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The Lifestyle of Paliaya's Neer Katha Ayyanar Temple Tribes Living At Rajapalayam

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Abstract

Indigenous communities, often referred to as *Tholkudi* (ancient inhabitants), are known as *Pazhangudiyinar* (tribal people). Descendants of those who lived in ancient Tamil Nadu, they continue to preserve their traditional customs and culture to this day. In Tamil Nadu, the Paliyar tribe resides at the foothills of the Western Ghats in the Neerkatha Ayyanar Kovil area of Rajapalayam Taluk, Virudhunagar district. Their settlement is located 15 kilometers away from the nearest town, and their habitat is situated within the *Kurinji* (mountainous) landscape. Unlike other tribal groups that remain strictly within mountain ranges, this community has adapted to changing times. They face significant challenges in meeting not only their livelihood needs but also their basic necessities. Although the government has issued various orders to address these issues, there is a lack of awareness and interest regarding them among the community members. A notable shift in their lifestyle is their tendency to relocate based on the availability of external assistance. They remain marginalized across various sectors, including dietary habits, culture, healthcare, hygiene, education, and employment. Even among the educated youth, there are those who find themselves unable to bring about significant transformation within their community. Various voluntary organizations are currently extending support to them. This study aims to examine their way of life by considering their historical context alongside their current basic needs.

Key words: kurinji, Health Care, Dietary, Mountain

Indroduction

The tribal people known as the 'Tholkudi' live in the mountainous areas as their habitat. The livelihoods of the tribal people living in each area are different. The tribal people of the Palaya tribe live at the foothills of the Western Ghats in the area of 'Neer Katha Ayyanar Koil' in the Rajapalayam of Tamil Nadu. They live 15 kilometers away from the village. They have established their habitat based on the 'Kurinji land', which is a hilly and mountainous area. Unlike the 'Todar' tribe, who have settled in the mountains in other areas except Rajapalayam, Through interviews with them, we can learn that they have changed only a few lifestyles to suit the changing weather conditions and are reluctant to move beyond the foothills.

Palliya's Among the Tribes

At the foothills of the Western Ghats, the Paliya people have chosen their own areas to live. In this way, they established habitats in areas such as the Senbagathoppu, Theni district, Neer Katha Ayyanar

Temple in Rajapalayam, Thaani paarai, vasudevanallur in Tenkasi district. They had lived in the mountains for centuries, but only in the last century, at the insistence of the government, they were forced to move to the mountains on the basis of voluntary service. They have agreed to live on the plains and have stayed there, unable to leave the foothills and live anywhere else.

In Tamil literature, it is said that the lifestyles of the Kurinji people are similar to the lifestyles of the Paliya tribes. Most tribes have their own unique customs and traditions. Like them, the customs of the Paliyar people are also found. They lived in separate tents in the forests of the Western Ghats and established their habitats near water sources. They still live that way today. Their families are found wherever the Western Ghats are located. More than a thousand Paliyar tribal people live in the Kodaikanal region. Their food habits, economy, religion, and environment will be studied based on interviews with tribal people, such as the Palaiyars, who live in the water

conservancy of the Rajapalayam, Neer Katha Ayyanar Temple.

Food Habits of the Paliya Tribal People

They settled at the foot of the Western Ghats, where the Neer Katha Ayyanar Temple is located, only eighty years ago. Until then, they had lived in the mountains. Their custom was to eat roasted sweet potatoes found in the mountains and dip them in honey. They lived by hunting animals in the mountains. They hunted deer and wild cattle, processed the food, and used it as food for several days. Furthermore, they were in the habit of sharing the food brought by hunting or foraging with everyone around them, rather than just consuming it for themselves. Currently, rice, pulses, sugar and other commodities are being distributed directly to their doorsteps once a month through the government's warehouse. They travel 15 kilometers away to buy vegetables and groceries from stores. Those who go to the mountains carry the necessary food supplies when they are forced to stay there for a month. A member of the Paliyar ethnic group says that it takes a day and a night to reach the mountain area by taking the forest path. They say that it is a bit difficult to extract and use the tubers, and that this is the perfect way to satisfy their hunger if food is not available in the mountains.

Occupation of the Paliya People

He says that the tribal people of the Paliya tribe use the income they earn by selling honey and tubers found in the mountains. They also sell incense, which is a fragrant ingredient, by searching for it from the mountains. They also sell incense, which is a fragrant ingredient, by searching for it from the mountains. They use a thread made from moss made from trees to help newborn babies using the ornament bringing good luck. Apart from this, they do whatever jobs are available in urban areas and return home in the evening.

The women do agricultural work. They also said that the government had started a free sewing training center near their homes and provided them with free sewing machines. However, they regretfully said that they were unable to use the machines properly because they had purchased old ones. The sewing training center has not yet taught them how to repair the machines if they break down. They said that due to the distance, the trainers don't come even twice a week.



Free Sewing Training Centre-Neer Katha Ayyanar Temple Area

They said that the government had not provided the one thousand rupees that women receive every month to their families, and that they had appealed to the government several times to no avail. They said they have a saving habit but cannot save a lot of money. They feel that they cannot keep their money and jewelry safe. Born in the mountains, since ancient times, they have not come to the plains, but rather have brought in products such as Indian gooseberry, Indian silk, and frankincense that are found in the mountains, and have been refining and selling them. They said they were making money by selling Hindu fiber, which is used to make laundry soap. They also said they still haven't received the necessary supplies for their livelihood.



Palliya Pepole (Mr.Marimuthu & Mrs.Shanthi) and the Researcher

The Ayyanar temple area has been a place of water conservation since ancient times. But the people protecting the temple said that people should not stay around the temple.

During the British era, the British government of the time built separate settlements for them. But now

those areas are falling apart, so the current government. The local people also say that the organization has promised to do the necessary work to make the houses feel like a next step. They brought Karagam grass and made it like a fence around their houses.

Population of the Paliya People

There are 30 families of the Paliyar ethnic group around the Neer Katha Ayyanar temple. Currently, there are only a few houses built specifically for them, so they are facing a situation where other families, including their immediate family, have to stay in their homes, resulting in a space-constrained situation. People are forced to struggle to maintain their livelihoods without being able to access their basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter.



British Period Building – Palliya's House

Threats to Wildlife in Areas Inhabited by Paliya's

The Meghamalai Wildlife Sanctuary reports that there are wild animals such as elephants, bears, wild boars, spotted deer, red dogs, leopards, pythons, wild cows, and black tigers at the Neer Katha Ayyanar temple.

Although there are threats from wildlife in the places where the Paliar people can go for their livelihood in the Western Ghats, They have been able to protect themselves from their attacks by lighting fires. It is said that elephants come into their habitat at night. They say that one should be very careful when seeing a bear, as they will attack the human eyes first. When elephants come to drink water, they cannot drink from the taps. They said that they heard a shrieking sound at night and that spotted deer would come in droves. They say, without fear for their lives, that when they go to work in the wild, the wild animals will not do anything and will just walk away. They say that there have been cases where bears have snatched away small children when they saw them, describing their cruel living conditions. They say that if you see a bear

trail in the forest, you should avoid going through the forest and take other routes. If you don't, you will be faced with a situation similar to that.

Marriage of the Paliyar People

The people of the Paliyar ethnic group, who live in the Neer Katha Ayyanar temple, live in areas like Srivilliputhur, Shenbhagaththoppu, Theni district, Thaaniarai, Tenkasi district Vasudevanallur, and Thalayanai. People living in these areas said that they had arranged their marriages with them. Marriage is a one-day ritual and no jewelry is asked for. They said they would accept whatever was offered as per their convenience. They said that it was customary to serve non-vegetarian food as a feast at weddings. Furthermore, they do not refuse to let the bride and groom stay at their home after the wedding. They say they do not accept marriages with people of other races than their own.

Education of the Paliya People

"The land of the uneducated is barren.

Grass can grow there. Good sons are rare."

Bharathidasan would say. Education is a tool that helps people develop social understandings and act accordingly. Only the current young generation of women of the Paliya community are striving to develop education that will help in the development of the people and social change. A few women are pursuing vocational courses and working in small businesses in the town. Rajapalayam Ramco Institute serves as a resource center for the educational development of the Palayan ethnic minority. They are providing assistance by providing food and shelter, and by setting up school and college life in places of their choice.

They explained that sewing machines were provided through the government's free sewing training program, but since they were used machines, if they broke down, they had to travel far away to get them repaired. They also expressed their concern that no one had come to teach them the art of tailoring in full.

Medical Practices of the Paliya People

The ancestors of the Paliya people who lived in past centuries followed the medicinal practices found in nature and in culinary ingredients. Until the last decade, obstetrics was performed in homes by elderly obstetricians with experience. As per the government's instructions, there is an environment where you can visit government hospitals. Just come out of the mountains and call the government hospital, An

ambulance will immediately arrive at the area, take them away, and provide medical care.

Due to the lack of awareness among the people about hygiene, it is seen that they do not maintain cleanliness in the areas where they live and do not keep their children clean. We can see them wearing tattered clothes, as if they were people who did not know the proverb, "Even if you are dirty, you should bathe and drink, and even if you are dirty, you should tie it up."

Festivals of the Paliya People

These people are known to worship folk deities according to their religious practices. There is a temple of Velappar in the hilly area. They worship this deity as a family deity. They participate in the pujas held at the Neer Katha Ayyanar temple. For the past 10 years, they have been carving a statue of Mariamman and holding festivals during the months of Aadi. Similarly, when the Velappar temple festival is held in the mountains, they avoid the festival if it is the rainy season, considering the natural environment. It is also said that when the Velappar festival is held in the month of Chithirai, if there is occasional rain in the mountainous area, the Velappar festival will not take place.

Conclusion

The livelihoods of the Ayyanar Kovil ethnic people of the Rajapalayam district, who guarded the water, were backward in terms of food, industry, housing, education and medicine. Because of this, they are in a situation where they are unable to fully follow even the benefits that the government provides them. Furthermore, people are not in the mood to move from the mountainous areas to leased lands without much interest in education and employment. They fear that the common people will cause trouble and suffering when they switch to leased lands. Those who only ate honey and tubers have been somewhat relieved to receive their groceries without any problems. It can also be said that the life of tribals is full of problems and challenges.

Reference

Filed Visit "Neer Katha Ayyanar Temple Rajapalayam" Data's Collection From two Peoples Name of the people Mr.Mariyappan and Ms.Shanthi. Collection Date : August 24 - 2025.
