

**Role of Village Deities among the Rural Society
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Andhra Pradesh, India***KEYWORDS** Village Deities. Rituals. Fairs. Rural Folk. Castes

ABSTRACT In this paper an attempt is made to highlight the importance of the village deities and related rituals in the context of rural society of Rayalaseema region, the southern region of Andhra Pradesh, which is a rich store house of fold deities continued from the times immemorial. The region consist of masses mostly residing in villages and maintaining the rural character since agriculture and other related occupation form the major means of the subsistence. The people are all of god fearing and polytheism form the most basis of their worship and devotion. Each and every village is adorned with some deity or other with a belief that it will protect the rustics from the external forces like spirits and witches etc. Though some of these deities have temples, many of them find their place under the shade of Margosa and Ravi tees with some epic background of their own. The female deities are more in numerical strength in the area under report. Generally once in a year or whenever there is drought or outbreak of epidemics, a ritual is celebrated by the villages to appease the village deity along with the near and dear. In the social stratification, the working caste and the untouchables associate with the ritual more enthusiastically than that of others. The peculiar feature of these rituals in an admixture of little and great traditions. The rural masses mostly rely on these village deities for all their practical purposes, since they will inject a sort of self-confidence and inspiration among them. A detailed study of the village deities projects some of the hidden social-economic and religious aspects of semi-arid Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh.