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Socio-Economic Challenges, Migration Dynamics, and Livelihood Adaptation in the Gollakurma Community

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ABSTRACT

The Gollakurma community in Telangana, particularly in the Palamuru region, represents a traditional pastoral society navigating the pressures of modernization, resource scarcity, and migration. Known for their historical association with sheep herding and pastoralism, the community faces significant socio-economic and cultural challenges that impact their livelihoods and identity. This study aims to explore the socio-economic conditions, cultural practices, and migration patterns of the Gollakurma community to provide a comprehensive understanding of their experiences amidst these changes. Adopting an Exploratory-cum-Descriptive research design, the study integrates qualitative and quantitative methods, with data collected from 580 households. Statistical analysis, including SPSS, was employed to interpret socio-economic trends, caste dynamics, and migration behaviours. The findings reveal that 69.7% of families engage in sheep migration due to limited grazing resources, which emerged as the predominant driver of movement. The Kurma community exhibits higher mobility, including inter-state migration, while the Golla community predominantly engages in intra-district migration. Economic data indicates a middle-income community with notable disparities, as well as varied expenditure and migration patterns influenced by caste and resource accessibility. Challenges such as livestock health, lack of shelters, and social pressures further compound their struggles. While migration serves as an adaptive response, resource scarcity, cultural obligations, and socio-economic pressures are deeply intertwined. This study underscores the importance of resource management, supportive policies, and cultural preservation in enabling the Gollakurma community to adapt effectively while maintaining their heritage amidst modernization. The research highlights their resilience and provides insights into marginalized communities navigating socio-economic transformation.

Keywords: Gollakurma Community; Sheep Migration; Socio-Economic Challenges; Cultural Heritage; Resource Scarcity; Livelihood Adaptation

1. INTRODUCTION

The Gollakurumas are a significant and culturally rich community in Telangana, particularly in the Mahabubnagar district, historically known as the Palamuru region. Situated on the Deccan Plateau, this region provides an ideal setting for exploring the community's sociological and cultural dimensions. With its historical and cultural legacy, Mahabubnagar has also been a focal point of political and social movements, symbolizing resilience and progress (Duthie-Kannikkatt et al., 2019).

Historically, the Gollakurumas have practiced pastoralism and sheep herding, forming the backbone of their economy and way of life(Shanaz et al., 2022). This tradition has shaped their social structures and cultural identity, making them indispensable to the regional economy and cultural landscape (Zukin, 2008). Their skills in livestock rearing and traditional knowledge have not only supported their community but also bolstered local trade.

However, the community today faces profound changes. Modernization, urbanization, and migration are eroding traditional practices and threatening their cultural identity (Zerbe, 2022). These pressures manifest as shifts in livelihoods, a decline in age-old customs, and the marginalization of their language and heritage. Such transformations raise important concerns about the sustainability of their identity and social cohesion.

This study aims to document and analyse these ongoing changes within the Gollakuruma community with socio economic and migration. It explores their cultural practices, social structures, and the challenges they face in a rapidly modernizing society and migration, while also contributing to broader discussions on marginalized communities and their resilience.

Sociologically, the Gollakurumas can be understood as both a community and a caste within the regional hierarchy. As defined by Robert MacIver, a community is a "social unity whose members recognize as common a sufficiency of interests to allow for the inter-activities of common life" (MacIver & Page, 1961) This idea aptly applies to the Gollakurumas, who, despite being geographically dispersed, maintain a cohesive cultural identity rooted in shared traditions.

1.1. Territorial Identity and Socio-Economic Pressures of the Gollakuruma Community

The concept of territoriality is central to understanding the Gollakuruma community. The Chicago School of Sociology highlight that a community is inherently tied to its geographical location (Arum, 2000), stating that "the community must have a geographical location and be comprised of residents within the territory of the community" (Yamamoto, 1926). The Gollakurumas' settlements, though dispersed across the Mahabubnagar district, reflect this strong territorial identity, with each settlement associated with a specific area regarded as their own.

While traditionally reliant on pastoralism, the Gollakurumas now face growing socio-economic pressures. Urbanization and industrialization in Telangana have led to the loss of grazing lands, which were once central to their livelihoods (Station et al., 2017). Climate change and erratic rainfall further threaten livestock-based livelihoods, forcing many families to seek alternative income sources (Ahmad et al., 2022).

Migration has emerged as a significant response to these challenges. Younger generations are particularly drawn to education and urban job opportunities, seeking improved economic prospects and living standards (Grant & Ursula, 2012). Migration also offers a way to overcome caste-based marginalization, enabling greater social mobility within urban centres (Dutta & Chattopadhyay, 2024). However, this shift often comes at the cost of detachment from their territorial and cultural roots.

Despite these changes, the Gollakurumas retain a strong sense of identity linked to their settlements, which symbolize their historical and cultural legacy(Babu, 2014). Balancing tradition with the demands of modernity, their story reflects the resilience and adaptability of marginalized communities navigating socio-economic transformations in contemporary India(Sarkar, 2022).

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the cultural practices, social structures, and socio-economic dynamics of the Gollakuruma community in Telangana. Particular attention is given to identifying the factors that drive migration within the community and understanding the transformations these migrations bring to their identity and livelihoods. The study aims to explore the traditional territorial identity and pastoral lifestyle of the Gollakurumas, examining their socio-economic significance within the regional context. It seeks to investigate the impact of modernization, urbanization, and environmental changes on their livelihoods and cultural practices, while also understanding the role of migration in shaping their social and economic mobility. Additionally, the study endeavours to highlight the challenges and opportunities faced by the community as they adapt to contemporary societal pressures, proposing strategies for preserving their rich cultural heritage alongside fostering resilience and adaptability in a rapidly changing world.

3. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The importance of this study lies in its potential to preserve and document the Gollakurumas' traditional practices, territorial connections, and social structures, which are under threat due to modernization and migration pressures. By exploring the lived experiences of this marginalized community, the research provides crucial insights into their resilience and struggles in navigating socio-economic challenges, offering valuable guidance for policymakers and social researchers. Additionally, the study has significant policy implications, as its findings can inform initiatives that promote sustainable livelihoods, equitable resource access, and cultural preservation for the Gollakuruma community. Beyond its immediate scope, the research addresses broader themes of migration, urbanization, and socio-economic transformation of traditional societies, which are particularly relevant in the context of India’s rapid development. By bridging sociological theory with the realities of community life, this study also contributes to the academic discourse on identity, change, and the delicate balance between tradition and modernity, making it a vital reference for understanding the complexities of marginalized communities in today’s evolving world.

4. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study employs an Exploratory-cum-Descriptive research design to address specific research questions and hypotheses, focusing on the social and cultural life of the Gollakuruma community. A mixed-method approach is used, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a holistic analysis. Qualitative methods capture the community's lived experiences, traditions, and social structures, while quantitative techniques systematically examine socio-economic trends and demographic patterns. Data collected was further analysed using SPSS software to ensure statistical rigor and meaningful interpretation.

The research was conducted in the erstwhile Mahabubnagar district of Telangana, historically known as "Palamoor," a region strongly associated with the Gollakuruma community's pastoral practices and milk trade. The study explored socio-economic phenomena such as "Palamuru Valasalu," or large-scale migration, driven by the need for grazing grounds. Cultural heritage, including folklore like "Katamaraju Katha" and unique festivals dedicated to Mallanna and Birappa, was also examined.

A total of 580 households formed the sample size, encompassing community members, local officials, and administrators. The analysis highlighted pastoralism, agricultural participation, and socio-economic challenges like limited education access, child marriage, and indebtedness, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive ethnographic research on this community.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Age Distribution of Respondents

The age profile of respondents in the study reflects a diverse representation across various life stages. The majority belong to the 31–40 years age group, comprising 37.2% of the sample, highlighting a significant presence of individuals in their early to mid-career stages. The 41–50 years age category accounts for 24.5%, contributing insights shaped by substantial life and work experience. Older respondents aged 51 and above constitute 23.6%, offering perspectives from a longer span of personal and professional experiences. The youngest cohort, aged 21–30 years, represents 14.7%, providing views from those in early adulthood. This age diversity enriches the study by incorporating perspectives from different stages of life.

5.2. Caste and Social Status

The study highlights distinct social dynamics within the Golla and Kurma communities. All 290 Golla respondents belong to the Backward Classes (BC), indicating homogeneity in caste identity. Kurma respondents exhibit varied social statuses, with 241 categorized as BC, 11 as Scheduled Castes (SC), and 38 under "Not Identified." Overall, the majority of respondents (90%) are BC, while SC and "Not Identified" account for 1.9% and 6.6%, respectively, underscoring the complexities within caste classifications.

5.3. Linguistic Proficiency

A significant linguistic divide exists between the Golla and Kurma communities. While 46.9% of respondents are Kannada-speaking, this proficiency is concentrated among Kurma members (264 individuals), compared to only 8 Golla respondents. In contrast, 97.2% of Golla respondents are monolingual in Telugu, emphasizing

linguistic homogeneity, whereas Kurma respondents exhibit bilingual tendencies with only 8.9% being monolingual. These linguistic dynamics reflect deeper cultural and historical influences.

5.4. Birthplace Analysis

The majority of respondents (87.93%) hail from rural areas, emphasizing the community's deep connection to rural lifestyles and traditions. Among Kurma respondents, all were born in rural areas, while Golla respondents display a mix, with 220 born in rural regions and 70 in semi-urban areas. This geographical variation suggests greater mobility and semi-urban influence within the Golla community.

5.5. Economic Distribution and Caste Dynamics

Among the 580 respondents, a majority (75.0%) earn an annual income between ₹1,00,000 and ₹2,00,000, reflecting a predominantly middle-income community reliant on moderate economic opportunities. A smaller segment (12.6%) earns ₹2,00,001 and above, indicating financial stability and access to better resources for this higher-income group. Conversely, 12.5% fall into lower-income brackets, with 9.7% earning ₹51,000 to ₹99,000 and 2.8% earning ₹10,000 to ₹50,000, highlighting economic challenges faced by some members.

A detailed caste-wise analysis reveals disparities. Within the lowest income category (₹10,000–₹50,000), the Kurma community dominates, with 11 individuals compared to 5 from the Golla community. Similarly, in the ₹51,000–₹99,000 range, 54 Kurma respondents are represented, compared to just 2 Golla respondents. In the middle-income group (₹1,00,000–₹2,00,000), 259 Golla and 176 Kurma respondents participate, indicating the Golla community's stronger representation in this bracket. The highest income group (₹2,00,001 and above) includes 24 Golla and 49 Kurma respondents, highlighting greater income variation within the Kurma community.

A chi-square analysis confirms a statistically significant association ($p < 0.05$) between caste status and annual income distribution, illustrating caste's influence on economic diversity. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing the economic disparities within and between the Golla and Kurma communities.

5.6. Economic Diversity and Expenditure Patterns

The analysis of monthly expenditure among the Gollakurma community highlights significant economic diversity. Of the 580 respondents, 45.9% spend ₹5,001 to ₹10,000 monthly, reflecting moderate income allocation for essentials and limited discretionary spending. Another 35.2% report expenditures of ₹10,001 to ₹15,000, indicating higher spending capacities driven by financial stability or responsibilities. A smaller group, 10.2%, spends ₹15,001 to ₹20,000, likely reflecting better economic standing or larger family needs. At the spectrum's lower end, 5.2% of respondents, primarily from the Kurma community, spend ₹5,000 or less, signifying financial constraints. On the higher end, 3.6% of respondents, exclusively Kurma members, spend over ₹20,001 monthly, suggesting substantial financial comfort and discretionary spending.

Caste-wise, Kurma respondents show more variation, with a significant presence in both lower and higher expenditure brackets. In contrast, Golla respondents are concentrated in the middle ranges, reflecting relatively stable spending patterns. A chi-square analysis confirms a statistically significant association ($p < 0.05$)

between caste status and expenditure levels, indicating that caste influences financial behaviour. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to address the diverse financial challenges and dynamics within the Gollakurma community.

5.7. Family Engagement in Sheep Migration

The study reveals that 69.7% (404 families) of respondents engage in sheep migration, making it a central livelihood strategy for the Gollakurma community. Among Golla respondents, 61.0% (177 families) participate in sheep migration, reflecting its significance in their traditional lifestyle and income generation. Conversely, Kurma respondents demonstrate even higher involvement, with 78.3% (227 families) engaging in sheep migration. This disparity highlights the deeper reliance of the Kurma community on this practice for economic sustenance.

5.8. Migration Patterns and Duration

Migration patterns vary considerably across the Gollakurma community. Intra-district migration tends to be short-term, with most respondents spending less than a month migrating for temporary or seasonal work (Sucharita, 2020). Inter-district migration displays longer-term trends, with 223 respondents spending six to twelve months and 125 spending three to six months pursuing stable economic opportunities. Migration to other states shows diverse durations, ranging from short-term (less than one month) to long-term (six to twelve months), reflecting varied motivations such as employment or education. Notably, 121 respondents reported no migration, indicating reliance on local opportunities.

5.9. Caste and Migration Behaviour

Caste dynamics influence migration patterns significantly. Among Golla respondents, intra-district migration is more common, with 46 individuals participating compared to 14 Kurma respondents. Inter-district migration is balanced across communities, with 171 Golla and 183 Kurma respondents engaged. Inter-state migration is rare for Golla respondents (2 individuals) but more prevalent among Kurma respondents (43 individuals), underscoring the Kurma community's greater mobility and willingness to explore distant opportunities.

5.10. Motivations Behind Migration in the Gollakurma Community

The analysis of migration motivations among the Gollakurma community reveals diverse factors driving their movement. The predominant reason, cited by 41.9% (243 individuals), is the lack of grazing resources, highlighting the critical dependence on grazing availability for sustaining livelihoods, especially among those engaged in sheep rearing and agriculture. Additionally, 29.5% (171 individuals) attribute migration to a combination of traditions, customs, lack of grazing resources, and livelihood needs, reflecting the complex interplay of cultural and economic factors influencing their decisions.

Smaller proportions cite specific reasons for migration: 4.5% (26 individuals) mention traditions and lack of grazing resources, 1.2% (7 individuals) cite traditions alone, and 1.4% (8 individuals) migrate for livelihood needs. Interestingly, 21.2% (123 individuals) report no migration, indicating a segment of the community with access to sufficient local resources or other stabilizing factors.

The findings emphasize the dominant role of grazing scarcity in driving migration, alongside cultural and economic considerations. Addressing these diverse motivations is essential for resolving the challenges faced by migrating members and creating sustainable strategies to support their livelihoods.

Table.1: Challenges Faced by the Gollakurma Community During Sheep Migration

Statements	N	%
Lack of Water and grazing resources	12	2.1
Health Issues in sheep	3	.5
harassment by locals and authorities	1	.2
Difficult in finding temporary shelters	4	.7
Not Applicable	158	27.2
Lack of water, Health issues in sheep, Harassment by local and authorities, difficult in finding temporary shelters	349	60.2
Lack of water, Health issues in sheep, Harassment by local and authorities	18	3.1
Lack of water, Health issues in sheep,	3	.5
Lack of water, Harassment by local and authorities	6	1.0
Lack of water, Health issues in sheep, difficult in finding temporary shelters	6	1.0
Health issues in sheep, difficult in finding temporary shelters	20	3.4
Total	**580**	**100.0**

The data provides a comprehensive view of the challenges faced by the Gollakurma community in relation to sheep migration. Among the respondents, the majority (60.2% or 349 individuals) cited a combination of factors—lack of water, health issues in sheep, harassment by locals and authorities, and difficulties in finding temporary shelters—as the primary reasons for migration challenges. This highlights the interconnected nature of resource scarcity, animal health concerns, social pressures, and infrastructural constraints, which collectively impact the community's ability to sustain their traditional practices.

A notable proportion (27.2% or 158 individuals) fall under the "Not Applicable" category, indicating that they do not face these challenges. This suggests the presence of a segment within the community that either does not engage in sheep migration or has found ways to mitigate these difficulties, potentially through alternative livelihood strategies or local stability. Specific individual factors are less frequently reported. For instance, 2.1% (12 individuals) solely attribute their challenges to the lack of water and grazing resources, emphasizing the critical dependence on these essentials. Other singular issues, such as health problems in sheep (0.5%), harassment by locals and authorities (0.2%), and difficulties in finding temporary shelters (0.7%), are cited by smaller proportions of respondents. Some respondents report combinations of factors with varying prevalence. For example, 3.1% (18 individuals) mentioned a combination of lack of water, health issues in sheep, and harassment by authorities, while smaller proportions cited other combinations such as health issues and shelter difficulties (3.4%).

The data underscores the multifaceted nature of challenges faced by the Gollakurma community during sheep migration, with resource-related issues playing a dominant role. These findings are crucial for developing targeted interventions to address the community's needs, ranging from resource management to policy support for mitigating social and infrastructural pressures.

6. DISCUSSION.

The Gollakurma community in Telangana presents a fascinating case study of traditional livelihoods navigating the pressures of modernization, resource scarcity, and socio-economic transformation. Rooted in pastoral practices, particularly sheep herding, the community has historically relied on a way of life intricately tied to its environment and cultural heritage. However, their contemporary experiences reflect a complex interplay of challenges that threaten both their livelihoods and cultural identity.

One of the most pressing issues faced by the Gollakurma community is the scarcity of critical resources such as grazing land and water. These resources are essential to their traditional sheep migration practices, yet are increasingly constrained by urbanization, industrialization, and environmental changes. The depletion of grazing grounds not only undermines their economic stability but also forces families to adopt migration as a survival strategy (McDowell & de Haan, 1997). This dependence on migration, while rooted in tradition, has become a response to shifting socio-economic realities rather than a purely cultural practice.

At the same time, the community encounters multiple compounding challenges during migration. Issues such as the health of livestock, lack of temporary shelters, and even social pressures in the form of harassment from local authorities create significant obstacles. These challenges disproportionately affect those who rely most heavily on sheep herding for their livelihoods. Moreover, migration is not a uniform experience within the community. Caste status plays a notable role in shaping migration patterns, with variations between the Golla and Kurma communities (Ramagoud & Somanaboina, 2021). While the Golla respondents exhibit higher instances of intra-district migration, the Kurma respondents demonstrate greater mobility, including inter-state migration. This disparity points to deeper socio-economic factors influencing the decisions and capabilities of these groups.

Despite these challenges, the Gollakurma community continues to adapt and persevere. Their economic practices reveal significant diversity, with most families falling into middle-income expenditure categories. However, economic disparities exist, with segments of the community facing financial constraints that limit their spending capacities, while others achieve greater stability and comfort (Stiglitz et al., 2009). This economic variation is echoed in their migration behaviours, where some respondents are able to remain stationary due to sufficient local opportunities. This group contrasts with those compelled to migrate, highlighting the uneven distribution of economic pressures within the community.

The cultural and social dynamics of the Gollakurma community further complicate the picture. Linguistic distinctions, such as the Kurma community's proficiency in Kannada compared to the predominantly Telugu-speaking Golla group, hint at differing historical and geographical influences. These cultural nuances shape not only their identity but also their interactions with the broader society (Sam & Berry, 2010). Additionally, traditional practices and social structures remain central to their way of life, yet are increasingly under strain from external influences and internal changes.

This discussion underscores the need for targeted interventions that address the specific challenges faced by the Gollakurma community. Strategies that focus on resource management, livestock health, and supportive migration policies are critical for sustaining their livelihoods (Ahmadzai et al., 2021). Simultaneously, efforts to preserve their cultural heritage while enabling socio-economic mobility are essential for fostering resilience in the face of rapid societal changes (Wei et al., 2024). By addressing these multidimensional challenges, it is possible to support the Gollakurma community in navigating the delicate balance between tradition and modernity.

7. CONCLUSION

The Gollakurma community in Telangana exemplifies the challenges and resilience of a traditional pastoral society adapting to the pressures of modernization, migration, and socio-economic transitions. While their livelihoods remain closely tied to sheep herding and pastoralism, dwindling grazing resources, environmental changes, and infrastructural challenges have necessitated migration as a survival strategy. These migrations, shaped by cultural heritage and economic necessity, highlight the intertwined nature of their social and economic identities. At the same time, the community faces issues such as resource scarcity, livestock health concerns, and uneven economic opportunities. Distinct patterns in migration, income levels, and linguistic diversity between the Golla and Kurma groups further reveal nuanced internal dynamics. This study underscores the urgent need for sustainable interventions to address resource constraints, improve livelihood opportunities, and preserve their cultural identity. Supporting the Gollakurma community will enable them to adapt effectively while honouring their rich traditions.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author had conflict with publishing this article, and no financial aid is provided by any institution or organisation.

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