



Problems Of Tribal Women: A Study Of Dumka District Of Santhal Pargana

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Abstract: We humans, carrying various differences, so we are very much different from each other in the form of community and society, similarly, our problems are also different. This present paper undertakes a study of the problems faced by tribal women, one of the marginalized communities in our country, in their daily lives. Every community has its own ups and downs, uniqueness, and distinct cultural practices, and they also face disparities in access to life's opportunities. Through this paper, it becomes evident that tribal women continue to grapple with fundamental shortcomings in their lives, which is particularly egregious given the purported advancements of our civilized society, ostensibly founded upon the provision of basic necessities, and ultimately perpetuating their misery.

Index Terms: Marginalized, disparity, tribal opportunities, uniqueness, basic necessities, civilized,

Introduction: Life and problems are indeed two sides of the same coin. It can be argued that the human experience is characterized by a perpetual struggle with challenges, ranging from mundane to profound. The existential reality is, in fact, a testament to human resilience and vitality. Throughout history, humanity has undergone significant transformations, with corresponding shifts in the nature and complexity of problems faced. In primordial times, humans lacked a nuanced understanding of their existence, let alone an acquaintance with urbanization and civilization. Their basic needs and survival instincts drove their actions. However, the human species has consistently demonstrated an innate curiosity, which has fueled their environments in more sophisticated ways, leading to the emergence of villages, cities, and ultimately, complex societies. This transformative journey has been marked by an increasing awareness of human existence, prompting individuals to reevaluate their approaches to life and navigate the intricacies of their problems. As society evolved, civilizations emerged, and people began to establish settlements, transitioning from rural to urban areas. The fundamental needs of food, clothing and shelter became the cornerstone of human existence. Consequently, the nature of problems shifted from basic survival to more complex issues. When contemplating contemporary society, it is often assumed that individuals' problems have transcended basic necessities. However, this assumption warrants scrutiny, particularly when considering the context of marginalized communities, such as tribal women. This raises important questions about the accuracy of this perception, inviting a nuanced examination of the complexities surrounding the lives of tribal women. In indigenous communities around the world, tribal women play a crucial role in the social, cultural, and economic fabric. These women, who frequently live in isolated or rural locations, represent the distinctive traditions, practices, and worldviews of their individual tribes. As caregivers, farmers, craftspeople, and

spiritual leaders, women in many tribal societies serve a variety of tasks that are vital to the survival and continuity of their communities (Dr. Suryakanta Acharya, 2023). Undoubtedly, the lives of these women differ significantly from those of women in other communities, exhibiting distinct cultural nuances. Their language, dietary habits, attire, and residential patterns, among other aspects, set them apart. These differences underscore the unique cultural identities of these women, shaped by their distinct socio-cultural contexts. Given the distinct cultural identities and experiences of these women, it is imperative to acknowledge that their problems and challenges also differ from those of women in other communities. This perspective is supported by Standpoint Feminism, a theoretical framework posited by Sandra Harding, which emphasizes that women's experiences and problems are shaped by their unique socio-cultural contexts (Bowell). In this vein, Standpoint Feminism asserts that women from diverse communities possess distinct knowledge systems, born out of their specific experiences and realities. Consequently, their problems and challenges are equally distinct, necessitating context-specific approaches to understanding and addressing them and it's essential to acknowledge and discuss the problems faced by all individuals distinctly, regardless of their community affiliation. This nuanced understanding recognizes that each community's experience and challenges are unique and deserve specific attention.

Demographic profile: Dumka district consist of one subdivision ten blocks including Dumka block and four towns. The Dumka district lies in the Santhal Pargana division, which is part of Jharkhand state, which was separated from the former Bihar state on the 15th November 2000, and includes five divisions: North Chotanagpur, South Chotanagpur, Santhal Pargana, Palamu, and Kolhan. Dumka district is a part of Hazaribag plateau. Based on geological characteristics like as relief, soil, climate, geology, and natural vegetation, it has been separated into four sub-micro regions: the Dumka-Godda uplands, the Deoghar uplands, the Rajmahal Hills, and the Pakur uplands. The area is covered by the tropical monsoon season. Because this territory is encircled by mountains and trees, it has a healthy climate. Here, the summers are relatively hotter, the rainy season is wetter, and the winters are bitterly cold. One of the districts in the state of Jharkhand is Dumka. With a total population of 1321442 according to the 2011 Census there are 668514 males and 652928 females in the district. The population of the Schedule Tribes in the district of Dumka during 2011 Census was 571077, the current Dumka district is made up of 10 Community Development Blocks, which include 5 townships and 2928 villages (2688 inhabited and 240 unoccupied). Four percent of the state's total population lives in the district. There are 668514 males and 652928 females in the district, with a population density of 351 (per square kilometer) in 2011. The 2011 Dumka district's rural and urban population proportions are 93.2 percentages (rural) and 6.8 percentages (urban). In the entire Dumka district, there are 977 women for every 1000 men (India, 2011).

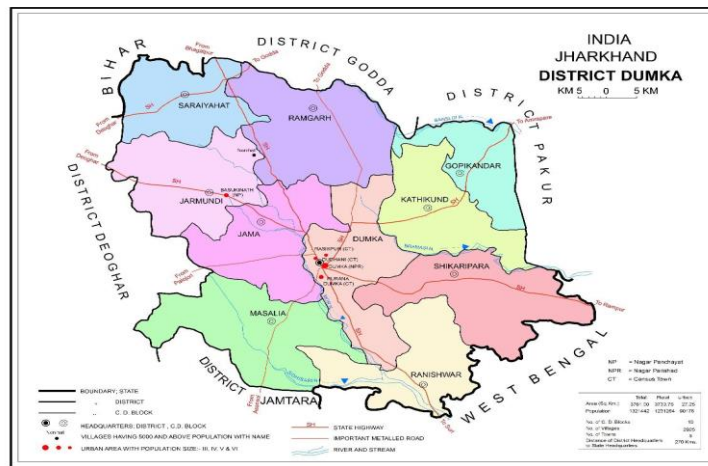


Fig-1, Map of district Dumka

Objective of the study: India is a nation characterized by profound diversity, encompassing a multitude of communities, geographical regions, cultures, and religions. This diversity inevitably gives rise to unique lifestyles and distinct challenges faced by individuals within these communities. It is often assumed that our communities are equipped to fulfill various basic needs; however, the disparity between perception and reality warrants examination.

This study primarily aims to investigate whether this assumption holds true, exploring the extent to which community resources adequately address the fundamental needs of the people especially when it comes to the fulfillment of the basic needs of the marginalized tribal women of Dumka district. This study aims to contribute to this understanding by exploring the specific challenges and difficulties faced by tribal women in their daily lives, and how they navigate and negotiate these difficulties to construct their lives.

Methodology: The study was conducted at rural places of Dumka district. During a research visit to the rural setting of Dumka, I had the opportunity to conduct a personal observation of the daily life patterns of tribal women. Employing non-participant observation as a research tool, I closely observed their daily activities and routines.

Furthermore, I conducted unstructured interviews, which enabled me to interact personally with some of the tribal women residing in the rural areas of Dumka district. This qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of their experiences, perspectives, and challenges.

Research findings: This study reveals that various issues, perceived as fundamental and ostensibly resolved at the national and societal levels, persist as grave concerns for marginalized tribal women. Contrary to the assumption that we, as a society, have transcended these challenges, the research findings highlight the following problems that continue to hinder the lives of tribal women:

(A) Insufficient clean water resources: One of the most fundamental challenges faced by tribal women is the acute scarcity of clean water resources. Given that access to water is a basic necessity for human survival, it is alarming to note that in a typical village comprising 20-25 households, with an average of 3-4 family members per household, there exist only 1-2 functional hand pumps or tap water sources (ignou). Furthermore, these limited water sources often become non-functional, particularly during the summer months when water demand is at its peak, exacerbating the crisis and highlighting the dire need for improved

water infrastructure in these rural areas notably, the responsibility of collecting water from these limited sources predominantly falls on the shoulders of adolescent girls and women. A common sight in these tribal areas is women carrying earthen pots, traversing long distances to fetch water. The water scarcity issue exacerbates with changing seasons, as women face heightened challenges in accessing this basic necessity, perpetuating a cycle of hardship and drudgery throughout the year.

(B) Inadequate access to healthcare services and poor dietary habits: India's remote and rural areas face a severe shortage of hospitals and healthcare professionals. A woman's body undergoes various stages throughout her lifespan, necessitating adequate healthcare. However, in tribal areas, pregnant women often struggle to access timely and quality healthcare, leading to significant hardships. Furthermore, research has consistently shown that tribal women frequently suffer from deficiencies in essential nutrients, such as iron, calcium, vitamins and so on, highlighting the inadequacies of their dietary systems. This nutritional inadequacy underscores the need for targeted interventions to improve healthcare access and nutrition among tribal woman.



Fig-2, Tribal women fetching water using a hand pump for her daily chores

(C) Inadequate sanitation and hygiene: The limited awareness regarding personal hygiene maintenance among tribal women often renders them vulnerable to infections and various diseases. Despite growing awareness about open-defecation and related issues, this problem persists in remote areas. Furthermore, the inadequate availability of sanitary napkins during menstruation exacerbates health concerns among these women, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to promote menstrual hygiene and overall health.

(D) Widespread superstition and lack of education: In contemporary tribal areas, superstition persists, often leading to detrimental consequences. For instance, instead of seeking medical attention, individuals frequently consult local shamans or faith healers for ailments or snake/bite injuries, resulting in exacerbated health issues. Moreover, the heinous practice of witch-hunting remains prevalent in tribal societies, we frequently encounter reports in the media highlighting how marginalized communities in remote areas attribute various problems, ranging from financial losses to illnesses, to alleged witchcraft or demonic possession. This phenomenon often results in the scapegoating of a particular community, with women disproportionately being accused and subsequently subjected to maltreatment (Mohanty, 2021). During focus group discussions, several tribal women corroborated these assertions, underscoring the pervasive nature . Furthermore, women in these areas continue to be deprived of mainstream education, rendering their lives

increasingly challenging. This educational disparity perpetuates the cycle of vulnerability, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to promote education, critical thinking, and women's empowerment in these marginalized communities.

(E) Lack of socio-economic empowerment: Socio-economic empowerment is an essential imperative for individuals in the 21st century, irrespective of their caste, community, religion, or gender (S, 2024). Socio-economic empowerment primarily refers to the access and availability of resources, opportunities, and services at both societal and monetary levels, enabling individuals to enhance their overall quality of life and make informed choices that foster prosperity for themselves and their families. However, an examination of the socio-economic empowerment opportunities available to tribal women reveals that it would not be an exaggeration to state that they face numerous challenges in achieving empowerment at both societal and economic levels. Tribal women residing in remote and inaccessible areas face significant barriers in accessing quality education and skill training essential for economic independence. Furthermore, their cultural identity and language often diverge from mainstream norms, leading to feelings of alienation and marginalization when interacting with external entities. This cultural disconnect frequently results in exploitation, with tribal women being offered meager compensation for their labor. The absence of economic empowerment severely restricts tribal women's autonomy in making fundamental life decisions, such as pursuing higher education, seeking employment outside their community, or choosing their own life partners. These limitations have far-reaching consequences, profoundly impacting their entire lives and perpetuating cycles of vulnerability and disempowerment.

Conclusion: The findings of this study highlight the inherent complexities in the lives of marginalized tribal women in India, which are often obscured by superficial narratives. As we engage in discussions on holistic development and women's socio-economic empowerment, it is essential to acknowledge the far-reaching consequences of daily deprivations on women's aspirations, confidence, and overall well-being. Consequently, it is imperative that concerned authorities assume a more proactive role in addressing the fundamental needs of these women.

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