

Tribal women and PRIs: a Study of Mysore District, Karnataka

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ABSTRACT: *The paper presents the Tribal women in Panchayati raj Institutions. It also highlights the social composition of elected members and their participation in the decision making process in PRIs. India has one of the largest tribal concentrations in the world. Prior to the adoption of Indian constitution the tribes were variously termed as aboriginals, adivasis, forest tribes, hill tribes, primitive tribes etc. Up to 1919, the tribes were included under the head of depressed classes, the Indian Franchise Committee in 1919 accorded a separate nomenclature for the census reports in 1931 primitive tribes; 1941 tribes and 1951 scheduled tribes. As per the 2001 census, the tribals inhabit in almost all the states and union territories. The government has identified more than 630 tribal communities in the country. Scheduled tribes have been divided into three major groups based on their distribution in three well-defined zones viz., the southern, the central and the northeastern zones. The word 'tribe' has been defined clearly in the Constitution of India. Article 342 of the Constitution of India empowers the President to draw up a list of scheduled tribes in consultation with the Governor of each State subject to the revision by the Parliament. According to Oxford Dictionary "A tribe is a group of people in primitive in barbarous stage of development, acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding themselves as having a common ancestor". Kottegala Grama Panchayat situated in Hunsur Taluk of Mysore District, constitutes of 7 villages. This village panchayat is located 9 kms from Hunsur taluk head quarter dominated by Soliga tribes. The languages of the people is Kannada and Telugu. The study has revealed that women leaders in Kottegala have exhibited their determination to occupy the public place; though there are hurdles in the process of empowering women. In order, to overcome the hurdles in Dodda Hejjuru and to make the 'empowerment process', sustainable the Elected Women Representatives need proper orientation, information, counseling and sensitization continuously through NGOs, where the women members and thereby draw support from their presence.*

KEYWORDS: *Tribes, Panchayat Raj, Women.*

I. INTRODUCTION

India has one of the largest tribal concentrations in the world. Prior to the adoption of Indian constitution the tribes were variously termed as aboriginals, adivasis, forest tribes, hill tribes, primitive tribes etc. Up to 1919, the tribes were included under the head of depressed classes, the Indian Franchise Committee in 1919 accorded a separate nomenclature for the census reports in 1931 primitive tribes; 1941 tribes and 1951 scheduled tribes. As per the 2001 census, the tribals inhabit in almost all the states and union territories. The government has identified more than 630 tribal communities in the country. Scheduled tribes have been divided into three major groups based on their distribution in three well-defined zones viz., the southern, the central and the northeastern zones.

Southern zone consists of the part of peninsular India, south of the River Krishna. The tribes in this zone appear to be the most ancient inhabitants of India. Now, they are called as the Todas, Paniyans, Kurumbas / Kurubas, Kotas, Soligas, Malayalees, Kadars, Kanichars, Mutheevans, Mannans, Irulas, Uralis, Malapantarams, Koyas, Yendis, Yeravas, Chenchees etc. A Negrito characters found among some of the more primitive and isolated tribes like the Kadars, the Irulas, the Paniyans, and the Uralis. Their livelihood based on hunting, food collection and gathering. The village headman adjudicates the disputes of the tribal communities. The structure of society is based on the matriarchal character and there is, or was till recently evidence of polyandry among the Nilgiri tribes.

The central zone has provided refuge for the aboriginal population from time immemorial and it consists of the plateaus and mountainous belts between Indo-Gangetic basin in north and the Krishna River in the south. The Juangs, Kharias, Hos, Santhals, Gonds, Bhils, Mundas, Oraons, Bihors, Bhuiyas, Saoras, Khandas, Baigas and Kols are the major tribes found in this region. They conform to the pattern of Austroloid characters. Shifting cultivation is the prevalent of food production. Community life is organized with village

councils under headman. Contact with low country people and other persons of the surrounding areas have led to a considerable degree of assimilation of Indian ideas and religious rites among these tribes.

The Northeastern zone consists of the sub-Himalayan region and the hills and mountain ranges of northeastern India of the Tista valley and the Jamuna-Padma portion of the Brahmaputra valley. The main tribes found in this zone are the Nagas, Khouses, Gares, Mistruis, Limbus, Lepehas, Daflas, Abors, Mitims, Bodo and the Kuki-Lushais. The Mongoloid characters found among them.

Definition of the Scheduled Tribes

The word 'tribe' has been defined clearly in the Constitution of India. Article 342 of the Constitution of India empowers the President to draw up a list of scheduled tribes in consultation with the Governor of each State subject to the revision by the Parliament. Accordingly the President has made orders, specifying the scheduled tribes in the different states of India. In post-independence period, the decision as to which community is a tribe and which one is not taken by the administration and not by the social scientists. Thus any community, which is listed in the schedule of the Constitution as a tribe is known as the scheduled tribes in India.

Most of the definitions of tribes are confusing and vague. There is haziness and the definitions are never precise. Some of the definitions of the word tribe are given below.

An East Asian Conference defined "A tribal community as forming a group of people generally constituting a homogenous unit, speaking a common language, claiming a common ancestry, living in a particular geographical area, generally they are lacking in scientific knowledge and modern technology and having a social structure based on kinship".

According to Oxford Dictionary "A tribe is a group of people in primitive in barbarous stage of development, acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding themselves as having a common ancestor".

Apart from the Scheduled Tribes, there are 75 indigenous groups in India known as 'Primitive Tribal Groups'. The Tenth Plan of the Central Government observes that these vulnerable communities have experienced a 'decline in their sustenance base and the resultant food insecurity, malnutrition and ill-health has forced them to live in the most fragile living conditions and some of them are even under the threat of getting extinct'. In Karnataka, the Koragas of Dakshina Kannada district and the Jenu Kurubas who are concentrated in the districts of Mysore, Chamarajnagar and Kodagu are classified as 'primitive tribes'.

As a result of the restructuring the political administrative system provided by the constitutional amendment women had been elected to the local councils in unprecedented numbers. By 1994, 3,30,000 women had entered politics as a result of PRI and the percentage of women at various levels of political activity has shifted dramatically as a result of this constitutional change from 4-5 per cent before PRI to 25-40 per cent after PRI. This brought about a qualitative difference as they are making the state sensitive towards issues of poverty, inequality, and gender injustice by bringing their experience of governance of civic society in to governance of state.

Objectives of the study:

- 1) To identify the problems faced by women members of the PRIs.
- 2) To identify the decision making in tribal areas.
- 3) To identify the NGOs in creating awareness the tribal women to participate in their PRIs issues.

II. METHODOLOGY

Rationale selection of the sample Hadies namely, Dodda Hejjuru Grama Panchayat and Kottegala Grama Panchayat. The office of the members in the two villages' panchayats is reserved for women candidates belonging to Schedule Tribes. In the two villages, Kottegala Grama panchayat has an NGO trained member while Dodda Hejjuru Grama panchayat has no NGO participation. Individual case studies of the Panchayat members were recorded by conducting personal interview and probing into various aspects of their achievements and constraints. The filed investigation was conducted by administering a detailed questionnaire and through personal interviews. The main tool of data collection was carefully prepared questionnaire for the various categories of sample respondents who included, women panchayat members of the sample village and Male representatives of the sample village.

Table-1: Taluk wise Distribution of Tribal population in Mysore District

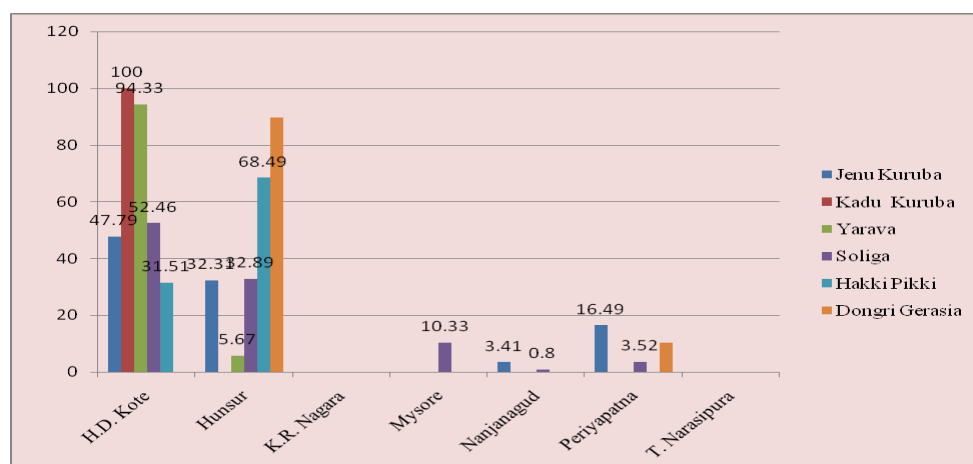
| Taluks | No. of Hadies | Jenu Kuruba | Kadu Kuruba | Yarava | Soliga | Hakki Pikki | Dongri Gerasia | Total |
|---------------|---------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| H.D. Kote | 114 | 16761 (47.79) | 2430 (100) | 1547 (94.33) | 2630 (52.46) | 512 (31.51) | - | 23880 (51.67) |
| Hunsur | 51 | 11329 (32.31) | - | 93 (5.67) | 1649 (32.89) | 1113 (68.49) | 396 (89.59) | 14580 (31.55) |
| K.R. Nagara | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Mysore | 1 | - | - | - | 518 (10.33) | - | - | 518 (1.12) |
| Nanjanagud | 5 | 1195 (3.41) | - | - | 40 (0.80) | - | - | 1235 (2.67) |
| Periyapatna | 30 | 5783 (16.49) | - | - | 176 (3.52) | - | 46 (10.41) | 6005 (12.99) |
| T. Narasipura | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 201 | 35068 (100) | 2430 (100) | 1640 (100) | 5013 (100) | 1625 (100) | 442 (100) | 46218 (100) |

Source: Annual Report 2009-10 DSO, Mysore

Table-1 shows that talukwise distribution of tribal population in mysore District. H.D. Kote taluk had the highest number of 23,880 tribes, which accounted for 51.67 per cent. Followed by Hunsur taluk with 14580 (31.55), Periyapatna taluk with 6005 (12.99%), Nanjanagud taluk with 1235 (2.67%) and lowest tribes in Mysore taluk with 518 which accounted for 1.12 per cent. K.R. Nagara and T. Narasipura taluks was no tribal population.

The table also shows that distribution of sub category wise of tibes. As per annual report 2009-10 Mysore District has the highest of 35,068 June Kuruba tribes, followed by Soliga tribe 5013, Kadu Kuruba tribe 2430, Yarava tribe 1640, Hakki Pikki tribe 1625 and lowest number of 442 Dongri Geresia tribes.

H.D. Kote taluk have highest of 16761 Jenu Kuruba tribes which accounting by 47.79 per cent, followed by Hunsur taluk with 11329 (32.31%), Periyapatna taluk with 5783 (16.49%) and lowest in Nanjangud taluk with 1195 which accounted for 3.41 per cent. Kadu Kuruba or Betta Kuruba tribes are situated in H.D. Kote taluk with 2430. Yarava Tribes are situated in H.D. Kote taluk with 1547 and Hunsur taluk with 93, which accounting by 94.33 per cent and 5.67 per cent respectively. Highest Soliga tribes are situated in H.D. Kote Taluk with 2630 which accounted for 52.46 per cent, followed by Hunsur taluk with 1649 (32.89%), Mysore taluk with 518 (10.33 %), Periyapatna taluk with 176 (3.52%) and lowest soliga tribes situated in Nanjangud taluk with 40 which accounting by 0.80 per cent. Highest number of Hakki Pikki tribes are situated in Hunsur taluk with 1113 and H.D. Kote taluk with 512 which accounted for 68.49 per cent and 31.51 per cent respectively. The highest of Dongri Geresia tribes are situated in Hunsur taluk with 396 and Periyapatna taluk with 46 which accounting by 89.59 per cent and 10.41 per cent respectively. It is observed that highest number of tribes are situated in H.D. Kote taluk, Hunsur Taluk and Periyapatna taluks in Mysore District. And other taluks like Mysore, Nanjangud taluk are lowest. The K.R. Nagara taluk and T. Narasipura taluks are not having tribal people. (Figure-1).

**Figure: 1- Taluk wise Distribution of Tribal population in Mysore District**

Findings of the study:

Kottegala Grama Panchayat situated in Hunsur Taluk of Mysore District, constitutes of 7 villages. This village panchayat is located 9 kms from Hunsur head quarter dominated by Soliga tribes. The language of the people is Kannada and Telugu.

BAIF- Development of Research Foundation an NGO has been working in this Grama Panchayats since 10 years. The motive of this NGO is that to motivate tribals about their own affairs. The NGO brought drastic change among the tribals. The NGO have been giving training to tribals in all aspects.

Dodda Hejjuru Grama Panchayat situated in Hunsur taluk of Mysore District, constitutes of 8 villages. This village is located 28 km from Hunsur head quarter dominated by Jenu Kuruba Tribes.

Awareness of Tribal Women in Panchayat Activities:

The most positive thing noticed in Kottegala village is an improvement in overall awareness of women in panchayat work and its activities. As many as 62 per cent women are aware of the development programmes undertaken by the panchayats in this village where the NGO is working. Nearly 70 per cent were aware about the timings and agenda of the panchayat meetings and equal number knew about the powers of panchayat. Implementation of the government policies and undertaking of the development programmes were regarded as the two main powers of panchayat. 70 per cent of the respondents replied the question regarding their awareness about the issues undertaken in their panchayat. Most of these were stated to be related to the housing under Indira Awas Yojana, Ambedkar housing scheme, Basava Kutira or construction work, pension schemes, maternity benefits etc. 69 per cent of women identified the source of income of their panchayats, which came mainly from either government funds, panchayat property, collection of taxes and through politicians like MLA, MP grants. The participation and performance of women in panchayat has brought about a positive change in tribal women's image and the respect they receive from other as expressed by more than half the respondents. 56 per cent respondents expressed that people have started believing that women can perform well as panchayat representatives.

Dodda Hejjuru Grama panchayat where there is no NGOs working, it has been identified that there was lack of regular women attendance in meetings, less rising of the issues and the dominance of the male members of the family in the panchayat work. 73 per cent of women in Dodda Hejjuru Grama Panchayat said that they do not raise any issue and those few who did were mainly confined to personnel and drinking water. About 48 per cent of them attend meetings regularly where as 52 per cent either do not attend meetings at all or attend at times. 61 per cent of those who were not attending meetings regularly said that their husbands manage the affair.

Earlier women were not interested in politics but now after two terms, their participation in the political process had enhanced their political consciousness, awareness and empowerment. As a result they are ready to contest again. All this goes to reveal that the elected women members of the panchayats value their knowledge and their new sense of freedom and their new political status, as representatives of the people, which has relatively improved their social status both at home and outside.

The grama sabha meetings were more popular and better attended in the Kottegala (72 per cent) than Dodda Hejjur (51 per cent) indicates that role played by civil society in organizing women's participation. In other words, people in the village panchayat, feel that, through participation in the social, economic and political processes they may be able to bring about speedy development of their village panchayat.

The 50 per cent reservation provision, a large number of tribal women candidates from the weaker sections have come into the panchayats now. The elections and the 50 per cent of seats for women have ensured their numerical strength in the rural power structure, and women have been physically there, occupying formal positions of power.

The study is that the PR system functioned efficiently in the Kottegala when compared to Dodda Hejjur.

The field study revealed that political participation of women panchayat members in Dodda Hejjuru was more intensive in voting, attending meetings, where as it is more vibrant extending to participation in decision making, formulation of plans and monitoring in NGO aided Kottegala village.

III. CONCLUSION

The rural tribal societies have been provided a place in the PRIs under the Act. The most valuable area of contribution of NGOs to engendering the PRIs has been in the organizing of women like, the NGO works with health, SHGs, housing, water and sanitation, education and watershed etc., it has also been reported that women in PRIs who have been supported and nurtured by NGOs and those who have been involved in larger people's movements have gained a more confidently.

Today when the seats are reserved for tribal women, men of such families still dominate the panchayat through them. It is shown the study that the important positions in the traditional panchayats were always held by males that were passed on more or less in a hereditary manner. Tribal women must also be seen as women and not just 'tribal'.

Tribal women must be looked as a part of the tribal community, which has suffered at the hands of the non tribals and marginalized in the process of development. It was noticed at many places (Dooda Hejjuru Grama Panchayat) that the non tribals dominated the panchayats. Tribal women suffered as much, in fact more by virtue of their belonging to the tribal community. The scheduled tribes are given special provisions constitutionally and how with extension of panchayat raj in the scheduled areas, they have been given power of self governance.

The study has revealed that women leaders in Kottigala have exhibited their determination to occupy the public place; though there are hurdles in the process of empowering women. In order, to overcome the hurdles in Dooda Hejjuru and to make the 'empowerment process', sustainable the Elected Women Representatives need proper orientation, information, counseling and sensitization continuously through NGOs, where the women members and thereby draw support from their presence.

It is necessary that women come out of this domination and subordination for which they need to be educated and trained. These two are not sufficient conditions in themselves, their scarcity of women from taking important decisions. Besides lack of awareness, education and training, the respondents also expressed their opinions regarding other problems. Lack of financial resources was considered as the most important one. The seeds of empowerment have been sown and now it is the responsibility of the NGO, political leadership and the bureaucratic structure to educate it to flower bud.

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