

TRADITIONAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL LIFE OF RURAL WOMEN IN KARNATAKA-A STUDY.

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ABSTRACT

This comparative study of impact of technology on rural women across south and north Karnataka has shown that a given technological change will have different effects depending on socio-economic conditions within a village and how that village is connected to the rest of the country. Efforts are on since independence to bring rural women into the mainstream of development process knowing full well that social and cultural traditions in India are not fully geared to give a critical push. Compared to their male counter parts, rural women are deprived of access to improved production and processing technology, credit, training and other facilities. Infusion of technology and increase in women's ability to earn and control a secure a livelihood also has positive effects on women's welfare and status. Two policy conclusions can be made; first, women are central to the success of poverty alleviation efforts in the short as well as long term. Second, market forces have great potential to influence gender ideology and increase the perceived value of women. Both have to do with the complex linkages among gender, economic status and access and both have very clear programme and policy implications.

KEY-WORDS: - SOLAR LIGHT, LEAF PLATE, DHARAMASTALA RURAL DEVELOPMENT SANGHA, COOKING FROM GOBAR GAS, PREPARATION, PLANTING, WEEDING, HARVESTING, CROP PROCESSING, TRANSPORTATION, STORAGE, AND MARKETING.

INTRODUCTION

This comparative study of impact of technology on rural women across south and north Karnataka has shown that a given technological change will have different effects depending on socio-economic conditions within a village and how that village is connected to the rest of the country.

The effect of technological change can be predicted if "all other things are assumed to remain unchanged." The changes in all other things depend on the nature of the economy including such factors as the pattern of socio-economic variables, the percent of the economy dependent on agriculture, the percent of labour force in agriculture, and the openness to outside markets and others. Yet, this study helps to understand fact that technology is not for economic benefits alone but even human development issues.

This study succeeded in proving the fact that technology has a tremendous potential to transform the lives of women in a positive way, freeing them from long hours of unpleasant drudgery. In fact vast majority of rural women have not fully benefited from technological advance especially farm sector so far. Both state and non-state actors have to devote time and energy on 'technology inclusion' of rural women.

Since decades, development strategists in India firmly affirm that unless rural women have been provided with enough space, nation's social development priorities of:

- (1) Controlling population growth,
- (2) Feeding the nation, and
- (3) Improving the health and vigor of the next generation, will remain a distant dream.

From the standpoint of rural economy, they have a significant economic contribution also, as:

- (a) They form the major source of agricultural labour;
- (b) They are engaging in the process of improving distribution, standards of production, preservation, and costs through co-operative efforts;
- (c) They produce goods in home industries; and
- (d) They engage in marketing of farm and non-farm produce to a considerable degree. 'The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India' tried to review and evaluate the change in women's roles, rights,

and opportunities triggered by planned development concludes with a note that “definite changes in the status of women will be a long-term social process and will require continuous examination and assessment by persons interested in social change”.

Classical wisdom says India lives in villages acknowledging the fact that majority lives in villages and agriculture is the mainstay of national economy. While moving the wheel so agrarian economy both men and women perform a wide range of production activities such as land **preparation, planting, weeding, harvesting, crop processing, transportation, storage, and marketing.**

Even in non-farm activities like animal husbandry (breeding and caring for farm animals), **dairying, sheep rearing, poultry** and others have a great bearing on sustaining agriculture.

For rural women participation in them is a way of life; a part of daily chores. Though rural women keep heart and soul together in farm and non-farm activities there is a misconception about women's productivity.

Hence, as farm laborer they receive less than what men receive. Researchers opine that women's lower productivity vis-à-vis men, is mainly due to lack of access to important resources – income generating assets and value-enhancing ‘technology.’ In fact, rural women in farm households in India perform almost all domestic chores and home production activities by traditional means and technology.

These days, women play a key role in socio-economic-cultural and political spheres of civil society, while performing their duties of domestic life as a member of the family or in economic life as an earning member of the family as employee or as owner of an enterprise.

The main objectives of the study project are to:

- Find out the linkages between women's roles, responsibilities and then use of technology by rural women.
- Explore the ways in which women use their knowledge and skills to develop, modify and adapt the techniques and technical processes in which they are involved.
- Examine the links between indigenous and modern technologies in relation to gender considerations.
- Find out whether locally available indigenous technologies are appropriate to the living conditions of rural women.
- Compare use of rural technology used by rural women of north and south Karnataka.
- Bring into light the indigenous technologies used/conserved by rural women of selected districts of Karnataka.

The chief findings of the study are as follows:

- Rural women have clear awareness about the modern cooking gadgetry, a sample which we have shown to them, except to certain about micro-wave oven. Some even tried to link microwave to ‘point-of-use’ but could not spell it. Informally when we asked them– “why are you not using pressure cooker?” They firmly replied it not useful to them as they are cooking of large quantity based on fire-wood fuel. It has been noted that the much hype created – An astrachula entered the rural habitat but retreated at the same speed, many are not aware of it. High percent of rural women knew about gober gas (cow-dung digester gas), but only a few are using. They have cited two reasons for its either less or no-use: indispensability of dairy farming which is not profitable and second, gober gas-setting need money and good space to spare.
- Sourcing of cooking fuel continues to be a burning issue. Traditional open oven cooking fired by biomass fuel (wood, charcoal, dung) and consequential health hazards linked with smoke continues to motivate the technologists to innovate fuel efficient gadgets that suit rural world.
- However, firewood-based traditional open oven cooking is still prevalent on the top spot and alternative cooking fuels like LPG and gober gas are slowly entering into this domain. Our observation is on the same lines of NSSO observation which observed that less than one in 10 households use liquefied petroleum gas as their major cooking fuel in rural areas.
- The other issue we tried to explore was to explore the ways in which women use their knowledge and skills to develop, modify and adapt the techniques and technical processes in which they are involved. For instance, food processing and preservation indigenous technology.
- Many rural women have abundant knowledge on sun-baking and salt treatment of mangoes, jack fruit, tamarind, fish and forest products. Unfortunately, traditional methods of paddy/rice storage methods like **tiri, mudi** and **wooden storage** devices like **pattasu** are making way for plastic bags.
- China wares used in the yesteryears were replaced by small glass jars. Modernization has virtually created a dent on the storage practice for rainy/slack season and even rurals slowly emulating the urban culture of ‘on demand shopping’. Many households have mixer-grinders and use of refrigerators is still less across south and north Karnataka.
- Information and communication technology has changed the leisure hour spending of rural people. TV and CD players have entered into middleclass household's

providing free viewing opportunities to neighbours. Radio is still a powerful thought listener ship is dwindling slowly in rural areas.

- In remote areas too TV (DTH connected) and DVR are entertaining the rural thanks to the solar energy systems. Many a times they replied, CDs and compact disc players are cheap (CDPs); hence they can afford it. People of two or three houses collectively watch movies and new programmes and a sense of social capital is emerging.
- When computers plus internet and internet telephony are making waves in urban areas, rural areas still lag behind in bandwidth. Many of the rural women, whom we spoke, told that they neither need iron box nor sewing machine. They don't mind travelling a few miles to get their torn clothes stitched. In respect of domestic assisters they are still backward, socio-economic settings of rural areas do not call for them.
- Probably the best technology that empowered the rural women is tele communication. They have solid knowledge of fixed-line (including Wireless Local Loop - WILL) as well as mobile telephony. Many of rural women know the minimum usage functions of mobile set. A rural women of remote hamlet situated below western ghat, showed the instrument of empowerment' by dialing to a milk dairy situated 25 KMs away and spoken to a clerk of taluk tahashildar's office somewhere about 35 KMs, in front of research team. In many cases they use the coin phones established by State owned BSNL and other private operators and have become very handy for both domestic and economic role performance.

The research team got two contrasting images of water conservation and sanitation technology. In South Karnataka, houses are scattered and they are not portraying the commune type of living. Though they have not full understood the nuances of either rain water harvesting or water conservation technology, they have some elementary knowledge from good offices of village-level NGO officials.

Almost all houses have their own well for drinking purposes and a few have water pumps connected. And only in a few areas of **Indira Aavas Yojana** – housing settlement of landless labour they are depending on public water taps/ bore-well hand pumps.

But for rural women north Karnataka, technology has not come to their rescue. Less annual rainfall coupled with low knowledge-base and commune type living restricted their choice. Even in their farm-land collective efforts of rain-water harvesting and redeeming tanks have not been done.

The public toilets meant for each commune were on very bad shape and rural women were the silent sufferers. Though many can afford to construct captive leach-pit toilets, they do not have the space to construct close to their house. It is not technology-trap but 'trap of unfelt-need'. Research team interviewed the former Minister for Cooperation, Government of Karnataka, we asking about adoption of public hygiene technology. We brought out the fact that 'lack of space' is main culprit and not the public funds. We concurred that low 'awareness of public hygiene' is accepted phenomenon in rural areas and Herculean efforts are needed to set it right.

- Solar power especially photovoltaic technology combined with use of **Compact Florescent Lamps (CFL)** opened new avenues for lighting and raised the scope for even irrigation water pumps. Solar lantern is one such example.
- It was noted that electricity is the main source of energy for lighting across south and north Karnataka. In south Karnataka, there is increased awareness about solar power and noted that even a few houses located in remote areas have solar powered lights. In contrast, in north Karnataka, energy saving technology is missing and they use kerosene as well as electricity. Our findings are in the line with NSSO observation that only 56 per cent of households use electricity as the major fuel for lighting. Hence, the improvement inequality of life is restricted for non-use of electricity or green energy like solar lamps.
- Our study indicated that women are interested in reductions in the time and effort required for performing household tasks. Many a times, rural women cannot afford to pay for new equipment unless it adds some extra income. Mere labour saving domestic tools have no cash-earning value. Drudgery reduction comes only next.
- Second, where do rural women spend their 'saved free time'? Many have replied that they engage in other domestic chores which they cannot devote much time, or spend on children's and household's basic needs.
- The sustained campaign for drudgery reduction through 'cost saving' and 'labour saving' technology must go hand-in-hand with a push towards skill development for income generation activities. Otherwise there is a danger that technology devices will become 'welfare objects' and women will become 'welfare recipient'.
- Rural women continue to the store house of traditional knowledge of seed bank and seed treatment. Still, the number of such practices is slowly vanishing and the tacit knowledge will be completely lost unless it is converted into explicit knowledge.
- Fortunately even today they use the home grown seeds for cultivation to a large extent. Plastic bags are

found most useful for storing seeds as it is convenient for handling.

New technology of 'SRI' method of seed bed preparation and seedling rising is becoming popular where rice cultivation is popular and there exists labour shortage.

Even terrace of building or any brick laid garden space can be used for seedling rising. This technology is yet to become popular and if becomes popular, it avoids the tedious bending posture for picking up seedling and induces the twin-wheeler weeders to a considerable degree.

- Organic farming practices are not popular across both the regions. Immense potential of vermi-culture and use of bio-degradable waste are less practiced. Dependence on chemical fertilisers further pushes cash-strapped farmers into further deep into debt-trap.
- Large scale of post-harvest technologies like use of harvesters has not emerged in rice harvesting. Yet many rural women of big cultivator households informed that they will try to use it as there is lot of labour shortage. They dread that within ten years they will be left with two alternatives: either mechanize or perish from farm fields.
- Women entrepreneurs informed that initially they are novices and only months of experience, and even years made them strong. Their difficulties were on two aspects: first, awareness and acquisition of technology and second, 'in-use' turbulences. Group entrepreneurs (SHG-led) are of the opinion that development oriented and sensitive NGOs like **Shree Kshetra Dharmastala Rural Development Project (SKDRDP)** and its marketing arm "SIRI" are completing shielding from vagaries of technology. For instance, **Sri Radhakrishna Garments** (manufacturing 'shramic' brand shirts, employing more than 150 member employees) has no technology hassles. Whatever teething troubles they had were solved within a day or two by SKDRDP people with the help of technicians of supplier concern.

Moreover, issues of handling newer version of machines and up gradation of skills are taken care by 'skill up-gradation' programmes conducted by "SIRI". Thus, strong hand holding and reassuring on technological risks and at times perceived technological risks will help in achieving context economic and human development goals. Similar is the case of **Sri Raksha Areca Nut Leaf plate manufacturing unit** explained already.

CONCLUSION

In contrast to above a food processing unit at **Lakkundi**, the less-literate rural women owner manager of **Shivaraj Khadak Rotti Products** claimed that much acclaimed Astra Chula, which she has constructed within the small one room shop floor cum machine room, has been abandoned. She claimed that amount spent on construction that has gone waste. She intends to remove it, for want of space. When asked, she told the person of industry circle who recommended was not sure of its suitability for industrial purpose. Its how that awareness and acquisition must go along with relevance. Astra Chula technology is successful rural areas with modifications even with bigger families but it is of less-use for industrial purposes.

Rural women have not shown enough 'tolerance for ambiguity' on issues of technology selection. They have not tried to go to the bottom of issue – "shrouded technology". It came to light when research team visit areca nut leaf plate manufacturing unit. There are two types of heating agents for areca nut leaf-plate manufacturing: electricity or cooking gas. When electricity operated compressors are used, compressed leaf plates need not be sent for shearing section; while on heating stage itself edges will be cut to right shape with the help of harp blade. Beware, in case of electricity compressors, excess water percentage in leaflets leads to frequent circuit-breaking. However, in gas-based system, there is no short-circuiting but leaf-plates are to be sheared and shaped.

In both the units' team asked the rationale between selection of compressor. They are of the firm opinion that it is better to depend on electricity-based compressor, because if they need not depend on whims and fancies of outside gas agency which is known for discourteous service.

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