



AN OVER VIEW ON MIGRATION OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA

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Introduction

The tribal population of the country, as per the 2011 census, is 104.3 million constituting 8.6% of the total population. There are over 705 Scheduled Tribes notified under Article 342 of the Constitution of India, spread over different States and Union Territories of the country. Many tribes are present in more than one state. The composite State of Andhra Pradesh had the largest tribal concentration in South India with the population of 5,918,073 constituting 7 % of the total population. These Scheduled Tribes (STs) are indigenous, have their own distinctive culture, geographically isolated and are low in socio-economic conditions. For centuries, the tribal groups have remained outside the realm of the general development process due to their habitation in forests and hilly tracts. Most of the tribal areas are hilly, inaccessible undulating plateau lands in the forest areas of the country resulting in the bypassing of general developmental programmes. Due to this, infrastructure and development facilities in tribal areas for education, roads, healthcare, communication, drinking water, sanitation etc. lagged behind compared to other areas which has resulted in further widening the gaps of development between the tribals and the general population for a long time.

Due to the backwardness and low socio-economic development among STs, Government has made affirmative policies, Programmes and enacted laws. There are many Constitutional safeguards for the welfare, development and protection of STs in the country. In spite of the many affirmative action's, tribals in India face insurmountable problems due to their low socio-economic conditions, poverty, unemployment, displacement, indebtedness, lack of opportunities, accessibility and awareness of the government programmes. Coupled to this, the government and private industrial establishments have initiated mega projects of mining, hydro-electric, industry, business, roads and transport which is leading to the loss of traditional land ownership and livelihood opportunities. This is resulting in large scale migration of rural tribal to urban areas in search of livelihoods. Along with men, tribal women and girls also migrate to urban towns and cities in different situations. For them the society and cultural system in the cities is totally new and different and adjustment is difficult in the initial stage. These tribal women and girls are facing a number of problems in the big cities in India where they have taken shelter. Their housing conditions are miserable, economically they are still poor, only few of them are in regular employment and they are financially and sexually exploited in these big cities. Human Migration and in particular tribal migration with its implications is becoming an important socio-economic problem for the policy makers and government to undertake welfare and development activities. It is, therefore, the present paper is to present the review of literature and be focused on discussing the socio- economic causes for migration to urban areas among tribal women and girls in India and also to examine the factors influencing migratory patterns. Further the paper also tries to make some suggestions for policy makers to improve socio-economic status of tribal women and girls.

Review of the Literature

A brief review on the literature relating to this present study is presented in the following pages. A range and combination of push and pull factors drive circular migration particularly the tribals and tribal women in particular. Circular migration, or rural-urban migration, is emerging as a dominant form of migration amongst STs in India (Deshingkar et.al 2008).

In the 18th and 19th Centuries, the migration was forced as the British employed tribal labour to work in the Assam tea gardens. In the last century, a noticeable change was visible in the nature and pattern of tribal migration. A new feature of tribal migration in recent years has been the large - scale migration of single women to cities in search of livelihood, which is a subtle change from the earlier migration patterns when only the men migrated to urban centres. Tribal families nowadays are driven by poverty to send unmarried daughters to cities in search of work. Single women and tribal girls are however, prone to exploitation not only by employers but also by anti-social elements. (Mosse et al., 1997).

Tribal migrants have found jobs in factories, agro-processing plants or working as porters, domestic servants, bus cleaners, rickshaw pullers, street hawkers, petty traders, construction workers and domestic workers. Migrants are often willing to take on jobs that others cannot or do not want to do (those that are dirty, degrading and dangerous). The work is commonly poorly paid and insecure but it is very attractive to those from marginal areas where wages are too low to make a living. Income is one driver, with people migrating in search of paid employment. Early studies also reported that internal migration can lead to positive change in both sending and receiving areas (Deshingkar et.al 2006).



Anthropologically, a tribe is a social group the members of which live in a common dialect, uniform social organisation and possess cultural homogeneity having a common ancestor, political organisation and religious pattern. But, perhaps, it would be very difficult to find many tribal groups in India who possess all these characteristics. Again a number of tribal groups are recognized by the Government and they are the scheduled tribes. But since all the tribal and analogous social formations are not considered as Scheduled Tribes, and when tribal population is considered, the number of actual tribal population must be much more than what is mentioned as Scheduled Tribe Population (Chaudhuri, 1992).

In recent times many attempts have been made to understand the status of women in the tribal society. Robert Lowie (1920) has suggested four different criteria to determine the status of women in a society i.e. (i) actual treatment, (ii) legal status, (iii) opportunity for social participation and (iv) character and extent of work. Mujumdar and Madan (1956) state that “expressed, some of which take a stand that primitive society” women are generally a depressed group”. For this reason Robert Lowie has stated that any general statement regarding the relation of women to the society must be taken with caution.

The division of work is heavily loaded against the tribal woman because in addition to an equal share in the economic production process she has to take the sole responsibility of household chores. In certain tribes only the males can participate in ancestor worship. Usually she cannot hold the office of a priest (Rajyalakshmi, 1996).

Tribal women in India contribute positively towards economic pursuits by participating equally with men folk. They participate in all agricultural operations like sowing seeds, weeding and harvesting, felling and burning trees. In plough based cultivation, transplantation, weeding, winnowing and dehusking is done entirely by women. They work in all sectors of indigenous cottage industries, tribal arts and production of artifacts. Generally, the ploughing is done by men but in some tribal societies, women do the ploughing too. Though the women work for more time than men, they receive less wages and that too in kind which are encashed by males. (Singh, 1994).

Owing to the migration, a large number of tribal women and girls become victims of sexual and financial exploitation. Their children rarely get an opportunity to go to school and learn a productive skill. Gradually many women and girls lose contact with their kith and kins back home and become alienated from their culture and roots. In tribal areas land is a symbol of the organisation of the community. When a transfer takes place beyond the threshold point, the community looks upon the process as alienation. It is thus obvious, that transfer of land is not merely a question of exploitation of innocent tribals by cunning people, there are more complex factors involved (Chaudhuri, 1990).

These works to a large extent highlight the socio-economic conditions and status of tribal women. After five decades of planned effort to develop the lot of the tribes, there is need for import studies in order to know the changes as a result of Governmental efforts.

Causes of Exploitation

The study team examined the causes of exploitation of migrant tribal women and girls. The investigators discussed this issue with the respondents when different factors were reported as causes of exploitation; the prominent among these are as under :

1. Poverty
2. Ignorance about provisions of Minimum Wages Act
3. Unorganised Labour
4. No knowledge of institutional finance and credit facilities
5. Lack of employment opportunities in the city
6. Loans from non-registered money-lenders.
7. Misunderstanding among the non-tribal people about the free sex
8. in tribal communities.
9. Ignorance about the law giving protection form forced sexual
10. exploitation.
11. Indifferent attitude of police department when complaints of
12. sexual exploitation are lodged in the nearby police stations.
13. Lack of social and community support.

As a result of the causes stated above the cases of financial as well as sexual exploitation of migrant tribal women and girls are increasing in the urban areas. Some social activists in big cities and a very limited number of NGOs have taken up the issue on their agenda but they too could not do much to stop the exploitation. Good education and the courage to fight the exploitation are the only ways open for resisting exploitation of migrant tribal women and girls.



Factors Influencing Migratory Patterns

Age and literacy: Age and education also influence migration like employment, marriage, occupational composition and certain social and cultural activities of the community. The age groups 15-24 years and 25-34 years show greater migration tendency compared to other age groups. This is true for both sexes as well as for both sectors urban and rural. The main reason for this trend is that both these groups constitutes for economically most mobile youth which moves out of their habitats for greener pastures occupationally. Also, the majority of marriages take place in this combined age group only (S. Sundari: 2007). The literacy rate of the tribals is 23.63 per cent. This is lower than that of the general population (62.21%). The literacy rate of the rural tribal female is 12.74 per cent. The health status of the tribals is lower and inferior compared to that of the general population. It is so or it is because the attitude of the tribals towards health that disease is caused by supernatural powers and wrath of their deities and ancestral spirits and therefore, they can be cured by the pacification of these enraged supernatural powers by sacrifices of animals, religious rituals, sorcery and the witchcraft, Despite their supernatural beliefs the tribals have an indigenous medical system based on herbs.

Occupational patterns and struggle: The role of tribal women in their society is considered very crucial in India because they work harder. Family's economy and management both depend on them. They are sometimes considered as economic assets as they would participate in all agricultural operations indigenous cottage industries, arts etc. however, women are paid lesser in comparison to men for the same work. This biasing continues to hold true even at domestic fronts where the complete household responsibility is shouldered on women folks (Singh, P.K., et al. 2013). The early monographs used to portray them as objects of beauty and sexuality and for this reason they had been exploited by men from higher strata of society. Between 1950 and 1980, tribal women migrated to the rural areas of Bihar and West Bengal mainly to work as agricultural labour, but from 1980 onwards, they began migrating to bigger cities in search of employment. They readily agree to work at low wages also as domestic helps in metro cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Bangaluru etc. Here, they become victims of constant verbal and sexual abuse, working without any grievance redressal mechanism. Tribal women migrants have found jobs in factories, agro-processing plants or working as porters, street hawkers, petty traders, construction workers, domestic workers, sweepers and cleaners. Migrants are often willing to take on jobs that others cannot or do not want to do (those that are dirty, degrading and dangerous). The work is commonly poorly paid and insecure but it is very attractive to those from marginal areas where wages are too low to make a living (Megha Shree: 2012). They have also found suffering from anaemia, malnutrition, body-aches, weakness etc. Their exploitation include long working hours, extremely unhygienic working conditions, never paid salary by the placement agencies, fraud done by the recruitment agencies and verbal and physical abuse of sorts (Deshingkar, P., S. Kumar, H. Kumar Chobey and D. Kumar: 2006). Many amongst them have been found working in massage parlours but some have been found to be pushed into brothels for meagre amounts. This issue actually highlights the most crucial problem of our society i.e. human trafficking. These girls are forced to live humiliating and disgraceful lives.

Demographic Patterns: According to the research report (Jha V: 2005) it is observed that in the process of migration of tribal women and girls to cities the "Push – Pull" factors have played an important role. The significant push factors located during investigation were very low rates of wages, unemployment and land alienation along with poverty and indebtedness. Marriage was found to be the single most important reason for migration of female members of tribal communities. Migration of tribal girls to big cities for education is very limited and hence negligible. Only about 0.8 percent females migrate to big cities for education. It is, therefore, very clear that in spite of the facilities like free primary education, free hostel and other basic facilities, tribal girls are not coming to big cities for higher education in sufficient number. The major pull factors include economic stability and employment opportunities. They consider cities would provide better and improved lifestyle conditions and therefore better standards of living. Once in city, they tend to feel self-sufficient and financially independent. Some even claim to be trained in vocational programs run by NGOs to become trained and skilled wagers.

Problems Faced By Tribal Women Migrants

Unemployment, poverty and lack of basic facilities of education, health and hygiene are still a major problem in the tribal areas forcing them for out migration to various towns and cities. The case studies and data of migrant tribal women and girls indicate that they face number of problems immediately after their migration to cities which included difficulty of communication in local language, residential accommodation, employment, education of children, local contacts, adjustment with city life and environment etc. The migrant tribal women in cities suffer from poor housing conditions. Most of them have their houses in slum areas surrounded by unhealthy environment. In addition, more than 50% of the migrant tribal women are living in rented houses. Education and vocational guidance and training for development of their skills with a view to improve their potential for employment are lacking in tribal areas (Commission Government of India: 2010). Tribal migrant women exploitation is mostly done by the middlemen who offer them good emoluments, good placement and work



conditions and after they are taken to the work place they are cheated. The tribal migrant women of the three metro cities namely Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata expressed that, of the specific cases of exploitation by the person/agency, landlords exploitation is the major one followed by placement agency at the place of work. The economic and physical abuse, sexual exploitations have been reported (Singh, Andrea Menefee: 1984). The tribal families are not able to meet their basic needs out of their meagre income from their occupations and are heavily indebted to the money lenders. They pledge their fixed assets like land, trees and mobile articles for meeting their daily expenses and occasional functions. There are no proper marketing and forward and backward linkages for the forest produce and articles being produced by the tribals in the interior areas.

Discussion

The main reason for migration of tribal women is unemployment followed by poverty. This can be attributed to lack of knowledge or educational backwardness of migrant tribal women which is due to mostly non-availability of sufficient number of educational institutes in the tribal areas as well as in the slum areas of cities where majority of the migrant tribal women and girls live. However, the reasons for their exodus need to be studied in detail given the large number of development programmes like National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (JRY), Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), Food for Work Programme (FFW), Prime Minister Gramin Swarajgar Yojana (PMGSY), Swarna Jayanti Gramin Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY). These tribal migrants specially the women folks should also be made aware of various development programmes being implemented for their benefit by these agencies (Thadani, V.N and Todaro, M.P: 1984). The present paper covers an array of issues affecting female migration and discussed diverse and different aspects of migration and its multi-fold issues. The migrant class always lags behind in terms of economic and social respects. And they also have to bear the cost of travel, the access of information about migration opportunities, chance of unemployment etc. Studies reviewed, push and pull factors involved in female migration. This fluctuating trend in employment opportunities for tribals despite many efforts on part of Government remain unproductive and futile, resulting in high suicide rates as also discussed by Singh et al (2013). Further other issues such as the impact of migration on the economic and social status of households, cost and benefit of female labour migration quality of life among migrant households and the status of children in migrant families are some other dominant problems faced by tribal women migrants.

Conclusion

Since the tribals are descendents of some primitive human civilization, they have inherited a rich cultural heritage from their past ancestors. The traditional folk dance, folk songs, folk instruments, folk art and craft are unique cultural heritage of the tribal people. The traditional beliefs and practices have helped tribals in India in preservation of their age-old culture. But with the onslaught of industrialization, urbanization and modernisation and resultant migration of tribal men, women and girls to urban centres the age-old culture of these primitive human societies is threatened with extinctions. It is suggested that allout efforts must be made by the policy makers to make the tribals realise the importance of their culture and motivate them to preserve this rich culture at any cost. Efforts must be made to see that the women and girls migrated to cities maintain their links with the people in their hinterlands so that they do not get cut-off from the tribal culture.

The migrant tribal women and girls have moved from tribal regions to cities due to non-availability of employment opportunities resulting in acute poverty in addition to floods, famines, volcano and other natural calamities. To stop migration of tribals to cities it is necessary that ample employment opportunities should be provided to the tribal families in and around their hinterlands. Moreover, the employment should be provided throughout the year. To reduce the extent of migration the State Governments should be provided sufficient money from the President's Fund to confront with the problem of employment in tribal region of different states. The work for construction of roads, anicuts, check-dams bunds, wells, ponds, school buildings etc. should be undertaken.

Inspite of the great emphasis laid on women's education in the five years plan and the facilities and incentives given majority the tribal women and girls remained without education even after migration to cities. The main reason for educational backwardness of migrant tribal women and girls was non-availability of sufficient number of educational institutes in the tribal areas as well as in the slum areas of cities where majority of the migrant tribal women and girls live. It is, therefore, suggested that the Zilla Parishads, City Corporations and the Gram Panchayats should be directed to provide Schools in tribal villages and the tribal localities in the big cities. And also for tribal girls different programmes of non-formal and continuing education will be more effective and useful. Such programmes should be given to NGOs having good record of honest working in the field of Tribal Development.



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