

KURICHYA TRIBE: SOCIO - ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Dr. Sreeja s, Department of Economics, Associate Professor and Guide, SreeSankara College, Kalady.

Devi Krishna Ramesh, Phdfultime Research Scholar, SreeSankara College, Kalady.

Abstract

Kurichya tribe – socio economic characteristics- food gatherers – agricultural – “karanavar” – inheritance of property

Introduction

Kurichya tribe also known as Hill Brahmins or Malai Brahmins are a matrilineal tribe of Kerala distributed mainly in Wayanad and Kannur districts of Kerala. They are one of the Scheduled Tribes of Kerala practicing agriculture. This article aims to make a short description about the Kurichya tribe.

SOCIAL

Food Gatherers

They are mostly food gatherers and completely dependent on forests for their livelihood. They are interested in collection, gathering and hunting. They are numerically less and distributed mainly in Wayanad.

Shifting Cultivation

It is one of the major feature of Kurichya tribe. Shifting cultivation is an important aspect among them. As part of forest economy, certain small scale tribes practice slash and burn or shifting cultivation. It is in combination with Terrence and wet cultivation in the foot hills and valleys.

It is primitive in nature and the land is cultivated for two consecutive years. In the first year, only one crop is grown and in the second year, other crops will also use. Earlier times after this process, the land is left as a fallow for twelve to sixteen years, but now, this long gap period has been minimized to three to five years for the non-availability of virgin land for the purpose.

Agricultural

This tribe holding an variety of socio – cultural heritage along with an economic self-sufficiency. They are interested in a commune type of living. They prefer a matrilineal

heritage. Equal distribution in owning property, all amenities of life space and food etc. The most important difference is apart from the other tribal communities, they form a socialistic life style and pattern. They are very honest and hardworking people. They always show the maximum level of sincerity in their day-to-day activities.

Occupation

Another feature is that their occupational diversification is very less. Some of them are owners of land, agriculturalists and a small group among them are wage labourers. Also, very few among them are in permanent service such as Government or private employees. In the context of gender proportion, it is evident from the lifestyle of Kurichya tribal community, is that there are equal importance of both males and females. Females are also getting a kind of importance in their family.

“Tharavaadu”

This Kurichya tribal community follow a matrilineal system and they live in the joint families. Every family or the economic self-sufficient group of Kurichya family is known as “mittom”. There, the eldest male is named as “pittom” (Puppan, Karanavar). They have common kitchen. They are following a matrilineal family system. Their ancestral property is owned collectively and inherited strictly in the same way as matrilineal.

The wives always stay with husband, but the children remain in father’s house till the age of 5 or 6 years old. After that, they will go and join their mother’s mittom. If her husband dies or if she is divorced, the wife has to rejoin her natal family. She will never lose the membership after marriage.

This combination of the patrilocal (uxovilocal) residence and the matrilineal descent is known as “dysfunctional”. It is same in the characteristic of Nayars of North Kerala and is same as in the case of Kurichya.

Only the Pittom has the right for economic transaction regarding the property. This “pittom” is respected by everyone in the family. He will supervise the family’s whole functions very deeply and will ensure the welfare and cohesion of their family. When “pittom” fails in doing responsibilities, he will be removed. Pittom’s wife is “ammayi or odakkarathi”. She is charge of cooking and allotting different duties to the other women, life cycle rituals and ceremonies.

Kurichya families are large and wealthier. Now they are disintegrated into nuclear families because of Government intervention.

ECONOMIC

Karanavar: The Economic Head

In Tharavaad, there is a Karanavar. He is the head of the tharavad and will take care of all the activities of the family, regarding socio, economic and political affairs.

Karanavar controls all the matters related to the “therattukalyanam” (puberty ceremony), harvest, festival etc. At the time of puberty ceremony, all members assemble in the tharavad and provide financial assistance. “Kalorakkaran” has an important role in the activities.

Sharing Work and Income

Rice cultivation and animal husbandry are the main livelihood of Kurichyas. Normally men are engaged in animal husbandry and vegetable cultivation. Women are participated in rice cultivation. They are experts in collecting seeds, “Natipani”, weeding, manuring etc. In the various stages of farming, majority of the work is done by women.

Wealth control is mainly by male members especially by Karanavar. Animal husbandry, cash crop cultivation, vegetable cultivation also generate surplus income among Kurichyans.

Inheritance of Property

Their family property is based on matrilineal line. Under their system, individual ownership of property doesn't exist. They follow a joint family system and property is also under joint ownership.

So let's sum up that Kurichyas are the top most tribal community in Kerala and they constitute an important position in the culture of the Kerala tradition. So to protect them is important because they will protect the other tribals and the downtrodden class also. They are the land owners. It is important to protect them, allow them to break the social taboos and make them accessible to whole benefits.

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