

A Study on Life Style of Jenu Kuruba Tribes working as Unorganised Labourers

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Abstract

Tribals usually are primitive people, living socially as homogeneous unit with their own culture different subsistence pattern, custom, superstitious beliefs, distinct life style living in isolation from outside influence. Forests are closely associated with the tribal economy and culture. Foreign invasion affected tribal life by assimilating through invading their culture. The independent India saw the legal takeover of prime tribal lands in the name of development dispelling millions of tribes. The Government of India adopted a policy to integrate tribes with modernization by encouraging partnership between the tribes and non tribes. The policy of integration or progressive acculturation has laid the foundation for the march of the tribes towards Equality, Upward Mobility, Economic viability and National mainstreaming. The tribes who are very backward are grouped into 'Primitive Tribes' having a low level of literacy, declining in population, poor technological access and extreme economic backwardness. Jenu Kuruba Tribes are one of the vulnerable Tribal Groups living in the state of Karnataka. This paper examines the socio-economic life of Jenu Kuruba Tribes covering personal profile, economic condition, literacy, housing pattern and the use of welfare schemes. This research will suggest ways for new interventions to solve the problems through the collective intervention of government officials, local administration, social workers, and the general public.

Key Words: Tribes, Culture, Primitive People, Adjustment, Welfare.

Introduction

The word 'Tribe' is derived from the Latin word 'Tribus' meaning one among the three people, 'Ramayana' denotes 'Jana' the people with different physical appearance, having superstitious beliefs. Tribes believe in inhabitation of souls

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into objects to make it holy for worshipping. Majumdar D. N. (1961) Tribes are groups with a common name, territory, language, occupation having mutual obligations. Gillin and Gillin (1942) "A tribe is a group i.e. area with a specific language and follow a mutually agreed culture". Their dependency on forest for wood, food, herbs, fodder and agriculture has built a symbolic relationship among them. The Indian Constitution under Article 342 Clause 9 (i), declared around 255 tribes who belongs to 17 states as 'Scheduled Tribes'. They are listed in Article 366(25) on the criteria of geographical isolation, backwardness, primitive agriculture, poverty, low literacy and poor health. The constitution protects their distinctive life from social injustice, exploitation and discrimination to develop them to be on par with others for inclusive national growth. It grants educational safeguards (Art. 15(4) and 29), employment (Art. 16(4), 320(4) and 333), Economic safeguards (Art.19), Abolition of bonded labour (Art.23), Protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Art.46). Political Safeguards like Reservation of seats for ST in the parliament (Article 330,332), Appointing Minister in charge of Tribal welfare (Art. 164), Special provisions in respect of Nagaland, Assam and Manipur (Art. 371(A), 371(B) and 371). Developmental Safeguards like promoting the educational and economic interests of the Scheduled Tribes (Art. 46), Central grants to states to raise the level of administration of Scheduled Areas (Art.75). After reorganization of states, Scheduled Castes and Tribes List (Modification) order, 1956 was recognized on the recommendations of the Backward Classes Commission declaring 414 tribes as scheduled.

History of 'Jenu Kuruba' Tribes

The name 'Jenu Kuruba' is derived from their occupation of roaming in the forests in search of honey, edible tubers, fruits etc. they inhabit 2000 sq. kms in the conclave of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala states. They have Negroid features like short stature, curly hair and generally dark complexion etc. One version of their origin is that, when the world was completely destroyed, a vegetable called "burude" (bitter Guard) managed to stay afloat. This vegetable finally settled on a piece of earth. From this "burude" sprang a man and a women who perpetuated the Jenu Kuruba tribe. As per the second version, the world was created within 40 days in which the male and female 'Kont' [God] took a handful of mud, and from each fistful of soil, created the first man and women in the early summer. History depicts that 'Jenu Kurubas' used to supply elephants to the Chola and the Pallava Kings, in 1972, they played a major role in the 'Khedda' operations, to catch and train wild elephants as they were exceptionally skilled mahouts and well versed with the flora and fauna of the forest.

Life Style of Jenu Kurubas

According to Verma R. C. (1990) Jenu Kuruba Tribes from 50 families have been staying in Hadi village from 50 to 60 years since the days it was a jungle. They choose this place due to the availability of pond and rich edible fruits and tubers. Most of them were unorganized labourers working as colliers and later migrated to Coorg District in search of work.

- (a) **General Characteristics:** They are descendents of a common mythical ancestor with common topography and community sentiments connected through blood relationship with a language 'Jenunudi' similar to Kannada. Both men and women engage equally in economic activities. For two and half month in the year they work as agricultural labours in coffee plantations for daily wages, some work as coolies and collect honey to sell by visiting houses or at "Sahakara Sangha" for a price. Sing (1993) 86 percent of schedule tribes consume roots, jungle fruits, tubers, small animals like rabbits, rats after hunting. The present forest law prohibiting entry and hunting into the forest has affected their food patterns hence they eat 'Ragi Ball', rice and sambar. According to Vidyuth Joshi (1998) males wear 'Lungi' with shirt and females, wear saree. They comb the hair by applying oil, decorate with jasmine followers, wear glass bangles and kumkum. Only the elders do not wear 'chappals'. Generally, they marry within the same tribal group but due to the recent cross contact with other tribes this is practice is changing gradually.
- (b) **Settlement:** It is a cluster of ten to fifteen huts constructed in an elliptical shape, surrounded by hillocks inside the forest. The huts are rectangular in shape, built of bamboo slits having wall of 5 to 10 feet height and 8 feet breadth plastered for 2 to 3 feet with mud having a slanting roof of elephant grass and a very small door. Bamboo curtains divide the hut to make room on the right side for a kitchen. The outside space is divided into head-zone (tale kade) and foot-zone (kal kade). The head-zone is adjacent to the wall opposite to the door way used as dining hall. The husband and grown up children sit in the head zone and wife in the kitchen. At night, the hall is a sleeping space for the husband, wife and young babies. The grown up children will sleep near the fire pit. The hearth occupies a central position in the kitchen. The utensils and pots are kept around the hearth. Vertical bamboo pillar is used to hang the food materials kept in bamboo mugs.
- (c) **Insider and Outsider:** Husband, wife, unmarried sons and daughters are the insiders. Married son and daughter establish their own huts hence become

outsiders. A married daughter cannot enter the hut or use utensils hence, feed on leaves. A married son & daughter-in-law (In the absence of father-in-law) can enter till the foot-zone in the presence of the inmates of the hut.

- (d) **Social Space:** The social space between the insider, outsider, kin, and people of the settlement is maintained. Etiquette is different for outsiders. Males or females, can exchange words, only near the fire pit after first shouting the others social kinship title near the hut and wait for the addressee till he comes near the fire pit.
- (e) **Outsider to the settlement:** An outsider may pass behind the huts at a visible distance in sight of any insider and send word through such a person to the one he intends to meet. Until the intended person comes out he has to wait and then they can talk near the fire pit. But, outsider of same ethnic group can talk by offering honey, tapioca or beedi. But, he cannot take of any cooked food and should leave the settlement before sunset. If there are obstacles like rain or signs of wild elephants, he can stay in the hut constructed for guests. A person outside the ethnic group cannot enter the settlement. He has to stand on the hillock and shout for the head man.
- (f) **Fire Pit:** The central place of the settlement where fire burns always, where the people sit in the evenings, unmarried boys and girls will sleep during the nights, elders meet each other, the place to decide duties for the next day and the place where gathered materials for the day will be distributed.
- (g) **Justice:** The space around the fire pit serves as a court where the sitting arrangement is in a circle, the accused and the accuser sit inside the circle facing the head man. They cannot face each other or audience during the enquiry. Accused, accuser, audience and witnesses should directly address only the head man as per his queries. If the parties are male then, women cannot participate.
- (h) **Work:** By keeping the settlement as a center they work within a radius of ten kilometers inside the forest and return. They are careful to avoid attacks from wild animals by working within a shouting distance. They identify elephant movements just by observing the elephant dung, and destroyed branches of tree etc. they move in such a way that wind does not carry their smell to the elephant. In case of chase by the elephants they climb trees and shout 'kuu' which is a sign of danger. If the elephants are very near they move towards the left as the elephant is short sighted on left side. They wear cloth after washing them in mud. They demark the forest by naming the places after certain events, peculiar trees and geographical qualities. For

instance, 'Kodavana Konda Matti' the elevated place where a Kodava was killed, 'Aane Niir Halla' means Brook where elephants drink water etc. Their work depends highly upon the location of honey combs. They can locate the direction and the probable size of a honey comb just by watching the movement of honey bees. They understand that if the honey bees are coming together, bees are going back after collecting honey and if going separately it seems the honeybees are going to collect honey. The tribes are very conscious about what they take and give back to forest. When they pick edible roots, they do not take every tuber which they find but leave a couple of them behind, as they do not store anything and collect just enough for the day. They practice shifting cultivations between the trees. The vegetation is not cut for building huts, fire etc. For the huts, almost dried out bamboo is used. Only small animals like rats and squirrels are hunted for food. Even then, a small rat if caught is set free again, as they believe that rat has not yet lived life to the full and hence should not be killed.

- (i) **Pollution:** Chauhan (1984) Tribes have placed different restrictions for women at puberty, pregnancy and child birth. In the first menstruation, the girl is shifted to a hut called 'Palli' to stay for four to six week situated behind the dwelling huts close to the settlement. She is fed only by a girl who has already menstruated. From the third month of conception she should stay in the 'Palli' and only an old lady of the settlement can feed her. She can return to her hut only after her delivery. If anybody dies inside the hut it denotes a bad omen hence the whole hut is burnt. Territorial border of the settlement is safeguarded and any trespasses will be punished through court marshalling by the head man. The polluted area is purified by a priest by drawing a conceptual boundary around the settlement and performing 'pooja'. Any epidemic disease is considered to be a sign of evil spirits. All try to drive the evil spirit out of boundary through rituals if they fail, they will burn the whole settlement.
- (j) **Social Space:** F-Formation is the space between two or more persons special relationship to keep equal, direct and exclusive access (Kendon 1977). In the settlement Husband and wife cannot sit together in the presence of children, wife has to turn her face around while talking, While walking outside the settlement the wife has to walk 4 to 5 feet behind the husband. Mother and Daughter can sit close by putting her folded leg on the thigh of her mother. Grown up son is not supposed to sit facing his father keeping eye contact. Son and Daughter cannot touch each other, hence has to sit par alit to each other but they cannot sit in a single row. Father in law and Daughter in law cannot stand face-to-face. She should stand and

turn her face other side. The mother-in-law while speaking to son-in-law should turn aside.

- (k) **Movement near the Fire Pit:** During the process of litigation boys leave some space while sitting but girls sit very close. The accused person cannot stand within 3 feet in front of the head-man. Women should sit in a separate group leaving 5-10 feet distance from men. During rituals, half of the circle is covered by men, and remaining half by women. The 'Shaman' always raises his neck to the sky and speaks with the spirit. These physical and psychological difference of age, sex is condoned during 'Kent-Puje' (Phallus worship).
- (l) **Personal hygiene:** Personal hygiene is very poor as they take bath only once in two weeks, do not wash hands before meal, use Neem Stick to clean their teeth, attend nature's calls in open fields. A previous study shows that 77.1 percent children suffer from anemia.
- (m) **Marriage:** Any male of 18 to 20 years and female between 13 to 15 years after liking each other without informing anyone should run away from the village. The Boy should take the girl for a movie to a nearby theatre, should present her cloths and ornaments. Then enter the forest and have sexual relationship and stay there for 2 to 3 days. When they return to the village they are accepted by the people as married couples. If anyone breaks the law of marriage they will be punished by sending them out from the Hadi Village.
- (n) **Separation:** Bose (1981) wedlock is not strong as in orthodox Hindu families. Separation is common among them. Peculiar thing is that after divorce the female will come back and stay in her parent's house. The father will not try to console the daughter or persuade the husband to take her back as they have not bothered to take his consent for their marriage. They can remarry or marry any other person.
- (o) **Festivals and Rituals:** The Fire pit, functions as a ritualistic center. For 'Yugadi' festival they will take a bath, wear new cloths and perform pooja, prepare sweets like 'Obbittu' and 'Payasa'. They will have non vegetarian food on the next day. Kont Puje (Phallus Worship) is performed in April and May. Usually, females chant folk songs (hymns) in the order of older married women, young married women, unmarried girls and children (girls) sit near the male konti occupying half of the circle. The men folk sit near the female konti in the order of priest, aged men, married men, unmarried boys and children. Thus they maintain a sort of distance based on gender

and age. Old-young, married-unmarried in the rituals, they believe in the existence of the Earthly world, The World of Evil Spirit, and World of Holy Spirit. Masquelies (1997) they believe in evil spirits and black magic. 'Bunde Kareyuvudu' is one such type of black magic in which they believe that they can talk with dead person, the evil spirit always traverses above the head in the air. Usually the evil spirit is prevented from entering the settlement through certain rituals by involving the 'holy spirit'. They believe that spirits enter the body through certain rituals by invoking the 'holy spirit'. They believe that spirits enter the body through the sole of a person to get its due share. Any person who has properly treated the spirit perpetrates to face the wrath of the evil spirit, when they are outside the boundary of the settlement. The 'Shaman' who sits besides the fire pit forms a circle by pouring water. People have to assemble outside the marked circle. This ritual of 'inviting the spirit' is performing to root out the evil spirit that may cause individual or social problems. The Shaman will invite the evil spirit from the world of spirits and ask them the reason for troubling them and then invites the Holy Spirit to drive out the evil spirit from the body. The shaman and the patient sit inside the circle opposite to each other. Two to three women who sing the chorus (Sollu) invite the spirit to sit behind the shaman. Only one person, moves to supply the required materials like beetle leaves, banana, coconut etc. From the beginning to the end of this spirit-inviting ritual the shaman and the people traverse between different worlds. The world of the Holy Spirit can be reached only by the shaman. He describes that once the Holy Spirit enters his body it gets terribly heated and attains the power to trace and travel to the world of Holy Spirit through the narrow path of light crossing 7 hillocks and 7 doors to the garden of Jasmine, the home of Holy Spirit. At his request the Holy Spirit sits on a white horse and comes to the settlement to drive away the Evil Spirit.

Methodology

The study being descriptive in nature, the structured questionnaire has been used to collect the primary data by using the Purposive Sampling technique. The secondary data is collected from books, journals, government sources and the internet. The population for the study consisted of 50 Jenu Kuruba Tribe of Hadi Village in Hunsur Taluk of Mysore District, Karnataka State. Among them, 36 percent are between 26-30 years of age, 26 percent between 20-25 years, 16 percent above 36 years, 14 percent below 19 years and 8 percent between 31-35 years. The majority 68 percent are Male, 36 percent have passed S.S.L.C, 60 percent working as Coolie, 68 percent from Joint family, 52 percent are unmarried. This study aims to understand the socio-economic conditions of Jenu Kuruba's to suggest various interventions towards tribal welfare.

Analysis and Discussion

- (a) **Indian Tribal Ratio:** Among 543 tribal communities in India, 258 communities who speak 106 different languages and 225 subsidiary languages are classified as Scheduled Tribes. According to 2011 census, out of total of 1,21,05,69,573 population in India, 10,42,81,034 are tribals. Among them, 9,38,19,162 belong to Rural areas and remaining 1,04,61,872 from Urban area. The decadal change in the population since 2001 to 2011 census is 23.7 percent in which 21.3 percent in Rural areas and 49.7 percent in the Urban areas. Among the total 5,24,09,823 tribal Males 4,71,26,341 belong to Rural and rest 2,83,482 are from Urban and out of total 5,18,71,211 tribal females 4,66,92,821 belong to Rural and the remaining 1,78,390 belong to Urban area. Tribal Sex ratio has increased from 978 in 2001 to 990 in 2011 census. Mostly the tribes live in isolated hamlets representing under developed areas in the nation. Except the states of Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, Delhi and Puducherry, tribes are found in all States and Union Territories. Among the general population in Lakshadweep (94.8%), Mizoram (94.4%), Nagaland (86.5%), Meghalaya (86.1%), Arunachal Pradesh (68.8%), and Union Territories of Dadra & Nagar Haveli (52.0%) tribes exist.
- (b) **Tribal Ratio in Karnataka:** These people are believed to be the descendents of the original Aryan gypsy's of the North West India. They were basically nomadic traders who are socially, educationally, economically backward and still stick to old customs. Even though this tribal population is increasing, the pace of growth is steady (Refer Table-01). As per Census 2011 nearly 42,48,987 vulnerable tribes are living in Karnataka and among them 34,29,791 belong to Rural and remaining 8,19,196 to Urban areas with the sex ratio of 990 in rural and 993 in urban areas. 'Primitive Tribes' are those who have a low level of literacy reduction in population and live in poverty.

Table 1 Population Growth of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) in Karnataka

Name of PVTG	Growth of Tribal Population Decade wise					
	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Jenu Kuruba	3623	6655	34,747	29,371	29,828	36,076
Koraga	6382	7620	15,146	16,322	16,071	14,794
Total	10005	14,276	49,893	45,693	45,899	50,870

Source: Office of Registrar General of India & Census Commissioner of India.

- (c) Jenu Kuruba Tribes in Karnataka: Jenu Kuruba Tribes are those who work as Coolies or Agricultural labours. Among a total 36,076 Jenu Kurubas living in Karnataka 17,948 are Male and 18,128 are female with sex ratio of 1010 and child sex ratio of 964. (For Literacy & Work Participation rate refer table-02). Jenukurubas of Mysore District use ethnomedicinal plants. They can identify different varieties of trees by its use, medicinal herbs, known behavioural patterns of animals, developed their own technique of self defence, their method of acing forest fire is even adopted by the forest department.

Table 2 Literacy & Work Participation Ratio

Number of Households	Literacy Rate			Work Participation		
	Total	Male	Female	Working Population	Main Workers	Marginal Workers
8767	56.1%	59.1%	53.1%	58.2%	86.1%	13.9%

Source: Census Report 2011

- (d) Changes in Socio-Economic Life: In 1963, the Karnataka Forest Act converted forest land into Reserve Forests and Village forests. A drastic change happened during 1970s due to the acquirement of tribal land by the state and destruction of forest land. The construction of dams across the rivers Kabini (1971) have submerged 14 tribal hamlets. 'Taraka' dam displaced 80 tribal families and some part of this land was given to non-tribal farmers as compensation Legislations like Wild Life Protection Act of 1972, The Declaration of National Park in 1975, Stringent laws for trespassing forest enacted in 1988 have prohibited tribal vegetation. Many starvation deaths, infectious diseases like sickle cell anemia have increased the mortality rate. The tribal population in Heggada Devan Kote decreased from 20,000 in 1973, to 15,000 in 1990. The tribal's are now struggling to survive (Refer Table 03) Many do not have alternative sources of income, they work as manual labours for a weekly wage, live in temporary shelters, are addicted to alcohol and spend a major portion of their earnings in the liquor shop and have many superstitious beliefs.

Table 3 Socio-Economic Condition

Sl. No	Social and Economic Condition	Response	Percentage
01	Alternative Source of Income	No	60.00
02	Occupation	Coolie	60.00
03	Wage Period	Weekly	56.00
03	Residence	Temporary Shelters	60.00
04	Addicted to Alcohol	Yes	70.00
05	Faith in God	Yes	90.00
06	Believe in Superstitious Ideologies	Yes	76.00

- (e) Infringement of Tribal Culture: Tribal sentiments is neglected in the developmental projects of the government. Housing schemes, provided row upon row of concrete houses for the rehabilitation of tribes which created a sense of emotional alienation among them. Due to the absence of a fire pit each family began its own fire which led to a shift from the holistic system to an individual approach. The symbol of security was diluted due to the frequent entry of unknown persons to the tribal colonies. The entry of shoes, slippers and boots by officials violated the belief and symbol of domination or intrusion. Moreover, new houses constructed are not ritualized to keep away the evil spirits hence in some colonies they started using these houses as cattle sheds. The absence of a bamboo curtain for partition, bamboo pole to hang mugs and other utensils, placement of hearth in one corner of the house, non adherence to head zone and foot zone due to the built in concrete structure has infringed tribal sentiments. The 'Yajamana' is ignored in the decision making process. The pollution concept was violated by reducing the social space between the relationships and face to face interaction resulted in the degradation of respect towards the elders. The younger generation moved to the power structure of outer world. Displacement has also resulted in inter-mixing of clans by a disintegration of social life.
- (f) Welfare Schemes: Most of the respondents have inculcated the habit of saving money through banks, post office, pigmy, Self Help Groups and investment on property. Schools started providing books, bag, scholarship and free seats to the tribal children. Tribal families are listed as Below Poverty Line. Nanjunda D.C. (2011) Health facility is provided by the Primary Health Centers constituted in the tribal districts as tribal development initiative. (Refer table-04).

Table 4 Welfare Schemes

Sl. No	Criterion	Schemes	Percentage
01	Saving Pattern	Bank Savings	50.00
		Post office Savings	22.00
		Pigmy & SHG Investment	14.00
		Investment on Property.	08.00
02	Benefits from the School	Books & Bag	32.00
		Scholarships	42.00
		Free Education	20.00
		Hostel	02.00
03	Protection of Health	Primary Health Centre	64.00
04	Poverty Line	Included in the BPL List	62.00

- (g) Suggestions: Barriers like insufficient transportation facility to the tribal village, nature of work of tribes has become a hindrance to the service of Non Governmental Organisation. Education is the best means to develop tribal people. The practice of separation after marriage needs social work intervention. They need to be trained in self employment in order to get alternative sources of income. Many people are exploited without paying a fair wage. Hence compliance with wage legislations at workplace should be monitored. Government Housing schemes shall coordinate with the tribal sentiments. Elderly tribes should be educated to encourage younger generations towards schooling. Proper Health service including Immunization should be provided by the Primary Health Centers. The superstitious beliefs should be eliminated through awareness. Special authorities should be appointed to monitor the benefits and delivery system of all government sponsored Schemes. New income standard shall be set to list the tribes who are belonging to below poverty levels (Refer table 05).

Table 5 Suggested Measures

Sl. No	Problem	Respondents	Percentage
01	Illiteracy	18	36.00
02	Separated from the Spouse	15	30.00
03	Alternative Source of Income	30	60.00
03	Not Satisfied with Income	26	52.00
04	No Savings	06	12.00
05	Harassment at Work Place	16	32.00
06	Temporary Shelter	30	60.00
07	Elders do not support Education	11	22.00
08	No Immunization	26	52.00
09	Addicted to Alcohol	35	70.00
10	Faith in Black Magic	38	76.00
11	Non availability of Government Schemes	30	60.00
12	Family not included in BPL Category	19	38.00

Conclusion

Even today, Tribes swear in the name of the sacred tree by believing that god resides in tree. They worship 'Shivalinga' and trust that god will reward and punish according to the merits of one's deeds. Jenu Kuruba community has gone through the process of acculturation resulting in the loss of Tribal culture and assimilation in a steady manner. Modernization plays an important role upon the changing lifestyle of these tribes. They can be brought under the process of modernization only through the process of integration of tribes with the non tribes. Due to the spread of education their socio-economic condition is improving. As per the Human Development Report (2005) The collective efforts of Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra, Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement, Development Through Education (DEED), Foundation for Educational Innovations in Asia (FEDINA), Coorg Organisation of Rural Development (CORD), Samagra Grameena Ashrama, Janashikshana Trust, Chintana Foundation, Samvriddi/Krupa, Vanavasi Kalyana Ashrama and local administration have empowered them to utilize government schemes effectively. Effective implementation of MGNREGA scheme, constitution of tribal residential schools, starting tribal research centers and promotion of NGOs working for Tribes can be strengthened, Scholarships can be enriched. Further, registration of tribal migrants by Panchayat under the supervision of nodal officers from tribal region should be encouraged for protection of their rights. All should collectively work to achieve the aim of tribal welfare.

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