

Depopulation of Koraga Tribes in South India

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Abstract: *The tribals of India constitute about 8.2% of the total population. Even though, tribals are not perceived as untouchable 'lower caste Hindu' population by the mainstream upper-caste Hindus, they are marginalized and considered as backward and primitive 'jati' or caste with a pariah status (Mitra, 2008). This perception however, did not help the tribals. Whereas, lower caste Hindus enjoyed minimal opportunities to integrate with mainstream society and to share few common custom and traditions, the tribals have been excluded and isolated from the mainstream society (Mitra, 2008). The Koragas are one of the primitive tribes perhaps the poorest among the scheduled tribes in Karnataka and Kerala faced serious problems such as poverty, ill health, malnutrition, morbidity leading to mortality together with deforestation, exploitation result in depopulation of the particular primitive tribe.*

Keywords –Ajal, Bhuta worship, Demons- holy, Koragas, Primitive Tribes,

I. Introduction

The tribals of India constitute about 8.2% of the total population. Majority of Indian population are non-tribals and mainly are followers of Hindu (82.41%) religion Census of India, 2001). Even though, tribals are not perceived as untouchable 'lower caste Hindu' population by the mainstream upper-caste Hindus, they are marginalized and considered as backward and primitive 'jati' or caste with a pariah status (Mitra, 2008). This perception however, did not help the tribals. Whereas, lower caste Hindus enjoyed minimal opportunities to integrate with mainstream society and to share few common custom and traditions, the tribals have been excluded and isolated from the mainstream society (Mitra, 2008). Regardless of the tribals' perspectives toward caste systems, they are the victims of an imposed oppressive caste-based social structure (Snaitang, 2004). A particular group of tribals who are food-gatherers (without any habit of agricultural practice), with diminishing population and very low or little literacy rates can be called as Primitive Tribes. Cholanaiikans, Kurumbas, Kattunaikans, Kadars and Koragas are the five primitive tribal groups in Kerala. They constitute nearly 5 % of the total tribal population in the State. At this juncture this article focused on depopulation of Koraga tribes in south India one of the primitive tribal group. The Koragas are perhaps the poorest among the scheduled tribes in Karnataka and Kerala. Koraga is an aboriginal tribe at Dakshina Kannada and Udupi Districts in Karnataka. In the Kerala State Koragas are seen at Kasargod District. Manieswara, Mangalapalli of the district.

II. Origin of koragas

Regarding the origin of the Koragas there are, a few legends. One such legend describes them as the issue of Brahmin woman by a sudra on account of the difference in the social status of their parents. The children were treated with contempt.

Another legend connects the origin of the Koragas to Chiot Hubushika [Haba-hika] who invaded Tulu Nadu and drove out Mayura-varma the founder of the Kadamba Dynasty and Empire. The army of Habashika is also claimed to have defeated the Anagaravarma son of Viravarma of Manjeshwara. Later, Habashika and his followers were defeated and driven out by Lokaditya Raya, son of Mauryavarma of Gokarna and Brahmins were brought into zone to replace the Koragas.

A third legend states that Habashika [King of the Chandalas] consented to marry Kanayathi the daughter of Lokaditya - a Kadamba Prince and a girl of the Varma family. The legend states obscurely that at the marriage ceremony Habashika and his party were killed by Lokaditya soldiers and his followers driven out to the forest. The Koragas are reported to have surrendered on the assurance that they would be looked after and maintained by them but were neglected

III. Features of Koragas

3.1 Etymology of the label koraga

'Kora' the first part of their name refers to the sun and the name may have originated from their conventional worship of the sun. There is a possibility that their name is a corruption of Koruvar which in Tulu means the people of the hills.

3.2 Socio-Cultural life

Koragas have their highly distinct and unique folk culture and language. Their language is Koraga and undoubtedly grouped as Dravidian. The Koraga language has no script, but today a few literates have mostly borrowed its linguistic resources from Kannada. Thus, the Koragas are bilinguals and multilinguals too.

The multilingual Koragas are living in Kundapura and Karkalataluks speak Koraga, Kannada and Tulu, whereas the other Koragas living in Udupi and Mangalore taluks speak Koraga and Tulu. The ethnic and anthropometrical features reveal that the Koragas are aboriginal Dravidian tribe. The Koragas belong to matriarchal family system and they were worshipping major Hindu deities along with their specific type of bhuta worship. They perform simple ceremonies during death, puberty and marriage. Their God is called *KoragaThaniya*, which is the god of Koragas. In every Koraga colony we can find small stones, a few plants or trees representing different cults.

3.3 Family type

The Koraga family reveals that like any were else, joint family system is disappearing among the Koragas. Traditional joint families of the Koragas were not as large as in the main stream of Indian society. Nearly two-third of the sample respondents live in nuclear families and only about a third live in joint families

3.4 Ajal

The Koragas are expected to perform “ajal” duties. In other words, a particular area is assigned to a group of families and they are expected to play a key role in certain occasions like village festivals, death ceremonies social and religious functions. The Koraga men beat drums and play flute during deaths and other socio-religious functions. They also announce the dates of festivals, village functions etc. for performing these duties. They enjoy certain special privileges like collecting leftover food and old clothes. In addition, the Koragas are allowed to collect leftover food from the plantain leaves. The leftover food, clothes and some other used household articles are usually collected by women. But keeping this in mind they were asked to state the things that they collect from ajal area. At present the habit of ajal and collection of leftover food has been undergoing transition. The younger generations are having greater disagreement with their elders for such habits

3.5 Name of sub group

Several studies report the existence of many sub-groups among the Koragas. However, we could observe only 6 groups. They are *OntiKoragas*, *SoppuKoragas*, *MuduKoraga*, *TappuKoraga*, *Dadi/kadaKoraga*, *Vastra/KuntuKoraga* and *KappadaKoraga*

3.6 The Koraga language

Koraga is a tribal language spoken mainly in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi Districts of Karnataka State and Kasaragod District of Kerala State. Koraga language is divided into a number of distinct dialects, which are separated from one another by both geographical and social factors. Most of the Koragas are bilinguals, the other language being Tulu or Kannada.

3.7 Marriage

The marriage systems in Koraga are simple but convincingly matching with the common core of the Hindu marriage methods. Here, lexical items related to the marriage ceremony have been taken. Matrimonial allied will be made as according to the cross-matrimonial relations allowed in their community. Usual marriage system is simple and arranged marriages are common but no such rule within the community

3.8 Gods

Even though the Koraga community is a primitive tribe, which is associated with the spirit worship we find that the ethnic group hold distinction between holy spirits and evil spirits. And their association with the trends other than bhuta worship is quite evident to the fact that those people were associated with the major trends in the Hindu society from the very beginning.

3.9 Demons – holy

Here we find several names of spirits found exclusively in the Koraga community which are worshiped and the names of the permanently built places for worship, like temples which do not have cognates in Kannada, Tamil, and Tulu.

Koragas are, a very quiet and inoffensive race, small and slight, the men seldom exceeding five feet six inches, black skinned, thick lipped, noses broad and flat, high-check bones and sloping foreheads, and with

bushy rough hairs and very distinct eyes and lips .But these tribes in SouthIndia seems to be depopulated and these tribes are in extinction.

IV. Objective of the study

4.1 To identify reasons for the depopulation of koraga tribes in south india

In the last 10 years, the Koraga population has actually declined by 3%, according to 2001 census figures

POPULATION OF KORAGA TRIBES IN KARNATAKA

Districts	Number of Tribal settlement	Males	Females	Total Population
Dakshinakannada	1135	2067	2070	4137
Udupi	3055	5843	5723	11566

Census 2001

As mentioned in the above table only 3 females are more than their males in Dakshinakannada district and 120 males are more than their females in Udupidistrict .The Koragas are the most backward among the tribes of Karnataka State in every respect. According to the 2001 Census, the total population of the Koragatribe in Karnataka district is 11,566. Decline in koragapopulation is not only due to pressure of family planning exerted by the state agencies, but also due to nutritional deficiencies and health problems which are taking a very high toll of the community. In fact, very few of their men survive beyond the age of 40 years.

It is to be noted that Dakshina Kannada district has, in terms of the Human Development index, very high literacy and health indicators, matching those of Europe. However, nobody is paying attention to the state of koraga.community.But koragas in Dakshinakannada have resolved to free them selves of their degrading occupation once and for all. But due to rehabilitation packages some of their younger generation have acquired education, and some of their young men have studied at the undergraduate and even post-graduate levels. Some areworking as teachers and lecturers.

In Kerala Koragas are living inKasargodetalukonly.These people arebackward ,financially,Educationally as well as Culturally

POPULATION OF KORAGA TRIBES IN KERALA

District	Number of Tribal house holds	Males	Females	Total population
Kasargode	445	802	842	1644

KILA SURVEY REPORT 2011

Koraga community belongs to one of the third largest community in Kasargodedistrict.As mentioned in the above table it is only 445 tribal households belonging to these community consists of 802 males and 845 females .Thus total population of the community is only 1644.It is to be noted that females in the Koragas are more than their male community. And Koragapopulation is 3.44 per cent of the total tribal population in the district.They aresettled in 18 tribal colonies in the district.

Educational status of these tribal population comprise of 78.35% and their main occupation is traditional craft making 82.62 per cent belonging to this category,27.08 per cent belonging to agricultural labourers,16.62 per cent worked in other than agricultural jobs .And only 3 people are employed in Government and Semi-Government departments.

Population belonging to koraga community is 1152 (census2001).But latest survey conducted by Kila shows that their population is 1644.Only 492 people are increased during that period. Although their population is increased, it is very much lesser than other tribal categories in the district.

In the case of health and nutritional status 73.81 per cent of Koragas in Manjeswaramblock Panchayath in the district suffered from nutritional deficiency. They are engaged in traditional items making ie 17.82 per cent of people in the district .More over most of koragas in the district are suffered from permanent illness like physical illness, bone related diseases , Asthma,Tubular culosis,Skindiseases,Visual disability etc.They are also suffered from poverty related diseases like diarrhea , and other diseases likeAnaemia,Malaria,etc. Some of them are suffered from more than one diseases also. Most Koraga women and children also suffer from malnutrition and chronic diseases such as anaemia and tuberculosis.

Now The total population of the Koraga community in karnataka, Udupi and Kasargod (Kerala) districts is 22000; Of these 1644 are in kasargode districts.(census 2011).

V. Reasons For The Depopulation Of Koraga Tribes

5.1 Health and Hygiene

Good health is crucial for socio-economic development of the people. Health is defined as “complete physical and mental fitness of an individual. But health is one of the serious problems among the Koragas. Many of them die due to malnutrition, ignorance and superstitious beliefs. Accessibility to proper health facilities is very rare. Though there are primary health centers, its services are very limited and not easily reachable. Advanced checkups and treatments are not available and affordable to the majority of them. Health education and proper sanitary amenities are far from them.

5.2 Poverty and Illiteracy

Poverty and Ignorance continue to keep them poor and less dignified. Education can bring changes and development gradually for the next generation. There are primary schools in several tribal settlements, mostly far away for most of the villages. Moreover, quality education which is available to the majority is not available to them due to their poverty. Most of the tribal people live for a day and do not plan much for future because they do not have sufficient income to plan for their future if there is any unexpected incidence like accidents, spread of diseases etc occurred in their life that may lead to their mortality also.

Koragas in south india, are seems to be malnourished due to abject poverty and battered by dreaded diseases, Primitive Koraga tribe in Kerala faced serious threat to their survival despite launching various welfare schemes by the government. Now confirmed in 55 hamlets in Kasargod and Majeswaram blocks bordering Karnataka, their number dwindled to a mere 1,579 as against 1651 according to the 1991 Census, (V N Raghunathan, 2007).

According to V N Raghunathan a senior tribal welfare officer working among the primitive group said that medical records had indicated tuberculosis was the main cause of the casualties, although government-sponsored mobile teams, comprised of doctors and para medics, roamed frequently in the settlements to provide the needy with medical support. Cancer and leprosy also claimed many lives leading to the shrinking of the community, he said. Stating that they were living in severe poverty in the absence of any employment, he said their meagre income derived from marketing baskets made of cane collected from Karnataka. Some of the youth were engaged in laterite stone cutting, masonry work and in beedi-rolling to supplement the family income, the officer said. There is widespread alcoholism among Koraga men and they also indulge in beedi and betel for which they had to spend a major portion from the paltry income leaving very little for other day-to-day expenses. They subsist mainly on rice and meats such as pork and beef, although they are increasingly also using produce such as pulses and vegetables. Their meat is often sourced from animals that have died naturally rather than by slaughter.

5.3 Ownership of land

Most of them were originally food gatherers and all of them made a living from the forest. These tribes are placed in colonies where they are forced to live. They are normally do not destroy forest or its resources. Their traditional rural habitat and livelihood is under threat due to deforestation as a result of large-scale industrial projects. The area, especially Mangalore, is prone to communal riots. This adversely affect their survival.

Some Koraga families have got agricultural plots as a result of the land movement launched by Samagra Grameen Ashram, But, the land is often of inferior quality and situated far away from their home, forcing many to leave the area. Also men are resentful as the land is often in the name of women. Koraga society originally had a matrilineal system, which is now giving way to patriarchy followed by communities around them. This has made women subordinate and vulnerable to exploitation and violence. Children, especially girl children, have been affected.

5.4 Occupation

Though the Koragas are tribal's, they are regarded as ceremonially impure and unclean in the local Hindu Society and were considered untouchables by the main stream of social group. Forbidden from appearing in public places, they are restricted to demeaning occupations such as scavenging, collecting carcasses and clothes from dead bodies, and begging at festivals. Their principal occupation was basket making and food gathering. At present, they are engaged with many other occupations. Most of them are labourers. But their meagre income is not sufficient

to meet the unexpected events in their life leading to reduction in population

5.5 Food pattern – Traditional

They are non-vegetarians and once those were the ones who use to eat even carcass for their diet. However, now-a-days the practice is outdated among many Koragas. Due to Lack of nutritious food most of them are malnourished this adversely affect both present and their future generation.

VI. Conclusion

It is evident from the foregoing analysis that the Koragas are leading a hard life and they have not been removed from the clutches of superstitious beliefs and practices. Situations of koragas in South indian states both in DakshinnaKannada,Udupi,in Karnatakastates and Kasargode in Kerala are always similar. Their Poverty coupled with illiteracy and ignorance are exploited by outsiders in their income generating activities. A good portion of the land in their areas has been legally transferred to non-tribals. They are emotionally attached to the forests for they believe that their gods, spirits live in forests. Due to their ignorance Koragas are not able to appreciate modern concept of health and sanitation. They do not take much care pertaining to their own health. They believe that diseases are caused by hostile spirits and ghosts. They have their own traditional means of diagnosis and cure. Good number of them fall a prey to the diseases such as skin disease, forest fever, typhoid, T.B., leprosy, malaria, venerable diseases, small pox, etc.

Accessibility of proper health care facilities, advanced checkups and treatments are not affordable by majority of them together with pressure of family planning exerted by the state agencies leading to depopulation of their community. No wonder, the population of the Koragas is declining fast and they are entirely destroyed from our nature itself.

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