

# Challenges of the livelihood of the resettled Jenu Kuruba tribal community: A Sociological study

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**Abstract:** The Jenu Kuruba tribe, recognized as a Primitive Tribal Group in Karnataka, primarily resides in the districts of Mysore, Chamarajanagar, and Kodagu. Known for their deep connection with nature, they are self-reliant, innocent, and hold their village life in high esteem. However, their peaceful existence was disrupted after the implementation of the Wildlife Protection Act, which led the Forest Department to forcibly evict and relocate them. These displacements have caused severe challenges for the Jenu Kuruba community. This study focuses on the Masthi Gudi Rehabilitation centre, located about 20 kilometres from Heggadadevanakote Taluk in the Mysore district, which now serves as the new home for the tribe.

Traditionally, the Jenu Kuruba tribe engaged in honey collection, a practice that has now nearly vanished due to their relocation. The move has not successfully integrated the tribe into their new environment. The government's rehabilitation package, which was supposed to aid their transition, has not been uniformly distributed. Additionally, the agricultural land they were given is unsuitable for farming, leaving them without stable employment. Many from the tribe have been forced into precarious work as agricultural labourers or migrant workers, where they often face exploitation. The youth, particularly those with education, are moving to cities, distancing themselves from their cultural roots. Social issues such as forced religious conversions, alcoholism, and other negative influences have become common within the relocated community.

**Keywords:** Primitive, Tribe, Village, Rehabilitation, Occupation, Farming

## INTRODUCTION

Historically, the Jenu Kurubas relied on honey collection as their primary livelihood, along with subsisting on fruits, tubers, and other forest resources. However, the enactment of the Wildlife Protection Act in 1972 marked the beginning of their displacement by the Forest Department. In 2017, the Masthi Gudi

Tribal Rehabilitation Centre was established to resettle 182 Jenu Kuruba families, alongside 19 Betta Kuruba and 09 Yerava families. This centre now has a total population of 680 Jenu Kurubas, including 352 women and 328 men. The focus of this study is on the Jenu Kuruba tribe, particularly their children, who face difficulties in accessing education, needing to travel 03 kilometres to Bhimana Halli for schooling.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To investigate the current occupations adopted by the relocated Jenu Kuruba community after relocation.
2. To evaluate the economic conditions and livelihood challenges faced by the tribe.
3. To observe the cultural shifts and changes in traditions among the Jenu Kurubas post-relocation.
4. To assess the social and economic issues the Jenu Kurubas encounter within rehabilitation centres.
5. To analyse the influence of neighbouring villages on the lifestyle and culture of the Jenu Kuruba tribe.

## STUDY AREA

The study is centred on 40 families from the Masthi Gudi Tribal Rehabilitation centre, a settlement established specifically to accommodate displaced tribal communities, particularly the Jenu Kuruba tribe. The centre is located in Heggadadevanakote Taluk, within the Mysore District of Karnataka. This region, which is close to forested areas, has been designated for the relocation of indigenous tribes following their eviction from forest lands due to wildlife protection laws.

Out of the total 182 Jenu Kuruba families living in the rehabilitation centre, this study focuses on a representative sample of 40 families. These families were selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the economic, social, and cultural changes that have occurred as a result of their forced relocation from the forest to the rehabilitation centre. The Masthi Gudi Tribal Rehabilitation Centre serves as a critical hub for understanding how these tribal communities are adjusting to new living conditions, their integration into mainstream society, and the specific challenges they face in this transition.

The geographical location of Heggadadevanakote Taluk is significant because it borders the forest areas where the Jenu Kuruba tribe traditionally lived. This proximity highlights the drastic change in their lifestyle, as they have been moved from their natural habitat into a more structured and regulated environment. The surrounding areas include agricultural villages and small towns, which influence the tribe's new social and economic dynamics.

By focusing on a smaller subset of 40 families, the study aims to provide a detailed and nuanced view of the challenges and adjustments being made by the tribe in their new environment, while still capturing a range of experiences that reflect the broader situation of the 182 families residing at the centre.

#### RESEARCH STUDY METHODS

In this study, data was collected from 40 relocated Jenu Kuruba families. These families were selected through purposive sampling, and direct interviews were conducted using an interview schedule to gather information.

#### CHALLENGES OF THE LIVELIHOOD

The relocation of the Jenu Kuruba tribe from the forest to forest-edge villages has brought significant changes to their family structures and cultural practices. In the forest, they engaged in various activities year-round, sustaining themselves through minor forest produce. However, after relocation, they have been forced to become farmers, agricultural labourers, or migrant workers. The proximity of the rehabilitation centre to nearby villages and towns has led to young people being influenced by unhealthy habits such as alcohol consumption, idleness, and health issues. Educated

youth are drifting away from their traditional culture, while their parents are caught in a cultural conflict, struggling to let go of their original culture and finding it difficult to fully adapt to mainstream society.

The shift in the Jenu Kuruba tribe's traditional occupation has primarily occurred due to relocation, forcing them to face several challenges. The Forest Department has provided relocated families with homes and 3 acres of land. Drinking water facilities have also been provided, with ₹75,000 in cash as part of a ₹3 lakh rehabilitation package, the remainder placed in a fixed deposit. The houses are not well-suited for larger families. The construction quality is poor, especially the roofing, which leads to leaks during the rainy season. The water provided is of low quality, causing health issues. The agricultural land provided is not level, and there is a lack of capital to level the fields. Since the land relies on rainfall for irrigation, there is no guarantee of consistent yields. The families also lack proper agricultural tools like oxen or cattle, forcing them to rely on expensive tractors. Wild animals such as elephants damage their crops, and being unfamiliar with farming, the tribe struggles to achieve high yields. From December to April, many families migrate to the Kodagu district to work as labourers in coffee and pepper plantations.

Relocation has also led to changes in the Jenu Kuruba tribe's traditional cultural practices and rituals. Their religious beliefs have lost significance, and they require permission from the Forest Department to visit their original deities in the forest, which happens only once a year. Many are converting to Christianity due to the influence of Christian missionaries. The lack of year-round employment has made migration inevitable. The younger men and youth have become addicted to alcohol and tobacco due to their exposure to nearby villages. Educated youth are abandoning their traditional practices, and the community leaders, once respected, are no longer as revered. In the forest, disputes were traditionally settled through mutual agreements in front of a fire, a practice that has largely disappeared in the rehabilitation centre.

The Jenu Kuruba tribe is unique among other indigenous tribes. They used to construct beautiful and functional houses using materials provided by nature. These homes suited their lifestyle, but they are reluctant to live in the houses provided in the rehabilitation centre. Their beliefs around marriage, devotion to deities, and traditions related to festivals,

clothing, food habits, and funeral rituals are losing their importance in the new setting.

Migration is also negatively affecting children's education. Since entire families migrate for work, children often drop out of school. While working in plantations, both men and women face exploitation by landowners.

In their forest homes, the Jenu Kurubas used to craft tools and materials needed for daily life, but in the rehabilitation centre, they now have to purchase everything. In the past, they relied on herbal remedies for healthcare, but now they are forced to buy medicines.

Local organizations have provided some assistance to the Jenu Kurubas, offering training in fields like Ragi Malt production, chikki (a local sweet) preparation, and electric mechanics. Although a few Jenu Kurubas have found employment in production units after receiving training, most are disinterested in unfamiliar jobs and instead migrate to the Kodagu district for work.

#### KEY FINDINGS

1. The traditional occupation of honey collection is disappearing due to the relocation.
2. The agricultural land provided to them is not suitable for cultivation, compounding their difficulties in achieving economic stability.
3. Their cultural identity and customs are eroding, with many Jenu Kurubas converting to Christianity under the influence of missionaries.
4. Job satisfaction is low, as most are forced to take on roles that do not align with their traditional way of life.
5. The relocation has caused deep-seated issues, including the rise of alcoholism, addiction, and weakened social structures.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Agricultural Training: The Agriculture Department should provide the Jenu Kurubas with modern farming techniques to improve their yield.
2. Wildlife Protection: The Forest Department should install rail fencing around agricultural land to protect crops from wild animals like elephants.

3. Land Development: Agricultural land provided to the Jenu Kurubas should be levelled and prepared for cultivation to make it more productive.
4. Employment Solutions: To prevent mass migration for work, small-scale industries such as garment factories should be established near the rehabilitation centres to provide stable employment opportunities.
5. Health Interventions: Medical centres near the rehabilitation centres should focus on addressing issues like alcohol addiction and other health problems prevalent in the community.

#### CONCLUSION

The forced relocation of the Jenu Kuruba tribe, a group deeply intertwined with the forest, has resulted in severe social, economic, and cultural challenges. The rehabilitation efforts, lacking sensitivity and an understanding of their way of life, have contributed to the gradual loss of their cultural heritage. The tribe now faces physical hardships and mental distress due to displacement, and unless significant interventions are made, they risk losing their unique identity and traditions.

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