

Acts and Schemes for Welfare of Indigenous Communities in India

Arathy Ashok*

Indigenous communities in India, often regarded as the guardians of nature, uphold unique traditions and play a vital role in preserving the nation's rich cultural heritage. However, they face many challenges including poverty, socio-economic marginalization and limited access to basic education and healthcare facilities. By recognizing this, the Government of India has been implementing targeted interventions for protecting the rights and overall welfare of the indigenous communities from time to time. Historical background of these targeted interventions dates back to 1950 when the **Article 342** of the Constitution of India was implemented. It grants the authority to the President to identify and notify certain indigenous communities as Scheduled Tribes for a specific State or Union Territory. Later, **Article 244(1) (Fifth & Sixth Schedule)** gave provision for self-administration and control of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes in any state. Other major Acts for protecting the rights and welfare of the indigenous communities are as follows:

- ❖ **Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act:** This Act was established in 1989 to prevent offences and atrocities against the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and to provide special courts for the trials of such cases.
- ❖ **PESA (Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act:** It was enacted in 1996 and grants autonomy to self-governance to tribal communities by empowering *Gram Sabhas* to safeguard local traditions, culture, natural resources, and to approve development plans and programmes in the Scheduled Areas.
- ❖ **Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006:** This Act recognizes and vests the forest rights and occupation in forest land for the Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers.

Targeted Welfare Schemes for Indigenous Communities

Tribal Sub Plan (TSP), a flagship programme of Government of India post-independence, was introduced along with the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-1979), attempted to ensure guaranteed allocation of funds to reduce the development gaps among the indigenous communities. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs had implemented the scheme 'Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub-Plan (SCA to TSP)' during 1977-78. After the amalgamation of Plan and Non Plan, the scheme was renamed as 'Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub-Scheme (SCA to TSS)' since 2017 and it also expanded its coverage

* The author is a Scientist at ICAR-National Institute of Agricultural Economics and Policy Research (NIAP), New Delhi. Most of the information given in this blog related to schemes is compiled from the website of Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. Views expressed are personal.

to the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. Later, the scheme has been revamped as '**Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAAGY)**' with the main objective being to achieve integrated socio-economic development of selected villages through a convergence approach. Major ongoing schemes for the welfare of the indigenous communities in India are summarized below:

- ❖ **Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan (DAJGUA):** It is a convergence based programme launched in 2024, aiming to address critical gaps in social infrastructure, health, education, and livelihood development across approximately 63,000 tribal villages by integrating 25 interventions across 17 ministries and departments of the Government of India.
- ❖ **Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN):** This mission, focuses on ensuring basic facilities such as safe housing, clean drinking water and sanitation, improved access to education, health and nutrition, road and telecom connectivity, electrification of households and sustainable livelihood opportunities, with special focus on Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).
- ❖ **Pradhan Mantri Jan Jatiya Vikas Mission:** The scheme envisages fixation and declaration of Minimum Support Price for the selected Minor Forest Produce (MFP) and its procurement and marketing by the designated State Agencies.
- ❖ **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS):** It comes under the Central sector scheme and these schools aim to provide quality education to the Scheduled Tribe (ST) children in remote areas, facilitating access to higher education and employment opportunities.
- ❖ **Scholarship programmes for students: Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarship Schemes** promote the education of tribal students by providing financial support in classes IX, X and higher education up to post-graduate courses. National fellowship scheme provides financial assistance to meritorious Scheduled Tribe students to pursue higher education after completing their post-graduate degree. **National Overseas Scholarship** provides opportunities for meritorious ST students to pursue post-graduate, doctoral, and post-doctoral studies at universities abroad.
- ❖ **Support to Tribal Research Institutes:** This is a Centrally-sponsored scheme that provides funds to the Tribal Research Institutes to strengthen their infrastructure, conduct research and documentation, and carry out capacity-building programmes.
- ❖ **Aid to Voluntary Organizations working for the Scheduled Tribes:** Through this Central sector scheme, grants are being provided to voluntary organizations to enhance the reach of welfare schemes to the indigenous communities.

The focus of welfare programmes for indigenous communities in India has progressed from protective and rights-based initiatives towards holistic empowerment. Recent schemes emphasize education, health, livelihoods, and infrastructure development, while preserving cultural identity of the indigenous communities.