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	CLEAR IJRMST Indexed Impact Factor Journal CLEAR IJRMST	Vol-12, Issue-23 Jan-Jun- 2022 pp. 09-15,

CLEAR International Journal of Research in Management, Sciences and Technology

MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENTS OF MALAYALI TRIBES IN TAMILNADU

Dr. C. Kannan

Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Ancient History, School of Historical Studies
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai -625021. Mail Id:kannanmouly@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The Malayalis are the agricultural tribes inhabiting the hill ranges of Salem, Namakkal, North Arcot, South Arcot and Tiruchirappalli districts of Tamil Nadu. There are three divisions among the Malayali tribes. Those who live in the Shervaroy hills of Salem and the Kalrayan hills of Kallakurichi taluk in Vilupuram and South Arcot districts are called the Periya Malayalis. Those who live in the Kolli hills of Namakkal district are called the Kolli Malayalis and those who live in the Pachamalai in Thuraiyur taluk in Tiruchirappalli and Gangavalli taluk in Salem district are called as Pacha Malayalis. There are thirty six tribal communities in Tamil Nadu and the Malayalis come under the twenty fifth positions in the list of Scheduled Tribes of Tamil Nadu. According to the Census Report of 2001, the Scheduled Tribe population constitutes 651.321. Malayalis are the largest Scheduled Tribes with a population of 310. 042 constituting 47.6 % of the state population.

Article History

Received: 11th March 2022

Received in revised form: 27.03.2022

Accepted: 18.04.2022

Published

: 28th April.2022

Keywords: Malayalis, inhabiting, Shervaroy hills, Pacha Malayalis, Scheduled Tribe, population

Corresponding Author : **Dr. C. Kannan**

Email: kannanmouly@gmail.com


Introduction

Agriculture is the main occupation of the Malayalis. Formerly they were good hunters but at present there is not much scope for hunting on account of forest reservation. They snare small animals and hunt wild pigs. On the whole, they are good cultivators. The tribal belt is fairly long in dimensions and it has its own original customs including birth, marriage and death

rituals. They communicate in their own dialect and they are mostly uneducated, most of the areas are underdeveloped. Within the dawn of independence, several measures have been undertaken to uplift their life development.

Malayali Tribes

The word Malai denotes inhabitant of the hills. The Malayali are a Tamil speaking people, who migrated from the plains to the hills

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in recent times. According to Thurston, the term Malayali has been derived from the words Malai meaning hill and al-meaning person and is used to denote people who lived on the hills.

Etymologically the word is derived from *Malai-* hills and *ali-* inhabitants. The Government of India accorded the status of scheduled tribes to the Malayali. The Malayali people claimed themselves different names like as Malayali Goundans, Malayalis, Karalar, Goundars, Malai Jatikar and Kanchipuram Gounders.

The Malayali community predominantly lives in the hills of Tamil Nadu. The Malayali settlements are formed in the districts of South Arcot, North Arcot, Salem, Namakkal, Tiruchirappalli and Dharmapuri. In North Arcot district, they are living in the hills of Jawathu, Elagiri and Pudur Nadu. In South Arcot district, they are found in Kalrayans. In Salem district they are living in the hills of Yercaud (Sherveroys), Kolli hills in Namakkal district, Pachamalai in Tiruchirappalli district and in Dharmapuri district they inhabit the Sithori hills.

Migration


This paper aims to traces the migration and settlements of the Malayali tribes in Tamil Nadu. Available sources are suggested that Malayali emigrated from Kanchipuram and took with them, three brothers of whom the eldest came to the Sherveroy hills and Kalrayan hills the second to the Pachamalai and the youngest to the Kolli hills. The Malayalis who live in Shervaroy hills and Kalrayan hills are called Periya (Big) Malayali or the Kanchimandalam Malayalis. The inhabitants of the Kolli hills are known as China (Little) Malayalis. Those from the Pachamalai hills are called Nadu (Middle) Malayali.

The origin and migration of the Malayalis to the hills are shrouded in mystery. The legends *Nattukattu* say that some warriors belonging to *Karalar* community hailing from Kanchipuram came to Kalrayan hills subjugated the native's and established their settlement.

According to another legend, *Nattukattu* the Malayalis originally belonged to the Vellala caste of cultivators and emigrated from the sacred city of Kanchipuram to the hills, when Muhammadan rule was dominant in Southern Indian, they left Kanchipuram. They took with them, three brothers of who the eldest came to the Sherveroys hills, the second to the Pachamalai and the youngest to the Kolli hills.

According to another version, the exhortation by the Malayali deity Kariraman, prompted emigrants from Kanchipuram to shift to the hilly region. Another version states that a priest of Kanchipuram who happened to be the brother of the King, quarreled with the king, left the place and entered the Pachamalai regions with his three sons and daughters. These regions were ruled by Vedans and the Vellalans who resisted the new comers. But the invader defeated the natives and established their settlement.

They gave their sister in marriage to a Tottiyar stranger in exchange for providing food. A curious custom that prevails in this region testifies to this story. Thus, the women of the Pachamalai Malayalis put aside a portion of each meal in honour of their Vedar ancestor before serving their husbands and the same custom is followed in marriage occasions too. During the marriage function, the Malayali women wear a comb, which is said to have been a characteristic ornament of the Vedars. A sword and an arrow placed in the marriage function and remember the hunting habits of the

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Vedars and also they support that people settlement and livelihood on the hilly region.

An account regarding the origin of the Malayalis of the Jawathu hills in North Arcot furnished here under. In 1332 A.D some Vedars of Kangudi asked the maidens of the Karaikkat Vellalas of Kanchipuram to marry them. They were scornfully refused and the Vedars of Kangudi kidnapped seven young Vellala maidens, whom they carried a way to Kangudi. To recover them, seven Vellala men set out with seven dogs, leaving instruction with their wives that if the dogs returned alone they should consider that they had perished and should cause the funeral ceremonies to be performed. Arriving at the Palar, they found the river in floods and crossed it with great difficulty, but their dogs, after swimming half away, turned back and returned to Kanchipuram. The men however continued their journey and killed the Vedars and retrieved their maidens. Then they went back home, but found that they had lost their wives who had become widows. As a result there were branded as outcastes. Then they married Vedar women and retired to Jawathu hills. There they took to cultivation and became the ancestors of the Malayali tribe.

According to Francis, the editor of the South Arcot District Manual, that the Jawathu hills were inhabited by Vedans and that the Malayalis killed the men and wedded the women. Even today during marriages function, a gun is fired in the air to represent the death of the Vedan husband. The Malayalis termed and called themselves as Karaikkat Vellalas.

The Malayalis of South Arcot call themselves as Kongu Vellalas. All the branches of the community living in different places agree that they are Vellalans, who emigrated from Kanchipuram, bringing with them their


God Kariramman. Another point should be recorded here. In the wedding of Kalrayan in South Arcot, the priest who performs the marriage utter the word Kanchi as just before the tali is tied. It shows that the migration occurred from Kanchipuram. The Malayali of the Shervaroy call them Kanchimandalam Malayalis. Many called themselves as Vellala and Karalan. Malakkaran and Mala Nayakkan are also used as synonyms for Malayali.

There are some who believe that the Malayalis are the Keralities. Because some of their customs are similar to those of the Keralities. For example, the Kolli hills girls wear clothes of white cotton tied across their breast like the Keralities while few other Malayalis prefer tattooing. The Kolli Malayalis follow the customs and preventing tattooed persons from entering their house.

Settlements

Tribals as a social group speaking a distinctive language and possessing a distinctive culture differ from other tribes. The tribals live in houses on the side of hills. Further, there is minimum contact with the other groups. In short, they lead a secluded life. The Malayalis tribes of Tamil Nadu are scattered all over the district. Their chief settlements are as follows.

Sl. No	Name of the Settlements	District
1.	Shervaroy Hills	Salem
2.	Pachamalai	Salem
3.	Kalrayan Hills	Salem
4.	Kolli Hills	Namakkal
5.	Jawathu Hills	Thiruvannamalai
6.	Sitheri Hills	Dharmapuri
7.	Aranuthumali	Salem
8.	Kalrayan Hills	Vilupuram

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9.	Pachamalai	Tiruchirappalli
10.	Pothamalai	Salem

According to legend, the Malayalis were originally belonged to the Vellala caste of cultivators and emigrated from the sacred city of Kanchipuram to the hills about ten generations ago, when the Muslim rule was dominant in Southern India.

The Kolli hill is one of the settlements of the Malayali tribes. These hills are part of the hills of the Talaghat. This group is associated with the Pachamalai on the east and the north by the Pothamalais, Jerugumalais and Tenmalais. The natives of the Kolli hills call it as *Chathuragiri* or Square Mountain. This is a fine mass occupying area of 29 kms from the north to south, 19 kms from east to west. It occupies an area of 282 kms. Half of the hills are situated in Namakkal, Rasipuram taluks and the other half in Gangavalli taluk with 14 Nadu or villages.

The elevation of the Kolli hills is about 1000 meters above the sea level and its area is about 280 sq kms. The hills are located at 55kms from Namakkal. The Panchayat Union at Semmedu, consisting of 14 village Panchayats come under Rasipuram taluk and the remaining 7 village Panchayats are located in Namakkal taluk. The Kolli hill is surrounded with plains in the east. The hills touch the border of Rasipuram taluk, Namagiripet Panchayat Union limit partly, Salem district of east Thammampatty and in the west the hills go down up to Sendamangalam Panchayat Union of Namakkal district.

There is a road laid from Nadukombai, 8 kms from Kalappa Naickenpatti on the Namakkal-Rasipuram road. This road has been laid tier upon tier on a single face of the hill at a cost of Rs. 22 lakhs. The road winds its way up

the hill for 20 kms and reaches the top of Solakkadu. A highways department rest house had been built here. From the Solakkadu rest house which is located at a height of over 4, 000 feet from the sea level, an undulating track leads to Valavanthinadu which is at a distance of 7 kms.

A Christian settlement is there and a number of solid buildings have been constructed by J.W. Brand who lived on the hills between 1913 and 1929. His mission was continued by his wife Mrs Lily Brand. She had settled down in the Kolli hills spreading Christianity among the hill tribes and it evoked poor response from them. However it must be admitted that the credit of spreading literacy in these areas goes to above mentioned missionaries who were responsible for the development of 30 elementary schools and three higher secondary schools. Most of the teachers who worked in these schools are converts to Christianity from the hill tribes and had received their education in the plains.

The temperature in the hill is moderate. The average maximum and minimum temperature in the hill is recorded as 30 °F and 20 ° F respectively. The maximum rainfall is generally about 35 inches a year. The Kolli hills receive heavy rains during the south west and north east monsoon. The small rivers and jungle streams provide water to the farmers of the village for cultivation. Most of the tribes residing in Kolli hills are below poverty line and depend on cultivation in their own land. They produce paddy, pine apple, banana, citrus, mango, orange and lemon. Coffee and pepper are the minor crops in this hill. There are no private companies or industries in Kolli hills. The products are sold in the Panchayat Union weekly market (Chanthai) at Solakadu and

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Thembalam. The merchant from plains from various places used to come to purchase the Kolli hill products.

The whole of the Kolli hills is populated by Malayalis. It comprised of 16 revenue villages and 251 small villages. These above villages came under the 14 nadus (villages) viz; 1.Valavanthi, 2. Ariyur, 3. Thennur, 4. Selur, 5. Devanur, 6.Gundur, 7. Alathur, 8.Edappuli, 9. Thirupuli, 10. Byil, 11. Perakkarai, 12. Cittur, 13. Valapur and 14. Adukkaputhur Kombai. According to the Census Report of 1991, the total number of the tribal population on the Kolli hills in 33, 880. Out of this Malayalis account for 32,080. The Malayali houses are built of tottis (mats) of split bamboo, and roofed with jungle grass. The Malayalis refrain from using tiles or bricks for they believe that the use of tiles or bricks will excite the anger of the gods.

The Pachamalai is yet another settlement of the tribes is situated in the Thuraiyur taluk of the Tiruchirappalli district. It is surrounded by Rasipuram and Namakkal in the west, in the north by Attur and Gangavalli taluk of Salem district and in the east by Perambalur district. The entire wild range is scattered over approximately an area of about 35, 000 hectares; its altitude ranges between 2,000 and 3,000 feet. There are as many as 50 villages in this region which are referred to as ooru. Ooru that is hamlet are grouped under three nadus, such as Thenpuranadu, Vannadu and Aathinadu.

The tribes of the hills live in more than 50 settlements. Each settlement consists of a few clusters of houses. A Pachamalayali settlement is known by a distinct word Ooru. However, each settlement is given a specific name such as Senguttupatti, Perumparappu, Sembulichampatti, Puthur and so on. A

boundary is recognised by demarcating a certain area between two adjacent settlements. Natural surrounding like bamboo thickets rocky surface, water source etc. generally determine the boundaries of a settlement. The Pachaimalayali settlements size varies from one another depending upon the number of huts in a settlement. The Malayalis live in the hilly regions spread among six districts forming a nest along the mid north of the state. The Nallamalai or Pudur Nadu hills are at elevation reaching up to 1000 meters. The average annual rain fall is 75 to 100 cms.

The Pachamalai is an important settlement of the Malayalis. Pachamalai are organised into three Nadu of which two are in Tiruchirappalli district and the third one in Salem district. The Pachamalai are less elevated than the other ranges. Its length is 19 Kms from the east to west and 13 Kms from north to south. The Pachamalai hill to the south of this place has 30 hamlets in two revenue villages namely Pachamalai and Veppadi with over 2, 000 Malayali tribes. There are six elementary schools and four drinking water wells on the hills. The hills are not at a high level nor are they are wooded. A large part of the hill is covered by reserve forests where sandal wood and bamboos are found. The jack trees are common on these hills.

The Pachamalai tribal area has many villages and notable among them are as follows; Veppadi, Manmalaipalakkad, Chinna Karatur, Periya Karattur, Valacombai, PuthuMavar Melthombai, Kelthombai, Naripaddy, Perappancholai, Pillayarmathi Thumbalpatty, Gangavalli, Vanavaram, Ravanavaram, Kalkattu, Baithur, Thavalapatty and Puthur. The total extent of the hill is 193.63 square kms.

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There is another Malayali settlement in Kalrayan hills located in Salem district. The Kalrayan Hills are geographically located on the Kalrayan of Attur Taluk in Salem district and one with the Kalrayans of Kallakurichi Taluk in Villuppuram district. They are divided into five Jaghirs of which Chinna Kalrayan Nad and Periya Kalrayan Nad .Each of these Nadu is governed by a Dorai, the hereditary chieftain of the Malayalis. The Chinna Kalrayan forms the northern portion of the Attur Kalrayans, while the Periya Kalrayan Malayali settlement is wrapped in obscurity. The Periya Kalrayan has 39 hamlets with 1,376 houses and a population of 5, 370 while the Chinna Kalrayans has 49 hamlets with 1, 613 houses and a population of 6, 587. There are only six government drinking water wells in the hills for the two ranges and seven elementary schools. The residents have to resort to streams and springs which are often infected with guinea worm. The residents follow the traditional method of cultivation.

The other major hill areas of Malayali tribes are Shervaroy hills, Jawathu hills, Sitheri hills, which are well known places in Tamil Nadu. The Shervaroy is a small detached range about 400 sqm in area divided into an eastern and a western section by the deep valley of the Vaniar stream. The western portion consists of three plateaus, rising to a maximum of about 1700 meters above the sea level; Yercaud is at 1500 meters above the sea level and serves as beautiful hill station. The upper areas are covered with grass and sparse tree growth, plantations of exotics like apples, tobacco, potato etc. Bamboo, teak and sandal wood are valuable forest species. The temperature which ranges from 15 to 25°c is always pleasant and the annual rainfall is about 100 cm.


The Jawathu hill is at about 800 meters above the sea level. The peak's height is 1200 meters. This region is shared between the Irula and the Malayalis. It is made up of small plateau with bamboos and sandal and the valuable red Sandal is also found. Even though the average annual rain fall is about 100 cm, the area is hit by cyclonic storms during the monsoon.

Conclusion

After examining all the views. One can arrive at the logical conclusion that the Malayalis are not natives of these hills and they migrated from Kanchipuram and settled the hills and engaged work of cultivators, woodmen and shepherds. Even though they are scatted, they follow similar customs and traditional habits and have common administrative, socio-economic and religious system of life. The tribal are an intrinsic part of our national life with their rich cultural heritage. The tribal settled down in India in the pre-historic times, inhabiting mostly in the sparsely populated parts of hills and forest. The tribal are primitive and prefer living in isolation i.e. in dense forests or remote areas which are generally cut-off from civilized area. The habit of isolation helps them to preserve their social customs, traditions and beliefs to a large extent.

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