

Tribal Women Participation in Decision Making Process in Odisha: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Democracy gives rights to all to take their own decision in all sectors i.e. social, political, and economic, etc. but some parts of our society are somehow left. They are mostly the tribal women. Odisha is the home to 62 distinct tribal groups out of which 13 communities are declared as primitive tribes. The state has the third highest tribal population in the country. The Scheduled tribes constitute a small proportion of the total population of the country and they are marginalized from the society in many respects. Provisions made in the Constitution have brought about changes in their position but still they are confronted with a number of challenges. The objectives of the study were to assess the level of autonomy and decision-making power of tribal women. Traditionally women have always been subjugated. True development of a nation is not possible if one half of the population is ignored or marginalized. Therefore, the Constitution of India has many rights and acts in favour of them. The present study examines the decision-making role of tribal women and to find out the impact of their socio-economic status on their decision-making roles. The development of tribal community cannot be accelerated without women participation. Therefore, the government should focus on developing the literacy rate among the tribal women which would facilitate their economic upliftment. This would surely result in their qualitative participation and decision making among all aspects of their living. The purpose of this theoretical paper is to find out the challenges faced by tribal women, and to discuss the strategies that they can consider for handling these challenges successfully. The findings can be beneficial for implementing projects that can help in improving their situation of backwardness.

(Key Words: Tribal Women, Socio-economic status, decision making role)

Introduction

The term "Tribe" arose at the time of Greek and before the establishment of Rome Empire. The Shillong consultation on tribal in 1962 defines tribes as "an indigenous homogenous unit, speaking common language, claiming a common ancestry living in particular geographical area, backward in technology, pre-literate, loyally observing social and political customs based on kinship. Basically Tribal community originated from one of the oldest ethnological segment of population which possesses some qualities and characteristics that makes them exceptional. Tribal people also called as aboriginal people or indigenous inhabitants or primitive people. However many tribal people employed the term for them "Aadiwasi or Upjati" but it is not recognized by government of India because it has been considered as the more political term of self reference. Some have also referred them as Vanyajati, Vanvasi, Pahari, Adimjati and Anusuchit Jan Jati etc. Mahatma Gandhi called them as "Girijan. Tribal people are generally, socially, educationally and economically deprived groups for the centuries. Though, the tribal population in India is numerically small but worth of consideration which is representing the poor people in the country. Even if government of India included tribal people in a particular section (STs) called as "schedule tribes". However, there are many communities and clans within them and completely differs from one another in terms of socio-cultural beliefs, their habits, lifestyle, and health practices, etc. It is well

known fact that the status of tribal health in India is “very poor” and is affected by the general extensive poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, absence of safe drinking water and sanitary living conditions, poor maternal and child health services ineffective coverage of national health and nutritional services which make for the “dismal health”. Article 366 (25) of the Indian constitution refers to scheduled tribes as those communities who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. This Article says that, “only those communities who have been declared as such by President through an initial public notification or through a subsequent amending Act of parliament will be considered to be Scheduled Tribes”. The inclusion of STs is still ongoing process. To identify particular community as a tribe few essential characteristics formed down by the Lokur committee which had included following conditions

- a) Indication of primitive traits
- b) Distinctive culture
- c) Shyness of contact with the community at large
- d) Geographical isolation and backwardness

In general term, tribe or tribal people are a group of indigenous people that have certain common characters and separated from other population. In Anthropology tribes are defined as smaller population which has temporary or permanent political integration defined by traditions of common descent language culture and ideology, also preferred as “ethnic group” in anthropological view.

Meaning of Tribe

The tribal population is identified as the aboriginal inhabitants of our country. They are most vulnerable section of our society living in natural and unpolluted surrounding far away from civilization with their traditional values, customs and beliefs. There has been a long and enduring debate among the social scientists to define a tribe. Notwithstanding the academic exercise, for the purpose of development and administration, the definition given by the Constitution serves our objective. The definition is practically an administrative definition. According to the Constitution “Any tribe or tribal community or part of or group within any tribe or tribal community as deemed under article 342 are Scheduled Tribes for the purpose of the Constitution”. Thus, the groups which are in the Scheduled list of the President of India are defined as Scheduled Tribes. There is a procedure for including tribal groups in the Scheduled list. The President may, after consulting with the governor of a state, by public notification, specify the tribes which would deem to be Scheduled Tribes in relation to that State. Communities are notified as Scheduled Tribe under Article 342 of the Constitution based on the Characteristics such as -Primitive Traits, Geographically Isolated, Distinct Culture, and Shyness of contact with community at large, and Economically Backward. The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1911, defines a tribe as a “collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not usually endogamous though originally it might have been so.

Thus in Indian context, they are commonly designated as Adivasi (original settlers), Girijan (hill dwellers), Vanya jati (forest caste men), Adimjati (Primitive castes), and Anusuchit Janjati (Scheduled tribes). The tribes of India who are unable to defend them and were gradually forced to recede before the invading hordes of such people, as the Dravidian, Indo-Aryans and Mongolians coming from the West, North West and North East. These people took shelter in the forest and mountain ranges. Those who were left behind in the plains generally disappeared either by absorption or by acculturation. The number of Scheduled Tribes has always been increasing over the years. It was 212 in the year 1950. Today the number has swelled to 573 (1919 Census), constituting over 84 million populations in the country.

Main Features of Tribes

The original tribes in India have been divided and sub-divided into large number of sub tribes. They are mutually exclusive, each having the endogenous and exogamous clan with their own names and culture, customs, locational practice and lifestyle. A well-established criterion being followed is based on certain attributes such as:

- Geographical isolation: They live in cloister, exclusive remote and inhospitable areas like hills and forests
- Backwardness: Livelihood based on primitive agriculture, low cost closed economy based on low level of technology which caused of poverty. They have a low level of literacy and poor health
- Distinctive culture, language and religion: They have developed community wise their own distinctive culture, language and religion
- Shyness of contact: They have margin degree of contact with other cultures and people

The Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, in its reports (1952) has listed eight features of the tribal groups in India: They live always away from the civilized world and are found in the inaccessible parts lying in the forest and hills. They generally belong to three stocks such as Negritos, Australoids and Mangoloids. They speak the same tribal dialect. They prefer primitive occupations such as gleaning, hunting and gathering of forest produce. They are mostly carnivorous. They live and prefer to be naked and semi-naked. They have nomadic habit and are fond of drinking and dancing. They prefer primitive religion known as "Animist" in which they worship ghost and spirits as the most important elements. All the qualities are related to great extent, in a particular groups and villages of tribal India. But the qualities present in them differ in degree. Like other societies, tribal society is also not static, rather is quite dynamic, but the rate of change in tribal society is very slow. That is why they have been backward and poor in comparison to other people. Since they have been materially backward and economically poor, attempts have been made by the Government to develop them. Today the Government of all places of the world is paying special attention towards the development of the tribal, i.e., one finds the existence of induced or planned change in tribal society.

Classification of Indian Tribes

In India the tribes have been designated as "Scheduled Tribes" under the Constitution. They have been classified in various categories. On the basis of language, area of inhabitation, occupation, cultural contact, and by the Tribal Welfare Committee, we may classify and group the Indian tribes into the following heads.

I. Linguistically Classified Groups: On the basis of language, Indian tribes have been classified into the following categories.

1. Austro-Asiatic Family: This group consists of Mundas of central and eastern India, Khasis of Assam and Nicobaries of Nicobar Islands.
2. Dravidian Family: This group is popular in the central and southern India and includes Gonds, Badaga, Toda, Yarava, Korwa etc.
3. The Tibeto-Chinese Family: This group includes the tribes, which belong to the Southern slopes of Himalayas from the Northern Punjab to Bhutan and Assam. Nagas, Kui, Khasi etc.

II. Geographically Classified Group: From the point of geographical distribution of the tribes in India, three zones have been identified, such as southern zone (between 80 to 200 north latitudes and 750 to 850 east longitudes), the central zone (between 210 to 250 north latitudes

and 730 to 900 east longitude) and north and north-eastern zone (between 260 and 350 north latitudes and 730 to 970 east longitudes). The southern zone forms of peninsular India. This zone appears to be the most ancient inhabitants of India and is now represented by the Todas, Paniyars, Kurumbas, Kotas, Soligas, Malayalees and Chenchus etc. The central zone represented by the Jurigas, Baiga, Gonda, Ho, Bill etc. The north and north eastern zone consists with Nagas, Charse, Khasis, Limbus, Aborsetc as tribes. The geographical distribution of Indian tribes, Vidyarthi (1977) proposed fivefold geographical regions on the basis of ecological, social, economic, administrative, ethnic and racial factors. These tribal regions are as follows:

1. Himalayan Region: With three sub regions;
 - (a) North-Eastern Himalayan region
 - (b) Central Himalayan region
 - (c) North-Western Himalayan region
2. Middle Indian Region: It comprises Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh where more than 55 percent tribal people of India live.
3. Western-Indian Region: It includes Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Dadra and Nagar Haveli with about one crore tribal population.
4. South India Region: It comprises Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala constituting approximately one-sixth of tribal population.
5. The Island Region: The Islands of Andaman and Nicobar in the Bay of Bengal and Lakshadweep in the Arabian Sea.

III. Economically Classified Group: We may also classify the tribes on the basis of their occupation and distinctive economy. This classification is based on the level of economic development from food gathering/hunting stages to shifting and settled cultivation. Majumdar and Madan (1970) made the six-fold economic classification which includes:

1. Food gathering tribes
2. Agricultural tribes
3. Tribes who practise shifting cultivation
4. Tribes who maintain their livelihood on the basis of their handicrafts
5. Tribes who practise pastoralism
6. Tribes who are industrial labour

IV. Classification on the basis of cultural contact: Apart from the above classification, we may also classify the Indian tribes on the basis of their culture and contact. According to Prof. Elwin, the aboriginal population is distributed into four cultural divisions. In the first group, they are living in the most primitive stage, Ex: Hill mariyas, Gadabas. These tribes are isolated from the people of plains. The main characteristics of these tribes are as follows,

- (a) All the members lead a community life
- (b) All the members share a common economic structure
- (c) All the members are concentrated around a peculiar form of agriculture
- (d) They are honest, simple, and innocent and are very shy before the strangers

V. Classification by the Tribal Welfare Committee: The tribal welfare committee constituted by the Indian conference of social work has divided the Indian tribes into the following.

1. Tribal Communities: They are confined with the forests and distinctive in their pattern of life. Therefore, these may be termed as "Tribal Communities."

2. Semi Tribal Communities: These tribes are settled in rural areas and practise agriculture and other allied occupations.

3. Acculturated Tribal Communities: These tribes have migrated to urban and rural areas. They are engaged in industrial and other vocational activities and have adopted the culture of the people of migrated area.

4. Assimilated Tribes: These tribes are totally assimilated. They have lost the original traits of their own culture. In this regard the social reforms and Christian missionaries have played a very important role.

Distribution of Tribes in Different Geo-Physical Zone

India has the largest concentration of tribal people anywhere in the world except perhaps in Africa. The tribal are children of nature and their lifestyle is conditioned by the Eco system. India, with a variety of Eco-system, presents a varied tribal population throughout its length and breadth. The tribal communities invariably lead an isolated life remote from the general habitation. But inside their group, they are in most part independent, free and self-managing. They inhabit in (i) North and North Eastern mountains and Terai region (ii) Central India and (iii) South India. In North and North-Eastern zone which include the Himalayan belt, North and North-Eastern parts covering frontiers, Tista valley and Brahmaputra basin. The area roughly extends over 310.7" to 350.0" north latitude to the west 230.30" and 280.0" North latitudes with the east and 770.33" least 900.0" east longitude. The main states include are eastern portion of Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Northern U.P., Assam, Arunachal, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura.

Tribes of Odisha

Orissa occupies a special position in the demographic map of India. Out of the 573 tribal communities in India, Odisha alone has 62 groups of tribes and, as such, it provides one of the largest home for Indian tribes. According to 2001 census, Odisha accommodates about 81, 45,081 scheduled tribes which is 22.13 per cent of the state population and 9.66% of the total tribal population of the country. In the hierarchy of distribution of tribal population Odisha comes third in position, the first two being Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, constituting about 22.73 and 10.80 percent respectively. According to the constitutional provision (Article 342) Odisha, has as many as 62 groups categorized as scheduled viz., Scheduled Tribes. Of these, 13 are declared as Primitive Tribal Groups. These are (1) Bagata, (2) Baiga, (3) Banjara, Banjari, (4) Bathudi, (5) Bhattoda, Dhotada, (6) Bhuiya, Bhuyan, (7) Bhumia, (8) Bhumij, (9) Bhunjia, (10) Binjhal, (11) Binjhia, Binjhoa, (12) Biror, (13) BondoPoraja, (14) Chenchu, (15) Dal, (16) Desua, Bhumij, (17) Dharua, (18) Didayi, (19) Gadaba, (20) Gandia, (21) Ghara, (22) Gond, Gondo, (23) Ho, (24) Holva, (25) Jatapu, (26) Juang, (27) Kandha, Gauda, (28) Kavar, (29) Kharia, Kharian, (30) Kharwar, (31) Khond, Kond, Kandha, NanguliKandh - SithaKandha, (32) Kisan, (33) Kol, (34) Kolah, Loharas, KolLohras, (35) Kolha, (36) Koli, Malhar, (37) Kondadora, (38) Kora, (39) Korua, (40) Kotia, (41) Koya, (42) Kolis, (43) Lodha, (44) Madia, (45) Mahali, (46) Mankidi, (47) Mankirdia, (48) Matya, (49) Mirdhas, (50) Munda, Munda Lohra, Munda Mahalis, (51) Mundari, (52) Omantya, (53) Oraon, (54) Parenga, (55) Paroja, (56) Pentia, (57) Raiuar, (58) Santal, (59) Saora, Savar, Saira, Sahara, (60) Shabar, Lodha, (61) Sounti, and (62) Tharua (Taradutt, 2001).

The tribal communities in Odisha are among the poorest, most vulnerable and exploited group. Most of them are confined to the more hilly and remote area of the state. The tribals mostly inhabitant in the western hilly reigns of the state, mainly in or in close proximity to

forest. Out of the total tribal population in Odisha, 68.09 per cent of the tribal population lives in the Scheduled Area and the remaining outside the Scheduled areas. The Tribal Sub Plan area comprises 118 Panchayat Samities and 1902 Gram Panchayats of 12 districts. Of the districts, 5 districts are located in KBK Region. These areas have been the habitat for some tribes for centuries, whereas the others have been slowly driven out of the more fertile plains by the non-tribals in recent times. Historically, tribals have had a life style characterized by close dependency on the forest for shifting (Podu) cultivation, hunting and collection of forest produce.

Schedule Tribe Population in Odisha

The Scheduled Tribe population of Odisha is not evenly distributed. . The tribal communities are found in almost all 30 districts of Odisha. Half of their total population is concentrated in Koraput, Rayagada, Nawarangpur, Malkangiri, Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj, Gajapati, Kalahandi, Keonjhor, Nuapara, Kandhamal and Ganjam etc. These districts are located both in the Scheduled Areas and Tribal- Sub Plan Areas.

Literacy of Scheduled Tribes in Odisha

On the literacy front the achievement has been impressive as the literacy rate increased from 49.09 per cent in 1991 to 63.8 per cent in 2001 (Figure XII) as against an increase from 52.10 per cent to 64.8 per cent at the national level during the same period. The male and female literacy rates, which were 63.1 per cent and 34.7 per cent respectively in 1991, has increased to 75.3 per cent and 50.5 per cent respectively in 2001 (Figure XIII). Female literacy continues to be an area of concern despite notable achievement during last decade. Increase in total as well as female literacy among STs is significant. From the figure XIII, it is seen that in case of both general and tribal population the male literacy rate is higher in comparison to female literacy rate. The ST female literacy rate is showing an increasing trend from 1991 to 2001. Similarly, ST male literacy rate has increased 17 per cent from 1991 to 2001 where as ST female literacy has increased 13.15 per cent in the same period

Occupation Pattern of Scheduled Tribes of Odisha

The Work Participation Rate (WPR) of the tribal population is 49 per cent, which is equal to that of all tribals at the national level (49.1%). There has been a slight decline of 0.4 per cent in the WPR of the tribes during 1991-2001. While there has been a decline in male WPR from 58.9 per cent to 54.8 per cent, female WPR (43.2 %) has increased by 3.4 per cent during 1991-2001. Among the total workers, 57.4 per cent are main workers and this proportion is much below the national average recorded for all tribals (68.9%). There are 4.1 million operational land holdings in Odisha with an area of 5.1 million hectares (Agricultural Census- 2000-2001). Farmers with small and marginal holdings account for 84 per cent with total land area of 53 per cent. The other categories of farmers account for 16 per cent of the land holdings with total land area of 47 per cent. Out of 4.1 million operational land holdings in Odisha, 42.22 per cent belong to tribal's. Agricultural Labourers constitute the highest proportion (47%) among the total workers. This figure is higher than that of the national average of 36.9 per cent. Cultivators account for 33.3 per cent and 'Other Workers' constitute 15 per cent. Tribal workers engaged in 'Household Industry' (HHI) constitute 4.8 per cent. The percentage of people living below poverty line (BPL) in Odisha was much higher than the all-India figure during 1973-74 to 1999-00 for both rural and urban population (Table 28). In 1999-2000, the percentage of people living below the poverty line in the state was 47.15 while the all India average was 26.1 per cent. The acuteness of poverty gradually decreased

for India in all the five phases during 1973-75 to 1999-00. In Odisha, the percentage of population below poverty line increased from 66.18 per cent in 1973-74 to 70.07 in 1977-78. Since 1977-78, the extent of poverty declined in Odisha. The 1999 cyclone and 2000 drought dragged the economy of Odisha again into poverty.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA

The term status means position of a person in a society. Status has been defined by R.Linton (1936) as a position in a social system¹⁰. The term role is closely linked to the notion of status. It refers to the behavior expected of people in a status. 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. The higher level of education will generate health awareness, employment opportunities and decision making ability among these groups. The status of women in a society depends to a large extent on the social structure and the type of society. In Indian social context, there is a predominance of patriarchal family structure where males predominate in all settings and social contexts. 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.

Various studies (Mitra, 2007; Burman Roy, 2012) have suggested that the Garo and Khasi tribes of the North East India assign relatively higher position to women due to the system of matrilineal descent, matrilineal residence and inheritance of property through the female line. But other tribal communities which follow patriarchal norms, the status of women is not as high as it is in matriarchal societies^{7,8}. For some other tribes, such as, Ho, Gond, the husband does not always enjoy a dominant role. Gond woman enjoys equal status with their male counterparts in many aspects of their social life. A study on the Naga women by Hutton (1921) indicated that they have substantial freedom and higher social status. This indicates that the status of tribal women are not same in all places, rather they vary according to the tribal group and the social structure. However, in tribal societies, tribal women are more important than women in any other social groups because tribal women are very hard working 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. Status is also determined by health conditions. The tribal group's health status is lower compared to that of the general population. They have high infant mortality rate, higher fertility rate, lack of awareness regarding diseases and health care, drinking water provisions, hygiene. In many parts of India tribal population suffers from chronic infections and water borne diseases, deficiency diseases. Incidence of infant mortality was found to be very high among some of the tribes. Malnutrition is common among them and it has affected the general health of the tribal children. It increases vulnerability to infection, and leads to chronic illness which sometimes may affect brain. 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. The education level of the tribal population is low and formal education has made very little impact on tribal groups. The level of literacy among the tribals in most states in India is very low. Reservation policy of the

Government has made some changes in the educational status. One of the main reasons for low level of literacy is their assigning relatively less significance on formal schooling. The school curriculum and education system do not create much interest in them, rather a much more practical based curriculum would be helpful for them. Moreover, since the tribes live in poverty they do not like to send their children to schools as they are considered to be extra helping hands for generating income. Chowdhuri(1988) attempted to examine the socio – economic condition of the Scheduled tribe women in West Bengal in a comparative setting with scheduled caste and non scheduled women. The main findings were that only 5.01 per cent of Scheduled Tribe females were noted as literate in comparison to Scheduled Caste women who were 13.70 per cent and non scheduled population was 37.43 per cent. This level was quite low as compared to the overall rate of females who are literate. This study was mainly based on the data collected from Census office and from different studies conducted by the Cultural Research Institute, Calcutta.

Various reasons have been attributed for low level of literacy among the scheduled tribe girls. Work participation rate among scheduled tribe women were higher in percentage as compared to others. Poor economic condition has a direct bearing on the degree of participation. Scheduled tribe workers are engaged in agricultural sector and in non gainful occupations. Considering the education, economic and health of the tribal women, their positions were not at all satisfactory. A study by Singh and Rajyalaxmi(1993), status of tribal women in terms of their demography, health, education and employment have been discussed. Since independence, various protections have been given to the tribal population by the Constitution of India. The study highlighted some aspects of tribal work; tribal women work equally with their male counterparts with lower pay, sexual exploitation. Tribal women don't have property rights, they have lower literacy rate than scheduled caste and general population. Tribal women are not healthy and suffer from malnutrition and various diseases. The study highlighted the need to improve the status of tribal girl, to bring about change in the status of tribal woman.

Problems faced by Tribal women

Most tribals faces a number of challenges which they need to overcome in order to improve their status in society. The researcher intends to discuss here the issues faced by tribal women in particular. Absence of any fix livelihood: Various literature studies reveal that although work participation among tribal women is higher compared to scheduled caste and general population but the livelihoods of the tribal people are neither permanent nor fixed. Most of them do not have a regular source of income, and they live below the poverty level. Tribal people residing in the rural areas pursue diverse low level activities for fulfilling their basic needs. Mostly they are engaged in agricultural activities. Apart from that, they are engaged in pastoral, handicrafts and at times as industrial labourers. Tribal women are mainly not engaged in any kind of continuous work and much like their male counterparts are found to work in agriculture. A meagre number of tribal men and women are engaged in government services. Economic conditions of households are related to other aspects of their life. Lack of access to education: Most of the tribal women work outside their homes and are engaged in various activities. They work in order to earn money for their family. The women's work involves daily labour, agricultural work. Even young children and girls go for work along with their mothers. Most of the time they do not go to school regularly or become drop outs from school. Even the parents in very poor families don't always want to send the children to school because then their helping hands in work would be reduced. Effect of patriarchy could be strongly seen in

most tribal groups and so whatever money women get from their work they give it to their husband and the husband very often spends the money on activities like drinking. Household works are done by the female members of the family. Household work involves cooking, cleaning, washing utensils and clothes, collecting fuel for cooking. The young girls who are studying in primary level in schools hardly learn anything in school and they don't study at home also.

The government has announced free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years, which nowadays encourage parents to send their children to schools with the hope that if their children receive proper education, then their conditions will improve. The children are given free school uniforms, books and mid day meals. However, the girls don't continue school at a stretch. Sometimes they go to school, some other times they do not go to school and stay at home and go to work with their mothers and help their mothers at household work. As a result, they tend to forget what they have learned in school. After the girl child attains teenage the parents stop sending them to schools. Poor condition of health: Lack of awareness about nutritional requirements mostly leaves the tribal women weak, anaemic and they suffer from various diseases. During pregnancy, special attention is required to be given to women otherwise that will affect the health of both the mother and child. Educational level, employment status, health status and decision making ability helps to measure the status of women in society. Women's education has to be channelized to employment opportunities. This in turn, will increase the decision making ability of women. Women's ability to communicate with other family members and to be able to convince them indicates a decision making ability of women. When the decision making ability is higher, women can have a higher status in the household.

Strategies for promoting a change in the status of Tribal women in India

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. Awareness can be created through effort to empower these women. Various NGO's can come forward to provide necessary trainings which will help them in becoming empowered and generate livelihood. Bridge trust an NGO has been working with tribal women in areas near Mumbai for generating empowerment for them¹⁸. In an article by Nidheesh, the role of Self help groups (SHGs) in Kerala in empowering women have been highlighted where women worked to bring about a change in their identity at the local level and also beyond the local level. If the economic aspect is taken care of and awareness generated, then the tribal children can attend school which will help them to develop a strong base for their future. Preparing themselves for future lives will be possible through adequate education. It is essential to aware and motivates the tribal children the reasons why it is important to have education. It is not just for acquiring money but to improve their decision making ability. 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. They have lower life-expectancy than the national average because they do not take the required amount of food and rest. From various reports it has been found out that, illiteracy is a cause of lack of awareness about health. If economic, educational and health aspects are given adequate attention, then these factors may contribute to an increase in the decision making abilities of the tribal women. If they are convinced

about the significance of financial institutions and if the banks extend their co-operation to these women then their security about financial matters will be enhanced. Moreover, if efforts are given to make women literate then that may help them to face the outside world in a confident manner, which in turn will enrich their lives.

DECISION MAKING ROLE OF TRIBAL WOMEN

The power to take decisions is extremely important from the view point of empowerment of women because it is often seen that their voice is not properly listened. The decision making power of women should not be ignored. The real development cannot take place without active participation of women. So in the present study, the involvement of women in decision making in the economic and social spheres, both at household and community level was examined.

Economic Decision

Results shows that decision pertaining to minor economic matters i.e. daily family expenses and their personal needs were generally taken independently by women and these finding are similar to the finding of Sethi (1998) and Shyamalie and Saini (2011). But the major financial decisions relating to investment, savings and borrowings are taken mostly by mutual consent. The patriarchal social setting of the study area could perhaps be attributed to the male dominance in the economic related matters. This finding is tuned to the findings of Lena and Das (1993) who concluded that husband and wife jointly decided major financial matters. However, these findings do not confirm with the results of Bala and Moonga (2004) who have stated in their result that women play passive role of decision making in economic affairs. If we compare among three different hamlets, male are more dominant in Jaratoli as compare to Militoli and Phartoli. The major financial decisions are taken by male. This may be because; females of this hamlet do not have any permanent source of income and lack ownership right. Whereas in other two hamlet, as most of the females are engaged in selling of Handia (local brew), they have a source of income all round the year. Therefore, it is one important factor that gives them a say over financial decisions.

Decision Pertaining to Social Aspects

The study reveals that females enjoy a lot of autonomy pertaining to social issues. They take decisive role regarding visiting relatives and kin, whereas decision regarding to children's education were taken care of by both the parents. The result is almost uniform in the entire study area i.e. in all three hamlets. The tribal societies traditionally give lot of autonomy to women in family related matters and the results confirm the hypothesis. The important point arising from the finding was that females in the study area were not ignored in the decision making related to social aspects. The females take independent decision relating to treatment of sick persons, visiting relatives and friends and daily cooking whereas joint decision is taken for children education.

Decision at Community Level

The autonomy at community level is very low. The village has many formal and informal institutions like Self-Help Groups (SHGs), forest management committee, village MahilaSangathan and village Panchayat etc. The tribal women do not utilize their voting rights also. Overall only 56.9% come out to vote out of which only 22% of sample population cast their vote on their own accord. But if we look into it hamlet-wise, the result is bit different. In both Pahartoli and Jaratoli the village head man takes the decision for the entire community. This may be due to ignorance, illiteracy and blind faith in old traditions. The case is different in Militoli, the females take the decision by themselves. The reason behind this is that the

tribal communities in Militoli are migrants. They have settled in that area after being displaced by development projects. They do not have any ancestral connection to that place and are not blind followers of old values and traditions practiced by the village Headman and other senior villagers. The findings show that decision making role of tribal women in general is very high. Their tradition and culture give them that liberty. In spite of being uneducated and unemployed, their participation in household decision making is very high. But the tribal women have very low decision making role at the community level.

Role of Education in Decision Making:

Education helps in generating awareness, makes an individual well informed about the overall changes taking place all around, liberates its mind from ignorance, sharpens it for logical thinking, mobilizes and generates capacity building, and thus increases the ability to understand the problem and to take effective decision, and thus one of the key determinants affecting the autonomy of any individual. The findings show that the literacy rate of study area is very poor. Only 52 percent of the tribal women are illiterate, 38 percent of them have completed higher secondary education, 8.9 percent are matriculate, and 5 percent are pursuing higher studies after matriculation. The education has direct impact upon autonomy. The literate individual has high autonomy power in comparison to illiterates. As the chart given below, denotes, 54 percent of literates have high decision making power, in comparison to 47 percent among illiterates.

Among all the three hamlets, the literacy rate among the Militoli women is quite high. 80 percent of them have completed their education till high school level. 5.0 percent of them are pursuing higher studies after high school and matriculation and 15 percent of the tribal women of that village are illiterate. The tribal women of this hamlet are well informed and well aware; they play a prominent role in taking various decisions at their household and community level. About 98 percent of women in Pahartoli and Jaratoli are illiterate. But they do have considerable role in taking minor decision at household level, the reason may pertain to their tradition and culture while major decision was taken by their male counterparts. Due to lack of awareness and illiteracy, the autonomy level of tribal women, in case of community participation is also low. They are not aware about new things happening around them as a result they act as mere spectator and don't play a lead role in community matters.

Employment

The critical analysis of nature of employment helps to understand the economic liberty of the females. Economic self independence empowers the women to take its own decision. The family and society give due respect to their opinion and looks upon them for all matters. The study reveal that only 46.7% of the female population are employed, out of which 80 percent of them work as agricultural labour and thus have seasonal employment, 11 percent are self employed (selling handia and forest product) and rest 9 percent are daily wage labour. The employment distribution between three hamlets is as follows:- Jaratoli: 90 percent of tribal women are agricultural labour, 6 percent are self employed i.e. they sell "handia" or forest product collected by them and 4 percent are housewife.

Income

Women's share in household income throws light on the fact that it is a crucial factor that affects the decision making role of women. Impact of income in women's autonomy could be

visualized in that particular area very effectively. For the present study income is calculated not only on the basis of payment made for employment but also, the house rent, allowances, pension etc are also taken into account. Although employment ratio is nearly 50 percent, about 66 % of the working females share half of the family income. The chart below shows that about 54.4 percent of women from income groups have high autonomy in comparison to 46.9 percent from no income groups. Overall the income group has more autonomy than non-income group.

Ownership

The results show that about 93.4 percent of the females do not possess any ownership rights. The ownership right is restricted to land ownership and having bank accounts. Only 3.2 percent of them have ownership of land and about 5.7 percent have bank accounts out of which 57.7 percent have joint bank accounts and 42.3 percent have personal accounts. Moreover about 45 percent respondents operate it by own self or else it is operated by husbands or other members of the family. Still then the comparison between ownership holders with non-ownership holders with respect to autonomy shows that those who have some sort of ownership rights have a better life than those who do not have any ownership holdings. 65 percent of owners have high decisive rights in comparison to others.

Marital Status and Age

Marital status indicates whether a person is married, unmarried or a widow and this is one important factor that determines the level of autonomy among females in any community. A majority of widows who lost bread-winners of the family have taken the entire responsibility upon themselves. They have to take face insecurities, non-cooperation etc. In the study area the widows have more decision making powers in comparison to others. The unmarried females also have high decision making role in comparison to married females. Married females have to take decision pertaining to their family members and in-laws.

Decision Making Power among Non-Tribal's

The study area also houses Muslims, General Caste people, and Other Backward Caste (OBCs) as non-tribal groups. The comparative study between tribal and non-tribal's shows that non-tribals, specifically the Muslim women enjoy more autonomy than others in that particular area. The reason behind this is that most of them are migrants from other regions and they are engaged as daily-wage earners in nearby factories and workshops and most of them have studied till high school level. Hence they are more empowered than their tribal counterparts because of their better social and economic conditions. Additionally, in many of these families the husbands don't stay with the family year round, as they work at distance places, sometimes even outside the country, for their livelihood.

Difference between Tribal and Tribal Groups by Education and Employment

The literacy rate of non-tribals is quite high in comparison to tribal population, as they are more educated and have better job opportunities. The general caste people who comprise about 8 % of the population have high literacy rate, but the society is male dominant. The women lack voices in major financial issues.

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. 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. They work very hard and contribute significantly towards the economic condition of the family, but they are still in poverty mostly because no proper efforts are oriented towards them. During the plan periods, various programmes are taken up for the development of the Scheduled Tribe population and a lot of betterment has been already done, but still, a lot more requires to be done. The families need to have a sufficient income to enable them to cross the poverty levels. Since economic status determines other aspects of life and living conditions, it is of utmost importance. Education for tribal women is an essential aspect of decision making process. 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 independent in decision making. It would help them to organize themselves to analyze their situations and living conditions and be aware of their rights and responsibilities.

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(Footnotes)

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