

SOCIAL STATUS OF THE PEOPLE IN JAVATHU HILLS

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Malayali's have their own unique social and cultural life. An attempt has been made in this chapter to examine the social and cultural life of the Malayalis with reference to their origin, migration, stratification, settlement pattern, housing, dress, food habits, etc., changes that have occurred in certain aspects of their social and cultural life have also been analyzed here.

The tribes who are generally referred to as Malayali refuse to be counted as tribals. They claim that their forefathers migrated from main land to hills due to political reasons, mostly to avoid being attacked by mercenary soldiers or kings who enjoyed conquering land. Being farming communities and unaware of fighting they escaped to hills and got settled there so as to remain away from the reach of plundering soldiers and cavalcading armies. Additionally they prefer to be called as Goundar, a backward community among the Hindus settled on plains. Most among them are farmhands and animal husbandry is their other occupation. Cultivation and animal rearing had been the mainstay of their economic activities from the hoary past. Those who moved to hilly region would have felt the paucity of cultivable land. They would have taken over hunting as the chief occupation and for subsidiary activities would have depended on forest products.

The fact that they talk only Tamil and that Language had been their mother tongue since long supports their claim that they are Tamils who had moved to hilly region due to various reasons. Moreover in stature and other physical features they resemble the Dravidians. Having lived on mountains mostly cut off from the Tamils living on plains they have developed a slang thought it is not much different from the language spoken by other Tamils.

The Malayali male members use to go for hunting monthly once. Only the women and children have stayed at home. In the beginning hunting was the main occupation of the Malayalis. Hunting became more difficult and consuming more time, which resulted the tribal people who are living on the top of the hills turn their attention towards agriculture for agricultural purpose more forest land was cleaned and made suitable for agriculture. The whole family engaged in farming and animal husbandry. This situation has changed the family setup. It became male centered and matriarchy give away to patriarchy. As a result the entire hilly region became patriarchal society.

In 32 villages of Javathu Hills joint family system still prevails. The Malayali families can be divided into two groups the tribal who has own land, and landless tribals. Very few has large area of land. They used wells for irrigation. The agricultural produce generally sufficient for particular joint family.

Malayalis of Javathu Hills of Vellore District are very superstitious by nature. They worship Kali, Durga, Nachi and gods and Goddesses. They are afraid of the spirit such as ghosts and other evil spirits. They are true worshippers of Goddess kali and during the days of Navaratri, they worship her for nine days like other Hindus. Malayalis are often found worshipping various ghosts and spirits offering sacrifices and engaging in various magical activities. In the moonlight night when shadow plays with light, even the gods and goddesses from heaven, as if, participate in dance and merry making with the mortals on the earth. Malayalis believed that the truth was not established in a day or two, it took years together. Tribal religion is the most primitive form of religion found in human society. It contests of worshipping mountains, rivers, thunders, animals, trees, the sun, the moon, the soul, the ghost of the departed man and other natural phenomena. Religion is generally associated with rites and rituals. These rites and rituals are always condition based, mostly based on geographical conditions. The landforms, the natural vegetation, the minerals, the agricultural products and the forest – resources are all related with rites and rituals and hence with religion. Most of these tribals worship Lord Siva and his consort Kali.

The Malayalis of Javathu Hills of Vellore district involved in agricultural activities besides they use to collect forest products. Similarly they also worship Muniswarar, who is considered as the deity taking care of arable land. Every year the people of Javathu Hills celebrated the festival for this deity with much pomp and gaiety. Animal sacrifices, mostly goats or pigs are given. The meat of the sacrificial animal is collected in the field itself. It is cooked and a grand feast has given to the villagers as well as to their relations who participated in the special worship.

The Malayalis of Javathu Hills proud to be called Goundar and celebrate various festivals. They celebrate pongal in the month of Thai for ten days, at a stretch. Being obliged to land, rain, water, animals, sun and other natural elements each one is worshipped on a particular day one after the other. The other important festival in 'Vaikunda Ekadesi' Vaishnavites offer special prayers on this day. 'Karthigai Deepam' is devotionally celebrated in the of November. They practice many Hindu Customs and traditions. They also celebrate Deepavali, particularly by the Youngsters and newly married couples. In the month Vaikasi the people of Javathu Hills celebrated the festival called 'Ponneru Kathudal' which is connected with sowing seeds after summer review. The celebration is fixed on some day by the 'Ur Gounder'. On that day ploughing of field commences and in some cases

seedlings are sown, on a particular auspicious day. During the period full moon day and Ammavasi day the people use to go the temple and they observe anniversary of the dead.

Every village has Temples in which the people use to burn an oil lamp and special prayers are offered on the full moon day and in the month of Karthigai.

Among the people of Javathu Hills bride-price, broadly speaking is the price paid by the bridegrooms' family to the father of the bride while fixing the marriage. Among the Malayalis people the girl is, by and large, taken as an economic asset. To lose her in marriage, as she joins her husband's house, is a loss to the parents. To compensate for this loss the bride-price is arranged between the parties. This is an almost universally prevalent custom among the tribals. It certainly enhances the social status of women for whom a higher bride-price is given. Bride-price is an important aspect of tribal life. This is paid at a higher rate for a hard working, intelligent and of course good looking female.

Marriage is a necessity in the history of human evolution. The actual meaning of marriage refers mainly to the ceremony of 'carrying away' the bride to the house of bridegroom. It requires either religious or social sanction for a man and women to live at one place to satisfy their sexual desire and to procreate children to perpetuate the generation. The function of marriage is not just the fulfillment of biological urges or sexual desires. It also helps man and women to set up a family and share life's joys and sorrows. The rites, rituals and rules of marriage differ from the tribe to another.

Marriages are settled by the parents. Father of a son goes to the house of the girl for settling the marriage. Some other persons numbering two or three also go with him. If marriage is settled then a rupee is given to the bride. The date of marriage is fixed by the father of the bride. At the time of marriage ceremony oil mixed with turmeric is rubbed on the bodies of bride and bridegroom. The bridegroom wears Dhoti, Kurta, Talipa in the marriage and also wears a sword. Marriage party used to go on foot but sometimes by bullock-carts. In the marriage no help of any Brahmins is taken. The marriage age for the boys is 16 years for the girls is thirteen years, child marriages are not prevalent among the Malayali Community. Malayalis of Javathu Hills do not marry in any other community. Widow marriage is permitted in this community. Marriages are performed in the presence of Nattan. There are three forms of marriages namely, through negotiations, elopement and occasionally by Bride service. Cross cousins are the preferred relatives.

Marriage between the children of siblings of opposite sex is commonly practiced. It means that a young man can marry either his mother's brother's daughter or has father's sister's daughter. Respondents said that their arrangement will offer them personal security; affinity and helps in maintain relationship.

The institution of marriage among the Malayalis is different from that in the Hindu Society. Marriage among the tribals is not a religious sacrament but a social contract with the purposes of enjoyment of sex, procreator and captainship. The forms of marriages, the ceremonies and the laws of dissolution of marriage are different in the tribal world from civilized society. Normally, the tribal male marries only one woman, because he is not rich enough to maintain more than one wife and the number of males and females in a tribe is usually equal. An interesting form of securing a bride prevalent among the Malayalis is marriage by mutual clops with a young man by her own consent and does not return to parents till they given consent for marriage. Naturally, so bride price is demanded in the type of marriage. Similarly marriage by exchange also took place among the Malayalis.

In this type of marriage when a man's son is prepared to marry another's daughters, the latter's son accepts the former's daughter in marriage, thus an exchange of boys and girls is made between the two families. Besides some other type of marriages – levirate. In this type of marriage when a person dies, his younger brother marries his wife. This custom is found in some of the Malayalis of Javathu hills. Likewise another type of marriage is when the wife dies, the husband marries her unmarried sister. This type of marriage also existing among the Malayalis. Tali system exists and other marriage among the malayalis the procession of marriage starts from the brides place instead of form the bridegrooms' house. There are almost no religious rituals observed on the occasion of a Malayali tribe marriage, but generally there is provision for community sons and dances at feats.

Among the Malayalis they do not marry in other Community. It a marinade girl runs away from has husband's house, then the parents of that girl are fined heavily by the community panchayat. Widow marriage is permitted in community. Gents wear, dhoti longi and short, small piece of white cloth. While the ladies wear blouse and saris. At present modern type of dresses are wear by the young girls. During the winter season they use woolen cloths.

The ornaments of ladies are generally nose stud, ear rings, chain for leg, rings, necklace which is made of gold. Men are not fond of wearing the ornaments. They were rings and chain etc.

In the past Bullock-Card and at present four wheels like Tempo and auto-rickshaw are the means of conveyance in the Javathu Hills which is used as multipurpose vehicle for carrying passengers side by side for carrying agricultural goods and other materials used for cultivation and construction work. There are more than 20 auto-rickshaws, seven tempo and five Tractors can be found in the 32 villages. Some of the Malaiali families are having tow wheelers and cycles.

There is no medical facility available in every village. They have to go to the nearby town – Tirupattur for availing the medical treatment. Primary health centre is functioning in Pudurnadu on the top of the Javathu Hills. The people of 32 Villages go to Pudurnadu for general treatment. The Government of TamilNadu provides Ambulance service which is attached to the Primary Health Centre. Similarly Siddha Hospital is also functioning in Pudurnadu. Vetenary Hospital is also available in Pudurnadu. For wounds, snake bite the herbal treatment is given by some of the people in every village. Delivers are took place generally at home itself. If there is any critical condition, the pregnant women are brought to Tirupattur Government Hospital.

The people of Javathu Hills of Vellore District generally Celebrate Deepavali, Pongal, Chittirai festival, Punaru and Aadi festival. Similarly the celebrate Marriamman Festival every year with great religious tradition. Kalamman festival along with goat sacrifice took place. During the month of Karthigai the Malayali's of Javathu Hills celebrate Karthigai deepam and Nattu Karthigai. Sivarathri festival, Yagadasi fasting are also celebrated by these people.

Malaiali Community is a religious and self respecting community. They have great faith and belief in their Gods and Goddess. It is a matter of importance that Malayali's are not criminal. We cannot find a single thief or beggar in this community. Though they are poor yet they fill their bellies after doing hard work. They use to take liquor every day evening. During the marriage and festival times liquor is commonly used by these people. They use to have great hospitality. Though they are always half starved, but nobody can doubt about their honesty.

Formerly Malayali's are entertaining themselves by dance and music in night time but this system is now fading fast. Malayali's are keeping cell phone, radio, Television for listening to music and other programs for entertainments purpose. Occasionally these people use to go for hunting along with dogs. Sometimes hunting will took place in the night.

Family is the fundamental unit of society. The foundation of family rests upon man's biological and psychological – social needs. Among the Malayali's, the family is the main unit of social organization. Thus, the individual is primarily accountable to his family. Family plays a very important role in the life of a Malayali's from birth to death. The joint family system exists but it slowly disintegrating among Malayali's and in its place nuclear families are emerging. Because it is a general practice for a son to separate from his parents soon after a marriage and form a separate household. Another reason is domestic Quarrels between the wives of brothers and misunderstanding between daughters in law and mother-in-law. A male head managed the family and he had to administer the family in matter such as arrangements of marriage, decision making, expenditure, celebration of festivals and the other family functions. The role of the head of the household is most important at the time of marriage, death, birth and other socio – religious activities.

Every village or hamlet has a headman who is the defacto king of the place. He is referred as Vooran or Gounder. Besides this most important person of the village there is a dharmakartha, a poojari (a priest), Pattakkaran, Manyakkaran and a guruswamy (a preacher). Each village has the head is known as Nattan. Each Nathan is assisted by a mature counselor who is called as Manthiri.

This a post occupied by the selected person by the villages who select a very experienced man for this post. Once selected as Vooran, he occupies that position till death. Most of the times the eldest son succeeds him when he the person dies. A Vooran knows the in and out of the village and every individual of the village. Every ceremony in the village is celebrated only after obtaining his consent. He use to gave judgment for any dispute. In fact a Vooran is the force which keeps uniformity and cohesion in the village. He advises, persuades and commands according to the situation. He ensures peace and harmony among the villagers. In all hi tasks he is helped by a servant called 'Nathusevani. Nattan is made responsible for conducting all festivals, small or big similarly he supervises the religious ceremonies which are conducted at the time of festivals.

He is the religious preacher who is residing is every Village. Apart from religious duties, he joined together with Nathan and settled family disputes and propriety disputes. He guides the Village people on all religious matters and conduct celebrations of festivals. In one way he is the sole authority on all affairs connected with Village and its special festivals. He use to perform all the pujas in the temples.

The Malayali's food habits are not much different from the underprivileged class of people living on the plain. The total population in the Javathu Hills is chiefly divided into two classes – those who possess land and those who are landless. Even the landowning class can't be counted as rich. The main different between the two is that the landed families have two square meals a day with a house and sufficient material. The grains usually cultivated are samai, ragi, millet, cholam and rarely rice. Their staple food is samai and their second choice is ragi. Topioca is also consumed. Malayali's are non-vegetarians and consume lots of chilies. The chatni is paste of chilies with Onion and salt, they use every day. The hold rotis which are made of kambu cholam ragi in their hand and eat. They are also very fond of liquor. They distill their own liquor from Mahua flowers, sura pattai, which are freely gathered from the forest. Next to farming animal husbandry is the main occupation. Because of distance from towns, these places are out of the rich of milk co-operations. The Malayali's used milk, curd and butter milk and ghee.

The forefathers of the Malaiyali's were hunters. Previously hunting was the mainstay and agriculture was not the chief occupation. Even animal husbandry was a risky job due to abundance of wild animals like cheetah, leopard and wild days. In course of time hunting proved as a unsatisfactory job and the Malayali's turned their attention to cultivation. But still hunting has its own fascination. They could have a complete meal of meat. They consume Pig, hare, wild birds and the like. Among many varieties of fruits, Jack fruit grows on the mountain in abundance. The triples of Javathu Hills consume intoxicating drinks with relish. Though it is the men who enjoy a drink whenever they can, elderly ladies too join them.

The people in this place are among the most superstitious. As pointed out earlier they attribute all incidences in one's life, small and big, good and bad, to spirits and their benevolence and malevolence. Diseases and accidents are no exception. For each such happening they approach a priest (pujari) and like to ascertain from him the spirit which they have offended to invite its wrath in the shape of an untoward accident and from the benefit the spirit who bestowed goodness.

This attitude does maximum harm if one falls ill. Instead of taking the patient to a physicians or hospital they rush to the priest seeking his intervention and to propitiate the spirit which has become angry with the patient. They believe that the more serious the illness the more the patient has offended the spirit or god or goddess. The priest or the shaman demands offerings to be

presented to the offended spirit. This may include even animals like a goat or a bird like hen and many more things. A lengthy ritual is performed including offering the animate as a sacrifice and finally a medicine made from the herbals is given to be administered over a period. There is a rider attached to this way of treatment. The patient would definitely die if he is treated in a hospital or by another physician after having been treated by the priest.

Yet it is a well known fact that they know much about the healing properties of many plants, roots, leaves and stems. Some are known for their efficacy such as bites of poisonous insects including snakes skin allergies and the like. Most common diseases among these people are fever, chest ailment and socially transferable diseases fever and chest ailments are due to the climatic condition of the place. As regards to socially transferable diseases such as syphilis, the whole community is to be blamed. Sexual intimacy is not looked down upon. Even husbands and wives turn a blind eye in these affairs. So such diseases got easily transferred. They refer to it as eruption due to heat in the body. Ladies do not mention it at all, taking it a routine skin allergy around public region resulting in mooring of smelly liquid. Untreated sexual diseases lead to leprosy in some cases that is the reason why there are many lepers among the tribals, many suffer from syphilitic ulcer. They believe that is due to heat in the body and the common treatment is eating in the morning the rice cooked the previous day, soaked in water and mixed with butter milk. The ulcer may get subsided to sprout somewhere else in the body. Such relapsation is considered as 'God's course which leads to leprosy.

Among children and women malnutrition, vitamin deficiency and anemia are common diseases. The treatment for all these is again the same going to the priest, going round banyan tree, incantation and the like. Government has established a primary health centre with a fully qualified doctor, nurses and a midwife. The tribe makes little use of this they collect the condoms supplied free. As regards to treatment, some cases of delivery are brought to hospital if it felt that the cases are complicated. Because of the people's apathy the PHC are not kept in ideal working order. So complicated cases are referred to talk or district headquarters hospital. By the time the suffering lady get admitted into such a hospital her state becomes critical and mostly she breathes her lost. They has an adverse effect on all. The detractors of hospital among the tribals reiterate that no doctor or hospital can save one who has earned the course of the spirits or god.

Children are left to themselves at all they survive fortunately they remain vulnerable all their life. They generally believe that girls have better immunity than boys and so they are left uncared if they fall ill. The Government is doing its best to take care of these innocents. Now Schemes have been introduced. The State Government has come out with schemes to support all from the pore – natal state to the final breath. Doctors have been appointed. Health department has posted staff to look after welfare of common man who knocks at every tribals door and attend to their need. The tribals are becoming accoutered to their care. In near future they are most likely to take advantage of the medical facilities provided to them.

Everything undergoes changes and the people living in Javathu Hills are no exception. Having liked no mountainous land from time unmemorable, secluded from the people living on plains, the tribals have evolved for themselves a way of life which is peculiar to them. Their way of living and live, and they draw sustenance from the surroundings in which they are born. Yet many changes have taken place. It is the electronic media which precipitated these changes. First their outer appearance underwent a change and then came the changes in their thinking, though they still continue to be superstitious and fatalist to the core, there has come about much change. Nowadays their social life resembles much the life of those live on plains.

Among the Malayali's, dead bodies are cremated. Immediately after the death of an individual, message is sent to all the relatives. The dead body padai is then prepared for funeral. The corpse is anointed with oil and turmeric paste, shaved and washed neatly. New cloth is wrapped on the dead body. Since they have a belief in life after death, symbolically they keep ornaments, utensils and other goods by the side of the dead body at the time of burial. The corpse is buried, with the head towards the south. On the eleventh day the rite is performed. After the funeral of the body, all those who have attended it have to take bath and purify themselves. In the house of death, food is not prepared for certain days and the neighbors are supplying the food to the family members for one or two days.

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