Ethno-Demographic Determinats of High Fertility Among Tribes

B.L. Nagda

INTRODUCTION

Ethno - demographic characteristics of population brings out wide variation in the level of fertility within the country. It is mainly because of variation in social, cultural and economic practices. Thus, for better understanding the causes of differential fertility, it is necessary to study the ethno - demographic composition of the tribes. The focus of this paper is on specific group of scheduled tribe, they are economically backward and socially retarded. Tribes differ in various ways and degrees from the general population and also differ considerably in socio cultural life among themselves. The tribes of the country are known by many names such as Aboriginal, Adivasi, janjati etc. They are known as the original inhabitant of the country. It is very difficult to state the exact definition of tribal. However, River has defined tribe as "A social group of simple kind, the members of which speak common dialect, having simple government and act together for such common purpose of welfare" (River, 1932). The tribal is not necessarily endo-gamous; that is to say, it is not an invariable rule that a man of the particular tribe must marry a woman of that tribe and cannot marry a woman of a different tribe (Risley, 1969).

The tribes inhabited in forest and hills according to availability of land, water and other resources hence, their socio cultural norms and values differ from other society. Primitive activities like hunting, food gathering and agriculture became their main occupation (Nagda, 1988).

This paper attempts to examine the relationship between elements of ethos of tribals and their high fertility behaviour. The draws relevant information from primary survey conducted during 2001 in twelve villages of tribal districts of Rajasthan Viz. - Dungarpur, Banswara and Udaipur districts. A good deal of information collected through observation, field notes, focus group discussion and prescribed schedules.

POPULATION GROWTH

According to census of 1991, population of sample areas consists of 8612 persons comprising of 4296 males and 4316 females. Out of the total population of the selected villages 96.2 percent were Scheduled Tribes. Out of the total surveyed villages nine villages are fully inhabited by tribals. The villages were fairly tightly bounded by tribal communities, traditional village life was relatively isolated, generating a common community culture and understanding. The growth rate of population of sample villages was 34.17 during last decade 1981-91 (Census 1991). It was higher than the average growth rate of the districts (32.4). This phenomena shows that tribal growth rate was more than the population growth rate of the districts. Let us examine this higher growth rate with reference to the ethno-demographic characteristics of tribal society.

Ethnographic Scenario: The socio-economic condition of the Scheduled Tribe population is miserably poor. The number of characteristics that distinguish this group from the general population. However, it may be noted that similar condition may be there in the general population but the difference got further widened because of geographical segregation and social discrimination. The main characteristic features of this group are simple, illiterate, traditional, primitive, rurality, economic stringency and isolation. In sample area about 12 percent tribes found to be literate. The literacy rate of female was found as low as 3 percent.

The tribal follows their traditional occupation of cultivation (Jhumi agriculture) with primitive tools and techniques. Most of workers of Scheduled Tribes is dependent on agriculture and forest product. About 89 percent of the worker among tribals was engaged as labourers in agriculture, fishing, forestry, hunting and allied activities. It is interesting to note that higher proportion of female workers of tribals engaged in different kinds of economic activities than males. It is true that majority of women share the work with the man folk, both at home as well as in field. Child labour is common practice in the tribes. The tribals are living in the lowest strata of income majority (68%) of the tribal population survive below poverty line. It is evident from survey data that 73 percent of the household of Scheduled

Tribes were having an annual income in between Rs. 2000-2500.

Religious Sets: The tribes have three sets of religious beliefs viz- Bhil, Bhagat and Christian. About 83 percents population of tribals belongs to Bhil, 16.35 percent Bhagat and rest of Christians. The religious sphere of Bhils is represented by variety of spirits, ghosts, gods, goddess, and deities. The Deovera (place of pray) is a popular religious centre and commands full respect and recognition (Mann, 1982). The Deovra are erected in the names of lineage, hamlets or village as a whole. In general, a Bhil Deovera contains images of Devi, Mata, Bhomia, Dharam Raj, Robari Baba etc., such religious spots are specially taken care of by the popular religious man known as Bhopa (Nagda, 1992). The chief of a Deovera is called Pat Bhopa or Badwa. He is fully competent to invoke deity. A Bhopa is used to search the cause and cure of morbidity and sterility. He gets into trance, establishes links with the supernatural power and then announces the causes of sterility and morbidity. He also suggested the procedure adopted for its cure. The Bhils believed that children is the gift of god. The Bhagat community also believed that children is the gift of god but dimensions of their thought is different. They are follower of Mavaji School. Mavaji was the great saint of tribals community, he had given new direction of religion activities. The direction was on the line of Hindu mythology. Third religious set among tribal is Christian, the followers of Christian religion is not believed in artificial methods of birth control. Therefore, birth control programme is not successfully take place among Christian tribes. The religious ethos of these tribes are responsible for higher fertility. The average living children of Bhils was calculated to be 5.6, followed by Christian Bhils 5.3 and Bhagat Bhils 4.9.

Sex Ratio: Sex ratio at birth is biological phenomena which is almost equal for male and female baby but after the birth of baby, social and cultural discrepancy about sex of child influence sex ratio in the society. In case of tribals, sex ratio was almost equal or higher than the sex ratio of general population. It has reported that sex ratio of tribal population was higher (1004) than that of the average sex ratio of the districts (978). The medical termination of pregnancy and sex determination was not practice among tribes. Hence, sex ratio was higher in the tribes.

Sex Preference: Two indicators of sex preference were used in the current study such as number of sons and daughters considered as ideal in family. The tribals expressed more balanced view about the ideal number of sons and daughters. The tribal considered an average number of sons and daughters as ideal was 2.7 and 2.5, respectively, given almost the five child dilemma. Though, the aims of tribal is not to have the birth of a son, or a daughter essential for the continue of family line as is mythological argued by the Hindus. Hindus consider marriage is a sacrament. There is no salvation emancipation from the cycle of birth without marriage. Son again, is the need of a Hindu family for continuing of family line. The tribal society does not suffer from any of these compulsives to get married and also to have children preferably a son. The tribals do not believe in rebirth, neither they agree to the theory of transmigration of soul. Historically, tribes were known for their daring nature. They have been chivalrous in war, if any harm is done to him, his family and wider kin group, they would not miss any opportunity to take a vendetta (ver). Perhaps for this, only they would require the birth of son. The daughter considered as economic assets in term of bridge price (dapa). For this tribals gave almost equal preference to birth of male and female children. The birth of children among them is a biological incidence and gift given by the god (Nagda, 1988).

Economic Value of Children: The majority of tribals living in hilly and non-accessible areas, economic value of children is pro parent economy. The tribal people want large family size in hope of rise the economic status of family. Estimate the cost of bringing up a child in tribals is very less about Rs. 1000/. In tribals, a child started their economic contribution directly or indirectly in age of 6 - 9 years, about 72 percent of the children started financial contribution in their families in early ages says 8 - 9 years. It is system in tribes that after the marriage of son, become separate from their parents and established his own family. Therefore, tribal son can help to their parents till their marriage. The system of educating the children is not prevailing in tribal society, majority of tribes (90 percent) are still illiterates. They never bother about educating the children, because their economy is subsistentive type and depends on land and forest. This phenomena among tribals give the appreciation to higher fertility (Nagda, 1999).

Polygamy: The practice of polygamy is responsible for more number of children in tribal society. The tribal persons attach with a higher degrees of status having polygamy. More are the wives of person, greater is his esteem in the society. During the course of survey it was observed that tribal Leaders, Teachers, Patwaries, Surpunchs and Mukhiyas had more than one wives. About 23 percent of the husbands had more than one wives. These husbands were economically sound and having some status in their society. Further found that average family size in polygamy family was larger than monogamy family. The average size of polygamy family was 9.3 person while in monogamy family 7.2 persons.

Discordinate Marriage: The discordinate marriage system is prevailing in the tribal society. About 19 percent husbands had the lesser ages than their wives. The main reasons of discordinate marriage are early nuclearisation of son from the parents and frequent remarriage (Nata). The process of early nuclearisation is a part of their economy. The tribals are poor and live in small huts. These huts are inadequate to live more than one couple. Therefore, son separates from his father's house just after marriage or before the rainy seasons of his marriage (Nagda, 1992). The separation of elder son from the family, parents feel that nobody to do work in the family, in such situation, parents want to marry the younger son age in between 7 to 13 years with a girl age about 20 years and above, so she can look after the household independently. In some of cases it has been observed that till son not become matured, father establish the sexual relations with the wife of his son without any hesitation, because open sex is prevailing in the society. This system is creating the higher fertility in the tribes.

Age at Marriage: Age at marriage in the tribes are comparatively higher than that of general population. The tribals have their own indices of determine the age of marriage of boys and girls. When girls bring two earthen pots of water on head from nearby well become marriageable. The tribal boy plough the field become matured for marriage. The mean age at marriage of tribal girls and boys was 17.2 and 17.3 years respectively. The differences of mean age at marriage between boys and girls was very narrow, because of prevailing discordinate marriage system in the tribes.

Bride Price: Tribe girl is considered as economic and social assets for the family. It is because of the prevalence of dapa system (bride price). The concept of women among the tribes is property. She considered as commodity and got married through methods of elopement, abduction, service or bride price. She never possess as a wife without consideration of money. This has enabled her parents to get some cash money at the time of her marriage by way of bride price. A tribal women never attains the status of a widow, accept the incidences of extremely advanced ages. It is also interesting that a tribal women in all her life, never practices sex abstinence because of frequent remarriage (Nata). This system gave the support to higher fertility.

Housing Pattern: Tribals live in scattered type of settlement. The houses constructed in very limited space (8 x 10 sq ft) on the top of hill made by local building materials viz. wood, stone and soil. In a such small size of house known as Jo-pada, all members of family are huddle to sleep. No privacy available for intercourse. Husband and wife have to wait for intercourse till their children do not sleep. The intercourse takes place at a little distance in the same room. But it must be usual occurrence for every child to witness the primal sense. Married sons feel shy to sleep with wives when they sleep in one common room. Hence, they practices intercourse in day, at the fields and forest, such practice of intercourse create illicit cohabitation and given the support to higher number of children.

Nutritional Status: One of the dimensions of higher fertility is malnutritional status of mother. It has observed that woman of poor nutritional status to procreate more number of children. In other words say that poor mother has higher breeding around. Nutritional scientists have found out the high degree of correlation exists between poor nutritional status and higher fertility of mother. About 58 percent of the tribal women and 80 percent of their children in age group 6-35 months suffering from Anaemia. About 62 percent of tribal women and 83 percent of their children was malnourished (IIPS, 2001). Tribal poorly nourished women cannot stand, stress and strain of pregnancy and child birth, probability of having miscarriages and still births is more which in turn exhaust the mother physically as well as emotionally. Desease like anaemia if clubbed with blood loss during preg-nancy can be fatal to mother and child. In the tribals

infant mortality is higher (95) than general population (82). Further it evident that higher the infant mortality, higher the fertility among the tribes. The malnutrition prove higher infant mortality rate (IMR) and maternal mortality rate (MMR), again higher IMR create desire of couple to produce 4-5 children in hope that some of them would be survive.

Birth Control: The majority (80%) of the respondents heard about at least one method of birth control. Twenty one percent respondents was currently using the methods. The female sterilization was the most popular method. None of the respondents was using oral pills, very few (4%) respondents was practicing IUD and Nirodh for spacing the birth of children. Among the space method IUD is more popular than Nirodh. Average spacing between two birth was found 18.3 months. It was lesser than general population (31.2 months). The shorter spacing between births given preference to higher fertility. The attitudes of the respondents about the methods of birth control reveals that various family welfare methods are known to be liked or disliked for different reasons. The main reasons for disliking the methods are effect the health of users, requiring surgery, and being irreversible. While reasons for liking the method reported that method is convenient to use, very effective and easily available. Majority of the respondents (62%) dislike the methods of birth control because of illiteracy, social customs and lesser economic value of additional children.

In sum higher fertility among tribes resulted by several prevailing, ethno demographic determinants viz. value of children, polygamy, discordinate marriage, bride price and housing pattern of the society. All these factors are highly responsible for higher fertility among the tribes.

ABSTRACT Tribes are differ in various ways and degree from the other castes and also differ considerable in socio - cultural, demographic and economic life among themselves. The main characteristics of tribes are simple, illiterate, traditional, primitive, rural, economic stringency, isolation, low dependency ratio, higher fertility and higher infant mortality, less spacing between two births, higher sex ratio and higher work participation rate of females. The tribes gave almost equal preference to birth male and female children. The birth of baby among them is a biological incidence and gift of god. The economic expenditure on birth of the child and its development is almost very meagre. The polygamy is an emblem of esteem in the society. The tribal considered girl as commodity, hence discordinate marriage and bride price is part of their cultural ethos. The poor economy creates illicit of sex relations and suffering from malnutrition. The tribal women always considered as currently married (Amar Suhagan) because of frequent remarriage (Nata) system is part of their culture. All these factors determine higher fertility among the tribes.

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Author's Address: **B.L. Nagda**, *Assistant Director* (Senior Scale), Population Research Centre, Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur 313001, Rajasthan, India