

## **Contribution of Tribal Women towards Household Economy**

**Dr. Rashmi Pramanik<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

Many social scientists, scholars, reformers, philosophers and specialists think that socio-economic development and political modernization is not possible without enhancing the status of women in the Third World Countries. Here by “status” we mean position of women as an individual in the social structure defined by her designated rights and obligations. These days women have started demanding for equity rather than equality. It is true that women's traditional roles are thought to be confined mainly within the household. Egler (1964) argued that a nominal definition of household is: “A household consists of the people who live in one compound and who form either a simple conjugal family or a joint family. Such a Joint family is considered to be a single household, if the income is pooled and expenditures are made from a common purse”. Economy is another important concept. Dalton (1967) as: “A set of institutionalized activities which combine natural resources, human labour and technology to acquire, produce and distribute material goods and specialist services in a structured repetitive fashion”. When we are talking of household economy here- “economy” is used in more general and simple meanings than it is used in the science of economics. Household economy means all those activities of the members of the household which generate income or cause saving. Here the term production as the activity of residing material items and making them available for human use. In the household economy the production is defined as the different materials and items used by the household members for the existence of that group. The household unit which consists of men, women and children may show a considerable division of labour. Normally this concept refers to that rules which govern the assignment of jobs to the people.

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 well as their roles within the family, the community and society. In tribal communities, the role of women is substantial and crucial. In fact, women’s works sustain society. This is no less true in the case of women in the tribal societies. They rear

---

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, PG, Department of Anthropology, Sambalpur University, JyotiVihar, Burla- 768019

children, care for the aged and the sick, toil on farms and in factories, and perform economic and non-economic activities within the family. But most of the time their working hands remain invisible. Their work is taken for granted and their contribution to the family is considered a natural outcome of their caring, nurturing and self effacing nature (Desai and Thakkar, 2001). Thus, their ability and indeed their inclination to accept outside employment has been severely constrained, and the jobs done by them at home are not regarded as employment at all, thereby reducing national income as well as employed workforce, which has been viewed as economic scandal (Sen, 1999). It may be mentioned here that the study of tribal women's work participation and occupational pattern is vital towards understanding the socio-economic functioning of a region. The work participation rate and occupational composition among them, and prevailing sex disparity in different economic pursuits certainly reveal their economic status and the system of social organization in it. In fact, the working force and the occupational pattern among the tribal women of a region greatly determine the character of its socio-economic progress. The participation of the tribal women in workforce brings in two positive effects in their society - it raises the quality of living and exerts an effective control on family size (Kar, 2002).

### **Learning Outcomes**

- The readers will broadly understand the socio- economic status of tribal women
- The reading materials tries to elaborate the role of work participation of tribal women in different sectors
- The learners will gain insight and analyze the nature and characteristics of socio-cultural conflicts faced by the tribal women

### **Work Participation of Tribal Women**

The main emphasis of this lecture has been laid on the women, their role within the family and economic contribution in the household economy. A woman is the companion of a man in all sorts of development including her contribution in the economic activities of household economy. The woman in its various roles as mother, wife, daughter, grandmother, daughter-in-law helps in household affairs to boost the economy. So the household has been taken as the basic unit of analysis for studying women's economic contribution. Household is the basic unit

where production, consumption and distribution of goods and services take place for the subsistence of the members of the society and women play a central role within the household, as her all works are mostly related and confined within the household. Household works are subjected to include everything, which is done to organize and care for a family and a home, including regular domestic, and social work and also economic work, which are conducted while remaining at home. As far as the women's daily works are concerned, they are mostly undefined and thought as obligation rather than a work. Direct economic activities simply mean all those activities which generate money and by indirect economic activities I mean all those activities which cause saving.

In this way tribal women's economic participation in agriculture, other occupations like teaching, selling things etc. and household activities are income generating as well as expenditure saving. A tribal woman contributes a lot in the household economy, which is an important part of tribal economy. They are the vital human resource in the improvement of the quality of life because earning of these women is crucial for family survival and its improvement. Keeping peace and good atmosphere in house is considered as a female's responsibility. God has granted equal status to both men and women and He has endowed them with different specialization skills with respect to their concerning fields. The woman often remains unable to manage between her activities and her relationships with her family. This inability creates tension and problems not only for her but also for the other members of the family. This gives rise to role conflict within the family.

In Odisha male and female have different roles to play in the society. There is the biological difference between men and women which forces them into different social roles in all the societies. In past women used to participate in household economy by doing inside household activities like: home management, children care and other activities inside their homes and men used to contribute to the household economy by doing outside activities. But due to economic problem faced in the family both men and women are engaged in income generating activities in order to fulfill their basic needs. Now women are contributing towards household economy directly and indirectly. This scenario has been changed due to the education, economic empowerment, awareness, technological and media development.

In our local villages of Odisha a number of women are indirectly contributing in household economic by performing household chores like managing their home, looking after their children and performing other domestic responsibilities. Both literate as well as illiterate women remain busy in these activities. Housewives and the other non-working women do good job at their homes but in comparison with working women their position in the household is weaker. They are less authoritative as far as the decision making is concerned. In general the condition of the houses of working women is found better as compared to the non-working women. Some people think that housewives are more responsible but here the case is different, working women are providing financial support to their families, sending their children to good schools and also managing their homes in a proper way. Women in the villages are working as: teachers, nurses, labour in industry, House maids. Midwives, Lady tailors and Business women.

### **Problems Faced By Tribal Women**

Most tribals faces a number of challenges which they need to overcome in order to improve their status in society.

- **Absence of Any Fix Livelihood:** Various literature studies reveal that although work participation among tribal women is higher compared to scheduled caste and general population but the livelihoods of the tribal people are neither permanent nor fixed. Most of them do not have a regular source of income, and they live below the poverty level. Tribal people residing in the rural areas pursue diverse low level activities for fulfilling their basic needs. Mostly they are engaged in agricultural activities. Apart from that, they are engaged in pastoral, handicrafts and at times as industrial labourers. Tribal women are mainly not engaged in any kind of continuous work and much like their male counterparts are found to work in agriculture. A meager number of tribal men and women are engaged in government services. Economic conditions of households are related to other aspects of their life.
- **Lack of Access to Education:** Most of the tribal women work outside their homes and are engaged in various activities. They work in order to earn money for their family. The women's work involves daily labour, agricultural work. Even young children and girls go

for work along with their mothers. Most of the time they do not go to school regularly or become drop outs from school. Even the parents in very poor families don't always want to send the children to school because then their helping hands in work would be reduced. Effect of patriarchy could be strongly seen in most tribal groups and so whatever money women get from their work they give it to their husband and the husband very often spends the money on activities like drinking. Household works are done by the female members of the family. Household work involves cooking, cleaning, washing utensils and clothes, collecting fuel for cooking. The young girls who are studying in primary level in schools hardly learn anything in school and they don't study at home also. The government has announced free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years, which nowadays encourage parents to send their children to schools with the hope that if their children receive proper education, then their conditions will improve. The children are given free school uniforms, books and mid day meals. However, the girls don't continue school at a stretch. Sometimes they go to school, some other times they do not go to school and stay at home and go to work with their mothers and help their mothers at household work. As a result, they tend to forget what they have learned in school. After the girl child attains teenage the parents stop sending them to schools.

- **Poor Condition of Health:** Lack of awareness about nutritional requirements mostly leaves the tribal women weak, anaemic and they suffer from various diseases. During pregnancy, special attention is required to be given to women otherwise that will affect the health of both the mother and child. Educational level, employment status, health status and decision making ability helps to measure the status of women in society. Women's education has to be channelized to employment opportunities. This in turn, will increase the decision making ability of women. Women's ability to communicate with other family members and to be able to convince them indicates a decision making ability of women. When the decision making ability is higher, women can have a higher status in the household. Women keep themselves busy at their workplace and they hardly get time to have a proper diet. This leads to malnutrition leading to many other health problems. The women striving for more money often work more than normal and take less care for their diet. While working they normally eat whatever is available, so their

health deteriorates because of the malnutrition and overwork. In spite of their health issues they do not get time to take rest.

- **Poor Salary Packages:**

Salaries of the women working in employment sector is not very good. Majority of them hardly get Rs.8000/- to 15000/- per month. It is generally seen that the input and the output do not match. They have to put a lot of hard work but at the end they get a very minimal amount of money. It is hard to fulfill their basic needs even. The only consolation was that they were being paid and providing some assistance to their family income. Some of them were able to manage their household expenditures within their salaries.

To mention a few professions carried out by the tribal women:

- ✓ **Women in Agriculture**

Tribal Women in Odisha carry out these tasks in addition to their normal domestic chores but in this area women generally work in the nurseries and fields on daily wage.

### **Problems**

- In this profession health problems were very common. Women suffer from many skin diseases. Especially in summer, dehydration is a major problem due to extensive heat and lack of water in the body.
- If women are doing work in their own fields then they don't take salaries from their husbands. In case of daily wages women are also earning low wages.

- ✓ **Midwives**

They could handle delivery cases and also give medicine to patient.

### **Problems**

- Local midwives are not so skilled and in many cases they are not aware about new technologies so they treat females in a wrong way.
- Actually people also blame midwife for any complications that occur during and after delivery.

### ✓ **Housemaids**

It is a common profession for women to earn money by doing services for others such as laundering, cleaning utensils, washing clothes, food processing, serving, grooming etc

#### **Problems**

- In this profession health problems are highly seen. Women do a lot of work so their own health suffers a lot.

### ✓ **Beauty Parlors**

Beauticians were also serving in the local villages.

#### **Problems**

- While running their own parlor they had to face financial risk. Sometimes they earned more and sometimes they did not have customers.
- There were no specific salary packages for them like many other jobs.
- For uplifting their business women had to take a lot of responsibilities. To run business was more challenging.

### ✓ **Embroidery**

Embroidery is one of the most common skills among the native women. Many women know embroidery. This is their hobby as well as a source of income. The women do beautiful embroidery on shirts and *dopatta* (scarf) with thread of different colors in beautiful designs. They also do it on bed sheets, cushion, cover, table cloth; pillow covers and makes all these things for house as well as for earning. The women start learning this art from the early age.

#### **Problems**

- In this profession health problems are seen. Women who stitch clothes since many years are suffering from eye sight problems.
- While running their own business they had to face loss or profit on their risk. There are no specific salary packages for them like other jobs.
- For uplifting their business women have to take lots of responsibilities. To run business is more challenging than any other job.

## ✓ Nursing

Nursing is another profession which is found.

### **Problems**

- In this profession women were also face marriage problems. Unmarried girls do not get marriage proposals because of tuff duty timings. Married women were unable to manage their job and home in a proper way.
- In our society many families do not like this profession. People think that dealing with the male patient is not good for girls. Our local people are very sensitive about tradition and culture so they are very concerned with the honor of their daughters. They even become furious if their daughters go outside without purdah.
- Another problem related with this profession is working atmosphere. Many harassment cases at work place during working hours are reported. Mostly girls didn't have any idea about the laws related with harassment and many others hesitated to share this situation with their families.

### **Concluding Thought**

Women play a very vital role in human progress and have a significant place in the society. They are not at all inferior to men. They are capable of sharing all the responsibilities of life. Man and woman have been rightly compared to the wheels of the same carriage. Women are silent workers and good partners of the socioeconomic development of the country in general and the family in particular. They can contribute more to the socioeconomic upliftment of the family if proper environment and facilities can be ensured. Economic pressure is forcing them to break away their traditional roles of housewives into wage earners. The contribution of women in different activities as well as in total family income is substantial. The pattern of women's contribution to household income is changing.

Women are affiliated with different professions like: teachers, nurses, and industrial lady workers, lady tailor, lady formers, and others. But I also focus on the employment impact on their families and their own self. I found out some positive and negative impact of women employment on their families. The potential of women must be tapped for the socioeconomic improvement of the families and development of the nation as a whole. Women should be



organized and be made aware that they have equal right of participation. In the tribal areas, many cases are observed which shows that women are supporting their families by doing outside and inside activities. They face lot of problem by doing both jobs but they are satisfied because in their point of view the advantages are more than their disadvantages. So we cannot ignore their sacrifices for their families by doing both jobs inside their homes and outside as well.

## References

- Ambreen, M. & Mohyuddin, A. (2013). Economic Empowerment of Women Influencing Family Structures: A Case Study of Village Dasuha, District Faisalabad. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences: Volume 3 Issue 1*, 422-434
- Benjamin, W. (1977). Rural household studies in Anthropological perspective. Bogor, Indonesia: Agricultural Development Council.
- Dalton, G. (1967). *Economic Development and social change: The modernization of village communities*. Garden: Natural history press.
- Egler, Z. (1964). *A Punjabi Village in Pakistan*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lone, K. R. & Mohyuddin, A. (2013). Rising Inflation and Women Adoption of Domestic Work. *Academic Research International Vol. 04 No.01*, 148-156
- Mohyuddin, A., Chaudhry, H. R. & Ambreen. M. (2012a). Economic Structure of a Village in Balochistan: World System Analysis at Micro Level in Anthropological Perspective. *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Research (IJEER)*. Vol.2 No.3, 79-98
- Mohyuddin, A., Chaudhry, H. R. & Ambreen. M. (2012b). Economic Empowerment of Women in the Rural Areas of Balochistan. *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan*. Vol 19, No. 2, 239-257.

Mohyuddin, A., Chaudhry, H. R. & Ambreen. M. (2012c). Contribution of Women in Economic Activities in Rural Balochistan: World System Analysis at Micro Level in Anthropological Perspective. *Academic Research International Vol. 03 No.02*, 548-556.

Sharma, U. (1982). *Women, Work and Property in North-West India*. New York: Tavistock publication.

### **Assessment**

Q1. Discuss the different problems faced by the tribal women

Q2. Elaborate the various sectors in which the tribal women are engaged

Q3. How do you understand the status of tribal women in our society?

Q4. Elucidate the importance and role of the tribal women towards their contribution to their household economy