ABSTRACT

The Banjaras of India have a great historical legacy. India is known for cultural diversity. It is also called as a pluralistic society. Scholars have called India as an ‘ethnological museum’. The country has several social groups which are governed by the Varna system. The Indian social order is primarily responsible for the deprivation, degradation and depression of a vast majority of indigenous people of India. The goals of social democracy and economic democracy have not been actualized even after seventy years of national independence. The dominant powers continue to rule the roost by abusing the caste power, muscle power, money power and political power. The indigenous people have been excluded from the mainstream of national development despite several constitutional protections, provisions and privileges. The central and state governments have also formulated certain policies and implemented specific programmes for the social and economic modernization, transition and development of the marginalized sections of Indian society. These initiatives have not really benefited the women and weaker sections of Indian society mainly due to lack of political will, social concern and discriminatory tendencies of the ruling class. The Lambadi’s had led a gypsy life in the past and primarily lived in the western Indian state of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. They belong to Scheduled Caste in Karnataka state and backward caste in other states respectively. They are basically nomadic people from the Indian states of Rajasthan, North West, Gujarat, Western Madhya Pradesh and Eastern Sind province of Pakistan. The aim of this topic is to study the Banjara (Lambada) community in India: issues and challenges.

INTRODUCTION

India, a country with diversified cultural heritage, spread widely with various cultures, traditions, castes based on their respective professions. Banjaras a tribe in India, meant for their efficient logistics is a shining beacon to the nation’s culture and are the best known for their migrating from one place to other in search of merchandise, with their Pack- Bullocks. They have shown path to various empires from north to south and are meant to be the outstanding service providers to the kings in showing path to them, as they themselves are the explorers of the places. Indian society is very carefully and dexterously stratified on the basis of castes and sects. This carelessness and dexterity are used not only to divide the society into thousands of sections but also to protect and preserve this system for ages, banning and barring mobility and interaction between castes. Each caste has a caste lower than itself in hierarchy. Even the most downtrodden and discriminated against section like “untouchables” are divided sharply among themselves according to their castes and practice untouchability against one another. Subservience to one caste and subjugating another caste will put each caste’s agenda, position and attitude in tact by making it rigid in its hierarchical behaviour.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the origin and historical background of Banjaras in India.
2. To analysis Social Life of Banjaras Community.
3. To focus the significance of the Banjara culture, Issues and Challenges in the present day scenario.
Dhalias or Banjari Monges were added to each clan as musicians, although their touch was considered as impure by other clans. Cumberlege points out that the Matura Banjara, who trace to Mathura in upper India are called Hindustani Brahmanas who wore sacred thread and do not eat meat but learn Vedas like any other upper caste.

**HISTORICAL TRANSITION OF BANJARAS**

As per "Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics", Vol.-II, Arthur-Bunyan, edited by James Hastings, the name 'Banjara' comes from Sanskrit Vanij, 'a merchant', Karaka, 'doing'. The tribes of wandering grain-carriers in India, As a result of their wandering habits, which have now much decreased since the carrying trade has fallen into the hands of railway authorities, they are a very mixed race. It is found that their origin is probably Dravidian, but they now all trace their descent from the Brahman or Rajput tribes of Northern India. It is in the Deccan and in the State of Hyderabad that they still retain more of their primitive beliefs and customs than in the scattered colonies in the more northern parts of the country, where they have largely fallen under Hindu or Muhammadan influence. In the legends of the Deccan branch of the tribe, Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, figures as a worker of miracles and as their spiritual advisor.

**THE BANJARA COMMUNITY OF INDIA**

Banjara is the biggest ethnic tribal group of India which is not a conventionally construed caste. They were basically the ethnic group which lived in forest areas (Banaj) and depended on trade (Vaniyya) according to the Sanskrit terminology. The Banjaras are also known as Lamans / Lambara/ Labans/Labhani/Lakhapati/Lamanis/Lavani / Laban / Labhani/Mukha/Laman / Lemadi/Lamadi/ Lambadi/ Lamani/ Lahbana/ Lumadale/ Brinjar/ Bripati/ Banjari/ Pindari/ Bangala/ Banjori/ Banjuri/ Brinjari/ dhadi/ Gormatti / Goolu/ Gurmati/Mukeri/ Sugali/ Sukali/ Kora/ Sugali/ Sukali/ Tanda/ Vanjari/ Vanzara/ Wanjari/ Wanji. There are a number of historical evidences and landmarks which prove that the Banjara community was aboriginal and primitive tribes of Indian sub-continent.

They are basically divided into two tribes namely – Maturia and Labana. The name Laman is popular long before the name Banjara and the Laman Banjaras originally came from Afghanistan before settling in Rajasthan and other parts of India. The survey of literature on Banjaras Community clearly indicates that ample literature has been produced by the Western and Indian scholars. Yet the treatment of this problem is exponential. Issues like Semantics, Historicity, Location, Ethnicity, Categorization, Caste-clan Dichotomy and thecommunity’s identity and inter face with different pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial political settings continued to gravitate the attention for penetrative insights. The Banjaras of India have a great historical legacy. They share common anthropological characteristics and historical features with the Romani Gypsies of the Eastern Europe and middle east countries. The Romani Gypsies, Lambanis and Banjara’s history reveal the common fraternity.

**Social Life of Banjara Community:**

The unique community life, language, religious customs, festivals, and ceremonies marked the socio-cultural life of Banjaras. Predominantly Banjara maintained a unique and separate tribal identity. They claimed to have descended from Rajput ancestry from Rajasthan region. Though they have all tribal characteristics after classification of these DNTs they were included under various caste categories and in Karnataka they came under SC category. This uprooted their tribal identity and displaced them from their forest rights.

Banjaras, unlike any other people have a unique tradition of socio-cultural life, Thanda settlement, dress, language, festivals, gods, customs and manners as independent of public life. Dubois rightly pointed out that, “The Lambadis form a caste entirely distinct from the rest of Hindus being wholly different from them in religion, language, manners, and customs.” Mothiraj writes that Gorvamshiya (Banjara) had a unique culture, independent public life, unique tradition of livelihood, and much evident in their lifestyle, food habits, festivals, rituals, worship, likes and dislikes, dances, songs, languages, clothing and Thanda life. Nagarjuna Sagar in Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh is said to be the origin of Banjara dance and other cultural practices.

**Banjara Settlement/Thanda:**

The settlement of Banjara in camps outside the non-Banjara habitations was called Thanda/encampment. It was their exclusive characteristic to live in “Thanda” which they acquired from the days of their nomadic life. In the modern times though have settled still continued to live in Thandas. The traditional house of Banjara looked very different from other non-Banjara house which is naturally built and easily dissolvable. As they have been assimilated into the main stream society government is providing permanent houses. The social life settings of Banjara were still experienced and visible in present day. Some peculiarities of Banjara settlements are given here.

**Community Life:**

Banjara people live in “Thanda” keeping a distance from non-Banjara people. The community was held above the individual interests and “Naik” (head of the community) led the community both in matters of socio-political and religious life. The kinship and clan or sub-clan relationship enhanced the strong sense of communitarian life.

**Banjara and Non-Banjara:**

The Banjara settlement was a sign that they did not mixed with others. Banjara lived outside the villages in camps keeping the distance from other non-Banjara people. This helped them to preserve their unique socio-cultural life, language, dress, the songs and religious life. However the introduction of modernism and rise of poverty among Banjaras forced them to mingle with others.

**Place of Women:**

Banjara women were not strictly subordinated to men and at the same time not fully free. Women were allowed to divorce, remarry, and also if unjustly deserted she will be given half the portion of husbands property. Women also involved in agriculture, animal husbandry, collection of firewood, cattle breeding, and they contribute to the income of the family by making liquor. The women can participate in social, religious and political activities but only men have the voice and perform the ritual ceremonies.
The Thandanasabwas male hierarchical and women were not allowed to head the Thanda. The property and succession in the family devolves upon the eldest son. In the modern times due to the influence of outside society, modern education and contact with outside world the role and place of women was changing and women have been given a good place.

Banjara Cultural life and Practices:

Banjara people have a unique cultural life and practices that differentiate them from others. The language, food, dress and ornaments, art and dance, body tattooing and ceremonies formed the cultural world of Banjara people. The influx of modern life style and growing contact with non-Banjara world had affected the Banjara cultural life.

Language:

The language of Banjara is known as “Gorboli” “GormatiBoli or “Brinjari,” an independent dialect. The dialect spoken by Banjara/Roma Gypsy falls in the category of Indo-Aryan language. Robert Caldwell writes that “the Lambadis, the gypsies of peninsula, speak a dialect of Hindustani.” The dialect was spoken since the pre-Indus period in Gor provinces of Afghanistan, Baluchistan, Sindh, Punjab, Gujarat, Kethwada, Harappa and Mahenjodaro. Banjaras can easily understand the Hindi and Sanskrit language as about 90% words resembled with ‘Gorboli’. GorBoli was spoken within the family and kin groups, and the regional/local languages were used to communicate with others.

Economic Life of Banjara Community:

Before the establishment of British colonialism in India, the economic life of Banjara had flourished through trade on packed bullocks. During colonial times as the new transport, market and circulation system were developed, free pass was restricted and tax were laid on sale by the Banjara. As a result the economic life of Banjara was put to death. Francis in this regard writes:

“They used to live by pack-bullock trade, and they still remember the names of some of the generals who employed their forebears. When peace and the railways came and did away with these callings, they fell back for a time upon crime as a livelihood, but they have now mostly taken to agriculture and grazing.”

As their business diminished, they resorted to dacoities and cattle stealing. Majority Banjara live under severe poverty and in the modern times a very few hold white collar jobs. Tanaji G Rathod who did a study on socio-economic life of Banjara in Karnataka says that due to illiteracy, alcoholism, crimes, anarchy, exclusion from outside world, rigidity, and ignorance and lack awareness of situations Banjara were still under thseevere poverty. The loss of their livelihood had to indulge in various types of crimes68 and unsocial works. Despite various programs by the governments, NGOs, and self-help groups the economic condition of Banjara remains pathetic.

Impact of globalization on Lambada community:

With the passage of time and the impact of globalization, an immense change is observed in the Lambada community. This can be visualized through the habitat, dressing patterns, food, dancing and life style. Most of the Lambadas are still found to be living as groups in huts along with their families. The families live together in their own settlements at a distance from the town or city. These settlements, as already mentioned are recognized as Tandas. This geographical location in which the community lives has become synonymous with Lambadas. At present the situation is slowly changing. Mainly after India becoming an independent nation. The then government started off by giving special privileges and passing polices for the betterment and future development of the scheduled tribes, in which the Lambada tribe is one among them. The basic and much needed policy was reservation policy for the scheduled tribes which have driven them to get jobs, education, loans for business by banks. This seems to have led the community to give up their traditional homes (huts) and settle in well-constructed brick houses along with the main stream society.

With the Lambadas becoming more prone to the societal affairs and the globalization impact seem to have brought a major change on the dress codes, which are greatly altered. In the present times, most of the Lambada women are found to be draped in sarees. Men are found wearing shirts, trousers, jeans and T shirts. Lambadas are said to be having a rich traditional dress which is almost into usage. A traditional recognition of the community is vanishing.

CONCLUSION

Banjara were one of the ancient nomadic tribes of India which possessed a peculiar habitation, history, culture, religious and social practices, festivals, language, folk lore, dress, governing system, understanding of death, sin and salvation. The Thana living helped Banjara people to preserve their traditional and cultural practices undefiled from outsiders. At various point of times and due to various reasons Banjaras had migrated to Europe through Asia Minor and Greece. The British colonialism had uprooted them from their nomadic trade, culture and social life by branding them as criminals. Many tribal characteristics, cultural and social practices have under gone tremendous change. Severe poverty among Banjara had forced them to migrate to the cities where they came in contact with modern culture, language, lifestyle, and living system which impacted on their tribal life. At this juncture of transition in early 1970s Christianity entered the Banjara community in Bagepalli. The next chapter has exclusively dealt with the advent of Christianity and its influences among the Banjara people.

India is an ‘ethnological museum’. The Indian social order is primarily responsible for the deprivation, degradation and depression of a vast majority of indigenous people of India. The Lambadi’s had led a gypsy life in the past and primarily lived in the western Indian state of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Banjara is the biggest ethnic tribal group of India which is not a conventionally constrained caste.

REFERENCES


