

Tribal Women of Jammu and Kashmir in Quest for their Identity with Special Reference to Socio- Economic and Educational Status

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ABSTRACT

When women attempt to redefine their roles and expand their arena of choices, their perceptions and actions generate reverberations through the entire society necessitating a re-ordering of not only gender roles and arrangements, but also of the social and political order affecting the culture and the collectivity and its self-definition and identity. Thus history's oldest oppression and fault line is shaken at its very roots. Identity is, also, about subjectivities; yet it is not something that persons done at their will, irrespective of objective situations and processes. Traditionally, tribal women and men had equal access to land, animals and resources, and this was beneficial to the collective. However, as a result of the integration and assimilation efforts of dominant culture, capitalistic systems and the ideal of individual ownership, tribal women in particular experience fewer opportunities to access their natural resource and lands. As a consequence gender relations within tribal society have been changing. The objective of the paper is to analyze the identity crisis, Jammu and Kashmir tribal women face in the male dominated society and this paper analyses the social, economic and educational status of tribal women in Jammu and Kashmir.

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Introduction

Identity is the birthright of an individual. Everyone is born into this world with an identity or with multiple identities. Identity is also formed in due course of time. Hence, identity is both inherited and acquired. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize people's identity and allow them to preserve their distinct ethnic identity. People use it to differentiate the 'self' and the 'other'. It is good and advisable to have an identity without which one is considered to be weak. We may also possess more than one identity like a national identity, religious identity, cultural identity, professional identity, etc. However, our identity based on gender, ethnic and national are more enduring than other identities like religious, professional etc. (Demmers, 2012). Identity is a symbolic construction, an image of ourselves, which we build in a process of interaction with others. If we do not compare ourselves with others there is no need for an identity. It is therefore contextual and dynamic, developing through dialogue and through the different ways in which people interact with others in relation to their cultural environment and their relations (Mach, 2007). Identity is the creation of oneself, not placed on someone by another person, organization, or

society. Identity moves from the local to the transnational. Identity is situational. Individual posses a core identity, but one's ethnic identity can shift depending on the environment and the relationships with others within a particular situation (Johnson, 2003). Articulations of identity have to be understood as a function of historical, social and material circumstances. (Bilgrami, Akeel 1993: 282) While feminist theorists have generally highlighted the universality of this dimension of women's situation, it is also necessary to historicise and contextualize this generalization. Patriarchal oppression intermeshes with various social formations in diverse ways in different historical situations and it is this that imparts a specific character and a social groundedness to the concrete historical articulation of patriarchy. Similarly the Scheduled tribes constitute a small proportion of the total population of the country and they are marginalized from the society in many respects. Provisions made in the Constitution have sought about changes in their position but still they are confronted with a number of challenges. Tribal women in Jammu and Kashmir are hardworking than tribal men and they contribute significantly towards their family income but their income generating sources are limited. Low income necessitates



more hands in labor as a result, they are reluctant to send their children to formal schools. Moreover, due to the general low level of education their awareness level is also low and so they tend to ignore the basic conditions of health. Status of tribal women in terms of education, employment and health is low not just compared to tribal men, but also in comparison to women belonging to the general population. The tribal women of Jammu and Kashmir, constitute like any other social group, about half of the total population of the tribal community. Tribal societies generally view gender as complimentary and egalitarian, where each role is defined but complimentary to the other. Men focus on cultivation and women plant and gather the foods, thus both roles are necessary and complimentary in the holistic relationship of the family/community.

Causes for Identity Crisis:

Identity crisis can be caused by various factors such as discrimination, exploitation, alienation, and deprivation. When people feel that they are not acknowledged, accepted, appreciated and are deprived of something that they are entitled to, then the crisis emerges. Identity crisis can happen to both majority and minority

communities. However, most of the times the crisis occurs among the minority communities for fear of losing something that they have been enjoying for quite some time. According to Garg (2007), every ethnic group has its own distinct culture, language, and traditional institutions. The fact of belonging to one group often gives rise to follow feelings and sentiments. The fear of being assimilated to the dominant culture and the apprehension of being exploited to make the minorities to fight for their common cause in preserving their identity. When people feel that they are a potential victim, they retaliate (Bijukumar) (2013).

Socio- Economic and Educational Status of Tribal women of Jammu and Kashmir:

Seventy years after independence and about the same span of planned development, women's position in India in general and women in Jammu and Kashmir in particular is still grim. The position of the tribal women of Jammu and Kashmir is worsening considerably in almost every sphere of life with the exception of some women who were very lucky to receive a good education and employment. The available literature on women in India has



brought to light many negative social practices like rape, wife-battering, domestic violence, dowry deaths, prostitution, and working long hours within and outside the home without recognition. All this indicates that women are still perishing at the periphery of the mainstream society. However the condition of tribal women of Jammu and Kashmir is appalling. They are socially, economically and educationally treated as “other”. According to Bina Agarwal, Tribal women are the second major category facing substantial disabilities in inheritance. Given the non-codification of their laws, tribal communities are governed by customs which discriminate against women. And even the limited customary land rights many tribal women enjoyed historically having been eroded. So, we should attempt to link land resource rights for tribal women as the central point of all the gender inequity making its entry in the tribal community, and we should not forget patriarchy can take various shapes and forms: from globalization ‘trusted’ to the feminization of poverty to violence against women in the name of customs. Simon de Beauvoir has suggested in *The Second Sex* that ‘one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one’. For de Beauvoir, women are designated as the ‘Other’ women and the negative about men, the lack against which masculine identity

differentiates itself. There are hundreds of attempts being tried to create a better world for tribal women: from the tribal identity protection perspective, from women’s right perspective, from the perspective of community control over natural resources, from a labor rights perspective in this globalized economy. But still there is concern for a society based on justice and this includes gender justice issues in tribal communities.

A critical cultural perspective becomes difficult when presented with multifarious factors such as patriarchy, labor, education, and government initiatives that influence tribal women’s socioeconomic development in Jammu and Kashmir. Differing conceptual frameworks and insufficient empirical evidence mean presenting general inferences regarding the status of tribal women seems inappropriate. However, tribal women of Jammu and Kashmir are oppressed by a patriarchal society share common inequalities. Such a gender-biased ideology hinders tribal women’s socioeconomic empowerment. Deconstructing gender-biased realities is critical for empowerment. Income generation alone is not sufficient as it is only one factor in women’s empowerment. An analysis of four recurrent themes (patriarchy, labor, education, government) within the milieu of poor Jammu



and Kashmir tribal women's socioeconomic development revealed a cycle of gender inequality weaving throughout society. Without socioeconomic equality for tribal women in all the sectors of J and K, the developer in case of J and K tribal women cannot become fully realized. Socioeconomic development can both empower tribal women and raise the status of the States' economy. Tribal Women need employment justice. Education, vocational training, and skill improvements would increase the capacity for gainful economic participation of tribal women in Jammu and Kashmir.

Conclusion:

The needs of Tribal women in the state of Jammu and Kashmir should be included in a national approach to workforce development. From a U.S. perspective, Jacobs & Hawley (2003) described workforce development as coordinated policies and programs that collectively "enable individuals the opportunity to realize a sustainable livelihood and organizations to achieve exemplary goals, consistent with the history, culture, and goals of the social context" (p. 101). Naquin (2002) described workforce development systems as a means of serving the needs of organizations, communities, and nations. Our State is a

complex social context – it will require many integrated approaches of private and public systems to serve the pressing needs of tribal women in all the sectors of Jammu and Kashmir. The need of the hour is to provide equal rights like socioeconomic and educational rights so that they could be uplifted and empowered from the poor sectors for development and should be given equal opportunities in every field in the form of education and employment justice. Finally, vocational training and skill improvement would enhance tribal women' capacity to gain economic involvement in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

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