

**Problems of Tribal Women in Karnataka: A Case of Malekudiya Women in Udupi District**

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The constitution of India identifies the indigenous people as “tribes”. According to the 2001 Census, India has a tribal population of 8.2% of its total population. Tribes as a social formation may be identified in two- ways: firstly as a stage in the history of evolution of human civilization; secondly, as a society organized on the basis of kinship ties which enables them to be a multifunctional grouping. In India, tribals are defined in reference to the cultural practices of certain groups in relation to the mainstream Hindu cultural practices. Each Tribe has a unique history, language and culture. Though our knowledge is vague about the origin and subsequent history of numerous aboriginal tribes of India in the absence of sufficient Archaeological and Paleontological data, yet a story of their glory and decline may be arranged as far as the History period is concerned.

Tribal women occupy an important place in the socio-economic and political structure of their society. They exercise free and firm hand in all aspects related to their social and economic life. But it is still important to emphasize that the tribal woman is in herself exactly the same as any other woman with the same passion, love and fears, the same devotion to the home, to husband and to children, the same faults and the same virtues.

**Malekudiya Women:**

Malekudiya women are new to the modern life style and environment and find it difficult to make adjustment with the changed situation and environment. They are facing a number of problems in the state in general and in Udupi District in particular. Moreover, they are exploited both financially and sexually by the non-tribals in the forest area. With a view to examine the socio-economic conditions of these tribal women and girls in the District and to study the problems faced by them it was proposed to conduct a research study.

This article is based on the data collected in Kabbinala village of Udupi District. The methodology adopted for the present study includes both primary and secondary sources of data. Kabbinala, a village at the foot hills of the Western Ghats (Sahyadri) Agumbe range, is situated in Karkala taluk of the Udupi district of Karnataka state, India. This small village is around 50 km from Udupi Town, and the nearest town is Hebri, which is around 20 km from Kabbinala. The area is covered by thick rain forests, evergreen, and populated by wild animals. There is only one way to enter the village, as further you go it's a dead-end, the road enters the forests and the ghats. The last settlement, called Kuchur, is around 1500 feet above sea level. Korth Baill is the highest and last point of village Kabbinala.

Traces of Stone Age culture dating back at least to 6000 years are visible around the village. The old hammer stone and Hand axe were observed by the respondents in their residential area. One of the respondents expressed his personal experience as follows: 'I am completely over-excited. I was digging a virgin patch of clay other day and found these. I am almost completely convinced that they are of Stone Age because. a) They are really sharp; b) the other bits of stone around them were also really sharp quite unlike any other garden flints I've seen. c) Here is known to have been a Stone Age settlement here and artifacts have been found before'.

The houses are scattered and found roughly 2000 feet above the sea level and some of the settlements are virtually inside forest and national park. Kabbinale had a lot of Jain settlers in the initial times, that are a few hundred years back, but the latest settlers are Sthanika Brahmins, families who migrated from a place called Sulkod or Suligod, a place close to Kollur, a few years ago. One can find small number of Shivalli Brahmins, Bunts and Billavas in this area. There are some hard working families called Goudlus, who are predominantly agricultural labourers. Goudlu's are scheduled tribe people, known as 'Malekudiyas' in Karnataka. The settlement of 'Goudlus' can be found in the 'Kabbinale' in many places. They are highly skilled in honey plucking and other wild life related works. 50 percent of their income is from agricultural work and the rest from wildlife. Next to Sthanika Brahmins, these tribal people are the second highest population in the area. Edgar and Thurston in "Caste and Tribes of South India" (1909) describe 'Malekudiyas are found at Neriya, Dharmasthala and Shishila in South Canara District. Those who live at the two formal places are agrestic slaves of landlords, who own Cardamom plantation in the Ghats'. K. Anantha Krishna Iyer in his book "Mysore Tribes and Castes" (1931) explains that 'Maleru and Jangal Tribe confined to wild regions of Western Malnad. They live in isolated huts, which are however provided with the usual entrance through which one has to (crown) peep in but also with half concealed hole in the rear, a kind of postern'. In the book 'Karnataka State Gazetteer South Canara District' (1973) we can find some information about Malekudiyas of Dakshina Kannada.

The life in Kabbinale is not so easy, it rains for almost 5 to 6 months, it receives heavy downpour as it is in the foothills of Agumbe Ghat. There are wild animals in this hilly region, and the village is infested with leeches, poisonous snakes and other small-time animals. The National Park adjoining the settlement contains Tigers, Wild boar, King Cobra and other animals. Some of the families have a licensed gun for self protection. Kabbinale village is considered an ideal place for breeding, reproduction and habitation for the King Cobra.

The sample of 50 households is chosen for the study. Samples are chosen from Kuchur, Mundani, and Alangad darkas, Sampige, Devaragundi and Konkanarabettu. The data regarding the duration of their settlement in the area reveals that 8.16% of people are staying since 50 years they said, 6.12% of people are dwelling around 51 to 100 years, 20.40% of people are the dwellers of the area between 101 and 150 years. Since they are less exposed to outer world they are unaware of development. Poverty may also be the reason which has made them to stay in the forest. Moreover they are psychologically not ready to accept the new conditions. It is also observed that the tribals cannot adjust to the new environment. They feel insecure with regard to employment if they go outside.

### **Economic conditions of Malekudiya Women:**

The purpose of collection of data is to assess the role of one tribal woman of each of the surveyed families in terms of its average income and mode of spending for the family consumption. Though the information may be notional as it is quite difficult to assess the expenditure category supplementing the women wages, but it is an effort to analyze the role of the tribal woman in helping the family for survival and running the family. Data regarding the nature of their houses shows that 60 percent of their houses are kaccha houses: that are built by Bamboos and a few among them are plastered by mud and constructed in a traditional way. The remaining are Semi Pakka houses, they have tiled roof and bricked walls. Dr. Shridhar Gowda (1996) in his thesis 'Social Change among Malekudias of Dakshina Kannada' mentions that most of the houses of Malekudiyas are tiled houses allotted by Government under various schemes in Dakshina Kannada.

Malekudiyas are living in kaccha houses do not have the legal ownership of property and are utilizing Government land. Similarly, they do not own agricultural property. Majority of the households lie below the poverty line and only one household has the APL card. 70 percent of the women work as laborers either in cashew industries or as agricultural labourers in the houses of upper caste people, and consequently their income is also meager. Many of the women were earlier dependent on beedi rolling for a livelihood, while the men were involved in collecting forest produce, weaving cane basket or other labour in nearby areas. The low level of education may also be the reason why they cannot opt for white collar jobs.

As per the data 83.67% of households have electricity facility to their homes and 16.33% of households do not have electricity. 46.94% of households have Radio and 53.06% of people do not have that facility. Only 16.33% of households have fan and other electric appliances at home where as 83.67% of households do not have. 20.41% of households have Bicycles and 2.04% of people own two wheelers.

The data also shows that majority of households have electricity connection at home mainly because the Govt considers it as a measure for anti- naxal action. The data also shows; very less percentage of people has other household appliances like radio, TV, mixer or grinder though they have electricity connection. It can be seen that very less number of people own bicycle and two wheelers, basically because of their economic condition and even they do not have path to run those vehicles.

Dr. Mohammed Peer, in his study 'Social, Economic and educational Conditions of Koragas' (1994) opines that "On account of the clearing of thick forest by the forest contractor, the dependency of the Malekudiyas (both men and women) on the forest products for their livelihood has weakened. This has given rise to new era in their life" On the other hand Lack of Education have blocked their way for better jobs. More over they do not teach ancestral occupation to their children as there is no financial benefit. However it is observed that many of the women depend on agriculture as secondary occupation

According to the information 6.12% of the households have income up to Rs. 40,000 per annum, 8.32% of households have the income of Rs. 21,000-30,000 per year where as 8.00% of households have income of Rs. 10,000-20,000 per year, and majority, i.e. 77.56% of people have income below Rs. 10,000. The data reveals that they are poor. The low rate of coolie made them to earn meager income. It is observed that, the Self Help Group is only institution which has reached them and is successfully implemented Micro financing.

It is also observed that 4.08% of households borrowed loans from Banks, 83.67% households have borrowed loans from Self Help Groups, and 4.08% of households are indebted to both from Banks and Self Help groups. The data shows that 91.83% of households have borrowed loans mainly, for the constructions of their houses and marriage of their daughters. This indicates that low level of income and easy way of getting loan from different Organisations made them to go for loans. The tribal women need to have control over limited resources like land, productive asset ownership, livestock and other resources, so that, they can take decisions and implement them in any way that is required. The ownership and control over productive assets will create a sense of belonging and owning.

### **Education of Malekudiya Women:**

Education is the main instrument of change in the social sphere as well. Here, change is visualized and hoped for in a tradition-modernity paradigm with a stress on structural and cultural changes. One must point out here that all in all, education has helped to achieve embourgeoisement of certain segments of the population even though to a limited degree.

In open societies, education has been perceived as a means of achieving social mobility. It has been a path to upward social mobility. Thus, its values have been derived not from its intrinsic worth but from its function as a stepping stone to success and higher social status. In spite of the efforts by the Government and NGO's for the educational development of the tribal girls, the formal education has made very little impact on them. Earlier Government had no direct programmes for their education but in the subsequent years the reservation policy has made some changes. There are many reasons for low level of education among the tribal people. Firstly, there are no schools in the near vicinity. Secondly, they expect their children to earn for their family income. Formal education is not considered necessary for girls to discharge their social obligations. Superstitions and myths play an important role in rejecting education. Most of them live in abject poverty. It is not easy for them to send their children to schools, as they are considered extra helping hands. The formal schools do not hold any special interest for their children.

The data shows that there is no evidences of child marriage in Kabbinala, Majority of them prefer to marry between the ages of 21 to 25 years. Marriage takes place within the clan. But at present, few evidences were found related to inter-caste and inter religious marriages. It is clear from the data available from the field that there is no system dowry among the selected community. As per the data less than 50 per cent of women take part in political aspects, and participate in panchayat meetings. Since they are ignorant of political issues they do not actively participate in voting process and panchayat meetings. Even though there is reservation of seats in local bodies no representation from Malekudiya community is found. It is clear from the data that only 18.37% of households are aware of the reservations for women and ST's in different fields of their life.

### **Government Facilities and the Tribal Women:**

Directorate of Women and Child Development department has introduced the **Stree Shakthi Scheme** to make the rural women self-dependent through organizing the women into one lakh self help groups. This project has been initiated exclusively for the women. But Malekudiya women do not join this SHG s for their own reasons.

Another scheme from the same department is **Comfort (Shantwana) Scheme**. Under this scheme if a woman, is subjected to rape and atrocities, the government provides the economic and legal assistance. Aggrieved women can use free telephone no 1091 from 8:00 AM to evening 8: 00 PM and can receive the calls. In spite of the harassments to Malekudiya women not even single case is reported under this scheme. In case any woman is subjected to dies then the Govt. could deposit Rs 10,000 in the name of the children of the deceased women in the nationalized Bank for their educational purpose.

No single beneficiary is found in the study area under the following schemes of Karnataka government meant for tribal women. i) Training Programmes to Women, ii) Economic assistance to the girls to run the hostels in rural areas, iii) Training Programme for Women Law Graduates, Karnataka Women Development Planning, iv) Women Reservation in Employment, v) Special Unit for Eradication of Social Evils, vi) Kittur Rani

Chennamma Award, vii) Assistance to the Widow and Devadasis Marriage, viii) Compensation for the death of Anganawadi worker and Anganawadi assistant.

**Other Government Programs for Scheduled Tribes:**

**Social welfare department programmes for SCs & STs:** In Karnataka, the department of social welfare and the Scheduled Tribes welfare department are implementing various programmes for the development of the conditions of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The several amelioration programmes are being implemented for the educational, social and economic advancement of Scheduled Castes and scheduled tribes. They are as follows:

- a) Educational development programme
- b) Economic development programme
- c) Social development programme
- d) Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes sub plan programmes

**Educational development programme:** For the purpose of innovating the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students, the above department has undertaken the following programmes.

**Cash prize:** For the purpose of developing the competitive skill and mind as well as to inspire the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students to obtain maximum marks in their examinations compared to the other students, both the departments are attempt in the following examination. But the cash prize is received most often by the other students of ST community but not by the Malekudiya girls. Somehow the study tour allowance is reimbursed by the Malekudiya women along with the other ST students.

In addition to the above prizes, the social and tribal welfare departments provide a cash prize of Rs.5000 to those scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students who obtain rank in the above mentioned examinations.

**Pre-metric and Post-metric Hostels:** Among the various developmental programmes, educational development programme plays an important role. For the educational development of rural scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students as well as those students who are not able to study in the urban areas outside their homes, both the departments providing the hostel facilities. Only 02 to 03 percent of Malekudiya women occupy the Post-metric hostels.

**Health condition of Malekudiya Women:**

Health is a prerequisite for human development and is an essential component for the well being of the mankind. The health problems of any community are influenced by interplay of various factors including social, economic and political ones Malekudiya women give least importance to their health. Majority of them do not have an access to Primary health centers. Topographical feature is one of the main reasons. On the other hand the newly constructed Primary Health Centre is not yet opened even though it is ready to use due to local political reasons. Due to the efforts made by panchayats and other NGO's majority of households have toilets at their houses. In spite of the facility some of them do not use the toilets properly. It is also seen in the field that majority of the Malekudiya women along with men have the habit of Liquor consumption. Meanwhile they have the common habit of chewing Betel leaves.



The Tribal specific standards and measures were developed after a thorough process of study, vetting and testing. NIHB and the Tribal Public Health Accreditation Advisory Board helped to develop these standards and measures. These can be used to advance the practice of public health, should reinforce the role of public health in tribal communities, demonstrate accountability and should apply to all sizes of health departments and all forms of governments including tribal governments.

The primitive tribes of Karnataka and their health scenario presents a kaleidoscopic mosaic of various communicable and non-communicable disease profile keeping in pace with their socio-economic development. Among these there are communities who still depend primarily on hunting and food gathering as primary source of livelihood. The wide spread poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, absence of safe drinking water and sanitary conditions, poor maternal and child health services, ineffective coverage of national health and nutritional services, etc. have been found, as possible contributing factors of dismal health condition prevailing amongst the Malekudiyas of the country. Many of the infectious and parasitic diseases can be prevented with timely intervention, health awareness and IEC activities. The noncommunicable diseases like diabetes and hypertension are conspicuously absent indicating that the primitive tribal communities are still far away from the modern civilization and developments. In spite of the tremendous advancement in the field of preventive and curative medicine, the health care delivery services in these primitive tribal people are still poor and need to be strengthened in order to achieve the goal of Health for all in the state.

The awareness of Malekudiyas on different government facilities is also studied. The data shows that 67.76% of people know about the schemes and plans of the Government for them, 32.24% of people do not know about Government Facilities. Among the total respondents 61.43% utilized one or the other facility. People who have the knowledge of facilities, have utilized the developmental schemes like housing, sanitation, MREGA, (Mahathma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act)

A large majority of tribal women did not utilize the government schemes like Anganwadi food facility scheme, old age pension, Widow Pension etc. It is also observed that more than 50 percent of them in spite of the awareness are not utilizing the Women and Child Welfare facilities by the state government like Madilu, Tayee Bhagya, and Janani suraksha. Bhagya Laxmi etc.

### **Developmental Problems in the Empowerment of Malekudiya Women**

The researcher has listed here some of the major obstacles for empowerment of tribal women. They are:

1. Lack of basic education and skills as well as training, particularly for self employment.
2. Malnutrition and infant mortality rate is high among the scheduled tribes.
3. High rate of unemployment and under employment.
4. Lack of resource control, productive resource ownership and decision making.
5. Lack of financial support to self employment. Because, SHGs are not progressing very well, so it is an obstacle for savings and to the supply of micro finance.
6. Implementation of Wild Life Protection Act of 1972 and not properly implementation of Forest Right Act of 2006 and 2008 is hindering the collection of MFP, which is partially hindering the economic empowerment of tribal women.

7. Tribal women laborers are not getting any social security benefits because they are working in unorganized and informal sector.

8. Organization capacity and leadership quality is absent.

9. The food grains production on family farm and cash income derived from wage

Employment by the tribal women is used to feed the family members. Thus in general the women in tribal households provide a food security to the tribal families. A large portion of the male earnings is spent on buying alcohol and toddy. Thus there is no enabling socio-economic environment for tribal women to achieve economic empowerment in Udupi district of Karnataka state.

### **Conclusion:**

On the basis of the above analysis and findings it may be concluded that the tribal women are not empowered economically and socially as well. The socio-economic empowerment of tribal women could be kept as a long term development goal in India. Economic independence and education of tribal women will go a long way in attaining self-reliance for women. So development/empowerment awareness, education, competitiveness, willingness, confidence, self-motivation, mind set, encouragement from family and society is essential for the economic empowerment of tribal women. Karnataka Government had launched a series of welfare schemes for the benefit of tribal communities and women; But the Malekudiya women still remain backward owing to poverty, backwardness and lack of educational and medical facilities. Some of them are at the receiving end of exploitation and discrimination. Their survival and exclusive cultural identities are at stake. The worst casualties are their unique ethnic culture, art, heritage and herbal medicine practiced by several of them. There is a need to extend educational opportunities to tribal women and girls living in rural areas. Moreover, to bring them into the mainstream of economic development suitable strategies must be adopted. The vocational as well as skill training courses should be provided to improve the socio-economic status of tribal community particularly women who are alienated and deprived of these facilities and opportunities.

### **Suggestions:**

From the conclusions drawn the researcher feels that measured by any standards the tribal women and girls are backward in all respects. Here are some suggestions emerging out of the study, which if implemented, will reduce their misery and help in improving their socio-economic conditions.

1. The State should emphasise the importance of skills formation and development programmes for the benefit of tribal women.

2. Government and NGOs should prepare the special plans and programmes for the economic empowerment of tribes in general and tribal women in particular.

3. The local government officials and NGOs should be involved for organizing the SHGs among tribal women and to encourage to take-up self employment activities outside the tribal habitats and settlements.

4. Agriculture and allied sector development should be promoted to create the household job opportunity for tribal women.

5. Self awareness and interest is essential for the empowerment of the tribal women.

6. Manual wage work should be provided with an appropriate wage to tribal women under the government employment generation schemes like MGNREGA, wherever it is possible without any cheating and discrimination.
7. Health care services and health insurance is necessary to improve the health status and supply of food grains through the LAMPS or PDS for tribal women.
8. Forest Right Act of 2006 and 2008 should be properly implemented without delay for the increase and improvement of the MFP based business and its processing activities.
9. Institutional financial assistance including micro finance is an urgent need for increasing the access of tribal women to open up new avenues of economic empowerment.

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