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## Final Reports

### Title

Forms of Money: An inquiry into the processes of use and adaptation among the Konda Reddis of south India (Synopsis of Research Results)

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## Project Year

2009

## Region(s)

South Asia

## Country(ies)

India

## Project Description

This proposal is a continuation of a PhD study on the Konda Reddis, who are classified as a 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group' by the Government of India. It will examine the process of use of different forms of money that operate with the Konda Reddis and examine the social fabric of money and financial services they use. By utilizing established relationships and previously collected ethnographic data, this study will further research using the extended case method and situational analysis as it performs an inquiry into the process of use of different forms of money that operate with the Konda Reddis.

## Researcher(s)

Thanuja Mummidi

## About the Researcher(s)



*Thanuja Mummidi* holds a PhD (2006) in Social Anthropology from the University of Madras, India. She is Assistant Professor at the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy in Pondicherry University. In 2006 she was awarded the Royal Anthropological Institute's, Urgent Anthropology Fellowship for continuing her research on the Konda Reddis. Thanuja Mummidi is also affiliated to the French Institute of Pondicherry in the programme on Labour, Finance and Social Dynamics and teaches at the Department of Anthropology, Pondicherry University, India.

## Synopsis of Research Results



The poor are largely defined on the basis of financial status and behaviour, which is narrowly equated with their access to and use of state currencies. In contrast, this study finds that among the Konda Reddis of south India different stores of value co-exist with state currencies. These stores of value can be seen as different forms of money with varying levels of transferability, with value and transferability locally constituted. At



the same time, neither the form nor the value and transferability of local forms of money are static but rather transform in accordance to changes outside the local sphere. The paper argues, using the case of the Konda

Reddis, that there are different forms of money which do not get replaced or substituted but co-exist with new entrants in turn having different standards or value which contribute to the complexity of financial behaviour.

The analysis of the data from south India draws largely on C.A. Gregory's *Savage Money* (1997), in which Gregory argues: "[T]o define money in one way or the other is always to adopt a standard of value of some sort" (1997:6). Money, in other words, is created through the value attributed to it. Moreover, material objects are assigned value by people through transforming them into "marked social forms such as gifts, commodities, and goods, and the process through which they acquire these values are institutions such as Market, the house, and the State" (1997:13). The author finds that among the Konda Reddis different standards of value co-exist which in turn create different forms of money through the specific context of transactions in relation to these institutions (Market, House, and the State).

The Konda Reddis are classified by the government of India as a 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group' (PTG). The PTG category was created in 1969 to include those groups who lived in relatively isolated geographical regions, engaged in subsistence labor that relied primarily on pre-agricultural technology, with stagnant or diminishing population rates and low levels of literacy in comparison to the national average. The Konda Reddis are one among the seventy-five communities belonging to this category and live mainly in the forested tribal concentration region of north-central and eastern



parts of Andhra Pradesh state in south India. Konda Reddis participate in diversified livelihood strategies centered around shifting cultivation. As argued elsewhere (Thanuja, 2005), shifting cultivation is a diversified strategy because it allows management of time, space and labour in practicing hunting, gathering, rearing livestock, maintaining kitchen gardens and making of bamboo ware. Land is communal property owned or claimed by different lineages but with residence and marriage choices being quite inclusive allows mobility and access to cultivation land across the whole territory to members of different lineages.



The main 'goods' exchanged are products of cultivation, hunting, collection, livestock and bamboo ware and human labour. These goods must be understood as different forms of money among the Konda Reddis, exchanged alongside and in conjunction with state currency.

Notably, shifting cultivation allows for the seasonal distribution of activities such that individuals and households have flexibility and choice regarding livelihood activities depending on store of goods in the household. Though the main food supply comes from the grain produced

through shifting cultivation it was not uncommon to see households skipping cultivation in a particular year. A common reason for this was sufficient grain from previous harvest or some other livelihood activity taking up more labour. This can be illustrated through the following ethnographic excerpt.

The flexibility that shifting cultivation allows is evident in the case of Kadala Gangi Reddi of Jinnethogu settlement in 2002. Besides fruit trees, the Konda Reddis also plant the *Caryota urens* tree called locally as Jirugu chettu. The sap of this tree is called jirugu *kallu* and is collected three times a day. A mature spadix provides *kallu* for nine to ten months after which it dies out. In the meantime another spadix develops thereby ensuring a year round supply of *kallu*. At any given time a settlement may not have more than one or two mature jirugu trees owned by one or two individuals. As the jirugu tree yields *kallu* thrice a day, it is common with the collectors of *kallu* to do little besides this activity. The first

spadix had formed in the one jirigu chettu in Jinnethogu in July 2002. The tree belonged to Kadambal Bul Reddi who had planted it some years ago. Gangi Reddi of Jinnethogu who first spotted the spadix took the news to Bul Reddi who was now residing in Marthigondi settlement. As the tree was too far from his gumpu, Bul Reddi allowed Gangi Reddi to tap the tree. The tree yielded *kallu* from July 2002 to Jan 2003. On average the yield was twelve litres every morning, afternoon and evening and Gangi Reddi was so occupied with tapping *kallu* that he did no shifting cultivation that year.

The *kallu* belonged exclusively to Gangi Reddi and he was free to barter the *kallu*. In fact for every collection men and women from neighbouring settlements either gathered by the tree or at Gangi Reddi's house for a drink. Sometimes a member of a neighbouring settlement carried the collected *kallu* in gourd bottles back to his/her settlement. For two gourd bottles of *kallu* which can hold approximately three litres each either three kg of pearl millet or two kg of rice or a kilogram of pulse was exchanged. The *kallu* also attracted Koya's from the plains. The *jirugu kallu* was considered superior in taste to that *kallu* (toddy) available in the plains from January to May. The article for barter with *kallu*, its quantity and time of exchange were not rigid and often individuals had a glass or two of *kallu* for no payment. Because Kadambal Bul Reddi was recognized as the original owner of the tree he was always given *kallu* whenever he came to the tree for no article in exchange. Nevertheless, in the seven months of tapping *kallu* Gangi Reddi had earned sufficient food stores for the year and exchange partners for the future.



Other forms of additional labor that the Konda engaged in during non-cultivation periods that allowed them to participate in the local economy include bamboo basket weaving. Konda Reddi women typically make baskets and sell them at the weekly village market through trade intermediaries from another tribal group, the Koya; Konda Reddi men raise cash through the collection and sale of honey and resin. The cash earned from these sales is compounded by the value of the long-term partnership, loans, and the availability of goods made possible by these exchange networks. As such, the cash value of bamboo baskets, honey, resin and

other produced goods is only part of its value. On the other hand, pearl millet, produced through shifting cultivation is not sold for cash but is primarily used for household consumption and as a medium of trade between households in exchange for labor and ritual contributions. These exchanges qualify as gifts yet are part of reciprocal networks within the community through which collective harvesting labor is exchanged for cooked food or harvested grain and accrues respect and recognition within the community.

According to a five-year development plan (1997-2002) issued by the government of India the Konda Reddis were to be resettled away from their current isolated hill settlements into colonies in a nearby foothill plain village. This was intended to bring the Konda Reddis out of isolation as well as direct their labor towards agriculture rather than shifting cultivation. This resettlement process was still underway when the author entered the field in 2002. Agriculture on common land requires greater cooperation over longer periods of time than shifting cultivation. Moreover, shifting cultivation allows more flexibility and choice of non-cultivation labor because cultivation occurs less regularly. The author notes that this development gave rise to tension within the community and impacted forms of reciprocity and transactional behavior. The resettlement and shift to agriculture also increased the degree to which Konda Reddis rely on state currency for transactions rather than other forms of money. In turn, this has brought an increased reliance on bank savings accounts for money storage, facilitated by improved transportation that allows Konda Reddis to travel to cities where banks are located.

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