

## Research Article

## Proverbs, Occupational Identity and Social History: Reading *Vishwakarma* Artisans in Telugu Folk Tradition

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### Abstract

Proverbs constitute an important but comparatively underutilized source for reconstructing the social and cultural history of artisan communities. Although brief in form, proverbs preserve collective observations concerning occupations, social relationships, economic practices, moral values, customary behaviour, technical knowledge, and everyday experiences. This article examines Telugu proverbs associated with the *Vishwakarma* or *Panchanam* communities, with particular attention to the traditional occupational groups of *Kammari* (blacksmith), *Vadrangi* (carpenter), *Kanchari* (metalworker), and *Agasali* or *Kamsali* (goldsmith). Drawing upon published collections of Telugu proverbs, historical ethnographic literature, and proverbs collected through oral interviews with community elders, the study analyses the ways in which occupational identities were constructed and represented in popular discourse.

The article argues that *Vishwakarma*-related proverbs constitute a form of vernacular historical evidence through which the relationship between artisanal skill, village economy, caste, labour, material culture, and social perception can be reconstructed. The proverbs preserve detailed knowledge of craft practices, tools, raw materials, working environments, seasonal employment, economic vulnerability, customer–artisan relations, and occupational specialization. At the same time, they reveal ambivalent social attitudes: artisans are represented as indispensable producers and technically skilled specialists, but are also subjected to stereotypes concerning cunning, dishonesty, competition, and social distance. Such contradictions are historically significant because they demonstrate the complex position of artisans within rural society. The article therefore proposes a critical reading of proverbs in conjunction with epigraphic, literary, ethnographic, and material sources for reconstructing the social history of *Vishwakarma* communities.

**Keywords:** *Vishwakarma*, *Panchanam*, *Vishwabrahmin*, Telugu proverbs, artisan communities, occupational identity, social history, folklore, caste, rural economy.

### 1. Introduction:

The reconstruction of social history requires historians to move beyond conventional sources such as royal inscriptions, administrative records, political narratives, and elite literary texts. Everyday experiences of ordinary people are frequently preserved in less formal cultural forms, including oral traditions, folk songs, stories, rituals, sayings, idioms, and proverbs. Among these, proverbs are particularly significant because they condense collective experiences into short, memorable, and culturally intelligible statements.

A proverb is not simply a linguistic construction. It is a cultural statement produced within a particular social environment and transmitted across generations. It may preserve

observations concerning labour, occupation, family relations, economic behaviour, morality, gender relations, caste practices, and community interaction. Wolfgang Mieder's extensive scholarship on proverbial discourse has demonstrated that proverbs are dynamic cultural forms: some disappear when the circumstances that produced them decline, while new expressions emerge in response to changing social conditions. Proverbs can therefore provide evidence not only of continuity but also of social transformation. (Wolfgang Mieder, p. xi.)

The often-cited observation attributed to Lord John Russell that a proverb represents "the wit of one and the wisdom of many" captures an important characteristic of proverbial knowledge. (Jon R. Stone, p.xii.) An individual experience becomes generalized and is subsequently transmitted as collective wisdom. Consequently, proverbs occupy an intermediate position between individual memory and collective social consciousness. They are simultaneously linguistic expressions, repositories of popular knowledge, and representations of social attitudes.

This article applies this perspective to proverbs associated with the *Vishwakarma* communities of Telugu-speaking society. The principal objective is not simply to catalogue proverbs concerning artisans but to examine what these expressions reveal about the historical experience of artisan communities. Particular attention is given to occupational specialization, technological knowledge, labour practices, economic relationships, professional reputation, caste perceptions, and the position of artisans within the rural economy.

The study focuses primarily on four occupational groups represented in the available proverb corpus: *Kammari* (blacksmith), *Vadrangi* (carpenter), *Kanchari* (copper and bronze worker), and *Agasali /Kamsali* (goldsmith). These occupational identities were historically interconnected within the broader *Panchanam* or *Vishwakarma* social formation. Their proverbs provide a distinctive vernacular archive through which the relationship between craft and society can be examined.

## **2. *Vishwakarma* and the *Panchanam* Artisan Tradition:**

The communities conventionally identified as *Panchanam*, *Vishwabrahmin*, *Vishwakarma*, or *Kamsali* have traditionally maintained genealogical narratives connecting themselves with *Vishwakarma* and his five sons. In the community's traditional account, the five occupational branches are associated with *Kammaracharya*, *Vadlacharya*, *Kancheracharya*, *Kasacharya*, and *Agasalacharya*. Their descendants are conventionally associated with blacksmithing, carpentry, metalworking, stone working, and goldsmithing respectively.

These traditions should be understood as important components of community identity rather than treated uncritically as literal historical genealogies. They express a collective understanding of occupational heritage and social identity. The association with *Vishwakarma* provides a common cultural framework through which different artisan occupations are brought together.

The historical importance of these occupations is evident from their relationship with village production. Blacksmiths produced and repaired iron implements essential for agriculture. Carpenters manufactured wooden agricultural equipment, carts, doors, furniture, and other necessities. *Kancharis* produced copper, brass, and bronze vessels used in domestic and ritual contexts. Stone artisans contributed to the construction of wells, irrigation structures, temples, architectural components, and sculptural objects. Goldsmiths produced, repaired, and transformed ornaments and other objects made of gold and silver.

Thus, the artisan was not merely a producer of commodities. The artisan occupied a functional position within a wider network of agrarian, domestic, ritual, and commercial activity. The proverbial tradition examined in this article preserves precisely this embeddedness of craft within everyday life.

A striking expression of the perceived importance of *Vishwakarma* artisans occurs in the Telugu proverb: "*Vishwakarma Lenide Visvam Ledu*", "There is no world without *Vishwakarma*." (Papireddy, p.115.)

The proverb should not be interpreted simply as a claim of social superiority. More importantly, it expresses an understanding of the indispensability of productive and technical labour. The "world" in this context may be understood as a social and material world dependent upon tools, implements, buildings, vessels, ornaments, and other manufactured objects.

### **3. Proverbs as Sources for Social and Occupational History:**

The methodological significance of proverbs lies in their ability to preserve social knowledge that may not appear in formal historical records. An administrative document may record taxation imposed upon an artisan, while an inscription may identify an artisan or guild. A proverb, by contrast, can reveal how an occupation was perceived by the people who interacted with it.

Three dimensions are particularly important.

First, proverbs preserve occupational knowledge. References to furnaces, hammers, chisels, files, tools, metal, wood, gold, lead, agricultural implements, and other materials reveal aspects of traditional technology.

Second, proverbs preserve social perceptions. They demonstrate how artisans were represented by customers, farmers, neighbours, and members of other occupational groups.

Third, proverbs preserve economic experience. Expressions concerning employment, scarcity, customer dependence, material shortages, professional competition, and fluctuating demand provide clues to the economic position of artisans.

At the same time, proverbs cannot be treated as transparent descriptions of reality. A proverb is a cultural representation, often employing exaggeration, humour, irony, or stereotype. A statement that a goldsmith steals gold, for example, cannot be accepted as evidence that goldsmiths as a group were dishonest. Rather, it is evidence that suspicion concerning the handling of precious metals existed in popular discourse. The historian must therefore distinguish between the social reality of an occupation and the social representation of that occupation.

This distinction is essential to the interpretation of *Vishwakarma* proverbs.

### **4. Kammari Proverbs: Ironworking, Labour and Occupational Skill:**

The *Kammari*, or blacksmith, represented one of the most important craft occupations in agrarian society. The blacksmith's forge provided the implements upon which agricultural production depended. Ploughshares, sickles, axes, knives, agricultural blades, and numerous other tools required the skills of the ironworker.

#### **4.1 Occupational Specialization:**

The proverb: "*Kammarimunaku Kuracha, Vadrangamunaku Podavu Melu*", (Papireddy, p.139.) "Shortness is advantageous to a blacksmith, while height is advantageous to a carpenter", illustrates how occupational requirements were translated into popular wisdom. The proverb associates different physical characteristics with different crafts. Blacksmithing required repeated hammering and manipulation of heated metal, while carpentry involved the handling of comparatively large wooden materials and tools.

The significance of the proverb lies less in its literal claim about bodily height than in its recognition of occupational specialization. The physical body itself is imagined in relation to the technology of work.

A related proverb states: "*Vadrangiki Vadulu Naanyamu, Kammaraaniki Biguvu Naanyamu*". (Papireddy, p.117.). The expression contrasts looseness or flexibility associated with carpentry with firmness associated with blacksmithing. Once again, popular knowledge distinguishes the technological requirements of two related occupations.

These expressions demonstrate that occupational knowledge was not confined to the artisan workshop. It circulated through village society and became incorporated into proverbial language.

#### **4.2 The Spatial Organization of Craft:**

The proverb: "*Kammari Veedhilo Sudulamminatlu*" (M. W. Carr, p.22; Papireddy, p.117; Divakarla, p.177.), "Like selling needles in a blacksmith's street" uses the spatial organization of artisan production to convey the idea of futility. A person attempting to sell an article in a locality where that article is already produced is engaged in an unnecessary activity.

The proverb is significant because it indirectly preserves evidence of occupationally identifiable streets or neighbourhoods. The "blacksmith's street" is imagined as a specialized economic space in which particular commodities were produced and circulated.

Thus, the proverb provides an indication of the social geography of craft production.

#### **4.3 Production for others and Self-Reliance:**

The proverb: "*Kammari Kathi, Kammariki Kadu*" (Lakshmanachari), "A blacksmith's knife is not necessarily for the blacksmith himself" draws attention to the distinction between production and consumption. The artisan manufactures objects primarily for customers rather than for personal use. This is a fundamental feature of specialized craft production.

Conversely: "*Kommari Kathitho Kattelu Kostadu*" (Venu), "The blacksmith cuts wood with his own iron tool" emphasizes occupational self-reliance. The artisan's technical knowledge enables him to produce and use his own implements.

The apparent contradiction between these two proverbs is historically instructive. One emphasizes the artisan's role as a service provider, while the other emphasizes self-sufficiency. Together they reveal the dual economic identity of the artisan: producer for the community and skilled worker capable of meeting personal needs.

#### **4.4 The Working Environment:**

The proverb: "*Kammari Kallu Kalina Kaddi*" (Ravindrachari), "A blacksmith's eyes are like burning charcoal" preserves a popular observation concerning the physical environment of the forge. Heat, flames, smoke, and burning charcoal formed part of the traditional blacksmith's workplace.

The proverb consequently constitutes an indirect record of occupational conditions. It transforms the physical effects of work into a metaphor that could be understood by the wider community.

#### **4.5 Occupational Self-Sufficiency:**

The saying: "*Kammari Gaddiki Kammari Kathi*" (Bhadrachari), "For the blacksmith's grass, the blacksmith's knife" again connects occupational expertise with everyday life. The artisan possesses the technical capacity to manufacture the tools required for his own agricultural or domestic activities.

Collectively, the *Kammari* proverbs demonstrate that blacksmithing was understood as a highly specialized form of productive labour. They preserve information about tools, bodily practices, occupational spaces, working conditions, relations with farmers, and the distinction between production for customers and production for oneself.

#### **5. *Kanchari* Proverbs: Metalworking, Household Life and Economic Constraints:**

The *Kanchari* occupied another important position within the *Vishwakarma* occupational system. Traditionally associated with copper, brass, bronze, and related metalworking activities, *Kancharis* produced vessels and objects central to domestic and ritual life.

##### **5.1 Craftsmanship and Occupational Humour:**

The proverb: "*Oragabetti Tagedi Cherichera Kancharavadu*" (M. W. Carr, p.87; Papireddy, p.115; Divakarla, p.164.), is used in a humorous context concerning the repair of a

defective metal vessel. A vessel brought for repair is represented as being damaged further rather than successfully restored.

The expression illustrates the use of occupational humour to comment upon technical competence. Its historical value does not depend upon whether the accusation was literally true. Rather, it demonstrates that craft expertise was subject to public evaluation. The customer possessed expectations concerning the quality of repair, while the artisan's reputation depended upon meeting them.

## **5.2 The Soundscape of the Workshop:**

The proverb: "*Kanchari Vari Inti Pillalu, Tataku Chappullaku Bedararu*" (Papireddy, p.115; Divakarla, p.167.), observes that children raised in *Kanchari* households become accustomed to the repeated sounds of hammering and metalworking.

This expression provides an unusual glimpse into the sensory history of artisanal life. The workshop was not merely a place of production; its sounds entered the domestic environment. Children born into artisan households encountered the occupational soundscape from an early age.

The proverb therefore demonstrates how occupational identity was reproduced through everyday sensory experience.

## **5.3 Production and Household Deprivation:**

The proverb: "*Kancharodiki Gante Karuvu, Vadlodiki Teddu Karuvu*" (Bhadrachari), associates *Kancharis* and carpenters with the paradox that artisans may produce numerous objects for others while lacking comparable goods in their own households.

This expression is particularly important for social-economic history. It exposes the distinction between productive capacity and purchasing power. An artisan may possess the technical ability to manufacture an object but lack the economic means to consume the commodities he produces.

The proverb consequently challenges any simplistic assumption that technical specialization necessarily produced economic prosperity.

## **6. Vadrangi Proverbs: Carpentry, Agricultural Production and Labour:**

The *Vadrangi*, or carpenter, occupied a central position in the material infrastructure of village society. Agricultural production required wooden plough components, yokes, carts, handles, and other implements, while domestic life required doors, beams, furniture, and architectural components.

### **6.1 Seasonal Demand and Agricultural Dependence:**

The proverb: "*Uli Badise Bhujam Meda, Uru Vadlavaani Modda Medannatlu*" (K. Mutyam, p.19.) refers metaphorically to the carpenter carrying his chisel and large woodworking tool upon his shoulder while the village depends upon his labour.

The expression is especially significant in relation to the agricultural cycle. At the beginning of the agricultural season, farmers required the repair and preparation of implements. The carpenter consequently experienced an increase in demand for his labour.

The proverb preserves evidence of the seasonality of artisanal labour. Craft production was not necessarily uniform throughout the year; demand fluctuated according to agricultural requirements.

### **6.2 Farmers as Observers of Skilled Labour:**

The sayings: "*Vadrangi Pani Chusi Variki Pani Ledu*", "*Kammari Pani Chusi Variki Pani Ledu*" (Rajendrachari), describe people who watch the carpenter or blacksmith at work instead of attending to their own responsibilities.

These expressions are revealing because they demonstrate the attraction of specialized technical knowledge. The farmer may know how to use a plough but does not necessarily possess the technical knowledge required to manufacture or repair it.

The proverb therefore recognizes a distinction between use-value and technical expertise.

### **6.3 Competition and Reputation:**

The proverb: "*Vadrangi Vacchina Chota Variki Vadrangi Pani Ledu*" (Krishnamachari) suggests that where a highly skilled carpenter is available, another carpenter may find little work.

This statement highlights the importance of reputation, skill, and customer preference. Artisan production was therefore not simply determined by hereditary occupational identity; competence and reputation also shaped access to work.

### **6.4 Labour as Embodied Habit:**

The proverb: "*Vadla Vadi Chetulu, Gajji Unnavadi Chetulu Urike Undavata*" (Ramesh Chari) compares the active hands of a carpenter with those of a person constantly scratching because of an itch.

The proverb transforms manual labour into a cultural virtue. The working hand becomes an image of industriousness, while inactivity is implicitly contrasted with productive engagement.

Taken together, *Vadrangi* proverbs reveal the carpenter as a central figure in the agrarian economy whose labour was seasonal, technically specialized, physically demanding, and socially valued.

## **7. Agasali /Kamsali Proverbs: Goldsmithing, Trust, Skill and Social Perception:**

Among the *Vishwakarma* occupational groups, the *Agasali* or *Kamsali* occupies a distinctive position because goldsmithing involves the manipulation of highly valuable materials. Consequently, proverbs concerning goldsmiths frequently revolve around trust, precision, economic value, professional intelligence, and suspicion.

This corpus is particularly valuable because it contains both negative stereotypes and positive representations of technical expertise.

### **7.1 Goldsmithing and Suspicion:**

The proverb: "*Talli Puste Bangaramaina Agasali Dongilinchakunda Undaledu*" (Divakarla, p.302.), "Even if the mother's *puste* is made of gold, the *Agasali* cannot refrain from stealing it", and the related saying: "*Kanna Talli Bangaramaina Kamsali Vadaladu*" (M. W. Carr, p.38; Papireddy, p.115.) represent the goldsmith as potentially dishonest.

Such expressions should not be read as empirical statements concerning the moral character of goldsmiths. Rather, they reveal the social suspicion generated by asymmetrical control over valuable raw materials. Customers entrusted gold to the craftsperson, while the technical process of melting, cutting, shaping, soldering, filing, and weighing was not always easily observable to the customer.

The proverb therefore provides evidence of the trust relationship underlying artisanal production.

### **7.2 Material Appropriation and Occupational Stereotypes:**

The proverb: "*Sudetu Vanni, Suttetu Vanni, Kandetu Vanni Nammaradu*" (M. W. Carr, p.84; Papireddy, p.115; Divakarla, p.581.), associates the tailor, goldsmith, and weaver with the alleged appropriation of small quantities of customer-owned materials.

The historical importance of the proverb lies in its representation of a broader social suspicion directed toward artisans who worked with customer-controlled raw materials.

The goldsmith appears here as part of a larger category of material specialists whose technical control could create opportunities for distrust.

### **7.3 Customer Dependence and Delayed Delivery:**

The proverb: "*Ichhi Tirigite Komati, Tisukoni Tirigedi Kamsali*" (Papireddy, p.115; Divakarla, p.108.), contrasts the behaviour of the *Komati* and *Kamsali* and refers to patterns of giving, receiving, and postponement.

In the context of goldsmithing, the proverb represents the customer repeatedly returning for an ornament that has not yet been completed.

This is significant because it reveals the temporal dimension of craft production. Goldsmithing was not simply an immediate exchange of commodity for payment. It involved commissioning, advance payment or delivery of raw material, processing, and eventual return of the finished object.

#### **7.4 Economic Vulnerability and Famine:**

The proverb: "*Kamsali Varu Kalaniki Pendlikodukulu, Karuvuku Kati Pinugulu*" (Divakarla, p.170.), "Goldsmiths are bridegrooms in prosperous times and corpses during famine", provides a particularly important indication of the vulnerability of specialized luxury-oriented occupations.

Unlike blacksmiths and carpenters, whose services were directly connected to agricultural production, goldsmithing depended heavily upon discretionary expenditure on ornaments. During prosperity, demand could increase considerably; during famine or economic crisis, expenditure on jewellery could decline sharply.

The proverb therefore captures the relationship between artisanal livelihood and macro-economic fluctuation.

#### **7.5 The Occupational Household:**

The proverb: "*Kamsali Pelliki Illanta Poyile*" (Papireddy, p.11; Divakarla, p.170.), "At a goldsmith's wedding, the whole house is full of furnaces", uses the furnace as a symbol of the goldsmith's occupational environment.

The expression illustrates the extent to which occupation and domestic space were intertwined. The workshop was not necessarily separated from the household. Occupational tools and technologies formed part of the material environment of family life.

#### **7.6 Goldsmiths and Life-Cycle Practices:**

The saying: "*Na Chevulu Kamsale Kuttadu*" (Papireddy, p.116.), "My ears too were pierced by a *Kamsali*" refers to ear piercing and demonstrates that goldsmiths participated in practices associated with bodily adornment and life-cycle customs.

This is significant because it expands our understanding of the goldsmith's social role. The goldsmith was not simply a manufacturer of ornaments but could also participate in ritualized practices associated with ornamentation and bodily identity.

#### **8. Knowledge, Intelligence and Professional Secrecy:**

Not all *Kamsali* proverbs are negative. Several explicitly recognize the technical intelligence of the goldsmith.

The proverb: "*Kamsali Maya Kamsalike Gani Teliyadu*" (Divakarla, p.50), "A goldsmith's trick is known only to another goldsmith", acknowledges the existence of specialized occupational knowledge.

The expression is especially important for the history of craft secrecy and transmission of technical knowledge. Traditional artisanal knowledge was frequently transmitted through apprenticeship and family-based learning. Certain techniques could therefore remain inaccessible to outsiders.

Another saying compares the *Kamsali* with the *Karanam*, the village accountant: "*Kamsali Gotu, Karanam Tetu*" (Divakarla, p.170.). The goldsmith's file or scraping tool is compared with the accountant's pen. The proverb constructs an analogy between two forms of specialized manipulation: the artisan's technical control over material and the accountant's control over written records.

Likewise: "*Karananni Kamsali Vadini Katiki Poyina Nammaradu*" (Anitha), associates the *Karanam* and *Kamsali* with cunning and perceptiveness.

Such expressions demonstrate that occupational skill could generate not only respect but also apprehension. Specialized knowledge created a degree of power because outsiders were dependent upon expertise they did not possess.

#### **9. Gold, Material Value and Precision:**

The proverb: "*Chedda Bangaram Avusaloni Intike Cherinatlu*", (Krishnamachari) "Like bad gold reaching the *Agasali*'s/ Goldsmith's house", illustrates the goldsmith's role in the circulation of old, damaged, or unwanted gold.

The goldsmith's workshop functioned as a site of transformation where old ornaments could be repaired, melted, refined, or remade. The proverb consequently preserves an important aspect of the material life of precious metals.

Similarly: "*Kamsali Vaddanaina Undavale, Kumpatilonaina Undavae*" (M. W. Carr, p.21; Divakarla, p.170.), "The villagers' gold and silver must either remain with the *Kamsali* or in his furnace."

This expression emphasizes the centrality of the goldsmith in the circulation and transformation of precious metals.

The proverb: "*Kamsali Barrenu Ammuthunnadu, Lopala Lakka Lekunda Chudara*" (Divakarla, p.170.), refers to the fear that lac or another material might be concealed inside an object to manipulate its apparent weight.

Again, the historical significance lies not in accepting the accusation as fact but in recognizing the importance of weight, purity, measurement, and trust in the gold economy.

#### **10. Occupational Danger and the Goldsmith's Workshop:**

Several proverbs employ the physical dangers of the goldsmith's workshop metaphorically.

The expression: "*Kamsali Intiki Donga Kuda Radu*" (Prakritamba), "Even a thief does not enter a *Kamsali*'s house" and: "*Nee Venaka Puli Thariminaa, Kamsali Gudiseloniki Poradu*" (Chennoju Prakritamba), "Do not enter a *Kamsali*'s hut even when a tiger is chasing you", construct the goldsmith's workshop as a dangerous environment filled with sharp tools and implements.

These sayings should be understood as examples of occupational imagery. Tools that were necessary for craft production could simultaneously be imagined as sources of danger.

The proverb therefore converts the material environment of the workshop into a metaphorical cultural landscape.

#### **11. Goldsmithing and Linguistic Knowledge:**

The proverb: "*Kaviki, Kamsaliki Sisam Telika*" (Divakarla, p.183.), "*Sisam* is easy for the poet and the *Kamsali*", is particularly significant because it connects literary and occupational knowledge.

In the technical context, *Sisam* refers to lead, a metal relatively easy to melt in comparison with precious metals. In literary usage, *Sisam* refers to a Telugu poetic metre.

The proverb therefore creates a semantic bridge between craft technology and literary culture. Such expressions demonstrate that occupational knowledge could become incorporated into broader linguistic and intellectual traditions.

This is evidence that artisan knowledge was not isolated from the wider cultural world. Technical vocabulary entered everyday speech and became available for metaphorical and literary use.

#### **12. Caste, Commensality and Social Distance:**

The proverbial corpus also contains expressions concerning caste boundaries and social distance.

The saying: "*Kamsali Koodu Kaakulu Kuda Muttavu*" (Papireddy, p.116; Divakarla, p.170.), "Even crows will not touch a *Kamsali*'s food" represents an extreme form of social exclusion through the metaphor of commensality.

Such statements should be interpreted critically. They are not reliable evidence that a particular community was inherently avoided or considered impure. Rather, they preserve historical perceptions concerning caste hierarchy, commensality, and social boundaries.

Similarly, references in ethnographic literature to the social position of goldsmith communities provide a comparative framework for understanding the caste-related dimensions of these proverbs. Colonial ethnographic works such as Edgar Thurston's *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* should themselves be read critically because colonial classifications often reproduced the assumptions and hierarchies of their period.

The juxtaposition of occupational respect and social exclusion is particularly important. The same community could be indispensable to village economic life while simultaneously being subject to caste-based social boundaries. This apparent contradiction is a central feature of the social history of artisan communities.

### 13. Comparative Analysis of *Vishwakarma* Proverbs:

The proverb corpus reveals several recurring themes.

| Occupational Group       | Principal Craft         | Major Proverbial Themes                                                        | Historical Significance                               |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Kammari</i>           | Ironworking             | Tools, physical strength, forge, self-reliance, occupational specialization    | Agricultural production and technical labour          |
| <i>Vadrangi</i>          | Carpentry               | Seasonal demand, agricultural implements, skill, competition, industriousness  | Agrarian dependence and craft specialization          |
| <i>Kanchari</i>          | Copper / bronze working | Metalworking, workshop soundscape, repair, household economy                   | Domestic production and artisan livelihood            |
| <i>Agasali / Kamsali</i> | Goldsmithing            | Gold, trust, precision, intelligence, economic fluctuation, social stereotypes | Precious-metal economy and customer-artisan relations |

The comparison demonstrates that proverbial representations varied according to the economic position of each craft.

Blacksmiths and carpenters were closely associated with agriculture and essential production. Their proverbs therefore emphasize tools, physical strength, agricultural seasons, and technical skill.

*Kanchari* proverbs emphasize metal vessels, workshop life, household experience, and economic limitation.

Goldsmithing generated a different proverbial vocabulary because gold and silver were high-value materials. Consequently, the themes of trust, secrecy, precision, suspicion, fraud, intelligence, and economic fluctuation occur more frequently.

This variation demonstrates that proverbs are closely related to the material characteristics of occupations.

### 14. Proverbs, Caste and the Ambivalence of Artisan Identity:

One of the most important findings emerging from this study is the ambivalent representation of *Vishwakarma* artisans.

On one side, the proverbs recognize their indispensability. The statement "*Vishwakarma Lenide Visvam Ledu*" (Papireddy, p.115.) presents the artisan as foundational to social existence. Other expressions recognize their technical expertise, industriousness, self-reliance, and contribution to agriculture and domestic life.

On the other side, some proverbs portray artisans as cunning, dishonest, competitive, or socially distant. This is particularly visible in the *Kamsali* corpus.

These two representations should not be regarded as mutually exclusive. They reflect the structural position of artisans within village society. Artisans possessed specialized skills upon which others depended, but their control over technical knowledge and materials could also produce suspicion.

The proverb thus becomes a site where dependence and distrust coexist.

This is particularly important for understanding caste-based occupational societies. Occupational specialization generated economic interdependence, while caste organization simultaneously produced social boundaries. The proverbial tradition captures both dimensions.

### **15. Proverbs as Evidence of Material and Technological History:**

The *Vishwakarma* proverb corpus has considerable value for reconstructing the history of material culture. References to: iron, gold, silver, copper, bronze, lead, lac, furnaces, charcoal, hammers, chisels, files, adzes, knives, sickles, agricultural implements, vessels, and ornaments, demonstrate that technical knowledge was embedded within everyday language.

These references permit historians to ask questions concerning traditional technologies: How were tools produced? Where were they used? What materials were valued? Which occupations were seasonal? What forms of technical knowledge were transmitted within families? How did customers evaluate artisanal production?

Although proverbs rarely answer such questions directly, they provide clues that can be combined with material, archaeological, epigraphical, literary, and ethnographic evidence.

The methodological value of proverbs therefore lies partly in their interdisciplinary potential.

### **16. Oral Tradition and the Preservation of Community Memory:**

A substantial number of the proverbs considered in this study were collected orally from elders of the *Vishwabrahmin/Vishwakarma* community. Such material is particularly important because oral tradition may preserve expressions that are absent from published collections.

Oral collection, however, requires methodological caution. Proverbs may have multiple regional versions, variations in pronunciation, differences in vocabulary, and changing interpretations. The same proverb may also acquire different meanings in different social contexts.

Accordingly, oral proverbs should be documented with information concerning: (1) the locality of collection; (2) the age and social background of the informant; (3) the language or dialect used; (4) the context in which the proverb was remembered or used; (5) variant forms; (6) the informant's explanation of meaning; and (7) the relationship between oral versions and published collections.

Such documentation transforms the proverb from an isolated quotation into a source of community memory and oral history.

### **17. Historiographical Significance:**

The study of *Vishwakarma* proverbs contributes to a broader movement in social history that seeks to recover the experiences of occupational and non-elite communities.

Traditional historical narratives have often emphasized rulers, political institutions, wars, dynasties, and administrative structures. Such approaches remain important, but they do not fully explain how rural societies functioned at the everyday level.

The history of artisans requires attention to production, labour, technology, caste relations, household organization, economic exchange, and cultural memory. Proverbs are particularly useful because they emerge from precisely these domains.

They also encourage historians to move from a history of artisans toward a history from the perspective of artisanal experience and social perception.

The distinction is significant. Official records may classify artisans administratively, whereas proverbs reveal how occupational identities were understood in everyday society.

#### **18. Methodological Limitations:**

Despite their value, proverbs must be approached critically.

First, they are not chronological records. It is often difficult to establish the exact date at which a proverb originated.

Second, they may contain exaggeration, humour, irony, and stereotypes.

Third, a proverb may represent the opinion of a section of society rather than the entire community.

Fourth, meanings can change over time.

Fifth, proverbs concerning caste groups can reproduce prejudice and should not be treated as objective descriptions of social groups.

Consequently, the historian should employ source triangulation. Proverbs should be compared with oral histories, inscriptions, literary texts, ethnographic accounts, material culture, economic records, and archaeological evidence.

The most productive approach is therefore neither to accept nor reject proverbial evidence wholesale, but to interrogate it as a cultural representation.

#### **19. Conclusion:**

The study of Telugu proverbs associated with *Vishwakarma* or *Panchanam* artisans demonstrates the considerable potential of proverbial literature as a source for social history. These expressions preserve knowledge concerning occupations, tools, technologies, labour practices, seasonal employment, economic relationships, household experiences, professional reputation, caste boundaries, and social perceptions.

The *Kammari* proverbs emphasize the physical demands of ironworking, the importance of tools, occupational specialization, self-reliance, and the blacksmith's contribution to agrarian production. The *Vadrangi* proverbs reveal the carpenter's dependence on seasonal agricultural demand, the importance of skilled craftsmanship, professional competition, and the cultural value attached to productive labour. The *Kanchari* proverbs illuminate the sensory environment of metalworking, the relationship between workshop and household, and the economic paradox of producing goods for others while experiencing material constraints at home.

The *Agasali* or *Kamsali* corpus is particularly complex. It simultaneously represents the goldsmith as indispensable, technically sophisticated, alert, intelligent, and economically important, while also reproducing stereotypes concerning dishonesty, cunning, delay, and manipulation. These contradictory representations are historically significant. They reveal the tension between social dependence upon specialized artisan knowledge and suspicion of the artisan's control over valuable materials.

The proverbs also demonstrate that occupational identity was deeply embedded in everyday social consciousness. Craft knowledge was not restricted to workshops; it entered popular speech, humour, metaphor, and moral discourse. The forge, furnace, chisel, file, gold, lead, wood, and agricultural implements became cultural symbols through which broader social experiences were expressed.

Most importantly, these proverbs demonstrate that *Vishwakarma* artisans should not be viewed merely as hereditary occupational groups. They were active participants in the production of the material, economic, and cultural worlds of rural society. Their skills sustained agriculture, domestic life, ritual practices, construction, transport, adornment, and exchange.

Therefore, *Vishwakarma*-related proverbs constitute a valuable vernacular archive. When read critically alongside epigraphical, literary, ethnographic, archaeological, and oral-history sources, they can substantially enrich the reconstruction of the social history of artisan communities in Telugu-speaking regions. They illuminate not only what artisans produced but also how their labour

was perceived, valued, questioned, remembered, and incorporated into the collective consciousness of society.

The study of these proverbs consequently shifts attention from elite historical narratives toward the everyday histories of labour, technology, caste, and community. In doing so, it demonstrates that the history of society can also be recovered from the seemingly ordinary words through which communities remembered their world.

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