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TRIBAL WOMEN: THEIR PROBLEMS AND MEANS OF EMPOWERMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Tribal women from time immemorial have been performing multifaceted roles. They play simultaneous role of a daughter, sister, wife, mother and their activities are no less than their male counterpart. Their main task includes bearing and rearing children, household works and above all to satisfy all the members of the family. In many societies, especially in rural areas, tribal women take the responsibility of fetching drinking water, collecting fuel- wood, weaving, keeping animals, selling vegetables and other household and hand-made products in the local market, take part in agricultural activities from sowing to harvesting etc. With social change and modernization though the role of tribal women living in urban areas has changed remarkably, their participation in the welfare of the family and contribution towards the society is all the same. They are working in offices, teaching pupils from school level to the universities, doing multifarious business, engaged themselves in the corporate world, extending their contribution to the Army, Navy and Air force, taking parts in various games and sports, taking active parts in politics, doing social service either individually or by opening NGOs and women's organisations and so on.

In spite of playing multifaceted roles and extending indispensable contribution to the family as well as the society, women in the tribal community are still the deprived section of the society. They are to suffer both by the state machineries as well as tribal customary practices. There are many problems which are creating impediments and are hindering their empowerment. Some of these are categorized as follows :

Superstitious beliefs and harmful practices : The tribal women have always become the victims of superstitious beliefs, outmoded and meaningless practices and harmful habits. Child marriage, infanticide, black magic, witchcraft and other harmful practices are still obstructing the progress of tribal women.

Exploitation: The innocence, illiteracy and helplessness of the tribals are always exploited by the outsiders. The tribal men and women have been exploited by all - from the British rulers and zaminders to the present day state machineries

Education Problems: Lack of education is a major problem so far tribal women in the rural area are concerned. It is such a problem which has brought ignorance to their lives and hindered their social, economic and political empowerment. Tribal people who live in remote areas are not aware of the importance of formal education.

Livelihood: Because of globalization and development projects like mining and setting up of industries, the displacement of Tribal people from their own land is on the rise. Since 1990, 55.19% of the internally displaced are tribals. .

Alcoholism: Alcoholism is a serious problem among the tribal community and the tribal women are to face its ugly impact. In the rural tribal areas, a major part of the earnings of the tribal families are wasted on alcohol, which is also a cause of the increasing domestic violence and violation of women's human rights.

Food security: Threat to food security due to the commercialization of agriculture and change in pattern of cropping is creating another threat to the life of tribal people resulting the increase of misery of the tribal women.

Problem of health and sanitation: The lack of infrastructure in the health sector and lack of proper awareness regarding health and hygiene in most of the tribal dominated areas are proving instrumental in the growing health problems of the tribal women.

Revolts and Uprisings: The tribal people's political aspirations to 'Self-determination' and assertion to have full control over their resources have led to numerous revolts and uprisings all over the world. Whatever may be the consequences of such revolts, the tribal women are the worst sufferers.

For the overall development of the tribal community, empowerment of their womenfolk is very essential. An attempt has been made to suggest some measures for their empowerment.

Legislative Measures: The existing provisions of the Constitution and other laws relating to the safeguards provided for women, especially tribal women, should be examined and if necessary, amendments (including amendments in the sixth schedule of the Constitution) should be made for the overall development of the tribal women

Legal aid should be organised for tribal women in need with the active assistance of the Bar Councils

The setting up of family courts should be considered for speedy and effective adjudication in all cases concerning the tribal family. Tribal women, particularly in rural areas, should be protected against harassment.

Active public support should be mobilised, especially in rural tribal areas, by Government agencies, voluntary organisations and public leaders against child marriage, various superstitious beliefs, meaningless practices and harmful habits.

Measure of Education: Education is the greatest known catalytic agent for social change and empowerment. Efforts should therefore be made to promote and emphasize women education particularly in tribal areas. To achieve this target following efforts may be taken :

- * To achieve the goal of universal primary education as early as possible.

- * In tribal areas Girls' Schools and Girls' Colleges should be promoted.
- * In every schools and colleges, especially which are in rural areas, toilet with proper facilities for ladies should be provided.

Measure for Employment: The employment of tribal women in public as well as private sector should actively be promoted. The existing employment procedures, including those for part-time employment should be renewed and wherever necessary, relaxations in different aspects should be made so that more tribal women can be employed.

Village industries, which provide scope for the employment of tribal women should be further promoted.

Refresher courses and training programmes should be organised for tribal women of all age group to make them fit for different kinds of self-employment.

Organisations entrusted by the Government with the task of promoting self-employment opportunities should develop tribal women's entrepreneurial training motivation programmes and provide special assistance to tribal women entrepreneurs and to women's co-operatives in terms of credit, licensing etc.

Measure for Health Care, Nutrition and Family Planning: Maternal and child health facilities should be expanded, particularly in semi-urban and rural tribal areas, and coverage should be provided to high risk pregnant women. Antenatal and post-natal clinics should be started in every primary health centres and district hospitals.

Nutrition supplementation should be provided to high risk pregnant mothers. Simultaneously, nutrition and health education should be given to tribal girls and mothers through all available media and institutions.

Family welfare planning services should be expanded and measures should be taken to educate and prepare couples to avail them, especially in rural and backward tribal areas.

The empowerment of Women, specially tribal women and women of other backward classes, is necessarily a sustainable development for Kokrajhar district and without proper development of women's community the overall development of the district is not possible. Therefore women of this locality should be boosted up to encounter the challenges which have been hampering their prestige, dignity, honour and empowerment. Infact women's development and empowerment through education and change in their social, economic and political status will definitely ensure a sustainable development of a country.

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