EMPOWERMENT OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN SRIKAKULAM DISTRICT

Dr. M. R. Jyothi Frederick

Government Degree Women's College, Srikakulam.

Abstract

Any developmental process is the expansion of assets and capabilities of rural women to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold the institution accountable that affect their lives. Skill development among tribal women is the need of the hour so as to make them confident, self reliant and to develop in them the ability to be a part of decision making at home and outside. Indeed it may not be wrong to say that still tribals and rural women are the most disadvantaged and neglected section of the society for they are economically backward. Therefore there is a need on the part of the government and civil society to enable improvement in the quality of life of such vulnerable sections of the Indian population. More importantly the developmental process in India should give priority to welfare schemes and programmes meant for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes including women. These are the people who are economically backward; therefore, there is a need for sincere efforts on the part of the government to help improve the quality of their life. The Social Assessment for the training and skill development clearly reflected that rural landless STs form an integral part of poverty-ridden and marginalized groups. By empowering tribal woman through education can thus enable them to live with dignity and self reliance cutting across the barriers of customary biases and prejudices, social barrier of caste, class, gender, occupation and institutional barriers that prevent them from taking actions to improve their state both at the individual and collective level.

Introduction

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 were 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. Earlier studies have suggested that the tribes of North East India assign relatively higher position to women due to the system of matrilineal descent. 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 health status of tribal groups 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. Malnutrition is common among them and it has affected the general health of the 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, 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 of the states in India is very low. The school curriculum and current 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.

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. Most of the scheduled tribe women 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. Since independence, various protections have been given to the tribal population by the Constitution of India. Even though there is no significant change in the socio-economic and health status.

Need for the study

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. The study emphasized the need for socio-economic development of tribal women in India. 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

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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 development. 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 economically independent. It would help them to organize themselves to analyze their situations and living conditions and be aware of their rights and responsibilities. Education will enable them to take up jobs so that they can improve their situation. Social and economic status of the scheduled tribe to a large extent depends on the educational attainment. Educated women will be able to face the present day society better than earlier times. In the present context, no one can remain completely isolated, but they are influenced by the growth of modern society and culture. Government is providing a lot of support and grant for the education of Tribal students. This will help to increase the literacy rate and it will lead to the right way to development. The health status of the tribals is explored to assess their awareness regarding their health. Sometimes they lack the essential nutrients. Many times they suffer from various diseases as there is a lack of health and hygiene awareness. Thus increasing the literacy rate and providing opportunities for gainful employment for tribal women will be instrumental in bringing about a change in the status of tribal women in India and to handle to challenges successfully.

Significance of the Study

Social, economical, political and health status is a crucial issue facing women as whole and tribal women in particular. Today as they themselves have become better aware of the need and as they struggle to reaffirm their indigenous identity, rights, values and dignity as human beings and have become determined to stand against the threat to their existence perpetrated by ideologies of sexism, colonialism, materialism and individualism. Today 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. In addition to the work at outside, the tribal women involved in cooking, cleaning, washing utensils and clothes, collecting fuel for cooking, etc. The status of tribal women can be judged mainly by the roles they play in society. Their roles are determined to a large extent through the system of descent. On the other hand the government has sanctioned number of facilities and benefits for tribal community especially for women who are hard workers and key role players in the family. In recent years, due to the population explosion and in-migration, many tribal women come forward to work in various sectors.

Large number of women in Andhra Pradesh state especially the women belonging to the tribal communities of Guntur district are comparatively having less status in social, economical, political and health aspects than the women belonging to other communities, due to the various prominent factors that contribute towards this differences. It has been almost twenty years since India became free from the tyranny of invaders and has gradually moved towards industrialization and modernization, and is now in a neck-to-neck race with the developed countries however the condition of women, particularly in tribal communities is very slowly showing improvement in an upward trend and this is very true for most of the tribal women working who still lives an alienated, male dominated, ignorant environment; unaware of her potentials, skills and equal abilities in organized and un-organised sectors to compete with other groups of male and female. Thus, this study not only probes the area of status of tribal women of Srikakulam district, but also searches the other different factors that are directly or indirectly connected with the condition of these women involved in the development process.

As it has been pointed out from the earlier studies, low levels of economic activity and living conditions below the poverty level is a major problem faced by the tribal women for economical, social and political development and also health status. Awareness can be created through effort to empower these women in economical, social, political and health aspects. Today, tribal women themselves have become better aware of the need and as they struggle to reaffirm their indigenous identity, rights, values and dignity as human beings and have become determined to stand against the threat to their existence perpetrated by ideologies of sexism, colonialism, materialism and individualism.

Statement of the problem

Critics of the Indian family system say that women in the Indian society have from time immemorial been victims of discrimination. The status of women in the tribal societies is comparatively vulnerable than that of the women in general society. They haven't enjoyed an equal platform with their male counterparts. They have not only been deprived at the society level but also in the family. It is not uncommon to come across individuals from all strata of society, not expressing happiness at the birth of a girl child. In fact there are sections of societies in India that even kill the girl child before she could come into this world. She may not even have any share in her father's property. Ideologies, institutional practices and existing norms in society have contributed much to their harassment.

The status of tribal women can be judged mainly by the roles they play in society. Their roles are determined to a large extent through the system of descent. In spite of the legislative measures adopted in favor of women in our society after independence, the spread of education and women's gradual economic independence, countless women still continue to be discriminated and harassed. In the light of this dismal picture, the condition of the rural women is even more pathetic. Illiteracy, cultural and religious oppressions have made their condition even more pitiable.

Comparatively, in some sections of the urban areas, women are considerably aware of their rights and privileges. They have learnt to be assertive and accept new roles for themselves. They have developed optimism and a hopeful approach to life. My in depth survey of the life of the women of Srikakulam district has shown that they too are oppressed, first of all as women and secondly as tribal women. This has probed me to do an in depth analysis of the various factors associated with their condition and whether these factors have contributed to their empowerment or not. A comparative study of the condition of non-tribal and tribal women in Srikakulam district has also thrown light on the working of factors differently for both these groups and has gone to prove that the condition of the non-tribal women is much better as compared to the tribal woman.

Objectives of Study
1.   To analyze tribal women empowerment in Srikakulam district to fight for their rights.
2.   To find out the determinants of empowerment among the tribal women in Srikakulam district.

Methodology

This study is aimed to investigate the social and economic status of tribal women with reference to their empowerment, and this research confined to Srikakulam district in Andhra Pradesh as the study area. The present composition of the population of Srikakulam district may be broadly classified under three revenue divisions: (1) Tekkali, (2) Srikakulam and (3) Palakonda. Srikakulam district consists of 38 mandals having numerous Grama Panchayats villages. The district is broadly divided into urban and rural areas - the urban area which is mainly inhabited by the business and administrative and the rural area which is the habitation of agriculture by farmers. Out of the 39 mandals in Srikakulam district, more tribal populated mandal from each revenue division were selected. These 3 mandals are: (1) Seethampeta (15,593), (2) Sarubujjili (10,604) and (3) Vajrapu Kotturu (10,960). Hence, the sample has been drawn from tribal women in these 3 mandals.

The aim of this study is focuses on the social and economical status of tribal women, for which the total population of this study group in the selected 3 mandals was 19,307 (according to the Census, 2011).Out of which 5% population has been considered as sample i.e. 965. While this study is confined to working tribal women, out of 965 samples around 50% were observed as non-working group i.e. children and students below 18 years old and old and disabled persons who are living without doing any economical activity. A random sampling method has been applied for selection of respondents in the study mandals.

Selection of Respondents

Since this study is aimed at the social and economic status of tribal women with reference to their empowerment in selected mandals in Srikakulam district, significant number of respondents comprised of tribal working woman generally between the age group of 18-60. This study has adopted the following criteria while selecting the required number of respondents from the sample demarked, for the purpose of this study:
1.   Number of respondents – The number was adequate enough to gather the required amount of information for the purpose of this study.
2.   Gender of the respondents – While the study comprised mainly of tribal women respondents; there is no need of male respondents who are neglected in this research.
3.   Age of respondents – The study is on working women, the age of the respondents is considered between 18-60 who could understand the questions posed to them and could disseminate the relevant information connected with topic under study.
4.   Marital status of respondents – Most of the respondents were either married or unmarried. However a small percentage also consisted of unmarried individuals, divorcees and widows.
5.   Representation as per area under study – Adequate representation was given from all the villages under study mandals and that this sample group was largely representative of the entire woman population of working group from tribal community.
6.   Educational level of the respondents- Adequate representation from the literate population of the group under study was made, however the illiterate group was also considered, as they could highlight the problems that they undergo due to illiteracy. Thus, for a comparative study both the literate and literate populations were selected that proved quite significant for the study.
7.   Occupational status of the respondents- Adequate representation taken from employed (both government and private) as well as self-employed groups including housewives, labour, agriculture workers, business (petty traders). This was to prove the significant relationship between occupation and the status of women.
8.   Residential locality of the respondent – In equal priority of sample distribution both rural and urban areas have been considered and sample are drawn from both the localities of the respondents' residential.

Hence, the sample is restricted to 483 tribal women who are doing some kind of economic activity.

Tool for data collection

While this study is an empirical in nature a questionnaire was designed and used for primary data collection from respondents. The total questionnaire is divided into 7 sections from Section-A through Section-G.

Section-A: Personal Information: This section contains demographic profile of the respondents where age, education, occupation and other personal details of the respondent.

Section-B: Family Information: In this section the particulars of the family and its details like family size, dwelling house and the facilities available in the house are included.

Section-C: Social Status: This section deals with the social status of the respondents where the information pertaining to social standards in marriages, culture, habits, social activities, social behavior are containing.

Section-D: Economical Status: In this section all the economic variables like asset holdings, income sources, working status of the family members, area of working, working conditions, etc. are present.

Section-E: Health Status: In the health status section the health relation problems and prospects of working women are considered.

Section-G: Religion and Religious Beliefs

Section-H: Political Status: In this section the political participation and political awareness of the respondent are covered.

Section-G: Opinions and suggestions about women development: In this final section the opinions of the respondents on overall status of tribal working women in various sections are discussed and also their suggestions on further improvement in working women's status in social, economical, political and health factors are acquired.

Data Processing and Analysis

The data was processed in the computer and Regression analysis was done with the help of the SPSS package. In regression model the researcher estimated empowerment of tribal women as dependent variable, where total empowerment has measured by index of various parameters have taken and the independent variables are age, education, religion, vocational training, occupation, family type, family size, number of dependents, living house, basic amenities in the house, social status, economic status (income), health status and political awareness and participation.

Multiple Regression Model: $Y = a + x_1 b_1 + x_2 b_2 + x_3 b_3 + x_4 b_4 + x_5 b_5 + \ldots\ldots\ldots$

Dependent Variable: Y = Empowerment of tribal women considered by the factors influencing women strong and independent

Independent Variables:

x1 –> Age – Quantitative Variable, actual age of the respondents has considered

x2 –> Religion – Dummy variable (1-Hindus, 0-Others)

x3 –> Educational Status – Rank variable, where illiterates ranked as 0, primary as 1, secondary as 2 so on …… and finally post graduates have given rank with 5

x4 –> Vocational Training – Dummy Variable (1-Trained, 0-Untrained)

x5 –> Occupation – Rank variable, where housewife ranked as 0, labour as 1, self-employee as 2, business as 3, private employee as 4 and government employee as 5

x6 –> Family type – Dummy variable (Nuclear – 0, Joint and Extent – 1)

x7 –> Family size – Quantitative variable measured by number of family members in a house

x8 –> Dependence ratio – Quantitative variable measured by actual number of dependents in the house

x9 –> Dwelling house – Quantitative variable, where number of rooms in the house has considered

x10 –> Amenities in the house – Index variable, where number of facilities in the house are considered

x11 –> Social Status – Index variable, where it measured by the importance of respondent in different areas and fields in the society are considered

x12 –> Economic Status – Quantitative variable measured by actual income of the respondent

x13 –> Individual Property – Quantitative variable, total property possessed by the respondent in her own individual name

x14 –> Health Status – Dummy Variable (1-No health problems, 0-Health problems)

x15 –> Political status – Index variable, considered by political awareness and participation

EMPOWERMENT OF TRIBAL WOMEN

Regression Summary for Dependent Variable: Empowerment R= .99179643 R²= .98366015 Adjusted R²= 0.98313532 F(15,467)=1874.2 p<0.0000 Std. Error of estimate: 0.39067						
	Beta	St. Err. of Beta	B	St. Err. of B	t(467)	p-level
Intercept			1.300	0.274	4.743	0.000
Age	0.018	0.006	0.059	0.020	2.873**	0.004
Religion	0.004	0.006	0.026	0.039	0.661	0.509
Education	0.301	0.024	0.653	0.052	12.554**	0.000
Vocational Training	0.024	0.006	0.155	0.041	3.751**	0.000
Occupation	0.208	0.020	0.317	0.030	10.529**	0.000
Family Type	0.001	0.006	0.005	0.039	0.117	0.907
Family Size	-0.019	0.007	-0.084	0.029	-2.911**	0.004
Dependence ratio	-0.008	0.011	-0.026	0.035	-0.736	0.462
Dwelling house	0.008	0.012	0.026	0.035	0.735	0.463
Amenities in house	0.278	0.028	0.449	0.045	9.933**	0.000
Social Status	0.072	0.035	0.102	0.050	2.044*	0.042
Economic Status	0.103	0.017	0.134	0.022	6.168**	0.000
Individual Properties	0.073	0.011	0.111	0.017	6.599**	0.000
Health Status	0.029	0.006	0.053	0.012	4.444**	0.000
Politics status	0.008	0.006	0.026	0.020	1.327	0.185

Regression analysis

1.   In this model the linear multiple regressions has been applied for total sample of 483 respondents. This model is also the best fit to measure the influence of social, economical and demographic variables of tribal women on their empowerment. This is because the F value in this regression is 1874.2 which is satisfactorily significant at 1% Level. The model also explains R2 at 98.31% of variation. In this model of regression analysis out of the total 15 explanatory variables as many as 10 variables are found to be significant, where one variable i.e. family size is negative. These variables are Age, Education, Vocational Training, Occupation, Amenities in house, Social Status, Economic Status, Individual Properties and Health Status of tribal women which are indicate significant at 1% level. But the variables like Religion, Family type, Dependence ratio, Dwelling house and Political status are not significant. On the whole the regression analysis shows that the impact of social, economical and demographic va-

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riables determines on the empowerment of the tribal women in the selected study area which are found to be significant at many factors. This regression model is the best fit where Adjusted R2 =0.9831 and F value at 1874.2.

2. In this model of linear multiple regressions the data was considered for rural area respondents constituted with 287 samples. This model is also the best fit to measure the influence of social, economical and demographic variables of tribal women on their empowerment. This is because the F value in this regression is 942.15 which is satisfactorily significant at 1% Level. The model also explains R2 at 98.01% of variation. In this model of regression analysis out of the total 15 explanatory variables as many as 8 variables are found to be significant, where one variable i.e. family size is negative. These variables are Education, Vocational Training, Occupation, Amenities in house, Economic Status, Individual Properties and Health Status of tribal women which are indicate significant at 1% level and 5% level. But the variables like Religion, Family type, Dependence ratio, Dwelling house, Social status and Political status are not significant. On the whole the regression analysis shows that the impact of social, economical and demographic variables determines on the empowerment of the tribal women in the selected study area which are found to be significant at many factors. This regression model is the best fit where Adjusted R2 =0.9801 and F value at 942.15.

3. This model of linear multiple regressions applied for 196 urban area respondents. This model is also the best fit to measure the influence of social, economical and demographic variables of tribal women on their empowerment. This is because the F value in this regression is 993.76 which is satisfactorily significant at 1% Level. The model also explains R2 at 98.70% of variation. In this model of regression analysis out of the total 15 explanatory variables as many as 7 variables are found to be significant, where as the variable i.e. family size, dependence ratio, dwelling house and the political status are found negative. These variables are Education, Occupation, Amenities in house, Social Status, Economic Status. Individual Properties and Health Status of tribal women which are indicate significant at 1% level and 5% level. But the variables like Age, Religion, Vocational training, Family type, family size, Dependence ratio, Dwelling house and Political status are not significant. On the whole the regression analysis shows that the impact of social, economical and demographic variables determines on the empowerment of the tribal women in the selected study area which are found to be significant at many factors. This regression model is the best fit where Adjusted R2 =0.9870 and F value at 993.76.

Conclusion

Any developmental process is the expansion of assets and capabilities of rural women to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold the institution accountable that affect their lives. Skill development among rural women is the need of the hour so as to make them confident, self reliant and to develop in them the ability to be a part of decision making at home and outside. Indeed it may not be wrong to say that still tribals and rural women are the most disadvantaged and neglected section of the society for they are economically backward. Therefore there is a need on the part of the government and civil society to enable improvement in the quality of life of such vulnerable sections of the Indian population. More importantly the developmental process in India should give priority to welfare schemes and programmes meant for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes including women. These are the people who are economically backward; therefore, there is a need for sincere efforts on the part of the government to help improve the quality of their life. The Social Assessment for the training and skill development clearly reflected that rural landless STs form an integral part of poverty-ridden and marginalized groups. By empowering rural woman through education can thus enable them to live with dignity and self reliance cutting across the barriers of customary biases and prejudices, social barrier of caste, class, gender, occupation and institutional barriers that prevent them from taking actions to improve their state both at the individual and collective level. Therefore, free education and necessary and employable skill development programmes must be launched for tribal students and women so as to make them self reliant and economically independent. Furthermore, right to vote is meaningless unless rural women are made aware, educated and imparted skills to understand the order of the day and this can bring change in their lives, in the family and lastly transform the holistic tribal landscape of India, through education, legal awareness, and socio economic independence.

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