



## An Analysis of Changing Socio-Cultural Practices Among The Lambadas Of Andhra Pradesh

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### ABSTRACT

*The Lambadas, the largest tribal community in Andhra Pradesh are undergoing a massive socio-cultural change in recent times. Hence, an attempt has been made in this paper to examine the changes that have come in the socio-cultural practices of Lambadas and to show how this community, originally caravan traders, had adversely transformed their lives.*

*The paramount objective of this study is to analyze the changing socio-cultural profile of Lambadas. The major thrust of the present inquiry is to find out the extent of tribal socio-cultural transformation, its causation and the consequences. Furthermore, the researcher tries to examine the areas of tribal life which have received more acceleration in change.*

*The data showed that the Lambadas have undergone significant structural changes due to migration, acculturation, assimilation, modernization and several tribal welfare policies/schemes of the state and central government.*

**Keywords : Tribe, Socio-Cultural Transformation, Ethnic Identity**

### Introduction

The Lambadas are a colourful, versatile, Scheduled Tribe inhabiting most of the districts of Andhra Pradesh. They are predominantly inhabited in Telangana districts of Andhra Pradesh. According to 2011 census the ST population in Andhra Pradesh was 5,024,104 (6.6%) and there are 33 Scheduled Tribes listed in the census. Out of the total ST population 2,077,947 (41.4%) are Lambadas. They are known as Lambadas, Banjaras, Sugalis, etc. Lambadas speak Lambadi/ Banjar dialect which is close to Gujarati – Punjabi – Rajasthani.

### Origin of the Lambadas

The origin of the Lambadas can be understood through Historical and Mythological stories. Lambadas claim that they are of Rajput origin and are Kshatriyas. Lambadas of Telangana claim that they are from warrior race and have fought against the Mohammadans. They also pointed out that they are having a clan by name Chauhan which shows their connection with Prithviraj Chauhan (Census of India, 1961).

There are many Mythological legends regarding the origin of Banjaras which were told by the elders of the community and was attested by the Anthropologists and Sociologists.

One such legend that is popular among the Lambadas regarding their origin is that they are the descendents of Mola and Mota, two brothers who were in the court of Lord Krishna. Lambadas claim that they are the descendents of Mola's three adopted sons named Chauhan, Pamar and Rathod from whom the sub-clans of Lambadas have been originated (Census of India, 1961).

### Migration of Lambadas

The Banjaras of North and Western India had collaboration with Moghul army when it invaded South India, which resulted in migration of these people to Andhra Pradesh.

The migrations of Lambadas, which are judged by the inscriptions found in 'Khyber' and 'Bolan' passes, had taken place between 600 B.C. and 350 B.C. (Handbook of Basic Statistics, 1993).

In view of their occupation the Banjaras may be referred to as non-pastoral nomads or service nomads. The armies in

the war field were fed by the Banjaras and they were never injured by either enemy. Many scholars are of the opinion that Banjaras migrated to Deccan along with the armies of Moghuls (Raghavaiah, 1968).

Based on the past identity of the Banjaras and their wandering habits, they were classified as the Gypsies of India. They are supposed to be the descendents of the original Aryan gypsies of North-West India, whose descendents are also to be found in various parts of central and southern Europe and America.

### Review of Literature

"Basic Statistics Handbook" (1993) published by Tribal Cultural Research And Training Institute and a Monograph released by Census Bureau (1961) on Lambadi Tribe of A.P. provided the basic secondary source material. After reviewing various works published by various scholars like Vidhyarthi & Rai (1985); Haimendorf (1988); Prakash Rao (1954); Mohan Rao (1950,1998); Raghavaiah (1971); Pratap (1968); and other articles, books published on Banjaras, it is found that no data or study is made on the impact of acculturation on material culture. So, here an attempt is made to look into this area.

### Research Methodology

With regard to methodology, both qualitative and quantitative techniques are used to collect the primary data which includes structured questionnaires, interviews, in depth interviews, as well as non-participant observation. Secondary data is attained by scanning substantial published material available at different libraries of various universities and institutions.

The research sample consists of 360 respondents from six districts of Andhra Pradesh: (i) Hyderabad, (ii) Rangareddi, (iii) Medak, (iv) Mahabubabad, (v) Khammam and (vi) Krishna. The sampling technique used to select the respondents is random sampling keeping age, sex and rural/urban variables into consideration (Data of 2001 and 2011).

In order to investigate and analyze the changing socio-cultural practices assimilation approach as propounded by Kroeber (1948:428); L. P. Vidhyarthi & Binayak, Rai (1976); Ghurye (1963:23); Majumdar (1947:131) is adopted. Assimilation is a continuous process and the culture contact with the neighboring population is held responsible for it.

Changing Traditional Socio-cultural practices among the Lambadas of Andhra Pradesh

Sociologically speaking when members of a society or community migrate to another society or community, there is always a change in the community of origin and also the community of destination. From this view point, it should be said that when Banjaras migrated from north-west Rajasthan or Maharashtra or Gujarat, there is a definite change in their social structure and also cultural system.

When they migrated from the first level of social structure and cultural system, they find themselves introduced to the second level which is that of the Telangana/Andhra villages in the plains. Here, the contours are altogether different. The structure of family, clan, kin, pattern of habitation and economic and political dimensions in the caste villages, with whom the Banjaras reside is entirely different.

The cultural aspects also undergo a drastic change. The various cultural elements like dress, language, customs, values, norms, beliefs, religiosity, ceremonies, rituals, marriage patterns, in fact, the total idiom of social and cultural life is under the influence of caste Hindus and non tribal groups.

When they jumped to the third level of social structure and cultural systems i.e. to towns, cities, industrial towns, they are exposed yet to a new kind of social structure and cultural system.

Therefore, migration makes a socio-cultural transformation. Let us briefly look at some of these transformations.

#### **Language/Dialect:**

Lambadas traditional language is Lambada or Banjari or Labhani dialect akin to Gujarati – Punjabi – Rajasthani. But today majority of them speak Telugu. In fact, all of the respondents spoke only in Telugu with the interviewer. Very few elders know Lambada dialect. Even among them majority speak a mixed language of Lambada and Telugu together.

#### **Dress, Costumes and Ornaments:**

Lambadas are identified basically with their traditional dress. Among the 180 female subjects only 22 wore traditional Lambada dress, which is colourful, bright, decorated with beads, mirrors, etc. The rest of them from different districts wore sarees, half sarees or dresses as these are usually caste Hindu way of dress.

Traditionally the men and women exclusively prepared their own ornaments, clothes, etc. They were good at making handicrafts. But today majority of them buy ornaments from goldsmiths and clothes from market.

They prefer heavy ornaments, dresses with mirror work, silver jewelry and ivory bangles. The whole ethnic identity visibly rests on their heavy dress, elaborate costumes and ornaments and adornments. They wear separate ornaments for a married woman, unmarried girl and widow for identification. Today they are not following such differentiation.

#### **Festivities:**

Traditionally they celebrated mainly Seethala, Holi, Jatra festivals. Today they celebrate all Hindu festivals. They are making conscious efforts to hide their ethnic identity by discarding animal sacrifices to their deities.

#### **Dwellings (Huts-Zumpda):**

Traditionally their dwellings were thatched square or rectangular or conical shaped mud houses. Today majority of the urban Lambadas live in pucca or semi-pucca houses. But

in rural areas still some of them are having the traditional houses due to lack of finances to build pucca houses.

#### **Beliefs:**

They used to believe in witch, witchcraft, magic, sorcery,

tantrik-mantrik activities. Today majority of them do not believe in witch and witchcraft, magic, etc. but want to integrate into caste Hindu society.

#### **Evil Spirits/ Evil Eye:**

Traditionally they were the strong believers of evil spirits and evil eye. Today they do not believe in evil spirits but they do believe in evil eye.

#### **Norms:**

Today majority of the traditional norms related to dress, interpersonal relations, behavioural aspects etc are phenomenally changed.

#### **Marriage Patterns & Rites/Rules:**

Traditionally, clan and gotra exogamy was followed, but today they follow only clan exogamy and gotra endogamy. Polygamy was prevalent but now majority practice monogamy. Child marriages were not preferred but today they are quite prevalent.

Majority of them simply conduct marriages according to Hindu rites. From arrangement, engagement to all other customs till marriage and after marriage, they follow Telugu pattern. Traditionally bride price/bride wealth was given but now all of them take dowry. Cross-cousin marriages were never took place because they were prohibited as they were considered incest. Today majority of them prefer cross-cousin marriages.

#### **Economic Activity:**

Traditionally they were cattle breeders and in trade of run pack bullocks, and salt. Today they are mainly engaged in various other activities like construction labour, vegetable, fruit, pea-nut sellers (mostly), cereal and millet sellers, kankar breakers, etc.

#### **Religion and Religious Ceremonies:**

Traditional religion is Animism. They worship deities made of stones at temple premises and practiced giving blood bath to the deities through animal sacrifices. They do not believe in idol worship. Today all of these respondents worship Hindu Gods and Goddesses in the form of idols at home.

#### **Folk-Songs and Dances:**

For every occasion Lambadas have a folk-song. Women dance at regular intervals in order to relax from their daily hectic work. But today very few know their folk-songs and very rarely they dance.

#### **Food Habits:**

Traditionally they were non-vegetarians which include all types of food like pork, beef, meat, etc. Liquor consumption is traditionally a basic requirement for both men and women. Today majority of them do not eat beef and pork but consume meat, chicken, fish, etc. And majority of Lambada men consume liquor. Occasionally, even women consume liquor. Younger generation girls are totally abstained from alcohol intake.

#### **Settlements:**

Traditionally their settlements are called as Thandas and are found in large numbers representing different clans. Thandas are exogamous units. Basically they were forest dwellers and nomadic in nature. Today, in urban areas there was no concept of Thanda representation and no practice of exogamy. In rural areas Thandas are found as exogamous units. Mostly, today they are settled in plains, in one place and also found mixed with local people.

#### **Utensils:**

Traditionally they used utensils made out of clay. But today in every house-hold one can see steel, brass, copper utensils.

#### **Division of Labour:**

Traditionally both men and women were wage earners. But today in middle class and upper class there is a tendency

among men to keep their wives and daughters away from working outside the house.

#### Education:

Traditionally education was unknown. But today many of them are sending their children to schools and colleges.

#### Leadership:

Traditionally Thanda Naik had ultimate power. He was the chief, decision maker in the public sphere. Today none go to any such Naik, since they do not have any such chiefs. They go to courts to resolve conflicts or disputes.

They had 'participatory' type of society where all male adult members assemble to face the crises or disputes. They did have fixed territories. Today decisions are taken by individuals. They have no fixed territory as they are dispersed all over.

#### Movement and other practices:

Traditionally Lambadas were 'Pastorals' and moved from one place to another that too much larger distances as nomads. Today they are agriculturists, so settled at one place. Traditionally they never believed in accumulation of wealth and material goods. Now, they started accumulating wealth and material goods. Traditionally they practiced trade and participated in warfare. Today they practice lower level trading but not participating in warfare or joined in army, police, etc.

#### Values:

Women, traditionally, attached a lot of social value to their dress and adornments. They preserve them as their ancestral property as well. Now, majority of them gave up their traditional dress and adornments.

#### Tattoos:

Traditionally they have strong belief in tattooing since it relieves the body joints from pain and exertion and also checks the effects of evil looks of others on them. Today also one can see the practice of tattooing, but they go for small and simple designs.

#### Medicines:

Traditionally, herbs, roots, leaves and bark are used to prevent or cure certain diseases. Today majority of them go to hospitals for treatment.

#### Widow Re-marriage:

After husband's death, the woman is expected to marry his younger brother (Dhavlo system). Today this custom or practice is discarded.

#### Staple Food:

The main staple food was Baatti, Boti, Seeds, Daaru, Raagi, Jowar, Bajra and Rice. Today the major staple food is the food preferred by caste Hindus.

#### Hysteria:

Hysteria was very commonly seen among them, especially women often get possessed by one or other Deity. Today it is rarely witnessed.

#### Findings and Concluding Remarks:

One can find significant structural changes among Lambadas due to migration, acculturation, assimilation, modernization and various tribal welfare policies/schemes of state and central governments.

- Lambadas are in a phase of transition.
- From being a structural and cultural concept, Lambadas have become a political category.
- They are imbibing elements of other cultures.
- They have adopted several caste characteristics.
- As far as their self-identification is concerned for economic, political, educational and

occupational purposes they do not call themselves as caste groups. But they identify

themselves as tribes.

- They have adopted the customs, traditions, notions of cosmology and a way of life quite similar to that of high caste Hindus for social acceptance, but in recent times they have been reinforcing their tribal image and distinctiveness.
- This may be attributed to the fact that their identification as tribe and not as caste makes them eligible for inclusion under the category of S.T.

Undoubtedly the extent of socio-cultural transformation is due to assimilation and culture contact with Hindu caste groups. But in the process of this transformation some new problems/ crisis cropped up. The absence of infrastructures, welfare schemes, poverty has resulted in large scale trafficking of the girl child. They became obsessed for sons and producing several daughters for one male child. Poverty led them to sell their infant daughter just for few bucks. Another reason for selling girl child is due to the shift from bride price to dowry. This has transformed the girl child into a felt burden. Lambadas give up the girl child for just a sari valued Rs. 200/-.

It should be admitted that major socio-cultural changes among these tribals have brought improvement in their quality of life, such as settled life, educational and employment opportunities, economic activities and integrated them into the main stream.

But in the process of this transformation, some new problems cropped up such as loss of ethnic identity, constraints on widow re-marriages, fading of their rich folk culture-songs and dances, social evils like dowry, female infanticide, selling female infants, selling young girls, etc.

On the debate of Integration and Identity/Isolation-data showed that for some purposes they want to be integrated with the mainstream and for some other reasons they want to be identified as a separate ethnic group.

For the evolution of social formation, transforming society from one stage to another is a natural phenomenon, where the cultural and material changes happen side by side. If there is an imbalance between material and cultural changes, it leads to a crisis in society. This study also showed that this imbalance created a gulf in Lambada society. They are undergoing massive cultural change in Andhra Pradesh.

In spite of all these changes what they actually need are some welfare schemes, education, infrastructure, counseling, etc.

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