



ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA: A STUDY

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Abstract

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. In tribal communities, the role of women is substantial and crucial. They constitute about half the total population but in tribal society women are more important than in other social groups, because they work harder and the family economy and management depends on them. Even after industrialization and the resultant commercialization swamped the tribal economy, women continued to play a significant role. Collection of minor forest produce is done mostly by women and children. Many also work as laborers in industries, households and construction, contributing to their family income. Despite exploitation by contractors and managers, tribals are more sincere and honest than non tribals. Increase agricultural production through conservation to settled agriculture, where possible, with linkage to easy credit and markets and assured irrigation.

Introduction

The participatory role of tribals in improving their living conditions by fully exploring natural endowments and alternative uses must find an appropriate place in the strategic approach. The social dynamics of tribal welfare and development is such that effective strategies to protect tribals and their livelihood imply negotiating some kind of social consensus about criteria concerning tribal development and values of the society that evolves from such programmes. This also implies a broad social consensus about the basic rights and opportunities that tribals should enjoy and the responsibilities that should be taken by different individual and social groups.

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. In tribal communities, the role of women is substantial and crucial. They constitute about half the total population but in tribal society women are more important than in other social groups, because they work harder and the family economy and management depends on them. Even after industrialization and the resultant commercialization swamped the tribal economy, women continued to play a significant role. Collection of minor forest produce is done mostly by women and children. Many also work as laborers in industries, households and construction, contributing to their family income. Despite exploitation by contractors and managers, tribals are more sincere and honest than non tribals.

However, tribal women face problems and challenges in getting a sustainable livelihood and a decent life due to environmental degradation and the interference of outsiders. The strategy for tribal development, and specially women, needs improvement, betterment, development and upliftment to effect their empowerment. 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. The development process should be perceived as an involvement and reorganization mechanism of not only the economic system but the entire eco-system. Against this backdrop, the present proposal reviews the emerging perspective in the context of the economic empowerment of tribal women and changing paradigms of development.

Statement of Problem

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. This seclusion has been responsible for the slower growth, dissimilar pattern of their socio-economic and cultural development and inability to negotiate and cope with the consequences of their involuntary integration into mainstream society and economy. Tribals continue to be socio-economically backward.

For the accelerated economic development of any community, the active participation of women is essential. In a social set up like India's, their participation has to be ensured through tangible measures, taken at various levels, which result in their empowerment in the real sense. Empowerment of women is one of the concepts that has developed in connection with improving their status. Empowerment includes higher literacy levels, education, better healthcare, equal ownership of



productive resources, increased participation in economic and commercial sectors, awareness of rights and responsibilities, improved standards of living, self-reliance, self-esteem and self-confidence.

Tribal women, while being a disadvantaged and vulnerable group are, nevertheless, better placed, in many respects, than their counterparts in the general population and are, in certain areas, more empowered. They do not suffer segregation or lower status. This is reflected in their higher sex-ratio vis-à-vis the general population (977 as compared to 933 - 2011 census). The child sex-ratio for tribal women also compares favorably vis-à-vis the general population, being 972 as against 919 for the general population - 2011 census. However, the negative practices of the mainstream population seem to have started percolating to the tribal population as well. The child female to male sex ratio shows a decline from 985 (per thousand males) in 1991 to 972 in 2011 while in areas such as education and health tribal women lag behind significantly.

Tribal women work as men's partners in agriculture, yet their status remains the same. Tribal women work very hard for the livelihood of the family but live a poor life, in spite of their many contributions in the house and on the farm. Tribal women are important for the improvement and progress of tribals. They are the pivot of tribal agriculture, performing many household and agricultural jobs. Without them, tribal welfare in agriculture is meaningless.

Tribal habitations are facing environmental hazards everywhere due to careless, unplanned and faulty development policies followed by government's skipping the necessary environmental safeguards in development projects. Most development activities impinge upon the environment and adversely affect the ecological balance. The large scale cutting of forest trees in tribal habitats has led to a shortage of fuel, fodder, foliage and forest produce which form the economy of tribals. In the changed context of development, environment protection and sustainable development with a human-centred approach must be ensured. Since tribal women are engaged in ecological movements, environmental protection and conservation, their role may be enhanced through capacity building and empowerment in the context of ecological development.

Tribals have been residing in forest areas for generations, cultivating land and collecting non-timber forest produce. As per the Forest Survey of India Report, 2003, 60.04% of the 63% forests cover of the country and 63% of dense forests lie in 187 tribal districts, though the geographical area of these districts is just 33.6% of the country's geographical area. Out of 58 districts, which have more than 67% of their area under forest cover, 51 are tribal districts. A comparison of the 2001 and 2003 assessments of forest cover in tribal districts shows a net increase of 321,100 hectares underscoring a very strong symbiotic relationship between tribals and forests and of tribals being at the forefront of conservation regimes.

While tribal women have more say in family decisions than their non-tribal counterparts, they also share more responsibilities. Preparing food and providing for drinking water is solely their responsibility so they operate closely with the forests from where they get water, fuel and minor products including edible fruits, tubers, flowers, vegetables and berries.

Minor forest produce plays an important part in the tribal economy. Its collection and marketing is a major source of livelihood for most tribal families contributing around 70% of their total income. The different varieties are classified as plants for use in tanning, natural gums, resins and balsams, plants and seeds used in pharmacy and perfumery and tendu leaves.

Empowerment of Tribals in Development and Planning

The need for empowerment of tribals hardly needs justification. Their primitive way of life, economic and social backwardness, low level of literacy, outdated system of production, absence of value systems, sparse physical infrastructure in backward tribal areas and demographic quality of tribal areas make the development of tribals and tribal areas essential.

The tribal sub plan was adopted for the first time at the beginning of the 5th Five Year Plan in 1974-75. It applies, at present, to 21 states and two Union Territories, where tribals constitute a sizeable population and provides for the allocation of funds in proportion to the tribal population in the country by each of the concerned central ministries/departments in proportion to the tribal population of that state.

After the adoption of this approach, since fifth five year plan, the flow of funds to TSP areas has significantly increased. TSP expenditure which came down to poor 0.51% during the 4th five year plan increased to 9.47% during the 8th five year plan. The objective of the Tenth Plan was to empower STs through their educational, economic and social development. An outlay of Rs. 1,719.71 crore was provided in the Annual Plan for 2007-08, which is 3.79% higher than the outlay of Rs. 1,656.90 crore for 2006-07 (RE). The outlay includes Rs. 816.71 crore provided as Special Central Assistance (SCA) to Tribal-Sub Plan (TSP) which includes Rs. 220.00 crore for development of forest villages and Rs. 150 crore for Minor Irrigation of tribal lands. SCA to Tribal Sub-Plan is a 100% grant extended to States as an additional funding to undertake developmental, family-oriented, income-generating schemes, the creation of critical infrastructure, the extension of financial assistance to Self Help Groups (SHGs) for community-based activities, and the development of Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) and forest



villages. Grant-in-aid under Article 275(1) is also being provided to the States to promote the welfare of STs, improve administration and take up special welfare and development programmes which are not included in the Plan.

PESA is an instrument for tribals' empowerment of tribals. To make it effective, it is necessary to (a) endow Panchayats at the appropriate level and Gram Sabhas with ownership of minor forest produce (MFP), (b) empower Gram Sabhas to approve beneficiaries under poverty alleviation programmes and the provisions relating to minor forest produce, minor minerals and settlement of land rights in forest, (c) make prior consultation with Gram Sabha or Panchayats at the appropriate level mandatory before acquisition of land for development projects, (d) make the recommendation of Gram Sabha or Panchayat at the appropriate level mandatory for granting prospecting licences or mining leases for minor minerals and (e) get State Governments to change their existing laws whenever they are inconsistent with central legislation.

Concept of Economic Empowerment of tribal Women

Economic empowerment of marginalized groups involves not only the process of creation of socio-political space for these groups by the state and civil society but also it is a process of liberation from man-made bondage through sustained struggle and resistance. It also represents realization of hopes and dreams of marginalised groups for a social environment, free of inequalities which affect them politically, socially and economically. The issue of economic empowerment is also linked with aspects like equality, liberty and fraternity. Thus the concept of "Economic Empowerment" of tribal women is quite new and it has been contextualized and acquires a new connotation in recent years among social scientists, policy makers, and development activists. So to overcome all the obstacles of the economic empowerment of tribal women, the scientific research is an urgent need.

There are a good number of studies explaining the causes and consequences of women disempowerment. Such studies are related to a general enquiry of women exploitation and dependency. These studies have identified lack of education, absence of skills and training, lack of property rights, social isolation and segregation and male control over resources and reproductive rights as responsible for women disempowerment. These factors in different degrees are applicable to the disempowerment of different socio-economic groups of women are socially heterogeneous groups like White women versus Black women, educated and 351 uneducated women, high caste women and low caste women, Christian women Muslim and Hindu women. These socially discriminated women face different degrees and various types of obstacles for empowerment (Boserup;(1970)Sen;(2001) Becker.(1956)Further economically, women are classified into high income, middle income, and low income groups (like men).

The tribal women being economically poor and socially backward live at a low level of scale of the quality of life. Thus the tribal women often face the problems of food insecurity, malnutrition, lack of access to health care services and education and the victim of domestic violence and rape. Unlike the well organised modern communities, the tribal communities and tribal women lag far behind in social networking. This is the nature and dimension of socio-economic disempowerment problem among the tribal women in India. Sen has advocated human capabilities approach to the development process. The human capabilities include social, economic, cultural and political capabilities of the human beings. Sen (2001) has identified the following seven types of gender inequalities in his public lecture delivered at Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University in 2001. They are:

1. Mortality inequality
2. Natality inequality
3. Basic facilities inequality
4. Special opportunity inequality
5. Professional inequality
6. Ownership inequality
7. Household inequality

These seven types of gender inequalities explained by Amartya Kumar Sen do not apply to women in tribal society. These gender inequalities apply in varying degrees in rural and urban society which are generally modernising and industrialising. However the mortality inequality, natality inequality, basic facilities inequality are more pronounced between women of rural and urban societies vis-à-vis tribal societies. Sen has referred to gender inequalities of different kind between men and women. However to understand and measure the disempowerment magnitude of 352 the tribal women and their overall position, that has to be compared with the women of urban and rural society and not with their poor male counterparts.

Women participation in social and political activities, their legal status in terms of marriage, divorce and inheritance of property, seeking health care should be taken into consideration. Empowerment means in terms of knowledge and awareness of one's own life and society including legal status with regard to the human lives.

Empowering may be understood as enabling women, especially tribal women, to acquire and to possess power and resources, in order to make decision on their own or resist decisions that are made by others which affect them. A person may said to be powerful when he/she has control over a large portion of power resources in society (Gowda and Yogish 2006). The extent of possession of various resources such as personal wealth, assets, land, skilled education, information, knowledge, social status, and position held, leadership traits, capabilities for mobilization of resources etc., indicate the level of empowerment.

Sushma Sahay (1998) observed that empowerment could be possible by outlining the mechanisms and tools that still influence the women empowerment, decision- making process, multidimensional process that enable women to realize their full identity and powers in all walks of life.



In Sen's (2001) parlance, women agency means any bargaining process of their own to reduce their exploitation within family and also within the economy. The women agency, thus, can take place both at the individual level and in collective form by way of women forums or organizations.

Importance of the Study

Development of tribal people and areas is important for the comprehensive and overall development of society. The governments have been planning and implementing various schemes and programmes for the welfare of tribals. But there is no satisfaction in achieving the targeted Results. Therefore an in depth analysis is needed to find out the reasons for the failure of schemes and programme and suggest the suitable measures for the development of tribal people.

Objectives of the Study

The present study will be carried out with the following aims and objectives.

1. To find the economic status of the tribal woman in India.
2. To examine the structure and functioning of the integrated Tribal Development Agencies.
3. To analyze the programmes, operational procedures, personnel practices of the institutions.
4. To analyse perception of the beneficiaries and to present a few case studies to get to the core of the problem.
5. To review the tribal development policies and programmes and sketch the problems of tribal's peoples in India.

Overview of Problem

Tribal women play a major role in the co-management of their natural, social, economic resources and agricultural development including crop production, livestock production, horticulture and post harvest operations but they remain backward due to traditional values, illiteracy, superstitions, and dominant roles in decision making, social evils and many other cultural factors.

The participatory role of tribals in improving their living conditions by fully exploring natural endowments and alternative uses must find an appropriate place in the strategic approach. The social dynamics of tribal welfare and development is such that effective strategies to protect tribals and their livelihood imply negotiating some kind of social consensus about criteria concerning tribal development and values of the society that evolves from such programmes. This also implies a broad social consensus about the basic rights and opportunities that tribals should enjoy and the responsibilities that should be taken by different individual and social groups.

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