

Socio-Economic Empowerment of Tribal Women in High Altitude and Tribal Zone of Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract: The study was conducted in tribal dominated mandals of High Altitude and Tribal Zone of Andhra Pradesh. With the help of exploratory research design, data was collected from 180 farmers and analysed with the help of suitable statistical methods. Tribal women play a significant role in the economic development of tribals as they contribute in various economic activities. Women's work is regarded as crucial for the survival of tribal households in terms of provisioning food, income, earning and management of financial resources. Extent of information seeking behavior, Achievement motivation and credit orientation were found to be medium. Extent of mass media exposure is found to be low. About 50 per cent respondents expressed limited social participation, lack of access and control of productive resources and services and finally less than 20 per cent of respondents indicated location of isolated villages, limited extension staff, no access to basic amenities.

Key words: Tribal, Women, Socio-Economic, Empowerment,

I. INTRODUCTION

The status of women in a society is a significant reflection of the level of social justice in that society. Women's status is often described in terms of their level of income employment, education, health, roles within the family, the community and society. In tribal communities, the role of women is substantial and crucial because they work harder and the family economy & management depends on them. Collection of minor forest produce is done mostly by women and children. Many also work as labourers in construction, households & industries. However, tribal women face problems and challenges in getting a sustainable livelihood and a decent life due to environmental degradation and the interference of outsiders. The strategy for tribal development and specially women needs improvement, betterment, development and upliftment to effect their empowerment. Tribal women have adjusted themselves to live a traditional life style in the local environment and follow occupations based on natural resources. The developmental programmes oriented towards the empowerment of tribals particularly women should be perceived as an involvement and reorganization mechanism of not only the socio-economic system but the entire eco-system. Against this backdrop, the present paper highlights the emerging perspective in the content of the socio-economic empowerment of tribal women.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the profile characteristics of tribal women.
2. To find out the relationship between profile characteristics of tribal women with their livelihood security.
3. To elicit problems perceived and suggestions as expressed by the tribal women for enhancing their livelihood security.

Empowerment of tribal women

Empowerment refers to increasing the social, political, educational, spiritual, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities. For the accelerated socio-economic development of any community, the active participation of women is essential. Their participation has to be ensured through tangible measures, taken at

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various levels, which result in their empowerment is the real sense. Empowerment includes, higher literacy levels, education, better health care, equal ownership of productive resources, awareness of rights and responsibilities, improved standards of living, self reliance, self-esteem and self –confidence. Tribal women while being a disadvantaged and vulnerable group are, nevertheless better placed, in many respects, than their counterparts in the general population and are in certain areas more empowered. Raising the status of tribal women is not just a moral imperative but also a strategic one. Within the framework of a democratic policy, our laws, development policies, plan and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as a central issue in determining the status.

Tribal women and forests

Nearly half a million tribal people from various communities reside in the forested and hill-top villages of the Eastern Ghats in Visakhapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh. They have lived as isolated entities for centuries, largely untouched by the society around them. This seclusion has been responsible for the slower growth dissimilar pattern of their socio-economic and cultural development and inability to negotiate and cope with the consequences of their involuntary integration into mainstream society and economy. Tribals continue to be socio-economically backward.

Tribals have been residing in forest areas for generations, cultivating land and collecting non-timber forest produce. The traditional economics of the tribal people centre around hunting, food gathering, shifting agriculture, podu cultivation, NTFP collection. Paddy and a wide variety of traditional millets, cereals and pulses are grown to meet household needs. These are supplemented by vegetables, fruits and roots and tubers some of which are cultivated while others are collected from the forest. Preparing food and providing for drinking water is solely their responsibility so they operate closely with the forests from where they get water, fuel and minor products including edible fruits, tubers, flowers, vegetables and berries. Minor forest produce plays an important part in the tribal economy. Its collection and marketing is a major source of livelihood for most tribal families contributing around 70% of their total income. Several forest produce to contribute to their diet that includes for example honey and gooseberry. Firewood is also provided by forests. Since firewood gathering is done mainly by women, the interaction between forest and women gets further enhanced. Since all the duties of tribal women are connected with the forests and they look towards the forest for nature's gift, their dependence on forests is strong and intrinsic.

Tribal women participate actively in all agricultural operations including ploughing, digging sowing, manuring, transplanting, weeding, harvesting threshing, winnowing and storing food grains. Processing of food grain is exclusively a woman's job. Tribal women work as men's partners in agriculture, yet their status remains the same. They 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. Tribal women are important for the improvement and progress of tribals.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in 6 tribal dominated mandals of High Altitude and Tribal Zone of Andhra Pradesh during 2010-11. Six mandals namely Chintapalle, G.K.Veedhi, Hukumpeta, G.Madugula, Araku and Pedabayalu were selected for investigation. Three villages from each of the six mandals were selected and from each village 10 respondents were selected thus making a total of 180 respondents. Data was collected through structured and pre-tested interview schedule. The collected data was coded, tabulated and analyzed statistically and the results were interpreted accordingly.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic profile of Tribal women:

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to their education

(n = 180)

S. No	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Illiterate	87	48.34
2.	Functionally literate	59	32.77
3.	Primary school	34	18.89
Total		180	100.00

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Tribal women play a significant role in the economic development of tribals as they contribute in various economic activities and education is one of them education is a crucial requirement for the sustained growth of a developing society and lack of it is largely responsible for the exploitation. The dropout rate among tribal schools is high. Various steps taken by state government to check dropouts, including free distribution of books, stationery, scholarships, reimbursement, mid-day meals etc have had an impact but still fall short. Low literacy especially among tribal girls and high dropout rates at elementary and higher levels. The main causes are (i) Poverty (ii) Contents of the education (iii) Inadequate educational institutions and supporting services in tribal areas (iv) Absentism

A glance at Table 1 reveals that 48.34 per cent of the respondents were illiterates followed by functionally literate (32.77%), primary school (18.89%). It could be observed from the results that majority of the respondents were illiterates followed by functionally literate. This trend might be due to the fact that majority of the respondents could not go for higher education because of their poor economic status, social environment, poor educational facilities during their childhood days and schools located at far away places were the contributing reasons for their poor education. This calls for encouragement of women to acquire formal education. Hence to increase the educational status of tribal women the Government should take due care to improve the literacy levels in the tribal areas and more literacy programmes need to be organized. This result is in conformity with the result of Pallavi (2006)

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to their family size

(n = 180)

S.No	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Small	35	19.44
2.	Medium	89	49.44
3.	Large	56	31.12
Total		180	100.00

A bird's eye view of Table 2 indicate that most (49.44%) of the respondents were having medium family size followed by large family size (31.12%) and small (19.44%) family size respectively. This trend may be due to the practice of small family norms, their awareness regarding the cost of living and difficulties in maintenance of big family. They might have found it beneficial to have small families to lead a better and comfortable life.

Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to their annual income

(n = 180)

S. No	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low	40	22.23
2.	Medium	121	67.22
3.	High	19	10.55
Total		180	100.00

An examination of Table 3 reveals that majority (67.22%) of the respondents had medium level of annual income followed with low (22.23%) and high (10.55%) levels of annual income respectively. This trend might be due to reason that, majority of families had few acres of land and they were not getting good returns from their limited land holding. To meet the day to day expenditure they were depending on the daily wages either from farm operations and other allied works in the village. Hence the income levels of most of the respondents were low.

Table 4. Distribution of respondents according to their information seeking behavior

(n = 180)

S.No	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low	22	12.22
2.	Medium	122	67.78
3.	High	36	20.00
Total		180	100.00

Information sources are the predominant communication tools in the present day situation. Each individual have their own information networks, where they continuously interact to get the information to solve their problems. An individual relies on a few information sources and rejects many others. Therefore, it is necessary to identify

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different sources of information available to the respondents and to locate the most utilized sources so as to have a effective communication.

The contents of Table 4 indicate that 67.78 per cent of the respondents had medium level of information seeking behaviour followed by high level of information seeking behaviour (20.00%) and 12.22 per cent of respondents had low level of information seeking behaviour. The respondents were seeking information mostly from friends/relatives, village leaders and neighbours. This may be due to the fact that information seeking from formal source was very less, as they believe that these agents visit very rarely to their villages and distant location of villages. Hence, the ITDA officials and extension agencies should concentrate their efforts in providing need based information to the tribal women through formal sources even to remote villages. This result is in conformity with the result of Kiran *et al.*,(2011).

Table 5. Distribution of respondents according to their extension contact
(n = 180)

S. No	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low	59	32.78
2.	Medium	89	49.44
3.	High	32	17.78
	Total	180	100.00

Table 5 reveals that 49.44 per cent of the respondents had medium extension contact followed by those with low level of 32.78 per cent and high level of 17.78 per cent extension contact. It could be inferred from the results that majority of the respondents were having medium extension contact. This could be attributed to the reasons like illiteracy, inability of women to devote their time, lack of awareness of activities of various social institutions and lack of social mobility due to family restrictions. To improve the extension contact, the extension professionals need to have regular visits to the villages conduct demonstrations, meetings, focus group discussions, training programmes and by educating them to maintain better contact with the extension professionals.

Table 6. Distribution of respondents according to their mass media exposure
(n = 180)

S. No	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low	121	67.22
2.	Medium	40	22.23
3.	High	19	10.55
	Total	180	100.00

Communication is a basic need of all human beings and it is a continuing process throughout one's life. It is very difficult to provide latest information and farm technologies in shortest time. Communication can play an important role in empowering women and increasing their participation in decision making. The strength of mass media is of great help to extension workers for providing cost effective and efficient service.

The findings that presented in Table 6 reveal that 67.22 per cent of the respondents had low level of mass media exposure followed by respondents with medium (22.23%) and high (10.55%) levels of mass media exposure respectively. Majority of the families have low access to communication media. Tribals live in far-flung areas outside the reach of modern means of information and communication technology. They are thus deprived of crucial information regarding development initiatives, employment opportunities etc.,. Women of the tribal area get traditional knowledge from elder members of their families during process of socialization. Women are not getting information about latest technological developments. Hence there is a need to increase the mass media exposure of the tribal women by the provision of the related information materials and literature by the extension agencies by conducting training programmes, kisan melas, discussions etc. more in number. This finding is in conformity with the result of Sivanandan (2002)

Use of information and communication technology could help women to provide farm related information such as best package of practices, weather forecasting, access to credit, price and availability of farm inputs, market information etc.

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Table 7. Distribution of respondents according to their achievement motivation
(n = 180)

S.No	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low	43	23.89
2.	Medium	95	52.78
3.	High	42	23.33
Total		180	100.00

Results figured in Table 7 shows that 52.78 per cent of the respondents had medium level of achievement motivation followed by those with low (23.89%) and high (23.33%) level of achievement motivation respectively. The results indicated that medium achievement motivation trend may be due to reason that most of the respondents were living in poor socio-economic conditions coupled with their illiteracy, they were always striving at getting more income through Agricultural labour and without that they could not survive themselves also their family members basically for their food and shelter, but they were regularly failed in meeting their requirement. This condition might have resulted in such trend. So, from the results we can conclude that most of the respondents belong to medium level of achievement motivation, which makes us to give a rethink while developing a new locally suited and feasible so as to make the respondents towards high level of achievement motivation.

Table 8. Distribution of respondents according to their credit orientation
(n = 180)

S.No	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low	52	29.17
2.	Medium	93	51.67
3.	High	35	19.16
Total		180	100.00

It was apparent from table 8 that majority (51.67%) of respondents had medium level of credit orientation followed by low (29.17%) and high (19.16%) levels of credit orientation respectively. The respondents were getting the credit from the local money lenders by paying high rates of interest. They expressed that the bank personnel were not helping them in knowing the procedures of institutionalized credit. They articulated that the procedure for getting credit from the Government agencies was cumbersome and they do not know the process of getting loans of such agencies completely. Hence the extension personnel and bank personnel should help the women in knowing the procedures of sanctioning the loans and procedure for getting the loan.

Table 9. Relationship between the selected profile characteristics and livelihood security of tribal women

(n = 180)

Sl. No	Independent variable	Correlation coefficient ® values
1.	Age	0.1833*
2.	Education	0.1564*
3.	Family size	0.1012 ^{NS}
4.	Annual income	0.1972*
5.	Information seeking behavior	0.1134 ^{NS}
6.	Extension contact	0.1972*
7.	Mass media exposure	0.0164 ^{NS}
8.	Market facilities	0.0456 ^{NS}
9.	Achievement motivation	0.2658**
10.	Credit orientation	0.0539 ^{NS}

* Significant at 0.05 level of probability ** Significant at 0.01 level of probability
^{NS} Non significant

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It could be observed from Table 9 that the computed coefficient of correlation ‘r’ values of age, education, annual income and extension contact were found to be positively significant at 0.05 level of probability while achievement motivation was found to be positively significant at 0.01 level of probability. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected and empirical hypothesis was accepted. Therefore, it could be inferred that there was a positive and significant relationship between independent variables and livelihood security of the tribal women. The computed coefficient of correlation ‘r’ values of family size, information seeking behavior, mass media exposure, market facilities and credit orientation were found positively and non significantly related with livelihood security of tribal women. Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted and empirical hypothesis was rejected.

Education not only adds knowledge but also widens horizons of the individuals. It is mainly because education improves awareness, decision making power, understanding skill and knowledge in any activity and plays very important role in making the women empowered. Higher the education wider will be the interactions of the individuals with different sources and increases the ability to grasp facts, analyze and interpret them in proper way. Hence the above trend was noticed.

The variable annual income showed positive and significant relationship with livelihood security. Economic improvement in the households will automatically boosts the individual to perform better. So, naturally this would bring about significant improvement in their livelihood.

There is every chance for the member with high extension contact to get up to date and innovative information from authentic sources. Accumulation of this information would necessarily prompt the individuals to gain knowledge and this would in turn enhance their livelihood security. Thus, the above relationship was observed.

Achievement motivation forces an individual to work constantly towards reaching a goal. Individual with high achievement motivation would be determined to reach their goal with concentrated efforts in any activity and this leads to rich livelihood security. Hence the above trend was noticed.

Table 10. Multiple linear regression analysis of the selected independent variables with Livelihood security of the tribal women

(n = 180)

Sl. No.	Variable	Partial regression coefficient values (b)	Computed ‘t’ values
1.	Age	0.098	1.062
2.	Education	0.121	1.475
3.	Family size	-0.099	1.229
4.	Annual income	-0.032	0.042*
5.	Information seeking behavior	-0.046	1.818
6.	Extension contact	0.122	0.471*
7.	Mass media exposure	0.003	0.062*
8.	Market facilities	0.0188	2.460
9.	Achievement motivation	0.104	1.301
10.	Credit orientation	0.051	0.680*

* Significant at 0.05 level of probability ** Significant at 0.01 level of probability

^{NS} Non significant R² = 0.524

In order to determine the combined effect of all selected independent variables in explaining the variation in the attitude of the respondents multiple linear regression analysis was carried out. The calculated coefficient of determination (R²) value with partial regression coefficient ‘b’ values and their corresponding ‘t’ values are given in table 10. The R² and b values were tested statistically for their significance. The ‘R²’ value of 0.524 indicated that all the selected ten independent variables put together explained about 52.40 per cent variation in the livelihood security of the respondents. The partial regression coefficients further revealed that the independent variables namely Annual income, extension contact, mass media exposure and credit orientation were found to be positively significant as evident from their significant ‘t’ values.

When the income of the family is more, women can invest in different income generating activities and can earn more money which will encourage saving habits and control the money earned by her. Extension agencies are

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the best and reliable sources of information. Hence, respondents with more extension contact would have more information because of which the individual applies knowledge and skills in a better manner.

It was very true that TV and radio are important sources of information at the awareness stage influencing even uneducated women. With the increased mass media exposure women will become aware of so many aspects, knowledge improvement, attitude change which ultimately leads them to enhance their livelihood security.

Credit orientation will make the individual to use resources brought on credit carefully and had effect to be more successful. Therefore Annual income, extension contact, mass media exposure and credit orientation was found positive and significantly contributed towards livelihood security of respondents. This could be concluded that variables selected for the study explained the variation of the respondents to a large extent. In other words variables selected for the study were relevant.

PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTIONS AS EXPRESSED BY THE TRIBAL WOMEN

The role of tribal women is important but their socio-economic development is poor. More needs to be done. The problems of tribal women and tribals are largely common. A list of problems perceived by the respondents and suggestions as expressed by tribal women to enhance their livelihood security were arranged in rank order in terms of frequencies and percentages. They were presented in Table 9

Table 9. Problems as perceived by tribal women

(n = 180)

Sl. No	Constraints	Frequency	Percentage
1	Illiteracy	148	82.22
2	Lack of credit facilities	146	81.11
3	Exploitation of money lenders	140	77.77
4	Poor connectivity	135	75.00
5	Lack of accessibility to nearby markets	128	71.11
6	Remoteness of the village	118	65.55
7	Low size of land holding	110	61.11
8	Lack of access and control of productive resources and services	103	57.22
9	Limited social participation	98	54.44
10	Insecure land tenure	86	47.77
11	Location of isolated villages	28	15.55
12	Limited extension staff	18	10.00
13	No access to basic amenities	10	5.55
14	Electrification	9	5.00

From the Table 9 and it was indicated that about three fourth respondents (71.11% to 82.11%) expressed lack of credit facilities, illiteracy, exploitation of money lenders, poor connectivity, lack of accessibility to nearby markets. On the other hand about 50 per cent respondents (47.77% to 65.55%) expressed limited social participation, lack of access and control of productive resources and services and finally less than 20 per cent of respondents indicated location of isolated villages, limited extension staff, no access to basic amenities.

Table 10. Suggestions expressed by tribal women for enhancing their livelihood security

(n = 180)

Sl. No	Suggestions	Frequency	Percentage
1	Creation of transport facilities	136	75.55
2	Creation of market facilities	124	68.88
3	Regular visits of extension worker	118	65.55
4	Creating awareness about income generating activities	109	60.55
5	Conducting training programmes	109	60.55
6	Establishment of training centres	103	57.22

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7	Access to credit and other financial services	98	54.44
8	Access to better health facilities	99	55.00
9	Providing opportunity in decision making in the family	86	47.77
10	Reducing the dependence on external sources of finance	76	42.22
11	Access to appropriate technologies and information	49	27.22

From the Table 10 it was revealed that 75.55 per cent of tribal women respondents suggested creation of transport facilities followed by Creation of market facilities (68.88%), regular visit of extension worker (65.55%), creating awareness about income generating activities (60.55%), conducting training programmes(60.55%), establishment of training centers (57.22%), providing access to credit and other financial services(50.44%), access to better health facilities(55.00%), reducing the dependence on external source of finance(42.22%) and access to appropriate technologies and information(27.22%).

Recommendations

The empowerment of tribal women and development of tribal women and sensitization of research and extension systems about their roles and contributions are important for sustainable growth and management of livelihood security. A strategy in this study was conceived as a plan of action in order to develop the tribal women and sensitize the development agencies for greater contribution for ensuring livelihood security. Suggestions made by the sample were listed and filtered them based on their feasibility and retained only the workable suggestions for developing a strategy as an action plan of activities to be undertaken by the administrators.

- ❖ For the benefit of women, introduce drudgery-saving devices for food processing, cooking and storage.
- ❖ Create better linkages with mainline departments (veterinary, agriculture, banking and so on) and other collaborating training institutes to improve group performance.
- ❖ Create women’s economic development corporations.
- ❖ Focus on women among agricultural extension systems.
- ❖ Increase the number of female extension staff.
- ❖ Promote diversification among microenterprises (that is, non-farm-based activities).
- ❖ Access to developmental programmes.
- ❖ Extension officials, NGO’s must provide regular training sessions in different possible activities to sustain members interest.
- ❖ Some of the women should be specially trained in new skills so that they may serve as master trainers to communicate to other group members.
- ❖ Emphasize on creating links to education, health and nutrition initiatives.
- ❖ Formation of tribal women co-operatives to take up dairy, sericulture, fisheries, handicrafts, horticulture agri-food processing and post harvest technologies.
- ❖ Imparting practical knowledge and training in modern techniques to all tribal women regularly so that their work becomes easier and crop production increases.
- ❖ Ensuring social protection through provision of support prices to tribals and should be allowed to collect, process, transport and market the non-timber forest produce.
- ❖ Devising new systems to improve the access of tribals to modern health care
- ❖ Strengthen the tribal sub-plan strategy with an institutionalised mechanism to develop a workable system.
- ❖ Training of tribal women to take up their responsibilities and sensitize them about the new provisions.
- ❖ Encouraging womens organisations and ensure the formation, stabilization and bank linkages of SHGs to promote viable micro-economic activities with substantial support in terms of credit and market.

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These strategies would empower tribal women and bring them into mainstream development.

IV. CONCLUSION

Tribal women play a major role in the management of their natural, social, economic resources and agricultural development but they still remain backward due to traditional values, illiteracy, dominant roles in decision making, social evils and many other cultural factors. The participatory role of tribals in improving their living conditions by fully exploring natural endowments and alternative uses must find an appropriate place in the strategic approach.

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