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## A STUDY OF BANJARA TRIBES OF ANDHRA PRADESH: THEIR MORES AND BELIEFS

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**Abstract:** There has been a lot of heated debate and discussion over how to characterize the tribes. It is believed that tribes speak different languages and perform certain rituals. However tribes are confined to forests, hills, mountains et.al. According to Oxford Dictionary "A tribe is a group of people in a primitive or barbarious stage of development acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding themselves as having a common ancestor. The banjara tribes have their own beliefs and mores which is something unique and fading away. This paper explicates who are banjaras, what are their customs and traditions and their sufferings.

**Keywords:** Propitiate, geographical isolation, liquor, beliefs, exploitation.

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**Introduction:** In India the tribes are divided into two groups of people and recognized as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Constitution. During the rule of the British people in the Indian subcontinent, the tribes were known as the Depressed Classes.

The tribal peoples are less advanced than those in industrialized societies. They are stuck in the past; they choose to live on their land in different ways. My paper throws a light into the life of the Scheduled Tribes especially Banjaras of Andhra Pradesh and inspects the living style of the Banjaras. "Tribal" refers to groups of people who define themselves by a kinship to an ancient lineage before they identify with the nation.

The tribes all over the world belong to a separate clan and treated as historically disadvantaged people. This paper addresses the desperate and miserable living conditions of the Banjaras. The idea of this paper highlights how Banjaras have added richness and beauty to the culture and heritage of their respective countries.

**Banjara tribes:** The banjaras are the exceptional tribes of India, who spread all over the country. We find the settlements of banjara tribes especially in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and some other states of India. They are called with different names in Andhra Pradesh known as Lambadi, Sugali, Gooar et.al. The most striking feature of this tribe is their dress.

As they live in hills, forests and mountains they wear heavy clothes to protect themselves from cold, rain, snow, dust and weather. They live in small hamlet which is called as Thanda. They live in houses made of mud and clay. They are very tall, strong with agile body structure and tattoos on their hands. Both the men and women are fair looking with pointed nose and broad shoulders.

According to the research done by Banjara Seva Sangh, it is estimated that these tribes are divided into 17 sub-groups all over the country called with

different names.

**Characteristics the tribes:-**

**Primitive Traits:** The banjaras are physically very strong with hair all over their body. They are tall and fair, with broad shoulders and muscular body. They are hard-workers, works on the field under sun till evening.

**Geographical isolation:** The banjaras live in their won habitats and environment. They live in hills, mountains, forests, caves and in remote areas which is hard to survive. They live far away from the society. They are totally distracted from the mainstream society.

**Beliefs:** The banjara tribes are superstitious. They can read the stars and can know the suitable time for the performing of marriages. They can forecast rain and draught, and warn of the evil days which may bring disaster. They perform some pujas and rituals in times of draught to propitiate the gods to bring rain. They sacrifice pigeon, sheep, goat and fowl and offer liquor into the soil to solace their gods to bring peace in their land. They beat drums; everyone shouts, whistles and dance, so that the gods would awake from sleep. They believe that they have to communicate with the spirits of their ancestors and learn their wishes, which must be fulfilled. Man or woman is possessed by some ancestral spirit or tribal god or goddess, and temporarily acquires supernatural powers of prophecy, through whose lips the gods or the spirits of ancestors speak and can interpret.

**Distinct culture:** The customs and beliefs of these tribes are totally different from the mainstream cultures. They have their own beliefs, superstitions and a different value system. The culture is something unique and distinct. Married and unmarried men and women dance together on festivals. All the people of that particular Thanda gather together at night and dance to the drum beat. They form a ring like a garland, move round and round and dance in a frenzy way. They sway

rhythmically to the sound of the drum beat.

**Language:** Their language is completely different and unique which has led to their segregation from the other groups of society. The banjara tribes of Andhra Pradesh communicate in their language called Sugali or Lambadi language. Their language is very nearer to Hindi. Those who speak Hindi may understand their language upto some extent.

**Shy of contact with community at large:** The banjara tribes hesitate to contact with the people other than their community. They have very less contact with people belonging to other communities. They like to live in their own community. They love solitude. They don't feel safe when they talk with people of other community.

**Economically backward:** As these tribes live in remote areas, they are far away from the new technology. They use their own traditional and primitive methods and techniques to cultivate their farms. This results in low yield and low quality of crop and ultimately leads to their poverty. They live in poverty which cannot afford them three times meal in a day.

**Tradition and culture:**

**Food habits:** Banjaras are very fond of eating spicy food. They cook rice very soft and make it into a kind of paste like thing which is called as Heatu. They love eating meat into it. They make Solai out of meat, is their favourite dish. Their traditional food is roti called as Bati and curry into it called as Khodi.

**Dress code:** The banjara tribes of Andhra Pradesh wear very beautiful and colourful clothes. Men wear dhoti and kurta. Banjara women wear colourful clothes which are very famous all over the country. Banjara women wear heavy ornaments such as metal coins, pieces of glass decorated on their dress. They put on new clothes, piles of metal bracelets, coloured beads, and other finery. They decorate their hands full of white bangles made of plastic and fibre like thing.

**Occupation:** The banjaras who are also known as Lambadi and Sugali usually live by hunting. Lambadis living in Andhra Pradesh are known for stealing the sheeps and goats from the flocks during the night time when everyone is in deep sleep. The most popular and familiar occupation of banjaras since the last decade is making liquor. The banjara tribes are very fond of meat and drinking liquor which is called as *daaru*. The process of preparing liquor is simple. They collect some sickly-sweet flowers of the mahua tree, which grow abundantly in the forest, soaked them in water in a large earthen pot with a lid until they were rotten and fermented. The pot was then boiled over a large open furnace, which is kept well stoked. A clay pipe connected the pot to a second earthen vessel at a much lower level. A piece of

bamboo is split in half along its length, with one end dipping in the stream and the other just touching the receiver. As the mixture is boiled, it condenses into liquor.

**Festivals:** There could be no festival without liquor; no ritual completes without it. They needed liquor not only to propitiate their gods but also to drown their hunger and their misery. The traditional festival of the banjara tribes of Andhra Pradesh is Holy. They clean their house and wear new clothes on this festival and celebrate this festival with different colours. The other important festival of banjara is Molakala Punnami. They invite their relatives and friends on this day. They offer their praying to goddess by killing goats and sheeps and immerse the idol with its blood. They believe that if they immerse the idol of the goddess by the blood of animals, they get heavy rains. They serve their relatives meat with wine on this day.

**Lambada women:**

**Early marriage:** Early marriages are a serious problem prevailing in our country. Child marriages and early marriages can be witnessed in the banjara tribes. It is a harmful practice that robs children from their childhood and jeopardizes their health and lives. The girls in this community are getting married once they enter into their teenage. They believe that a girl should get married when they get eleven years. A banjara woman is immediately married once they attain 11 years. They feel unsafe to keep a teen girl with them not getting married. This practice and blind belief is still practiced in most of the Thandas of Andhra Pradesh.

**Sexual exploitation:** Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse that involves the manipulation or coercion of young people under the age of 18 into sexual activity in exchange for things such as money, gifts, accommodation, affection or status. Most of the Lambadi girls engage in sexual activities to fulfill their primary needs; such as food, shelter or access to education. When it is brought to the notice of their family members, they ignore as they are benefited from the perpetrator.

**Search of work:** Poverty is one of the main causes which brings helpless woman to the doors of prostitution. The banjara girls are forced to enter into prostitution to pay off her family's debts. The banjara woman is encouraged by their families, friends to enter in this flesh trade and profession where there is no other way to help her family from starvation. Most of the families depend on the income of their daughter. They become the victim of HIV/AIDS. The society looks at them as commodities. They lose social status and respect. Now-a- days, it has become very common for most of the illiterates and unemployed to fly to Arab countries in search of job

to earn money in a stipulated time. The banjara women are encouraged to go to the Arab countries and make some money to clear the debts off her family. These women face many problems at abroad for the sake of her family. Still the banjara woman is sent to the red light areas in Mumbai, Pune, and Delhi and abroad for her family.

**Problems of these tribes:**

**Poverty-stricken:** Depressed by their traditional ways and means, these tribal are facing abject poverty. Money lenders have added to the problems by charging very high rates of interest and in the process claiming their immovable property and land in lieu of unpaid loans.

**Alcoholism:** These tribes are very fond of consuming alcohol. Alcohol is very important in all the festivals of these tribes which is made from crude cereals, millets, flowers and herbs. The banjara tribes are very much connected with liquor and have become slaves to it. Availability of readymade and much stronger liquor made the tribal an alcoholic.

**Illiteracy:** Illiteracy is one of the biggest problems which India has been facing since many years. As these tribes live far away from the society, they do not get proper education. Parents do not like to send their children to school. They want their child to go for some work and earn money for the family. The banjara people make liquor to survive and to earn some perk for the family.

**Unemployment:** Population of our country India is increasing day by day. It is the second highest populous country in the world. These tribes are illiterate as they do not get formal education even though it is in their reach. They flow to different places in search of job. These tribes are reluctant to go to schools and are ignoring education and this leads to high unemployment.

**Bonded labours:** This is one of the serious problems these tribes have been facing. They go in search of jobs and falls in the conspiracy of the perpetrators. They borrow some money as loan and are not able to repay the loan. They are forced to work to repay the loan by their employer. Poverty and the threats of violence force many bonded labourers to stay with their masters, since they would not otherwise be able to eat or have a place to sleep.

**Lack of primary needs:** The banjaras and the aboriginals are struggling to survive. They lack primary needs that is food, water, shelter and clothing. They live in areas which are harder to survive. They don't have well-constructed houses. They dwell in huts and are not in reach of science and technology.

**Role of government:** The Indian government has initiated many welfare schemes to uplift the condition of the banjara tribes. But as these tribes are illiterate, they are not aware of the welfare schemes undertaken and introduced by the government. Thus they are not fully benefitted. The government has to provide financial assistance to these tribes to get education. The government has to take separate measures to educate these tribes and encourage them to mingle with other groups of the society.

**Conclusion:** In spite of their poverty and difficulties, these tribes have added richness to the culture and tradition of their respective countries. Especially the dress worn by the banjara woman is most popular all over the world. The society too has the responsibility to create awareness among these tribes and encourage the parents to enroll their children in schools. Unless these tribes are educated, they cannot come out of their poverty.

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