



RESEARCH ARTICLE



STUMBLING BLOCKS ENCOUNTERED FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CHENCHU WOMEN OF ANDHRA PRADESH

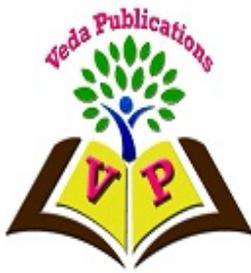
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ABSTRACT



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The Chenchu women of Andhra Pradesh, belonging to one of India's Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), navigate a complex web of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional challenges that hinder their empowerment and well-being. This study explores the multifaceted stumbling blocks they encounter, including limited access to education, healthcare, and sustainable livelihoods, compounded by entrenched gender norms and geographic isolation. Despite government interventions and tribal welfare schemes, Chenchu women often remain marginalized due to systemic gaps in policy implementation and cultural disconnects. Through qualitative interviews and field-based observations, this research highlights the lived experiences of Chenchu women, revealing how traditional roles, poverty, and lack of awareness about entitlements restrict their socio-economic mobility. The findings underscore the urgent need for culturally sensitive, community-driven development models that prioritize gender equity, skill-building, and participatory governance. By amplifying the voices of Chenchu women, this paper contributes to the broader discourse on tribal empowerment and calls for inclusive strategies that recognize and respond to their unique realities.

Keywords: *Nomadic, Tribal Women, Small Business, Civilization*



INTRODUCTION

Our country is known for diversity of socio-ethnic groups. We have countless number of castes and sub castes, linguistic groups, religious cults and sects. The Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC) constitute major portion of the under privileged section of the society. There are few more castes and tribes which are not included in the above mentioned categories. These groups were mostly wandering in nature and don't have permanent residence. They have no single identity in India. Some of these tribes are categorized as 'nomadic tribes' whereas some others as 'De-notified tribes'. All these tribes are collectively known as De-notified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs).

Nomadic tribes are mostly widespread today in far-flung, remote and unpopulated regions, it is also found in more crowded and developed regions. Some nomadic populations occupy remote regions, environmentally marginal and distant from centres of civilisation and power, but other nomadic pastoral populations like the CHENCHU, YENADIS, YERUKALA, GOND migrate through regions of agricultural settlements and often pass, and even halt at, major cities and towns. Stopovers at markets may in act determine some of the routes taken by nomads. Thus nomads have long negotiated both wilderness and busy settlements. Rao and Casimir (2003) wrote that in times when settlements were few, roads limited, and communication over long distances rare, nomads were seen to be the carriers of news, goods and resources from other societies.

CHENCHU TRIBES

The Chenchu's has been in transition from being a relatively independent; self-reliant and self-determining entity to one dependent on the vagaries of money markets, labour. Promote the importance of protecting a community's local heritage and ecological capital as effective economic development strategy, Sustainability principles should be the cornerstone of any community employment and economic strategy, Community's Economic base should be consistent with the "Ecology of Commerce". I.e. Community may be able to encourage and promote business activities that not only provide jobs, income, and economic base but also are environmentally restorative in nature. Eg; Leaf plate making etc.; the significance and the value of the infrastructure composition of the environment and its dynamics have received little attention in Economics. Therefore, identify and facilitate new techniques to bridge natural resource conservation with jobs and community based development (CBD).

Supporting small business that creates new markets for socially and environmentally responsible goods and services builds the consumer base for these products which in turn creates demand for more goods produced in a sustainable matter (Ex; Raising of medicinal plants) Offer a revolving loan fund for high-risk projects and help to provide access to the local bank loans. Poverty alleviation through sustainable livelihood development for Chench's of Nallamalai Region. "Livelihoods are the means and opportunities for living, governed by resource ownership, skills, access, productivity, entitlements and vulnerabilities at the individual family and collective levels". It comprises the capabilities, assets



(including both material and social resources) and 10 activities required for a means of living.

STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN

The term 'status' of tribal women refers to (i) the position of women occupy in households, workers and citizens (ii) Women empowerment, decision power and human dignity attached to their positions and (iii) rights and duties they are expected to perform. Mason (1984) points out that the status of women has three dimensions i.e., prestige, power and autonomy (freedom to take decision about education, marriage, employment, health care, in the family) and empowerment to take decision in the family, official and political roles where ever they are discharging their functions.

The status of women is not the same in all tribes; it differs from tribe to tribe due to their cultural traits. However by and large, the status of tribal women is very low in the sense that they have no access to knowledge, economic resources, decision taking power, and they have the lowest degree of personal autonomy. However, some studies revealed otherwise also in certain minor groups in some tribal areas. Though the extent of tribal women labour working as pure labourer and their participation as labourers in private and public sector is very low, yet most of the tribal women work irrespective of their economic position. They share more or less equal responsibility with men in the economic activities. When men work in other towns and cities, women carry out agricultural work at home lands. If we take education as a socio-economic indicator of tribal women their literacy rate is low.

Tribal women are not having own lands for cultivation and to improve their economic condition. Women are totally unaware of their rights regarding property. Their political awareness is very low, as they neither read newspapers nor listen to the news through radio or television. The electricity or artificial power availability does not exist due to that they are deprived of receiving communication and knowledge about the present development of society and technology. Their participation in the political representation in the tribal councils and village panchayats are poor. However, there are some tribal communities like Bagatha, Yerukula, Yanadi, Koya, Naiks, Meena, Sema Naga and Tharus, etc., in which the status of women cannot be said to be low on every count.

There is no serious widow problem in tribal societies. A widow is free to remarry. There are some tribes where a widow marries her deceased husband's younger brother (levirate type of marriage). Divorce is permitted in many tribal societies. The procedure of divorce is also simple, as it will be held with mutual consent, a formal ceremony and return gifts taken from bridegroom. The community elders will grant the divorce. After divorce they can marry with their willing persons. Thus the individual consent is more honoured by the tribal community.

The educated and well-employed tribal groups are having good hygienic conditions among female population, still in most of the tribal women the health conditions were founded be deteriorating due to inaccessibility of medical care and health facilities. In modem times, the traditional herbal medicines are being discouraged due to non-awareness of tribal



herbal medicine. Allopathic medicines and services are not adequately available to them. The Primary Health Centers are not catering the needs of tribes living in interior hilly tracts. The tribal women were found to be scantily dressed up because of their acute poverty. As they are not able to change their clothes regularly due to non-availability of dress and it resulted skin diseases. In view of scarcity of water, they are not able to take bath regularly. The tribal women are bringing the water from streams and ponds, which are very far to their huts.

The male tribals are attending to ploughing of the cultivating lands and collection of minor forest produce. Whereas the tribal woman not only assists the husband in all kinds of agricultural operations, collection, processing and marketing of Marginal Forest Produce (MFP), in addition to her regular household duties of bringing fire wood, water, cleaning, making good utensils, cooking, looking after children and all kinds of activities connected with maintenance and management of the house. The woman works in the fields of forest till the last days of her delivery and again resumes to her regular duties soon after the purificatory bath is performed. Thus her hard work and suffering is intolerable. The ethics and humanity teachings should be done by the Non government organizations and teachers in the tribal area has to do these counseling work for the improvement of women working conditions in the house as well as cultivation and collecting forest goods.

Further the Women's "triple burden" of reproduction, domestic work and productive labour work contributes to their lower survival rates. These factors if not properly tackled will be obstacles in the

way of improving the quality of life of women population.

Eating egg among some tribal communities of Visakhapatnam district is a taboo, as they believe that if pregnant women eat egg, the child would be born without hair on the head. This concept deprives nutrition food to the pregnant women.

Prior to advent of development in tribal areas, tribal societies were having their own herbal pharmacopoeia. The women folk were able to maintain reasonable health standards with administration of herbal medicines. A woman breast-feeds the child till the baby begins to walk and till that time sexual relations are tabooed. Because of this taboo pre-natal and post-natal disease among women folk are rare and this restriction automatically limits family size.

Now a days these rigid traditions are disappearing due to contacts with non-tribes. Large-scale immigration of non-tribes into tribal areas is also resulting in transmission of venereal diseases (VD) to innocent females. After the construction of buildings and railway track by the DBK Railway at Araku Valley and Drumbiguda Mandals of Visakhapatnam district, the incidence of V.D. increased. (Study report of TCR&TI1970).

Wherever tribal population is exposed to modern civilization, the women folk are the worst sufferers due to exploitation. As the tribal settlements are found in the interior places, modern medical facilities are not accessible to them therefore; they suffer irreparable damages to their lives. The health conditions and transport system is very poor in tribal areas. The posts of doctors, nurses and compounders



are vacant. If the Doctors and staff are available the medicines and infrastructure facilities like ambulance, oxygen and emergency equipment is not available with the hospitals in tribal areas. These are the backlogs, which are damaging the lives of tribals, and timely treatment is not available in case of emergency.

Women's health is basic to their advance in all fields of endeavour. Though health of women has been identified for priority attention and efforts made for maternal and child services since the planned development in India, much remains to be done to improve health care for women both in qualitative and quantitative terms.

Women face high risk of malnutrition, retardation in growth and development, disease, disability and even death at three critical stages in their lives viz. infancy, early childhood and reproductive phase. The health care facilities offered by a community in the form of medical services for women, is a significant index of the emphasis that a community places on the health of its women.

In the light of various constrains that impedes the positive impartation of true sexual behavior aloof the dreadful hazards of genital elements and its related infections including HIV.

Violence against women is also a manifestation of class oppression. Domestic violence, battering, dowry, rape suicide are the manifestations of gender inequalities within the family system. Women do not own the land, the house. Her wages are not equal if she is working. Her earnings are not considered important for families' sustenance. Since women are not given rights to the family property and assets,

dowry is legitimized as her share in property. Women's exclusion from the ownership of land is largely the basis of their subordination and dependence on men.

CONCLUSION

As per the customary laws prevalent in all the tribal societies, except a few matriarchal societies the women are not entitled for a property share within the family's or ancestral property except in families where there are no male members in the family. There are no matriarchal tribal societies in Andhra Pradesh 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 our country.

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