

A Study on The Tribal Culture And Folklore Of Attapady

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INTRODUCTION

India is a land of rich and varied folk art tradition. The folklore is important in passing on the values, beliefs and moral teachings of a society. Since ages, it has been an eternal part of Indian culture. The grass fields, flowing rivers, alluring temples, folklore, culture, heritage and agriculture define the Indian society. The literary and cultural theories represent the life of people in history. The folk and tribal arts of India are simple, ethnic and colorful. It speaks volumes of country's rich heritage. According to *Ward H. Goodenough*,

"Folklife represents the aspect of cultural anthropology which concentrates on the study of one's own national cultural heritage. There is no known human society which does not possess folklore". Nils-Arvid Bringéus (1968) says, "The focus of the study of Folk life is to obtain and understand the present way of life itself. In the future we must not simply be content with reminiscences instead testimonies. We must also study what is alive. The ethnologist is looking for the normal situation. Superficially it may mean that ethnology becomes less historical. But its objectives in the study of society must still be to demonstrate the part played by tradition as the motor of our culture. Consequently, a historical perspective is needed in an analysis of the present and in planning the future" .

From the words of *Ward.H.Goodenough*, it is clear that folklore doesn't reflect on the remains of primitive cultures alive today, instead it focus on the individual in the midst of social conflict, the present and the future. The folklore studies include Oral literature, Material culture, Social folk custom and Performing folk arts. The words and phrases such as "manners", "customs", "neglected customs", "fading legends", "fragmentary ballads", etc., present an outline of Folklore. (*Dundles, 1965:4*).

The tribes constitute a rich, unique, varied and critical element of Indian tradition. The folk and tribal arts of India are ethnic, simple, colorful and vibrant enough to speak volumes about the country's rich heritage. Tribal life is an epitome of paradox. Even though, they are living in an

enriched environment with full of colors and music, their personal life is an untold agony arising from alienation, deprivation and enslavement.

ATTAPADY – AN OVERVIEW

Attapady is an extension mountain valley of 731 sq.km in area, lying at the Western Ghat ranges. It is located in the mid-eastern part of Kerala on the north-east of Palakkad district, adjoining Coimbatore and Nilgiri districts of Tamil Nadu. The population of Attapady consists of tribesfolk and non-tribesfolk. Attapady got its name from *atta*, the blood leach and *pad*, the habitation. The three major tribal communities of the region, namely, Irulas, Mudugas and Kurumbas, belong to the broad group of Dravidians. Tribal settlements in Attapady are known as *Ooru* (hamlet). Each *Ooru* contains, on an average of 50 houses, densely constructed in rows. Tribesfolk of Attapady is the most backward among the vulnerable groups of Kerala. Their economy is traditional in nature, depending mainly on land and forest. The plight of tribes folk continues to be steeped in the morass of ignorance, illiteracy and poverty.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The low literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes is a serious threat to Indian education. It is significant even to Kerala, the state with highest literacy rate. The intensity of the problem is reflected by the SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate) examination results of March 2010 where the Palakkad district has scored the less pass percentage of 83.04. The increase in the number of failures and drop outs in the schools of Attapady is discussed as major cause for the fall by educators and proponents of the State. The observation has impacted the Researchers to undertake a study on the *Educational backwardness of Tribal learners of Attapady with reference to English Language Learning and Teaching*.

According to *Israel (1998)*, recognizing the community as the unit of study is an important principle of any research. A pilot study is carried out to generate an understanding of the community members' perspectives and needs, According to *Richard.M.Dorson(1965)*, "in the objectives to study about a society, a historical perspective is essential in an analysis of past and in planning the future ". The knowledge of past is important to understand the present and predict the future. The study of folklore is one of the means to understand the folklife. The observations and data collected in the Pilot study is being discussed.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the culture and folklore of Tribal community
- To understand the folklife of Tribes
- To investigate the backwardness of Scheduled Tribes of Attapady

METHODOLOGY

A pilot study is conducted using Participatory Social Action Research Method (PSARM) to identify the cultural perceptions and priorities of tribesfolk. The investigators conducted in-depth interviews and observed the daily-life activities of tribesfolk. A visit has been made to the Mudugar-Kudumbar Research Centre, established in Attapady with the funding of World Oral Literature Project of The University of Cambridge. It is the space of the tribal people to interact, express, refresh memories, experience the joy of ethnicity, enjoy the power of tradition, learn indigenous culture and to promote ecological life. The primary data is gathered through a field-level investigation.

TRIBESFOLK IN ATTAPADY

There are three different Tribesfolk in Attapady : Irulars, Mudugars and Kurumbas

Kurumbas who constitute less than five percent of the total population lies in the interior of the northern area of Attapady. They were the first group of *Adivasis* to settle in the place.

Mudugas are believed to have immigrated from the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu. They had lived in the northeastern part of Attapady under the leadership of *Kovai* (Coimbatore) Moopen.

Irula is a Dravidian tribe spread over the three state of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala, whom are also known as *Eruvalla, Iruliga, Illiga, Kasova, Urali, Kadupujari* and *Velliga*. The term Irular is derived from the word *Irul* meaning darkness. Irulas are rigid in their customs and manners.

The dailect of tribesfolk is known as *Aadivasibasha*. It remains only in its spoken form without a written script. For the tribesfolk, the transmission of oral literature from one generation to the

next lies at the heart of cultural practice. The local language act as a vehicle for the transmission of unique cultural knowledge.

TRIBAL VALUES, CULTURE & PRACTICES

Culture

Eco values are integrated as feminine values. Tribesfolk are the custodians of a culture, rooted in integrated values of a perspective that women and nature are one. The wisdom of tribesfolk tells that the earth meets the needs of not only humans but also the whole creation. According to them, forest and nature as their mother. Unlike non-tribes, a distinct characteristic of tribes is that they have an *ethic of enough*. Nothing is taken from nature, other than what is essential. The bare-foot folk dance is a life celebration of their oneness with nature. The Divine is perceived in the trees, mountains, streams, animals and in all creation. Earth is mother God and God is not to be bought or sold. They approached the land with great respect. For tribes, joining with nature is a celebration which all of them celebrate together as *Kootake* and *Kampla*. The Mannakkaran, who before sowing the seed leads the worshipping of the earth and sowing, planting, weeding, and harvesting are done in a festive mood.

They are the originators and contributors of unique system of nature and indigenous medicine. All the hybrid in food crops, medicinal plants and animals all over the world are those developed from the rich variety of life species preserved from ancient times by tribesfolk. It is an irony that our modern society perceives tribes as *uncivilized and uncultured*. For centuries, Kadu (forest) and its fertile land were owned by the tribesfolk. They never privatised them, nor did they destroy them in the name of development. Their life is *need-based* and not *greed-based*. They have not become money-minded. They go for work for two or three days a week and spend the rest of the days in total relaxation. When the money gets exhausted, they start working again.

A society with little gender and class discrimination

The traditional tribal system allows equal rights and participation for both men and women. There is no other human group in the world in which women's freedom is upheld to this extent, avoiding all discrimination in work. The women are given freedom to find and choose their own

life partners. Divorce and re-marriage are accepted by tribal society. There is no dowry system among them. Men and women enjoyed equal rights to property. Female infanticide is unheard in this society.

The whole traditional society is built on the solid foundation of equality among all life forms including the plant kingdom, water and earth. It is based on the symbiotic relationship of all beings with nature. People are given respect and status according to their contribution to society, but only when they are performing the particular item assigned to them. (The Hindu, Adivasi Folio, 2000). Hence, a Mannookkaran or a Guruvar or Guruvathy who performs rituals is treated with respect when he/she is performing the rituals in their respective roles. After the event, they are treated as equal to anyone else in the Ooru. The attitude comes from the core of culture, eco-friendly life and social environment.

Socio-cultural structure

Tribesfolk lack written language of their own, but it has not prevented them from passing of their rich culture and customs from generation to generation. They speak their own dialects. Children are given names on the seventh day after birth and is usually named in accordance with family tradition. Tribes bury the dead in areas set apart as burial ground. Dance and songs accompany funeral ceremonies. The people have strong belief in the spirits of ancestors. In the hamlet, there is a special house for worshipping the *Kara Deivam*. Whenever, there is some incidence of disease, they perform Pooja. On *Shivaratry day*, they observe abstinence and take food only after seeing the light on *Malleswaram* mount.

Tribal songs and dances

The tribesfolk play a vital role in transmitting the history, cultural traditions, and the way of living to new generations. Tribal songs and dances are the main media by which transmission is done.

One of the tribal songs has the following as its theme. It is sung by a woman while her husband is about to sleep. She sings:

Let us cut the ragi plant at its seed bunch; let us collect the torn sheafs in the upper fold of the *chela*, (The *chela* is the female dress worn with two folds in front). For both of us to play, let us tie the double-seated swing on the branch of Dhani tree. If you were a basket swing it to the settler. A basket with two pockets is better for our use. Let us go to our lord (Malleswaram) and pray for the gift of a child. If we get a baby boy, we will give him your name, *Thampaso*, if it is a baby girl, let us give her my name. If we unite, we would be able to please the Goddess, Thotere (the goddess of prosperity) and offer her *pongal* (Cereals specially cooked with jaggery in a new pot)

The woman is using her leisure time to advise her husband about her knowledge and practices. While harvesting, she collects the sheafs that fall away in her own *chela*-fold. She cannot afford to allow any grain to go waste. If husband and wife are united in will and work, they can enjoy life and perform useful duties. If they are not united, the benefit will go to the settlers. The intuition of the tribal woman is well depicted here. Unity and co-operation are considered as the base of prosperity. Pleasing God is essential for their prosperity of their progeny. The tribal woman welcomes their expected child with great enthusiasm and delight irrespective of whether, it is going to be a boy or a girl.

Another song gives graphic details of plant growth. It speaks of how to prepare the ground, how to prepare the seedlings, how to plant them in the furrows, how to watch their growth, how to harvest and how to prepare the food out of the harvest. The details of how to remove stones and thorns from the furrows are also given.

Red Thina and black Thina seeds should be mixed and sown; birds that come must be chased away. You have to look after the cultivation by watching from a small hut built on the top of the tree. The hut should be 12 feet high from the ground. Take the trips to drive the birds and say, *Aha Aha..* and throw stones at them..

Their customs and traditions are handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. The elders play a vital role in this process. They hand down to successors their songs and stories.

CONCLUSION

In an ethnographic research, to study about a community, it is vital to analyse their problems in various perspectives. The study of the cultural priorities of tribesfolk has enabled the researchers to look at the problems, beyond the extent to which, an outsider can perceive. Being the possessors of a wealthy culture, tribals would have hesitancy to adapt and tune to the prospects of a foreign language as English. Certainly, initiatives have to be taken to evolve culturally specific syllabus and curriculum for the tribals. A learning environment has to be created in the classroom, that nurtures the curiosity and path to knowing. The skills of language is important for the balanced participation in tribal community as well as, larger world community. Practice and preparation in the cultural traditions interwoven with language experiences reflecting all education domains helps the learners to understand and participate in rightful place in the universe. Tribal history is World history. Tribal culture has several elements that mainstream people have to emulate. The noble values and attitudes can be contributed to the present-day world at large.

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