



An Anthropological Analysis of the Socio-Cultural Systems of Yanadis of Andhra Pradesh and Australian Aborigines

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Abstract : This research paper presents an anthropological analysis of the socio-cultural systems of the Yanadi tribe of Andhra Pradesh, India, and the Australian Aborigines, two indigenous communities shaped by parallel histories of colonisation, displacement, and socio-economic marginalisation. Through a comparative analytical framework, the study examines key cultural dimensions including family and kinship organisation, marital practices, religious beliefs, ritual traditions, social structure, economic livelihoods, customary laws, and traditional knowledge systems. Despite divergent geographical and historical contexts, both communities reveal shared experiences such as erosion of ancestral land rights, decline of traditional occupations, cultural assimilation pressures, low educational access, and contemporary struggles for identity assertion and rights recognition. The findings highlight the remarkable resilience and adaptive strategies employed by both groups through cultural revival movements, community mobilisation, and engagement with state welfare policies. The study contributes significantly to anthropological scholarship by offering cross-cultural insights into indigenous survival strategies and cultural continuity in the face of modern transformation. It further proposes policy-relevant recommendations aimed at inclusive development, safeguarding of intangible heritage, and strengthening indigenous participation in governance.

IndexTerms - Yanadi, Australian Aborigines, Culture, Religion, Healthcare practices

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian society can be broadly categorised into tribal, rural, and urban groups according to geographical circumstances and socio-cultural attributes. Tribal communities are an essential element of the social structure. Tribal populations are not confined to India; they exist worldwide. Africa has the largest tribal population globally, with India ranking second. India's diverse ecosystems are home to several tribal communities, each contributing to the cultural tapestry. Numerous tribal societies reside in relative isolation, generally inhabiting rugged, forested landscapes or certain, and defined locations. They are characterised by unique cultures, dialects, religions, and a strong sense of ethnic identity.

Tribals are recognised as the indigenous inhabitants of the Indian Peninsula, being the oldest settlers of the region. In India, tribals are sometimes referred to as adivasis (original dwellers). In the modern context, they are regarded as socio-economically disadvantaged.

YANADIS : A MARGINALISED SCHEDULED TRIBE IN ANDHRA PRADESH

The Yanadi are of subaverage height, distinguished by extended crania, possessing a medium cephalic index that is the lowest documented in the state. They exhibit a broad facial profile marked by a diminutive chin and prominent nasal features. The Andhra Pradesh Tribes Enquiry Committee contends that the Chenchu and Yanadi are same. The Chenchu descended the hill because of Yanadi. Their culinary habits, religious beliefs, cultural customs, clan characteristics, folklore, and predominantly their living situations are analogous.

Andhra Pradesh, India, is native to the area and designated as Scheduled Tribes under the Indian Constitution. They inhabited the surrounding woodlands and derived their primary means of sustenance from collecting non-timber forest products. The Yanadis possess comprehensive traditional health knowledge, including general health care techniques and specialist cures, such as those for snakebites.

The yanadis' traditional health knowledge is closely linked to biological resources, utilising medicinal plants for healthcare acquired via continuous access to and observation of natural resources. Secondary sources show that the Yanadis hold many religious beliefs and festivals linked to forest vegetation.

Ceremonial trips to the forest are undertaken to commemorate nature and deceased ancestors, venerate health deities, and pay tribute to the plants that support their well-being. Traditionally, the entire family would explore the forest to collect non-timber forest products, with the household head educating members on medicinal plants and their uses.

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES

The Aboriginal presence in Australia, as substantiated by anthropology, exceeds 60,000 years. This extensive history includes legendary origin narratives that describe 'ancestral' entities thought to have traversed the region, so shaping its natural features, geographical locations, customs, and even language. As of 30 June 2021, the estimated resident population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was roughly 984,000, constituting about 3.8% of Australia's overall population.

The change, nay epistemic violence, which perhaps devastatingly affected them, was colonization:

Since the arrival of European settlers in Australia over 200 years ago, they have persecuted, harassed, tormented, and oppressed the indigenous population. The more ruthless concluded that the most compassionate approach to managing a galaxy of populations incapable of adapting to the "whitefella" government was to exterminate them swiftly, resorting to shooting and poisoning. Some believed it was their divine obligation to save the unenlightened primitive, eradicate his pagan culture, provide him with clothing, and instill the importance of labour. Abandoning the original people was never a viable choice; acquiring knowledge from them transcended any concept of morality and propriety. The pink individuals regarded black Australians as primitive beings, remnants from the Stone Age in a nation that time overlooked.

Aboriginal Society

Prior to colonisation, numerous Aboriginal tribes existed, each distinctly distinctive and possessing their own complex languages. Nonetheless, a pan-Aboriginal resemblance was seen, with numerous characteristics shared throughout the majority of Aboriginal tribes. Prior to colonisation, Aboriginal existence and societal frameworks were straightforward. Fishing, hunting, and foraging constituted their principal vocations. They resided in compact communal structures, exhibited complex kinship connections, and engaged in customary rituals. Despite the absence of a pronounced social order, the community's "Elders" commanded significant respect. Graham Jenkins, in his *Conquest of the Ngarrindjeri*, articulates a remark regarding the Ngarrindjeri that can be generalised to encompass all Aboriginal peoples.

They were genuinely a classless society and had attained the pinnacle of perfected egalitarian socialism. However, if they were to be categorised within any European social hierarchy, their lifestyle could solely be likened to that of the historical nobility. Their commitment to cultural endeavors—ballet, music, opera, and art; their appreciation for grandeur and ceremony; their strong adherence to ancient codes of chivalry and etiquette; their enjoyment of sports and hunting; their notable personal courage, pride, and independence; their insistence on the right of a man of status to bear arms and defend honour; their epicurean approach to cuisine; their candid acceptance of human passions without hypocrisy; these and other facets of Ngarrindjeri life exhibit clear parallels with the perspectives and lifestyles of European aristocracy. The significant distinction was in the reality that, under Ngarrindjeri society, all individuals were considered aristocrats. The Ngarrindjeri demonstrated that socialism and an aristocratic lifestyle could coexist happily, allowing for a culturally and creatively enriching existence devoid of servitude and domination. Their notion of land ownership was intricately linked to their religious activities, connected to the natural world, and centred on the concept known as "Dreaming."

Australian Aboriginal Culture

Australian Aboriginal culture represents one of the most ancient continuous cultures globally, profoundly anchored in language, spirituality, land, art, and performance. Prior to European colonisation, there existed over 250 unique Aboriginal languages and countless dialects, many of which are now endangered but are currently undergoing revival through preservation initiatives. The essence of Aboriginal spirituality lies in the concept of Dreamtime (or Dreaming), which delineates the creation period during which ancestral entities formed the land, rivers, fauna, and laws—these sacred narratives are maintained and transmitted through songs, dances, and paintings that connect individuals to their ancestors and the land. For Aboriginal people, land is perceived not as property but as a holy entity integral to their identity, spirituality, and survival, with custodianship entailing the duty to care for the "Country" rather than possess it. Their artwork, comprising rock and bark paintings, sand drawings, dot paintings, sculptures, and body adornments, functions as a potent medium for storytelling, frequently encapsulating Dreamtime themes and representations of natural landscapes. Music and dance are essential to cultural expression; instruments such as the didgeridoo and clapsticks accompany corroborees—ceremonial performances that integrate song, dance, and intricate costumes to uphold and honour Aboriginal tradition.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze the cultural practices and traditions such as art, dance, music, folklore, and rituals, and their role in shaping community identity and continuity.
2. To study the religious beliefs and spiritual systems of the Yanadis and Australian Aborigines, emphasizing their relationship with nature, ancestor worship, and ritual life, social contract and political organization.
3. To compare study social change and progress among the Yanadis of Andhra Pradesh and the Australian Aborigines.

II. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

SIMILARITIES OF AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES AND YANADIS OF ANDHRA PRADESH

The Australian Aborigines and the Yanadis of Andhra Pradesh have several significant physical and socio-cultural similarities, albeit their geographical and historical divergence. Both tribes are categorised within the Proto-Australoid racial lineage, displaying analogous anthropometric traits, such as dark brown to black skin pigmentation, which signifies adaptation to hot tropical environments. Their hair is typically curly to wavy, thick, and dark, accompanied by broad face characteristics such as prominent cheekbones, large lips, and wide or flat noses. Additionally, both tribes generally possess dark brown eyes, well-developed strong physiques shaped by traditional hunting-gathering activities, and dolichocephalic cranial forms. Research demonstrates a notable

predominance of the O blood group and strong jaw and dental morphology in both cultures, highlighting their biological connection.

Australian Aboriginals and the Yanadis demonstrate significant similarities in their social organisation, ecological adaptation, and belief systems. Both communities often inhabit woodland regions, riverbanks, and coastal locations, often live in makeshift shelters constructed from thatch or leaves, which support their nomadic way of life. The joint or extended family system is common among both tribes, marked by complex clan-based kinship structures that regulate marriage, social status, and resource distribution. Their traditional occupations focus on hunting, fishing, and foraging for forest resources, utilising primitive equipment crafted from wood, bamboo, bone, and stone, which reflect their profound relationship with nature and minimal reliance on modern technology.

Both parties subscribe to animism, animatism, naturalism, and totemism, believing in spirits residing in animals, trees, water, stars, and natural events. They revere natural phenomena such as the sun, moon, mountains, forests, and water sources, while maintaining beliefs concerning ancestral spirits and sacred totems, including the concept of 'Seven Sisters' associated with mystical feminine powers in their mythology. Their eating habits are similar, primarily comprising roots, tubers, wild fruits, fish, honey, and small mammals, supplemented by foraged or naturally available forest resources.

Thus, although inhabiting different continents, the Australian Aboriginals and the Yanadis display notable physical, cultural, and ecological similarities, suggesting common ancestral origins and comparable adaptive strategies to traditional tribal life dependent on forest ecosystems and nature-worship practices.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES: AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINALS AND YANADIS OF ANDHRA PRADESH

The socio-cultural structures of Australian Aboriginals and Yanadis exhibit significant similarities grounded in community life, kinship connections, and sustainable interactions with the environment. Their family structure is primarily joint and extended, highlighting communal duty, shared resources, and mutual collaboration. Families serve as fundamental units of production, childcare, cultural transmission, and social governance. Kinship networks shape social identity, inheritance patterns, marital relationships, and ethical responsibilities. In Australian Aboriginal cultures, kinship functions through intricate skin or subsection systems that dictate behaviour, marriage regulations, and social duties. The Yanadis uphold clan-oriented social stratifications with established standards regulating interpersonal behaviour and ceremonial duties. In all civilisations, elders serve as crucial stewards of traditional knowledge, mediators in disputes, and embodiments of moral authority.

Marriage customs embody robust communal ideals. Customary practices of early and arranged marriages predicated on clan and kinship norms have been prevalent among both populations. Exogamy and endogamy differ by location, promoting relational harmony and social cohesion. Historically, polygyny operated under particular socio-economic circumstances, such as demographic disparities or subsistence needs, but has markedly diminished due to legal prohibitions, contemporary education, and the impact of prevailing societal norms. Current trends demonstrate a growing acceptability of partner selection, monogamy, and inter-community unions, signifying evolving goals.

The educational status was historically poor due to geographic isolation, cultural marginalisation, and distrust of official institutions. Residential schools in Australia and conventional schools in India first undermined local educational institutions. Targeted state initiatives, affirmative action, scholarships, and community-based education have enhanced literacy and enrolment rates. Nonetheless, dropout rates persist at elevated levels owing to poverty, cultural disconnection, and linguistic obstacles. Australian Aboriginals have ongoing challenges in preserving endangered languages, but the Yanadis maintain a unique Telugu-based dialect infused with indigenous lexicon.

Healthcare techniques incorporate traditional medicine based on ethnobotanical knowledge, spiritual healing, and ritualistic methods. Aboriginal healing encompasses ceremonies, smoking rituals, and spiritual purification, while Yanadis depend on herbal treatments, indigenous healers (vaidyulu), and divinatory traditions. Despite the growing accessibility of modern healthcare attributed to heightened awareness and governmental endorsement, the coexistence of parallel medical systems remains evident.

Historical occupational patterns centre on hunting, gathering, fishing, honey harvesting, and forest-based livelihoods, exemplifying ecological intelligence and sustainable resource utilisation. Currently, livelihoods are varied, encompassing agricultural labour, construction, government welfare employment, forest conservation, and revenue derived from handicrafts. Migration and dispossession from ancestral territories have resulted in economic precariousness and cultural dislocation.

Religious and spiritual convictions are fundamental to both civilisations, rooted in animism, totemism, ancestor veneration, and holy geographies. Australian Aboriginal spirituality is founded on Dreamtime, which encompasses cosmology, law, and identity. Yanadis venerate natural deities, woodland spirits, and indigenous divine beings. Sacred rituals strengthen commitments to land, community, and ancestors. For both communities, land represents holy legacy rather than just property—symbolizing identity, survival, and continuation.

Traditional knowledge systems include climate patterns, medicinal flora, conservation of water and forests, animal behaviour, and culturally encoded geographic memory. These knowledge systems exhibit advanced scientific comprehension tailored to ecological sustainability. The modernisation and degradation of traditional lands jeopardise these knowledge systems; nonetheless, documenting and community-driven conservation measures are emerging.

Music, dance, and art provide essential socio-ritual functions. Aboriginal artistic expressions, including dot painting, bark painting, rock art, sand drawings, and ceremonial dances, function as encoded repositories of mythology and legal traditions. The Yanadi cultural expression encompasses folk dances, drumming, ritual chants, storytelling, and basket weaving, serving as a means of cultural education and the reinforcement of group identity.

Social control and governance are traditionally rooted in egalitarian principles, collective decision-making, and reverence for elders. Informal dispute resolution prioritises reconciliation above punitive justice. Traditional councils persist in functioning alongside contemporary legal and administrative frameworks.

Tattooing and body painting, historically prevalent as cultural markers, emblems of rites of passage, protection, and status, have significantly diminished due to contemporary influences and religious conversion. Nonetheless, revival groups associated with cultural pride are gradually resurfacing.

The cultural systems of Australian Aboriginals and the Yanadis of Andhra Pradesh embody profound indigenous perspectives influenced by their interdependent connection with the natural environment, communal identity, and ancestral knowledge. Both societies attribute profound spiritual importance to the land, viewing it not alone as a physical resource but as a holy living creature that encapsulates the essence of ancestors, spirits, and cosmological origins. For Australian Aboriginals, the land is fundamentally connected to the Dreamtime—a spiritual framework that elucidates creation, social laws, morality, and identity. The Yanadis perceive woods, wildlife, rivers, and sacred groves as embodiments of divine powers, which underpin their traditional beliefs and ritual activities.

Both tribes have dynamic oral traditions that serve as repositories of cultural memory. Cultural knowledge is conveyed intergenerationally through myths, legends, folktales, riddles, and songs, hence cementing communal identity and moral principles. Storytelling, body marks, symbolic rituals, and ceremonial dancing function as principal educational instruments rather than written documents. Among Aboriginal peoples, rock art, bark paintings, ground designs, ceremonial masks, and sand drawings convey spiritual narratives and territorial assertions. Cultural transmission among the Yanadis is manifested in songs that honour hunting, fishing, and farming rites, traditional healing chants, craft-making (baskets, nets, tools), body painting, and group dances performed during seasonal and life-cycle celebrations.

Cultural rituals possess collective importance and signify major life transitions - birth, naming, puberty initiation, marriage, and death. Aboriginal initiation practices, including circumcision, scarification, and periods of seclusion, signify the transition into maturity and spiritual awakening. Yanadi initiation customs, however less formalised, encompass rituals conducted by elders, symbolic blessings, and communal feasts that affirm new social responsibilities. Marriage ceremonies in both communities traditionally adhere to kinship regulations and encompass ceremonial exchanges, dancing, and sacred sacrifices. Funeral customs underscore reverence for ancestors and spiritual continuity, emphasising belief systems related to the afterlife.

Contemporary factors, including formal education, dominant religions, urbanisation, wage work, media exposure, and the proliferation of global religions (Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam), have profoundly transformed cultural traditions. Although certain rites and customs are progressively diminishing, others are transforming into hybrid forms to accommodate modern circumstances. Initiatives for cultural revitalisation encompass cultural festivals, heritage preservation centres, and art exhibitions that honour Aboriginal identity. Documentation of oral histories, digitisation of folk customs, resurrection of traditional crafts, and cultural training programs for the Yanadi community, Educational initiatives promoting youth engagement in cultural learning settings, Cultural research and museum activities supported by academic and governmental institutions, Community-oriented tourism that fosters sustainable cultural heritage.

Despite the intrusion of contemporary society and institutional faiths, both Australian Aboriginals and Yanadis vigorously affirm their cultural autonomy. Their resilience is visible in the revitalisation of endangered languages, the restoration of traditional arts, the fortification of community networks, and the enhancement of cultural pride among younger generations.

Culture serves as a potent foundation for identity, continuity, and empowerment among both communities. The continuous challenge of reconciling traditional heritage with the demands of globalisation signifies a crucial aspect of indigenous resilience. Their cultural revival activities represent not only preservation but also a creative reinterpretation of legacy in modern circumstances.

The political awareness of both Australian Aboriginals and Yanadis of Andhra Pradesh has markedly developed in recent decades, influenced by social measures, grassroots activity, and an increasing recognition of indigenous rights. Historically marginalised and excluded from mainstream political participation, both groups are now rapidly establishing their identities through collective mobilisation and democratic engagement. In Australia, Aboriginal political movements have historically focused on land rights, constitutional recognition, and self-determination, exemplified by significant milestones such as the Mabo Decision, the Native Title Act, and current discussions on the Voice to Parliament. These programs have enabled Aboriginal communities to engage in political arenas that were previously inaccessible to them.

The Yanadis have had a gradual political awakening mostly due to Scheduled Tribe (ST) safeguards, educational and employment reservations, and state-sponsored welfare initiatives in Andhra Pradesh. Engagement in gramme sabhas, participation in local self-governance entities, and representation via tribal welfare organisations have augmented their visibility and impact in policymaking. Despite their political representation being somewhat restricted relative to Australian Aboriginals, the trend indicates consistent advancement towards collective voice and agency.

Revitalisation efforts among these communities encompass intentional actions to save traditional knowledge systems, languages, healing practices, and ecological legacy. Australian Aboriginal initiatives, including language reconstruction centres, indigenous cultural schools, ecological ranger programs, and community museums, are essential for preserving traditional knowledge. Similarly, activities among the Yanadis—led by government agencies, NGOs, and academic institutions—concentrate on forest-based livelihood programs, the preservation of oral traditions, the recording of ethnomedicine, and community-oriented educational approaches. These initiatives bolster cultural integrity and enhance socio-economic resilience.

Contemporary socio-cultural advancements demonstrate swift changes induced by globalisation, mobility, and modern technology. Enhanced literacy and career prospects have stimulated greater political engagement and social ambition among younger generations. Urban migration, access to internet platforms, and exposure to prevailing cultural influences are transforming conventional conventions, attitudes, and professional patterns. Modernisation facilitates empowerment but concurrently jeopardises the preservation of indigenous cultural frameworks, communal lives, and spiritual traditions. The reliance on foreign markets and less access to land undermine traditional subsistence systems, generating conflicts between cultural heritage and contemporary ambitions.

Notwithstanding these constraints, both Australian Aboriginals and Yanadis exhibit exceptional resilience through adaptive tactics that integrate traditional beliefs with modern reality. Community-driven governance, indigenous educational frameworks, heritage celebrations, and the resurgence of traditional practices signify a revitalised dedication to cultural preservation. Their challenges symbolise wider global indigenous movements seeking acknowledgement, equality, and cultural autonomy.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

1. Enhancing Indigenous Rights and Land Tenure Security

- Prioritisation of legal protection and restoration of traditional land rights is essential through transparent land mapping, community engagement, and resolution of longstanding land conflicts.
- Policies should guarantee community-driven management of forests and natural resources, grounded in traditional ecological knowledge rather than external exploitation frameworks.

2. Advancement of Culturally Attuned Education

- Education systems must incorporate indigenous languages, oral traditions, local history, and ecological knowledge into formal curricula.
- Develop and enhance residential schools, digital learning assistance, and scholarship initiatives customised for tribal requirements to decrease dropout rates and augment participation in higher education.

3. Conservation and Revitalisation of Culture

- Advocate for community-oriented cultural documentation initiatives, museums, archives, and digital heritage platforms.
- Promote the resurgence of indigenous arts, crafts, music, dance, and traditional healing methods via cultural festivals, marketing networks, and job initiatives in cultural tourism.

4. Improving Healthcare Accessibility and Integration

- Establish robust connections between conventional medical wisdom and contemporary healthcare, encompassing formal acknowledgement of qualified indigenous healers.
- Enhance accessibility to primary healthcare services in tribal areas via mobile health units, telemedicine, and culturally attuned mental health assistance.

5. Economic Empowerment and Livelihood Advancement

- Advocate for livelihood initiatives utilising local resources, including eco-tourism, forest product processing, handicrafts, indigenous agriculture, and wildlife management.
- Facilitate capacity-building workshops, entrepreneurship training, micro-finance support, and market connections for sustainable income prospects.

6. Enhancing Political Engagement and Governance

- Enhance the representation of indigenous groups within local self-governance frameworks, advisory councils, and policy-planning entities.
- Enhance understanding of constitutional rights, welfare initiatives, and legal frameworks via grassroots leadership training and community mobilisation.

IV. CONCLUSION

The socio-cultural systems of Australian Aboriginals and Yanadis of Andhra Pradesh illustrate robust indigenous identities adept at managing the intricate dynamics of cultural transition, political marginalisation, and contemporary development demands. Despite persisting obstacles including land confiscation, social marginalisation, and assimilationist policies, both groups exhibit notable adaptive potential rooted in robust kinship networks, spiritual connections to land, and lasting cultural traditions. Their joint endeavours in cultural revitalization—via education, preservation of oral traditions, documenting of history, and community-driven governance—underscore an active engagement with modern reality rather than a passive cultural deterioration.

Culture is a fundamental pillar of identity, social cohesion, and empowerment, allowing communities to maintain continuity in the face of fast socio-economic changes and global influences. The effort to protect traditional knowledge systems and indigenous values against the uniformity of modernisation highlights a continuous process of negotiation and resilience. Their revival activities exemplify cultural preservation and a dynamic rearticulation of legacy suited to contemporary situations.

This comparative analysis demonstrates that Australian Aboriginals and Yanadis possess notable socio-cultural, ecological, and spiritual similarities grounded in communal life, sustainable resource utilisation, and veneration of ancestral landscapes. Although modernisation has altered specific elements of their social structures, both groups persist in sustaining a fragile equilibrium between adaptation and tradition, exemplifying unique trajectories of cultural resilience and evolution.

The study concludes that enhancing indigenous autonomy, advocating for culturally appropriate development policies, and acknowledging traditional knowledge systems are vital for preserving the cultural sovereignty and social welfare of these communities in a progressively globalised environment.

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