Indigenous Autonomy, PESA Act, and Adivasi Self-Governance in Jharkhand

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Abstract

This research paper talks about tribal governance in Jharkhand, India, tracing its historical evolution, contemporary challenges, and future prospects. Drawing upon existing literature, the study examines the complex interplay between traditional systems of self-rule and external administrative interventions, from pre-colonial tribal times to post-independence bureaucratic reforms. It explores how colonial and post-independence administrative changes, including the Bihar Panchayat Raj System, have eroded indigenous autonomy and marginalized traditional governance structures, setting the stage for the contemporary challenges faced by Adivasi communities. The enactment of the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act in 1996 represents a significant legislative effort to address the historical marginalization of tribal communities and promote self-governance in scheduled areas. However, the partial implementation of PESA in Jharkhand has posed significant challenges to the special rights and autonomy of Scheduled Area Adivasis, exacerbating the challenges faced by indigenous communities in asserting their self-governance rights. Bureaucratic apathy, lack of clarity in legal provisions, and resistance to change have impeded the effective enforcement of PESA, resulting in discrepancies between formal requirements and on-the-ground realities. The current study highlights the importance of strengthening Gram Sabha institutions, promoting transparency and accountability, and fostering civil society engagement to realize the objectives of tribal self-governance. It emphasizes the need for collaboration between government, civil society, and tribal communities to bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that the rights and aspirations of Adivasi populations are respected and upheld. Ultimately, the research underscores the urgent need to revitalize indigenous self-rule in Jharkhand, empowering communities to shape their own development trajectories and preserve their cultural heritage for generations to come. By navigating the complexities of tribal governance with sensitivity and foresight, stakeholders can pave the way for a future where indigenous voices are heard, their rights are respected, and their aspirations are realized.

Keywords: Tribal Governance, Jharkhand, Indigenous Autonomy, Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, Adivasi Communities, Self-Governance, Community Empowerment, Implementation Gap.

1. Introduction

The tribal communities of Jharkhand are custodians of rich cultural heritage and ancient governance systems that have sustained them for centuries. From the verdant forests of the Chotanagpur Plateau to the rolling hills of Santhal Pargana, these indigenous populations have forged unique social structures, customs, and traditions that reflect their deep connection to the land and their collective identity as Adivasis, or original inhabitants [1]. However, the legacy of tribal governance in Jharkhand is not merely a tale of tradition and continuity but also one marked by historical injustices, external interventions, and contemporary challenges. At the heart of the discourse on tribal governance in Jharkhand lies the tension between traditional systems of

self-rule and the imposition of external administrative structures by colonial and post-independence authorities [2]. Prior to the advent of colonial rule, Adivasi communities in Jharkhand operated within their own federations, characterized by democratic yet exclusionary governance structures. Each tribal village had its council, known by various names across different tribes, such as the 'Parha Raja System' among the Munda and Oraon communities. These councils served as the primary decision-making bodies, overseeing various aspects of administration, parliament, and judiciary matters within Adivasi communities [3].

However, the arrival of British colonialists in India ushered in a new era characterized by the erosion of indigenous autonomy and the imposition of external administrative structures. The British administration introduced the notion of "scheduled tribes" and "scheduled areas," designating certain regions, including parts of present-day Jharkhand, as special administrative units subject to distinct legal provisions [4]. While the colonial authorities acknowledged the existence of indigenous governance systems, they sought to exert control over tribal communities through indirect rule and administrative reforms. The legacy of colonial rule reverberated long after India gained independence in 1947, with successive governments continuing to grapple with the complexities of tribal governance in Jharkhand [5]. The Bihar Panchayat Raj System (BPRS), introduced in the post-independence period, further marginalized indigenous governance structures, prioritizing non-Adivasi areas and neglecting the traditional practices and customs of tribal communities [6]. This erosion of indigenous autonomy laid the groundwork for the contemporary challenges faced by Adivasi communities in asserting their rights and preserving their cultural heritage [7].

Against this backdrop, the enactment of the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act in 1996 represented a significant milestone in India's efforts to promote tribal self-governance and community empowerment. PESA aimed to ensure tribal self-rule in scheduled areas of India, empowering local governance structures within tribal communities and safeguarding the autonomy of tribal villages [8]. The Act sought to protect and preserve tribal autonomy and traditional decision-making processes, recognizing the cultural and social diversity of India's tribal populations. However, the partial implementation of PESA in Jharkhand has posed significant challenges to the special rights and autonomy of Scheduled Area Adivasis, exacerbating the challenges faced by indigenous communities in asserting their self-governance rights [9]. As Jharkhand navigates the complexities of tribal governance in the 21st century, it is essential to critically examine the historical trajectory of Adivasi governance, the impact of colonial and post-independence administrative changes, and the implications of partial implementation of the PESA Act [10]. By understanding the challenges and opportunities inherent in tribal governance in Jharkhand, we can pave the way for a future where indigenous self-rule flourishes and remains preserved for generations to come.

2. Role of PESA Act in Jharkhand's Tribal Governance

The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, commonly known as the PESA Act, holds paramount importance in the legislative framework concerning tribal communities in India, particularly in regions like Jharkhand. This legislation carries the potential to rejuvenate self-governance among indigenous communities, offering a platform for traditional decision-making processes to thrive [11]. In the context of Jharkhand, the significance of PESA Act becomes evident when examining the historical trajectory of Adivasi governance in the region [12]. Historically, Adivasis in Jharkhand operated under their own federal governance structures, which were characterized as democratic, albeit with certain exclusions, notably the participation of women [13]. These indigenous systems of governance reflected the socio-cultural fabric of the tribes inhabiting the region, showcasing a form of community-led decision-making that was deeply rooted in tradition and local customs [14]. However, the advent of colonial rule and subsequent administrative changes post-independence gradually eroded the traditional governance systems of Adivasis in Jharkhand. The imposition of external structures and the marginalization of indigenous voices led to a decline in the autonomy and self-governance that had once characterized Adivasi communities [15]. The PESA Act, enacted

to address these historical injustices and to restore traditional decision-making authority to Adivasi communities, represents a crucial step towards revitalizing indigenous self-governance in Jharkhand [16].

By recognizing the autonomy of tribal communities in matters of resource management, land ownership, and local governance, the PESA Act aims to empower indigenous people and ensure their participation in the development processes that directly affect their lives. However, despite the noble intentions behind the PESA Act, its implementation in Jharkhand has been marred by challenges and shortcomings. While the legislation provides a legal framework for decentralized governance and tribal autonomy, its practical application has often been hindered by bureaucratic hurdles, lack of awareness among stakeholders, and resistance from vested interests [17]. The state of Jharkhand, carved out of Bihar in 2000, stands as a distinct entity with a significant Adivasi population. Home to 32 tribes, including nine Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG), Jharkhand embodies the rich cultural diversity and indigenous heritage of the region. Among the major tribes in Jharkhand are the Santhal, Oraon, Munda, and Ho communities, each contributing to the diverse traditions and customs of the state.

Despite the collective unity in the creation of Jharkhand as a separate state, the tribes within its borders exhibit variations in their traditional practices and systems of governance. While there may be overarching similarities in certain aspects of indigenous culture and heritage, the diversity among Jharkhand's tribes underscores the need for nuanced approaches to governance and development that respect the unique identity and aspirations of each community [18]. The PESA Act represents a pivotal milestone in the journey towards restoring indigenous self-governance in Jharkhand [2]. However, its effective implementation requires concerted efforts to address the systemic challenges and ensure meaningful participation of tribal communities in decision-making processes [7]. By recognizing and honouring the traditional wisdom and governance systems of Adivasis, Jharkhand can chart a path towards inclusive and sustainable development that upholds the rights and dignity of its indigenous inhabitants.

3. Customary Laws, Governance Structures, and Indigenous Practices

Tribes in Jharkhand uphold distinct customary laws, social norms, and resource management processes, reflecting their deep-rooted connection to the land and community. These customs, which have evolved over centuries, serve as the cornerstone of indigenous governance and social organization in the region. Scholars like S.C. Roy have extensively studied these customs, shedding light on their complexities and significance in the context of tribal life in Jharkhand. Central to the traditional governance structures of Adivasis in Jharkhand is the absence of a rigid caste system and hierarchical governance. Unlike mainstream Indian society, where caste often dictates social status and roles, Adivasi communities operate outside this framework, emphasizing equality and communal harmony [13]. This non-hierarchical approach to governance fosters a sense of solidarity and mutual respect among community members, ensuring that decisions are made collectively and in the best interests of the entire village. At the heart of tribal governance in Jharkhand are the village councils, known by different names across tribes but serving similar functions.

For instance, the Munda and Oraon communities refer to their village councils as the 'Parha Raja System,' where respected elders and leaders convene to discuss and decide on matters concerning the village. These councils serve as the primary decision-making bodies, responsible for overseeing various aspects of community life and resolving disputes. Governance among Jharkhand's tribes is structured into three main levels: village, cluster, and community [15]. Each level plays a distinct role in the governance hierarchy, with forums established to address specific administrative, legislative, and judicial functions. These forums, comprising representatives from different households and lineages, ensure that decisions are made inclusively and with the participation of all stakeholders [17]. At the village level, the administration is primarily concerned with managing village commons, allocating resources, coordinating labour-sharing arrangements, and organizing religious and cultural events. This decentralized approach to governance emphasizes the

importance of local knowledge and community involvement in decision-making processes, promoting resilience and sustainability within Adivasi communities. The structure operating at the cluster level, focuses on upholding traditional norms and values that govern social interactions and relationships within the community. This body plays a crucial role in maintaining social cohesion and resolving conflicts through dialogue and consensus-building, thereby preserving the harmony and integrity of the tribe [2].

Simultaneously, the judiciary, functioning at the community level, serves as the arbiter of disputes and grievances, ensuring that justice is served in accordance with tribal customs and principles. This judicial system, guided by the wisdom of elders and traditional norms, prioritizes reconciliation and restoration over punitive measures, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and accountability among community members [16]. Decentralized decision-making processes in Jharkhand's tribal villages are characterized by a commitment to consensus-building and participatory governance [12]. Regular meetings are convened at all three levels to discuss relevant issues, deliberate on proposed solutions, and reach mutually acceptable decisions that reflect the collective will of the community. This bottom-up approach to governance ensures that decisions are rooted in local realities and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people.

However, despite the benefits of traditional governance system, it has been criticized for its lack of female participation and representation. Women in Jharkhand's tribal communities are often marginalized in decision-making processes and barred from holding leadership roles or owning property [8]. This gender disparity persists despite the formation of Jharkhand as a separate state, signalling the need for greater efforts to address gender inequality and promote women's empowerment within indigenous governance structures. In traditional tribal societies, chiefs and leaders are typically hereditarily selected based on lineage and seniority. While these leaders wield considerable influence within their communities, they are also subject to scrutiny and accountability. Inefficient or unpopular chiefs can be replaced through consensus-building processes, ensuring that leadership remains responsive to the needs and aspirations of the community [4]. The governance systems of Jharkhand's tribes are characterized by their resilience, adaptability, and emphasis on communal decision-making. Despite facing challenges such as gender inequality and external pressures, these traditional systems continue to play a vital role in maintaining social cohesion and preserving indigenous identity and heritage.

4. Evolution of Traditional Adivasi Governance in Jharkhand

The traditional governance systems of the Adivasi tribes in Jharkhand have long been integral to their socio-cultural fabric, shaping their communities and sustaining their way of life. However, the advent of post-independence administrative changes, particularly the Bihar Panchayat Raj System (BPRS), brought about significant shifts that weakened these age-old systems of self-governance. Scholars and researchers have extensively documented how the imposition of the BPRS in Adivasi regions of Jharkhand marginalized indigenous governance structures, prioritizing non-Adivasi areas and neglecting the traditional systems that had been in place for centuries. This neglect, coupled with the growing influence of external forces such as industrialization, displacement, and urbanization, further eroded the foundations of traditional Adivasi governance, leading to a decline in its prominence and effectiveness [6]. As industrialization and urbanization spread across Jharkhand, particularly in areas rich in natural resources, traditional Adivasi governance faced unprecedented challenges. The influx of external actors, including government agencies, corporations, and non-tribal settlers, altered the socio-economic landscape, disrupting the intricate balance that had existed within Adivasi communities for generations.

While traditional governance structures persisted in some rural villages, particularly those located far from urban centres, their functions gradually shifted, primarily focusing on cultural activities such as festivals and hunting rituals rather than broader administrative affairs [9]. Historically, each tribal village in Jharkhand operated under its own council, known by various names across different tribes, such as the 'Parha Raja

System' among the Munda and Oraon communities. These councils formed the backbone of indigenous governance, functioning at multiple levels, including village, cluster, and community levels. Scholars have highlighted how these forums served as decision-making bodies, overseeing various aspects of administration, parliament, and judiciary matters within Adivasi communities [15]. However, the reach and effectiveness of these councils diminished over time, particularly with the imposition of external administrative structures that undermined their authority and autonomy. The 73rd constitutional amendment aimed at promoting local self-governance in rural India, represented a significant legislative effort to empower grassroots institutions. However, the application of this amendment to scheduled and tribal areas, as stipulated under Article 243(M), was met with restrictions, further complicating the landscape of governance in regions like Jharkhand.

Despite the constitutional mandate for decentralization and local autonomy, the realities on the ground often diverged from the intended objectives, particularly in areas with significant Adivasi populations where traditional governance systems had been marginalized [16]. Scholars and activists have pointed to the need for greater recognition and support for traditional Adivasi governance systems in Jharkhand. They argue that these indigenous structures not only reflect the cultural heritage and identity of Adivasi communities but also offer valuable insights into sustainable resource management, conflict resolution, and community cohesion. While external forces and administrative changes have posed significant challenges to indigenous self-governance, the spirit of community empowerment and cultural pride endures among Adivasi tribes [3]. As Jharkhand continues to navigate the complexities of modernity and development, there is a pressing need to safeguard and promote traditional governance systems, recognizing their intrinsic value and relevance in shaping the future of indigenous communities in the region.

5.   Role of PESA Act in Empowering Indigenous Governance

The Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act of 1996 stands as a crucial legislative milestone in India's efforts to protect and promote the rights of tribal communities, particularly in regions designated as scheduled areas. Emerging in the wake of Bhuria Committee recommendations in 1995, PESA was conceived with the overarching goal of ensuring tribal self-rule and autonomy within these designated areas. Scholars and legal experts have extensively documented the genesis of PESA and its significance in the context of indigenous governance in India, shedding light on the intentions and objectives behind its formulation [3]. At its core, PESA was designed to empower local governance structures within tribal communities, recognizing their intrinsic right to self-determination and decision-making. This legislation sought to safeguard and preserve the autonomy of tribal villages, ensuring that they had the authority to manage their own affairs in accordance with their customary laws, social norms, and traditional practices [8]. The PESA Act, therefore, represents a fundamental shift towards decentralized governance, emphasizing the importance of community participation and consent in matters affecting their lives and livelihoods.

The implementation of PESA is widely regarded as crucial for sustaining indigenous governance practices and preserving the cultural integrity of tribal communities. By providing a legal framework for tribal self-governance and community empowerment, PESA seeks to address the historical marginalization and neglect that tribal communities have endured over centuries [11]. Scholars have pointed out that the Act not only acknowledges the unique cultural and social diversity of India's tribal populations but also seeks to bridge the gap between traditional and modern governance systems, fostering a more inclusive and participatory approach to development. Central to the ethos of PESA is the principle of village-level autonomy and authority, wherein local communities are empowered to make decisions regarding their own welfare and development [7]. The Act mandates the establishment of gram sabhas or village assemblies as the primary decision-making bodies, ensuring that key decisions related to land management, resource allocation, and social welfare programs are made through a democratic and participatory process [12]. This emphasis on

grassroots democracy and community-led governance resonates deeply with the ethos of tribal self-rule and collective decision-making.

One of the key provisions of PESA is the requirement for community consent in developmental projects undertaken within scheduled areas. This provision underscores the importance of respecting the rights and aspirations of tribal communities, particularly in matters concerning land acquisition, natural resource extraction, and infrastructure development [6]. By prioritizing community consent and participation, PESA seeks to redress the historical injustices and inequities that have plagued tribal communities, empowering them to assert control over their own destinies and shape their future on their own terms. Moreover, PESA aligns closely with constitutional provisions for tribal rights and self-determination, reflecting India's commitment to upholding the principles of justice, equality, and democracy [8]. Legal experts have highlighted the symbiotic relationship between PESA and constitutional safeguards such as the Fifth and Sixth Schedules, which provide special protections and privileges to tribal communities in designated areas. By enshrining the principles of autonomy, self-governance, and community empowerment, PESA serves as a bulwark against the forces of exploitation, marginalization, and cultural assimilation that have historically threatened the survival and well-being of tribal communities.

The Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act of 1996 represents a watershed moment in India's legal and policy framework for tribal governance and empowerment. Rooted in the principles of self-rule, autonomy, and community participation, PESA embodies the aspirations and struggles of tribal communities to assert their rights and assert control over their own destinies [11]. As India continues its journey towards inclusive and sustainable development, the proper implementation of PESA holds the key to revitalizing indigenous governance structures, fostering greater social justice, and ensuring the dignity and well-being of tribal communities for generations to come. The Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act of 1996 stands as a pivotal piece of legislation aimed at reinforcing the importance of indigenous knowledge and practices in governing tribal communities. In the context of Jharkhand, where the cultural heritage and traditional wisdom of Adivasi tribes are deeply intertwined with their way of life, PESA serves as a powerful tool for promoting inclusive and participatory governance. Scholars and researchers have underscored the significance of PESA in recognizing and preserving indigenous governance systems, which are rooted in centuries-old customs, social norms, and community traditions.

However, the effective enforcement of PESA hinges upon collaboration between government agencies and tribal communities. While the Act provides a legal framework for tribal self-governance, its implementation requires concerted efforts to build trust, foster dialogue, and ensure the meaningful participation of indigenous communities in decision-making processes [5]. Scholars have highlighted the importance of capacity-building initiatives, awareness campaigns, and institutional reforms to strengthen the mechanisms for enforcing PESA and upholding the rights of tribal communities [3]. In Jharkhand, where 16 out of 24 districts fall under the provisions of PESA, the Act is considered the backbone of tribal legislation, providing a framework for tribal self-governance and community empowerment. Within these designated areas, Gram Sabhas are empowered with a range of functions, including the protection of traditional beliefs and cultures, resolution of local disputes, prevention of land alienation, and management of common properties based on indigenous traditions. These Gram Sabhas also oversee various aspects of village life, including the operation of village markets, regulation of liquor production, and oversight of money-lending activities.

However, despite the legal provisions outlined in the national PESA law, the alignment of state laws for Scheduled Areas with the principles of PESA remains a challenge in Jharkhand. Activists have pointed out discrepancies between the national PESA law and the state laws governing tribal governance, with Jharkhand only adopting a fraction of the provisions outlined in the central legislation. This lack of alignment not only undermines the effectiveness of PESA but also raises concerns about the erosion of tribal rights and autonomy

in the face of bureaucratic indifference and political apathy [7]. Moreover, while PESA empowers Gram Sabhas with significant authority and autonomy, it also recognizes the advisory role of state legislatures in ensuring the proper functioning of Panchayats and Gram Sabhas. This collaborative approach to governance reflects a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between traditional and modern governance systems, emphasizing the importance of dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect between state institutions and tribal communities. By fostering a culture of inclusive and participatory governance, PESA holds the potential to transform the lives of tribal communities in Jharkhand and beyond, ensuring that their voices are heard, their rights are respected, and their aspirations are realized.

6. Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing PESA

The partial implementation of Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act in Jharkhand poses a significant challenge to the special rights and autonomy of Scheduled Area Adivasis. Despite being enacted to reinforce tribal self-governance and empower indigenous communities, the incomplete enforcement of PESA in Jharkhand undermines these objectives, exacerbating the challenges faced by Adivasi populations [2]. Researchers have highlighted the detrimental impact of partial implementation, pointing to factors such as bureaucratic apathy, lack of clarity in legal provisions, and resistance to change from entrenched interests as key obstacles to effective governance in Adivasi areas [8]. Social audits and field studies have revealed troubling discrepancies between the formal requirements of PESA and the realities on the ground. Developmental schemes are often approved on paper without proper Gram Sabha meetings, where key decisions affecting tribal communities are supposed to be made. Moreover, regular Gram Sabha meetings, which serve as the cornerstone of indigenous self-governance under PESA, are rarely conducted in practice, further hindering effective governance and community participation in decision-making processes.

PESA, in its essence, recognizes and respects traditional decision-making processes within tribal communities, seeking to promote self-governance and autonomy at the grassroots level. However, the partial implementation of the Act in Jharkhand undermines these principles, denying Adivasi communities the opportunity to exercise their rights and assert control over their own destinies [16]. Scholars have emphasized that the full implementation of PESA presents a crucial opportunity to revitalize tribal self-governance in Jharkhand, empowering communities to shape their own development trajectories in accordance with their cultural values and aspirations. Furthermore, the comprehensive adoption of PESA provisions in Jharkhand could address longstanding gender disparities and enhance democratic participation within Adivasi communities [17]. By recognizing the role of women in decision-making processes and promoting gender equality, PESA has the potential to foster more inclusive and equitable governance structures in tribal areas.

However, achieving these objectives requires concerted efforts to address legal, bureaucratic, and political challenges that hinder the effective implementation of the Act. Strengthening Gram Sabha institutions is paramount for realizing the full potential of PESA and promoting effective self-governance in Jharkhand [1]. These grassroots assemblies serve as the primary decision-making bodies within tribal communities, providing a platform for collective deliberation and consensus-building. Scholars and activists have stressed the need to empower Gram Sabhas with adequate resources, training, and support to enable them to fulfil their mandates under PESA effectively. Moreover, the success of PESA hinges on promoting transparency, accountability, and community participation in governance processes. Civil society engagement plays a vital role in monitoring PESA implementation, advocating for the rights of tribal communities, and holding government agencies accountable for their actions. Advocacy efforts should push for the comprehensive adoption of PESA provisions in Jharkhand, ensuring that the Act's intent translates into tangible benefits for Adivasi populations.

Education and awareness programs are also necessary to empower communities to assert their rights under PESA and hold authorities accountable for their actions. By equipping tribal communities with the knowledge

and skills to navigate legal frameworks and advocate for their interests, these initiatives can help bridge the gap between PESA's intent and its actual implementation on the ground [7]. Ultimately, collaboration between government, civil society, and tribal communities is essential for the success of PESA and the realization of its objectives. By working together to overcome challenges, build trust, and foster inclusive governance structures, stakeholders can uphold the principles of self-rule, autonomy, and community empowerment enshrined in PESA. In doing so, they can pave the way for inclusive and sustainable development in tribal areas, ensuring that the rights and aspirations of Adivasi populations are respected and upheld.

7. Conclusion

From the genesis of indigenous self-governance systems to the complexities of implementing the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, the journey unveils the nuanced dynamics shaping the socio-political landscape of Adivasi communities in Jharkhand. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literatures in the field, this paper has endeavoured to shed light on the multifaceted nature of tribal governance, highlighting both its resilience and vulnerabilities. The historical narrative of Adivasi governance in Jharkhand reveals the journey of indigenous self-rule, characterized by democratic yet exclusionary governance structures. The advent of colonial rule and subsequent administrative changes post-independence ushered in a new era marked by the erosion of indigenous autonomy and the imposition of external administrative structures. The Bihar Panchayat Raj System (BPRS), in particular, dealt a severe blow to Adivasi governance, prioritizing non-Adivasi areas and neglecting the traditional practices and customs of tribal communities. Despite legislative efforts such as the PESA Act of 1996, the partial implementation of PESA has undermined the special rights and autonomy of Scheduled Area Adivasis, exacerbating the challenges faced by indigenous communities. Bureaucratic apathy, lack of clarity in legal provisions, and resistance to change have impeded the effective enforcement of PESA, resulting in discrepancies between formal requirements and on-the-ground realities.

Despite these challenges, the potential of PESA to revitalize tribal self-governance in Jharkhand remains palpable. The Act, with its emphasis on grassroots democracy and community empowerment, presents a crucial opportunity to bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that the rights and aspirations of Adivasi populations are respected and upheld. Strengthening Gram Sabha institutions, promoting transparency and accountability, and fostering civil society engagement are essential steps towards realizing the objectives of PESA and promoting inclusive and sustainable development in tribal areas. Education and awareness programs play a vital role in empowering communities to assert their rights under PESA and hold authorities accountable for their actions. In envisioning a future where indigenous self-rule flourishes, collaboration between government, civil society, and tribal communities is indispensable. By addressing the challenges of partial implementation and fostering dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders, we can build a future where Adivasi communities in Jharkhand thrive in dignity and self-determination. Upholding the principles of autonomy, participation, and social justice enshrined in PESA is not only a legal imperative but also a moral obligation, reflecting India's commitment to inclusive and equitable governance where indigenous voices are heard, their rights are respected, and their aspirations are realized.

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