



## Bedar Tribe in Karnataka: A Sociological Analysis

### KEYWORDS

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**ABSTRACT** *The scheduled tribes are deprived from civilization and due to the rules of forest conservation, they have lost their shelter in forests. Further, they are not educated and civilized as their stay was in forests or hilly areas. Bedar community is also one of the tribe which is concentrated in different parts of Karnataka. Bedar tribe is unique in terms of social culture, traditions, etiquette, etc. The present paper analyzed the social culture of Bedars in Karnataka.*

### Introduction:

India is a secular country covering people from different religions and castes and also the subdivisions of the castes. Based on Vedic faith, Manusmriti and culture, the castes were formulated according to the occupations. According to ancient Hindu faith many of the castes were regarded as lower and others are higher. The lower castes include the backward communities with lower occupations and people living in forests and have ancient occupations. The term 'Adivasi' is derived from Sanskrit word 'atavika' means forest dwellers. They are also called as Vanavasi or Girijans (hilly people). There are many tribes and each of these tribes are recognized in a particular state in India. These groups are classified as backward castes and grouped under 'Scheduled Tribes' by the Indian Constitution.

Scheduled Tribes constitute a section subjected not only to social ostracism but also to economic exploitation. Scheduled Tribe or Adivasi is an umbrella term for a heterogeneous set of ethnic and tribal groups claimed to be the aboriginal population of India. They comprise a substantial indigenous minority of the population of India. Adivasi societies are particularly present in the Indian states of Kerala, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Mizoram and other north-eastern states, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Many smaller tribal groups are quite sensitive to ecological degradation caused by modernization. Both commercial forestry and intensive agriculture have proved destructive to the forests that had endured swidden agriculture for many centuries. Officially recognized by the Indian government as "Scheduled Tribes" in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India, they are often grouped together with scheduled castes in the category "Scheduled Castes and Tribes", which is eligible for certain affirmative action measures.

There is a substantial list of Scheduled Tribes in India recognized as tribal under the Constitution of India. There are some 85 million Indians who are officially classified as "scheduled tribes". Of these, about 16 million live in the states of north-eastern India (Guha, 2007). According to the 2001 Census, adivasis, or STs, make up just over 8% of the Indian population (Divya Vaid, 2009). In the northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland, more than 90% of the population is tribal. However, in the remaining northeast states of Assam, Manipur, Sikkim, and Tripura, tribal peoples form between 20 and 30% of the population (Wikipedia, 2014).

There are smaller numbers of tribal people in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala in south India; in western India in Gujarat and Rajasthan, and in the union territories of Lakshadweep and the Andaman Islands and Nicobar Islands. About

one percent of the populations of Kerala and Tamil Nadu are tribal, whereas about six percent in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are members of tribes. In India, the scheduled tribes constituted 700 million population showing 7% of the total population according to the Census of India 2001.

The term Adivasi used as synonymous to the terms 'tribe', 'indigenous people' and 'aboriginals'. But, none of the sources have clearly defined the term Adivasi. As stated by Xaxa (1999), various conventions of the International Labour Organisation from 1957 onwards and the Working Group on Indigenous Populations set up by the United Nations have sought to protect the interests of "indigenous and other tribal and semi-tribal populations". Due to the industrialization and urbanization, the tribal have lost their land and occupation, which mainly based on hilly and forest areas. As such, the tribes were neglected by the government in terms of education, employment, health care, etc.

On the one hand, by not providing them with decent education and healthcare, the government of India has dishonoured its constitutional guarantee to provide the Adivasis equal opportunities for social and economic development. On the other hand, the policies of the government have more actively dispossessed very many Adivasis of their traditional means of life and livelihood. For the tribal of the mainland live amidst India's best forests, alongside many of its fastest-flowing rivers, and on top of its richest mineral resources. Once, this closeness to nature's bounty provided them the means for subsistence and survival. However, as the pace of economic and industrial development picked up after Independence, the Adivasis have increasingly had to make way for commercial forestry, dams, and mines. Often, the Adivasis are displaced because of the pressures and imperatives of what passes as "development"; sometimes, they are displaced because of the pressures and imperatives of developments equally modern other: namely, "conservation". Thus, apart from large dams and industrial townships, tribals have also been rendered homeless by national parks and sanctuaries (Maharatna, 2005).

Bedar community is one of the most backward tribe in Karnataka. In Kannada language the term 'Bedar' means Adivasis or hilly people with hunting as their occupation. Bedar community is also called as 'Valmiki' tribe, 'Balmiki' tribe or 'Beda' tribe. They were now grouped under the Scheduled Tribes in Constitution of India.

Bedar, Bendar, Berad-The great hunting and agricultural tribe of the Karnataka, identical with the Boyas of Telangana and the Ramoshis of the Maharashtra. They call themselves Kanayamkula, "descendants of Kanayam", Dhorimkulam "children of chiefs" and Valmika Kshatriyas "Kshatriyas descended from Valmiki". They are a wild and fierce looking

people, of coarse features and dark complexion and bear an evil reputation as highway robbers and dakaits. Their predatory habits have been greatly repressed, and they are now largely employed as village watchmen (Hassan, 1920).

Bedar tribes belong to the famous Dravidian language family group. The Bedar tribal community can be found in several places of Karnataka. They are also known as Beda, Berad, Boya, Bendar, Berar, Burar, Ramoshi, Talwar, Byadar, and Valmiki. The word 'bedar' has an etymological significance. The word has been derived from the word bed or bedaru, which signifies a hunter. The ancestors of Bedar tribes were the Pindaris. However, some claim that their ancestors were Tirole Kunbis. The origin of the name of the tribe is not properly known. It is said that the meaning of the term bedar is without fear. Less information is available about the origin of these Bedar tribes. Within the Bedar tribal community, there are few Hindus and are called Bedar. The Muslims are being referred as Berad. These Bedar tribes themselves like to be identified as Naikwadi since they work as village policemen or Talwar (watchmen) or Naikmakalu (Chief's Children).

The word Bedar is derived from Byaderus, a corruption of Vyadherus (Sanskrit term- Byadha, a hunter). The origin of the tribe has been the subject of many legends. According to one they are descended from the primitive pair, Kannayya and Kanakavva who are fabled to have sprung from the right and left eyes of Basavanna respectively.

The Bedars claim descent also from Valmiki, who is represented in the Puranas as being reclaimed from his pernicious and marauding habits by the divine sage Narada. But the legend which is very widely current among them states that from the thigh of the dead king Hoti of the Solar race was produced by the great Rishis, a black dwarf, ugly in appearance and ferocious in habits. Being unfit to rule, he was driven by the sages into the jungles to live on forest produce or by hunting. In his wanderings he once met Menaka, a celestial nymph of matchless beauty, and made love to her. Their union was blessed with seven sons: (1) Nishaad (2) Shera (3) Kuvangriyari (4) Salika (5) Ksharakari (6) Ansari (7) Sheshatardhari. From these sons' seven great clans of Bedars, bearing the names of their progenitors:

1. Nishadas, who hunted tigers, bears and wild boars and ate the flesh of buffaloes;
2. Sheras, who made a living by selling jungle roots, fruit and sandal wood;
3. Kavangriyaris, who wore long hair and had their ear-lobes bored with large holes. They subsisted on the sale of Bibla (*Pterocarpus marsupium*) and oyster shells;
4. Salikas, who were employed as day labourers in digging wells and tanks;
5. Ksharakaris, who made lime and salt;
6. Ansaris, who were fishermen and worked also as ferry-men; and
7. Sheshatardharis, who were hunters and fowlers.

All these clans were distinguished by their respective gotra names or bediga (1) Gojaldaru or Gujjar (2) Gosalru or Gurrall (3) Bhadmandalkaru (4) Saranga Gunda Bahsarandlu or Sarang Gauda (5) Tayarasamantaru or Tair Samant (7) Rajadhiraj (Maharaja or King).

#### Status of Women among Bedars:

Even though Bedar tribe is very popular for its rule in different parts of Karnataka and India, still it is backward. It is emphasized that the status of women in Bedar tribe is very low. When Valmiki, founder of Bedar community was used to rob the people in forests, lord Shiva in disguise asked Valmiki that, as he has committed sins to rob and kill the people and animals in forests, whether his sins will be shared by his wife and children. Surprisingly, Valmiki asked his wife that whether she also shares in his sins and she is rejected to share his sins. It shows that the Bedar women during those days were

living morally and used to think independently regarding morality and even become rebel to the views of the husband, if he is committed mistakes and sins (Bevinakatti, 2009).

When the history of Karnataka is analyzed, Bedar people were employed as soldiers in the army of the rulers and as a result, there may be frequent deaths among the Bedar men. Due to such incidents, there may be increase in the number of widows and they become unsecured. Under such circumstances, the Bedar widows used to become 'servants of gods' in the name of Goddesses of villages. Gradually, such women were exploited by other people and as a result, there was subordination of women in Bedar tribe. Later, such convention was celebrated as 'Devadas' or 'Basavi' in Bedar tribe (Bevinakatti, 2009).

It is also revealed that apart from her family duties such as cooking and looking after children, the Bedar women were also engaged in animal husbandry, knitting of skin products, hunting for the sake of livelihood, etc. In that respect, the Bedar women were also trained and learnt the use of many weapons. Later, Bedar tribe depended on agriculture for their livelihood and during those days, the women were also co-operated with their husbands in the agricultural processes. The historical records reveal that majority of the Bedar women are experts in cultivating, harvesting, etc processes of agriculture.

As described by Sunanda Naik (2009) due to National Literacy Mission, the Bedar women living in rural and forest areas are also become literates. Further, the Bedar women used to emphasize the education of their children. Recently, there is also increase in the number of Stree Shakti Groups (Self-Help Groups) and Bedar women are also voluntarily participating in the Self-Help Group activities. Thereby, they are also developing their livelihood and socio-economic life. The Bedar women as Self-Help Group members are also engaged in the income generating activities such as stitching, embroidery, matt weaving, preparing home products, etc. Even though, there is gradual improvement in the status of women due to education and employment, still there are cultural roots, which are celebrated by the Bedars, especially Bedar women at different occasions as per their cultural rites.

#### Social Culture:

The internal structure of the Bedars is very intricate. This is due, partly to the large area over which they are scattered, and partly to the different social levels that have been formed among them. Thus at the highest level are the Rajas and rich landholders who have, in every respect, assumed the style of higher Hindu castes, while the lowest level is occupied by the bulk of the people who adhere to their aboriginal customs and usages and have few scruples in diet—eating beef, as well as cats and other unclean animals. In Maharashtra, the Beda tribe is known as 'Ramoshi' community and in Andhra Pradesh they are called as 'Boyas'.

The social structure of the Bedar tribal community is quite significant. The endogamous groups are found among the Bedar tribe are (1) Sadar or Naikulu (Valmiki) Bedars (2) Tanged Bedars (3) Mangala Bedars (4) Chakla Bedars (5) Neech Bedars (6) Basavi Bedars (7) Ramoshi Bedars (8) Jas Bedars (9) Bedars (proper). Bedar tribes have taken up occupations like farming labourers, security guards, workers, stonemasons, drivers etc. Apart from these occupations, the Bedar tribal are also engaged in occupations of servants, traders, messengers, police and soldiers. The Bedar tribal community is of a mixed nature. There are three sub-divisions of Bedar tribal communities. These are Maratha, Kande and Telugu Bedars. They have their indigenous customs and traditions. They eat meat and also drink liquor.

The ordinary dress of the Bedars was a pair of loose cotton trousers descending to the calf of the leg, a turban and a waist band, with a chintz tunic for festival occasions (Halap-

pa and Krishnarao, 1920). The women wear Saree as usual. They use readymade bangles of glass and tattoo their bodies, especially the upper arms with floral designs. Gold and silver ornaments are rarely found except in a few families in the urban areas. The Bedar women wear all the kinds of ornaments such as Mangalasutra, bangles, earrings, etc. Both the tribal and rural middle aged Bedar men wear shirts and shorts extending to the knees. An aged Bedar wears only a loin cloth (Dhoti) that comes below the navel, a turban to cover his head and an woolen blanket on his shoulders. But urban dwellers use trousers and shirts in the case of males and sarees and skirts in case of females.

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