

Changing Socio-Cultural Practices Among the Lambadas of NTR District

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Abstract :

The Lambadas, a prominent tribal community in the NTR District of Andhra Pradesh, have experienced significant socio-cultural transformations over the years. Traditionally known for their nomadic lifestyle, vibrant customs, and unique traditions, their practices have evolved due to socio-economic shifts, modernization, and governmental policies. This article examines the changing patterns in language, clothing, festivals, marriage customs, and livelihoods, highlighting the impact of urbanization, education, and external influences on their cultural identity.

Keywords: Lambada Tribe, NTR District, Socio-Cultural Change, Modernization, Tribal Identity

Introduction:

The Lambadas, also called Banjaras or Sugalis, have historically been a migratory tribe, renowned for their trade and transportation services. Over time, socio-political and economic changes have influenced their traditional lifestyle. Today, they are transitioning from their indigenous customs to a more assimilated existence within the mainstream socio-economic framework. This study explores the factors that have led to these transformations, focusing on the NTR District.

Traditional Socio-Cultural Practices:

Language and Communication:

The Lambadas originally spoke Gor Boli, also known as the Lambadi language, which is a dialect of Rajasthani origin and closely linked to other Indo-Aryan languages. Gor Boli served as a crucial medium of communication within their community, preserving their oral traditions, folklore, and ancestral knowledge.

However, with the increasing influence of regional languages and the expansion of formal education, there has been a significant linguistic shift among the Lambada population. The introduction of Telugu as the primary language in educational institutions, government programs, and media has led to the gradual replacement of Gor Boli in daily communication. This shift is particularly evident among the younger generations, who primarily use Telugu for social interactions, schooling, and employment, while Gor Boli is now largely restricted to informal conversations among older community members. The decline of their native language poses a challenge to the preservation of their cultural identity, necessitating efforts to document and promote Gor Boli through community initiatives and educational programs.

Festivals and Rituals:

The Lambadas celebrated unique festivals such as Teej, Holi, and Seetla Mata Pooja.

The integration of mainstream Hindu festivals like Diwali and Sankranti has influenced their traditional customs.

Marriage and Kinship System:

Arranged marriages within specific clans (gotras) were once strictly followed, with the bride price being a traditional custom. Modern influences have resulted in increasing instances of love marriages and inter-caste unions, which were previously uncommon.

Livelihood Patterns and Economic Transitions:

Historically, the Lambadas were nomadic traders and cattle herders. With colonial interventions and post-independence land reforms, they transitioned to settled agriculture. Today, many Lambadas are engaged in wage labor, small businesses, and government jobs, benefiting from affirmative action policies under their Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Impact of Modernization and Urbanization:

Education and Language Shift:

The emphasis on formal education has led to a decline in oral storytelling traditions.

Younger generations increasingly use Telugu and English, leading to linguistic erosion of Gor Boli.

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Traditional animistic beliefs and spirit worship are declining as mainstream Hindu practices gain prominence.

Family Structure and Social Organization:

The transition from joint families to nuclear families is evident due to economic migration and urban influences.

Government Policies and Welfare Programs:

Welfare schemes, including ST reservations, have provided better educational and employment opportunities. Government health programs have improved access to healthcare, but they have also led to the decline of traditional healing practices.

Conclusion:

The socio-cultural transformation of the Lambadas in the NTR District is a result of modernization, economic shifts, and government policies. While these changes have brought improved living standards, they have also led to the erosion of traditional customs and practices. Future efforts should focus on balancing modernization with cultural preservation to sustain the unique identity of the Lambada community.

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