



“Socio-Economic Status of Banjara Community in Maharashtra State”

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Abstract

The Banjara community is geographically isolated due to the continuous migration and the smear of criminal tribes. The people migrate along with women and children. The migration has a large impact on the life of Banjara people. It influences the socio – economic status, education, health and livelihood of the community. The literacy of the community is very lower level. The Tandas are worst hit by losing the traditional jobs and source of income. As observed in reviewing literature and important realities related to banjara people, the status of banjara community is noticeably varying from tanda-to-tanda and role in the development of the region has been greatly administered in the last few decades. The Tanda is a socio-political unit having its own set of traditional leaders. They have a say in the village affairs. The Naik is the formal head of the Tanda council. All important matters are brought to his notice for opinion and intervention. His post is hereditary. No ceremony or function is held for his selection. He does not receive any honorarium for his services but he gets a major share of the meat of sacrificial animals during communal worships.

Introduction:

The indigenous tribes draw India closer to an obscure and indifferent picture far from the contemporary trend and economic development. As such the Gor Banjara is one of the tribes ethnically identified by isolation, their own language, culture and traditions, festivals, cuisine, dance and music. This tribe significantly holds such an enigmatic culture and hospitality and contrasting patriarchal and matriarchal society. It is an indigenous and popular ethnic tribe, which is also known by different names in various parts of the country namely, ‘Gor, Gor Banjara, Laman, Lambani, Lambadi, Sugali, Labhan, Gavaria, Baldiya, Shikligar, Vanjar, and Gouriya’. They are mainly distributed in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal States and living in all the other States except the North-Eastern States and Union Territories. Gor Banjaras speak their distinct language known as ‘Gorboli’ which is also called as ‘Lamani’ or ‘Lambadi’ or ‘Gormati’ or ‘Banjari’. They have their oral literature and traditions, but do not have any written literature because of not having script for their language. As their history and traditions are not in written form, it has become difficult for historians and social scientists to chronicle their past. It is said that even their subsequent history up to the Aryan invasion is shrouded in obscurity, as not much was discussed about them in the books of history and culture and no significant evidences were traced about them though they are survivals from the later prehistoric period^[1]



Banjaras were historically pastoralists, traders and transporters of goods on the inland regions of India, for which they used boats, carts, camels, oxen, donkeys and sometimes the relatively scarce horse, hence controlling a large section of trade and economy. The mode of transport depended upon the terrain; for example, camels and donkeys were better suited to the highlands which carts could not negotiate, whilst oxen were able to progress better through wet lowland areas. Their prowess in negotiating thick forests was particularly prized. They often travelled in groups for protection, this *tanda* being led by an elected headman variously described as a *muqaddam*, *nayak* or *naik*. Such *tandas* usually comprised carriage of one specific product and thus were essentially a combined trade operation. They could be huge assemblies, some being recorded as comprising 190,000 beasts, and they also serviced the needs of armies, whose movements naturally followed the same trade and caravan routes. The Duke of Wellington used them for that purpose in his campaign against the Maratha Confederacy around the late 1790s and Jahangir, a Mughal emperor who reigned in the early seventeenth century^[2]

In the post-Independence era along with other ex-criminal tribes, they have been put under the category of the de-notified tribe. In Maharashtra, they are popularly known to be an integral part of the de-notified tribes. While some of them have prospered in life, the majority of them are still suffering in a state of thorough poverty though they have been able to overcome the tag of criminality largely. In the state of Maharashtra, there are many different kinds of communities dwelling from ancient time. The community calls them Nomadic and Denotified tribes who found about five million of the population in Maharashtra and about 60 million in entire India. There are 313 Nomadic Tribes and 198 De-notified Tribes. Due to the drifting traditions over hundreds of years without any apparent means of livelihood and due to the influence of caste system, they are enforced to live under sub-human conditions. The large section of these tribes is known as “Vimukata Jatis” or Ex-Criminal tribes because they were named as criminals by birth under the “Criminal tribes Act. 1871” According to the census 2001, the population of Maharashtra was 96, 752,247 (Rathod, 2000). About a century ago, the Lamani were nomadic transporters and petty traders; today, they lead mostly a sedentary life because of the changes that have occurred in their traditional economy since their nomadic ways^[3]

Review of Literature

Mahanthy Dhanavath (2020)⁴ conclude that Banjara were one of the ancient nomadic tribes of India which possessed a peculiar habitation, history, culture, religious and social-practices, festivals, language, dress, governing system. It is limited by various factors of physical environment, technology, ecology, their own history by the colonial rule. There is a need of reforms taken by the educated people of the community, because the power of illiterate lambada's is just imitating the Hindu practices adopted by them. Many tribal characteristics, culture and social practices have gone under tremendous change. Ramesh Naik .B (2017)⁵ stated that the Banjara were one of the ancient nomadic tribes of India which possessed a peculiar habitation, history, culture, religious and social practices, festivals, language, folk lore, dress, governing system, understanding of death, sin and salvation. The Thana living helped Banjara people to preserve their traditional and cultural practices undefiled from outsiders. Heeru and Nusarat (2016)⁶ revealed that meager numbers of Banjara people were gained benefits from social welfare facilities and schemes and they got educated and settled in urban areas. As described already, Banjara culture is unique as they drink local liquor and eat non-vegetarian dishes during festival seasons. The literature of Banjara tribe is different. The folk culture of Banjaras has



revealed by their costumes, customs, language, festivals, dances, songs, etc. Of course, Banjara culture is rich and needed to be developed. Vijaya Lakshmi and Milcah Paul. (2019)⁷ Social and economic justice, equality of status and opportunities, assurance of the individual's dignity are ensured by the Constitution of India for all the citizens among other things. The constitution of India is enriched with several provisions for schedule castes and schedule tribes to safeguard and promote their cultural, social, educational, and economic interests to bring them in the mainstream of the nation.

Statement of the Problem:

In term of the status, the Banjara community lies at the lowermost of all other communities in the country. Unfortunately, their history is still an unidentified particularly relating to their sense of dressing, culture, customs, tradition and language in India. Another unique feature of the community is that it was one of the first groups in India to oppose the colonial rule and afterwards was branded as a criminal tribe. Traditionally the nomadic Laman Banjaras who were involved in trading of salt including the merchandise faced severe calamity with the arrival of roadways and railways and were forced to lead a criminal life. That is a true history of the Banjara community then they are divided various place which was a forest area with their cattle.

Objectives of the Study:

The present study has been conducted on the following concrete objectives.

1. To study the present socio-economic status of Maharashtra state
2. To know the Income sources of banjara community in Maharashtra state.
3. To identify the socio-economic effects of recent developments on banjara community

Research Methodology

The present study is based on the field survey conducted with the help of a well-structured questionnaire and interviews with banjara peoples. The study is confined to Maharashtra state and the primary data was collected from 400 respondents from Ahamadnagar, Jalgaon, Jalna and Yawatmal districts. Secondary data- The data collected from government agencies

Economic Conditions of Banjara

In our country 40 per cent to 70 per cent, people are living under poor economic condition. Out of them, 70 per cent of 80 per cent people of 'Banjara community lives under 'poor economic condition.' It shows that their primary needs are not fulfilled. Being a characteristic lifestyle, though the present picture is clear of the community these is no clarity about their history. In Maharashtra. Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh 2 crore Banjara people have been settled down. Banjara is a very backwards community that is socially, politically, educationally, and especially economically^[8] In roaming condition, due to the less income, Banjara community turned to crime, but after the settlement, they accepted farming and its related occupations. Banjara community has a short percentage of education. The chief of the family is illiterate, so, the children of the family also remain illiterate in major proportion. Banjara community believes in Hindu customs and rites. Banjara people have a strong faith in Banjara saints like Sevalal, Samid dada, and Sevabhaya. Banjara people know the Marathi language due to the interaction with Marathi people can speak and write Marathi and Hindi. Child marriage is in major percentage^[9]

Banjaras traditional occupation is nomadic cattle shepherding. Later they slowly moved into agriculture and trade. The Banjaras were bullock transporters and builders of

great monuments, who ranged throughout the subcontinent negotiating and upholding affluent contracts to supply goods to important customers as the Mughal armies and the British. For periods, they efficiently moved their massive caravans through the vast roadless tracks of all India, guarantying safe bearing for grain, salt and messages. Doing so, they spread from Kashmir to Tamil Nadu, from Orissa to Gujarat, spilling over into Sindh, Pakistan, Iran and further west.

With the advent of the railway and the building of a road system, the Banjaras lost their primary occupation but reserved their tradition of monument building. Typical of wandering nomads, the Banjaras maintain strong borders so that they can interact with surrounding people and yet retain their cultural integrity. Such borders include the separate villages called Tanda where the bulk of the Banjaras still live today. Their occupation has been shifted from nomadic to established agriculture. When necessity arises, they sell sheep and goats for cash. Some of them retain their traditional occupation of selling salt, coconuts, stationary goods etc. at the weekly markets and local fairs. Some of them work as agricultural labourers. Both the male and females go for wage earning. When the females are mostly engaged as agricultural labourers, the males generally opt for road construction and forest works with the contractors. They are experts in traditional hand embroidery with mirror works. Artwork of Banjara has a good demand in the market in the various States of India. Articles made of materials like silver, brass, gold, cowries, ivory, animal bone and even plastic; adorn the wardrobes of fashionable urbanites. They gather firewood, house building materials, leaves, varieties of mushrooms, edible roots, fruits and tubers from the nearby forest to meet their consumption needs. This is done by both the sexes ^[10]

Table 1.1 - Respondents Main Sources of Income

Main Sources of Income	District wise Number of Respondents				Total
	Maharashtra State				
	Ahamednagar	Jalna	Yawatmal	Jalgaon	
Agriculture	57 (57.00)	56 (56.00)	48 (48.00)	52 (52.00)	213 (53.25)
Farm worker	08 (8.00)	07 (7.00)	12 (12.00)	14 (14.00)	41 (10.25)
Service	08 (8.00)	09 (9.00)	07 (7.00)	06 (6.00)	30 (7.50)
Small business	09 (9.00)	11 (11.00)	07 (7.00)	03 (3.00)	30 (7.50)
Livestock	06 (6.00)	05 (5.00)	04 (4.00)	05 (5.00)	20 (5.00)
Trading	04 (4.00)	03 (3.00)	06 (6.00)	08 (8.00)	21 (5.25)
Other	08 (8.00)	09 (9.00)	16 (16.00)	12 (12.00)	45 (11.25)
Total	100 (100.00)	100 (100.00)	100 (100.00)	100 (100.00)	400 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey - 2018-19

Note: Figures in parentheses indicates percentage to column total

It was found from table 1.1 that majority of respondents 53.25 percent respondents source of income had agriculture, followed by 11.25 per cent from other sources of income, 10.25 per cent of respondents had income from farm worker, 7.50 per cent of respondents income source had service and small business, 5.25 per cent of respondents from trading and 5.00 of respondents income sources had livestock.

Table 1.2 - Condition of respondent's house

Condition of house	District wise Number of Respondents				Total
	Maharashtra State				
	Ahamednagar	Jalna	Yawatmal	Jalgaon	
Pacca	72 (72.00)	71 (71.00)	77 (77.00)	67 (67.00)	287 (71.75)
Semi Pacca	23 (23.00)	19 (19.00)	16 (16.00)	24 (24.00)	82 (20.50)
Kaccha	05 (5.00)	10 (10.00)	07 (7.00)	09 (9.00)	31 (7.75)
Total	100 (100.00)	100 (100.00)	100 (100.00)	100 (100.00)	400 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey - 2018-19

Note: Figures in parentheses indicates percentage to column total

It was pointed from table 1.2 that majority of 71.75 per cent of respondents Condition of house had pacca, followed by 20.50 per cent of respondents Condition of house had semi pacca and 7.75 per cent of respondents Condition of house had kaccha

Conclusion

The Banjara are primarily agriculturists and animal husbandry is their secondary occupation. They have retained their traditional occupation of selling salt, coconut, stationery goods, etc. at the weekly markets and local fairs. Some of them work as agricultural labourers. In multi-ethnic villages, they live in separate wards called Tanda maintaining their cultural identity. For their traditional nomadic style of life, they used to possess scanty household items to meet their bareminimum necessities of daily life. Those who have settled down to a sedentary life, more or less, have acquired extra householdassets required for the changed style of life.

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