

Socio-Economic Changes of Yanadi Tribe in Andhra Pradesh

Dr. P. Kalyan Kumar

Faculty, Department of History, Sri Venkateswara University, TIRUPATI, Andhra Pradesh, India
Email: drpkalyankumar@gmail.com

Abstract

Yanadis are one of the major scheduled tribes of Andhra Pradesh. They are among the most vulnerable tribal groups in India. They live in extreme conditions of poverty and social exclusion. Over 460,000. Yanadi live in the southeastern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. A significant Yanadi population used to be concentrated on Sriharikota Island, a barrier strip in southern Nellore District next to the Bay of Bengal, where they were repeatedly visited by anthropologists. In 1970-71, the entire population of the island, Yanadi and non-Yanadi alike, were removed so India could develop its primary space rocket launching facility there. Over half of the Yanadis still live in the Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh, but they also live in rural areas and the margins of towns in other districts, such as Chittoor, Kadapa, Krishna and Visakhapatnam. Severe forms of dispossession and landlessness has reduced the Yanadi community to a life of agricultural bondage in the fields of village elites, often from higher castes. Some of Yanadi households also rely on small-scale subsistence fishing for survival. Abysmal living conditions forced Yanadis into debt bondage with interest rates as high as 100-120% per annum. Domestic work was another source of livelihood, but the vulnerable conditions made them subject to a lot of oppression including sexual abuse. Others worked as scavengers and rag pickers. Children were also forced to do labour. The present paper appraises the socio-economic changes took place in the lives of Yanadi tribes in Andhra Pradesh.

Keywords: Yanadi Tribe, Socio-Economic Condition, lifestyle, socio-cultural profile, , poverty, Education, Government Welfare Schemes

1. Introduction

The Yenadis are a tribe in Andhra Pradesh living in extreme conditions of poverty and social exclusion. Their nomadic way of life makes it difficult for governments to reach out to the community with help and support. Yanadis are one of the major scheduled tribes of Andhra Pradesh. **Thurston (1909)¹** noted that the people were natives of Sriharikota Island and suggested that they derived their name from the Sanskrit word “Anadi” denoting those whose origin is unknown. Now they are predominantly spread over the districts of Nellore, Chittoor Guntur, Krishna, Kadapa and Prakasham. Yanadis live in symbiosis with non-tribals. The Yanadi tribe, primarily residing in Andhra Pradesh (especially Nellore, Chittoor, and Prakasam districts), has transitioned from nomadic forest-based hunting and gathering to settled wage labor, agriculture, and cooperative fishing, bolstered by targeted

government welfare and NGO programs, though economic vulnerability and educational dropouts persist. The Yanadi tribe is one of the significant scheduled tribes in the southeastern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, particularly prevalent in the district of Nellore. Known for their deep connection to the natural environment, the Yanadis are considered one of India's most vulnerable tribal groups due to their socio-economic conditions. They live in extreme conditions of poverty and social exclusion. They live near canals and streams and their settlement were till recent times nomadic in nature. As they lived away from the main villages, they did not have access to facilities including drinking water, school admission, access to Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and electricity.²

HISTORY OF YANADIS

For many years, the Yenadi people lived in isolation on the island of Sri Harikota, off Andhra Pradesh's Nellore district. In 1835, the British government took possession of the island. The British opened schools and industries to try to "civilize" the Yenadi people by showing them a more modern way of life. These efforts were not successful. The Yenadi people are among what the Indian government calls the "scheduled tribes." Because scheduled tribes are underdeveloped economically, the Indian government has attempted to bring them into the mainstream of political and economic life. These tribes were "scheduled" for special treatment. The Yenadi are now located in Andhra Pradesh in southern India. They live primarily in the districts of Nellore and Chittoor, as well as other nearby districts. They speak Yanadi, which belongs to the Telugu language family.³

Historically, the Yanadis have engaged in hunting, gathering, and agriculture. Their survival has closely depended on their extensive knowledge of the local land and its resources. They possess a rich repository of traditional health knowledge, utilizing various plants to treat ailments ranging from gastrointestinal and respiratory disorders to skin conditions and reproductive health issues. Yanadis are broadly divided into four endogamous groups on the basis of occupations and dietary habits. The sub divisions are: Manchi Yanadis or Reddi Yanadis (Cultivators and servants) Adivi Yanadis (those living in forests) Paki Yanadis (Scavengers) and Challa Yanadis (those who collect left out food from leaf plates in the dust bins). Yanadis are non-vegetarians and eat the meat of rabbit, fowl, goat, sheep fish etc, but abstain from eating beef. Yanadis mainly subsist on agricultural labour. They are traditionally inland fishermen and are also engaged as watchmen to the fields and orchards of farmers. Collection of firewood, rickshaw pulling, rodents catching etc., constitutes secondary occupation of the Yanadis.⁴

Historically, the Yanadis have been associated with occupations such as hunting, gathering, and agriculture, relying on their intimate knowledge of the land and its resources for sustenance. They have rich traditional health knowledge, including knowledge for everyday healthcare and specialized knowledge (e.g., snakebite cures). They harness the medicinal potential of plants for treating gastrointestinal disorders, respiratory ailments, skin conditions, and reproductive health issues. Yanadis have many religious beliefs and festivals connected with the forest flora.⁵ The Yenadi people have a history of being exploited by crooked money lenders leaving them in debt peonage. Child marriage has been a problem in the past, and the Indian government is finding ways to keep them from this practice that usually leads to a life of poverty. Finally, there is an effort to legally help the Yenadi people recover their land from those who exploit them. This is especially important since land ownership means the difference between poverty and having needs met. When they don't own the land, they wind up working

for others, often only being paid with scraps of food. Though they are best known as farm hands, some catch fish and frogs while others search the forests for goods they can sell.⁶

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Main Hubs: Sri Potti Sriramulu Nellore, Chittoor, and Prakasam districts.

Sub-divisions: Broadly divided into groups such as Manchi Yanadi, Adavi Yanadi, and Challa Yanadi.

Habitat: Reside mostly on the plains, scrub jungles, and coastal fringes rather than deep interior forests.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The population of Yanadis according to 2011 census reports is 5, 33,746 in Andhra Pradesh.⁷ The total literacy rate among Yanadi is 35.35 as per 2011 census. Their mother tongue is Telugu. Yanadis are broadly divided into four endogamous groups on the basis of occupations and dietary habits. The sub divisions are:

1. Manchi Yanadi or Reddi Yanadi (Cultivators and servants)
2. Adavi Yanadi (those living in forests)
3. Paki Yanadi (Scavengers) and
4. Chella Yanadi (those who collect left out food from leaf plates in the dust bins).

The Chella Yanadis and Paki Yanadis are considered to be unclean and low among Yanadis. Each division of the Yanadi is further divided into a number of patrilineal exogamous groups representing their lineage names (intiperlu). Yanadis are non-vegetarians and eat the meat of rabbit, fowl, goat, sheep fish etc., but abstain from eating beef. Yanadis mainly subsist on agricultural labour. They are traditionally inland fishermen and are also engaged as watchmen in the fields and orchards of farmers. Collection of firewood, rickshaw pulling, rodents catching etc. constitutes secondary occupation of the Yanadis.⁸

OCCUPATION

The main occupations of tribal population were agriculture labourers, Fishing & hunting, Watching orchards, Forest produce collection, Goats and sheep rearing, Agriculture, Private employed (Scavengers), Self-employed (Making bamboo products and selling) working in MNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme), Rat pickers in the fields and Maid Servants etc. Yanadis mainly subsist on agricultural labour. They are traditionally inland fishermen and are also engaged as watchmen in the fields and orchards of farmers. Collection of firewood, rickshaw pulling, rodents catching etc., constitutes secondary occupation of the Yanadis. The Yanadis have rich traditional health knowledge, including knowledge for everyday healthcare and specialized knowledge (snakebite cures). The traditional health knowledge of the yanadis is closely interlinked with bio-resources and

medicinal plants for healthcare are derived by continuous access to and observation of the natural resource.⁹

Socio-Economic Conditions

Traditionally, the economy of the Yanadis was mainly subsistence in nature. They mainly depended on fishing and hunting. Sometimes, even this was not sufficient for their minimum dietary requirements. The Yanadi tribe faces extreme poverty and social exclusion, limiting their access to resources and opportunities for advancement. As per the 2001 census, there are approximately 462,167 Yanadi individuals in Andhra Pradesh, making them a significant cultural and demographic presence in the region. Their mother tongue is Telugu, which they share with the majority of Andhra Pradesh's population.¹⁰

CULTURAL AND OCCUPATIONAL PRACTICES

Cultural Identity

The Yanadis have a profound spiritual connection with the forest, which is reflected in their religious practices and the celebration of numerous festivals linked to the forest flora. This traditional dance is an integral part of Yanadi cultural expression, performed during festivals and special occasions to celebrate their heritage and communal bonds.¹¹

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES OF YANADI TRIBE

Shift in Livelihoods and Economy

From Forest to Wage Labour: Traditionally dependent on gathering minor forest produce, hunting, and inland fishing, most Yanadis now work as daily wage earners, agricultural field laborers, or orchard watchmen.

Cooperative and Alternative Models: Initiatives by civil society groups have organized Yanadi men and women into fishery cooperatives and farmer producer groups, helping them reclaim land and secure alternate streams of income.

Debt Emancipation: Systematic drives have helped free hundreds of families from historic debt bondage, allowing them to utilize schemes like MNREGS for livelihood security.

Social and Educational Transformations

Rising Literacy: Access to state-run residential and government schools has gradually raised literacy rates among the younger generation. The Yanadi community has transformed their lives. By securing access to education for their children and ensuring their youth move on to higher education, they are now transforming the future of the community.

Persistent Dropouts: Extreme poverty, lack of early educational support at home, and financial pressures forcing children into work continue to drive high school dropout rates.

Women's Empowerment: Community mobilization programs (such as erstwhile Velugu and women's self-help groups) have brought women out of traditional isolation, encouraging active participation in local markets, community decision-making, and land rights advocacy.¹²

HEALTH, HOUSING AND ONGOING CHALLENGES

Living Conditions: While government housing programs have provided permanent shelters, many Yanadi settlements still lack adequate sanitation and safe drinking water infrastructure.

Health Issues: Malnutrition, lack of awareness, and inadequate localized healthcare access leave the community vulnerable to communicable diseases.

Social Exclusion: Historical marginalization and social exclusion continue to affect their absolute integration into mainstream economic prosperity, pointing to a need for expanded skill training and sustained welfare implementation.

Traditionally, the yanadis depended on forest-based livelihood such as hunting, fishing, and collection of minor forest produce. However, due to changes in environmental conditions, and socio-economic transformations, many Yanadi families have shifted to agricultural labour, daily wage work and other informal sector activities. Despite these changes, their income levels remain low and unstable and economic insecurity. Literacy levels among Yanadis is gradually improving due to the availability of Government schools and welfare programs. However dropout rates Schools remain high due to their poverty lack of awareness and the need for children to support family income. Housing and sanitation facilities are inadequate in many Yanadi settlements, contributing to health-related issues such as malnutrition and communicable diseases.¹³

Persistent Challenges

Despite these positive developments, several challenges continue to impede the full potential of digital transformation for tribal entrepreneurship.

Digital Divide: A significant portion of the tribal population, particularly in remote areas, still lacks access to reliable internet and affordable smartphones.[22][23]

Digital Literacy Gaps: While progress has been made, digital literacy levels among the tribal population, especially among women and older generations, remain low.[9][16]

Access to Finance: Despite various government schemes, access to timely and adequate credit remains a major hurdle for many tribal entrepreneurs who often lack the necessary collateral.[24][32]

Infrastructural Deficits: Poor road connectivity, inadequate storage facilities, and unreliable power supply in many tribal areas continue to hamper entrepreneurial activities.

Market Dynamics: While online platforms offer new opportunities, tribal entrepreneurs often struggle with digital marketing, branding, and logistics to compete effectively in the larger market.¹⁴

POLICY/PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following policy and practical implications are recommended:

The Yenadi people need better schools and hospitals. Perhaps Christian teachers and medical workers can open doors to reach the Yanadi

Bridging the Digital Divide: The government should prioritize the extension of affordable and reliable broadband connectivity to all tribal hamlets. This could be achieved through a combination of public and private partnerships and the use of innovative technologies like satellite-based internet.

Enhancing Digital Literacy: Digital literacy programs should be scaled up and tailored to the specific needs of different tribal groups. These programs should go beyond basic computer skills and focus on imparting practical knowledge of digital marketing, e-commerce, and online financial transactions.

Facilitating Access to Finance: The government should create a dedicated fund for promoting tribal entrepreneurship and simplify the process of accessing credit from financial institutions. The promotion of microfinance institutions and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) can also play a crucial role in this regard.[30]

Strengthening the NTFP Value Chain: The Girijan Cooperative Corporation (GCC) and other government agencies should be strengthened to play a more proactive role in the procurement, processing, and marketing of NTFPs. This should include investments in modern storage facilities, processing units, and quality control mechanisms.

Promoting Product Diversification and Branding: The government should support tribal entrepreneurs in diversifying their product portfolio and developing strong brand identities for their products. This could involve providing training in product design, packaging, and marketing.

Fostering a Culture of Entrepreneurship: Entrepreneurship development programs should be introduced in schools and colleges in tribal areas to nurture an entrepreneurial mind-set among the youth. The establishment of incubation centers and mentorship programs can also provide valuable support to aspiring entrepreneurs.

Strengthening Institutional Support: The Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs) should be empowered and provided with adequate resources to play a more effective role in coordinating and implementing tribal development programs.[12][13][14] Collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations can also enhance the reach and effectiveness of these programs.[34]¹⁵

Challenges before the government

1. The Yanadis way of living in isolated pockets and a lack of community representatives who can speak on behalf of their community also poses a challenge.
2. there remains the constant fear of falling back into the trap of exploitation and losing the rights to a landlord,

3. There is lack of antenatal care which is the major determinant of maternal outcome among the Yanadi women. A significant portion of the women suffered with severe morbidity.
4. The tribal women do not even register in Primary Health centres, not attended to antenatal check-ups and have not taken TT injection or folic acid tablets during the time of their pregnancy.
5. The government has a host of welfare schemes for the Yanadis that aims to provide them with housing, education and a livelihood. However, she also admits that changes are extremely slow to come into effect¹⁶

Self-help is the way forward

Unaware of the challenges of government officials, the Yanadis are taking small steps to claim their rights.

In dozens of villages in Nellore—one of the four districts where the Yanadis are a majority—these indigenous people have begun joining Yanadai Samakhya, a network created by Sriramal with the help of ARD.

Currently, there are about 12,000 members in the network which looks into all the major issues faced by the Yanadis, with landrights, education, bondage and unpaid labour being some of them.

Landlessness and exploitation

Gandala Sriramalu is a community elder who is one of the lucky few to have received an education and been employed in government job. Now retired, Sriramalu spends his time visiting his community and making them aware of their rights as well as the opportunities available to them, including free education for their children.

The problem, he tells IPS, is that the Yanadis have never learnt to think or act on their own. So, when aid is given from the government and other agencies like NGOs, they are unable to make use of the opportunities.

The ownership of land is one such issue. For the past two decades, the government has been distributing land rights to the Yanadis. But, it is extremely rare to see a community member actually utilising the land. In most cases it is his employer who enjoys the landrights.

"The employer uses the Yanadi as a puppet, cultivating the land and consuming the produce. The Yanadi does not speak because he is either scared of losing his job or of being beaten up," Sriramalu explains ¹⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

1. Enhancing Indigenous Rights and Land Tenure Security

- ❖ Prioritisation of legal protection and restoration of traditional land rights is essential through transparent land mapping, community engagement and resolution of longstanding land conflicts.

- ❖ Policies should guarantee community-driven management of forests and natural resources, grounded in traditional ecological knowledge rather than external exploitation frameworks.

2. Advancement of Culturally Attuned Education

- ❖ Education systems must incorporate indigenous languages, oral traditions, local history, and ecological knowledge into formal curricula.
- ❖ Develop and enhance residential schools, digital learning assistance, and scholarship initiatives customised for tribal requirements to decrease dropout rates and augment participation in higher education.

3. Conservation and Revitalisation of Culture

- ❖ Advocate for community-oriented cultural documentation initiatives, museums, archives, and digital heritage platforms.
- ❖ Promote the resurgence of indigenous arts, crafts, music, dance, and traditional healing methods via cultural festivals, marketing networks, and job initiatives in cultural tourism.

4. Improving Healthcare Accessibility and Integration

- ❖ Establish robust connections between conventional medical wisdom and contemporary healthcare, encompassing formal acknowledgement of qualified indigenous healers.
- ❖ Enhance accessibility to primary healthcare services in tribal areas via mobile health units, telemedicine, and culturally attuned mental health assistance.

5. Economic Empowerment and Livelihood Advancement

- ❖ Advocate for livelihood initiatives utilising local resources, including eco-tourism, forest product processing, handicrafts, indigenous agriculture, and wildlife management.
- ❖ Facilitate capacity-building workshops, entrepreneurship training, micro-finance support, and market connections for sustainable income prospects.

6. Enhancing Political Engagement and Governance

- ❖ Enhance the representation of indigenous groups within local self-governance frameworks, advisory councils, and policy planning entities.
- ❖ Enhance understanding of constitutional rights, welfare initiatives and legal frameworks via grassroots leadership training and community mobilisation.

Suggestions

1. Although the government is implementing Ammavodi and Vidya Divena schemes, literacy is not increasing at the expected level, compared to mainstream society. So, in the tribal schools' focus should be on developing communication skills and also providing aid to the tribals in getting good jobs.
2. Sewerage facilities are very limited in tribal areas. As part of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), the government should organise awareness camps on sewage facilities and collect dry and wet waste from tribal areas as well.
3. Government schemes are still not reaching the people below the Poverty Line (BPL), so the government should identify them and provide housing to them.
4. There are nominal resources in the tribal areas for business development. But Apiculture could be a successful business plan in these areas. The ITDA should train tribals in Apiculture, and the Central Government should provide loans through Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY).
5. The majority of the Yanadis still depend on agriculture and its allied sectors for their livelihood. Moreover, their income is low as they are daily wage and unskilled labourers. So, handicraft jobs should be increased, skill training classes should be provided to the youth, and businesses should be set up by them, and if loans are granted on full subsidy, their income level will increase.

Conclusion

The Yanadis are amongst one of the most vulnerable tribal groups in India. Social constraints, economic inequalities, a lack of even the most basic chances, cultural taboos, a lack of adequate education, and health problems continue to limit their opportunities to improve their life. However, despite the opportunities they receive from society, Yanadi exhibits tardy development. The government's current programs have brought significant changes in the status of tribal communities. Tribals have made progress in areas like education, healthcare, and economic independence. These government efforts have contributed to improving their social status and standard of living. Through community-based initiatives and local awareness, tribals have gained better opportunities. If government programs are effectively implemented, they can contribute to the socio-economic and cultural development of tribals. This leads to improved living standards and overall holistic progress.

References

1. Baruah, D. (2020). Tribal Development Policies in India: Its Implications and Prospects. *ResearchGate*. [38]
2. Wordsworth, A., & Kumar, A. (2018). TRIs Revisited: An Outcome Perspective Analysis. In NILRED (Eds.), *Reflecting on India's Development*. [2]
3. Reddy, G. P., & Kumar, P. S. (2010). Political Economy of Tribal Development: A Case Study of Andhra Pradesh. *ResearchGate*. [3]
4. Elets News Network. (2024, October 23). *Andhra Pradesh Government Collaborates with Meta to Enhance Digital Public Services*. [6]

5. The Hindu. (2025, March 21). *Pilot project launched in Chittoor to empower farmers with digital technology*. [21]
6. Digital Empowerment Foundation. (n.d.). *Andhra Pradesh Priorities: Digitisation*. [20]
7. e-PG Pathshala. (n.d.). *Tribal Development Programmes and Welfare Schemes*. [11]
8. Vankayalapati, V. (2022). *Value Chain Analysis of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) Tendu Leaves (Diospyros Melanoxylon) in India: The Case of Andhra Pradesh, Kurnool District*. Technische Universität Dresden. [39]
9. Communications Today. (2025, April 26). *Andhra Pradesh to integrate AI tools across 20 govt departments*. [7]
10. Kumari, S., & Sharma, M. (2024, November 11). Opportunities and Challenges of Tribal Entrepreneurship: A Review. *International Research Journal of Economics and Management Studies*, 3(11), 48-53. [24]
11. Sahoo, K. (n.d.). Challenges and Opportunities for Tribal Entrepreneurship Development in India: An Analytical Study. *SciSpace*. [25]
12. SAMATA. (n.d.). *Problems related to tribal people in Andhra Pradesh*. [40]
13. A.P. Forest Department. (n.d.). *Minor Forest Produce*. [5]
14. Saxena, N. C. (2003). *NTFPs Value Chain Development for Rural Communities of Madhya Pradesh, India- A Case Study of Chakoda (Cassia Tora L.)*. [41]
15. Centre for Economic and Social Studies. (2018). *Gaps in the Wellbeing of Scheduled Tribes in Andhra Pradesh*. Tribal Digital Document Repository. [32]