

# Empowerment And Well-Being of Tribal Women in Rural Tripura: A Comprehensive Assessment

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## Abstract

The aim of this research is to illustrate the prevailing conditions faced by tribal women residing in the rural areas of Tripura. Every individual, irrespective of gender, possesses inherent rights within society. The empowerment of women can be achieved through the avenue of education. India, characterized by its vast expanse and diverse populace, accommodates a multitude of ethnic groups, one among them being the tribal community. A retrospective view of India's recent history unveils the unfortunate disparity that the tribal population has endured within society. Propelling forward as a cohesive society necessitates the imperative task of educating these indigenous communities. The primary objective of this study is to meticulously assess the status of tribal women in the rural environs of Tripura. Furthermore, this paper will delve into an exploration of the living conditions and social standing of tribal women dwelling in the rural landscapes of Tripura.

**Keywords:** Tribal women, societal status, education, rural areas, Tripura, tribal community.

## Introduction

Tripura, a compact state nestled in North East India, is home to a population of 3,671,032 people as per the 2011 census. Notably, this populace includes 0.83 million indigenous people who reside in the state's interior hills. The literacy landscape paints an encouraging picture with an overall literacy rate of 87.75% (92.18% for males and 83.15% for females) according to the 2011 census. However, among the indigenous population (totaling 993,426), the literacy rate is comparatively lower, standing at 63%, with a significant portion being proficient in Kokborok, their indigenous language. The challenges faced by tribal communities, especially in terms of literacy, stem from multifaceted factors, primarily rooted in economic disparities and limited access to education. Within the tribal demography, two economic categories emerge: settled cultivators and shifting (Jhum) cultivators. In recent decades, a commendable shift has been observed in their economic endeavors, marked by an increasing number of educated individuals seeking employment in industries and the public sector. The significance of women's education has gained prominence within this context. In Tripura's tribal society, women have assumed pivotal roles of socio-economic importance. These women, much like their counterparts in other hill regions, grapple with physically and socially demanding lives. Despite the infusion of new ideas and norms, the tribal society of Tripura has yet to exhibit a pronounced gender preference, indicating a relative balance between male and female children.

This study embarks on a journey to dissect the impact of modernization and development on Tripura's tribal society, particularly focusing on tribal women. The objective is to comprehensively analyze the evolving socio-economic status and occupational dynamics of these women. Data spanning the Census Reports of 1991, 2001, and 2011 spotlight a shift from the traditional Jhum economy to engagement in diverse sectors such as government service, industry, trade, and transportation. This transformation is attributed to three pivotal factors: literacy, reservation policies, and cultivable variables. Notably, the literacy rate among Tripura's tribal population surged from 27.4% in 1991 to 56.21% in 2011. It is worth underscoring that the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) emphasizes the importance of women's studies and tribal studies as crucial domains of social science research. Recognizing the significance of region-specific and area-specific investigations, the study advocates for an inclusive approach to human development, especially in the context of the North-Eastern Region. A remarkable feature of Tripura's tribal population is their predominantly rural existence, with 98.35% of the tribal populace residing in rural areas as per the 1991 Census. Intriguingly, economic participation among tribal women in rural areas outpaces their urban counterparts. This shift in the occupational landscape is attributed to rising literacy rates and changing economic pursuits, particularly notable among tribal women who now actively participate in education, occupation, industry, trade, commerce, transport, and communication. Moreover, a discernible trend is observed in the increasing number of tribal individuals, including women, venturing into government employment. A third influential factor in this evolution is the transition from traditional crop cultivation to rubber plantations. This shift has significantly boosted the economic prospects of tribal families owning substantial land holdings. It is vital to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of women to their families' welfare, often through their labor in household activities. This study endeavors to shed light on these intricate transformations, not only providing insights into the lives of tribal women in Tripura but also contributing to the broader understanding of socio-economic changes and women's empowerment in tribal societies.

### **Objectives of the present study:**

1. To conduct an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic status of tribal women in the state of Tripura.
2. To assess and comprehend the extent of development achieved by tribal women within the context of socio-economic changes in Tripura.

### **Methodology of the Study**

The methodology employed in this study encompassed a comprehensive collection of data from diverse sources, including books, scholarly articles, journals, reports, and reputable websites. Official statistics and pertinent information were garnered from esteemed institutions and organizations such as the Tribal Welfare Department and the Social Welfare Department, both under the Government of Tripura. Additionally, insights were drawn from the wealth of knowledge available at the Tribal Research Institute, an authoritative body operating under the aegis of the Government of Tripura.

For the acquisition of primary data, the approach of participant observation was adopted. This method facilitated an immersive and firsthand understanding of the nuances inherent in the socio-economic fabric of tribal communities. Substantive aspects relating to the socio-economic status of tribal women and the scope of their engagement in various occupations were gleaned from official records. These records were subject to expert estimation and analysis by qualified officials, lending credibility to the findings. By harnessing a combination of secondary and primary data, this study aims to provide a

comprehensive and accurate portrayal of the socio-economic landscape and the dynamic roles played by tribal women in the evolving milieu of Tripura.

**Intrepretation of Data**

Table-1: Constrained Mobility of Tribal Women in Relation to Labor, Agriculture, and Literacy across 1981, 1991, 2001, and 2011

Year	Characteristics	Women of Tripura	Tribal Women	Non-tribal Women
1981	Women Labourers	28, 634, (2.8%)	20,268(7.8%)	8,048(1.13%)
1991	Women Cultivators	34,174(3.4%)	30,408(10.6%)	3,766(0.52%)
2001	Women other workers	24,299(2.43%)	3,172(1.11%)	21,107(2.96%)
2011	Women literacy	3, 19,398(32%)	35,126(12.27%)	2, 84,272(39.93%)

In the year 1981, the literacy rate among tribal women stood at a mere 12.27 percent, in stark contrast to the 39.93 percent literacy rate among non-tribal women. Furthermore, tribal women comprised a significantly higher proportion in the categories of unskilled laborers and cultivators, accounting for 7.8 percent and 10.6 percent, respectively. Conversely, the percentage of tribal women engaged in occupations categorized as "other workers" – roles that often contribute to social advancement – was notably lower at 1.11 percent compared to non-tribal women. These statistics, as presented in the table, distinctly highlight the limited social mobility experienced by tribal women.

Table-2: Percentage of workers to total Tribal Male and total Female Population in 1981, 1991, 2001 Tripura

Year	Total		Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1981	54.13	27.86	54.27	28.06	44.69	10.96
1991	45.93	25.32	45.89	25.45	47.5	16.47
2001	40.87	20.52	40.97	20.51	40.17	10.56

It is evident from the table that the work participation rate of tribal women is not very much lower.

Table-3: proportion (percentage) of workers among general males and females, Tribal males and females and females and Non –Tribal males and females in 1981, 1991, 2001 Tripura

Year	General		Tribal		Non-Tribal	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1981	50.71	12.77	54.13	27.85	49.36	6.71

1991	47.56	13.76	45.92	25.32	47.81	8.5
2001	45.59	10.67	40.89	20.43	40.85	5.7

The table indicates that in the tribal society the number of working women may be less that of the men but in this respect they are better off than their counter parts in the non-tribal society of the state among which women are economically more dependent on men.

Table-4: Proportion (percentage) of workers among Tribal Females and Non-Tribal Females in 1981, 1991, 2001 Tripura.

Year	Total		Rural		Urban	
	Tribal	Non-Tribal	Tribal	Non-Tribal	Tribal	Non-Tribal
1981	27.86	6.71	28.06	6.37	10.96	7.81
1991	25.32	8.5	25.45	8.35	16.47	9.03
2001	23.39	10.8	23.56	10.39	22.53	11.08

This table clearly illustrates that tribal women in Tripura exhibit greater economic participation compared to their non-tribal counterparts. Presently, it remains evident that the participation rate of non-tribal women continues to lag behind that of tribal women

**Findings of the study:**

1. Tribal women in general are much more vulnerable to such socialization.
2. Economic participation of tribal women is much higher than that of their non-tribal counterparts in Tripura.
3. In tribal society the number of working women may be less that of the men.
4. Literacy of tribal women was only 12.27 percent as against 39.93 percent of non tribal women literacy.
5. The percentage of tribal women as unskilled labourers and cultivators are on higher side (7.8 and 10.6 respectively).
6. Tribal women have adjusted themselves to live a traditional life style in the local environment.
7. The tribal's of Tripura are almost rural people.
8. According to 1991 Census 98.35 percent of the total tribal population of the state live in rural areas.

**Conclusion**

The transformations observed in the economic and socio-cultural landscapes of Tripura's tribal communities underscore a distinct duality in the roles and lifestyles of both men and women, applicable broadly to tribes in general and specifically to urban and rural tribal women. The advantages brought forth by government-led developmental initiatives have primarily favored the educated urban tribal elite. Regrettably, the implementation of programs focused on the welfare of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) often lacks diligence and effective oversight, resulting in diverted resources and unrealized scheme objectives. Consequently, the conditions of these communities continue to remain distressing. To address these issues, it is imperative to introduce corrective measures. The SC and ST communities are still grappling with fundamental necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. Moreover, they now require enhanced opportunities to live with dignity and self-respect in the

contemporary 21st century. Therefore, avenues should be created to ensure their security and dignity, fostering a life of stability. Regarding employment distribution, both tribal men and women exhibit limited engagement in the service sector, with women experiencing even fewer opportunities in comparison to men. This trend, albeit slightly improved between 1981 and 2001, suggests an uneven expansion of secure employment avenues between the genders. This discrepancy is perhaps linked to the prevalence of illiteracy among tribal women, which hampers their access to various service roles. The study underscores that rural tribal women in Tripura are yet to be effectively mobilized. Given their socio-economic context, there is an immediate and vital need for strategic orientation. This should encompass constitutional provisions, government policies, social initiatives, establishment of safety nets, and increased awareness among rural tribal communities. By equipping these communities with necessary skills and fostering equal opportunities, the status of Tripura's tribes can be elevated through political empowerment.

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