

SOCIO ECONOMIC STATUS OF TRIBAL'S IN KOLLIMALAI OF TAMILNADU AND THEIR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

Kolli hills or Kollimalai located near Rasipuram taluk of Namakkal district in Tamil Nadu is situated at 11° 10' to 11° 30' N latitude and 78° 15' to 78° 30' E longitude with an altitude ranging from 1000-1400 m above msl (Fig. 1). A minor area of the eastern portion of this hill lies in the Perambalur district. It has a total area of about 283 sq km. Kolli hill is part of the Talaghat stretch and eastward of the hill lies in Pachamalai. A broad valley divides Kolli hill and Patchamalai. Kolli hill on the western, eastern and southern sides appears abruptly from the plains and on the northern side ascends to the plains by numerous long and gently sloping spurs. The maximum temperature ranges between 20°C-30°C and minimum temperature between 10°C-20°C. The average annual rainfall is around 1445 mm. The soil is deep to very deep, non-calcareous. The top most hill area is characterised by sandy loam soil, whereas the bottom of the valley is characterised by alluvial and clay loam soil. The forest types range from evergreen to moist deciduous and dry deciduous. On the western side of the hills, patchy good sholas still exist, though a great portion of the plateau is cleared. The total population of Kolli hills is 33,888 living in 6,840 households. Out of the 33,888 people, 32,080 are tribals and the rest 939 have been declared as Scheduled Castes. The population density in Kollimalai is 119 persons per sq km.

Keywords: *Pachamalai, Kolli hills, Policy, law, economic, sholas*

Introduction

Institutions are formal and informal constraints that are formed by human beings, and gradually change over time in relation to external forces. In the form in which they exist at any time, they shape the choices and constraints that individuals face as they undertake their economic and social activities. They include codes of conduct, conventions, norms of behaviour, accepted laws including common and religious laws. According to North, 'the major role of institutions in a society is to reduce uncertainty by establishing a stable (but not necessarily efficient) structure to human interaction' (North 1990). Local institutions have been shown to be, therefore, a key to development outcomes, even though they are largely ignored in economic analyses and their resulting policy prescriptions. Economic outcomes at the aggregate level are often limited by institutional characteristics which shape behaviour and information flows and therefore condition transaction costs that influence the payoffs from individuals engaged in productive activity (Bardhan, 2000).

According to North (1991) 'all but the most myopic economists agree that institutions are important. What is missing is a way to integrate institutional analysis into economic theory'. Though we generally think of an institution as synonymous with an

organization, both its literal definition, and its use in economic theory are much larger. Local institutions embody a combination of formal and informal rules while policies and laws embody formal rules, and customs and tradition shape informal rules. Development outcomes are a combination of both. Gender roles form the core of local institutions in every society.

Efforts to enhance gender participation based on policy proclamations and even legal frameworks have been slow and limited. The structural characteristics of informal constraints, formal rules and their enforcement and the way in which these evolve need to be understood. An in-depth study based on such understanding can draw on the effective support of local organizations to change social behaviour towards attaining economic and social goals such as gender equity, child survival and nutrition, and sustainable livelihoods.

Political economists have identified institutions at four levels: state, market, community and household. It can be seen on the one hand that household and community-level institutions are crucial in shaping operations of the market and state-level institutions. On the other hand, household and community-level institutions also undergo a process of change in response to market and state institutions (and policies, laws etc.). This study will focus on the second set of processes, that is, the changes in household and community-level institutions. In particular, institutions that shape gender roles and resource allocation will be addressed.

Significance

The primary objective was to study the process of change in local institutions (formal and informal) and their influence on gender roles and economic status. The focus of the study was to be on changes in institutions related to gendered participation in economic activity and transactions involving resource use and human capital formation. One of the expected immediate outcomes from the study was the comparison of alternative approaches for promoting the status and effective role of women in development. This was to form the basis for a longer-term strategy of informing policy makers, and designing community-based interventions by MSSRF.

Rapid transformations of economic systems are taking place on a worldwide scale. This so-called freeing of market forces is, however, not producing the rapid economic results that the neoclassical economic models had predicted. There are still largely unexplained differences in outcomes of virtually identical structural reform measures. An important reason is that it is the institutional framework that determines the payoffs, (Ostrom, Schroeder and Wynne 1993). According to De Capitani and North (1994), to realize the gains from trade requires institutions to change and evolve so that transactions are not based on personal ties alone. In this process of change, most economies appear to become 'stuck' somewhere along the way. Economic analysis however, still lags behind in

its capacity to incorporate an analysis of institutional factors in the economic change process.

In a recent paper, **Pranab Bardhan (2012)** explores the role of institutional economics in explaining underdevelopment.

Institutional arrangements between parties, contracts, and conditions of information and enforcement are important factors that determine the scale and efficiency of economic transactions. In traditional village-based communities, personalized exchange reduces transaction costs, but production costs are high. As self-enforcing institutions give way to a wider network of interdependence, so can efficiency improve, but only if in-built asymmetries and behaviours are resolved in the process. But how do we explain the continuation of poverty in much of the world if the sources of growth are known? The answer is to be found in the failure of humans to organize themselves to undertake the improvements that would lead to increasing output. The institutional framework of a society provides the incentive structure that directs economic and political activity. (North, 1999) What are institutions? Though we generally think of institutions as synonymous with organizations, they encompass much more, both literally, and from the perspective of economic theory.

Institutions embody a combination of formal and informal rules. Policies and laws embody formal rules, and can be changed overnight. However, informal rules and constraints embedded in customs, traditions and codes of conduct are much more impervious to deliberate policies. These cultural constraints not only connect the past with the future, but also provide us with a key to explaining the path of historical change and economic growth patterns (North 1981). Local customs and practices form the foundation of all human interaction, and through them policies and laws are translated into development outcomes. In the process, local institutions shape development outcomes, sometimes in ways quite unanticipated when policies were designed. Also, local institutions too change and adapt to external forces, creating a new interface with formal policies and laws.

In traditional societies such as in India, there is often a large disconnect between formal and informal institutions. Policies and laws are devised to ensure egalitarian and gender sensitive economic development outcomes. However, their impacts are often very different from what they were expected to achieve. Impacts of identical policies, therefore, can also differ between communities. In the institutional view of development, organizations are the result of formal institutions (policies and laws) and operate in a milieu dictated by informal institutions prevalent in society. The functioning of these organizations, the cross-section of participants, and the results they achieve, are determined at the interface of policies and the local informal institutions in which they operate. In this sense, these three elements in turn have the opportunity to shape and mould local institutions. Together they shape the incentive structure and the feedback process by which individuals perceive and react to changes in the opportunity set (North 1990:7)

It is necessary to examine development from an institutional perspective in order to understand the startling contrast between the logical implications of economic theory and the performance of economies. For example, neoclassical theory shows that the increase in women's education and wage rates benefit children's health and education, household income and welfare (Becker 1965, Becker and Lewis 1973). Empirical evidence from diverse communities also supports this hypothesis, for example, Kerala (Kumar 1978), Philippines (Garcia and Pinstруп-Andersen 1987), Nepal (Kumar and Hotchkiss 1988), Guatemala (von Braun, Hotchkiss and Immink 1989), and Zambia (Kumar 1997). A recent empirical analysis for Sub-Saharan Africa shows that gender inequality is a significant factor in the region's low economic growth rates (Blackden and Bhanu 1999). Despite the widespread scholarship and numerous policies and laws to change traditional practices of discrimination, persistent inequalities remain. Local institutions are at the heart of this dilemma. The key is that institutions are not necessarily, or even usually, created to be socially or economically efficient; rather they, or at least the formal rules, are created to serve the interests of those with the bargaining power to devise new rules (North 1990:16). Once devised, they form the basis for decision-making by all individuals by conditioning behaviour patterns. Their value derives from making human interactions predictable, even while limiting the choice set of the actors. Though policies and even individual convictions may be consistent with optimum behaviour, institutions can alter the price paid for one's convictions and hence play a critical role in the extent to which non-wealth and welfare-maximizing motivations influence choices (North 1990:26). Property rights in the sense of rights to services derived from particular assets, and the extent to which they are assured and clear, are a big dimension of local institutions that influence the transaction costs of economic activity, and therefore the possibilities of resource allocation.

The household was once viewed as an altruistic unit of individual welfare under the benign leadership of the household head. Those familiar with recent advances in intra-household economics, now recognize that it is to be regarded more as a site of a contest on gender and generational terms. Clear forms of power are exercised here, and these lay the foundation for codes and principles of social interaction, psychology and cultural preferences. These include, in the South Asian context, the norms for deference, dependency, risk avoidance, plural security portfolios, blood ties, mutual interdependence, subordination of individuality, patriarchy and the submersion of self to the collective identity, which together constitute socialization for life.

Community Participation

Community-level institutions represent dimensions of 'social capital' of individuals and groups. Personal social resources tend to be highly gendered, and 'patron-client' relationships are generally the norm, especially in highly stratified social settings. In

situations where .options for exit are so low their social closure' operates, 'loyalty and inclusion occur only on adverse terms for dependent clients (including women in households), in which long-term positive social capital has to be traded off to meet immediate needs' or demands of this patron-client relationship (Wood 1999).Escape options from these community-level institutions are often fickle, and can be temporary. The recent highly publicized case of the released bonded labourers in TamilNadu whose plight grew worse after the release program was announced, is a case in point. The expectation that simple payment for a release programme would work is also flawed, even if the payments did reach the target group after being filtered through heavy government bureaucratic processes. Alternative institutions to support their entry into new sustainable livelihood options are needed, as has been shown by the failed rehabilitation programmes for sex workers (Mina Swaminathan, personal communication).

Conclusion

Access to state institutions and organizations is relatively limited in Kolli Hills. The Tribal Federation of India Ltd. (TRIFED), the tribal development programme of the Government of India, supports two cooperative societies of the Large Area Multi- Purpose Society (LAMPS). They provide subsidized loans for purchasing agricultural inputs, tree seedlings, etc. The Department of Forestry also has a large and visible presence here. Besides monitoring reserve forest uses, it also runs large nurseries and supplies large numbers of seedlings (e.g. silver oak and gallnut saplings, coffee, cloves, pepper and cinnamon) at subsidized prices. Primary schools, balwaadis (childcare centres) and school feeding activities are widespread, and are monitored by the Block Development Office located in Kolli Hills.

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