

TRIBAL WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOOD PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY OF DONGRIA KANDHA IN RAYAGADA DISTRICT, ODISHA

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Abstract: Odisha has the third largest tribal population of country after Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra having 62 tribal communities and 13 have been identified as particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs). In Odisha as per 2011 census total tribal population is 95, 90,756 constituting 22.8% of total population of the state and 9.2 % of total ST population of the country. The present study focus on Dongria Kandha a section of the Kandha community identified as PVTGs of state. Rayagada district has coming under tribal sub-plan with three micro projects operating for the indigenous tribal communities such as Kandha and Soura. The objectives of this paper is to understanding the women and their role in traditional livelihood practices. And also explore on the contribution of forest towards the livelihood of women. The study was conducted in the Kurli Panchayat of Rayagada district.

IndexTerms- Indigenous, PVTGs, Dongria Kandha, Women & Livelihood.

I. INTRODUCTION

India with a variety of eco-systems presents a varied tribal population throughout its length and breadth. The Tribal people are the oldest ethnological segment of the Indian population. Tribal people have traditionally lived in forests, hills and undulating inaccessible terrain in plateau areas and rich in natural resources. The tribal constitute 8.6 percent of total population of India. In India as per 2011 census women constitute 48% of the total population. Women's work participation among the Scheduled Tribe in India fall marginally from 44.8% in 2001 to 43.5% in 2011. But in Odisha Women's work participation rate increased from 42.2% in 2001 to 43.9% in 2011. Out of the total tribal population 95, 90, 756 lived in Odisha out of women constitute 48,63,042 whose contribution to the states socio economic development is very vital. Women as an important human resource were recognized by the Constitution of India to bring equality and empowered the State to adopt measures for growth and wellbeing of women. Women's work participation is considered as an important indicator of women's participation in economic activities of the State. Despite their overall input to the economy they have limited access and control over the resources and productive assets (Sabar, 2017). Gender disparities vary vastly across cultural, geographical and historical context. India is a large country with vast economic and socio-cultural diversity within its regions. As a patriarchal society that gives women in a subordinate position in the country is characterized by disparities in the economic, social, cultural, and political spheres (Adugna Eneyew and Sileshi Mengistu, 2013). Tribal in India geographically and culturally are at widely different stages of social as well as economic development and their problems differ from area to area within their own groups (Banothu, 2016). The livelihood strategies of men and women in the society vary usually basing on the difference created in socio-cultural background. 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 assets in their society. Tribal have been residing in forest areas for generations, cultivating land and collecting non-timber forest produce. The traditional economy of the tribal people is hunting, food gathering, shifting cultivation ,agriculture, minor forest produce collection. A variety of millets, cereals, pulses and paddy are cultivated to fulfil the basic need of family and also wide range of leaves, mushrooms, fruits, roots and tubers are collected from the forest. The concept of livelihood analysis emerged in the mid-nineties closely associated with poverty reduction strategies. Understanding the livelihood system of the poor is crucial to effective poverty reduction. Basically women are assigned to the domestic sphere of production whereas men are involved in

more productive work. Land and Livelihood are connected to each other because the tribal livelihood history comes from the natural and ethnic factors (Simon, 2016). The position and status of the tribal women is better than their non-tribal counterparts. There are a large number of studies on tribal communities but only a few are focussed on tribal women (Singh & Rajyalakshmi, 1993). Tribal women have adjusted themselves to live a traditional life style in the local environment and occupations based on natural resources (Mareeswaran, Jansirani, Asokhan, Mani, & Duraisamy, 2017). The forest based cottage industries especially Sal leaf plate making and lac cultivation play crucial roles in rural economy and employment generation to a huge mass of tribal people (Islam & Quli, 2017). The tribal women spend considerable time, collecting fuel wood, honey, silk cocoon, medicinal herbs and fruits as part of their domestic chore but since they also often sell the surplus if possible, the border between household and commercial motivation becomes extremely porous (Ghosh, 2000). Concentrating on the economic sphere of the tribal in India it can be conveyed that economic life of tribal is not specific in nature. It is difficult to find a precise definition of the Tribal economy. The tribal act as a single body that practice subsistence type of mixed economy with mutual dependence among themselves (Gupta & Paul, 2017).

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Anthropological studies are characterized by their holistic approach of study based on first hand information collected through fieldwork. The natural beauty of the Rayagada district fills with immense joy and thrills. The Dongria Kandha is a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group live in the terrains of Niyamgiri hill ranges in Rayagada and Kalahandi district of Odisha. They speaks in "Kuvi", a Dravidian Dialect. They live in being organized in to strong territorial clan groups. The paper is based on women in traditional livelihood practices among Dongria Kandha in Rayagada District, Odisha. The study emphasis the role of women in traditional livelihood practices. The study was conducted in Arisakani, Radanga and Khajuri villages of Kurli Gram Panchayat (GP) in Rayagada district, Odisha. By applying purposive and random sampling method 68 women were selected for study. This paper is based on qualitative data collected primarily using Interview Scheduled, In-depth interview, Case Study and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Secondary informations were collected from various documents such as books, magazines, journal and research papers as well as from internet etc.

III. RESULTS & ANALYSIS

The research was conducted in the geographical location of Rayagada district in Odisha, its population specially the tribal population is the original habitatant of forest since time immemorial and they had been the real forest guards before the ownership was taken by Zamindars and later by the government. The state can be divided into four physiographic regions, viz (i) Northern Plateau or uplands (ii) Eastern Ghat, (iii) Central plateus and (iv) Low lying valleys and Coastal plains. Rayagada is full of natural scenery with mountains, valleys, running stream and dense forest with wild animals and it also a home land for indigenous communities. Dongria Kandha inhabits in the Niyamgiri hill ranges and depends on nature for their livelihood.

Role of Women in Traditional Livelihood Practices:

Shifting/Swidden Cultivation:

Shifting cultivation has a special importance in the life of tribal and number of socio-cultural imperative are attached to it. The ethos and value of tribal are associated with the shifting cultivation that encourages many tribes to still continue it. Rites and rituals always make an integral part of the shifting/swidden cultivation. Different tribes of Odisha practicing shifting cultivation and is known by different names by different tribes for this subsistence work. These are usually expressed by the names given to their swiddens among different categories of land under cultivation. The Dongria Kandha of Rayagada district calls it Haru and the Desia Kandha of Rairakhol and Bamra sub-division 'Rama'. The Kandha of Kalahandi district use different term, 'Dongar Chasa'. The Dongria Kandha tribal community has been sustaining themselves from the resources of the Niyamgiri range. In shifting cultivation Odisha and Northern eastern states women are in far better position as a bulk of the work is performed by them and the societies give them liberty in the economic aspects. For instance among Bonda of south Odisha, division of labour was simple and based mainly on age and gender. They enjoy nearly an egalitarian relationship prior to the incursions of modernisation (Nanda, 1994).

Selection of the Plot:

Every year in the month of Magha (January-February) the head select the land for cultivation. Generally the patch which has completed its rotation cycle and is sufficiently covered with trees and bushes is considered suitable to be cleared for shifting cultivation. For selecting the patch of land a mutual discussion is takes between husband and wife.

Rituals of land:

Rituals and rites are associated with the swidden/shifting cultivation. The main festivals associated with cultivation are Bihana puja (*Sadrangi Laka*), *Mandia Rani*, *Dhana nuakhai Pidika*, *Punapudi etc.*

Neta Tudunga (Slashing):

After the selection of suitable area the cleaning of the plot starts by felling the trees and bushes. It is done by both men and women. Giant trees felling by men and shrubs are cleared by women. The fallowed swidden plots grow into bushy vegetation. This sort of vegetation is called jada. Neta tudunga means “cutting the swidden”. The slashes are collected at one or more places in heaps which are called heledi. Sometimes the heledi are put at places to demarcate the boundary of the plots. Usually the heledi is left for a few days to dry.

Nanirundna (Setting Fire):

When the heledi becomes dry the Dongria Kandha set fire to it. The ashes are frequently spread over the plot.

Sowing:

Sowing seeds are done by both men and women. Dongria are doing mixed farming. The methods are more or less same in all region of the quantity. They sowing seeds of different food grains in a single plot viz. *Mande* (ragi) , *Kosala* (millet), *Arka* (bajra) , *Kaanga*(pigeon pea) , *Kating*, *Kanga*, *Kunye* , *Aada*(ginger), *Hinga* (turmeric) etc.

Watching the Crops:

It is normally done by men. But in the day time women are also watching the crops. There is a fear of birds and animals who destroying the crops. So the Dongria build the watch house and save the crops. The women spends long time that is from early morning to dusk in the Dongar. Cultivation in the hill slopes is an arduous.

Weeding:

Weeding is one of the hard working and pain taking work. Without weeding the crops cannot be properly grown up. It is also work of the women.

Harvesting:

Harvesting starts in the month of November- December. Both men and women have role in harvest the crops. The crops are harvested one after another. It is done with the help of a knife locally known as katri. Various activities like reaping the crops, winnowing the crops, drying the crops, storing the crops are done by women along with it transporting of the crops also partially done by women.

Minor Forest Produce collection:

Minor forest produce provides substantial sustenance to the tribal communities particularly in the backward region. In some cases they are major source of cash income. The collection of minor forest produce by the tribal is primarily for fulfilling their basic requirement. Forest and forest resources are important source of livelihood of tribal. Seasonal forest produce collection can be a major source of Dongria economy. They collect forest produce both for consumption and money. Seasonal variety of fruits, roots, tubers, green leaves and mushroom collected by them .It has great significance in socio economic life of tribal. The tribal are solely depends upon the surrounding environment. They extract various goods and services from forest. The NTFP gathers mostly by the women. Dongria women are self-reliant. They work hard for the sustenance of their families. The selling of NTFP also carried out by women. The women sell siali fibre, broomsticks, fruits like mango, guava, banana, berries, *Champeii*, *Ambamatang*, *Ambahade* etc.

Table I: Collection of MFP by Dongria Kandha

Season	Local name of MFP and the collector (Women or Men)				
	Kucha (Green Leaves)	Kuna	Kutuka (Mashroom)	Fruits	Others
Summer	Kaleri/barada(W/M)	Kaduru(W/M)		Panasa (W/M)	Paraka(sisal fibres)(W)
	Muninga (W)	Napa (W/M)		Amba(W/M)	Kranja (oil seed)(M)
	Maddi (W)			Jambu (W/M)	
				Kajir,kendu (M)	
Rainy	Ganderi (W)	Hudo(W)	Jambu(W)	Chara (berries)(M)	Derki(Bamboo shoot)(W/M)
	Kumuda(W)	Nagedi (W/M)	Ambu (W)		
	Kati(W)		Wati (W)		
	Karila(W/M)		Chhapi (W)		
	Drihli(W)		Menda(W)		
	Kuna(W)		Watan (W)		
Winter	Kunda (W)	Jada (W/M)			Irpi (Mahua)(M)
	Muninga (W)	Rani (W/M)			

Source: Fieldwork Data, 2018

Animal Husbandry:

Dongria have very strong belief in existence of super natural power. They worshiped many God and Goddesses with a belief that they have control over their life and any misconduct might have serious consequences like drought, epidemic, accidents and death. Dongria possess the animals viz. Buffalo (*kodru*), Pig (*paji*), Goat (*ada*), Fowl (*Kanyu*) and Pigeon (*parang*). The livestock possession has a socio-cultural value like sacrifice conducted to please the supernatural power and gift/presentation to the social relation. The animals are also a means of economy for the peoples. They sell Goat, pig and buffalo in a high cost. It is mostly the duty of women to take the animals for grazing. At the times of epidemic arise it is the women who take care of animals. The decision regarding the selling of animals are made by mutual consultant of both the spouses.

Horticulture:

The term horticulture is derived from the Latin words *hortus* meaning garden and *cultura* meaning cultivation. Horticulture is the science and art of growing fruits, vegetables, flowers and any other cultivation. It includes plant conservation landscape restoration, soil management, land scape and garden design, construction and maintainance and oboriculture. Dongria are horticulturists the favourable climatic conditioned made them a skilled horticulturist. They produce jackfruit (*Panase*), orange (*Kamla*), papaya (*Ambarata*), banana, pine apple (*Sapri*), guava (*Jambu*), cashew nut (*Bale*), tamarind (*Leli*). The main environmental factors which have favoured fruit growing in the Niyamgiri hills are high altitude/ good drainage and low temperature period. They can produce plenty of fruits. In the family all members above 8 years old work in the field and while cutting trees are done by the male members, clearing of thorns, planting, weeding, hoeing, manuring, reaping are done by women. Men make holes in the field where women put seeds in them.

IV.CONCLUSION

Nature unfolds scenic beauty which lies among different cultural groups. Among all the culture the most fantasise group is the tribal who have a distinct culture, traditions and lifestyle. Tribe are the indigenous people having a simple meaningful livelihood pattern implying their culture and extract from the surrounding environment to fill their breadbasket. The tribal women play a vital role preserving cultural dictionary, tradition and customs. Women have major participation in activities related to bread and butter of the family. Dongria Kandha women are adjusted themselves to live a traditional life in the local environment and follow occupation based in natural resources. Forest plays a vital role in social, cultural, historical and economic development of Dongria Kandha and also maintaining its ecological balance. Dongria women have major role in all traditional livelihood practices like shifting cultivation, horticulture, minor forest produces and animal husbandry. As compare to their counterpart Dongria women considerably more active and responsible towards the sustain of family life. Though women contribute substantiality to economic production, they do not have full autonomy over disposal the produce.

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