

A STUDY OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND PROBLEMS OF GOND TRIBE OF ODISHA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GOND WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Tribal people in India and also in Odisha are socially and economically marginalized in many respects. Although there exist several constitutional provisions which are oriented towards welfare of tribal people yet there is hardly any upliftment in the socio-economic status of tribal people who are experiencing unending challenges in their everyday life especially in the wake of commercialisation and industrialisation. Present study is an attempt to investigate into the economic profile, problems and newly emerging economic challenges of Gond population of Odisha in general and Gond women in particular and also the impact of government programmes on the economic aspect of their lives.

KEYWORDS: *Scheduled Tribes, Gond, Commercialization, Socio-Economic Status, Literacy Rate.*

INTRODUCTION

As per Census 2011, scheduled tribes constitute 8.6% of the total population of the country. Tribal population of India (104.3 million) is larger than that of any other country in the world. There are many such states in India where the ratio of tribal population to that of total state population is much higher than the national percentage. Odisha is one such poor state of India where more than 1/5th of the total state population (22.8%) is tribal and therefore it is believed that taking care of development needs of the tribal population of Odisha is necessary to address the issue of poverty in the state. Tribal people in India and also in Odisha are socially and economically marginalized in many respects.

Although there exist several constitutional provisions which are oriented towards welfare of tribal population yet there is hardly any upliftment in the socio-economic status of tribal people who are experiencing unending challenges in their everyday life especially in the wake of commercialisation and industrialisation. Gender dynamics among tribal communities have also changed drastically under the impact of commercialisation posing distinct challenges to the tribal women as compared to their men counterparts. Present study is an attempt to investigate into the socio-economic profile, problems and newly emerging economic challenges of Gond population of Odisha with special reference to Gond women. The study also investigates into the impact of various government schemes and programmes on the economic life of Gond people in general and Gond women in particular.

II.OBJECTIVES

1. To study socio-economic status of Gond tribal population with special reference to Gond women in the state of Odisha
2. To develop understanding about the socio-economic challenges faced by Gond people especially Gond women in Odisha.
3. To suggest strategies for handling the economic challenges faced by Gond population in general and Gond women in particular in the state of Odisha.

III. Scope and Methodology

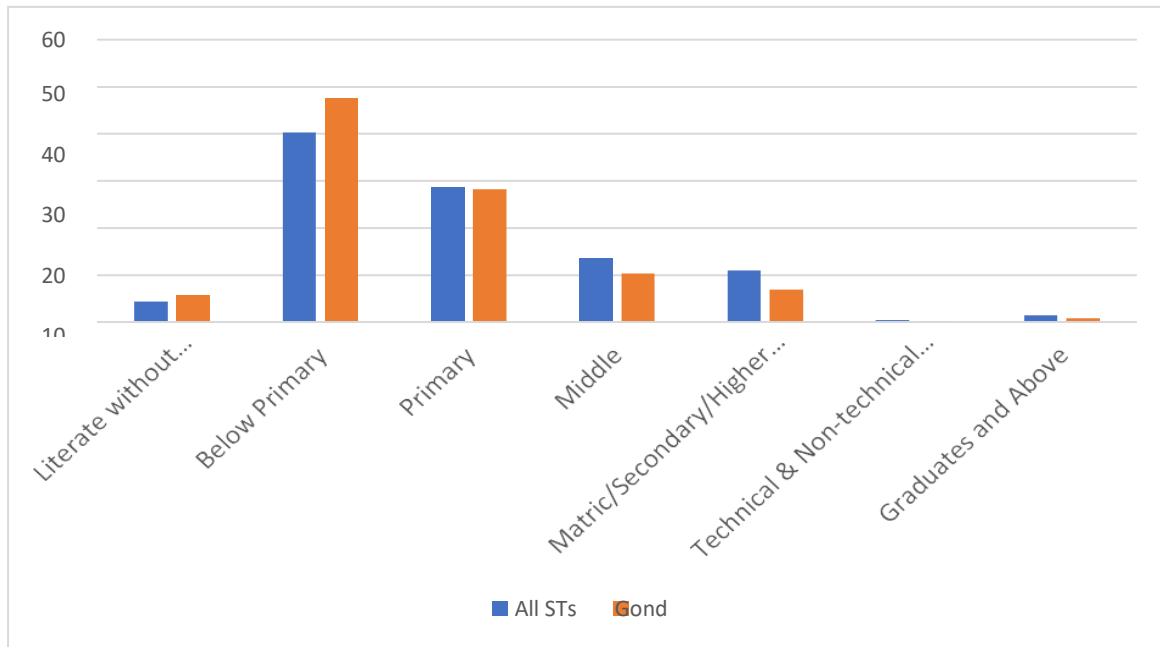
The study focuses on the state of Odisha. Odisha has the largest number of tribal communities (62 tribes including 13 primitive tribes) that account for 22.86% of state's total population and 9.17% of the total tribal population of the country. Gond is the second largest tribe of Odisha having 9.6 per cent share in the total ST population of the state. Gond is tribal peasant community largely concentrated in Nabarangapur and Nuapada districts. The study entails both exploratory and explanatory research aspects and therefore qualitative method of research has been adopted for the purpose. The study depends on secondary information provided by various researchers in the field including books, journals, Census Reports and other published reports on tribal population of India and its various states.

IV. Discussion

Statistical evidence suggests that India is a nation with concentrated pockets of poverty. Poverty in India is largely concentrated in a few states and regions. Therefore, India needs to address the issue of poverty at the regional/local level and tribal regions are the worst hit in terms of poverty and backwardness. Odisha is always counted among the poorer states of India and therefore Odisha also needs to place emphasis on its tribal population for utilizing its hidden and untapped growth potential. Gond is the second largest tribe in Odisha and therefore policy makers and policy executers need to emphasise on the special concerns of this particular social tribal group so that the problem of backwardness and vicious circle of poverty can be addressed at the bottom level.

Economic status of any social group depends on its educational achievements which finally get translated into economic achievements. Figure 1 suggests that Gond people are doing better or at least equal to their other counterparts as far as primary or below primary level of education is concerned. However, Gond tribe is far behind the other tribal population with regard to above primary level of education and therefore it becomes increasingly important to take care of educational needs of Gond tribe so that the benefits of commercialisation and growth can actually trickle down to their level.

Figure 1: Level of Education among overall ST Population and Gond Tribe in Odisha



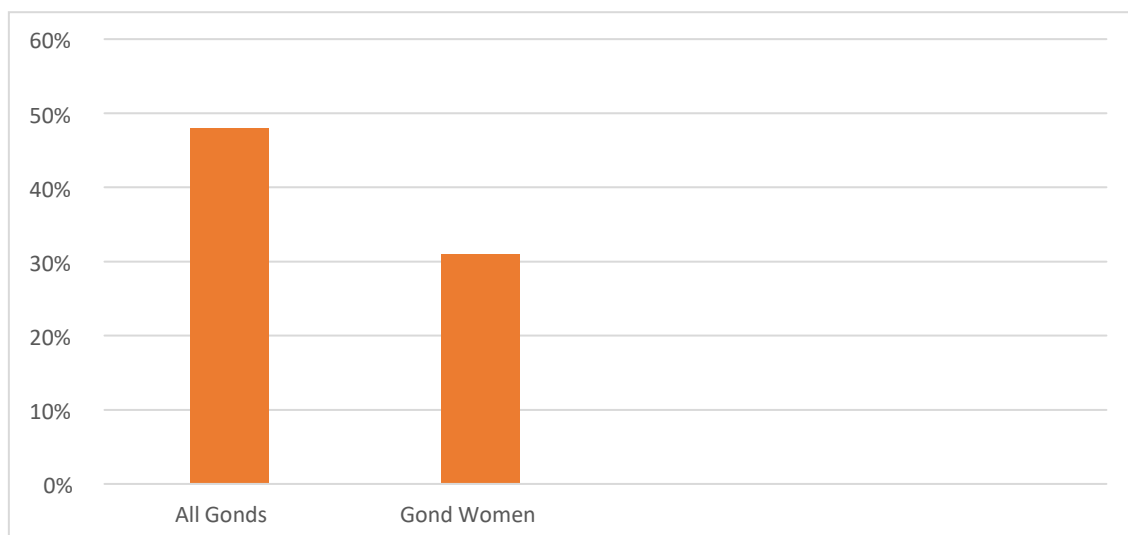
Source: https://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_st_orissa.pdf

There is a common belief that women act as fuel for the engine of any economy and when women progress, the entire state and nation progresses. Socio-economic well-being of a Gond tribal community, just like other special groups and communities, depends largely on the status of its women. Tribal women constitute half of the total tribal population of Odisha and therefore it becomes imperative for the state to take special care of gender aspect of development among different tribal communities including Gond community.

Education is most important instrument for ensuring women empowerment. In contrast, Figure 2 indicates that literacy rate among Gond women is far lesser than overall literacy rate among Gond community. This obviously means that opportunities of education are better for men than women in the Gond community. Improvement in the overall socio-economic status of any community depends also on the upliftment of socio-economic status of their women. Fixed and theoretical curriculum in schools has failed to generate adequate interest in formal education among Gond people. It is significant to introduce skill based practical curriculum in tribal schools so that Gond children can learn livelihood earning skills within the prescribed school curriculum. Such an approach would definitely be helpful to create educational interest among Gond people. Govt programme of providing free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years has helped to increase enrolment of Gond girls in government schools but despite free education, many parents stop sending their girls to schools after they attain puberty.

Income generating sources of Gond women in Odisha being very limited, Gond mothers are reluctant to send their girls to formal schools and rather want them to work in fields, collect forest produce or help in household chores so that girls can also make some contribution towards their family income.

Figure 2: Literacy Rate among Gond Population and Gond Women in Odisha



Source: https://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_st_orissa.pdf

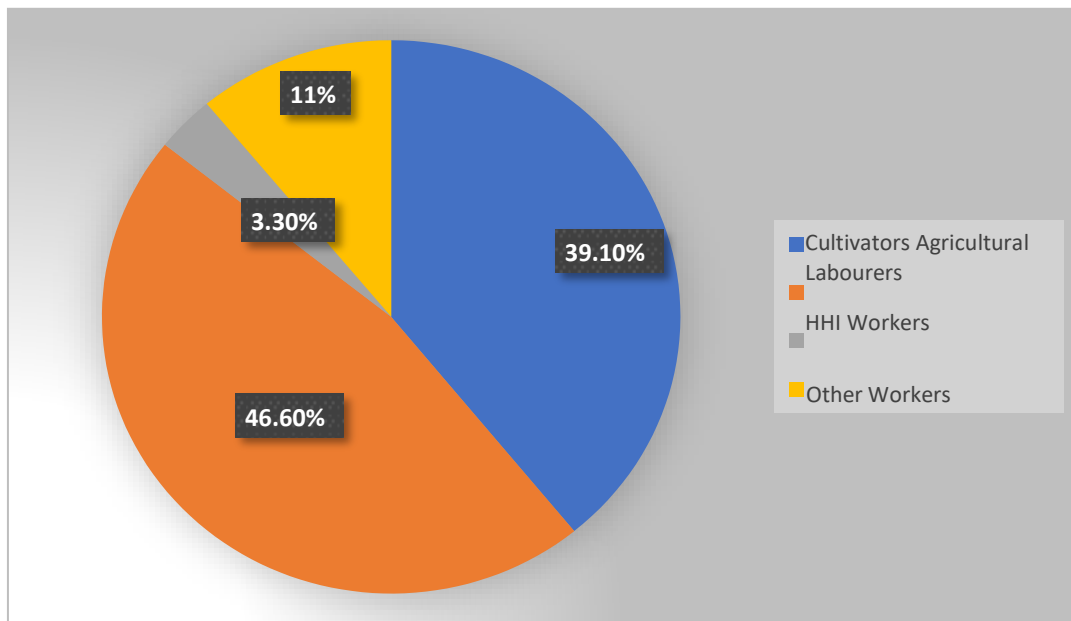
As per literature, there is significant relationship between educational status, employment status and health status. These variables together determine the socio-economic status of any social group. Higher level of education is known to create health and hygiene awareness and also to enhance employment opportunities in the organised sector. Because of low level of education, health status of Gond people including their women is much lower as compared to general population. They record high infant mortality rate, higher level of malnutrition and undernutrition, low blood count and many chronic skin diseases.

Figure 3 indicates that employment status of Gond men and women also portrays a highly dismal picture. Gond people are mostly engaged in collection of minor forest produce, craftsmanship, pottery, agricultural and allied occupations. These occupations do not generate sufficient income for meeting their everyday expenses and therefore they depend mainly on moneylenders for most of their needs and occasional events. Commercialisation and Industrialisation have also played havoc with their lives. Under the impact of industrialisation and urbanisation, many Gond families have got uprooted from their villages and got dependent on contractors and industrialists in the non-tribal areas. In the absence of regular source of income, most of Gond women and their families live below poverty line.

Gond women mostly undertake agricultural activities including collection of minor forest produce. Collection of Mahua leaves is also one of the major economic activities undertaken by women. Mahua leaves are used for making liquor and oil. However, major cash income comes from collection of tendu leaves which are used for wrapping the tobacco and making Indian

cigar. Apart from tendu and mahua, there are scores of medicinal plants that are sold into the market for making an earning. However, terms of sale are often twisted to the disadvantage of the tribal people. Many Gond women can now be seen working in handicrafts sector and also as construction and industrial workers. Gond families are pledging their fixed assets like land, mahua trees and tamarind trees for meeting their daily needs. There is absence of sound marketing facilities and backward/forward linkages of the forest produce and the articles being sold by the Gond households.

Figure 3: Percentage distribution of Gond Workers in Different Economic Categories in Odisha



Source: https://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_st_orissa.pdf

The study indicates that development projects undertaken in tribal areas have benefitted Gond men more than the Gond women. For many Gond women these developments have become rather a threat to their traditional livelihood and family arrangements. Under the influence of western culture, Gond men have started drinking and smoking and therefore a major chunk of their family income goes towards financing these expenses of men which could otherwise be used to ensure food safety to the family. However, women hardly spend any income on their personal desires and rather believe in spending on the family needs.

Every development brings changes and these changes affect men and women differently. Gond women have been severely affected by the commercial developments in their regions. These developments have changed the gender dynamics of Gond community. Women are mostly left with collection of minor forest produce only. Because of most of natural resources coming in the hands of contractors, these women are losing their traditional ways of earning. At the same time numerous family responsibilities and limited mobility is forcing these women to remain stuck to

their own villages and houses. However very few Gond women also work as labourers in industries and construction but they also get exploited at the hands of contractors. In the process, many Gond women have been forced to become dependent on their male counterparts and are losing their economic value and associated social status.

Because of loss of traditional means of livelihood, many Gond families including women have started migrating to urban areas where they are generally subjected to exploitation and inhuman treatment. Many Gond women have got victimised to sexual exploitation in the urban areas which has further compounded their problems and has left profound effect on their self-image and societal respect.

V. Socio- Economic Impact of Government Schemes

With a view to provide supplementary source of income to the tribal people, subsidised loans are being provided to Gond and other tribes to buy cows, buffaloes, goats and sheep for livestock keeping and animal husbandry. However, because of lack of awareness and lengthy credit procedures, Gond people prefer to take loans from moneylenders and are constantly coming under the burden of heavy indebtedness.

Besides, for upliftment of tribal people in Odisha, several training centres have been opened by the government where people are taught weaving, wood carving, fishing, handcrafts etc. and thereafter the government also facilitates the exhibition and sale of these articles through organised marketing initiatives. Employment opportunities are also being created by the government through various kinds of construction work projects including construction of schools, dispensaries, canals, roads etc.

With coming of roads and schools, more and more Gond families are getting assimilated into the mainstream but unfortunately this assimilation is happening in the ways where these people are at disadvantage. In the pursuit of new ways of livelihood, they are losing their distinct identity. Despite several policy interventions and programmes, the poor execution could not make the lives of Gond people much better. They are not gaining much in terms of economic advantage but losing a lot in terms of their cultural identity and sense of worth.

Conclusion

Study depicts that lack of education and adequate information is a major obstacle in the path of development of Gond tribe in general and Gond women in particular. Inadequacy of educational, transportation and communication facilities is keeping this community away from sharing the benefits of overall state and national growth. Despite the training of Gond men and women in various arts and crafts, these people find it extremely difficult to sell their produce as they neither have finance nor any knowledge for the marketing of their produce. The community lacks exposure to business environment and therefore gets easily exploited at the hands of urban businessmen and contractors. Owing to commercialisation, women are losing their traditional ways of earning and limited mobility is forcing many of them to get financially dependent on their male counterparts. Economic evidence suggests the failure of trickle-down effect in the backward regions/states and therefore bottom-up approach needs to be adopted for the purpose of uplifting the Gond community in Odisha.

The study suggests the initiation of micro and gender level study of different tribal communities so as to understand the specific problems and concerns of these communities. Economic activities of a region including production, distribution and exchange get largely determined by socio-economic structure of the communities living therein. Cultures, traditions, beliefs and gender dynamics of people influence the production relations and techniques in any region. Therefore, a uniform national/state level tribal development policy may not work in case of all tribal communities which are spread across different regions with varied cultures and identities.

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