

Administration Functions of Malayali Tribes in Eastern Ghates of Tamil Nadu

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The word *Malai* denotes inhabitant of the hills (malai – hill or mountain). Etymologically, the word *Malayali* is derived from the word Malai and ali which means in inhabitants of the hills. The Malayalis have not; however, like the Todas of the Nilgiris, any claim to be considered as an ancient hill tribe.¹ The Malayalis come under the Twenty fifth number in the list of Scheduled Tribes. A majority of them are found in the hill areas are Javathu hills, the Shervaroy, the Kalrayan, the Pachamalai and the Kolli Hills. They are known as Tamil Nadu Hills².

According to Thurston, the term *Malayali* has been derived from the words *Malai* meaning *hill* and *al-* meaning person and is used to denote hill people. Etymologically the word is derived from *Malai – Hills* and *ali – inhabitants*³.

The Malayalis normally conform to the norms and traditions of their society through the influences of three agencies, viz., and authority of elders, public opinion and religious beliefs. They have a well organized and tradition bound system of tribal administration. In all the hills, the tribal areas are divided into nadus.

Kollimalai, tribal area is divided into 14 nadus. The chief of a nadu is called Periyapattakaran, whose office is hereditary. Each nadu is sub-divided into ur[s/village] which are governed by Ur-goundan. The office of the Ur-goundan is elective. He is helped by Karakkaran is setting disputes among the tribes. Karaikkaran are elected from different clans in an Ur, on appeal, disputes are settled by Periya pattakarans. Hence decisions of the Ur-goundans and Karaikarans are renewed by Periya pattakarar⁴.

The Kollimalayalis normally conform to the norms and traditions of their society. There are no written norms only the followed the ancestor's way. There are fourteen nadu in the region of Kolli hills as follows, Vazhavanruinadu, Thinnurnadu, SelurNadu, Devabyrnadu, Valapurna du, Ariyurnadu, Gundurnadu, Alaruurnadu, Gundandinadu, Thinpulginadu, Perakkarinadu, Citurarnadu, Edapulinnadu and Bailnadu⁵. It has to jurisdiction over all the settlement in the divisions of the hills. They discuss important function, Panchayat and festivals, the head man of the tribal council is referred to as Pattakkarar and he is superior authority or all villages and he is dealing authority of the entire hills⁶.

The village council is headed by the Ur-gounder (village headman) to whom the other member like Karakkarar, Tharmakarta, Thahdalkarar and Poojari. The entire member do assist him in solving the inter and intra-village disputes, every village meeting is conducted in presence of the members of both the traditional village Panchayat. The Ur-goundar and Karakkarar take the leading rules both of them equally respected by the village. They followed traditional norms and customs. The tribal women not recognized to participated Panchayat council⁷.

The village Panchayat meeting held in under the tree or temple. They deals and discuss such cases are quarrel between two family, marriage, divorce, fair and festival etc. The head man consult for all members of village panchayat finally take decision. Their judgments or decision to accepted all members of the village council⁸.

The Pachaimalai nadu is divided into four. Each of which is commonly governed by Dories, the tribal council is presided over by a Periyadorai, who's under the Dorais there are certain Mandris to assist some duty for head. Each village has a headman called on the Muppan and on the kollimalais, Ur- goundan or Kuttimaniyan, all the appointment are hereditary⁹. The tribal council at the hills level is known as the Nattu koottom [hill assembly]¹⁰ the headman of the tribal council is referred to as Periyadorai or Thorekkavendan .it has the jurisdiction over all the settlement in the three chief divisions of the hills. Only to discuss common problems, development schemes and to fix the date of festivals representatives of all the settlements meet the headman of the tribal council.

¹ Aiyappan, *Sco-Economic Condition of the Aboriginal Tribes of Province of Madras*, Chennai, 2000, p.142.

² B.Narasimaiah, *Neolithic and Megalithic Culture in Tamil nadu*, Delhi, 1980, p.3

³ Edgar Thurston, *Caste and tribes of southern India*, Vol-IV, Cosmo publishers, New Delhi, 2009, p.406

⁴ K.S.Singh, *The Scheduled Tribes*, An Anthoropological survey of India vol.III, 1982, pp.736-37

⁵ S.Balusamy, *Kollimalai Makkal Paadalkal*, Chennai, 2002, pp.66-67.

⁶ S.Balusamy, 2002, *Op-cit*, pp.66-67.

⁷ Interview with Sellaiyan ur gounder, Unanthangal, Kolli hills area, 16.6.2011.

⁸ Interview with Natarajan ur gounder, Unanthangal, Kolli hills area, 16.6.2011.

⁹ Interview with Rajendran Panchayat president, periyapakkalam, Pachamalai on, 15.8.2011

¹⁰ C.Maheswaran, *Ethnography of the Pachamalai Malayalis Tribes*, Chennai, 2007, p. 77

Tribal council at a settlement level is called Oorkottom[settlement assembly]¹. Thus each and every settlement is with a settlement assembly of its own. The entire hills nearby 50 assemblies are there. The headman of such settlement assembly is termed Muppan. The headman of the settlements whose preside over the meetings whenever they are convened. The two office bearers whose functions are mainly to assist the headman of the settlement are the Mandhiri and Kankaani.²

The Mandhiri acts as an assistant to the head man of the settlement. His presence is necessary at the time of a meeting. He assists the headman asking questions and counter-question and thus he is helpful to arrive at a decision. However his main duty is to convince meeting of the tribal council of the settlement of the hills.

The Kangaani who in turn assists the Mandhiri in arranging meeting of the tribal council. He visits the various Malayali settlement and date, time and place of meeting. Moreover, he accompanies his immediate superior, viz, Mandhiri, whenever the latter visits the other settlements. It is who use to control the offenders if they turn out violent etc.³

The tribal council of the tribes of the hills is functioning effectively with joint actions of the office-bearers. Effective functioning of the tribal council settles the entire matters of the tribes of the hills. Violation of tribal code and the directions of its office bearers are viewed as serious offences rather than offences such as adultery theft, non-remittance or refusal of remittance of tax demanded by the tribal council, only by observing such rigid practices, they are keeping their tribal council as a powerful one till today. However incest is viewed as a serious breach of tribal code as they posit some supernatural punishment viz, draught, flood disintegration and ultimate rain of that house hold. In cases like quarrel, theft etc⁴. The accused is asked to remit thandom (fine) in the form of case if he or she is proved to be guilty. The fine varies from two and half rupees to five rupees. If they refuse very offence itself or to remit the fine and he is excommunicated up to fair days. Hence generally even if they did not commit that offence they remit the penalty. However the office bearer of the tribal council is not too blind to victimize a virtuous man⁵.

Divorce as reported in earlier contexts is not as pronounced as the women folk of the hills enjoy considerable freedom. However, one cannot deny the fact that it is in practice. Both men folk and women folk are hand to apply for divorce before the tribal council. At the first phase, the council tries their level best to compromise the pains and it only it ends in vein they sanction divorce for remarriage. The second husband should return the bride price to the first husband which was given to the women by the latter at their first marriage.⁶ If it is the man who wants the divorce just for his second marriage he is not repaid the bride price. If the couple wants the divorce just for separation and not for remarriage then no give and take is observed and the separation is sanctioned just by formal declaration of office-bearers of the council. In such case if the man wants his off springs to be with him, and then he is asked to give a sum of Rs 50. or so to his spouse as compensation for her breast-feeding the off springs in their infancy. This amount is referred to as paalmadi panom.⁷

When case of extra-marital adultery is brought before the tribal council and if ample proof is produced the tribal council takes action such as granting divorce. Pre-marital adultery, on the other hand, is penalized with fine of cash and grain.⁸ The note worthy point in this context is that fine is collected both from man and the girl. The thevasom (grain) collected is utilized to prepare ceremonial feast and the cash is spent either for getting country liquor or pig. If the adultery is found in the girl's residence then she is penalized with a low amount than her partner. On the country, if it took place at the man's residence, then he is penalized less than his partner in the case of extra- marital adultery.⁹ The fine of woman should be remitted by her husband and in the case of pre-marital adultery her parents or her brother, if she has lost parents, remits the fine, such a practice of collecting fine from both the man and woman, that too from the kin of their household has minimized the offences, on the one hand and hinting them, on the other hand. In the village panchayat system Muppan was head, his assistant Kanganani or Karaikaran. In social matters, polygamy, remarriage, divorce cases are brought before the panchayat the day and time fixed. The kumpal was held in the under the tree now a days the meeting is held in a Temple and discussed as a matter of public concern. Usually punishments are given in the form of Kutham (fines).¹⁰

Malayali is a tribe in transition. Like other institutions of Malayali, follow to the norms and traditions of their society through the influences of three agencies, viz., they solved their problem in their village panchayat. They have a well organized and tradition bound system of tribal administration.

¹ Interview with Subramani, Puthumavar, 18.6.2011

² Interview with Annadurai, Semmedu, Kollihills, 20.5.2012

³ Interview with Selvarasu, Nariyankadu, Kollihills, 20.5.2012.

⁴ Interview with Maruthamuthu, Ur muppan, Mavar, 10.5.2012.

⁵ F.R. Hemingway, *Manual of Salem district*, p.24

⁶ F.R Richard, *Madras District Gazetteer*, Madras, Vol,I, p.30.

⁷ E. Thurston, *Opcit*, pp.55-58.

⁸ Philo irudayanath, *Mearku Malai Vaasikal*, Vilupuram, 1984, p.48.

⁹ M. Arokiyasamy, *The Kongu Country*, Madras, 1956. p.85.

¹⁰ Interview with Karuppannan, Karaikarar, Perappancholai, 13.5.2012.