International Journal of Applied Social Science *RESEARCH ARTICLE*
Volume 5 (9), September (2018) : 1544-1547 ISSN : 2394-1405 (Print)
Received : 24.07.2018; Revised : 06.08.2018; Accepted : 25.08.2018

Life-cycle rituals of attappadi tribe, Kerala

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is a milestone to elaborate a brief profile on the life cycle rituals of Attappadi tribe. They live in the hills of Attappadi valley situated in Kerala. The life of Attappadi tribe is much entwined with traditional, socio-cultural and religious practices. Due to scattered settlement and arrival of intruders, slight changes are instilled in the life cycle rituals of Attappadi tribes. Factors like, modernization, industrialization and urbanization are the major causes for few changes in the tribal society. But still pregnancy and childbirth, puberty, marriage and death ceremonies are celebrated with proper rituals by minimizing the number of days.

Key Words : Attappadi tribes, Life-cycle Rituals, Socio-cultural practices

INTRODUCTION

Adivasi are said to be the original inhabitants of any country. According to 2011 census they make up 8.6% of India's population. Whereas Kerala constitutes 1.45 % of the total population. Attappadi is one of the important forest regions of the state and it is situated in Manarkad Taluk of Palakkad district. Irulars, Mudugas and Kurumbars are the three main tribal communities living in this region. Majority of the tribes in India practice life cycle rituals as important event. The life of all these three tribes is much entwined with culture. Attappadi tribes give much importance to tradition, customs, cultural traits, rites and rituals due to their confinement in living with their community alone. They celebrate several events occurring for an individual from birth to death. These events are considered to be life cycle rituals.

Importance of Study:

Attappadi is an extensive mountain valley located at the head waters of Bhavani River in Mannarkkad Taluk of Palakkad district with an area of 743 sq.km. Attappadi is encompassed of three panchayats namely Agali, Puthur and Sholayur. Irula, Mudugas and Kurumbar live with low density of population. Among the three tribes Irula constitutes the highest population followed by Muduga and Kurumba tribe. Among these tribes Irula live close to plains, Muduga in the midst of the forest and Kurumba in the interior forest. All these three tribes give much importance to rituals and conventional practices, and lead a unique way of life. The present study focuses on life cycle rituals of Attappadi tribe. Life cycle rituals include pregnancy, child birth, puberty, marriage and

How to cite this Article: Bhuvaneswari, A. and Muthu, RM. (2018). Life-cycle rituals of attappadi tribe, Kerala. *Internat. J. Appl. Soc. Sci.,* **5** (9) : 1544-1547.

death.

Objectives of the study:

1. To know the ritual practices adopted during pregnancy and child birth.
2. To study the ritual practices adopted during puberty, marriage and death ceremony.

METHODOLOGY

The present study focuses on the life cycle rituals of Attappadi Tribe. Purposive Sampling Method was adopted and 100 respondents were selected for the study. Primary data was collected from the selected Attappadi tribe by interview and observation methods. The secondary data was collected from Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP), Attappady tribal block, District census hand book, Journals and Internet.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Life- Cycle ceremonies are found in all societies, although their relative importance varies. The biological life cycle include numerous kinds of rituals during pregnancy and childbirth, puberty, marriage and death. The Attappadi tribe are tradition bound and practise several rituals and ceremonies and lead a unique way of life.

Pregnancy and Child birth:

Marriage among Attappadi tribe is endogamy. After marriage when girl is on family way at the end of the third month of first pregnancy they convey the news to headman. Among Attappadi tribe, girl's parents and their relatives prefer to visit the girl with sweets in her in-laws house on anyone of the Mondays and take her to their home on the same day. While girl is taken to parents' home boy's relatives also accompany them.

Earlier in hamlets sheds for parturition is kept but nowadays the tribes have started to go to hospital. But few tribes like Kurumba and Muduga residing in the interior of hamlets deliver the baby in sheds for parturition. The mother of girl or boy is involved in the process of delivering the baby and therefore she adopts pollution for six to seven days. After delivery, the mother avoids non-vegetarian food and takes ragi, gruel with turmeric, salt and pepper. On the eighth day, gift is given to woman who attended delivery. Tying of plantain fibres around the waist of infant by grandmother is their habit. Mother has to obtain pollution for the whole month until she takes bath in the river. Child is fed only with breast milk till six months and feast is held on sixth month and boiled rice is given. Then naming ceremony is celebrated on 28th day or after completion of one year. Father of child beats on metal utensil and proclaims the name of new-born that reckons ancestry. The parenthood is enjoyed by Attappadi tribe and they widely accept the child without any gender difference at the time of birth.

Puberty:

Once puberty is attained it has to be brought to the knowledge of Muppan and girl should stay inside the home for fourteen days. Peer group of the girl will entertain her by singing and dancing. Male members are restricted to see until the girl completes ceremonial bath. Elderly woman and sister-in-law will accompany the girl and hold the centre part of pestle and other ends are hold by rest of the people. They pound turmeric and smear it on girl's face and repeats this ritual for three

times and takes bath in the river. After this, they return back home without looking at the back. The girl wears the dress gifted by maternal uncle and offers feast for the guest. Following this, every month seven days of pollution is adopted during menstrual cycle.

Marriage :

Marriage is important event in individual's life which brings two different individuals into a family. As Majumdar and Madan (1956) states, " Marriage is generally considered as a contract by the tribals. This gives rise to certain pattern of selecting mates which is generally followed when both boys and girls are adults. The views of both boys and girls are considered in the process of selection of mates.

Among Attappadi tribes the marriage proposal is made by boy's father to girl's parents. The girl prefer their father's sister son for marriage and secondary chance is given to maternal uncle. In most of the marriages boy and girl meets, decide and represent to Headman called Muppan. Attappadi tribe considers Monday to be an auspicious day. So marriage proposal is intiated along with Kuruthalai and Bandari in the presence of relatives of both girl and boy's family. Items like tobacco, arecanut, betelnut, bannana and some cash are provided. Kurutale who is a spokesman of the girl represents and gives consent of gathering and presents the gifts. Later the visitors are entertained with feast. The bride price is negotiated and given according to the economic status of bridegroom. It is about Rs. 1000 to 1500. In case if they are unable to pay, it can be compensated by working for wages in the bride's family or settled before the death.

Marriage ceremony is conducted on Monday at bridegroom's residence. The previous day of marriage the bride comes with their relatives to bridegroom's place and stays in the hut of the Muppan or bandari or kurutale. At the time of ceremony special *pandal* was built with coconut leaves and plantain leaves. The bride is adorned and made to sit on the left side of bridegroom. The hands are joined and garlands are exchanged by the bride and bridegroom. They are made to sit on the mat facing each other and plantain leaf is placed in front and they feed each other. The gathering is treated with feast. After the feast, bride and groom are seated on a mat in front of the parents, headman and other persons of hamlet. In front of everyone bride price is settled. In case of failure of marriage, bride price should be returned back to bridegroom's father. Other participants of marriage if they wish offer gifts to the couples and bless them. Throughout the day and night dancing and singing programmes will be performed for three days. Elopement and love marriages are also noticed among Attappadi tribes. Remarriage also takes place among Attappadi tribe with the support of members in hamlet.

Death and Funeral ceremony of Attappadi Tribe:

Death is the natural phenomenon of last stage of human. "As Vidyarthi and Rai ('77) observe," Like other men of the world, the tribal people also have no definite knowledge about the nature of death, but they take it as a mystic terror. They have a conviction that death is an accidental event and the anger of the so-called gods and deities. The ancestral souls, sorcery, witch-craft, etc., are also responsible for the same. In the case of suspicious death, the sorcerer or witches are punished directly by beating them to death or indirectly by the magic with the help of special witch diviners.

When a person is passed away among Attappadi Tribe, all members of particular hamlet attend the death ceremony. The body is laid down for three days and nights and there will be mourning. All the three days food is not cooked in the death house instead food is cooked by the rest of hamlet and served to all. The dead body is cleaned, dressed and placed on *Coppara* made

of bamboo. Coins are placed on mouth and fore head. The widow or widower will mourn loud. In case of any balance in settlement of bride price, payment is made and body is removed and if unable to pay other relatives contribute and settle the amount. After payment is settled, dead body is taken to burial ground and placed in sitting position facing south side inside the pit. The eldest son throws three handfuls of grains into the pit. All the things used by the deceased is put inside the pit and abandoned. The important event in this ceremony is that son cuts grass and takes bath in river and comes to grave with grass. In two different bowels coconut oil and water are kept. Son has to dip the grass in coconut oil and holds over the water bowl chanting the names of deceased persons. When two drops of oil fall from grass with water it is believed that a particular deceased soul whose name has been chanted during that time accepts the present deceased soul in heaven.

Death pollution is observed for fifteen days after which a feast is given. Following this funeral ceremony, ciru is conducted annually in memory of the departed. A grand ciru is conducted once in twelve years in honour of all the departed soul within the clan or settlement. But nowadays it is conducted once in 20 years on the basis of their inclination. During the ceremony bones are removed, cleaned and redeposit in the ossuary. There is a feast and dance throughout three days over which the ceremony is conducted. As it involves considerable expenditure, it is conducted rarely.

Conclusion:

The above discussion brings out the Life Cycle Rituals of Attappadi Tribe. Though tribal society is undergoing social transition ritual practices are still followed with few changes alone. They believe that celebrating rituals paves way for healthy life. The above preliminary study on Life cycle rituals of Attappadi Tribes will form a base for further intensive studies in Attappadi.

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