



## Gendered Perspectives in Tribal Social Research: Role of Women Researchers in India

Dravin Maurya<sup>\*</sup>, Vivek Yadav<sup>\*\*</sup> and Shivam Maurya<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

### Introduction:

The role played by women researchers in social sciences research is extremely significant, especially when focusing on tribal regions in India. At the global level, women constitute nearly 33.3 percent of the total research community. Despite this, considerable gaps in data persist, particularly across regions such as South Asia, Southeast Asia, Oceania the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa. Women researchers contribute distinctive insights, empathetic engagement and innovative research methods while studying tribal societies. Historically, women have been responsible for several important scientific contributions; However, they still represent only about 30 percent of researchers worldwide, and nearly 35 percent of students pursuing STEM-related education are women. As India is characterized by a wide diversity of tribal populations, the involvement of women researchers becomes essential for comprehensively understanding and addressing the social, economic, cultural, and

political challenges experienced by these communities.

Women researchers demonstrate a strong ability to build trust and meaningful relationships with indigenous populations, which helps in collecting data in an ethical, sensitive and reliable manner. To safeguard tribal women's rights and ensure their perspectives are included, women researchers actively collaborate with local organizations, government agencies and international institutions. Women scholars often follow participatory and inclusive research approaches to strengthen tribal communities. By engaging directly with tribal women, who are frequently marginalized, they support initiatives related to gender equality, health services, and education. Such advocacy plays a crucial role in empowering tribal women and contributes significantly to the overall development and progress of tribal communities.

### Historical Context

*Dravin Maurya<sup>\*</sup>, Vivek Yadav<sup>\*\*</sup> and Shivam Maurya<sup>\*\*\*</sup>*

*\*M.Sc. scholar, Department of Agricultural Extension, Banda University of Agriculture and Technology, Banda*

*\*\*M.Sc. scholar, Department of Soil Science, B.M. Memorial P.G. College, Ambedkar Nagar*

*\*\*\*M.Sc. scholar, Department of Horticulture, Tilak Dhari Post Graduate College, Jaunpur*

The participation of women in social sciences research in India has a long and meaningful tradition, marked by the contributions of several trailblazing women scholars. In the past, women researchers played a crucial role in recording the cultural richness, social practices and community structures of tribal societies. Anthropologists such as Madhuri Shanker established a strong foundation for present-day academic inquiry. Their research offered deep and valuable understanding of tribal life, bringing attention to the challenges faced by these communities, as well as their strength, adaptability and significant role in society.

### **The Unique Contributions of Women Researchers**

Women researchers bring new and valuable perspectives that are highly significant in socio-cultural research environments. Their distinct viewpoints strengthen research in several important ways:

- ⇒ **Community Participation:** Women researchers are often viewed as more approachable and trustworthy by community members, which helps in obtaining more reliable and in-depth data.
- ⇒ **Sensitivity and Insight:** They are generally better equipped to handle delicate and personal issues, encouraging

respondents to share their experiences more openly and honestly.

⇒ **Comprehensive Outlook:** Women researchers tend to emphasize community well-being and sustainable development, thereby enhancing the overall quality and relevance of research findings.

⇒ **Innovative Research Approaches:** The increasing involvement of women researchers has contributed to the adoption of culturally appropriate and context-based research methods. These include participatory rural appraisal, ethnographic research and community-based participatory approaches. By integrating indigenous knowledge systems and local practices, women researchers ensure that studies remain meaningful, ethical, and respectful of the cultural identity of tribal communities.

### **Gendered Barriers in Tribal Research**

Women researchers working in tribal regions encounter distinct challenges that can restrict their involvement in research activities.

These obstacles include:

- ⇒ **Social and Cultural Constraints:** Established traditions and gender roles often limit women's freedom of movement and access to educational opportunities.

⇒ **Financial Constraints:** Several research initiatives fail to adequately recognize women's contributions or do not allocate sufficient funding to support female researchers.

⇒ **Lack of Representation:** Women are frequently underrepresented within research teams, which reduces the diversity of perspectives in research outcomes.

⇒ **Operational Challenges:** Practical difficulties such as reaching remote locations and securing financial resources further complicate research efforts.

⇒ **Work-Life Balance:** Women researchers must often overcome these barriers while simultaneously managing their professional commitments and personal responsibilities.

## Future Directions

In the coming years, the continued involvement of women scholars in tribal regions will be essential to addressing emerging opportunities as well as evolving challenges. With ongoing changes in the socio-economic conditions of indigenous communities, new and relevant areas of research are likely to emerge. Future research should give particular attention to topics such as the impact of climate change on tribal

livelihoods, the influence of digital technologies on education and the protection and revitalization of indigenous languages. Women researchers will remain key contributors in these areas, offering their distinctive perspectives, experiences and expertise to advance meaningful and inclusive research.

## Conclusion

Women researchers perform a significant and multifaceted role in social science research within India's tribal communities. Their contributions have not only enhanced academic understanding of tribal societies but have also led to meaningful improvements in the lives of tribal populations. By encouraging gender equality, introducing innovative research practices and shaping policy frameworks, women researchers are driving positive change in tribal regions. Moving ahead, it is essential to provide them with adequate recognition and institutional support so that they can continue to make valuable contributions to the field. Through their commitment and sustained efforts, women researchers are strengthening social science research and helping to build a more equitable and inclusive society.

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