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SOCIETY FOR PUBLIC WELFARE AND INITIATIVES

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YERUKALA TRIBES IN WARANGAL DISTRICT OF TELANGANA STATE – A STUDY



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Abstract: *In this paper focused on the profile of Yerukala tribes, who are habituating in a plain area in erstwhile Warangal District of Telangana State. This paper is based on the collection of various ethnographic techniques in some villages of the erstwhile Warangal district. 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 possess a few sub-tribes and several exogamous patrilineages. Uncle niece marriages and cross-cousin marriages are highly preferred. And monogamy is common. It is a patriarchal society and patrilocal residence is the norm. People are non-vegetarians. Most of the Yerukala tribes are illiterate, occupationally, these people have a history of being involved in criminal activities such as burglary and dacoity. However, many of the Yerukala tribes have changed their occupation. The religion of the Yerukala is animistic and the influence of Hinduism and Christianity is noticed. This paper also revealed various ceremonies and rituals.*

Keywords: *Ethnography, Yerukala, Warangal, Telangana State*

Introduction

Telangana is the only south Indian state with a tribal population of 9.34% out of its total population as per the 2011 Census. The presence of tribal communities is more in and around the river valleys and forests of Telangana. As such their socio-cultural conditions can be understood better by identifying their regions as under. Gond – Kolam Region; Koya – Konda Reddi Region; Chenchu Region; and Plain Areas.

The Gond – Kolam Region falls in the hills and forest region of Adilabad district north of Godavari River. The main tribes inhabiting the region are Gonds and Naiknods

and their dependent communities Pardhans and Thotis. Kolams, Andhs and Bhils also live side by side to the above communities. The Koya – Konda Reddi Region runs down Adilabad district further south-east side along the river Godavari through the districts of Karimnagar, Warangal and Khammam giving shelter to the Koyas and Konda Reddis. The Chenchu Region is the forested belt of Nallamala Hills north of Krishna River in the districts of Mahbubnagar and Nalgonda. The Chenchus also live in and around the Vikarabad forest region of the Ranga Reddy district. Communities such as Lambada (Lambada/Sugali), Yerukala and Yanadi living in the plain areas have also been being treated as tribes from 1976 onwards. In the year 2003, the communities of Nakkala and Dhulia were also treated as Scheduled Tribes. Further, the Government of Telangana has announced that it would consider whether the communities such as Boya Valmiki and Mathura Lambada can be included in the list of Scheduled Tribes.

Yerukala Tribes in Telangana

Yerukala is Scheduled Tribe found throughout Telangana. They call themselves 'Kurru'. They are called 'Yerukula' after their women's traditional profession of fortune-telling (*ErukaChepputa*). The population of the Yerukala tribe according to the 2011 Census is 5,19,337 in the Telangana state. Out of the total Yerukala Population, 3.35 lakhs are inhabitation in rural and 1.63 Lakhs in an urban area.

In it observed that. According to the Census 2011 is 21,518 in the Warangal district of which 10,777 are male and 10,741 are female. Regarding the rural and urban population, 14,204 inhabitations in rural and 7,314 are in urban areas. The details are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Yerukala Tribe Population in Warangal district

Religion Name	Total			Rural			Urban		
	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F
1. Hindus	21,161	10,593	10,568	13,941	6,968	6,973	7,220	3,625	3,595
2. Muslims	16	8	8	13	6	7	3	2	1
3. Christians	310	161	149	220	114	106	90	47	43
4. Sikhs	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
5. Religion not stated	30	14	16	30	14	16	0	0	0
Total	21,518	10,777	10,741	14,204	7,102	7,102	7,314	3,675	3,639

Source; *Census 2011. Government of India.*

Language

The Yerukala tribe has a dialect of its own which is called 'Yerukula basha' or 'Kurru basha' or 'Kulavatha'. It is derived from Dravidian languages, mostly Telugu, Tamil and Kannada.

Endogamous Sub Divisions

The Yerukala tribe is divided into several functional and endogamous subdivisions and each such subdivision is named after the commodity, which they traded in and the occupation they adopted. The sub-divisions are Dabba Yerukala (those who make baskets from split bamboo), Yeethapullala (Date twigs) 'Yerukala (those who make baskets from wild date leaves), KunchapuriYerukala (those who make weaver's combs), ParikamuggulaYerukala (soothsayers and beggars), Karivepaku (curry leaves) Yerukala (hawkers of curry leaves), Uppu (salt) Yerukala (salt hawkers).

Each sub-division is divided into four phratries viz., Sathupadi, Kavadi, Manupati and Mendraguthi. The first two phratries viz., Sathupadi and Kavadi are considered to be superior to the other two. Each phratry is further sub-divided into several exogamous intiperlu (surnames). Some of the intiperlu are Kumbha, Mogili, Katta, Devara, Sreerama, Palaparathi, Meda etc, Endogamy at the community level and exogamy at phratry and interlude level is observed.

Family System

The type of family among the Yerukala tribe is usually nuclear. Descent is patrilineal, the residence is patrilocal and authority is patriarchal, Cross-cousin (*Menarikam*) marriages are preferred. Marriages between the maternal uncle and niece were also permitted. Monogamy is the common form of marriage, but polygyny is also socially permitted. Marriage through negotiation and exchange are the common modes of acquiring mates. Traditionally, married women used to wear a bead necklace as the symbol of marriage. But now thali *Bottuor* mangal sutram, the marriage pendant is being worn as a marriage symbol by most women. Divorce is permissible on grounds of adultery, barrenness and incompatibility between the spouses. Widows are permitted to re-marry.

Religion

Yerukalas worship Hindu benevolent Gods i.e., Lord Venkateswara, Narasimhaswamy, Narayanaswamy and Rama. The Yerukalas are a spirit haunted and ghost-ridden people and attribute every disease or misfortune to the action of some malevolent spirits and ancestral ghosts. The influence of evil spirits is averted by sacrificing goats, pigs, fowls etc. They worship benevolent Gods, which are common in the Hindu pantheon and appease malevolent deities such as Ankamma, Kollapuramma, Sunkulamma, Poleramma and Ellamma. The Yerukalas celebrate Hindu festivals such as Sankranthi, Sivarathri, Sreeramanavami, Dasara, Ugadi (Telugu New Year's Day). But it is also reported that out of the total population of the Yerukala community 5.06 Lakhs are following Hindu Religion remaining are covered to other Religions.

Social Control Mechanism

The Yerukala tribe has its own social control mechanism at each habitation inhabited by Yerukala to ensure proper observance of prescribed codes of conduct.

This traditional council (Kula Panchayat) is headed by an elderly man whose office is hereditary traditionally. The traditional council (Kula Panchayat) try and decide the domestic disputes, disputes relating to theft, adultery, loans, property, and land. The characteristic feature of deciding guilt or innocence of an accused among Yerukalas was through trial by ordeal, which was in vogue till recent times such as 1. Dipping of fingers in boiling oil, 2. Picking up the burnt iron crowbar and, 3. Walking barefoot through the fire bed. Apart from solving disputes, the Kulapanchayat is also competent to maintain the solidarity of the community by checking the behaviour of the individuals. If a person commits the breach of incest taboo he is excommunicated and denied all community rights. The defaulter is readmitted into the community after the purificatory ceremony is observed.

Food habits

Yerukalas are non-vegetarians. They eat pork, fowls, scaly, and scales fish, field rats, jackals, fox cats, mongoose, carrion etc. Most of the men drink country liquor and toddy, but rarely, they take bottled liquor. Most of the males and females smoke and chew tobacco. Though these people take tea and coffee, consumption of milk and milk products is very low.

Occupation

The traditional occupation of Yerukalas includes basket-making, mat weaving, pig rearing, rope-making etc. The Yerukala women are specialized in soothsaying and fortune-telling. Some of them also participate in economic activities like basket making, mat weaving etc, and make baskets with wild date leaves.

Property and Economy

These people have no properties such as houses, agricultural lands, jewellery, etc. These people rear pigs and sell the pig meat in villages as well as in weekly markets. Domestic animals such as country pigs, hens and dogs are reared. Many people do not have land ownership. They usually erect their juts either in the government land or in the outskirts of the village. However, some of these people got houses constructed by the government. The property is shared equally by all sons after their father.

Life Cycle Ceremonies

1. **Birth:** A unique customs of great antiquity, which still survives among the Yerukala is worth recording in this ethnographic profile. The moment labour begins, the women communicate the matter to her husband, who immediately retires to a dark room and lies on a bed, covering himself with his wife's clothes. When the child is born, it is placed by the side of the father. He is not allowed to leave his bed for 3 days and during this period he is regarded as being impure. But nowadays, these customs are not followed strictly. The mother is taken to *Dai* (*Mantrasani*) or to a local hospital for giving birth to the child. After delivery, the mother and child are given a purification bath by

anointed with oil and turmeric on the 11th day and a feast is arranged to close relatives and friends. All these days are considered as pollution period.

2. **Naming:** The Yerukula do not conduct any specific ceremony for naming the child. The elder or head of their community in that village will give a name to the child as per their tradition or otherwise the parents will name the child. Usually, they call the child with the name of their favourite deity.
3. **Menarche:** On attaining the first menstruation, the girl is secluded in a room or outside or Veranda and she has to sit/sleep only on the palm leaves till the pollution period is completed. The menstruation of a girl is regarded as unclean and she is kept in seclusion. On the 6th or 10th day, a ceremony will be conducted to purify the girl. On that day, the girl's mother or a close relative removes all the material used by the girl during these days. And the girl will be given a bath with oil, turmeric and neem leaves, and dressed in new clothes. A non-vegetarian feast will be arranged for relatives of the family.
4. **Marriage:** When a Yerukala youth attains a marriageable age (usually below 20 years for boys and below 15 years for girls), his parents look for a suitable bride or bridegroom. After finding a suitable boy/girl and the proposal is acceptable to both the parties, a day will be fixed for the performance of the *AguMudu*(betrothal) ceremony. On that day, the parents of the boys, with their relatives set out for the girls, house by taking with them a new mat of date palm. On their arrival, they spread the mat in the open space in front of the house, and on this mat, the bride's father, their relatives and the members of the Kula Panchayat, who accompanied will be seated. The question of the bride price will be discussed. On its final settlement (to the satisfaction of both the parties) an amount of 8 rupees is given as earnest money to the bride's father. Liquor is ordered at the expense of the bridegroom's father and distributed to the gathering. The first cup will be served to the girls' father, whose drinking of it symbolises the ratification of the alliance.

On the morning of the wedding day, a marriage shed (Pandal) is erected at the bride's house. The bride and groom in their respective houses are smeared five times with turmeric paste and oil and are bathed. They worship an earthen jar filled with water, a twig of the pipal tree (*Ficus Religiosa*) with five offshoots. This water is carried to the marriage place by the girl's father in the evening. As the auspicious hour approaches, the bridegroom, with a dagger in hand, is taken in pomp to the bride's house where, on arrival, he is joined by the bride coming from their house. The couple dressed in white are seated facing the sanctified pot, the bride to the left of her husband, on squares of rice drawn on a date palm mat spread underneath the bower. The throwing of turmeric coloured rice (*Akshintalu*) on the wedded pair, first by their parents, and then by the other guests attending symbolises the marriage. *Pusteis* necklace of black beads is tied around the girls' neck and two rings are put to

her toes. The ceremony continues until the early hours of the morning, the bridal pair sitting up all the while. The next morning, the married couples bathed, auspicious lights are waved around their faces by married females and milk and curds their faces by married females and milk and curds are given to them to drink. The bride is concealed in the neighbour's house by her mother and the bridegroom starting on foot, seeks her out and carries her in his arms. That day the consummation ceremony takes place. After that, the girl is taken to the bridegrooms' house.

5. **Divorce:** Divorce is allowed on the ground of the wife's barrenness or unchastity or disobedience. This is effected by turning her out of the house in the presence of the *Kula Pedda* (Chief of the Community) of *Kula Panchayat*. The *Kula Panchayat* of the tribe is very strong. She is permitted to remarry. However, her first husband will be compelled to refund the amount he paid to her parents as bride price. All these disputes are settled by the Kula Panchayat.
6. **Death:** The dead are usually burnt, but occasionally buried in a lying posture, with the head placing towards the south. It is said that some members are buried and some members are burnt. The ashes are either left at the place of cremation or thrown into the stream. Mourning is observed for five days, during which time the principal mourner is regarded as polluted and abstains from non-vegetarian food. On the fifth day, a fest with non-vegetarian (Pork) food is given to all the relatives and friends in their community. In the name of the deceased, birds are fed with food placed on a leafy plate. Thus, the Yerukala strictly observe the death ceremony, by inviting all their community members.

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