

TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURAL CHANGE: A CASE STUDY OF MANNAN TRIBES IN KERALA

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Abstract : According to the UNDP Report 2010 Kerala, the state which has second position in literacy rate, highly modernized, civilized and developed in science and technology. According to Amartya Sen, Kerala is the model for development. In Kerala, Idukki is the second largest district where most number of Scheduled Tribes and Tribal ambiguities exist. According to Census (2011) around 11516 Scheduled Tribal families are living in Idukki. Among the tribal group Mannan tribes were one of the only two tribal communities in India which still have a traditional king, Raman Mannan. In the era of technological advancements and modern ways of living, the Mannan's culture change. The study attempt to analyze cultural change and technological advancement happened among Mannan tribes.

IndexTerms - Mannan tribe, technology, culture, cultural change.

I. INTRODUCTION

The world is changing rapidly as a result of new digital technologies which have revolutionized opportunities for and the nature of networking and communication. It is essential to understand how different populations use digital technologies and social media in order to explore their potential to improve social and health outcomes. People often lament that the advance of technology has had a dehumanizing effect. But the reality is quite the opposite. The second digital decade is all about personalization and connectivity in ways that previously were not possible or imaginable. Far from inhibiting expression, technology has enhanced and enabled our individuality. For example, websites such as the BBC allow us to tailor the home page so that it contains only those categories that are of personal interest, while social network sites such as Face book and MySpace provide a canvas for self expression and a harbor for community.

According to the census of 2011, the total tribal population is 3, 64,189. In 1991 census there were only 3, 20,967. This shows there is an increase in number of tribal population. Kerala, the God's own country has a tribal population of 3, 64,189 according to the census report of 2011. Idukki district have the second position in maintaining a larger tribal population about 50269.

The key informant interview from King of Mannan revealed that there were only two tribal groups in India who have king as their ruler, one in Tripura and the other in Kerala that is mannan tribes in Idukki district. The term 'Mannan' is a combination of 'Manna' (earth) and Manusian (man), which means 'the sons of the soil'. The mannan tribes have unique customs and rituals. Mannan tribes are the third largest tribal group in Idukki. Mannan tribes maintain their own unique cultural identities, value system and practices which are accepted by the wider society. Many important aspects of mannan social structure and process will not be known through a questionnaire or survey research method. Many of the interaction among the tribal are symbolic, the meaning of which will be best understood only by the close interaction and careful scrutiny. At the same time some of the basic data like number of members, age, marital status, education, occupation etc in the family which are quantitatively can be collected through the survey method. Karunakaran in his book "Athivasikalude lokam vanavasikal" (2007) emphasis about social structure of the mannan tribal community with the view to identify the social process that have contributed to their modernization. He has made an attempt to delineate their history, progress, present condition of life and the impact of various welfare measures and technology among them. But very few systematic studies on

cultural and technological change among Mannan tribes. This study made an attempt to understand what are the technological and cultural change among Mannan tribes in Kerala.

3.1 Population and Sample

The Mannan tribes in Idukki district of Kerala state form population of the study. In Idukki Mannan tribes lived in three settlements with 130 families. The researcher had taken 150 Mannan tribes by using simple random sampling method.

3.2 Data and Sources of Data

The researcher had used both primary and secondary data for collecting data. The primary data were collected through interview schedule and Participant observation, besides Informal interviews and key informant interview with the king of Mannan and elder members of the tribal settlement help the researcher to get more insights about the technological and cultural change happened among them. The secondary data collected through books, Journals and research papers.

3.3 Discussion and findings

Mannan people's life and culture has changed significantly in the recent past. They have lost their authority over their temple, Ayyappamkovil and many of their gods still domicile in forests. If colonialism was the beginning of major transformations in their life, the post colonial period has made their life more vulnerable and exploitative. They become marginalized people in all realm of life. The Mannan language too changed under the influence of Malayalam and most of the new generalizations are unaware of their heritage. They become hybrid because other people trespassed into their religion and they tend to forget their real identity on the mirror of a false world. The scope of this study lies in the possibility for a social change, a change in the point of view of the community and of the outer world through rethinking and re-describing the past, present and the future. (Key informant interview from Mannan King)

This study found that Mannans keep a good relationship with the outsiders and they feel comfortable with the use of TV, mobile and internet especially among youngsters. They use whatsapp, face book and You Tube. The researcher could identify that men are most advanced with technology than women, especially youngsters. They learn to use the technology without any special training. The impact of education led youngsters to use the technology. The researcher identified that the younger women also advanced with kitchen equipments like gas stove, mixer and grinder. The researcher also understands that older generation still follows traditional methods in kitchen.

With the key informant interview with the king helps the researcher to identify the inauguration of a new website for Mannan tribes called kovilmalaraja.com. This shows the technological advancement happened among the Mannan tribes. It is through the site information about the Mannan tribes easily available. It includes the information regarding the geography, and culture. As part of technological advancement even though the website launched, the younger generation do not take much initiative to maintain the website efficiently.

C.K. Karunakaran(2007) mentioned about meeting held by the king and his ministers to take decision regarding important matters. The researcher also could understand even though social medias are prevalent, the king use mobile phone for to contact with his people and ministers. Decisions were taken through face to face meeting. Even though they were equipped with technologies, they keep the older form of meetings and gathering as it was in earlier time.

The researcher could found that only five people got laptop from government as part of promoting technical aid this group. During the interview with the king reveals that a new project computer awareness programme for Mannan tribes will launch soon. This project aims to achieve computer literacy to all Mannan people. After the technological innovation the Mannan's hope to communicate their issues and problems to outside the community. The government allowed 20 lakh rupees for the reconstruction of the palace for Mannan king before three years but the amount yet to be sanctioned.

As per census report literacy rate of Mannan's were only 1%. The researcher could identify that now everybody have opportunity for primary education. The study found that in earlier the lack of economy and lack of awareness about self goal were the pull factor against education. Now the free education and the mid- day meal scheme were the push factor towards education. The smart class room facility also availed for the children. As per School records now enrollment of school have been increased. The study found

digital technology can bring aspirations in their life. The Mannan tribes also went for higher studies in different parts of Kerala.

The study of Joshua(1995) reveals that the Mannan's cultivate basic crops in their own allotted farm lands, they collect forest products from non restricted area and doing manual labor were the main source of income. Due to 8 years old project of world vision development which was crossing the mountains has affected some of the houses. Most of the houses built with handmade bricks and the roof with leaves were untouched development. The study conducted by researcher reveals that the due to technological influence mannan tribes use irrigation, fertilizers in farm land for better production. They began to build houses with cement and bricks than mud and roofs with leaves. Due to technology they could improve their production and as a result they could not protect their traditional forest goods like bamboo products and honey because the artificial goods easily available for the outsiders reduce the demand for their products.

Bryan Shaw (2008) a famous researcher conducted a research on mannan tribes of kozhimala. The main objective of this research was to find out the present health needs and socio-economic and political conditions. The research set out to describe and understand the social, economic, political, cultural and personal changes happened among the Mannan tribes. The main health problem found among them is blood pressure. Because Mannan's were like to opt modern medical practices. Due to increase in awareness about health and illness their health seeking behavior has been increased. Lack of trained medicine men in tribal area was also caused to mannan resort to modern medicine. Here the researcher found that modern health practices also intervene the life of the mannans. The health awareness programmers' in TV and phone in programmes increased their health consciousness. During the interaction with the elder members reveals that the younger generation highly depend on modern medicines. As a result the role of medicine man, protection of traditional medical practices and herbs decreased. So the importance of indigenous medical practices among tribal community is decreasing due to the innovation in modern medical practices. It is the need of the hour to preserve the herbs and traditional medical practices even in this technological era.

This study found that due to the technological advancement the Mannan tribes social relations got changed. In earlier time the family relation was so strong among them. Now they spend more time for watching TV, serials and movies. Youngsters spend more time in social media. The family relation gets weakened, people became independent and communication with neighbors weakened due to technologies arrival. The previous reports show that the mannan tribe does not have any communication with the outer society. But the researcher could found that mannans keep a good relation with outsiders and they feel comfortable with the use of TV, mobile and internet among youngsters.

Understanding of Mannan culture

The researcher could understand that mannan tribes believes in their fore fathers spirit. Punampoojari temple is their community temple. They conduct their festival every year at the month of February 17 and 18. They mainly worship Madura Meenakshi Amma well known as Muthiamma. The king divides each god for each family for worship. The four main gods were Pathmanabha Swami for west, Sabarimala Ayyappan for north, Ganapathi for south and Murukhan for east. Hinduism is the religion followed by them. Only 1% of conversion takes place. Karunakaran (2007) stated that in earlier times both men and women among mannan had the habit of growing hair. Both men and women had stud (kadukkan) in their ears, which is comparatively big in women. The mannan tribes follow the dressing pattern of outsiders due to the influence of mass Medias like television and films. Men wear shirt and dhoti. Teenagers used to wear modern dresses like jeans and shirt. The women wear nighty and skirt & shirt in house and wear churidhar and sari in public. The mannan tribes have their own language, dialect of Tamil and Malayalam. Aged people knew only this Tamil language. Due to the communication with outsiders the Mannan's language became modernized. Under the influence of Malayalam most of the new generations are unaware of their linguistic heritage. They became hybrid because other people region and they tend to forget the real identity on the mirror of a false world. The secondary source of data provides information that there were existence of special customs for girls at the time menstruation, pregnancy and puberty. There is an existence separate place for women at this time which is known as inns or Sathram. The researcher could found the existence of such inns now too. It was found that in early times women got married at an age of 13. Due the implementation of child marriage act, the women marriage age raised to 18. Researcher found that education also played a vital role in increasing age at marriage. Even though the younger generation use face book, whatsapp and other Social Medias they strictly follow the traditional ways in marriage. Most of them favor arranged marriage than

love marriage. Only 1% had done religious conversion in relation to marriage even elder members took decisions regarding marriage. The interview with the king enable the researcher to explore that when someone dead, the partner should undergo fasting(called as vrutham) includes not taking bath for seven days. Even it is an unhealthy practice still it was followed by Mannan. The interview with the king helps the researcher to understand about the law and order maintained among them. Before twenty years law and order and punishments were decided by the king. But now including Mannan King follow bureaucratic system. During the focused group discussion the researcher identified that they were mainly stay in forest inland which was allotted by government. When the government banned deforestation these families, made a great exodus to the civilized places and are forced to restrict themselves in the allotted plots with their own culture. Which can made hindrances for diffusion of culture to outside tribal settlement.

Women are Queen as well....

The status of tribal women can be judged mainly by the roles they play in society. Their roles are determined to a large extent through the system of descent. The families try to pass their property by the line of descent. The family surnames too are traced on the basis of the system of descent. In an unilineal system the descent is traced either through the male or female line. Among Mannan women is considered as Madurai Meenakshi Devi(Goddess of Hindus of Tamil Nadu). As like king and his ministers, the wife of the king and wives of ministers take care of the women matters. About 80% of the elder women had a habit of chewing betel leaf. As compared with the elders the younger generation is more conscious about oral cancer and life style deceases due technological advancement. The cancer awareness programmes like 'we can' influence the younger generation and they took part in awareness campaign.

The researcher found that very earlier time Mannan's follows the system of 'marumakathayam' (a system of matrilineal inheritance prevalent in Kerala) for selecting their king, ministers, and other officials. The king expressed his anxiety on younger generation due to segregation of indigenous culture from their daily life. Due the modernization the younger generation showed less interest to follow primitive religious rituals and practices part of their culture. Another notable thing is that the youngsters unaware of their linguistic heritage and not interested to speak their common dialectics.

Cultural practices , social media and cultural change

The mannan tribes had their own art form called 'Koothu' and they conduct it in every special occasion. The outside community accepts their art form and they also try to participate in this. So they expand 'Koothu' as a means of tourism. Through the study researcher found their aesthetic articulations mainly include their tales, songs and koothu. Koothu is their art form in which they sing the story of Kannagi (Kannagi is a legendary Tamil woman who forms the central character of the Tamil epic Silapathikaram). They have their own costumes for this art form. As women not allowed performing, men disguise as women. Their main festivals are kalaavootu and meenootu. Kalaavootu is a festival which has similarity with pongal, a festival of the Tamil people. The celebration is for Kanchiyar Muthiamma(A Goodess). The researcher could realize that the entertainment had its importance at the time of marriage, ceremonies and in other special days. Their main entertainment is 'koothu'. It is also known as 'Attupattu'. 'Kummikali' is another entertainment for women. Even though many changes happened for them. They strictly follows their cultural art form 'Koothu' very carefully. The researcher could understand that the Mannan tribes upload their cultural festivals and the "koothu" in YouTube. It is through social media the outer world. It is through social media the outer world could understand about their customs and traditions. It attracts people towards their culture and heritage. The study conducted by the researcher reveals that Mannan tribes propagate their culture through songs and stories. 'Mannan Koothu' had play a vital role. 'Chavadi' is a cultural center to maintain their cultural heritage work effectively among them. Through 'chavadi' they taught the children about their rules and regulations, art form, administration, culture and astrology.

Due to the technological advancement social relations got changed among Mannan tribes. In earlier days they spent more time with family. Now they spend more time for watching TV, serials and movies. Youngsters spend more time in social media like whatsapp, face book and online chatting. The family relation got weakened, people became independent and communication with neighbors weakened. Due to the use of technology they began to cultivate in their land than following the traditional occupations like handicraft and forest good preservation. As a result they could improve their economic level even though

their traditional occupation got changed. The authority of mannan tribe is still the king but now autocratic ruling of king shifted to democratic.

Challenges to preserve culture

The study found following challenges are mainly faced by Mannan tribe people. The younger generation is less concerned about their culture. In earlier times they strictly follow the cultural practices. In earlier times they had a habit of gather together and conduct a common prayer for all gods before they went to work. Now this common prayer before work is rarely held. Because they became individualized. All the people without any distinction compulsorily participate in their festivals. Now those who migrated to cities and went out for higher studies don't give much importance to ceremonies. Even though they follow their own cultural practices, the younger generations expect to treat them as equal to all others. So they try to reduce their participation in tribal area and they mainly concentrate to imitate the modern way living and they made their thoughts and beliefs modernized. Before 20 years the laws and order maintained by king but now it is in democratic ways. Thus the value system and rules and regulations particular to tribal community at cross road.

Strategies adopted to maintain culture

They gathered together to conduct 'Koothu' which is the base of their culture. This conduct at the time of harvest, marriage, death, and other special meetings. They gathered together to conduct 'Kalavootu' and 'Meenootu' related to agriculture. It also help them to maintain their own life ways. They maintain a group of people who study 'Koothu' pattu' and they expand 'Koothu' as part of promotion of tourism in tribal area. They share their festivals, folk dances and unique practices through social medias such as face book, you tube and whatsapp. From early childhood special training given to children about their culture, customs and traditions. 'Chavadi'-a training center that exist in mannan community. In chavadi special training given about their own art, rules, laws, administration, taboos, the role and position of gods and goddess and how to conduct prayers. To maintain their own religion the god and goddess distributed to each family and they conduct daily prayers for the god which they got. The king have the power to seek whether they successfully follow the prayers or divert from it.

CONCLUSION

The research analyses and interpreted data on the basis of objectives and data collected through primary and secondary data. The study aims to discover the impact of technology values, customs and other traditions followed by mannan tribes. They mainly maintain their culture through 'Koothu' and 'Chavadi'. The impact of modern trends has contributed many changes in their traditional ceremonies. The people of younger generations do not like to give much importance to the ceremonies. This is because they are getting educated. Even in the middle of fast progress they maintain their traditions and rituals. The mannan language too changed under the influence of Malayalam and most of the new generalizations are unaware of their injustice heritage. They become hybrid because other people trespassed into their religion and they tend to forget their real identity on the mirror of a false world. The academia should aware of mannan culture and literature and proper importance should be given to mannan oral tradition and culture to bring them to the lime light of mainstream culture. The scope of this study lies in the possibility for a social change, a change in the point of view of the community and of the outer world through rethinking and re-describing the past, present and the future. As technology has entered tribal lifestyle, there is a chance to lose the traditions and tribal uniqueness in the long run, in the changing scenario. As we step forward into the twenty first century, there is a need to protect and promote these traditions or they will be lost forever.

II. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

A Special thanks to King of Mannan for giving valuable information for the study. Heart felt thanks to Ashly for your personal assistance.

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