



Women Empowerment in Tribal Area – A study on related Economic Issues

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Abstract:

Socio-Economic empowerment is the process of revitalization of local people by giving more powers and responsibilities so that they can utilize the opportunities, resources available for sustainable development. This process encompasses social, cultural, financial, skill and knowledge empowerment. Unless all these vital aspects are integrated and greater vision is developed in local female population the sustainable development among tribals cannot be ensured. The important areas to be considered for empowerment of tribal women in this study are identified as: functional literacy and education, health and nutrition, development of skills to take up new income generating schemes, social and cultural development and organization of thrift, credit and processing societies.

Economic development of a region alone does not help in the elevation of the status of women which is enshrined in the social and cultural values. For the removal of inequality based on sex and discriminatory practices against the women, we have to shift our focus on values of the society and culture. The status of women can be elevated only when they will be made economically, socially and psychologically independent in the society. It will provide an insight to the planners, policy makers, academicians and researchers about the grass-root relations prevailing in the tribal economy. The tribal women should be allowed to use their full potential. Through adequate measures of health, education, skills and intellectual as well as moral capabilities, they should be equipped to raise the quality of life.

Key Words: Occupational Patterns, Work Participation Rates, Dependency Ratio, Minor Forest Product (MFP), DWACRA.

Introduction:

The phenomenon of women's empowerment in the Indian context has been considered as an important variable for integration of women in development process. Enabling women to gain equal access to and control over resources, transforming the institutions and structures through which the ideology and practice of subordination is reinforced and reproduced. The important studies on women empowerment are conducted by Batliwala, Srilatha, Hall, Stephen, Vijaya Lakshmi, Kate Young. Some of the research studies analyzed the term as multi-faceted concept. In order to prepare ground for this process, the Central and State Government had been declared the policy for empowerment of women. The studies of Uma Chakravathy, Agarwal, Hasan, Kasambi

analyzed that the state is a major player in the enterprise of women's empowerment and the role of the state is always a question. During the first 50 years after independence the question of bringing women into the mainstreams through opportunities and capabilities has been considered from time to time. In recent years, there has been considerable work on the question of empowerment. The most notable contributions from Sen and Gupta, Shama, Kabeer and others are with the view that empowerment aims to increase women's access to and control over social, economic and intellectual resources. However the debate on empowerment strategies have not sufficiently explored or analyzed the role of the state.

Until the Report of the Committee on the status of women in India in the mid-seventies, this neglect was invisible to policy makers as well as scholars. By the mid-seventies and mid-eighties, the women's movement had accelerated. Throughout eighties, women's groups kept addressing the state as there was a belief that only through public policy can the status of women be empowered. However, field experience reveals that women's empowerment process must take the form of social movement located within communities. The Government of Andhra Pradesh has announced 'A Strategy paper on women empowerment' during the period January 2001. However it is very shortest period to evaluate the role of state in the process of women's empowerment. One must appreciate the approaches advanced by the Government of Andhra Pradesh. But still some criticism is there that the wide income disparities and gender gaps stay in the face of all societies. Hence moving towards women's empowerment is not a technocratic goal it is a political process. It requires a new way of thinking.

Methodology and Collection of Data:

Multi stage stratified random sampling method is used in the present study. The selection process is carried out in four stages, they are relating to district, mandal, villages and households. The Vizianagaram district is selected for the study as it is having relatively larger extent of its Sub-Plan area. The G.L. Puram mandal is selected for the study because it is one of the tribal mandal that is having a high proportion of tribal population. The villages are selected depending upon the higher concentration of specific tribes. With a stratification procedure based on the specific tribe population concentration, the panchayats are classified into three categories. From the Konda Dora tribe concentrated panchayats two villages are selected from very interior hill areas another two villages are selected and from Gadaba tribe concentrated panchayats another two villages are selected.

The Konda Dora and Gadaba tribes are equally proportioned in the G.L. Puram mandal. To examine the inter tribe variations in the socio economic conditions of tribal women 60 households are selected from each tribe women 60 households are selected from each tribe from their concentrated selected villages based on the random sampling procedure. The eldest female member was treated as a unit of study. In this way we had 180 households who are equally proportioned from Konda Dora and Gadaba. Information relating to the selected households is collected while canvassing a prely designed and structured household schedule in the selected villages during April 1998 to March 1999 in different visits. The secondary data has been obtained from Annual Reports and Action Plans of ITDA Parvatipuram, District hand book of statistics of different years published by the Chief Planning Officer, Vizianagaram, MRO and MDO offices of G.L. Puram Mandal.

Economic Status of Women in Tribal Society:

The women are not permitted to plough the lands. If she ploughs, it is believed that it does not rain. Even in the marriage by capture the girl can be captured much against her will and she is forced to marry that particular boy only. This practice has a social sanction. The girl's education is totally neglected by the parents since they believe that investment on girl is not rewarding. Further, early marriage and various peculiar types of matrimony are great obstacles for the development of education among girls. Thus, women suffer because of traditional belief systems and taboos.

As per the customary laws prevalent in all the tribal societies, except a few matriarchal societies the women are not entitled for a share within the family's or ancestral property except in families where there are no male members. There are no matriarchal tribal societies in the study area and all the tribal communities are patriarchal and matrilineal. This customary law makes tribal women insecure in case of divorce or desertion by the husband. Moreover the Hindu social codes are not applicable to scheduled areas in the study area.

Occupational Patterns:

Women in tribal societies are more industrious compared to men. A tribal woman is considered as an economic asset. She attends to all kinds of economic activities except ploughing which is a taboo in most tribal societies. In addition to regular work of fetching water from distant streams, fuel from forest, grinding, cooking, collection of minor forest produce along with her husband and grown up children. The processing of Minor forest produce is largely done by womenfolk. She carries heavy head loads of either minor forest produces or some items of agricultural produce and go to weekly markets along with her husband attend to weekly markets and sell whatever they brought to markets and purchase some items of their domestic necessities.

Woman plays vital role in all kinds of economic transactions along with her husband in selling or purchasing their essential items. Tribal woman plays crucial and vital role in all kinds of economic productive activities. They constitute more than half of the labour force. They are constituting more than half of the labour force. They are invisible potential workers. Declined from 59.9 percent to 56.8 percent. The occupational pattern of tribal women as per 1991 census reports reveals that 32.2 percent are cultivators and 59.1 percent are agricultural laborers, whereas among males, agriculture laborers constitute only 37.2 percent. These figures indicate that large number of women supplement their meager family income by wage income. This trend also reveals that 96.2 per cent of women are working in primary sector and rest are pursuing occupations on off farm sector. Occupational pattern may form basis for formulation of relevant specific schemes for economic empowerment of tribal women. Female children from the tender age are assigned more duties by parents than male children, as female children are more obedient by nature. The grown up girls are not usually sent to schools but they are made to look after younger children and other household duties like made cooking, cleaning of utensils etc., during the absence of parents in the daytime. The girl in the tribal household around 10 years of age goes along with parents for collection of minor forest produce, agricultural operations and attend to other domestic chores. The man tribal areas attend to only ploughing of the land and collection of minor forest produce. Tribal woman not only assists the husband in all kinds of agricultural operations, collection processing and marketing of MFP in addition to her regular duties of bringing fire wood, water, cleaning of utensils, cooking, looking after children

and all kinds of activities connected with maintenance and management of the house. The woman works in the fields and forest till the last days of her advanced pregnancy and again resume her regular duties soon after purificatory bath is performed. In hunting and gathering societies, woman collects edible roots, tubers, wild fruits, leaves etc., to keep ready for household consumption at regular intervals. The man sits at home and looks after young children while woman goes to the forest for collection of MFP, fire wood etc.

Work Participation Rates:

The details pertaining to sex-wise distribution of workers indicate that, through the male population is higher (61.86) than female population (48.14). Among the work force female participation is higher (50.10) than male population (49.92). Among the total female population 71.53 percent are working and on the other hand in the total male population only 68.69 per cent are working population. This indicates that in tribal economy women does much work, she participates in agricultural operations, collection of minor forests produce and also in non-agricultural labour activity. The freedom to remarry and the bride price give her more or less equal status with men. This situation reveals a low dependency ratio among the tribal households. In the total population, workers are very high (70.42 percent) than non-workers (29.38 percent) and the extent of child labour is only 10.91 percent of total population. Inter tribe worker participation rates indicate that except in case of Gadaba in all other tribes women work participation rates are very high. The data pertaining to non-workers among different tribes reveal that including school going children the male works are only 29.38 percent of total population of the households. Among the non-workers men are in higher proportion (56.49 percent) than women (43.51 percent). The male non-workers are higher in number rather than women. The non-workers are very less in number in case of Gadaba tribe and very high in case of Konda Dora tribe.

The tribe-wise distribution of child labour among the selected households shows that, the child labour are only 9.78 percent of total population of the selected households. Among the child labour female are higher (56.96 percent) than men (43.04 percent). The child labour are more in number among Konda Savara tribe residing in the hill and remote areas and the number of child labour are relatively low among the Konda Dora tribe who are residing in the plain areas of the tribal economy. In the remote and interior areas tribal people used to engage their children in activities like cow holding, sheep rearing, crop guarding and other agricultural and household activities. As the tribal agriculturist cannot afford to employ wage labour because of poverty, he finds it easily and necessary to involve his children in some activity. The low rate of child women labour among the selected households indicate that more female children are being sent to schools rather than involving them in households activities. This is a good symptom of transformation of the tribal economy.

Dependency Ratio:

In the tribal economy in agriculture and non-agriculture activities most of the family members are involved. Hence we assume a low dependency ratio among the tribal households. The data on the dependency ratio shows that, it is around 1:0: 31 to 1:0: 51 among different tribes and it is 0.42 when the two tribes put together. The size of dependency ratio depends upon the work participation ratio of the children and also of the adult above the age of 55 years. Through nearly 35.90 percent of the children population are not in the effective work force, due to the existence of adults above 55 years of age is negligible (4.21 percent) of total population. A high rate of the female work participation rates it is observed that the dependency ratio in general is relatively low among

the tribe communities. It is interesting to note that dependency ratio is relatively low among the hill tribes (Konda Savara) rather than the tribes in plains (Konda Dora) because in the hill and remote areas the child labour is very high in Gadaba, when compared to plain tribes.

Nature of Different Occupations:

Agriculture is the predominant occupation in the study area followed by labour works. Because of the subsistence nature of agriculture, the tribals are compelled to work as both agriculture and non-agriculture labour, to collect minor forest produce in the forestry to earn additional income. Though all the selected households are agriculturists most of them are forced to go with other occupations like labour works and forest produce collection. As all the selected households are agriculturists their main occupation is cultivation and they are owner cultivators. The occupational spread of women workers by participations in number of activities shows that addition to their main occupation 52 households in the plain areas are participating in labour works both in agriculture and non-agriculture and forest produce collection as secondary occupations. On the other hand a number of 60 percent households in the remote and hilly areas are considering labour works and forest produce collection as one the secondary occupations. In the selected sample 36 percent of the households are with more than two occupations.

Tribe wise occupational distribution of women workers according to their main occupation indicates that, in the total workers 47.77 percent are largely depending upon agriculture, 18.93 percent of workers are relying upon labour works and the extent of women workers depending upon collection of forest produce is only 3.09 percent. Out of 28.84 percent of the non-workers, larger portion belongs to school going children (22.52 percent). The Konda Savara women are relatively relying more upon minor forest produce. Konda Dora women in plain are diverting towards non-farm occupations like other services, salaries services and non-farm labour. The occupational distribution of family members ultimately reveal that all the tribals are relying more upon agriculture (47.77 percent) and labour works (18.93 percent).

Measures to Improve the Levels of Living of Tribal Women:

In development of women and children of rural areas programme (DWACRA), several income generating schemes are being introduced among women folk in order to make them real productive economic assets. Women folk among tribal communities are not equipped with necessary operational and managerial skills. Moreover several schemes such as horticulture, sericulture, soil and water conservation, improved varieties of crops, joint forest management, construction activities etc., are being introduced in tribal areas. It should be made as mandatory to all the departments to introduce all these schemes through participatory management. Tribal women folk have to be imparted skills in exclusive groups in management of various development activities. It is significant to note that women thrift societies in some tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh have taken up construction of school buildings, anganwadi centers, even check dams and these works are appreciated for their quality by both internal and external funding agencies. Women folk should be imparted skills in different occupations. As women folk possess innate skills in raising nurseries, grafting etc., they have to be entrusted with the responsibilities of raising plants required under joint forest management.

One of the important reasons for pauperization of tribal societies is exploitation by money lenders, and lords and merchants. These exploitative agencies spread their debt traps in the tribal areas and made innocent and

gullible tribals as permanent debtors by charging exorbitant rates of interest. In the past when transportation and communication facilities were not developed, tribal societies had full command over the resources available in their habitat. But in modern times tribals are gradually alienated from their own lands, forest resources and even from his own cultural moorings. All the exploitative and disruptive forces have to be totally eliminated to restore credibility and self-reliance.

Conclusion:

Socio-Economic empowerment is the process of revitalization of local people by giving more powers and responsibilities so that they can utilize the opportunities, resources available for sustainable development. This process encompasses social, cultural, financial, skill and knowledge empowerment. Unless all these vital aspects are integrated and greater vision is developed in local female population the sustainable development among tribals cannot ensured. The important areas to be considered for empowerment of tribal women in this study are identified as: functional literacy and education, health and nutrition, development of skills to take up new income generating schemes, social and cultural development and organization of thrift, credit and processing societies.

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Social change through equal treatment for the girl child and reducing son preference, schooling for both boys and girls, empowering women and providing them new skills for income generation is need of the hour. In view of fast changing scenario in tribal areas, a vision for self-reliance and urge for development has to be inculcated in tribal societies especially in the women folk. These vital changes can be accomplished by establishing thrift and credit societies, grain banks, M.F.P. processing societies. Adult literacy centers, DWACRA groups have to be established in the interior tribal areas. These local organizations have to be empowered and guided properly in functioning and maintenance by women liaison workers and community coordinators.

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