

THE LIVELIHOOD OF TRIBAL WOMEN AND THE EXTINCTION OF NATURAL MEDICATIONS – A CASE STUDY WITH FUTURISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Tribes are occupying a major area in India. On account of the standardization of medical field it is quite difficult for Indians to look into the old medicinal practices followed by the ancient tribes. This shows how the economically downtrodden and ancient culture inherited members are not given due consideration in the society. This article is a case study of the tribes, especially women, living in the southern part of Tamilnadu in remote areas and their livelihood and further represents the extinction of the natural medicines of the forest produce along with them. It further throws light on how to bring effective changes in their life by representing the government practices and schemes exclusively meant for them. Further it explores other aspects of developing their livelihood even in the forest by the effective deployment of technological assistance.

Keywords: Anthropology, medication, urban, rural women.

INTRODUCTION

Anthropology represents the study of multi-aspects of humans within past and present societies. “Social Anthropology and cultural anthropology study the norms and values of societies” as stated in Wikipedia. This article aims at the social and cultural anthropology of the tribal people living in a remote area of south Tamilnadu. Tribal communities occupy a prominent portion in the world. The tribal communities do not have a secured life and their environment creates a hard living task. They really feel difficult to cope up with the socially and economically sound background. “Tribe” represents a group of people living in a particular place for a long period of time.

I. Tribes in India

Tribes are the primitive members who follow their ancient cultures and practices without imbibing the civilization into it. They demarcate themselves from the world of civilization out of fear and insecurity. According to D.N. Majumdar,

A tribe is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous with no specialization of functions, rule by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise united in language and dialect, recognizing social distance with other tribes or caste without any social obloquy attaching to them, as it does in the caste structure, following tribal traditions, beliefs and customs, illiberal

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of naturalization of ideas, from alien sources, above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration. (355)

They are categorized under scheduled list of Indian Constitution under Article 342(i) and 342(ii). Around five hundred different tribal communities exist in India. Though the world has achieved the highest technological advancement in one end, the tribes occupy the other end without meeting the basic amenities of life. The tribes' life styles still exist in the same level without much change because of their deviation from the rural and urban people. Even in this modern world they struggle for their existence by depending upon the livelihood they attain from the forest. Special attention for the tribal community was given in 1950 under Article 48. The government henceforth tries to behold the economic, social and livelihood status of the tribes. In India approximately 80 million tribes are living. They consider themselves to be the safe guards of the ancient civilization. But these tribes need focused attention as they lack the basic conditions like communication, transport and relationship with the city or town dwellers. In order to develop the livelihood of these tribes the government has launched Ministry of Tribal Affairs, under which functions 'Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP)' through which the tribes earn their livelihood. They have launched in 1987, Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited (TRIFED), which serves as a store house for the tribes to sell their products. The tribes' artifacts and other produce, find place for selling through this way. Shah, Mihir sates in "Tribal Alienation in an unequal India" that Official data on all indicators of development reveal that Indian tribal people are the worst off in terms of income, health, education, nutrition, infrastructure and governance. They have been unfortunately at the receiving end of the injustices of the development process itself. Around 40 percent of the 60 million people in India are tribes.

II. Literature Survey

Many researchers have talked about the tribes and their educational status in India. T. Brahmanadam states that in "Educational Status among the Scheduled Tribes: Issues and Challenges", the education of the tribes are very meager as there are a lot of drop outs due to the unpaid attention of the government towards the tribal education and upliftment. Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf states in *The Tribes of India: A Struggle for Survival*, different kinds of tribal people their ethnicity and culture. Sisodia states in "Contemporary Debate of Tribal Development in India" that the tribes had to move gradually from the plains to [...] organize and more developed areas. The process went on for centuries very steadily until recent times when concerted efforts were made by state to take these communities back into the mainstream of the society. Because of this estrangement from the so called modernizing society, tribal community is treated as a homogeneous unit which is very much different from the non-tribal communities.

Goswami states in his article, “A Study of Tribal Development in India” that government has to implement programme for the active participation of the tribal community members for the real social development of the tribes. Rai, Rajiv and Vijendra Nath in “The Role of Ethnic and Indigenous People of India and their culture in the Conservation of Biodiversity” states about the tribes usage of the natural remedies for treating fatal diseases and snake bites and their mindset to protect nature under the disguise of culture.

III. Focus of Case Study

There are many researches carried out on tribes in various places while the researcher has planned to concentrate on the tribes living in the foot hills of the Western Ghats especially near Krishnankoil and Rajapalayam, TamilNadu. The places particularly chosen are Thaniparai, Athithoppu, Ayyanar Falls, Shenbagathoppu, Pilavakaldam and Puliyanakudi. As no research has been done so far regarding the upliftment of the people in these areas the task for the development of the tribes especially women is taken into consideration. The women living there simply have their living without any facilities. They do not indulge in work. The men go to forest and get the forest produce. Depending upon the amount of forest produce they lead their life. They do not have any sort of civilized environment. They do not have thirst for money. They long for the day’s survival. They do have a lot of herbal medicines which are getting unknown to the future generations. According to Chandra Guru et.al. “Though our national leaders and constitutional makers are committed to uplift the tribal people, a desired level of development has not been achieved yet.” (Chandra Guru et. al., 2015) This research work as a whole focuses on the improvement of the livelihood of the tribal community by teaching the easiest and most profitable methods of earning to upgrade their life style as well as to invite their contribution to Nation’s revenue.

Objectives of the Case Study

- Σ To study the socio-economic level of tribal women in the selected places.
- Σ To identify the difficulties encountered by them and their children regarding getting food, earnings and other basic amenities of life.
- Σ To identify the reason for illiteracy and to identify the effective stratagem to eradicate it.
- Σ To let them know the government schemes and their rights.
- Σ To let them be aware of the Technological skills through special training programs.
- Σ To ensure them about the eco-friendly atmosphere.
- Σ To minimize the communication gap between them and the rural and urban people.

- Σ To implement Sericulture methodology among housewife.
- Σ To enable them to sell their products through online marketing devices.

V. Geographical Area that will be Covered

The research areas taken up for this study lie in the foothills of the Western Ghats. The first village taken up for study is Thaniparai which is located 15km from Srivilliputtur, Tamilnadu. The second and third are Athithoppu and Pilavakkal Dam which are 5 km and 3 km from Thaniparai respectively. The other three places are Shenbagathoppu, Ayyanar falls and Puliyanakudi which are 15km, 20km and 35 km from Rajapalayam, Tamilnadu. These six places are located in the foothills of the WesternGhats where a lot of tribal people live.

VI. Target Group that is Sought to be Studied

In Thaniparai there are around 62 families. Among them 150 are females and 200 are males. There are 45 children whose studies are taken care of by Ramco group of industries, Rajapalayam. In Athithoppu there are only 15 families who lack the basic amenities of life. There are only 20 men and 15 ladies there. In Shenbagathoppu there are 30 families in which 60 ladies and 65 gents are living. In Pilavakkal Dam there are only 15 families within which 15 are ladies and 25 are gents. In the Ayyanar falls there are only 28 families. Among the members 15 are ladies and 20 are gents. In this place also the children's studies are taken care of Ramco group of Institutions, Rajapalayam. In the village Puliyanakudi, there are only 21 families in which 20 are ladies and 25 are gents. The ladies present in these villages are taken up for study to improve the livelihood of the people.

VII. Analysis of the Survival

The people present in these areas were visited to identify the pros and cons of their lifestyle. The researcher has observed the following elements from the interaction. The major strength of these tribal communities is both men and women are accustomed to herbal medicines. They are able to cure any sort of diseases through their medicines. The second important and adorable factor is the food habits. They do not rely on tasty consumption of food. They live on the forest. In all the six villages they do not concentrate more on eating rice instead they depend on yams and green leaves for their survival. In all these six places, the location is highly peaceful, pleasant and greenish. The health hazards due to smoke, dust and noise are hardly seen there. Though the people are uneducated, they all send their children to schools. Ramco Group of Institutions, Rajapalayam, plays a vital role in establishing the studies for the kids. The kids are taken to boarding and lodging school for education.

In Thaniparai the people depend on fetching indanmattai, which is used for the preparation of soap fragrance, sikkai, kadukai and nannari. They sell them all in nearby places at meager prizes.

In Thaniparai self-help groups are available. Everyone is a herder. Both ladies and gents indulge in the same work. The women here collect gooseberries, mango, indankattai and avaram flower.

Before ten years they were having only yams and greens to eat. But their food culture has also got changed. They earn per month ₹2000/- only.

In Athithoppu there are no hospitals. No self-help groups are available. Ladies here get inside forest for survival. There are no particular jobs for ladies.

In Shenbagathoppu the main occupation is gathering tamarind and honey. They get medical aids only three times every month. No self-help groups exist. Students go to Mamsapuram School, a nearby location for studies. The people residing there earn ₹1500-2000/- per month.

In Puliyangudi, most of the people are converted to Christians. They indulge in Jute making. Only 4-5 members have mobile phones in their houses.

In Ayyanar Falls there are 15 ladies altogether. They do not have any specific occupation. They live on what their husbands bring from forest. Though they have Televisions at home they do not have any security of life. The cheetah residing in the forest comes near the house yards at times. Even wild elephants come near their houses at night.

VIII. Findings

In all these places no special attention is given to the ladies. Mostly they live on what their husbands bring home. As there are strict restrictions for cutting the trees by the forest department they could not do that in a free way. Their earning at times goes upto ₹300/- some times to the least extent of ₹5/-. These people fear of living and mingling with the other people because of the chances of ridicules, deception and teasing. They really lead an insecure and pathetic life. When they do not fetch anything from forest they need to remain hungry on that day. Though they are provided with rice from ration shop which opens once in a month, it does not remain till the month's end. They are not much passionate towards jewels and luxuries. Hence they lead a very simple life. They do not have any chance for the development of their livelihood. The women also rear cattle, sheep at times but do not do anything to earn money. They are even unaware of the governmental schemes, which are to be given a full focus to them through camps organized from the government sectors.

The socio-economic level of tribal women is very low and could not be enough for their living. Their problems in running the family for basic food, clothing and shelter are to be given due consideration by the government. The government has

to take some necessary measure to ensure the rise of literacy rate as well as the allowances offered by the government for job opportunities of the tribal people. To eradicate the illiteracy rate the government's schemes are to be convened through awareness camps for education. The technical knowledge must be imbibed in them through special training programs as they are totally devoid of the common world. The simple use of gadgets and the usage of the same, for sales of the forest produce and hand works, are to be highlighted to them. To create occasion for meeting the urban people either by deploying them amidst a social group to throw light on the medical values of the forest produce. Sericulture implementation has to be brought to them through governmental norms, fixing up a margin for their work for creating opportunities for their livelihood.

Though effective measures are taken for these all, it is quiet difficult to fine-tune them and elevate them to the civilized society status. They are not interested to meet the social group instead they want to confine themselves to their own world. The government schemes go waste only because of these constraints. They must be an eye-opening awareness camp for the effective usage of government schemes by them.

IX. Future Perspectives

The ladies could be given training for earning. They have humpty land in the forest which could be used for mulberry growth. As they are really at home all the time, they could even grow the silk worms at home with the financial assistance from the government. Through this they will also have livelihood and at the same time helps to generate revenue for the government. The incorporation of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) updated methodologies in seed germination and other processes help them to generate maximum revenue. Through ICT incorporation they could be introduced to online purchase and marketing like flipkart, and other modes. They could be properly guided to sell the herbs prepared for various diseases. The advertisement tactics could be taught in such away to advertise their products and to have them exposed to the world in a different look. Though they could not get these much of technological update overnight, it is quiet easy for them if the government nominates a person for doing these. They real value of their medicines go waste as it is not used by the people. Their medicines which are like palm scripted medicines are going unwritten now-a-days. Some are literates while others fear of the outside society to move with. The government has to take some more initiatives to make their life with required food, clothing and shelter.

X. Conclusion

Though tribes are the predecessors of the ancient heritage they are to be given equal chance of livelihood. Though the governmental schemes support them with the basic aids, they need much more awareness camps and address regarding the

world now and their important contributions to the human kind in case of the medicines they have. If an age old man in the tribal community dies, he takes away with him whatever the medical sciences he got from his father, grandfather and great-grandfather. As the younger generation is not interested in it, they happen to make their medical sciences extinct with them. This has to be noted down for the future generations. The women are to be motivated for earning from home. Special organizations are to be formed for making them aware of the preparation of house-decoration projects, stitching, embroidering and other similar works. The sericulture methodology will further enhance their earning with the support of the government. If the livelihood of the women is increased, it will enhance their way of living by giving education to the kids, having food for the children and further a moral support to the family head. Further, it will bring up their self-confidence and make them to come out of the cocoons to see the word of the civilized man.

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