

Issues and Challenges of Soliga's Women's of Karnataka

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Abstract: *The Soliga culture, in recent times, has been severely affected by habitat degradation of the Western Ghats, change in economic practices in neighboring areas and ironically, because of the government declaring their home as a wildlife sanctuary. Collection of non-timber forest produce has been banned by the Wildlife Protection Act since 2006. The State is the home to 42,48,987 tribal people, of whom 50,870 belong to the primitive group. Although these people represent only 6.95 per cent of the population of the State, there are as many as 50 different tribes notified by the Government of India, living in Karnataka, of which 14 tribes including two primitive ones, are primarily natives of this State. Extreme poverty and neglect over generations have left them in poor state of health and nutrition. Unfortunately, despite efforts from the Government and non-Governmental organizations alike, literature that is available to assess the state of health of these tribes of the region remains scanty. It is however, interesting to note that most of these tribes who had been original natives of the forests of the Western Ghats have been privy to an enormous amount of knowledge about various medicinal plants and their use in traditional/folklore medicine and these practices have been the subject matter of various scientific studies.*

The concept like empowerment, local self-government though projected as viable alternative to fill the gap created by State's withdrawal is not rooted at the local level. The empowerment package more or less falls in line with the centralized, top-down characters of the economic policies that were followed in the initial years. This is evident from the poor allocation of resources to local bodies, essential for the implementation of the programs in a concrete manner.

Keywords: *Medicinal plants, Health Issues, Economic policies, Social aspects, folklore, Women Empowerment.*

INTRODUCTION

Tribals have traditionally lived in about 15% of the country's geographical areas, mainly forests, hills and undulating inaccessible terrain in plateau areas, rich in natural resources. 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.

The Soliga tribe living in the Biligiri Ranga Hills of Karnataka State in India has a culture rich in traditional values and rituals. This secluded tribal community has recently come in contact with modern ideas and new health care approaches which have shaped some of their health practices. At present, primary health care services are being offered to the tribal people by Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra (VGKK), a voluntary organization. Further health programming is expected for the tribal population including a community based rehabilitation program.

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. Undoubtedly, the programmes, oriented towards the empowerment of tribals, particularly women, have improved their socio-economic conditions and status. However, there are wide variations across regions and tribes in terms of work participation, sex ratio, economic productivity and social life.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Balakrishnan (1953) used the word "Swamiga" for the Mahadeshwara Swamy who is their favourite deity and later it is believed to be transformed to Soliga by corrupt usages.

Nanjundayya H.V and L.A.K Iyer (1931) in their book the Mysore Tribes and castes, Vol IV describes about the origin and customs of Soliga and the exogamous divisions of the tribe distributed in Biligiri Rangana hills and they have stated that in the hilly tracts of Rangagiri these people are called by other natives as 'Cad Eruligaru'.

Sadashivaiah (1975) in his unpublished dissertation work about the Soliga in Kannada conducted his fieldwork in Bankvadi, Katvalu and Nemmanahalli colonies of Heggada Devana Kote taluk of Mysore district.

In this dissertation work, he gave more concentration to explain socio-cultural aspects, occupations in anthropological point of view. The main occupation of Soliga is agriculture and he discussed about the government providing them the agricultural land in the forest areas in which they are growing the millets, grains etc.

Objectives

1. To know the recent challenges faced by the soliga women's and its impact on their socio economic life
2. To identify their role in the decision making process and their effective leadership qualities

III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of data is generated on the secondary source of tools and techniques.

Socio-Economic Opportunities

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 ion, lack of access to health care services and education and the victim of domestic violence and rape. Unlike the well or ganised 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. Sen has advocated human capabilities approach to the development process. The human capabilities include social, economic, cultural and political capabilities of the human beings.

The Scheduled Tribes are tribes noticed under Article 342 of the Constitution, which makes special provision for 'tribes, tribal communities, parts of, or groups within which the President may so notify'. There is no definition of a tribe in the Constitution but one may distinguish some characteristics that are generally accepted: self-identification, language, distinctive social and cultural organization, economic underdevelopment, geographic location and initially, isolation, which has been steadily, and in some cases, traumatically, eroded. Many tribes still live in hilly and/or forested areas, somewhat remote from settlements.

Historically, the tribal economy was based on subsistence agriculture and/or hunting and gathering. However, since the tribal people treated land as a common resource, they rarely had land titles, and thus, lost their lands to outsiders when exploitation of forest resources began to take place on a significant scale. This ensured that a majority ended up as small and marginal landholders.

The Karnataka Agricultural Census 2001 established that STs hold 30.9 per cent of small and 19.4 per cent of semi-medium holdings. There is not much difference between STs and others here, but ST ownership of medium and large holdings is a low 7.9 and 1.0 per cent respectively.

There was hardly any awareness among the Soligas about the modern systems of education and health. Much more than the lack of awareness was their abject poverty. There was widespread hunger and lack of basic necessities of life. The limited facility of schooling in government schools was not sensitive to the socio-cultural context of the Soliga people. For example, most students ran away from government schools when they realized that they had to be confined to the class rooms for long hours. This was not the way of the forest. School attendance, therefore, was very low. Besides, the children had to walk for many kilometers to school and back to their forest homes.

The centralized planning by the federal government could not understand the impact of such policies on the tribal community like Soligas, whose main source of livelihood was forest. When the Indian Forest Act was implemented by the State government the Forest Department prevented the tribal community from entering the forest and those lived inside the forest were thrown out. State sovereignty for this tribal community sounded the death knell, as they had no alternative sources for livelihood. This was traumatic for the Soligas as they were ignorant of making a way to life. Displacement of this tribe from their traditional locations forced them out of the forest to the 'unknown' destinations in the surrounding villages. Soligas who lived in isolation from the mainstream for centuries were innocent and ignorant of the ways of the world. Such ignorance on the part of Soligas made them an easy prey to the exploitative practices of landlords, forest department and other trading class. Soligas who now forced out of the forest found it difficult to reconcile with the outer world, which did not share their culture and value system. Tribal people were made bonded laborers for their incapacity to repay small debts borrowed from local landlords.

Health aspect

Health care services and health insurance is necessary to improve the health status. And supply of food grains through the LAMPS or PDS for tribal women. Health and nutrition are two important basic needs to be met for the empowerment of tribal women. Health condition and nutrition level of tribal women is vulnerable. The tribal women face many problems in health and nutrition. The maternal malnutrition is quite common among the tribal women. The fertility rate of tribal women is more compared to the women at the national level. The infant mortality rate and child mortality rate of the tribal women is also high compared to the national under nutrition and CED (Chronic Energy Deficiency). Though the medical facilities are not adequate, yet they are hardly used by the tribes living in isolated villages and hamlets. So to achieve real and quick development in health sector, an extensive as well as intensive health education and awareness campaign and health insurance

scheme are to be given the top most priority and main stress on the nutritional benefits, benefits of immunisation, family planning, personal and domestic hygiene, cleaning of surrounding environment, health education, sanitation, supply of safe drinking water, nutritious food etc.

Sudarshan's gift is his ability to introduce a semblance of modernity into the tribal's world, while ensuring he does not disturb their traditions. The hospital, for instance, has developed and now has a paediatrician and gynaecologist. It even runs a mobile unit that travels at least once a week to provide medical care to the communities living in remote areas of Mysore district's four taluks. At the same time, Sudarshan has integrated tribal medicine with allopathy at the hospital, his Soliga friends having taught him how to prepare 23 herbal medicines for various ailments. Even deliveries at the hospital remain true to tribal tradition: caesarean sections are not allowed, and babies are born, as always, with the women squatting.

Education and legal awareness

The Soliga women who had a formal education were able not only to describe curative health practices but also preventative health techniques. The influences of a western school system are changing the behaviour of the Soliga youth.

Soligas who live in the foothills of Biligiri Rangana Betta (BR Hills) and Male They are also found in Hunsur and Bandipur area are of Mysore District. Madeshwara Betta (MM Hills) of Chamarajanagar districts is one of the rare tribes of India. Soliga Abhivrudhi Sangha (SAS) is a central organization of this tribal community in the Kollegal Taluk of Chamarajanagar District. According to SAS the total population of the tribe in Kollegal Taluk is 20417, which is spread in the 80 villages, constitutes approximately 6% of the total population. 92% of this tribe lives in rural areas.

Lack of basic education and skills as well as training particularly for self employment. Malnutrition and infant mortality rate is high among selected tribes. High rate of unemployment and under employment Lack of resource control, productive resource ownership and decision making. Lack of financial support to self employment. Because, SHGs are not progressing very well, so it is an obstacle for savings and to the supply of micro finance.

Education has received due attention. There are as many as 20 single teacher schools, 10 Boarding schools, 05 Secondary Schools with boarding facilities. The State Government is meeting 50% of the educational expenses of the students from this community. Residential schools, hostels were started at Malemahadeshwara Hills and Nakkundi. Adult education program of the State has been implemented effectively in this tribal area too. Soliga youth were given training in computer education too. Mass literacy campaigns were pursued by SAS during 95-96, nearly 500 houses were covered and another 730 houses are in the process of being covered.

Soligas Tribe, which lived in isolation in and around the forest under the foothills, is one of the most backward tribes. Forest is the source of livelihood for them. They collect forest products and exchange the same for other commodities required by them with the nontribal. Hunting is another occupation of the tribe. With an age-old tradition of shifting cultivation, the tribe used to lead a semi-nomadic life in the forest area. Generally fifty to sixty huts form a settlement, which is called 'podu', which literally means shifting cultivation. In each 'podu' they have a well-organized Nyaya system of community administration. Under the Nyaya system Yajman, Kolukar and Chaluvaadiin consultation with the senior members of the community take important decision to resolve any crisis.

The role played by the intermediaries bore fruits because of the presence of the democratic State. The experiments by the soliga community with the help of volunteers stand testimony to the powerful role that a civil society can play in the empowerment of the community. But one should not lose sight of the context in which the experiment bore result. It was the democratic system, presence of welfare State, and the presence of a strong civil society, that enabled people to empower themselves.

The concept like empowerment, local self-government though projected as viable alternative to fill the gap created by State's withdrawal is not rooted at the local level. The empowerment package more or less falls in line with the centralized, top-down characters of the economic policies that were followed in the initial years. This is evident from the poor allocation of resources to local bodies, essential for the implementation of the programs in a concrete manner.

The gap between the haves and have-nots has been widening despite the success of empowerment programs, local-self governments and efforts to reduce gender disparities. Empowerment, Local-Self governments, Micro-Credit, and other programs in the package appear to be diversified products of the capitalist development model. The major strength of the organization is its ability to take tradition and modern power centers together, though there has been some problem subsequently. It is only through emphasis on ideas like sustainable and community development, that SAS can keep the tempo of socio-economic growth, which was responsible for their emancipation.

Empowerment through Programmes

There was hardly any awareness among the Soligas about the modern systems of education and health when Sudarshan initially came to them, inspired by the ideals of Swami Vivekananda. Much more than the lack

of awareness was their abject poverty. There was widespread hunger and lack of basic necessities of life. The limited facility of schooling in government schools was not sensitive to the socio-cultural context of the Soliga people. For example, most students ran away from government schools when they realized that they had to be confined to the class rooms for long hours. This was not the way of the forest. School attendance, therefore, was very low. Besides, the children had to walk for many kilometers to school and back to their forest homes. Sudarshan decided to start a school and a hostel for boys and girls right inside the forest. And this worked. I could see for myself how happy the boys and girls were in the school and hostel run by VGKK and Karuna Trust started by Sudarshan. The children were made to feel free in their own cultural milieu. When the school was started 25 years back, there were only five students. Today there are more than 500 students. It is a remarkable achievement. The success of the spread of education among the Soligas was evident when I met a tribal student (Jadeya) from the first batch in the tribal school. He is about to complete his PhD from the University of Agricultural Sciences at Bangalore. I found him exceptionally bright, apart from being fluent in English. He proudly announced to me that he was the chairman of the managing committee of VGKK. I was happy to know that he was planning to go back to the Hills after he got his PhD degree to work with Soligas and did not plan to migrate to a city or go abroad.

Education is the key which opens the door of life, develops humanity and promotes national and self development. Education can be an effective tool for women empowerment. It enables the tribal women to acquire knowledge for improving and empowering their tasks in all fields. Tribal women are involved in almost all agricultural operations in tribal areas yet, they have inadequate technical competency due to their limited exposure to outside world as well as continued reliance on traditional practices. This has compelled them to follow the age old practices which in turn result in poor work efficiency and low productivity.

Even more than the impressive work of Sudarshan in promoting education in the remote tribal areas was his outstanding contribution to primary healthcare and community health. His philosophy of health work clearly recognized the limitations of modern curative medicine alone in improving the health status of the people. It was necessary to integrate health programmes with the work in other sectors like agriculture, food, water, sanitation, housing and education. Above all, one must consider equity and Social justice in healthcare programme. As in any other field. Sudarshan encouraged Indigenous and traditional systems of medicine. He clearly recognized that primary healthcare must be based on maximum community participation, active involvement and empowerment of the people.

IV. SUGGESTIONS

Tribal women labourers are not getting any social security benefits because they are working in unorganised and informal sector. The Soliga health behaviours include a combination of both traditional and modern medical practices. The Soliga's tendency to use one or another health system is influenced by the availability and accessibility of both.

It addresses many issues of the Soligas including literacy, occupation patterns, children education, family size, tribal council practices, types of disputes raised in the community, awareness of the younger generation towards the tribal council, marriage practices, landholding, sources of income from different sources, migration problems, dependency on the forest, unemployment problem, cultural practices, festival celebration, rituals and culture of the Soligas, types of health problems faced by the Soligas and their treatment sources, drinking water problems, the different reasons for lack of development, and the different socio-economic, cultural, political and external factors influencing the lifestyle of the Soligas. Welfare programmes introduced by the Government concentrating on the development of the Soligas have not succeeded in reaching them. The Soligas expect programmes on social, political, health, economic, Sanghas and empowerment activities.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The impact of development planning needs to be evaluated in terms of desired and unanticipated consequences. The development process 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 reviews the emerging perspective in the context of the socio-economic empowerment of tribal women and changing paradigms of development. It is necessary that women come out of this domination and subordination for which they need to be educated and trained. These two are not sufficient conditions in themselves, their scarcity of women from taking important decisions. Besides lack of awareness, education and training, the respondents also expressed their opinions regarding other problems. Lack of financial resources was considered as the most important one. The seeds of empowerment have been sown and now it is the responsibility of the NGO, political leadership and the bureaucratic structure to educate it to flower bud.

Tribal women must be looked as a part of the tribal community, which has suffered at the hands of the non tribals and marginalized in the process of development. Tribal women suffered as much, in fact more by virtue of their belonging to the tribal community. The scheduled tribes are given special provisions constitutionally and how with extension of panchayat raj in the scheduled areas, they have been given power of self governance.

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