



THE STATUS OF BANJARAS IN MAHARASHTRA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY WITH OTHER STATE'S TRIBES

RAJESH ANANDRAO ADE

Assistant Professor in English
Shriram Kala Mahila Mahavidyalaya,
Dhamangaon (Rly.). Dist. Amravati.

ABSTRACT:

Banjaras are primitive tribes in India as compared with other tribes. They were businessmen before the British rule. They travelled from north to south and from east to west. They made their journey with the oxen. British enacted the law to stop the business of these people. By their law this community with other communities was declared as the 'Criminal Tribes'. The Banjara community was from those days considered as the tribe. Tribe means a group of people who have same traditions, cultures, religions and their distinctive language. After independence of India this tribe and other tribes are denominated from the criminal law. All the tribes in this group are in the category of scheduled tribes except Banjaras. It is interesting that this tribes fall in the category of scheduled tribes in some of the states.

Key words: Banjaras, culture, tradition.

Different tribes are spread in maximum states of India. "Adivasi means, a group of people, often of related families, who live together, sharing the same language, culture, and history, especially those who do not live in towns or cities." Adivasi is a word which is applied to the tribal communities. Adivasi communities are present in Kerala, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Mizoram and other states including Andaman Nicobar islands. They are spreading in the east, west, south and north. They are called Adivasi because they were the primitive inhabitants. The term Adivasi is derived from Hindi word 'Adi' which means earliest times and 'Vasi' means inhabitations. The paper tries to analyze Banjaras status in Maharashtra as compared with other tribes in India. It also focuses similarities in their cultural, social, religious and folk songs.

The word *Banjara* is derived from Sanskrit word. *Vana* means jungle *Jara* means wonderer. The background of tribes can be considered from the following points, Distinctive culture, language and religion. Some of the Assamese tribes begin the wedding ceremony with *Panchmitra*. It means a combination of *ghee*, curd, sugar, honey and raw milk. It is given to the bridegroom to eat. *Banjaras* also follow the same system in their wedding. In both communities the bride and groom put on garlands to each other. The wedding ceremony held in front of sacred fire with chanting mantras and the grooms in both the communities



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apply *sindoor* on the forehead of their brides. The *Baiga* tribe in Madhya Pradesh consider about *gotra* at the time of marriage which plays significant role. *Munda* tribe also gave the same value to this ritual. *Banjaras* have the same philosophy at the time of marriage. As per the tradition of *Banjaras*, the father of the son approaches to the father of the girl. The *Charans* have the same tradition.

The *Bido* tribe's women have craze of ornaments. *Hansli* is a kind of necklace. They put it in their arms. The *Banjara* community's women have same craze. *Sahariyas* business is selling of woods from the forest, collecting gum, *tendu* leaf, honey and *mahua* flowers. Some of the *Banjaras* also have the same business in Maharashtra.

The *Banjaras* in Maharashtra have rich heritage of folk songs including festival (*Lengis*) songs, marriage songs, religious songs etc. They have their own musical instruments like *Dafada* and *Nagara*. The *Oraon* tribes have a rich range of folk songs, dances and musical instruments: *Mandar* and *Nagara*. They reside in north Bihar. They have *Bhagat* system in their religion.

Charan is another caste in the tribes. Few *charans* used to enjoy opium and wine. *Banjaras* also used to enjoy *mahua* flowers wine. They used to drink it on the special occasions especially on *Holy* festival. The residential places where *Banjaras* live are called *tandas*. *Charans* temporary *Birhars* are known as *tandas*.

Kolis are included in the tribes they have their own culture, religion and folk songs and dances. While dancing the women and men are divided into two groups. *Banjaras* also performed their dance in the ways.

Arunachal Pradesh tribal people used to follow some unique customs at the marriage time the groom's family gives dowry to the bride's family. The *Banjaras* give the dowry at the time of the weddings though there are strict laws of dowry. It is still followed by both these communities. Assamese follow another unique wedding ceremony which is called *Pani Tola*. It is afforded by *nuini*. *Nuini* means bathing the brides. It is the ceremony of bathing before the time of the wedding. These people used to bath both the brides and bridegrooms with the help of relatives. *Banjars* also followed the same ceremony before the marriage. Many times, they waste the time in this process but they follow this process. The tribal people in Bihar, there is one type of marriage that is called, *Raji-Khusi*. In such type of marriage the girls and boys are ready to marriage with their own wishes. *Banjaras* have such type of marriage.

Marriage by service is another type of wedding ceremony in the tribes of Bihar. *Banjaras* have the same custom. In which the poor youths who have no money to pay bridge price, serve at the beloved's father for certain period of time and then they get married.

The research paper tries to show the similarity of *Banjaras* and other tribes in India. Tattooing is an integral part of the *Baiga* tribes. It is their life style; it is the life style of *Banjaras*. The women in both tribes are interested in spotting tattoos on their bodies especially, on forehead, nose, ears, chicks etc.





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The analyses of the tribes with *Banjaras* makes it clear that the tribes have established their respective cultures, traditions, religion and distinguished language from their primitive times. All the tribes have the same customs, traditions, folk songs and distinguished languages as *Banjaras*. They lived in the jungle and hill sides. They were real competitors to British when they established their business in India. There were other tribes with *Banjaras* in the India. According to some scholars tribes means a group of people who have some distinguished cultures, traditions, folk songs and respective languages, if we compare *Banjaras* with other respective tribes which are included in the Indian Constitution. British people enacted the law against these primitive tribes and declared these tribal people along with other tribes that they were criminal people. Their main purpose was to flourish their business in all the parts of India. They also considered there are witches in the world; *Banjaras* have also the same views. Some *Banjaras* in Maharashtra created Gods at the end of village which they called *Siv* or *wesh*. They collected money from the villagers before the rainy season and give the sacrifices of goat to that God. They believe that now the God will stop all evil at the boundary of the village. The tribal people lived in forests so their business was going in the forest to collect forest wood, gum, *tendu* leaf, honey and *mouha* flowers. Such is the business of the *Banjaras* in the Maharashtra.

After the Independence of India and commencement of the Indian Constitution many tribes were put in the category of scheduled tribes. It is unjust to the *Banjaras* people because they are given different names in different states though they have given respect by denominating their tribes along with other tribes from the scheduled of criminal laws.

Conclusion

The research paper reaches to the conclusion that *Banjaras* are the primitive tribes with other tribes of India. There are seventy five tribal communities that are identified as primitive tribal groups. *Banjara* is one of them. So they must be included in the tribal scheduled and given justice.

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