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Dr. D. Suresh



SOCIETY FOR PUBLIC WELFARE AND INITIATIVES

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ETHNOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF KOYA TRIBES IN TELANGANA STATE



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Abstract: *The Koyas are one of the few multi-linguals and multi-racial tribal communities living in India. The Koya population is mostly spread out in the Eastern ghats especially the southern region of India, particularly in the states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Karnataka. They are also present in West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh as a mixed tribe with the Gond tribe. According to the 2011 census, the total population of these tribes in India is 7,38,629 among them 3,60,441 are males and 3,78,188 are females. Koyas are one of the major peasant tribes of Telangana numbering 4.86 lakh as per 2013 tribal census data. Physically they are classified as Australoid. The Koyas call themselves "Koithur". The mainland of Koithur or the Koya land includes the Indravati, Godavari, Sabari, Sileru rivers and the thickly wooded Eastern Ghats, covering parts of Bastar, Koraput, Mulug, Mahabubabad, Jayashanker Bhupalpally, and Bhardrai Kothagudem, and the East and West Godavari districts. The main objective of this paper is to reveal the ethnography profile of the Koya tribes in Telangana State.*

Keywords: *Ethnography, Koya Tribes, Telangana*

Introduction

The Koyas are an ancient scheduled tribal community credited with a unique way of life and a common cultural heritage also one of the few multi-linguals and multi-racial tribal communities habituated southern part of India. Koyas are commonly referred to as Koi, Koyalu, Koyollu, Koya Doralu, Doralu Sattam, etc. Koya tribes can be further divided into Koya, Doli Koya, Gutta Koya or Gotti Koya, Kammara Koya, Musara Koya, Oddi Koya, Pattidi Koya, Rasha Koya, Lingadhari Koya (ordinary), Kottu Koya,

Bhine Koya, Raja Koya, etc. Koyas call themselves “Koitur” in their dialect. Koyas speak the Koya language, also known as *Koya basha*, and is a member of the Dravidian language family. The Koya population is mostly spread out in the southern region of India, particularly in the states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Karnataka. In Andhra Pradesh, they live especially in West Godavari, East Godavari, in Telangana State. The highest population of the Koya tribe are located in Telangana are (4,86,391) and the second-highest in Andhra Pradesh (1,04,348) in total state population according to the census of 2011.

Origin

Koya is believed to be a section of Gond but the present Koyas do not agree with this and say they were never a part of the Gond tribe. Koya goes by different names like ‘*DoralaChattam*’ (Lord’s group), ‘*Putta Dora*’ (original lords), ‘*Koitur*’. The name ‘Koya’ is believed to have been derived from the word ‘*Koyya*’, in Koya language ‘*Koyya*’ means tree. The Koyas have a folk tale to explain their origin as well as the derivation of their name. Briefly, this legend goes as follows. God married a beautiful woman found in a bottle gourd and the couple gave birth to 101 children. One day these 101 children killed ‘*Kamadhenu*’ (sacred cow) which gave food to all the people in the universe, cooked its meat and ate a large part of it and the rest of it was preserved in the hole found in a tree. One of the 101 children stealthily approached the tree one day and consumed the meat. Jambavantha saw him eating and called him ‘*Koyya*’ (tree) and from then onwards his descendants became ‘*Koyya*’ which in course of time became ‘*Koya*’.

According to their folk-tale, the origin of the Koyas could be assessed. According to one mythical story. When the Pandava brothers were in exile, Bhima went hunting in the jungle and met a wild woman, with whom he fell in love and married. The fruit of this union, it is said was the Koya people. The Pandava brothers occupy a very significant place in Koya folk-lore.

Language

Ethnologically and linguistically the Koyas are divided into two main groups those who speak the Gond dialect and those who speak Telugu of the rural areas. The Koya language is a typical dialect of Telugu spoken with the characteristic hill-accent. There are dialectal variations among the speeches of different areas of Koyas. The Koyas living in the Godavari gorges speak a very ancient type of speech which is perhaps close to Gondi or Kui, the dialects of Gonds, Khonds and Jatapus respectively which are essentially Dravidian. It is also called *Chettu Basha* (Tree Language) or *Gali Basha* (Air Language) in ‘Telugu’. This simply means the language spoken by the people who live under trees.

Dress Pattern and Ornaments

The southerners have been much influenced in dress, ornaments and hairstyle by the Telugus, while the northerners have retained their primitiveness to a great

extent. Koyas of the older generation use very scanty clothes, Men use the only loincloth. Older women wear narrow shorts covering the portions of the body from waist to knee and use another piece to cover the upper part of the body. Nowadays women of younger generation wear saree, blouse and petticoat and young men wear dhoti, half pant, lungi etc. Women wear several ornaments on their wrists, ankles, ears, nose and neck.

Habitat Settlement and Housing

Mostly, the access to the Koya villages is by narrow footpaths of kacha type. In every village, one finds two or more clusters of houses. The Koya live in low thatched houses. Each house consists of one or two small huts, which are used as sleeping rooms. The walls of a house are made of tree branches and bamboo, which are thickly plastered with mud. The roofs are low thatched with a type of wild grass, locally known as *sindi*. The houses are rectangular in size and partitioned into rooms by walls of bamboo plastered with mud. The house is windowless and the hearth is situated in its one corner. A verandah (*arra*) runs almost on all the sides of the house. There are no separate storerooms. The agricultural produce and forest collections are stored under the roof over a shelf inside the sleeping rooms. The shelves are made of bamboo and wooden pillars.

Social Organization

Sub-Tribes/Sub Groups

Many of the sub-tribes mentioned by Cains perhaps were functional groups, which in course of time acquired endogamous character. For example, *Oorr'* means palanquin, Koyas who carried Palanquin were called *Doli Koya*, likewise '*Kammara*' means blacksmith, the Koya branch who were blacksmiths might have been called '*Kammara Koya*', '*oddi*' is caste engaged in stone and earthwork. The nomenclature '*Dorala Chattam*' today refers to all the Koyas but not to a single sub-tribe. At present all the Koyas claim that they are *Racha Koyas* and the endogamous character of these sub-tribes has almost disappeared and marriages are controlled by *Phratries* and *Clans*.

Phratries and Clans

Total clans in Koya are (1) *Peresuboyudu*, (2) *Mudogatta*, (3) *Peregatta*, (4) *Nutamuppayogatta* and (5) *Vidogatta*. *Galtaf* or *him* is the name given to the clan. According to P.R. Hemingway as quoted by Thurston exogamous sects among Koya are called '*Gatta*' and the following '*Gattas*' are mentioned by him, *Mud* (third), *Nalo* (fourth), *Aiydo* (fifth), *Aro* (sixth) or *Ratibonda*, *Nutamuppaya* (130) and *Peramboy*. It is not clear whether these are the numbers in each *Phratry* or the names of the clans themselves, besides all the names or numbers are mentioned in the Telugu language. The authors mention the following '*Gattas*' (*Phratries*). (1) *Mudava Gatta* (three *gatta*), (2) *Nalugavagatta* (four *gatta*), (3) *Idavagatta* (five *gatta*), (4) *Aravagatta* (six *tribes*), (5) *Yedavagatta* (seven *gatta*). Each *gattais* constituted by innumerable clans and the clans are associated with several Gods and deities.

Family

Nuclear families are predominant among Koyas. A son immediately after marriage invariably establishes his household in most cases in the settlement of his parents. In very few cases, he may migrate to his wife's village but establishes his household. Parents would not like to live with their son's family unless they are invalid because of old age or illness. The parents of the boy after marriage help him in all the possible ways from the construction of the house to the initial provisioning of the family. Household equipment like cooking utensils etc. are provided by the wife's parents. If the parents of the wife are too poor and the husband's family is also too poor, the Koyas on both sides comes forward to their rescue by pooling together their resources and provisioning the new family. Very few cases are to be found in matrilineal residences in the Koyas. The division of labour in a Koya family is based on sex. It is the responsibility of the women to cook food and keep the house and surroundings neat and clean by sweeping it daily. Further, it is the wife fetches water from a hill stream nearby or a well located in the settlement. In all these tasks she is assisted by her unmarried daughters. In addition to the tasks in the house, a woman also participates in weeding, sowing and harvesting in agriculture, besides participating in food gathering in the forest. The husband and grown-up sons of a family mostly participate in economic activities like agriculture (Ploughing, transporting) etc., and also in hunting often. The sons from a very early age follow their father in their economic activities while the girls follow their mother in domestic and other activities. The Koyas say that a daughter should become an expert in both the activities inside and outside the house. Girls aged below 10 years have the additional duty of looking after the young siblings when the elders are busy with other activities.

Life Cycle

1. **Birth Ceremony:** Koyas say that children are a gift from God. However, it does not mean that they do not know how a woman conceives. When they say that children are the gift of God, they mean despite man's efforts his wife conceives only, it is believed that God has put the baby inside her womb. The first delivery of a woman takes place in her parent's house. In the eighth month of a woman's pregnancy, her parents will come to her house, with the permission of the husband and his parents if they are living with their married son take their daughter to their house. The woman usually does not attend to hard work either outside the house or within. However, she attends to sedentary works, like helping her mother in cooking and other household duties. When her labour pain starts, she is taken to a hut erected behind the main house or in a corner of the house for delivery. The *Wadde* (priest) conducts necessary rituals to save the child and mother from the evil spirits and facilitate the smooth delivery of the baby. She cuts the umbilical cord with the help of a heat-treated arrowhead or a sharp piece of the new broken

earthen pot to the baby, collects placenta, takes it to the outskirts of the village, digs a hole when no one is there in that place, the placenta and umbilical cord covers inside the earth. Later on, the father or the grown-up brother of the woman visits the place and stamps on the place with their feet so that the covered earth is firm and no animal would be able to extricate it. Dissected part tying the base and apply turmeric mixed oil there. In the early days, they used to apply freshly prepared ash with oil. The newborn and the mother are bathed with warm water after turmeric mixed oil has been applied twice. Usually, after birth, pollution is observed for eleven days. All these eleven days, the mother has to confine herself to the corner of the house, and every day the midwife visits the house and gives a bath.

2. **Naming Ceremony:** Name giving ceremony of the newborn is performed after 2 to 3 months of birth and in some cases even earlier after eleven days when the family has the means to afford the expenses. On this occasion, all the village ladies take bath and assemble in the house of the newborn along with the team of women present at the time of delivery. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday are considered auspicious for this ceremony. Uncles and maternal grandparents are invited. They come and apply turmeric paste on the forehead of the child and place some coins on a plate. The lady who had severed the umbilical cord holds the child and starts the singing song, which the other ladies recite. She starts with the name of a dead ancestor and says "We don't know in which heaven you are. We want to have you; shall we call the child by your name? You will bless the child" etc. Then she disperses some rice over a piece of bread and breaks it into two. If it ends with equal distribution, then the child will be named after him and if it does not, she throws the rice and starts singing again with another name. After the child is named, a pig is sacrificed and a feast is organized for the village women. The woman and the child will be taken to her husband's house during the third month after delivery.
3. **Puberty Ceremony:** Koya girls usually attain puberty by age between 12 and 14 years. During the first menarche, the girl is made to sit on palm leaves spread in a corner of the house. Pollution is observed for eleven days. During all 11 days, the girl is not permitted to touch any object in the house as well as visit other parts of the house. All her requirements including food are supplied in the corner. She is permitted out only for nature call but she has to take care that no one sees her face and not to touch any object being used in the house or outside, particularly the agricultural implements which might get polluted and the result would be that the implements may pass on the pollution to the soil which in turn loses its fertility. On the eleventh day, the girl's body will be smeared with turmeric paste by the midwife and she will be given a bath. After the bath, the girl is given a new saree and a blouse by her parents. After

the bath, the period of pollution is over and the girl once again becomes part of the family and the Koya society. A vegetarian feast will be served to all the people who are present at the time of the bath of the girl. The Koyas think that a boy attains maturity when hairs grow in his armpits and face. Usually, these things happen when a boy is aged 12 to 13. Hence the marriageable age for boys starts at 13. A girl becomes marriageable when she attains puberty (errata), irrespective of her age. During the time of adolescence, they learnt how to live independently. They co-operate the family in all socio-economic activities along the lines of division of labour. In Koya society division of labour is observed along with all the grades of age and sex. The youth dormitories of Koyas play a major role in promoting their culture and tradition. The dormitories are the institution for unmarried youths. The Koya boys and the girls spend nights there in separate rooms. The girl's dormitory is called Pikin-Kudma. The girls gather there in the night for singing and gossiping and they sleep there together. But this practice is gradually being abandoned and, in many villages, Pikin-Kudma is not in existence. An open space left opposite the dormitory is meant for practising dance. It would not be wrong to say it as the school of dance for the Koya youths. This dormitory also facilitates the selection of life partners by the youth. It is indeed a democratic institution for the promotion and propagation of Koya culture.

4. **Marriage:** Two ways of securing mates are very common among the Koyas: one is by negotiations and the other by marriage by capture. Generally, marriages are performed after the girl attains puberty, but infant marriages are seldom celebrated. The marriage negotiations are always from the bridegroom's side and he has to bear the entire expenditure of the marriage of the bride side also. The bride's parents need not spend much money on the marriage celebrations. After coming to know about a particular girl, the parents of the bridegroom accompanied by some of the village elders visit the house of the bride. They take money along with them to purchase liquor if the marriage is settled. If the girl's party agrees to the proposed marriage, the groom's party serves them with liquor. The girl's parents consult her before consenting to the marriage proposal. Generally, both the parties consult local priests about the agreement of the horoscopes of the proposed couple. An auspicious day agreeable to both the parties is fixed after consulting the local priest. Two days before the marriage celebrations the bride-groom party sends one goat, some measure of rice, new clothes and ornaments. The bride's party accompanied by drums and trumpets go over to the bridegroom's house on the fixed day. As soon as they reach the outskirts of the groom's village the bride's party visits all the village deities and are received by the groom's party. Both the couple are then given a ceremonial bath after which actual marriage rites are performed when a necklace of black beads will be put

around the neck of the bride. The marriage dance with bisonhorn is one of the most striking features. In the evening the bride and bride-groom visit the shrine of the village deity (Mutyalamma). The consummation takes place after the marriage in the bride groom's house only. The next day early in the morning the couple would leave for the bride's village where they stay for five days. If the couple is comparatively wealthy, the festivities last several days. Dancing and singing are arranged every evening.

The second type of marriage prevalent among this community is marriage by capture. When a young man cannot afford to give a wedding feast and pay the bride price, they generally resort to this kind of marriage. A young man who wants to marry a particular girl informs about his desire to the elders and friends of his village. Generally capturing the bride is also pre-arranged. The boy party sometimes informs the elders of the girl's village about the capture of a particular girl for marriage. The boy's party waits for the opportunity either at weekly shandies (markets) or in forest places and capture that particular girl when she appears solitarily. Sometimes the girl struggles to escape, but generally, her resistance is easily encountered. Soon after the boys' party returns with the girl to the village, the girl's parents demand the bride price. If the groom pays the bride price all other marriage ceremonies are observed.

5. **Pre-Marital and Extra-Marital Sexual Relations:** Pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relations are completely prohibited, and many occurrences of such contacts will often lead to serious disputes. Such contacts will often lead to serious disputes. In case an unmarried girl develops any sexual relationship with any man of their community and if such a union is detected, the entire society forces the man to marry her. If the married woman develops any sexual contact with another man the husband gives her divorce and the latter has to pay a penalty to the former husband.
6. **Divorce:** Divorce is permitted in this society, both husband and wife can take initiative but generally it is the man who initiates and the cause in the majority of the cases is falling in love with another woman. If he wants to leave, he just leaves her and starts living with the woman he likes, but he has to inform the *Povi* (head of the Kula Panchayat in the village) on the other hand when a woman wants a separation, she never expresses it, but leaves him to her parent's house without telling him or with any man she likes, which quite often is the case. If the woman leaves on her own and no-fault lies with her husband, either her present husband or her parents have to return the bride price and all the ornaments given to her by the previous husband along with a fine imposed by the head of the Panchayat. If the wrong lies with the husband, she need not return the bride price and ornaments and has to pay *Maganali* (compensation) to his wife, which will be fixed by the 'Panchayat'. The children

accept the baby at the breast remaining with the husband. Even the baby taken with the woman has to return to her father at the mutually agreed age.

7. **Widow Remarriage:** Widow remarriage known as *Maru Manuvu* is also allowed. Widow remarriage is a simple one. A man desirous of marrying a widow after taking her consent gives a feast to his and her relatives. After the feast, she automatically becomes the wife of the man and enjoys the same status as that of other married women.
8. **Death:** When a death occurs in a Koya family the body is taken out immediately and placed on a cot in front of the house. A messenger will be sent to inform the news of the relatives. Meanwhile, the body is given a bath, wrapped in a new white cloth is placed on the cot. The dead bodies' legs are brought close to each other and the big toes of both the feet are tied together. The body's nostrils and ears are closed with cotton and the forehead is smeared with turmeric. In previous days one of the traditions of the Koyas family killing a cow, on the death of a married woman or a man and they keep its tail in the hands of the dead person. They believe by doing this the soul of the dead person goes to heaven. the number of cows they kept also decreased and it is expensive to buy a cow and kill it, hence they have stopped this practice. When children and pregnant women die, they are buried, the rest of the dead are cremated. After the arrival of the relatives, a round of liquor is served to the people assembled and pallbearers belonging to the dead man's clan are given an extra round of liquor. The palls caw the cot to the cremation ground in a procession to the tune of the beating drums. The pallbearers sway like dancers to the rhythm of the beating of the drums. In front of the funeral procession, a member of the dead person clan walks with a pot filled with fire. After reaching the cremation ground, the cot with the dead body is kept on the funeral pyre already made ready by the agnates of the dead. One of the pallbearers takes an axe makes a small crack on the four comers of the cot and the dead body and the cot is covered with fuelwood and the chief mourner who carried the fire sets fire to the pyre. All these who attended the funeral return back to the house of the dead after taking bath in a hill stream or at a nearby well. In the house of the dead, a small oil lamp is lit to honour the dead person and everyone who attends the funeral comes inside the house and pays respects to the lamp, representing the dead person. During those days when the Koyas killed a cow after the death of a person, after returning from the funeral the family cooked the meat of the cow and served it to all those who attended the funeral. Today, the family of the dead man instead passes one more round of liquor to all the people. On the eleventh day after the death *Chinna Dinam*(small obsequies) and 21' day *Pedda Karma* (major obsequies) will be observed. On the day of *Chinna Dinam*, a person from the family of the dead visits the grave or funeral place and cleans the surroundings, with water. On

the day of *Pedda Karma*, a dish, which is liked by the dead man, is cooked and kept on the grave or at the place of the funeral. On that day all those who attended the funeral or burial take bath to become ritually clean and enjoy the feast and liquor provided by the family of the dead.

Food Habits

The staple food of the Koyas is jowar. They make flour out of the jowar and prepare gruel or Ganji out of it. Since paddy is also widely cultivated, they take rice also frequently. As the produce from their field is not sufficient throughout the year, they gather edible roots and tubers from the forest in different seasons of the year and preserve them to supplement their food requirements. They generally eat roots and tubers like Tella Channa Gadda, Nalla Channagadda, Govindagadda, Botukugadda, Chodagadda, Vodagadda, Chetigadda, Alligadda, Kalavagadda, Demaragadaa, Chirragadda Yellerigadda. All these roots and tubers cannot be eaten in raw condition. First, the skin is peeled off and then boiled for a considerable time to clear off bitterness. They also eat some flowers and leaves such as Ippa flower, Tyresikura, Volakura, Boddikura etc. Ippa flowers are available in March and April and womenfolk and children abundantly collect them and preserve them to times of scarcity. An intoxicating drink is also from the Ippa nuts and the oil is used both for cooking and lighting. They hunt the wild animals with their bows and arrows and eat them. Fish is a most delicious item of food to Koyas. They go to distant places and catch fish with their nets. Koyas also abundantly take toddy from January to June month. Womenfolk and even children also take toddy during this season.

Economy

Today Koyas wherever they inhabit in the state are settled cultivators, but once they were shifting cultivators. Writing about the shifting cultivation of Koyas "J. Cain" says, a clearing is made in the jungle, and a few acres for cultivation are left vacant round the houses. In clearing away the wood, every tree is removed except the 'Ippa' (*Bassia latifolia*) and tamarind trees, which are of the greatest service to the people on account of their fruits and shade. The Kois do not remain long in the same place. Four years are sufficed to exhaust the soil in one locality and they do not take the trouble to plough deeper, but migrate to another spot, where they make a fresh clearing and erect a new village". Further J. Cain writes that when the "cultivation season is over and the time of harvest draws on, the whole of the village turns out by families and lives on the small wooden scaffolding erected in the fields, to scare away the wild animals and birds which comes to feed on the ripening grain". According to him, the Koya grew millet and maize in these fields, they also grew a little quantity of cotton and tobacco. With the cotton, they made coarse cloth and tobacco for smoking.

K.S. "Singh" writing on Koya says that "Traditionally, the Koyas subsist by tiling land. As their holdings are small, they go hunting and gathering to supplement their

income. They are also experts in indigenous medicine and go around selling it". Koyas contemporary economic scene suggests that they are struggling hard to take out their living from settled agriculture. Shifting cultivation has almost disappeared as an occupation because of strict forest rules and regulations and the efforts of developmental agencies to wean them from shifting cultivation.

They are today settled cultivators and agricultural labourers and marginally depending on the collection of minor forest produce. When they took up settled cultivation, many decades back they were fortunate to have fertile lands because their habitations were located on either side of Godavari flood plains. In these lands, they produced jowar, ragi, bajra and other types of millets. They also produced a little quantity of cotton and paddy. The paddy grown is of course variety and does not require perennial water supply in large quantities. They grow vegetables such as Brinjals, Gongura, Thotakura, beans etc. They also grew cereals like Redgram, Blackgram, Greengram and chillies.

Besides cultivation, Koyas as mentioned earlier does make use of the forest for their subsistence and for earning some cash. But today the role of forests in their lives is decreasing. They still collect a variety of roots and tubers from the forest. Depending on the seasonality, they collect tubers like 'Velisherda Gadda', 'Nallishenda Gadda', 'Vanier Gadda', 'Naradumpa', etc. They also gather several edible fruits like Custard Apple, Velaga, Mango, Tunku, Polymra etc. If they are abundant, they do sell them to the people from the plains, but this rarely happens. One of the important items they collect from the forest is the "Ippa" flower with which they brew liquor as well as make sweet food because the sweetness of the flower Ippa flower is also very nutritious. Apart from the roots, tubers and fruits they also collect minor forest produce like, Myrobalan, Soap Nuts, Gum, Tamarind, Adda Leaves (adda leaves are used in Beedi making country cigarettes). Before the establishment of Girijan Cooperative Corporation (Tribal Cooperative Corporation) the Koyas sold their minor forest produce to the non-tribal traders and moneylenders. These traders and moneylenders taking the innocence of the Koyas not only underweighted the produce but also paid much less than the market price. Girijan Corporation was established with two objectives, to buy the minor forest produce by paying market and remunerative prices and to supply the tribes with essential commodities like rice, oil and grams at a cheaper rate by establishing fair price shops.

Social Control

The Koya tribe is controlled by an extremely democratic organization which is called *Kula Panchayat*. A village is a small unit of an administration headed by "*Pinna Pedda*". This office is hereditary but if he is incapable of leading immoral life, the entire village community will choose another leader. The village traditional leader must be familiar with all cultural patterns of their community and he must evince contagious enthusiasm in social as well as religious festivals. Above him is the "*Kula Pedda*" or

Patel, who is recognized by the Government. A group of ten to fifteen villagers form a “*Samutu*”. *Samutu Dora* or *Kula Dora* or *Pedda Kapu* presides over the *Samutu*. All the disputes in the village are settled by the *Kula Pedda* whose decision is normally final. The fines are usually utilized by the whole community for drinking. Whatever the disputes which cannot be settled at village level and inter-village disputes are referred to the inter-village traditional council (*Samutu*). The traditional panchayats have not lost their influence in the villages concerning social control even after the inception of statutory panchayats. The Gram Panchayats and *Samithi*'s in tribal areas are dominated by the plains people since tribal representatives are not properly informed.

Religion, Festivals and Faris

Koyas' religion is animism they worship various Gods, Goddesses and spirits including ancestral spirits. Further according to them, the Gods and Goddesses are divided into benevolent and malevolent spirits, Gods and goddess if not worshipped or appeased, they harm the people with sickness and disease, cause droughts and famine etc., some of the malevolent spirits and Gods have to be appeased with sacrifices. They venerate Bhima and Arjuna, the Pandava brothers of Mahabharatha. The Koyas claim their descent from Bhima. Writing about the religion of Koya the following Gods and Goddesses were appointed to be worshipped by Sudras, Muttelamma, Maridimaha Lakshmi, Poturaju, Adomarazu. The Goddess Mamili or Pele must be propitiated early in the year, or else the crops will undoubtedly fail and she is said to be very partial to human victims. The present-day Koyas deny that their ancestors ever practised human sacrifice to appease neither the Mamili spirit nor any other spirit. They do believe that some of their deities are bloodthirsty and requires a lot of sacrifices to satisfy them. They think that the malevolent spirits and deities like blood and relishes, drinking it, they can even smell blood from a distance. The Gods and Goddesses worshipped by Koyas can be divided into two groups. The Gods and Goddesses of local nature i.e., purely belonging to Koyas and other tribes in the area and those derived from Hindu great tradition.

The local Gods and Goddesses propitiated are (1) Pothuraju, (2) Muthyalamma, (3) Durgamma, (4) Sangamma, (5) Korra Raju and (6) Mamili. Except for Korra Raju and Pothuraju who are male Gods, the rest are female Goddesses. The great Hindu tradition Gods propitiated by them is (1) Rama, (2) Hanuman and (3) Ganesha. The Koyas living in the surroundings of Bhadrachalam where a famous temple dedicated to God Rama is located claim a special relationship to God Rama. On the festival of *Sreeramanavami*, the Koyas surrounding Bhadrachalam propitiate Lord Rama and his wife Seetha. One of the items of propitiation on this day is performing the marriage of Rama with Seetha the two represented by two wooden pestles.

Many Koyas of this region claims that Seetha the wife of Rama belongs to the Koya community. According to them, Rama during his exile was living in the forest of

Bhadrachalam. When a Koya king of the area announced '*Swayamvaram*' (a woman choosing a husband amongst many men specially invited for the purpose), a practice quite often mentioned in Hindu epics. In addition, they also propitiate '*Bhumatha*' (Goddess of Earth) supposed to be in charge of the fertility of the land and '*Kondadevatha*' called '*Malyamma*'. This Goddess, the Koyas believe to take care of the fertility of the forest. Each clan has its '*Velupu*' (heroes of veneration). The clans Velupus are believed to take care of the health and wealth of the people of the clan.

Except '*Pothumju*' who is represented by a wooden statue the rest of the local Gods and Goddesses are represented by stones of various shapes installed at appropriate places. If the statue of *Potharaju* becomes old, a new wooden one will be installed. One common feature of propitiation of local Gods and Goddesses is that they are communal and have shared activities. While all the female local deities are satisfied with sacrifices the male local deities and Hindu Gods and Goddesses do not require any animal or bird sacrifices, they are satisfied with the offerings of vegetarian food. Without a brief mention of festivals and fairs among Koyas, the religion of Koyas will not be complete. Below given in brief is the list of the festivals and fairs celebrated by the Koyas.

1. **Vijjupadaum:** It may be called seed fertility or seed charming festival. Celebrated at the beginning of monsoon. It is celebrated to increase the fertility of the seed. The seed is mixed with the blood of the animal sacrificed and the same will be distributed to all the farmers who mix them with the seeds made ready for sowing.
2. **ElavelupuPanduga:** Families of each '*Gatta*' (phratry) celebrate the festival related to their '*Gatta*' deity. It is a large festival. All the Koyas belonging to the gatta are supposed to attend the festival.
3. **Dadepandum:** It is a festival celebrated in January before they start consuming toddy. Before bringing down the toddy for the first time in the year, they sacrifice a fowl at one of the palm trees; sprinkle the toddy on all the people assembled men and women, dance around the tree and then start drinking the toddy.
4. **Kondalakolupu:** It is a festival propitiating *Kondadevatha* and other deities located in the hills. It is celebrated on Sunday in April.
5. **MotigaddaTirdam:** Motigadda is a small islet in Godavari River near Bhadrachalam. The Koyas believe that God Siva married a Koya woman on this island. To commemorate the marriage, they celebrate this festival.
6. **Sammakka and SaralammaJathara:** The largest fair celebrated by the Koya at Medaram Village in Warangal District. Not only thousands of the tribals in the area but also a large number of non-tribals attend this *Jathara*. This

Jathara is held to commemorate the *valour* of Koya women Sammakka and Saralamma, who fought the armies of Kakatiya Kings of Warangal.

Aesthetic Life

The Koyas, have retained their rich and varied heritage of colourful dance and music forming an integral part of their festivals and rituals. Among them, the dance, song and music are developed and maintained by themselves as a folk tradition without the aid and intervention of any professional dancer or teacher. The performance of these only gives expression to their inner feelings, their joys and sorrows, their natural affections and passion and their appreciation of beauty in nature and man. This consists of clapping of hands or beating of drums or an orchestra of different instruments. Koya dance is characterized not only by its originality and spontaneity but also by its wide range of movements. Many parts of the body such as the head, back, arms, feet, finger, etc. are brought into play. Some of the groups put on a colourful dancing costume during their performance. Like dance, the songs sung by different groups differ from each other. Songs are adopted from the past so many years describe the history of gods, the myths of creation, some epics and legends. In the Bija Pandu dance, the Koyas form two separate groups: one of the males and the other of females for dancing. The male dancers hold a drum and they beat them while dancing. They wear huge headgears of bison horn which are richly decorated with peacocks' feathers and cowries. The girls adorn themselves in ornaments, wearing flat brass bands in their foreheads and holding sticks fitted with tinkling bells they dance in circles striking the sticks during the dance in between the beats.

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