



Socio Economic Analysis of Sillekyatha Community in Mysore City, Karnataka

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to assess the Socio-economic status of the Sillekyatha community of Ekalavyanagara, Mysore city of Karnataka. More than half of the respondents belonged to middle age group and were illiterates. Their traditional occupation was the leather puppet show (Togalu Gombe Aata). Most of them live in kutchra (hut) dwellings (98%). More than half of the respondents belonged to the low income group and had a nuclear family (93%). They live in poor sanitation conditions and unhygienic routine practices (lack of toilets and sanitary conditions for women in the community) with a semi-nomadic lifestyle and unhealthy feeding habits.

Introduction

There are 96 Nomadic communities in Karnataka, historically unorganized minorities, socially disadvantaged and, more often than not, ignored by major developmental state programs. They are put under different categories such as the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). In this categorization, communities that were earlier part of de-notified, nomadic and Semi-nomadic tribes were also included in the list of the SC, ST and OBC Categories. The Sillekyatha is one of the nomadic communities belonging to the Scheduled Caste (SC) in Karnataka. The present study concentrated on a number of socio-economic issues concerning the Sillekyatha community of Ekalavyanagara in Mysore city. Ekalavyanagara is situated in the west side of the Mysore and it is ten km from the city centre from the midpoint of Mysore. The aim of our study was the comprehension of the Sillekyatha lifestyle, assessing their socio-economic status as well as studying their educational status, and propose some suggestions and recommendation concerning the improvement of the community's socio-economic conditions.

Methods of the Study:

The present study adopted an exploratory-cum-descriptive design to gather the relevant information and data. The exploratory design was chosen in order to collect basic statistical data to

have an in-depth knowledge of the socio-economic status of the community and their relationship with other communities. The descriptive design was helpful in getting to know the innermost feelings, views and attitudes of the respondents. The sample size of the study was made of a hundred families; we used household surveys, interview schedules, focused group discussions, participant observation methods to collect primary data. Secondary data was collected through books, journals, periodicals, newsletters, Government and Non-Government Reports, internet etc. The primary data were analyzed by adopting the simple descriptive statistical measure.

Sillekyatha community:

The Shillekyatha are known by different names such as Killekyatha, Killiketar, Killket, Katbus, Chatri, Chitrakathi Joshi, Bommalatavallu, and Gombe Ramaru. In some places they are also referred to as Bunde Besthas. The Shillekyatha community is a numerically small nomadic community classified as a scheduled caste and have been living since many decades not only in the districts of the old Mysore state but also in the former Bombay-Karnataka and Madras-Karnataka regions. While most of their income comes from the puppet-shadow playing, fishing and begging, after they settled in the plains villages they had to fit themselves into the larger social and economic structure and, accordingly they started to be occupied in farming, animal rearing (buffalo), government services etc. They are predominantly a rural based community and are largely distributed in Karnataka. The Sillekyathas are also found in other parts of the country but with different local names. However, they are identified as one ethnic group due to their common dialect. They are akin to other Maratha allied castes but they are a distinct community, which played a dominant role as spies of both the Karnataka and the Maharashtra.

There are different opinions with regard to the basic unit of the Sillekyathas' social structure because their customs and manners are not uniform throughout Karnataka due to geographical and cultural variations.

According to the 1971 Census the population was around 18,513 i.e. 0.06% of the population in Karnataka State. The *Bombay Gazetteer* (1884) shows that 374 families of Killekyatha or Katabu were found in the Bijapura districts. E. Thurston (1909) further writes:

The Killekyathas are a Marathi speaking people. They travel around the villages and perform wherever they can secure sufficient patronage. Contributions can be in the form of money or oil for the foot-lights. Their profession is enacting religious dramas before the audiences of villages and some women in the community are engaged as professional tattoo anchors.

Nanjundayya and Iyer (1931) state that Shillekyatha means "drama artists" in the Marathi language. They call themselves Dateru but the origin of this term cannot be traced. Anantha Krishna Iyyar (1930) states that the Killekyathas are nomadic people who have two occupations, that is they do fishing in the morning and puppet show in the night. They have been called Katabu in Bombay presidency and say they are kshathriyas and belong to the royal family.

According to Singh, K. S. (1993) the Shillekyatha people migrated from Maharashtra some time back. Their population in Karnataka according to the 1981 census is 7868 (3997 males and 3871 females). They are predominantly a rural based community and are mainly distributed in the

Belgaum, Bijapur, Dharwad, Bellary, and Mandya districts. Marathi is spoken at home but Kannada is spoken with other communities. The alphabet used for writing is Kannada.

The Sillekyata are non-vegetarians, but do not eat beef or pork. Their staple foods in the northern parts are jowar and maize, while in the southern parts they are ragi and rice. Pulses like *tur dal* and horse grams are used. Men and old women consume alcohol drinks. Fruits are occasionally consumed. Milk and milk products are also consumed. Smoking *beedis* and chewing betel leaves are common habits. Some men wear *dhotis* in the kachcha style, some men wear shirts and pants bought in the market. Women generally wear sari and have tattoos on their hands.

Result and Discussion:

There are 380 families in Ekalayanagara. Nearly 70% of the population is illiterate. The family is the basic unit of society, which assigns social status, roles and social responsibilities to every individual. The family is the most powerful medium through which a value system can develop over a period of time and individual behaviors and attitudes are determined by the family one belongs to, that is whether a family is joint or nuclear, and it also determines the status and role of women.

Table: 1 Type of family

Type of Family	Frequency	%
Nuclear family	93	93.0
Join family	7	7.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 1 shows that 93.0 of the respondents belong to nuclear families and 7.0 % of the respondents belong to joint families. Thus, nuclear families more than joint families. The Shillekyatha are a male dominated community, and women do not have the right to take any individual decision without the family males' consent.

Table: 2 Size of family

Family size	Frequency	%
One	1	1.0
Two	16	16.0
Three to Four	73	73.0
Above Five	10	10.0
Total	100	100.0

The family is the basic unit of society. Families exist in all sizes and configurations and are essential to the health and survival of the individual members and to society as a whole (Himani Bhasin, 2016). The family size of more than half (73.0%) of the respondents was medium sized (3-4), while 16% was

only two and rest above five.

Table 3 Type of House

Type of house	Frequency	Percent
Hut/ <i>Kutch</i> a house	98	98.0
Semi- <i>Pucca</i> House	2	2.0
<i>Pucca</i> House	0	0
Total	100	100.0

Housing is one of the major problems of this community. Since most of them have been nomadic and have been wandering in the past to earn their living, they never had a permanent home or settlement. Table 3 shows that most family members live in a *kutch*a house made from mud, thatch, or other low-quality materials. Most families don't have enough space for a separate toilet and bathroom. So most people either use public toilets or go in the open and also don't have access to safe drinking water. Either there is no tapped water or it is far away from the settlement.

People live in settlements and have their huts in a row and most of the huts are adjoining one another, with an open space between the rows which gives the settlement the appearance of a street. The huts have no foundations, with mud walls and bamboo or wooden roofs covered with grass, straw or local tiles. The houses are made of a single room with a front-opened veranda and without a toilet and bathroom. The flooring is plastered with mud and leathered with cow dung.

Table 4: Age and gender wise-wise population distribution

Age Group and Gender	Male	Female	Total
0-5	39	32	71
	19.5%	17.7%	18.6%
6-14	35	41	76
	17.5%	22.7%	19.9%
15-19	23	7	30
	11.5%	3.9%	7.9%
20-29	47	52	99
	23.5%	28.7%	26.0%
30-39	28	24	52
	14.0%	13.3%	13.6%
40-49	11	10	21
	5.5%	5.5%	5.5%
50-59	11	5	16
	5.5%	2.8%	4.2%
60-69	3	4	7
	1.5%	2.2%	1.8%
70 and Above	3	6	9
	1.5%	3.3%	2.4%
Total	200	181	381
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The sample consists of 100 households; most household members belonged to the age group of 20-29 years (26.0%) followed by 19.9% household members 6-14 group of age, 18.6% are 0-5 age

group, the rest of the members belonged to the age group of 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69 and above 70 years. (Table 4) with an average of 3.81 members per household. The details show that 47.5% of the population were women and 52.5% were men.

Table 5: Gender-wise marital status

Marital Status	Male	Female	Total
Married	93	98	191
	46.5%	54.1%	50.1%
Unmarried	107	81	188
	53.5%	44.8%	49.3%
Widow or Widower	0	2	2
	.0%	1.1%	.5%
Total	200	181	381
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Of the total population 50.1 percent were married and 49.3 percent were unmarried. The proportion of married women is higher than that of unmarried men and the proportion of unmarried women is lower compared to unmarried men. Only 0.5 percent are widows or widowers.

Table 6: Gender wise Education Status

Education level	Male	Female	Total
Illiterate	78	102	180
	39.0%	56.4%	47.2%
Lower Primary	66	52	118
	33.0%	28.7%	31.0%
Highr Primary	22	11	33
	11.0%	6.1%	8.7%
Highar Shool	28	14	42
	14.0%	7.7%	11.0%
PUC or +2	2	1	3
	1.0%	.6%	.8%
Degree	2	0	2
	1.0%	.0%	.5%
PG	2	0	2
	1.0%	.0%	.5%
ITI-Dip or Any Professional coursee	0	1	1
	.0%	.6%	.3%
Total	200	181	381
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 6 point outs the education level of the sample families. Among the total population 47.2% is illiterate, and female illiteracy is higher than male illiteracy. The level of education among these communities is very low. Since the very nature of their livelihood requires them to frequently move around, they are not able to send their children to school. Added to this, children are also a part of their profession in this community.

Educational level of the males: around 39.0% illiterate, the rest are literate. Among the literate males 33.0 percent studied up to the lower primary, 11.0% higher primary, 14.0 % high school, and

very few at college level. The observed females were 56.4% illiterate, among the literate females 28.7% studied up to the lower primary level. Only 0.6% female studied up to PUC level, but no one reached the UG or PG levels, and only one female attended a professional course.

Table: 7 Major Sources of Livelihood of the Sillekyatha community:

Occupation	Frequency	%
Traditional Occupation/ leather puppet show	8	8.0
Labourer	69	69.0
Small Bussiness	11	11.0
Private Sector	6	6.0
Other works	6	6.0
Total	100	100.0

The Sillekyata were once nomadic but have now settled down in different villages and towns. They own land in certain areas and cultivate it. In Mysore city, however, they do have no land. Most of them (69.0) work as laborers in various factories and in the building construction sector, whole 8.0% families are engaged on their traditional occupation. The traditional occupation of the Sillekyata was mainly entertaining the public with leather puppet shows (*Togalu Gome Aata*) based on the Ramayana and the Mahabaratha. The 11% of the families depended on small roadside business, selling bangles, mosquito nets, dry fruits and so on. They also sew the hemlines of blankets (*karekattuvadu*), and made quilts out of rags. Nowadays, traditional occupations have lost its economic importance, so the Sillekyata have been forced to take up labour work in various sectors. Some of them (6.0%) repair metalware, others sell bangles, mosquito nets etc. Child labour is common among them.

Table 8: Monthly income

Income level	Frequency	Valid Percent
< 2000	14	14.0
2001 to 3000	47	47.0
3001 to 5000	35	35.0
>5000	4	4.0
Total	100	100.0

Income is generally taken as an index of social status and influence of a person particularly in India, where social status and influence go hand in hand with the income of a person. Though income is not an exclusive basis of influence, it certainly is important. The above table 8 shows the monthly income level of the Sillekyatha community: near half (47%) of the families had low levels of monthly income, followed by 35% families with 3001-5000 rupees, 14% families were below 2000 and only 4% got above a 5000 rupees monthly income.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Sillekyatha people were displaced from the Hebbal Industrial area in 2004, and since their displacement they have been living in Ekalavyanagar. Frustrated over the apathy of the district administration in rehabilitating semi-nomadic communities displaced from the Hebbal Industrial area, the Karnataka State Semi-Nomadic Community Federation (KSSNCF) has threatened to launch an indefinite agitation if the authorities concerned did not grant their demands for their permanent rehabilitation.

The puppet show was this community's other important occupation known as "*Thogalu gombe aata*" depicting various scenes of the great epics of India i.e. the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. But today they are also involved in different occupations, because they work in the manufacturing as well as the hotel sectors as laborers; some of them is engaged as domestic servants, construction laborers, etc. Few of them found drive auto rickshaws owned by others. These drivers expressed their willingness to own auto rickshaws in the future. This is an indication of their willingness towards settled life, but the number of such people was very small.

Besides, they have not received the title deeds for the land where their huts have been built on. Nowadays the government provided Janatha apartments for the Shillekyatha community, but only few, or about to say nearly 100 families, have moved to Janatha apartments. The rest refused to move to Janatha apartments because they have been living in their settlement since 20 years and the government promised them to provide the single roof independent Janatha houses for each family, not apartments. The reason is there is no room for their domesticated plants and animals (Kavitha, 2018)

Earlier people occupied in the puppet- shadow plays wandered around the villages and collected contributions for their living, but the younger generations prefer other works, and when they come back to the settlement they turned to begging. They are poor, illiterate, they live in a slum and their economic condition is pathetic, they do not have resources for a regular income, they live in untidy, unhealthy and unhygienic places. They do have many health issues but no proper treatment facilities.

Most men are drunkards and spend their earnings on liquor and other intoxicating things. Everybody in the community celebrates every festival, every occasion or event by boozing. Poverty is hindering them from saving, so they recur to loans, mostly from friends and money lenders. The celebration of festivals is the one of the causes for their indebtedness.

All these issues give a mixed impression of the socio-economic aspects of the Sillekyatha community in Mysore city. In sum, we can say that a more settled lifestyle may result in a general amelioration of their standards of living; on the less positive side, this means a decay of their culture and rich traditional practice.

The Sillekyatha people have established their slum settlements in urban areas lacking basic amenities, and creates considerable pollution and health hazards. In an effort to improve these slums, they may be provided with running water, electric supply, drainage, public lavatories, access roads, Anganavadis, primary schools, community halls, *et cetera*. Residential schools like the Ashram school or the Morarji residential school may establish near the population pockets of nomadic tribes and it should be ensured by field workers appointed for the purpose that not a single child remains out of school. Proper schemes could be implemented for their educational, economic and social improvement. Occupational skill trainings are needed by the contemporary society, hence, after training them in new skills, they may be financially supported to set up their enterprises in the manufacturing and service sectors. The Government should formulate a reservation policy also for nomadic tribes as a separate category; moreover, it is necessary to initiate a comprehensive anthropological study to identify Indian nomadic tribes.

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