

Original Research Article

An analysis on Constraints faced by Scheduled Tribes in access to Social Institutions in Eastern Ghats of Tamil Nadu

Abstract

The study was conducted to find out the constraints faced by scheduled tribes of Tamil Nadu in accessing the social institutions and availing their services. Ex post facto research design was used for this study. The study was conducted in Pethanaickenpalayam, Jawadhu hills and Kalrayan hills blocks of Salem, Tiruvannamalai and Viluppuram districts respectively. A list of constraints related to the social institutions has been prepared and survey was conducted among 270 tribal respondents in the study area. It was found that changing size of family into nuclear family (59.63 per cent), difficulty in adopting the spiritual needs (34.07 per cent), indebtedness of family hampers the schooling of children (67.41 per cent), The awareness level of various developmental programs was poor (57.04 per cent), An increase in indebtedness among tribes (65.93 per cent) was the major constraint concerning the family, religion, education, panchayat, and economy respectively. Also suitable suggestions and strategies to overcome the identified constraints were also discussed in this paper.

Key words: Social Institutions, Scheduled Tribes, Constraints, Family, Religion, Education, Panchayat, Economy

1. INTRODUCTION

In India, a total number of 703 individual ethnic groups are notified as Scheduled Tribes across 30 States/UTs. As per the 2011 census, the tribal population of the country, is 10.43 crore, constituting 8.6% of the total population; 89.97% of them live in rural areas and 10.03% in urban areas. Tamil Nadu has tribal populations of 7.95 lakh which constitutes 1.1% of the total population notified with about 36 tribes and sub-tribes. Tribes are the deprived sections of the country struggling hard for their survival and development. Tribes are isolated from other societies with cultural homogeneity and simple life.

The life and the socio-cultural system of the tribal people are closely interrelated with the forest. Social values, norms, taboos, beliefs, and religion are playing a key role in the development of tribal communities. Educational attainment, employment generation, financial, and social inclusion are the potential ways to bring socio-economic, and cultural development among the tribes in the country. However, total literacy rate of tribal people in India is 58.97% which is very much lower than total literacy rate of the country (74.4%) (Census, 2011). As per Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report 2018-19 published by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, literacy rate for STs is 69.4% and corresponding figure over all is 78.1% (PLFS, 2020).

Various tribal welfare schemes are implemented by the Central and State Governments in the country for the welfare and development of scheduled tribes. However the scheduled tribes in the country are still in unprivileged state. The lack in effective and widespread implementation of such developmental schemes among the tribal communities is the main reason for this condition. The development of scheduled tribes cannot be achieved simply by formulating welfare schemes by means of subsidies and monetary benefits but it requires effective implementation of such schemes among the needful tribal community.

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Lacunae in implementation of development interventions in the tribal communities can be improved by effectively utilizing the services offered by social institutions which already well-established in the tribal society. Sutherland et al. (1961) defined an institution as a set of folkways and mores into a unit that serves a number of social functions. Social institutions are established forms or conditions of procedure characteristic of group activity (Robert MacIver and Spitz, 2020). Social institutions were created by man from social relationships to meet basic human needs such as stability, law and order, clearly defined roles of authority and decision making in society. Tribal people are mostly bound with the informal institutions such as family and religious belief. Also formal institutions like local government (Panchayat), educational institutes and economic institutions can bring personal, social and economic dimensions of development among the tribal community.

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These institutions are present in all societies so they are called as basic institutions. The tribes in the country are facing some serious problems in access to the social institutions. Especially the disadvantages of tribes are in accessing the formal institutions such as education, economy and panchayat. The key factors affecting the access of social institutions by the scheduled tribes characterized by the predominant illiteracy and isolated settlement of tribes. Also, some other constraints restrict the tribes accessing the social institutions. To improve this situation, first the constraints faced by tribes have to be identified. With this background a study was formulated with the following objectives.

1. To find out the constraints faced by the scheduled tribes in access to social institutions and availing their services.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted based on the Ex-post facto research design. An ex-post facto research is a kind of research design in which the researcher predicts the possible causes behind an effect that has already occurred. It is also known as "after the fact" research design. In Tamil Nadu, three districts namely Salem, Tiruvannamalai, and Viluppuram were selected purposively for this study as these districts stand in first three positions based on scheduled tribe's population.

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Based on the highest scheduled tribes' population, one block each namely Pethanaickenpalayam, Jawadhu hills, and Kalrayan hills from the districts Salem, Tiruvannamalai, and Viluppuram were selected respectively for the study. A total of nine villages were selected from the blocks based on the criteria of each three villages with highest scheduled tribes' population in the respective blocks. From the nine villages, a total of 270 tribes were selected as respondents by using proportionate random sampling method, with 90 respondents each from three districts.

A pre tested and well-structured interview schedule was used for data collection. A list of possible constraints that can be faced by scheduled tribes in access to social institutions and availing their services were prepared by reviewing the related literatures. A pilot survey was conducted to pre-test these constraints with a group of tribes at a non-sample area. Based on the results of pilot survey, 24 constraints were finalized to be included in the interview schedule.

These 24 constraints were grouped under five social institutions selected for the study. After construction of the interview schedule the data were collected by direct interview method. The data collected were tabulated and analyzed by using the descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage analysis. The constraints were ranked based on the percentage and presented in this paper.

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3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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The constraints expressed by the tribal respondents in access to social institutions were presented under each social institution. With the constraints, the possible suggestions were also collected from the respondents and presented along with the constraints in this chapter.

3.1 Family

The family is a social group consisting of two or more people who have blood ties, marriage or adoption (Soefandi and Pramudya, 2009). Family as an institution provides care, mental support, and physical protection to the members. Family determines Kinship and maintains human survival through marriage and reproduction. Also, family provides basic knowledge to the children for survival and socialization in the tribal society. Nowadays these functions of the family have not been fully experienced by the tribes. There are some constraints that hinder the tribes from enjoying the benefits of the family as an institution. Those constraints were collected from the tribal respondents and presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Constraints faced in access and getting services of Family

(n=270)				
S. No.	Particulars	No.	Per cent	Rank
1	Importance and respect for elders has been decreased	63	23.33	IV
2	Increase in materialism among the family members	74	27.41	III
3	Decreasing family values	87	32.22	II
4	Conflicts due to wealth distribution	54	20.00	V
5	Changing size of family into nuclear family	161	59.63	I

From Table 1, it was found that almost three-fifths (59.63 per cent) of the tribal respondents said that 'The changing size of the family into nuclear family' as a constraint which ranked first among other constraints. The majority of the households were nuclear families since the tribal families nowadays prefer to become a separate family after marriage. This might be the reason for the change in family size was found as a major constraint.

It also found that around one-third of the tribal respondents felt constraints such as 'Decreasing the family values' (32.22 per cent) and 'Increase in materialism among the family members (27.41 per cent) that possessed ranks II and III. It is because the young generation deviating from their family values due to the exposure to modern culture. There also an increase in the use of mobile phones and television for entertainment purpose which reduces the time tribes spent as a family.

The next two constraints identified were 'Importance and respect for elders have been decreased' (23.33 per cent) and 'Conflicts due to wealth distribution' (20.00 per cent) with respective ranks of IV and V. These two constraints were felt by comparatively less number of tribal respondents.

To overcome these constraints the scheduled tribes have to be encouraged to become joint family and spend quality time with their family. Since, majority of the respondents were farmers the family farming has to be encouraged so that they can engage in farming activities as a family and get benefits from each other.

3.2 Religion

Religion is described as the beliefs, values, and practices related to sacred or spiritual concerns. Émile Durkheim (1976) defined religion as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things". Religion could be a force for social change (Max Weber, 1964). Religion as a social institution operated to standardize the religious emotions, beliefs and practices, and to spread and propagate them among the individuals that serve the needs of society. Religion acts as a powerful instrument for social change and social integration in the tribal areas. These functions of religion in the tribal society were affected by some constraints. Such constraints that prevent scheduled tribes from access to religion were collected and presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Constraints faced in access and getting services of Religion

(n=270)

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S. No.	Particulars	No.	Per cent	Rank
1	Declining the level of faith on religious institutions	70	25.93	III
2	Decrease in faith on God's Sovereignty	57	21.11	IV
3	Difficulty in adopting the spiritual needs	92	34.07	I
4	Discrimination in access to religious institutions	51	18.89	V
5	Lack of time to spend in religious activities	76	28.15	II

Table 2 shows that a little more than one-third (34.07 per cent) of the tribal respondents have mentioned that 'Difficulty in adopting the spiritual needs' as the major constraint concerning religion with the rank I and 'Lack of time to spend in religious activities as the next major constraint by more than one-fourth (28.15 per cent) of the respondents. Even though, nearly half of the respondents did farming as their occupation, and the rest of them were engaged in some other occupations like wage-earners either in and around their village or nearby towns. It is also found that the majority of the respondents had a high level of economic motivation and looking for income generation activities. In such conditions, it shows difficulty for them to spend time in religious activities and fulfilling their spiritual needs.

The next two constraints found with the ranks of III and IV were 'Declining the level of faith on religious institutions' and 'Decrease in faith on God's Sovereignty' among 25.93 per cent and 21.11 per cent of the tribal respondents respectively. These two constraints were related to the faith and belief of the scheduled tribes found only among one-fourth of the respondents.

Since, the tribes were exposed to the modern culture and the young generation had started getting some formal education their faith, belief and attitudes towards the religion and god have changing negatively among few of the current generation.

Only 18.89 per cent of tribal respondents have mentioned 'Discrimination in access to religious institutions' as a constraint which possessed rank V. It might be due to the gender based discriminations in entry in the religious places were prevailing in some tribal villages. It was reveals that all the above mentioned constraints were only felt around one-third of the tribal respondents. Based on the above aspects, we can conclude that there was no serious constraint which is preventing tribes in access to the religious institutions.

3.3 Education

According to Igbo (2003), education is viewed as a social institution because it comprises that segment of the basic social structure which meets the educational needs of society. Education is the institution that imparts knowledge, skills and socially acceptable attitudes to the individuals of the society. Education as a social institution also transmitting new ideas, cultural values, morals and norms cherished in the society. By imparting these functions education helps an individual in socialization in tribal society. There are various constraints in tribal areas that prevent tribes from availing the services of education. These constraints were collected and presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Constraints faced in access and getting services of Education

S. No.	Particulars	No.	Per cent	Rank
1	Indebtedness of family hampers the schooling of children	182	67.41	I
2	Long distance of educational institutions in the hilly areas	94	34.81	III
3	High cost of tuition fee in the private schools	53	19.62	IV
4	Inadequate teachers in the school of hilly areas	49	18.15	V
5	Lack of college facilities in the tribal areas	153	56.67	II

It is clear from Table 3 that concerning education, 'Indebtedness of family hampers the schooling of children' was felt as the major constraint by little more than two-thirds (67.41 per cent) of the tribal respondents with the rank I. It is because the majority of the tribal respondents were farmers and wage earners, they belonged to low in material possession and livestock possession. As the majority of the tribal families were living below the poverty line it is difficult for them to repay their debts. Hence, it is difficult for them to send their children to schools rather they involve them in some income generation activities.

Also, more than half (56.67 per cent) of the tribal respondents have felt 'Lack of college facilities in the tribal areas' as the second major constraint in accessing education. And the constraint 'Long distance of educational institutions in the hilly areas' was expressed by little more than one-third (34.81 per cent) of the tribal respondents which ranked three. These two constraints were related to the availability of educational institutions within the tribal society. Even though there are sufficient schools operated by the respective panchayat unions and forest departments in the study area, there are no college facilities for the higher education of the tribal students after completion of their school education. Also, there were no sufficient high schools and higher secondary schools in interior part of hilly areas. So, the children have to travel long to continue their education with poor transport facilities. Hence most of the children became dropouts after completion of their middle school.

The constraints such as 'High cost of the tuition fee in the private schools' and 'Inadequate teachers in the schools of hilly areas' were the least two constraints observed among 19.62 per cent and 18.15 per cent of tribal respondents with the respective ranks of IV and V. As only a few of the tribal respondents sending their children to private schools they felt the tuition fee was high. Even parents sending children to government schools have expressed to send their wards to private schools for better education but it is not affordable to tribes due to high tuition fee in the private schools. The preference of parents towards private schools is mostly inclined by the insufficient teachers in the government schools of tribal areas.

All the constraints discussed above were circled around the poverty of the tribal families. Though the government provided several scholarships and other benefits for school-going children they were not sufficient to convince the parents to send their children to the schools happily.

Even though, there were Government Tribal Residential Schools (GTR) and Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) were operating in the study area, they are in few numbers and situated only in the headquarters of the block. Hence, the parents were not preferred to send their children to these schools as it will lead them to not see their children for a long time. So the number of residential schools has to be increased and they have to be situated close to the tribal habitations. Also, the awareness about the facilities of residential schools among the tribes was low. Hence, the government must organize awareness campaigns in tribal hamlets on the facilities at the residential schools such as free medical treatment, food and hostel. "So that the tribal parents can get convinced that their children would be taken care of at these schools.

3.4 Panchayat

Panchayat institution provides rules and regulations in line with maintaining the law and orders, settlement of disputes, administration affairs and providing the legitimate use of power. Panchayats help in keeping social order and decisions to be made in the tribal society. The ultimate aim of the local panchayat is the achievement of the set goals of the group. The constraints affecting these functions of the panchayat were collected from the respondents and furnished in Table 4.

Table 4. Constraints faced in access and getting services of Panchayat

(n=270)				
S. No.	Particulars	No.	Per cent	Rank
1	Delayed response from officials	63	23.33	IV
2	More formalities for applying and getting welfare schemes	136	50.37	II
3	The awareness level of various developmental programs is poor	154	57.04	I
4	Poor allocation of welfare schemes	95	35.19	III

From Table 4, it has been found that regarding panchayat institution 'The awareness level of various developmental programs is poor' has expressed as a constraint by nearly three-fifths (57.04 per cent) of the tribal respondents followed by half (50.37 per cent) of the respondents who said 'More formalities for applying and getting welfare schemes' as the second major constraint.

Though, the State and Central Governments have implemented several welfare schemes for the development of Scheduled Tribes, the awareness level among the tribes on the schemes was very poor. The reason might be that the majority of the tribes in the study area were illiterates; hence it is difficult for them to be aware of welfare schemes. It is also difficult for them to carry out all the formalities in the application of welfare schemes.

The next major constraint was 'poor allocation of welfare schemes' expressed by more than one-third (35.19 per cent) of the respondents. The biasness was there in the allocation of the welfare schemes in the local panchayats. It is noted that many of the respondents applied for the housing and other schemes, but only a few of them were benefitted from schemes and others still waiting for approval from the officials.

The least constraint was 'Delayed response from officials' by 23.33 per cent of the tribal respondents. The significant delay was observed in the processing the papers and approval of schemes to the tribes. The delay was due to the less man power and less skilled man power of the local panchayat at the tribal areas. As most of the government offices are situated far from the tribal villages it is difficult for the tribes to travel and contact the officials directly.

The above specified constraints can be solved by improving the awareness level of scheduled tribes about various welfare schemes available. Hence, the local panchayats have to develop strategies to ensure the timely information to the tribes related to new schemes. So the tribes can contact the officials and avail the schemes.

The government has to organize capacity-building training periodically for the officials of local panchayats in the tribal areas. So that the officials can be equipped in the processing of applications and also their attitude can also be modified. The road and transport facilities to the remote tribal villages have to be improved so that tribes can be well connected with panchayat offices and avail the services timely and regularly.

3.5 Economy

The economy is the social institution through which goods and services are produced, distributed and consumed among the individuals in the society. The ultimate aim of the economy is the satisfaction of the economic and bio-social needs of the society. United Nations (2006) said that the developing countries need to design appropriate strategies for increasing access to financial services by all segments of the population, especially to the unprivileged societies. In tribal society, economic institutions promote the physical wellbeing of tribes through economic arrangements such as the promotion of employment opportunities and financial support for better livelihood. These functions of economic institutions have been affected by several constraints which were identified and presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Constraints faced in access and getting services of Economy

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(n=270)				
S. No.	Particulars	No.	Per cent	Rank
1	Lack of financial literacy	156	57.78	II
2	Increase in indebtedness among tribes	178	65.93	I
3	Less manpower in banks in the hilly areas	86	31.85	V
4	The slow processing of loan approval	92	34.07	IV
5	Economic institutions are situated far from the tribal habitats	133	49.26	III

Table 5 shows that almost two-thirds (65.93 per cent) of the tribal respondents have said that 'Increase in indebtedness among tribes' as major constraint regarding economic institutions which ranked first among the constraints. It is also the most common constraint which can prevent accessing the other social institutions too.

It is common in a tribal society that the predominance of poverty, low income and exploitation of money lenders made them already indebted. Hence, they were not in a position to further access the formal financial institutions. Even though they are approaching banks for financial assistance for business startups, their proposals were approved in minimum due to the poor loan repayment rate and the tribes are not making collateral security as they were only marginalized farmers.

The second most identified constraint was 'Lack of financial literacy' among more than half (57.78 per cent) of the tribal respondents. The majority of the tribes in the study area was illiterate, had low information source utilization and had low cosmopolitaness. These factors resulted in the lack of financial awareness among the tribes on various loan facilities, banking rules and regulations and the malpractices prevailing in the society.

The constraint namely 'Economic institutions are situated far from the tribal habitats' was expressed by half (49.26 per cent) of the tribal respondents. The tribes have to travel long way to reach the financial institutions as many of the financial institutions are situated only in the block headquarters,. Hence it was considered as the third major constraint in the study area.

'The slow processing in the loan approval' was the constraint felt by one-third (34.07 per cent) of the tribal respondents followed by 'Less manpower in banks situated at hilly areas' felt by 31.85 per cent of the respondents. These two constraints were closely related to one other and it was observed that the less manpower at the banks in the tribal area affects the processing and approval of loan applications.

To overcome these constraints, the government has to empower the tribes with capacity-building programmes on income generation and financial management. The nationalized banks have to create some credit schemes especially for promoting entrepreneurship among the tribes. With these strategies, the repayment of debts among tribes can be improved significantly. Also, the government should increase the number of branches to be situated in the tribal villages.

The indebtedness of tribes was prevailing mainly due to their importance on money lenders for immediate needs. Even though there are several schemes for the tribes in cooperative banks and nationalized banks, low financial literacy among tribes and their wrong perception about banking preventing them to avail the services. Also, the delayed process in approving the loans and difficulties in applying the loans affect tribes which force them to prefer the local money lenders. Hence, the banks have to conduct awareness programmes for the tribes to improve their financial literacy and change their attitude positively towards banking.

The trained manpower in the banks at the tribal areas must be increased to improve their efficiency in processing and approval of loan proposals from the tribes as soon as possible. The nationalized banks have to provide some collateral-free loans to the tribes so that they can get away from the clutches of money lenders and bring financial inclusion in the tribal society.

4. CONCLUSION

In India, the problem of access to institutional support is extensive among the marginalized and weaker sections especially the tribal society. Scheduled tribes have been historically deprived of the basic physical and human entitlements, which are reflected in their development. Social institutions are the key in the implementation of welfare schemes and bring social and financial inclusion among scheduled tribes so that they can be included in the mainstream of society. In this study, several constraints were identified which affect the access to social institutions and factors restricting tribes from availing the services of social institutions.

From the findings, we can conclude that there were not many constraints related to family and religion as these two institutions are closely tied with tribal life. But regarding the formal institutions such as education, panchayat, and economy there were a significant amount of constraints identified. The important factors that affect the access to social institutions among the Scheduled Tribes were illiteracy of the tribes, lack of job opportunities which made them indebted, inadequate skilled manpower in the social institutions situated in the tribal areas, behavior and response of officials, geographical remoteness of tribal habitations, and low awareness among the tribes about various development schemes implemented by the government.

To overcome these constraints possible solutions were also suggested along with the constraints in the study. The significant way to implement these suggestions was by improving the literacy among the scheduled tribes. Social institutions such as schools and banks have to be established within the tribal locality so that the access to social institutions among the scheduled tribes can be improved. By implementing these suggestions, the socio-economic and cultural development of scheduled tribes can be achieved through the functions of social institutions.

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