

Prehistoric Background to Pastoralism in the Southern Deccan in the Light of Oral Traditions and Cults of Some Pastoral Communities *

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Contents

1. Introduction
2. The Geographical Background
3. Archaeological and Ethnohistoric Basis
4. The Legend of *Birappa*
5. The Festival of *Birappa*
6. Analysis of the Legend and the Cult of *Birappa*
7. References from Karnataka and Maharashtra
8. Conclusions

1. Introduction

The Kuruvas (or Kurubas) are a shepherd community inhabiting the semi-arid regions of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in Southern India. Like some groups of Kurubas (as they are called in Karnataka) and some groups of Dhangars in Maharashtra (SONTHEIMER 1975: 139-170), living in a similar semi-arid environment, they are either nomadic or practise transhumance moving with large flocks of sheep from one pasture to the other. They now lead a symbiotic life with the settled farmers and maintain themselves by the

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sale of sheep and goats and through folding of their herds in the fields to provide dung which is used as manure. As a result of gradual disappearance of pastures and of extension of regular cultivation, they are also adopting agriculture and are settling down in villages. Each pastoral group represents a single little community, and more often than not, forms an isolated whole being a homogenous, more-or-less self subsistent unit, retaining some of the distinctive qualities. Nonetheless, as a result of constant interaction with the predominantly Hinduized societies, their religion had been subjected to continuous Sanskritization probably over the last three thousand years. Owing to the spread of Sanskritic rites and the increasing Sanskritization of non-Sanskritic rites, one finds, as has been observed by MCKIM MARRIOTT (1955: 171-222) in an Indian village, a transmutation and transformation of great and little traditions resulting from upward universalization (carrying forward of religious contents which are already present in the little traditions to the levels of literate Sanskritic great traditions of Hinduism under the influence of the latter) and parochialization (downward devolution of great traditional elements and their integration with the little traditional elements), although it is difficult to know whether the present religious traditions of these communities are the result of one, and not also the result of the other, of these two processes.

All these pastoral communities are Śaivites. The Kuruvas in southwestern Andhra Pradesh worship *Mallikārjuna*; the Kurubas in northwestern Karnataka and northwestern Andhra Pradesh are devotees of *Mailār*; the Gollas in Andhra Pradesh, another pastoral community, of *Mallaṅṅa*; and the Dhangars of *Khaṇḍobā* - all said to be incarnations of *Śiva*. These four important gods, though are not completely identical, share many common features. Historically, they may be traced back to a prototype god who made his appearance in the early Tamil (Caṅkam) literature of the second to fourth centuries A. D. in which he is called *Murukaṅ*. *Murukaṅ*, who is later identified with *Kārttikeya* or *Skanda*, has especially one feature in common with other gods, namely that they all have two wives. One of these wives comes from the settled advanced communities who were either agricultural, but with a propensity towards cattle keeping, or the once influential merchant groups. Under the latter can also be included the itinerant Banjaras (also called as Lambadas and Sugalis) with pack bullocks, who played a very important role in the trade of cattle, food grains, salt, etc. even until the end of 18th century A. D. Thus *Khaṇḍobā*'s first wife, otherwise identified with *Pārvatī*, is also considered to be the daughter of a Liṅḡayat Vāṇī (merchant); the Liṅḡayats in general being a predominant agricultural community of Karnataka. *Mallaṅṅa*'s first wife at Odela near Sultanabad in the Karimnagar district of Andhra Pradesh is *Madala Devī* and belongs to Balijas or Baṇajigas, another agricultural Liṅḡayat caste, also traditionally associated with trade. The second wife of the god, often regarded as a concubine by the settled, advanced and Sanskritized castes, comes either from the pastoral communities or from the forest tribes which must have had much in common or lived in symbiosis with the village based societies as the archaeological evidence discussed below would suggest, and which is also evident from the early Caṅkam literature (SONTHEIMER 1976: 18f.). Accord-

ingly *Khaṇḍobā*'s second wife comes from the Dhangars; *Mallikārjuna*'s favourite wife is a Cencū tribal; *Murukan*'s beloved is the famous *Valli* of the Kuruvar hill tribe (see for details VAIYAPURIPPILAI [edit.] 1967: 101f.); *Mallanna*'s second wife at Odela is *Ketamma* of the pastoral Golla tribe; and *Mailār*'s second wife at Devarguḍḍa in Karnataka is *Kurubattyavva* of the Kuruba tribe.

This instance in the religious history of these pastoral groups – the god having two wives, one from an advanced community and the other from a hill tribe or a pastoral tribe – presupposes acculturation of communities of different subsistence systems, who were drawn into the fold of each other in an ecosystem, which as archaeological reasoning points out, induced the development of an economic system that tended to be dyadic. This is reflected in a corresponding dichotomy of traditions which are not only orally transmitted but also found their way into the Purāṇas or local Māhātmyas.

Though *Mallikārjuna* in the legend narrated below apparently does not have two wives, he maintains his relationship with the pastoral Kuruvas through his special devotee *Birappa*, who is the exclusive god of the pastoral communities of the Deccan. In fact, one may detect in this legend instances pointing out that a lower culture was in continuous interaction with the higher culture. The legend of *Birappa* records an interesting situation with which communities like the Kuruvas must have been confronted time and again. Further, the evidence from northern Karnataka and Maharashtra corroborates such a persistence of homogeneity between oral traditions, incidents of cults, and archaeological findings in areas which, for ecological and culture-historic reasons, predetermined the economic systems and to a greater extent the religion of the pastoral and peasant populations inhabiting these areas. In Karnataka and Maharashtra also, the oral traditions involve communities which, on the one hand, were, at least in the past, either settled farmers with a bias for cattle economy, or respectable merchant castes like the Baṇajigas (Liṅgāyats), and on the other, pastoral nomadic groups based on sheep/goat economy. The latter also include communities like the Gollas/Gavḷis, who were once primarily cattle keepers maintaining cattle camps in the forests (SONTHEIMER 1976: 101ff.), as well as Rāmoṣis and Koḷis, who constituted the predatory and tribal elements in Maharashtra.

It is also interesting to observe that a binary economic system embracing both pastoralism and agriculture may at times permeate through groups and even families. For instance, Haṭkar Dhangars are settled farmers, but one part of the group, or one member of a family, or a relation by marriage may be a nomadic shepherd wearing the typical red turban of the nomadic Dhangars. Such a practice evidently came into vogue due to ecological stresses and greater economic advantages. All the same, the ecological necessities (deterioration of pastures due to overgrazing, population concentration in the potential ecological niches suitable for agriculture, etc.) drove away a segment of the population into the interior forested zones and in course of time, they lost trace of any links with the parent stock. There are evidences to this effect in the oral traditions; and moreover such a group which became distinct by exclusively

adopting sheep/goat pastoral system and a 'life in the forest' (as the legends tell us) suffered social degradation and ritual impurity.

An endeavour is made here to trace the culture history of the Kuruvus and the prehistory of pastoralism in the Deccan by evaluating a Kuruva legend in the light of archaeological and ethnohistoric evidence. This legend is recorded at Balapālapalle (15°28' :78°7'), a village seventy kilometres to the southwest of Kurnool town (Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh), predominantly inhabited by the Kuruva community.

2. The Geographical Background

The region where the concentration of Kuruvus is found broadly comprises the eastern part of Karnataka and western part of Andhra Pradesh (for more details on geography see SINGH 1971: 791-850; SPATE 1972: 700-707, 715-727). The average elevation of this region ranges between 300 and 600 metres above sea level and forms a plateau country broken-up by hills, sluggish rivers, small streams, and tanks. While the Karnataka part is characterized by castellated granite hills of the Archean series, in southwestern Andhra Pradesh, apart from the extensions of the former, there are several chains of hills namely, the Velikondas, the Palakondas, the Erramalais, the Nallamalais, etc. of the Cuddapah and Kurnool series. The Karnataka part of this region is drained by the Manjira, the Krishna, the Bhima, the Tungabhadra, and the Cauvery river systems. In southwestern Andhra Pradesh, there are the tributaries of the Krishna, the Tungabhadra, and the Pennar. Although deep black, medium black, mixed red and black soils are found in several parts of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, the region inhabited by the Kuruvus is mostly characterized by red soils and red sandy loams: both types being unsuitable for agriculture. While the hilly regions support dry deciduous forests, the low hills and plains have a scrub jungle and the peneplained rocky open country with a poor soil cover has a thin grass growth with occasional xerophytes. Excepting the areas subjected to dry cultivation in the vicinity of tanks and both dry and wet cultivation in the well watered river basins, the rest of the region including the hilly and forested zones has good pastures and is well suited for a pastoral system.

3. Archaeological and Ethnohistoric Basis

There is enough archaeological evidence to know the prehistory of early human populations that inhabited this region. In Pleistocene and early Holocene times, they were conditioned to a nomadic food procuring system based on hunting and food gathering economy. The evidence for the food procuring system is available from scores of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic find-spots scattered along the river valleys, foot hills, and forested zones. The faunal remains from some of the excavated Upper Palaeolithic cave sites (for a detailed account and references see SANKALIA 1975; LYDEKKER 1886: 23-58; MURTY

1975: 132-138) and a late Mesolithic rock shelter site¹ in the limestone escarpments of the Kurnool region testify to the ecological potential offered by this ecosystem for the primitive food procuring societies. The faunal remains from these sites include some of the favoured game animals like porcupine (*Hystrix crassidens*), black naped hare (*Lepus nigricollis*), nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*), black buck (*Antilope cervicapra*), chinkara (*Gazella gazella bennetti*), four horned antelope (*Tetracerus quadricornis*), sambar (*Cervus unicolor*), chital (*Axis axis*), barking deer (*Muntiacus muntajak*), mouse deer (*Tragulus meminna*), ox (*Bos* sp.)/buffalo (*Bubalus* sp.), and Indian wild boar (*Sus scrofa cristatus*). Some of these animals survive even to this day in the higher forested hilly ranges, and tribes like Yerukulas, Boyas, Cencūs, Yanadis, etc. practise primitive hunting.

By around the third millennium B. C., a food producing system based on a pastoral-cum-agricultural economy was introduced into this hunting and food gathering ecosystem by communities who moved in from elsewhere and raised villages in the favourable ecological niches. Some of these excavated settlements – the Neolithic-Chalcolithic sites – in the Andhra-Karnataka zone such as Brahmagiri (WHEELER 1947), Sanganakallu (SUBBARAO 1948; ANSARI and NAGARAJA RAO 1969), Tekkalakota (NAGARAJA RAO and MALHOTRA 1965), Piklihal (ALLCHIN 1960), Maski (THAPAR 1957), Hallur (NAGARAJA RAO 1971), Utnur (ALLCHIN 1963), Kodekal (PADDAYYA 1973), Palvoy (RAMI REDDY 1968), and T. Narsipur (SESHADRI 1971) have shown that their economy was chiefly based on cattle pastoralism supplemented by agriculture and hunting.

Even after the introduction of this pastoral-cum-agricultural system into this area, the Mesolithic cultural system based on hunting and food gathering continued side by side, as is known from the afore-mentioned Mesolithic rock shelter site in the Kurnool area. Here the microlithic industry occurs continuously in a deposit of 1.60 m thickness, but in the upper levels, pottery and a couple of copper objects are also found, the latter making their first appearance in southern Deccan in the Neolithic-Chalcolithic levels falling in the time range of c. 1800-1500 B. C. (ALLCHIN 1968: 163). Further, from the middle levels, occur a few osteological (metapodials and phalanges) and dental remains of domesticated *Ovis/Capra* group along with wild fauna². A few other late Mesolithic sites in the country like Adamgarh, Madhya Pradesh (JOSHI 1968: 245-254) and Bagor, Rajasthan (MISRA 1973: 92-110) have already yielded the remains of domestic sheep and they preponderate at the latter site. At Adamgarh and the Kurnool rock shelter site, while the microlithic industry and the remains of wild fauna prove beyond doubt that hunting and food gathering was the mainstay of economy, the occurrence of the remains of domesticated sheep/goat alongside point out that the late Mesolithic communities adopted sheep/goat domestication from the advanced societies into their economic system as a result of contact diffusion.

¹ This cave site locally known as Muchchatla Chintamanu Gavi was jointly excavated by the first author and Dr. K. THIMMA REDDY of Andhra University.

² Thanks are due to Dr. A. T. CLASON of Biologisch-Archaeologisch Institut, Groningen, for identifying the remains of domestic *Ovis/Capra* group in this collection.

As mentioned earlier, the faunal remains and other evidence from the excavated Neolithic-Chalcolithic sites in the area under discussion make it clear that these village based groups were primarily cattle keepers (ALLCHIN 1963). The oral traditions of the existing shepherd castes moreover explain that a group of the original cattle keeping-cum-farming stock branched off into new habitats resorting to increased reliance on sheep pastoralism. In the light of the archaeological evidence and the oral traditions of the pastoral groups, it can be conjectured that the operational advantages offered by the sheep/goat pastoral system in this semi-arid grassland ecosystem induced its development as a distinctive economic system, inducting into its fold populations from the then surviving Mesolithic groups and the newly introduced Neolithic stock. The enactment of rituals associated with hunting and hunting expeditions, in the otherwise predominantly Śaivism oriented religion of the Kuruvas and the allied groups, plausibly was the resultant product of integration, in the prehistoric past, of the cultural contents of the native hunting Mesolithic bands and the predominantly sheep pastoral offshoots of the alien Neolithic population. In this context, it is worthwhile to make note of an inscription (SIRCAR 1961: 8-9, 21) dated as late as Saka 1291 (1369 A. D.) on a pillar in the compound of Malleśvara (also called as Mailāradeva) temple at Ainavolu near Warangal in northwestern Andhra Pradesh, which until recently was a predominantly pastoral area. About five stanzas (verses 23-27) in this inscription, which is in Telugu and Sanskrit, narrate that god Śiva, in order to protect *Arjuna* assumed the form of a hunter (*Śabara*), fought with the demon *Malla* and killed him, thus acquiring the name *Mallāri*, which in course of time became *Mailāra*. The goddess who accompanied her consort in the form of a huntress is said to have been given the name *Mālāchī*. This evidence implying the association of the 'great traditional' god Śiva with 'hunting', 'demon' and the 'forest' is suggestive of an upward universalization of the deep rooted importance attached to hunting and forest tribes in antiquity, by these pastoral castes (regarding MALLĀRI and Khaṇḍoba cf. SONTHEIMER 1976: 92, 124, 179, 189 f.).

It also becomes evident from the oral traditions that the groups who adopted sheep/goat pastoral system, in due course, lost trace of any links with the parent stock and became so distinctive that their subsequent interaction with the ancestral village based societies was that of initial conflict and eventual enculturation – in this instance a group from the higher culture taking-up the life ways of the lower culture. There may thus be a change over from cattle keeping to sheep pastoralism as it happened with the Gollas (HASSAN 1920: 204) and the Haṭkar Dhangars (SONTHEIMER 1975: 139 f.).

Keeping in view the above mentioned considerations, it would be of great value to attempt an appraisal of the legend of *Bīraḥṣa* for an understanding of the interplay of the ecological and socio-economic motive forces that shaped the culture, economy, and religion of the pastoral communities of the Deccan.

4. The Legend of Birappa

There was a Kāpu couple: *Ādireḍḍi*³, the husband and *Ādemma*, the wife. They had seven sons. Their last son *Elanāgireḍḍi* was a *varaḥputra* (blessed son). He had *vaikunṭha rēkha* in his palm, *vinjāmari* on his back, *amruta rēkha* in his naval and the crown of a serpent on his head⁴; and he used to look after seven villages as a village head. The six elder brothers felt envious of *Elanāgireḍḍi* and to get rid of him, asked him to procure his own bullocks and proceed to a place where they have about hundred acres of land. The place where *Elanāgireḍḍi* was asked to go and cultivate was situated north of Balapalapalle somewhere near Srīśailam in the same district. The local landmark of the area where *Elanāgireḍḍi* was to cultivate was known as *munimōdakamānu puṭṭa*, because of the presence of a tree (Telugu: *ceṭṭu*) known as *munimōdakamānu ceṭṭu* in that area. The belief in vogue was that in this *munimōdakamānu puṭṭa* god *Śiva* kept a *brahma rākṣasi*⁵ (demoness) which was guarding this place falling under its territory. *Elanāgireḍḍi*'s brothers thought that he will fell this tree while clearing the land for cultivation as a result of which the demoness will get enraged and would kill *Elanāgireḍḍi*. Unmindful of this foul play he proceeds to the place with an iron axe. When he approaches the tree for felling it, the children of the demoness challenge him and he kills them with his iron axe. The demoness goes to *Śiva* and complains about the intruder and his killing of her children. *Śiva* tells the demoness that the intruder (*Elanāgireḍḍi*) is a *varaḥputra* and that from then onwards that place belongs to him.

Sometime ago in Kailāsa, Pārvatī asked *Śiva* for a sheep. The latter for the pleasure of his consort creates one (or two). In due course, these multiply into large numbers overrunning Kailāsa and dirtying the gardens. Then *Śiva* brings all the sheep to the *munimōdakamānu cēnu* (the area of land recognized by referring to the *munimōdakamānu ceṭṭu*), created a *nāgalōka* (another world under the earth), drove all the sheep in, and covered the entrance of *nāgalōka* with a stone slab. It is in this area *Elanāgireḍḍi* starts ploughing the land and

³ Kāpus are the chief land holding and cultivating caste of Telangana. They rear milch cattle and bullocks which are employed in agricultural operations. Kāpus also claim their descent from *Ādireḍḍi*, from whose seven sons the whole Kāpu race is said to have sprung (HASSAN 1920: 306).

⁴ These are some birth marks which according to ancient tradition are expected to be found (though not always) on the person of such individuals endowed with supernatural qualities. This is a good example of later interpolation whereby *Elanāgireḍḍi* had been raised to a supra human status.

⁵ The name *brahma* may actually have been derived from *bhram*: 'to wander around' (Sanskrit, Kannada, Marathi). There is a god in Karnataka and elsewhere known as *Bharmappa/Bharma/Bhramā* etc. who roves on horseback during the nights guarding the village. The *Brahma Rākṣasi* is a typical tree or forest demoness who lives on trees and roves around guarding the forest. The same demoness occurs in the traditions of Dhangars/Kurubas around Kolhapur and she is called *Yeḷamakkaḷṭāi* (Kannada, the mother of seven children). She inhabits a tree the cutting of which results in harmful consequences (SONTHEIMER 1976: 38 ff.; SETTAR 1971: 17-34).

in so doing his plough hits the stone slab. His curiosity being aroused, *Elanāgiredḍi* lifts the stone slab, thus uncovering the entrance of *nāgalōka* and to his surprise hears the bleating of sheep. *Śiva* appears at this moment and tells *Elanāgiredḍi* that he should take away the sheep and rear them. *Śiva* further tells him that he should proceed to Kalyāṇapaṭṇam⁶ which is situated in the west, followed by the sheep and without looking back, for, if he looks back, the sheep will stop coming out of *nāgalōka*, and also that, among the sheep concealed there-in, there is a golden *gorre* (ewe) and a golden *poṭṭelu* (ram) which will come out last. Unfortunately, *Elanāgiredḍi* looks back when the golden sheep are about to come out, and they stop. *Śiva* at this juncture asks *Elanāgiredḍi* to go to Kalyāṇapaṭṇam with the rest of the sheep. When *Elanāgiredḍi* reaches the outskirts of Kalyāṇapaṭṇam with the flock of sheep, he is not allowed by the king to enter: as a result *Elanāgiredḍi* spends about twelve years in the forest leading a nomadic life with his sheep.

In Kalyāṇapaṭṇam everyone was wearing a *liṅga*⁷, every article was tied with a *liṅga* and even the animals were having *liṅgas* tied to their horns. Everyday *nandī* (*Basavanna*) (the humped bull), the *vāhana* (carrier) of *Śiva*, comes to Kalyāṇapaṭṇam from Kailāsa and after receiving the worship from the people it returns to Kailāsa. Since the practice of keeping sheep flocks is disliked by the king and people of Kalyāṇapaṭṇam (as it was not their tradition), *Elanāgiredḍi* was not allowed into the city: he was considered filthy!

Śiva, who from Kailāsa had been observing *Elanāgiredḍi* spending about twelve years in the forests, takes pity on him. *Śiva* decides that *Elanāgiredḍi* should find a place in Kalyāṇapaṭṇam where he can lead a comfortable life. To facilitate the entry of *Elanāgiredḍi* into Kalyāṇapaṭṇam, *Śiva* plans a strategy. He makes one of the rams of *Elanāgiredḍi* and the *nandī* on worship at Kalyāṇapaṭṇam die simultaneously. The people and the king of Kalyāṇapaṭṇam were shocked and grieved for this mishap, for, *nandī*, the *vāhana* of the god, died at the time of worship; and they started chanting prayers to revive it back to life. As soon as the ram of *Elanāgiredḍi* dies, *Śiva* appears before him and tells him to go to Kalyāṇapaṭṇam with the dead ram and to sell its wool and meat to the people of Kalyāṇapaṭṇam. Following the instructions, *Elanāgiredḍi* along with his seven sons carries the dead ram to Kalyāṇapaṭṇam. The people there, let alone buying the meat and wool, once again refuse to admit them into the city.

Elanāgiredḍi being helpless carries the dead ram to the outskirts of the city and puts it on a pyre. The fumes and smoke coming off the burning animal start blowing over Kalyāṇapaṭṇam when its inhabitants were still engaged

⁶ Kalyāṇapaṭṇam is situated to the north of Pune-Hyderabad road, about 160 km to the east of Hyderabad. Also known as Kalyāṇa, this place seems to have been involved in social upheavals. The Liṅgāyats, a Śaivite sect, who experienced a flourishing period in the 12th century A. D. under their spiritual leader Basavappa, the minister of king Bijjala, had been attracted to Kalyāṇa, which was first the capital of the Cālukyās and then of the Kalacuryās. As they seem to have posed a threat to Jainism and Brahminism, they were subsequently forced to leave Kalyāṇa and were dispersed in different directions.

⁷ The phallus shaped object, or its symbolic representation worn by the Liṅgāyats.

in prayers to please *Śiva* so that he will revive *nandī*. Enraged by this deed of *Elanāgiredḍi*, as this has rendered the ritual to revive the life of *nandī* impure, the people of Kalyāṇapaṭnam threaten him with dire consequences. *Elanāgiredḍi* being unperturbed throws a challenge: if they fail to make the *nandī* alive, they should let him make his ram alive, in which case they should accept the meat and woolen blankets offered by him. The people of Kalyāṇapaṭnam, despite their best prayers with all music and dance, fail to revive the life of *nandī*. Frustrated, they ask *Elanāgiredḍi* to try his chance with the ram.

Then *Elanāgiredḍi* takes out of pyre of what remained of the ram and wants to cut it into pieces for which he needed a wooden plank. The people of Kalyāṇapaṭnam tell him that since every article has a *liṅga* tied to it he cannot use anything as they would become impure. He asks them to dismantle one of the doors of the main entrance to the city and take away the *liṅga* from it so that he can use it as a plank. They oblige him finally. *Elanāgiredḍi* cuts the half burnt animal into pieces, collects them into a big pot and starts cooking. *Śiva*, who has been observing from Kailāsa what all is happening sends down *Rēvaṇa Siddēśvara*⁸ to Kalyāṇapaṭnam to help *Elanāgiredḍi* succeed in his attempts. *Rēvaṇa Siddēśvara* descends down on the scene at Kalyāṇapaṭnam with his paraphernalia and at the cross-roads of the city he stops to buy *pasupu* (turmeric powder) and *kumkum* (red ochre) from the shops. He finds to his surprise that in those shops which were selling *vajramulu* (diamonds) and *vaiḍhūryamulu* (gems), *pasupu* and *kumkum* are not available. He tells those *vartakulu* (traders) to look into their bags. When they do so, however reluctantly, they find to their dismay that the bags which had been filled with *vajramulu* and *vaiḍhūryamulu* contain only *pasupu* and *kumkum*. They apologize to *Rēvaṇa Siddēśvara* for failing to recognize his greatness right in the beginning. He takes from them a bit of *pasupu* and *kumkum*, gives them back their *vajramulu* and *vaiḍhūryamulu* and starts for the place of conflict.

When *Elanāgiredḍi* notices *Rēvaṇa Siddēśvara* coming, he and his sons start drumming, dancing, and chanting prayers. *Rēvaṇa Siddēśvara* sprinkles the *pasupu* and *kumkum* into the cooking pot containing the dead animal cut into pieces. Owing to the chanting of prayers and the sounds of the musical instruments, and with the addition of *pasupu* and *kumkum* by *Rēvaṇa Siddēśvara*, the pieces in the cooking pot join together and the ram springs alive. It jumps out of the pot and runs amuck in Kalyāṇapaṭnam, destroying everything and killing everyone coming in its way with its horns and by dashing its head. Even the king, scared out of his wits, runs to a spot called *sūdiguṇḍu rayi* (a circular boulder with a conical projection on the top) and sits on it to save his life. The ram chasing the king starts hitting the boulder and with this impact

⁸ The Vīraśaivas (Liṅgāyats) claim *Revaṇasiddha* as one of their *pūrvācāryas* and the Kurubas equally claim him as one of theirs. According to an inscription of the 12th century A. D. one *Revaṇagavaḍa*, belonging to the Haṇḍe-Kuruba caste, built a temple when the Cālukya king *Someśvara* was ruling in Kalyāṇa (Kalyāṇapaṭnam). This *Revaṇagavaḍa* became *Revaṇasiddha* (see HANUMANTHIAH 1958: 77), or *Rēvaṇa Siddēśvara*.

the boulder starts shaking. The king then requests *Elanāgiredḍi* to bring the ram under control and promises that he and his people would take the meat and woolen blankets offered by *Elanāgiredḍi* and also that they would follow his traditions. But *Elanāgiredḍi* has no powers to control the ram which is endowed with supernatural powers. Hence *Rēvaṇa Siddēśvara* who alone is capable, curves the straight horns of the ram with his golden hand-stick: as a result the ram dies. (The Kuruvas believe that since then the rams have only curved horns.) Most of the inhabitants of Kalyāṇapaṭṇam, as they were deeply moved by the greatness of *Elanāgiredḍi* threw away their *liṅgas* into water and adopted the way of life of *Elanāgiredḍi* and his group. The others, not willing to change to the new tradition, migrated to Srisailam, a pilgrimage centre dedicated to the god *Mallikārjuna* and remained as Liṅgāyats.

Because of the association of *birudulu* (musical instruments) in the prayers of *Elanāgiredḍi* for the invocation of *Śiva* and also because he won the challenge using *birudulu*, *Śiva* confers on him the title *Bīradēva*⁹. *Bīradēva* is popularly called as *Bīraḥḥa*. The descendants of *Bīraḥḥa* are the present day Kuruvas as *kuru* in Kannada (the language of Karnataka) means wool. The Kuruvas of southwestern Andhra Pradesh also call themselves as *Elanāṭi Kāpus*. The Kuruvas in this area, as elsewhere in this region, identify themselves into two groups namely, Uṇṇikankaṇam Kuruvas – the descendants of the first wife of *Elanāgiredḍi* and P(H)aṭṭikankaṇam Kuruvas – the descendants of the second wife of *Elanāgiredḍi*. These two groups do not intermarry as they consider themselves to be parallel cousins.

Kuruvas spread over several villages in the Kurnool district are almost acculturated into the agricultural society. Some of them keep flocks of sheep and migrate seasonally (once or twice a year) to the neighbouring villages within a radius of 150 km. For instance, the Kuruvas of Balapālapalle migrate during the drier summer months to the adjacent villages: Maddūru, Togarcēḍu, Anapūru, Bāpanapalle, Yāluru, and Ṭanguṭūru. They return to Balapālapalle with the onset of monsoon. All these villages mentioned above are known as *rēnāḍupallelu* (Telugu *rēnāḍu*: red soil, *pallelu*: villages).

5. The Festival of Bīraḥḥa

At Balapālapalle, there is a temple dedicated to *Bīraḥḥa* which is a small modern structure built of bricks and limestone slabs. The sanctum sanctorum is a square room (approximately 2 m in length, 2 m in width, and 5 m in height) and facing it is a rectangular hall (8 m in length, 3 m in width,

⁹ There are various explanations for *Bīradēva*/*Bīraḥḥa*/*Bīrobā*. Some derive it from *vīradēva* (*vīra*: hero; *deva*: god). This belief is in vogue in Karnataka where *Bīraḥḥa* is also associated with *Vīrabhadra*. In the legend quoted here, *Bīradēva* is associated with musical instruments (*birudulu*). This corresponds with southern Maharashtra where *Bīrobā* is associated with *bāvan birudem*, which are 52 magical cult objects, the drum being the most important (SONTHEIMER 1976: 193). But *Bīrobā* is also said to have '52' *vīrs* (*bīrs*) – godlings or spirits – under his control.

and 5 m in height). The devotees sit in this hall and perform *bhajan* (singing of songs dedicated to *Bīrap̄pa* and from the themes of Ramāyaṇa and Mahābhārata to the accompaniment of music) on festival occasions.

Bīrap̄pa is an ardent devotee of god *Mallikārjuna* and leads the god who sits on a horse. There are two bronze figurines of *Mallikārjuna*. He has four hands, one posterior right hand holding a trident and the anterior right hand holding an umbrella; with his posterior left hand he holds *Mallikādēvi*, his consort, who is seated on his left thigh, while his anterior left hand is free. In one of these figurines, *Mallikārjuna* with *Mallikādēvi* is on the horse back; this including the horse is 10 cm tall and 6 cm broad. The other figurine is of the same size but without the horse.

The bronze figurine of *Mallikārjuna* with *Mallikādēvi* on the horse, on the day of the *jātra*, will be placed on an *ambhāri* (canopy), the latter mounted on a wooden horse. In some places, as at the neighbouring village of Betamcherla, a bronze horse instead of the wooden horse is used. The wooden horse at Balapālapalle is 60 cm tall at the shoulder, painted in red, and to its right side stands the wooden figure of *Bīrap̄pa*. *Bīrap̄pa* has a beard and moustache, wears a *ṭopi* (cap), *jubba* (shirt), *kurta* (trousers) and is bare footed. His *jubba* is green coloured and is painted with yellow flowers. He has a garland of flowers around his neck and a loin girdle around his waist. In his right hand he holds a sword upright and with his left hand holds the reins of the horse. The belief is that *Bīrap̄pa* leads the horse with the god sitting on it: they travel during the nights and take rest during the day.

Bīrap̄pa's festival (*jātra*) takes place on the night of *caitra suddha vidiyā* and on the evening of *tadiyā*, the two days immediately following the Telugu New Year's day, which usually falls either at the end of March or the beginning of April.

On the evening (around 4 P. M.) of *caitra suddha vidiyā*, before the real *jātra* begins, the Kuruva men, women and children, dressed in their best attire, go in bullock carts (the bullocks are also decorated with floral designs in polychrome) to the *Sunkalamma*¹⁰ temple which is situated in the outskirts about 2 km away from the village. Each bullock cart is accompanied by music, which, after reaching the temple makes three clock-wise perambulations around the temple and stops in front of it. Music is played in front of the goddess for considerable time picking up a rhythm which induces some of the women to get possessed. Immature goats and sometimes hens are sacrificed by individuals as per their vows to the goddess. After the sacrifice they return to the village to participate in the *pāruveta* (Telugu *paru*: to run, *veta*: hunt), the ritual connected with the hunt, that takes place before the sunset. For this, a couple of hares (which abound in the neighbouring hilly scrubby jungle) are kept in captivity a day or two earlier. These two hares, each held by a village elder are let free in the presence of a crowd: keeping a distance of a few metres from the men

¹⁰ *Sunkalamma* is a village goddess and her temple is a small modern structure of 2 × 2 m dimension standing 1.5 m high. The deity is represented by an elongated conical black limestone rock of 0.5 m high.

who stand making more-or-less a straight line, ready to chase the animals. The scared animals run helter-skelter in a bid to escape the chasing crowds and rarely do they succeed in running to safety. The two successful men who capture the hares enjoy a feast that night with their respective family members and friends. In case no hares are available, as it happened at the nearby Betamcherla village on one occasion, a ram is let loose for the *pāruvēta* festival. In order to make the ram run as fast as it could, its tail is cut and *chunnum* (calcium hydroxide) is applied to burn the wound. As is the case with the hares, the one who gets the ram rejoices the occasion by making a feast of meat with his family members and friends.

After witnessing the *pāruvēta*, most of the women return to their homes to finish the household chores early so as to assemble at the *Bīrap̄pa* temple for the *bhajan* (singing of devotional songs) which precedes the procession. The men on the other hand proceed to the village meeting place where the singers among them form a group and sing songs rendered in Telugu in colloquial Kuruva folk style of the themes from the Ramāyaṇa and the legend of *Bīrap̄pa*. The singing is accompanied by music and dance. This continues for about an hour and a half after which they return to their homes for supper by around 8.30 to 9 P. M.; those who perform the worship strictly fast for the whole day.

Although no strict time schedule is observed, all the men, women and children gather at the temple by 10 P. M. By now all is set ready for the procession. While some of the men (especially the aged), women and children do *bhajan* in the hall of the temple, there goes on in the front yard an incessant beating of drums, playing of flute and other favourite musical instruments of *Bīrap̄pa*. When the beating of drums and the playing of flute reaches the climax, some men get possessed. When they get possessed, they become ferocious and bellowing with rage they fiercely brandish the *alugu* (sword) (also a spear sometimes) and hit with the pointed tip of the sword on their own person, either on the head or the abdomen. This display of savage fierceness is called *ugram* (infuriation) and scars left by this act can be seen on those persons who went through this experience. There is always an aid standing by with a bowl of turmeric powder (which has antiseptic properties) applying it on the wounds; in case an individual starts hitting himself too hard with the likelihood of a serious injury, the onlookers will hold him back and give him a lemon. The possessed individual, keeping the lemon in one palm, pierces the sword into it with the other hand, cutting it into two pieces: his *ugram* is thus relieved. Those who get possessed and experience *ugram* are held in high esteem in the society because it is believed that only those who are pious, truthful, and virtuous get possessed. It is also not uncommon to see young boys and women getting possessed: while the former behave like the elder counterparts in all respects, the latter on the other hand get into trance and dance swaying their hands and bodies.

Amidst the beating of drums and other fanfare, the god – the small bronze figurine of *Mallikārjuna* (with *Mallikādēvi* in his lap) sitting on the horse, placed in the canopy on the wooden horse with *Bīrap̄pa* leading it – is brought out into the front yard and mounted on a pedestal to be taken out

to the outskirts of the village. Before the procession starts, the god is profusely garlanded, coconuts are offered, lemons are cut and a *mēkapilla* (immature goat) is sacrificed. The procession now proceeds through the important lanes accompanied by the people singing devotional songs to the beating of drums and playing musical instruments. It has become customary to hire a *natch parte* (dance party) to dance in front of the god in the procession¹¹. As the procession moves into the spacious yard in the outskirts of the village, which is the usual meeting place for all the village festivals and functions, the pedestal carrying the god is brought to rest on the ground. A ceremonial bath is then given to the figurine of *Mallikārjuna* (and *Mallikādēvi*) and the wooden figure of *Bīrappa*; they are anointed with sandalwood paste; incense is burned; the god as well as *Bīrappa* and the wooden horse are decorated with flowers and garlands; coconuts, plantains and other fruits are offered; lemons are cut; and an immature goat is again sacrificed. While the priest (of the Kuruva caste) and other devotees are engaged in the worship, beating of the drums continues with occasional spells of silence, and it is a common scene to see both men and women getting possessed. This goes on until the early hours of the morning (with the *natch parte* entertaining the enthusiasts not very far from the place of worship) and the procession returns back to the village before sunrise. Another immature goat is sacrificed before entering the village and the *jātra* comes to an end with the placing of the idols (the bronze figurines, wooden horse and *Bīrappa*) in their original positions in the temple. The next day is the day of *mokkubaḍulu* (offerings) and *uggupālu* (feeding milk to the new born child) which take place only in the evening (around 3 P. M.) in front of the temple. For the *uggupālu* ceremony, a *kambaḷi* (woolen blanket) is spread on which is placed a rectangular bowl filled with about two litres of coconut milk; according to the original practice the bowl should be filled with sheep's milk. The devotees have to drink all the milk without lifting the bowl with their hands and without spilling even a single drop of milk on the *kambaḷi*. Before drinking the milk, the devotees moving on their fours perambulate thrice around the bowl barking and

¹¹ The dance troupe consists of a couple of young Bogum girls and their male accomplices who, standing on a well illuminated high rostrum erected on a bullock cart (which proceeds slowly in front of the procession), dance to the tune of grammophone records blasting at the maximum volume. This undoubtedly is the impact of Indian cinema and understandably, although regrettably, provides one of the rare occasions for amusement to the otherwise monotonous routine of the Kuruva village. None of the Kuruvās, unfortunately, know whether the practice of having dancing girls in the procession of god has a high antiquity. In point of fact, Bogum caste (HASSAN 1920: 91-98) represents an order of Telugu dancing girls. Some of them belonging to Munnur and Telaga Bogums are recruited from the Munnur, Kāpu, Golla, Telaga and other castes of the same social standing. There are also Balija Bogums, known as Basavīs, who belong to the Liṅgāyat caste and are chiefly found in Karnataka. The Basavīs, being devotees of Śiva are also called Liṅga Basavīs: they abstain from eating meat and drinking intoxicating drinks. The Bogums are professional dancers and musicians who enjoyed royal patronage during historical times. They were originally attached to the temples of Śiva and Vishnu as servants of god. The duties assigned to them were to fan the idol, carry the sacred light and to sing and dance before the god in a procession and in the temple. They now earn their living by singing and dancing, prostitution and concubinage.

biting each other like dogs. In the same kneeling position they bend their heads to the bowl, one after another, and holding the bowl with the teeth on a corner drink the milk slowly lifting it up. The *uggupālu* ceremony will be over by about 6. 30 P. M. and this marks the end of *jātra* for that year.

6. Analysis of the Legend and the Cult of Bīrappa

The story begins with the Kāpu couple, *Ādiredḍi* and *Ādemma*. The prefix *ādi* of these names meaning the earliest or most ancient, considered in the context of Indian tradition, implies reference to the foremost ancestral communities from whom the Kuruvās have descended. The episode by which *Elanāgiredḍi* was asked to procure his own bullocks and clear a particular area of land for cultivation in a new territory suggests the gradual expansion of agricultural communities into the regions hitherto uncultivated. The belief that a *brahma rākṣasi* was the guardian of the forest in which *Elanāgiredḍi* was to clear a specific area of land for cultivation, underlines the awareness of the forest tribes possibly having territoriality, when these new communities started moving in. These forest tribes can be no other than the Mesolithic groups whose continued survival into the Neolithic-Chalcolithic times is attested by the archaeological evidence.

Tradition tells us that *Elanāgiredḍi* comes across a flock of sheep in the forest. This is of great significance in the light of archaeological evidence. In the excavations of the cave sites in the Kurnool region, dental remains possibly belonging to wild sheep are found along with those of the other wild fauna falling in the time range of Late Pleistocene (MURTY 1975). The expression in the tradition that the sheep are found concealed in the *nāgalōka*, and that *Śiva* asks *Elanāgiredḍi* to rear them, seems to highlight a surprise discovery of a potent domesticate in the forest. Pending confirmation of the identification of the remains of wild *Ovis/Capra* group among the Kurnool cave fauna, it can be provisionally stated that the precursors of the domesticated sheep/goat species were probably extant during the Pleistocene times in this hilly and forested country. The legend moreover tells us that *Elanāgiredḍi* leads a nomadic life (for twelve years) in the forest along with the flock of his sheep, which is a clear confirmation of adoption of sheep pastoralism as a distinct economic system by a community. Further, the refusal of entry to *Elanāgiredḍi* and his sheep into Kalyāṇapaṭṇam; the aversion shown by the inhabitants of Kalyāṇapaṭṇam towards keeping sheep; the religious importance bestowed on *nandī*, the humped bull, at Kalyāṇapaṭṇam – all add to indicate that cattle played a predominant role in the economy of Kalyāṇapaṭṇam, which originally must have been a prototype settlement of the Neolithic-Chalcolithic type. It is said that *liṅgas* were worn by the inhabitants of Kalyāṇapaṭṇam and that even the animals therein were tied with *liṅgas*. This religious tradition continues to be practiced by the agricultural Liṅgāyat community of Karnataka revealing their ancestral relationship and thus lends support to the belief that the economy at Kalyāṇapaṭṇam was cattle keeping and agriculture. The oral tradi-

tions augmented by the archaeological findings thus suggest that a nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoral system based on sheep herding and a sedentary village system sustained by cattle keeping and agriculture were in vogue in this geographical area.

The struggle between *Elanāgiredḍi* (and his group) and the inhabitants of Kalyānapaṭnam, portrayed in the oral tradition by reference to: (1) the death of the sheep of *Elanāgiredḍi* and the *nandī* at the time of worship at Kalyānapaṭnam; (2) the challenge thrown by *Elanāgiredḍi* as to which group would be able to revive the respective animal; (3) the success of *Elanāgiredḍi* in bringing his sheep to life; and (4) the ultimate victory of *Elanāgiredḍi* in making the inhabitants of Kalyānapaṭnam to follow his traditions, altogether point out the initial conflict and final enculturation between two groups having different economic systems. This evidently took place due to the operational advantages of the sheep pastoral system over cattle keeping and agriculture in this semi-arid grassland ecosystem most suitable for grazing.

It is interesting to note that god *Mallikārjuna* has two carriers, as he is worshipped by two types of communities. In the case of Kuruvas, a horse is the *vāhana* of the god, whereas for the settled agricultural communities, the humped bull is the god's carrier. Archaeologically, the knowledge of the domestic horse (*Equus caballus*) is attested from the Harappan times, at a rough estimate from around c. 2000 B. C., and in the Deccan, a few remains of horse – one molar and a second phalanx in the Neolithic-Chalcolithic levels (c. 1500–1100 B. C.) and a splint bone in the early Iron Age levels (c. 1100–800 B. C.) – were found at Hallur, a site in the Tungabhadra valley of Karnataka (ALUR 1971: 107–124). At the present state of our knowledge regarding the association of horse with the prehistoric cultures of India, it is difficult to know at what stage the horse became the *vāhana* of the god. The horse, however, seems to have assumed great significance as an animal of mobility from the Iron Age period (c. 1000 B. C.) and the Deccan is rich in Megalithic grave complexes, some being situated in the sheep pastoral area. A few of the grave sites have yielded horse bits, horse burials and iron implements (LESHNIK 1971: 141–150, 1975: 40–67; DEO 1970) suggesting the importance attached to the horse. The adoption of the horse by the Kuruvas, to begin with, must be due to its mobility and to this day some groups of Kuruvas and Dhangars use the horse as the transport animal when they go on their annual migration. Secondly, it is considered prestigious to have the horse as the riding animal, as is the case with the Siledārs of Maharashtra. Thirdly, this indicates that the humped bull, and consequently the cattle, played no significant role either in the economy or the culture of Kuruvas.

7. References from Karnataka and Maharashtra

Versions basically analogous to the afore-mentioned *Bīraṭṭa* legend, but with some differences, are available from eastern Karnataka and southern Maharashtra. They centre on the origin of the *uṇṇikaṅkaṇ* and *hattikaṅkaṇ* groups of the Kurubas. *Uṇṇi* (Kannada) refers to the wool bracelet (*kaṅkaṇ*)

worn by the members of the group which according to tradition subsists on sheep/goat economy. The *unnikaṅkaṅ* is tied during the marriage ceremony performed in the forest, no *hatti* (Kannada: cotton) being available. The *hattikaṅkaṅ* group depends primarily on agriculture with a strong preference for cattle economy. This brings them nearer to the other agricultural-cum-pastoral communities like the Vakkaligas and Gāvaḍās (Gāvūḍas) of Karnataka and the Kāpus (Reḍḍis) of Andhra, who similarly had a strong leaning towards village based cattle economy. In all versions, it is told that the original and actual occupation of the mythical ancestors of the Kurubas was considered to have been agriculture and that they belonged to one or the other of the above mentioned groups.

The tendency of fission in these groups leading to the formation of a distinct group with sheep/goat economy, is an intrinsic reflection of the man-land relationship and seems to have occurred repeatedly from the prehistoric times. According to the legends it is always the younger brother depicted as 'brave', 'lazy', or 'stupid', who is connected with the tending of sheep and migrations – the elder members of the family staying back at the village. This can be corroborated by the annual migration of the Dhangars in the Kolhapur area of Maharashtra. In this region, even to this day, the younger members of the settled Dhangar families join together for the long transhumance towards the drier northeast up to Kurudvadi in the Usmanabad district at the beginning of the monsoon. As maintenance of large flocks of sheep require considerable territories for grazing, such a transhumance was obviously necessitated by the increasing pressure exerted on land due to extension of agriculture and overgrazing in their native habitats. It is plausible that in ancient times, such transhumant groups eventually got disassociated from the parent sedentary stock once they moved into new habitats which offered better pastures but no scope for agriculture. The oral traditions in the Kolhapur area itself provide a culture-historic explanation for such a disassociation. Firstly, it is believed that the *unnikaṅkaṅ* Kurubas are the illegitimate children of an ancestor who had extramarital relations with a demoness during his migrations in the wilderness. This once again implies a reference to the forest tribes who must have been the then Mesolithic populations. Secondly and generally, it is the filth and bad smell attributed to the sheep and the shepherds, their association with the 'forest', which means any unsettled, uncultivated, potentially dangerous, and ritually unclean area, and the consumption of sheep's meat (if not the slaughter of sheep), which tended to cause fission. The oral traditions apart, sheep pastoralism nonetheless becomes an important adjunct to settled agriculture under conditions of drought and other ecological restraints which render the maintenance of large cattle herds impossible. There may thus have been a change-over from cattle keeping to sheep economy as it happened in the case of Gollas or the Haṭkar Dhangars.

The enculturation of shepherds in the settled system is reflected in the legend by the arrival of Kuruvas and their sheep in Kalyāṇapaṭṇam, notwithstanding the initial culture-clash. In other versions, as found in the *Hālumatāda Caritra* (ATTIKOLLA 1949), Kalyāṇapaṭṇam is the famous capital Kalyāṇi of

king Bijjala of the Kalacuri dynasty. His minister Basavesvara, who is reputed to be the famous restorer of the Liṅgāyat faith, had called the Kurubas with their herds of sheep to Kalyāṇapaṭṇam. But they are repelled by the people of the city for the same reasons indicated in the Balapālapalle legend. Later the Kurubas return to Kalyāṇapaṭṇam at the instance of *Maruḷasiddha* – a saint like *Revāṇasiddha* claimed by Kurubas as well as Liṅgāyats. The miraculous revival of the dead animal by the Kurubas convinces the inhabitants of Kalyāṇi and facilitates their settling and 'the sale of milk and milk products'. The Balapālapalle legend is more straightforward: the Kurubas want to sell meat and woolen blankets.

The arrival of shepherds in a settlement and their enculturation is also the central theme in the legend of Pattan Kudoli, a large village sixteen kilometres to the east of Kolhapur in Maharashtra. Their arrival is marked by the arrival of their gods *Viṭṭhal* (*Viṭhoba*) and *Bīrapṭa* on horses, who are accepted into the village only after they had performed some miraculous feats. In fact, the *Viṭṭhal*/*Bīrapṭa* cult is the most important cult today at Pattan Kudoli. Owing to the influence of the Liṅgāyat god of Pattan Kudoli, the Dhangars in the area have given up sacrificing sheep to their gods. Nor is the sound of the '500' drums (drums also play their magical role in the legend of Balapālapalle) of the Dhangars and Kurubas, who come for the annual *jātra* allowed to disturb the peace of the Liṅgāyat god: thus the drums are said to be not audible in the temple. Kurubas in northern Karnataka were inclined towards the Liṅgāyat faith and their saints are claimed by both the groups, but what generally prevented Kurubas from becoming Liṅgāyats was their occupation and the consumption of meat. *Bīrapṭa* often becomes a vegetarian under the influence of Liṅgāyat faith.

Some Dhangars also maintain the belief that their original *dharma* (tradition) was Liṅgāyat which they lost because they turned to keeping sheep and the consumption of meat (SONTHEIMER 1976: 121). This is reflected in the episode at Kalyāṇapaṭṇam which indicates a reversal to the pastoral life amongst the Liṅgāyats who are said to have adopted the way of life of the Kurubas, whereas some of them unwilling for this change migrated to Śrīsailam to continue their Liṅgāyat tradition.

Bīrapṭa/*Bīrobā* has been exclusively a god of the Kurubas and Dhangars. According to some legends he is said to be *Virabhadra* and lives in the forest and there are also clear-cut accounts explaining his association with hunting. For instance, he is said to have been found as an abandoned child in a forest by two huntresses. According to one version, these huntresses are the daughters of *Bāṇāī*, the female head of a large cattle and sheep camp and the second wife of *Khaṇḍobā*. A hunting background is also mentioned in an account of the Haṭkar Dhangars of Berar who were carrying bear spears on their expeditions. This spear is still carried by many Dhangars and is conspicuous in the Somavati Amāvāsyā festival in Jejuri (Pune district, Maharashtra). Here the Dhangars consider the procession of the god *Khaṇḍobā*, from his temple on the mountain down to the river a hunting expedition. The corresponding god *Mailār* in Devargudda near Ranebennur in Karnataka has his hunting excursion on the eve of Dasara festival. The Kurubas have a prominent role in this ritual

and one of their elders climbs a high bow to make predictions on the climax of the ceremony. The Kurubas have a special right to this bow which is usually kept in the temple. On the Dasara day, the enormous *capphals* (sandals) of the god and the goddess are kept ready by the side of the temple to protect their 'pure' feet in the hunting expedition. A similar tradition connected with *Murukan* occurs in the *Paripāṭal* (XXI) of the Caṅkam age indicating how widespread and persistent certain incidents have been (SONTHEIMER 1976: 190). In some of these rituals, as at Devaragudda for instance, the *bhaktas* (devotees) consider themselves as horses (the *vāhana* of the god) and beat themselves with whips: an act of showing their devotion to the god; while some others consume offerings of milk and bananas, acting like dogs, as at Balapālapalle. Such practices are also common in the cult of *Khaṇḍobā*. Moreover, in the *jatṛā* of *Khaṇḍobā* at Pali (Satara district, Maharashtra), the *vāghyās* (*bhaktas*) enact a ritual in which they imitate the dogs of the god and kill sheep by tearing their throats with their teeth. The Kurubas in Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh were known to have sacrificed sheep and other animals in the same fashion; but such above mentioned practices are fast disappearing in almost all the regions.

The crystallization of the pastoral (and forest) and the settled agricultural (and merchant) communities is not only shown by the two wives of the god, but is also born out by the *vāhanas* which have clustered around the cults of the god. *Khaṇḍobā* rides a horse. *Śiva*/*Mahādev*/*Śaṅkar* has a *nandī*: at times several of them, or even a herd of cattle or votive stone figurines. *Birobā* tends to have a horse and/or a ram. There are also a few bronze figurines of rams with a disproportionately small human figure (*Birobā*?) leading the ram. This can be interpreted, as in the case of *nandī*/*Basava*/*Basavanna* which is worshipped by the Liṅgāyats, that the ram in all likelihood must have been worshipped by the shepherds. These suggest that before the gods emerged in the form of *mūrtis* (images), their *vāhanas* were the objects of worship. In the case of *Birobā* who is primarily the god of the shepherds, the *nandī* is conspicuous by its absence; the 'horse with the rider' is ubiquitous. During the *jatṛā* at Pattan Kudoli each Dhangar family keeps its individual bronze figurine of 'horse with the rider' in the temple – a veritable army. As a matter of fact, this deity seated on a horse is one of the most widespread and common presentation in the Deccan: he may be *Mailār*, *Mallikārjuna*, *Khaṇḍobā*, *Mallanna*, *Birobā* or any similar god often identified with *Bhairav*. He has two (as in the case of *Birobā*) or four arms; one of his wives is seated before him or in his lap; and he may be accompanied by a dog. *Khaṇḍobā* has either stone or wooden horses, sometimes a multitude of them; *Mallikārjuna* has several wooden horses (as at Uravakonda near Bellary in the borders of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, one of the most typical sheep pastoral areas) or even a bronze horse as at Betamcherla; and these recall the clay horses of the Tamil god *Aiyaṅār*, who it is believed, keeps a vigil by his nocturnal rides and protects the village (though at times he may be dangerous to the villagers). At some places, a living horse is kept ready as for the god *Jyotibā* (near Kolhapur), or a horse is led in front of the ceremonial hunt during the Somavati Amāvāsyā festival of *Khaṇḍobā*.

As outlined earlier, the importance of the horse had been realized by the Iron Age times and both these nomadic and village based communities living in the semi-arid, millet growing and pastoral area found much use of the horse. For the nomadic pastoralists like the Kuruvas and the Dhangars, the horse is of utmost importance as a pack animal. For the settled farmers with large herds of cattle, the horse was of greatest use in petty warfares, especially for pastures. These groups were always ready for a feud which generally began with a cattle raid and such cattle raids and warfares for pastures, as for instance in the Palnad region of Andhra Pradesh, are known even in the late Medieval times. Thus there is no wonder that the *mūrti* of the god Śiva is generally equipped with a sword and a shield and is mounted on a horse. Moreover, groups from both types of communities formed an important element in the Medieval armies and many of them rose high in rank as polygars or Siledārs and the horse became a prerequisite for honour and booty. The invasion of the Muslims or the influence of the Rājaputs only enhanced the predilection for horses and during the Maratha period, much of the pastoral area in Maharashtra was used not only for pasturing cattle and sheep but also for rearing horses.

8. Conclusions

In the oral traditions and cults of the pastoral communities like the Kuruvas/Kurubas and Dhangars is preserved valuable information to understand the origins of the sheep pastoral system in the Deccan. Plausibly, the sheep pastoral system developed as an offshoot of the food producing system which was introduced by the Neolithic-Chalcolithic communities who moved into this region from elsewhere. The earliest manifestations of these new societies are apparent in the village based primary Neolithic sites like that of Hallur, Kodekal, and Palvoy in the southern Deccan ascribable to c. 3000 B. C. The economy of these village settlements was characterized by animal husbandry (predominantly by cattle keeping), supplemented by agriculture and hunting. The evidence available from the excavated cave sites is suggestive (though not as yet conclusive) that the wild ancestors of the domestic sheep were extant in this region during the Pleistocene times; and the oral traditions imply that these were domesticated by a branch of the Neolithic-Chalcolithic stock who moved into the forested areas. A branch of this original population must have moved into the forested areas under ecological pressures and realizing the suitability of semi-arid pastures for grazing, specialized in sheep pastoralism. It is perhaps for this ancestral relationship that the Kuruvas of Kurnool district call themselves as Elanati Kāpus; Kāpu being a traditional agricultural community. It can be postulated on archaeological reasoning that the sheep pastoral system, since its inception in this area, drew into its fold some of the surviving Mesolithic populations as a result of contact-diffusion in a common geographical area. This is attested: (1) by the two wives of the god: one belonging to a settled agricultural/merchant community and the other to a hill/forest/pastoral tribe; (2) the importance attached to rituals associated with hunt and hunting

expeditions of the god, in the otherwise Sanskritized religion of the Kuruvas; and (3) other episodes narrated in the oral traditions connected with the 'forest'. Moreover, the present habitats of the Kuruvas are characterized by innumerable Mesolithic findspots indicating that the sheep pastoralism was introduced into the structure of a hunting and food gathering ecosystem.

The populations who adopted sheep pastoral system, in due course, broke away from the ancestral village based stock and became so distinctive that they came to be regarded by the latter as socially degraded and ritually impure, as a result of their association with sheep and consumption of sheep's meat. But at the same time, under conditions of ecological duress, cattle keepers like the Gollas and agriculturists like the Haṭkar Dhangars resort to sheep pastoralism and such a change-over is portrayed in the oral traditions by an initial culture clash and eventual enculturation of the village based cattle keeping societies into the shepherd cultural and economic system. Such a process must have occurred recurrently and even reversibly from the pre-historic times, striking a balance between economic-cultural systems and the eco-climatic systems in the geographical area which had supported populations of three modes: (1) nomadic hunting and food gathering type, (2) sedentary cattle keeping-cum-agricultural type, and (3) sheep pastoral type, all at one time. The resultant integration of cultural elements from the three types of systems, as well as Sanskritization of non-Sanskritic rites, is explicit in the religious traditions of the shepherd groups. The adoption of the horse for various uses by both the agricultural and pastoral groups might have taken place with the spread of Iron Age culture into the Deccan, although the possibility of a slightly earlier date for the use of horse exists on theoretical grounds.

Abstract. – The oral traditions and religious cults of the pastoral communities like the Kuruvas (Kurubas), the Dhangars, and the Gollas of the Deccan are centred on themes which provide evidences to reconstruct the development of their economic and cultural systems. It is endeavoured here to make an appraisal of the oral traditions and cults of the Kuruvas, the sheep pastoralists inhabiting the semi-arid regions of the southern Deccan, in the light of archaeological evidence. These studies point out that the antiquity of the sheep pastoral system in this region, plausibly goes back to the Neolithic-Chalcolithic times, in that it developed as an offshoot of the sedentary village based cattle keeping-cum-agricultural system. The sheep pastoral system, since its inception, also drew into its fold the hill and forest tribes and this is evidenced by the enactment of rituals associated with hunting, in the otherwise Sanskritized religion of these communities, as well as one of the wives of their god who belongs to a hill/forest tribe.

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