



**ROLE OF NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS (NTFPs) IN EMPOWERMENT
OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN ADUKKAM VILLAGE IN DINDIGUL DISTRICT –A
MICRO LEVEL STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

Forests constitute some of the richest natural resources of the World. The forests cover of India as per the latest assessment is 678,333km² and this constitutes 20.64 percent of the geographical area of the country of this 51,285km² (1.56%) is very dense forest, 339,279km² (10.32 %) is moderately dense forest while 287.769km² (8.76 %) is open forest cover. A large number of tribals settled down in India. Forests are an important gift of nature for the well being of mankind. In India, a large population still depends on forests for their existence. Most of the non-urban people below the poverty line almost entirely depend on forests for their livelihood. They generally reside inside or in the vicinity of forests. Tribes are the most dominant group of communities who live inside the forest area and depend on the forests for meeting their maximum needs. Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) play a key role in the life and economy of rural and tribal communities living in and around forests. It provides 50 percent of income for 20-30 percent of the rural and tribal people in India. Tribal Women are the backbone of tribal household economy. They perform all three kinds of the tasks related to family, viz., the survival tasks (fetching of water, collection of firewood and fodder, and fodder, and maintaining and harvesting of the agricultural crops), the household tasks (cooking the food, and cleaning the house etc.) and income generating tasks (collection and sale of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) in the tribal areas. Women are the collectors, head loaders, users and sellers of forest produce. It is women who collect

fuelwood for cooking and wage earning purposes, as they do not have any other alternative sources of wage earning purposes and sources of employment. Hence, the present study was analysed in the role of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) in empowerment of tribal women in Adukkam village in Dindigul District.

Key Words: Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), Tribal Women, Collection, Livelihood, Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Forests constitute some of the richest natural resources of the World. The forests cover of India as per the latest assessment is 678,333km² and this constitutes 20.64 percent of the geographical area of the country of this 51,285km² (1.56%) is very dense forest, 339,279km² (10.32 %) is moderately dense forest while 287.769km² (8.76 %) is open forest cover^[1].

A large number of tribals settled down in India. The Tribal Population of India is more than total population of France and Britain and Four times that of Australia. If all the tribals of India had lived in one state, it could have been the fifth most populous state after Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Maharashtra^[2]. Forests are an important gift of nature for the well being of mankind. In India, a large population still

depends on forests for their existence. Most of the non-urban people below the poverty line almost entirely depend on forests for their livelihood. They generally reside inside or in the vicinity of forests. Tribes are the most dominant group of communities who live inside the forest area and depend on the forests for meeting their maximum needs^[3].

NTFPs AND ITS IMPORTANCE

“Non-Timber Forest Products” (NTFPs) is the term used to describe all goods biological origin other than wood, and all services other than ecological services derived from the forests. The utility of NTFPs ranges from food to medicine. From cordages to clothing, from oil to perfume, from paints to dyes, and from detergent to disinfectants^[4].

It constitutes an important source of livelihood to the millions of people from forest fringe communities across

the world. According to FAO (1999) 80 percent of the population of the developing countries uses NTFPs to meet their livelihood security. It is estimated that over 50 million people are dependent on NTFPs for their subsistence and cash income^[5]. NTFPs provide 50 percent of the rural and Tribal people in India. A large number of Tribals eke out through collection of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) like sal and tendu leaves, Laha flowers, sal seeds, fruits, resins, lac, Tassar cocoons etc., In Bihar, Orissa, M.P and Himachal Pradesh, it has been noted that more than 80% of the forest dwellers collect /get 25% to 50% of their food from forests^[6].

TRIBAL WOMEN AND NTFPs

Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) play a key role in the life and economy of rural and tribal communities living in and around forests. It provides 50 percent of income for 20-30 percent of the rural and tribal people in India. Tribal Women are the backbone of tribal household economy. They perform all three kinds of the tasks related to family,

viz., the survival tasks (fetching of water, collection of firewood and fodder, and fodder ,and maintaining and harvesting of the agricultural crops), the household tasks (cooking the food, and cleaning the house etc.,) and income generating tasks (collection and sale of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) in the tribal areas. Women are the collectors, head loaders, users and sellers of forest produce. It is women who collect fuelwood for cooking and wage earning purposes, as they do not have any other alternative sources of wage earning purposes as they do not have any other alternative sources of employment.^[7]

Marketing of NTFPs connotes marketing in all its possible variations since NTFPs comprise a variety of products that satisfy the needs and wants of all kind of end-users. Some of the products are bought by final consumers without any major processing (e.g. fruits, berries, barks etc.,) others are bought by industrial customers who use them as raw materials in making either other industrial products (e.g. converting essential oils to fragrances) or consumer

products. Despite the fact that both the rural and urban economies are highly depended on NTFPs such as leaves, fruits fuel wood, barks, gums and others to generate income and to provide food and medicare, little or no attention is given to this important natural, renewable revenue earner. Many people depend on wild fruits, timbers, leaves, wild animals and birds for food during lean months of the year. The Tribals living at subsistence level largely depend on forests, particularly on non-timber forest produces. Collection of honey and non-timber forest produces is important sources of income for the tribals. But they are always ill paid and the market is practically but the businessmen^[8].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A study was conducted in Adukkam village in Dindigul District of Tamilnadu state. Adukkam was fully surrounded by the forest were selected based on purposive sampling method was used the criteria of Tribal Women engaged in collection and marketing of

NTFPs activities. For the present study tribal Women respondents from such families were selected purposively who were performing NTFP activities as an income generating activity and the marketing pattern with the help of pre structure interview schedule from 85 Tribal women respondents in the study area.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The marketing pattern of NTFPs and livelihood status of the people at Adukkam panchayat in Kodaikanal taluk of Dindigul District. At this panchayat, approximately, all the 10 percent of the total number of households was surveyed. At Adukkam panchayat, data was obtained from two tribal settlements, namely Thamaraikulam colony and Palamalai. Data on the following formal interview method: availability of NTFPs in the study area, number of NTFPs collectors, number of days spent for collection of NTFPs and the marketing of NTFPs by the respondents in the study area.

MARKET STRUCTURE AND PRICE SPREADS

Adukkam is one of the important panchayats of the NTFPs promotion activities. It is located in 25 km away from Kodaikanal hills. In this village, there is no commercial market and there is a common place to gather the collected NTFPs for to commercialization are located by agents / contractors by vehicle like, Jeep, horse, hand loading etc., The tribes cannot go and sell their produces directly in the market, due to the lack of transports.

The gatherers are selling their produces to the contractors / agents are very lower price. The most of the respondents (85%) are that the contractors/agents are paid about one third of price of the product in the current market price. They never bargain the reasonable price from to sell produce. It is influenced by the lack of road connectivity and market mechanism in this village. The people are opinioned that they are inadequate the price for their produce in the present market practices.

Table 1

Available and Collected NTFPs by the respondents in the study area

(in quantity)

S. No	Name of the NTFPs (in qty.)	N	Average available quantity (per person)	Average collected frequency /per person/ per week
1	Kadukkai	85	30.5	5
2	Nellikai	81	30	5
3	KalPasam	64	10	4
4	Eachamar	82	15	4
5	Chitrathai	64	15	5

Source: Computed from the field data

Non- Timber Forest Products play a key role in the life and economy of rural and Tribal Communities living in and around forest. Tribal Women are largely responsible for collecting and processing many of the forest products. The available and collected frequency of NTFPs by the tribal women in the study area. The selected five NTFPs are collected by the respondents. They are Kadukkai, Nellikai, Kal Pasam, Eachamar, Chitrathai.

Table 2

Working pattern of the Tribal Women in NTFPs activities in the study area (Per Month)

S. No	Man Days Employment NTFPs (Per Month)	N	Average distance travelled /per person(km)	Average days spent by per person / per month(days)
1	Kadukkai	85	13.5	22
2	Nellikai	81	10	20
3	Kal Pasam	64	14	21
4	Eachamar	82	11	17
5	Chitrathai	64	9	21

Source: Computed from the field data

The above table 2 reveals that the working pattern of the tribal women in NTFP activities. NTFPs are the important source to the tribal people, who depends the forest for their livelihood security. Generally, the tribal women travelled 13.5 kilometres per day for collection of Non-Timber Forest Products especially for Kadukkai, followed by Nellikai (10km), Kalpasam (11km), and Chitrathai (9km). Tribal Women are travelled more for collecting forest products and for marketing also.

The Tribal Women spent maximum days for NTFPs collection and marketing. They are spent maximum 22

days for going to inside the forest for collecting the kadukkai and followed by Nellikai (20 days), Kalpasam (21 days), Eachamar (17 days) and Chitrathai (21 days).

Table 3

Marketed and Market Price of the NTFPs in the study area

S. No.	Name of the NTFPs	N	Marketed Price	Market Price
1	Kadukkai	85	12.00	25.00
2	Nellikai	81	10.00	22.00
3	Kal Pasam	64	35.00	75.00
4	Eachamar	82	5.00	10.00
5	Chitrathai	64	6.00	18.00

Source: Computed from the field data

The Table 3 represents the marketed and Market price of NTFPs in the study area. It is observed that the marketed price is very low to the collected NTFPs, but the Market price is very high. In this regard Tribal women are very much suffered by the local traders and contractors. From the above table the researcher observed that the highest marketed price is Rs.35 and the market price Rs.75 is for Kal Pasam. The lowest marketed price is Rs.5 and the market price is Rs. 10 for Eachamar.

Table 4

Income earned through selling of selected NTFPs by the Tribal Women in the Study area

S. No.	Name of the NTFPs	N	Average Income earned through selling of NTFPs/Per week
1	Kadukkai	85	382.31
2	Nellikai	81	292.60
3	Kal Pasam	64	354.38
4	Eachamar	82	71.40
5	Chitrathai	64	88.50
	Total		1189.19

Source: Computed from the field data

The above table 4 reveals the product wise NTFPs income earned by tribal women respondents in the study area. It is observed that the total average income of selected NTFPs is Rs. 1189.19. Out of this, the majority of income earned was registered to Kadukkai (Rs. 382.31) and the lowest amount is from Eachamar(Rs. 71.40) per week by the respondents in the study area.

Table 5

Period of Collection, Sale value, Collection intensity and annual per capita income from NTFPs of the study area

S. No.	Name of the NTFPs	Period of Collection	Local Rate (Rs.) Per kg.	Average daily collection (per person)	Average annual income (per member / Rs.)
1	Kadukkai	80 days (Jan-April)	12.00	15 kg.	14,400(24.1)
2	Nellikai	74 days (July- Sep)	10.00	20kg.	14,800(24.8)
3	Kal Pasam	90 days (Jan-May)	25.00	5kg.	11,250(18.9)
4	Eachamar	125 days	5.00	12kg.	7,500(12.6)
5	Chitrathai	130 days	6.00	15kg.	11,700(19.6)
		Total			59,600(100)

Source: Computed from the field data

The above table 5 elaborately explains the period of collection, sale value, Collection intensity and annual per capita income from NTFPs of the study area by the respondents. It is observed that the total average income earned by the respondents is Rs. 59,600.

The majority of the income earned by the respondents through the collection of Nellikai in the period of 74 days in a year. But at the same time, nearly 130 days the tribal women respondents are involved in collection of Chitrathai in all the seasons.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The role of tribal women is important but their socio-economic development is poor. More needs are to be done. The problems of tribal women and tribals are largely common. Suggestions and recommendations to strengthen the socio-economic conditions of tribals as well as tribal women are⁸.

- i) Low literacy especially among tribal girls and high dropout rates at

elementary and higher levels are areas of serious concern.

- ii) Focus on girls' education, inclusive of context-specific traditional and innovative interventions. Launch special and sustained education initiatives/drives in low female literacy tribal pockets.
- iii) The government should ensure 100% literacy among the tribal women by the welfare programmes.
- iv) Create self employment opportunities and encouraging them to sell their own NTFPs.
- v) Provide proper basic amenities to the tribal people in their remote areas.
- vi) Give protection against violation to the tribal women inside the forests.

CONCLUSION

While the importance of NTFPs is coming into lime light, there are some militating problems against their production and marketing. NTFPs are biological entities which are grossly affected by seasonal variation. This in turn affects their prices. In Adukkam village, there are seasons, rainy and dry.

Most of the NTFPs are cheap during the rainy season because of the abundance of rain while they are relatively expensive during the dry season. There has not been any recorded irrigation scheme for the production of NTFPs in the State. Apart from seasonal variation, another factor that affects the supply of NTFPs is the presence of competing substitutes. Hardly is there any NTFPs without a close substitute and as any other agricultural product, the demand for NTFPs is almost perfectly elastic. Other problems include high transport cost cum poor transportation which affects the price of NTFPs especially those brought from a far distance. Lack of capital and credit facilities also some of these products on a large scale. Harvesting of many NTFPs is labour intensive and a lot of wastage accompanies it.

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