

Changes in Tribal Culture: A Study among Muthuvan Tribe in Idukki District

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Abstract:

Tribes, a social group, indigenous self-sufficient people, who differ from mainstreams of the society, add significance to the Indianness of the country. They totally depend on their land for their livelihood. 11.3 % of the rural population and 2.8% of urban population together constitute 8.6% of the total tribal population of the country. In Kerala 1.14% of tribal population constitutes of total population of the state.

The unique and distinct culture of the tribes got modified caused by various changes, to which the influence of outsiders play a greater role. The reasons of present day scientific development such as modernization, westernization and globalization too caused both negative and positive changes. The negative influence was to such an extent that they are alien to their tradition and history.

Based on the survey conducted on 'Muthuvaan' tribe at Adimali of Kerala, this paper discusses the influence and changes that caused by the evolutionary trends of present century. Negligence of the youth in following their age old, unique culture and their readiness for easily acceptance of modern trends marks dark side of the injustice that these evolutionary theories offered. Willingness of older generations in maintaining this special culture reflects how it influenced. Even today the elder generation holds different perceptions on it. Data collected through survey, personal interviews and observations has been analyzed descriptively as well as qualitatively.

Key words: Tribe, Tribal culture, Tradition, Modernization.

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Introduction

Culture is a shared pattern of behavior and interactions of a group of people encompassing language, religion, habits, music, arts, rituals, clothing etc. which are learned through socialization. Taylor (1871) defines culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by men as a member of society. Culture is essentially fluid and constantly in motion. While change is inevitable the past should also be respected and preserved (Zimmermann, 2017). A tribe is a group of distinct people, dependent on their land for their livelihood, who are largely self-sufficient and not integrated into the national society (Rai&Vidyarthi, 1977).

Tribes in India

Tribal people constitute 8.6% of India's total population, about 104 million people according to the 2011 census. The extent to which a state's population is tribal varies considerably. In the north eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland upward of 90% of the population is tribal. In the remaining northeast states of Assam, Manipur, Sikkim and Tripura tribal people form between 20% and 30% of the population. The largest tribes are found in central India. Major concentrations of tribal people live in Maharashtra, Orissa and West Bengal.

Tribal people in India are called Adivasi. Adivasi is an umbrella term for a heterogeneous set of ethnic and tribal groups. Although terms such as Atavika, Varnavasi or Girijan are also used for the tribes of India, some of the major tribal groups in India include Gonds, Santhals, Khasis, Angamis, Bhils, Bhutas, and GreatAndamanese. All these tribal people have their own culture, tradition, language and lifestyle.

Tribes in Kerala

According to 2001 census of India the scheduled tribe population in Kerala is 3,64,189. According to 2011 census the total population of scheduled tribes are 484839 (Census Reports). There are 35 major tribes and out of these Paniyar are the largest. The major tribes in Kerala are Adiyar, Aranda, Eravallan, Mala Pulayan, Irular, Kadar, Kanikkaran, Karimpalan, Kattunayakan, Kochuvelan, Koranga, Kudiya, Kurichchan, Kurumans, Kurumbas, Mahamalarar, MalaiArayan, MalaiPandaran, Vedan, Malakkuravan, Malarar, Malayan,

Mavilan, Malayarayar, Mannan, Muthuvan, Paliyar, Paniyan, Ulladan, Urdu, Mala Vettuvan, Kurumban, Thachenadan, Cholanaickan, Malapanickar, Vet-takuruman. They are living on the hill ranges mainly on the Western Ghats, bordering Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Tribal culture

Tribal culture is marked with the traits of simple ways of living, warm hospitality and unique practices. All tribes have their own god and goddesses and believe in super natural forces and spirits. Some tribe's shares patriarchal culture and some are matriarchal. Some are either migrated from another place or the original inhabitants of the land. They have their own unique customs, practices, dialect, dressing style, food habits, agricultural practices, economic activities, politics etc. Among the tribes in Andaman and Nicobar islands, some are coast dwellers (i.e. they obtain much of their food from sea) and some are forest dwellers (Singh, 1994). The Malar tribes of Bihar make their huts with leaves, bamboos and grasses collected from forest. The Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh burn their hut after the death of a family member (Suryanarayanan & Gangadharam, 1982). The Juangs of Orissa are primarily hunters, food gatherers and shifting cultivators. They practice batter system. The clothing of women consists of a girdle composed of several strings of beads and behind curtain of leaves. They strictly practice clan exogamy for selection of marital partners (Mishra, 1991). Some tribe's practices animal husbandry. The Todas of Tamil Nadu involve in activities of buffalo-keeping and rituals associated with this and also certain rituals are conducted for the care of animals (Rivers, 1986). Shifting cultivation is a practice used by most of the tribes. It refers to use of a patch of land for cultivation. After preparing the land by cutting trees and burning them, seeds are sown and covered with ash.

Muthuvan Tribe and the original culture

The Muthuvans or Mudugars are a tribe of hill cultivators in Coimbatore and Madura. In Kerala, they are found in the Adimali and Devikulam forest regions of Idukki district. They are believed to be migrated from Tamil Nadu. There is a story behind the migration and origin of the name 'Muthuvan' from Tamil Nadu and the story goes like this: the wrath of Goddess Meenakshi fell upon Madurai and the city was burning. During this time the Muthuvans carried the statue of Goddess Meenakshi on their muthuku (shoulder)

and reached the Suryanelli area of Idukki and therefore the name Muthuvans. Even today one can see, the Muthuvans women are carrying their little children and belongingness on their back. The Muthuvans have a dialect of their own which is closely related to Tamil, with a few Malayalam words. It has no script. Now most of them are following Malayalam script.

Dress and Ornaments: Men wear shirt and long dhotis. The old men use a thalappavu, a cloth knot that cover the whole head. Old men wear earrings (kadukkan) with stones and glass. Women wore saree. The chains on neck, rings for the ears, fingers and toes, and many glass bangles on the arms, nose-stud and an anklet on each leg are the usual ornaments of women. They also have practices like tattooing. Unmarried girls wear fewer ornaments than the married women, and widows wear no jewelers till they are remarried.

Food: Their staple food is ragi. They also cultivate and consume tapioca, maize, tenay and sweet potato. Various types of wild fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, yams, roots, tubers, green leaves and pulses are consumed. Fish, crab caught from streams, meat of hunted animals, honey from forest and milk products of domesticated animals such as cow and goat are also consumed.

Customs and practices: Muthuvans are practicing a dormitory system called 'saavady' or 'chavadi' for unmarried men and women in every settlement. Children, both male and female, after attaining the puberty, become the members of dormitories and start sleeping in their respective dormitories during night times. Till they get married, they continue to sleep there. This practice provided sexual freedom for the parents during night and these dormitories functions as a club, non-formal school, training center and helps in making of the teenagers into a mature Muthuvans. There is a fire pit lit at the center of chavadi for providing warmth.

Social organization: The Muthuvan have six clans known as Koottams, they are Melaekoottam, Kana koottam, Thushanikoottam, Kanyakoottam, Elli koottam and Puthanikoottam. Each koottam again divided into sub clans (Iyer, 1937). The functions of these divisions are mainly for marriage alliance, to keep up the social status and to indicate descent and ancestry.

The Muthuvan adhere to community endogamy and clan exogamy. Cross cousin marriages are given preference. The Muthuvans follows a nuclear family pattern. Muthuvans live in hamlets called kudi. The Kudi represents the

Muthuvan society, each of which consists of 30 or more families. Almost all members of a kudi are related. The Kudi's headman is called by various names like 'kani', 'moopan'. They have various punishment methods for breaking their traditions and moral standards.

Festivals and religions: According to Iyer (1937), 'the Muthuvans show signs of influence of Hinduism on their religion and adopted some of the forms and rituals of Hindu-worship'. 'Vinayakan, Murugan, Meenakshi etc. are the God and Goddesses they worship. They also worship the deities and spirit of ancestors to avoid disasters and calamities. ThaiPongal, celebrated for a week in the month of January-February (Thai), and Karthika, in the month of November, are the two major festivals celebrated by the Muthuvans-Agriculture:

Agricultural practice: Muthuvans are using the traditional method of shifting cultivation. The clearing up of the site, the sowing and harvesting etc. will be done with the prayer of religious headman and will be in the month of November which was followed by the festival Karthikai.

Muthuvan tribe in Kulamankuzhikudy

The present study was conducted on Muthuvan tribe of Kulamankuzhikudy, Adimali of Idukki district. These people lead a very simple life depending on forest for their livelihood. The women are prohibited from having any relationship with the outside world other than the kudy. They begin consuming tobacco at an early age and their men are addicted to liquor and other intoxicants. Most of them have their own land and cultivate cardamom, pepper, tapioca etc. But cardamom and other refined products they collect are devalued and being exploited by the mediators. They are worshipping 'Maladai-vam' which is originally the idol of 'Mathurameenakshi'. The Muthuvans in the Kulamankuzhikudy belongs to the Kana and Poothanikootam. The child inherits the Kootam of mother.

Dialect: The language that Muthuvans use as their medium of communication does not have a script. It is closely linked to Tamil and Malayalam. Almost all can follow Malayalam. In the schools, the medium of instruction is Malayalam. Therefore the younger generation usually uses Malayalam more.

Entertainment and Habits: The major source of entertainment is movies. Most of them have own TV in their houses. Tobacco chewing is a common

practice among the Muthuvan men and women. They consider it as good for the cold climate. One practical use of tobacco is to treat leech bite especially when they work. In case of leech bite they chew the tobacco and put it on the leech which then gets detached and thus the blood flow from the wound is stopped. Alcohol consumption is also common among Muthuvans.

Agriculture and Food Habits: Most of the Muthuvans have their own land. The state government has given them the land for agricultural purposes but without a deed certificate. The main agricultural crops grown by Muthuvans are tapioca, pepper, cardamom. Muthuvans rear cattle, goat. Their food timings vary depending on their work. Their daily menu include rice, curries, tapioca, fish etc. women collect green leaves, wild vegetables, mushroom and other tubers from forest. They also collect 'rudraksha' and 'thelli' from the forest and sell it. The Muthuvan women are hard working; they work in the field during the day time along with the men. Once, they are back in the evening from the field they cook the food. Some of them collect crab and fish from the streams.

Cultural Change of Tribal Society

Tribals have different social habits and cultural differences in their languages, clothing, ornaments and religion which make them who they are (Wei, 2014). But their culture is slowly eroding and its reasons are many. One reason is migration and the contact with other culture, the tribal people especially the new generation migrate to urban areas for higher education, jobs, better facilities etc. this will lead to bilingualism which led to indifference towards tribal language. Also they will imitate western culture in different aspects of their social life and leave behind their own culture. These imitations in dressing patterns, modes of living etc have led to the degeneration of tribal life and tribal acts. Another major problem is the disintegration of their economic system. 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 forest. As a result they have forgotten their ancient crafts and most of them are working as laborers in plantations, agricultural farms, factories, and other jobs. Politics and political parties start to influence tribal culture. As a result of

these influences, the importance of leaders like Moopan, traditional religious practices, etc got diminished. Insufficient recognition of their unique culture, closer proximity to urban lifestyles, improved roads, infrastructures technology, exposure to modern knowledge and governmental interventions are all reasons for cultural change in tribal people (Wei, 2014). These adaptation and incorporation of new ideas from elsewhere leads to the evolution of new practices within their culture and possible removal of old existing practices.

The Present Study

Title: A study on the cultural changes of Muthuvan tribe in Kulamankuzhikudy of Idikki district.

Objectives

- To study the culture and the changes of tribal people in Kulamankuzhikudy
- To have knowledge about the present day growth and development that the community acquired.
- To know about the role of government and other agencies in the upliftment of the community.
- To know about the influence of modern policies on the lifestyle of the community.
- To know the cultural changes that these policies could create.
- To know the attachment of the community to their own tradition and the means that they use to preserve them.

Methodology

The primary objective of this paper is to study the culture and the reasons for the changes of tribal people in Kulamankuzhikudy of Idikki District. The samples are collected from adults who are the natives of this kudy. The data was collected through survey, personal interviews and observations and has been analysed descriptively and qualitatively. 58 families of the Muthuvaan-community that belong to the Kana and Puthani clans in Kulamankuzhikudy, Valarawere selected. Each family is considered as a single unit in the census method. The survey includes a total number of 43 questions which answers the present situation of the community in relation to their social life, culture, health, Government and Youth's role in the present scenario of modern life style. The questionnaire provides the basic demographic details too.

Semi-structured interview method was used to collect the details in personal interviews. The questions helped to gather information about the origin

and ancestral history of the Muthuvan tribe in Kerala, the marriage custom they followed and the changes that has taken over time, religious practices, their style of medication, political systems, superstitions, art forms especially the dance, Death and related practices and the forest rules.

The observations helped to see tangible and visible changes in their life-style and way of interaction. The very example of their welcoming outsiders into their community was one among them. The changes in their style of shelter places all were the results that are caused by the development.

Demographic Details

Table No.1: Demographic details (n=207)

		Frequency	Percentage
Age	1-5	18	8.69
	6-18	47	22.70
	19-40	74	35.74
	41-65	62	29.95
	66 above	6	2.89
Educational Qualification	Illiterate	60	28.98
	Std 0-4	43	20.77
	Std 5-7	38	18.35
	Std 8-10	46	22.22
	Std 11-12	15	7.24
	Above 12	5	2.41
Occupation	Coolie	11	5.31
	Govt. Scheme	10	4.83
	Farmer	58	28.01
	Shopkeeper	3	1.44
	Driver	2	0.96
	Business	2	0.96
	Private Job	5	2.41
	Others	116	56.03

Major Findings about the Muthuvan Tribe Findings through Observation

Muthuvan people are very welcoming and helping people. They welcomed the researchers whole heartily and accepted us as one among them during the entire week that we spend there. It was observed that adults, especially

old people prefer to speak in their native language. But youngsters use Malayalam; this might be because they are constantly in contact with people outside the 'kudy' for various reasons like education health needs etc. Regarding food, their daily menu includes rice, tapioca, fish, vegetables and they do not prefer junk food. Men and women chew tobacco, and there is increased use of alcohol among men. In every house there are one or two dogs, and it will accompany where ever they go. The people in the village had houses made up of palm trees. Though most of the houses were such, now only less number of such houses are found. The changes were the result of government's developmental activities.

Both men and women were found interacting with others. They wear normal cloths as natives. They spend time for watching TV and speak fluent Malayalam. Most of them are having mobile phones. Even women are in possession of mobile phones. The younger population are not aware of their typical dance forms.

The major threat that tribal community faced is the cultural cringe that lay foundation to most of the related issues of the community. As the cultural cringe is very much old and related to the colonization, the challenges begin with the colonization to the extent of the present day technological advancement and development. Cultural cringe or inferiority complex about their culture add pace in people to a movement to something new without respecting the precious and age old culture of theirs. It has two way influences on tribal society. One is as a prejudiced concept, the people who claim themselves as the initiators of development and welfare of tribals hold, the enabler such as government and other agencies associated with it are example of it. The other way is, it influences directly upon the members of the community who believe in the need of a change.

To such an 'other is better' attitude there come the most modern development policies of globalization and modernization where 'west is considered as best'. Everything that was introduced to them was easily accepted at the cost of neglecting a pious and distinct style of life. This newness separated the tribals from the connection to the forests as the new culture could satisfy them to a great extent without the effort that they took earlier. These could erase some of the tribal nature from their lifestyles. Growing to consumerist style of life

divorced their bond with the forest to which some of the new forest protection acts too have a role. The primitive and nomadic characteristics of this community have lost, causing extinction of the diverse approach to various fields like medicine, food, dress, first aid etc.

Findings from the Interviews

The story and the history of Muthuvans was also heard from them, their journey from Madura carrying the statue of Devi Meeakshi and travelled to Kerala as a result of the wrath that fell upon the city, thus getting the name as Muthuvans meaning 'carrying on the shoulders.' It was learnt from the elders of the community about the changes in the marriage that took place over time. Against the strict and pious culture of marriage has taken an opposite style of approach where much freedom and flexibility is given to youngsters even to marry from outside the clan.

The need to preserve the culture is intensely felt among the older generation of people but the new and younger people of the society are reluctant to hold back tradition and to follow them. But the dislike of the youngsters towards it is an alarming concern for the community elders.

This special group of the country has extraordinary art in dealing with the medication that too easily accessible through forest plants and other natural resources. But ver less attention was given for the protection of their own ways of medication that treat the sickness from the root cause. Furthermore, no measures were taken to safeguard or to provide advanced research upon them. On the other hand, mass dependence of the people on the modern medical facilities increased, providing a fast relief but not necessarily a permanent one. Surely, it has only positive impacts except downplay that has done. Today, almost all the people of the village depends hospitals for the medical aid.

The religious practices are not of that focus; they do have a place of worship but is not given much preference. They have occasions to come together as part of celebrations where they play their 'Kaikottikali' which is also considered as a religious activity.

Findings from the Survey

There is no doubt that the tribal culture and the tribal way of life has made a substantial change in all the realms of its uniqueness and speciality that they developed and followed as their own. The Muthuvan tribe too went through

various changes as part of its upliftment and development. In its efforts to provide equality and increase in the progress and growth of tribal group of people, various schemes and policies undertaken by the government is active in this community too. 37.93% of families are beneficiaries of the state government initiated housing plans of LIFE – Livelihood Inclusion and Financial Empowerment. And through the housing scheme of central government 6.89% of families received houses to live and today many of the houses in the village are new and good facilities are given to them. 25.86 % of people are receivers of the project Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) a Central Government initiated scheme to provide highly subsidized food to millions of the poorest families. Avoided some of the drawbacks of its implementation among this community Kudumbasree too has great influence upon the women empowerment. Infant mortality and improving maternal care were the focal attention of the 'Anganwadi' or the courtyard shelter. The village is very much benefited through the services provided by it.

The health facilities are easily accessible to the community and except 25.86% of people take required precautions against the communicable diseases, for which 33.03% of them are taken at the instructions of the government. The safety measures taken are letting water flow off and not allowing the water blockage, they keep mosquitoes away by burning the frankincense, and various other means are used in as precautions against diseases.

58.62% of the community depends upon the stream and river for their drinking water and others on their own wells. The panchayath water facility is not that useful for the people as only 10.34 % people use it and others being non functional. The waste management process in the village is not a scientific one. 56.89% of people burn it out and 18.96% of them dig it out. The need for the scientific methods of waste management is not felt till now as the population is less and as much waste materials are not created in the village. But it is found that a growing nature of consumerist culture could force them to find proper means of waste management.

The members of the community agree that there is a huge shift in the practices and culture that they followed from an early period of time. 56.89% of people agreed that their practices and customs have been changed. It has been found that the elders of the community urging the young generation of

the group to safeguard their own culture. To a question of relocating to a better facilitated location, 77.58% of people were happy with their present place and facilities. It is found that at present only 18.96% of people take special attention in following tradition. And 44.82% have agreed that they rarely give attention to such things. The marriage system and practices that they followed have changed in due time and now there is a flexibility with regard to the stringent regulations of marriage. Members are free to marry out of their clan which was not at all a permitted matter.

As the role of non tribals among the tribals increased there also came a space for political ideologies and parties among the people, and tribal participation increased in state politics. At the same time a political hierarchy that the tribals followed got aversion from within the community itself and today the position of 'Moopan' is only a decorative role to a greater extent.

Notions and norms regarding development and social betterment of this group of people have contradicted in defending the threat that it faced in embracing the newness. The threats were the outcome of the so called development agencies' wrong conception that they equaled development with replacing the culture and tribalness and in becoming like any other citizen of the country.

The linguistic change that came upon the community signals the danger end of the existence of the culture. The interaction with the non-tribals caused the increase in the depth of the inferiority complex that obviously forced them to have talk in their special language only in a space that surrounded with walls. The characteristic of geographical alienation was disturbed and it has greatly affected these linguistic aspects of the tribals. But we find an urge in them to safeguard their language culture by using it when they are at home.

The updating and change that came over the tradition mention that the uniqueness of the community is lost and is visible in the changes of dressing and food habit. Though they cultivate most of the food resources at their own farms, cultivation is with the aim of business purpose and food materials are bought from the markets. On the other hand with advent of modern technologies and spread of them it has reached even to these communities whose characteristics are geographical alienation and separation from the mainstream of the society. Their access to this modernity and growing along

with the pace of the time is not criticized here, but an alarming tendency is found among the youth where on one side they leave behind all their cultural attributes and they are vulnerable to the substance addiction. Some may find it natural to find such addiction among the tribals as they are closely linked with the forest and resources there. But in the case of these youngsters the substances they find are from outside the community and not part of their nomadic lifestyle. The need to encourage them to feel proud about their own culture and in being propagators of it is highly recommended.

Conclusion

Present study addresses various issues of Muthuvans of Kulamankuzhykudi, pertaining to their social and cultural life, health, government and youth role in the present scenario of modern lifestyle. The Muthuvans of Kulamankuzhykudi is vibrant with their rituals and associated practices. But tribal culture and tribal way of life of this kudi underwent a lot of changes due to numerous reasons such as globalization, government's interventions and diffusion with mainstream society etc,

Government interventions can be found in almost all realms of their life. LIFE programme, AAY, Kudumbashree, ICDS etc., are the few of government interventions. Eventhough these interventions along with consumerist style of life, increase of tribal participation in state politics, technological advancements, interactions with non-tribals cause remarkable changes in their food habits, dressing styles, language, health care and overall culture. These factors bought tribal developments also. Thus it was very important that the travails of tribal development need to be understood properly in order to integrate the development of unique culture with the ongoing rural development programs.

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