



Full Length Research Article

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN GAJAPATI DISTRICT: A BRIEF SUMMARY ON SAORA TRIBAL

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment of women is a major social phenomenon which requires an understanding of its multi-dimensional influence including our family structures and units. Education, health, skill building, credit facilities, family decision making, property rights and legal rights all are come under the empowerment of women. This paper analysis to the tribal women is empowering many sectors i.e. socially, economically and politically. In now a day major attributes that contributes to women empowerment are education, social equality and status improved health, economic or financial stability and political participation. Women are empowering in agricultural fields, science and technology, they empowering included development of technology kits and media mix. They become organised many formal and informal sectors i.e. Non-Government Organisations, Self Help Groups, self confidence skill and agricultural sectors. Decision making processes in panchayati need to be better defined, to diminish the possibility of elite capture, proxy participation and single point decision. Women need to be empowered in the realm of political decision making so as to facilitate their real empowerment.

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INTRODUCTION

Tribal development in India has been a success as the primitive societies living in remote rural areas are now educating their children and living in desirable standards. It is interesting to note that apart from several governmental efforts, the contributions of non-governmental organizations in providing training and development in different sectors of economy especially the tribal population. This paper discusses training as well as skills development in tribal women of Gujarat, India. The training and skill development among women would be mainly pertaining to farm forestry, papad making, sewing, cooking, sanitary pads making and so on. Women in tribal India often face abusive situations related to domestic violence, physical and mental torture, wife-beating, sexual abuse, and so forth. It is also realized that women face resistance in participating in training programmes due to sharing of responsibilities at family level. They also face barriers due to bias and discriminatory behaviour common in society. Arrangements are made by the government and Non Government Organisations to encourage women to form self-help groups and seek answers to their own problems. The paper brings out the cases of under-represented women who are successful in empowering themselves by making use of education and training.

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Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (e.g. urban and rural), educational status, social status (e.g. caste and class), and age. Policies on women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local (Panchayatiraj) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence, and political participation. 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. The tribal women being economically poor and socially backward live at a low level of scale of the quality life. Thus the tribal women often face the problems of food insecurity, malnutrition, lack of access to health care services and education and the victim of domestic violence and rape. Unlike the well organised modern communities, the tribal communities and tribal women lag far behind in social networking. This is the nature and dimension of socio-economic disempowerment problem among the tribal women in India.

Status of Tribal Women: 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 and fertility as

society. 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. Many also work as labourers in industries, households and construction, contributing to their family income. Despite exploitation by contractors and managers, tribals are more sincere and honest than non tribals.

Concept of Empowerment: Empowerment is an active process enabling women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life (Awais *et al.*, 2009). Empowerment is a process that takes a person from a position of powerless inaction to responsible action. The process moves through several stages from participation, decision making, action and ultimately the capacity to take responsibility for those actions. Empowerment is defined as the process by which women take control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices. It is the process of acquiring the ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability has previously been denied. The core elements of empowerment have been defined as agency, awareness of gendered power structures, self-esteem and self-confidence (Gnanadhas, 2011). The National Policy for Empowerment of Women 2001 aimed at bringing about advancement, development and empowerment of women in all spheres of life. However, a close examination of the social and economic status of women, especially in the rural areas shows unsatisfactory achievements in most human development indicators. Citing published facts and figures, the reasons are identified for the failure of the government in India in areas such as growing feminization of poverty and exploitation of women in low paid, hazardous and insecure jobs in the unrecognized sector; wide gender gaps in literacy and in wage rate, escalating violence against women and the rising incidence of female feticide and infanticide.

Self Help Groups: Self-help groups are small voluntary associations of poor and the marginalized people preferably from the same socio-economic background which has actually become the vehicle of change for the poor and marginalized people to be released from the clutches of poverty. Though there are many Self Help Groups in Gajapati districts and most of them are managed by women, yet the information about empowerment especially from the rural area is lacking. Thus this study was planned with the objective to assess women's perception about the role of SHGs in improving their situation empowerment in saora women tribe of Gajapati district of Odisha. They undertake economic activities such as thrift and credit and use of common assets on the basis of equality nurturing trust (Gnanadhas, 2011). The process, by which the group of people with a common objective is facilitated to come together in order to participate in the development activities, i.e. saving, credit, and income generation, is called group formation (Kabeer, 2011).

Empowerment of Tribal Women through Self Help Groups: Poverty deprives women of the opportunities to have equal access to participation in development programs, mobility and decision making. In the subsistence sector women spend the greatest amount of their time in collecting fuel, fodder water, looking after livestock and kitchen gardening.

Deforestation deprives the poor of their livelihood opportunities, thereby causing migration to urban areas. Poverty pushes them down to the lowest strata. When we think about tribal women, they are more backward and their social and economic empowerment issues are even more complicated.

Economic Security: Many members said to have opened savings accounts in bank or post office after joining SHG and were having regular savings. Thus, they were able to avail loan against their savings and utilized in various income generating activities like making incense sticks, retail shop, dairy, transport business etc either in group or individually. Some members invested money in making new house or in gold as they thought that these were profitable investments for long term. They were also able to make useful expenses which were difficult for them to do before, because of financial crisis in family. As said, "I started my own business with the help of SHG and my monetary crisis was almost over. I could avail higher studies for my daughter; I spend my maximum savings for her education".

Political and legal awareness: After joining Self Help Groups, the member's level of awareness in political, educational and legal fields had increased. They were well informed about their local leaders and some knowledge about the Nation's political affairs. They even knew the legal age of marriage for boys and girls, dates of election as well as the nominated candidates. Tribal Welfare Association has been giving much importance to equip tribal youth and women with alternative skills to supplement and augment their income and employment and to fulfil the community needs with locally available raw materials and human resources towards optimum use.

Some of the important skill training programmes in equipping tribal youth and women are: Tailoring, embroidery, sanitary pads, cooking snacks, painting potteries, women training programmes on eco-environmental issues, socio-economic and cultural aspects have found its effect in women taking up issues affecting them, through collective action. The importance of such issues and problems are - women asserting property rights, free choice of their would be husbands, organizing women against violence on women. The Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme (OTELP) is being implemented by the Scheduled Tribe & Scheduled Caste Development Department of Govt. The programme aims to ensure that livelihoods and food security of poor tribal household are sustainably improved through promoting a more efficient equitable self managed and sustainable exploitation of the natural resources at their disposal and through off farm non-farm enterprise development. The Lanjia Saora tribe are love trees; therefore they take all care to preserve the fruits plants like Date Palm, Mango, Jackfruit, Tamarind Mahul, Salap, Ramphal, Sitaphal etc in their villages. Presently, following the gradual decline in agricultural production and forest produce they are looking for dependable supplementary sources in horticulture. They have started growing many new varieties of economic species including vegetable crops introduced by themselves as well as the development agencies like the concerned ITDA, DRDA, OTELP and NGOs.

Goatery farming: The table shows, Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme (OTELP) and NGOs are providing goat rearing practices amongst the tribal is very traditional and unscientific among the BPL families.

Table 1. Mahalaxmi Self Help Groups at Bangosahi

Mahalaxmi Self Help Groups at Bangosahi					
SL. No.	Members Name	Purpose	Bank Name /Loan	Amount/Rs.	NGOs
1	Shrimati Sabar	Goatery	Rushikulya Gramin Bank, Narayanpur	10,000/-	SWWS
2	Pabitri Sabar	Goatery	Rushikulya Gramin Bank, Narayanpur	10,000/-	SWWS
3	Rama Bhuyan	Stone Bunding	Rushikulya Gramin Bank, Narayanpur	10,000/-	SWWS
4	Malati Bhuyan	Mango Plantation	Rushikulya Gramin Bank, Narayanpur	10,000/-	SWWS
5	Parbati Bhuyan	Cashew Plantation	Rushikulya Gramin Bank, Narayanpur	10,000/-	SWWS
6	Drupati Bhuyan	Poultry	Rushikulya Gramin Bank, Narayanpur	10,000/-	SWWS

Table 2. Literacy Rate of Respondents (in percentage)

	Male	Female	Total
Literate	30.7	8.8	18.33
Illiterate	69.23	91.1	81.66

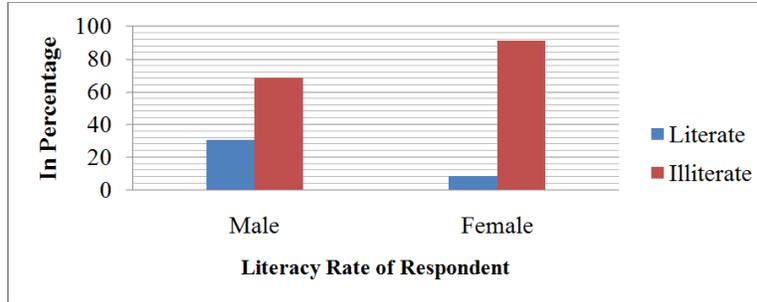


Figure 1. Literacy Rate of Respondents (in percentage)

Table 3. Literacy Rate in Families (in percentage)

	Male	Female	Total
Literate	51.06	35.65	43.70
Illiterate	48.93	64.34	56.29

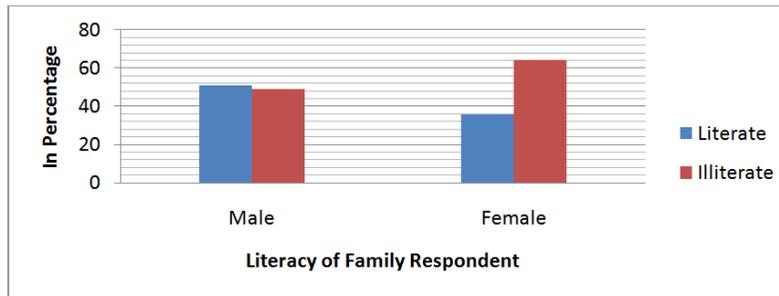


Figure2. Literacy Rate in Families (in percentage)

Table4. Level of Educational of Respondents by Sex (in percent)

Education	Male	Female	Total
I-V	7.69	-	18.18
VI-VII	7.69	2.94	27.2
IX-X	11.53	5.88	45.5
XI-XII	3.84	-	9.0

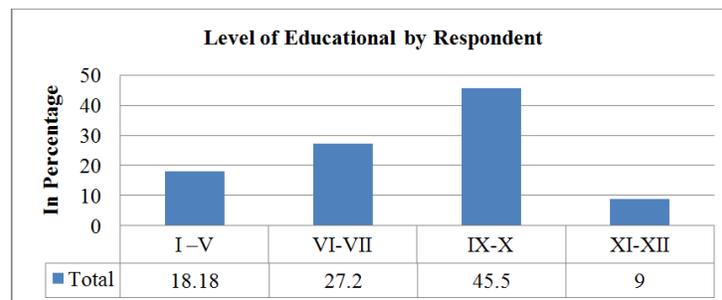


Figure 3. Level of Educational of Respondents by Sex (in percent)

Livestock Production

In Odisha Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme operation villages about 75% households are below the poverty line Below Poverty Land & 24% are absolute landless. These tribal families depend on subsistence agriculture. OTELP adopts micro watersheds as a unit of planning & implementation with community participation for livelihood promotion including farm, off farm & nonfarm enterprise interventions. The income from traditional agriculture being low due to seasonal (rain fed) is unable to provide full employment for working class. The major issues for the poor & landless tribal are food security & risk spreading through subsidiary income. Therefore, there is dependency on non-farm activities like poultry & goatery for supplementary income.

Literacy

Illiteracy is very high in our study area. The table shows that nearly 82% are illiterate and only 18% are literate. Illiteracy is much high among women i.e. 90% and that of men is 69%. Literacy among women is only 9% and among man is 31%. Among the literate person around 3% have studied up to class 7th are women and 6% of up to class 9th among women. Among men literacy rate is 31%, around 16% of have studied up to class 7th, 12% per cent up to class 10th and 4% of studied up to +2. This shows among even men, education is very low. It shows only 4% of men are matriculate. Among women nobody has studied beyond school level and only 8 percent of women are literate who have been educated within class 7th and 10th. More than 81 percent of women are illiterate and mostly women are engaged as the agricultural and daily wage labourer. Our table shows the educational level of family members. Maximum people (i.e. 28%) were educated up to 5th, 20% up 8th, 25% up to 10th, 16% up to +2, 9% up to +3 and 2 percent have done their study up to graduation.

Conclusion

Self Help Groups are the key instruments in women's empowerment which are generally facilitated and supported by NGOs. These NGOs advise and train members in a variety of on- and off-farm income-generating activities.

In the present study also Self Help Groups had played very important role in empowering women by strengthening their earning ability, boosting their self-confidence and promoting regular savings. Thus the participants had economic security, easy credit accessibility, better decision making in family, improved family environment (relative freedom from domination), increased mobility and improved political and legal knowledge. Self Help Groups had provided women a common platform to discuss and solve their individual and community problems.

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