



AMERICAN JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (AJMRI)

ISSN: 2158-8155 (ONLINE), 2832-4854 (PRINT)

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 4 (2022)

Indexed in



PUBLISHED BY: E-PALLI, DELAWARE, USA

Sacred Festivals of Banjaras in India- Seetla Teej and Holi

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Article Information

Received: September 11, 2022

Accepted: September 22, 2022

Published: September 26, 2022

Keywords

*Banjara, Tradition, Festivals,
Seetla, Teej and India*

ABSTRACT

Geographically Banjaras are spread all over the country, from North to South. The Banjaras constitute about seven per cent of the entire country's population. They are culturally advanced; they have been relatively isolated, living on the edge of the mainstream. The Banjara community generally lives in the inaccessible hilly and forest regions and plain areas. The economy is mainly self-sufficient, unstructured and non-specialized. Their social system is a simple and more democratic way of functioning. They performed various festivals in the traditional way of doing, but three are more significant traditional festivals like seetla, Teej and Holi. Seetla is a protection festival, Teej is a fertility festival, and Holi is a seasonal fest among banjara communities. Their rituals are intended to propitiate various supernatural powers that are believed to mould the material, social and physical welfare of the community and individual.

INTRODUCTION

Indian cultural tradition is unique. However, uniqueness is one fact of reality. Its other point comprises a function that is the way social realities interact and are related to one another. Louis Dumont taking an ideo-structural approach to Indian society, observed that individual in so far as he is the principal bearer of the values in the modern society is equivalent to order, or Dharma in classical Hindu society. According to him, modern society has evolved from the Middle Ages, which certainly appears to be a traditional type, more like the Indian than contemporary. The conception of the universities that are of the social body as a whole of which living men are merely the parts belong to the Hindu concept of Dharma and the hierarchal interdependence of social status; this implies that many elements of the Indian culture, which for the lack of methodological clarity, are treated as unique. Can this facility be analyzed in terms of higher abstraction levels without disturbing their distinctiveness as cultural symbols, Lal(2003).

The unity of India has been symbolized by a cultural continuity, embodied by a united principle of consciousness, Singh(1973), which has contributed to its inner structure's identity. This internal structure plurality lies in the religious principles and their interpretation. Hinduism constitutes the basis of an orthogenetic cultural tradition in India. In contradistinction, all other religious-cultural patterns exist in India. Parallel to it provides instances of heterogenic growth of its cultural traditions, Hinduism may be viewed as a religious system alone. Still, more than that, it represents a way of life. It constitutes a distinctive worldview and a cultural complex.

Traditional culture did not treat an individual as a social and cultural participation unit. For all modes of interaction, the household, clan sub-caste, and caste were recognized as social units' clan as a unit of cultural participation observed in most tribes. According to Kosambi(1975), many cultural items of the existing peasant Hinduism

culture in India originate in the aboriginal cults and cultural patterns.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Banjaras have a unique culture of their own, and it occupies an important role in Indian culture, their life style is unique which does not have anything in common either with the population of plain areas or with the local tribes who are popular as Banjara or Lambadi or Sugali or Lambani, in different parts of India. Banjaras they speak dialect known as Gor Boli/ Ghor Boli, is used for both inter- and intra-group communication, which has no script and has mixed languages of Sanskrit, Hindi, Marathi, and Gujarati, Lal (2015) and, Lal (2016).

The banjaras have been called with different names such as Banjari, Vanjari, Brinjari, Labhani, Labhani, Labhana, Lambadi, and Lambani. According to Thurston (1975) all these words have been mainly derived from the two words banjari and lambhani.

Russell (1916) has said that the banjaras are also called as banjara, vanjari, labhana and mukeri. Jeevla Naik (1990) in his "Banjara-Vamshavale" has given a list of names which are in use they are banjara, vanjara, banjari, brajavasi, baladia, lambada, laman, lavani, lambadi, labhan, ladiniya, labhani, panda singali banjari, shirkinbond and roma banjara.

Shyamala Devi (1989) is of the opinion that the names Banjaras denote that they live in the forest or wonder in the forest. Though they have got so many names and were called by different names all speak same dialect mixed with mostly North Indian languages based on Sanskrit language. Non-tribal dominant culture should not humiliate or undermine tribal culture. Let the tribes live as they like. Dominant culture should not penetrate and disturb the whole set up of tribes, Lal(2021).

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

The paper is based on primary and secondary data

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sources. First, primary data, such as interviews with elders and the Naiks of the Thanda, was collected. Then, secondary sources like past field studies, reference books and research articles were used—most of the information was collected through the purposive sampling technique from banjara respondents.

- To focus on the significance of the Banjara culture in the present-day scenario.
- To study festivals of Banjaras and its performances and
- To suggest appropriate measures to restore their traditions and culture.

The Banjaras

The Banjara (Gor) is an ethnic group among larger populations in any society with a unique culture and characteristics such as physical features, everyday language, habits, cultural homogeneity, unifying social organization and habitats in the same territory. Their settlements are organized around lineage, clan and cultural and economic resources, irrespective of the invasion of outsiders on their land. The families or communities making up an ethnic group are linked through socio-economic relations, religion and customary laws, Lal(2015).

Banjara was one of the ancient communities, dating back to 5-6 thousand years BC. There are references about Banjara in Greek Civilization leading up to Harappa and Mahenjodaro Civilization, and Gor must probably have been the possible originators of the Indus valley civilization to which documents are available, Rathod(2001).

Banjaras have a unique culture, which occupies a vital role in Indian culture. Their lifestyle is unique and does not have anything in common either with the population of plain areas or with the local people who are famous as Banjaras or Lambadis or Sugalis, or Labani, in different parts of India, Lal(2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The festivals of Banjaras have three types of productive (fertility) implications, protective and seasonal. In addition, the Banjaras rituals are intended to propitiate various supernatural powers that are believed to mould the material, social and physical welfare of the community and individual.

The rituals connected with the agrarian cult of Teej provide pomp and decoration blended with dance and song. Further, these rituals are intended to perpetuate women's fertility and fruitfulness of the soil on which they depended for their livelihood Lal(2003).

Festivals, rituals and the observance of holy days are part of the great cultural heritage of India. Besides being a great source of spiritual and moral enrichment, they lend zest, variety, colour and grandeur to drab, dull routine and careworn day-to-day human existence in different parts of the country. These holy festivals are the nerve centres of cultural heritage, and hence they are called the Parva. These holy days and festivals have a far more

profound impact upon an ancient yet dynamic culture. They are essentially a way of living and thinking in the course of existence and bring their whole weight to bear on the individual and society. These festivals show the reaction of human society to the changes that occur in nature. Hence, all of them are intimately connected with the change of seasons Chaturvedi (2012).

Banjaras Dressing Pattern

Banjara people have 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 the Banjara people.

Women wear colourful and beautiful costumes with rich embroidery, jewellery and mirror patchwork. Their dress includes Phetiya (the skirt), Kanchali (blouse), Kurta (the top), and Chantiya (the veil). The ornaments used were: Baliya (bangles), Kasautiya (armlet), Sadak (skirts decorated with drawstring), Gagri/ Topli (clips worn by married women), Pawlar Haar/ Haasli (the necklace made of coins), Bhuriya (nose ring), finger rings, Ghoogri-Chotla (metal flowers and balls suspended from the hair), Kolda (leg ankle rings), which were different from others. On the other hand, Banjara men wear Dhoti, Kurtha or long shirts and Pagadi (turban) with multiple rounds. Their ornaments are silver rings, coins, chains and hair pleats tied together at the end by chotla to woman, Lal (2015).

Seetla Bhavani Festival

Seetla (Seetala) is one of the important animal festivals of Banjaras performed in the month of Asada, usually occurring in June and sometimes in July. Praying Seetla is only for the protection of cattle. The Banjaras believe that Seetla, the eldest of the Mathrukas malignant (seven sister- deities), namely Seetla Bhavani, Marama (Merama) Bhavani, Tulja Bhavani, Hingla Bhavani, Kenkhali Bhavani, Manthrali/ Masuri Bhavani and Dwalangar Bhavani. These Goddesses are considered that they control pustule and epidemics diseases to protect the cattle. These seven Goddesses are symbolically represented by seven stones, kept under a Jeenzero Jhad (Bauhinia tree). They believed that Seetla was born under the cool shade of this tree. This festival is celebrated on the outskirts of the Thanda.

Just opposite the deities, a male deity called "Lunkadiya" (similar to potaraju) is also propitiated at a distance of about thirty feet. First, a goat is offered to sacrifice before the deities, and its intestines are drawn out to the abdomen and stretched up to the idol of Lunkadiya across the pit and tied there. Then, men raise Adin by beating drums and vessels to frighten the cattle, run halter- skater and cross over the pit stretched intestines of the sacrificed animal—Seetla, followed by Teej.

Teej Festival

Banjaras celebrate the fertility festival of Teej at the

beginning of the monsoon after trying months of sizzling heat. The celebration ritual is performed with utmost religiosity spread over nine days with a strong ritual chance committed to the tune of melodious songs. The Banjara dancers' meditative mood and sacred chores, the sacred burning fire and the occasional canopy of smoke raised by the ceremonial burning of pancakes in fire inculcate religious feeling among the banjaras, and a holy atmosphere descends upon the Banjara Tanda. However, the all-pervasive sacred atmosphere is not allowed to become monotonous. The ceremonial dances, wriggling movements of the colourful skirts, and sweet sacred songs provide a feast to the beholder's eyes and ears. They offer a welcome relief to the performers from the taxing ritual observances, Lal(2003).

The fertility festival is exclusively the festival of maidens, who are considered free from pollution of birth and other unclear sexual activities. Therefore, married men, women and widows are tabooed from performing rites during the celebration of Teej. Barren women are even forbidden to approach Teej baskets.

The festival-like another Hindu festival, has a sacred origin. On the day of Teej, the mountain Goddess Bhavani or Parvathi is beloved to have been reunited with her consort Shiva after a long and trying period of stem austerity. To mark the day with honour, the Goddess declared it holy and proclaimed that whosoever invoked her on that day would have their desires fulfilled. With this conviction and confidence, all the banjara maidens gather that the Goddess Bhavani desires excellent and virtuous husbands for themselves.

During festive celebrations, the Goddess Meramma and Shevabhaya are propitiated. Maremma is believed to protect their females and children and preserve their land and females' fertility, while Shevabhaya is regarded as the protector of their cattle Lal(2003).

Dhamoli (Offering Pan-cakes) Ritual

"Dhamoli" the girls perform dhamoli on the Teej seventh day of the offering pan-cakes by burning them in the sacred fire before the Teej baskets with the rising smoke reaching the Teej baskets is the sole rite of the day. All the maidens prepare sweet pan-cakes in their houses, each bringing five sport smeared and purified with cow dung. The girls' leader takes five cakes and a handful of jaggery and keeps the cakes in a leaf plate on a circular spot smeared and filtered with cow dung. Then, the maidens' leader takes five cakes from the pile, supposedly the share of shevabhaya and throws them into the sacred fire burning before the Teej baskets. This causes a canopy of smoke from the fire, and the emanating smoke reaches the baskets.

Ganagore a Praising –Fun Ceremony

"Ganagore" praise the eight-day ceremony of the Teej, a welcome humorous interlude in between the girls' exacting ritual duties, and the serene atmosphere gives way today to fun and frolic. The leader of a group observes a fast

on the day. Two obscene clay figures represent a male and female with all the parts of the human body, including the genital organs. They sing a beautiful song akin to a lullaby in praise of the ganagore represented by the male figure.

The First-Day Song of Teej

The girls and the females sing the following song, performing their traditional dances rhythmically, moving in a circle and raising their hands half above their heads. Shevabhaya Borayo Teej, Bayeena Paleno; Dandy yadi, Borayee Teej, Bayeena Paleno; Shukabhaya, Borayo Teej, Bayeena Paleno; Tethabhaya, borayo Teej, Bayeena paleno Maarocharo Javarare ya-gham

voomladde-deriya

Lambi Lambi ye lambedi vekoriya

Lyaada briya lambedivekoria

Joka Kariye lambbedi vekoriya

Lambi Lambiya-lambedi vekoria

Shevebhaya Borayee Teej ye lambedi vekoriya

Dandiyadi Borayo Teej ye Lambedi vekoriya

Jethabhaya Borayo Teej ye Lambedi vekoriya

(Translation)

"The Teej planted by Shevabhaya is like the little babes lulled in cradles.

The Teej planted by Dabdhadi (Meramma) is like infants wrapped in swaddles.

The Teej planted by Sukabhaya is like little children in the cradle lulled.

The Teej planted by Jethabhaya is like the babes lulled in cradles.

"My green plants grow quick. The wheat plant progressed as tall as hibiscus" The plant of the gram grows long and long-and swings and tosses in the soothing lap of the season. It grows and quickens tall and tall".

The Teej planted by Shavabhaya grows tall and well.

The Teej planted by Meramma grows tall and well.

The Teej planted by Jethbhaya grows tall and well.

Final day song of Teej

After throwing the baskets and seeing them off-floating in the water, all the maidens sing the following song in a melancholy mood cursing the water, which carries away their baskets.

"Thoo kathethi ayee ryarana ganga

maari O! Sathanerajop laye chaalida, dagar chalia

Thoo kathethi area raaki thalavadi, Maya busenero, chope, leyechalida

Dagar Chalia.

Thoo kathethi ayee khalayavo roongalee, maaro, husanero, chope, leyichalida,

dagar chaalida".

(Translation)

"Where thou hast come to sinful Ganga from;

Thou art taking may include beautiful baskets away;

Floating my darling baskets away;

Though hast washed the sign of my happiness away".

The final stage of the festival is marked by the exchange of banter between cross-cousins of the opposite sex and between sister-in-law and their younger brother-in-law.

For the maiden of the Thanda, it is a moment of grief and melancholy as the tender saplings reared with care over all the nine days of the festival are to be distributed. Finally, the sacred Teej baskets have to be thrown into the waters. While the Virgins sing at the time of throwing the baskets in water in a melancholy tone, the boys make mirth and merriment at the mourning girls' expense. The girls are forcibly dragged out of the stream, and their feet are washed by their younger brother in token of their innocence and purity, even at the touch of marked men and women.

All of them silently return to the Thanda, and in this calm and quiet atmosphere, they feel that all evil has gone out of their habit as their gods are pleased with the maidens' purity and satisfied with the offerings and sacrifices. This ends the nine-day festival of Teej, Prathap(1975).

Holi is Colourful Festival

Holi is the most beautiful and colourful festival of all the Banjara festivals and ceremonies. It is a unique occasion for both the sexes to gather for fun and frolic, generating a 'we' feeling and a sense of group solidarity which is the hallmark of Banjara Thanda life. The exciting feature of this festival is that no deity is propitiated on festival day. Perhaps, it is the only occasion when they can completely forget all past petty wrangles, problems and hand ships of life and abandon themselves to the joy and pleasures of the festival celebrations, reflecting on their gay community life on the merry occasion of Holi. This happy atmosphere nurtures inter-community relations and community solidarity Prathap(1975).

These three festivals are community festivals. The Banjaras are both settled plough cultivations and peasants. Hence, the protection of fertility of the cattle's land and health is of paramount importance for eking out a thriving livelihood. As they believe in supernatural powers, they invoke their gods and propitiate their deities to provide ample protection to their cattle and land. Thus, these festivals reflect the traditional cultural milieu of Banjaras in India, who have a communitarian way of life.

CONCLUSION

Teej festival made men and maidens learn how to understand each other in family life by filling fertile soil, in which the unmarried men sow the wheat seeds in the baskets. Symbolically it represents the respective role of males and females in the procreation of the race. The influx of modern lifestyle and growing contact with the

non-Banjara world had affected the Banjara cultural life.

Our responsibility is to prevent the decay of banjara culture and initiate a new direction for positive changes to better the Gor Community. Now-a-days, the Banjara traditional marriage system we cannot find in plain areas except in rural pockets only. All most all Banjaras follow the non-banjara (Hindu) marriage system in present day scenario.

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