

## **A STUDY OF BUNT COMMUNITY HISTORY, BELIEFS AND TRADITIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Bunt community of south Kanara has different History, Beliefs and Traditions; they have the immense feeling of belonging towards the community since they have unique history of their own about their origin and development. The present looks into the origin and their unique cultural history, beliefs and Traditions through ethnographic and as an insider participant observation.

**KEYWORDS:** Bunt Community, History, Beliefs & Traditions

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The coastal region of Karnataka is the homeland of Bunts and it is popularly known as South Kanara or Dakshina Kannada. The Coastal Karnataka is the creation of lord Parasurama as per the legendary stories. The earliest record says, coastal Karnataka known as Mangalapura and it was ruled by Alupa kings. Coastal Karnataka is bound by Arabian Sea, as the Bunts local community presently spread to Udupi, Kasaragod and other locations of the world in search of occupation and livelihood. They speak Tulu and partially Kannada as their language for interaction and they were regarded as the aboriginals of the coastal Karnataka. Bunt community is unique in many ways and having distinct cultural history, heritage, beliefs and practices. Since this is a local community of South Kanara which drawn attention of many scholars, Bunts are very special unique attitudes and courage across the globe.

This study specially carried through participant observation, secondary data and majorly with the collection opinions of elderly people in the Bunt community.

#### **Bunt Community History**

Bunt previously represents for the Bravery, strong and powerful community in the locality. 'Bunt' word comes from Sanskrit word Bhata which denotes the powerful warrior or soldier. This physical character of the Bunts noted them to be the dominant community of the region and constitutes more than 15 lakhs people in this region they have unique nature of natural bold character. Inscriptions of Venoor, Savanoor and Kafiyat referred about the Bunts and these Bunts are also called as Nadavaru, which means the people of the Naadu or belongs to local region. They speak Tulu, a Dravidian language it has no independent script and its literature was mostly oral in character and they use Kannada as their official language and they belongs to Tulu speaking Minority group of Coastal Karnataka.

Bunts are Hindus by religion, but during the political supremacy of the Jains, some Bunts were influenced by the Jainism. The people of Tulunad or South Kanara believe almost all the deities. Each family is so special with regard to the religious performances and traditions. They have given due importance to the festivals and rituals even in their busy schedule life. Bunts are generally attendants on Shiva and that is found in almost all temples in Tuluva as reference given by Saleore. Tulunad is popularly known as Nagarakanda where they worship serpents or the King cobra. Nagara or Worship of King cobra is also known as Nagaradhane. Nagaradhane is associated with lots of rites and rituals in the local

region which is celebrated with utmost sincerity and devotion. There are offered with prayers to fulfill their aspirations and ambitions which can be fulfilled through the worship of Nagaradhane. Along with this they also worship various Daiva and devathe (God and Goddess). Every year Bunts perform various kinds of rites and rituals in order to please the god and goddess of the region and there are multiple religious rituals to engage and that shows their cultural heritage. They have unique surnames, more than 40 surnames among Bunts, they are representing their family names

There are different categories as like Buntaru Nadavaru, Jain Bunts, Masadika Bunts and Parivara Bunts. There are four segments among the Bunts:

- Masadika Bunts: Found in south Kanara, they speak Tulu language.
- Nadavaru or Nad Bunts: Found in some parts of south Kanara.
- Parivara`Bunts: Found in north south Kanara and follow Aliyasantanakattu.
- Jain Bunts: These Bunts are influenced by the rituals and customs of Jains. A large number of Bunts were converted to Jains. They have well and strong well developed physique. The other Jains were mainly of the same class as the Tulu Bunt Landholders and cultivators. Jain Bunts were vegetarians, wear sacred thread strictly follow the customs and practices of Jainism. Their names and title are in almost all case the same as those in use amongst the Bunts. (Sturrock 1973:190-191).

## 2. BUNTS BELIEFS AND TRADITIONS

The life of the Bunts were coloured by various beliefs and practices as per the elderly people of the community, they have been explained the following well known practices were performed in this community. Newborn baby is welcomed in the family by an occasion of ceremony. Whenever a child is born in a Bunt's family the woman is kept in a secluded apartment of the residential house beside their house keep away from the house previously but today this has been followed by the changes. A local untrained but much experienced woman attends the delivery cases. She comes at least for a week and taken care of the both mother and child. She even stays with them at the night. Until the purificatory ceremony called 'Ame' is held the whole family is put in Sutika (impurity) for a period of seven days. The Ame is usually held on the seventh day of birth of the child, but if the child is under the influence of any bad star, it is observed after twenty seven days previously and still followed the culture of the family and delivery has been shifted to health care services.

### Traditions/Samskaras

Samskaras are the greatest occasions for the Bunts to be followed to keep their traditions alive. These beliefs and practices have upheld the social institutions and provided guidelines for good conduct and better understanding of the members of the community. These rites and rituals are the ceremonial actions which transmit from one generation to another without any hurdles as a mark of cultural practices of the community. From the birth to the death each and every moment is of great significance to the community members. These samskaras begin when the child is in the womb. All the rituals are great because it related to their progress in the life. Some of the important rites or samskaras are listed below.

- Namakarana (Naming ceremony): The name is selected well in advance according to the horoscope. The priest chooses the name which suits the child star symbol. The child's relatives and neighbors are also invited for the same. As the child's birth is welcomed with joy and happiness, a feast is arranged at which relatives and friends

are entertained with non vegetarian food and various offerings. The child is then shown to the invitees for their blessings. They present the child money, gifts, and valuables jewelry to the child as to share their happiness and blessings. This ceremony is also called as Bale thotilu or cradling the child.

- KeshaMundana (Hair removing): Keshamundana means hair removing or cutting the hair at the end of one year. Formerly the traditional caste barbers used to cut the hair. But now days the child taken to the temple and offer the hair for the wellbeing of the child.
- Karapathavani (Puberty rite): when the girl attains the puberty this ceremony is performed. She is becoming the bride or 'Madimal'. Puberty is sign of maturity and this is observed by a function. She will take exhaustive oil bath with soap nuts. This is specifically for the girl child not for males.
- Ritual of marriage: Basically the Bunts perform the functions of their own. It is called as "Lesu". They put a large pendal in front of the house. Madme (marriage) and simanta (pregnancy ceremony) were the biggest functions they perform. Marriage is the biggest deal among Bunts. (Thurston E L: The Caste and Tribes of Southern India.) Dhare is auspicious time in the marriage. The couple seeks the blessing the elders, they sprinkle the rice to the couple. They perform different rites and rituals to the general prosperity of the couple.

Marriage is an occasion associated with high rituals. They feel that destiny brought them together. Today marriage interprets the modern culture along with the tradition. They expense a lot of money just to get marry and that is the status symbol. They marry in great occasions and give dowry and put jewels according their capacities of economic conditions. Marriage is an occasion which is very great in life. Marriage is a social significant function among the Bunts. They tie the manglya around the neck. This Manglya should be compulsory in the Bunt wedding. A number of guests were invited and offered good food. The sari which wears for the marriage is very expensive, and all the relatives will be given cloth and invited with formally. The bride and bride groom were the most centre part of attraction.

- Simanta: Another exciting function of Bunts was the Simanta; this is to fulfill the demands of the pregnant women. She will be given with green silk sari that is symbol of progress. Giving jewels is a common affair among the Bunts. It is related to their economic conditions. All the family members indulge in these functions. Both these functions happen to be the greatest occasions in the life of a woman. They enjoy these occasions. All the participants will be offered good food according their capabilities.
- Bojja (Death rite): The corps among Bunts is kept until the arrival of the nearest relatives of the deceased. The dead body applied with "Arasina" (Turmeric) and given a bath, the relatives, then show their respect by touching his feet and wishing him moksha or salvation. The corps is dressed with cloth and decorated with the flowers and garlands given by the relatives. The dead body is put on the funeral pyre and rites connected with it are performed. The eldest son of the deceased or in the absence of the children the nearest relatives ceremonially sets fire to funeral pyre by touching the mouth of the corps with a burning piece of wood. None except the family members of the deceased have the right to perform rites connected with it. When the cremation is over, the people attending the final rites, bathe, take rice 'gangi' which is called Dukkada the Ganji or mourning meal and return back to their home. Saturday and Tuesday were believed to be inauspicious by the people of South Kanara. Until 16 days mourning will be observed. Last rites are performed with most sadly and departed soul respected with utmost traditional way.

### **Architecture or the Housing Arrangements**

The traditional house of the Bunt families was known as Guttu houses. They were also known as village panchayat representing the power of the villages. The power of the villages also interrelated with power of Bhuta or the local deity. Dharmadachavadi or the righteous court was found at the guttu house which has power to punish to those who violate the rules. The local litigation would be solved by the head of the Guttu. But today Bunts life has been influenced by the modernization. Rural Guttu (head) houses of the Bunts somehow shifted to the cities or the modern courts. Guttu houses having many branches few of the families have been shifted to the towns for the sake of the job opportunities. But still some of them live in the villages, carrying out their traditions. Especially they have to light the lamp for their family deity every day. In the houses they have a separate room for the agricultural products for the storage reasons. This room was popularly known as “Banda sale. The architecture of House tailed roof it is keeps the harsh sunlight and protected by the rain, it has well and courtyard and very traditional and sitting area to discuss the family matters in this area. Hall, bedroom, kitchen and open courtyard is covered in the houses. Houses are creative and many stone statues and flooring of the house usually red oxide and it is a wonderful place for the family members. Bathing area of the house is unique and placed with copper container to boil hot water to bath. Another element in every household is Tulasi plant and it is compulsory in every household.

Kitchen called ‘Adpil’ or ‘Ateel da Kone’ was located in the south east. The kitchen worked around the clock and not just with daily meals for the family and helpers. Here traditional Bunt Cuisine was cooked. Grinding was done in ‘KadepiKall’ or manual grinders to grind the batter for traditional breakfast dishes. A tough life indeed! Peradane, (coconut grater stool) mutati, (Sickle with stool) semai da mane, (rice noodle press) and other kitchen tools are also kept in a small store room adjacent to the kitchen known as ‘ugrana’. Seasonal fruits available in their backyards like mangoes and jackfruits were used to make uppad (pickles), neeruppupacheer, shendige, happalas, (papads); the list could go on forever. The dining hall was called ‘unpunakone’.

### **3. BUNTS RELIGIOUS PRACTICES**

Religion is the path that takes human being to their ultimate destinations Bunts share this practice with a few other communities of Dakhina Kannada region. Bunts are also connected with the management of Brahmic temples of Tulunadu from ancient times at least from the tenth century onwards. They managed temples of both the streams of Hindu religion, the Shaiva and the Vaishnava. Strictly speaking, they were neither Shaivas nor Vaishnavas. Their idols of worship were those of the folk deities. The rituals they conducted in their households and villages were concerned with propitiating their respective folk deities. They carry on with this practice even today. At the same time, they are traditional trustees of a large number of Brahminic Shaiva and Vaishnava temples in the region. This speaks of their leadership role in society. They were donors of lands and to the Brahminic temples. This may perhaps explain their Shaiva connection and the Vaishnava Linkage.

### **4. WORSHIP**

In South Kanara people worship the Bhutas or the spirits. It is the way to fulfill their needs by pleasing the god or goddess. Not only the Bunts other castes in South Kanara worshiped the spirits. As a result they even participated in this spirit worship or Bhutaradhana. Almost every villager is having a separate room for this worship or Bhutas. It is also known as Bhootasthanas. There were various names given to these spirits i.e, Guliga, Kalluti, and Panjurli. They worship innumerable Bhutas. Every Bhuta has got history, which is deposited in the folklore that is called as ‘Padano’. During the yearly celebration of the Bhuta worship they have a different story to narrate. Once in a year, a festival has to be conducted

for these Bhutas, which is known as Nema, Bhandi, Ayano (utstava) and Kola. These stories of the Bhutas help us to understand the Tuluva society very easily. A number of metallic weapons are kept in the Bhootasthanas. Sword and shield are commonly found on the devil shrines. The ornaments kept in the room were called as 'Bhandaro.

## **5. NAGARADHANE (SERPENT WORSHIP)**

Worship of Naga is also yet another common form of worship among the Bunts. It takes the form of adoration of effigies of snakes (nagakallu), placed at the foot of pipul tree (Nagabhana), especially on Nagara Panchami day, with milk, practically by all the people. These effigies are to be found all over the district. Serpent worship (Nagapooja) has become the practice since from the ancient times. The form of snake is believed to be a symbol of divine power or of divine power of God Subramanya. This cult which takes the form of adoration of effigies of snakes (Naga Kallu) or snake stones placed on platforms under the Ashwatta (Baniyan) trees or in shrines and temples seems to be more prevalent in this region than in other parts of the state. These effigies are to be found all over the district.

### **Beliefs**

Faith and belief is the path that takes human being to their ultimate destinations. Bunts is religious people with lots of religious practices. Unique practices with specific significances. Bunts share this practice with a few other communities of Dakkhina Kannada region. Bunts are also connected with the management of Brahmic temples of Tulunadu from ancient time's atleast from the tenth century onwards. They managed temples of both the streams of Hindu religion, the Shaiva and the Vaishnava. Strictly speaking, they were neither Shaivas nor Vaishnavas. Their idols of worship were those of the folk deities. The rituals they conducted in their households and villages were concerned with propitiating their respective folk deities. They carry on with this practice even today. At the same time, they are traditional trustees of a large number of Brahminic Shaiva and Vaishnava temples in the region. This speaks of their leadership role in society. They were donors of lands and to the Brahminic temples. This may perhaps explain their Shaiva connection and the Vaishnava Linkage.

## **6. TAMBILA (A PATTERN OF ANNUAL WORSHIP)**

Every year Bhutas and Daivas offered with Tambila. It is a custom of offering prayers with celebrations. That will repeat every year without any obstacle. Homa will be offered (sacred fire) every year as part of this festival. This follows Agel as a form of religious performance. For this occasion the whole family will be united and performs these occasions. This will be followed with Bojana (common lunch).

## **7. BALI SYSTEM**

Bunt believes in the practice of Bali system. It is said to be equalent to the Gotra system of Brahmins. It followed by Bunts to avoid the endogamous marriage. They follow purely exogamous rule of marriage, clan was traced through the female line. Same Bali ancestors will be relatives and that is not permitted during the marriage practices. There are few names of the Bali system i.e., Tholarabali, Chachibali, Hungarabali, Holebali, Ajjanabali, etc., these Bali were strictly followed during the time of marriage.

## **8. POLITICAL LIFE**

Most of the traditions of the villages were controlled by the 'Yejaman' or the head of the villages. He will be the authoritative person to handle the sensitive matters in the villages. Marriage, samskaras, rite rituals were controlled by the Yejaman. During

the village Utsava or the festivals it was the duty of Yejaman to take maximum responsibility. Daiva, Bhoota Kola, Nema were celebrated every year without fail. The faith in this ritual shows the progress of the village. The Yejaman and other members of the villages totally committed to these responsibilities. Both male and females take part in these kinds of festivities. But supervision will be always by head of the villages. "It may be proper to turn our attention to another sub-division, which though in the strictest sense, could better be regarded an economic unit has something significant to do with political administration. It is called the guttu. The epigraphically reference to guttus comes rather late.

Today the Bunts glory spread all over the world, they contribute highly to the economic growth through agriculture, entrepreneurship, business, Bunt are such a community very dominant and popular community in all fields of development. Certainly this community plays landmark in the history of Karnataka and coastal Karnataka in specific.

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