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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Empowerment of Tribal Women

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ABSTRACT

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This article examined an evaluation empowerment of tribal women's were empowerment, in terms of their success as in relation to their contribution to gender development. The study reveals that tribal women alleged changes in their identity towards working collectively to pressure for change at the village and Panchayat levels. They organized in community and social action programmes, both at the local level and by joining with issues beyond the local. When well thought-out within constructs of empowerment, potential poverty, citizenship and participation in democratic processes, outcomes, and the community development processes that go together with their work, can be seen to make a modest but significant contribution to broader transformations of repressive structures.

The tribal people are economically and socially backward. Their plight worsened because of pressure of non-tribal population on tribal lands. There is also state demand on tribal lands and private demand on tribal community land. The tribal lands have been alienated to their better endowed tribal neighbors or non-tribal's. Protective laws prohibit sale or transfer of tribal land to non-tribal's. In spite of constitutional safeguards, majority of tribal people still live in condition as their predecessor liver a century ago.

INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (Urban/rural), educational Status, social status (caste and class), and age,

policies on women's empowerment exist at the national, state, and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence, and political participation.

However, there are significant gaps between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level. One key factor for the gap in implementation of laws and policies to address discrimination, economic disadvantages, and violence against women at the community level is the largely patriarchal structure that governs the community and households in much of India. As such, women and girls have restricted mobility, access to education, access to health facilities, and lower decision-making power, and experience higher rates of violence.¹ Political participation is also hindered at the panchayat (local governing bodies) level and at the state and national levels, despite existing reservations for women.

TRIBAL WOMEN IN THE SOCIETY

Women in a tribal society play a vital role in their social, cultural, economic and religious ways of life and are considered as an economic asset in their society. But they are still lagging far behind in the different walks of life like education, employment, good health and economic empowerment etc.

Though they are industrious, they have limited control over resources and economic activities. Therefore, there is a need for economic empowerment of tribal women in order to overcome inequality, discrimination and exploitation and to achieve their all round development in the society.

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 marginalized groups for a social environment, free of inequalities which affect them politically, social and economically.²

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 who are socially heterogeneous groups like white women versus black women, educated and uneducated women, high caste women and low caste women, Christian, Muslim and Hindu women. These socially discriminated women face different degrees and various types of obstacles for empowerment. 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 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.² Unlike the well organized 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.

- Mortality inequality
- Natality inequality

- Basic facilities inequality
- Special opportunity inequality
- Professional inequality
- Ownership inequality
- 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 modernizing and industrializing. 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 the tribal women and their overall position has to be compared with the women of urban and rural society and not with their poor male counterparts.

Status of tribal women

The status of women in a society is a significant reflection the level of social justice in that society. Women's status is other 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 produces is done mostly by women and children. Many also work as laborers in industries, households and construction, contributing to their family income. 3 Despite exploitation by contractors and managers tribals are more sincere and honest than non tribals.

Background information of empowerment of tribal women

Situated in the Suri Sadar subdivision of Birbhum district in the Indian state of west Bengal is a small town called Sainthia it is the home to one of the world's oldest tribal groups called the 'Santhals', the Santhal tribal women for long have faced gender inequality in the society. The tribal women of the area are the most vulnerable and their lives have been impacted severely by the oppression related to gender, caste, religion, patriarchy and age-old customs. In all tribal hamlets, the sole priority of women is the survival of their families. Traditionally, tribal women were able to scrape though their survival with meager income/resources available in the area.

The national socio-economic changes have created instability in the life of the tribal population all over the country besides; some of the new paradigms employing advanced technologies have proved as a curse for development of these marginalized tribals since they are illiterate, backward and far away from new technology information and resources. Only a few tribal families are dependent on the small plots of land that produce an inadequate quantity of food crops due to poor farming practices. The survival of the majority families is dependent on daily wages, which are extremely under-paid in the operation area. In the absence of adequate means of employment and survival, the tribals are forced to borrow from vicious money lenders. These lenders exploit them by charging high interest rates and cheat with nefarious entries which land the tribals into never ending misery. Many of the male members of the tribal families have chronic alcoholism issues, which leads them to frustration, violence against women and children in the family and inability to think for the betterment of their families.4 The vicious circle of poverty, debt, ignorance. Illiteracy and fear of corrupt politicians has still kept the tribal women miles away from development.

Conclusion

Data on women's mobility in India indicates the lack of choices women have, and that urban and educated women have more mobility choices than rural women. The data shows that about half the women interviewed had the freedom to go the market or a health facility alone. Seventynine percent of urban women from the highest education brackets and only about 40 percent of rural women without education were allowed to go to the market alone.

Mobility restrictions for women are dependent upon how the family and community view women's rights. They also however, are intrinsically dependent on the prevailing levels of violence against women in the household and the community. Abuse and violence towards women is predominantly perpetrated within the household, and marital violence is among the most accepted by both men and women.⁵ Wife beating, slapping, rape, dowry related deaths, feudal violence towards tribal and lower caste women, trafficking, sexual abuse, and street violence permeate the Indian social fabric, and create one of the most serious obstacles in achieving women's empowerment.

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