

Gongadi—traditional blankets

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To encourage the shepherd community to protect the vanishing wool craft, Anthra and other activists are showcasing Gongadi crafts and material at an exhibition at Malkha, Humayun Nagar, from October 11-13.

The exhibition has various types of gongadi made by traditional weavers. The specialty of these rugs is that they are not dyed; it is the natural colour of the wool from Deccani sheep, which becomes darker as time passes. The Gongadis in the exhibition are priced between Rs 2,000 and Rs 6,000. These traditional gongadis can be used as décor in urban homes.

Oggu Katha is one of the attractions at the exhibition.

"In urban homes, the gongadis can be used as traditional carpets and wall hangings. Many people are enthusiastic about these traditional blankets," says Shruthi Tharayil of Anthra.

Gongadi is the traditional woolen blanket of Telangana. The rug is woven from the wool of the unique Black Wool Deccani Sheep breed. This sheep is locally called as



Artistes performing 'Oggu Katha' at the exhibition

"nalla-gorre." The sheep is known to adapt the ecological and climatic conditions of Telangana, thus providing livelihood to farmers, shepherds and craftsmen. This breed is specially selected by farmers, as it has high tolerance level to drought and fodder shortages. Members belonging to the Kuruma community are said to be the original custodians of this breed.

The gongadi is also known as kambali. The blanket is woven from handspun wool. Traditionally women hand-



Women along with their Deccani sheep

spun the wool to make yarn and men hand-wove the yarn to make gongadi.

Most gongadis are woven using the black wool. The black wool is dominant colour in this sheep. The blankets have very simple designs.

The gongadis are widely used by the village community and it continues to be the integral part of the Kuruma community's culture and is a significant symbol of Telangana region.

Yaddamma, a weaver from Peddagokula, Narsapur taluka, says that she learned the craft of making gongadis from her parents. As a child, she used to observe the work which her parents would do and later she started making gongadis when she was 16 years old. Now, she along with her family, does this seasonal business.

A similar exhibition of Telangana wool craft was conducted at Dakshin Chitra, in Chennai, to coincide with the International Crafts Council Conference, from Oct 5-11, 2012, where the wool craft of Telangana and its craftspeople, and the shepherding community of Medak, Telangana, participated.