

PRIMITIVE TRIBALS IN KERALA: STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

Niju.P.

Research Scholar. Department of History.
Annamalai University

Abstract: The socio-economic conditions of primitive tribal groups of Kerala which dealt with the tribal communities with pre-agricultural stage development, stagnant population and very low literacy are recognized as primitive tribes (1) Cholanaikan, Kattunaikans, Kurumbas,

Keyword: Primitive, Struggle, Survival, Socio-economic.

INTRODUCTION :

Kadars and Koragas are the Primitive tribes in Kerala and they constitute nearly 5% of the total ST population in the State. The problem of remoteness, ill health, absence of educational facilities, landless and houseless families, seasonal unemployment and poverty, lack of essential facilities such as power connection, isolation from the mainstream etc., are the problems confronting the primitive tribal groups. During the 10th plan Primary and secondary education will be ensured to all primitive tribal groups students through Ashram Schools and tribal schools.

PRIMITIVE TRIBAL GROUPS: MEANING

Tribal groups with pre-agricultural stage of development, with and very low literacy rates are defined as Primitive Tribes Groups (PTGs). Cholanaikan, Kurumbas, Kattunaikans, Kadars and Koragas are the 5 primitive tribe groups in Kerala. Kattunaikans are mainly seen in Wayanad, Malappuram and Kozhikode districts. Cholanaikan are considered as the offshoot of the Kattunaikans and are seen only in Malappuram District. Majority of the Kadar population is found in Trisoor district and the balance in Palakkad district. Kurumbas are living in the Attappady Block of Palakkad district. The Koraga habitations are in Kasargode district.

CHOLANAICKANS:

The once naked cavemen of Kerala, the Cholanaickans living in the deep forests of Nilambur close to the Silent Valley National Park, have started adopting modern ways of life. Cholanaickans the caveman of Kerala still at a pre-agriculture level of technology (2). They are one of the primitive tribal groups of Kerala. They are fully depending on forest, they collected forest goods and sell it through co-operative societies. But now they are in the stage of transition. This primitive tribe numbering around 300 was identified only in 1970, and till recently they were considered an offshoot of the Kattunaikan, another tribe living in the same valley and also in the adjacent Wynad forests (3). In

2002, the state government recognized Cholanaickens as one of the five primitive indigenous communities in Kerala. The Cholanaika habitats are seen in the Karulai and Chunkathara forest ranges near Nilambur, which fall in Ernad Taluk of Malappuram district. The survey conducted by KIRTADS for

the Action Plan estimated 365 Cholanaikan in 1998 (4). The fieldwork and study among them in the Karulai Range in July 2003 revealed that there are 41 families with a population of 157 of which 92 are male and 65 female. It found that out of 157 Cholanaickans, 25 are literate (5).

KORAGAS:

The Koraga community of Karnataka and Kerala states of southern parts of India is considered as one of the most primitive communities of India (6). Koragas are divided into a number of exogamous clans or sects. The clan is known as Bali. The Koragas are basically agriculturists and led their livelihood depending on the forest produce such as Bamboo, cane, creepers for basketry. Koragas sing songs and perform folk dances, rituals and magic to appease their deity for bountiful crops and eradicate epidemics. Koraga population is distributed in Kasargode and Manjeswar blocks. Their major stalk lives in the adjoining Karnataka State. They live mostly in rural areas and are distributed in 43 settlements. They speak a language close to Tulu and Kannada. Their population as per the Socio-Economic Survey of 1996-97 was 1349. A survey undertaken by KIRTADS for the Action Plan in 1997 has estimated their population as 1330, constituting 407 nuclear families living in 284 houses. At present, they are engaged with many other occupations. Most of them are labourers. Koragas are, a very quiet and inoffensive race, small and slight, the men seldom exceeding five feet six inches, black skinned, thick lipped, noses broad and flat, high-check bones and sloping foreheads, and with bushy rough hairs. Their principal occupation was basket making and food gathering

KATTUNAICKANS:

Kattunayakan is one of the tribes who had been the true inhabitants of forest(7). As the name indicates kaatu means forest and naickan means king so they were once the kings of jungles. They are completely dependent on forest and forest products and subsist on honey, roots and barks of plants and what small animals that they trap or fell with their bows and arrows. They are also known as Then Kurumas as they collect honey from the forest State. As per the Socio-Economic Survey of 1996-97, their population was 11871 with 5991 males and 5880 females. The settlement of the Kattunayakan is called kudi. The areas of habitation of Kattunaikans are in Wayanad, Malappuram and Kozhikode districts. Their population is distributed in the proportion 91:8:1 in these districts. Literacy rate of Kattunaikans in Kozhikode is slightly better. Kattunaikans cultivate plantain, ginger, tapioca, coconut, coffee, pepper, paddy etc. in their available lands. Agriculture is only a subsidiary activity for them. Major source of income is derived from casual wage labour, forest woks.

KURUMBAR:

The kurumbar are one of the primitive tribal group in Kerala. They inhabit the Attappaadi valley of Palghat districts in Kerala(8). They are also found in Nilgiri hills of Tamilnadu. Their language is a mixture of Tamil and Malayalam. They have been identified the primitive tribe by government of India in 1976. In 1981 the population of Kurumbar was 1283. According to 1991 census, their population was 1820 and the socio-Economic survey of 1996-97 showed a population of 1602. Hamlet of the Kurumbar is known as ooru. Each ooru has a headman called Oorumboopan, who is assisted by Bhandari, Kuruthala and Mannookkaran. The Bhandari serves as a treasurer to social functions and the Mannookkaran is a traditional agricultural expert.

KADAR:

In Kerala, the Kadar population is distributed in the Parambikulam, Kuriyarkutty, Nelliampathy and Kodassery forest areas coming under Chittoor taluk of Palakkad district, and Vazhachal, Poringalkuthu and Sholayar forest areas of Mukundapuram taluk of Thrissur district(9). The Kadar families are showing interest in Agriculture. But they have no sufficient land base for this purpose. In the existing available land they use to cultivate vegetables, coconut, rubber, plantain etc. Their staple food is rice, supplemented by other items like tapioca, wheat etc. The Socio-Economic Survey of 1996-97 has estimated 1472 Kadar population, consisting of 744 males and 728 females; and the survey conducted by KIRTADS for the Action Plan estimated 460 Kadar families in 1999.

Problems of the primitive tribes in Kerala:

The total population of primitive tribes in the state is 16,678. The population of primitive tribes during 1981 census was 12,921. The average decennial growth rate of primitive tribes is estimated as 18.17% considering the period from 1981 to 1999-2000. This rate is also slightly less than the decadal growth rate for all tribals found during 1991 census [22.75%]. The estimated population of tribals in the

State during 1996-97 is 3,59,176(10). Hence the primitive tribes population arrived at during 1996-97 through the survey is 4.89% of this.

Among the primitive tribes, Kattunaikans form the majority. Their total population is 11871 [71.17%]. Cholanaikans are the smallest group among them. They number

only 384 with 88 families. The population of Kurumbas, Kadars and Korages are 1,602,

1,472 and 1,349 respectively. Primitive Tribes in Kerala, in general facing some common problems such as problem of geographic separation, economic problem, cultural problem, social problem, educational problem and health problem.

Problem of geographical separation:

Most of the primitive tribes in Kerala geographically separated from total population. They are lived in deep forest, deep valleys, hills, and mountains. So it is very difficult to maintain communication between other people of Kerala, so socially they are away from civilised world.

Cultural problem:

The primitive tribal culture is entirely different from the non tribals. They are suspicious of the non tribals. They fail to understand the some of the customs, practice, beliefs and attitude of non tribal civilised peoples.

Exploitation:

The innocence, illiteracy and introvert attitude of the primitive tribal peoples are exploited by outside people. The tribals are exploited by land lords, money lenders, forest contractors and revenue officers. Non availability of banking facilities is another reason for exploitation. The tribals are forced to depend on money lenders.

Problems of cultivation:

Most of the primitive tribal groups are engaged in cultivation and most of them are landless, they practice shifting cultivation. They are unaware about new techniques in cultivation. It resulted their crop yield very less. So their cultivation always unprofitable.

Educational problems:

As per the socio-economic survey 1996-97, the number of primitive tribes who passed SSLC is 66 only (11). Whereas the number of SSLC failed PTGs are 142. Though the Kattunaikans form the majority, they could produce only 25 SSLC holders. It is seen that 28.05% of the tribal families have school facilities within a radius of 1 KM. More than 17% of the families lack such facilities within a radius of 5 KM. Cholanaikan families totally lack school facilities. They have to walk more than 8 Kms for reaching the nearest primary school. The Kadars of Trissoor district & Palakkad districts, the Kurumbas of Palakkad districts also have difficulty in school access within 5 Kms. The Kattunaikans however, has comparatively lesser problem with regard to school infrastructure facilities. The medium of instruction is another problem to the promotion of education among tribals. Most of the primitive tribal languages in Kerala don't having any script of their own. The curriculum and syllabus

in the school framed mainly for non tribal students.

Problem of health and sanitation:

Due to the ignorance the primitive tribals not appreciate modern concept of medicine, health and sanitation. They do not take much care about their own health. They believed that diseases are caused by the hostile spirits and ghosts. They have their own traditional means to cure the diseases. Some of the common diseases which affected in tribal areas are skin diseases, typhoid and small pox.

Alienation of tribal land to non tribals:

Lack of legislation to prevent the passing of tribal land in to the hands of non-tribals main reason of land alienation (12). Alienation of land is a serious problem faced by the primitive tribes. The number of landless tribals has increased during the last decade and several reasons can be attributed to this phenomenon. Primitive tribals largely depend upon non-tribals to meet their credit requirements. The socio-economic survey of tribals, reveals that tribals alienate their lands mainly for meeting their domestic expenses and for clearing their past debts. Other causes for land alienation are marriage ceremonies and medical treatment.

Governmental Failures:

The failure of the government to take appropriate measures to rehabilitate the tribal population both before and after independence had disappointed the tribals. The state government and central government are vested the responsibility of implementing the constitutional provisions. Now a days land of primitive tribals pass out to non-tribals. Money lenders continue to exploit them. Outside people interfere the economic and social matters of these tribals and exploited them.

Unjust forest policy:

The unsympathetic forest laws and regulations damaged the tribals economically and emotionally. They lost their control over their own land, because once they owned and cultivated land by the primitive tribals now branded as "forest lands" under the new forest policy. So they are facing some restrictions, this made them strangers to the forest.

Problems of land ownership:

This is true that most of the tribal land in primitive tribal areas has been now legally transferred to non-tribals. Now in Kerala tribal movements are demanded this land should be returned to the them. In the early period primitive tribal people enjoyed much freedom for use and hunt animals freely in the forest areas. They are much closes with forest and its gods emotionally. The tribals who are "deprived" of their rights to the land and forest have reacted sharply to the restrictions imposed by the government on their traditional rights.

CONCLUSION:

Primitive tribals problems are simple but very delicate to handle. The modern culture should not impose on

them. Majority of tribals are extremely poor and economically backward so various economic programmes and project have been undertaken to improve their economic position. Measures to provide educational facilities to the primitive tribal areas have been taken by the government. Schools are established these tribal areas. Research institutes take intensive research works on tribal art, culture and customs of primitive tribal group of Kerala. Tribal leadership is an important thing of tribal development; tribal elite have been effective human agent in the tribal system. They can keep in such with outside world on the one hand, and other, they can maintain their leadership among their own tribes. The primitive tribal people constitute a sizable population in Kerala. They are also the citizen of India and hence promotion of their welfare is of equal importance.

END NOTES

- i. Seetha Kakkoth . "The Primitive Tribal Groups of Kerala": A Situational Appraisal. Department of Anthropology, Kannur University Centre at Palayad, Thalassery, Kannur.p-47.
- ii.PRG Mathur- " Cholanaickans of Kerala. In primitive tribes". the ministry of home affairs. New Delhi p:10,11. 19.
- iii.Saritkumar Chaudhari & SuchetaSen Choudhari . "Primitive Tribes in Contemporary India", Volume 1.Mittal publications.New Delhi.2005. p.102.
- iv. Action plan for Cholanaickan development, KIRTADS, Kozhikode,1998
- v.The Hindu news paper : News on " Cholanaickans". 2004 oct 16.
- vi.Action Plan for Koraga Development. Kozhikode :KIRTADS. 1998.
- vii. PK Mohanthy – "Encyclopaedia of primitive tribes in India volume1". Gyan publication 2004, New Delhi p.276.
- viii.Viswanathan Nair N. "Tribal Health and Medicine in Kerala" DC books kottayam 2008, p.46.
- ix.PK Mohanthy - "Encyclopaedia of primitive tribes in India volume1". Gyan publication 2004, New Delhi p-209,210.
- x. M Nazer – "A Study of Land Alienation and Indebtedness among Tribals in Tamil Nadu,Kerala and Karnataka states". (Principal Investigator) Research Department of Commerce of Khadir Mohideen College, Adirampattinam, Thanjavur District, Tamil Nadu.p.205-206.
- xi.Shankar Rao .C N- "Sociology of Indian society". S.Chand Company Ltd, New Delhi. 2004. p-361.
- xii.Shankar Rao .C N-" Sociology of Indian society". S.Chand Company Ltd, New Delhi. 2004. p-362.