

Bamboo Based Subsistence and Decline of Traditional Occupation Among The Medha Tribe of Southern Karnataka

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Abstract: *Bamboo has been a sustainable means of livelihood for tribal and rural communities. The bamboo has a big potential to create job opportunities, which has been successfully demonstrated by China. To flourish the bamboo based handicraft industries, there is a need of creating a level playing field by keeping the welfare of tribal and rural communities. Bamboo has been means of livelihood for tribes and rural communities across the globe, thereby government, nongovernmental organizations and agricultural universities take initiatives to provide bamboo in large scale. The present study makes an endeavour to analyze the bamboo-based livelihood among the Medha tribe and problems concerned with availability of bamboo.*

Keywords: *Bamboo, Handicrafts, Livelihood, Reserve Forest, Tribes.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Bamboo is one of the most important forest produces which available in throughout India and it has been considered as the poor man's timber. Similarly, bamboo has been providing sustainable livelihood for millions of tribal and rural people. The large size of bamboo is utilized as raw material for packing, handicrafts, housing, paper-pulp industries, rural and agricultural applications. Of India's total forest area of 67.7 million ha, bamboo (both natural and planted) occupies around 11.4 million ha. This represents 16.7 per cent of the total forest area of the country and 3.4 per cent of the total geographical area (329 million ha) of India (FSI, 2003). Despiten bavnu Sol, 2008). In spite of having large resources, India hardly contributes only 4 per cent share in global market. This is mainly attributed to the low productivity of around 0.4 tons per hectare, which is very lower when compared to other countries such as Japan, China, and Malaysia, which contribute over 80 per cent to the bamboo market of the world.

The history of bamboo craft is traced from the beginning of the civilization, which started thousands of years ago when man started cultivation of food crops. Bamboo has become a major source of raw material for several industries, such as bamboo mat veneer composites, bamboo mat boards, and bamboo mat corrugated sheets etc. These experiments have created a new interest in bamboo across the world. Bamboo craft is one of the earliest cottage industries primarily due to strength, versatility, easy workability of bamboo with simple hand tools. Bamboo has been utilizing for various applications ranging from household utilities to construction and more than 1,000 documented usages, including an important use in paper and pulp manufacturing (Anon., 2008). In many parts of the sweltering world, the tribal and rural poor are completely dependent on bamboo for their habitats and for day-to-day utilities. Nearly 600 million poor people generate income from bamboo and over a billion people live in bamboo houses across the world. Women and children in Africa and Asia, who are living in the below subsistence levels, harvest a huge part of the bamboo.

1.1. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY:

The Present study has emphasized to analyze the bamboo based livelihood among The Meda tribe and problems concerned to the availability of bamboo. The study pertained to Mysore and Chamarajanagar districts of Karnataka state Bandipur National Park is regarded as one of the most beautiful and better-managed national parks of India. Located amidst the picturesque surroundings of the towering Western Ghats. It is an important part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve that constitutes Tamil Nadu's Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary to its South, Karnataka's Rajiv Gandhi National Park (Nagarahole) to its Northwest and Kerala's Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary to its Southwest. The Bandipur National Park located partly in Gundlupet taluk of Chamarajanagar District and partly in H.D.Kote and Nanjangud taluks of Mysuru District. About 200 samples were selected from both the districts. There are approximately 1.25 lakh members in the Medha tribe in the state and most live in Mysore and Chamarajanagar districts forest areas. Because the study is descriptive in nature, the structured interview schedules have been used to

collect the primary data by using the purposive sampling technique. Similarly, relevant literature is collected from secondary sources such as journals, books, encyclopedias, gazetteers, reports, and different websites as well.

2. BACKGROUD OF THE MEDHA TRIBE:

Medas are a tribal community who had to be nomadic because of their essential occupation of weaving different articles out of Bamboo. They are now settled in different parts of Karnataka, but they originate from different places of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, though many are natives of Karnataka. Their different origins can be explained by the different languages they speak at home. Mēdās from Andhra Pradesh speak Telugu and those who trace their origin to Tamil Nadu speak Tamil at home. In spite of that, Mēdās who come from Salem, a part of Tamil Nadu speak Telugu, which speaks of the earlier migration from some Telugu-speaking area. But there are also Mēdās settled in Karnataka who speak the Kannada language.

The original habitats of the Mēdās were located in wooded regions, as explained by their handicraft, for which bamboo is the essential raw-material. Significantly, the shrine of the deity of the community is located on the top of a hill, about 60 miles away from Guntkal near Guntur in Andhra Pradesh. They lived in such hilly regions, depended on bamboo-based crafts for a living and worshipped deities like Candi, Māri, and Mallamma – different names of the Mother Goddesses. Such shrines are to be found in many bamboo forests and hills. Medias masters of Though they first settled in areas where bamboo was easily available, as handicraft products had to be sold they gradually found it more convenient to live in places where they could find their customers, in towns. It was quite a difficult task for them to carry their products from the remote woods to townships. Hence, gradually they shifted their residences to the outskirts of townships, which, in due course of time, with townships expanding, came to be within the town limits or even in the centre. They still pursue their traditional bamboo craft, going to the woods once a week to fetch their raw material.

The tribe is known by a variety of names: Mēdaru, Mēdāra, Myādāra, Mēdāri, Mēdārkel, Myāda, Mēdārlu, Mēdārakāras, Mēdās Buruda, Buddara, Gauriga etc. In Kittel's dictionary, the tribe is designated as Mēdara or Mēdāra. The Kannada-speaking members of the community are known as Mēdās, Mēdāras, Myādāras etc. Telugu speaking Mēdās call themselves Mēdārkal or Mēdārakāras. The Mēdās settled in Mysore region are known by the name Gaurigas.

3. RESULT ANALYSIS:

The classic bamboo handicrafts like mats, baskets, handheld fans and others items are woven by members of the Medha tribe. Obviously, the elegant, unique bamboo handicrafts like mats, baskets, adders, baskets, snake charmer basket cradles, grains cleaning pans, starch discharging pans, fishing baskets, agricultural land cultivating implements and agricultural harvesting implements are woven by members of the Medha tribe.

Particulars of Traditional Bamboo Products Woven by Medha Tribe

Sl. No	Product Description	Local Name	Usage	Average Span of Life(In years)	Weaving By M/F
1.	Ladder	Eni	To Climb Height Places	4-6	Male
2.	Ploughing Implement	Kunte	Used for Ploughing	4-6	Male
3.	Open Basket	Kukke	To Storing Paddy	3-5	Female & Male
4.	Long Cylindrical Container	Jalle	To Store Maize, Millets	2-4	Male
5.	Carrying Baskets	Mankari	To Carry the Bunches Fodder	5-6	Female & Male
6.	Mat	Chaape	To Dry Paddy	2-3	Female & Male
7.	Grains Cleaning Pan	Mora	To Cleaning Food Grains	3-4	Male
8.	Small carrying conical container	Khuli	To Catch Fish in Shallow Water	3-5	Male
9.	Flat container	Sibbilu	To Selling Flower	3-5	Female & Male
10.	Cradle	Tottilu	For Infants Sleep	4-5	Female & Male
11.	Handheld Fan	Beesanige	To Prevent Sweltering	2-3	Female & Male

Since Government has removed Medha tribal families from forestland, only 30% of them continuing their traditional work and the rest became daily wageworkers in unorganized sector. While some who still live in the fringes of the forests are continuing bamboo based basketry and other crafts. The Medhas, who are living in Hunsur, Koppa, Periyapattana in Mysuru district as well as Madhuvanalli, Mooguru, Naganahalli, Santhemaaralli, N Beguru in Chamarajanagar district are purchasing bamboo from private bamboo depots to continue their bamboo based art work. Previously, Medha tribe was Depended on the Nagarahole and Bandipur forests for bamboo. However, The Forest Department has banned the cutting down of trees for basketry and other crafts. As there is a shortage of bamboo, the government should take the initiative to provide bamboo available in the forest for the survival of this beautiful and unique craft culture.

Respondents` Opinion About Continuing Traditional Occupation

Sl. No	Perception	Response	Percentage
01	Source of Additional Income	39	19.5
02	Religious & Hereditary	45	22.5
03	Leisure Time Activity	38	19.0
04	Preserving Tribal Identity	06	03.0
05	Not Applicable	72	36.0
		200	100

Respondents have stated the following reasons for continuing their traditional occupations. About 39(19.5%) respondents opine that their traditional occupations serve as an additional source of income, which supplements family income to some extent. Another 38(19%) respondents traditional occupation considered as a leisure time activity and remaining 6 (3%) said that they want to continue these occupations in order to preserve their identity. About one –fifth of the respondents are not in favour of continuing their traditional occupations because according to them it is very difficult to get bamboo. It is evident from the above data that their basketry and bamboo based artifacts are disintegrating. Non availability of bamboo, deforestation, and legal restrictions are some of the factors contributing to the disintegration of their traditional occupations and crafts.

4. SUGGESTIONS:

In the light of the findings of the study and fieldwork experiences, some important suggestions for the implementation by the government, voluntary service organizations, activist and all those who are interested in the progress and development of the Medha and other tribes.

Handicrafts and basketry need to be promoted from the level of livelihood to industry with the help of advanced technology and also to be provided wider marketing facility. The forest laws prevent extraction of bamboo in the National Parks and Wildlife sanctuaries. In such cases, suitable alternative sources of livelihood for tribal people should be given outside the protected forests. The Central and Government authorities should ensure that the benefits of the development policies and programs targeted exclusively at the forest dwellers should effectively reach the Medha and other tribes. Besides health, education and infrastructures, facilities should be ensured to tribal communities within the available provisions.

5. CONCLUSION:

Basketry and other bamboo based articles producing by Medha tribe reflect their skill and indigenous knowledge. However, Medha tribe is facing the problem of scarcity of bamboo. Since bamboo creates employment opportunity to tribes and rural communities, Government needs to take initiative to provide bamboo in large scale to continue their legacy of traditional occupation. On the other hand, provide an opportunity to make use of bamboo available in reserved forest too. A unique technique of producing bamboo based handicrafts will disappear from the community in course of time due to following advancement of technology. Hence, Indigenous Knowledge of producing bamboo based art - artifact by Medha tribe has to be documented and disseminated among the younger generation. There is also an urgent need of commercialization of the bamboo products through skill up gradation, quality improvement, design input and innovative marketing.

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