

SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSITION OF ADIVASIS IN WAYANAD – ROLE OF MASS MEDIA

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by

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ABSTRACT

The world is rapidly changing as a result of new digital technologies which have revolutionized opportunities for communication. Mass media strengthens human development as it enables people to access and produce information and transfer it, which is vital for empowerment and progress. Nonetheless, the impact of mass media has been different for different communities. While it is essential to understand how different communities, gender, and age groups use digital technologies and social media for their development, it is even more crucial to explore how the indigenous and marginalized communities use it towards their empowerment, integration and upliftment. The latter is also one among the major goals of the modern nation-state.

This study is an earnest attempt to understand the role of mass media in the transition of Adivasis in the Wayanad District of Kerala. It was designed to address certain intriguing questions that emerged in the researcher's mind, ranging from when the media technologies made inroads into the life of the Adivasi communities, what are the media artefacts that have got diffused, what are the different factors that have influenced the diffusion of mass media among Adivasis and how they have influenced the everyday life of the Adivasis.

The population chosen for this study was three Adivasi communities in Wayanad - the Kurumar, Paniyar and Kattunaicker, who resided in Noolpuzha Panchayath of Sulthan Batheri thaluk in Wayanad. This research employed a qualitative methodology as the research objectives demanded an immersion into the field to understand the way the Adivasis create, conceptualize and perceive the impact of mass media in their lives. Data was collected using a triangulation of methods, including in-depth interviews, focused group discussions, invoking collective memory through group discussion, oral histories and participant observation.

The study shows that the diffusion of the mass media technologies among Adivasi communities is variegated. The socio-cultural history of the communities has influenced the diffusion of mass media technologies. Geographical factors, education status, economic capabilities, social relations with other communities and the number of households in a settlement are important factors determining the diffusion and use of the mass media. Diffusion of the mass media to the Adivasi hamlets can be traced from the 1970s onwards. Newspaper, Radio, Television and Mobile Phone (Smartphones) are the major forms of mass media. The socio-historical advantages of the Kurumar community helped them to obtain earlier and better access to different mass media technologies compared to the Paniyar and the Kattunaicker communities. Simultaneously, one can also observe gender differences in the use of technology.

Changes have occurred in the structure and infrastructure of houses. Mass media has impacted the relationship among family members, community feelings, sexual life, childbearing practices and the use of family planning methods. The nature and type of marriages and the rituals associated with those marriages have also undergone fluctuations. From animism and ancestral worship, these communities have started worshipping Hindu Gods. Hinduization and Sanskritization are two significant outcomes of mass media. Their dress, food habits and indigenous medical practices have transformed. Much of their indigenous cultural heritage, like folklores, songs, dances and stories, which have been transmitted orally over the generations and are mostly undocumented are getting erased along with their traditional language. Their connection with the forest has decreased, their ability to sense animals and understand nature is lost and this has resulted in increased man-animal conflicts.

The theoretical lens of the study is built upon the aspects of mediatization, social logistics, micro-coordination and hyper-coordination, integration versus assimilation and tradition versus modernity. The study argues that assimilation has taken place more than integration. The tensions between tradition and modernity have increased. Nonetheless, mediatization is visible in all social relationships.