CHAPTER - II

PEOPLE AND THEIR HABITAT

2.1 LOCATION

Uttara Kannada district is one of the most beautiful regions in India. It is the richest forest district endowed with variety of flora and fauna. This district is in the North Western part of Karnataka and lies between 70° 9' to 75° 10' East longitude and 13° 55' to 15° 32' North latitude and extends over an area of 10,327 sq km.

This district can be topographically divided into Coastal sector, Central belt and Transitional belt. The Central belt is known for its beautiful landscapes of ‘Sahyadri range’. Administratively Uttara Kannada district has been divided into eleven taluks namely Karwar, Kumta, Ankola, Sirsi, Siddapur, Joida, Yellapur, Bhatkal, Honnavar, Mundagod and Dandeli.

The geographical area of this district is covered by green thick forest and beautiful hillocks. There are four important rivers which flow across the district are Kali, Bedti, Aghanashini and Sharavati.

2.2 FLORA

The forest is dense having deciduous and ever green trees interspersed by paddy fields. The economic importance of this forest is
of quiet remarkable. It contains the most valuable Sandalwood \( \text{Santalum album} \), Teakwood \( \text{Tectona grandis} \), Matti \( \text{Terminalia arjuna} \), Bamboo \( \text{Bambusa bambos} \) and Sesame \( \text{Sesamum indicum} \). The forest also has many other plants namely Mango \( \text{Mangifera indica} \), Banana \( \text{Musa paradisiaca} \), Jackfruit \( \text{Artocarpus hirsus} \), Gooseberry \( \text{Physalis peruviana} \), Jambul \( \text{Eugenia jambulan} \), Papaya \( \text{Carica papaya} \), Coconut \( \text{Cocos nucifera} \), Cashew nut \( \text{Anacardium occidentale} \), Aracnut \( \text{Areca catechue} \), Great fan Palm \( \text{Cory tea umberaculifura} \), Champak \( \text{Mesua nagassarium} \), Black Pepper \( \text{Piper nigrum} \), Cardamom \( \text{Ammomum cannicarpum} \), Cinnamon \( \text{Belschmicdia dalzellii} \), Venilla \( \text{Vanilla planifolia} \) and Betle leaves \( \text{Piper betel} \). Along the Coastal belt trees like penny nerved Laurel \( \text{Aleodaphne Seaecarpifalia} \), Jungle marking nut \( \text{Haligarna Arnotiana} \) and Wild Peepal \( \text{Ficus Ernottiana} \) are common. Such wild varieties of trees are used for fuel and construction activities.

2.3 FAUNA

The green forest gives shelter to many varieties of animals, birds and insects. Aquatic animals like Jelly fish \( \text{Aurelia} \), Sea anemones \( \text{Anemonia sp} \), Edible Oyster \( \text{Ostrea sp} \), Cuttle fish \( \text{Sepia sp} \), Star fish \( \text{Astropecten} \), Edible shrimp \( \text{Crago sp} \), Squid \( \text{Loligo sp} \), Fiddler crab \( \text{Uca sp} \) and many other varieties of fish are common in the fresh water.
pounds and marine. Many verities of birds, insects, honey bees and rats are common in the deep forest. Animals like Elephant (Elephas maximus), Tiger (Felio tigris), Cheeta (Panthera pardus), Spotted deer (Axis axis), Wild dog (Kunn rutilous), Jackal (Canis aureus), Fox (Vulus bengalensis), Bison (Gavaena gaurus), Mongoose Bear (Ursus labiatus), Hare (Lepus nigriglois) and Chameleon (Chameleon calcaratus), Wild boar (Sus cristatus), Black faced Langur (Presbytis entellus) and Stripped squirrel (Funambulus tristriatus) are common in the forest. Birds like Sparrow (Hirunda rustica), Crow (Corvus splendens), Pigeon (Terophoenicopters chlorigaster), Cuckoo (Eudynamys acolopaces), Wood peckers (Picoides mahrrattensis), King fisher (Halcyon smyrnensis), Vulture and Owl (Bibasis sena) are commonly seen. Varieties of Snakes like Cobra (Naja naja), Viper (Echis carinata), Russell Viper (Vipera russelli), and Pythons (Python reticulatus) are abundantly seen. Hot and humid climate of this area is an ideal breeding place for varieties of insects. The domestic animals are like Cats, Dogs, Oxen and Goat.

2.4 CLIMATE

The Coast stretches in a long straight line to the south except the shallow Karwar and Belikere bays. The climate is highly humid in Coastal and Western ghat region, while climate is dry in the plateau.
2.5 SEASONS

The year may be divided into three seasons namely summer, monsoon, and winter. The summer starts from March and ends in May followed by monsoon with heavy rainfall till September. The district experiences winter from October onwards and overlaps with summer.

2.6 RAINFALL

The average rainfall of this district is estimated to be 2741.7 mm; heavy rainfall occurs between June and August.

2.7 PEOPLE

Gunagi is a small interesting endogamous group in Karnataka and are scattered over the Coastal region of Uttara Kannada district. They are settled down in the four taluks of Uttara Kannada district namely Karwar, Kumta, Yellapur and Ankola. They are thickly populated in Karwar followed by Kumta. Gunagi are basically Hindus but they are non-vegetarians. They celebrate all Hindu festivals. Most of the people worship female deities namely Kari Devaru, Jatak Devaru, Devi, Amma and Choudi. They also worship male deities namely lord Venkateshwara, Shankar and Masthi. The Gunagi are found in the hamlets near the forest. They are mild, sober and economically poor people. In Karnataka Gunagi are considered as very backward community and placed in Category-I (Government order SKE-225–BCA-2000; dated: 30-03-2002).
In the 2001 census the Gunagi are mixed with the other backward communities, hence the exact picture of the Gunagi is not clear.

There is a very little written record available on these people. Vijayendra in the book People of India, Karnataka, has mentioned about the Gunagi (2003). According to him Gunagi are also called Ghadi and Ghadiga. Further he opines that the ancestors of Ghadi community were torch bearers in the processions of festivals. He clearly mentions that the Gunagi and the Gunaga are two different communities as Gunagi being the priest. According to the people Gunagi, Ghadi and Ghadiga are synonyms. Gunagi were earlier called ‘Gunagaru’ (Those who perform pooja) in due course of time the term Gunagaru became present Gunagi.

2.8 DAIVAJNA BRAHMIN

Daivajna Brahmin are basically Hindus but they are non-vegetarians like Gunagi. They are also called Sonar or Suvarnakar. Daivajna Brahmin community is divided into many clans; each clan worships different God and Goddesses. Their family deities are Shanteri, Kamakshi, Jambavali, Mahalasa and Kamakshi of Shiroda. They speak Konkani and Kannada. They are traditionally gold smiths. They practice clan exogamy and caste endogamy. Divorce and widow marriage are not prevalent among them. The dead are cremated. In Karwar the Daivajna Brahmin live along with the Gunagi.
2.9 ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

The Gunagi are engaged in agricultural activities. They have encroached forest land bit by bit for growing crops. They till the land with the help of male buffalos and oxen to grow rice. Rice is staple food of these people; rice if grown excess for the year will be sold in the near by market. Paddy is preserved in big bamboo basket and sealed with a lid. They use to store rice in ‘modi’. For daily use they keep rice in gunny bags. Along with rice they eat fish or flesh of wild animals but they do not kill domestic animals for flesh. Those who do not have land, work as daily wage labourers. A few of them are working in the Kaiga Thermal Power Station. Educated men and women are working in the Government and Non-Government offices. Most of the women are seen working in the fields. During off seasons they bring home head load of dried wood from the forest and men are engaged in boiling paddy before it is dehusked (Kuchalakki).

A few of them bring home the forest products like honey, gum and fruits. Excess of these products are distributed or sold in the market. Even Prawns, Fish, Crabs and such marine products are also collected from the near by sea shore. Now days there is a tendency among youths who migrate to work in packing industries situated in Goa and Mumbai. Some men have joined Army and Police force too.
2.10 HOUSING

Gunagi live in the constructed houses of many types. The traditional houses have two big halls of a size 20×10 feet one behind the other. The house starts with a door which opens into a big hall. Further, this hall connects to a kitchen. The walls are constructed with ‘cherykallu’ and cement is used as binder. The front portion of the house is often seen plastered with cement. For roofing they use red burnt clay tiles. Floor of the rooms are cemented. The houses have wooden doors and windows. Most of the Gunagi are economically poor. They live in huts where dried grass commonly used for roofing. Floor of the rooms are smeared with Cow dung. Bathrooms are constructed in front of the house around 20 feet away from the main house. These are temporary structures constructed with coconut leaves knitted each other. Top of the bathrooms remain uncovered. A few are living in RCC buildings situated in Karwar town. The pets and the fowls are kept separately in the backyard of the house. A few houses have cage of parrots and fish aquarium. Almost all houses have ‘Tulasi Katti’ in front of the house. The Gunagi worship Tulasi plant also.

2.11 PHYSICAL FEATURES

Men and women exhibit light brown skin colour. Dark skin colour is less frequent. The Gunagi men and women have moderate stature and lean body build.
Men at work wear half trousers to cover lower parts of the body and they wear stitched banyan on the top. Cotton towel is commonly seen tied around the head. A small bag containing betel nut, betel leaves, lime and tobacco is often seen hooked in the trunk. The Gunagi call this bag as 'Chounchi'.

Men when they go out of the village for some work, wear half trouser and a shirt on it. Most of them wear plastic or rubber sandals. Women wear a 'Seere' (5-6 meter cloth which is wrapped around waist) that covers the lower part of the body. On the top they wear stitched blouse. Women commonly tie a necklace of black beads. Single Gold bead at the center of the necklace is a mark of marriage. Women and girls wear glass or metal bangles. Ear piercing is common for both boys and girls. Men and women wear artificial rings. Nose piercing is common among women.

2.12 LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

Gunagi are basically Hindus. Marriage age among Gunagi is comparatively high and ranges between 22 to 30 years. People prefer arranged marriages. Marriages between the Gunagi and other local caste people are prohibited. Uncle-niece marriages are prohibited but cross-cousin marriages are entertained. Clothes, ornaments and other gifts are exchanged during marriages between parents of the bride and bridegroom. At the time of marriage the bride groom ties 'Thali' around
the neck of bride. There is a small golden ball at the centre of necklace. Usually there are two orange colour beads on either side of the golden ball. Many ‘karimani’ (Black beads) are also used in the necklace. ‘Thali’ is bought by the bride groom’s parents. Most of the marriage expenditures are borne by the bride’s parents. Dowry system prevails in this community. Widow marriage is not entertained. Gunagi strictly practice monogamy.

*Seere ceremony* is usually celebrated in the seventh month of her pregnancy. This function is celebrated in the husband’s house. A special dinner is arranged for invitees. Gunagi are fond of fish and meat but such preparations are not entertained during auspicious functions. Pregnant women is given oil bath and decorated with new clothes, bangles and flowers. This ceremony is celebrated to disclose that she is pregnant. Friends and relatives present gifts to pregnant women. Then, she is sent to her parent’s house for first delivery. Most of the time delivery takes place in the hospital. After delivery mother is considered as polluted and kept in isolation for eleven days. She is given mixture of pepper and rice. On the twelth day after the delivery, the naming ceremony will be arranged. Naming of the child is usually by the parents. Ear piercing ceremony is performed when the baby is of six months.

When a girl is matured that is when she experiences her first menstrual cycle, she is educated by her mother. She is kept in isolation
for five days. She is given healthy food and turmeric liquid. After each menstrual cycle the women is considered as polluted for three days and she is not allowed inside the main house.

When the person is dead he is given bath by using oil and turmeric powder. Body is covered with white cloth. A single banana leaf is kept beneath the body of the dead. Four people carry the dead on a bamboo platform specially made for the purpose. Dead are carried in a sleeping position. Male friends and relatives follow the procession. Children and women are not allowed to join the procession. Gunagi cremate the dead.
SETTLEMENT OF THE GUNAGI
RESEARCHER WITH THE PEOPLE

[Top image: two people engaged in conversation, one with a notebook]

[Bottom image: a group of people posing together, appearing to be a community gathering]
GUNAGI AT WORK