



# IMPORTANCE OF MINORITY KURUBAS IN THE QUINQUENNIAL FETE OF VALAGEREHALLI

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## Abstract

The state of Karnataka has a tradition of *Jaathre*, (fete) which is celebrated time to time at various locations. These fetes are organized by villages once in two, three, five or ten years. Valagerehalli has its Beera Lingeshwar fete *quinquennially*. In this article I would like to bring to the notice of the reader a distinct feature i.e., that though the whole village has majority *Vokkaliga Gowda* community members, the minority *Kuruba* community takes prime importance besides the vegetarian *Lingayat* community has to offer the first sheep or goat to be sacrificed at the fete. *Heergars*, who are members of Kuruba community, a minority in the village to perform all the ceremonies of the fete. The quinquennial fete begins only after consulting the *Heergars* and their availability for the ceremony. No *Brahmin* priest is involved in any of the ceremonial or worship procedures of the fete right from temple to the ground of sacrificial ceremony.

**Key words:** *Anathiamma, Heergars, Are-baditha, vokkaliga, quinquennial, Beeralingeshwara*

## Geographical location

"Anathe Kere" is a lake located in the Hassan district of Karnataka, India. The name "Anathe Kere" translates to "Elephant Lake" in Kannada. This lake is known for its scenic beauty and serves as a water resource for the surrounding areas. It contributes to the local biodiversity and attracts visitors for its peaceful ambiance.<sup>1</sup> Hassan district is well-known for its historical sites, temples, and natural beauty, and lakes like Anathe Kere add to the charm of the region. Anathi Kere (anathi lake/ tank) is surrounded by important villages such as Kodihalli, Anathi, Beechangondanahalli, Valagerehalli and Honnanakoppal at the tail of the lake. Anathi kere plays an important role in the lives of all the villages as it is the water source for farming as well as religious activities of the surrounding and dependent villages mentioned above.

## Valagerehalli

Valagerehalli is a small Village/hamlet in Channarayapatna Taluk in Hassan District of Karnataka State, India with its *13.0548 Latitude and 76.4938 Longitude*, 800 meters above Sea level.<sup>2</sup> It comes under Valagerehalli Panchayath, located 42 KM towards East from District head quarters Hassan, 146 KMs from State capital Bangalore. With its postal head office is Nuggihalli having the Pin code 573131.<sup>3</sup>

## Population

According to 2011 Census Details, Valagerehalli Village had a total population of 1747 and houses numbering around 476. Female Population was 51.3%. Village literacy rate was 72.7% and the Female Literacy rate was 33.4%.<sup>4</sup> Slight improvement is seen in the literacy rate of the people in comparison to 2011. More over migration has been a problem faced by this village.

| Census Parameter                      | Census Data    |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| Total Population                      | 1747           |
| Total No of Houses                    | 476            |
| Female Population %                   | 51.3 % ( 896)  |
| Total Literacy rate %                 | 72.7 % ( 1270) |
| Female Literacy rate                  | 33.4 % ( 584)  |
| Scheduled Tribes Population %         | 0.0 % ( 0)     |
| Scheduled Caste Population %          | 1.8 % ( 32)    |
| Working Population %                  | 34.7 %         |
| Child(0 -6) Population by 2011        | 134            |
| Girl Child(0 -6) Population % by 2011 | 50.7 % ( 68)   |

## The Genesis

The **Beera Linga** deity was in a village called **Sannakkibagilu, beyond Hassan** and came in the dream of a Lingayat devotee instructing him to celebrate his coming to Valagerehalli as a Jaathre (fete) and build a small temple in his name. Thus a tiny temple in soil (mud) was built for Beera Lingeswar which served the people for almost a century. Later people decided to build a decent and strong temple for the Beera Lingeswar.<sup>5</sup> Today stands a wonderful temple that is strong and beautiful besides becoming a symbol of spirituality as well as pride as thousands of devotees gather for the fete. Awesome fact of the temple is that this temple is dedicated to the deity of the Kurubas and not Vokkaliga Gowdas. Even then every family in the village, the majority Vokkaliga Gowdas too contributed for the construction of a magnificent temple for Beera Lingeswar and consider it a pride.<sup>6</sup>

Mr . Kenge Gowda, one of the committee members for the quinquennial fete from Valagerehalli says, “this fete began around three or four generations before, may be around 300- 400 hundred years ago. It was the only fete of its kind in this locality. But of recent decades other villages have followed the suit in competition with us.” Earlier, this fete was organized annually. But as the families grew more and migration took place<sup>7</sup>, families began to settle far from this village whose clan deity remained the same. It was difficult for them to travel either by foot or on bullock carts from 150-300 miles every year with their family and the sacrificial goat. Hence the elders of the village decided to host or organize the fete once in three years. As of now it is settled for quinquennial as it is convenient and serves the purpose of the people well.<sup>8</sup>

## Beera Lingeswara Deity

“Beera Lingeswar is the deity of the Kurubas and not of the Gowda community” reveals Mr. Kenge Gowda in his interview. He also affirms that throughout Karnataka wherever there is Beera Lingeswar temple, it is dedicated to the Kuruba community. Beera Lingeswar is the deity that blesses the shepherds to prosper. Hence Kurubas

only have to do the pooja (worship), they have the privilege of handling all the ceremonial aspects of sacrifice. They are the first ones to be consulted when preparation for the fete begins.

### God of the Clan

For the quinquennial fete at this village people come from as far as 150-300 miles. Hence the village elders need to keep this in mind when planning for the quinquennial fete. Many Vokkaliga Gowdas<sup>9</sup>, whose house deity / clan deity (Mane Devaru/ Kula Devaru) is god **Beeralingeshwara**, the replica of Shiva in person. Since Beera Lingeshwar is the family deity of only Kuruba community members, most of the Kurubas travel a lot to take part in the fete.

### Anathiamma (goddess Lakshmi of Anathi)

Anathi is one of the neighboring villages located at the south west of Valagerehalli. As mentioned above the Anathi Kere (Anathi lake) plays an important role in the life of surrounding villages around it. The goddess of Anathi village is goddess Lakshmi. Anathiamma is brought in grand procession and placed in the temple of the village. The procession comprises of **Are-baditha** (a special drum that makes strange and strong noise when rubbed), women singing the praises of god Shiva in folklore style with floral dances as well as lit oil lamps. For this procession usually married, young women and girls decked in new vivid clothes would join. Any woman who has menstruation or monthly periods would not join the lot.<sup>10</sup>

On Tuesday all the three gods namely **Anathiamma**, Doddayya and Chikkayya are taken out of the village early in the morning with **Are-Baditha** and Dolu Kunitha (drum beats in group) by **devara-vokkaru** to the north of the village where Chikkayya deity is placed in Melgudi / Beera Lingeshwar Temple (dedicated to Doddayya deity) and Doddayya deity is placed in Chikkayya's temple. **Anathiamma** is brought back to the village and placed in the village temple until the fete is complete.

### The exchange of Deities

It is a belief that Doddayya deity was fed up of the evil spirits that troubled him round the clock. He requested Chikkayya Deity to help him by exchanging and occupying his seat for some time so that he could take rest in Chikkayya's temple. Chikkayya deity, believed to be a brave and stubborn one accepted the invitation and was able to withstand and frighten the evil spirits that troubled Doddayya deity. Therefore during this procession the deities are placed in the opposite temples.<sup>11</sup>

### The Process of the quinquennial fete:

The quinquennial fete is marked for celebrations fifteen days after the festival of **Ugadi** in the given year. This fete is celebrated once in five years (quinquennial) as it is not possible for the devotees to come annually for the same from far off stations. This fete is planned after Ugadi festival. (**Ugadi**, is celebrated with great enthusiasm in the state of Karnataka. 'Ugadi' or 'Yugadi' translates to the 'new beginning' and is celebrated on the first day of Chaitra regarding the Hindu lunisolar calendar).<sup>12</sup> The New Year is begun as well as the **Kula Devaru** (Clan/ ancestral deity) also is worshipped with good things to follow in the subsequent five years to come.

The quinquennial fete commences and completes as well as culminates in the long desired and promised wishes of the Vokkaliga Gowda community. On Tuesday evening after placing Anathiamma in the temple following procedures commence. "Hundreds of devar Vakkalu<sup>13</sup> (children of Beer Lingeshwara) who have come from far and wide in their bullock carts bring sheep, kill it and offer it god. There would be around 100-150 sheep that

would be offered that night,” says Jithi<sup>14</sup> who is one of the volunteers. This would happen around 11.00 pm on Tuesday night. The food is cooked and then it is served to people from far and wide.

Next day in the morning Beer Lingeshwar deity is taken out and worshipped. After appropriate Pooja (worship), during the process the Heergars<sup>15</sup> are possessed by the deity and now ready for the sacrificial act. At this auspicious hour one specific family from Lingayat community (Lingayatism is a Hindu denomination that originated in southern India and is also known as Veera-shaivism. Lingayats are people who practice Lingayatism, and they are known for wearing the lingam and rejecting caste distinctions)<sup>16</sup> offers the first sheep to be sacrificed. It is to be noted that Lingayats are vegetarians and are considered as people who follow their Hinduism meticulously and to begin this fete, which witnesses the river blood, they are to offer the first sheep to Beera Lingeshwar. When asked “can anyone else offer the first sheep?”

Mr. Kenge Gowda replies, “No other community members can offer the first sheep except the chosen family from Lingayat community, though they too are minorities in the village. And the opportunity is not denied by the family; rather, it is taken as a privilege offered to them by the village. Hence, regularly, whenever the village has the quinquennial fete, they offer early in the morning the first sheep without fail. Once the sheep is offered during the morning ceremony, the Heergars (four of them) hold each other’s shoulders, cover the prey and tear the throat of the sacrificial sheep into pieces. No other metal is used to tear the throat of the sheep. It is also to be noted that the sheep should not be touched by anyone else other than Heergars during this ceremony. This is done in the Mele devara gudi ( the temple in the north). More than a thousand sheep would be torn by the heergars in here and then the heergars move down to Chikkayya temple.”<sup>17</sup>

When moving down from Doddayya temple devotees come to the Anathi Kere and dig a small well by the lake where fresh water (considered as fresh Ganga water, holy water) seeps through, water is gathered and both the deities are given Ganga Snana (bath with holy water). Here, people gather in huge number to witness the ceremony of heergars as this temple has huge ground adjacent to it. After the Ganga snana the deities are taken to the Chikkayya temple and pooja is performed after which the sacrificial ceremony by the heergars would begin.

More than 3000 sheep would be torn apart at the throat by heergars. There would be helpers who would bring the sheep brought by the devotees and place it in the midst of heergars. Others would hold the sheep so that it would help the Heergars to tear the throats of the sheep at ease. And some other volunteers would carry the sacrificed sheep to the lots. Other volunteers pour pots of water over Heergars to keep them cool in the scorching sun.

While the sacrificial ceremony is in process the two deities are carried by 10-20 people and dance around the place of ceremony. It is an interesting scene to witness two deities so finely decorated, heavily laden with flowers and other natural leaves and those who carry it immersed in dancing without being tired. “earlier,” says Mr. Jayanna, “Heergars would tear the throat of a sheep and jump into the well, come out of it and again tear the throat of another sheep. Since there would be more than five Heergars it was fine. But now it is not practiced as it is very tiresome. It was fine when the sheep were less but now the sacrificial sheep offered are more than 4,000 and to jump into the well and come out for several times would be not possible at all. Hence the volunteers keep them cool by pouring buckets or pots of cold water.”<sup>18</sup> Besides this, there will be constant announcement reminding devotees and onlookers not to enter the terrain even by mistake because heergars would not be able to distinguish between people or animals as they are possessed by the deities.<sup>19</sup>

This ceremony that starts at 8.00 a.m. in the morning would end by 1.00 p.m. once the ceremony of tearing the throat of the sheep is completed, the priest would throw a garland towards the pile of sheep that is collected by the

ground. Only then the people identify their sacrificial sheep and carry them home to be cleaned and cooked for serving it to the inmates, devotees, guests and strangers as well.

### **Utsava of the Deities: the concluding ceremonies**

Towards the late night at 11.00 p.m. devotees gather in order to begin the Utsav of the deities. The procession goes into every street of the village. All the streets of the village would be lit with serial sets and every house would be decorated with colorful lights, flowers and Rangoli. Fire crackers are burst when the deities are taken in grand procession throughout the village. In the first place Are-baditha, followed by drums of various types, then the dancers and the women decked with jewels would be walking. The deities are carried in Ratha (Chariot) which is decorated with flowers, lights and other important elements. The priests also would be in the chariot to hand over flowers, coconuts and other pooja items offered to the deities. The procession would end by the dawn and the deities are taken inside the temple and placed inside the temple for devotees to offer their respects and worship.

### **Preparation by Heergars**

The preparation for the quinquennial Beera Lingeshwara fete begins only after consulting the Heergars<sup>20</sup> and their availability. Once they have agreed for the same, then those Heergars 5-7 members come the previous day of the fete with their own sacrificial goat or sheep. They offer it to the ancestors and pay homage to them. Knowing their sacred duty to tear the throats for the sacrificial offerings, they prepare for a month and half by fasting and abstinence from eating unclean things as well as meat. They begin their strict fast one day before the sacrificial ceremony. On the day of the ceremony they are possessed by the deity and they do not eat the whole day. They complete their duty as a sacred task and then take a solemn bath and retire to rest. They would take active part in the Utsava procession that night and then have their meals the next day. This brings out the divine element that works in them and human flesh and blood does cooperate with that of the divine.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Gathering**

“More than ten-thirty thousand people gather for this event, especially to witness the sacrificial ceremony of heergars tearing the goat’s / sheep’s throat by their bare teeth,” says Mrs. Sushmitha.<sup>22</sup> People from other villages, relatives, invitees and those, whose clan deity is Beera Lingeshwar would exclusively attend the fete. Reserve police is diploid to control the crowd for two days while this quinquennial Beera Lingeshwar fete takes place. We have met not only Hindus but also Christians and Muslims coming from far off to witness this fete. The interesting part of it is that all of them can get into any house and have food.<sup>23</sup>

### **Fascinating factors:**

- The majority in the village are from Vokkaliga Gowda community (farmers).
- Kurubas (shepherds) in the village are a minority community. But they take prime participation in the sacrificial ceremony than Vokkaliga Gowdas.
- Lingayats are a visible minority in the village, having countable members in the village. But the first sheep/goat is to be offered by them and no other.
- Heergars are those chosen from Kuruba community only.
- No one else but only Heergars have to involve in the sacrificial ceremony. Others can help but tearing the throat of the sheep is done by Heergars alone. Anyone else trying to tear the throat of the sheep would be punished without mercy.

- The Heergars do not get tired during the process of sheep sacrificial ceremony where in they have to tear the throat of every sheep by their bare teeth.
- They are only seven members who take part in this ceremony and sacrifice more than 4000 sheep and goats in one series.
- None of the Heergars fall sick after this tedious ceremony of sacrificing sheep/goats one after the other.
- Any stranger can get into any house without invitation to have their lunch or dinner during this fete. And no one in the village would enquire the unknown guest about his/ her whereabouts.
- Even if there is only one old woman in a house, she would offer a sheep as her commitment to the fete.
- No vehicles are allowed into the village. Hence devotees and guests have to walk a mile to reach their relatives and houses. But the crowd never shrinks.

### Conclusion:

Beera Lingeswar quinquennial fete reflects the domination of minority community called the Kurubas. Though the village has majority Gowda community members this fete needs the presence of Heergars, who are members of Kuruba community, a minority in the village to perform all the ceremonies of the fete. No Brahmin priest is involved in any of the ceremonial or worship procedures of the fete right from temple to the ground of sacrificial ceremony. It is a lesson to be learnt by rest of citizens as to how well they coordinate for the success of the fete and the satisfaction of the devotees.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.google.com/maps>

<sup>2</sup> <https://indiamapia.com/Hassan/Valagerahalli.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.onefivenine.com/india/villages/Hassan/Channarayapatna/Valagerehalli>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.onefivenine.com/india/villages/Hassan/Channarayapatna/Valagerehalli>

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mr. Kenge Gowda, aged 72, one of the consultants in the village committee for the fete.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Mr. Jayanna Gowda, aged 34, a resident of Valagerehalli

<sup>7</sup> Migration due to marriages, purchase of land, in search of work and at one point due to some disease that had spread in the village which was taking the toll on the people.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Mr. Gopal Gowda, aged 65 from HonnanaKoppalu village, a close relative of Mr. Kenge Gowda.

<sup>9</sup> **Gowda** (also known as Gauda, Goud, Gouda or Gonda is a surname native to [Karnataka](#) state of India. It is mainly found among the [Vokkaligas](#) in South Karnataka, [Vokkaliga Gowda](#) and the [Lingayats](#) in north Karnataka.

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gowda\\_\(surname\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gowda_(surname)))

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Mrs. Manjula, aged 60, wife of Mr. Gopal Gowda.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Mr. Kenge Gowda, aged 68

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.karnatakaturism.org>

<sup>13</sup> All those kuruba families, whose clan deity is Beera lingeshwara are called as devara vakkalu. It is believed that at point of difficult moment when they pleaded beera lingeshwar to save them from harm and their prayer was heard. Thus from that moment this deity is considered as their clan deity.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Mr. Jithi, aged 37, one of the active volunteers from the village for the fete.

<sup>15</sup> Selected people from Kuruba community who are specialized in tearing the throat of the sheep by their bare-teeth.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.google.com/search?q=lingyats>

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Mr. Kenge Gowda

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Mr. Jayanna Gowda, aged 34, a resident of Valagerehalli.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Mrs. Sushmitha Gowda, aged 32, the wife of Mr. Jayanna gowda

<sup>20</sup> This is an identification for those chosen few who are ready to tear the throat of goats and sheep.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Mr. Gopal Gowda, aged 65 from Honnana Koppalu village

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Mrs. Sushmitha Gowda, aged 32, the wife of Mr. Jayanna gowda.

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