

# **Raleigh Tribal Housing Project**

## **Project Overview**

Raleigh is working in partnership with the Centre for Tribal and Rural Development Trust (CTRD) in the mountainous Nilgiri district, Tamil Nadu. Raleigh volunteers will live alongside and work with the inhabitants of remote forest communities belonging to the Kattunayaka and Paniya indigenous tribal groups to construct a simple home for each of the 14 families.

Their present living conditions are very basic and their substandard housing is the cause of much hardship and contributes to poor health. Existing dwellings, which are in considerable disrepair, will be replaced by simple mud brick constructions which have been designed in consultation with the community, to facilitate a healthier standard of living whilst enabling them to retain their tribal customs and cultural identity.

## **How was the project identified?**

The project was identified through discussions between Raleigh's Country Director and the Director of the CTRD Trust following a number of visits to the indigenous communities of the Nilgiris with Mr Ranganathan and his team.

Mr Ranganathan established CTRD over 20 years ago and has established an excellent rapport with and mutual respect for the tribal population in the region. His extensive knowledge of the needs and challenges of the indigenous people have enabled the identification of the communities as the first of many projects Raleigh and CTRD will work in partnership on.

## **What need(s) does it fulfil?**

The Indian Government have identified the Kattunayakan and Paniyan people as 'Primitive Tribal Groups'. Their ancestors have inhabited the same forests for thousands of years. Their living conditions are very basic and they face daily challenges associated with poor health caused by their housing conditions: water security, sanitation, malnutrition and poverty as well as dangers associated with gathering food and resources in forests populated with large predators and elephants.

The current dwellings used by the inhabitants are very basic. Many are falling down and virtually all have substandard roofing of plastic sheets with many holes in. With the roof being constantly degraded comes the additional problem of heavy leakage during the rains and as a result the inhabitants suffer cold and wet living conditions and develop health problems. Families cook on fires indoors and it is not uncommon for homes to catch fire.

Replacing the existing dwellings with the proposed replacement homes will also help to reduce tension between the Forest Department and the community since they will no longer be reliant on gathering resources from the forest for repairing and maintaining their homes.



## **Who has been consulted and what are their views?**

CTRD Trust has been working at a grass-roots level with these communities for many years. There is a good trust and rapport between the communities and CTRD and they have been fully engaged with all stages of the project development.

Community leaders told Raleigh's Country Director they were tired of living in such conditions in the forest and wanted to achieve a better standard of living for and healthier conditions for themselves. They are both excited and intrigued about having visitors from other parts of India and foreign countries coming to share their lives and culture with them and to work alongside them to improve their living conditions.

## **Project Outputs**

Construction of 14 houses for 14 families in two indigenous tribes

## **Intended Project Outcomes**

- A diverse international mix of young expedition participants and the tribal communities will develop an understanding of each other's cultures and way of life and gain awareness of development and forest protection issues as global citizens
- Families will have a higher standard of living and be more contented through living in better housing
- Families will experience an improvement in health through better living conditions

## **Background to Nilgiri's**

The Nilgiri's (or literally the Blue Mountains) are situated at the tri-junction of the three States of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka of South India and covers an area of 2479 square kilometres.

The Nilgiri's are surrounded by a zone of thick jungle, extending more or less into the plains and are irrigated by two rivers, the Moyar and Siru Bhavani.

The Nilgiri's are occupied by the district tribes of which the Todas, the Kotas, the Irulas, the Kurumbas, the Paniyas and the Kattunayakans are considered to be primitive tribal groups. According to a 1991 census, the total population of the Nilgiri's is 710,214 out of which the total tribal population is 25,048 constituting 3.53% of the total general population.

## **Background – The Paniyan's**

In the Nilgiri district, the Paniyan tribe are found only in Gudalur and Pandalur taluks.

The Paniyan have different lineages known as 'illiam', which are traced in the paternal line. They bury their dead and celebrate funeral rites elaborately with the help of their priest,



'attali'. Rules of inheritance among the Paniyan is 'marumakkathayam' i.e. the right of inheritance is restricted to the sister's children. Their chief occupation is agricultural labour. They have historically been subjected to a subtle form of bonded labour by the local non-tribal landowners.

Most of them are employed in the agricultural farms owned by the Chetties (Hindus), Moplahs (Muslims), Syrin Christians and Government run farms. The Paniyan tribal council, called 'Kottani' is a permanent body with a group of elderly Paniyans called 'muppanmars'. They follow the religious cult of animism and worship goddess 'Kattu Bhagavathy'.

## **Background – The Kattunayakans**

In the Nilgiri district, the Paniyan tribe are found only in Gudalur and Pandalur taluks.

The Kattunayakans do not have sub-groups or divisions and they do not know about their early clan and division rules. They are patrilineal with patrilocal residence. Child marriages were once common but nowadays girls marry after attaining puberty. Monogamy is the most common form of marriage. Kattanayakan's life cycle rituals are simple. They bury the dead near their habitation and it used to be customary to desert that locality and carefully avoid visiting it.

Kattunayakans were hunters and food gatherers. Nowadays, besides gathering non timber forest products (NTFP), the Forest Department employs them as Mahouts (elephant keepers) and watchers. Some of them cultivate small patches of land on hill slopes. They are experts at collecting wild honey and wax. A few have become wage labourers in tea estates. Kattunayakan communities are headed by the Muttan (Headman) who is obeyed and respected.

Once animists and totemists who worshipped trees, snakes and animals most Kattunayakans now claim to be Hindus and use popular Hindu names. They worship Lord Siva under the name of 'Bairavan'. They are fond of music, song and dance.