

## Part 1

### Chapter 4 The organisation of Madiga life

#### Families and the larger scale

In 1969 T.R. Singh published, with some up-dating, the detailed study of Madigas in Medak district of Telangana that he had researched in the field 10 or so years earlier. By then he had as a context S.C. Dube's major study, *Indian Village* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1955), the product of research in 1951-52, based at the Arts faculty of Osmania University in Hyderabad. Singh himself had worked on it as a research assistant in the extension team associated with the community development project that Dube directed. He went on subsequently to his own PhD project on the Madigas of 15 villages. Both studies now, like everything in this book, bear witness to a past which contains much that is painful as well as detail that is interesting and enriching. They provide base lines for understanding the change that has been occurring, for better or sometimes perhaps worse, over the past three generations. We shall return in Part 2 to Dube's village perspective, to the village as the context of life for all its inhabitants. We shall see how such a context was a trap for its Madigas and the perspective one that distorted even what was positive for Madigas in facing their difficult lives.

The present chapter, like Singh's study and the other chapters of Part 1, has a different and central focus. It is on Madigas for themselves rather than for others. The picture Singh provides is exceptional in the insight he offers here. The most general lesson to be learnt from him is the social complexity and variety of what lies behind the fateful name of Madiga. With the complexity there is locally valued variation in almost ever respect. What is done, arranged and divided in one way in one place is sure to be somewhat differently done in another, even when that is between one village and the next. His book offers a unique basis for informed comparison with evidence from other places and other regions and for understanding change as it occurred in subsequent generations. In the next section of this chapter we move on from Singh's evidence to evidence from 40 years later, from a different region and a small town rather than a village. Following that, Madigas' caste relationships with 'significant others' are considered. This significance has, as will be seen, broader bases than the location within structures of power and wealth in particular villages under which Madigas laboured and suffered.

**T.R. Singh 1969.** *The Madiga: a study of social structure and change.* Lucknow: **Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society.**  
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[pp 41-46]

In Medak district, where fieldwork for this work was largely done, the Madiga are divided into two endogamous groups: Tangedi or Tega Madiga, and Gosangi<sup>a</sup> or Gosika Madiga.

The Tangedi Madiga take their name from a plant called *tangedi*, the bark of which is used in tanning hides. The Madiga use this plant in their traditional occupation, and a section of the caste is known by it. The clean caste people have a different version. According to them a *tangedi* plant is always crooked, and one needs considerable effort to make it straight; a Tangedi Madiga too is never straightforward and needs considerable pressure to mend his habits. The plant has to be beaten hard with a stick for removing its bark, and only after a good deal of beating it becomes useful for burning; in the same way a Tangedi Madiga will not work properly unless he is punished every now and then. The Tangedi are found in almost all the villages of Medak district. In some villages they are also called *Tega* Madiga because they work as village menials.

The Gosangi or Gosika Madiga, a small group, are found only in some villages of Medak

District. They claim superiority over the Tangedi Madiga. They do not eat beef or pork, nor do they work in leather. In some villages they do not even work as village menials. Most of them work as agricultural labourers. It is said that the Gosangi at first ate beef but refused buffalo meat, and as such received this name. Because the Tangedi Madiga ate buffalo they are placed lower than the Gosangi.

These two groups are endogamous, and even interdining is not permitted between them.

The endogamous groups of the Madiga in other districts of Telangana are:

1. Sambari Madiga
2. Jingari or Zingar Madiga
3. Pinchini Madiga
4. Dhore Madiga
5. Dokkali Madiga
6. Manne Madiga
7. Areti Madiga

Tangedi or Tega Madiga are found in large numbers in these districts also.

The Sambari Madiga work in leather, but unlike the Tangedi Madiga they do not claim the dead animals of the village. They do not work for the village officials, nor can they be called upon to perform *etti* (forced labour)<sup>b</sup>. They buy hides from the Tangedi Madiga or local dealers and make leather articles from them. The Tangedi Madiga also make *chappals* and articles of agricultural use, but they supply them only to the cultivators as part of their customary obligations to the latter to whom they are affiliated in terms of fixed patron-client relationship. The Sambari Madiga on the other hand make *chappals* only for general sale. The Tangedi Madiga make *chappals* and also mend them when necessary; the Sambari only make new ones and never mend them. The Jingari Madiga are saddlemakers. The Pinchini Madiga specialize in making broomsticks. They make most of their living from this work. The Dhore Madiga buy raw hides either from the Tangedi Madiga or from Muslim contractors, and sell them again after they have been tanned. The Tangedi Madiga also tan hides, but they tan only the hides of the dead animals belonging to their patrons. In some villages the Sambari Madiga buy hides only from Dhore Madiga, and not from the Tangedi Madiga. The Dokkali Madiga collect bones of animals. They also buy bones from the Tangedi Madiga and sell them to the contractors dealing in bones. The Areti Madiga work in horns. In the hilly tracts of Warangal and Adilabad is found a group of Madiga called Manne Madiga who are said to live by thieving and robbery. However, the Madiga who work as labourers for the Raj Gonds of Adilabad are also called the Manne Madiga. They only work as labourers and do not remove dead cattle or work in leather.

The Tangedi or Tega Madiga are divided into two sects: Tirmandar and Ibotidar. The latter are also called Vibhotidar<sup>c</sup>. The Tirmandar Madiga are Vaishnavite and the latter Saivaite. The Tirmandar Madiga marks his forehead with vermilion powder, while the Ibotidar smears ashes across his forehead, wears lingam – a phallic symbol, and imitates the ways of the Lingayats. Cases of intermarriage between the Tirmandar and the Ibotidar are not lacking. The Ibotidar regard themselves as superior to the Tirmandar. When a Tirmandar girl goes to live with her Ibotidar husband she has to undergo a purificatory rite after which she starts wearing the phallic symbol round her neck. She is instructed not to take it out even when she goes to her father's house. She also smears ashes across her forehead every morning. Custom permits an Ibotidar Madiga to eat his food even before the dead body of a close relative is buried. But a Tirmandar will not do this. He will not cook food as long as a dead body is in the house or in the colony. After the cremation and a purificatory bath alone can any cooking be done. There is also a difference in the offering of food to the dead on the

third day after death. The Tirmandar cooks food to be offered in his house. The chief mourner proceeds to the grave with this food and offers it to the grave. The Ibotidar does the opposite. He cooks food at the burial ground and offers some to the grave and partakes of the rest himself. Both Tirmandar and Ibotidar claim their descent from Jambavant, the originator of the caste. Belonging to different sects, they have adopted different customs and rituals, and today they are practically two separate endogamous divisions.

The Madiga do not have any exogamous *gotra* or clans. The only exogamous divisions they have are agnatic lineages called *vamsham* and *inti-peru*. There is considerable confusion in regard to their use of these terms. Some people use them synonymously and interchangeably; while others make a sharp distinction between the two. According to the latter, each *vamsham* has a common ancestor five, six or even more generations above in the genealogical scale, while the common ancestor of an *inti-peru* rarely goes above three generations in this scale. Their existence is not explained by mythology or oral tradition.

Village	Vamsham	Inti-peru	No. households
Toopran	1. Erraballi	1. Gajjelli	15
		2. Kalakanti	10
	2. Sargala	1. Sargala	7
		2. Kichchugari	5
	None	1. Vadyaram	12
		2. Enrelli	6
		3. Bangarugalla	4
		4. Bijlipuram	1
		5. Kondapuram	1

While some lineages have only one name, i.e. *inti-peru*; others are grouped together also into *vamshams*. The former may roughly be called a minimal lineage; the latter a maximal lineage. However, a dividing line between the two cannot always be neatly drawn. Exogamy is based essentially on considerations of nearness or remoteness in the kinship scale. The names of *vamshams* and *inti-perus* are incidental and associational, following places, peculiarities or professions of an ancestor from whom the name is derived.

In the absence of accurate genealogical records extending to several generations it is difficult to reconstruct the history of the formation of *vamshams* and *inti-peru* with any degree of reliability and certainty. Poor memories of the informants in regard to their own family tree is also not conducive to any fruitful search in this direction. From fragmentary accounts that I was able to gather from the families covered in the preceding Table, it appears that *vamshams* and *inti-peru* follow a developmental cycle. Large *inti-perus* tend to become a *vamsham*; the latter being divided into two or more *inti-perus*. To illustrate the process the division of the Madiga into *vamshams* and *inti-perus* in Toopran can be examined. [...]

Some generations ago there were two brothers of Erraballi *vamsham*. One of them was married in a village called Sargala. Having quarrelled with his brother he went to his wife's father's village and lived there for some time. When he came back to Toopran with his wife and children to take charge of his ancestral property, he was called Sargala. This name remained associated with his children also. Beginning as an *inti-peru* the Sargala developed into a *vamsham*. In this way the Erraballi *vamsham* broke up into two: Erraballi and Sargala. A few generations later an Erraballi man went to his father-in-law's village called

Gajjelli to live temporarily with his wife. The name of this village got associated with his name as with the names of his descendants as well. However, Gajjelli inti-peru has not yet developed into a *vamsham*. The Kalakanti *inti-peru* was also formed in a like manner. The Sargala *vamsham* also expanded as time went on. A member of this *vamsham* was a stammerer and produced a peculiar nasal sound. His descendants were called Kichchugari. The name was derived from a Telugu word describing the peculiarity of the ancestor. These again only constitute and *inti-peru* so far. [...] One may not marry into either type of identified lineage; there is nothing to prevent one from marrying into a lineage bearing the same name as one's own but to which one is not agnatically related.

### **Social structure: family**

[pp 50-55]

Among the Madiga, a widow is free to remarry, though some widows whose children are grown up prefer to stay with their children, and look after them and their property. Young widowers usually also remarry even if they have children from their previous spouses. In some villages it is regarded as the duty of the parents-in-law to provide a widower with another wife. This is necessary specially if the widower's children are very young. Remarriage of a middle-aged widower with children, however, often evoked criticism from people. Medi Sailu of Amirpet became a widower at the age of thirty-five. He had an unmarried daughter of 12 years and a son who was 10 years old. The widower's lineal relatives were not interested in his remarriage; they were more interested in marrying off the girl. But contrary to their wishes, Sailu decided to remarry a widow who had children from her previous husband. People were heard criticising him: 'Look at him. He has grown up children. Still he is thinking of marrying that widow. He should instead have made arrangements for the marriage of his daughter. He is indeed selfish.' The supporters of Sailu put it like this, 'What should he do? He is *mogabhai* (simple man or a man without a wife), without any experience of domestic work. How will he work in the field and also cook and feed the children. He should have someone to look after him and his children. It is true that a step-mother is a step-mother, but she is also a human being. If she feeds her own children three times in a day she will at least feed the husband's children once a day.' Sailu married the widow and has children from her also.

An ageing widower may marry a widow who has children from her previous husband, and treat the woman's children as his own. Guddi Gaura of Madhawaram was about forty-five when his wife died leaving only an unmarried daughter behind. The girl was grown-up and was married in another village. Gaura married a widow who had two children, a daughter of 12 years and a son of 10 years. The girl was married off in the same village, and the mother and son lived with Gaura. Gaura made some interesting remarks about his wife and children. He said, 'I have brought a cow from the market and with the cow were two calves. People say that the cow is mine but the calves do not belong to me. They cannot inherit my property. How is it possible, to take the cow and drive away the calves? They are as much mine as is the cow. The girl is married off. Her mother will cook food for me. The boy will light a lamp in my house after my death.'

There are very few polygynous compound families among the Madiga. Even if they are formed, they do not last long. If a man takes as his second wife a woman other than his first wife's sister or cousin there are greater possibilities of quarrels in the house. Interesting descriptions of quarrels between co-wives are related by the Madiga. 'Madiga women are quarrelsome. Two women cannot live in peace. A man who marries two women leads a miserable life and sometimes he is placed in very awkward situations. One of his wives would insist on him sleeping with her but another would not let him go. One would hold his

legs and another his arms and there would be a regular tug of war. The poor man is helpless because he cannot satisfy either of the two'. Sometimes polygynous compound families are formed in the following way. If a woman does not have children, she does not get proper treatment from her husband and his people. Most women in such situations divorce their husbands. But if they are cross-cousins<sup>d</sup> of their husband, they may advise them to remarry and have children to continue the line. In Amirpet, Kommu Narsimma and his wife were cross-cousins. They did not have a child for a long time. The wife did not like to run away or to divorce her husband because she was fond of him and did not want to bring a bad name to her husband's and parents' families. Her mother-in-law wanted to see them have a child and specially a son. In the mean-while one of the wife's cousins divorced her husband and went back to her parents' village. She had a small child, a boy, from her previous husband. Narsimma's wife advised him to take this woman as his second wife, and he did so. Ellayya of Kanjerla, a village six miles from Madhawaram, lived with his wife and children. Durgi of Madhawaram was married to Balayya of Kanjerla. Durgi used to approach him for help whenever her husband beat her and treated her badly. The Madiga of that village suspected her when Ellayya started frequenting Durgi's house very often. They called a meeting and decided that Ellayya should leave his wife and children and take Durgi as his wife and pay the marriage expenses to Durgi's husband. Ellayya's wife was his mother's brother's daughter. She did not want to leave him. She advised him to keep Durgi in his house. Ellayya, his wife and children, Durgi and her son ran away from Kanjerla and settled down in Madhawaram. Since then, this polygamous compound family has lived in Madhawaram. [...] Ideally brothers should continue to live under one roof even after their parents' death. But most of them separate soon after their marriage. Theoretically a woman is inferior to a man, but in practice she is not so. If the husband does not treat her properly, she takes another man as her husband. If he beats her, she can also beat him. If he teases her and taunts her, she also retaliates in like manner.<sup>e</sup>

### **Social structure: authority**

[pp 65-68]

Authority in a multi-caste Telangana village has to be viewed at two different levels: the intra-caste level and the inter-caste level. On the one hand the Madiga in each village have a separate authority organization consisting of a caste council and a headman; on the other they are also represented in the general village council through their headman.

Caste authority operates at three different levels. Each family has a recognized head who is responsible for the acts of omission and commission on the part of the family members, and is answerable to the head of the minimal lineage in the first instance. The head of the family as well as the head of the minimal lineage are answerable to the caste council and to the headman of the caste in the settlement.

Minor offences are expected to be dealt with by the head of the family. Admonitions and light punishment by him are considered adequate. If he is lax or ineffective he may be directed to be more watchful or strong, and may even be admonished by the head of the lineage, the caste headman or the caste council.

A head of lineage is similarly supposed to watch the activities of all the families belonging to the lineage. Negligence and ineffectiveness on his part may provoke the headman of the caste or the caste council to rebuke him.

The caste council of the settlement consists of all the heads of lineages and the headman of

the caste. The latter is known as *myatari*. If the Madiga colony consists of two recognizable units, as in many larger villages, there are two *myatari* for them. The head of the older colony is the senior headman and is known as *pedda myatari*. The head of the relatively more recent colony functions as the junior headman and is known as *chinna myatari*. Both the headmen are represented in the caste council; the senior one enjoying precedence and conducting its proceedings.

The more serious infringements of caste norms by the members in the settlement come up for decision before the caste council. An analysis of over one hundred concrete cases coming before them mostly relate to: (i) sex offences, especially adultery and incest; (ii) inheritance and division of ancestral property; (iii) ill-treatment of dependents and members of the family, especially the aged; (iv) personal quarrels involving violence or serious threat of violence; (v) stealing and damage to property of other members of the caste; (vi) failure in discharge of contractual obligations to patrons and service-rendering castes having traditional arrangements for exchange of services; (vii) failure in timely repayment of debts; (viii) lack of proper courtesy to or improper behaviour towards the upper castes involving risk of possible violent retaliation by them; (ix) defiance of caste authority or refusal to accept the decisions of caste functionaries; and (x) undue familiarity with or latitude towards the satellite castes involving breaches of traditional propriety governing their interaction.

Decisions are taken generally by the democratic consensus of the members of the council. However, the outcome of a case depends largely upon the personality and attitude of the headman. The pulls and pressures of the parties involved in the dispute are also a powerful factor in governing the decisions of the council. In any case, the council is expected to hear both sides and consider concrete and circumstantial evidence as well as the testimony of the witnesses. Punishments range from admonition to ex-communication, fines occupying a middle position.

The office of the *myatari* is hereditary, and goes from the father to the eldest son. He enjoys a special status within the caste settlement. In the sphere of authority, his position largely depends upon his personality, tact and the quality of his inter-personal relations. An aggressive *myatari* can dominate caste affairs; a weak one becomes a mere symbolic head.

The privileges enjoyed by the *myatari* can now be enumerated. (i) He can dispose of many of the less serious cases himself. He decides what cases should go up before the caste council. He presides over the deliberations of the council and can play, if he so wishes, a significant role in determining the outcome of the case. (ii) The upper castes bring complaints against the Madiga men affiliated to them to the *myatari* in the first instance. If he fails to give satisfaction to the patrons, the cases are generally taken to the larger council of the entire village. (iii) His presence is essential on many socio-religious occasions, such as marriage negotiations, receiving the marriage party, feasts and sacrifices. (iv) He is the first to be served in a feast, and often gets the choicest share. (v) He sacrifices the goat or sheep under the marriage shed. (vi) In the festival in honour of goddess Poshamma (goddess of smallpox) his offerings are given precedence over the offerings of others. (vii) If there is no Baidla priest in the settlement he officiates as a priest both at marriages and at Poshamma worship. (viii) He sacrifices the buffaloes at the ceremony held every three years in honour of Durgamma (the goddess of epidemics).

His authority has weakened considerably in recent years. The same is true, to a lesser

degree, of the authority of the caste council. More cases are now taken to the statutory village councils or to higher law courts in defiance of the caste council. When this happens, the caste council feels helpless and generally lets the matter take its own course.

Each multi-caste village also has a traditional village council. Its deliberations are conducted by the headman of the village and members representing all the major caste groups in the village. The Madiga caste is represented in it through the headman of the caste. But because of his low status the Madiga headman is rarely an influential or even a vocal member of this council. Disputes involving members of two different castes or more are generally referred to this council.

The creation of statutory village *panchayats* or councils has affected the position of the traditional *panchayats*. These new councils have both administrative and limited judicial powers. While the upper castes are tending to cling to the traditional councils in so far as judicial matters are concerned, the lower castes – including the Madiga – are more enthusiastic about the statutory *panchayats*. Because of their voting strength they can occupy a better position in it and can even effectively influence its decisions. At the time of this research both types of panchayat were co-existing, but the struggle for survival between them was on.<sup>f</sup>

The Madiga do not have any large inter-village caste councils.<sup>g</sup> In cases involving Madiga of two different settlements, the two parties to the dispute nominate two responsible elders to discuss the issue. Each has a right to nominate one elder. These two, if they think fit, ask a few other responsible caste members to join them in hearing the dispute. Their agreed verdict is supposed to be binding on both the parties.

Madiga caste councils have always had to face some competition from the general village council, for the spheres of the two have never been quite clearly demarcated. While the caste council could not hear any dispute involving members of other castes (these cases being decided either in a joint meeting of the councils of the two castes or in the village council), the village council could always hear serious cases even if both parties to a dispute belonged to the same caste. With the creation of statutory village panchayats and easy accessibility to higher courts of law, their position has been weakened still further. They still function, but the possibility of defiance of their decisions has loosened their hold on the community.

### **Social structure: the satellite castes**

[pp 31-36]

The organization of inter-caste relationships within the framework of the Hindi social system is extremely complex. The picture that we get of this system from classical texts is different in many ways from the picture that emerges out of empirical studies. However, both classical texts and empirical studies have so far not adequately analyzed the system of caste constellations that constitute an identifiable socio-cultural system within the local and regional Hinduism. In this constellation there is a large central supporting caste and several small satellite castes, each having all the traditional characteristics of individual castes, but all together constituting an individual and identifiable cultural whole in their unique organization. Here the main supporting caste has been called the central caste; the others – economically dependent upon, but complementing the socio-cultural life of the former, have been called satellite castes.

[...]

The Madiga have six satellite castes. They are: Sangari, Baindla, Erpula, Sindu<sup>h</sup>, Mashtu and Dakkali. The Sangari are spiritual guides to the Madigas in particular and to all the other satellite castes of the Madiga in general. The Baindla are musicians and function as domestic and temple priests to the Madigas. They propitiate the goddess of epidemics. The Erpula, like Baindla, are also musicians. They specialize in the worship of Maisamma (the goddess of the prosperity of crops), and Ellamma (the goddess of epidemics). The Sindu are bards and minstrels who sing songs in praise of Jambavant, the mythical originator of the caste. Sindu men stage mythological plays and the women help them by playing musical instruments. Some women get into trance and act as spirit mediums. They help the Madiga with their magical powers in curing diseases and warding off evil spirits. Some Sindu women work as prostitutes. The Mashtu are acrobats and entertain the Madiga by displaying their acrobatic feats. The Dakkali are beggars. They also keep the genealogical records of the Madiga.

The capacity of an economically poor caste to maintain six satellite castes can at first appear somewhat puzzling. However, we have to bear in mind that although poor the Madiga are a fairly numerous caste and have a wide distribution. The satellite castes, on the other hand, are very small. They are constantly on the move visiting their patrons all over the wide region. The customary payments made to them are small, but they can nevertheless make a living out of them. The Sangari, Sindu, Mashtu and Dakkali visit the colonies of their patrons once in three years and render their services only to the Madigas. The Baindla and Erpula, however, have a dual position. In addition to being a satellite caste of the Madiga, they also earn a part of their livelihood by providing drum and pipe music to the general village community. As a satellite caste they function as domestic and temple priests to the Madiga, and as musicians they help caste priests in the worship of the goddess of epidemics and the goddess of prosperity of crops. But for the Baindla and Erpula, all the other satellite castes are entirely dependent upon the Madiga. They live on the customary payments made to them by the Madiga.

**The Sangari**<sup>i</sup> are few in number, but their position is the highest in the constellation of the Madiga and their satellite castes.

The functions of the Sangari are manifold. As spiritual guides of the Madiga they preach the appropriate ethical standards of conduct. The Madiga seek their blessings for prosperity. If they happen to be present in a Madiga colony on the occasion of a wedding, their participation in the ceremony is considered essential. They help the Madiga in settling important caste disputes. They also ensure that the Madiga do not supply *chappals* to certain caste such as the Medari (workers in bamboo) and the Mundi (pigherd), who are regarded as lower than the Madiga. Near Medak town, a Sangari saw a Medari wear a pair of *chappals*. He asked the Medari from whom he bought them. The Medari, not knowing the authority of the Sangari, told him that he bought them from a Madiga of Gangaram village, five miles from Medak town. The Sangari went to this village, gathered the headmen of all the neighbouring colonies and declared that the offending Madiga had been ex-communicated from the caste. For three years the culprit had to stay outside the caste.

The Sangari travel in a special bullock-cart doing the rounds of their widely dispersed clients. Their stay in a Madiga colony may extend from two or three days to a week or even more, depending on the number of Madiga households and the warmth of the welcome extended to them. He stays in the house of a prominent Madiga. The house is specially cleaned for his stay and the children of the household are prohibited from entering it during

the Sangari's stay. Supplies are brought to him by his Madiga clients, but he cooks for himself. If his family members accompany him, they look after the kitchen. The Sangari will not accept cooked food from the Madiga. When he leaves the settlement the clients make offerings of grain and money to him.<sup>i</sup>

As mentioned earlier the **Baindla and Erpula** derive their subsistence partly from the general village community and partly from the Madiga.

Before Independence the Baindla and Erpula were given pieces of rent-free land for their services to the village community. Their main service was playing the *Jammidike* drum<sup>j</sup> on the occasion of the worship of village deities.

The Erpula got their rent-free land for a different purpose. [...] Their main duty was to find out the pleasure or wrath of the deities and to determine the sacrifices to be made to them. This they do with their special divination techniques.

In some villages the Madiga also give the Baindla a piece of land for their services as marriage priest. In other villages the Madiga give them 3/4 seers to 2 seers of paddy at each harvest.

As marriage priest the Baindla gets Re. 1/- or Rs. 2/- from the Madiga. He also earns a few rupees every year by officiating as priest at the shrines of Poshamma (the goddess of smallpox) and Ellamma (the goddess of epidemics).

A Baindla is free to accept charity from any caste. He goes from door to door singing songs in praise of Ellamma and accepting alms when they are offered to him.

**The Sindu:** 'Like Rambha in the court of Indra in the heaven and Urvasi in the court of Rama on the earth, there was Menaka in the court of Jambavanta', says Sindu mythology. The Sindu claim their descent from Menaka, the court dancer of Jambavant. They are the bards of the Madiga. The total number of Sindu according to the Census of 1931 was 340.

Each Sindu family has to dedicate a woman for the attainment of special spiritual powers.<sup>k</sup> The woman having such powers generally trains one of her daughters. The woman having these powers can cure diseases. They get into a trance and ward off evil spirits. Should a Sindu family fail to dedicate a woman for this purpose it loses its claim to charity in the village.

At the age of nine or ten the girl to be dedicated is nominally married to a sword or a plant. A man, either from among the Sindu or from the Madigamen, is asked to 'hold the sword' during the mock marriage. When she is fourteen or fifteen the parents of a girl approach a well-to-do Madiga and request him to take the woman as his 'wife'. If the man is ready to pay a sum varying from Rs. 50/- to Rs. 300/- along with the necessary clothes and ornaments, the woman is sent to him. She stays there until a child is born. After that she is normally required to go back to her parents' home. If the man wishes to keep her for some more time he has to pay more money to the parents. The children born to the woman are Sindu and are not permitted to work in leather. She eventually returns to perform her special functions.

The Sindu do not have any permanent residence; they keep on moving from one Madiga colony to another within their jurisdiction. They move in groups staging mythological plays.<sup>l</sup>

The Sindi women are of great help to the men at the time of staging a play. They assist them by playing musical instruments, and singing in chorus. At the end of every drama the dedicated woman comes out on the stage. She is dressed in a white sari; her forehead is marked with vermilion, turmeric powder is smeared on her face, and she holds *neem* twigs in one hand and a whip in another. This is called Ellamma-vesham. The Sindu men beat their drums vigorously to make her go into a trance. She is then taken in a procession round the village. Shouting at the top of her voice she scares evil spirits. She beats men and women with her whip so that ghosts and evil spirits residing in them may leave.

The Sindumen in some villages have started training Madiga boys in singing and staging plays. Some Sindu women have started working as agricultural labourers. This was prohibited to them before.

Sometime back it was necessary for a Sindu family to supply ropes and pot hangers made of ropes for the Madiga families. Today they have started selling ropes in the open market also. The customary payment to a Sindu family in an average Madiga village colony varies from Rs.20/- to Rs.50/- every third year.

**The Mashtus** are also very few in number.<sup>m</sup> They visit the Madiga colonies, display their acrobatic feats, and leave for another Madiga colony after receiving their customary payment from the Madiga. The payment made to the Mashtu, besides food during their stay in the village, varies from Rs.2/- to Rs.10/-.

**The Dakkali** is considered to be the lowest among the low in Telangana. The Dakkali sets up his temporary camp on the outskirts of the Madiga colony. After fixing his little hut outside the Madiga colony, he informs the headman about his arrival so that arrangements for food to be supplied to him and payment to be made to him are taken in hand. In the evening he goes to the Madiga colony and standing at a distance from Madiga houses, announces loudly, 'I am Dakkali. Bring food for me'. Food is thrown into his garment and water is poured into his vessel from a distance. It is obligatory for the Madiga households to feed the Dakkali. They feed him either collectively or family by family each day during his entire stay.

Custom enjoins a number of restrictions on a Dakkali. He must not use a cot. He must not use a blanket or *chappals*. He should not sit down in the presence of a Madiga. He should also not go out in public places in the early hours of the morning or in the evening. He must not draw water from any well or at least from the well from which the Madiga draw water for their domestic use. He must not accept charity from any caste other than Madiga, not even from Sindu and Mashtu.

Dakkalis: additional notes

Siraj ul Hassan 1920, p. 413:

'The Dakkalawads are wandering beggars, who appear to be a degraded branch of the Madigas and beg only from them. They are also the genealogists or custodians of the gotras

of their parent caste.

Origin: Heppu Muni, eldest son of Jambavant, killed by Brahma, restored to life by his father, but was degraded and condemned to subsist by begging from, and reciting the mythical history of, the Madigas and Manga castes. [...] Should any Madiga decline to give them their due, they mount his effigy on a bamboo pole and set it up in front of his house. Standing in the neighbourhood, they hurl at him horrible imprecations and curses; he remains under the ban of his caste and no-one dares to maintain any communication with him until he thoroughly satisfies the demands of the refractory beggars.' [Dakkalawad marriage, Karnatik version, is described at p. 418.]

From Karnataka, Nanjundayya & Ananthakrishna Iyer 1930-35, Vol. IV, p. 134-35 report that 'Dakkalus are considered to be the Halemakkalu (hereditary bondsmen) of the Mādigas, and are treated by them as outcastes. Their progenitor is said to be the second son of Jāmbava, whose head was sacrificed when the crust of the earth hardened. His head and trunk were thrown into a well, but there was still so much vitality that the severed body continued to speak. Siva and his consort passing in the aerial regions heard some noise in the well, and impelled by curiosity came to the place, questioned the body, and learnt its story. The trunk and the head were brought together by the God, and restored him to full life. The boy declined to go back to his father, or to accompany the God to his heaven or Kailasa, and as he proved so refractory, he was nicknamed Dakkalava, that is, one that could not be held in restraint, and, sent to roam about the world with a curse that he and his descendants should have no home of their own, and should live on food begged from the descendants of the other son of Jāmbava, who are Mādigas. Even now, the Dakkalus have no recognised headquarters and are always moving from place to place. They are not allowed to enter the Mādiga quarters. When they come to a village, they pitch their camp in a garden, or other place at a small distance from the houses of the Mādigas, and announce to them their arrival. The latter are bound to supply them with food and drink, and will on no account incur their displeasure, lest they should curse them; when leaving the village they get some presents from each family of the Mādigas. On important occasions, such as a marriage, these Dakkalas are not forgotten, but have some money presents and *tāmbula* kept apart for them.'

[See also Tirumala Rao 1996.]

**Neil Armstrong 1998. Checks to integration:  
AKs of Mahepura.  
pp 154-186 in *Challenging Untouchability. Dalit  
initiative and experience from Karnataka* (eds  
Simon Charsley & G.K. Karanth). New Delhi:  
Sage**

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The Adi-Karnatakas or AKs of Mahepura were studied by Neil Armstrong in 1994/95 as part of a wider comparative project on entrepreneurship and social mobility in seven Scheduled Caste communities of Karnataka. Here 'AK' had become the accepted substitute for their former name, Madiga[n]. 'Mahepura' is the pseudonym for a small town, then only about 5000 people, in Chitradurga district of Karnataka.

[p. 175] **A wider caste world**

The AKs of Mahepura present themselves as belonging to one of three ranked, endogamous groupings within a wider AK community. These divisions coincide with linguistic boundaries. Those in Mahepura, themselves all Kannada-speakers, regard themselves as being superior to both Telugu- and Tamil-speakers, this in virtue of their claim not to empty latrines, which the other two groups openly do. The Mahepura AKs regard the others as kinsmen, but junior to themselves because they say that 'from the beginning they performed dirty work'. Consequently, a Kannada AK may not enter the house of either of the other two and may not consume food cooked by them. However, Tamil and Telugu AKs can go inside the Kannada AK homes (1) and can eat food cooked by them. This is a straightforward status relation, which captures inequality through asymmetry: the superiority of the Kannada AKs is expressed by their being vulnerable to pollution from the other types. There are Tamil AKs living in a nearby taluk town who confirm the claims from Mahepura.

[...]

pp 178-83 **A community for itself**

The Mahepura AKs are divided internally into several named exogamous clans (*bedagu*). This category is locally understood to be equated with *gotra*, which as a Sanskrit word is more sophisticated and prestigious. Each caste calls its clans either *gotra*, *kula* or *bedagu*; higher castes, namely Shettys and Brahmans, tending to use the former name and other castes the latter two. There are locally said to be twelve AK clans, and older AK informants are able to reproduce a formula which lists them in order of decreasing population.(2) It is noteworthy that the logic of the ordering is demographic, a theme I return to later on.

Each of the clan names has meaning. Some are of animals, such as Meenu (fish), Kuri (goat) and Emme (female buffalo). Others are of everyday household objects: Madlu (coconut-leaf roof covering), Muchala (lid) and Magga (loom). Another is the name of a kind of thin-grained rice (Sannakki), and another jasmine (Malla). There are in addition names of other kinds, Basavanna, named after the Lingayat founder, Aihole (five rivers and the name of a famous religious centre further north in Karnataka), and Buddivantha (intelligent). These names are not exclusive to the AKs; certain of them are shared by other, but not upper, castes. For example, the Devangas have a Muchala clan, Kurubas an Emme and Bestas a Sannakki. High-caste *gotra* naming is quite different in character, so much so that informants from such castes do not always realise that the name of a kind of rice, for instance, can also be the name of a clan. Once again, the distinction here is not between Untouchable and Touchable but between the two upper castes and the majority, coinciding with the distinction in nomenclature used between *gotra* and *bedagu* or *kula*.

The main role of a clan is to restrict the scope of marriage alliances, proscribing parallel cousin marriage [o]. Members of the same clan regard themselves as kin, expressed in terms of fraternity. The groups are thus sometimes presented as a useful way of avoiding incest: marriage to a person from one's own clan is the equivalent of marriage between brother and

sister. There are no special relationships between particular clans, but it is thought best to limit the number entering the house as affines: too many clans within one house is expected to lead to discord. Ideally, affines should be from one or at most two clans. On marriage, the wife's clan is not given up but in effect superseded by her husband's; her children take the identity of their father. So the household, where it has a male head, takes on the clan of the head of the house and thus in most cases of all the males. From this male-oriented perspective clan numbers are spoken of - for the settlement - in terms of number of houses or households. According to these criteria, within the Mahepura colony the largest is Sannakki, followed by Aihole and Muchala. There is a tendency within the colony for residence patterns to be related to clan. One of the roads in the older part of the colony is primarily Aihole, whilst two others are almost exclusively Sannakki.

Clan is not used as a unit in calculating the spread of pollution. However, it does have an important contribution in the organisation and regulation of life within the caste. In the Mahepura AK colony there are nine elders (*yajamaanas*), who have authority on juridical and ritual occasions.<sup>(3)</sup> Their position is thought of as being hereditary, passing down from the father to eldest son, but this principle is not strictly adhered to: a younger son who is better equipped for the position, for example knowing the rituals better or being better able to speak in public, is likely to succeed his father. The elders are responsible for organising ritual matters and collective obligations, for example the AKs' part in the village festival and the collection of money to give to the Dakklas, [...]. They are essential honoured guests at auspicious life-cycle rituals such as naming ceremonies, where they may be called upon to choose the name of the child. But the role I want to examine in most detail here is a juridical one. If disputes occur within the colony the case may be taken to them. They then hold a meeting outside the colony's Durgamma temple, at which they are empowered to judge the issue, set fines, and pardon the offenders. These meetings are said to be held irregularly, every year or two perhaps, arising only when quite serious disputes take place.

A disagreement between two men of the caste about who was to unload a lorry that had arrived late in the town was the occasion of such a dispute during the period of fieldwork. Insults and then blows were exchanged, culminating in the two taking off their chappals and fighting with them. The following morning the elders gathered together on the veranda of the temple. A crowd of onlookers (mostly male, as women are not allowed to participate in these meetings and are kept at a distance) milled around whilst witnesses were assembled. The dispute was extensively discussed, but so also were other quite mundane matters, mostly amongst those not directly involved and unconnected by marriage or kinship. When all of the elders were present, they called several witnesses. These had to squat in front of them in an attitude of deference. They were questioned about events, and a consensus amongst the elders soon emerged. Throughout the proceedings only they and those they addressed were permitted to speak; continual cries and comments from the onlookers were angrily quietened by elders and others. The proceedings were animated and unruly, with frequent interruption and confusion. The defendants were next summoned, and, having given their side of the story, were reproved: one was very reluctant to squat, and there was uproar as the elders tried and failed to assert their authority. Some of the witnesses evidently found the experience frightening. The father of one of the defendants cried, feeling shame and perhaps also looking for some leniency. Once guilt had been established it was decided that fines should be fixed, and some of the senior elders moved away from the crowd to discuss the amount. After much deliberation the fines, to be paid in eight days, were set at Rs. 251 and 125, very large amounts for people who earn at most Rs. 35 in a day. The two offenders were then forgiven. This took the form of a puja, in which they had *vibhuti* of holy ash marked on their foreheads, a sign of Shiva, and neem leaves placed on their tongues. In the event the fines were not settled in full, but about half of each was collected.

It is striking that in a town that has its own police station this parallel law-enforcing institution continues. It highlights the vitality, and within their own domain, the autonomy of the AKs, something [also to be] seen in the rejection of the Gaalimari and Hattimari buffalo sacrifices. A motive for the exercise of their autonomy in this case was suggested to me by several AK informants. The community wanted to present itself to the rest of the population of Mahepura as a refined 'civilised' caste (e.g. *naajuuku*). Fights like this are seen by others as typical backward behaviour by the AKs, highlighting their uncivilised nature and inability to co-operate or organise themselves. So they acted quickly in what was in part a piece of image management. In this they displayed a sensibility and ambition that is striking. They are very conscious of the dismissive views other castes have of them, and are now actively trying to reduce this. It is also worth noting that in this juridical context purity values resurface. Disputes between people that result in violence or insults create pollution. This is given precise ritual expression if people spit, or hit each other with their chappals, but even if these things do not literally occur, all those participating in the fight become polluted. It is often stressed that in this state they should not perform puja and the caste guru should not enter their house. The purpose of the puja at the end of the panchayat is understood as a means to expiate this pollution. This is a second case where order and purity are closely associated, and impurity is linked with the disruption of that order.

Quite apart from the present administrative boundaries of district and taluk, throughout old Mysore there are traditional territorial units called *kattemane*[p]. These are classically presented as structuring a chain of administrative responsibility extending up to the Mysore kings. It is widely reported (e.g. Mendelsohn 1993) that structures of this type are largely decayed, and it is clear that the higher levels of the structure no longer operate. But the most fundamental level of *kattemane* is still in existence, although dislocated from its original context. What is known in Mahepura is that the units of different castes do not coincide; instead each caste has its own sets of boundaries. In each one there is a central place (also called *kattemane*) which has a juridical and also ritual authority over its constituency; and Mahepura is the central place for nine other villages. In principle, disputes that occur in the other villages and are unresolved locally may be brought to be settled at the centre. The leaders of the head village thus are senior to the others. In fact no such cases are brought any more, and probably have not been for some years. The structure would seem to presuppose a difference in status between *kattemane* elders and the local elders whose jurisdiction extends only to disputes occurring within their own colony, but no such distinction is made: all have an equal say.

*Kattemane* courts are part of an array of rules which reserve many of the most important occupational and ritual roles for the most numerous clan. These range across the spectrum of AK life. For example, during weddings the two central ceremonies are rituals associated with preparing a blanket decorated with unhusked rice, and tying the tali. Both of these jobs may only be performed by a Sannakki headman. Likewise, the priest for the AK Durgamma temple and the officiants in the contribution to the village festival are all Sannakki. In fact all their traditional work, moving the carcasses of dead cows, making leather goods, cleaning temples for festivals, playing and even storing the AK drum, is reserved for the Sannakkis. The internal organisation and division of labour within an AK population of this size may seem potentially a good domain for replication, of the kind that Moffatt (1979) has discussed, in which groups may be organised around the structural principles of purity and pollution. If the pure : impure opposition were operative here in dividing labour, we would expect to see the largest possible structural separation between those exposed to great impurity and those whose role requires the highest level of purity. Further, assuming that purity is constitutive of or encompasses status, we would see this higher grouping claiming superiority in virtue of their lower exposure to pollution. There could perhaps be a priestly

clan and a leather working clan, between which marriage might be restricted or impossible, recreating the distinction between the Brahmans as archetypal priests and AKs as leather workers. There are castes in Mahepura where this kind of organisation is found, such as the Voddas who, as I mentioned earlier, have an endogamous *saacha* subsection and the Besta priests who officiate at the Durgamma festival. Yet the range of Sannakki rights is strikingly heterogeneous. They perform work which they themselves regard as dirty, dealing with dead cows, as well as pure work such as performing puja as a priest. In place of a group taking on all the pure activities, and thereby claiming higher status we thus find the Sannakkis taking promiscuously all the important AK jobs irrespective of purity, and on this basis claiming superior status. The same phenomenon has been seen in connection with the *muula:bevuur* distinction in Nuliyur (Chapter 4). What is seen in the colony is a different orientation, in which purity figures as part of a mix of values but where its role in this mix is weaker inside than it is outside.

There is a lack of consensus about why the Sannakkis were given these rights. Some say that it is because they were the first AK settlers in Mahepura, whilst others suggest that it is because they are the majority clan in the *kattemane*. Informants from other *kattemane* report that they have a different dominant clan but that the reason is the same: it is the largest clan that corners the jobs that are important in the community, and which are for others distinctive of the AKs. That these rights are part of a hierarchical ordering is expressly claimed by the participants. Members of the Sannakki clan say that they are the highest, superior to the others in virtue of their special roles. They generally do not present each of the clans as having a different status within the colony, but rather that they are superordinate and the others are all of equal status beneath them. Unable to deny that it is the Sannakkis who run the ritual show, one Aihole informant claimed that a special relation holds between themselves and the Sannakki such that if no Sannakki were present, they could do the work just as well. This is a claim to be next in line, and has some weight as they are the next most populous clan, at least in Mahepura itself. The Muchalas take a different approach. They are numerically small compared to the Sannakki and Aiholes, so they say that the Sannakkis' right are legitimated by the caste guru, who is a Muchala. More than this, all Muchalas have the powers of a guru which they could exercise if they wanted to.

The importance of these rules and the internal ordering that they underline is beginning to decline. Younger informants know much less about the restrictions than older ones, although this may be explained as in part simply because they have yet to go through the learning experience associated with marriage. More significantly, they view many of the Sannakki jobs with distaste: they wish to be disassociated with the impure activities that are the markers and justification of their subordination in the world beyond their own caste. Their increased contact with members of other castes appears to be eroding part of this AK world.

### **'Significant Others'**

The rich and complex heritage of relationships between Madigas and others in their society outside the confines of village dominance has already emerged from the readings of preceding chapters. In the following pages, further insights into relationships with others are offered. Brahmans, Viswabrahmans or Visvakarmas, Komatis and Gollas (Yadavas) are brought into the frame here; others could be if evidence were available from different periods and different places. Such links have been important in the past and may be again for a future when the painful and often tragic elements of Madigas' position in the old society have faded into a distant memory.

### **Brahmins**

As significant others, Brahmins have, occupied Madiga minds in a variety of ways, as will already

have been noted in passing. The earliest record quoted in Chapter 1 has a Brahmin guru and God Brahma as Madiga's own deity and creator. However, as priests, before the new legislation of the twentieth century Brahmins normally denied Madigas access to the mass of temples they ran, including the grandest, allowing them at best some external and mediated relationship to the deities they tended. Even as family priests, gurus and astrologers, until recently they refused Madigas their services. In contrast, for the religion of village goddesses and their festivals Madigas often had key roles and it was the Brahmins themselves who were peripheral. As village accountants Brahmins were often in the past a part of the team running and controlling many villages, a team that often had a valued hereditary position for Madigas within it. At higher levels, Brahmins were often prominent amongst the officials and ministers of government. In some regions they were major landowners, meaning sometimes that they controlled villages directly but at least that they were involved in the exploitation of Madigas as labourers. It was the farmers themselves, however, who were far more often and urgently of practical significance for Madigas, as masters, employers and patrons. As a result of Brahmins' withdrawal from villages in many areas in the twentieth century, their significant presence in village society became even less. In the Telangana region in which Madiga presence is strongest, the seven centuries of predominantly Muslim rule, ended only in 1948, meant an historically weak Brahmin presence. There they enjoyed little of the local power and wealth which association with rulers in the colonial period and before had assured them in the coastal regions of Andhra and elsewhere within then British India.

Despite such practical limitations, for Madiga minds and for their ideas Brahmins have been far from peripheral. One common form of myth, amongst for instance the Paraiyar from Tamil Nadu studied by Deliège (1993), though it has not been prominent amongst Madigas, has appeared and can be found in the section on Aranzodi (Arundhati) in Chapter 1. This is the idea that the ancestors of Madigas and Brahmins were originally brothers but were differentiated and separated by some calamitous event, usually to do with the eating of beef. Nevertheless, as in the version of the performed Jamba Puranam at the beginning of that Chapter, a pairing of Madiga and Brahmin is often central in Madiga thinking. That performance is framed as a confrontation between Jambava and Brahmin: proving Madigas superior to Brahmins is the strategic rationale. The Brahmin role stands for values of purity and pollution in terms of which Madigas have been devalued and excluded. The malign power of these values for Madiga lives over the centuries cannot be underestimated but, as has been seen, they can be and have been ridiculed in a variety of ways. In addition, love and intermarriage across the barrier of such ideas and restrictions exert a fascination as the ultimate challenge, within that performance and elsewhere. The widespread Yellamma cult makes, as will be seen in the following section, an emphatic statement of the same key opposition. Yellamma herself is commonly thought of as the Brahmin head on the Madiga body, for some to be linked in the mythical complex with the Matangi as her opposite, the Madiga head on the Brahmin body. Sanskritization produces a Yellamma whose Brahmin head only is worshipped, portrayed therefore bejewelled but bodyless.

In the festivals of village goddesses, as will be seen in Chapter 7, a further kind of connection is sometimes made. Both in buffalo sacrifice and in the purifying and protecting of the village and its boundaries, Madigas have often had key roles, but the perspective here is nevertheless fundamentally hostile. The associated origin myths turn on a marriage that produced a goddess. The father of a successful and apparently Brahmin family was after many years revealed as no Brahmin but a Madiga. The Brahmin wife became a furious and avenging goddess, killing her husband and children as well as herself. The buffalo and other sacrifices are said to recreate this slaughter, appeasing and cooling her fury. Even where these myths are found, it is striking that this does not result in any simple relationship of exclusion for Madigas but makes them integral to village religion and the pacifying of the goddess. Brahmins loom large, that is to say, in Madiga minds. The link is in no way private to them [q] but where the relationship opposes the direction of dominance, with the Madiga as the husband, its significance may be very different.

Returning to Arundhati, the most chaste and virtuous of the wives of the rishis (Mitchiner 1983 pp 43, 237-39) and the classic exemplar of a Hindu wife was for Madigas one of their own: Brahmin not only loved but was married to this virtuous Madiga. Two songs on the theme of such intercaste love follow. In the first the Brahmin man takes the initiative, in the second it is the Madiga woman. Neither, however, challenges the flow of social dominance even if they do challenge Brahmin pretensions.[r]

**Reddy, Kalikiri Viswanadha 1989.**  
***An anthropological study of Telugu***

**folk songs. (A case study of Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh). Tirupati: Sri Ventakeswara University**

Reddy (pp 103, 105-07) presents an AramJyoti song from Chittoor District in romanised Telugu. Here it is translated by I. Narasaiah with contributions from Anand Akundy and the editor.

Crossing seven streets[s]and more, crossing twelve streets,  
why did you come to this street, Oh Bāpannāyā [t]?

Crossing seven streets and more, crossing twelve streets,  
I came to see you, Oh Rāmājyōti.

You are a Brahmin man, I'm a Madiga woman:  
you and I cannot become a couple! Oh Bāpannāyā.  
You and I cannot become a pair! Oh Bāpannāyā.

Though you are a Madiga woman and I a Brahmin man  
we two can be a couple, we two can be a pair.  
Yes Rāmājyoti, we two can be a couple.

Mother and father went the town:  
they'd stitched leather buckets,  
they collected their dues and packed them up.  
This is the time for their arrival:  
go from my house, Oh Bāpannāyā!

Mother and father went to town:  
what if they stitched leather buckets,  
took their dues and packed them up?  
What's their arrival time to me?  
They are my in-laws, Oh Rāmājyoti.

My seven brothers went to the forest.  
They cut the sticks for tanning and bundled them up,  
they put the bundles on their heads.  
It's their arrival time, Oh Bāpannāyā.

Go away from my house, Oh Bāpannāyā!  
What if your seven brothers went to the forest?  
What if they have cut the sticks for tanning?  
What happens if they have put the bundles on their heads?  
What's their arrival time to me, Oh Rāmājyoti?  
They are my brothers-in-law, Oh Rāmājyoti.

My seven sisters-in-law with seven baskets on their heads  
went near the tank to collect dung.  
It's their arrival time, Oh Bāpannāyā.  
Go from my house, Oh Bāpannāyā!

What if your seven sisters-in-law had seven baskets?  
What if they went to the tank and collected dung?  
What happens if they gathered the dung and this is their arrival time?

What's it to me, Oh Ramajyoti?

They are my own sisters, Oh Ramajyoti.  
See the flesh in the middle of the house, see the bones at the fire,  
see the guts on the line and the mess in the trough,  
see the tubs in the corner, see the chappals on the veranda.  
Go from my house, Oh Bāpannayā!

I have seen the flesh in the middle of the house, the bones at the fire,  
I have seen the guts on the line and the mess in the trough,  
I have seen the chappals on the veranda.  
Whatever you eat bring to me, Oh Ramajyoti.

I will give you rice, I will give you lentils, I will give you things for cooking,  
I will give you leaves for plates, I will give you the sticks to fix them.  
Cook and eat, Oh Bāpannayā!

I don't want rice, I don't want lentils, I don't want things for cooking.  
I don't want leaves for plates, I don't want sticks to fix them.  
You cook the food and and bring it me, Ah Ramajyoti.  
You cook the food and and bring it me, Ah Ramajyoti.

Your truth I  
accept , oh Ramajyoti

**N. Sudhakar Rao 1998. Organised  
Power and Unorganised Resistance  
[Nellore district, AP]  
New Delhi: Aravali Books International.  
© N. Sudhakar Rao 1998**

[pp 226-27]

The following is a *naretha* [transplanting] song, and the protagonist is a Madiga girl. [...]

- 1 Singer: Handsome Brahmin while praying in the lake  
while praying - oh my brother!  
A cunning Madiga damsel came that side  
cunning damsel came, oh my brother!
- 5 The Madiga damsel liked the Brahmin  
liked the man, oh my brother!
- Madiga: 'If you want, why don't you come, my Lord'  
why don't you come my Lord, oh my brother!
- Brahmin: 'I don't know your village, I don't know you'  
10 I don't know, oh my brother!
- Madiga 'Compound wall all around and lime plastering'  
lime plastering, oh my brother!  
'Near lime plastering, village boundary'  
village boundary, oh my brother!
- 15 'Near village boundary, the path of Suranna'  
Suranna path, oh my brother!
- Brahmin 'I will come and I will come beautiful angel'  
Beautiful angel, oh my brother!
- Madiga 'In the compound of Reddy, a calf died'  
20 Calf died, oh my brother!

'Go and bring dragging its leg'  
     bring dragging, oh my brother!  
 'Cut slowly with small knives'  
     cut slowly, oh my brother!  
 25 Brahmin 'How do I cut, I am a young Brahmin'  
             young Brahmin, oh my brother!  
     Madiga 'Put your janjam on the peg'  
             on the peg, oh my brother!  
             'Cut slowly with small knives  
             Cut wide with big knives  
             Cut slowly with small knives'  
             cut slowly, oh my brother!  
             'Cut wide with big knives'  
             cut widely, oh my brother!  
 35 Singer: Cooked delicious food with chillies and salt  
             cooked delicious food, oh my brother!  
     Madiga 'You feed me first and last morsel'  
             you feed me Sir, oh my bother!  
     Brahmin 'How do I feed, my beautiful angel?'  
 40              beautiful angel, oh my brother!

In a poetic sense, the song is about two polar ends of the society – the Brahmin and the Untouchable. The pure, vegetarian Brahmin eats most polluting carrion. However, for the singer, the song signifies desecration and an attack on Brahmins. The Brahmins attribute terrible impurity to the Madigas, but now the latter are taking revenge by making the young Brahmin fall in love with a Madiga girl, butcher a dead calf, eat it and have sex with the girl. This says that Brahmins are not superior beings that have mastered sensuality; they are like any other human being. In that sense, all humans are the same, whether a Brahmin or a Madiga. Thus, the Brahmins are more hypocritical than others.

#### Viswakarmas

A perhaps more ancient link less surely active in the present is with Viswakarmas, otherwise Viswa Brahmins. Kotaganahalli Ramaiah in his book *Sindh Madiga Sanskruti* (1993) offers an expanded idea of the link between Viswakarma and Jambava already seen in the performed purana (Chapter 1). Even to this day, he writes, there is a greater closeness between Madigas and Vishwakarmas than with any other castes. The Vedic sage Agastya cursed Vishwakarma, who as a result lost all his energy and imagination. In his helpless state he went to the grand old man, Adi Jambava, for help. He in response killed his own son and made tools for Viswakarma from his body. (This is the part of the story familiar in Telangana today.) Despite this, he still expressed his helpless failure of imagination. Jambava therefore took Vishwakarma to a *tangadi*[u] plant, the bark of which is used for tanning leather. He pointed out its leaves, flowers and fruits and advised Vishwakarma to keep the image of them before him so as to get his inspiration back.[v]

Viswakarma has a presence in the Rig Veda as a creator god fashioning the world. Viswabrahma authors argue that he was subsequently reduced from this pre-eminent position. 'Gō-Brahmins', meaning Cow-Brahmins, the Brahmins of today, successfully represented him in a service role, as merely craftsman or architect to the Trimurti of more recent times (Brouwer 1995, pp 40-45). Like Jambava in relation to the Madigas, for Viswakarmas he therefore stands for a primordial pre-eminence, ahead of both the great gods worshipped today and the human race as their worshippers.[w]

#### Kōmatis

**Edgar Thurston & K. Rangachari 1909.**  
***Castes and Tribes of South India,***  
**7 vols. Madras: Government Press**

[Vol. 3, pp 325-31]

The Komatis have for a long time been alleged to be connected with the Madigas in a variety of ways. 'The Komatis,' Mr. F. R. Hemingway writes, 'do not as a rule deny the fact of this connection. The Madigas are, indeed, apparently under the protection of the Komatis, apply to them for help when in trouble, and obtain loans and other assistance. Some Komatis explain the connection with the Madigas by a story that either Vishnu Vardhana[x], or his successor Rajaraja Narendra persecuted the Komatis, and that they had to fly for refuge to the Madigas. The Madigas took them in, and hid them, and they say that the present favour shown to that caste is only in gratitude for the kindness shown to themselves in the past. The Komatis themselves do not admit the title 'Mid-day Madigas' (applied to them by other castes), but explain it by a story that long ago a Komati killed and ate a cow-buffalo, which was really no cow-buffalo, but the wife of a great sage who had transformed her into that shape in order that she might be safe when he was in contemplation. The saint accordingly cursed the caste, and said that they should be Mid-day Madigas for ever more.' It is possible that the connection between the Komatis and Madigas was originally such as that of the Kammālans, Ambattans, and other castes, with Paraiyans, Vettiyan, and other depressed classes [y], and that, in later times, weird stories were invented by fertile brains to explain them away. One of these undoubtedly is that which makes the Komatis the descendants of the issue of a plain Brahman and a handsome Madiga woman. It is said that their children managed a sweetmeat bazar, which the Brahman kept in a much frequented forest, and, in his absence, pointed with a stick (*kōl*) to the plates, and thereby told their prices, without polluting the articles with the touch. Hence arose the name Kōlmutti (those who pointed with the stick), which became softened down to Kōmutti. [...]

In days gone by, it was incumbent on the Komatis to bear the marriage expenses of the Madiga families attached to their village, [...] In later times, this custom dwindled in some places (4) to the payment of the expenses of the marriage of two Madigas, and even this was abandoned in favour of inviting the Madigas to their weddings. In the city of Madras, it would appear to have been customary, in the eighteenth century, for the Komatis to get the *māngalyam* or *sathamam* (marriage badge) blessed by an aged Madiga before it was tied on the bride's neck. Further, it would appear to have then been customary to give the sacred fire, used at marriages for the performance of *homam*, to a Madiga, and receive it back from him.

These, and similar customs, traces of which still exist in some places (e.g. North Arcot), show that the Madiga has some claim on the Komatis. What that claim is is not clear. However, it is reported that, if the Madiga is not satisfied, he can effectually put a stop to a marriage by coming to the house at which it is to be celebrated, chopping away the plantain trunks which decorate the marriage booth, and carrying them off. Similarly, Kammālans invite Vettiyan (or Paraiyans) to their marriage, and, if this is not done, there is the same right to cut down the plantain trunks. It would seem that the right thus exercised has reference to the right to the soil on which the booth stands. The cutting away of the plantain shows that their right to stand there is not recognised. The invitation to the Madiga or Vettiyan would thus refer to the recognition by the Komatis and Kammālans to the lordship of the soil held in bygone days by these now depressed castes.

Writing in 1869 and 1879, respectively, Sir Walter Elliot and Major J. S. F. Mackenzie of the Mysore Commission refer(5) to the presentation of betel and nuts by the Komatis to the Madigas, thereby inviting them to be present at their marriages. [...] Having risen in the social scale, the Komatis would naturally wish to give this invitation covertly. Major Mackenzie says that the Komatis in Mysore, in order to covertly invite the Madigas to the wedding, went to the back of their houses at a time when they were not likely to be seen,

and whispered into an iron vessel, such as is commonly used for measuring grain, an invitation in the following words:- 'In the house of the small ones (i.e. Komatis) a marriage is going to take place. The members of the big house (i.e., Madigas) are to come.' The Madigas look on such a secret invitation as an insult, and would, if they saw the inviters, handle them roughly. It is noted, in the Madras Census Report, 1901, that 'now-a-days the presentation (of betel leaf and nuts) is sometimes veiled by the Komati concerned sending his shoes to be mended by the Madiga a few days before the wedding, deferring payment till the wedding day, and then handing the Madiga the leaf and nut with the amount of his bill.'

According to another account, the Komati of set purpose unbinds the toe-ring of his native shoes (*chērupu*), and summons the Madiga, whose function it is to make and repair these articles of attire. The Madiga quietly accepts the job, and is paid more amply than is perhaps necessary in the shape of *pān-supāri*, flowers, and money. On the acceptance by the Madiga of the betel and nuts, the Komati asks '*Chērinda, chērinda?*' i.e. has it reached you? and the Madiga replies '*Chērindi, chērindi*', i.e. it has reached. Until he replies thus, the *māngalyam* cannot, it is said, be tied on the bride's neck. In the Bellary district, betel leaf and nuts are usually left at night behind the Madiga's house, in token of the invitation to the wedding.

In the Godavari district, according to Mr. Hemingway, the Komati gives an order for a Madiga for palmyra leaf baskets before the marriage, and presents him with betel and nut when he brings the baskets. Still another account says that some of the Komatis, just before a marriage, leave in the backyard of Madiga houses a few pice and betel close to the cattlepen, and that it is whispered that some Komatis use chuckler's (leather-worker's) tools, made in silver, for worship. It is also reported that chuckler's work is pretended to be gone through by some Komatis, after the completion of the marriage ceremonies, in the backyard of the house at dead of night, in the presence of caste-people only, and by preference under a *dānimma chettu* (*Punica Granatum*: pomegranate). This is known as *kulāchāram*, *kuladharmam*, or *gōtra pūja* (custom of the caste, or worship of the *gōtras*).

### Gollas

**N. Sudhakar Rao 1998. *Organised Power and Unorganised Resistance*  
[Nellore district, AP]  
New Delhi: Aravali Books International.  
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[pp 38-41]

Since the largest population among all the high castes belongs to Kammas [z]who are also economically dominant in the village, [...] they are the main patrons in the village. However, caste relations between the Madigas and the Gollas are of a special kind which perhaps needs elaboration.

Bukkaiyah, the priest of Munindamma, also *peddagolla* says that castes used to be divided into two categories long ago. One category was called *ganga pangasthulu*, or people belonging to Ganga (the water goddess and a consort of Shiva), and the other was *setti vargam*, the merchant category. This division is very similar to divisions reported in other parts of South India – as agricultural and artisan castes or right- and left-hand divisions (Beck 1972, Stein 198, Mines 1984). The right-hand division castes were organized on the worship of Ganga, the principal deity of the Gollas (shepherd caste), who are low in the social hierarchy. All the right-hand division castes followed similar practices such as the worship of Ganga during funeral rituals, engaging Madigas to tell stories, and engaging

jangams for funerals. But now the Gollas are the only caste observing these practices.

The goddess Ganga has temples in different villages, and there is a sort of territorial organization. Gollas of a particular group of villages worship the goddess at a particular village. The village Anthatipuram comes under the territory of the goddess at Maripuru, about 20 kilometres away. The goddess is represented by a box called *ganga pette* which is made of cane. It contains insignia called *veeradallu* (ropes made of fibre of the *gogu* shrub) and turmeric powder called *veeragandham*. A Golla man officiates as a priest at the temple. For every wedding and funeral ritual, these symbols are carried by a Golla man to the house of those who ask for *ganga pette*. Not all Gollas can touch or carry the *ganga pette*, only a few who are called *sivakollu*. [...] Occasionally they become possessed by the goddess, and at that juncture the Madigas of the village who are attending the ceremony hand over chickens of their own to the *sivakollu* who bite at the neck and suck the blood. The chickens are taken over by the Madigas. In a procession accompanied by Madiga's drum beating, the *ganga pette* is brought to the house of the Golla man where a wedding or funeral ceremony is taking place. The Madigas have to help the Golla family in erecting a temporary shelter called *pandiri*, bringing firewood or any other odd job. They will not be paid for their services except with plenty of food and liquor. This is the ritual relationship between the Gollas and the Madigas.

For a funeral procession of the *ganga pangasthulu*, Madiga sub-caste the Kommulollu and the Jangam caste provide services for the different purposes. A Kommulodu leads the funeral procession by blowing a huge horn-like bronze pipe called a *kommu* (horn of cattle), from which their caste name is derived. It is said that to engage a Kommulodu is to give honour to the dead person and prestige to the family. The Jangam goes after him, ringing a bell. They are paid in cash. The services of the Kommulollu are required again for a second funeral ceremony to perform what is called 'telling stories' [...]. The services of these two castes are called for by those belonging to the Shivite [section] but not by others.

Bukkaiah describes the relationship of Golla and Madiga as a metaphor of filial love – *memu thallidandrulu varu ma biddalu*. It means 'We (Gollas) are parents and they (Madigas) are our children.' He said, 'They (Madigas) can grab food from our plates. If they ask for money or grain when they are in need, we cannot turn them away, similar to our children'.

In this intimate relationship, the Gollas enjoy a privileged position as their 'parents'. Being shepherds and cattle tenders, the Gollas traditionally are veterinary experts in the village. Even Bukkaiah is an adept in treating sick cattle. The high castes who kept quite a few cattle for milk, dung (manure), and raising bullocks and male buffaloes (for ploughing and other agricultural purposes), needed the assistance of Golla experts to attend to the health care of cattle. When cattle died, they were available to the Madigas for eating as well as for making sandals and agricultural implements which could be sold. So, there was an indirect relationship between the Gollas and the Madigas; [...] In some villages, even the Gollas are dominant having landed property and supporting other castes including the Madigas. Bukkaiah's further comments reveal other aspects of these relations. He said, 'They (Madigas) respect us, and we take care of them. They would rise from their seats when we walk before them. They cannot perform a marriage or honour their goddess Mathamma without our consent. They should come to our funeral ceremonies even before they are called to attend.' [...] A slightly different picture has been revealed when the claims of Bukkaiah are verified with the Madigas. They firstly confirm an intimate relationship. Secondly, the consent of the *peddagolla* for marriage and his presence in the ritual of

Mathamma has a different purpose. The *peddagolla* gives a gift, some cash for a wedding and a goat for the ritual.

He is formally invited, as is the *acharakapu* [...] with the offering of betel leaves and nuts by Madiga elders.[aa]