

## **Chapter - III**

### **Religious Identity of Lambada**

#### **Introduction**

Today, we find that members of a community, which was earlier almost totally animistic, are now following different religions like Hinduism, Christianity and Sikhism. The researcher found that the ancient community of Lambadas has been transformed into different groups and religions. The changes in the Lambadas can be seen in the tradition, culture, language, food habits, dressing pattern, ornaments, etc.

#### **3.1. Hinduised Lambadas**

Once the British entrenched themselves in India, they started exploiting the Lambadas who were traders. Many Lambadas chose to settle as agriculture laborers' on barren land. Once this happened, the cultural life of the Lambadas underwent a change. The community started slowly adopting or changing its religious culture to a new religious culture, which has been adopted from the mainstream society. After the colonial period, the community started settling near the predominantly Hindu villages, "which made them more 'visible' to the wider society, particularly to the caste Hindu society" (Bhangya, p 222).

"The way of interaction between the tribes and the Hindus is a process of religious 'borrowing' or syncretism. By and large all the tribal communities are adopting the

beliefs system of the Hindu Gods and goddesses into their animistic religious system”

The majority of the upper castes, who live in Telangana, have higher incomes, when compared to the other castes in the state. In many parts of Telangana, Reddys are biggest landlords who own acres of land. Such landlords have tended to appoint agricultural workers and servants from the economically backward communities like Dalits and Lambadas.

The culture of the Lambada community is being influenced by that of the Hindu mainstream society. People of the Lambada community have tended to stay in their unique settlements, known as “Thandas”. They live approximately three to four km away from the mainstream village. The people from the Thandas are increasingly earning their livelihood in the nearby Hindu villages. In this process, they are being influenced by the rituals, festivals, mode of worship, language, food and dress of the Telugu Hindu community.

“The tribal community can be classified into two groups on the process of cultural change. One, those assimilated to the Hindu culture and, two, those who continue to be animistic in culture, with their own cultural practices and beliefs”(R.K. Sharma, p 167).

“Since 1921, all the Lambadas and Adivasis were classified as ‘Animists’. It was probably because of the communal politics of the time, which motivated the state officials to specify Adivasis under a separate religious category, so as to reduce the Hindu population in the state. There was strong opposition to this move by the Arya Samaj. This scheme was dropped finally in the 1941 Census. However, the Census Commissioner of Hyderabad declared Adivasi tracts as a no-man’s-land. By then, the

Lambadas of Telangana had started claiming their position within the Hindu fold” (Bhangiya, p 223).

As already mentioned, the Lambadas in Telangana state have culture, tradition, belief system, etc., which are quite dissimilar from those of the mainstream society.

“The communities are generally treated as, separate, outcastes and untouchables” by the larger Hindu populations in Telangana region, The Lambadas are originally a nomadic tribe which have settled long before independence in different parts of the Telangana. In rural and urban areas, most of the neighbouring communities are Hinduised Telugus. It is rather unfortunate that the Lambadas were given the rather cruel tag of ‘criminal tribes’ by the British rulers. This unjustified stigmatisation seems to be carried forward by the village mainstream community in Telangana and also other parts of country. “The nomadic ways of life too was regarded as suspicious. Since they were difficult to be controlled, they were often termed as criminals. Even now, the practice of branding members of this community as criminals has not totally disappeared, and criminality continues to be regarded as the hereditary occupation of the Lambadas” (Meena Radha Krishna).

The Lambadas of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh states, claiming themselves as a Hinduised tribe from 1985 onwards. They started regarding Mola, who was linked to Hindu mythology, as their ancestor. The Lambadas started asserting that Mola was a descendant of Lord Krishna.

The story goes like this. One day, Lord Krishna decides to return to his heavenly abode. He asks his servants to meet him in his chamber. When the servants assemble there,

Krishna tells them that he has decided to depart and distribute his Gopikas (female devotees) among them. He also tells them that they can have sexual relations with the Gopikas. At that time, Mola, a servant, was absent, as he has been sent on some work. When he returns, he comes to know of what had transpired and is upset that no Gopika has been kept for him. He reproaches Krishna for this. Lord Krishna consoles him by saying that he has kept aside Radha, his most beloved Gopika for him. But Krishna tells Mola that because Radha is sacred and his (Krishna's) beloved Gopika, Mola should not have a sexual relationship with her, and should take great care of her. Mola gladly accepted Radha with this condition. From then onwards, Mola and Radha start living as partners, without any physical relations (Kamala M.R, article).

The cultural change in the Lambada community is being accelerated by factors like: Adoption, Acculturation, Assimilation, Sanskritisation and conversion. The Lambada community of Telangana can be said to be adopting the culture of the mainstream community in order to be integrated into the mainstream, "where a low Hindu caste, or a tribal group, tends to change its traditions, rites, beliefs and way of life in the direction of a high, and habitually, twice-born caste" (M.N. Srinivas, p 46).

Adoption means nothing but change in the culture of Lambada from their traditional dress of women skirt, chunari, and half blouse to saree, food habits, belief system and language. Also, the dress of many Lambada men has changed from dhoti and turban to simple dhoti worn by many men in the Telugu mainstream community.

"The Assimilation of any castes should be low in the group of Brahminical society and which must be inculcated in the Hindu society. In other words, a 'Hindu', in this

operative sense, refers more to a member of a certain social hierarchy than to a follower of a certain religion as such. This being the case, over the centuries, non-Hindu groups living on the fringes of caste Hindu societies have been gradually absorbed into the Hindu fold as castes, generally relegated to the position of shudras or 'untouchables.' If they were artisans, they were transformed into labouring or tribal groups. They came to be regarded as kshatriyas, in case they originally belonged to the ruling tribal groups. This process of Hinduisation, which extended over several generations, often though not necessarily always, resulted in the transformation of the local religious tradition through the incorporation of beliefs and practices associated with Brahminical 'Hinduism' (Robinson Rowena, Clarke Sathanathain, p 100).

“Certain low castes continue to be looked down upon as so contaminated that they may not enter the courtyard of the great temples. These castes are obligated to live by themselves on the outskirts of villages.” (G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India*, p, 9). The majority members of the community were treated by the mainstream communities as uncouth and uncivilized people.” Even today, in some parts of the rural areas, the Lambadas tend to be looked down and treated as an outcaste community and were treated as 'untouchables' by the mainstream community. When someone from the mainstream community like Reddy's, Komati's come to the Thanda, They feel uncomfortable to take water from the Thanda people.

### **3.2 Cultural Practices of Hinduised Lambadas**

The Tribal community of Lambada is surrounded by the non-Lambada community, the mainstream people whose culture and traditions are controlled by the Brahmin priests. Before the introduction of modern means of transportation by the British rulers, the

Lambadas, the inhabitant of forests, earned their livelihood by collecting forest products like wood, fruits and leaves, etc., and selling these in the nearest markets.

The members of Lambada community, who try to imitate the culture of the Hindu Telugu speaking community, are adopting features like Hindu-Telugu names (Shiva, Ganesh, Ravi, etc.) and Telugu rituals, festivals, and dress, language and food habits of the mainstream Hindu community. Such a phenomenon is more pronounced in the case of the educated Lambadas, who come into greater contact with the Telugu speaking community. Earlier such changes were more predominant in urban areas, but now, even Lambadas in rural areas, are being increasingly drawn towards the cultural practices of people of other communities.

One can find increasing instances of Tulsi plants appearing in front of houses in the Thandas. Pujas to Hindu Gods are being performed and temples of Hindu Gods and goddesses are being constructed in the Thandas. Also, more and more Lambadas have started visiting Hindu temples. The members of the Lambada community who have been greatly influenced by the Hindu cultural practices are known as Hindu Lambadas. These people celebrate all the rituals like the mainstream community.

### **Puberty Ritual.**

Due to the cultural contact with the mainstream communities, the Lambadas have started to organise functions, when their girls attain puberty. The near and dear ones are invited to celebrate the event. The particular girl child is not allowed to go out of the house for eleven days. On the last day, a function is organised. They invite Brahmin priest is to conduct the puja, and this is followed by lunch.

### **Marriage Ceremony of Hinduised Lambadas.**

The marriage rituals, adapted from the Telugu culture, are now confined to a single day process of marriage. The present system is an admix of Lambada and Hindu systems. One major change has been increasing trend towards the “Dowry system”. Earlier, it was considered as bride price. Now the dowry be in terms of cash, gold ornaments, property, and land, etc., according to the status of the family. Depending on the financial condition of the parents of the bride, the marriage rituals are performed either in their house, or in a function hall.

Even the attire of the bride and bridegroom is changing under the increasing influence of the Hindu Telugu culture. Now, there is an increasing trend for the bride to wear a saree and the bridegroom, kurta pyjama. In both urban and rural areas, Hindu Brahmin priests are increasingly ‘presiding over’ the marriage rituals of the Lambadas. The bride and bridegroom are made to sit towards the east direction and the priest reads the mantras. The main important symbol of marriage, the mangalsutra, is tied by the groom to the bride’s neck and jilakara bellam (cinnamon and jaggery) is placed on the head of the bride according to the Telugu tradition.

### **Cradle Ceremony.**

This is ritual is celebrated on the 21st day of the child’s birth. Earlier, there were no celebrations on such occasions, but, today, after adaptation of the mainstream customs and culture, the community has started to celebrate this ceremony like the Telugu community.

### **Festival Celebration.**

In Telangana, the Lambada community is being greatly influenced by the practice of Hindu festivals. Along with animistic celebrations, the Lambada community has started giving importance to the Hindu festivals. In the urban areas of Telangana, Lambadas are celebrating Hindu festivals such as “Bonalu Panduga, Ganesh Chaturthi, Varalakshmi Varatham, Raksha Bandhan, Karthikamasam, Sankranti and Shivratri. Lambadas residing in the cities are tending to give a lot of importance to the celebration of these festivals.

### **Bonalu Panduga (festival).**

This festival is celebrated by the low caste people of the mainstream communities. These include: shepherds, potters and dhobis (washer men) etc. However, today, we find this festival being celebrated by a large number of Lambadas.

### **Vinayaka Chavathi.**

The community is also giving importance to the “Ganesh Chaturthi.” These communities in the rural areas also have adopted the habit of inviting Brahmin priests to perform the puja at the mandaps. According to the present practices of the Lambadas, they collect money from the Thanda people and install idols of Lord Ganesh in the Thandas. The celebration is spread over five to eleven days. During these days, the Lambadas do not take non-vegetarian food. They perform these puja with cleanliness. Even though many

Lambadas do not know why they are celebrating the festivals, they are trying to follow the mainstream culture. This festival was never celebrated in the Lambada community earlier.

**Photo**



**Vinayaka Chavithi Celebration Lambada House**

**Bathukamma Celebration.**

Many Hinduised Lambada women are slowly shifting their focus from the Teej festival to Bathukamma celebration.

**Vara Laxmi Vartham:**

This festival is very famous which is celebrated by women across the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. This festival comes in the rainy season (Shravana Masam). On the fourth Friday, many Telugu women perform puja to goddess Laxmi. They wake up early in the morning and clean the house and take bath. After that, the ladies prepare the “Prasadam” of five varieties and offer that to Goddess Laxmi. After performing the puja, the ladies are invited to attend for “Pasupu Bottu.” Today, we can find this type of cultural imitation, acculturation in many Lambada women, especially in urban areas.

**Karthikamasam:**

The masam starts beginning the day of Deepawali and this period is observed for one month. During this month, the women fast and pray for their wellbeing. On Karthika Purnami day, they go to the temple and light the lamps early in the morning. They also offer prayers to the “Tulasi” plant during the entire period of Karthikamasam.

**Shivratri:** The Hinduised Lambada community celebrates this festival by fasting for a day without sleeping in the night. This festival is celebrated in the name of Lord Shiva. Hinduised Lambadas are now observing this festival with a lot of fervour and devotion.

**Religious places of Hinduised Lambadas.** More and more Lambadas are visiting the predominantly Hindu pilgrimage centres like Sabrimalai, Tirupati and Srisailam. They are very devotedly following the strict dress code and austerity rituals that the pilgrimage to Sabrimalai entails.

## **Some Popular Deities for the Hinduised Lambadas**

**Mahadeva.** This God is regarded as the annihilator of evils. More and more Lambadas are visiting the Jyotirlinga and performing a particular worship to Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati. After their return from pilgrimage, they invite the residents of the Thanda, distribute 'Mahaprasad' to them and serve them meals.

**Lord Shri Rama.** "Ram Ram" is a popular form of salutation in many parts of north India. Many Lambadas seem to have adopted this in a big way. They consider Lord Rama as an incarnation, who appeared on the earth to put an end to the atrocities of Ravana. A number of episodes are famous in Lambada community about the righteous deeds and dutifulness of Lord Rama. Shri Ram Sharma observes, "There are folklores of Shri Rama, but these are lesser in number than the songs related to Lord Krishna."

**Lord Shri Krishna.** This God is also popular in the Lambada community. The Lord is regarded as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Krishna and his cow myth are related to the Lambada culture. The Lambadas are much interested in the episode of Krishna stealing butter, curd and milk of the Gopikas.

**Balaji:** There is great impact of Balaji on the lives of the nomadic Lambadas. Many of them go to Tirupathi every year to have a darshan of Lord Venketshwara and perform puja to the Lord after they return home. They invite the inhabitants of the Thanda for the puja. The method of invitation is called 'Hawk Marno'. The devotees beseech Balaji in the following words

*Saives Maraj Panta, Polamne bharkatdesh*  
*Ye Balaji Bhagwan, hamare BAL bacha re,*  
*Jeev, Janvar rethi, en dhakh dal sen saives Maharaj,*  
*Bhar por rahkades maharaj*

### **Translation**

“O! God Balaji, Protect us from all bad things and give prosperous to new way of life and protect them famine and drought condition. Please also bless us about the well being of our children.”

The above said narration points out that Lambadas prefer the extreme stage of worship in the form of sacrifice to the plain process of devotion. However, it is an established fact that they believe more in sacrifice and that plain worship is an extension of their worship. Their canvas of worship has expanded from nature and mythic deities to their local clanic ones. Anyway, they believe much in nature and power. There have been also ascetics and divine females in the Lambada community about whom many more myths are prevalent. The Lambadas seem to be more attracted to Krishna and his miracles. No religious rites and practices are regarded as complete without the folklores. At the same time, they are fond of religious myths and sayings. There are two sorts of songs among them. One of them is related to the devotion and worship and second one is pertained to narration. The Lambadas get engrossed while singing these songs, particularly thos belonging to marriage or religious rites. The very life of Lambadas is governed and inspired by these songs. Sometimes it is felt that religion may not be separated from the social lives of

Lambadas. Their original tendencies are reflected everywhere. As far as their religious life is concerned, this reflects fearfulness to God, gratitude and devotion.

**Hanuman:** He is a very popular God for the Hinduised Lambadas. He is also known as “The monkey god of Hindus”. Lambadas too worship this monkey God (Hanuman) in their own style and there is a myth related to “Vaali and Sugriva.”

Lambadas of Nalgonda and Mahboobnagar District pay their tribute to the god Hanuman. The temple is located in the ‘Nallamala’ forest. Tribal communities like the Chenchus, Koyas, and Lambadas can be seen near the temple, located at village Madhigudem of Mahboob Nagar District and is at a distance of 60 km from the Srisailam Temple. This place is regarded as a religious place for the Hinduised Lambadas of this area. The people pay their annual tribute every year and it is a belief of the Lambada people, whoever visits this place have to spend night and should perform puja to Lord Hanuman. The puja is performed by a male person only and he prepares prasadam without using a stove. He uses only firewood. On the flame, the pan is kept and maida atta rotis, pancakes are prepared from jaggery and ghee is poured. After performing the puja, they start their journey to Srisailam and pay their tribute to Lord Shiva.

### **Case study of a Hinduised Lambada**

Banoth Krishna Naik, who is a retired employee from Khammam District, has totally adopted the customs like those followed by the Hindu Brahmin caste. He is 75 years old and worked as driver in the department of Transport, Government of Telangana for a period of 40 years. He totally gave up non-vegetarian food. He was very much interested

in the Bhagvat-Gita and knows about the Brahminical idol worship and approached three priests, but they never taught him, how to perform rituals and know about the Hindu idol worship, because he was from the tribal Lambada community. After his every day journey to the temples, one of the Brahmin priests noticed his devotion towards the Hindu Gods and asked in what way he could help him. With the help of the priest, Krishna Naik started learning mantras and slokas of Hindu customs and started participating in the pujas and yagnas along with the Brahmin priest. He also participated along with the Brahmin priest in the prayer rituals at Srisailam. These group of members started educating the community people about Hindu dharma. With the help of his community members, they translated the 'Bhagavad-Gita' into the Lambada dialect, so that the community people could easily understand the Hindu dharma. This book is being distributed among the community members.

### **3.3 Christianized Lambadas.**

As stated by David Hardiman, "When The British occupied India, they categorised a range of disparate communities scattered over the subcontinent, and, in the process, creating for them a conceptual unity that they had never till then hitherto possessed Those so singled out lived for the most part in the more unreachable hill and forest tracts, and survived largely from hunting and gathering, or rudimentary shifting agriculture. They were classed as 'aboriginals' or early tribes', being characterised, among other things, by their 'clan' based systems of kinship and their 'animistic' religious beliefs. Occasionally, they were distinctdefined in terms of their habitat, as 'jungle tribes'". (David Hardiman p, 20)

During the British colonial period, the religious conversion process among many tribes in India started. The missionaries were interested in converting the people of India to Christianity. “It has been a significant factor of cultural change among the tribals since the British rule. The first impact of Proselytization in the tribal areas was felt by the Khasis of Assam in 1813, the Oran tribe of Chotanagpur in 1850 and Bhils of Madhya Pradesh in 1880” (L P V, p 458).

“In the early period of the twentieth century, different religious group were trying to attract the Adivasis to their respective faiths. This had an adverse cultural effect on the Adivasis, including the Lambadas. In the Telangana region the Christian Missionaries, who were mainly operating in some areas of Warangal District, began to target the Lambadas” (Bhangiya, p 223).

With the entry of Christianity in India, changes in the tribal community of Lambada could be noticed. The Christian Lambadas mostly who are practicing the customs, rules and rituals of the Christian community. In some parts of Telangana, the Lambada changed to Christian religious customs and belief system increasing day by day. The missionaries are to some extent succeeding in converting many economically poor Lambadas.

### **Why Lambadas are embracing Christianity?**

The Lambadas are superstitious people and believe in black magic, witchcraft and evil practices. Whenever they feel ill, they tend to become superstitious.

Christianisation has been able to help many Lambadas to give up such practices. According to Ramavath Chandi Surthya, Thanda of Nalgonda district, in her words when

interviewed to her 'she says that Christianity is giving new hope living by providing medical help and teaching prayers to such persons'. Sabavat Sakmhi Bai, a resident of Amsanpally Thanda in Medak District, said that she was very often falling sick because of the black magic by her neighbor. However, after she converted to Christianity, she is happier and in a healthier frame of mind. After her conversion to Christianity, she changed her name from Chandi to Chandini. Under the influence of religious conversions, a number of Lambadas have changed their belief systems, rituals practices and way of dressing. They are now following the Christian celebrations, marriage rituals and celebrating festivals like Good Friday, Easter and Christmas, etc. The sub-groups among the Christian Lambadas include: (i) Catholics, (ii) Protestants and (iii) Members of the indigenous Church, the Hebron Church, which is very active in several districts of the state of Telangana. Each of these sub-groups has its own church and prayer meetings.

**Festivals and Religious belief of Christian Lambadas.** In Telangana state, the Lambada religion was almost invariably termed as animistic and an indigenous belief system. The accent was on remembrance of indigenous spirits, and worship of ancestors and indigenous deities. Festival and rituals of deities almost invariably entailed sacrificing of goats, hens and buffaloes. Now, the Christian Lambadas festivals such as The Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter, Nativity of Mary Matha and Christmas.

The Christian Lambadas celebrate all these festivals with great pomp and joy. They decorate their houses with special interest by keeping 'Star', with all the colour papers and lighting is also kept. They purchase new clothes and go to the church early in the morning for prayer. They are convinced that Jesus can help them in all matters regarding

their health issues, education and employment, etc. They enthusiastically participate in the devotional songs which are sung in the church. They also have hymns in the Lambadi dialect, which are tuned by the Pastors. These hymns, compiled in CDs, are distributed among the community members. Some Christians enact plays in the evening in the church compound.

Christian missionaries among the Banjara community are run by two tribal Lambada ministries in parts of Telangana. These are: 1) Banjara Tribal Ministry and 2) Badavo Banjara Projher Trust.

The Banjara Tribal ministry is being run by Pastor Christopher Boda and the Badavo Banjara Projher Trust, by Lazarus Lalsingh. Christian Lambadas can be seen all over the Telangana state.

Both Christopher Boda and Lazarus Lalsingh originally hail from the Lambada community. A large number of Lambada Christians are working in the Ministries. All of them have been appointed as pastors and sent to different Lambada Thanda in order to bring others into the Christian fold.

These ministries run schools, orphanages, training schools, nursing schools, etc. The schools run by these missionaries are providing school from elementary to graduate level, with free boarding and lodging. After the school hours, Bible classes are conducted. After completing their SSC, the students are trained as pastors and provided regular salaries and all possible facilities. Some are educated to the graduate level. A large number of girls join nursing schools.

### **3.4 Cultural Practices of Christianised Lambada**

**Life Cycle:** The Life cycle of human being starts with the birth. When a woman gives birth to a child, the animistic communities of Lambadas bury the natal of the new born in the ground in order to protect the new born child and the mother from evil spirits and black magic.

Converted Lambada Christians consider such practices as superstitious. The original practice was to keep women who delivered in the cattle shed. The converted Lambada Christians are allowing such women to stay in the house premises it.

These new born are taken to the church after the completion of eleven days to take the blessing of the Father or Pastor of the church. The names of the new born are decided by the father only like the Christian names. The animistic names are Bhilya, Rama, Bhuli, etc., but the Christian names, are William, Paul, Mary, etc.,

#### **Christian Lambada rituals:**

Christianity has brought about many changes in the ritual celebration of marriage, baby shower, and death rituals. The Christianised Lambada marriages are mostly performed in the Church. In urban areas, the preference is for church marriages. However, in some cases, marriages are being solemnised in the house of the bride. It is quite common to see the Baraat procession being taken out from the rural Thandas. Here, the Pastor or Father of the Church is invited to perform the marriage. In Medak District, in some houses of the converts the marriages are performed at home only. In the Amasanpally Thanda of Kolcharam Mandal, the marriage of Hansalibai and Ganesh was performed at home and was attended by the pastor and his group of church members.

The marriage system of Christian includes the exchange of rings and garlands. In some places, the symbolic cross is put on the bride's neck. After completion of this process, the marriage certificate is given to the couple with several promises. Thereafter, the Father of the church and the Pastor bless the married couple. The girl's costume is white frock, or white saree, and that of the bride groom dress, a suit.

Before the marriage ceremony, both the girl and boy should give their names in the church, so that the necessary arrangements can be made. The names are placed on the notice board. If the girl and boy already know each other, they have to take consent for the marriage, from the pastor of the church. Surprisingly, despite the conversion to Christianity, the marriage rituals of such persons still have some elements of the Lambada and Hindu traditions. Turmeric bath, barat, etc., are observed from the animistic belief of Lambadas and the dowry system, from the Hindu custom. Love marriages are not frowned upon in the Christian community and if a Christian Lambada wants to marry a Dalit Christian there is no objection for the church people.

**Death Ritual.** After conversion to Christianity the converted Lambadas have changed their mind set towards the new way of living and attitude. While the dead body is kept and around the dead body a group of ladies sits to do prayer nobody is involved in crying as the non Christians do."Christianity has significantly changed the views of the people towards the death. They want that death should not be sudden so that they could get sufficient time to purify themselves by doing prayers or taking the holy communion known as 'Last Sacrament' among the holy catholics." (Shyam Lal, p, 145)The dead person body is buried just like the practice of the Christians.

**Social life of Christian Lambadas.** A female Christian Lambada avoids wearing the traditional dress of the Lambadas. Instead, she prefers to wear a saree and have a sign of the cross on her neck. She also does not have a bindi on her forehead. She also does not wear any ornaments.

These converted Lambadas are giving up all the old system and they follow the new system of living. When two such persons meet, they shake hands and exchange their greeting by 'Praise the lord'. Converted Lambadas avoid alcoholic drinks. They observe Sundays as days of prayer.

**Health.** Christian missionaries have brought many changes in the living conditions of the Lambada community. These missionaries provide hospital facilities to these superstitious people in way to cure them with English medicine (David Hardiman p, 189-190). Missionary hospitals are running in many parts of India. The treatment is mostly free of charge. Palthiya Lali, a Lambada woman, who converted to Christian religion, informed the researcher that she was cured by 'Jesus Christ,' who gave her a new life. She suffered from cholera and typhoid for six months. But her community people and her family members were convinced that her ill health was due to black magic, for which there was no cure. And she was admitted for one month in the missionary hospital. During her treatment, she was taught prayers. By this she started believing in the Lord 'Jesus Christ'. And later on, she took Baptism into Christianity

Christian missionary hospitals have been treating pregnant women for the last 30 to 40 years. During their visits to the rural areas or the Thandas, the missionaries inform the pregnant women about the missionary hospitals and teach them about the healthcare

precautions to be taken. They also provide healthy diet free of cost to them. Missionary hospitals are rendering valuable service to the pregnant women in the In Lambada Thandas.

“The tribal community lambadas who were connected to the liquor are totally avoiding this type of intoxicating liquor and giving end to the liquor preparation as said by the Lambada pastor ‘Vittal Naik’.

## **A Case Study**

### **Hebron Church of Medak District**

This is the located in Medak district around thirty families attend this church some employees’ and are daily wage labour from the surrounding areas attend the church. And it is a purely indigenous church. As said by church pastor ‘PAUL’. There I interviewed one of my informants, Kehthavat Durgiya Naik.

### **Questions asked during the researcher’s field work.**

*Why you have converted to Christianity? How you are feeling about the new faith?*

Kethavath Durgiya Naik 35 years old was interviewed during the researcher’s field work. He was from the Avusulapally Thanda of Medak District. The Medak cathedral church is 3km from the Thanda. Durgiya lost his mother when he was 2 years old and his brother was 6 months old. It was said his mother was a victim of black magic, which took her life. Durgiya Naik’s father also died when he was 6 years old. The family members allege that this death too was caused by black magic. After some years, the family performed the marriage of Durgiya’s elder sister. Since she did not give birth to children and was facing problems with her in laws, her husband used to torture her very badly. One day,

she was beaten very cruelly and sent to her parental house. After 6 to 7 months, the couple got divorced.

Durgiya Naik got married at the age of 17 years, because there was no one to look after his remaining family members. After his marriage, he did not have children for 5 years. He was a daily wage labourer, who used to work under the Mason, a Dalit Christian from Guntur District. One day, he told Durgiya about Jesus Christ, “If you believe in the Lord Jesus, He will help you. Durgya Naik did not care about and did not believe in him. He said suddenly one day, both he and the mason went to Church and took baptism. After returning home, he told to his wife and brother that he had taken baptism in the Christian religion. After his conversion to Christianity, his wife gave birth to a baby boy. At present, they are happy and he himself became a Mason and now, some labourers are working under him. He says that it is all God’s grace. God helped him and he is happy with his two children and wife from then every Sunday he attends church prayer at ‘Hebron church’ in medak district which five kilometers from his house.

### **A Case Study of Bhadrappally Thanda**

This Thanda is at a distance of 40 km from Medak town. The total population of the Thanda is 150 to 200. The Thanda has a mixed population. SCs and BCs caste also live in the Thanda. Among this total population, 20 households have converted to Christianity and the church strength is around 56. These people had converted to Christianity around 50 years back. The first converted member of the Thanda was Nenavath Naniya Naik. He was staunch believer and worshiper of the Lambada Goddess. His occupation was robbery. He belonged to a group of 10 members who use to live by doing robbery and spend their life in the surrounding areas of Ramayampet Mandal. One day, his friend,

Anand, a Dalit Christian, told him about Jesus Christ. After that, Naniya Naik took baptism in the Hebron Church and decided to give up robbery. Naniya Naik informed this researcher that Jesus Christ appeared in his dream and gave blessing not to do robbery. He added that ever since he started worshiping Jesus Christ, everything has been going well for him.



**Bhadraj pally Thanda church with the pastor date, 26-03-2016**

### **3.5 Sikh Lambadas and Their Culture.**

**Guru Nanak Dev.** Sikh and Lambadas have been very close since the very beginning. The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak Dev, had undertaken six journeys for the welfare of mankind and spread the message of God to all the community members. Nanakji sermonised to mankind about righteousness and good deeds, without any prejudice and bias. According to a myth, Nanakji came in contact with several Lambadas who worked as ‘Ladenis’ (transporters). He conveyed the real meaning of life to them.

In this way, Guru Nanak Deva had pronounced the word 'Banjara' to convey the philosophy of life. A number of Lambadas used to regard him as a Divine Being. A number of Lambadas go on a pilgrimage to Nanded and Amritsar, the holy centres for the Sikhs. They offer gifts to Guru to get their desires fulfilled. The Lambadas worship the Guru at the time of their engagements and marriages.

**Banjara Sikhs.** Mr. Balfour has mentioned in his paper that the Banjaras call themselves Sikhs. Members of the Charan sub caste are convinced that their ancestors were three Rajput boys who followed Guru Nanak, the prophet of the Sikhs. The influence of Nanak appears to have been widely extended over northern India. Cumberlege states that, before starting for his marriage, the bridegroom places a rupee coin in his turban in honour of Guru Nanak. This is later expended on sweetmeats. Otherwise, the modern Lambadas do not appear to retain any Sikh observances (Russell & Heeralal, p 178).

### **Loka Masand**

This monastery is located in Mahboob Nagar District, Telangana. Every year, many Lambadas visit this place to prostrate at the grave of Loka Masand. The Temple of Goddess Kalika is also located here. Thousands of Lambadas visit the temple to get their desires fulfilled. According to a myth, a Lambada, named Loka, had adopted Sikhism, being impressed by Guru Govind Singh. Later, Loka became famous as Loka Masand. He came from Nanded and propagated Sikhism among the Lambadas residing in South India (Bhangiya, p 206-207).

While preaching the sermons of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Govind Singh, he reached Mahboob Nagar. He was much grieved to see the critical condition of Lambdas and he set all himself to serve them. The Lambadas were very much impressed by his benevolence and spirit of devotion. Later on, he settled down here. After his demise, a grave was built up at this very monastery. Today, this place has been converted into a pilgrimage centre for both the Lambadas and Sikhs.

### **A Case Study of a Lambada Sikh**

Bhilya Naik was born in the Darga Thanda in Sankapur Village, Chinna Shankarampet mandal of Medak district. He originally hailed from the Bhukiya clan of 'Nanavath' gothra or sub caste. His father's name was Jeeniya Naik. His was a joint family, consisting of six brothers and five sisters. He was an agricultural daily wage worker, who used to work in the fields. During the harvest season for sugarcane, Naik and his family members used to go to different place to earn their livelihood. Later, Bhilya Naik went for pilgrimage to Nanded Gurudwara. There he stayed for 7 years. He was involved in the seva of 'Seventh Guru Saheb Sri Guru Har Rai Sahib Ji Maharaj'. He was drawn towards the Sikh religious belief system. After years of staying there, he returned to the Thanda and convinced his brothers to adopt Sikhism.

Bhilyanaik changed his name to 'Premsingh'. His second brother, Phooliya, now took the name of 'Phoolsingh'; the third brother, Vasaram, changed his name to Vasaramsingh. Another brother, Chandiya, became Tejab Singh. In a similar way, a brother, Sakariya, assumed the name of sakariya Singh and Shankar became Shankar singh. Their next generations have followed the same tradition.

### **Culture of Banjara Sikhs**

After Bhilya Naik (Prem Singh) and his brother adopted Sikhism, they settled in a different Thanda, half a km away from their earlier Thanda. They named it as “Sikh Thanda” and constructed a “Gurudwara” in the name of Sri Guru Har Rai Saheb.” The Temple was inaugurated in the year 1970. They invited “Baba Joginder Singh Ji Moni” for the inaugural ceremony. Today, daily pujas are performed by the Thanda people. There is an organisation committee to take care of the gurudwara. The puja is performed by Gopisingh the eldest son of Bhilyanaik (Preamsingh).

The Sikh Lambadas of Shankapur Thanda follow all the customs, beliefs, traditions and festivals of the Sikh religion. The Thanda people even worship all the Lambada gods and goddess and their belief system in same manner. They also worship Sevalal Maharaj, Merriamayadi, and Tulja Bhavani, etc., However, they do not sacrifice animals like goats.

**Dress of the Lambada Sikhs.** After converting to Sikhism, male Lambadas of this Thanda have changed their dress from dhoti, shirt and turban to kurta-pyjama and they tie their hair and cover it with the turban. They have also adopted the five ks (Kesh, long hair; kanga, comb; kripan, dagger, kada, steel bracelet and kachha, long underpants), just like the other Sikhs.

**3.6. Islamic Lambadas.** These people had embraced the Islamic Religion during the rule of Humayun, the great Moghal emperor. They are known as Lambada Bhats (servants).

According to Cumberlej, “Dhadis and Bhats are from same clan, and Bhats are the ancestors of the Dhadis”. (Naik.D.B,p,71)

### **3.7. Rethinking Culture in the Community**

Hindusied Banjara Seva Sangh. The educated youth from the Lambada community have been organising Seva Mandals among the community members at the central and state levels. At the central level, the organisation is named as All India Banjara Seva Sangh.’ Their objective is to educate the community people about their culture, customs, traditions and belief systems, etc. In parts of Maharashtra and Karnataka, they have opened schools and are providing free training in Lambada art and craft works, embroidery etc.

Sevalal Jayanthi was observed in Osmania University in 2016. Every year, 15 February is celebrated as Sevalal Jayanthi. Earlier, the Lambadas hardly knew about this. However, now the educated youth from the community are taking a leading part in the celebrations. Now, Sevalal Jayanthi is being celebrated across the country at various levels - from the Thandas to the cities. An attempt is being made to impose a dress code. The women are required to wear their traditional dresses on this occasion. Woman are called upon to wear their heavily decorated, colourful dresses with all the ornaments and the men, dhoti, shirt and turban.

Puja is being offered to their saint Seva Bhaya. After completion of the Puja, the idol of Sevalal Maharaj is taken out in a huge procession. On this occasion the community organises community lunch (Anadhanam) for all the members. The Telangana state

Chief Minister has released Rs 10 lakh each to the districts of the state for celebration of the Sevalal Maharaj Jayanthi. He has also announced that a Banjara Bhavan would be constructed at Banjara Hills, which was originally inhabited by the Lambadas.

### **Temple Construction**

Actually, the Lambadas who have been animists and the worshipers of stones and trees are nowadays inculcating the habit of temple construction. It is mainly done by the youth of the community who are more into adaptation of Hindu culture. Now it is common to find most of the Thandas of Telangana having temples of Seva Bhaya and mother goddess (Mariyama Yadi). Educated youth are collecting money from the employees and constructing the temple. They have inculcated the habit of annual worship to the Temple by doing pujas and inviting their relatives and family members for these.



### **Temple at Laxminagar Tanda Medak District**

In Lambadas Thandas of Telangana, it has been noticed that the community members are keeping “Seva Mala” for forty one days. This has been adapted from the Telugu community who keep malas for Ayyappa Swami. These people from the Thanda who opt for this mala they should be clean and not consume alcohol and non vegetarian food.

This practice seems to be gaining in popularity due to the efforts of the Seva Bhaya.

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