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## Constitutional Provisions For Tribes In India: Issues And Challenges

Dr G.Narsimulu

Associate Professor of Public Administration

GDCW (A) BEGUMPET, HYDERABAD (Telangana)

### Abstract:

The indigenous tribal communities, known as Adivasis, are among the oldest inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent. Despite constitutional safeguards, these communities face myriad challenges, including exploitation, forced displacement, social and economic marginalization, and threats to their cultural identity. This paper examines the constitutional provisions related to Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India, explores the critical issues impacting these communities, and proposes measures to enhance their welfare and integration into the national mainstream.

**Keywords:** Constitutional Provisions, Natural Resources, Displacement, Globalization, Immigration, Adivasis, Tribal Rights

### Introduction:

India's tribal communities, collectively referred to as Adivasis, encompass a diverse range of ethnic groups and cultures. They are recognized as the country's original inhabitants, with a population of approximately 104 million, constituting about 8.6% of India's total population. These communities are predominantly found in forested and mountainous regions, where they maintain distinct social, cultural, and linguistic identities. Despite their rich cultural heritage, Adivasis are among India's most marginalized groups, facing socio-economic challenges and systemic exclusion.

Historically, the Indian government has made efforts to protect the rights of tribal communities through various constitutional provisions and policies. However, the rapid pace of development, globalization, and industrialization has often led to the marginalization and exploitation of these communities. This paper explores the constitutional framework for the protection of tribal rights, identifies the key challenges faced by Adivasis, and suggests measures to address these issues.

### **Constitutional Provisions Related to Tribes in India:**

The Indian Constitution provides a robust legal framework to protect the rights and interests of Scheduled Tribes. These provisions aim to ensure social justice, economic welfare, and cultural preservation for tribal communities. Key constitutional provisions include:

**Article 46:** Directs the state to promote the educational and economic interests of SCs and STs and protect them from social injustice and exploitation. This provision underscores the state's commitment to uplifting marginalized groups.

**Article 15(4) and 16(4):** Empower the state to make special provisions for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes, including SCs and STs. This includes reservations in educational institutions and government employment.

**Article 23 and 24:** Prohibit human trafficking, bonded labor, and child labor. These protections are particularly relevant for tribal communities, who are vulnerable to exploitation due to socio-economic disadvantages.

**Article 244:** Governs the administration of Scheduled and Tribal Areas, with the Fifth and Sixth Schedules providing special provisions for the administration and governance of areas with significant tribal populations. The Fifth Schedule covers states such as Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and Chhattisgarh, while the Sixth Schedule pertains to the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram.

**Article 275(1):** Provides for the grant of special funds from the Consolidated Fund of India to meet the costs of development and welfare activities in tribal areas.

**Special Provisions (Articles 371A to 371J):** These articles provide special administrative provisions for states with significant tribal populations, such as Nagaland, Mizoram, and others. They ensure the protection of cultural practices, land rights, and local governance structures.

These constitutional provisions are supplemented by various laws and policies, such as the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), which aim to empower tribal communities and secure their rights over land and resources.

## Challenges Faced by Tribal Communities in India:

Despite these constitutional safeguards, tribal communities face numerous challenges that hinder their socio-economic development and threaten their cultural survival. Key challenges include:

**Exploitation of Natural Resources:** Tribal regions are often rich in natural resources such as minerals, forests, and water bodies. However, the extraction of these resources has frequently led to environmental degradation and the displacement of local communities. Government policies favoring industrialization and economic growth often prioritize resource extraction over the rights and livelihoods of tribal people. This has resulted in significant ecological damage, loss of traditional livelihoods, and violation of tribal land rights.

For example, large-scale mining projects in states like Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh have led to deforestation, soil erosion, and water pollution, adversely affecting the local ecosystem and the health of tribal populations. Moreover, the lack of adequate compensation and rehabilitation for displaced communities exacerbates their socio-economic vulnerability.

**Forced Displacement:** Infrastructure projects such as dams, highways, and urban development often lead to the displacement of tribal communities. The absence of comprehensive rehabilitation policies and inadequate compensation exacerbate the suffering of displaced tribes, who lose not only their homes but also their means of livelihood and cultural ties to the land. The Narmada Dam project, for instance, has led to the displacement of thousands of Adivasi families, who struggle to rebuild their lives in new, often unsuitable environments.

The forced displacement disrupts traditional social structures and economic systems, leading to unemployment, poverty, and social alienation. The inadequacy of government programs in providing sustainable resettlement and alternative livelihood opportunities further compounds these issues.

**Social and Economic Issues:** Tribal communities are among the most economically disadvantaged groups in India. They experience high levels of poverty, indebtedness, and limited access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and clean water. The intrusion of external economic systems and cultures has disrupted traditional tribal economies, leading to a loss of livelihoods and increased dependency on exploitative labor markets.

The transition from a subsistence-based economy to a cash economy has also led to the erosion of traditional knowledge and practices. The lack of adequate infrastructure and services in tribal areas further exacerbates socio-economic disparities, making it difficult for these communities to access essential resources and opportunities for advancement.

**Health and Education Concerns:** Health and education indicators among tribal communities are significantly lower than the national average. Tribal areas often lack adequate healthcare infrastructure, leading to high rates of malnutrition, infant mortality, and prevalence of diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis. The limited

availability of quality healthcare services, combined with cultural barriers and mistrust of modern medicine, further impedes access to necessary care.

In terms of education, tribal regions suffer from high dropout rates, inadequate school facilities, and a shortage of qualified teachers. The curriculum often does not reflect the cultural context and needs of tribal students, leading to a disconnect between education and the lived experiences of tribal children. These challenges contribute to low literacy rates and limited opportunities for higher education and skilled employment.

**Cultural Preservation and Integration:** Tribal communities have rich cultural traditions, languages, and practices that are integral to their identity. However, the pressures of modernization, assimilation policies, and external cultural influences pose significant threats to the preservation of these traditions. The imposition of mainstream cultural norms and values often leads to the erosion of tribal languages, rituals, and social structures.

There is a pressing need to balance the preservation of tribal cultural heritage with integration into the national mainstream. This requires a nuanced approach that respects the autonomy of tribal communities and recognizes the value of their cultural contributions while ensuring their access to the benefits of modernization and development.

### **Suggestions and Measures for Improvement:**

To address the challenges faced by tribal communities and promote their welfare, the following measures are suggested:

**Social and Cultural Preservation:** Efforts should be made to preserve tribal cultural heritage, including traditional practices, crafts, and languages. Government and non-governmental organizations can collaborate to document and promote tribal art forms, festivals, and oral traditions. Sacred sites and cultural spaces should be legally protected from encroachment and destruction.

**Community Empowerment:** Tribal communities should be actively involved in decision-making processes that affect their lives and resources. This includes recognizing and supporting traditional governance systems and ensuring meaningful participation in local and national governance. Programs aimed at capacity building and leadership development can empower tribal leaders and communities to advocate for their rights and interests.

**Land Rights:** Ensuring clear land ownership and addressing land alienation are vital for protecting tribal livelihoods. The implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, should be prioritized to secure the rights of tribal communities over forest land and resources. Legal measures should be enforced to prevent illegal land acquisitions and ensure fair compensation for land acquired for development projects.

**Awareness and Sensitization:** There is a need for increased awareness among government officials, law enforcement agencies, and the general public about the rights and issues faced by tribal communities.

Sensitization programs can help mitigate prejudices and promote understanding and respect for tribal cultures. Educational institutions can incorporate modules on tribal history and culture to foster a more inclusive society.

**Protection of Isolated Tribes:** Isolated and vulnerable tribes require special protection from external interference and exploitation. A strict "hands-off" policy should be maintained to preserve their way of life and prevent the spread of diseases and other harmful influences. Any interactions with isolated tribes should be conducted with caution and respect for their autonomy.

**Legal Protection:** The legal framework protecting tribal rights should be strengthened and effectively implemented. This includes enforcing the provisions of the Forest Rights Act, PESA, and other relevant legislation. Legal aid and awareness programs can help tribal communities understand and exercise their rights.

**Inclusive Development:** Development projects in tribal areas should prioritize the welfare and interests of local communities. This includes ensuring that development plans are inclusive, participatory, and environmentally sustainable. Impact assessments should be conducted to evaluate the social, cultural, and environmental implications of proposed projects.

**Rehabilitation and Compensation:** Tribes affected by development projects must receive fair compensation and proper rehabilitation. This includes providing alternative housing, livelihood opportunities, and access to basic services. Rehabilitation programs should be culturally sensitive and designed in consultation with affected communities.

**Education and Healthcare:** Improving access to quality education and healthcare services in tribal areas is crucial. This includes building infrastructure, providing scholarships and incentives for tribal students, and training healthcare professionals to work in remote areas. Culturally relevant education and health programs can address the specific needs of tribal communities.

**Employment Opportunities:** Skill development and employment initiatives can help reduce dependency on exploitative labor markets and provide sustainable livelihood options. This includes promoting traditional crafts and industries, supporting entrepreneurship, and providing vocational training tailored to the needs and interests of tribal youth.

## **Conclusion:**

The tribal communities of India, despite their rich cultural heritage, continue to face numerous challenges that threaten their well-being and survival. The constitutional provisions and legal frameworks designed to protect their rights must be effectively implemented and strengthened. A comprehensive approach that respects tribal autonomy, preserves cultural heritage, and promotes socio-economic development is essential for integrating these communities into the national mainstream. A concerted effort by the government, civil society, and the broader public is required to ensure that the rights and interests of India's tribal communities are upheld and that they can thrive in a rapidly changing world.

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