



Tribal women as the victims of the interrelation between the empowerment and domestic violence in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence is one of the crimes against women which are linked to their disadvantageous position in the society. Domestic violence refers to violence against women especially in matrimonial homes. Therefore domestic violence is recognized as the significant barriers of the empowerment of women, with consequences of women's health, their health seeking behaviour and their adoption of small family norm. However an attempt has been made to study whether ever married women of reproductive age group in India view wife-beating as justified. Background characteristics such as education, age, marital duration, place of residence, caste, religion, sex of the head of the household, standard of living, work status of women, exposure to mass media and the autonomy of women with respect to .The analysis shows that the women belonging to low socio-economic status are more likely to agree with each of the different reasons justifying wife-beating. Again domestic violence is more among lower autonomy and women belonging to low socio-economic status

KEYWORDS

Introduction

Scheduled Tribes in India are generally considered to be 'Adivasis,' meaning indigenous people or original inhabitants of the country. The tribes have been confined to low status and are often physically and socially isolated instead of being absorbed in the mainstream Hindu population. Psychologically, the Scheduled Tribes often experience passive indifference that may take the form of exclusion from educational opportunities, social participation, and access to their own land. All tribal communities are not alike. They are products of different historical and social conditions. They belong to different racial stocks and religious backgrounds and speak different dialects. Discrimination against women, occupational differentiation, and emphasis on status and hierarchical social ordering that characterize the predominant mainstream culture are generally absent among the tribal groups. Adivasis are not as a general rule regarded as unclean or polluted in the same way as the Scheduled Caste population is perceived by the mainstream culture. Scheduled Tribe population represents one of the most economically impoverished and marginalized groups in India. Although Scheduled Tribes are a minority, they constitute about 8.2 % of the total population in India, or 85 million people in absolute number. Violence has a profound effect on tribal women. Beginning before birth, in some cases, with sex-selective abortions, or at birth when parents who are desperate for a son may kill female babies, it continues to affect women throughout their lives. Each year, millions of girls undergo female genital mutilation.

Nature and scope of the study

The most widely used definition of violence against women (VAW) is: The Declaration on Elimination of Violence Against Women adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993, defines Violence Against Women as "any act of gender based violence against women that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private spaces".

The Centre for Diseases Control in the US has defined four different types of violence:

- Physical violence
- Sexual violence
- Threat of physical or sexual violence, and
- Psychological or emotional abuse.

Economic violence

is another category of violence identified by the UN Special Reporter on Violence against Women. This is perpetrated usually by an intimate partner or family member and includes economic blackmail, control over money a woman earns, denial of access to education, health assistance or remunerated employment and denial of property rights. Gender-based violence against women takes many forms and occurs throughout a woman's life cycle.

Domestic violence

that is any act of physical, sexual, or psychological abuse, or the threat of such abuse, inflicted against a woman by a person intimately connected to her through marriage, family relation, or acquaintanceship is universal and has its root in the socio-cultural set up of the society. The perpetrators of domestic violence have often been found to be the males and the victims, their sexual partners. Internationally, one in three women have been beaten, coerced into sex or abused in their lifetime by a member of her own family (Heise et al. 1999). Looking at the domestic front, starting from Vedic age to twenty first century, women in India perhaps have never experienced equal rights and freedom compared to their male counterparts. The concept of 'Ardhangini' [half of the body] seems to be restricted only in literatures and have never implemented in practical life. In addition to this, extracts from Ramcharitamanas of Tulsidas like 'Dhol, Gauwnaar, Shudra, Pashu aur Nari; Sakal Tadan ka Adhikari' [drums, uncivilized illiterates, lower castes, animals and women are all fit to be beaten] besides other indicators like Pardaha system [hiding the face in veils], Sati system [self immersion of the lady in husband's pyre] that are subject to women only; is a reflection of the history of women's subordinate status. In short, it is always the women who have to be in the tight rope, subject to inequality and looked down as an inferior sex. Staring from childhood to the end of her life she has to be under the control of father or husband or the son. The subordinate status of women combined with socio cultural norms that are inclined towards patriarchy and masculinity can be considered as an important factor determining the domestic violence.

Health

Health is an important indicator of the well being of any group. Literature on the health status of the tribal women in India is not comprehensive. Most health related studies are limited, they do not cover the various dimensions of health affecting the status of tribal women like i) sex-ratio, ii) Female

literacy, iii) Marriage practices, iv) Age at marriage, v) Age of mother at first conception vi) Life expectancy at birth, etc. Poverty, deprivation and now the reduction of government expenditure on basic medical health facilities is reflected in the absolutely poor health condition of Tribal women and children. Child bearing is in this 21st century still a risk to the life of the woman. Anemia is the normal condition for women, and malnutrition is rampant. Trafficking and Migration of tribal Women

Poor economic conditions, usurpation of their land by outsider landlords, lack of employment opportunities, displacement and poverty are forcing adivasi men and women to migrate to urban areas or to areas where there is work. Earlier only men migrated to urban centers but in recent years large scale migration of single women is taking place from all regions. Tribal families are driven by poverty to send unmarried daughters. These single women and tribal girls are being exploited by employers and are in a vulnerable position. They are also becoming victims of attacks by anti social elements. One of the most common problems which adivasi women face is sexual exploitation by outsiders – forest contractors, usurers, landlords, forest department officials etc. the relatively free sexual relations among unmarried adivasis were also exploited by them for their own ends.

Table 1
Forms of violence experienced by tribal women throughout their lifespan

Phase	Type of Violence Present
Pre-birth	Sex-selective abortion; battering during pregnancy; coerced pregnancy.
Infancy	Female infanticide; emotional and physical abuse; differential access to food and medical care.
Girlhood	Child marriage; genital mutilation; sexual abuse by family members and strangers; differential access to food, medical care and education
Adolescence	Violence during courtship; economically coerced sex (e.g. for school fees); sexual abuse in the workplace; rape; sexual harassment; arranged marriage; trafficking.
Reproductive age	Physical, psychological and sexual abuse by intimate male partners and relatives; forced pregnancies by partner; sexual abuse in the workplace; sexual harassment; rape; abuse of widows, including property grabbing and sexual cleansing practices.
Elderly	Abuse of widows, including property grabbing; accusations of witchcraft; physical and psychological violence by younger family members; differential access to food and medical care.

Conclusion

Violence against tribal women is not a new or recent phenomenon. Women had been the victims of violence all through the ages- in all societies, culture, region and religious communities of the world. Violence in any form should be averted, and condemned at all means. The study showed that,

knowledge about laws related to atrocities against women and services addressing women’s issues were scanty with regard to the victims under study. Proper awareness campaigns, Workshops, Seminars etc. in this regard should therefore be organized regularly in rural as well as urban areas. Furthermore, a committee should be set up to monitor the proper functioning of the institutions dealing with women’s issues. More over a clear – cut state policy is needed to safe guard women’s rights. A fundamental change is required in the attitude of the employers, policy makers, family members and other relatives and the public at large towards women. An attitudinal change in the society is also required, if women are to live in the world as free human beings with due respect and without fear. Women must organize themselves in-groups and raise a collective voice against violent acts. Unified efforts can certainly create a public opinion and outcry against situations, where women are subjected to all forms of atrocities.

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