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## Vaddera Community: Historical Context and Socioeconomic Conditions in Telangana

Vemula Kameswara Rao, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Government Degree college, Bhadrachalam, Telangana, India

### Abstract:

Vaddera (also written Vadde, Vadderaju, or Waddera) is a caste prevalent in the Indian states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and a few others. According to the Joshua Project, India has 33,000 Vaddera while Sri Lanka has 1,52,000. They are one of the poorest and most populous backward castes in Telangana. Circular migration, as well as their status as unnotified tribes, aggravate poverty, vulnerability, and isolation. Vadders are one of Telangana's lowest and most populous backward castes. Vaddera villages are often situated on the edges of villages and cities/towns. Land ownership among them is exceedingly low, with only 27 percent of households having land holdings. Occupational diversification remains abysmally low, with more than 75% of households still reliant on traditional vocations such as stone labour and soil work. Occupational diversification remains abysmally low, with more than 75 percent of households still reliant on traditional vocations such as stonework, earthwork, and construction-related industries. Modern technology, in the shape of earth-moving machinery, has destroyed their livelihoods.

Key Words: Vaddera, Bhovi, Earth Workers, Stone Workers, Telangana

### Introduction:

Vaddera is a historically displaced pan-India peripatetic community that may be found throughout India. Apart from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra, the community is said to exist in other Indian states, as well as in neighbouring Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Those who see the similarities between Telugu and their own ancestral tongue might trace their roots back to Andhra Pradesh. According to the Joshua Project, there are 33,000 Vaddera in India and 1,52,000 in Sri Lanka<sup>1</sup>. Vaddera people, also known as Wadders in Maharashtra, Vadde, Vaddila, and Vaddu Raju in Andhra Pradesh, and Bhovi in Karnataka, are an ethnic community native to Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Western Orissa, and other Indian states. Vaddera (also spelled Vadde, Vadderaju, or Waddera) is a caste found in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and a few other Indian states. Their forefathers were stonecutters and well diggers. The Bhovis are divided into three groups: stone cutters (Kallu Bhovi), earthworkers (Mannu Bhovi), and lowly labourers (Uppar Bhovi) in the municipality. They are fluent in Telugu and Kannada.

The name 'Bhovi' derives from the word bhovi, which means the leader or headman of a group. The vaddars speak a language derived from Rayalaseema, which means "country of rocks<sup>2</sup>." The vaddars, also known as vodde, vaddila, odda, odde, bhovi, odeyar, and wadeyar, are nomadic tribes who travel from place to place in search of occupations such as land levelling for farmer communities, digging of earth and canals, road construction, and cutting of rocks and stones for the purpose of building water tanks, houses, and roads. In the Karnataka region of Banavasi, they are known as Uru oddars or Uru bhovis, and they are known for surveying of lands to settlement of villages. Because Uru means village, those who make land levelling for location of villages and cultivation are known as uru bhovis<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, earth diggers and land suppliers of sands to make roads and other construction are known as matti voddars or mannu vaddar, Katte vadders and rahuth vadders are those who haul sand from river beds on the backs of donkeys and horses. Bande vadders, bandi vadders, and Gaali vadders are individuals who cut enormous boulders and wheel them out on huge carts. Girini vaddars are those who mill stone and break it to make jelly stone, whereas Kallu vadders work on stones, slabs, quarries, and mining.

### **Legends about Vaddera Community:**

According to Mahabharata legends, the Odras share land with Utkala, Mekala, Kalinga, and Andhra. Manu, on the other hand, groups the Odras with the Pallavas, Kiratas, Chinas, and Khasas, among others. These remarks, however, do not describe the country's location or size. Pliny's Natural History mentions Oretes as a race that lived in the territory where Mount Meleus is located. Odras is the Sanskrit translation of the Greek word Oretes. Malayagiri near Pallahada, currently in the district of Angul, has been identified as Mount Meleus<sup>4</sup>.

They claim to be the lineage of Bhagirath Ganga, who during a hundred-year drought in northern India dug a canal from the Ganges in the Himalayas. This Bhagirath was urged by the then Kshathriyas to find a solution, and he was successful in excavating large canals from the Himalayas to Prayag, diverting the Ganges to the whole northern section of India. As a result, Bhagirath is honoured as the saviour of northern India, and they refer to him as the Ganges' son. As the oldest group in India, these wadders claim to be India's builders<sup>5</sup>.

### **Historical Reference of Vaddera Community:**

During the time of Asoka the Great, the wadders were the first to script on rocks. King Kharavela refers to him as the great Odda, and his hathigumpa Inscription refers to him as Sri Odde, which means the blessings of Odda, the forefather of modern Orissa<sup>6</sup>. The oldest epigraphic reference to Odras is seen in Somadatta's Soro Copper Plate grant, which shows that Uttara Tosali, with its Visaya 'Sarepahara' linked with Soro of Balasore District, was part of Odra Visaya. The inscription dates from the 7th century A.D., when Uttara Tosali, which included portions of the contemporary Medinapur and Balasore districts, was a part of Odra Visaya. This citation clearly shows that Odra was a small but powerful territorial organisation.

The Vadderas who carted stones for the construction of the temples at Alampur<sup>7</sup> (also known as Dakshina Kasi in Mahaboobnagar District) used the site on which the city now stands as a halting place before crossing the Tungabhadra and greased their cart-wheels with oil supplied locally by some of the oil mongers and named the place Kandenametta during the time of the Western Chalukyas of Badami in the 11 Century A.D This scenario resulted in the establishment of a tiny village on the site, which became known as Kandenapalli, Kandenolu, and Kandenavolu, the city of Kandena or grease. It is also worth noting that the spot where the Vadderas halted in those days is still called as Bandla Metta (Bandla means carts; Metta means headquarters or halting point), a street in the Old Kurnool city.

During the mediaeval period, the state approximately approximating to today's Orissa was known as Utkala, Kalinga, and Odra (Udra) Desa. These place names are linked to persons. Tribes described in literature include the Okkala or Utkala, the Kalinga, and the Odra or Oddaka. Between the 11th and 16th centuries, the term Odra Desa was twisted; the name Odra Desa was progressively turned into Uddisa, Udisa, or Odisa, which became Orissa in English. Odisa's language became known as Oriya. Around the 12th century, the Ode tribe went to Gujarat to build temples, for which they are particularly skilled. People who contributed stone and lime for temple building.

In Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, people from this region were known as Oddars, Vadderas, and Waddars. 'Jasma devi' is a prominent Deity in Odes<sup>8</sup>. Vaddars and Kaikadis keep pigs for consumption. Some Vanis and Kumbhars, as well as Vaddars, keep donkeys as pack animals. The Vaddars are regarded as a low caste. Child labour is widespread among them. The stone-cutting Vaddars are the main criminals, and by travelling around pretending to fix grindstones (a task for Takankars), they gather a lot of important information about residences to pillage or groups of travellers to assault.

**The following Vadderas are under denotified list:**

1. Kal Oddars ( Kancheepuram, Tiruvallur, Ramanathapuram, Sivaganga, Virudhunagar, Madurai, Theni, Dindigul, Pudukottai, Thanjavur, Nagapattinam, Tiruvarur, Tiruchirapalli, Karur, Perambalur, Tirunelveli, Toothukudi, Salem and Namakkal Districts)
2. Nellorepet Oddars ( Vellore and Tiruvannamalai Districts ) and
3. Oddars ( Thanjavur, Nagapattinam, Tiruvarur, Tiruchirapalli, Karur, Perambalur, Pudukottai, Madurai, Theni and Dindigul Districts )<sup>9</sup>

Due to the loss of Indian imperial strength and the invasion of Muslims and British control, many fugitives fled and the captives were forced to perform laborious tasks such as stone cutting and soil digging, and thus the warrior class reduced greatly. During British administration, the Vaddar population shrank dramatically. These unfortunates have turned out to be permanent stone cutters and earthworkers who are continually on the move in quest of job. They are primarily from Orisha, which means "land of rocks and hills" in Southern India.

## Socioeconomic Factors Affecting Vaddera Community in Telangana:

The Vadderas are one of Telangana's poorest and most numerous backward castes. Circular migration and their position as unnotified tribes exacerbate poverty, vulnerability, and isolation. For a long time, the community has been subjected to relative hardship and marginalisation. Their traditional activity (stone work and earth labour) is changing due to a number of circumstances. However, there are no studies that represent the current state of the community from a policy standpoint. As a result, the study is an attempt to fill this need.

Pucca dwellings are only found in one-quarter of the Vaddera households. The Vadderas' residential segregation may be found in both rural and urban locations.

Vaddera settlements are usually found on the outskirts of villages and cities/towns. Land ownership is extremely low among them, with only 27 percent of households owning land holdings. Occupational diversity remains abysmally low, with over 75% of households still relying on conventional occupations like stone labour, earth work, and construction-related activities<sup>10</sup>. Approximately 90% of the working-age population participates in traditional pursuits. Traditional activities contribute for more than 70 percent of the community's family income. The Vadderas' literacy rate of 65 percent is lower than the State's Scheduled Tribes' literacy rate of 70 percent, and their school drop-out percentage is significantly greater than the State average<sup>11</sup>. The Vadderas' livelihoods have been harmed by modern technology in the form of earth-moving machinery. Because of their social, economic, and educational backwardness, the community is unable to reap the benefits of reserves. They do not have easy access to institutional money. The Vaddera co-operatives or groups, as well as the Vaddera Federation, require institutional and financial support.

### Conclusion:

During the middle Ages, the state roughly corresponding to today's Orissa was known as Utkala, Kalinga, and Odra (Udra) Desa. Between the 11th and 16th centuries, Odra Desa was gradually shortened to Uddisa, Udisa, or Odra. The Vadderas are one of the poorest and most populous backward castes in Telangana. Vaddera villages are often situated on the edges of villages and cities/towns. Land ownership among them is exceedingly low, with only 27 percent of households having land holdings. The livelihoods of the Vadderas have been impacted by contemporary technology in the form of earth-moving machines. The community is unable to realise the benefits of reserves due to their backwardness. Vaddera co-operatives and organisations, as well as the Vaddera Federation, require institutional and financial assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> (Project Joshua Project 2005)

<sup>2</sup> Ghodke, Digambar. "Revisiting the mother tongues of the de-notified tribes in India." (2016): 36-44.

<sup>3</sup> Brihaspativaradavaru, Hale, Halu Kuruba, Jadi Hosa, Kunchi Kambli Kuruba, and Sada Mullu. "s: Gauda, Gaudati, Heggadati, Heggade [Tamil Nadu] Gauda, Gaudikiyavaru, Gorava Vandlu, Heggade, Nayakkan (adopted title)(E. Thurston] Gauda, Heggade [Nanjundayya and Iyer] Surnames: Ajjannavar, Dasagonnavar [Karnataka]." *Encyclopaedia of Primitive Tribes in India 2* (2004): 414.

<sup>4</sup> Ghodke, Digambar M. "Language and Culture of the Waddar Community in."

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp69.

<sup>6</sup> Kant, Shashi. *The Hathigumpha Inscription of Kharavela and the Bhabru Edict of Asoka: A Critical Study*. DK Printworld, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Rao, PR Ramachandra. *Alampur: a study in early Chalukyan art*. Akshara, 1977.

<sup>8</sup> Ghodke, Digambar M. "Language and Culture of the Waddar Community in."

<sup>9</sup> Ghodke, Digambar. "Revisiting the mother tongues of the de-notified tribes in India." (2016): 36-44.

<sup>10</sup> (*Status Report on the Vaddera Community of Telangana n.d.*)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp 35.

