

Tribal Identity and Culture: Ways of Documenting and Protecting the Primitive Tribal Groups in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

The tribal people of India are a part and parcel of the Indian population and represent a true synthesis of Indian culture. The original tribes in India have been divided and sub-divided into large number of sub tribes. They are mutually exclusive each having the endogenous and exogamous clan with their own name and culture, customs, rituals, practice and lifestyle. Because of multiple factors like poverty, illiteracy, bad sanitary conditions , malnutrition, poor maternal and child health services ,unavailability of health and nutritional services ,superstition and deforestation their health status too is in an awful condition. In the field of education and infrastructure facilities, these PVTGs lag far behind than the other scheduled tribes. These are our indigenous cultures and traditions and if we do not take the effort to preserve them we would lose a rich heritage that was once an integral part of our existence. The goals should be to let people develop along the lines of their own ingenuity and avoid imposing anything on them and to encourage their traditional art and culture, their land and forests respected to maximum. The folk songs, dances and oral narratives are the symbols of social integration. The upliftment of the tribal society is possible only with the promotion of tribal art and traditional art. This paper tries to analyze the ways to protect and preserve the indigenous tribal groups and their culture for future.

Keywords: Tribal culture, oral narratives, primitive tribal groups, folk songs, deforestation

Introduction

Culture is a shared pattern of behavior and interactions of a group of people encompassing language, religion, habits, arts, music, rituals, clothing etc., which are learned through socialization. The tribal people of India are a part and parcel of the Indian population and represent a true synthesis of Indian culture. The original tribes in India have been divided and sub-divided into large number of sub tribes. They are mutually exclusive each having the endogenous and exogamous clan with their own name and culture, customs, rituals, practice and lifestyle. The Adivasis are an inseparable part of Kerala population and for that reason the state holds a unique position in the tribal map of India. Thirty six communities are listed in the scheduled tribes list of the state. Of them five tribal communities viz.,Koraga, Kattunayakan, Cholanaikkan, Kurumbar and Kadar have been categorized as Primitive Tribal Groups(PTGs) by the Government of India in 1976 and later in 2006, renamed as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)based on the criteria of pre-agricultural level of technology, less than five percent literacy, marginal or stagnant rate of growth etc. In 2006, The PVTGs in India are seen distributed in fifteen states or Union Territories.

Objectives of the study

- 1.To analyse the various primitive tribal communities and its own cultural activities.
2. To study the role of tribal people in the culture of Kerala.
3. To compare the status of primitive tribal communities with other scheduled tribes.
4. To evaluate and adopt various measures to preserve the primitive culture and tradition.

5. To examine the extent to which modernization is affecting the religious customs and traditions of the tribal people.

Aim and Significance of the study

In Kerala there are five PVTGs. The five PVTGs of Kerala are the Koraga of Kasargode district ; the Cholanaikkan of Nilambur valley, Malappuram district ; the Kurumbar of Attappady, Palakkad district ; the Kadar of erstwhile Cochin area and the Kattunayakan of Wayanad, Malappuram and Calicut districts. PVTGs have some basic characteristics - they are mostly homogenous, with a small population, relatively physically isolated, social institutes cast in a simple mould, absence of written language, relatively simple technology and a smaller rate of change etc. The level of inequalities in social and economic conditions is very high among PVTGs. The growth of PVTGs population is either stagnating or declining, compared to the general population growth. Because of multiple factors like poverty, illiteracy, bad sanitary conditions , malnutrition, poor maternal and child health services ,unavailability of health and nutritional services ,superstition and deforestation their health status too is in an awful condition. In the field of education and infrastructure facilities, these PVTGs lag far behind than the other scheduled tribes.

The tribal culture is slowly eroding and its reasons are many. Tribals are forest dwellers and food gatherers. Their major source of income was through the forest products. But due to various reasons like legal ban of hunting, decreased availability and demand of forest products, climate changes etc., they cannot support themselves by depending purely on forests. As a result

they have forgotten their ancient crafts and most of them are working as laborers in plantations and agricultural farms. Usually they are engaged in low skilled, low paying jobs especially in primary sector. Drastic changes are being perceived and the rich cultural heritage that once was the identity of the tribes is no longer being followed. The practices of miracle and healing through herbs were knowledge and a ritual that was passed on from their ancestors has almost come to extinction. These agricultural people when uprooted were in a great trouble. First was about their alternative place for rehabilitation as well as alternative occupation and their livelihood though these affected families were given reasonable compensation ,they had to face numerous social problems, cultural crisis, disorganization and social disintegration.

The Significance of the study rises from the fact that tribal cultures and traditions need to be preserved. These are our indigenous cultures and traditions and if we do not take the effort to preserve them we would lose a rich heritage that was once an integral part of our existence. The goals should be to let people develop along the lines of their own ingenuity and avoid imposing anything on them and to encourage their traditional art and culture, their land and forests respected to maximum. Tribal people should be allowed to administer themselves and avoid entry of too many outsiders into tribal area in the name of administration, without overwhelming them with too many schemes and work in cooperation with their own social and cultural institutions. The art, history, tradition and the awareness of indigenous knowledge should be preserved so that the future generation won't be deprived of their cultures.

Expected outputs

1. Cultural study of traditional skills, rituals and religious practices of the primitive tribes in Kerala .
2. By documenting and preserving the various indigenous art forms and tracing the origin and growth of various tribal communities.
3. Retrieving folk and traditional culture of tribes taken and making it worthwhile for the society and further studies

Conclusion

The unique adaptive strategy and cultural space of diverse tribal communities has gained huge research attention across the world owing to complexities of the issues related to their bio-cultural diversities, ethnicity, historicity, response to state policies and ongoing negotiation processes in a globalized world. Depending on their exposure to the forces of change and intricate link to the wider socio-political realities of life these issues have accelerated the process of transition among the diverse tribal population. The folk songs, dances and oral narratives are the symbols of social integration. The upliftment of the tribal society is possible only with the promotion of oral art and traditional art.

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