

# Epoch Making of *Dasabodha* Folklore: A Study on Adi-Andhra Community

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**Abstract:** The array of identity and culture in the form of *Dasabodha*, popular cultural folklore influenced the Telugu region among the *Adi-Andhra* Community. The Epoch making of *Dasabodha* has a 17<sup>th</sup> century *Bakshi* movement led in Marathi literature. It connects the indigenous excluded communities through literature. The traditional knowledge forms are explored through this popular folklore to reinvent the identity and culture which has eco-centric in nature. This article traces the interaction between masses and schooling systems, which explores the autonomy and identity as *Adi-Andhras*, refers to the nature of self-consciousness critique and to the need to develop a discourse of social transformation and emancipation that does not cling dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions. In other words, *Adi-Andhra* movement refers to both a 'school of thought' and a process of anti-caste critique during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. It points to a body of collective thought for mobilizing the people under single cultural identity of humanity. The conflict theory and cooperative theories are evolved out of social dialogues between *Guru* and *Shishya* parampara for the larger humanity.

**Keywords:** Epoch making, *Dasabodha*, Folklore, *Adi-Andhra*, Telugu Region.

## INTRODUCTION

The present enquiry can be broadly situated in the pre-colonial and early colonial intervention on the social premise of identity and culture. The main focus of the paper is to frame indigenous knowledge and thought as an object of pre-colonial thought and concern.<sup>3</sup> Obviously the point is not to suggest that discourse has become less real and knowledge has acquired a new salience in the supposedly capacity and capability approach in the globalized contemporary world. In fact, the material for

discussion belongs to a period where the people are finding social identity between the nature and god is under the process and remarkable influence of *Bakthi* literature which has Upanishads and pre-Upanishads historical cultural roots.

In some measure this attempt is made to understand the socio-cultural practices of groups in the pre-colonial Telugu region for the mobilisation of lower social strata of *Adi-Andhras* of south India. Does it is to allow to self-understanding of erstwhile Nizam Hyderabad State and Coastal Andhra Pradesh as a meaningful and cultural community? Is it a product of *Adi-Andhra* or autonomous independent struggles or Nizam Hyderabad State policies? Though this study engages itself with the pre-colonial period, it is aware that the folklore in contemporary cultural politics needs to locate historically in the pre-colonial intervention and the structure of anti-colonial responses found in the *Dasabodha* narratives.

## Socio-cultural History of *Adi-Andhras*

During the early phase, socio-cultural knowledge was subjugated by *Dwijas* in the form of the sacred scriptural knowledge. Against this leading knowledge learning system, the *Bhumiputras* or the sons of the soil emerged as an alternative egalitarian and materialist thinking process initiated in the form of Charvakas/Lokayatas and Buddhist schools of thought. With the advent of Muslim rule in Bharatiya cultural tradition during the medieval period, the socio-cultural knowledge formations were resisted in the form of *Dasabodha* a popular folklore emerged. In the concrete sense Islamic socio-cultural attention on practical matters with the

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<sup>3</sup> Most of the structuralist studies focus on school as a very important object of enquiry

spiritual outlook emerged as *Sufi* cultural knowledge tradition. The liberal *Bhakti* cult has its roots from Upanishads period and this trend had advocated serious socio-cultural knowledge among the different autonomous social identities. Furthermore, the rise of Maratha power had also brought new dimensions to *Dasabodha* and influenced the Telugu region among the Adi-Andhra Community.

The Marathi socio-cultural reformers, Ekanath, Tukaram, Ramadas and Vaman Pandit, initiated social equality in the Hindu cultural practices that has to be universalised. Especially, Ramadas Samarth, teacher of Shivaji was an influenced saintly personality to many Adi-Hindus not only in Maharashtra but also in Southern India through his innovation of *Dasabodha*. It is interesting to mention here that the Muslim rulers have found interest in this folk form and started practicing Muslim provincial rulers on par with Arabic and Persian languages. Later Muslim rulers found Urdu as language in Bijapur and Golkunda. In North India had not been found any literary expression at the time of Muslim invasions whereas, in South, Dravidian languages had its heritage way back to early century A.D. It is interesting to know the social communities engaged in learning through *Dasabodha* folklore process before the advent of British East India Company. Four major languages have had distinctive scripts and written literature, they are in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

The social group name *Adi-Andhra*<sup>4</sup> is derived from 'Adi' meaning from the 'beginning' or 'original settler' and Andhra refers to people from Andhra Pradesh. This term is coined by group of lower strata intellectuals in the beginning of early 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Government of British India started enumerating the Census of the social communities living in the region. The ethnic identity of *Adi-Andhra* has actually come up during the first provincial Adi-Andhra conference known as *Andhra Panchama Maha Jana Sabha* held at Vijayawada in 1917.<sup>5</sup> Then the participants and the organising committee leaders of the conference passed a resolution to use the word *Adi-Andhra* for outcasts or untouchable, the main purpose of coining *Adi-*

*Andhra* is to consolidate and enhance the self-respect of the 'untouchables' in Andhra Pradesh.

The *Adi-Andhra* is numerically a major caste in Andhra Pradesh followed by Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Pondicherry and Kerala. The members of the caste are distributed in all major cities and towns in the plateau down to 'Sahyadri' ranges in Karnataka, which in Tamil Nadu they are migrants from the neighbouring coastal Andhra Pradesh. The majority of *Adi-Andhras* in Tamil Nadu are urban dwellers. The districts found where members of the caste have returned in large number are indicated in Andhra Pradesh: Srikakulam, Vishakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Nellore, Chittoor, Cuddapah, Ananthpur, Prakasam, Kurnool and Guntur. In case of Karnataka *Adi-Andhras* are found in the districts of Bangalore, Bellary, Mysore and Kolar. Whereas in Kerala *Adi-Andhras* concentrated in one district called Kozhikode but in Tamil Nadu these community can be found in Madras, Chegalapattu, Dharmapuri, and North Arcot.

A number of exogamous groups known as surnames are found among the *Adi-Andhra* some of these are 'Karati', Satyanpalle, Mekala, Dasar, Mitla etc. Telugu is the mother tongue of *Adi-Andhras*. In Karnataka, Kerala, Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu, they are bilingual. In other words, apart from their mother tongue that is Telugu they speak the language of the respective states.

#### Mapping the Rationality of *Dasabodha* Folklore

The socio-cultural knowledge 'learning phenomenon'<sup>6</sup> was invented by Adi-Andhra intelligentsia is to develop the *Dasabodha* elementary state of social learning though popular folklore methods such as songs, poetry used for 'self-respect' social mobilisation. The traditional socio-cultural learnings structures developed by Buddhism, Jainism and Islamic Madararasas, Maktabas were liberated by Hindu model of "*Gurukula*".<sup>7</sup> It has had constructed certain legitimate safeguards in promoting and protecting traditional knowledge forms within their own communities. The new orientation of socio-cultural knowledge learning emerged due to *Dasabodha* folklore encouraged

<sup>4</sup> Mala, Madiga and Panchama castes are preferred to call themselves as *Adi-Andhra* in Coastal Andhra Pradesh, In Karnataka, the caste like Achhut, *Adi-Jambava*, *Adi-Hindu*, Chambara, Jambavalu, Muttaranevaru, Panchama and Tholavadu are

synonymous, whereas in Tamil Nadu, the sweeper and Thoti are other names used for them.

<sup>5</sup> Andhra Patrika, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1917. Pp.2-7.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp: 1344-1349.

<sup>7</sup>Ghosh, S. C. (2007). *History of education in India*. Jaipur, Rawat Publications.

social groups towards social consciousness of their own traditional indigenous knowledge forms.

The socio-cultural reformers from *Adi-Andhra* community Bhagya Reddy Verma (1888-1939) founding leaders of *Adi-Andhra movement* at coastal Andhra and Deccan Nizams Hyderabad State. He is a learned intellectual and activist used extensively *Dasabodha* folklore in Hyderabad region in establishing 26 schools and social cultural organisations<sup>8</sup> with public funds. Later on, Vundru Tatayya (1850-1930), Voguri Veeraiah were influenced by socio-cultural movement initiated by Bhagya Reddy Verma some of the Burma returned *Adi-Andras* social activist leaders earned 300 acres of land in Burma and 150 acres of land in Rajolu Taluk of East Godavari district for the establishment of schools and hostels for *Adi-Andras* in Ponnamanda, Anaravaram, Allavaram and Modalukunduru villages<sup>9</sup>. Tatayya's had influenced many *Adi-Andras* leaders to take up the cause of socio-cultural development in the area popularly known as Golla Chondrayya, Kusuma Tatayya, Tadiswamy, Pamula Reddy, Konda Venkanna became the advocated of *Dasabodha* folklore.

#### Socio-Cultural Transformation of *Adi-Andhras*

The development of *Adi-Andhra* socio-cultural movement, which underwent a transformation in 1906 with the emergence of *Jagan Mitra Mandali* later in 1911, became Manyasa Sangham and then in 1922 *All India Adi-Hindu Conference* declared as *Adi-Hindu Social Service League*. Though the Hyderabad region was under the indirect rule of British Government, it had independent status of administering the Hyderabad state by Nizams. Telugu did not receive state patronage; instead, Urdu was made the language of administration. Hyderabad state under Nizam kept it almost isolated from the progressive trends and modern influences. *Adi-Hindu* Movement is profoundly rooted in the remote part of the Hyderabad region. The main trajectories of the movement are the material conditions that created by the colonial rule, the propagation and

proselytization of Christianity and Islam, the mass anti-colonial assertion.

The society of Hyderabad during 1906 to 1934 consisted of two main sections namely the Hindus and Muslims. The agitation was already in existence when Bhagya Reddy Verma began his propagation work through Jagan Mitra Mandali by popular folk forms like Harikatha, Burrakatha as 'Bhajana Mandali' in 1906 in the *Dasabodha* style of social mobilisation. Within 14 years that is by 1920s the Hyderabad and Secundrabad experienced widespread openings of schools, and similar occurrences took place in the provinces of Madras, Bombay, and to a lesser extent in the Karnataka<sup>10</sup>. Soon after this, awareness activities in Hyderabad and Secundrabad led to the discovery of caste associations in many of the provinces.

In the Coastal Andhra region also, some young *Adi-Andhras*, such as Eali Vedappalli (1911-71), organising secretary of *Adi-Andhra* conferences in East Godavari, and Geddada Brahmaiah (1912-50)<sup>11</sup>, secretary of an *Adi-Andhra Sangham* in 1935, were energized by *Dasabodha* folklore for transforming socially, culturally. They were joined by Kusuma Dharmanna (1898-1948). Dharmanna was one of the important *Adi-Andhras* poets of the time. The author of the famous song *maakoddu nalladoratanam* (we don't want a country ruled by the upper castes) was sang in the Telugu dialect by using the *Dasabodha* method. He was also publisher of *Jayabheri* newspaper. The tenth conference of the *Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha* was organized at Rajahmundry, East Godavari district in 1935. While Kusuma Venkataramayya was the president of the conference, Kusuma Dharmanna was its reception committee chairman. This conference was inaugurated by M.C.Rajah, one of the prominent *Adi-Andhras* leaders of the Madras Presidency. After this conference, several district level and provincial level conferences were organized under the leadership of Kusuma Dharmanna in 1936 and 1938. The twelfth provincial level conference that was organized in 1938 was presided over by Bhagya Reddy Varma.

<sup>8</sup> Annual Report of Adi-Hindu Social Service League in 1922, Machilipatnam, Ramji Mudraksharalayamu, P. 18.

<sup>9</sup> Paswan Sanjay and Jaideva Pramanshi (2002): *Encyclopedia of Dalits in India, on Education in Volume 10*, Delhi, Kapaz Publications, Pp. 112-113.

<sup>10</sup> M.B. Gowtham (1991): "Bhaghodayam," *Adi-Hindu Social Service League* publications, Hyderabad, pp 14-15,

<sup>11</sup> Brahmaiah edited the *Adi-Andhra Patrika between 1938-40*, for more details see Gowtham, M.B. (1976). *The Untouchable Movement in Andhra Pradesh, Harijana Conference Souvenir*, Hyderabad, Government of Andhra Pradesh, P. 71.

Boyi Bheemanna (1911-2005) another *Adi-Andhra* intellectual and poet influenced Dasabodha folklore from Mamidikuru village of Rajolu, Taluk, East Godavari. He received Kendriya Sahitya Academy award for his poetry collection entitled Gudeselu Kalipotunnai (The Huts are Burning). The style of writing was *Dasabodha* folklore. Boyi Bheemanna suffered the evils of untouchability since his childhood. He started writing even from his youth (school days) and he was discouraged and insulted that an untouchable cannot write poetry. He called himself as Mamalarishi (taking the first two letters from both the prominent Scheduled Castes- (Madiga and Mala). He is a versatile writer. His writings include poetry, prose, essay, drama, and research works on social, political and economic issues represented in Paleru (1933) a play. He became popular in using *Dasabodha* literary form in presenting his views.

Boyi Bheemanna is a very powerful *Adi-Andhra* poet; not only had he portrayed the worst suffering of *Adi-Andhra* but also delineated their awareness and protest and their development through his writings. His other works are *Janmantharavairam* (1988), *Balayogiyam* (1986), *Dharmam Kosam Poratam*, *Paramatma*, *Panchama Swaram and Sankharavam*. *Coolie Raju* (1946) is yet another play focused on the exploitation of labour. It deals with the just fight between the agriculture labourers and the landlords and their goondas. The agriculture labour practice, Gandhian ideology and fight for their rights and after achieving success they conduct elections for their associations.

Gudiselu Kalipothunnai (The Huts are Burning)

Published in 1973 is a prose poem. The poet perhaps hopes that if the huts are burnt, in their place, the buildings will come up. Bheemanna too accepted the annihilation of caste by Ambedkar. In the first part of the poem, very ironically and pathetically the poet reveals the fact. While introducing the burning-hurts he writes:

The huts are burning

Oh! Burning!

Whose huts are they; it is a pity,  
Perhaps, they are of Malas and Madigas  
Who else have the huts? (P 1)

The poet takes the huts as a symbol of the ignorance of *Adi-Andhra*. He hopes that the ignorance of *Adi-Andhra* like huts have to be burnt and the non-flammable buildings i.e., the mental and physical development of *Adi-Andhra* should come.

During those days the huts of the Scheduled Castes are burnt periodically.

## CONCLUSION

It could be either at the time of pre-colonial socio-cultural knowledge forms that gain momentum in the form of *Dasabodha* folklore among the lower strata of social system mobilised under socio-cultural identity as *Adi-Andhras*. Though it has influence from Maharashtra to the Telugu region as a socio-cultural reformation movement turned into self-respect movement. The body of literature it produced as a socio-cultural tradition has influenced to mobilise the larger section of the indigenous communities to have an identity. Interestingly as part of this movement social, economic and political development has also taken place among the *Adi-Andhras*. It has also produced leadership; this leadership became very active in national movement under different leaderships. The socio-cultural dominance and resistance turned in to self-respect and universal humans due to popular folklore of *Dasabodha*. In modern times the crux of caste-class conflicting theories and debates have solution in the form of *Dasabodha* folklore as a conflict relinquishment.

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