

Lambanis and Cultural Dilemma

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Abstract

The history of the Lambani tribes is unique in nature, despite influence of modern cultures and sanskritisation the tribes have retained the identity of the Nomadic Banjara community. The paper is an attempt to take up the study of Lambani tribe and the influence of modern life style over the heterogenous population of this tribe involving people of various age groups, gender, class and educational status. The paper is a sincere attempt to analyse the dilemma of the tribe and its age old culture. The new generations are moving away from the cultural, social and traditional rituals. Whereas the older generations have stuck on deeply with the old traditions and rituals and most of them are often less educated. The paper suggests a new overhauling of the people's mental setup to retain their unique identity as Lambani tribe an inseparable part of the Karnataka and Indian culture.

1. Introduction:

In the course of process of cultural changes, the tribes have made many attempts to retain and redefine their age old traditions and cultures in the wake of western influence. The tribes are educating themselves to protect their rights. Sanskritization, westernization and modernization models were widely used to capture the changing scenario of Indian society during the last 50-60years. The researcher is not attempting a critique of this approach, as it is not pertinent here. I attempt is to indiscriminately examine the situation among the tribal communities, the researcher doesn't go in to the merits of this approach considering the objective of this brief paper.

Lambanis are treated as a tribal community, if we see category wise they belong to schedule caste but if we see in terms of culture they look like tribal community having different names, rituals, customs, cuisine, living style, birth, marriage ceremonies and death rituals, which are different from other communities in the society but Lambanis have more similarity with tribes. Due to the sanskritization, westernization and modernization tribal people have adapted themselves with the changing process; thus Lambani people are losing their age old values, traditions, customs etc. On the other side there is a long struggle to retain their age old culture and tradition. In this paper I am going to survey, how Lambanis are stepping ahead with cultural transition. If they want to change their culture why? what is reason? or if they wanted to retain what is sentiment behind that?

Gone are the days of Metcalfe and Mendel Baum. And we have to think twice before endorsing the romantic presentation of the likes of Elwin also. Today tribal people are responding favorably to the planned programs for the

Tribal Development Programs sponsored by the Government. They are eager to obtain the benefit from education, urbanization, technology, industrialization, agriculture, animal husbandry, medicine, health service, political changes and government policies and programs.

It is pertinent to recall the here the statement of Ghurye, perhaps he has rightly called “tribes are backward Hindus”. Most of the so-called advanced castes were tribes at one or the other stage of their existence. They could be called as ex-tribes. Tribal people are also changing their habits customs and behaviors. They can no longer remain static with their old beliefs, taboos, and isolation. With the development of industries, construction, irrigation, power projects and mining in tribal areas has opened up a new horizon for them. The emerging scenario in tribal society calls for a careful analysis and understanding. It is difficult to name the new identity as perceived by the tribes today.

This paper is a modest attempt in discussing the need of an appropriate concept that would fairly reflect the emerging trends among Indian tribes. This paper is based on the empirical study carried out on Banjaras- a gypsy tribe of Karnataka.

2. Methodology:

I have selected Bangalore rural district for the study. In this district again I have chosen seven taluks, involving two to three villages or Hamlets in each taluk randomly. Among these, seven villages are very near to town or city; 06 villages are multicast in nature and composition. For comparative study I have chosen Bangalore city where I have interviewed 300 members as respondents around the age group of 18 to 65, among them 146 respondents belong to urban areas and 154 belong to rural area. In all 300 persons belonging to different age group, educational level, and occupation have been interviewed.

3. History of Banjara:

Banjaras are today found living in twenty-one states and union territories in India from Kashmir to Kanyakumari except in the northeastern states. Though living in different states their tradition, dialect, social and religious customs, dress, habits, songs and so on are all alike. They could easily be recognized as banjara colourful dress of their women folk.

Banjaras are called with different names such as Vanajara, Lamani, Lambani, and Sugali. ‘Banjara’ is derived from Sanskrit word ‘Vanajari’ means ‘trading’; Lambani word also derived from Sanskrit word “Lavana” meaning ‘salt’. This people were trading salt on “pack bullock”. Hence this name might have come (Mr. Cumberlege) Banjaras are living in “thanda or hamlet”. (Venktasubiah 1975-404) their language is Lambani called “Gorbholi”, which doesn't have script. Their occupation was trading salt, spice and other food grains on pack bullock to army in the war field. (R.E.Enthoven, Mr.Gregison, Khandoba, E, Thurston, Roopla Naik, Krishnamurthy).

In Banjara tribe there are three Gothras; such as Chavan, Rathod, Powar. The marriage between the boy and a girl of same Gothra is prohibited as they become Brother and Sister. Hence the marriages are inter-gothra marriages. Particularly Bangalore rural districts contain some seven taluks. In seven taluks Banjaras are living in 154 hamlets. They have a very different culture, tradition, Rituals, Hobbies, and Language etc. Now due to the impact of education urbanization, sanskritisation, people are realizing the values of these customs and traditions. Hence they are trying to join the mainstream.

4. Identification of Banjaras:

Banjaras are very colorful and picturesque Tribe of India. Banjara ladies decorate themselves with a Variety of ornaments. They look like a medieval dame in her complete battle panoply. Heavy pendants and silver chains are plaited in air and hung over cheeks. A nose ring called 'Bhooriya' the size of curtain ring comes over her lips. Their hair is parted in center combed back and plaited with 'silk or cotton tosses'. They wear massive silver hoop called 'Haansalee' on their wrist and arms. They also wear Brass and Horn Bracelets called 'Balya'. On their feet they wear brass and silver anklets with tiny bells that jingle with every step they take.

A banjara lady wears a heavy Skirt or Ghagra made of brightly colored cotton, richly embroidered and bordered with glass, beads, mirror, dices, cowries and shells. Her covering veil also curiously embroidered. The short-sleeved bodice is grandly embroidered in front and over the shoulders and tied at the back. No other tribe in India is as colourful and picturesque like banjara women folk. Banjara men wear dhoti with short trousers and turbans. Banjaras are hardworking and industrious by nature hence; beggary is the almost unheard among Banjara.

It is important to present and note the changing scenario among this once colorful tribe with special focus on the following aspects.

- Dress Ornament
- Marriage Rituals
- Cast Panchayat
- Religious Life

4.1. Dress and Ornament

Forces that are effecting changes in the civilized section of our society seems to have influenced Banjara's social life. My data largely confirms my observations; I shall present the emerging trends in various aspects of their lives. As I stated earlier Banjara's dress and ornaments are very different from others. However, the women folk today have hardly any fascination for their traditional dress, it is becoming a thing of past. Banjaras women settled in

towns and cities and those belonging to the younger generation have completely given up their traditional attire. According to the women folk their traditional dress:

- Develops inferiority complex in them
- Evokes unnecessary curiosity among others
- Very expensive to prepare
- Takes longtime to prepare
- It is not comfortable to work in office, industry or anywhere.
- Contempt from neighbors
- Lack of raw materials available to prepare
- Decline in the number of people who admire traditional dresses
- Impact of modern education, urbanization, mass media

Apart from the above they have developed a taste for the dress, which their counterparts wear. They say that they are averse to reveal their identity through traditional dress and ornaments. As many as 62% people have rejected while only a 38% people still have some taste for traditional dress and ornaments and incidentally all of them are above 60 years.

4.2. Marriage system:

Customary marriage ceremony among Banjaras used to be too long and tedious affair lasting for a week or even more. It used to start with rituals such as engagement, first “Golkhayeero” (eating jaggery), “Bhaman Puchero” (consulting astrologer or priest), “Saacher Rapyra” (giving one Rupee to leader of the thanda), “Vethadooro talo” , “Ghota kaadero” and “tecko dero” , “Veeyaa Bhaandero Kullarkhayeero” (distributing sweets), “Tying Mandal to bride’s left leg, applying mehndi, tying and loosing thread to groom hand. And many more lasting for a week. Marriage was solemnized at the groom’s house only. Next day bride’s father would host a feast to all the kiths and kins. This was the Banjar’s traditional marriage system.

Now a days it has been reduced to a day or maximum of two days’ affair only. The notion that marriage sacrament has taken deep roots. According to my data 90% of people have given up the traditional pattern. Excepting few “[significant rituals such as Ghosyayiar dhag thero, Saacher Rapyra , Vadhaayi , Saghayi, the rest have been given up. Today Banjaras follows the customs and traditions of other castes. The reasons they cited are as follows;

- No use in following in meaningless traditions.
- Traditional system is very costly and time consuming.

- Some rituals are ridiculous.
- Impact of Hindu Caste.
- Impact of modern education, urbanization, mass media etc,

4.3. Caste Panchayat System

The institution of Tribal Panchayat, meaning “Tribal council” was there among Banjaras. It was entrusted with the authority including maintenance of justice law and order issues. People in village recognize this body and often abide by the decisions taken by elders in the caste panchayat. They also feel that it is a traditional and hence should be respected.

Lamabani call their tribal council as “Naik panchayat”. Naik is the head of the thanda, Karabhari the vice chairman assists Naik. Davo is the vice chief who also assists Naik. All the three posts are hereditary. “Daady” is a messenger. All these dignitaries are knowledgeable, honest, talented and wise with expertise and foresighted to judge the disputes. In addition to these all Banjaras head of the family also assemble into the Panchayath. Banjaras approach their organization “Ghorphachayata”.

Those who violate and insult the caste traditions and customs are punished and even ex-communicated. Quarrels, violence, rape and assault on women and other complicated problem of guilt are not taken out of their society for redressal. Panchayath decides everything and takes care to see that no crime committed by banjara is given publicity outside the thanda. When Naik finds a problem too complicated to solve, he seeks the help of the councils of the reputed chiefs of the other thandas. Naik, Kharabaari, Davo are the main pillars to conduct any religious program and meetings, they take care of thandas in the issues of welfare, marriage, death rituals.

But now the institution of Ghorphachayat is losing its importance as inefficiency, corruption has crept in. People do not obey its decision. Instead they approach the governmental institutions such as police, court. The role of traditional leaders has been confined to religious and ritualistic affairs.

4.4. Religious life and festivals:

In the past Banjaras worshiped only Seva Bhaya, Mitu Boukya, Mariyamma Mathral, Vagjoi, Bheamisati, Kankali, Dasaravo, Seethla, Saathibhavani etc. Today they have started worshipping Hindu Gods and Goddesses along with their traditional Gods and Goddesses. They offer a Pooja for all Hindu Gods and Goddesses, by adopting Hindu culture, and imitating upper caste culture, lifestyle and religious life. Earlier they celebrated the festival Dewali and Holi (Teej), Seethla, Horbeed and Chadpooja but now they celebrate all Hindu festivals. Many Banjaras have embraced Christianity.

5. The Dilemma:

My data indicates a rather a blurred picture. Although the desire for change is very clear, their will is not firm. Even though they are imitating Hindus, they have not completely left their religious life. They worship 'Seva Bhaya' every year. Celebrate Dewali, Theej, and Holi compulsorily. It indicates Banjaras are trying to retain their culture by simplifying it. They are inclined to retain some important or significant rituals.

6. Data analysis:

6.1. Why do they retain their traditions?

These are the following questions asking in the time of birth, death and marriages ceremony and rituals. About 38% of the respondent people have accepted to follow their traditional customs during their marriage and other occasions, among these 38% of people 8% of people are following these rituals due to their "ancestral traditional practices". If we look into age wise statistics, there are 7% of people between the age group of 31-50 who have accepted to be following these rituals. In the educated category above 10th standard to Post graduate degree holding people accepted and acquired the Lambanis old customs. We can consider 3% illiterate people also contributed to this opinion.

30% of people follow these rituals to save and develop original culture. Among 30% of people 5.9% are from 18-30 age group, 3.8% are from 31-50 age group. In the educated group 6.4% from illiterate, and remaining groups consisting each 1.5. are worried of losing the culture more by illiterate youths and aged category.

It could be noted from the study that, 13% people are following their old culture and tradition for self-esteem, this opinion was received from 18 to 30 age group are opinioned cent percent. In the educated column among illiterate and primary literate group as says 12% each 22% per from above 10th and P U category but higher educated are neutral where as in rural and semi urban 19% people are following because of their self-esteem. rural people can't think of this view.

We follow these rituals to bring the unity among the community people say 26%, opinions given in favour by the age group of 18-30 is 24% and of 31-50 age group is 31 %. we found among primary literates the rate is 43% also among illiterates it is 22%.

The present youths are thinking to bring the unity in the community by following our customs which are the tools for the integration of the community. Hence by practicing this ceremony we can bring the unity back.

There are 14% people who follow the rituals to worship their god and goddess, 18-50 is the only age group have favoured worship to their Gods, where as we found in illiterate 05% offering Pooja, 29% from primary education

group remain neutral because the educated think that rituals are not meant just for offering Pooja to god and goddesses; they think rituals are lifestyle and culture.

There are 14% percent people who are following the customs because of fear of the Gods and the ancestors; this opinion is given by 18-30 age groups and illiterate groups only. The findings are that, some uneducated youths think if they do not follow the rituals God may force some adverse things and punish them. Hence we found this kind of anxiety in the illiterate class.

Only 04% people are following the traditional rituals because of lack of education, this opinion was given by age group of 31-50 and in the illiterate category cent percent of the respondents opined that they follow the customs and rituals.

6.2. Reasons for parting from traditions?

There are 62% people who are not following these rituals and they are ready to leave the age old traditional rituals because of following reasons: there are 22% of people who have parted from these rituals because of 'the influence of education'. Among this percentage 33% from 18-30 age group, and only 17% from 65+ age groups category where as in education background 75% more in highly educated and 19% less in primary level education categories; we found the influence is more affected in highly educated than the primary education group. In region wise if we see education influenced more in urban 22% than rural 21%.

Due to the influence of urbanization there are 23% people who are leaving the rituals, among them 44% from 65+ and 08% are from 31-50 age groups say they have parted from these rituals. But where as in educated category 42% from illiterates and 17% in PUC educated group people says they have left the rituals. Where as in urban 32% and rural 09% people say that it is due to the influence of urbanization, people are not following the old customs and traditions.

There are 20% percent of respondents opined, due to the improvement of transport and medias influence they have done away with the old traditions. Among this percentage respectively 38% from 51-60, and 31% from 65+ age groups we may find this tendency. If we look in to the education column 40% people from degree qualification category told they have left the age old customs against the 'modern upper caste cultures'. Geographically taken 18% of the urban have left under the influence of media and transportation, but only 06% of the rural areas are not following the rituals due modernization. People opine that Lambani's are leaving their traditional rituals because of "neighbors' influence and humiliation by other community" says 16% among this percentage 36% from 18-30, 10% in 31-50 age groups people from this category are influenced by their neighbors more and they could tolerate the

humiliation by others, hence the reason. Where as in educated column we can see only in illiterates and primary educated respectively 25% and 13% reason behind is illiterates and semi literates are not think broadly then highly educated and up course their way of thinking.

There are 08% people who are not following these rituals because it's a "costly affair" this opinion was given by 31-50 age groups illiterates and primary category respondents.

Changes is natural phenomenon according to time and situation things should be taken places hence we could find same process in this community says 11% respondents. Among this age category 12% from 31-50 age 05% of 65+ category people are opinioned if we see in the education column 25% are from highly educated and 10% high schools studied people replied here we can find changing and rational attitude more among youths and highly educated category. Because the young blood always thinks new innovations at the same time their education also supports lots.

7. Important Findings:

- Banjaras are not certain and clear about their social status.
- They are not aware that they were once tribal.
- Banjara culture is on the decline.
- Well placed Banjaras in towns and cities have taken to modern life style.
- Those in villages and exclusive thanda are following the caste Hindus.
- The number of educated and those taking modern occupation is on the rise.
- Consciously compare them with the rest in the neighborhood.
- Feel some of their customs and rituals as blind, antiquated and useless.
- However, and interestingly enough they are proud of being Banjaras.
- They want to retain their identity while accepting the trends In the mainstream.

Thus the scenario is vague and indefinite. They are caught in a dilemma tossing between the hangover the past and fascination for the products of modern culture.

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8.1 tables of statistics:

Why they retain tradition?

Sl no	Reason	Age					Education						Region			
		18-30	31-50	51-60	61+	Total	Illiterate	primary	High school	Above PU	DEGREE	ETC	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
1	Some great traditions		07 70 14 %	02 20% 100 %	01 10 50 %	10 100 08%	03 30% 05%	--	02 20% 22%	02 20% 40%	01 10% 33%	02 20% 100 %	10 100 09%	05 50% 07%	05 50% 12%	10 100 09%
2	To save culture	20 59 33 %	13 38 28 %		01 03 50 %	34 100 30%	22 64% 41%	04 12% 09%	04 12% 44%	02 06% 40%	02 06% 67%		34 100 30%	20 57% 28%	14 41% 32%	34 100 30%
3	Self esteem	15 100 23 %				15 100 13%	07 47% 12%	05 33% 12%	02 13% 22%	01 06% 20%			15 100 13%	07 47% 09%	08 53% 19%	15 100 13%
4	To promote unity	15 50 24 %	15 50 31 %			30 100 26%	12 40% 22%	18 60% 43%					30 100 26%	18 60% 25%	12 40% 28%	30 100 26%
5	To worship god	08 50 12 %	8 50 17 %			16 100 14%	03 19 05%	12 75 29%	1 06 11%				16 100 14%	12 75% 17%	04 25% 09%	16 100 14%
6	fear	05 100 07 %				05 100 04%	03 60% 05%	02 40% 04%					05 100 04%	05 100 07%		05 100 04%
7	Lack of education		04 100 08 %			04 100 03%	04 100 07%						04 100 03%	04 100 05%		04 100 03%
		63 55 100 %	47 41 100 %	02 02% 100 %	02 01 100 %	114 100 100	54 47% 100	41 36% 100	09 07% 100	05 04% 100	03 02% 100	02 01% 100	114 100 100	71 62% 100	43 38% 100	114 100 100

8.2 What are the reasons for leaving traditions?

Sl no	Reason	Age					Education						Region			
		18-35	36-50	51-65	65+	Total	illiterate	primary	High school	Above PU	Degree	ETC	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
1	Education	19 46% 33%	13 32% 15%	04 10% 25%	05 12% 17%	41 100 22%		16 39% 19%	12 29% 31%	08 19% 67%	02 04% 40%	03 07% 75%	41 100 22%	16 39 21%	25 61 22%	41 100 22%
2	Urbanization	09 21% 16%	15 35% 18%	06 14% 37%	13 30% 45%	43 100 23%	17 39% 42%	15 35% 17%	09 21% 23%	02 04% 17%			43 100 23%	07 16% 09%	36 84% 32%	43 100 23%
3	Improved transportation & communication		22 59% 26%	06 16% 38%	09 24% 31%	37 100 20%		29 78% 34%	05 13% 13%	02 05% 16%	01 02% 40%		37 100 20%	05 20% 06%	20 80% 18%	25 100 13%
4	Neighbor's influence and humiliation	21 70% 36%	09 30% 11%			30 100 16%	10 33% 25%	11 37% 13%	09 30% 23%				30 100 16%	20 62% 27%	12 38% 11%	32 100 17%
5	Costly affair		15 100 18%			15 100 08%	13 87% 32%	02 13% 02%					15 100 08%	15 100 20%		15 100 08%
6	Changes in natural phenomenon	08 40% 14%	10 50% 12%		02 10% 07%	20 100 11%		13 65% 15%	04 20% 10%		02 10% 20%	01 05% 25%	20 100 11%	12 40% 16%	18 60% 16%	30 100 16%
Total		57 31% 100	84 45% 100	16 09% 100	29 15% 100	186 100 100	40 21% 100	86 46% 100	39 21% 100	12 06% 100	05 03% 100	04 02% 100	186 100 100	75 40% 100	111 60% 100	186 100 100

