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A Study of Socio-Economic Status of Thakur Tribal Women in Thane District, Maharashtra

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Abstract:

Generally we see that the status and the role of women are different from society to society. Besides, as the nature of society is always dynamic one, the status and role of women vary in the same society itself in the paces of time .The socio-economic status of women plays a very vital role in both individual and community life. The tribal women, constitute like any other social group, about half of the total population. It is a multidimensional concept that can be measured by composition of various factors. The present study is about the socio-economic status of Thakur Tribal women. When primary and secondary subsistence activities are counted, women work more than men. Role of women is not only important in economic activities, but in non-economic activities also equally important. The tribal women work very hard, in some cases even more than the men. However, in their own world, women have a freedom, and a self-expression. With the onset of development programmes economic changes are taking place but tribal women remain traditional in their dress, language, tools and resources etc. Modernisation is bringing changes, which affect men and women differently. A study of the economic conditions of a leader would help to reveal the sociological significance. Therefore, researcher wants to study on the selected theme “A Study of Socio-Economic Status of Thakur Tribal Women in Thane District, Maharashtra”

Keywords: Socio-economic Status, Tribal Women, Thakur Tribal, Thane District, Maharashtra state.

I. Introduction

The tribal population is identified as the aboriginal inhabitants of our country. For centuries, they have been living a simple life based on the natural environment and have developed cultural patterns congenial to their physical and social environment. References of such tribal groups are found even in the literature on the ancient period, right from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata periods (Mehta, 2000). According to L. P. Vidyarthi tribe is a social group with definite territory, common name, common descent, common culture, behaviour of an endogamous group, common taboos, existence of distinctive social and political system, and full faith in leaders and self- sufficiency in their distinct economy (Vidyarthi, 1981). There are approximately two hundred million tribal people in the entire

globe, which means, about 4% of the global population. They are found in many regions of the world and majority of them are the poorest amongst poor. According to India's most recent census in 2011 Schedule tribes comprise 8.6% of the population. Empowerment enables women to take control over their lives and builds self-confidence and self-reliance. In order to build self-confidence and to evolve a female agenda, besides education, formation of coalitions to have a united strong voice is equally important. Economic profile is an important role in characterize the social life and behaviour of an individual. It is, therefore, essential to analyze the economic background of the Tribal women and to understand the pattern of relationship between Tribal women and local environment. In Indian society, caste and kinship has been influencing on the social life and acute disparity in terms of standard of living and sub-culture among various groups and regions exist, a study of the economic conditions of a leader would help to reveal the sociological significance. At the same time, socio-economic stratification determines the structure of political power.

Thakur is a scheduled tribe of India. They are adivasi tribe originally living in forest areas of Maharashtra but now scattered all over Maharashtra. They are also called by other names like Thakar, Thakur, Ka Thakar, Ma Thakar, Ka Thakur and Ma Thakur. It comes under ST Category which consists of 47 tribes. Thakars and Thakurs are Indo-Aryans and speak a dialect of Marathi. However, the surname Thakar belongs to the Deshastha Brahmin caste in Maharashtra. They are natives of Pune district but can be found in some nearby places of Maharashtra, including Aurangabad. They typically speak Marathi language.

The Thakurs were originally living in all the hilly areas of Sahyadri in Maharashtra, Jawhar, Mokhada, vikramgad, wada, Bhiwandi talukas in Thane District. Their surnames are like Morgha, Bhore, Bambare, Barathe(Baratha), Kawh, Chibhade, Gavte, Madi, Khutade, Govind, Vishe, Ghugse, Mali & Murbad, Shahapur Taluka M-Thakur Sure name Wagh, Kavte, Darwada, Ughada, Nirguda, Pardhi, Shid, Mengal, Kevhari, Bhasma, Sawala, Thombre, Shende, Songal Etc. Belonging To Ka-Thakar. a Karjat, Khalapur, Panvel, Sudhagad and Pen talukas of Raigad district. Kannad, Khultabad, and Soegaon Talukas of Aurangabad Aकोletaluka in Ahmednagar districts etc. in the Indian state of Maharashtra in India. They are also found in Satara, Solapur, Aurangabad, Dhule and Jalgaon and scattered all over Maharashtra in the course of time in search of a livelihood. According to the survey of Dr. Ramesh Suryawanshi their population in Aurangabad district is near about 18000. They are distributed in Kannad, Khultabad, Soegaon tehsils of Aurangabad district and Nandgaon tehsil of Nasik District. Their hutments or dwellings are spread in Ajanta range in 30 to 40 spots. and their surnames are like Lendi, Pingale, Pardhi, Mengal, Fasale, Thombre, Aagiwale, Pathave, Aghan, Madhe, Savat, Shinde, More, Chavan in various 30 names. According to the 1941 Census, the population of these indigenous people was 22,182 in the district. As per 2001 census, the population of the Thakurs/Thakars in Maharashtra was 487,696 and the literacy rate was 50.9%. Some Thakar Tribals Came from Sahyadri and are living in Sindhudurg district also. They are scattered in Sindhudurg and are living since 400 years in Sindhudurg. Their population in Sindhudurg District is near about 6000.

They have rich traditions of folk dance, songs and unique culture of their own. They celebrate Diwali in a different way. On this occasion, they light lamps made from a fruit called Chibra, which are placed on a stand made of cow-dung. At home, the celebrations are in form of a breakfast of boiled corn, sweet potato and chauli. The grain stored in wicker basket called kangas is worshiped during Diwali. This time of year they do frenetic dance to the beats of dhols, crooning Amhi thakar thakar ya ranachi ga pakhar.... (We are Thakars, Thakars.. the butterflies of the woods) The famous Marathi film Jait Re Jait was made on Thakar tribe.

The Thakur community is one of the composite parts of great Indian nation. Though many characteristics of the Hindu social system are found in the functional system of the Thakur, yet, its peculiar characteristics are also much more evident in all respects of their social life. Same is the case to the status of Thakur women.

II. Objectives

The main objectives of this research paper are as following-

1. To find out the socio-economic status of Thakur tribal women.
2. To analyze the challenges faced by tribal women.
3. To suggest some strategies for handling the challenges faced by Thakur tribal women.

III. Review of Related Literatures

Singh A.K. (1993) have expressed that the health and educational status of tribal women is low in comparison to their non-tribal counterpart and they have also characterised the status of the tribal women by over-work, invasion of sexually exploitative market forces in tribal society, illiteracy, high fertility and high malnutrition and near absence of modern health care facilities.

Dowerah D. (1993) explained that the Dimasa womenfolk in Assam, enjoy certain freedom but in spite of this the women are not given any opportunities for active participation in decision making. Adding to that it further stressed that for the improvement of the status; the women need social, political and economical development

Kumari R. (1998) in an attempt to examine the relationship between women's work participation and their status finds that women's work participation enhances their status and also found out that there is a positive association between women's work and male view regarding issues relating to the status of women.

Mullah M.S. (2007) through their study highlighted that the socio economic status of the tribal people is substantially lower in comparison with the general people as they are lagging behind in terms of the economical, political, social and technological standings and most of them are still going on with old-fashioned tradition, standard of living and beliefs.

Mishra B.K. (2009) in highlighting the status of tribal women in term of their demographic, education, health, economic pursuits and social behaviour have explained that the problem of tribal women differs from one area to another owing to their geographic location and historical background.

Rao V.M. (2010) through his work founds that the women do not have the freedom of decision making as all the decision on the important activities are taken by the male member in the family. So the woman has to go a long way to attain a sound socio-economic status in the society.

IV. Sources of Data

The study is based on both primary as well as secondary data. The secondary data have been collected from the Census of India, various official reports, records, documents and publications. Data for understanding the average condition of demographic, social and economic characteristics have been collected from district census handbooks. Further, in order to have detailed information on various aspects relating to demographic, economic, socio-cultural characteristics and social change among Thakur tribal women household survey has been conducted with the help of a well-designed schedule, in the selected sample villages in the Thane District.

V. Discussion and Findings

Under the following heads, an effort has been made to discuss and highlight the status of women in Thakur Tribe.

1. Status in the Family

The Thakur are a patriarchal community. Generally, as I have seen in the Thakur villages of Thane district, the joint Thakur family is consisted of father, grandfather, mother, grandmother, sons, daughters, daughter-in-laws, grand children etc. In Thakur family different women members assume different status which varies from one another. For example, someone assumes the status of mother, other one of daughter, daughter-in-law, and mother-in-law etc. Accordingly, their role played in the family is also different from each other. In practical situation what I have seen in Thakur villages is that the housewife takes primary role in the maintenances of domestic affairs and the husband's role may be considered as secondary to his family. This shows that, Thakur women enjoy a great extent of right and freedom in the family which is a sign of good status of women in the society. Hospitality by women is another important yardstick by which the status of women is measured. In a Thakur family, the items of food as well as the process of their preparations also changed in which a Thakur woman has to spend more time. To engage taken hygienic care of her children and old members of the family as well as taken care of the family environment etc. become a regular duty for a Thakur woman. The above discussion shows that a Thakur woman's having prominent status in their family.

2. Economic Status

As a Thakur communities are agriculturist. It is unknown to us when did the Thakur begin a stable agricultural social life. Thakur Tribal women play a significant role in the economic development of tribal's as they contribute in various economic activities. A Thakur women economically assumes an equal degree of status to a male counterpart. Rather, the role played by a Thakur woman in certain economic field is more significant than a man. She takes a major contributor role to economic sufficiency of the family by way of indulging herself in farming, animal husbandry etc.

3. Status in Religious Life

The institutional role that a Thakur woman plays in respect of religious life is equally significant to the man. The religious activities incomplete without the participation of women. The role of Thakur women is equal to men. As a woman of religiosity, she is a friend, assistant, counsellor and a servant of her husband throughout life. The responsibility of daily propitiation of God in house temple is performed by women. Besides, the observation of different types of socio-religious functions i.e.marriage ceremony, death and burial ceremony, birth ceremony and other social festivals, women have to play an important and specific role in domestic life also.

4. Educational Status

In the reference area of the study there are 240 Thakur families covering 24 villages and have found that higher is the level of education, lesser is the level of female participation. For further clarification relevant data are shown in the table no. 1.

Table No.1

Sr. No.	Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
1	Primary	76	71.03
2	Secondary	24	22.43
3	HSC	4	3.74
4	Graduation	2	1.87
5	Post Graduate	1	0.93
Total		107	44.58
6	Illiterate	133	55.42
Total		240	100.00

From the data presented in the table no. 1 it is seen that the level of female participation in education starts declining just after under Matric level and this declination is quite faster from High School Leaving Certificate level and at post graduate level the female participation becomes very low. A time has now come to critically analyse the causes that lead to lesser participation of females in education among the Thakur tribe. Various factors are found for poor status of education among Thakur community. For example Poverty of Parents, Educational Policy, Lack of Female Teacher, Absenteeism of Teachers, School Dropouts,

Long Distance, Medium of Teaching, Content of Education, Inadequate Infrastructure etc. However, the status of women in Thakur tribal society cannot be looked upon in isolation as it is closely integrated with the status of women in general.

VI. Problems faced by Thakur tribal women

Thakur tribal's faces a number of challenges which they need to overcome in order to improve their status in society. The researcher intends to discuss here the issues faced by Thakur tribal women in particular. Most of them do not have a regular source of income, and they live below the poverty level. Thakur Tribal women are mainly not engaged in any kind of continuous work and much like their male counterparts are found to work in agriculture. Economic conditions of households are related to other aspects of their life. Lack of access to education: Most of the Thakur 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 dropouts from school. Even the parents belong to poor families don't always wants to send their children to school because they are helping hands in their routine works. 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 Thakur 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 the mindicates a decision making ability of women. When the decision making ability is higher, women can have a higher status in the household.

VII. Strategies for promoting a change in the status of Thakur tribal women

As it has been pointed out, low levels of economic activity and living conditions below the poverty level is a major problem faced by the Thakur tribal women. A practical way of dealing with this problem can be to provide skills and training to women which will

help them in building up of self help groups. Awareness can be created through effort to empower these women. Various NGOs can come forward to provide necessary trainings which will help them in becoming empowered and generate livelihood. Bridge trust an NGO has been working with tribal women in areas near Mumbai for generating empowerment for them. If the economic aspect is taken care of and awareness generated, then the tribal children can attend school which will help them to develop a strong base for their future. Preparing themselves for future lives will be possible through adequate education. It is essential to aware and motivates the tribal children the reasons why it is important to have education. It is not just for acquiring money but to improve their decision making ability. The health of the Thakur tribal women is another aspect which needs attention because the tribal women work very hard and the income of the family depends on efforts of the Thakur tribal women. Thakur Tribal women suffer from nutritional deficiency. They have lower life-expectancy than the national average because they do not take the required amount of food and rest. From various reports it has been found that, illiteracy is a cause of lack of awareness about health. If economic, educational and health aspects are given adequate attention, then these factors may contribute to an increase in the decision making abilities of the Thakur tribal women. If they are convinced about the significance of financial institutions and if the banks extend their co-operation to these women then their security about financial matters will be enhanced.

VIII. Conclusion

It is a reality that the Thakur tribal women still are lagging behind in many respects and they have to face many challenges. Thakur 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 traditions, illiteracy, social evils and many other cultural factors. They work very hard and contribute significantly towards the economic condition of the family, but they are still under below poverty and proper efforts are not oriented towards them by Government and male dominated society.

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