

## **Economic Empowerment of Tribal Women in Karnataka: A Case Study in Mysore and Chamarajanagara Districts**

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**ABSTRACT** 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 various walks of life like education, employment, good health and economic empowerment etc. Empowering may be understood as enabling weaker sections like poor women, especially tribal women to acquire and to possess power and resources, in order to make decisions on their own. After the analysis of the data and field observation, it is revealed that lack of education, poor health status and infant mortality rate, low level of wage work, lack of self employment opportunity, organising capacity and leadership quality are the main obstacles to the economic empowerment of tribal women. The government and non- governmental organisations should prepare suitable plans and programmes for the economic empowerment of tribal women.

### **INTRODUCTION**

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. Though they are industrious, they have limited control over resources and economic activities. Therefore, there is a need for economic empowerment of tribal women in order to overcome inequality, discrimination and exploitation and to achieve their all round development in the society.

Economic empowerment of marginalized groups involves not only the process of creation of socio-political space for these groups by the state and civil society but also it is a process of liberation from man-made bondage through sustained struggle and resistance. It also represents realization of hopes and dreams of marginalised groups for a social environment, free of inequalities which affect them politically, socially and economically. The issue of economic empowerment is also linked with aspects like equality, liberty and fraternity. Thus the concept of "Economic Empowerment" of tribal women is quite new and it has been contextualized and acquires a new connotation in recent years among social scientists, policy makers, and development activists. So to overcome all the obstacles of the economic empowerment

of tribal women, the scientific research is an urgent need.

There are a good number of studies, explaining the causes and consequences of women disempowerment. Such studies are related to a general enquiry of women exploitation and dependency. These studies have identified lack of education, absence of skills and training, lack of property rights, social isolation and segregation and male control over resources and reproductive rights as responsible for women disempowerment. These factors in different degrees are applicable to the disempowerment of different socio-economic groups of women who are socially heterogeneous groups like White women versus Black women, educated and uneducated women, high caste women and low caste women, Christian, Muslim and Hindu women. These socially discriminated women face different degrees and various types of obstacles for empowerment (Becker 1956; Boserup 1970; Sen 2001). Further economically, women are classified into high income, middle income, and low income groups (like men).

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. Sen has advocated human capabilities approach to the development process. The human capabilities include social, economic, cultural and political capabilities of the human beings. Sen (2001) has identified the following seven types of gender inequalities in his public lecture delivered at Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University in 2001. They are:

1. Mortality inequality
2. Nataliy inequality
3. Basic facilities inequality
4. Special opportunity inequality
5. Professional inequality
6. Ownership inequality
7. Household inequality

These seven types of gender inequalities explained by Amartya Kumar Sen do not apply to women in tribal society. These gender inequalities apply in varying degrees in rural and urban society which are generally modernising and industrialising. However the mortality inequality, nataliy inequality, basic facilities inequality are more pronounced between women of rural and urban societies vis-à-vis tribal societies. Sen has referred to gender inequalities of different kind between men and women. However to understand and measure the disempowerment magnitude of the tribal women and their overall position, that has to be compared with the women of urban and rural society and not with their poor male counterparts.

By way of implication it may be observed that to achieve the goal of empowerment of tribal women, it is necessary to build and develop human capabilities among the tribal women as equal to and comparable with men and women of modern urban society and urban economic system.

Thus the human capabilities approach becomes an important tool for achieving the goal of tribal women empowerment. This view point is made by Indira (2006: 326) as under: There is a synergy between the conventional measures of the impact on women empowerment in terms of empowerment indicators and the capability approach. Though, the expected outcomes in order to improve the position of women are the same, the conventional approach through empowerment indicators looks at how her participation has increased in decision-making. Capability goes beyond it and tries to understand

the role of these outcomes in improving the capability of individual, in terms of improving the choices. This way, it is an extension of conventional measures and gives a holistic impact of these programmes on the lives of women.

Nussbaum (2000) has suggested that increases in basic capability are essential for promoting the well-being of the poor women in any society. This suggestion is relevant for promoting the empowerment and well-being of the tribal women as well.

Therefore the human development perspective used to promote increasing and more economic growth participation, equality, human security and human dignity and respect for people necessitate the adoption of programmes for achieving empowerment of tribal women like others. Tribes including their women and children have right to live and enjoy the full human life happily. This universe definitely belongs to the poorest of the poor namely the tribal people as it belongs to the men and women of modern and materialistically prosperous system.

### Objectives

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To analyse the factors influencing the economic empowerment of tribal women.
2. To identify the constraints of economic empowerment of tribal women.
3. To suggest the suitable programmes and policy measures to achieve the goal of economic empowerment of tribal women.

### Hypotheses

1. More stronger constraints on the economic empowerment of the tribal women, they generate greater feminization of poverty.
2. Programmes and Policies of the Government and NGOs promote the economic empowerment of tribal women.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology adopted for the present study includes both primary and secondary sources of data. For collecting primary data 100 tribal households of Soliga (35), Jenukuruba (35), Bettakuruba (15) and Yarava (15) living in Mysore and Chamarajanagara districts have been chosen. This region is lo-

cated in southern part of Karnataka state. These are primitive tribes as well as ancient tribes who live in three southern states namely Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. There are discernible differences in the levels of socio-economic and educational development achieved by these four tribes during the last 60 years of planning era. The Betta Kuruba and Jenu Kuruba tribes live in Nagarahole and Bandipura national reserve forest area (Karnataka and Kerala), Soligas live in M.M. Hills, B.R. Hills (Karnataka) and Nilgiri Hills (Tamil Nadu) and Yarava tribes in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. This is the geographical distribution of these four tribes.

The sample households were selected from Havinamoole and Nellikatra of Kollegal *taluk*, Melukamenahally and Maddur in Gundalpet *taluk* of Chamarajanagara District. Kempahady and Bramhagiri of H.D.Kote *taluk*, Kolavige and Hosahally of Hunasur *taluk* of Mysore District. The required primary data was collected through an interview schedule. The primary data was collected about agriculture, minor forest produce collection, education, health, asset ownership, wage, employment, gender discrimination, decision-making, and economic organization of tribal women.

Approximately, the total number of three hundred women and girls are included in one hundred tribal households of the case study region. The reference period of the study is restricted to January–December, 2011. The secondary data was collected from the various published documents. Statistical tables and the simple average methods are used to analyse the economic empowerment of tribal women.

### Conceptual Framework

Throughout the world and particularly in South-east Asia and Africa, the gender problem has assumed importance during the recent years. The gender issue has become virtually a crucial point of argument. It is now widely believed that empowerment of women, in general and particularly for tribal women, to provide equal rights, opportunities, asset ownership and responsibilities, will go a long way in removing the existing gender discrimination. Women empowerment in contemporary Indian society, in the form of their work, education, health, and media images in the context of lineage, rule of residence and household chores has to be achieved.

Women participation in social and political activities, their legal status in terms of marriage, divorce and inheritance of property, seeking health care should be taken into consideration. Empowerment means in terms of knowledge and awareness of one's own life and society including legal status with regard to the human lives.

Empowering may be understood as enabling women, especially tribal women, to acquire and to possess power and resources, in order to make decision on their own or resist decisions that are made by others which affect them. A person may said to be powerful when he/she has control over a large portion of power resources in society (Gowda and Yogish 2006). The extent of possession of various resources such as personal wealth, assets, land, skilled education, information, knowledge, social status, and position held, leadership traits, capabilities for mobilization of resources etc., indicate the level of empowerment.

According to Chambers English Dictionary "to authorize", in the context of people, they have authorised to have control over their lives. When applied in the context of development the particular segment of population, the poor, the women, the vulnerable, the weak, the proposed and the discriminated have to be "empowered" to have control over their lives, to better their socio-economic and political conditions.

Women's development can be attained by improving their status and bargaining power in the economy.

Sahay (1998) observed that empowerment could be possible by outlining the mechanisms and tools that still influence the women empowerment, decision-making process, multidimensional process that enable women to realize their full identity and powers in all walks of life.

The Government of India has adopted the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2001. The main objective of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women, to eliminate all forms of discrimination against the women and to ensure their active participation in all spheres of life and activities. Articles 15, 16, 39, and 42 of the Indian Constitution have ensured the freedom to women in every sphere of life.

In Sen's (2001) parlance, women agency means any bargaining process of their own to reduce their exploitation within family and also

within the economy. The women agency, thus, can take place both at the individual level and in collective form by way of women forums or organisations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Aspects of the Economic Empowerment of Tribal Women

During the last two decades there have been increasing numbers of research studies relating to social empowerment, economic empowerment, and political empowerment of women in general. Such studies are undertaken in the context of both developed and developing, viz., expanding societies and economies. The purpose of the present paper is exploring factors facilitating or discouraging economic empowerment of women, such studies are attempted by Banerji, Sen, Krishnaraj, Agarwal, Kelkar and Heggade. These Indian scholars have explored the economic opportunities like employment, education, access to healthcare services, improvements in human resources development, property rights and inclusive growth process for women as important determinants of economic empowerment of women. Lesmke (2003) has analysed, how very high levels of domestic violence and rape have caused women disempowerment and thus has become a source of economic poverty. Budlender (2000: 133) state "poorer women are often rapped in abusive relationship due to their dependence on partner for food, shelter and money".

Awais et al. (2009: 1) point out that tribal women face problems and challenges in getting a sustainable livelihood and a decent life due to the environmental degradation and the interference of the outsiders. However, there are wide variations across regions and tribes in terms of work participation, sex ratio, economic productivity, and social life. Awais et al. (2009: 2) further pointed out that without any healthy and productive tribal women, the tribal societies cannot have productive settled agriculture. That means tribal women contribute immensely to the tribal agriculture. However in modern India, the natural resources and natural habitat of the tribes are used for commercial purposes and thus their ecological sustainability is damaged. This has the potential to damage the life sustenance of goods from the forest and its water

bodies. This study suffers from primary data about tribal women participation by different State sponsored employment and welfare programmes in tribal regions. However, Awais (2009) have suggested based on the intuitive reasoning that to initiate policy measure to increase agricultural production through better supply of inputs including credit and improving marketing network for the agricultural output and MFP of the tribes.

Kantidas (2012: 1) has made out a strong case for the socio-economic empowerment of the tribal women in India. This study identifies many social, political, economic, technological and physiological constraints in the way of tribal women empowerment. Kantidas has attempted an analysis of constraints in women empowerment in the tribal area of Assam State. This research has found that, the cognitive and infrastructural constraints are major hurdles for tribal development as well as tribal empowerment. In particular, Kantidas has pointed out that the main reason for the poor empowerment of tribal women was noted as lack of knowledge about new technology and information.

From time to time a number of descriptive studies about the process of and issues in economic empowerment of tribal women, with reference to different tribes in various parts of India are attempted. Most of them have advocated policy initiatives like: a) Agricultural diversification. b) Increased emphasis on the growth of non-farming activities. c) Policy measures for promoting girl's education d) Emphasis upon increasing the access for modern allopathic medicine system and e) Protection of tribal land property from the encroachment by the main land people and the State. All these policy measures are universally relevant for promoting the human capabilities which help to increase economic empowerment of tribal women.

The economic empowerment of tribal women includes the following determinants

**1. Educational Status:** 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 (Suresh and Padmaja 2005). But the level of education of the tribal women (34.76 percent), in general and study area is very low (37.5 and 32.8 per-

cent in Mysore and Chamarajanagara districts respectively) (Tables 1 and 3). So it should be encouraged through the special literacy and educational programmes. And the dropout rate of tribal girl child is also more than 80.7 percent (Table 2). The main reason for this is that, in the tribal area, the children are forced into early marriage. To overcome this, attractive measures should be taken on one hand, and on the other hand, there should be efforts to create awareness about the evils of child marriage and thus the need for its prohibition.

**Table 1: Literacy rate of tribal population from 1961-2001**

Year	Male	Female	Total
1961	13.85	3.16	8.5
1971	17.63	4.85	11.30
1981	24.52	8.04	16.35
1991	40.65	18.19	29.26
2001	59.17	34.76	47.10

Source: Selected Educational Statistics 2004-05 of India

**2. Health and Nutritional Level:** 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 (Suresh and Padmaja 2005). 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 average (Table 5). In addition to that

**Table 2: Dropout rates of ST and general population in India**

Class	Class I-IV			Class I-VII			Class I-X		
	GM	ST	GAP	GM	ST	GAP	GM	ST	GAP
Boys	31.8	42.6	-10.7	50.4	65.0	-14.6	60.4	77.8	-17.4
Girls	25.4	42.0	-16.6	51.3	67.1	-15.8	63.9	80.7	-16.8
Total	29.0	42.3	-13.3	50.8	65.9	-15.1	61.9	79.0	-17.1

Source: Selected Educational Statistics 2004-05 of India

**Table 3: ST population and literacy rate in Karnataka**

	Total population size			Literacy rate		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Karnataka	1756238	1707748	3463986	59.7	36.6	48.3
Mysore	136856	134495	271351	50.1	37.5	46.4
C.R. Nagara	53202	52900	106118	50.2	32.8	41.2

Source: Population Census Report – 2001

under-nutrition and CED (Chronic Energy Deficiency) is also very high as compared to others (Table 5). The development of health facilities for S.Ts is undertaken by the government through its successive five year plans. The PHC (Primary Health Centre) HSC (Health Sub Centres) and ICDC projects established in tribal areas are indicators of extension of medical services to the tribes (Table 4). 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.

**Table 4: Medical facilities in tribal areas**

Type of medical centres	Total number	Number in ST areas	Percentage
Primary health centres	21853	3258	14.9
Health sub centres	132778	20355	15.3
ICDS projects	4200	70	17.8

Source: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, GOI New Delhi

**3. Agriculture and Minor Forest Produce (MFP):** Most of the tribes depend on MFP collection and also follow agriculture-based economy. The tribal women possess unique

**Table 5: Gender gap in under- nutrition among social groups (2005-06)**

Social Groups	Chronic Energy Deficiency			Anaemia		
	Women	Men	Gap	Women	Men	Gap
S.T.	46.6	41.3	5.3	68.5	39.6	28.9
S.C	41.1	39.1	2.0	58.3	26.6	31.7
O.B.C	35.7	34.6	1.1	54.4	22.3	32.1
Other	29.4	28.9	0.5	51.3	20.9	30.4
S.T./Other**	1.6	1.4	-	1.3	1.9	-

Source: Computed from NFHS-3 Unit Level Data

\*\*indicate that the ratio of ST percentage to corresponding percentage of others

skills in agricultural operations and MFP collection. However, over the years, various new techniques have been introduced to reduce the manual labour power and to use the different external inputs to enhance the productivity. Generally it leads to unemployment, particularly women labour, who work (Table 7) 75- to 87 percent on the agricultural land and coffee plantation and domestic sector for wages. The daily wage is the main source of income in their life and it also fulfils the basic needs of the family. In recent years, tribal women, nearly 40-75 percent of the samples are migrating to plantation economy along with their family for wage work from January to June, every year (Table 7). This is not only helpful to eradicate the seasonal unemployment but also useful to generate income. But migrant women labourers are not getting any social security benefits and they are unaware about it. Some events of sexual harassments are also reported during the migration period. Women accompany the family members for collection and sales of MFP. This can be part time work to generate additional income for the family. But implementation Wild Life Protection Act of 1972 is hindering the collection of MFP and improper implementation of 2006 and 2008 Forest Right Act; these are also an obstacle for economic empowerment of tribal women. So proper implementation of Forest Right Act of 2006 and 2008 and providing wage work opportunities through the government employment schemes with out any bureaucratic hurdles is an urgent need.

**4. Ownership of Assets and Access to Resources:** The tribal women need to have control over limited resources like land, productive asset ownership, livestock and other resources, so that, they can take decisions and implement them in any way that is required. The ownership and control over productive assets will create a sense of belonging and owning. It will thus

**Table 6: Some health indicators in India**

Indicator	Infant mortality 1000 live births	Under-5 mortality 1000 live births	Child mortality rate
All India	57.0	73.3	18.4
S.C.	66.4	88.1	23.2
S.T	62.1	95.7	35.8
OBC	56.6	72.8	17.3
Other	48.9	59.2	10.8

Source: NFHS3: 2005-06 Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

**Table 7: Empowerment status of selected sample tribal women in Mysore and Chamarajanagara districts**

Status	Soliga	Jenu	Kadu	Yar- ava
		kur- uba	kur- uba	
Education	48	45	52	55
Family planning	91	88	95	93
Decision- making	50	60	65	66
Members of SHGs	57	70	75	73
Ownership of agricultural land	5	2.85	2.1	6.2
Wage employment	85	87	85	75
Gender equality	82.6	88.4	87	75
Organization and leadership quality	02	03	02	04
Migration for wage work	40	75	60	40

Source: Compiled from Primary Data

help to take responsibility in family and local group activities. Other impact of control is to enhance their decision-making ability to meet some physiological needs, self-esteem and confidence. But in the tribal area, women control over the ownership of Agriculture Land is only 2.1 to 6.2 percent (Table 7). It is very negligible. This is the obstacle for women empowerment. So appropriate measures are required to overcome the above problems.

**5. Micro-credit Programmes:** Micro-credit programmes extend small loans to tribal women for self-employment projects that generate income allowing them to care for themselves and

their families. In most cases, micro- credit programmes offers a combination of services and resources to their clients, in addition to credit for self-employment (Rajashekar 2004). Access to productive resources is critical to enhance the tribal women's economic choices. Since the formal credit institutions rarely lend to the tribal women, in case of the study area 60-70 percent of the tribal women have become the members of SHGs. But these SHGs do not provide sufficient micro- finance (Table 7), because almost all the SHGs are not working successfully. Therefore the Government and NGOs should make an effort to set up SHGs, appoint bank correspondents and bank facilitators to promote the financial inclusion among the tribal women. The policy challenge is to support the effective grass-root credit schemes and intermediaries and ensure that the low- income people have assured credit from the formal financial system.

**6. Technological Empowerment:** 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. So the formal and skill based education and training for the economic empowerment of tribal women is needed.

**7. Attaining Economic Security:** Attaining economic security is the main factor to achieve the economic empowerment of tribal women. But the tribal women have not attained economic security, because, basically they have forest resource, primary sector based earning activity, and depend on wage earnings; nearly 75-87 percent (Table 7) of them depend on primary sector for their livelihood. So to attain economic security, provision of self employment opportunity, education and training, supply of micro-credit and market facility is needed.

**8. Decision- making and Gender Equality:** Gender equality and decision- making is the important factors to the women empowerment. There is gender equality in tribal families. But decision- making ability of tribal women is very less in outside the family but it is equal to male within family.

**9. Organisation and Leadership Quality:** Organisation and leadership qualities are the basic factors to achieve empowerment, because it is helpful to mobilize the resources and to

exchange views. Organisation capacity of the tribal women is very less. As low as 2-4 percent (Table 7) of tribal women are engaged in organisation since most of them do not understand its significance. This hindrance the SHGs progress and overall empowerment process. NGOs and government intervention is needed to overcome the above problems and to organize the leadership and management training camps or courses for tribal women.

### Identification of Obstacles for Economic Empowerment of Tribal Women

The researchers have listed here some of the major obstacles for empowerment of tribal women. They are:

1. Lack of basic education and skills as well as training particularly for self employment.
2. Malnutrition and infant mortality rate is high among selected tribes.
3. High rate of unemployment and under employment.
4. Lack of resource control, productive resource ownership and decision making.
5. 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.
6. Implementation of Wild Life Protection Act of 1972 and not properly implementation of Forest Right Act of 2006 and 2008 is hindering the collection of MFP, which is partially hindering the economic empowerment of tribal women.
7. Tribal women labourers are not getting any social security benefits because they are working in unorganised and informal sector.
8. Organisation capacity and leadership quality is absent.
9. The food grains production on family farm and cash income derived from wage employment by the tribal women is used to feed the family members. Thus in general the women in tribal households provide a food security to the tribal families. A large portion of the male earnings is spent on buying alcohol and *toddy*.

Thus there is no enabling socio-economic environment for tribal women to achieve economic empowerment in Mysore and Chamara-janagara districts of Karnataka state.

### Policy Implications

1. The State should emphasise the importance of skills formation and development programmes for the benefit of tribal women.
2. Government and NGOs should prepare the special plans and programmes for the economic empowerment of tribes in general and tribal women in particular.
3. The local government officials and NGOs should be involved for organizing the SHGs among tribal women and to encourage to take-up self employment activities outside the tribal habitats and settlements.
4. Agriculture and allied sector development should be promoted to create the household job opportunity for tribal women.
5. Self awareness and interest is essential for the empowerment of the tribal women.
6. Manual wage work should be provided with an appropriate wage to tribal women under the government employment generation schemes like MGNREGA, wherever it is possible without any cheating and discrimination.
7. 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.
8. Forest Right Act of 2006 and 2008 should be properly implemented with out delay for the increase and improvement of the MFP based business and its processing activities.
9. Institutional financial assistance including micro finance is an urgent need for increasing the access of tribal women to open up new avenues of economic empowerment.

### CONCLUSION

In concluding remarks, we may say that the tribal women are not empowered economically as well as socially. The socio-economic empowerment of tribal women could be kept as a long term development goal in India. Economic independence and education of tribal women will go a long way in attaining self-reliance for women. So development/empowerment awareness, education, competitiveness, willingness, confidence, self-motivation, mind set, encouragement from family and society is essential for the economic empowerment of tribal women.

The success achieved in this regard is helpful to bring tribal women into the mainstream of inclusive growth process in India. Reducing poverty and unemployment of the tribes would pave the way towards their empowerment.

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