

A SOCIO-ECONOMIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE GONDHALI COMMUNITY OF CENTRAL INDIA

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Abstract: Gondhali is one of the well-known communities in central India. They are mainly popular for their traditional dance (folk dance) form i.e., 'Gondhal dance'. In the present-day scenario, the life of the folk dancers (performing artists) changes gradually. In many situations, it is found that due to the lack of interest of upcoming generations, many arts are on the verge of abolition. So, it is important to study a community like Gondhali (a community of folk dancers) to understand various dimensions of their society, economy, livelihood etc. So, the current study is an ethnographic investigation of the Gondhali (widely known for their traditional dance) community who inhabit several states in India's Central region. This study examines various facets of the demographic data, means of subsistence, social organization and structure, and religious practices of this population through empirical observations. The implementation of government-led development initiatives has resulted in significant transformations in the populace's lifestyle. The present paper mainly focuses on the social, economic and other perspectives that are essential for their survival.

Keywords: Gondhali, Folk Dance, Livelihood, Society, Economy, Development

Introduction

Livelihood or socio-economic condition refers to the source by which one obtains the essential requirements for sustaining life. Livelihood refers to the methods, actions, rights, and resources that individuals use to earn a living, fulfill their diverse needs and economic requirements, manage uncertainties, and adapt to new possibilities. Livelihood encompasses more than simply securing shelter, earning income, acquiring sustenance for one's family, or engaging in market transactions (Tiwarly, 2020). The issue at hand encompasses both the possession and dissemination of knowledge, the administration of abilities and connections, and the validation of individual identity.

India is famous for its unique cultures and traditions. Indian Folk dance is part of the social fabric of Indian society because every occasion includes exuberant festivities. Indian folk and tribal dance have arisen from varied socio-economic circumstances and cultural traditions passed down through generations. Traditional dances mark the start of a new season, the birth of a child, the joining of two souls in marriage, and cultural celebrations. Folk dance has several styles, each influenced by its state, ethnicity, and location (Sahay, 2022).

Folk performing art is characterized by its practicality, functionality, naturalness,

and spontaneity and it is becoming functionally significant to society. Art and dance are a fundamental component of the daily existence of individuals in traditional societies. Performing art is seen as an integral and essential aspect of their everyday existence (Maheswari & Subhashini, 2015). In India, most of the folk dancers from rural areas face obstacles like poverty, illiteracy, lack of awareness and support, etc. The Gondhali community is not exempt from these issues. They also have a significant prevalence of these kind of livelihood related problems.

Interestingly, now-a-days rural areas in India are undergoing significant social, economic, political, demographic, cultural, and ecological changes primarily as a result of the growing influence from urban areas. This influence is introducing urban characteristics into rural settings and causing shifts in rural ecology, as well as altering systems and processes that affect the way rural people live and make a living. (Ramphul Ohlan 2016; Patil, Dhere and Pawar 2009).

According to the Census of India (1951), the population of the Gondhali community was 8300 in Bombay region and in Madhya Pradesh, the population of Gondhali community was only 4791. As per the findings of the Report of National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi Nomadic Tribes (commonly known as the Idate Commission Report) published in 2017, it has been established that the Gondhali community is a nomadic tribe. The Gondhali community is renowned for their proficiency in the traditional dance form known as 'gondal'. Their origin is traced back to Maharashtra. The indigenous name for this entity is Gondhli, as recognized within the local community. The etymology of the term 'Gondhali' or 'Gondhli' can be traced back to the word 'gondhal' or 'gondal', which refers to a traditional performance that is practiced by this community (Singh, 1998). The Maharashtra edition of The Peoples of India, published by the Anthropological Survey of India in edition XXX, Part One, notes that the customary profession of this community is to perform songs that extol the goddess Bhavani during wedding ceremonies. This traditional performance is referred to as gondhal and typically takes place on a specific auspicious day following a marriage.

Similar to numerous communities, the Gondhali community possesses an oral tradition. As per their account, the Gondhali community traces its lineage back to Parshuram, who is believed to have conducted the inaugural Gondal or Devi Jagran ceremony in the world. As per their account, Parshuram's lineage can be traced back to Jamdagni and Devi Renuka, also referred to as Devi Bhawani. Parshuram exhibited a high degree of filial piety towards his father, Jamdagni. One morning, Jamdagni expressed doubt regarding the purity of Devi Renuka and instructed Parshuram to execute her by decapitation as a form of punishment. Parshuram proceeded with the aforementioned action, subsequently experiencing a sense of remorse. Subsequently, he initiated the performance of yajna and 'gondal' (devi jagran) in the presence of his deceased mother's remains. By means of his literary creation known as 'gondal', he was able to revive the essence of his mother's being.

Parshuram is responsible for executing the complete procedure of 'gondal' and subsequently imparting this knowledge to his successors, namely the Gondhali. The Gondhalis primarily venerate Devi Bhawani as their principal divinity.

Apart from the aforesaid narrations, the Gondhalis have another history. As per their assertion, the incursion of the Mughals emerged as a significant predicament in Central India during the 17th century. During the era when the Mughal Empire was dominant in military conflicts, Chhatrapati Shivaji emerged as a champion for the welfare of the general populace. Shivaji venerated Devi Bhawani through the performance of the 'gondal' ritual and the accompaniment of 'sambal' and 'chunduka', both of which are musical instruments. Following the performance, Devi Bhawani presented Shivaji with the 'Bhawani Sword'. Shivaji emerged victorious over the Mughals with the aid of the 'Bhawani Sword'. The Gondhali community played a significant role in instructing Shivaji in the art of 'gondal' or 'devi jagran', subsequently becoming an essential component of the Maratha Empire. Although the majority of community members, who are primarily young individuals, are unable to provide a historical account of their migration, a select few elderly individuals have conveyed that their ancestors migrated from the present-day districts of Maharashtra, specifically Nagpur and Amaravati, in the distant past. The informants also conveyed that their community is geographically dispersed throughout the state of Maharashtra, with a significant concentration in the northern region.

In the early seventeenth century, the veneration of Bhawani of Tuljapur experienced a notable surge in popularity across the Deccan region. Throughout the designated time frame, every individual belonging to the Maratha community was actively engaged in religious practices. According to Enthoven's (1922) research, the Gondhalis were a highly esteemed group and their musical creations were extensively admired.

As per previous research, the Gondhali community is predominantly dispersed across the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh. The community in Madhya Pradesh is predominantly concentrated within the Betul and Jabalpur districts. As per the 1951 census of Madhya Pradesh, the Gondhali community's population was recorded at 4791 across the state.

The predominant linguistic group within the community is Marathi-speaking. In addition, they possess the ability to communicate in Hindi. An intriguing aspect pertaining to their linguistic practices is their proficiency in a form of manual communication known as 'Karpauli.' The language has no written text. The manual language is conveyed through the gestural movements of the fingers and hands. During the era of Chhatrapati Shivaji, the aforementioned language was utilized to communicate pertinent information regarding adversaries or other significant messages to the Maratha monarch. Currently, a limited number of individuals (approximately 4-5 elderly individuals) within this community possess knowledge

of this particular language. The dialect in question is typically utilized within the confines of a particular community and is presently employed during various stage performances of ‘gondal’ for the purpose of entertainment.

Methodology

The present study was conducted in the Dhanora and Bhadus villages of Betul district (Madhya Pradesh). The study of the social and cultural practices of the Gondhali was conducted by means of employing the participant observation method. The research utilized an interview schedule as a means of collecting data and empirical evidence related to social or group interaction. A schedule or structured interview protocol was developed to collect relevant data on essential demographics and other significant variables. The process of selecting participants was conducted through a combination of random and purposive sampling methods. Moreover, a sequence of focus groups was carried out in diverse regions to augment the participants’ comprehension of their ethnic identity perspectives and to gain a more profound insight into the local community’s perceptions of the dynamic social environment of identity. The participants’ narratives were collected through the utilization of audio-visual documentation. The research utilized a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine and interpret the collected data.

Demographic Variables

Population

The current study of the Gondhali community of Madhya Pradesh was conducted among 199 community members, 100 of whom are males and 99 of whom are females from 41 households in various districts of Madhya Pradesh.

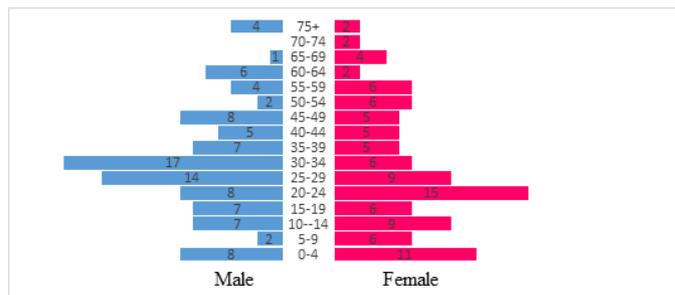


Figure 1. Population Pyramid of the Gondhali Community

The Gondhali community has a sex ratio of 990 females per 1000 males, which is higher than the national sex ratio of 943 females per thousand males. Figure 1 depicts the distribution by gender and five-year age groups. According to the

population pyramid, the young and working population (15-59) accounts for 67.84 per cent of the total population, despite having a low life expectancy. Children under the age of 15 account for 21.61 per cent of the total Gondhali population, while people aged 60 and up account for only 10.55 per cent. The pyramid also shows that fertility has increased significantly in the last 5 years and that the child sex ratio has increased and fluctuated continuously in the previous 15 years in the case of females.

Educational Status

A literate is considered a person of minimum 7 years old and above, who can both read and write with understanding of any language.

Educational Status		Gender		Total (N=176)
		Male	Female	
Non-literate	N	18	20	38
	%	10.23	11.36	21.59
Literate	N	72	66	138
	%	40.91	37.5	78.41
Total	N	90	86	176
	%	51.14	48.86	100.00

Table 1. Educational Status of the Gondhali Community

More than three-quarters (78.41 per cent) of the Gondhali community is literate, with 40.91 per cent being male and 37.5 per cent being female. Non literacy affects less than one-fourth of the population (21.59 per cent), with men accounting for 10.23 per cent and women accounting for 11.36 per cent.

Marital Status

In the earlier generation marriage is solemnised before attaining 18 years of age for both boys and girls, by the negotiation of two families but currently, the younger generation prefer to marry after 18 years of age. In the Gondhali community, 50.26 per cent of people are married, followed by 44.2 per cent who have never married, 5.02 per cent who are widowed, and 0.50 per cent who are separated.

Marital Status		Gender		Total (N=199)
		Male	Female	
Married	N	50	50	100
	%	25.13	25.13	50.26
Widowed	N	1	9	10
	%	0.50	4.52	5.02
Divorced	N	0	0	0
	%	0.00	0.00	0.00

Separated	N	0	1	1
	%	0.00	0.50	0.50
Never Married	N	49	39	88
	%	24.62	19.60	44.22
Total	N	100	99	199
	%	50.25	49.75	100.00

Table 2. Marital Status of the Gondhali Community

Social Organization of the Community

The Gondhali community is a cohesive entity. The Gondhali community does not possess a distinct aspect of territoriality. The community is predominantly concentrated in the regions of Betul, Jabalpur, and Gwalior in the state of Madhya Pradesh.

Conversely, the conventional attire style of the Gondhali populace bears resemblance to that of the Marathas, featuring a Dhoti and Kurta for males and a sari for females. During the 'gondal' or 'devi jagran', individuals adorn themselves with a garland made of cowrie shells and a traditional Marathi cap.

The customary practice of the Gondhali community is known as 'Gondal'. The ceremony is scheduled to occur at a designated time within each annual cycle. The observance commences on the first day of Navaratri and extends until the occasion of Guru Purnima. The theatrical performance known as 'Gondal' is executed exclusively by male individuals within the community. During the 'gondal' dance or 'devi jagran', members of the Gondhali community perform music using traditional instruments such as the 'sambal', a percussion instrument, and the 'chunduka', a stringed instrument. During Navaratri, devotees venerate their musical instruments as they consider them to be the means of their sustenance. On that day, individuals observe fasts. The primary deity of the community is Devi Bhawani, and they predominantly engage in the veneration and observance of 'gondal'.

Social Designation of the Community

The Gondhali community is a caste whose social rank is lower than Brahmins and Rajput's and according to them, they are higher than Dhobi, Chamar, Baniya. They get uninterrupted access to the local sources of water, places of worship, school, and other public places.

Social Grading of the Community

The Gondhali has ten clans without any social barrier, which are given below:

SI No.	Name of Clans
01	Simpikar
02	Geetekar
03	Dhukekar
04	Mudgal
05	Botolekar
06	Shinde
07	Awadkar
08	Pawar
09	Shahembkar
10	Panange

Table 3. Hierarchy of Clans in the Gondhali Community

Common Cultural Practices*Birth*

There has been a rise in institutional deliveries within the Gondhali community. In the past, it was customary to conduct home births with the assistance of a senior female member of the community. She was assigned the social designation of 'dai'. Currently, the majority of pregnant women give birth in healthcare facilities, with local Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) promoting this practice. The duration of the 'pollution' period extends up to a maximum of thirteen days.

Marriage practices

The customary practice among this group is to engage in clan exogamy and caste endogamy. It is customary for the clan of the groom and the clan of the groom's mother prior to her marriage to be distinct from the clan of the bride prior to her marriage. Although child marriage was prevalent in earlier generations, contemporary community members tend to choose to marry after reaching 18 years of age. The customary practice for marriage involves negotiation, however, instances of love marriage are not uncommon. Furthermore, remarriage is permissible for individuals who have experienced the loss of a spouse or have undergone a divorce. The practice of 'Dahej' or dowry is observed within the Gondhali community. The practice of levirate or sororate is not observed within the community. The Gondhali community predominantly adheres to the practice of monogamy.

Death

The Gondhali community of Madhya Pradesh follows Hindu system of death rituals and rites. They follow cremation of the deceased members of the family. They cremate their bodies in the same crematorium, where last rites of the other castes members of the village, also takes place. They only burry deceased infants.

Social Control

The Gondhali community in Madhya Pradesh adheres to a customary panchayat or council system. Typically, individuals who are elderly and actively engaged in community affairs are chosen to serve as “mukhiya” by their peers. In multiple locations, the ‘mukhiya’ or ‘mukhiyas’ are summoned to arbitrate in the event of any conflicts. In addition, in the event that the resolution process does not adequately address the concerns of the complainant, the matter is escalated to the local panchayat in the village for the purpose of addressing the grievance. Occasionally, individuals may choose to bring forth grievances to their nearby law enforcement precinct.

Livelihood*The Gondal Dance: A Brief Note*

Gondhal is a traditional Marathi folk dance genre characterized by its ritualistic nature, primarily enacted by a collective of male participants. This dance form is typically observed in the context of post-ceremonial rites, such as those after marriage or the advent of a new baby. The term ‘Gondhal’ can be defined as a form of theatrical storytelling that encompasses the retelling of legendary narratives, the glorification of heroic figures, and the recital of folk legends. These many forms are integral components of a ritual that is devoted to distinct deities. The heritage of Gondhal holds educational, entertaining, and significant value. The aforementioned folk art, predominantly found in Central India, particularly Maharashtra, holds significant cultural value and has formed an integral aspect of the local populace’s way of life.

Origin of Gondal

The tradition of Gondhal has its origins in the act of paying respect to the Mother Goddess by Parashuram. In a mythological account, Parashuram is said to have vanquished a demon known as ‘Betasur’, afterwards decapitating him and utilizing his arterial and venous structures to fashion a musical instrument, which he affixed to the crown of his head. He produced an auditory resonance with the aforementioned musical instrument, and proceeded towards the deity known as Goddess Renuka, engaging in acts of veneration towards her.

Rituals and Performances

The Gondhal ritual is performed in the vicinity of the Yajamana's (host's) residence, who is the designated host for the event. A wooden board positioned horizontally is adorned with a freshly laid cloth, upon which grains of rice or jowar are meticulously arranged in a symmetrical square formation. Each corner of the arrangement is embellished with a half coconut, betel nuts, dried dates, turmeric roots, a banana, and betel leaves. At the central location adjacent to the deity of the Goddess, a vessel containing water, betel or mango leaves, and intact coconuts is positioned. Flowers are utilized in the act of worshiping the Goddess. At each corner of the board, there are five stalks of jowar plants or sugar-cane sticks, with their upper halves bound together in a cluster above the pitcher. The top of the pitcher is adorned with a garland, from which dangle a series of delicate, wafer-like kadakanya, also known as sweet Puri, and karanjya, which is a coconut pie. These culinary offerings symbolize the presence of the Goddess.

The practice of Gondhal encompasses both the act of devotional singing and the dramatic rendition of specific sections of the Puranas. The vocalists are regarded as the counterparts of the Caranas, Bhatas, and Pauranikas, who were likewise known for their roles as narrators and singers of epic tales and mythological narratives. The text incorporates a narrative derived from the ancient Indian epics, either the Ramayana, Mahabharata, or the Puranas, accompanied by many additional insertions. The narrative unfolds by means of discussions, jokes, songs, dances, and prose comments, devoid of a written screenplay.

The primary Gondhali dances and songs adhere to established rules, characterized by circular and spinning movements, accompanied by the execution of mudras using the fingers. The primary Gondhali, equipped with an ignited torch, is accompanied by a group of three to six individuals who own various musical instruments such as tal or cymbals, sambal and chaundke drums, conch, and the stringed tuntune. Additionally, there is an equivalent level of interest in the delivery of other social and mythological songs.

The primary Gondhali performer adorns a substantial knee-length attire that necessitates approximately 25 meters of fabric. Additionally, they accessorize with a necklace consisting of 64 cowrie shells and 64 silk gondas, which are tassels arranged in an alternating pattern. Furthermore, they wear a kanganidar pagri, a towering turban. The individuals accompanying him are attired in customary dhotis that are commonly worn in their daily lives.

Current Means of Livelihood

Gondal (*Devi Jagran*) by playing Sambhal (a musical drum like instrument) and Chunduka (a string musical instrument) is the traditional occupation of the Gondhali community. This (*gondal*) is mainly performed by the male member(s) of the

family. Primarily they work as ‘hamali’ (daily wage labour), agricultural labour, self-employed and job (government and private sector). These are the primary means of earning for the Gondhali community.

Occupational Diversity		Gender		Total (N=136)
		Male	Female	
Self Employed	Agriculture	N	0	0
		%	0.00	0.00
	Non-Agriculture	N	10	2
		%	7.35	1.47
Daily Wage	Agriculture	N	0	7
		%	0.00	5.15
	Non-Agriculture	N	18	5
		%	13.24	3.68
Regular Wage / Salary Earning	Central Government Service Group C	N	3	0
		%	2.21	0.00
	Private Sector	N	6	2
		%	4.41	1.47
Traditional Occupation - Gondal		N	24	0
		%	17.65	0.00
Not Working		N	12	47
		%	8.82	34.56
Total		N	73	63
		%	53.68	46.32

Table 4. Occupational Diversity of the Gondhali Community (15-59 years)

Most of the community member of the Gondhali community of working age group (15-59) 17.65 per cent are engaged in their traditional occupation followed by 16.91 per cent of people working as daily wage labour (non-agriculture labour) of which 13.24 per cent are male and 3.68 per cent are female, 8.82 per cent of people are self-employed of which 7.35 per cent are male and 1.47 per cent are female, 5.15 per cent of people (only female) are working as agricultural labour. In the scenario of regular wage/salary earning, only 2.21 per cent of people (male) are employed in the government sector (Group C) and 5.88 per cent of people are employed in the private sector of which 4.41 per cent are male and 1.47 per cent are female. 43.38 per cent of people are not working of which 8.82 per cent are male and 34.56 per cent are female (Table 4). Apart from this we observed that two (02) females and ten (10) males who were 60 years of age or older were actively involved in earning a living and providing a stable source of income for their families.

Dependency on other Communities

The Gondhali community is not so much dependent on the neighbouring communities. In case of the invitation for 'gondal' dance, the inviter may be a neighbour of the village or an outsider of the village. But the inviter can't be a Muslim because the 'gondal' is purely a Hindu ritual.

Apart from that, the community purchases the skin of the goat from the market. They avoid those shopkeepers who are '*Chamar*' because, they believe that if they make the 'sambal' from the skin of a goat bought from the shop of a lower caste, it will be impure and the goddess will be angry with them. Besides, during alms seeking, they prefer the houses of their neighbour (mainly Hindu community). As the community (Gondhali) is not considered as the 'untouchable' or in the lower status of the society, they are treated and get opportunities of work as equal as other communities in the villages.

Seasonal Migration

From October to July, during the 'gondal' season, they typically migrate in groups of 3 to 4 individuals to neighbouring districts or states, primarily Maharashtra, for a duration of 10 to 15 days. The duration may be extended and locations may vary based on the requests of clients wishing to host 'gondal' at their venues. Annually or seasonally, performers of the 'gondal' dance are compelled to relocate to other locations for income generation due to this type of program. The organisers offer food and shelter for the performers. The artists transport their personal items for a duration of 10 to 15 days. In times of urgency, like as medical crises or economic difficulties, they address the issue collectively as a family. The 'gondal' dancers migrate together from their homeland. Upon concluding the scheduled show, the dancing group returns home to prepare for the subsequent event.

Gender Role

Male members are the main bread earners for their families. Most of them are engaged in their traditional occupation ('gondal'), seeking alms and daily wage labour. On the other hand, most of the female members of the Gondhali community are homemakers and some of them work as daily wage labour (agriculture and non-agriculture).

Monthly family income

Monthly family income is calculated based on the aggregate income of all working members of a family.

Monthly Family Income (in Rs/-)	Number of Household (N=41)	Percentage (%)
≤ 6174	10	24.39
6,175-18,496	21	51.22
18,497-30,830	6	14.63
30,831-46,128	3	7.32
46,129-61,662	1	2.44
61,663-123,321	0	0.00
≥123,322	0	0.00
Total	41	100.00

Table 5. Monthly Income Level of the Gondhali Community

Table 5, shows the monthly family income of the Gondhali community. 51.22 per cent of household have a monthly family income between Rs.6,175/- to Rs.18,496/-, followed by 24.39 per cent of household have a monthly family income below Rs. 6174/-, 14.63 per cent of household who have a monthly family income between Rs.18,497/- to 30,830/-, 7.32 per cent of household who have a monthly family income between Rs.30,831/- to 46,128/-, and only 2.44 per cent of household have a monthly family income between Rs.46,129/- to 61,662/-

Role of Government and Developmental Schemes

In the year 2022, there is a total of 41 household belonging to the Gondhali community in the state of Madhya Pradesh. A significant proportion of households benefit from the government's initiatives. The majority of children are enrolled in educational institutions that are either government-run or get financial assistance from the government. Children in the age group of 6-14 are entitled to receive free education at the primary and middle levels under the 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan' initiative. Additionally, they have the opportunity to profit from the provision of a 'mid-day meal'. In addition to this, students ranging from the 6th grade to those pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate studies are eligible to receive a scholarship provided by the state government.

Programmes		Beneficiaries		Total
		Yes	No	
Mukhya Mantri Annapurna Yojana/BPL (N=41)	N	34	7	41
	%	82.93	17.07	100.00
Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (N=41)	N	13	28	41
	%	31.71	68.29	100.00
National Family Benefit Scheme (N=2)	N	0	2	2
	%	0.00	100.00	100.00

Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) (N=41)	N	22	19	41
	%	53.66	46.34	100.00
Ujjwala Yojana (N=20)	N	17	3	20
	%	85	15	100.00

N-Number of total eligible household.

Table 6. Beneficiaries of Government Programmes at Household Level

Only the Mukhya Mantri Annapurna Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana have been successfully implemented, with more than three-fourths of eligible households receiving benefits. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana benefits 53.66 per cent of eligible households, while the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana benefits 31.71 per cent of eligible households. Only two households are eligible for the National Family Benefit Scheme, but they are unable to apply since they are unaware of the scheme.

Programmes		Beneficiaries		Total
		Yes	No	
Old Age Pension Scheme (N=16)	N	11	5	16
	%	68.75	31.25	100.00
Widow Pension Scheme (N=7)	N	7	0	7
	%	100.00	0.00	100.00
Disability Pension Scheme (N=6)	N	4	2	6
	%	66.67	33.33	100.00
Scholarship for Child (N=34)	N	29	5	34
	%	85.29	14.71	100.00

N-Number of total individuals.

Table 7. Beneficiaries of Government Programmes at Individual Level

Only the Widow Pension Scheme was successfully implemented, three-quarters (85.29 per cent) of qualified students got scholarships and more than 60 per cent of eligible individuals received benefits under the Old Age Pension Scheme and Disability Pension Scheme.

Based on the data shown in tables 6 and 7, it can be stated that a majority of community members have experienced positive outcomes as a result of the implementation of various governmental programs. The community is particularly interested in accessing these beneficiary programs due to their recent history of semi-nomadic lifestyles, which has been a significant factor contributing to their vulnerability and exploitation. This is the reason why in contemporary times, parents are increasingly inclined to prioritize formal education for their children once they have obtained a permanent place of abode. Governmental scholarship programs provide an opportunity for academically inclined students

from economically disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue their education. The well-informed and educated youth within the community are actively seeking employment opportunities across a range of governmental and non-governmental industries. The younger generation is progressively losing their inclination towards conventional occupations, such as agricultural employment.

Conclusion

The Gondhali community is acknowledged as a collective of itinerant individuals with origins in the Madhya Pradesh region. The community under consideration exhibits a relatively limited level of prominence within the Madhya Pradesh region. However, they have garnered acknowledgment for their traditional dance style, referred to as “gondal,” in the adjacent districts that share borders with Maharashtra.

The research was commenced after obtaining demographic data on the Madhya Pradesh community from a representative of the Gondhali community residing in Maharashtra. After careful analysis, it has been ascertained that The Gondhali species is exclusively found in the Betul and Jabalpur districts of Madhya Pradesh, with no observable occurrence in other districts that have been subject to investigation. The districts of Betul and Jabalpur in the state of Madhya Pradesh collectively encompass a population of 199 individuals, distributed among 41 households. According to the 1951 Census, the population of Madhya Pradesh was documented as 4791. The customary eco-cultural dwelling of the community is situated in the southern region of Madhya Pradesh and its adjacent territories. The individuals in question are followers of Devi Bhawani. Presently, the community predominantly engages in agricultural and construction labour, alongside the pursuit of soliciting alms. Furthermore, community members actively engage in the customary artistic practise known as “gondal,” which encompasses the performance of musical instruments like the “sambal” (a folk drum) and “chunduka” (a string instrument) during diverse cultural and religious rituals. In ancient times, nomadism was the prevailing lifestyle adopted by individuals. The primary source of sustenance for this particular group is reliant on “gondal” and engaging in wage labour at different locations, thereby requiring regular seasonal migration. The observed behaviour is incongruent with the anthropological categorization of “nomadism” as a human behavioural pattern. The Gondhali community has been officially classified as an ‘Other Backward Class’ (OBC) in the listings provided by both the state and central governments.

The Gondhali community demonstrates a sex ratio of 990 females per thousand males, which exceeds the average sex ratio of the state of Madhya Pradesh, currently recorded at 931 females per thousand males. The proportion of individuals who are married, irrespective of gender, is 50.26 per cent. In preceding eras, the institution of marriage was established before individuals reached the age of 18, for both males and females, through the mutual agreement of two families. Nevertheless, in the present era, the younger cohort exhibits a proclivity towards entering into

matrimony subsequent to attaining the age of 18.

Based on available data, it has been ascertained that a proportion of 21.59 per cent within the Gondhali community exhibits a deficiency in literacy abilities. The proportions of individuals who have attained a bachelor's degree or higher, and a secondary level of education are 14.20 per cent and 22.16 per cent, respectively. The Gondhali community demonstrates a dropout rate of approximately 25 per cent. One of the key factors that contributes to this phenomenon is the migration of individuals within the community who are seeking employment prospects. At times, the progeny of these individuals may experience a transient disruption in their educational endeavours.

The Gondhali community primarily derives their income from engaging in a diverse range of unskilled labour activities. A proportion of 20.51 per cent of individuals depended on Gondal as their principal means of livelihood. A total of 17.95 per cent of the population is involved in daily wage labour, whereas 8.33 per cent are engaged in self-employment. Presently, there are merely three individuals from the aforementioned community who are employed in Grade-C positions within the central government.

The Gondhali community can be classified as a caste group. The individuals under consideration engage in the practise of endogamy within their respective caste. In the context of Indian culture, it is customary for families to be commonly identified by a got or gotra, denoting an individual's ancestral lineage. The gotras do not demonstrate any discernible social hierarchy. The practise of endogamy, which is based on the got/gotra system, is strictly prohibited within this particular social group. Within their community, the practise of remarriage between widows and widowers is allowed. Cremation is the customary practise for disposing of the deceased. The Gondhali community is perceived to experience social and economic disadvantages within the state of Madhya Pradesh.

The research findings indicate that the Gondhali community residing in Madhya Pradesh engages in migratory practices, relocating to various destinations in order to exhibit their traditional dance performances. Presently, dance practitioners exhibit a tendency to engage in seasonal migration. The community under consideration has undergone a shift from a nomadic existence, which may have been their customary mode of living in ancient times, when their sustenance was solely dependent on their traditional 'gondal' dance. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that the Gondhali community's traditional dance form, known as the 'gondal' dance, lacks widespread recognition among the general population of Madhya Pradesh, except for the southern region. This phenomenon is among the factors that contribute to the prevalence of poverty, discrimination, and deprivation that individuals are presently encountering. Over the course of several decades, they have successfully formed clusters in multiple hamlets located in both urban and rural areas of the southern region of the state.

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