

EDIFYING INHERITANCE OF URALI TRIBE IN MANETHADAM, IDUKKI

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Abstract : History and tradition followed by ancestors to existing generation and will handover to gen next is something in a cyclic motion that tag along from the beginning of this universe. The marginalization of barbarians and civilized group of people tied two different knots of traditional followers and modernization. Artistic traditions of ethnic groups are still maintained and followed by themselves which are a great treasure to other group of existing people to sustain and keep a good track to find out what this modernity left behind for suffering. There are many studies done in the field of ethnic groups all over the World. The paper titled as '*Edifying Inheritance of Urali Tribes in Manethadam, Idukki*' tries to find out the cultural, oral and artistic traditions still followed and practised by them in relation with the characteristic features of their socio-cultural factors, indigenous knowledge, folklore aspects and language of 'Urali' tribes reside at Kanjikuzhi' village in 'Udumbanoor' area of Idukki District in Kerala. The elicited data is collected through quantitative and qualitative method using pre-structured questionnaire. 35 informants of both gender consists of old aged, middle aged and teenagers with the situation they exists is taken into consideration.

Key Words: Artistic traditions, Edifying inheritance, Scheduled Tribes, Socio-culture

1. INTRODUCTION

On the basis of the 1991 census, the Offices of the Registrar General of India has identified the number of languages as 114 consisting of 18 Scheduled languages as the 216 mother tongues an d96 Non Scheduled languages, as the Census enumeration has ignored, since 1971 to enumerate and list any language spoken by less than 10,000 'mother –tongue' speakers (Bhattacharya 2002: 54-97). The census of India 2001 (Language) recognizes 122 languages, comprising of 22 scheduled and 100 Non- scheduled languages ; 234 mother tongue are identified, out of which 93 are classified under the scheduled languages and 141 are grouped under non-scheduled languages (2007: 8-9). The languages of India generally classified into four major families on the basis of their genealogy –(i) Austro- Asiatic (ii) Dravidian (iii) Indo-Aryan and (iv) Tibeto-Burman. The genealogical classification is based upon the commonly inherited linguistic features by a group of languages from its ancestors.

India is a multilingual, pluriculture and polyethnic society with variety and diversity as the very fabric of its ethos. There are almost 537 different tribal communities spread all over India. As per the official data, 258 tribal communities speaking about 106 different languages are notified as Scheduled Tribes. (Ramakrishna Reddy, B 2010).

1.1. THE CONCEPT OF TRIBES

The word 'Tribal or Adivasi' brings to our mind a picture of half-naked man and women, with arrows and spears in their hands, features in their heads, and speaking an unintelligible language, their lives often combined with myths of savagery and cannibalism. When majority of the communities (so called civilised people) in the world kept changing their life styles, competed with each other and developed materialistic instincts to keep pace with the 'progress' of the world, there were communities still living in line with their traditional values, customs and beliefs. Those of them are called as 'Tribes' (Ramakrishna Reddy, B 2010).

According to the definition, 'Tribe, commonly called scheduled tribe, in the Indian context is an administrative and legal term to label some ethnic groups based on their socio-economic status, and religious

and cultural customs in order to give special attention to them as mandated by the constitution'. The concept of tribe has been a complex one with various ramifications and perceptions right from ancient days in the context of Indian subcontinent (Annamalai, 2000)

Though the ancient Indian works do not bother to provide the names and characteristics of tribal communities, from historical and archaeological evidence it is clear that the indigenous people lived with distinct cultures and used their languages in this subcontinent even during the Pre-Vedic period (Levi et al, 1929).

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study tries to find out the cultural, oral and artistic traditions still followed and practised by them in relation with the characteristic features of their socio-cultural factors, indigenous knowledge, folklore aspects and language of 'Urali' tribes reside at Kanjikuzhi' village in 'Udumbanoor' area of Idukki District in Kerala.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data is collected through direct method with the pre-structured questionnaire and observation is also done for the analysis and investigation of their language features. To identify the close variation in speech forms, recorded data is carried out from the field.

4. SAMPLING SIZE

For this study, 35 informants of both gender consists of old aged (nos.10), middle aged (nos.13) and teenagers (nos.12) in which male (21) and female (14) out of 35 with the situation they exists is taken into consideration in Manethadam region.

5. ETHNIC GROUPS IN KERALA

While considering the state Kerala, it has as a unique pose in tribal map of India. According to the 1991 census report, the population of the Scheduled Tribes in Kerala is 3, 20,967 constituting 1.10% of the total population. The combination of male and female are 1, 60,812 and 1, 60,155 respectively. It is estimated that by 2001 the tribal population would increase to nearly 3.91 Lakhs. The tribal population in the state is only 1.1 percent of the total population in the state. (Census of India, 2011a)

There are 35 tribal communities in Kerala. For eg:- *Adiya, Paniyar, Arayar, Urali* etc. Among them, 5 are Primitive tribal groups (PTG's) viz., *Kattunaikkan, Cholanaikkan, Koragas, Kadar* and *Kurumbas*. Majority of the tribal families are belonging to BPL (Below Poverty Line). They mostly found in *Waynad, Idukki, Kannur, Palakkad, Kozhikode* etc.

5.1. IDUKKI DISTRICT IN KERALA

Idukki District is a heavenly place filled with scenic beauty and greenish sight of reservoirs, astounding waterfalls and the highest peaks with delightful crown of clouds and the rare and precious medicinal plants and the fragrance from the spices garden. Geographically Idukki is known for the dense forests and mountains. The largest District of Kerala with an area of 5105.22 sq km. Rugged mountains and forests cover about 97% of the total area of the district. There is only a strip of middle land (3%) in the western part of the district.

5.1.1. ETHNIC GROUPS IN IDUKKI

Idukki is the second largest place in Kerala where the most of the scheduled tribes and tribal ambiguities

exist. According to the reports, approximately 245 tribal settlements in the District of which 74 are in *Thodupuzha*; 11 in *Peermedu*; 126 in *Devikulam* and 34 in *Udumbanchola* Taluks. Almost all the scheduled tribes are living in the extreme remote hilly banks and in the deep interiors of thickly growing forests of this district. According to the most recent census, around 11,516 scheduled tribal families are living in the district. *Malayarayan, Mannan, Muthuvan, Oorali, Paliyan, Hilpulaya, Malapandaram, Ulladan, Malayan* are few of the scheduled tribes found in Idukki.

6. URALI COMMUNITY

'*Urali*' is mainly a tribe of agricultural workers. They are believed to be 'Kshatriyas'. The previous studies on them stated that, the '*Urali*' tribe has been able to integrate and incorporate the current trends and advancements into their rich cultural legacy. The Uralis are described as "caste of agricultural labourers found chiefly in the districts of Madurai and Trichinopoly. Urali is further a synonym of the Tandans of Travancore, in reference; it is said to their having been guardians of villages in former times. It is also the title of the headman of the Kuravas of Travancore and a synonym of the Kolayans of Malabar (Malabar Census Report, 1981).

6.1. MANETHADAM IN IDUKKI DISTRICT

Manethadam is the place which belongs to ward 15 of *Macoli* area of *Kanjikuzhi* panchayat in Idukki Dist. Approximately 15 Urali families consisting of 60 members including 20 children are living here. There are no teenage girls. Unfortunately the boys do not even think about girls until they visit the low land. From the nearby township *Udumbanoor*, it takes roughly one and half hours to reach *Manethadam*. Though it takes exactly 15 km to reach *Manethadam*, the journey by road is a tough task. Animals and reptiles like Elephant, Tiger, Pig, Jackal, Ant-eater, king cobra etc are a frequent sight on the way.

Jeep and a mini school bus are the vehicles that are used for travel purpose but unfortunately conveyance is available only twice in a day. In order to reach there one should cover areas like *Kaithappara, Chappathe* (during floods, people cannot cross the *Chappathe*, and it takes nearly 7 days for the water to recede) *Kollavuppara, Panthalikkalam, Kombiyaari* And *Murkkala*. Thick evergreen forests are found on both sides of the road. 26 hairpins are there from *Chappathe* to reach *Manethadam*. The road was made for the 'VELLATHUVAL KSEB' services in the 1980s. The road is risky and unmaintained even from the beginning. To reach Idukki from *Manethadam* nearly 45 minutes is needed via *Udumbanoor- Vazhathoppe*. It is the simplest and shortest time saving way to Idukki from low land.

6.2. URALIS IN MANETHADAM

In Idukki District Uralis are mainly found in *Venmani, Valppara, Pattayakkudi, Varikkamuthe, Pattakkal, Aarakkallu*. They define themselves as "Kerala Pattika Varga Urali" tribes. And for every region they have a committee or forum actively working on the welfare of their community. There is also a 'Vana Samrakshna Samithi' which is meant for the protection of forest as well as the Uralis.

7. EDIFYING INHERITANCE OF URALI TRIBE IN MANETHADAM

Cultural legacies are powerful forces. They have deep roots and long lives. They persist , generation and after generation, virtually intact, even as the economic and social demographic conditions that spawned them have vanished and they play such a role in directing attitudes and behaviour that we cannot make sense of our world without them (Caldwell, 2009).

7.1. RULING SYSTEM

As like other tribal community, they are also having a "Uurru Mooppan" who is the headman of their

community. Thenikkudi Sajeevan is the present Urru Mooppan. He is the leader in charge of Kerala State Sub-Committee Scheduled Tribes. Actually he belongs to Ulladar community. But the Urali community accept him as their Urru Mooppan. Accepting other headman from another community is not common in other ethnic groups. He is elected by the vote of *Urali* community people. His word is considered as the last word or final decision in their clans. Though he is the Mooppan, the prayers and offerings during the special occasions are done by the priest. '*Kozhimala Manan*' is the only king among the whole tribes who is accepted and respected by the Uralis.

7.2. BELIEFS AND PRACTISES

They believed in ancestral God, '*Maladaivam*' (God of Mountains) and '*Vanadaivangal*' (God of Forest). They are born and brought up in that hilly thick forest. So they are used to entitle their God as the above. They used to give offerings and prayers. They also consider Lord Ganesha as their God called as "Vikneswaran" believed to protect them from problems. The offering is known as "*Vechu Puuja*". They place Tender Coconut, Jaggery, Tulsi Leaves, Banana etc in front of Lord Ganesha.

For *Maladaivam*, they offer rice, coins, coconuts, betal leaves, areca nut, lime etc. and light lamps before these deities. They have "*Kudumba Temple*" (i.e., each family has their own temple for prayer and offerings). It is a proud as well as compulsory responsibility should follow from antecedent. It is in '*Mazhuvadi*' near to their native place. There is also another place known as "*Pathi*" where they do "*Pathiyuuttu*" ('pathi'-place name and 'uuttu' –giving food as part of an offering to God) in every December. The government provided one acre land for them in that place in order to built a temple. People did whatever possible to make the temple. Years past and most of the people went to low land in order to have better place to live. And nowadays most of the families living there belong to other religion and are there for agriculture purposes. *Mala Arayar* tribes are some among them.

8. LIFE CYCLE

(i) **BIRTH:** According to their concept, pregnant women are untouchables. They are not supposed to live in the house. They should stay in another hut made with hails and coconut leaves and woods. While the women give birth, she should be alone there and suffer the most. The food and water must be provided by the mother-in-law or mother in front of the hut which she takes on her own. If she gave birth to a child, she alone should give bath to her child by placing the baby in her knees while the water will be provided at the doorstep. If the child is dead, then she should herself bury the baby inside the hut itself. If she does all of this by herself, she may enter the house and if not, i.e., if she does not answer to the calls of her mother-in-law, they wait for a moment and put fire to the whole hut. During the early days, elephant attacks are common. At that time the mother should save the child from the attacks by holding them in her back by cloth pieces "chellaa" and climb herself on the top of the tree where they made wooden hut called "Eaaru Madam". She should collect food, water and clothes to there by herself.

- Pregnancy is not at all a matter for them. They don't even give much concern to giving birth to a baby. For them it is a law of nature. Nowadays, it is different. They give birth to baby in their home itself otherwise they will go to hospital.

(ii) **PUBERTY:** For the first sixteen days the teenage girl should cover her head. She should keep herself away from others sight. They make separate hut for the girl away from home. The food ought to provide by someone who is hired in the family. Her face should be covered by 'cheela'. After 16 days, her sister-in-law will put ornaments throughout the body and carry her to the nearby river with people accompanying them. On the way the girl should take a big stone having heavy weight in her head. When they reach there, they ask her to place the stone in the river and stand on it. Sister-in-law and others take her to bath meanwhile the girl should leave her ornaments in that stone. After that, when she comes home, they put "ORALE" and 3"OLAKAS" for

grounding the rice. With her, other two girls should help her for grounding the rice. After that, the grounded rice should be cooked by her.

- Nowadays it is different. They usually keep away from home but do not make the girl to carry the big stone to the river and not to ground the rice.

(iii) MARRIAGE: In their marriage, they used to tie “Thali” on the neck of the bride. “Thali” is made from the fibre of the dry banana plant and turmeric. The “Thali” is kept in front of the Maladaivam. Moopan gives his blessings and asks them to live together with prosperity and joy.

- Marriage is a holy matter for them. Though they are not celebrated too much they believe in marriage custom and togetherness.

(iv) DEATH: If someone dies, after one day they dig 6 feet in their land itself and roll the body in “PARAMBE” First they put tools, coins, rice, pans, spoons, mustard, salt etc into the burrow and then put the dead body into it. After that, they make a small hut above it in order protect it from rain and thunder. Without fail, every year they will go and commemorate him with prayers, lights the lamp and do pujaas.

- Still they do this without fail.

8.1. HABITS

Old people are always chewing betel leaves with areca nut and lime especially after meals. It seems to be as a habit in older people. Uralis are well known for their cleanliness. They keep their surrounding clean and hygienic. They do not have many health troubles. Rarely do they visit doctors. But the interesting fact about them is that even now they collect tuberous roots by digging by hand and eat them either raw or cooked. Traditionally they did not consume alcohol.

8.2. CULTIVATION & OCCUPATION

In early periods, their occupation was collecting honey and fire woods from forest. They made “vatti”, “kotta” with bamboo (i.e., basket). And they came to low land and sold those collected materials. But now the condition is different. Most of the tribal people are educated. But instead of doing reputed jobs, they are doing agriculture.

For them, agriculture is the ancestral occupation and they are fond of soil and cultivation. The community once ate roots and fruits but had started cultivating crops now. In early days, the crops like Paddy, Elephant Yam, Mize, Thina etc were cultivated.

Today, it has been changed to cash crops, spices like coffee, cardamom and areca nut, pepper, cardamom, grampus, ginger, etc respectively. They are trying to cultivate rubber as well.

8.3. MEDICINAL PRACTICES

They have certain peculiar practices among them for different day-to-day diseases or ailments like fever, diabetes, allergy, sinusitis, diarrhoea etc. They have what are called as ‘*Ottamooli*’ for all these ailments which are made from the herbs found commonly in their surroundings. For eg, “*Jatikka*” (*Myristica fragrans*) paste mixed in honey for diarrhoea, paste of Kacholam (*Kaempferia galanga Linn*) and onion for sinusitis, paste of Touch-me-not leaves (*Mimosa Pudica*) for diabetes to be taken before sunrise, “*Thumba*” (*Leucas zeylanica*) paste for migraine.

9. SOCIAL SETUP

Urali lives in huts or houses made of bamboo, woods, bricks, etc. The roof is made up of hay or dry palm

leaves. Every house has a Tulsi plant in front of their house and every day they light the lamp there.

Though the government provided solar panel to each houses most of them are not working properly. Unfortunately they do not have electricity most of the time. Ration is allotted for them. They are eligible for reservations but the facilities and their rights are ignored by the government. Because of it, their attitude is somehow against the governing body.

9.1. EDUCATION

The region has only a ‘single teacher school’ with four students and a teacher. This is done as a part of a government project 14 years ago. The teacher does not get any bonus or grants and is not a permanent staff though he teaches the students from the beginning of the school.

10. FOLKLORE AND LANGUAGE

Urali community have rich culture of folklore. They sing songs during special occasions like “*Kellayyutu*”, “*Karayyuttu*”, “*Chankranathy*”, “*Edachuttu*”, while they are in field, on the first day of “*Koitholsavam*”, while collecting fire woods, climbing trees and hills, marriages, and deaths.

Urali language is a South Dravidian language. The language has some features of Kannada even though they speak Malayalam. According to them, Malayalam is their mother tongue, however the rhythm and some expressions used in their language is different from other native speakers of Malayalam. The examples, *banāṅṅa* – ‘come here’ [especially used to refer male] and *banāṅṅi* – ‘come here [used to refer female] shows the gender marker in their language. The use of “*ṅṅa*” and “*ṅṅi*” for representing male and female respectively is evidence to it. /*kaijen*/ means ‘boy’ and /*kajire*/ girl also embraces the same. /-en/ and /-re/ are the markers. Here also illustrates the age also. They used /-en/ and /-re/ markers for referring youngsters rather aged ones. Ambiguity arises in the use of the word /*mutti*/. For them /*mutti*/ can be used to represent children while pampering them and also for addressing grandmothers. It is changed according to the situation and to the one whom they talk with. The word /*muttan*/ is used for grandfathers as well as for elder boys too. /-i/, /-ṅi/, /-tā/, /-ri/ sounds is occurs in final positions of speech forms. The feature of Kannada can be identified in the word [Malayalam] /*vāri*/ > /*[Kannada]* /*bāri*/ which means ‘to gather’. /*va*/ is the feature of Malayalam speech and /*ba*/ is Kannada. In Malayalam /*nāṅṅaṅal*/ means ‘coins’ they denoted as /*nāṅṅiyaṅal*/ means the same –coins. /*ṅa*/ > /*ṅi*/. The change high back vowel to front mid- vowel /*u*/ > /*e*/ in Urali language can be seen in *oru* > *orē* means ‘one’. The word /*avarkku*/ > /*avarikə*/ denotes the loss of cluster /*kk*/ to velar /*k*/ and back vowel /*u*/ > /*ə*/ due to the influence of /*e*/.

11. CONCLUSION

Each Urali tribes are themselves proud to be a member of an Urali community who were settled in interior forests. They are worshiping their ancestral Gods and follow the customs that they got from their parents. They are indigenous in culture and practises. They do not feel absurd about expressing their feelings, emotions, rights and justice to anybody. They do not care about the civilised society but gives care and concern to all other tribal communities. And of course they do not have fear and earns themselves for living. Animals, floods and drought make their life risky and dangerous in forest and yet they are not ready to leave the place. Even in this condition they are not at all strangers to the towns and its developments. One among the 35 tribes in Kerala, they wish to have a good road transport and electricity in their place.

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