

Challenges to the Tribal Development in Coastal Karnataka: A Sociological Analysis

Dr. Duggappa Kajekar, Assistant Professor, Dept of Sociology, Govt First Grade College Thenkanidiyur, Udupi, Karnataka
Email: kajekarduggappa@gmail.com

Abstract

The tribal population is the aboriginal inhabitants of India who have been living a life based on the natural environment and have cultural patterns congenial to their physical and social environment. The concerted efforts for the development of these groups by the Central and State Governments have had only marginal impacts on their socio-economic conditions despite the various welfare measures and constitutional protection. This paper attempts an analysis of the development and welfare programs addressing poverty, land alienation, exploitation, education, health care, employment, social development, and in their strengthening of service delivery. This article is concentrated on the tribes of three Districts Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, and Uttara Kannada of Karnataka state. The methodology adopted for the present study includes both primary and secondary sources of data. The researcher has visited Tribal areas with his students to collect the primary data. The above three districts cover the foothills of the Western Ghats (Sahyadri) Agumbe range in the Udupi District and other forest areas in Dakshina Kannada and Uttara Kannada.

Article

In India, tribal development planning is being implemented since the implementation of five-year plans by the Government of India. But, Indian tribes are facing some unsolved problems from time immemorial. The tribes of India are in a way separated from the rest of the population. Some of them are living in unapproachable geographical areas such as deep valleys, dense forests, hills, mountains, etc. It is difficult for them to establish relations with others, and hence, socially they are far away from the civilized world.

Scheduled Tribes in Karnataka

Adiyan 2. Barda 3. Bavacha, Bamcha 4. Bhil, Bhil Garasia, sholi Bhil, Dungri Bhil, Dungri Garasia, Mewasi Bhil, Rawal Bhil, Tadvi Bhil, Bhagalia, Bhilala, Pawra, Vasava, Vasave 5. Chenchu, Chenchwar 6. Chodhara 7. Dubla, Talavia, Halpati 8. Gamit, Gamta, Gavit, Mavchi, Padvi, Valvi 9. Goud, Naikpod, Rajgond 10. Gowdal 11. Hakkipikki 12. Hasalaru 13. Irular 14. Iruliga 15. Jenu Kuruba 16. Kadu Kuruba 17. Kammara (in South Kanara district and Kollegal taluk of Mysore district) 18. Kanivan, Kanyan (in Kollegal taluk of Mysore district) 19. Kathodi, Katkari, Dhor Kathodi, Dhor Katkari, Son Kathodi, Son Katkari 20. Kattunayakan 21. Kokna, Kokni, Kukna 22. Koli Dhor, Tokre Koli, Kolcha, Kolgha 23. Konda Kapus 24. Koraga 25. Kota 26. Koya, Bhine Koya, Rajkoya 27. Kudiyam Melekudi 28. Kuruba (in Coorg district) 29. Kurumans 30. Maha Malasar 31. Malaikudi 32. Malasar 33. Malayekandi 34. Maleru 35. Maratha (in Coorg district) 36. Marati (in south Kanara district) 37. Meda 38. Naikda, Nayaka, Chollivala Nayaka, Kapadia Nayaka, Mota Nayaka, Nana Nayaka, Naik Nayak, Beda, Bedar, and Valmiki. 39. Palliyan 40. Paniyan 41. Pardhi, Advichincher, Phase Pardhi 42. Patelia 43. Rathawa 44. Sholaga 45. Soligaru 46. Toda 47. Varli 48. Vitolia, kotwalia, barodia 49. Yerava 50. Siddi (in Uttar Kannada district).

According to the census reports, the tribal population of Karnataka increased to 34.64 lakh in 2001 from 19.16 lakh in 1991. The decadal growth rate during this period is a high 80.8 percent, caused not by a spurt in fertility rates but by the addition of several new tribes to the Scheduled Tribes (ST) category. The decadal growth rate is higher for females (81.9 percent) than for males (79.8 percent). The highest decadal growth rate occurred in the Mysore district (around 2328.0 percent), Bagalkot (261.6 percent), Dharwad (201.1 percent), and Belgaum (193.0 percent). The decadal growth rate is negative in Dakshina Kannada (-2.9 percent). Raichur (18.1 percent) has the highest percentage of ST population followed by Bellary (18.0 percent), while Chitradurga (17.5 percent), which had the highest percentage of ST population in 1991 came down to third place in 2001 on account of its bifurcation. The reverse is true of Raichur. Bellary has the highest population of Scheduled Tribes as a percentage of

A cursory glance at these figures shows that the tribal population is still not defined properly in Karnataka. Certain tribes like the Kudubis are still to be recognized as the scheduled tribes. Therefore any increase in the tribal population at large doesn't necessarily mean that they have access to welfare programs by the State. This may serve as an example to show the difficulties in indexing and empirically stating and establishing the nature of problems of the tribes.

Schemes are framed and visions are stated for the development of tribes. Several schemes of tribal development are still active through several five-year plans in India. Attempts have been made to help the scheduled tribes to develop socially, educationally, economically, politically, and culturally. For the development of tribes, various models, approaches, and theories of development have been propounded in different five-year plan periods.

The problems where the State could intervene are as follows:

1. Educational Problems:

Educationally the tribal population is at different levels of development but overall formal education has made very little impact on tribal groups, e.g. Koragas of coastal Karnataka did not improve in their education even after many provisions made by the Government. Earlier Governments had no direct programs for their education. But after the 1970's the reservation policy brought in some changes. There are many reasons for a low level of education among the tribal people: 1. Formal education is not considered necessary to discharge their social obligations. 2. Superstitions and myths play an important role in rejecting education. 3. Most tribes live in abject poverty. 4. It is not easy for them to send their children to schools, as they are considered extra helping hands. 5. The formal schools do not hold any special interest for these children. The literacy rate of STs in Karnataka is a cause for concern, as it has consistently been lower than that of the total population. The literacy rate among Scheduled Tribes, which was 36.0 percent in 1991, increased to 48.3 percent in 2001. The reasons are identical to the ones adduced to SC girls and indicate that the poor cannot afford the high opportunity costs of education. Girls are the first to be pulled out of school to work at home and take care of siblings to enable their mothers to work. The medium of instruction is another hindrance to the promotion of education among the tribes. Most of the tribal languages do not have a script of their own. Hence the children are obliged to learn things in a language that is foreign to them, e.g. Koragas speak the Koraga language which is neither Tulu nor Kannada. Similarly, Kudbis of Dakshina Kannada and Siddis of Yallapur speak the language that is nearest to Konkani but it is difficult for Konkanis to understand. Even in tribal areas, the number of tribal teachers is very less, and hence communication problem always arises between the students and the teachers. The existing curriculum, as experts rightly have pointed out, is not suited and has little relevance to the tribal people.

2 Economic Problems:

The tribal people are economically the poorest in India. The majority of them are living below the poverty line. The tribal economy is based on agriculture of the crudest type. Banking facilities in the tribal areas are so inadequate that the tribals have mainly to depend on the money-lenders. The tribals, therefore, lose their mortgaged land. Studies on koragas, Malekudiyas, and Kudbis reveal that 60 percent of their houses are kaccha houses: which are built with Bamboo, and few among them are plastered with mud and constructed traditionally. Similarly, they do not own agricultural property. The majority of the households lie below the poverty line and only one or two households in a tribe possess the APL card. Many of the men and women are involved in collecting forest produce, weaving cane baskets, or other labor in nearby areas. The innocence, illiteracy, and helplessness of the tribals are exploited by the outsiders. The British policy, in particular, had led to ruthless exploitation of the tribals in various ways as it favored the zamindars, landlords, money-lenders, forest contractors, excise, revenue, and police officials.

a) Problems of land ownership:

Tribals do not have legal ownership of property and are utilizing Government land. A good portion of the land in the tribal areas has been legally transferred to non-tribals. Tribals demand that this land should be returned to them. The tribals had earlier enjoyed much freedom to use

the forest and hunt their animals. They are emotionally attached to the forests for they believe that their Gods, and spirits live in forests. The tribals who are “deprived” of their rights to the land and forest have reacted sharply to the restrictions imposed by the government on their traditional rights. Malekudiyas in Dak-shina Kannada and Udupi Districts, the Koragas in coastal areas of Uttara Kannada and Udupi, Siddis of Yellapur, and Halakki in Uttara Kannada are still landless and live in forests.

b) Unprofitable cultivation:

More than 60% of the tribal people are engaged in cultivation and most of them are landless and practice shifting cultivation. They need to be helped in adopting new methods of cultivation. The tribals possess uneconomic holdings because of which their crop yield is very less. A very small percentage of the population participates in occupational activities in the secondary sector.

A large number of tribal young men and women are either unemployed or underemployed. They are unhappy because they are not able to get jobs that can keep them occupied throughout the year. They need to be helped in finding a secondary source of income by developing animal husbandry, poultry farming, handicrafts, collecting herbal medicine, etc.

3. Social and Cultural problems

The tribals suffer from their social problems. They are traditional and custom-bound. They have become the victims of superstitious beliefs, outmoded and meaningless practices, and harmful habits. Child marriage, infanticide, homicide, animal sacrifice, exchange of wives, black magic, and other harmful practices are still found among them.

They believe in ghosts and spirits. They have a keen desire to maintain all these practices in general, and their tribal character. Hence it is said that “the tribals are the tribesmen first, the tribesmen last, and the tribesmen all the time”. The tribal culture is entirely different from the way of life of the civilized people. The tribals fail to understand the civilized people, their customs and practices, beliefs and attitudes, and so on. They are suspicious of civilized people. They are clinging tenaciously to their customs and traditions.

The reports of the studies conducted by different researchers in Karnataka revealed that 95 percent of them live below the poverty line (Peer Mohammed: 1994). The low rate of coolie made them earn a meager income. It is observed that the Self Help Group is the only institution that has reached them and is successfully implemented Micro financing. A large majority of them borrow loans from Self Help Groups. Due to illiteracy and ignorance, the tribal people are not able to appreciate the modern concept of health and sanitation. They do not take much care of their health. They believe that diseases are caused by hostile spirits and ghosts. They have their traditional means of diagnosis and cure. A good number of them fall prey to the diseases such as skin disease, forest fever, typhoid, T.B., leprosy, malaria, venereal diseases, smallpox, etc. Contact with outsiders further added to a few more diseases in the tribal areas. Unlicensed weapons and prohibited drugs are smuggled inside the land and beyond the borders of the state through the tribal areas. Some of the tribes have been made the victims of drug addiction. Hence, tribal areas in the borders have become extremely sensitive areas. e.g. 50 percent of the Koraga population is drinking.

4. Atrocities against Tribal People:

Initially, the indicators of violence were major crimes such as murder, rape, grievous hurt, arson, and other offenses. The increasing violence against Dalits and Adivasis was attributed to the 28th report of the Commissioner for SCs and STs (1986). There are unresolved disputes over-allotment of government land or distribution of surplus land even today. Tension over non-payment or underpayment of minimum wages is on the increase. The total number of crimes recorded in Karnataka from 1997 to 2001 is 21,426. The average rate of crimes is 4,285 (Rao Y.R:2003)

Several legislations have been enacted for the protection of the scheduled castes and tribes. And yet violence and discrimination against them continue. This is hardly surprising, says Prof. Y. R. Rao. Since the police resort to various machinations to discourage registration of cases, dilutes the seriousness of the offenses, shield the accused persons, and often inflict violence itself Denial of justice to Dalits (Scheduled Castes) and Adivasis (Scheduled Tribes) and

violence directed at them continues in India today despite official policies and declarations to the contrary. Considerable physical violence is inflicted on members of these deprived and marginalized communities as substantiated by official reports. Policing, far from being 'the professional imposition of a coherent moral consensus on society' is an intensely political activity with policemen often facilitating and participating in the violence not just against these two communities but against minorities, other weaker sections, and women.

5. Indifferent Political Attitude:

The political environment is characterized by indifference to the plight of the Dalits. Meager space for social justice issues in the manifestos of political parties; poor debate on such issues in the national and state legislatures. The political insensitivity to atrocities against Dalits is reflected in the reluctance to discipline the bureaucracy for its failure to implement the law fairly and objectively. The excesses of the police machinery and others are condoned or ignored to maintain the morale of the forces. The findings of a plethora of reports are not taken seriously by the political elites. Relief and rehabilitation measures are adopted indifferently or not at all.

6. Problems of non-scheduled tribes:

Certain tribes in Karnataka are not yet notified and hence suffer a lot of problems. For example, there is a tribe called 'Channa Dasa' spread across coastal Karnataka (concentrated especially in Udupi and Dakshina Kannada District), despite its poor socio-economic status, it is non-scheduled. This is the reason why they cannot enjoy the Government reservation and other constitutional facilities. Kudbis in Dakshina Kannada is another non-scheduled tribe. The Tribe named Kunabis found in other parts of Karnataka is scheduled. Even the educationally aspired children do not get the chance to go for higher education for want of an ST certificate. Moreover, educationally achieved candidates will not get an opportunity to enter the job market without reservation. Many other hurdles that the young and graduated Channadasa and Kudbi people face due to the above problem. No caste certificate is given by the Tahsildar for their children. Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) is neither funding nor concentrating on them. No reservation is given for them in educational institutions and employment areas of the Government.

7. Development-induced displacement:

Dalits and Adivasis account for about a quarter of the Indian population (over 250 million): they are the primary victims of the ongoing development process. The forest has been an important source of livelihood for the poor, particularly the tribal communities. In the post-Independence period, while the Constitution protected the rights of the Scheduled Tribes and accorded them reservation in the legislature, educational institutions, and government jobs, other 'development' activities, such as the construction of large dams or the sale of timber, led to the further marginalization of some tribes in Karnataka. In June 2008, the state government approved more than 2,400 hectares of land for setting up 45 special economic zones (SEZs) in Karnataka. The land acquired covers a large area of forest and barren land in the state, which again is a threat to tribal life. 43 Families of Kudbis in Dakshina Kannada are displaced between the years 2009 and 2010. The Mangalore SEZ (MSEZ) area is located in the villages of Kalavar, Yekkar, Permude, Jokatte, and Thokur village of Dakshina Kannada.

Suggestions to improve the conditions of Tribals:

Since illiteracy and poverty are factors that play off one another to create a cycle of deprivation, ensuring greater cohesion at the gram Panchayat level between anti-poverty programs and school enrollment/retention drives would provide the poor with viable ways to access education. Following are some of the suggestions to improve the conditions of the Tribals in the state.

1. Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.
2. The state should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.
3. There should be a comprehensive policy on tribal development, which derives inputs from people at the grass root level to ensure sustainable development that is ecologically sound, people-oriented, decentralized, and culturally acceptable.
4. A rapid survey must be conducted on the health status of the tribals and prepare region-specific and tribe-specific health plans.

5. Tribal girls should be selected for training as ANMs and post them to sub-centers located in predominantly tribal areas. They could also be trained in traditional medicine and health practices, thus encouraging and integrating traditional healing systems into modern medicine.
6. 100 percent antenatal care coverage and immunization of women and children must be assured. Provide secondary and tertiary care, transport facilities for emergency services, and obstetric care.
7. Greater access to education through the convergence of the services of several departments should be ensured for the tribals. Education, Rural Development, and a system to monitor child labor, track dropouts and provide local employment to their parents.
8. Tribal culture, traditional knowledge systems, tribal history, and vocational skills training must be included in the school curriculum.
9. We must involve tribals in biodiversity conservation; encourage them to grow fruit trees on degraded forestlands; allow sustainable harvesting of non-forest produce for their livelihood, without endangering the biodiversity of the forest.
10. Government should provide them with more budgetary support for their land purchase scheme.
11. Organic farming and the conservation of traditional seeds must be supported. Tribes at the village level should be empowered to participate effectively in Gram Sabhas, by promoting community-based organizations.

Despite the above changes, the state should also develop a comprehensive policy on tribal development, which derives inputs from people at the grass root level to ensure sustainable development that is ecologically sound, people-oriented, decentralized, and culturally acceptable. Include tribal culture, traditional knowledge systems, tribal history, and Vocational skill training in the school curriculum.

Conclusion

The occupational distribution shows that the majority of the tribal people are small and marginal farmers and agricultural laborers in the study area. Their holdings are unirrigated and therefore economically unviable. The Scheduled Tribes also have very low monthly per capita expenditure compared with the rest of the population. Access to basic facilities and amenities is very low among certain tribes, who live in or around forests. Most of the Tribes are now classified as wildlife sanctuaries. The conditions presented above give us a clear picture of the status of tribal people living in Karnataka. The tribes when compared to other people are facing more problems and difficulties. Though the introduction of several Five Year Plans has tried to help and support the tribes, we require well-planned, more effective schemes to be successful. Such plans should contribute a lot to the welfare of the tribal community.

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