

A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN KURICHYA AND PANIYA TRIBE

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Abstract

Paniya – Kurichya – paniya language – culture – occupation – education – kurichya community – culture – education – economic practices

Introduction

Traditionally, the term 'tribe' has been used for those groups of human beings whose place of residence is situated in remote areas like hills, forests, coasts and islands and whose style of life is quite different from the present day civilized men. India is one of the countries having a large concentration of tribal population. In this, it has second rank in the world. In this article, it is decided to make a comparison between the Kurichya tribe, the top most upper class community among tribals and Paniya- the lower class tribal group among them.

SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC PRACTICES OF KURICHYA TRIBE

SOCIAL

Food Gatherers

They are mostly food gatherers and completely dependent on forests for their livelihood. They are interested in collection, gathering and hunting. They are numerically less and distributed mainly in Wayanad.

Shifting Cultivation

It is one of the major feature of Kurichya tribe. Shifting cultivation is an important aspect among them. As part of forest economy, certain small scale tribes practice slash and burn or shifting cultivation. Hill cultivation is a seasonally regulated sequence of activities designed to open up and bring under cultivation patches of forest lands especially in hilly regions. It is also combined with Terrence cultivation and wet cultivation in the foot hills and low lying areas.

The system of shifting cultivation is primitive and a plot of land is cultivated for two consecutive years. In the first year, only one crop is usually grown and in the second year, by of crops in usually rises. Thereafter, the land is left as a fallow for twelve to sixteen years, but in the recent years recuperative period has been minimized to three to five years for the non-availability of virgin land for the purpose.

Agricultural

The Kurichya tribe holding an interesting socio – cultural heritage and an economic self-sufficiency. They always prefer a commune type of living. They follow a matrilineal heritage. Cooperative farming is common among them. Equally in owning property, all amenities of life space and food etc. The most important difference is apart from the other tribal communities, they form a socialistic life style and pattern. These Kurichyans are very

honest and hardworking people. They always show the maximum level of sincerity in their day-to-day activities.

Occupation

Another feature is that their occupational diversification is very less. Some of them are owners of land, agriculturalists and a small group among them are wage labourers. Also, very few among them are in permanent service such as Government or private employees. In the context of gender proportion, it is evident from the lifestyle of Kurichya tribal community, is that there are equal importance of both males and females. Females are also getting a kind of importance in their family.

“Tharavaadu”

This Kurichya tribal community follow a matrilineal system and they live in the joint families with minimum of 30 family members up to 100. Every family or the economic self sufficient group of Kurichya family is known as “mittom”. There, the senior most male is the “pittom” (Puppan, Karanavar). They have common kitchen. All their generations share the same kitchen. They are following a matrilineal family system. Their ancestral property is owned collectively and inherited strictly in the same way of matrilineal.

The wives stay with the husband, but the children remain in father’s household till the age of 5 or 6 years old. After that, they will go and join their mother’s mittom. When her husband dies or if she is divorced, the wife also leaves his household to rejoin her natal family. She has the membership in her own family also. She will never lose the membership after marriage.

This combination of partly the patrilocal (uxovilocal) residence and the matrilineal descent is often described as “dysfunctional” by some others. It is same in the characteristic of North Kerala Nayers of centuries and same as in the case of Kurichya.

Only the Pittom has the right to sell, mortgage or lease the property. This “pittom” is respected by everyone in the family. He will supervise the family’s social, economic and cultural functions very deeply and will ensure the welfare and cohesion of their family. If “pittom” fails in doing responsibilities, he will be removed by the other members of the family. Pittom’s wife is known as “ammayi or odakkarathi”. She is in charge of cooking and allotting different duties to the other women, life cycle rituals and ceremonies.

At this time, there are mainly 56 Kurichyatharavaads in Wayanad. Most of them are large and wealthier. Now these tharavaads are disintegrated into nuclear families because of Government intervention. Now the tharavaadu land property is divided into 5 – 10 cent for constructing small huts.

ECONOMIC

Karanavar: The Economic Head

In every Tharavaad, there is a Karanavar. He is the head of the tharavad and will look after all the financial activities of the members of that family, regarding socio, economic and political affairs.

Karanavar controls all the financial matters related to the “therattukalyanam” (puberty ceremony), harvest, festival etc. At the time of puberty ceremony, all members assemble in the tharavaad and provide financial assistance. “Kalorakkaran” (Changathi) has an important role in all the activities.

Sharing Work and Income

Rice cultivation and animal husbandry are the main livelihood of Kurichyas. Normally men are engaged in animal husbandry and vegetable cultivation. Women are participated in rice cultivations. They are experts in collecting seeds, "Natipani", weeding, manuring etc. In the various stages of farming, majority of the work is done by women.

Wealth control is mainly by male members especially by Karanavar. Animal husbandry, cash crop cultivation, vegetable cultivation also generate surplus income among Kurichyans.

Inheritance of Property

Kurichya family property is based on matrilineal line. Under their system, individual ownership of property does not exist. They follow a joint family system and property is also under joint ownership.

SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC PRACTICES OF PANIYA TRIBE

Paniya group also known as Paniyas and paniyans are an ethnic group of India. They are mainly the inhabitants of generally in Kerala and particularly in Wayanad, Kozhikode, Kannur and Malappuram districts. They speak the Paniya language which belongs to the Dravidian family. In Kerala, the population of Paniya are 88450 in number.

Socio-economic profile of Paniya

Paniya group in Kerala are living in the hill ranges, mainly on the western ghats, bordering Karnataka and Tamilnadu. Historically, their job profile was as agriculture labourers. It is believed that they have been brought to Wayanad by the King of Malabar, thereafter continued in the land as serfs. Following the abolishment of the slavery system, the Paniya were resettled in many areas established by the Government. Historically, Paniyas were also reputed for their boldness and recklessness. Because of this reason, they were often employed as thieves.

Language

They speak the Paniya language as their mother tongue. As a member of the Dravidian family, it is very closely related to Malayalam, Kadar and other Dravidian language. Paniya language is spoken both at home and during religious ceremonies. Some of them also use other Dravidian languages such as Malayalam, Tamil or Kannada.

Paniyas use different writing systems depending on where their residence. Those who are in Karnataka use the Kannada script, those who are in Kerala write in the Malayalam script, while the Paniya in tamil Nadu will use the Tamil script.

Culture

Paniyas mainly lives in villages, which are known as padis comprising of a few huts with courtyards. These huts are also known as 'pire' or 'chala'. Each hut settlement contains 5 to 15 families. Usually, Paniya males wear a lengthy band cloth around the waist which is known as 'mundu'. A smaller mundu is also slung over the shoulder to cover their body. Paniya females or panichi wears a long cloth with a smaller one above the breast area to

cover the breast and around the armpits. Plus, they wear a red or black aratti scarf around the waist.

The Paniyas bury the deadbody in formal funeral rites. The place of burial is about to the padi. The burial is convoyed by a seven-day mourning period by their family members and close relatives.

Occupational distribution

Occupational mobility is to be considered as a major factor which provides tremendous changes in the socio-economic profile of the people. It is clear that none of the Paniya tribe are the owners of the land. They are merely only agricultural labourers and no Paniya household could be identified in the Government job. This is because they have low educational standard.

Financial Inclusion

Only some of the Paniya tribe has banking transactions and bank accounts. They have very limited awareness about banking facilities. All the banks have introduced many measures to reach their services in the remotest areas. But even after the introduction of Government rules and policies, 4% of Paniya tribals are taking part in banking transactions.

Education

Education enables to enhance human resources in a nation. Every child has the right to education. In broader term, education refers to all forms of human learning. In narrow sense, it refers to the process that occurs in specialized institutions. There is a significant difference between basic literacy and education. Education improves social mobility and social status.

Paniyans are considered to be the most backward in education and literacy status while comparing the other tribals groups of the state. Paniyan community is 21.77% of the total tribal population and the illiterates among the community represent 28.99% of the total illiterate. Moreover, the proportion of illiterates among Paniyan community to their population is 34.81%. The highest rate of dropout is also found among Paniyan community. Increasing dropout rate and low educational status is a very critical problem faced by the community. Hence, there arrives a need to identify specific problems that are leading to their condition.

Conclusion

Let's sum up, we know that paniyans are the downtrodden class among the tribals. The Government made a lot of initiatives to push up this society. But it is evident from the past experience that they are not at all ready to break the social taboos and cultural fringes.

On the other hand, Kurichyas are just opposite of Paniyas. They are educated, civilized and the top most class among the tribals. They are leading a life of the same features of Nayers of Kerala. So, a lot of measures have to be taken for the upliftment of these tribals. Then only a kind of social equalization will happen. Let's hope for the best.

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