

Centre for Multidisciplinary Development Research (CMDR), Dharwad.

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Policy Recommendations from National Seminar On **Programmes and Policies** **For the Development of Tribes:** **Issues and Challenges**

3rd and 4th March 2025



Brief Introduction

According to the Census of India 2011, Scheduled Tribes (STs) constitute **8.6% of India's population**, amounting to approximately **10.43 crore people**. A significant portion of them i.e., **89.97%** resides in **rural and remote areas**. India is home to around **645 distinct tribal groups**, each possessing unique cultural, social, and ethnic characteristics. They engage in a wide range of economic activities such as **collection of minor forest produce, hunting, shifting cultivation, and handicraft production**. However, their economy is largely characterized as a **subsistence economy**. Many tribal communities tend to maintain their traditional lifestyles and often **resist large-scale developmental projects** like dams and industries.

In the post-colonial period, tribal development in India was influenced by the Jawaharlal Nehru's **assimilation approach**, which was significantly shaped by the ideas of Verrier Elwin. His idea was to **preserve their culture and gradual integration into mainstream**. Despite several developmental efforts, they continue to linger behind national average in education. According to 2011 data, the **literacy rate among Scheduled Tribe was about 59%**, compared to the **national average of 73%**. Similarly, their female literacy rate stands **around 49.36%**, which is lower than that of Scheduled Caste women.



Another aspect to discuss on tribal population is the unreachable healthcare facilities to them. As per the National Family Health Survey 4 (NFHS-4: 2015-2016) indicates that **under-five mortality rate** among tribal children was **57.2 per 1000 live births**, compared to **38.5 among others**. **In the same way, the infant mortality rate (IMR) stood at 44.4 per 1000 live births**, whereas in **non-tribal population** it is only **32.1**. A child born to a ST family faces a 19% higher risk of dying in the neonatal period, and 45 per cent greater risk of dying in the post-neonatal period compared to non-tribal groups (*Jai Prakash Narain, 2019, p:313*). The prevalence of communicable diseases like tuberculosis (TB) are significantly higher among tribal populations with 703 per 100,000 compared to the national average 256 per 100,000. All these were due to **geographical isolation, lack of healthcare infrastructure, poverty, malnutrition, and social exclusion**.

Affirmative action policies have made limited impact and a small number of tribal groups have been able to benefit from positive discrimination. During colonial rule, the introduction of moneylenders led to new form of economic exploitation. This further weakened their traditional economic systems and autonomy. Despite these hardships, tribal communities have shown a strong desire to preserve their cultural identity.

Due to lack of skill, poor access to education, no proper training, a long history of geographic and social exclusion - which has also affected their confidence levels. Developmental activities in tribal areas have frequently resulted in displacement without adequate rehabilitation. As a consequence, a large section of the Adivasi population has been impoverished—either pushed into marginal and unproductive lands or forced to shift from self-sufficient livelihoods to wage labor or encroachment.

The seminar examined the important policy frameworks like Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, which aims to protect tribal communities from exploitation by

empowering local self-governance institutions. The Act grants significant authority to Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas. In addition, the seminar has highlighted recent government initiatives focused on tribal development. As announced in the Union Budget 2024–25, approximately 36,428 villages with a majority Scheduled Tribe (ST) population are being developed as “ideal villages,” with a financial outlay of ₹7,300 crore. This initiative is expected to cover nearly 63,000 villages (including cluster villages) and benefiting over 5 crore tribal people. The program will be implemented across 549 districts and 2,740 blocks, spanning tribal-majority regions in 30 States and Union Territories.



The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (**commonly called the Forest Rights Act or FRA**) is indeed one of the most significant forest and tribal welfare laws in India.

The theme “Programmes and Policies for the Development of Tribals: Issues and Challenges” highlights the persistent gaps between policy formulation and effective implementation in tribal areas, particularly among PVTGs and tribal women. Under the seminar discussions, the papers collectively suggested the need for accessible and accountable welfare delivery, ensuring that PVTGs and tribal women can easily avail government schemes through simplified procedures and grassroots-level facilitation. Further, there was a strong emphasis on livelihood and economic empowerment policies, promoting traditional occupations, and reduce vulnerability.

The discussions also highlighted the importance of integrated and culturally sensitive development policies, combining health, education, nutrition, and livelihood support while respecting indigenous knowledge and practices. Special attention was given to women-centred empowerment strategies, including education, awareness, leadership development, and increased participation in decision-making processes. Overall, the seminar concluded that a holistic, inclusive, and participatory policy approach is essential for the upliftment of PVTGs and tribal women, ensuring not only access to resources but also the dignity, equity, and sustainable development.

Objectives:

1. To analyse the problems of the tribal people in the context of changed economic scenario;
2. To discuss and highlight the rich cultural heritage of tribal communities and also identify the suitable strategies and policies that may generate sustainable development to them;
3. To assess the efficacy of the programmes like ideal villages, Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan and schemes and acts meant for empowering the Tribes;
4. To review the different viewpoints about the indigenous people in India and suggest measures for their development.
5. To bring out the present status of these tribal groups based in different region of the country.



Sub-Themes of the seminar:

The seminar discussed the following subjects in detail:

1. The education status of the scheduled tribes such as literacy rate like GER, drop-out and retention;
2. Health index like MMR, IMR, Malnutrition, Under-child nourishment, Anaemia, Tuberculosis and other health issues;
3. The over-all development of the scheduled tribes like poverty and strategies, programmes to reduce the same;
4. Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996;
5. Land alienation in schedule areas; Scheme like Ideal Villages, Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan, Eklavya Model Schools, Centre of Excellence for Sports (CoE for Sports),
6. Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

Purpose of the Seminar

The seminar focused on discussing and debating both theoretical and empirical issues related to the welfare of tribal communities in India. It brought together various stakeholders, allowing them to share diverse perspectives and develop a deeper understanding of tribal society through different theoretical approaches and welfare schemes. The discussions have generated new insights into tribal society in general and its social structure in particular. The seminar highlighted that it is inappropriate to treat nearly 645 tribal communities as a single homogeneous group and apply a uniform strategy for development or intervention. Instead, it highlighted the importance of understanding the unique cultural, social, and economic characteristics of each tribal community before implementing any policies or programs. Overall, the seminar produced multi-dimensional outcomes and opened new avenues for further academic research and exploration in the study of tribal societies in India.

Methodology

The seminar followed a well-structured academic discourse, incorporating keynote addresses, lead presentations, practitioner perspectives, thematic technical sessions, and interactive discussions were planned. A total of 42 abstracts were received, out of it 32 were shortlisted for the presentation in the Seminar. Subsequently, 31 presenters have attended the seminar and made presentations in the seminar. The two-day event featured distinguished keynote address, followed by special lecture and lead speakers, contributing to rich academic and professional engagement. In total, 31 scholars participated, representing over 10 states across India, including Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana.





“Policy Recommendations with thematic specifications”

Theme-I: The Schedule Tribe education

Issues Discussed:

- 1. Tribal literacy rate. 2. Tribal Women literacy. 3. Dropout rate. 4. Tribal participation and performance.***

Recommendations:


- ❖ Efforts should be made to educate Tribal in their mother tongue starting from Anganwadi to Class 3 to bridge the linguistic gap.
- ❖ Build more Ashram Schools and girls' hostels in remote areas
- ❖ Ensure accessibility, safety and security to girls in the schools,
- ❖ Recruit and train teachers from the local ST communities, providing training on tribal culture and lifestyles *particularly in remote and underserved regions,*
- ❖ Expand and upgrade **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)** infrastructure and quality to provide quality education in remote areas,
- ❖ Strengthen Post-Matric Scholarship schemes and provide full-time, permanent employment incentives to curb dropouts, particularly at the secondary level,
- ❖ Relax norms for opening primary schools within 1 km of small habitations (200-300 population) and provide digital tools to envisage the digital dividends,
- ❖ Establish dedicated, fully funded coaching centres for ST students aiming for competitive exams, and strengthen mentorship programs in universities.
- ❖ Active involvement of parent-teacher meetings (PTMs) and Local School Management Committees (SDMCs) in school management to increase community confidence and trust. *This will help in reducing disparities and improve enrolment as well as learning outcomes.*

Theme-II: Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

Issues Discussed:

- 1. Socio economic marginalization 2. Traditional occupations 3. Culturally sensitive issues to PVTG 4. Vulnerabilities 5. Special survival strategies***

Recommendations:

- ❖ Conduct a specialized, habitat-level census for PVTGs to map habitats, resources, and map the population changes to create a "vulnerability index" for prioritized intervention,
 - ❖ Proactively recognize individual and community rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 to protect against displacement from development projects,
 - ❖ Implement mobile health units to address high mortality
 - ❖ Implement the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN) to provide safe housing, clean water, and road/telecom connectivity to underserved PVTG habitations,
 - ❖ Wherever displacement and relocation become absolutely essential appropriate strategies were evolved for providing facilitative support and rehabilitation.
 - ❖ Within the 75 PVTGs, those groups whose population is declining should be clearly identified and survival strategy for such groups needs to be devised
 - ❖ Financial and other resources allocated for the PVTGs should be in accordance with the degree of vulnerability of the PVTGs.
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- ❖ A rights-based approach to development of PVTGs needs to be adopted. Suitable measures should be taken for protection and promotion of their rights (especially to their land and customary habitats) and empowerment of rights-holders to exercise their rights. Simultaneously, accountability of duty bearers should be ensured,
- ❖ There is a need to assess by conducting a survey to assess the degree of indebtedness of the PVTGs to the local money lenders and address or redeem their debts and make them debt free,
- ❖ Strict controls need to be imposed so that no development can take place on PVTGs' land and habitats without their free, prior and informed consent.

Theme-III: Land, Agriculture and Marginalization

Issues Discussed:

1. *Money lenders*
2. *Multi-cropping*
3. *Community forest rights*
4. *Large scale development projects*
5. *Displacement*
6. *Land alienation*

Recommendations:

- ❖ Set up fast-track tribunals for clearing Individual and Community Forest Rights (IFR/CFR) claims,
- ❖ Update land records with geospatial technology to prevent encroachment and illegal alienation.
- ❖ Empower local councils (Gram Sabhas) to manage community forest resources and authorize land usage,
- ❖ Ensure displacement as a last resort, but if necessary, provide equivalent land, and rehabilitation within the same or similar habitat.
- ❖ Shift focus away from mono-cropping to multi-cropping or mixed farming, and organic practices.
- ❖ Implement small-scale water management projects to improve irrigation in tribal-dominated areas,
- ❖ Provide vocational training focused on forest produce processing and sustainable entrepreneurship,
- ❖ Enhance political representation at local and state levels to allow tribal communities to influence policy design,
- ❖ Set up small-scale industries for value addition to minor forest produce (MFP) to increase income,
- ❖ Encourage Girijan Co-operative Corporation (GCCs).


Theme-IV: Tribal Development and Policies

Issues Discussed:

1. *Vocational training centres*
2. *Autonomous council*
3. *Tribal research institutes*
4. *Gandhian method of sustainable tribal development*

Recommendations:

- ❖ **Rigorous Implementation of Forest Rights Act of 2006,**
- ❖ Enforce the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act to strengthen grassroot self-governance,
- ❖ Resettle displaced populations close to their natural habitats to preserve socio-cultural identity,
- ❖ Expand Van Dhan Vikas Kendra (VDVKs) to process forest produce, ensuring better income through Strengthen Minimum Support Price (MSP),
- ❖ Promote vocational training centres (VTCs) tailored to local and modern market demands,

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- ❖ The 6th Schedule Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) are empowered to provide self-governance. They can manage land, forests, water, local agriculture, village administration, and inheritance, alongside establishing schools, markets, and regulating moneylending
 - ❖ Support and strengthen the Tribal Research Institutes to document and preserve tribal languages, traditions
 - ❖ Prioritize and recognition the individual and community forest rights to prevent land alienation
 - ❖ *Effective implementation and community participation are essential to ensure that welfare measures reach the intended beneficiaries.*
 - ❖ *A Gandhian approach to sustainable tribal development should be adopted, emphasizing self-reliance, decentralization, and eco-friendly livelihoods. Policies must promote village industries, local resources, and ethical development aligned with cultural values.*

Theme-V: Scheduled Tribes Women & Political empowerment

Issues Discussed:

1. *PESA Act* 2. *Gram Sabha* 3. *Self Help Groups* 4. *Capacity building* 5. *Reservations* 6. *Adivasi Mahila Sashaktikaran Yojana (AMSY)* 7. *Monitoring committees*

Recommendations:

- ❖ Tailor made training/ workshops are needed to enhance their political awareness, leadership skills,
- ❖ Prepare them for effective roles in Gram Sabhas and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs),
- ❖ Strengthening Gram Sabhas to give women greater control over local land, water, and forest resources.
- ❖ Connecting experienced female leaders with emerging ST women leaders to build capacity and professional networks,
- ❖ Promoting the integration of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) with PRI functionaries to foster financial independence, reducing dependence on male relatives to "call the shots".
- ❖ Enhance the schemes like Adivasi Mahila Sashaktikaran Yojana (AMSY) to provide better financial aid for women candidates and leaders to manage campaigns,
- ❖ Establishing monitoring committees to curb the "Panchayat Pati" system (husbands acting on behalf of elected wives),
- ❖ Launching campaigns to inform women about their constitutional rights (e.g., Article 15(3), PESA) to help them assert themselves in decision-making,
- ❖ Regularly reviewing the implementation of existing laws such as the Forest Rights Act and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act to ensure the women's interests,
- ❖ *A strong policy intervention framework is needed to address gender inequality and enhance decision-making capacity among tribal women.*
- ❖ *Ensure equal access to resources, opportunities, and institutional support systems.*
- ❖ *Encouraging leadership, reservation, and political training will strengthen their role in decision-making processes.*



Theme-VI: Health, and Indigenous medicinal knowledge

Issues Discussed:

- 1. Infant mortality rate (IMR) 2. Maternal mortality rate (MMR) 3. Tuberculosis (TB) 4. Anaemia 5. Herbal medicine 6. Traditional healers 7. Indigenous knowledge***

Recommendations:

- ❖ Formally recognize the traditional healers and Dais (*Traditional Birth Attendants*), provide training to upgrade their skills and integrate them into the public health system as partners,
- ❖ *A strong policy framework is required for the protection and promotion and documentation of tribal herbal medicines and ethno medicine, particularly at the community level,*
- ❖ Establish community ownership over traditional herbal medicines and practices to prevent bio-piracy,
- ❖ Increase the deployment of Mobile Medical Units for remote, hard-to-reach areas, specifically targeting Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs),
- ❖ Relax population norms for setting up Sub-Health Centres (SHCs) and Primary Health Centres (PHCs) in tribal areas to ensure accessibility,
- ❖ Intensify focus on Sickle Cell Anaemia, malaria, tuberculosis, and malnutrition through dedicated, localized missions,
- ❖ *An integrated policy is required to link the livelihood, health, and cultural identity for tribes like the Gond,*
- ❖ *Ensure and respect indigenous knowledge systems while promoting development and well-being,*

Conclusion

The seminar concluded with a strong consensus that **tribal communities are not just beneficiaries but key stakeholders in development of the nation.** Their deep connection with nature makes them vital contributors to **environmental sustainability**, and they must be treated as **equal partners in shaping India's development trajectory.**

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