

Tracing the Nāmadhāri Naiks: Roots and Role

Pooja Naik

Research scholar, Department of Studies and Research in Ancient History and Archaeology, Karnataka State Open University, Muktha Gangothri, Mysuru.

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ABSTRACT:

This research article is about recently styled Nāmadhāri Naiks, originally belonging to a community of toddy tappers found predominantly in the Uttara Kannada district, who were transformed into Nāmadhāri Naiks in the early 20th century CE. This article aims to find out various aspects of the Nāmadhāri Naiks such as their other caste indicative words, origin, historical background and role by brief study. The primary and secondary sources that shed light on them have been examined for this. This study traces their deep root, assimilation, transformation, influence and role in the local history.

KEYWORDS:

Nāmadhāri Naiks, toddy tappers, Haḷēpaiks, Īḍiga, Dīvar, Billavas.

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Introduction:

Toddy tapping is one of the many ancestral occupations of ancient India and this community is spread over a wide geographical area across India. This community, which assimilated into the culture of its respective geographical environment, is identified by different names. The people of this profession

are also found in different geographical environments in Karnataka and are recognised by several names. The Nāmadhāri Naiks, who are the subject of this proposed research article, are also a part of this community, and they are mainly found in the coastal districts of Karnataka, namely Uttara Kannada, Uḍupi and Dakshina Kannada. They have made an impact on local history and have thus earned a significant place in the history of Karnataka. They are called Īḍigas in Mysore, Tumkur, Chitradurga, and Ballary districts, Billavas, Pōjāris, Īḍigas, Baidas, Murthēdars, and Kuḍiyas in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts, Nāmadhāris in Uttara Kannada.¹

Etymological meaning:

Looking into the background of the term Nāmadhāri, toddy tappers identified themselves as Nāmadhāri in the 1901 census, previously Haḷēpaiks and Dīvars.² They were mainly devil-worshippers, later turned into Vaishnavites.³ They worship lord Vēṅkataramaṇa of Tirupati and are followers of Rāmānujāchārya. Almost all the Śudra caṣṭes in North Kanara worship the same deities. Tātāchāri, residing at Tirupati, was the Guru of the Nāmadhāris, and Lokāchāri at Tirukolam in the Sagar in Shivamogga district was the Guru of the Trināmadhāris.⁴ Haḷēpaiks add the word naik to their names.⁵ Due to the process of Vedicization, to enhance their social prestige and the influences of the Ārya Īḍiga Saṅgha, they accepted the Narayana Guru as the Guru of the entire Īḍiga community at the Ārya Īḍiga conference in 1995, as he was born in the Tiyaṅ (toddy tappers) caṣṭe,⁶ and fought against casteism for social equality.

Toddy tappers are mostly known as Īḍiga in Karnataka. The root of the term Īḍiga is 'Īḍu', which means toddy (alcohol) 'Īḍiga' means toddy tapper.⁷ In the word Haḷēpaika, haḷē

means old and paika means foot, which indicates that earlier they served as the foot soldiers of former rulers, and were noted for their fidelity.⁸ Rice says, ‘haḷē payika or payaka, which would mean “old drinkers,” also given as the word’s origin. The occupation of toddy drawing may have suggested the latter.’⁹ Billavas is a contraction of Billinavaru which means bowmen, and the name was given as the men of that caste were formerly largely employed as bowmen in the army of the ancient native rulers of the district.¹⁰

About the term Dīvar or Haḷēpaiks Dīvar, the Madras manual of South Kanara says that ‘the inhabitant races of South India invaded the northern part of Ceylon before and after the Common Era. Malabar tradition tells that some of these Dravidians remigrated from Ceylon northwards to Travancore and other parts of the west coast of India, bringing with them the cocoanut or southern tree (tengina mara) and being known as ‘Tīvars’ (Islanders) or Iravars, which names have since been altered to Tiyars and Ilavars. This derivation would also explain the name ‘Dīvar’ or ‘Haḷēpaiks Dīvar’, borne by the same class of people in the northern part of the district and North Canara. In Manjarabad above the ghats, which, with Tuluva, was in olden days under the rule of the Humcha family, known later as the Bairasu Wodears of Karkaḷa, they are called ‘Dēvaru Makkaḷu,’ literally God’s children, but more likely a corruption of Tīvaru Makkaḷu,’ children of the Islanders.’¹¹ They possibly also appear to be connected with the Tiyans of Malabar, who are toddy tappers by profession.¹²

Origin:

Tracing the origin of Nāmadhāri Naiks or Haḷēpaiks is not an easy task. This is because people known by other names

similar to or belonging to their caste have been found in different geographical areas with different cultural backgrounds, making it difficult to be certain about their origins. Hence, there are various opinions about the origin of the Haḷēpaikas. Rather than saying that any of them is correct, all these facts related to the Haḷēpaikas belong to different periods and reveal their origin, migration and spread.

B. L. Rice says there are some curious coincidences between Haḷēpaikas and the Toḍas, a tribe of the Nilgiris.¹³ While talking about the language of the Toḍas, B. L. Rice furnished the statement from Dr. G. U. Pope's work "Brief Outline of the Grammar of the Toḍa Language" which says "The language seems to have been originally old Canarese and not a distinct dialect. The Toḍas were probably immigrants from the Canarese country, and have dwelt on the Nilagiris for about 800 (? at least 1800) years."¹⁴ The Canarese country mentioned here is the coastal districts of Karnataka, also called the Canara Districts by the English. The Haḷēpaikas and the Toḍas of Nilgiri are not only related in language similarities but also through the bow. The Haḷēpaikas are called Billavaru in Malēnādu and Tuḷunādu. Whereas the bow figures in some remarkable rites among the Toḍas.¹⁵ Both were skilled archers. Thus, the bow connects the both.

Even more intriguing is that attempts have been made to trace the origins of these Toḍas, similar to the Haḷēpaikas, to Ethiopians. In this regard, B. L. Rice furnished the statement from Colonel Marshall's work on the Toḍas, in which Colonel Marshall strongly believed a connection between the Dravidian Toḍas and the Ethiopian.¹⁶ The connection between the Toḍa and the Ethiopian is made through the bow. An event establishes the connection.¹⁷ Cambyses II (530-522 BCE), a Persian king sent spies to Ethiopia to investigate the existence of

the legendary “Table of the Sun”, to explore the strength of the Ethiopian kingdom for his further expedition with a flask of date wine, a purple cloak, a twisted gold necklace, armlets and an alabaſter box of incense. Having identified them as spies, the king of Ethiopia unstrung the bow, gave it to the spies, told them that he knew that the gifts were not sent to make friends but with bad intentions to attack Ethiopia and told them to convey his message to the Persian king where he advises when the Persians could draw a bow of that greatness as easily as he did, then dare to attack the long-lived Ethiopians. When enquired, he was only satisfied by date wine’s preparation among other gifts. With this argument, attempts have been made to trace the origin of the Haḷēpaiks or Billavas to a diſtant foreign base.

There is another ſtory¹⁸ regarding the origin of the Haḷēpaiks in which Narayana, a boy born in 1143 ſaka era in Kumārakſētra, was taken to the palace by the Vijayanagara king Vijaya Rama Bhupala’s son Gopala Krishna Raja. He was given a good education, later, a commander poſt in the army, and all the marks of royalty. When he reunited with his father, King Gopala Krishna put him in charge of the mint and gave the village Haḷēpaikas. His descendants on pilgrimage visited many places and Saṅkaṅṅa Nāyaka and Vēṅkaṭappa Nāyaka of Keladi. The Anegundi and Chandāvar sovereigns appointed them to honourable poſts. Thus, came to reside in Chandāvar (Honnāvar taluk) The ſtory refers to ſaka 1143, i.e., 1221 CE, but the kingdom of Vijaynagar was not founded till about 1336 CE. Kumārakſētra and Haḷēpaik places are also unidentified. However, it can be said that they could enliſt in good positions in Vijayanagara’s army and later also served the Keladi Nayakas.

As already explained, their origin and migration can also be underſtood from the meaning of Dīvars.¹⁹

Diaspora:

They spread to many parts of the Indian subcontinent. In terms of South India, the major states like Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, and Maharashtra naturally grow trees like date palm, coconut, palm, and Baiṅu (*Caryota urens*), which are essential for the production of toddy. Therefore, they are found in all these places identifying with different names.²⁰

Role:

They played a very significant role in the local politics. Assisted by an insurrection of the Halypecas (Haḷēpaiks) Keladi Venkatappa Nayaka defeated the queen Chēnnabhairādēvi of Gerusoppa (Honnāvar taluk in Uttara Kannada district) and Hāḍuvaḷḷi (Bhatkaḷ taluk in Uttara Kannada district) and established his power over her territory.²¹ Later, during the reign of Vēnkaṭappa Nāyaka, the landed gentries such as the Jogis of Kadri, and farmers of the Ghat of Kollur were adversely affected by his heavy tax revenue policy²² and were driven into poverty, on hearing the news of the death of Keladi Vēnkaṭappa, revolted against the Keladi authorities in 1629 CE, which spread from the Ghat to Bhatkal.²³ However, the revolt failed because those leagued against Keladi Virabhadra, the successor of Vēnkaṭappa were poor.²⁴ Further, the Haḷēpaiks landholders did not join the revolt as they were responsible for establishing the Keladi Nayaka's power. Even during the reign of Queen Chēnnammāji, Kāsaragod Timmaṅṅa, the leader of the Haḷēpaik, her trusted servant, helped her in capturing many forts.²⁵ Naturally, they were influential in the Keladi kingdom. They troubled the British when (1799) they captured Kanara.²⁶

Conclusion:

This article aims to find out various aspects of the

Nāmadhāri Naiks, the toddy tappers such as their origin, historical background and role by conducting a brief study. They are known as Nāmadhāris, Īḍiga, Haḷēpaiks, Billava, Dīvars etc. in different parts of Karnataka. Efforts have been made to trace their origins among the Toḍas of the Nilgiris, military commanders in the service of Vijayanagara, and among the natives of South India. They have spread to all the states of South India. They influenced the local history. They helped Venkatappa Nayaka to invade the kingdom of Chennabhairadevi, the queen of Gerusoppe and Hāḍuvaḷḷi. Even they helped Virabhadra Nayaka to suppress the revolt of the landlords and Tulu Palegars against the heavy taxation. Later, when the British captured Kanara, they troubled them. The article finds that there is a deep history about their origin, the base they spread was wide, and in the local political history, sometimes they were found to be biased, regardless of the wrongs of their favoured dynasty. Thus, this article conveys that every community, regardless of origin, caste, religion, region, community, and status, can contribute to the country's and society's progress as in the past, by leaning towards the righteous forever.

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Conflict of interest:

The Authors have no conflict of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.

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