



# INVOLVEMENT OF NON-TRIBAL PEOPLE AND CULTURAL CHANGES AMONG ADIVASI IN KERALA.

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India is a land with diverse customs, races, cultures, religions, and castes. Among all the race tribes are the most ethnic group of Indian society. Even in the Epic texts like Mahabharata and Ramayana, we can find some tribal clans who helped the heroes in the forest and mountains. According to the 2011 census, 8.6% of the total population of India is tribal. About 550 tribes are living in different parts of the country. Most of them live on slopes of mountains or in forests. But nowadays these people are considered as barbaric and boorish after the advancement of science and technology. Meanwhile, they are subjected to various issues and exploitations because of the development of society. Tribal people are debased from their habitat and they are forced to follow modern culture. The ethnicity of these people gets ruined as they are linked with modern culture and non-tribal life. The modernization of tribal culture is a trend nowadays and many have become a part of it. Modernity is an idea based on social changes such as industrialization, globalization, and consumerization. Modernity brings about changes that we can see everywhere, and it is an indefinable process. In some areas modernity is caused by progressive changes in society, whereas on the other side it leads to the destruction of society. It is very common in India that it takes away tradition from the life of a tribal community. For instance, modernity brought drastic changes in the life of the Paniya Community in Wayanad. Many of their customs and practices are being changed.

Keywords: Tribal culture, language, migration, modernity,

## I. INTRODUCTION

India is a land with diverse customs, races, cultures, religions, and castes. Among all the race tribes are the most ethnic group of Indian society. Even in the Epic texts like Mahabharata and Ramayana, we can find some tribal clans who helped the heroes in the forest and mountains. According to the 2011 census, 8.6% of the total population of India is tribal. About 550 tribes are living in different parts of the country. Most of them live on slopes of mountains or in forests. But nowadays these people are considered as barbaric and boorish after the advancement of science and technology. Meanwhile, they are subjected to various issues and exploitations because of the development of society. Tribal people are debased from their habitat and they are forced to follow modern culture. The ethnicity of these people gets ruined as they are linked with modern culture and non-tribal life. The modernisation of tribal culture is a trend nowadays and many have become a part of it. Modernity is an idea based on social changes such as industrialization, globalization, and consumerization. Modernity brings about changes that we can see everywhere, and it is an indefinable process. In some areas modernity is caused by progressive changes in society, whereas on the other side it leads to the destruction of society. It is very common in India that it takes away tradition from the life of a tribal community. For instance, modernity brought drastic changes in the life of the Paniya Community in Wayanad. Many of their customs and practices are being changed.

## II. Identify tribes

Defining Tribe is a conceptual as well as an empirical problem for the academician (Xaxa-1999). Early ethnographers did not have much clarity about the difference between caste and tribe. The term tribe is often used to refer to a group in a human social group. The term is most commonly used in anthropology. The word tribe first appeared in English in twelfth-century Middle English literature, which referred to about twelve tribes of Israel. The term tribe is derived from the Latin word Tribus which means a division of the people. The term tribe was first used in India by the British Authority for administrative purposes. There are a lot of controversies going on the use of the term tribe. Although known by different names, they are generally referred to as backward communities or ethnic groups. Their history is labelled as mythology moreover their culture is declared to be regressive, a negation of progress. (Roy Burman 1960: 19) Therefore, it is widely contended that backwardness is becoming a trait in this society. At the same time, few are admitting the transformations and changes of the tribal people. There is no universal definition for identifying tribal peoples, but these peoples have their own cultures, languages, customs, and institutions that set them apart from other parts of the society in which they find themselves. The term tribe has never been satisfactorily defined in the Indian context. The Tribals of India were considered a "backward class" and until 1919 they were called "depressed". The Census of India gave different names to the tribals, and the 1931 Census referred to them as the "Primitive Tribes", the 1941 Census as the "Tribes" and the 1951 Census as the "Scheduled Tribes".

### 2.1 History of Tribes in India

India has been depicted as a melting pot of caste and tribes. The tribes in India constitute a significant part of the total population. They are playing an important role in preserving Indian culture. They are the descendants of a particular tradition that is integrated with the culture medley of Indian civilization. There are about 550 tribes in India. 8.6% of the total population of India are tribes. Among them 11.3% scheduled tribes of the total population living in rural areas whereas 2.8% are in urban areas. As per Census 2011 Madhya Pradesh has 14.7% tribal population which leads all the other states as regards the tribal population. In Kerala 1.5% of the total population are tribal people. There are several references to many tribes in India today in the old classic literature like Ramayana and Mahabharata. Santhal, Bodo, Ahom, Oraon, Kurumba are mentioned in old text. The Ramayana tells of some tribes. It mentioned both the Rakshasas and the Vanaras were aboriginals of Deccan. Vyas says the Rakshasas were the earliest inhabitants of southern India and Sri Lanka. The Vanaras are considered as the non-Aryan hill tribes of South India. The Mahabharata also mentioned a few tribes. In the Mahabharata battle Munda and the Nagas fought on the side of the Kurus. Although the tribal people have lived in India from the earliest times, there is no historical evidence that they were the first inhabitants of the land. Similarly, there is no proof that the land that Tribes holds today is theirs. In the lack of exact information about their early history or subsequent migrations, it must be assumed that some tribes in India may have become real inhabitants or they may have migrated to India from outside the country, especially from Burma, Tibet and China.

Historically speaking, the tribes have come in contact with the Aryans. For instance Chandals, Nishadas, all these people were tribals in India during the Vedic period, and these were marginalized with the arrival of the Aryans. (Shiny, 2018). Because of the availability of the sources, the history of the tribes in medieval India is better understood than earlier times. During this period few tribal states were formed in India. Some of them later led to clashes with the Rajput rulers, who took over the tribal lands of the Bhils and Gonds. The struggle between the Rajput soldiers and the tribal warriors was short-lived, and in almost all cases, the tribesmen exercised independent sovereignty, freeing the tribe to continue its isolated existence in the hills. The historic ceremony of crowning a Rajput king with a 'tikka' on his forehead, made of the blood of a tribal chief, highlights the significance of the bond between them. The Muslim rulers, who were the successors of the Rajputs considered the tribes as enemies along with the Rajputs, left them alone in the hilly areas. In modern times, new master of India the British followed the same policy of Muslim rulers freeing the tribals alone. Moreover, a special administrative system was created to look after the tribal and forest areas. But gradually they abandoned the policy of segregation with the tribes and, with the support of the Christian missionaries, infiltrated the desolate life of the tribes, which gave a new life to the Indian tribes. Following the British rule, the development program in India such as the construction of railways, the development of transport, the development of the agricultural sector and the new revenue policy have seriously affected the lives of many, including the tribal. An important change in the lives of the tribal people during this period uprooted them from the hunting economy and planted in the new agrarian economy consequently absentee

landlords system was formed in tribal areas. Gradually the British authority realised the importance of the forest to increase their commercial interest and scientifically exploited such areas. Since independence the Government of India has been working day and night to bring about development and social upliftment of the lives of the tribals. While development is taking place on the one hand, on the other hand, they are losing the heritage they have so far preserved.

## 2.2 Tribes in Kerala

Kerala is a state with a large tribal population. Most of them live in the western part of the Western Ghats. According to the 2011 Census Kerala's 1.5% of the total population is tribal people. In all, there are 36 Adivasi groups in Kerala, each known by a particular name such as Irula, Eravallan, Kadar, Karimpalan, Kurichia, Paniya, Kattunaickan, etc. Among them, Cholanaikans are the most primitive tribes. Tribals are an integral part of the population of Kerala, thus the state has a special place on the tribal map of India. They have a unique culture and civilization. Tribal communities are living in different parts of the state. It can be divided into seven major regional groups based on their historical, ethnic, social, and cultural uniqueness (P.R.G.Mathur, 1977). They are Thiruvananthapuram, Idukki, Parambikulam, Attappady, Nilambur, Wayanad, and Kasaragod. Of the 36 tribal communities in Kerala, the largest are the Paniyas, Kurichias, and Kurumans. The tribal communities in Kerala are farmers. In addition to agriculture, the gathering of hill products is the important occupation of tribes in the State. The tribes had enjoyed the monopoly of the collection of minor forest produces. Their daily routine begins and ends with a search for food. There are many stories that prevailed about the origin of each tribe. For instance, the Paniya tribal community in Wayanad is believed to have descended from an imaginary mountain called Ippi Mala. Originally they were two. They were brother and sister. Later they married each other. They had five sons and five daughters. Their descendants formed the present-day Paniya community. Every tribal society has many such stories. Most of the tribal languages did not have a script so each of these stories was passed through orally to the next generation. But today these stories are unknown to their younger generations. Moreover; the younger generations are indifferent to their traditions.

## III. Modernity and Tribal issues

Over the past few decades, many developments have taken place among the tribes, resulting in significant changes in their way of life. Changes in their social life and social formations naturally led to changes in customs. Various forces have played an important role in bringing about these changes. Changes have taken place in the status of both males and females. An Adivasi scholar at the Kannada University in Hampi said that the decline of affluent Adivasi culture was due to the advent of modernization and the lack of interest among Indians to preserve ancient civilization. Due to the interaction with outside culture, tribal culture is undergoing a revolutionary change.

**3.1 Language:** The problem of bilingualism developed under the influence of non-tribal people, which led them indifference towards the tribal language. As in the case of the Paniya community, they are bilingual. They used Tamil and Malayalam along with their main language Paniyabhasha. But unlike other tribal languages, it does not have a script. Today, most of the younger generation in the Paniya community speak Malayalam or Tamil extensively. As a result, their traditional language loses its significance and the paniyabhasha becomes unfamiliar to the younger generation.

Many of us may ask what the need to preserve these tribal languages is. The primary need to preserve any language is to preserve the cultures associated with it. It comprises their thoughts, life, tradition, literature, and social formations. As Noam Chomsky said "A language is not just words. It's a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community." When a language disappears, the culture associated along with it also dies. It is also needed to be preserved tribal languages to guarantee literacy and education of tribal people. Another reason is to eliminate the feeling of marginalization and evade communication gaps. So how can we preserve these tribal languages? The choices are many. The first is to acknowledge the importance of tribal languages. The second is to form committees of linguists - either voluntary or government-appointed - to decide whether the spoken language is a local language or whether manuscripts of the language are available. Another recommendation is to publish dictionaries and learning material in the language. Many are doing a great job to understand and codified paniya language. Prof. Somasekharan's paniya bhasha is a reference. KIRTADS, a tribal research institute, has published a beta (light) dictionary of the Paniya language that helps to learn and understand their language and life. The other one is to allow tribal languages as a medium of communication and education. The majority of tribal students drop out of school due to communication problems. They could



not follow non-tribal languages. Subsequently, these students leave school and remain illiterate. Another proposal is to promote tribal languages through cultural and entertainment programs. In Wayanad, there is Jesuit Organisation TUDI (Tribal Unity for Development Initiative) working nearly 25 years in the midst of Paniya people promoting their languages and organizing cultural fest in the first week of May in every year.

**3.2 Settlement:** Tribal usually living in clusters. Generally, there were 5-10 houses in a settlement. The pattern of residence is changed today. Their dwellings are normally thatched huts. They used bamboo wattle for the walls, mud for plastering, and the roof was made of bamboo. Overall those houses were eco-friendly houses. Now there are no such houses to be seen. Today they are living in a house built by the government. In fact, when I spoke to the Paniya people of Sultan Bathery, I observed that they did not like government-built houses i.e. concrete houses. The main reason is that most houses are incomplete, which is not suitable for their lifestyle.

**Households:** Due to the influence of modern society and the market on tribal life, there is a great change in the use of household goods. They have plastic and aluminium utensils for kitchen use. The next generation will be completely unfamiliar with the tribal community who used to cook in clay pots and serve food on leaves and bark.

### 3.4 Tribal Customs and outsiders

Many of the people believe that Indian tribal communities are still very close to nature. Moreover, they are trying to stay out of the grip of modernization and successfully preserve their old traditions and customs. However, studies in the tribal areas have shown that many of their customs and practices have undergone significant changes due to the contact with outsiders. The report prepared by IG S. Sreejith while he was part of the Human Rights Commission detailed the problems faced by the tribals at present. According to Sreejith's report, the biggest problem facing the Adivasi is the intrusion of outsiders. It is true that letting the outsiders into the secluded life of the tribal people will uproot the traditional life of them. The study found that tribal are still living in the midst of exploitation. In fact, the modernity which makes some serious changes among the tribal people. If borrowed Attoor Ravi's remarks on modernity "Modernity as something that happens transtemporality". It is true in the case of tribal people that these people are fascinated by the lifestyle of modernity. For example, the dress was one of the characteristics of the tribal people. They are the identity of Indian traditional culture. For the paniya community, there were traditional dresses for men and women. Udumundu and puthamundu were for men whereas women used cela (saree preferably white in colour) and aratti (Long narrow cloth) is tied around the waist. The aratti colours are mostly black and red, but there are local differences. In the Mananthavady area, for example, they use red aratti, which is black in Kalpetta and Sultan Bathery. It is very rare to see it today. Like other people, most paniya women wear blouses, saris, and maxis. Women wearing a variety of ornaments made of stone and other materials were one the peculiarity of this community. But gradually such features are disappearing from them. Religious beliefs and customs play an important role in tribal mythology. Like the fishermen, the tribesmen are very strict in their religious beliefs as well as their practices. Due to the influence of the religion of the surrounding communities, tribal religion is now subject to various changes. It is clear that the involvement of Hindus and Christians in the religious life of Paniya is taking place nowadays (Aerthayil: 2008, 34). Subsequently many are converted to this religion. In fact, the lives of people who have converted are much better than the lives of people who remain in their own religion

### Conclusion

Modernisation has always been an issue of attraction in the present era. Everyone thinks through the modernization process the whole world will be united as one family or as one global family. But the reality is not so. The functioning of society is not according to our expectations. Therefore, we need to preserve tribal culture in order to sustain the survival and civilization of the country. Non-tribal- people are making tribal people come out from the forest and gradually the real culture of tribal is slowly losing ground in the emergence of modern civilizations. The indigenous culture in the forest is losing value and the forest people are obligated to encounter urban culture. It has become the need of the tribals to adapt to modern life.

An effective intervention on the part of the state is essential for a constructive change in the way of life of the tribal community. Sturdy interferences are needed in land acquisition, education policy, economic development, and social security of the tribal people. The work of bureaucrats, non-informal NGOs, tribal and non-tribal agencies among the tribals for the sustainable development of the tribal people is priceless. But the studies explicit that all sorts of tribal empowerment programs regionally or nationally

somewhere have lost its contact with the beneficiaries which produce reverse results. Subsequently, many tribal communities are forming as hopeless communities. So the paper recommended while framing the tribal development program, consider the life pattern of tribal people, their cultural uniqueness, and relation with nature. More research activities for the preservation of tribal culture and tradition should be encouraged.

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