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## Polygamous Marriages in Kuncherukula Tribe: A Modern Slavery of Women and Girls

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### **Abstract:**

*This is a brief study on the Kuncherukula caste, a sub-caste of Erukula comes under schedule tribe and indigenous people most vulnerable, least population group, rarely found in a few places of Kadapa District of Andhra Pradesh. M.VENKATACHALAPATHY & B.JAYASARADHI CHOWDARY the team of Sri Krishnadevaraya University, Anantapur, conducted this study in Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh (India). The informal discussion includes the oral questions and cross questions was adopted to extract the information. The men, women, teen aged were interviewed selecting randomly from five mandals of high population areas in Kadapa district. The objective of the study is to initiate the development process of social inclusion and to produce documents for future studies. The study provides information about the population distribution, livelihood pattern, and health and education status, traditional methods of health practices and conflict resolution, polygamous marriage system and women's status. The women exploitation, suppression of freedom of expression, slavery and servitude were discussed in the light of human rights.*

### **1. Introduction-Kuncherukula**

Kuncherukula is one of the sub caste of Erukula which come under schedule tribes and indigenous people, a most vulnerable, least population group, rarely find in rural, urban and suburban areas of Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh. The population is distributed in B.Kodur, Badwel, Porumamilla, Kadapa and Jammalamadugu Mandals The families live in groups away from the residential areas in hemispherical thick cloth or plastic sheet roofing small huts. Five or more persons include children and wives live in the small hut. No records are available for the population, number of voters, habitations, habitats and the employees in the caste.

### **2. The Population**

The tribes populated in the Rayalaseema district, Kadapa, Ananthapur, Kurnool and Chittoor of Andhra Pradesh. They live in urban and rural areas away from the residential area. The urban camps consist 5 or 10 families and rural colonies consist 20 to 30 families. The Government provided pacca houses to rural tribes. But they dislike living in houses and live in huts constructed near colonies. No records are available for the population and number of voters. They are interested to enroll in the voter list. The local political leaders enroll them for their interests. A random sample of 3 urban camps and 4 rural colonies in Kadapa district were selected for enumeration of the population. Some empirical and extrapolation statistical method was used to estimate the population in Kadapa district. The total estimated population is to be 1320 in which the men to be 328 women to be 472 and children to be 520 and sex ratio is to be 80:100. The adult literacy is to be 1.8% and child literacy is to be 5% and school dropout is to 99.9%.

### **3. Livelihoods**

The main occupations of the families of the caste in urban and semi urban areas are pig rearing, wild palm tree leaves broom sticks and basket making waste hair (removed while combing ladies head) collection, and soothsaying. The women have greater role in the above activities. The pig rearing is main occupation because of availability of waste food and shelters and rest places (drainages) for pig rearing. They hide the pigs when Municipality alert to fire due to swine flue. The women make and sale the broom sticks, collect and sale the waste hair, beg food to feed children and pigs, soothsaying. The children and adult beg food in the residential areas. They hunt the birds for food. Man (Husband) dictates the women. The women temporarily migrate to other areas for soothsaying, collection of waste hairs, saler of boom sticks.

The families living in the rural area are depending on above livelihood activities except pig rearing, because they have threat from the local farmers for damage of crops by stray pigs. So the rural families stopped pig rearing and mainly depend on the broom sticks due to availability of raw material wild palm tree leaves availability for making broom sticks.

The rural migration to urban area is increasing to sustain on pig rearing and availability of fruit and vegetable waste in the dump yards and food waste from hotels for pig rearing. 4. Health Status:

They are exposed to the open air. The cough and fever are the common diseases. They have a herbal healer for common ailments. They take baths occasionally, because of lack of adequate water in the camp areas. They remain with single cloth due to low income. The personal and domestic hygiene is very poor due to lack of awareness of health and hygiene. No cases of STD/RTI/HIV/AIDS are found because they have no sexual affairs with multiple partners in and outside the caste people.

#### 4. Education Status

The parents lack awareness on the value of education. They consider the children as asset to beg food to feed pigs. It was observed that school phobia is high in children due to language problem. They speak a language of a mixture of three south Indian languages and have no script. The parents do not send the children to school. The adult literacy is to be 1.8% and child literacy is to be 5%, including school going children and school drop out and school drop out is to 99.9%.

#### 5. Polygamous Marriages

The tribe is practicing the polygamous marriage system. The men can have any number of marriages till death, where as the women is limited to seven marriages in her life time. The marriage system proceeds like this; suppose a person wants to marry a girl, he contacts her father for his willingness and has to pay some amount for girl to marry. Sometimes the parent may sell the girl for marriage. In two ways the girl is sold for money. The married husband gets right on her to sell to others. The cost varies from Rs.5000 to Rs.1 lakh depending on the beauty, physical fit for work and modesty of the women. When wife is sold to other persons, she has no right on her children; the children are left at previous husband. If she has infant at the time of next marriage, the infant is taken with mother and handed over to previous husband after becoming a child. Thus the women is brought and sold for marriage. The older person can buy girls for marriage. The women has no freedom to choose husband.

#### 6. Conflict Resolution

The tribes would not go to police stations and courts for litigations. They resolve the conflict in the caste panchayat. Generally they are away from the litigations with the persons out side the caste.

The most common conflicts are small quarrels, theft and late payment women auctioned amount. The victims bring the complaint to the notice of the caste panchayat for resolution. The caste-panchayat means an assembly of caste elders and caste leaders to hold the trial of the offence. A person who married or having much number of wives is considered as caste leader and given importance in conflict resolution.

The persons of both side parties assemble in a lonely place away from the residential area to hold the panchayat to resolve the conflict. The both side parties arrange food, pork and alcohol for Panchayat participants. It make 2 or 4 days for conflict resolution. The false side party should pay the fixed penalty in addition to the amount spent for the panchayat expenses. When interviewing the caste leaders they expressed about two types of tests to prove the offence. The offender should pick up the coin from boiling oil or hold a red hot iron rod to insert in the ground. If he is feared to do so, he is treated as offender and fined as per the panchayat decision.

#### 7. Child Status

- No child birth registrations.
- Malnutrition. Among girl mothers and children.
- All most all children are out of school.
- Parents would not send the children to school.
- School drop out at primary school level is 100%.
- Parents engage is begging.
- Early marriages.
- Girls forced marriage with older persons.

#### 8. National and International Laws for Children

These are a few international laws related to the child.

- UNO convention on Rights of Child
- UNO convention on elimination of modern slavery
- ILO International convention on child labour

These are the national legislations related to the child

- Child Marriage Restraint Act
- Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act

#### 9. Child Rights Perspective

The CRC of UNO ensures the survival, development, protection and participation rights for every child in world. The India Government is one of the signed parties of this International treatise. In consonance to CRC India Government formulated National commission for child rights and Integrated Child development Scheme (ICDS). It is boon to the underprivileged communities. The children of below 5 years are provided nutrition and prepare children for primary schools through Angan Wadi centers. Thus, the Government ensure the survival and development right of child who lack less access for neutrino and education. The Angan Wadi

centers are not present in the urban camps and rural colonies for these tribal children. Neither the Government nor the parents are interested in cent percent immunization of the children.

The Government launched several education programmes for school dropout, children out of school and child labour for streamlining. The schemes of child labour school, bridges, schools and Residential Special training centers to cover the child labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act. There are number of children of school going age in this tribe are found in street beginning and waste picking. The child development and protection rights are failure in the case of the children of the tribe.

Child Marriage Restraint Act is a protection for the children. But the child marriages are prevailing under polygamy system. The marriage is compulsory at will of parents. The child is exploited and decision of the child is not considered. Thus the child protection and participation rights are violated. The forced child marriage an modern slavery.

Every year forced marriage sentence millions of women and young children to a life in slavery. It's a crime that's widespread, but rarely spoken about – a crime that flourishes in the shadows of society. The UN says that forced marriage is likely to increase in the coming year unless major changes occur.

Due to stigma and lack of awareness about forced marriages, many people do not report cases of forced marriages. We can help ensure that people at risk and their families know that forced marriage happens, forced marriage is illegal and activists around the world are taking a stand to end the practice forever.

#### 10. Women Status

- Women are brought and sold for marriages
- Woman is a slave worker to feed the family members
- No involvement in decision making process
- Women have no right on children, children left at husband's family when she is sold to other person in the caste
- Women have no choice to choose husbands
- No woman participation in development process and representation
- Lacking social, economic and political consciousness

#### 11. Women Human Rights Perspective

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993.

The polygamous marriages are being practiced in the caste. The men buy women for marriage for cost. The wife is the property of man. The number of wives indicates the economic status of men. The husband has right to sell to anybody irrespective of relation and age. The wife should work and feed the children until she will be sold to other person of the caste. Woman has no freedom to choose the husband or express her consent.

#### 12. Suggestions

The polygamous marriage system is the main cause for poverty, women and child rights violation and under development. The polygamy is possibly eradicated through educating children of the first generation and women's awareness of the disadvantages of polygamous marriages and women economic independence. The Government and NOs has to take initiation to work with this underprivileged tribes.

The ANGANWADI centers are needed to the urban camps and rural colonies of the tribe to create awareness among nutrition for children, prepare the children to primary education. The child labour schools provide the basic education to child labour and children out of schools. The Sakshara Bharath for adult literacy in which women are educated on the rights, link up skill trainings and financial literacy.

The awareness is needed on child and women's rights, disadvantages of polygamy and Government schemes.

#### 13. Conclusion

The polygamous marriage in Kuncherukula tribe is a women exploiting system of women and girls violating the fundamental rights. Women buying and selling for marriage and early marriages and forced girl marriage with older person are one form of modern slavery. This system can be eradicated by child education and women awareness and development. The Government and NGOs intervention are needed to protect the women and child human rights.

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