

Study on the kikuyu



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The Kikuyu are mainly located in the central province of Kenya in East Africa. They are the largest indigenous and populous ethnic population found in Kenya. Kikuyu people make up approximately 22 percent of the Kenya's total population. The word Kikuyu is used as a general term to describe the language spoken by the Kikuyu people. Kikuyu belong to the Bantu speaking language of the Niger Congo family.

Oral tradition had it that the Kikuyu were founded by a man named Gikuyu. It is believed among the people that the Kikuyu god popularly known as Ngai took Gikuyu to the top of a mountain called Kirinyaga. The god of the mountain told him to stay and build his house there. Gikuyu had a wife named Mumbi. They had nine daughters whose names later formed the nine Kikuyu clans found in Kenya. These clans includes Achera, Agachiku, Airimu, Ambui, Angare, Anjiru, Angui, Aithaga, and Aitherandu were formed (Miruiki, 1974). Other oral traditions suggests that the ancestors of the Kikuyu came from the North around the region of Nyambene hills to the north East of Mount Kenya otherwise known as kiriyaga. This is believed to be the original home of all cenral Bantu speaking peoples such as the Meru, Embu, Chuka, Kambu and Mberre. The people are generally believed to have arrived in their present location since the thirteenth century. It is generally agreed among the Kikuyu that they migrated from Axum in present day Ethiopia to Kenya while the other mythological story stated that the people migrated from ' Shungwaya' in Somalia (Miruiki, 1974).

The people of Kikuyu rely heavily on agriculture as their main form of occupation. They grow bananas, millet, maize, black beans and a variety of other vegetables. Besides, they also raise cattle, sheep and goat. They use

the hides from the cattles to make bedding, sandals, and carrying straps and the goats and sheep that were used for religious sacrifice and purification (Lambert, 1956). Generally, the Kikuyu people have a reputation of being very hard workers. A lot of them are now involved in business. Many of them live on small family plots of land while some of them have moved to urban centers and different areas to work. The people have a strong desire for knowledge, children are raised to work in the farms and to have access to western education. The Kikuyus are well educated. Their abilities to adapt new realities have resulted in many people in the rural areas adopting many aspects of modern cultures (Mwakikagile, 2008).

The Kikuyu traditionally worshipped a single god Known as Ngai, who is known among the people as the provider of the community living at the top of the mountain. Besides the indigenous beliefs, there are many of Kikuyus who are Christians and Muslims. Approximately 45 percent of Kikuyus are Christian, ten percent Islam, ten percent traditional, two percent Hindu, and two percent Buddhist. Geographically, the people were found in the Ngong hills to the south, the Nyandarua Mountain to the west and the Mount Kenya to the northeast (CIA Factbook).

The political organization of the Kikuyu during the pre-colonial era was closely linked to the family system. The family was the basis of political authority in the town. Young people were usually initiated into the national council of junior warrior (Njama ya Anake a Muno) after 82 moons or twelve rain seasons after the circumcision ceremony the junior warrior was promoted to the council of senior warriors (Njama ya Ita). These councils are usually called upon to protect the people in case of external aggression. The

council of senior warriors was in addition an important decision making organ of the political system. These councils comprises of people between ages twenty to forty years (Miruiki, 1974).

Upon marriage, the husband is initiated into a council called (Kiama Kia Kiamatimo). This is the first grade of eldership. These elders were also known as warriors. The warriors assisted in carrying out proceedings of menial tasks like skinning animals, being messengers, carrying ceremonial articles or light fires among other tasks. Furthermore, It is believed among the people that when a man had son or daughter old enough for circumcision, he is elevated to another council called the council of peace (Kiama Kia Mataathi). On entering this council, the man is now regarded as a man of peace and no longer of the warrior class. He assumed the duty peace maker in the community when a man had practically all his children circumcised, and his wife or wives had passed child bearing age, he has reached the last and most honored status. This council is known as religious and sacrificial council (Kiama Kia Maturanguru) (Miruki, 1974). At this stage, the father slaughtered and offered an animal as sacrifice to the Ngai god. The man is then invested with power to lead sacrificial ceremony at the sacred tree known as (Magumu Muti Wa Igongona). The elders of this grade assumed the role of “ holy men” They were high priests. All religious and ethical ceremonies were in their hands. Among the Kikuyu, the elders handled the religious, governance, and the legal functions within the community. Both men and women usually perform the initiation ceremony into the various councils. Above all, the father of the different family heads in the village makes up the political structure of the community. The most

senior elder of the district heads this. The most advanced in age was elected as the head of the judge (Tate, 1904).

Kinship structure is also an important feature among the Kikuyu groups of East Africa. The Head of the family who is the man is known as Muthuri that is (someone who can discern evil from good) while the Woman is called Mutumia (one who retains family secret and practices). The polygamous system of family is widely practiced among the people. The family units in Kikuyu lived in several huts in the society. These huts were constructed in such a way that during cold seasons the interior would be very warm while in the hot seasons the hut would be cool (Lambert, 1956). By tradition, the first son of the family is named after the grand father, while the second son is named after the mother's father. This is the same with girls, whom the first daughter would be named after her father's mother and the second daughter after her mother's mother. Perhaps the reason for this according to the people's belief is that the spirit of the deceased grand parent would carry on to the child (Miruiki, 1974). This cultural practice is no longer common among the people since life span became longer with the advent of modern scientific medicine to cure diseases. The Kikuyu people have an affinity for ceremonies. They have a culturally diverse history of how people live during the pre-colonial period. During festive periods, the people usually entertain visitors with sonorous songs and dancing display whenever there is marriage, naming ceremony and joyous religious festivals of the town (Tate, 1904).

The Kikuyu groups were one of the most popular ethnic groups that hastened the Kenyan Independence in 1963. The uprising of the Kikuyu

created a rift between the white colonial communities in Kenya and the home office in London. Under colonial rule, the British colonial masters displaced the Kikuyu groups of their land (Newsweinger, 1981). The inability of the colonial administration to develop mechanism through which African grievances against the white settlers might be resolved in terms of equity and fairness served to accelerate a growing disaffection with the colonial authorities in Kenya. This consequently led to the rise of revolt and the nurture of the seed of a growing African Nationalism (Wunyabari, 1998). The Kikuyu conceived militant nationalism against the British authorities. The worsening effect of poverty, starvation, unemployment and over population set the Kikuyu to stage of what can be described as by the British as the Mau Mau revolution against the colonial masters (Newsweinger, 1981). The Mau Mau revolt is one of the most prominent world revolutions in East African history. The word Mau-Mau was coined by the colonial authorities to describe the rebel movement against colonial masters over the control of their land (Corfield, 1960). The Kikuyu groups who are members of the movement described themselves as the “ Muingi” meaning The Movement (John, 1981). The deprivation of the Kikuyu against land ownership made them to revolt against the colonial government. The colonial masters made the Kikuyu to become tenant farmers who had no land of their own and also protesting against more days of labor in the colonial farm without adequate remuneration (Wunyabari, 1998).