



ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION AMONG EDIGA COMMUNITY (A Study in Rayalaseema Region of Andhra Pradesh)

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Introduction

Wealth is an important constituent of the community life and plays a deciding role in the formation of the cultural and social structure of any society (Mohan Rao, K., 1993; 14-15.)¹. Economics may be briefly described as the study of those broad aspects of human activity concerned with the utilization of resources and the organization whereby they are brought into relation with human wants. It has sometimes been thought that the simple societies have no economic organization worth of the name (Sherring, M.A., 1975; 130)². But the study of any society, however simple, will show that the resources of a people are handled in a systematic way with regard to means and ends. And this economic organization is fundamental to their life, being linked with their social structure, their-system of government, their technology, their ritual institutions (Notes and Queries on Anthropology, 1967;158)³.

The present paper gives a detailed account of the economic life of the Ediga community in Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh. The study has been carried out in the Rayalaseema region which consists of four districts named Anantapur, Chittoor, Kurnool and Kadapa and it covered 330 Ediga households. The paper also describes the possible changes that have taken place in their economic activities.

A Brief History of Edigas

Ediga is one of the socially and economically backward castes in Andhra Pradesh and the Government has included it in the list of backward castes for further development. The Edigas are mainly distributed in Andhra Pradesh, in Ganjam district of Orissa, in Selo), North Arcot and Chengalput districts of Tamilnadu and in almost all districts of Karnataka. The Telugu toddy-drawers whose hereditary occupation is the extraction of juice of the date and palmyra palms, go by different names in different localities (Thurston, 075: 366)⁴. In Rayalaseema districts of Andhra Pradesh such as Kurnool, Kadapa, Anantapur and Chittoor they are known as Ediga; in Coastal districts of Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam and Nacre they are called as Gamallas or Goundlas; in East and West Godavari districts they are known as Settibalijas or Goundlas; in Visakhapatnam they are designated as Yatas; and in Srikakulam district they are known as Yatas and Segidilu.

For the Edigas Agriculture, Toddy-tapping, Government/private services etc., form the primary occupations. Majority of the families are involved in agriculture. According to seasons and on demand the people change their works. These occupations are discussed in the succeeding paras under the broad areas viz., agricultural economy and non-agricultural economy.

I. Agricultural Economy

The agricultural and rural development essentially depends upon a system of related functions. The utility of agricultural innovations depends very much upon the large-scale addition of these innovations by the fillers of the soil. Owing to the failure of the monsoons for the last five years the Edigas are



supposed to utilize the water resources with the help of modern agricultural technology in the farming. Although the farmers are becoming more and more aware of modern agricultural technology, the degree of adoption of the innovations varies from farmer to farmer. Keeping this in view, the researcher made an attempt to find out agro-economic characteristics of the Edigas adoption of agricultural.

Agriculture is the technology of farming with the help of a plough and cattle. The use of plough distinguishes agriculture from horticulture. Usually agriculture is a more intensive form of cultivation than that of horticulture. Fields are permanent and kept fertile using farm manure, grains, rather than root crops are likely to be planted. Man does the ploughing and usually assisted by the members of his family in planting and harvesting. Agriculture forms the major occupation of most of the Ediga households. There are no good irrigation facilities like river, canal, etc. near the villages. Mainly wells cater to the needs of the irrigation, that too under deplorable condition. The dry lands are mainly irrigated by rains. Their agricultural lands are close to the settlements.

The land immediately around the settlement is very fertile. This portion of the land is suitable for the cultivation of irrigation crops. The red variety of soil, which is found in limited quantity, is the next best and fertile land in the villages under study. The rest of the land is fallow and covered with toddy trees. A few varieties of dry crops are also cultivated in these soils.

Agricultural activity is mostly conducted with the help of water from the wells. In summer season the water level in these wells goes down. Most of the wells used for irrigation are fitted with electricity, driven motor pump-sets. For dry land cultivation is done using rain water. Accordingly crops are cultivated only during rainy season.

Agricultural Implements

The agricultural implements used by the Edigas are similar to those used in other rural areas of this region. Both conventional and modern implements are being used by the Edigas. A few families often hire a tractor from the neighboring villages for tilling the soil. The common implements used by the Edigas are plough (nagali), iron plough, lever, knife (katti), spade (pars), crow-bar (gaddapara), sickle (Kodavali), bullock-cart (eddulabandi), yoke (kadimanu) and a small hoe (tollike). They also use a leveller (manu or dandimanu).

Among the Edigas agriculture is the primary occupation for 105 (31.8%) households out of 330 households. This followed by 95 (28.7%) households, 58(17.5%) households, 50 (15%) households, 12 (3.6%) households and 10 (3%) households depend mainly on toddy-tapping, Government/Private services, labour, tailoring and business respectively. Though the land owning households are plenty in number, but households having a small area of wet land and dry land have resorted to occupations stated above, other than agriculture. For such families agriculture becomes a subsidiary or secondary occupation.

There is a clear distinction between dry and wet lands. Compared to dry land, wet land is less in area, According to village revenue officials the amount of tax collected varies according to the crop that is grown on the land. Gradually, due to decentralization the Edigas are purchasing agricultural lands from the caste neighbors and start cultivation with a humble beginning.

Cattle Rearing: Animal husbandry is the practice of breeding and raising domesticated animals. Such animals require constant attention. Animals may be used beast of burden for ploughing, lifting, water



transportation. They are also rearing animals and often used for meat. Animal husbandry, as an occupation is not well developed among the Edigas. But a few families keep cattle, goats and hens.

II. Non-Agricultural Economy

Under non-agricultural economy, the toddy-tapping, services in government or private organization, wage labour, tailoring and business can be discussed.

Toddy-Tapping: The traditional occupation of the Edigas is toddy tapping (F.R. Heirningway, 1915; 57)⁵. In the past, the entire community earned its livelihood by tapping toddy. They took pride in their profession and also considered it as second to none. Under study area, a few years ago, nearly 180 Ediga households were earning their livelihood by toddy tapping. Now it has been reduced to 95 households. This shift in the occupation is attributed to many reasons including the introduction of modern education and the employment opportunities it brings, lack of demand for toddy, occupational hazards and so on. However, in these villages, as many as 95 (28.7%) out of 330 families accept toddy-tapping as their primary occupation.

The wages paid for toddy-tapping vary according to the distance from the places of normal residence and work, age and experience of the person and so on. Generally the contractors who hire them pay Rs.500 to 700/- per day, if the work is nearer to their village. If they are taken to far-off places, their payment ranges from Rs.700/- to Rs.1000/- per day for a skilled worker. They are also employed on daily payment basis to attend to job of shorter duration.

All over Rayalaseema region, in and around villages there are plenty of coconut, toddy and date palms. This abundant presence of the palm trees provides full employment to the Edigas throughout the year. Generally, the job of a toddy topper is to collect the palm juice from all the trees and deliver it to the toddy contractors. They store the toddy in barrels and transport to their places for sale. The normal price of toddy at the consumer level is Rs. 50 to 65 per litre.

A few toddy tappers are also employed by contractors to go far off places into adjacent states like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, to draw the toddy. Demand for toddy depends upon the season. More toddy is sold during the summer months. To get regular supply of toddy, the drawer adopts a technique of tapping the trees on alternative days. The gap is necessary to help the tree to accumulate adequate sap for the next taping. Another important useful palm tree is toddy (Palmyra) tree. The same method adopted in the case of coconut tree is employed here also to tap the juice.

Government and Private services: Now-a-days the Edigas are found employed in Government and Private establishments. It is found that 58 (17.5%) out of 330 households derive their total income by working in various organizations like Road Transport Corporation, Electricity Board, Schools, Revenue Offices and Private Lorry Transports as conductors, Drivers, Cleaners, Clerks, teachers etc.

Labour: The Edigas who own little land and do not have the skill to tap toddy and fail to get employment in offices, go for wage labour. For this they go both within the village and outside also. Under study area, 50(15.15%) out of 330 the households have daily wages as their source of income. Their daily income ranges from Rs.300/- to Rs.500/- and depends upon the nature of work. An agricultural labourer is also provided with a mid-day meal in addition to his wages. During lean months such as October to December agricultural labourers do not get adequate work and so it becomes difficult to make a decent living.



Tailoring: Out of 330 households, 12 (3.6%) follow tailoring as their source of income. The tailors only stitch clothes and do not sell ready-made garments or raw materials. They accept their tailoring charges both in cash and kind, but mostly customers pay in cash. During the festival and wedding seasons, they get more work and income. The Edigas who want to have a new dress, purchase the required cloth material from the neighbouring towns like Chittoor, Yadamari, Rajampet, Kodur and Nandyal and pass it on to their tailors for making the required dresses, The, tailors too get their stitching materials such as thread, needles from the towns referred above.

Business: 10 (3%) households are found running business establishments in the villages. They sell and buy household provisions needed by the villagers. Their business also includes seasonal purchase and selling of the agricultural products like paddy, jaggery, groundnut and chillies. A few business men have sub-contract from the contractors, for the retail selling of the toddy in the village. It is a profitable business according to them,

III. Secondary Occupations

Generally, it is common for a family to have any number of secondary occupations when their primary occupation fails to provide them with sufficient income to make a comfortable living.

Occupational Mobility: As long as the traditional order ruled, the old occupational system worked well. Over the years changes came into the economic life of the Edigas in the form of new avenue for employment, education and so on. This new occupational mobility has weakened the old system. Urban contacts, modern education and attraction of the cash payments have brought significant impact on the younger generations. They refuse to take up their traditional occupation with a family to which they were attached. Most of the Ediga people prefer government employment in towns like Chittoor, Madanapalle, Tirupati, Anantapur and Kadapa etc., of the region. This occupational shift has brought a chain of changes. Now the young people have to shift their residence to their places of work, live away from caste and community members and “home” culture. Over the years, due to the campaign on prohibition and social and moral consciousness, the Ediga youth have developed an aversion towards their primary occupation. This has led to change of their occupation.

Previously, the Ediga people followed their traditional occupation i.e. toddy-tapping to the extent of 180 households in the study settlements, whereas it has now come down to 95 (28.7%) out of 330 household. Thus, it is noticed that sizeable number of families (85 households) changing their occupations. The shift is towards agriculture, labour and employment in government and other agencies. Two more avenues open are, tailoring and business, which too are followed by other caste members. Tailoring is a secondary profession with substantial income. Business including toddy selling is a profitable business.

The Edigas get money needed for their day-to-day use from friends, caste people and kinsmen on interest rate. When they want larger sum, borrow the same from money lenders in the villages and nearby towns on a very high rate of interest which ranges from two to three rupees per one hundred per month. The latter are the commission agents in the towns. Often groundnut seeds for sowing are taken from the rich landlords from neighbouring villages on the condition that they will repay them after harvest.

It is noticed that the state and central governments have not brought any effective programmes to save the Ediga people of this region from the clutches of money lenders and land-lords. Often the Edigas



complain that the loans sanctioned by the nationalized banks are not sufficient to meet their needs. So they are forced to take loans from money lender to meet their expenditures.

Conclusion

Sedentarization is the basic indispensable factor for any community to further its conditions of life of all the changes occurred after Sedentarization. This is mainly due to the acquisition of land or cattle or both besides services. By dint of rigorous efforts, the peasant Edigas have learnt agriculture. Those who failed to adapt themselves to settled way of life and cultivation have disposed of their land or cattle.

Majority families of parental and grand parental generations have been found to depend on supplementary occupations like weaving, fire-wood and toddy-tapping etc., apart from farming, in spite of lack of experience in such activities, agriculture as the main or secondary occupation besides services in Government or private agencies, has certainly improved the economic life of the Edigas. The Edigas have also altered their working pattern because of taking up agriculture to suit the changed situation. Another important change that has occurred is that the economy of the Edigas is integrated with the regional economy, mainly due to the production of commercial crops like sugar cane and groundnut, food crops like paddy and jowar, and vegetables like brinjal, beans, tomato etc., not only for domestic consumption but also for marketing. The economic changes and economic improvement or development among the Edigas has further led to some changes in their social organizations and a few changes can be attributed to sedentarization, while others are due to economic change and development, acculturation, and status evaluation

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