

Jangama the Community and its Tradition

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Abstract

India especially when it comes to its ethnic communities displays a varied picture of social diversities, differences and well-to-do artistic traditions. The study of such culturally rich traditions and their study of community will not only display their lifestyle and traditions but also their worldview. The study of communities will reveal social structures and how the each community pursues the other communities within the social hierarchy. However many factors of such communities are still to be understood from different perspectives. In this article one such attempt is made to know the Jangama community and its tradition. The Jangama community as generally attributed to Shivite cult of mendicants. In southern India especially in Telugu speaking country they not only perform religious duties assigned to them but also perform various folk and traditions arts forms. It is interesting how the community study will influence the art forms they perform. The facts of history, race and culture of this community are still unknown because of their nature of their tradition as mendicants and their itinerant nature. In modern times it is interesting to study them because due to globalization slowly these communities are also undergoing changes from wanderers to settlers changing their life style.

Keywords: *Southern India, Ethnic Communities, Jangama, Jangama Devgara, Performing traditions, Bard communities.*

Jangama literally means wanderer or a person who does not stay permanently at a place. Historically the communities of Jangamas were known as mendicants affiliated to a religious order of either Shivite or Vaishnavite cult. In the sacred narratives of Bhakti movement, Shiva is depicted as “Jangama Devara”. This depiction is used in the Shivite literature to relate Shiva as wanderer and God of forest people, pastoralists, and marginalized communities of the settled village agglomerates.

The striking feature of these communities is that they being itinerant and semi-nomadic, their incorporation into Shivite sectarian fold is legitimized through the depiction of Shiva himself as God in the form of “Jangama Devara”. The chief feature of Jangamas is that they carry an image that is symbolical to Lord Shiva. The image is called Jangama lingam or movable lingam and it is distinguished from the Stavara or fixed lingam of Hindu temples. It is always carried on the some part of the body, usually around neck or on the left arm, and is placed in the left hand of the deceased at the time of cremation.

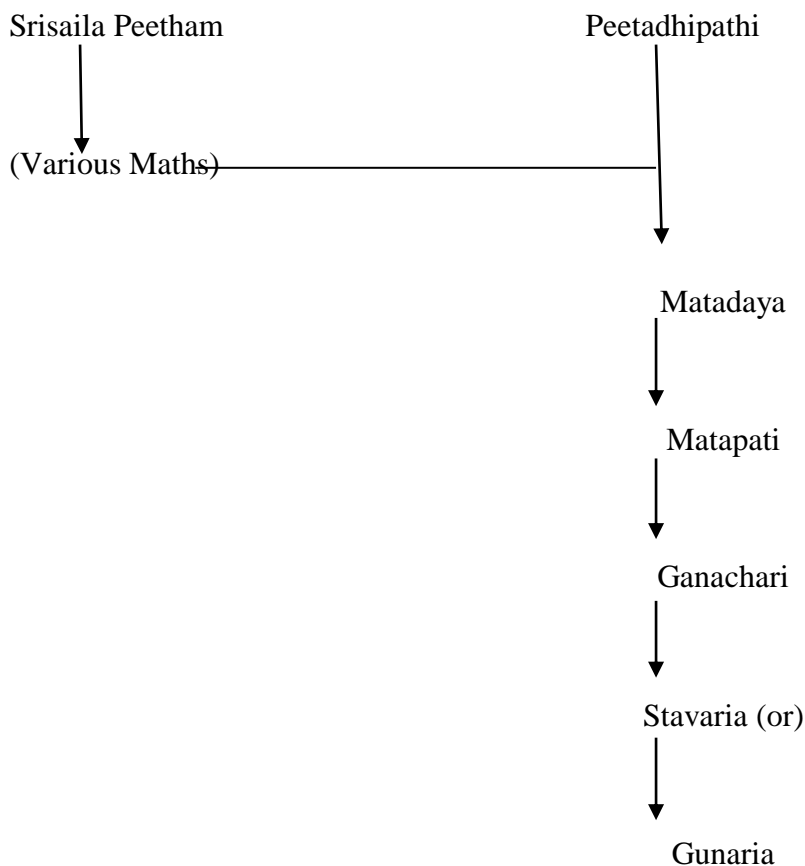
Generally the Jangamas are divided into two major subdivisions: Ganayata Jangamas and Stavara Jangamas. The Ganayata Jangamas are itinerant in nature and therefore live as mendicants. The Stavara jangamas are settled ones that are ritually considered lower to Ganayata Jangamas. Scholars revealed that the two broad divisions are even now persisting among the Jangamas. In the colloquial expression the two broad divisions are known as Gudeti Jangamas and Gudiseti Jangamas. Gudeti Jangamas are those who live in the villages. The obviously refers to those people who live near the temple and temple usually situated within the habitual site of the village. This conspicuously refers to their itinerant nature. That means those who live outside the village and wander after staying for a brief stint near a village. According to their worldview Gudiseti Jangamas are considered to be lower to Gudeti Jangamas. However both the terms Gudeti and Gudiseti are referred as ethnic slurs between them to abuse each other when quarrelsome situation arises.

Settlements of Jangamas

Andhra	Telangana	Rayalaseema
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Though the Ganayata Jangamas are confined to present day settlements, they did not leave their habit of itinerary. Each settlement in the above mentioned table has ten to thirty families. They also perform different types of folk art forms and known by their art form such as Vipravinodulu, Balasantyu, Sarada Gandlu, Katipapalu, mandahechulavallu etc. The performers of usually leave their settlements around the month of Ashada (June-July) and cover regularly in their itinerary certain villages and towns by performing different folk art forms. After at least spending six or seven months as mendicants they come back to their settlements in the month of Chaitra (March-April), in which the Telugu New Year's day known as Ugadi falls. From the month Chaitra to the month of Ashada they remain in the settlement and attend to their family activities and celebrations such as marriages and engagements etc. They call the 'roaming days' as Sancharam (literally means travel or journey).

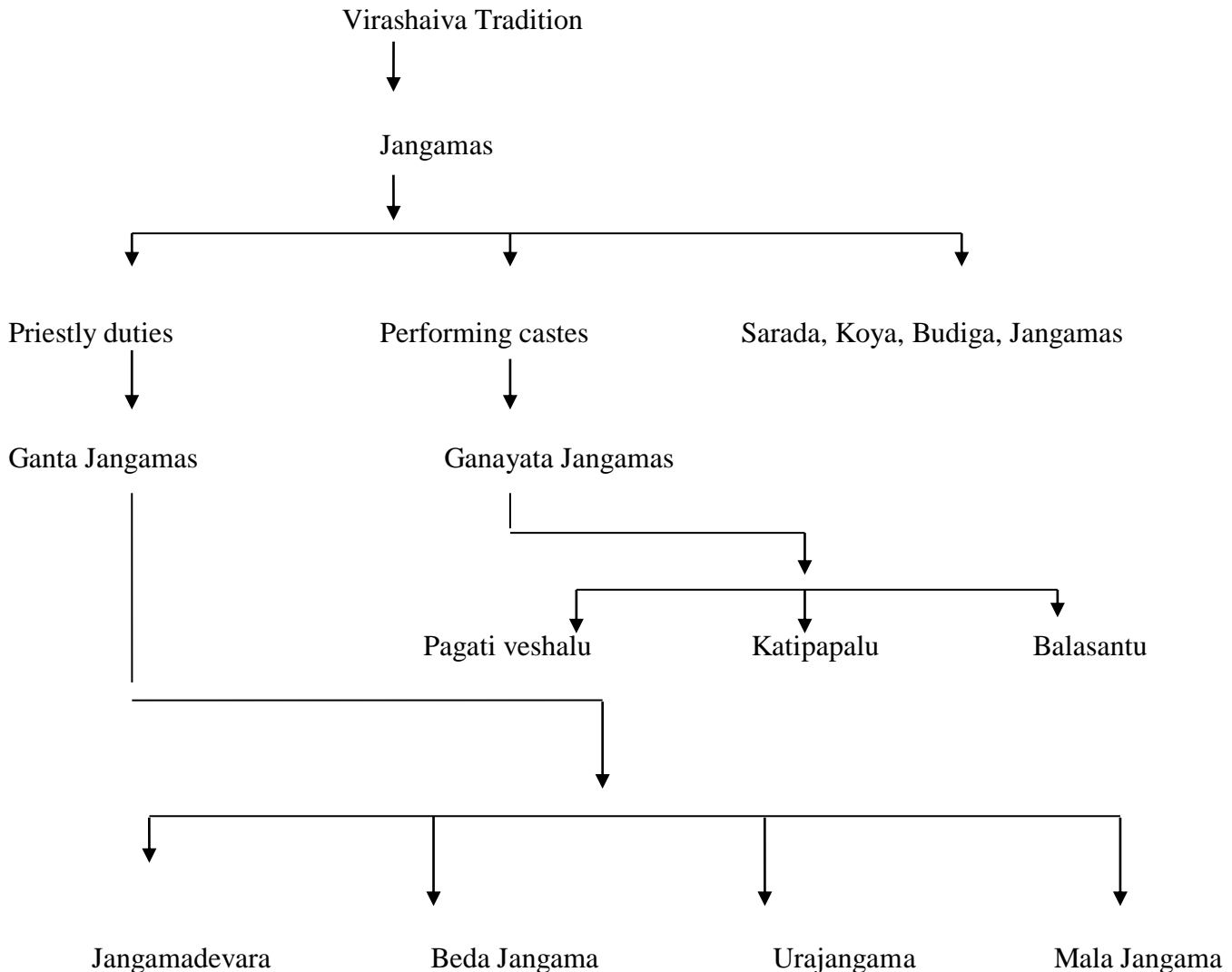
Since the Ganayata Jangamas are mendicants and wanderers, to prevent them from getting polluted by intermarriage, the Saivite system developed a strict austerities as well as hierarchical order among the Jangamas. The hierarchical order is intrinsically connected with Matha, and therefore it is expected of the communities to follow allegiance to Matha. The following is the hierarchy in the Jangamas that is found in Matha Tradition.



Source: Edgar Thurston

However the major sub-divisions in the Jangamas seem to be Ganta jangama and Ganyata Jangama. It can be summarized from the above discussion that the Bhakti movement, which has given way to Virashaiva and Viravaishnava traditions, resulted in forming new social groups in the Varna-Jati paradigm of the Indian social

order. The Bhakti movement, which is started as a revolt against Brahmanism, questioned the ritual superiority and Brahmin supremacy. Simultaneously the Shivite and Vaishnavite traditions developed into priestly communities of Jangama and Jiyar respectively. The jangamas, basically as mentioned already, belong to Virashaiva tradition. Within the Jangamas, those social groups, which perform priestly duties, are divided as Ganta Jangamas and the non-priestly social groups as the Ganayata Jangamas who chiefly live making performance as their profession. The following chart gives the picture of Jangama and its sub-division.



As shown in the above chart Jangamadevara, Bedajangama, Urajangama enjoy more or less equal status between Sudra and Non-sudra verna people and they are called for services in performing rites of passage. The Malajangamas though perform priestly duties they rank lower in social order for they exclusively perform the priestly rites to mala community that is a Scheduled Caste (dalit) in present day community.

Among the non-priestly social groups of jangamas, the Ganayata jangamas are distinct and claim superiority over the other jangamas, which also practice performing arts. The families of Ganayata Jangamas of present day situated at Rajahmandry, Warangal and Maidukur perform exclusively pagativeshaly, which is a distinct art form from the other Jangama art forms.

The Budiga Jangama, Sarada Jangama and Koya Jangama use string instrument accompanied by two percussion instruments, perform the Jangama Kathalu. The Katipapalu who also claim to be sub-division of jangamas perform magic and participate in funeral rites.

Of all the communities Budiga Jangama need mention because they also belong to performing tradition. An instrument known as Budiga, that is, a percussion instrument used by Budiga Jangamas whole performing narratives. The lead singer uses a string instrument known as Tambura while narrating 'Katha' (Story) and two performers playing percussion instruments, known as Budiga or Gummeta accompany him. The narratives of Budiga jangama are also known as sarad kthalu. The lead singer's instrument (Veena) is also known as sarada. These narratives are performed in song-dance sequence. The lead singer narrates the story in a song form and percussion instrumentalists on both sides as chorus and also help the lead singer in constructing his narrative through a dialogue form. One of the accompanists invariably takes a role of comedian.

All the narratives performed by Jangama are more or less song-based performances. They are performed with string and percussion instruments and popularly known as 'Jangama Kathalu'. Budiga Jangamas performs them all. Some of the folk art forms, which are performed by bards as exclusive rights to perform the caste myths of the main community. Generally the tradition of bard emerges as reciprocity between the patron and client in a given social organization. It is interesting to know that in Indian social order such reciprocity norms are prevailing in the dry zone areas wherein castes are divided into sub-castes and intra and interrelationships are intrinsically netted among these.

Each cast has a bard community, which narrates the caste myth of the caste. Usually the bards are marginalized communities and survive only by the tradition of narration of caste myth. Among the Sudra Varna almost all the castes have bard community in Telugu speaking county. The following table shows the details of casts and their Bard communities.

Castes and their Bard Communities

1. Brahmin	Vipravinodulu
2. Komati	Mailarubhatulu, Veeramustulu
3. Reddy, Kamma, Velama	Pichakakuntivallu, Santanulu
4. Yadavulu	Mandechulu, Podapotulavallu, Bommalatavallu, Tagitajogula, Poojagollalu, Tellacheeralavallu, Peddintigollalu, Gollabhagavatulu, Baikanivallu, Oggollu, Mallannalu, Tapetagullu, Gangireddulavallu.
5. Kurumalu	Beerappalu, Goravayyalu, Mailarubhatulu, Oggollu
6. Goundlavallu	Gowdasettilu-Enatlu, Jettilu
7. Tantuvyalu(Sale)	Kunepulivallu, Padigarajulu, Plulijendavallu, samayavallu, Padigelavallu, Brugvadulu, sainollu Chamaravallu, Sadhanasoorulu, Sayamvallu

Source: Yadagiri Sarma, "Janapada Bhikshuka Gayakulu".

Sometimes one caste supports three or four bard communities depending on the type of narration that the caste is interested in. For instance the Madiga and Golla castes have more than one minstrel community, who perform the cast myths with different versions. The Madigas have Chindu, Baidla, Maasti, (asadi, pamba), and Dakkali groups as minstrel communities. They are also recognized as sub-sects within the Madiga community. Similarly the Kurmas have Oggollu and Mandechulavallu as minstrels. According to each caste myth every bard community that performs the caste myth exercise a right over the narration as that right comes directly from myth itself. Invariably the caste myth narration has ritual link so as to make minstrel community the custodian of myth. It is binding on the part of patron caste to arrange such performances annually in a cyclical manner to ward off any evil that otherwise could be caused by the gods. In return to the performances the minstrel community receives shares of kind or cash from the patron community. This system is known as mirasidar system. The root word 'mirasi' from from Arabic term 'merh' which literally means 'share'. The sharing of resources being the chief feature in lieu of the services rendered the system is metamorphasized as mirasider system.

Of late owing to several socio-economic changes the minstrel communities are looked down upon as begging communities.

As rule followed by the Jangama community a levy at the rate of two rupees per hundred rupees is imposed on collections made out of the performances by the community. The levy collected as two rupees is now being utilized as corpus fund of the association to look after the welfare of the respective settlements. In olden days two more rupees per hundred are collected on the revenues obtained from performances and given to the old people who used to previously participate in the performance. Apart from these, another levy is imposed for

every household, which is technically termed as jole pannu (earning by begging). It is at the rate of from half rupees to one rupees and paid to the matadhipathi at different sacred places of the Shamshabad.(Telangana). Usually these collections are done when the whole community of the performers of jangama community makes a visit to Srirangapuram in Mahaboobnagar district to attend the Jatra. The Mahanthu and Ganachari on behalf of the Matadipati collect the fee and give it to him. The reason for collection is that the Matadipati is supposed to settle the disputes among the households in the community. However, the most of the disputes pertaining to marriage, shares, purity pollution etc., are resolved within the community by a system of panchayat. All the elders of the Ganayata Jangamas invariably be the members of the panchayat and settle the disputes. For instance if a boy commits adultery with other caste girl, he is considered as polluted and kept outside the community until and unless he performs purification rituals to get back into the community. A fine of twenty-four rupees is levied and a ritual purification is made to incorporate him back into the community. Similarly there is a tradition of Oli, i.e. the bride price to be offered to incorporate a girl in a family through a matrimonial system. It is interesting to note that a person whose marriage is celebrated for sixteen days (pedda pelli) alone is entitled to perform the priestly role in other marriages. They consider the sixteen-day marriage a full-fledged one and other marriages simply pradhanams, which is something lesser to marriage. Yet covenant between the couple for unison in the family system. A person gets married properly i.e. for sixteen days are full-fledged persons in the community rights. Their presence is considered auspicious for the host who is celebrating the ritual. In olden days the Jangama devara or the Matadipati is invited for such ceremonies compulsorily.

The Matadipati and Jangamadevara need not necessarily be following celibacy in fact the community accepts even their families for such ritual occasions. It is considered bad omen to ask widower be it Matadipati or Jangamadevara to perform rituals like marriage. Since the host will not have in most occasions information with regard to Matadipati and his family, he avoids calling them for such occasions and celebrate marriage by calling a couple of their own community who underwent the sixteen day marriage celebration. However, they do not mind calling the Matadipati and Jangamadevara for death rituals. All these customs indicate that the community is highly sensitive to protect the system of marriage and thereby the system of family within the community of Jangamas. The Jangama being wonderer and mendicant possibility of getting polluted through inter-marriages, there by loosing he identity of community itself is apparently even now felt by them.

To surmise from the above discussion the performers belongs to a sect of community of Jangamas who basically by virtue of their profession are wanderers or mendicants. Itinerary being the nature of their livelihood they adopted themselves to the art form which is based on mobile performances. Since the mobility is the key to the art forms performed by Jangama community this gives the flexibility and therefore makes the art forms readily reachable to the audience at their doorsteps. This charter further forms an asset to the community, which is performing different art forms. Therefore community and its tradition lied in the distinct nature of art for in which segmentation and fragmentation from the basis of inventing tradition.

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