

Contribution Of Tharu Women In Household Economy

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INTRODUCTION

Nepal though a small country contains more than a dozen of ethnic groups. These groups have originated from three major ethnic divisions viz Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burmese and Aborigine (Dor Bahadur Bista 1967). Looking at them from the point of the language they speak, among 62 different dialects, of 12 languages only 10 accounts major. In our context an ethnic group is called major when its languages-speaking people account for more than 500,000 people. These 10 groups, 70 percent, comprise a big chunk in the population of Nepal. Tharus are one of the indigenous ethnic groups of Nepal and comprise of 6.5 percent of the total population of the country. In terms of the absolute number their population comprises of about 70 percent of the population of the country. In terms of the absolute number their population is 1,194,224 (CBS 1991). The number of Tharu female is 593,690. Among 75 districts of Nepal, Tharu are predominant in the 6 districts. They are Bardiya, 52.8 percent Kailali, 49.5 percent, Nawalparasi, 16.8 percent, Sunsari, 16.2 percent and in Bara, 11.9 percent (CBS 1996).

With respect to some aspects life Tharus resemble other people of Nepal but they have their own culture, tradition, values, norms and life styles. They are Hindu by religion. They usually live at the side of the river of the forest. Most of them have been working as the servant of the elite group of society. However this tradition has been significantly decreasing.

The life of women is always difficult in comparison to their male counterpart in Nepal. It is well known that the status of women is lower than that of the male. Girls work more than boys, sometimes more than twice, in all the age groups. Their work burden increases with age (NPC 1997). But it is so painful to mention here that, their work is not considered as the productive work. It is due to the lack of education, poverty, low social values and norms of religious faith etc.

Though Nepalese Tharu women are very active in household and field works, they have been assigned subordinate status to men. In most of the ethnic groups there is traditional myth that women are inferior to men. Customs and traditions about sexual division of labour limits the status of women only to the households activities. Household activities are not considered as the economic activities. This tradition is not confined only to

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the division of labour but it also determines the food intake. Food intake is determined not only by the work output but also by social and cultural factors. Because of these factors Tharu women are affected by nutritional deficiencies, which in turn leads to nutritional deficiency of children.

Tharu women are confined into their domestic and subsistence activities. The main occupation of these women is household chores and agriculture activities. As already mentioned, the housework are themselves not clearly defined. In most households, women's economic contribution is crucial for its subsistence, male earning alone are by no means sufficient. These household works is also not less important than men's economic activities. It should be considered as diverse activities. Women have to undertake diverse activities to make goods that are deficit in family's survival requirements. They add to real income by collecting and processing fuel, vegetables and fruits. Tharus are by tradition the poor people of our society with some exception. They have very low area of agricultural land. The food material what they produce from their land is not sufficient to make their ends meet for the whole year. Tharu women also help their male counterpart in collecting the basic food materials such as rice, wheat etc. She substitutes for paid labour in activities like repairing and maintaining the house. They are also involved in small productive works such as kitchen garden, cattle and poultry farming etc. In addition to that, they are often self-employed in making and selling services and goods. They take care of the children and family members as well. Tharu women carry a triple burden in the society. Women in other countries of the world also bear heavy burden of the household chores. They equally participate in the agricultural activities. In South Asia between 70-80 percent of the female work force is employed in agricultural activities, either as a cultivator or as a farm worker. Their workload reaches peak during planting and harvesting season.

To explore on this Taruwa Village of Kawasoti VDC of Nawalparasi was chosen as the study area. The objective of the study is to find out the contribution of Tharu women in household economy. For this only three parameters: involvement in household chores, time contribution in household works and role in household decision-making were considered.

ROLE OF NEPALESE WOMEN IN HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY

Women in Nepal as elsewhere hold the triple work responsibility of reproduction, house holding and employment. However, reproduction is not considered as a productive job at least by the state and the society. Women make substantial contribution to uphold Nepal's economy. A Study done in early 1980s found that women and girls together contribute more than 53 percent of the household income in rural household of Nepal. Several studies in subsequent years have reconfirmed that women's labour contribution to Nepalese agriculture is at least equal to men. Ojha found

that women contribute over 58 percent of the labour input in the agricultural sector. Acharya and Bennett (1981) concluded that females contribute 51.6 percent of the labour required to run farms. Farming activities include crop farming, kitchen gardening, livestock and forestry. Except these works women in Nepal are confined to their domestic and subsistent activities which could include a variety of heavy duty tasks such as fetching water, collecting firewood, working in the fields in addition to cleaning, cooking, working at home for the family members.

Table 1
Selected Economic Indicators On Women's Participation Rate

S.No.	Indicators	Urban		Rural		Overall	
		1981	1991	1981	1991	1981	1991
1	Economic activity rate	31.5	20.3	47.2	48.1	46.2	45.5
2	Women in total labor force	26.4	23.8	35.1	41.6	34.6	40.4
3	Women in agriculture	34.4	37.8	36.4	45.2	36.4	45.0
4	Women in non-agriculture	12.2	19.5	17.9	20.7	16.6	20.2
5	Women in manufacturing	12.5	27.3	16.5	20.9	18.9	22.9
6	Female/male agricultural wage ratio	66.6	75.0	88.6	86.8	-	-

Source : Acharya, 1994.

A recent study of status of women indicates that in rural areas, women's activity patterns are changing in favour of "conventional economic" activities as defined by Acharya and Bennett (1981). This group of activities included agricultural, livestock raising, manufacturing at home. A second group of activities which included hunting and gathering, fuel collection, water collection, house construction for self-use and food processing were defined as subsistence economic activities. Women seem to be devoting more time to conventional economic activities in 1993 than in 1978.

Female migration for employment has also increased. This is indicated by the increased participation of women in the manufacturing and service sector. The proportion of female workers in the non-agricultural sector has increased to 20.2 percent in 1991 compared to 16.6 percent in 1981. Women's employment in the manufacturing sector has increased by more than six fold during the decade and it constitutes almost 23 percent manufacturing labour force. Still Nepalese women have greater role in the household economy. But in monetary term their role is least. This could be due to the fact that very few of them are working in the income generation activities and also due to the gender discrimination and low social status of women. This could be due to the fact that very few of them are working in the income generation activities and also due to the gender discrimination and low social status of women. Thus to promote the

role of Nepalese women in the household economy in general their status have to be uplifted. In this regard HMG/N has formulated different policies in the past and the feminist movement has also begun. Even though the Sixth 1980-85 and Seventh 1985-90 Five-Year Plans progressively increased the participation of women in the development activities, the impact did not seem to be quite visible. Thus, the Eighty Five Year Plan 1990-95 also sought to enhance women's participation in all sectors of development activities.

WOMENS' INVOLVEMENT IN DOMESTIC ACTIVITIES

Gender roles are socially and culturally constructed and gender practices vary according to culture and society. In the Tharu community of the study area, there exists a distinct pattern of gender division of labour within households. Tharu women seem to be more confined to what Acharya and Benette term as "domestic sphere" that women and girls contribute more than 53 percent of the household income in the rural communities.

Table 2
Women's Involvement In domestic Activities

S.No.	Activities	Male	Female	Both
1	Fetching Water	x	53	x
2	Household Works	x	53	x
3	Fodder	x	50	3
4	Livestock Care	x	48	5
5	Washing Dishes and Clothes	x	53	x
6	Making Dung Bars	x	53	x
7	Weaving	x	50	x
8	Making Claypot	x	x	3
9	Fisheries	15	22	x
10	Plantation	x	53	x
11	Ploughing	3	x	x
12	Digging	26	27	x

Source : Field Survey, 1999.

It is clearly seen that almost all the activities in the domestic affairs fall under the responsibility of the women. Of the twelve activities, ploughing is the only work that women do not do, whereas there are six activities, 50 percent of the total activities, which are done only by women. It is found that both male and female work together in collecting fodder and care taking of livestock, 3 and 5 i.e. 5.66 percent and 9.40 percent

respectively. Digging is considered as the job of men but it is found that in twenty seven households women are doing that job as well. In only twenty six households the male do the job. This indicates that women are given additional responsibilities gradually in addition to the traditional one. There is only one job, which is done by both male and female that is to make pottery. The Table 2 shows that women alone do 84.12 percent of household jobs as against 14.22 percent by men. Only 1.94 percent of the works are done mutually. Thus, we can conclude that women contribute more than 85 percent in domestic activities and they can be termed as the pillars of the household economy.

TIME CONTRIBUTION IN HOUSEHOLD WORK

Everybody in the house contributes time according to their age and social norms. In an average, males work 10.9 hours where as, women work 17.6 hours a day. Table 3 shows that in average, women work 6.7 hours more, 61.5 percent, then men. Similarly, in average girls work 0.81 hours more, which is about 10 percent extra than that of boys. In Tharu society also women have more workload.

Table 3
Time Contribution In Household Work

S.No.	No of HH	Time Contribution In hours/Work			
		Male	Female	Boys	Girls
1	10	10	17	4	4
2	11	10	17	4	5
3	16	11	18	4	5
4	16	12	18	5	6
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Average		10.9	17.6	4.9	5.11

Source : Field Survey, 1999.

In totality women involve in household activities such as cooking, caring for children, regular house maintenance, grinding, weaving, cleaning, fetching water, milking, animal feeding etc. as extra work in comparison to male. Ploughing is they only work that male alone do but both male and female do the rest of the farm activities. Among these works, the farm and off-farm activities are the seasonal but the household works, where the burden of women is more, are regular.

From the above analysis there is no doubt that the contribution of women in household activities is greater than that of the male which eventually contributes in the economy of the family. This phenomenon is generally true in most of the households of rural Nepal.

ROLE IN DECISION MAKING BY GENDER

The women in the Tharu community have greater responsibilities in production and income generating activities but they alone have no role in decision making.

Table 4
Role In Decision Making By Gender

S.No.	Activities	By Male (No. of HH)	By Female NO. of HH)	By Both	Total HH
1	Loan	5	x	x	5
2	Agriculture	x	2	51	53
3	Business	3	x	x	3
4	Education	40	2	x	42
5	Family Planning	20	x	7	27
6	Weeding	15	x	10	25
7	Politics	51	x	x	51
8	Social Works	51	2	x	53

Source : Field Survey, 1999.

CONCLUSION

The Conclusions Are As Follows :

- Tharus are one of the indigenous ethnic groups of Nepal. They have common characteristics of other people only in some aspects of life but they have their own culture, tradition, values, norms and life styles. They are Hindu by religion.
- Major occupations are agriculture, livestock and wage labour.
- Though the Nepalese Tharu women are very active at household and field works they have been assigned subordinate status of men. They are confined into their domestic and subsistence activities. The main occupation of these women are household chores and agricultural activities.
- Tharu women carry a triple burden in the society. These are: as a production worker, as a mother and wife and as a community worker.
- The women contributes 6.7 hours more per day than men. They are highly responsible for household chores and activities. Male participation is less.

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