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### **The Investigator**

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### **Editor's Note**

*The Investigator* is an International Peer-Reviewed Multidisciplinary Journal published quarterly (March, June, September and December), launched under the auspices of the academic community *Association for Cultural & Scientific Research* (ACSR). Keeping the panoramic scopes of research as a vibrant path, *The Investigator* intends to reflect on the skilled minds attitudinally conjuring from humanities to other disciplines. The journal explores the currents of criticism and unleashes divergent thinking. It welcomes original, scholarly unpublished papers

from the researchers, faculty members, students and the diverse aspirants writing in English. It is a peer reviewed journal that brings the scholarship of academicians and practitioners around the world. *The Investigator* hopes and wishes to provide a self-assuring means to you for your further accomplishments.

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**Dr Loona C**

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### **Cultural Custodianship and Ecological Conservation: The Kani Tribes of Kerala**

*While the world is discussing sustainability, sustainable development, and attaining sustainability of the Environment, the indigenous communities have always followed a sustainable model. Their model ensures the sustainability of the environment as an outcome. They developed this model due to their long struggle with the environment. Moreover, they have always been practicing this model as a part of their cultural tradition. Sustainable practices are reflected in their cultural activities. Their ancient wisdom is reflected in using resources, and they utilize resources by ensuring their renewability. It seems that in the life of tribal people, culture and nature are playing a game of natural balancing. To achieve sustainability, we must protect indigenous communities' cultural identity. For generations, the Kani tribes have relied on Arogyapacha for sustenance during their long treks through the dense forests of Agastyakoodam. Chewing its leaves provided instant energy and relief from fatigue. Unlike outsiders, the Kani community carefully guarded this knowledge, passing it down orally within the tribe. Their understanding of the plant was not limited to its medicinal properties but extended to identifying the precise ecological conditions required for its growth, ensuring its sustainable use. The aim of the present study is to analyse the contribution made by the kani tribe in agastyakoodam in the preservation of arogyapacha. For attainment of this objective an attempt has been made for pursual by encompassing different aspects of kani tribes like their history, social, economic, cultural development and status through different tools and techniques of research methodology.*

**Keywords:** *sustainable development, indigenous communities, ancient wisdom, Kani tribes, Arogyapacha.*

A tribe is a group of people who live and work together in a shared geographical area. A tribe has common culture, dialect, and religion. They also have an intense sense of unity. A chief usually heads the tribe. The main occupation includes agriculture and hunting gathering. They live in the forest, deserts, hilly and areas out of the reach of the common people. Group that supports itself by hunting and fishing and by

gathering wild fruits and vegetables. The rituals are aimed at solving day to day problems of life objects of worship are things of nature such as trees, rivers, sun, moon, and earth.

The “Kanitribals” are traditionally nomadic community who now lead a primarily settled life in the forest of the *Agasthyamalayi* hills of Western Ghats. The traditional structure of community was that of a highly co-

ordinated unit under the control of tribal chief called the “*Muthukani*. The traditionally the *Muthukani* combined the roles of the law giver, protector, and dispenser of justice physician and priest. The Kani live in several tribal hamlets each consisting of 10 to 20 families dispersed in and around the forest area Trivandrum district. The language of the Kanikars is a dialect of Malayalam and mixture of Tamil which called *malambashai*. The traditional occupation of Kanis were the experts in honey extractions from very unconventional places. Another occupation handicrafts such as basket making, mat making, cane work. The cultivate edible plants such as tapioca, pepper, coconut, banana, millets, arecanut and cashew nut. The customs and rituals or followed in the intelligently. The rice or grains on plantain leaves burn incense and carried around the area to various sports, trees, or rock. Religious often have met with some unusually good luck or calamity. There general offer the prayers are these sports. The Kanikars train bows and arrows for their safety.

The Western Ghats, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, are home to some of the world’s richest biodiversity. Nestled within this ecological treasure lies Agastyakoodam, a sacred peak in Kerala’s Thiruvananthapuram district. It is not only revered in mythology as the abode of sage Agastya but also serves as the natural habitat of a rare medicinal plant – Arogyapacha (*Trichopus zeylanicus travancoricus*). This plant, hailed as the “evergreen energy

provider,” has been used for centuries by the Kani tribes, the indigenous custodians of this region, as a source of vitality and health. The significance of Arogyapacha reached global attention in the late 1980s when scientists from the Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (TBGRI) learned about the plant through their interactions with the Kani tribes during an expedition. This led to the development of the herbal drug “Jeevani,” which gained international recognition. Importantly, this also became a landmark case in benefit-sharing of traditional knowledge, where a portion of the royalties from the drug was directed to the Kani community.

*NaraNilekani* settlement is in the shadows of *Agasthyarkoodam*. It has a good fortune of having received advantages of development to a great extent. Neli was the goddess of the tribal people. The *muthukani* of *Njaraneeli* settlement makes elaborate arrangements for the pooja performed once in a year. This is done by their own funds without any financial aid. Sometimes the pooja is also performed to get rid of evil spirits. But the rituals of lightening of lamps is done every evening. Only a *muthukani* has the power of trying to be in direct contact with their gods. Marriage amongst the Kani’s performed by a priest under the supervision of the elderly members of the family. The whole community gets together to decorate bride house. But adult and child marriage are practiced. Younger girls get accustomed to their husband home with is on a fixed day within a month of marriage

ceremony for *Kanikars* accompanied by a boy carrying betel leaves and aracanut go to the home of the future brides and present them to the families of the settlements.

Kani is a tribe living in the Western Ghats area of Kerala, India. Their use of the forest plant arogyapacha (*trichopus zeylanicus*) as a key ingredient in a herbal remedy called Jeevani was noted by visiting scientists in the 1980s. The formula was eventually developed as a commercial enterprise by Arya Vaidya Pharmacy, with the tribe's Kerala Kani Welfare Trust receiving license fees and royalties. Members have been encouraged to cultivate the plant. A recently discovered species of tree-dwelling crab has been named Kani maranjandu after the tribe.

Kaanikkars who had cloths of leaves, weeds and barks of trees. Earlier men was Half naked, Vattan kanni leaf wears in night and Eranchi tree's barks in day time They call it as Marauri Udoppu and used areca nut leaf for making foot wears. Women wears Maravuri inside the house – covering breast to the feet. They don't use foot wears Women put up dress after the age of 14. Women use blouse above waist and dhotis below waist. Both males and females wear ear studs made of brass or silver. They made ornaments of thandu, thodu , naru of vegetables. They used the leaf stub of tapioca to make ornaments like chains and foot earrings ( Kolusu ). White soft inner part removed hollow tapioca stump used for making finger rings. Making and wearing of these ornaments were with back ground of

songs they follow. From the names mentioned in their folklores such as Siva, Vishnu, Subramaniya, Iyyappa, Parvathi, Isakki, Muthuaramman etc. We can guess that they worship the idols of Hindu gods and goddesses. They call Iyyappan as Sastha but they do not follow the rituals of Christianity fully. Irrespective of their religion, these tribes follow the traditional rituals.

Among them, worshipping of deities as the children of Kathiravani Makkal, Ayira Valli, Mallan Thampuram, Madan, Mathaperumal, Kattarathu Thampuram, Keemalai Thampuram etc. More importance given to Madan mostly in all their festivals. They lead a simple life. They have the same things as seen in the house of the other tribes. The important things are Ural, ulakkai, different types of knives , traps and wild box etc

Language Kaanikkars call their speech form as 'Mountain language'. There are many different views about the nature of their language. Some say that they speak a language which is a dialect of Malayalam. Some do not accept this view. The spoken language of Kaanis belonging to Tirunelveli, Kattabomman district resembles Tamil and the mother tongue of Kanyakumari district Kaani people gradually changes into Tamil. The spoken language of Kaanikkars contain more Malayalam language features. But we cannot take them for granted that it is a dialect of Malayalam.

Arogyappacha (*trichopus zeylanicus*) found endemic to agastyar hills of kerala is used by the local kani

tribe as a health food for getting instant stamina ever green health and vitality the tonic effect of this plants is comparable to that of the famous health food drug ginseng a critical survey of the ayurveda classics suggests that the arogyappacha may be the divine varahi described by sushruta chemical and pharmacological evaluation of the plant have been initiated. During the course of ethno medico botanical investigation of the kani tribe of agasthyar hills of kerala the authors have come across with a very interesting wild plant species used by the local kani tribe for getting instant stamina health and vitality. The unripe fruits of Arogyappacha (as kani tribe calls the plant) is eaten fresh to remain healthy and agile by kani tribe during their long trekking trips in high mountainous forests of agasthyar hills.

The word Arogyapacca means the greener of health i.e. the one that gives very good health and vitality. It is claimed by kani men that one can live days together without food and still remain energetic and could perform even very rigorous physical work exercises by eating few fruits of this plant daily. The kani tribe also claims that if one eats the fruits of Arogyappacha regularly he will remain always healthy agile. Young and that no disease will afflict him. The kani tribe is normally very secretive about this plant , but thanks to the chance incident that led to the discovery of this secret by the authors from them.

A team of scientists of the all India coordinated research project of Ethnobiology unit of the post Graduate -

cum-research centre in Ayurveda Trivandrum along with the AICRPE chief coordinator made a trekking tour in the high mountainous forests of Agasthyar hills in December 1987 with the aim of visiting the kani tribal settlements scattered in various pockets of this region the team was accompanied by a few kani tribe men as guides while climbing some of the steep mountains of agasthyar hills most of the members of agasthyar hills most of the members of the AICRPE team used to become exhausted and at times felt great fatigue to the surprise of the team members the kani tribe men accompanying he team were found munching in between some small blackish.

Fruits at one instance one of the kani young men offered a few of those same fruits to us and told that if we eat them we can also remain as agile as they are curiously most of the team members ate those fruits after removing its leathery skin. It tasted like almonds and had a pleasant flavour, but what surprised us all was that it gave us a sudden flush of great energy and strength. We could thereafter do the trekking at ease and with great spirit and enthusiasm. After experiencing the wonderful effect of those curious looking fruits we asked the kani men were initially very reluctant to reveal the identity of the fruit by saying that it is a tribal secret a scared information that cannot to be revealed to any outsiders. They said that the use of this plant and many other traditional herbal practices followed by them are part of their sacred knowledge-system that were imparted to

their great ancestors directly by saint Agastya-the mythical ancient saint who is considered to be the founder of siddha medicine and the agastyar hills named after him was his abode. After great persuasions the kani tribe men finally revealed he secrecy of his fruit and even showed the plant which in fact was very much available in the area of Agastyar hills we were trekking at that time.

Arogyappacha has been identified now as *trichopus zeylanicus* Gaertn of the family Dioscoreaceae. This species has already been recorded from agastyar hills by botanical survey of India southern circle, Coimbatore but this is for the first time that its use as a medicinal herb that on consuming gives instant energy and stamina is recorded. The specimens collected by us matched well with the specimen available at the botanical survey of India. Herbarium Coimbatore however on a critical study of its morphology and comparison of the species it matched better with the description of *Tzeylanicus* ssp *Travancoricus* Bedd burk as given in the flora malesiana 1954. Flora of India and flora of madras have recorded *Trichopus zeylanicus* and mentioned its distribution as confined to the hills of Tirunelveli and Travancore region in the Indian subcontinent Bed-dome (1861) who recorded this species for the first time from Travancore hills has named it as *trichopodium travancoricum* which was later renamed as *trichopus zeylanicus*. Flora malesiana while discussing about the world distribution of this species stated that the species is found only in

Kelantan and Pehang in Malay Peninsula, Ceylon and Travancore. Flora malesiana and Travancore as non-specific and named it as *Trichopus zeylanicus* ssp *Travancoricus* Burk. Small perennial herbs with many slender stems arising from a nodose rhizome. There is one terminal leaf on each stem the long petiole appears like a continuation of the stem. Leaves are dark brownish to grey purple broadly triangular ovate with acute or obtuse apex and basally cordate with acute or obtuse apex and basally cordate with a wide sinus, flowers small or medium bisexual mostly one fasciated at the base of the leaves extruded from between the protecting scale leaves. Perianth dark brown, sub-equally 6-lobed stamen 6 with subsessile anthers filaments widening in to broad connectives ovary inferior. 3 celled with two superimposed ovules in each cell. Stigma 3-lobed fruits are somewhat winged triangular and indehiscent. The tender kernel of immature fruit is sweet to taste and has pleasant flavour on ripening it becomes stony and unpalatable.

Currently there is no information available on the ayurvedic use or identity of this plant from a critical survey of the various ancient ayurvedic classics the authors have come across with some descriptions of a plant which matched strikingly with Arogyappacha Sushruta while dealing with the various divine drugs along with some also described one *Varahi* which he described as *kandha sambhava* rhizomatous. *Ekapatra* single leaves arising from a stem and *Anjana samaprabha* -shining like grey-black

stone. The leaves and flowers of this plant shine like grey- black stone. Sushruta also described the plant that with its railing stem with the raised leaves appears krishnasarpa swarupena -like a black cobra with its raised hood. Sushruta ascribed great rejuvenating property of the divine varahi which is very true. Arogyappacha sushruta has also described the habitat of this plant as a shade loving herb found in the banks of rivers and natural ponds is also true to this plant. These descriptions given by sushruta suggests that the divine varahi in kashmir region but has also mentioned that it may also be found in similar habitat of other mountainous regions in the country. The antifatigue and spirit promoting properties of the fresh fruits of Arogyappacha as claimed by the kani tribe are found to be true from the direct experience of the same made by the authors during there are found to be true from the direct experience of the same made by the authors during their visit to the agastyar hills. The other claims of the kani tribe on the efficacy of these plants as rejuvenating age stabilizing disease resistance building etc...are not supported by any evidence however in the light of the available proof of its efficacy as anti-fatigue and spirit promoting drug it offers great scope for scientific investigation and its possible medical application. A detailed scientific investigation which includes chemical screening to isolate the active principles coupled with its pharmacological screening are being carried out at the regional research laboratory Jammu. The

fruits and the whole plant along with its rhizomes have been collected for this purpose the rapid recovery from fatigue experienced after consuming the fresh fruits of Arogyappacha suggests its effects on neuro -physhological changes the tonic effects this experienced is comparable to that of Ginseng this suggests that the other claims on the efficacy of Arogyappacha as a protector of health by giving greater resistance to diseases and as elixir of life etc.....many also be sometimes turn out to be true. This little-known wild plant used by kani tribe may be the drug stocked in the dispensary of mother nature for combating that most dreadful killer disease of man namely acquired immune deficiency syndrome shortly known as AIDS.

The stereotype approach of modern medical research like phyto-chemical screening isolation of single compounds active principles and pharmacological evaluation of compounds etc.. are at time found to be inadequate or even futile efforts in evaluating the efficacy of traditional tribal medicines. It will be desirable therefore to evaluate the tribal drugs also from he point of view of those well organized traditional medicines like ayurveda or unani or siddha. So in addition to the routine modern chemical and pharmacological evaluation the drug Arogyappacha will also be subjected to evaluation from the point of view of ayurvedic pharmacy and pharmacology and the theoretical and the theoretical and conceptual coundations of ayurveda the

plant will have to be examined of its properties called rasa Guna veerya vilaka and prabhav and then evaluate its relation as well as its reaction to the constitutional types of body taken in to account for correcting the vitiated doshas. From the preliminary observation made by the authors the arogyapacha may be investigated as a drug belonging to the svathahita group of drugs. Detailed ayurvedic study on this plant is planned to be carried out at the AICRLE unit of Post Graduate-cum research centre in Ayurveda Poojappura Trivandrum.

#### Traditional Knowledge and Discovery

The significance of Arogyapacha reached global attention in the late 1980s when scientists from the Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (TBGRI) learned about the plant through their interactions with the Kani tribes during an expedition. This led to the development of the herbal drug “Jeevani,” which gained international recognition. Importantly, this also became a landmark case in benefit-sharing of traditional knowledge, where a portion of the royalties from the drug was directed to the Kani community.

#### The Role of Kani Tribes in Conservation

The survival of Arogyapacha is threatened by overharvesting, habitat destruction, and commercialization. In this context, the role of the Kani tribes as guardians of Agastyakoodam’s biodiversity becomes critical. Their contributions include:

##### Sustainable Harvesting Practices

– The Kani never engaged in large-scale extraction. They harvested leaves only

when necessary, ensuring that the plant populations remained healthy.

**Sacred Stewardship** – For the Kani, Agastyakoodam is not merely a forest but a sacred landscape. This worldview fosters a natural ethic of conservation, preventing exploitation of its resources.

**Community-Led Protection** – After the commercialization of Arogyapacha, the Kani formed trust bodies such as the Kerala Kani Samudaya Kshema Trust to regulate collection, cultivation, and distribution. This helped prevent outsiders from plundering the plant.

**Knowledge Sharing with Safeguards** – The community’s involvement in the Jeevani project highlighted their willingness to share traditional knowledge while demanding recognition and protection of their intellectual rights.

**Active Forest Guardianship** – As the primary inhabitants of the Agastyakoodam forests, the Kani monitor the ecological balance, prevent illegal harvesting, and collaborate with forest departments in biodiversity conservation.

#### Challenges and the Way Forward

Despite their crucial role, the Kani face challenges such as limited recognition of their rights, bureaucratic hurdles in benefit-sharing, and pressures from commercial interests. There is also a risk of traditional knowledge being misappropriated without adequate compensation or acknowledgment. Ensuring the survival of Arogyapacha requires:

- Strengthening community forest rights under the Forest Rights Act.
- Promoting in-situ conservation and community cultivation to reduce wild harvesting.
- Expanding benefit-sharing models that respect tribal custodianship.
- Documenting and protecting traditional knowledge systems from biopiracy.

### Conclusion

The story of the Kani tribes and Arogyapacha is not just about a medicinal

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plant—it is about the symbiotic relationship between indigenous people and biodiversity. As the guardians of Agastyakoodam, the Kani have shown that conservation is most effective when rooted in cultural traditions, respect for nature, and sustainable use. Their contributions remind us that safeguarding our future depends on recognizing and empowering those who have been protecting the earth’s treasures for centuries.

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### **Oral Traditions and Tribal Beliefs in the Literary Imagination of Mamang Dai and Easterine Kire**

*This paper examines the representation of oral traditions and tribal beliefs in the fiction of Mamang Dai and Easterine Kire, focusing on *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) and *When the River Sleeps* (2014). Dai and Kire, two of the most prominent literary voices from Northeast India, draw deeply upon oral traditions, myths, rituals, and animistic cosmologies that continue to shape tribal identity amidst modern disruptions and colonial legacies. Their works emphasise the importance of storytelling, rituals, taboos, and ecological connections in shaping social cohesion and identity. The paper argues that these tribal practices are not remnants of a distant past but evolving systems that continue to influence contemporary life. By foregrounding indigenous knowledge, Dai and Kire challenge mainstream historical narratives and offer alternative perspectives rooted in spiritual ecology, communal memory, and cultural resilience.*

**Key words:** Tribal, Oral, Myth, Adi community

Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* foregrounds the oral storytelling of the Adi community, where myths like that of the serpent Birbik and the cursed Danki ship reveal how memory, belief, and identity are preserved through narrative. Kire's *When the River Sleeps* portrays the Naga cosmology in which dreams, genna (taboo days), and animistic encounters with weretigers sustain spiritual life and ecological consciousness. In both novels, food, land, and ritual emerge as cultural anchors, shaping not only survival but also the moral and spiritual fabric of society.

By interweaving narrative art with cultural memory, Dai and Kire present literature as both archive and resistance. Their works challenge

dominant historiographies that marginalise indigenous epistemologies and affirm the literary imagination of Northeast India as a vital space for cultural continuity, ecological wisdom, and resilience.

The representation of tribal traditions and beliefs in literature is not merely an aesthetic choice but a cultural act of preservation. For centuries, tribal voices from Northeast India have been excluded from mainstream Indian historiography and literature. As G. N. Devy has argued, the "subaltern silence" surrounding tribal cultures results from a literary canon that privileges urban, Anglophone, and nationalist voices over local, oral, and indigenous perspectives. In this context, Mamang Dai and

Easterine Kire stand out for their literary engagement with the oral imagination of their communities.

This paper analyses Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* and Kire's *When the River Sleeps*, two novels that exemplify the integration of oral traditions and tribal beliefs into written narrative. Both works portray myths, rituals, and spiritual worldviews not as static remnants of the past but as living, evolving systems. They preserve endangered cultural memory while simultaneously adapting it to modern literary forms. Dai, drawing upon the Adi traditions of Arunachal Pradesh, constructs a narrative where stories themselves function as historical records: "the only records of their journeys are the stories that the older men and women remember" (*The Legends of Pensam* 3). Similarly, Kire's Naga world foregrounds the binding force of the spoken word, as in Pelhu's oral agreement with British officers: "I came to make peace" (*When the River Sleeps* 86).

Edward B. Tylor's concept of animism, formulated in *Primitive Culture* (1871), describes the belief that natural entities such as trees, rivers, and animals possess spiritual essence. This framework is central to understanding both novels, where dreams, spirits, and supernatural beings pervade everyday life. Bronislaw Malinowski's theory of myth as a charter clarifies how narratives like the Adi myth of "si-ye" or the Naga legend of weretigers legitimise rituals and practices. Victor Turner's ideas of liminality and *communitas* explain how rituals such as naming ceremonies,

funerary chants, or genna days create collective cohesion. Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory highlights how oral traditions serve as cultural archives. Finally, Stuart Hall's view of identity as 'always in production' frames how Dai and Kire represent tribal identity as dynamic and adaptive.

Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* mirrors the structure of oral storytelling. The title *Pensam*, meaning "in-between", suggests the liminal space between history and myth. Oral stories act as living archives. As Dai observes: "We have long voyages in our blood" (*The Legends of Pensam* 3), linking memory, migration, and identity. Words carry transformative power in this narrative world: "Words are important... Words can change a man's views through the application of the correct words" (157). Such insights echo Walter Ong's assertion that in oral cultures, words are events that create reality.

Myths and rituals permeate the novel. The myth of 'si-ye' narrates the sacred yeast for rice beer, endowing the drink with ritual authority (28). The tale of the serpent Birbik and the cursed Danki ship reveals how myth encodes moral lessons and cultural anxieties (*The Legends of Pensam* 10). Ritual specialists like the 'miri' priests mediate between humans and spirits, while funerary chants and harvest rituals build *communitas* in Turner's sense. Taboos regulate life; ignoring forbidden days invites disaster. These practices highlight the cultural logic embedded in ritual and myth,

preserving identity through symbolic action.

Kire's *When the River Sleeps* exemplifies Naga animism. The protagonist Vilie embarks on a quest shaped by dreams, omens, and spiritual encounters. He faces weretigers, "the men whose spirits had metamorphosed into tigers" (26), blurring boundaries between human and animal. The kirhupfumia embodies agricultural and spiritual power: "People brought her the beginnings of their harvest ... She was supposed to possess great wicked powers" (131). Vilie's conviction that "when the river sleeps, it reveals its heart in the form of a stone of power" reflects Tylor's animism, where dreams reveal divine communication.

Food and land shape Naga identity. Pelhu affirms the oral tradition when he says, "I came to make peace" (86), showing the binding power of the spoken word. Meat-sharing reflects solidarity, and herbs like bitter wormwood embody healing and spirituality. Land is a sacred inheritance; forests and rivers sustain not just material but also spiritual life. Genna days exemplify ecological wisdom, where taboos preserve balance. Ignoring such prohibitions results in disaster, reinforcing the integration of ecology and spirituality in Naga cosmology.

Dai and Kire, though from different communities, converge in their valorisation of oral traditions and tribal beliefs. Dai uses a fragmented narrative to reflect oral culture, while Kire uses the quest motif infused with animism. Both highlight women's roles as custodians of

food and ritual practices. Both critique colonial disruptions and affirm that tradition evolves rather than disappears. Together, their works highlight literature as an archive, resistance, and site of cultural renewal.

Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* and Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps* illuminate how oral traditions and tribal beliefs sustain community identity. They embed myths, rituals, and animism into fiction, transforming literature into a cultural archive. Their works affirm that indigenous epistemologies are vital, challenging the marginalisation of tribal voices in mainstream literature. Ultimately, their fiction situates the literary imagination of Northeast India as a site of cultural continuity, resistance, and ecological wisdom.

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## **Family and Folklore -Reconstructing Domestic Life in Medieval Kerala**

*This paper aims to explore the possibility of using folklore in understanding the family of medieval Kerala. Folklore encompasses oral compositions that hint to the beliefs, customs, traditions and practises of indigenous cultures belonging to any region, group or community of any period. It mainly represented the life and culture of the masses. Family being a private institution was never a subject of interest among the professionals. But when historical studies on family were initiated, it was realised that there were less or even lack of written or tangible evidences to understand family in medieval Kerala. This highlights the possibility of folklore in understanding family of this respective period as majority of the people were part of the oral culture. This article attempts to illustrate various folklores in Vadakkumpattukal and Thekkampattukal and the way it helped in understanding family system in medieval Kerala.*

**Keywords:** *Folklore, Family, Vadakkumpattukal, Thekkumpattukal*

### **Introduction**

Historical investigations in present scenario encompassed wide range of topics of interdisciplinary nature. As historical enquiries transcended the conventional areas of studies and new methods and techniques were introduced, research in history entered new dimensions. The new nature of the discipline unveiled new possibilities in micro historical enquiries. It is under this context that family and folklore becomes a matter of discussion. Family as an interdisciplinary topic is perceived from a historical context. Folklore as an unconventional source highlights its possibility to understand the life and culture of the masses. This article is an attempt to probe into the study of family in medieval Kerala based on folklore.

### **Family History**

Family is a universal institution and the basic unit of any society. As Ghanshyam Shah stated, “Family is something that can be discovered in all societies-to be immutably there. It was the foundation of the society” (Shah 507). Family histories probe into the transition of family in various periods. It in detail tries to investigate the changes family as a social unit undergoes in different contexts and its effects on the society as a whole. This interconnectedness between family and society helps one to understand transformation of a place in a particular period of time. Moreover, the study of family means, study of its members, relations and interrelations between its members, their mobility, role and functions, the inter relatedness of

customs, traditions rules and codes in the functioning of family as a unit in the society and its response to the internal and external dynamics of the society.

### **Folklore and family history**

Now the question to be investigated in this article is to why folklore is used in the study of family in Kerala? Secondly, to what extent folklore can be useful in understanding the family system in medieval Kerala? The study has focused on medieval times because, written and tangible sources related to family were fewer in number. The most important challenge in this regard is the difficulty in getting details about family and its functions as it was not a topic of discussion in the public domain. Only matters of significance for the royalty and nobility were recorded mainly in inscriptions. The details of the life and society of the ordinary were in oral forms. These could be either gleaned through the folklores like folk songs, proverbs, stories transmitted from generation to generation. Though foreign references about family were available, they were from their perspectives and referred to what they have come across and so were not complete. But what makes folklore more important is that, it narrates about the lives, beliefs, customs, traditions related to family of the commoners who formed the majority of the population.

Folklore, as per Britannica encyclopedia, is the total of all traditional practices developed and orally transmitted from one generation to other which included details of their material culture like

beliefs, customs, daily activities, attitudes and performances etc. of subcultures within predominantly literate and technologically advanced societies. According to American folklorist, Alan Dundes, folklore is something alive and dynamic rather than dead and static which is not relegated to primitivized others-historically or socially-but rather a behavioral pattern that everyone exhibits (Bronner 1). Dundes also considered folklore as a meaningful source for the study of cognition and values (Bronner 1). The following definition on folklore puts forward the importance of folklore (Journal of Folklore Research 225-264).

“The science of folklore is that branch of human knowledge that collects, classifies and studies in a scientific manner the materials of folklore in order to interpret the life and culture of people across the ages...interprets the history of civilization... contribute in a great measure to the history and interpretations of human life.”(Aurelio M Espinosa)

Realizing the significance of folklore, this article makes an attempt to interpret the family in medieval Kerala through some of the folklores of the period. For this purpose, few folklores from South (Travancore) and North Kerala (Malabar) have been used. Kerala in the pre-colonial period was divided into different principalities. Later during the colonial period it was divided into three parts based on the nature of control – Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. While Malabar was directly controlled by the British, Cochin and Travancore were

princely states who entered the Subsidiary Alliance and were subjected to indirect rule by the British Resident.

### **Folklore of Kerala**

#### **Vadakkanpattukal and Thekkanpattukal**

Vadakkanpattukal were the most popular of folklore in Kerala which were ballads and consisted of *Thacholipattukal*, *Puthurampattukal* and *Ottapattukal*. All these were composed after the coming of the Portuguese and towards the beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> century (Panikkotty 19). These folk songs delineated about heroes and heroines of the northern part of Kerala, mainly Kadattanad, a principality which was under the kings of Kolathunad till 1757 (Mathew K 8). They gave details of caste system, family feuds, heroic exploits of warrior classes and the institution of Kalari in Malabar. The stories displayed the emotions and ideologies of love, chivalry and revenge intertwined in the life of common people. Though there were different opinions regarding the period of Northern Ballads, according to the majority of historians they belonged to a period between the 15th and 17th centuries.

#### **Thekkanpattukal**

These were oral compositions found popular among ordinary people in South Kerala from ancient times. Most of these songs were embedded with themes related to ancient beliefs, customs and myths. They were also connected with temple rituals and performances for

propitiating Gods. These songs depicted the culture of the respective periods. *Valiya Thampi Kunju Thampi Katha*, *Moovottumallankatha*, *Chenganoorathi*, *Ramakathapattu*, *Panchavankattuneelipattu*, *Girivargapattukal*, *Villadichanppattu* are some of the songs that belonged to this category. Like *Vadakkumpattukal*, *Thekkanpattukal* delineated the life and culture of the common people. These compositions expressed the emotions, feelings and thoughts of the people though they were added with elements of fantasy and imaginations in many cases.

This article tries to find out the instances in *Vadakkumpattukal* and *Thekkanpattukal* which hint to the nature, character and functioning of family system in medieval Kerala.

#### **Marumakkathayam**

The matrilineal system in Kerala was known as *Marumakkathayam*. The stories in *Vadakkumpattukal* mentioned about various family occasions that referred to the institution of *Marumakkathayam*. In this system, the ancestral property was inherited by the children of the female members of the family. Though inheritance was claimed by nephews and niece, the ancestral property was managed and taken care by the eldest male member who was known as the *Karanavan*. In such a system, husbands of the female members had less importance and the power rested in the hands of the maternal uncle (*Karanavan*). The maternal uncle was the head of the family, all the decisions within the family

was taken by him. The husbands were mere visitors to their wives' house and lacked any authoritative power over them.

These details of *Marumakkathayam* system is evident through the different stories of *Vadakkumpattukal*. The residence of *Chirutakkuty* (a character in *Vadakkumpattukal*) was avunculocal (A residential system where the newly married couple resides in the house of the maternal uncle). It was her maternal uncle who considered it as his duty to make arrangements for the *Pulikudi* of *Chirutakkuty*<sup>i</sup> (Mathew 64). *Aromolunni* was reminded by his friends of his obligation to take revenge upon *Candu* who murdered his uncle (Mathew 64). This signified the important position which uncle had in his family. The residence of the women was generally matrilocal. This was evident in the case of seven brothers of *Unniamma* of *Tonnuramvidu* who used to visit wives in their houses (Mathew 64). Similarly, *Valunnor* of *Kurungattidom* visited his wife at her residence before he set for pilgrimage (Mathew 64). When the *Karanavar* died, the eldest member among the nephews became the *Karanavar*. Though husbands had less importance as a male head, his role was recognized in certain occasions. There was a reference where *Kunjikannan*, husband of *Cirutakkuty* was informed by his uncle that it was his duty to meet the expenses of *Pulikkudi* (Mathew 62).

The Valiya Thampi Kunju Thampi Katha, one among the popular

*Thekkanpattukal*, dealt about the heroic exploits of two brothers, Valiya Thampi and Kunju Thampi, the sons of Rama Varma, the nephew of King Marthanda Varma. King Marthanda Varma wanted to marry their sister, Kochumanithanka. But her brothers refused the alliance which made the King angry and he took away all their assets. This instigated the brothers to take revenge on Marthanda Varma for which they conspired with the chief of the nearby kingdom. But as the chief was influenced by Marthanda Varma, he planned a plot to kill the brothers. During an occasion, when Valiya Thampi visited King Marthanda Varma, the latter killed the former. Later his brother was also killed. The news of the death of the brothers forced their mother, sister and uncle to commit suicide. The story supposed to have happened during the period of King Marthanda Varma and the social conditions that prevailed corresponded to the period either to the 18th century or prior to it. This story testified *Marumakkathayam* system. The right of kingship was inherited from his uncle, Rama Varma. The custom of marrying uncle's daughter was also evident from the Marthanda Varma's interest in marrying Kochumanithanka. The story also pointed to the existing custom of granting kingship rights only to nephews and not to sons. These instances depicted the prevalence of *Marumakkathayam* among the ruling class (Padmakumari 85).

*Moovottumallan Katha* known as a *villupattu* was the story of a conflict

between uncles and their nephews <sup>ii</sup>(Padmakumari 24). The song narrated how the nephews got the favour of the spirit of Moovottumallan and killed the uncles. The two nephews Alicheriyil and Ayikkaracheri were not in good terms with their uncles named Varikkappalli and Vazphally as they prevented the nephews from doing agriculture. These stories were narrated in the background of the eroding system of *Tharavad* and the transformation of *Marumakkathayam* to *Makkathayam*.<sup>iii</sup> According to the existing system, the nephews had to get a share in the property, but the uncles were reluctant to give the share which made the nephews to kill the uncles. The story pointed to conflicts within *Tharavads* on the issue of property and the breakage of families due to internal conflicts.

*Edanadanppattu* was a famous folklore in Kuttanad that narrated the story of *Edanadan*, the hero who took revenge on those who killed his father (Sajitha 5). The folklore dealt about two *Tharavads*, Thekkelam Kuttu and Vadakkalam Kuttu. Vadakkalam Karutha invited Thekkelam Kaimal to teach martial arts to their sons and nephews. The latter was given a house and a *Vellati* woman to cook. Kaimal had developed a deep relation with the *Vellati* (Women slaves from the Vellalas caste used for housekeeping) woman and she got conceived. Kuthpilli Menon, who came for agriculture fell in love with Kaimal's niece and she got conceived. Knowing the news, Kaimal killed his niece. This created a great cause for sorrow as she was the only heir to five *Tharavads*. This

made Kaimal to bring the *Vellati* woman to his house. But she died on the way during her delivery. The child born was named *Edanadan* and he was given education and training. Kaimal was killed by Menon and *Edanadan* took revenge on him.

The story demonstrated the power of *Karnavars* in deciding the life of a niece. *Edanadan's* visit to his wife's house and the dominance of *Karnavar* indicated the existence of *Marumakkathayam*. The importance of martial training in those times was also indicated through the story.

### **Marriage, Rituals and Women in Medieval Kerala**

*Talikettukalyanam* as a symbolic marriage existed. Tumbolarca and Kunjunnuli in *Vadakkumpattukal* had *Talikettukalyanam* at the age of seven (Mathew,64) This practice was evident from the instance of *Edanadan's* marriage at the age of seven and a half (Sajitha 5). In the song *Cheganooradhi*, the hero while talking with Kunnuvam pennu, mentioned that he had tied her *Tali* at a very young age (Appukuttan 26). Though the word *Sambhandhan* was not found, there existed a loose marriage as is evident in the fact that the 7 brothers of Unniamma of Tonnuranvidu used to go to their wives houses at night after dinner and returned in morning. Pallattu Koman visited Unniamma in the night and left in the morning before her brothers were back home<sup>iv</sup>. These instances were pointed out by some historians as the existence of polyandrous relations.

*Vannanum Kentron Pattum* dealt with marriage custom which prevailed among the Mannan and Vannan castes. They mentioned about *Thirandumangalam*, *Pandalmangalam* and *Mangalam* referring to puberty marriage, Kettukalyanam and real marriage respectively (Vishnu Namboothiri 9).

*Vadakkumpatukal* and *Thekkanpatukal* were great source to understand the socio cultural rituals and practices of the times. There were references to rituals attached to family and religion. *Vadakkumpattukal* referred about the custom of *Pulikudi* performed during pregnancy period of a woman. It also mentioned about the naming ceremony of Aromal Chekavar (Mathew 65). *Kentron Pattu* described a ritual called *Garbhabali* performed during pregnancy period (Vishnu Namboothiri 22). *Chenganooradhi*, delineated different customs and rituals followed by the Parayar community (Appukuttan, 137). This include the practice of giving 'bride- price' by the bridegroom to the bride's family

There were references which indicated great deal of independence and freedom among women in the matter of marriage and mobility. Women enjoyed great freedom in accepting or discarding their husbands. This was evident in the case of Aromal Cekavar who tied *Tali* for Tumbolarcca. But she did not marry him as she testified that he did not like her. Elantharmadathil Candu wanted to marry Unniarcha but she refused to be married. In *Chenganooradhi*, when Adhi stated his interest to marry Palluvam Pennu, her

father replied that he needs to ask her daughter's consent too (Appukuttan 136).

Likewise, women enjoyed more mobility. Such an instance is found in *Chenganooradhi* in which Palluvam Pennu went in search of Adhi and during the time she did different jobs (Appukuttan 32). In the case of *Mathileri Kani*, a story included in *Vadakkumpatukal*, the heroine, Mathileri Kanni, the daughter of a royal member ruling in Chirakara, Koluthunad travelled in disguise to Venad to meet her husband. Like Palluvum Pennu, Mathileri displayed unexceptional skill in *Kalari*<sup>v</sup>. Taking the case of Unniarcha with these women, it pointed to the fact that women also underwent martial training in those times. As understood from , *Murikencheri Keluvinte Pattukatha*, women were given importance in Arakkal dynasty. There kingship was determined by seniority and if women became the head, she was called *Beebi Thangal* (Vishnu Namboothiri 33). They had more mobility in those times. There were references about love marriages in these oral traditions which also indicated that women had enjoyed the right to choose her husband. In the *Neelikatha*, popular in South Kerala, mentioned the existence of Devdasi system and the prevalence of prostitution<sup>vi</sup>.

### **Understanding Family through Folklore**

Analysing the details available from the folklores, one could summarize some aspects about the family system in medieval Kerala. Firstly, marriages as

ritual was performed and it was not very complex. There were references of both arranged and love marriages. Caste system was a determining factor in marriage, though there were instances of informal inter caste marriages. Oral composition such as *Vannannum Kentron Pattum* even mentioned the rules for inheritance of property by the nephews and niece, lack of importance to husband, management of ancestral property by *Karnavar*. The folklores even revealed the inner conflicts within the families. Thirdly, they hinted about a ritualistic and kinship bonded relations within the family. The narrations of various family events indicate the ritualistic nature of the society and how family reinforced it. The descriptions regarding the various occasions explained the significance of kinship bonds. Fourthly, the details of women have helped to understand their role in the society and family. Women, especially the common category enjoyed more freedom and mobility than the upper strata during the medieval period. *Kalari* as an institution was popular and even women had undergone training.

**Endnotes:**

1. Pulikudi is a ceremony performed in the ninth month of pregnancy.
2. Villupattu is an ancient form of musical story telling that was popular among Nada and Chettiar castes of erstwhile Travancore kingdom.
3. Tharavad refers to ancestral home.

marriage (Vishnu Namboothiri 11). Secondly, these sources described matrilineal and patrilineal nature of family. Most of the sources depicted the features of a matrilineal family with a *Tharavad* (joint family), headship by the eldest male member called *Karnavar*,

There were references about women who were exceptional warriors which hinted to the fact that they were not restricted to households.

Thus, to conclude, narrations of different folklore demonstrate family as an important social unit nurtured and groomed within the traditions of caste, customs and rituals reinforced by each family. As folklore is the product of an indigenous group, they greatly help in recording the voices unheard and there by represent the history of the masses. Historical studies on family would definitely benefit from folklore, provided it overcomes the challenges of intermingling of facts with fantasy and myths.

4. Sambhandam is a simple Nair marriage ceremony involving the presentation of a cloth by the man to the woman.
5. Kalari is a martial art which was popular in medieval Kerala.
6. Devadasi system existed in medieval Kerala in which women dedicated their lives to be temple dancers.

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## **A Historical Perspective on the Origins of the Kani Tribe**

*Kanikkaran (kāṇikkāraṇ) or Kani (kāṇi) is an isolated scheduled tribal community with unique physical, cultural, social, and tribal living stature residing in the Western Ghats of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The present research, “A Historical Perspective on the Origins of the Kani Tribe”, attempts to record the forgotten history of the Kani Tribe, which is on the verge of extinction. The present research is intended to document the historical traditions existing through orality of the Kani tribe, as they do not have a written form of language. Tribal discourses on the oral inscriptions of the Kani tribe decipher the latent ethnic-specific culture, tradition, myths and other rituals encrypted in the oral texts. The study's objectives are to map out the ethnographic history of the Kani people by deciphering the latent discourse and socio-linguistic concepts and grasping the different social, cultural and totemic aspects of the Kani tribe. It also enquires about the corpora of oral texts, decodes Kani's traditional messages and social discourse, and provides recommendations to the government and policymakers to restore the conventional and ethnographical means of the Kani tribes in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.*

### **Introduction:**

The Kanikkaran (kāṇikkāraṇ) or Kani (kāṇi) are a Scheduled Tribal community living in the rugged and mountainous Western Ghats regions of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The Kani people, who inhabited Tamil Nadu and Kerala, knew they owned and guarded the Western Ghats. They are a Proto-Australoid minority tribe with a distinctive tribal culture that sets them apart from other people's perceptions and assumptions. The social construction of culture is how a society defines itself. It can be viewed as a predetermined way of living that defines a clan's or a person's identity. It is crucial to comprehend that the Kanikkar community's demographics

can differ between these two states. The demography of Kanikkar in Tamil Nadu and Kerala is reported based on population, language, livelihood, and social structure.

### **Aim of the study:**

The study aims to explore the Kani historical documentations and oral traditions that has been remained silent.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

The present study dwells on the Kanikkar's historical understanding. It determines to unearth the forgotten historical footsteps of the tribal Kani community.

### **Methodology:**

The research is based on the original oral descriptions collected from the Kani tribal people and the secondary sources of information. To illustrate the findings, secondary sources are gathered from the library, books, journals, papers, other online sources, and all the data are scrutinized.

### **Need for History:**

The word 'History' comes from the Greek term 'ἱστορία', historia, signifying 'inquiry or knowledge obtained through investigation'. It focuses on examining the past, especially as it pertains to human beings. History is recognized as an academic field that is used to tell a story, exploring and evaluating the order of past occurrences while objectively identifying the causative factors that shape them. Historians occasionally engage in discussions about the essence of history and its significance, contemplating the study of the field as a goal in its own right and as a means to offer alternative viewpoints on contemporary issues. Authors utilize history in their works as an inclusive term to connect past occurrences, the recollection, exploration, gathering, organization, display, and interpretation of information about those events. Events that took place before the advent of written records are referred to as 'prehistory'. The examination of history is deemed significant because it is through past experiences that individuals can learn how to navigate life appropriately. Notable authors have demonstrated

remarkable skill in portraying life through the lens of history and literature.

### **Historical Background of Kani:**

The origin of the Kani settlement dates back to 4000 years, even before the Dravidian

and the Aryan settlers. Kani enclaves are found in the dense forest of the Western Ghats at

high-altitude hills that are aloof from the inland people. Shyam, in his research article

*Aspects of Life and Language of Kanikkar Tribal Community of Kerala – A Study,*

addresses Kani as Proto-Australoid.

Ethnographically, Kanikkar belongs to Proto-Australoid group. Some of them live in the interior parts of the forest, especially in the Podiyam, Mukkothivayal, Chonampara, Erumbiyad, Pothod, and Plath regions in the Agathiyar and Kottur Forest ranges in the Nedumangad Taluk of Trivandrum district. Around 27 settlements are identified in these regions. (364)

Ershad Ali, in her research article *Ethnic Composition of Indian Population,* informs the

Proto-Australoid as a,

group considered the second oldest racial group in India characterised by dolichocephalic head, broad and flat nose (platyrrhine nose) which is depressed at the root. They are further short in height, dark

brown to nearly black in skin colour. The hair is wavy or curly. Supraorbital ridges are prominent. These features are found among almost all the tribes of Central and Southern India. (09)

A study on the Kani community culture reveals that their cultural practices have been

responsible for enabling them to lead a good, meaningful, and dignified life associated with nature. Their living heritage has helped the community maintain its values, tradition, and identity, develop self-esteem, and survive adverse social and economic conditions.

#### **Settlement History of Kani:**

Tribals are nomadic people with a migratory history that influenced their social and cultural aspects. Kani people lived in the wooded places of the Western Ghats for ages. They establish a close relationship with nature and depend upon the resources the area provides them for survival. The Kani is a semi-nomadic tribe that moved about the Western Ghats in search of food, water, and suitable habitats. They engaged in shifting cultivation, commonly described as slash-and-burn agriculture, which involves removing small portions of forest for

cultivation before relocating to new locations after a few years. As the Kani people grew closer to the Western Ghats through time, they started to construct permanent settlements.

They acquired a thorough knowledge of the forests, their rich biodiversity, medicinal plants, and other resources.

The Kani people have social and commercial relationships with the areas where the Malayalis of Kerala and the Tamils of Tamil Nadu reside. Language influences, cultural interactions, and social relationships contributed to the increased complexity and profundity

of the Kani community. When European colonial powers like the British entered India, it had

a profound effect on the way of life of the Kani people. Their customary life methods were disrupted, and their ancestral lands were destroyed. When forests were declared reserved

zones and boundaries were set for settlement, Kani's movement into the woods was restricted.

Multiple theories highlight different versions of the migration history of the people.

Stephen, in his book *Kokkarai: Life and Culture of the Kaanikaarar*, observes that the Kani

people once lived to the west . . . on the Kerala side of South India's west coast - and they

were forcibly sent to the mountain regions by Dravidians and Aryans (1). Ayyanar and Ignacimuthu, in their research article, *Traditional knowledge of Kani Tribals in Kouthalai of Tirunelveli Hills, Tamil Nadu, India*, claim that, “the Kani people may have come to the Tamil side through the Courtallam pass” ( 247). Tharmaraj, in his *Folklore of the Kani Tribe*, “perceives that Kani people once lived to the east . . . on the Tamil Plains . . . and migrated westward from Tirunelveli District through Kalakadu” (63).

Kani's legendary story about the Two Sisters<sup>1</sup> claims that the Kani people migrated westward from Tirunelveli District. According to a legendary tale from ancient times, the Kani people lived on the plains of the east of the mountains. Two Sisters were living on the mountain. The elder sister had four sons, and the younger had three sons. These two groups of young men quarrelled, and as a result, the Kani people divided with the younger sister's children and went westward to the mountains to live in the forest. The elder sister's children went eastward to the Tamil coast to be a sea-fishing community<sup>2</sup> (299). The forests and mountainous regions of Kerala and Tamil Nadu play a significant role in the migration history of the Kanikkar or Kani. The history of the Kani people's migration is the result of social, cultural, environmental, psychological and personal reasons.

### **Demography of Kani :**

Kani lives in Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari, the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. In Tamil Nadu, the Kani people are considered a small tribal group. Those who identify as Kani in Kerala are primarily located in the eastern hilly regions of the state, specifically in the districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, and Pathanamthitta. Kani in Kerala is estimated to have a population of 5,000–7,000 individuals. The Kani tribe, sometimes known as Kanikkarans, inhabit large and small towns in or near forestland. In Tamil Nadu, there are 52 settlements, and in Kerala, there are around 70 settlements. Grace Varchese (2018), who investigated the sociocultural aspects of Kani, states:

Kannikars inhabit the hills of Neyyaattinkara and Nedumangadu taluks of Trivandrum district and also live in the adjoining district of Quilon / Kollam in Kerala state. They are short, long-necked, flaring nostrils, prognathous jaw and brachiceph-halic heads. Their colours vary from light to dark brown. Individuals of both sexes grow long hair and knot at the back of the head. (45-46)

Bourdillion's "Report on the Forest of Travancore" is a report on the socio-economic status of the Scheduled Tribes Development Department, prepared by the Government of Kerala in the year 2013, reports that,

There are 5872 Kanikkaran families spread over 48 local bodies in seven districts. As their population is 19455, the family size of the Kanikkaran community is 3.31. The population consists of 9212 males and 10243 females. Therefore, the sex ratio is 1000:1112, which is higher than the Kerala state's average population. Kanikkar's community is mainly distributed in eight Grama Panchayaths in the Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam districts. (30)

The reports show the availability of a considerable population living in the Kani settlements on the Western Ghats of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Krishna Iyer, in his book, *Travancore Tribes and Castes*, states that the "Kanikkars are a prominent group among the tribals in Kerala mostly found in the hills of Southern part of Kerala. They are the largest number of tribal people in Kerala (1). Adabiya, in her research article, "Culture and Traditions of Kanikkars in Kerala - An Analysis", addresses the Kani people as, "honest and truthful and are the sons of the jungle. Kanikkars can survive the challenges in the high terrains of deep forests and the dangerous wild animals (740).

The Kani tribe was previously a tiny nomadic, but now, it is a settled community.

Most members cultivate mixed crops such as rubber, areca nut, banana, pepper, and cashew.

Almost all the group members have small huts along with a small garden attached to them.

The requirements on the tribal communities by the Forest Department have increased over

the years, adversely affecting their ability to make decisions. They consider themselves the

guardians and protectors of the forest. Their life, faith, beliefs, language, customs, religion, rituals, ceremonies, lifestyle, and emotions rest in their rustic forest environment. Their close

association with the forest has made them as pure, innocent, and lively as the forest.

The rich culture hidden in their community is also as secretive as the habitats of the woods.

### **Conclusion**

The Kanikkaran, often referred to as the Kani, occupies a distinctive role within the cultural and demographic framework of the Western Ghats. As a Scheduled Tribal group with Proto-Australoid ancestry, their customs, economic activities, and societal structures set them apart from other groups, while simultaneously demonstrating profound connections to their natural surroundings. Understanding the differences in their demographic trends across Tamil Nadu and Kerala is crucial for appreciating their identity, resilience, and cultural preservation. This examination of the Kanikkar people not only underscores their historical role as stewards of the

Western Ghats but also highlights the necessity of safeguarding their heritage amid evolving social and environmental challenges.

### **Acknowledgment:**

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**Stories and Kani's: A Critical Appreciation of Kani Tribes through their Stories**

*The Kani tribes are a group of people living in the forests of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. They have a deep connection with nature and adhere to many traditions. They have extensive knowledge of their community and social setup. Their lives are simple, and they share their ideas and things through storytelling. They follow an entirely oral tradition that showcases their culture and ethnicity. However, they also face problems such as the loss of forests, a lack of schools and hospitals, and others using their knowledge without respect. Studying the Kani tribes reveals their admirable qualities and the challenges they face. It also teaches us the importance of protecting their culture and learning from their way of living in harmony with nature.*

**Introduction:**

The Kani are a tribal group that lives in the forests and hills of Kerala and Tamil Nadu in Southern India. They follow oral tradition to transfer their knowledge from one generation to the next. They are renowned for their profound understanding of nature, particularly plants and the principles of sustainable living. Mostly, they live in Thiruvananthapuram District near the Agasthyarkoodam forest, Kerala, in Tamil Nadu. The government provides them with exceptional support and protection due to their unique culture and traditions. They have strong traditional knowledge about medicinal plants. They follow nature-based spiritual beliefs. The Kani used these plants to gain energy and

maintain their health. Scientists learned about it from them and created a herbal medicine called Jeevani. Sometimes they are not allowed to enter forests that are now protected. They are losing their land and traditions because of outside influences. A law called the Forest Rights Act (2006) helps protect their rights to live in and utilise the benefits of the forest. The Kani are renowned worldwide for their contributions to establishing guidelines for sharing tribal knowledge fairly. Their story is used to educate people about indigenous rights and the importance of respecting traditional wisdom.

**Aim of the Study:**

The aim of the study is to learn about the Kani tribes of Kerala and Tamil Nadu through their stories that have been

transmitted from generation to generation. It wants to understand their culture, traditions, and way of living. The study aims to identify the problems they face, such as deforestation, a lack of schools, and social difficulties. It also aims to demonstrate why their culture should be protected and how their knowledge can help people coexist with nature more sustainably.

#### **Objectives of the Study :**

- To learn about the daily life, culture and tradition of the Kani tribes.
- To understand how they live close to nature and sustainably.
- To find out the problems they face in education, health, and livelihood.
- To show why their culture should be saved and their rights protected.
- To explain how their knowledge can help modern society and the future development.

#### **Methodology:**

The stories are collected from the Kani people and the collected stories are carefully examined to understand Kani traditions, nature connection, plant knowledge, and the problems they face. Important points will be presented in a clear and concise manner. The study will respect the Kani people's privacy, culture, and permission. Their knowledge

will be recorded and protected against misuse.

#### **Kani Stories Translated into English**

##### **Crocodile and the Fox**

A vast forest with lush green plants and majestic trees. There was a widespread pond, and near the pond lived a crocodile. One day, a hungry fox came by and said, "A dead cow is lying on the other side. I will take you there so you can eat it." The crocodile believed the fox, carried it on its back, and crossed the river. But the fox kept tricking the crocodile over and over again. At last, the crocodile became suspicious. It took the fox to the middle of the river and asked, "Why do you always deceive me?" The frightened fox tried to run and escape into the water. But the crocodile immediately caught it by the tail and taught it a lesson fox its deceit.

##### **The Fox Trapped Inside and Elephant's Belly:**

A few days later, the fox was wandering in the forest, hungry. During a dark, stormy evening, it found a dead elephant. Driven by hunger, it went inside the elephant's belly to eat. After eating, it tried to come out but it got stuck inside. Later, some hunters arrived and began cutting the elephant open. The fox seized the moment, leapt out and escaped.

##### **The clever Crab and the Greedy Mongoose :**

In a stream near the forest lived many crabs. A mongoose often came there to trouble and eat them. One day, a wise crab named Mootukaani warned the mongoose; “We have done you to harm. Why are you destroying us?” The mongoose lied, saying it was starving and needed food. But the crab didn’t believe it. Finally, the crab trapped the mongoose and punished it. In anger, the mongoose bit the crab and ran away. From that day onwards, mongoose hesitated to approach the crabs.

### **Critical Appreciation of the Kani Stories:**

The tribal stories presented are “Crocodile and the Fox,” “Fox Trapped Inside Elephant’s Belly,” and “The Clever Crab and the Greedy Mongoose.” These stories serve as rich illustrations of traditional storytelling that encapsulate moral lessons through engaging narratives. These stories employ animals as allegorical characters, making complex human traits and societal values accessible and memorable, especially for younger audiences.

In “Crocodile and the Fox,” the tale highlights themes of deception and the importance of trust. The fox’s cunning manipulates the crocodile, but ultimately, deceit leads to its downfall, emphasising that dishonesty can be exposed and punished. This story highlights the tribal value of honesty and cautions against treacherous behaviour.

Similarly, “Fox Trapped Inside and Elephant’s Belly” depicts the consequences of greed and hunger. The fox’s desperate act to satisfy its hunger results in a perilous situation, which it narrowly escapes through quick wit. This narrative conveys the lesson that greed can lead to perilous circumstances, advocating for moderation and caution.

“The Clever Crab and the Greedy Mongoose” explores themes of wisdom and suspicion. The crab’s alertness and understanding of the mongoose’s falsehoods prevent it from falling prey to greed and treachery. It teaches the importance of discernment and the value of cautious judgment in safeguarding oneself against deception. Overall, these stories reflect the tribal community’s emphasis on moral virtues such as honesty, prudence, and wisdom. They serve as instructive tools that reinforce social values and cultural ethics, passed down through generations orally. The narratives also reveal a keen awareness of the natural world and human nature, using animals as symbols to communicate essential life lessons. Such stories are vital cultural assets that help preserve tribal identity and moral fabric, while also entertaining and educating their community members.

### **Conclusion :**

The Kani tribes are an important community with rich traditions and extensive knowledge of traditional medicines. They live close to nature and demonstrate how to coexist in harmony

with the environment. However, they face challenges such as deforestation, limited access to education, and other social issues. It is essential to protect their culture and rights. Studying the Kani tribes helps us learn from their knowledge and shows us how we can live in a better and more sustainable way.

The Kani tribes embody a rich cultural heritage rooted in a harmonious relationship with nature and traditional knowledge. Their simple way of life and oral traditions offer valuable insights into sustainable living and cultural preservation. However, they are increasingly vulnerable to environmental degradation and social challenges that threaten their existence. Recognising and respecting their unique identity is essential for safeguarding their culture and ensuring the future of their community. By understanding and supporting the Kani tribes, we can learn important lessons about coexistence with nature and the importance of preserving indigenous ways of life.

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### **Menstrual Huts in the Malabhandaram Tribal Tradition: The Politics of Gender and Seclusion**

*Menstruation is a universal biological process unique to women, typically beginning between the ages of 11 and 14 and signalling the onset of puberty. Despite its biological necessity, menstruation has historically been embedded within cultural myths, secrecy, and taboos. In India, menstruation is often viewed as the first marker of womanhood, and communities have developed a variety of customs and ceremonies surrounding menarche. Rituals such as Thirandukalyanam in Kerala, Peddamanishi Pandaga in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Manjal Neerattu Vizha in Tamil Nadu, and Tuloni Biya in Assam celebrate this transition in positive and festive ways (Goled, 2019; Sharanya, 2020). At the same time, Hindu mythology and religious traditions have often framed menstruation as a state of impurity. Ancient narratives describe Lord Indra's curse as the origin of menstruation, thereby constructing menstruating women as ritually unclean (Lee, 2020). This paradox of celebrating menstruation as womanhood while simultaneously stigmatising it as pollution is deeply embedded in Indian society. The Malabhandaram tribal community of Kerala provides a compelling case study of this contradiction. The continued practice of menstrual huts, wherein women are isolated during menstruation, highlights how cultural taboos intersect with religion, gender, and socio-economic marginalisation. This paper examines the socio-cultural practices, religious underpinnings, lived experiences, and health implications of menstrual huts among the Malabhandaram community.*

**Keywords:** *puberty, customs and ceremonies, Thirandukalyanam, Malabhandaram tribal community, cultural taboos.*

#### **Introduction**

Menstruation, though biologically universal, is culturally interpreted in vastly different ways. Across societies, it is often treated as a threshold between childhood and adulthood, but also as a condition requiring regulation and restriction. Anthropological research suggests that menstrual taboos have historically served both symbolic and social functions: they mark fertility, but

also enforce boundaries of purity, gender roles, and social hierarchy. In India, menstrual beliefs oscillate between reverence and stigma. On one hand, rituals at temples such as Kamakhya in Assam or Chengannur in Kerala celebrate the menstruation of goddesses, equating menstrual blood with fertility and renewal (Chawla, 1992). On the other hand, menstruating women are often excluded from domestic, religious, and community life, seen as carriers of ritual

pollution. The derogatory Malayalam term Theendari (derived from theenduka, meaning “to pollute”) captures this duality, labelling women as impure during their cycle (Nanditha & Sathyamurthi, 2023).

The persistence of menstrual taboos is particularly visible in tribal communities, where traditional customs remain relatively insulated from modern reforms. The Malabhandaram tribal community of Kerala continues to uphold the practice of menstrual huts (Refer to Figure 1), despite state interventions in health and welfare. This paper situates the Malabhandaram within the wider cultural and religious framework of menstruation in India and analyses the implications of menstrual seclusion for women’s health, dignity, and social status.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the socio-cultural taboos surrounding menstruation among the Malabhandaram community.
2. To assess the influence of religion on menstrual practices.
3. To analyse women’s lived experiences during menstruation.
4. To evaluate the conditions and amenities of menstrual huts.
5. To explore the implications of menstrual seclusion for women’s health, dignity, and social participation.

### **Menstruation in Indian Cultural and Religious Contexts**

The cultural imagination of menstruation in India is layered with both reverence and stigma. The myth of Lord Indra

dispersing his curse on women is central to Hindu beliefs regarding menstrual impurity. From this origin story emerged numerous restrictions: menstruating women are traditionally prohibited from entering temples, cooking food, wearing flowers, sleeping on family beds, or even touching pickles (Lee, 2020). Yet menstruation is also sacralized in goddess traditions. In Punjab, Mother Earth (Dharti Ma) was believed to rest during her “menstrual week.” In parts of the Deccan, goddess temples close after Navaratri for a period of rest, echoing menstrual cycles. In Assam, the Kamakhya temple hosts an annual festival during which the goddess is believed to menstruate, symbolising the fertility of both land and women. Similarly, in Kerala’s Chengannur temple, the Thripputhu ritual honours the menstruation of Goddess Parvati (Bhagavathi). These practices exemplify the contradictory status of menstruation as both sacred and polluting. Such contradictions have significant social consequences. While rituals celebrate fertility, day-to-day restrictions stigmatise women. In Kerala, women are excluded from festivals and community life during menstruation, reinforcing gender segregation. These contradictions form the cultural backdrop for the Malabhandaram tribal community’s menstrual hut practices.

### **The Malabhandaram Tribal Community in Kerala**

Kerala is home to 36 Scheduled Tribe communities (Refer to Table 1), which are categorised as Particularly Vulnerable

Tribal Groups (PVTGs), marginalised tribes, and minorities by the Scheduled Tribes Development Department (2013). The Malai Pandaram (Malabhandaram) are among these tribes, concentrated primarily in Kollam and Pathanamthitta districts. Traditionally semi-nomadic forest dwellers, the Malabhandaram sustained themselves through minor forest produce such as honey, frankincense, wild pepper, ginger, and cardamom. Trade relationships were limited to exchanges with local cooperatives and forest labourers. The community speaks a dialect blending Malayalam and Tamil, reflecting its hybrid cultural heritage (Manjusha, 2019). According to the 2011 Census, the Malabhandaram population stood at 2,422 (1,227 males and 1,195 females), with 715 households. Although government rehabilitation projects (Manjathodu Unathi, 2015) resettled many families in the Laha region of Pathanamthitta, cultural practices such as menstrual seclusion remain resilient. Out of 32 families, only 12 continue to live there reflecting the enduring politics of gender and the relevance of seclusion theory in understanding these practices. The small population size and relative isolation of the tribe intensify the persistence of such traditions, even in the face of modernisation and state welfare policies.

### **Menstrual Huts: Practice and Cultural Significance**

The menstrual hut (Kurma Ghar) is a recurring institution across tribal societies in South Asia. In Maharashtra

and Chhattisgarh, Gond and Madiya tribes follow similar practices. In Nepal, the Chhaupadi system isolates women in huts during menstruation, often under life-threatening conditions. These practices are rooted in the belief that menstrual blood is polluting and that menstruating women endanger the sanctity of homes, temples, and community life (Siddiqui & Nidhi, 2025). Among the Malabhandaram, menstrual huts remain a central cultural practice. During menstruation, women are confined to makeshift shelters located at the edge of hamlets. These huts are often used for postpartum seclusion as well, with new mothers remaining there for up to three months. Inside, women are barred from cooking, handling food, touching water sources, or interacting with family members. Social isolation is enforced by leaving meals and water outside the hut, reinforcing their separation from daily life. The menstrual hut thus functions not merely as a physical structure, but as a cultural marker of impurity. It signals the community's belief in the polluting potential of women during menstruation and enforces rigid gender boundaries.

### **Taboos During Menstruation**

The Malabhandaram community observes a wide range of restrictions during menstruation:

- Food and Water Access: Women are prohibited from cooking or touching food. They cannot fetch water or water plants. Meals are left outside the hut, often irregularly, leading to inadequate nutrition.

- Religious Restrictions: Entry into temples, participation in rituals, and handling sacred objects are forbidden. The association of menstruation with pollution reinforces exclusion from religious life.
- Social Isolation: Women are forbidden from touching family members, including children. Physical contact is believed to transmit impurity. This isolation can result in emotional distress and reinforces their marginalization.
- Hygiene Practices: Bathing, washing hair, or wearing flowers are restricted. Though less strictly enforced than food or religious taboos, these restrictions reduce women's ability to maintain hygiene.
- Symbolic Pollution: Cultural beliefs suggest that if menstruating women touch food, it becomes poisonous, reflecting deep-seated notions of pollution and danger.

These taboos illustrate how menstruation is not just a biological event but a deeply social and cultural one. They regulate women's movements, bodies, and identities, reinforcing gender hierarchies.

### **Amenities and Conditions of Menstrual Huts**

The physical conditions of menstrual huts exacerbate the hardship of seclusion. Huts are typically constructed from sticks, cloth, or tarpaulin, often without walls or proper roofing. Bedding is minimal or absent, forcing women to sleep on bare ground. Huts lack sanitation facilities, clean water, or privacy. Such conditions expose women to a range of

- health risks:
- Infections: The lack of hygiene and presence of pests increase susceptibility to urinary tract infections and reproductive health issues.
  - Malnutrition and Dehydration: Restricted access to food and water contributes to poor nutrition, particularly during adolescence or postpartum recovery.
  - Psychological Distress: Isolation can cause anxiety, loneliness, and feelings of inferiority. The stigma of impurity undermines women's self-esteem.
  - Maternal Risks: Postpartum seclusion in huts poses additional risks to both mother and newborn, particularly in the absence of medical care.

Despite modernisation and awareness campaigns, menstrual huts persist. Their resilience illustrates the strength of cultural beliefs, but also the failure of interventions that do not address the cultural roots of taboos.

### **Discussion**

The Malabhandaram practice of menstrual huts reveals the complex interplay of culture, religion, and gender. At one level, it reflects the community's adherence to traditional cosmologies of purity and pollution. At another, it underscores the vulnerability of tribal women who bear the brunt of cultural restrictions while already marginalised by poverty and limited access to healthcare. The practice must be understood within broader frameworks of gender inequality and human rights. Menstrual seclusion restricts women's

access to education, labour, and social participation, reinforcing cycles of exclusion. It also contravenes international commitments to gender equality and health, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Comparative evidence from Nepal and central India suggests that outlawing menstrual huts is insufficient; without cultural change, the practice persists in hidden forms. Effective interventions require culturally sensitive approaches that engage tribal leaders, women’s groups, and health educators in reshaping perceptions of menstruation.

**Conclusion**

The persistence of menstrual huts in the Malabhandaram community illustrates the enduring influence of socio-cultural and religious taboos on women’s lives. While menstruation is universally

biological, its cultural meanings vary widely, oscillating between reverence and stigma. The Malabhandaram case demonstrates how taboos translate into tangible health risks, emotional suffering, and gender inequalities. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach: improving menstrual health infrastructure, ensuring access to affordable hygiene products, and fostering cultural shifts through education and dialogue. Policy interventions must move beyond prohibition to focus on empowerment, enabling women to reclaim menstruation as a natural and dignified process rather than a source of stigma. Only through such integrated efforts can the cycle of exclusion be broken, ensuring that cultural traditions evolve in ways that affirm rather than undermine women’s health and dignity.

Tables and Figures

Table 1. Scheduled Tribe Communities in Kerala/India

Adiyan	Kurichchan (Kurichiyan)	Mannan	Aranda (Arandan)
Kurumans	Muthuvan	Eravallan	Kurumbas
Palleyan	Hill Pulaya	Mahamalar	Paniyan
Irular	Malai Arayan	Ulladan	Kadar
Malai Pandaran	Uraly	Kanikkaran	Malai Vedan
Mala Vettuvan	Karimpalan	Malakkuravan	Ten Kurumban
Kattunaickans	Malasar	Thachenadan	Kochuvelan

Malayan	Cholanaickan	Koraga	Mavilan
Malapanickar	Kudiya	Melakudi	Malayarayar
Vettakuruman			





Figure 1. Menstrual Hut in the Malabhandaram Community (Placeholder)

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### **A Historic Analysis of the Early Culture, Tradition, Life System and Taboos of the Paliyan Community in Idukki District of Kerala State**

*The Paliyan community, an ingenuous tribal group residing in the forest regions of Idukki district of Kerala state, represents one of the earliest cultural traditions of the Western Ghats. This article explores the traditional life systems, cultural practices and taboos of the Paliyan people during the earlier period, with particular attention to their modes of subsistence, social relations and belief systems. Drawing from oral narratives, ethnographic records, and historical sources, the study examines the role of taboos in regulating social conduct, resource uses and ritual practices, thereby ensuring community cohesion ecological balance. By documenting these cultural traditions, the article seeks to contribute to the preservation of the intangible heritage of the Paliyan community and to provide insights into the dynamics of tribal life in Kerala before the impact of modernization and state intervention.*

*Key words:Indigenous tradition,Idukki district, Kerala tribes, Paliyan community, tribal culture.*

#### **Introduction**

Tribal communities are the most noteworthy pieces of society; they preserve their own particular culture, tradition, and life form. They are a precise societal group settled down within a definite territory, with a common name of their own and the common culture and behaviour of the endogamy set. Like all other states in India, a substantial portion of the Kerala population is tribal. The Paliyan community is one of the numerous tribal sections inhabited in Kerala. The Paliyan community came to the Travancore Forest area through the Cumbum Pass, and they settled down in different parts of the Idukki district. It was once a thick forest and was a part of Travancore, known as the high Ranges of Travancore . They are mainly inhabited in the Kumily, Puliyanmala, and Chakkupallam regions, which were once covered with dense forest. As nomadic tribes,

they settled in the forest and made their livelihood by collecting honey, wood, and cultivating wild vegetables. As one of the minority tribes living in Kerala's Idukki district is the Paliyan tribe as a group from Tamil Nadu. Along with Mannan, Muthuvan, and other migratory tribal clans, they moved and settled in different parts of the forest lands of the erstwhile Travancore High Ranges. The Paliyan community of Kerala state is mainly concentrated in the district of Idukki.

#### **Study Area**

The universe of the present study is Idukki district in Kerala state. Idukki came into existence on January 26th, 1972. As per the notification No. 54131/C2/71/RD dated January 24, 1972 . The inhabitants of Idukki district have migrated there at different times. Several tribal groups, as well as people from

the plains, are found in the Idukki district of Kerala. It is believed that the tribal groups migrated from Tamil Nadu and other parts of Kerala in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The Europeans entered the area during the first decades of the 19th century and started tea plantations, which brought many changes to the district. Presently, Idukki district holds the second rank in the tribal population of Kerala. According to “Scheduled Tribes of Kerala”, Report on the Socio-Economic Status, statistical survey by the Scheduled Tribes Development Department Government of Kerala, fifteen tribal communities in Idukki district namely; Adiyar, Irular, Kanikaran, Kattunayakam, Malayarayan, Muthuvan, Malayan, Mannan, Uraly, Hill Pulaya, Ulladan, Paliyan, Malavedan, and Mala Pandaram. The Paliyan community are mainly concentrated in five different settlements: Kumily settlement in Kumily panchayat; Annakkara settlement and Pashipillakudi settlement in Vandanmedu panchayat; Chakupalam settlement of Chakkupalam panchayat; and Shivalinga Kudi settlement of Kattapana municipality. The first Kumily settlement belongs to Peerumadu Taluk, and the others to the Udumbanchola Taluk of the Idukki district of Kerala.

### ***Historical and cultural background Life system of the Paliyan's***

Like other tribal communities, the Paliyan community also had a specific culture, tradition, and life system. Different sources are giving information about the Paliyan community in Kerala, “The Travancore Tribes and Castes”, Vol.II and III, by

L.A. Krishna Iyer. “Tribes of Kerala”, by A.A.D. Luiz, and “The Paliyan of Kerala”, by N. Suseela Devi. One of the oldest sources of information about Paliyan's is available in John Daniel Munro's, “The High Ranges of Travancore”, published on November 12, 1880. According to it, the total number of Paliyans during the period was 598. According to the 1991 census, the population of Paliyan in Tamil Nadu was 4,322, while in Kerala it was 1,442. According to the 2011 census, the Paliyan community consists of 741 males and 743 females; the sex ratio is 1000:1003. The family size of the Paliyan community is 3.50 .

### ***Etymology of the term Paliyan***

There are different views and traditions regarding the origin of the word Paliyan. One of them is that the term Paliyan has been derived from the word Palaniyan; in the Tamil language, it means a man from Palani. The Paliyan originally belonged to the Palani Hills; they are also known as Palliyar, Palleyan, Palani Makkal, and Malai Paliyar. According to A.D. Luiz, there are two views regarding the origin of the word Paliyan. The first is that, they claim that their name originated from Valli, a Palachi (Palliyar female) who was the wife of God Subramanian, son of Siva, represented as Karthikeya in North India. This is a legend that dates back to the age when mixed marriage between Aryans and Dravidians was advocated by quoting examples from the lives of gods. The second view of Luiz is

that, the name originated from the worship of the goddess known as Palichiammal, who is very popular among them, or it may be the corruption of Pallien connoting a good tracker." To Gardner Paliyan is a regional expression of Paraiyan, "the ancient".

*The settlement areas of Paliyan Community in Kerala: The Paliyan community in Kerala is only found in Idukki district. In the work of T.F.Bourdillon, F.L. S. "Report on the Forests of Travancore", the settlement regions of Paliyan community during 1893 is mentioned as Puliyanmala and Ramakkal on the north, Periyar on the west, and Peermerd Road on the south, which is similar to the current settlement area. Now they are chiefly settled in Peerumedu and Udumbanchola taluks. In total, there are five Paliyan settlement areas in the Idukki district. They are; Kumily settlement, Passipilla Kudi settlement, Shivalinga Kudi settlement, Chakkupallam settlement, and Anakkara IMS Paliyan settlement.*

### ***Reasons for migration***

Paliyan's, who are a tribal group, migrated from Tamil Nadu ages ago; there is no fixed reason for their migration. Different views and opinions are prevailing regarding their migration to the High Ranges of Travancore. Accordant to A.D. Luiz, "Paliyan's claim that their original home was near Gudalur within the Cumbum Taluk of the Madurai District and that they moved into the fertile

cardamom hills of Central Travancore at the direction of a Pandaram Chief". They came to the Travancore Forest area through the Cumbum Pass and settled down in different parts of the Idukki district. Ages before Kumily, Chakkupalam, and Anakkara villages were covered with thick forest, this attracted the nomadic agriculturalists, and they occupied the virgin forest areas. According to one tradition, they were the descendants of those who came to western ghats to collect forest goods for Pandya kings. For some, the poverty in the regions inhabited by the Paliyans in Tamil Nadu and the fact that they acknowledged the prosperous forestry regions in the High Ranges of Travancore and wished for a better life forced them to migrate to the forest regions of Travancore. According to some, they came here for cardamom cultivation. According to some traditions, the knowledge about the migration of Mannan, Muthuvan, and Uralies communities from Tamil Nadu to high-range regions of Travancore and the fact that they didn't come back makes them believe that the regions are much more suitable for habitation, which leads them to migrate to high-range regions of Travancore.

The old-age customs, practices, traditions, socio-economic, and religious activities of the Paliyan community, once they were inhabited in forest areas, were discussed here;

### ***Socio-political life***

According to “The Madura Country A Manual”, the Paliyan community is of a far lower type of humanity. According to J.D. Munro, the Paliyan’s are the descendants of slaves. They belong to the lower class; they were following a life of remoteness. To J.D. Munro regarding their societal life, they are savages and decline to adopt the simplest usages of ordinary men, having neither houses nor clothes nor any kind of property, roaming over the hills; satisfying hunger with such roots and fruits as they can find by search; and occasionally a little wild honey. They carefully shun the society of civilised men and will never approach a stranger except upon the offer of a piece of tobacco on a strip of cloth. In “Caste and Tribes of South India”, as well as in the “Gazetteer of Madura District”, the Paliyans are mentioned as belonged to a very backward caste. According to Rev. F. Dahmen, the Paliyans are a nomadic tribe. All the references indicate that earlier in life, the Paliyan community was an isolated one. According to Suseela Devi, the Paliyans, who were leading a nomadic way of life, had very simple and few material possessions in the past. They used to shift from one place to another in search of edible tubers and fruits. Temporary huts were constructed for that reason. After the migration to the high ranges of Travancore, too, the Paliyans led a life of isolation. Information regarding their isolated life and their life completed in the

forest is available from personal chats and interviews with the elder members of the family. The tribal chief enjoyed higher authority, and the elder members were respected well. They try to follow their own social life, not interacting with other tribal communities.

In total, there were five settlement areas, or *Kudi's*, and each settlement area had a chief or headman. In earlier periods, the chief was known as *Kanikkaran*. He is assisted in his work by *Valia Elandari*, *Vina Mariya*, and *Thandakaran*. The *Valia Elandari* and *Vina Mariya* were appointed to maintain the good behaviour of the boys and girls of the hamlet and help those in need by providing them labour. They look after the erection of the hut for the *Kanikkaran* and avail themselves of free labour for putting up their huts and for work in the field. The *Thandakaran* collects men and gets through all the work.

**Kinship and Family structure:** As like other tribal communities the Paliyan community also followed kinship-based family system, the kinship was the backbone of them. Both the patriarch, the fathers relatives and matriarch, the relatives of mothers side kin’s were followed equally by them. Thus, the maternal kin’s was more privileges, but both were equally participated in ritualistic as well as social activities and practices for the Paliyan community the family was a dynamic part of a being. The father was the head of the family.

The respect towards the elder persons (*Periyavar*) followed by each and every member of Paliyan community. The affection between family members was with great bonding, enjoyed and celebrated each and every aspect of life together with family.

**Economic Status:** at forest they were hunting and gatherers, as well as small scale agriculture was followed by them. They were nomadic, slash and burn cultivation was their cultivation mode. The small-scale agriculture followed was of collective nature, as the male members of a settlement clear the forest, then the chief divided the plot and give a portion to each family and they cultivate kara nellu, cholam, raggi, and nuts in it. The necessary foods for their needs are cultivated by them, the preservation, farming and harvest were done collectively by them, and divided it according to the size of the family. Also the Paliyan's engaged in weaving mat, basket-making, and even bird cages were made by them, used vegetable dye for decoration. The basket-making was mainly done by the women folk. They are wholly illiterate, and only a few can count up to ten. The honey, wax and forest produce collected by them was exchanged with tobacco, rice, and cloth with outer people.

**Food Habit's:** Food used by them was wild fruits and vegetables etc. especially vallikizhangu, hunted animals mainly squirrels, hares, wild fowl, and even frog, beef was not used

by them, they mostly used mutton, fishing was followed by them. According to Edgar Thurston; "A good catch is a great boon for the famished Paliyan. The meat obtained therefrom must be divided between all the families of the settlement, the skins, if valuable, are preserved to barter for the little commodities they may stand in need of, or to give as a tribute to their chief".

**Dressing and ornaments:** Grass or leaves especially palm leaves was first used to cover body. They were scanty clothing, later loin clothes used. Dress used by male folk was called as *Kosuvam Konakam* (it's just a cloth covering their underarms), later started to use *Arra mundu*. The dress used by womenfolk called as *chella*, the sari without blouse. Ornaments; the paliyan's was fond of ornaments. Necklace, was used, decorating hair with flower was done. They also used earrings and nose-rings etc. The ornaments were made of bamboos and other tree parts. Tattooing was followed by them. Mainly of plants, weapons, serpents and of other animal's designs used for tattooing.

### ***Cultural traditions and belief systems***

They had a rich glory phase in cultural traditions and belief system. They followed different Practices related to birth, puberty, marriage and death **Marriage:** Usually marriage take place for a girl after she attaining puberty. Cross-cousins marriage was usually followed, for maintaining the relationship more cohesive. The main rules

existed regarding marriage was; (a) only marry a woman or boy from the Paliyan community itself. (b) the marriage will be fixed by family. (c) those who marry a girl or boy from other communities or from outer groups will be face *Urruvilak*. *Urruvilak* is a practice in which a person is not able to enter the settlement area, or to meet family members or not to have any contact with community people, he or she will be considered as polluted. According to "The Travancore Tribes and Castes"; A man marries the daughter of his maternal uncle or father's sister. The marriage was fixed even in the childhood itself. Mostly if a daughter is born to one's sister, then the daughter is to be the wife of that man.

**Delivery:** there was peculiar ritual for delivery, in the last days of pregnancy or feel signs of delivery, the women should stay in a separate shelter near to the home. Women's who assist her for delivery only stay with her. The shelter is known as "*Vannapur*". After delivery the pollution (*Pela*) lasts for six days, after seven days she takes an oil bath, turmeric water and enters the home.

After the birth they followed different rituals like ;

**New-Born's naming ritual:** It's performed on the seventh day after delivery. For the baby boy name of his grandfather – paternal was generally named to the baby. And for the baby girl the name father's mother is given. For some the name of gods and goddesses worshiped by them was also given as name.

**Thottil Sasthram:** This is a vital observance practiced on the eighth day after the birth of a child. On the eighth day for the first time the newborn was put in a cradle, its celebrated along with the relatives both of paternal and maternal side. **Araganam Kettu:** It's performed on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of the newborn. On the day the eldest person of the family ties the arainjanam i.e., a black thread around the waist of the baby.

**Hair Cutting ceremony of children:** cutting of hair of the child for the first time is called "*Mudiyedupu*" / "*Mudivettu Chandangu*". It's done when the child finishes one year of age, the most important person wants to be present in the occasion is the mother's brother who is called as *Mamma*. To them the *Mamma* is the vital part of the kinship, for all the functions the matrilineal relatives especially mother's brother had a prominent position in all matters.

**Puberty ceremony:** The puberty ceremony has great cultural importance. Among the Paliyan community, the common term denoting puberty ceremony was "*Chandangacharam*" / "*Chandangu*". When a girl attains puberty, a separate shelter known as "*Vannappura*" will be made and they will stay there for more than fourteen days, because the pollution lasts for fourteen. **Funeral ceremony:** The funeral ceremony among the Paliyan's was known as "*Illavu*". When a death happens, the information was sent to all the relatives

families (*Swanthakkaru*). Excessive loudly lamentation occur over the loosed one, this loudly lamentation song is known as *Oppari* among them.

**Religious practice:** Earlier period they were animist, the worship a deity of the rock which stands on an eminence. The Paliyan's regard sylvan deities with great veneration. "Karupuswami is the tribe's custodial god, and, when a great haul of wild honey is made, offerings are given at some shrine. They pretend to be followers of Siva, and always attend the Adi Amavasai ceremonies at Courtallum. He keeps no animal, except a stray dog or two. An axe, a knife, and a pot are all the impedimenta he carries ". No specific place for worship. The of God placed under the foot of a trees, covered the stone with turmeric water, and decorated with cloths. The very earlier clan worship center of them was at kalluvriyar under a Sal tree.

### ***Taboos and social regulations***

There existed some peculiar restrictions in the hamlets of Paliyan community. That are; they try to follow their own social life, not interacting with other tribal communities. In the previous period, if any other tribal community or others came for needs or any type of official communication, a special place called '*Chavadi*' was made for contact with the outer communities. The person who came for contact or any type of need will wait, and the person or chief will go to the "*Chavadi*" to meet them. They were not allowed to enter the houses of Paliyan's; the only place and platform for communication

with any outer community was "*Chavadi*". They considered contact with even other tribal communities, other than in '*Chavadi*', as polluted. Up to the sunset, those who made any contact with the outer people remained out of the settlement, either with other tribal communities or with the outer people.

Yet another important regulation practised was those who marry a girl or boy from other communities or from outer groups will be face *Urruvilaku*. *Urruvilaku* is a practice in which a person is not able to enter the settlement area, or to meet family members or not to have any contact with community people, he or she will be considered as polluted. A man cannot talk with or touch his mother-in- law. The aunt does not call the nephew by his name. A man can talk with his uncle. He cannot talk with his uncle's wife. All this are completely a Tamil culture influenced ones.

### **Conclusion**

The early cultural traditions, life systems and taboos of the Paliyan community in Idukki district reflect a unique and shaped by their close relationship with nature, spiritual beliefs and social organizations. Their practices and restrictions were not merely superstitions but served as mechanism to preserve harmony within the community and with their environment. The taboos regulated behaviour, ensured resource sustainability, and reinforced social values, while their cultural traditions provided continuity and identity across generations. As a migrated tribal community their sociocultural, traditional and religious practices of the Paliyan's were profoundly influenced by Tamil culture, yet the early culture, tradition,

life system and taboos of the community is significant.

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**Performing Dignity: A Study of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's Short Story *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*.**

*The short story *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar is examined in this paper as a story of resistance and it looks at the protagonist Mangal Murmu's conscious act of agency in refusing to dance in state-sponsored cultural programmes as a way to subvert prevailing narratives of development and cultural commodification. This non-participation represents political struggle and a radical recovery of identity rather than silence. Using subaltern frameworks, the study investigates how refusal serves as a political position.*

**Key words :** *Forced Migration, Land Dispossession, Minority Rights, Tribal Identity.*

Set against the backdrop of modern capitalist developments in Jharkhand, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's short story "The Adivasi Will Not Dance" delivers a moving condemnation of the systemic exploitation of Adivasi/Santhal identity, land, and culture. Through the voice of its protagonist, Mangal Murmu, a Santhal artist, the story highlights the marginalization of tribal groups by government elites, the media, and corporates. Shekhar's story examines the intersections of class, power, and identity within the larger context of postcolonial and neoliberal India. The story is a powerful indictment of cultural exploitation and commodification. Situated within the Adivasi/Santhal experience of marginalization, the opening lines of the short story capture a potent moment of self-awareness and introspection. "But we Santhals are fools, aren't we? All of us Adivasis are fools. Down the years, down generations, the Diku have taken advantage of our foolishness. Tell me if I am wrong." (Shekhar 114) Mangal Murmu's rhetorical

question, "Aren't we fools?" is a critique of historical exploitation rather than an admission of ignorance. It exposes the internalized trauma brought on by political oppression and draws attention to the intergenerational manipulation that indigenous communities endure. This moment, however, can be interpreted as a call for resistance rather than as a confirmation of passivity. By highlighting the ways in which colonial, capitalist, and caste-based political structures have continuously undervalued Adivasi knowledge, autonomy, and land, the usage "fools" turns into a bitter irony. By admitting this alleged "foolishness," Murmu regains agency by exposing historical injustice and forcing a reconsideration of the true exploiters. By declaring, "We Adivasis will not dance anymore," the speaker opposes the objectification of Adivasi identity, especially the idealized depiction of Santhal dance as merely amusement for non-Adivasis. It encapsulates the dehumanizing way dominant groups consume Adivasi

culture while also denying them land, political rights, and dignity when they consider them as toys that are controlled by an "ON" button.

I only said, ‘We Adivasis will not dance anymore’”what is wrong with that? We are like toys—someone presses our ‘ON’ button, or turns a key in our backsides, and we Santhals start beating rhythms on our tamak and tumdak, or start blowing tunes on our tiriyo while someone snatches away our very dancing grounds. Tell me, am I wrong? (Shekhar 114)

The irony is that they are losing the very foundations upon which they dance. Their cultural expression turns out to be tragically meaningless in such a condition of loss. The lived experience of dispossession that Adivasis like Mangal Murmu endure is described later in this story.

My name is Mangal Murmu. I am a musician. No, wait... I am a farmer. Or... Was a farmer. Was a farmer is right. Because I don't farm anymore. In my village of Matiajore, in Amrapara block of the Pakur district, not many Santhals farm anymore. Only a few of us still have farmland; most of it has been acquired by a mining company. (Shekhar 115)

His transition from musician to farmer to dispossessed represents a larger breakdown in indigenous culture brought on by capitalism. The story highlights how mining corporations, supported by institutional and political power, take land by force, destroying traditional means of living and

cutting off communities from their ancestral lands. Under dominant narratives, the voice of the marginalized and unsupported Adivasi is silenced. The injustice and irony are encapsulated in Murmu's statement The community itself loses both its voice and its land while outsiders assert that they speak for it. This is not just neglect, it is systemic silencing. A harsh indictment of media's role in influencing public discourse in support of hegemonic interests is presented in this story. The unfair portrayal of the Santhal boys as murderers highlights how media put appearance before reality. Why are indigenous struggles only recognized when they are mediated by outside parties? He asks. Murmu challenges this disparity. The act of falsely criminalizing Adivasi protestors has two purposes: it discredits local resistance and removes barriers to corporate growth. The selective blindness of the media is not coincidental, rather, it is ideological, supporting the systematic erasure of subaltern agency. By exposing the tactical character of solidarity provided by outsiders, whether they be missionaries or political leaders, Murmu's story challenges idealized allyship. Murmu criticizes the flimsy solidarity that prioritizes outside heroes while ignoring indigenous leadership and the continuous resistance of the past. By conveniently delegitimizing the entire movement, the government enables corporations to expedite land grab while claiming that order has been restored. Murmu's insight reveals how formal support frequently serves institutional agendas rather than the community's true well-being. This is a deliberate takeover of authority, not merely betrayal highlighting the intricate

intertwining of displacement, media distortion, and the shortcomings of protests. According to Mangal Murmu's account, corporate mining interests systematically evict Santhal communities while disguising extraction as development with the help of political and missionary workers. Being landless after being a farmer represents both financial loss and loss of identity. Murmu criticizes the flimsy solidarity of outsiders who become well-known while the community is kept in the dark and criminalized. This story questions prevailing development discourses by exposing the ways in which deliberate demonization of indigenous agency frequently weakens Adivasi resistance. In the context of capitalism, this highlights the glaring disparity between Adivasi suffering and Diku profiteering. Murmu draws attention to how outsiders from different communities, such as coal and stone merchants, exploit tribal land with impunity, uprooting people and destroying the environment. The Santhals are left with poverty, illness, and environmental destruction, while the Dikus amass wealth, construct buildings, and have access to proper healthcare and education. This is a stark contrast. Once a source of food and cultural identity, the land is now used by some for profit and violence.

If coal merchants have taken a part of our lands, the other part has been taken over by stone merchants, all Diku—Marwari, Sindhi, Mandal, Bhagat, Muslim. They turn our land upside down, inside out, with their heavy machines. They sell the stones they mine from our earth in faraway places—Dilli, Noida, Panjab. This coal company and these quarry

owners, they earn so much money from our land. (Shekhar 115-116)

Native land is only seen as a resource to be turned into a commodity under the logic of neoliberal development, which makes this systemic dispossession structural rather than incidental. A regime that prioritizes capital accumulation over the well-being of the community and is motivated by profit renders ecological knowledge, cultural relationship with the land, and the ethnic practices of the Santhals obsolete. Furthermore, the reference to cities such as Dilli, Noida, and Kolkata reveals how indigenous suffering subsidizes metropolitan growth by signaling the extractive chain that connects rural exploitation to urban prosperity. The Santhals are not only left out of the advantages of development, but it also affects them through health problems, and ecological degradation. The story also reveals the psychological and cultural aspects of displacement. Indigenous populations are disproportionately affected by this type of violence, which is linked to occupational illnesses and environmental degradation. Their health is compromised in the name of economic "growth." A political economy that encourages exploitation and penalizes livelihoods is brought to light by the speaker's scathing comparison of the Santhals' poverty with the opulent lifestyle of the Diku's. The land's profit is not reinvested in the community in the form of infrastructure, healthcare, or schools, demonstrating both parties' willful disregard for their welfare obligations. Furthermore, the land being destroyed, turned "upside down, inside out" is a metaphor for a more profound damage. It symbolizes the loss of memory, cultural

continuity, and spiritual belonging in addition to the loss of habitat. According to Santhal cosmology, land is a living thing connected to ancestry, festivals, and communal life rather than a commodity. Therefore, its violation is also a spiritual injury. As Anjana Singh observes:

Represented as communities whose existence is intertwined with 'Jal, Jungle, Jameen' (water, forest, and land), Adivasis are the most prominent communities facing dispossession and displacement from their roots to further the ideology of development in which they have no stake. (Singh)

This violence is ontological. Adivasi ways of knowing and being are denied when holy landscapes are turned into commodities for the market. By forcing mechanical capitalist logic upon a community that has historically been governed by ecological and seasonal cycles, the use of machines becomes representative of a development model that disregards the rhythm of indigenous life. The story emphasizes the lack of accountability and justice. State agencies, environmental regulators, and the judiciary institutions designed to protect indigenous peoples' rights are either complicit or remain silent. The result is a multi-layered system of dispossession that includes legal, environmental, and economic aspects. Both the mainstream media and the prevailing socio-political discourses, which extol industrialization while downplaying the costs borne by marginalized groups, fail to acknowledge the Adivasi experience.

Murmu calls for a radical rethinking of what progress is and whose lives are considered

expendable in its pursuit by giving voice to these exclusions. The story exposes the intersection of caste and religion with Adivasi marginalization, criticizing the political co-optation. Santhals are exploited economically and culturally by the dominant Hindus in towns, who value them only as performers or voters. The speaker emphasizes that such groups' "assistance" frequently comes with restrictions, such as giving up Santhal traditions like eating beef or drinking haandi and switching to a caste-marked form of Hinduism called Safa-Hor that still views Adivasis as inferior. Sarna religion and identity are displaced as a result of this forced assimilation, which causes cultural erasure. The loss of rootedness and belonging is summed up by the expression "people from nowhere," which also shows how religion and development can be used as instruments of alienation.

Hindus live around Pakur town or in other places. Those few Hindus here, who live in Santhal villages, belong to the lower castes. They too are powerless and outnumbered. But why would the Hindus help us? The rich Hindus living in Pakur town are only interested in our land. They are only interested in making us sing and dance at their weddings. If they come to help us, they will say that we Santhals need to stop eating cow-meat and pig-meat, that we need to stop drinking haandi. (Shekhar 116)

Adding to this, the story exposes the ingrained systems of cultural dominance found in caste and religious structures. Santhal autonomy and self-definition are threatened by the drive for conversion and

cultural conformity, which serves as a kind of symbolic violence. Dominant groups eliminate the diversity of indigenous identities and create strict dichotomies that support social and political control by portraying Santhals as either "Kiristan" or "almost Safa-Hor." It is associated with electoral politics, as tribals are used as "vote banks," turning cultural survival into political capital. Murmu highlights how critical it is to defend indigenous identities and faiths against assimilationist forces.

The environmental destruction caused by coal mining on Santhal lands and lives is vividly depicted in this text. The ubiquitous "blackness" represents the widespread pollution that changes the community's cultural and social fiber in addition to the physical landscape. A loss of vitality and legacy is reflected in the blackened forms of the earth, plants, and even traditional home décor. The pictures of kids covered in coal dust and their eyes burning "like embers" highlight the pain and health risks associated with mining activities. Building on this critic Victor Narzary points out that

“Land, forest, village, community and territory are integral to tribal identity ... Any disruption of this relationship between the tribal peoples and their lands do not bode well for the continuance of the tribal identity” (Narzary). Furthermore, the socio-economic issues brought on by poverty and dispossession is highlighted by the community's obsession with stealing and selling coal. This illustrates the close connection between economic exploitation and environmental deterioration.

It is this coal, sir, which is gobbling us up bit by bit. There is a blackness—deep, indelible—all along the Koyla Road. The trees and shrubs in our village bear black leaves. Our ochre earth has become black. The stones, the rocks, the sand, all black. The tiles on the roofs of our huts have lost their fire-burnt red. The vines and flowers and peacocks we Santhals draw on the outer walls of our houses are black. Our children—dark-skinned as they are—are forever covered with fine black dust. (Shekhar 117)

The paradox of development in the face of extreme poverty is encapsulated in the story. For the Santhals, the black coal, a representation of economic worth, also serves as a destructive force poisoning their bodies and surroundings. The community's relationship to nature, which is essential to their cultural identity, is weakened by the ecological devastation, which upends traditional ways of existence. Systemic neglect and the lack of sustainable livelihoods are reflected in the fact that even youngsters are engaged in coal theft. The community is caught in cycles of exploitation due to lack of education, an empowering tool. The story also highlights how the Santhals bear the burden of environmental and social expenses, subtly criticizing the larger political economy that prioritizes profit over the welfare of indigenous people.

Did I tell you? I was once a farmer. Once. My sons farm now. The eldest stays back to work our fields while the other two migrate seasonally to Namal, along with their families. I used to

compose songs. I still do. And I still maintain a dance troupe. Though it is not a regular one, the kind I had earlier, some fifteen–twenty years ago, when I was younger and full of energy, enthusiasm and hope. Matiajore, Patharkola, Amrapara—I had singers and dancers and musicians from all these villages. (Shekhar 118-119)

Murmu's sentimental look back at his days as a farmer and cultural leader stands in stark contrast to the current state of affairs, which is characterized by shattered livelihoods and weakened communal ties. Reflecting the consequences brought on by displacement and contemporary demands, the once-thriving dance troupe, a crucial platform for cultural expression and group identity, has diminished. This story emphasizes how traditional customs are linked to land and community, and how their deterioration reflects the Santhals' broader loss of hope and vitality as a result of continuous marginalization. This highlights how culture is passed down through generations and how socio-economic shifts endanger it.

The significance of oral traditions in conserving Santhal history, values, and identity is reflected in the speaker's roles as a composer and troupe leader. His current troupe's smaller size, however, represents the splintering of social ties brought on by migration and land loss. Once lively manifestations of happiness and defiance, their music and dance now fight for survival in the face of adversity and uncertainty. Since these artistic endeavors function as acts of affirmation and resistance against erasure, this fall is not only cultural but also political.

The Santhal community's deep sense of loss and disintegration as a result of political and administrative reform is reflected in this text. Santhal Pargana's dissolution and Jharkhand's split from Bihar represent not just geographical splits but also the breakdown of social cohesiveness and cultural oneness. The speaker yearns for a period of widespread acceptance and hope, when Santhal performances were honored throughout cities and even other regions as a gesture of appreciation for their cultural contributions. But this unity has been undermined by the division caused by political manipulation—"breaking down districts" for the benefit of outsiders.

Administrative regulations can be used as instruments of control, undermining indigenous agency and community pride, as this story clearly illustrates. Economic challenges compel Santhals to perform at Diku (non-Adivasi) festivals, where their art is frequently disregarded or underappreciated, despite the fact that their music and dance are sacrosanct. Non-Adivasi communities assert the cultural identity and advantages of Jharkhand, yet they demand Adivasis to be the only ones to perform as representatives of "Jharkhandi culture." Adivasi customs are tokenized and commercialized for public exhibition, yet they are not valued or properly incorporated, exposing a fundamental cultural hierarchy.

The story underscores disparities and the degradation of indigenous dignity under socio-economic pressures by criticizing the selective appropriation and exclusion of Adivasis from social and economic privileges in spite of their cultural contributions. This

conflict highlights more general concerns about Jharkhand's identity, cultural sovereignty, and structural marginalization. "Our music, our dance, our songs are sacred to us Santhals. But hunger and poverty has driven us to sell what is sacred to us. When my boys perform at a Diku wedding, I am so foolish, I expect everyone to pay attention. Which Diku pays attention to our music? (Shekhar 120). Adding to this Murmu highlights the psychological and emotional toll on the Santhals, who, in spite of their crucial cultural function, feel ignored and devalued. The lack of response to the performers' aspirations for recognition reflects a larger cultural contempt for Adivasi identity feeds a vicious cycle in which indigenous culture loses its underlying meaning and sanctity and is converted to entertainment for non-Adivasi audiences. The mention of other ethnic groups claiming control over Jharkhand's culture highlights tensions between communities and cultural appropriation, further exacerbating the power disparity. The story criticizes the Adivasis' institutional marginalization and cultural commodification and calls for a fairer acknowledgment of their legacy that upholds their identity and dignity in the sociopolitical context of Jharkhand and it effectively conveys the artist's struggle to balance emotional demands with practical needs. "What does a hungry man need? Food. What does a poor man need? Money. So, here I was, needing both. And recognition too. We artistes are greedy people. We are hungry for acceptance, some acknowledgement, some remembrance" (Shekhar 120-121). Food and money are the narrator's two most pressing demands, which highlight the hard realities of

poverty that influence cultural performances. Beyond just survival, however, there is a deep desire for approval and acknowledgment, which exposes the artist's frailty and basic human need for respect. Both hope and desperation are evident in the eagerness to accept the performance offer in spite of obstacles like travel in uncomfortable surroundings.

The narrator's inner excitement and expectation contrast with the vision of Santhals darkened by dust, which highlights their neglected condition. This eloquently demonstrates the close relationship between indigenous performers' pursuit of cultural recognition and economic necessity. The systematic displacement that indigenous groups like the Santhals, Paharias, and low-caste Hindus experience is highlighted in this story. Eleven villages were forcibly evicted by the district government, exposing a pattern of land dispossession that jeopardizes the communities' identity, livelihoods, and cultural existence. The villagers' bewilderment highlights their vulnerable status and lack of control over decisions impacting their ancestral grounds. This highlights the tension between traditional living and state-driven modernization, critically exposing the continuous fight for land rights and the sociopolitical difficulties marginalized rural communities in Jharkhand endure. Ram Dayal Munda, a prominent Indian tribal activist and scholar, asserts:

To separate the Adivasi from his land is to stop his breathing. If you want to see an Adivasi's extinction, take him away from his land — as it is happening at present. It is a strange irony that when

the Adivasi could lead a life of self-reliance, he is being compelled to become disabled and parasitic. The Adivasi, after having been uprooted from his land through the establishment of big projects in the name of public interest and national development, is ending up in slums in the peripheries of modern cosmopolitan cities as an army of landless labourers and domestic servants losing altogether their self-reliance and self-esteem.

The glaring inconsistency and insensitivity of government officials to the lived circumstances of the Santhals are revealed in this story. The trauma of displacement that affects the artists and their communities is ignored by officials, instead their emphasis is on the significance of the cultural performance for VIPs: “They asked me to keep working for the show. They never forgot to remind me that this show was of the utmost importance, that we were going to perform before some very important people” (Shekhar 122). There is a troubling gap between political ambitions and the mental health of indigenous people, as evidenced by the forced expectation to sing and dance in the midst of such misery. Despite dire threats to the community, the tokenistic exploitation of Adivasi culture as a spectacle for official events is highlighted by the narrator's dissatisfaction. This paradox highlights structural marginalization, when resolving urgent social injustices like land dispossession and displacement is subordinated to cultural exhibition.

But the papers carried glowing reports, along with pictures, of the roads which

were being repaired or rebuilt in Ranchi and Dumka. Breathlessly, they reported that the President would stay in Jharkhand for three days. He would spend day one in Ranchi. On day two, he would preside over a university convocation in Dumka. On day three, he would visit Godda, lay the foundation stone, and fly out of Jharkhand. (Shekhar 123)

The story presents a sharp contrast between the media's jubilant storylines and the harsh reality of forced displacement. Official reports concentrate on infrastructure development and the President's visit, hiding the human cost behind glossy headlines as police brutality wreak havoc on the Santhal villages. Villages are being demolished for a symbolic foundation stone ceremony, which emphasizes how political spectacle is valued more highly than the rights and welfare of indigenous people. A very pertinent question is raised in the most poignant way: “We have nowhere to go, nowhere to grow our crops. How can this power plant be good for us? And how can we Adivasis dance and be happy? Unless we are given back our homes and land, we will not sing and dance. We Adivasis will not dance. The Adivasi will not—’ (Shekhar 125). Murmu criticizes governmental propaganda that ignores the severe trauma inflicted on Adivasi communities in favor of sanitizing oppression and framing unsustainable development as progress. This contradiction reveals the ways in which governmental and media work together to silence dissent and hide the pain of indigenous people, thus sustaining structural injustice in the name of modernization and patriotism.

The forced relocation brought on by the power plant project is directly and poignantly protested in the final parts of the story. It emphasizes the contradiction between the terrible realities of dispossession, loss of livelihood, and cultural erasure that the Adivasis face and the government's promises of progress. Cultural expression and socio-political dignity are inextricably linked, as demonstrated by the reluctance to perform without justice. At this point, agency is being reclaimed, and tokenistic cultural displays under oppressive conditions are being rejected. It questions the development narrative, calling for reparations and acknowledgment, and claiming that rights and justice are inextricably linked to cultural identity. This highlights that genuine cultural expression cannot flourish in the face of injustice and encapsulates the conflict between indigenous resistance and imposed progress. Murmu makes a strong statement of political agency and self-respect by refusing to sing and dance until houses and land have been restored. It criticizes the vacuous claims made by politicians who disregard the misery and displacement caused by infrastructure projects in favor of equating them with advancement. Murmu questions the state's narrative and demands accountability by speaking directly to the President, turning the performance into a protest. This is part of a larger fight for indigenous rights and acknowledgment against exploitative development

“The Adivasi Will Not Dance” is a critique of cultural exploitation and marginalization in the socio-political environment of Jharkhand, highlighting the agonizing paradox that Adivasi dance and music, which

are considered sacred and essential to their identity, are commercialized for the amusement of outsiders, particularly at political events, and painfully reminding that true respect and admiration for Adivasis are lacking. Despite being forced to be visible, the metaphor of dancing at political events, where attention is limited, emphasizes cultural invisibility. The story also emphasizes how non-Adivasis have appropriated Jharkhand's identity in order to assert their supremacy over the region's native resources and culture. This exposes systemic cultural alienation and demands that Adivasi rights be recognized beyond mere tokenistic demonstrations, while ironically denying them access to economic and political advantages and placing all the weight of portraying "Jharkhandi culture" on them.

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### **A Limelight on the Navajo Tribes as delineated by Leslie Marmon Silko's *Lullaby* and *Storyteller***

*The Navajo, or Diné, are among the largest and stupendous Native American tribal clan in the US, residing primarily in the Southwestern regions exquisitely known for their rich cultural heritage, including their thriving traditional crafts like weaving and silversmithing, and deep ties to their land. The Navajo language has embodied its significance because of the role it sought to play in WWII as Code Talkers created an unbreakable military code. Their society is matrilineal, and is downtrodden by modern challenges which includes economic development, health disparities, and environmental issues; yet they strive for cultural preservation and sovereignty. Leslie Marmon Silko's "Lullaby" and "Storyteller" provide a poignant and intricate portrayal of the Navajo tribes' lives, capturing their cultural essence and struggles. This paper resonates the significance of the stories within "Lullaby" and "Storyteller" revealing the resilience of Navajo culture in the face of external pressures and the ardent role of storytelling in preserving the cultural heritage. Silko's evocative prose and deep empathy for her characters invite readers to engage with the complexities of Navajo life, acknowledging both the suffering and the enduring spirit of the Navajo people. Through her depiction, Silko affirms the power of narrative as a means of cultural survival and resistance which is the embodying quintessence of this paper.*

**Key Words:** Sovereignty, Imperialism, Cultural Essence, Matrilineal, Quintessence

#### **Preface:**

The Navajo Nation, the largest federally recognized tribe in the United States, had faced quite atrocities since the century with the advent of the imperialistic temperaments but the most current and significant challenge is their resilience and progress throughout the COVID-19 pandemic era as exacerbated as one of the highly vaccinated domains in the US. Economic development is intertwined to be one key focuses for Navajo leadership. Balancing traditional practices with modern economic needs, the Navajo Nation emphasizes the preservation of its language

and culture, which are crucial to its identity and resilience. In her works "Lullaby" and "Storyteller," Leslie Marmon Silko portrays the hope of the Navajo people through themes of resilience, cultural continuity, and the strength derived from storytelling and tradition. The lullaby Ayah sings in "lullaby" symbolizes the enduring connection to her culture and the natural world, providing her with a sense of peace and this act serves as a means of preserving cultural identity and instilling hope for the future, even amidst adversity. "Storyteller" emphasizes the importance of storytelling as

a means of cultural preservation and resilience. The narratives within this collection highlight the role of stories in maintaining the Navajo people's history, values, and identity. Overall, Silko's works underscore the idea that hope for the Navajo people lies in the preservation of their cultural practices and the strength of their communal bonds, which are sustained through storytelling and traditional songs. These elements provide a foundation for resilience and a vision for a hopeful future despite the challenges they face.

### **Background**

Leslie Marmon Silko is a renowned Native American writer of Laguna Pueblo, Mexican, and Anglo-American heritage, best known for her novels, essays, and poetry. Her writing delves into issues of identity, tradition, and the intersection of Native American culture with the modern world. Through her storytelling, she sheds light on the complexities of Native American life, including the impact of colonization, the importance of oral tradition, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Silko's connection to the Navajo community lies in her engagement with broader Indigenous experiences and her advocacy for Native American rights and representation. "Storyteller" by Leslie Marmon Silko is a collection of poems, short stories, and traditional tales that explore the rich cultural heritage of the Laguna Pueblo people. It weaves together themes of identity, tradition, and the power of storytelling to preserve culture and connect generations. "Lullaby," one of the stories in the collection, focuses on a Native American woman's struggles with her mixed heritage and her journey to find her

place in the world. The story beautifully intertwines personal experiences with larger themes of cultural preservation and the impact of colonization on indigenous communities.

### **Historical Backdrop**

The Navajo, or Diné, have a rich history spanning thousands of years, with roots in the Four Corners region. The Navajo have endured various challenges, including conflicts with Spanish colonizers, forced relocation known as the Long Walk, and assimilation efforts by the U.S. government. Despite these hardships, they have preserved their language, culture, and traditions, and today, the Navajo Nation is one of the largest and most influential Native American tribes in the United States. In Leslie Marmon Silko's works, particularly "Lullaby" and "Storyteller," she offers a nuanced exploration of Navajo history, culture, and identity. In "Lullaby," Silko delves into the intergenerational trauma caused by historical events such as the Long Walk of the Navajo, during which thousands were forcibly relocated by the U.S. government. She portrays how these traumas continue to impact Navajo families and communities, highlighting themes of loss, survival, and healing. In "Storyteller," Silko further explores Navajo culture through a collection of interconnected stories. She presents the power of storytelling as a means of preserving traditions, passing down wisdom, and reclaiming cultural identity in the face of assimilation pressures. Through these narratives, Silko celebrates the resilience and vitality of Navajo culture, emphasizing its enduring significance in the modern world. Overall, Silko's portrayal of Navajo history in

"Lullaby" and "Storyteller" offers a multifaceted perspective that honours the complexities of Navajo identity while shedding light on the enduring strength of the Navajo people in the face of adversity.

### **Themes Investigated:**

In Leslie Marmon Silko's "Lullaby" and "Storyteller," several prominent themes are explored, each revealing insights into Navajo culture, history, and identity. Here are some of the key themes investigated in detail:

1. **Cultural Preservation and Identity:** Silko's works delve into the importance of preserving Navajo culture and identity in the face of external pressures and historical traumas. Through the retelling of traditional stories, rituals, and language, characters in both "Lullaby" and "Storyteller" seek to maintain a connection to their heritage and resist assimilation.
2. **Intergenerational Trauma:** The impact of historical events such as the Long Walk and government assimilation policies reverberates through generations in Silko's narratives. Characters grapple with the lingering effects of displacement, loss, and cultural suppression, highlighting the resilience required to navigate the legacy of trauma.
3. **Power of Storytelling:** Central to both works is the role of storytelling as a means of healing, empowerment, and cultural continuity. Silko celebrates the oral tradition of the Navajo people, emphasizing how stories serve as repositories of wisdom, identity, and communal solidarity.
4. **Nature and Landscape:** The natural world holds deep significance in Navajo culture, and Silko vividly portrays the landscapes of the Southwest as integral to the characters'

experiences and spiritual connection. Descriptions of the land, animals, and elements evoke a sense of reverence and interconnectedness with the environment.

5. **Spirituality and Belief Systems:** Navajo spirituality and traditional belief systems are interwoven throughout Silko's narratives. Characters engage in rituals, ceremonies, and interactions with spiritual beings, reflecting a worldview that emphasizes harmony, balance, and respect for the spiritual realm.

6. **Family and Community Dynamics:** Relationships within families and communities play a central role in shaping characters' identities and experiences. Silko explores themes of kinship, duty, and loyalty, as well as tensions arising from generational differences, cultural shifts, and outside influences.

7. **Colonialism and Resistance:** Silko confronts the enduring legacy of colonialism and the ongoing struggles for autonomy and self-determination faced by Indigenous peoples. Characters in "Lullaby" and "Storyteller" navigate complex power dynamics, contesting dominant narratives and asserting agency in the face of oppression. By examining these themes in detail, Silko's works offer a nuanced portrayal of Navajo history, culture, and resilience, inviting readers to engage with the complexities of Indigenous experiences in the modern world.

### **Contrasting character exploration**

In Leslie Marmon Silko's "Lullaby" and "Storyteller," the characters are intricately woven into the fabric of Navajo culture and history, each representing different facets of identity, resilience, and the complexities of

Indigenous experiences. Here's an in-depth exploration of some key characters:

1. **Ayah**: The protagonist of "Lullaby," Ayah is an elderly Navajo woman who reflects on her life's struggles and losses. Through her eyes, readers witness the enduring impact of historical traumas such as the Long Walk and the loss of her children to assimilationist policies. Ayah embodies resilience and quiet strength, finding solace in her memories and connection to the land.
2. **Chato**: Ayah's husband, Chato, is a World War II veteran grappling with the trauma of his wartime experiences and the challenges of returning to reservation life. His struggles with alcoholism and internal conflicts underscore the broader themes of cultural dislocation and intergenerational trauma.
3. **Tayo**: While not a direct character in "Lullaby" or "Storyteller," Tayo is the protagonist of Silko's novel "Ceremony," which shares thematic connections with her other works. As a mixed-race Laguna Pueblo and white man, Tayo embodies the complexities of cultural identity and the search for healing in the aftermath of war and colonialism.
4. **Various Storytellers**: In "Storyteller," Silko presents a diverse cast of characters who serve as storytellers, each contributing to the rich tapestry of Navajo oral tradition. These storytellers represent different generations, perspectives, and storytelling styles, highlighting the continuity and adaptability of Navajo culture across time.
5. **Grandmother and Grandfather**: In "Storyteller," the narrator's grandparents play a central role in shaping their understanding of Navajo culture and tradition. Through their

teachings and anecdotes, they impart wisdom, values, and a sense of connection to the past, reinforcing the importance of oral storytelling in preserving cultural knowledge.

6. **Mix of Traditional and Contemporary Characters**: Silko's characters inhabit a world where traditional ways of life intersect with modern realities. From elderly matriarchs like Ayah to young activists advocating for Indigenous rights, Silko presents a diverse range of characters navigating the complexities of identity, heritage, and cultural preservation in a rapidly changing world.

By exploring the lives and experiences of these characters in depth, Silko's "Lullaby" and "Storyteller" offer a nuanced portrayal of Navajo culture, history, and resilience, inviting readers to engage with the challenges and triumphs of Indigenous peoples in the face of adversity. The pungent quotes capture the thematic richness and evocative language present in Silko's works, offering insights into the power of storytelling, the interconnectedness of the natural world, and the enduring significance of cultural memory and tradition.

#### **Narrative Technique**

Leslie Marmon Silko employs various narrative techniques in "Lullaby" and "Storyteller" to weave together complex stories that blend traditional Navajo storytelling with modern literary forms. An in-depth exploration of some of these techniques are as follows:

1. **Oral Tradition and Storytelling**: Both "Lullaby" and "Storyteller" are deeply rooted in the oral tradition of the Navajo people. Silko incorporates elements of traditional storytelling, such as repetition, symbolism,

and vivid imagery, to evoke a sense of continuity with Navajo cultural practices. By framing her narratives as oral retellings of stories passed down through generations, Silko imbues her works with a timeless quality that resonates with the oral traditions of Indigenous peoples.

2. Interconnected Narratives: "Storyteller" features a mosaic of interconnected narratives, each offering a different perspective on Navajo culture, history, and identity. Silko seamlessly weaves together multiple storylines, characters, and themes, creating a rich tapestry of storytelling that reflects the diverse and multifaceted nature of Navajo oral tradition.

3. Layered Storytelling: Silko employs a technique of layered storytelling, where stories within stories unfold, revealing deeper layers of meaning and complexity. Characters in both "Lullaby" and "Storyteller" recount traditional myths, personal anecdotes, and historical events, blurring the boundaries between past and present, reality and myth, and individual and collective experiences.

4. Cyclical Structure: Silko often structures her narratives in cyclical patterns, mirroring the cyclical rhythms of nature and traditional Navajo cosmology. Themes, motifs, and imagery recur throughout her works, creating a sense of continuity and interconnectedness across time and space.

5. Mix of Prose and Poetry: Silko's writing style is characterized by a blend of prose and poetic language, creating a lyrical and evocative narrative voice. Her use of vivid sensory imagery, metaphor, and symbolism

imbues her stories with a rich sensory texture that engages the reader's imagination and emotions.

6. Intertextuality and Cultural References: Silko incorporates a range of intertextual references to Navajo myths, rituals, and cultural practices, enriching her narratives with layers of cultural meaning and significance. By drawing on traditional Navajo storytelling conventions and cultural symbolism, Silko situates her works within a broader cultural context while also challenging Western literary norms and conventions. Overall, Silko's narrative techniques in "Lullaby" and "Storyteller" reflect her commitment to preserving and revitalizing Navajo oral traditions while also engaging with contemporary literary forms and themes. Through her innovative storytelling techniques, Silko creates immersive and thought-provoking narratives that invite readers to explore the complexities of Navajo culture, history, and identity.

### **Result**

In conclusion, the depiction of Navajo life in Leslie Marmon Silko's works "Lullaby" and "Storyteller" offers a rich and multifaceted exploration of Navajo culture, history, and identity. Through her masterful storytelling techniques, Silko brings to life the complexities of Navajo life, weaving together traditional narratives, personal anecdotes, and historical events to create immersive and evocative narratives. One of the central themes explored in both works is the enduring impact of historical traumas such as the Long Walk and government assimilation policies on Navajo families and communities. Silko's characters grapple with the legacy of displacement, loss, and cultural

suppression, highlighting the resilience and strength required to navigate these challenges while maintaining a connection to their heritage. Additionally, Silko celebrates the power of storytelling as a means of preserving cultural traditions, passing down wisdom, and reclaiming cultural identity in the face of assimilation pressures. Through the retelling of traditional Navajo myths and rituals, characters in "Lullaby" and "Storyteller" assert their agency and assert the importance of cultural continuity in the modern world. Furthermore, Silko's narratives offer a nuanced portrayal of Navajo spirituality, kinship, and community dynamics, emphasizing the interconnectedness of individuals with each other and with the natural world. Her evocative descriptions of the Southwestern landscape and its inhabitants underscore the deep spiritual connection that Navajo people have with their environment. Overall, Silko's depiction of Navajo life in "Lullaby" and "Storyteller" serves as a powerful testament to the resilience, vitality,

and cultural richness of the Navajo people. Through her poignant narratives, Silko invites readers to engage with the complexities of Navajo history and identity, while also highlighting the importance of cultural preservation and solidarity in the face of adversity.

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### **Tribal Resources and People Development in Kerala: Initiatives of Haritha Keralam Mission.**

*Kerala's Haritha Keralam Mission (HKM), launched in 2016 as part of the Nava Kerala agenda, is a state-level initiative focusing on water conservation, waste management, organic farming, and ecological restoration. While the mission is largely environmental in orientation, its programs intersect with the developmental priorities of tribal (Adivasi) communities across Kerala. This article examines how HKM initiatives contribute to tribal development by promoting water security, sustainable agriculture, and livelihood opportunities. Drawing on government documents, secondary literature, and case studies of Kudumbashree tribal initiatives, the study explores synergies between environmental restoration and socio-economic inclusion. The findings suggest that HKM has created enabling platforms for tribal households, yet significant gaps persist in targeted inclusion, market linkages, and culturally sensitive implementation. Policy recommendations are proposed to institutionalize tribal-specific modules within HKM, strengthen coordination with the Scheduled Tribe Development Department, and adapt monitoring frameworks to capture socio-economic as well as ecological outcomes.*

**Keywords:** *Haritha Keralam Mission, tribal development, sustainable livelihoods, Kerala, Adivasi, organic farming, waste management*

#### **Introduction**

Kerala's Scheduled Tribe (ST) population constitutes approximately 1.45% of the state's demographic profile, with significant concentrations in Wayanad, Idukki, and Palakkad districts (Government of Kerala, 2020). Despite Kerala's high human development indicators, tribal communities face persistent challenges including poverty, land alienation, food insecurity, and limited access to sustainable livelihoods (Prakash, 2019). In this context, environmental and livelihood-focused interventions offer

promising avenues for inclusive development.

The Haritha Keralam Mission (HKM), inaugurated in December 2016, is one of the four flagship initiatives of the Nava Kerala framework. Designed to rejuvenate water resources, promote waste management, expand organic agriculture, and restore ecological health, the mission creates platforms that intersect directly with tribal development goals.

#### **Literature Review**

Research on tribal development in Kerala has emphasized integrated approaches combining education, health, livelihoods, and environmental management (IIM Kozhikode, 2017). Programs such as the Wayanad Initiative highlight the importance of aligning development with traditional knowledge systems and ecological contexts (Nair & Thomas, 2018).

Environmental restoration missions, including HKM, are increasingly recognized as vehicles for socio-economic transformation. Studies have shown that waste management units (Haritha Karma Sena), organic farming campaigns (Haritha Samrudhi), and green island programs can generate employment and strengthen community cohesion (Sasidharan, 2020). However, literature also identifies gaps in targeted tribal inclusion, with many interventions designed in a “one-size-fits-all” manner (Menon, 2021).

The Kudumbashree Mission provides complementary evidence: tribal women’s collectives engaged in organic cultivation, non-timber forest product (NTFP) enterprises, and waste management have achieved modest but tangible outcomes in empowerment and livelihood resilience (George, 2019). Yet, sustainability depends on access to markets, capacity-building, and institutional convergence with state missions like HKM

The Haritha Keralam Mission's activities include promoting organic farming, water conservation through projects like the "Ini Njan Ozhukatte" campaign, and scientific waste management, but it also supports tribal

areas by prioritizing Scheduled Tribe (ST) entrepreneurs for agro-based ventures like mushroom and ginger cultivation, value addition, processing, and marketing of agricultural products from tribal regions. While the mission's focus is broad, specific programs under the Scheduled Tribes Development Department (STDD) are designed to integrate tribal communities into its eco-friendly agricultural and livelihood initiatives.

### **Statement of the problem**

Kerala has consistently been recognized for its high human development indicators and leadership in environmental sustainability. However, tribal communities (Adivasis), who constitute approximately 1.45% of the state’s population, continue to face persistent challenges such as land alienation, livelihood insecurity, food vulnerability, and limited participation in mainstream development programs. The Haritha Keralam Mission (HKM), launched in 2016, was envisioned as a comprehensive environmental initiative focusing on water conservation, waste management, organic farming, and ecological restoration.

Despite its broad scope, the mission’s direct and sustained impact on the socio-economic development of tribal populations remains underexplored. Many HKM interventions are generalized and risk neglecting the cultural and ecological specificities of tribal households. Furthermore, the absence of systematic convergence between HKM and the Scheduled Tribes Development Department (STDD) has led to gaps in targeted inclusion, monitoring, and market

linkages. This raises a critical problem: to what extent has HKM contributed to sustainable tribal resource management and livelihood development, and how can the mission be redesigned to ensure culturally sensitive and socially inclusive outcomes?

### Scope of the study

The scope of this study is outlined along four dimensions:

1. **Geographical Scope.** The study focuses on tribal-concentrated districts of Kerala, particularly Wayanad, Idukki, and Palakkad. Specific reference is also made to the High Range Mountain Landscape (IHRML–UNDP project), where HKM has been implemented in partnership with state and international agencies.
2. **Thematic Scope.** The analysis encompasses HKM’s core areas of intervention—organic farming, water conservation, waste management, and ecological restoration. Emphasis is placed on their intersections with tribal livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, and community inclusion.
3. **Time Frame.** The study covers the period from HKM’s inception in 2016 to the most recent initiatives documented up to 2022.
4. **Data Scope.** This study is based on secondary data, including government reports, academic research, and documented case studies, in order to assess trends, opportunities, and challenges in

aligning HKM with tribal development.

### Relevance of the study

The significance of this study can be discussed across four levels:

1. **Policy Relevance.** The study offers evidence for policymakers to institutionalize tribal-specific modules within HKM, strengthen coordination with STDD, and adapt monitoring frameworks to capture ecological as well as socio-economic outcomes.

2. **Practical Relevance.** The findings provide actionable insights for local self-governments, tribal cooperatives, and civil society organizations to design livelihood strategies that are ecologically sustainable and culturally sensitive.

3. **Academic Relevance.** The study contributes to the limited scholarship on the intersection between environmental restoration and tribal development, positioning Kerala as a case study for inclusive sustainability missions.

4. **Developmental Relevance.** Since Kerala has consistently topped NITI Aayog’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Index (2018–2021), it is imperative to critically assess whether such achievements extend to marginalized communities, ensuring

equity in the trajectory of sustainable development.

### Objectives of the study

1. To analyze the initiatives of the Haritha Keralam Mission (HKM) in relation to the conservation of biodiversity and natural resources in tribal-dominated areas of Kerala.

2. To examine the role of HKM in promoting sustainable livelihoods among tribal households through organic farming, water conservation, waste management, and ecological restoration.

### Relevance of the study

Government of Kerala has been focusing on the sustainable development issues through its traditional machinery of Local Self-Governing Departments (LSGDS), Department of Irrigation and Department of Rural development. They were given operational flexibility in chalking out plans for sustainable development and its execution. The projects were monitored and supervised by the respective departmental heads. With the launch of *Haritha Kerala Mission* in 2016, the entire projects on sustainable environment development in the state was brought under the armpit of this Mission. It is worth noting that as an endorsement of *Haritha Kerala Mission* functioning, NITI Ayog has listed the state in the first position in the ranking of states with respect to sustainable development in India, consecutively in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021. In Niti Aayog SDG India index 2021 Kerala retained the top rank with a score of 75. This is for the fourth time Kerala bagged this position consecutively. The state acquired this position after the implementation of

HKM. Haritha Kerala Mission play an important role in the development of tribal people and conservation of resources.

### Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature and purely based on secondary data. The secondary data collected from various publications, journals, Government reports and websites.

### Specific activities relevant to tribal areas

- **Support for Tribal Entrepreneurs:** The STDD, in collaboration with programs like the Haritha Keralam Mission, gives priority to ST entrepreneurs and startups in agro-based ventures within their communities.
- **Farm Development and Value Addition:** This includes activities such as mushroom and ginger cultivation, spice farming, organic inputs, planting saplings, strengthening existing crops, infilling, and expanding plantations.
- **Modernization and Mechanization:** Projects focus on modernizing farms, mechanizing operations, and setting up hi-tech nurseries for agriculture.
- **Beekeeping and Honey Processing:** Scientific beekeeping and honey processing initiatives are undertaken to create new livelihoods for tribal communities.
- **Agro-Product Marketing:** Activities also extend to the processing, value addition, and marketing of agricultural products

originating from these tribal farms, ensuring economic benefits for the communities.

**Broader Haritha Keralam Mission activities that support tribal areas indirectly:**

- **Organic Farming:** Promotes organic farming methods on household lands, which is a key component of eco-friendly development initiatives that benefit all segments of society, including tribal populations.
- **Water Conservation:** Projects like restoring streams, rivers, and watersheds, along with water budget formulation and water quality testing, create a more sustainable environment, improving the overall living conditions in tribal areas.
- **Environmental Restoration:** Activities like creating man-made mini-forests (Pachathuruthu) contribute to the environmental well-being of the state, including its tribal regions.

**Role of Haritha Kerala Mission for Sustainable Development of Tribal Resources & People in Kerala: A Case Study of IHRML-UNDP Project**

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supports the implementation of the project “Sustainable Livelihood and Biodiversity Conservation through Multiuse Management of Anchunad and Adjoining Landscape”, with the funding from Global Environment Facility (GEF).

The objective of the project is to protect the biodiversity of the High Range Mountain Landscape in the southern Western Ghats in peninsular India. The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), through funding from Global Environment Facility (GEF) supports the implementation of the project. Haritha Keralam Mission is the special purpose vehicle for implementation of the project in the state. The Kerala State Forests and Wildlife Department has been entrusted the responsibility for carrying out activities in the forested areas.

The demarcated mountain landscape is host to a rich diversity of flora, a large part of it being endemic. The region harbours over 200 endemic plants, of which about 100 species are placed under various RET (Rare, Endangered and Threatened) categories by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). The endemic shrub *Strobilanthes kunthianus* (Neelakkurinji), which flowers once every 12 years and enchantingly carpets the entire mountain landscape of Eravikulam National Park and nearby areas with mauve blossoms, is widely known. Rare medicinal plants of economic potential are found in the region, particularly along the drier tract of Marayoor-Chinnar. The mountain landscape is also home to diverse fauna. Some, like the Nilgiri Tahr, Indian Elephant and Tiger are of conservational significance. Great Indian Hornbill, Black and Rufous flycatcher are the noteworthy avian inhabitants.

The High Ranges extend over an area of 600,000 ha. But the area of direct focus of

this project is around 259,878 ha. 265 species of butterflies, 72 species of fish, 79 species of mammals, 122 species of reptiles, 50 species of amphibians and 111 species of Odonata have been reported from the project landscape.

part of planning and implementation of local development activities by ensuring ownership of local communities and local governments, mainstreaming biodiversity concerns in local planning and implementation, and convergence of resources.

The project seeks to demonstrate how biodiversity concerns can become an integral

### Project Overview

Area	2,068.27 sq. km
Coverage	11 Panchayats in 4 Blocks
Households	43,527
Population	1,80,731
Tribal hamlets	141
Protected areas	6 (25,320 ha)
<u>HVBAs</u>	<u>79,300 ha</u>

**Implementation Mechanism:** The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), through funding from Global Environment Facility (GEF) supports the implementation of the project. Haritha Keralam Mission is the special purpose vehicle for implementation of the project in the state. The Kerala State Forests and Wildlife Department has been entrusted the responsibility for carrying out activities in the forested areas.

**Other Partners:** Local Self Government institutions, Relevant line departments, Civil society organisation, Research institutes.

**Proposed Landscape:** The project landscape is divided into four clusters comprising of 11 Grama Panchayats

Munnar Cluster	Anchunad Cluster	Kuttampuzha Cluster	Edamalakkudy Cluster
Chinnakanal	Vattavada	Mankulam	Edamalakkudy

Munnar	Kanthalloor	Kuttampuzha	
Devikulam	Marayoor	Athirappally	

## INTERVENTIONS BASED ON CLUSTERS

ANCHUNAD		
Grama Panchayaths	Focus Areas	Intended Biodiversity Benefits
Marayoor	Sustainable vegetable farming during cool seasons	Shifting to organic cultivation will improve habitat quality and ease the stress on biodiversity
	Promotion of homestead-based agroforestry for livelihood	Conservation of traditional seed varieties and wild allies of crops will improve agrobiodiversity and genetic stock of crops
Kanthalloor	Protection of traditional seed varieties and wild allies of cultivated crops and conservation of traditional knowledge on resources	Homestead-based agroforestry will lessen the pressure on natural habitats and also enhance conservation
Vattavada	Putting in place a decentralized Waste Management system and ensuring door	

	to door collection through Haritha Karma Sena (Kudumbashree Self Help Groups)	
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Source-(<http://haritham.kerala.gov.in/ihrml-undp-project-2/>)

<b>MUNNAR</b>		
<b>Grama Panchayaths</b>	<b>Focus Areas</b>	<b>Intended Biodiversity Benefits</b>
Chinnakanal	Adopting sustainable cultivation and processing practices by plantations, primarily tea plantations	Mainstreaming of ecology and biodiversity considerations in plantations management and tourism operation
Munnar	Converting exploitative model of tourism into more eco-friendly and high-value tourism to reduce impact on nature	Evolving sustainable management models for plantations, with focus on ecologically compatible operations and biodiversity conservation
	Adapting better solid waste management and sanitation practices to reduce harmful effects on water and soil	Evolving responsible tourism models with focus on biodiversity concerns and considerations
Devikulam		Through effective solid and liquid waste management, natural resources are protected and conserved by preventing solid and liquid waste reaching forest land and waterbodies

Source-(<http://haritham.kerala.gov.in/ihrml-undp-project-2/>)

<b>KUTTAMPUZHA</b>
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<b>Grama panchayaths</b>	<b>Focus Areas</b>	<b>Intended Biodiversity Benefits</b>
Mankulam	Reed-based sustainable livelihoods	Extension of organic cultivation will sustain habitat quality and biodiversity
Adimali	Carbon Neutral initiatives in Mankulam Panchayath	Organized development of agroforestry will enhance resource availability and ensure conservation of biodiversity
Kuttampuzha	Responsible Tourism initiatives	Interventions will lead to responsible tourism development with focus on biodiversity conservation
Athirappilly	Agroforestry models for conserving the biodiversity	Sustainable management and optimal extraction of reeds are ecologically rewarding

Source-(<http://haritham.kerala.gov.in/ihrml-undp-project-2/>)

<b>EDAMALAKKUDY</b>		
<b>Grama panchayaths</b>	<b>Focus Areas</b>	<b>Intended Biodiversity Benefits</b>
	Conservation of forest resources through sustainable harvest/extraction practices	Sustainable harvesting of NTFPs will ensure resource availability and biodiversity conservation

Edamalakkudy	Initialisation of value chain interventions for enabling access to premium markets for products	Interventions will conserve landraces and wild resources of cultivated crops
	Regeneration of degraded forest resources	Evolve a sustainable development model for a Panchayath situated within forested mountain landscape

Source-(<http://haritham.kerala.gov.in/ihrml-undp-project-2/>)

## **PROJECT OUTCOMES**

- 1.Strengthened capacities for community-based sustainable use and management of natural resources
- 2.Application of multiple use landscape management to secure the ecological integrity of high-range landscape
- 3.Commonly accepted governance framework for multiple-use high range landscape management evolved

### **Outcome 1 : Strengthened capacities for community based sustainable use and management of natural resources**

#### **Output**

#### **a .Capacities of Local Self Governments and community organizations developed to plan for sustainable resource use**

- 1.Workshops/meetings and consultations/discussions with relevant stakeholders on project related activities –  
(Government officials, Panchayat functionaries, elected representatives and community members)

2. Develop IEC products on project related activities

3. Training relevant stakeholders for mainstreaming BD considerations – (for Government officials, Panchayat functionaries elected representatives and community members)

4. Exposure visit of select stakeholders to other landscape approach-based conservation models

5 .Technical studies to establish baseline, assess impacts of current resource use practices in the landscape

#### **b. Sustainable resource use practices demonstrated for improved quality of life**

##### **Waste Management outside forest areas**

1. Implementation of “Green Munnar” Project for (Dumpsite clearance, treatment of bio & non-bio waste, campaigns for waste reduction, Septage treatment and Nallathanni river rejuvenation)

2. Waste Management interventions in Athirapilly and other GPs in the landscape
Water Resource Management 3 .Demonstration of measures for better water harvesting in the landscape based on the Integrated Watershed Management Plans prepared for 11 Gram Panchayats in consultation with all relevant stakeholders
4. Action based project to make Mankulam a carbon neutral Panchayat
<b>c.Enhanced products/services value chains developed for providing ecologically sustainable livelihood options</b>
1. Sustainable livelihood practices for Tribal communities NTFP (including branding & marketing of Vamasree shops & products), Bamboo & Reed Agri and allied sectors
2.Enhancement of reservoir fish production and creation of livelihood opportunities for the tribal community in Munnar Landscape through development of aquaculture practices of native species, Lemongrass value chain intervention, Sustainable Farming, Value addition and Market linkage of Tribal community at Athirappilly Medicinal plant-based value chain approach
3. Sustainable livelihood practices for farming community and supporting institutions Passion fruit value chain interventions Study and implementation on Market Mapping & Value Chain analysis of Veg and fruits Strengthening Farmer/ tribal institution for increasing their impact
4. Innovation and enterprise support around ecologically sustainable livelihoods options Green Innovation Fund Developing a farm tourism model around fruit cultivation Intervention in Jaggery value chain
<b>d. Community-based models developed for sustainable access and use of forest resources by local communities</b>
1. Developing a comprehensive strategy based on evaluation of socio-economic study of Edamalakudy
2. Implementation based on the comprehensive strategy for Edamalakudy
3. Facilitation in implementation of Community Forest Right in project landscape.
4. Technical Experts/Consultants extended to MoEFCC, Haritha Kerala Mission and State Forest Department (Salaries)
Outcome 2: Multiple use landscape management is applied to secure the ecological integrity of the High Range landscape Out put
a. Capacities of conservation and production sector personnel developed for applying landscape approaches in to sectoral planning and operations

1. Geospatial mapping of the landscape using high resolution satellite imagery and ground information (different sector & ecological attributes) Inventorying high value biodiversity areas & assessment of flora and fauna of selected sholas inside tea estate

2. Develop & validate state of sector documents for mainstreaming into the policies and practices of sectoral stakeholders (Tea, Coffee, Cardamom, Oil, Forest plantations and Tourism sectors)

b. Mainstreaming of bio-diversity concerns in key production sectors demonstrated

1. Demonstration of developed potential strategies in plantation sector (tea, cardamom, coffee, forest plantations)

2. Demonstration of developed potential strategies in Tourism sector in the landscape

3. Removal of invasive and exotic species and Eco- restoration of degraded locations outside forest areas

4. Adopting Soil stabilization measures outside forest, especially at identified landslide prone areas in Devikulam block such as along the National High Way from Munnar to Chinnakanal by planting vetiver, shola species and other deep-rooted species along the synforms.

**c. Best practices documented and disseminated for improving decision making on sustainable resource management and use**

1. Updating of State biodiversity strategies and action plan

2. Develop key policies and management framework/ decisions adopted at local and state level related to sustainable mountain landscape management

3. Technical Experts/Consultants extended to MoEFCC, HarithaKeralam Mission and State Forest Department (salaries)

**Outcome 3: Commonly accepted governance framework for multiple-use high range landscape management evolved**

**Output**

**a. Landscape level management plans and sustainable resource management systems in place**

**Improved Protected Area Management**

1. Measures to mitigate threats such as forest fire, road kills etc in biodiversity conservation

Technologies for monitoring wildlife movement - installation of thermal sensor at Malayattoor & Chalakkudy as part of reducing human wildlife conflict

2. Management and reduction of waste inside the forested areas supporting Green Grass Project

**b. Institutional platforms of multiple stakeholders evolved and strengthened at appropriate levels for planning and reviewing sustainable resource use**

. Training forest dependent communities, VSS, EDCs & frontline forest officials on:

Livelihood skill development (advanced wood working course to 25 tribal youth)

\* Eco tourism destination management: Visitor management and disaster risk reduction in eco-tourism destinations

- \* Local Action Plan for Climate Change in 8 FDAs (106 VSS & EDCs)
- \* Advanced community research improvement: census techniques & habitat monitoring protocol by giving training and involving tribal communities
- 2. Community based bird conservation at Thattekad and adjoining areas  
Conducting certified course on ornithology and birding for tribal youth  
Publishing book on bird in local language  
Developing Salim Ali sathram as heritage building
- 3. Strengthening of Chilla market through automation of existing market system- Establishing goods transportation facilities for tribal NTFPs and Agriculture produces from tribal settlements
- 4. Strengthening of RRT (Marayoor, Munnar & Malayattoor) in the landscape by providing improved facilities & establishing tool rooms
- 5. Establishing decision support system in the form of centralised digital database management of existing geospatial maps, studies, surveys, research publications and so on.
- 6. Upgradation of eco-tourism destination and interpretation centre to address the special needs and make them differently abled friendly at Athirappally and Thattekad including development of eco-tourism website for differently abled
- 7. Developing green building code with energy efficient facilities & piloting the same in the landscape (Divisional Office, Forest Station IB and Check post – one each)
- 8. Establishment of live museum at Marayoor
- 9. Facilitating landscape level multi stakeholder forum for sustainable landscape management  
Enhancing management effectiveness of HVBA

**c. Management effectiveness of designated biodiversity rich ecosystems are strengthened to address existing and emerging challenges to ecosystem conservation and services**

1. Establishment of cyber wildlife crime control cell at Forest Head Quarters
2. Review of Management Plan guidelines; Review of State Forest Policy  
Review and validation of METT and MEE scores of PAs within the project landscape to identify gaps
3. Developing eco-compatible habitat monitoring cell inside Eravikulam National Park  
Establishment of habitat and wildlife health monitoring cell at Thattekkad
4. Development of detailed project report - Centralized Hospital for Elephants at Vadakkanchery & State level Digital Forensic Lab at Forest Head Quarters  
Habitat Improvement – Strategies and Implementation
5. Removal of plantations (Wattle and Eucalyptus), Eradication of alien weeds, from PAs and outside PAs, Removal of alien species from the high altitude montane grassland (inside and outside the PAs), Restoration of identified vulnerable and degraded forest areas (including shola/ grasslands segments within PAs and other degraded areas including improvement of Nilgiri Tahr habitat in Meesappulimala (Removal of exotics and restoration of grasslands) & designing a long term sustainability plan for Nilgiri Tahr
6. Bamboo ecosystems -mapping of species, age and developing conservation measures( such as measures to prevent exotic invasion and forest fire) at Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary
7. Conservation of special habitat like Hornbill and Vayal ecosystems based on the recommendation

from the study titled ‘Ecosystem requirements of Hornbill’2019-2020

8.Reviving of aquatic ecosystems at Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary and establishing sustainable monitoring systems for improving the migratory bird habitat

9. Rejuvenation of flood affected Riparian vegetation (Stabilization of Riverbanks by rehabilitation centre; Establishment of Monkey Rescue Centre at Malayattoor

**d.Rare Endangered and Threatened (RET) ecosystems and endemic species are secured through improved conservation measures**

1. Establishment of nurseries with micro- propagation facility for RET species at Devikulam

2. Establishment of centralised grassland/shola/ nursery at Devikulam & Pampadumshola. Sandalwood nursery at Marayoor.

Riparian species nursery at Chalakkudy & Vazhachal

3.Technical Experts/Consultants extended to MoEFCC, Haritha Keralam Mission and State Forest Department (Salaries)

## CONCLUSION

The Haritha Keralam Mission (HKM) represents one of Kerala’s most ambitious sustainability initiatives, integrating waste management, water conservation, organic farming, and ecological restoration. It has provided opportunities for linking environmental conservation with tribal livelihood promotion in select regions of the state. Programs such as organic farming support, honey production, waste management units, and biodiversity conservation have created spaces for tribal communities to participate in sustainable development. These interventions have also highlighted the importance of tribal ecological knowledge and collective action in resource management.

However, the study reveals that the mission has not yet fully addressed the unique developmental needs of Adivasi communities. Many interventions remain generalized, and a lack of targeted strategies risks marginalizing tribal groups further.

Weak institutional convergence between HKM and the Scheduled Tribes Development Department continues to limit the inclusiveness of the mission. Additionally, gaps in market linkages and value-chain support reduce the long-term economic benefits for tribal households.

For HKM to become truly inclusive, it must prioritize culturally sensitive approaches, ensure tribal-specific modules, and strengthen institutional collaborations. Policymakers should focus on capacity-building, local governance participation, and the integration of tribal value chains into mainstream markets. By doing so, Kerala can reinforce its position as a leader in sustainable development while ensuring that tribal communities are not left behind. Ultimately, HKM has the potential to serve as a model for inclusive ecological governance where environmental goals are achieved alongside social justice and tribal empowerment.

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