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## **Festival of Madel: A Study of Madelpuranam and Rajaka Caste in Telangana**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Festivals and Rituals are part of the culture. Cultures of the castes are is closely interwoven with its social structure. Madel is a collective representation of the Rajaka caste and this festival is a collective expression of their caste identity in the larger socio-cultural arena. They celebrate this festival in the memory of first ancestor of their caste. The caste is offering their devotional respects to their idol and in a festive manner. Rajaka's strongly believe that their occupation, cultural identity and socio-economic relations are gift of the Madel. This paper is based on my ethnographic filed work on Rajaka caste in Districts of Telangana state. Rajaka's are perpetuating of their cultural traditions, customs and belief patterns through the festival of Madel and it shows caste wise variations of religious and cultural practices. The rituals are contributing to an evolving sense of castes integrity. Most of the caste lore is not written down but memorized and generations together it is passing through the word of mouth. The cultural history and heritage of the Rajaka caste is representing through the festival of Madel in Telangana region. Still it is a vibrant culture in hereditary occupational practicing castes. This paper aims to investigate the cultural roots of the Rajaka caste and their ancestor Madel. It also examines their rituals and performances of their dependent castes.*

**Keywords:** *Madelpuranam, Rajaka caste, dependent castes, Patam , Ganjikuti*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The traditional hereditary occupational practicing of washing clothes is identified with this name by the state and society. In Telangana region, *Madel* is the traditional title of the *Rajaka* caste to address the washer man in the village. The *Kulapedda* (head of the caste) is addressed as a *Madel* in order to invite him for village level meetings of all the castes. The word *Madel* represents the first person of the caste. Every member of the washer man community is a *Madel* but this word is frequently used to address the elders of the community. *Rajaka* caste is colloquially addressed as *Chakali* in the Telangana and of Andhra Pradesh. However, the caste is identified with the *Chakali* name rather than with the *Rajaka* name. The government is using the name *Rajaka* for official activities related to the washer people's caste but in many places it is confused to identify with the *Rajaka* name. People recognize this group with Dhobi or *Chakali* names.

As Bailey said " One caste has direct control over economic resources and it alone has a corporate political existence: the other castes derive their living by a dependent relationship upon the dominant caste, and in themselves they have no corporate political existence (Bailey:258). The *Rajaka* caste is known as a service community in the village. It is a patron

community to other two communities called as *Patam* and *Ganjikuti*. These two communities are involved in performance and singing of genealogies for their patrons. They do not practice the same occupation as their patron castes do. Existence of *Patam* and *Ganjikuti* communities is only known to their patron caste and they are not even visible in the list of state recognized castes. The *Rajaka/ Chakali* is recognized as a Backward caste list in group A and identity list number 5 but *Ganjikuti* and *Patam* communities are not in the same list. The situation is not only prevailing within *Patam* community, but also in other nomadic narrative communities. However, *Patam* performers are only seen in ten districts of Telangana. These two communities are depending on their patron and do not enjoy the equal status as their patron caste. The dependent system basically is related to services that are social which create caste consciousness in making the main caste as the most important and superior. The services of the independent system are basically skilled arts that are meant for entertainment to the main caste and all the villagers. It may once again be noted here that the dependent castes seek alms only from the main caste and refuse to receive from other castes in the village (Rajpramukh :33).

### **PATAM CASTE**

One of the distinctive folk art forms of Telangana region is '*Madelpuranam*', popularly known as *Madelaiah katha* (story of *Madel*). This is a narrative performance and performed with a long scrolling map along with the narration in the form *Yakshagana*. '*Madel*' is the founder figure of the *Rajaka* caste. This caste is a service community in the village. This performance is narrated by *Patam* community. In Telugu language *Patam* means map. This community owns a long scrolling map which has the story of *Madelpuranam* in the form of paintings. So, this caste is identified with their long scrolling map and people address them as *Patam* community. Actually they do not have any name. They are dependent caste on *Rajaka* caste. The dependent system could be viewed as an independent social system. In order to understand caste myths and caste lore in the traditional relations between castes and extensions of the castes boundaries, the study of dependent becomes indispensable (Rajpramukh:35). The story of the *patam* community existence in society is merely taken from the *Rajaka* caste and *Madelpuranam* myth. According to the narrative *Madel* was running an institution it's called *Matam*. So, He was called *Matadhipathi* (head of the institution). The *Patam* people are born from the *Matam* and in the later years, this generation people are performing the Puja's in the *Madel* temples. They are considered as learned people in the community with knowledge of the divine and evil forces. They are the experts of the caste lore and knowledge about human significance in the context of occupation. The popular belief of the *Rajaka*'s on the name of their dependent community that over a period of time the word *Matam* pronounced as *Patam*. So, they settled with this name.

In simpler terms, a *kulapuranam* is a caste-myth, an identity narrative of given caste. On other words Sadanandam defined in a different way "most of the nomadic tribes recite the caste myths of their patron community known as *Kulapuranas*. Every caste has its own *Kulapuranam*. In this way, each *kulapuranam* is not only a narrative of its identity but also a sacred narrative and equivalent to the status of the God of the respective caste. Each live performance of the caste-myth is a process of discourse. *Kulapuranam* establishes

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*Rajaka* caste *Kulapuranam* name is *Madelpuranam*. Madel is first ancestor of this caste. This caste myth narrates the origin of their caste and ordeals of the protagonist in order to establish a occupational identity and its tools. *Madelpuranam* is divided into three parts of the narration. First part of the story deals with the creation of universe and birth of Adishakti and the triads. Second part of the story deals with pan Indian *puranic* stories from the *Shivapuranam* such as *Parvathi* marriage, *Dakshayazna* and birth of *Veerabadra*. The third part of the story directly deals with the birth of *Madel* and his devotion and dedication to establish himself as an occupational practice. *Kulapuranas* are closely associated with pan-Indian *Puranic* tradition.

In this sense, the *Madel Puranam* performance tradition is not just an object of reality, but that reality in the representations through the ages. Thus *Kulapuranam/ Madel Puranam* become a mode of representation rather than a mere piece of entertainment. The scope of *Kula Puranam* performance is ranging from the 12<sup>th</sup> century Palkuri Somanadha’s *Basvapuranam* to recent performance of the *Madelpuranam*. However the primary focus of this paper will be a kind of investigation of the roots of the human culture. *Kulapuranam* establishes fundamental to identity in the oral text and it connects with the memory to make the community people united.

## **FESTIVAL OF MADEL**

The entire community of *Rajaka* is represented by *Madel*. *Madelpuranam* is a three days festival performance and it ends with rituals and celebrations of *Rajaka* community. This festival is not merely moments of joy and happiness. It has each action of the behavior of *Rajaka* caste. For a *Rajaka*, therefore, a day of is not merely a day of feasting but also spent in praising his ancestors, remembering their attributes and thanking him for his countless blessings in providing a livelihood.

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## TRADITION OF *BONAM*

*Madelpuranam* is a festival performance. It is a collective festival of the *Rajaka* caste. The time period is decided by collective decisions of the caste. Every three or five years they celebrate the festival to remember their first ancestor of the caste *Madel* but every year they offer a *Bonam*. *Madelpuranam* is a festival performance and it ends with a huge *Bonam* offering procession. This is a prominent festival of the every member of the *Rajaka* caste. They invite their relatives, friends and well wishers of their family to attend and participate during the celebrations.

The ritual consists of an offering of food made to the goddess by woman which is later shared by the family, friends and well wishers as "prasad". It is a ritual honor of *Madel* and other local deities *Pochamma*. It's an expression of the devotion and of devotees that they offer special food to the deity. Many worshipping procedures of local deities either begins with *Bonalu* celebrations or ends with procession.

*Bonalu* is not a festival. It's a one of the ritual process during the worshipping of various regional deities in Telangana region. This is a colorful procession in order to offer the *Bonam* to their deities. *Bonalu* means *Bojanaalu* (meal) in Telugu language, is an offering to the Goddess of power. Women prepare the *Bonam* with cooked rice, milk, sugar in a pot, decorated with neem leaves garland around the neck of the pot and turmeric, kunkum and a Lamp on the top it. Women put the pots on their heads and take it to Goddess temple, led by drummers and dancing men. *Bonam* offering is an important ritual and it will celebrate on the third day of the *Madel* festival. In the context of *Rajaka* caste, the *Bonam* has to offer for two deities one is *Pochamma* and *Madel*. *Pochamma* is a consider as a village deity and *Madel* is *Rajaka* caste's founder. *Madel* temples built near the *Dhobi Ghats* or ponds wherever they practice their caste occupation.

*Rajaka* caste woman carries the *Bonam* on her head in a mass procession of the community. This procession is accompanied by *Madiga Dappu* (drum) troupe. It begins from the house of head of the caste and all the people gather in a junction with one or two *Dappu's*. Then, the whole community moves towards their deity temple through the village processions. This is restricted to *Rajaka* caste people but other caste person also participates as guests.

The *Bonam* pots are arranged in a order in front of the temple, when they reached in a procession. *Patam* community priests sing songs on *Madel* and other deities. Then, they distribute the *Kankanam* ( a piece of mango leaf tied with a turmeric applied thread) to all the community members. It is a belief that this holy thread is a protection of their wishes. *Patam* people designs a wheel shape *Kolam* in front of the temple with rice powder, turmeric and green powder which is made by the dry leaves.

One more important Telangana custom begins in front of the *Madel* temple during the *Bonam* offering ceremony. The maternal side of *Rajaka* woman family members brings the new clothes and turmeric applied rice to the married couple. This occasion can be performed for every three to five year and it is depending upon the families' interest. This custom is meant for wishing and blessing a happy prosperous healthy future of their daughter's family. Offering turmeric applied rice along with the new clothes to the couple is an auspicious ceremony in the families and a strong belief exists among these people that this tradition enriches their prosperity and growth in all aspects of their lives. This traditional custom is



called Odi/vadi Biyyam. In case parents are not alive, brother's of the woman will take the responsibility and continue this traditional custom

On this occasion, Patam community plays a role as priests to the *Madel* idol. They offer Puja's along with the head of the caste and other senior members of the *Rajaka* caste. They are devotees of Shiva and his sons. They specially worship Eedamma for protection of their community and offer non-vegetarian food and alcohol to her. *Rajaka* community people will invite the upper caste people as guests of their festival and they will send the meat of the sacrificed goat to their upper caste friends and well wishers.

### **ANIMAL SACRIFICE**

The animal sacrifice is obligatory in these rituals and practices. This is *Rajaka's* devotional offerings to their first ancestor of the caste. The place of animal sacrifice is associated with the occupational and cultural identity of the caste. They strongly believe that these offerings will satisfy their deities in order to fulfill wishes of the individuals as well as members of the community. Animal sacrifice begins during the *Bonam* offering . A decorated goat or sheep brought to the temple and offer small amount of toddy palm wine to that animal before they sacrifice. Then, the animal is sacrificed until the head divides from the body by a special person with his teeth. A senior person or expert in performing puja's in villages deities celebrations from the Patam community or Bynadla community do this sacrificing ritual. The man cuts the goat or sheep's neck and separates the head and body with his teeth. He conducts animal sacrifice ritual in front of the temple. It's called "*Gava*" in Telugu language. One person from collects the small amount of food from all the *Bonam* pots and mixed it with the sacrificed animals blood. This material is called *Kumbham*. It stores in a new bamboo basket called *Baligampa* or *Sarvugampa* .

People believed that the material in basket has more supernatural powers to protect their community from the evil forces. The blood mixed food will be distributed to every house of the community by the head of the caste or whoever the senior person from the *Rajaka* caste . This procedure is called *Sarvu* distribution and the person sprinkles the material on the houses and occupation practicing places. The person, whoever carries the basket on his shoulders, he should not put it down until he comes back to the temple. *Bonam's* will be remained at the temple until distribution completes.

This festival begins with *Madelpuranam* performance and ends with animal sacrifices in front of the temple. The feast and festive mood shifts from the occupation practicing place to their houses. *Madel* is only their occupational god and his position exists at the occupation practicing place not in their houses. He does not have any status in the houses of the *Rajaka* caste and the house is occupied with their *istadaiva*. In some cases people follow the Christianity and celebrate their caste god. So *Madel* is occupational identity and not individual choice.

(This information is documented on my filed work conducted during the *Madel* Festival in Marupaka and Kodimyala villages of Karimnagar District, Telangana)

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