

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF TRIBALS IN PERINGAMMALA PANCHAYATH WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KANIKKARS

The progress and all round development of a country or any place depend upon harnessing the skills and abilities of all sections of society regardless of caste, creed, religion and sex. Most Indians consider the tribal communities, which live in isolated and self-contained communities as wholly distinct from them culturally and ethnically. The little state of Kerala is a homeland of about thirty five colourful tribal groups. These thirty five tribal land sects at different socio-economic strata. A large number of tribal people live in the forest and mountain regions of Western Ghat. They have their own unique customs in every aspect of life. Tribal people had a great position in mountain ranges mainly on the Western Ghat bordering Karnataka and Tamilnadu. The most important tribal groups on the Kerala hills are listed here. *Adiyan, Kattunaikan, Malaipandaram, Cholanayakan, Malaivetan, Malayan, Irulan, Kadar, Mutuvan, Kanikkaran, etc.*

Kanikkars are the inhabitants of the area around Agastyakutam and Mahendragiri peaks of the western in the Adimali hills of Idukki. They are engaged in agriculture and also collected forest products. They are the largest number of tribal people in Kerala. They are honest and truthful. Kanikkars lives in different hamlets of Thiruvananthapuram district.

Peringammala Panchayath one of an important Panchayath of Thiruvananthapuram District. It is situated in the Peringammala village and Nedumangadu taluk. Kanikkars are the earliest inhabitants of Peringammala Panchayath. Njaraneeli is an important tribal settlement which is related with other tribal settlements. The kanikkars are wild but inoffensive hill tribes. They lived in the forest and their world was forest. They collected the forest goods and it give to Travancore kings as gift.

The term Kanikkaran means the hereditary proprietor of land. The legend has said that the name was given by Agastya muni. Generally Kanikkar community are dark skinned, short and plathyrhine type. In the early stage Kanikkar did not settle any place permanently. They moved from one place to another after having cultivation for two or three years. This practice got restrictions with the coming of the outside communities. With this the kanikkars have permanent settlement. The tribal communities in general and Kanikkars in particular tried to preserve our nature and natural resources. They contribute more to the development of the cultural history of Kerala.

SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The Western Ghats region has been studied by many people. But the entire life of Kanikkars has not been investigated in a standardized manner and there are several areas which remain unexplored. As a result, our understanding of the tribals of these areas is still far from completion. Some tribes in Kerala

have come to the main stream while most of them are far from development and education. The present study attempts to portray the life condition of kanikkars in Peringammala Panchayath

The significance of the study is really great. It is calculated to find out the social and economic conditions of Kanikkars in Peringammala panchayath. It intends to preserve the traditional culture and customs of Kanikkars. The unique characters of tribal identity can be found and preserve properly. The preservation of the rich culture of the tribals would be the most important responsibility of the government. The difference of their lifestyle is a matter of historical interest.

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the origin and settlement patterns of Kanikkars in Peringammala panchayath
- To trace the social and economic background of the Kanikkars.
- To identify the factors those affect the Socio Economic status of the Kanikkars.
- To suggest suitable measures to improve their conditions and solve the Problems of the Kanikkars.
- To illustrate the customs and believes of the Kanikkars .
- To expose the changes that taken place in the life of Kanikkars .

Major Findings of the Study

- ❖ Kanikkars are a prominent group among the Scheduled tribes in Kerala. They have a worthy traditional culture and way of living. They have their own unique customs in every aspect and event of life.
- ❖ Peringammala Panchayath is the largest tribal populated Panchayath in Vamanapuram Block. There are 1317 Kanikkaran families spread over seventeen Oorukkuttams in this Panchayath.
- ❖ Majority of tribal population in peringammala panchayath is living in settlements.
- ❖ The kanikkars are wild but inoffensive hill tribes. They lived in the forest and their world was forest. They are the owners of land and their knowledge about nature became valuable.
- ❖ The Kanikudi or Kanipat(settlement) is the basic unit of social, economic, political and religious organization. Each Kanipat is headed by a Muttukani who enjoys great powers.
- ❖ The lives of kanikkars are identical and well knitted together by social, religious, economic and political ties. Their society was devoid of complexities and every man was equal in it, superiority and inferiority was never allowed in the simple social system of the Kanikkars.
- ❖ Kanikkars are closely associated with forest and they maintained a proper eco-system in the full sense. They always tried to preserve our nature and natural resources.

- ❖ More than half of the families suffer from poverty and chronic nutritional deficiency. Most of them made subsistence on minor forest produce collection and cultivation.
- ❖ Self employment initiatives among Kanikkars are very few
- ❖ Inaccessibility of institutions of basic services is the major hurdle standing against the development of settlements and improvement of the lifestyle of Kanikkars.
- ❖ Literacy rate of Kanikkars is lowest when we compared it with other communities. Non existence and distance of educational institutions and the ignorance of parents to send their children to educational institutions etc. are the reasons attributed for the lowest literacy rate.
- ❖ Different government and other agencies have been implementing many developmental projects in the tribal area since many decades. It has resulted some developments in this area.
- ❖ The important projects implemented by the Peringammala Panchayath for tribal welfare were assistance for self employment, colony renovation, house construction, assistance for marriage, and installation of drinking water supply. The functioning of tribal development department and co-operative societies for tribals is not much successful due to the lack of proper planning and co-ordination.

- ❖ The socio economic conditions of Kanikkars in Peringammala panchayath need to be improved and developed.
- ❖ Their life in the thick forest temporary shelters had been a source of concern since enough attention was not given to their specific needs.
- ❖ The public services, including roads, transportation, electricity, water supply, education, health etc were not adequately provided.
- ❖ Prevalence of physical disabilities, mental disorders, and chronic diseases are high among Kanikkars compared to the general population. Alcoholism among men are also high.
- ❖ Lack of appropriate and adequate developmental strategies are the main problem experienced in the tribal shelters.

Recommendations

The study highlights some recommendations for the enhancement of the situation of socio- economic conditions of Kanikkars in Peringammala Panchayath .The major suggestions in this regard are the following.

- ❖ A comprehensive attempt encompassing all aspects of development of human resources at individual community level has to be adopted.
- ❖ Profitable employment may be ensured to the poor tribal families who are below the poverty line. Promotion of cottage industries such as basket making, bee-keeping and minor forest produces would be beneficial.

- ❖ Promotion of Kani medicinal practices and encourages the cultivation of medicinal plants. Marketing facilities are to be arranged in different centers inside and outside Panchayath .
- ❖ Provide more effective Non-formal and formal educational activities and extended to all hamlets. The quality of education need to be enhanced considerably.
- ❖ A paradigm shift in the policies and programmes had to be adopted to bring about equitable development among Kanikkars.
- ❖ For their political and social development promotion and awareness classes should be arrange.
- ❖ Provide assistance for self employment, colony renovation, house construction, assistance for marriage, installation of drinking water supply, etc.
- ❖ Community Based Organisations of Women in the Self Help Group pattern may be formed and strengthened for providing necessary credit and livelihood opportunities.
- ❖ Traditional medical practitioners among Kaanikkars may be recognized and financially assisted to settle them in practice and to raise medicinal herbal gardens. Traditional and ethnic medicines should be promoted.
- ❖ Domestic latrines may be set up in the premises of every tribal household.

- ❖ Skill base and educational capacity of the tribes need to be improved and developed.