

MATHAMMA JATHARA OF MADIGA COMMUNITY: A CULTURAL SYMBOLISM

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ABSTRACT

Symbols are the basis of culture. A symbol is an object, word, or action that stands for something else with no natural relationship that is culturally defined. Everything one does throughout their life is based and organized through cultural symbolism. Symbolism is when something represents abstract ideas or concepts. Mathamma Jathara is a community festival of Madigas. Mathamma is the mother goddess to the Madigas. Madiga community comes under Scheduled Castes of Andhra Pradesh. They are suppressed and oppressed sections of the society since the ages. This community is having their own symbols to represent their culture. This paper broadly explains about the cultural symbolism of Mathamma Jathara of Madiga community. In specific, it explains that how the Mathamma or Mathamma Jathara was evolved and it trace the historical evidences that how the Madigas claim that they are the children of Mathamma and how the procession of the Mathamma Jathara takes place in the community.

Keywords: Cultural Symbolism, Mathamma Jathara, Madiga community, Tradition.

INTRODUCTION

Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are the two States of South in India. Geographically, Andhra Pradesh is having boundaries with Bay of Bengal, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Telangana and Odisha. Before the Independence, Andhra Pradesh was in Madras Presidency under the British control. Based on the demand for a separate State to the Telugu speaking people in AD 1953, Andhra Pradesh got separated from Tamilnadu¹. Similarly, Telangana was also a South Indian State in India and it had boundaries with Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Karnataka. Before the Independence, Telangana was under the control of Nizam State. In AD 1948 Telangana came under Union of India. Based on the linguistic States demand on 1st November AD 1956, the Telugu speaking areas like Telangana and Andhra Pradesh were merged as one State (Andhra Pradesh) and Hyderabad as its capital. In 1969 Telangana people

¹ Andhra State Act, 1953, Act No-30 of 1953, pp. 5-6.

started 'Jai Telangana' movement for separate State from Andhra Pradesh. After a long standing struggle in AD 2014 June 2nd, the Andhra Pradesh State was divided into Telangana and Andhra Pradesh².

According to Indian Constitution there were sixty one Dalit communities in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Among these heterogeneous communities, Mala and Madiga are in large number³. All these sixty one Dalit communities are located in different parts of the state. Mala and Madiga are having their own sub-groups along with their own occupations. Based on their occupational activity, the caste relations within these groups have emerged.

Mala and Madiga and the other castes are dependent castes on these two categories directly or indirectly. Mala and its sub-groups are right hand castes (*kudivaraam*) and Madiga and its sub-groups are left hand castes (*melavaram*)⁴. Malas are agriculture labors and they are right hand castes directly involved in the production process. Sometimes they are small scale farmers and they work in cultivable and non-cultivable lands. For their agricultural services they used to get the shares from the crops. These reciprocity norms were based on the ethics of both the peasant and other castes that are tied up with the land to each other⁵. Madigas are left hand castes and they do not directly participate in the production process. They participate in different works like the menial works, skinning and tanning works and disposal of dead carcasses. Their main profession is leather work. So, whoever work in leather and menial professions they were segregated from the society and they become the left hand castes.

ORIGIN MYTH OF MADIGA CASTE

Madigas are basically, leather workers, village menials, drumbeaters and agricultural laborers and they are considered as untouchables during pre-independence times, and their place at caste ladder is the lowest. The Madigas directly or indirectly are associated with the disposal of carcass or corpse. In Andhra, there are several names popular among the Madigas, known as Gosangi, Arundhatiya, Jamhavvulu, Jambhavanthulu, Matanga, Ettivaru and Tegavau. Some of these names had mythological connection with Jambavanta – a figure that appears in the epic of Ramayana⁶. These Madigas are considered as the left hand caste. They are leather working

² S.B. Satyanandam, "Historical Background of Telangana State", *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Advanced Research Trends*, Vol. II, Issue 2(2), September 2015, pp. 10-16, pp. 10-15.

³ *Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950* (Rules and Orders under the Constitution)

⁴ Y.A. Sudhakar Reddy, "The Religiosity of the Marginalized: Reflections in the Bard Tradition of Andhra Pradesh", in *Dalits and Social Marginalization*, ed. J. Bheemaiah, Jaipur: Aavishkar Publishers, 2012, p. 43.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 43.

⁶ Singh, T R (1969), "*The Madiga: A Study in Social Structure & Change*", Ethnographic & Folk Culture Society, U P, pp-2

people and they do not participate directly in food production process and hence they are considered as left hand caste (*Melvaram*).

Madigas have called with some other names in the other states like, Mangs in Maharashtra, Batal in Jammu and Kashmir, Dher and Mochi in Gujarat, Chamar in Punjab, and the Chakkiliyan in Tamilnadu⁷ e.t.c. Usually the Madigas' settlements are formed as hamlets and their services are rendered for certain works connected with purity and population. According Rev. H. Huizinga⁸, Madigas "they live in hamlets at a respectable distance from the village of the caste people, by whom they are greatly despised. Their habits are squalid in the extreme, and the odour of a Madiga hamlet is revolting. They perform all the lowest kinds of service for the caste people, especially bearing burdens and working in leather. They take the charge of the ox or as soon as it dies. They remove the skin and tan it, and eat the loathsome carcass, which makes them specially despised, and renders their touch polluting. Some of the skins are used for covering the rude drums that are so largely used in Hindu festivals, and beaten in honour of the village deities. The caste men impress the Madigas into their service, not only to make the drums, but also to beat them at their feasts. It may be mentioned that nearly ten percent of the Madigas are nominal Christians, and, in some parts of the Nellore district, the Christians form over half of the Madiga population. This changes their habits of life and also their social position. Eating of carrion is now forbidden, as well as beating of drums at Hindu festivals, and their refusal in this particular often leads to bitter persecution at the hands of the caste people. The main duty of the Madigas is the curing and tanning of hides, and the manufacture of rude leather articles, especially sandals, trappings for bullocks, and large well-buckets used for irrigation. The process of tanning with lime and *tangedu* (*Cassia auriculata*) bark is rough and simple. *Tangedu* is said to be cut only by the Madigas, as other classes think it beneath their dignity to do it. The quality of the skins they turn out is fair, and the state of the development of the native leather trade compares very favorably with that of other trades such as black smithy and carpentry. The Madiga's sandals are strong, comfortable, and sometimes highly ornamental. His manner of working and his tools are as simple as his life. He often gets paid in kind, a little fodder for his buffalo, so many measures of some cheap grain, perhaps a few vegetables, etc. The Madigas are attached to one or more families of peasants, and are entitled to the dead animals of their houses. Like the Vettiyan in the south, the Madiga is paid in kind, and he has to supply sandals for the peasants, belts for bulls, and all the necessaries of agriculture; and for these he has to find the requisite leather himself; but for the larger articles, such as water buckets, the master must find the leather. Of late years there is a tendency observable among Madigas to poach on each other's monopoly of certain

⁷ Census of India 1931,xxiii,I,154

⁸ Thurston, Edgar and Rangachari, K (1987), "*Castes and Tribes of Southern India*", Vol-IV, Asia Educational Services, New Delhi, pp-308-309

houses, and among the peasants themselves to dispense with the services of family Madigas, and resort to the open market for their necessities. In such cases, the peasants demand payment from the Madigas for the skins of their dead animals. The hides and skins, which remain after local demands have been satisfied, are sold to merchants from the Tamil districts, and there is generally a central agent, to whom the various sub-agents send their collections, and by him they are dried and salted and sent to Madras for tanning. In the Krishna district, children have little leather strings hanging from the left shoulder, like the sacred cord of the Brahman, from which is suspended a bag containing something put in it by a Madiga, to charm away all forms of disease from the infant wearer”.

The Madigas also call themselves as Jambavas and claim to have descended from Jambu or Adijambuvadu, who perhaps the Jambavanthudu of Ramayana, the name Madiga has been interpreted in a number of ways. The earlier writers like “Edgar Thurston and Sirajul Hasan⁹, wrote that the name “Madiga is derived from *mahadige* (the great man who has come down) or to *maha digi ra* (great man, come down). This legend of Jambavant is connected with the origin of Madiga. It is said that one day, Siva and Parvathi went to vanavihara, where she got hurt by a thorn in her thigh, then she tore a portion of flesh of the thigh and hit it on the ground and it fell near the Chennagi tree. Then a boy was born out of it and was named after the tree as Chennayya. He was blessed with three voices *dasavaakku*, *visavakku* and *amritavaakku*. Parvathi finding him alone, kept a Kamadenu, a sacred cow to look after him. And later on he enjoyed the taste of the milk of cow. Then he wanted to eat the flesh of the cow hoping that it would be much tastier than its milk, on hearing this, the cow committed suicide. Then nobody could remove the cadaver. On the advice of devatas Chennayya called Jambamuni. He called Jambamuni as “*maha tata digira*”, as he could not pronounce “*Maha Tata digira*” instead uttered as “*ma digira*”. Because of his tongue twister and for having *visavakku*, the evil *spell the posterity of Jambavamuni become Madigas*”.

There is one more version about the origin of the word Madiga¹⁰. According to this legend “Siva had a Divine cow called Kamadenu. His wife Parvathi milked this cow, and fed the gods with the milk and milk products. This milk had the quality of nectar, and was meant only for the gods. To look after this cow and to take her out to graze in the forest; Parvathi appointed a boy named Chennayya. One day Chennayya had an irresistible temptation to taste the milk, which had so far been denied to all mortals. Though Parvathi refused, but repeated requests of the boy had moved her. She asked him to go to the cow and request her for some milk. Then the boy did this and

⁹ Singh, T R (1969), *Op cit*, pp-4.

¹⁰ Y A Sudhakar Reddy, (2000) “Negotiating Conflicts: Reflections in Folklore of a Marginalized Community of Andhra Pradesh”, *National Seminar on the Religiosity of the Marginalized and Social Transformation*, conducted by the Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras, 7th –8th November 2000.

suddenly the cow fell down on the ground and died. When Parvathi and Siva heard about the death of the sacred cow, they summoned all the gods to help them to cut it to get feeded on its flesh. According to the custom prevailing in those days they could not cut it on the very spot it had died, they had to move it at least a few paces. The gods tried but failed to move the carcass. Then they advised Siva to seek the assistance of Jambavant who was the senior most among the gods and he was also born six months before the creation of the earth. Reaching the spot where Jambavant was performing penance, Siva ordered the mala boy to call the old man. Obeying Siva, he said to Jambavant "*tata maha digi ra*" "Grandfather, come down". The old man came down. He lifted the carcass with his left hand, and carried it to a convenient spot where the gods could cut and unskin it. When they had done this, the gods requested Jambavant to put the flesh into two 'heaps' so that after they had cooked and eaten one heap, they could bring the cow back to life with the help of their powerful chants from the other heap. However, Jambavant put all the pieces in one pot and lighted a fire under it. While stirring, a piece of flesh fell down on the ground. Chennayya, the boy, picked it up and cleaned it to remove sand and dust, and put it again in the pot. Siva and the other gods were very angry with Jambavant as he had not divided the meat into two parts and not kept apart one half for bringing the cow back to life. They were also annoyed with Chennayya for having picked up a piece from the dust and put it back in the pot. They (gods) cursed both Jambavant and Chennayya; in kaliyugam (the fourth and final age in the cyclic order of time) they were to have a degraded life and were to earn their livelihood by handling dead cattle and by sweeping village lanes. Jambavant and Chennayya ate the flesh and drank liquor. Jambavant took the cow hide and gave it to his sons; they became leather workers. Chennayya's descendants took to cleaning village lanes. Jambavant's descendants are Madiga, and Chennayya's descendants are Malas. These castes still following the occupations which their ancestors got as a curse from the gods"¹¹.

There was another slightly different version of the legend of the divine cow is given by Thurston. According to Thurston¹², "At a remote period Jambava Rishi, a sage, was one day questioned by Isvara (Siva) why the former was habitually late at the divine court. The Rishi replied that he had to attend to the wants of his children every day. Which consequently made his attendance late; Whereupon Isvara pitying the children gave the Rishi a cow (Kamadenu) which instantaneously supplied their every want. Once upon a time, while Jambava was absent at Isvara's court another Rishi named Sankya, visited Jambava's hermitage, where his son Yugamuni hospitably entertained him. While taking his meals the cream that had been served was so savoury that the guest tried to introduce Jambava's son Yugamuni, to kill the cow and eat her flesh; and in spite of the latter's refusal, Sankya killed the animal and prevailed upon the others to partake of the

¹¹ Singh, T R (1969), *Op cit*, pp 4-5

¹² Thurston, Edgar and Rangachari, K (1987), *Op cit*, Vol-IV, pp-315-316

meat. On his return from Isvara's court, Jambava found the inmates of his hermitage eating the sacred cow's beef; and took both Sankya and Yugamuni over to Isvara's court for judgment. Instead of entering, the two offenders remained outside, Sankya Rishi standing on the right side and Yugamuni on the left of the doorway. Isvara seemed to have cursed them to become Chandalas or outcastes. Hence, Sankya's descendents are, having stood on the right side, designated right-hand caste Holiya's (or Malas); while those who sprang from Yugamuni and his wife Matangi is called as left-hand caste of Madigas".

There is one more version regarding the origin of the Madiga caste, which is also very prevalent. "Jamadhagni Maharishi, known also as Begawan, on account of his godly power and virtues, married Renuka, the daughter of Renu and had five sons by her, the youngest of whom was the famous Parasurama an incarnation of Vishnu. 'Once upon a time' says the Bhagavatapurana, Renuka having gone to the Ganga, saw the king of the *Ghandarvas* wearing garlands of lotus, to play with the *Apsaras*. Having gone to the river to fetch water, she, whose heart was somewhat attracted by Chitaratha (the king of the Gandharvas) who was playing, forgot the time of Yajna (sacrifice). Coming to feel the delay, and afraid of the curse of the *Muni*, she returned to the hermitage, and placed the pitcher before the *Muni*, and remained standing with folded palms. The *Muni* (Jamadhagni), coming to know of the unchasteness of his wife, got enraged, and said 'O my sons! Kill this sinner'. Although thus directed, they did not do so. Parasurama, who was well aware of the power of his father, killed his mother along with his brothers. The son of Satyavati (Jamadhagni) was pleased, and requested Parasurama to pray for any favour. Rama desired the reanimation of those killed, and their forgetfulness of the fact of their having been killed. Immediately they got up as if after a deep sleep¹³.

This version was locally prevalent and some what it is different than the other versions that are "Jamadhagni Begawan's hermitage was near the Kona, and he was worshiping the god Surabeswara, and doing *tapas* (penance) there. One day his wife Renuka Devi went very early in the morning, to the river Gundlacama to bath and fetch water for her husband's sacrificial rites. She was accompanied as usually by a female slave of the chuckler (leather worker) caste, as a sort of bodyguard and attendant. While she was bathing the great warrior Karthavirarjuna with a thousand arms happened to fly across the sky on some business of his own, and Renuka saw his form reflected in the water, and was pleased in her mind. It must be mentioned that she never used to take any vessel with her to fetch water, for her chastity was such that she had power to roll water into a pot-like shape, as if it were wax and thus bring it home. On that day, however, she failed to affect this. She was returned home empty handed. In the meanwhile, the sage, her husband, finding that his wife returned empty handed, learnt through, his 'wisdom sight' what had

¹³ *Ibid*, pp 300-01

happened and ordered his son Parasurama to slay his sinful mother. Parasurama went towards the river accordingly, and seeing his mother returning, aimed an arrow at her, which severed her head from her body and also similarly served with its unspent force, the head of the chuckler woman who was coming immediately behind his mother. Parasurama returned to his father without even noticing this accident and when his father pleased with his prompt obedience offered him any boon. He prayed for the reanimation of his mother. Jamadhagni then gave him some holy water out of his vessel and told him to put together the dismembered parts, and sprinkle some water over them. Parasurama went off in great delight and haste. As it was still dark and early in the morning, he wrongly put his mother's head on the chuckler woman's trunk and sprinkled water on them. Then seeing another head another body lying close by he thought that they belong to the female slave whom he had unwittingly killed and he put them also together and reanimated them. He was extremely vexed when he found out the mistakes he had committed, but as there was no rectifying them without another double murder, he produced the two women before his father, and begged to be forgiven. The sage finally accepted the person with his late consorts head as his wife, and granted to other woman the status of an inferior deity in response to her prayers, and owing to her having his wife body. Thus Matangi was born"¹⁴.

This story says that how the Matangi was born and how Matangi is the mother goddess to the Madigas, and how the Madigas claim that they are the children of Matangi. Here the Matanga means a Chandala, a man of the lowest caste and out caste; a barbarian. Thurston¹⁵ says that the "origin of the supremacy of the Matangi is obscure, and shrouded in legends. According to one of them, the head of Renuka, the wife of the Sage Bhrigu, who was beheaded by her lord's orders, fell in a Madiga house, and grew into a Madiga woman. According to another legend a certain king prayed to be blessed with a daughter, and in answer the gods sent him a golden parrot, which soon after perched on ant-hill, and disappeared into it. The disappointed father got the ant hill excavated, and was rewarded for his pains by finding his daughter rise, a maid of divine beauty, and she came to be worshipped as the Matangi. The interesting to note that Matangas were an ancient line of kings somewhere in the south, and the Madigas call themselves Matangi makkalu or children of Matangi or Durga, who is their goddess".

SIGNIFICANCE OF MATAMMA JATHARA

The Matamma *jathara* in Madiga caste is unique than the other communities. As we discussed in the above since the Matamma is the mother goddess to the Madigas they use to celebrate the *jathara* once in a year or once in every three years which is decided by their caste elders (*Pedda Madiga*). Mathamma *jathara* is a biggest religious performance among Madiga community in

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp-302-03

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp-297-98

Sothern districts of Andhra Pradesh, especially in Nellore and Prakasham which has been performed in every three years since at least last fifty years. Madiga has brought the importance to this *jathara* not only because she is their *Kula Devatha* (the deity of the caste), but also due to the restrictions and the practice of untouchability from the part of the dominant castes in the villages. The process to perform *jathara* starts from one month before. The committee first consults the *purohit* or *pujari* (priest) to fix the days, after that; they start to collect certain amount of money from every family of Madiga community. This task will be fulfilled by elders of community. And, as the fixed date is coming closer to one week, the committee and the senior caste members along with *Pedda Golla* and *pujari* lay down *gevudu rallu*¹⁶ around the boundaries of the area within which the Madiga community people are living. Strictly, *jathara* starts after one week on the same day in which the *gevudu rallu* (marked stones) laid down¹⁷.

THE MADIGA AND GOLLA (SHEPPARD CASTE) CASTE NEXUS:

Once upon a time in the kingdom of Katamaraju, there lived Mala and Velama caste people to look after cattle. A person named Beeru Naidu, who had been brought up by the father of Katamaraju, called Peddiraju, on his return from the forest, gave a child to his queen and suggested her to take care of the child by feeding with her right breast. The child had been named by the king only. After some years, Katamaraju became the king, so he employed Beeru Naidu to look after their cattle along with the Mala and Velama caste people. One day the neighboring kingdom ruler, Nellore Nelasiddi Raju declares war against the Katama Raju. Though, Katamaraju had military, he asked Mala, Velama and Madiga people to support him in war, but, Mala and Velama people refused Katamarajus' request, as they were employed only to look after the cattle, it was only Madiga people who gave assurance to war against Nelasiddi Raju under the leadership of Beeru Naidu.

Katamaraju was happy when he heard assurance from the Beeru Naidu. So, he prepares a special sword called '*Kongala Katthi*' for Beeru Naidu and presented to him. With that special sword Beeru Naidu rages over the enemies and assassinates them in the war. Unfortunately, he dies in the same war, and asks Katamaraju before he dies, to keep the sword that he used in the war as a memorial so that the friendship will last between the Madiga and Golla forever. Katamaraju honors the wishes of the Beeru Naidu and he keeps the sword at his thrown. On that day onwards Golla caste people believed to have been determined to look after Madiga community people¹⁸.

¹⁶ Special stones prepared, with writing mantras on them, for lay down around the caste boundaries

¹⁷ Venkata Ramanaiyah Moddu, is a Madiga person and also Ex *pujari* of the Mathamma temple in the Madiga community, Chamadala Village, Nellore District

¹⁸ Chinna Ramaiah Panditi, is Madiga person in this village, Chamadala Village, Nellore District

Since then, the sword of Beeru Naidu became a sacred object for Madiga community. It is memorized at the time of marriages that take place among Madiga community, when a Madiga boy gets married, and his wife comes home, the sword has been memorized by bringing it from the *Pedda Golla* house to the bridegroom's house in a procession. And again, the sword will be shifted over to the Mathamma temple from the bridegroom's house. And it will be kept in the temple till the marriage ends, after that it will be taken to the *Pedda Golla* house again. Due to this legendary connection the *Pedda Golla* is considered as *Pedda* (elder) to all Madiga community and *Pedda Madiga*. *Pedda Golla* has to in all the important occasions, such as religious aspects, marriage and also during some important/critical disputes¹⁹. So, in absentia of *Pedda Golla* all the auspicious and inauspicious occasions of Madiga will not takes place.

PROCESS OF MATHAMMA JATHARA:

The *Jathara* starts with the decoration of Mathamma Temple, the task of decorating Mathamma temple is assigned to the people of Madiga community and *Pedda Golla*. As the decoration work finishes, *Bineeduvaru*²⁰, and *Kommuvaru*²¹ come from neighboring villages to perform the *puja* to Mathamma. The first day ends with the story telling by *Bineeduvaru*, the stories usually related to Mathamma and the origin of Madiga community or about Mathangi etc.

On the second day, all the Madiga caste people along with *Golla* (sheperd community), *Chakali* (washer men), *Bineedi*, *Kommu* and *Vetti*²² people go to *Putta* (termait mount) that is at the village boundary. There, they clean the *Putta* and perform *Puja* and then they employ the *Vetti* people to take care of the *Putta* and remaining people come back to home. By the time the people come back from the *Putta*, the *Pedda Golla* prepare *Ganga Petti* (sacred box), *Bolliavu* (image of the sacred cow), *Veerathallu* (sacred threads) and *Kongala Katti*²³ to take them to *Putta* as again the people go to there, and it is obligatory to bring the *Puttabangaram* to Mathamma temple. So, after reaching the *Putta* Madiga caste people decorate *Putta*. And the *Bineeduvaru* starts to tell the story as it ends the *Kommuvaru* sacrifice of *Badde Gorre*,²⁴ then the *Puttabangaram* (termite mount soil) is lifted onto the head of *Pedda Madiga*, *Golla* lifts the *Bolliavu* (sacred cow) and *Ganga Petti* and starts the procession towards and through *Madigawada*²⁵ and *Chakali* holds the lights and the rest of the people perform *Veerathallu*. If anybody is possessed with the spirits, then that person should be served with lemon or cock to

¹⁹ Venkaiah, Manda is a Madiga person, Chamadala Village, Nellore Disrict

²⁰ Sub- caste of the Madiga community, who are professionals in story telling

²¹ Sub- caste of the Madiga community, who are professionals in sacrificing the buffalo

²² The person from the Madiga community to do religious works as well as community works is called as announcer

²³ Which is a special showered hereditarily comes from the ancestor (Beeru Naidu) of the Madiga community

²⁴ The goat which is already decorated by *Kommuvaru* with the help of Madiga men for the sacrifice to Mathamma

²⁵ The colony of the Madiga is called Madigawada.

bite. Along with the procession a Matangi²⁶ will dance. At the entrance of the *Gevudu Rallu*, they perform *Eduru Veta* (sacrifice of a Goat) then the procession enters through the *Gevudu Rallu* into Madigawada. The procession should pass through every street and every corner of the Madigawada before it reaches the Mathamma Temple. And the second day of the *jathara* ends with the Mathamma *Puja* followed by the story telling.

On the third and final day, the Madiga women clean the surroundings of the Temple and put *muggu* (kolam or floral drawings) before the temple followed by again story telling by Bineedivaaru, which lasts till afternoon. Then, *Pongali*²⁷ is served, starting with *Pujari* followed by Pedda Madiga family and all the community members. Meanwhile people go to *Pedda Madiga's* house where a buffalo is prepared to be taken to the Temple in a procession to offer as a sacrifice. Then, they sacrifice the buffalo after pouring the *Pongali* into *kumbam* in front of Temple. After that individuals fulfill their promises by giving sacrifices different animals or birds. Then, the *Kommuvaru* has to rub off the *muggu*, in this occasion Madiga people have to pay the remuneration in the form of cocks, cloths and money. After this, a leg will be separated from the sacrificed buffalo and will be placed it in its mouth, and this arrangement will be decorated as facing the Temple. Soon after, everybody has to vacate the place as it strictly prohibited from roaming or even from seeing the place, because it is believed that the spirits come to eat the sacrificed Buffalo during that night. The next morning, the buffalo will be separated into different parts and distributed to all the families, the head and the leg, which are decorated as facing the temple, are given to Pedda Madiga. The *jathara* ends with paying all the remunerations to the Bineeduvaru, *Kommuvaru*, *Chakalivaaru* and *Vettivaaru*.²⁸

CONCLUSION

This paper summarizes that symbols are representing culture of a community. Malas and Madigas are two dominant caste groups in scheduled caste category. Madigas are basically, leather workers, village menials, drumbeaters and agricultural laborers and they are considered as untouchables during pre-independence times, and their place at caste ladder is the lowest. The Madigas also call themselves as Jambavas and claim to have descended from Jambu or Adijambuvadu, who perhaps the Jambavanthudu of Ramayana, the name Madiga has been interpreted in a number of ways.

According to community based researchers, Madigas are sons of Jambavantha and Mathamma. But later the Mathamma become their mother goddess. There were stories about Mathamma how

²⁶ Matangi is a woman who sacrificed or dedicated to the goddess from the Madiga community. She should not marry. Her life is sacrificed to the Mother goddess only.

²⁷ Sacred food which is prepared by all members of the Madiga community at Mathamma temple

²⁸ Venkaiah, Moddu is member of the Madiga Chamadala Village, Nellore District

she becomes their mother goddess. She is an unmarried woman from the Madiga community. There are legends about the origin of Matangi and how her sons become Madigas. Another interesting point is that Matangas were an ancient line of kings somewhere in the south, and the Madigas call themselves Matangi makkalu or children of Matangi or Durga, who is their goddess. Mathamma *jathara* is a biggest religious performance among Madiga community in Southern districts of Andhra Pradesh, especially in Nellore and Prakasham which has been performed in every three years since at least last fifty years. Madiga has brought the importance to this *jathara* not only because she is their *Kula Devatha* (the deity of the caste).

Generally Mathamma Jathara celebrates in 3 days, in these three days organizers follow certain processions; firstly, they will give the historical accounts of origin of Mathamma, secondly, all the Madiga caste people bring the Puttabangaram to Mathamma temple along with different bard groups with different sacred things/ symbols. Thirdly, the Madiga women clean the surroundings of the Temple and put *muggu* (kolam or floral drawings) before the temple followed by again story telling by Bineedivaaru, which lasts till afternoon. Meanwhile a buffalo is prepared by Pedda Madiga to offer as a sacrifice. Then, they will have a community dining.