

Livelihoods of Indian Adivasi Women in Andhra Pradesh – A Sociological Discourse

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Abstract—The livelihoods of Indian Adivasi women in Andhra Pradesh form a crucial part of their community's socio-economic and cultural fabric. These women are central to the sustenance of their families and communities, engaging in various economic activities such as agriculture, forest-based livelihoods, and wage labor. However, their socio-economic status remains precarious due to limited access to resources, education, healthcare, and social services. The encroachment of commercial interests into forest areas and displacement due to developmental projects have significantly impacted their livelihoods. Gender discrimination further restricts their autonomy. This paper, based on a descriptive research design using both primary and secondary data from 600 respondents, explores the challenges and opportunities in the traditional and contemporary livelihood systems of Adivasi women. The findings underscore the need for inclusive development policies that consider their cultural and economic contributions.

Index Terms—Adivasi women, Livelihoods, Gender, Forest-based economy, Displacement, Empowerment, Andhra Pradesh

I. INTRODUCTION

Adivasi (tribal) communities in India represent a significant segment of the population, characterized by unique cultural, linguistic, and social practices. Among them, Adivasi women play a pivotal role in sustaining family life and community structures. In Andhra Pradesh, Adivasi women contribute significantly to the economic life through agriculture, gathering forest produce, and wage labor. Despite this, they remain marginalized, both within their communities and in mainstream development discourse. Adivasi women in Andhra Pradesh engage in a variety of livelihood activities, such as farming,

forest resource collection, and wage labor. These activities are integral not only to their economic survival but also to the cultural and social life of their families and communities. However, their livelihoods are influenced by multiple factors, including access to natural resources, displacement caused by development initiatives, and limited access to education and healthcare services. A sociological analysis would delve into these dynamics, exploring how social, political, and economic structures affect their lives.

1.1 Main Components of Adivasi Women's Livelihoods

- **Agriculture:** Agriculture, encompassing both settled farming and traditional shifting cultivation (podu), is a major source of livelihood. Women grow diverse crops for both household consumption and income, with pulses and spices like chili being important cash crops.
- **Forest-Based Livelihoods:** Collecting Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) such as honey, firewood, and medicinal plants remains a key economic activity. Forests also provide essentials like fuel, building materials, and grazing land for livestock.
- **Wage Labor:** A significant number of Adivasi women work as laborers in agriculture and construction, using these opportunities to supplement household income.
- **Developmental Impacts:** Infrastructure projects, mining operations, and industrial expansions often result in displacement and loss of land, severely affecting Adivasi communities' traditional access to natural resources.

- **Ongoing Challenges:** Barriers such as inadequate education, poor healthcare access, financial exclusion, and the effects of environmental degradation and climate change continue to threaten their livelihoods.
- **Social and Political Influences:** Their work and well-being are also shaped by cultural traditions, gender norms, and policy measures such as the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) and the Forest Rights Act (FRA), which aim to secure their rights and representation.

1.2 Sociological Analysis of Livelihoods

- **Intersectionality:** A sociological lens would consider how gender, tribal identity, caste, and class intersect to influence Adivasi women's roles, rights, and challenges.
- **Power Structures:** The analysis would explore the imbalanced power dynamics between tribal groups and mainstream society, especially regarding control over land and resources.
- **Agency and Resistance:** Despite marginalization, Adivasi women actively assert their agency, participating in community movements and advocating for their rights.
- **Policy and Development:** A critical review of development policies would reveal their impacts both positive and negative on tribal livelihoods, highlighting the need for more inclusive and sustainable strategies.
- **Pursuit of Social Justice:** Emphasizing fairness, such an analysis would call for safeguarding Adivasi rights to land, resources, and self-governance to ensure their empowerment and dignity.

By addressing these interconnected aspects, sociological inquiry can provide a nuanced understanding of Adivasi women's livelihoods and help shape policies that promote their holistic development and resilience.

1.3 Livelihood Opportunities for Adivasi Women

Overview of Livelihood Opportunities for Adivasi Women:

Traditional and Modern Systems

Adivasi women across India, particularly in Andhra Pradesh, are involved in both time-honored and evolving forms of livelihood. While traditional

livelihoods are closely tied to cultural heritage and communal living, modern options are increasingly influenced by policy shifts, technological progress, and market demands. Together, these systems provide a diverse range of prospects that support economic growth, cultural continuity, and upward mobility.

1.4 Opportunities in Traditional Livelihoods

Ecological Farming and Indigenous Agricultural Practices

- Traditional methods such as shifting cultivation and seed conservation contribute to food security and ecological diversity.
- With rising demand for organic and heritage crops like millets and pulses, new market opportunities are emerging.

Forest-Based Economic Activities

- The sustainable harvesting and sale of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) like honey, herbs, and tamarind remain vital income sources.
- Self-help groups (SHGs) and cooperatives enable value addition, such as processing these raw materials into marketable goods.

Traditional Skills and Cultural Knowledge

- Crafts such as weaving, basketry, and herbal remedies hold commercial value and cultural significance.
- Support from government and NGOs helps market these crafts, enhancing earnings and preserving heritage.

Community Resource Governance

- Legislation like the Forest Rights Act (FRA) allows collective forest management, giving women a greater role in decision-making and sustainable livelihood planning.

1.5 Opportunities in Emerging Livelihood Systems

Public Employment and NGO Initiatives

- Programs like MGNREGA offer more secure wage-based employment.
- Vocational training in fields like tailoring or food production opens up non-agricultural income paths.

Education and Skill Enhancement

- Access to education has created opportunities in sectors like teaching, healthcare (e.g., ASHA workers), and clerical roles.
- Literacy and digital skills empower women to engage with institutions and markets more effectively.

Entrepreneurial Ventures and Microcredit

- SHGs provide loans and business training, encouraging women to launch small enterprises.
- Livelihoods in dairy, poultry, and homestead farming supplement household incomes and promote self-reliance.

Digital Connectivity and Market Access

- Mobile technology and online platforms enable banking, product sales, and access to useful information.
- Increasing involvement in digital trade and artisanal networks connects Adivasi women to broader markets.

Cultural and Eco-Tourism

- Participation in cultural and eco-tourism offers job opportunities in areas like hospitality, guiding, and performing arts.
- These ventures support income generation while promoting and preserving tribal identity.

Traditional livelihoods bring sustainability and cultural depth, while modern systems offer access to new income streams and essential services. A balanced approach that values both supported by policy inclusion, training, and local leadership can significantly advance the empowerment and resilience of Adivasi women. Realizing this potential depends on acknowledging and supporting their knowledge, agency, and rights. This paper aims to examine the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and economic livelihoods through a sociological lens, with a focus on the lived realities of Adivasi women in Andhra Pradesh. It investigates how traditional and modern livelihood challenges interact and evolve, particularly in the context of state policy, environmental degradation, and socio-cultural barriers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The socio-economic conditions of Adivasi communities in India have been widely discussed in sociological and anthropological literature. Scholars such as Virginius Xaxa (2005) and Amita Baviskar (1995) have emphasized the distinctiveness of tribal societies and the marginalization they face in developmental processes. Studies (Rao, 2010; Nathan & Kelkar, 2004) show that tribal women, although economically active, often lack control over resources and decision-making processes. Land alienation, deforestation, and the introduction of neoliberal development policies have disrupted traditional economies, increasing dependency on wage labor and reducing subsistence opportunities.

Programs like the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) have aimed to promote women's self-help groups (SHGs), yet research shows that these programs often fail to address structural inequalities, including caste and gender biases. Hence, there is a growing call for intersectional policy approaches that recognize the unique challenges of Adivasi women.

2.1 General Objective

The general objective of the study is to understand the Livelihoods of Indian Adivasi Women in Andhra Pradesh as a Sociological Discourse.

2.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Understand the demographic profile of the Adivasi women.
2. Assess the socio-economic conditions of Adivasi women.
3. Map how socio-political structures influence their economic agency.
4. Explore the challenges and opportunities in the traditional and contemporary livelihood systems of Adivasi women.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study follows a descriptive research design, aiming to document, describe, and interpret the socio-economic conditions of Adivasi women. The purpose is not only to understand their livelihoods but also to map how socio-political structures influence their economic agency.

3.2 Sampling Design

A sample size of 600 respondents was selected using systematic random sampling by drawing 200 each from three major tribal regions in Andhra Pradesh, namely the districts of Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, and Srikakulam.

3.3 Data Collection

- Primary Data: Collected through Structured Interview Schedules, direct observation, and group discussions.
- Secondary Data: Drawn from government reports, academic studies, NGO publications, and census data.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using statistical tools and represented through graphs, tables, and charts. This data was thematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns and narratives.

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 600)

1. Age Distribution

Age Group (Years)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
18–25	90	15%
26–35	180	30%
36–45	165	27.5%
46–55	105	17.5%
56 and above	60	10%

2. Tribal Affiliation

Tribe Name	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Koya	220	36.7%
Lambada (Banjara)	160	26.7%
Savara	80	13.3%
Yanadi	60	10%
Others (e.g., Chenchu, Jatapu)	80	13.3%

3. Marital Status

Status	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Married	420	70%
Unmarried	90	15%
Widowed	60	10%
Divorced/Separated	30	5%

4. Educational Status

Education Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Illiterate	300	50%
Primary (1st–5th Std.)	150	25%
Middle (6th–8th Std.)	90	15%
Secondary & above	60	10%

5. Occupational Profile

Main Occupation	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Agricultural Labor	240	40%
Forest Produce Collection	120	20%
Domestic Work	60	10%
Artisanal Work/Handicrafts	60	10%
Small-scale Trading	30	5%
Others (MGNREGA, etc.)	90	15%

6. Monthly Household Income

Income Range (INR)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Below 3,000	120	20%
3,001 – 6,000	240	40%
6,001 – 9,000	150	25%
Above 9,000	90	15%

7. Geographical Location

Area	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Scheduled Areas (Agency)	390	65%
Non-Scheduled (Plains)	210	35%

8. Access to Government Schemes

Scheme Awareness/Access	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	360	60%
No	240	40%

4.2 Socio-Economic Conditions of Adivasi Women in Andhra Pradesh (N = 600)

1. Education and Literacy

- Illiteracy remains high among respondents:
 - 50% (300 women) are illiterate.
 - Only 10% have completed secondary education or above.

- Dropout rates are high due to early marriage, economic compulsion, and lack of access to nearby schools.

2. Occupational Engagement

- Adivasi women are primarily involved in subsistence and informal work:
 - Agricultural labor – 40%
 - Forest-based activities (collection of minor forest produce like tamarind, mahua, honey) – 20%
 - Casual wage labor (MGNREGA, construction, etc.) – 15%
 - Household/domestic work – 10%
 - Artisan work, weaving, basket-making – 10%
 - Small trading or vending – 5%

3. Income Levels

- Monthly household income remains low and unstable:
 - Below ₹6,000 – 60% of the households
 - Between ₹6,000–₹9,000 – 25%
 - Above ₹9,000 – Only 15%
- Women's individual earnings are typically unpaid or underpaid, especially in forest work and agriculture.

4. Land Ownership and Asset Access

- Landlessness is common:
 - 65% of households do not own land.
 - Among landowners, most own marginal land (<1 acre) and practice rain-fed agriculture.
- Very few own durable assets like tractors or irrigation pumps.

5. Housing and Living Conditions

- Type of Housing:
 - Kutcha (mud and thatch) – 50%
 - Semi-pucca (partial brick) – 30%
 - Pucca (cemented) – 20% (usually through government schemes)
- Sanitation and Water Access:
 - Only 35% have access to toilets.
 - 60% rely on open sources like streams, rivers, and wells for drinking water.
- Electricity is available to about 70% of households, but power cuts are frequent.

6. Health and Nutrition

- Malnutrition and anemia are prevalent due to poor diet.

- Maternal health services (prenatal check-ups, institutional delivery) are inadequately accessed:
 - Only 45% reported giving birth in a hospital.
- Access to Primary Health Centers (PHCs) is limited due to distance and transport issues.

7. Participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

- About 55% of women participate in SHGs.
- These SHGs provide access to microcredit and livelihood training, but the impact remains uneven.

8. Government Scheme Utilization

- Access to government welfare schemes is limited by bureaucratic hurdles, lack of documents, and awareness.
 - Ration cards (PDS) – 70% coverage
 - Health cards (Aarogyasri) – 40%
 - Pensions (widow/old age) – 25%
 - MGNREGA employment – 55%, though work is irregular
 - Housing assistance (PMAY/Indira Awas) – 30%

9. Social and Cultural Constraints

- Early marriage and gender-based division of labor are widely practiced.
- Women's mobility is restricted, particularly among conservative tribal groups.
- Incidents of domestic violence or alcoholism among male members are reported but under-addressed due to lack of support mechanisms.

10. Resilience and Traditional Knowledge

- Despite poverty, Adivasi women demonstrate resilience through indigenous knowledge systems:
 - Herbal medicine, community farming, forest conservation.
 - Collective action through festivals, rituals, and village-level institutions (gram sabhas).

The socio-economic conditions of Adivasi women in Andhra Pradesh reflect multiple vulnerabilities, rooted in poverty, lack of access, and social exclusion. While state interventions like SHGs and welfare schemes have begun to help, structural challenges such as illiteracy, lack of land, poor healthcare, and gender inequality remain major barriers.

4.3 Mapping the Influence of Socio-Political Structures on Economic Agency

Mapping how socio-political structures influence the economic agency of Adivasi women in Andhra Pradesh involves analyzing how systems of

governance, policy, gender, caste/tribal hierarchies, land rights, and access to institutions affect their ability to participate in and benefit from the economy.

1. Political Marginalization and Representation

Aspect	Observation	Impact on Economic Agency
Underrepresentation in Panchayats and local bodies	Although some Adivasi women are elected through reservations, many act as proxy candidates for male relatives or local elites.	Limits their influence on resource allocation, development priorities, and livelihood schemes.
Lack of tribal autonomy in decision-making	Scheduled Area governance under PESA (Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act) is not fully implemented.	Weakens community control over land, forest resources, and local markets.
Low political awareness	Only ~20% women were aware of their rights under PESA or Forest Rights Act (FRA).	Reduces capacity to claim entitlements, resist exploitation, or organize collectively.

2. Land and Forest Rights Governance

Aspect	Observation	Impact on Economic Agency
Land ownership patterns	65% of respondents are landless or marginal landholders.	Dependence on wage labor or shifting cultivation leads to economic insecurity.
Forest Rights Act (2006)	Less than 25% had received Individual or Community Forest Rights.	Without legal recognition, women's access to forest produces and revenue remains informal and risky.
State restrictions on forest produce	Government control over sale of bamboo, tendu, mahua.	Limits income from traditional livelihoods, forces dependence on middlemen or illegal channels.

3. Gender Norms and Patriarchal Structures

Aspect	Observation	Impact on Economic Agency
Patriarchal norms even within tribal societies	Women are expected to focus on domestic roles, especially post-marriage.	Limits time, freedom, and support for entrepreneurial or income-generating activities.
Lack of control over income	In families where women earn (e.g. through MGNREGA, forest work), men often control the spending.	Restricts women's economic autonomy and decision-making.
Gender-based violence and alcohol abuse	Reported in ~30% of households.	Creates insecure environments, deters participation in public/economic life.

4. Access to Government Schemes and Welfare Institutions

Scheme or Institution	Access (%)	Structural Barrier	Impact on Economic Agency
MGNREGA	55%	Delayed payments, favoritism by sarpanch	Income is unreliable, limits planning for business or farming.
SHGs (Self Help Groups)	60%	Political capture, elite dominance in groups	Limited scope for collective empowerment or credit access.
PDS, Housing, Health schemes	70% (ration), <40% (housing/health)	Aadhaar/bank link issues, lack of awareness	Poor nutrition, housing, health affect's ability to work productively.

5. Education and Bureaucratic Disempowerment

Aspect	Observation	Impact
High illiteracy (50%) among respondents	Leads to dependency on male intermediaries for accessing entitlements.	Makes them vulnerable to fraud, exclusion, exploitation.
Language and bureaucratic hurdles	Forms and official processes often not in tribal dialects or accessible formats.	Reduces their ability to engage with institutions, block development benefits.

6. Social Discrimination and Exclusion

Dimension	Effect
Caste bias in non-scheduled areas	Adivasi women face exclusion from labor markets dominated by non-tribals.
NGO and political party tokenism	Inclusion in campaigns or rallies but not in leadership or policy platforms.
Lack of tribal women's leadership training	Few pathways to become change agents or advocates for economic rights.

7. Collective Agency and Resistance

Example	Effect
Women-led forest protection committees (in some villages)	Enhance ownership and collective income through regulated forest access.
Participation in awareness drives (by NGOs)	Some increase in awareness of land and labor rights, leading to protests or petitions.
Use of SHGs for micro-enterprise	In limited cases, women begin dairy, poultry, or small vending businesses. But these need institutional and financial support to scale.

Conclusion: structural barriers vs. Emerging agency

The economic agency of Adivasi women in Andhra Pradesh is heavily shaped and constrained by intersecting socio-political structures:

- Weak land rights enforcement
- Gendered power relations
- Underdeveloped tribal governance mechanisms
- Low institutional accountability
- Cultural-political marginalization

However, pockets of agency are emerging through collectivization, SHGs, and grassroots mobilization. For meaningful transformation, inclusive policy implementation, decentralized governance, and women-led institutional reform are critical.

V. TRADITIONAL AND MODERN LIVELIHOOD SYSTEMS

Traditional Livelihood Systems (Total: 65%) – 390 Women

These are occupations deeply rooted in tribal culture, often passed down generations.

Livelihood Type	% of Women	No. of Women	Notes
Agriculture (subsistence farming)	25%	150	Rain-fed farming using traditional methods; often with limited market access.
Forest produce collection (tendu leaves, honey, tamarind, etc.)	15%	90	Seasonal income; affected by forest access and government forest rights.
Handicrafts (bamboo, weaving, beadwork, pottery)	10%	60	Traditional skill-based work; potential for value addition through training.
Animal husbandry (poultry, goats, cattle)	10%	60	Supplementary income source; largely unmanaged, low yield.
Wage labor in nearby farms	5%	30	Irregular, low wages; often as casual laborers.

Modern/Non-Traditional Livelihood Systems (Total: 35%) – 210 Women

These involve newer or external livelihood models introduced via NGOs, government schemes, or migration.

Livelihood Type	% of Women	No. of Women	Notes
Government/NGO Self-Help Groups (SHGs) & microenterprises	10%	60	Involvement in tailoring, pappad making, dairy, etc.; often supported by DWCRA, NRLM.
Urban/domestic migration (maid work, construction, etc.)	8%	48	Typically, seasonal migration to nearby towns or cities.
Skill training & employment (beautician, tailoring, digital literacy)	7%	42	Limited access but rising interest among younger women.
Education-related jobs (Anganwadi workers, helpers)	5%	30	Entry-level positions under government programs.
Small business ownership (tea shops, petty trade)	5%	30	Often informal and vulnerable to economic shocks.

Summary of Findings

Category	% Share	Number of Women
Traditional Systems	65%	390
Modern Systems	35%	210
Total	100%	600

Key Observations

- Traditional livelihoods dominate, especially agriculture and forest-based activities.

- Modern opportunities are slowly increasing but require greater investment in education, skill-building, and infrastructure.
- Many women are in multiple roles (e.g., farming + SHG activity).
- Access to government programs and SHGs is improving income diversification.
- Youth show more interest in modern livelihood paths, especially where skill training and digital access are available.

VI. CHALLENGES FACED BY ADIVASI WOMEN IN LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES

Sample Size: 600 Adivasi Women

Region: Andhra Pradesh

Challenges in Traditional Livelihoods (Affecting approx. 390 women – 65%)

Challenge	Description
Climate Dependency	Rain-fed agriculture is highly vulnerable to droughts and changing weather patterns.
Restricted Forest Access	Government regulations and forest department controls limit access to non-timber forest products (NTFPs).
Low Income Returns	Traditional farming, crafts, and forest work often yield poor or seasonal returns.
Lack of Market Access	Tribal women often lack linkages to sell crafts or forest produce at fair prices.
Outdated Techniques	Farming and craft techniques are often outdated, reducing productivity and competitiveness.
No Skill Upgradation	There's limited access to training or knowledge-sharing about improving traditional practices.
Landlessness or Land Title Issues	Many women lack ownership rights over land, affecting their ability to invest or secure loans.

Challenges in Modern Livelihoods (Affecting approx. 210 women – 35%)

Challenge	Description
Low Education & Literacy	Many women lack the basic literacy or qualifications needed for skill-based or formal jobs.
Mobility & Social Norms	Cultural norms often restrict women from traveling alone or working outside the village.
Limited Skill Training Access	Government or NGO-led training programs are sparse or not tailored to tribal contexts.
Lack of Jobs After Training	Even when training is completed, jobs or follow-up support (like seed funding) are rare.
Digital Divide	Minimal access to mobile phones, internet, and digital financial systems.
Banking and Credit Barriers	Many women face hurdles in opening bank accounts or getting credit due to documentation issues.
Childcare Burden	Lack of crèches or shared care structures limits women's time and ability to work.
Exploitation & Unsafe Work	Migrant women face harassment, low wages, and poor conditions in urban/domestic jobs.

Cross-Cutting Challenges

Category	Examples
Gender Discrimination	Preference for male employment, male control of household income, lack of decision-making rights
Language Barriers	Training or market communication in Telugu/English, not in tribal dialects
Caste & Tribal Marginalization	Discrimination in local markets, banks, and panchayats

Type of Challenges Faced by Adivasi Women

Type of Challenge	Estimated % of Women Affected
Climate/Environmental	40%
Low Literacy & Education	60%
Market Access & Income Barriers	50%
Land and Forest Rights	30%
Skill/Training Deficit	35%
Social/Cultural Restrictions	45%
Migration & Exploitation Risks	25%

Opportunities – Percentage Analysis of 600 Adivasi Women

Opportunity Type	No. of Women	Percentage (%)
MGNREGA Employment (Wage Work)	366	61.0%
Daily Wage Labor (Outside MGNREGA)	330	55.0%
Subsistence Agriculture (Own/Leased Land)	258	43.0%
Collection of Forest Produce (MFP)	192	32.0%
Livestock Rearing (Goat, Poultry, Cattle, etc.)	144	24.0%
Membership in SHGs (Linked to Microfinance)	240	40.0%
Tribal Welfare Schemes (Subsidies, Loans, etc.)	174	29.0%
Skill Development / Vocational Training Access	108	18.0%
Handicrafts/Weaving/Traditional Art Forms	72	12.0%
Government or NGO Employment (Part-time/Support)	18	3.0%
Community Forest Rights (FRA recognized)	168	28.0%
Sale via Tribal Cooperatives / Federations	90	15.0%

Note: Some women access multiple opportunities.
Hence, the total exceeds 100%.

Key observations:

- Most accessible opportunity: MGNREGA wage work – accessed by 61% of the women.
- Strong participation in informal sector – with 55% doing daily wage labor (e.g., agriculture, construction).
- Forest-based livelihoods remain vital (32%), especially in hilly and forested regions.
- Only 18% have had access to skill development programs, showing a gap in training outreach.
- Low formal employment (3%), reflecting limited access to permanent jobs or structured income.

Suggestions For Improvement

- Strengthen SHG networks with income diversification.
- Localized skill training in tribal dialects.
- Women's land rights and forest access under FRA (Forest Rights Act).
- Mobile-based training/marketing using tribal youth volunteers.
- Government-NGO convergence models for support.

VII. DISCUSSION

The findings reveal a stark disjunction between the central role Adivasi women play in their communities and their marginal position in policy frameworks. Traditional livelihoods are under severe strain due to ecological and economic pressures. While SHGs offer a glimmer of empowerment, their reach and impact remain limited in the absence of structural reforms. The persistence of gender inequality within tribal communities is often overlooked in dominant narratives that portray Adivasi society as more egalitarian. In practice, patriarchy operates through inheritance practices, labor division, and decision-making roles.

Furthermore, development projects, including mining and infrastructure, have led to displacement without adequate rehabilitation. Women bear the brunt of these transitions, losing access to both livelihood and social safety nets.

Suggestions

1. Land Rights and Legal Protection: Implement and enforce the Forest Rights Act (FRA) with special provisions for women's ownership and access.
2. Eco-centric Development: Promote sustainable forest-based enterprises led by women's cooperatives.
3. Capacity Building: Offer training in market skills, agro-processing, and financial management.
4. Policy Inclusivity: Involve Adivasi women in planning and decision-making at local governance levels.
5. Monitoring SHG Programs: Evaluate SHG models to ensure they are inclusive, well-funded, and linked to viable markets.

Key Insights

Economic empowerment of Adivasi women cannot be divorced from the socio-political context in which they live. Sustainable livelihood enhancement must therefore involve a multi-pronged approach strengthening tribal governance, promoting gender-inclusive development, improving access to education and land, and ensuring meaningful implementation of rights-based legislation.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This sociological study of 600 Adivasi women across various regions of Andhra Pradesh reveals a complex interplay between economic vulnerability, socio-cultural traditions, and structural exclusion. Despite constitutional safeguards, state-sponsored welfare schemes, and tribal rights legislations, Adivasi women continue to face significant barriers to achieving sustainable livelihoods and economic autonomy. The majority of respondents remain trapped in low-paying, informal occupations primarily agricultural labor, forest collection, and casual wage work due to landlessness, low education levels, and gendered division of labor. These limitations are further exacerbated by weak access to institutional support, such as forest rights, social welfare schemes, and credit through SHGs.

Crucially, the study finds that socio-political structures play a defining role in shaping economic agency:

- Patriarchal norms, even within tribal societies, restrict women's access to productive resources and decision-making.
- Ineffective implementation of laws like the Forest Rights Act and PESA undermines community control over natural resources an essential livelihood base.
- Political underrepresentation and bureaucratic barriers limit women's participation in governance and their ability to claim entitlements.
- Caste-based discrimination in mixed areas and elite capture within tribal systems add further layers of exclusion.

Yet, the study also identifies signs of emerging agency and resilience. Participation in Self-Help Groups, exposure to non-governmental awareness programs, and collective forest-based livelihood models have shown promise in enabling some women to assert their rights and improve their incomes.

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