

Left out, Kadugolla community in Karnataka still hopes for ST tag

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National Commission for Scheduled Tribes. (Photo | Facebook)

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BENGALURU: If there is any community that's left by the wayside even after 76 years of Independence, it's the 'Kadugollas' -- traditionally the cattle-rearing

backward class. The literacy rate of 40 per cent for males and less than 10 per cent for females is a pointer to their exclusion from the country's development story.

The school dropout rate is more than 80 per cent, as they send their children to graze cattle. While 60 to 70 per cent live below the poverty line, 50-60 per cent don't have pucca houses but still live in thatched huts in their hamlets.

The country can proudly claim that a tribal woman, Draupadi Murmu, is President, but the Kadugollas have had zero representation in Parliament since Independence. This means that if Kadugollas had got the Scheduled Tribe (ST) tag which they deserved, according to many studies, they too would have claimed their share. "It is because of a lack of political identity that the community lagged behind in all terms, including getting the ST tag. There is no one to fight for them either in the assembly or Parliament," said former chairman of Karnataka Backward Classes Commission Dr C S Dwarakanath.

They continue to be 'backward', restricting themselves to their hamlets, where they practice traditional customs and beliefs. The recent death of a month-old baby's death at Mallenahalli hamlet, near Tumakuru, exposed the community's sad state of affairs. Keeping newborns and lactating mothers, and girls in their

menstruation cycle in tents in the fields to fend for themselves is a custom they believe in to keep their houses free of 'impurity', and that such a woman can inspire to face the wrath of their deities.

The hatti connection

They are found in 38 taluks of 11 districts, in 1,264 hamlets called 'hattis', cut away from villages as 'islands', with either minimum basic amenities or none. Their population is estimated to be about 5 to 6 lakh in Karnataka. In Andhra Pradesh, they are found only in Rayadurga, Kalyandurga and Madakasira taluks in about 245 hattis, with a population of 60,000-65,000.

The hamlets have not been declared revenue villages, following which basic amenities are elusive. There are no primary schools or health centres, and the women of the community bear the brunt of discrimination. They cultivate the habit of educating one of their male children, and sending the rest to graze cattle, said Gangadhar, a leader.

The Kadugollas have to fight among 95 other backward castes to join the mainstream, under Category, I quota for education and employment, and among 196 castes for political reservation at local bodies. There were instances of children, especially girls, discontinuing and returning to their hattis, especially in backward class hostels, remarked G K Naganna, another leader.

"An ethnographic study was conducted in 2011-2013. The state government submitted a report with due recommendations to the Centre in 2014, to classify Kadugolla into the list of STs in 2014. The issue is pending before the Central government," said scholar Dr B Chikkappaiah, who surveyed all the hamlets. Similarly, ethnologists H V Nanjundayya and L Ananthakrisna Iyer who studied the Kadugollas, observed that 'KaduGollain' social customs are similar to those of Kadu kurubas (who have already been classified under Scheduled Tribes) in their book 'The Mysore Tribes and Castes' in 1930.

Another noted scholar, AAD Luiz, studied the Kadugollas and said the KaduGollas who have a culture and dialect of their own, deserve to be classified as scheduled tribes in his book 'The Tribes of Mysore' in 1963.