

6. SOCIAL WORLD OF THE CULTIVATORS

The Social structure of the agrarian community of the region as else where in the Circars was heterogeneous and complex. It consisted of several layers with several castes playing an important role in maintaining and preserving it intact with their own customs and traditions. These customs in turn determined or maintained the differences between various castes. The presence of cultivating groups was common every where unlike the artisanal groups who were mostly clustered in specific geographical locations. This omnipresence of the cultivators is not surprising, given the predominance of agriculture as a prime rural occupation and it found expression even in the popular proverbs like 'Rajuleni Rajyam Kapu Leni Gramam' (Kingdom without a King, Village without a Peasant).¹

Agrarian Castes and the Rural Structure :

In the Madras Presidency, the cultivators generally belonged to the Vellalar community.² The word Vellalan was derived from Vellanmai, vellam meaning water, anmai is management, that is, cultivation or tillage. According to a legendary account, when a severe drought fell upon the land and when people prayed to Bhudevi for aid she had produced from her body a man carrying a plough who showed them how to till the soil and his offsprings were the Vellalars.⁵ The term Vellalar was commonly used in the

records for the cultivators of Telugu districts or Northern Circars, though it did not represent the Telugu cultivating castes.

The Telugu counter parts of the Vellalars of **Tamil** origin were **Kammas, Kapus, Velamas, and Razus. Velamas** were often referred to as **Velamvars** and the Razus as Rachewars. Though all these were agricultural castes, not all castes were dominant in a particular region. For instance, Reddis who formed a division of the Kapus were the dominant agrarian caste of the ceded districts, whereas Razus were most commonly found in **Visakhapatnam**. Velamas were more common as **Zamindars** and as large estate owners in both Masulipatnam and Godavari districts. Generally claiming themselves as belonging to the military class and having a dominant position in the agrarian setup they never cultivated their lands on their own. Another caste which in spite of enjoying large Inam grants, never cultivated lands on their own was that of the Brahmins. Thus the region had cultivating castes like Kammas, Kapus, Rachewars, **Velamvars**, Brahmins, and to a small extent Muslims who were limited to only specific localities, in and around **Masulipatnam**.

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As seen in the second chapter, the cultivating groups in the region were not homogeneous. They had several hierarchical gradations based not only on the economic strength of the group but on the prevailing local customs and traditions. For instance, in Masulipatnam as else where in the Northern Circars, as already noted, the cultivators were divided into two groups

Kadeem ryots and Payakarı ryots. The Kadeem ryots belonged to the Kamma caste as also the Ulcudi ryots.⁵ The Paracudis, the non resident cultivators who had come to the village to cultivate lands for a stipulated term of years might have belonged to various caste groups.⁶

Besides these main cultivating groups, there were other castes whose presence was necessary in agricultural operations and who occupied the lowest rungs in the rural social structure. They were the Malas and Madigas. They were mostly the landless agricultural labouring groups and generally were employed on the fields of the dominant ryots as farm servants and seasonal labourers.⁷ But though both the groups were the lowest castes they still had their own gradations and even had different social customs which maintained their separate identity.⁸ Between the two groups also, Malas were mostly employed in agriculture and Madigas were attached to the cultivating groups for making agricultural implements though they were also employed as agricultural labourers.⁹

Kammas :

Kammas, the main cultivating caste was divided into many sub sects. The sub sects were divided mainly based on the social practices and these differed from region to region. This in turn implied that the sub sects were not common through out the region

and each sect had its own strong holds. For example, in the Godavari region the Kavati sub division of the Kamma seemed to be predominant, whereas in Masulipatnam the Illuvellani and Pedda Kamma sects were dominant.

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The word Kamma in Telugu literally meant the ear ornament. Many legendary accounts seemed to be in vogue regarding their origin. According to one account the rishis being troubled by Rakshasas applied to Vishnu for protection who in turn directed them to Lakshmi. The goddess gave them a casket containing one of her ear ornaments and enjoined them to worship it for a hundred years. At the expiry of the period, a group of five hundred armed warriors sprang up from the casket. They, at the request of the rishis, attacked and destroyed the demons. After this they were directed to engage themselves in agriculture.

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Interestingly the story is common to both Kamma and Vellalar castes though the reasons for which the casket was worshiped differed in the two cases. Another story revolved around the Kakatiya king Pratapa Rudra, indicating that originally all the cultivating castes were one family and later on were divided into different castes. According to this account the ear ornament of the king Pratapa Rudra fell into the hands of an enemy whom a section of the Kapus boldly attacked and recovered the jewel and hence were given a title Kamma. Those who ran away became Vela-

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mas.

According to another Oral tradition, originally, the Vellalar castes kept women confined to the domestic space, under the so called gosha. But as they got more involved in cultivation, the Vellalars needed the extra help that women could provide in agricultural operations. It was therefore determined to abandon the gosha custom so as to meet these needs. An agreement was drawn up on a palm leaf scroll and all the members were required to sign on it. But some abstained from signing. Those who signed were said to have become **Kammas** and those who declined to do so were Velamas or outsiders.

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The **Kamma** caste was not a homogeneous one and was divided into several sub sects. Though they were not very prominent divisions they were mostly divided based on the existing practices of the region. Those who were **Zamindars** became Zamindari Kammas. In status and economic position, next to the Zamindari Kammas were Pedda Kammas. This group though economically not as powerful as **Zamindars** followed the same social customs as the **Zamindars**. Those who cultivated and lived as agriculturists were known as **Chinna Kammas**.

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These divisions were mainly based on the economic position of the groups.

There were certain divisions which were mainly based on the marriage customs and other social traditions. Those who brought the brides in the basket during the marriage were called **Gampa Kammas**. Those who did not allow their women to go out and work

in the fields were known as **Illuvellani Kmmas**. There were others like **Gampa chatu**, **Godachatu**, **Kuchi Kamma**, **Macha Kamma**, **Yedamapaita Kamma**, **Kudipaita Kmmas**.¹⁶ But not all the sects were common in the region and these divisions also were again differed from district to district. For example in the Godavari district the sub sects in the Kamma caste were mainly derived from curious house hold customs deriving generally from traditional methods of carrying water. They were **Kavidi**, **Eredis**, **Gudas**, **Uggams** and **Rachas**. The **Kavitis** generally carried water pots on a **Kavidi**, the **Eredis** always on a pack bullock, **Uggams** in pots held in the hand and not on the hip or head. The **Racha** ¹⁷
Kmmas always carry water in a pot carried by two persons.

But generally the **Kmmas** inter dined with all the **Satsudra** castes. Originally among the sub sects marriages were not allowed as they were related closely. The minor differences between the sects were generally maintained on important occasions.¹⁸ For instance, the **thalibottu** of the **Gampa Kmmas** was a concave **disc** of gold whereas that of the **Godas** was a large flat **disc**. In the marriages the bride price also seemed to have varied depending on the sect to which they belonged. It seemed to have been the **highest** in the **Gampa** section of the **Kmmas**.¹⁹

The **Kmmas** generally worshipped hero stones. Women commonly performed pujas like **Chata vayanamu** and **Pustedanamulu**. Some during the marriages go to worship the village deities walking on the wet clothes spread on their way.²⁰ **Kmmas** also had gotras

and house names. But these sometimes coincided with those of the Velamas also. Some of the common household names and gotras of the caste were - Addagada, Arekapudi, Yalamanchili, Katta, Kandi-bedala, Singamaneni, Viramachaneni, velanki. Vallabhaneni, Vasireddi and gotras were like Kundutla, Vallutla, Vipparla, Thalluri, Sarijala, Kulukunalla, Dynolla, Puvvada.²¹

Kammas were both Vaishnavites and Shaivites. Most of the Shaivites were disciples of Aradhya Brahmanas and the Vaishnavites had gurus of Vaishnava Brahmanas and beside worship village deities like Draupadi, Manarsami, Gangamma, Ankamma, Peddavetiamma, were worshiped by Gampa chatu Kammas, whereas Godachatu Kammas worship Poleramma, Veikandlathalli and Padavetiamma.²² Perhaps this was the reason why we do not have much evidence of right and left hand caste disputes involving Kammas as they belonged both to the Shaivite and Vaishnavite groups. Although there were these divisions, and some of them fell across the Right hand and the Left hand divide, we have little evidence of conflicts between these subdivisions, suggesting that the Kamma caste as such provided a cohesive link.

Thus Kammas formed one of the dominant and major agricultural caste of Masulipatnam. Their success as good cultivators and hard labouring groups was generally expressed through proverbs like 'Kamma vaani chetulu kattina nilavadu' (though you tie a Kamma's hands he will not sit quiet), 'Kamma vaallu koodite

kadama jaathulu vellunu' (if Kmmas come together other castes go out), 'Kamma vaariki bhoomi bhayapaduthundi' (the earth fears the Kmmas), 'Kammavarintlo Panditi Gunjalaku kuda Pani Chebutharu' (In the Kamma house holds even the pillar posts will also be given work).
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Razus :

Another cultivating caste was that of the Razus. Though they were predominant in Visakhapatnam and Godavari regions as dominant agriculturists and Zamindars of big estates like Peddapuram, Vijayanagaram, they were also common in the Masulipatnam region. The Razus had two prominent divisions among them. One was Konda Razus and another Bhu Razus. The Konda Razus were further divided into the following sections to which various Zamindars belonged like Kodu, Gaita, Muka, and Yenati sections. The Konda Razus were believed to be the hill chiefs who in course of time adopted the title Razu.
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They were regarded as the descendants of the military section of the Kapu, Kamma and Velamas. They always tried to maintain this distinction and be different from other cultivating castes in their social practices. At their weddings they worshipped a sword which usually denoted a soldier caste. They also use a string made of cotton and wool the combination peculiar to Kshatriyas during the weddings. They had endogamous subdivisions like Murikinati, Nandimandalam, and Suryavamsam.
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The Razus were mostly Vaishnavites and their priests were Brahmins. They wore the sacred thread and mostly followed, the customs of the Brahmins thus maintaining a distance from the other group of agriculturists and had Brahmanical gotras. They did not inter dine with other non Brahmin groups.²⁶ In the well to do families the females generally observed pardah to the extent that even during the marriage ceremonies they were not allowed to sit in the Pandal. During ceremonies special respect was shown to the families of Pusapati and Gottimukkala²⁷ generally.

Kapus :

Another important agricultural caste was that of the Kapus. Rather confusingly the term Kapu was commonly used also for the ryot or the cultivator and in some areas the term Pedda Kapu also meant the head of the village, because mostly the head ryots acted as village headmen.²⁸ This term was used, however to refer to Reddi and Baliya cultivators also. These were distinct from the Kapu caste, also a caste of Cultivators.

Kapus were again divided into several sub sects like Akapati, Palle, Panta, and Velapati. The Panta Kapus were said to be divided into Pedda Reddis and Katama Reddis. Reddy was the title of the Kapus and also the title by which the Village Munsif²⁹ was called in the Telugu districts. May be because of their

numerous sects the proverb came 'Redlaki vadlaki perlu cheppale-
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mu'(we cannot name the reddis and varieties of paddy).

Kapus like the **Kammas** were both **Vaishnavites** and **Shaivites**. Besides, they also worshipped a variety of deities like **Thallamma**, **Nagaramamma**, **Putlamma**, **Ankamma**, **Muneeswara**, **Poleramma** and **Oesamma**.
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Baliyas though generally known as trading castes were also known to be cultivators. In their customs there was very little difference between the **Kapus** and **Baliyas**. The general name or title among the **Baliyas** was **Naidu**. The name **Baliya** was said to be derived from the Sanskrit **Bali** (sacrifice) and **ja** (born) signifying that the **Baliyas** owe their origin to the performance of a **Yagam**. The **Baliyas** also employed **Brahmins** and **Satanis** as their priests and **Gown** was their main caste deity. **Baliyas** had sub sects like **Gajula Baliya**, **Telagas**, **Musa Kammas**, **Jakkulas**, and **Adapapa**. In both these groups of **Jakkulas** and **Adapapas** it was
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customary for each family to give up one girl for prostitution. One particular ceremony performed by this caste before every auspicious occasion was **Parvati Puja** that is, the worship of
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their female ancestors.

Velamas :

Velamas were another cultivating caste of the **Masulipatnam** district. Most of the **Zamindari** estates in the region were held

by Velamas. The **Zamindars** of Nuzividu , **Charmahal** and **Mylavaram**
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belonged to the Velama caste. There is a lot of controversy
over who the Velamas were. According to one account, they were
stated to belong to a **subdivision** of the **Balijas**. Other accounts
claim that they belonged to **Kammas** but were divided from them in
consequence of the difference of opinion on the subject of the
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gosha system among women of their castes.

Even among the Velamas there was division on the question of
gosha, into **Adi** Velamas and **Padma** Velamas. The Velamas style
themselves Telugu Vellalars not because of any connection between
the two castes, but because they were at the top of the Telugu
castes as the Vellalars were of the **Tamil** castes. Other impor-
tant sub division of the castes were **Kapu**, Koppala, Padma, Ponne-
t, and Yanadi. The ancient Zamindari families of **Bobbili**, **Venka-**
tagiri, **Pithapuram**, and Nuzividu belonged to the Racha Velama
sect. Among women the practice of sat1 was prevalent. The social
position among the chief cultivating castes in the region seemed
to be as follows: Velamas were called Velama Doras and were fol-
lowed by Kammas called as Karma varu and were followed by Kapus
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who called simply Kapus without any title.

Though the above described groups formed the dominant sec-
tion of the agrarian population there were two other castes who
occupied the lowest social strata but whose presence was a must
in agricultural operations, was that of the **Malas** and **Madigas**.
Mostly these two castes were the landless agricultural labouring

groups. They were either employed on the farms of rich cultivator as farm servants or worked as daily wage labourers. They were the Pariahs of the Telugu districts. It had been suggested that the word Mala was derived from Maila or dirt. The Malas were almost equally inferior in position to the Madigas. They ate beef and were debarred entrance to the temples and were not allowed to use the general village wells. They served as their own Barbers and Washermen. In Masulipatnam there were pariah weavers in sizable number who wove coarse cloth mainly for local consumption. This was the case only with the Masulipatnam and Guntur regions and their presence was not noticed in other circars like Godavari and Visakhapatnam.

Malas

Though both Mala and Madiga castes were inferior, they had gradations between them. Malas did not draw water from the same well used by Madigas and looked down upon them for they eat pork. Malas belonged to the right hand section. Malas did not eat food prepared or touched by the Kamsali, Medaras, Beri chettis, Boyas, Bhatrajus or Madigas though these castes were much higher than the Malas in the social scale. Perhaps this was because they belonged to the left hand castes.

Malas had their own dancing girls, priests and also attached or dependent caste beggar. Usually in the village festivals

especially those of the village deities both the castes played a prominent role. The **Malas** did not wear leather shoes. If they were seen with them a fine was inflicted on them and the money was spent on drinks.⁴²

Originally the Malas belonged, **it** was believed, to the **kudi-paita** section of the community that is their women wore the sari over the right shoulder but **in** course of **time** there were both **Kudi** and **Yedama paita** section among them. **This** custom was taken as the basis for the division among the Malas. The Kudipaita section was again divided **into** Reddy **Bhumalavaru** and the Pokanativaru. The **Yedamapaita** section was divided **into** Arava, Kanta, and **Murikinativaru**. But again **in** them there were divisions according to the religious faiths that **is** followers of Shaivite faith and Vaishnavite faiths.⁴³ Mostly **it** was these castes who were converted **into** Shaivite and Vaishnavite religions as those religions **did** not have caste barriers. Besides, Malas worshiped a variety of deities like Gurappa, Subbarayudu, Gunnatadu, Sunkalamma, Poleramma, Gangamma, and Gontiyalamma.⁴⁴

Madigas :

Madigas were the leather working caste of the region and they corresponded to the **Chakkiliyans** of the **Tamil** origin. **The** Madigas belonged to the left hand caste and often quarrelled **with** the Malas regarding these rules. Madigas also had their own **dancing girls** dedicated to temples and she was called **Matangi**.⁴⁵

According to one legend the head of Renuka the wife of sage Bhrigu was beheaded by her son in accordance with the sages order. The head which fell into the house of a Madiga grew up into a Madiga woman.

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The Madigas like Malas did not take food or water from pariahs. The main duty of the Madigas was cleaning and tanning of hides and the manufacture of crude leather articles, though they also worked as agricultural labourers. But they were not as common as Malas. This was revealed through proverbs like 'under the magali system of cultivation even a Madiga will grow good crops' and 'not even a Madiga will sow before Malapunnama'. This also reveals Madigas hatred towards Mala community.

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Generally the Madigas in the villages were attached to one or more families of cultivators. They made leather articles like sandal trappings for bullocks, large well buckets used for irrigation and were entitled to receive the dead animals from the cultivators. Usually they were paid in kind.

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The Madigas had the Panchayat or the tribal council system for the adjustment of disputes and settlement of various questions at issue among members of the community. The head man was called Pedda Madiga. The office of the Pedda Madiga was hereditary and generally he was assisted by two elected officers called Dharmakarta and Kulam bontrothu. The Madiga also like Malas

participated actively in the festivals of village deities in the village and also had dependent caste beggars like all other castes. The Madigas were Vaishnavites, Shaivites, and Sakteyas and worshipped a variety of local deities beside these. ⁴⁹

Muslims :

Another cultivating group was that of the Muslims. Though in a minority when compared with other cultivating castes they were found in some pockets in the region. Muslims of higher class held huge jagir lands and ruled the Circars as renters in the initial period of the Company rule. Certain other categories of Muslims like the Qazis also held Inam lands though in small quantities, and were a sizable number in Masulipatnam. ⁵⁰

The first Muslims in the district might possibly had been Arab traders at Masulipatnam. But in the fifteenth century Muslim soldiers were in the employment of Reddy Kings of Kondavidu and of the kings of Vijayanagar. ⁵¹ Muslims also had two sections among them called Shias and Sunnis. The great majority of the Muslims in the Masulipatnam district were orthodox Sunnis and only few Shias were found at Masulipatnam. ⁵²

The Muslims chiefly engaged themselves in trade, in cloth, indigo hides or cotton. But though they did not work on others fields they cultivated their own fields. In Masulipatnam there were many Muslims who held lands on Inam tenures as Qazis. ⁵⁵

Perhaps as they did not have any caste restrictions like Brahmins to cultivate their own lands, they settled as cultivators. But this section formed a minority among other cultivating castes.

Castes and the Customs :

Though the caste distinctions were very wide and distinct, still each caste in their social customs especially on ceremonial occasions had to depend on or interacted with several other castes. These castes always were inferior in the social hierarchy but still played a dominant role in the marriage or death ceremonies of the dominant groups. The agrarian castes of Masulipatnam were no exception to this. In the marriage and death ceremonies of Kammas, Kapus, Razus, Madigas and several others had a prominent role. Though several reasons were given for this as to whether the inferior groups helped the agrarian castes in earlier times or were told to depend on them, still it stresses the interdependence of several castes in the village system and also the caste ties among these groups.

Generally in almost all the Kamma, Kapu, Velama and Razu marriages Barbers pared the nails of the bridegroom and touch the nails of the bride. Like wise Chakali or washerman in the marriages of these castes tied a small wooden frame work called dhornam with cotton threads wound round it to the marriage pan-

dal. The Kapus proceed to the house of washermen with some food and gingely oil undbring the dhornam which was tied by him to the pandal. For this service the washermen were given certain quantity of Paddy. Like wise the Kapus visited the house of goldsmith for the bottu and the potter's house for marriage pots. Madigas gave a new pair of chappals to the bridegroom for which food was given to the Madigas placed in a basket on eleven leaves. In the Kapu families the Bhatraju tied the basingam on the forehead of the bridegroom and remained with him throughout the ceremony, whereas for the bride a Bhogam woman generally waited on the bride. Not only that, even on the marriage dais both the Bhatrajus and Bogam woman accompanied the bride and the groom.

However these customs differ slightly with the sectarian differences among them. For instance, in the marriage of Panta Kapus the washerman dressed up as a woman heads the procession and kept on dancing and singing till the destination was
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reached.

In the Kapu community generally women played an important role except in matters connected with agriculture. This was accounted for by a story to the effect that when they came from Ayodhya the Kapus brought no women with them. They were told to marry women who were the illegitimate issue of Pandavas and the women consented on the understanding that they were to be given

the upper hand and that menial service should be done for them for which they employed Gollas and Gamallas. Malas and Madigas freely enter Kapus houses except the Kitchen.

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In some sections of the castes Chakkiliyan played a prominent part in the marriages. He was deputed to ascertain the status of the other party before the match was arranged and his dreams were considered as omens of its desirability. He was also honoured at the marriage by being given the first betel and nuts.

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In the Velama marriages they always arranged for a Mala couple to marry before they had a marriage in their own house and they provided the necessary funds for the Mala marriage. They accounted the custom by a story to the effect that a Mala once allowed a Velama to sacrifice him in order to obtain a hidden treasure and this custom was observed out of gratitude for the discovery of the treasure.

Even during the death ceremonies the presence of some of the castes was a must. In the death ceremonies of the Kammas the food that was offered to the dead in the burial ground was first taken by the Pariahs followed by Barber, Washerman and other mendicant groups. In the case of Kapus the news of a death in the community was conveyed by a Pariah and it was the Barber and not the son who carried the water pot in the burial ground.

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The Dependent Caste Beggars:

The major cultivating castes in Masulipatnam who were prosperous and economically dominant in the village hierarchy and enjoyed high social status had various groups attached to them as dependent castes. These dependent castes or the caste beggars lived on the alms provided by the particular castes to which they were attached and their dependent status was continuously underlined by a variety of rituals which they performed in the houses of the respective caste groups. However, this feature was not conspicuous of only the cultivating castes. Each caste had supported a beggar caste and sometimes the beggars had two or three supporting castes. For instance, the Picchaguntalu were supported by Kammas, Kapus, and Gollas. Again legendary accounts were prevalent for their dependent status and also why each caste supported these groups. It is interesting to note that not only the dominant castes even lower castes like Malas and Madigas also had certain mendicant groups dependent on them. The practice which was common had reference in the literature speaking of their obnoxious presence under each caste.

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Jangala palu Devangula Vittambu

Kapu vittamu Pambakani palu

Baliija vittambu Pattedasari palu

Golla vittamu Pichagunta palu

Vyapari vittambu Varakantala palu

Kaliju vittamu Runjakani palu

Parajala pal Sistu karanala sommu

Gurjarula vittambu Taskarulu palu

It is interesting to observe that other agricultural castes like Razus and Velamas did not have any attached mendicant groups. The Kammas and Kapus had caste beggars called Pichiguntalu. Baliyas patronized Patte Dasaris, whereas Madigas had Dakkali and Malas also patronized Mastiga besides Pambalas.

Apart from these groups there were several others like Sarada kandru, Viramushtis, Bhagavatars, Pusabaliyas, Birannalavaru, Suddulagollalu, Gangireddulavaru, Balasantavaru, Budabukkalavaru, Chindumadigas, Jogulavaru, Bavanilu, Jakkulavaru, Hakarulu, Kommuvaru, Viravidyavantulu, Mastilu, Dakkalivaru.

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But it is important to note that most of the names of these castes were derived from either the instruments they used or from the sounds the instruments produced. Almost all the caste beggars prepared the genealogies of their superior castes and sang the songs or the viragathas, the songs of the valiant in their castes and recited caste gotras and genealogies. They played an important role in the death ceremonies and also on other occasions. Perhaps these groups were maintained by the superior castes to sing their caste puranas and also to maintain minor sectarian differences or caste differences among the castes in their social customs and rituals. It was reported that some of

these caste beggars enjoyed land grants in the villages. The fact that these depended castes maintained and articulated caste genealogies and also constantly reiterated the differences between the different gotras, helped to reinforce the separate identities of the different sub sects.

Picchikuntlas :

Picchikuntla or pitchukakuntla or bikshakuntla were the caste beggars of Kapu and Kamma cultivating castes. Reference was made to this group even in the literary text of Palkuriki Somanatha. From the statement "maaku veevanga chetulu levayya nadichi povanga kaallu levayya andhakulamayya pichhukaguntulamayya " it is evident that they were handicapped and the proverb "pichukaguntu pa1 brahmastramu" revealed their weakness and their handicap. They mainly received alms from the above mentioned castes. They recited the genealogies and caste gotras of the Kapus. Among their popular songs were stories of Lakshamma, Kamamma, Balanagamma, Somanadri, Sadasiva Reddy, Parvalata Mallareddi.

Again among them there were sub sects like Golla, Telaga, Ganta, Turaka, Togaru, Manda, Thitthi. They generally did not inter marry among the sub sects. Their common gotras were Gante-
duvaru, Bandaruvuru, Singamavaru, Pidamuvaru, Antugalavaru. They mostly follow Shaivite faith and Mallikarjuna was their main

deity. They also worshipped village deities like **Pochamma, Yellamma, Mallamma, Edamma.** Jangamas acted as their priests and ⁶⁵
gurus.

The name **Pichigunta** literally meant an assembly of beggars. They were called **in** Telugu speaking districts as a class of mendicants who acted as herbalists and medicine men. Some of the **Pichaguntas** served the Vellalars **in** their fields and others lived ⁶⁶
by begging.

Pambalas :

Another mendicant group was that of the **Pambalas** or drum people. They acted as musicians and caste **pujaris** at Mala marriages and festivals **in** honor of their deities. They also took part **in** the recitation of the story of Ankamma and put **muggu** at the death ceremonies of the **Gamallas.** This group was also known by the name of **Bavanilu** or **Baindla.** These names indicate the instruments of music they use. Their music instruments were called **Bavanika, Javanika** or **Pambas.** During the village ⁶⁷
vals they took part actively beating the drums and dance.

Mastigas :

Another group of mendicants were **Dakkalas** or **Mastigas.** **Dakkalas** generally beg from **Madigas** only. The **Dakkala** meant the

one who was brought to **life** from a vertebral column. Though they beg from **Madiga**s, they do not enter their households and females in the Madiga caste were not allowed to serve them food. **This** practice was followed to the extent that Madiga women **did** not tread on the foot steps of the **Dakkalas**.⁶⁸

Mastigas was a caste dependent on the **Malas**. They were supposed to be the illegitimate descendants of the Malas. They also begged from Madigas and **Gollas** and were commonly known as Mala Mastigas.⁶⁹

Dasaris :

Dasaris were another religious mendicant group. Generally there was a **Dasari** for every three or four villages. A few Dasaris had Inam lands but the majority lived on the charity of the people. They sang hymns in honor of Chennudu or **Peddamuni** and officiated as priests. Their services were mostly required at ceremonial occasions like marriages, deaths and the initiation of Basavis **into** profession.⁷⁰

Thus each caste maintained a dependent caste. These dependent castes did special services to the castes to which they were attached **like** singing caste gotras and preparing their genealogies. Though the caste beggars played an important role in the ceremonial occasions they were inferior and this status was always distinctly maintained by the dominant castes.

Cultivating **Castes** : Right **Left Divide** :

Another important social distinction very clearly **maintained** by several castes was the right and left hand division. A peculiar feature only applicable to South Indian society, this **division** seems to be **in** existence right from eleventh century and ceased to exist after nineteenth century except **in mild** forms.⁷¹ The society was vertically divided into two sections engulfing **most** of the castes on each **side**. The number included **in** each division seemed to differ from one account to **another**. But **this** division was clearly not for the first two higher castes like Brahmins and **Kshatriyas**. It included **Vaishyas** and involved **mainly** the Sat Sudra groups. There were certain neutral groups who did not participate or were above **this** division. But the castes **which** belonged to **this** category **differed** from region to region. For instance, the Vellalars who formed a dominant caste **in** right hand division **in** Tamil areas were not included **in** the Telugu speaking areas.⁷²

As the name itself indicates the left hand division **in** South India had connotations of impurity whereas the right hand had powerful and positive normative **associations**.⁷³ Thus the left hand castes were looked down upon by the right hand castes and each division had certain religious symbols and **insignias** that **distinguished** them from one another. These should not be encroached upon by other divisions. Any **small** breach in this prac-

tice led to serious conflicts involving all the castes in each division. This, at the lowest level became one caste against the other like Malas who belonged to the right hand caste against Madigas who belonged to the left hand caste.

However in the form of the conflict between the artisans and the dominant agricultural castes, the disputes seem to have been most common in the Tamil country and to some extent in the Canarese country. It is interesting to note that the most important Telugu agricultural castes such as Reddis and the Kammas seem to have avoided this classification and Velamas and Razus were not mentioned in any of the lists. This must have been due to their claim that they belonged to Kshatriyas. However this right and left hand conflict sometimes found its expression in the religious sectarian conflicts of the times, in the region the two dominant sectarian faiths being Shaivite and Vaishnavite. Though the Brahmins were not supposed to be involved in these schisms as it became a matter of faith among the castes sometimes the higher castes seemed to have indirectly supported one or the other of these divisions.

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In this manner also the cultivating castes of the region seemed not to have participated in any of the conflicts as they belonged to both Shaivite and Vaishnavite groups. It was not that this divisions of right and left hand caste was totally absent in the region. We do have references to schisms and

consequential participation of **artisanal** groups in these schisms in the region.

The right and left hand division which was absent among the higher agrarian castes seemed to have involved the lower agrarian castes like **Malas** and **Madigas**. It is necessary in this connection to know who generally formed the right hand caste and who formed the left hand division though the number did vary regionally. Vellalars though supporting indirectly the right hand faction were above the classification. The following list shows the castes included in each of the divisions.

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| Occupations | Right Hand Division | Left Hand Division |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Traders | Ballja Komati | Berichetti Vaniyans |
| Weavers | Jandra Saliyan | Devanga Kaikolan |
| Artisans | Chakali Kammari | Kammalan Kamsali |
| Leather workers | Madiga Females | Madiga Males |
| Field labourers | Mala | Bedar |
| Agriculturists | Vellalar. Reddy Kamma, Golla | Bedar Palli |

It **is** interesting to note that **sometimes these** divisions were followed within the family. In some castes males **in** a family represented a particular division and females another. According to Burton **Stein** the right hand and left hand divisions seemed to have forged significant social links among a group of dependent people of diverse localities.

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When the society was so sharply divided **into** these divisions and when there were so many schisms between different castes over their rights **it is** important to know what were these distinctive customs followed by the two divisions and different emblems and religious symbols peculiar to each caste and each division on these **lines**.

Right hand castes exclusively had the privilege of erecting a marriage pandal **with** twelve poles, only they could mount the horse during the marriages. There were disputes whenever one division of the society tried to follow the rules or the customs of the other.⁷⁷ For instance, **in** the lower castes of **Malas** and **Madigas** during the marriage procession of **Madigas**, Malas closely followed them to see whether the bridegroom would mount the horse. These differences were carried to the extent that each caste did not allow the other marriage party to go in a procession in their street. Malas especially always objected to the dance done **in** group by Madigas **in** processions popularly known as **Madiga Chindu**.

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Each caste had their own religious emblems and flags with different signs. Vaduga Vellalars had the swan as their caste emblem; for Reddis it was the plough; Kammas had the bull; Komattis had the sloth as their insignia; Gollas had the wheel as their symbol; a five coloured tent was the symbol of Kannada Gollas; for Telugu Gollas it was the Conch; Padma Sales had Tiger; whereas Pattu Sales had two headed bird; Jandra caste weavers had crocodile as their emblem; and the Berichettis had the eagle. Though earlier they might have used these symbols in the war times representing each caste but later on they formed a part of all ceremonial occasions like marriages. The lower castes led the procession holding the symbol perhaps to specify that they belonged to a particular caste. ⁷⁹ But it is important to note that this division which was so explicit in Tamil and Kannada speaking regions was absent among the agrarian castes in the region.

The inferior status of the artisan groups to the Vellalars was given even in the legendary account regarding the origin of the Vellalars. The architect of the Gods Viswakarma intruded on the privacy of Shiva and Parvathi. Annoyed by this, they said they would cause an enemy of Viswakarma to be born on the earth who should punish him for his temerity. Having found all the details he waited for the birth of the enemy to annihilate him with a single blow. He failed to do and knocked only the crown. As peace was concluded between the two on the condition that the

panchajati who were the sons of Viswakarma should be subservient
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to the earth born person whose offsprings were Vellalars.

In almost all the higher agrarian castes there were both Shaivite and Vaishnavite followers and we do not have any references to the schisms involving any of these castes in this region though they had serious Vaishnavite and Shaivite sectarian conflicts. This perhaps must have been due to their claim that they belonged to the military caste, that is, Kshatriyas and as mentioned above the first two sections of the society were above this division.

Caste divisions in the rural structure played a dominant role both in social interaction and maintaining respective traditions and customs intact. Each caste has its own rules in social conduct, and religious practices. Different castes were expected to follow these rules strictly so that they could maintain the differences among their traditional values and customs intact and thus maintain the rigidity in the social customs and traditions.

Birth in a particular caste fixed ones ritual status and
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along with that one's economic and social position. These caste distinctions which were already there, were maintained and reinforced through many factors. One such factor according to
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Andre Beteille was physical appearance. This to some extent was true but this factor could not be the main distinguishing mark. Perhaps because of these beliefs there came into existence

proverbs like 'nalla brahmanuni, yerra komatini nammakoodadu' meaning Brahmins were generally had a fair complexion and Komatis had a dark complexion. So if they were found in opposite ways one cannot trust them.

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Costume was another medium through which inequalities were maintained and various castes had different customs in their dress patterns. Economic inequalities at one level were reinforced through costume. For instance, the Zamindars generally wore cloths embroidered with gold laces and also cloths of finest texture. It was given that each pair of dress in some cases costed several hundreds of rupees. But in contrast a locally woven coarse dhoti and a kambali was the daily attire of the farm servants. This inequality was reinforced by the rich cultivating sections who employed lower castes as their field laborers and farm servants. The attached field labourers locally called palerus were given two dhotis and a kambali annually which costed not more than three rupees all together.

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Another factor that reinforced disparities among the castes was settlement patterns in the villages. The upper castes had their settlements in the heart of the village, whereas the Malas and Madigas being out castes lived outside the village especially in settlements like Malapalle or Madigageru respectively as they were called. Further among the higher castes generally Brah-

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mins were distinguished from non Brahmin caste⁹ and Brahmin settlements were known as Agraharams. ⁸⁷ It was seen that in the region there were pettahs named after each caste as a group of people belonging to a particular caste built a pettah. They were Velamagudem Kammavaripalem, Chakirevupalem, Kannereddivaripalem, Kapupalem, Kummarapalem, Kimmarapadu, Chinagollapalem, Gollagudem, ⁸⁸ Peragolla palem. These names indicate either they were built by persons belonging to a particular caste or indicate the castes which resided in them.

The distinctions between different religious faiths were also indicated by the caste marks. Shatvites wore horizontal caste marks whereas Vaishnavites wore vertical. These practices which were carried to extremes were criticized by Vemana in ⁸⁹ several of his poems.

During this period the caste distinctions and social distinctions as seen above were too many. Always it was the lower rungs of society in whatever profession they were in which suffered most. These conditions made the life of the lower castes full of exploitation and misery. It was only through the missionary activity in the region that the lower rungs of the society were relieved and their social position bettered. The missionaries whose main aim was to spread Christianity as an alternative choice to the many sections who obviously did not have any chance to improve their lot socially under the rigid caste system. The

missionaries through various means like preaching Gospel and starting schools to educate masses on Christianity succeeded in their attempts to convert many depressed classes. It was through the efforts of the missionaries that the social position of the deprived classes began to change.

There were several missionaries in Andhra as early as 1700.⁹⁰ However it was the British missionaries in the 1850s that really started serious work. By 1700 the Portuguese Jesuits were already in Nellore and had been successful in converting

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many of the inhabitants to Roman Catholicism. One way of quickly making the conversions was to take advantage of the economic crises in the region and by minimum monetary offers the poor were attracted. Thus in 1736 taking advantage of the famine conditions several concessions were made. But subsequently following a change of policy by the Pope the mission was closed and the converts reverted to their religion.⁹²

However in the initial stages as the East India Company was mainly a private organization it did not show much interest in missionary activity as it was engaged in consolidating its own position in a alien political economy. It was only in 1813 with the act of British parliament that the East India Company which by then had firmly established itself granted permission to even non British missionary societies to work in India.⁹⁵ Several missionaries chose different centres in Andhra for their activity.

The American Baptist mission functioned with Nellore as its Centre. The Lutheran mission had Guntur as its head quarters. The Church Missionary Society chose Visakhapatnam and the Society for the Propagation of Gospel functioned from Rayalaseema and Kakinada was the centre for the Canadian Baptist mission.

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Thus though there was much activity in Andhra, Masulipatnam was left out. When Goldingham was made the Collector of Masulipatnam in 1854, not finding any Christian missionary in the area he wrote to the Church Missionary Society for the propagation of the Gospel to come and work in the region. They sent two English men Robert Nobel and Henry Fox to do missionary work and spread Christianity in Masulipatnam.

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The missionary activity was however started only in 1843 and Nobel opened a school with a limited number of boys and tried to do the work through education. In the school lessons were taught in New Testament, Gita, and Koran. Against the other two faiths the merits of Christianity were highlighted. Though the schools were popular and educationally successful even in 1852 the response of the students to his proselytizing appeals was not much and the first converts were a Brahmin and a Velama. This raised a great agitation and the angry Velama caste people even attacked Nobel's house. For this reason, for sometime Nobel's school was almost deserted and the number of pupils fell sharply from 90 to 15. Thus education was one measure actively started

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by the missionaries to spread Christianity and in the process it ameliorated the conditions of the depressed castes.

But indigenous education had been prevalent in the region before the missionaries came and there were many schools in almost every taluk and even some colleges imparting instructions to the higher castes of the society. Students were taught Telugu and Sanskrit in all places; in some locations Persian, Astronomy, and Science of Law were also taught. Of all the people there were more Brahmin students and among the girls whose number was almost negligent, those who attended the schools were mainly the dancing girls.⁹⁷ The main text books were like Bala⁹⁸ Ramayanam, Amaram and students had to write on sand.

The charges to a native scholar averaged 6 annas per month. This was collected for paper, cadjans, books besides food as well as the pay of their school master. Both of these charges of course depended upon the rank and circumstances of the relations of the scholars. The wages to the school master was commonly⁹⁹ from 1/4 to Rs 2 for each boy. Perhaps the expenses it involved in education and their futility to the cultivating castes was reflected in the proverb 'Bapani Sedyam Battem Chetu, Kapula Chaduvulu Kasula Chetu' (Cultivation by Brahmins was waste of wages and education to Kapus was waste of money).¹⁰⁰

Another important factor was the perceptions of the cultivators towards the Company and the law. The cultivators were not ignorant of the changes that were taking place in the region under the Company. The cultivators were aware of the existence of a government or an authority which was above that of their immediate rulers like Zamindars, Renters, Deshmukhs and Deshpandes. Though petitioning was not a new feature introduced by the Company, in the Company period the evidence from the records suggest that whenever there was a problem the cultivators petitioned to the Company. In fact, the petitions were sometimes against the village administrative officials, Zamindars and sometimes against the Collectors.

Generally the cultivators were averse to any changes in the existing revenue systems or modes of a revenue management. Though a common practice which was generally followed was desertion of villages in the case of oppression they did represent their grievances to the Board. For instance, in the estate of Divi, when the Collector proposed a change in the existing system in the wet lands from Ausara, the cultivators sent a petition to the Board and refused to take up the lands under the new contract.

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Whenever the terms of contract were not to their advantage the cultivators combined with the head inhabitants petitioned the government. For instance. some of the Brahmin inhabitants

of Viswanadhapalli in Divi taluk combined with Dastakdar of the village compelled the other ryots not to under take the dry lands under Visabadi tenure. Having sent the petitions to the Collector and also to the Board, they proceeded to Madras to present their case.

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The Zamindar of Devarakota levied extra cesses on the cultivators which were not customary in the region. The cultivators who were aware of the traditional practices in the region filed a petition through a vakeel Chilkalapati Bapiraju against the Zamindars in the Court. The cultivators resorted to the Court because they felt that the Collector was colluding with the Zamindar and his staff to suppress the issue.

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What is interesting in all these cases was the awareness of the cultivating groups of the administrative structure of the Company. Though in most of the cases these representations were turned down or the Court rulings went in favour of the economically dominant and politically influential groups. Still the people were aware of the legal redress that could be got from the courts. The Company in strengthening the position of the cultivators and protecting their rights, under the Permanent Settlement defined the powers of the Zamindars and left the cultivators at the mercy of the Zamindars though the Company made provisions for legal proceedings against the Zamindars in case of oppression and frauds against the ryots, in many ways they were not in the

reach of the ryots and even if they were the cultivators could not afford such measures.

Thus the Agrarian Social structure of the region presented a complex and hierarchically organized multi layered structure where the caste and the customs interacted in many ways. In fact, it was through caste and social customs that the dominant cultivating groups reinforced their social status in the society.

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