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## SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF BANJARA TRIBES IN ANDHRA PRADESH: A CASE STUDY OF RAYALASEEMA REGION

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### Abstract

India is predominantly an agrarian country where 70 per cent of its population still depends on agriculture for its livelihood. The agricultural labourers constitute a considerable proportion of the rural work force in India. In the present study, the socio-economic conditions of the Banjara tribe in the Rayalaseema region are marked by a mix of traditional practices and modern challenges. Efforts to enhance the socio-economic conditions of the Banjara tribes must focus on improving access to education, healthcare, and employment, while also respecting and preserving their cultural identity. By providing greater economic opportunities, along with continued support for the protection of their traditional practices, the Banjara tribes of Rayalaseema can make significant strides in improving their living standards. In this chapter, an attempt is made to examine the socio-economic conditions of Banjaras in the Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh.

**Keywords:** Banjara Tribes, sugali, Lambada, Animal husbandry etc.

### Introduction

India is predominantly an agrarian country where 70 % of its population still depends on agriculture for its livelihood. The agricultural labourers constitute a considerable proportion of the rural workforce in India. The tribal population is identified as the aboriginal inhabitants of our country. They are seen almost in every State of India. The socio-economic conditions of the Banjara tribe in Andhra Pradesh are complex and multifaceted. While there have been notable improvements in terms of education, healthcare access, and government support, many challenges remain. The tribe's traditional livelihood activities, such as agriculture and livestock rearing, continue to be central to their way of life, but climate vulnerability and economic dependency on these sectors leave them at risk. Government welfare schemes have had some success, but better implementation, along with focused efforts to enhance education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, are essential to improving the quality of life for Banjaras in Andhra Pradesh. For centuries, they have been living a simple life based on the natural environment background and have developed their own cultural patterns congenial to their physical and social environment. The Banjara tribes, also known as Lambadas in some regions, are traditionally nomadic communities spread across various parts of India, including the Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh. Historically, they were known for their role in trade, as they often moved across different regions, transporting goods and acting as traders and merchants. The socio-economic conditions of the Banjara tribes in Rayalaseema have evolved significantly over the years, but they still face numerous challenges.

### 1. Demographics and Social Structure

**Population:** According to various estimates, the Banjara tribe constitutes a significant portion of the tribal population in Andhra Pradesh, with concentrations in districts like Anantapur, Kurnool, Chittoor, Mahbubnagar, Khammam, and Nellore. Although exact population figures vary, Banjaras are recognized as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) in the state, which ensures certain welfare benefits and legal protections. The Banjara tribe is generally divided into clans, each with its social norms and rules. Traditionally, the community was organized into a hierarchical structure, with the elders and chiefs (referred to as Patels) leading the tribe. These elders were responsible for resolving disputes and making key decisions for the welfare of the tribe. The social status of an individual in the community was largely determined by their family background and their role in the community, such as trade or cattle rearing. However, modernization, education, and government interventions have changed these traditional social structures. Although some degree of caste-based distinctions persist, the younger generation is becoming more integrated into mainstream society. The social structure of



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DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2024/13.1.20.2.2.2>

the Banjara community is traditionally organized around clans or gotts. These clans have their customs and norms, which govern marriage, inheritance, and dispute resolution.

## 2. Economic Activities

Historically, the Banjaras were nomadic traders who traveled with herds of cattle and goods, facilitating trade across regions. However, over time, their economic activities have diversified and evolved:

### a. Agriculture

Many Banjaras have gradually transitioned from their traditional nomadic lifestyle to settled agriculture. In Andhra Pradesh, many families now own small or medium-sized agricultural land, particularly in drought-prone regions such as Rayalaseema. These lands are often used for cultivating crops like groundnut, chili, sunflower, and millet, although agricultural productivity can be low due to the region's frequent water scarcity issues. The success of agriculture among Banjaras is dependent on access to irrigation and government schemes. However, many Banjara families still rely on rainfed agriculture, making them vulnerable to climatic changes like droughts and erratic rainfall patterns.

### b. Livestock and Animal Husbandry

Animal husbandry continues to be an important economic activity for many Banjara families. Cattle rearing and dairy farming are still common in rural areas, though the scale of these activities has reduced in some regions as urbanization increases. Livestock rearing serves as an important source of income, especially for families in rural parts of Andhra Pradesh.

### c. Traditional Crafts and Artisanal Work

Some Banjara groups are also involved in traditional crafts, such as weaving and embroidery. Women in particular are known for their skills in creating the brightly colored, embroidered clothing and accessories that are part of the tribe's cultural identity. These crafts are sold in local markets, helping generate income, although this form of economic activity is often limited.

### d. Trade and Business

Although many Banjaras have moved away from their historical role as itinerant traders, a portion of the community remains involved in small-scale retail trade or business activities. This includes selling goods such as clothes, household items, and agricultural produce in nearby towns or villages. However, the level of success in this sector is highly variable and often dependent on access to capital and local market conditions.

### e. Migration and Employment

Increasingly, many Banjaras are migrating from rural areas to cities in search of better livelihood opportunities. This migration is often driven by the lack of agricultural opportunities or the adverse impact of climate on farming. A significant proportion of Banjara migrants work as manual laborers, construction workers, domestic helpers, or in small businesses in urban centers like Hyderabad.



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### 3. Access to Land and Resources

In the past, the Banjara tribe had limited access to land, which made them largely dependent on their traditional ways of life. In Rayalaseema, many Banjaras live in **semi-rural areas** or on the outskirts of towns. While some have acquired land through state-sponsored land distribution schemes, landownership remains limited for a significant number of families, especially those who have not fully integrated into the agricultural or settled lifestyle. Additionally, the drought-prone nature of the Rayalaseema region poses a major challenge to agriculture, which affects the socio-economic stability of the Banjara tribe.

### 4. Education

Education remains one of the key challenges for the Banjara community in Andhra Pradesh. Historically, the community was predominantly **nomadic**, which hindered access to formal education for Banjara children. While the literacy rate among the Banjara tribe has improved in recent decades, it remains lower than the state average. One of the biggest barriers to socio-economic advancement for the Banjara community has been **limited access to education**. In the past, many children from the tribe were not enrolled in schools, as the community was traditionally nomadic and constantly on the move. However, with government initiatives aimed at improving education in tribal areas, enrollment rates for Banjara children have increased in recent years. In Rayalaseema, the literacy rate among Banjaras is still lower than the state and national averages, although improvements are being made. Education is often seen as a pathway to breaking out of the cycle of poverty and integrating more fully into the broader economy.

- **Access to Schools:** Many children in remote rural areas, especially those in Rayalaseema and other tribal-dominated regions, still face challenges in attending schools due to distance, economic constraints, and cultural factors.
- **Government Initiatives:** Over the years, the government has implemented various schemes to boost education among tribal communities, such as free schooling, mid-day meal programs, and scholarships for ST students. There are also dedicated tribal welfare schools (like the Ashram Schools) that offer free education and hostel facilities to students from marginalized communities.

Despite these efforts, school dropout rates remain high among Banjara children, especially among girls, due to factors such as poverty, child labor, and early marriages. Increasing awareness about the importance of education, particularly for girls, is a continuing challenge.

### 5. Health and Sanitation

The health conditions of the Banjara tribe in Andhra Pradesh are often poor, with limited access to **healthcare facilities**, especially in rural and remote areas. Some of the major health challenges include:

- **Malnutrition:** Many Banjara families live in poverty, leading to poor nutritional standards. Malnutrition, particularly among children, is a serious concern.
- **Lack of Healthcare Access:** Despite government schemes like National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and tribal health initiatives, many Banjara communities still face challenges in accessing basic healthcare services, particularly in remote regions. In some areas, access to public health centers is limited, and there are fewer healthcare professionals familiar with the needs of tribal populations.
- **Common Health Issues:** The community often suffers from preventable diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, diarrhea, and respiratory infections, exacerbated by poor sanitation and lack of clean drinking water.



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## 6. Government Welfare Programs and Support

Being recognized as a Scheduled Tribe (ST), the Banjara tribe benefits from various **government welfare schemes** designed to uplift tribal communities:

- **Reservations in Education and Employment:** Banjara people have access to reservations in educational institutions and government jobs, which help improve their social mobility. However, the effectiveness of these reservations varies by region, and many Banjaras still face challenges in accessing these benefits.
- **Tribal Welfare Schemes:** Various financial assistance programs have been introduced by the state government, including land distribution schemes, subsidized loans, and income-generation programs for tribal communities. However, implementation gaps and bureaucratic delays often prevent these programs from reaching all beneficiaries.
- **Housing:** The government has provided subsidies for housing through the Indira Awas Yojana and other state housing schemes, but many Banjara families still live in substandard housing and poor living conditions.

## 7. Cultural Identity and Change

Culturally, the Banjara people have a rich heritage, with a distinct **language (Lambadi)**, traditional music, dance (like *Ghoomar*), and colorful clothing. However, their traditional lifestyle is increasingly under threat due to modern influences. The younger generation is more likely to migrate to urban areas for work, contributing to the erosion of traditional practices and a shift towards more urbanized lifestyles.

While some cultural aspects are being lost, there has also been a resurgence in the interest in preserving Banjara culture through festivals, music, and dance. Many Banjaras, particularly those in urban areas, are attempting to maintain a balance between modernity and tradition.

## 8. Challenges Faced

1. Although many Banjaras have diversified into farming and trade, a significant proportion still depend on seasonal or subsistence farming, which is heavily impacted by the region's erratic climate.
2. Being a historically marginalized community, Banjaras continue to face social and economic discrimination in some areas, especially in more conservative or rural parts of Rayalaseema.
3. Like many tribal communities, Banjaras are increasingly migrating to cities in search of better livelihood opportunities. This migration often leads to a loss of community bonds and cultural heritage.
4. The Rayalaseema region is drought-prone, and its semi-arid nature poses a challenge for agriculture. This has a direct impact on the Banjara tribe, whose economic activities are often based on farming and animal husbandry.

## Reasons For Backwardness of Scheduled Tribes

An attempt is made in this chapter to examine the reasons for the backwardness of scheduled tribes in the study area. The reasons for the backwardness of scheduled tribes in the study area as perceived by the respondents include 1. Dependency on outsiders 2. Tribal value system 3. Lack of proper interface with modern mechanisms of development 4. Land alienation 5. Inadequate credit 6. Excess spending on drinks 7. Very poor self-economic initiatives 8. Very poor technology use 9. Complacent nature 10. Exorbitant rate of interest 11. Dependency on unorganized sources for credit 12.



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DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2024/13.1.20.2.2.2>

Poor availment of development initiatives by the state 13. Poor nonfarm sector development 14. Inadequate integration of forest resources to overall economic development 15. The small industry is undeveloped 16. Marketing efforts are insignificant 17 The role of SC/STs Cooperative Corporation is limited 18. Tribes markets are not well integrated with the urban markets 19. Limited role of institutions 20. The scale of enterprising activities is small

### Suggestions for the lambada Tribal Problems

The Anantapur, Chittoor, Kadapa, Kurnool districts lambada tribal peoples are facing so many troubles and problems to socio- economic development, they are socially, economically, politically, communally poor developed and huge backward community in the Rayalaseema. Deeply discussed all the troubles and problems above section in the study, suggestions and solutions are given below.

1. Provide quality education and teachers in Lambada tribal village primary schools and high schools why because education is the root for elevating the Lambada tribal standards of living and it provides better employment in the Rayalaseema.
2. Health is the primary element to solve any problems in society, establishment of primary health centers in Lambada tribal villages is necessary to elevate the standards of living in the Rayalaseema.
3. Providing good nutrition food to all the Lambada tribal people to elevate the standards of living in the Rayalaseema.
4. Providing employment is the solution to Lambada tribal’s economic development in the Rayalaseema.
5. Provide good infrastructure facilities to elevate the standards of living in the Rayalaseema Lambada tribal people.
6. Proper monitoring of all the govt. schemes and policies to reach real lambada tribal beneficiaries in Rayalaseema.
7. Providing superior positions in politics to the social development of Lambada tribal people in the Rayalaseema.
8. Famous personalities and NGOs in society should adopt each lambada tribal village in the Rayalaseema.

### Conclusion

The Banjaras were the nomadic tribes who traveled across the country and settled down in various states. The Banjaras are known as the wandering traders for a long time. They are predominantly spread all over Maharashtra except the Konkan region. The Banjaras speak the same language across all over India. The Anantapur, Chittoor, Kadapa, Kurnool districts of Lambada tribal peoples are facing so many troubles and problems with socio-economic development, they are socially, economically, politically, communally poor developed and huge backward community in the Rayalaseema, Providing quality education and teachers, establishment of primary health center Providing good nutrition food to all the lambada tribal people to elevating the standards of living in the Rayalaseema

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