

Education of Denotified and Nomadic Tribes Women and its Effect on their Empowerment in Haryana

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ABSTRACT

Position of women in India is also not good even after the implementation of the Indian Constitution which assured the equality, freedom and dignity of life to the people. Social biases are still in practices against the women in general. If we traced the history of the world, we found that majority of the societies in the world was patrilineal and male dominated. Education level of women of Denotified and Nomadic tribes is very low as compare to the women in general. They are deprived of the education facility due to wandering nature of the Nomadic and Denotified tribes. Education has direct impact on the occupation and income generating activities of the women. This paper is an attempt to analyse the education level of the women of denotified and nomadic tribes and its impact on their income generating activities in the state of Haryana.

Keywords: Denotified Tribe, Nomad, Criminal Tribe, Habitual Offender, Livelihood

INTRODUCTION

Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 was passed by the Britisher to notify about 150 tribes in India as criminal tribes. Ample powers were given to police under that draconian Act vide which police have to keep surveillance on them, restrict their freedom of movement from one place to another and arrest any one of these communities on slightest of suspicion without warrant (Gandhi and Lalitha, 2009). In 1947, Criminal Tribes Inquiry Committee was constituted in the United Province, which recommended ways to settle them and adopt adequate welfare measures for their proper rehabilitation. A committee was established under the chairmanship of Mr. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar in 1947, which submitted its report in 1950 and made several recommendations for the repeal of the Act. Some of the recommendations of the Ayyangar Committee were accepted by the Government of India. It repealed the Criminal Tribes Act with effect from 31 August 1952 and this is how they came to be known as Denotified Communities. Ironically

in 1959, “Habitual Offender’s Act” was passed by many state governments again subjecting them to the same social stigma of criminality or born criminals. There is no doubt that even after so many decades of independence, these communities are still one of the most neglected and marginalized social groups of Indian society (Biswas, 1960; Gandhi, 2008; (Misra and Malhotra, 1982).

A nomad is a person who have no settled home, who moves from place to place to earn their livelihood. The word nomad comes from a Greek word that means one who wanders for pasture. Most nomadic groups follow a fixed annual or seasonal pattern of movements and settlements. Nomadic peoples traditionally travel by animal or on foot. Today, some nomads travel by motor vehicle. Most nomads live in tents or other portable shelters. A National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi Nomadic Tribes was constituted in 2006 under the chairmanship of Shri Balkrishna Sidram Renke. It made several recommendations to the Govt. of India to improve the living standard of these communities (Balkrishna, 2008; Sarthak, 2017).

In present, most of these communities are very poor, and live just hand to mouth. Even survival is a constant struggle for them with their daily earnings being very low. Various laws passed by State and Central Government since independence, have adversely affected the livelihood opportunities of Denotified and Nomadic Communities. In 1952, Criminal Tribes Act was repealed and around 150 communities were denotified. But unfortunately soon after that many state governments passed 'Habitual Offenders Act' a similar Act, which not only stigmatized them again but curtailed their freedom. A number of communities which traditionally have been earning their livelihood by holding street shows are harassed and frequently booked under 'Prevention of Begging Act', 1959. Likewise, many communities were deprived of their livelihood by 'Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960', without any alternative source of earning or relief offered (Aggarwal, 2008; Gandhi, 2006).

The level of education among women of denotified communities is very low. Since the very nature of their livelihood requires them to frequently move around, they are not able to send their children to schools. Added to this, children are also a part of their profession of many of these communities which work as street acrobats or magicians. Because, men including boys go out for work, women and girls stay at home attending to various household responsibilities. That most of the women of Denotified and Nomadic Communities take care of various responsibilities such as cooking food, washing clothes, cleaning house, taking care of children etc. Women from these communities are very hard working. A large number of them go out to earn as well as take care of household activities. Some of the women and girls also work as rag pickers. Many of them can be seen roaming in the streets with polythene bags on their shoulders for collecting waste like paper, plastic, tins and bottles. Many of them suffer from skin diseases and other ailments as they are continuously in contact with garbage. Begging is common among denotified and nomadic communities. When there is nothing else to do, they especially women and children just go for begging. But begging, as they say, is full of hazards. Sometimes they are caught begging by the police under the Prevention of Begging Act, and taken to remand homes. Young girls begging on streets face sexual harassment by goons roaming around. Majority of people from Denotified and Nomadic Communities want to earn their livelihood through their traditional occupations as the alternative

sources of income for them are limited due to lack of resources and lack of skills (Casimir and Jung, 2009; Engelen *et al.*, 2009; Devy, 2006).

The women of these communities have a liking for knitting, stitching, embroidery, making mud toys, handicrafts and other decorative articles. These women are willing to learn new skills and work to earn extra income for the family. But lack of capital and marketing skills is a major handicap. Besides, women also take keen interest in animal husbandry. If given enough incentives and loans on low interest, it can generate extra income and supplement the diet of the family members (Chauhan, 2009; Foucault, 1988; Galton, 1869).

Research Problem and Research Methodology:

The present study is aimed at having an objective assessment of the education level of women of denotified and nomadic communities in Haryana and their involvement in income generating activities of their families. An effort has been made to look in to the qualitative as well as quantitative changes taking place as a result of their interaction with other communities in an effort to improve the quality of life of women, and efforts to remove the barriers for their full and effective participation in social and economic development. The present study adopted a doctrinal research methodology to gather the relevant information. Mainly secondary sources are used to complete the research paper.

Universe and Limitation of Study:

In Haryana Denotified and Nomadic Tribes are divided in to three categories *i.e.* Denotified, Nomadic and Taprivas. Total numbers of castes under these categories are 44. The present study is limited to the women of four castes. These are Sansi, Bajigar, Gadia Lohar and Nat and selection method is random.

Brief Summary of Selected Castes:

Sansi:

Sansi is a denotified and nomadic community originally belonging to Rajasthan. During British rule in India they were placed under Criminal Tribes Act 1871, hence stigmatized for a long time, after independence however they were denotified in 1952. Most of the Sansis in Haryana are Hindu by religion. They claim their lineage to saints Malang Shah and Sans Mal. The main occupation of Sansis is said to be hunting. They are also stigmatized for brewing country made liquor. The

community has moved on with time, and most of the people belonging to this community are living with honor and dignity now. But unfortunately the community has not been able to shrug off the stigma of criminality attached to their name for centuries. The oldest settlements of Sansis in Haryana are Rohtak, Jajhar and Panipat

The level of education among Sansis is very poor but has been gradually improving. But school dropout rate is still quite high. It was also revealed by many respondents that due to poverty many families want even their daughters to drop out of schools and make them earn to supplement the family income. Most of the families don't seem to be aware of the importance of education. Earlier there was a tradition of bride price, which means dowry used to be paid by the family of bridegroom. But now the dowry is paid by family of bride. Widow marriage is not welcome in Sansi society. There is no fixed income. Most of the people are daily wage earners. Women are actively engaged as agriculture labourer. Most of the people live in their pucca houses, but community sanitation is still very poor. Community complains against police harassment and atrocities. According to them, police is biased and prejudiced against them and still treats them as criminals.

Gadia Lohar:

Gadia Lohar are also known as Gadulia Lohar. They are a nomadic community which originally came from Rajasthan. They are lohar (ironsmith) by profession who move on from one place to another place on bullock carts. The bullock carts are their homes. The major settlements of Lohar in Haryana are in Sirsa, Hisar and they can be found in almost cities of the Haryana near to main roads, bus stand and railway station of the cities. They call themselves Rajputs. According to the story told by them, after the defeat of Chittor in 1568 by the Mughal emperor Akbar, they were forced to retreat into the dense forests. They take a vow of not returning to return home unless Chittor is taken back and their honor and prestige restored. Gadia Lohars want to maintain their distinct cultural identity at all cost as a result of which they prefer to live separately in small clusters. They don't like to mix easily with members of other communities.

Women of Gadia Lohars are very hard working. Their mother tongue is called Mewari which is dialect of Hindi. They are very proud of their culture. In the past, Gadulia Lohars never stayed at one place or long and were always on the move. They used their bullock carts

for transport with all their household belongings on the cart. But with the changing social reality and uncertainty of their trade, they now want to settle down permanently at one place. Gadia Lohar women wear earrings, bangles, necklaces and rings. Their bangles are made of ivory. The anklets are of copper. The necklaces are made of gold and silver. The women wear bangles on their arm too, right from the shoulders. Women also wear pendant between the hair partitions and tie it to the hair. They also wear metallic waistband and nose ornament called nath. They are usually engaged in making and repairing agricultural and household implements. They lead a hard life despite the adverse weather and the uncertainties of their trade. There was a time when the iron tools made by Gadia Lohars were in great demand. Villagers used to wait for them as these tools were very useful for household and agriculture. But with the change of time, new cheap and modern tools began appearing in market which reduced the demand for tools of Gadia Lohars.

Gadia Lohar women have traditional skills in embroidery which if promoted can earn them a good income and become an alternative source of livelihood. Housing, water and sanitation are their major problems. None of the families has built in toilet as a result almost all including women are forced to defecate in the open. Level of education is very low. Women are not only actively engaged in manufacturing and repairing of iron wares, but they also sell their products in streets and weekly markets held on different days in different parts of the city.

Most of the girls drop out of schools as soon as they attain puberty. They feel it unsafe for their girls especially unmarried to go out alone; as a result they are married at an early age. Marriages are arranged by parents and with the consent of cast panchayats. In the past they had good number of livestock such as bullocks, dogs, goats, cows etc. but they have almost none of them now as there is low space of living in urban area, low income and lack of fodder.

Nats:

The Nats, a nomadic community have been entertaining as acrobats and jugglers for centuries. Young girls and women of Nat community perform the rope-dance on tight ropes tied to a centrally fixed bamboo while their men beat drums to attract an audience. The name of the tribe is taken from the Sanskrit word 'nata' a dancer. In the past Nats used to enjoy royal patronage

for their living, amusing the rulers and their guests with their acrobatic performances. They also entertained people in villages and towns through acrobatic shows, music and dance. They are divided into two subcastes Bajniyanat and Brajwasi nat. The major settlements of Nats in Haryana are Gurugram, Faridabad and Rohtak districts. Their total population in Haryana is approximately 45000. Their main language of discourse is Hindi and Haryanavi.

The level of education is extremely low in Nat community. Women enjoy low status in family compared to her male counterpart. Women participated mainly in household work and also participated in economic activities of family being agriculture labour. Nats don't marry outside their community, but they are required to marry outside their clan. Marriage is settled through negotiation among parents or elders. Bride price is prevalent among the poorer Nats and is paid in cash. Child marriages are common among the Nats but the departure of the bride to her husband's home is performed only after her attaining puberty.

Bazigar:

The Bazigars are believed to be originally Chauhan Rajputs, who had taken to acrobatics during the time of Aurangzeb to escape persecution and forcible conversion to Islam. When Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life, the sir (head) of the Guru was brought by a Bazigar on his gadda (trolley) and was concealed in his jhonpar (hut). The hut was burnt to cremate the mortal remains of the guru. They claim to find a mention of it in the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book. The name of the community finds its origin from the word bazi, which means acrobating. The Bazigar, thus, means the one who has taken to acrobating. The present population of the state had migrated from the Sargodha district of Pakistan at the time of partition in 1947. They are found throughout the state in varying numbers, but are concentrated in Ambala, Kurukshetra, Karnal, Rohtak and Hissar. According to the Census of India 2011, their population in Haryana is 138163. The Bazigars speak their own bazigaraboli (dialect) within the family and with the kin groups and Hindi and Punjabi with others. The Devanagiri script is used for written communication. They are classified as Scheduled Castes. The Bazigars were landless community. Traditionally, they are engaged in acrobatics and making a show of similar feats. From time immemorial they were engaged in similar occupations and

earning their livelihood. But presently, community abandoned their traditional occupation because they find it less remunerative and lacking in respect. Presently, they are engaged as labourers on daily wages, in animal husbandry and petty business and trade. A few are employed in government and private jobs. Some are also self-employed as vegetable vendors, selling confectionery, eatables and clothes as hawkers.

The Bazigar women have low status and are confined to household activities and after the family needs. They are not allowed any share in the parental property. The woman has a right to maintenance by husband. The women have a role in animal husbandry, collection of fuel bringing potable water whenever needed. They have a role in social functions, rituals and the religious sphere. On account of adult franchise, they have a limited role in political sphere. The women of the Bazigar community know cloth embroidery and knitting. They have oral traditions in the form of folksongs, folklore and folktales, which they share with other local and regional communities. Punjabi oral traditions are mostly prevalent. Ghori and mahia folksongs are sung at the time of marriage in the family. Percussion and wind instruments are used. Men and women both participate in dance during the marriage in the family.

Among the Bazigars, the literacy rate was very low. Formal education is favoured for boys, but not for girls. While the boys are able to get their schooling with some even having been able to go to college level, girls generally drop out at the 10th or 12th level. The reasons for dropouts are economic and social. There is general apathy towards girls' education.

Level of Education:

The level of education among women of denotified communities is very low. Since the very nature of their livelihood requires them to frequently move around, they are not able to send their children to schools. Added to this, children are also a part of their profession of many of these communities which work as street acrobats and hawkers. Because, men including boys go out for work, women and girls stay at home attending to various household responsibilities. The percentage of girls in the category of graduate or above was found to be very low.

There is also sharp variation among communities. Level of education was found to be even lower among Gadia Lohar who live in small J J clusters, and Nats who either perform on streets or sell flowers or other items to

people passing by. One may be surprised to know that the level of education among girls in denotified communities when compared is even far below than that of other Scheduled Casts.

Reasons for School Dropouts

Women prefer separate schools for girls as their apprehension of girls sexual harassment from members of other community is the main reason of their obvious reluctance. Due to the compulsion of migrating from one place to another for livelihood, and the frequent displacement of their settlements by authorities, it is difficult for their children especially the girls to be regular in schools.

There is a need for residential school for these children especially for their girls. Since the parents of these children are very poor and are forced to migrate very frequently to earn their living, the facility of residential schools will considerably increase the school enrolment and reduce the dropout rate. Residential schools for children of Denotified and Nomadic Communities have been very successful in Maharashtra.

Women in Income Generating Activities:

Most of the women of Denotified and Nomadic Communities take care of various responsibilities such as cooking food, washing clothes, cleaning house, taking care of children etc. Women from these communities are very hard working. A large number of them go out to earn as well as take care of household activities. Tending cattle, fetching fuel and fodder as daily chores of women were more reported among Bajigars and Sansi who live in urban villages and keep livestock. Most of the women are willing to work and earn some supplementary income for their families. They have a liking for knitting, stitching, embroidery, making mud toys, handicrafts and other decorative articles. But they need some training and resources to begin their own small enterprises.

Begging is common among denotified and nomadic communities. When there is nothing else to do, they especially women and children just go for begging. But begging, as they say, is full of hazards. Sometimes they are caught begging by the police under the Prevention of Begging Act, and taken to remand homes. Young girls begging on streets face sexual harassment by goons roaming around. Some of these communities might have practiced it long time ago, but none of them wants to do it by choice now. Some of the women and girls also work

as rag pickers. Many of them suffer from skin diseases and other ailments as they are continuously in contact with garbage.

Occupational profile of women varies significantly from community to community. In Nat and Gadia Lohar communities, women are almost equal partners in income generating activities. They are very hard working and laborious. They earn as well as take care of household responsibilities such as cooking, washing clothes and cleaning the house, and caring for children. Women among Bajigars and Sansi mainly remain inside their homes. Men don't like their women to work outside. Some of them sell liquors and also go for begging. Women and girls from Nat community take active part in holding street acrobatic shows. Recently some of them have also begun selling flowers and other small items on the street. As far as employment for women was concerned, most of the women are willing to learn new skills and work to earn extra income for the family. They have a liking for knitting, stitching, embroidery, stuffed toys and handicrafts. But lack of capital and marketing skills is a major handicap. Besides, women also take keen interest in animal husbandry. If given enough incentives and loans on low interest, it can generate extra income and supplement the diet of the family members. Almost all families belonging to these communities are very poor, and live just hand to mouth. Even survival is a constant struggle for them with their daily earnings being very low and hardly enough to sustain the entire family.

Impact of Various Legislations on Livelihood:

Various laws passed by State and Central Government since independence, have adversely affected the livelihood opportunities of Denotified and Nomadic Communities. In 1952, Criminal Tribes Act was repealed and around 150 communities were denotified. But unfortunately soon after that many state governments passes 'Habitual Offenders Act' a similar Act, which not only stigmatized them again but curtailed their freedom. A number of communities which traditionally have been earning their livelihood by holding street shows are harassed and frequently booked under 'Prevention of Begging Act', 1959. Likewise, many communities were deprived of their livelihood by 'Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960', without any alternative source of earning or relief offered.

Conclusion:

Women of Denotified and Nomadic communities are very hard working and courageous. They undertake the maximum burden of the household. They take care of livestock and other household responsibilities. Gadia Lohar women play major part in the household profession of blacksmith. Nat women and girls actively take part in street shows. Therefore, it can be said that women are the backbone of denotified and nomadic communities. But it is women only who suffer the most pain and agony. The level of education of girls among these communities is very low. There is gender bias against them when it comes to sending children to schools. Many of those who go to schools, are forced to dropout as soon as they attain puberty, or because there are no separate schools for girls, or there is a case of sexual harassment. Women of these communities live under the most horrible conditions. They face humiliation due to the stigma, the community suffers from. They are also looked down upon by people of other communities. The social neglect, discrimination and prejudiced attitude of mainstream society make them the most marginalized in society.

Since these communities want to maintain their distinct cultural identities and refuse to be a part of the mainstream society, their problems need to be viewed and addressed in a different social context. There is also a need for a focused intervention in dealing with the problems of women of these communities, as a general approach and policy of development for all communities may not prove very helpful. The situation is changing very fast as women of these communities are more aware now, and are beginning to fight for their rights. The community can also play an important role in bringing about a positive change in the attitude of people toward their women and girls.

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