



BANJARA/GYPSIES OF INDIA

**THE MOST RESPONSIVE GROUP TO
GOSPEL, YET REMAIN UNREACHED**



THE BANJARA THEOLOGIAN

The first Banjara/Gypsy M.Th Graduate under Senate of Serampore University, India. A happy moment

Greetings

Dear Friends In Christ,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I am indeed happy to meet you through this presentation and share about Gypsies and their longing for Salvation in Jesus Christ.

Banjara are one of the largest ethnic community, under different groups scattered all over India and in most European countries. The European Gypsy trace their origin to Western India who have migrated between 12th -13th century.

Majority Banjara live in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. As they live outside of the mainstream social system, they are hardly reached by outsiders, even by the gospel of Jesus. Further, their secluded social life, religious and cultural customs and practices, peculiar characteristics, keep them away from non-Banjara. Banjara people are one of the most backward, uneducated, poor, suffer severe health care, kill girl child and they are discriminated both by casteism and racially. Education level is very low among them.

There are very few theologically trained Banjara pastors working among their own people. I The Beulah Ministries was began in 2009 to work for Banjara people in state of Karnataka and also in partnership with other churches. The focus of ministry was among rural villages and children. It had a very good beginning and many children accepted Jesus.

Due to lack of sponsors and funds the ministry was closed, and the congregation was handed over to another church. Still we are looking at God to open doors to restart the ministry and partner with other churches. Our focus is among rural thanda and children, training the local people for reaching out their own people and fight for their rights. Illiteracy, malnutrition, poverty, child labor, labor exploitation, immorality, drunkenness, female child killing are a common phenomenon among them. It works in the areas where frequent famines, illiteracy, poverty and malnutrition prevails. The Banjara people needs the care of body, mind and soul.

The Banjara people are now readily responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ than ever before. The harvest is ripe and ready to cut and gather. Before the storm comes and destroys the harvest let us gather and store them in the kingdom of God. We welcome you to join with us to reach these unreached people with the love of Christ.

Yours Sincerely In Christ,

Babu.C, M. Th

Who is Banjara/Gypsy?

Banjara are descendents of Rajput tribe in North West India. They were nomadic in nature, involved in salt and grain trade on packed bullocks moving to every corner of India and to middle east.

From 10th century onwards the frequent invasions by the foreign colonials displaced them not only from their place, but also from their business.

The invaders took Banjara with them till Asia Minor and from their through Balkans and Greece they further crossed into Romania and other European states in about 15th or 16th century. Since it was believed that they came from Egypt, they were called “Gypsy.” Today they are found in more than 60 countries with about 30-40 Million gypsy population. The recent genetic studies further strengthened the Indian origin of the European Gypsies.

The total population is estimated to be about 20-30 million scattered all over India and with highest population in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra with 6 million together. The Banjara are present throughout India in 195 of 506 districts.

Gypsies are known by various names such as Banjara, sugali, Lambadi, Ghor etc. The Gypsy of Europe and the Banjara of the India have about 90% of similarities in living, customs, practices and habitation. Both speak Indo-Aryan language and their dialect has no script.

The peculiar colorful dress of Banjara/gypsy women which no other women wears. The ornaments, bangles, glass-work skirts and the needle works are very rich



Banjara Culture

- Gypsies have preserved their unique tradition of livelihood also independent public life. It is very much evident in their lifestyle, food habits, festivals, rituals, worship, use of cosmetics, likes and dislikes, dances, songs, language, clothing, literature among the Tanda life.
- Gypsies preserve their culture through their 'Thanda' life, an excluded habitation. "Thanda" is the "Mother Nature" and their unique independent living system has helped them to preserve their culture even in the midst of modernism.
- The Nature, which the Gypsies were worshipping, was responsible for destruction of the whole culture. Hence they have reconciled to the thought of living in Tandas/Caravans instead of building well-designed cities and dwellings that destroys the 'Mother Nature.' They had no faith in creating physical wealth and settling down at one place rather they moved from place to place, which even today Gypsies follow both in India and Europe, living in caravans. It gave origin to their Tanda culture. Tanda is the symbol of their life, community and everyday life with mother nature.



**The Gypsy woman
in Europe with her
Children in her
traditional dress**

Though the Gypsies have migrated to Europe in ca. 12th century, despite European fast changing social and cultural society the Gypsies still have maintained their cultural values

Banjara Religious Life

- Banjara/Gypsies are primarily animists, nature worshipper and later came under the influence of Folk Hinduism.
- Banjara worship goddess Kalikadevi or Bhavani or Banjari Devi. God Balaji was worshipped and annually Banjara people go on pilgrimage. Lord Balaji in Tirupathi is favorite god of the Banjaras and go on annual pilgrimage.
- Banjara believed in Witchcraft, sorcery, superstitions, and evil spirits.
- *Bhagat* or *Janiya*, the Banjara priest and also witch doctor plays an important role in the community religious life.
- The gradual contact between the Banjara and other people have brought them under the influence of popular Hinduism and live as Hindu Banjara and follow Hinduism.
- The presence of Christianity among Banjara is very less and still majority have not touched by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Christianity was considered as low caste people's religion.



The Banjara priesthood is followed only in male line. He is responsible to perform all the community religious and cultural rituals.

The Banjara Community priest

Social Life of Banjara

- Family Structure: The Banjara have the same family structure as Abraham had. They have a close knit-family relationship with minimal interface with other communities. They have a large extended family living under same roof or in same hut. Naik is the head of the thanda.
- Relationship with non-Banjara: The Banjara generally maintain a separate thanda life and does not mix with others. They see themselves as higher than the Dalits the low caste people. Their living habits portray their exclusive settlements keeping some distance away from the multi-caste villages.
- Banjara people celebrate Dussehra, Deepavali, and Holi. The Banjara women decorate themselves in traditional dress and go from house to house, dancing and receiving alms.
- Banjara social life is reflected in their songs, arts and stories which are major part of Banjara daily life.
- Banjara women wear a colorful-mirror worked hand embroidery patch worked *lehenga*(skirt)and *ghungato* (head cover). Men wear 'dhoti' with long white shirt and turban(*pagadi/rumal*)
- Tattooing is significant among Banjara women. Tattoo shows the place and character of the woman.
- Banjara are non-vegetarian and maze, bazra, rice, gehu(wheat) and pulses are use.They do not eat beef.
- Baati and boti and saloi are favorite non-veg food.
- Drinking alcohol and chewing beetle nut are common among both men and women. They brew alcohol in their homes.
- Dowry(bride price) is practiced and many parents go in debts to do marriage of their daughters and as a result the killing of girl children is a common among Banjara ,due to poverty and dowry fear.



**Banjara Woman
preparing
'Baati'(Roti), the
favorite daily food of
Banjara**

Roti is the common food of Banjara, a cheap and nutritious morsel.

Gypsies of India and Europe

- The Gypsies of Europe believed that they have come from India. The recent genetic study conducted by Estonian and India scientist revealed that the European Gypsies have their origin in Western part of India.
- The living style, dress, food, language, customs, rituals, religious and social practices have about 90% of resemblance between Indian and European Gypsies.
- The Banjara/gypsies are termed as Dalits, if the European Gypsies are racially discriminated, the Indian gypsies face caste discrimination, oppression and treat them as lesser human beings.
- There are about 50-60 million gypsies scattered all around the world.



The Banjara Thanda

Banjara people build houses with mud wall and straw houses, which are nature friendly. However, the government is giving subsidized houses and few thandas have built cement houses. There is gradual shift from nomadic life to permanent settlement.



The Thanda settlement

The mud houses are now replaced with asphalt roof houses. The thanda lack basic amenities and there is no proper drainage, sewage, drinking water, electricity and school. A street of the Thanda settlement.

Banjara Economic Life

- Banjara, in the past had the countrywide/worldwide nomadic business on packed bullocks. They were also horse breeders, cattle breeders, agriculturalists, musicians, and involved in many various works.
- Poverty is common phenomena among Banjara. Before the arrival of British colonials Banjara people had grain and salt business on packed bullocks travelling to every corner of India and even to Middle east. But the colonial market uprooted their livelihood and forced them to become thieves, robbers and land laborers.
- Majority Banjara are ex-bonded laborers and now migrant coolie workers in various places like Tirupathi, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Mumbai, and other places.
- A few Banjara possess a piece of agricultural land, but majority are landless daily wage laborers.
- Child labour is common among Banjara as whole family is involved in income generation. A family lives on less than Rs 50 a day!
- Despite government programs Banjara live out of reach of these benefits. Moreover, church has not given much interest on them.



Banjara Laborer looking for work in the field

Banjara people depend on labour in the field for generating income. Majority Banjara have unfertile lands near hills and mountains.

Banjara and Christianity

- The Banjara are one of the most resisting group earlier, but from the last one decade these people are one of the most responsive group to Gospel. There are few independent churches working among them, yet they could only reach a few areas. The Christian population among Banjara will be about 30-35,000 as estimated by some independent organizations such as Joshua Vision India, Partners International and others.
- The life of Banjara and the Abraham resemble and it is easy to relate them to biblical world. However, they have been very reluctant to become Christians, but many are responding to the Gospel. They view conversion as a break with their tribe or community or family and fear that their gods will bring calamity on their families or community. Many feel that by becoming christian it will lower their caste status.
- Banjara people are illiterate and love singing, story telling and dancing. Banjaras could be reached through education, social upliftment, sanitation, pure drinking water, nutrition, childcare and healthcare. Non-literary forms could be effectively used for evangelism.
- The churches that work among Banjara people does not have any partnership with WCC or with any local or regional ecumenical bodies. Hence there is no representation or effort done to bring them to the experience of ecumenicity. They also does not have representation in evangelical bodies. The lack of connection also severs the Banjara relationship to wider christian community.
- There is also less theologically trained nationals among Banjara people and Babu.C (the Presenter) is the first Master's in Theology under Senate of Serampore college and is striving to bring this community under a wider christian influence.
- There is a necessity of grass-root evangelism and focus on community based ventures. Banjara people can be easily reached through social upliftment programs than only a means of gospel alone.
- Banjara community is ready for seedling with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Love of God in action. Jesus said, the harvest is ready for gathering, but there is a need of laborers and investors on the harvest.
- Before it falls into earth we need to gather them into the kingdom of God.
- Banjara needs Salvation and Love. Love in Action.



**The Banjara pastor
and Banjara converts
worshipping on
Sunday under a tree,
Open air Worship!**

The Banjara Christians come from poor economic background and the Sunday offering will be less than Rs.50. They could not afford to build their church. They worship under trees, or in some houses.



HIV/AIDS affected Banjara women

She is Shanthi bai from Andhra Pradesh, India. She was married at a very young age. She had a good married life, but soon it dried out. Her husband used to work in Bombay as a migrant laborer, and was contracted with HIV. He then transmitted it to his wife who did not know anything about the disease of her husband. Her husband died and she was thrown out of her in-laws' house. Now she lives with her parents. She has a daughter. When she heard about Jesus and his healing, she believed and was baptized. Since then she is living without fear of death and spends her life in telling about Jesus to others. Sexual immorality is one of the biggest problems among Banjara people and their poverty, illiteracy and unemployment forced them to migrate to cities and involve in commercial sex work. This is a common phenomenon in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. There is a need to help these women to find livelihood and the love of Jesus. I had the privilege to share the gospel to this child of God.



The Presenter with few Banjara Christians

The Christian converts fear the community excommunication and there is a need of protecting their rights and also help them to remain in culture. Here a few converts have changed their dress into modern attire.



Ministry among Children

The happy children shouting for Jesus. The children are most vulnerable to school drop outs, child labour and exploitation. Jesus loved them and put them as an example to us. These children want your Love and care.



Pastor's Wife and Children celebrating the birth of Jesus

These children come from non-Christian Hindu background. Through our regular contact and friendship we were able to tell them about Jesus.



Banjara Girl in cultural dress

Banjara girl, Beulah is a shining bud for Jesus. On India's independence day celebration she loves to be in her cultural dress



**Thank you and Pray
for us and give us
Love**

Little Banjara boy in patriot dress. Showing the love for his country.

You Can Be a difference

- Yes, you can be a difference to Banjara people/children who long for love, care and salvation, and also betterment of their body, mind and soul needs care.
- You can pray for them regularly.
- You can pray and contribute little towards their education, health care and evangelism.
- You can adopt the Banjara children and give a new life by providing education, food and shelter, above all your love in Jesus.
- You can support the works among Banjara.
- If God is ready to reconcile between you and Banjara, we are ready to help to bridge this gap.
- They need your Love and your help. Give us love and Friends in Jesus.



**A Small Effort Can
Bring a Great
Change in these
lives! Help us to
reach out with the
Love of Christ**

You are warmly welcome to Partner with:

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