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# Ethnography of Koya Tribe in Eastern Ghats – Holistic Approach

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**ABSTRACT:** The Koyas are one of the few multi-lingual and multi-racial tribal communities living in India. The Koya population is mostly spread out in the Eastern ghats especially southern region of India, particularly in the states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Karnataka. They are also present in West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh as mixed tribe with Gond tribe. According to 2011 census the total population of these tribe in India is 7,38,629 among them 3,60,441 are males and 3,78,188 are females. Koyas are one of the major peasant tribe of Telangana numbering 4.86 lakh as per 2013 tribal census data. Physically they are classified as Australoid. The Koyas call themselves as "Koithur". The main land of Koithur or the Koya land includes the Indravati, Godavari, Sabari, Sileru rivers and the thickly wooded Eastern Ghats, covering parts of Bastar, Koraput, Warangal, Khammam, Karimnagar and the East and West Godavari districts.

**KEYWORDS:** Australoid, Bhadrachalam, Eastern Ghats, Koya basha, Koya Dora.

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. CHARACTERISTICS OF EASTERN GHATS

Eastern Ghats are discontinuous range of mountain sets along with Eastern coast. Eastern Ghats are passing through states like Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The northern portion of the Eastern Ghats extend from Orissa, the districts of Sambalpur, Angul, Cuttack, Bolangir, Mayurbhanj, Kalahandi, Ganjam, Dhenkanal, Gajapati, Phulbani and Koraput, and in Andhra Pradesh the districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari and parts of Khammam, southern portion ends with Tamil Nadu. These parts have an altitude of above 400 m with a few peaks exceeding 1,100 m. The highest peak is Mahendragiri range at 1,516 m. The Middle Eastern Ghats extend from the River Krishna towards the city of Chennai (in Tamil Nadu state) in the south. The southern Eastern Ghats meet the high mountain ranges of the Western Ghats in the Nilgiri belt and cover in Tamil Nadu. Eastern Ghats gift its inhabitant the popular profession of fisheries as its coastal area is full of fishing opportunity.

#### B. EASTERN GHATS TRIBAL POPULATION

The Eastern Ghats are home to several tribal communities, who have been living here for hundreds of years with the forests and land sustaining them. The land is occupied by quite a few tribes which include Koya Dora, Savara, Jatapu, Konda Dora, Gadaba, Khond, Manne Dora and Mukha Dora. These indigenous people have their own unique cultural heritage. These people follow the age old customs and traditions. They are still dependent on the forest produce and hunting for their livelihood. These tribes have good knowledge about the region and its produce and thereby make a good use of its medicinal plants.

### II. DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION KOYA

The Koyas are an ancient scheduled tribal community credited with an unique way of life and a common cultural heritage also one of the few multi-lingual and multi-racial tribal communities habituated southern part of India. Koyas

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are commonly referred to as Koi, Koyalu, Koyollu, KoyaDoralu, Doralu Sattam, etc. Koya tribes can be further divided into Koya, Doli Koya, Gutta Koya or Gotti Koya, Kammara Koya, Musara Koya, Oddi Koya, Pattidi Koya, Rasha Koya, Lingadhari Koya (ordinary), Kottu Koya, Bhine Koya, Raja Koya, etc. Koyas call themselves "Koitur" in their dialect. Koyas speak Koya language, also known as *koya basha*, and is a member of the Dravidian language family. The Koya population is mostly spread out in the southern region of India, particularly in the states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Karnataka. In Andhra Pradesh, they live especially in West Godavari, East Godavari, in Telangana, Khammam and Warangal districts and are sparsely found in Adilabad and Karimnagar districts. Highest population of Koya tribe are located in Telangana are (4, 86, 391) and second highest in Andhra Pradesh (1, 04, 348) in total state population according to the census of 2011. The Koya are mainly settled cultivators and artisans, expertise in making bamboo furniture including mats for fencing, dust pans, and baskets. They grow Jowar, Ragi, Bajra and other millets. Tubers and roots such as Tella Chenna Gadda, and edible green leaves such as Gongura, Thotakura, Boddukura, Palakura are dietary staples as are curries made from some of these ingredients. After Andhra and Telangana Koyas are more number in Odisha, the long past the Koyas were identified as a warrior tribe. They call themselves Koya or Koitor meaning 'people'. Ethnoculturally, the Koyas of Malkangiri are more connected with the Bison-Horn Murias of adjacent Chhatishgarh.

### A. NAME, HISTORY, ORIGIN AND LOCAL TALES

Koya is believed to be a section of Gond but the present Koyas do not agree with this and say they were never a part of Gond tribe. Koya goes by different names like '*Doralu chattam*' (Lord's group), '*Putta Dora*' (original lords), '*Koitur*'. The name 'Koya' is believed to have been derived from the word '*Koyya*', in Koya language '*Koyya*' means tree. The Koyas have a folk tale to explain their origin as well as the derivation of their name. Briefly this legend goes as follows. God married a beautiful woman found in a bottle gourd and the couple gave birth to 101 children. One day these 101 children killed '*Kamadhenu*' (sacred cow) which gave food to all the people in the universe, cooked its meat and ate large part of it and the rest of it was preserved in the hole found in a tree. One of the 101 children stealthily approached the tree one day and consumed the meat. Jambavantha saw him eating and called him '*Koyya*' (tree) and from then onwards his descendants became '*Koyya*' which in course of time became '*Koya*'.

### B. LANGUAGE

The Koyas are a branch of the Gondi-speaking people. Their mother tongue comes under the Dravidian group of languages. This dialect also differs among the two groups of Koya - the north and the south. There has been some incorporation of Telugu, Hindi and Odia words into the language of the southern and northern Koyas respectively. It is evident that the Koya of the two regions of the district are more or less similar linguistically, the slight differences being seen due to the contact with Odia or Telugu speakers. The Koyas have their own dialect but the Koyas living in Adilabad, Karimnagar, Warangal and in some parts of East Godavari District have now forgotten their language and speak only Telugu, the regional language while the Koyas living in Bhadrachalam area in Khammam District and West Godavari District speak 'Koya' language. It is also called *Chettu Basha* (Tree Language) or *Gali Basha* (Air Language) in 'Telugu'. This simply means the language spoken by the people who live under trees.

### C. DRESS PATTERN AND ORNAMENTS

The southerners have been much influenced in dress, ornaments and hairstyle by the Telugus, while the northerners have retained their primitiveness to a great extent. Koyas of older generation use very scanty clothes, Men use only loin cloth. Older women wear narrow shorts covering the portions of body from waist to knee, and use another piece to cover the upper part of the body. Now-a-days women of younger generation wear saree, blouse and petticoat and young men wear dhoti, half pant, lungi etc. Women wear several ornaments on their wrists, ankles, ears, nose and neck.

### D. DEMOGRAPHY

According to 2011 census, the total population of Koya tribe in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are 5, 90,739 including 2, 89,025 males and 3, 01,714 females. Their sex ratio comes to 1044 females for 1000 males. The literacy among the

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Koyas is leveled at 53.7 percent (60.7 percent for male and 47.0 percent for female). Odisha is 1, 47,137 including 71,014 males and 76,123 females. Their sex ratio comes to 1072 females for 1000 males. The literacy among the Koyas is leveled at 29.87 percent (36.46 percent for male and 23.77 percent for female). Maharashtra is 388 including 209 males and 179 females. Their sex ratio comes to 856 females for 1000 males. The literacy among the Koyas is leveled at 85.9 percent (89.4 percent for male and 81.9 percent for female). Karnataka is 365 including 193 males and 172 females. Their sex ratio comes to 891 females for 1000 males. The literacy among the Koyas is leveled at 60.9 percent (71.8 percent for male and 48.6 percent for female).

## ***E. HABITAT SETTLEMENT & HOUSING***

The Koyas inhabit the hills and forests north of Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh and Malkangiri district of Odisha. This district is comprised of vast forest areas in the Eastern Ghats mountain range, which has an elevation of 3000 feet at its eastern boundary. The northern region has an elevation of 800 feet near the foot of the ghat. From north to south the elevation gradually diminishes and the southernmost point has an elevation of 400 feet where the river Sileru and Saberi join and flow together with a name 'China Godavari' towards the junction at Komanavaram where they meet river Godavari. In each village there is one structure called bijjagudi or 'House of God'. This is situated either inside the village, or near the village boundary or even in front of the head man's house. The sacred shrine of Gudimata the village goddess is located in a group of Mahul trees inside or near the village. The boundary of each house site is demarcated by fencing made of neatly woven bamboo splits. There are small sheds for pigs, goats and fowls. Each Koya house is attached with a kitchen garden. There they grow tobacco, mustard, vegetables, maize and millets. The roofs of almost all houses are covered with vegetable creepers. They plant beans in the garden or near the house.

Mostly, the access to the Koya villages is by narrow footpaths of kacha type. In every village, one finds two or more clusters of houses. The Koya live in low thatched houses. Each house consists of one or two small huts, which are used as sleeping rooms. The walls of a house are made of tree branches and bamboo, which are thickly plastered with mud. The roofs are low thatched with a type of wild grass, locally known as sindi. The houses are rectangular in size and partitioned into rooms by walls of bamboo plastered with mud. The house is windowless and the hearth is situated in its one corner. A verandah (arra) runs almost on all the sides of the house. There are no separate storerooms. The agricultural produce and forest collections are stored under the roof over a shelf inside the sleeping rooms. The shelves are made of bamboo and wooden pillars.

## **III. SOCIAL LIFE**

### ***A. SUB-TRIBES***

Many of the sub-tribes mentioned by Cains perhaps were functional groups, which in course of time acquired endogamous character. For example, oorr' means palanquin, Koyas who carried Palanquin were called **Doli Koya**, likewise '**Kammara**' means black smith, the Koya branch who were black-smiths might have been called '**Kammara Koya**', '**oddi**' is caste engaged in stone and earth work. The nomenclature '**Dorala Chattam**' today refers to all the Koyas but not to a single sub-tribe. At present all the Koyas claim that they are Racha Koyas and endogamous character of these sub-tribes has almost disappeared and marriages are controlled by Phratries and Clans.

### ***B. PHRATRIES AND CLANS***

Total clans in Koya are (1) Peresuboyudu, (2) Mudogatta, (3) Peregatta, (4) Nutamuppayogatta and (5) Vidogatta. **Galta** for him is the name given to the clan. According to P.R. Hemingway as quoted by Thurston exogamous sects among Koya are called '**Gatta**' and the following '**Gattas**' are mentioned by him, **Mud** (third), **Nalo** (fourth), **Aiydo** (fifth), **Aro** (sixth) or **Ratibonda**, **Nutamuppaya** (130) and **Peramboy**. It is not clear whether these are the numbers in each Phratry or the names of the clans themselves, besides all the names or numbers are mentioned in Telugu language. The authors mention the following '**Gattas**' (Phratries). (1) Mudava Gatta (three gatta), (2) Nalugavagatta (four gatta), (3) Idavagatta (five gatta), (4) Aravagatta (six tribes), (5) Yedavagatta (seven gatta). Each **gatta** is constituted by innumerable clans and the clans are associated with several Gods and deities.

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## IV. FAMILY

Nuclear families are predominant among Koyas. A son immediately after marriage invariably establishes his own household in most of the cases in the settlement of his parents. In a very few cases, he may migrate to his wife's village but establishes his own household. Parents would not like to live with their son's family unless they are totally invalid because of old age or illness. The parents of the boy after marriage help him in all the-possible ways from construction of the house to initial provisioning of the family. Household equipment like cooking utensils etc., are provided by the wife's parents. If the parents of the wife are too poor and the husband's family is also too poor, the Koya community on both the sides comes forward to their rescue by pooling together their resources and provisioning the new family. Very few cases to be found matrilineal residences in the Koya tribe. The division of labour in a Koya family is based on sex. It is the responsibility of the women to cook food and keep the house and surroundings neat and clean by sweeping it daily. Further, it is the wife fetches water from a hill stream nearby or a well located in the settlement. In all these tasks she is assisted by her unmarried daughters. In addition to the tasks in the house, a woman also participates in weeding, sowing and harvesting in agriculture, besides participating in food gathering in the forest. The husband and grown up sons of a family mostly participate in economic activities like agriculture (Ploughing, transporting) etc., and also in hunting often. The sons from very early age follow their father in their economic activities while the girls follow their mother in domestic and other activities. In fact, the Koyas say that a daughter should become an expert in both the activities inside and outside the house. Girls aged below 10 years have the additional duty of looking after the young siblings when the elders are busy in other activities.

## V. LIFE CYCLE CEREMONIES

### A. BIRTH

Koyas say that children are gift from God. However, it does not mean that they do not know how a woman conceives. When they say that children are the gift of God, they mean despite man's efforts his wife conceives only, it is believed that God has put the baby inside her womb. The first delivery of a woman takes place in her parent's house. In the eighth month of a woman's pregnancy her parents will come to her house, with the permission of the husband and his parents if they are living with their married son take their daughter to their house. The woman usually does not attend to hard work either outside the house or within. However, she attends to sedentary works, like helping her mother in cooking and in other household duties. When her labour pain starts, she is taken to a hut erected behind the main house or in a corner of the house for delivery. The wadde (magico-religious functionary) conducts necessary rituals to save the child and mother from the evil spirits and facilitate smooth delivery of the baby. She cuts umbilical cord with the help of a heat treated arrowhead or a sharp piece of new broken earthen pot to the baby, collects placenta, takes it to the outskirts of the village, digs a hole when no one is there in that place, the placenta and umbilical cord covers inside the earth. Later on, father or the grown up brother of the woman visits the place and stamps on the place with their feet so that covered earth is firm and no animal would be able to extricate it. Dissected part tying the base and apply turmeric mixed oil there. In the early days, they used to apply freshly prepared ash with oil. The new born and the mother are bathed with warm water after turmeric mixed oil has been applied twice. Usually after the birth, pollution is observed for eleven days. All these eleven days, the mother has to confine herself to the corner of the house, and every day the mid wife visits the house and gives bath.

Name giving ceremony of the new born is performed after 2 to 3 months of birth and in some cases even earlier after eleven days, when the family has the means to afford the expenses. On this occasion all the village ladies take bath and assemble in the house of the new born along with the team of women present at the time of delivery. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday are considered auspicious for this ceremony. Uncles and maternal grandparents are invited. They come and apply turmeric paste on the forehead of the child and place some coins on a plate. The lady who had severed the umbilical cord holds the child and starts singing song, which the other ladies recite. She starts with the name of a dead ancestor and says "We don't know in which heaven you are. We want to have you; shall we call the child by your name? You will bless the child" etc. Then she disperses some rice over a piece of bread and breaks it in to two. If it ends with an equal distribution, then the child will be named after him and if it does not, she throws the rice

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and starts singing again with another name. After the child is named, a pig is sacrificed and a feast is organized for the village women. The woman and the child will be taken to her husband's house during the third month after delivery.

## **B.PUBERTY**

Koya girls usually attain puberty by age between 12 and 14 years. During the first menarche, the girl is made to sit on palm leaves spread in a corner of the house. Pollution is observed for eleven days. During all the eleven days, the girl is not permitted to touch any object in the house as well as visit other parts of the house. All her requirements including food are supplied in the corner. She is permitted out only for nature's call but she has to take care that no one sees her face and not to touch any object being used in the house or outside, particularly the agricultural implements which might get polluted and the result would be that the implements may pass on the pollution to the soil which in turn loses its fertility. On the eleventh day, the girl's body will be smeared with turmeric paste by the midwife and she will be given bath. After the bath, the girl is given a new saree and a blouse by her parents. After the bath, the period of pollution is over and the girl once again becomes part of the family and the Koya society. A vegetarian feast will be served to all the people who are present at the time of the bath of the girl.

The Koyas think that a boy attains maturity when hairs grow in his armpits and face. Usually these things happen when a boy is aged twelve to thirteen. Hence the marriageable age for boys starts at thirteen. A girl becomes marriageable when she attains puberty (erata), irrespective of her age. During the time of adolescence they learnt how to live independently. They co-operate the family in all socio-economic activities along the lines of division of labour. In Koya society division of labour is observed along all the grades of age and sex. In Odisha the youth dormitories of Koyas play a major role for promoting their culture and tradition. The dormitories are the institution for unmarried youths. The Koya boys and the girls spend nights there in separate rooms. The girls dormitory is called Pikin-Kudma. The girls gather there in the night for singing and gossiping and they sleep there together. But this practice is gradually being abandoned and in many villages Pikin-Kudma is not in existence. An open space left opposite the dormitory is meant for practicing dance. It would not be wrong to say it as school of dance for the Koya youths. This dormitory also facilitates selection of life partner by the youth. It is indeed a democratic institution for promotion and propagation of Koya culture.

## **VI. MARRIAGE**

Among Koyas marriages are performed outside one's own phratry. It means phratry, clan and surnames are exogamous. Further marriage of a girl invariably takes place only after the attainment of her puberty. Not only this one, she should also be must be good in all the economic and non-economic activities both in the household and outside. Likewise a boy is ready for marriage when he is believed to be capable of participating in all the economic activities required to maintain a separate family. There are four types of acquiring mates (marriage). They are (1) marriage by negotiation, (2) marriage by love and elopement (3) marriage by service and (4) marriage by capture. In the past all the above mentioned four types were practiced frequently but today marriage by negotiation is the predominant one.

### **A.MARRIAGE BY NEGOTIATION**

After identifying a suitable girl, the parents of the boy along with a few Koya elders visit the house of the girl. The father of the boy telling the girl's father that they have come to "*Pappu annam thinataniki vachchinamu*" (we have come to eat food in your house). The parents of the girl requests the parents of the boy to contact first the maternal uncle of the girl since his consent is necessary for the marriage of their daughter. If both the parties accept in principle for the alliance, they negotiate the bride price and other aspects of the marriage. After every aspect of the marriage is agreed upon the father of the boy buys some liquor and all the people there enjoy it. This is called "*Kalakalu Pusarni*". Ten day before the actual marriage ceremony the party from boy's side once again visits the girl's house for betrothal called "*Pasupu Kumkum*" (Turmeric and Vermilion). The party takes along with them turmeric powder, vermilion, rice, ghee, redgram, five bottles of liquor, a new blouse and some cash (bride price) to be distributed among the Koya elders of the village and a large part of the cash going to the maternal uncle of the girl. After two or three days, the boy's party again visits the girl's house with new clothes, silver jewellery and provisions for a feast. The



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clothes and the jewellery will be presented to the girl and with the provisions carried with them food is cooked and served to both the parties. Both the bride and bridegroom will be given bath after smearing them with turmeric paste. The groom and the bride are made to sit under the marriage pandal. The bridegroom ties Tali (marriage locket) and a black beads necklace in the neck of the bride, Mile the relatives bless the couple by throwing turmeric mixed rice on their heads. Then the bride and bridegroom will be carried on shoulders of their respective relatives in a procession in the settlement to the beating of the drums. After returning from the procession a sumptuous feast along with liquor will be served to all the invitees to the marriage. One economic aspect of Koya marriage is that almost all the expenditure is borne by the bridegroom's parents and very little is incurred by the bride's parents.

## **C.MARRIAGE BY CAPTURE (POVITHOR)**

In the past, marriage by capture occurred quite often. As mentioned above, regular marriage is quite expensive to the family of the boy. Those who could not afford these expenses resorted to marriage by capture called "*Povithor*" in their language. A young man who intends to marry a particular girl seeks the help of his relatives and friends to capture the girl. Usually capture is carried out either in the forest or while the girl is returning from a *Shandi* (weekly market) and never in the settlement because the villagers may object it. When an opportunity arises the boy and his friends carry the girl to their house, the girl and her friends resist but ultimately yield. The moment the girl is taken into the house of the boy, the boy and the girl are accepted as husband and wife by Koya society. Within an year of this type of marriage the parents of the boy should arrange a feast to the relatives as well as send a small amount of bride price to the parents of the girl who in turn would give a feast by spending this amount to their relatives.

## **D.MARRIAGE BY ELOPEMENT**

When a boy and girl love each other and either of the parents opposes the alliance they elope to a far away located settlement where some of their relatives are living. The couple stays with their relatives for some time either returns to the boy's parent's house or to the girl's parents. Any how the parents of the boy send bride price to the parents of the girl. With the bride price the parents of the girl organize a feast to their relatives.

## **E.MARRIAGE BY SERVICE**

If a boy and his family cannot afford to pay bride price and incur expenses on marriage, he enters into agreement with his would be father-in-law that he would serve in his house for a stipulated period mostly participating in economic activities. The period of service ranges between one to three years. After the stipulated service is completed the parents of the girl celebrate the marriage. Even after the marriage, the boy is free to live along with the girl in his father-in-law's house or to go back with his wife to his parent's house.

## **F.DIVORCE**

Divorce is permitted in this society, both husband and wife can take initiative but generally it is the man who initiates and the cause in majority of the cases is falling in love with another woman. If he wants to leave, he just leaves her and starts living with the woman he likes, but he has to inform the "**povi**" (head of the Kula Panchayat in the village) on the other hand when a woman wants separation she never expresses it, but leaves him to her parent's house without telling him or with any man she likes, which quite often is the case. If the woman leaves on her own and no fault lies with her husband, either her present husband or her parents have to return the bride price and all the ornaments given to her by the previous husband along with a fine imposed by the head of the Panchayat. If the wrong lies with the husband, she need not return the bride price and ornaments and has to pay "**Maganali**" (compensation) to his wife, which will be fixed by the '**Panchayat**'. The children accept the baby at the breast remaining with the husband. Even the baby taken with the woman has to return to her father at the mutually agreed age.

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## G. WIDOW REMARRIAGE

Widow remarriage is called "*Maaru Manuvu*", Widow remarriage is a simple one. A man desirous of marrying a widow after taking her consent gives a feast to his and her relatives. After the feast, she automatically becomes the wife of the man and enjoys the same status as that of other married women.

## VII. DEATH

When death occurs in a Koya family the body is taken out immediately and placed on a cot in front of the house. A messenger will be sent to inform the news to the relatives. Mean while, the body is given bath, wrapped in a new white cloth is placed on the cot. The dead bodie's legs are brought close to each other and the big toes of the both the feet are tied together. Body's nostrils and ears are closed with cotton and the forehead is smeared with turmeric. In previous days one of the tradition of Koyas family killing a cow, on the death of a married woman or a man and they keep its tail in the hands of the dead person. They believe by doing this the soul of the dead person goes to heaven. the number of cows they kept also decreased and it is expensive to buy a cow and kill it, hence they have stopped this practice. When children and pregnant women die they are buried, the rest of the dead are cremated. After the arrival of the relatives, a round of liquor is served to the people assembled and pall bearers belonging to the dead man's clan are given an extra round of liquor. The palls caw the cot to the cremation ground in a procession to the tune of the beating drums. In fact, the pall bearers sway like dancers to the rhythm of the beating of the drums. In front of the funeral procession a member of the dead persons clan walks with a pot filled with fire. After reaching the cremation ground, the cot with the dead body is kept on the funeral pyre already made ready by the agnates of the dead. One of the pall bearers takes an axe makes a small crack on the four comers of the cot and the dead body and the cot is covered with fuel wood and the chief mourner who carried the fire sets fire to the pyre. All these who attended the funeral return back to the house of the dead after taking bath in a hill stream or at a nearby well. In the house of the dead a small oil lamp is lit to honour the dead person and everyone who attend the funeral comes inside the house and pays respects to the lamp, representing the dead person. During those days when the Koyas killed a cow after death of a person, after returning from the funeral the family cooked the meat of the cow and served it to all those who attended the funeral. Today, the family of the dead man instead passes one more round of liquor to all the people.

On the eleventh day after the death '*Chinnadinam*' (small obsequies) and on 21" day "*Pedda Karma*" (major obsequies) will be observed. On the day of '*Chinna dinam*' a person from the family of the dead visits the grave or funeral place and cleans the surroundings, with water. On the day of "*Pedda Karma*", a dish, which is liked by the dead man, is cooked and kept on the grave or at the place of the funeral. On that day all those who attended the funeral or burial take bath to become ritually clean and enjoy the feast and liquor provided by the family of the dead.

## VIII. ECONOMY

Today Koyas wherever they inhabit in the state are settled cultivators, but once they were shifting cultivators. Writing about the shifting cultivation of Koyas "J.Cain" says, a clearing is made in the jungle, and a few acres for cultivation are left vacant round the houses. In clearing away the wood, every tree is removed except the 'Ippa' (*Bassia latifolia*) and tamarind trees, which are of the greatest service to the people on account of their fruits and shade. The Kois do not remain long in the same place. Four years are sufficed to exhaust the soil in one locality and they do not take the trouble to plough deeper, but migrate to another spot, where they make a fresh clearing and erect a new village". Further J. Cain writes that when the "cultivation season is over and the time of harvest draws on, the whole of the village turns out by families and lives on the small wooden scaffolding erected in the fields, for the purpose of scaring away the wild animals and birds which comes to feed on the ripening grain". According to him, the Koya grew millet and maize in these fields, they also grew a little quantity of cotton and tobacco. With the cotton they made coarse cloth and tobacco for smoking.

In East Godavari district they are practicing '*Chilkapodu*' (ordinary shifting cultivation) and '*Kondapodu*' (hill shifting cultivation). The difference is, *Chilkapodu* they cultivated for a year two and left it fallow for a period of two years and

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returned back to same field once again, while in '*Kondapodu*' after cultivating it two or three years either abandoned it forever or returned back to the same after a long gap. K.S. "Singh" writing on Koya says that "Traditionally, the Koyas subsist by tiling land. As their holdings are small, they go for hunting and gathering to supplement the income. They are also experts in indigenous medicine and go around selling it". Koyas contemporary economic scene suggests that they are struggling hard to take out their living from settled agriculture. Shifting cultivation has almost disappeared as an occupation because of strict forest rules and regulations and the efforts of developmental agencies to wean them from shifting cultivation. They are today settled cultivators and agricultural labourers and marginally depending on collection of minor forest produce. When they took up settled cultivation, many decades back they were fortunate to have fertile lands because their habitations were located on the either side of Godavari flood plains. In these lands, they produced jowar, ragi, bajra and other type of millets. They also produced a little quantity of cotton and paddy. The paddy grown is of coarse variety and does not require perennial water supply in large quantity. They grow vegetables such as *brinjals*, *gongura*, *thotakura*, beans etc. They also grew cereals like redgram, blackgram, greengram and chillies.

Besides cultivation, Koyas as mentioned earlier do make use of forest for their subsistence and for earning some cash. But today the role of forest in their lives is decreasing. They still collect a variety of roots and tubers from the forest. Depending on the seasonality, they collect tubers like '*Velisherda gadda*', '*Nalishenda gadda*', '*Vanier gadda*', '*Naradumpa*', etc. They also gather a number of edible fruits like custard apple, velaga, mango, tunku, polymlra etc. If they are abundant they do sell it to the people from plains, but this rarely happens. One of the important items they collect from the forest is "Ippa" flower with which they brew liquor as well as make sweet food because of the sweetness of the flower Ippa flower is also very nutritious. Apart from the roots, tubers and fruits they also collect minor forest produce like, myrobilam, soap nuts, gum, tamarind, adda leaves (adda leaves are used in beedi making country cigarettes). Before the establishment of Girijan Cooperative Corporation (Tribal Co-operative Corporation) the Koyas sold their minor forest produce to the non-tribal traders and moneylenders. These traders and moneylenders taking the innocence of the Koyas not only under weighted the produce but also paid much less than the market price. Girijan Corporation was established with two objectives, to buy the minor forest produce by paying market and remunerative prices and to supply the tribes with essential commodities like rice, oil and grams at a cheaper rate by establishing fair price shops. The Koyas say that their position did not improve in the sale of minor forest produce, because in some tribal areas the personnel of the Girijan Corporation did under weigh their produce and the Corporation never paid them market price and even delayed the payments due to them. Given a choice many Koyas say that they prefer a private trader to Girijan Co-operative Corporation because with all his negative approach the private trader pays them in time.

There are many reasons for large scale indebtedness and consequent land alienation among the Koyas in particular and other tribal communities in general, they are (1) decreased access to forest resources, (2) increased expenditure on unproductive purposes like socio-religious ceremonies, (3) competition from immigrants from plains for the same forest produce, (4) adoption of commercial crops on large scale and (5) loopholes in the land transfer and money lending regulations and (6) avariciousness of non-tribal immigrants, traders and moneylenders.

comparing the position of Koya and Muria Gonds, a food gathering tribe about their position of debt has to say the following". The percentage of debts in Koyas was higher than in Muria Gonds. The source of debt in the Koyas was wholly from non-tribal moneylenders who fix exorbitant interest rates. Whereas 67 per cent of the Murias take loans from their own community who extend a helping hand in times of need. Debt incurred by the Koyas and Muria Gonds are predominantly for the purpose of getting food". Urmila Pingle also has this to say about the energy consumption among the Koyas. "The Koyas inspite of entering a cash economy consume less energy per consumption unit per day than Muria Gonds. This suggests that introduction of cash crops into a subsistence agriculture community does not necessarily have a beneficial impact as one might logically suppose", according to this writer taking up large scale cultivation of cash crops like groundnut, oil seeds, tobacco and cotton among the Koyas , the traditional distribution system based on reciprocities and balanced exchange has totally broken down. In the past as the Koyas say that all the Koya families made an effort to share their food with those families who experienced scarcity, today no one looks at the need of the neighbours.



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It is an irony that the economic position of the Koyas is deteriorating day by day despite the establishment of Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAS) in the tribal areas in general and in the territories inhabited by the Koyas. Special agricultural development programmes have been launched, a few minor irrigation sources have come up and alternate employment generation programmes have been worked up, still majority of the families today live below poverty line.

## IX. RELIGION, FESTIVALS AND FAIRS

Koyas' religion is animism they worship various Gods, Goddesses and spirits including ancestral spirits. Further according to them, the Gods and Goddesses are divided into benevolent and malevolent spirits, Gods and goddess if not worshipped or appeased, they harm the people with sickness and disease, cause droughts and famine etc., some of the malevolent spirits and Gods have to be appeased with sacrifices. They venerate Bhima and Arjuna, the Pandava brothers of Mahabharatha. The Koyas claim their descent from Bhima. Writing about the religion of Koya the following Gods and Goddesses were appointed to be worshipped by sudras, Muttelamma, Maridimahalakshmi, Poturaju, Adomazazu. The Goddess Mamili or Pele must be propitiated early in the year, or else the crops will undoubtedly fail and she is said to be very partial to human victims. The present day Koyas deny that their ancestors ever practiced human sacrifice to appease neither Mamili spirit nor any other spirit. They do believe that some of their deities are blood thirsty and requires lot of sacrifices to satisfy them. They think that the malevolent spirits and deities like blood and relishes, drinking it, they can even smell blood from a distance. The Gods and Goddesses worshipped by Koyas can be divided into two groups. The Gods and Goddesses of local nature i.e., purely belonging to Koyas and other tribes in the area and those derived from Hindu great tradition.

The local Gods and Goddesses propitiated are (1) Pothuraju, (2) Muthyalamma, (3) Durgamma, (4) Sangamma, (5) Korra raju and (6) Mamili. Except Korra Raju and Pothuraju who are male Gods, the rest are female Goddesses. The great Hindu tradition Gods propitiated by them is (1) Rama, (2) Hanuman and (3) Ganesha. The Koyas living in the surroundings of Bhadrachalam where famous temple dedicated to God Rama is located claim special relationship to God Rama. On the festival of *Sreeramanavami*, the Koyas surrounding Bhadrachalam propitiate Lord Rama and his wife Seetha. One of the items of propitiation on this day is performing the marriage of Rama with Seetha the two represented by two wooden pestles.

Many Koyas of this region claim that Seetha the wife of Rama belong to the Koya community. According to them, Rama during his exile was living in the forest of Bhadrachalam. When a Koya king of the area announced '*Swayamvaram*' (woman choosing a husband amongst many men specially invited for the purpose), a practice quite often mentioned in Hindu epics. In addition they also propitiate '*Bhumatha*' (Goddess of Earth) supposed to be incharge of fertility of the land and 'Kondadevatha' called 'Malyalamma'. This Goddess, the Koyas believe take care of the fertility of the forest. Each clan has its '*Velupu*' (heroes of veneration). The clans Velupus are believed to take care of the health and wealth of the people of the clan.

Except '*Pothumju*' who is represented by a wooden statue the rest of the local Gods and Goddesses are represented by stones of various shapes installed at appropriate places. If the statute of Potharaju becomes old, a new wooden one will be installed. One common feature of propitiation of local Gods and Goddesses is that they are communal and have shared activities. While all the female local deities are satisfied with sacrifices the male local deities and Hindu Gods and Goddesses do not require any animal or bird sacrifices, they are satisfied with the offerings of vegetarian food. Without a brief mention of festivals and fairs among Koyas, the religion of Koyas will not be complete. Below given in brief are the list of the festivals and fairs celebrated by the Koyas.

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S. No	Name of the Festival or Fair	Purpose
1.	Vijjupandum	It may be called seed fertility or seed charming festival. Celebrated at the beginning of monsoon. It is celebrated to increase the fertility of the seed. The seed is mixed with the blood of the animal sacrificed and the same will be distributed to all the farmers who mix them with the seeds made ready for sowing.
2.	Elavelupu Panduga	Families of each ' <b>Gatta</b> ' (phratry) celebrate the festival related to their ' <b>Gatta</b> ' deity. It is a large festival. All the Koyas belonging to the <b>gatta</b> are supposed to attend the festival.
3.	Dadepandum	It is a festival celebrated in the month of January before they start consuming toddy. Before bringing down the toddy for the first time in the year, the sacrifice a fowl at one of the palm trees; sprinkle the toddy <b>on</b> all the people assembled men and women, dance around the tree and then start drinking the toddy.
4.	Kondalakolupu	It is a festival propitiating <b>Kondadevatha</b> and other deities located in the hills. It is celebrated on Sunday in the <b>month</b> of April.
5.	Motigadda <i>Tirdam</i>	Motigadada is a small islet in Godavari River near Bhadrachalam. The Koyas believe that God Siva married a Koya woman in this island. To commemorate the marriage they celebrate this festival.
6.	Sammakka and Saralamma Jathara'	The largest fair celebrated by the <b>Koya</b> at Medaram Village in Warangal District. Not only thousands of the <b>tribals</b> in the area but also large number of non-tribals attend this <b>Jathara</b> . This <b>Jathara</b> is held to commemorate the <b>valour</b> of Koya women Sammakka and Saralamma, who fought the armies of Kakatiya Kings of Warangal.

### A.AESTHETIC LIFE

The Koyas, have retained their rich and varied heritage of colourful dance and music forming an integral part of their festivals and rituals. Among them, the dance, song and music are developed and maintained by themselves as a folk tradition without the aid and intervention of any professional dancer or teacher. The performance of these only gives expression to their inner feelings, their joys and sorrows, their natural affections and passion and their appreciation of beauty in nature and in man. This consists of clapping of hands or beating of drums or an orchestra of different instruments. Koya dance is characterized not only by its originality and spontaneity but also for its wide range of movements. Many parts of the body such as head, back, arms, feet, finger, etc. are brought into play. Some of the groups put on colourful dancing costume during their performance. Like dance, the songs sung by different groups differ from each other. Songs are adopted from the past so many years describe the history of gods, the myths of creation, some epics and legends. In Bija Pandu dance, the Koyas form two separate groups: one of males and the other of females for dancing. The male dancers hold a drum and they beat them while dancing. They wear huge head gears of bison horn which are richly decorated with peacocks feathers and cowries. The girls adorn themselves in ornaments, wearing flat brass band in their foreheads and holding sticks fitted with tinkling bells they dance in circles striking the sticks during the dance in between the beats.

### X. SOCIAL CONTROL

Among the Koyas, if anyone breaches their tribal customary rule, the village community takes corrective action by imposing penalties like fine upon the wrong done and then worships the deities to avoid the calamities expected to follow because of the anger of the supernatural beings. On the other hand such beliefs and practices ensure social discipline and conformity. Functioning of traditional institutions of social control among the Koya reflects that both secular and sacerdotal leaders play a major role in the village through the traditional village council which effectively manages inter and intra village disputes and awards punishments and rewards. The traditional head of the Koya village

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is called "Peda" around whom the leadership, both political and social revolves and the post is hereditary. A decision made by the Peda is never challenged. If a Peda becomes unpopular for some reason, the villagers sit together and select another headman. The people of Koya village sit together once a year to discuss about the headman's activities. The headman sits and listens to what his people say. If he is accused or criticized for any reason, he is given a chance to defend himself. This occasion is known as peda gudma. When a new Peda is chosen, the villagers hold a new cloth is wrapped around the new Peda's head like a turban by the village priest and he is led to the seat of village goddess to swear to remain just and good. Beyond the village organization there is another wider unit at the regional level known as mutha panchayat. It consists of members who are the headman of the different component villages. It takes a care of inter village disputes of serious nature. This panchayat mainly deals with the cases like eloping with another man's wife, which is considered as a big crime. The aggrieved person asks the headman of his village to summon the mutha panchayat to demand compensation from the accused person. Crimes like witchcraft and sorcery are also dealt with in this body, if these happen to involve persons belonging to more than one village. Koya traditional authority structure gives little scope for their women to participate in decision-making process both at household and community levels.

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