



A Study on Yerukala Tribes as Marginalized Groups

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ABSTRACT

Yerukala or Erukala or Erukula is a Tamil tribal community primarily found in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The population of Yerukala tribes according to 2011 census is 519,337. The total literacy rate among Yerukula is 48.12%. Most live in southern coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema, with a smaller minority in districts of Telangana. Their native language is Tamil based Yerukala but most have shifted to Telugu. They were vilified in British sources for being habitual criminals, and so were placed under Criminal Tribes Act, although they were underrepresented in the population of criminals and were most likely targeted for their nomadic lifestyle.

KEYWORDS: yerukala, language, tribe, marginalized, section, lifestyle, minority, telangana, telugu

1. INTRODUCTION

Long before the Independence of India, the Tribal were fighting for their untimely existence. Those who were native to this land, today they are forced to fight for their own rights. Earlier, where the identity of the tribal was from India's land, now their identity has been confined to water, forest, and land. It is said that tribal society has gone through a structural transformation from the mainstream to marginalized. But the truth is that the system has been scheming to kill their true identity in the name of development of the system. The tribal section is not limited to the Chhattisgarh, but their population is in the entire country and their struggle has remained the same in every state. [1,2] You can understand by this example when Birsa Munda organized awareness among the tribal in Jharkhand area and was fighting against British and the country rulers. During the same period, under the leadership of Govind Guru, tribal of Rajasthan

and Gujarat were fighting against Britishers. The point is that there was no communication between them, even when the battle took place in one style at the same period. The lives of tribal who make unique identities from water, forest and land and their ancient culture are very simple, which are completely dependent on the forest. Apart from urban life, they live in dense forests and most of the food is dependent on farming. Tribal have always been simple and also diligent as well. They are very hard working and even today, the tribal are very diligent, who still do not withdraw from hard work. Adivasis basically worship the nature and today their nature is being stripped from them and the forest is being illegally occupied. Today, in the era of Globalization and Industrialization, the rights of the tribal are being exploited, it is not only disappointing but their fundamental and constitutional rights are also being violated. Today, journalism is losing its existence

in a true sense, which is a big misfortune. Journalism which is a 'Mirror of the society', is losing its identity. Also, the position of entitlement is that in many places some journalists are not given promotion because they are in a tribal cast.

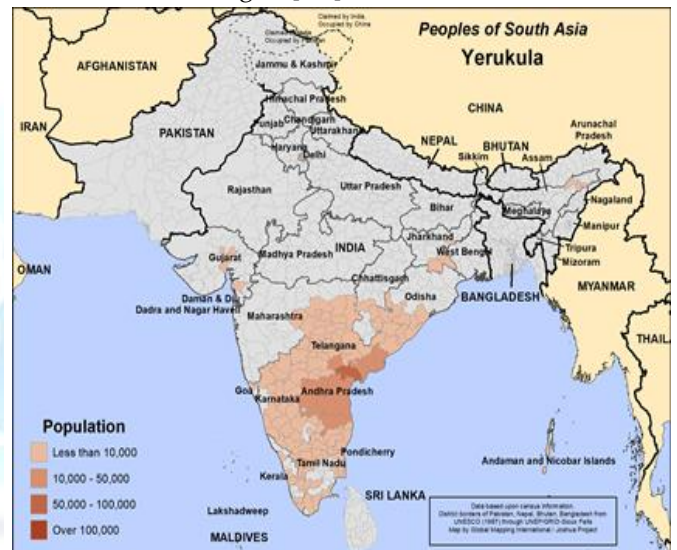
Yerukala people are a tribe found largely in the southern Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Yerukala are an indigenous people which means they have low status in modern India. They are called Yerukala after their women's traditional profession of fortune telling. This people have a language of its own, Yerukula. Many of them also speak Telugu and Hindi so they can communicate with those outside their group. A small fraction of the Yerukala claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. [3,4]

Yerukula is a Dravidian language mainly spoken by the Yerukala tribe. This language is also called *Kurru basha* or *Kulavatha*. Yerukala is linguistically close to South Dravidian languages such as Ravula and Irula. Lexical similarity among these languages ranges from 53% to 81%; in the case of Irula, it varies from 33% to 38%; in case of Ravula, it varies from 28% to 45%; in case of modern Tamil, it varies from 27% to 45%. Sathupati Prasanna Sree has developed a unique script for use with the language.

Some of the language terms, mostly relations.

English	Kurru	English	Kurru	English	Kurru
Father	Aava	Father's Father	Jejaava	Father's Mother	Jeji
Mother	Amma	Mother's Father	Tata	Mother's Mother	Ammamma
Son	Momu	Elder Brother	Berannu	Younger Brother	Thenbhi
Daughter	Maga	Elder Sister	Berukka	Younger Sister	Thangisee
Grand Daughter	Pethi	Grand Son	Pyathu	Father's Sister	Atta
Elder Sister-in-law	Nangala	Younger Sister-in-law	Merchenc hi	Uncle	Mama

The traditional occupations of Yerukala include basket-making, mat weaving, raising pigs and chicken and rope-making. The Yerukala women are specialized in fortune telling and making charms. Today, most of the Yerukala are settled in villages or towns. They are trying to make their way out of poverty by getting an education. Even though they live in a democratic country like India, they are still living under harsh social conditions because of the Hindu caste system. They face daily social and economic discrimination. The sub-divisions of Yerukala include those who make baskets from split bamboo, those who make items from wild date leaves, those who make weaver's combs, and sellers of curry leaves and salt. Most of them live in nuclear families. Descent is along the father's line, and authority comes from his line as well. They prefer cross-cousin marriages. [5,6]



The Yerukula have only been reported in India

Their marriages are usually between one man and one woman, but they do allow a man to have more than one wife if he can afford it. Marriage through negotiation and exchange are the common modes of acquiring mates. Divorce is permissible on the grounds of adultery, barrenness and incompatibility between the spouses. Widows are permitted to re-marry. The Yerukala tribe has its own social control mechanism to ensure proper observance of prescribed codes of conduct. This traditional council is headed by an elderly man whose office is hereditary. The traditional tribal council decides the domestic disputes and enforces social norms. [7,8]

The Yerukala practice Hinduism, the ancient religion of India. Their brand of Hinduism is heavily influenced by folk religion. They worship and serve the gods of the Hindu pantheon. Hindus believe that by performing rituals and good works that they will attain "moksha" or freedom from the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth. The Yerukala visit Hindu shrines and offer prayers, food, flowers, and incense to their gods in hopes of gaining protection and benefits. They do not have a personal or familial relationship with their gods as Christians do. There are many forms of Hinduism, each with its own deities and beliefs. The main yearly holidays of the Yerukala people are Holi, the festival of colors and the start of spring, Diwali, the festival of lights, Navratri, the celebration of autumn and Rama Navami, Rama's birthday. The caste system divides Hindus into four main categories. Dalits and tribal peoples are outside of the caste system. As a tribal people the Yerukala are outside the Hindu caste system.

The Yerukala people need to put all their trust in Jesus Christ. He alone can forgive their sins and free them from their fear of evil spirits. They also need to learn new job skills and good local schools for their children.

Ask the Lord to give the Yerukala a desire to investigate the Person and claims of Jesus Christ. Pray for a disciple making movement among the Yerukala people this decade. Pray for the Lord to send workers to the Yerukala people to tell them about Jesus and to help them with their physical needs.[9,10]

2. DISCUSSION

There are many tribes in Andhra Pradesh, namely Bodo Gadaba, Khond Poroja, Chenchu, Gond, Yerukala, Kolam, Konda Savaras and Thoti are some of them. Yerukala is a tribal community which is primarily found in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. According to the 2011 census, the population of Yerukala tribes is 519337. 48.12% is the total literacy rate among this tribal community. Most of them live in Rayalaseema and in southern coastal Andhra and with a small minority in the districts of Telangana. The native language of this tribe is Yerukala. This tribe comes under a classification of Adivasi. The people of this tribe mainly follow Hinduism and Christianity. The people of Yerukala Tribe are usually involved in making baskets in Andhra Pradesh.

The subgroups of this tribe are:-

Subgroup Name	Population ▼
Katherolu	66,000
Pachhabotla	47,000
Koracha	34,000
Koravar	26,000
Kuncheti	25,000
Kapparallatippa	9,800
Kothula	3,500

During ancient times, the Yerukala were nomads who also acted as spies for the rulers of the land. They were the chief collectors of secret information from enemy territories until the time of the British invasion. Then they lost their jobs as intelligence staff and moved into agriculture and petty trades such as rope making and mat and basket weaving. At a certain time there was a setback in their businesses, and unfortunately they turned to crime for survival. Subsequent harsh punishments and torture have driven the Yerukala to a subhuman standard of living. Though the Yerukala are spread throughout the states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra, they are mainly concentrated in the hills and plains of Andhra Pradesh, a state in south central India. Recently, most of the Yerukala have been allotted agricultural lands by the government and they have put them to good use.[11] They have also made use of government welfare schemes to regain the freedom they once enjoyed. Today, most of the Yerukala are settled in villages and small towns, trying to make their way out of poverty by getting education so that they can obtain the financial freedom they have long been denied. The Yerukala are largely Hindus with a small percentage of Christians. There are a few churches among this community. Christianity is on the rise among the Yerukala because of the economic inducements and the cooperation of missionaries. There is no Christian literature in the Yerukala people's language, Sankara-Yerukula, which is closely related to Tamil. However, a few Gospel recordings are available in Yerukula. A children's Bible was published first in the year 2007 and New Testament translation is in progress. Let us hope that Christianity will make a greater impact in the lives of the Yerukala at all levels.

Pray for: 1. God's wisdom and favour for the mission agency working among the Yerukala. 2. More long-term

workers to join the few missionaries who have already responded to God's call. 3. Qualified people to be raised up by God to translate the Bible into Yerukula.



Indian Yerukala tribal women weave bamboo baskets

The social status of the tribe is very low in rural areas. However, they claim superior status over scheduled castes. It is a patriarchal society. And it possessed a few sub-tribes and several exogamous patrilineages. Uncle-niece marriages and cross cousin marriages are highly preferred. Child marriages are not unusual. And monogamy is common. It is a patriarchal society and patrilocal residence is the norm. People are nonvegetarians. Most of the Yerukula people are illiterate. Occupationally, these people have the history of being involved in criminal activities such as burgling and dacoity.[12] However, many of the Yerukulas have changed their occupation. Religion of the Yerukula is animistic and the influence of Hinduism and Christianity is noticed

3. RESULTS

Cultural activities of the Yerukala community in Guntur and Nellore districts are very special. We can see all these on the days of moonlight, festivals, marriages and when the "petharlu" are performed. While on work, the women sing in their language to forget the tiredness of their daylong work. Separate songs are sung at the time of planting, harvesting, and when the harvest is brought to the threshing floor. In addition, there is a tradition of singing songs early in the morning, when the wife and husband are pounding the grain. In the Yerukala community, we can observe the practice of equal participation of men and women in the cultural activities. Playing on the flute, made out of the tender parts of the bamboo sticks, are practiced as a custom by the Yerukalas of Dabbala area in Nellore and Guntur

districts. In the same way, they also play "pulizoodam" which resembles today's chess.

Among the traditional caste occupations of these people, weaving baskets and rearing pigs are important. These are male-oriented occupations. But women also play a crucial role in financially supporting the family. The main occupations of women are: Sode chepputa (Fortune telling), Pachcha podavadam (Tattooing), and Mugguluvayadam (Making designs on the soil). With the help of these, women will contribute to the house management expenses. Telling "sode" is the community's salient feature. In fact, the community derives its name from this work. The sode system of kurru (yerukala) tribes is very special. "Gadde" is another name of "sode". This is a part of astrology. There are different forms of astrology such as sankhya sastramu, prasna sasthramu, hastha samudrikamu (palmistry), puttumachchala sastramu (based on moles), sakuna sastramu (omen), etc. Telling sode is also prevalent in some old ancient tribes such as in Yanadi where sode is called "Rangam". Only a Yerukala woman is allowed in these occupations. The sode telling woman is called "Yerukalasan" in Andhra region and "Kuruvanji" in Karnataka region. We can easily recognize the Yerukalasan from the way she is dressed up and the kind of instruments she carries with her. Moreover, her slogan "Sodemma...sode...sode chebutanu...sode" (I will tell your fortune) will inform the needy people about her presence. When one sees her wearing a beautiful sari and her hair tied in a tuft and with a saffron mark in the middle of her forehead, one feels as if the village goddess (gramadevatha) is coming to their house. The instruments she carries with her include a basket specially made with palm leaves, kollapuri made out (adusu) of gunny bag in the size of the palm and some cowries decorated with saffron and turmeric powder, mantra dandam (magic stick), and sode burra. If she is a nursing mother, she will carry her child tied in her sari-made bag. The sode takes remuneration only in the form of grains, but not in the form of money. Depending on the amount of grain given as remuneration, it is measured as three types which are mudu solala gadde (three measures), aidu solala gadde (five measures), yedu solala gadde (seven measures). This sode is told for a long time in detail in a melodious tone by the Yerukalasan with her loquaciousness that attracts her customers very well. When any human being or animal fall ill or lose any valuable things or if suffer

from some other problems, generally, people tend to approach the sode woman to know the reason behind their sufferings.[13]

The sode telling women recites the names of different God and Goddess remembering them and pleading to them in devotion to give her their word. She feels as if possessed by the God and that God is talking through her mouth. In this way, she talks in a trance and satisfies the sode listeners by explaining causes and solutions to their problems. Some of the sode tellers pick out few grains from the chata (winnowing basket), count them and then tell the result with the help of numerical knowledge. The women who take up the profession of fortune telling are not only the breadwinner of the family but also enjoy the privilege of restricted freedom. Wherever she goes during the day time, she comes back home by the same evening. When she travels long distances, she is accompanied by someone trustworthy. In the absence of travel facilities, sometimes the sode tellers would stay overnight in the houses of their acquaintances. To introduce a new yerukalasan into this profession, the community choose a Sunday after her first menstruation. On that day, they give a feast to their relatives. But the practitioner fasts for the day. After the completion of the feast, they close the practitioner's eyes with a cloth and make her eat a mixture of boiled rice, green gram, black hen, black pig, black goat and fresh blood. She has to eat at least three mouthfuls of this mixture. They believe that after eating this mixture, if she does not vomit, she could become a good sode gathe (fortune teller)! The most pitiable thing is that nowadays the sode art is gradually losing its valuable measures due to the entry of dishonest people into this art. Once it was a sacred art, a blessed gift of Parvathi Devi. It believed that the goddess Parvathi Devi once tested the skill of a man belonging to koracha caste in making a cradle. He successfully passed the test. Impressed by him, the Goddess gave the art of fortune telling in the form of sode to this community. From then onwards this caste entered in to this profession. She also gave her mantra dandam (magic stick) and chata as gifts and in the place of chata they are using kollapuri nowadays. As this art is a gift of Parvathi Devi (a Goddess), it is very sacred. So those who enter the profession of sode-telling used to be very devoted. They have to be chaste and they should never lie. As a result, these sode-tellers used to be talkative. Whatever they say would happen. They used

to catch the real or true nature of the incidents that happened in the past and those incidents that are going to happen in the future, naturally. They used to observe "vokka poddu" (fasting) in some particular days, and once in a year visit their deity who gifted them with the "vaksiddi" and offer their gifts to the Goddess. Moreover, they worship "Shakti" (Power Goddess).

Tattooing is also one of the traditional occupations of Yerukalas. Tattooing of Yerukala woman is a different one. They tie some needles as a bundle and make the tattoo. They use juice of some leaves to make tattoos. The tattoo using the juice of these leaves will remain for life long. There is no chance of it fading away. It shows that these people have a good knowledge of the herbs and its usages. Tattooing is one fine example of their talent in exploring and utilizing of their natural resources. Tattoos are made in different forms and in different shapes to make good diagrams and pictures to please interested persons. Hands, forehead and temples are much preferred parts of the body for tattooing. These people used to lead a nomadic life. Now they established a standard habitation. Those people who have this tattooing as a profession are called with different names in different areas. They are called Dayyalollu (people of devils). Yerukulollu, Pachchabotiollu and Peddeti Gollalu in different areas. They all use the Kurru language. So they are all treated as Yerukalas. Many people believe that if they make tattoos on their body after their death, the devils won't eat their body.[14]

Yerukala women and young girls wake up early at the dawn and sprinkle the vaakili premises with water and kallapi, and decorate it with rangawalli or rangoli

Festivities, Ceremonies and Other Practices

Moonlight dance

During the nights under the moonlight all the women are girls in the community come together and dance in circles holding each other's hands singing songs. In some areas they will play "uppu aatallu" and "chedugudu aatalu".

Festivals & feasts

The Yerukalas of Prakasam and Guntur districts share many norms. They fast during festival days. They perform the feasts and festivals with care and devotion. On these nights, they call all the storytellers among their community and listen to the devotional stories. They have their scholars who can recite the stories about the

Ramayana, the Bhagavatha and the stories of local Katamaraju's Veerabrahmendra Swami, Ankamma Katha, and Thirupathamma Katha, etc.

Marriages

Marriages are performed mostly at the bridegroom's house in the community. At the time of marriage, there are songs describing the bride and bridegroom. The bride's relatives sing songs about the bride and the bridegroom's relatives sing about the bridegroom. In this tradition, only women sing these songs. As a part of the marriage "Vasantham aata" (game of spring) is also played. To the happiness and excitement of the community, at first, the bride and bridegroom start to play the game. The bridegroom pours (sprinkle) the colour water on the bride and later the bride pours the colour water on the bridegroom with metal mugs (generally bronze). The event starts and thus prolonged until the whole community including the elders also participate and enjoy.

Petharlu

"Petharlu" is a ceremony practiced in the remembrance of the elders who have passed away in the community. On these occasions, edibles and clothes of the departed elders are kept for them in the house with the belief that their souls will come and taste the offering. The vistharlu (plates made out of stitched leaves) served with food are kept in the house along with the clothes of their liking and they come out of the house leaving no one inside the house. The elders (male) and paternal relatives in the house take sedative drinks and enjoy them with a rhythmic dance. After the dance, they eat the food kept as samples for their elders, taking a bit from each assuming that the elders had blessed it. Either the elders or paternal relatives wear the clothes. Only men take part during the time of Petharlu.

Cultural Songs

Some special songs are sung to forget the effect of scorching sun, hot air and the daylong fatigue of labour while planting the seedlings that come out of freshly sworn seeds. An example of such a song is Patha padu patha padu patu kunje / Nanantha patha padure Gudakunje. Similarly, there are songs to sing at the time of kallamulu (threshing floors) and early in the morning when wife and husband pound the grain i.e. paddy, millet, spiked millet, etc. In this community, the newly

married couple will have one meal for the day as a feast in each and every house. The unity among these people is obviously visible from this practice. This custom is not observed to perfection nowadays.[11,12]

Viluvudya

(Archery) Villu (bow) is one of the weapons used by the Yerukalas from the ancient times. They are experts in hunting the birds with bows. Yerukalas used to live mostly in forests, and protect themselves from the wild beasts in the jungle with the bows. Though these are not in use now, still villu could be seen some houses.

Karrasamu

Yerukalas used to do karrasamu (fighting practice with stick) for their self-protection. This karrasamu art is practiced during the festival season. Some villagers teach it to their children early in the morning. With the help of karrasamu, we can also block stones thrown on us.

Kyatball (Catapult)

The Yerukala tribe is predominantly a tribe of catapults. They tie an elastic ribbon strip at both the sides of a "V" shaped stick and make it a slingshot. They keep a small stone in the middle of the elastic ribbon and target the birds. As it hits strongly, there is scope for the bird to fall down.

Flutes

Yerukalas are experts in playing songs with flutes that are made out of bamboo sticks. They can play at a stretch without any break by breathing from the nose and blowing it into the flute through the mouth. They make these flutes themselves

Kolatam

In rural areas, the "kolanna" or "kolatam" is specially performed in thirunallu (day and night fairs) and jathara (night fairs). Yerukalas play this kolatam especially during those times. "Kolu" means a small stick in the Yerukala language. And kolatam is played with kolu. This kolatama is rhythmically played to the drums with sticks while singing songs in the Yerukala language. Generally, six to ten people form into team and dance systematically, singing songs, and beating the sticks rhythmically. This is mostly prevalent in Nellore and Guntur districts, and still practiced in rural areas. Besides these cultural practices, Yerukalas use or make instruments thus becoming part of their lifestyle. Some of

the instruments are: Kolli (big sword), Thattu (basket), Gade (storage tin), Isurudu Rayi (dry grinder), Mutha Butta (basket with a lid), Marram (knife), Amuduku Voluku (lamp with castor oil), Gundrai (round shaped stone). Garisa (a big pot to store grains), Beru Manika or Thavva (used for measuring grains), Kaavidi (used for bringing the water), Kallu Muntha (used for drinking toddy), Vutti (useful for keeping their edibles high above from dogs), Vuchchulu (to catch the birds), Bonulu (to catch some type of animals like rats), Theddu (weden spoon), Veduru Lotalu (bamboo glasses), and Matti Mookudu (clay bowl).[10,11]

4. CONCLUSIONS

The Yerukalas community is an ancient yet rich in terms of cultural practices—right from fortune telling to song, dance, archery, tattooing and rangoli making. The community not only knows the art of making their own instruments for labour and entertainment, it lives life fully with various cultural activities embedded in almost all parts of their lives. This study documents various cultural practices of the Yerukala community belonging to two districts of the Telugu state of Andhra Pradesh.[14]

Conflict of interest statement

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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