

Socio-Economic Conditions of Tribal Women as Agricultural Labourers: A Case Study of Different Tribal Women Group of Erstwhile Khammam District of the Telangana State

Dr. B. Nageswar Rao

Assistant Professor of Economics, Government Degree College, Nelakondapally,
Khammam District, Telangana State

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ABSTRACT

A Tribal woman is considered as an economic asset to the family as she earns income through participating in economic activities to supplement the family income. The second side of her dual role is to take care of the household chores and rear children. She works more than 14 hours a day in her wage earnings employment as well as other income earning activities and domestic assignments. In any economy, the status of the women depends on their income level, Employment, education, health and security as well as the role women plays with all freedom in the family, community and society. These features have their impact on the occupations and economic conditions of the tribal women. They have two or more income earning activities like agricultural labourers, non-agricultural workers and collection of MFP besides rearing cattle, goats, sheep and birds. 60-70 per cent of the tribal women depend on farm related activities mostly.

Keywords: *Economic Activities; Dual Role; Income earning activities; Domestic assignment; farm related activities*

INTRODUCTION

The population of tribal communities is 10,42,81,034 crore as per 2011 census and account for 8.6 per cent of the total population. Rural population is 9,38,19,162 while urban population is 1,04,61,872 accounting for 90 and 10 per cent respectively. Males are 5,24,09,823 and females are 5,18,71,211 accounting for 50.3 per cent and 49.7 per cent respectively with the sex ratio at 990 females 1000 males. Nagaland (89.1 per cent), Meghalaya (85.9 per cent), Arunachal Pradesh (64.2 per cent), Mizoram (94.5 per cent) and Lakshadweep (94.5 per cent) have the highest concentration of tribal population in India. Sex ratio among the tribals has increased to 990 in 2011 from 978 in 2001. They have been living across all the Indian states and Union Territories except Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and the Union Territories of Pondicherry and Chandigarh. They live in about 15 per cent of the Nations geographical area, mainly forests and hills which have abundant natural resources. The forest area in the country is 74.74 million hectare covering 22.7 per cent of the total geographical area of the country. At present, 94 per cent of the forest dwellers are tribals and depend on forest to a great extent for their survival. They have been isolated and untouched by the society for centuries.

WOMEN IN THE TRIBAL SOCIETIES

The main features of the tribal economies include their agro-forest base, weekly shandies and exploitation by the outsiders, low levels of income, dependency on the non-institutional sources for credit, low levels of education and literacy. These features have their impact on the occupations and economic conditions of the tribal women. They have two or more income earning activities like agricultural labourers, non-agricultural workers and collection of MFP besides rearing cattle, goats, sheep and birds. 60-70 per cent of the tribal women depend on farm related activities mostly. Petty trade activities like sale of rice, vegetables, spices and hand-made toys for children are taken up by a limited number of women. Some of the women work in leaf plate making and beedi manufacturing during the slack season of agriculture. One third of their incomes are normally from non-farm activities while a major portion is from agro related activities and MFP collections. Over the years, their occupational patterns and income earning activities have been stagnant since there is little diversification in the economies. However, increasing population, overall development in the outside economy,

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growing transport and communication facilities, diversified employment and income generating programmes like MGNREGA by the Government have brought in occupational changes among the tribal women and are facilitated by their exposure to the outside world.

Women are assets to the tribal households as they play an important role in the socio-cultural, economic and religious ways of tribal societies. They work hard, manage the family economy, take care of children, attend to domestic chores, work as labourers in the own farms, bring income by taking up wage employment and mostly collect MFP by going into the forests. Tribal women are mostly traditional and their occupations are related to the available natural resources in and around their habitations. Agriculture is considered a family occupation and 60 per cent of the agricultural operations are handled by the tribal women in the villages. 80 per cent of the tribal women work in agriculture against 53 per cent in the general population. They are entitled to participate in all agricultural operations like sowing, maturing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing and storing food grains. They earn money, save money and take care of children and family needs. But they lead a poor life with a gloomy future. Tribal welfare programmes need to develop women and empower them to be meaningful. They enjoy economic freedom unlike the women in the general population. They consider forest as a gift of nature and always try to protect and develop it.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chittaranjan et.al (2002) have examined the status of tribal women labour along with the problems they face in the state of Odisha. The study points out that the food they consume is traditional even though the younger generation of the tribals prefers modern food. They consume liquor produced locally. Plantation Programmes of the Government are not helpful to the tribal women and they are constrained to spend more time on gathering food and firewood in the forests. Most of the tribal women in the study area receive cash by plucking “Kendu” leaves and the money they earn is used by the males for liquor consumption. Middlemen exploit the tribal women by paying very low prices for the MFP. The author suggests fruit bearing trees to help the tribals by involving them in the conservation and development of forest resources.

Prasad Rao, Macherala (2005) examined the conditions of Koya and Konda reddy tribal groups of Khammam in Andhra Pradesh. The study reveals that tribal face difficulties for their livelihood since they depend on food cultivation and dry crops. In most of the tribal villages wage employment is very much limited. Medical and health services are in shortage in the tribal areas due to which death rates are high. The author suggests that the integrating of tribals with non-tribals would bring fast changes in socio-economic and political conditions of the tribals.

Gomati Bodra (2008) has examined the status of tribal women in the state of Jharkhand. The study reveals that thought women are not equal to men, tribal women are better than the high cast women in many aspects. The study observes that the process of development has led to extreme exploitation of the tribal women. Gender discrimination is noted among the tribals along with very low political empowerment of the tribal women. Local political leaders in the tribal villages do not encourage tribal women to participate in discussion and decisions. The study has also examined the status of tribal women in urban centers like Ranchi and concluded that gender discrimination is evident.

Mohammad Awais et.al (2009) have examined the socio-economic empowerment of women in the tribal societies in India. Role of women in agriculture, ecological development, collection of forest produce and the education of tribal women have been elaborated in their study. Different programmes for tribal development have been reviewed and the authors conclude that a tribal woman plays a dominant role in the management of natural, social and economic resources. Tribal women play an important role in agriculture, livestock-promotion, horticulture and post-harvest operations of the tribal economies. However, traditions, illiteracy, superstitions, social evils and cultural factors kept them backward in the tribal societies. Even then they are better than the women in the general population in enjoying freedom.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective function of this research paper is to enquire into the economic conditions of tribal women agricultural labourers belonging to Koya, Konda reddy (PTG) and Banjara tribal communities inhabiting the agency areas of Erstwhile Khammam district of the Telangana state. The main objective is operationalised as follows;

1. To analyze the socio-economic conditions of the tribal women as agricultural labourers in the study area.
2. To study the various income earning activities of the tribal women labourers and their economic conditions.
3. To delve into the Demography patterns of the tribal women labourers.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

An attempt is made in this study to compare the socio-economic conditions of the tribal women as agricultural labourers of selected tribal groups. The study compares the conditions of tribal women agricultural labour belonging to major tribal groups and Primitive Tribal Groups.

METHODOLOGY - SAMPLE DESIGN

This research study is a micro level study at the village level in the agency area of Erstwhile Khammam district, where the tribal population is the largest (27.4 per cent) in the entire state of Telangana. Multi-stage sampling has been adopted in the selection of the sample. In the first stage, three mandals where the particular study groups of the tribals are heavily concentrated are selected. Koya, Banjara and Konda reddy tribal groups are predominant in the Chintoor, Kamepalli and Kunavaram Mandals and they are selected. In the second stage, three villages are selected from each mandal and the total villages of the sample are nine and from each village respondents are selected randomly. Adopting the same procedure 132 female respondents are selected from the sample villages.

DATA COLLECTION

Primary has been collected for the study. Primary data has been collected by administering a structured questionnaire to the sample households. Earlier studies have been reviewed extensively by the researcher before designing the questionnaire to make it effective.

TOOLS OF ANALYSIS

Two-way and three-way tables, averages, percentages, measures of central tendency are used where ever necessary to identify the relations among the variables.

Table-1 Age-wise Distribution of the Sample Women Respondents (Group-wise)

Age (in years)	Konda reddy	Koya	Banjara	Total
Less than 25	4	5	1	10
	40.0	50.0	10.0	100.0
	13.3	9.8	2.0	7.6
25-40	17	22	29	68
	25.0	32.4	42.6	100.0
	56.7	43.1	56.9	51.5
40-55	4	14	9	27
	14.8	51.9	33.3	100.0
	13.3	27.5	17.6	20.5
Above 55	5	10	12	27
	18.5	37.0	44.4	100.0
	16.7	19.6	23.5	20.5
Total	30	51	51	132
	22.7	38.6	38.6	100.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Study

Age-wise distribution of the sample respondents is examined in table-1. It shows that more than half of the women respondents are in the 25-40 years age group followed by 20.5 per cent in the age group of 40-55 years. It is clear that 72 per cent of the women respondents are in the "active work force". Around 8 per cent of the respondents are in the less than 25 years of age group of which Konda reddy women are more followed by Koya and Banjara women respondents. Of the above 50 years of age group (20.5 per cent), Banjara respondents are relatively more (23.5 per cent) followed by Koya (19.6 per cent) and Konda reddy (18.7 per cent) women respondents.

Table-2 Educational status

Education	Konda reddy	Koya	Banjara	Total
Primary	4	4	8	16
	25.0	25.0	50	100.0
	13.3	7.8	15.6	12
Upper primary	3	1	4	8
	37.5	12.5	50.0	100.0
	10.0	2.0	7.8	6.0
Secondary	0	1	3	4
	.0	25.0	75.0	100.0
	.0	2.0	5.8	3.0
Collegiate	0	1	0	1
	.0	100.0	.0	100.0
	.0	2.0	.0	0.8
No Formal Education	23	44	36	103
	22.3	42.7	34.9	100.0
	76.7	86.3	70.0	78.0
Total	30	51	51	132
	22.7	38.6	38.6	100.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Study

Educational status of the sample women is examined in table-2. Of the sample, 78 per cent of the respondent women do not have any formal education. Group-wise data shows that 71 per cent of the Banjara women followed by 86 per cent of Koya and 76.7 per cent of the Konda reddy women have no formal education. It implies that the women respondents of all the three groups are mostly illiterate. Education of the respondent women represented the women education in the tribal societies 3-4 decades ago. Tribal education, especially of girls was very low in those days as revealed by the data. Of the 29 women respondents who are literates more than 55 per cent have completed primary education only. One woman respondent has completed collegiate education, four Secondary level and 8 upper primary levels of education. Interestingly 24 per cent of the Konda reddy women, 13.7 per cent of the Koya women and 30 per cent of the Banjara women are literates in the sample of 132 tribal women.

Table-3 Opinion about Female Education

Opinion	Caste name			Total
	Konda reddy	Koya	Banjara	
Yes	24	36	38	98
	24.5	36.7	38.8	100.0
	80.0	70.6	74.5	74.2
No	4	4	6	14
	28.6	28.6	42.9	100.0
	13.3	7.8	11.8	10.6
Not applicable	2	11	7	20
	10.0	55.0	35.0	100.0
	6.7	21.6	13.7	15.2
Total	30	51	51	132
	22.7	38.6	38.6	100.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Study

Willingness of the sample women to give education to daughters is analyzed in table-3. It is happy to note from the table that majority of the respondent women 74 per cent are willing to provide education to their daughters. Surprisingly Konda reddy women are more (80 per cent) followed by Banjara (74.5 per cent) and Koya (70.6 per cent) women of the study. Importance of education as an instrument to overall development is realized by the tribal women in the light of the responses they have offered. It is equally surprising that about 12 per cent of the sample Banjara women are not willing to educate girls against 7.8 per cent of the Koya women. The need for education is not totally recognized by the upcoming women of the Banjara tribal group as early marriages are widely prevalent among them. At the same time 13 per cent of the Konda reddy women are not willing to educate girls which can be understood in the back drop of their living conditions as PTGs.

Table-4 Demographic Features of Sample Tribal Women (Group-wise)

Tribe name	Age of puberty (In years)	Age at marriage (In years)	Age birth to the first issue (In years)	Age birth to last issue (In years)
Konda reddy	15.07	17.90	19.29	23.57
Koya	14.35	17.80	19.48	22.57
Banjara	13.86	16.96	18.82	21.57
Total	14.32	17.50	19.17	22.35

Source: Field Study

Demographic features of the sample tribal women are given in table-4. It reveals that the average age of puberty is 14.32 years age at marriage is 17.5 years, age at the first issue 19.17 years and average age at the last issue of child is 22.35 years. It can be observed that the age in all these four aspects is relatively higher among Konda reddy women followed by Koya and Banjara women. It implies that Banjara women attain puberty at a lower age, married at a lower age, become mothers at an early age. It can be inferred that Banjara women prefer early marriages and early motherhood. Konda reddy women (PTG) attain puberty at a higher age, get married and become mothers at a higher age when compared to the other two groups. Here also the data is concerned with the women respondents and dates back to two-three decades. In 1970s and 80s early marriages and early motherhood were the general features of the Indian women, more so, of tribal women.

Table-5 Employment Days Available to the Sample Respondent Women

Days	Caste name			Total
	Konda reddy	Koya	Banjara	
<100	10	18	8	36
	27.8	50.0	22.2	100.0
	33.3	35.3	15.7	27.3
101-150	8	13	12	33
	24.2	39.4	36.4	100.0
	26.7	25.5	23.5	25.0
151-200	5	8	11	24
	20.8	33.3	45.8	100.0
	16.7	15.7	21.6	18.2
Above 200	7	12	20	39
	17.9	30.8	51.3	100.0
	23.3	23.5	39.2	29.5
Total	30	51	51	132
	22.7	38.6	38.6	100.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Study

Employment days available to the sample respondents in the study area are examined in table-5. As per the table 29.5 per cent sample women have worked for above 200 days in the previous year. It is noted that 27.3 per cent women have worked for less than 100 days, 25 per cent worked for 101-150 days and the remaining 18.2 per cent women have worked for 150-200 days. The data shows that 72.7 per cent of the respondent women have worked for more than 100 days.

Days of employment available to Koya respondents and Konda reddy sample women are relatively low. They are more for Banjara women respondents as 84.3 per cent have worked for more than 100 days. More than 60 per cent of the Banjara respondent women have worked for more than 150 days while only 40 per cent of the Koya and Konda reddy sample women have worked for such a number of days. It is observed that Banjara respondent women are relatively in a better position in getting employment than the other two groups.

Table-6 Type of Agricultural Works Engaged by the Respondents (Preceding Year)

Type of Agricultural work	Konda reddy	Koya	Banjara	Total
Others	2	3	1	6
	33.3	50.0	16.7	100.0
	6.7	5.9	2.0	4.5
Paddy related	9	21	17	47
	19.1	44.7	36.2	100.0
	30.0	41.2	33.3	35.6
Cotton	6	14	21	41
	14.6	34.1	51.2	100.0
	20.0	27.5	41.2	31.1
Harvesting	5	6	5	16
	31.2	37.5	31.2	100.0
	16.7	11.8	9.8	12.1
Livestock rearing	8	7	7	22
	36.4	31.8	31.8	100.0
	26.7	13.7	13.7	16.7
Total	30	51	51	132
	22.7	38.6	38.6	100.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Study

Type of agricultural works in which the sample women worked in the preceding year are given in table-6. As per the data in the table, 35.6 per cent of sample women worked in paddy related agricultural activities. Among sample, women belonging to Koya community are more (44.7 per cent) followed by Banjara (36.2 per cent) and Konda reddy women (19 per cent). Another 31 per cent of women worked in cotton related activities of which Banjaras are more followed by Koya and Konda reddy women. Further 12 per cent of sample women worked in harvesting while 16.7 per cent worked in livestock rearing. In both these activities Konda reddy sample women are more followed by Koya and Banjara women.

Table-7 Activity-wise Number of Days Employed in Agricultural Works

Activities	Konda reddy	Koya	Banjara	Total
Paddy related	166.11	101.14	131.29	124.49
Cotton	136.67	130.64	201.10	167.61
Harvesting	69.60	114.17	151.00	111.75
Livestock rearing	108.88	188.00	272.86	186.23
Total	126.21	124.04	182.40	147.68

Source: Field Study

Activity-wise number of days employed in agriculture is given in table-7. It is noted that the sample women have worked for 124 days in paddy related work. Women belonging to Konda reddy group have worked relatively more days (166), followed by Banjara (131) and Koya respondent women (101). In cotton related activities the respondent women worked for 167 days on an average. It can be said the Banjara women are in the first place followed by Koya and Konda reddy respondent women. In harvesting activities the average, number of days for the sample women are accounted to 112. In this aspect also Banjara women are at the first position followed by Koya and Konda reddy women. Average number of days employed in livestock rearing are 186.23 and here also Banjara women are at the top followed by Koya and Konda reddy women. Paddy related activities and cotton related activities are important to Konda reddy women in providing employment. However, livestock rearing and cotton related activities are important in providing employment to Koya and Banjara women.

Table-8 Average Wage Earned per Annum in Agriculture (Activity-wise)

Activities	Average agriculture wage income			
	Konda reddy	Koya	Banjara	Total
Paddy related	16611.11	10300.00	13200.00	12600.00
Cotton	13833.33	13500.00	20400.00	17100.00
Harvesting	6960.00	11400.00	17900.00	12000.00
Livestock rearing	9387.50	16700.00	33600.00	19400.00
Total	12228.57	12300.00	19500.00	15200.00

Source: Field Study

Average annual wage income earned from the agricultural activities by the sample women shown in table-8. The table reveals that the annual average wage income earned by the sample women from paddy related activities is Rs 12,600 and the income of Konda reddy women is at the first position followed by Banjara and Koya women. Average income earned from cotton related activities by the sample women is Rs 17,100. The income of Banjara women is relatively higher while the incomes of Konda reddy and Koya women are very close. Average wage income of sample women from harvesting activities is Rs 12,000. Banjara women have relatively more income followed by Koya and Konda reddy women respondents. Average income from livestock rearing is Rs 19,400. The income of Banjara women is very high at Rs 33,600 followed by the women belonging to Koya and Konda reddy groups. Banjara tribes are known as expert cattle breeders. The income from livestock rearing to the sample Banjara tribal women supports this fact.

The average income earned from all agricultural activities in the study area is Rs 15,200. Koya and Konda reddy sample women have less than the average income while Banjara women have 28 per cent more than the average income in the study area. In all activities their average income is higher than the other two groups of the study area. Except in paddy related activities average wage income of the Konda reddy women is the lowest.

Annual incomes earned by the respondent women from agricultural activities are given in table-6.12. It is noted from the table that 29.5 per cent of sample women have incomes in the range of Rs 5,000-10,000, 22.7 per cent have in the range of Rs 10,000-15,000, 17.4 per cent have in the range of Rs 15,000-20,000 and 12 per cent have in the range of Rs 20,000-25,000. These respondents account for 82 per cent of the total sample women. Further, 13.5 per cent have incomes in the range of Rs 25,000 and only 4.5 per cent have incomes of less than Rs 5000. The data also shows that three fourth of the sample women have annual incomes less than Rs 20,000.

Most of the Konda reddy respondents (80 per cent) have less than Rs 20,000 as annual income while, 88 per cent of the Koya respondents have less than Rs 20,000. Banjara respondent women are comfortable with higher incomes as more than one fourth of the respondent women have annual income greater than Rs 20,000. No Konda reddy respondent women have more than Rs 25,000 as annual income while no Koya respondent women have annual income more than Rs 35,000. Income levels of the tribal groups place Banjara women at the first place Koyas at the middle and Konda reddy women at the bottom.

Table-9 Annual Income Earned from Agricultural works by the Respondents

Agricultural income (In Rupees)	Konda redden	Koya	Banjara	Total
<5000	2	3	1	6
	33.3	50.0	16.7	100.0
	6.7	5.9	2.0	4.5
5000- 10000	11	20	8	39
	28.2	51.3	20.5	100.0
	36.7	39.2	15.7	29.5
10000-15000	6	14	10	30
	20.0	46.7	33.3	100.0
	20.0	27.5	19.6	22.7
15000-20000	5	8	10	23
	21.7	34.8	43.5	100.0
	16.7	15.7	19.6	17.4
20000-25000	6	3	7	16
	37.5	18.8	43.8	100.0
	20.0	5.9	13.7	12.1
25000-30000	0	1	9	10
	.0	10.0	90.0	100.0
	.0	2.0	17.6	7.6
30000-35000	0	2	3	5
	.0	40.0	60.0	100.0
	.0	3.9	5.9	3.8
35000-40000	0	0	1	1
	.0	.0	100.0	100.0
	.0	.0	2.0	.8
45000-50000	0	0	1	1
	.0	.0	100.0	100.0
	.0	.0	2.0	.8
Above 50000	0	0	1	1
	.0	.0	100.0	100.0
	.0	.0	2.0	.8
Total	30	51	51	132
	22.7	38.6	38.6	100.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Study

Annual incomes earned by the respondent women from agricultural activities are given in table-9. It is noted from the table that 29.5 per cent of sample women have incomes in the range of Rs 5,000-10,000, 22.7 per cent have in the range of Rs 10,000-15,000, 17.4 per cent have in the range of Rs 15,000- 20,000 and 12 per cent have in the range of Rs 20,000-25,000. These respondents account for 82 per cent of the total sample women. Further, 13.5 per cent have incomes in the range of Rs 25,000 and only 4.5 per cent have incomes of less than Rs 5000. The data also shows that three fourth of the sample women have annual incomes less than Rs 20,000.

Most of the Konda redden respondents (80 per cent) have less than Rs 20,000 as annual income while, 88 per cent of the Koya respondents have less than Rs 20,000. Banjara respondent women are comfortable with higher incomes as more than one fourth of the respondent women have annual income greater than Rs 20,000. No Konda redden respondent women have more than Rs 25,000 as annual income while no Koya respondent women have annual income more than Rs 35,000.

Income levels of the tribal groups place Banjara women at the first place Koyas at the middle and Konda reddy women at the bottom.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Majority of the tribal women in the study are of below 55 years of age which can be considered as the active and effective workforce. Educational status of the sample women shows the predominance of illiteracy to an extent of 78 per cent. The impact of illiteracy is evident on the average age at marriage age at the first delivery of child and average age at the birth of last child (22-35 years). Availability of unskilled work within the villages with prompt payment of wages is the basic factor for the tribal women to become labourers. Husbands mostly accept the women to work as labourers because they share family expenditure. Employment days available in the study area are relatively more for Banjara households than the other two groups as 84 per cent have worked for more than 100 days in the previous year. Employment in paddy and cotton related agricultural works is more important for the respondent women. Konda reddy women are relatively more in livestock rearing than the other two groups. On an average the sample women have worked for 147.7 days in the year in agriculture with Banjaras at higher number of days of work. Average wage income earned from wages in agricultural activities in the study area is Rs 15,200. However, the average wage income is higher among Banjara women followed by Koya and Konda reddy women. Banjara respondent women have 28 per cent more than the average income in the study area. Incomes earned by the tribal groups in the study from agricultural works show that Banjara women are at the first position, Koyas at the middle and Konda reddy women at the bottom. Tribal women enjoy freedom in the selection of partners as the consent of the girls is taken before finalizing the groom. They have freedom to spend their incomes and to involve in family decisions. Though there is domestic violence in the form of wife beating and abuses which they accept as a normal practice, they are comparatively better in many aspects of socio-economic, cultural and domestic living than their counter parts in the general population.

CONCLUSION

The relative levels of development of the three tribal groups indicate that Banjara women are more advanced in many aspects. Though Koya and Konda reddy women are very close in the level of development, Koya women have an edge over the Konda reddy women. The analysis in this study reveals that the process of transformation of the tribal women economies from self sufficient and subsistence nature to a dependent and agro-commercial oriented economies has started, though, at a slow pace. The future policies of development of tribals women need to emphasis on agriculture and address the issues and challenges related to tribal women agricultural labour. It requires very sincere and committed administration at all levels in our country.

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