



PROBLEMS OF TRIBAL LANDLESS WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABORERS: A SOCIOLOGICAL OBSERVATION OF KOLLI HILLS FROM NAMAKKAL DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

Agriculture plays a pivotal role in Indian economy it continues to provide gainful employment and livelihood for majority of the population. Tribal women constitute half of the work force among tribals in India. Tribal women are discriminated, though they make enormous contribution to the agriculture and allied sector. They have very little access to the knowledge and skills of modern agriculture technologies and related resources. Tribal women involve in agricultural operations like winnowing, cleaning, storage. Women are the primary food producers and agricultural sustainability cannot be achieved without their active participation. Agriculture is essential to both rural and urban development and food security is a basic human right inextricably tied to sustainable agriculture. The tribal women agricultural labourers are characterized by poor conditions of work and consequently suffer high poverty levels. All of them are in the unorganized sector with little regulation or social security cover. Realizing their plight, the government has launched a number of programmes from time to time to assist them in enhancing their wage and self-employment opportunities. Evaluation studies conducted from time to time have revealed the extent of their success and weaknesses. Taking note of these inputs, the government has taken many new measures to improve the lot of agricultural labourers. Despite these measures, initiated over the last six decades since independence, the tribal women agricultural laborers are still vulnerable both with regard to finding adequate work and receiving the statutory minimum wage for manual work. There is disparity in wages paid on account of gender activities in agricultural sectors. In this line of thinking, the paper gives its attention on problems of tribal agricultural women labourers.

Key words: *Agriculture, Women, labourers, Poverty.*

Introduction

A tribe in the Indian context is an Indian group which possesses certain qualities and characteristics that make it a unique cultural, social, and political entity. The nature of what constitutes an Indian tribe and the very nature of tribes have changed considerably over the course of centuries, but certain characteristics still remain unchanged. A tribe is viewed, historically or developmentally, as a social group existing before the development of, or outside of, states. India is home to a large variety of indigenous people. The Scheduled Tribe population represents one of the most economically deprived and marginalized groups in India. With a population of more than 10.2 crores, India has the single largest tribal population in the world. This constitutes 8.6% of the total population of the country (Census of India, 2011).

A social group is usually identified by a common territory, dialect, and cultural homogeneity, social and political organization. It may include several sub groups. A tribe becomes Scheduled Tribe only when it is notified as Scheduled Tribe under Article 342 of the Constitution of India. There is no doubt that tribes are backward and exploited more when compared to other ethnic groups of our country. There is less means of communication in tribal areas, lack of proper drinking water, prevalence of illiteracy and inadequate medical facilities which are some of the major problems. Tribal development efforts in India came into force during the British rule. British rulers had to face tribal insurgency and unrest. Tribal insurgency was suppressed by the use of armed forces by the British administrators. But at the same time, the Britishers had realized the problems of the tribals. Hence, the British administration established a separate administrative system in the tribal areas.

After independence, a secular constitution was adopted to govern the country. Several constitutional provisions were made for the development of tribes. Many schemes of development were formulated and implemented. Several schemes of tribal development are still active through several five year plans in India. Attempts have been



made to make the scheduled tribes to develop socially, educationally, economically, politically and culturally. For the development of tribes, various models, approaches and theories of development have been propounded in different five-year plan periods. Some of them include Community Development Programme, Multipurpose Tribal Blocks, Tribal Development Block, Development Agencies, Primitive Tribal Groups, Integrated Tribal Development Projects, Modified Area Development Approach, Tribal Sub-Plan, Dispersed Tribal Development Programmed, and Centrally Sponsored Schemes etc.

Review of Literature

Triptimoy Mondal and Jaydeb Sarkhe (2015) make an attempt to analyze the problems faced by the poor tribal women in self-help groups (SHGs). The analysis of the data shows that majority of the women in the study area live in the most deprived conditions of ignorance and poverty, being completely unaware of their potential and individuality, leading to unhealthy lives. They sow, weed out, transplant, collect and carry the forest produce and agricultural waste from the fields to their homes as head-loads, often with their babies on their back or in the womb. In the study area, most of the disadvantaged women work as domestic workers, agricultural laborers, collectors of forest products like fire wood or saal-leaves for making plates etc, sweepers and cleaners in schools, hospitals, shops and other establishments. They do not have permanent, dignified, sustainable livelihoods. Unfortunately, agriculture has become a gambling in this area due to persistent drought conditions.

M Muniyandi and Neeru Singh (2012) in their article mention that women do more work than men as they participate in all agricultural activities (except ploughing) as well as other indigenous cottage industries. In addition, they deal with household chores. Child rearing is also their responsibility. Tribal women work hard for the livelihood of their family but maintain a poor life in spite of their contributions. Their whole income is spent over their basic requirements i.e., food and other needs. The status of women usually depends on the economic roles they play. Due to lack of skills and regular income generating activities, they are below the poverty line. Economic environment of women affects the social development.

Ramu Bhukya (2015) from whose paper it is clear that marital status determines the level of autonomy among females in any community. A majority of widows who lost bread-winners of the family have taken the entire responsibility upon themselves. They have to face insecurities, non-cooperation etc. In the study area the widows have more decision making powers in comparison with others. The unmarried females also have a high decision making role in comparison with married females. Married females have to take decision pertaining to their family members and in-laws.

Haseena V.A (2015) in her article reasons that the tribal women are the victims of the attrition between empowerment and domestic violence. Further, she argues that poor economic conditions, usurpation of their land by outside landlords, lack of employment opportunities, displacement and poverty are forcing adivasi men and women to migrate to urban areas or to areas where there is work.

Mohanty (2012) in his article highlights the existence of some crucial problems like deforestation, loss of agricultural land, environmental degradation, and marginalization of the schedule tribes.

Methodology

The researcher has collected the essential data from Puliampatty village of Kolli hills, Namakkal district in Tamil Nadu. This particular village consists of 160 households. There are 53 landless women agricultural labourers who have been interviewed by using semi-structured interview scheduled as the tool of data collection. The researcher used systematic random sample method.

Major Findings of the Study

1. More than half of proportion of the respondents (53.4%) have lost their agricultural lands due to indebt.
2. Majority of the respondents (76.9%) started to work in agriculture before marriage.
3. More than half proportion of the respondents' spouses (58.0%) is addicted.



4. 30.1% of the respondents involve in agricultural operations because of spouse's low income, investment in children's education and high indebtedness, only spouse's low income and spouse's low income, large size of family, investment in children's education.
5. Majority of the respondents (74.0%) involves in agricultural work throughout the year.
6. More than half proportion of the respondents (52.1%) feel all domestic work as a burden.
7. 57.7% of the respondents face the wage discrimination in agriculture.
8. A sizeable proportion of the respondents (84.3%) take rest while involving in agricultural activities.
9. 30.1% has faced instrumental hazards both sickle and spade.
10. An overwhelming proportion of the respondents (92.9%) suffer from seasonal diseases during the agricultural activities.

Conclusion

The present study finds more than half of proportion of the respondents has lost their agricultural lands due to indebtedness and majority of the respondents started to work in agriculture before marriage because their livelihood is agriculture. Unfortunately, More than half proportion of the respondents' spouses is addicted and there are reasons for involve in agricultural operations because of spouse's low income, investment in children's education and high indebtedness, only spouse's low income and spouse's low income, large size of family, investment in children's education. Majority of the respondents involves in agricultural work throughout the year, More than half proportion of the respondents feel all domestic work as a burden because they play dual role. Women still face the wage discrimination in agriculture and a sizeable proportion of the respondents take rest while involving in agricultural activities followed by they face instrumental hazards both sickle and spade and suffer from seasonal diseases during the agricultural activities.

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