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**QUEST TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING
REGIONAL DISPARITY IN NORTH KARNATAKA:
A SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

Introduction

Development is a concept loaded with value judgements. No generally accepted definition exists, nor do we have a convenient means to measure the rate of development. Now the per capita income growth has been discarded as such. Basically, developmental planning is an interdisciplinary field and requires holistic approach. The sustainable development requires equal attention for natural, economic and political aspects taking into consideration appropriate specificities of social-cultural factors.

In any kind of developmental activity, socio-cultural factors play a significant role. In this regard, the adopters of innovation attempt to interpret them in tune with their socio-cultural settings. They had to fit into their cultural matrix only then, would the innovations obtain a survival chance. Culture has a causal effect on economic development. It is measured by indicators of individual values and beliefs, such as trust and respect for one another and confidence in individual self-determination. The difficulty in estimating a causal effect of culture is that it is endogenous to economic development. As stressed by the modernization theory, economic development has predictable effects on culture and social life (Inglehart and Baker 2000). Hence, we have to find some endogenous and exogenous sources of variation to identify a causal effect from culture to economic development and vice-versa.

On the other hand, if the meaning of development is taken to be more limited, namely to relate to the process by which poverty is alleviated, inequality is reduced, and the opportunities for the self-fulfilment of all individuals are increased, then anthropology with its emphasis on micro-research has an important role to play.

No doubt, quantitative enquiries are an important facet of development studies but they can never tell the whole story; they need to be supplemented

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by qualitative data to help explain the intricate independence of different socioeconomic variables involved in the development process. It is in this sphere of study that anthropological micro-studies can contribute most to better understanding of development problems. Keeping all in view, the present paper tries to understand regional disparity in Karnataka state by focusing on under development in north Karnataka region through socio-cultural perspective.

The regional disparity in India is now a matter of serious concern. It is well known that in a large economy, different regions with different resource bases and endowments would have a dissimilar growth path over time. One of the reasons why centralised planning was advocated earlier was that it could restrain the regional disparity. In spite of planning, however, the regional disparity remained a serious problem in India (Bhattacharya & Sakthivel, 2004). The post-independent state of Karnataka has failed in inducing balanced development in all the regions. Greater the heterogeneity in different parts of the State, more striking can be the deficiencies in comparison with an average level of facilities. Consequently, it is leading to marked imbalances. The region belonging to northern part of the state has been lagging behind in almost all the facets of development relatively than southern region of Karnataka due to historical reason. In order to reduce the developmental gap among various regions, Karnataka government has taken various steps like setting up Hyderabad Karnataka Area Development Board, Bayaluseeme Development Board, Border Area Development Programme, Malanad Area Development Board and so on. In addition, government had also appointed a High Power Committee for Redressal of Regional Imbalances (HPCRRI) under the chairmanship of Prof. D. M. Nanjundappa (DMN committee) during the year 2000. The committee has done an extensive and elaborate study on regional imbalances, but it could not focus much on the socio-cultural dimensions on developmental processes.

The present paper is organised in the following ways. The first part of the paper presents the issues relating to situation in north Karnataka region in terms of human development indicators and information on backwardness. The second part discusses on dimensions of social underdevelopment by highlighting certain aspects the economic deprivation, effect of family system, belief system, women and child development, education, gender bias, dowry system, early marriages etc. in the region. The last section of the paper concluded with some significant socio-cultural factors for the development and some initiatives taken by the government to improve the socio-cultural and socio-economic diversities of the region.

Status of north Karnataka region

Karnataka state is divided in to three regions demarcated broadly according to the levels of development, (Table 1) viz., Bombay Karnataka, Hyderabad Karnataka and Southern Karnataka. Bombay Karnataka consists

of the seven districts of Belgaum, Bijapur, Bagalkot, Dharwad, Gadag, Uttara Kannada and Haveri. Hyderabad Karnataka consists of six districts, namely Bidar, Gulbarga, Raichur, Yadgiri, Koppal and Bellary. The remaining seventeen districts are part of Southern Karnataka.

The indicators of development which have been developed by a number of researchers show that north Karnataka exhibits a high degree of underdevelopment as compared to south Karnataka (Panchamukhi, 2001). In support of this statement, human development indicators of Karnataka (Human Development Report, 2005) shows, Raichur is among the most impoverished districts of the state, which are concentrated in the north Karnataka region (Hyderabad Karnataka) and figure at the bottom ranking of the list followed by Gulbarga (26th rank), Koppal (24th rank) and Bijapur of Bombay Karnataka (23rd rank) in terms of all human development indices².

The Government of Karnataka had setup a high power committee to study the problem of regional imbalances and recommend measures for their redressal. The report of the committee which was submitted in 2002 has identified 59 out of 80 taluks of north Karnataka as backward³. The most revealing observation of the committee is the acute backwardness of the Hyderabad region. According to the findings of the committee, 28 out of the 31 taluks of Hyderabad-Karnataka region⁴ are considered as backward. According to DMN committee, there is underdevelopment in both the regions but north Karnataka region is comparatively more underdeveloped. Reference here is largely to economic underdevelopment, but the committee has not attempted to examine social underdevelopment in north Karnataka region.

Economic Deprivation and Social Underdevelopment

The constitution of India specifically states that “the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and in particular, of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation” (Article 46, Part IV, Directive Principles of State Policy). In line with this, the government introduced many programmes such as *Bhoo Odetana Yojane* (land ownership scheme), *Ganga Kalyana Yojane* (bore well facility for agricultural land) etc. According to scheme *Bhoo Odetana Yojane*, agricultural land available for sale (other than the land of scheduled caste and tribe people) in a village should be purchased and granted to a person's belonging to landless scheduled caste/scheduled tribe (one acre of wetland or two acres of dry land). The maximum price of the land may be decided by responsible/concerned officer from government as per market rate. Fifty per cent of the price will come as subsidy and the rest to be subsequently paid by the person who gets land. Political leaders and administrators have done their best to help scheduled caste households of villages to acquire land under this programme.

A specific case study was carried out by the author to illustrate the importance of social development. In the account of *Mallesh* (name changed in order to ensure privacy), a scheduled caste man, there was an entry that his wife owned some land under this scheme. On enquiry he disclosed that one of his peasant caste patrons who is the owner of the land agreed to sell the land to him on informal agreement, provided he paid an extra amount of Rs. 5000 per acre, over and above the price fixed by the government; or else, the patron would continue to cultivate the land till he gets money. Mallesh and his wife could not afford the money but at the same time he did not want to lose the benefit of the scheme. In addition, the landowner promised to help him with a loan for the forthcoming marriage of his daughter, should he abide by the informal agreement. Mallesh accepted the deal and the patron did keep his promise and lent Rs. 10,000 for the latter's daughter's wedding.

Mallesh was aware that since he belonged to scheduled caste he had special provision, but he also knew that private finance was needed to pay his share of amount to the government to transfer the documents to his wife's name. A village scheduled caste and a daily earner could not have found money to make this payment. Thus Mallesh was convinced that he had no chance of acquiring the land by himself. So under these circumstances Mallesh had to agree to the terms of the landlord. This case very clearly illustrates how the socio-economic conditions of the weaker sections could come in their way of development even when the state comes forward to help them. If he had economic resources, he would have graduated himself as a land owner which would give him social status in rural society. Therefore it appears that, social status or social development in this case depends on economic development of the person concerned.

Migration and their effect

The second generation adults are born and brought up in urban camouflage; they do not possess any attachment with their kin and their land at villages. Urban matrixes are also favourable with lesser hierarchy, reduced inequality and choice of diversified occupations. Therefore the incidence of migration from village to nearby city is alarming, because villagers are compelled to estrange themselves from their traditional occupation to seek better fortunes. But migrated villagers are basically not as skilled to avail the highly skilled urban jobs; so they are forced to accept employment at minimal wages. This leads to a very peculiar situation when the migrants to urban areas can neither continue their job in urban area nor can they go back to the village. At the same time aged persons, pregnant women and young children suffer much in villages. Hence they switch over to nuclear family system from joint family system which to a great extent adversely affects the economic stability that they enjoyed earlier. The economic instability in turn has adversely impacted upon the social status of such families and has led to underdevelopment.

Providing all the infrastructural and basic facilities to migrated people has now become a real problem and extra burden to the government. The serious step we must initiate is to quickly eliminate the gap of wealth distribution between urban and rural areas and achieve the goal of integration of the both. So, providing urban amenities to rural areas is of prime importance. Prices of essential commodities go on increasing but the purchasing power of the rural people remains the same. To match this, government should introduce scientifically fixed rate to agricultural crops and take measures to provide employment opportunities to villagers in their habitat.

Modernization theory attempts to identify the social variables which contribute to social progress and development of societies, and seeks to explain the process of social evolution. Due to some historical and other reasons, southern Karnataka region adopted the theory of modernization more adorably and developed in terms of industries, better infrastructure, market oriented goods, education, health sector, governance, gender equality, women empowerment, distribution of government plans and facilities, equal employment opportunities to all caste and religion etc. but we cannot say the same proximity in North Karnataka region regarding development.

Role of Belief System

Anyone will be prepared to make a certain degree of change in approach within normal structure of activities, but will not be interested or able to change much further. However, most of the rural population does not easily accept the changes that take place. They are all still under the umbrella of superstitions. Concept of purity and pollution, social hierarchy, superiority, faith between subcults within the group, continued practice of abolished systems, etc, are anti-developmental factors for any region.

As Patil (2010) has stated in an article published by *Deccan Herald* newspaper, the social evil like *Devadasi* system may be banned in law books. But it is still practised in Belgaum district and many parts of north Karnataka, though not openly. Girls are dedicated to the system confidentially on the full moon day in February, christened as *Bharat Hunnime*. Virgin daughters are dedicated to goddess *Yellamma* by certain communities in north Karnataka. The communities have a prejudice that if they do not offer their girls, the goddess will certainly take revenge. Once the girl is offered to the goddess, she can neither marry nor come back to family life. Then she can be coveted and she cannot refuse him, even if he suffers from an incurable disease (Maitra, 1997). Government of Karnataka has taken several welfare measures to uplift the social and economic condition of the devadasis by eradicating the devadasi system and all its associated rituals. During 1993-94, Government of Karnataka identified 22,873 ex-devadasis from 10 districts of North Karnataka and introduced many programmes like, wide publicity against the practice of devadasi system, encourage to forming self help groups, conduct skill

development programmes, awareness programmes and health check-up camps, housing facility, etc. The fact that government focused to end the devadasi system and all its associated rituals by introducing various programmes and schemes, but it is still practiced even when it has been banned by law.

Even caste system is very strong in north Karnataka. Caste as an institution found a fresh lease of life in modern institutions such as panchayats, schools, factories and government offices. Such events have thwarted any serious attempt to reach out to the genuinely poor. In many villages and even small towns, caste continues to play a retrogressive role. Discrimination based on prioritization of caste, creed and ethnocentrism⁵ undeniably hinder the developmental processes. Social institutions should take even much responsibility on harmonization of inter-caste, inter-group, inter-religion relationships and extend the awareness of fraternity.

Women Health and Education

The World Bank stated that women's disadvantaged social position which is often related to the economic value placed on familial roles, helps perpetuate poor health, inadequate diet, early and frequent pregnancy and continued cycle of poverty⁶. The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) report (as cited in Uwakwe, 2004) argued that women because of their desire to take care of other members of the family, eat less nutritious foods. This has significantly affected their nutritional status and perpetuated lower standards of health. This affects their overall contribution to the labour force and subsequent economic development. Ononamadu's study (as cited in Uwakwe, 2004) pointed the total amount of labour inputs by sexes is often quite disproportionate with women doing more work than men. Country Report on Tanzania for the Gabon Conference (as cited in UNECA, 1972) also concluded that men spend about 1800 hours annually on agricultural activities, while women spend about 2600 hours. Evidently women have always been deeply involved in tasks that take much of their energy and have been actively in labour, however; they have not been accorded a corresponding reward to match their efforts. Women with poor health are more likely to give birth to low weight infants. They are less likely to be able to provide food and adequate care for their children. Finally, a women's health affects the household economic well being, and as a women with poor health will be less productive in the labour force.

Human capital is a well known determinant of growth and development. Jeffrey Sachs (2005) has argued that the cultural or religious norms may block the role of women..... leaving half the population without economic or political rights and without education, thereby undermining half of the population in its contribution to overall development. If you don't believe that women should work, you have effectively halved the earning potential of your country. On similar lines, CTA (as cited in Uwakwe, 2004) reported that

high illiteracy and low enrolment rates, especially in secondary schools, affect women's ability to acquire the skills needed for income-generating activities and will have repercussions for generations to come.

Education of women plays a very important role in the overall development. Education is a main determinant of cultural traits. It not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but also improves the quality of life at home and outside. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but can also provide better guidance to their children. Moreover educated women can also help in the reduction of infant mortality, morbidity and growth of the population (Caldwell, 1981). As per 2001 census (Table 2), the female literacy rate in the country is only 54.20 per cent but the percentage in Karnataka state is higher (56.90%). However, the female literacy rate in north Karnataka is much lower (48.30%) than not only the national average but also south Karnataka (63.02%). The Karnataka Human Development Report for 2005 shows that, Raichur district has the lowest female literacy rate, at 35.93 per cent followed by Gulbarga (37.90%) Koppal (39.61%) and Bagalkot (43.56%) as against state overall (male and female literacy rate) average of 66.64 per cent. The gap between male and female literacy rates is also significantly high in north Karnataka districts.

Children's Health

According to data from Department of Women and Child (2010), Government of Karnataka as many as 78,366 children are malnourished in Raichur. Of them 599 suffer from the most severe forms (Grade III and IV) of malnutrition⁷. Koppal district has the dubious distinction of having the majority of the children who suffer from different grades of malnutrition. Preschool children in Koppal district (0.7 per cent) are severely malnourished (which is more than double the state average), followed by Bagalkot (0.6), Raichur and Bellary, both with 0.5 per cent tie at the third place.

Bageshree and Gandhi (2010), columnists in the *Frontline* Magazine, made a strong case about the health and education of north Karnataka children in an article titled 'Hard to Swallow'. They pointed out that the Infant Mortality rate (IMR)⁸ in the north Karnataka districts (Table 3) is higher than the state average of 55: Bidar (66), Bijapur (67), Dharwad (69), Gadag (66), Gulbarga (67), Haveri (66) and Koppal (65). Again the district with the highest number of out-of-school children, according to the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Survey (SSA) done in January 2010 (as cited in Bahgeshree and Gandhi, 2010) is Raichur, followed by Bijapur, Bidar, Yadgir, Gulbarga and Koppal.

Gender Discrimination, Dowry System and Child Marriages

Gender inequality is a peculiar form of social and distributive injustice. Girls encounter gender bias at almost every stage in their lives such as men are taller than women, only boys drink milk, certain work is not fit for girls,

girls are weak in physical as well as biological characteristics, etc. As Gulati and Jaswal's study (as cited in Gulati, 2010) stated the unequal distribution of food in the family, with a definite gender discrimination against the female has been observed even in rich families but the lines of discrimination in poorer societies seem to be etched deeper. However, the awareness about gender bias in north Karnataka has slowly spread over time. But it will take a long time for this awareness to seep into the grassroots and translate into social change.

The Dowry Prohibition Act was brought into force with an intention of protecting the women in the country. Sadly, it seems to be one of the most misused provisions of law as of today. Several women had remained unmarried because of the inability of their parents to meet the demands for huge dowry. Prospect of development is not possible without abolition of dowry system and reduction in domestic violence. Dowry death in north Karnataka is also high compared to other regions. About 1.767 in Uttara Kannada district and 2.839 in Gulbarga district reported per hundred thousand populations (HPCRRI report, 2002).

Early marriage has implications for the well-being of families, and for society as a whole. It gives girls an adult status and they are not prepared for it and it prevents them from advancing in school. Where girls are uneducated and ill-prepared for their roles as mothers and contributors to society, there are costs to be borne at every level, from the individual household to the nation as a whole. Perhaps, many social and economic determinants influence the age of marriage. For instance poverty, illiteracy, social insecurity, gender discrimination etc.

According to UNICEF "The State of the World's Children 2009" report⁹, 47% of India's women aged 20–24 were married before the legal age of 18, with 56% in rural areas. In nine of the thirteen northern districts the percentage of women who marry before they turn eighteen is higher than the state average of 22.06. Proportion of married females in the age group of 15–19 in north Karnataka (above 37%) is almost twice that of the proportion in south Karnataka (less than 20%). North Karnataka also leads in the percentage of child marriages¹⁰ with Raichur district at 59.4 per cent followed by Koppal (51.4), Bijapur (50.1), Gulbarga (48.9), Bagalkot (48.3), Belgaum (43), Bidar (44.9), Gadag (44.8) and Bellary (35.2) districts¹¹. HPCRRI report (2002) shows that, about 64% of the marriages take place between 10 to 14 years of age in Bijapur, Belgaum, Gulbarga and Raichur districts of north Karnataka region.

Industrial Sector and Infrastructure

It is a sector that supplements economic activities and generates income with high degree of employment opportunities. According to Honnali

(2005), most of the industrial estates and sheds are concentrated in the districts of Bangalore divisions. Gulbarga division accounts for only 18.47 per cent and 7.14 per cent industrial estates and sheds respectively with a minimum of less than one per cent in Koppal district. The industrial strategy of Karnataka, according to Honnalli, apart from its uneven spatial growth has been its top priority to 'sunrise industries' such as information technology, bio-technology, food processing industries, etc., which are concentrated in and around few developed districts such as Bangalore and Mysore. Whereas poor regions that have no or little infrastructure have continued to remain backward. In addition, he opined that the districts of Hyderabad-Karnataka region have continued to remain at a disadvantaged position. Industrial development in north Karnataka has suffered due to the lack of infrastructure, whether economic, demographic, financial or social (HPCRRI report, 2002). The prevalence of infrastructural facilities like provision of road, railway connectivity, power stations, market facilities, etc., are relatively poor across the region particularly on rural areas.

Educational Sector and Development

King of Mysore, Krishna Raja Wadiyar, advised by Sir M Visveshwarayya, Diwan-cum-Chief engineer of Mysore State, instituted several initiatives to improve the quality of higher education in the state, with a particular emphasis on technology and the sciences, which in turn produced generations of engineers and scientists who contributed to the technological development (Kadekodi *et al.* 2007). Evidently, the first Engineering College was started by the Mysore Government in 1917 at Bangalore. Additionally, migration of people in search of employment in government and private sector units in Bangalore region strengthened the development of south Karnataka region. The state average of primary schools for every hundred thousand population declined marginally to 84 by 1999-2000 (it was 91 schools in 1958-59) caused largely by the corresponding decline in the average number of schools in north Karnataka, as the average number of schools in south Karnataka improved marginally from 99 to 102 schools in corresponding period (HPCRRI report, 2002). Imbalances in basic educational facilities have resulted in poor literacy rates (56.32 per cent) in north Karnataka region. Gap in technology based education has denied the opportunities for the people to contribute for the betterment of their family as well as growth of the region. A modern institution, such as education, particularly quality and/or higher education was a domain of the urban and the privileged classes (Hebbar and Acharya, 2003). Children of rural and depressed class are almost deprived of opportunity of higher education and employment because, poor socio-economic condition and lack of interest in education on the part of parents. There are grave inequities in terms of the access to quality education and employment opportunities which urgently need to be rectified.

Conclusion

The development of less developed societies poses a challenge not only to politicians, administrators and planners but also to social scientists. Social science researchers are perennially concerned with social change, prediction of future trends and policy implications. There are obviously other perfectly valid and fascinating aspects of society which warrant further investigation. The backwardness of north Karnataka region is due to some endogenous and exogenous factors. The development regarding social life of the people, belief system, family system, education, health, sanitation, gender bias, women empowerment, child health and education, industry, market and infrastructural development must be improved. Government and NGOs should take initiative to improve the socio-economic status taking into consideration the socio-cultural diversities of the region. With suitable action plan, this region can certainly develop to a comparable level of the other regions of Karnataka. Social scientists should thus try to make a meaningful contribution to better understanding of the developmental processes through further studies.

NOTES

1. Long and healthy life: as measured by life expectancy at birth, access to knowledge: as measured by the adult literacy rate and the combined gross enrolment ratio in education and a decent standard of living: as measured by GDP per capita in purchasing power parity (PPP) US dollars.
2. 26 are classified as 'most backward', 17 as 'more backward' and 16 as 'backward' taluks.
3. 21 are 'most backward', 5 'more backward' and 2 'backward' taluks.
4. Ethnocentrism is the feeling that is characterized by or based on the attitude that one's own group is superior.
5. IBRD. "Women's Health and Nutrition-Making a Difference". World Bank Discussion Paper. USA, 1994.
6. Department of women and child development, Government of Karnataka. Retrieved from <http://dwcdkar.gov.in/>, accessed on October 07, 2010.
7. The infant mortality rate (IMR) is the number of deaths of infants under one year old per 1,000 live births. This rate is often used as an indicator of the level of health.
8. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Report, published on December 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.unicef.org/sowc09/docs/SOWC09-FullReport-EN.pdf>
9. Generally defined as below the age of fifteen years.
10. Rediff.com news. Karnataka: '2 of 5 girls are married before18', June 30, 2008. <http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/jun/30girl.htm> accessed on September 06, 2010.

Table 1
Regions of Karnataka and their Associated Districts

Northern Part		Southern Part	
Bombay Karnataka (7)		Hyderabad Karnataka (6)	Southern Karnataka (17)
1	Bagalkot	1	Bellary
2	Belgaum	2	Bidar
3	Bijapur	3	Gulbarga
4	Dharwad	4	Koppal
5	Gadag	5	Raichur
6	Haveri	6	Yadgiri
7	Uttara Kannada		
			1 Bangalore Rural
			2 Bangalore Urban
			3 Chamarajanagar
			4 Chikballapur
			5 Chikmagalur
			6 Chitradurga
			7 Dakshina Kannada
			8 Davangere
			9 Hassan
			10 Kodagu
			11 Kolar
			12 Mandya
			13 Mysore
			14 Ramanagara
			15 Shimoga
			16 Tumkur
			17 Udupi

Table 2
Region wise Literacy Rate

Region	Female (%)	Male (%)	Total (%)
North Karnataka	48.30	72.68	-
South Karnataka	63.02	77.70	-
Karnataka	56.90	76.10	66.64
India	54.20	75.80	64.80

Sources: Registrar general of India, Primary census abstract 2001
HPCRRI, 2002

Table 3
Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) in the regions of Karnataka

Region	IMR
Southern Karnataka	50
Bombay Karnataka	59
Hyderabad Karnataka	60
Karnataka	55
All-India	64

Source: Human Development Report-2005

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