

EXPLORING THE PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL ATTITUDE AND ADVOCACY OF KALLEN POKKUDAN: THE MANGROVE DEFENDER OF KERALA

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the pro-environmental attitude of Kallen Pokkudan, one of the major environment conservationists of Kerala, India, known as a "Protector of mangroves". His approach to nature not only inspires sustainable development activities but also underlines the importance of cultural heritage. Coming from a Dalit family, Pokkudan's early life was tense with socio-economic hardships that limited his access to formal education. Despite these challenges, Pokkudan developed a deep connection with nature, especially the mangrove ecosystem near his village. He succeeded in bringing the concepts of sustainable development and biodiversity conservation to the level of the layman which was the main goal of his life. He continues to inspire us while highlighting the importance of the common man in biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, and we can understand that his dedication to this cause stems from his deeply innate pro-environmental attitude. This study also discusses the impact of living conditions in coastal areas on his environmental conservation perspective, which subsequently influenced nature conservation methods and the development of resilience within coastal communities. This study aims to highlight the transformative power of individual and community-led activism in promoting environmental sustainability. By examining the enduring cultural legacy of Kallen Pokkudan, a common man, this study seeks to inspire environmental activists and policymakers to adopt similar approaches in the future generations in conserving biodiversity and fostering sustainable livelihoods around us.

KEYWORDS: Kallen Pokkudan, Pro-Environmental Attitude, Mangrove Protection.

Introduction

Mangrove Defender, Kallen Pokkudan's Pro-Environmental Attitude

Kallen Pokkudan (1937-2015), a beacon of environmental activism from Kerala, India, embodies a profound commitment to conservation rooted in cultural heritage and community stewardship. Born into a Dalit family in the coastal village of Ezhom, Pokkudan's early life was intimately connected with the mangrove ecosystems that once thrived along Kerala's shores. These ecosystems, vital to local livelihoods and biodiversity, would become the focal point of Pokkudan's life's work as an environmental advocate. In the 1980s, Pokkudan witnessed firsthand the rapid depletion of mangrove forests due to urbanization, industrial development, and unsustainable agricultural practices. Motivated by the ecological degradation unfolding before him, Pokkudan embarked on a journey of awareness and action. His pro-environmental attitude was not merely a response to environmental crisis but a reflection of deep-rooted values instilled in him by his community—a reverence for nature and a commitment to sustainable living.

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Through community-based grassroots initiatives such as mangrove planting campaigns and educational outreach programs, Pokkudan sought to empower local communities to become guardians of their own natural environment. His efforts extended beyond conservation; they embraced advocacy for social justice, recognizing the irrevocable connection between environmental health and human well-being.

In his later years, Kallen Pokkudan documented his life and experiences in his autobiography, "Kandalkkadukalkkidayil Ente Jeevitham" (My Life amidst Mangrove Forests), published in 2002. This work provides a personal and detailed account of his journey, challenges, and achievements, which serves as a perpetual source of inspiration for future generations of environmental activists.

Pokkudan's legacy reverberates far beyond the mangrove-lined shores of Kerala. His life serves as a testament to the transformative power of individual commitment and community-driven action in environmental conservation. As we dive deep into the pro-environmental attitude of Kallen Pokkudan, we discover not just a story of ecological resilience but also a profound narrative of cultural heritage, community empowerment, and the unending quest for harmony between man and nature.

Significance of the Study

Kallen Pokkudan's work in mangrove conservation represents a pivotal but often undervalued aspect of environmental activism. Documenting and analyzing his contributions provide recognition and validation for the grassroots efforts that are crucial for ecological preservation. Pokkudan's conservation practices are deeply anchored in indigenous knowledge and local traditions. Analyzing his work offers valuable insights into how indigenous practices can be incorporated into modern environmental management and policy-making. Insights from Pokkudan's strategies and successes can reform environmental policies at local, regional, and national levels. Policymakers can draw lessons from his work to develop more effective and inclusive conservation programs that engage and empower local communities. This paper could serve as an educational resource for students, researchers, and practitioners in environmental studies, highlighting practical approaches to conservation and the importance of community involvement since it emphasizes the role of cultural and ethical perspectives in shaping environmental attitudes. The need and significance of this study lies in its ability to illuminate the vital role of grassroots activism in environmental conservation, particularly in the context of mangrove preservation. By exploring the pro-environmental attitude and efforts of Kallen Pokkudan, the present study not only contributes to academic knowledge but also offers practical lessons and inspiration for ongoing and future environmental initiatives.

Review of Related Literature

The literature review aims to contextualize Kallen Pokkudan's contributions within the broader framework of environmental activism, mangrove conservation, and grassroots movements. It highlights key themes and findings from existing research that inform and support the analysis of Pokkudan's pro-environmental attitude and actions.

Biographical works and documentaries on Kallen Pokkudan, such as his autobiography "Kandalkkadukalkkidayil Ente Jeevitham" (My Life amidst Mangrove Forests) (2002), provide primary insights into his life, motivations, and environmental philosophy. These sources are crucial for constructing a detailed narrative of his environmental activism. Studies assessing the impact of Pokkudan's work, such as local government reports and NGO publications, offer empirical data on the outcomes of his conservation efforts. These assessments help in evaluating the effectiveness and broader implications of his initiatives.

The study of pro-environmental attitudes involves understanding the psychological and sociocultural factors that motivate individuals to engage in environmental conservation. Works like "The Theory of Planned Behavior" by Icek Ajzen (1991) and "Environmental Attitudes and Behavior" by T. Dietz, A. Fitzgerald, and R. Shwom (2005) provide theoretical frameworks for analyzing the motivations behind environmental activism.

These literature on environmental activism, mangrove ecosystems, conservation strategies, pro-environmental attitudes, and Kallen Pokkudan's contributions provides a comprehensive foundation for this study. By integrating these diverse sources, the paper can contextualize Pokkudan's work within broader environmental and socio-cultural frameworks, offering valuable insights into his pro-environmental attitude and the significance of his grassroots activism.

Objective

- To analyze the factors that shaped Pokkudan's pro-environmental attitude and the impact of his work on mangrove conservation.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, focusing on a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of Kallen Pokkudan's pro-environmental attitude and activism. The qualitative approach is chosen to capture the delicate and contextual aspects of his work and its impact. This methodology ensures a thorough and refined exploration of Kallen Pokkudan's pro-environmental attitude and activism, providing valuable insights into his contributions to mangrove conservation and grassroots environmental movements. By combining thematic and narrative analyses, this study aims to offer a thorough understanding of the pro-environmental attitude of Kallen Pokkudan.

Early Life and Influences

Kallen Pokkudan, born in 1937 in Ezhom, a village in the Kannur district of Kerala, India, emerged as a significant figure in environmental activism, particularly noted for his efforts in mangrove conservation. Pokkudan's early life was marked by socio-economic hardships. Coming from a Dalit family, he faced caste-based discrimination and economic deprivation, which limited his access to formal education. Despite these challenges, Pokkudan developed a deep connection with nature, particularly the mangrove ecosystems near his village. Growing up in a coastal area, Pokkudan was keenly mindful of the importance of mangroves in protecting the coastline and supporting local biodiversity. The traditional knowledge and practices of his community, which relied on the mangrove forests for fishing and other livelihoods, profoundly influenced his environmental consciousness. This cultural backdrop laid the foundation for his later activism. Pokkudan's journey into environmental activism began in the 1980s when he observed the rapid degradation of mangrove forests due to urbanization and industrial activities. He realized that the destruction of these vital ecosystems right before his eyes not only threatened biodiversity but also augmented the vulnerabilities of coastal communities to natural disasters. This revelation sparked his commitment to mangrove conservation.

Conservation Efforts

Kallen Pokkudan's conservation efforts centered primarily around mangrove ecosystems, driven by his deep-seated commitment to preserving biodiversity and supporting local livelihoods. Despite having limited resources and facing initial resistance from both the government and local communities, Pokkudan embarked on a mission to restore and protect the mangrove forests. He began by planting mangrove saplings along the coastlines and riversides, often working alone. Over time, his persistent efforts gained recognition and support. Here are some key aspects of his conservation initiatives:

- **Mangrove Planting Drives:** Pokkudan organized extensive planting drives, mobilizing local communities to participate in the restoration of mangrove forests.
- **Educational Campaigns:** He conducted awareness programs in schools and villages, educating people about the ecological and economic benefits of mangroves.
- **Collaborations:** He worked with environmental organizations and government agencies to promote sustainable mangrove management practices.

Challenges and Obstacles

Kallen Pokkudan faced numerous challenges and obstacles throughout his environmental activism journey, which tested his resolve and determination. Here are some key challenges he encountered:

- **Socio-Economic Barriers:** His lower socio-economic status and lack of formal education initially hindered his ability to garner support and resources.
- **Resistance from Local Communities:** Convincing local communities to participate in conservation efforts was difficult due to their immediate economic needs and lack of awareness.
- **Institutional Challenges:** Bureaucratic hurdles and lack of government support posed significant obstacles to his initiatives.

Despite these challenges, Kallen Pokkudan's unwavering commitment and strategic approach enabled him to overcome many obstacles and achieve significant milestones in mangrove conservation and environmental stewardship. His resilience in the face of adversity continues to inspire

environmentalists and community leaders striving to protect natural ecosystems and promote sustainable development.

Achievements and Recognition

Despite these challenges, Kallen Pokkudan's relentless efforts led to the successful restoration of extensive mangrove areas. His work gained widespread recognition, earning him several accolades:

- **P V Thampy memorial award (2001):** which identifies ordinary people who do extraordinary work for the environment and honors them.
- **Vana mitra award (2003):** Instituted by Kerala Forest and Wildlife Department, for voluntary organisations/individuals/educational institutions/farmers in each district in honour of their contribution towards biodiversity conservation.
- **Vanashree Award:** Conferred by the Government of Kerala for his outstanding contributions to environmental conservation.
- **Various Local and National Awards:** Recognizing his grassroots activism and impact on mangrove conservation.

Legacy and Impact

Kallen Pokkudan's legacy and impact in the realm of environmental conservation are profound and far-reaching, extending beyond Kerala, to inspire global movements for sustainable development and community-based conservation. Here are key aspects of his legacy and impact:

- **Enhanced Biodiversity:** Helped restore local biodiversity by rehabilitating mangrove ecosystems.
- **Community Empowerment:** Empowered local communities through awareness and involvement in sustainable practices.
- **Policy Influence:** Influenced regional and national environmental policies, highlighting the importance of mangrove conservation.

Development of Pro-Environmental Attitude

Pro-environmental attitude refers to a positive mindset and active commitment to protecting and preserving the natural environment. It involves recognizing the importance of sustainable practices, advocating for environmental conservation, and taking personal responsibility to minimize environmental impact. People with a pro-environmental attitude prioritize actions that support ecological health, biodiversity, and the long-term well-being of both current and future generations. Kallen Pokkudan exemplifies a profound pro-environmental attitude rooted in cultural heritage and community empowerment. His dedication to mangrove conservation in Kerala reflects a holistic approach blending traditional ecological knowledge with modern sustainability practices. Through grassroots activism and educational outreach, Pokkudan not only restored degraded ecosystems but also inspired local communities to embrace environmental stewardship. His legacy underscores the transformative power of individual commitment and collective action in safeguarding natural resources and promoting sustainable development worldwide.

The Dalit community to which Pokkudan belonged was historically marginalized and oppressed and had faced severe social and economic challenges. Growing up in this context, he experienced caste-based discrimination and economic hardship, which profoundly shaped his worldview and his commitment to social and environmental justice. The cultural heritage of Pokkudan's community was deeply intertwined with the natural environment, particularly the coastal and mangrove ecosystems. Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices played a crucial role in their daily lives and livelihoods. The local community relied on the mangrove forests for fishing, firewood, and other resources, fostering a deep connection with these ecosystems. This traditional ecological knowledge influenced Pokkudan's understanding of the importance of mangroves and motivated his conservation efforts. The sense of community and collective action inherent in Pokkudan's cultural background also played a significant role in his activism. Despite facing social marginalization, the Dalit community often engaged in cooperative efforts to address common challenges. This cultural trait of collective action and mutual support became a foundation for Pokkudan's grassroots initiatives for mangrove conservation.

Mangrove forests are a critical component of Kerala's coastal ecosystems. These forests provide essential services such as coastal protection, prevention of soil erosion, and support for

biodiversity. They act as nurseries for various marine species and are crucial for the livelihoods of local fishing communities. Kerala's mangrove ecosystems, however, have been under threat due to urbanization, industrialization, and agricultural expansion. By the time Pokkudan began his activism in the 1980s, Kerala's mangrove forests were facing severe degradation. Rapid industrialization and urbanization led to the large-scale destruction of mangrove habitats. This environmental degradation had dire consequences for both the local ecosystem and the communities dependent on it. The loss of mangroves increased the vulnerability of coastal areas to natural disasters such as cyclones and tsunamis and led to a decline in fish populations, impacting the livelihoods of local fishermen and communities such as Pokkudan's. His work coincided with a growing global awareness of environmental issues. The late 20th century saw the rise of environmental movements worldwide, emphasizing the need for sustainable development and conservation. In India, movements like the Chipko Movement in the 1970s highlighted the role of grassroots activism in environmental protection. This broader environmental consciousness provided a supportive backdrop for Pokkudan's local efforts. The environmental policies and initiatives in Kerala and India also influenced Pokkudan's work. While initial government efforts to conserve mangroves were limited, growing recognition of the importance of these ecosystems led to the development of conservation programs and policies. Pokkudan's activism played a crucial role in bringing attention to the plight of mangroves and advocating for stronger governmental action.

The cultural and environmental context of Kallen Pokkudan's life significantly influenced his pro-environmental attitude and activism. His socio-economic background, rooted in a marginalized community with a deep connection to the mangrove ecosystems, provided the foundation for his environmental consciousness. The environmental degradation of Kerala's mangroves and the broader global environmental movement shaped his activism. Pokkudan's work exemplifies how local cultural heritage and environmental challenges can drive impactful grassroots conservation efforts, highlighting the interdependence of social and ecological justice.

Pokkudan's proactive approach to conservation was characterized by hands-on initiatives such as planting mangrove saplings along coastlines and riverbanks. He also conducted extensive educational campaigns to raise awareness among local residents about the ecological importance of mangroves and the urgent need for their protection. His efforts aimed not only at restoring mangrove habitats but also at empowering communities to take ownership of their environmental resources. Central to Pokkudan's pro-environmental attitude was his belief in the power of collective action and community engagement. Despite facing initial challenges and resistance, he mobilized support from local residents, government agencies, and environmental organizations. His collaborative efforts not only led to the successful restoration of mangrove areas but also influenced regional policies and practices regarding environmental conservation.

Pokkudan's legacy extends beyond tangible conservation achievements. His life serves as a beacon of inspiration for environmentalists worldwide, illustrating the transformative impact of individual commitment and community-driven initiatives in safeguarding natural ecosystems. Through his autobiography and documented experiences, titled "Kandalkkadukalkkidayil Ente Jeevitham" (My Life amidst Mangrove Forests), Pokkudan continues to educate and inspire future generations about the importance of environmental stewardship and the enduring value of cultural connections to the land. Kallen Pokkudan's pro-environmental attitude is a testament to the profound impact that grassroots activism and unwavering dedication can have in preserving biodiversity and fostering sustainable coexistence between human communities and the natural world. His legacy underscores the importance of individual responsibility and collective action in addressing global environmental challenges, leaving an indelible mark on environmental conservation efforts in India and abroad.

Conclusion

Kallen Pokkudan's pro-environmental attitude is evidence to the transformative power of individual commitment and community-driven action in environmental conservation. Pokkudan's journey as an environmental activist was deeply rooted in his cultural heritage and intimate connection to mangrove ecosystems. Witnessing firsthand the rapid depletion of mangroves due to urbanization and industrialization in the 1980s, Pokkudan responded with unwavering resolve and proactive initiatives aimed at restoration and advocacy. Through his grassroots efforts, including extensive mangrove planting campaigns and educational outreach programs, Pokkudan not only rejuvenated degraded habitats but also empowered local communities to become stewards of their own natural environment. His approach emphasized the integration of traditional ecological knowledge with modern conservation

practices, fostering a holistic approach to environmental responsibility. Pokkudan's impact extended beyond Kerala, influencing regional environmental policies and inspiring a global movement for sustainable development and community-based conservation. His legacy is characterized by resilience, dedication, and a profound commitment to social justice, emphasizing the inseparable link between cultural preservation, environmental protection, and inclusive development. As we reflect on Kallen Pokkudan's pro-environmental attitude, we are reminded of the enduring value of individual initiative and collective action in addressing environmental challenges. His life and endeavors shall continue to inspire environmentalists and communities worldwide to embark upon similar approaches in safeguarding natural ecosystems and promoting sustainable livelihoods for future generations.

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