

# **Strategies Folk Performances : A Study of Two Forms of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana**

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## **Abstract**

*This article discusses the challenges of two distinctive art forms for survival by using different strategies. Pagativeshalu and Oggukatha. Pagativeshalu is not a ritual performance either in its content or in its context. Since it is not ritualistic theatre, strategizing performance becomes the prime concern of the performers. The performers being much dependent on this art form and it being their chief occupation it is imperative for them to sustain the performances by attracting the audience. On the other hand Oggukatha being a ritual based art form and already establishes an obligatory rights on audience to watch the performance. But both the forms face the problem of survival since every art form has to face socio-economic challenges of modern times and also to establish themselves and culture specific fulfilling the needs of the designated and un-designated audiences. An attempt is made to identify the text and contextual strategies of these two and how they operate on ritual/non-ritual qualities of performance/performances contextualizing the performance.*

**Key Words:** Text, Context, Ritual, Strategy, Bard Community, Survival.

## **Research Paper**

**Creative** expression in the behavioral pattern when forms as the style of a given community, it draws the attention of the other communities not only within the intra-cultural but inter-cultural strands of social system. Their artistic behavior of that community when clubbed with the verbal art, it transforms itself to a culture specific art form. This being the case, art form survives only when it is capable of producing texts for its artistic communication. This text becomes realistic not when they contextualize themselves in a performance centered communicative pattern. However in a performance centered communicative pattern. However big or little the art form is in size, dimension and length, it still requires artistic communication by a performance centered expressive tradition to designate that culture specific behavior as art form. Though these art forms quite often than not, found in communities living in rural India, to study them as either theatrical presentations or as cultural patterns is not taken up seriously by the literate strand of culture. Several folk theatrical/semi theatrical forms require a deeper study in

order to bring out the unique features of art form for simple reason that they are still alive and survive till date, despite the technological advancement which the modernity has brought in. Therefore understanding inherent strengths of such art forms would help the practitioners and scholars of modern theatre. The dichotomy between tradition and modernity increasingly posing threats to the folk art forms. The cultural continuities of these art forms where based on a tradition strategically survive either by adaptation of by resisting to such challenges. In either case the art form would require strategies to place themselves in the changing contexts.

In this paper a small attempt is made to probe the issues of strategies of performance of two different art forms *Pagativeshalu* [1] and *Oggukatha* [2] of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in order to understand the status of art form in the wake of modernity. These art forms are not merely isolatable entities but intermixed with the community which produces them.

The term strategy literally means “plan” or a “design”. In the context of performance strategy denotes the ways and means of playing out a text in a given context.<sup>[3]</sup> In context of a performance different forms works out. The strategies of performances of these art forms are discussed in terms of context, text at different levels.

**Community:** Usually majority of the folk art forms of Telugu speaking country are performed by bards as their exclusive right. The performers of most of the folk art forms believe that they are born performers and performance is their birth right. Generally the tradition of bard emerges as reciprocity between the patron and client in a given social organization. It is interesting to know that in Indian social order such reciprocity norms are prevailing in the dry zone areas wherein castes are divided into sub-casts and intra and inter relationships are intrinsically netted among these.

Each cast has a bard community, which narrates the caste myth of the patron community. Usually the bards are marginalized communities and survive only by the tradition of narration of caste myth. Almost all the castes have a bard community in Telugu speaking country. The following table shows the details of castes and their bard communities.

### Castes and their Bard Communities

1. Brahmin	<i>vipravinodulu</i>
2. Komati(vysya)	<i>Mailarubhatulu, Veeramustulu</i>
3. Reddy, Kamma, Velama	<i>Pichukakuntlavallu, Satanulu</i>
4. Yadavulu	<i>Mandechnulu, Podapotulavallu, Bommalavallu, Tapitajogulavallu, Poojagollalu, Tellacheeralavallu, Peddintiogllalu, Gollabhadgavatulu, Gollasuddullolu, Baikanivallu, Oggollu, Mallannalallu, Tappetagullu, Gangireddulavallu</i>
5. Kurumalu	<i>Beeraplu, Goraavayyalu, Mallarubhatulu, Oggollu</i>
6. Goundlavallu	<i>Gowdasettilu-Eenatlu, Jettilu</i>
7. Tantuvayalu(sale)	<i>Kunepulivallu, Padigarajulu, Pulijendavallu, samayamvallu, Padigelavallu, brugvadulu, sainollu, chamaralavallu, sadhasoorulu, sayamvallu</i>
8. Panchananvaru	<i>Runjalu, Panasavallu,</i>

<i>(viswakarma)</i>	<i>Avajakandru</i>
9. <i>Naibrahmin</i>	<i>Addamsingvallu-addapollu</i>
10. <i>Mudiraj, Mutracha, bantu, Telugu dandu, Telugollu, Kavali</i>	<i>Pandavulavallu, Kakipadigelavallu</i>
11. <i>Rajakulu</i>	<i>Ganjikutivallu, Patamchakallu</i>
12. <i>Kummarivallu</i>	<i>Pekkarlu, kulambiddalu</i>

**Source:** Shri Yadagiri Sarma, “Janapada Bhilshuka Gayakulu”

Sometimes one caste supports three or four bard communities depending on the type of narration that the caste is interested in. for instance the *Madiga* and *Golla* castes have more than one dependent community, who perform the caste myths with different versions. *Madiga* is a community of scheduled caste found in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu<sup>[4]</sup>. *Golla* is a community or a caste is a cattle rearing caste In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.<sup>[5]</sup>

The *madigas* have *chindu, Bainla, maasti, (asadi, pamba)* and *dakkali* as bard communities<sup>[6]</sup> They are also recognized as sub-sects within the *madiga* community. Similarly the *Kurumas* have *oggollu* and *mandechulavallu* as minstrels<sup>[7]</sup> According to each caste myth every bard community that performs the caste myth exercise a right over the narration as that right comes directly from myth itself. Invariably the caste myth narration has ritual link so to make minstrel community the custodian of myth. It is binding on the part of patron caste to arrange such performances annually in a cyclical manner to ward off any evil that otherwise could be caused by the gods. In return to the performances the minstrel community receives shares of kind or cash from the patron community this system is known as *mirasidar* system. The root word ‘*mirasid*’ comes from Arabic term ‘*mereh*’ which literally means ‘share’. The sharing of resources being the chief feature in lieu of the services rendered the system metamorphasized as *mirasidar* system.<sup>[8]</sup>

**Pagativeshalu :** The literal meaning of *Pagativeshulu* is day time performances. Due to the time of its performance it is better known as “*Pagativeshalu*”. ‘*Pagalu*’ in Telugu means daytime and *veshalu* means the person in disguise or enacting a role or role-playing ‘*Pagativeshalu*’ as the term indicates is always used in

plural in the context of the performance, because it is not a single performance, but a series of performances consecutively presented for a number of days[9]. The performers of this art form known as *pagativeshagallu*, *pagalichigallu*, *byroopulollu* in colloquial usage of Telugu language.[10] An equivalent of this art form is also found in the states of West Bengal, Tamilnadu, and Karnataka and is well known as *Bahurupi*, *Pagal vesham* and *Hagaluveshada Aata* respectively.[11] The performers of this art form at present belong to mendicants of *ganayata jangama*[12] community attributed to shivite tradition. The *jangama* literally means wonderer or a person who does not stay permanently at a place[13] they are affiliated to Shivate religious order as mendicants.

These performers have no particular patron community depend on due to the fact that they do not have any cast myth to trace out their origins. Since no patron community is associated with *pagativeshalu* the families of performers of *pagativeshalu* carved out their own areas of performances with consensus. As per the oral evidences collected, it is learned that the performers in olden days use to depend upon Jamindars, Jagirdars, Palegars and other rich landlord communities in rural areas. When they visit a village they used to perform *pagativeshalu* in the *grama chavadies*[14] i.e. the meeting places of elders at the heart of the village for conducting panchayats (legal disputes). Now when the patronage started decreasing from the villages, the performers are turning towards market places and started performing before the markets in the busy market streets. This folk art is a unique theatrical form owing to the fact that it does not require any specific rigid performance space nor particular context or specialized audience. It is a typical itinerary art form, which is performed while the performers literally on move. In the process of movement, 'performance spaces' are created not in a continuum but in a fragmented manner. Therefore, the performers are not drawn from general public but belong to a particular community whose prime occupation is performance.

**Oggukatha** : *Oggu Katha* a distinct folk art form with a indigenous performance structure which narrates the caste myths of their patron community with a percussion instrument known as Oggu. This art form performed by the *Oggu Pujarulu* (minstrels) to their patron community, the *Kurumas* / *Gollas*. They perform different cast myths including *Mallanna Katha*, a caste myth. The performers

are better know as "*Oggu Pujarulu*" and the narration of the story or katha popularly known as *Oggu Katha*. The technique of *Oggu katha* performance includes dance, drama and music usually with a group of 4 to 6 performers. In other words it is one among the the total theatrical forms of Andhra Pradesh. *Oggu Pujaries* who narrates different kathas i.e. stories belongs to *Kuramas*, a sub-sect of pastoral community of shepherds usually known as "Yadavas." They believe that their origins belongs to Lord Krishna. According to oral evidences there are two major divisions amongst the community. The 'Gollas and the Kurumas'. The 'Gollas are again divided into twelve sub-sects . *Kurumas* are of two divisions.

The following table shows the division of sub-sects of both *Golla* and *Kuruma* communities.

<b>GOLLA</b>	<b>KURUMA</b>
<i>Erra Gollalu</i>	<i>Oggu Pujarulu</i>
<i>Mekala</i>	<i>Pathollu Unnollu</i>
<i>Paakanti Gollalu</i>	
<i>Kankaram</i>	
<i>Musthi Gollalu</i>	
<i>Domalollu</i>	
<i>Pua Gollalu</i>	
<i>Ve Gollalu</i>	
<i>ModatiGollalu</i>	
<i>Karna Gollalu</i>	
<i>Pedditi</i>	
<i>Gangeddu</i>	

**Source:** Dr. N.J.Bhikshu, A Theatrical Study of *Oggu Katha*: A Narrative Form of a Pastoral community of Andhra Pradesh.

While the *golla* community worships 'Lord Mallanna,' the *kurmas* worships' Lord Beerappa.[15] There is a belief among these performers that the first drop of sweat of Lord Siva became 'Birappa' and the second drop became 'Mallanna'. But the cast myth / story narrated by *Oggu* performers describes Mallanna, as son of Adireddi and Neelima Devi they are his descendants and belongs to the lineage of Mallanna and his Brahmin wife Bapana Ratnangi. Having born to a Brahmin mother they claim the status to perform the rituals in their own community temples.

*Oggu katha* performances survive mainly at two levels.

## 1. Performances at temples

### 2. Performances outside temples

Performing at temples as a legitimate right the thy perform Mallanna Katha, Beerappa katha on some auspicious days and festivals like *Sankranti*, *Shivaratri* and *Ugadi* at different temple premises. The major performances at temple is Mallanna Kalyanam. (*Mallanna* marriage) This ritual-performance takes place at different temples of Mallanna at large scale. As a part of performances outside temples they are performed as a part of household rituals. These performances takes place at different occasions. According to the performers they perform different rituals and performances at Jeeva (Human) kalyanam (marriage) to Deva (God) kalyanam (marriage). The other occasions are like a girl reaches puberty, marriages, *palu pattu*<sup>[16]</sup> (offering milk to God mallanna), *Bonalu*<sup>[17]</sup> (offering food(*prasada*) to god Mallanna, Beerappa) to mention few.

In changing times apart from the above two context the *Ogguktaha* is now being performed at a different context. The secular context of the performance where the performers are being requested to perform apart from the above mentioned situations. In this induced context the dramatization, rendition of text, performance found integral part as found in either at performances at temples and performances outside temples of course with slight variations.

**Text:** The Indo-European root of text comes from “tek”, which means “weave, or “to fabricate.”<sup>[18]</sup> Any theatrical performance is done on the Maxine of cautious enactment of a text, be it oral written or visual text. Enactment being the keynote to the theatre how texts are unfolded through enactment determines the nature of theatre on one hand and on the other designates the generic form to such theatre.

As per the texts of *pagativeshal* are concerned they are distinct in nature because of fragmentation that is a intrinsic to the text. Not all the texts are having such flexibility in theatre. Each text of *pagativeshalu* is a segment by itself as distinct *vesham* (role) and each *vesham*(role) can further be fragmented while it is being enacted. At least there are thirty two texts are there that referred to *pagativesham* texts by the performers of *pagativeshalu*.

Theme	Name of the text
Caste	<i>Somayalu-somidevamma</i> <i>Lambadi</i> <i>Bodibrahmana streela vesham</i> <i>Veerabahu</i> <i>Gollaboya</i> <i>Bhatraju</i> <i>Koya</i> <i>Komati-Lingabalija</i> <i>Devanga</i> <i>Karuvasomayaji</i> <i>Erukala</i> <i>Vaddi-uppara</i> <i>Jangama</i> <i>Kommadasari</i> <i>Budabukkala</i> <i>Mandula</i> <i>Gangireddula</i> <i>pamulollu</i>
Mythology	<i>Ardhanareeshwara</i> <i>Shakti</i> <i>Rambha-shukamuni</i> <i>sarada</i>
Religion	<i>Adibairagi</i> <i>Chattadivaishna</i> <i>Kasikavillu</i> <i>Haridasu</i>
Muslims	<i>Fakirsayeb</i> <i>Sidhi-Kanchani</i> <i>Chittipantulu-Pathanu</i> <i>attarusayeb</i>
Others	<i>Devarapette</i> <i>Pittladora</i>

These texts reflect different societal groups and their attitudes in a satirical way so as to make them aware of how each group is relevant to other. By manipulating these texts the performers are so sensitive to the audience that they traverse between the story realm and teller realm during the performance. This unique feature of the genre of the *pagativesham* makes it interesting even without a ritual context and a patron community to create a performance context and still survives.

When it comes to the texts of *Oggukatha* various text are performed. *Mallanna Katha*, *Beerappa Katha*, *Yellamma Katha*, *Desinguraju Katha*, *Nalla Pochamma katha*, *Yerra Pochamma katha*, *Pedarasi peddamma Katha*, *Mandhata Katha*, *Sarangadhara*, *Siva Kumara*, *Balagiri Raju*, *Sirithonda Maharaju*, *Harischandra* and *Neelapati Raju* to mention a few<sup>19</sup>. Most of these stories are connected with Lord Shiva or his devotees.

Being a cultural text i.e. a part of the rituals the text of *Oggukatha* is easily identified by the audience. In other words the text invariably performed in a given community it transforms the audience into devotees. This being the key to the performance of *Oggukatha* it survives mostly as a performance emerging from a community and being performed mostly for community.

The notion of context has two folded implication; one the context in which it is performed i.e. the physical context the other the context into which the play is created i.e., the social context. The physical context refers includes the place/places of performance(space),time. In most of the cases the texts being cultural texts unites the audiences and performers from the same community makes the performance survives.

One important observations is that the survival of *Pagativesham* is the creating the performance zone by the performers and the survival of *oggukatha* is only possible by performing the art form as a part of rituals.

To surmise it can be said that the social context which creates the performance to happen and played to the individual audience reciting the text in either in a sequential (*oggukatha*) or in a non sequential (*pagativesham*) order and force them to make them as their own. Therefore, the physical and social contexts play a significant role as the strategies of survival of these two folk performances.

## Footnotes :

1. *Pagativeshalu* the native term used in Telugu language for folk theatre performers of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana literally means day time performers.
2. *Oggukatha* the native term used in Telugu Language for the performers of a folk narrative in Telangana. The performers narrate the story with the help of an instrument called *Oggu*.
3. C.P. Brown, 1988, Dictionary of English to Telugu, New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, P.1116.
4. <http://www.hindu.com/1f/2004/09/10/stories/2004091002370200.htm>
5. Comprehensive History and Culture of Andhra Pradesh p 15 M. L. K. Murty, Dravidian University - 2003
6. *Chindu*, *Bainila*, *Maasti*, *Dakkali* are the sub-castes of *Madiga* community.
7. *Kuruma*, *Oggollu* and *Mandechulavallu* are sub-castes of *Golla* community.
8. Y.A Sudhakar Reddy, 1986, *Agrarian Relations in the Ceded Districts of Madras Presidency 1800-1857*, an unpublished PhD thesis submitted to Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, PP. 53-63.
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10. S. Gangappa 1991, "Pagativeshalu" in *Vagmaee*, Ed., by Laxminarayana, Telugu University, Hyderabad, P. 86.
11. S. Gangappa, *Op.Cit.* P-86.
12. Edgar Thurston, and K. Rangachari, 1909, (rpt 1987), *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol:II, New Delhi, Asian Educational Services. P-279.
13. B.S.L Hanumatha Rao, 1973, *Religion in Andhra*, Guntur, Wel-come Press Pvt. Ltd.,
14. A native term used in Telugu language for the place in a villages to conduct panchayat meetings.
15. Mallanna and Beerappa are the main protoganists in the cast myths narrated in *Oggukatha*.
16. A native term in Telugu language meaning offering to mild to God *Mallanna*. This comes as a part of the cast myth of *Mallanna Katha*.
17. A native term in Telugu language meaning offering food (prasada) to God.
18. Walter J.Ong(rpt), 1990, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing the Word*, London, Rutledge, P.13.
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