

Sanitation Disparities: Exploring Challenges among Scheduled Tribes in India

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Abstract-

Sanitation is a critical aspect of public health, yet it remains a significant challenge for many communities worldwide. Among these communities, Scheduled Tribes in India face unique and complex sanitation disparities. This research paper aims to explore the sanitation disparities and challenges faced by Scheduled Tribes in India focus on the sociological dimensions of sanitation; the study delves into the unique circumstances and factors that contribute to these disparities. By examining the historical and cultural influences on sanitation practices within tribal communities, the research seeks to understand the complex interplay of social, economic, and environmental factors. The paper also examines the impact of limited access to clean water, inadequate sanitation infrastructure, a lack of awareness, and cultural beliefs on the sanitation conditions among Scheduled Tribes. Through a comprehensive analysis, this research highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions and policy measures to address the sanitation challenges faced by Scheduled Tribes in India. The present research paper is based on secondary data, which involves compilation of existing data source from government reports, books, and research articles. The findings of this study contribute to the broader discourse on public health and equity, with the ultimate goal of improving sanitation conditions and promoting well-being among Scheduled Tribes in India.

Keywords- Sanitation, Disparities, Scheduled Tribes, Challenges.

Introduction-

The word tribe is derived from the Latin word 'tribus'. The early Romans used the term to designate divisions of society. The latter usage suggests that it was meant for poor people. The current popular meaning in the English language was acquired during the expansion of colonialism, particularly in Asia and Africa. The current prevailing meaning of 'tribe' in India is a class of people included in the list of Scheduled Tribes. Tribal populations are relatively isolated and closed groups, forming homogeneous units of production and consumption. Scheduled Tribes, also known as Adivasis are recognized under the Article 342 of the Constitution of India, represents a diverse group of indigenous communities with distinct cultures, languages, and traditional practices. India constitutes 10.45 crores Scheduled Tribes population which accounts for 8.6 percent of India's total population. Sanitation is extremely important for all. Access to sanitation facilities can have a significant impact on every

individual’s health, well-being, and overall quality of life. Many Scheduled Tribes in India face unique challenges when it comes to sanitation. Sanitation disparities among Scheduled Tribes in India pose a critical public health concern. Due to various factors like geographical remoteness, lack of infrastructure, and limited resources, they often have limited access to clean water, toilets, and waste managements. Despite efforts to improve overall sanitation conditions in the country, Scheduled Tribes continue to experience significant disparities in access to proper sanitation facilities.

Improving sanitation conditions in these communities is crucial for preventing the spread of diseases and improving overall health. When proper sanitation practices are in place, it can help reduce the incidence of waterborne illnesses and other preventable diseases that disproportionately affect Scheduled Tribes. Furthermore, access to sanitation facilities can promote dignity, privacy, and gender equality, especially for women and girls. It can also contribute to better educational outcomes by reducing school absences due to preventable illnesses. By addressing the sanitation challenges faced by Scheduled Tribes in India, we can work towards creating healthier and more inclusive communities for everyone. It's an important aspect of promoting their overall well-being and ensuring their rights to health and dignity. This paper aims to shed light on the challenges faced by Scheduled Tribes in India, the factors contributing to these disparities, and the implications for public health and well-being.

Objectives of the study

1. To study sanitation disparities among Scheduled Tribes in India.
2. To understand need for Targeted Interventions and Policy Measures.

Methodology

The researcher has used descriptive research design. The present research paper is based on secondary data, which involves compilation of existing data source from government reports, books, and research articles.

Demographic Profile of STs in India

Table 1: ST population in India

Scheduled Tribes Population		
Total	Rural	Urban
10,42,81,034	9,38,19,162	1,04,61,872

Source- Census of India 2011

Table 2: Percentage of STs to total Population

Percentage of STs to total Population		
Total	Rural	Urban
8.6	11.3	2.8

Source- Census of India 2011

What is Sanitation?

The World Health Organization defines the term “Sanitation” that ‘Sanitation is the provision of facilities and services for the safe disposal of human urine and faeces and maintenance of hygienic conditions, through services such as garbage collection and wastewater disposal.’

Sanitation is also refers to the set of practices and measures aimed at promoting public health and preventing the spread of disease through the safe disposal of waste, access to clean water, and the promotion of proper hygiene practices. It encompasses various aspects such as the provision of sanitation facilities like toilets, waste management systems, access to clean water sources, and education on hygiene practices. Sanitation plays a crucial role in maintaining the health and well-being of individuals and communities by preventing the transmission of disease and creating a clean and safe environment for everyone.

Here are some common sanitation practices such as –

- Proper handwashing with soap and clean water before eating, after using the toilet, and after handling waste or garbage.
- Using toilets or latrines for safe disposal of human waste, rather than practicing open defecation.
- Regular cleaning and disinfection of toilets, bathrooms, and other areas where waste is generated.
- Safe disposal of solid waste through proper waste management systems, such as recycling, composting, or using designated waste collection services.
- Access to clean and safe drinking water sources, either through piped water supply systems, wells, or water treatment methods.
- Education and awareness programs on hygiene practices, including the importance of hand hygiene, safe food handling, and maintaining a clean-living environment.

Historical and Cultural influence on sanitation practices within tribal communities.

Historical and cultural influences play a significant role in shaping sanitation practices within tribal communities. These factors impact the beliefs, traditions, and behaviours related to sanitation i.e., 1. Traditional Practices: Tribal communities often have unique traditional practices that are deeply rooted in their cultural heritage. These practices may include specific rituals, taboos, or customs related to sanitation and hygiene. For example, some tribes may have specific rules about waste disposal or the use of natural resources for sanitation purposes. 2. Spiritual and Religious Beliefs: Many tribal communities have spiritual and religious beliefs that influence their perspectives on cleanliness and sanitation. These beliefs may emphasize purity, cleanliness, or the sacredness of certain natural elements like water or land. Such

beliefs can impact the way sanitation is perceived and practiced within these communities. 3. Communal Living: Tribal communities often have a strong sense of community and communal living. This can influence sanitation practices, as decisions regarding waste management, water sources, and hygiene may be made collectively. The communal aspect can affect the design and maintenance of sanitation facilities within the community. 4. Historical Experiences: Historical factors, such as colonization, displacement, or marginalization, can also influence sanitation practices within tribal communities. These experiences may have disrupted traditional practices or led to the adoption of new sanitation practices influenced by external forces. 5. Limited Resources and Infrastructure: Many tribal communities face challenges in accessing resources and infrastructure necessary for proper sanitation. Historical and cultural factors may have contributed to the limited availability of sanitation facilities, safe water sources, and waste management systems within these communities.

In many tribal cultures, there is a deep connection between nature and daily life. They often have a strong sense of environmental stewardship and a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of humans, animals, and the natural world. This perspective can influence their sanitation practices, emphasizing the need for cleanliness and hygiene to maintain harmony with nature. Understanding the historical and cultural influences on sanitation practices is crucial for implementing effective interventions and policies that address sanitation disparities in tribal communities. By considering these factors, we can develop context-specific approaches that respect the cultural values and traditions of these communities while promoting improved sanitation and hygiene practices.

It is important to recognize and respect these historical and cultural influences when implementing sanitation programs among tribal communities. By taking a culturally sensitive approach and involving community members in the planning and decision-making process, it becomes possible to create sustainable and effective sanitation practices that align with their cultural values and traditions.

Sanitation Disparity

Sanitation disparities refer to the unequal distribution and access to sanitation facilities, services, and resources among different communities or population groups. These disparities can be influenced by various factors such as poverty, inadequate infrastructure, lack of education and awareness, cultural practices, and discrimination. These disparities can manifest in various ways:

1. Access to sanitation facilities: Many communities, especially in rural or underserved areas, lack access to proper toilets or latrines. Instead, they may practice open defecation, which can lead to the contamination of water sources and the spread of diseases.

2. Clean water access: Access to clean and safe drinking water is essential for proper sanitation. However, marginalized communities may face challenges in accessing clean water sources, leading to unhygienic practices and increased health risks.
3. Hygiene practices: Education and awareness about proper hygiene practices, such as hand washing with soap, are crucial for preventing the spread of diseases. However, disparities in education and awareness programs can result in inconsistent or inadequate hygiene practices among different population groups.
4. Infrastructure and services: Inadequate sanitation infrastructure, including sewage systems, waste management facilities, and garbage collection services, can contribute to disparities in sanitation. Communities living in remote or underserved areas, including marginalized groups like Scheduled Tribes, may face greater challenges in accessing proper sanitation facilities and often face a lack of investment in infrastructure, exacerbating the sanitation gap.
5. Social, Economic and Environmental Factors: Sanitation disparities among Scheduled Tribes can be influenced by factors like Social, Economic and Environmental. Social factors such as limited access to education and awareness about proper sanitation practices, which can contribute to inadequate sanitation facilities. Economic factors like poverty and lack of resources may hinder the implementation of improved sanitation infrastructure in tribal communities. Additionally, environmental factors such as geographical remoteness and limited availability of clean water sources can pose challenges to maintaining proper sanitation. These factors, when combined, can contribute to the disparities in sanitation among Scheduled Tribes.

Table 3: The following data on the percentage of households having latrine facility within premises, Night soil remove by human and open defecation published by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs is an indicator of sanitation disparity.

	Total number of households	% of households having latrine facility within the premises	% of households not having latrine facility within the premises	Night soil remove by human	% of households practicing open defecation
All Social Groups	2467,40,228	46.90	53.10	0.30	49.80
Scheduled Tribes	23374527	22.70	77.30	0.10	74.60

Source- Annual Report 2020-21, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GoI.

Sanitation practices among Scheduled Tribes

Among tribal communities, sanitation practices are based on their cultural beliefs, traditions, and access to resources. In some tribal communities, there may be a strong connection to nature and a belief in the importance of maintaining cleanliness in their surroundings. They may follow traditional practices of waste disposal, such as burying or burning waste material. Many tribes do not consider open defecation to be unhygienic. Rather, having a toilet next to the bedroom or even attached to the house is highly despised by them. Having a toilet within the house is considered to pollute the living space. They believe that only animals defecate where they sleep; human beings don't. This is an ancient notion. But what about the modern toilet? That too does not go well with the practices and beliefs of the people. According to them, if a toilet is used, the excreta accumulate in a pit or tank near the house, which is undesirable. They believe that human excreta should be discharged as far away from human habitation as possible. However, it is important to note that sanitation challenges exist in many tribal communities, particularly in remote and marginalised areas. Limited access to sanitation facilities and infrastructure can lead to open defecation, which poses health risks and contributes to the spread of disease. Lack of awareness about proper hygiene practices and the importance of sanitation also be a challenge.

As we all know, Menstrual hygiene is an integral part of health. In India, Menstruation is regarded as a social and cultural taboo. For menstrual hygiene the use of sanitary pads varies significantly in different tribal communities in India. Majority of females prefers reusable old clothes due to cost factors, availability and ease of disposal. Tribal women residing in urban areas has higher pooled prevalence of sanitary pad usage. This is due to community awareness, hygiene knowledge, different beliefs and customs.

Challenges among Scheduled Tribes in India in sanitation disparities.

1. Geographical Isolation- Most of the Scheduled Tribes resides in remote and inaccessible areas, which makes it challenging to provide adequate sanitation infrastructure and services. The lack of proper roads, transportation, and connectivity hinders the delivery of sanitation facilities and resources.

Sanitation disparity also manifests itself in rural tribal areas in two ways. Because most of the tribal people are located in remote areas, the problems of the tribal people in the remote areas are more and different from those of the tribal people in the plains. People in remote areas are not able to benefit from all the government schemes, policies and programmes. So geographical location is a major challenge in sanitation disparity.

2. Limited Access to Resources- Scheduled Tribes often face socio-economic challenges, including poverty and limited access to resources. This can make it

difficult for individuals and communities to invest in and maintain proper sanitation facilities.

3. Cultural Practices and Beliefs- Cultural practices and beliefs can influence sanitation behaviour and practices. Some tribal communities may have traditional practices that don not align with modern sanitation practices, making it challenging to promote behaviour change and the adoption of improved sanitation practices.

4. Lack of Awareness and Education- Lack of sanitation awareness and hygiene education about proper sanitation can contribute to disparities. Many Scheduled Tribes may lack knowledge about the importance of sanitation, hygiene and its impact on health which hinders the adoption of improved practices.

5. Inadequate Infrastructure and Services- The lack of proper sanitation infrastructure, such as toilets and waste management systems, in tribal areas exacerbates the disparities. Without access to these basic facilities, open defecation may be prevalent, leading to contamination of water sources and the spread of disease.

6. Lack of Institutional Support- Inadequate institutional support and limited involvement of local governance bodies in sanitation planning and implementation can contribute to disparities in sanitation access for Scheduled Tribes.

7. Language and Cultural Barriers: Communication barriers due to language differences and cultural practices can hinder effective healthcare delivery. Lack of interpreters or healthcare providers who understand the cultural nuances of Scheduled Tribes can lead to miscommunication and inadequate care.

8. Discrimination and Stigma: Scheduled Tribes may face discrimination and stigma when seeking healthcare, which can discourage them from seeking timely medical attention. This can result in delayed diagnosis and treatment, leading to worsened health outcomes.

9. Financial Constraints- Economic limitations can prevent tribal individuals from maintaining proper sanitation practices. The cost of services, transportation and adequate infrastructure is beyond their means, making it difficult for them to access the sanitation practices they require.

Need for Targeted Interventions and Policy Measures

The urgent need for targeted interventions and policy measures to address sanitation challenges faced by Scheduled Tribes in India is crucial. Here are some key areas that require attention:

1. Customized solutions: Tailor sanitation interventions to the specific needs and cultural practices of Scheduled Tribes. Recognize their unique requirements and incorporate traditional knowledge and practices into sanitation programs.

2. Accessible infrastructure: Build and maintain sanitation facilities that are easily accessible to Scheduled Tribes. Ensure that toilets, hand washing stations, and waste management systems are located within close proximity to their settlements.
3. Behavioral change programs: Implement behavior change communication programs that are designed specifically for Scheduled Tribes. These programs should focus on promoting proper sanitation practices, safe water handling, and hygiene behaviors within their cultural context.
4. Capacity building: Provide training and capacity building programs for local community members, including women, to become sanitation ambassadors. Empower them to take leadership roles in promoting sanitation and hygiene practices within their communities.
5. Water and sanitation committees: Establish and strengthen community-based water and sanitation committees in tribal areas. These committees can play a vital role in managing and maintaining sanitation facilities, ensuring sustainability, and addressing community-specific challenges.
6. Policy support: Develop and implement policies that prioritize sanitation and hygiene in Scheduled Tribes areas. Allocate sufficient resources and funding to address their specific needs and ensure that policies are inclusive and sensitive to their cultural practices.
7. Monitoring and evaluation: Regularly monitor and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of sanitation interventions in tribal areas. This will help identify gaps, refine strategies, and ensure accountability in achieving desired outcomes.

By focusing on these urgent needs and implementing targeted interventions and policy measures, we can address the sanitation challenges faced by Scheduled Tribes in India and work towards achieving equitable access to sanitation for all.

Conclusion-

Addressing sanitation disparities requires targeted interventions that focus on reaching and empowering marginalized communities, improving infrastructure in underserved areas, promoting behaviour change through education and awareness programs, and ensuring equitable access to clean water and sanitation facilities for all. It is essential to address these disparities to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a clean and healthy environment. It is essential to customize solutions that take into account the unique and cultural practices of Scheduled Tribes. Accessible infrastructure, behaviour change programs, and capacity building initiatives are crucial to promote proper sanitation practices and hygiene behaviours. Furthermore, the establishment of water and sanitation committees and the implementation of supportive policies are important steps towards sustainable change. Regular monitoring and evaluation will help ensure the effectiveness of interventions and

identify areas for improvement. By working together and prioritizing the sanitation needs of Scheduled Tribes, we can create a healthier and more inclusive environment for all. Let's continue to raise awareness, advocate for change, and support initiatives that address these challenges.

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