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## STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

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## ABSTRACT

*Farming in India is mainly a family occupation. Farmwomen are an integral part of the human society but there has been little realization about the contribution of women in the economic activities of a country. This was a position in most of countries till recently and India is no exception. In tribal communities, the role of women is substantial and crucial. They constitute about half the total population but in tribal society women are more important than in other social groups, because they work harder and the family, economy and management depends on them. Even after industrialization and the resultant commercialization swamped the tribal economy, women continued to play a significant role. Collection of minor forest produce is done mostly by women and children. Though they are industrious, they have limited control over resources and economic activities. Therefore, there is a need for empowerment of tribal women in order to overcome inequality, discrimination and exploitation. In this background, a descriptive study is made to highlight, the status of tribal women in agriculture, evidences of empowerment of tribal women in agriculture and to suggest suitable measures for the attainment of inclusive growth.*

## KEYWORDS

tribal women, empowerment, status.

## INTRODUCTION

Even cultural anthropological literature suggests that agriculture is invention of women. Farming in India is mainly a family occupation. Most of the family members are acutely engaged in farming. The timely and judicious decisions by the farm families have a direct bearing on the agricultural development in country. Farmwomen are an integral part of the human society but there has been little realization about the contribution of women in the economic activities of a country. This was a position in most of countries till recently and India is no exception. Farmwomen are the backbone of Indian agriculture. Growing food has been an interminable saga of her life. Like other rural women, tribal farmwomen also play an important role in agriculture. No field operation is beyond the reach of women (Chauhan 2011).

The tribal population is an integral part of India's social fabric and has the second largest concentration after that of the African continent. It is more than the total population of France and Britain and four times that of Australia. In tribal communities, the role of women is substantial and crucial. They constitute about half the total population but in tribal society women are more important than in other social groups, because they work harder and the family, economy and management depends on them. Even after industrialization and the resultant commercialization swamped the tribal economy, women continued to play a significant role. Collection of minor forest produce is done mostly by women and children.

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 asset in their society. But they are still lagging far behind in the different walks of life like education, employment, good health and economic empowerment etc. Though they are industrious, they have limited control over resources and economic activities. Therefore, there is a need for empowerment of tribal women in order to overcome inequality, discrimination and exploitation and to achieve their all-round development in the society (Puttaraja & Heggade 2012).

The concept of empowerment can be looked at from two perspectives - a process and a state. The process of empowerment is defined as "enhancing the capacity of an individual or group to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes" and the state of empowerment is defined as "an individual or group having the capacity both to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes" (World Bank; 2007). **Empowerment of tribal farm women is a need of the time in agrarian country like India where farming is mainly a family occupation.**

Tribal women are important for the improvement and progress of tribals. They are the pivot of tribal agriculture, performing many household and agricultural jobs. Without them, tribal welfare in agriculture is meaningless. **In this background a descriptive study is made to highlight, the status of tribal women in agriculture, evidences of empowerment of tribal women in agriculture and to suggest suitable measures for the attainment of inclusive growth.**

## STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Scheduled Tribes (STs) are indigenous, have their own distinctive culture, geographically isolated and are low in socio-economic conditions. For centuries, the tribal groups have remained outside the realm of the general development process due to their habitation in forests and hilly tracts. After independence, Government of India has scheduled the tribal groups in the Constitution and provided special provisions for their welfare and development as in the case of SCs. There are about 654 ST communities across the States in India and 75 of the STs are most backward and are termed as Primitive Tribal Groups. Most of the tribal areas are hilly, inaccessible undulating plateau lands in the forest areas of the country resulting in the bypassing of general developmental programmes.

According to the 2001 Census, the population of STs is 84.3 million constituting 8.2% of the total population of the country. Chhattisgarh (31.8%) has the highest percentage of ST population followed by Jharkhand (26.3%) and Orissa (22.1%). These proportions are in the lowest in Uttar Pradesh (0.1 %), Bihar (0.9 %), Tamil Nadu (1.0 %) and Kerala (1.1%). There are 75 districts in the country which have more than 50% ST concentration and in terms of villages there are 90,189 villages with more than 50% ST concentration. ST population was 3.01 crore representing about 6.9% during 1961 and this has reached to 8.43 crore (8.2%) during 2001. Over 80% of tribals work in the primary sector against 53% of the general population. About 45% are cultivators against 32.5% of the general population. According to available data, the number of tribal who were cultivators, declined from over 68% to 45% in 2001, whereas agricultural laborers increased from about 20% to 37%, an indication that tribals are steadily losing their lands. Unlike other communities, among tribals there are no restrictions on women's participation in the cultivation process. A tribal woman can participate actively in all agricultural operations including, ploughing, digging, sowing, manuring, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, preparing the granary, threshing, winnowing and storing food grains. In agriculturally backward areas, tribal women are forbidden to touch a plough and cannot dig the ground but in all other agricultural operations, women participate actively and traditionally these are a female's job. Processing of food grain is exclusively a woman's job. Every morning tribal women dehusk millet and paddy in husking levers and then clean the grains and cooks them. They not only save money, but also earn it, unlike females of other communities.

## EVIDENCES OF THEIR STATUS

Poorer the tribal families, the greater are the dependency on women's economic productivity (Atcharya and Samantray 2013).

Tribal women work as men's partners in agriculture, yet their status remains the same. Tribal women work very hard for the livelihood of the family but live a poor life, in spite of their many contributions in the house and on the farm (Awais, Alam and Asif 2009).

There is a scope of integrating tribal people, women in particular, in the modern day forest economy for both economic and ecological gains (un published source). The majority of the decisions regarding farm management were not performed by tribal farm women, thus they were husband dominated decisions such as, when to irrigate the fields, quantity and type of fertilizers to be used in the farm introduction of new crop variety, buying farm machinery/equipment, using plant protection measures, borrowing money for farm operation, installing oil engine, electric motor and pumps, selection of seed, deciding area to be sown under each crop etc (Chauhan 2011).

Sericulture provides tremendous opportunities to the women in the tribal areas particularly in silkworm rearing and reeling activities with reference to income. Sericulture can serve better for the additional income generation and lay concrete on the way for the local employment generation. After adopting the sericulture, they need not go to money lenders or any middle man thus resulted their self-respect elevated and they recognized socially. They also released from the debt ness (Dewangan et al 2011).

Sericulture is a potential sector of the agriculture to raise economic status of the farming community and also earning foreign revenue (Thapa and Shrestha, 1999). Women farmers in the tribal villages of Odisha, eastern India, are increasing their yields through the use of hybrid seed varieties, new technologies and better agriculture practices with training and support from the Cereal Systems Initiative for South Asia (CSISA) project and the Odisha agricultural department. The work burden of these women has been reduced with the use of the seed drill. (Anuradha Dhar 2014)

The need for empowerment of tribal's hardly needs justification. Their primitive way of life, economic and social backwardness, low level of literacy, outdated system of production, absence of value systems, sparse physical infrastructure in backward tribal areas and demographic quality of tribal areas make the development of tribal's and tribal areas essential.

## SUGGESTIONS

Tribal women play a major role in the co-management of their natural, social, economic resources and agricultural development including crop production, live-stock production, horticulture and post-harvest operations but they remain backward due to traditional values, illiteracy, superstitions, and dominant roles in decision-making, social evils and many other cultural factors. Economic independence is one of the stepping stones towards overall empowerment. In this regard the following measures are suggested to gain economic independence and be empowered through agriculture.

- Increasing agricultural production through conservation to settled agriculture, where possible, with linkage to easy credit and markets and assured irrigation.
- A comprehensive survey of water resources, including surface water and groundwater, in tribal areas with the help of remote sensing will be helpful for the tribal women to plan for cultivation.
- Diversification of agriculture and non-farm sectors could create job opportunities and thus avoids migration.
- Women to be encouraged to grow new varieties of nutritious vegetables and fruits at their homes, which will cater to the health needs of the family, and at the same time they can earn money by selling the surplus.
- Tribal women could be trained by the SHGs in vermi compose, kitchen gardening etc.
- Tribal women co-operatives should be encouraged to undertake dairy, sericulture, fisheries, handicrafts, horticulture, agri-food processing and post-harvest technologies.
- Provision of training in modern techniques to all tribal women should be given regularly so that their work becomes easier and crop production increases.
- Research and extension activities should be encouraged by Government agencies and NGOs to improve current practices, increase output and income and eliminate adverse ecological effects.

## CONCLUSION

Women in agriculture play a vital role in wide range of activities, thereby contributing to sustainable agricultural development. To achieve inclusive agricultural growth, empowering women by having comprehensive understanding about work participation, gender issues, drudgery and health and nutritional status is very much necessary.

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