Chapter 1

Introduction

The present study is about a tribal group mostly found in three states of South India, namely Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Though their presence is spread throughout different districts of these states, this study is limited to the Paniyas of Nilgiri districts of Tamil Nadu and Kannur district of Kerala. This study is to analyse the social structure, issues and challenges of the Paniyas in the context of modernization and their social change.

Tribals are homogeneous and indigenous communities in India. Many of them are still live in a primitive and an unsophisticated life style. Anthrologists call them ‘Aboriginal’ because they are living in the primitive life style. After the African countries, India has the largest tribal population in the world. According to Ponraj S.D. (1996:15) there are around 580 tribal groups in India. Generally the word ‘Tribal’ regarded to all tribe but they do not form a uniform race and they belong to various racial backgrounds. They have innumerable inward and outward differences within themselves.

Tribals are believed to be the original inhabitants of the country. For this reason they are called ‘Adivasi’. Their history starts even before Palaeolithic period. They are also termed as ‘animists’ because their religion is based on the spirit worship.

It is a generally accepted fact that the tribals are one of the suffering communities in our country. Most of the Tribals in India are found backward and oppressed, by others in various ways. For this reason Indian government is giving them special status for their development and welfare. In the constitution of India they are given much considerations and assurances. They are been categorized as Scheduled Tribes (ST) for the administrative purpose. The government of India
extends supports, and other material welfare for their developments. But it is really regrettable that the implementation of the constitutional rights is very poor. Most of these tribal communities are struggling even to survive.

According to the 1991 census in India there are 580 recognized Scheduled Tribe (ST) with the population of 6.78 crore. It constitutes 8.08% of the country’s total population. Their literacy rate is just 29.60%. (Malayala Manorama Year Book, 2002:527)

The present study examines the socio-cultural and economic condition of the Paniyas and the social changes taking place among them. The term 'Paniyas' literally means "a worker". The name has originated from the Malayalam word 'Panikkar' (labourers). It is also believed that the outsiders gave them this name, because mostly they worked in others fields. Paniyas or Paniyan or Paniyar is believed to be from the Dravidian tribe. (Luiz.D.96:166). Paniyas are of the dark- skinned tribe, short in stature, broad noses with curly or wavy hair. They inhabit several parts of North Kerala, South Karnataka and Northwest Tamil Nadu. They are a homogenous community having distinct social and cultural traditions. They speak Paniyabhasha, unintelligible dialect of Malayalam with a mixture of Tamil and Tulu words. (Luiz D 1962:167)

The Imperial Gazetteer (1911:51) reports that "the Paniyas are the most characteristic representatives of the Dravidian tribe being to a varying extend by the admixture of the Aryans, Scythians and Mongoloid elements". It is believed that their original occupation is agriculture but they are also famous for hunting wild animals with spear and nets.

Generally it is believed that Paniyas are of the Dravidian tribe. There is also a theory of their African origin. According to Thurston (1975:57), the European planting community brought their ancestors to work in their estates in Malabar
from Africa. However this theory is not proved with sufficient reasons. A.A. Luiz (1963:167) comments on this:

“One such opinion indicates that they are the African tribe that came into India after a shipwreck on the West Coast. Anthropologists also claim that their cephalic and nasal indices have resemblance to the long armed Negroes and Kapiris of Africa”.

Mostly they are educationally and economically found very backward. They have been far away from the main stream of developments. Most of them are found living in the forests and remote hills. Government of India categorized the Paniyas in constitution as Scheduled Tribe (S.T.) to give a special status and consideration.

Paniyas have been in constant contact with the people of the surrounding communities. This influence leads them into many changes in their culture, belief and practices. Their connection with Hinduism led to ‘Sankritation’. The effect of this Sankritation resulted into many social changes. The industrialisation and urbanisation also have played an evident role in social changes as we see them now.

These days many of the Paniyas have been influenced by urban culture in their dress style, food habit, customs and cultures. This study is both about the traditional and present day’s life style of Paniyas. It is also based on some of the vanished and vanishing customs and traditions of the Paniyas.

The Paniyas in Tamil Nadu are mainly inhabited in the Gudalur taluk of Nilgiri district. According to 1991 census their population in Nilgiri is 5700. (Census of India "Nilgiris" 1991). In Karnataka this tribe is mainly found only in Kodugu district. This tribe is also settled in several parts of Kannur, Kozhikode and Wynad district of Kerala. According to the 1997 Statistics of Kerala government the details of this tribe in Kannur district shows as follows, ’ Number
of colonies-134, Number of families- 2167, Population- 9557. (List of Paniyas in Kannur District is enclosed in Appendix)

In this study the researcher also bring out some facts about Paniya’s social structure, culture and custom etc. Most of their customs and cultural aspects are linked with the religion, economic, social and environmental aspects of their life. Traditionally they live according to the environment of the forest. They use to respect and worship trees, rivers, mountain, big rocks, birds and animals. They express their greatest love towards nature and philosophies of life in their folk songs, legends, myths and other literatures.

1.2. Significance of the Study

This research study is significant for the following reasons:

1. Most of the Paniyas in their settlements do not know of their own origin and history. There are very less literature available on this topic. The researcher had an opportunity to visit many of their settlements, and enquire of their origin of existence. It was found that they have very vague understanding about this topic.

2. At present many of the young generations are strange to their own traditional customs and cultures. It is observed that they have transformed very much from the traditions. They have adopted the customs and cultures of the surroundings. The traditional customs and cultures are in the path of vanishing. The researcher is convinced that, it is important to study and preserve in records their valuable customs and culture.

3. Now a day’s many Paniyas have adopted major religions of the surroundings as their own religion. Many who have converted into Hinduism are treated as low caste by high caste Hindus. They are ill treated and work as servants of high caste Hindus. Traditionally in Paniyas religion there is no caste or class system. In this study the researcher studied about the traditional religion of the Paniyas, its uniqueness and importance.
4. The researcher analyzes the contemporary issues and problems of Paniyas in the Kannur district of Kerala and the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu. It is observed that tribals are undergoing a rapid social change caused by modernization, deforestation, globalization and other developmental activities. These changes drag them into a series of problems, like various kinds of exploitations, landlessness, high rate of mortality, vulnerable diseases, drug and alcoholic addictions especially among youth, ethnic conflicts, unemployment, prostitution, poverty etc. In the process of cultural, social and religious changes, they have lost some of their traditional values. In this research, the researcher addresses some of the major issues mentioned above.

5. In this research, the researcher studies the Paniyas of the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu and Kannur district of Kerala. The researcher analyzes their economic, education, customs, culture, religion and the way of life.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

1. Paniyas were the ancient inhabitant of the land. They survived by engaging in shifting cultivation, agriculture labour and hunting. In the later periods the other group of people from elsewhere migrated into their territories. In this way they lost their land and they had to flee away into the remote hills and forests. In some places they became the slaves of landlord’s. In the context of Kerala the great migration from South to North Kerala took place after 1950s, that they have come and occupied most of the land, which were inhabited by the tribals. Henceforth Paniyas are facing a lot of social, cultural, religious and ethnic challenges. Today one of the major struggles among the tribals are their fights for regaining their own land in several parts of the country. They mostly live in the settlements, where there may be ten to hundred of families. The local leadership of 'Kuttan' or 'Muppan' or Elder administers them.

2. At present they are in threat of loosing their own cultural identity. The younger generation is found adopting the culture of others and yielded into many social changes. They are moving away from their own traditions. Everywhere the
tribals are found in the process of transformation. Urbanization has encroached into their territories. As a result, they have lost much of their own traditional values and cultures.

3. Paniyas are having their own traditional religion called Paniya religion, it is coming in the category of 'animism'. In this traditional system of religion is full of spirit worship, rites and rituals. At present, it is observed that the traditional religion is vanishing away, only few older generation practices the traditional religion. Many of them have adopted the religions of the surroundings like Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

4. Deforestation also caused a lot of environmental and social problems. They are pushed into the remote colonies, where they lack proper sanitation facility, transportation and communication. Hence many of them suffer from various kinds of contagious diseases, famine and other problems. In some places it is observed that their population is also decreasing because of the lack of health care and basic amenities.

5. Though Paniyas is regarded as a south Indian tribe, there some differences observed among them locally. According to the land, people, language, climate, educational and economical standard of the place and its surroundings, the Paniyas are also influenced. In this way the Paniyas of Nilgiris and Kannur district have lot of differences. It can be also observed that there are many similarities in their basic features.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

1. To trace the origin and development of the Paniya tribe of South India and their present social structure.
2. To study the traditional customs and culture of Paniyas.
3. To evaluate the traditional religious life of Paniyas and the changes taking place in their religious life.
4. To study the social changes due to contexts socio-political and environmental challenges like modernization, globalization, urbanization, etc.

1.5. Hypotheses

1. Paniyas are one of the ancient homogenous tribal communities of South India. They belong to the Dravidian family.

2. They have their own social life, customs and culture traditionally.

3. Their traditional religion is very much different from Hinduism, now days many of them are influenced by Hinduism and other religious faith.

4. The traditional customs and culture of Paniyas are under going changes due to modernization and other environmental problems. Many of their present problem and issues are the result of these social changes.

1.6. Methodology

Both primary and secondary data are collected for the present analysis.

1.6.1. Primary Data: According to the nature of the topic selected the following methods are used for the gathering of primary data. The researcher has used the following research methods: i.e. field study, observation method, case study method, and interview-schedule method. 300 samples from both Nilgiris and Kannur are selected by simple random sampling method.

1.6.1.1. Field Study

Since it is a sociological research, fieldwork is an essential part. Through the fieldwork the researcher was able to collect maximum scientific data. In this regard the researcher has visited the areas of the study by spending time with people groups, studying their life style, custom, culture and social changes.

By this empirical study the researcher was able to get first hand information, which helped the researcher to understand the past and present status of Paniyas.

In this study, the fieldwork is most important, because there are not many books written on them, only few articles published on them, most of them are
found out dated. Mostly they live far away from the civilized world. The world outside gets very less information about them through the common communication media. For these reasons the researcher was very much convinced of the need for a solid field research to update information on statistical details and other issues of the Paniyas. Fieldwork helped the researcher to collect more reliable information.

Information collected by fieldwork, is logically analyzed, tabulated and the facts are proved through various scientific methods. Some of the Hypothesis of the researcher are tested and proved.

The following are some of the methods adopted in this field research.

1.6.1.2. Pilot Study

The researcher has visited various parts of the research field before the actual research. It is the preliminary study conducted on a limited scale before the original studies. Through this study a general knowledge of the topic, area and people are acquired. The information which, is gathered through the pilot study is used for the continuous construction of the thesis. This study has helped the researcher to gain more systematic knowledge about the universe of the study.

Pilot study has helped the researcher to frame the right kind of interview schedule and it is tested. In this 20 interview schedules were taken to the field for filling. This also helped the researcher to frame the right kind of questions for the interview schedule and estimate the research cost and the time required for it.

Through this the researcher was able to locate the various Paniya colonies in Nilgiris and Kannur Districts. This has helped the researcher to get an overall understanding on the present day life situations of the Paniyas.
1.6.1.3. Interview Method.

This is one of the powerful tools to collect the data. It is a direct method to collect the information. William Emory (1976) a well-known scholar affirms, “Personal interviewing is a two way purposeful conversation initiated by the interviewer to obtain information that is relevant to the research purpose”. Through the interview, verbal and non-verbal information was collected on the Paniyas of Kannur and the Nilgiris. The non-verbal expressions like gestures, glances, facial expression, pauses, modulation of voice, tone etc. was communicated well. The interviewer has observed all these facts. In order to save time and to get accurate information tape recorder, video- camera and other electronic instruments were also used.

Through the interview the researcher has made a collective opinion about the custom, culture, religion and social changes of the Paniyas of Kannur and the Nilgiri districts.

In this study the researcher conducted 300 interviews 150 from Kannur district of Kerala and 150 from Nilgiris districts of Tamil Nadu.

1.6.1.4. Participant Observation

In this research study, the researcher has personally participated in the activities of the Paniyas for the purpose of study which is known as participant observation. The information was collected by applying the standard anthropological techniques of participant observation. It was to stay with the people in their settlements for some days by creating an empathy.

In this study the researcher stayed with the Paniyas of Kannur and the Nilgiris for a limited period of time. This was to acquire wider information by attending some of their social and religious functions, to acquire wider information.
1.6.1.5. Interview Schedules

Interview Schedules are the most important tools generally used in sociological research to acquire more knowledge on the study topic. Schedule is used for the collection of personal references, social attitudes, beliefs, opinions, behavior patterns, group practices and habits of the Paniyas. As most of the Paniyas are living in illiteracy, the researcher sat with each of the informants and filled the schedule for them. In order to understand the details of their customs and cultures many descriptive and exploratory questions were also added in the schedule.

Ethno historic method is adopted in the interview schedule to collect the data on traditional and modern cultures of Paniyas. In this the researcher has interviewed both the elder and younger groups.

The interview schedule was used to collect first hand information about Paniyas, their social life and social change, who live in Nilgiris and Kannur districts. Five sets of interview schedules, with the 167 questions were prepared according to the objectives of the study. The researcher has used 300 interview schedules both from Tamil Nadu and Kerala in order to collect the information on various topics.

1.6.1.6. Sampling Design

In this method, a smaller group or segments of area or people are taken to examine and study. The researcher has collected the samples from different settlements of Paniya. This is the major part of this research study.

The researcher has taken a total of 300 samples, in this 150 is from Nilgiris of Tamil Nadu and 150 is from Kannur of Kerala.

1.6.1.7. Census and Survey Methods

Census and survey methods were used for collecting information on population, number of house, demographic detail, etc., of the Paniyas, which is the
topic under study. Census sheets usually contain basic biographic data like names, age, sex kinship links, descent group, caste / tribe affiliation, past and present marriages, residential history as well as information on the educational background, occupation, income and other economic resources of the household. The researcher’s specific interests may add to this survey question about hygiene and health matters, social, economic and religious problems. Through census and survey methods the researcher could get the detailed above-mentioned information. The information was quantitatively analysed to make an appropriate conclusion, In this way the researcher got more information about the Paniyas’s present day’s population, their settlement, their educational status, their employment, their income, etc.

1.6.1.8. Photographic and Videographic Methods

Due to the development in science and technology, different types of audio, video, c.d. and v.c.d. Cassettes were used to record the folk songs, dances and other cultural practices, folklore and life-styles of the Paniyas under the study. The scientific development has given birth to this method.

Mapping involves the graphic recording of topographic and demographic data of the people’s environment. A map may contain the location of important natural resources: garden areas, forest, roads, path territorial/ village boundaries, etc. In this way, the use of photographic and cartographic methods, are very important in this study of Paniyas.

1.6.1.9. Case Study Method

This method is very old in anthropology. The informants were selected for an indepth interview, by the researcher who made a case study of the same group of Paniyas who were already into social and cultural changes. By this way the researcher gets many insights and knowledge of the informants about this subject. Through the case study conclusions were drawn accordingly. The social changes of the Paniyas are analyzed primarily based on the case study. The cases of social
problems, social change or violation movement against government policies, developmental programs were collected by the researcher by the case study method.

1.6.2. Secondary Data

The secondary source of data are collected from relevant books in different libraries, Internet, government records, academic reports, and other published and unpublished literatures on Paniyas, Relevant research journals and other documents. etc. It is given in the review of the relevant literatures. In order to collect the secondary sources the researcher also visited many accessible libraries such as Tamil University Library Thanjavur, Central Institute of Indian Languages Library Mysore, Bangalore University Library, Kannur University Library, Calicut University Library, Tribal Research Centre (Museum & Library) Ooty, KITARDS Calicut, Dharmaram Seminary Library Bangalore, ACTS Academy Library Bangalore and other Libraries.

In order to collect relevant primary data on the research topic the researcher has employed the following methods.

1.7. Tools of Analysis and Interpretation of Data (SPSS Analysis)

The collected data, which were so scattered and unsystematic were arranged and analyzed. After the data collection the next step was to arrange for processing and analyzing the data scientifically. Thus the data collected is processed. The data processing comprises of the following steps:

a. Classification of data
b. Editing
c. Coding
d. Categorization
e. Tabulation
1.7.1. Classification of data

Once the collection of data is over, the next step is to arrange it into different groups for processing and analysis of the data. Through careful and systematic classification, processing, the data collected are lend itself for statistical treatment and meaningful interpretation.

1.7.2. Editing

Editing is the second step in data processing. Editing is the process of examining the data collected through various methods such as interview schedules, sampling and various ways of field study, to detect errors and omissions and to see, that they are corrected and edited for tabulation. When the data collection is over, a final thorough check up is made.

1.7.3. Coding

Coding is the process/ operation by which data/ responses are organized in to classes/ categories and numerals. Symbols are given to each item according to the class in which it falls. In other words, coding involves two important operations: deciding the categories to be used and allocating individual answer to them.

These categories should be appropriate to the research problems, exhaustive of the data, mutually exclusive and one-dimensional. Since coding eliminates much of information in the raw data, it is important that the researcher design category sets carefully in order to utilize the available data more carefully.

1.7.4. Categorization

Categorization is the process of grouping the statistical data under various understandable homogenous groups for the purpose of convenient interpretation. A uniform distribution of attributes is the basic criterion for classification. The grouping of data is made according to similarity. A good categorization should have the characteristics of clarity, homogeneity, equality of scale, purposefulness and accuracy.
1.7.5. Tabulation

Tabulation is the process of summarizing raw data and displaying it in compact form for further analysis. Analysis of data is made possible through tables. Therefore, preparing tables is a very important step. Tabulation is done manually and by the computer. The choice is made largely on the basis of the size and type of study, alternative costs, time pressures, and the availability of computers and computer programs.

1.7.6. Analysis of Data.

Analysis of data means studying the tabulated material in order to determine inherent facts or meanings. It involves breaking down, existing complex factors into simpler parts and putting the parts together in new arrangements for purposes of interpretation. A plan of analysis should be prepared in advance before the actual collection of material. A preliminary analysis on the skeleton plan is very important, as the investigation proceeds and develops into a complete, final analysis, enlarged and reworked as and when necessary. No similarities, difference in trends and outstanding factors should go unnoticed. Larger division of material are broken down into smaller units and rearranged in new combination to discover new factors and relationships.

1.7.7. Interpretation of Data

Analysis and interpretation are central part in the research process. The goal of analysis is to summarize the collected data in such a way that they provide answer to the questions triggered in the research. Interpretation is the search for the broader meaning of the findings. This search has two major aspects. First, there is the effort to establish continuity in social research through linking the results of one study with those of another. Secondly, interpretation leads to the establishment of explanatory concepts.
The data collected through the various method of research are edited, classified, tabulated and analyzed systematically for a proper evaluation and recommendations on the research topic.

The primary data collected are analyzed with the help of computer and suitable theories and models. General structures, graph, diagrams and photographs are used to make the analysis clear.

1. The Frequency table was used to obtain the percentage for all the questions (variables) in the schedule.
2. One way ANOVA Test

1.8. Limitation of the Study

1.8.1. Though this tribe is spread over to several parts of North Kerala, South Karnataka and NorthWest Tamil Nadu, this study is limited to Paniyas of Kannur district of Kerala and the Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu.

1.8.2. The researcher has found that there are only limited numbers of written documents, magazines or books available about their origin, history, development, religion, culture, custom and social change. In this regard the researcher has to depend mostly on field research and interviews.

1.8.3. It is difficult to reach all their settlements because they are situated far away from the towns, with poor transportation and communication system.

1.8.4. They speak a language, which is not very clear to outsiders. This is called ‘Paniyabhasha’ it has no script, only few among them can speak literary language Tamil or Malayalam. The sending of questionnaire method may have only little success, as many of them know only oral language. Therefore the researcher has collected the data personally meeting with them using the interview schedules with the selected samples.
1.8.5. Paniyas were found mostly fearful and suspicious of any outsider. When some one go to them and ask their views or any other information, they hesitate to express because of fear. They are not open to any strangers or outsiders. This makes it very difficult to collect the correct data of them. This mistrust may be developed in them because of some previous experiences with middlemen or government officers. It took a lot of time for the researcher to build up a rapport with them to collect current information.

1.8.6. There is a limitation in analysing the collected data, because some of them are in descriptive form and abounds information. It is difficult to make an appropriate conclusion from this form. There are also questions which are multiple edged which cannot be judged as right or wrong.

1.8.7. The findings which are made through this research study is not applicable to the whole Paniyas of South India. It is only applicable to the Paniyas which is under the researcher’s study. The social life and issues of Paniyas are different from place to place in various respects.

1.9. Period of the Study

In this research, the researcher spent the period of two years 2005 to 2007 mainly for primary data collection from the field. In this period the researcher had made pilot study, visited the study area several times, made participatory observations, stayed with them and collected 300 samples from both Nilgiris and Kannur.

During the period between 2007 and 2009, the researcher mainly spent time in analyzing and interpreting the primarily data in different perspectives. Accordingly, the chapters of the thesis are systematically developed with the periodical consultation with the guide.
1.10. Chapterization

In this study ‘Customs, Culture and Religion of Paniya Tribe and their Social Change’ the researcher has analysed the social life of the Paniyas of Kannur district of Kerala and the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu in the following chapters.

The first chapter is the introduction of the research study. In this the researcher has studied the various topics related to the study on Paniyas, Significance of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Objective of the Study, Hypotheses, Methodology, Limitation of the Study, Geographical location, Chapterization and Outline of the Study.

In the second chapter the researcher reviewed the literatures, concept and theories on related topics of the study from the books, magazine and articles published.

In the third chapter the researcher has studied on the Profile of the study area. The following topics are dealt with the locations of the study, Land, People, Tribals, Paniyas in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

The fourth chapter analyses the primary data collected on Origin and Developmental Perspectives on Paniyas of South India in general and particularly to the Paniyas of Kannur and the Nilgiris. This study has helped the researcher to get various details of their origin, ethnography, development, history, education, employment and language,

In the fifth chapter the researcher made a thorough analysis of primary data collected on Paniyas of South India in Socio- Cultural and Economic Perspectives. In this chapter the researcher dealt with the customs and culture of Paniyas, which includes housing, clothing, food, jewellery, occupation, birth rites, marriage rites, death rites, burial rites, beliefs and practices.
In the sixth chapter the researcher has made an analysis of Primary Data based on Religious Perspectives. Some of the important aspects of their traditional and modern religion, major beliefs and practices, conversion to other religions are dealt with in this chapter.

In the seventh chapter the researcher analyses primary data on social change perspectives. In this chapter the social changes taking place due to the contextual socio-political and environmental problems and the present social status of Paniyas are evaluated.

In the eighth chapter the researcher makes an evaluation on the overall research study and list out the findings, recommendations, suggestions and conclusion.