

TRIBAL WOMEN AND RURAL EMPLOYMENT IN MELGHAT: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Dr. Shivcharan Laxman Kottewar

Assistant Professor, Dept of Commerce,
Arts, Science and Commerce College,
Chikhaldara, Dist. Amravati (M.H)

Abstract :

In India it has been seen that 94 percent of women working force is engaged in unorganised sector and only 6 percent are working in organised sector. It is also seen that due to lack of literacy among women workforce they are forced to work in unskilled jobs and they also get less wages. There is also a wage differential between the men and women workers. Most of illiterate and less literate women workers work in agriculture and also in forests.

It is well known that tribals or adivasis' try to keep their old customs and traditions. Women play an important role in tribal culture. They collect fuels, they work in fields and forests, they earn income for the families and also prepare food for the family. They strive very hard at every step of the life. Anthropologists, linguists studied the language and cultural side of the tribals but from economic point of view very few scholars have studied the livelihood conditions of tribals especially tribal women.. In this paper attempt has been made to study the livelihood conditions of tribal women labourers in Melghat region of Maharashtra.

Tribal women in the Melghat region play a crucial role in sustaining their families through various forms of rural employment. Despite their contributions, they face numerous socio-economic challenges such as wage disparities, seasonal employment, lack of education, and poor working conditions. This study explores the employment patterns, income levels, and overall living conditions of tribal women in Melghat while identifying the key challenges they encounter. The findings highlight the urgent need for policy interventions to improve their economic well-being and social empowerment.

Keywords

Tribal Women, Rural Employment, Wage Disparities, Livelihood, Socio-Economic Challenges, Melghat.

Introduction :

India has a significant tribal population, with a considerable number residing in rural areas. These communities depend on agriculture, forest produce, and daily wage labor for survival. In Melghat, a predominantly tribal region in Maharashtra, women contribute extensively to household income through agricultural labor and government employment schemes. However, their economic conditions remain poor due to seasonal employment, low literacy rates, and inadequate wages. This study aims to examine the employment conditions of tribal women in Melghat and analyze the challenges they face.



Objectives of the Study

- To examine the nature and extent of employment among tribal women in Melghat.
- To assess the socio-economic challenges faced by these women.
- To analyze wage disparities and employment opportunities.
- To suggest measures for improving their employment conditions.

Research Methodology :

Sampling and Data Collection :

Study Area: Chikhaldara and Dharni tehsils of Melghat region.

Sample Size: 320 tribal women laborers from 32 villages (10 respondents per village).

Data Collection: Primary data was collected through structured interviews and personal visits. Secondary data sources include government reports and census data.

Findings and Discussion :

1. Employment Patterns :

The employment patterns of tribal women in Melghat indicate that a majority of them are engaged in low-paying and unstable labor. About 45% of tribal women work as regular agricultural laborers, primarily engaged in farming activities such as sowing, weeding, and harvesting. However, the seasonal nature of agricultural work means that their employment remains uncertain throughout the year. Additionally, 16.25% of women are employed under government schemes, such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which provides short-term employment opportunities. A significant portion, 38.75%, engages in both agricultural and non-agricultural labor, balancing multiple work types to sustain their livelihoods. This highlights their struggle to secure stable and continuous employment, leading to financial insecurity.

2. Wage Disparities :

Wage disparities remain a critical challenge for tribal women laborers in Melghat. Nearly 60% of women earn between ₹60-70 per day, which is significantly lower than their male counterparts who earn higher wages for the same type of work. Wage discrimination based on gender is evident, as 25.94% of women reported earning ₹21-30 less than men despite performing similar tasks. This wage gap not only affects their financial stability but also limits their ability to access better healthcare, education, and nutrition for their families. The persistent issue of wage inequality continues to push tribal women into economic vulnerability, restricting their chances of upward mobility.

3. Work Availability :

The availability of work for tribal women laborers is highly inconsistent and seasonal, leading to severe economic instability. A large proportion, 60% of respondents, reported employment for only 90-100 days per year, which is far below the standard for full-time



employment. Another 34.69% of women get work for 120-160 days per year, while only 5.31% manage to secure employment for 180-200 days annually. This irregularity forces many women to seek multiple employment sources or migrate in search of work, further impacting their social and family lives. The seasonal nature of agricultural work, coupled with a lack of alternative employment opportunities, exacerbates the economic hardships faced by these women.

4. Socio-Economic Conditions :

The socio-economic conditions of tribal women laborers in Melghat reflect severe deprivation and marginalization. More than 55% of the women surveyed are illiterate or have minimal education, which restricts their access to better-paying jobs and financial independence. Household conditions are also poor, with 80% of women living in nuclear families that struggle to meet basic needs. Access to essential amenities remains a major challenge, as 99.06% of respondents fetch water from wells or ponds, indicating a lack of proper water supply infrastructure in the region. Additionally, 70% of tribal households lack electricity, further limiting their access to modern facilities and opportunities for educational advancement. These socio-economic disadvantages reinforce their cycle of poverty, making it difficult for them to improve their quality of life.

5. Challenges Faced by Tribal Women :

Tribal women in Melghat face multiple challenges that hinder their social and economic progress. One of the primary challenges is seasonal and unstable employment, which results in unpredictable income and financial insecurity. Furthermore, gender-based wage discrimination continues to affect their earnings, reducing their ability to support their families effectively. Limited access to formal credit and financial inclusion is another major challenge, as most tribal women lack awareness or eligibility for financial support from banks and government schemes. Additionally, they endure poor working conditions with no social security benefits, making them vulnerable to workplace exploitation. A crucial issue is the lack of opportunities for skill development and alternative employment, which forces them to rely solely on low-paying labor jobs without prospects for improvement. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions, such as vocational training, better wage policies, and stronger labor protections to uplift the socio-economic status of tribal women laborers.

Recommendations :

- **Enhancing Employment Opportunities:** Implementing sustainable livelihood programs.
- **Skill Development:** Vocational training for alternative employment options.
- **Equal Wages:** Strict enforcement of minimum wage laws.
- **Access to Education and Financial Inclusion:** Increasing literacy rates and providing access to microfinance schemes.
- **Improved Infrastructure:** Ensuring basic facilities such as electricity, water supply, and healthcare services.

Conclusion :

Tribal women in Melghat face multiple challenges in securing stable and fair



employment. Despite their critical contributions to the rural economy, they struggle with low wages, seasonal work, and socio-economic barriers. Policy interventions focusing on education, skill development, and gender equality are essential for improving their quality of life. The findings of this study highlight the need for targeted government programs and social reforms to uplift tribal women and enhance their economic security.

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