

The Tribal cult in Punnadu Region

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ABSTRACT

The Tribal Culture of Punnadu region is very unique in the History of India. Punnadu or Punnat kingdom was one of the ancient kingdoms in South India. It consisted the present regions of South Karnataka including Coimbatore, Salem and Neelagiri regions of Tamilnadu, Wynadu and Sultan Bateri of Kerala states. Punnadu was also one of the chief centers of Jainism in ancient times according to the Archaeological and epigraphically sources. The Tribal cult of punnad is very significant from historical and cultural sphere of South India in particular and India in general. It was the meeting place of Eastern ghats and Western ghats. The Geographical factors such as natural resources, thick forest, fertility of soil, water facility and others provided the necessary environment for the growth of a different type of tribal cult in South India. The greater part is thick forest, especially in the west and the south. In Kakanakote, Bandipura, Machchuru, Metikuppe, Madumalai, Kutta, Nagarahole forest areas are the principal centres of elephant kheddass. The east is mountainous with Malai Madappa, Biligiri Rangappa and Himavad gopalaswamy peaks are hilly regions. The main rivers like Kapila, Nugu, Lakshmanatheertha, Gundlu, Taaraka, Hebballa, Suthanalla and other small rivers flow with a tortuous course from South-west to north-east. These natural elements and environment has been supported to rise of a special Tribal cult in Punnadu region. As a result tribal people like Kadukurubas, Bettakurubas, Jenukurubas, Soligas, Yaravas, Odugas, Lambanis and others lived in this region in very large numbers and developed their own culture and traditional heritage which is very unique in Indian history.

Key words : Tribes, Culture, Punnadu, Karnataka, Eastern Ghats, Western Ghats, Kadukurubas, Bettakurubas, Jenukurubas, Soligas, Yaravas, Odugas, Lambanis, Hadi, Podu

According to the Anthropological survey of India, this prosperous region has provided a vast scope for the development of a variety of tribal cult where different types of tribal people have been living. This paper intends to examine the special features and significance of the Tribal cult of Punnadu region. There are good number of Tribe communities in Karnataka in general and Punnat region in particular. They are generally perceived as unprivileged and socially educationally and economically backward people. They lived in the relatively isolated pockets or remote hilly areas, away from the fertile river valleys, and outside the framework of the peasant formations. The Geographical or the location constraints have served as hurdles for their response to the process of rapid social change. The Tribes of

punnat mainly live in the hilly and forested areas of Eastern Ghats that extend eastwards in southern Karnataka bordering north west of Tamil Nadu and South west of Kerala States. Actually Punnat region is considered as the meeting place of Eastern and Western Ghats. The hilly and forest areas of Punnata region reveal that the Tribes have found to be incomplete adjustment with their physical environment. The settlements of the Tribes are kadukuruba, Jenukuruba, Bettakuruba, soliga, Lambaani, Yarava, oduga and others.

The term Kuruba generally means a shepherd. It is supposed to be derived from the the kannada word kuri which means sheep. But there is some non-shepherd communities with whom also the term kuruba is associated. For instance, there are the Kadu Kurubas, dwellers of the forest

(kadu means forest in Kannada language). As regards the relation between Jenu Kurubas and Kadu kurubas found in the president's order, the various authorities are of the view that the Jenu Kurubas are only a sub-division of the Kadu kurubas. Thus according to Ananta Krishna Iyer; "There are two endogamous groups among the Kadu kurubas, namely, (1) Betta kurubas and (2) Jenu kurubas. The former are again divided into three minor groups, namely, (1) Ane (elephant), 2) Bevina (nee) tree (*Melia Axaderachta*), and (3) Kolli (fire-brand)" Thurston (1909, IV 159-60) also confirms the same view.

During the field investigation it was found that the Betta kurubas and the Jenu kurubas live in the same areas side by side, but they do not consider to have originated from the same stock. As regards the similarity of cultural traits it is to be noted that this phenomenon is not confined to these two tribes alone. Many of the cultural traits they have in common with the Soligas, another tribe of the region. The explanation may be in ecology and not in social relations. For the different Tribes groups of the region the specific economic pursuit appears to be the diastical element. Collection of honey and wax is the traditional right of the Jenu kurubas and the collection of other forest produce is the traditional right of the Betta kurubas. It seems that in the formation of their self-image, the perception of the difference has been accentuated due to this competitive relationship with reference to the source of nature at the identical level of technology.

Here it is to be noted that the term kadu kuruba is never used by either of the two groups among themselves. Kadu in kannada means forest and is used indiscriminately by the non-kurubas for both the groups to indicate their level of adjustment with their physical environment. The present report will deal with the Jenu kurubas exclusively but it will be difficult, to completely ignore the Betta kurubas. As mentioned earlier in coorg district, the Jenu kurubas and Betta kurubas have not been

differentiated in the President's order, hence, they have been enumerated under the common name kuruba. As a result it is not possible to give complete demographic data relating to either the Jenu kurubas or the Betta kurubas in Karnataka State as a whole.

In Punnat Jenu kurubas are found mainly in Heggadadevanakote, Gundulpete, Hunsuru and Periyapatna taluks of Mysore District and Madikeri, Virajapet and Somawarpete taluks of Coorg District. The area of their concentration is in and around the forest and hill tracts such as kakanakote forest area, Bandipur forest area, on either bank of the kabini river and all over hilly tracts in Coorg district, specially near Poonampete, Srimangala villages in Virajpete taluk. Forest is their eternal source of livelihood and they are the parasites of the forest and cannot exist away from it.

According to Lewis Rice, in 1872 the population of Jenu Kurubas and kadu kurubas together was 2,923 consisting of 1,466 males and 1,457 females. In the Mysore Census Report of 1911: Kuruba-A shepherded community was enumerated and discussed separately and no reference was made of Kadu kurubas and Jenu kurubas either as sections of kuruba or any way related to it. Under Animists they had been treated separately with section like Betta kuruba and Jenu Kuruba under kadu kuruba and their number was 6,476. Separate enumeration of jenu kurubas was made in 1921 Census when they numbered 1,672. In 1931 they numbered 4,603. At the subsequent enumeration's, it appears that the population of Jenu kurubas had not been separately recorded.

In the 1961 Census, the Jenu kurubas had been enumerated separately in other areas of the old Mysore State but in Coorg district the Jenu kuruba, hence it is not possible to know the population of the Jenu kurubas separately for coorg district. Leaving out Coorg district, in the rest of the State the Jenu kurubas numbered 3,623 and formed 1.89% of the Jenu kurubas live in urban areas. When compared with the Scheduled Tribes as a whole of Mysore State, among whom only

5.17% are urban dwellers, it appears that urbanization has made slightly more head way among the Jenu Kurubas.

Anantha Krishna Iyer describes that the Kadu kurubas (i.e. Betta kurubas and Jenu Kurubas) are either dark or dark brown in colour and of short stature and wooly hair. Thurston made some anthropometric observations among the Jungle Kurubas of Nilagiris and found that their average stature was 157.5 cm. and average nasal index was 88.8. He classified them as dark skinned, short and with platyrrhine type of nose. The kadu kurubas as including Jenu kurubas have been described as diminutive but hardly race of dark complexion with broad face, low forehead, delicho-cephalous head and wooly hair.

Somatoscopic observations of 20 Jenu Kurubas were made in the field during the present field study. The average height is 162.5cm, the maximum and minimum height vertexes being 177.8cm and 147.32 cm, respectively. Their skin color varies from dark brown to medium brown. Out of the 20 Jenu kurubas, 2 were dark brown, 4 were brown and remaining was medium brown. Except one with wooly hair all have low wavy hair. They have oval faces with medium foreheads, chins, lips, prognathism and cheeks. The shape of the nose is round with medium depression at the root having normal wings. They have straight eye-slits with no epicanthic fold. Jenu kurubas very much resemble their other neighboring tribesmen like Soligas and Betta kurubas in their physical characteristics except that the former are a bit taller in height. Like kadukurubas and soliga community is also dominant tribal community in punnat region.

The soligas live in small dispersed settlements, known as Podu. They are located on hill slopes. Due to the establishment of new settlements and abandoning old ones, the numbers do not remain fixed. For example, during the field investigation it was found more than 150 podus and Haadis. The soligas in punnat region depend upon shifting cultivation (podu) and collection of forest products and hence movement of people

from one place to another becomes quite essential.

The Soligas settlements in Punnat region are established in interior areas and are therefore not easily approachable. Only by foot one can reach their habitats. In N. Begur, Kenchanahally, Beeramballi, Jaganakote Brahmagiri, Hosahalli, Jekkahalli and other villages the situation is different, but later the tribes were outnumbered by Indian castes, and consequently their habitats were merged into the revenue villages.

Lewis Rice wrote on the Jenu Kurubas as follows in 1877. The Jenu Kurubas are found scattered in all the jungles. They have no fixed abode but wander about from place to place in search of honey, hence their name, from Jenu honey. They are excellent climbers of trees and skilled in the use of sling and bow and arrow. B.L. Rice mentions, not long ago they were nomadic food gatherers who never thought of a settled life and home. When stationary they have the most disappointing type of long and low huts with the floor in level with the ground. The sides are of flattened bamboo and the roofs are covered with grass or leaves. Often they live under wind-breaks resting on trees, in the hollows of trees and over banging rocks. Many were noticed to be in the open all the day and sleeping around a lighted fire at night. Almost similar information is recorded in the Census Report of Mysore. "They (Jenu kurubas) belong to this locality and do not come from anywhere else. They move from one place to another in the same forest" In the course of present study it was noticed that they were commonly in the habit of sleeping in the open around a fire.

All the above accounts indicate that the Jenu Kurubas lived practically a nomadic life till recently. Even now many aspects of nomadic way of life continue among them. Due to the restrictions imposed by the Forest Department free movement have become difficult for them know a days and many of them are, therefore, settling down in the villages, bordering the forest.

The Jenu Kuruba settlements whether in the forest or in the outskirts of a village, are known as haadi. A number of families live clustered together in a haadi. Each *hadi* has a recognized leader known as Yejamana who deals with the socio-religious aspects in the hadi. There is no prescribed settlement pattern but the common feature observed in different hadis is that the hutments are built around an open place with their entrances facing one another. A burning fire is always kept inside as well as in front of the hut, and the females and children are often seen squatting by the side of the fire in front of the hut. They maintain the sanctity of their dwelling place and no outsider is allowed to enter the same with leather shoes on. Till recently they would not allow any person to enter into the haadi even with leather belts on. But rigidity of the custom has been considerably reduced. Recently the Government has settled some Jenu Kurubas in agricultural colonies. The settlement pattern in these colonies is considerably different from the traditional pattern. In the colonies, the dwelling units are arranged in a linear pattern. Each dwelling unit consists of a big living room, a small ante-room a kitchen and a raised platform at the entrance.

The Jenu Kurubas are not subjected to any kind of ritual disability by their neighboring communities. They can enter the houses of the clean caste Hindus. They consider all Scheduled Castes as inferior to them and never live along with them. Though not subjected to ceremonial disabilities the Jenu Kuruba prefer to maintain some social distance vis-à-vis other castes, even in mixed villages they live in separate clusters. Their most close neighbors are generally other forest Tribes like Betta Kurubas, Soligas, Yeravas, etc.

About their habitats Anantha krishana Iyer has written as follows: The Jenu Kurubas live in miserably low huts thatched with leaves, with walls of battled reeds. They have no articles of furniture except the grass mats of their own making. Their domestic utensils consist of a few earthen, bamboo and brass vessels. A few families may be found

close together in a part of the forest cleared by them. The selection of the plat depends upon the vicinity of some brook or other water reservoir. They rear no kitchen gardens of any kind. But now-a-days they are growing pumpkins, gourds and other green vegetables at the boundaries of their hadis.

The Tribes are non-vegetarians and eat all types of flesh and other animal food excepting beef and the flesh of tiger, leopard, dog, wolf and fox. However, Thurston informs that Jenu Kurubas are said to eat the flesh of bison, where as Betta Kurubas abstain from the same. They very much relish mutton, venison, the flesh of wild eat, pork, rabbit, crab, chicken, duck, wild pigeons and peacock. They do not consume any intoxicating drink. They would like to have tea or coffee if it is offered by others. So also, their male folk smoke beedi and cigarette when offered by others.

Kannada the regional language is the mother tongue for most of the Kurubas. The Jenu kurubas in the Coorg district speak Coorgi or Kodagu language in addition to kannada. According to Grierson, Kanarese or Kannada belongs to the Dravidian Sub-Family and Kodagu and kurumba are dialects of Kanarese. Kurumba has spoken in the Nilgiri Hills, is a corrupt form of kanarese with an admixture of Tamil. Kodagu or Coorgi is by some classed as an independent form of speech. In the 1961 Census records Kadu bhasa which has been returned as the mother tongue of a few Jenu kurubas, seems to be an admixture of several other languages.

During 1961 Census some Jenu kurubas returned Kadu bhasa as their mother tongue. In kanarese language, the etymological meaning of Kadu bhasa, is 'language of the wild tribes'. This, however, seems to be an admixture of several language, like Kannada, Coorgi, Malayalam, Telugu, Tamil etc. Tamil, Telugu, Tulu and Urdu have also been returned as mother tongues by a small number of Jenu Kurubas. Marathi, Hindi and Malayalam have been returned as the subsidiary languages of some of the Jenu Kurubas. Thus, the above ideological analysis we can come to a conclusion that the tribble

people of punned region constituted a unique and significant cultural and Historical heritage in Karnataka and South India to a great extent.

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There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.

- Albert Einstein.