

Social Customs, Ritual Practice and Language of the Kattunayakan Tribes

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Abstract

The present study analyses the social customs of the Kattunayakan tribes. It aims at social life and its rituals. The Kattunayakar is literally the king of the jungle or the lord of the forest and has no fixed residence. The term 'Kattunayakan' is derived from the words 'Kadu', meaning forest. Nayakan means leader or headman. They speak the Telugu language, and within the family and in the kinship group, they speak Tamil. There are 36 tribes living in Tamil Nadu. Kattunayakan community tribes, inhabitation, custom, beliefs, economy, life style, indigenous cultural practices, educational status, health status and access to economic resources, occupational structure. Kattunayakan are a designated scheduled tribe in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The word Kattunayakan means the king of the jungle in Tamil. The Kattunayakan are one of the earliest known inhabitants of the Western Ghats, who are engaged in the collection and gathering of forest produce, mainly wild honey and wax.
Keyword: Kattunayakan, Social, Customs, Rituals, Language

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Introduction

The present study described social customs, Rituals and languages. The Kattunayakan are one of the few tribal peoples of India who still live as hunter-gatherers. The literacy rate is very low for both men and women. They practice traditional medicine and live without modern conveniences like electricity and indoor plumbing. The Kattunayakan live mainly in the south Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. They live in deep forests and try to stay away from modern Indian society. The Kattunayakan live much like their ancestors have for hundreds of years. The Kattunayakan like to live in separate family dwellings of about ten people. A council of elders makes decisions for the family groups. Honey plays a special role in their lives. They eat it, use it for medicine and trade it for things they need.

The Directorate of Tribal Welfare pays special attention to 14 Districts where Scheduled Tribes is more. Out of the 36 Scheduled Tribe communities in the State, 6 Tribal Communities (i.e., Toda, Kota, Kurumbas, Irular, Paniyan and Kattunayakan have been identified as Primitive Tribal Groups. The other Tribals living in scattered areas are classified as Dispersed Tribes. The area where the population of Scheduled Tribes exceeds 50% of the total population is declared as an Integrated Tribal Development programme area. The Integrated Tribal Development Programme area exists in 7 districts.1

Historical background

The tribal community have been largely located in the Western Ghats. Commonly, the Kattunayakans have been hunter-gatherers by occupation. They attain their name from the phrase „kadu“ (forests) and „nayakan“ (leader/chief), implying that they are the lords or nobles of the forest.

They are also denoted to by various other names like Jenu (honey) Kurumbas and Thenu (honey) Kurumbas in different parts in Tamil Nadu because of their large proficiency in honey gathering from the forest. The term or phrase Nayakan was endowed in Malayalam and replicated in Tamil as well; moreover, there is not much distinction in the meaning between the two languages. The Kattunayakan language, practiced by them, referred to as nama basha (our language) by them, is fundamentally of the South Dravidian family clan, like most other Nilgiri languages spoken in the area. It also encompasses the essentials of the Kannada language, Malayalam and Tamil. However, Kannada is the principal language in it; the dialect or idiom is distinctive in nature and is scarcely comprehensible to Kannada speakers.

Kattunayakan is one of the tribes who had been the true inhabitants of the forest. As the name indicates they were once the kings of jungles. They rarely mix with other tribes and still follow black magic and sorcery. They are completely dependent on the forest and forest products and subsist on honey, roots and barks of plants and what small animals they trap or fell with their bows and arrows. They also worship their ancestors. The physical features of hill tribes are very obvious in them, and their language is a mixture of all Dravidian languages.²

The Kattunayakan tribes largely live in the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu as well as in Kerala. Their name means “chiefs of the forest. They are believed to be among the earliest inhabitants of South India. Their main livelihood is collecting and selling honey. They also fish, hunt and collect forest products to eat and sell.³

Honey Hunting

One hive can yield over 25 pounds of honey. They get so many bee stings that their bodies develop immunity. Their main competition is bears, which they sometimes have to fight off to get the honey. The Kattunayakan are known for their dancing and singing.

Language spoken by the Kattunayakan Tribes

People in the community know Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam. They are comfortable with all three over years. Daily speech mixes words from each language. A Tamil greeting

blends with Kannada phrases and Malayalam ends. This mix helps them connect fast. Kattunayakan people speak a dialect of Canarese. Canarese names the old Kannada tongue from Karnataka lands. They favor this dialect for close talks. Family chats stay in it. Village meetings use it too. Dialects build tight group bonds. They pick up Tamil easy. Malayalam flows for them as well. These skills aid work with outsiders. Neighbors grasp each other quick this way.⁴

Marriage

The marriage customs were found to be very rigid as they never wanted to have any marital association with any other communities. All tribes are endogamous in nature. Although a mother’s brother’s daughter is preferred for marriages, a father’s sister’s daughter is prohibited. All forms of sororate and levirate are prohibited. Marriage is usually performed after the girl has attained puberty (narde). Marriage by capture (Kattukondu vinde), marriage by elopement (odatu), marriage by service and marriage by negotiation are the modes of acquiring mates. Divorce is permitted. Divorce can remarry. Divorce and widower remarriage are permitted. Children in such cases remain with their mother. ⁵

Widow Remarriage

Widow Remarriage is permissible in the community; widows and divorced women are allowed to remarry. They do so in a simple Ceremony known as Cherakatinchadam, in which the man offers a sari to the woman to wear it in the name of the man. The man must serve the woman’s family for a period of time decreed by the village council. Family ties among them are nuclear, but a few vertically extended family types are found in the village Pilathu Vedesandur, village Pudupatti in Nilakkotai, Valichetti patti, Vedesandhur in dindigul district. ⁶

Family

They have a significant institution called Kudumbam, the members of a settlement or groups of nearby residential areas are considered to be members of a Kudumbam however they may belong to various Kulams. The conservative marriage custom is associated with a huge value system of the Kattunayakan community.⁷ Among the Kaattunayakan, community endogamy and clan exogamy are the rules of marriage.

They have exogamous divisions called ‘inteperulu’ (family names), which literally means the house names. Theintrepidis attached as a prefix to one personal name, and a person’s identity is often referred to by his family names. Theintrepid of boy remains the same throughout his life, but a girl changes her family

name. When she married, it became that of her husband's family name few names of the intiprelu founding the community are mentioned below:

1. Galivandu 2. Koruvuvandu 3. Pasaodi 4. Kolavodu 5. Matungodu 6. Pasimodu 7. Pillodu 8. Bandamodu 9. Thannerodu 10. Seeralodu 11. Naidodu 12. Kavittodu 13. Alantlodu 14. Pandodu 15. Muanhalodu 16. Gorantaludu 17. Gongamodu 18. Chinatomodu 19. Mosamodu 20. Ollivotodu 21. Matunga 22. Korivi 23. Kavari .8

Puberty

The Kattunayakan girl attains puberty, all her relatives will be invited for the ritualistic ceremony. She will be made to bath and given a new half saree to wear. After that, many rituals will be done by her maternal uncle. She has to stay alone for nine days in a hut where others were not allowed to enter. On the tenth day, she will be given a bath again. The maternal uncle will heap betel leaf on her Tongue and place a piece of a hot gold plate on it. After this ritual, she will be permitted to enter the house. Then the girl will be considered as one of them again.9

Funeral Ceremonies

The last stage of man is death. A few die a natural death, while the others become diseased and then meet their end. During their life time, men live with their family, relatives and society. But when death assails them, a great change occurs. The news of the death of the Kattunayakkan is informed to the relatives. The dead body will be kept until the arrival of the relatives. After their arrival, they do the funeral rituals. Sometimes it may take two days for the relatives to reach. The dead body will be kept for two days. Then the traditional musical instrument will use to sing from the time of death till the funeral ceremonies are over. When a person dies, his body is placed in laying position, and a 50 paisa coin will place on the forehead. The corpse is bathed and kept on the bier. Later, the name of the deceased is painted on its forehead, a pounded mixture of betel leaves and nuts is set between its lips, and the corpse is shrouded in a new chou cloth. The Parayan will beat flat drums and lead the

procession. The chief mourner is the eldest son in the case of the father and the youngest son in the case of the mother. They observe death pollution for three days. On the third day, they conduct Palupoyadam or milk pouring ceremony in which the chief mourner offers milk and other items, like beedis, liquor and the favourite food to the deceased at his grave. On the third day, the bereaved family arranges a feast for all the relatives. During this ceremony, the wife of the deceased is declared a widow after she removes all her marital symbols. Thereafter, the widow wears a white sari. All the guests are served a non-vegetarian feast. 10

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