

KULAPANCHAYATS OF MADIGA: A PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION

Dr. Mallikarjuna Chiruthoti

Centre for Folk Culture Studies, University of Hyderabad.

ABSTRACT

Kulapanchayats are very predominant in Indian social system. They play a prominent role in protecting their culture, tradition and customs. Each caste framed its dharma (norms) to be executed by danda (coercive power) which is in the hands of their caste assembly (samaya sabha), thus functioned on the paradigm of purity and pollution. Each caste is having their own panchayats and Madigas one among them. Generally Madigas are untouchable people and they treated as outcast or Panchama Varna. In modern times Madigas comes under scheduled caste category. By profession they do menial scavenging and removal of dead carcasses and leather work which is untouched by the mainstream society. Their food (eating carcasses) is also forbidden by the mainstream society. Madigas are socially excluded based on their birth and profession/occupation and food. Though they are socially excluded the Madiga caste people are excluding their own folk through the caste panchayats. But, panchayats are taking certain measures to incorporate them within the community. This paper broadly discussed about the Historicity of Kulapanchayats in general and Madiga caste Kulapanchayat in particular.

Keywords: Social Exclusion, Culture, Tradition, Caste, Panchayats

INTRODUCTION

Legal pluralism is well established in India ever since the Vedic times. What so ever the changes that occurred in judiciary and execution of justice, they were targeted for the benefit of people hailing from different cultural communities. At the same time the conventions and customs of the communities were given space in the codification of laws. Upendra Baxi, a prominent sociologist of law, argues that “we have to accept at the outset that there are systems of people’s law in India as there are systems of state law”¹. Alongside the colonial law system he finds a rich diversity of dispute-resolution institutions based on social entities other than the state. One of the most notable of these is caste panchayat. Mandelbaum (1970: 294-315) distinguishes two

¹ Baxi, U (1982), *“The Crisis of the Indian Legal System”*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi

functions of caste panchayat: the redress of ritual lapses connected to norms of purity and defilement, and the settlement of civil disputes. The depletion of natural resources in India has however, provoked new questions on panchayat' role. Several prominent Indian cultural ecologists² contend that collective management of common resources is actually grounded in the fabric of Indian society, and that the caste system plays a crucial role in that management. It is quite reasonable to suppose that caste panchayat took an active part in the distribution of justice to the people belonging to their communities. It was quite common in the Indian society to organize people belonging to the same community to form into a caste cum professional organizations. The *Samayas* (professional organizations) looked after the needs of their respective members through their office *Samaya sabha* (caste assembly). The members of the community abide the *Samaya dharma*, the code of conduct to be observed by them to identify themselves personally with the community on one hand, and on the other hand, the *Samaya dharma* attributes distinctiveness and social identity to the community among other caste groups. Regulation of social roles of their respective communities is the prime duty of the caste assemblies. It implies that the violation of caste rules in relation to the gender roles are an offence which is to be settled by the respective *Kulapanchayat* specially meant for this purpose.

The prime motive of the *Kulapanchayats* is to see that the purity of caste is maintained. It is done in two ways: the ban on commensality among members of various castes and the strict observance of rules of endogamy and exogamy as applied with reference to caste. Rules of marriage were rigidly enforced to emerge it as an institution that regulates and determine social roles. Among the traditional communities that co-existed with four-fold *Varnas* and complex *Jatis* whose origins are mixed due to proliferation of castes in changed socio-political circumstances. Before going to further we need to understand the concept of social exclusion and inclusion in general.

UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION

Social exclusion is a process through which individuals or groups either completely or partially are excluded from full participation in the society within which they live. Such social distancing from accessibility of resources is a culturally constituted phenomena and is instrumental in making and breaking social relations which may even lead to conflicts and

² Gadgil, M (1985): 'Social Restraints on Resource Utilization: The Indian Experience' in J A McNeely and D Pitt (eds), *Culture and Conservation: The Human Dimension in Environmental Planning*, Croom Helm, London, pp 135-54. Gadgil, M and R Guha (1992): *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. Gadgil, M and P Iyer (1989): 'On the Diversification of Common-Property Resource Use by Indian Society' in F Berkes (ed), *Common Property Resources: Ecology and Community-based Sustainable Development*, Belhaven, London, pp 240-55. Gadgil, M and K C Malhotra (1994 [1983]): 'The Ecological Significance of Caste' in R Guha (ed), *Social Ecology*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp 27-41.

thereby violence. At the societal level, social exclusion reflects inadequate social cohesion. At the individual level, it refers to the incapacity to participate in normatively expected social activities and to build meaningful social relations. Social exclusion can be considered as both a condition and a process, although it is most frequently treated in dynamic terms. The meaning of 'inclusion' is by no means clear and perhaps conveniently blurs the edges of social policy with a feel-good rhetoric that no one could be opposed to³. According to United Nations, social inclusion is the process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities – that everyone, regardless of their background, can achieve their full potential in life. Such efforts include policies and actions that promote equal access to (public) services as well as enable citizen's participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives⁴.

HISTORICITY OF KULAPANCHAYATS

We have the evidence of Kulapanchayats from the ancient times. In Kulapanchayats the customary law plays a magnificent role in keeping up the diversity in unity (identity) of the Indian social groups. The ancient Indian society was fragmented and segmented into different professional and cultural communities based on *Varna* and *Jati* maxims. People following similar means of livelihood were formed into a corporation, 'guild' and maintained some rules and regulations that guide them in fulfilling the roles entrusted to them by the maxim of *dharma*. For this, each guild maintained an office, *samaya* and code of conduct, *samayadharm* which is grounded on the *acara* of the clan, caste, community, region, religion, and profession. The guilds wielded extensive influence in royal courts and the elders constituted the inner circles of the king. The *Sreni* is the term that designated the trader's professional organization and its entry is open to those who are traders irrespective of the caste. In this period, they used particular term to denote the corporation of tradesmen or mechanics is '*sreni*',⁵ it means that a corporation of people, belonging to same or different caste, but following the same trade and industry. The ancient literature, both Brahmanical and Buddhist, as well as ancient inscriptions,⁶ had references to guilds, and also Gautama Dharma Sutra,⁷ states that, nearly all the important branches of industry formed themselves into the 'guilds'. The number of these guilds must have differed considerably, not only in different periods but also in different localities. It seems that all-important professionals of industries and trade were organized into such guilds. R C

³ Armstrong, Derrick, Ann Cheryl Armstrong & Ilektra Spandagou (2011) Inclusion: by Choice or by Chance?, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, Vol. 15, No. 1, February 2011, 29–39, p-31.

⁴ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/socialperspectiveondevelopment/issues/social-integration.html>

⁵ Derrett, J Duncan M (1964), "Law and the Social Order in India before the Muhammadan Conquests", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol-7, No-1, (Apr, 1964), pp-14

⁶ *Ibid*, pp-15

⁷ *Ibid*, pp-15

Majumdar⁸ gave an exhaustive list of guilds that were prevalent as corporate bodies in Ancient India.

“Workers in wood (carpenters, including cabinet makers, wheel wrights, builders of houses, builders’ ships and builders of vehicles of all sorts)⁹, workers in metal, including gold and silver¹⁰, leather workers¹¹, workers in stone, ivory workers, workers fabricating hydraulic engines (odaya mitrika)¹², bamboo workers (vasakara)¹³, braziers (kasakara¹⁴, jewelers, weavers¹⁵, potters¹⁶, oil millers (tilapishka)¹⁷, rush workers, basket makers, dyers, painters¹⁸, corn-dealers (dhamnika)¹⁹, cultivators²⁰, fisher folk, butchers, barbers and shampooers, garland makers and flower sellers²¹, mariners²², herdsmen²³, traders, including caravan traders²⁴, robbers and freebooters²⁵, forest police who guarded the caravans²⁶, money lenders²⁷, rope and mat makers²⁸, toddy-drawers²⁹, tailors³⁰ and flour makers³¹. The Satavahana inscriptions in Deccan mention several guilds like *dhamnikaseni* (corn dealers), *vasakara seni* (guild of brazier), *tesakraseni* (the polishers), *malakaras* (florists), *kolikas* (weavers), *tilapisakas* (oil mongers), *odayantrikas* (fabricators of hydraulic machines), *kamaras* (iron dealers), *loha naniyas* (iron-

⁸ Majumdar, R C (1920), “*Muga-pakka-jataka* (VI, P-1) refers to the king who assembled people from four castes and eighteen guilds and the whole army while he was going of his country which indicates the space given to the guilds in the political sphere

⁹ *Jat-VI*, p-427, *Cf Ibid*, pp-15

¹⁰ *Jat-VI*, p-427, *Cf Ibid*, pp-15

¹¹ *Jat-VI*, p-427, *Cf Ibid*, pp-15

¹² Nasik Inscription, Lud.1137, *Cf Ibid*, pp-16

¹³ Junnan Ins, Lud-1165, *Cf Ibid*, pp-16

¹⁴ Junnan Ins, Lud-1165, *Cf Ibid*, pp-16

¹⁵ Nasik Ins, Lud-1133, *Cf Ibid*, pp-16

¹⁶ Nasik Ins, Lud-1137, *Cf Ibid*, pp-16

¹⁷ Nasik Ins, Lud-1137, *Cf Ibid*, pp-16

¹⁸ *Jat-VI*, p-427, *Cf Ibid*, pp-16

¹⁹ Junar Ins, Lud-1180, *Cf Ibid*, pp-16

²⁰ Junar Ins, Lud-1180, *Cf Ibid*, pp-16

²¹ *Jat-III*, p-405, *Cf Ibid*, pp-16

²² *Jat-IV*, p-137, *Cf Ibid*, pp-16

²³ Ga, XI,p-21, *Cf Ibid*, pp-17

²⁴ Ga, XI,p-21, *Cf Ibid*, pp-17

²⁵ *Jat-IV*, p-430, *Cf Ibid*, pp-17

²⁶ *Jat-II*, p-335, *Cf Ibid*, pp-17

²⁷ Ga, XI,p-21, *Cf Ibid*, pp-17

²⁸ Ep Ind, V-23, *Cf Ibid*, pp-17

²⁹ Ep Ind, V-23, *Cf Ibid*, pp-17

³⁰ Ep Corn V Belur-236, *Cf Ibid*, pp-17

³¹ Ep Ind, XXI-60, *Cf Ibid*, pp-17

dealers), *avesanis* (artisans), *lekhakas* (scribes), *chammakras* (leather tanner), *gadhikas* (perfumers), *suvarnakaras* (goldsmiths), *manikaras* (jewelers), *mythicas* (Stone polishers), *vadakas* (carpenters) etc, that were actively involved in their caste cum professional organizations by adhering strictly to the dharma as a law. The inscriptions of Gupta rulers also attest the democracy enjoyed by the guilds in the judicial and professional dealing (*vyavahara*) matters of their business³².

The *Gautama Dharmasutra* sanctions additional occupations like agriculture, trade, tending cattle and lending money at interest the Vaisya community legitimizes the jural autonomy to their guilds. It mentions that the cultivators, traders, herdsmen, money lenders and artisans have authority to lay down their rules for their respective classes. It further states the King should give the legal decision after “having learned the (State of) affairs from those who (in each class) have authority (to speak,)”³³. It further confirmed that who has authority to speak would listen to the cases and gives the legal decisions (xi v.21). The *Dharmasastra* ordains that the organized should be treated as an important one and its rules have to be recognized as valid in the eye of law. Its representatives had also had a right to be consulted by the king in any affair that concerned. According to *Brihaspati Smriti*,³⁴ the guilds were framed the constitution and it was running on that. In this constitution of the guilds, there should be two or three or five executive officers in each guild. For example, the oil-miller guilds had two or four and gardeners’ guild,

³² Gupta dated in the year 146, i.e. 465 A.D records the gifts an endowment, the interest of which is to be applied to the maintenances of lamp which has been established in a temple for the service of sun-god. We are further told that “this gift of Brahmana’s endowment of (the temple of) the sun is the perpetual property of the guild of oilmen, of which Jivanta is the head, residing at the town of Indrapura as long as it continues in complete unity, (even) in moving away from this settlement several interesting points are to be noted in this short references to a guild. Beside the custom of designating a guild by the name of its headsmen, it distinctly points to the mobility of the body, and more important is evidently attached to the unity of guild than the place where it settles. This is an evidences of the high state of guild –organization , for none but a fully organized body could thus shift from place to place and yet retain its unity and public confidence far the most interesting account of a guild that furnished by the Masdasar stone inscription of Kumaragupta and Bhadhuvarnam. It related how a guild of silk-weavers, originally settled at lata, immigrated in to the city of Dasapur, attracted by the virtues of the king of that place. Here many of them took to different pursuits. Some archery and become good fighters, others adopted the religious topics. The prudent among them learnt astrology and astronomy, while a few gave up all worldly concerns and took to an ascetic life. Various other professionals were also followed, while a silk-weaving. Thus guilds flourished as Dasapur, and build in the year 436 A.D. a magnificent temple of the sun of its accumulated riches.

³³ Muller, Max (2006), “*Sacred books of the East : as thought of in the school of Apastamba, Gautama, Vasistha and Boudhayana*”, Vol-II, Motilal Banarsidas Publications, Delhi, pp-234

³⁴ Majumdar, R C, (1969), “*Corporate Life in Ancient India*”, Firma K L Mukhopadhyay Publications, Calcutta.pp-64

seven such members. Each group implemented different kind of punishments to their members who committed mistakes.

During the medieval times, in Andhradesa, the merchants were organized territorially as guilds at *desi* (local) *paradesi* (foreign), *nanadesi* (traders from different places) *ubhayanadesi* (itinerant traders from different territories). Different castes were consolidated into respective corporate bodies, they are; the brahmins as *mahajanas*, Vaisyas as *nagaras*, agriculturalists *chitrameli* and kapus, the weavers as *saliya janulu*, *sanis*, the temple girls as *sani munnuruvur* (*sani* 300), the traders of *balija* caste into *Pekkamdru*, and the oil mongers (*Telikis*) into *Teliki vevuru*. The artisans who took to the profession of carpentry, braziers, goldsmith, sculpting, and metalwork were organized into a guild of *panchahanamvaru*. Thus by the end of 11th century AD each village was inhabited by eighteen communities which were known as *astadasaprajalu* or *padunenimidi jatulu*. A fifteenth century inscription (Annual Report 1918,p.174) mentions brahmana, ksatriyas, vaisya, sudra, *vyavaharikas* (probably law officers), *pamcala* (panchahanamvaru), *kumbhalika* (potterers), *tantuvaya* (weavers), *vastra bhedakas*(dyers), *tila ghatakas* (oil mongers), *kurantakas* (parayas), *vastra-raksakas* (sewers of cloths), *devamgas* (spinners), *perika* (transporters of goods by pack loads), *go-rakshakas* (cow herdes), *kirataka* (hunters), *ksurakas* (barbers), *rajaka* (washermen). The list varies slightly from time to time. *vetti* was one of the twelve offices of the village that hail from *paraya* community who work as the announcers of major village events to the public.

A few examples are quoted to explain how caste assemblies look after the interests of their community. The merchant guild *Pekkandru* which runs on the *virabalanja dharma* resolved a case with regard to debt. An inscription from Suravaram, in Krishna district registers an interesting case. "A certain Kannisetti borrowed 1200 tankas from Kumara Telunguraya and Pinkuni Mamchibattu stood as surety. Since the debtor was unable to repay, the creditor collected money from surety. Then the surety sued for court of the guild for justice. The *samaya sabha* pursued the matter and settled the case. The debtor was asked to write a promissory note to the surety for the principal amount and for the interest all the merit he had acquired by excavating tanks in Akiripalli, planting gardens of palms, mangoes, gifting six cows, and performing marriages and *upanayanas* to the Brahmins; chaultries meant for guests and people should also be transferred to him". Thus the *Ayyavali Ainnurvuru* basically an itinerant guild from Karnataka got vernacularised as *pekkamdru* in Telugu by incorporating the sons of the soils - *reddi*, *settis*, *boya* communities, and acquired their new identity having legitimized in the state as a powerful international guild.

The Vaisya of Andhra were organized into a corporate body, '*nakaram*' with eighteen branches having Penugonda as headquarters (West Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh) (South Indian

Inscriptions, vol. X. nos. 429; 65; and vol. VI. no.136). *Vaisyapurananam* of Bhaskaracarya and *Vaisyavamsasudhakaram* of Mallinadha, fifteenth century works describe vividly the stern observance of *varnasramadharm* and protection from caste contamination, the *Varna samkara* through stringent and elaborate expiatory rituals, even the self-immolation. The elder of Penugonda, Ksumasetti denied giving his daughter Vasavi Kanyaka in marriage to Calukyan king Vishnuvardhana and the *eighteen samayas* of the caste and decided to immolate alive in sacrificial fire pit along with Kanyaka instead of committing the sin of *Varnasamkara*. Out of 712 *gotras* among Vaisyas, only 102 were burnt in fire pit along with Kanyaka and hence their descendents became 'Arya Vaisyas' the pure or reverend sect bearing the *gotras* of *puranic* sages and the others were known as *beharis* (traders) with totemic clans.

Contemporary literature furnishes us valuable information about the procedure adopted for administering justice basing on local norms. There were courts of justice in each village, called *dharmasabhas* and *dharmasanas*. Those who tried cases were called the *dharmasabhajanas*. They were the elders of the village belonging to the upper castes. The *Kridabhiramam* of Vallabharaya dated to fifteenth century refers to a *dharmasana* trying to settle a dispute between a courtesan and her lover.

Trials by ordeal were resorted to when there was no direct evidence. One of the methods was to make the accused hold a red-hot iron ball in his hands to prove his innocence. The author of *Simhasanadvatrimika* compares the moon to "a red hot iron ball held by the Damsel of the east to prove her innocence before the sun".³⁵

Punishments in criminal cases were very severe. High treason was punished with death. Other punishments included "removal of the skin from one's body, amputation of one's hands and feet, crushing one's body in an oil-mill until death, flaying one alive and so on"³⁶. Inscriptions (A.D. 1260)³⁷ attest to the prevalence of *angaccheda* (mutilation of body parts) as punishment. *Kukshiccheda* (mutilation of stomach and intestine), *Bijaccheda* (mutilation of testicles) were executed by *Talari* (police) of the village of Mandadam, Guntur district.

Civil offences were punished severely. Rukmangada Charitramu enumerates a number of punishments inflicted on a person who pleaded inability to pay tax or repay the debt. "They fettered him, belabored and dragged him this way and that, placed a heavy stone on his chest,

³⁵ Koravi Goparaju: *Simhasanadvatrimika*, Kakinada, 1960, part I, IV: V. 106.

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 106-107 (III: 60).

³⁷ South Indian Inscriptions, Vol. 365

pushed him down forcibly, made him stand in hot sun, removed the warm clothing from his body and screwed his thighs with iron tongs.”³⁸

Louis Dumont³⁹, mentioned about three types of assemblies (*Kulapanchayats*) prevailing in modern times in India: 1) the castes having no assembly, 2) castes having permanent assembly, and 3) castes having non-permanent assemblies. The first case is often encountered among superior castes, the castes of twice born. In such cases the authority is diffused and public opinion is effective in ex-communication or boycotting. In the case of castes having non-permanent Panchayat,⁴⁰ the assembly only meets at the guilty party, who has been excluded by the community without any formal decision. In such cases he appeals against the collective attitude before the assembly to obtain his reinstatement into the mainstream of his community, conditional to a punishment to be decided. These types of assemblies are very rare and are evident only in few castes. In case of permanent assemblies,⁴¹ there will be one or more permanent dignitaries, who are responsible for bringing infringements to its notice and convening it when the need arises. These people are always members of the committee. Most of the times, the head of the Panchayat was hereditary or elected by the people of the same caste for the lifetime. At the same time the members of the *Panchayat* are also hereditary or elected by the caste people. It means that the head of the *Panchayat* and members of the *Panchayat* have rights to continue in the assembly as long as the committee exists. But it is not a compulsion that there should be only one chief.

Meetings of *Kulapanchayats*:

The assembly sometimes specially convened and it may also, perhaps more often meet at the request of plaintiff on the occasion of one of the banquets which mark family ceremonies (marriages, funerals) and where the members of the fraternity are present in large numbers or again on the occasion of one of the greatest regional pilgrimages, where even several fraternities, corresponding to several assemblies, may meet and discuss reforms to be made in the sub castes customs. The group which meets in official assembly is often called as ‘*biradari*’ or ‘fraternity’.⁴²

The territorial extent of the caste assembly can’t be demarcated clearly. It is purely empirical and subject to great variations. The assemblies of some of the specialist castes cover a larger area

³⁸ Mallana (1954), “*Rudramangadu Charitramu*”, Madras, pp-169 (IV: V. 112)

³⁹ Dumont, Louis (1970), “*Homo Hierarchicus: An Essay on the Caste System*”, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp-173

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp-173-74

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp-174

⁴² *Ibid*, pp-174

than that of the farmer. For example the assembly of the washermen and barbers etc... These castes will not cover wider territorial area as they are spread on each limited to a single village. One more striking element of the caste assembly is that, the dominant caste exercise strict control over the relations between castes in a village.⁴³

The Jurisdictions of the *Kulapanchayats*:

The jurisdiction of the assembly goes beyond the domain of internal justice. It can decree rules and exercise a controlling function. It depends upon the professional interests of the groups against the third parties, which have some kind of privilege. The caste assembly controls the maintenance of '*Jajmani*' relations,⁴⁴ both punishing a member who attempts to take someone else's patron or who has been patently remiss in his professional duties and boycotting the patron who, without sufficient reason in the caste's eyes attempts to put an end to the services of one of its members or replaces him by another.⁴⁵

Different professional castes depend on the reciprocity of the services of each other. Sometimes there will be a dispute in such reciprocity. In such conditions one caste tries to show that one caste is independent from the other. For example barbers boycott dancing girls who refused to dance for their marriages.

The jurisdiction of *Kulapanchayat* is conceived as extending to any matter in which the men of the caste considered that the interests or reputation of the castes require action to be taken against a member of the caste.⁴⁶ One obvious thing to be noted here is that there will be more rigid control on those castes which are having a permanent and continuous system of controlling bodies. Contrary to it, it will be least among the higher and generally speaking better-educated classes whose distribution is wide.

Scope of the *Kulapanchayat*:

The *panchayat* deal the cases of both civil and penal matters. They settle the conflicts, whether by arbitration or by passing sentence. Generally the authority will be very strong when it is a matter of preserving the states of a group and weaker in other aspects. The serious crimes like murder or theft are considered to be less serious than an infringement of the rules about food. Offence which the *panchayat* is considered to be serious a person who impure or degrades the status of the society by going against the established commensal taboo would be

⁴³ *Ibid*, pp-175

⁴⁴ Dumont, Louis (1970), "*Homo Hierarchicus: An Essay on the Caste System*", pp-175

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp-176

⁴⁶ Hutton, J H (1977), "*Caste in India: Its nature, Function and Origins*", pp-102

excommunicated by the *panchayat*. Likewise, regarding marriage, every caste will be following some particular customs. If anybody goes contrary to it, he will be treated as an outcaste. For example, if a person marries a widow where caste rules do not permit, he will be excommunicated. The *Kulapanchayat* will involve in some matters of the caste affairs.

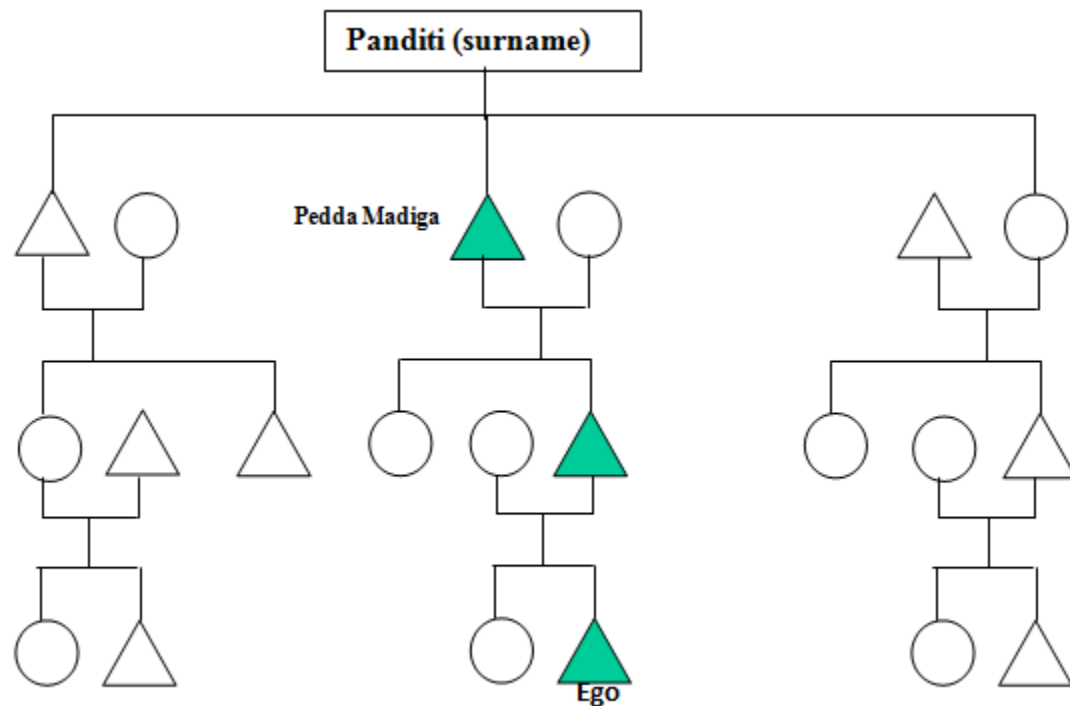
Formation of Madiga Kulapanchayat:

The Madigas deserve mentions about their *Kulapanchayats*. They constitute one of the present scheduled castes in Andhra Pradesh and for they construct their identity as the first and foremost dwellers of Andhra, the *Adi-Andhras*. The *Aitareya Brahmana*, a Brahminical text belonging to sixth century BC refers to *madugas* along with other communities like *Andhra* and *chunchus*. Madugas are considered as Madigas since the Manusmriti (10th Chapter, VV.47-49) mentions that the *Medas*, *Andhras*, *Kunkus*, and *Madgus*, took to the profession of the slaughter of wild animals.

The Madiga caste people have formed a *Kulapanchayat* to look after the caste issues. The Madiga *Kulapanchayats* are very predominant in the South costal Andhra especially in Nellore and Prakasham. The Madiga Kulapanchayats in these districts are formed and run by their caste people only. Each Madiga village has their own Kulapanchayat. Each Kulapanchayat is varying from one village to the other. The uniqueness of the Kulapanchayat in Chamadala⁴⁷ village is the committee comprises a *Pedda Madiga*, and other four committee members. Traditionally, the key positions in the Madiga caste in Chamadala village like, *Pedda Madiga* (elder of the community) comes from one lineage, the priest (*pujari*) comes from another lineage. The Kulapanchayat head in this village comes from 'Panditi' surname (which is the surname for more number of families among the Madiga community in Chamadala). Since the beginning days of Kulapanchayat of Madiga community decides to give the panchayat headship to that particular lineage because they are more in number. Likewise, the *pujari* (priest) of Mathamma (the mother goddesses of Madiga) temple gives to a surname 'Moddu', which is the surname for second highest families), and four other members of which two belongs to the same surname (Panditi), to which *Pedda Madiga* family belongs, but they should not be from the *Pedda Madiga* family and his descent family members. And two members belong to two other surnames called Moddu and Manda⁴⁸. This can be shown in the following diagram.

⁴⁷ Chamadala village is one of the major Grampanchayat in Jaladhanki Mandal of Nellore District of Andhra Pradesh. Chamadala is a heterogeneous caste village. It has at least 14 castes and two tribal group's habitats. Each caste habitation is confined to a particular geographical area, in other words, the village is the combination of different caste groups confining to a particular locality.

⁴⁸ Chinna Venkaiah, Panditi is Pedda Madiga of that Madiga community in this Chamadala village,



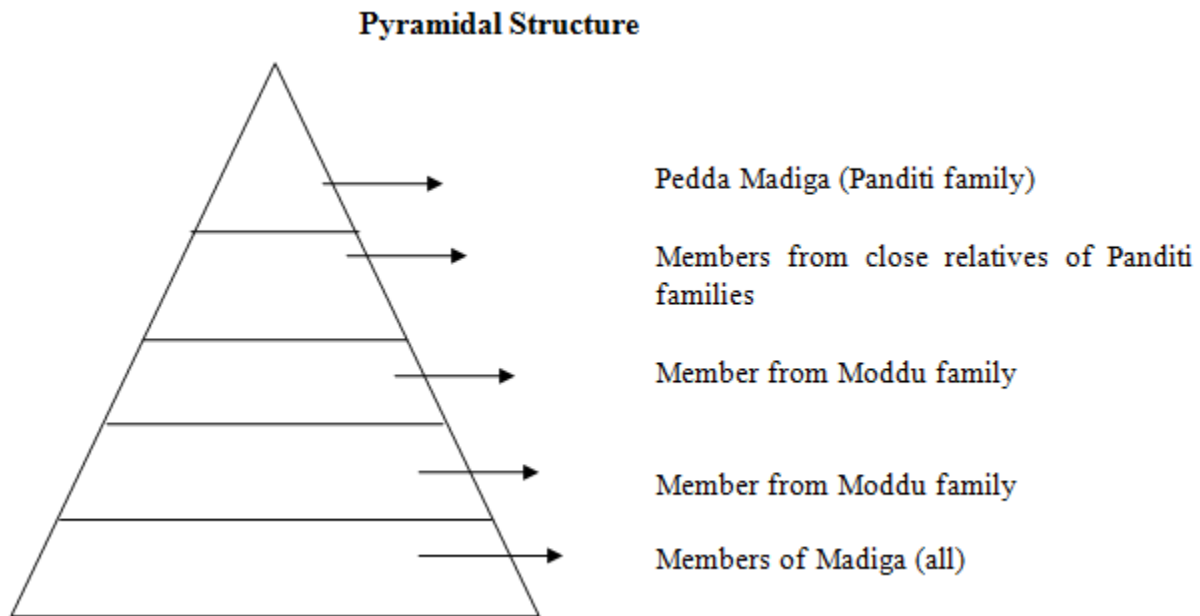
Note: Δ = Male, O = female,

The above diagram shows that the ‘Panditi’ is a surname, which is the surname for the majority of the families in the Chamadala village. *Pedda Madiga* can only be selected from a family that is attached to a surname, which is a surname of the Majority of the families in the village. So, Panditi is a major surname in the village. The Post of *Pedda Madiga* only can descent from the paternal side, the male ego in every generation is eligible candidate for the post, in other words the post is hereditary for the Panditi family male ego. Neither *Pedda Madiga*’s Brother’s Son (BS), nor his Sister’s Son (SS) are eligible for the post of *Pedda Madiga*. In the case of *Pujari* (priest) also it is true that, except from his family and his descent group (BS and SS) no one is eligible for the post of *Pujari*.⁴⁹

Structure of *Kulapanchayat* in Chamadala Village:

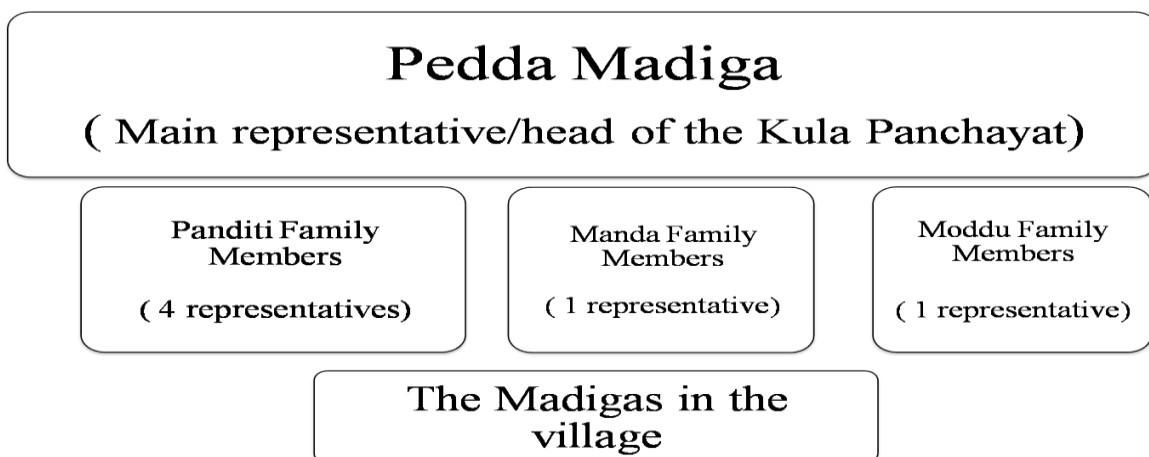
The *Kulapanchayat* in Chamadala village is having the following structure.

⁴⁹ Chinna Ramaiah Panditi is Madiga person in this village, Chamadala Village.



As seen in the above diagram the Madiga *Kulapanchayat* in Chamadala village denote pyramidal power structure wherein the *Pedda Madiga* and his close relatives enjoy the power and dictate terms to the others in the village. Though the family dominance is not well appreciated by the others, yet they are bound by tradition and continue to live in the subordinate position.

Composition of the members in Madiga *Kulapanchayat*



As seen from the above, the *Kulapanchayat* has seven members who are recognized as elders in the village and their decisions are considered to be final.

Qualifications of Pedda Madiga:

Anybody in the Madiga community desired to become *Pedda Madiga* then he should fulfill the following qualifications:

1. The person should be a Male member
2. He should be from the dominant clan group among Madiga in the village
3. He should belong to Chamadala village (by birth)
4. He should be married
5. He should have children (except newly married)
6. His wife should be alive⁵⁰

Functions and rights of the committee and its members:

Kulapanchayat among Madiga community in Chamadala is a multi functional body; which looks into the matters of religious aspects, property disputes, and plays a key role at the time of marriage functions and also disputes arising out of marital life.

Pedda Madiga is the prime member among the Madiga caste people in Chamadala village; he represents the caste in several occasions, for example at the times of marriage *Pedda Madiga* acts as the elder for the bride or bridegroom whoever may be the resident of the village. The marriage system among the Madiga caste in Chamadala is a typical one. From the stage of searching a girl or a boy, the family, to which the girl/boy belongs, asks the *Pedda Madiga* to give his representation along with the family members, because they consider the presence of the *Pedda Madiga* in such an activity is an honor for them. If the match is conformed for a girl/boy with the same community boy/girl (resident of the village or non-resident of the village), she would engage with the boy in a meeting and fulfill some formalities like sending *Pradanam*, (it's a kind of practice to send *Akulu* (betel leaves), *Vakkalu* (betel nuts) and *Ariselu* (a kind of sweet made up of rice flour and jaggery), wrapped in a cloth, which should be done by the *Pedda Madiga*. The bridegroom's family sends to *pradanam* to the bride's house one day before the marriage. It is an occasion and conforms or indicates that she is engaged to that boy, and the next day the marriage will take place. If marriage of a bride, it takes place in this village the *pradanam* that is sent by the bridegroom should be opened by the *Pedda Madiga*. The *pradanam* separates into *pogus*, (nothing but parts or shares) accordingly the number of Madiga caste houses in the village, and five more special *pogus* put apart from the other *pogus* as a part of tradition to distribute them to five important icons among the Madiga caste in the village *i.e.*, the first part or share will be given to Mathamma (the goddess of Madiga), the second share will be kept as *Devara*

⁵⁰ Venkata Ramanaih, Moddu is member of the *Kulapanchayat* in Madiga caste in this village, Chamadala Village

Thamboolam pogu which is given to *Ayyavari Ammavari Pujari*⁵¹, and the remaining three, four and fifth parts or shares will be given to the *Pedda Madiga*, *Pedda Golla* (a traditional friend of Madiga from Golla caste) and *pujari* (priest) of Mathamma respectively. The remaining *pogus* will be distributed to the each and every family of Madiga community in the village. The *pogu* of the Mathamma will be taken by the *Pedda Madiga* or the other persons of *Kulapanchayat* members in a rotation system. In the marriage, the ‘calf’ should be sacrificed and prepared as a food item without which the marriage function is considered as in complete. In any case, during the marriage function, if food is prepared without the beef, then nobody even smells the aroma of the food items, and they will demand for it until the beef is prepared⁵². Another important role by the *Kulapanchayat* was celebration of Mathamma (the mother goddesses) *jathara*. It is traditional and big festival in the community. They celebrate it for three days. Each day is very auspicious to the community members. The *Pedda Madiga* along with other committee members work together to make *jathara* success.

The other important role the *Kulapanchayat* play is resolve the disputes like inter-caste marriages, property disputes, thefts, fight within the family members and other disputes will be resolved in the *Panchayat*. If the girl is eloped with a boy, who is not from the same community, then the issue will be brought to the *Kulapanchayat* where the decision will be taken to ex-communicate the girl in the presence of community members and with the family members. If any family member is found as guilty against the *Kulapanchayats* decision (communicate with the girl), then they will be ex-communicated from the community. If it is other than the family member, then they will be fined. Though the girl’s family, stays away from the girl still they have to pay some fine to restore their position in Madiga caste, because, when the moment girl eloped with another caste boy, according to the Madiga caste rule, they lost their normal position in the Madiga community.

If elopement occurs within the Madiga community, the *Kulapanchayat* will call the family members and if possible the eloped girl/boy to the *arugu*⁵³ asking their explanations, and levy the penalty upon the family according to their economical status. And they will be asked to organize a function for the community or to pay the equal amount to organize the function, but it is upon to the committee whether to organize a function or not. If anyone looks forward for the marriage, he/she has to first clear his/her due penalties levied by the *Kulapanchayat* if he/she was proved guilty in any case, otherwise no community member will attend to the marriage function⁵⁴.

⁵¹ The person appointed to look after death ceremonies among the Madiga community

⁵² *Ibid*

⁵³ It is a place where the Madiga Panchayat elders can sit to give the judgment on the issues. It will be located in the Madiga colony only.

⁵⁴ Ramanaiyah Panditi is member of the Madiga community and also head to the one batch of the Panditi families,

Pedda Madiga is the whole and sole responsible person to assemble the committee at the *Arugu*, for which he can employ a person to communicate with the other *panchayat* members as well as the community members. He has the final choice to take decisions about anything that brought to the *Kulapanchayat*. In case of contradiction between *Pedda Madiga*'s opinion and remaining committee members, the *Pedda Madiga* will take the majority committee members' opinion as the final decision. But, if the *Pedda Madiga* finalizes the case and takes a decision then the decision will prevail at any cost. If the case is too complex and difficult to deal with, then the *Pedda Madiga* will ask *Pedda Golla* for help in taking decision. In the absence of *Pedda Madiga*, any person, irrespective of male and female, from his family or the ex-*Pedda Madiga* can be active to deal the issues⁵⁵.

The people belongs to Madiga community should obey Panchayat judgments. If anyone fails to pay the penalties or disobeys the *Kulapanchayat* judgment they are strictly illicit from the auspicious and inauspicious occasions held in the Madiga community. If a person commit mistake and unable to pay the penalty he or she will be excused from the penalty by accepting their guilty and they should distribute the betel leaf and betel nut to the entire community. It shows that he/she is accepting the mistake in front of all the community members. Except inter-caste marriage the committee is flexible in their community members.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the above discussion that the *Kulapanchayats* of the Madiga community are still focused on the practices of commensality. It is not simply the production relations that form the basis for social groupings in India, but clubbed with it is a religious ideology evolved on purity-pollution concept, which framed social groups into a hierarchical alignment. Pollution was controlled through the functioning of two taboos: (i) regarding kinship in the context of marriage and (ii) the concern for eating with or taking food from only those ritually permitted. Levying fines or excommunicating members is noticeable mostly in the cases of intermarriage or dining. It is very clear that *Kulapanchayats* are excluding their own caste members in the name of certain acts or norms and in the same way, they are included by the *Kulapanchayat* by doing certain acts.

⁵⁵ Venkaiah Manda, is a person who appointed as a messenger to call the persons of the Madiga community for meetings in this community