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Ritualistic alcohol consumption among lambani community in Karnataka

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ABSTRACT

Lambani community has been ardent in retaining traditional symbols despite the influence of modern practices as evidenced by their female dress and adoration practices. These people respect the traditional values and practices. Alcohol liquor is being in use by Lambani community in many ceremonies. Offering of the liquor and receiving of liquor during some ceremonies is very important aspect often depict the status and standard of persons involved. These people have a long history of preparing their own liquor. They have their own special methods of brewing and distillation which is specific to specific tando (abode). Being the persons engaged in trade, demand of liquor for other community people will also force these people to engage in preparation and supply of liquor. However, law of the land prohibits preparation and storage of liquor without government sanction and standards prescribed. Thus, authorities have targeted this community as being involved in crime of preparing illicit liquor. Involvement of specific community in specific crime needs to be dealt with the knowledge of social-anthropology. Accordingly a study of ceremonies involving utilization of liquor among 18 tandas of Karnataka has been conducted and socio-cultural significance of the factors involved has been discussed.

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Introduction

Lambanis are known to be migrants with unique culture of their own through the passage of time (Alian 1995, Panda, 2002). The influence of industrialization and subsequent socio-economic changes enforced these tribal people to adopt settled pattern of life. Strict dress code and adoration practices which were adopted by women belonging to this community helped to retain the barrier between their tribe and with those other communities with which they use to have contracts.

Since Lambanis were allowed to move inside the villages and women of this tribe are more actively engaged themselves in income generation. Women of this tribe are constantly moving in this direction. Unique dress code and adoration practices of these women helped to identify the women belonging to tribe easily and allowed more chances for seniors of the tribe to protect them. Probably due to this reason unique dress code and adoration practices are still found in these communities even today with tremendous changes in cultural activities among other people throughout the world. Utilization of red colour with maximum extent in clothes justifies the thing that women were identified easily from a long distance. Identification becomes difficult if colour of dress is other than red. Since other colours camouflage easily in forest and rural circumstances.

Forest dwelling and active women participation in income generation allows men of these communities to engage in more pass time. Thus many rituals and ceremonies are performed which involve singing (Bhajan), dancing and also drinking of alcoholic preparations by both men and women. Lambani community is more conservative when it comes to change the lifestyles. It has respect for its own language, dress-code and cultural practices which were followed and respected by elders. Respect for elders as evidenced by their elaborate cultural practices performed for their departed elders is one of the vital

force probably enforced these people to follow traditional customs and practices.

Lambani community was known for trade and migration. Alcoholic drinks were among the commodities under trade since long time. Lambani abodes were known for their liquor distillation practices. There were times when village people used to prefer tandas (Lambani abodes) distillation liquor for toddy (fermented palm tree extract) before the initiation of arrack sales by government in villages. Being an migratory tribe, Lambani people were not subjected to regulations of normal villages regarding their drinking habits and distillation practices.

In general, villages include certain caste people to engage in brewing and selling of toddy (Idigas, Serigars, etc). People belonging to these castes engage in toddy selling and toddy preparations and those who consume were usually considered as belonging to lower social strata by the people. However, Lambani people are preparing and selling alcoholic liquors occasionally Lambanis were not treated as exclusive caste engaged in liquor preparation and selling. Their unique dress-code and adoration practices might have prevented the other people to categories further base on their activities. Added to this, these people used to live in vicinity of villages with their own rules and regulations which rarely involves interference by other community. These factors might have supported to continue their practice of distillation uninhibited. This probably could have resulted in cultural and ritual practices involving in alcohol consumption.

Being an migratory tribe and subject to settlement in recent years, Lambanis are having wide range of cultural variations which might have resulted due to sudden settlement and due to influence of local cultures. Thus Lambanis of Karnataka state need specific tando oriented studies to evaluate their socio-

cultural variations within the strong unique lambani practices. Accordingly this study has been undertaken to evaluate the ritualistic drinking habits of Lambanis in eighteen tandas belonging to four districts of Karnataka, i.e, Dharwad, Gadag, Haveri and Davangere.

Tandas Studied under Four Districts of Karnataka

DHARWAD	Number of Families
Ramdurga	10
Gangapura	18
Chikkamagalur	25
Ramapura	20
Siddapura	27
HAVERI	Number of Families
Timalapur	12
Nandigul	25
Gangachala	32
Aatti katte	35
Kavalur	20
GADAG	Number of Families
Nagavi	18
Dindapur	27
Beladhadi	25
Nabhapura	30
DAVANAGERE	Number of Families
Kabla	32
Tolahunase	35
Karekatte	28
Basvarajapura	31
TOTAL	450

Material and Methods

A total of eighteen randomly selected tandas of four districts of Karnataka (Dharwad, Haveri, Gadag and Davangere) comprising 450 families were interviewed with a questionnaire to the family members supplied earlier inquiring about the ceremonies and rituals conducted by them which involve the drinking of alcohol between January 2004 and December 2004. Information regarding persons engaged in drinking during these rituals their age, sex, quantity consumed and the source of liquor along with time and place were collected. In case of families and group of families engaged in distillation of liquor, the details of distillation methods and materials used were also collected.

Observations

Lambanis apart from performing festivals perform certain rituals as well. During specific occasions denoting births, puberty, marriage and death. Among the tandas under study it was found that all the festivals involve preparation of non-vegetarian food and consumption of liquor is option, where as there are rituals marking pregnancy, birth, death and offering respect to departed souls where preparation of non-vegetarian items and drinking of liquor is involved. Thus ritual drinking can be divided into festival drinking and non festival drinking.

Drinking during Non-Festival occasion:

Birth of male child is considered as a special occasion to all Hindus. During this ceremony, five to seven women were invited to perform ceremony which involves offering of fruits, coconut and jaggery to ancestral spirits. Child's father or head of the family treats the guest with arrack or toddy with all joy. Whereas when a female child attains puberty the on set of menstrual cycle is observed as special occasion. Girl thus matured is kept in a separate corner or place for seven days and after seventh day a grand feast is shared by the family members along with close friends and relatives. During this ceremony food with non vegetarian items and alcoholic liquors are used commonly. Birth of child whether male or female is an occasion to celebrate and the naming ceremony includes drinks as well.

Marriages include widow marriages, widower marriages or subsequent marriages of male. However women are not allowed to marry second time during the life time of their husbands. Marriage of any type begins with a betrothal ceremony. Elders along with few respected persons visit the bride's house and declare the intention; this step is observed as "Sagai" among Lambani. To mark this occasion liquor is distributed by the bride's family.

Marriage ceremonies involves 'Sadithanero' function in which a decorated posture prepared out of mango leaves, coconut frond, is placed before the brides and grooms house along with decorated vessels. This marks the actual beginning of the marriage ceremony. This day is also occasion to have drinks and non-vegetarian food. Usually first marriages of the male or female will have grand function with declare of marriage. However, second marriage and widow marriages lack this function of "Sadithanero".

All the marriages involve the occasion to worship the family deity at the onset of marriage ceremony and also at the end of the marriage ceremony. Rich ones celebrate these on separate days and offer food and drinks on these days whereas those who cannot afford expenditure involve these worships of family deities along with marriage functions. This will save the expenditure of additional foods and drinks.

In case of bride's family, receiving of groom, sending of bride to groom's house are the sad parts of the function which involve drinks and non-vegetarian foods. In case of groom's family, receiving the bride into their house or tanda is a special occasion and celebrated with fervor depending upon the status of the groom in the tanda. Marriages involve various steps of celebrations which can be extended for many days and can provide opportunity to offer drinks and foods. Depending upon the financial condition and available time ceremonies are mixed up and separated.

Birth, marriage, pregnancy and maturity of girl are happy occasions observed by Lambanis with special food and drinks. Religious rituals specific to specific functions are followed wherever they should be followed. However, drinks are essential in the functions involving showing respect to the departed elders. In case of deaths, sufficient time is spent to inform the relatives and friends of the individual. Usually one night is spent with dead body in the house along with appraising the departed person in-between weeping and songs. A token fire is burnt before the house. Since burning or burying is to be performed, decision is taken and spot is sketched for final ceremony. Dead bodies of unmarried, puerperal women and children are buried. Once the grieving family returns hospitality is extended by other families which involves liquor. On the third day of death, in the shade of tree near the secluded place, "Kandya" rituals are performed which involves offering of food and water in a pot. On this day, some tanda people on behalf of grieving family sacrifice the sheep or goat. Food prepared out of this offering along with "Hadbhandero". On the twelfth and thirteenth day, of death, "barothero" (meaning 12th and 13th day of the death) function is performed. On these days along with specific rituals drinks are shared between hosts and guests.

Drinking during Festival Occasion:

Lambanis perform several festivals Holi, Dasera, Deepavali are prominent festivals which involve offering of sheep, goat or hen. Ceremonies involve drinking sessions after the non-vegetarian food is prepared. Usually small pace of ceremonial time is spent to prepare and offer vegetarian food in case of

deities which must be worshipped without non-vegetarian food. In case of some festivals (Gangapati, Shivaratri) after the actual day of usual festival is selected to prepare non-vegetarian food and to involve drinking session.

Norms in drinking sessions

Usually married male and female are allowed to consume the liquor in ceremonies. Elders of the family are the first to get the share which is followed by male members and then females are allowed to consume the liquor. However, it has been maintained that women should not engulf drinks before their in-laws. Sons and daughters are allowed to consume liquor before their parents.

In case of distillation within the house atmosphere women are allowed to provide cooling water to collecting chamber whereas in case of defilation in field atmosphere, small children are used to provide cooling water. Since distillation has to be done with secrecy to avoid the notice of excise department only worthy people are allowed to join in this process. According to experts in such distillation it works out to be cheap if more than ten kilograms of jiggery is used with one or two labours for three to six hours. Unlike toddy it can be preserved for long time. However, caution is needed to avoid the attacks of police and excise departments who may get tips from the rival groups of tandas.

Ritualistic Drinking Patterns

It has been observed that maximum number of persons engage in ceremonial drinking comes under age group 60 and above for both male and female. Among these males, about 49% are habitual drinkers whereas 51% of males drink only in sessions, in case of women is 60 and above groups, habitual drinkers is 29% whereas 71% take ceremonial drinks. In case of offerings of liquor to departed ancestors, a small amount of liquor is placed in a cup before the ceremonial structures and adoration. This special amount of liquor is shared by the family members only. Along with the liquor things which were favourite to the departed elders are also placed (Beedi, tobacco and betel nuts, pan, etc.) Usually arrack is purchased from the shops and used. On special occasions in case of large amount of liquor is needed, distillation is undertaken.

Distillation of liquor is entrusted to some members of the family or to a group. About one bottle of liquor (750ml) is prepared out of 1 kilogram of jaggery. Jaggery is dissolved into sufficient water about 80-90 times and allowed to ferment for three to four days. Then "Navasagara" (Ammonium chloride) and bark of jambolana tree along with peelings of orange lemon are added to this fermented mixture. On a constant fire this mixture is heated and evaporation is cooled and collected in a separate container. This collected part is tested for its quality by allowing a sample to burn if very little moisture is left after catching fire; the distillation is considered as strong.

In case of below 60 and above 40 years age group both male and female comprise 30% of the ritualistic drinkers. Among this group about 60% of the male are habitual drinkers and 21% of the female are habitual drinkers. In case of 20 and up to 40 years age group 12% of the male are habitual drinkers and 8% of the female are habitual drinkers.

It has been observed that in case of tandas where more number of worshippers of Tulaja Bhavani are present the number of occasions to drink in mass are more (Nagavi tanda, Gangapur tande, Nandigul tanda). Followers of Sevalal include families which have maximum number of sessions next to the followers of Tulajasathi. Apart from birth-death and festivals

ceremonial drinking sessions are followed after settlement of disputes, selling and purchase of lands and vehicles. These sessions along with birth-death occasions can be considered as casual drinking sessions. There are special occasion specific to specific tanda which provide opportunity to have drinking sessions. In case of Attikatti tanda and Dindur tanda there are five to six special occasions specific to tanda which involve offering of animals and mass drinking in families.

It has been observed that in families in which both parents are educated are having very few sessions of mass drinking. However, ritual drinking, birth-death and marriage ceremonies have no correlation to education of family members. Out of 450 families, 129 families are having their own land and 32% of these families are found to engage in distillation three to four times a year. Families with heads of the family educated up to fourth standard are 99 and illiterate females are heads of the 172 families. Total of 1358 family members are below 20 years and 45% of these are going to educational institutions.

Discussion and conclusion

The present study is an attempt to observe the factors related to ritualistic drinking in Lambani residential areas. Alcoholism is a repetitive intake of alcoholic beverages. Though ritualistic alcohol consumption is not intended to make the individual to get into alcoholism, it may provide the opportunity to know the intoxicating effects of alcohol. This type of shift escape intoxicating condition for individual might have been in need in the days of migration and forest living. However, such escape to intoxication under settled life may lead to unwanted consequences. But being members of the tribe which respects traditional practices Lambanis involve rituals with offering and sharing of liquors. Apart from this practice of preparing their own liquor may dispose the tribe to criminal activities. (Gupta Mithilesh 1964). Alcohol has the property of making the individual addictive to get intoxicating effect. Like tobacco and ganja (herb used to smoke) alcohol produces withdrawal symptoms if addicted person wants to quit. There are some research reports that in rural India households have a significant preference for arrack and toddy. Further it has been noted that large families with many earning members prevent consumption by concealing the actual disposable earnings (Lupis Rahman, 2003). But in the present study, it has been observed that in houses with more number of individuals, the percentage of male and female participation in ritualistic drinking is more or less equal at all age groups. It has been observed in present study that families headed by female are not showing any correlation with ritualistic alcohol consumption whereas it has been reported that there is lower participation in alcoholic consumption among the houses headed by female. Since the present study data is regarding ritualistic alcohol consumption, it should not be compared with general alcohol consumption. Ritualistic alcohol consumption patterns contradicting to alcoholism patterns clearly indicate the strong hold of tradition on the ritualistic alcohol consumption. As the family size increases, more number of non festival drinking due to births-marriage-deaths increase. Further, settling in a tanda where local festivals are more increases the number ritualistic drinking sessions. General alcohol consumption reveals do not correlate with ritualistic alcohol consumption indicate that alcohol consumption is limited to rituals and participation is bounded on tradition. Lambanis treated alcohol as one of the item need to maintain the tradition. This fact is evident from their capability to distill whenever it is needed. This makes

them immune to prohibition. It has been observed that tandas of Dharwad and Haveri have more festival ceremonies than those of Davanagere and Gadag. Probably this could be due to more number of followers of local temples and deities present in the vicinity of these tandas. However, a community which introduces the individuals to intoxicants in the name of tradition or tolerates the involvement of intoxication in the name of tradition needs to be educated with consequences of addictions and subsequent effects.

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