

SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDIES OF TRIBAL COMMUNITIES OF KERALA



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ABSTRACT

Kerala the smallest state of the Republic India with an area of 15,000 square miles including 5318 square miles of Government Reserve Forests and 1265.5 square miles of private forests. Among the tribal communities in Kerala the most numerically dominant are the Pulayans, Paniyans, Maratis, Malayarayans, Kurumans and Irulas. Even though all the districts of Kerala account for some tribal population, they are significantly, found in Cannanore, Kozhikode, Palaghat and Idukki Districts. Eight percent of all the tribal population is found in these four districts. However the main tribal concentrations are in the Taluks of North Wynad, South Wynad, Mannarghat, Devikulam and Thodupuzha. They have their own culture, life style, social structure, rituals, values etc.

Keywords: Tribe, Kerala, Forest, Communities, Culture, Social Structure.

INTRODUCTION

The tribal communities of Kerala not only differ from one another but also from the nontribals. These differences relate to language, social organization, and means of subsistence. Two tribes speaking different dialects belonging to the same linguistic family may sometimes vary in their means of subsistence. Whereas there may be two tribes with more or less the same economic pursuits who have no linguistic affinities. An attempt to classify the tribes of Kerala on the basis of their economy reveals that they are food gatherers and hunters, shifting cultivators, farm laborers, agriculturist, etc.

The majority of the tribes are concentrated on the Waynadu district of constitute 35.82 percentage of the total tribal population. The second and third position occupied by Palakkadu and Idduki district. They constitute 15.66 percentage and 11.05 percentages respectively of the tribal population. The least majority of tribals are found in Alappuzha district 0.87 percentages.

Salutation among member of the family is interesting 'Ammā' is the salutation for the mother for all tribes of Kerala, expected Uridavans who use the term 'Avva'. Father is addressed 'Appan' or 'Appa' by most groups and as 'Achan' by Paniyans, Kurumbas, Nayadies, and Uralis. Irulas, Malapandarams and Malmalassars call him 'Ayya' and the 'Malavedans', Manassas and Malakkuravans use the terms 'Anthai'.

Tribes of Kerala.

Adiyan:- A community of Kerala, they also describe themselves as Ravuler have a population of 8152 according to the 1981 census. Their name has originated from an old rule that they should maintain a distance of ar (six) addi (feet) to avoid pollution. The word adiyan also connected a slave or a vassal attached to a person of social standing. The word addi is now interpreted to mean lowly. The adiyan are distributed in the district of Wayanad and Cannanore where they mainly inhabit the equal area. They speak themselves in adiyan bhasha which is a dialect of the Kannada language belonging to the Dravidian family of language. They are also conversant with Malayalam and use the Malayalam script. The women wear a saree with a knot over the right shoulder (Sindha Kettu) and bear tattoo marks on their forearm. Regarding food habit, they are nonvegetarians, and their staple diet is rice supplemented with pulses like gram, peas, and beans. Men drink alcoholic beverages and smoke beedis. Both sexes are found of chewing betel leaves.

Aarandan: - A community of Kerala which may have derived its name from two local words aravam, meaning a snake and nadan, denoting countrymen. They hunt Pythons to extract oil which they sell to the people of the place as a remedy for leprosy. They speak their own dialect which is kin to Malayalam with others they speak in Malayalam. The Malayalam script is used. The Arandan usually attaining adulthood. Monogamy is the common form. A bead necklace (Kallu) is the marriage symbol. Bride price (Patta Panam) s paid to the father of the bride by the bridegroom at the time of marriage. Divorce is permitted and the bride price has to return to the husband. They are non-vegetarian who eat carrion too. The Arandan worship the village deity and deities of the Hindu Pantheon.

Eravallan:- Eravallan was known as the Eravallor or Villu Vedans, they are distributed in the Palakkad district of Kerala. The term Villu Vedan means hunters with bows and arrows. Their speech resembles Tamil, Dravidian languages. They speak either in Tamil or Malayalam or Tamil script. An Eravallan can marry his father's sister's daughter or mother's brother's daughter and these marriages are fixed by negotiation. Monogamy is the form. The marriage pendant (tali) and toe-rings are marriage symbols. The traditional occupation of the Eravallor

was agriculture, hunting, and gathering which are still perused by some. Their children also work and earn. A few of the Eravallan are followers of the traditional tribal religion and believe in demons (boodamn). The rest of profess Hinduism and worship Kali, Kannimars, Mani, and Karupparaya.

Hill Pulaya:- Hill Pulaya popularly called Mala Pulaya. They are reported from Kerala. Mala means a mountain or a hill and Pulayan is derived from Pula. Hill Pulaya are studied in two groups: the Karavazhi Pulaya and Kurumba Pulaya.

Hill Pulaya Kuravazhi, A group of Hill Pulaya, they are concentrated in the Idduki district of Kerala. The community's oral tradition reveals that they migrated from Tamilnadu. The Kuravazhi Hill Pulaya never intermarried or intermarried with the other two endogamous groups of the Hill Pulaya. They speak in the Dravidian language. Tamil and write in the Tamil script. The Malayalam language and the Malayalam script are used for inter-group communication. The Karavazhi are non-vegetarians. Men consume alcoholic drinks occasionally which they purchase from the market. Only the males smoke, while betel chewing is common to both the sexes. The Kuravazhi accept food and water from the Muthuvan, Kurumbapalaya, Vellala, Ezhava and some more neighboring people. The primary occupation of Kuravazhi is agricultural labor. Their attitude towards formal education is not favorable as both boys and girls often drop out after primary school level due to Socio-Economic reasons.

Hill Pulaya Kurumba, they are one of the three endogamous groups of the Hill Pulaya. The other two endogamous groups are Kuravazhi Pulaya and Pambu Pulaya. The Kurumba Pulaya are distributed in the Idduki district of Kerala. They speak in Tamil among themselves and use Tamil and Malayalam with others. The Malayalam script is used. They are non-vegetarians. Their staple food is rice and ragi, supplemented with different pulses, roots, and tubers. Traditionally the Kurumba Pulaya were engaged in hunting, gathering, trapping of birds and animals, shifting cultivation, animal husbandry pastoralism.

Irular or Irulan:- The Irular or Irulan inhabit the hilly tracts of the Palghat district in Kerala. Both Malayalam and Tamil languages are spoken. The Malayalam script is used. The irular women of Kerala bear a V-shaped tattoo mark on their forehead. Their average status is short to medium below medium whereas the nose is medium to broad in shape. Among the irular of Kerala, they have eleven exogamous clans (kulam) namely Arumoopan, Samar, Laratti, Kurgan, Vellaka, Devan, Kuppli, Kuper, Pungar, Perathara, and Uppili. A black bead necklace (kurapasi) is the marriage symbol. A newly-wed couple lives away from the natal families. Hunting and gathering, trapping of birds and animals, shifting cultivation, animal husbandry and pastoralism were their traditional occupations. At present they are engaged in settled cultivation, animal husbandry, basket and mat making service and labor. They profess Hinduism.

Kadar: - They are distributed mainly in the Trichur and Palghat districts of Kerala. The climate of the area is moderate with low humidity and medium rainfall. The terrain is hilly with dense forest. The term Kadar has been derived from the word Kadar, meaning forest. The Kadar language is close to the Dravidian language, Tamil and is locally known as Kadar bhasha which has no script. With others, they converse in Malayalam and Tamil. The script used for writing in Malayalam. The Kadar are short stature and long-headed people with a round or oval facial profile and a broad nose for suggesting Proto-Australoid strains. The Kadar observe community endogamy. Earlier the Kadar were hunters and gatherers, now a day, many of them have become settled cultivators, agricultural laborers, basket makers, mat weavers and petty shop owners. A few are engaged in Government services as forest guards and peons. The seasonal collection of minor forest produces also contributed to their

income. A Kadar headman is known as Moopan. The Community professes Hinduism and Worship village and regional deities and deities of the wider Hindu Pantheon.

Kanikkaran, Kanikkar:- They are also known as Kanikkaran, but their neighbors refer to them as the Kani. They inhabit the hills of Neyyattinkara and Nedumangadu taluks of Trivandrum district and also live in the adjoining district of Quilon in Kerala. They are short, long-headed, flaring nostrils, prognathous jaw, and brachicep-halic heads. Their colors vary from light to dark brown. Both sexes grow long hair and knot at the back of the head.

They have the institution of headman known as Vettermale Kanikkars. The law of exogamy govern all marriages. A man usually marries the murapennu. There is no payment of dowry. Desertion and dowry are common. Women have low status. The does not permit to Uttar the name of her husband.

Burying the dead is common except among those living in the forests of the Kottayam River. Funeral ceremonies were conducted in the most solemn manner. Pollution connected with death lasts for 15 days.

They worship clan deities like Karutta Thamburan, Kottara Thamburan, and Adulla Thamburan. Generally, their literacy rate is higher than scheduled tribes.

Kochuvelan:- Also referred to as Mala Ulladan, they are distributed in the Kottayam, Idukki and Pathanamthitta districts of Kerala. The term Ulladan may have been derived from the word “UL” meaning side and “Nadan” countrymen, ie one who lives in the interior country. The language used both within the family and with others in Malayalam, one of the Dravidian language. Rice is their staple cereal. They are non-vegetarians and eat pork but avoid eating the meat of buffalo and bison. Both men and women drink alcoholic beverages occasionally which they purchase from the market.

Cross-cousin marriage is in vogue among them. Adult marriage is the common practice and marriages rearranged by elders through negotiation. Hunting, gathering, trapping of birds and animals and shifting cultivation were the traditional occupations of Kochuvelan. They profess Hinduism and appoint sacred specialists from their own community to perform worship and conduct marriage and death rituals.

Their attitude towards both indigenous and modern medicine is favorable. Modern contraceptive methods have been accepted by them.

Koraga: - Koragas are inhabitants of the Cannanore district. They are of average height, black-skinned, thick-lipped and have wavy or curly hair. Both sexes use earrings and bangles. They are non-vegetarians. They speak Tulu language.

Their total population was 1500. They are divided into two groups that is Sappu Koraas and Kantu Koragas. Basket making is their main occupation. They live in low huts hatched with grass or leaves.

Marriages are arranged by the parents of the bridegroom. Divorce is common. Divorce and widowed are free to remarry. Polygamy and forbidden.

The Koragas were animists. They worship Sun and Guru Karnavans. Their popular God is known as Katu and Mariamma. Women are participating in all religious ceremonies. They bury the dead. The grave is far away from the settlement. Pollution connected with death lasts for sixteen days.

Kurumans:- A group of the Kuruman, they are referred to as Mulla Kuruman and sometimes as Mulla Kurumba. The Mulla Kuruman are concentrated in the Wynad district of Kerala.

Traditionally the Mulla Kuruman were hunters, food gatherers and shifting cultivators, but now they are mostly

engaged in settled cultivation or wage labor. Boys and Girls of this community generally study to the secondary and primary school level, respectively.

They worship the territorial deity (kudi devata), Ganapathi, Sri Krishnan, Kadamkuli, and Mariamma.

Kurumbas:- They are found in Kottayam district. They are of medium height, dark complexioned. They are two main divisions that are Urukurumbas and Kadukurumbas. They are food gatherers and hunters. They follow the patrilineal rule of succession. The Kurumbas have the institution of the headman known as Arason. It is hereditary. They have the Chapli (Priest) who is the important person at funeral and marriage ceremonies.

Marriage is only after puberty. Marriages have to be exogamous. To marry the daughter of the maternal aunt is objectionable but the daughter of the maternal uncle is recommended. To essentials, part of the ceremony is the presentation of the cloth and the trying of a string of colored beads. Marriage by the exchange is not popular. Polygamy and Sorority were popular.

These family ties are not very strong and the morality is not satisfactory. Divorce and desertion are common. They are animist and totemists. Their favorite deity is Sanchali Karuppan. They bury the dead in a common graveyard, close to their settlement. The son is the chief mourner. Pollution connect with death lasts for six days.

Mahamalaras: - They are found in Palaghat district. They are also seen at Sangam, Thekkady and is the Parambikulam in Idukki district. Their total population was 500.49. They are the most primitive kattujathi. They lead a nomadic way of life. They are still following hunting and food gathering. They are of medium height, dark in color have oily hair. The closed approach to nakedness is the most salient nature.

They are non-vegetarian. They treat cow as a polluting animal. They speak Tamil. They live in under overhanging rocks and in the hollows of trees. They follow nonlocals' residence after marriage. Their family is the nuclear type.

They have the institution of the male headman called Mooppan or Periyathampy and female head women called Ponnuthalavi. The Wiseman enjoy equal status in compared to men in all walks of life. The life cycle ritual is simple and they follow strictly the concept of purity and population during the occasion of post-delivery, puberty, death etc. As soon as girls attain puberty, a separate hut is constructed and the girl ushered into it. They are very rigid in the observance of taboos connected with menses of women.

Marriage is held at bride's residence. It generally takes place on Monday. They worship Godless like Vanabhadra, Kaliamma, Banathiamma, etc. The dead person is given a bath and is buried in the forest.

Kota: - Kota is one of the primitive tribal group in Tamilnadu and Kerala. The Kota male wears a shirt and munda and uses a varad as covering. The female use a traditional wear called Kir in the village and wear saree and blouse. When they go out of the village the women are fond of wearing gold and silver ornaments. Both the men and women beautifully their bodies with tattoo marks of birds, animals, and flowers.

The Kota social structure is based on a number of Keri or street. Normally each Kota village has three Keris with two different names, they are Kiker (lower street), Nadukar (middle street).

The family is the basic social, economic and religious unit of Kota tribe. Husband is the head of the family. They are traditionally involved in Blacksmith, Carpentry, etc. they

practice shifting cultivation called Bhurthy. At present their major economic activity is small farming.

Keri is an exogamous unit. Marriage and sexual relationship between the same Keri are strictly prohibited. They also worship natural objects like Sun, Moon, Earth, and Rain. Every month of the first Monday the whole village gather before the temple to worship deities. Both on the marriage and death ceremony, they play music and the whole village participate in the dance. Feast also provides the other villages.

Malaiaryan: - They are found in Kottayam and Ernakulam district. They are non-vegetarians. Women have equality of status and are permitted to own property. They followed the Marumakkathayam rule. They are economically and culturally miserable.

Their huts were made of stone or mud. Some of the huts have mud walls and rooms with doors and windows fitted on wooden frames. Bamboo mats are used for sitting and sleeping. They have the institution of headman known as Perumban or Kani. They worship Durga, Bhagavathi, Sashta etc.

They have the Talikethu Kalyanam before girls attain puberty. The real marriage is after puberty. Marriage was arranged by elders. Divorce is permitted. Polygamy is popular. They bury the dead.

Malayar: - They are the hill people of Kerala. This Malayar group is distributed in the Palaghat and Thrissur district of Kerala. The language spoken by them at home and with others is Malayalam. Rice is the staple cereal for them.

Cross-cousin marriage is prevalent among them. Hunting, gathering, and collection of honey are their traditional occupation. Now they took animal husbandry, agriculture, labor and cultivation as a primary occupation.

They profess a local form of Hinduism. The major festivals observed by them are Onam and Thandanvala.

Mannan:- They are a community of Kerala who lives in the Devikulam taluk of Idukki district. The Mannan is divided into two moieties (kudi), namely Arava and Panaya.

They are non-vegetarian who eat bison meat but not beef. They consume alcohol and avoid cow milk.

Their traditional occupation is hunting and gathering, trapping of birds and animals and shifting cultivation. At present, their occupation and agricultural labor, settled cultivation, animal husbandry, and mat weaving. They follow Hinduism. Madurai Meenakshi is regarded as the community deity. Various Hindu Gods and Goddess are also worshiped. Some of the Mannan boys studied up to the secondary levels and girls up to the primary school level.

Malai Veden:- Also known as Malai Veda in Tamilnadu, they claim to be the original inhabitants of the Travancore region of Kerala. Presently they lie in the Kanyakumari district of Tamilnadu.

The Malai Vedan do not have social division. Monogamy is the norm and marriage between cross-cousins are preferred. The age at marriage varies from fifteen to eighteen years for girls and from twenty to twenty-five for boys. The Malai Veden were traditional food gatherers. Now they collect forest produce and supply the same to the market through middlemen.

The Mali Vedan profess Hinduism and worship deities like Karungaliyamma, Yeratamalla, and Parangliamma. The Mali Vedan attach importance to modern education and prefer to send their children to school. They usually study up to the secondary school level. They make use of traditional medicines and follow indigenous methods of contraception. The voluntary organization has helped them to get employment and information.

Muduvan / Muthuvan: - This community inhabits the border regions of Tamilnadu and Kerala. The Muduvan are Hindu and believe in a number of spirits. The Muduvan are distributed in Idukki district and adjoining the Western Ghats of the Palakkad and Thrissur district. They are non-vegetarians. Rice and ragi are the staple cereals.

They prefer cross-cousin marriage. Marriage by negotiation is usual mode of acquiring a mate. They are agriculturalist, shifting and terrace cultivation is also practiced by them.

Recently they have started sending their boys to school. While the girls are not encouraged to go informal education. They use both traditional and modern medicines.

Malasar: - These are tribes in Kerala and Tamilnadu. They were nonvegetarian. They have no social divisions of exogamous. They make their living by labor in the forest, in the non-tribal land lord's house and a few collect minor forest produce. They were experts in catching and taming the elephant.

The Kula panchayat exists at village level among the Malasar under the headship of Mooppan. They profess Hindu religion. They do not have family deities but worship village deities. They mainly worship goddesses like Kliyamma and Droupadhi. Recently they started worshipping male God, Ayappaswamy.

They follow cross-cousin marriage. Polygamy and Junior Sorority are the forms of marriage. Divorce is permitted with the consent of their Kula panchayat the Malasar community observe pre-delivery rituals and post-delivery restrictions for the pregnant women. They observe birth pollution for seven days. The mother's brother takes active parts in child's naming ceremony.

They bury dead, elava and observe obsequies Karamadhi on eight days. They observe annual ancestors worship.

Mala Kuravan: - The Mala Kuravans a tribe of Tamilnadu and Kerala. They were considered as nomadic agricultural laborers and subsisted by hunting and gathering hill produce. Nowadays their major economic resource is land and labor. They are non-vegetarians and take the meal of beef, pig, frog, fish etc. their staple food is rice and they prefer to take Pachavellai rice, water. Both men and women habitually take alcoholic drinks available in the market. They are fond of smoking a beedi and chewing tobacco and betel.

They are animists and Toto mists and they worship the spirit of ancestors. They also worship the forest Gods like Mantramurthy, Ayarvelli, Pottanatha etc. they observe Hindu festivals like Onam, Deepavali, Shivaratri etc.

They claim to have eight exogamous clans. Child marriage was the earlier practice nowadays girls are married after puberty. Monogamy is the principal form of marriage. The most common type of family is the nuclear type.

They bury the dead in a deep grave far away from their settlement and pollution connected with death rites lasts for sixteen days or on the last day a non-vegetarian feast is given.

Marati:- This tribe is found in Kannur district. Both sexes grow long hair and knot it at the back. Females wear sarees, blouse, nose-rings, ear-rings etc. They speak Marati language. They are non-vegetarians. They were economically better off than the other tribes in Kerala. They are mostly cultivators. They follow the patrilineal rule of succession. They are most agriculturist and laborers. Most of them have their own land. They also rear cattle, sell milk and butter.

They have the institution of headman known as Yojaman, he is respected and obeyed. Marriage is endogamous. A girl on attaining puberty is segregated for three days and is not allowed to enter the kitchen or to meet or mix with the male members. They are Hindus of a high order. They worship Siva, Parvathi, Durga, and Mariamma. They visit temples and make offerings. They have great faith in magic moments, witchcraft, and sorcery.

The Marati creates the dead except an infant. The corpse is washed and covered with new cloth. The eldest son is the chief mourner, sets fire to the Pyre. The pollution lasts ten days. They pray for the dead every year.

Irular:- This tribe mostly found in Tamilnadu and Kerala is known by several names like Irulas, Irulon, Iratiga, Irvan etc. Traditionally the Irular were hunters and trappers of small game animals. Now they make their living by labor collecting minor forest produce and by agriculture. They were experts in catching snakes.

Each Irular settlement has headman called Mooppan. Who presides the tribal council called Kulam panchayat. Their women do not participate in Kulam panchayat because their men do not allow them unless they are called them witnesses.

They follow cross-cousin marriage. Monogamy is the common form of marriage and few cases of polygamy and junior sororate are found. Modes of acquiring mates are by courtships by service, by mutual consent etc.

Given bride price of RS. 25 and 25 paise is common but nowadays besides bride price, they are also practicing giving dowry in the form of cash and gifts. Divorce is permitted.

They had animistic belief but now they worship local Hindu deities like Valliamman, Mariamma, Bhadrakaliamma, Murugan etc. the tribe Goddess is Kanima, Friday is an auspicious day.

They are skilled at making mats and bamboo baskets, Palliyan of Kerala as followers of Hinduism. These people inter-dine with the Mannan, Ulladan and some of their neighbors. Their achievement informal education in this state is better.

Ulladan:- This community of Kerala are said to have derived their name from the term UL, meaning within and Odunnu, meaning run as they used to run away into the forest at the sight of strangers. The Ulladan inhabit the districts of Palaghat, Thrissur, Emakulam, Kottayam, Quilon, Allepy and Thiruvananthapuram. This community is divided into some exogamous clans. Cross-cousin marriages are practiced by them. Adult marriage is the norm and marriage are mostly settled through negoti, trapping of birdstion. Monogamy is the form of marriage.

The traditional occupation of the Ulladan is foraging, trapping of birds and animals, a collection of honey and medicinal plants, canoe-making, wood cutting, basket-making, and mat-weaving. Now they have ceased to be foragers. Recently they have taken to animal husbandry, salaried jobs in Government and private organization and wage labor.

The Ulladan profess Hinduism but also worship their own deities like Kappivi, Thikutti, and Chatham. The Ulladan share wells and others sources of water, crematoria and religious shrines with their neighbors and participate in the traditional festivals with them. They have recorded a high literacy rate.

Marati:- Also known as Maratha, they are concentrated in some parts of Karnataka state and Kerala. The term Marati denotes various Marathi Non-Brahman castes who came to the south either as soldiers or as camp followers in the armies of the Marathi invaders. This community was evidently tribalised and has been notified as a scheduled tribe with two different names at two different places.

Rice is their staple food and gram, tur and urad are the pulses eaten. They rarely eat non-vegetarian food, coconut oil is the cooking medium. The men drink alcoholic beverages occasionally, which they purchase from the market. The main occupations of the community are cultivation and agricultural labor. In Kerala, the Marati are also called Maratha and Marathi. The Malayalam and Kannada scripts are used by them.

The Marati profess Hinduism. They have commensal relations with the Maniyani, Bannara, and Nair. They have benefited from rural employment generation schemes.

Palliyan:- In Kerala, the Palliyan have been enumerated as Palliyan, Palliyar and Palliyan are mainly distributed in the Idukki district. These people are bilingual and use the regional language Malayalam apart from their mother tongue Tamil. Both Malayalam and Tamil script used by them. Basically, they are food gatherers, but now some of them are engaged in agriculture and salaried jobs.

Uraly:- They inhabit the states of Kerala and Tamilnadu. The term Uraly is also spelled as Urali and if has been derived from the words UR, meaning a village and AL, meaning a person. The district of Madurai is considered their original home. In Kerala, they are concentrated in the Idukki district. Malayalam is their mother tongue and they use Malayalam script.

There are eight exogamous clans among the Uraly. A man can marry his mother's brother daughter or father's sister's daughter and also the younger sister of his deceased wife. They bury the dead and perform ancestor worship.

CONCLUSION

Tribe in Kerala constitute 1.1 percent of the total population. Scheduled Tribe Development Department is giving high priority to the educational development of tribal. In the view of the department, the major hurdles in tribal education are inaccessibility of tribal habitats and difficulties faced by students to reach schools. Socio-economic condition of the tribal-like economic backwardness and poverty, their reluctance towards regular class etc. In order to drag the children away from this situation, the government has drawn up a number of schemes. The tribal has a common name and language or dialect of their own. The members of a tribal generally marry in to their own. They have their own culture, life style, social structure, rituals, values etc. usually the tribe is politically organized and all authority for administration is vested in one person called the chief.

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