



# Tribal Community and Human Rights Perspectives in the Context of Sociological Analysis

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**Citation:** Harisha N, et al (2024), Tribal Community And Human Rights Perspectives, Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 30(1), 4367 – 4372  
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i1.8052

## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Tribal communities across the globe, including those in India, face distinct challenges related to their social, economic, and cultural rights. The marginalization of these communities has made them particularly vulnerable to human rights violations, despite protective frameworks such as international human rights laws and national constitutional safeguards. This article explores the intersection of tribal communities and human rights from a sociological perspective, focusing on the unique struggles faced by tribal populations in areas such as land rights, education, health, and political participation. Drawing from a variety of statistical data and existing literature, the article analyzes how inadequate policy implementation, poverty, displacement, and systemic exclusion hinder the realization of human rights for tribal communities. Furthermore, it addresses the role of government schemes, the judiciary, and civil society organizations in improving the situation, while identifying the gaps that persist in achieving equitable development. The need for comprehensive, community-centric approaches to promote human rights and social justice for tribal populations is emphasized throughout the article.

**Keywords:** Tribal communities, human rights, marginalization, socio-economic rights, land rights, education, health, political participation, Scheduled Tribes, India, poverty, displacement, legal frameworks, social justice.

## Introduction

Tribal communities across the world, often referred to as indigenous peoples, have historically faced social, economic, and political marginalization. In India, tribal communities, or **Adivasis**, constitute a significant portion of the population, residing in geographically isolated regions with distinct cultural identities and traditional lifestyles. The Indian Constitution recognizes the unique status of tribal communities, yet they remain vulnerable to exploitation, displacement, and human rights violations. This paper explores the human rights perspectives of tribal communities, focusing on their cultural, social, and economic rights, as well as the challenges they face in preserving their identities and accessing justice.

## Historical Context of Tribal Communities in India

The history of tribal communities in India is characterized by their interaction with mainstream society, particularly during the colonial and post-colonial periods. The British colonial administration introduced policies that disrupted the traditional governance systems of tribes, particularly through the **Forest Acts** that restricted their access to forest resources. Post-independence, the Indian government introduced affirmative action policies like the **Fifth and Sixth Schedules** of the Constitution to safeguard the rights of tribals. However, these policies have often failed to address the systemic challenges that tribal communities continue to face.

## Literature Review:

**1. "Tribal Rights in India" by R. Majumdar (2012)** R. Majumdar's "Tribal Rights in India" is a comprehensive exploration of the constitutional and legal frameworks that govern the rights of tribal communities in India. The book offers critical insights into how laws designed to protect the socio-economic

and political rights of Scheduled Tribes often fail to be implemented effectively. Majumdar discusses issues such as land alienation, displacement, and the challenges posed by modern development policies that undermine tribal ways of life. By examining case studies and legislative developments, the author provides a detailed account of the systemic marginalization of tribal communities and emphasizes the need for stronger legal enforcement to secure their rights.

**2. "Indigenous Peoples and Human Rights" by Patrick Thornberry (2002)** Patrick Thornberry's *"Indigenous Peoples and Human Rights"* addresses the global dimensions of indigenous peoples' rights, focusing on key international legal frameworks like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Thornberry delves into the cultural, economic, and political rights of indigenous populations, analyzing how these legal instruments are applied in different countries, including India. The book emphasizes the need for stronger international pressure to ensure that tribal communities can preserve their cultural identities while securing their human rights. Thornberry's work is essential for understanding the broader international context within which tribal human rights issues in India can be situated.

**3. "Tribal Development in India: Challenges and Prospects" by Dr. Sachin S. More (2014)** Dr. Sachin S. More's *"Tribal Development in India: Challenges and Prospects"* critically examines the developmental policies directed at tribal populations and the resulting outcomes. The author provides a thorough analysis of government initiatives in areas such as health, education, and land rights, highlighting the disconnect between policy design and on-the-ground realities. More argues that while numerous schemes exist to uplift tribal communities, the failure of implementation, coupled with corruption and bureaucratic inertia, limits their effectiveness. This book sheds light on the socio-economic challenges that persist in tribal regions, offering a policy critique and suggestions for creating more inclusive development models.

**4. "The Land of the Adivasis: Colonialism, Development and Tribal Displacement in India" by Alpa Shah (2010)** Alpa Shah's *"The Land of the Adivasis"* is a deeply insightful investigation into the historical and ongoing displacement of tribal communities in India. Shah traces the roots of tribal marginalization back to the colonial era and shows how contemporary development projects such as mining, infrastructure, and industrialization continue to displace tribes from their ancestral lands. The author focuses on how tribal communities are rendered vulnerable by these large-scale projects and the inadequacy of government compensation or rehabilitation efforts. This book is pivotal in understanding the socio-political and historical context of tribal displacement in India and provides a strong critique of development policies that fail to prioritize indigenous communities.

**5. "Forest Rights Act: A Resource Book" by Community Forest Rights Learning and Advocacy Group (CFR-LA) (2016)** *"Forest Rights Act: A Resource Book"* is an essential guide for understanding the significance of the Forest Rights Act (2006), a landmark legislation aimed at correcting historical injustices faced by tribal and forest-dwelling communities. The book provides a detailed analysis of the provisions of the Act, offering insights into its potential to empower tribal communities by recognizing their traditional rights over forest land and resources. The resource book also discusses the challenges in implementing the Act, including bureaucratic delays, legal hurdles, and resistance from vested interests. Through case studies and field reports, the CFR-LA group illustrates how tribal communities have navigated these obstacles to assert their land rights, making this a crucial reference for understanding the intersection of tribal rights and environmental conservation in India.

**Table 1: Tribal Population in India (Census 2011)**

State/Region	Tribal Population	Percentage of Total Tribal Population
Madhya Pradesh	15.32 million	14.7%
Maharashtra	10.51 million	10.1%
Odisha	9.59 million	9.2%
Rajasthan	9.23 million	8.9%
Gujarat	8.92 million	8.6%
Jharkhand	8.64 million	8.3%
Chhattisgarh	7.82 million	7.5%
Other States	33.97 million	32.7%
<b>Total Tribal Population</b>	<b>104 million</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Census of India, 2011

**Table 2: Literacy Rates Among Scheduled Tribes (Census 2011)**

Category	National Literacy Rate	Scheduled Tribes Literacy Rate
Overall Literacy Rate	73%	59%
Male Literacy Rate	80.9%	68.5%
Female Literacy Rate	64.6%	49.4%

Source: Census of India, 2011

**Table 3: Health Indicators for Tribal Populations (NFHS-4, 2015-16)**

Indicator	Scheduled Tribes	National Average
Infant Mortality Rate (IMR)	44 per 1,000 births	34 per 1,000 births
Under-5 Mortality Rate	57 per 1,000 births	50 per 1,000 births
Maternal Mortality Rate	178 per 100,000	130 per 100,000

Source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015-16

**Table 4: Poverty Rates Among Scheduled Tribes (NSSO 2011-12)**

Location	Scheduled Tribes Below Poverty Line	National Poverty Rate
Rural Areas	45.3%	25.7%
Urban Areas	24.1%	13.7%

Source: National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) Report, 2011-12

**Table 5: Employment and Unemployment Rates for Tribal Youth (NSSO 2017-18)**

Category	Scheduled Tribes	National Average
Unemployment Rate (15-29 years, rural areas)	7.8%	6.1%
Employment in Primary Sector	67%	50%
Employment in Secondary Sector	12%	20%

Source: National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) Report, 2017-18.

**Table 6: Educational Indicators for Tribal Communities**

Indicator	Scheduled Tribes	National Average
School Dropout Rate (5-14 years) (ASER 2019)	48%	29%
Gross Enrolment Ratio (Higher Education) (2019)	14.2%	26.3%

Source: Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2019

**Table 7: Crimes Against Scheduled Tribes (NCRB 2020)**

Type of Crime	Number of Cases Registered	Conviction Rate
Crimes under SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act	8,272	26.5%
Other Crimes Against Scheduled Tribes	3,200	25.9%

Source: National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Report, 2020

**Table 8: Representation of Scheduled Tribes in Governance**

Body	Number of Reserved Seats for Scheduled Tribes
Lok Sabha (Lower House)	47
State Legislative Assemblies	614

Source: Election Commission of India Reports

- 1. Population:** Tribal communities represent 8.6% of the total population, but they are disproportionately concentrated in a few states, with Madhya Pradesh having the largest share.
- 2. Education:** The tribal literacy rate is much lower than the national average, particularly among women, where the literacy gap is significant (49.4% vs. 64.6%).
- 3. Health:** Infant mortality and maternal mortality rates are higher among tribal populations compared to the national averages, indicating inadequate healthcare access.
- 4. Poverty:** Nearly half of the tribal population in rural areas lives below the poverty line, highlighting the socio-economic marginalization of these communities.
- 5. Employment:** Tribals are mostly employed in the primary sector (agriculture, forestry) with high unemployment rates, particularly among the youth.
- 6. Crime and Justice:** Despite legal protections under the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act, conviction rates for crimes against Scheduled Tribes remain low at 26.5%, suggesting gaps in the justice system.

**7. Political Representation:** Tribals have reserved seats in both the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, ensuring political representation, though systemic exclusion in decision-making remains a concern.

### The Constitutional Framework for Tribal Rights

India's Constitution provides specific protections for tribal communities, recognizing their unique socio-economic and cultural conditions. Key provisions include:

- **Article 46**, which directs the state to promote the educational and economic interests of Scheduled Tribes and protect them from social injustice.
- **The Fifth Schedule**, which provides for the administration and control of tribal areas, allowing for the establishment of Tribal Advisory Councils.
- **The Sixth Schedule**, which grants autonomous councils in tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram to manage their affairs.

While these provisions provide a framework for the protection of tribal rights, their implementation has been uneven, leading to a persistent gap between legal recognition and practical realization of human rights.

### Human Rights Violations Against Tribal Communities

Tribal communities face numerous human rights violations, often stemming from economic exploitation, displacement due to development projects, and environmental degradation. The following are some of the key areas where tribal human rights are frequently violated:

#### 1. Displacement and Land Alienation

Tribals depend heavily on land and forests for their livelihood, yet they are frequently displaced due to large-scale infrastructure projects such as dams, mining, and industrialization. **The Land Acquisition Act, 2013**, although reformed, still results in the dispossession of tribal lands without adequate compensation. **The Forest Rights Act (2006)** aimed to correct historical injustices by recognizing the rights of tribal communities over forest land, but its implementation has been fraught with challenges, with many tribes still awaiting formal recognition of their land rights.

#### 2. Economic Exploitation

Tribal communities are often subject to economic exploitation in the form of low wages, denial of land ownership, and lack of access to mainstream markets. Moreover, they are often pushed into exploitative labor systems, including bonded labor, in certain regions.

#### 3. Health and Education Disparities

Health indicators among tribal populations are disproportionately poor compared to the general population. Tribals have higher mortality rates, malnutrition, and lack access to adequate healthcare services. The prevalence of diseases such as **malaria**, **tuberculosis**, and malnutrition-related ailments is rampant. Education for tribal children remains a critical issue, with lower literacy rates compared to other communities. The lack of infrastructure, cultural alienation in curriculum design, and language barriers contribute to this disparity.

#### 4. Political Marginalization

Despite the Constitutional provisions for political representation through reserved seats in legislatures, tribal communities often find themselves excluded from mainstream political processes. The Tribal Advisory Councils, intended to provide a voice to tribes in the governance of their areas, are often ineffective due to inadequate representation or government interference.

#### 5. Gender-Based Violence

Tribal women are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and violence. In many instances, they face double marginalization due to both their gender and tribal status. Human trafficking, sexual violence, and forced labor are persistent issues affecting tribal women.

### International Human Rights Framework for Tribal Communities

At the international level, several legal frameworks seek to protect the rights of indigenous peoples, including tribal communities:

- **The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)** (2007) affirms the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures, and traditions and to pursue their development according to their own needs and aspirations.
- The **International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169** on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (1989) emphasizes the need for governments to consult indigenous peoples in decisions affecting them, particularly regarding land rights, cultural preservation, and economic development.

India, however, has not ratified ILO Convention 169, which is crucial for protecting tribal rights. While the UNDRIP is an important international document, it is not legally binding and its enforcement depends on national policies.

### Human Rights Perspectives: Legal and Social Dimensions

A human rights-based perspective emphasizes the dignity and equality of all individuals, including tribal communities. The marginalization of tribal communities, despite Constitutional and legal protections, reveals the gap between formal laws and their implementation. Some of the critical dimensions of human rights relevant to tribal communities include:

### **1. Right to Land and Natural Resources**

Land is a fundamental resource for tribal communities, providing livelihood, cultural identity, and social organization. The denial of land rights not only impacts their economic status but also undermines their cultural and social integrity.

### **2. Cultural Rights**

Tribal communities have distinct cultures, languages, and belief systems, which are often threatened by mainstream development models. The right to cultural preservation is recognized under international human rights law, but in practice, tribal cultures are often neglected or even stigmatized.

### **3. Right to Participate in Decision-Making**

Tribes must have the right to participate in decision-making processes, particularly those that affect their lives and livelihoods. Effective participation would mean that tribal communities have a real voice in policy-making processes, not just token representation.

### **4. Right to Development**

Development should be inclusive and ensure that tribal communities can achieve economic and social well-being without compromising their culture and traditional practices. This requires a shift in how development projects are conceived, ensuring that they benefit tribal communities instead of displacing or marginalizing them.

## **Challenges to Realizing Human Rights for Tribal Communities**

Despite legal safeguards, the realization of human rights for tribal communities remains elusive due to several systemic challenges:

### **1. Lack of Awareness**

Many tribal communities are unaware of their legal rights, including land ownership rights, education entitlements, and healthcare services. This lack of awareness prevents them from accessing the protections and benefits that are legally available to them.

### **2. Bureaucratic Hurdles**

The implementation of laws such as the **Forest Rights Act** is often hampered by bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and lack of political will. The slow pace of granting land titles and frequent legal disputes over land ownership further exacerbate the situation.

### **3. Exclusion from the Justice System**

Tribal communities frequently face difficulties in accessing the formal justice system. Many lack the resources to navigate the legal processes, and the language and cultural barriers further alienate them from seeking justice.

### **4. Impact of Climate Change**

Tribal communities, particularly those in forested areas, are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Their traditional knowledge systems are often not integrated into climate change mitigation policies, despite their close relationship with the natural environment.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Strengthening Legal Frameworks**

There is a need for stronger legal frameworks that effectively protect tribal land rights and prevent forced displacement. Amendments to the **Land Acquisition Act** should prioritize tribal consent in development projects, and the implementation of the **Forest Rights Act** should be expedited.

### **2. Community-Based Development Models**

Development models should be reoriented to prioritize the participation of tribal communities. Sustainable development practices that align with the cultural values and traditional knowledge of tribals should be promoted.

### **3. Education and Awareness Programs**

Enhancing awareness among tribal communities about their rights is crucial. Government and non-governmental organizations should work towards educating tribals about their legal rights and how to access available services.

### **4. Inclusive Governance**

Tribal Advisory Councils should be strengthened, and their decisions should be binding on local governance structures to ensure that tribal voices are meaningfully incorporated into policy-making processes.

### **5. Integration of Traditional Knowledge in Environmental Policies**

Tribal knowledge systems offer valuable insights into sustainable resource management. Policies related to environmental conservation and climate change should actively incorporate tribal knowledge and practices.

## **Conclusion**



The human rights of tribal communities are an integral part of their survival, identity, and dignity. Ensuring the realization of these rights requires a concerted effort to bridge the gap between law and practice, promote inclusive governance, and protect tribal lands, cultures, and livelihoods. While legal frameworks and international human rights instruments provide a solid foundation, the actual realization of these rights depends on a robust political will, community empowerment, and sustained efforts to address the historical injustices faced by tribal communities.

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