

SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACT OF NON-TRIBAL CONTACT ON TRIBES OF ANDHRA PRADESH AND TELANGANA, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

During the colonial period, anthropologists described Indian tribal societies as having distinctive cultures. Tribal people have been studied as different from the rest of the Indian population based on racial, linguistic and cultural traits. This is true for the tribal communities of North-East India, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and a few other places. But, in many places there have been contacts between tribal and non-tribal communities leading to diffusion of caste and Hindu religious elements into the tribal communities. The socio-cultural impact of the non-tribal contact on tribes of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana is evident in the presence of caste-like hierarchy, linkages with Hindu mythology and association with local rulers. The trend of tribal communities moving towards caste labels and caste status witnessed a decline in the post-independence period with increasing awareness of constitutional privileges and developmental benefits available to the scheduled tribes.

Keywords: *Socio-cultural impact, Non-tribal contact, Caste in tribal setting, Hindu elements among tribals.*

INTRODUCTION

The dominance of theories and concepts originating from Europe and America influenced the perceptions and identities of communities and regions in various parts of the third world. The response to the stereotypes popularized by the western knowledge is reflected in the works of authors like Edward Said (1978, 1993). Said was critical of stereotypes that are essentialist representations of non-European other. Census reports during the British period accorded a separate identity to the tribal communities in India on religious and linguistic basis. Anthropology in India started with ethnographic studies leading to the publication

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of monographs on different communities. Following the colonial tradition, tribal people have been studied as different from the rest of the Indian population. Anthropologists in India identified and highlighted the tribes in India on the basis of specific cultural traits. It has been criticized that Indian anthropologists have internalized the orientalism discourse and are subject to all the charges that were brought against the west: “as legatees of the oriental academic tradition, Indian anthropologists and other human and social scientists are homegrown orientalists as they are caught up in the tyranny of the orientalist discourse in which they were educated (Podar and Subba, 1991:78). Indian anthropologists have become camp followers until the end of 1940, and the work of the Indian anthropologists was not different from that of British administrators (Sarana & Sinha 1976:213, 220).

Indian anthropologists studied the tribal communities as distinct from rest of the communities, in the early decades of the discipline. But, the ‘other cultures’ approach did not continue for long. Anthropological contributions centering on concepts like tribe-caste mobility, tribe-caste continuum, and links between Hinduism and tribal religions are pointers to this trend. Anthropologists like Surjit Sinha (1957) have highlighted the contribution made by the tribal communities to the Indian civilization. The tribal communities in North-East India and Andaman and Nicobar islands, having their own distinctive cultures due to geographic, political insulation, did not experience the contact with Hindu religion and the caste system. In the rest of India, the contacts have been there as can be seen in mythology and history. The cultural links between tribal communities and neighbouring populations in different parts of the country have formed the focus of culture contact and acculturation studies. While presenting the distinctive features of tribal communities, the scholars highlighted the varying levels of continuity and contact between Hindu society and tribal communities. This is evident in the work of N. K. Bose who adopted a combination of Indology, history and ethnology. The most well-known paper titled “Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption” followed the acculturation tradition. The process of accommodation of tribals into Hindu fold without abandoning their cultural practices was highlighted by N. K. Bose (Pradip Kumar Bose, 2007).

Amongst the Southern States of India, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana together have the largest concentration of Scheduled Tribes. In these states, the tribal communities are found mainly in hilly and forest regions of Eastern Ghats, extended into the hill ranges of Nallamalai. Gond, Kolam, Koya, Konda Dora, Konda Reddi, Savara, and Jatapu are among the principle tribes inhabiting hilly and forest regions. The tribes have been under contact with non-tribals since ancient times as seen from the references pertaining to them in various mythological and historical sources. The contacts between tribals and non-tribals increased during colonial and postcolonial periods due to large-scale migration of non-tribals into the tribal areas. The present paper is an attempt to examine the socio-cultural impact of non-tribal contact on the tribes of Andhra Pradesh and

Telangana. The paper is based on authors own fieldwork and publications, and the writings of various scholars.

NON-TRIBAL MIGRATION INTO THE TRIBAL AREAS

Contacts between tribal communities have been there from ancient times. Though located in the remote hilly and forest areas, the tribal leaders used to pay taxes and tributes to the regional rulers and assisted them whenever needed. In the nineteenth century, rulers made attempts to increase tax revenue by encouraging non-tribals to settle down in tribal areas by clearing forest land for cultivation. The Nizam rulers in Telangana region granted large tracts of land in the forest areas for cultivation to the soldiers discharged from service. State granted land *Inams* (gifts) in the tribal areas to various categories of people in lieu of their services and even resorted to the sale of land to non-tribals in order to gain more revenue (Janardhana Rao, 1987: 52, 118). The Hyderabad Forest Act of Nizam rulers, had provision for allowing conversion of forest land into agricultural land. Cultivation of forest land under *Siwai-i-jamabandi* (without proper documents) has been a common feature and many such lands were given ownership documents later. There has been conferment of land grants in the form of *Zamindaris*, *Jagirs* and *Inams* to the Gond chiefs who were the tribal chiefs in Adilabad district. In return for their ruling privileges, the tribal chiefs had to meet the obligation of populating the areas (Sethu Madhav Rao, 1949). Gradually, revenue officials were entrusted with the functions of collecting village revenues and maintaining village accounts. The revenue officials appointed the village functionaries for assistance. Non-tribals were encouraged to settle down in the tribal area for serving the police, revenue and forest personnel. Thus, deliberate policy of populating the area contributed to the in-migration of non-tribals into the tribal areas.

In the earlier part of the 19th century, traders from non-tribal towns developed business interests in tribal areas. Over a period of time, the seasonal visits of itinerant traders and convoys of merchants grew into weekly tribal markets at centrally located tribal villages. Along with the non-tribals, cash economy also entered and the dependence of tribals on money became inevitable. The non-tribal traders established a business of trade cum money lending in the Eastern Ghats. In this process, non-tribal towns nearer to the tribal areas emerged as business centers. Traders from small towns established a net-work of marketing places in the agency areas in the form of weekly markets. With increasing demand for land required for cultivation in other regions, agricultural castes ventured into tribal areas. Sastry (1989) analyzed the demographic changes that have taken place in the Gond territory. According to him, Utnoor taluk was a predominantly tribal area until 1941. Its population strength witnessed 111% increase due to in-migration of non-tribal population between 1961 and 1971 (Sastry, 1989: 205). The laying of railway

tracks passing through the tribal areas for transporting coal in the Telangana regions, and Iron ore through Andhra region led to the migration of non-tribals. Hydro-electric projects were executed in the tribal region. Industries depending on bamboo and wood from the forests, rayon factories, paper mills, plywood factories were established in the tribal regions. This has led to in-migration of non-tribals. With the improvement in the health and communication facilities and opportunities for trade, the tribal areas attracted the more non-tribal population. All these resulted in considerable non-tribal presence in tribal areas.

LINKAGES WITH HINDU MYTHOLOGY

Though significant migration and contact happened in the nineteenth century, the tribal communities in these regions have been part of centuries-old mythology and history. References pertaining to the tribal communities are found in various mythological and historical texts. Ramayana, the great epic describes tribes inhabiting Dandakaranya. The Dandakarayana is partly extended to Andhra Pradesh. Various epics and Puranas, both in Sanskrit and Telugu mention about tribes living in respective periods. Chroniclers of various rulers also provided accounts of the tribes in those kingdoms. Many classical literary texts have references to tribal cultures (Venkata Rao, 2012). Many tribes claim descent from Hindu mythological figures. Savara is one of the important and ancient tribal groups living in the districts of Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts of Andhra Pradesh. The Sabaras have been mentioned in the ancient Sanskrit literature from the very early times. According to Chandramowli (1969: 200), Savara were originally called Sabara, said to be the descendants of the old lady Sabari who offered fruits to Lord Sri Rama.

“The Aitaraya Brahmhana text of Rig-Veda mentions the Savaras as the descendants of sons of Viswamithra who were cursed to become impure by their father for an act of disobedience. The Ramayana describes them as having emanated them from the body of Vasista, to fight against Viswamitra” (Thurston. 1909: 305).

The contribution of the Savara community to the culture and society of the region was highlighted by writers like Gidugu Sitapati (quoted by Mohana Rao, 1999: 4). Among other major tribes, Valmiki trace their descent from sage Valmiki of the Ramayana epic. The Erukala community of Andhra Pradesh claim that they are the descendants of ‘Ekalavya’ of the Mahabharat epic. Krishna Reddy and Ramachandra Reddy (1987) observed that:

“The Banjara seem to have been one of the ancient tribes of India since their name is found in old works like Dasakumara Charitam written by Dandi in the 11th century and 12th centuries. The Banjaras claim to have descended from the off-spring of Vali

and Sugriva, the two mythological figures of the epic, Ramayana. But Siraj-ul-Hassan (1920) writes that the Banjaras claim to have originated from Mota and Mola, the two brothers who tended the cows of Lord Krishna. From Mota sprang the ancestors of Modern Marwaris, Mathura Banjaras and Labhanas” (Krishna Reddy and Rama Chandra Reddy, 1987: 19–20).

Tribal communities like Soara, Chenchu, Manne Dora, Koya and others are closely associated with Hindu pilgrim centres of Srikurmam, Srisailam, Simhachalam and Bhadrachalam. Linkages with important names of the Hindu great tradition are mentioned to support claims for superior status in many tribes. Koya and Konda Dora trace their origin from King Bhima of Pandava brothers; the pastoral Goudus believe that they are descendants of Yadavas to whom Lord Sri Krishna belongs. The origin story of Gonds reveals several mythological links. According to Haimendorf, (1948: 180-182) the Gonds had divine ancestors who were nurtured by goddess Parvati. There are references to Brahmins as priests and Komti as a trader among the Gonds (Sethu Madhav Rao, 1949). V.N.V.K Sastry (1994) argued that elements of Saivism are deep-rooted in Gond religion. According to him, the dominance of Maratha culture over Gond culture due to proximity resulted in the spread of Saivite traditions among the Gonds. The presiding deity of the Gonds is Nagoba (serpent God) and the Shivalinga which is there along with it is a clear indication of Shivism’s influence over the Gond religion. The Nagoba Jatra in Adilabad district is thoroughly Hinduized (Sastry, 1994a). Another neighbouring community of the Gonds, the Kolams trace their decent to Bhima and Hidimbi, the well-known personalities of the Mahabharata. While Hidimbi is portrayed as malevolent demon living in the forest in this epic, Kolams consider her as their patron goddess and call her ‘Hidamala Devi’ (Mohana Rao, 1990).

The Chenchu Mallanna, tribal god in Nallamala hills was replaced by Lord Mallikarjuna, an incarnation of lord Shiva. Sastry (1994b) concluded that the original God of Chenchus was replaced by Sanskritized version. The Chenchu claim that Bramarambha, the female deity of Srisailam belongs to their community. The contact between Chenchu and non-tribals was mentioned by G.P Reddy that:

“From many centuries the pilgrimage route to the famous sacred shrine at Srisailam situated in the Nallamalais of the Eastern ghats passed through Chenchu inhabited area. Pilgrims going to the shrine walked all this distance through forest with the Chenchus acting as guides paying Metta (hill) fee for each pilgrim” (1979: 89).

A.S.N. Murthy (1981) indicated that many aspects of Koya religion are similar to the Hindu religion. The Koya idea of a soul is parallel to the traditional Hindu notion of soul. They also believe that the good deeds which the individuals do secures for him heaven or good things of life, and that evil actions expose him to punitive consequences. Like the Hindus, the Koya also believe in ancestor

worship. The beliefs and practices of Koya illustrate the Hindu influences on the Koyas. The Bagathas worship both Hindu and tribal gods. Nookadoras are followers of Hinduism. Gadaba follows both Hinduism and tribal religion.

The Banjaras worship many little traditional deities of the Hindus and several deities of great tradition, especially those of surrounding agricultural castes. Banjaras are subject to Hindu influence through different sources such as Hindu mythology, Hindu shrines, Brahmin priest etc. These sources of influence are working simultaneously to bring about a change in the life and culture among the Banjaras (Reddy and Reddy, 1987). The Yanadi profess a mix of Hindu religion and tribal religion. They worship village deities and also worship Hindu gods. Lord Venkateswara of Tirupati, and Lord Narasimha of Ahobilam, and many other local deities are also worshipped by the Yanadis. The religious practices of tribes exhibit a mixture of Hinduism and animism. Hindu festivals like Mahasivaratri are popular while pilgrimage to non-tribal shrines like Simhachalam (near Visakhapatnam city) is well known to the tribals in the Visakhapatnam agency. Many of them worship non-tribal deities also and it is a common sign that the idols like Rama, Hanuman and Ganesh find a place along with the tribal deities in the villages. Tribals have adopted some of the Hindu religious practices without abandoning their old rituals and beliefs.

ASSOCIATION WITH RULERS AS A RESOURCE FOR CLAIMING STATUS

The long association of the tribal communities with non-tribals can be seen in many of the groups who claim to have served the regional rulers. The Gonds established their own rule and emerged as Raj Gonds. It was conjectured that the Gond kings in imitation of other neighbouring rulers of the period, had appointed 'Pradhans' as bards to sing Gond genealogies and in praise of Gond Rajahs (Sastry, 1994). The Pradhans are originally Marathi speaking population brought into the tribal fold when they accepted the role of bards to the Gonds. Some of the Bagathas of Visakhapatnam agency claimed that they are Racha Bagathas (Kshatriya Bagatha). Bagathas were said to have served under local Zamindars with Bhakti (devotion), hence came to be known as Bagathas (Thurston, 1909:128, Aiyappan, 1948:71). Muniratnam Reddy (1979) observes that the ancestors of the Bagatha were excellent archers; the seventeenth-century Zamindars of Visakhapatnam Agency had appointed them as their army personnel. In appreciation of their military services, the Zamindars had appointed them as regional chiefs of the hill tracts. This paved way for the Bagatha to claim themselves as a warrior tribe. They developed politically and acquired social supremacy during the late seventeenth century to the early eighteenth century (Reddy, A.M: 1972: 23–27). There is a tradition that the tribe Gadaba owes its name to the fact that its ancestors emigrated from the banks of Godavari river and settled at Nandapur, the former capital of

Rajah of Jeypore. Gadabas are said to be Palanquin bearers to the rulers of Jeypore (Thurston, 1909: 243).

PRESENCE OF CASTE PRACTICES

The contact and interaction with non-tribals led to the emergence of caste-like features in the tribal communities. Commensal rules came into operation between different tribes. Even in remote areas, practices associated with the caste system are found. Not accepting cooked food, avoiding eating together with communities not considered as equal in rank is practiced in many tribal communities. Inviting Brahmin priests to officiate in ceremonies formed a strategy among well to do tribals for raising the status. Untouchability, hierarchy, ritual purity, sub-caste endogamy, occupational specialization, are some of the features that are found among tribal communities. Subba Reddy (1973) pointed that the tribal communities in the Visakhapatnam agency reveal evidence of contact with Hinduism of various levels. In this area, a system of social hierarchy based on food habits and occupational practices came into being which is expressed in the commensal relations and marital practices. The Yanadi comprises of two endogamous groups, the Challa and Manchi. The Manchi Yanadis are numerically dominant and also claim superiority in the tribal hierarchy (A.P. Reddy, 1984: 19). The Yanadi have commensal relations with a number of castes. The services of castes are available to them through patron-client (Jajmani) relation. Sudhakara Rao (1997) viewed that Yanadi is a part society within the wider non-tribal Hindu society, but different in some ways from the society that encompasses it. The Yanadi structurally stand in opposition to the non-tribal society, the former is inferior and part society which is encompassed by the latter, the superior whole society (Sudhakara Rao, 1997: 29).

The contacts with Hindu non-tribals have affected the tribal communities to adopt a stratification based on criteria followed by Hindu castes. The social hierarchy has become part and parcel of tribal communities which use various criteria like food habits, occupation, etc. as underlying considerations. Koyas while maintaining their distinct tribal identity, are internally stratified into a number of caste-like endogamous sub-groups. The sub-groups are formed mainly on the basis of occupation (Murthy, 1981: 215). As a consequence of the contact with caste populations, the status of the beef-eating tribes has declined. Both Kondadora and Valmiki eat beef, but the former has a relatively higher status over the latter as they avoid dealing with hides and skins which are handled by the Valmikis. In Visakhapatnam district, the residences of Valmikis are located away from the other communities as in the case of Scheduled Castes in the non-tribal areas. Konda Reddis claim higher status when compared to Koyas who sacrifice cattle. S.C. Dube (1950) described the Koya – Kondareddi interactions in the following

manner. Koyas and Konda Reddy have commensal relations as in the case of castes. While the Koyas practice cow-sacrifice, the Reddis do not have such custom. By observing the Hindu practice, the Hill Reddis claimed to be higher than the Koyas in the esteem of the Hindu population. The Reddis cannot accept food from Koya, but the Koyas do eat food cooked by the Reddis. During functions, the Koyas make separate seating arrangements for the Reddis and give them raw food to be cooked by themselves.

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS REFORM

In the tribal areas of Visakhapatnam district, the presence of tribals who are followers of Ollek faith also known as Mahima Dharma is another consequence of contacts. In the tribal villages of Araku and Paderu region, the followers of Mahimadharma are locally termed as Olleks. Ollek is the local term for Alekhism used for the people who follow the distinctive religious faith of Mahimadharma. Members belonging to this faith are from different tribes. Alekhism exhibits similarities to the ideas and practices of Hinduism. The impact of Satya Mahimadharma was studied in Orissa, the birthplace of Mahimadharma (Eschmann, 1986). The followers avoid non-vegetarian food, do not consume alcohol, wear saffron colour cloths, and profess to non-violence. According to one version, around 1920, several households of Raj Bagathas embraced Jainism, which was regarded as superior to Vaishnavism or Saivism. Jain faith of Holeyaka variety has locally come to be known as Ollek. The converts call themselves as Maha Jain Bagathas (Reddy, 1979: 41). In the course of interface between non-tribal and tribal traditions in the Visakhapatnam agency, this reform movement from Orissa formed in to a sort of cult but confined to a small population (Venkata Rao, 1999). It is likely that the reform movement must have spread as a response to the emergence of caste-like hierarchy among the tribes. The presence of an exogenous reform movement against caste in a tribal area reflects the diffusion of the practices of caste system.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL MOBILITY

Adoption of new social or cultural practices, which are considered to be superior and prestigious, is one of the factors leading to new labels. The consequence of interaction with culturally advanced groups results in a change in the consumption pattern, religious beliefs etc. Adoption of such practices results in a separate identity for them. Those adopting practices of a more advanced group add a new suffix or prefix to their name to differentiate from those who still retain old practices. The Madras census report observes about Jatapu that

“These are a civilized section of Khonds who speak Khond on hills and Telugu on plains and are now a distinct caste. They consider themselves superior to Khonds who still eat beef and snakes. They have taken some of the customs of the plains people” (Thurston, 1909: 453).

Social and cultural mobility is also possible through the adoption of other religious practices. The number of Christians in all tribes has increased steadily. In East Godavari and Visakhapatnam districts, Valmiki have embraced Christianity in large numbers. The Raj Gonds of Adilabad region in Telangana were the first group of aboriginals who came in contact with Rajputs and got Sanskritized. The process of Sanskritization came to a standstill during the Muslim rule during the 19th and early part of 20th century. During this period Gond Chiefs were subjected to Islamization. They adopted names, dress, and festivals of Muslims. After independence there is a resurgence of Sanskritic Hinduism through contacts with Saints of Maharashtra (Mohan Rao, 1990: 4). In the Telangana region where the impact of Muslim rulers was significant, Banjaras tribals venerate Muslim *Pirs* (Saints) like some of the other Hindus.

Economic mobility among the tribal communities through dependence on agriculture has also led them to maintain some economic relationships with caste populations such as grazing the cattle of caste farmers, working as attached agricultural labourers or casual labourers and as share-croppers. By taking up the non-tribal pursuits of the economy and by improving their standard of living, the tribal communities could improve their position in the hierarchy in their respective villages.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRIBAL WOMEN

One of the important developments as a consequence of economic changes is the increase in the amount paid as bride price and entry of dowry. It is natural that monetization and commercialization lead to more demand for cash and increased rates of bride-price. Dowry also made its entry among the tribals in case of educated and urban employed males. Anthropologists have associated bride-price with typical egalitarian lineage based societies where the property is collectively held by the members of the corporate descent group. Dowry is associated with the individual property, the process of social stratification and social mobility. Dowry is attributed to declining of women's earning power, withdrawal of women from outdoor work and as a means of transfer of women's share in the property. A change in the women's work roles and economic polarization results in a transition from bride-price to dowry. Entry of dowry can be correlated with better education and employment of tribal males.

Since the non-tribal culture is considered as superior, attempts are made to imitate their practices such as confining women in the house. The incursion of non-tribals has led to deforestation and land alienation resulting in growing proletarianization of tribal women, rendering them subject to wage exploitation, bonded labour and even flesh trade (Rao and Rao, 1988). In Visakhapatnam district, some of the well-to-do Valmikis do not allow their women to work. They are not allowed even to work in their own fields. It is a measure to enhance one's status. This idea has been taken from the non-tribal people. Disassociating women from an economic activity confers a status on their families. Land settlement by providing documents in the name of the males by the government gave importance to men as owners of the property.

THE DYNAMICS OF IDENTITIES

The non-tribals who settled in tribal areas attempt to get identified with tribals groups pursuing similar occupations. Muniratnam Reddy (1979) points to this process from his study in Visakhapatnam district. The immigrant Golla caste, the traditional Hindu shepherds are equated with Goudu, the pastoral autochthones of the Bagatha region. The similarities of occupations facilitate a caste to rename themselves in the name of the tribe. The acceptance of tribal status by a relatively high caste, the Kapu is another significant event of caste-tribe transition in this area. They identified themselves as tribals by suffixing a local prefix 'Konda' (hill). Konda Kapu is also the popular name of the Konda Dora tribe because they are employed by the Bagatha as cultivators (Kapus in local language). Bagatha who are the local dominant tribe in Visakhapatnam district were said to have used Konda Kapu label in interacting with non-tribal communities (Mohana Rao, 1993: 45). Communities like Konda Dora who came in to contact with plains cultivators (Kapus) felt it prestigious to be called Konda Kapus (Kapu is a caste name). It has already been discussed that members of plains castes who migrated into the region assumed Konda Kapu label to get themselves identified as hill cultivators in order to escape from the purview of land transfer regulations meant for protection of tribal lands. Thurston and Aiyappan equated Konda Dora and Konda Kapu. Vizagapattam manual (Carmichael, 1869: 79) says Bagatha is a branch of Kapu. Francis (1907: 80) dealt with both Bagatha and Konda Dora under castes. N.V.K. Rao (1980) discussed the processes involved in the issue. Mohana Rao (1999: 69) mentioned similar instances in his discussion on land alienation. The Kummara (potters) caste who have settled in agency tracts have accepted an inferior social status to the Bagatha tribals, calling themselves as Konda Kummara (Hill potters), an artisan tribe equivalent to local Ozulu (hill blacksmiths and carpenters). The Konda Reddi tribe of hilly areas and Reddi caste of the plain areas are distinct and different. The government of India recognized Konda Reddis as Scheduled tribes

and later as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group and special schemes are being implemented in East Godavari, West Godavari and Khammam districts for their development. Instances of individuals from Reddi community producing bogus Scheduled tribe certificates as Konda Reddi have been reported.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the tendency among tribal communities was towards status mobility by adding caste prefixes and suffixes and claim caste status. A certain prestige seems to be associated with adopting prefixes and suffixes indicating caste labels. Reddi and Kapu form the popular prefixes/suffixes among tribes of Andhra Pradesh. One can see in many of the labels and prefixes, the intention to impress upon others or to make intelligible their relative status in the local hierarchy. Labels such as Kapu Savara, Reddi Dora, Konda Reddi, Konda Kapu, Reddi Yanadi, Kapu Gadaba stand out as examples.

In the early seventies, there were widespread rumours that Konda Kapu community will be deleted from the scheduled tribe's list by the government. Fearing that they may lose all the benefits, those who earlier claimed to be Konda Kapus started insisting that they are Konda Doras. The author has seen instances among community members in the same village, some claiming that they are Konda Doras and others to be Konda Kapus. The trend is that of a rapid shift towards Konda Dora label and towards the disappearance of Konda Kapu label. Similarly, among a community labelled Jatapu, the trend towards adopting status-giving Samantha label has declined because of apprehensions that Samantha is not recognized as a scheduled tribe. Awareness about the advantage of scheduled tribe status is resulting in a shift towards safer tribal labels (Venkata Rao, 2003).

CONCLUSION

The study of tribal communities in India followed the colonial anthropological tradition by describing them as distinctive cultures. Tribal communities have been dealt with as aborigines and indigenous people. Early anthropologists prepared ethnographic monographs on different tribal communities in the 'other cultures' tradition. While the tribes in India are distinct in racial, linguistic and cultural terms due to geographical segregation, they experienced varying levels of contact with the non-tribal population. Exceptions for this are found in places like North-East India, Andaman Nicobar Islands and other places. Contact with non-tribal resulted in the adoption of many elements of Hindu religion and the caste system. The impact of contact with non-tribals in the case of the South Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana resulted in the diffusion of practices of castes. The presence of hierarchy, commensal relations, and other caste-like features, tribal names having caste prefixes and suffixes can be mentioned to substantiate this. Many of the tribes have links with great traditional texts (as reflected in origin myths), Hindu temples, and deities. The number of

Hindu beliefs and practices existing in different communities further reveal the continuity and contact between non-tribals and tribals. The tribal communities can be considered as other cultures only partially. The communities which were taking pride in adopting caste practices and caste identity started shifting towards tribal identities as consequences of growing awareness about privileges granted to scheduled tribes by the constitution of India. Tribal identity started gained importance after Independence in the wake of competition for resources and development benefits.

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