



"Blurred Borders": The Case of Viewing Indigenous Identity through Existentialism

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ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this paper is to dive deeply into the complexities of indigenous culture by taking the Kattunayakan community as a touchstone to find out how psychology shapes identities. Kattunayakan is one of the earliest inhabitants of the Western Ghats and the true representative of the Dravidian culture. There are multiple ways to study the people properly by observing how the community deciphers the new era and how they shape their reality. As time goes by, there is a reflection of "decay" due to marginality and migration. Existential psychology can hence be used as a tool to analyse the psychological evolution of every indigenous community, including Kattunayakan. Every existential philosopher, from Kierkegaard to Nietzsche to Sartre, agreed that we are born with no purpose and are bound to feel anxious. This anxiety perhaps turned out to be why the community stopped resisting the oppression against them and accepted the exploitation as their fate. Isolation is not an answer for exploration; it only elevates the chances for the death of every indigenous community with the right to control the rhythm of nature.

Keywords: *Indigenous, Existentialism, Kattunayakan, Marginality, Identity.*

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous Peoples are a distinct social and cultural groups that share collective ancestral ties to the lands and natural resources they live, occupy or from which they have been displaced. The land and natural resources they depend on are inextricably linked to their identities, cultures, livelihoods, as well as their physical and spiritual well-being. They often subscribe to their customary leaders and organisations for representation that is distinct or separate from those of the mainstream society or culture. Many Indigenous peoples still maintain a language different from the official language of the country or region in which they reside; however, many have also lost their languages or are on the precipice of extinction due to eviction from their lands and relocation to other territories, and in. They speak more than 4,000 languages, though some estimates indicate that more than half of the world's languages are at risk of becoming extinct by 2100.

This threat of extinction was prevailing over the past decades in almost every community, including Kattunayakan. Kattunayakan is one of the tribes who had been the actual inhabitants of the forest. As the name indicates, they were once the 'kings' of jungles. They rarely mix with other tribes and still follow black magic and sorcery. They are entirely dependent on forest and forest products and subsist on honey, roots and barks of plants and what small animals they trap or fall with their bows and arrows. They are also called *The Kurumas* as they collect honey from the forest. They follow a religion firmly rooted in their culture and worship animals, birds, trees, rocks, snakes, and almost everything natural. They also worship their ancestors. The physical features of hill tribes are pronounced in them, and their language is a mixture of all Dravidian languages.

The *Kattunayakan* community is found nowadays in Wayanad, Kozhikode and Malappuram districts. While they are called *Kattunayakan* in Wayanad, those belonging to interiors of Nilambur of Malappuram district are called Cholanaickan, and those who live in the plains of Malappuram district are called Pathinaickans. These people are always highlighted as the "true owners" of our

echo system. That tag made them the figures who deserve all the support and protection from the "contemporary gangue", which reflects the concepts of marginality and alienation.

Kattunayakan people are migrating to get a "new life", leaving behind their ancestry. Existential psychiatry can be used to analyse the core of the entire happening. It can also be used for creating awareness among the rest of the community. Hence, this paper dissects the reasons for their survival and the psychological evolutions of the community.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are focused and aimed

- To provide a source for studying Indigenous identity
- To explore the evolution and the psychological reasons behind tribal migration.
- To analyse the "existential" mode of survival through *the Kattunayakan* community
- To suggest feasible measures to conserve and aid the traumas of Indigenous people.

To analyse the reasons for indigenous migration, *the Kattunayakan* community can be taken as a "case" because of the recent hike in the migration rate. They primarily depend on collecting honey, and the rest have a job closely associated with their land and nature. Depleting these natural resources and the quest for survival might be the reason for the migration. Hence, a study was done to find the impact of existential psychology on *the Kattunayakan* community in Kerala.

METHODOLOGY

The data were collected from various sources, which include recent online interviews, surveys, news reports, articles and from the Directorate of Scheduled Tribes Developmental Department Kerala, and the records of Kerala State Development Corporation For Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes.

Kattunayakan people generally represent the goodness and glory of Sahyadri, the great Western Ghats, which covers the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra and Gujrat; studies show that the Western Ghats are the primary reason for seasonal timings and in fact, it acts as the proper regulator of climatic occurrences. The Mountain topography of Western Ghats affects precipitation and is also a reason why Karnataka receives more rainfall than Maharashtra. *Kattunayakan* people have most of the similar qualities that of Sahyadri, which makes them the 'son' of Sahyadri.

Kattunayakan, the earliest inhabitants of the Ghats, have shaped nature through environment-friendly customs/rituals, cultivation and cultural intercourses. They have a significant role in maintaining the rhythm of the ecosystem through their unique way of life.

Evolution or Enlightenment?

'Muthanga' Land Struggle

Kattunayakan community have a unique sense of survival. Research shows that they evolved from the 'primitively bound features' to a 'contemporary outlook' due to the influence of anxiety. The more they interact with the "outer world", they feel the urge to speak for their needs. Kerala Adivasi riots were, in fact, a true reflection of the same. They felt the need to evolve and speak for their rights while exhibiting their Identity. The changing political scenarios and climatic changes are also why some significant 'land' struggles emerge. Adivasi Land Struggles in Kannur was started by nine landless Adivasi families who occupied 9.25 acres of land in Thiruvonappuram in the Peravoor region of Kannur. They crept into the ground due to the Government of Kerala capturing it to implement the Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1970. And the following years also witnessed a spectrum of riots which demanded their basic needs and highlighted their spirit of "identity".

The elements of 'Existentialism.'

Existentialism takes its name from the philosophical theme of 'existence'; this does not entail that there is homogeneity in the manner existence is to be understood. One point on which there is an agreement, though, is that the

existence with which we should be concerned here is not just any existent thing but *human existence*. There is, thus, an essential difference between distinctively human existence and anything else, and human existence is not to be understood on the model of things, that is, as objects of knowledge. And the concepts of 'freedom', 'anxiety', 'irrationality', the influence of the 'crowd', and 'freedom' are also some of the key terms we can use to analyse the birth and development of indigenous identity.

Every indigenous community possesses a quality of their own. The culture, customs, harmony, and agricultural practices show authenticity and their choice of freedom. Due to the impact of modern technology and external invasion, they had an illusion that they were "aliens" who did not have the right to express their needs. Studies show a vast decrease in the riots, which they narrate as the outcome of a hopeless life. The anxiety and the struggle for identity are hence evident while the rate of migration hikes. Some tend to hold on to the 'imagined past', and some abandon their roots to fit into the frame of cultural immediacy.

CONCLUSION

Hence, the study finds out the impact of existential elements on shaping indigenous identity. While observing the transformation of *Kattunayakan* people, we see that they not only reflect the plight of indigenous people in Kerala but also accurately represent the experience of entire indigenous people. The existential elements can be used to make them aware of their importance and prominence in our world. No matter what, every being have the right to own a place of their own devoid of class, creed, community, colour and culture.

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