

ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY ON ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE OF ARUNDHATHIYAR WOMEN

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Introduction

Every community, every nation has its own heritage and cultural setting within which man-woman relationship in caste and gender identity is acquired. At any point of time, the interrelationship between the sexes must have poise and rhythm, which cannot be static, but be progressive change combining the old and new. The progressive change incorporating measure to element subjection of women will be of slow, strenuous, and protracted struggle. We must admit that the change cannot be brought about easily. It has to be fought at emotional, cognitive, and action level. The struggle has to be carried on within caste, class, race, religion everywhere in which man-woman relationship figures and matters.

The Indian society is patriarchal. Patriarchal values and normative structures established some two thousand years ago persist through different garbs. Patriarchal values regulating sexuality, reproduction and social production, prevailed and were expressed through specific cultural metaphors. Eventually women compelled to accept their role as adjuncts to men and a great virtue was made of a women being a loyal and devoted wife and mother. In addition, man continued to have the dominant role and in the process controlled all the resources, through which he continued to look upon women as one of his resources required for the management of his family.

Since the beginning of this century, an ever-increasing awareness has been developing amongst the women about the illogicality of their role in society. In short, during the phase of independence, an awareness of the need to remove social disabilities of women are created. The doors of education were opened for them; women's organization emerged to represent needs and cause of middle and lower class urban and rural women; political participation of women increased their mobility. Finally, through several legal enactments women's unequal position was being rectified. In spite of women's political participation, still in small town, in rural areas or in city slums, women suffer social and economic oppression. The growing instance of suffering socially and economically by women of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes generate despair frustration and expose the inter- twining of caste, class, and gender forces.

One has to exert more and more in one aspires to achieve the dreaming of equal status of women in all respects. In this direction, the studies related to the socio-economic condition of women will be more helpful in understanding the vital issues of women status. The status of women in any society is determined by the inter ply of various socio-economic factors. It is found that social status generally coincides with economic status. In other words, both are more or less overlapping. Therefore, the sections, which are economically very poor, also occupy a low position in the social scale. Therefore, it must be mentioned here that in the lower strata, the problem is more 'economic' than 'social'. The relationship between employment and increased social and economic autonomy for women is a vexed one. Education is thus clearly linked to women's socio-economic status and to their role and position in society.

Women and Employment

Occupation of women is a significant indicator for their economic independence forms their husbands in certain aspects of social life. Women's employment has increases rapidly as with the increase of factories and industries within the village and around the villages.

Let us now look at the occupational structure of the *Arundhathiyar* economy during the period under review. Women of *Arundhathiyar* families would possess certain traditional skills to help their men folk in producing household products, but also invariably go for outside employment on seasonal basis.

Arundhathiyar women opted for primary and secondary occupations to meet the daily expenditure to their families. It is mother's responsibility to provide food for the children and for wellbeing of the children, which required women to be economically independent to some degree.

While examining, the occupational data of the *Arundhathiyar* women, 11.24 per cent of women's primary occupation is traditional leatherwork, 22.35 per cent of women has agriculture work as their primary occupation, and 13.95 percent of women's occupation is working in leather factories. 48.25 percent of women occupation is working in paper-manufacturing factory, and 4.21 percent of women are holding different types of government jobs such as clerks, teachers and sweepers as their primary occupation.

Some of the primary occupation holders also go for secondary occupation to meet the everyday expenditure. The secondary occupation which they opt for are running petty shops

like selling brewed liquor, working as mid-wife, milk vending, and basket weaving ; 22. 95 per cent of women are traditional mid-wives; 10. 12 per cent of women are milk vendors; 10. 25 per cent of women are basket weavers.

Shift in Traditional Occupation

Arundhathiyar women would possess certain traditional skills to help their men folk in producing household products, but also invariably go for outside employment on seasonal basis. There is, however, considerable shift of these families from their traditional occupation to agricultural wage labour due to the heavy competition from manufactures goods and the increasing cost of production with noneconomic return at the household level. Eventually, the recent generation among these families, both men and women have witnessed large-scale migration and shift in the occupational patterns. In some cases, the men are found sticking on to the profession by undertaking certain piece- meal work or by finding an employer; but women have to invariably shift to other occupation, which in their old generations never dreamt of it.

Economic Condition

With regard to economic position, it may be averted that though women of the *Arundhathiyar* have been working for wages for many years, still their lives are below the better condition of livelihood. In spite of hard work, the earnings are conventionally used to mark the borderline between self- employment and unpaid family labour.

The first and foremost indication of a women's economic condition is her income. The problem of per capita income is more acute among the women of the *Arundhathiyar*, where women earn their income out of the economic necessity. Therefore, they opt for a job where there is no social security, no pension, and no long-term financial benefits. They are mostly engaged in as unskilled labour coolies or in self-employment .These; women are compelled to take up such hobs in order to meet their ends.

Arundhathiyar women spent a great deal of time in expenditure, replacing activities, which involve the production of goods and service, mainly for consumption by household members that would otherwise to be bought in the market. A good number of these economically active women may not have enjoyed a readily identifiable personal income. Nevertheless, most of

them would have been contributing significantly in maintaining the economic equilibrium of their household. However, *Arundhathiyar* as a poverty group has shown that women allocate a greater amount of their income than men to the basic survival needs of their children.

Division of Labour

The division of labour in this society is based on sex and relative age. Thus, the division of labour among them may be broadly categorized into activities confined within and outside the home on the one hand and on the other hand, the classification includes the economic activities of men, women, elders, and children. Of course, the specific tasks performed by these categories depend on the nature and kind of occupation of the family. Majority of *Arundhathiyar* men attend the traditional shoe and sandal making while women are engaged in domestic work. Few women help their husbands in traditional leatherwork. They do jobs as sticking sponge pads to the leather sandals, designing the straps, nailing, spraying and painting for sandals and shoes.

While women's household work is cleaning, cooking, washing, fetching water, daubing the floor, and tidying the house. Additionally cleaning, pounding, husking, and milling the grain.

If a family is dependent on agriculture labour, then both men and women hire themselves as labourers, the tasks of men in agriculture are ploughing, sowing, harvesting, and thrashing, while the tasks of women are sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, winnowing and cleaning the grains.

Sometimes men may help their women in the domestic work and take care of their infants when women go out for market.

Social Factor

The social value of men and women within the household and kinship unit are numerous. Since *Arundhathiyar* women are economically independent, they have flexible status in some instances of social activities. Due to economic independence the gender hierarchy among *Arundhathiyar* is little loose. It could be clearly seen in some of the social functions how women are treated equally with men in consuming alcohol. Usually during life-cycle rituals like marriage, childbirth, death, religious rituals like propitiatory worships, ancestors worships and *kulatyvam* worships and during certain economic activities like sowing and

harvesting. The *Arundhathiyar* people both men and women consume country made liquor. The drinking habit of the *Arundhathiyars* is an important problem from socio-economic point. They cannot think of any socio-religious occasions without a supply of drink.

Conclusion

It has been observed that the socio-economic condition of *Arundhathiyar* women is more miserable. This is partly due to their social system and partly the women are themselves responsible for their disgraceful positions in their society. There are overlapping between social and economic indicators, therefore it is very difficult to segregate the socio-economic problem of women as social and economic. Hence, an attempt is made to study this consolidated problem with the help of a number of relevant categories such as, social, education, and economic indicators. However, the economic emancipation is a part of total liberation of women from many factors, but there persists oppression of *Arundhathiyars* women directly and indirectly in some of the social values.

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