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Reimagining Tribal Welfare in India: Comparing PM-JANMAN and Tribal Development Schemes towards Viksit Bharat 2047

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Abstract

Tribal development has long been a priority in India's journey toward inclusive growth, yet the outcomes of various welfare initiatives have remained uneven due to structural challenges, geographical isolation and policy fragmentation. Over the decades, the Government of India has introduced several programmes to improve the socio-economic conditions of Scheduled Tribes, especially the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). In this context, the present study explores the evolution of tribal welfare policies from 1970 to 2023 and examines the emergence of the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN) as a transformative initiative aligned with the national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

This research adopts a qualitative, descriptive and comparative policy analysis approach. It reviews key national-level interventions including the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP), the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), the Forest Rights Act (FRA), Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana (VKY), Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) and other sectoral programmes. The analysis relies on secondary data drawn from government reports, policy documents, NITI Aayog publications and academic literature. A structured analytical framework is used to compare the schemes based on their policy approach, governance model, target population, sectoral coverage and implementation strategy.

The findings show that India's tribal welfare approach has gradually shifted through four broad phases—fund allocation, rights-based governance, sector-specific development and finally a convergence-driven model. While earlier policies made significant contributions in areas such as funding, legal empowerment and infrastructure development, many programmes functioned in isolation, resulting in gaps in service delivery and limited holistic impact. PM-JANMAN represents a major step forward by bringing together 11 ministries under a mission-mode framework to ensure last-mile delivery of essential services to PVTGs.

The study concludes that convergence-based governance has the potential to redefine tribal development by promoting coordination, accountability and comprehensive service delivery. Strengthening implementation, monitoring and community participation will be critical to ensure that the goals of PM-JANMAN translate into tangible improvements in the lives of tribal communities and contribute meaningfully to the realisation of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Keywords:

Tribal Welfare, Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN), Viksit Bharat 2047, Policy Convergence

Introduction

India is home to one of the largest tribal populations in the world. Scheduled Tribes make up about 8.6% of the country's population, representing rich cultural diversity, traditional knowledge systems, and deep connections with nature. Yet, within this broad community, there exists a smaller group that faces far more severe challenges – the 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). These communities often live in remote and forested regions, far from mainstream development. Many struggle with extreme poverty, low

literacy levels, poor health outcomes, malnutrition, and limited access to basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, schools and healthcare.

Since Independence, India has consistently tried to improve the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities through various policies and programmes. In the early years, the focus was largely on allocating funds for tribal development through the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP). This was an important step, but it mainly emphasized financial allocation rather than ensuring effective delivery of services.

India's tribal policy has gradually shifted from welfare-based support to rights and participation. The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas), 1996 (PESA) empowered tribal communities through local self-governance, while the Forest Rights Act (2006) recognized their land and forest rights, correcting long-standing historical injustices. Alongside these rights-based measures, the government launched sector-specific schemes such as Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana, Eklavya Model Residential Schools, Jal Jeevan Mission and PM Awas Yojana to improve education, water access and housing. Although these initiatives brought progress, they often operated in isolation under different ministries, leading to fragmented implementation and limited reach among the most vulnerable tribal groups.

The PM-JANMAN scheme launched in 2023 marks a major shift towards a convergence-based and mission-mode approach focused on Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). By bringing multiple ministries and schemes together, it aims to deliver essential services in a coordinated and time-bound manner. The focus on saturation ensures that every eligible household receives basic facilities and development opportunities, addressing long-standing gaps in tribal welfare implementation.

Review of Literature

NITI Aayog (2022), a policy document analysis by NITI Aayog on tribal development highlighted persistent gaps in coordination, monitoring and last-mile service delivery in tribal areas. The report observed that despite multiple schemes, outcomes remained uneven due to fragmented implementation across ministries. It recommended adopting a convergence-based and mission-mode approach to ensure saturation of basic services in remote tribal habitations.

Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2023), a government document review on Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) emphasised the need for focused and multi-sectoral interventions. The report noted that existing sectoral schemes often failed to address the multidimensional vulnerabilities of PVTGs in a holistic manner. It stressed the importance of integrated planning and targeted service delivery to improve development outcomes.

Kumar & Singh (2021), study examined the implementation of the Forest Rights Act and found that while the legislation strengthened legal recognition of tribal land rights, administrative delays, limited awareness and weak institutional capacity affected its effectiveness. The authors highlighted the need for better coordination and community participation in policy implementation.

Meena & Rao (2023), study on tribal development programmes identified fragmentation and duplication across departments as major challenges. The authors argued that a convergence-driven governance model could improve efficiency, reduce gaps in service delivery and support inclusive tribal development.

However, the existing literature primarily concentrates on sector-specific interventions such as rights, education and governance, with limited focus on multidisciplinary convergence and integrated livelihood development. There is also a noticeable research gap in analysing PM-JANMAN as a comprehensive mission targeting the holistic development and last-mile service delivery for Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

Objectives of the study

- Trace the evolution of tribal welfare policies in India.
- Analyze the design and implementation of PM-JANMAN.
- Conduct a comparative study of PM-JANMAN with major tribal welfare schemes.
- Identify policy gaps addressed by PM-JANMAN.
- Examine its contribution to Viksit Bharat 2047.

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive and comparative policy analysis design to examine the evolution of tribal welfare policies in India and to analyse the significance of PM-JANMAN within this policy evolution. The nature of the research focuses on understanding policy frameworks, governance mechanisms and programme objectives rather than measuring numerical outcomes. Since tribal welfare involves complex social, cultural and administrative dimensions, a qualitative approach is considered most appropriate for gaining in-depth insights into the intent and design of various schemes.

The study follows a descriptive research design as it aims to systematically describe and document the development of tribal welfare policies over time. It explains the major features of key schemes, institutional arrangements, target beneficiaries and implementation strategies. Descriptive research is suitable for this study because the primary objective is to present a clear and structured understanding of how tribal welfare policies have evolved and how PM-JANMAN fits within this broader policy landscape.

A key component of the research design is comparative policy analysis. The study compares PM-JANMAN with major tribal welfare initiatives implemented in different phases of India's development planning, including the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP), PESA Act 1996, Forest Rights Act 2006, Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana, Eklavya Model Residential Schools and selected sectoral flagship schemes. The comparison is carried out using common analytical parameters such as policy approach, target population, governance framework, sectoral coverage and delivery mechanisms. This enables the identification of similarities, differences and policy innovations across schemes. Overall, the research is conceptual and policy-oriented, relying on secondary data and documentary analysis. This design is appropriate for examining national-level programmes and understanding long-term policy transformations in tribal development. The chosen methodology helps situate PM-JANMAN as a convergence-based, mission-mode intervention aimed at strengthening inclusive development and contributing to the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Scope of the Study

This study examines the evolution of major tribal welfare policies implemented in India from 1970 to 2023. It focuses on national-level initiatives aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of Scheduled Tribes, with particular emphasis on Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). The research analyses the policy approach, coverage, governance mechanisms and developmental focus of selected schemes, and situates PM-JANMAN within the broader framework of inclusive development and the national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Scheme Selection Criteria

Since the present study is based on comparative policy analysis rather than primary field data, the selection of schemes follows a purposive and thematic approach. The schemes included in the study were chosen based on their direct relevance to tribal development and their role in shaping the policy landscape for Scheduled Tribes and Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India. Priority was given to programmes that address key dimensions of tribal welfare such as governance, land rights, education, infrastructure, livelihood and basic service delivery.

Another important criterion was national-level implementation. Only schemes and legislative interventions that have been implemented across multiple states or at the national scale were included, ensuring broader policy significance and comparability. This helps in understanding long-term trends in India's tribal development strategy.

The schemes were also selected to represent different phases of tribal policy evolution. The Tribal Sub-Plan represents the budgetary allocation phase; the PESA Act reflects decentralised governance; the Forest Rights Act highlights the rights-based approach; Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana and Eklavya Model Residential Schools represent sectoral and developmental interventions; while major flagship schemes such as Jal Jeevan Mission and PM Awas Yojana illustrate sector-specific service delivery. Finally, PM-JANMAN was included as the most recent mission-mode initiative, representing convergence and saturation-based development.

Data Collection

The study relies on secondary data obtained from official government reports, policy documents, NITI Aayog publications and relevant academic literature. These sources provide comprehensive information on tribal welfare schemes, their objectives, implementation strategies and policy outcomes, forming the basis for qualitative and comparative analysis in this research.

Ethical Consideration

This study is based entirely on publicly available secondary data and does not involve human participants. All information has been used responsibly and cited appropriately to maintain academic integrity, transparency and credibility. Proper acknowledgement of sources has been ensured to avoid plagiarism and uphold ethical standards in research.

Analytical Framework

The study uses a qualitative comparative framework instead of statistical tests. Selected schemes are analysed based on policy approach, target population, governance model, sectoral coverage and implementation strategy. These parameters help identify similarities, differences and innovations, enabling systematic comparison and understanding of the evolution of tribal welfare policies in India.

Data Analysis

Secondary data collected from policy documents and reports were systematically reviewed and organised according to the selected analytical parameters. The schemes were then compared across different policy phases to identify trends, similarities and differences. This process enabled interpretation of policy evolution and the emergence of PM-JANMAN as a convergence-based initiative.

Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Evolution of Tribal Welfare Policies in India

Scheme/ Policy	Policy Type	Main Objective	Targeted Group	Key Limitation
Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP)	Budgetary allocation	Dedicated funds for tribal development	Scheduled Tribes	Weak monitoring
PESA Act, 1996	Governance reform	Strengthen Gram Sabha and tribal self-rule	Tribes in Scheduled Areas	Limited integration with service delivery
Forest Rights Act, 2006	Rights-based legislation	Land and forest rights recognition	Forest-dwelling STs	Implementation gaps
Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana	Development program	Infrastructure and livelihood support	Tribal communities	Fragmented scheme delivery
Eklavya Model Residential Schools	Education intervention	Improve tribal education outcomes	Tribal Students	Limited sector coverage
Sectoral Flagship Schemes (JJM, PMAY)	Sector-specific approach	Water, housing and basic services	Rural & Tribal households	Lack of convergence
PM-JANMAN	Convergence mission	Saturation of services for PVTGs	PVTG households	Implementation challenges

Interpretation: As shown in Table 1, tribal welfare policies have evolved from fund allocation (TSP) and rights-based frameworks (PESA, FRA) to sectoral development programmes (VKY, EMRS). However, fragmentation persisted. PM-JANMAN represents a shift toward convergence and saturation of services, focusing on PVTGs and last-mile delivery, aligning tribal development with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Table 2: Key Dimensions of PM-JANMAN Convergence Approach

Dimension	Earlier Tribal Schemes	PM-JANMAN Approach
Policy Model	Fragmented, scheme-based	Mission- Mode convergence
Target Group	Broad ST population	Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)
Ministry Involvement	Single or few ministries	11 ministries working together
Implementation Strategy	Department wise delivery	Saturation and last-mile delivery
Sector Coverage	Sector-specific (Education, rights, housing, etc.)	Multi- sector (housing, water, roads, health, education, livelihoods)
Planning Approach	Allocation-driven	Needs-based micro planning
Monitoring	Limited tracking	Real-time monitoring and mission dashboard
Development Goal	Welfare and inclusion	Holistic human development

Interpretation: Table 2, highlights the shift from fragmented, sector-specific tribal welfare schemes to the convergence-based PM-JANMAN mission. Earlier programmes focused on broad tribal development with limited coordination, whereas PM-JANMAN targets PVTGs through multi-ministerial collaboration, saturation of services and real-time monitoring. This reflects a transition toward holistic and last-mile development aligned with Viksit Bharat 2047.

Findings

The study finds that tribal welfare policy in India has evolved through four major phases—allocation-based, rights-based, sectoral development and convergence-driven approaches. Early initiatives such as the Tribal Sub-Plan laid the foundation by earmarking funds, but weak monitoring and fragmented implementation limited their impact. Rights-based frameworks like PESA and the Forest Rights Act strengthened governance and land entitlements, yet faced challenges in effective execution. Later programmes improved access to education, infrastructure and livelihoods but largely operated in sectoral silos.

A key finding of this study is the emergence of PM-JANMAN as a convergence-based mission integrating the efforts of 11 ministries to ensure coordinated and last-mile delivery of services. The policy focus has shifted toward Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), recognising their unique developmental needs. This marks a transition from welfare-oriented interventions to a holistic human development approach, positioning convergence governance as a major innovation in advancing inclusive development and contributing to the broader vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Conclusion

This study concludes that tribal welfare policy in India has undergone a significant transformation from fragmented and sector-specific interventions to a more integrated and convergence-based development model. Earlier policies laid important foundations through budgetary allocation, rights recognition and sectoral programmes, but their impact was constrained by weak coordination, implementation gaps and limited focus on the most vulnerable groups.

PM-JANMAN represents a major policy shift by adopting a mission-mode approach that integrates multiple ministries, prioritises Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) and emphasises last-mile service delivery. The convergence framework strengthens governance, improves accountability and promotes holistic human development across housing, health, education, livelihoods and infrastructure. The study highlights that achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 requires sustained policy convergence, community participation and effective monitoring. Strengthening institutional capacity and ensuring inclusive implementation will be crucial for translating policy intent into tangible improvements in the lives of tribal communities across India.

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