



# CHANGES IN CULTURAL IDENTITY OF LAMBADA COMMUNITY IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

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## ABSTRACT

Several studies have depicted the people labeled as gypsies mysterious and intriguing. A number of so-called gypsy-like tribes are said to have inhabited and migrated from and to India. The Lambadas, described as nomadic people are sometimes identified as the “gypsies of India”. They are popularly known as Banjaras, settled as clusters in *Tandas* (living place) in different parts of India. The nomadic culture is considered as a central aspect to the European gypsy and the Lambada identity. Hence, some studies have established a cultural connection between these communities. However, the identity of the Lambadas has now mutated into different patterns of travelling. Some families travel for few weeks to few months. Many clusters are still nomadic in nature. Further, they travel on a seasonal basis. Nevertheless, a majority of them have settled down in one place and have maintained their identity through ‘holiday trips’. In the modern era, the nomadic culture is substituted with a search for constant opportunities for income, abiding by law, settling down with families and trying to become a part of the society. Both the original tribes of India and the Western gypsies have undergone constant transformation with respect to their cultural and individual identities that are contingent with political, economic and societal influence. Thus, it has resulted in variations in language and culture. This paper will discuss on Lambada tribe, which is considered gypsy-like in nature. The discussion would move around the changing linguistic and cultural patterns of the tribe under the influence of globalization.

**Keywords:** Lambada, Globalization, Cultural, Linguistics, Pattern.

## Introduction

At the outset, I would like to assert that the information provided about various facets of Lambada community has been collected from the literature as well as my own experience and observations.

Lambadas, a tribe settled in various parts of India, are recognized as *Lambadis, Lambanis, Labanis, Lamaras, Banjarans, Banjaris, Banjaras, Brinjaris, Vanjars, Vanacharas, Vanjaris, Sugalis, Sukalis* (Thurston 1994, p393). The word, Banjara, assumed a mutilation of the term Vanachara, means those who roam in forests (Hutton 1951, p 275). As the Lambadas were traders of ‘lavana’ (salt), it is said that this is one of the derivation of their name and the other being ‘lamba’, which means tall in Hindi language fitting to that name. The physical appearance shows that the men and women of this tribe are usually tall and muscular. The word *Sugali* is said to be derived from *Supari* (mixture of nuts). The Lambadas were salt sellers (Balaji 1982:107). The Lambadas are commonly ascertained as a nomadic group from the Rajasthan, a state situated in the northern part of India. Later are said to have spread across the other parts of India.



Some scholars have noted that primarily from the Western part of the Rajputana region, the Lambada community advanced throughout India as traders of commodities like grains and salt. The tribe is said to have played important role in winning or losing of kingdoms. The advancement in transport seems to have made Lambadas to change their profession from salt sellers to cultivators of lands in order to do agriculture. This looks as if has helped the nomadic community to settle down in a constant place, which fashioned the evolution of settlements of the nomads, called *Tandas* on the out skirts of cities and villages.

At present, the Lambada groups are found largely constrained to the southern regions of India, particularly to Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Though many scholars over the few decades have discussed and debated over many of the issues pertaining to the origins of the gypsies of European and other countries, it is rather surprising that sufficient attention has not been given to the origins of the Lambada community, which is more recognized as a gypsy-like cluster. According to 2001 census conducted in India, the Scheduled Tribes population in Andhra Pradesh was 5,024,104 (6.6%) and there are 33 sub-castes among the Scheduled Tribes listed in the census. Out of the total S.T. population 2,077,947 (41.4%) are Lambadas (Hyderabad: TCRTI 2005, p 2)

Lambada community has experienced a drastic transmutation from an underdeveloped and self-sustaining to a literate and dependent on society. These migrants have stopped from restricting themselves and have started to engage living with the other communities, no matter the caste or religion, and have become the normal law abiding citizens in the society especially after the sovereignty of India. They have slowly come under the influence of globalization, within which they have advantages, like educational privileges, modern medical facilities, business employment, career, personal development and disadvantages like extinction of primitive culture and traditions.

### **Sub-communities in Lambada Tribe**

The 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 state of India. Lambada community comprises of five main clans viz., 1) Bhukiya (Rathod) 2) Vadthya (Jadhav) 3) Chauhan 4) Pamar and 5) Banoth (Ade). They are further divided into Patrilineal kin groups called Pada or Jath (sub clan). Bhukyia Phratry consists of 27 Padas, Vadhitya 52, Chauhan 6, Parmar 12 and Banoth 13.

### **Lambadas connection with gypsies**

Gypsies of the Europe are a distinct tribe with nomadic culture at their center of identity. Based on linguistics and occupations, their origin has been traced down to northern India. According to Marlene Sway, during the nineteenth century, gypsy vocabulary’s similarity with Indian languages has been established. (Sway 1975:48). Once this was done, author says gypsiologists, moved on to establishing similarities



in occupation. On the other hand, H Risley says that many scholars that have worked in India, have not been able to trace down a single gypsy during their entire years of research but have found many gypsy-like tribes in terms of their habits, trades and tricks but the language is vernacular of the places they roam but not of gypsy (Risley and Sinclair 1902:180).

### **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 policies 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 has 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.

The dressing pattern of the Lambadas has undergone a major change. The unmarried women are dressed up in colorful and embroidered "Oni" (a type of dress which will cover the above body) and "Ghaugri" (a type of long skirt), who in the modern era are very less in number. Moreover, the married women are dressed in "Kali" (made of mirror chips and it is stitched with coins and silver plates decorated dress) and "Phetia" and "Tukri" (Phetia is a skirt as same as Ghaugri, but Tukri is used for covering the head and is long enough to wrap down their backs. They also have tattoos on their hands. They wear big bangles called "Balliya". These are specially made out of elephant tusks. Men wear *Dhoti* and *Kurta* and *Pagdi* (turban). These clothes were designed especially for the protection from harsh climate in deserts and to distinguish them from others (Naik 1998:171-177).

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 non usage. A traditional recognition of the community is vanishing.

### **Lambada Cultural Profile and Correspondent Changes**

#### **Nomadic Culture**

Lambadas, after settling down, slowly became dependent on agriculture. This dependency mainly looks as if has emerged due to their withdrawal in trading salt.



The community started to cultivate in the forest areas, as they did not own any lands. They cleared forests and cultivated the land. As they received their harvests, they left for a different place for their living. They made temporary tents or constructed huts and lived like nomads. Most of their livelihood revolved around forest products and hunting. The clusters gradually settled in the outskirts of villages. The settlements were named as *Tandas*. The Lambadas rooted themselves to these *Tandas*, by building huts, performing agriculture and cattle rearing. However, it can be said that in the last few decades, the Lambada community started to migrate itself to the main stream villages and to the urban areas for a better living. A radical change can be envisaged in the taking up of various professions by the Lambadas. A number of them have changed their professions from cultivators to taxi drivers, hard labors and so on by settling themselves in cities. So, the question of endangerment to the nomadic culture can be raised.

### **Education**

In the past few decades, it has been noted that the Lambadas have gradually taken up to education. However, still illiteracy and poverty among the community are big challenges. Various governments in India have brought policies and schemes for scheduled tribes, in connection to free education. The governments, in the last few decades, along many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have come up with many schemes, which have been implemented for providing free education.

This has brought out facilities and opportunities to many a deprived tribe in India. Among the Lambada community, with each year an increase in the percentage of literacy rate is found. However, still various measures are to be taken up by the government for the raise of literacy level of the Lambadas. At present, some case studies point out that among the Lambada community at least 10% of the population is reaching the level of higher education. One of the main factors for such an improvement is due to globalization. The student community is getting to know more about various technologies and in turn is getting acquainted with these new techniques at the levels of research.

### **Social Celebrations and Family Systems**

#### **Marriage**

The aspect of marriage in the Lambada community is unique. Earlier the marriage ceremony was carried out for eight days. However, in the present age, it has slowly deteriorated to two days. This transformation can be considered, as an outcome of the community's assimilation with society (mainly the nearby villages) consisting of various groups. The other class and castes have directly or indirectly influenced the traditions of the Lambada community. The Lambada marriages were performed with all their unique costumes. However, the transfiguration, seems to have forced the tribe to perform their marriages, in accordance to the norms of either the Hindu marriage system or the Christian (a few converted Lambadas). The Lambada culture allows men to go with polygyny (Iyer 1998:154-168). Due to the effect of globalization, currently these practices are not much in practice. This may



be said also is due to the synthesization of the Lambada community with the other groups. However, the practice of polygyny has been modified in affinity with the Hindu customs of marriage, where until and unless either the husband or wife gets divorced or passes away, is one allowed to get married.

### **Religion**

The origin of Banjaras from Northern India and its spread to other parts of India has resulted in change and adoption in social traditions depending on the geographical and physical circumstances. Banjaras called as Lambadas in Telangana have rich cultural heritage following customs and rituals of Hindus but are totally neglected from the mainstream society. It is evident from the above literature that Lambadas worship female deities of Hindu religion while their way of living is in complete contrast to other people (Aparnarao and Casimer 2003:114-118). Lambadas live in *thandas* i.e. villages far away or disconnected from the mainstream society adopting the socio-cultural traditions passed on to them by their ancestors. However the scenario is changing which is evident from the fact that Lambada people are moving to towns and cities in search of employment and livelihood thereby resulting in awareness and inclusion in the society through education, job and this is visible in their way of living and dressing that has changed over the years.

### **Pregnancy**

Among the Lambada community, earlier the pregnant women had to give birth in *Tandas*. They were accustomed to the local mid-wives due to the geographical areas that they were settled in. The economical condition was poor and to seek the help of doctors was a costly affair. In general, most of the deliveries are found to have been carried out in a natural process without giving proper medication ( Karamsi 2010: 455-467). And, the risk of mother-child death was too high. Nevertheless, the gradual change in the thought of crossing the boundaries of the *Tandas* has helped to decrease the death toll of the mother and the child. Further, it is to be noted that, the present situation is far better, due to the services of the governments, which have extended their hands to almost all the rural areas. At present, most of the deliveries are carried out in modern-day hospitals and some of the families are going on for preventive measures.

### **Divorce**

The issue of divorced women is also very peculiar in the Lambada community. The women are allowed to re-marry in the Lambada system. But, most of the women once married; do not usually prefer divorce as they feel that divorce is not a genuine act in accordance to the customs of the community. However, widows are allowed to re-marry in the Lambada culture, if the women's husband dies. The brother-in-law is given preference. He can marry the widow and is permitted by the customs of the community to live with two wives in the same house. However, with the advent of public health awareness programmers and livelihood in the main streams of society, this custom has been structured as unofficial among the Lambadas. Though, the custom of polygyny is still retained among the cluster, the present economical and social conditions do not assist for such a practice.



## Lambada council

The Lambadas have their own traditional council for each *Tanda*. This acts mainly in sorting out the disputes originated from economic and social causes. The council consists of one headman (Nayak), one advisor (Karbari) and one messenger (dappan). All the offices of the council are hereditary. The traditional council is known as Nayakar Ghar. This traditional council will try to sort out the disputes among the community or among the people in a systematic way after hearing the arguments from both the sides (Rathod Shamala 1984: 49). The council's conclusions and its final resolutions are to be strictly abided by the people of the community. With the influence of globalization, gradually the Lambada councils have extinguished. The clusters are now under the jurisdiction of government. The rules and regulations framed and passed by the government are being followed.

## Changes in Lambada due to Language Contact

### Language of Lambadas

Grierson states that the Lambadi is the language of the community, which is noted to be among the Indo Aryan Language family. It falls into the main dialects of Punjabi and Gujarati (Grierson 1907:1-5). The language possesses the characteristics of an old form of speech, which has been preserved unchanged for some centuries. It is noted that the language is also based partly on Marwari, and partly on Northern Gujarati. He further points that the Lambadi dialect of southern India is mixed with the surrounding Dravidian languages. The language in and around the Telangana region, is found to be influenced by languages like Telugu, Urdu and Hindi. The Lambadas are also found to be using in their communication, a dialect, identified as Ghorbholi language. The Lambada language and its variations do not have script. The Banjara language started taking shape in tune with the languages of other communities. It has been highly influenced in time. For instance, the influence of Telugu language on Lambadi has led to Code-mixing, Code-switching, Borrowing. As part of my research work, I have identified that there are some words, which are not at all used in Lambadi language. These have been replaced by Telugu words.

### List of borrowed words and their replacements

Word in Lambada	Word in Telugu	Meaning
Swakan	Ottu	Promise
Accho	Mastu	Very good (In reference to beauty)
Sudo	Manchiga	Straight forward
Raas	Bochedu	Many
Garj	Avasaram	Useful
Vach	Sadav	Read
Kaldi	Sanchi	Bag
Danthan	Pulla	Toothbrush
Dookh	Jabbu	Disease



List of those Telugu words which have become a permanent part of lambadi language and have replaced the original words of Lambadi language.

Borrowed word	Meaning
Prema	love
Siggu	shame
Pooja	reverence
Beedi	cigarette (type of smoke)
Gudi	temple
Valla	net
Konga	crane
Kottu	shop
Balla	table
Kitki	window
Bugga	bulb
Pustakam	book
Sanchi	bag
Etuka	brick
Gadhiyaram	clock

At the end, the transformation of lambada society in various spheres of life under the impact of globalization is shown by the following table

#### Summary of changes under globalization

Social phenomena	Existing system	Changes under globalization
Dress	Colourful kanchali, phetiya-married women Oni, ghaguri- unmarried women Pagadi, dhoti-men	Sari, blouse -married women  Chudidar- unmarried women Jeans, t-shirt- men
Way of life	Nomads and salt-traders	Various services from one place
Education	Nil or trade related	Upto university level or less
Marriage	Polygamy	Monogamy or bigamy
Delivery	At home, midwife, normal	Multi-speciality hospital, doctors, caesarian
Death	Ceremonies believing in rebirth	Respect for dead, varying beliefs
Language	Only Lambadi-monolingual	Adapting local language-multilinguals
Family	Joint	Nuclear
Marriage system	Exogamous, caste-specific	Exogamous, caste-lineant
Festivals	Sacrifices, elaborate celebrations, innumeros	Sacrifices, small rituals, less in number



## Conclusion

The paper shows richness and the cultural patterns of the Lambada community. However, with the advent of globalization, traditions are on the verge of extinction, although the changes that come with globalization are important but there is a need to preserve the culture that is innate to this tribe. This paper has been an effort to focus this tribe's history, traditions, language and culture. Current research efforts to make critical analysis of transformations under the influence of globalization leading to code-switching, code-mixing in lambada are subjected to changes.

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