

Research Article**Role on Political Participation of Scheduled Tribes in India****Banoth Elender**

Department of Political Science, Kakatiya University, Warangal, Telangana

Corresponding Author: Banoth Elender**Abstract**

Indigenous people and Tribals (STs) are among the most marginalized groups in politics. The Indian state has been forced to look for alternate ways to guarantee sufficient representation for the STs by implementing a political reservation system as a result of their political marginalization brought on by past injustices. Because it has guaranteed the redistribution of political resources in favor of the marginalized communities, political reservation has thus emerged as their main tool for political empowerment. Against this backdrop, the article explores the location of tribal communities in the colonial political system and the reasons for their disproportionate representation, the nature and dynamics of ST reserved constituency and the effects of political reservation on these communities. Further, the article concludes by suggesting that the political reservation system has brought both hope and despair among the STs. Tribal communities' political participation in India is a complicated and multidimensional phenomenon that includes a range of elements, such as grassroots activism, electoral representation, and policymaking involvement. Given the varied cultural, social, and economic backgrounds of these communities, tribal members' political participation is essential to the inclusive and democratic operation of the Indian polity. The study looks into how tribal political liberation is affected by constitutional provisions like Panchayati Raj institutions, Scheduled Tribes (ST) reservations, and other affirmative action measures. Examines the extent to which these mechanisms have facilitated or hindered the effective participation of tribals in decision making processes at local, state, and national levels. Furthermore, the study reconnoitres into the socioeconomic factors influencing tribal political engagement, including education, economic development, and social awareness. It also reconnoitres the role of traditional tribal leadership structures, cultural values, and community solidarity in shaping political participation patterns.

Keywords: Political Participations, Political representation, Scheduled Tribes.**1. Introduction**

The political participation of tribal communities in India stands at the intersection of historical legacies, constitutional provisions, socio-economic dynamics, and cultural intricacies, contributing to a complex tapestry that shapes the democratic landscape of the nation. This comprehensive analysis seeks to unravel the nuances of tribal political engagement by delving into the multifaceted dimensions that define their taking part in the political process. Historically marginalized and often facing socio-economic challenges, tribal communities have undergone significant transformations since the pre-independence era. As India embarked on its democratic journey, constitutional provisions such as Scheduled Tribes (ST) reservations were

instituted with the intent of rectifying historical injustices and ensuring adequate political representation for these communities.

Understanding the impact and effectiveness of these measures in empowering tribes is paramount to assessing the evolution of their political agency. Pivotal to the analysis is an exploration of the role played by local governance structures, particularly the functioning of Panchayati Raj institutions, in influencing tribal political participation. Examining these grassroots mechanisms provides insights into the efficacy of decentralized decision-making processes and the extent to which they accommodate the unique perspectives of tribal communities. Socio-economic factors, including education, economic development, and social awareness, emerge as crucial determinants shaping the political consciousness of tribal populations. This analysis seeks to unravel the intricate interplay between these variables, offering a nuanced understanding of how they impact tribal political participation at various levels. Within this context, gender dimensions are paramount, as tribal women navigate intersecting challenges in political mobilization. Acknowledging the distinct hurdles faced by tribal women is essential to fostering a panoramic understanding of the barriers and the right set of circumstances for political engagement within these communities. Traditional leadership structures and cultural dynamics play a pivotal role in influencing tribal political mobilization. The preservation of indigenous identity, community solidarity, and adherence to cultural values contribute to the intricate fabric of tribal political participation, warranting an in-depth exploration. However, the path to political empowerment for tribal communities is riddled with challenges. Issues related to land rights, displacement, and socio-economic marginalization continues to impede the full realization of political agency.

By allocating seats in the Lok Sabha (Parliament), State Legislative Assemblies, Panchayats (local bodies), and Municipalities, the Indian Constitution ensures that STs have political representation. The Constitution's Articles 330 and 332 expressly require that seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies be reserved for STs. ST representation in local governance is further improved by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, which guarantee reservations for them at the Panchayat and Municipal levels.

2. Representation of Tribes in the Political System

2.1. Pre-Independence

The several tribal communities with unique cultures, languages, and social structures have existed in India for a long time. The political climate of the Indian subcontinent was significantly and permanently impacted by the interactions between these tribes and colonial powers, particularly the British. Throughout India, they came across many tribal communities, particularly in the central and northeastern areas. The caste-based social structure that was common in many other regions of the nation was frequently different from that of these tribes. As part of their indirect rule policy, they designated some areas as "Tribal Areas" or "Scheduled Areas." To preserve the ethics and independence of tribal communities, these regions were subject to unique regulations. British colonization often led to changes in land ownership and resource management. Tribal communities, who traditionally had communal ownership of land, faced challenges as they introduced concepts of private property. The exploitation of natural resources, such as timber and minerals, by them for economic purposes sometimes had adverse effects on tribal livelihoods. Many tribal communities were geographically isolated and marginalized by the colonial administration. This isolation, intentional or otherwise, led to the preservation of unique tribal cultures but also hindered their integration into the mainstream political and economic systems. Several tribal communities resisted British rule through various movements. The Santhal Rebellion (1855-1856) and the Munda Rebellion (1899-1900) are examples of tribal uprisings against the British in different parts of India. These movements were often responses to the economic exploitation, cultural oppression, and displacement

caused by colonial policies. The British administration's efforts to assimilate tribal communities into the mainstream often involved undermining traditional cultural practices and imposing Western values. Christian missionaries played a role in converting some tribal groups, leading to changes in religious beliefs and practices.

2.2. Post-Independence

Tribal issues were still addressed by the government after India attained independence in 1947. Tribal rights are protected under the Indian Constitution, and the Fifth Schedule names some regions as Scheduled Areas with unique governance requirements. Numerous tribal development initiatives, with an emphasis on socioeconomic development, healthcare, and education, were started after independence in an effort to improve these communities. Tribes' involvement in post-British political systems differs depending on the nation and area. In many post-colonial nations, including India, Africa, and parts of Southeast Asia, tribes or indigenous communities have faced both opportunities and challenges in their engagement with the political landscape. In some post-colonial countries, Endeavour has been made to include tribal representation in political institutions. This can involve reserved seats in legislatures or specific provisions for tribal participation in decision-making bodies. For example, in India, the Scheduled Tribes (STs) have reserved seats in parliamentary and state legislative assemblies to ensure their representation. Some post-colonial countries have created autonomous regions or special administrative units to protect the cultural, social, and political rights of tribal communities. These regions may have a certain degree of self-governance and control over local resources. Examples include the Sixth Schedule areas in India and autonomous regions in countries like Myanmar and Nigeria. Land rights are crucial for many tribal communities, and post-colonial governments have implemented policies to address historical injustices related to land dispossession. Land reforms and recognition of customary land rights aim to empower tribes and protect their traditional ways of life. Tribal cultures and languages must be preserved, according to post-colonial governments. Tribal festivals are observed, education in the local languages is encouraged, and cultural institutions are supported. The integration of traditional knowledge with formal education systems is a common focus of initiatives. There are still issues in spite of initiatives to encourage tribal involvement. Tribes may experience unequal representation in decision-making processes, limited access to healthcare and education, and economic disparities. Tribal communities and the federal government occasionally clash over matters such as development initiatives, conservation, and resource exploitation.

3. Demarcating the Reserved Constituency in India

Understanding the historical background, social dynamics, and justification for the reservation system are all important when defining reserved constituencies in India, particularly from an anthropological standpoint. In India, seats designated for particular social groups, like Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), are known as reserved constituencies. The reservation system is a constitutional measure designed to address the marginalization, discrimination, and historical social injustices that these groups have experienced. Recognize the background of social hierarchy and prejudice in India, especially with regard to Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes. Analyze how these communities have been historically marginalized and excluded from mainstream socio-political processes. Recognize the immense cultural diversity within Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Different groups have distinct cultural practices, languages, and traditions. Anthropologically, explore the impact of reservations on preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of these communities. Examine the role of political representation in shaping the identity of these communities. Analyze how reservations in political seats contribute to empowering marginalized groups and providing them with a platform to assert their rights and interests. Examine the social dynamics in reserved constituencies, taking into account elements like caste

relations, community ties, and the function of conventional institutions. Examine whether reservations have promoted social integration and dismantled caste-based prejudices, resulting in significant social change. Examine the issues and objections to the reservation system raised by members of the reserved communities as well as by the general public. Determine anthropologically if reservations have produced the desired results or if there are unforeseen repercussions. Analyze the impact of reservation policies on education, employment, and overall socio-economic development within reserved constituencies. Explore whether the reservation system has contributed to upliftment and empowerment or if additional policies are needed. Consider intersectionality within reserved constituencies by examining how factors such as gender, class, and regional variations intersect with caste and tribal identities. An anthropological perspective on demarcating reserved constituencies involves a nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural fabric of India, the impact of historical injustices, and the effectiveness of constitutional measures in addressing these issues. It requires a holistic analysis that goes beyond just electoral boundaries and delves into the lived experiences of the communities involved.

A key component of guaranteeing political representation for historically underrepresented groups in India, such as Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), is the establishment of reserved constituencies. A constitutional clause that aims to advance social justice and inclusivity reserves seats for these communities in legislative bodies. Articles 330 and 332 of the Indian Constitution stipulate that seats in the State Legislative Assemblies and the Lok Sabha, the lower house of Parliament, are reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. An independent Delimitation Commission is responsible for demarcating or delineating constituencies. The Delimitation Commission is constituted by the President of India, and its primary responsibility is to redraw the boundaries of parliamentary and assembly constituencies to ensure fair representation. The delimitation process is not a continuous or regular exercise. It takes place periodically to readjust the boundaries of constituencies based on population changes, and it is typically conducted before the first general elections after the census. One of the main criteria for delimitation is population equality. The aim is to have approximately the same number of voters in each constituency, which involves adjusting boundaries based on population changes over time. While conducting the delimitation exercise, the Delimitation Commission ensures the reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their population in the state or union territory.

In democratic politics, tribal communities encounter obstacles such as inadequate representation and a lack of political options for ST candidates. A response to these issues, made possible by legal provisions, may be seen in the observation of candidates running in unreserved constituencies outside of their states. Although the causes of this inefficiency are not stated clearly, they may be attributed to a number of things, including a lack of funding, poor representation, or other structural problems. Particularly when running from reserved constituencies outside of their states, ST candidates have few political options. The reservation system designates certain constituencies for candidates from specific communities, but geographical restrictions may limit the options for ST candidates. There's a shift observed where ST candidates are contesting elections in unreserved constituencies outside their states. This shift is made possible by Section 33 of the Representation of People Act, 1951, allowing candidates to contest from two parliamentary constituencies one in their state and another outside the state. This implies that the Scheduled Tribe status is limited to a particular state, and individuals may not claim this status outside their home states.

Cultural differences may make it difficult for tribal representatives to navigate mainstream political structures. Political representatives and the communities they are meant to represent may become estranged as a result of this. It's possible that government regulations aren't always

inclusive or designed to meet the particular requirements of tribal communities. Tribal populations may become frustrated and feel neglected as a result. Conflicts may arise in some tribal areas, frequently as a result of resource disputes or old grievances. Violence in these places can impede development initiatives and fuel hopelessness. It's possible for tribal communities to feel left out of decision-making procedures that directly affect their daily lives. This lack of participation can result in a sense of powerlessness and disillusionment. Addressing the despair of tribal communities requires a comprehensive approach that includes equitable policies, improved representation, cultural sensitivity, and efforts to address historical injustices. Collaborative efforts involving government, civil society, and tribal leaders are crucial to creating positive change and improving the well-being of tribal populations within the democratic framework.

4. Role of Political Reservation

In order to guarantee their proper representation and reallocate political resources in their favor, political reservation has emerged as a key tool for ST empowerment. According to studies, reservations may eventually improve ST communities' access to public goods and welfare programs by fostering the rise of political elites within those communities. When a constituency's ST population is moderate in size and the community is more uniform, reservations may be more successful.

5. Impact on Development and Governance

Addressing tribal issues in development planning and bringing their concerns to the forefront of the agenda depend heavily on the effective representation of STs in local governance, especially in Panchayats. Research indicates that ST leaders in local government have the ability to successfully impact choices and represent the interests of their communities, which enhances access to welfare and public goods.

6. Gender and Political Participation

The Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC) states that although reservations have allowed tribal women to participate in Panchayats, societal norms and male-dominated traditional administration make it difficult for them to do so effectively. To increase tribal women's political participation and decision-making authority, it is imperative to address the socioeconomic and educational obstacles they face.

7. Conclusion

Traditional tribal lifestyles have frequently been disrupted by the effects of colonial policies and post-independence development initiatives. Tribals' current political participation and the importance of cultural elements in tribal political participation are influenced by this historical context. Tribal communities frequently have distinctive belief systems, customary laws, and social structures that influence their political beliefs and behavior. Their political choices may be motivated by the desire to maintain cultural identity and autonomy. Tribal populations' socioeconomic circumstances have a significant impact on their political participation. Tribal concerns are centered on issues pertaining to economic development, resource access, and land rights. Anthropologists may highlight how these factors influence their voting patterns, participation in grassroots movements, and engagement with mainstream political processes. The reservation policies implemented to address historical injustices have both positive and negative implications. In addition to examining issues like tokenism and the need for more significant structural changes, anthropologists may examine how tribal representatives have been empowered by reserved seats in legislative bodies. Participation in tribal politics is frequently associated with a feeling of representation and identity. We might contend that political movements among tribal people are about more than just solving current problems; they are also about claiming their unique identities and opposing popular narratives that might marginalize or stereotype them. We can conclude by discussing the challenges faced by tribal

communities in actively participating in the political process, including issues like illiteracy, lack of awareness, and inadequate representation. Simultaneously, they might highlight opportunities for empowering tribals through education, awareness programs, and inclusive policies.

References:

1. Bajpai, R. (2015). *Debating difference: Group rights and liberal democracy in India*. Oxford University press, New Delhi.
2. Ghosh, S. (1987). *Law enforcement in tribal areas*. APH Publishing House. Government of India.
3. India, G. o. (2008). *Delimitation of parliamentary and assembly constituencies order, 2008*. New Delhi. New Delhi: Government of India.
4. Kalinga, k. k. (2016). *Globalization and Climate Change: It's Impact on Tribal lives and Livelihoods*. *International Journal of Research in Economics and Social Science*, volume 6 Issue 2.
5. Mohanty. (2011). *Impact of Development Project on the Displaced Tribals : A Case Study of a Development Project in Eastern India*. *Orissa Review . Jstore*, volume 39 (3469).
6. Raj, B. (1935). *Government of India Act*, Retrieved on 11 September 2018. New Delhi: Government of India

Citation: Banoth Elender 2025. "Role on Political Participation of Scheduled Tribes in India". *International Journal of Academic Research*, 12(2): 87-92

Copyright: ©2025 Banoth Elender. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.