

PANIYAS OF KARIKKAMUNDU IN GUDALUR NILGIRIS DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Paniyas are one among the Primitive Tribal Groups (PTG's) in Tamil Nadu. The Paniyans or Paniyas are found in the Southern part of the India in the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. They are concentrated mainly in the Gudalur and Pandalur taluks of the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu. The paniya have historically worked as agriculture laborer's. They are believed to have been brought to Wayanad by the king of Malabar, and there after tilled the land as serfs. They used to hunt for food from the woods and Kabani River. Fresh fish, crab and tapioca mainly constituted their cuisine. The Paniya language is a Dravidian language spoken by the Paniya people, an indigenous tribe in India. It is also known as Pania, Paniyan, Panyah.

KEY WORDS

Agriculture, Food gathering, Language, Education and Healthcare, Ornaments, Festivals.

INTRODUCTION

Tribal people form a major segment of the world population. They are found all over the world. They were called by different names such as 'primitive', 'tribal', 'indigenous', 'aboriginal', 'native', and so on. India has a large number of tribe people; they live in different regions in the forest as well as in urban areas, and mostly speak their own languages. The major tribes in TamilNadu are Malayali, Toda, Kurumba, Paniya, Irular, Kattunayakkan, Kani, Palliyan, Sholagar, Kadar and Veddar. Most of the Tribal communities are small in size and the exceptions are Malayali and Irular tribes. Only two Taluks in TamilNadu, i.e., Devakottai Taluk in Sivagangai district and Thiruchuli Taluk in Virudhunagar district do not have any tribal population.

LOCATION

Karikkamundu is 40 kilometers away from Gudalur towards Sulthan Bathery and 18 kilometers from Bathery. It is a part of Erumadu village called Kuyyunni, under the jurisdiction of Cherangodu Panchayat. This comes under Gudalur taluk of Nilgirs District in Tamil Nadu. The road to Paniyan Farm Colony (PFC) is metaled. Karikkamundu is a part of the PRF colony, the latter comprising of the Paniyan settlement, the tea plantation, dispensary

and the Balvadi. The houses are tiled, five in a line built by NAWA with the help of the Government of Tamil Nadu in 1965.

FLORA

The surrounding region of the hamlet is enriched with innumerable plant species. Apart from tea, coffee and pepper there are jack fruit trees, as well as rose wood, pine, bamboo, chilly and a variety of greens are also found. Being a rainy region, the vegetation is rich with bryophytes like mosses, liverworts, etc.

FAUNA

Except the domestic animals (two calves and four goats), the fauna found here are rabbit, centipede, spiders and common species of bird like, crow, sparrow, and fowls.

ETYMOLOGY

The name, “Paniyan” appears to have evolved from Pani, which in Malayalam mean ‘work’. Thus, Paniyan is a worker or labourer. Luiz considers “the name Paniyan is modified form of a Malayalam word Paniker (Laborers). They are addressed and referred to as Paniyan (male) and Panichi or Paniyathy (female) by other. The plural term is Paniyar. The word ‘tribe’ is derived from the Latin term ‘tribus’ which was applied to the three divisions of the early people of Rome. The term however has gone through a lot of changes. It meant a political unit consisting of a number of clans. A tribe occupied a definite, geographical area. Permanent settlement gave a geographical identity to a tribe. For that reason, tribes were often named after the area. Our country is named after a tribe called ‘Bharata’. A common definition for a tribe is a group of people that all have common ancestry, or a common ancestor, a common culture, and live in their own enclosed society.

RACIAL FEATURES

Paniyans are dark skinned, short statured persons with broad noses and curly or wavy hair. They are Negroid types. They have straight eyes, thick averted lips with slight facial prognathism. Paniyans are said to be the descendant of Africans.

DRESS PATTERN

The traditional dress is simple. Men’s dress is consisted of a mundu (dhoti) and a towel. Today they are dressed normally in mundu and shirt. The dress of the Paniyan women is unique. It consists of two mundus, one bigger than the other one. The bigger one is wrapped on the loins and the smaller one is wrapped above the bosom through the armpits leaving the shoulders bare. Few women use bigger mundu to serve both the purposes, in which case, the bigger mundu is wrapped above the bosom. The women keep bobbed hair or occasionally grow them long, but in either case a few locks at the forehead are trimmed so as

to avoid them from falling on the face while at work. The younger generation has a different style altogether.

ORNAMENTS

The Paniyans, both male and female, use a few cheap ornaments, which are purchased from the market or made by them. The urge for wearing ornaments is very much in them, particularly among the females. Their economic conditions, as they put it, do not permit them this 'luxury'. Below are given the most important ornaments worn usually by the women folk. The other ornaments used by them are mala, mothuram, vala, kammel, kolusu, mookkuthy, thandavala, etc.

LANGUAGE

Paniyan language is dialect of Malayalam, replete with Tamil and Kannada word (Thurston). It belongs to Dravidian family of language. They usually speak both Malayalam and Tamil.

AGE, SEX AND MARITAL STATUS

Total population of the Karikkamundu Paniyan settlement is 121, including 61 males and 60 females. Family types such as Nuclear family. Sup-nuclear family, supplemented family, lineal collateral family and lineal joint family are found in this settlement.

MARRIAGE

The age at marriage for Paniya boy is fall in the rank of 18 to 24 and that of girls from 16 to 20. The average age for boy is thus 21.5 and that of a girl is 18. The village council called "Kuttuam" regularizes the marriage, the act of the couple is looked down upon as shameful, immoral, and disgraceful and the marriage is not viewed as auspicious as the formal marriage.

FESTIVALS

The only festivals that they celebrate are Onam and Vishu. They do not have any other local festival. Leisure and recreation, in the true sense of the term, is unknown to the Paniyans. She/he has to toil from dawn to dusk to make his or her both ends to meet, by way of daily labour. The women have the additional burden of cooking food, and rearing children. They dance only on festive occasions like Vishu, marriage etc. accompanied by musical instruments like Tudi and Kuzhal.

EDUCATION

As far as Krikkamundu is concerned, education seems to be no interest for them. There are two schools exclusively for the Paniyans, one at Pothukolly, up to class V, and the other at Kappala, up to class VII. There is a government school, up to class X at Kayyunni

and another at Erumadu, up to +2 where both Malayalam and Tamil are taught. There are two English medium schools within the reach of 5 kilometers namely, St. Thomas Matriculation Higher Secondary School at Ayyankolly, and Sacred Heart Matriculation Higher Secondary at Kayyunni. But Paniyan student is found here.

HEALTH

Vegetables and Roots

The paniyans, unlike in the past, do not ample vegetables. They lack cultivatable land. In the kitchen gardens they cultivate Chempu (yam), Kanchil (a type of yam), Mathunga (pumpkin), Amarakai (beans), Cheera (greens), poosani (ash-gourd) and brinjal. Since there is no forest nearby, they do not go for collecting wild roots. These people buy vegetables from the nearby markets.

MILK AND DAITY PRODUCTS:

A decade ago, the people consumed milk, and today only countable households have cows, and goats. There is a big cattle shed in the settlement, which presently stands empty. The reason is lack of grazing ground. Due to poor economic conditions, they do not buy milk. The cost of milk per litter is Rs.14/ which is remarkably high for them.

HONEY

Honey is also considered as one of the important products. It is consumed depending upon the availability. It remains their favorite food.

FISH AND SEA FOOD

Paniyas eat all types of fish. Variety of dry fish is available in the nearby markets. Fresh fish is also available in abundance. They also eat crabs.

FOOD AND NUTRITION

A grave health problem of Paniyans is malnutrition and the related disease, scabies, due to deficiency of vitamins.

USE OF TOBACCO

Both men and women in different forms use tobacco. Men smoke 'beedi', and now cigarettes. Both men and women have the habit of chewing tobacco, either along with betel-leaves, or arecanut. Extensive use of tobacco causes inflammation of mouth, esophagus and other parts of respiratory tract and food tracts. Most of the people's teeth have become permanently brown in colour. It is unfortunate that even children are encouraged to chew betel leaves, arecaunut and tobacco. Many of the people in the settlement smoke ganja (India hemp), whenever it is made available by the other Paniyan settlement.

EXTERNAL APPEARANCE

The women folk and the girls look cleaner and well-dressed than men and boys. But on the whole the entire Paniyans look dirty and unclean. Very few use hair oil, and do not cut their nails. The younger generation, both boys and girls, use modern dress when they go out, either to the market or elsewhere.

DEATH

The dead among the Paniyans is usually buried except the persons like the Chetti, Koima and the elder members of the family who are cremated. The corpse is laid on a bier prepared out of bamboo poles. The dead body is carried to the Chudukadu (burial ground). The women and children do not accompany the procession. Before leaving the burial ground betel leaves and arecanuts are shared. Everyone is expected to take a purificatory bath before reaching the house. Pollution lasts for seven days. On the seventh day special celebration is held. They sing for the whole night.

CONCLUSION

The Paniyans of Karikkamundu are innocent, friendly, cordial and of inviting nature. The fine cool weather, the kindness and hospitality of these people make life more thrilling. Basic health of the Paniyans is relatively poor. Malnutrition and poor hygienic condition are two main vulnerable aspects. Scabies and anemia are rampant disease found among them.

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