



Contemporaneity of English Language and Literature in the Robotized Millennium

Vol: 2(1), March 2023

REST Publisher; ISSN: 2583-7370 (Online)

Website: <https://restpublisher.com/journals/cellrm/>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46632/cellrm/2/1/2>



Situation of Tribal Women in South India's Economy

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Abstract. The status of Tribal Women has been like a moving equilibrium various time and in various parts of the globe. It has sometimes been liberal and other times of constraint and subordination. With regard to India, gradual variations are marked in the writings of Vedic, Puranic, Medieval and Modern age Writers. The constitution of India guarantees several rights to Scheduled Tribes. Various studies on the South Indian tribals have always ignored tribal women though they continue to constitute half of the tribal population. Predominantly, the male bias remained largely unrestricted as such studies were by and large, carried out by the male. The latter extracted information from male respondents, as the women were comparatively difficult to approach due to their inherent reluctance for the purpose. Women have been playing a significant role in the society and culture and will continue to do the same in future. Even when the intimate relation of man and woman is accepted and women have been occupying a very important status in the social milieu, the treatment of men and women has been differentiated in social structure as well as social organization.

Keywords: Tribal women, territory, economy, culture, socio- economy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Different parameters govern the status and role of men and women. The segregation and synthesis are regulated by the ideas, expectations, rights, duties, privileges, taboos, roles and activities having bearing in certain universal traits of human thinking. More so, they are compartmentalized as per convenience requirement and suitability of different societies. To be precise, the formation of men and women, in totality of the ways of life are well delineated. They are equally important and absolute. If one formation is weak, it is bound to reflect on the other. The balance of entire infrastructure of life and culture of a group of people would thus, be better maintained if the world of women is not under rated by the world of men. To obtain a strong infrastructure, none of the balancing forces should suffer from lack of strength. The tribe itself is the basic social unit for the community. India has the second largest concentration of tribal population after that of the African continent. The population of tribals in India according to 1991 census is 6.78 crores. This paper essentially deals with the status of south Indian Tribal Women in tradition and changing contexts. Status is position in pattern of reciprocal behaviour and is embodiment of rights, duties, privileges, taboos, etc., as part of social structure of society each and every social group assigns a specific social status to its women folk and hence it cannot be measured as high and low. It deals with the various definitions of tribes and their origin. The paper on childbirth vividly describes the various ceremonies, customs, female infanticide among the tribals and education consists of tribal's education system, their attitude towards education, government's encouragement and efforts of voluntary organizations for the tribal women's upliftment. In tribal India, a tribe is definitely a territorial group, having traditional territory and emigrants always refer to it as their home. The Santhal working in the Assam tea gardens refer to particular regions of Bihar or Bengal as their home. All members of a tribe are kin to each other, but within every Indian tribe kinship operates as a strong, associate, regulative and intergrating principle. The consequence is tribal endogamy and the division of a tribe into clans and subclans and so on. These clans etceteras, being kin groups are exogamous. The Imperial Gazetteer defines a tribe as a collection of families, which have a common name and a common dialect and occupy or profess to occupy a common territory and which have been if they are not endogamous. A tribe was a homogeneous and self-contained unit without any hierarchical discrimination. They are the autochthonous people

of the land who are believed to be the earliest settlers, in India peninsula. They are generally called the Adivasis, implying original inhabitants. The ancient and medieval literature mention various tribes. Each tribe has its own system among the tribes. There was decentralisation of authority among the tribes. There is no religious bar for specifying a tribe as a schedule tribe.

The term 'Tribe' is commonly used in social science literature, particularly in anthropology to describe certain categories of pre-literate cultures. Despite its wide currency, it has not been defined with scientific rigour and continues to be used to describe a wide range of forms of social organisation and levels of techno economic development. In the evolutionary perspective, it referred to a social form intermediate between the band and nation, and in this sense it represented a territorially defined social group. In the Indian context the term tribe has never been defined precisely and satisfactorily. It was used, at one time, to denote a bewildering variety of social categories that were neither analogous nor comparable. The Rajput and the Jat as well as the aboriginal and the primitive groups. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has taken initiative steps to safeguard the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes at the constitutional level. The tribes have no permanent crystal line structure belonging to a particular stage of historical and social development. The Government minded the social backwardness, economic inequality, exploitation of non tribes and inter tribes and poor educational standard of the tribal community. Provisions have been made in the constitution to protect the rights and interests of the community. The word Tribals' have been used all through the literature to address these persons. As the word has come in parlance so it conveys the set meaning of a social group speaking a distinctive language or dialect and possessing a distinctive culture that makes it off from other tribes. Verrier Elwin does not define the tribals but specifies their characteristic when he writes most of the tribals are hill people and they like to have their houses on the side of hills and do not usually arrange them in their village". Late Prof. Majumdar's definition may be worth mentioning as it comes closest to our purpose. "A tribe is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous, with no specialization of functions, rules by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united language or dialect, recognizing social distance from tribes to caste but without any stigma attached in the case of a caste structure, following tribal traditions, beliefs and customs, liberal of naturalization of ideas from alien sources and above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration. The Education commission appointed in 1882 was the first to take initiatives to define the tribes and recommended policies for their upliftment. Article 46 promises that 'the status shall promote the educational and economic interest of the scheduled tribes with special care and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

The tribals have had a heterogeneous cultural and economic pattern of life, largely conditioned by the ecological setting and ethnic environment for centuries, in to the tribal communities which have lived in isolation from the social mainstream, their cultural and transmitting their skills and knowledge through oral tradition from one generation to the other. The economic life of the tribals is specific in nature. The board economic classifications based on the manner in which they primarily and distinctively make their living are eight.

1. Forest-hunting type
2. Hill cultivation type
3. Settled Agriculture type
4. Simple Artisan type
5. Cattle-herder type
6. Labour, Agriculture and Industrial types
7. Folk-Artist type
8. White-collar jobs and trader type

The tribals are usually surrounded by thick forests. They live in hilly regions away from the modern world. The forests are an integral part of the tribal economy. The forests and the tribals are inseparable. Very rightly, the tribals consider the forest as their nourishing mother. The use of forests and their produce in tradition to tribal economy as food-gatherers and agriculturists. In drought situations the forest are the only sources of subsistence for the tribals. They provide food, wood for fencing, fuel and serve as pasture grounds for the cattle of the tribals. There are in-built elements of the tribal economy. The forests which are their nourishing mother had also protected their interent culture which are of the utmost value to the tribals from the rest of the world and hence they are deprived of any kind of modern development. The lack of communication and transport facilities are also due thick forests, heavy rainfall and number of rivers and rivulets running through them. On the one hand, forests are an important element in their economy while on the other, these have proved to be obstacles in their development. The tribals

residing in forest areas constitute human resources. As the forests are a part of the tribal economy, any forest policy with less stress on tribal development will be a lopsided one. On the other hand, any plan for tribal development should give priority to exploitation of forest for the benefit of the tribals. In short, there must be interlinking at every stage in plans for tribal development and forest policy. This helps to raise their standard of living and at the same time preserve their cultural identity. Employment facilities are to be provided in the tribal areas. Programmed forest development can have much higher employment potentiality. There must be coordination between forest policy and tribal development.

Until recently, tribals enjoyed autonomy in matter of forests. Now, government as a policy grants some concessions to the tribals, to use some of the facilities of the forests. The tribals have a tendency to look upon the forest as their own as they have been habituated to it for generations together. Hence granting a few concessions will not solve the problems. In this respect the Tribal –sub plan has placed to emphasis on forest co-operatives. Tribal development will automatically ensure national development and serve as a distinct advantage to the national economy. Hardworking, god-fearing, honest, and humble, their's is a society ridden with superstition and ignorance which makes them vulnerable and extremely backward. Perhaps the best way to further the tribals cause and to improve their social and economic condition would be to adopt a Gandhian plan for tribal development. Gandhian economics favour the generation of employment leading to self-sufficiency through the setting up of cottage industries in the tribal areas. Such industries as oil ghanis, leather chappals, simple agricultural implements, small utility articles, handspun and hand-woven woollen clothing need very little by way of finance. The principal occupational structure of tribal communities revolves around agriculture and collection of minor forest produce. A sizeable number practise hunting and shifting cultivation. These groups are largely found in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa. Despite their heterogeneous socio-economic background, a number of Adivasi communities depend primarily on forest and land. It is these two sectors of the Adivasi economy which have been subjected to a large-scale exploitation since Independence. With the introduction of a new legal system supported by refurbished revenue machinery, the traditional rights of Adivasis were severely jeopardized. Displacement also occurred due to the forest policies and industrialization initiated by the state government in the Adivasi regions. The construction of large-scale irrigation dams and implementation of the anti-Adivasi Forest laws resulted in a massive denudation of forest and their resource system.

2. CONCLUSION

Tribal economy is intimately connected with forest and forest economy. The tribal community had traditionally subsisted on forest and forest-produced. This symbiotic relationship had been recognized but had not been articulated in terms of clear policies and programmes. Tribal economy and forest economy, therefore, have tended to drift apart with adverse implications to both. In some cases, forests have suffered. This has happened because for over a century the Forest Department had been more of a quasi- commercial organization or a quasi-social or quasi-welfare department. Tribal community generally clings to a crude economic state or organization i.e., they have a primitive technology and this is considered as one of the important criteria. Homogeneity or lack of social stratification is another tribal feature. This paper provides the situation of socio-economic, culture, religious and constitutional aspects of south Indian tribal women.

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