CHAPTER – IV

TRIBALS OF SRIKAKULAM DISTRICT

4.1 Socio-Cultural and Religious Traits of Selected Tribes

In Seethammapeta Mandal the important tribes are Savara (Hill and plain) Jatapu and Gadaba. Savaras are one of the important Mundari speaking tribes of India, on linguistic and ethnological grounds. Savaras can be considered as pre-Aryan and pre-Dravidian. Though, there were many sub-divisions among Savaras, broadly they are treated as Konda Savara (Malia Savara) and Kapu Savara. Savaras are divided into a number of endogamous tribes. It has been noted that among sub-tribes the Konda Savara tribe have restricted themselves to the tracts of hill and jungle covered valleys. But as the plains are approached, traces of amalgamation become apparent, resulting in a hybrid race, whose apperance and manners differ but little from those of the ordinary citizens. The culture of the hill Savara is very ancient and they are considered by Government as primitive tribal groups (PTG) and the Savaras in plains are not considered as PTG in the Srikakulam District. The researcher has observed considerable differences between Konda Savaras and plain Savaras and also they are equally numbered in tribal population of the District [1].

The other important tribes residing in Seethammapeta Mandal are Jatapus, who are socially, economically and culturally advanced tribe in the Seethammapeta mandal. Actually, the other tribes residing in Seethammpeta
mandal are insignificant in number. Konda Savara, plain Savara (hereafter mentioned as Savara) and Jatapu are almost in equal proportion and they consist of nearly 92 per cent of the total tribal population of the Seethammapeta Mandal.

4.2 Socio-Cultural and Religious Traits of Konda Savaras

Tribal groups, most of them even today do not know how to wear the dress properly. They celebrate several festivals of which “AUAM” is an important one. Konda Savaras live in Seethammapeta agency area and in some villages of Kotturu, Bhamini, Veeraghattam, Burza, Hiramadalam and pathapatnam Mandals. In order to communicate their views freely, Konda Savaras have their own dialect called Savara language. The Savara live in parallel rows of linear huts. Each linear hut consists of number of compartments each of which houses a family. The Savara village is called gorjan [2]. The villages are one usually homogenous settlement. In Seethammapeta hill tracts Savara villages are identified relatively isolated and mostly homogenous. In Konda Savara economy, shifting cultivation still plays an important role. Konda Savara do practice terracing, dry and wetland cultivation. Food gathering and hunting are the important subsidiary occupations. Agricultural services in Konda Savara villages are seen operating at different levels and accordingly they extend obligatory services between co-villagers, besides paid services. Within the family one can find division of labour based on sex and age. They are expert terrace cultivators and are known to grow very good varieties of bananas, turmeric and other crops on hill slopes.
The Savara family is not static. It is dynamic and transforms over a period of time. The Savara family development is subject to the social customs and demographic variables. Still there are joint families in the Savara hill tracts. The social control in Savara villages is maintained through an organized political system. Each Savara village is characterized by the existence of status-oriented groups like the Gamang, the Buya and Parjas. The Gamang is the village chief as well as the civil head of a village. Buya is the religious head and the parjas are the common people in the villages. Even in the present Panchayat Raj system of the political structure at the village level, the Gamang and Buya are continued to be respected. In the Konda Savara villages the influence of the traditional political organization of the villages still has decisive role to play.

Marriage customs are peculiar among Konda Savaras. They have developed a customary practice of demanding of bride price for all arranged marriages. Polygamous marriages are not uncommon. Among them hill Savaras provided the bridegroom to pay bride price to all the spouses. Feast expenditures are very extravagant. Music and dance is a way of life of the Konda Savaras of study area and these are important aspects of their cultural heritage. Dancing in the villages provides them appropriate for collective rejoining as well as it inculcates in them a dance of cultural solidarity. The Konda Savaras mainly concentrate upon ancestral worship arising out of belief in the souls of died ancestors. Dwelling is predominant in Savara beliefs and ritual practices. Because of the relative isolation of the area in which Konda Savara reside the interaction with outside Hindu and Christian traditions is limited. Due to this their
socio-cultural religious system is still intact. The traditional political system is still powerful in the Konda Savara areas.

As far as their religious life is concerned, Konda Savara tribal world consists of supernatural forces animism and mystical forces. The magico religious life of the tribals explains how the tribal attempts to live in a dynamic equilibrium with nature and super-natural powers. Ancestor worship is the core of their feasts and ceremonies, they proficient Balam Puradan and Suda Puradan in all initiatives of new activities including economic activities such as house building, sowing, harvesting etc., all these economic activities have their social referent. In a process of elaborate ceremonial performances, religious festivals, magical practices, and on liquor and other intoxicants the tribal is forced to spend more money, which affects adversely their economic position in course of time. The extravagant expenditure on religious ceremonies and social feasts and festivals lead the tribal into perpetual debt.

4.3 Socio-Cultural Religious Traits of Kapu Savaras

The Kapu Savaras who reside in plains are said to retain many of the Savara customs. The Kapu section are treated as denoting pallapu cultivators and considered as Savaras of the low level in their social order. The Kapu Savaras are some times called Kudunga or Baseng, a class name Kapu is referred to them because it implies that the Savaras of this class have adopted the customs of the Hindu Kapus. Savaras living in plain areas are also in different categories. Along with the name of Kapu Savara, there are other plain
Savaras on the name of Bhima Savara, Tekkali Savara and Sudha Savaras. Among these entire sources Sudha Savaras are vegetarians. All these plain Savaras speak only telugu. These groups of Savaras are found in Seethammapeta, Pathapatnam, Saravakota, Hiramandalam and Mandasa Mandals. Kapu Savara are more found in surrounding mandals of Seethammapeta, Bhima Savara and Sudha Savara are living in Mandasa Mandal and they also speak in Savara language with preponderance of Oriya words. Even in plains of Seethammapeta mandal, Savara villages are identified as homogenous settlements. In villages where Savaras seem to be in living with other tribes like Jatapu and others there is ethnic segregation in such heterogeneous villages. Jatapus in such cases are given higher social position.

The plain Savaras practice terracting, dry and wetland cultivation and their major occupation is cultivation. They are also adopting new agricultural technology in the irrigated areas.

Savaras in the plains are responded to the modern forces and the process of change is felt through their changing life style, material culture, social and economic relations, political organization, beliefs and rituals. The field survey observation reveals these changes. When compared to Konda Savara with Kapu Savaras in plains, there is considerable change in the food habits of the plain Savaras. The taste of the present generation is changing; people prepare to take as much as vegetable curries different non-vegetarian items along with cooked rice. They are consuming milk to prepare tea. Many tribals carry tea stalls at roadside bus stops, which are always crowded. Also due to the interaction with
Christain tradition, they are slowly reducing the consumption of ippasara and other liquors.

Another impressive change identified in the Savaras in the plains is their dressing pattern. The Plain Savaras wear modern dresses like pants, lungies, shirts, banyans, and under wears. The dress of women also varies with income, age and education. They like to wear mill made clothes, synthetic and wollen clothes. Men are maintaining more hairstyles. The family system is also changed from joint family system to nuclear family system. The education and health facilities provided by the governmental agencies are being utilized by the plain Savaras. They are also adopting family planning system [4].

It is noted that, among the Savaras who have settled in the interior places differ in the marriage rites. Owing to the introduction of Hindu customs some of the Savaras who are not Hindus consult their religious men as to what day would be the most auspicious for marriage, erect pandals. Substituting liquor consumption with sugar water, and holding a festival for two or three days are the recent changes found among these tribes. But even the most Hinduised Savara has not yet fallen directly into the hands of Brahmin priests. The Kapu Savaras are taking to menarikam (marriage with maternal uncle’s daughter) although the hill customs require a man to marry outside his village. Their wedding ceremonies bear a distant resemblance to those among the Konda Savaras. The interior village people no longer feared to trust themselves above the ghats. Even among plain Savaras ancestral worship arising around their dwelling is
predominant in Savara beliefs and ritual practices. Savara social control system consists of functionaries like Buyan (village headman), Bairsoji, Kundan maru and Kudan boi (priests).

The traditional patterns of music and dance of the Kapu Savara in the study area also had undergone change in some aspects. The plain Savaras are changing in terms of their cultural values like music and dance. Music cum dance is slowly becoming less popular among the educated sections. Similarly, social interaction between these tribes and Christains and Hindu traditions change the social relations between different sections of the tribal society as well as with other groups. Though, inter community relations have increased, marriages are still largely performed within their castes [5]. The change in their social domain is gradually diluting their marriage practices, their beliefs in supernatural forces and magico religious life.

The above analysis reveals that the socio, political, cultural and religious organization of the plain Savaras is not as much primitive as in the case of hill Savaras. This is due to the fact that the plain Savara society is undergoing transformation with regard to its integration with the larger Indian society. This change is much found in the plain Savaras in roadside villages rather than in the very interior plains without any communication facilities. Their socio-cultural relations and religious traits are being much influenced by rapid process of Christianisation and slow process of Hinduisation particularly in the plains of the scheduled areas rather than in hill tracts.
4.4 Socio Cultural and Religious Traits of Jatapus

The Jatapus are defined as a civilized section of the Khonds, who speak Khonds on the hill and Telugu on the plains, and are now practically a distinct caste. They consider themselves superior to the Khonds. The name Jatapus is popularly believed to be abbreviated form of Konda Jatapu Doralu, or lords of the Khonds caste. To this caste, the old chiefs of the palakonda Zamindars are said to have belonged. The Jatapus are a major scheduled tribe in the Srikakulam District. According to 2001 census they are 28,630 in number and the total schedule tribe population of the District is 1,51,249 [6].

The social organization of Jatapus is based into totemic and exogamous groups of class. Among Jatapus the smallest social unit is the nuclear family, spread over by joint or extended families, modernization and new set of social forces have changed the Jatapu social system. Although the breakdown of extended families is the result of natural process of growth and phenomenon of the family units, the operation of divisible forces like wage labour and money economy has accelerated this process in the roadside villages and in semi-urban scheduled areas. Against the tradition of parental properties with the development of individualization, the adult ones began to pressurize and quarrel with their father for the division of family property. So the nuclear family has come to be the production unit in the plain areas [7]. The parents complain that the youth of present generation are not as obedient as they used to be. The traditional behaviour of super-ordination and subordination between older and younger generation remains little affected.
Marriage is celebrated either before or after a girl reaches puberty. A man may claim his paternal aunt’s daughter as his wife. The marriage ceremonies closely resemble those of the low country telugu type. Remarriage of widows is allowed, and a younger brother may marry the widow of his elder brother, divorce is permitted and divorcées may remarry. Jatapus speak dialects of “Kul” and “Kubi” which is Dravidian in nature.

The wage labour provided an opportunity for both adult male and female to earn incomes besides the traditional production system [8], which has affected the traditional behaviour pattern of Jatapus who are economically advanced in plains. The authority of father and mother’s brother in the marriage is considerably weakened. The different practices in marriage, including Voli are generally ignored in semi-urban areas. The economic independence of women is leading to frequent divorce. In the wake of money economy and changing values, youth began to give value for smartness and attraction on girls at the time of selecting spouses. Consequently the incidence of cross-cousin marriage is declining. The contact with Hindu castes has made them to adopt sister’s daughter marriages. The value that the elder brother’s wife is equal to mother which is found in the Hindu system is slowly cropping into tribal value system and they are not marrying elder brother’s wife.

The Jatapu worship mainly, the benevolent supernatural powers as well as beings but in case of necessity they sometimes worship the malevolent spirits also. Various forms of festivals and worships are performed by dissari on behalf
of the Jatapu tribe. Jatapus traditionally expect to conduct festivals and worships are performed jointly held at clan or village level, which ultimately helps them in maintaining and strengthening their kinship bonds and social solidarity [9].

The traditional ritual complex of the Jatapus mainly revolves around agriculture. With the development of diversified economy and disappearance of food gathering and hunting activities among Jatapu tribe, the traditional ritual complex is losing its value. In the semi-urban and road side villages, who are employed outside is not following the rituals. Several rites are dropped from practice, while some rites like puberty rites for girls are still observed. The traditional ties between Jatapus and priests are weakened. Most of the Jatapus worship the village deities or family deities and ancestral sprits at the family levels where the services of priests are not necessary. Many Jatapus in roadside village are following either Hindu or Christian cult.

The interaction with non-tribals relatively changed the Jatapu’s socio-political religious life very significantly. Their racial qualities of dynamism, dareness and determination mutually helped them to grow very fast in their social and political life. Though their number is lower than Savaras, due to their racial qualities and their quick reaction to modern and changing forces, Jatapus emerged as powerful political and social group in the Srikakulam tribal economy. They have changed their social and political organization on the line of mainstream of Indian social political system. This socio-political transition process and their positive reaction on education and wage and non-farm
employment diluted their cultural and religious traditions. Their relatively much interaction with Christian and Hindu traditions gradually changed their belief in religious traits, conduct of ceremonies, festivals and functions \[10\].

4.5 Inter-Tribe Variations in Socio-Cultural and Religious Traits

The above socio-cultural and religious life pattern analysis of the selected tribes reveals, how the different tribes in Seethammapeta mandal responded to the exogenous change agents and modern forces. The Konda Savara, plain Savara and Jatapu tribes are not only popular but also are socially, culturally, ritually dominant tribes in the Srikakulam District. The comparative observation about their socio-cultural and religious life patterns and styles reveal that Jatapu and plain Savara who are living in plains significantly responded to the change agents. The degree of change is more in Jatapu and Kapu Savaras who are residing in the surroundings of Seethammapeta and in roadside villages. However, the degree of change among these tribes is limited in the interior villages which are not having any transport or communication facilities.

The Konda Savara are also showing some degree of change but somewhat less when compared to Jatapu and plain Savara tribes. This reveals that the impact of the change in the life styles of different tribes is not uniform throughout Seethammapeta Mandal. The topography of Seethammapeta itself does not facilitate the spread of alien cultures into the hill tracts and remote interior areas. Co-existence of money economy and barter economy are still found in Konda Savara village. These tribes in the hill tracks and remote interior
areas are not so much influenced by the changing agents of modernization. As these areas are far away from Seethammapeta and not easily approachable, the traditional social, cultural and religious organization of Konda Savara in their areas remained largely intact.

Music and dance is a way of life to the tribals of study area and these are important aspects of their cultural heritage. Dancing in the villages provides them opportunity for collective rejoining as well as inculcates in them a sense of cultural solidarity. The traditional patterns of music and dance of the tribes in the study are undergoing change in some aspects, mainly due to the impact of education. Music and dance is slowly becoming less popular among the educated sections of the tribal society. Also the encouragement and support from the government legislation for the progress of tribal music and dance have inculcated a new sense of pride in their music and social ethos which play an important role. Significance of socio-cultural factors cannot be ignored in formulation of schemes for their all-round sustainable development.

The above analysis reveals that the tribes living in plains, particularly Jatapus and Savaras slowly emerged as socially and politically leading communities and dominating the tribal scenario. Even among the plain tribes due to the racial qualities Jatapu tribes are leading politically and socially. The tribes living in the hill and remote areas particularly Konda Savaras are still in back seat of the social and political system.
References

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6. Hand Book of Statistics, Srikakulam District, Published by Chief Planning Officer op cit, Collectorate, Srikakulam, pp. 95.