CHAPTER - II
HISTORICAL PROFILE OF BILLAWAS OF TULUNADU
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The undivided Dakshina Kannada District, the western coastal strip region of Karnataka is popularly known as Tulunadu, that is, land of people speaking ‘Tulu’ language or Taulava state. It is a land of various castes and communities. P. Gururaj Bhat (1975) says that social history of Tulunadu should begin with certain significant facts of three classes of its people-The Billawas and Mogers; The Nadavas and Nayars and The Brahmins and Jains. This does not mean that the other classes or communities of people are unimportant in the evolution of social and cultural life of the region. But the role of these ‘3’ strata of Tuluva society in the variegated activities or social and cultural activities of life has been more marked than those of the rest. Thus the Billawa is one of the important caste-communities of Tulunadu.

General Demographic Aspects of the District

Tulunadu consists of two districts i.e., Dakshina Kannada (D.K.) and Udupi districts. Before 1860, Dakshina Kannada was part of a greater district called Canara, which was under a single administration in the Madras Presidency. In 1860, the British split the area into South Canara and North Canara, the former being retained in the Madras Presidency, while the later was made a part of Bombay Province in 1862. Kundapur taluk was earlier included
in North Canara, but was re-included in South Canara later. Before 1997 Dakshina Kannada was vast district with eight Taluks. On August 1997, it was bifurcated into Dakshina Kannada (D.K.) and Udupi districts. At present D.K consists of five Taluks, viz. Mangalore, Bantwal, Puttur, Sullia and Belthangadi, whereas Udupi district consists of three Taluks- viz. Udupi, Kundapur and Karkal. These two districts together are called as Tulunadu, since the most popular language of this region is ‘Tulu’.

Undivided Dakshina Kannada is a natural geographical area. It is relatively small in size. Earlier known as South Kanara district, it is the southern of the two coastal districts of Karnataka state. The total population of the district according to the 1991 Census is 26.92 lakhs, the geographical extent of the district is 8441 sq. K.M and the density of population as 319 person per sq. K.M. in 1991, whereas in 1981, it is 282 per square K.M. During the times of 2001 census, the total population of Dakshina Kannada is 1,897,730 and of Udupi-1,112,243 and the density of population of D.K are 416 per square K.M and of Udupi 287 per square K.M. The 2001 census found the highest literacy rate in these districts, 83.4% and 81.3% respectively. These districts also had highest sex-ratio during 2001 Census survey. D.K. had 1022 females per 1000 males and Udupi had 1,130 females per 1000 males.

As a socio- cultural region, undivided Dakshina Kannada district is inhabited by diverse castes and communities, speaking a variety of languages and observing a variety of customs and traditions. This region has also undergone drastic socio-cultural changes due to the spread of modern education, urbanization, economic development, demographic changes, and ideological inferences. Rapid growth of population resulted in migration from...
D.K to cities and towns of other parts of the country. Brahmins have migrated to various cities usually to establish the Hotel industry. Persons belonging to other castes like Bunts and Billawa began to migrate to Bombay as early as the 1930s, in search of better opportunities. The financial help of the migrants to their families has led to an improvement in the conditions of villagers in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts. The social system of these regions today is different from the kind of society it was even a generation ago. The cities of this region are fast growing and it had very much exposure to modern developments of the world.

The 'paaddanas' or folk songs of Tulunadu are a valuable source of information for a study of the life which the Tuluvas led in early and mediaeval times. These folk songs mentioned the names of some seven or eight prominent classes of inhabitants of Tulunadu. They are the Billawas, the Bunts, the Brahmans, the Jainas, the Mogers; the Mapillas, the Pombadas and the Holeyas (Saletore, 1963, p460). More or less the district is inhabited by the same people now also. The Billawas were considered as old ethnic people of the region. The most recent sources of information on the caste and communities living in Dakshina Kannada are the Reports of the Backward Class Commissions, popularly known as Havanoor commission (1975) and Venkataswamy Commission (1985). These reports consist of information on estimated strength of various caste-communities for the years 1971 and 1984. This information is summarized in table 2.1
Table 2.1- Percentage of Population of Castes of Undivided Dakshina Kannada as per Reports of Backward Class Commissions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste-Community</th>
<th>Havnoor Commission, (Percentage of Population)</th>
<th>Venkataswamy Commission, (Percentage of Population)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Billawa (Idiga)</td>
<td>15.56</td>
<td>17.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>9.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buntand Nadava</td>
<td>10.20</td>
<td>11.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devadiga</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vokkaliga Gowda</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>5.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Castes</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>5.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Tribes</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Castes</td>
<td>27.98</td>
<td>21.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>12.26</td>
<td>12.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>9.67</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jains</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religion</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Thus according to this data, Billawa community is numerically largest in the district. Thurston (1909) also mentioned that Billawas are the “numerically largest caste in the district and form close upon one fifth of the total population”. In tulunadu or in present Dakshina Kannada / Udupi districts lion's share of population is of Billawas. Biruwas. Poojary, Baida or Billawa are the different names of the same caste in the region.
Origin of Billawas

Billawa community has a very ancient history. It is difficult to trace its origin. There are no historical documents dealing with it. There are many legends regarding its origin and early life of its members. The ethnographers trace the origin of each caste-name to their traditional occupation. John E. Nesfield explained the origins of the caste system as a process of evolution of occupation. Even the origin of cast-names of Billawas can also be traced through their traditional occupations. It is commonly accepted in the district that the word ‘Billawa’ signifies ‘Bow-Men’, as they were formerly employed as soldiers by the ancient native rulers of the district. It is also noted from ancient history of Tulunadu that many number of Billawas were worked as bow-men in the army of the native rulers who ruled over tulunadu after 12-13th century. There is however no evidence to support this view (Thurston, 1909, p.244). Further Sheenappa Heggade and N.S. Killey recorded that whenever war look-place in Tulunadu, there was system of employing Billawas as commander of the army. The Heruru epigraphy of 1444 A.D. mentions, ‘billa-biruva’ which means the Billawa, whose chief work is with the bow (Gururaj Bhat, 1975, p.228).

Another opinion was expressed by Rev M.A. Sherring in his book “Hindu Castes and Tribes of Madras Presidency: (Vol. III, p. 136). He wrote that ‘poojaris’ of Tulunadu was untutored wild race. But this version has been rejected widely by saying that as Billawas speak a very rich tulu language, they could not be tribal.

‘Baidya’ is another name of Billawas. It is said that this is because they had tradition of being ‘vaidyas’ or physicians. Billawas were largely called as ‘baidyas’ in ‘paddanas’ of
Tulunadu. The 'paaddana' or folksong known as 'Bantara Sandhi' which consists of history of Billawa community depicts many Billawa physicians. Billawas were well known as doctors in ancient days. During Koti Chennaya's time their mother Deyibaidethi, Kanthanna baida, Sayana baida were all doctors. Because of this profession they might be called as Baidyas or Baider. Thus as Billawas were expert in giving local medicines, they were called as Baidya. Even now also some Billawas are doing this work.

Billawas are also called as 'pujari', which means a person who worked as a priest; Some Billawas officiate as priests at 'Bhutasthanas', (worshipping place of spirits). Though most of the communities of Tulunadu were spirit-worshipers, the job of priests was allowed only to Billawas. The word 'poojary' literally means "worshiper". In olden Tulunadu region the Poojarys had very important role in 'Nema' or 'Bhuta Kola' which are some kinds of spirit-worship. Billawa community was performing the 'pooja' activity during spirit-worship. That is how the name Poojary came for this community.

'Biruva' is another name of Billawa. The term 'Biruwa' comes from Bhargava who was preached by Maharshi Brigu. Parashurama the son of Jamadagni was considered to be the leader of Bhargava community. It is said that tulunadu is gifted as reclamation land by Parashurama. Bhargava was known to have established the human race on this land for the first time and hence first inhabitants were Bhargavas or the followers or students of the Parashurama. As they scattered all over India, Bhargavas advanced further to the prominence and kshatriyas were frightened of Bhargavas. Thus, due to several reasons Bhargavas were considered as 'pojarha' or one who deserve to perform 'poojas' or offering to
God. Hence 'poojari' is eroded form of 'poojara'. Most of the community people put 'poojari' as their surnames. Billawas were the only people who used to perform 'poojas' in temple and 'bootha kola', 'nema pooja', 'brahma pooja' etc. (Jyesta Verman, 1995). In this way regarding ethnic origin of the Billawas there is an opinion that basically they were 'Vaidik dwijas' and they belonged to Bhargava brahmin class. This opinion was justified on the basis of their religious tradition. This legend says that once upon a time Billawas were protectors of educational tradition of Brahma, Later on they started to follow Kshathriya Dharma; as new religious ideology of Buddhism and Jainism began to spread, they gradually took up agriculture as a means of livelihood, some of them who are landless had become agricultural laborers and some of them started to draw toddy from palm tree.

'Halepaiks' is another caste name of Billawas. This name comes from 'Hali' means 'Old' and 'paik' means a 'soldier'. Thus many Billawas were employed as soldiers in the armies of the Hindu Kingdoms of the south.

In this way there are various versions and legends about the origin of Billawa community and its different caste-names. Dr. Gururaj Bhat was very much sure, when he says that Billawas are not Tiyas of Malabar. Dr. Vishwanth Karnad (1994, p.15) opines that they are not Idigas of Bangalore. But Backward Class Commissions regarded Billawa as a sub-sect of Idigas. However till recent times both Billawa and Idiga castes are considered as different. Even their religious beliefs, customs, and traditions differ from each other and marital alliance was not allowed between them. It is only these days that they started to organize through associations and also marital relationships are established. Anyhow
Billawas concentrated largely in undivided Dakshina Kannada District and had unique way of life and traditions. In this connection it is opined by Prof. G.K. Karanth in his article "Idigas - Redefining their identity", in New Indian Express (01-12-2002) that an important feature of castes in post-independence India, has been to forge a common identity, a process that may be referred to as 'broadcasting' the castes. He pointed out that Idigas as a caste community have come together, although they are known by different names in different parts of Karnataka like; Bhandari, Billava, Belachada, Deevaru, Desha Bhandari, Devaramakkalu, Illiga, Izhava, Gaundla, Halepaikaru, Illavan, Kalar, Namdhari, Tiya, Guttedar, Shindhya etc. It was during the mid-1950s that, according to him, the process of broadcasting began, largely as a result of First Backward Class Commission listing a set of caste name as synonymous with Idiga.

**The spread**

As a caste, Billawas are spread across different parts of Karnataka. Mainly they found in the districts of Tumkur, Hassan and Chikkamagalur Districts besides the coastal districts of Udupi, Dakshina kannada and Uttara Kannada. But they are known by different names in different parts of Karnataka like Idiga, Deevaru, Illiga, Izhava, Halipaiks, Namadhari, Tiya, Guttedar, Shindye etc. During 1990 the population of Idiga was estimated to be 10,17,828 persons (Indian Express Dec.1.2002). This put them last among the eleven caste communities identified by the third backward class commission of Karnataka, which popularly known as Chinnappa Reddy commission.
Major section of Billawa population is living in Bombay. Most of the Billawas migrated to Bombay in search of their livelihood. According to one of the recent surveys conducted by the Billawa Association of Bombay about ‘2’ lakhs of Billawas are living in Bombay city only.

However Billawas spread all over India and they are known by different names in different parts of Karnataka State. But overwhelming majority of Billawas as such are found in undivided Dakshina Kannada District.

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