

The Role Of Women In The Culture Of The Mansa Community

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Among the many tribal communities of Tulu Nadu, the **Mansa** community holds significant importance. Now identifying themselves as **Adi Dravida**, this community has a range of distinct **cultural features**, especially in relation to the **unique role of women**. Within their culture, various **beliefs, rituals, and customs** relate specifically to women. This article aims to **gather and analyze** such information to understand the **position of women**, the **challenges they face**, and their **cultural significance** in the Mansa community.

Mansas – An Introduction:

Mansa families are found throughout all the taluks of **undivided Dakshina Kannada district** and many parts of **Kasaragod**. Among the indigenous tribal communities that have lived here for thousands of years, the **Mansas** are regarded as prominent. Researchers believe they are the **original inhabitants** of the region. The government has officially classified them under the **Scheduled Castes** category.

As early as the **19th century**, British officer **Sturrock** provided details about the Mansas, and scholar **Thurston** also referenced them in 1909. In the **1901 census**, and in the 1903 study by H.V. Nanjundayya and Rao Bahadur Ananthakrishna Iyer, **Mansa marriage customs** were mentioned.

Despite their long presence, there has been no **comprehensive study** or widespread discussion about the word "Mansa" or the community itself. Traditionally, a section of Scheduled Castes and tribal groups were referred to by this name. In some parts of the district, they are also known as "**Maaniyar**", likely because they **served in royal households**, thus earning the name "Maaniyar" or "**Original Mani**". In Tulu, *Mani* refers to one who **worships deities**, so perhaps those who worshipped specific deities were given this name.

The word "**Mansa**" is thought to derive from the Sanskrit word *Manushya*, meaning **human being**. Over time, it became a **community identifier**. However, due to caste-based untouchability, the term **acquired derogatory connotations**, leading many in the community to now prefer the identity **Adi Dravida**. Still, since the term "Adi Dravida" covers multiple groups, some argue that using "**Mansa**" to mean **human** preserves the community's unique identity.

Earlier, tribal and forest-dwelling groups were often referred to as "**Holeya**", which originally meant **those who worked in the fields** (*Pulamard* or *Holamadd*). Over time, "Holeya" became associated with **pollution and untouchability**, so its usage is now discontinued. Still, terms like "**Mani**" or "Original Holeya" were once widely used and denoted specific occupational roles.

There are also **legends** that suggest the **Mansas were once kings** who eventually lost their kingdoms and moved to forest regions. Later, they served under **Jain and Bunt kings** and local landlords (palegars), which supports the belief that they are the **original inhabitants**. In the **hill regions**, they engaged in **foraging, agriculture**, and other forms of hard labor.

Today, they are **living with self-respect**, owning small plots of land, doing agriculture, working in **plantations and government jobs**. The Mansa population is now spread across **Chikkamagaluru, Kodagu**, and other regions of Karnataka beyond Dakshina Kannada and Kasaragod. In **Kundapur**, they are known as "**Uppaaru**", although their culture is slightly different from that of the Mansas of Dakshina Kannada.

Cultural Identity of the Mansas:

The Mansas have their **own distinct culture**. Their **birth, marriage, and death rituals**, forms of **worship, dance, clothing**, and other customs reflect this uniqueness. Although **modern influences** have altered some of these traditions, traces of the **old customs** still remain.

The Mansas followed a **matrilineal family system**, with "Aliyakattu" (nephew-lineage) customs. Therefore, **women held a central role**. Since women played a leading part in all aspects of life, **studying this community through the lens of gender** offers valuable insights into **gender equality and women's autonomy**.

By examining women's roles in the Mansa community, we can **indirectly gain a broader understanding** of the entire community.

