

The Socio-Economic Status of Tribal Women in Jammu and Kashmir, India

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Abstract:

Tribal's are administrative categories of population identified by the government for special provisions and each tribe is having own culture, tradition and lifestyle. These are the people who have been isolated by mainstream Hindu population for centuries. These tribes are characterized by different socioeconomic set up than mainstream Hindu population. ST constitutes 8.6 % of total population of India but in Jammu and Kashmir ST constitutes 11.90% of total population of state. Tribal women in India are said to face less discrimination than women of mainstream Hindu population. Tribal women enjoy greater freedom and sex ratio among tribals is found to be higher than mainstream population in many states. The practices like child marriage and dowry is found be absent among many tribal's. In matters of freedom greater personal freedom is given to women in many tribes, a girl is never forced marry against her will and here is greater flexibility in matters of divorce and even polyandry is found to be existing among many tribes. Tribal women's work participation is high and both men and women work alongside. But inheritance laws of these tribes are not in favor of women as women is not given due share in property of her parents and also in recent years due to process of sanskritisation. The practices of dowry, child marriage are gaining ground in these tribes as well. In Jammu and Kashmir tribal women is better placed in certain respects and worst in some other respects as in many districts the practice of dowry is not visible but the high status of women appears myth when child marriage and female literacy is

taken into account. Majority of marriages among Gujjar tribes take place in the age of 13-17 but incidence of child marriage is less among Bhutto tribes. Female literacy is abysmally low in J&K 37.54%, in Kulgam female literacy among tribes being as low as 11%.female literacy among tribal's is lower than non tribal's in all districts of J&k reflecting low status of women in J&k. Besides 98% of households are headed by females. Another important indicator of status of women-sex ratio suggests that scheduled tribes have better sex ratio than non scheduled tribes in almost all Districts except District Srinagar and Baramulla. Work participation of scheduled tribe women is higher than national average in rural areas but it is very low in urban areas. Furthermore educational attainment of tribal women has found to be very less from the very beginning. One of common feature among all tribal women that is found is lack of education. This paper discusses status of women in J&K in selected indicators of literacy, sex ratio, female labor force participation rate, head of household, age of marriage and spending decision in family. This study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data.

Key words: Scheduled tribes, Spending decision, Sanskritisation, Child marriage.

Introduction

Tribals are said to be original inhabitants of India before settlement of Aryans. The Aryans forced them to move in to isolated regions. Majority of these tribes live in remote and inaccessible regions and hilly areas (Sujhata).The proportion of scheduled tribe population to total population in India has increased to 8.6% in 2011 from 8.2 % in 2001.One of distinguishing feature of tribes is that most majority of them live in scattered habitations located in interior and remote regions. Tribal's were for the first time defined in the history of Indian census not on the basis of religion (animism) but on the basis of their origin in 1941.Tribal's are not homogenous group of people but heterogeneous, each tribe having its own culture tradition, social practices. These tribes have been isolated by

mainstream Hindu population and their lifestyle is altogether different from Hindu population. They have primitive lifestyle. Though distinction is maintained between tribe and civilization but two terms are not isolated but in interaction with each other (Sinah-1958) tribal people are characterized by lack of hierarchical social and cultural practices, absence of taboos in food and social practices (Arpita Mitra-2010) tribal's are non vegetarian and they eat beef, pork..Before in 1941 tribes were describes on the basis of religion. Tribes were described as practicing animism and it is on this basis that these were separated from the rest of population and some of tribe were put under the category of tribal religion which continued alongside of tribal animism till 1941(Virginus Xaxa) as advocate of Hindutva wanted these tribes to be put under the category of Hindus as politics of religion gained momentum After inception of communal electorate in 1909.Ghuryes writing on tribes divides them into three groups :1.Those that are properly integrated with hinduism2. Those that are partially integrated and 3.Those who are loosely integrated. And it found a strong resonance among Christian missionary enquiry committee called Niyogi committee. It was only in 1941 that these tribes were classified on the basis of their tribal origin.

Women's position in Indian society is still low as it has been secluded within homes and neglected in social, religious and political and economic spheres. In India low status of women derives from lack of control over material and social resources of community (Bhasin- 2007). Scheduled tribes in India face less discrimination than mainstream Hindu population. Tribal women enjoy greater freedom and have better sex ratio than mainstream population, at a time when women became victim of Sati Pratha, scheduled tribe women never became victim of such an evil. Child marriages too is found to nonexistent among tribe in India but over the period of children marriage are taking place due to assimilation of dominant culture (Arpita Mitra).With the process of

Sanskritisation tribes are opting for early marriage as a matter of prestige and discouraging widow remarriage as well as divorce and separation (Roy Burman 1988). K. Mhan also makes similar observation about Bhill women where freedom of Bhill women in the sphere of pre-marital sex, marriage, is gradually curtailed. Naga women is known for the freedom in personal affairs as she is never forced to marry against her will and she is important decision maker in home (J.H.Hutton -1995). Important thing that cause delay in marriages of tribes is bride price demanded by parents of girls which is meant to compensate the economic loss that family of girls suffers by losing an economically active member. But there is also a shift from bride price to dowry among educated and salaried class (kishwar). Even in states where the development indicators consider higher human development as in Kerala and acting as model for other states in the form literacy, health but marginalization of tribal population is worst in Kerala. But still woman in Kerala is better than in any other states. Though sex ratio is found higher in tribe than general population but tribal too have preference for male child but do not discriminate against females and thus don't do sex determination test. Boys and girls have different inheritance laws and girls do not inherit land except under special circumstance. Girls are not usually allowed to get married or have extra-marital relation with non tribal although they have greater choice to marry within same tribe. If the girls have no brother than she is allowed share of fathers in land and she can have a marriage called *Gharjamaye*. But in some tribes like Gadhi and Bhill women have no right to parental property even in the absence of sons. Bhutia women if marries outside her tribes forfeits their right to any personal or parental property. Santhal tribal women is also not allowed to marry outside her tribe as tribes consider it an attempt to acquire land and times serious conflict occur between tribal and non tribal's. The issue of acquiring tribal land by non tribal has been Jharkhand also where one of

the ways by which non tribal's gain access to tribal's land is by marrying tribal. Sometimes to acquire property widow women's are declared as bitch and murdered by relatives. Santhal women has been given same treatment (Kelkar- 1993).Witch hunting is common phenomenon in these tribes and mostly *widow are* kept in captivity of magicians after declaring them Bitch. Soma Chaudhuri in her study of Dooars region of Jalpaiguri district of west Bengal has shown how women who form half of labor force in the plantation regions are branded as Witch and are tutored and exploited. Witches, Tea Plantations, And a good account of how women are killed and tortured.

So called state development tribal's have been forced to move into other places in search of livelihood. Multipurpose dams, mining and industrialization have led to eviction of thousands of tribal families (VidhyaDas, Achyut Das). Tribal women play an important role in the management of house .With so called state development; women have to cover long distance to collect fodder fuel and water resources. This ultimately leads to migration of tribal women. Women in Jharkhand have been migrating to nearby cities where they are exploited by agents in various ways (Vinita Singh and Kali Nath jha). In poverty ridden tribal areas of Orissa the push factor has caused migration of tribal girl in cities where they are exploited by agents in the cities and many girls are forced in to prostitution. Besides tribal women workers working in tea plantation and other plantations plants are also victims of sexual exploitation. They are not only paid less wages but also contract terms forced them into sexual relations with managers, supervisors (Jayabrata Sarkar). In some of tribes girls are made into prostitution with the consent of parents. One such tribe is Bedia family. A woman born in Bedia family is made to work in prostitution. This they do to provide for economic needs of the family. (Anuj Agarwal 2008). But available research on women of tribes considers that with passage of time the values of dominant culture has been

imbibed by tribes and thus evil practices like dowry, child marriage and opposition to widow remarriage has been seen even among tribals. This thing maybe true to major extent and in relation to some tribes. Educational attainment of tribal women is very poor from the very beginning. Majority of tribal women are illiterate which makes them susceptible to exploitation. The prime reason is that these tribes have been isolated by institution of state and hence tribals themselves cannot be held responsible for their poor educational achievement

Majority of tribal schools are without infrastructural facilities (Sujata 1994). Besides the fact majority of tribal children especially girl children are important earners of family and due to migration from place to place keeps absenteeism high and high dropout ratio. (Ranvi- M 2000) observed in her study that due to language barriers tribal children are unable to establish contact with teacher which makes them to drop the school at some point or the other. The main cause low educational attainment of scheduled tribe women is dual system of educational administration; ministry of tribal affairs at national level and state education department at state level which cause lack of coordination among these two departments. Schools schedules are decided by state education department which hardly takes into consideration specific condition and circumstances of tribal children.

On health matter due to their extreme poverty tribal women have very poor health and health infrastructure is very lacking in the tribal belts. Nutritional anemia is acute problem among tribals in India and in tribal belts and anemia adversely affects the psychological and social lives of tribal women.

The assimilation of tribals within folds of Hinduism and Christianity has different kinds of impact. Although Christian missionaries have done lot of work to ameliorate the condition of these tribes especially in the field of education but in religious sphere the role of women is secondary women is never

appointed as priest but she was given freedom to worship both in Hindu society and Christian society. Religious freedom of women of that tribe who have embraced Christianity and Hinduism is found to be secondary to men as women. Furthermore educational attainment of tribal women has found to be very less from the very beginning. One of common feature among all tribal women that is found is lack of education. Besides another important disturbing trend that has emerged in recent years is migration of tribal women to cities as an economic compulsion. Although in general tribes are free from social taboo and cultural and social hierarchy but in many tribes women is made to deliver her child in cattle shed and is considered impure and not allowed to enter the house as long as she is purified through rituals.

Objective of study

1. To study about sex ratio of women among tribes in Jammu and Kashmir.
2. To study about female literacy rate of tribes and compare it female literacy of non tribal's in Jammu and Kashmir.
3. To study work participation of tribal women.
4. To study as to child marriage, dowry, and religious freedom of the tribal's.

Research Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. In case of primary data collection purposive sampling technique has been adopted .Three districts representing Gujjar tribes and Bhutto tribes has been selected. These districts are Kishtwar, Rajouri and Ladakh .from each of the districts a sample of 50 household was chosen adopting purposive sampling technique and data collected with help of well designed questionnaire, personal interviews after pilot study.

Secondary data has been collected from office of registrar and census commissioner of India.

Discussion of study:

A. Family head and expenditure decision of sample families of Gujjar families

Table 1

S.NO		% of families
	Householods headed by female	2
	Household headed by male	98
Total		100
	Decision regarding spending of money to be taken solely by male head	70
	Decision taken regarding spending by female only	5
	Decision taken by both male and female regarding spending of money	25
Total		100

Source: field survey

Majority of families selected in Gujjar tribes of kishtwar and Rajouri district and Ladakh district are headed by male 98% and only 2% are headed by female. Among those headed by females are widows and divorced. Apart from it the decision on allocation of money among different items of expenditure is decided by males in majority of cases which reflects the Patriarchy structure in these families. But in some cases, 35% of cases decision regarding spending of money is taken by mutual understanding of both males and females.

B. Family head and Expenditure decision of Bhutia tribes of Padder kishtwar and Ladakh

Table2

S.NO		% of families
	No of families headed by males	66%
	No. of families headed by females	34%
Total		100
	Decision regarding spending of money taken by males	60
	Decision taken regarding spending by female only	5
	Decision taken by both male and female regarding spending of money	35
Total		100

Source: field survey

In Bhutia families also majority of households were headed by males and decision regarding spending of money were either taken by males or by understanding of both. Only in 5% of cases decisions regarding spending of money were taken solely by females

C. On child marriage, Dowry and religious freedom

The dowry custom is absent in the tribes of ST in Kishtwar particularly Gujjar tribes of Kishtwar district. There is instead a system of bride price³ in these tribes which has to be paid by bridegroom to the parents of girl.70% of respondents agreed that bride price is given in the form of both cash and kind. Equal amount is paid in the form of animals to the parents of girl. This amount is given to compensate for the loss to the parents of the girls but in the Gujars of Rajouri district this custom has gone way but in its' place the custom of dowry is gaining ground and depending upon economic condition dowry is given. While doing engagement ceremony, the terms of marriage are fixed and the bridegroom is asked to deposit the amount of cash in the name of bride in the form of economic security.

One of the notable features of Gujjar tribes is that in many cases polyandry is practiced. And there is flexibility in

the matters of separation and divorce, an important thing that was found in a study on Gujjar tribes was that in 40% of cases there was love marriage between the couples. A love marriage among couples is very common in Gujjar tribes of Kishtwar, Ramban, Rajouri, Ponch, Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir. In some cases already married women marries another men and dispute arising out of such cases hardly go to courts and are solved by elders of the tribes who may impose fines and other penalty. The tribal woman is not allowed to marry to nontribal especially Hindus as majority of tribal's including Gujjar in Jammu and Kashmir belong to Islam.

There are tribes in tehsil Padder of district Kishtwar and in Ladakh who belong to Bhudhism.The Buddhist women of Padder is very active and some of them are found to run retail shops in district Kishtwar town. The Buddhist women also have greater say in the matters of household. The marriages among Buddhist are usually arranged by parents but consent of boy and girls is taken while deciding marriage of girl.

Table showing marriage age for Gujjar tribe of Jammu and Kashmir

Table 1

S.NO.	Gujjar tribes		Bhutia tribes	
	AGE OF MARRIAGE	% OF PEOPLE	AGE OF MARRIAGE	% OF FAMILIES
1	12-17	60	12-17	30
2	18-23	24	18-23	45
3	24-29	9	24-29	16
4	30-35	6	30-35	07
5	36-41	0	36-41	02
6	42-47	0	42-47	0

Source: field survey

Majority of marriages in Gujjar tribes take place between the age of 12 and 17 which is child marriage. The bridegroom is kept in the home girl to offer services for the father of the girl for few years as decided by parents and elders of the family.

The child marriage is very less visible among Bhutia tribes of Jammu and Kashmir as 45% of marriages take place in the marriage able age of 18-23 but 305 of people were got married at an age less than defined legally.

Thus it can be said that child marriage is found among Gujjar tribes of Jammu and Kashmir but incidence of child marriage is less in Bhutia tribes.

On religious freedom:

Gujjar tribes in Jammu and Kashmir belong to religion of Islam and tribal girl is not allowed to offer prayers inside mosques but they perform prayers at home. Unlike many other social groups Gujjar allow their women to sing in their festivals but dancing is unknown to Gujjar women in Jammu and Kashmir. Women are not allowed to attend death funeral prayers along with the man counterparts.

Bhutia tribes on the other hand are governed by Buddhist religion and they exercise their freedom according to tenets of their respective religions in matters of religious and other festivals.

1. Sex ratio among tribes in Jammu and Kashmir

Table 2

NAME OF DISTRICT	SEX RATIO (ST)	SEX RATIO (ALL SOCIAL GROUPS)
Anatnag	902.4	927
Budgam	931.03	832
Bandipura	913.14	892
Baramulla	863.17	885
Doda	924.52	919
Ganderbal	875.95	863
Jammu*	904.93	880
kargil	952.62	978
kathua	924.92	890
Kishtwar	918.09	920
Kulgam	909.92	883

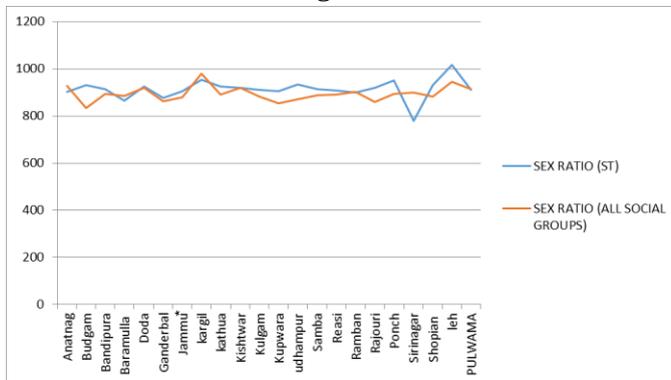
Kupwara	905.88	854
Udhampur	932.22	870
Samba	912.66	886
Reasi	907.29	890
Ramban	899.35	902
Rajouri	918.16	860
Ponch	950.73	893
Srinagar	779.5	900
Shopian	929.09	883
leh	1016.21	944
PULWAMA	909.85	912

Source: Census of India 2011.

Sex ratio is an important indicator of attitude of parents towards the girl child. Many of studies in other states of India have found sex ratio of tribal's to be higher than non tribal population. In Jammu and Kashmir also sex ratio of tribal's is comparatively better than nontribal in all districts except Srinagar and Baramulla despite their poverty and misery. Sex ratio is highest in Leh 1016.21 (per 1000 men) having 71.805% of tribal population which indicates that sex ratio among tribal is found to be better. District Leh is followed by district Ponch 950.7 (per 1000men) having tribal population of 36.93% is at second place. District Srinagar has lowest sex ratio of 779.5 but proportion of ST population in Srinagar is only 0.72% followed by Baramulla district with sex ratio of 863(per 1000 man) having ST population of only 3.71%. In all districts except Srinagar and Baramulla the sex ratio of tribal population is slightly better than non tribal population. But one thing is that sex ratio is less than desired in both the population calling for serious attention. Some of these tribal's are unaware of family planning methods and about abortions and hence slightly better sex ratio but many of them don't discriminate against the girls as marriage ceremonies of these tribes is not costly and even parents get bride price for the girl from bridegroom to compensate for loss of economically active member of home. And also there is prevalence of practice Gharjamai system in which male is brought at the parental home of girl and he

spends his life there. He also gets share in the property of girls parents.

Figure 1



Source: Census of India 2011

2. Female literacy of tribal's and non tribal's in Jammu and Kashmir:

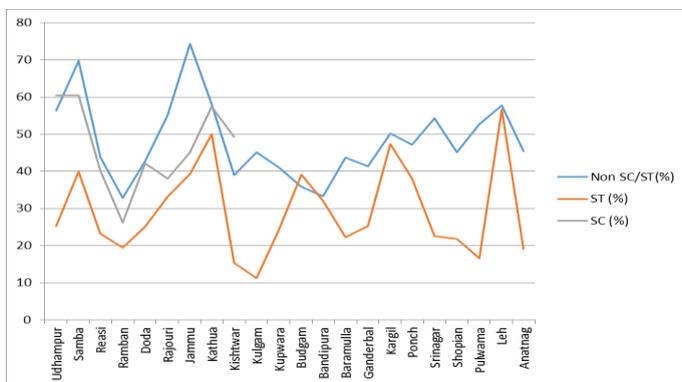
Educational achievement of tribal women is very low in India. Tribal habitations are suffering from lack of infrastructural facilities. Poverty and ignorance of tribal's has also kept these tribal's in a state of poverty and low literacy. In Jammu and Kashmir also the tribal people have low female literacy. Parents find it difficult send their daughters to school. Girl's children are send for rearing cattle's as they are one important earners of the family. In spite of the facts that state government bears all expenses of education of the children, parents cannot bear some running expenses related education of girl child. It is due to reason that dropout ratio is found high in these tribes. Even if girls attend the school they leave the school at some point or other before them complete high school education or even primary education. Teachers that have been employed in these schools at times don't know their language making teaching difficult. Besides even if girls attend the school, family environment at home is not conducive to education, they are employed in rearing cattle and in household

chores. Imparting proper education to tribal girl where she can be earner of family and hold some respectable position is distant dream of tribal especially Gujjar² tribes.

In Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir, many tribes have managed to impart education to their girls and many girls are found pursuing university education and even in research courses like M.PHIL and PHD but the situation is grim for those children who are from rural areas and belong to economically poor families otherwise Bhutia girls of Ladakh have good educational achievement.

The female literacy is abysmally low in Jammu and Kashmir among tribal as compared to non tribals. It is lowest in Kulgam 11% but proportion of ST people living in Kalgam district is very low. After Kulgam lowest literacy is found in Anantnag which again has very less proportion of scheduled tribe population. Kulgam is followed by district Ramban where the socioeconomic condition of scheduled tribes is poor, here literacy is 19.1%. The highest literacy is found in Leh 56.56% which has majority of ST population followed by Kathua district followed by District Kargil 47.35%.

Figure 2. Female literacy among tribal's and other social groups in Jammu and Kashmir



Source: Census of India 2011.

3. Labor force participation rate (LFPR), worker population ratio (WPR), proportion unemployed (PW) according to usual status (PS+SS)

Table 3

	Urban									Rural								
	Male			Female			Person			Male			Female			Person		
	LFPR	WPR	(PU)	LFPR	WPR	(PU)	LFPR	WPR	(PU)	LFPR	WPR	pu	LFPR	WPR	pu	LFPR	WPR	pu
All India	534	510	24	212	203	09	378	362	17	569	559	10	362	359	3	468	461	07
J&K	645	649	16	36	0	439	429	10	557	557	0	710	710	0	652	628	0	24

Labor force participation rate is higher in Jammu and Kashmir for male in urban areas but it is slightly lower in rural areas. Work participation rate is higher in both rural and urban areas. Person unemployed are higher than nation average in rural areas but lower in urban areas. For women labor force participation rate is very low in urban areas but it is very higher in urban areas. Thus it can be said that women in rural areas of Jammu and Kashmir play an active role as an in work alongside with male but at the same time unemployed women is found more in urban areas than in rural areas in Jammu and Kashmir as compared to national average. See in detail in table above (LFPR) labor force participation rate, (WPR) worker population ratio and person unemployed (PU) in both rural and urban areas

NSS Report No. 543: Employment and unemployment situation among social groups in India.

Findings of study:

Major findings of study are:

1. The sex ratio among tribals is higher in all districts except district Srinagar and district Baramulla but in both of these districts; the percentage of ST population is very less. The sex ratio of tribal's is less than what it should be. Sex ratio among those tribal's who live in Districts with majority of tribal's is significantly higher than non tribal.

2. The female literacy of tribal's is very low in all districts of Jammu and Kashmir. IT IS as low as 11.26% in Kulgam district of Jammu and Kashmir.
3. In Jammu and Kashmir female work participation rate is higher than at national level among scheduled tribes in rural areas but it is very low in urban area.
4. The practice of child marriage was found among the tribal's of Kishtwar and Rajouri district. But such a practice is less among Bhutto tribal's of Padder in kishtwar district and in Ladakh districts.
5. The practice of dowry is not found among Gujjar tribals of Kishtwar district rather the custom of bride price prevails. The dowry custom is found among tribals of Rajouri District.

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