

THE CHANGING STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

According to the preaching of social reformers, Government schemes and NGO, we have observed that positive changes are taking place in the social, economic, political and educational lives of the tribal women. Yet the tribal women remain to a large extent isolated and out of reach of the helping hand to bring real changes expected in their lives. This paper is an effort to throw light and spread awareness about the precarious conditions of tribal women despite of many schemes and efforts in order to find an adequate solution to bring effective and long lasting changes in the lives of tribal women.

Keywords – Tribal women, religious background, empowerment, gender gaps, physical violence, social inequalities, Government policies.

Introduction-

The term tribe is derived from the Latin word 'tribes' meaning the 'poor or the masses'

In English language the word 'tribe' appeared in the sixteenth century and denoted a community of persons claiming descent from a common ancestor, This chapter attempts to give an insight into the tribal studies in India.

The Indian society is a unique society with diversity of nature and people. In our country, known for the extreme poverty of the masses, the tribals constitute the core of the poor. Poverty, poor health and sanitation, illiteracy and other social problems among the tribals are exerting a dragging effect on the Indian economy. Scheduled Tribes in India are generally considered to be 'Adivasis,' meaning indigenous people or original inhabitants of the country.

The tribes have been confined to low status and are often physically and socially isolated instead of being absorbed in the mainstream Hindu population. . They belong to different racial stocks and religious backgrounds and speak different dialects. The tribals are



socially, economically and politically backward sections in India. According to census 2001 tribals accounts for 8.2 per cent of Indian population. Scheduled Tribe groups have traditionally lived in remote and far-flung areas closer to forests and natural resources. Most of the tribals live in inaccessible areas, the areas in which tribal live are economically backward and living conditions are also poor. Most of the trials reside in rural areas which are under developed.

The population of the tribes had grown at the growth rate of 24.4 per cent during 1991-2001 (Andrabi,2013). There are more than 400 tribal groups among the scheduled tribe population, each with their distinct cultures, social practices, religions, dialects, and occupations. Thus, the different tribal groups are highly heterogeneous, The problems faced by scheduled tribes during the colonial period in the form of the loss of control over land and other resources due to alienation of land to non-tribes and the state-sponsored displacement projects has continued unabated in the post-independence period. In addition, tribals have been confronted with other problems as well. While the post-Independent India made well-meaning provisions and legislation for the protection, welfare and development of the tribal people, actual practices have belied this hope. On the contrary, scheduled tribes today experience deprivation, oppression, exploitation and discrimination in almost all fields of life. The government response to the problems of scheduled tribes has either been lukewarm, indifferent or even hostile. Such an experience has been most strongly felt by the emerging middle class. That explain why there has been increasing assertion of an identity among tribes that now have a sizeable middle class. Underlying the new mobilization is the discriminatory treatment meted out to tribes by the dominant population or the state, which actually acts on behalf of the former. Hence there has been an increasing assertion by tribals for rights and control over land.

India has witnessed a three-fold increase in population over the last half century without corresponding growth in opportunities, especially in rural areas. Women constitute 50% of the population and are the backbone of the family. Indian tribal Women's life encompasses various dimensions of personal, domestic and community life. One of the most crucial aspects of women's emancipation is their political empowerment. Rural population in the area ranged between 65% to 92.72%,. Male dominated society needs to change its mindset in tune with the change in times and circumstances.

The Government has been undertaking several programmes to improve the socio-economic situation of women/ girls. Independent India proclaimed equality of the sexes as a Fundamental Right under the Constitution and directed state policy towards removing the various disabilities that prevent women from realizing their potential. focused on socio-economic conditions, education and literacy, health, crime against women, traditional practices and Panchayati Raj indicators.



On the basis of Constitutional commitments towards promoting equality and social justice, in the past 65 years, the Government has implemented several policies, programmes and schemes specifically focusing on Dalit and Adivasi educational development such as affirmative action, developing educational infrastructure and scholarships. But unfortunately such initiatives have seriously failed in ensuring access or availability of educational development programmes for Dalit and Adivasi communities due to lack of political and administrative will and increasing caste based inequalities.

Several schemes were implemented by the Department of Rural Development and these were Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna (SGSY), Swayamsidha, Indira Awas Yojana, Indira Mahila Yojana, Balika Samridhi Yojana, National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS), Swa- Shakti Project planners felt that formation of women's groups would lead to leadership development among women, and Total Literacy Campaign. Under the SGSY scheme, 40% beneficiaries were women, and 18 women's Self Help Groups (SHGs) were formed during 2003-04.

Among the major states of India, Maharashtra ranked second with respect to literacy (77.3%) after Kerala (90.9%). Enrollment in higher secondary schools increased by 9.2% in 2002-2003. In 2000- 2001, the drop out rates for boys and girls declined by 15% and 19% respectively from 53% and 63% in 1980-1981. To promote girls education, the State Government launched Ahilyabai Holkar Scheme from 1996-1997. Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) decreased from 105 in 1991 to 48 in 2002. The mean age at marriage for females was 17.6 years in 1971 which increased to 19.8 years in 1999 (NFHS II). 18% of the women in Maharashtra had experienced violence since the early age of 15 years and of the women who experienced violence 92% have been beaten by their husbands.

The socio- economic background of women respondents has significant bearing on their functioning as village sarpanchs. The awareness level of structure and composition of panchayat samiti was The traditional system of male dominance prevails even after women earn an independent income and perform a political role. Income of the husband was also an important determinant of the status of the family as well as extent of conflict in role performance of women representatives. With regard to spending of family income, it was observed that husbands spent the maximum part of the family income. A women representative had to meet the expectations and Gender specific violence, especially violence against women is a common universal phenomena. Harassment of women is found in every society and at all stages of the development of human civilization. Women had very low representation in decision-making bodies, and did not even have complete freedom in household decision making. In many insurgency-affected areas, women were victims of different forms of crime.

Very little effort has been made to address the problems of these women in difficult situations

Violence against women occurs in several forms including intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, forced prostitution and rape. The most pervasive form of violence against women is abuse by husband or intimate male partner. Both, physical and psychological violence were higher in rural areas compared to urban areas.

Wife abuse is not a recent phenomenon. Its roots can be traced to the remote past. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) II of India (1998-99) reported that 50% of women in India accepted at least one reason for wife-beating. About 40% women justified beating for neglecting the house or children; 7% for not paying the expected dowry; and 25-37% for some other reason. 70% reported that alcoholism was the major reason for wife battering. About 90% respondents believed that poverty was the reason behind their husband's aggressive attitude.

Violence against women (VAW) is a phenomenon that cuts across boundaries of culture, class, education, ethnicity and age. The most important amendment came in the form of the introduction of Section 498A in the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which deals with domestic violence against women. Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, is a criminal offence. It is a cognizable, non-bailable, and compoundable offence

It was found that women suffered varying degrees of physical as well as psychological violence by their husbands. The process of sensitizing men on the issue of domestic violence should start from early childhood itself. There should be at least one shelter home in every city. Indigenous arbitration bodies like mahila mandals, self help groups, etc. should be formed in each locality to combat the problem of domestic violence locally.

In recent years, the traditional roles of women have undergone some changes due to economic needs, and some efforts were made to bring visibility and mainstream women's contribution to the overall growth and development of society. Violence against women is universal, and some societies have higher rates of violence against women. In India, between 22 and 60% of Indian women have been victims of physical abuse by an intimate partner. Domestic violence is defined as all actions against the wife (victim) by her present husband (perpetrator) that threaten the life, body, psychological integrity and restrict her liberty.

Whenever there is unemployment arising out of displacement and jobs are scarce, women are the first ones to lose. This is not only because they lack skills, but more so because they have to make way for men. It has observed that most tribal communities are patriarchal, but compared to mainstream society, they allow greater freedom to women.



The National Policy for Women's Empowerment mandates gender audits as an important method of monitoring women's empowerment. The scheme of Awareness Generation Projects (AGP) has been implemented through NGOs by Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) to create awareness on issues relating to status, rights and problems of women, especially rural women

It was recommended that traditional attitudes and social norms need restructuring to remove gender bias. Mass awareness campaigns and seminars should be held, and lawmakers and enforcers should work jointly with activists and social workers towards eradication of gender imbalance and domestic violence. More public prosecutors should be appointed to redress the grievances of victims.

There is a need to reconstruct the justice delivery system, which would ensure an enquiry and investigation before arresting the accused person, especially in cases of women and aged, and conclude the investigation within a definite time period. NGOs should organize women's meetings in different localities and create awareness on legal provisions.

Local Self Government personnel should take active part in combating domestic violence and dowry death. Police should keep a strong vigil in rural areas where more cases of domestic violence are reported. In April 1999, Government of India launched a new self-employment programme known as Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) which is a holistic programme covering all aspects of self-employment like Self Help Groups (SHGs) training, credit, technology, infrastructure and marketing.

Indian tribal Women's life encompasses various dimensions of personal, domestic and community life. One of the most crucial aspects of women's emancipation is their political empowerment. By how many millions are aware of the existence of these laws and how many are still ignorant of the same. Our socio-economic reforms and their impact need to be studied in depth. Achieving gender equality does involve a process of active social changes and cannot be automatically connected to economic growth in a given region.

Maharashtra is the second largest Indian state in terms of population and the third largest in terms of area. The New Women's Policy 2001 was a charter for women's empowerment, which emphasized women focused planning, women's participation in decision making, health package for women, etc. to further government initiatives. Several NGOs are working collaboratively with the Government to further the cause of women. Annapurna Mahila Mandal (AMM), an NGO in Pune City, works with poor self-employed women and men in urban slums.

Human development approach is recommended as it offers a comprehensive framework that goes beyond a mere sectional or departmental mode of action. Mizoram does not

have a separate Department for Women's Development. The two schemes for girls were *Balika Samridhi Yojana* and *Kishori Shakti Yojana*, and Mizoram has set up State Commission for Women. Position of women in the traditional Maharashtra family was one of complete subordination and subservience. Government programmes for women and child development are trying to bring a change in situation of women.

As per 2001 Census, the population of Maharashtra was 96.9 million, of whom 50.4 million were males and 46.5 million were females. Maharashtra is the third largest state of India in terms of area (308,000 sq. km) and second in terms of population. By September 2002, the population had crossed 100 million marks. Life expectancy for males and females was 63 and 65.4 years respectively. 42.4% of the State's population lived in urban areas and 57.6% in rural areas. Females per thousand males declined from 934 in 1991 to 922 in 2001, while sex ratio in the age group 0-6 years declined from 946 in 1991 to 917 in 2001.

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To promote girls education, the State Government launched Ahilyabai Holkar Scheme from 1996-1997. Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) decreased from 105 in 1991 to 48 in 2002. The mean age at marriage for females was 17.6 years in 1971 which increased to 19.8 years in 1999 (NFHS II). As per the 55th Round of National Sample Survey (NSS) (July 1999- June 2000), 25.02% of the population was below the poverty line, the incidence of poverty being 26.81% in urban areas and 23.72%, in rural areas. Only 1-2% women aged 35 years participated in decision making compared with 25% women in the age group 15-19 years. 18% of the women in Maharashtra had experienced violence since the early age of 15 years and of the women who experienced violence 92% have been beaten by their husbands. Urban women (17%) were slightly less likely than rural women (19%) to have experienced violence.

Women from nuclear families experienced more violence than women from non-nuclear families. The number of rape victims in 2002 was 1277; abduction cases increased from 662 in 2000 to 782 in 2002; dowry deaths recorded were 242; sexual harassment increased from 930 in 2000 to 1349 in 2002; while domestic violence decreased from 6768 in 2000 to 5065 in 2002. Maharashtra Protection of Women Bill 2001 was passed which defined violence and abuse. Many organizations like NABARD, SIDBI, UTI, Mutual Funds, Mumbai Port Trust, etc. have worked for the protection of women's rights.

The Maharashtra Government has taken up several special schemes for the empowerment of women and girls, such as rehabilitation of devdasis, financial aid to widows and victimized women for self-employment programme, scheme for marriage of daughters of destitute and widows, Savitribai Phule multipurpose women's center, Kamadhenu Yojana to provide employment to home based women workers, insurance scheme for women, provision of cycles for school going girls, educational and play material for balwadis, providing uniform to school girls and sarees to poor women, providing household articles to needy women, etc. In 2001- 2002, there were 2055 primary schools, 856 secondary schools and 256 higher secondary institutions exclusively for girls. Gender gaps, however, still exist in health, education, equality and work participation. The current downsizing of the economy has led to reduced State spending on the social security sector.

Conclusion –

- 1) It is very essential to understand the unique conditions of tribal women as resistance from family, husband and other blocking chains and hurdles in their lives in order to help themselves.
- 2) Just providing the basic needs such as 'roti-kapda-makaan' i.e. food-clothing-shelter and primary education with blind policies such as promoting students without examinations will not bring paradigm changes but by providing well-equipped schools and colleges with international standers will surely bring the tribal women in the main stream.
- 3) By maintaining their heritage and culture the changes and reforms should be introduced. At the same time the care should be taken that it should be free from social stigmas such as beatings by husband, drunkard family members and even hygienic problems in their lives.
- 4) Male dominated society needs to change its mindset in tune with the change in times and circumstances. Gender and poverty need to be addressed more directly, especially among the non S u v a r n a J a a t i s the Dalits, and the minorities.

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