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A Study on the Social Profile of the Irular Women

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Abstract:
India as a whole is characterized by sharp gender disparities, although women's status varies considerably by region. On virtually all frontiers of human societal pursuits Economic, Social, psychological, educational, scientific, legal, political, official, political and religious sphere, Indian women suffer profoundly. Tribal society is also characterized by such inequalities especially for their women are totally debarred from legal, economic, educational, and political rights. Their daily life is filled with lot of struggles. Cultural factors and traditional customs have a major influence on tribal women even in the twenty first century. The social life of tribal women is still found to be in the same condition as in the ancient period. The study present study portrays the social profile of the Irular women in a descriptive manner.

Keywords: Social Profile, Irular, Women

1. Introduction

India is home to a large number of tribes with population of about 70 million. In terms of geographical distribution about 55% of tribals live in central India, 28% in west, 12% in North-East India, 4% in South India and 1% elsewhere. Each tribal community is rich in their culture, folk tales, folk songs and folk stories. Tribals constitute 8.14% of the total population of the country, numbering 84.51 million (2001 Census) and cover about 15% of the country's area. "Tribals" are found in almost all the states of country. Currently there are over 600 scheduled tribes in India (Lata. B. Hiware, 2012).

Irulars are a tribal community who live in southern India, mainly in Kanchipuram, Nilgiris and Villupuram districts of Tamil Nadu. Ethnically they belong to negritos race. Their language Irula is a mix of Tamil and Kannada. These tribes are behest with problems of land alienation, displacement and political disempowerment, harassment, basic rights violated, bonded labourers. One of the tribes present in various parts of India. Their main occupation was snake and rat catching and at present they also work as laborers do fishing. These groups have been traditionally economically and socially marginalized, Illiterate, lacking of income earning skills and were in general not accepted by the larger society. Their mother tongue is Irula. The languages spoken with others are Tamil and Telugu. The Tamil script is used. The term Irular is derived from the word Irul, meaning black or dark.

Irulars are one of the most backward tribes who are facing innumerable challenges. The name Irular bear a reference to the dark jungles they live in. A legend says that goddess was interested to create people who could collect honey without being stung by bees, and she created one out of her sweat, who was successful in collecting honey without being stung. Even now it is said that bees and wild life flee at the smell of Irulars sweat. Another legend speaks of origin from Irular Mara (tree)

1.1. Objectives
1. To describe the socio-economic status of the respondents.
2. To study the culture of the Irular community.
3. To understand the social status of the Irular women.
4. To suggest suitable measures to enhance the social wellbeing to empower the Irular women.

2. Materials and Methods

This study intends to portray the social status of Irular women using the descriptive research design. Since the universe is definite, the whole universe is taken for the study. No sampling procedure was used and hence Census method was adopted with complete enumeration of all the items. Since the research study covers all the 252 Irular women census method was adopted. The universe for the present study consists of 252 Irular married women from122 villages of Kancheepuram district Tamil Nadu covered by ASSET (Adivasi Social Service Educational Trust) and NGO working for their cause.

2.1. Sources of Data Collection

The researcher for the present study used the primary sources of information acquired though the self-prepared interview schedule. Besides secondary sources such as the Planning commission reports, Department of Social welfare and Department of Adi Dravidar and Tribal welfare department records were looked into for details on statistics.

2.2. Instruments of Data Collection

The following self-administered interview schedules and scales were included in the package for the purpose of collecting information for the study. Tamil translated versions of all Interview Schedules were used to collect data.

3. Results And Discussion

3.1. Distribution of the Respondents by Their Social Status

The social status of the tribe is measured by the type of marriage, pattern of marriage, type of family system, type of family, and participation of these women in festivals. The above table shows that majority of the respondents 82.1 percent have had arranged marriage and 17.9 percent of the respondents got married by love marriage. The rationale behind this behind this is in tribal culture is entirely different from other nontribal people. Among Irular tribes' marriage is usually arranged by the parents, however people are free to choose their own spouses or life partner. Once they choose the parents arrange marriage if inside their community. Similar findings have been reported by Sinu. E. (2013) in the Irular women at Chengalpet District that they practiced arranged marriage system of marriage.

Endogamy as the pattern of marriage was followed by majority 59.7 percent of the respondents followed by 23 percent who followed polygamous marriage and18.3 percent endogamous type of marriage. Endogamy helps them to survive as distinct communities over a long time, in societies with other practices and beliefs and also preserve their ancestral lineage. But it is also observed that polygamy existed among the men and women. This was practiced to balance the gender imbalance (positive) and also resulting in extra marital relationship. It was also observed that remarriage of widows was encouraged in the community Similar findings have been reported by Sinu. E and Bindu. C. (2005). According to a study by Santhosh Sasirega (2010) it was observed that remarriages are an accepted norm in Irula Community. This also coincides with the findings of Santhosh et al (2012) where polyandry and polygamy was observed in the irular women. Bindu (2005) in her study found that Irulars were an endogamous tribe in nature which coincides with the finding of this study.

Majority 76 percent of the respondents followed patriarchy family system as this system gives power and control of the men rather than the women whereas 4.0 percent of the respondents follow matriarchal family system. Similar findings are reported in the study by Kartikeswar Roul, 2006 and it was observed that the tribe of Kolha, Santal, Juanga and Bhuyan tribe's patriarchal family system was found.

The Indian family system is moving away from the traditional joint family system to becoming nuclear in nature. In keeping with this trend, majority 45.2 percent of the respondents belong to nuclear families. An equal number 42.5 percent of the respondents belong to the joint family and the remaining 12.3 percent belong to the extended family. The tribal community resides on the outskirts of the city on foot hills or seashore. The Irulas followed joint family system in the ancient period. Later due to poverty and influence of modernization they started following nuclear family system. It was followed in the study that although they live in nuclear families they have their parents' house attached to their huts and can be said that they follow joint family system to improve family income.

Among the Irular community 60.1 percent of the male in the tribe participate in all their festivals whereas only 30.5 percent of the female participate in festivals. This shows that 32.9 percent of the both the male and female participate in festivals.

India is a land of varied cultures and celebrates many festivals. The Irular tribes celebrate their festival Masi Maham which is a yearly festival. Masi Maham attracts people from tribes from all over south India when weddings are solemnized and happen. The female oppression is more among Irulars. The women Irular are not allowed to touch articles of worship during the festivals, because of the impurification of menstruation. Patriarchy is strongly rooted in Irular Society.

It is evident from the analysis that majority 92 percent of them voiced that they do not take part in panchayat meeting and the remaining 8 percent participate but only if the spouse agrees. The social life of Irula women is analyzed to understand their participation and contribution in their local village panchayat. The social life of Irula women was measured by their social participations in their villages. The social life is oriented with the village participation, the Irula women are interested but not encouraged to participate in panchayat meeting. They are eager to know to about the problems and it solutions taken by the village panchayat. All the respondents voiced out that pre-marital sex is accepted in their community and their elders approve it.

In the study 87.3 percent of the respondents had the freedom to choose their life partners. Although they had the liberty to choose the marriage was solemnized with the parent's blessings. The remaining 12.7 percent of the respondent's marriage was love marriage by elopement. Majority 87 percent of the respondent's spouses are taking decisions in their family and the remaining 13 percent of the respondents take decisions in their family.

67.5 percent of the respondents voiced out that they are victims of domestic violence because of the alcoholic nature of the spouse and problems of extra marital relationship. The remaining 32.5 percent said they had no problems of domestic violence at home.

It also reveals that 83.73 percent of the respondents voiced that their spouse is dependent on alcohol and consume alcohol almost daily and the remaining 16.27 percent of the respondents felt that their spouses did not consume alcohol.87.3 percent of the respondents confirmed that they do not consume alcohol and the remaining 12.7 consume alcohol on the compulsion of their spouses.

3.2. Social Work Intervention in the Social Dimension

Do women feel socially empowered in the present scenario? Is social empowerment much needed for the tribal women?

Social empowerment of women will include free movement, lack of discrimination against the daughters at home. It will also include the commitment that the community or family has to educate their daughters. A shift in patriarchal norm is also expected for socially empowering them. Holistic approach to women health, safe drinking water, sewage disposal, sanitation within the accessible reach of households and women's participation in planning, participation in festivals, delivery and maintenance of such services also empower her socially. Women's perspectives in environment conservation also socially empower her.

3.3. Education

The need to educate the daughters can be encouraged by small incentive from the government. Since majority of the respondents remain illiterates, education should be given importance. Like basic education should be made compulsory. Awareness' and incentive should be given through SHG. A higher percentage of the Irula women don't have awareness about government programs and awareness should be created about the prevailing government programs for their up-liftmen.

3.4. Community Participation

To increase the female participation at the community level and to give more decision making power it is needed to understand the existing traditional pattern of tribal community in more details which would help in formulation of more effective developmental polices and it will also help to bring out the lacunae lying within present policies. Women empowerment does not signify increasing the numbers of women in decision making position. There should be measures to improve the quality of participation. The quality of participation signifies taking initiatives in new projects, identifying problems and providing suggestion towards effective solution.

3.5. Creating Awareness

Tribal population in this study has poor health outcomes, because of inaccessible health care delivery system that does not cater to their needs. They lacked awareness on the prevention and control of diseases like malaria, measles, sexually transmitted disease etc. Anemia was a common vitamin deficiency disease among tribals as per the study. Lifestyle diseases such as and hypertension, which are usually associated with the urban populace, have now spread to rural and tribal areas.

3.6. Panchayat Leadership

The social life is oriented with the village participation; the Rule women must be encouraged to participate in panchayat meeting. The Irulas are not encouraging the difference in panchayat leadership and leadership in Self Help Group. The patriarchy system does not allow women to possess the leadership.

3.7. Decision Making in the Family

Decision making refers to the ability of people to define their own goals, act upon them, and make choices through critical thinking (Kabeer, 1999). The Irular women should have control over her life. She is not allowed to take major decisions their finances, saving their income, spending their income, decision regarding their children's education, children's marriage, participation in festivals, participating in panchayat meetings, political meetings, and participation in festivals.

3.8. Discrimination

Discrimination of daughters start from home but the trend is changing in cities with modern families. These changes are not seen in tribal communities. The daughters are always seen as someone to be married and sent off or as a treated as a person works all day. This has to be addressed and daughters to be married after 18 years. There is also discrimination regarding their choices in spending money, choice of marriage partners, and participation in festivals. Discrimination is also seen in wages that a women and a man gets. Collective mobilization of women should be encouraged to fight for equal wages at the workplace.

3.9. Safety & Security

Respondents in the study were facing domestic violence by their spouses. Violence is because of alcoholism and polygamous and extra marital relationship. Irula women are not leading their life pleasant and happy. Every day they have to tolerate violence and ill-treatment in their marital life. The patriarchy system dominates and subjugates the Irula women by the domestic violence. Tribal women are also victims of rape and maltreatment in their place of work. Provisions to be made for women to address their problems through the SHGs or through crisis intervention centers.

3.10. Conclusion

When women are psychologically empowered, there will be a change in attitude, cognition and behaviour, which most assuredly will lead to a positive change in value orientation, improved Self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-consciousness as well as better psychological well-being which will culminate in a peaceful and developing society. When women are empowered whole family benefits and these benefits often have effects on the future generation. Empowered women are able to adjust in health, social, work, emotional, psychological dimension. These make a change in her quality of life. Economic and social empowerment increases her security feeling and life satisfaction. This also leads to women with strong personality and their social status is good. Therefore, the above said

interventions and suggestions can be used as guidelines by a social worker in order to help the tribal women to cope with her problems in the social dimensions.

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