

A STUDY OF THE LIFE OF WOMEN BELONGING TO MAANGARUDI NOMADIC TRIBE: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Shaila Balaganur

Guest lecturer, Department of women's studies, Karnataka State Akkamahadevi Women's University Vijayapura



ABSTRACT

For the reasons stated above, the women belonging to Manga Arudi nomadic tribal community, have remained at lowest strata. Socially and economically. Women suffer from gross neglect and are left to suffer due to lack of education and health care thus, to realise the "right to life" as enshrined in the constitution there is an urgent need to study the status of women of this community from a feminist research methodology. It can safely be stated that studies on this community done so far are from point of view of being a "criminal community" – and oriented towards patriarchal importance and not paid adequate attention to women's lives.

Keywords: *Life of Women, Maangarudi Nomadic Tribe, Feminist Perspective*

Introduction:

By and large people belonging to nomadic, semi-nomadic tribes, and other tribes have been unable to come to mainstream of the society and have remained out of the ambit of social benefits they are entitled to even though many schemes are available to them from the government and the non-government agencies. There are many such tribal societies in the country and Mangarudi is one such tribe. "There is none to echo our suffering, none to convey our difficulties to the authorities, none to guide us. Therefore, despite being in the age of progress and prosperity seen around us, we continue to suffer and live with it" said a hapless woman when spoke to her.

Many a social welfare schemes and popular agendas have been implemented by the governments both at the centre and states, as also considerable amount of money has been pumped into these schemes over the last seven decades of independence. However, despite the efforts, the plight such nomadic communities like Mangarudi has remained quite backward and lives of their women folk even worse. One woman said "our suffering is worse than that of SITA (the wife lard Rama of Ramayana)". These words, coming from the women of this community is an enough indicator of their inner aversion, helplessness and anger towards the travails they face each day. Why should a community, although belonging to a nomadic tribal roots (in the past), should be left behind in the social structure of the mainstream society? More pertinently, why should the "female" population of this community suffer vagaries of life needlessly despite the provisions in the constitution, acts and laws?

This study is aimed to understand the problems faced by the women of this community and bring out the gaps in the efforts in their upliftment and empowerment by the various agencies established/operating for the purpose. This community is spread mostly in Maharashtra and Karnataka and as per reports in internet (Joshua Project) their number is approximately 77,000/-. It is desired to undertake field study by visiting the community in randomly selected areas or locations across both the states in the border areas and across Karnataka.

There are quite many nomadic and other tribes in Karnataka, notably, the Hakka-pikki, Chapparband, HaranShikari, Ghisadi, Madari, Sindhholli, Shilleketar, Sudugadu sidha, Handijogi, Dokkaliga and many other tribes suffer the same fate of social aloofness and depravity as that of Manga Arudi tribes. The status of women in these communities is by and large same. The fact that these communities are small in numbers and spread across vast areas, the facilities and schemes available for DNT (De-notified Tribes) for their progress have not effectively helped them. The community is prone to exploitation by the powerful. Though the member of this communities are involved in (often low paying and strenuous) jobs in support of the society they live with, they are often subject to cheating, alienation and neglect since hoary past, and sadly even now.

The studies done on tribal communities have mostly focussed on their history and culture. However there is no study on the life of women focussing on their daily toil, family ordeals due to patriarchy and the much neglected health issues and more importantly about the neglect of formal education to the girl-child, which is an essential tool to bring this society in to main stream by empowering them.

Indian constitution is explicit in providing basic human rights to all its citizens. However, our effort to provide social justice to these communities, who are at the fringes and most down trodden in the social structure is indeed a daunting task. This is not surprising. The nomadic or semi – nomadic communities tend to be often neglected, or possibly glossed over due to their social aloofness. The situation is such that, many people even do not know or aware about the names various tribal (nomadic or otherwise) communities live in own nearby neighbourhood. Under such neglected conditions, it is hoped that if an in depth study is undertaken about this society, focussing on issues pertaining to women, it would pave a healthy way towards their empowerment. In this introduction the objectives of the study and its importance is detailed.

Objectives

- 1. To understand the status of living if women in Manga Arudi community.
- 2. To investigate their social, economical educational and health status of women.
- 3. To collate problems faced by the women in this community and,
- 4. Find out reasons as to why these women are not able to make use or social welfare measures provided by government and organisations.

Review of literature:

a) Colonial police literature:

Unfortunately there is not much of written material available to know about the Manga Arudi clan or tribe. Books available in anthroponomy and anthropology do not shed much light either. However, during the colonial British India period some writings started appearing. The main objectives appear to be the spread of Christianity among the tribal, and to help the imperial police administration in identifying, those communities, which were considered as “criminals”.

Thus, the first appearance of this tribe name “Manga Arudi” came in the description of a protestant missionary named Rev, M A Sherring in 1881, in his book entitled ”Hindu Tribes and Castes”, ans in 3rd Vol, the name Mang Arudi appears in a solitary paragraph. Immediately after this, in 1882, Major E.J.Gunthorpe, MSC, Berar police, in his book “Notes on criminal tribes residing in or frequenting the Bombay presidency, no brought out considerable data on a number of tribal communities- that includes Manga Arudi tribe. The main purpose of Gunthorpe’s writing was to identify features of these communities like their living places, occupation and culture etc, to help the lower police echelons in identifying these “criminal” tribal individuals for the maintenance of “law and order” by the imperialist rulers.

In 1907 another note appeared on the subject of these “criminal” tribes. This was written by M. Kennedy, who was from the Crime Investigation Department in the Railways of the Bombay presidency. The book was entitled “Notes on the criminal classes in Bombay Presidency”. This book carried the same objectives and mindset as that of Gunthorpe (1882). It is interesting to note that Kennedy in his introduction to the book has admitted that the study of Anthroponomy or Anthropology of these tribes does not help much to the police in “crime Investigation”.

In 1909 George Whilty Goyer, Principal, Police Officers Training School, Sagar wrote a book entitled” Lectures on some criminal tribes of India and Religious medicants. Even this book followed the footsteps of Gunthorpe. The whole narrative of these writers is that of colonial rulers. What is unfortunate is that subsequent writers on the study of these tribal communities have rather not been able to come out of the prejudices about these tribes.

b) Literature Anthroponomy and Anthropology.

Anthropologist Herbert Hope Reslay (1851-1911) has done extensive studies on the tribes of Bengal. In 1906 a Civil Servant in Bengal, wrote a book on “the tribes and castes of North-Western province and Oudh. This book, unlike police literature preceding it made an effort to understand tribal communities more humanely and comprehensively from anthropological perspective. Subsequent writers have also made studies on the tribal life, throwing light on the Manga Arudi tribe. A new approach on the subject was adopted by Chief Justice of (erstwhile) NIZAM state, Sayyad Siraj Al Hasan in his book “Castes and Tribes of H.E.H. The Nijam’s

Dominions". This book goes in to greater detail about the features of the community, habits, internal structure of the society, social status, rituals of birth, marriage, death and divorce etc, Various other scholars have also dwelt on the subject. But sadly, most writers have treated them as belonging to criminal mindset or background.

c) Literature of University Research:

In 1994, Dr Metri Shesh Narang's unpublished Ph.D. theses "A sociological study of Mang Garudis of Karnataka in urban setting" throws much light on the tribes residing at Kalburgi city. The main short coming of the book is that it follows the same mindset of the colonial rulers. However, Shri Harsh kumar Kugve of Dr. B.R.Ambedkar research centre in his research book titled "Anthropological and social studies of Manga Arudi tribes" throws much needed light on the subject which is free from the earlier prejudices. This book is in Kannada and is valuable for further research of the community from feminist perspective.

Research Methodology:

Research is an effort to search for 'truth'. And "truth happens to be multifaceted and multi-dimensional. This research takes the approach through feminist perspective on the issue of women belonging to this community. It dwells on bringing out gender inequalities within the target group". Such an approach is a great enabler in sincerely understanding the inner feeling of women and their struggle, which is fundament to further evaluate their problems in social inequalities and gender discriminations.

The French feminist thinker Simon-de- Bova – was the first person to put forward this thought in her classic book "The Second Sex". Here, she has clearly brought out all scholarship in the field of philosophy, life sciences, psychology, art, literature, et al; have been consistent in denying the 'women' her true status in the society. Such an approach has been bedrock on which feminist research methodology is based.

This study intends to probe in to the life of women of Manga Arudi community. It would look in to their mother hood, impact of nomadic life, family life, status of women in their panchayat's, health, education, and their role in politics. For the study, interviews, discussions and interview methods will be used. Qualitative methods will be also put to use.

Quantitative Data Collection:

Quantitative data is based on random selection of data available in Karnataka district of Vijayapura, Belagavi, Kalaburgi and Bidar with a total population of about 7000 people. Of this, about 300 women of various categories will be randomly selected for the study.

Qualitative Data Collection:

Every research adopts its own and specific methodology. Likewise, this research too has adopted "Feminist Research Methodology". The research is based on Qualitative and Quantitative methods. These include Questionnaire, Interview, observation and the Case Studies, for collection of data. This data is then analysed through "feminist-research" perspective.

The phrase "Feminist Research" means, understanding the entire range of issues pertaining to women from a feminist point of view to find out the causes and their consequences by in-depth study. Feminist research considers the aspects of life of women affected by the circumstances of social milieu in which she lives, as the objects of study. It has gained importance in the proper understanding of various facets of women's life. The social, economical, educational, religious and cultural facets her life, and her condition within different layers in which she lives can best be studied with required sensitivity only through a feminist world view. This approach has contributed to the robust growth of "women Studies". Such an approach with focus on women-centric sensitivity has, unfortunately, remained outside the ambit of traditional "Social Research", resulting in loss of significant information on the subject. Thus, this research methodology is more helpful in this study.

A part of "Qualitative data collection" is the 'case study'. The case study is a research approach, situated between concrete data taking techniques and methodological paradigms (Lamnek-2005). Thus, case studies helps in the "social construction of reality" by looking into the "gaps and holes" and identifying the anomalies on the topic under investigation.

Relevance and Anticipated Outcomes:

The community of Manga Arudi stands at the far end of the society. The tribe is nomadic and comes under denotified tribes (DNT). A look at the Gazette reveals that this name is missing in the list of tribes. Thus most scholars don't even know about them. If this be the social aloofness of the society as a whole, how to know what is the life of women and children, especially the girl-children in the society?

This study mainly focuses on the female population of this community. The study would focus on understanding female identity and through that seek measures to eradicate basic inequalities so that community as whole improves by empowering its women. It is rather sad that the civic society has not paid enough attention to the vagaries the community as a whole, and its women in particular. Thus this study gains importance in the understanding of women's life in this tribal community.

This reasons why this study is necessary at this juncture is that, while, India during the recent years is recognised as an important country globally, and takes prominence in human development, yet, it is also true that many tribal communities are living in the margins of social development. This is more visible in the deprivations suffered by its girl – children and women folk in particular. This pathetic situation of this (Manga Arudi) community despite constitutional provisions, social welfare measure in place – is an indicator that much needs to be understood – and proactive actions initiated without delay for their upliftment. It is necessary to understand the causes for their poverty, illiteracy, ill-health and socio-economic backwardness.

Presently most community members make their living jobs like, rag picking, giving shave to buffalos, running autorickshaws, working in municipalities for scavenging and even working in Musical Bands. How do the women folk survive and sustain in this community has not been studied. What are the problems faced by women in this society? How is their domestic, social and cultural life? How do they react to modernity and the ubiquitous mass media impact are yet to be understood in-depth. Finally, it is desired to know what makes the community remain backward even with all social welfare schemes in place.

Conclusion

For the reasons stated above, the women belonging to Manga Arudi nomadic tribal community, have remained at lowest strata. Socially and economically. Women suffer from gross neglect and are left to suffer due to lack of education and health care thus, to realise the “right to life” as enshrined in the constitution there is an urgent need to study the status of women of this community from a feminist research methodology. It can safely be stated that studies on this community done so far are from point of view of being a “criminal community” – and oriented towards patriarchal importance and not paid adequate attention to women's lives.

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