

Living Conditions of the Gond Community in Veerdandi Village of Adilabad District in Telangana

Valya Lunavath¹

¹ Assistant Professor of Economics, Government Degree College, Rangashaipet, Warangal, Telangana

Correspondence: Valya Lunavath, Assistant Professor of Economics, Government Degree College, Rangashaipet, Warangal, Telangana.

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Abstract

The Gond community, one of India's most prominent tribal groups, boasts a rich history and cultural heritage that dates back to the 9th century AD. Their vibrant art, traditional practices, and festivals were renowned, and they once ruled several prominent kingdoms in the hill Gondwana region. However, the British colonial period disrupted their traditional rule, leading to the current socioeconomic profile of Veerdandi village in Telangana's Adilabad district, revealing significant challenges. Predominantly male (80%), with a large segment in the 25-35 age group (36.7%), the village faces problems such as low literacy rates (55%), lack of education and health facilities, and heavy reliance on agriculture and labour. Modern agricultural technology is limited despite infrastructure such as roads and emergency transport. Demographic and socioeconomic conditions highlight significant challenges in health, education, and living standards. 56.7% of households don't possess sanitation facilities in their houses and 78.3% are suffering from nutritional deficiency. This underscores the urgent need for government schemes to address the multifaceted problems faced by tribal communities in Telangana. The Pearson Chi-Square value is 18.400. The p-value (.000) was statistically significant in the government support schemes and in preventing tribes' malnutrition, health issues, and poverty in the study.

Keywords: Gonds, living conditions, poverty, tribes and Telangana

1. Introduction

The Gond community, believed to have settled in India around the 9th century AD, is a testament to resilience. Their name likely originates from the Dravidian word 'konda', meaning 'hill' or 'mountain', which reflects their historical habitat in hilly regions. The Gondwana region, historically ruled by Gond kings, encompasses significant parts of central India, including notable kingdoms such as Garha-Mandla, Deogarh, Chanda, and Kherla. The Gonds are one of the largest tribal groups in India, primarily residing in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh. They are renowned for their rich cultural heritage, traditional practices, and vibrant art forms. During the British colonial period, Gond territories were annexed, disrupting their traditional governance structures. The Gonds speak Gondi, a Dravidian language, and many are bilingual. They also speak regional languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, and Odia. Their traditional religion includes the worship of deities like Farsa Pen, the god of nature, ancestors, and justice (Yagnaraman, 2023). However, many Gonds have also adopted Hindu traditions and festivals. Major festivals include Keslapur Jatra, a crucial tribal fair, and Pola, a festival dedicated to bull worship. Gond art is famous worldwide for its intricate patterns and vibrant colours. Traditionally, these artworks were created on the walls and floors of houses using natural pigments, but today, Gond artists also use canvas and paper. Music and dance are integral to Gond ceremonies and rituals, with traditional dances like Karma, Ri, and Saila accompanied by instruments such as the Dhol, Mandal, and Flute. Gond society is organised into clans (gotra) and sub-castes, characterised by solid associations and mutual support (Yagnaraman, 2023).

Historically, the Gonds were agriculturists and hunters. Today, many engage in small-scale agriculture, forest-based livelihoods, and wage labour. Despite contemporary changes, the Gonds maintain their unique identity, deeply rooted in their cultural wealth and traditional knowledge systems. These aspects significantly contribute to India's cultural diversity, showcasing the Gond community's resilience and adaptability (Merty, 2019).

2. Review of Literature

Lal and Devanna's (2016) study on the Socioeconomic development of tribals in the Adilabad district of Telangana concentrated on various studies highlighting essential aspects of their living conditions and the impact of government policies. The study revealed that the majority of the respondents were illiterate, lived in nuclear families, and owned their own houses, underscoring the crucial role of government policies in addressing these issues.

Lakshmi (2019) explained that, as highlighted in various studies, the socioeconomic development of tribal communities is often hampered by several interlinked factors. For the Gond community, these challenges include geographical and cultural isolation, lack of proper health facilities, and inadequate basic needs. Tribals often need more control over resources and assets, a crucial aspect of their empowerment, and help in education and skills critical to economic advancement.

Omkar's (2020) research highlights the importance of focused actions targeting poor populations' needs by leveraging different forms of capital. Human capital (H) includes skills, knowledge, labour capacity, and health, which are critical to different livelihood strategies. Physical capital (P) includes the necessary infrastructure and means of production, while social capital (S) relates to networks, trust-based relationships, and institutional access. Financial capital (F) includes monetary resources such as savings, credit, payments and pensions that provide livelihood options. Finally, natural capital (N) refers to stocks of natural resources such as land, water, and biodiversity needed to sustain livelihoods.

Veerababu (2014) suggested an integrated strategy for developing Scheduled Tribes, emphasising simultaneous economic and social empowerment. Recommendations include starting resource-specific industrial units with major tribal stakeholders, implementing a policy of at least one government job per family and classifying tribes based on their levels of development.

These respondents are mainly mono-crop farmers or agricultural labourers with little knowledge of modern farming practices. They have received modern agrarian inputs and financial assistance from the Integrated Tribal Development Agency. However, 87% of the respondents earn less than 1500 rupees per month, mainly spending their income on food (Lal, 2016). A few sample women take nutritious food, and the majority of the women in the study seldom use milk, curd, ghee and leafy vegetables (Lal, 2016a).

3. Objectives

- 1) To study the demographic conditions of the Gond tribal community.
- 2) To understand the occupation and income levels of Gond tribes and
- 3) To examine the living standards and poverty status of the Gond tribes.

3.1 Hypotheses

- 1) Does education lead to the economic and health development of Gond tribes?
- 2) The Gond community needs more development due to its lack of education and consciousness.

3.2 Methods

The study adopted a multistage sampling design and collected 60 samples from households of the Gond tribal community in Veerdandi village of Adilabad district, Telangana State. The data were analysed using percentage and frequency analysis methods.

3.3 The Gonds and Study Village

The Gond community is one of the prominent tribal groups in Telangana, with a significant presence in several districts. The Gonds are primarily concentrated in the northern districts of Telangana, such as Adilabad, Komaram Bheem Asifabad, and Mancherial. They live in rural and forest areas, with many settlements in remote regions. The main occupation of the Gond people in Veerdandi village is significantly centred around agricultural activities. 50% are mainly engaged in agriculture. 8.3% of the society is engaged in tenant farming. These people work on land others own, paying rent or sharing part of their produce as compensation. Only 3.3% work as agricultural labourers, representing a small group without land and working in other fields for wages. 10% are engaged in non-agricultural self-employment, while 28.3% work as daily labourers. This category refers to people who do not have a fixed or stable career and work on various jobs that they can find daily. Literacy in

the Gond community is moderate, with 55% literate. However, 45% still need to be made literate; educational facilities are available in the village, there is no primary health centre, and 72% own livestock, an essential asset for agricultural and economic purposes. Livestock ownership is vital to the rural economy, providing milk, meat, and labour for farming activities. Adoption of modern agricultural technology is shallow, with only 28.3% using tractors and harvesting machines and 6.7% using tractors. The vast majority, 65%, rely on traditional farming methods and use something other than modern technology in cultivation. Despite not having healthcare facilities, they reported having access to an ambulance or a car when needed. This indicates that transportation is available for medical emergencies or other urgent needs, which is critical to community well-being.

4. Results and Discussion

The study analysed core parameters of demographic variables, occupation, facilities available in the study area, health particulars, education particulars and living standard of sample respondents.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Sample Respondents

Variable	Indicators	Total	Percentage
Sex	Male	48	80
	Female	12	20
	Total	60	100
Age Group	25-35 Years	22	36.7
	36-45 Years	18	30
	46-55 Years	13	21.7
	56-65 Years	6	10.0
	Above 65 Years	1	1.7
	Total	60	100.0
Marital Status	Married	43	71.7
	Unmarried	17	28.3
	Total	60	100.0
Type of Family	Nuclear	10	16.7
	Joint	50	83.3
	Total	60	100.0
Size Of Family	Below-3	7	11.7
	4-6 Members	47	78.3
	Above -6	6	10.0
	Total	60	100.0
Language Spoken	Telugu and Mother Tongue	45	75.0
	Mother tongue	15	25.0
	Total	60	100.0

Source: Field study.

Table 1 presents demographic information for Veerdandi village in Adilabad district in Telangana, of 60 sample respondents, showing a higher percentage of males (80%) compared to females (20%). The largest age group is 25-35 (36.7%), and most are married (71.7%). Most people live in joint families (83.3%), with the most common family size being 4-6 members (78.3%). Additionally, most speak Telugu and their mother tongue (75%).

One-third of the sample women wear modern dresses, which indicates the transition of the tribal communities to modernity (Lal, 2016a).

Table 2. Occupation Particulars and Facilities of Sample Respondents

Variable	Indicators	Total	Percentage
Are you Literate	Yes	33	55.0
	No	27	45.0
	Total	60	100.0
What is your main occupation	Farmer	30	50.0
	Tenant Cultivation	5	8.3
	Agricultural Labour	2	3.3
	Non-farm self-employed	6	10.0
	Daily Labour	17	28.3
	Total	60	100.0
What is your secondary occupation	Business	3	5.0
	Employment	1	1.7
	Not Applicable	56	93.3
	Total	60	100.0
Do you have educational facilities	Yes	0	0.0
	No	60	100.0
	Total	60	100.0
Do you have a PHC	Yes	0	0.0
	No	60	100.0
	Total	60	100.0
Do you have a road facility?	Yes	60	100.0
	No	0	0.0
	Total	60	100.0
Do you have a streetlight?	Yes	60	100.0
	No	0	0.0
	Total	60	100.0
Do you have Livestock?	Yes	43	72
	No	17	28
	Total	60	100.0
Do you use modern technology in cultivation	Tractor and Harvesting Machine	17	28.3
	Tractor	4	6.7
	No	39	65.0
	Total	60	100.0
Do you have access to the Ambulance or Car when you need it	Yes	60	100.0
	No	0	0.0
	Total	60	100.0

Source: Field study.

Table 2 presents data on the occupation and amenities of the 60 respondents. Among them, the literacy rate is 55%, 33 are literate, and 27 are illiterate. Half of the respondents (50%) were farmers, while the rest were tenant

farmers (8.3%), agricultural labourers (3.3%), non-agricultural self-employed (10%), and daily labourers (28.3%). Secondary occupations were rare, with 93.3% reporting none. All the respondents lack educational facilities and a primary health centre (PHC). However, 100% of road facilities, street lights, and emergency transport (ambulance/car) are available. Livestock ownership is common (72%), but the use of modern agricultural technology is limited, with 65% using none.

Table 3. Income Particulars and Facilities of Sample Respondents

Variable	Indicators	Total	Percentage
How many members of your households	Yes	1	1.7
	No	59	98.3
	Total	60	100.0
What is the primary source of income for your household	Daily Labour	34	56.7
	Agri Labour	17	28.3
	Non-farm Employment	1	1.7
	Allied Agri Activity	8	13.3
	Total	60	100.0
What is the income of your household Per Year	41000-60000	1	1.7
	61000-80000	4	6.7
	81000-100000	15	25.0
	Above-100000	40	66.7
	Total	60	100.0
Annual Expenditure of the Households	Below 75000	3	5.0
	75000-100000	34	56.7
	100001-150000	5	8.3
	Above-150000	18	30.0
	Total	60	100.0

Source: Field study.

Table 3 provides detailed information about the income details and amenities of the 60 sample respondents. The table is divided into four sections, each representing a different household income and expenditure aspect. Only one respondent (1.7%) employed family members, while 59 respondents (98.3%) had no employed members. Daily labourers (56.7%), agricultural labourers (28.3%), non-agricultural employment (1.7%), and allied agricultural activities (13.3%) are the primary sources of income. 1.7% earn between Rs.41,000-₹60,000, 6.7% earn between ₹61,000-₹. Annual household income varied with 25% earning between ₹80,000, 25% between ₹81,000-₹100,000, and 66.7% earning above ₹100,000. Household expenditure also varies, with 5% spending less than ₹75,000, 56.7% spending ₹75,000-₹100,000, 8.3% spending ₹100,001-₹150,000, and 30% spending more than ₹150,000. These data highlight the respondents' economic conditions, which indicate dependence on labour-based income and a significant proportion of households earning and spending substantial amounts annually. The study analysed the data on the respondents' working days per year. About 25% of the people work for 100 days in a year out of 365 days. 49% of the people can work for 100 to 200 days a year, and about 26% are working for 200 to 300 days for their livelihood. These are mostly unorganised, so they may not get work for the entire days in a year (Lal, 2010).

Table 4. Poverty Relates Information of Sample Respondents

Variable	Indicators	Total	Percentage
Is there any person	Yes	47	78.3

undernourished	No	13	21.7
	Total	60	100.0
Did any child under 18 have died in the household	Yes	5	8.3
	No	55	91.7
	Total	60	100.0
Years of schooling	Yes	10	16.7
	No	50	83.3
	Total	60	100.0
School Attendance	Yes	2	3.3
	No	58	96.7
	Total	60	100.0
Cooking Fuel	Gas, Agricultural Crops and Wood	56	93.3
	Wood	4	6.7
	Total	60	100.0
Sanitation Facility	Yes	26	43.3
	No	34	56.7
	Total	60	100.0
Drinking Water is Safe	Yes	50	83.3
	No	10	16.7
	Total	60	100.0
Electricity Connection	Yes	60	100.0
	No	0	0.0
	Total	60	100.0
Housing	Mud Floor, Shell Roof and Mud Walls	2	3.3
	Floor and Roof	32	53.3
	Floor and Walls	26	43.3
	Total	60	100.0
Assets	Mobile Phone, Television, Motorbike	25	41.7
	Mobile Phone and Television	21	35.0
	Mobile Phone and Motorbike	1	1.7
	Mobile Phone	13	21.7
	Total	60	100.0

Source: Field study.

Table 4 shows the Multidimensional poverty level of the people of Veedhanddi village. The multidimensional poverty index mainly consists of three components: health, education, and standard of living.

Health: Health has two aspects: one is malnutrition, and the second is the number of deaths of children under the age of 18 in a family. A survey was conducted in Veerdandi village, and the number of people suffering from nutritional deficiency was 78.3%, while 21.7% responded that there was no nutritional deficiency. Similarly, health indicators are the second aspect. The percentage of deaths among children under 18 years was 8.3%. Sanitation is vital for human health; it controls nearly 10 million child deaths globally annually. Sanitation and hygienic interventions are a must to reduce child mortality. 56.7% of households don't possess sanitation facilities in their houses. Access to safe toilets alone can reduce child diarrhoeal deaths by over 30 per cent and

control pneumonia mortality (Lal, 2020). Burdened daily by water collection and finding a place to go, women and girls spend large amounts of time carrying heavy vessels and walking long distances. The physical strain of these activities impacts their health and, if pregnant, the health of their unborn children (Lal, 2019).

Education: 16.7% of the household's children aged ten years have yet to complete at least six years; similarly, any school-aged child is not attending school up to the age at which he would complete 8th class is 3.3%.

Living Standard: There are six indexes in the living standard. 93.3% of people use gas, crops and wood, and 6.7% of people said that they use crops and wood. Safe drinking water is available to all, and electrical collection is also available. As far as housing is concerned, only 3.3% of people have proper houses, and the remaining 96.6% of people do not have proper houses, so there is a great need to increase the housing facilities of Gond people. About 41.7% of the people in this village said they have a mobile phone, television and motorbike; 35% of those have a mobile phone and a television, and 21.7% have only a mobile phone. However, the Gond people's cooking activities are kept separate even though they live in the same household. Although primary education is available in this village, there are no proper facilities in school, and high school education is not available; they go to other neighbouring villages for high school study, and a primary health centre is not available in this village. The study emphasises the significant relationship between government policies and the living standards of tribals, suggesting that policy interventions can effectively improve their socioeconomic status (Lal, 2016).

Chi-Square Analysis

The Pearson Chi-Square value is 18.400. The p-value (.000) was statistically significant in the government Support Scheme and Preventing tribes' malnutrition, health issues, and poverty in the study.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

To improve the overall quality of life in the village, establishing a high school, enhancing facilities in the primary school, and implementing adult literacy programs will significantly boost literacy rates. Setting up a Primary Health Center (PHC) will address healthcare needs and improve health outcomes. Introducing modern agricultural techniques and training can increase productivity and reduce dependence on labour-intensive methods. Promoting secondary occupations and self-employment through skill development programs can mitigate economic vulnerability. Enhancing transport and communication infrastructure will facilitate better market access and economic activity. Increasing women's education and workforce participation will contribute to balanced and sustainable development. Financial literacy and savings programs will help families manage their income and expenses more effectively. Community-based programs to address social issues can foster a cohesive and supportive environment. Better implementation and awareness of government agriculture, health, and education schemes will provide additional support. Regularly monitoring and evaluating development programs will ensure their effectiveness and adaptability to changing needs. Implementing comprehensive nutrition programs will address malnutrition and improve child health. Housing projects should be developed to enhance living conditions, and support for vocational training and the purchase of mobile phones, televisions, and motorbikes will improve living standards and economic opportunities.

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