



Traditional Festivals of Kurumba Tribe in Attappady with Special Reference to Pudur Panchayat – A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

Attappady is situated at Mannarkkad Taluk of Palakkad district. Kurumbas are very primitive tribe. They are living in the interior part of the forest. Kurumbar are included in the Particular Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) of Kerala. This paper is focused on the Kurumba tribe in Attappady with special attention to their festivals. They have religious and agricultural festivals. The agricultural festivals like Bethe, Vithuda, Kaadupidi Muthattu Pooja and Kambalam. Their gods and goddesses are Malleeswaran, Thamandreyan, Murugan, Karadaivam, Ganapahy, Kaali and Maariyamma. This paper discussed about their funeral function also. It emphasise the importance of Malleeswaran Shivarathri and Vrathanushtana. Harichandran koothu and Kaadupidi Muthattu Pooja also discussed.

Keywords: attappady, kurumbas, tribes, festivals, kambalam, vithuda, shivarathri, malleeswaran, pooja, koothu, agriculture, maariyamma, functions

Limitation of the Study

Kurumbas, Irulas and Mudugas are the major tribes living in Attappady. This paper focused on the festivals of only Kurumbas.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the festivals of Kurumbas in Attappady.
2. To highlight the important gods and goddesses of Kurumba tribe in Attappady.
3. To focus the important festivals of Kurumbas in Attappady.

Introduction

Attappady is located in the Western Ghats forest area in the north-eastern part of Palakkad district of Kerala. It is a protected forest area. The Attappady region, which is spread over an area of 745 square kilometers, consists of Agali, pudur and Sholayur panchayats. Attappady stands about 1200 feet to 3000 feet above sea level. It plays a key role in Kerala's weather systems, because the rain forest Silent valley is a part of it. Attappady is rich with biodiversity. The area Attappady extends up to Nilgiris in North, Coimbatore in east, Mannarkkad in the South and dense forest in the West¹. The main



river flowing through Attappady is the Bhavanipuzha. The Bhavanipuzha and its tributaries act as the lifeblood of agricultural activity in Attappady.

Today, there are 193 tribal Oors in Attappady. Of these, 147 are Irula Oors, 27 are Muduga Oors and 19 are Kurumba Oors. According to the census report conducted by ITDP in Attappady (2024), the total tribal population of Attappady is 33361. Of this, the population of Irulas are 26536, Kurumbas 2813, and Mudugas 4012.

Kurumbar is located in 19 Oors in the Attappady region. Kurumbas are the most aboriginal tribes. Being one of the earliest occupants of Attappady, Kurumbar are called “Palu Kurumba” to differentiate them from the “Alu Kurumba” who belongs to the Nilgiris of Tamil Nadu State. They speak a language which is most probably a blend of the nearby languages of Tamil and Malayalam. Kurumbas are included in the Particular Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) of Kerala².

Man is simultaneously realistic and artistic, and sometimes he is artificial. For leading a life, the satisfaction of primary needs are enough. But sometimes we have to travel beyond the primary needs. A hungry man may enjoy with a song and vice versa a man who had his dinner may not happy. In this sense all men are artistic irrespective of whether they are tribes or civilized. Kurumbas also have their art forms in connection with various rituals and religious occasions.

Gods of Kurumbas

The Kurumba people of Attappady live in harmony with the forest. The forest plays a big role in their beliefs and customs. The Kurumba people consider the forest as their mother. The Kurumba people of Attappady worship the earth, mountains, nature and rivers. The Kurumbas are polytheists. They pray to their gods and ancestors in all tribal ceremonies³. The important deities in the Kurumba community are the following.

- Malleeshwaran (Shivan)
- Karadaivam
- Ayyappan

- Kuladeivam
- Kaali
- Murugan
- Ganapathy
- Nagas
- Bajavan
- Thamandreyan
- Maariyamma

The deities are fixed in small huts in the form of wooden or stone sculptures. This place is known as ‘*Kaavu*’ (temple). Malleeshwaran temple is the most famous temple in Attappady⁴.

The important festivals related to the devotion of deities are Malleeshwaran Shivarathri and Maariyamman pooja.

Malleeshwaran Shivarathri

Malleeshwaran Mudi is the oldest place of worship for the tribal people of Attappady. This is the highest mountain seen from Attappady. The tribal people climb the mountain once a year on Shivarathri to worship the god Malleeshwaran and celebrate it in a grand manner⁵. Malleeshwaran Shivarathri commonly belongs to the three major tribes in Attappady viz. Irulas, Mudugas and Kurumbas. The traditional right to perform the *pooja* belongs to the Muduga tribe of Attappady. There are many legends circulating among them about Malleeshwaran Mudi, the tallest in Attappady, and about Shiva.

In the Shivarathri day the devotees go to the temple with offering things such as ghee, milk, food grains etc. to offer the god for his grace. In this day all the people climb Malleeshwaran peak and all of them gather in the temple yard. After the *pooja* they climb down and go back to their own homes. To participate in the *pooja*, every devotee has to observe seven days ‘*Vrathanushtana*’. During the *Vrathanushtana* one cannot take non-vegetarian foods. On the Shivarathri day they enjoy the festival by performing music and dance. This festival takes place in major tribe festivals in India⁶.

In the present time Malleeshwaran Shivarathri attracts the people from all over Kerala. Even though



it is a festival of tribal god it is celebrated by all sections of people.

Koothu

Koothu is the one of the colorful art forms of Kurumbas. Koothu is performed on Sivarathri season mainly at a Malleeshwaran temple. Harichandran Koothu, Maduraveeran Koothu and Rugmantha Koothu are the main Kooths performed by the community⁷.

Harichandran Koothu

Folk art of Kurumbas is the imprints of their socio-cultural life. Harichandran Koothu is one such art. It is a musical drama with dance and acting and miming with social criticism. In short it is a performing satire. These days it shows the decaying nature and loss of harmonious life with nature. It has a spiritual undercurrent also. The theme of this art is deeply connected with the Raja Harichandra, an Indian mythological character. In olden days they took seven days to complete story. But now the time is shortened to two days. The language used in this musical drama is multilingual. It is a mixture of the languages of the tribes, Mudugas and Irulas⁸.

Agricultural Festivals

A tribal people of Attappady are closely associated with agriculture and nature. Each agricultural festival celebrated by the Kurumbas is an expression of their traditions and beliefs. Every agricultural activity, from selecting the farmland to harvesting, is a festival for the Kurumbas. Each agricultural festival promotes social cohesion among the tribes and maintains their cultural identity. Every agricultural activity in Attappady is carried out under the leadership of *Mannookkaran*. He is the head of agricultural activities. Kurumbas also worship their gods and ancestors during agricultural festival⁹.

The following are the major art forms performed in this area by the Kurumba community especially in connection with various aspect of life such as agriculture and important occasions of life such as marriage (menarche) and burial.

- Bethe
- Kambalam
- Vithuda
- Kaadupidi Muthattu Pooja

Kaadupidi Muthattu Pooja

There is a ritual called *Kaadupidi Muthattu Pooja*, it is led by *Mannookkaran*. This ritual is conducted soon after the selection of agricultural land¹⁰. The land is prepared for cultivation before the middle of March (i.e. before Shivarathri). In this ritual Kaadupidi Muthattu Pooja the head Mannookkaran gives offering to the traditional deities. At this time a sweet, made of ragi, is given as '*Prasadam*'. Each family gets the agricultural land on the basis of eligible members.

Bethe

There is also a ceremony among the Kurumbas like the Malayalees sowing seeds in the month of *Medam*. It is known as Bethe. They sow seeds in monsoon and just before monsoon they observe the ritual Bethe (sowing seeds) by performing dance and song by men and women together. The dance group is led by a leader called *Mannookkaran*. Mannokkaran takes handful of sand from the field praying and rounds the field three times. But this ceremony is disappearing. It exists only in the memories of the old peoples¹¹.

Vithuda

Sowing seeds is known as Vithuda among Kurumbas¹². It is also a ritual for them. Vithuda starts with a worship to their deity. All the members in the *Oors* participates in this function. Food items and fruits from different families are taken to the house of Mannookkaran. This food is distributed to the people after *Pooja*. If rain or thunder occurs in between the ritual, they consider it as a good omen.

Kambalam

A colourful festival related to harvest is Kambalam. Kambalam dance is famous among the Kurumbas¹³. Kambalam festival shows the intensity of the bond between man and soil. This agricultural festival



associated with the sowing of seeds makes us aware about the importance of protecting the world around us. Such kinds of festivals attract the man who has gone away from the soil. Kambalam is an ancient but new resistance to face the natural disasters and the perspectives that destroy nature. This festival starts with *Bhoomi Pooja* in the monsoon season with songs and dance. They use *chama, raagi, amara, thumara* are agriculture¹⁴. At present the tribes in Attappady usually do not have such a custom.

They keep seeds in bamboo baskets. They also do different *Poojas* for good weather, rain and to protect their crops from all dangers. They worshipped the rain god called '*Eriyudayavan*'.

Marriage Function

Like any other cultured society Kurumbas also consider their marriage as a festival. On the day of marriage the groom and his relatives come to the house of the bride singing song. The bride's relatives welcome them very happily with sweets and fruits. In the *Ooru Mooppan* plays a major role in the marriage ceremony¹⁵. They sing and dance during the *Thaaliketu* ceremony. *Thaalikettu* is conducted the *Ooru* temple. After *Thaalikettu* they have food together. During the night there would be songs, dance and *Koothu*. Blessing the newly wedded couples is a very important part in the marriage ceremony among the Kurumba tribe.

Funeral Functions

Kurumbas approach death in a pleasant manner. When a person dies the dead body is carried like a procession conducted by friends and relatives with music and bands. This ceremony is known as '*Saavu*'. The procession is not allowed to pass by temple. Sometimes the dead body is carried in a silent manner and it is known as "*Pachai Saavu*"¹⁶. While burying Kurumbas deposit things along with the body which was used by the defunct in his day today life. This indicates that Kurumbas believed in life after death.

Findings

1. Kurumbas festivals are related to nature

2. They have their own agricultural festivals
3. Malleeswaran shivarathri is important festivals of Attappady

Suggestions

1. Kurumbas have lot of superstitious believes. In the 21st century they should overcome this believes.
2. They need proper shelter.
3. Malleeswaran shivarathri wants to include Keralas important festivals.
4. Attappady festival need popularity among all other peoples.

Conclusion

The Kurumba tribe, an indigenous community nestled in Kerala, India's scenic Attappady region, boasts of its rich cultural heritage. Festivals are central to their society, deeply reflecting their connection to nature, spirituality, and community. Kurumba festivals offer a window into their unique customs, showcasing vibrant art, traditional music, and dance, alongside a profound respect for ancestral traditions. Exploring these celebrations reveals how the Kurumba people celebrate life, honor their deities, and strengthen community ties, all while navigating the challenges of a changing world.

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