

Unveiling Rural Harmony: An Ecosystem Study of Ganjalagunte Village, Karnataka

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Abstract: *This study examines the ecosystem of Ganjalagunte, a rural village in Madhugiri Taluk, Tumkur district, Karnataka, with a population of 824 across 215 households. Agriculture and livestock are the primary livelihoods. Using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools, focus group discussions, interviews, and secondary data, the study explores the village's social, economic, ecological, cultural, and political dimensions.*

Key findings highlight challenges such as low literacy rates, gender disparities, caste-based discrimination, and inadequate access to education and healthcare. Economic struggles arise from low agricultural profitability, dependence on rainfed farming, high input costs, and seasonal migration. Ecologically, groundwater depletion, deforestation, and soil erosion threaten sustainability. Poor transportation and limited awareness of government schemes further hinder development.

The study recommends addressing these issues through improved educational and healthcare infrastructure, better transportation, and enhanced social inclusion. Promoting sustainable agriculture, livelihood diversification, and gender equality while increasing awareness of welfare schemes can empower the community. These interventions can unlock Ganjalagunte's potential for sustainable development, improving the quality of life for its residents

Key Words: *Community empowerment, Livelihood. Rural Community.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Rural India represents a blend of tradition and development. Villages like Ganjalagunte play a vital role in the socio-economic fabric of the country, relying predominantly on agriculture and natural resources for their livelihoods. However, they often face challenges like inadequate infrastructure, social inequalities, and ecological vulnerabilities.

Located in Madhugiri Taluk, Tumkur district, Karnataka, Ganjalagunte exhibits the characteristics of a semi-developed village. It covers 205.83 hectares, with a population of 824, and faces constraints such as low literacy rates (57.68%), inadequate healthcare facilities, and limited connectivity to nearby cities. The village's primary occupation is agriculture, complemented by livestock rearing and wage labour. Despite its reliance on traditional practices, the village is gradually adopting modern methods like borewell irrigation.

Understanding the ecosystem of Ganjalagunte requires examining its social, economic, ecological, and cultural dimensions. The village reflects the disparities prevalent in rural India, including gender inequality and caste-based discrimination, which hinder its growth potential. However, Ganjalagunte also displays resilience through community-led practices, cultural heritage, and resourcefulness.

The study aims to comprehensively analyze the village's ecosystem to identify developmental issues and provide actionable recommendations. By understanding the village's current state, policymakers and development professionals can design interventions that align with the needs and aspirations of its residents.

2. OBJECTIVES:

- To review the economic patterns and livelihood status of families in rural context.
- To study the topographical characteristics and cultural patterns of the rural villages.
- To assess the existing environmental circumstances and social and physical dimensions of villages.
- To identify developmental issues and the poverty scenario of the villages.

3. RESEARCH LOCATION & METHODOLOGY:

The study utilized a combination of primary and secondary data collection methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of Ganjalagunte's ecosystem. Primary data was collected using various participatory and qualitative tools to capture firsthand information from the community. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques such as social mapping, resource mapping, seasonal calendars, and problem-tree analysis were employed to identify community challenges and resources. These tools provided a visual and interactive means to engage with the villagers and gain insights into their livelihoods, resource utilization, and developmental issues.

Focus group discussions were conducted with diverse groups, including farmers, women, youth, and elders, to gather multiple perspectives on livelihood practices, health, and social challenges. Semi-structured interviews with key informants such as Panchayat members, Anganwadi workers, and schoolteachers added qualitative depth to the findings, highlighting specific institutional roles and community dynamics. Additionally, case studies provided detailed narratives of individual households, illustrating the socio-economic diversity and unique challenges faced by different families. Observations during field visits offered valuable insights through proxy indicators such as infrastructure conditions, social interactions, and community behaviour.

Secondary data complemented these primary sources by providing a broader context to the findings. Information from government offices, schools, Anganwadi centers, and libraries was analysed alongside published reports, including census data and village records. This multi-method approach ensured a holistic and robust understanding of Ganjalagunte's ecosystem and the developmental issues faced by its residents.

4. RESULT & DISCUSSION:

I. Social Dimension

The social structure of Ganjalagunte is shaped significantly by caste and gender roles. The caste system remains dominant, with Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) forming distinct social groups. Each caste occupies a specific position in the social hierarchy, influencing access to resources and opportunities. While the Lingayat community (OBC) holds a dominant social and economic position, the SC community often faces marginalization and caste-based discrimination. SC individuals are frequently excluded from temples and other public spaces, reflecting persistent inequalities despite constitutional safeguards.

Gender dynamics also play a crucial role in shaping the social fabric. Women in Ganjalagunte often bear a disproportionate share of household responsibilities and agricultural labour. Although there is no gender-based restriction on education, societal norms prevent women from working outside after marriage, curtailing their economic independence. Moreover, parents prioritize education for male children, often escorting boys to school while expecting girls to walk. These practices reinforce traditional gender roles and limit women's participation in the workforce.

Education remains a significant concern, with a literacy rate of 57.68%, showcasing disparities between male (65.81%) and female (49.20%) literacy rates. The village has a primary and a high school; however, inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of teachers, and limited resources hinder the quality of education. These challenges, combined with poor transportation, exacerbate school dropout rates, especially for girls.

Health facilities are minimal, with no Primary Health Centre (PHC) in the village. Residents rely on neighboring towns for medical emergencies, creating significant accessibility issues. An Asha worker conducts annual surveys and provides basic health services like vaccinations and prenatal care, but these efforts are insufficient to address the broader healthcare needs of the community. Diseases such as elephantiasis remain untreated due to a lack of resources and awareness.

II. Economic Dimension

Agriculture is the primary livelihood in Ganjalagunte, with the majority of the population engaged in rainfed farming. Crops like ragi, paddy, and groundnut dominate the agricultural landscape, while tamarind and horticultural crops like coconut and areca nut provide supplementary income. Farmers face challenges due to high input costs, fluctuating market prices, and unreliable rainfall. Those with access to borewells adopt irrigated farming, but this is not affordable for all.

Livestock rearing serves as a secondary source of income, with cows, goats, and poultry being the most common. Livestock products like milk, meat, and eggs contribute to household incomes and provide a safety net during lean agricultural seasons. However, diseases like foot-and-mouth disease pose significant risks to livestock health, affecting productivity and income.

Wage labour is another vital livelihood strategy. Many residents migrate seasonally to nearby towns and cities for employment in construction and other sectors. This migration reflects limited local employment opportunities and the need for supplemental income. The lack of financial literacy and access to banking services further constrains

economic growth. Only 21% of villagers have access to both bank accounts and ATM facilities, indicating low financial inclusion.

Income inequality is evident, with the majority of the population earning low wages while a small proportion enjoys significantly higher incomes. The Lorenz curve highlights this disparity, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to uplift economically weaker sections.

The income distribution among the community is characterized by a high level of inequality. The income of individuals in the village ranges from a minimum of 500 to a maximum of 50,000, indicating a wide income. The area of inequality line, which represents the gap between the lowest and highest income earners, is also large. This suggests that a significant proportion of the population is earning very low incomes, while a small percentage of the population is earning very high incomes. The unequal distribution of wealth is also evident in the village, as a small percentage of the population likely owns a large share of the community's resources and assets, while the majority of the population has limited access to wealth and resources.

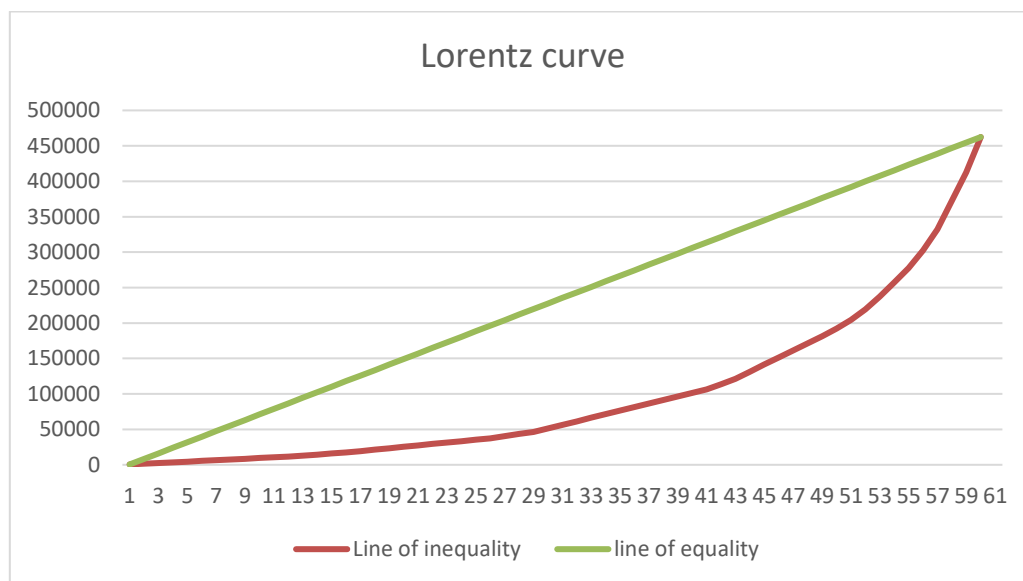


Chart 1 Lorenz curve

III. Ecological Dimension

The ecological landscape of Ganjalagunte is defined by its limited natural resources and dependency on seasonal agriculture. The village covers 205.83 hectares, with borewells and rainfed farming as the primary sources of irrigation. Crops like ragi are predominantly grown in rainfed areas, while paddy cultivation relies on flood irrigation or borewells. However, over-reliance on groundwater extraction through borewells raises concerns about sustainability.

Resource mapping revealed minimal forest cover and limited biodiversity, making the village vulnerable to soil erosion and climatic fluctuations. Seasonal variations significantly affect agricultural productivity, with periods of water scarcity impacting crop yields. Traditional irrigation methods like flood irrigation are still prevalent but need modernization to optimize water use.

The village's ecological challenges include deforestation due to the use of firewood for cooking and the unsustainable use of groundwater. Efforts to promote alternative energy sources like LPG are hindered by affordability issues. Despite these challenges, the community has shown resilience by adopting organic farming practices and utilizing local knowledge to manage natural resources.

IV. Cultural Dimension

The cultural fabric of Ganjalagunte is rich and deeply rooted in tradition. Festivals like Ugadi and Marema Jatre are celebrated with enthusiasm, reflecting the community's strong cultural identity. The Marema temple serves as a central place of worship and a hub for social gatherings. Traditional ceremonies, such as puberty celebrations and marriage rituals, reinforce community bonds and provide a sense of belonging.

Food habits in the village are simple yet nutritious, with staples like Ragi mudde (Ragi balls) forming a significant part of the diet. Traditional clothing styles and practices, such as wearing sarees and dhotis, showcase the cultural heritage of the community. These customs are preserved across generations, emphasizing the importance of cultural continuity.

Despite its rich cultural heritage, the village faces challenges in preserving its traditions amid the pressures of modernization. Younger generations are gradually shifting towards urban lifestyles, posing a risk to the continuity of traditional practices.

V. Political Dimension

The governance structure in Ganjalagunte revolves around the Panchayat, which administers local development and implements government schemes. However, awareness and accessibility of these schemes remain low among villagers. Programs like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) are underutilized due to a lack of information and bureaucratic hurdles.

The Panchayat's role in addressing community needs is constrained by limited resources and funding. Infrastructure development, such as road construction and sanitation facilities, has seen some progress, but gaps remain in healthcare and education. The implementation of caste-based schemes, such as housing assistance under Ambedkar Vasati and Basava Vasati programs, has benefited specific groups but also highlighted social inequalities.

Political participation is influenced by caste dynamics, with dominant groups often wielding greater influence in decision-making processes. This can marginalize SC and ST communities, limiting their access to resources and representation. Strengthening participatory governance and enhancing community awareness of rights and entitlements are essential for equitable development.

5. DEVELOPMENT ISSUE:

Ganjalagunte village faces several critical development issues identified through the field study, impacting various aspects of the community's life. Education emerges as a significant concern, with primary and high schools grappling with infrastructure challenges, including inadequate classrooms, drinking water facilities, and a shortage of teaching staff. Students in primary school face issues such as poorly maintained toilets, no access to computers, and lack of a playground. High school students struggle with similar problems, compounded by transportation difficulties. Girls, in particular, face additional hurdles, especially during menstruation, when long walks to school exacerbate physical discomfort, causing absenteeism. These challenges result in a lack of quality education and limit the aspirations of many students, particularly girls.

Healthcare is another pressing issue, as the village lacks a Primary Health Centre (PHC), and residents must travel to nearby towns for medical services. While an Asha worker provides limited support, such as vaccinations and prenatal care, the absence of proper healthcare infrastructure leaves many ailments untreated. Elephantiasis has been reported among residents, and inadequate veterinary services hinder efforts to manage diseases like foot-and-mouth disease in livestock. The lack of timely medical interventions affects both human health and the economic stability of families dependent on livestock for livelihood.

Transportation is a major bottleneck in the village, with no proper public transport system. The few available autos operate only during limited hours, making travel to schools, healthcare facilities, and markets both challenging and expensive. Farmers struggle to transport their produce to markets, reducing profitability and causing economic strain. This restricted mobility also limits access to essential services, further isolating the community.

Social inequalities persist, particularly caste-based discrimination, which marginalizes Scheduled Caste (SC) communities. SC individuals are often excluded from participating in certain social and religious spaces, reinforcing inequality and limiting their access to communal resources. Gender disparities further exacerbate social challenges, with women shouldering a disproportionate share of household and agricultural responsibilities while being excluded from decision-making processes. Women's participation in the labour force is minimal, and they are often restricted to traditional roles, curbing their economic independence.

Livelihood challenges stem from agriculture being the primary occupation but increasingly unprofitable due to rising input costs, low market prices, and erratic rainfall. Many villagers supplement their income through livestock rearing, wage labour, or seasonal migration to nearby towns. However, these options provide limited economic security and often involve harsh working conditions. Awareness about insurance schemes for crops, livestock, and health remains low, further exposing families to financial vulnerabilities during crises.

Addressing these development issues requires a community-centered approach. Interventions must focus on improving school infrastructure, healthcare facilities, and transportation networks to enhance access and quality. Social reforms addressing caste-based discrimination and gender inequality are essential for fostering inclusivity. Economic resilience can be strengthened through diversified livelihood options, vocational training, and better awareness and uptake of government schemes. Such measures would enable Ganjalagunte to overcome its challenges and progress towards sustainable development.

8. CONCLUSION

Ganjalagunte village exemplifies the challenges faced by many rural communities in India, where socio-economic, ecological, cultural, and political dimensions intersect to shape livelihoods and development opportunities. The study highlights critical issues such as low literacy rates, inadequate healthcare, limited transportation, social inequalities, and livelihood vulnerabilities. Persistent caste-based discrimination and gender disparities further exacerbate the marginalization of vulnerable groups, undermining equitable growth. Livelihood challenges, primarily driven by unprofitable agriculture and limited local employment, force many to migrate seasonally, reflecting economic insecurity. Despite these challenges, Ganjalagunte also demonstrates resilience through its rich cultural heritage, resourcefulness, and gradual adoption of modern practices. Addressing its development issues requires an inclusive, multi-pronged approach. Improving education, healthcare, and infrastructure while promoting social reforms and financial inclusion can empower the community. Encouraging participatory governance and raising awareness of government schemes can ensure better access to resources and entitlements.

With targeted interventions and sustained efforts, Ganjalagunte has the potential to leverage its strengths, reduce disparities, and improve the living standards of its residents. Empowering the community through education, equitable resource distribution, and sustainable livelihoods can pave the way for holistic and long-term development, fostering a more inclusive and prosperous future.

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