

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF GUTTI KOYAS: A CASE STUDY OF GUTTI KOYAS OF WEST GODAVARI DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

Scheduled Tribes are the most vulnerable, under-privileged, marginalized and socially excluded communities in India. Their exclusion from socio-economic and political aspects is furthermore severe than other marginalized social groups like Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Many Scheduled Tribal communities have forest dependent livelihoods like collecting forest produce and hunting. The areas where Scheduled Tribes are living are rich in mineral resources which attracts the development projects such as mining, national highways, nationalization of reserved forests and construction of large-scale dams. This forced them to migrate to plain areas subjecting them to vulnerability, exploitation and social exclusion. This paper deals with the social exclusion of Gutti Koya tribal community, migrated from Chhattisgarh and settled in West Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh. The paper discusses various problems and prospects of Gutti Koya tribal community by understanding their situation through anthropological approach. In this context, it is necessary to begin with the brief introduction of Gutti Koya community to provide a general idea as a background to this paper.

Keywords: Livelihoods, Social Exclusion, Scheduled Tribe, Gutti Koya and Andhra Pradesh

INTRODUCTION

This article is developed as a result of fieldwork for my M.Phil. research, which examines the challenges and opportunities faced by migrant tribal people living in deep forest areas of Andhra Pradesh's West Godavari district.

Indigenous Knowledge systems are evolved through the experiences and experiments of indigenous people with the natural environments in search of their survival as an individual, the community and the society over generations. These knowledge systems have been developed not only to ensure a continuous supply of livelihood requirements, but also to reinforce the continuation of a relationship between an individual, the community and the nature. Indigenous people looked upon themselves as an integral part of nature. The ecosystem from the indigenous people's point of view is the relationship they have as an individual and community with the natural resources around them. This includes the use of natural resources for livelihood and various values, beliefs, practices and cultural norms which regulate the use of these. In indigenous societies traditional practices and behaviors are linked with the livelihoods and natural resources management, these relationships are vice versa and which strengthens the bonding between human and nature.

Gutti Koyas

Gutti Koya a migrant tribal communityⁱ of Chhattisgarh state settled in deep forest areas of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states. Gutti Koya community are still depending on the hunting, gathering and some of them are getting permanently settled in host states and doing settled agriculture. This paper tries to study the problems of Gutti Koya tribal people, like recognition and exclusion, and socio-economic conditions, and development programs for the welfare of Gutti Koya people, West Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh. This paper consists three sections. Section-I deals with the tribal situation in India and Andhra Pradesh. Section-II deals with the background history of Gutti Koyas and their migration to the Andhra Pradesh. Section-III explains the present situation of Gutti Koyas in host state and their problems and prospects.

Methodology

The present study was conducted among the Gutti Koyas of West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh. Primary data were collected through the interview scheduled and participatory method. Secondary data was collected from Census reports, research articles, Government reports, from NGOs and newspapers.

Tribal Situation

India is the home for the 705 ethnic communities and are notified as scheduled tribesⁱⁱ. Indigenous people in India are popularly known as Adivasis/ Girijans implying aboriginals/original/native inhabitants. The Government of India (GoI) refers to them as the Scheduled Tribes (STs) as per the Constitution. The STs population of the country, according to 2011 census was 10,42, 81,034 and constitutes 8.6% to the total Indian populationⁱⁱⁱ. Most of the STs communities are living in rural areas particularly in forests and mountainous regions, within the close proximity of nature for centuries. The economy of the STs is primarily hunting-foraging and shifting cultivation. Traditionally, forests have been providing most of their foods, medicinal produces, fire wood, fodder and other Natural Resources (NRs). More than 90% of the STs to a large extent depend on forest resources for their livelihood, even today. The STs generally conserve and protect the nature in the surroundings of their habitats. They have several taboos or prohibitions or restrictions with regard to use of certain plant, tree and animal which have been deeply rooted in their culture in the form of socio-economic and religious practices. They will not use any agriculture-based produce without performing an appropriate harvesting festival. Thus, they have very exceptional practices of preservation, conservation and regeneration of their traditional crops, foods, grains, animals and forest produces.

The Scheduled Tribes population in the Andhra Pradesh is 27,39 919 (census 2011) and constitutes the 5.53 % of the total Andhra Pradesh population. There are 40 recognized Schedule Tribes among them 6 are Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

Table-1: District wise Scheduled Tribe population in Andhra Pradesh.

S. No	Name of the District	Total Andhra Pradesh Population	Total ST Population	ST Male	ST Female
1	Srikakulam	2703114	166118	81382	84736
2	Vizianagaram	2344474	235556	114687	120869
3	Visakhapatnam	4290589	618500	302905	315595
4	East Godavari	5285824	297044	144548	152496
5	West Godavari	3994410	133997	65439	68558
6	Krishna	4517398	132464	66734	65730
7	Guntur	4887813	247089	125105	121984
8	Prakasam	3397448	151145	76677	74468
9	SPSR Nellore	2963557	285997	145168	140829
10	YSR Kadapa	2882469	75886	38571	37315
11	Kurnool	4053463	82831	42052	40779
12	Anantapur	4081148	154127	78573	75554
13	Chittoor	4174064	159165	79756	79409
Total		49575771	2739919	1361597	1378322

Source: Census 2011 (Data includes ST population of Submerged villages of 7 mandals transferred from Khammam District of Telangana to the A.P. State, as per reorganization act 2014).

The Gutti Koyas of Andhra Pradesh: A Case Study

The Gutti Koyas are one of the predominant migrant tribal communities from Chhattisgarh inhabited in the Scheduled Areas / agency tracts of Andhra Pradesh and their habitations are extended to West Godavari and East Godavari Districts of Andhra Pradesh, Khammam and Warangal Districts of Telangana State. The Gutti Koyas living in East Godavari and West Godavari of Andhra Pradesh are not recognized as Scheduled Tribes.

- a) **Migration:** The United Nations (1998) defines a migrant as “any person who changes his or her country of usual residence”. Hyderabad Tiger Conservation Society (HyTiCoS)^{iv} examines the “Gutti Koyas have been migrating into Andhra Pradesh for over a decade for land for agriculture and living. They have mainly migrated into Khammam and Warangal districts” of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh
- b) **Social Structure:** Social and economic factors play an important role in the Gutti Koya society as in other traditional societies. Social structure among the Gutti Koyas is centered on the principle forms of their social institutions i.e., clan, family, marriage, economy, religion, law, political system, etc. Most of the Gutti Koyas live in homogeneous tribal villages. The Gutti Koyas are characterized by patrilineal descent, patri-local residence and patriarchal authority. Every Gutti Koya village traditionally has kula-panchayat (village council) consisting of four to five persons, headed by the village head, which is usually a hereditary position. The members of the kula-panchayat will generally comprise of the respected elderly men in the village but occasionally younger men are also involved as members. The main functions of the kula-panchayat are preparation for festivals, arrangements for carrying out economic activities with joint effort by the villagers, preparations for the needy in the village and resolution of disputes between individuals and families.
- c) **Economic Systems among Gutti Koyas:** The Economic systems of Gutti Koyas are mainly forest based. Gutti Koya tribal communities living in hamlets are economically inter-dependent and co-operative. In rainy season(kharif) agricultural operations constitute the primary occupations of the Gutti Koya tribals. After Kharif season Gutti Koyas engage in collection of forest produce like tamarind, shekakai, veduru-biyyam (bamboo rice), honey, gum, basketry, MGNREGA works and cattle herding. It clearly indicates the presence of a tradition of handicrafts amongst the tribes of Andhra Pradesh. The other main occupations of Gutti Koyas are agricultural labour, daily wage labour and employed in cutting Eucalyptus trees. For felling of Eucalyptus trees Gutti Koyas take 700/- rupees per ton, and as a daily wage labour for chilli plucking, they earn 200/- rupees per day. Most of the forest works are related to construction of bunds and tanks to prevent soil erosion these works are assigned to non-tribal contractors and in most cases, they will appoint these migrant tribal workers for less wages than local

recognized tribes. Like other tribal communities Gutti Koyas also sell their collected forest produce in Girijana Co-Operative Corporation. The Gutti Koyas expressed that the GCC is not paying them reasonable rates for good quality gum they sell. Further, they expressed that they have been cheated by the GCC sales men of domestic ration depots in weighing their minor forest produce. A few non-tribal business men of plain areas buy tamarind, shekakai, veduru-biyyam (bamboo rice), honey, gum, baskets, made of bamboo and other items at very cheaper prices from the Gutti Koyas and sell these products at various Shandis(markets). Collection of Tendu Leaves (Beedi leaves) Gutti Koyas collect the beedi leaves (tuniki akulu) individually and arrange the beedi leaves in bundles. Each bundle consists of 50 leaves. They sell these bundles to the buyers. The beedi leaf buyers pay the money in accordance with the quality and quantity of the beedi leaf in the bundles and the average rate for each bundle is thirteen rupees. The tribals are unhappy with the present price of beedi leaves and are demanding to increase minimum price.

Table 2: Distribution of Gutti Koyas in West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh

S.NO	Name of the Mandal	Number of Hamlets	No of House holds	Population
01	Kukunoor	12	331	1270
02	Velairpadu	03	78	301
	Total	15	409	1571

Source: Field work.

PROBLEMS OF GUTTI KOYAS

- 1. Isolated Habitation:** All most all hamlets of Gutti Koyas of West Godavari districts are in reserved forests and mountainous areas. There 20 hamlets in Kukunoor mandal of West Godavari district no hamlet has proper road connection as a result, for any means of contact or communication with them is a difficult task. The problem of

communication has arisen due to inaccessible habitat. Roads, post office, telegram, telephone, newspaper, radio and cinema facilities are not present in these areas. Every Gutti Koya hamlet in Kukunoor mandal situated at an average distance of 7 kilometers from Primary Health Center (PHC) which is in Kukunoor mandal headquarters. There are no schools in Gutti Koya hamlets, for education purpose they have to go to Kukunoor. As a result of isolated habitations and way of isolated living life style of Gutti Koyas in all means of socio-economic, cultural and political aspects are excluded.

2. **Problem of Cultural Contact (Geographical):** Gutti Koyas have not been able to contact main stream society as a result of their remote geographical location, and they are falling far behind in current advancement. Majority of Gutti Koyas hamlets are surrounded by the other tribal (Koya, lambada and Erukula) and non-tribal communities. Everyday Interactions of Gutti Koyas with Non-Gutti Koyas has some influence on their living style like imitating the non-Gutti Koyas in terms of dressing style, eating habits and drinking modern alcohol (from permitted wine shops). Learning and speaking of Telugu language giving chances of getting work in telugu speaking farmers cotton and mirchi fields. There are a variety of factors that contribute to the tribals' cultural interaction issues like contact with traders, forest officers, police officers anganavadi workers and NGOs made little differences in these areas.
3. **Economic Problems:** Gutti Koyas are economically more backward than other tribal communities in West Godavari, majority of them live in more worse conditions like no shelters, proper food and poor health conditions. Gutti Koyas economy is based on agriculture and forest produce. The main economic problems of Gutti Koyas is Exploitation- it is the one of the important problems of Gutti Koyas. Outsiders (Non-Gutti Koyas) take advantage of their innocence, illiteracy, poverty, helplessness and lack of awareness about non-Gutti Koyas and their nature. The Gutti Koya tribal community mainly exploited by money lenders, forest contractors, political party leaders, government officials, registered medical practitioners (RMPs) and non-tribal farmers. Majority of Gutti Koya tribal people work in *podu* agriculture or otherwise known as Shifting Agriculture (clearing forest and developing the land for agriculture). So, they do not get any legal rights on *podu* agriculture lands, it gives advantage to forest officials to confiscate the lands any time without any intimation to these tribes.

- 4. Social Problems:** Gutti Koya tribal community have their unique culture and social practices, they are more in to the superstitious beliefs. They still practice animal sacrifice, black magic and traditional rituals. Spending their savings in celebrations of traditional festivals is one of the major issues of their poverty. In every ritual drinking of alcohol and sacrificing animals are common aspects, so the way of living style is one of the factors for their backwardness. Taking advantage of the poverty, innocent and helplessness of Gutti Koya tribals, contractors, moneylenders, businessmen and RMPs causing problem of easier to get exploited
- 5. Problems related to health:** The Gutti Koya tribes reside in deep forests which comes under reserved forest area /protected areas, are inaccessible to welfare services. All Gutti Koya hamlets have no approach road so that reaching the Gutti Koya hamlets is difficult and risky task. Gutti Koyas collect contaminated water from streams, springs and pits causes the ill health. Diarrhea, malaria, malnutrition, jaundice, viral fevers waterborne diseases and anemia are very common among the Gutti Koyas. Due to inaccessibility to the hamlets, reaching and shifting of patients to nearby primary health center is difficult job. Majority of Gutti Koyas practice traditional healing methods and beliefs in superstitions.
- 6. Problems related to education:** Majority of Gutti Koyas of West Godavari are living in remote forest areas and this is the main hindrance for accessing the education. Majority of the Gutti Koya hamlets has no schools and anganavadi centers. Due to migration from Chhattisgarh many Gutti Koyas were asked to prove their identity as tribe and they failed resulting in loss of tribal rights in the host state. Most of the tribals are able to take primary education through bridge schools which were run by NGOs, now they are not working due to lack of funds. Those who availed primary education they must submit their tribal certificate in secondary education institutions, majority of Gutti Koyas feel that getting a tribal identity certificate from government is difficult, so they dropped from education. Whatever they have enjoyed tribal rights in Chhattisgarh are not liable to enjoy in the Andhra Pradesh because Gutti Koyas are not recognized as tribe so that they are excluded from the government welfare schemes.

CONCLUSION

The present study on the problems prospects of Gutti Koyas, a migrant tribal community settled in West Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh. Seasonal migration of tribal people from Chhattisgarh has a history. Movement of Tribal people from Chhattisgarh to Telugu states is a well-known phenomenon, majority are from Sukuma, Baster, Bijapur and Dantewada districts of Chhattisgarh. Majority of Gutti Koya hamlets were established two decades ago. Studies on migration of tribes from Chhattisgarh to Andhra Pradesh and other states mentioned that less land availability for agriculture and low wages in the native state are the major reasons. Those who migrated from Chhattisgarh and settled in West Godavari, Andhra Pradesh experienced discrimination, exploitation in the host state.

In the year 2006, Salwajudum a state sponsored program with the aim of elimination of Naxalites created the tensions among the tribal people forced them to flee to other states in general and United Andhra Pradesh in particular. This was the one of the major reasons for Gutti Koyas migration after 2006. Fleeing away from resources they become more vulnerable and easier to get exploited. Loss of house, land and livelihoods and livestock forced them to become to daily wage labour in brick making industries, in eucalyptus trees cutting works, in cotton and mirchi plucking works for very less wages than other native daily wage labour earns. Exploitation and betrayal by political leaders, building contractors, forest officials and auto drivers is a common experience among the Gutti Koyas. In the context of Gutti Koyas of Andhra Pradesh, concluded that very existence of Gutti Koyas depended on the mercy of Andhra Pradesh government because their hamlets are in reserved forests and they don't have any recognition as tribe though they enjoyed tribal status in Chhattisgarh. Among the several reasons in social exclusion and inclusion of Gutti Koyas of Andhra Pradesh, the role of State government was very significant by providing ration cards, Voter Identity cards, Aadhar cards and livelihood through MGNREGA except Tribal identity certificates. Due non-tribal status, people who got primary education through Bridge schools and anganavadi are unable to continue further studies. All these factors are exacerbating the conditions of Gutti Koyas excluding them from the development.

Suggestions

Findings from the field work done among the Gutti Koyas of West Godavari, Andhra Pradesh suggestions are mainly policy issues to Tribal Identity and Land holding and ownership rights. Protection of basic human rights and dignity are necessary. Firstly, the forceful eviction of Gutti Koyas from revenue lands and forest lands need to be abandoned. Government should take necessary steps to protect rights of migrant tribal community and should conduct awareness programs on health, education other the developmental programs.

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ENDNOTES

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