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**STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN ODISHA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Tribals are the indigenous people who live in the lap of the nature, and depend on natural resources for their livelihood constitute the major segment of Indian society. Odisha is the home to 62 distinct tribal groups out of which 13 communities are declared as primitive tribes. The state has the third highest tribal population in the country. As the tribal dominated areas are endowed with rich minerals both national and international organizations are attracted towards these areas thus once peaceful area have turned into battle ground. The life and livelihood of these innocent people is at stake with the impact of Globalised culture. Tribal men are moving to nearby towns or states in search of work. This is state of affairs despite the implementation of many poverty alleviation and rural developments programmes by both the Central and State Governments. Tribal women and children are the worst sufferers.

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**INTRODUCTION**

**Meaning of Tribals**

The definition of a modern society is that it is a society in which people are innocent, truthful, free from corruption, prevalence of good governance, gendered society, egalitarian society, classless, caste-less society, fellow and neighborhood feelings are there. If this true then the tribal society is the most modern society in which all these traditions, customs, culture, belief are there since time immemorial. Thus, when we hear the term 'tribal' immediately it comes to our mind that they are innocent, truthful, simple and hardworking people whom call as aboriginal people with a very backward tradition, culture and customs. Whereas tribal society is the most advanced society where meanness like discrimination on the basis of gender, caste, class and religion is absent, system dowry and corruption which are the root causes of many evils in our society is not there. Instead they have bride price and a matrilineal society. However, the tribes of India constitute an important segment of Indian society, known by various designations and appellations, such as 'Adivasi' etc, they are enlisted in Art 342 of Constitution of India and designated as 'Anusuchita Janajati' (Scheduled Tribe). The tribal people are those who live in the lap of the nature, and depend on natural resources for their livelihood.

Odisha is the home to 62 distinct tribal groups out of which 13 communities are declared as primitive tribes. The state has the third highest tribal population in the country, and the tribals constitute 23% of the total population of the state. The districts of Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, Koraput, Rayagada, Nawarangpur, Malkanagiri and Parts of Balasore, Keonjhar, Sambalpur, Gajapati, Ganjam, Kalahandi and Phulbani are declared as 'Scheduled Areas' under Article 244 (Fifth Schedule) of the Constitution of India. As per 2001 Census, the Scheduled Tribe population of the State of Odisha is 8,145,081 which constitute 22.1 percent of the total population of the State and 9.7 per cent of the total tribal population of the country. Interestingly, the sex ratio among tribals in Odisha is in a better position i.e., 1003. Majority of the Scheduled Tribe population i.e., 94.5 per cent in the State of Odisha live in villages.

Out of 62 Tribes, Khond is the most populous tribe with a population of 1,395,643 constituting 17.1 percent of the total ST population. Mostly the tribals are concentrated in Koraput, Sundargarh and Mayurbhanj regions. Each of these tribal groups has its own indigenous customs which they continue to practice even today. The Odishan tribals not only have a rich but also a diverse cultural heritage of their own. This is evident from their music and dance forms. The tribal economy is by and large based on activities around the jungles and this is their birth right. However, the main sources of livelihood of Odishan tribals are food gathering, hunting and fishing etc. Some of the tribes have agriculture as their main occupation

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while others have adopted cattle breeding, shifting cultivation, artisanship like basket weaving and tool making etc. In the present paper an attempt has been made to discuss the status of tribal women in terms of their demography, Socio-economic status, health, literacy, education, legal and constitutional and employment status in Odisha. Despite constitutional protection and assurance, even after 66 years of independence, their status is found to be lower than not only that of women in the general population but also lower than the women belonging to the Scheduled Caste. Women, who constitute half of the population, play an important socio-economic role towards the nation's development. They are instrumental in building up a new social order of a country.

A United Nations Study in 1975 reveals "they constitute one third of labour force but consume two thirds of the working hours and yet earn only a tenth of the income and own only one percent of world's property (Verma, Shashi Kanta, 1992)." World's Women Report, 1985 further reveals that women grow about half of the world's food but own hardly any land and find it difficult to get a loan; they perform one third of the world's counted labour force, but are concentrated in the lowest paid occupations and earn less than three quarters of wage of men doing similar work and that the desire for girl children has dropped from six to four in just one generation. The report emphasized that because of poorer education, their lack of confidence, their greater work load, and are still under-represented in the decision-making bodies of their countries (Raju ladevi AK, 1987). A UNDP report in 1995 highlights that "The increasing poverty among women has been linked to their unequal situation in the labour market, their treatment under the social system and their status and powers in the family". The above facts pertaining to the status of women indicate that women in many ways and at many levels remained relatively powerless. It is pertinent to discuss these issues in relation to tribal women of Odisha.

### Social Status of Tribal women

The term 'status' connotes a position in a social system and it not only implies a physical position, but also is concerned with a set of cultural values, beliefs and expectations. Today tribal women are amongst the poorest of the poorer, most marginalized and backward people. Even today they have no rights over the forest and cultivating forest lands is considered an offence. In spite of their important contribution in various types of labour, within the tribal community too, women are oppressed by various traditional male chauvinistic practices. This patriarchal oppression manifests itself in various ways among different tribal groups. The position of women in tribal society is unique. From early childhood, by her service to the family a tribal woman, in fact, is a full master of the house.

In social and cultural life of the family, she plays an important role. She enjoys perfect freedom to choose a partner of her own choice. Per marital sexual intimacy is not far bidden among quite a few tribes, provided the rules of avoidance in the choice of mates are not transgressed. Young men and women thus grow up without many inhibitions and repressions to which sophisticated societies are gradually subjected (Bose N.K. 1971). In the aspect of the tribal gender health in Odisha various studies have found that in spite of

considerable expansion of maternal and child health facilities, the prenatal and post-natal care of women is not adequate in the tribal areas of the state. On the basis of available records of indoor and outdoor patients of medical institutions it has been reported that for every four patients who avail services there was only one woman (ORG, Bhubaneswar, 1992). Odisha, known for its proverbial poverty, is home to 38.41% SC and ST population. As per 2011 census, scheduled Tribes who are more backward socially and economically constitute 22.21%. The corresponding all India population is only 7.95 percent. Odisha is next to Madhya Pradesh in concentration of tribal population. Out of 414 principal tribes, the state has 62 ethnic stocks. There are 21 I.T.D.As and 17 Micro Projects covering 12 primitive tribal groups functioning in the State at present for improving the living standard and status of tribals and tribal women.

### Prevalence Economic Status of Tribal Women in Odisha

Out of the total tribal population of 70, 32,214 in Odisha, women constitute 3,519,323 (50.05%) whose contribution to the state's socio-economic development is very vital. As per census data the ST women constitute only 23.36 percent of main workers as against 57.94 percent male main workers. The percentage of female marginal workers is 17.54% as against 1.46% male marginal workers. 59.15% tribal women are engaged as agricultural labourers as against 30.27% of males. 2.49% of tribal women are engaged in household industries as against 1.14% of males. 32.19% of tribal women work as cultivators as against 60.87% tribal women contribute 47.92% to the total man-days utilized for the purpose of collection of minor forest produce. Besides household work, tribal women perform a major part of agricultural operations like breaking clods of earth, weeding, transplanting, harvesting, threshing and winnowing.

Besides, women do most of the work of carrying for the dairy animals and marketing of their products so also perform other small industries work too. So in the domain of socio-economic front, the tribal women play a two-front role—a domestic and economic front. For improving livelihoods of tribals and other vulnerable communities, several schemes have been implemented with active support from a number of external donors. The schemes like Orissa Tribal Empowerment Livelihood Programme (OTELP), Western Orissa rural Livelihood Programme (WORLP), Jeebika, Targeted Rural Initiative for Poverty Termination and Infrastructure (TRIPTI), and improvement of traditional water bodies and tanks through community participation etc. State Government of Odisha has initiated a livelihood programme popularly known as Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihood Programme (OTELP) since 2004-05 in 30 backward blocks of Koraput, Kalahandi, Gajapati, Kandhamala, Malkangiri, Nawrangpur and Rayagada districts of Odisha in phase manner.

This programme has been implemented to increase the living standard of the tribal people of Odisha. The project is being carried out with the help of 23 NGOs. Under this programme 358 Micro Watersheds projects are going on in 746 villages including 56,180 households. The objective of this programme is to provide livelihood support system for the vulnerable section of the society within the community by creating

community based infrastructures like storage structures, drying yard and drinking water at the door step to enhancing and improving the quality of life tribal community in an inclusive approach in Odisha. Tribal female beneficiaries in both phases under OTELP programme are 82720. As per NSS report on incidence of poverty among tribals has reduced from 73.10 in 1999-2000 to 52.09 in 2007-08.

## Demography

### Population

As regard, demographic composition, Scheduled Tribes constitute 23 per cent of the total population. They form a major chunk of disadvantaged groups leading a subhuman life. They represent a majority of voiceless marginalized people living below the poverty line. Therefore, development of Odisha is unthinkable without the concomitant development of tribals of Odisha. As per 2001 Census, the Scheduled Tribe population of the State of Odisha is 81, 45,081 which constitute 22.1 percent of the total population of the State and 9.7 per cent of the total tribal population of the country. Majority of the Scheduled Tribe population i.e., 94.5 per cent in the State of Odisha live in villages. Out of 62 Tribes, Khond is the most populous tribe with a population of 1,395,643 constituting 17.1 percent of the total ST population. Mostly the tribals are concentrated in Koraput, Sundargarh and Mayurbhanj regions.

- Sex Ratio- Interestingly, the sex ratio among tribals in Odisha is in a better position i.e., 1006.
- Health Status of Tribal Women of Odisha

Health is wealth, thus health is the prerequisite for human development. It is futile to think of implementation of other welfare services in the incidence of a poor health condition. This has been substantiated by the definition of World Health Organisation "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmity." Tribals of Odisha inhabit widely varying ecological and geo-climatic conditions i.e., mountains, hills, forests, coastal regions etc., with distinct biological isolates with characteristic cultural and socio-economic background. Tribal groups are homogeneous, culturally firm, have developed strong magico-religious health care system and they wish to survive and live in their own style.

The health status of tribal women of Odisha is very poor though it has been clearly mentioned in Art 21 of the India the state government should ensure health and nutrition to all. Both central government and state government have implemented several health related programme despite that very little difference in the health status of the tribal women could be seen. Still tribal women are suffering from some serious health problem because they are not only staying mostly in hilly forest and mountain areas compounded with multiple problems like illiteracy, ignorance, superstition, poverty, unhygienic way of life away from the mainstream. They are also living in isolation and inaccessible area and scattered throughout the forest which is very difficult to reach them. The tribals are found in majority of the districts of the state's Odisha, thus the problems of tribal women also differ from a particular area to another area owing to their

geographical location, historical background, culture and the processes of social change. Things have changed drastically since 90s with the initiation of various developmental projects like dams, factories, and mines also in the name of industrialization, urbanization and modernization has disturbed the traditional tribal society, which has aggravated since the nineties of the last century in the new economic regime of globalization, liberalization and privatization (Debarajan, 2011). In the process they get displaced from their roots and there is the incident of forced migration to cities within the state and outside state even in search of livelihood.

The health status of tribal women is very poor in comparison to women of other caste and religion. Tribal women lack nutrition, safe drinking water and sanitation which have a direct bearing on their reproductive health causing maternal mortality, fertility rate higher. The common health related problem of tribal women of Odisha suffer from things like sickle cell anemia, malaria, tuberculosis, malnutrition and sexually transmitted diseases etc. The incidents of chronic energy deficiency are high among the primitive tribes of Odisha. (ICMR, 2003) Though health related programme like ICDS and NHRM are functioning yet they are not getting the real benefit of these programmes. Though the government boasts of having welfare schemes and Anganwadi, tribal children are dying in thousands due to malnutrition each year.

### Literacy and Education

Education holds the key to the socio-economic and cultural development of any society. There are substantial social, regional and gender disparities in literacy which is evident from the fact that the tribal female literacy in Odisha continued to remain at the lowest level in comparison to women of other caste and religion. But good thing is that there is an increase from a very low level of 4.76 to 23.23 percent between the period from 1981 to 2001. According to 2001 census the literacy rate of tribal population of Odisha is 37.4 out of which male literacy rate constitutes 51.5 percent where as female tribal literacy is 23.37 percent.

To promote education among tribal government of India and government of Odisha has initiated the Non Formal Education (NFE), District Primary Education program (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The Govt. of Odisha has established special schools like Sevashrams and Kanyashrams for tribal children. There are 11 nos. Ekalabya Model Residential Schools, 8 Higher Secondary Schools, 155 High Schools, 143 Girl's High Schools, 109 Ashram schools, 2 secondary Teachers Training Schools, 142 Residential Sevashrams and 1026 Sevashrams. To popularize education among tribals at the primary level of education 1548 Secondary School Hostels, 1003 Primary school Hostels, 1003 Scheduled Tribe Girl's Hostels have been established in the state of Odisha.

### Crime Against Tribal Women and Laws

Tribal women are not free from atrocities. They are prone to victims of incessant sexual violence within their own community by the community men and are also outsiders within their own community like abuse by contractors, government officials, visitors and the police. Tribal women are

also easy prey to the false promise of jobs, trafficked by criminal gangs and attracted by luring city life and lifestyle in the process get trapped traffickers and sold like commodities with a very meager amount and ruining their lives. Agents are working in the tribal areas day in and day out but least has been done by administration, police, and judiciary. This has become a regular news item both in electronic and print media. This is increasing day by day with the effect of Globalization has even not spare these innocent women. The economic policies of the central and state governments, in keeping with liberalization, privatization and globalization, have opened the gates for imperialist plunder. It is not surprising then that imperialist companies and big capitalists are competing with each other for projects in tribal areas that lead to their displacement and environmental degradation.

### Trafficking

Trafficking of tribal women and girls are rampant. This has become everyday news. Agents are active in the tribal areas because they poor, innocent, lack awareness, illiterate, hard working, committed, trustworthy with little expectation. The greedy agents are luring family members of the tribal women and girl by paying them a very meager amount. This meager amount is a big amount of these victims who became easy prey of the local agents. The agent then sell these women and girls to another agent, this is how chain moves on finally sold like any other commodity, used and exploited to its fullest extent, like nonliving things or even treated very badly like beast. Very few of them are lucky enough to escape.

### Discrimination faced by Tribal Women

The tribal women of Odisha, apart from social prejudices, suffer from lack of education, health services and independent economic activities. Tribals generally discriminated and face atrocity due to the government policies on forests and excise and the manner in which these policy were implemented. Tribal women are discriminated more in cases relating to ownership, possession, cultivation and enjoyment of lands. In land related violence women suffer most, as they are intimidated, beaten and molested. A large number of offences against woman have occurred in the schedule Areas showing once again the extremely vulnerable position of tribal women. Tribal women again are discriminated by State Govt.'s R & R Policy of 2006, which in highly gender insensitive and discriminatory, which provides for serving information pertaining R & R related benefits only to the eldest male members of the family.

Further tribal women are particularly more vulnerable in cases of violence against tribal for indebtedness, in which women are extracted as forced labour against borrowing. Women in schedule areas are more vulnerable to exploitation in matter relating to minimum wages. Thus poverty, illiteracy and ignorance to law make tribal women prone to exploitation and discrimination, even in cases of filing complaints for grievous offences such as rape. Organized crime against tribal women in forced displacement by corporate goes unreported. Despite the enunciation of National Forest Policy Resolution 1988, which provides accessibility to tribals the right to collect fire wood, fodder, minor forest produce and small timber from

forest, there are tensions between the tribals and the Forest Department which erupts in many cases atrocities on the tribals more specifically on tribal women. Tribal women suffer badly and face more discrimination by the forest officials, as they are intrinsically related to forest with a symbiotic relationship.

### Land and tribal women

To understand the value of land rights for rural women, it is important to understand the social character of land and property relations (Whitehead, 1984). Land rights to tribal women, do not just imply control over an object, that is, land. Its meaning is found in social, cultural and economic terms. This could be higher status, security against absolute poverty, the capacity to challenges male oppression and domestic violence and the ability to improve intra-household distribution of resources. It even could give them the access to credit, technology, information and other services, ability to nurture the environment by determining land use priorities, or even a symbolic sense of identity and rootedness. Thus land right to tribal women is an indicator of the power equation between classes but also gendered in any social setting.

Women work all the time, but much of their work remains invisible. In India women are productive workers accounting for one-third of the labour force. Adivasi women have special work-related problems. In past they have been dependent on forest-based occupations and deforestation for industrial uses or development projects have led to growing insecurity of their livelihoods. Amongst the Santhals, women are central economic actors, yet they are denied rights to own and inherit land, right to land and their livelihood security. Globalization is also adding misery in the life of the tribal women Odisha. As such the tribal areas are endowed with rich minerals which attracting big corporate houses and multinational companies to business by encroaching upon tribal land. Thus there is a huge commercialization of tribal agricultural land and there is rush for bid of the tribal land because these business giants have made commoditization of land by raising its price. The worst sufferers are the tribal women because access to land to them is also access to labour. As cultivation is one of the occupation of the poor tribal women when they get displaced by different developmental projects they lose the opportunity to agriculture.

The basic concern for them is how to ensure basic standards of living. Lack of these has forced them to leave their native land in search of daily wages. Though government of India has implemented MGNREGA which ensures 100 days of work to the poor people living below the poverty line during lean period irrespective of caste, religion it has very little impact on tribal women of Odisha. But as per OTELP Annual Outcome Survey 2011-12, the programme has facilitates the security on land tenure to the poor landless families to ensure that all families have a piece of productive land to cultivate. Thus they have implemented land tenure programme in programme villages and as per their report 84 per cent of the tribal have ownership over productive land, whereas ownership in control village is about 73 per cent. The report also shows that rights over the property in both the cases have similar result.

## Governmental initiatives inclusive laws, policies & schemes-efficiency and Implementation

### Constitutional and legal safeguard

The constitution of India provides a number of safeguard measures for protection and promotion of interest of the SCs and ST community. These provision relates to prohibition of restriction of any access to public places (Art-15(2)); reservation of post in Government services for marginalized backward classes (Art-16(4)); abolition of untouchability (Art 17); restriction of traffic in human beings and forced labour (Art. 23), guarantee religion (Art.25) protection of right to admission to educational institutions (Art 29.2); special care for promotion of educational and economic interests of schedule castes and schedule tribes (Art-46); social administrations arrangements and control over schedule areas and schedule Tribes in the State (Art - 244 and scheduled - V & VI); reservation in services (Art-335); Union government direction to state government for welfare of schedule Tribes (Art-339) besides, the protection for civil Rights Act, 1955 and the SC and ST (prevention of atrocities) Act 1989. The minimum wage Act 1948, The Forest Policy Resolution of 1988, are some of the subsequent measure by Govt. to minimize the suffering and exploitation of tribal women. 3

The Forest Right Act 2006, and PESA Act and two progressive Legislation that provides great relief for tribal women from discrimination and exploitation and a step towards empowerment of tribal women. Besides the state Govt. has initiated certain programmes and schemes for upliftment and development of women in seclude areas of the state. Above all, for a rapid and concentrated socio-economic development of tribals the Tribal sub plan approach was adopted in the fifth plan. Odisha is vulnerable to frequent natural calamities such as droughts, floods and cyclones. These calamities also adversely affecting the agriculture and sub-sectors of the economy but also tribal women in particular thus special efforts should made to address these challenges.

It is for the obvious reasons found that there is huge gap in case of regional, social and gender disparities. The worst affected districts are KBK region and Scheduled Tribes are most disadvantaged groups social groups and tribal women are marginalized and victims of gender disparities.

### Gaps in accessibility and implementation

However, despite constitutional provisions and various subsequent enactments to protect and promote the interest of the tribal women they are not completely immune from discrimination, exploitation and suffering. Most of the laws and provisions have stood in statute book for a long time and could not able to significantly improve the status of tribal women in the state. Despite the various development measures implemented by the state, tribal women have lagged behind in every field. While, provisions exist under Bonded Labour Act and Debt Relief Act, tribals women still suffers from exploitation. The Forest Right Act, which ensures rights to tribal women over forest and forest produce, has become highly inaccessible due to brutal variance between policy and practice.

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