



THE PANIYA TRIBE OF NILGIRIS: CAUGHT IN THE CONFLICT BETWEEN SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPIRATIONS AND TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

Despite living in a techno-crafted society, many communities are still marginalized. This paper intends to examine the socio-cultural development of the Paniya tribes, the major tribal community which is sidelined in the Nilgiris district. Being mostly landless workers, illiterates, leaderless, unorganized, they are considered the most deprived people. The critical factors of constructive communication are found wanting in tribal people due to their shyness in contacting others, introverted behavior, lack of self-awareness, attitudes of the peer groups, and lack of confidence that affects them physically and psychologically. This pushes the Paniyas into the vortex of a regressive stage in this society. The Paniyas, as a whole, are the poorest of the poor among all tribal communities. The struggles of the paniyas to be on a par with the mainstream in this society are taken cognizance of in this paper through a critical view of the socio-cultural dimensions like Culture, Language, Religion, and Level of education of tribals belonging to the Paniya community and their development. This paper adopts a Qualitative Research of descriptive case analysis using face-to-face interviews and case studies as the research tools. Though paniyas are underprivileged they are looking for a change in their standard of living. The changeover can take place by creating awareness and knowledge about the sources available for them for their development in social, economic, physical, and psychological aspects. Effective interpersonal interaction is the byword.

KEYWORDS : Paniya Tribes, Transformation, Culture, , Education, Awareness.

INTRODUCTION

The present study is about a tribal group mostly found in three states of South India, namely Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. Though their existence is spread throughout different districts of these states, this study is limited to the Paniyas of Nilgiri districts of Tamil Nadu. The word Paniya is obtained from *pani* which is a Malayalam word meaning work. The physical appearance of Paniyans is a short, dark-skinned tribe with broad noses and curly hair (Ershad Ali, 2019). Generally believed that paniyans are of the Dravidian Tribes and they are the origin of Africans. Mostly this community people are found to be very backward in education and economic status. They have been far away from the mainstream of development as their social awareness is very low.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Most of the Tribals in India are found backward and oppressed. The Paniyans are one of the Primitive Tribal Groups (PTG's) in Tamil Nadu (Varghese, 2010). Various districts where the Paniya tribes have built their settlements but they have largely settled in Gudalur and Pandalur Taluk (Bandhu P, 2010). The detailed information about the origin of the Paniya tribe is still unclear, but some details relating to this tribal community indicate a little about the extraction of this tribal group by their appearances like thick lips, dark complexion, and curly hair (Bhasin MK, 2007).

The barriers of paniya community people being not into the mainstream of development are lack of trust, confidence, self-esteem, personal freedom, self-awareness, interactions with family members and peer groups, fear of criticism, dominance, shyness in contacting others, and lack of social relationships (Uma Lele, 2017). When they overcome all these barriers there will be a change in their standard of living. The other various problems are Education Low enrolment, high dropouts, the gap in education, remoteness of schools, poor livelihood, non-availability of teachers, language and cultural barriers, lack of vocational training (A.B.Ota, 2015). The solution for these problems can be given by the government by taking initiatives which will fulfill the basic needs and solve their problems. For their betterment, the Government of India categorized the paniyans as primitive tribes in the constitution as scheduled tribes to give a special status and consideration

(Mohindra B, 2010). The tribes remain backward in terms of their socio-economic advancement, seclusion in remote areas, and ideological specialty reflected in the primeval level of manifestation of core traditions. The Development communication process can be adjusted according to the needs, which improves the program as a learning process, as the concept of development communication is continuously evolving.

OBJECTIVES

- To study the traditional culture of Paniyans
- To examine the extent of the development process in the field of education, culture, religion, and language.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

At present they are at threat of losing their own cultural identity. The younger generation is found adopting the culture of others and yielded too many social changes. They are moving away from their traditions. Everywhere the tribes are found in the process of transformation. Urbanization has encroached into their territories. As a result, they have lost much of their traditional values and cultures. This study attempts to find the traditions which they followed and the changes that are taking place in the present era.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the socio-cultural factors that can be explored in the paniya tribal community in the Nilgiris District?
2. What are the socio-cultural changes that have been acquired by the paniyans?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative mixed approach of both descriptive and ethnographic research method using the theory Nightingale's environmental theory (1859) and the cultural adaptation theory (1893) by Durkheim. Through the fieldwork, the researcher was able to collect qualitative data. Observation, Interviews, focus groups, Case studies were the tools used for better understanding the community. In this regard the researcher has visited the areas of the study by spending time with people groups, studying their lifestyle, custom, culture, and social changes. Non-probability

purposive sampling is used in the selection of samples for the study. The samplings were chosen as they were able to understand and talk to the local language. The data was collected in the written and audio recorded form.

CULTURE, LANGUAGE, AND RELIGION

Tribals are addicted to drinking, pan chewing, and smoking. They are highly superstitious, oppression, discrimination, and gender problems are common among them. Among themselves, they speak a very corrupt dialect of Malayalam with an admixture of Tamil and Tulu words and phrases. The form of marriage among the Paniyas is marriage by negotiation (Ananthakumar, 2020). This traditional system of religion is full of spirit worship, rites, and rituals. They are religiously diverse, with some following animism, while others have adopted Hinduism, Islam, or Christianity (Ershad Ali, 2019). The social traditions of most tribes make them outstand from the country's mainstream Hindu population. The area which the researcher has selected for her study comprises many Hindu people and only four families belong to Christianity. The Paniyas usually avoid marrying their cross cousins.

CASE STUDY 1

Jothi, age 30, is the first paniya tribal girl to be educated in this community and she owns a government job. She recalls the transformation of their dressing style, their beliefs, and attitude towards marriage, deity, a transition of works, and about the basic facilities and non-facilities, they have at present. The dressing has been changed from wearing only white cloth to saree and blouse, teenage girls like to wear pants and t-shirts which is not accepted by our community, so they started to wear chudithar. Boys don't like wearing shirts they wear only dhotis and banyans.

We believe and choose our god based on the tree which is tall among our surrounding and produces many fruits whether it is eatable or non-eatable will be considered as our community deity. We celebrate it once a year by dancing, singing and making food as a whole, and distributing it to our community members. We are allowing them to go for work which is a big transition for development in our community and boys in our community will be working only in the place which is nearer to our homes but as days passed and the demand for money increased men in the community are working for daily wages around the village.

EDUCATION

The Parents do not take any effort to send their children to school, they are not even ready to spend money to purchase school bags and stationery for their kids (Jayakumar A, 2016). The teachers in the elementary schools take an effort to visit the settlements and bring the children to schools. At times the children hide themselves from teachers. Nevertheless, contemporary researches show that the tribal children are not interested in the processes of formal schooling and there exists a wide educational gap and inequality between the tribes and other weaker sections in Indian society (Sachidanandha 1999; Singh, 1994; Sujatha, 1999).

CASE STUDY 2

Mooki, Age 88, the eldest lady of the entire community stated about their people's education status and development. We never thought of education in our lifetime the only job for men is to go hunt the animals and for women is to cook and eat. Only now do we feel that education is important since we want our children to see in good positions in the future. If they are educated, they can go to work in shops and increase their standard of living.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the study, it is concluded that the Paniyas are different tribal groups with their unique lifestyle and culture. They provide an insight into the process of growth of human society (Mohsina B, 2018). If proper support is given to these

people, they can continue their tradition and culture, and also, they will have a better standard of living as their needs and wants have been increased. The Paniya group is trying to retain their tribal character, changes are bound to continue in their traditional social organization, economic status, adoption of a new culture, awareness about education, the need for employment opportunities, etc.

The changes drag them into a series of problems, like various kinds of exploitations, landlessness, high rate of mortality, vulnerable diseases, drug, and alcoholic addictions especially among youth, ethnic conflicts, unemployment, prostitution, poverty, etc. The government can take more initiatives for the development and welfare of the people to be the same. In the process of cultural, social, and religious changes, they have lost some of their traditional values. If the society is imposing new things on them then their own identity will vanish. They just wanted to have few changes which will have benefits for their betterment of life but by not changing their culture, their ethnic identity.

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