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## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS OF LAMBANIS IN KARNATAKA**

### **A Sociological Study with special reference to Hassan District**

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#### **Introduction:**

India is a land of variety. This vast area of land inhabited by population exceeding 1000 millions of diverse creeds and castes. India, the seventh largest and the second most populous nation of the world, contains the largest variety of human types in the whole world. It could rightly be called an “ethnological Museum”.

Many divers races with different cultural background came to India and merged with the Indian population. Dravidian was the race who was existing in India prior to the Arayans. Aryans entered India about 1500 B.C. from Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and Iran.

According to an estimate three are about 613 tribes in India. Each tribe has its individual culture and the tribal cultural background is different from the cultural background of the caste system. Each tribe has its own beliefs, traditions, norms, practices etc. Therefore each tribe is distinct from another tribe, even the problems of a same tribe vary from one geographical area to another geographical area.

Karnataka has witnessed highest growth rate of 80.82% followed by Nagaland 67.23%. The lowest growth rate as per 2001 census was recorded in Andaman and Nicobar Islands at 10.08% followed by Himachal Pradesh at 12.02%. The sex ratio among STs stand at 977 per 1000 males. In all states except Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu and Uttaranchal, the STs Sex ratio as per 2001 census was more women centric. The literacy rate for STs increased from 259.62% to 47.10% the female literacy rate among tribal increased from 18.19% to 34.76% in 2001.

It is evident that the tribals are very backward, some of them are living in huts and some families are residing in cities, enjoying modern facilities, where as some of them are still in remote villages and in forests and in forests without any modern facilities.

Lambani lead a gypsy life and mainly inhabit the western Indian states include Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. A part of this tribal community is also found in the northern region of Karnataka. The Lambani tribe of India speak a language which is believed to have been originated in the state of Rajasthan. Though it has no script, it is a living language.



Lambani tribes keep moving from place to place. Noticed usually in groups, people of this tribal community earn their daily bread by selling cloths and ornamental things. When they inhabited the forest region of the southern India, they were also referred to as the bee keeping caste.

### Objectives of the Study

- To study their socio- economic conditions.
- To know the factors responsible for changes which are taking place among the Lambani Community.
- To know their cultural conditions.
- To know their educational standard.

### Hypothesis

- ❖ Lambani community people are the backward and highly exploited sections of the society.
- ❖ They are neglected and unorganized in the society.
- ❖ They are educationally and economically very backward.
- ❖ Their original culture is diminishing.

### Methodology

An oral Interview Schedule method was designed to collect required data, since the majority of them are illiterate's interview schedule found to be more useful. Both Interview method and observation method have been used covering the various aspects of the study. Simple Random Sampling method has been used in this study.

### Review of Literature

1. Shering, (1872), With regard to the origin of the word, 'Lambani', says that, "The name has been variously explained, but the most probable derivation is from the Sanskrit banijjakara, a merchant.  
"Quoting Enthovan Shering states, "The Tribe clearly has been recruited to some extent either from Rajput sources or followers of Rajput clans who have adopted their clans after their masters".
2. As per the Census Report of 1901, Thanda (The name of Lambani Settlements or camp) and Vali Sugreva are given as synonyms for the tribal name. Vali Sugreeva were two monkey chiefs mentioned in the Ramayana from whom the Lambanis Claim to be acceded. It is however noted in the Census Report (1891) that the enquiries show that Lambanis and Sugalis are practically the same. (E.Thurston – 1975-P-207)
3. According to Najundayya and Aiyer, (1928-P128-136) as quoted by Halabar, "The Banjaras are supposed to be descendants of the original Aryan gypsies of North-West India".



4. In 1928, "The Mysore tribes and caste" written by H.V Nanjundaiah and L.K Ayyar, information about their original, social and cultural practices available in volume no.2 of the book.
5. Kamala Mohan Rao (1950 – P-12-22) writes, "it would be interesting to speculate on the origin of the word Banjara. Banjaras are a nomadic people and accustomed to live in jungles. Those who lived in jungles and wandered from place to place were called Vanachara.
6. Bellary District Gazetteer (1972 P-119) that, "they are good structured and fair complexioned. They are a brachycephalous race, with oval face, black or brown eyes and straight nose. They speak an Indo-Aryan dialect called Banjari".  
(Quoted in "Change and Development in Lambani Community by Dr.C.R. Gopal)
7. According to Karnataka State Gazetteer (1972-P-99), "there are strong reasons to believe that they (Lambanis) are from Rajasthan". It has been mentioned in Bellary District Gazetteer 1972, that the Lambanis or Banjaras may be classified among the gipsys of India.  
(Quoted in "Change and Development in Lambani Community by Dr.C.R. Gopal)
8. In the Madras Census Report, the Lambadis are described as a class of traders, herdsmen, cattle breeders and cattle lifters, found largely in the Deccan districts, in the parts of which they have settled down as agriculturists."  
(Quoted by Thruston – 1975 – P-210)
9. According to Cumberlege, as quoted by Sussell (1975-P-164), Banjara, Wanjara, Labhana, Mukeri, is the "caste of carriers and drivers of pack bullocks. The name has been variously explained, but the most probable derivation is from the Sanskrit Vanijyakara, a merchant". Further, Sussell says, "It may be suggested that the Banjaras are derived from the Charan or Bhat caste of Rajputana".
10. In 1975, Pushpalatha Rampura submitted a Doctoral Thesis entitled "Banjaraloka Geethonka Samuha" to Shivaji University, is also one of the important theses to understand their cultural life'.
11. Halabar (1986) writes, "the Lambani seem to have been one of the ancient tribes of India, since the Sanskrit writer Dandin (about 6<sup>th</sup> century AD) mentioned them in his Dasakumara Charitha.

The Lambanis existed and practiced the avocation of grain carries with the help of pack bullocks since ancient times". But subsequently, Cowel disproves it by saying, the name Banjara did not occur in the original text of the work.



12. According to Gremarson, ‘The Banjaras are originally Dravidian becoming Aryanised at a comparatively early date and philological consideration point to the conclusion that this occurred somewhere in Rajaputan. Naik further concludes that “the Banjaras are originally Dravidian and subsequently aryanised themselves and found in Rajaputhana of Rajasthan.”

In Karnataka, they are recognised as Lambanis. As per the order of the Govt. of India Notification (census of India -1951, Vol.XIV Mysore part 11 Tribes) Six castes were considered is one, By this order the Banjara were called by other names like lambada, Lambadi, Lamani, Sugali and Sukali.

Even though they are called Banjars or Lambanis in Karnataka, the Lambanis call themselves as Gor Banjara. Gormati, Gormata or Gor. Gor means fair, since Lambanis were fair and well structured they might have been called by that name.

### **“Thanda” Their Settlement**

The Lambanis were mostly nomadic and semi-nomadic people and never settled anywhere. Hence, the use to live in group (thandas) with their Bullocks. Earlier, they were very nearer to forests, they settled down around forests and near water. They took up agriculture and started living in temporary settlements called “Thandas”. Since they were near or around forests which helped them in tapping forest products, including fire wood for their livelihood.

The Karnataka Gazetteer (1975 P-475) found the Lambanis settled in the proximity of villages, living in the thandas, usually work as Agricultural Labourers. According to Khandoba, generally, the Lambanis live separately in thandas.

### ***The reasons for living in thandas are as follows***

1. They believe they could preserve and protect their faith, religion and culture.
2. They could maintain better health
3. They could find good place for grazing their cattle.
4. They find it easy to move from one place to another for trading.

### **Lambani Language**

Language is an important tool for communication of ideas and values. Khandoba says that ‘Lambani Language does not have an independent history of its own. Lambanis Language it has no script, is a spoken language only. Kannada Language has deep influence on Lambanis and their languages, because Lambanis have lived here for nearly 300 years with Kannadigas in Karnataka.

### **Social life of Lambanis**

Social life of Lambanis is quite interesting. There are more number of nuclear families rather than joint families among Lambanis. The main reason for this is soon after marriage; the new couple establish a new family and live together. It has become a tradition among Lambanis in many places. The Lambanis are Patriarchal. Though



the head of the family appear to be possess more status outside the family, there is equality between husband and wife. But men take decisions in the family and women are not allowed to take any decisions. Monogamy is the accepted system of marriage among Lambanis. But polygamy is also found among them.

Widow remarriage is rarely found, no child marriage is found. 'Nayaka' of the Thanda plays an important role during marriage even now. The position of the Nayaka is hereditary. A secretary looks after the all affairs of the Nayaka being his close associate. He is also known as 'Kharabari' this post is also hereditary. This Kharabari plays an important role during marriage and in the Gor Panchayat, his major role is to advise and assist the nayaka to take an appropriate decision.

Dhadi, Dhalia and sanasa are also in important post of social system as nayaka and Kharabari. Dhadi are professional singer in the community. They are known as brilliant people since, they know Lambani culture and keep the people happy by giving performances of song and music and they are also called 'Sarangi'. These Sarangis are basically Muslims. They have entered Lambani Community due to various reasons. Lambanis consider them as their adopted childrens. The Sarangis feel that serving the Lambanis community is their prime duty.

'Dhalia' is a servant of the thanda, his service is being used in organizing panchayat and managing the tandas work. But today all of them forgotten the differences exist carrier, they respect each other and consider them as equals, this has been observed earlier during the field work.

### **Nature of Housing:**

As the Lambanis were nomadic people they were not settled anywhere properly in the initial stage. But they were use to live together with their bullocks near forest or outside the main village. Their main purpose was to lead life through trading food grains. Gradually, they took agriculture and settled nearby forests in temporary settlements called 'Thandas'. Their traditional style of constructing houses was longer than width (called ZUPDA in their language) and square this style is still continued among Lambanis.

The common houses where in Lambanis live is called 'ZUPDA' in their language. And those who have capacity to build middle type houses, they construct better houses such houses are known as Male. ZUPDA is oblong in shape where as male type is normally square.

But today constructing a house is purely depend upon the economic capacity of the people. They are economically becoming well by doing different occupations and hence modern type of houses is being build by them.

According to the below table, 76% of them are living in tiled houses, 4% in Hut, only 6% in RCC house and 2% in Sheds. It is well known that the nature of depicts their standard of life and this standard of life depends upon the economic



condition of these people. At present they are constructing modern houses with toilet and other facilities inside their houses. But still the Lambanis are living in backward areas and some of the villages have not even approachable roads and suffering from lack of drinking water facility.

**Table – 1: Nature of housing**

Sl.No	Nature of housing	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Hut	02	04%
2.	Tiled	38	76%
3.	RCC	03	06%
4.	Sheet	06	12%
5.	Other (Shed)	01	02%
	Total	50	100%

#### Sub-Sects among Lambanis:-

There are three major sects among Lambanis; they are Rathod, Pawar and Chowan. Gradually, Jadhav and Banoth sects were created. There are 25 sub sects, these 25 sub-sects are mainly divided as two parts, they are 'Jaat' and 'Bhukya'. Pawar, Chowan and Vadaty groups are considered as Jaat and Rathod group is considered as 'Bhukya'.

A study was conducted to know the different sects exist in our area of study and the details of the sects are given in the following table.

**TABLE – 2: Sects among lambani community**

Sl.No	Details of sects	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Mood	11	22
2.	Rajavath	14	28
3.	Bhukya	10	20
4.	Rathod	00	00
5.	Pawar	00	00
6.	Chowhan	02	04
7.	Wadtya	02	04
8.	Jaat	11	22
	<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

As per the above table, majority of them are belong to Jaat, Rajavaat, Mood and Bhukiya and no Pawar sect found. Only 04% belong to Wadathya and Chowhan sect and 22% belong to Mood and Jaat. Brides are exchanged in Marriage between Jaat and Bhukya.

#### Educational Standard

Education is the main key through which anybody can open all channels of life. Education is very important in every one's life. Hence, Central and State Governments have given more emphasis for education of the Scheduled caste children. Government has opened residential schools, Ashram Schools, Pre-metric



and Post-metric hostels, libraries etc. Free book, Uniforms, Scholarships are being given to these children to educate them.

It is observed in our field study that, there are more number of aged illiterates and still Lambanis are not in a position to send their children to school in some villages due to their economic backwardness. Soon after agricultural activities are completed, they migrate to coffee plantations with their family therefore; the children of such parents cannot go to school.

**TABLE – 03: Educational Standard**

Sl.No	Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Illiterate	10	20
2.	Primary education	07	14
3.	Secondary education	09	18
4.	PUC	05	10
5.	Under graduate	08	16
6.	Post graduate	04	8
7.	Medical courses	02	4
8.	Technical Education /Diploma/Professional Courses	05	10
	<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

It is clear from the above table that, of 50 respondent 20% of them are illiterate, 18% Studied up to secondary education, only 8% studied higher education. It is observed from the above table that, more number of them received secondary education and still illiterates are more in number. But, even though these are difficulties in finding out the dropouts and sending them to school, proper efforts are being made by the officials to provide educational facility and educate their children. Now there is lot of improvement compared to earlier decade.

**As per the census report (1961-2001) educational standard of Banjara community is given in the following table**

Educational level	Karnataka	
	Male	Female
<b>1961 Census</b>		
1. Illiterate.	67243	69810
2. Literate (without ed.)	7678	925
3. Matriculation and below	1024	85
4. Above Matriculation	16	-
<b>1971 Census</b>		
1. Illiterate.	77817	86510
2. Literate (without ed.)	6323	1550
3. Matriculation and below	10867	1944
4. Above Matriculation	16	-



	<b>1981 Census</b>		
1.	Illiterate.	245714	279286
2.	Literate (without ed.)	27359	8545
3.	Matriculation and below	38793	617
4.	Above Matriculation	1125	41
	<b>1991 Census</b>		
1.	Illiterate.	290994	349384
2.	Literate (without ed.)	50703	26213
3.	Matriculation and below	73469	19598
4.	Above Matriculation	11816	1328
	<b>2001 Census</b>		
1.	Illiterate.	276878	368749
2.	Literate (without ed.)	7364	4040
3.	Matriculation and below	200587	104629
4.	Above Matriculation	29662	5429

Source: Encyclopaedia of Scheduled Castes in India. Vol-5 'South India'. Nandu Ram.2007.

It is evident from the above table that, there are more number of literates and owing to governmental educational programmes literates and educated number is also increasing. The educated ratio of men is more than the ratio of women.

#### ***Economic life of Lambanis:***

The Lambanis were engaged in trading salt, Beatelnut, food grains etc., For a long time they were supplying food grains during Mughal and British period for their army and cattles were used to carry these goods. They had to travel in dense forest and deep valleys hence they had a big herd of cattles. They use to go to forest to bring firewood from the forest and leading their life by selling firewood. Majority of them were working as coolies in construction, only a few of them had taken up other activities to lead their life.

When the British started Railway works these Lambanis were engaged and only those Lambanis who are educated have been succeeded in getting government employment.

In this present study, a study was conducted to know the occupations taken up by them. The details of them have been given in the below table

The below table depicts that, Majority of them are engaged in agriculture and 40% of them are working as stone cutters, rest of them are working in construction raring cattle or domestic animals, Stitching meals leaf and coolie etc. Since majority Lambanis are illiterate, they are engaged in different occupations available in rural areas. Therefore their standard of life is not good.

**TABLE – 4: Details of Occupation of the Respondents**

Sl.No	Details of Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Agriculture.	20	40
2.	Selling firewood.	02	04
3.	Stone cutting.	10	20
4.	Construction of house.	04	08
5.	Raring domestic animals.	03	06
6.	Meals leaf stitching.	02	04
7.	Business	05	10
8.	Coolie / Etc.	04	08
	<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Religious Life:**

Lambanis themselves claim that they are Hindus, since they worship Hindu Gods and Goddess. They worship Maramma, Kankaliyamma, Durgamma, Balaji, Hanuman, etc, and also worship their community. God Sevalal and Goddess Satisattibai and Satti Bhavani.

Lord Krishna is the most worshiped God, they believe that he is the main person for the origin of their community. Majority of them feel that it is very good to have darshan of Sri Venkateshwara of Tirupati and they also worship Rama and Shiva. It is found that lambanis worship and sacrifice animals to nearest and famous gods and goddesses. They also worship and practice almost all festivals which are celebrated by Hindus. For instance, Ganesha festival, Deepavali, Dasara, Teej, Snakranti etc. But they celebrate their own community festivals with special interest. Two important festivals of them are Teez and Holi.

**Teez Celebration:**

Teez (Gowri festival) is a special festival among Lambanis. Celebration of this festival in Rajasthan is a tradition even today. The migrated Lambanis from Rajasthan have protected their cultural heritage. This festival will be celebrated for 10 days. 'Teez' 'Wheat (plant) saplings' will be reared for two days and they will be put in to water after 10 days. During this time Lambani youths dance and are happy. This festival will be celebrated every year if there is enough rain and crops. If there is no rain and crops this festivals will be celebrated once in tow year or once in five year. Now a days girls usually go to cities to pursue their education, hence this culture is diminishing.

**Holy Celebration:**

Holy is an important festival among Lambanis, they take the permission of the Nayaka of the thanda before one month for preparation. The youths gather and apply colour, sing love songs and dance for nearly one month. At the end they sacrifice a goat and distribute its meat, prepare delicious food after having food the holy ends.



But now a days, since they are not economically strong this holy will be celebrated once in two or five years as per the decision of the Nayaka, These festivals have their own speciality even in this highly modernized commercialized entertainment world.

### **Dressing Style:**

The traditional Lambani women dress is very colourful and attractive; their dress is different compared to any other people belonging to different religion or caste. While preparing their dress they use coins, mirror chips, cowries, silk thread etc. They use blue and red colour cotton cloths for embroidery and decorate well. Hence, their dressing style is very attractive.

They give important for three types of wears, they are,

1. Petia / Langa.
2. Kanchali / Blouse
3. Chantiya / vel

### **Ornaments of Lambanis:**

Traditional dress in India has its own speciality, similarly, ornaments also has got a different scope. Majority women in India are found of ornaments. Lambani women wear ornaments which are made of Steel, Brass, Ivory, Copper, Plastic, Aluminium, Silk thread etc, rather than gold and silver and they decorate in their own style.

### **The different ornaments are as follows.**

1. **Choodi** – A type of thick bangle.
2. **Joodo** – It is worn on shoulder
3. **Kasoothya** – It is hanged on shoulder
4. **Mooguti** – Made of gold, and worn on nose
5. **Chotla** – Made of silver, and hanged to hair on the back side of ears.
6. **Thali** – Made of gold, tied at the time of marriage, Thali has an important place among Lambanis.

### **Ornaments for men.**

Generally, Lambani men do not use more ornaments, however they wear certain simple ones they are ear ring, thick wrist ring (kadaga) finger rings, ududara ( silver thread) bracelet etc but now a days the use of these ornaments are very rare.

### **Problems of Lambanis**

1. Problem of isolation.
2. Their traditional art is diminishing.
3. Problems of getting educational facilities.
4. Low socio-economic status.
5. Problem of preserving their language.
6. Lack of modern facilities.



### **Suggestions:**

1. Government should provide modern facilities to Lambani thandas.
2. Create awareness about health and hygiene and open PHC's in thandas for their well being.
3. Good road and transportation facility.
4. Encourage and develop their traditional art such as, embroidery-dance, tattoo, rangoli etc.
5. Establish home / small scale industries to provide Jobs through which their socio-economic status can be elevated.
6. Open schools to access education easily.
7. Distributing food grains through fair price shops at cheap rate.

### **Conclusion**

Even though Lambanis are facing various problems, they are not united or organized to solve their problems hence all India level organizations such as Dhadi and Banjara organizations are trying continuously to organize the Lambani community people. Since there is no proper organization among them exploitation, atrocities, and cultural marginalization is continued. Therefore, Educated Lambanis, social reformers, Govt, representatives etc are needed to look in to their issues.

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