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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PERCEPTION OF FREEDOM FROM POVERTY AND INSECURITY OF TRIBAL WOMEN: THE CASE OF PALAKKAD DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Kerala comprises of 36 unique kinds of Scheduled Tribes (ST) whose livelihoods show wide variation. Their traditional jobs also vary such as hunting-gathering, shifting cultivation, settled agriculture, contract labour, etc. Attappadi, one of the prominent forest regions of Kerala, is situated in the north eastern part of Palakkad district of Kerala. It is one of the 43 tribal development blocks in India. The very working of the development paradigm, by uprooting them from their niche, language, modes of understanding, livelihood etc., proves to be against their interests. The pressure for subsistence fall heavily on women. The loss of traditional agricultural land compels them to engage in wage labour. As gender discrimination is prevalent among tribal labour, the women are forced to work for lower wages. Tribal women were less conscious about their actual living conditions. They were unaware of their relative poverty also they were oblivious to their developmental needs. Perception of freedom from poverty was found to be high among the respondents. Similar way perception of freedom from insecurity of tribal women was found to be very high.

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INTRODUCTION

Since independence, various measures have been taken up at the national and state level for protecting the interests of the tribes people of the country and particular attention has been given to tribal development in the different plan periods. Like all other communities, development status of tribal communities also to a large extent depends on the upliftment of the status of tribal women. Being the most vulnerable section, tribal women fall prey to various levels of exploitation and discrimination from the rest of the society. It is a fact that some of the vulnerable sections of society that ought to have benefited more from the various reforms have ultimately become victims of the reforms. Income plays a major role in the economic security of the family. It improves the standard of living and their by initiates development. Tribal women were less conscious about their actual living conditions. They were unaware of their relative poverty also they were oblivious to their developmental needs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Selection of Panchayats

Attappadi, one of the prominent forest regions of Kerala, is situated in the north eastern part of Palakkad district of Kerala.

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It is one of the 43 tribal development blocks in India. The Scheduled Tribe population of Kerala is 4, 84,839 persons as per 2011 Population Census constituting 1.45 per cent of the total population of the State. Highest concentration of Scheduled Tribes is seen in Wayanad district (31.24 per cent) followed by Idukki (11.51 per cent), Palakkad (10.10 per cent) and Kasaragod (10.08 per cent) (Census 2011). These four districts together accounts for 62.93 per cent of Scheduled Tribes in the State. Attappadi is predominantly a tribal block and it lies at the eastern half of the Mannarghat taluk of Palakkad. Administratively the Attappadi development block consists of three grama panchayats namely Agali, Pudur and Sholayur and it spreads over six revenue villages such as Agali, Kallamala, Pudur, Padavayal, Sholayur and Kottathara. The population of Attappadi consists of tribal people and non-tribal people (Settlers or *vanthavasis*).

Selection of sample

The study was conducted in three panchayats of Attappadi tribal developmental block namely Attappadi I (Agali panchayat) Attappadi II (Pudur panchayat) and Attappadi III (Sholayur panchayat). One tribal settlement from each of the panchayat identified for the study. From these settlements 40 women respondents were selected randomly for the study. Thus total of 120 was the sample size.

Operationalisation and Measurement of the Variables

Perception of freedom from poverty

The perception of freedom from poverty was operationally defined as degree to which an individual is aware and interprets meaningfully the level of access and consumption of food and other livelihood necessities. Based on review of literature, discussions with experts and observation made by the researcher, a list of 16 dimensions of perception of freedom from poverty were identified so as to compute their perception of freedom from poverty.

Measurement of Perception of freedom from poverty

Statements were prepared and rated on a five point continuum. (Strongly agree-score 5 to strongly disagree- score 1) Responses for each statement were collected and as the rating is on equal scale summated score for each individual was taken. The maximum and minimum score an individual attained could be 80 and 16 respectively.

Pudur 92 per cent and Sholayur cent per cent of the respondents were having a high level of perception of freedom from poverty. The result of the table show cases that the tribal women were less conscious about their actual living conditions. This was the actual situation existing there. Even though they were facing situations like infant mortality due to malnutrition, they had not realized that one of the reasons behind it was poverty yet. Human Development Report of Tribal Communities in Kerala (2009) reported that however, rural poverty among the STs remains more than two and a half times of that of the total rural population below poverty line in the state, which stands at 9.4 percent. They were unaware of their relative poverty also they were oblivious to their developmental needs. Many causes can be attributed to this situation. It was observed that most of them were guided by the pleasure principle and lack of thrift proneness as their way of life. They were satisfied with whatever they had, in every aspects of life like food, clothing and shelter. They were not at all aware of opportunities and possibilities of leading a standard of life, desired by the mainstream society. Importance of nutrient rich diet for a sustainable health life, a

Table 1. Perception of freedom from poverty of tribal women N=120

Sl.no	Category	Score range	Agali		Pudur		Sholayur		Total	
			Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1	Low	16-48	11	28	3	8	0	0	14	12
2	High	48-80	29	72	37	92	40	100	106	88
	Total		40	100	40	100	40	100	120	100

Table 4. Perception of freedom from insecurity of tribal women N=120

S.No.	Category	Score range	Agali		Pudur		Sholayur		Total	
			Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1	Low	16-48	4	10	6	15	3	8	13	11
2	High	48-80	36	90	34	85	37	92	107	89
	Total		40	100	40	100	40	100	120	100

Perception of freedom from insecurity

The Perception of freedom from insecurity was operationally defined as degree to which an individual is aware and interprets meaningfully the immunity and liberty from sexual and other forms of exploitation. Based on review of literature, discussions with experts and observations made by the researcher, a list of 16 dimensions of perception of freedom from insecurity were identified so as to compute their perception of freedom from insecurity.

Measurement of Perception of freedom from insecurity

Statements were prepared and rated on a five point continuum (Strongly agree - score 5 to strongly disagree - score 1). Responses for each statement are collected and as the rating is on equal scale summated score for each individual was taken. The maximum and minimum score an individual attained could be 80 and 16 respectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perception of freedom from poverty was found to be high among the respondents. In Agali panchayat at 72 per cent, in

better housing for safe and comfortable life, a better standard of living etc., were not considered as important and relevant. Even if they had one meal a day, they seem satisfied without any complaint. Almost all the tribespeople had National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) as their main source of employment which shows the popularity of this scheme among the tribal communities. However, this raises concern about the sustainability of the traditional livelihood options of tribal people. This shows the skewed and unscientific nature of the income and employment generation schemes introduced by the government against the interests of the most backward tribespeople.

Perception of freedom from insecurity of tribal women

Perception of freedom from insecurity of tribespeople was found to be very high (89 per cent). The results of panchayat wise analysis also shows similar results like that of the total. The results of table 4 clearly explains the living ambience of tribal society. The tribal women found themselves free from any kind of insecurity in their society. In contrast to the prevailing conditions in the mainstream society, gender discrimination is not at all a problem among the tribespeople.

Even though domestic violence is rampant there, the tribal women did not consider it as a violation of their rights. They believe that it is their husband's right and were always ready to accept it as a part of their culture. Majority of the tribal women believed that they were secure in their hamlets. In fact they don't realize the insecurities and exploitations they were being experienced.

Conclusion

The tribal people have been confined to low social status and are often physically and socially isolated instead of being absorbed in the mainstream population. Psychologically, the tribespeople often experience passive indifference that may take the form of exclusion from educational opportunities, social participation, and access to their own land. The study revealed that perception of freedom poverty was found to be high among the respondents. In Agali panchayat 72 per cent, in

Pudur 92 per cent and Sholayur 100 per cent of the respondents were having a high level of perception of freedom from poverty. Perception of freedom from insecurity of tribespeople was very high. In the panchayat wise analysis it was seen that Agali (90%) and Sholayur panchayat (92%) respondents had high level of perception of freedom from insecurity and in Pudur 15 per cent of them had low level of perception of freedom from insecurity.

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