

**Pitchiguntala Nomadic Tribes In India**  
**- Marginalisation of Women by Marriage & Caste Name**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

In India, Culture and Religious practices makes the identity of a community stronger and recognised under a particular group or category. As per the book published by Syed Siraj Ul Hassan titled ‘The Castes and Tribes of H.E.H. the Nizam’s Dominions’, 1920, defined people belonging to Pichguntalas, the variants of Pichakuntala, Pichagunta, Bhaktollu, Hevala, Helavaru, Helawar, Helvi, etc., with the recent version of Vamsharaj, as a Telugu Caste are of wandering beggars, local genealogists and mat-makers based in the southern parts of India. The Caste name is supposed to be derived from ‘Bhiksha Kunti (Bhiksha = Begging, Kunti = Lame), probably an opprobrious epithet denoting a lame beggar. These people are classified under the nomadic, semi nomadic and de-notified tribes in India. Pitchiguntalas are a social division in a traditional society consisting of families or communities linked by social, economic, religious and blood ties, with a common culture and dialect, having a typically recognised leader and ancestor referred as Kuntimalla Reddy. Similarly, the heirs of Pichamma and Kuntimalla Reddy also referred as Pichimma+mallanna+inttivallu = Pichikuntintivallu = Pichikuntala @ Pitchiguntala (Dr.L.Ramakrishna & N.M.Dhanya, 2005).

As per the commonly agreed legendary background for these Pitchiguntalas, during the ancient times, there was family belonging to Roddi of Rashtrakutas community in Deogiri (City of Gods) presently in Maharashtra near Aurangabad, whose members migrated to the Deccan areas of present Andhra Pradesh and later become the Reddys in Telugu speaking areas and Reddiars in Tamil populated areas.

### **SOCIAL STATUS:**

Pichakuntalas rank socially with Viramustis, Sanyasis, Sharadakanis and other low beggars. They eat mutton, pork, fish, chicken and fowls, goats, forest animals; and the leavings of Jangams. They indulge freely in strong drinks and alcohol, both male and female in the family. The Government of Andhra Pradesh, before its bifurcation, issued a G.O. Ms. No.1 dated 24/01/2009, to restore and add the original name Pitchiguntala as synonym to Vamsharaj at Sl. No.18 under Group –A in the list of Backward Classes.

### **PRACTICES IN PITCHIGUNTALA:**

#### **RELIGION:**

In matters of religion, the Pichakuntalas are almost all are Shaivas (Vibhuthidharis) and worship Mallikarjunaswamy (lord Shiv) as their patron god with offerings of sweetmeats. Pochamma, the goddess who presides over small-pox, is worshipped on Wednesdays with sacrifices of goats and fowls. Their other animistic deities are Yellamma, worshipped on Thursdays and Fridays, Idamma on Wednesdays and Maisamma, on Sundays. The offering such as goats and fowls to deities are eaten by the members of the household. These people strongly believe in witch-crafts and spirits and when illness befalls a family, the members seek the assistance of an Erkala (Yerikala-Schedule Tribe) woman to identify the troubling spirit and appease it with a variety of animal and other offerings. The functions of the priest are performed by Jangams (elders of the community), to whom great reverence is paid by the members of the caste. Women play an important role in the practice of religion in Pitchiguntala Community; most of the religious rituals at home are taken care by the women, forming a supportive role for the male in the family.

**OCCUPATION:**

The observations made by Syed Siraj Ul Hassan in his book on 'The Castes and Tribes of H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions', 1920, begging is believed to be the principal occupation of the caste and as has been already mentioned, they receive alms only from the Kapu and Golla castes. They also earn a livelihood by making mats of leaves of Shendi (wild date palm). Some of them are now engaged in agriculture as non-occupancy raiats and landless day-labourers. They are also said to be engaged in pig breeding. Presently, the Pitchiguntalas are classified into (1) Nomadic (2) Semi-nomadic and (3) Farming Community. In case of nomadic, these Pitchiguntalas go place to place practicing the genealogical histories for the other caste people such as Reddy, Kuruba, Golla, etc., with their family (including the husband, wife, unmarried daughters and sons). They make temporary tents away from the main livings in the villages and do live for few days in the area to complete the genealogical works and collection of alms. These people have no permanent places of their living, no agricultural lands of their own, and no permanent addresses and do have only a nomadic life with makeshift livings.

**MARRIAGES IN PITCHIGUNTALAS:**

It is a socially approved relationship between man and woman that bides each other into a permanent, official relation of husband and wife. It is an important social institution that satisfies physical, social, psychological, cultural and economic needs of men and women. According to the ancient scripture, marriage is regarded as a socio-religious duty constituted to attain three important aims of life the dharma (duty), rati (sexual pleasure) and praja (progeny). Hinduism regards marriage as a socio-religious duty of an individual.

Various forms of marriages are based on number of wives or husbands a person has. Two broad categories are monogamy (one spouse) and polygamy (more than one spouse):

- In Polygamy, one man marries more than one woman at a given time. It is most popular form of polygamy and is common in Muslims now-a-days but it is used to be common in Hindus also once upon a time. Polygamy has two forms (1) Sororal Polygamy, when man marries more than one lady who is also sisters of each other and (2) Non-sororal Polygamy, when man marries more than one lady who is not sisters of each other.
- In Polyandry, one woman married to more than one man. It is not very common and is further classified into Fraternal Polyandry (one wife of several brothers) and Non-

fraternal Polyandry (one wife of several men not related to each other). The practice of Polyandry is believed to stem from the tale of Mahabharata. It was common in ancient Indian tribes such as Hunas. Fraternal Polyandry is still common in some tribes and villages of northern India and is practiced due to scarcity of girls for marriage.

Monogamy, this type of marriage is most widely followed where one man marries one woman at a time. It is considered as an ideal and rational type of marriage followed in all civilized societies. This type of marriage is normally a permanent relationship continued till the death. Monogamy is further classified in two types (1) Senior Monogamy and (2) Straight Monogamy.

- In case of Senior Monogamy, a man can marry again only after the death of his first wife or after a divorce but he is not permitted to marry more than one wife and remains monogamous throughout his life.
- In case, of Straight Monogamy, remarriage is not allowed either of the couple even one of them is dead or divorced.

#### **Causes of Exogamy:**

- The desire on the part of a few to show that they are distinct from others must have encouraged exogamy.
- Some people feel that they become very cheap and insignificant if they marry within the known circle of relatives and friends. Hence, they want to go out of the group to select their life- partners.
- The practice of female infanticide must have compelled a few tribal to go out of the tribe to find out mates for them. Due to the shortage of girls they are forced to do this. Some used to kidnap girls belonging to other groups.
- The belief that close in-breeding would affect the biological quality of the offspring's, has also added to the practice of exogamy.
- It may be noted that endogamy and exogamy are not mutually exclusive. In some societies both the rules may coexist. For example, in India both are practised by the caste

Hindus. Castes and sub-castes are endogamous in nature. But 'Gotra'- a small unit of sub-caste is exogamous. Such rules differ from society to society.

- Today there is a greater trend towards exogamous marriages. Endogamy is said to be conservative. It is widely criticised.
- Exogamy is appreciated as progressive and more scientific. Exogamy has brought peoples of various castes, races, and religious groups, tribal together.
- It can effectively reduce social distance among peoples and encourage and support social solidarity and communal unity.

#### **OTHER CHALLENGES FACED BY THE PITCHIGUNTALA WOMEN:**

- Most of the Pitchiguntala women are uneducated and speak / talk differently with Telugu accent, which is not to that of the local languages. This make them shy away from the other people while in public places and they try to live away from the main stream and modernisation.
- These women struggle in the historiography of modern India and failing in the understanding of nationalism.
- Educating these Pitchiguntala women is challenge as their wandering life styles do not permit them to stay in a place to continue their education.
- Being very low in the numerical, these Pitchiguntala women are being very poor; these women to bear three fold hardship of caste-based discrimination in the society.
- These women are very shy type; they feel insulted to expose themselves with their caste name in the public places and gatherings.
- In a context of gender inequality, marital and family status shapes women's gendered experience of poverty, creating particular challenges for single women. Development initiatives and social policy programmes need to support these single women from Pitchiguntala community.

- Among these Pichiguntala, women are most marginalized in terms of decision making and accessing REDD+ benefits.
- These women are at the crossroads of gender, class and caste. Being treated as lower castes, particularly as untouchables by the higher castes and Reddy community itself, these women are failing in civil rights and entitlements.
- The women belonging to Pitchiguntalas face many number of violence from men. Pichiguntalas, general male dominated, no equality is practiced.
- These women face more violence every day; they will continue to do so until society changes and accepts them as equals. The right to equality regardless of gender and caste is a fundamental right in India, which is absent in the minds of Pichiguntala male.
- Vulnerably positioned at the bottom of the gender, caste and class hierarchies, When these women joins a mass meetings or a gatherings, they experience the outcome of severely imbalanced social, economic and political power equations in terms of caste-class-gender discrimination and violence.
- Domestic violence against these women has not caught the attention of social sciences researchers. No National family Health Survey showed that the prevalence of violence is against these women belonging to Pichiguntalas as compared to women outside these categories.
- Among the causes for domestic violence against these women were male alcoholism, the man's suspicious nature, dowry demands, husband's extramarital relations and the complex social situations related to inter-caste marriages.
- These women end up facing caste discrimination and harassment outside the home and domestic violence inside.
- Discrimination in the name of caste name is a common thing for the women from Pitchigutnala community and are subjected to different types of atrocities such as:

- No entry to houses of other castes
- No Educational avenues for girl children
- No Marital Care
- Alcoholism
- Wife beating
- Bullying in Public
- Sexual Exploitation among family members
- Sexual Exploitation by Non-family members
- Prostitution & Devadasi System (?)
- Male domination
- Physical Harassment
- Mental torture
- No legal avenues
- Lack of recognition in the family
- Lack of recognition in the society
- Multiple Marriages
- Child Marriages
- Widow Marriages
- Concubines
- Lack of Housing
- Lack of Sanitation
- Lack of exposure to Government Welfare Schemes
- Lack of NGO Participation

## **CONCLUSION:**

The women in India in general are subjected to various types of problems and untold exploitations by the male dominated community. There exists need for the provisions of government welfare measures and schemes for the rural women, especially the women belonging to the nomadic, semi-nomadic and de-notified tribes. There should be some facilities in the educational system for the provision to the children of the wandering communities in India. The Pitchiguntala who are also referred as Vamsharaju and Helava in India, are mostly nomadic to semi-nomadic in nature, who live in make shift tents and wandering for the practice of genealogy for other caste people as a lively hood and collect the alms for their services. The women in Pichiguntala community are subjected to various types of exploitations by the male due to lack

of recognition and male dominations. The Pitchiguntala women are used for family assistance, breeding the children, sexual objectives of the males, etc. There exist practices of consumption of alcohol by both men and women in the Pitchiguntala families, the women are subjected to physical exploitations. Prostitution, devadasi system, multiple partners for sexual needs, internal fighting and wife beating, etc. can be seen commonly.

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