

Tribals in Tamil Nadu with Special Reference to Tribes of Pachamalai Hills

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The tribal population is identified as the aboriginal inhabitants of our country. For centuries, they have been living a simple life based on the natural environment and have developed cultural patterns congenial to their physical and social environment. References to of such tribal groups are found even in the literature on the ancient period, right from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* periods. According to L.P.Vitharthi tribe is a social group with definite territory, common name, common descent, common culture, behaviour of an endogamous group, common taboos, and existence of distinctive social and political system, full faith in leaders and self-sufficiency in their district economy. There are approximately two hundred million tribal people in the entire globe, which means, about 4% of the global population. They are found in many regions of the world and majority of them are the poorest amongst poor. According to India's most recent census in 2011 Schedule Tribes comprise 8.6% of the total population. The distribution of ST populations varies widely across India's state and territories. In Mizoram and Lakshadweep, STs represent close to 95% of the population whereas in Kerala and Tamil Nadu STs represent only 1% of the population. Among the total ST population in India, the highest populations are found in Madhya Pradesh (14.5%), Maharashtra (10.2%), and Orissa (9.7%). There are around 700 different tribes living across India, predominantly in remote areas: forest hills, and rough terrain in plateau areas. There is great heterogeneity across different tribal groups, including a sub- category of particularly vulnerable STs known as primitive tribes. After Indian independence, number of policies and programmes were initiated in the tribal areas, which had far reaching consequences.

Tribe

The oxford dictionary defines the tribe as "a group of people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development, acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding them as having common ancestor". The tribe is a social group of a simple kind the member of which speaks a common dialect, have a government, act together for common purposes and have a common name a contiguous territory, a relatively uniform culture or way of life and a tradition of common descent. Accordingly, a tribe is viewed, as a group of people with common dialect, purpose, and name or culture. A.B.Bardhan defines the tribe as a "course of a social-cultural entity at a definite historical stage of a development. It is a single endogamous community, with a cultural and psychological make up going back in to a distant historical past. Majumdar defines the tribes as "a collection of families or groups bearing a common name, the members of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and above certain taboos regarding marriage, profession or occupation, with a well-assured system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligations. Various scholars have defined the term tribe from their own perception.

Tribal Setting in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu can be broadly classified into three geographical regions, namely, the Eastern coast line region, the central plain area and North and west mountains regions where the majority of the tribal people are living. The important hills of Tamil Nadu are the Jawadhu hills and Elagiri hills of North Arcot district, the Kalrayan hills of south Arcot district, the Pachamalai, the Kollimalai and Yergadu hills of Salem district, the Anamalai of Coimbatore district, the Sitteri hills of Dharmabari district, the Palanimalai of Dindigul district, Elumalai (cardamom hills) hills and Varshanad hills of Theni district.

The tribal population of Tamil Nadu was 5.74 lakhs, where as the total general population was 5.58 crores as per the 1991 census. The concentration of tribal population in Tamil Nadu is very low. The percentage of tribal population to the total population was 1.03 per cent. These are 36 tribal groups in the state.

Pachamalai Hills

Pachamalai is located in the North western part of the Tiruchirappalli district in Thuraiyur taluk which separate the district from the Salem district. This is only important hill in the district inhabited by the Malaiyalee (hill-men). The hill range is about 2000 feet above the MSL and certain peaks are about 3400 feet high. This hill in the shape of an hour- glass, the length of which is about 20 kilometers.

Through the Ghat road, which is about 31 kms length from Shobanaburam which is at the foot of the hill, we can reach the top of this hill. It has many hairpin bends (11 in number) and the roads are well maintained one. Three kilometer below the top of the ghat road, highway division authorities have displayed a notice board at valley view point and put up a small raised platform from where one can have a beautiful view of the valleys

in the slopes and the hill below. At the end of the ghat road on the top of the hill, we are having two travelers' quest houses, one maintained by the local Panchayat Union and the other by the forest department.

The isolated nature of Pachamalai hill (green hill) to an extent made their population illiterate that caused them to become obsessive to modern medical system. They were living in simple huts in an electrified villages with traditional dresses during the pre- colonial period. Hize Faine, in his manual of Salem district (1887) has given an account of their tribal culture, illiteracy, the native doctors and their day-to-day manual labour and also the house types and dressing pattern of the tribal people.

After the independence, the government of India legalized their status through various acts of the constitution, Directive Principles of State Policies and by many welfare measures to promote their socio-economic conditions. A separate wing, Tribal Welfare Department was established and was authorized to take up suitable welfare measures. Other departments were also given guidelines to give priority to tribal areas. Thus under various scheme, the Malayalee tribes of Pachamalai hill came under socio-economic and cultural changes.

Tribal groups in the hills continued to speak a variety of tribal languages. The Tamil race came into being as soon as the mountains were found above the surface of the sea. The ancient Tamil literature clearly reveals that the Tamils found one of the ancient human races and Tamil languages claim their antiquary.

The hill is replete with many herbal plants. Eight residential schools are there for the benefit of the tribal students. There are four branch post office, one government hospital, one veterinary sub centre, ten public distribution centers and a co-operative society for the use of these people. The people live in this hill are called Malayalees and they are scheduled as the tribal people. The Pachamalai forms part of the Uppiliyaburam Assembly constituency which has been reserved for the return of a Scheduled Tribe member to the Legislative Assembly of Tamil Nadu legislature. Most of the Malayalees are poor. The Pachamalai hills are inhabited only by the Malayalees and others are not allowed to migrate to this place. People here seem to live in union and in co-ordination with each other. This is evident from the fact that in all the past elections the presidents and ward members are elected unopposed and unanimously.

Social Conditions of the Tribes

The majority of the tribes of the Pachamalai hill belong to nuclear family and majority of them were uneducated. The economic conditions of the tribes primarily depended on agriculture, forest and labouring. Similarly, it was found that majority (50%) of the people do agriculture and 25 percent of them were engaged in forest work. It was found that majority of the peoples monthly income ranges between Rs.1000-2000. Only very small percentage of the population get assistance from the government and it is due to the fact that most of the tribes were not aware about the government assistance. The health, nutrition and medico-genetic problems of diverse tribal groups have been found to be unique and present a formidable challenge for which appropriate solutions have to be found out. Further, it indicates that significant percent of the people had typhoid and small percent of the people had other health complaints like chicken pox, malaria and whooping cough. Among them, more than fifty three percent of them take treatment form government hospital and one forth of them takes traditional treatment.

Most of the tribes of Pachamalai hill are living in huts. The construction materials used for these huts are mud, bamboo wood and graces. Another feature of these huts is that each house has a small granary, which is miniature hut, constructed in the courtyard. Each hut has a place for storage. Formerly they were not in tiled or terraced houses. But of late tiled and terraced houses have come up in some of the villages.

Utensils

The utensils used by the tribes are usually earthen vessels, although a few metal utensils, particularly of Brass and Aluminum are noticed.

Fuel

Firewood is obtained in plenty as it is a hill region and thus it is used as fuel.

Ornaments

Though the Malayalees are forest dwellers, isolated from the rest of the country, they are not behind in their aesthetic sense. Both men and women wear ornaments of gold as well as other metals. *Lolakku*, a gold ear-ring and *kappu*, a gold bracelet, are worn by women and *kadukkan*, a golden ear-ring, by men.

Dress

Whether rich or poor, women wear sarees and the men wear loin cloth, shirt and turban. A few men wear dhotis also.

Food

They eat three times a day like other people of plain. The food generally comprises *kali* or gruel and occasionally they eat the residue of the rice cooked in the previous night which is rare. Their lunch is mostly *kali* and gruel with greens and their night meal is mostly rice or *kali*, which is prepared using ragi, jowar or maize, generally eaten with some side dish, like pickles and greens.

Worship

Malayalee tribes of Pachamalai hills worship only the traditional gods goddess, as in the plains. All the branches of the community believe that they were who migrated from Kancheepuram to these hills bringing with them their god Hari Raman, which in due course came to be called 'Karirama'. The '*vigraham*' brought by these people has been installed in a temple in the Periyakalrayan hills. Now they have a separate temple for Karirama in each of the village and also in Neiyamalai and Akkaraipatty villages. At the time of wedding, the priest chants the word in the temple of Karirama when the bridegroom ties the '*thali*'. The tradition goes that the hills were originally inhabited by *Vedans* (hunters). Even now at the time of marriage a gunshot is fired in the air to denote the death of the *Vedan*.

The Malayalees themselves do the *puja* to their own traditional gods. They worship the deities such as Mariamman, Droupathi and many other minor deities. Some temples look very ancient. The practice of taking oath before these shrines to settle disputes is common. The individual makes a solemn affidavit of the case in the presence of the deity, holding some burning camphor in the hand. Having made this settlement he blows out the flame to signify that if he had lied, god would snuff out in the same manner.

Customs Related to Marriage and Property

Marriages are not uncommon between the people of these hills and those on the plains in the Thuraiyur taluk. The distance between the places makes such marriage difficult. The Malayalees are short and sturdy. Marriages take place either before or after puberty. The Jagirdars (local village headman) permission is obtained after paying certain fees to him. Marriage among Malayalees involves the payment of bride price to the bride's party, that is, a minimum of Rs.10 to 50, which is known as '*parisom*'. The bride has to bear the marriage expenses and the bride has to give a few '*kalams*' (measures) of cereals, pulses and vegetables. As a rule, the marriage ceremony is celebrated during nights only. All the people in the hamlet are entertained to a feast on the marriage day by the bridegroom's party. These tribes spend large sums of money on marriage, even by borrowing at abnormal rates of interest.

In rare cases a young boy is married to a woman who can cohabit with the child-husbands relatives still her husband attains enough age to take his place as her husband. Formally, when the husband died even before removing the corpse, the widows re-married to another man.

Another most disturbing custom was that a married woman with children could live with a person than her husband and the children born to her through the other man were also entitled do a share in the property of her legal husband. Yet marriages are dissolved by collecting a few rupees from the person with whom she elopes and the fee is paid to the husband of the lady. But according to the tribal custom, only men inherit property. Now with the advancement of civilization these customs are slowly disappearing.

In olden days child marriage, was prevalent in the community. Even now a boy of 15 years is married to a girl of 13 years. Even widow are free to remarry. In addition polygamy is sanctioned by the tribal customs and it is still in vogue, but polygamy is not allowed among the Malayalees. The fact that a man has more on wife does not in any way hurt this social prestige.

Festivals

The important festivals celebrated invariably by the people are '*pongal*' and '*deebavali*' which fall during the month of January and November respectively. The people also celebrate Mariamman, Pallikondaraman, Karuppasamy and Hariraman of festivals. The Mariamman and Hariraman festivals are conducting in the month of April every year. In the days of *Pongal* festivals, the villages turn out in the large numbers and conduct games like hunting. It is considered inauspicious if no animal or bird is shoot. There is also a kind of bull fighting where cattle in a specially constructed cell relieved from there; until bulls are tired and captured one by one. The non-tribal also follows these customs.

Conclusion

In view of these facts, an attempt was made to study the socio-economic characteristics of tribes in Tamil Nadu with special reference to the tribal belonging to the Malayalee community living in Pachamalai hills in Tiruchirappalli district. To sum up the study finds that there is only a partial development in the socio-economic conditions of the tribes in the Pachamalai hills.

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