

Beyond the Fire Line

Perceptions of Eight Tribal Women

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Peter Fernando
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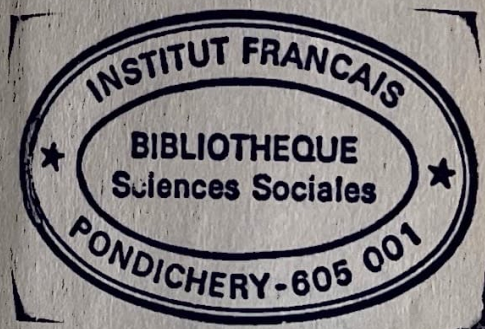
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PREFACE

The self-image of the Jenu Kuruba woman brought out in this book is the result of a study undertaken by *Streevani*, Karnataka at Dasanpura Haadi, which is a colony of Jenu Kuruba tribals.

Jenu Kurubas live in the forest. The forest has been everything to them. They were born there, lived within it and expect to make it their final place of rest.

A few decades ago, the forest was the entire universe of the Jenu Kuruba woman. She lived in it playing her role as a member of the tribe, roaming at will in the company of others or alone, collecting tubers, leaves, roots, honey and dead wood. No part of the forest was closed to her.

Then came the strictures in the form of a "fire line" which marked off the reserve forest that prohibited entry of the tribals to their own ancestral homeland. Thenceforth, crossing the fire line became an offence. Thus they have been pushed "Beyond the Fire Line" and have been forced to work out a new strategy for survival beyond the fire line in permanent colonies. It is here that we have met the Jenu Kuruba woman who is the concern of this study.

This study is addressed to all working in the field of women's development who are looking for a new approach to women's development, different from the traditionally welfaristic one of rescuing, sheltering, moralising and the like. We have been making our experience by using the interdisciplinary approach in the present study. Research workers who like us are trying to find answers to working with women will find in this study a basis on which to question further and contribute to women's development.

The basic concept we have used in this study is "self-image." We believe that a woman who discovers her self-image as a person has taken the first step on the road to progress. An understanding of her own

perception of self, of others, of life, of nature and of the supernatural will put her in a better position to bring about changes in behaviour and relationships that will make life more meaningful for her. A positive change in her self-image will have its impact on all her relationships, and it will transform the way others perceive her. A woman with a healthy self-image will no longer be prepared to play roles that ensnare her in oppressive structures. Her realisation of herself as an equal human partner will induce others also to perceive her in the light of her true status. Therefore, as a first step our main concern was to discover the status of the self-image of the Jenu Kuruba woman and to bring out the reality of the status she enjoyed as a tribal woman.

The study relies upon the self-perceptions of eight Jenu Kuruba tribal women who were interviewed at length for their oral stories. Besides, group discussions, which were held with both men and women, together as well as separately, have yielded significant insights.

We hope that the present study will throw new light on the importance of taking into account the self-perceptions of women and the status of their self-image in introducing developmental programmes at the grassroots level.

Introduction

Women constitute the largest single group that is lowest on the development ladder forming the ultimate "weaker section." Significant developmental indicators, such as literacy rate, per capita income and gainful employment, point to this fact. There has been no dearth of statistical data compiled by world organisations and our own governmental and non-governmental agencies to substantiate this premise. It is the same realisation that is reflected in the project-priorities of voluntary agencies (volags) concerned with development. Many of the volags in recent times have realised the need to evolve specific and appropriate strategies for women's development and apply them in their action-programmes.

Volags which come in direct contact with women, faced with problems like poor health, illiteracy, inadequate income, social oppression and destitution, find time and again that the statistics and development euphemisms are of little help in understanding their target population or in helping them tackle problems effectively. When it comes to action programmes involving women, mere concepts fail to serve as effective instruments of change because of the basic feeling of insecurity given to the women as "the second sex," problem that does not lend itself to familiar frames of reference.

The Beginning of *Streevani*

It was in this context that Dr. E. Zeitler, the then Director of Ishvani Kendra, Pune, convened a consultative meeting on "Women and Development" in January 1981. This meeting was also in response to a growing awareness among development workers and researchers concerned with women that a lot more attention had to be

paid to the situation of women and a wide range of related issues. The purpose of the meeting was to consider the unmet needs, problems and issues affecting women today, in order to outline a plan of action. Nineteen persons from eleven organisations, mostly women holding responsible positions at policy level in their organisations and also some in their individual capacity as researchers and academicians, participated. After much deliberation the consensus opinion was that a crucial step in furthering women's development was the working out of a positive and constructive vision of women and using it as the basis of any effective programme for women.

In keeping with the recommendations of the Consultative Group, *Streevani* (Voice of Women), was started in January 1982 as the body responsible for a research project entitled "Perceiving Indian Women." The objective was to initiate broad-based interest in the study of perceptions of women belonging to different sections of Indian society. The research project was conceived to conduct studies on self-image and to discover how images are made and shaped. *Streevani* was also expected to explore possibilities of cooperation with other volags, in the process of implementing action programmes that would evolve from the study.

The findings of the studies were to be collated to form the basis of the working out of a positive and constructive vision of women. It was envisaged that an understanding of the self-image of women and using such an understanding as the basis of programmes for women, would be adopted by volags in due time as an integral part of their approach to development. Once this approach was internalised by the volags and became a component of the ethos of voluntary action, the effectiveness of women's programmes was expected to be enhanced. This study received impetus also from the seminar on "Women's Image: Making and Shaping" organised by Ishvani Kendra, Pune, in October 1982. This seminar provided some significant clues, theories, methods and findings on how to identify images and how they are made and shaped.

In Karnataka we began work on this project through Shubadha which is a women's development organisation. At the annual general body meeting of FEVORD-K (Federation of Voluntary Organisations in Rural Development, Karnataka) of which Shubadha is a member, the subject of the study, its objectives and methodology

were put forward to the assembled volags. The interest shown by the volags in the study and the support offered by them confirmed our conviction that the study was needed and timely.

Project Objectives

The broad objectives of the *Streevani* project were laid down as:

1. The discovery of the images that women have of themselves in their multiple roles, problems in the family, work situations, community and religion in the context of their struggle for total human liberation.
2. The beginning of a process of critical self-awareness among women into the cause and solution of their problems in the family, work situations, community and religion, and the stimulation of the confidence in them that they can begin to do something about these problems.
3. The stimulation of a wider and deeper awareness among women's organisations, writers and personnel in mass and folk media of women's problems and their causes.
4. The development of the results of these findings into writings and publications of various kinds and levels, including audio-visuals to provide a basis for policy decisions, action projects, educational programmes, research and publications.

***Streevani* and Volags**

The plan of action was that *Streevani* would be responsible for the studies, and the collaborating volag, which was expected to have some history of experience in working directly with women, would provide the support services. The entire study process would be a symbiotic one wherein the research staff of *Streevani* would be helped by the volag to get exposed to the subject population and individuals in the actual execution of the study. Once *Streevani* withdrew, the study having been completed, the volag would take responsibility for the follow-up action programmes. Such programmes were to be designed on the basis of the insights gained through the study. The expectation, which turned out to be quite realistic, was that even if no

structured programme evolved out of the exercise due to budgetary or other constraints, the future work of the volag would be definitely influenced by the experience gained by their key-functionaries in the course of their collaboration with *Streevani* in conducting the study. Policy makers of the volag would have gained new insights during the study to guide them while designing programmes for women in the future.

The Questions Raised

Once the goal and the objectives had been laid down, several operational questions had to be faced: Where to locate the project? What methodology to adopt? Which action group to select for our work and study?

The first study under the *Streevani* project was undertaken in Maharashtra by Dr. Frances Maria Yasas who worked out the conceptual design and developed the structural framework and a methodology suitable to the purposes of that study. When a parallel Karnataka study was proposed, fresh questions of methodology came up. Rather than making a centralised choice of any particular methodology we decided to refer the question to a cross-section of people involved in women's development activities in Karnataka and to carry on with the help of recommendations that would come up from such a group. Accordingly, two meetings were held between January and February 1983, one at Bangalore and another at Mangalore.

The questions raised at these meetings were: Is this an analytical study of images or is it an action-oriented one? What is the hypothesis of the study? Is it that the negative images that women now carry are not inherent in them and that they are culturally imposed? Is the research design under consideration a study of "what is" rather than "what ought to be?" Will the study pay attention to the personal rights of women and make proposals as to the means to achieve these rights? Would the study address itself to the developing of philosophy of women in India through the study of images? Obviously, all these questions came up because of the very broad goals of the study which were presented for consultation.

This was intentional. The very purpose of undertaking the

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exercise of holding consultation meetings was to invite the involvement of support groups and resource persons right from the early stages of the study. This would ensure also that, having initiated collective thinking, the many individuals and organisations involved would lend their support in translating the findings of the study into action. Consciousness-raising and awareness-building are inherent in the conceptual framework. We believe that the creativity of the individual assumes meaning and power only against the backdrop of the collective consciousness.

While discussing the methodology to be adopted for the study at the consultative group meetings, we ran into a lot of debate, as can only be expected, because present at these meetings were sociologists, anthropologists, economists, psychologists, psychotherapists and social workers. Considering the purpose we had in mind in undertaking this study we finally decided to adopt the participatory research approach. We have not attempted elaborate quantification as the phenomenon of self-image does not lend itself easily to quantitative measurement. However, various techniques of data gathering, such as oral histories, oral stories, individual and group interviews and questionnaires, were employed in the study.

We have deliberately avoided pure research terminology. We have also not made use of any of the scales developed by social scientists in gauging social and psychological phenomena. Rather we have drawn guidance from the self-image concepts propounded by the self-image psychologists as well as from the disciplines of anthropology and social work. The methodology is given fuller treatment further on. The present study is a collaborative effort of an anthropologist, a psychotherapist and a social worker involving an interdisciplinary approach.

While recognising the importance of looking at larger totalities and the crucial role of societal analysis, we have all along stressed the need to take a closer look at the human person who is at the centre of the existential vortex. Often we see development activists carrying out work according to the dictates of doctrines and theoretical formulations in the development context but losing sight of the individual in the process. In our thinking and practice our primary concern has been the individual person. Hence, the focus of this study is the individual woman. By design, though, we have also allowed a consid-

erable amount of light to fall upon the network of relationships which holds her in the position she is in, the Jenu Kuruba Tribal woman emerges as the chief protagonists of our study. She stands in the spotlight. The tribe itself remains in the penumbra.

Participatory Research

A brief treatment of the concept of "Participatory Research" is relevant in this context in view of the proliferation of several similar sounding terms used liberally by activists, researchers and writers concerned with voluntary action. "Action-Research," "Participatory Action Research," "Participative Research," and "Participatory Conscientising Research" are some of the phrases often traded among researchers in the development polemics. The Newsletter of the Society for Participatory Research in Asia, puts the issue in the proper perspective. To quote the Newsletter of the Society of Participatory Research.

It is understandable how this outpouring of labels can lead to confusion and also mutual hostility. We also share the concern about the threat to the core meaning of Participatory Research. The proliferation of labels is not an isolated process but a reflection of similar treatments meted out to potentially threatening and potent concepts across the globe. Similar nit-picking and hairsplitting by hard-nosed academics and dogmatic ideologues have made simple and powerful concepts of dialectical and historical materialism beyond comprehension. Perhaps this proliferation of labels is a reflection of the underlying divisive force in our societies—another illustration of divisions among the have-nots and their allies. Because, in its core essence, Participatory Research is one of the potentially powerful contributions to the process of the empowerment of the oppressed, it is perhaps important for all of us to overcome the barriers raised by multiplying labels.

For us, once again, Participatory Research is an ideologically biased non-neutral methodology of inquiry into the phenomena of oppression, poverty and marginalisation, with the active collaboration of the have-nots (or their representatives), with a view to their obtaining knowledge, as well as its tools, about their situation and thereby acting on the basis of that newly acquired

knowledge to change the situation structurally by collective actions in their common interest.

The choice of methods, use of experts, form of communication of that knowledge, etc. are subsidiary issues which derive their elaboration through this core meaning of Participatory Research. Other activities like evaluation, monitoring or training, for us derive their nature, format and methods from this distinctive characteristic of Participatory Research. Academic one-upmanship, personal recognition and/or dogmatic rigidity need to be overcome through our own actions.

It should not be construed that our acceptance of the Participatory Research approach for our study was uncritical. We were fully aware of the limitations of the approach. While we have taken into consideration the potential ambiguities inherent in the approach, we have also taken advantage of the wide scope which this methodology offers.

The Field and the Tasks in Karnataka

The main concern of this study was to focus on the images of tribal women. In our search for an appropriate volag to collaborate with the research team, "Development Through Education (DEED) of Hunsur turned out to be the most suitable. DEED is concerned exclusively with tribals, and at the time this study was proposed, it has already made considerable headway in establishing a rapport with several tribal communities, especially the Jenu Kuruba Tribe of the Hunsur Taluk. Studying the Jenu Kuruba woman seemed the most practical choice.

While the modalities of collaboration with the identified volag were being worked out, a parallel activity the research team engaged in was training in methodology and research skills. Mention has to be made of two formal programmes. One was conducted by the authors as a lab experience on recognising images, and interviewing. The participants were helped to develop:

1. Sensitivity to the concept of images and to recognise the images with which people grow and live. Self-awareness exercises brought out clearly some of the self-images of the participants themselves.

2. Skills in interviewing to bring out images.

The second was a review and evaluation exercise conducted by Ms. Shyamala Hiremath, Programme Coordinator, India Development Service, Dharwar. These exercises consisted in spelling out objectives and activities with reference to the structural status and time frame of the project.

The tasks of the research associates were brought under three broad categories:

Task 1: Study of the Collaborating Organisation

- a. To make a study of DEED, the collaborating volag and its programmes, by interviewing persons in the organisation on aspects included in the study and at the tribal women's programme level.
- b. To compile documented material available with the support group at both the levels and also to collect published and unpublished studies available on the Jenu Kuruba tribe.
- c. To prepare a background paper with all the materials available from primary as early as secondary sources.

Task 2: Profile of the Target Group of Women

- a. Documentation on the group of selected tribal women with reference to daily routine, marriage, kinship roles, socio-cultural and religious practices, occupation, health and so on.
- b. Documentation on the reaction of the target women as a group to selected questions, statements and concepts introduced by the research associates, e.g., wife-beating, marriage age, control of money, etc.
- c. Preparation of a background paper on the target women's group highlighting images that emerge.

Task 3: Profiles of Selected Tribal Women

- a. From the target group of women, to identify about eight women

who could be studied indepth for individual profiles using the oral story method.

- b. To interview these women and observe their life-pattern over a period of time in order to get their life story and capture the different images which they have developed.

Sources of Information

The sources of material made use of in this study are as follows:

1. Oral stories and oral histories of the key informants.
2. Interviews with tribal women, men and their mixed groups.
3. Direct information collected by the research assistant from tribals in general during her visits to the various Jenu Kuruba hamlets.
4. Available documentary resources.
5. Discussions with the DEED team and the documentation of the DEED agency on the Jenu Kuruba tribe.
6. Census survey conducted in the field.

The Field Investigator

While selecting the field investigator who would do the actual interviewing and recording of information, we had to bear in mind several considerations. The investigator had to be conversant with the nuances of the tribal language in order to understand the tribals, perception of realities. Another skill required was the ability to listen empathetically both to the verbal and non-verbal communications. A further requirement was experience in working with communities, as the present task entailed establishing rapport with the tribal women in particular and the tribal community in general.

The entry point to the tribe was the DEED agency which had been working with the tribals for quite some time. To find acceptance at the agency level, especially with the field staff, the field investigator had to go round with them to their work areas. She had to make several trips to the tribal hamlets where she entered into conversation with the tribals. She continued to go back to the hamlets and the tribals quickly learnt to distinguish her from the field workers of the development agency. They viewed her as a special visitor and unless they were out on wage labour in the neighbouring villages, they gathered around her as soon as word went around about her arrival.

This study describes the way of life of the Jenu Kuruba tribe in its socio-cultural setting which is the forest, and in the new colonies that are getting settled on revenue land on the edge of the forest beyond the fire line. The fire line shows the demarcation between land which belongs to the centrally administered reserve forests and revenue lands which come under the purview of the district administration of the State Government. The Dasanpura Haadi, the locale of this study, is described with its identifying marks.

The Jenu Kuruba woman, who is the principal concern of the study, is presented here against the general background of the tribe. Her life in the Haadi is traced from birth through womanhood. Her daily routine, occupation, traditional practices, marriage and kinship roles and her status in the tribe are also described.

She is presented within these pages also as a person; her capacities, attitudes and self-perceptions are described. Her perception of other significant persons in her life is dealt with. How the Jenu Kuruba woman perceives nature and the supernatural in the shaping of her self-image is captured. By going through the direct statements of the women that have been recorded in the pages that follow, one can understand the influence of the self-image of a Jenu Kuruba woman on her status at present.

Finally, we propose some suggestions and recommendations for new directions to all interested in a new approach to women's development.



Self-Image: Some Basic Concepts

Self-image is the very foundation of one's being. It is the central core of all our experiences. Our behaviour and actions, feelings and expressions, thinking and reflections, dreams and aspirations, relationships and interactions well up from the very ground of our beings. Arthur T. Jersild, in his book defines self thus: ¹

A person's self is the sum total of all he can call his. The self includes, among other things, a system of ideas attitudes, values and commitments. The self is a person's total subjective environment; it is the distinctive centre of experience and significance. The self constitutes a person's inner world as distinguished from the outer world consisting of all other people and things.

The self is the personality centre. It is best represented by what we call "I" or "Me." It takes on various subjective attributes in the form of nature, capacities, talents, values, aspirations, attitudes, qualities and also weaknesses and woundednesses. Through self we become aware of our uniqueness, identity, worth, values and attitudes. Various terms are used to describe this personality construct, such as self-image, self-concept, self-structure and self-worth.

We become aware of our "self" as we grow. Self-awareness develops slowly as the child recognises the distinction between self and not-self, me and not-me, I and not-I, my body and my environment. Gradually the child learns to recognise and identify its body parts, feelings and behaviours as integral parts of a single "me" and builds a cluster of beliefs about itself. All of us have certain fixed ideas,

1. Arthur T. Jersild, *In Search of Self*, (New York: Teacher's College Press, Columbia University, 1952).

feelings, and perceptions about our basic worth as persons. All of us have a mental picture or a blue-print of ourselves. This is called self-image. "Your self-image is your picture of yourself. It is your opinion of yourself. It is your value judgment about yourself. And this image of yourself you carry with you out into the world; it helps to shape the calibre of your experiences."²

Thus, self-image is closely related to how a person perceives oneself, how a person feels about oneself and how a person thinks of oneself. The self-image (mental picture, blueprint) is a real thing, though we may not see, touch, taste or even be conscious of it.

Self-image and Personality

Self-image is the cornerstone of the entire structure of our personality. It is a sure and unmistakable key to our personality and behaviour. By changing our self-image, we can change our personality and behaviour. It influences our mental health and personal adjustment. Self-image determines who I am, what I think I am, what I feel about myself, how I behave, how I communicate with people, how I relate to others, how I achieve in the world and what I can become.

Self-image and Behaviour

There is a close and inescapable relationship between one's self-image and one's behaviour. Our thinking and feeling with regard to ourselves influence our behaviour. When we act and respond in our daily life, we are acting out our self-image. When our self-image is good, we express ourselves and function at our best. When our self-image is poor, we walk away from ourselves and others. If we think of ourselves as inadequate, then we will act out and communicate as that kind of a person. For example, if a woman perceives herself as ugly, then not only will she internalise this perception, but she will also project this image in her behaviour. Thus, she will also avoid mingling with people or will feel uncomfortable in their company and thereby confirm to herself her own poor self-image. But a woman who possesses a good self-image will not only feel that she is liked, wanted, acceptable, and worthy, but will also behave as though she is in good relationship with people.

2. Maxwell Maltz, *Psycho-cybernetics and Self-fulfillment*, (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1970) p. 22.

All our actions, behaviours and relationships are consistent with our self-image. A woman will act like the sort of person she thinks she is. She simply cannot act otherwise, even if she exercises all her will-power. The woman who thinks she is a "failure type" will find a way to fail, no matter how hard she tries to succeed. A woman who thinks she is just "unlucky" will manage to prove that she is indeed a victim of "bad luck."

Don E. Hamachek firmly believes that mental health and personal adjustment depend very much on one's basic feelings of self-worth. Feelings of personal inadequacy, helplessness, inferiority, insecurity or worthlessness erode and weaken the main pillars of one's self-structure, sometimes to the point of collapse.³

Our self-image also influences our achievements, our communication and our relationship with people. There is a close link between our achievements and the feelings we have about our own self. Every time we relate to another person, we communicate either positive or negative feelings about ourselves.

When our self-image is good, our expression and functioning is at its best. But when this self-image brings us shame and fear of failure, we suppress our creative expression and walk away from self-others, life, world and the supernatural—into a dark cell of our own making. Thus, our self-image can bring either fulfilment or frustration in life.

Making of Self-Image

Self-images are formed (made) through the influence of many different life experiences. The sources of the major experiences in life which influence our self-image are:

- How we are perceived by significant persons
- How we are perceived by our own self
- How we perceive our body
- How we perceive others
- How we perceive life, world (nature) and the supernatural.

Each of these factors partially contribute either positively or negatively to the formation of our self-image. These five factors are discussed here:

3. Don E. Hamachek, *Encounter with Self* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1971), p.8.

How We are Perceived by Significant Persons

According to Don E. Hamachek (*Encounters with Self*, p. 16) how we behave today depends to a great extent on how we were regarded by the significant persons in our life when we were small and by the nature of our relationship with those significant persons. Our self-image comes largely from the feed-back we get from the time we first came into the world. We are born asking the question WHO AM I? The significant people who are with us constantly answer this question by saying:

- You are a pretty girl.
- You are a good girl.
- We were expecting a boy when you were born.
- You are the darkest in the family
- You are just like your grandfather.
- Stop fighting with your sister.
- You are indeed better than your brother.
- You will become a doctor one day.
- Don't cry like a little girl.
- Don't act like a boy.

and so on.

From these sayings we infer answers to the question WHO AM I? The answers could be:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| - I am loved | - I am not OK |
| - I am wanted | - I am useless |
| - I am intelligent | - I am lovable |
| - I can do this well | - I am pretty |
| - I can become a doctor | - I am unwanted |
| - No one loves me | - I am stupid |
| - It is better to be a boy | - It is good to control our emotions, |
- and so on.

We, as persons, especially as children, are vulnerable to the responses we get from the significant persons. If the significant persons in my life continually doubt my worth and if they were to regard me as incompetent, inferior, not OK, unlovable, and so on, then we would naturally develop a poor self-image along with self-doubt, inferiority feelings and inadequacy. On the other hand, if they were to regard me

as a person of worth, then we naturally develop a good self-image along with self-confidence, adequacy, a feeling of being loved and accepted. Thus, the significant people in our life play an important role in the making of our self-image.

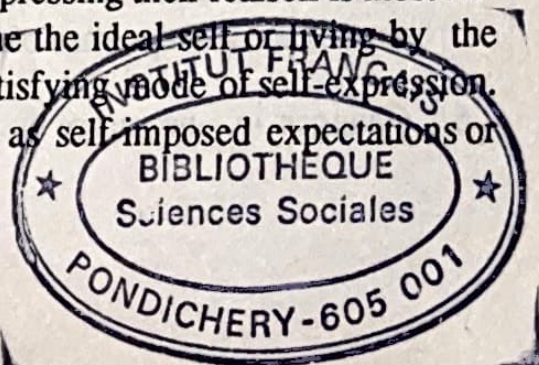
Among the significant persons, parents play a very important role in the making of self-image. The way we feel about ourselves is very much linked to the relationships we had with our father and mother in our early childhood. The parents can have an amazing influence on the self-image of children over a period of fifteen to eighteen years till they grow into adulthood. There are many ways parents can influence the image of the child. When the parents have a favourite among the children, automatically the other children's self is devalued and they get a feeling that they are not good. When parents make unfavourable comparisons with other children at home or in the neighbourhood, the child may feel incompetent and inferior. The parents may expect the child to achieve what they themselves had desired but could not achieve; and if the child does not have the aptitude he/she will feel incompetent and develop a poor self-image. Sometimes the attention given to a newborn baby in the family may give an older child the feeling of not being wanted which will hinder his/her growth of self-esteem. The children experience not-OK feelings when they are loved and valued only for what they do and what they bring, and not for what they really are.

Even though we are very much influenced by significant persons in our lives, we cannot say that these persons are totally responsible for the self-image which we have today. We can say that they are partially or largely responsible in the making of our self-image.

How We are Perceived by Our Own Self

Our self-image is determined partially by how we perceive ourselves, partially by how we view ourselves; as ideally wanting to be, partially by the expectations we perceive that others have of us.

Each one of these three perceptions contributes more or less to our feeling of selfhood. For some, expressing their realself is most important, for others striving to become the ideal self or living by the expectations of others is their most satisfying mode of self-expression. Expectations can come from within as self-imposed expectations or



from without, that is, expectations of others. But when we live only by expectations, we are sure to develop a poor self-image.

Our self-image is affected by the positive and negative signals we receive from the internal world within our personality. For example, one may be quite good-looking in the eyes of others, but if she were to put herself down by saying, "I am not at all good looking," then her self-image will be low.

How We Perceive Our Body

Our body-image too has a deep influence on our self-image. We notice a close relationship between body-image and self-image. Physical features have an important place in the constitution of the self-image.

Women who have negative feelings about their body (poor body-image) are most likely to have negative feelings about themselves (poor self-image). Persons who have positive feelings about their body (healthy body-image) are most likely to have positive feelings about themselves (healthy self-image).

1. A woman's general body proportions (height, weight, girth, size, colour) are very much related to her feelings of self-worth.
2. The pace of a girl's total growth in relation to other girls in her age group plays an important role in the formation of her self-image.
3. The development of certain features of girl's body, in comparison to other girls of her age, is an important factor in determining her self-image.
4. Deformative and chronic illness in a child can cause a poor self-image.
5. Loss of any part of the body can be experienced as a partial loss of self, thus leading to a sense of personal inadequacy. A woman who loses her teeth or hair may experience changes in her self-image. A woman who loses a limb or an eye may experience a deep sense of injury to the entire personality.
6. Changes in one part of the body lead to changes in self-image.

When a facial defect is corrected, certain changes in personality also take place.

7. Disliking one's body-image leads to a disliking of one's own self.

How You Perceive Others

One's attitude towards other people is also related to the kind of image one has about oneself. The way you think about others is related to the way you think about your own self. If you think people are bad, good-for-nothing, sinners, not-OK, then you do not have a good self-image because such a person will be attributing the same qualities to one's own self. The very fact that you condemn and judge others makes it evident that you do the same thing to yourself. Thus, the way one thinks about other people is important for one's own self-image.

How We Perceive Life, the World and the Supernatural

How we perceive life and the world is closely linked with our self-image. People who have a positive self-image look upon life and the world in a very positive way. On the other hand, people who have a poor self-image tend to look upon the two realities in a negative or a pessimistic way.

It has been noted by psychologists that there is a close relationship between the God-image and the self-image. People who score high in positive God-image items (benevolent, forgiving, unconditional love, total acceptance, infinitely merciful, caring, etc.) also score high in positive self-image items. On the other hand, people who score high in negative God-image items (God of fear and anger, justice, reward and punishment, conditional love, rejection, appeasing, etc.) score high in negative self-image items. Thus, one's perception of God is closely related to one's self-image.

We hope that the basic concepts of self-image brought out in this chapter will help the readers to place the study of the self-image of the Jenu Kuruba woman which follows in the proper perspective.

The Jenu Kuruba: A Tribe of Karnataka

The tribal population of India is still considered as being distinct from other communities which form the mainstay of India's social fabric, despite the changes that have taken place in the tribal cultural life. Many of the tribal groups still maintain their cultural identity and social mores. Most anthropologists agree that there is no social group today in India which may be said to mark the zero point of cultural contact. For the same reason, when we attempt to understand the Jenu Kuruba culture, rather than delineating the community as an isolated tribal group we have viewed them in the total context of the historical and social forces with which the tribe has been interacting.

What is the tribal's design for living today? In this design what is the position of women? In trying to find the answers to these two questions we have probed deeper into the tribal existence. The first part of this chapter deals with tribes in general and the second part focuses on the Jenu Kuruba tribe.

Tribal Life Under Pressure

A tribe, as we understand the term for this study, is a territorial group as distinct from a social group. The habitat of the members of the tribe can be located with precision as it is often a compact cluster whereas a social group is usually scattered over large areas.

The tribal population of India is about 7 per cent of the total population. In the State of Karnataka tribals constitute nearly 1 per cent of the state's population. In Karnataka the tribals are mostly concentrated in the districts of Mysore, Kodagu, Dakshina Kannada and Chikkmagalur.

Till about half a century back, the tribals were largely free from any overwhelming oppression by other communities and external forces. They led a more or less autonomous life depending mostly upon nature for their sustenance and resorting to shifting cultivation when hunting was not sufficient. Unlike the Scheduled Castes, the tribals until recently were not subjugated by the rest of society nor were they reduced to a position of social degradation. Since independence there has been a marked change in this comparatively happy state of affairs. With the forest wealth being fast depleted and the government exercising control over the remotest of the forests, the tribal has been driven to a corner. The law-enforcing machinery treats the tribals as mere thieves when they gather firewood or use any of the other forest resources. But the tribals have always considered the forest as their home and believed that whatever belongs to the forest naturally belongs to them. When hunting is prohibited in the name of wild-life preservation, where is the tribal to turn to for his daily food? Whatever hunting or tree-felling the tribals used to do was done in a way that was not damaging to ecology. Tribals have not been known to have taken from nature anything more than what was necessary to satisfy their basic needs and sustain their marginal economy. Nature is bountiful enough to take care of the modest needs of the entire tribal population. But in the greed of the rest of the society for conspicuous consumption, large tracts of forests have completely vanished. The irony of it all is that legislation and government action meant to protect and preserve forests victimise the tribals who have been least harmful to the forest.

Volag's Perceptions of the Tribal Situation

A seminar organised by the Federation of Voluntary Organisations for Rural Development in Karnataka (FEVORD-K), where four member organisations with direct experience in working with tribals like the Soligas of B.R.Hills, Kadu Kurubas of Hunsur Bedars, Gowlis and Lambanis of Dandeli-Dharward belt, concluded that the problems of the tribals could be summarised as follows:

1. The tribals have been alienated from their traditional way of life mainly due to the forest regulations. They are at a loss to discover by themselves new means of living required by the changed circumstances.

2. Whatever economic programmes the government has undertaken for their welfare do not find much favour with them because such programmes are often forced upon them without taking their priorities into consideration.
3. There is no dialogue worth the name taking place between the tribals and those who plan and implement the programmes.
4. The tribals live under constant fear of authorities and other communities.
5. They do not understand the 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. time-rhythm of the work-a-day world, nor the Monday to Saturday weekly cycle. Absenteeism among tribals when they are regularly employed is due to this failure to understand an alien notion, and the rest of the society stamps the tribals as lazy and unreliable.
6. The tribals have been deprived of the very source of their livelihood which is their right to freely use the forest resources for subsistence. The least that could have been done to compensate was to have allotted sufficient land to them so that they can try to survive by farming. But this has not been the case.
7. In all their dealings with the outside world, the tribals turn out to be the losers. They are cheated while buying and selling, while being paid for work, while receiving welfare assistance like old-age pension and cluster programme benefits. The tribal women are victims of many more varieties of exploitation.
8. The tribal elders are still the custodians of tribal culture. Any scheme which aims at the development and welfare of the tribals has to be sensitive to this fact. Such schemes should be planned and implemented with the willing cooperation of the existing tribal organisation. The tribal people still have confidence in their elders and look up to them for guidance and redressal of their grievances.

Hunger caused by the shift in the national economy and the forest policy of the government has forced the tribals to look for new sources of sustenance. The entire design of tribal existence is in transition. The tribes have increasingly come under the influence of structures like

the caste systems which properly belongs to the village communities settled on the forest borders. Those tribal individuals who go out for work in neighbouring plantation also bring back, along with their wages, values which are wholly unsuited to many of the egalitarian concepts rooted deep in the tribal consciousness. These value conflicts only worsen the crisis.

The tribes have now to be viewed in the context of the changing trends in social development and economic progress of the country. The specific problems of tribal life must be approached with an understanding of and insight into the tribal dynamics. The tribals cannot continue anymore as autonomous social and economic units isolated from the larger socio-economic entirety. Nor are they equipped to chart out a course best suited to them without external assistance.

The Jenu Kuruba Tribe in Transition

The Jenu Kurubas seem to have, at least in principle, resigned themselves to the idea that they can no more depend upon the forest produce for their livelihood, and that they will have to take to farming or other avenues of employment. But in these days when the traditional farming communities themselves are abandoning agriculture, finding it unremunerative, and go for wage labour, it is no wonder that the tribals are hesitant to take to farming wholeheartedly. What actually has been happening in the tribal hamlets is that when there is seasonal employment available, say coffee-picking, they readily go in for that. Wage labour brings in the rewards by the evening of the day or at least by the weekend, but agriculture entails patient tending for a minimum of three months, whatever be the crop.

When we examine the Jenu Kuruba tribals' relationship with other communities in the Hunsur taluk, we have to see how they relate to the Gowda agriculturists and the Coorgi coffee planters; both the groups being beneficiaries of the tribals' toil. The tribals do not manifest any feelings of aggression or resentment against the Gowdas or the Coorgis; rather they look upon them as their benefactors. The underlying exploitative relationship nevertheless points to the contrary.

When the forest regulations came to be strictly enforced, the tribals had no other option but to settle on land outside the forest

boundary. Ignorant of the intricacies of property legislation and land records, the tribal went by the dictum, "Whatever I clear is mine." Most of the land which they cleared, levelled, and made cultivable using whatever crude agricultural skills they had, fell neither within the purview of revenue lands nor that of the forest range. The village accountant had the authority to grant *fasal pani* (cultivation rights) to these lands to any applicant who could prove that he has been actually cultivating the land.

Many village accountants usually work on the basis of a simple formula. Whoever makes them happy gets the *fasal pani* for any piece of land which can be so granted. The other minor requirement is that the potential rival claimant should not be powerful enough to cause inconvenience to the village accountant. The Gowda watches when the tribal clears the forest, levels the ground and makes it cultivable. Then he goes to the village accountant and stakes his claim for the *fasal pani* of the land which the tribal had chosen to settle on, and the accountant is happy to oblige. At the next season when the tribal is confronted with the fact that the Gowda has the cultivation right for the land which the tribal has cleared and in certain cases even planted one season, the tribal, not understanding the complexities, makes a protest, but moves on to a new spot, earnestly believing that he must have made a mistake. The extent to which this simple strategy of encroachment has been used to the disadvantage of the tribals is clear from the fact that hardly any tribal individual has been granted cultivation rights in the past quarter of a century. The dispossession of the tribals has been so total that today they hardly know the land that could be theirs by right. The result is that the tribals have now been reduced to the status of landless labourers living on whatever employment the Gowda farmers or the Coorgi planters offer them, which too is seasonal.

The ignorance of the Jenu Kurubas has been exploited ruthlessly by the unscrupulous elements time and again. During the national emergency in 1975, three men of the Dasanapura *haddi* were sterilised unwillingly without really knowing what it meant or what the consequences were.

The Cultural Ambience

The Jenu Kurubas are concentrated in the Hunsur and Heggade Devana Kote taluks of Mysore district in the forest tract where the

boundaries of the state of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu converge. A cluster of ten to fifteen huts constitutes a *haadi*, but there are some in *haddis* with as many as fifty huts. They build their huts with bamboo and thatch them with *handhi hullu*, (wild grass). Now, as the wild grass has vanished from the forests due to uncertain rain, they use *mutgad* leaves. They use *sotte*, *kare* and *mailadi* trees as fuel wood, for the wood is not durable. They express their anguish at the forest contractors and city dwellers who are responsible for the fast-vanishing forests. To them it is other people who have incessantly cut the trees like *honne*, *hatti*, *sagu* and have used the timber for building their permanent houses and for making furniture and have made them homeless.

The Jenu Kuruba can be said to have a Dravidian physiognomy. They are of medium built, dark-complexioned and with curly hair. They distinguish themselves from the other Kadukurubas such as Bettakuruba, Handekuruba, Mullukuruba, Kudemaleyaryukuruba. There are no inter-marriages between these tribal groups. They consider the Brahman and the Gowdas as upper castes (*uttam jati*) and the holeyas as low caste (*keelu jati*). They accept food and water from the upper castes but not from the lower castes. They practice strict tribal endogamy and ostracise any person marrying outside the tribe. An ostracised person is refused water and fire by others. Only in case of a marriage with upper castes is a person allowed re-entry into the tribal group after performing a ritual and payment of a token fine.

The Jenu Kurubas take pride in keeping their persons and huts clean. Strangers are not allowed to enter the premises of their huts or houses with shoes or slippers on. They smear cow-dung on the floor twice a week, usually on Tuesdays and Fridays. If they do not have anything to eat, they may give up cooking but they will not give up smearing cowdung. On the occurrence of any untoward event, the hut is burnt and the site is abandoned and a new hut is set up in the vicinity. When soap was still unknown, they used mud and water to clean their feet. They do not mind walking long distances for a bath. But during winter, when there is hardly any water in the rivulets, maintaining their reasonably high standards of hygiene becomes difficult, and as a result scabies breaks out among children. They do not partake carcass but eat the meat of chicken, and animals like rabbit, pig, deer and goat. They proudly say that they do not eat stale food but cook afresh twice a day and carry fresh water for cooking both times.

The practice of shifting cultivation which was prevalent till recently necessitated frequent displacement of their dwellings. A particular *haadi* did not remain in a place for more than three years in general. Only if the spot was especially fertile or the availability of forest produce such as honey and herbs was abundant, they used to remain for a longer period. However, all the shifting would take place within the territorial division known as *jamma*, the boundaries of which are streams and hills.

Every *jamma* has a headman known as *dodda yajamana*. It is a hereditary position which is held by a person who belongs to the family of the original settlers of that territory known as *staldavaru*. The *yajamana* holds the rights over the territory of a *jamma* and his consent is essential if any outsider wants to settle within its limits. He, however, plays no role in the distribution of the land. His other vital roles include ceremonial felling of a tree before clearing any part of the forest for cultivation. At a funeral ceremony he receives four *annas* (equivalent to 25 paise) and a clothe covering the dead body from the family members of the dead person, as a token payment of the debt owed for being allowed to live in that forest area. The *chicka yajamana* is the second-in-command who deutes for the *yajamana* in his absence. He also acts as a regent in case the *yajamana's* son is too young at his father's death. The son assumes the position when he comes of age. If the *yajamana* has no sons, the *chicka yajamana* is appointed *yajamana*. Another key position among these tribals is that of the *kolkara* (the staff bearer) who can be described as an enforcer. As a symbol of authority he carries a silver-tipped staff with him. The *gudikara* is a tribal who acts as a priest for the *haadi*, conveying messages and calling members of the *haddi* for the meetings of the tribal council. These traditional office bearers play a significant role in dispute settlement of the members of their *haadi*. In case of a dispute they try to bring about a reconciliation. The offender is made to accept his mistake before the tribal council with a betel leaf in his/her hand and pay a four *annas* fine to the council. In case of dining with lower castes or tribals, a person is fined, and this amount is used for buying large vessels for community purposes.

In case of sickness the tribals resort to exorcism and charms. Of late the Kurubas are not averse to going to the nearest clinic in case of ill-health. Yet the *bunde* or the oracle is still looked upon to cure "illnesses" and solve other problems. The *bunde* is a dried wild gourd

from which all the pulp has been removed. Nine different types of grains are put into the empty gourd and it is sealed. When the gourd is then twirled on a flat surface, it makes a musical sound which reverberates to great distances at night. Whenever the oracle's services are needed, the tribals gather around, and the man starts twirling the gourd to the accompaniment of singing by two women who wail in a monotone, one asking questions and the other responding. Gradually the oracle goes into a trance, which means he is possessed. The musical sound which the gourd makes and the singing cast a hypnotic spell on the gathering. Then the supplicants put questions to the oracle, to which he replies, and this is taken as the will of the divinity. The Gowdas dread the tribals for their supposed magical power and sorcery.

Every hut in a *haadi* shelters a nuclear family. The emphasis is on nuclear family living and a newly married couple sets up a separate hut to live in. They trace their descent through the male line. The residence pattern is not strictly patrilocal. It is not uncommon to find a married tribal living with his wife in her *haadi*. The Jenu Kurubas are normally monogamous, but a few instances of polygamy also exist. Separation and desertion is very frequent, but separated and widowed persons marry again.

Four types of marriages are practiced. These are *Karkambardu*, *Kudikolludu*, marriage by testing the suitor, *Kudavalli*. A majority of the marriage unions are by *Kudikolludu*, whereby a man and woman mate together and live as husband and wife.

There is no marriage rite associated with this form of marriage. The husband is responsible for providing *hittu-batte* (food and clothing) which are the basic necessities of life.

On the death of a partner it is pronounced at the funeral spot that marital relations have ceased and the surviving partner is free to marry again. They do not practice child-marriage. Often a boy and girl enter into marital union when they come of age. As every nuclear family is expected and constrained to be self-supporting because of the subsistence economy, there is a marked absence of joint families.

In *Karkambardu* marriage, a bride-price of twelve rupees is to be paid to the parents of the bride. Receipt of the full bride-price by a

woman's parents denotes the transference of total rights to the husband's family whereby all relations including visits to her natal family are barred. The common practice, however, is to pay half the bride-price whereby the relations between the wife-takers and wife-givers could continue.

The children receive no names after birth and many a time they are not named till they suffer from some ailment. On being inflicted by an ailment, through the oracle they choose the name of the child in keeping with the desire of the divinity. Their names are very few. It is common to find persons with similar names in one *haadi* and also in the same family. Beera, Biliya, Bhoja, Beeramma, Sani, Basvi, Boji are the common names.

Typical of nomadic tribes, the Jenu Kurubas have very few material possessions apart from some clothing and a few earthen and aluminium cooking utensils. They fetch water in aluminium containers, cook in earthen pots, use bamboo container *kutti* for storing salt and possess a few aluminium plates. Their other household possessions include a hand-mill and a grinding stone. Mirrors and mats to sleep on are recent acquisitions. The Jenu Kuruba man's prized possession is a bow made of bamboo and fibres with which he shoots small animals. Pointed wooden staves are used for an occasional wild-boar hunt. A kind of metallic net is used to trap rabbits. A particularly well-to-do Kuruba might own a shot-gun also.

The pattern of their life has been essentially nomadic till recent times. They leave early for the forest to collect honey or hunt for small game or to collect jungle fruits, tuberous roots or dry wood. Returning in the evening they cook and eat the food and the day is over. Honey (*jenu* in Kannada) is very dear to them and from it they have derived their very name. They collect honey from beehives that are either on trees or on ant-hills and distinguish them as *maradajenu* and *huttajenu*. The larvae of honeybees is a popular delicacy. Their staple food is *ragimudde*. Tubers and edible leafy vegetables procured from the forests are also used. Most of them now go for daily wage labour which supplements their income. They take two meals a day, but there are days when they have to go without food.

Dasanapura Haadi

The Dasanapura *Haadi* was chosen for study due to various

reasons. This particular *haadi* represents the Jenu Kuruba tribals in transition from a semi-nomadic to a settled life pattern. Further, the *haadi* also represents the exposure of the tribals to the neighbouring caste communities. With the increased contact with outsiders there has been a collapse of the traditional society and institutions among them, and this has adversely affected the women's status. It is hoped that a critical analysis of their life situation and self-perception will be helpful in safeguarding the interests of the tribal women. Easy access to the *haadi* also contributed to its selection for the study.

The Dasanapura Haadi lies about 19 kilometres south of Hunsur town of Mysore district. It is a part of Hanugod Hobli. There are motorable roads till Hanugod village, from where one has to walk about four kilometres to Dasanapura. The tribals take short cuts through the forest to arrive at the *haadi*.

The Dasanapura Haadi originally consisted of twenty huts built of bamboo and grass. At the time of this study fifteen of them had been converted into brick and tile structures through government assistance. The new houses are built according to a set pattern and are situated on sites adjoining each other on revenue land. The ownership papers are not in the hands of the tribals as yet. The picturesqueness of the *haadi* has given way to the uniform type of houses standing in rows on an open space. The tribals have begun planting trees and shrubs and have grown live fences to mark their house sites. The houses are one-room dwellings of 22' x 14' size, built on a plot of five cents each. Most of the families have built a wall to partition the room into two parts, the bigger part used as a living room and the other as a kitchen. Only one house is electrified, the rest use *chimani*. Each house shelters a nuclear family. Out of the twenty families, three families are extended and the rest nuclear. There is a bore well and an open well in the *haadi*. The latter dries up in the summer. At the entrance to the *haadi* stands a huge banyan tree. While this tree provides shade for people and animals, it also guards the *gudi* (temple) that exists close by. This *gudi* which was originally a tiny structure dedicated to the deity was large enough for only one person to remain inside. It had an idol of God Shiva in it under the title of Beerappa. Today the *gudi* has been enlarged and is on the way to expanding into a popular temple because of the ministrations of one of the tribals who combined in himself the roles of priest, oracle and medicine man. Devotees from far and wide come to this place twice a week with their supplications and offerings. Because of the in-

creasing number of devotees, a pilgrim rest-house was constructed close to the *gudi* during the course of this study.

Of the fifty-two adults in Dasanapura Haadi, twenty-eight are men and twenty-four women. There are forty-nine children of whom twenty-six are female and twenty-three are male. *Jenu Nidi* the language of the Jenu Kurubas and which is a dialect of Kannada, is fast falling into disuse, and the tribals now largely use the colloquial Kannada spoken in the neighbouring village communities. This adoption of the mainstream culture is obvious also in their dress. The tribal women now dress like the village females.

In the past three or four decades this *haadi* has been virtually on the run. The strategy of dispossession employed by the village Gowdas has played havoc with their lives. The grandfathers of today's elders of the *haadi* were the original settlers of the area. Since then they have been clearing small areas on the edge of the forest, only to have it claimed by the Gowdas as theirs by right. Even while the present study was on, it was reported that a tribal had been cheated of his two acres of land by a neighbouring Gowda. The Gowda had advanced a small amount to the Jenu Kuruba and had taken the latter's thumb impression on a blank stamp paper. The Gowda now has occupied the land, having converted the blank stamp paper into a sale-deed. This has happened several times within the past couple of decades, so much so that the tribals have now been driven to the edge of the so called fire line marked by the forest department. Forest authorities mark the reserve forest boundary by burning the undergrowth and beyond the line is the prohibited area. Squeezed in between the land-hungry Gowda and the high-handed forest authorities, the tribals have lost their economic independence and have become bonded labourers (*jeetha*) of the dominant Vokkaliga community of the neighbouring villages, receiving no other remuneration for their service except food and clothing. Till about ten years back every adult Jenu Kuruba worked as a *jeetha*, and the tribal women worked for the landlord's family to clean their cattle sheds. As a result of DEEDS awareness raising programmes, no tribal now works as a *jeetha*. With the support from DEED and the tribal organisation, the tribals have pursued their claim for the cultivation rights of the land they have cleared and tilled. In the *haadi* two families have obtained deeds of ownership and nine have obtained the *fasal pani* (cultivation rights).

The main source of their livelihood now is cultivation. The tribals have received rights to cultivate land under *fasal pani*. Every family owns two to four acres of dry land. The main crops are *ragi* and maize. The second crop is horsegram, chillies and vegetables. Due to the uncertainty of rain, agriculture only partially fulfils their needs, and to supplement their income they depend on forest produce and manual labour. Some of them hire themselves out as labourers and servants to the Gowda farmers and receive wages during the crop season. In the intervals between crops they work as casual labourers or go into the reserved forests and collect edible roots. During plantation and harvest the wages vary from five to seven rupees a day and one meal in the afternoon. For the rest of the year the wages paid are three to four rupees or three to four *seers* of *ragi*.

A few families have benefited from the income-generating programmes introduced by various government departments. Eight families have taken up a seedling growing scheme from the horticulture department. Nine families have received financial assistance of Rs.8,500 each from the animal husbandry department for purchasing two buffaloes each, out of which 75 per cent is received as subsidy and 25 per cent as loan. Some families also supplement their income by rearing hens, goats and cows, while some make brooms and sell them to the village folk. In spite of all these efforts to eke out a living, there are days when they have to go without food.

The Jenu Kurubas of Dasanapura do most of their buying and selling on every Wednesday which is the *shandy* day at Hanugod village. Husband and wife go to the *shandy* together.

There is not a single literate person among the adult Kurubas. In the last eight years children have been going to school. There are eleven children studying in the primary school at Dasanapura village situated at a distance of one kilometre. Eleven children study in the high school at Doddahajjur (which is about 25 kms away) by availing of residential facilities at the hostel. As a part of the tribal education programme undertaken by the government department, all school-going children receive school uniform, school bag, rain-coat, blanket and reading material. A special incentive scholarship of hundred rupees and hundred and fifty rupees to the primary and secondary school children respectively is awarded by the government. The DEED

agency conducts remedial classes to help the tribal children cope with their studies. The agency has also undertaken adult education and awareness-raising programmes for the tribals. The tribals now regard school education as a means to improve their social status, mainly through employment.

Changes of a permanent nature can be seen in the *haadi*. Children and adults are slowly giving up the practice of sleeping in the open around the communal fire because school-going children get every year bed sheets and clothes from the government which give them sufficient warmth inside the newly-acquired permanent houses.

More material possessions are seen in their dwellings, such as steel plates and glasses, aluminium vessels and brass water-containers. One also notices a pair of spare clothes hung in the houses. Some houses also have stored *ragi* in gunny bags for the rainy day. With the increased material possessions these tribals have felt the need to use lock and key. In their earlier huts none used to lock the door but now they do so because of the fear of theft.

Pictures of Hindu Gods are now seen in several homes. More gold ornaments are in evidence on their persons. The sense of proprietorship has become more real. The process of acculturation, which began from the time the *haadi* assumed the characteristics of a permanent settlement, is going ahead at a fast pace.

Jenu Kuruba Woman: Life Experiences

Dasanapura Haadi is one of the Jenu Kuruba settlements which is going through a transitional process. The marks of this transition are reflected in the life style and value systems of the women also.

The Jenu Kuruba woman is of medium height and build ranging from dark to wheatish complexion with curly unkempt hair. Marks of interbreeding with the neighbouring village communities are noticed among them as the tribal women often work in the fields and houses of the landholders and are exposed to sexual exploitation by them. The present generation has taken to the dressing mode of other Hindu women of neighbouring villages who are of similar economic status. The five-and-half yard saree is draped about the body over a long petticoat and then pulled across the bosom over the left shoulder. Along with this they wear a blouse. Some of the older women still dress in the traditional manner where the cloth is wound round their bodies without pleats and tied into a knot in the front. As an embellishment, Jenu Kuruba women wear glass bangles and a *bottu* on the forehead. On festive occasions they oil and comb their hair decorating it with jasmine flowers.

Childhood

Jenu Kurubas show great affection towards children, irrespective of whether they are male or female. Though generally there is a preference for male children, parents who do not have girls pine for one. Men and women often say that they need sons to bring in the food, but to look after them especially in old age they need the daughters. The

Jenu Kuruba women often proudly proclaim, "I was the one who poured the last drops of water into the mouth of my dying parents."

Though the Jenu Kuruba man is quick in finding fault with his wife and in raising his hand to beat her during a quarrel, he dotes over his little daughter. Most women state that their fathers were always kind to them even when their own mothers were often beaten and ill-treated by the father.

Till the girls are about eight or nine they are treated on a par with the boys. They join boys in games like *Ifti-Ifti*, or *Kho-kho*, and go to the forest to collect wild berries. During meal time little girls and boys alike eat with the men while grown-up women are the last to have their turn.

Children grow attached more to the mother than to the father, which could be because they are more exposed to her than to him. The Jenu Kuruba man has to be out in the forest, sometimes for days together, when he goes for honey collection, small-game hunting or tree-felling. Disciplining the children is left to the mother who in extreme cases of disobedience strikes her children or gives other corporal punishment. It is interesting to note that the man almost never raises his hand on a child.

Childhood in general can be said to be a happy period in the Jenu Kuruba's life, and girl children are no exception to this. It goes without saying the children too have to go through all the hardships entailed by poverty and the hand-to-mouth existence of the Jenu Kurubas.

Apart from these inevitable travails, as in other societies, the Jenu Kuruba children also suffer a lot when parents separate due to conflicts. Desertion of the wife and children by the man is very prevalent. Till the mother succeeds in finding another man to provide for her and the children, they all have to survive on the meagre earnings of the mother. Often the grandparents, moved by the suffering of the children, undertake to look after them.

The period of equal treatment of the children ends very soon. When the girl is about eight or nine years old and is barely capable of the household chores, she is assigned some of the work. The siblings have to be taken care of. Water is to be brought for cooking. The grain

is to be cleaned. Gradually, as she grows into adolescence she assumes all the tasks and duties of a woman in the household. By puberty she is ready to play the role of a grown-up woman.

Puberty

When a young Jenu Kuruba girl menstruates for the first time, not only the immediate family members, but also the entire neighbourhood comes to know of it. The stained clothes are tied to a tree nearby to be collected by the dhobi and washed. The concepts of purity and pollution are very much present among the Jenu Kurubas. When a girl menstruates she is considered to be polluted and is kept apart. In the past the girl had to stay apart in a temporary extension of the family dwelling for three to six months at the first instance. But now with the Janata houses, the girl stay in the same house in a secluded corner. She is not expected to do any of the household chores like collecting water or cooking. She is nursed by the family to the best of its ability. The expectation is that the girl has to be allowed enough rest and should get sufficient nourishment so that she grows up in time into a healthy young woman when she is ready to be given in marriage. Her reentry into the normal routine of living is marked by a ceremony called *ganga pooja*.

The *pooja* is performed after the period of seclusion. The girl is dressed up in new clothes and decorated with flowers and other trinkets. The *bottu* is applied to her forehead. She is then escorted by a few women to the nearest pond or river. She stands with her back to the water. Three balls of cow-dung, two balls of mud and a banana leaf with fruits and coconuts are placed in a row on the bank. The girl is then turned to face the water and she throws betel leaves into it. Then she carries a small pot of water on her head back home with two other girls in trail carrying similar pots. At the entrance to her hut a stone with *vibhuthi* (holy ash) on it is kept ready. She stands on the stone, washes her feet and applies the *vibhuthi* on her forehead; she then enters the hut. This ceremony is observed even today. Through this ceremony the *haadi* comes to know that the girl has come of age.

Courtship and Marriage

Till recent times there were distinct tribal modes of courtship among the Jenu Kurubas. Every Jenu Kuruba settlement till recently

had a boys' dormitory called *pundal mane* and a girl's dormitory called *pundatir mane*. Boys and girls over seven or eight years of age used to spend the night in their respective dormitories. There was no strict restriction on the boys entering the girls' dormitory and were allowed even to spend the night there. Similarly, girls too were allowed into the boy's dormitory. Boys and girls dance and play together from an early age. On reaching maturity it was taken for granted that flirtations would lead to sexual relationships. There was no interference by the elders in these premarital sexual relationships. In case of premarital pregnancy the girl named the man, and supported by the dormitories and the elders, the boy was prevailed upon to marry the girl. There were rare incidents of boys disowning responsibility, but this did not constitute a major problem because no illegitimacy was ever attached to the children. This form of courtship does not exist at present in the Dasanapura Haadi. However, a few tribal women of the *haadi* do recollect the existence of these dormitories. Often marriage takes place after a girl attains puberty. In rare cases when a girl is married before puberty *Karkombarudu marriage*, she is sent to her husband's house only after she matures. We found only one *Karkombarudu* marriage in this hamlet. The general practice is *Kudikolludu*.

There are a variety of forms of marriage acceptable to the Jenu Kuruba community. Four distinct forms of marriage that can be readily identified are:

1. *Karkombarudu* or the Arranged Marriage
2. *Kudikolludu* or Alliance by Co-habitation/Elopement
3. Marriage by testing the suitor and
4. *Kudavalli* or Remarriage.

***Karkombarudu* or the Arranged Marriage**

This is the idealised form of marriage among the Jenu Kurubas. *Karkombarudu* literally means to invite and take along. The first step is the proposal. The boy's family visits the girl's house on a mutually arranged date. The boy may not accompany the party. At the girl's house, after the exchange of pleasantries, betel leaves, betelnuts and tobacco are presented by the boy's family to the girl's family. If they are accepted, it is considered that the girl's family has accepted the proposal. The boy's party then returns home. Soon afterwards, on another prearranged date, that is, the wedding day, the groom's

family once again goes to the bride's house, this time along with the boy. They carry presents such as betel leaves, betelnuts, tobacco, rice, coconuts and bananas to be presented to the bride's family. They also bring the *thali* (marriage pendent) to be tied round the bride's neck. The simple ceremony over, the bride and the bridegroom return with his family. The Jenu Kuruba wedding is marked by the lack of any elaborate ceremonies and they usually do not have a feast. The newly married couple generally start living in a separate hut soon after the wedding.

***Kudikolludu* or Marriage by Co-habitation/Elopement**

This form of marriage is widely practised by the Jenu Kurubas, but they themselves see it in a rather bad light. As interaction between unmarried boys and girls is not frowned upon by elders, romantic relationships occur quite frequently. If the couple suspects that there will be some opposition to their marriage, they elope to the jungle and stay away till they feel that the opposition would have subsided. In some cases the couple do not return at all, and instead they settle down in some other *haadi*. If they return, they are accepted by the community without much ado and allowed to build their hut within the settlement. No penal steps are taken against them by the families or the community as such.

In another form of *Kudikolludu* marriage the man takes a second wife while the first wife is still living with him. This alliance, though prevalent, does not enjoy much respectability. What is required is only that the bridegroom ties a *thali* round the bride's neck in her home and presents her with new clothes and ornaments. Usually a few members of the groom's family or friends are present at the ceremony. She then accompanies him to his house. The community does not take too kindly to the second wife, but nothing is done overtly to express its disapproval. It is left for the wives either to live in harmony or fight it out for the man's affections and the provisions he brings home. Usually, the wives continue to live rather cordially in the same hut but in two portions with separate entrances.

Marriage by Testing the Suitor

In this form of marriage, when a young man expresses his wish to marry a girl, he is asked to live with the girl's family for a certain

period of time, usually for about six months. During this period he is expected to show his capacity for work and prove that he is capable of providing for a family. If the girl's parents approve of the boy, the marriage takes place. Otherwise, the boy is sent away.

Kudavalli or Remarriage

Alliance of widowed and separated persons are quite common among the Jenu Kurubas. Normally, young widows and separated young women get remarried. If the woman has grown-up children who will provide for her, she does not generally go in for another alliance, but a young widow with small children feels compelled by circumstances to accept the protection of another man. Remarriage of this type is not looked down upon by the community. The woman continues to wear the *thali* from her first marriage.

Certain observations regarding the symbol of marital status requires mention here. The *thali* which indicates the marital status among caste Hindus does not have the same significance for the Jenu Kurubas as the women continue to wear the *thali* even after the husband's death. There are also instances where women live with their husbands but do not wear the *thali*. Wearing of the *bottu* as a sign of marital status is a recent practice.

Family Life

Monogamy is the ideal form of marriage for the Jenu Kurubas though it is not uncommon for men to practice polygyny. Couples who live harmoniously together without any history of desertion or remarriage are held in considerable respect.

The Jenu Kuruba woman is at her best when the man is hard working and brings in the provisions regularly and she is allowed to look after the children and manage the household. She takes pride in keeping the dwelling and its surroundings clean and cooking and serving the food in time to her husband and children. Considering the meagre resources of the Jenu Kuruba family she maintains her hut and surroundings clean and tidy. She smears cow-dung on the floor of her house at least twice a week. Generally, she does not face any management of her household because the tendency to live in a nuclear family. Conflicts due to Kurubas.

In the ideal Jenu Kuruba household the man is looked upon as the *of hittu batte*. *Hittu batte* literally means food and clothing which are the basic necessities of tribal life. Throughout the interviews the Jenu Kuruba women gave a lot of emphasis to this aspect of family life. As soon as a husband ceases to provide this, a woman looks for another man who will provide *hittu batte* for herself and her children. Carrying water, cooking and other household chores are done by women. However, it is common for the men to undertake all these chores during the pregnancy, confinement, monthly periods and sickness of the wife. Sometimes the confinement period may be observed even up to a year when the husband is especially affectionate and concerned about the wife's well-being. This arrangement ensures that the children become sturdy before the mother leaves for work outside the dwelling or into the forest. Till recently it was also necessary for mothers to remain with the baby because the threat from wild animals snatching babies who stray into the forest was very much present.

The Jenu Kuruba women have always played an important role in augmenting the family economy. Traditionally, the collection of roots, tubers, fruits and edible leafy vegetables has been the task of women. Today though the tribals have moved from hunting-gathering and shifting cultivation to settled agriculture and agricultural labour. Production from cultivable land and wages earned are generally inadequate to sustain a household at subsistence level. Thus, gathering of forest produce still constitutes an important source of family livelihood particularly during the lean season. In the agricultural season weeding, harvesting, thrashing, winnowing and dehusking become the lot of the women. During the off-season women work as casual labourers. Some women supplement their family income by making brooms and selling them to the village folk. On the whole, women's contribution to the family economy assumes considerable importance. Marketing of goods and buying articles of daily necessities are done by both men and women.

In the precarious economy of the Jenu Kuruba, men and women have to snatch whatever employment is available at the moment. This necessitates an irregular pattern of life with frequent absences of the man from the household. Now that the Jenu Kurubas are not allowed a free hand to collect forest produce due to the recent regulations, even women have to look for employment in neighbouring villages. Jenu

Kuruba men and women are employed in the plantations also. It is only natural that extra-marital relationships develop when men and women are exposed to each other constantly at the place of work. Such relationships are one of the major causes for the frequent quarrels in the Jenu Kuruba household at present, and they are left to be solved at the individual level. The man or woman who suspects infidelity in his or her spouse cannot take the grievance to anybody. All they can do is to fight it out. The man does not hesitate to beat his wife for the slightest provocation in this regard. Jealousy is so strong in the Jenu Kuruba men that most women complain that their husbands dislike to see them dressed neatly. Often when a married woman gives herself an extra touch of style in her appearance, the suspicion of her husband is aroused leading to quarrels. In this respect the women too do not appear to be far behind. A casual conversation of the husband with another woman is sufficient for a wife to start nagging and to provoke a quarrel with him.

Desertion by the husband is a heavy blow to the Jenu Kuruba woman as she is so much dependent upon him for *hittu-batte*. In this tribe both husband and wife enjoy the freedom of taking a new partner. This could be either because they are not satisfied with each other or because one or both of them has developed a new relationship. The children usually stay with the mother, and when she makes a new alliance the stepfather generally does not discriminate against the children.

Effects of Transition on the Jenu Kuruba Woman

We acknowledge with due respect the policies and programmes undertaken by the government departments and volags for the split of the tribal communities in their efforts to bring them into the mainstream of national life. However, the negative effects of these well-meant measures on tribal women have often been overlooked. Hence, a critical analysis of the effects of transition on the Jenu Kuruba woman is relevant here.

The contact of the Jenu Kuruba tribe with their Hindu neighbours has resulted in the rapid disintegration of the tribal life and values. As a result, the tribal women are exposed to increased economic and social oppression within their own communities. Customs, practices and values like remarriage of deserted women and



widows, the absence of dowry, the independence of the nuclear family, the equality of the sexes, the absence of stereotype role models of men and women were some of the good features of their life. However, with their exposure to Hindu caste society, child-marriage, dowry and restrictions on the freedom of women, decline in their social status have come about.

There were no child-marriage, as they marry only after adolescence. The age at marriage of men and women thus was relatively higher than that of the caste Hindus of the neighbouring villages. Women were married when they were around seventeen and the men around twenty. It was also an economic necessity because soon after marriage the married children stayed separately from their parents. Gradually, the age at marriage is showing a declining trend. This is because of the new value of chastity creeping into the tribal life.

In matters of marriage and sexuality no controls were placed on women's sexuality. Women were free to select their own partners and no illegitimacy was attached to the children born out of marriage. There was no disgrace attached to rape. It was customary that a tribal often owned up his sexual relations with a tribal girl and accepted to marry her. Thus a premarital sex-relation between a boy and a girl ultimately resulted in marriage. Premarital chastity is now becoming a cherished value for the tribal men and instances of tribal boys disowning the sexual relations with a particular tribal girl and marrying another are noticed. Earlier, women who were exposed to the sexual exploitation of the landlords were accepted as victims and were not held responsible for it. Widow remarriage as well as marriage of a deserted woman is now discouraged. Thus, the powerlessness of woman is now on the increase.

The tribals practice bride-price and a customary payment of twelve rupees is required to be made by the bridegroom to the bride's father in an arranged marriage. Sometimes, to bear the expenses of the marriage the prospective groom had to work for years. The bride-price was considered a legitimate payment to be made to the family of orientation of the girl for loss of her labour power. Though dowry is not practised, it is not uncommon now for the groom's family to demand gifts in the form of clothing. The differential wage paid to men and women in the labour market has diminished the status of these women as contributors to the family economy.

Non-participation in the economic activity outside the house by women is considered an indicator of the social status among the well-to-do land-holding families of the neighbouring villages. Imitating their example, some of the tribal families who have improved their economic conditions have now withdrawn their women from outdoor agricultural work to in-door work.

Till recently there was a total absence of extended families. Every married couple made its own arrangements for living with regard to shelter and food. Now with the permanent brick and tile construction for their dwelling and as a result of losing the freedom to settle on the forest land, married sons are constrained to live in the house of the parents. One way of separation practised now is, a married son building a thatched hut adjacent to the parents' house on the plot of land the father owns. He cultivates the land together with the father and shares the produce. The limited resources in terms of the cultivable land and dwelling place have caused harm to the interest of the women.

The permanent houses and cultivation rights of the land granted to the tribals by the government have introduced a new concept of personal property unknown to the tribals earlier.

A house had no monetary value for the tribals. It was merely a dwelling which either a man or a woman could set up in the *haadi* with the consent of the Dodda Yajamana. Further, the thatched huts were built of materials available in the forest—the walls made—of bamboo with a thatched roof. Thus, a woman who was deserted by her husband and did not remarry could often stay in her parental or husband's *haadi* by building her own hut. Now there is no open land. The plot of land and the house granted by the government too are registered in the name of the husband. Thus, a woman deserted by her husband has no place of her own to live. Moreover, earlier a deserted woman often found a partner, but now in the *haadi* there are two deserted women who have returned to their parental home.

Though descent was traced through the male line, inheritance rights were not defined, and the position of tribal men and women with regard to inheritance right did not indicate their status. With the concept of private property newly introduced and the increased material possessions, the tribal women's rights have been eroded.

The government policy on liquor has brought much abuse to women. The tribals who occasionally drank toddy are now becoming liquor addicts. And this has resulted in increased family indebtedness and physical abuse of women.

There is a compelling need for the restricting of policies and programmes of the government and volags in order to ensure that the interests of the tribal women are safeguarded in the context of integrating them into the larger society.

Jenu Kuruba Woman: Profiles

Rangamma
Radhamma
Ratnamma
Devamma
Neelamma
Chauramma
Bolamma
Sangamma

These are not the names by which the women profiled in the following pages call themselves. To maintain confidentiality, their names have been changed. In this chapter we introduce to the reader one by one the women we have interviewed through excerpts taken directly from the interviews.

RANGAMMA is around 35 years of age. She is dark-complexioned, shy and looks timid. She smiles a lot but does not talk much. She used to look uncomfortable when interviewed even though she came readily. She used to attend the group meetings regularly and spoke only when addressed specifically. She worked hard around the home. The field investigator never saw her idle. She had a welcoming smile and a warm greeting for the investigator whenever they met.

Rangamma was the eldest child of her parents and had the responsibility of the younger siblings thrown on her especially when the mother was confined after childbirth. She married Beerayya and had three children; two girls and a boy. Beerayya used to beat her daily. Unable to bear it any longer she left him and went back to her parents. The husband promptly found another girl, and Rangamma continued to live in her parent's home with her children. Her mother

died about eight years ago. Her father is still alive. Her brother is married and lives in the same house with his wife and two children.

Rangamma's children go to school and get scholarship money and clothes from the government which is a great support to her. Asked what she felt about being born a woman she said; "Women should not be born or else they should die soon. When you are worn out working, it is better to die than to live. If we have the courage and confidence that as long as we are alive we can work and feed ourselves, it is alright."

The Jenu Kuruba characteristic of answering a question with another question is well illustrated throughout the interview with Rangamma. A few excerpts are presented here that will give the reader direct glimpses of this woman.

Rangamma : You have come walking in this hot sun?

Field Investigator: Yes, I heard that you had gone out to work today and came thinking I would have a chat with you if you have the time.

- : What do I know to talk about? Had I known how to talk, do you think that I would have had to live like this, deserted by my husband?
- : If you can spare the time, please come for fifteen minutes to the school shed.
- : You go ahead. I shall follow right now.
- : Rangamma, did you live peacefully together with your husband any time after marriage?
- : No, there used to be fights. He listened to the tales others told him and deserted me.
- : Who told the tales?
- : People of this *haadi*.
- : I find that for a while after marriage a couple lives together nicely, loving each other. But this situation changes quickly, why?
- : I'm unable to answer that. It is just our luck, our destiny.
- : So, you feel it is your luck and your destiny?
- : What else can I say?
- : Was he beating you?
- : Yes, he was beating me.
- : What did you do then?

- : What could I do? Take the beating and be quiet.
- : Did he regret later that he had beaten you?
- : No. If he felt like it, he would beat me again. My body has borne such a lot of pain from the beating. Together with it, I had to do the house work.
- : Your parents live in this very *haadi*. When he beat you, did you go to the house of your parents?
- : No. I would get beaten, cry and remain where I was.
- : So, you cried and stayed?
- : Yes. What else could I do?
- : What happened when you left your husband? Was it you who went back to your parents or was it your parents who brought you back to their house?
- : Parents did not bring me back. It was I who went to them.
- : When you went back to your parents what did they say to you?
- : What could they say? They advised me to return to my husband, and I replied, "What is the use of going back now? I will work and earn my living."
- : When my husband was advised by my parents saying, "Where do married people not fight? Come on, take her back," he said, "I am not taking her back. I have found another girl." I knew that, if I returned, I would get beaten again.
- : Your husband left you, what was your state of mind then? Were you sad?
- : Where was the question of being sad? He will not provide for me. It is up to me to earn. This is our fate.
- : Did you weep when he said that he was bringing another girl?
- : No, why should I weep?
- : You are now in your parent's home. How do they look after you?
- : Why will they not look after me? Will they push me out?
- : I ask this because it is you who went back to them. Sometimes, when a married girl returns to the house, parents do not look on her kindly. Did this happen to you?
- : Yes.
- : What did you feel then?
- : As long as my mother was alive, she looked after me well.
- : Now at your father's place do all of you cook together?
- : Yes, all of us live together.
- : After you left your husband and returned to your parent's home, did your parents speak to you in a way that hurt you?
- : Can you expect them not to speak?

- : No, but what did they say?
- : Whenever we quarreled, they would ask me to earn and feed myself.
- : Did quarrels arise?
- : Can you expect quarrels not to arise?
- : If you do not do the work one day, what happens?
- : Don't you think that I will be scolded?
- : Who will scold you?
- : My brother and my sister-in-law will say "the work is not finished. Is it right to stand and be idle? Is it right to sit and be idle? There is nothing for food and clothes." Such occasions arise.
- : Why do you continue staying at your father's house? Don't you get the thought that it would have been better if you had a house of your own?
- : Yes.
- : What do you feel when I ask you all this?
- : I feel very unhappy. What can I do? I think that this is just my luck and continue to live there.
- : Don't you retaliate any time?
- : What can I say even if I want to retaliate? So, I don't talk.
- : You have three children. Which of them have you in mind to educate most?
- : The eldest.
- : What about your son?
- : Let any of them that wants to study carry on studying. If they don't want to study, let them discontinue.
- : You have had to put up with so much. What comes to your mind when you look at your daughter? You have three children, two girls and one boy. For whom have you the most affection. The girls or the boy.
- : I have no preference for any one. How can I show distinction between one and the other? All must be looked after well.
- : You see, often mothers are most fond of boys.
- : But we love girls because parents are looked after by girls in the end.
- : When I come over here, do you find it a problem to speak to me?
- : It is a pleasure. Why should I be unhappy to speak to you?
- : I wondered whether it made you anxious because you seemed to be busy all the time.
- : I have a lot of work. Now that I am sitting here, can you imagine

how much work will get piled up there? This was the only reason. The question was not, what shall I speak about nor that I am unable to say anything. After all, we speak of our own joys and sorrows.

*** *** ***

RADHAMMA is an attractive looking woman. Her hair is always neatly combed and she is well dressed. She is slim, soft spoken and very friendly. She is around 27 years of age and keeps her house, child and the surroundings clean. She did not miss a single group session. Her child looks smart and cheerful all the time. Her husband too is a friendly person.

I am from a *haadi* about fifteen kms away. I was brought here after marriage nearly eleven to twelve years ago but I cannot tell you exactly. Our parents had four children. Two had died and one brother and I are now alive. My parents are dead. My father died about twelve years ago, before I was married. Mother died about five years ago. It is my mother who got me married. My husband's father came over to our *haadi* looking for a girl. He saw me and then the marriage was fixed.

- : Were you the eldest daughter-in-law of the house?
- : Yes
- : For how long did you live with your in-laws?
- : I am not able to say. We were together for quite a while. Quarrels came up because of some reasons. Don't you know how we women go on? The men were alright. Difficulties arose. There were fights and then the parents-in-law said, "You live separately and we will live separately." So we separated from them.
- : Does it mean that differences arose between your mother-in-law and you?
- : Yes.
- : Among you isn't it rare for married sons to live with their parents?
- : Yes, mostly they stay out unless the mother-in-law is a good woman.
- : Why did you fight?
- : When I cooked, she would find fault. Whatever I did was wrong. She would say "I was not well. You did not look after me. I will do this and I will do that." To which my husband said, "there is

no need for her to do this or to do that. We will manage on our own. If we have, we will eat. If not, we won't." Now all come. My husband too goes and eats with them and they too eat with us. Now, I too go there.

: I have a son studying in the fourth standard. The boy before him died. After the second son my husband got himself operated.

: Did he tell you about his operation?

: Neither his parents nor anyone of us knew about it. Someone took him and when they questioned how many children he had, he said two. So they told him, "two children are sufficient" and got him operated.

: Did he not make proper enquiries?

: We do not know. He didn't tell any of us anything. The first child died. So he said, "I didn't want more children to be born only to die." He feels quite comfortable about having got sterilised. Even today he keeps saying, "We don't want more. Let God give long life to the one we have, and he will look after us in our old age."

I reacted very badly saying, "how nice it would have been to have a girl." For a fortnight I did not wash his clothes, did not heat water for his bath, did not speak to him."

: What happened to your first child that died?

: He had fever and we did not go to the doctor. We don't see a doctor when the fever is not very high. So some local remedies were given but the child died. God gave and God has taken away. It is God's will. I still feel very sad that I do not have a girl. My son will grow up, find a girl, and go to the forest, and I will be left to myself.

: Do you speak of it to your husband?

: No, what is the use now? I keep these things to myself.

: When you were married? What did you know about married life?

: Did your mother tell you anything regarding marriage?

: What can she say? She told me, "Your marriage is arranged." That is all. Then she advised me, look after your parents-in-law well. Deal nicely with your other in-laws. Don't show anger or annoyance. Behave well. If you don't behave well, you will not be wanted neither by us nor by them. It is we who have to understand and carry on well."

RATNAMMA is around forty years of age. She has dark curly hair. She is lively, intelligent and warm-hearted. She is welcoming and cooperative and knows the background of the Kurubas well.

Ratnamma is a widow with four daughters and a son. Her children go to school. She gets a scholarship for each child from the government. She also tills the fields to make ends meet. When the fields have to be ploughed and later when the yield has to be gathered, she misses her husband a great deal, because she has to ask her neighbours to help her. Ratnamma reminisces:

In the early days of my marriage, I never went to the village for work. I stayed at home and looked after the house and the cooking. I had no trouble of any kind those days. I had the clothes I wanted, the ornaments I wanted. Even though I had no parents-in-laws, my husband looked after me very well. He loved me a lot. If he did not see me for a while, he would ask the children "where has your mother gone". In case I had gone to the village on coolie work, he would come there to talk to me for a while and return. We lived in great love of each other. He was ready to do anything for me those days.

My father had two wives. One married according to regulations and other just by common consent. Our older mother (step-mother) had no children. Every child she bore died. Fearing that the husband might find another woman, my stepmother arranged for her own younger sister who was my mother to be married to her husband as the second wife.

My father never raised a finger on his children. He looked after all of us in the same way in the matter of clothing or feeding. But after we were married he is more fond of my brothers. My brothers live close to him. We girls are far away.

If we go to visit him he entertains us well for a week and feeds us well. He tells us that we can stay on. However, I never stay beyond three days. I tell him that I have to be back with my husband and children.

All of us seven children might have had petty differences but never had fights. We have never hurt each other with our words

and this continues to be the same today. We were all looked after like children of one mother and we looked on each other in the same way. That we had two mothers never came in the way of our family life.

My father used to scold and beat my mother from time to time in anger. My mother was a very beautiful woman. So, my father used to be angry whenever she spoke to other men in the *haadi* and beat her. My stepmother is like me—darker and not very attractive to look at. My stepmother did not let my father get by with it easily. She would question him.

My mother could not bear the beating any longer and went away with some other man to the nearest city. My younger sister and brother were very small at the time. I was about eight to ten years of age. I was such a small child when I had to bear all this trouble. My stepmother was confined. I had to look after her needs—carry water for the house, tend the animals, cook and also keep provisions ready for the house since I was the eldest girl.

When the responsibility fell on me, I used to say to myself - "What am I going to do with these children? Dear God, give me death soon. Take me away soon. I am unable to look after these children." I used to feel very miserable those days.

My older brother did not understand the situation at all. He put everything on the head of the girl—myself. When my stepmother began to get back to work after her confinement, I began to get some relief. It was only then I was able to eat my meal in peace.

Some time later I got my first period. It was arranged that Lingayya was to be my husband, so, he was brought into the household to remain there and work for a while. He used to put his hand to all the work and help in the house. He was there for a few months. After which we were married by tying the *thali* (marriage by tying the *thali* is explained elsewhere). My stepmother was mainly responsible for getting me married to Lingayya. They made a number of ornaments for me of silver anklets, a waist chain, ear rings, ear hangings, neck chain and rings were all given to me. They had great love for me. They used to say that the house got lighted up because of me.

For some years before she died, my mother returned to the *haadi*, but her hut was built outside the *haadi* fence. She used to cook and eat all by herself. We never accepted anything from her like food and other things. The men never visited her there. When she died, no one from the *haadi* touched her. The people of the *haadi* got other people to see to her last rites. Since she married outside the community, she was not accepted back into the *haadi*. The saddest part of this for us was that even in death we could not acknowledge our mother by touching her. Doesn't this hurt? Can you realise how it hurt me? We provided everything that was needed for the last rites, but others had to bury her. We could do nothing.

Without being able to touch or render any other service to my mother (*muttu-thattu*) we had to let her body be disposed off by others and this hurt has been with me always. A woman should not be brought to birth on this soil.

- : Do you say this because of this one experience or is there any other reason?
- : If we exist, we should be able to live peacefully. If not, we should not exist. See, my husband Lingayya has just died. While he lived I did not have much trouble. I have four daughters and the youngest is a son. Can I take a spade and dig the soil? Can I take the bullocks and plough the fields? Can I clear the land of creepers and shrubs?

I have just received the scholarship money of two children. I brought clothes for all of my children with it. I have to pay back the loan on the bullocks. I have to see to the notice served on me for, the fields. Have I looked at a court or *cacheri* so far? I have to attend to all these things now. If I had died and my husband had lived, he would have shouldered all these responsibilities. Now everything has come on my head. What use am I whether alive or dead? My son is too small still for any responsibility. Who can give me relief in hearing this burden? If men were there to help me, would I have had to face all this distress? If I keep talking, tears come to my eyes.

DEVAMMA is about twenty-seven years of age. She looks constantly preoccupied, sad and lifeless. She is hardly seen outside her hut. The Field Investigator had to make a special effort to meet her each time because her hut is situated in a far corner of the *haadi*. She did not attend any of the group sessions. When Devamma spoke, her voice did not carry and the investigator felt that she was trying to swallow down her sorrows because of which she was feeling choked. Each time she spoke out, it was observed that she felt more relieved. She was the only woman who after the first interview had said, "Please don't disclose anything to my husband." She is a deserted wife with two daughters. Her husband cohabits with Devamma's own younger sister. They live in the same *haadi*.

Devamma's parents and brothers live in a different *haadi* a few kilometres away. They did not approve of the younger girl living together with Devamma's husband but were unable to do anything about it because he provides her with *hittu-batte*. The husband comes occasionally near Devamma's hut to talk to the children.

Devamma has no concept of time and age. She calls both her daughters by her own name because it is God's name.

Our parents had eight children. Five boys and three girls. Three brothers were elder to me. Two were younger. One elder sister and one younger sister. My three older brothers are married and one older sister too is married. My younger sister now cohabits with my husband. One younger brother goes to school. Our parents are alive.

- : When your husband began to cohabit with your sister, did you agree to that?
- : I did not agree. I knew nothing about this affair.
- : When you got to know of it, what were your feelings?
- : I felt very sad. I had gone for my second confinement at the time. Isn't this a matter to feel sad about?
- : Your parents and older brothers did not say anything?
- : As soon as my brothers came to know of it, they told my husband "Take your wife and children and return to your house." He then brought me to this hut but he stays there most of the time. I don't talk to my sister.
- : What was his reason for marrying your sister?
- : He got influenced by what was being said in the *haadi*.

- : What were they saying?
- : All of them said, "In the end you will cohabit with her also." He found a good excuse and lived with her.
- : When you came to hear of it, what did you do?
- : I asked him and he quarreled with me saying that he would give *hittu-batte* to my sister also.
- : Are you reconciled with your husband?
- : I don't speak to him freely. Hasn't he been unjust towards me? I get angry with him because of that. Therefore, I avoid speaking to him.
- : How does he take it? Does he quarrel?
- : No, but I quarrel with him sometimes.
- : Does he beat you?
- : At times he beats me.
- : What feelings have you regarding men?
- : What am I to say? Even now I shed tears. What can I do with the sufferings that are lodged in my guts? I suffer when I think of how he has treated me.
- : What do you feel when your husband tells you to go and find someone else to provide for you?
- : There is nothing to feel. Do you know what people will say if I try to find another man? "She has given up one man and is playing about with another."
- : So, you are afraid that people will talk ill of you?
- : No, it is not like that. Why should I give people a chance to say anything and why should my children be dependent on another man? Instead, I will work and provide for ourselves. Once I have lived with one man, why should I live with another? I will earn and feed myself—that is it.
- : Have you the courage to say that if your husband does not provide you with anything, you will be able to manage on your own to bring up the children?
- : I can surely feed and clothe them even if he does not give me anything. That courage I have. I can earn doing housework. So many women whose husbands have deserted them have looked after themselves and their children. I am witness to that. My courage comes from that.
- : One day he may say "I have given you up completely and will not give you anything." Can you starve your children and leave them without clothes? Have you at anytime talked to your husband about this?

: I haven't said anything. I have only kept everything in my mind and heart.

NEELAMMA looks to be about fifty years of age. She is still beautiful. She looks shrewd and acts shrewd, is intelligent and hard-working. During the farming season she is to be found in the fields all the time. She does all the work in her home herself. Her husband used to be an asthma patient and fell ill from time to time. She is a woman who speaks out what is in her mind and has no fear of anyone. She has a lot of humour in her and the field investigator used to look forward to interviewing her. They would sit side by side and talk. Sometimes she would seek out the field investigator and tease, "Madam, now I have come searching for you to talk to you. Once the rains arrive, you will have to come searching for me and speak to me. Do you know why I will be very busy working." She has the persistence to earn and save for the future and be able to stand on her own feet. She keeps her house and the surroundings always very clean.

- : Until we were about eight years old, we played games and also a lot of mischief. After that, since there were many cows in my father's house, as soon as each of the children became around nine years old, we were given the responsibility of grazing the cows. After that the older sister would be kept home and she got ready for marriage and the one younger to her would take her place. This happened to all of us in turn. We only knew how to graze animals. We did not know any other type of work.
- : Though your mother used to beat you so much, why is it that you have so much love for her?
- : I too have children. Whenever I go to work if anyone gives me food, do you think my feelings allow me to eat it? I think of my children and bring it home. My mother looked after us in the same way, and I remember it always. She might have hit us but I keep in mind that she has brought us up with all this struggle. So, though she has beaten us, I have no resentment against her. Many times when mother wanted to beat me, she couldn't get at me. I used to escape. I wouldn't show anger but I wouldn't be around also as long as she was angry.
- : Did your mother sit with all of you around and chat with you?
- : No, but she used to tell us that such and such a task must be done

- by so and so. "You fill the water, you grind the ragi, you tie up the cows and water them," and so on. She would go out to do coolie work after that, adding: "If you do not finish the work by the time I return, I will chop you up like a slaughtered lamb."
- : Did all of you finish the work?
 - : Yes.
 - : Didn't your father have any say?
 - : Occasionally, when he got angry. Normally he would go to work in the morning and return late in the evening.
 - : When you had meals, did all of you sit down together?
 - : Occasionally. Usually my elder sister and I would serve every one and after all had been served, we would eat on our own. Then, spreading the mats for everyone to sleep my older sister and I used to grind ragi.
 - : When did you become aware that you are a woman? Is it after your marriage?
 - : I was not aware of it even after marriage. You may not believe me when I say this but the thought that I am a woman, I have to bring up a child I have to play with the child--none of it had entered my head. When I had my own child I said, "What kind of a creature is this," and never suckled it. I was terrified that the child would bite me. I had never seen newly-born babies up to then. My sisters used to come to our parents house for their confinement but my mother did all the work. We had been given the tasks of filling water and washing clothes. If mother served food in a plate for my confined sister, I had only to take it and leave it near her. I never looked at the child. In case we stayed near the room where the sister was lying, my mother raised her voice asking, "What work have you over there?" She was very strict about it. So I knew nothing about what would happen to me after marriage. If anyone came to see the child, I would tell them, "Don't look at the child." I wouldn't show it to anyone. When my sister arrived, she said, "this girl will kill the child," and she suckled my baby at her breast since she was still in milk. Later after one month, my sister made her child suckle my breasts and my child suckle her's.
 - : When women get involved with men, who is blamed for it?
 - : The women.
 - : What is said?
 - : If you were alright, nothing would have happened. No one says anything to the men.

Take for instance myself. If anything goes wrong with me, because of some man they will say "Did she not have a head on her shoulders? He is a man. He will walk across a mire and wash his feet when he finds water. Who faces the trouble now—it is she."

: Does that mean that everyone blames only the woman?

: Yes, they say, "Because she has given him liberty, this is the result."

I grew up in a village of Coorg, near the border of Hunsur Taluk. My husband is from this very *haadi*. His first wife used to say to him, "I am unable to work, you bring a younger woman to live with you."

When he had gone to the Coorg village for work, he told his companions at work that he would like to take back with him a woman from that place. His companions said to him, "If you like, there is a woman here whose husband has left her." I used to look very nice. I was tall and well-built. The reaping time was on. I too had gone out to reap and they pointed me out to him. He was working in the neighbouring field. He approached my parents. I got to know of this and resented it. The following day when I was attending to the work in my hut, my mother called out to me and my father said, "Today, I am an old man, your mother is old too. Your sisters and brothers too are there. But of what comfort is all that to you? As long as we are alive, we will care for you. Who will do it when we are gone? If you fall ill, your mother will make at least some *conji* and heat some water for you while we are there. You must give value to our words. Don't dishonor us." I then agreed.

: You were two wives with one husband and you were together for some years.

: Not just some years but ten years. Soon after he brought me here, the first wife told me about everything, and I said to her, "People will speak. But he had brought you and he has also brought me. He is my husband as well as your husband. Since this is the position it is not right for us to tear at each other's hair. It will tell on our self-respect. The place we are staying in is quite a big village. We are Kurubas. Even if we fight we may make up, but the village people around us will comment. You don't speak ill of me and I will not speak ill of you. Let us learn to accommodate each other. Between the two of us let us keep our husband in the right path." So, until her death we never abused each other or

had serious disagreements. We used to go together to fetch water, to fetch firewood and to collect greens for cooking. But we used to cook food separately. Sometimes we used to sit out in the moonlight and eat betel leaves together. Then we would hear someone from the village commenting—Who is this? Oh! Here are this Kuruba's co-wives sharing their betel leaves. This will never happen in our community.

CHAURAMMA is an elderly woman around sixty years of age. She is slim, tall and fair of skin. She talks well and freely. She was not a member of the discussion group conducted by the field Investigator. It was she who went on her own to the investigator. Chauramma has been in the *haadi* since childhood. She is the second child of a family of five children—three girls and two boys.

- : What were your feelings when you had to go to the house of the neighbouring Gowdas for work? How did they treat you?
- : How do you think they would treat us?
My sister and I both used to do house work in the village. When we worked they gave us *ragi mudde*. If there was no work, they would say to us "why are you sitting here? Go away."
- : Did they let you enter their residence or did you have to keep standing outside?
- : Why should they let us enter? They did not do it. If we could have lived like them, why would we have come to work for them? If they gave, we had. If they did not give, we did not have. That is why we used to cry within ourselves. "Lord Shiva, why have you given us such troubles to bear?"
- : Did the Gowdas let you play with their children?
- : No, their children used to be inside. We were told: "bring firewood, drive away the cows, sweep the floor, throw out the waste, clear the cowdung from the shed and put it into the field. I'll give you food to eat, money to spend, 'roti' to much." If we did not follow instructions immediately, we would be asked, "why are you still standing there? Sweep up the floors, clean up the vessels, go to the fields and we will feed you after that." Our stomachs used to cry out in hunger. So, we used to try doing whatever they asked. After returning from the fields if we called out asking, "Amma, I am thirsty, please give me some water to

drink, they would say "So you are back already?" They would give us just a little water. We would drink that and we would be told—"Go now and finish off all the work and come back. Food will be served to you then."

We used to be very hungry and there was no hope of getting food immediately. So, we would go away to finish the work feeling depressed. When we completed the work and returned, we would say again, "Amma, we are hungry." She would say, "Alright, bring the leaf." We would bring the leaves. "Sit in the stable" and we would be given food in the stable. If the leaf had a leak, the curry would ooze out. If we asked again for *saaru* she would give just a little more. Water used to be poured into our vessels for us to drink. We used to drink up the water. And we would be asked, "Have you finished eating" and we would reply, "Yes, we have finished" and she would comment "what a lot you eat. Our children will not eat like that. How much these Kuruba children eat!" We had hardly anything to eat. If we had one meal, we had to go hungry the rest of the day. Whatever they served we did not feel satisfaction. As for their children, they had food from time to time. Whereas we had to leave home at seven in the morning and would get a meal at mid-day. How could we contain our hunger?

All the four of us, excepting the baby brother, used to go to the forest. We would get the tubers, boil them, feed ourselves and go to sleep. Sometimes collect greens from the fields and cook it to eat with boiled tubers. We would drink water with it and go to sleep. If we were called for coolie work, we would go. Otherwise, go into the forest looking for tubers and roots once again.

My husband had no parents. So he joined our household. Later we were married and continued living here. After some years he just walked out.

- : Who walked out?
- : The one who married me. Why should I hide anything? The man I live with now is my second husband. The other was the first. The second man is from here itself. By the first husband I had three boys and by the second six children of whom three are boys

- and three girls.
- : You have seen me coming here. Other women from the Agency also come here. What do you think about us.
- : Now I am used to you. Now we are not afraid and do not hesitate to appear before people and talk to them. But in the earlier days if people came we used to feel—oh, we don't know how to talk.
- : Now I am used to you. Now we are not afraid and do not hesitate to appear before people and talk to them. But in earlier days if people came we used to feel—Oh, we don't know how to talk. If these people ask us questions what can we reply? What can we say? Therefore, as soon as anyone entered the *haadi* we used to go out of the huts. Now everything is changed. We attend the *haadi* meetings, Mahila Mandal meetings and anywhere else when we are called. We have courage now. We have the confidence that we are able to speak.

BOLAMMA is about 23 years old. She is nice looking, has a light complexion, looks shy, timid and helpless. She has a very gentle nature. She smiles all the time but there is a sadness in her smile. She used to speak very little in the beginning but she dropped her reserve and spoke freely later. She gives the impression of having lost all interest in life. She was hardly ever seen with her hair well-combed or her saree well-arranged and she seemed subdued all the time. She at times used to just sit by the field investigator without saying anything much. She seemed affectionate and appeared rather vulnerable.

Bolamma's father had two wives. Her mother was the younger of the two. She died when Bolamma was very small. Bolamma is the fourth wife of Beerayya, who's first wife is Rangamma whose profile is also found in this chapter. Beerayya married Bolamma's stepsister after deserting Rangamma. Another younger stepsister had been sent to help out during the older sister's confinement. When the sister died in childbirth, Beerayya co-habited with the younger stepsister. At the time of the younger stepsister's confinement Bolamma had been sent to help her and Beerayya got her pregnant. When her parents and the elders of the *haadi* questioned, he admitted that he was responsible and that he would provide for her also. She lives with her stepsister in the same hut which has a separate entrance. Bolamma's father and her stepmother have supported Bolamma all the time. Even after

her father's death her stepmother has been very kind to her children. Bolamma relates:

I had come to help my stepsister for her first confinement. There he made me pregnant. My people questioned, "How did this happen? Who is responsible?" My husband told them that he was responsible. They called a meeting of the elders and they told him, "You have spoilt the future of that child." They had not asked me to attend the meeting. To this my husband told them that he was responsible and that he would look after me and that he really wanted me.

- : How does he look after you now?
- : He doesn't give me any trouble, brings me clothes and food. But trouble comes from my stepsister. We two sisters don't agree. Towards the end the first pregnancy I lived with my father because he had taken me away with him. My two confinements took place in my father's house and my stepmother looked after me both the times.
- : Was your stepmother kind to you?
- : My father was alive and she used to look after me well. I had nothing to worry about. Even when my child was a year old, I did not go out to work. My father used to go out to work and bring in the provisions. My father had a position in the *haadi* as he used to get possessed by the deity and he earned sufficiently. My husband too used to visit me there with provisions.
- : You must have been quite young when your husband got you pregnant. What do you feel about it now?
- : I feel, "I came here and got caught. If a man has only one wife, then we and our children can live in peace." This is what I think and feel.
- : When your husband began to cohabit with you, what did your sister say then?
- : She didn't say anything. She did not quarrel. "It is his wish. You carry on," she said. She gave no trouble. My father was alive. He said to my husband, "What has happened cannot be changed. You and your wife stay here. I will take this daughter of mine with me." So saying, he took me back with him. Now I have no father. So, who will take me and keep me? My father was very fond of his grandchildren. He was ready to do anything for them.
- : For some time when you lived in the same house as your sister,

how did you manage the work?

: She was confined at the time. So, I did all the work. Quarrel arose when I began to go out to work. One day I teased my husband saying, "you spend all the money I earn. Give me all the money I earn and do what you want with your money. I will buy *ragi* with my money." My husband started beating me then and there and having dragged me up to the house he just pushed me aside. I took my children with me and went over to my stepmother's place. But he did not call me back. Both of them, husband and wife cooked and ate. It was Gowri Habba day. My brother asked me, "why did you go to quarrel? He too kicked me. I was swollen all over with the beating given by my husband and my brother.

: Did you not say anything to your husband when he beat you?

: I did not speak. I did not return to my husband's house.

I cooked but before I could eat, my husband came there pulled me by my hair, hit me and dragged me back to his house saying, "You should not remain here." There my sister had said, "If she returns I will hit her with the broom. I do not want her to step into this house." What could I do? So, I told him to build another hut and keep me there since my sister had said that she would not let me step in. "Let her stay on her own and I will stay on my own. You provide for her and also provide for me," I said. Therefore, he partitioned the same house. She stayed on one side and I stayed on the other.

: How long ago was this?

: It was during this year's Gowri Habba. For the last Gowri Habba I was still in my father's place. It is just about a year since I have come here since my father is dead. I do not have any courage now, I do not find it in my own husband. Even if my father had been sitting in a corner, I would have got courage from him.

: My children are still with my stepmother. My father had told my mother before dying. "Don't leave these two children in her hands. She cannot look after them. As long as I am alive I will look after them. As long as you are alive, you look after them. Later, let her take charge of her children as they are hers." My children have their food with me, but the night meal they have with my stepmother and sleep there itself. My husband eats with my sister and also with me.

: When you go out to work, do you hand over your earnings to him?

: No, I keep it and he too will not ask for it.

- : If he does not go to work and remains by the hut, where does he spend more time?
- : He is in both places.
- : Do quarrels arise on account of this?
- : Of course. My sister keeps telling him, "Don't keep her here. To which my husband replied, "She is an orphan. Where will she go? I may leave you, but I will not leave her. Who will earn for her? We ourselves will have to do it."
- : Do you speak to your husband's first wife?
- : Of course I do. Since she is in this *haadi*, I run into her often. Did we ask him to give her up" She is really better off now. She does not get beaten by any man. Her children get about a thousand rupees a year in scholarship. He cannot question her now.
- : Did you at any time live with your parents-in-law?
- : Yes. I spent a short time with them.
- : How do mothers-in-law look after their daughters-in-law?
- : My parents-in-law are good people. My father-in-law was a godlike person. If my husband ill-treated me, he would tell him, "We should not hurt the children of others." Our troubles started after my father-in-law's death.
- : Do men scold the women for talking to other men? Does your husband do it?
- : Yes, they scold and at times also beat. I used to be harassed like this many times out of mere suspicion.
- : Why don't most women comb their hair neatly.
- : If my husband sees me with well-combed hair, he abuses me. This is done also by many other men.
- : What do they say when they scold?
- : "Do you want to attract this one or that one? So, we don't comb the hair. Since he started hammering me, I have given up combing my hair entirely. When I was in my father's house, I used to dress neatly, comb my hair and put a *bottu*. Here I can't do anything, no combing, no *bottu*. I have given up everything. Only on the days I bathe, I comb my hair and put a *bottu*."
- : You have two male children. Do you want the one you are expecting now to be a girl?
- : What do you think? Who else will there be to share my joys and sorrows and at the time of death, pour the last drops of water in my mouth as I did to my father? Don't I need one at least to help me wash the clothes?
- : Do you think it is good to be born as a girl?

- : I feel that instead of being born a woman it would be better not to be born at all.
- : Why do you say this?
- : What else do you expect? There should be some blessings that come down from the parents or else there should be the blessing of having joined with a man in marriage. If everything is well, it is good. Otherwise, it is the greatest wrong to be born a woman. Girls have absolute need of a mother. A mother has always feelings for the daughters. Others don't feel for them like that. For instance my stepmother looked after me well when I was small since I had lost my own mother before I was six months old. However, today she doesn't have the same feelings for me. After all she has her own daughters.
- : This morning you were complaining that you are not feeling well. You did not mention this to your husband, I suppose?
- : I never say. What is the use of saying? Will he do anything? He will only say to me, "You will feel better, just be quiet. If anyone has to die, can we keep that person back?"
- : You are now about five months pregnant. In another two months you will not be able to do work. Will he provide you with food at that time?
- : He will provide me with what I need but will never ask me "What is happening? How are you today? Nothing.
- : It is your stepmother who will have to help with your confinement, I suppose.
- : How can I say that now? But who else have I got? My stepmother will have to help me. My sister will not do it. I am not in the habit of speaking much. I do not chat for long with other women of the *haadi*. It is only with you that I have spoken so much and so openly.

SANGAMMA must be about 25 years old. She is good looking and always lively. She is smart and intelligent. Her hair is always combed and she is always clean. Her house too is always clean and neat. She has a lot of courage and her self esteem is high. She aspires to live well. Never gives up going to work a single day and is very hard working. She has a smiling face and is active. Whether she had employment or not, whether she has sufficient to eat or not, she has a welcoming smile for the investigator.

- : My parents had five children. Three children were girls and two boys. My father died when I was very young. I might have been about eight years of age. My younger brother was still suckling. My mother looked after us since then. She did not marry again. We owned many sheep. Mother did coolie work in the villages and fed us. Then one day all of a sudden mother died. Only my eldest sister was married at that time. When mother died, my eldest sister and her husband came here and stayed with us for three years. They then went back to their place. They asked me and my younger brother to accompany them. But I did not go.
- : For a while I sent my youngest brother as a bonded labourer and I went to the village as a domestic where I used to get two meals and one seer of *ragi* daily. Later I began to take on coolie work. I got my brother released from bonded labour and put him to coolie work. Both of us worked and lived together.
- : Around this time, I received two or three proposals through my mother's brother (uncle) who is in the same *haadi*. He sent back these people saying that he was going to make me his daughter-in-law. I did not know about this at that time. My uncle asked me to come and live in his house. So, I was there for two years. One of my uncle's sons then began to cohabit with me. He treated me quite well for a while but later began to harass me.
- : I was not permitted to speak to his elder and younger brothers. I was not allowed to serve them food. I could not give them water. I was not permitted to do these services even for my father-in-law. If I gave anything, my husband would abuse me and beat me. He would beat me with a big staff until there were thick welts and bruises on my body. When he beat me, normally he used to close the door.
- : What did you do then?
- : What could I do? I bore the beating. Some people scream and howl but I never did that.
- : Not being able to tolerate the trouble he was creating, my parents-in-law asked us to live separately—but the beating and harassment did not stop. It is only now I have some relief since he has left me. It would have been better if he had left me earlier. Once because of the blow he had given me blood poured out of my nose and mouth. My face was swollen and it was a whole month before I felt well again.

One day he said to me:

"I did not ask my parents when I started living with you—If I leave you, who can question me?"

- : What were your feelings at this time?
- : I felt very bad. I have no peace and comfort in spite of slogging so hard. No peace in his parent's house and no peace even here. It is better for us to live apart. We went to the *haadi* where the other girl was and lived there for three months. I said, "I too will take on another man. Am I an old woman?"
- : Both of you live in this very *haadi*, when you happen to run into each other, what do you do?
- : I do not look at him. I feel miserable. I feel that I should not look at his face. After having given me all the confidence, hasn't he trodden on me? He says that my children are that of my sister's husband's younger brother. He says, "he is your husband not I." My brother-in-law's younger brother came back recently wearing the *mala* (a bead chain which is a mark of Shabari Mala Aiyappa devotee). After his arrival fights have decreased. If I talk well to the women, they say that I have my eyes on their boys or on their husbands and that is why I am being good to them. When people say all this I get affected. If our men had a little self-discipline and were at home regularly, how nice it would have been! Would people have spoken like this? After having to hear all this, when he keeps away and provides for another woman, don't you think we also feel that we should get someone else to provide for us? When we go out to earn for ourselves, they say all kinds of things. Why should we listen to it quietly?
- : I have now decided that I will go to the person whom my husband accused as being the father of my children and ask him to provide for me. Why not? Everything is commented upon now. I cannot speak to my sisters. I cannot speak to my brothers-in-law, I cannot speak to any other people. When I go to work, I cannot speak anything to anyone about myself. I cannot wear new clothes, I cannot put on a new sari and they say that someone had given it to me.
- : Who says this?
- : The people of this *haadi*. I bought a sari and they have not stopped talking about it. I wonder whether a woman can be good. However good she may want to be, she is unable to live a good life. Only bad things are spoken about her, however much she tries to live a good life. It is mainly the women who will speak ill of other women.

: Sangamma, you have been saying many things to me—what are your feelings while you speak like this? Are you bringing out your worry or are you expressing your anger?

: It is worry, don't you understand? I am not speaking for the sake of speaking. Up to now, we have been struggling without parents to look after us, we have risen early in the morning and worked up to late evening in order to earn and survive. After that I had to bear the ill-treatment of my husband. From those days till now how much suffering have I borne! It is not right for me to continue suffering like this. It is better that I get someone to provide for me. In the same way as he is moving around with another wife, I too must move around with another husband. Why should I die with everyone blaming me?

You remember that I had told you of the fight my first husband had with me demanding that I should give up this house since it is in his name. He abused me badly. As a woman, what could I do? My brother too was away. No one came to help me. I was so hurt I decided to take poison and die. I remembered my parents very much thinking that I would not have had these sufferings if they had been alive. How I have slogged to build this Janata house. How can I be asked to go away? All this suffering comes from the house. So it is best for me to die and leave everything. Anyone will look after my two children. I was in great distress. Many times I have had quarrels but that particular day I was affected greatly by the demands and quarrel of my husband.

Now they call me a bad woman because my husband has left me. I have told you earlier that my brother-in-law's younger brother was spoken of as having relations with me. So I will now get the same man to give me *hittu-batte*. I had not heard anything said against me from the time I was small. Why should they now accuse me of things because my husband left me? Why should I continue to go about with my head bent?

From the day I was deserted by my husband my brother-in-law's brother has been saying that they have blamed me unjustly.

I have said to him, "If you want, you provide for me. If you are going to treat me like the other man, then don't do it." He said, "I will not do like the other man. I will provide for you."

Jenu Kuruba Woman: Perception of Realities

We have noted in the chapter on self-image, that a person's self-image is influenced by several factors. When people are born, they are not born with a poor self-image. Today if some of them have a poor self-image, it is an acquired rather than inherited quality. Some of the factors which influence a person's self-image are: how a person is perceived by others and how one perceives others; how a person perceives oneself and how a person perceives nature and the supernatural. The way one perceives the realities of self, others, world and God tells us what sort of self-image one has. A positive perception of these realities is the outcome of a positive self-image and a negative perception of these realities is the result of a poor self-image. In this chapter from the oral stories of the Jenu Kuruba women, we try to bring out the self-image of the women of this tribe.

Self-Perception

Self-perception constitutes a pivotal factor in the making of the self-image. However, it has to be kept in mind that self-perception assumes fuller meaning in relation to other contributing factors to the self-image, namely, the perception of other people and the perception of nature and the supernatural. As already stated in the section on self-image, all these factors dynamically interact with each other. It is only for the convenience of understanding and presentation that self-perception is treated separately here.

The self, as already mentioned, is considered to be the core of one's being. It can be understood in terms of various subjective

attributes recognised as one's nature, capacities, talents, values, aspirations, attitudes, qualities and also weaknesses and limitations. These attributes are culturally and historically grounded. That is to say, a particular capacity or value is neither universally approved nor condemned and their significance varies from culture to culture. Acceptance or rejection, approval or disapproval of any particular attribute will depend upon the particular culture and the historical context. The very concept of self-hood and personality bear varying connotations and social significance in different cultures. This view has been established by anthropologists by means of cross-cultural studies.

In determining the nature of the self-perception of the Jenu Kuruba woman, the points of reference are her own perceptions of values, capacities, limitations, etc. and not that of the rest of society. For us the understanding of the self-perception of the Jenu Kuruba woman was a process of discovery and not one of evaluation or judgement. In practical terms this was made possible by avoiding judgemental, value-loaded and leading questions in the course of recording the oral stories.

The narratives of the Jenu Kuruba women bring to light how she perceives herself as really being; how she views herself as ideally wanting to be; her perception of the expectations others have of her.

The Physical Self

The physical self or body-image has a deep influence on an individual's self-image. Persons who have negative feelings about their body and physical appearance are most likely to have negative feelings about their own self, and vice versa. This in turn has its effect, positive or negative as the case may be, upon the entire range of their relationships.

The Jenu Kuruba women in general have a well-developed awareness of their physical self. From childhood they imbibe messages of appreciation, rejection or mere indifference from parents and persons around depending on their relative good looks or lack of it. Through these messages they come to regard their physical selves as appreciated or rejected. The appreciation or rejection may be of any shade or degree between the two extremes. It is learnt early in life that

attractive physical appearance is a desirable attribute, and the lack of it is a social handicap.

Ratnamma is about forty years of age. She must have been quite attractive in her youth. She appears confident and talks a great deal. In course of the conversation with the field Investigator she stated that she was married earlier than her sister who was about five years older to her. When asked for the reason she replied: "I was the better-looking of the two of us. I had grown into a beautiful woman quite early. My sister was a little stunted in growth."

The awareness of the value of a pleasing physical appearance is obvious from remarks made by other Jenu Kuruba women as well. Another woman of the *haddi*, Neelamma says: "After I came of age I always took care to appear nice. I used to comb my hair neatly every day. I pestered my parents to get new clothes every now and then. I managed to keep up my beauty even after having three children".

A positive acceptance of one's physical self, contributes to a healthy self-image. Neelamma, who is well over forty-five years but still looks attractive, is a good case in point. She is by far the best-looking woman of her age in the *haddi*. The neighbourhood women were jealous of her, and at the same time were overawed by her assertive personality. Her self-esteem is very high and during casual conversations she often refers to her own good-looks. She is also hard-working and very articulate. She had no hesitation to enter into conversation with the field Investigator unlike other women of the *haadi*. What is significant here is that her positive self-image due to her natural good looks helps her to move with confidence with others and to articulate herself in a better way. This is despite the fact that Neelamma has gone through desertion and other vicissitudes of the Jenu Kuruba woman's existence and lives in equally poor circumstances.

In the Jenu Kuruba's tribal existence, physical appearance stands out as an important criterion of a woman's worth. Other qualifications like better education, high economic status etc. are less significant in their impoverished society. Men are very much concerned about the physical attractiveness of a woman and this explains the frequent desertion of an aging wife to take in a younger woman. This preference of men for younger and prettier women only confirms the Jenu Kuruba

woman's awareness that a good physical appearance is an important attribute of one's self.

The attitude of the Jenu Kuruba woman towards her physical self undergoes a critical phase after marriage. There is an element of possessiveness in the Jenu Kuruba husband's feelings towards his wife. The man who was attracted to her by her pleasing appearance, now dislikes to see her neatly turned out. He gets suspicious whenever she takes some extra care to make herself look presentable. Often the husband makes the charge that she dresses up nicely only to attract other men in the neighbourhood. They also usually allege infidelity and do not hesitate to beat their wives on this suspicion.

Gangamma, aged about forty years and mother of three children, complains of all-treatment by her husband whenever she does anything to look tidy: "My husband picks a quarrel with me whenever I dress up neatly or put some oil in my hair and comb it. He suspects that I am doing all this to attract other men in the *haadi*. Most of the time the quarrel ends with his beating me up".

The self-image of the Jenu Kuruba woman is deeply affected by the suspicious and disapproving attitude of her husband. In some cases, after two or three childbirths the Jenu Kuruba woman finds that she is not wanted by her husband any more because she is not as attractive as before. Hard physical labour, lack of sufficient nutrition and childbirths in rapid succession makes the average Jenu Kuruba woman look weather-worn at any early age. The husband then looks for another woman for his sexual satisfaction. The men are generally successful in finding a younger woman for a second or third marriage. However, the deserted woman also does not find it difficult to find a new partner or provide for herself and her children.

Neelamma, when questioned about the frequent desertions of women by men, said:

Do you know why? Once there are two or three children the woman cannot work as much as she used to as she does not have sufficient food. She gets only what is left after the husband and children eat. What will she look like after having suffered all this? Will she look beautiful? Won't she look worn out? When the stomach is groaning from hunger, the face too gets shrivelled

up. She loses her man's love and he is drawn towards more attractive ones. He leaves the wrinkled old woman and goes for a younger and prettier one.

From the foregoing it appears that though the Jenu Kuruba woman learns to value her physical attributes early in life, she tends to develop conflicting feelings with regard to her physical self due to her husband's attitude towards her body-image. This leads to the development of a negative self-image in the Jenu Kuruba woman as she matures in life. She begins to consider it a misfortune to be born a woman. Many women expressed their wish to be born as a man or an animal or a tree.

Approval for Doing Rather Than Being

The self-image of a person is also influenced by whether she is merely appreciated and accepted for her doings or for being, i.e., whether an individual is appreciated for her work or whether she is accepted as a person. People who are appreciated and accepted for their inner worth as persons develop a positive self-image. What they do or achieve in material terms becomes secondary. When people are appreciated and loved for what they do, they try to work hard throughout their lives to receive love and appreciation from others. Individuals may strive to succeed and thereby to get appreciated even at the cost of their personal well-being and harmonious relationship with others. In general, families, communities and societies do give greater importance for doing rather than being. The doers enjoy a superior status in society. Accomplishments are held in high esteem and individuals are anxious to perform and excel and thereby to win approval. Individuals who cannot work, earn or otherwise be economically useful are openly or subtly made to feel rejected.

There are also individuals and societies which are non-judgemental and unconditional in the acceptance and approval of individuals. People are valued for what they are and for the simple fact of being. People are joyfully appreciated for their very being and they tend to be less anxious to be outstanding. All have their familiar and community roles, and economic competence is not of excessive significance. It has been observed by psychologists, anthropologists and social workers that when people are appreciated and loved for what they are rather than what they do they develop a healthier personality.

PERCEPTION OF REALITIES

The self-perception of the Jenu Kuruba woman shows her as living in a society that is fairly individualistic. She is considered worthwhile or not depending upon her usefulness to others. Her capacity for hard labour within the household and in employment is of great importance. Even as children, parents show a marked preference for those capable of doing some substantial work in the household. Chauramma reminisces: "Between my sister and myself my mother liked me more. She could not work much. I used to work a lot. My mother would say, 'though she is young, she works hard'. Mother was happy when I was around." Comparison of siblings on the basis of ability and willingness to work (to do) and thereby withholding or granting approval has long-lasting effects on the self-image of individuals.

In the abject poverty of the Jenu Kuruba's tribal existence, men also do not live in any better material circumstances than the women; but the lot of women is harder. She perceives herself as being born to take on all the work that is to be done and feels responsible for the maintenance of the household. Though in principle the man is the breadwinner, most women go out to work in the plantations or the farms. By the time they are in their early forties most women look emaciated due to the hard physical labour and lack of proper nutrition. The weariness and desperation of the Jenu Kuruba women is sometimes expressed in angry words. Rangamma, about thirty-five years of age, deserted by her husband and living with her married brother says: "My sister-in-law is with child again. So I have to do all the work in the house. I cannot rest even for a while. I do not get proper clothes and other things I need. What I get is abuses in return for all the work I do. Once a woman is worn out working it is better to die than live."

As the women get older, less attractive and physically weak, they come to look upon their own body in an alienating light. When her husband leaves her for another woman and her strength is running out, she feels as if her body is merely a material object to be used by men. Most women who are in their late thirties and early forties who have already been deserted once or twice and have depleted most of their energy working hard to provide for their children, feel condemned to a wearisome and joyless existence. And they come to the inevitable and agonising conclusion, "It's better to die. . . ."

Perception of Self in Comparison to Man

Perceiving oneself in comparison to other persons in terms of positive or negative attributes, achievements and failures, wealth and poverty, power and powerlessness may lead to feelings of inadequacy resulting in a poor self-image. The basis on which the Jenu Kuruba woman compares herself to men is founded on concrete situations wherein she suffers from social disabilities or disadvantages. This has come out clearly in the oral stories of the Jenu Kuruba women.

The Jenu Kuruba woman perceives herself as destined to be eternally dependent on man. How far is the dependence based on material circumstances? Or is the pervasive feeling merely psychological? Or is it a product of myths created by man in his pursuit of dominance? Looking for one single factor that leads to dependency may not be useful in understanding the situation. The source of the dependency is more in the nature of a complex set of interacting factors.

One of the factors that makes a woman feel inferior to man is the differences in wages paid to men and women when they take up wage labour. Another factor which tilts the balance unfavourably for the woman is the presence of children. When the man deserts his wife, he goes alone leaving the children behind with the mother. In their hand-to-mouth existence the Jenu Kuruba women find that without the earnings and support of a man the burden of maintaining the children and herself is difficult to bear. The realisation of the practical difficulties of life without a man and the superior status traditionally ascribed to man in his role as provider of *hittu-batte*, bears down upon her, and she comes to regard herself as helpless without a man.

At present, dependency is not restricted to the husband alone but extends to the father and brothers also. Rangamma, thirty-five years old, and deserted by her husband, expresses her anxieties:

While my father is alive, my children and myself can somehow survive. He tries to provide us with food and clothing. When he is out of work, he sees to it that my brother give us the daily necessities. After the father's death, will any brother and sister-in-law bother to take care of a woman and her children? This is our fate. What can we do about it?

The natural corollary to dependency is the acceptance of a subordinate role and the submissive tolerance of inequalities and injustices. The Jenu Kuruba woman's perception of herself in comparison with her husband is that of an inferior person. Physical abuse by the husband is tolerated as part of life. Radhamma, when asked about the beatings she gets at the hand of her husband, says:

Yes, he beats me occasionally. But I don't think I will leave him for that reason and stay at my mother's house. Whether one lives or dies it should be at the hands of one's husband. Let him do whatever he wants, beat me or kill me. After all he is my husband.

Bolamma expresses similar sentiments:

Whenever he wants to beat me, he does so. What can I do? Getting beaten and suffering it in silence has become a habit for me. He has married me and he is my husband. Whatever he does is right. If my life goes, let it be given up at his hands.

But even such an abject submission did not save Bolamma from eventually being thrown out of her husband's house. She had to take refuge in her father's hut.

The over-submissive acceptance of oppression, however, does not mean that the Jenu Kuruba women are totally unaware of the exploitative relationship. Beneath the perception of her troubles as part of a woman's existence, there is a constant underlying stream of thought that compares her lot with that of the man. The conclusion she comes to is that men are by nature of a superior category and to be born as a woman is a misfortune.

Sangamma compares her own fate with that of her brother:

I feel that all my troubles have come upon me because I was born a woman. If I had been a man I could have gone anywhere for work and made a living for myself. As a man I could have gone anywhere I please and work with anyone I choose. No one would have dared to beat me or abuse me. Look at my younger brother. Though he stays far away from this *haadi*, he is happy. He can find work in whichever place he wishes to go. He earns his own living and eats his food in peace. If I had been a man like him, I too could have lived the same way.

Whenever a Jenu Kuruba woman feels that the particular difficulty she is facing at the moment is due to her status as a woman and that a man would have been spared such troubles, she wishes that she were born a man. Sangamma relates how her former husband and his family harassed her even after the separation:

That day my husband, his parents and his sister all joined together and started abusing me, calling me names and accusing me of immorality. The people of the *haadi*, only supported them and said that I deserved the abuses and that I ought to be beaten up. I decided to end my life. I did not cook anything that day. I did not sleep the whole night and kept on thinking of some way to end my life. But when I watched the faces of my sleeping children, I felt discouraged. I was feeling defeated. I have faced difficulties but I am unable to tolerate abuses and false accusations. If I were born a man, none of these things would have happened. I could have lived my life the way I wished.

As the Jenu Kuruba woman progresses in age, she tends to lose the healthy self-image she possessed as a young woman. Most of the women have undergone desertions, in some cases more than once. Lack of sufficient nutrition and hard physical labour drains her strength and beauty by the time she is around thirty-five years. Being rejected by the man, she comes to look upon her own self negatively. Parallel to the rejection of herself grows the belief that men are endowed with superior virtues. She is aware that compared to herself the man has a more tolerable existence and that all the troubles she had to undergo are simply because she was born a woman. She explains to herself the good fortune of men through the myth that men are blessed with *punya*. In the Hindu tradition good deeds in the present life result in rebirth in a higher form in the next birth. The woman expresses her perception of her own self as an inferior person in comparison to man attributing mythical virtues to men, or blaming one's own fate for having been born as a woman.

B. Perception by Others and of Others

How Children Perceive the Mother

The Jenu Kuruba children look upon their mother with great fondness. Desertion by the men being so frequent, the children are left

with their mother and it is her responsibility to provide for them. Little boys and girls are supportive of their mother and try to help her manage the household. The boys, if they are old enough, go out to work and girls help in household chores like fetching water, cleaning the grain and also looking after the younger children. The children are appreciative of the fact that their mother struggles hard to keep them from being hungry and to clothe them. They remember the sacrifices of their mother and are grateful for the concern she has for them.

Chauramma speaks about how her mother struggled to provide for the children and how she (Chauramma) and her sister tried to help their mother:

After our father left us, mother had to look after all of us. We had our grandmother also living with us in the house. Those were miserable days indeed. Only God could see our suffering. Whenever mother brought something from her day's toil, we would cook at least a meal in the evening. When I got to be a little older, my sister and I also would go for work. We would carry our younger brother to the Gowda's house where we used to work. He was made to sit in the stable. In between carrying loads of cowdung to the field, I would stop now and then to console my weeping baby brother.

I would plead with the Gowda's wife for a little food for the baby. Sometimes my mother would sit weeping thinking of all the suffering we had to go through. God knows how hard she struggled to give us enough to eat.

The Jenu Kuruba woman's perception of her mother as a caring person is reinforced in the course of her adult life when she goes through various crises. The daughter looks up to her mother more for emotional support than for material help. Unlike most tribes whose social life is essentially communal, The Jenu Kurubas are very individualistic, and the nuclear family is the basic unit of social organisation. Once married, the daughter considers it to be below her dignity to depend upon her parents.

Devamma relates how her mother had been a source of comfort to her when her husband cohabited with her own younger sister even while she (Devamma) was living with him.

My mother tried to console me. She told me: 'You look after your children and yourself. I can't do anything more than advise you. Don't quarrel with your husband. Don't even think of taking your own life. You will only leave your children orphaned'. My mother's concern gave me the courage to continue to live.

To be by the death-bed of one's parents and to have attended to their last wishes and poured the last drops of water into the dying parent's mouth is a matter of pride for the Jenu Kuruba woman. Bolamma says with pride in her voice: "While my parents were dying I was the one who poured the last drop of water into their mouth. One has to be fortunate to get the opportunity, to offer this last service to one's parents." Thus, the way a Jenu Kuruba woman is perceived by her own children is very positive. The Jenu Kuruba woman recalls her childhood and her loving relationship with her mother. Indeed, every Jenu Kuruba woman was perceived by her children as a loving mother who tries her best to make the children and the husband happy even during times of hardship and suffering.

How Other Women in the *Haadi* Perceive Her

It was obvious from the group sessions and the interviews with individual woman that there was very little fellow feeling among the women of the neighbourhood and the community. When a particular woman is faced with difficulties, she is told that she herself is responsible for bringing about all the troubles upon herself. Helpful suggestions are not appreciated. Thus, during a group session with the women the topic for discussion was the need to send children to school. One woman commented: "There is no use suggesting anything good to our women. If somebody expresses her opinion, others would say that she is merely showing off and acting smart.

The ease with which men leave one wife and take another creates jealousy and suspicion among the women also. They see each other as contenders for the affections of their man.

Devamma's is a case where her own sister was taken as the second wife of her husband. Devamma says in bitterness: "My brothers tried to advise my husband not to marry my sister also. But my sister too was adamant. She refused to let him go. I did not speak to her. It would have been better if she was not born at all. Why should one have a sister who is a betrayer?" Devamma's husband and her sister live together in

a different hut and he pays a visit to Devamma's hut only occasionally. Whenever he feels like it, he brings in some provisions to her. "I live only for the sake of my two children. I look at their faces and pray to Shiva", she says.

How the Jenu Kuruba Woman Perceives Her Father

Though Jenu Kuruba men are generally harsh to their wives, they show a lot of affection towards their children. Most women interviewed, while recalling their childhood, remembered their fathers fondly. Even stepfathers are no exception to this. With so much of desertion going on, a great number of children get to know their stepfathers closely. There are many instances where the men, even after leaving their wives for good, come occasionally to visit the children, to which the mother also does not object.

Even after being married and having set up their own families, the father's house serve as a final refuge in times of difficulty for the Jenu Kuruba woman. But it is only with some reservations that they resort to this means. They feel that it is below one's dignity to live with one's parents even after marriage. When asked about what she thought of marriage and leaving one's parents' house, Radhamma said: "Can we stay in our father's house for ever? When we were children, our father took proper care of us. We didn't have to worry about anything. Once we are married, we have to go away and mind our own business.

Bolamma recounts how her father came to her rescue when she was made pregnant by her brother-in-law when she had gone to help her sister during her confinement after delivery. "My father came to my sister's house where I was staying. He said, 'What has happened has happened. Now it cannot be changed. I will take this daughter of mine with me'. My father looked after me and my children to the best of his ability. He was very fond of his grandchildren and would go out of his way to please them."

Rathamma's mother had left her husband and children to go with another man. She, when still a little girl, had been burdened with all the responsibilities of the household. But her father would often come to help her. "I used to cry so often, with all the work which I could not handle alone. Sometimes my father, feeling sorry for me when I

was weeping sitting in a corner, would grind the *ragi*, light the fire and help me in some such work until my stepmother's period of confinement was over."

How the Jenu Kuruba Woman Perceives her Children?

We have already seen how the children perceive the Jenu Kuruba woman. Here we deal with her in a reversed role and see how a woman perceives her children.

Children are both a source of joy and of despair to the Jenu Kuruba woman. Joy, because of the pride of motherhood and the instinctive pleasure of bringing forth a new being into this world and nurturing it into fullness. Despair, because of the burden of responsibilities that befalls her, especially when the husband chooses to desert her and the children. Most women whom we spoke to had their first desertion when they were still in their youth with two or three children. Because of their highly individualistic way of life, the nuclear structure of the families and the subsistence economy, the woman finds hardly any support from the extended family or the community as such in her struggle to provide for her children and herself.

Given the chance, the Jenu Kuruba woman will rather be earning independently for the upkeep of herself and the children than go in for a second marriage. However, the marginal economy of the Jenu Kurubas makes this difficult. She is compelled to look for another man to provide the *hittu-batte* if her first husband deserts her. Under these circumstances children suffer the most. The Jenu Kurubas do not beg. At the most they will go to the Gowda and ask for a loan of some provisions or something to eat in return for a promise to work on the following days.

However, none of these considerations prevent the Jenu Kuruba woman in accepting the new-born child as a gift of God. She is also aware of the brighter side of the matter. She is conscious that if the children survive and grow into healthy adults, they too can earn and bring in some extra income to the family. In the case of boys support will be available to the parents only until he takes a girl in marriage and settles on his own. In the case of girls also it can last only till she is married. Though boys are considered a better economic proposition by the Jenu Kuruba parents, they also set store by the girls because they

are the ones who care for the parents in their old age. Often it is the daughters who are of help to the aged parents when they cannot work any more.

It should be noted here that there is a pronounced preference for the earlier children to be boys. However, mother and father alike wish to have one or two female children also.

Devamma's husband, who had taken her own sister as his second wife, began to neglect Devamma and ill-treat her, asking her to find another man. She used to live in the small hut with her children in a separate part. When matters had reached this point, the field Investigator had the following conversation with her:

- : Has your husband any love for the children?
- : He likes them.
- : Your children are girls. Which of the children does your husband like more?
- : He is very fond of my younger girl. He keeps saying: "Instead of being born a girl this child should have been a boy."
- : You have two girls and what's your feeling about them.
- : God has given me two girls and no boys at all. But can I break my head over the fact or show any anger at my daughters for something they could not help?

Radhamma whose husband got himself sterilised after she had two boys says:

He didn't tell us anything. The first boy died. So he said, 'I don't want any more children to be born only to die. So I got myself sterilised. We don't want more. Let God give long life to the one boy we have and he will look after us in our old age.' Only after the operation was over did he tell his parents and me about it. They scolded him saying, 'You could have at least had one more girl. You have a son to pass on your name. Don't you think your wife would have been happy to have a girl to take care of her in her old age? How unhappy she must be now'. He would only retort, 'Keep quit. Let God give all the blessings to this one child.' I also told him how nice it would have been to have a girl. For a fortnight I did not wash his clothes, heat water for his bath or even speak to him. But later we made up.

Bolamma who had two boys and was expecting the third child, was asked whether she wished that the present one should be a girl. She said:

What do you think? Who else will be there to share my joys and sorrows and to be with me at the death-bed as I myself had been at the death-bed of my father. Don't I need at least one girl to help me wash the clothes?

Rathnamma whose husband wanted to bring a second wife as she gave birth to four girls consecutively was asked:

- : How many children do you have?
- : Five girls and one boy.
- : When you had these four girls? what did your husband say?
- : He was disappointed that he did not have a boy. At that time he even said, 'I wish to marry someone else'. I told him 'alright, go ahead', what can I do if God Shiva did not give me a son? I had only girls. I told him, 'If you want to get married again, do so, and I am not going to oppose you in any way.'
- : Were you not pained when he spoke of marrying someone else?
- : Yes I was. When I delivered the fifth child who was fortunately a boy, my husband came to see me. He asked to see the baby. I told him, 'the child and it's mother are both dead'. Seeing the sleeping baby he said the child was pretty. I told him this too was a girl. He was very happy when he realised that it was a boy. He did not let me do any work at all for a whole year. He and the elder children took care of the household chores.
- : Were you happy over the birth of the boy?
- : I too was delighted. I asked my husband, 'Weren't you planning to marry another woman because I did not give you a boy? Now hasn't my womb produced a handsome boy?'
- : Why are you so particular that you want a girl also?
- : When the parents are very old, it is only daughters who look after them. Also when there are festivals and other family celebrations, isn't it a beautiful sight to watch one's daughter all dressed up and step into the house alongwith the son-in-law?

How the Jenu Kuruba Woman Perceives Her Husband?

The Jenu Kuruba woman's perception of her husband should be seen in the light of her view of men in general. Men are considered to

be specially bestowed by God with *punya*' Women generally describe themselves as *karmagedigalu* (laden with sin). They see that the existence of men even in their society with a marginal economy is comparatively better than that of the women. The husband's dominant position in the family may also be due to his comparatively better earning capacities. Not burdened with the responsibility of nurturing the children, the men are more mobile. As long as he is healthy and can do wage labour, earning the day's meal is not very difficult for the man.

However, social compulsions against the unattached woman and, if married, the burdensome responsibility of taking care of the children tie down the woman to the hut. As the emotional attachment between the mother and off-spring is stronger, she finds it difficult to leave the children to their own fate. Without the support of the man, it is virtually impossible for her to manage as the roles she has to play become varied. It is obvious from the interviews with the Jenu Kuruba women that more than the love and affection for one's life-partner, it is often sheer practical and economic considerations that motivate her to look for support from the man. It is also as a matter of expediency that the deserted Jenu Kuruba woman looks for another man.

Providing of *hittu-batte* is a recurring theme in the conversation of Jenu Kuruba women. At the basis of all alliances between Jenu Kuruba men and women there is the contract where the man promises *hittu-batte* to the woman and children and the woman accepts. This is the same case whether it be the traditionally accepted marriage or one of convenience. Once the Jenu Kuruba woman leaves the parents' household with her man, her life is a long struggle to keep the man to herself and to find another if he leaves in order to ensure that she and her children are provided with *hittu-batte*.

How the Jenu Kuruba man uses his superior economic power to marry for the second or third time is evident from Devamma's experience. She had gone for the delivery of her second child to her parent's house. During her confinement a relationship developed between her husband and her younger sister. When the matter became known to the family, her brothers asked the husband to take devamma and the children away from the parents' house.

: My husband left me in this hut and started living with my sister separately. My sister was to have been given in marriage to

another boy in the *haadi*. My husband threatened the boy with dire consequences if he attempted to marry my sister. My sister also announced that she will get my husband to provide *hittu-batte* for her also. When I raised the matter with my husband, he also said that he will provide *hittu-batte* to both of us separately.

- : Does he actually provide you with enough?
- : Off and on he brings me something or the other. I also go for coolie work to earn sufficiently to provide for my children.
- : Doesn't your husband have any sympathy for you at all?
- : No. He has no feelings at all for me. What does he care? He only wants wives. That is his only interest.

Bolamma recounts how her brother-in-law started an alliance with her and legitimised it by announcing at the meeting of the elders that he will provide *hittu-batte* to her also:

I had come to help my step-sister for her first delivery and confinement. There he made me pregnant. My people questioned, 'How did this happen? Who is responsible? My husband told them that he was responsible. They called a meeting of the elders and they told him, 'You have spoilt the future of that child'. To this my husband replied that as he was responsible for my state, he would look after me and that he really wanted me.

The mere promise of maintenance enables the seducer to get away with what the community itself perceives as an injustice. From Bolamma's later statements, it is obvious that even this promise is not all too conscientiously kept.

Jenu Kuruba women in general have a strong preference for the monogamous relationship and they express this repeatedly. The realities of life, however, necessitates the shifting of their loyalty from one man to another when there is desertion, and they find the need for another alliance. However, it is the first husband who remains in her perception as "her own man" and even after the subsequent marriages, when the first husband dies, even though he has deserted her, she observes all the rituals attached to the death of a husband. She removes her ornaments and also stops wearing bangles, flowers and *kum-kum* on her forehead.

Bolamma, who was often beaten and ill-treated by her husband,

when asked why she didn't disown him and opt for another husband to provide for her, said:

He held my hand and married me and he is my husband. I want to wear only one flower. What do I want to do with twenty-five flowers? Let him give me whatever punishment he wants to. One day he threatened to shoot me. But didn't he have love for me and taken me as his woman? Will he ever have the heart to shoot me down?

Bolamma held on tenaciously to her first marriage, however strong the provocations. When the news of the frequent beatings to which her husband subjected her reached her father, he suggested that Bolamma should leave her husband and that he would fix another marriage for her. "But I told my father that I will earn my livelihood until I die with his name on my lips but will not marry another man".

The Jenu Kuruba woman speaks of her husband as a jealous person who becomes so unreasonable that he even forbids his wife to go out of the house to get provisions or firewood if his suspicions get aroused. Bolamma says:

He is afraid of sending me for any kind of work outside the house because he thinks I might run away with someone else. All men are the same. They are very suspicious. In this matter there is hardly any difference between them. The whole lot is like that. Why do you think my neighbour, the one who performs *pooja* in the temple, beats his wife? The same reason, and the women have to suffer.

Ratamma too expresses the dependency of the Jenu Kuruba women on their husbands:

We women should not be born at all. If we live, we should be able to live peacefully. If not, we should not exist at all. See, my husband Lingaya has died recently. While he lived, I didn't have much trouble. I have four daughters and the youngest son is still a baby. Can I take a spade and till the land? Can I take the bullocks and plough the land? Can I clear the land of creepers and shrubs? I have to pay back the loan on the bullocks. I have to see to the notice served on me regarding the land. Till now I have not even

peeped into a court or a *kacheri*. I have to attend to all these things now. If I had died and my husband to all these things now. If I had died and my husband was spared, he could have shouldered all these responsibilities. Now everything has fallen upon me. My son is too small for any kind of work. Who can give me relief in bearing this burden? If I keep talking about this, tears come to my eyes.

The violence with which the Jenu Kuruba men batter their wives is a recurring theme in the women's conversation. Rangamma puts it like this:

After one of the fights, I stayed with my parents. After some time they advised me to go back and join my husband. I knew that if I returned I would get beaten again. When he fights, he has no concern for the children. My elder child was injured during a fight with me when he trampled on her, and she limps to this day. Our Kurubas don't stop to think when they start a fight. They even hit with stones.

Bolamma had a similar experience at the hands of her husband:

A quarrel arose when I began to go out to work. One day I said in jest to my husband: 'You spend all the money I earn. Give me the money I earn and do what you want with your money. I will buy *ragi* with what I earn' My husband started beating me then and there and dragged me up to the house and pushed me inside by my neck. I took my children with me and went over to my stepmother's place. My husband did not come to call me back. It was Gauri Habba day. My husband and his other wife cooked and ate. He did not bother about me and my children. When my brother came, he asked me why I quarrelled with my husband. He too kicked me. I was swollen all over with the battering which I received from the hands of my husband and my brother. My brother did not allow me to stay in my stepmother's house. He chased me and my children out of the house and I had to take refuge in the house of a kind woman in the *haddi*.

Sangamma related how her husband used to harass her every now and then.

I was not permitted to speak to his elder and younger brothers. I was not even allowed to serve them food. I could not give them water. I was not permitted to do this service even for my father-in-law. If I gave anything, my husband would abuse me and beat me. He used the big staff until there were thick welts and bruises on my body. Whenever he wanted to beat me he would close the door. What could I do? I bore all the beatings. Some people howl and scream. But I never did that.

C. Perception of Nature and Supernatural

The way one perceives life and the world (nature) and God (the supernatural) gives some idea about the person's self-image. Psychologists and anthropologists have noted that there is a close relationship between the self-image and one's perception of nature and the supernatural. A positive perception of these two related phenomena points to a healthy self-image. The perception of the Jenu Kuruba tribals, both men and women, regarding nature and the supernatural is the same.

Bond with Nature

Being a forest tribe the Jenu Kurubas have a deep and meaningful relationship with nature. In fact, their very name Jenu Kuruba is derived from the forest produce honey. The Jenu Kuruba men have been collecting honey from the forest since time immemorial and this had constituted one of their main occupations and means of livelihood. Collecting honey needs special skill, and the Jenu Kurubas are adept at it. The depth of the Jenu Kurubas' bond with nature manifests itself in several ways. Their worship of trees, and their beliefs and religious rites are intertwined with natural phenomena. They often swear in the name of the sacred trees. This is called *Mara Sakshi*.

The total dependence of the Jenu Kurubas on the forest for all their needs till recently has already been dealt with at some length. However, it deserves mention here that restrictions imposed upon their use of the forest has deeply disturbed the tribal life and relationships within the community.

Trees as the Abode of God

The Jenu Kurubas believe that gods and goddesses reside in the

trees of the forest. There are separate trees for the male deities and the female deities. Till recently they were not in the practice of building shrines or temples as the trees themselves were considered as the shrines of the deities. In association with the peepal tree, which is believed to be the abode of the male deity, *Shiva Lingas* which are found at its base are also worshiped. The lingas are believed to have risen from the earth by themselves. Trees of a smaller stature represent the abode of the mother goddess *Amma*. *Chaudamma* is held in great reverence (The *linga* is spoken of as the *Kula Davaru* or the family deity of the Jenu Kurubas).

Human Qualities of the Divine

The Jenu Kurubas attribute human images and human qualities to the gods. They also believe that their ancestors have attained the status of gods. Because of this belief that their gods were once ordinary mortals like them living the tribal's life, they have a deep faith in God's power to understand their difficulties and his concern for their well-being. Their relationship with the divine is personal and intimate.

They look upon the supernatural to guide and assist them in overcoming problems in their daily life. When the Jenu Kurubas go through difficulties in life, they complain to God for the harsh treatment meted out to them. Just as one questions one's friend the Jenu Kuruba goes to the sacred tree and questions God why he has been unkind. Though God is generally perceived as benevolent and caring, he is also perceived as striking down those who provoke his anger by committing undesirable deeds. It is also believed that either the person who commits the deed is punished or close members of one's family whom this person loves are affected.

God's Presence through Human Medium

For the Jenu Kurubas God is not a distant, transcendent and unknowable entity. When people are in difficulty and they fervently pray for God's intervention, he appears through the human medium to answer their queries and to provide solutions for their problems. The rite through which God is invoked is called *bunde kariyodu* which has been discussed already. What is significant here is that God for the Jenu Kurubas, in addition to his mystical qualities and boundless powers, can be a "here and now" presence speaking through the oracle

to guide and assist human action. In the Jenu Kuruba's perception of God, fear is only a secondary element. God is seen as an immensely powerful being nearly human in his attributes, who should, however, be treated with respect and reverence. When the oracle gets possessed and starts uttering incantations, the Jenu Kurubas experience God as an immediate being who has come down to the earth giving heed to their prayers. The queries that they put to the oracle are mostly of a simple nature having to do with problems of life: 'Why is a child suffering from a disease?' "What has to be done to prevent the death of domestic animals?" "Why is there a drought?" and so on. Most of the time the oracle's remedy is to ask the devotee to desist from bad deeds and to walk along the virtuous path. Jenu Kuruba women play a significant role in this *bunde* ritual. It is they with their songs sung in a monotone wail make the oracle go into a trance and get possessed by the deity. It is also believed that in the absence of the two women assisting the oracle, the divine cannot be invoked.

God as Provider

The material needs of the Jenu Kurubas are very meagre and till recently the forest provided all that they wanted. But droughts and diseases used to be the bane of tribal life. All that the Jenu Kurubas expect from God is that they be provided with enough food and protected from diseases. Food and shelter till recently came from the bountiful forest. Trees are useful to them in a variety of ways providing fruits and also material for building huts. God is seen as the provider of all their material needs. Spiritual pursuits of a metaphysical nature are unknown to the Jenu Kurubas. Their concern is for the satisfaction of the basic needs and overcoming obstacles in obtaining the material requisites for their simple life. Their most fervent prayer is to be provided with enough food and to keep them away from all diseases.

Faith in God and Evil

Jenu Kurubas believe that God rewards good deeds and punishes evil ones. They too have faith in rebirth, but with some variation from the popular Hindu myth. Jenu Kurubas believe that a good person is reborn in the human form and an evil one takes a new birth as a crow. Women consider that men are born with *punya* (merit) whereas women are *karmagedigalu* (laden with sin).

The Jenu Kurubas are referred to by the neighbouring villages as adept in performing black magic. They are regarded with some fear by outsiders for the same reason. However, there is some guilt associated with the performance of black magic that is designed to bring about harm to others. Because of this the person who performs the magic is very cautious about it. There is the fear that if he is not careful, the evil affect may strike back upon himself. However, the Jenu Kurubas strongly believe that evil-doers cannot reside in their particular *haadi*, because God Beerappa resides there and keeps the *haadi* out of reach of all evil.

One thing that is noticed in the Jenu Kuruba's relationship with the supernatural is that it is not greatly different from that of other tribal communities or certain modern societies. They believe in good and evil. Their idea of relationship with God is very personal and not of a transcendental nature. They attribute a great deal of human qualities to God making him very intimately personal. He is perceived mostly as male, as the provider and the saviour from dangers. But the same God also can get angry and punish people for their evil deeds. Thus, the Jenu Kuruba's God is a person who rewards and punishes according to the merits of people's deeds. Another fact which emerges is that in the relationship of the Jenu Kurubas with God the concept of sin and morality is not very obvious. From the foregoing discussion it can be said that the Jenu Kuruba's have a very positive image of god and as observed earlier there is no distinction in the way the men and the women perceive nature and the supernatural.

New Directions

The Government and the volags have been of late showing increasing concern for the development of women taken as a distinct group. This concern is reflected in the growing number of schemes and welfare programmes that are being implemented to benefit women. Most of this effort has gone into mother and child welfare and training women in occupations like sewing, handicrafts and the manufacture of home products. The work of rescuing, sheltering and rehabilitation of women in distress as well as programmes for health and nutrition have continued to receive encouragement. The present trend is to train women in productive skills that will generate self-employment. On the part of a section of the volags, there is also increasing activity in the direction of organising women's groups and unionising working women.

All these activities and programmes have certainly played a useful role in poverty alleviation, relieving misery and creating awareness regarding discrimination against women. However, there has been no major breakthrough in women's development which touches the problem at its roots. We hold that this is because the significance of psycho-social factors has not been sufficiently taken into account. There has been a failure in delving deeper into the complex cultural and psychological factors which retard the progress of women. A woman feels shackled as much by her own internal pressures as by external factors. We suggest that a sharper awareness of the self-image of women on the part of women themselves as well as on the part of all who work with them for their development can add a new and deeper dimension to the perspective of viewing woman and her situation in society. This could lend a greater momentum to and point out new directions for the forward march of women in the path of development.

In this context it will be relevant to examine some of the underlying assumptions of the term *development*. In recent times development is understood universally as advancement towards a better quality of life which is more than economic growth, physical well-being and political power. The idea embraces all-round progress in procuring for all the benefits of civilisation that are generated out of the genius of humanity. Development is also a corollary to democracy, that political concept which rests upon the basis of equality of opportunity and equal rights for all. Underdeveloped countries in general, and within them, women in particular, have lagged behind in the race towards progress. Even though the constitution guarantees such rights to them in principle, women are neither in a position to exercise their rights effectively, nor are they able to fully utilise the opportunities available. The causes are traced to exploitative political, economic and psycho-social structures. Even hard-headed economists do not deny the pervasive influence of non-economic factors on women's development. Most significant among such factors are the psycho-social forces seen as culture and tradition. The prevailing social structure of a given society is the sum total of the interplay of cultural forces which include norms, values and belief systems. Any prescription to correct development lacunae has to take this reality into consideration. In India, we can cite any number of instances where institutional measures, including legislation, have failed to make any worthwhile impact on situations which are sought to be set right only because the strong bonds of culture and tradition have not been taken into account.

An illuminating illustration of cultural factors undermining progressive legislation is the case of anti-dowry laws. Despite provisions to bring offenders to book, there is a cultural collusion between the oppressors and their victims rendering the legal measures ineffective. The same is the case with legislation against the practice of *Sati*. Recent initiatives to improve the lot of women by providing low-interest loans to facilitate self-employment have met with a similar fate. Though there are no authoritative studies available as yet on the utilisation of such loans advanced to women, it is alleged that the money is often appropriated by male members of the family or is spent on presents or on making ornaments or other unproductive expenses like wedding feasts and religious or social events. Thus, governmental and other institutional initiatives to make a dent in the existing structure in favour of the underprivileged through legislative

measures and economic inputs are defeated by the stranglehold of culture and tradition in society.

When we urge planners and development workers to take a closer look at the individual person, we are stressing the potency of socio-cultural factors. This study being addressed in the main to workers in the voluntary sector, we now proceed to consider the significance of person-centred planning which takes into account the socio-cultural factors in development work. Most development workers belonging to volags which are working at the grassroots level, being closer to the people, are aware of these factors to some extent. Agencies who work with women have been searching for a theoretical framework and conceptual formulation which can guide and streamline their programme of action into new directions.

We believe that the concept of "self-image" can go a long way in sharpening the understanding and appreciation of psychological factors which come into play in development work especially on the level of individuals. This awareness would enable workers to bring into effect a tangible and enduring attitudinal change among the individuals, groups and communities they work with, thus contributing to a more permanent and just structural transformation. However, the concept of self-image is not presented here as a panacea for all ills. Nor is it an all-embracing field theory of development. It can only be one among the several other useful systems of ideas which seek to understand and propose measures to combat under-development and the inequality and injustice inherent in it. The usefulness of the concept of self-image will depend to a large measure on the imagination and resourcefulness of those agencies who seek to use it as an instrument in their work. We merely point to new paths, some of which we ourselves have walked by only to a limited extent.

A few pointers to how the concept of self-image which may be made use of by voluntary agencies involved in development work, especially by those concerned with women's development, are offered here:

The concept of self-image can serve as an effective instrument for the assessment of the status of the target group. The first step that agencies take when they propose to take up programmes involving individuals, groups and communities, is to make an attempt to under-

stand their problems and needs and various facets of their existence. Normally, volags make a preliminary study and assessment of their target group through surveys or interviews. It has been observed that such studies usually focus mainly on the economic aspects of life and some sociological data. As a result the data gathered by such studies reveal only a part of the reality. Conclusions are arrived at through the consideration of only a limited aspect of people's life. Such conclusions lead to a lopsided view of the situation. When decisions regarding the levels of intervention and the quantum of human and financial inputs are based upon the results from studies which have not taken the totality of the situation into consideration, programmes may lose direction.

We suggest that the discovery of the self-image of those individuals, groups and communities with whom the agency seeks to work should be a main component of the studies aimed at assessment. This can help the agency to obtain a more complete view of the situation, and also prevent the agency and the development workers from losing sight of the human person who has to be at the centre of developmental endeavours from the stage of planning down to monitoring and evaluation.

Faced with the responsibility of designing programmes for the development of the target population, development workers may draw upon the concept of self-image to analyse problems experienced by the group. Programmes assume greater meaning and promise better impact when they are based on a thorough analysis of the problems. Some questions that could be raised to facilitate such an analysis are:

- a. What is the nature of the self-image of the group or community in general?
- b. What is the nature of the self-image of men in the group/community?
- c. How is the self-image of the women different from that of the men in the group/community?
- d. Is there any difference between the self-image of various communities within the area of work?
- e. What are the causes that lead to positive or negative self-image in men and women in the target group?

- f. What perpetuates and reaffirms the negative self-image in these people? (The role of religion, caste, customs, myths, etc. in this regard)
- g. Who are the significant persons/institutions who influence the self-image of people in the community? (The part played by articulate individuals, opinion leaders, caste leaders, the media, etc.)
- h. Who are the potential facilitators for shaping a healthy self-image in people?
- i. What are the factors that could help and what needs to be changed, modified or completely reconstructed to facilitate a positive self-image in the people of the community?

Answers to these questions can indicate what kind of programmes will be suitable for the groups or communities in question.

Since the behaviour of individuals, groups and communities is the outcome of their self-image in relation to their perceptions of a situation and the people, and understanding of the self-image can help change behaviour patterns.

The concepts of self-image can help development workers to identify facilitators within the community capable of promoting a positive self-image in people. It will also help them to guard against those who contribute to the shaping of a negative self-image. Thus, people who relate to others as equals and are not hindered by religious ideological and personal prejudices are observed to possess a positive self-image and they induce positive feelings and thereby a positive self-image also in people who interact with them. Individuals who are critical, judgemental, opinionated and dominating react from some inner inadequacy and are found to have a negative self-image. Such persons generate feelings of inferiority, competitiveness and animosity in others and serve only to create conflicts and unrest in groups and communities.

Volags should, in addition to being aware of the nature of the self-image of the individuals and communities in the target area, also reflect upon the self-image of individuals who constitute the organisation. Persons with poor self-images cannot be expected to induce confidence and promote healthy self-image in other people. The

agency will have to see whether the organisational structure, its goals and objectives, its internal communication system, process of work, etc. are conducive to an atmosphere where a positive self-image can develop. In a rigidly hierarchical pattern of organisation, roles are specified and relationships tend to be mechanical. Individuals are appreciated for the position they hold rather than their inner worth. In organisations where decision-making is centralised and rests in a single individual or a small clique, other members feel left out and a sense of inferiority overcomes them. Where decision-making is shared with due regard to capacities, the organisation works as a team and each individual nurtures the other's self-image. A democratic set-up within the organisation appears to be the most desirable in creating the appropriate climate for the development of positive self-image.

Development workers who are involved in programmes aimed at changing and strengthening individuals and communities should constantly see whether their own selves are amenable to change in a positive direction. In the process of striving to liberate people who are oppressed, the worker should liberate oneself from attitude and ideas that are contrary to a positive self-image.

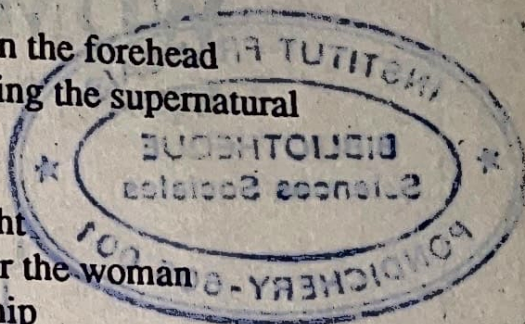
Self-image is contagious in a certain sense. Depending upon the strength of their personality, people with a positive self-image help to create a similar image in others and those who have a negative self-image promote the same kind of image in those around. Development workers should be conscious all the more of their self-image because they are held as change agents by target groups.

Voluntary agencies concerned with the development of women may at a wider level work in combination to identify, confront and change factors that promote and confirm the negative self-image of women. Women themselves have to become aware of the dynamics of the self-image concept. People and institutions that are involved in areas of vantage such as education and communication are potential facilitators of a positive or negative self-image. Volags would do well if they collaborate with them as well as with all others who believe in the equality of men and women to eradicate exploitative practices and modify attitudes which discriminate between the sexes.



ABBREVIATIONS

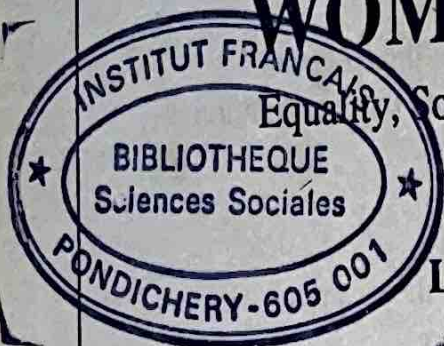
| | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------------------|
| <i>amma</i> | : | mother |
| <i>bottu</i> | : | cosmetic dot on the forehead |
| <i>bunde hariyudu</i> | : | ritual of invoking the supernatural |
| <i>cacheri</i> | : | office |
| <i>chimani</i> | : | oil flame |
| <i>fasal pani</i> | : | cultivation right |
| <i>ganga pooja</i> | : | puberty rite for the woman |
| <i>gudi</i> | : | place of worship |
| <i>haadi</i> | : | helmet |
| <i>handi hullu</i> | : | name of wild grass |
| <i>hittu batte</i> | : | food and clothing |
| <i>jamma</i> | : | territorial identity of the tribe |
| <i>janatha house</i> | : | government housing scheme for weaker section |
| <i>jeetha</i> | : | bonded labour |
| <i>karmagedigalu</i> | : | sinners |
| <i>keelu jathi</i> | : | low caste |
| <i>kum kum</i> | : | vermilion power, used for the bottu |
| <i>mahila mandal</i> | : | women's association |
| <i>mara sakshi</i> | : | tree witness |
| <i>muttu-thattu</i> | : | touch and feel |
| <i>punya</i> | : | merit |
| <i>rottis</i> | : | cakes of cereal made on an open fire |
| <i>saaru</i> | : | curry |
| <i>seers</i> | : | grain measure |
| <i>staladavaru</i> | : | original inhabitants |
| <i>uttam jathi</i> | : | upper caste |
| <i>mutgad, kaare, mailadi, sotte</i> | : | names of forest trees |



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WOMEN IN INDIA

Equality, Social Justice and Development



Edited by

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V.V. Devasia

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In India, women constitute the largest single group that is lowest on the development ladder. Analysing this phenomenon, this study brings out the importance of taking into account the self perceptions of women and the status of their self-image in introducing developmental programmes for them. More specifically, this book focuses on the images of tribal women and the impact these images have on their daily life, health and occupation, marriage customs, kinship and religion. Based on intensive field work and participatory methodology, the authors put forward a positive and constructive vision of women. Women's organisations and those in mass and folk media will find this study extremely stimulating. The life-stories narrated by eight tribal women not only provide new insights into the problems of women in a male dominated society, but also provide a powerful expression of women's search for equality.

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