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Development of Tribal Communities and Government Policies – An Analysis.’

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ABSTRACT:

Indian society is primarily divided into three main segments: the rural community, the urban or city community, and the smallest among them—the tribal community. The tribal community is distinctive compared to the rural and urban populations. As per the 2011 Census, the tribal population constitutes 8.61% of India's total population, while in Maharashtra, this figure stands at 9.35%. India has 705 recognized tribal groups, and Maharashtra has 47 of them.

Tribal communities are significant contributors to India's cultural diversity. However, they remain marginalized socially, economically, and educationally. Their traditional lifestyles, customs, and rights are under threat, making their development a key focus of government policies.

The government has implemented several acts and schemes like the Forest Rights Act, Tribal Sub-Plan, PESA Act, and various initiatives to improve education and healthcare. However, challenges in implementation, corruption, and administrative negligence have hindered their effectiveness.

This research analyzes the key problems faced by the tribal communities, evaluates the usefulness of government policies, and identifies barriers to their implementation. Recommendations have been proposed for holistic development through community participation, education, healthcare, and ensuring their rights. This topic holds importance in the context of social justice, development, and environmental sustainability, and thus, demands serious attention.

Introduction:

Although scholars differ on the evolution of tribal societies, available evidence allows certain conclusions. Globally, Africa has the largest tribal population, followed by India. Tribal communities are an integral part of Indian society. Their cultural diversity, traditions, languages, and lifestyles represent India's rich heritage. Yet, for decades, they have remained marginalized socially, economically, and politically.

Dr. Rivers defines tribal society as a simple social group whose members speak the same dialect and unite for common purposes like war. The government has introduced multiple policies for their development, but their effective implementation remains a major concern. This research paper examines the issues faced by tribal communities and evaluates government policies.

Objectives of the Research:

1. To identify the living conditions and challenges faced by the tribal community.
2. To understand and evaluate the key policies implemented by the government.
3. To discover obstacles in policy implementation.
4. To propose recommendations for the holistic development of tribal communities.

Hypotheses:

Based on the above objectives, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. Lack of education, unemployment, and inadequate healthcare are the main challenges faced by the tribal community.
2. Government policies have had a positive impact, but they are insufficient in scope and implementation.
3. Corruption, administrative apathy, and lack of tribal participation are significant hurdles in implementation.

4. Policies tailored to tribal needs and their proper execution can improve their quality of life.

Review of Related Literature:

In recent times, extensive literature has emerged regarding tribal communities. Globally, India ranks second after South Africa in terms of tribal population. Studies in Marathi, English, and Hindi languages have explored tribal life, including their culture, lifestyle, food habits, clothing, socio-economic and political status, and educational journey.

Key sources for understanding tribal communities include research theses, books, articles, newspapers, magazines, government reports, annual reports of institutions, brochures from the Tribal Development Department, documentaries, and other media.

Research Methodology:

This study is based on secondary data sources such as government reports, academic articles, books and reports from national and international organizations, Marathi encyclopaedias, Wikipedia, and other internet-based sources.

Status of Tribal Communities:

1. Economic Status:

Tribal people rely heavily on traditional occupations like farming. Due to low income, lack of minimum support prices, and dependence on forest resources, their participation in the modern economy is limited. Urban migration leads to wage labour, and events like weddings often require loans, deepening their financial crisis.

2. Educational Status:

- Lack of Access: Inadequate schools, teacher absenteeism, and poor quality education.
- Dropout Rates: Due to poverty and family responsibilities.
- Language Barriers: Gap between native languages and mainstream education.
- Hostel Shortages: Despite initiatives, the number and accessibility of hostels remain insufficient.

3. Health Status:

- Healthcare Shortages: Lack of health centers and specialists.
- Malnutrition & Diseases: Malaria and other infectious diseases prevail.
- Dependence on Traditional Medicine: Many still rely on indigenous practices.

4. Social Status:

- Displacement: Due to infrastructure projects and mining.
- Discrimination: Tribals face exclusion in mainstream society.
- Cultural Loss: Their arts, dance, languages, and traditions are under threat.
- Migration: Large-scale migration for jobs and education.

5. Political Status:

- Political Representation: Despite constitutional provisions, actual representation is often ineffective.
- PESA Act: Although designed for tribal empowerment, awareness remains low, limiting its impact.

6. Legal Rights and Awareness:

- Constitutional Articles 342 and 366 provide definitions and protections for Scheduled Tribes. However, there is widespread ignorance about these rights and laws among tribal communities.

7. Status of Women:

- Gender Discrimination: Tribal women face inequality, especially in education and employment.
- Exploitation: Both external and internal exploitation exists.

Impact of Government Policies:

1. Educational Impact:

- Ashram and Tribal Schools: These schools have expanded educational opportunities.
- Scholarships: Enabled access to higher education for some.

2. Health Initiatives:

- National Health Mission (NHM): Improved availability of primary health services in remote areas.
- Nutrition Programs: Helped reduce malnutrition.

3. Economic and Employment Policies:

- MGNREGA: Provided some financial stability through employment.
- Forest Rights Act (FRA): Granted land rights.

4. Social and Cultural Policies:

- PESA Act: Recognized traditional systems and strengthened local governance.
- Cultural Preservation: Support for arts, crafts, and traditions.

5. Land-Related Policies:

- Land Protection: Laws prevent permanent sale of tribal land to outsiders, ensuring protection.

6. Women Empowerment Policies:

- Reservation for Women: Promoted participation in local governance.
- Educational Support: Special provisions for tribal women.

Positive Impact and Challenges:

Some of the government's economic, political, socio-cultural, educational, health policies have improved the quality of life of the tribals. Employment generation and cultural preservation schemes have given positive results to some extent.

There is no doubt that government policies are having a positive impact on the lives of the tribals, but many challenges have emerged, such as inability to implement policies, implementation errors and inadequacy of policies being the major problems. Similarly, the benefits of the schemes do not reach everyone due to non-formulation of policies according to local needs, non-participation of the tribal community, corruption and obstacles. Their holistic development can be achieved only by linking policies with local needs and increasing the active participation of the tribal community.

Considering the objectives set for the present research article and the hypotheses formulated in accordance with them, it is clear that the hypotheses are proven.

In short, the tribal community is one of the weakest communities in modern India. Sustainable development, balanced policies, and measures that respect their local knowledge will be important to improve their condition.

Conclusion:

The tribal community remains one of the most vulnerable in modern India. Their upliftment requires sustainable development, balanced policies, and respect for their traditional knowledge. The research objectives and hypotheses presented here are validated through the findings.

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