

## **Ethnographic Note on Porjas of Andhra Pradesh**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Porja is a hill tribe and found in the agency area of Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. Porjas are forest dwellers and spread over the adjoining hilly areas of Orissa state. They raise crops in the *Podu* (shifting cultivation) plots on the high level hill slopes. They speak in a corrupt form of Oriya language known as 'Parji dialect'. This tribe has several endogamous sub groups, differing in their language, food habits and customs depending on the locality. The present paper is an attempt to describe the ethnographic note on Porja tribe of Andhra Pradesh by employing ethnographic techniques.

**Keywords:** Bride price, Clothes, Culture, Folk, Kinsmen, Marriage, Ritual, Worship.

### **INTRODUCTION**

As part of the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) strategy, certain tribal communities have been identified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (earlier: Primitive Tribal Groups.). The identification of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) has been done by the Government of India on the basis and the principle of i) Smallness of number, stagnant or diminishing population ii) General backwardness and isolation iii) Pre-agricultural level of technology, and iv) Very low level of literacy. In Andhra Pradesh, there were 12 PVTGs identified under 9 Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDAs). The State of Andhra Pradesh consists of 12 such primitive tribal groups with a population of 2,72,098 (1991 census). These are "Bodo Gadaba, Gutob Gadaba, Bondo Porja, Khond Porja, Parengi Porja, Dongaria Khond, Kutia Khond, Chenchu, Kolam, Konda Reddy, Konda Savara and Thoti" (Durga Rao, P., 2011). The present paper is an attempt to record the ethnographic details of Porja tribe which is one of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups in Andhra Pradesh.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The in-depth study was conducted in Jerrela village of Munchingput Mandal (Block1) in the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) of Paderu in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. Intensive and in-depth study was carried out in Porja settlement of Jerrela village for the collection of ethnographic details on this Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG). In addition, some knowledgeable and aged persons from each settlement were interviewed for eliciting information on ethnography. The present study has been designed to be purely descriptive and narrative.

### **AGENCY AREA OF VISAKHAPATNAM IN ANDHRA PRADESH**

The study area comes under Visakha agency area which is the part of Eastern Ghats and attached to Visakhapatnam district administration. As per 2011 Census, "The district is one of the North Eastern coastal Districts of Andhra Pradesh and it lies between, 17° – 15' and 18° – 32' in Eastern longitude. It is bounded on the North partly by the Orissa State and partly by Vizianagaram district, on the South by East Godavari district, on the

west by Orissa state and on the east by Bay of Bengal. The total population in the district is 42, 90,589 and tribal population in the district is 61.85 lakhs which constituted 14.42 per cent to the total population in the district.”

**Tribes**

The predominant tribes in Visakha agency area are Bagata, Konda Dora, Nuka Dora, Kammara, Gadaba, Kotia, Khond, Mali, Porja, Valmiki, Goud, Kulia and Konda Kapu. Among these tribes Gadaba, Porja and Khonds are Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). According to Subramanyam, V. (2002), “the major tribal groups in this district are Bagata, Kotiya, Konda Dora, Nooka Dora, Konda Kammara, Konda Kapu, Mali, Manne Dora, Valmiki, Gadaba, Porja and Khond”. Among these tribes Khond, Porja and Gadaba are considered to be the most primitive tribal groups. Among these, Khonds are numerically dominant with a population 51,293 followed by Porjas (18,796) and Gadabas (6,233).

**Table:1 Primitive tribe wise households in Visakhapatnam District**

S.No.	Name of the Mandal	Tribe			Total house-holds
		Gadaba	Porja	Khond	
		No. of house-holds	No. of house-holds	No. of house-holds	
1	Munchingput	52	2275	1028	3355
2	Pedabayalu	0	336	1446	1782
3	Hukumpeta	2	5	869	876
4	Dumbriguda	0	160	382	524
5	Araku Valley	71	773	368	1212
6	Ananthagiri	273	133	121	527
7	Paderu	151	114	808	1073
8	G. Madugula	0	0	1656	1656
9	Chintapalle	240	211	1760	2211
10	G.K. Veedhi	375	307	998	1680
11	Koyyuru	270	0	591	861
	Total	1434	4314	10027	15775

1. *Source: ITDA, Paderu, Visakhapatnam District of Andhra Pradesh*

Table.1 shows the particularly vulnerable tribal group wise households in the eleven tribal mandals of sub-plan area ITDA, Paderu. It can be seen that large number of primitive tribal populations are found in Munchingput, followed by Chintapalle, Pedabayalu, G.K. Veedhi and G. Madugula mandals. All the three PVTGs are found in Munchingput, Chintapalle, Araku valley, Paderu, G.K. Veedhi, Ananthagiri and Hukumpeta mandals. Among the three PVTGs, the Khond population is distributed in all the eleven mandals. The percentage of Khond population in the total primitive tribes’ population is 67.21. Gadaba population is relatively less when compared to that of Khond and Porja.

Gadaba, Porja and Khond are the three principal PVTGs living in the agency tracts of Visakhapatnam district. The population of PVTGs is distributed in 1033 villages. Total number of PVTGs households in the Paderu sub-plan area is 15775 and their population is 75846 (37586 are males and 38260 are females). The female population is slightly higher than that of the male population. Sex ratio is imbalanced. The concentration of Khond population is very high in Chintapalli mandal, whereas Gadabas number are more in Gudem Kotha Veedhi (G.K. Veedhi), while

Porjas number are more in Munchingput mandal when compared with that of other mandals in the sub-plan area. It is noticed that Khond tribe population is distributed in all the eleven tribal mandals, where as Porja population is distributed in nine mandals and Gadaba population is distributed in eight mandals. Porja population is not found in G. Modugula and Koyyuru mandals. Similarly the Gadaba population is not found in Pedabayalu, Dumbriguda and G. Madugula Mandals (Tehsils).

## **ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTE ON PORJA IN VISAKHAPATNAM DISTRICT**

Porja is a hill tribe in the agency area of Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. Porjas are spread over the adjoining hilly areas of Orissa state. They are shifting cultivators; raise the crops in the *Podu* plots on the high level hill slopes apart from collection of non-timber forest produce (NTFP) in the forest areas. They are forest dwellers and have symbiotic relationship with their nature. They converse in a corrupt form of Oriya language known as 'Parji' dialect. Mostly the Porja males can speak the regional language Telugu, while their women folk can only understand Telugu and can not speak 'Telugu' fluently.

As described by Thurston (1909), "the term Porja derived from Oriya words *Po* and *raja* which means the son of a king". It is recorded in the Madras Census Report (1891) that "the term is a mere corruption of the Sanskrit term signifying a free hill man. The Porjas say that they are the brothers of Rajas, but the Rajas took to riding horses, while Porjas could not get on to the back of the horse, and ultimately put up with all the burden of cultivating the lands". Thurston (1909) explained that "the term *Porja* is not a tribal denomination but a class denomination, which is used to mean a ryot. The Porja seems to be akin to the Khond of Ganjam. The terms Poraja, Porja, Parja seem to be synonymous". Grierson (1906) stated that "*Parji* language is identical with *Bhatri* which has now become a form of Oriya. They have migrated from Orissa State about 300 years ago, to Visakha agency areas in search of cultivable land".

According to Porja leaders of Munchingput area, the word *Porja* is derived from Oriya word 'Pursu' which means 'Sakti' or Power. Porjas are industrious and hard working people. The former rulers of Jeypore and other Zamindars used to employ them as Doli or Palanquine bearers (Boi Porjas). They were employed for all kinds of works where transportation of heavy articles was involved. They were employed as human beasts of burden (Mohan Rao, 1993).

It is said that in olden days there was a king who had two sons. When the king asked his two sons to ride on the horse, the eldest son declined to ride a horse while the younger son learnt horse riding and also other techniques of warfare. The king declared that eldest son was not fit to be a king as he could not ride a horse and hence he obtained his eldest son to live by manufacturing bamboo baskets. The younger son became a king (Raja) and he drove away his elder brother into the forest. The elder brother began to eke out his livelihood by manufacturing baskets and attending to carry heavy loads on his shoulders and hence the elder brother became a Porja (carrier of 'bangy' or a yoke, in Porja dialect). The younger brother (king) once ordered the elder brother and his kith and kin to bring oranges from one of *Muttadars* (feudal lords). The *Muttadar* while sending oranges through the elder brother and his kinfolk wrote on palmyrah leaf about the number of fruits he was sending to the king. As these people were carrying the fruits on their slings they came across a canal, where they were tempted to eat the oranges. One of them buried the letter under the earth so that the letter could not 'see' them while they were eating. They washed their faces and ate some oranges. They again dug out the letter and carried the oranges. As soon as they reached the place of king they showed the letter. The king counted the oranges and found some fruits missing. The king asked them about the missing fruits. The Porjas were surprised as to how a leaf could speak out the truth even though it was completely buried under the earth. They confessed their guilt to the king and promised to be truthful in future. This folk tale is told perhaps to indicate the simplicity of the Porja ancestors. Even in modern times also, Porjas are known for their truthfulness and gullibility. Porja ignorance is proverbial: anyone who is a simpleton is called Porja.

This tribe has several endogamous sub groups, differing in their language, food habits and customs depending on the locality. The Madras Census Report (1871) and Thurston (1909) recorded seven endogamous sections of Porjas, “namely Barang Thodia (who eat beef and speak Oriya), Pengu Poraja (sub-divided into those who eat buffalo and speak Oriya, Kondh languages), Kohondi or Kindi Poraja a section of the Khond who eat beef and buffalo, but speak Kondh, Parangi Poraja a section of the Gadaba sub-divided into those who eat and do not eat buffalo, but speak Gadaba dialect, Bonda or Nanga Poraja – a section of the Gadabas and speak Gadaba dialect, Tagara Poraja – a section of the Koya and speak Koya or Telugu) and Dur Poraja or Didayi Poraja (who speak Oriya). It is noticed that there are six sub-groups in the Porja tribe. Those are (1) Parangi Porja, (2) Jodia Porja, (3) Konda Porja or Barangi Porja, (4) Gadaba Porja (5) Didayi Porja and (6) Pengu Porja.” Though marital relations do not exist in between the sub group, commensal relations exist. Social hierarchy is also found among these sub-groups. The Gadaba Porja, claim superiority over other sub-groups. While the Parangi Porja, Jodiya Porja, and Konda Porja are considered to have equal status, followed by the Didayi Porja and Pengu Porja, who accept food from all the sub-groups.

It is observed that most of the Porjas living in Visakha agency belong to the Parangi Porja group. They belong to *Naga* (snake) and *Surya* (Sun) clans. They do not have any title or suffix after the name of individual to identify the tribe. Surnames such as Pangi, Killo, Vanthala and Korra are found. Both clan and lineage (surname) exogamy are strictly observed. In certain of the settlements the Porjas observe village exogamy also. Cross-cousin marriage, especially with father’s sister’s daughter is preferred. Maternal uncle-niece marriage is prohibited. Both junior levirate and sororate are practiced. Polygyny is permitted. A formal bride price system exists among them. Either party can divorce with the approval of the headman or tribal council. Children are the liability of the father and divorce compensation is paid to the aggrieved party. If a husband proposed divorce, he has to pay the maintenance to his wife till she gets remarried. If a married woman seeks divorce from her husband, she has to return the *voli* (bride price) amount to him. Widow, widower and divorcee remarriages are very common. At present child marriages are discontinued. Increase in the age at marriage of a girl and predominance of adult marriages are seen now a days. Pre and post extra marital relations are acceptable among Porjas.

Porjas follow the patriarchal system, in which the rule of descent is patrilineal and rule of residence in patrilocal. More number of nuclear families are found among Porjas, however a few joint and extended families are also exist among them. In principle, no avoidance relationship between family members is practiced. Joking relationship between grand parents and grand children, elder sister-in-law (elder brother’s wife) and younger brother-in-law (husband’s younger brother), uncle and niece are permitted. Usually conflicts arise between brothers at the time of sharing a workload or property, and check on the freedom of youngsters. They follow the male equigeniture in sharing of parental property, while succession to a hereditary office is by the eldest son. The eldest son gets an extra share (Jyesta bhagam), if he maintains the family after the death of the parents.

Porja women are treated inferior to their men. Though the women have lower status than men, they are consulted on all family matters. They contribute to the family income directly, as well as indirectly by assisting in agricultural operations. Domestic work is the domain of women still most of the Porja women are not much exposed to out side world when compared to their men folk. Children aged above six years and above also contribute their families economically and children are considered as an economic asset.

The older generation among them still wears simple traditional dress. The males wear a small loin cloth (*gochi*) to cover their groin part and leave the rest of the body bare. Females wear a sari wrapped around the body up to the breast level. In general, the men wear shirt and *lungi* when they go out side the village. In certain occasions, females wear the sari in a special manner in which they tie the ends of the sari on the left shoulder, covering breasts from right to left leaving the right shoulder bare. Young women wear blouses and keep *vermilion bindi* on the forehead between the eye brows. Women wear multiple nose-rings and ear studs made up of silver. They also

wear necklaces made up of silver currency coins. Only rich among them now a day are wearing gold ornaments. The Porja women are fond of tattooing. Bodily decoration is not the only motive behind this practice. It is a religious belief of the Porjas that after death one will leave everything behind in this world and to please the god of death *Yama*, one will have nothing but indelible tattoo marks carried with the body. For tattooing the services of women expert in this art are hired on the payment of remuneration in the form of grains. Such women experts are available in the Porja community and also in the neighboring villages where Mali and Khond tribes inhabits.

The staple food of Porjas is *ambali* (gruel), prepared with the ragi flour. They consume millets like *Ragi*, *Sama*, *Korra*, *Jowar* and sorghum. They are non-vegetarians and also consume locally available pulses. They take black with salt in the morning but they do not consume milk and milk products of their cattle. Consumption of seasonal fruits and vegetables is common. They use *valasulu* (niger) seed oil as cooking medium. Both men and women smoke cigars and chew loose tobacco. At present, the Proja men are habituated to take khaine, gutka which are readily available in the near by weekly shandies and mandal head quarters which is due to the influence of their neighbouring Orissa culture. They make *sara* (arrack) a local type of beverage to drink especially during fairs and festivals. It is taken by both men and women as part of their culture. They local rice bear (*Maddi*), caryota palm sap (*Jeelugu kallu*) and eusine corocama (*landa*). In olden days each Porja family used to have atleast a minimum of three to five caryota palm plants, for extracting toddy (*Kallu*). These plants met the subsistence of them whenever they were in food crises situation. Even today in such season majority of the Porjas survive on toddy, edible fruits, roots, leafy vegetables, small hunting game and *tenka ambali* (gruel prepared with mango kernel powder).

The traditional sacred friendship (*moitorjibu*) among Porjas is in practice. They make friendship with different tribes and caste people irrespective of gender from generations to endure the well-being of each other. One of the sub groups Jhodia Porja performs an enchanting folk dance known as Jhodia nat, Jelli nat or Nandi nat. However, they also participate in the performance of the regional tribal dance *Dimsa* along with other tribes or among themselves.

Porjas are physiologically strong and hardworking people. Their settlement pattern, dress and ornaments, belief system and economic life are different from other tribals in found in this area. They are humble and hospitable and to some extent there is xenophobia (fear of strangers) among Porjas. They prefer to remain aloof from other communities.

Porjas have sound health and well built physique which is gift of nature to them. Particularly the women are attractive for their anatomy exhibiting round contours and delicate curves which are slim and trim due to hard physical labour. In general, the Porja morphology exhibits medium height, broad nose, thick lips and scanty bodily hairs. Traces of eye fold are found in some cases.

They inhabit either small settlements of alone or multi tribal settlements with other tribes like Bagata, Valmiki, Kotiya, Kondadora, Nookadora, Gadaba etc. The housing pattern is a typical one and does not follow a regular trend. The individual houses have small kitchen gardens in the front as well as backyard the houses. Porjas are specialists in the basket making with bamboo.

A folk tale which is popular in the community reveals their traditional occupation. According to this folk tale, in the beginning God gave a stick to the ancestors of Porjas and asked them to plant it in the earth. When they planted, it grew into big shrubs of bamboos. God instructed them to eke out their livelihood by manufacturing baskets out of bamboos. But Porjas gave up their traditional occupation of basket making and adopted agriculture as their main occupation. But several Porja families eke out their livelihood by making baskets and selling them in weekly shandies or markets (Mohan Rao, 1993).

In a Porja settlement, there are two important places called *Sador* and *Nissani munda*. *Sador* is the place where the village head conducts meetings with villagers to set the dates for festivals and to solve the disputes at village level.

The *Nissani munda* also comprises of circular stone slabs encircled by menhirs standing erect. This is the place of the village deity. This deity is represented by an earthen pot, a chopping tool made of iron fixed to the ground, and an iron pole which is fixed erect and kept undisturbed in its original position. It is there since the establishment of the village. The chopping tool and the earthen pot are changed at least thrice in a year, during three important festivals like, *Sankurumanam*, *etum* and *Chaitra parba*. In such occasions the village deity is worshipped with elaborate rituals involving animal sacrifice and new earthen pot is used to collect the blood of the sacrificed animal which is then offered to the deity. This new pot replaces the old one.

Women play a more important role in their economic life when compared with that of their men folk. When a pregnant woman gets labour pains, she is kept in a separate room and no male member is allowed inside. Only the midwife (traditional birth attendant) and elderly experienced women attend the delivery. The newborn is given a bath after the umbilical cord is cut by the midwife. Usually the umbilical cord is cut and buried by the traditional midwife. The mother and child are kept in seclusion for a period of seven or nine days. A lamp is lit and incense sticks are lighted near the pit to ward off evil spirits. On seventh or ninth day after the birth of a child, the mother and child are given purification bath and wear new garments. They worship their family deities for well-being of the new born and family. They throw away the items used in delivery room such as pots, clothes and bedding and then a ritual is observed to purify the family members from birth pollution. A feast is arranged to the close kith and kin on the occasion. The midwife is given items like a new saree, some quantity of rice, dal, oil and vegetables as service charges for conducting delivery at home. Then the mother of new born is allowed to start her normal activities after pollution days. First hair tonsure ceremony is held within a year and its date is set by the *Disari* (local priest) as per their culture. It is also accompanied with cradle and name giving ceremonies. The age at menarche among Porja girls is between 12 and 14 years of age. Puberty function is also celebrated after first menstruation of a girl. After puberty, the Porja boys and girls enter into a colourful life of youth. Her female friends and relatives train her to become a disciplined good wife and sexual knowledge is also provided.

In the past, traditional youth dormitories have functioned very well among Porjas. Now, such institutions are disappearing. Each sex have a separate dormitory. The girls and boys spend nights in the dormitories to get an opportunity to know each other more intimately. Some times they meet at village *Sador* (meeting place) during the communal dancing and rejoice by dancing together and participate in song competition. The community elderly members provide cultural knowledge to their youth through community youth dormitory system for both boys and girls. Occasionally, both boys and girls perform dance as a group during festivals in the villages. These occasions make boys and girls to fall in love with each other that lead to find their life partners. This dormitory system is a centre for cultural communication of youth in tribal society.

Marriage ceremony is the most significant event in the life of Porjas. When a Porja marriage alliance is contemplated, the elders from the boy's side negotiate with the girl's parents. Usually the boy's parents bring a pot of liquor and some quantity of rice, and offer to the girl's parents as gifts. If the parents of girl show willingness to the marriage then the boy side parents accept the gifts and drink a little quantity of liquor. Later, the boy's parents sprinkle a little quantity of liquor on the walls of the girl's house as a symbol of agreement. After consulting their *guru* or *Disari* they fix a convenient day for marriage. One day before the marriage, the boy's parents bring five *Kunchams* (1 *kuncham* = 4 kgs) of rice, new clothes, goat or cow, a few pots of liquor and some cash ranging from two to five thousand rupees and offer to the girls parents as *Voli* (bride price). On that day, the girl's parents arrange a non-vegetarian feast to the guests and community people of the village. Next day, the bride accompanied by the relatives goes to the bridegroom's place. Outside the bridegroom's house, two poles are set-up and joined together at the top with a string to which a gourd (*cucurbita maxima*) is suspended. As soon as the couple comes before the house, a tall man cuts the gourd and it falls to the ground. Then the couple sits on a new mat made of bamboo for the occasion, which is spread before the entrance of the house. The bride is presented with new clothes

by the in-laws. Some times, the clothes are dyed with turmeric yellow. Both wear new clothes, and their heads, face and body are smeared with turmeric paste, oil and sometimes charcoal powder also. The bride's saree end and bridegroom's towel are tied in a knot. Wearing of toe-rings or *thali* by females is a symbol of marriage, but not strictly observed and hence identification of the marital status of woman is difficult. The nuptial ceremony is arranged on the same night, at bridegroom's residence. Even after marriage, the girl spends a few months with her parents. Apart from this kind of marriage by negotiation, marriage by elopement and capture are also very common among Porjas.

Death comes as a dreadful event in Porjas life. In the past, Porjas used to bury their dead keeping the head to the east and feet to the west. It was their belief that the kingdom of dead lies west and with their feet buried to the west it will be easy for the dead to make the journey. Due to their culture contact with the Hindu castes, presently Porjas either bury or cremate their dead placing the body in a north-south direction (feet to the south). Death mourning is observed for nine days. The family and kinsmen of deceased person observe many restrictions in respect of food, sex and other activities during the pollution period. A feast is served to the villagers by the deceased person's family to purify themselves. Some poor families may postpone this feast by a year and usually arrange it in the month of 'Magha' or 'Pausa' when they have sufficient food and money after harvesting the crops.

Apart from cultivation, the Porja depend on secondary occupations like agricultural labour and collection of non-timber forest produce. They sell their surplus agricultural produce and non-timber forest produce in the weekly market (shandy), where they buy household essential items, or to the Girijan Cooperative Corporation (G.C.C) which procures the non-timber forest produce items from the tribals.

The Porjas have their own village headman, locally called *naidu* or *munasub*, who solves disputes at village level as per their customary law. The Porjas have superstitious beliefs, witch craft and sorcery. They worship the natural products and objects. And also they worship Hindu deities, local Hindu festivals are observed in addition to their own, such as *etum* or *Itekula panduga*, during which all the able bodied males go on a ceremonial hunting expedition. They also attend the *Modakondamma* fair at Paderu in every calendar year held at the end of May month. The central pole of every house is an object of worship.

Most of the Porjas are illiterates. The children are not encouraged by parents to attend schools since they are considered as an additional source of family income. They do not encourage the girl child to educate. Generally, a few boys study up to primary school and drop out from the Schools due to their economic reasons. Nowadays, a few families allow their children to attend schools due to their increased awareness of educational facilities and employment opportunities. They are in favour of both traditional medicine and modern medicine. They are also accepting family planning methods and taking birth control measures; generally, men get sterilized. Only few villages have modern civic amenities. A few salaried employees are also found among them. Many Porja settlements lack proper transportation facilities. A few of the Porjas have exposure to film and radio media devices. Still the Porja peasants grow local variety of seeds and use the organic manure. The community is benefited with the I.C.D.S., and public distribution system. A few of them are availing the banking facility and have savings. But, still large majority of them have not developed the concept of saving due to their poor economic condition. They are struggling very hard to meet their subsistence due to lack of sufficient food resources. Food insecurity, indebtedness, land alienation, illiteracy, malnutrition and ill health are common problems among Porjas of Visakhapatnam district. At present the government as well as non-government agencies have taken up the case of tribal development and it will take some more time to reach to Porjas.

## CONCLUSION

It is noticed that some traditional and cultural practices are in common with Khond and Gadaba groups. These three PVTGs have many aspects in common; there are slight variations in their traditional cultural practices. However, such variation is not reflected much in their socio-economic background. These PVTGs have similar

livelihood practices and completely relying on forest environment for their subsistence. The Tribal Cultural Research and Training Institute (TCR&TI), Government of Andhra Pradesh and the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) should record and document the ethnographic note on Porja tribe to make it available for future generation since the original culture of Porjas is endangered due to influence of interaction with the non-tribal population.

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