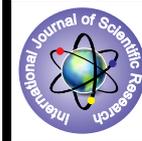


The Vanishing Forms of Tribal Art: A Study of the Lambadas of Andhra Pradesh



Sociology

KEYWORDS : LAMBADAS, TRIBAL ART, ETHNIC IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper intends to describe the various forms of traditional art among the Lambadas of Andhra Pradesh and explain the various reasons for its vanishing trends. The various tribal art forms included in this study are oral literature; music art and art of dancing; textiles and adornments; and stone sculptures.

This study involves both qualitative and quantitative techniques of data collection. The research sample consists of 300 respondents of both sexes of different age groups belonging to rural and urban areas from six districts of Andhra Pradesh. The data is collected first in 2001 and then in 2011.

The results show that the rich variety of tribal art forms are fast forgotten by majority of the Lambadas partly due to selective sanskritization, modernization and socio-economic and political developments. However, in the process of adjustment and adoption, Lambadas lost their valuable ethnic identity.

Introduction

Not much attention has been devoted to a scientific study of the artistic efforts of the Indian tribes in general and Lambadas of Andhra Pradesh in particular. The art of primitive peoples runs a wide gamut from technical clumsiness to high skill, from child like simplicity to confusing complexity, from materialism and realism to conventionalized abstraction (Hoebel, E.A. 1949). The tribal is essentially a man of the nature, deriving all his traits and ways of living from natural phenomenon. To a non-tribal most of the objects of tribal art may not look beautiful or artistic. For the full appreciation of a work of tribal art, it should be seen as far as possible in the setting for which it was created (Leonard, A. 1949).

The primitive art is the most pure; the most sincere form of art, partly because it is deeply inspired by religious ideas and spiritual experience, and partly because it is entirely unselfconscious. There are no tricks which can be acquired by the unworthy and no technical exercises which can masquerade as works of inspiration.

The most significant aspect of the art of tribal folk is that the art is interwoven with religion and the distinction which is usually drawn between the sacred and the secular by more sophisticated people ceases to exist. Thus, both art and religion "tend to fuse with each other into a unified whole" (Bose, N. K. 1971). The tribal artist is not ashamed of what might be regarded by others as 'crude'. He remains true to the impression which an object has produced upon him, and tries to reproduce it faithfully. Interestingly, the tribal artist may be 'untutored' but he is not 'uninitiated'.

Traditionally, the beating of the drums and blowing of flutes are the tunes of the tribal art. The dancing legs are the motion; and the folk songs and folktales are the props of their art; and the music and dance as a whole (Vidyarthi, L.P. and B. K. Rai. 1976). The stone deities symbolize their life and beliefs. The tribal folklore, folktales, folksongs, folk music and dance, folk crafts, stone sculptures combine to offer them an aesthetic life which is worth mentioning. These arts present a vivid picture of tribal life. These artistic activities concern their occupational, religious, recreational and other aspects of their everyday life. The folklore of the tribes contains in itself their unwritten record of their cultural life. In other words, the tribal art is a mirror of the tribal culture.

Majumdar (1950) and other anthropologists opine that tribal artistic life is reflected mainly in three forms of their art: (i) Oral literature (ii) Magic and Dance, and (iii) Art and Dancing. According to Vidyarthi and Rai (1976) the artistic life of the tribals includes in itself the following forms:

- (i) Folklore, Oral literature: It includes myths, tales, legends, riddles, proverbs, songs, verses etc.
- (ii) Folk Music and Dance: These include folk songs (Musical

aspects), folk music, folk dance etc.

- (iii) Folk Art, Handicraft and Acrobatics: These include folk art, drawing, painting, carving, wood craft, metal craft, garment making with decoration, wooden or cotton produce etc.

A. Folklore / Oral literature

Folklore is the oral literature of the simpler societies and it is perpetuated by oral traditions. For the tribals, the functions of folklore are more important than its form. The lullaby is for putting children to sleep, while the old feel elevated by telling stories of their ancestors, clan formation, origin and valour and try to educate their younger generation. (Vidyarthi, L.P. and Rai, B.K.1976).

Folklore of non-literate people consists of their myths, tales, proverbs, riddles and verse together with their music and comprises the least tangible expression of aesthetic aspects of culture. To varying degrees, these forms combine with each other and with graphic and plastic arts; to make up the rituals, dances and other means of group expression we term drama (Herskovits, M.J. 1956).

There are innumerable folksongs which symbolize Lambadas' life cycle ceremonies and offer them aesthetic value in their everyday life.

Birth

On the third day after delivery Lambadas perform a ceremony called '*Jalva Dokhano*'. During this ceremony womenfolk assemble and welcome the newly delivered woman with a song, the meaning of which is 'come to the pit weeping and go away from the pit with smiles' and perform the ceremony in the name of the ancestors, praying for the speedy recovery of health and strength of the newly delivered woman.

Child rearing

Folktales are narrated to discipline the young children and lullabies are sung to put them to sleep. Folktales and folk songs incorporating the morals are used to inculcate general attitudes and principles. Even though they practice 'bride price', Lambadas prefer a male child. Their preference for male child is sung in a song meaning 'Girls go that side and boys come this side'.

Marriage

One day before the actual celebration of the marriage, *Ma-hurtham (Sade Thomar)* '*Mude Veedo*' ceremony is performed. While performing this ceremony, womenfolk sing a song in memory of their guru '*Gosai Baba*'.

On the following day before the day break, the women prepare '*Panakam*' (a sweet liquid prepared with *jaggery*). While preparing this they sing a song wishing him a happy and successful marriage.

At the time of the bride and bride groom's departure to bride-

groom's house, the girl's mother and other women of the tribe weep loudly and sing some songs conveying their pangs of separation. The girl also weeps loudly and sings a song to express her concern for her maternal family members.

B. Folk Music and Dance

The Lambadas claim descent from Mola and Mota, the two brothers who served Lord Krishna and they were the descendants of Sugriva mentioned in Ramayana. A dance-drama called "Radha and Mola" was written and published by the then Social Service Department, Government of Hyderabad in Banjara language but the script is in Hindi. The dance-drama explains the legend regarding their origin, clan formation, narrating their descent to the times of *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* (Census of India, 1961).

There is a well known *Burrakatha* (Ballad) on the story of social service which is sung in order to educate the young Banjaras about the government role in positively changing the life-style of the tribals like *Chenchus* and *Gonds* of Andhra Pradesh.

Generally a festival involves either a single ritual or conglomeration of rituals intended to propitiate either a single deity or a number of deities. The festivals are both social and religious in nature symbolizing the feeling of a whole community. There are festivals to mark the emergence of a season or the end of the one. Festivals are also celebrated for the successful completion of an economic activity or for affording protection to cattle and people.

The Lambadas of Andhra Pradesh like many other ethnic groups in India/world believe that the world is peopled by a multitude of spirits, benign and malignant. They also believe that all the catastrophes occur due to the wrath of the malignant spirits. Hence these malignant spirits are periodically appeased through sacrifice and supplication. They also worship and pray reverence to the benevolent Gods such as Vishnu, Rama, Balaji and Shiva. This dichotomy of Banjara attitude, awe and reverence towards malevolent and primitive powers respectively is a characteristic feature of benevolent religion (Pratap, D.R.1972).

The festivals of Lambadas have three types of implications i.e. productive, protective and seasonal.

Teej: It is celebrated during the heavy monsoon season and just before the sowing and broadcasting operation is commenced. Lambadas are conscious that the proper germination of the seeds and the crop yields are dependent upon the fertility of the soil. Besides this, the fertility of their maidens needs to be protected for the procreation of a healthy race. Hence along with the protection of soil, the protection of the fertility of womenfolk is also ensured by the exclusive performance of various rituals of Teej by their unmarried girls.

Seetala: It is another important annual festival of Lambadas performed in the month of June. Seetala is one of the seven malignant sister-deities. On the eve of the Seetala festival all men stand before the deities and supplicate with folded hands and observe the rites while women dance to the tune of a song praising Rama in the sacred festive atmosphere.

Holi: A few days before the Holi, the Banjaras go around the nearby villages performing dances and singing melodious songs in their traditional way to collect money and grain. They sing a welcome song of Holi in order to declare the advent of New Year. Women and men exert themselves in singing and dancing and never leave any known person without extracting money or grain from them. The dancing women encircle the person and put him to so much of embarrassment that the man gives some money to escape the teasing and scolding of the women. The money collected is used for the celebrations of Holi festival.

On the day of Holi, right from the early hours of evening, they go on beating the 'Dappu' (Drums) and produce enticing sounds in order to stimulate excitement both in women and men and children to come out of their houses to play 'Holi Jojera' which is unique feature of the Holi celebrations of Banjaras.

C. Folk-art, Handicraft:

Stone sculptures

Lambadas mostly claim themselves to be Hindus and worship many of the deities of Hindu Pantheon such as Balaji, Krishna, Rama and Shiva. Besides the Hindu Pantheon they also worship some stone deities for different purposes.

Maramma, *Tulechamma* and *Maisamma* are the malevolent, benevolent and protective deities respectively. They are represented by stones at some distance from the tribal settlement. Before they worship, they whitewash these stones and put vermilion.

Bhavani is another deity which Lambadas alone worship. They believe that their dances appease the Goddess *Bhavani*. The Goddess is represented by a big stone placed on a heap of stones outside the habitation area. Once in a year they worship her by sacrificing a goat. On the day of the worship they smear the shrine with lime and decorate it with vermilion marks on it.

Seetala is another important malignant Goddess, whom they worship annually. Lambadas believe that *Seetala*, the eldest of the 'Saptha Mathurkas' (Seven Sister - deities) is Malignant. These Goddesses are considered that they control pastoral and epidemic diseases to protect the cattle. These seven Goddesses are symbolically represented by seven stones, kept under a *Jeenzero thad* (Bauhemia Spicata tree) at the outskirts of the tribal settlement.

Decoration

The artistic taste of the Lambadas finds expression in the decoration of their houses; in the clothes they wear and the adornments with which they decorate their own bodies. Though the range of colours is limited and mostly they are red, green, yellow, blue and deep black, we can see a riot of colours even within this limited range.

Lambada settlements are known as *Thandas*. Usually, their houses are arranged in rows facing each other with a street in between the two rows. The mud or stone walls are decorated with colourful lines. The floor is decorated with beautiful 'Rangoli'.

The Lambada women are conspicuous by their way of dressing and with their numerous and heavy adornments.

The pattern of dress for the male is very simple. They wear a white shirt, dhoti and a colourful turban on their head. Young girls wear *Langa* (a type of skirt), but after they come of age they start wearing their traditional dress. The traditional dress of women is very elaborate and colourful. Lambadas are identified even if they are present among thousands of caste Hindus, just because of their traditional dress and adornments.

The adornments of Lambadas are many and varied. The women are fond of their silver adornments. Adornments present excellent opportunity to the Lambadas to express their artistic creativity. They wear a variety of hair adornments like Ghugri; nose adornments like *Bhuria* and *Phulle*; Necklaces like *wanke*, *har*, *cheed*, *harla*; bangles like *chodus*; *moterabalia*; finger rings like *winte*, *plulal*; anklets like *khau*, *Ghode*, *wankdo*, toe rings, kunai, *Gazera*, *Kusotia*, by which they express their taste for adornments.

Lambadas are fond of tattooing. Men usually get their names tattooed and the figure of scorpion is commonly seen on their forearms. Women have tattoo marks on their hands, forearms, on legs, on their faces and also on their backs. They are drawn mostly for the purpose of decoration. But they also believe that tattooing relieves them from body pains.

Analysis

The present study clearly indicates that the Lambadas across Andhra Pradesh are fast losing their tribal art forms. Even though there are minor differences in different groups and in different districts of rural and urban setups, one can clearly notice a loss of ethnic identity among Lambadas.

Firstly, majority of the people of different age-groups either male or female of all districts of urban and rural setup lost their typical tribal identity in terms of their knowledge of folklore; folk music and dance; and folk art, handicrafts etc.

Secondly, majority of the women folk of all age groups especially in the urban areas of all districts discarded their traditional dress and adornments. But, in rural areas of Telangana district slightly more than 50% of the elder age group women are following their traditional dress but not with all adornments.

Thirdly, majority of the men and women of all age groups of all the districts of urban setup cannot sing their traditional songs or dance. A better situation is noticed in rural areas of few districts of Telangana region. Fourthly, majority of Lambadas of younger age groups have absolutely no knowledge of their marriage ceremonies and related songs. Majority of them are following Hindu marriage rites.

Fifthly, majority of them completely discarded their traditional tribal art, handicrafts, textiles, ornaments, tattooing, decoration and garment making. Sixthly, majority of them stopped worshipping the traditional deities like *Seetala*, *Maramma*, *Tulchamma*, *Maisamma* etc in urban setups. The picture is slightly better in rural areas. The village folk visit annually to their traditional temples built for the deities.

Seventhly, among all the respondents of women of all age groups, only 2% of the elderly women respondents could sing various types of songs which include mainly religious, marriage, festival and Holi songs. Interestingly, majority of the men and women of all age groups of rural areas of all districts have good knowledge of Holi songs. But only, less than 50% of the respondents could sing all types of Holi songs. Eighthly, folk dances of Lambadas have become rare events in all the districts. Traditionally, after the busy days work, every evening the women folk used to dance and entertain the men. Today, these dances are not seen. They perform them only on some festive seasons, and that too only by a few women.

Tribal art reflects the culture of the people, and also brings solidarity, continuity and consistency in a cultural group. But tribals are not living alone. Cultural contracts are there with the neighbouring Hindus and others. Modern forces are also actively transforming their lives. The factors responsible for the changes are broadly traditional as well as modern (Vidyarthi, L.P. 1968). The traditional process, characterized by the impact of certain traditions of the neighbouring caste Hindus on tribal group resulted in concepts like Hinduization, Sanskritization, tribe-caste continuum, tribal-Rajput continuum, revitalization, etc.

The modern process includes such factors like Christianity, urbanization and industrialization. Tribal development, community development schemes, democratic setup of the nation, modernization in education, communication and administration and the like are directly or indirectly responsible for the change. In modern times the rich tribal folklore is being disintegrated in the process of acculturation. Their cultural heritage is being swamped by dominant stream of modern life styles. The tribal sacred specialists (Priests) are also been replaced by outside priests in the 'sacred complexes', situated in tribal areas.

The traditional bonds between 'bards' who are custodians of genealogies, mythologies, folklore, folktales, etc., and their patrons are being disrupted in modern times. As these vital links are being cut, the unrecorded history of various major communities is likely to be totally lost if not preserved. Before the

tribal art forms completely disappear, there is an urgent need to take some comprehensive steps by the government. Mohan Rao, K (1993) has rightly suggested some measures to bring about greater understanding and appreciation between tribals and non-tribals.

Systematic steps have to be taken to document the entire folklore of tribals, their mythologies, folktales, proverbs, art forms, music and dances and dramas. This will help the historians, cultural anthropologists and students of tribal art and culture to understand and work for the cultural development of Lambadas. Important items of the tribals' folklore have to be included in the curriculum of tribal schools as well as in other school syllabus so as to dispel stereotyped ideas and prejudices about tribals.

Encouragement should be given to teach and perform tribal folk dances on important national festivals. Tribal artists, skillful craftsman, garment-makers should be encouraged and financed so that they can impart their skills to younger generations. The government should organize tribal fairs and festivals and competitions may be conducted among participants of various folk dances and suitable awards may be given to successful participants. Full length of video cassettes and CDs on tribal dances, fairs, festivals and their life styles have to be prepared with authoritative and good commentary on each pattern or item and telecast occasionally on national Television programmes.

These steps will certainly promote good confidence in local tribals and facilitate harmonious integration of tribal communities into national mainstream. Certainly, these measures will do well in improving the relations between tribal and non-tribals as well as helping in preserving the vanishing tribal art forms. But, is it possible to change the 'mind set' of tribals with these measures? There is a need to bring confidence among the Lambadas.

Concluding Remarks

The march of civilization, for some reasons, has a paralyzing effect on tribal people. The tribal people of India conquer the sorrows of daily life by discovering their own soul in depth of religious and artistic experiences. As such, tribal art is everyone's art but this everyone's art has started fast losing its richness in the bewildering mosaic of the fast marching industrial civilization.

Generally, any community which settles down in new habitat or come in contact with people of alien culture not only acclimatizes to the new environment but also selectively adopts indigenous cultural traditions in order to adjust well in the new environment in the midst of different ethnic groups (Mohan Rao, K. 1995).

However, in the process of adjustment and adoption, Lambadas lost their valuable ethnic identity. Because of the fear of socio-cultural stigmatization, majority of the Lambadas are discarding their traditional dresses, adornments, religious ceremonies etc. But, for the economic and occupational and educational benefits they are all continue to use their tribal identity.

In view of fast vanishing cultural life of tribal communities in general and tribal art in particular, there is a great need for national policy on Tribals and their culture. The policy should give guidelines for recognition and strengthening of core aspects of tribal culture/art. The policy should be made in such a way that it could promote development of Lambadas and preserving their tribal cultural identity.

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