DISTRIBUTION OF TRIBES IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

In Kerala, the tribals live in small settlements spread over the Western Ghats. The main tribes living in the Attapaddy region are Irulas, Mudugas and Kurumbas. Bhavani and Siruvani are the two important rivers which drain the whole of Attapady valley and these rivers have all potentialities for irrigating the entire area. In their hamlet, the huts are seldom in isolation but are mostly built contiguous to each other huts of close kin are erected in rows close to one another. The paper describes distribution of the Kerala tribes, characters of the tribes, important tribal areas, and tribal communities of Attapady etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

Before declaring a group as a tribe it is necessary that we should consider their physical features, area of settlement, social distance from the advanced groups, marriage systems, sororate and levirate marriages, taboos, religious conventions, material culture, language etc. The existence of discrimination, culture, and customs, combined with the fact that they are nomadic, primitive and still observe taboos and conventions likely to be described by modern society as derogatory and anti-social is proof to confirm civilization and if the external features of a tribe are present these will certainly strengthen the decision.

II. DISTRIBUTION OF TRIBES IN INDIA

Linguistically the tribal people belong to the groups Austroloid, Monoloid and Dravidian. Geographically the tribal areas in India is divided into five regions. They are:

1. Himalayan Region
2. Middle India
3. North East India
4. Western India
5. South India.

The hilly areas of Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Kerala come under the 5th region (South India). Anthropologists and Sociologists both foreign and Indian have taken a lot of interest on the tribes of this area. Linguistically the tribals of this area are Dravidians.

III. TRIBES OF KERALA

List of Kerala tribes are Adiyan, Aranadan, Allar, Irular, Ulladan, Uraly, Kurumans, Eravalan, Kammara Hill Pulaya, Kadar, Kattunayakan, Kanikkaran, Kudia, Kurichan, Kurumbas, Kochuvelan, Konda Kapus, Kondareddis, Koraga, Kota, Paniyan, Palliyan, Pallayan, Palleyan, Palliyar, Malamuttan, Malai Pandaram, Malayekani, Malayan, Malai Arayan, Malayayarayar, Marati, Mannan, Pulayan, Muthuvan, Vishavan.

IV. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Of the Kerala tribes, a few groups such as Aranadans, Koragas, Mala Pandarams, Nayadis etc. are the most backward tribes who are still in the primitive food gathering stage. Ulladans, Karimpalans, Kanikkar, Kurichian, Mala Arayan and Maratis are some of the relatively more advanced sections among the tribal communities.

Usually the tribal huts are made with bamboo, thatched with leaves or grasses. A few live in caves under over-hanging rocks or in the hollows of big trees. Separate dormitories for boys and girls were popular.
but they are fast disappearing except among a few tribes such as Urali Kurumans, Vishavans etc. Chavadies are available in the tribal settlements for the use of visitors when necessary.

Generally, a tribal family consists of father, mother and their unmarried children. Joint family system is also seen among tribes. The tribals practice very interesting social customs and taboos. In some tribes, it is objectionable for a man to talk his nieces after they have attained puberty. Also, there are taboos regulating diet, drinking, smoking and even the use of utensils. Regarding the succession most of the tribes have no clear rules because they have nothing to be inherited especially among those who are still in the primitive stage.

In all tribal groups except Aranadans and Karimpalans, there exists the institutions of a tribal chief. Their decisions and arbitrations are accepted and they are respected by the members of the community. The chieftain presides over the council of elders which takes decisions. Before finalizing the marriage arrangements the chieftain is being consulted and he is expected to attend the marriages and funerals in the settlements.

The tribes live in groups in a hamlet or settlement. They may generally be related to each other except a few families which had come to the particular hamlet from other hamlets after marriage or in search of livelihood.

V. IMPORTANT TRIBAL AREAS

In Kerala, the tribals live in small settlements spread over the Western Ghats. The tribal areas in Kerala may be divided into seven major regions according to Mathur (Mathur 1977). They are 1. Trivandrum, 2. Idukki, 3. Parambikkulam, 4. Nilambur, 5. Wynad, 6. Kasargod, and 7. Attapady.

1. Trivandrum

The two taluks Nedumangad and Neyyattinkara of the Trivandrum District comprises this region. The most important tribal community found in this region is Kanikkars.

2. Idukki

The important tribal areas in this district are Thodupuzha, Devikulam, Udumbanchola and Peerumade. The major tribal communities inhabiting in this district are Hill Pulayas, Uralis, Muthuwans and Mala Arayas.

3. Parambikkulam

Kadar is the major tribal community living in the Parambikkulam area of the Palaghat district. Other tribal communities inhabiting in this area are Malayans, Malasar and Muthuwans.

4. Nilambur

This region is in the Ernad taluk of Malappuram district. The important communities of this area are Aranadans, Malamuthans and Paniyans.

5. Wayanad

About 16 tribal communities are inhabiting in this region. The major tribal communities are Paniyans Kurichians, Mullakurumans, Uralikurumans, Kattunayakas, Pulayas, Adiyas etc.

6. Kasargod

Koragas and Maratis are the two major tribal communities settled in this region.

7. Attapady

a) Location and Physiography

Attapady one of the prominent forest regions of Kerala is situated in the north eastern part of the Palghat District of Kerala. This 765 square kilometres of area is bounded on the East by the Coimbatore District of Tamilnadu, North by the Nilgris, South by the Palghat taluk and on the West by the Karimba, Pottassery and Mannarghat revenue villages of Mannarghat taluk of the Palghat district and Ernad taluk of the Malappuram district. The elevation of the Attapady valley ranges from 750-1000 metres. The highest peak of this area is the Malleeswaran peak which has a height of 1664 metres.
b) Legend

The name Attapady was described to this region because of one of its peculiar features. Till recently this region was grossly infested with blood sucking leeches, the Malayalam name for which is attapady. Pady is the Malayalam for settlement. The menace caused by these leeches in this region even now especially in monsoon is widely known and people even dread to face the risk of treading on this region. It was thus aptly termed Attapady.

c) Climate

During the rainy seasons the higher elevation keep the area with cool humid weather. Much of the rain bearing clouds are being obstructed by the mountain ranges and receive high rainfalls especially in the western part of the area. The western half of the area is covered with thick vegetation while the eastern part of the forest vegetation changes to species like bamboo, bushes, shrubs etc. which needs only low moisture.

d) Rivers

Bhavani and Siruvani with their tributaries form the river system of the Attapady area. These two main rivers together have a catchment area of 562 square kilometres.

VI. TRIBAL COMMUNITIES OF ATTAPADY

The tribal population of Attapady constitute three major communities viz. Irulas, Mudugas and Kurumbas.

A. IRULAS:

They inherit about 80 hamlets in the eastern half of the Attapady area. The migration of the Irulas might have occurred only after popularization of Vaishnavism unlike that Mudugas. The Irulas are of medium height, black colored and have curly hairs and narrow noses. The men wear a short dhoti round their waist while the females wear chela round their upper part of the breast which covers the breast and the lower part of the body. Both men and women wear ear rings and finger rings. Both men and women take active part in agricultural operations. The Irulas cultivate maize, ragi, chama, thuvara, groundnut, paddy, tapioca etc.

Marriages are conducted only after the girl attains puberty. Bride money is prevalent among this tribe, and it is paid to the bride's father. Among the primitives the mother of the boy takes initiative to find a bride. She set out on a Monday, visits the home of a prospective bride, enjoys hospitality and escorts the girl to her home where she meets the boy and remains there for a couple of days. If she is found unsuitable, she is sent back and similar trails are conducted. (Luiz, 1962). In a marriage tying of tali and pouring of water on the united hands of the couple are essential. A woman is treated as unclean for three months after child birth. The new born child is named on the seventh day. When an Irula man dies the widow places betel leaves in the mouth of the corpse.

B. KURUMBAS

Kurumbas are the smallest community among the three tribes of Attapady. The huts are too small. They use bamboo, grass and even clay bricks to build the huts and smear the floor with cow dung. Each hut possesses a back room, a front room and a front veranda. The household utensils used are made of clay and very rarely aluminium, copper and brass vessels are also seen. They domesticate fowls, goats, cows and dogs. They do not use any medicines other than certain herbs and tubers for any kinds of illness. Honey collection is an important occupations of the male members. Regarding their dress the women wear a dark coloured chela round on the upper part of the breast which covers the breast and the lower part of the body. The men wear dhoti round their waist. Women wear ornaments such as ear rings, nose rings, chains, bangles, anklets, finger rings and toe rings while the male members wear only ear rings and finger rings. Ornaments they use are of plastics, silver coins and cheap metals.

Intermarriage with the Muduga is allowed. Usually the boy find out a girl and informs this to the parents through his friends. Parents inform this to the headman and request for his approval. If both the parties...
agree, the groom’s parents will fix a date for the marriage. Usually marriages are conducted in the afternoon of Mondays, at the groom’s residence. The headman joins the index fingers of the groom and the bride that is important ceremony in a marriage. No pollution shed is built for delivery, instead they make a labour room in the dinne of the hut. Birth pollution last for 9 days. The first hair cutting and the ear poring are done by the maternal uncle. They observe 7 days pollution for puberty and 4 days pollution for menses, and the polluted women should stay in the dinne during that period. Any death is considered to be the concern of the entire settlement. On the third day the corpse is taken to the burial ground and they bury the dead. The family members of the dead observe 14 days pollution and during that time they do not attend any kind of social ceremony.

C. MUDUGAS

Mudugas live in the remote forest settlements of the Attapady tribal area. The Mudugas settlements are found in forest areas near the river Bhavani which gives them drinking water. Mudugas are believed to be the earliest immigrants of this region. They are of Tamil origin and are believed to be immigrants from Coimbatore District. The religion of this tribe is akin to Hinduism. Though they have contact with the Irulas they won’t allow them to enter into the huts and won’t eat in the huts of Irulas when they take part in the ceremonies such as marriage etc. There are few instances of intertribal marriage relationship with the Kurumbas. Only Kurumba girls are married to the Muduga males and no instance of a Kurumba marrying a Muduga girl.

The women of this community are industrious and they work as laborers in the field, collect tubers and other forest produces, weave mat and baskets. The small squatther huts are low ceilinged with the ceilings not exceeding five feet from the floor level. It is believed that the huts supported by bamboo splinters and thatched with forest grass have small doors and low ceilings, they being so designed as to withstand the onslaught of adverse climatic conditions and strong winds. The floors are plastered with cowdung, clay and soil. These huts ordinarily contain two small rooms, thee backroom is being used as kitchen. Besides, there are also an adjoining verandah in the front of each hut, referred to by them as dinne. The earthwares are used for cooking and serving and seldom are copper and aluminium vessels, made use of.

The apparel of the men are sober and consists only of a handloom towel round the waist reaching up to the knee and the upper portion of the body is wrapped in a dhoti slung from the shoulders. Men are also seen wearing banyans and rarely are shirts used. The women's apparel consists of a brightly colored strip of cloth five feet long and four feet wide referred by them as ceela. The ceela wraps this tribal women folk from the upper part of the breast to the knee. Women wear ornaments made of silver such as kammal and other aluminium ornaments like bangles and necklaces made of black beads and also wear a small nose ring made of gold.

Next to the rice, tubers ragi and wheat occupy the important places in their diet which is boiled in stream and converted into a paste like diet.

As the first step the parents of the bridegroom will find out a girl and later they will inform this to their son. If the son is willing they will report this to the headman and request for his consent. The day and time of the marriage will be fixed in the presence of the headman. Usually marriages are conducted at the bridegroom’s residence on a Monday morning.

When a girl attains puberty her father has to report this news to the headmen and the headman informs this to her relatives and other members of the settlement. Before completing three months of the first pregnancy of a girl the news should be reported to the headman by her father-in-law and later the headman informed this to her parents. On an auspicious Monday of the third month the girl’s parents visit her and give sweets and on the next morning they take her to their hut. Her husband and his parents also accompany her. The girl’s parents have to arrange a feast for the visitors and after the feast the girl with her husband and his parents return to their hut.
Any death is considered to be the concern of the entire settlement and full honours are given to the departed soul by beating drum and playing pipes. All members of the settlement including the headman should have to attend the death ceremonies.

VII. CONCLUSION

The tribals live in groups in a hamlet or settlement. They may generally be related to each other except a few families which had come to the particular hamlet from other hamlets after marriage or in search of livelihood. Even though there are lot of tribes in Kerala major part of the tribes are Irulas, Kurumbas and Mudugas. These people are sometimes interrelated to each other for some occasion. They are not mingle with the non-tribal people.

VIII. REFERENCE