CHAPTER V

RELIGION
Religion has played a very great part in the evolution of human civilization and culture. They evolved as a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe and grew as an organised system of beliefs that bound people to become a closeknit society.

The Gangaputras, who belong to the Hindu religion, worship a pantheon of Gods and Goddesses of both great and little traditions and they practice ancestral worship as well. The Gangaputras believe in various deities, ghosts and spirits that they guide them in every walk of their life. They are religious minded or more strictly speaking superstitious. They have a strong belief in the existence of deities, spirits and ghosts.

**DEITIES ASSOCIATED WITH GREAT TRADITION**

The Gangaputras community, like other Hindu communities, worship popular Gods like Brahma, Vishnu, Siva and Vigneshwara. And Goddesses like Lakshmi, Gourí, Saraswathi and their various avataralu
(incarnations). They also believe in the concepts of *karma* (Deed), *dharma* (Duty), *punya* (Spiritual merit), *papa* (Sin), *moksha* (Salvation), *naraka* (Hell) and *swarga* (Heaven). They make pilgrimage to Vemulawada - a holy place in Karimnagar district, Yadagiri - a holy place in Nalgonda district and also Tirupati - a holy place in Chittoor district. The theology of the great Hindu tradition is well spread among these people mainly through narration.

**DEITIES ASSOCIATED WITH LITTLE TRADITION**

The belief among the Ganganputras is that the villages are protected by the village God/Goddesses which are propitiated whenever the symptoms of the wrath of the village God/Goddesses are perceived by the villagers. The wrath of the village God/Goddesses is generally attributed to the epidemics like spread of fever, measles, cholera, the rampage of cattle deaths and successive failures of crop harvest and fish catch. It is very common that some of the women in the village go into trance under the spell of the village Goddess and warn the village people for not
having worshipped her. The 'possessed woman' even pinpoints some of the bad incidents occurred in the village and attributes them to the anguish of the village deity.

The Gangaputra fishermen propitiate local Goddesses, the Gangamma, Uppalamma, Poshamma, Mankalamma, Yellamma, Kanakadurgamma and so on. The villagers have constructed shrines/temples in the name of these Goddesses. Gangamma temple built with permanent masonry work near Madannapeta tank bund.

The Gangaputras celebrate Gangamma festival as a regular annual festival. The families of Gangaputra fishermen, at the time of their first fish catch in the beginning of a year, either in July or August go to the tank bund and perform 'puja' (prayer) for the good haul of fish catch throughout the year. They smear turmeric paste on certain portions of the canoe and also on fishing equipment like nets, mavu, topela. Then vermilion dots are put on those spots wherever turmeric paste is applied. They pray Gangamma and offer fruits, coconut, camphor and betal
leaves and finally sacrifice a goat. Individual families also sacrifice hens and prepare food there itself and enjoy the day by taking kallu (toddy) and also sarai (alcohol).

MAISAMMA

The Gangaputras and other villagers also perform puja (prayer) to Maisamma, in the same way as was described earlier. The Goddess Maisamma temple is built nearby the tank bund. After the puja an auspicious day and time will be selected to plough the land. The paddy seedlings are broadcasted in a ready-made nursery bed which is also prepared on an auspicious day. Transplantation of seedlings and reaping of the crop are also done on auspicious days. The first fruits of paddy (rice) are cooked with jaggary and milk and are offered to the ancestors of the family.

POSHAMMA

The villagers celebrate Poshamma Panduga (Poshamma festival) as a regular annual festival. This festival is celebrated in the month of March before the eighteenth day of the Telugu month Chaitra.
Masam. The villagers ceremonially bring the clay idols resembling Poshamma and take out a procession accompanied with music performed by Madigas (Harijans) and Pambalavadu (Gypsies who are fortune-tellers) at the lead. Idols made up of brass are also carried in procession while celebrating the festival. During this procession brass pots are carried over the heads. They are called Bonalu (containing an offering of food to a Goddess). After the procession the villagers fulfill their vows by offering new clothes and ornaments, besides vermillion, turmeric, fruits, betal leaves, betel nuts along with a coconut and fowl. They break coconut and sacrifice a fowl before the deity. The Pambalavadu sings some songs of abuse, which are said to have been pleasant to the deity, together with his rhythmic drum beats and bodily gestures to invoke the deity Poshamma. If a woman is tranced by and of the village Goddesses, she expresses satisfaction over the ritualistic procedure rightly performed. In case of any omissions, the tranced woman pinpoints those mistakes and abuse the efficient Pambalavadu who in turn would appologies for the mistakes committed.
The villagers invite relatives and friends to this festival. They entertain the guest by serving liquor. This is followed by goat sacrifice by the clan groups within the village.

Among the Goddesses, Poshamma is regarded as the most popular and powerful deity. She resides at the bottom of the trunk of the tree and is represented by nine stones in one line and a single stone representing her brother, Potaraaju. As soon as the desired wishes are fulfilled they propitiate her by sacrificing a cock or a he-goat. In addition to this the newly married couples in and around the village pay a visit to the abode of Poshamma and offer coconut for a happy and prosperous married life.

KANAKADURGAMMA

Kanakadurgamma is one among the powerful Goddesses. She resides at the outskirts of the village. The village panchayat decides a festive week in the name of this powerful Goddess. They make Chatimpu (an announcement) by a Madiga (Harijan) in the nook and corner of the village. This type of chatimpu is made
generally in the evening hours. The villagers decide to go to Vanabhojanam (picnic) at their convenient time in that particular week. The total family members and relatives go to the village outskirts, where the Kanakadurgamma temple is located. The villagers go to the temple and fulfill their vows by offering fruits, betel leaves, betel nuts along with separate puja samanu (prayer needs). They break the coconut and sacrifice a fowl before the deity. The villagers celebrate this festival every year regularly.

After the completion of puja, the family members prepare food there itself. They enjoy with liquor on that day.

The village people also worship other local deities like Uppalamma, Yellamma. Temples are constructed for these local goddess at the outer premises of the village. They are believed to prevent the evil from entering the village. Besides, some of them installed the idols of the deity at home which is believed to keep away the evil from their homes. They worship these deities in their homes by celebrating festivals on smaller scale. Uppalamma festival is
celebrated on the thirteenth day of August. Yellamma festival is celebrated before the eighteenth day of March.

The villagers invite their kin members to these festivals. They conciliate these deities by sacrificing a cock or a he-goat within the clan group.

**Sammakka and Saralamma Jatara (Or)**

**MEDARAM JATARA (A LOCAL FAIR)**

The Sammakka and Saralamma jatara is celebrated in the thick forest area, Tadwai near Etunagaram in Warangal district. The jatara is celebrated once in three years. These deities Sammakka and Saralamma are considered as mother and daughter. This jatara is celebrated in the month of February. The people from various places come to the jatara one day before the jatara starts. The people treat Sammakka and Saralamma as powerful deities. The Koya (a tribal group of people in Andhra Pradesh) people celebrate the puja (prayer). It is they who only have the right to perform puja.
The holy jatara, Sammakka and Saralamma, is celebrated as a mark of their reward towards their faiths and traditional beliefs. This is one among the famous jataras in Warangal district. During the first day of jatara a koya boy will carry a bamboo cane personified as Sammakka, with traditional music and amusement. The personified deity Sammakka will be placed on the holy dias (locally termed as Gadde). And the next day her daughter Saralamma will be placed beside Sammakka in the same way. The traditional jatara is attended by huge crowds from different corners of the districts around. The people who have had invoked the deities will offer jaggery to their proportionate weight. The people will also offer coconuts and camphor to the holy deities. They sacrifice goats and cocks in front of the deities. The people will stay there for three to four days and will return back with a festive enjoyment. Their children will also be named after these holy deities like Saraiah, Sambaiah, Sammakka, Sarakka. Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation will run special
buses during this jatara named as jatara special. This jatara runs under the control of Endowment Department.

The researcher has interviewed a cross section of pilgrims for the cause their visit to the deity and their sacrifice. The immoalate are said to have been the fulfilment of various types of mokkulu (vows). The mokkulu are the wishes or prayers of the devotees to mitigate their difficulties and ailments or even for the prosperity, success in their lives. While they take a vow for a particular cause, they make mudupulu (a pinch of turmeric rice and money packed in a piece of white cloth) and they will also specify the manner in which the vow is going to be paid to the deity. Some devotees offer a fowl or a goat. Some offer a specific number of fowls without being sacrificed to the deity, the fowls are left free at the temple. Some will tonsure their heads and offer hairs to the deity. After the holy dip of water, the barren women prostrate before the Goddess and immerse fully in praying for her children and slowly would get into the state of unconsciousness. In their sleep,
as it is believed, the deity will come in a dream and bless them. Such women are reported to have been blessed with children and they name the children after the name of Goddesses. Most of the devotees present jaggery which is equivalent to their weight. Most of the pilgrims offer money in small amounts ranging from one rupee to ten rupees and rarely more than ten rupees. But some people offer gold and silver ornaments also once if their own are fulfilled.

FESTIVALS

The Gangaputras community performs many festivals. Some of the important festivals celebrated are as follows.

1. **UGADI (TELUGU NEW YEAR'S DAY)**

Ugadi is celebrated on Chaitra Suddha Padyami (March-April) by each and every family whether rich or poor. As it is supposed to be anniversary of the creation or the first day of the Satya-Yuga, great sanctity is attached to this festival. This is a great day of joy and happiness, concord, affection and goodwill. There is a strong belief that this
day's happenings forebode and colour the course of events in the entire year ahead. People naturally like pleasant things to happen to them on this day so that they may be happy throughout the year. Hence, they take care to keep themselves and others in a happy mood on the Ugadi day. A child's demand, reasonable or unreasonable, is met though grudgingly lest the family should be burdened with a weeping child throughout the year. Every effort is made to avoid tears and sad thoughts on this day. A sincere attempt is made to maintain a clean mind free from foul thoughts and ill-will towards other.

The years in Telugu calendar are not mere numbers like 1990, 1991, etc., with no significance and no end. They recur in a cycle of sixty years and the year's possibilities can be foreseen with reference to its performance in the past cycles. Whatever be the indication of the name of New Year, it must be properly invited and inaugurated. All that the people can do is to be happy and thankful to the Lord when a year arrives or be cautious and pray to the Lord for his/her protection when a year comes.
Ugadi is also an occasion for the critical appraisal of the achievements during the closing year. Everyone, everywhere and everything is made to appear happy and joyful. All exultation pervades the occasion. The advance preparations for this most important common festival are, getting the houses, white-washed and providing every member of the family with new clothing depending upon the financial means of the family.

All the persons get up early in the morning, clean the houses, decorate the floor inside the house and in front with rangavalli (ornamental lines, figures and designs drawn with rice flour), take oil bath and put on new clothes. As this is an occasion for putting on new clothing, children of the poor families are the happiest at the arrival of this festival. It need hardly be said that Ugadi is the festival of the villagers. The housewives in the villages under study get up earlier than three O' clock in the morning and grind purnam (a paste of dhal and jaggery) in large quantities. The quantity so prepared on that day would not only last for that
Panchangā Sravanaṁ in the evening is universally observed by the rich and poor alike in all villages. Hindus gather in the temple in the villages. The new panchanām (almanac) is worshipped and read by the village purohita (priest). The general influence of the planets during the new year over the local Gods, men, cattle, crops, fishing, diseases, etc., and on particular individuals are given out by the purohita. The presiding deity, during the year, over wind, rain, crops, cattle, health, etc., are also announced together with the effects and percentages of yield of crops of different varieties.

2. SRI RAMA NAVAMI

Sri Rama Navami is celebrated on Chaitra Suddha Navami (March-April). Rama, the God-king was born to Dasaratha, the king of Ayodhya (Kosala Kingdom) on the ninth lunar day in the bright fortnight of the month of Chaitram (March-April) in the Punarvasu lunar asterism. This festival is the anniversary of that auspicious day. On this day Rama and his consort Sita and his brothers Lakshmana, Bharata, Satrughna
and his devoted Bhakta Anjaneya are invoked, Sita and Rama are worshipped according to prescribed rites.

This festival is celebrated with pomp and gaiety for nine days. The entire expenditure on this festival is made by the villagers together by collecting the funds and operated by village panchayat. The celebration begins nine days before the festival. On the ninth day the celebration of marriage of the holy couple the epic hero Sri Rama and his consort Sita. The purohit (brahmin priest) is specially called for to officiate the ritualistic procedure at the temple. All the families in the village visit the temple and make their offerings consisting of coconuts, camphor and battis (scented sticks) to the God. The same day the holy couple is taken out for uregimpu (procession) in the village during the night with musical band. Every household offers a coconut and fruits to the God and his consort when the procession goes through the streets on the decorated bullock cart.
NAGULA CHAVITI

Nagula Chaviti is observed either on Sravana Suddha Chaviti (July-August) or Kartika Suddha Chaviti (October-November). A person whose father, mother or any other relative happens to have died by snake bite is specially instructed to perform this ceremony, part of which consists offering milk to snakes, with the object of propitiating them. In Warangal district it is performed only in Sravanam (August). The general observance of this festival which is common to all castes of Hindus irrespective of social status, is to observe the day as a festive day, clean the residences and have oil bath, wear clean clothing to go to ant-hills in which the snakes are supposed to live and offer naivedyams. A small quantity of the earth of the ant-hill is taken home and the figures of cobras are drawn with that earth on the walls of their houses invariably on either side of entrance. Sisters give a little of that earth to their brothers according to an old tradition with the belief that the gift is equal to the gift of nectar.
4. **VINAYAKA CHAVITI**

Vinayaka Chaviti is a common Hindu festival celebrated by the rich and the poor of the Hindu community. The scale of celebrations depends on the social status of the family. This is celebrated on the fourth day of the waning Moon in the month of **Bhadrapadam** (August-September).

Ganesha is the Indian God of wisdom. All sacrifices and religious ceremonies, all serious compositions in writing and all worldly affairs of importance are begun by pious Hindus with an invocation to Ganesha, a word composed of *Isa*, the governor or leader, and *gana*, a company (of deities). He is represented as a short fat figure of yellow or red colour having four hands and the head of an elephant with a single tusk. He is the son of Parvathi, who is supposed to have formed him from the scurf of her body. There are many versions to account for the formation of his head, one of which is that Lord Siva beheaded him for disobeying his orders but was requested to restore him to life, which was done only by the addition of a sleeping elephant’s head. He is represented
as riding a rat. He is the remover of all vighnams (obstacles) and is one of the most popular of Hindu deities. He is the patron of learning and is said to have written the Mahabharatha to the dictation of the Sage Vyasa. The Ganesha or Vinayaka Chathurdhi is observed in commemoration of the birthday of Ganesha.

Rich and poorer classes in each home worship an earthen image of Lord Ganesha (Ganapati). Special preparations such as undrallu, kudumulu that are supposed to be the favourites of Ganesha are prepared and offered. On a subsequent day that is suitable to each family, the image is taken to a well, worshipped there and immersed in water. On that day every one avoid seeing the Moon, to safeguard themselves against unmerited accusations during the subsequent twelve months under a superstitious belief. If, by chance, they see the moon, they listen to the legend of Sathrajit in which Lord Krishna was subjected to an accusation for having seen the reflection of the Moon that day in the cup of milk he was taking. By doing so, they are supposed to be absolved of the evil consequences.
5. **BRATHAKAMMA PANDUGA**

Brathakamma panduga locally pronounced as Bathakamma Panduga is celebrated for 9 days from Asvivuja Sudha Padyami to Navami (September-October). It is said that a Vaisya couple had a son, and a daughter named Brathakamma. After the marriage Brathakamma went to her mother-in-law's house. Her brother and her brother's wife were with her parents, whom Brathakamma had to leave behind consequent on her going to her mother-in-law's house. She and her husband were invited by her parents for Mahalaya Amavasya i.e., Bhadrada Bahula Amavasya (September-October). Brathakamma was sent by her husband to her parent's house, promising that he would join her at her parent's house for Dasara festival i.e., on Asvivuja Sudha Dasami (September-October). A couple of days after her arrival at her parent's house, the parents had to go to a neighbouring village. Brathakamma and her sister-in-law were invited for an auspicious function by the neighbours. She wore one of her sister-in-law's saree for the occasion and it got soiled due to smearing of sandal phaste, turmeric powder etc. This was misconstrued by the sister-in-law
as wanton soiling of the saree by Brathakamma. The heartless sister-in-law induced her thoughtless husband to do away with Brathakamma failing which she threatened she would divorce him. Brathakamma’s brother took her out during the absence of the parents on the pretext that there was an urgent call for her from her husband, killed her in the midst of a thick forest, buried her by the side of the path and returned home. Brathakamma manifested herself on her grave as a flower tree. Her sister-in-law made the parents believe that she was sent to her husband on an urgent call. But a day before dasami, her husband started for the mother-in-law’s house according to the previous promise. On the way he was very much attracted by the flower tree on his wife’s grave and when he attempted to pluck out flowers to present them to his beloved wife, a voice came forth saying

"Muttaku muttaku mavaru
ముతతకు ముతతకు మావరు
muttaboku mavaru
ముతతబుకు మావరు
papishti vadina champinchindi
పపిష్టి వడిం చంపించింది
kirathakannayya champadu"
మిరాతాకాంనాయయా చంపాడు
meaning "touch me not my Lord, touch me not. The sinful sister-in-law has got me killed and the heartless brother has killed me".

Unable to make out anything from it, he straight went to his mother-in-law's house where he was stunned to hear that his wife was sent for by him and that she had been already taken to his house. Recapitulating the words he heard on his way, he led the parents-in-law to the spot where the strange flower tree stood. When his mother-in-law tried to pluck out a flower, she was warned by the voice from the tree meaning "touch me not my mother, touch me not. The sinful sister-in-law has got me killed and the heartless brother has killed me".

The culprits there upon confessed the truth. In her memory an image of Brathakamma is prepared annually by every Hindu family with a variety of flowers. It would be more appropriate to say that huge heaps of several varieties of flowers are piled upon a big plank, plate or tray representing Brathakamma and worshipped. Woman dance round the heap in a circle singing the life of Brathakamma. As
Brathakamma reached her parent’s home happily on the day prior to Padyami and her husband started on Navami, this panduga (festival) commences on Padyami, celebrated day after day with great pomp and devotion till Ashtami. On the ninth day heaps of flowers of maximum size are arranged on plates, planks or trays and are taken in procession to a nearby tank, if there is one, or to a well. There the container of the flower heaps is taken to deep water and slowly removed from under the flower heaps leaving them to remain floating intact on the water or floating down a stream for several days afterwards, presenting a pleasant sight.

In some families, Brathakamma panduga is preceded by Baddemma panduga. It is of nine days duration from Bhadrapada Bahula Sathami to Amavasya (September-October). A platform is made of mud with as many pits in it as there are members in the family each pit capable of holding a small quantity of rice. Each member puts into the pit allotted to him or her a small quantity of rice and worship, offerings and singing continues for nine days. On the last day
appalu (a preparation with rice and jaggery) are prepared with the rice so collected in the pits adding jaggery. Baddemma is taken in procession and immersed in a tank or a well.

6. **DASARA**

Vijaya Dasami (Dasara) is one of the important festivals of Hindus. The significance of this festival is “Ayudhapuja” as it is colloquially known and it is even termed as “Vijayostava” to commemorate the victory in the war field. This festival is celebrated every year during **Ashweja Masam** (October-November).

In Mahabharatha the epic story of Pandavas and Kauravas, there is a small episode about this festival. At the time of “Agnathavasam” (living incognito), the Pandavas needed secrecy life. Before they entered to the Viratanagaram, their weapons were hidden on the **Jammi Vruksham** (Minosa Suma tree). After completion of their secret life, the war broke out between Kauravas and Virata Raju. At that time Pandavas took their weapons for getting ready to attack Kauravas. Before entering to the war field,
they have celebrated "Ayudhapuja" for their weapons and entered into the war field and have won the war.

Vijayadasami is common to all Hindus irrespective of caste or status. Besides the usual cleaning of residences, bath and wearing of new clothes. The agriculturists and others of traditional occupations such as Gangaputras worship the implements which they generally use in their profession, then follows the goat sacrifice of clan groups within the village. They enjoy the festival and entertain themselves by drinking liquor and also by inviting their kin members. In the evening hours the village people interact with each other, they go to the temple to collect the "Jammi" leaves from the Brahmin. They believe that these leaves bring safety to their lives. On that day in the evening hours people see the Palapitta (Jay) as they treat that this bird indicates to shows the peace in their lives.

7. DEEPAVALI

Deepavali is also called Naraka Chaturdasi and is celebrated on Asvitha Bahula Chathurdasi (October-November). All Hindus believe that Lord
Krishna along with his consort Satyabhama killed the Rakshasa Narakasura and returned home early in the morning on this day. Being an occasion of rejoicing and welcoming the Lord, elders as well as youngsters get up very early in the morning, take oil bath and celebrate the happy occasion with fire works on a scale suited to the purse of the family. It is a day of festivity with special food preparations and worship. There will be display of fire works in the night also. The families light lamps in their pials compound walls and roofs.

In Warangal district, Deepavali is the most important festival, both to the rich and poor. People of all castes and classes invariably invite their sons-in-law and daughters. The former are presented with new clothes. Early in the morning all the members of the family take oil bath, wear new clothes and prepare themselves for vathula harathi (wave-offering with lighted cotton wicks dipped in ghee or oil). The women first offer the harati to a cow after worshipping it with pasupu and kumkuma. Then commences the merriest function of the day. Each girl and woman offer harathi to every male member of the family,
irrespective of relationship and age and receives presents in the form of cash and jewels made of silver and gold. On the same night the villagers invite the Brahmin priest and celebrate the Vratham (a religious vow) with their relatives and friends.

8. **SANKRANTHI**

Makara Sankranthi or Uttarayana Sankranthi is the sun's entrance into the sign capricornus (Makara), which is identified with the Uttarayana or return of the sun to the north or to the winter solstice. The festival marks the return of the sun to the northern hemisphere. It is observed from 13th to 15th of January. Generally all Hindus observe it. First day is Bhogi, second day Sankranthi and the third Kanuma Panduga, known in the rural parts as Pasula Panduga (festival of animals, generally bulls). This festival is dedicated to the glorification of agriculture. In the matter of preparations for the day the various castes invariably prepare bread with cholam flour and sajja flour, if available, both mixed with gingily. For the special curry (kalapu koora) on this occasion all available vegetables are mixed and cooked together.
In these villages people wash their cows and bullocks and their bodies are decorated with designs, horns are coloured and bells of different sizes are tied to the horns and necks. During this festival "Gangi-reddula Vandlu" the trained and decorated bulls and cows along with their tamers come to the village and perform some scenes of Ramayana having their bulls played the roles of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita. Every household offers Dakshina (small amount of money or kind as presentation) to them for the pleasant praises of those tamers.

9. MAHASIVARATRI

Mahasivaratri falls on the fourteenth day of the waning Moon in Magham (February-March). According to the observances of the followers of Lord Siva, the festival day of Mahasivarathri is sacred of all the days and on this day. It is believed people would be devoid of their sins and their desires are fulfilled at the same time the people are believed to unite with Siva and attain heavenly life after death. If the people pray of Siva, on the fourteenth day of Magham, it is believed that they would come out of all the sins and attain moksha (the heavenly abode).
All Hindu communities observe this festival in Warangal district. On Magha Bahula Chatturdasi, devotees fast the whole day, go to Siva temple for abhishekam (religious rite of pouring sacred water on the image of a deity), worship and offer coconuts, fruits, panakam (jaggery solution tastefully spiced) and which they take as prasadam (eatable distributed after offering to a deity), observe jagarana (keeping awake the whole night), attend purana kalakshepan (spending time in listening to sacred legends), harikatha (legend of exploit of some God related with singing classical music and dance) or dramas with a theme of Siva. The next day morning they break their fast after a bath and puja. During the second day also they desist from sleep. One general practice is that this festival is observed not at their residences but at a holy place of Siva.

10. HOLI (KAMADAHANAM)

The festival Holi commences on Palguna Suddha Triodasi (February-March) and culminates on Bahula Padyami (February-March) though the actual Holi is celebrated on the Full Moon Day.
One legend which is current is that Manmadha was burnt to ashes by the fire that emerged from the third eye of Lord Siva when he opened it in wrath for having been disturbed from his penance.

According to Vaishnava Puranas it was the anniversary of a great feat of heroism which Krishna performed by destroying a she-demon named Sankhashuda, Hori, Holi, Hola, Holika, Medha and Dhunda. The most probable supposition, however, is that it was set apart to celebrate the return of spring - to typify the general influence of spring upon both the animate and inanimate creation and to express the feelings spread by the season and the delight which the revival of nature sent forth. The festival dates from Vedic times. According to a legend, Holika was the name of a she-demon who used to devour children that were supplied to her by turns from each family in the places where she held sway. It so happened that one day, an old woman’s only grandson was to be the victim and she was lamenting her bitter misfortune. A holy mendicant happened to pass her door and hearing of the cause of her sorrow contemplated for a time and then said that Holika could be killed and her grandson
saved, if Holika could be made to hear vile and obscene expressions, for it was destined that this alone could kill her. The whole village took this holy man at his word, and when Holika came for her prey next day she was met by such a chorus of vile and filthy abuse that she dropped down and died, as was prophesied. This event is supposed to be commemorated by the festival, and this obscene language used by some youths generally at the Holi festival is believed to have originated from this legend.

This is observed in these villages by all communities irrespective of economic status. This is more a public function than a domestic function. The main function is on Purnima (full moon) which is called Kamanna Punnama or Kamanna Panduga (festival of cupid). A pit is dug in the customary places in the middle of the streets and wood and other combustible articles are collected three days in advance. An earthen image of a female is placed in the centre of the pit and some kind of puja is performed. The gathered material is placed all round the image. A picture of Kama, son of Lord Vishnu disturbing the
penance of Lord Siva is taken round in procession and brought back and burnt after setting fire to the material in the pit, after the contents of the pit are practically burnt, half burnt sticks are taken home and oil lamps are lit with it at home. Coloured water is commenced on a small scale that very night and increases till it ceases by the next noon.

RITUAL AND BELIEF ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The life cycle ceremonies like birth, name giving, puberty, marriage and death are always accompanied by elaborate rituals and worship. Child at the time of birth should not have its mother's placenta around the neck. If at all it happens, it is believed that child's birth would definitely cause misfortune to the maternal uncle (mother's brother). He is restrained from seeing the child until a ritual to mitigate the evil affect is performed at the time of name giving ceremony.

Another belief also persists among the Ganga-putras. It pertains to the child first getting his lower incisor teeth followed by other types of teeth.
If a child gets abnormal size of the upper teeth, it is then believed that the child brings ill-fate to the maternal uncle. In such a case, the maternal uncle is restrained from seeing the child until a special ritual is performed to ward off the effects in this regard. A small quantity of oil is taken in a container such as a bowl, then the maternal uncle is asked to see the image of the child's face in the stand-still oil medium.

CHETABADI (WITCH CRAFT)

The Gangaputras also have beliefs in magical powers that made them to approach the Bhoota Vaidyudu (Witch Doctor). Bhoota Vaidyudu always worship Mahankali or Shakti Devata (Powerful deity) to acquire special powers. They are ordained to lead a special mode of life. They are well versed in secret knowledge and recite a special formula of Mantras (incantations). They are capable of directing injurious magic on others especially on their enemies and can also revert or ward off the evil magic performed by others. This evil or injurious magic is otherwise locally called as chetabadi, the aim of which is mainly to create problems and kill the enemy.
If a man faces any problem he will visit the Devudu Chepputa woman tranced by the God or Goddesses who foretell. The ailed have to pay Rs.2/- or offer some quantity of rice to the women. Then the tranced woman will reveal the cause of the sufferings. She will also suggest the way to lead a happy life by offering prayers and paying tributes to the God/Goddess. The ailed will pray before the God/Goddess by chanting the following. "I have committed a mistake, please pardon me. I will fulfill your demands, please recover my goodwill".

TAYATTU KATTINCHUTA (TALISMAN TIBING)

The Gangaputras' children, generally of 10 years age fall into the prey of malevolent spirits. Then, they do not take food and suffer from loose motions. Such symptoms reveal that the child has fallen into the prey of spirits. Then the parents bring a witch-doctor. The witch-doctor recites some incantations in low voice and simultaneously beat with neem twings on the back of the child. Then he prepares a Tayattu (Talisman) with a copper foil or Lakka (lac) and ties it to the neck of the child.
DISTI TEEYUTA (WARDING-OFF EVIL EYE)

Gangaputras practice the disti teeyuta (warding-off evil eye) as a very frequent and common practice. (The belief in the disti (evil) is rooted both in the expressiveness and uncanniness of the look). If a person feels jealous of one's property, progress, good health and the like, the jealousy affects the health, wealth or progress of the person concerned. To counteract such jealous and bad wishes, a ritual practice called disti teeyuta is performed. If the health of a person is severely affected, a woman generally takes common salt and jediginjalu (seeds of semecars anacardium) and waves them thrice in a clock-wise direction around the face of the affected and finally throws them into the hearth. The Gangaputras believe that the evil eye is ward off as soon as the material thrown is burnt.

WORSHIP OF ANCESTORS

Gangaputras also worship their ancestors to seek blessings and protection. They will install the portraits of their ancestors in the family. These
Gangaputras perform ceremonies in the name of their ancestors. Generally in the family - the head of the family - is eligible to lead the offerings at prayer. In case the father is dead the ritualistic practices are shouldered by the eldest son. They perform a memorial services to the departed soul on Sankranthi (Pongal) which is also designated as Peddalaku biyyamichuta (the festival day for the worship of elders). It is felt that the communication would prevail between the worshipper and their ancestors on this day through elaborate prayers. The worshipper keeps the objects meant for special offering such as sacred food - cooked rice, sweet dishes, ghee, some fruits, betel leaves and betel nuts - and then offer a long prayer by lifting incense sticks. The family members follow the family head/the elder son in this type of ceremonies.

The social functions of ritual sacrifices offered to the ancestor spirits is that their solemnity and collective expression are conducive to reaffirm and strengthen the family solidarity. As Radicllf-Brown (195
puts it, they give stability to social structure by giving
solidarity and continuity to the lineage-past, present and
future. The Gangaputras remember and venerate the dead in
order to show reverence to the latter, and seek their
blessings and protection. In short, the feelings of the
living towards their deceased relations are ambivalent,
compound of love and affection and fear.

BELIEF AND SPIRITS

The Gangaputras believe in the existence of soul
which is supposed to be present in all human beings.
Soul is the principle of the life which exists in the
form of light or air. According to them dissatisfied
souls, especially of those people who die of drowning in
the water, falling from the tree-top and suicide, in
general become ghosts. With regard to the soul, they
believe that soul after its departure from the body
wanders round the house of the departed for a few days
and then goes to the ancestral world. After the comple-
tion of the required obsequies, the soul either goes to
hell or heaven depending on its sin or righteousness.
The concept of sin, righteousness, hell and heaven held
by the Gangaputras are much similar to those of the surrounding castes. They presume that the dead who did good deeds continue to live when they go to heaven and those who lead an immoral life during their life time go to hell where they are punished by Yamadharma Raju (God of death).

They also cherish a belief in several non-human spirits. The spirits are associated with particular geographical locations such as thick groves, the places where unnatural deaths occur, huge trees like palmyra, pipal and banyan and abandoned places. Spirits are known by various names such as Dayyam (ghost), Gali (Omen), Butam (spirit), etc. Spirits do not seem to have particular shape but are capable of assuming the shapes of various living things at different times. They even believe that the spirits generally resemble human beings. People who are haunted by spirits are capable of seeing them. The most usual way in which the spirits make their presence is felt, is by causing disturbances of health like convulsions, epilepsy, rheumatic and neurological problems and vomiting of blood. A person who gets frightened is liable to get struck by spirits. Certain houses are haunted to such degree that nobody
dares to live in them. These spirits are believed to be generally very fond of ruins. The spirits are believed to be fond of darkness and are terrified by light. The burning of splinters, therefore, indicates keeping them away from human beings.

MAGIC AND MEDICINE

Persistant difficulties, uncommon diseases and frequent deaths turn the thoughts of the Gangaputras towards supernatural interferences and are sought to be remedied by magico-religious practices. However, most of the common diseases like cold, head-ache, fever, stomach-ache, cough, jaundice, etc., are mostly treated with herbal medicines.

The diseases like persistant head-aches, inter-mittent fevers, continued stomach disorders, repeated abortions, menstrual disorders, evil-eye, small pox and children's green diarrhoea, etc., are attributed to supernatural forces. In all such cases medical cures as well as propitiation of the 'unseen powers' are simultaneously made. Similarly calamities like the failure of crops, total blindness, repeated failures in undertakings, deaths of children or cattle in quick succession
and too many deaths in the family within a short period are attributed to the misfortune and the work of malevolent supernatural forces.

Sickness attributed to natural cause are cured by administering folk medicine by any one who has the requisite knowledge. A patient may treat himself or get the treatment from a man who knows herbs of medical value.

They strongly believe on the village God/Goddess that they come to the rescue during their difficulties. A patient often may treat himself or get the treatment from a man who knows herbs of medical value. On the other hand, the Gangaputras resort to their universal remedy of divination, if their diseases are not cured by oral administration or external application of herbal medicines. They strongly believe that divination can cure ailments not curable by medicines. The common and the professional shamans divinate the cause of mysterious diseases and suggest the magical remedies.

The portrayal of social, economic and political aspects does not fit to comprehend clearly the multilingual life of the Indian society. A reflection of
religious attitudes should also be focussed. If not the meaning would be different. Gangaputras, the inhabitants of the study area, are no exception to this general rule.

The study of Gangaputras would help us to explore and understand many such communities which are still to be studied.