

The Hanbars of South India: A Brief Ethnographic Profile

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Abstract

In this paper a brief ethnographic profile of the Hanbars a backward community largely of Belgaum and Bijapur districts of Karnataka is given. The Hanbars are also described as Krishna Golla or Krishna Gavali, who claim their descent from the Yadavas of Mathura in north India. It is believed that the Hanbar community is wide spread in Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The Hanbars are well adapted to the region they have inhabited. The Hanbars belong to the Australia group. Traditionally the Hanbars are cattle-keepers. In the last several decades, they have adopted agricultural way of life. The Hanbars consider themselves as Hindus and perform Hindu rituals and ceremonies. The awareness of social justice programmes among the Hanbars today have made them to enter into governmental and non-governmental sectors.

Introduction:

The Hanbars also called Krishna-Gavali or Krishna-Golla claim their descent from the puranic race of Yadavas, are chiefly found in Belgaum and Bijapur districts of Karnataka state and also in the Southern Maratha country i.e., Kolhapur and Sangli districts of Maharashtra state. It is believed that Hanbar are the descendants of the Yadavas who lived in the neighbourhood of Mathura in North India. Later they migrated to Deccan and from Deccan to Kalyan (now called as Basava Kalyan in Bidar District of Karnataka state), and from Kalyan in the then Hyderabad Nizam dominion moved to the different places in Karnataka and Maharashtra and up to down south in Tanjore which is in Tamil Nadu.

The term Hanbar means "a possessor of cattle with upright horns" (Enthoven 1992:56). The term Hanbar' as given in the Marathi dictionary (Molsworth 1947) means strong and sturdy men. 'Hanam' means bulls and cows of straight and long horns. The word ANABU in Kannada means security and pledge. Hence, it may mean that the people of this community were reliable warriors

Wherever the Hanbars migrated they adopted the culture of the local people. The new inhabitants took the habits of Deccan people and acquired their language, tradition and culture i.e., they did speak different languages in different regions. There has been a continuous process of racial mixture by inter group marriages. Similarly in the sub continent itself people have migrated from one part to another due to historical reasons, hence, it is difficult to say to which race the Hanbars actually belong. But physical anthropologists have recognized them as they belong to Australoid group.

Enthoven (1922) writes that according to their caste rules the Hanbars ought to live in forests, keep herds of cattle and sell milk and butter, eat only once a day, wear a wet cloth and never look at lamp or engage in tillage. Now-a-days they do not adhere to these rules and many of them till land and a few serve as messengers and farm labourers.

The Hanbars community today is found mostly scattered in the states of Maharashtra and Karnataka. Those who lived in Maharashtra have adopted Marathi as their mother tongue and also call themselves as Krishna-Gavali or Krishna-Golla. The Hanbars who have settled Karnataka have adopted Kannada as their mother tongue and local Kannada culture. As stated above, cattle herds were the wealth of the Yadavas and in Kannada language wealth is termed "Hana". Hence, the local people called them as "Hanbars" ie. Those who possess "Hana". The Hanbars say they are descendants of the Yadavas by whom Lord Krishna was brought up. Hence, the name 'Krishna-Gavali' or 'Krishna-Golla' the cattle keepers

In physical features the Hanbars are well built and robust. Even the women have above the average height. All these features are verified among the people under survey. "Hanam" means strong and sturdy, hence the name Hanbars. In their internal social organization the Hanbars are divided into exogamous clans called Bedagu. There are 12 Bedagu. Each settlement is headed by a Khatedar called Patil, Naik, Khot, Hegade, etc., and managed by council of elders (Pancharu).

The Hanbars were a pastoral group and have their own socio-economic-religious entity. Over the years when they moved out of their traditional homeland in search of better pastoral land for their cattle, they began to change not only in their economic field but also in others. As they moved out of their homeland, they split in several groups to facilitate in feeding their cattle. When the grazing land dwindled owing to utilization of fallow land for cultivation and other purposes, many of them were forced to rear sheep and goats, which could graze on hill slopes without much difficulty. The Hanbars finally abandoned their traditional life of pastoralist and settled in villages. This process of change from nomadism to semi-nomadism and finally to settled life, has taken place in a particular direction and the trend and phase of this change is the main purpose of this study.

Conclusion:

The conclusion drawn from the historical analysis and the one drawn from the analysis of the actual situation in the field seems to strengthen each other. A change has come about in the life of the Hanbars who were for a long time cattle-rearers in their outlook and economic pursuits. They are taking agriculture and are entering into wider national economic institution.

The Hanbars settlements are located within a distance of one to two kilometres from the main villages. The extensive Hanbars settlements are called Hanbarwadi. The Hanbars lived in small and more or less isolated settlements. This physical environmental situation has largely shaped their life and social organization.

The Hanbars consider themselves as Hindus. All religious rites and rituals are in simple form and are Hindu rites and ceremonies. Thus, the religion of the Hanbars is seen only as a type of folk Hinduism. That is why this community can be called, caste like community. Because of educational facilities availed by some members of the community, now-a-days the Hanbars are found in few governmental and non-governmental sectors and added to this the Hanbars have also taken active part in politics in the capacity of member of gram-panchayat, taluka-panchayat and zilla-parishad councils. Though this sort of change is found among the Hanbars, the older generation still has not given up their age-old traditional activities. The change which has occurred seems to be mainly due to educational and political awareness among the community.

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As a result the Hanbars are also imbibing the attitudes that are inherent in the new types of activities. But this process is not complete. The older values and institutions of nomadic life are still prevalent.

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