

# A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF SOCIAL INCLUSION AND INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

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**Abstract :** This review paper examines the importance of social inclusion among India's Scheduled Tribes, with particular emphasis on inter-generational solidarity. It explores in depth various methods of intergenerational transfer of traditional institutions, traditional values, customary laws and practices, cultural heritage, moral codes, ethical practices, and rituals and ceremonies in tribal communities, reinforcing community identity and cohesion. It shows us how recognizing and supporting these inter-generational transfer processes can strengthen social inclusion and help preserve indigenous heritage. The aim is to highlight how these concepts contribute to cultural preservation and the inclusion of the tribal community into the mainstream. It also elaborates that inclusive development is most effective when it engages with existing social structures, values, and inter-generational relationships, creating a society that is not only economically and politically equitable but also morally and culturally enriched. The study situates tribal elders and their knowledge systems at the centre of both inter-generational bonds and achieving meaningful social inclusion, thereby it defines that development approaches that are equitable, participatory, and culturally grounded. This paper proposes inter-generational solidarity as both a mechanism and an outcome of effective social inclusion. By engaging with the perspectives, the review underscores the need to integrate the wisdom of the forefathers into contemporary development models, thereby guaranteeing that social inclusion is no longer just theoretical but deeply rooted in lived realities, cultural continuity, and the ethical imperatives of community well-being.

**Keywords:** *Social inclusion, Scheduled tribes, Inter-generational solidarity, Inclusive development.*

## Introduction

Social inclusion is a concept and policy agenda for social justice. It seeks to overcome barriers and hurdles that prevent particular groups or segments from full and equal participation in civil society and they may be called as excluded groups of the society. Excluded groups have often been defined by criteria: if people met the criteria, they were included; if they did not, they were excluded. Among the excluded groups or communities, the tribal communities in India have suffered from historical patterns of prejudice. They have experienced significant exclusion, marginalization, and exploitation rooted in policies from the colonial era and continued during the post-independence period. These groups faced dual challenges: one is the need for inclusive development and the other is preservation of their unique cultural identities, languages, practices, and traditional knowledge systems. The inclusive development of tribal communities without compromising their traditions is an intricate yet crucial process that requires a bottom-up, participatory approach. Historically, a top-down imposition of alien values in the name of welfare and development has eroded tribal culture and led to displacement and exploitation and cultural erosion. The goal should be to uplift their socio-economic status while upholding their unique cultural identity and autonomy. This means the concept of inclusion should bring them development without cultural destruction. In this context, social inclusion may not fully be equated with adaptation or mainstreaming. However, recognizing their cultural, moral, and occupational practices as genuine, valuable, and central to this inclusion. Within tribal communities, intergenerational solidarity is a core concept that also emerges as a crucial social mechanism sustaining cultural continuity, social cohesion, and collective identity. Inter-generational solidarity refers to the connections, interactions, and mutual support that exist between all age groups within society, particularly between older and younger generations. Among tribal societies, elders serve as the custodians of indigenous knowledge passing down cultural norms, rituals, ethical values, occupational skills, and customary practices. This transmission is not purely an educational process but a deeply embedded social structure that shapes identity, moral frameworks, and social relationships, which builds a strong culturally rooted and heritage group in our society. Through such elder-led guidance, the future generations of the tribal community learn traditional arts, crafts, agricultural methods, medicinal practices, and rituals, which are collectively known as indigenous knowledge through practice, and some were innate that defines the community's social and cultural identity. Consensual solidarity, the concordance of beliefs, opinions, and values across generations, functions as a mechanism that reinforces identity and collective cohesion. Without this intergenerational linkage in the tribal society, cultural practices risk losing their importance, and the community's capacity to engage meaningfully in societal processes may be diminished in subsequent years. The intersection of the two important concepts of social inclusion and inter-generational solidarity highlights the ways in which preserving indigenous knowledge systems of the tribal community strengthens inclusion outcomes. Supporting the elders in their roles ensures that indigenous knowledges are not lost, but instead integrated into broader societal frameworks in ways that visualize tribal identity. By facilitating spaces for elders to guide younger generations, society not only promotes cultural preservation but also enhances the opportunity and visibility of tribal groups, nurturing participation in governance, education, and economic activities. Moreover, indigenous knowledge plays a critical role in ensuring sustainability and community well-being. These are skills and wisdom passed down intergenerationally. By connecting social inclusion policies with mechanisms that protect and support these inter-generational transmissions, policy makers can ensure that development is culturally sensitive, ethically grounded, and socially cohesive. The study situates tribal elders and their knowledge systems at the centre of both sustaining inter-generational bonds and achieving meaningful social inclusion. Through a synthesis of literature on tribal communities, elder-led knowledge transmission, and inclusion

strategies, this paper positions inter-generational solidarity as both a mechanism and an outcome of effective social inclusion. From all these we can say that social inclusion is not merely theoretical but deeply rooted in tribal realities, tribal cultural continuity, and the ethical imperatives of tribal community well-being. It is also important to recognize that social inclusion differs from affirmative action and restorative justice. Social inclusion is not an attempt to right past wrongs. It does not seek to include groups as a way of making amends for past disadvantages. On the contrary, social inclusion is a vision of a good society based on the notion of what everyone is entitled to by virtue of membership of that particular society, it seeks to include groups because of the intrinsic value of a cohesive and inclusive society. Based on intrinsic value of a cohesive and inclusive society, the inclusion of tribal communities is not merely a moral imperative but a necessity for building a stronger, more resilient society. The richness of tribal cultures, traditions, and knowledge enriches the entire society and promotes mutual understanding and harmony. Excluding these communities perpetuates prejudice and undermines social progress.

## Methodology

This article adopts a descriptive review approach to synthesize research on social inclusion and inter-generational knowledge transmission among Scheduled Tribes in India. Relevant existing literature was identified through in-depth searches in ResearchGate, SpringerLink, Google Scholar, and selected books and journal articles using keywords such as “social inclusion,” “inter-generational solidarity,” “tribal elders,” and “indigenous knowledge.” Studies were included when they examined the role of tribal elders in preserving and transmitting their knowledge to younger generations. The gathered information was then synthesized with particular attention to how interactions between elders and youth contribute to the concept of solidarity. This method of literature review enabled a more comprehensive understanding of how inter-generational dynamics influence the inclusion of tribal communities across India.

## Review of Literature

Social inclusion among marginalized communities, particularly the Scheduled Tribes in India, has increasingly been recognized as a vital framework, and it is ensuring equitable access to socio-cultural, economic, and political opportunities while respecting their unique cultural identities. Liamputtong (2022) emphasizes that inclusion should go beyond mere participation; it involves valuing and recognizing the intrinsic value of communities’ knowledge, traditions, and social structures, which reinforces their visibility and agency in society. Tribals in India faced many historical isolations both geographically and socially and also they faced multiple challenges that makes the social inclusion strategies as a necessity, especially when considering the cultural and inter-generational dimensions of their communities (Alam, 2023). The United Nations (2022) emphasized on inter-generational solidarity which is crucial for achieving inclusiveness and sustainable development, underscoring the importance of collaboration among all age groups of the society to ensure that no one is left behind. The 2022 International Youth Day theme emphasized that combating ageism is critical for building equitable societies across generations. Central to these inclusion efforts is the concept of inter-generational solidarity, which reflects the bonds, cooperation, and transmission of values between older and younger members of a community or group. In tribal communities, elders are generally the pivotal custodians of knowledge, morals, and cultural practices, acting as guides and teachers for subsequent generations (Seerangan & Venkataravi, 2023). This inter-generational transmission is not only vital for maintaining social cohesion but also supports a collective sense of identity and a shared sense of belonging. Studies also have demonstrated that elder-led guidance has a positive influence on well-being, mental health, and social resilience within indigenous communities. The importance of the intergenerational bonds is very much visible in it. (Alam 2023, Viscogliosi et al., 2020). The transmission of indigenous knowledge serving as a key mechanism through which inter-generational solidarity is maintained. Tribal elders carry a wealth of knowledge encompassing arts, crafts, rituals, medicinal practices, agricultural techniques, and ethical norms. For instance, Toda embroidery and shawl weaving in the Nilgiris have been preserved for over seventy years, serving both as cultural symbols and income-generating crafts (Sharma et al., 2025; Walker, 2022). Similarly, the Gond and Santhal communities holds a deep knowledge of visual arts, dance, and ritual practices, which are passed down through generations as both tradition and occupation (Bharadwaj & Ukande, 2014; Bora & Sakshi, 2022; Majhi & Mohapatra, 2023; Soren & Jamir, 2021). These examples illustrate that indigenous knowledge is not static but dynamically transmitted, and sustaining both identity and livelihoods among our tribals. The Kurumba community in the Nilgiris district, for example, continues to rely on ethno-botanical practices and traditional healing techniques, which are systematically passed down to younger generations by elders (Deepak & Gopal, 2025). Similarly, studies on tribal farmers in Kolli Hills highlight the adoption of indigenous technical knowledge in agriculture, demonstrating how inter-generational learning ensures the sustainability and resilience of local practices (Keerthana & Divakaran, 2021). Several Indian tribes, including the Santhal, Munda, Oraon, and Lohra, practice traditional seed conservation, organic cultivation, shifting agriculture adapted to respective local ecology, and the protection of sacred groves which is still a practice, reflecting a balance between belief livelihood and natural resource management. These practices serve as practical models for sustainability, highlighting the need and significance of community participation and the inter-generational transmission of indigenous knowledge in supporting resilient tribal governance and welfare strategies (Priyadarshini & Abhilash, 2019). These interlinked practices show that social inclusion is not only about enabling access to modern opportunities and facilities but also about recognizing and valuing the knowledge, customs, and cultural leadership of elders, which became a pillar of tribal identity. The collective evidence highlights that social inclusion and inter-generational solidarity are mutually emphasizing. Elders, through the system of transfer of indigenous knowledge, sustain cultural identity and community cohesion, enabling tribes to participate in broader societal structures without losing their heritage. This cooperation between inclusion and solidarity ensures that tribal communities retain agency over their traditions, occupations, and moral codes while engaging meaningfully with contemporary society (Cordero et al., 2018; Dhanjal & Sharma, 2022; Reddy, 2020; Rowkith & Bhagwan, 2020; Sujeetha & Ashokan, 2022). Thus, the planned policies or intended interventions aimed at fostering inclusion must actively incorporate and support elder-led knowledge transmission, acknowledging it as a critical channel for both cultural preservation and social empowerment. In conclusion, the review demonstrates that social inclusion in the context of scheduled tribes is inextricably linked to inter-generational solidarity. The elders’ role as custodians of indigenous knowledge and practices continues to thrive across generations, strengthening both community identity and societal unity. By highlighting examples from some of the tribal groups across India, this review provides a compelling justification for prioritizing elder-led cultural continuity as a central element of inclusion strategies, ultimately bridging traditional wisdom with contemporary development goals.

## Conclusion

This review paper concludes that tribal elders are not just a knowledge holders but living bridges between the past and the future, transmitting customs, traditional practices, rituals, occupations, and moral values to younger generations. This inter-generational community cohesion serves as a foundation for meaningful social inclusion. Far from being just a passive recipient of development, tribal elders are active members, serving as agents who safeguard indigenous knowledge systems and ensure their relevance in contemporary society. Therefore, for social inclusion to be effective, especially in tribal communities, it must go beyond economic and political integration. Elder-led transmission processes must be recognized and respected. By acknowledging and valuing the contributions of elders, policymakers and practitioners can strengthen both cultural continuity and community resilience. Inclusive development, therefore, is not only about bringing marginalized groups into the mainstream through political and economic development but also about respecting and preserving the unique identities and knowledge systems that sustain them. Meaningful tribal development cannot be achieved through a top-down process in which external development models are superimposed on tribal communities. This approach often fails because it disregards indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, and the unique needs of tribal communities, leading to resentment, ineffective projects, and the erosion of tribal identity. A bottom-up approach that prioritizes self-determination, active participation, and cultural sensitivity is essential for sustainable and inclusive development. In the context of inclusion, tribal elders are vital as they are living bridges between tradition and modernity, between older generations and younger generations. They are not just knowledge holders but custodians of collective memory and transmitters of indigenous knowledge, rituals, ecological practices, and moral values. This inter-generational knowledge nurtures a deep sense of belonging, continuity, and social cohesion, key elements of inter-generational solidarity. Such solidarity strengthens the social fabric of tribal societies and ensures that cultural wisdom continues to guide contemporary development paths. Social inclusion, therefore, must move beyond policy rhetoric and economic participation to encompass cultural inclusion valuing and protecting indigenous traditions as integral to national identity. Inclusion should not aim to assimilate tribal communities into mainstream society by eroding their unique customs and cultures but to create a pluralistic and respectful space where all cultural expressions coexist. This perspective transforms inclusion into a dynamic process of mutual enrichment, where traditional wisdom and modern governance can work hand in hand. Ultimately, inclusive and intrinsic development is achieved when every community, especially the tribal communities can contribute to and benefit from progress without sacrificing their identity or heritage. By recognizing the intrinsic worth of tribal knowledge systems, their customary laws and traditional practices and the inter-generational roles of tribal elders, we can foster a society that is not only economically and politically inclusive but also culturally vibrant, socially cohesive, and morally enriched.

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