
“SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF TRIBAL PEOPLE: ISSUES, CHALLENGES, AND DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVES”

***Dr. Sanjay R. Agashe**

Director of Physical Education S.N.Mor Arts, Commerce & Smt.G.D.Saraf Science College,
Tumsar-Dist-Bhandara.

Article Received: 26 June 2026

Article Revised: 15 July 2026

Published on: 03 August 2026

***Corresponding Author: Dr. Sanjay R. Agashe**

Director of Physical Education S.N.Mor Arts, Commerce & Smt.G.D.Saraf Science
College, Tumsar-Dist-Bhandara.

DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.1409>

ABSTRACT

Tribal communities constitute one of the most marginalized and vulnerable sections of society. Despite rich cultural heritage and deep ecological knowledge, tribal people continue to face severe social and economic problems due to historical neglect, exploitation, displacement, and inadequate access to development opportunities. This paper examines the major social and economic problems faced by tribal communities, with special reference to India. It analyzes issues such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, land alienation, health challenges, social exclusion, and the impact of modernization. The paper also discusses governmental initiatives and suggests measures for sustainable and inclusive tribal development. The study is based on secondary data collected from books, journals, reports, and government publications.

KEYWORDS: Tribal people, social problems, economic problems, poverty, development, marginalization.

INTRODUCTION

Tribal people, also known as indigenous or Adivasi communities, represent the earliest inhabitants of many regions. In India, tribal communities account for a significant proportion of the population and are mainly concentrated in forested, hilly, and remote areas. These communities have traditionally lived in harmony with nature and followed distinct socio-cultural systems.

However, due to colonial policies, industrialization, deforestation, urbanization, and globalization, tribal societies have undergone profound changes. Loss of land and livelihood, social disintegration, and economic deprivation have resulted in persistent social and economic problems. Understanding these problems is essential for framing effective development policies and ensuring social justice for tribal people.

2. Concept and Characteristics of Tribal Communities

Tribal communities are characterized by

Close association with nature and forests, Distinct language, culture, and customs,

Simple social organization based on kinship Subsistence-based economy

Strong sense of community and collective ownership

These characteristics, while culturally enriching, have also contributed to their isolation from mainstream development processes.

3. Social Problems of Tribal People

3.1 Poverty and Deprivation

Poverty is one of the most severe problems among tribal communities. Limited access to productive resources, low income, and dependence on subsistence agriculture contribute to chronic poverty. Seasonal unemployment and lack of alternative livelihoods further aggravate their condition.

3.2 Illiteracy and Educational Backwardness

Low literacy rates among tribal people remain a major concern. Factors such as poverty, lack of educational infrastructure, language barriers, migration, and cultural alienation from formal education systems hinder educational attainment, especially among tribal women.

3.3 Health and Nutrition Problems

Tribal populations suffer from poor health and malnutrition. Inadequate healthcare facilities, lack of awareness, unhygienic living conditions, and food insecurity result in high rates of infant mortality, maternal mortality, anemia, and communicable diseases.

3.4 Social Exclusion and Discrimination

Tribal people often face social exclusion and discrimination in mainstream society. Stereotyping, stigmatization, and lack of political representation reduce their participation in decision-making processes and access to public services.

3.5 Cultural Erosion and Identity Crisis

Modernization and cultural assimilation have led to erosion of tribal traditions, languages, and customs. Exposure to external influences often results in identity conflicts, especially among tribal youth.

3.6 Problems of Women and Children

Tribal women face multiple disadvantages, including low educational status, health risks, economic exploitation, and domestic responsibilities. Children are often affected by malnutrition, child labor, and school dropout.

4. Economic Problems of Tribal People

4.1 Unemployment and Underemployment

Lack of employment opportunities is a major economic problem. Traditional occupations such as hunting, shifting cultivation, and forest-based activities have declined, while alternative skills and employment avenues remain limited.

4.2 Land Alienation and Displacement

Land alienation due to industrial projects, mining, dams, and deforestation has severely affected tribal livelihoods. Displacement without proper rehabilitation has resulted in loss of income, homelessness, and social disintegration.

4.3 Exploitation by Middlemen and Moneylenders

Tribal people are often exploited by middlemen in the sale of forest produce and agricultural goods. Dependence on moneylenders leads to indebtedness and economic insecurity.

4.4 Low Agricultural Productivity

Primitive farming techniques, lack of irrigation, poor soil quality, and limited access to modern inputs result in low agricultural productivity and food insecurity.

4.5 Lack of Infrastructure and Market Access

Poor infrastructure such as roads, electricity, communication, and markets restrict economic growth in tribal areas. Isolation limits access to fair prices and employment opportunities.

5. Impact of Development and Modernization

While development initiatives aim to improve living standards, they have often disrupted tribal life. Industrialization and urban expansion have displaced communities and weakened traditional support systems. Inadequate participation of tribal people in planning and implementation has reduced the effectiveness of development programs.

6. Government Initiatives for Tribal Development

The Indian government has introduced various constitutional safeguards and welfare schemes, including:

Reservation in education and employment

Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP)

Forest Rights Act, 2006

Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDPs)

Scholarships and hostels for tribal students

Despite these measures, gaps in implementation and awareness persist.

7. Measures for Improvement

To address social and economic problems of tribal people, the following measures are suggested:

Strengthening education through culturally sensitive curricula

Ensuring land rights and effective rehabilitation policies

Promoting skill development and sustainable livelihoods

Improving healthcare infrastructure in tribal areas

Encouraging community participation in development planning

Preserving tribal culture and indigenous knowledge

CONCLUSION

The social and economic problems of tribal people are complex and interrelated, rooted in historical injustice and contemporary challenges. Sustainable development of tribal communities requires a holistic approach that respects their cultural identity, ensures economic security, and promotes social inclusion. Effective policy implementation, community empowerment, and inclusive growth are essential to improve the quality of life of tribal people and integrate them into the national development process without compromising their unique heritage.

REFERENCES

1. Government of India. (2014). Report of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. New Delhi.
2. Majumdar, D. N. (1977). Races and Cultures of India. Asia Publishing House.
3. Xaxa, V. (2008). State, Society, and Tribes: Issues in Post-Colonial India. Pearson Education.
4. Beteille, A. (1991). Society and Politics in India. Oxford University Press.
5. Planning Commission of India. (2013). Tribal Development Report.