

A Descriptive Study on the Life Style and Working Patterns of Tribal Women in Kolli Hills, Namakkal District, Tamil Nadu

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Abstract: Empowering women empowers the whole community. The overall status of women in the world is low. More so is the status of Indian women and even more is the status of Indian Tribal women. Though tribal women were considered away from the mainstream of national life in decades, it is an evident truth that there is not much difference between the status of rural woman and a tribal woman today. Due to urbanization and modernization tribal areas are becoming a close link with the cities and towns. This is very evident in the Kolli hills. This study aims to understand and describe the various challenges that women in tribal areas face especially when they are today confronted with the dual roles of going to work and upholding the responsibility of the family. Furthermore the study aims at identifying the role of professional social work in the field of women's development.

In this study the researcher was interested in identifying and highlighting the different roles played by the women in the tribal culture and how they adapt themselves to today's changing culture.

Keywords: Tribes, Kolli Hills, Empowerment, Work Life Pattern..

1. INTRODUCTION

The status of women in India is somewhat different from those of western countries. Women are often considered the weaker sections of the Indian society. In recent decades much attention has been paid towards women's problems. The issue women's status has become an important and burning issue on the social political levels in the Indian society today.

Women today are educated. It is observed that they have benefited through education and the status has improved to a good extent. Of late we find women fight for their cause through various organizations but the situation is very unpredictable for often women are not consulted regarding any matter in the society. In developing countries like India the situation is such that women have always been forgotten from the realities of life. Although in ancient India the place of women in society was much free in their educational, social and economic lives, in the medieval period the place of women was much restricted, which was confined to the four walls of the house. This creates a kind of ambivalence and leads to problems for women especially working women.

1.1. Problems of Tribal Women

Tribal women have the twin responsibilities of household management and supplementing family income through labour for wages. Various problems faced by them are heavy workload, irregular payment, lack of maternity benefits, health problems and absence of crèche facilities for children in their work place.

Women's income in poverty groups is critical for household survival. A large number of the women, like their men folk depend on daily wages earned in agricultural operations. Low wages lead to indebtedness. They continue to depend on the land owners for employment and loans. Their dependence on agriculture make the landlords utilize the services of all members of the family. Hence the female labourers become the victims of economic exploitation.

The government has provided women with different programmes and opportunities to improve their status. Despite the protection given to the tribal population by the Constitution of India (1950), it remains the most backward ethnic group in India, on the three most important indicators of development: health, education and income.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A tribal woman occupies an important place in the socio-economic structure of her society. Though tribal women were considered away from the mainstream of national life in decades, it is an evident truth that there is not much difference between the status of rural woman and a tribal woman today. Due to urbanization and modernization tribal areas are becoming a close link with the cities and towns. This is very evident in the Kolli hills.

The researcher was interested in studying the status of tribal women in terms of their demography, employment, empowerment, awareness and the problems faced by them. Even though information and technology has passed way to the development in tribal areas, the status of women in tribal areas is compared to that of the tribal men. The researcher not only intended to study the status of tribal women to compare with men but also with that of rural women.

Tribal women in Kolli hills were a primitive tribal group but today they do not appear as primitive tribals because of their casual urban way of life.

Women are the backbones of any society so also in tribal societies. Empowering women empowers the whole community. Identifying the problems and challenges faced by the women and rectifying them would be the right way to empower them. This helps to encourage and motivate them in performing many developmental tasks. Hence the researchers found that their problems should be studied and encountered.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Women in tribal societies are an integral part of the day to day activities and have equal responsibilities with their men. Along with domestic activities they perform many other

activities thereby contributing towards the general well-being of their families. However due to seclusion from general masses, they remained backward in certain respects. In order to bring them closer to modern world, government framed and implemented many programs for their development. But due to illiteracy, economic backwardness and lack of communication most of them remained unaware of these schemes.

Women constitute nearly half of the total population and if this population is not empowered there cannot be a holistic development of a nation. Women in tribal areas are considered less informed about the world but they play a vital role in their community. The researcher wanted to study the status of women in Kolli hills to analyze whether there is any change due to the modern technology intrusion into the tribal areas and due to the implementation of various programs in the tribal areas.

Tribals are considered secluded from the general masses more so the tribal women. The researcher was keen on studying the status of tribal women to examine how the grass root economy has changed and what impact has it made to their lives and their culture.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To study the demographic profile of the tribal women.
- To examine the life style of the tribal women.
- To understand the nature of women's working patterns.
- To ascertain the opinions of women on their roles and status in society.

5. METHODOLOGY

The researcher used the descriptive design in her research. Married and working women between the age group of 25 to 35 years in Valavanthi Panchayat in Kolli hills comprised the universe of the study. The Simple Random Sample method was used and the sample size comprised of 50 women from the area of study. The interview schedule was used as the main instrument for data collection. Informal discussions, observation and listening were the other tools and techniques used with the women to further gain deeper information.

6. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

More than half of the respondents (62 percentage) belong to the age group between 31-35 years, 2 percentage of the women are literate with no formal education, 24 percentage of the women are educated up to the primary level and there are no graduates among them. 78 percentage of the women have 4-6 members and the family consists of mostly 2 children. 62 percentage of the women live in nuclear families. 44 percentage of the women reported that they have frequent illness. 28 percentage of the women take home remedies for their illness. 38 percentage of the women visit government hospital

for their remedy and 30 percentage of the women depend on temples and magicians for their cure.

More than half of the respondents (60 percentage) are working for daily wages which is Rs 50/ per day. The average expenses for a woman is Rs 50/- per day and for men it is Rs 75/- . 50 percentage of the women earn Rs 50/- to Rs 75/- and 42 percentage of the women work on the own fields and work for 4 to 12 hours every day, 58 percentage of the women work for daily wages and 48 percentage of the women work 6 – 8 hours. Since the tribals are natives of *Kolli* hills they have their own lands and house which make it easy for them to manage their lives and families from the growing inflation.

Nearly half of the respondents (48 percentage) stated that the workplaces for the women is nearby enabling them to finish their household chores and go to work. 28 percentage of the women's work place is far from their houses hence they were finding it difficult to manage the household activities and their work together, very few women's work place is very far and the women have to compromise with their household duties to go to work. 68 percentage of the women are working for 2 years and more. Half of the women (52 percentage) said that they cannot manage both home and work together, they have to compromise with various house hold duties to work but they are not able to compromise on the work because they do not have any source of income. 44 percentage of the women have reported that they have physical strains in their work.

More than half of the respondents (66 percentage) feel safe at their work places, 75percentage of the women feel that their working conditions are good and 14 percentage of the women feel that they are not satisfied with the working conditions. Majority of women said that their income is not sufficient, that is 74 percentage of the women reported that their income is not sufficient, 74 percentage of the women's total monthly income is between Rs 1000 to 2000/- per month. 56 percentage of the women felt that their relationship with their landlord is good and 72 percentage of the women said that the relationship with the co-workers is good.

Majority of the women (74 percentage) said that their men manage their families, 72 percentage of the women are in the SHG groups. 88 percentage of the women report that the decision making authority lies with their husbands. Among the 100 percentage of the women none of the women takes her decision on her own is the family.

The research highlights that 70 percentage of the women feel that the primary image of women is equal to that of a Goddess. Majority of the women (86 percentage) said that they should be under the control of men. When women were asked about their equal rights for social betterment 92 percentage of the women agreed that they should have equal rights, 96 percentage of the women agreed that they should be paid more. On the opinion on the question whether women should hold property rights 48 percentage of the women have said that women do not have property rights and 48 percentage or women said that they should have property rights. 78 percentage women have said that widow remarriage is wrong and 94 percentage of women said that female infanticide is a sin.

More than half of the respondents (62 percentage) felt that men can do all the work and help the women in their house hold works like fetching milk, taking children to school and buying provisions. 48 percentage of the women said that they have problems with

their husbands because of alcoholism and 22 percentage of the women said that financial reasons create problems among the couples.

A Bose, UP Sinha and R.P Tyagi, 1998, in their book, Demography of Tribal Development, have studied the educational status of tribal women. In their research the educational status of tribal women is reflected in their lower literacy rate, lower enrolment rate and higher dropouts in the school. The study results that the literacy rate of tribals is lower than that of general as well as scheduled caste population. The literacy rate of the rural tribal female is the lowest of all groups. There is a gender bias in the tribal population as in other groups, the female literacy being lower than the male literacy. Though there has been five-fold increase in the literacy of tribal females it still is much lower than the national average for the females. The researcher brings out similar results in the research in Kolli hills. The women here are not sent to schools after 10th standard and they get married soon after they finish their studies or during their studies. Even though there are higher secondary schools in the Kolli hills most of the girls are not sent to schools.

V M Rao in his book Tribal women in India 2006, has made an in depth research into status and role of tribal women, role of the various organizations in the development and amelioration of these women, effects and outcomes of activities and suggestions for further improvement. UN Development Goals and the 73rd Amendment Act which makes a major step towards women's empowerment are analyzed and the place and status of tribal women in decision making apparatus is evaluated and empowerment strategies are formulated. The researcher's study on women at Kolli hills resembles the study conducted in Haryana by the author who focuses on the status and participation of tribal women. The researcher could understand the various issues that tribal women face in their families, work place and in their societies. The study proves that status of women in the tribal society being high is a myth. From an outside view the gender relations in the tribal society seems to be relatively egalitarian with women enjoying quite a high social status and economic value compared to their non-tribal counterparts. The freedom of movement from one place to another is perceived as social freedom among the tribal women. This study by the author and the researcher explores this myth and focuses on our gender stratification as well as discrimination as a prominent feature of the patriarchal tribal structure. It clearly defines the status of tribal women at Kolli hills and also discusses the various dimensions of gender stratification in tribal society.

7. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- In the light of the problem experienced the following policy measures need to be strengthened as tasks ahead to put the tribal women in the mainstream of economic and social development. Women participation can be increased and labour productivity can be raised by development of training and employment program stimulating female labour mobility by changes in social and religious taboos creation of adequate employment awareness crèche facilities at workplace effective enforcement of laws unionization of agricultural labour minimising sectoral wage variation.

- They must be given special rights to collect minor forest produce in a particular area minimum purchase price should be fixed by the government agencies need to purchase the products from them assuring sale of their products. Middle men should be eliminated and different products prepared by them directly supplied to the market.
- Women extension functionaries at the block level should be involved in identification of group activities and selection of beneficiaries. The groups should be allowed to choose freely the activities of their own interest without any coercion. They work the hardest but suffer the most. Hence there is a constant need for proper monitoring periodic evaluation of women employment programmes these will make them more benefit oriented. The situation calls for a result oriented approach. The practice of top down approach should be replaced by the development measures at the grass root level. Differential treatment of women at workplace must be checked to improve their economic status. Accordingly the development strategy must be adopted.
- A structural change in occupational pattern is a changing process related to various social and economic variables. A strong political will administrative competence people's participation growing consciousness and overall co-operation attitudinal changes will gear the employment activities to realize and reap the desired goals.
- Strengthen health infrastructure in the tribal region to provide regular supply of standard medical facility. All services promised as per norms have to be delivered. This should be the first priority. At the moment there are severe shortages of manpower and supplies in the tribal areas. There is also a need to change norms regarding opening of new PHCs, and staffing keeping in view the remoteness and population density of tribal villages.
- Improve IEC activities through mass communication and direct communication through the involvement of PRIs, NGOs, traditional healers, traditional birth attendants and local elites.
- The collective rights of tribal women to land, water and forests should be recognized and mentioned separately in government plans and policy documents.
- Tribal women particularly those living within the forest area, as well as women in forest dependent communities should be guaranteed their ancestral ownership and inheritance rights as per customary law or laws of the state.
- The government should adopt a gender sensitive rehabilitation policy that makes provision for the restoration of tribal women's livelihood and income. Women should also get legal rights to land allocated as part of the resettlement package.
- The role of NGO s must be strengthened at the grass root level in establishing

vocational training and income generation centres such as handicrafts, tailoring, wearing, embroidering, handloom painting, food processing packing etc. All these must have anti poverty thrust

- Encourage women organizations working for the tribal women and ensure the formation, stabilisation and bank linkages of SHGs to promote viable micro-credit activities with substantial support in terms of credit and market.

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