

Political Participation of Tribals in India

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Abstract

Political participation generally denotes the engagement of the people in governmental processes. It encompasses any acts that enable citizens to participate in the governance process. Participants may range from local to national levels and can engage in many forms of engagement, including advising, decision-making, and implementation. Participation is open to all individuals through volunteer or governmental groups. The nation is deeply concerned about the political participation of tribal individuals, who are considered the most marginalized group in society. People-based governance, notwithstanding individuals' apathy towards political participation, seeks to prioritize the populace in decision-making about governance matters. The political participation of tribal groups in India is complex and involves various elements, including electoral representation, grassroots involvement, and engagement in policy development. This study analyzes the opportunities and challenges encountered by tribal communities within the Indian political environment and delineates the key factors affecting tribal political participation. Considering the diverse cultural, social, and economic backgrounds of various communities, tribal political engagement is crucial for the inclusive and democratic operation of Indian democracy. This essay will discuss the political activity of Indian tribals.

Keywords:

Political, Participation, Tribals, Decision Making, Governmental, Tribal Development, Empowerment, Adivasi Communities, Socio-Economic.

Introduction:

Public participation in governmental operations typically signifies political support. It encompasses all techniques via which individuals "engage" in the administration's operation. Participation may vary from a municipal level to a national scope and can manifest in several forms, including implementation, advisement, or direction. Although administrative or deliberate entities may engage, individuals are excluded. The nation is profoundly concerned about the political involvement of tribal individuals, as they are perceived to belong to the lowest socioeconomic level. Despite individuals' disinterest in engaging in governmental activities, people-centered governance seeks to prioritize individuals in decision-making processes related to governance. Success can be perceived as both a concept and a process that requires consistent execution.

In Indian politics, tribal identity has a historical foundation established over decades of coexistence and interaction with predominant socioeconomic groups. Due to colonial governance and ensuing policies that marginalized them, tribal communities forfeited their lands and traditional heritage. In response to historical injustices, numerous Aboriginal communities remain politically aware and pursue redress through political participation. An individual engaged in political activity wields influence on decision-making processes and vigilantly oversees the successful implementation of policies and initiatives. A democratic administration must be as proximate to the populace as possible and provide the public the chance to engage in the decision-making process. Engagement is crucial in a democracy. Decentralization enhances participation by redistributing roles and authority. Tribal political engagement, meanwhile, occupies a diminished and inequitable status in exerting political influence in most democratic nations. Political participation refers to actions that affect legislative choices and processes. Diverse socio-economic situations and the nature of their social structure significantly influence the political conduct of tribal members within the broader society. Engagement in politics fosters equitable and sustainable human development. The objective is to engage individuals comprehensively in political decision-making and execution that affects tribal communities and social development initiatives. Their interests can be adequately represented if numerous tribe roles exist within the political assemblies. Political participation is believed to promote equity, empower native populations, and facilitate their inclusion in the development process. Individuals can express their thoughts and areas of interest through political engagement.

Therefore, it is feasible to achieve the greater good for a bigger populace by enhancing their political engagement. Furthermore, political engagement enables the state to harness the new capabilities and skills of the largest number of individuals.

Political Engagement

The political engagement of tribal tribes in India is a multifaceted subject shaped by historical, social, and economic considerations. The influence of tribal communities in Indian politics has transformed over time. Initially, tribal political participation in Indian democracy was little; however, there is now an increasing consciousness regarding rights and representation. Numerous indigenous individuals and organizations actively participate in local, state, and federal legislatures. This political activism is driven by their ambitions for development, socio-economic advancement, and cultural preservation, which shape their political awareness.

Legal and Constitutional Provisions:

The Indian Constitution provides certain rights and protections, recognizing the unique position of indigenous groups. The Fifth and Sixth Schedules address the autonomy of tribal communities in certain regions and the governance of tribal territories.

1. **Representation:** The Indian Constitution ensures the assured and protected political representation of tribal populations through several provisions in the Parliament, State Legislative Assemblies, and Panchayati Raj Institutions. Both state and federal governments allocate reserved seats to tribal tribes. This arrangement aims to ensure their participation and representation in political processes. Moreover, specific systems for representing tribal interests in municipal government are present in many states.

2. **Women Representation:** Distributing seats to women from tribal communities in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is a crucial strategy for promoting gender equality, social integration, and grassroots political participation, particularly in rural India. This reserve system has diverse implications, encompassing development, the empowerment of marginalized groups, and government.

3. **Obstacles:** Despite these provisions, the participation of tribe members is often impeded by socio-economic disadvantages, a lack of access to resources and education, and their remote location. Furthermore, there may be issues with political representation, as elected officials may not always act in the best interest of their constituents.

4. **Political Organizations:** Numerous entities and organizations have been established to tackle the issues and rights of indigenous communities. These groups aim to tackle challenges associated with the preservation of tribal cultures and languages, land rights, and relocation resulted from development initiatives.

5. **Government Initiatives:** The government has implemented affirmative action programs, development plans, and special funds to enhance the socio-economic status and political participation of tribal populations.

Tribal Identity and Political Engagement

Tribal identities significantly influence the political engagement of tribal populations inside the Indian democratic framework. The historical, economic, and cultural contexts of tribal life affect the extent and kind of political engagement. Comprehending the correlation between tribal identification and political activity may allow us to identify the factors that either facilitate or hinder their participation.

Tribal Groups within the Colonial Political Framework

The tribal culture possesses a lengthy history of autonomy, self-governance, and a unique democratic viewpoint. The egalitarian and communitarian democratic values that informed its construction facilitated living for the indigenous population. This concept was likely one of the primary rationales for a "tribalized" variant of democracy in post-colonial India, advocated by tribal legislators in the Constituent Assembly, like Jaipal Singh and J. J. M. Nichols Roy. The arrival of British colonists in India jeopardized their democracy, autonomy, and administrative frameworks by completely discarding their way of life. Subsequently, other indigenous communities commenced their resistance against the British.

To suppress tribal insurrections and consolidate the population under a singular political authority, the colonial army implemented a confrontational approach through invasion, combat, and pressure. This authoritarian integration of the tribes into the dominant political framework established new political circumstances that were previously unfamiliar to them, thus undermining the tribal practice of democracy. The indigenous groups subsequently integrated into the colonial governmental framework.

Significant Milestones in Tribal Development:

Since the inception of the Plan Era, tribal development has been explicitly incorporated into the nation's Development Agenda to address the distinct needs and challenges encountered by these communities. The following are many key milestones in tribal development:

- In 1951, the program design gave special consideration to Scheduled Tribes.
- The five guiding principles of the tribal development process, known as Panchsheel, were established in 1956.
- Multipurpose Tribal Development Blocks were established in 1961 to expedite the advancement of Scheduled Tribes.
- To ensure the allocation of population-proportionate funds from other developmental sectors for tribal communities, Special Strategies of the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) and Special Central Assistance (SCA) were implemented in 1974.
- Programs aimed at alleviating poverty should ensure that a minimum of 50% of tribal households can transcend it.
- The expansion of infrastructure in tribal regions began in 1985.
- Establishment of two distinct financial entities: the National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (1989) and the Tribal Co-operative Marketing Development Federation (1987).
- Ensure the involvement of PRIs and Gram Sabhas in the grassroots, participatory development of Scheduled Tribes under the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) PESA Act of 1996 and the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution (1993).
- A notable strategic shift from "Welfare" to "Development" and "Empowerment of Tribals" occurred in 1997, followed by the formation of the National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation in 2001 and the establishment of a Ministry of Tribal Affairs in 1999.

Literature Review:

Samal (2001) observes that the unsophisticated and uneducated tribal populace has challenges stemming from the complex administrative framework and the implementation of development initiatives. The administration, serving as the catalyst for social development in numerous

emerging nations, including India, must be cognizant of the conditions and context in which it functions. The report highlights the influence of tribal ethnocentrism, religious beliefs, social conventions and traditions, traditional institutions, language, and communication barriers on the implementation of development projects.

Indian researchers have mostly neglected the examination of political structures and tribal societies. Overall, research on tribal cultures has overlooked anthropological and sociological investigations of political structures (**Jain 1979: 946**). In his influential work, "State Formation and Rajput Myth in Tribal Central India," Surjit Sinha elucidated the dynamics of social class formation, the amalgamation of tribal and state symbols, and the adaptation of egalitarian, clan-based organizations to a centralized, territorially oriented political structure.

In an autonomous India, identity and survival are the primary factors shaping tribal politics. The principal difficulties differ according to the area. Tribal identity and "development" are significant concerns in Central India. Nonetheless, demands for autonomy and opposition to AFSPA are the primary forces shaping politics in Northeast India (**Mishra, 2022**). Tribal identity is essential to Indian politics, as it affects the dynamics of political representation, influence, and participation within the intricate Indian society. Tribal populations, referred to as Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the Indian Constitution, constitute a substantial segment of the population. We recognize these widely dispersed communities for their unique socio-economic conditions, traditions, and languages.

In her article, **Rathi (2015)** observed that the majority of tribes are in densely forested regions characterized by inaccessibility and minimal economic or political importance. She contends that the economic and political circumstances of tribal communities are inadequate; thus, it is imperative to enhance their eco-political conditions.

Pandey and Singh (2011) assert that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 conferred constitutional legitimacy upon panchayats as the third tier of self-governance in India. This legislation specifically sought to rectify the enduring marginalization of impoverished, marginalized, and underrepresented communities (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes).

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Objectives:

- The aim is to gain a comprehensive understanding and analysis of the political participation of Scheduled Tribes in India.
- This study aims to evaluate the socioeconomic status of Scheduled Tribes in India.
- We aim to gain insight into the representation of women in tribal communities within the political sphere, and identify the obstacles preventing them from doing so.

Research Methodology

The current study examines the political engagement of Scheduled Tribes in India. The political leaders' impact on their community's and the population's welfare. The foundational approach for this study is the use of secondary data. The offices of the Department of Panchayat, the Department of Census, and the Election Department of the Government of India are the sources of the secondary data that has been gathered. Furthermore, this study has utilized relevant newspapers, journals, books, articles, and websites related to the subject matter.

Initiatives to Promote Tribal Women's Political Participation:

Legislative and constitutional safeguards significantly support the political activity of tribal women. These regulations aim to guarantee their inclusion and representation in decision-making processes. Banerjee and Dey's (2017) study examines the constitutional provisions and legal structures that safeguard the rights of indigenous women and enhance their political empowerment.

Tribal Communities in Indian Politics

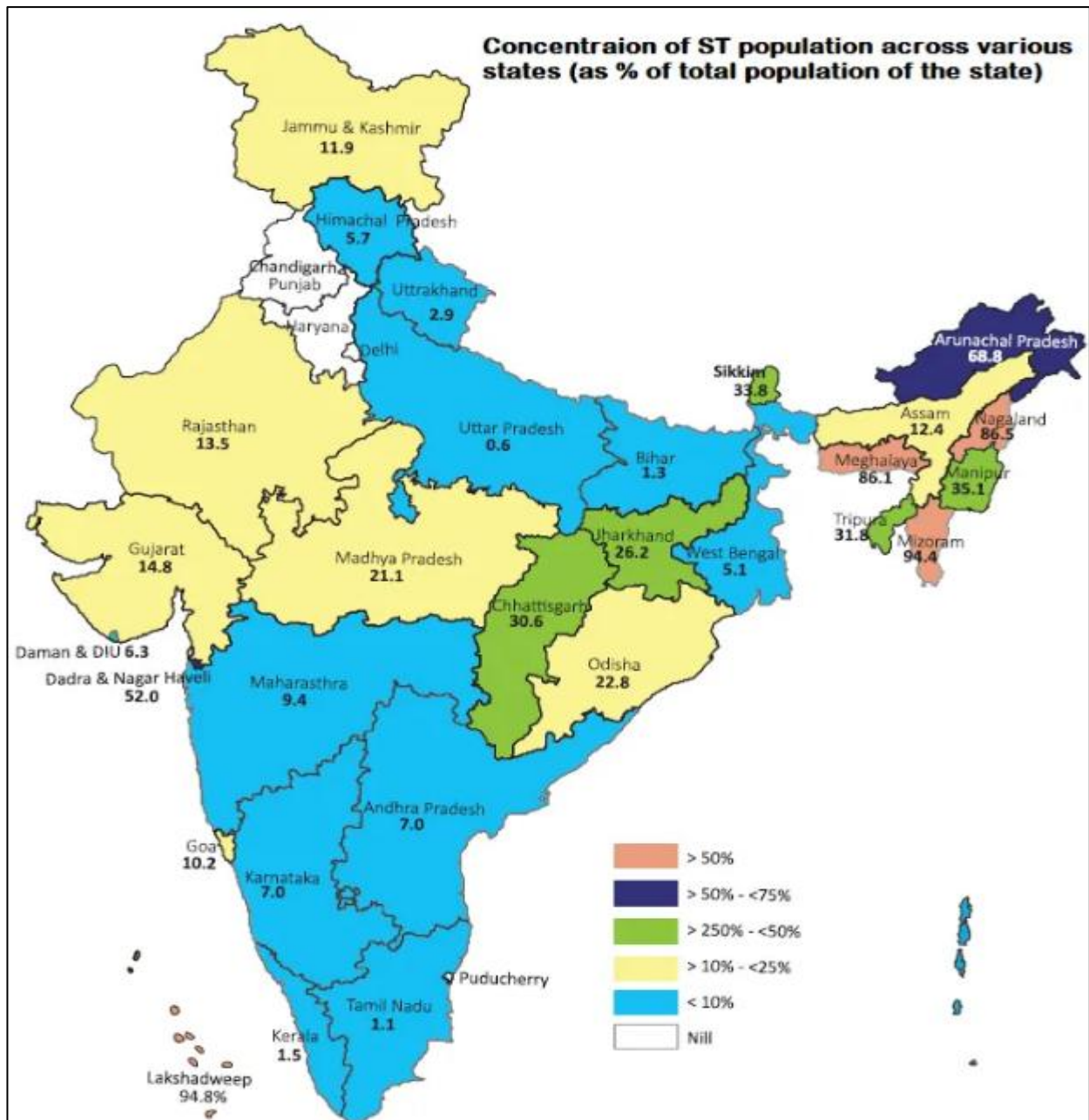
In India, "tribal politics" is not a novel phenomenon. The origins trace back to the colonial era when numerous indigenous individuals began to protest the exploitative actions of the British administration. In independent India, tribal politics focus on two primary issues: identity and survival. The primary issues vary depending on the region. The matters of "development" and tribal identity are essential in Central India. Conversely, resistance to AFSPA and calls for autonomy shape Northeast India's political landscape.

Indian society regards tribal communities as one of its most vulnerable elements. They constitute approximately 8.6% of India's population and around 8% of the global total. Tribal populations

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are predominantly located in the eastern, central, and western areas of India. This belt comprises nine states: Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh.



(Source: Pic credit – Wikipedia)

Conclusion

In summary, Indian tribal communities have a long history of experiencing disenfranchisement and land dispossession. The impact of colonial policies and post-independence development initiatives has been felt by traditional tribal communities on numerous occasions. Both the relevance of cultural factors in tribal political participation and the current political engagement of tribal members are impacted by this historical backdrop. The political ideas and behaviors of tribal societies are often impacted by the unique social structures, established rules, and belief systems that are characteristic of these cultures. The preservation of cultural identity and independence could be one of the reasons behind their political motivations. The degree to which tribal groups participate in politics is significantly influenced by the socioeconomic circumstances in which they live. Tribal communities prioritize land rights, resource access, and economic progress as their primary issues. The paper investigates the opportunities and benefits that decentralized government in India offers for empowering Scheduled Tribes, as well as the process of political inclusion through representation. It examines the concept of political representation as a process and investigates the ways in which it might be utilized to incorporate the Scheduled Tribes and make them more powerful when it comes to matters concerning governance that is decentralized. The theoretical research on the concept of representation is utilized as a foundation for the exploration of the substantive and descriptive representation of Scheduled Tribes in the political arena that is carried out in the paper.

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