



RELEVANCE OF TRIBAL LANDLESS WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS: A SOCIOLOGICAL OBSERVATION FROM KOLLI HILLS, NAMAKKAL DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

The agriculture sector is one providing plenty of employment opportunities to a major proportion of Indian population. Agriculture is still a family enterprise where the entire family participates as a unit and the share of women is half of the human resource in agriculture. The social, economic and cultural conditions of the area determine women's participation in home and agricultural activities. It also varies from region to region and within a region their involvement varies with different farming systems, castes, classes and socio-economic status. Women are an integral part of the human society. Women contribute one third labour force required for agricultural operations and allied sectors. They play a significant role at home, in agriculture and allied activities. The typical day of a tribal agricultural women starts from early morning and lasts till late evening. Household activities and the management of crops and livestock keep them engaged throughout the day. The women, per force, take up agriculture as the mainstay of their income. In this context the researchers carried out a study in the Kolli Hills on Namakkal district of Tamil Nadu which highlights the salient features of the landless tribal women agricultural labourers who sacrificing their lives for sustaining agriculture. Even from their childhood these women work alongside their parents in the agricultural fields to augment the family income. After their marriage the women relocate to their husband's place and continue to engage themselves in the agricultural work. These women are exposed to extreme weather conditions as they toil in the fields to make the ends meet which ultimately tells affects their health. Their income, however, small is still necessary to meet the family's economic needs and so they, even at the risk of their health, still do not stay away from work. Factors like the education of their children, taking care of the elders in the family and their own important role in the family are met by the income from agriculture. In the light of forgoing, this study, attempts to highlight the role of the landless women agricultural labourers in sustaining agriculture.

Key words: Agriculture, Tribal landless Women, Health.

Introduction

India still lives in villages whose main occupation is agriculture, because around 70.00 per cent of its population is involved in this occupation. Our rural sector is one of the biggest primary sectors in the world after China, with over 74.00 per cent of its population living in rural areas. In India, more than 90.00 per cent of the labor force is employed in unorganized sector, where there is no provision of social security and other benefits of employment as in the organized sector (Chauhan, 2011). The tribal population of our country, as per the 2011 census, is 10.43 crore, constituting 8.6% of the total population. 89.97% of them live in rural areas and the remaining 10.03% in urban areas. The decadal population growth of the tribals from Census 2001 to 2011 has been 23.66 % against the figure of 17.69% of the entire population. There are about 449 tribes and sub-tribes in different parts of India. The states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Karnataka are the states having a larger number of scheduled tribal populations in the country. Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Jammu & Kashmir, Tripura, Mizoram, Bihar, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu account for another 15.30 per cent of the total scheduled tribal population.

Status of Tribal Women in India

The level of social practice in a society reflects significantly on the status of women in that society while factors like women's level of income, employment, education, health and fertility are often the determinants of women's status, their roles within the family, the community and the society also play a role in their status. The role of women is quite substantial and rather crucial in tribal communities. Their women, engaged in agriculture play a crucial role in a wide range of activities, empowering them with a comprehensive understanding about work



participation, gender issues, drudgery and health and nutritional status is necessary to enable them contribute to sustainable agriculture development and to achieve inclusive agricultural growth. The concept of tribal women's participation in the growth of the agriculture sector is broad and multidimensional. Women's empowerment in agriculture is an important component of that inclusive growth. India's track record of women's empowerment and gender equality is rather poor that is reflected in many indicators. In many parts of India the sex ratio is 940 females to every 1000 males. The 2014 Global Human Development Report on the Gender Inequality Index ranks India at the 135th position out of the 187 countries covered by the report. Women from the down-trodden communities viz the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and the minorities face discrimination, exploitation and enjoy only very limited employment opportunities.

Status of Tribal Women in Tamil Nadu

In Tamil Nadu, the tribal population is 7, 94,967, constituting 1.10 per cent of the states total population. (Census of India, 2011). There are around 38 tribes and sub-tribes in Tamil Nadu of whole population only 27.90 per cent are literates. Tamil Nadu is second to Kerala in terms of human development indicators. Scheduled Tribes make up just one percent of the population, most of whole live in the forests of the Nilgiri Hills and the Eastern and the Western Ghats. The tribal people are predominantly farmers and cultivators depending on the forest lands for their livelihood. Of the many distinct tribes, the Kotas, the Todas, the Irulas, and Kurumbas form the larger groups, who mainly eke out a pastoral existence. Other tribes include Kattunayakan and Paniyan.

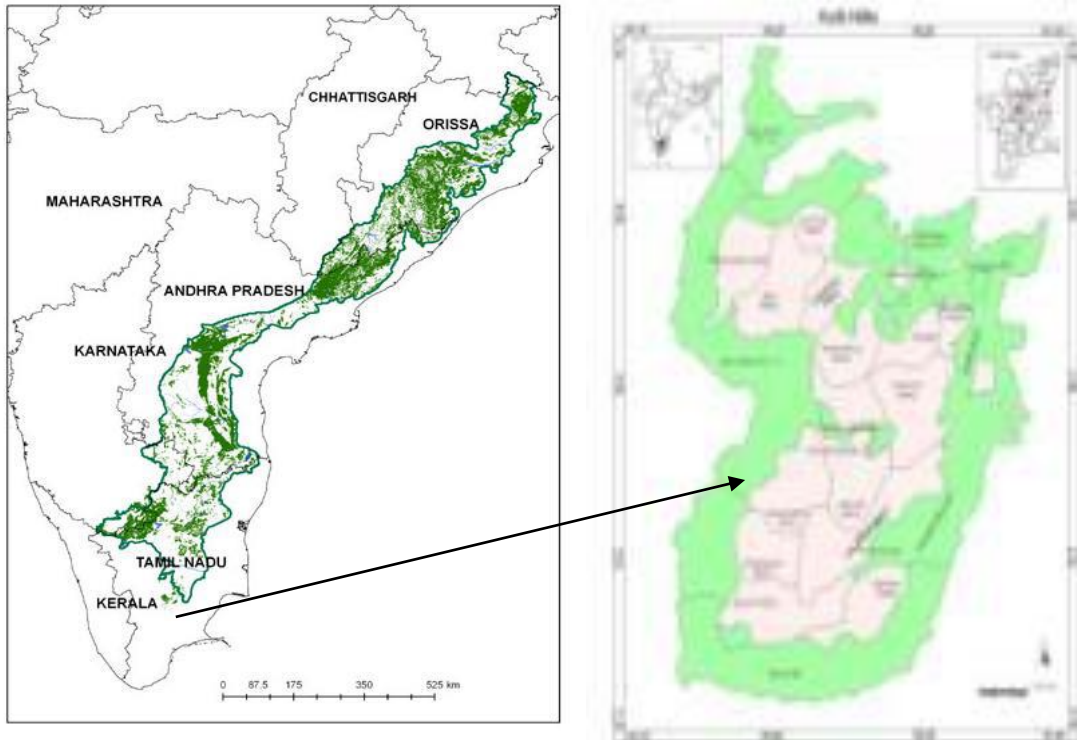
Tribal Women Labourers in Agriculture

Tribal women, over 80.00 per cent of them, work in the primary sector against the general population. Of these about 44.75 per cent are cultivators while the remaining 36.30 per cent are agricultural labourers. Unlike other communities the tribal people place no restrictions on their women's participation in the cultivation process. A tribal woman can participate actively in all agricultural operations including, ploughing, digging, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing, winnowing and storing food grains. However, in agriculturally backward areas, tribal women are not allowed to dig or plough the field whereas they can participate actively in all other agricultural operations which are traditionally considered a female's job. Processing of food grain is exclusively a woman's job. Every morning, tribal women husk the paddy in husking levers, clean the grains and cook the same.

Besides saving money they also earn it unlike the women of other communities. Although, tribal women do the same work in agriculture as their male partners, their status remains the same. Tribal women work very hard for the livelihood of the whole family. Despite their contributions in the running the family and in the farm activities they live a poor life. Their pivotal role both in agriculture as well as household affairs has not earned them, due recognition and as such any talk about tribal welfare in agriculture carries no meaning.

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.



Traditional Way of Processing Millets



Major Findings of the Study

1. More than three-fourth of the respondents (72.84%) are married,
2. More than three-fourth of the respondents (75.18%) are illiterates,
3. Most of the respondents (61.65%) come from the family size of 3-5,
4. A sizable proportion (89.78%) belongs to nuclear families in the study,
5. A sizeable proportion (88.49%) earns Rs. 1001- 2000 per month,
6. An overwhelming proportion of the respondents (95.83%) gains additional income from livestock,
7. Unfortunately, an overwhelming proportion of the respondents (93.58%) does not have the habit of saving in the study village,
8. Due to family commitment, majority of the respondents (70.63%) starts to earn under the age of 15,



9. Nearly three-fourth of the respondents (76.46%) involves in agricultural work throughout the year and the data prove that majority of the women depend on agriculture sector for their livelihood,
10. Nearly half proportion of the respondents (42.42%) involve in agricultural activities for more than 8 hours per day,
11. 100% of the respondents involves in all agricultural activities like sowing, transplanting, weeding, cutting, picking, cleaning of grains, drying of grains, storage and processing, winnowing, weeding, harvesting etc.

Conclusion

The present study reveals how important is the role of the tribal women in sustaining agriculture as they, short of ploughing the fields, render maximum labourer in all the agricultural activities such as cutting, picking, cleaning of grains, drying of grains, storage and processing, winnowing, weeding, gap filling, grading, shifting produce to threshing and cleaning of field. Thus, we come to the natural conclusion that tribal women are indispensable in sustaining agriculture.

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