



## ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF BANJARA COMMUNITY IN INDIA

**Dr.D.Palku**

*Post-Doctoral Fellow, Department of Public Administration & HRM, Kakatiya University, Warangal Urban.*

### **Abstract**

*The existing theories on origin and history of Lambadas are very vague and ambiguous. The Lambada tribe is one of the oldest tribes, also known as Banjara, Boipari, Sugali or Sukali. Vanjari, Brinjari, Lambani, Labana, Lambani, etc. in different parts of India. The Banjara tribe in Deccan Claims to be the descendants of two brothers Mota and Mola. who were in the court of lord Krishna. Mola and mota were very close to Lord Krishna. One day Lord Krishna thought of leaving this universe and called all his servants to meet him in his chamber.*

**Key words:** *Banjaras, Tribals, Social status.*

### **Introduction**

At the same time Krishna told him that, Radha was very sacred and most liked by him. So, Mola should not have involved in any sexual connection with her and he had to look after her very delicately. Mola was an expert in acrobats and he taught the same to Radha and they together started earning their livelihood by it. They had no issued, so they mutually agreed to adopt 3 boys from other castes. With acrobatic performance of Radha and mola, they were asked to express their desire. Then Radha and mola requested the Raja to give his son for adoption, for which Raja had agreed. Since the boy was from Ramghad, he was named Rathode. Like this mola and Radha gave their performance at the court of chowghad and pamghad, where the Rajas were impressed with their acrobatic feats and took one boy from each of them for adoption and they were named as chowhan and pamar respectively.

After a few years, mola thought of celebrating the marriages of his sons. There was a poor Brahmin who had three daughters; he could not get hold of bridegrooms to marry them off. Because of this, he was subjected to many abuses and insult by the villagers. At that time the custom was that, if the girls were not married immediately after puberty, their parents were looked down upon by the community and were insulted and ridiculed at every stage. With this the Brahmin, who was the father of three daughters thought of abandoning his daughters in a nearby forest and proceeded to do so. Mola met the Brahmin on the way and enquired about his journey. The Brahmin frankly explained the truth, without hiding any fact. After that, the Brahmin was asked by mola that he was also in search for three girls to celebrate the marriage of his sons.

Kamala Manohar Rao, former Director of Tribal welfare, Government of Andhra Pradesh, explains the same story with a minor variation. According to him, Lord Vishnu the creator of the world. He first created two Maharishies, viz, Bharugu and Rajhu, These Maharishies created both 'Raja Dhaj' and 'Amba Bai' to whom Kowar Dhaj was born. In turn, Kowar Dhaj had Rajpal and Reem to Rajpal. Reem had two sons namely Habel and Kobal. The direct descendant of Habel were Hindus and Kobal were Muslims respectively. Habel had a son named waged. He had Jogad, Jogad had Sandal and Sandal had Kasam, Kasam had karan, and Karan was blessed with four sons namely Teeda, Cheda, Mola and Mota. The descendants of Teeda are lambadas and the descendants of Cheda are the other Hindu communities. The remaining two sons namely Mola and Mota later became he disciples of Lord Krishna.

Majority of scholars approve the legend of Radha and Mola. In fact, this legend was not believable. Radha as the wife of mola might be true, but this Radha who was married to mola might not be the same Radha who was married the wife of Lord Krishna and it might be possible that they had no children. So they might have adopted three boys from other castes of different regions such as Ramghad, Pamghad and Chowghad naming them as Rathode, Pamar and Chowhan which seemed to be true. And the three major clans viz., Rathode, Pamar and Chowhan were identified only after their names with many sub/clans among these three.

Thurston also expressed similar views that Lambadas were the descendants of valiant Sugriva, who were two monkey chiefs in the Ramayana. The above views attest the relation of lambadas with the valiant and sugriva. Finally they say that mola was the descendant of sugriva. Above all, they approve the popular story that radha and mola adopted three sons from different regions. The legend of Lambadas as descendants of valiant and sugriva was built up on the names popularly known among the present day Lambadas. Because most of the present day names of Lambadas are synonymous with the legendary names. For instance, male names of lambadas are Valya, Vachaya, Sakru, Sakriya, Sukya, Surya etc., and female names are Vali, Valkii, sakri, Sevry etc., which are very close to the pronunciation of legendary names valiant and sugriva. The epic Ramayana



reveals another instance that when Vali died his wife was married to Sugriva. This custom is prevalent among the Lambadas in various parts of the country even today. The legends regarding the origin of the Lambadas to the epic tribal heroes Krishna and Vali, Sugriva appear to be conscious efforts to link with popular personalities of the epics.

All the authors on the origin of the Lambadas did not critically examine and their writings are simply based on the legendary stories told by the ignorant and illiterate elders of the Banjar community. The origin of Banjaras was linked with the ancient period or Lord Krishna's time. It may not be true because there was no Lambada or Banjar community in India till 1192 AD. These legends are un-scientific. Since the word Banjar is derived from the word 'Vanachara' (Wandering people). The word Vanachara was the result of the death of Prithviraj Chowhan in the battle of 'Tarain', the followers of Prithviraj Chowhan ran away into forest and while wandering in the forest they gradually took to trade for their subsistence. From then onwards, they were known as Banjaras. In this background, it is more possible to trace the origin of Lambadas or Banjaras only from the medieval times, that is, after the battle of Tarain in 1192. As to who were the Banjaras before the Battle of Tarain would be an important question to raise. To answer the doubt that more and more Lambadas are found in Rajasthan and these people were scattered all over the country. This is also corroborated by the current views among the Lambadas who claim Rajput status to themselves. Since the profession of fighting wars, earlier occupation of the Lambadas, the of linking Lambadas to Kshatriya status.

In that case all the followers of Prithviraj Chowhan might not have been Rajputs, and it is a difficult question to answer about others which is in limited scope of present work. So, the origin of Lambadas is taken only from the Battle of Tarain which transformed Lambadas from soldiers of the army to traders.

It is also clear that, all the Rajput clans such as Chowhan, Rathide Pamar and Vadiya are also found in the Lambada community. Prithviraj was a Chowhan, Jaichandra was a Rathode, Bhojraj of Gujarat was a paramara or pamar. The word pamar is a corruption of paramara.

The census Report of 1961 deals with the various explanations regarding the name of 'Banjar', Lambadas and 'Sugali'. Originally these people were 'Vanacharas' at one stage which means those who live or roam in the forests. The present day Lambadas believe that, the origin of Lambadas connected with Prithviraj Chowhan, who was defeated by Ghori. The defeated Rajput soldiers who were with Prithviraj ran into forest to protect themselves from the soldiers of Ghori. From then onwards forest became their abode and they became 'Vanacharas'. Then they changed their names and dressed to escape from Ghori and his soldiers.

The meaning of the Vanachara in Sanskrit is devoted to the people who lived in Jungle and wandered from place to place. During this period these Vanacharas became Vaniyakaras by profession or trade for their survival. Thurston opined that the word Banjaras owes its origin to a Sanskrit word that is 'VaniJyakarakas' which means merchants. Whereas the same in Prakrit was 'VaniJya Rao' a trader. In this regard Kamala Manohar Rao says that, the term 'vanacharas' as years passed changed into Banjaras.<sup>15</sup> Thurston further opined that, a section of people who traded the supari (betel nut) known as Sugali, that is the word of Sugali was corruption of supari.

Aiyer also associated with the opinion of Kamala Manohar Rao, who considered the word Banjar was derived from the Sanskrit 'Vanja' meaning trade or from the word 'Vanachara' meaning wanderers in Jungle.

These Vanacharas were being part of a plain society prior to Tarain war and they knew all the professions in said society. As they were the wandering people in the forest they could not cultivate the lands without any agricultural equipment. Hence, they started trading of food grains as well as salt on their pack-bullocks. In the course of time their services were required by the rulers. In supplying the food grains to the military forces during the time of war (fighting each other for their political existence during the medieval period in Indian history). Thus why after 1192 AD., the followers of Prithviraj Chowhan figured in Indian history as Banjaras, who were traders supplying food grains to the society.

They themselves claim that, they belong to Rajput clan, so in the light of this, they claim that they are Kshatriyas. The elders of the community claim that, their fore-fathers were the 'soldiers who withstood the onslaught of Mohammad Ghori, who invaded India during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. On series of invasions of Ghori looted the wealth of India. Prithviraj Chowhan was defeated in the battle by the Ghori in collusion with the treacherous Jayachandra. Then Ghori ordered the wholesale massacre of the Rajput soldiers to avoid further problems from the defeated force. The defeated soldiers ran away helter skelter throughout India; some went into hiding in forests also. Some ran away into forest, changed their dress and named as Vanacharas, who later on became Banjaras or Lambadas. So that, Ghori might not find out their identity.



Another elder of the Banjara Community N. JevlalNaik from Andhra region also expressed the similar view on the aspect of the origin of Lambadas or Banjaras. crooke says that, the legends popular amongst the Lambadas and the evidence of arms found in the houses of Lambadas in the present day proves that the Lambadas were formerly soldiers. But the circumstance of the 12<sup>th</sup> century forced them to take to the profession of trade.

Not only that the existed tradition during the marriage celebration proves that Banjaras are descendants of Rajputs: “Punch panchath, Raja Bhojaro Sabha, pachare lakh, unpachare, Savalakh, Bhainsugsene, pachare Jogath, Hetegum, Umparthumb, Thumbepar ameri, Amerima kasturi, kasturimaLal, Lo NayaK Hookah”, which means kindly, all those who are present here think that this court of Raja Bhoja Raju, Let those who are greeted take it that they are greeted a lakh times and those who are not greeted here are greeted a lakh and a quarter times. There is the Brass Bowl beneath and the earthenpipe over the column with Gum kasturi in it. I beg all of you to suck the hookah.

By’ and large scholars like Thurstan, Kamala Manohar Rao, Siraj- Ul-Hassan, Aiyer and the Census Report opine that the Banjaras were chiefly traders whether they dealt with salt or rice or betel nut, and also clear that the various nomenclatures such as Banjaras, Sugalis or Lambadas are one and the same. The banjara, Lambada and sugali are in one way or the other connected with their traditional, occupation that is trading.

So Lambadas are the descendants of Rajputs and their identity was found in history only after the Tarain war. After sometimes Jayachandra was also defeated by Ghori and his followers also ran into the forest to save their lives which became Rathode clan. Bhojraj who hails from paramaras defeated by the solankis became pamar clan.

### **Social Status of Tribes in India**

K.L.Bhowmick explains social status of Indian tribes. He mentioned in his writings that, in India, tribes are living in their present locations for many years with 34 exceptions of a few migrating and transhumance groups. Over 63 per cent of these people live in hilly and forest-terrain while 1.6 percent lives in semi-arid region and 2.2 percent in Islands. They live in small habitations, which consist of single or huts, often in irregular clusters, or wagon type, arranged in two or four opposing double roomed rows, in a grove of trees. Domesticates (cattle, sheep, goat, swine etc.) also share the habitation. Most of their houses have stone paved and plastered floors, mud walls on wooden frames with thatched roofs. They procure basic food needs through traditional “shandys” (weekly markets) and petty trade activities. They practice a wide range of economic pursuits such as hunting, forest produce, fishing, cattle breeding and plough cultivation. As per census, the Lambada tribe consists of 5.5 million<sup>23</sup> in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

### **The Lambada Tribe in Telangana Region Lives In Thandas (Tribal Hamlet)**

The Lambada tribe in Telangana region lives in „Thandas (tribal hamlet) one or two kilometers away from the main village and nearer to the forest works together in groups (10-15 families). All disputes, conflicts tried before the Naik and elders, whose judgment is final on all matters. The eldest son of Naik succeeds the father as headman. The customs of marriage, the religious life, beliefs, worship, festivals and their traditions are different from other civil society. The change and continuity among Lambada tribe is still unable to bring them out of their social evils and folklore due to various myths. Some of them can be quoted as celebration of Teej (fertility) festival for nine days to goddess Maremma, Sheetal Bhavani festival (protective cattle), Tolja Bhavani celebration, omen & ceremonies and community festivals, etc for which every individual irrespective of his financial status shall contribute and obey the village headman. They still practice „Dharumata (goddess of liquor) celebrations in which they offer country-made liquor to the goddess and make the children also to consume the same as a community celebration in order to get the blessing of Dharu mata.

### **Community in Lambada Tribe**

Lambada tribe is also known as Sugalis. It is a scheduled tribe inhabiting throughout the state of Andhra Pradesh. According to 2001 census it is the largest tribe in Andhra Pradesh. They live in exclusive settlements of their own called „Thandas, usually away from the main village, tenaciously maintaining their culture and ethnic identity. 50 Lambada communities comprise of five main clans viz., 1) Bhukiya, (Rathod), 2) Vadhitya (Jadhav), 3) Chauhan, 4) Pamar and 5) Banoth (Ade). They Bhukya Phratry consists of 27 Padas while, Vadhitya 52, Chauhan 6, Parmar 12 and 13. Banoth.

Location of Lambada Tribe: Lambadi is considered as a scheduled tribe in Andhra Pradesh. They are also found in other states and important cities like Bihar, West Bengal, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Mysore and Orissa. The Lambadas also called as Sugalis, Labanis and Banjaras. Thurston treats Lambada as synonym of Brinjari or Banjari, Sugali or Sukali. According to him, “The Banjaras are the well known Tribe of carriers who are found all over Western and Southern India. One of their principal sub-castes is known under the name of Labhani, and this name is often applied to the whole Tribe. The two names appear each under many variations, such as Banjari, Vanjari, Brinjari, Lambhani, Kabani, Labana, Lambadi and Lambadr.



Hutton also agrees with Thurstan and treats "Lambada as synonym of Banjara". Etythoven is of the opinion that Lamanis, Vanjaris, Banjaras, Banjaris, Brinjaris, Lamanas, Lambadis, Lambaras and Sukalis are one and the same.<sup>26</sup> Various explanations are given about the names of Banjara, Lambada and Sugali. Elderly persons of Chapancheruvu, Pattedagadda and Jadavaraopalle thandas of 51 Mahaboobnagar District in, Andhra Pradesh believe that the name 'Banjara' is the corelation of the 'Vanachara' which means those who live or roam in the forest. Some of them contend their origin of their name with Prithviraj Chauhan who was defeated by Muhammad Ghori, .Subsequent to this defeat most of his soldiers (Raj put) hibernated to forests which became their abode, and thus they are called 'Vanacharis'.

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