Yadava - A Pastoral Caste of Kerala

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ABSTRACT The Yadava of Kannur district in Kerala is a caste group engaged in cattle-rearing traditionally. They are believed to have migrated from Andhra Pradesh before Independence. The Yadavas came and settled in certain towns, suburbs and townships in the erstwhile Malabar, i.e., in the Northern Kerala. Yadavas are concentrated in Kannur town, Koothuparamba, Thazhe Chovva, and in Calicut town. Most of the families are rearing buffaloes and selling milk. Continuous cultural contacts and various other factors like education, industries, and employment opportunities within the towns and outside paved the way for socio-cultural change. The traditional subsistence activities of the Yadavas are declining today. An attempt is made in this article to trace the major reasons for social and cultural change. The use of three important concepts, namely, acculturation, environmental determinism, and environmental possibilism are examined in the light of the present material.

INTRODUCTION

Pastoralism is an economic activity, and it reveals the nature of subsistence of a population with respect to particular environment. "Pastoralism is a type of subsistence pattern in which food production is based largely upon the maintenance of animal herds" (Haviland, 1985: 239). Casimir (1991: 75) used "the term 'pastoralist' to denote populations who subsist primarily on the sale or barter of their livestock, livestock products or both". The species of animals vary with the region of the world. The Yadavas of Kannur district are rearing buffaloes, though they started to rear cows presently. They have a profound attachment to their animals. Although cattle rearing is the pivotal aspect of their subsistence activity, they are not nomadic. They are leading a sedentary life since their arrival in the present dwellings. In the past, the Yadavas completely depended on the pastoral economy. Now, they have entered into other economic specialisations. Occupational mobility is very high among the youngsters compared to the older generations at present.

Literature on Yadavas (Thruston, 1909, Reprints 1975); Singh, 1998; Menon, 2002) reveals that they are distributed in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Karnataka and Kerala. The traditional occupation of all Yadavas living in these areas is one and the same, that is cattle rearing. Moreover, all the Yadavas, or at least a considerable number, still maintaining their root language, Telugu. Based on the available literature

it is clear that they were a traditional cattle rearing community and followed a nomadic mode of life before a century or more. In Kerala, the Yadavas are distributed in Kasargode, Kannur, Kozhikode, Wayanad and Palakkad districts.

The Yadavas of Kerala are also called as Erumakar. In Malayalam, *Eruma* means buffalo and *Erumakar* means the people who rear buffaloes. The settlements of the Yadavas are concentrated in places like Thazhe Chovva, Kuthuparamba and Kannur South Bazar, Kottali, and Thalassery. Kannur district comprises three taluks, viz., Kannur taluk, Thalassery taluk and Thaliparamba taluk. The places such as Thazhe Chovva and Kannur South Bazar in Kannur taluk and Kuthuparamba is in Thalassery taluk.

Kannur district is situated on the northern part of Kerala state. It is situated on the south-west part of Elayavoor village. The N.H. 17 passes through Thazhe Chovva, which is 15 KMs away on the north-west of Thalassery and 6 KMs far from Kannur town on the south-east direction. The railway line to Mangalore cuts across Thazhe Chovva in the north-south direction.

SETTLEMENTS AND SOCIO-CULTURAL PECULIARITIES

The arrangement of houses in the settlement is not even and there are altogether 58 houses in two clusters. One cluster is on the southern part of the NH 17 and the second cluster is on either side of the Panchayat road that runs towards west from the NH 17. This is the main cluster of houses

of the Yadavas. The second cluster of houses is on the northern part of the railway line and NH 17. These houses are concentrated on either sides of the Chakkarakallu road. These houses are more closer to the core centre of the township. Nevertheless, a few houses of the Yadava are found scattered far away from these two clusters of houses.

Fig. Thazha Chovva Township & the Distribution of Yadava Households

The main cluster of the Yadava houses is around the Muthumariyamman Kovil and the Kanchi Kamakshiyamman Kovil, which is on the two sides of S.N. College road. These two Kovils or temples are the predominant worshipping centres of the Yadavas. At present, people belonging to other caste Hindus also visit these temples. The visit of other caste Hindus is more during festival seasons. It is mainly because of their faith on this deity. There are 24 Yadava houses around the temples. It has been noted that all the houses close to the township have attained more development in all aspects.

The traditional houses are thatched with coconut palm leaves and the walls of the houses are either made of mud or with woven palm leaves, and in most of the houses the floors are waxed with cow dung and charcoal or *karioil* (used engine oil of vehicles). As a part of the step-by-step progress in their house types, the houses with mud wall, cow dung floors and

Fig. Core Centre of Township showing Main Settlements of Yadavas and the Grazing land

thatched roof, gave way to tiled roof and the rest is the same. Slowly walls and floors were out of laterite and cement. It could be observed that there are still a number of transitional houses with cowdung-plastered floors. Nevertheless, there are some transitional houses with most modern facilities like that of a modern concrete house and the only difference is that the roofs of these houses are tiled instead of concrete. So, in fact the transitional category of houses exhibits a number of different house types or otherwise we can say that a slow and gradual transition of house types from the traditional to modern can be seen in the house types. The modern houses are made of either bricks or laterite and RCC roofs. These house types are due to the influence of township. Engineers and builders within the township have greatly influenced the construction of the newly built houses. The houses of the Yadavas could be classified into three types such as traditional, transitional, and modern RCC houses and their number is given in Table 1.

Table 1: House Types

<i>Types of houses</i>	<i>Number</i>
Traditional (Thatched)	6
Transitional (Tiled)	4
Modern (RCC)	10
Total number of houses	58

The food habit of the people has considerably changed. In olden days they used to consume rice gruel thrice a day. At present, they take meals twice a day. In the morning for breakfast *idly* or *dosa* are taken. Non-vegetarian foods like fish, meat etc., are consumed by them regularly. Beef is neither cooked at home nor consumed by them from hotels. They consume milk and milk products regularly.

The traditional dress of the Yadavas is *chela* for women and *dothi* and shirt for men. In the past the women did not wear blouse along with *chela*, but they used to cover the upper part of the body with one of the *chela* itself. At present, however, the use of *chela* is found only among the older women, the women use sari and blouse, churidars, nightgown, etc., and the girls use blouse and skirt, and churidars. The men wear pants, jeans, and shirts besides dothi and shirt.

The predominant family types among the Yadavas are nuclear families. The post marital residence pattern is patrilocal and the right of property passes from father to sons, the daughters get a portion of the landed property, if any, at the time of marriage.

But along with the urbanisation, the land price has increased three or four times and thus the people are unable to buy sufficient land for building houses. Due to scarcity of land, some people even after marriage continue to stay in the same house itself resulting joint living and joint families. Thus joint family system exists still among the Yadavas due to financial backwardness. The growing township assumes job or wages or employment thus the person even after his marriage continues to stay in his home with his parents leading to joint family system. This instance justifies the findings of Bhanu and Saheb (1982), which views that "urbanisation did contribute to the disintegration of joint families in one way and for some reasons the same may encourage joint family system to come back".

Cross cousin marriages are preferred among the Yadavas. Among the Yadavas, there are two clans or *gotra*, namely, *vamma gotra* and *vankara*

gotra. The *gotras* are exogamous with clear exchange or marriage alliance patterns prohibiting certain *gotra* from marriage relation by others. The people belonging to *vamma gotra* marry only from the *vankara gotra* and vice versa restricting the alliance to certain *gotras* only. Apart from the traditional practices, some exceptional cases of marriages like intercaste and love marriages could also be noticed.

The traditional political organisation of the Yadavas is called *sabha*. This organisation has a chief called *pinnabadha*. In olden times, this chief had a prominent role in the day-to-day life of the people particularly during initiation, festivals, ceremonies, etc. In the place of *pinnabadha*, the people have now a caste council called *kshetra* committee where the members are nominated and meeting is held in front of the temple. This committee looks after the affairs of the Yadavas presently.

The supreme deity of the Yadavas is Kanchi Kamakshiyamma. The deity, Muthumariyamma also has an important position in their society. They have their own traditional centres of worship. Lord Siva and other deities of the Hindu religion are also worshipped. For a few families belonging to certain *gotra*, the Muthumariyamma is considered as supreme goddesses and for others the supreme goddesses is Kanchi Kamakshiyamma. Ancestral worship is very common among them.

CHANGING SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES

From the time immemorial they were engaged in buffalo rearing for their livelihood. Sale of milk and milk products such as curd, ghee, buttermilk and cowdung as manure were their major source of income. The dried cowdung prepared by them are used as fuel for cooking. It is known as *valakatta* in their traditional tongue. In short their livelihood is merely depended on cattle economy. The cattle economy was successful in those days, since there were grazing land all over this region. There was no need of finding extra fodder for cattle.

Before the urban development and industrial growth, all family members were engaged in cattle rearing and the jobs connected with that were jointly done by the members of each household. The educational institution and industries have created new avenues of employment. At present, a number of people belonging to the Yadava

community have given up their traditional occupation, and entered into other jobs within the township and also in the nearest town, Kannur. Employment opportunities in this area are mainly in cotton mill, wood industries, workshops, shops, hotels, milk society, transport and conveyance. Apart from these avenues of jobs, some Yadavas are employed as head-loaders in shops selling cattle feed, ration shops, and general merchant shops. Some of them have also taken up coolie works as daily wage earners within the township. The major occupational categories are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Major changes of occupation among the Yadavas

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Change of occupation</i>	<i>No. of people</i>
1	Coolie	17
2	Milk Society	11
3	Beedi rolling	10
4	Beedi rolling	10
5	Gulf employed	10
Total		58

Apart from their traditional occupation, some of them have started small business like petty shop, general merchant shop, hotels, etc. In Thazhe Chovva and Koothuparamba, the families living on the roadside have constructed modern buildings and shopping complexes and given them to outsiders for rent. These chances came to them certainly because of the development of the township and township and also because they are living in the town or closer to the towns.

Some Yadava members got jobs in foreign countries like Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Dhamam, Saudi Arabia, etc. This gave rise to a rapid growth of economy and development of those families. These families have greatly reinforced their ritual, customs, marriages, etc., with pomp, splendour and luxury.

The status of women has changed considerably. Previously women used to manage household jobs and also cattle rearing along with men folk. And thus they were forced to live within the four walls of the house. A woman was financially dependant on her husband and thus she never bothered about other jobs. But at present, women are trying to become economically self-sufficient. She goes out of the house and works in other houses (housemaid) or factory or other shops such as tailoring, etc. This change in position of

women can be mentioned as the consequence of industrialisation and urbanisation.

DISCUSSION

This study supports three important concepts, namely, acculturation, environmental determinism and environmental possibilism. The Yadavas are in frequent contact with the township and intermingling with all other populations. The population of the township is heterogeneous; however, the dominant communities comprise the Thiyyas, and the Muslims. The township enhanced their contacts, which led to the borrowing of various traits of development. The pastoral economy is gradually losing its significance. At the same time, they have got various other economic opportunities within the township. This supports the belief that any isolated group of people with their own old ways of life will soon adopt modern ways of living, if a congenial circumstance evolves.

The traditional cattle rearing culture changed due to the culture contact and the new life-ways persuaded them to adopt new occupations. The mainstream culture of the people of the locality has virtually diffused to the Yadavas. As Collin observes, "Sometimes the contacts for diffusion may be relatively permanent, the number of traits diffused rather extensive, and the situation itself a rather one-sided affair with one society donating traits in very unequal proportion to another. This form of diffusion has been given the special designation of acculturation. Acculturation usually accompanies conditions in which some dominant group uses direct force or other pressure to compel a subordinate group to take on patterns from its way of being human. This is a case of rather intensive culture change introduced from the outside" (Collins, 1975: 474). Since the traditional subsistence activity of the Yadavas was selling of milk to hotels and households, with the limited number of cattle, land and fodder, it was difficult for them to supply adequate milk to the people and maintain a large number of buffaloes. Therefore, they forced to follow the lifestyles of the dominant communities. This is in support of Haviland on the theory of acculturation. "Acculturation results when groups of individuals having different cultures come into intensive firsthand contact, with subsequent massive changes in the original culture patterns of one or both groups. Its numerous variables include degree of cultural

difference; circumstances, intensity, frequency, and amiability of contact; relative status of the agents of contact; who is dominant and who is submissive; and whether the nature of the flow is reciprocal or nonreciprocal" (Haviland, 1985: 628). The change among the Yadavas is nonreciprocal, since they adopted some of the culture patterns of the dominant community and not vice-versa. According to Collins (1975: 475), "there are two outcomes to any extended acculturation situation. If this one-sided process continues long enough, it will result in assimilation, the weaker society will lose its cultural ... distinctiveness and become a part of the dominant society". It is true in the case of their traditional dress and traditional tongue. The new generation does not follow their traditional dress and their mother tongue.

Pastoralism is a type of subsistence pattern in which food production is based largely upon the maintenance of animal herds, and the availability of grazing land is inevitable for the existence of pastoral economies. The ecological anthropological concept, environmental determinism, which is also referred to as environmentalism, and environmental possibilism or possibilism are applicable in the case of the subsistence activities of the Yadavas of Northern Kerala. For Hardesty (1977: 6-7), "the deterministic view holding that environment actively shapes man... and the possibilistic view assigning environment a limiting or selecting role". According to environmental possibilism, culture is active and environment is passive in shaping cultures. That is, culture is the determining factor and not the environment for the changes of the subsistence activities of the Yadavas. During the course of acculturation, the Yadavas adopted other jobs due to the influence of other communities and jobs available within the township. In such a way, the concept environmental possibilism is applicable, but on the other hand, the steady decline of pastureland due to the population growth within and outside the community and the construction of a large number of houses within the area forced the Yadavas to exploit other economic opportunities. This phase of change emphasis on the applicability of the concept of environmental determinism, and according to this concept environment is active and culture is passive in shaping cultures. In other words, the decline of pastureland in the

periphery of the township is one of the major reasons for occupational mobility and change among the Yadavas of Northern Kerala.

In essence, the process of change of the people points out the role of environment and cultures. The eco-cultural roles act simultaneously and the extent of change exerted by these variables is more qualitative rather than quantitative.

The Yadavas of Kannur district are a fast changing group of people rearing buffaloes. They, traditionally, are a pastoralist community, which entered into other subsistence activities. The growth of township has brought in various opportunities, and promoted diversified economic activities. The non-availability of pastureland and culture change are the major reasons for the decline of the pastoral economy. And, finally, from the socio-economic point of view, the Yadavas are attaining living standards just like any other people living in this area.

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