Holi, Tushu, Jatara, Jitiya, Dashera, etc. Men and women of all ages dance in ecstasy on the rhythm of the drums throughout the night. It is only in the tribal rituals connected with religious practices that the men folk get a priority over the women. Alcoholism among tribals also contributes towards the misery of the women in the house.

**Religious status of tribal women**

In most of the patrilineal tribal society, women do not have an important role in religious activities. They are not allowed to officiate in any of the ceremonies, whether at birth, death or marriage, or in other occasion or festivals. But they greatly contribute in the ceremonies. Women are allotted many responsibilities connected with worship. Women, for instance, clean and decorate the place of worship, prepare and the native drink and in some tribes sing to involve the spirit. Among the Saoras of Odisha, each village has one or two women, engaged themselves in divination and in the spiritual treatment of illness. They play important role in society because, in the absence of doctor, they are called to cure the sick (Sachchidananda 1979).

**Tribal women in political system**

Tribal societies are well organised and have their own developed political and judicial system. Though tribal women play significant role in their society but they are not allowed to hold office in the village council and to participate in the council meeting. They can raise voice in the decision-making process at the family and home but they have no direct say in the matters relating to the community. They can convey their opinions through their husband and other men to the village council. Now a days, changes are occurring in the traditional system within the tribal society too, the tribal women are coming forward to carry the political post in their community as well as national level.

**Educational status of Tribal women**

Education is an important place for upgrading the economic and social condition of the Scheduled Tribes. Education is the most important tool not only for economic development

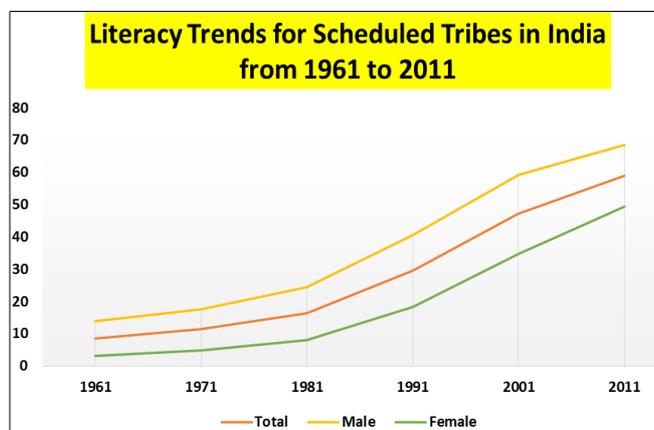
but also for inner strength of the tribal communities which helps them to in face the new challenges of life. Literacy and education are powerful instrument of social and economic development among the backward groups in India. The tribal lag between not only general population and but also the Scheduled Caste population in literacy and education. This disparity is even more remarkable among Scheduled Tribe women, who have the lowest literacy rates in the country (Maharatna, 2005). Education is the single most important means by which individuals and society can improve personal endowments, build capacity levels, overcome barriers, and expand opportunities for a sustained improvement in their well- being. It is not applicable for man but for tribal women also. The scenario of literacy rate and education amongst tribal women are comparatively low needs more attention for development.

Education is a fundamental right that provides of development among tribal groups. According to 2011 Census, the literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes in India is only 58.96 % against the National literacy rate of 74.04 %, which is improving. The trends of literacy of tribes in India from 1961 to 2011 is shown in the table-2.

**Table 2:** Literacy Trends for Scheduled Tribes in India from 1961 to 2011 (in Percent)

Year	Total	Male	Female
1961	8.53	13.83	3.16
1971	11.30	17.63	4.85
1981	16.35	24.52	8.05
1991	29.60	40.65	18.19
2001	47.10	59.17	34.76
2011	58.96	68.53	49.35

**Source:** National Commission for SCs & STs, Fifth Report & Census, 2011.



**Sources:** Census of India. 2011

**Fig 1:** Percentage of Literacy rate trends for Scheduled Tribes in India from 1961 to 2011

The improvement of literacy rate and gap in literacy rate between total population and ST population in India from 1961 to 2011 can be verified from the following table (Table- 2). The rate of ST remains well below the total population, but the gap has narrowed down significantly from 1961 to 1991, though the literacy rate of ST was increased but the gap between total population and ST population had also increased. After that the trends is positive and the gap is narrowing (Table -3 below).

**Table 3:** Illustrates a comparison between the literacy rates of the Total population and the STs, from Census 1961 to Census 2011

Literacy Rate of the Total Population and ST Population						
Category/Census Year	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Total Population	28.3	34.45	43.57	52.21	64.84	72.99
Scheduled Tribes	8.53	11.30	16.35	29.60	47.10	58.96
Gap	19.77	18.15	19.88	22.61	18.28	14.03

Source: Census of India, 2011

In Jharkhand, the overall literacy rate among the STs has increased from 27.5 per cent at 1991 census to 40.7 per cent at 2001, it is much lower than the national level of 47.1 per cent. The overall literacy rate among the STs, Male and female rates (54% and 27%) are also considerably lower than the national level (59.2% and 34.8%). Among the major tribes, Oraon and Kharia have more than half of the population in the age of 7 years and above are literates. Among the total tribal literates, 33.6 per cent are either without any educational level or have attained educational below primary level. The proportion of literates who have

attained education up to primary level and middle are 28.6 percent and 17.7 percent respectively. Persons educated up to matric/secondary/higher secondary constitute 16.5 percent. It implies that every sixth tribal literate is matriculate. 3.5 percent are Graduate and above while non-technical and technical diploma holders constitute a negligible 0.1 per cent only.

The Tribal women being economically poor and socially backward live at a low level of scale of quality of life. Thus, the tribal women often face the problem of food insecurity, malnutrition, lack of access to health care services and education and the victim of domestic violence and rape. Unlike, the other well-organized modern communities, the tribal women tribal and communities are far behind in social networking. Though, tribal women are industrious, they have limited control over resources and economic activities. Therefore, in order to overcome inequality, discrimination and exploitation and to achieve their all-round development in the society.

**Table 4:** Distribution of Literacy Rate of STs in Jharkhand

Literacy rate	All STs (state)	Oraon	Kharia	Munda	Bhumij	Ho	Lohra	Santhal	Kharwar
Persons	40.7	52.5	51.0	47.9	41.5	39.2	38.9	33.4	29.6
Females	27.2	40.8	42.2	34.9	24.0	23.9	25.0	19.5	13.9

Source: Office of the Registrar General, India

Among the total tribal literates, 33.6 per cent are either without any educational level or have attained education below primary level. The proportions of literates who have attained education up to primary level and middle level are 28.6 per cent & 17.7 per cent respectively. Persons educated up to matric/ Secondary / higher secondary constitute 16.5 percent. This implies that every sixth tribal literate is a matriculate. Graduates and above are 3.5 per cent while non-technical & technical diploma holders constitute a negligible 0.1 per cent only.

**Problems and Challenges faced by the tribal women**

- The tribal girls and women face a number of problems and challenges in their life which they need to overcome in order to improve their status in the society.
- The literacy and education level of the tribal women is low. The education system, school curriculum do not create much interest among them
- The tribes are economically poor as they mainly depend on cultivation, hunting, food gathering, pastoral and forest to meet their basic needs.
- The tribal women are engaged in agricultural and non-gainful occupation.
- The wages for women is low as compared to male workers which lowers the economic status.
- Tribal women are not healthy and suffer from malnutrition, anemia, and various disease. The poverty and illiteracy create hurdles to access the medical facilities.
- Mostly tribal residing in the rural, hilly, mountain and interior area. There are lack of transportation and communication facilities which make them to remain isolated.
- In tribal society women do not inherit property rights which also lowers their status in the society.
- Tribal women faces technological challenges as they have inadequate exposure to outside world and continue

to depend on traditional practices, which affect their efficiency and productivity due to lack of skill based education and training and information about new technique of production.

**Suggestions**

- After the detailed discussion and interpretation of socio-economic status of the tribal women some suggestion can be proposed to improve the present situation of the tribal women.
- The government, civil, societies people, NGOs should create awareness among the tribal women about the government programmes among the tribal women.
- The education, health, and employment are the main areas where the government should provide more attention to raise the socio-economic status of the tribal women.
- The government should provide training based on traditional skill to empower women.
- Tribal women are engaged as worker in agriculture, construction, brick clin, house maid, etc. in the unorganised sector, the government should protect their labour rights and also make special laws to prevent the exploitation of the women workers at work place.
- The government should provide a market for their agricultural, forest produce, handicraft and traditional goods.
- The tribal women need to have control over resources like land, livestock, productive ownership and other resources.
- Micro credit programmes should be extended to provide small loans to tribal women for self-employment to generate income for self and for their families.
- The laws should be implemented at work place to protect women from sexual harassment and violence.

**Conclusion**

The present study shows that tribal women status is high when they contribute substantially to primary subsistence activities. Even though they lack control over the material and social resources, their contribution of subsistence economy give them important and irreversible position. It is observed that the tribal women of Jharkhand has larger social and economic power and high status than the other cast women. The tribal women has greater freedom and independence in household and agriculture field. However, there are certain areas where men continue to dominate such as political and religious sphere. With the development programs, economic changes, the tribal women remain traditional in their dress, knowledge, language, culture, tools and resources. Modernization and globalization is brining changes which affect the tribal women status as it changes the mindset and ideology towards women. Education play a significant role to change the status of tribal women through improving their knowledge, skill, awareness about rights and provide wider opportunities in various sector.

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