

Tribal Women Position in Indian Society

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Abstract

The tribal population is an integral part of India's social fabric and has the second largest concentration after that of the African continent. It is more than the total population of France and Britain and four times that of Australia. The population of tribal communities scheduled in the Constitution of India and known as Scheduled Tribes (STs) was 8.43 crore (1 crore = 10 million) as per 2001 census and accounts for 8.2% of the total population. 4.26 crores are men and 4.17 crores are women, accounting for 8.01% and 8.40% respectively. They are scattered over all the states/UTs, except Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and the UTs of Pondicherry and Chandigarh. Tribals have traditionally lived in about 15% of the country's geographical areas, mainly forests, hills and undulating inaccessible terrain in plateau areas, rich in natural resources. They have lived as isolated entities for centuries, largely untouched by the society around them. The status of women in a society is a significant reflection of the level of social justice in that society. Women's status is often described in terms of their level of income, employment, education, health and fertility as well as their roles within the family, the community and society. Tribal women have adjusted themselves to live a traditional life style in the local environment and follow occupations based on natural resources. Undoubtedly, the programmes oriented towards the empowerment of tribals, particularly women, have improved their socio-economic conditions and status. However, there are wide variations across regions and tribes in terms of work participation, sex ratio, economic productivity and social life. The impact of development planning needs to be evaluated in terms of desired and unanticipated consequences. Against this backdrop, the present paper reviews the emerging perspective in the context of the socio-economic empowerment of tribal women and changing paradigms of development.

Keywords-*Women in India, Tribal Women, Scheduled Tribal Women Socio – Economic Status of Tribal Women.*

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Introduction

The tribal population in India numerically constitutes a small segment of the total population of the country but is a significant part of the population. According to 2001 census data, total population of Scheduled Tribes constitutes 8.2% of the total population of the country. Most of the Scheduled tribe people lives in rural areas and their population comprise 10.4 % of the total rural population of the country. For long periods of history, they were always socially and geographically isolated. They belonged to different races with diverse cultural characteristics, speaking varied languages, following a variety of religions and spread across various ecological zones.

Process of Sanskritization has affected them culturally, and other processes of displacement have made them a marginalized segment of the society. In fact, provisions made by the Constitution over the years have not made much difference to the status of tribal. International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies (IJIMS), 2014, Vol 2, No.2, 55-60. 56 women. Their status is found to be lower than that of women belonging to the general population, Scheduled caste women and also lower than that of the status of Tribal men.

Objectives

- To assess the social and economic situation of the tribal women.
- To study specific factors responsible for migration of tribal women from the tribal
- Areas to various towns and cities in search of employment.
- To investigate into the type and level of moral, physical and economic exploitation of migrant tribal women workers.
- To suggest various ways and means for improving the socio-economic condition.

Research Methodology

This is a descriptive research paper, where secondary information produced by different authors and researchers has been used. For obtaining necessary information, various books, journals as well as websites have been explored by the researcher which has been mentioned in the reference section

Under the following heads, an effort has been made to briefly discuss and highlight the Status of various Community Tribal Women in India;

Social and economic status of tribal women in India

Tribal women are more important than women in any other social groups because tribal women are very hardworking and in almost all the tribal communities

they participate in economic activities almost equally with men or works harder than men and the family economy and income also depend on women. Their health status is also related to economic and educational aspects. Their lack of ability to participate in the industrial economic activities of modern societies has deteriorated their living conditions. The tribals are mostly engaged in occupations which do not generate much income such as hunting, crafts making, and agriculture. Industrialization and urbanization has brought about a change in the life and living of the tribals by uprooting them from their day to day activities and making them dependent on the vagaries of non tribals.

Strategies for promoting a change status of tribal women in India

As it has been pointed out, low levels of economic activity and living conditions below the poverty level is a major problem faced by the tribal women. A practical way of dealing with this problem can be to provide skills and training to women which will help them in building up of self-help groups. It is not just for acquiring money but to improve their decision making ability. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies (IJIMS)*, 2014, Vol 2, No.2, 55-60. 59 The health of the tribal women is another aspect which needs attention because the tribal women work very hard and the income of the family depends on efforts of the tribal women. Among the tribal women, infant mortality rate is found to be higher as compared to national average, which is mainly due to their lack of awareness and facilities of child care. Tribal women suffer from nutritional deficiency.

The status of a person or a group in a society is determined mainly by the educational status, health status, employment status and decision making ability. All these factors are closely related to one another. However, among many tribal communities, predominance of matriarchal families could be found. Contrary to patriarchal societies, status of women is found to be higher in matriarchal families.

Family status of tribal women in India;

The modern Tiwas are a patriarchal community. On the ground of the equal status and extensive range of domination enjoyed by wife to her husband in the family it is a matter of pride that once the Tiwas were belonged to matriarchal family group. Generally, as I have seen in the Tiwa villages of Morgan district, the joint Tiwa family is consisted of father, grandfather, mother, grandmother, sons, daughters, daughter-in-laws, grand children etc. In Tiwa family different women members assume different status which varies from one another. For example, someone assumes the status of mother, other one of daughter, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law etc. Accordingly, their role played in the family is also different from one another.

Now, in place of orzo, the preparation of tea becomes a daily routine in a Tiwa family. In a modern Tiwa family, the items of food as well as the process of their preparations also changed in which a Tiwa woman has to spend more time. To engage her children in their study, taken hygienic care of her children and old members of the family as well as taken care of the family environment etc. become a regular duty for a Tiwa woman. The above discussion shows that a Tiwa woman assumes an honorable status in their family. A modern Tiwa wife is considered as friend, counselor and companion.

Health status of tribal women in India

A comprehensive review of the health status of tribal women has been prepared by Basu (1993, this volume). His paper discusses, inter alia, the following dimensions: sex ratio, age at marriage, fertility and mortality, life expectancy, nutritional status, maternal mortality, mother and child health care practices, family welfare programmes and sexually transmitted diseases. The main conclusions of the paper are:

- Higher infant mortality rate in the tribals compared to the national average,
- Low nutritional status of the tribals,
- Lower life-expectancy in the tribals than the national average,
- High incidence of Sickle Cell disease (HBss) and Glucose-to-Phosphate Enzyme Deficiency (G-6-80) in some tribal groups,
- Higher fertility rate in tribal women compared to the national women compared to the national average. (Basu S., 1993, Social Change, this Issue)

The health statuses of the tribals have been discussed in Status of the Tribals in India, (Social Change, 1993, Vol.23 Nos. 2&3). The factors which influence the health status of the tribal population in general, are also applicable to the tribal women, in fact, more so. For example, it has been found that illiteracy, in tribal, as also in non-tribal population, is positively correlated with ill-health.

Educational Status of Tribal Women in India

The low educational status of tribal women is reflected in their lower literacy rate, lower enrolment rate and higher dropouts in the school. The literacy rate of the tribal population as well as Scheduled Castes and general population for three decades (1961-1991)

- The literacy rate of tribals is lower than that of general as well as SC population.
- The literacy rate of the rural tribal female is the lowest of all groups.

- Singh and Ohri in their paper entitled Educational Status of Tribal Women in India (1993, Social Change, this volume) have suggested the following measures for the improvement of the educational status of tribal women:
- On the basis of data related to education available from various sources, identifying tribal groups for initiating innovative educational programmes at the micro-level.
- Studying the problems of drop-outs, wastage and stagnation among tribal girls in school.
- Examining occupational mobility among tribal women as a result of modernization, education and social change.
- Evaluating ongoing integrated tribal development programmes in tribal areas under the tribal sub-plans through performance appraisal with reference to:
 - Improvement in social and economic status of the people, health, modernity,
 - Use of science and technology in agricultural/ horticultural production
 - Environmental conservation.

Political status of tribal women in India

The overall picture of the tribal woman that emerges from the existing materials has the following features:

- The literature on tribal women is substantially romantic and grim economic realities have been completely ignored.
- The tribal woman is a working woman and works harder than tribal men and women in any of the social groups.
- The tribal woman is illiterate.
- The tribal woman is not healthy
- There is high fertility and greater incidence of malnutrition among them. Infant mortality is almost hundred percent.

Agriculture status of tribal women

Over 80% of tribals work in the primary sector against 53% of the general population. About 45% are cultivators against 32.5% of the general population. According to available data, the number of tribal who were cultivators, declined from over 68% to 45% in 2001, whereas agricultural laborers increased from about 20% to 37%, an indication that tribals are steadily losing their lands. Unlike other communities, among tribals there are no restrictions on women's participation in the cultivation process. They not only save money, but also earn it, unlike females of other communities. They are the pivot of tribal agriculture, performing many household

and agricultural jobs. Without them, tribal welfare in agriculture is meaningless.

Approaches to Tribal Women's Development

There can be two major approaches to women's development-(i) Governmental and (ii) Non-Governmental. The non-governmental approach can further have involvement of the voluntary organization or involvement of the local people. In India we find both the approaches being used in the development of women. Women's development must be viewed in different sectors such as education, health, family planning, nutrition, employment, training, support service etc.

Development of Women's Welfare through Five Year Plans

Sl. No.	Year	Five Year Plans	Women's Welfare Measures
1	1951-56	First Five Year Plan	Central Social Welfare Board
2	1956-61	Second Five Year Plan	Mahila Mandals were organized
3	1961-66	Third Five Year Plan	Women Education
4	1969-74	Fourth Five Year Plan	Family planning, immunization and supplementary nutrition for children.
5	1974-79	Fifth Five Year Plan	Training of women and functional literacy.
6	1980-85	Sixth Five Year Plan	Adopted a multi-disciplinary approach with thrust on health, Education and employment.
7	1985-90	Seventh Five Year Plan	Established a separate department for women and children under the Human Resource Ministry.
8	1992-97	Eight Five Year Plan	Empowerment of Women.
9	1997-2002	Ninth Five Year Plan	National Policy on Empowerment of Women was adopted in April 2001. Self-Help Groups were more active for creating awareness and Confidence and giving training for women.
10	2002-2007	Tenth Five Year Plan	The Plan has focused on the welfare and development of all the vulnerable sections of society especially women.
11	2007-2012	Eleventh Five Year Plan	The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGP).

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGP).

Role of Voluntary Organization in Tribal Women Development

The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment is implementing various schemes/programmes through non-governmental organizations and releases grant in aid to them based upon the inspection reports/recommendations from the States/UTs. (See format of recommendations. The government, many voluntary organizations such as the servants of India, Thakkar Baba Ashram, Ram Krishna Mission, Christian Missionaries and others have been working in tribal area for the last several years for the upliftment of tribal communities. Important organizations of all-India character are Harijan Sevak Sangh, Delhi; Bharatiya Depressed Classes League, New Delhi; Ishwar Saran Ashram, Allahabad; Indian Red Cross Society, New Delhi; Hind

Sweepers Sevak Samaj, New Delhi; Ramakrishna Mission, Narendrapur, West Bengal; Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh, New Delhi; Andhra Rashtra Adimjati Sevak Sangh, Nellore; Ramakrishna Mission, Cheerapunji, Ranchi, Puri, Silchar and Shillong; Thakkar Baba Ashram, Numkhani, Orissa; Servants of India Society, Pune; and Social Work and Research Centre, Tilloria, These training are possible only through voluntary organization. Voluntary organizations working at raising consciousness of tribal women and organizing them on issues relevant to their life, in a way prepares the ground for better implementation of programmers.

Findings and suggestion

If the government of Indian has implemented five years polices for treble women, The thrust of these programmers was to provide employment and income generation, education, training, support services, general awareness and legal support. Women's development must be viewed in different sectors such as education, health, family planning, nutrition, employment, training, support service etc.

- Though government of India has implemented many policies for tribal women it has not reached the level, so government should take the responsible to reach their level.
- Family and society support is crucial for the tribal women to utilized the opportunities provide by the government of India.

Conclusion

In spite of various constitutional provisions and policies for the tribals, it is a hard reality that the tribal women still are lagging behind in many respects and they have to face many challenges. The study emphasized the need for tribal development in India. Their low level of economic activities, social backwardness, low level of literacy, poor health conditions makes it vital for a systematic process of tribal development. Education for tribal women is an essential aspect of development. Education is a vital instrument to bring about a change in the cultural norms and patterns of life of the tribal women and to change their outlook and made them economically independent. Education will enable them to take up jobs so that they can improve their situation. Social and economic status of the scheduled tribe to a large extent depends on the educational attainment. Educated women will be able to face the present day society better than earlier times. In the present context, no one can remain completely isolated, but they are influenced by the growth of modern society and culture. Government is providing a lot of support and grant for the education of Tribal students. This will help to increase the literacy rate and it will lead to the right way to development. The health status of the tribals is explored to assess their

awareness regarding their health. Sometimes they lack the essential nutrients. Many times they suffer from various diseases as there is a lack of health and hygiene awareness. Thus increasing the literacy rate and providing opportunities for gainful employment for tribal women will be instrumental in bringing about a change in the status of tribal women in India and to handle to challenges successfully.

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