



# **WORKING PAPER 128**

## **SCHEDULED TRIBES AND GENDER: DEVELOPMENT PERCEPTIONS FROM KARNATAKA**

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# **SCHEDULED TRIBES AND GENDER: DEVELOPMENT PERCEPTIONS FROM KARNATAKA<sup>1</sup>**

**V Vijayalakshmi\***

## ***Abstract***

*The paper examines the development concerns of Scheduled Tribes in areas of geographical seclusion in Karnataka. The transition from their earlier lifestyle to a more sedentary form of living has consequences for men, women, and gender relations within the tribal communities. The various tribal welfare programmes in the state suggest that their impact on the living conditions of the tribal communities has been limited. Gender - related concerns have received less than adequate attention from policy makers and development analysts although it is of vital importance. There were several limitations in the implementation of tribal welfare programmes that need to be re-examined.*

Scheduled Tribes in India are groups with a social and cultural identity distinct from the dominant society and that makes them additionally vulnerable and disadvantaged in the development process. Along with other groups such as the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes are among the poorest and most backward in society. State policies initiated to integrate them into the mainstream development and political process were less effective in improving the social and economic conditions of the tribals. There are several grey areas in government policies in providing an alternative development perspective for tribals. The various commissions that were set up by the Government of India to examine the status of Scheduled Tribes pointed out some of the critical areas such as tribal land issues, rehabilitation, access to natural resources, and political autonomy. One of the vital issues that has hitherto received less attention by policy makers and development analysts are gender related concerns. Although the impact of the displacement of tribals and the restrictions on their access to forest resources is greater on women, they (women) are not a significant factor in the development debates of the tribal population.

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The transition from their earlier lifestyle to a more sedentary form of living has consequences for men, women, and gender relations within the tribal communities. The tribal women also had to endure the invasion on their sense of identity as members of a particular community, distinct from the larger society. An attempt is made here to examine the major problems that confront the tribals in general and women in particular. The broader concerns of the tribal communities are in a way responsible for the overshadowing of the specific needs of women. The observations are based on case studies of selected tribal communities in Mysore and Chamrajanagar districts of Karnataka. <sup>2</sup>

## **Scheduled Tribes in Karnataka**

The Scheduled Tribes comprise 67.76 million or 8.08 per cent of the country's total population. Of these, 1.32 million (1.95 per cent) are most backward tribes. <sup>3</sup> According to the 1991 census, the tribal population in Karnataka was 19,15,691. This represents 4.25 per cent of the total population of the state and 2.95 per cent of the total tribal population in the country. <sup>4</sup> It was estimated that there were about 3.83 lakh Scheduled Tribe families in the state. The tribal population in Karnataka as a proportion of the total tribal population in India declined from 3.54 per cent in 1981 to 2.95 per cent in 1991. In the list of Scheduled Tribes specified in Article 342 [I] of the Indian Constitution there are 49 tribal groups in Karnataka. The major tribes are: Gaudalus, Hakiplikis, Irruligas, Jenu Kurubas, Malaikuds, Malikudis, Bhils, Gonds, Todas, Varlis, Chenchus, Koyas, Aranadans, Yeravas, Helayas and Koramas. The tribal communities are concentrated in Chitradurga, Bellary, Raichur, Mysore, Kodagu and Tumkur districts. <sup>5</sup> Of the total Scheduled Tribe population, 8,37,421 were main workers, of which 3,59,973 were agriculture labourers, 39,958 were engaged in livestock, forestry, fishing, etc, and the rest were engaged in other categories. <sup>6</sup>

Nearly 60 per cent of the tribal communities in Karnataka live in areas surrounded by forests and hills. Except for those living in urban areas, the tribals live in settlements comprising 150 to 200 people. The tribals are one of the most neglected and disadvantaged groups in Karnataka. Most tribal settlements lack basic amenities such as housing, drinking water, health, and transport facilities. The extent of the economic, social, and cultural changes among these communities depends on their geographical distribution. Proximity to non-tribal settlements in some parts of the state has contributed to greater socio-cultural changes.

Mysore and Chamrajanagar districts in Karnataka, where the case studies were conducted, rank fifteenth and fourteenth respectively in terms of tribal population in the state [See Table 1. Annexure 1]. <sup>7</sup> Tribals in these districts live in areas surrounded by forests and hills. <sup>8</sup> Jenu

Kurubas, Kadu Kurubas, Betta Kurubas, Sholigas and Yeravas are the major tribal groups living in Heggadadevanakote (H.D. Kote); while Sholigas are a numerically dominant tribal group in Biligiri Ranga Beta (B.R.Hills). Among these tribal communities Jenu Kurubas, a matriarchal tribe, are recognised as a most backward tribe and they are numerically dominant in H.D.Kote and in B.R. Hills. The Jenu Kurubas are traditionally a hunting and gathering tribe with their livelihood system centred on forest products. Sholigas have been recommended for inclusion in the list of 'primitive tribes'. Their traditional occupation was shifting cultivation and hunting. In 1970, when the forests in the B.R.Hills where they were living were declared as a protected area, the Sholigas had to stop some of their traditional livelihood practices such as shifting cultivation. Similarly, Jenu Kurubas were displaced from their forest habitat when dams were constructed across the Kabini and Taraka rivers, and Nagarhole, Kakanakote and Bandipur were declared as national parks. Tribal groups who were displaced from their forest habitat do not have adequate access to development initiatives that would have provided an alternative livelihood to them. The literacy levels are low among the tribal groups. School enrolment continues to be low and the dropout rate is very high. The health and nutrition levels are poor with high prevalence of malnutrition and infant mortality.

The economy of the tribal groups ranged from semi-traditional subsistence forms of living such as hunting, gathering and to a limited extent, agriculture. Despite their heterogeneous social background, the livelihood systems of all tribal groups centred on forest products. Hunting and collection of minor forest products are a part of their livelihood system. Both men and women are actively involved in the collection of honey, gooseberry, soap nuts, bamboo, and edible roots and leaves. Hunting is mainly the activity of men. As a part of the resettlement programme some families were allotted land for cultivation. They are not able to make optimum use of the land given to them because of the lack of credit, irrigation, and other infrastructure facilities.

The tribal population living here feel deprived of the forest livelihood system with the introduction of forest development and conservation policies. Resentment is high among the tribal groups in H.D. Kote who were displaced from Nagarhole, Kakanakote, and Bandipur areas following the implementation of the World Bank-sponsored project on Forest and Wildlife conservation. Some of the tribal groups perceive the development intervention of the state as exploitative and not in the interest of tribal groups. The welfare interventions are seen as reactive rather than proactive. Tribals were of the opinion that state intervention in the case of programmes for tribals was an outcome of the greater concern for the conservation of forests and not out of the need to improve the economic condition of the tribal people.

## **Interventions, Government Policies and Programmes**

The government of India effected several policies to safeguard the interests of the tribes. Government expenditure on tribal programmes had increased over the past two decades but they did not have the desired effect on the social and economic development of tribal groups. Levels of health and education among tribals continue to be low despite these provisions. One of the reasons for such an outcome is that the focus of the policies was not on human resource development. Appropriate and effective policies in areas such as education, health, and sustainable development initiatives are still needed to improve the condition of the tribals.

Two important policies, which are in a draft form and would negatively affect the tribals, are the Forest Bill and the Rehabilitation Policy. The national forest policy resolution adopted by the government of India emphasises people's participation in forest management and stopping the utilisation of forests for commercial purposes. However, these aspects are undermined in the draft Forest Bill, which does not follow the national forest policy resolution. Biodiversity conservation initiatives do not acknowledge the important role that tribal communities play in conservation.<sup>9</sup> The draft 'National Policy of Rehabilitation of Persons Displaced as a Consequence of Acquisition of Land,' does not reflect the interests of the tribals and their development.<sup>10</sup> The policy is based on the premise that displacement is inevitable if development projects are carried out. It does not consider the possibilities of reducing displacement and initiating environment friendly and pro-people alternatives. Also, it does not perceive displacement and rehabilitation as a process, and that resettlement should be completed before the project actually begins.

The 'Karnataka Resettlement of Project Displaced Persons Act' was passed by the Legislature in 1987 and received the President's assent in 1994.<sup>11</sup> The development projects implemented earlier to the enactment of this Act do not come under its purview. The Act was intended to enable the resettlement of the displaced people of various development projects taken up by the state.<sup>12</sup> In principle the Resettlement Act guarantees the rights of the displaced people and provides them with alternative livelihood at the project site or elsewhere [Section 5]. It also places restrictions on the transfer, partition of land in the affected and benefited zone [Section 10]. This provision effectively checks any fraudulent transactions in the area where the development project is being undertaken.<sup>13</sup> To ensure the proper assessment and rehabilitation of the displaced people a provision has been made for a detailed census of the displaced population.

The dislocation faced by the tribals due to the development and conservation projects in Karnataka raises critical issues regarding the Resettlement Act. In Karnataka, despite having a legislation, very little

has been achieved in rehabilitating the tribals who were displaced when forests were converted into wildlife sanctuaries and national parks. In H.D. Kote the tribal communities who were displaced in the 1970s when the Kabini and Tharka dams were constructed are yet to be rehabilitated, although their situation does not come within the purview of the present enactment. Similarly, when Kakanakote, Nagarhole, and Bandipur forests were declared as conservation zones the tribals who were forced out of their forest settlements have not yet been rehabilitated. Instead of providing them with a viable alternative the forest department is employing the displaced tribals for low wages. As an alternative, tribal communities should be involved in forest management, particularly where the forests have been converted into wildlife sanctuaries and national parks.

There are certain sections of the Act [section 9(1)] that give the state discretionary powers to decide on the application of the provisions of the legislation for resettling displaced persons. Also, there are no stipulations or a timeframe for resettlement. There are provisions [section 16-17] that allow the government considerable flexibility in implementation. Phrases such as 'as many as possible' and 'subject to the availability' dilutes the Act and gives scope for not implementing the legislation. The official interpretation is that none of the development projects undertaken come under the purview of the Act. Only under considerable pressure from the High Court and the World Bank to rehabilitate the tribals of the conservation project, did the government initiate measures to resettle them. The Act is not equipped to meet the rehabilitation requirement specified by the donor agencies. <sup>14</sup>

There are some problems with regard to the structure of implementation. According to the Act the Directorate of Resettlement would carry out the census of the displaced people. In case of disagreement the aggrieved persons should appeal to the Director who has quasi-judicial powers equal to that of a High Court Judge. The intention behind such a provision is to expedite the resettlement process. In practice it would not be fair to entrust such power to the agency whose activities are being questioned. An independent appellate authority should be given charge and would be in a better position to arbitrate. <sup>15</sup>

The low priority given to rehabilitation of displaced tribal populations is not confined to Karnataka alone. It is in fact a reflection of the malady at the national level. The Government of India had drafted a Rehabilitation policy when the World Bank made it a requirement before releasing grants. If rehabilitation is to be taken seriously the planning for it must be integrated into the project document. Local bodies should be involved in the planning and implementation. Further, displaced people should be involved in the rehabilitation planning. <sup>16</sup>

Some of the policies that guide the state government on land allotments for tribals, or the utilisation and management of Common

Property Resources [CPRs] are ambiguous. In principle there should not be any problem in granting tribals the right to utilise CPRs which have been part of their support system for ages, or formalize the ownership of land allotted to them. However, the land allotted to tribals is considered as State property that may be acquired by the state at anytime without appropriate or corresponding compensation. For example, the tribals in Mysore and Chamarajanagar who were allotted land through a resettlement programme do not have any document (title deed) to confirm their ownership. The government records indicate that they were given land for agricultural purpose. Since they do not have any land entitlement document their status is similar to that of squatters who could be evicted anytime. There is a need to reexamine the Land Acquisition Act and revise it in the context of rehabilitation. Similarly, the tribal populations' access to the CPRs is not clearly defined.

There is no policy at the national level that gives attention to gender issues or treats the family as a unit for rehabilitation. Although the contribution of tribal women to the livelihood system is significant, land is allotted to the male family member. The rehabilitation measures that have been undertaken so far show a total disregard for the contribution of women and their specific needs. There is a need to emphasise the basic entitlements of women and their right to rehabilitation, and a greater role in development programmes.

## **Government Programmes**

The national programmes that are implemented by the state government recognise the importance of an all-round development of tribal people through special and targeted planning. Allocations were made in the Five -Year Plans on various programmes for tribal communities. It was intended that specifically targeted programmes would quicken the process of economic development among these groups. From the third Five -Year Plan there has been an increase in the institutions such as Tribal Development Blocks to facilitate development work undertaken for tribal populations.<sup>17</sup> The Integrated Tribal Development Programme [ITDP] was started during the fifth Five-Year Plan in the Scheduled Areas. Five ITDPs were set in Chikmagalur, Kodagu, Mysore, and Dakshina Kannada. Although Karnataka is not a Scheduled Area, ITDPs were set up in areas where there are tribal groups designated as 'primitive'.<sup>18</sup> However, these programmes were not successful in ameliorating the economic and social conditions of the tribals.

The Tribal Sub-plans in the fifth and sixth Five -Year Plans, were ambitious programmes aimed at economic development of tribal populations. During the seventies, the expectation was that the general development programmes would cater to the needs of these weaker sections and would provide the much needed thrust as an additive to the



general efforts. This has not occurred. Further, the special provisions for the welfare and development of the backward classes began to supplant rather than supplement the general sector provisions. It was in this context that the two innovative strategies of the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) for STs and the Special Component Plan (SCP) for SCs, were launched during 1974 and 1979 respectively. These two special strategies were expected to ensure that all the general development sectors, at the Central and State levels, earmarked funds for SCs and STs in proportion to their population so that adequate benefits from all the sectors concerned flow to these two disadvantaged groups.

The objectives of the Tribal Sub-Plan are<sup>19</sup>:

- To enable tribal families, both in ITDP areas and non-ITDP areas to come out of poverty.
- To lay down policies which will protect tribal culture and promote tribal welfare.
- To provide a basic minimum infrastructure to tribal habitats.
- To accelerate social and economic progress and remove the obstacles in development

In Karnataka, the Tribal Sub-plan has been implemented since 1996-97. There are also special grants to augment the programmes under the sub-plan from the central government under the Special Central Assistance Scheme. For the year 1997-98 an amount of 8288.55 lakhs under the state plan and 59.54 lakhs under the special central assistance were allotted for the Tribal Sub-plan. Under this scheme various departments were involved in development planning for tribal communities.<sup>20</sup> The impact has been limited because of low allocation for programmes under the sub-plans. Except for a few cases when they were included as beneficiaries in government schemes of various departments, tribal groups living in areas surrounded by forest and hills are yet to experience the benefits of state intervention. The forest areas that have tribal concentrations do not have adequate health, education, transport, and other basic services.<sup>21</sup> The sporadic medical facility the government extends through mobile units is mainly confined to inoculations. Although they reduce mortality rates these medical facilities are far from meeting the medical requirements throughout the year. It is evident from the examination of the tribal Sub-plan and various schemes that were implemented as a part of it that no special programme was designed for women.

A similar effort at tribal development through central assistance was the setting up of the State Tribal Development Co-operative Corporations. The programme was started in 1992-93. Under this programme, Large Multipurpose Co-operative Societies [LAMPS] were set up. Mysore, Kodagu, Chikmagalur and Dakshina Kannada were the districts

where LAMPS was started. The main function of LAMPS is marketing the minor forest produce collected by the tribals, and arranging for financial assistance to the tribals through public sector banks. The functioning and effectiveness of the LAMPS need to be examined considering the low profits of these cooperatives. It needs to be mentioned here that no special effort was made either to enrol women as members of these co-operatives or to promote co-operatives for tribal women under the Tribal Co-operative Marketing Federation [TRIFED] in Karnataka.

## **Non-Government Organisations [NGOs] and Tribal Welfare**

There are a few NGOs who have played a significant role in mobilising support for the tribal people, in extending counselling, and in providing services such as health and education. The greater optimism of an effective role of NGOs arises out of their present work as well as the disappointing performance of government agencies especially in the areas of health and education. Realising the facilitating role that NGOs can play, the government of Karnataka is financing some of their programmes. Also, beneficiaries for government programmes are being identified with the help of local NGOs. We looked at the working of Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra [VGKK] in B.R. Hills, and FEDINA Vikas and Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement [SVYM] in H.D.Kote [for more details about these NGOs see Annexure 2].

FEDINA Vikas in H.D. Kote and Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement [SVYM] in Kanchanahalli are working on issues related to tribal development. VGKK is providing cost free curative health and education facilities to the Sholigas living in Yelandur, Chamrajanagar, Kollegal, and Nanjangud. The Sanghas that have been formed through the initiative of VGKK are effective in taking up tribal problems at various levels with government officials and panchayat members. However, women play a limited role in these Sanghas. Women are not elected to executive positions of the Sanghas either. Except for the panchayat representatives, women rarely attended the Sangha meetings. Although VGKK has tried to form Podu [tribal settlement] Sangha for women it is not functional. Adequate initiatives have not been taken to encourage women to attend the Sangha meetings and participate in the discussions. The marginalisation of women in the political sphere, which is a common phenomenon in non-tribal communities, is also evident among the tribal people. Although tribal women played a significant role in economic activities, there is no encouragement for women to take up political and leadership roles. Men were of the opinion that women's preoccupation with household and economic activities does not allow them to be active participants in the Sanghas. Such an attitude was an inhibiting factor in effectively utilising the reservations provided for women in institutions of local government.

The strength of an NGO often lies in its focused effort to rehabilitate a particular group. However, if the organisation expands its activities and becomes less focussed on specific tribal matters, then the main objective in starting the organisation might be vitiated. SVYM is an example of such an organisation doing commendable work in the health and education sectors in the tribal areas. But their services are utilised only to a limited extent by the tribals. One of the reasons for the limited utilisation of the health and education facilities is the fee charged by the SVYM. Although the NGO claims that it is a nominal amount<sup>22</sup> to cover the expenses of the medicines provided to the patients, many tribals are unwilling to pay for medical consultation. Some of the tribals expressed the opinion that they could not afford the consultation fees every time they visited the SVYM hospital. Considering the poor health facilities in H.D. Kote and the high level of poverty among tribals, it is often women and children who suffer the most. Free medical consultation [including hospital charges, and medicines] would to a certain extent encourage more women to avail institutional childbirth facilities. Similarly, the fee charged in the school run by the organisation was a discouraging factor for most tribal parents from sending their children to the school.

The micro-credit groups started by SVYM for women in the tribal settlements are a positive initiative in organising the women. As of now women's savings are very small, considering their low income and the reluctance of most men to contribute to the savings in the name of women. The income of some tribal families was comparatively higher when they went to work in Kodagu and Kerala. Without the habit of saving, much of their income is spent in non-productive ways.

Advocacy and counselling are important in mobilising the tribal communities who have poor access to information. FEDINA Vikas in H.D. Kote has played a crucial role in mobilising the tribals in fighting for their right to rehabilitation and compensation. The women's groups formed by FEDINA are the only organised forums taking up issues related to women and development with the authorities concerned. There is a perceptible difference in the level of awareness of the tribals associated with the organisation. The members of the organisation are the displaced tribals from Nagarhole, Kakanakote and Bandipur and living in Manchur, Jaganakote and other areas in H.D. Kote whose main concern was rehabilitation and compensation. They were cynical about the role of the World Bank or the government regarding their welfare. Government agencies were seen as favouring the donor agencies and the hospitality industry at the cost of the interests of tribals.

Considering their work and commitment to the development of the tribal population the NGOs can be considered as a parallel agency (other than government agencies) in the implementation of the development programmes for tribals. Despite the committed work of these

NGOs there are certain areas of concern in the development and welfare of tribal women. The NGOs working in these districts should take the following issues into consideration for action.

- Considering the low literacy rate among tribal women, efforts should be made to promote education among girls.
- Teenage pregnancy and infant mortality rates are high among the tribal communities in B.R. Hills and H.D. Kote. Girls in the age group of 12-14 years become mothers. This would in the long run affect their [and that of their children] physical and mental development. There should be emphasis on awareness programmes and child and reproductive health facilities.
- The awareness level among women about development, tribal rights and the programmes that are being undertaken for their welfare is low. There is a need for awareness generation programmes and counselling.
- Low participation in political institutions at the local level and lack of participation in tribal committees is a matter of concern. Advocacy, training and counselling for tribal women representatives should be strengthened to increase their participation in local governance. A similar effort should be undertaken to encourage their participation in tribal committees and Sanghas.

While recognising the important role of NGOs in tribal development, the government and donor agencies should give a higher priority to the potential of a programme than to NGO sector building. It should be ensured that the services of the NGOs in the health and education sectors are free. Occasionally, there is a tendency among some NGOs to choose a target group such as tribals to gain access to government and other sources of funds and then diversify into other areas. Continuity in the programmes should be ensured for the target groups. To ensure that the NGOs continue to work for tribal welfare they could be given the responsibility for implementing certain parts of government programmes.

## **Tribals: Myth and Reality**

Before discussing the status of tribal women it is important to demystify certain commonly held views regarding tribals and tribal women. Idealising the tribal ways of life and the higher status that women enjoyed among their own community is to a large extent based on the perception of an earlier lifestyle.

- **Gender division of labour without social asymmetry being construed as higher status of tribal women.**

It is often presumed that there is no social hierarchy in tribal societies despite a gender division of labour. On the contrary, there is

evidence that the gender division of labour among most tribal communities is also hierarchical. Even among the matriarchal tribes, male members of the household managed the resources of women. Gender hierarchy among tribals is also evident from the low ritual status accorded to women. The sedentary form of living altered some of their earlier livelihood practices. Certain changes in the economic activities performed by men and women resulted in further dependence of women on men. Although women's role in the livelihood system is considered natural, their participation in leadership roles and the political sphere are not encouraged.

- **Tribal women enjoyed more freedom and power**

In the traditional mode of subsistence production the activities performed by men and women were complementary in nature. There was more interdependence between men and women. With the changes in livelihood practices and wage work becoming an important component, the asymmetry in gender relations and power differences within the tribal household is now more pronounced and evident, leading to a lower position for women.

- **Tribal life is without any social problems such as destitute women, stigma about widowhood, etc.**

While no stigma is attached to widowhood and widow remarriage, going to faraway places for wage work has increased the number of deserted women who have to support the children. Problems such as alcoholism and drug abuse are also becoming more common among men and women in tribal communities.

- **Tribal health practices are the best form of health system for tribals.**

It is not true that all tribals are knowledgeable about indigenous herbal medicine. Further, for certain health problems such as anthrax, which the SVYM detected, or viral diseases, preventive measures are required.

There are certain practices, particularly those related to childbirth, that are harmful for the mother and child. These practices continue to be justified as indigenous health care monitoring system. It needs to be emphasised, and awareness should be created that nothing can substitute for institutional support in reproductive health. Although tribals had managed their health problems in their own way over a long period of time, when modern medicine is now available they do not need to continue to do so.

- **Development means detribalising**

The paradox of the development debate on tribals is that the welfare initiatives are interpreted as detribalising. Acculturation of tribals is bound to be one of the consequences of integrating the tribal population

into the development process. It is difficult to keep the tribals isolated and insulated from social and economic changes that are taking place around them. This does not mean that tribal identity should be lost. But retaining tribal identity should not hinder tribal development and welfare.

Often, development specialists argue against evicting tribals from forests and resettling them outside the forests. Instead, the emphasis should be on adequate rehabilitation and compensation, now that they have been moved out of the forests. The development requirements of tribal communities are often sidelined because of the excessive importance given to issues such as the break up of social cohesion among tribals through development initiatives. Such misplaced emphasis would only lead to increased polarisation between the tribal and non-tribal populations.

## **Status of Tribal Women**

While discussing the status of tribal women it is necessary to place the evolution of tribal society in context. There is a certain degree of transformation in livelihood practices, distribution of resources, and control over labour among tribal men and women. There are changes in the notions of purity, about marriage, and sexuality. There is also a reconstruction of the public space by minimising the role of women in politics and rituals. Transition from interdependent and complementary roles in the livelihood system to a patriarchal structure is evident in most tribal communities. There are several contending hierarchies within the various tribal communities that decide whether there is going to be greater balance between gender relations or an asymmetry in relations. These changes are to a large extent a consequence of their displacement. Discussed below are some issues related to the process of change in the status of tribal women.

First, the changing role of men and women in tribal communities was to a large extent dependent on the nature of the livelihood system. Among the tribal groups [such as Jenu Kurubas and Beta Kurubas] practising semi-traditional mode of subsistence, i.e., hunting and collecting minor forest produce, supplemented by wage labour, there is a continuation of the non-patriarchal gender practices which allowed a greater social and economic role for women. On the other hand [for example, Sholigas] among tribes practising settled agriculture supplemented with wage labour and income from minor forest produce, the gender relations are more asymmetrical. With land ownership being associated with the male head of the household, social hierarchies are getting internalised in the tribal system.

An analysis of the role of women in the tribal economy reveals that their contribution to income generating activities is substantial. Among agricultural tribes such as the Soligas the participation of women in

agriculture is significant in all the activities related to farming. When Soligas practiced shifting cultivation, women were similarly involved in all the farming activities except the clearing of land. In the traditional shifting form of cultivation the landholding was much larger and in most cases community-based cultivation fulfilled the subsistence requirements of the tribals. With the settled form of cultivation women continue to do most of the agriculture work. However, the contribution of women is undermined because of low returns from the small land holdings and the supplementing of household income with wage labour.

Apart from agriculture, women also contributed to other livelihood practices such as collecting minor forest produce and working as wage labour. The contribution of women in each activity depends on the livelihood strategies adopted by the household. If the landholding is small [i.e., half an acre or even less] women managed the farm activity, supplemented by the labour of men whenever there was no wage work. Women are involved in all activities from preparing the land to cultivation and harvesting. Men took up wage labour in the nearby villages or on construction sites. Except for a few cases, farming among these communities is not a commercial activity. Ragi and paddy are grown as subsistence crops.

Women are involved in a wide range of activities, though most of them are seasonal. Both men and women are involved in the collection of minor forest produce. Although there is gender-based division of labour, it is less rigid when compared with non-tribal societies. Women are responsible for childcare and food preparation, and men play an important role in hunting. In activities such as collection of forest produce, fuel, and building the house, both men and women are involved. The gender regimes in these tribal communities are not rigid and there is no dichotomy of public and private spheres in economic and other day-to-day subsistence activities. In the market interactions too there is symmetry between the participation of men and women in the transactions.

Despite the equality in some areas of life, there are perceptible gender differences in at least two spheres viz., rituals and political participation. Among all the tribal groups women are associated with household rituals and men represent the household in public rituals. The ritual knowledge is passed on to men and they head the performance of most public rituals. Similarly, gender differences are evident in the participation in tribal committees. The tribal committee of a settlement is responsible for the enforcement of the tribal laws and ensures that the norms of behaviour are not violated. Although women are members of tribal committees they are not required to attend the meetings or participate in the proceedings. Women are also excluded from tribal leadership. All tribal chieftains are men, as they are perceived as ritually superior to women and as the natural leaders of a settlement or group.

Karnataka's 1983 and 1993 Panchayati Raj Acts, which provided for the reservation of seats in local government, for women and other disadvantaged sections such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and for other backward classes, is a positive step towards equal opportunity in politics. However, such provisions did not result in equal and effective participation of tribal women in local governance. While gender inequality in political participation is applicable to women in general, the tribal women are also confronted with problems arising out of their social and economic position. The perception of tribal women's role in local governance was to a large extent influenced by the position of tribals in the social hierarchy. The provision for representation of women in the institutions of local governance, therefore, did not result in equal sharing of power.

There were differences between tribes on certain issues. The conflict was between tribal groups who considered themselves as the *original* tribals [such as Sholigas, Jenu Kurubas, and Beta Kurubas] and the groups who were recently included into the Scheduled Tribe list [Parivara Nayakas]. There was a perception among the former group of tribals that the Nayakas played a dominant role in the panchayats in association with the non-tribal representatives. The inclusion of Nayakas was considered a political decision and had nothing to do with their being a tribal group. The common perception was that if the non-tribal groups use the benefits of representation in local governance the development interests of the tribal population will not be taken up by the panchayats.

Displacement is another major problem of the tribals living in H.D. Kote and B.R. Hills. Frequent disruption of the livelihood practices, and acute poverty, make survival and subsistence the main issues among these groups. Most of the tribal settlements lacked basic amenities such as drinking water, proper housing, sanitation, health and transport facilities. Women were not engaged in any gainful work for most of the year, as collecting minor forest produce was a seasonal activity. Getting wage work was also difficult and they have to migrate to Kodagu or Kerala, or commute more than 25 kms to get work. Men often migrated while the women remained at home without being engaged in economically productive work.

Women's problems mainly arise out of under-utilisation of their time and labour, and development strategies that are insensitive to the requirements of women. Areas of particular concern in the development and welfare of tribal women are women's access to resources, low literacy rates, high levels of fertility, lack of community services and inadequate state interventions. Barring a few instances, women do not have access to resources such as land, credit, training and counselling that would improve their standard of living. There are no specific interventions targeted to improve the access of tribal women to these resources.



## **'Survival, Stability and Development': An Agenda for Action**

An overview of the measures taken for the tribal people in Karnataka indicates four noteworthy areas. First, gender concerns or planned gender approach to the problems of tribals is lacking. Lack of gender sensitivity is evident in all the policy documents on tribals. Second, from the programmes for the development of the tribals it is evident that their perceptions are not taken into consideration. Development programmes designed for non-tribal populations were forced on the tribals. For example, the Integrated Tribal Development Project [ITDP] was designed along the lines of the Community Development Programme and agriculture extension programme. Third, the policies indicated a need to *develop* the tribal communities and *integrate* them into the mainstream development process. But there was no recognition of the fact that development needs of tribals and non-tribals are not similar. And finally, the welfare measures for tribals living in forest areas originate mainly from the concern for the conservation of forests than from any concern for the needs of the tribals. Although conservation of forests is important for sustained livelihood, there should be a holistic approach taking into consideration human needs as well as the preservation of forests. At present the emphasis is on conservation alone. The tribal welfare policy appears to be an afterthought when conservation or development work was to be undertaken.

While discussing the livelihood strategies of women in economically backward areas, Grown and Sebstad [1989] suggested that the development process has three main goals i.e., survival, stabilisation and growth. They further pointed out that the distinction between these three goals should be preserved while planning interventions. Development planners often combined them into just one, viz., growth. The strategy for a holistic development of tribal women is suggested here along similar lines. Since 'survival' is the immediate need of the tribal women, interventions should be made in this area. Facing a perennial crisis and low standards of living, it is imperative to first address the basic needs of the men and women in the tribal community. Most tribal women are in the 'subsistence' level. Planning should therefore focus on increasing their incomes, based on their livelihood practices and resource building mechanisms for women. Gender planning of the tribal population should include measures to improve their quality of living, economic development, and social justice.

The various tribal welfare programmes in the state suggest that their impact on the living conditions of tribal communities has been limited. There were several limitations in the implementation of tribal welfare programmes that need to be re-examined. Micro-enterprise projects implemented through the Tribal Sub Plan were not successful, from the point of view of both economic development and gender perspectives.

The tribal policies should, therefore, comprise a two-fold strategy, to address both the short-term and long term gender interests. The immediate concerns such as clean drinking water, housing, health, transportation, better nutrition levels, access to fuel and fodder, need to be attended to immediately. On the other hand the long-term gender interests should be taken up along side to be implemented over a period of time. These include human resource development [through better education, training, skill development] and improving their ability to exercise their rights and access to development resources. The long-term strategies should aim at improving the standard of living, broaden the resource base of tribal women, and strengthen institutional support in the areas of health and education. These would enable women to maximise output from their various livelihood strategies and improve the quality of living of the tribal women.

## **Implementation of Programmes**

- There are about 16 departments implementing different programmes for tribal welfare. However, owing to lack of coordination the impact of the programmes is limited.
- The low awareness level among the tribals of the various programmes is responsible for the under-utilisation of the welfare schemes.
- The Tribal Development Board should play a greater role in the coordination of the activities. For greater administrative control, all the sub-programmes under the various departments should be placed under the Director of Tribal Development Board.
- NGOs should be involved in the implementation of the tribal programmes because of their local base and rapport with the tribal people.
- The tribal committees or tribal panchayats should be involved in the implementation of the government programmes.
- There is no monitoring and evaluation of the various programmes that are implemented. The emphasis is on showing on record that the target has been achieved. Little emphasis is given to the impact.

In view of the poor medical facilities available right now, there is an immediate need for hospitals. Almost the entire population of tribal women does not have access to prenatal and postnatal health facilities. A complete lack of assistance at childbirth [of trained personnel or even one of the family members] which is the common practice among most tribal communities, very often harms the health of the mother and her child. For various reasons the tribal women did not use the existing and limited clinical facilities. Awareness of prenatal and postnatal care is very

low among tribal women. Also, the tribals' perception of 'hospital' is another reason for their reluctance to avail medical facilities. Most tribals see hospitals as places of death, and do not associate them with healing.<sup>23</sup>

There is a general feeling that since tribal women have managed for generations without outside help they can continue to do so. However, this ignores the grave risks that women undergo through unassisted childbirth and absolute ignorance of recent advances in medical services and childcare. VGKK has made a beginning to provide at least the bare minimum of maternity facilities. They provide free medical facility for tribals, and have trained midwives at the village level to provide assistance during childbirth. In H.D. Kote the SVYM is the only centre that has a fully equipped hospital. A fully equipped health centre providing free medical service should be provided to the tribal communities. This would reduce the rate of infant mortality and complications arising out of unassisted childbirth.

A related problem is the high incidence of teenage pregnancy [from early teens]. The reproductive cycle of most women in these areas ended by the time they were about 25 years old.<sup>24</sup> The low awareness level, multiple pregnancies and lack of adequate health facilities contribute towards this trend. The high fertility rate in H.D.Kote is also indicative of poor the response to family planning measures. Thus, greater emphasis should be given to reproductive and child health in these areas. Teenage pregnancies might be reduced to some extent if female education is encouraged and school dropout rates among girls are decreased. It is important, therefore, to provide 'quality' education with incentives to encourage tribal children to continue in school.

Education is another area where long-term intervention is needed. Except for the schools run by the NGOs working in B.R. Hills and H.D. Kote, there is no school in the tribal settlements. Some tribal settlements have primary schools but they are not functional. The non-resident teachers are not regular and the schools do not have any facilities. Although the NGOs have put in considerable efforts to provide good schooling facilities, the dropout rate continues to be very high. The continuing lack of adequate education in the tribal settlements will have serious and adverse development consequences.

Micro-level interventions should be specific to the locally available resources. The strategies should aim at the productive utilisation of the labour of tribal women. Initially, the programmes should be based on their livelihood system. For example, Beta Kuruba women make baskets and winnowing trays from the bamboo available in the forest, but do not find a market for their produce. If the skills of the tribal women are strengthened to make articles that are innovative, and marketing facilities are provided, it would enable them to increase their income. To make such a transformation possible it is important to strengthen extension and marketing.

Interventions aimed at broadening the scope of income generation should take into consideration the distinction between the levels of need. Tribal development planning under the ITDP and Tribal sub-plan programmes focus on enterprise promotion that are in no way related to their livelihood systems. There is a strong opinion among policy makers that all micro enterprises and vocational training programmes [irrespective of their relation to the tribal women's livelihood system] would automatically lead to income generation and economic development. However, most of the tribal women do not see the enterprise promotion as a viable option especially in the absence of credit, infrastructure and extension. Some of the enterprise interventions and vocational training programmes that failed are dairy farming, sericulture, sheep rearing, tailoring and baking.<sup>25</sup> It is important, therefore, to identify the potential areas in the livelihood system of the tribals and plan micro-level interventions accordingly.

The issues discussed here suggest that interventions are needed in three areas. First, since the survival need among tribal women is paramount there should be a 'livelihood systems approach' that would take into consideration the multiple activities in which tribal women are involved. Second, the micro level strategies should be based on local resources. The strategy for broadening the income generating options should take into consideration the possible constraints of the micro-level programmes. For example, programmes such as tailoring and dairy farming for tribal women will have a limited impact when the scope for income generation in the tribal settlements is low. Dairy farming in the absence of support mechanisms [such as veterinary] and marketing facilities would not yield the expected results. The interventions directed at income generation should be based on locally available resources and skills. If new interventions such as dairy farming and sericulture are implemented, then extension services and infrastructure should also be provided. Third, long-term strategies concentrating on women's reproductive health, education and basic infrastructure should be given emphasis.

The strategies that appear promising to meet the long-term and short-term gender needs of the tribal women are suggested below.

## **Long-term and Short-term Strategies**

Since tribal women's development is constrained by a complex web of factors such as policies, poor access to infrastructure, and resources, the long-term and short-term strategies should focus on:

- I. Measures that would promote a comprehensive approach to tribal women's development and structural changes in the resources available to them should be reinforced. These measures should enable greater visibility and bargaining power for women. Areas that need to be strengthened in the resource building process of women are:



### *a) Education*

- The literacy rate of tribal women is very low i.e., less than eight per cent, and the school drop out rate among girls is high. Opportunities for formal and non-formal education with scholarship or stipend should be provided. Although there are government schemes providing scholarships at higher levels of education, there is inadequate support given for continuing in school at the lower levels.
- Along with the monetary factor, there could also be a nutrition scheme, and health monitoring, while in school.
- A literacy drive for tribal women should be launched and it should emphasise the importance of hygiene, development issues for tribals, and health and family welfare issues.
- There should be more awareness programmes at school for tribal girls emphasising the importance of education and the hazards of teenage pregnancy.
- Vocational programmes should have a clear potential for income generation.

### *b) Health*

- Primary Health Centres [PHCs] should be started in tribal settlements.
- Mobile health services should be made available to all the tribal settlements in the absence of PHCs.
- Emphasis should be on reproductive and child health since the fertility, and infant mortality, rates are high among tribal communities.
- More women health workers at the village level should be trained to assist women in prenatal and postnatal health care. They should also be trained to create awareness about nutrition, health practices, hazards of teenage pregnancies, maternal and child health, and family welfare programmes.

- II. Policies at the national and state levels should be supportive and contribute to the continuity of tribal development programmes. As the tribal sub-plan involves all ministries and departments there should be greater commitment to tribal development in general and women's issues in particular.
- III. Policy changes incorporating gender agenda in tribal development: Guidelines should be devised to help government and non-government agencies to recognise and give operational content to the gender issues in tribal development programmes.
- IV. Efforts should be made to design specific programmes for tribal women, and mainstreaming women's issues into major sectoral plans

and programmes of the government. Women-specific programmes would increase tribal women's access to development resources.

- V. NGOs should be encouraged to develop a gender perspective and be involved in the empowerment and development process of tribal women. NGOs can:
- facilitate group formation and networking.
  - act as catalysts in active and informed participation of tribals in the development process
  - play a facilitating role in formal and non-formal education programmes
  - create awareness among tribal populations on their rights and privileges
  - can play a significant role in knowledge exchange and capacity building that are fundamental in the development of tribals
  - co-ordinate with government agencies and improve the negotiating capability of the tribals on issues pertaining to their development.

## **Micro-level Strategies**

- VI. Basic amenities such as safe drinking water, housing, health and transport should be provided.
- VII. Programmes should be based on the 'different levels of livelihood goals.' If the tribals are at subsistence level, emphasis should be on sustenance strategies. If they are above subsistence level, programmes that are growth generating should be initiated. Some of the strategies for income generation are:
- Local resource productivity and infrastructure should be improved. Support programmes based on locally available resources should be given priority in meeting survival goals. Marketing infrastructure should be improved.
  - Women's role in farming activities should be strengthened. This would require strengthening of the extension services and training for women.
  - Women should be encouraged to take up group farming rather than subsistence farming that a few practiced. Group farming, with support system and crop insurance would encourage women to take up livelihood practices that would sustain them longer and also has scope for growth. Commercial farming such as horticulture and coffee should be encouraged.
- Community/group farming for women can be tried on an experimental basis. Women's farming co-operatives should be formed and community farming taken up. The women working

on the farm should be paid wages, and the profits should be later distributed among all members.

Extension facilities for women should be strengthened and there should be diffusion of agricultural research and practices in these areas.

- There should be women-specific programmes to enable tribal women to be integrated with the development and economic process. Although integrated programmes involving men and women were suggested by women themselves as being more feasible, there is a need to develop self-reliance among women so that they would be involved in farming activities even when the men were away working as wage labourers in plantations and construction sites.
- Agricultural credit should be easily accessible to practice commercial farming. At present the tribals do not have any documentation of land ownership. Banks deny them agricultural credit, as there is no documentation to show that they own the land. Male and female members should be joint owners of land.

#### VIII. Networking of tribal women

- Women's groups should be formed in tribal settlement and there should be a network of these groups.
- These groups should comprise both tribal and non-tribal women. Similarly, there should be groups with men and women as members. Such groups would not only improve awareness levels but also infuse confidence among tribal women.
- Micro credit groups should be formed in all the tribal settlements. This would make it easier to organise women for other activities.
- Networking tribal women with urban-based marketing groups should be promoted.
- Networking mechanisms such as regular group interactions with tribal and non-tribal women, folk culture, and theatre would enable information exchange.

#### IX. Leadership capacities of the tribal women should be strengthened.

- Women should be encouraged to participate in tribal committees.
- In the committees formed in each tribal settlement, men should be encouraged to include women members.
- Tribal women committees should be formed at different levels to provide leadership positions for women. VGKK has been successful in forming tribal committees at Podu [tribal settlement], taluk, and district levels, where men are actively involved. Women's participation in these committees should be encouraged.



To mobilise women to participate in committees a facilitator is required at least till the groups start to function. A few women in the settlements should be identified and trained for this purpose.

- Tribal women's committees that are already in existence should be made functional by conducting regular meetings and information sharing and awareness generation sessions. NGOs could be involved in this exercise.
- Women's role in LAMPS and other co-operatives should be increased. Setting up of women's co-operatives would enable better organising among tribal women.
- Considering the low level of participation of women in local governance, efforts should be made to have intensive training and awareness programmes for women panchayat representatives, and also tribal women.

## Notes

- 1 The tribal people in India are variously referred to as 'indigenous people,' 'Adivasis,' 'Vanvasis,' 'Girijans,' and 'Scheduled Tribes.' There are certain problems in using some of these terms. For example, 'indigenous people' in the Indian context is a broad category claimed by most Dravidian or non-Aryan groups. 'Indigenous people,' therefore, refers to both non-tribal and tribal groups. Historically, it is very difficult to confirm the native status of a group to the state or country. The Constitution of India does not use the phrase 'indigenous people' and refers to tribals as Scheduled Tribes [the Government classified list of groups]. Broadly defined, Scheduled Tribes are groups delineated on the basis of relative isolation, economic backwardness and cultural autonomy in relation to the non-tribal population [Singh, 1995]. In this paper I will use 'Scheduled Tribes' to refer to the various tribal groups.
- 2 The analysis is based on in-depth interviews with members of Scheduled Tribes, NGOs, and government officials. :
- 3 The Government documents refer to certain tribal groups as primitive depending on their mode of subsistence.
- 4 Census of India, 1991.
- 5 The Scheduled Tribes in different districts are presented in Table 1 [in the Annexure].
- 6 Census of India, 1991.
- 7 There are two reasons for selecting these districts. The tribal groups in these areas live in settlements surrounded by forests and hills. They were subject to displacement because of the development projects in the region and the conservation efforts that are underway. Their isolation and displacement from their earlier habitat make their problems distinct from those of the tribals of other regions in the state.

- 8 The main tribal groups in Mysore and Chamrajanagar are Jenu Kurubas, Kadu Kurubas, Betta Kurubas, Sholigas, Yeravas, Dongiri Gersias, Hakkipikk, and Kaniyas.
- 9 Satish and Schaengold, 1999.
- 10 See Fernandes and Paranjpye, [1997] for a critique of the rehabilitation policy.
- 11 There is a perception that some of the conditions of the donor agency in funding the Upper Krishna Project have hastened the enactment of the Act.
- 12 The Act refers to 'Resettlement' and not 'Rehabilitation.' It is clear that rehabilitation of the displaced population is not intended. There is a perceptible difference between resettlement and rehabilitation. While compensation and relocation are sufficient requirements of the 'resettlement' Act, rehabilitation would include provision of civic amenities in the resettlement colony [Ramesh and Guntipilly, 1997]; and emphasises that relocation should be with the consent of the displaced people.
- 13 The declaration of the Act however should be made in consonance with the notification under Section 4 [1] of the Land Acquisition Act, 1894.
- 14 The World Bank finances some of the development projects in Karnataka. The requirement of the Operational Directive 4.3 of the Bank indicates that displaced people should be provided with alternative livelihood and development tools to improve their living condition. The Act has not made any provision to accommodate such requirements as it is confined only to resettlement.
- 15 Ramesh and Guntipilly, 1997.
- 16 The donor agencies who finance major development projects in India should also ensure that involuntary resettlement is avoided or minimised. Where alternatives are not feasible it should be ensured that rehabilitation measures are to the satisfaction of the displaced people.
- 17 See Rao, 1996.
- 18 Department of Tribal Welfare, Government of Karnataka.
- 19 Source, Tribal Sub-Plan, Annual Report, Government of Karnataka, 1997-98.
- 20 The departments that are involved in the tribal development programmes are: agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, fisheries, forest, village and small-scale industries, and sericulture.
- 21 Had it not been for the NGOs working in the B.R. Hills and H.D. Kote the tribal groups would not have had access to education and medical facilities.
- 22 The medical practitioner at SVYM said that the organisation charged Rs. 2 per consultation.
- 23 Often, tribal people take one of their members to the hospital when the patient was already in a critical condition. If the patient dies, as is very likely, the hospital is perceived as a place of death.
- 24 Normally, 25 years of age would not be considered the age when a woman's reproductive cycle would end. However, in the case of these tribal women

several factors contribute to this happening, including early pregnancies (starting in their early teens), several deliveries (7-8) by the time they are 25, alcoholism, drugs, and lack of proper medical treatment including pre and post natal care.

- 25 There were also instances where the tribals consumed the sheep given to them under one of the animal husbandry programmes.

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# Annexure 1

**Table 1: Scheduled tribe population in Karnataka**

	<b>District</b>	<b>Total popula- tion</b>	<b>Schedu- led Tribe popula- tion</b>	<b>Percen- tage</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1.	Bangalore [U]	661457	14155	2.14	21
2.	Bangalore [R]	1342866	43828	3.26	16
3.	Chitradurga	1096525	198456	18.10	1
4.	Davanagere	1120831	130587	11.65	2
5.	Kolar	1690673	142366	8.42	7
6.	Shimoga	945412	24295	2.57	19
7.	Tumkur	1903587	150829	7.92	8
8.	Chikmagalur	825388	24239	2.94	18
9.	Dakshina Kannada	1130008	59123	5.23	11
10.	Udupi	867399	35347	4.08	13
11.	Hassan	1330627	15188	1.64	25
12.	Kodagu	438477	39147	8.93	6
13.	Mandya	1399111	9859	0.70	27
14.	Mysore	1477661	49008	3.32	15
15.	Chamrajanagar	747073	28839	3.86	14
16.	Belgaum	2806077	67038	2.39	20
17.	Bijapur	1225645	15456	1.26	24
18.	Bagalkot	969748	18370	1.89	22
19.	Dharwad	633784	11581	1.83	23
20.	Gadag	560607	16634	2.97	17
21.	Haveri	1023516	55283	5.40	10
22.	Uttara Kannada	906688	9073	1.00	26
23.	Bellary	1095942	110873	10.12	4
24.	Bidar	986748	96767	9.81	5
25.	Gulbarga	1944163	94114	4.84	12
26.	Raichur	1036889	109905	10.60	3
27.	Koppal	814730	54810	6.73	9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>30981632</b>	<b>1625170</b>	<b>5.25</b>	

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