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Development of scheduled tribes in India: An overview

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Abstract

The development of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India has been a priority for the government since independence. Scheduled Tribes are indigenous communities that have faced historical marginalization and disadvantage. This abstract provides an overview of the initiatives undertaken by the Indian government to promote the development and welfare of Scheduled Tribes. The Indian Constitution incorporates constitutional safeguards, including provisions for the educational and economic welfare of STs. The Tribal Sub-Plan (now the Scheduled Tribes Component) ensures the allocation of funds for tribal development. Government initiatives focus on improving education through special schools, hostels, scholarships, and the establishment of residential schools. Economic development programs aim to enhance livelihoods and reduce poverty among STs.

Land and forest rights have been recognized through the Forest Rights Act, empowering STs to access and manage ancestral lands and resources. Healthcare programs specifically target tribal communities, addressing their unique health challenges. Affirmative action policies promote representation and empower STs in education, employment, and local self-governance.

Keywords: Scheduled tribes, development, communities, education, employment

Introduction

The development and upliftment of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India have been of paramount importance in the government's agenda since the country gained independence. Scheduled Tribes are indigenous communities that have historically faced marginalization, discrimination, and socio-economic disadvantages. Recognizing the need for social justice and inclusive growth, the Indian government has implemented various initiatives and programs to address the specific challenges faced by STs and promote their overall development.

The Constitution of India provides constitutional safeguards and special provisions to protect the interests and rights of Scheduled Tribes. These provisions aim to ensure their educational and economic welfare, preserve their cultural identity, and empower them to participate actively in the nation-building process. Additionally, the government has introduced policies and schemes that focus on improving access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, land and forest rights, and overall socio-economic well-being for the tribal communities.

This overview article provides an insight into the comprehensive approach taken by the Indian government towards the development of Scheduled Tribes. It explores the key initiatives, programs, and constitutional safeguards that have been put in place to uplift and empower these marginalized communities. It also highlights the progress made and the challenges that still persist, emphasizing the ongoing efforts required to ensure inclusive development and the holistic well-being of Scheduled Tribes in India.

ST populations

India is home to a diverse range of populations, including various ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. Among these populations, Scheduled Tribes (STs) constitute a significant segment. STs are indigenous communities recognized and listed under the Constitution of India for special protection and development. As per the 2011 Census of India, the ST population in the country was approximately 104 million, accounting for about 8.6% of the total population.

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The ST population is spread across different states and regions of India, with varying concentrations in different areas. States with significant ST populations include Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and others. However, it's important to note that the ST population is not uniform across states and regions, and the distribution varies based on historical, geographical, and demographic factors.

Scheduled Tribes in India encompass numerous diverse ethnic groups, each with its own distinct culture, language, traditions, and socio-economic characteristics. The STs in India represent a mosaic of communities, such as the Gond, Santhal, Bhil, Oraon, Munda, Kuki, and many more. Each community has its unique cultural heritage, livelihood practices, and social structures.

It's worth mentioning that the ST population is not homogeneous, and there is considerable variation in their socio-economic conditions, access to resources, and development indicators. While efforts have been made by the government to promote their development and well-being, challenges such as poverty, lack of education, inadequate healthcare, land rights issues, and socio-economic disparities persist among ST communities.

Understanding the diverse ST populations in India is crucial for formulating targeted development policies and interventions that address their specific needs and aspirations. It highlights the importance of inclusive growth, social justice, and cultural preservation to ensure the overall development and empowerment of Scheduled Tribes in India.

India constitutional safeguards

India has implemented several constitutional safeguards to protect the rights and interests of various marginalized and disadvantaged groups, including Scheduled Tribes (STs). These safeguards are enshrined in the Constitution of India and aim to ensure their socio-economic development, preserve their culture and identity, and promote their overall well-being. Here are some of the key constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Tribes in India:

- 1. Scheduled Areas:** The Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution designates certain areas with substantial ST populations as Scheduled Areas. These areas have special provisions and protections to safeguard the rights and interests of tribal communities. The administration and governance of Scheduled Areas are carried out according to the provisions mentioned in the Fifth Schedule.
- 2. Tribal Advisory Councils:** In the Scheduled Areas, Tribal Advisory Councils are established to advise and assist the respective state governments on matters pertaining to the welfare and development of STs. These councils ensure the participation of tribal representatives in decision-making processes that affect their communities.
- 3. Prohibition of Discrimination:** The Indian Constitution explicitly prohibits discrimination based on caste, religion, race, sex, or place of birth. This provision protects Scheduled Tribes from discrimination and ensures equal opportunities and treatment in various spheres of life.
- 4. Reservation Policy:** The Constitution provides for reservation of seats in legislatures, both at the national and state levels, for Scheduled Tribes. This ensures

their representation in the political system and facilitates their participation in the decision-making process.

- 5. Protective Measures:** The Constitution includes provisions to protect the rights and interests of Scheduled Tribes. These provisions aim to safeguard tribal lands, prevent their alienation, and protect them from exploitation. The Forest Rights Act (2006) recognizes and grants land and forest rights to tribal communities, empowering them to manage and conserve their resources.
- 6. Cultural and Educational Rights:** The Constitution guarantees the right of Scheduled Tribes to conserve their distinct culture, language, and traditions. It also provides for the establishment of educational institutions specifically for STs and the promotion of their educational and socio-cultural development.
- 7. Special Provisions for Development:** Article 46 of the Constitution directs the government to promote the educational and economic interests of Scheduled Tribes. It emphasizes the need for special care and protection for their social and economic advancement.

These constitutional safeguards reflect the commitment of the Indian government to protect and promote the rights and well-being of Scheduled Tribes. However, it is important to continue implementing and strengthening these safeguards to ensure effective implementation and address the challenges faced by tribal communities in India.

Economic development programs STs

The Indian government has implemented various economic development programs specifically targeting the upliftment and socio-economic progress of Scheduled Tribes (STs). These programs aim to address the historical disadvantages and promote inclusive growth among tribal communities. Here are some key economic development initiatives for STs in India:

- 1. Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) or Scheduled Tribes Component (STC):** The Tribal Sub-Plan, now known as the Scheduled Tribes Component, was introduced in 1974 as a planning strategy to allocate a proportion of the total plan outlay of the central and state governments for tribal development. Under this plan, funds are earmarked for specific development schemes and projects aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of STs.
- 2. Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana:** The Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana is a comprehensive development program launched by the government to cater to the unique needs of tribal communities residing in forested areas. It focuses on infrastructure development, livelihood promotion, skill development, education, and healthcare facilities to ensure the holistic development of tribal regions.
- 3. National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM):** The NRLM is a flagship program that aims to reduce poverty and improve livelihood opportunities for rural communities, including Scheduled Tribes. It provides financial support, skill training, and access to credit and market linkages to STs, empowering them to engage in income-generating activities and entrepreneurial ventures.

4. **Special Central Assistance (SCA) to Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP):** The Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub-Plan is a financial grant provided by the central government to state governments for implementing development projects exclusively for STs. The funds are utilized for activities such as infrastructure development, education, health, and income generation programs.
5. **Microfinance and Self-Help Groups (SHGs):** Microfinance initiatives and the formation of Self-Help Groups have been instrumental in improving the economic status of STs. These programs provide access to financial services, training, and capacity building, enabling STs to start small businesses, save money, and become self-reliant.
6. **Skill Development Programs:** Skill development programs focus on enhancing the employability of STs through vocational training and capacity building. These initiatives provide training in various sectors, including agriculture, handicrafts, tourism, healthcare, and other trades, equipping tribal youth with relevant skills for employment and entrepreneurship.
7. **Marketing and Market Linkages:** Efforts are made to connect ST producers and artisans with larger markets through initiatives such as Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation (TRIFED). TRIFED supports tribal entrepreneurs and promotes the marketing of tribal products, ensuring better remuneration for their produce and strengthening their economic prospects.

These economic development programs play a crucial role in providing STs with opportunities for income generation, skill enhancement, entrepreneurship, and overall economic empowerment. By focusing on their specific needs and addressing historical disparities, these initiatives aim to promote inclusive economic growth and improve the socio-economic conditions of Scheduled Tribes in India.

Land, forest rights of STs

Land rights and forest rights are vital aspects of the development and empowerment of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India. Historically, STs have faced issues related to land alienation and lack of recognition of their traditional rights over forests and resources. To address these challenges, the Indian government has implemented specific laws and provisions to safeguard the land and forest rights of STs.

1. **Forest Rights Act (2006)** ^[3]: The Forest Rights Act (FRA) is a landmark legislation that recognizes and grants certain rights to forest-dwelling communities, including Scheduled Tribes. It provides legal recognition to the traditional rights and occupation of STs over forest lands they have been traditionally inhabiting and dependent on for sustenance. These rights include the right to access and use forest resources for livelihood purposes.
2. **Individual Forest Rights:** The FRA grants individual forest rights to STs, allowing eligible individuals within tribal communities to claim ownership and cultivation rights over specific forestland. These rights enable STs to exercise control over the land, access forest produce, and use it for agriculture, habitation, and other purposes as per their traditional practices.

3. **Community Forest Rights:** The FRA also recognizes the collective rights of STs over community forest resources. It allows tribal communities to protect, conserve, and manage forests collectively. Community Forest Rights empower STs to participate in decision-making related to the use, conservation, and management of community forests, thereby preserving their traditional knowledge and sustainable practices.
4. **Recognition of Traditional Forest Dwellers:** The FRA recognizes the rights of Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers who have been residing in forests before December 13, 2005, but may not have official land titles or ownership documents. It provides them with a legal framework to claim their rights over forestlands and resources.
5. **Implementation and Support Mechanisms:** To facilitate the implementation of the FRA and ensure effective recognition of land and forest rights, the Act mandates the establishment of Forest Rights Committees at the village level. These committees are responsible for receiving and verifying claims, conducting inquiries, and making recommendations for granting rights to eligible STs.

The recognition of land and forest rights for STs is crucial for their socio-economic development, preservation of cultural heritage, and sustainable management of natural resources. These rights provide a legal framework to protect STs' land from encroachment and ensure their access to forest resources for livelihoods and cultural practices. However, challenges remain in the effective implementation of the Forest Rights Act, including the need for awareness, capacity-building, and addressing conflicts between conservation efforts and tribal rights.

STs Healthcare Programs

The Indian government has implemented various healthcare programs specifically targeting the healthcare needs of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in order to address their unique health challenges and improve access to quality healthcare services. These programs aim to ensure the well-being and improve the health outcomes of tribal communities. Here are some key healthcare programs for STs in India:

1. **National Health Mission (NHM):** The National Health Mission is a flagship program that aims to provide accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare services to all, including STs. Under NHM, various initiatives have been launched, such as the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM). These programs focus on strengthening healthcare infrastructure, promoting preventive healthcare, improving maternal and child health, and enhancing healthcare service delivery in tribal areas.
2. **Tribal Health Action Plan (THAP):** The Tribal Health Action Plan is a specific health intervention program designed for tribal communities. It focuses on addressing the health needs and challenges faced by STs. THAP aims to improve access to healthcare facilities, provide essential health services, promote nutrition and immunization, and raise awareness about health and hygiene practices among tribal communities.
3. **Mobile Medical Units (MMUs):** Mobile Medical Units are mobile healthcare facilities that reach remote

and underserved tribal areas to provide essential healthcare services. These units consist of doctors, nurses, and healthcare professionals who visit tribal villages, conduct medical check-ups, provide primary healthcare services, and facilitate referrals for advanced medical treatments, if required.

4. **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY):** Janani Suraksha Yojana is a maternal health program that focuses on reducing maternal and infant mortality rates. Under this scheme, financial assistance is provided to pregnant women from ST communities for prenatal and postnatal care, institutional deliveries, and access to emergency obstetric care. The program aims to promote safe motherhood practices and ensure better health outcomes for both mothers and infants.
5. **National Tribal Health Collaborative (NTHC):** The National Tribal Health Collaborative is an initiative that aims to strengthen the health system and healthcare delivery for tribal communities. It brings together various stakeholders, including government departments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community-based organizations, to collaborate and work towards improving the health status of STs.
6. **Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY):** Ayushman Bharat - PMJAY is a national health insurance scheme that provides financial protection and access to quality healthcare services for economically vulnerable sections of the population, including STs. It covers hospitalization expenses for a wide range of illnesses and procedures, ensuring affordable healthcare for tribal communities.

These healthcare programs for STs aim to bridge the healthcare gap, improve access to healthcare services, address specific health challenges, and promote preventive healthcare practices. They contribute to the overall well-being and improved health outcomes of Scheduled Tribes in India.

STs cultural preservation

The cultural preservation of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India is of paramount importance for maintaining their distinct identities, heritage, and traditional practices. The Indian government, along with various organizations and initiatives, recognizes the significance of preserving and promoting the rich cultural diversity of STs. Here are some key efforts focused on STs' cultural preservation:

1. **Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs):** The government has established Tribal Research Institutes at the state level to conduct research, documentation, and preservation of tribal culture, languages, traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems. These institutes play a crucial role in studying and understanding tribal communities, promoting their cultural heritage, and supporting policy interventions.
2. **Tribal Museums and Cultural Centres:** Tribal museums and cultural centres are set up to showcase the art, artifacts, costumes, tools, and other aspects of tribal culture. These institutions provide a platform for tribal communities to exhibit their rich heritage and educate visitors about their unique traditions. They also contribute to raising awareness and appreciation for tribal cultures among the general public.

3. **Tribal Festivals and Fairs:** The celebration of tribal festivals and fairs is encouraged and supported by the government to promote tribal culture and create opportunities for communities to showcase their traditional music, dance, art, crafts, and cuisine. These festivals provide platforms for tribal communities to come together, share their cultural practices, and keep their traditions alive.
4. **Tribal Development Grants:** The government provides grants to support tribal communities in preserving and promoting their cultural heritage. These grants facilitate the organization of cultural events, performances, workshops, and exhibitions that showcase tribal art, craft, music, dance, and storytelling traditions.
5. **Tribal Language Preservation:** Efforts are made to preserve and revive tribal languages, as they are integral to the cultural identity of STs. Initiatives include the establishment of language academies, the development of educational materials in tribal languages, and the promotion of language learning programs among tribal communities.
6. **Cultural Exchange Programs:** Cultural exchange programs are organized to facilitate interaction between tribal communities and the broader society. These programs provide platforms for sharing cultural practices, fostering understanding, and promoting appreciation for tribal traditions among different communities.
7. **Legal Protection of Cultural Rights:** The Constitution of India safeguards the cultural rights of STs, ensuring their right to conserve and develop their own languages, scripts, and cultures. Legal provisions protect tribal communities from cultural assimilation and provide space for the preservation and promotion of their unique cultural practices.

These efforts collectively contribute to the preservation and promotion of the cultural heritage of Scheduled Tribes in India. They play a crucial role in recognizing, respecting, and preserving the diverse cultural identities of tribal communities, ensuring their legacy is passed on to future generations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the development and preservation of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India require a comprehensive approach that encompasses their economic, social, and cultural well-being. The Indian government has implemented various initiatives and programs to uplift and empower STs, addressing the historical disadvantages and promoting inclusive growth.

Constitutional safeguards have been crucial in protecting the rights and interests of STs. Provisions for Scheduled Areas, Tribal Advisory Councils, and the prohibition of discrimination ensure their socio-economic development and participation in decision-making processes. Reservation policies and affirmative action measures promote representation and empower STs in education, employment, and local governance.

Economic development programs, such as the Tribal Sub-Plan, Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana, and skill development initiatives, focus on improving livelihoods, reducing

poverty, and creating sustainable economic opportunities for tribal communities. Land rights and forest rights provisions, including the Forest Rights Act, recognize and protect STs' traditional rights over land and forest resources, promoting sustainable practices and preserving their cultural connection to the environment.

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