

## Childrearing Practices Among Kurubas and Soliga Tribes From South India

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**ABSTRACT** Childrearing practices among the four tribes namely Jenu Kuruba, Betta Kuruba, Kadu Kuruba and Soliga settlements in villages of Nanjungud taluk from South India were studied. Fifty percent of the households were randomly selected; information about parental attitude, care of the child, habit formation, health practices and disciplining was obtained from housewives using an interview schedule. The total population of tribal was 728, men and women earned for their livelihood, most of them were food gatherers, few had adopted farming and others worked as peasants. A small percentage of men and women were able to read and write. Mothers took care of the child while fathers were responsible for disciplining; both parents shared the responsibilities. Majority of parents commenced toilet training at 1 – 2 years of age. Most families believed in democratic and permissive methods for training. All fathers spent time playing and talking with children, while mothers narrated stories. Allopathic and herbal medication was commonly used. The tribal seems to have undergone a radical change in their views and practices.

### INTRODUCTION

Childrearing practices was described by Bouchard, (1994) and Jenni and O'Conner (2005) as "transmission of the tradition, beliefs, culture and cognitive actions from parents to the offspring's". It is the biggest and most important business parents are engaged in, all over the world. Since human babies are most vulnerable compared to babies of all other animal species, are dependant on caretaker for shelter, food, personal cleanliness and socialization. Nevertheless, child rearing includes much more than providing the basic necessities for growth. According to Silverstein (1991) growing children should be provided opportunities for realization of his potentialities with love and affection. Socially acceptable behaviors such as toilet training, eating, sleeping and social etiquette's are taught at an early age, as soon as the child start comprehending few verbal expression. Regalado et al. (2004) opined that physiological develop-ments should coincide with the type of training for effective changes.

McGraw (1940) demonstrated that the right age for toilet training is one year because the child's nervous system develops at this age and the control on bladder and bowl is better. Coercive training has been reported by many researchers to induce premature responses (Agarwal et al., 1985; Sinha, 1985; Cowman et al., 1999). Techniques in training also play an important role

in parent child relationship as well as personality development (Raith et al., 1997, Aruna et al., 2001). Regional differences are reported to occur in methods of training adopted. Chinese mothers preferred authoritative practices while Indian mothers adopted permissive methods of training (Dosnajt et al., 1997; Rao et al., 2003). Godfrey et al. (1992) and Regalado et al. (2004) reported wide differences in practices among populations and mentioned that rural urban differences are prominent and proportional to technological advancements. There is a gap in the knowledge about existing child rearing practices among populations residing in remote areas. It was therefore interesting to study childrearing practices among few tribal populations living in colonies near Nanjungud taluk of Karnataka state.

### METHODOLOGY

Jenu kuruba, Betta kuruba, Kadu kuruba and Soliga tribes originally are inhabitants of remote areas in Tamil Nadu and Kerala in south India. De forestation and urbanization compelled them to migrate to interior regions. Presently they have made their settlements (hamlets) in Kothanahalli, Naganapura and Venkatagiri villages of Nanjungud taluk. These villages lie at a distance of 31, 49 and 52 km respectively from Nanjungud taluk. Each hamlet comprised of 25 to 30 houses.

Fifty percent of the households were selected

randomly thereby a total of 54 families were included for the study, from three settlements. Housewives were interrogated using a structured interview schedule. Information about literacy status, occupation, average earnings, parental attitude, care of the young child, habit formation, health practices and methods adopted for disciplining was obtained.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In each village, the tribal formed their colonies four to five kilometer away towards interior areas that were in close proximity to forest. The houses/huts used by the tribal families were provided by the government in collaboration with NGO – Pragathi, which is actively contributing for welfare of the tribal. Surrounding of the dwellings had poor sanitation; stagnant water, scattered garbage and open defecation were a common sight. Water was obtained from bore wells found in the vicinity. No other facilities were found within a close distance, medical help was available at PHCs located at a distance of 7 km. The total population in the colonies was 150, 214 and 364 in Kothanahalli, Venkatagiri and Naganapura, respectively (Table 1). Both men and women

worked together, majority of them were food gatherers, and collected honey, gum, wax, tamarind, amla or hunted birds and snakes from the forest. A few of them had adopted farming and grew seasonal crops. A small percentage worked as peasant in the fields or at construction sites, however during the off season most of the men and women worked as peasants (Table 2). Their earnings ranged between Rs. 20 to 50 per day, earnings became lean during off-season. It is evident from Table 3 that 28 to 50 percent men and 12 to 28.5 percent women were able to read and write.

According to Aruna et al. (2001), care and protection are essential components in child rearing to help children develop positive personality. Interest in knowing about the care and tenderness shown towards children in different communities is a matter of consideration. A perusal of table 4 indicate that mothers shouldered major responsibility of the childcare, such as putting the child to bed or to maintain discipline was taken care by her, however in considerable percentage of families it was shared by both the parents. Fathers were responsible to discipline the child, while in few of the families grand mothers also shared these responsibilities.

**Table 1: Population structure of the tribal colonies and the selected households.**

Colonies		Men %		Women %		Children %		Total No.
		> 18 yr.	> 18 yrs.	< 10 yrs.	> 11 yrs.			
Kothanahalli	Total	36.7	33.3	16.7	13.3			150
	Selected	33.4	33.4	30.9	12.5			24
Venkatagiri	Total	47.7	26.6	12.1	14.0			214
	Selected	33.2	33.2	23.7	6.5			63
Naganapura	Total	36.3	39.8	11.5	12.4			364
	Selected	33.3	33.3	21.3	12			75

**Table 2: Occupational status of men and women from the tribals (%)**

Colonies	Occupation					
	Cooli		Gatherers		Farmer Housewife	
	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother
Kothanahalli	25.0	12.5	62.5	62.5	12.5	25.0
Venkatagiri	38.1	14.3	61.9	61.9	-	23.8
Naganapura	44.0	24.0	56.0	64.0	-	12.0

**Table 3: Literacy rate of men, women and children from the selected families (%)**

Colonies	Illiterate			Literate			Educated		
	Men	Women	Child.	Men	Women	Child.	Men	Women	Child.
Kothanahalli	50.0	97.0	12.5	50.0	12.5	50.0	-	-	37.5
Venkatagiri	61.9	71.4	19.1	38.1	28.5	52.3	-	-	28.5
Naganapura	72.0	88.0	28.0	28.0	12.0	32.0	-	-	40.0

Siblings in-charge of taking care of their younger one's were found in 22.2 percent families from one colony i.e., from Naganapura (Table 4). Women shouldered multiple responsibilities; they took care of family members and also supplemented family income, 75 to 88 percent women worked outside home. It was interesting to note the extent of time, mothers spent with their newborns and young children. Majority of mothers started their routine jobs in the first three months after delivery, while a small percentage of women attended their work within one month. Nearly one fourth of women from Kothanahalli and Venkatagiri held their baby closer always while others attended babies at time of feeding or after completing house hold chores (Table 5).

Toilet training was considered as important in habit formation hence the practice adopted for

training by the selected tribal families was investigated. All the families who were approached considered toilet training (urinating or defecating out side home) as important, majority of the families was found to commence training at age 1 to 2 years, wherein both parents took the responsibility. It is evident from Table 6 that, most parents believed in explaining children about bowel and bladder control, a few parents abused (scolded) children and others punished in extreme cases. The practice of disciplining children followed by the tribal is presented in Table 7. It is evident that majority of families adopted democratic and permissive methods. Although time schedule for sleeping, playing and eating was regulated but children were given freedom. Parents extended guidance frequently in order to maintain discipline. Parent child relationship is

**Table 4: Family members as caretakers of young children (%)**

S. No.	Aspects considered	Mother	Father	Both	Grand mother	Siblings
1	Care taker	85.2	-	-	14.8	-
2	Child sleeps with	18.5	-	46.2	12.9	22.2
3	Put the child to bed	38.9	3.7	29.6	27.8	-
4	To discipline	16.7	42.6	40.7	-	-

**Table 5: Time devoted by mothers for child care (%)**

Colonies	Working out side	Attending job after delivery				Time management in attending infants		
		< 1 m	1-3 m	3-6 m	>6 m	Feeding only	After completing HH* jobs	Holds baby all the time
Kothanahalli	75	-	-	25	50	37.5	37.5	25
Venkatagiri	80.9	4.8	23.8	47.6	-	42.8	42.8	28.5
Naganapura	88	12	44	28	4	24	24	-

**Table 6: Methods adopted by parents for toilet training**

Colonies	Age to commence training (months)		Person responsible for training				Methods adopted		
	24-Dec	25 - 36	Mother	Father	Both	Grand parents	Explain	Spanking/ Yelling	Punishment
Kothanahalli	37.5	62.5	12.5	25	62.5	-	62.5	25	12.5
Venkatagiri	42.8	57.1	19.1	23.8	57.1	-	52.3	23.8	23.8
Naganapura	36	64	20	12	56	12	44	36	20

**Table 7: Parent child interaction observed (%)**

Colonies	Contribution from father	Story telling		Playing		Talking	
		Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Kothanahalli	100	87.5	-	100	25	75	75
Venkatagiri	100	52.3	-	100	61.9	52.3	38.1
Naganapura	100	76	-	100	52	48	48

**Table 8: Medical intervention provided during sickness (%)**

Colonies	Allopathic	Herbal	Home remedy	Witch craft
Kothanahalli	25	62.5	12.5	-
Venkatagiri	23.8	28.5	28.5	19.1
Naganapura	36	32	20	12

utmost important in maintain harmony in the family. A healthy relationship is possible only when parents and children understand each other. Parents especially fathers need to spend time with their children and share their feelings. A perusal of Table 8 suggests that all fathers spent time with their children; they played and talked to them while mothers seem to narrate stories apart from spending time playing or talking with them. This indicates that the tribal, although have less exposure to the modern knowledge about childcare, have developed the practices from their experiences. Such practices propose that the tribal maintain healthy parent child relationship. Among the responsibilities, providing medical help during sickness is of utmost importance. Awareness about disease and knowledge about where and when to obtain medicine is essential, especially with regard to nutritional status of the child. It is evident that allopathic and herbal medication was in common use. Application of witchcraft as a remedy during sickness still existed though in a very small percentage of families. It can be concluded that the tribal are also experiencing radical change in their views and practices. Although they continue to live in secluded areas, urbanization has made an impact on their practices and livelihood, which also includes childrearing practices.

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