ABSTRACT

The tribal women, constitute like any other social group, about half of the total population. Tribal societies generally view gender as complimentary and classless, where each role is defined but complimentary to the other. Men focus on cultivation and women plant and gather the foods, thus both roles are necessary and complimentary in the universal relationship of the family/community. Traditionally, tribal women and men had equal access to lands, animals and resources, and this was beneficial to the collective. However, as a result of the integration and adjustment efforts of dominant culture, capitalistic systems and the ideal of individual ownership, tribal women in particular experience less opportunity to access their natural resource and lands. As a result Gender relations within tribal society have been changing. The present paper is based on empirical study carried out in the Anuppur district of Madhya Pradesh that highlights the trouble of tribal women in present scenario and how the minor forest product changes the life of tribal women.

Keywords: Tribal Societies, Minor Forest Products, Tribal women

INTRODUCTION

The gender relations in a tribal society seem to be relatively egalitarian with women enjoying quite a high social status and economic value compared to their non-tribal counter parts.

Role of women is not only for importance in economic activities, but her role in non-economic activities is equally important. The tribal women work very hard, in some cases even more than the men. The tribal women have a freedom, and a self-expression. With the onset of development programmes economic changes are taking place, which affect men and women differently. This inequality arising from the development process calls for a detailed scrutiny because it has resulted in not only inequality between tribals and non-tribals but also among tribals on gender basis. Majority of the tribal societies are male-controlled. Women are not equal to men as such, but had higher status vise-a-visa non-tribal women. Both their relatively high status and children’s upbringing depended on abundant resources and partial control that they exercised over them. In other words, tribal women owed their relatively high status both to the abundance of resources and a clear division in their societies between the family and the social sphere. The man represented the family in the society and woman as the main decision maker in the family economy, production, and social relations. Tribal women enjoy a greater social status with regard to control over resources. This ensures their active
participation and decision-making with regard to land utilization, agriculture and powers over cash flow in a tribal economy. The fact that the woman controlled the family economy was the main reason why her status depended on abundant resources. As such, she had a bigger vested interest in treating them renewable, that is, in their sustainable use. The vested interests, her control over the family economy and her consequent relatively high status depended on the resources remaining as common property resources (Pathy, 1988). Much of this has changed during the decades of planned development. Modernization tends to move more and more individual land ownership oriented, and as a result destructive of the woman’s status (Fernandez and Barbora, 2002). These tribal women who sustained themselves on the natural resources had to face economic poverty, followed by loss of social status.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To study the changing status of tribal women through minor forest products.
2. To study the impact of minor forest products on their living standard.
3. To study the socio and economic condition of tribal women of Anuppur district.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gurnug (1998) suggests that the social and economic status of tribal women is low because of social hierarchy and economic deficiency. The distinction in land holding, food security, allocation of resources and role in decision making affects and determines their socio economic status. Bhasin (2007) has carried out her study about tribal women in different geographic region i.e. Ladhak, North Eastern Region, Rajasthan and her conclusion show that the tribal women possess a lot of importance in tribal communities. Awais et al. (2009) stated that tribal women have major role in co-management of their natural, social and economic resources. But still they suffer a lot; they are backward due to a traditional outlook, illiteracy, superstition, and submissive role in decision making, social evils and many other cultural factors. Geetha Menon (1992) reveals that the impact and the loss of common property resources are very severe on tribal women. She shows that the hardships of the tribal women have been increasing. Thus tribal women are the major victims of the deprivation of the traditional rights of the tribals in common property resources.

Recent research indicates that violence against tribal women is increasing while kinship bonds are decreasing (Panda & Snehalata, 2008). The practice of eliminating widows through “witch hunting” has been condemned throughout the country.

Nutritional intake is decreasing due to decreased traditional cultivation and agricultural activities, and as a result peoples' immunity and health is declining as seen in the increasing incidences of diseases like tuberculosis and malaria (Basu and Kshatriya, 1989; Basu et al., 1993; Chopra and Makol, 2004). Awais et al. (2009) said that tribal women face challenges and problems in getting a sustainable livelihood and a decent life due to the environmental degradation and the interference of the outsiders. According to Fernandes et al. (2001) in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal, tribal women deprived of natural resources that are their sustenance, complained of not having any work. These were the sources of their high status and of their economic utility. With their disappearance they felt that their community did not have any use for them. They are reduced to being housewives alone with no opportunity to work outside the house and make a contribution to the family economy. The review of literature clearly indicates that various researchers have highlighted the changing status of women in the tribal society.

CHANGING SCENARIO

There are a large number of processes through which tribals have lost access to land and forests essential for their survival and livelihoods. These don’t only include alienation of land which is legally owned by the tribals through debt mortgaging and sale, but also loss of access to land through reservation of forests, loss of traditional shifting cultivation land through Survey and Settlement, displacement, unsuitable and unimplemented land reform laws etc. Over a period of time, all these
processes have led to loss of control and access to livelihood support systems vital to their existence, marginalizing and destitution of tribal communities. In areas where tribals are in minorities, their conditions, along with that of dalits, are even more miserable and powerless. The situation in these scheduled areas are already extremely disturbing, with large scale mining leading to displacement of tribal, destruction of their livelihood support system including forests and water sources, large scale air and water pollution, and influx of outsiders.

For over a decade and a half the government has been pushing the agenda of the corporate sector, resulting in extraordinary pain to the tribal people depending on land and natural resources for survival. Projects varying from multi-purpose dams, reservoirs, power plants or any other industries have led to large-scale displacement, destruction of livelihood, cultures and also the physical environment. While local communities were adversely affected, the issue of women in such situations has never been considered. In the forest areas the pattern of industrialization is restructuring social relations. Labour roles are changing with the transition from traditional land- and forest based livelihoods to mining based. With this shift in labour roles and traditional livelihoods, gender roles are shifting as well. Where men and women had previously worked together in agricultural activities, now men are working daily in the mines to earn cash income, whereas they would have previously worked to support their families through agricultural production.

Women are staying at home to carry out only household duties with the degradation and alienation of lands. With the individual Patta becoming the norm of land ownership, power has been transferred to man and from him to his son. The increasing liability of land and forest dependent people in rural India has conflated pressure to retain what remaining land and resources they do hold. Now tribal women are prohibited from owning land without the support of their father, husband, son or brother, so that if a woman is married to a non-indigenous person, the land can stay with the male relative and with the tribal community. Livelihoods of forest dependent peoples, especially women, are adversely affected by forced dislodgments. Non-timber forest produce forms a major source of income for many tribal communities. Women are almost exclusively involved in collection, storage, processing and marketing of minor forest products such as fodder, that ching, and medicinal herbs. However increased government control of forests and minor forest products are adversely affecting livelihoods choices of Tribal and forest dependent women. The woman grabs to be the main decision maker in the family economy and becomes dependent on man (Thekkekara, 1993). Krishna (2005) says that the swift transformation of production systems, land use and livelihoods in recent decades has affected gender relations, leading in many cases to marginalization of women. Further, with the establishment of industries and various development projects by the Government, each member of the family was to be given a job where by women were never considered. Jobs were normally given to men, considered heads of family which were often temporary or daily wagers. Thus, in comparison to women, the men folk among tribals forged ahead in acquiring the modern privileges.

PROFILE OF ANUPPURDISTRICT

District Anuppur is situated in Shahdol Division of Madhya Pradesh in central India. The district has an area of 3701 km², and a population of 667,155. 309,624 people are from scheduled tribes and 48,376 are scheduled castes. Most of the tribal population (80 percent of total population) stays in forest areas and are engaged in agriculture. Their livelihood depends on forest & other natural resources. Their age old traditional practices are conservation oriented and form a true example of sustainable lifestyle. Anuppur is one of the last natural resource frontiers in India perhaps in the world. The district has rich forests and natural resources and is known for its tourism of Amarkantak waterfalls and scenic beauty and a central University named as Indira Gandhi National Tribal University Amarkantak. The main tribes of area are Baiga, Gond, Panika, Kol, Agriya, Charmkar, Bhaina, Bhil, Pardhan, Baheliya, Khairwar etc.
MATERIAL AND METHOD

Present study is an in depth exploratory analysis of the lives of tribal women in Anuppur district of Madhya Pradesh. Purposive generous of 300 tribal women in the age group of 15-55 years residing in Anuppur were included. Anuppur being the headquarters of the district, it was decided to collect the sample from the villages within the radius of 35 to 40 Km of the town. 85 tribal women from Baiga tribe, 26 from Bhaina, 16 from Panika, 18 from Kol, 83 from Gond, 30 from Agariya and 42 from Charmakar were included in the sample. Informal interviewing with the help of interpreter was used to collect information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The distribution of the respondents according to different age categories clearly indicates that a majority of the respondents belonged to an economically active age group. The majority of tribal women under study were married.

The incidence of widowhood and divorce, though rare is not uncommon. Taking into account the educational attainment of the respondents under study, it is difficult to find any marked difference in the tribes, since 48 percent of the respondents were illiterate. Results show that more than 60 percent of the respondents worked as laborers. It is necessary to mention here that most of the respondents did not own land and they turned up as daily wagers MFP collectors. The impact of ongoing aggressive growth on women could be broadly divided under two heads viz. Sociocultural and Economic

SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACT

Tribal society of Madhya Pradesh is alive on a culturally networked web. Landed property in tribal communities is understood as a secular tradition from the families and the sons who inherit them are the guardians of this land. They do work on the land and draw their food, but they also have a responsibility to safely hand over this property to the next generation. When the ambush of development projects uproots them from their inherited place, they are socially tumbling-down. They are underprivileged of the same social and cultural meaning when they start living in another place. As a result, the well-knit social fabric of tribal community gets completely exhausted. Their society breaks. They find it difficult and often impossible to begin a new society where they can live with their old values, old relations and old meaning of life and women are the worst hit group due to breakdown of society. The social and cultural web or network gets dismantled after displacement and so does the support system the community. The loss of land negatively contributes in the disruption of family bonds. The support and help the families provide to each other is not available after displacement. Women suffer the most due to breakdown of the social network.

INCREASE IN ALCOHOLISM AMONG MEN

Men start drinking or increase drinking as a ‘coping’ mechanism. As the man, who has lost his traditional occupation—farming, goes around looking for jobs, frustration builds up in him, which he takes out on the women of the house. Results show that most of the respondents had marital conflict due to alcoholism. The influx of hordes of outsiders in the area affects their cultural and social values. The material culture that the outsiders bring in along with them affects the locals. They start feeling inferior about their own culture. The culture of the group perceived as superior who are now their neighbors, is super imposed on them and here begins a cultural crisis. In other words the local society, which earlier had a distinctive culture, faces a abnormal problem previously unheard of that of cultural identity.

SOCIAL DIGNITY OF WOMEN GOING DOWN

The breakdown of the community network caused by investment invaders affect the women more severely than men. Wife’s rude behavior pattern towards her husband, her disobedience and being nagging type were the main precipitating factor for spousal quarrel among Gond tribes. Husband’s drinking behavior; money matters and work shirker were the main precipitating for quarrel among
Gonds. Domestic violence has become quite prevalent in recent times. Panika men in the present study were found to be more violent as compared to Gond men. Tribal groups who are residing near or in urban areas face the additional burdens of discrimination, menial jobs and higher rates of victimization. A sudden increase in marriages breaking-up is reported because of unemployment and other problems. Tribal women who generally enjoy a better social status in their communities are now treated according to status of women in the host villages. They, in some cases, find themselves pushed, into following the purdah system that did not exist earlier. Dignity of women, though unethically, is often associated with the wealth their family possesses. As the affected or uprooted family is robbed of its land and the wealth it generated from the land, it is usually poor. The dignity of women of the family also goes down in the eyes of the society. The new and dominant society that comes to the region after development expresses utter unwillingness to accord the same old status to the local women, as they deserved in their original society. Dowry is being practiced in a few tribal communities. This exposes them to various threats.

In many cases the torture is so severe that they suffer from the injuries for months. Within the village it is not possible to get treatment. The psychological injuries due to public insult and dishonor stay for life. In some cases the accused women commits suicide. In witch hunting cases, often the village representatives and the government officials do not come forward in opposition on the pretext that this is an indigenous belief that is best left undisturbed.

Results show that a significant number of respondents believed in magicians. With regard to Gond, Panika, Bhaina, Pardhan and Baiga tribes, the response was 100 percent. With regards to Baiga tribe 94.1 percent respondents reported that they believed in magicians. In Anuppur, while belief in magic and sorcery is wide spread. Evidence suggests that women are the main targets of suspicion. Many respondents felt that magic accusations are associated with property disputes. By accusing women as magicians, people actually try to find out a escape goat to pull all blame for perplexing situation of life. Since all the tribals under study are patriarchal in nature, women were blamed tobe magicians and there is no concept of a wizard.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The aggressive onslaught of investment leads to loss of land, loss of forest, loss of grazing land, loss of water bodies etc. thus brings loss of livelihood. The affected people are pushed to a new economy, with which they are totally unfamiliar. For tribals who depend on land alone for livelihood sudden change of occupation is just impossible. Thus, the indigenous community is silently going through the process, silent destruction of traditional occupation. Even if they try to find away out and get employment in the new economy, jobs are not adequately available. Those who had no land earlier and were dependent mainly on share cropping or rendering services to the community and/or solely dependent on common property resources, also lose their market and their access to the common property. Women face a new situation where jobs, if there are any, generally go to the men of the family, the compensation amount goes to men, and they are left with no work. Among Pardhan tribe women are not allowed to plough the fields. Baiga and Panika tribe women are prohibited from trading. Only Gond women work in the houses of non-tribalsas domestic help.

MIGRATION OF TRIBAL GIRLS DUE TO LOSS OF LIVELIHOOD

Migration of tribal girls to other states in search of livelihood is probably the severest fallout of aggressive growth and displacement in modern era. Loss of land and resultant loss of work has pushed tribal girls to migrate. Machination of construction works roads, buildings and others, has steal from them off their livelihood which they earned selling their physical labour. Though a small portion of the labour could still be used in these works along with machines, a big chunk was thrown out of work.
WOMEN FORCED TO PRODUCE ‘RICE BEER’ OR ‘MAHUA BEER’ AND SELL FOR LIVELIHOOD

All across tribal areas and especially in rural community that surround developed cities, women can be spotted selling rice beer or mahua beer on road sides, babies slung on their backs. Traditionally, tribal women have produced rice beer or mahua beer not for commercial use but for use during festivals. Now selling it seems to have become anew livelihood option for those women whose families have borne the brunt of aggressive development and loss of livelihood.

WOMEN ARE TURNING TO CONSTRUCTION LABOUR

Construction work in industrial areas is cashing on availability of cheap labour created by the loss of livelihood as a result of aggressive growth through industrialization. Women may find employment at construction sites, but they lose self-esteem in the process and become vulnerable to sexual exploitation by contractors. Instances of sexual exploitation occur more with women. Results show that more than 60 percent of the respondents worked as laborers. It is necessary to mention here that most of the respondents did not own land and they turned up as daily wagers. It has been found that in majority of tribes under study, heads of the household were engaged in menial types of occupations which included labourers in farms or construction workers. Majority of the tribals were poor as their total monthly income was less than Rs. 3000. Majority of the respondents admitted that they are paid less than men. Majority of the respondents belonging to Gond tribe (92.9 percent) followed by Panika tribe (87.5 percent) and then Baiga tribe (83.3 percent) who reported differentials in wages of men and women. They conferred that it was due to the economic pressure that they were accepting the low wages.

CONCLUSION

The analysis given in this paper shows that though development projects are important for the progress of the nation they tend to become a major threat to the traditional livelihood of the people affected by them. It is true more in case of tribal women. One can conclude from the above discussion that tribal women have been severely affected by the development. With the alienation of the natural resources, the tribal woman seizes to be an economic asset to the family.

The impact of this is felt not only in the economic field but also in the social arena. She seizes to be autonomous. Tribal women are particularly vulnerable to violence both within their own communities and in the broader society. Tribal women experience many kinds of violence in times of peace and war, including beating and forced labour. They are trafficked for prostitution and forced labour. Globalization and economic liberalization have often destroyed indigenous subsistence economies and displaced tribals from their land.

Tribal women have lost their livelihoods. Poverty has contributed to displacement of indigenous communities. There has also been an increase in migration of tribal women, in search of employment, to cities, where they face the danger of exploitation and in humane treatment. Forced migration has led to destruction of indigenous lifestyles and compounded the problems faced by tribal women.

REFERENCES


