



Geographical Distribution of Tribal Populations in India and Disproportionate Impact of Disasters on Tribal Communities

Mr. Arun Kumar¹, Dr Narayan Singh Negi²

¹Research Scholar, Malwanchal University.

²Research Supervisor, Malwanchal University.

ABSTRACT:

Natural disasters pose significant threats to human lives and infrastructure, and their impact can be even more severe in vulnerable populations such as tribal communities. In India, tribal populations inhabit diverse regions prone to various natural hazards, making them particularly susceptible to the adverse consequences of such events. This article aims to explore the knowledge and preparedness levels of tribal populations in India regarding natural disasters. By understanding their existing capacities and identifying gaps, we can develop targeted strategies to enhance their resilience and minimize the risks they face.

Introduction

India is noted for its diverse cultural heritage, which includes a sizable presence of tribal communities. In India, these tribal or indigenous populations are known as "Adivasis," which translates to "original inhabitants" or "first people." They have different cultural practises, languages, and social systems than the rest of the population.

Here are some essential aspects concerning Indian tribal populations:

1. **Population and Distribution:** According to the 2011 Indian Census, the nation has over 700 recognised tribal groupings, accounting for around 8.6% of the total population. They are found in a variety of states and areas, with higher concentrations in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Gujarat.
 2. **Cultural variety:** India's tribal groups are rich in cultural variety. Each tribe has its unique set of customs, rituals, folklore, art forms, and belief systems. Their cultural manifestations are often based in nature, showing their strong relationship with nature.
 3. **Livelihood and Economy:** Many indigenous people have historically depended on subsistence agriculture, hunting, gathering, and forest-based activities for a living. With the passage of time, however, there has been a trend towards other jobs such as wage labour, small-scale business, and participation in many economic sectors.
 4. **Land and Forests:** Tribal groups have a strong connection with their land and forests, which are essential to their social, economic, and cultural identity. However, owing to industrialization, infrastructural development, and forest protection legislation, their access to and rights to these resources have often been a cause of strife and conflict.
 5. **Socioeconomic Challenges:** Poverty, illiteracy, poor healthcare, a lack of basic infrastructure, and marginalisation are among issues that tribal groups in India confront. They often have inadequate access to high-quality education, healthcare, and other developmental opportunities.
 6. **Protective Measures:** In order to remedy the past injustices experienced by tribal people, the Indian government has put in place a number of safeguards. These include constitutional guarantees, the reservation of seats in legislative bodies and educational institutions, and the adoption of particular tribal welfare plans and programmes.
 7. **Traditional Knowledge and Biodiversity Conservation:** Tribal populations have significant traditional knowledge about ecology, medicinal plants, sustainable agricultural practises, and biodiversity conservation. This expertise is being recognised and integrated into mainstream development and conservation projects.
 8. **Social Activism and Advocacy:** Various social organisations, activists, and non-governmental organisations seek to preserve tribal people's rights and interests. They work hard to empower these communities, maintain their cultural legacy, and assure their involvement in decision-making processes.
- It is crucial to highlight that tribal communities' situations and experiences might vary greatly among tribes and areas. While some communities have experienced socioeconomic success, others continue to confront tremendous obstacles and marginalisation.

Natural disasters that often strike indigenous areas

Due to their geographical position, terrain, and environmental variables, tribal areas of India are vulnerable to a variety of natural disasters. The following are some of the most prevalent natural risks that might impact tribal areas in India:

1. Cyclones: Coastal tribal regions in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh are vulnerable to cyclones. These violent storms do major damage to infrastructure, crops, and livelihoods by bringing high winds, torrential rainfall, storm surges, and floods.
2. Floods: Many tribal communities in India are prone to floods, particularly those near rivers and in hilly terrain. Flash floods and riverine floods may occur as a result of monsoon rainfall, deforestation, and inadequate drainage systems. Floods may result in the death of people, the relocation of populations, agricultural damage, and the ruin of infrastructure.
3. Landslides: Landslides are a risk in tribal regions with steep slopes and mountainous terrain, such as the northeastern states. Landslides may be triggered by heavy rainfall, deforestation, and unstable slopes, resulting in the loss of life, destruction of villages, interruption of traffic, and damage to infrastructure.
4. Drought: Drought threatens several tribal communities, notably those in arid or semi-arid regions. Lack of rainfall, protracted dry periods, and insufficient water management systems may lead to water shortages, crop failure, animal losses, and food insecurity, hurting tribal populations' livelihoods.
5. Forest Fires: Tribal areas with dense forests, such as those in central and northeastern India, are subject to forest fires. Natural phenomena such as lightning may start these fires, as can human actions like slash-and-burn agriculture. Forest fires have the potential to damage important ecosystems, animal habitats, and tribal lifestyles that depend on forest resources.
6. Earthquakes: Certain tribal areas, particularly sections of the Himalayan states and northeastern India, are seismically active and prone to earthquakes. These seismic occurrences may inflict severe damage to buildings, infrastructure, and people, resulting in community relocation and interruption of socioeconomic operations.
7. Heatwaves: During the summer months, tribal communities in central India, as well as sections of Rajasthan and Gujarat, often endure significant heatwaves. High temperatures, along with low humidity and a lack of access to cooling facilities, may pose health hazards and result in heat-related diseases, especially among vulnerable groups.

It is vital to remember that the intensity and frequency of these natural disasters might varies among India's tribal areas. To limit the effect of these dangers and safeguard tribal groups' lives and livelihoods, proper disaster preparation, early warning systems, and sustainable land management practises are required.

Disasters have a disproportionate effect on indigenous groups.

Natural catastrophes often have a disproportionate effect on tribal groups in India. This gap is caused by a number of variables, including their geographical location, socioeconomic situations, cultural practises, and restricted access to resources and information. Here are some of the main reasons why catastrophes in India might have a greater effect on tribal communities:

1. Geographic Vulnerability: Tribal populations often live in isolated and environmentally vulnerable places such as woods, highlands, and coastal regions. Natural disasters like as floods, cyclones, and landslides are more common in these places, rendering indigenous groups more susceptible to their effects.
2. Inadequate Infrastructure and Services: Many tribal territories lack basic infrastructure such as well-maintained roads, bridges, and communication networks. This impedes prompt evacuation, search-and-rescue operations, and relief and humanitarian assistance distribution during and after catastrophes.
3. Inadequate Early Warning Systems: Access to early warning systems, which may offer timely information about imminent catastrophes, may be restricted in tribal communities. Language challenges, poor literacy rates, and a lack of knowledge of current technologies and warning systems all make it difficult for them to react effectively.
4. Socioeconomic Marginalisation: Tribal populations are often socioeconomically marginalised, with greater poverty rates and restricted access to healthcare, education, and critical services. This makes them less resilient to tragedies and less capable of dealing with the aftermath.
5. Cultural and Traditional Practises: Natural catastrophes may have a substantial influence on tribal populations' traditional livelihoods and cultural practises, such as agriculture, hunting, gathering, or pastoralism. Disruptions in these practises may result in food shortages, economic loss, and increased vulnerability.
6. little Disaster Preparedness and Awareness: Due to lower levels of education, information asymmetry, and poor outreach programmes, tribal groups may have little understanding of disaster preparedness and response procedures. This limits their capacity to take adequate precautionary measures before calamities hit.

Disputes over land and resources: Tribal groups often confront land and resource issues, which may be worsened by catastrophe aftermath. In the face of calamities, forced migration, loss of customary lands, and encroachment on tribal areas may further marginalise and weaken tribal groups.

To address the disproportionate effect of catastrophes on native populations, a multifaceted strategy is required. This involves boosting disaster preparation and response capacities, fostering sustainable livelihoods, maintaining traditional knowledge, and guaranteeing equal access to resources and services in tribal communities. Involving tribal people in decision-making processes, as well as recognising their distinct needs and views, is also critical for developing resilience and minimising susceptibility to future catastrophes.

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