

The System of Governance in a Primitive Tribal Community: The Case of Konda Reddys in Andhra Pradesh

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ABSTRACT Konda Reddys are identified as one of the primitive tribal groups in the State of Andhra Pradesh. The study is intended (i) to discern the political structure and organisation of the Konda Reddys, (ii) to examine the degree of control exerted by the traditional system of governance on the Konda Reddys and (iii) to describe how the traditional political system of the Konda Reddys has integrated politically with the regional and national politics. The principle of organisation in the case of Konda Reddys is based on territorialism and genealogical units. The chief is assisted by a body of officials which functions in a democratic way in checking the deviant behaviour of the people concerned and the customary law has defined various categories of disputes and varying rates of fines within the range of maximum and minimum. Further, the settlements of Konda Reddys are linked with the entire State as well as national political network. The Panchayat Raj system exists as a separate system independent of the traditional political system.

INTRODUCTION

The present study elucidates the traditional and the modern political organisation of the Konda Reddys, a primitive tribal group (PTG) of Tekuloddi village and its neighbouring tribal hamlets viz., Elugulagondi, Mamidimanugondi, Kopirimitta, Chintagandi, and Karumanu Konda. The study area falls under Abhicherla Gram Panchayat and is situated in Kunavaram Mandal of Khammam district in Andhra Pradesh. The village is located at the foot hills and one has to get off from the bus at Sitarampuram and walk for 4 kms to reach the village. Sitarampuram is just located on the side of the road which passes from Kunavaram, the Mandal headquarters. The village is situated at a distance of about 25 kms from Kunavaram and 75 kms from the well-known pilgrim centre viz., Bhadrachalam, the ITDA (Integrated Tribal Development Agency) headquarters and the said neighbouring hamlets, which are located

on hill tops, are connected with foot paths only.

Further, Konda Reddys and Koyas are the major tribal groups inhabiting in the district. Konda Reddys are the only inhabitants of the village and its neighbouring hamlets under study. The population of the study area is 331 out of which 167 are males and the rest are females. The Konda Reddys depend on shifting cultivation and basket - making for their livelihood. Some of them also depend on collection and sale of minor forest produce as subsidiary occupations.

The Konda Reddys of the present study fit into the concept of political community which, according to Naroll (1964), is "a group of people whose membership is defined in terms of occupancy of a common territory and who have an official with the special function of announcing group decision - a function exercised at least once a year". The political community is a maximal territorial unit with its own leaders outside the purview of a large unit. Its leaders deal with political affairs by means of a customary legal system to resolve the conflicts that manifest within the political units the decisions of which are enforced.

Further, every society operates by one principle or other or a combination of principles, producing different political systems. They are mainly classified into two broad categories — 'Stateless' systems and 'State' systems. The traditional political organisation of the Konda Reddys at Tekuloddi and its neighbouring settlements falls under 'Stateless' system, as it has no formal Government embracing the entire society, the political functions being performed by the settlements and there being no person or groups with centralized authority applicable to the tribe as a whole.

The principle of organisation in the case of the Konda Reddys of various settlements under

study is based on territorialism and genealogical or associational units. There is a headman for every clan. All clans enjoy equal status. In addition, there are no special associations, organisation, etc. Hence, it is appropriate to place the political organisation of the Konda Reddys under the principle of territorialism with the territory as the main organisational criterion. Thus, the territorial unit is the settlement, the smallest unit of organisation represented by family. The Konda Reddys, inhabiting in a number of settlements including the present ones, constitute the tribe.

Changes in the political organisation of a community usually occur with respect to the spatial and organisational aspects, type of leadership, legal system, military organisation and warfare. It is against this background the political organisation of the Konda Reddys is discussed in this paper, covering the territorial, organisational, leadership, legal aspects of the political community of the Konda Reddys. Further, an attempt is also made here to examine and evaluate the impact of the Government-sponsored formal political institutions on the traditional political organisation of the Konda Reddys under study.

A. TRADITIONAL POLITICAL STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION OF THE KONDA REDDYS

As stated earlier, the settlement is not only a political unit but an independent and self-sufficient unit headed by a headman or chief. The political structure at the settlements under study includes the system of governance, chieftainship and officials.

A.1. System of Governance

The system of governance resembles that of a political system with a hereditary chief assisted by a body of hierarchically placed officials. It, however, differs from feudalism to democracy in its functioning, since the officials have no absolute powers to enforce their decision without consulting the elders of the settlement. Further, in the case of all the settlements under study there exists no military organisation which is an indispensable characteristic feature of any

Government. Thus, the system is comparable to the caste *Panchayats* (councils) of rural India each consisting of a head with a body of elders.

A.2. The Chieftainship

The settlement has a permanent headman called *Patel*. The mode of inheritance of chieftainship is generally based on heredity and the chief of the settlement presides over the *Kula Panchayat*. The chief hails from a particular clan which is not the same in all settlements.

A cursory examination of the literature reveals that the early Konda Reddys could afford to have chieftainship with an upper voice in view of their strong solidarity. They had only one chieftain for all the nearby settlements and the chieftain was accorded great reverence and used to occupy a prominent place in the traditional political organisation of the Konda Reddys. But in course of time there developed conflict among the inhabitants of various settlements due to the habit of taking heavy doses of country liquor at the time of festivals. This resulted in the emergence of petty chieftainship for each settlement. At present each Konda Reddy settlement has its own chieftain. For instance, Tekuloddi settlement has Kachchala Raji Reddy as its chief, while Chintamamidi has Nalla Bheemi Reddy and Kopirimitta and Elugulagondi combinedly have Kachchala Narsi Reddy as their chieftain.

In general, succession to the office of the *Patel* is hereditary. He is expected to exhibit justice, truthfulness, a sense of right and wrong, patience, reason and wisdom. Observance of monogamy and restraining from heavy drinking habit on the part of the *Patel* are the appreciable qualities apart from honesty, sincerity, good nature, efficiency, sociability and contacts with other *Patels* and Government officials. Wealth, however, is of secondary importance for one to be a chieftain.

Upon the death of the *Patel* his eldest son succeeds him, if he is intelligent, is known for his understanding and capability of managing the affairs of the settlement. Otherwise, people of the settlement concerned select one of the sons of the *Patel* possessing these qualities to function as the *Patel*. The succession to the office of the *Patel* is not characterised by any special ceremony. If the *Patel* dies without any male

heir or even adopted son, the people of the settlement nominate another intelligent man of the settlement, preferably a member of the deceased *Patel's* clan. If none in that clan is found suitable, someone with requisite qualities from any other clan may be selected for the office of the *Patel*. But hitherto this situation never arose in the history of the office of the *Patel* at the settlements under study. Further, if the *Patel* dies leaving behind an infant male child, another person, preferably one of the brothers of the deceased or one of their sons, provided he is considered suitable, functions as the *Patel* until the child comes of age.

The *Patel* is not entitled to any type of regular or voluntary gifts either in kind or cash and compulsory dues such as tribute or tax. But there is a traditional obligation that during the process of dispute settlement when liquor and non-vegetarian feast are arranged, the *Patel* as per tradition is treated first. In addition, he is first consulted by the prospective bridegroom's parents before going to seek the hand of any girl for marriage at the settlement. He is also taken along with them for consulting the bride's parents. Further, the *Pujari* (priest) has to obtain prior permission from the *Patel* concerned to conduct any religious performance at the settlement level. The *Patel* is also compulsorily invited by all the families at the settlement at the time of conducting rites of passage. The *Patel* also has certain obligations to fulfill such as resolving disputes to maintain social harmony, working for the overall wellbeing of the inhabitants of the settlement concerned, treating the officials, both traditional and governmental, at the time of their visit, etc.

A.3. Officials

In the traditional political structure of the Konda Reddys, the *Patel* is assisted in discharging his duties by two hereditary and permanent officials apart from the elders of the settlement. These positions are hierarchically placed in table 1.

Table 1 reveals that the *Patel*, as stated earlier, occupies the highest position in the traditional political structure of the Konda Reddys under study. The *Patel* is assisted by the *Pinapedda* whose office is hereditary and per-

Table 1: Permanent and temporary officials in the traditional political structure of the Konda Reddys

S. No.	Name of the official	No. of persons	Nature of the post
1.	Patel	one	hereditary/ non-hereditary and permanent
2.	Pinapedda	one	hereditary and permanent
3.	Kulapoye	more than one	hereditary and permanent
4.	Elders of the settlement	a group	non-hereditary

manent, provided the son/sons of the deceased *Pinapedda* is efficient. The *Pinapedda* helps the *Patel* by expressing not only his opinions regarding an issue but also acting in the name of the *Patel* in the latter's absence. Even though the *Pinapedda* is empowered during the absence of the *Patel* to deal with ordinary cases he awaits the *Patel's* return in case an important decision has to be taken or a complicated case is to be settled. He invites, on behalf of the *Patel*, other *Patels* to deal with complicated cases apart from informing the venue and timings of *Panchayat* meeting to the fellow tribal folk and all the people concerned. He has no special prerogatives to mention. However, during the process of dispute settlement he is served country liquor after the *Patel*.

In the Konda Reddy culture each clan has a hereditary leader called the *Kulapoye*. The *Kulapoyees*, whose offices are hereditary and permanent, occupy third place in the political structure of the Konda Reddys. They attend the *Panchayat* meetings on behalf of their respective clans. The incumbents of the office of the *Kulapoye* render their advice out of their experience and well-versed knowledge with the Konda Reddy culture so that the *Patel* can arrive at a decision during the dispute settlement. In the area under study Kachchala Raji Reddy of Tekuloddi settlement, Nalla Bheemi Reddy of Chintamamidi settlement, Kadala Kannaiah Reddy of Bayabokka settlement, Suntra Bheemi Reddy of Karumanu Konda and Chadala Saraiah Reddy of Mamidimanugondi are functioning as the leaders of Kachchala, Nalla, Kadala, Suntra and Chadala clans respectively.

The elders of each settlement under study,

too, play a key role in the process of dispute settlement. They need not represent every clan in the settlement. Generally old age and experience are considered for treating a person elderly.

A.4. The Kula Panchayat

The traditional council of the Konda Reddys is known as the *Kula Panchayat*. It generally consists of the *Patel*, the *Pinapedda*, the *Kulapoyees* and some elderly persons of the settlement concerned. Women are not allowed to participate in the *Kula Panchayat* discussions, although this rule is flexible in the case of sharing the *Panchayat* dinner called *Banti* arranged out of the fines collected from the guilty.

It is not necessary that all the members of the *Kula Panchayat* should be present to resolve a particular dispute. But the presence of the *Patel*, a few *Kulapoyees* and some elders is essential. Members of the traditional *Panchayat* express their opinions on the merits of the case and assist the *Patel* in arriving at a decision. Complicated disputes are often settled with the assistance of the *Patels* of other settlements.

A.5. Functions of the Patel

As mentioned earlier, the political organisation of the Konda Reddys is handled by the political officials of the settlement concerned. This main and general functions can be summarised into four heads: 1. direction of behavioural norms for acceptable conduct, 2. settlement of disputes, 3. allocation of force and authority, and 4. redefinition of the norms of conduct.

In the organisation of each settlement under study the *Patel* enjoys the socially approved privileges of settling the troubled cases, and consequently, he is provided with official authority. No *Kula Panchayat* meeting at any settlement should be held in his absence. He is entitled to back his decisions with penal sanctions like imposition of fines and ex-communication of the persons involved in the tribal exogamous marriages. For giving a final judgement in a particular dispute, he mainly relies on the precedents set by his predecessors and his counterparts in other political communities of the Konda Reddys and views of the elders ex-

pressed in the *Panchayat* meeting. To maintain the integration of their respective native settlements, each one settles various types of disputes and makes arrangements to enforce the orders issued. Hence, all these conform to the three elements of law, namely 'official authority' 'privileged force' and 'regulatory' (Hoebel: 1954).

In addition, the *Patel* takes initiative in representing the matters of the settlement to the Government officials. Tradition expects every member of the Konda Reddy community to consult the *Patel* before starting any significant undertaking. The *Patel* also represents his native settlement in case any dispute arises between the people of his settlement and those of other neighbouring settlements.

The *Patel* also performs some other important traditional functions. He officiates as a leader in the case of any marriage in the settlement. His presence is required at the time of negotiations for marriage as well as betrothal ceremony. In addition, though the *Patel* does not perform any important role in the conduct of either festivals or other religious activities, the *Pujari* (priest) obtains prior permission from the *Patel* before undertaking any large-scale religious ceremony for the entire settlement.

A.6. The General Procedure of Dispute Settlement

The *Kula Panchayat* takes important decisions on behalf of the settlement and settles the disputes in matters related to adultery, elopement, divorce, theft, quarrel, abusing, etc. However, it does not assemble to consider all breaches of the established norms of the Konda Reddy way of life. In some cases social disapproval is expressed by elderly people. In the case of disputes that arise between or among siblings, the *Kula Panchayat* tries its best to patch up the differences among them. Even if the siblings involve themselves in beating up each other, the traditional *Panchayat* does not view it seriously. On the other hand, if the affinal relatives quarrel among themselves, the Konda Reddy society considers it as a serious offence. In ordinary cases such as abusing members of the family or fellow Konda Reddys, simple breaches of the laws of community for the first time, the

offender is excused or let off with a warning. If he is deliberately careless and repeats the mistake the traditional council takes a serious view of it and sees that the offender is suitably punished.

Regarding the procedure of dispute settlement, the aggrieved person or party informs or places his grievance before the *Patel* who informs the same to the *Pinapedda* and fixes the time, date and place for convening a meeting. The usual places for meetings are the residence of the offender or the shadow of a huge tree or outskirts of the settlement or in a place convenient within the settlement. The *Pinapedda* is sent to bring the accused as well as other members of the *Kula Panchayat*. When the council assembles, the victim places his case before it and prays for justice. Then the person accused is asked to give an explanation. The parties concerned express freely what they feel about the matter. They make charges and counter-charges before the *Kula Panchayat*. After hearing arguments from both the parties and assessing the opinions of the *Kulapoyees* and the elders, the *Patel* finally delivers judgement. There is also a provision for the accused or accuser to deny the judgement given by the *Kula Panchayat* of the native settlement. Both or any one of the parties can seek the interference of other experienced and wise *Patels* belonging to other settlements. If any one of the parties fails to honour the judgement, the matter is reported in the nearest Police station.

A.6.1. Fines and Punishments

Tradition has defined various categories of disputes and varying rates of fines within the range of maximum and minimum. Most of the fines are imposed in order to compensate the loss and the punishments don't include apology and ex-communication. However, there is always a provision for the reduction of fines imposed on the guilty, if the latter is very poor and cannot afford to pay the fines. The fine can also be paid in two or three instalments. The amount collected by way of fines is incurred by the *Panchayat* to arrange dinner for the entire settlement. One or two people from each family of other neighbouring settlements attend the dinner and vice-versa. The women are also al-

lowed to attend the dinner after the men have finished their eating.

The *Kula Panchayat*, as stated earlier, deals with issues related to thefts, adultery, cases of incest, pre-marital sexual relations, divorce, elopement etc., and imposes fines as per the customary law. The following is a list of fines that the traditional *Panchayat* of the Konda Reddys imposes on the convicted people of each settlement.

Table 2 shows different rates of fines depending upon the nature of deviant behaviour. For certain acts of deviant behaviour, minimum amount of fine is not fixed. But the *Kula Panchayat* imposes maximum amount of fine on the convicted depending on the seriousness of the anomic behaviour and existing value of money. Some case studies of the convicted are given below for a better perspective of the nature of crime, administration of justice and corresponding punishment.

Table 2: List showing different acts of deviant behaviour and corresponding amounts of fine prescribed by the *Kula Panchayat*

S. No.	Nature of deviant behaviour	Amount of fine (In Rs.)	
		Minimum	Maximum
1.	Elopement	100/-	1000/-
2.	Quarrel	15/-	50/-
3.	Failure to keep up a promise	100/-	250/-
4.	Adultery	—	700/-
5.	Beating a person in the Panchayat	—	250/-
6.	Murder	Imprisonment as per the court's verdict	
7.	Proved defamation	15/-	35/-

Case I

Kachchala Sita Reddy and Kondla Rami Reddy of Tekuloddi are affinal relatives and were addicted to drinking country liquor. They also developed quarrelsome nature due to the habit of heavy drinking. One day in a drunken state they started quarrelling which irritated the fellow tribal folk. A *Panchayat* meeting was convened with the *Patel* of Tekuloddi, *Kulapoyees* and a few others. The *Panchayat* imposed a fine of Rs.15/- and Rs.25/- on Kachchala Sita Reddy and Kondla Rami Reddy respectively for quarrelling with each other

forgetting their marital relationship and also warned them not to repeat the same indecent and anomic behaviour.

Case II

Once Kachchala Narsi Reddy of Kopirimitta and Kondla Bheemi Reddy of Tekuloddi had a quarrel which resulted in convening of a *Panchayat* meeting at Kopirimitta. When the *Panchayat* was in its session, Kachchala Narsi Reddy beat up Kondla Bheemi Reddy. Since beating up a person in the *Panchayat* meeting was considered wrong, a separate meeting was again convened at Kachchala Narsi Reddy's residence. The *Panchayat* was attended by the *Patels* of Tekuloddi and Kopirimitta, and the *Kulapoyees* of various clans, namely Kachchala, Kondla etc., and a few tribal folk. Since Kachchala Narsi Reddy's action in beating up Kondla Bheemi Reddy was viewed as an offence, the former was directed to pay a fine of Rs.250/- to the *Panchayat*.

Case III

One day Kondla Deveyya Reddy, a native of Kalingamidde settlement and Kadala Kommi Reddy of Tekuloddi settlement went to the weekly market to buy essential commodities. They consumed a heavy dose of country liquor at the fair and had a quarrel which resulted in injuries to both of them. A *Panchayat* meeting was convened at Tekuloddi where the *Patels* of Tekuloddi and Kalingamidde, the *Kulapoyees* of respective clans and a few fellow tribals assembled. After hearing the case the *Panchayat* imposed a fine of Rs.15/- on each of them, as quarrel between affinal relatives was considered as an offence. In this context, it is to be noted that Konda Reddys of the area under study do not view the quarrel between consanguineous relatives as a serious one, though the same offence between marital relatives is regarded as a serious one.

Case IV

Kachchala Raji Reddy, the *Patel* of Tekuloddi brought Nalla Kanamma to his residence on the condition that he would celebrate her marriage with his son in course of time. But

violating his promise, he developed an illegal contact with the prospective daughter-in-law. Enraged by this immoral act all the *Kulapoyees* and the fellow tribal folk convened a *Panchayat* meeting in which it was decided to impose a huge fine of Rs.700/- on the guilty irrespective of his holding the position of *Patel*. This incident reveals that the Konda Reddys are highly democratic in the administration of justice and everybody is equal before customary law or unwritten law.

Case V

Kachchala Sita Reddy went to the residence of Kadala Kanamma for proposing the latter's hand to his son. He also shared the country liquor with the friends and relatives on the said occasion. The parents of Kadala Kanamma also agreed for the proposal of marriage and sent their daughter to Kachchala Sita Reddy's residence. But the latter did not celebrate her marriage even after a lapse of several months. Infuriated by this the parents of the prospective bride, the *Kulapoye* of Kachchala clan and a few others demanded the convening of *Panchayat* meeting which was attended by the relatives of Kachchala Sita Reddy, the *Patel* of Tekuloddi and the *Kulapoyees* of the clans concerned. The case was decided in favour of the aggrieved party and Kachchala Sita Reddy was directed to pay a fine of Rs.100/- to the family of Kadala Kanamma for not keeping up his word.

Case VI

Kondla Rami Reddy of Tekuloddi proposed the hand of Kachchala Devamma for marriage by approaching her parents with relatives and friends and five bottles of country liquor. The parents of the prospective bride agreed for the proposal and Kondla Rami Reddy took her to his residence after sharing liquor with those gathered on the occasion. But he did not honour his promise even after a lapse of considerable time. Consequently, the *Panchayat* held its meeting and delivered its judgement condemning the action of Kondla Rami Reddy who had to pay a fine of Rs.100/- to the aggrieved party.

Case VII

Kachchala Kannaiah Reddy of Tekuloddi,

accompanied by a few friends and relatives, went to the residence of Suntra Somulamma seeking her hand in marriage. He also brought with him a few bottles of country liquor for sharing the same on the said occasion. The parents of the girl also agreed for the alliance of marriage. But Kachchala Kannaiah Reddy failed to honour his word, though the prospective wife lived with him for a long time. As a result, the *Panchayat* meeting was convened with a few fellow tribal folk of surrounding settlements, the *Patel* of *Tekuloddi*, the *Kulapoyees* of Kachchala and Suntru clans. The *Panchayat* delivered its judgement by directing the offender to arrange a dinner with 50 kgs of rice, two he-goats, one pig and 20 bottles of country liquor. The dinner was attended by all the tribal folk of Tekuloddi settlement and one or two individuals representing each family located in the surrounding settlements.

Case VIII

In the area under study there are also cases which were settled in the court of law. For instance, Nalla Kommireddy of Tekuloddi and Kondla Parapa Reddy of Gabbilagandi were distant relatives. One day they consumed liquor heavily and started quarrelling during which Kondla Parapa Reddy was stabbed to death by Nalla Kommireddy. The latter informed the same to the *Talari* of the village concerned and surrendered in the nearest police station at Kunavaram of Khammam district. The case was heard by the District court which directed the offender to undergo a rigorous imprisonment for a period of three years only, as the offence was committed in a drunken state of mind and without any deliberate scheming. Nalla Kommireddy, without going for appeal in the next higher court, underwent the punishment at Warangal jail.

Case IX

Chendala Kommi Reddy of Nallamanugondi married Chamma. They had a good marital life for some time. But the latter had developed an illegal contact with the younger brother of her husband. Her husband did not want to react openly in spite of his awareness of the affair. One day he took her to the weekly-held fair at

Kutur where he had a heavy dose of country liquor. He also goaded his wife to consume alcohol which induced her to go into a sleepy consciousness. Chendala Kommi Reddy committed a cold-blooded murder by using a knife to chaff off his wife's head from the body. The murder caused a sensation in the entire Mandal area in 1992. A case was registered in the Police station at Kunavaram. The District court at Khammam awarded a five year imprisonment which the guilty is now undergoing at Warangal jail.

Case X

In 1989 the two brothers — Kachchala Buchi Reddy and Kachchala Rami Reddy of Elugulagondi — happened to kill the elder brother of their father on the suspicion that he would resort to black magic or sorcery to kill their children. The *Talari* of the village concerned reported the matter in the Police station at Kunavaram. The case was heard by the District court at Khammam. The convicted had to undergo an imprisonment for a period of three years at Warangal.

B. PANCHAYAT RAJ SYSTEM

The Community Development Programme aiming at the individual and collective welfare of India's vast rural population was inaugurated in 1952. But it failed to develop, as expected, self-reliance and initiative in requisite measures in the village community. Since the public response of the Programme was poor, the committees on plan projects in the Planning Commission appointed a study team on Community Development under the headship of Sri Balwant Rai Mehta. In 1957, the study team suggested 'Democratic Decentralisation' through a three-tier structure of local self-governing bodies at the village, Block and District levels as a means of securing better implementation of the Community Development Programme.

In 1958, the National Development Council endorsed the recommendations for the establishment of a three-tier system of Rural Local Government in the name of Panchayat Raj. Specific powers and functions in the field of development and local administration were assigned to

this new political system, divided into three vertically inter-connected institutions namely, the Gram Panchayat at village level, Panchayat Samithi now Mandal Praja Parishat at area level which includes a few Gram Panchayats and Zilla Praja Parishat at district level which includes all Samithis now Mandals of the district. Consequently, this impersonalized democratic set-up has its serious impact on the normal functioning of the tradition-bound political institutions which were hitherto effective in the maintenance of peace and social order within the community.

The Panchayat Samithi and the Zilla Parishat came into existence on 1-11-1959 in accordance with the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishat Act, 1959. Before this there was the existence of Panchayat which is an innovation. These institutions are mainly interested in bringing about an all round development by undertaking various extension activities concerning the village as a whole. Panchayat Raj System cannot be identified or equated with the traditional political system of the Konda Reddys. The former exists as a separate system independent of the latter.

In addition, the Konda Reddys of Tekuloddi and other neighbouring settlements under study are linked with the entire State as well as national political network. They have come in contact with a number of administrative agencies which are part of this network. They vote in the Assembly and Parliamentary elections. Further, their non-traditional political field also brings them into contact with the District Collector, the Mandal Development Officer and his representatives, the police and courts, forest officials, excise officers, etc.

B.1. Panchayat Raj System at the Settlements under Study

In this wide stream of Panchayat Raj System out of two wards of Abhicherla Gram Panchayat, one ward is reserved for the Konda Reddys of Tekuloddi and other neighbouring hamlets which come under the said Panchayat in the Kunavaram Mandal. The Konda Reddys under study have so far participated in the last three Gram Panchayat elections held in 1970, 1981 and 1986 respectively apart from partici-

pating in the Assembly as well as Parliamentary elections.

Until 1987, the Konda Reddys did not elect any one for the only one reserved ward membership to represent in the Gram Panchayat. Generally the *Patels* of the Tekuloddi and neighbouring settlements under study and some elderly people nominate the candidates who are unanimously supported by the Konda Reddys. A man with good ability to talk in the Gram Panchayat meetings, interest in political affairs and contacts with caste leaders was usually nominated as a member in the Panchayat. During the first five Panchayat elections there was no contest for the ward membership at the settlements under study. Now Kura Pichchi Reddy and Kachchala Raji Reddy (the *Patel* of Tekuloddi), who are unanimously elected as the Vice-president and ward member of Abhicherla Gram Panchayat respectively, are serving the Gram Panchayat reserved for the Scheduled Tribes.

B. 2. Attitude of Voting

At the Konda Reddy settlements under study the people have generally voted for the person for whom their traditional leaders decided to vote. During the past Assembly and Parliamentary elections the same attitude prevailed. They did not bother about the merits and demerits of the contestants or the political party to which the contestants belonged. They are not usually dare enough to go against the will of their traditional leaders or elderly people. In the last Assembly elections they voted for CPI (M), electing Konje Bojji, a candidate belonging to Koya community. Regarding their political consciousness, the Konda Reddys under study have very limited knowledge of current politics. Very few people know the names of political leaders such as Smt. Indira Gandhi, Sri Rajiv Gandhi - the former Prime Ministers of India and Mr. N.T. Rama Rao, the former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. However, they know the names of their M.L.A. and Sarpanch. But they have not heard the names of great leaders like M.K. Gandhi, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, etc.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is apparent from the foregoing discussion

that the Konda Reddy settlement is not only a political unit but an independent and self-sufficient one headed by a head man or chief. The chief, whose office is usually hereditary, is assisted by a body of officials where positions are hierarchically placed. The chief of the Konda Reddys is called *Patel* who is expected to exhibit justice, honesty, integrity, reason, wisdom, etc. The succession to the office of the *Patel* is not characterised by any special ceremony and is not entitled to any type of regular or voluntary gifts either in kind or cash and compulsory dues such as tribute or tax. However, the *Patel* enjoys utmost respect at the settlement and is consulted and invited at the time of conducting rites of passage. The *Patel* also has certain obligations to fulfill such as resolving disputes to maintain social harmony, working for the overall well-being of the inhabitants of the settlement concerned, treating governmental officials at the time of their visit, etc.

In the traditional political structure of the Konda Reddys, the *Patel* is assisted in discharging his functions by the members of *Kula Panchayat*. The main and general functions of the *Patel* can be categorised into five heads: (1) direction of behavioural norms for acceptable conduct, (2) settlement of disputes, (3) allocation of force and authority, (4) redefinition of the norms of conduct, and (5) active participation in the performance of large-scale rituals for the entire settlement apart from officiating as a leader in the case of any marriage. The *Kula Panchayat* takes important decisions on behalf of the settlement and resolves the disputes in matters related to adultery, elopement, divorce, theft, quarrel, abusing, etc. Most of the fines are imposed as per the customary law in order to compensate the loss and the punishments do not include apology and ex-communication. The study reveals that Konda Reddys are highly

democratic in the administration of justice and everybody is equal before customary law.

Further, the settlements of Konda Reddys are linked with the entire State as well as national political network. Through the Panchayat Raj System they have come into contact with a number of administrative agencies which undertake various extension activities for the overall development of tribal villages. The Konda Reddys under study vote in the Assembly and Parliamentary elections apart from representing themselves in the local-self Government. The *Patel* and other elderly persons of the each settlement play a key role in influencing the voting behaviour of Konda Reddys. The Panchayat Raj System exists as a separate system independent of the traditional political system of the Konda Reddys of Tekuloddi village and its neighbouring settlements.

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