

Economic Life Of Malasar Tribes Of Kozhikamuthi In Coimbatore District - A Historical Study

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This paper focuses on the Malasar Tribes economic life at the Kozhikamuthi Settlement in the Anamalai Hills of the Coimbatore District. The tribal community of Kozhikamuthi is located approximately 35 km away from Pollachi town and 8 km away from Topslip in the Anamalai Hills. There are 222 men and 204 women among the 426 members of the Malasar tribal sect who identify as such. They mostly rely on resources associated with forests due to their poverty and lack of land. Like Mahouts and Kavadis, their main occupation is in the forest department. Their primary expenses are related to social activities, such as religious ceremonies, and transportation. They are therefore considerably different culturally from ordinary people, notwithstanding their extreme economic backwardness.

Key Words Kaliamman, Ponnalaatha, Manakadevaatha, Mahakaliyatha, Mariatha, Achchariyamman, Mallan, Mannadi, Mahouts, Kavadis, Avaray.

Introduction

Anamalai lies south of the Palghat gap in the Southern Western Ghats, it comes under the Coimbatore South Forest Division. Anamalai Hills falls in five Revenue Taluks namely Anamalai, Pollachi, Valparai in Coimbatore District Udumalpet in Tiruppur District and Kodaikanal Taluk in Dindigul District in the state of Tamil Nadu.¹

Every community has its own way to meet its basic needs for the existence of its members failing which they are threatened with extinction. Nature has come forward and joins hands with them to fulfill their needs fashioned, of course, in their own way depending on their customs, traditions, demographic structure, etc. Owing to this, people with the same natural surroundings have developed different economic process to meet their ends.² The Malasar live in the foot hills of the Anamalai hills, and they are in the 24th place in the list of scheduled tribes of Tamil Nadu. The Malasar speak Tamil among themselves and with others. They use the Tamil Script.³

Income Resources of Malasar Tribe

Malasars are employed in various forestry operations like timber harvesting, bamboo harvesting, minor forest produce collection, forest regeneration activities which provided them gainful employment throughout the year.⁴

Employment Opportunities Provided to the Malasars by the Forest Department.

Income from Permanent Sources

- Forest Guard
- Forest Watcher
- Mahouts
- Kavadis

Income from Temporary Sources

- Anti-Poaching Watcher
- Eco Guide
- Tourist Guide
- Care Takers
- Cleaning Workers
- Drivers for Safari Vehicles

Income from the Seasonal sources

- Fire Watcher
- Mazdoors
- Departmental Coolie Works
- Cultural Dance Activity⁵

Employment Opportunities Provided to the Malasars by the Government Income from Permanent Sources

- Noon Meal Organizer
- Cook

Income from Temporary Sources

- Morning Breakfast Cook
- Assistant Cook⁶

Income from Other Sources

- Labour Works

A group of Malasar women form a cultural troupe and entertain the tourist.

The Government has implemented the Noon Meal Scheme and Morning Breakfast Scheme in the schools. There is one school for the forest tribal children. Tribal people are given opportunities to work in the Noon Meal and Morning Breakfast Scheme. They are also working in various labour works in near the towns, (i.e) Sethumadai, Vettaikaran

Pudur, Anamalai and Pollachi.

Income from Forest Based Products

By Forest Rights Act 2006 the government has allowed these people to gather forest produce by cFishing and using water resources [3 (1) d] to visit deities in the deep forests, rest houses and food gathering, medicinal plants identification and tracking places where they move to be monitored by Global Position System to lock the latitude and longitude. So that it can be reached easily in the deep forest.⁷

As food gatherers from the forests they are allowed to gather some products. They are

- Honey
- Pepper
- Kungilam (Shorea Robusta Gaertn)
- Nannari (Sarsaparilla Root)
- Valampuri (Screw Tree Fruit-Helicteres Isora)
- Amla
- Shikakai
- Bagumbu
- Nilavembu (Andrographic Paniculata)
- Balm Grass
- Bangai Milk
- Cinnamon Bark

Marketing of produce

Pollachi is the central market for all products and the weekly shandy is a great event attended by buyers and sellers in thousands. Agricultural produce is sold at this shandy.⁸

Expenditure of the Malasar Tribe

The main expenditures of the Malasar people is family expenses (i.e)

- Food
- Dress
- Household Expenses (L.P.G. , kerosene, Vessels)
- Transport
- Hospital Expenses
- House Maintenance
- Liquor.

The people do not spend money for electricity, because their settlements are in dense forest areas. So they are using mostly solar power and kerosene for lights.⁹

Religious Expenses

The Malasars are Hindus. They mainly worship goddesses such as Kaliamman, Ponnalaatha, Manakadevaatha, Mahagaliatha, Mariatha and Achcharyamman. They have a separate priest

(sadayan) who performs their death rites, cures ailments and exorcises evil spirits. They play a few instruments such as the malladam (drum), urumai and kolal (pipe).¹⁰

Pooja for a mandalam (45 days) from the 1st of karthigai (November) to the 15th of Marghazi (December) is performed. Sheep and fowls are offered. Mallan is another diety worshipped with a view to ward off elephants and tigers. They observe sankaranthi (Pongal) as auspicious day.¹¹

Malasar Religious Expenses are

- Pongal festival
- Local Temple festival
- Aadi festival
- Deepavalli festival
- Temple tax from each family for maintenance of temple and celebrating of festivals.

Ceremonial Expenses

Marriage ceremonies are celebrated for 3 days. After the nallanarle (betrothal) ceremony the elders fix a Friday for the marriage. The wedding (tara muhurtham) takes place in the bride's residence. The bridegroom ties the tali (a thread smeared with vermilion) around the neck of the bride. A non-vegetarian feast is given by both families. The marriage procession takes place in the night and they cover all the streets of the settlement, accompanied by kollu molukku (music) and kalyana attam (marriage dance). The consummation ceremony takes place on the next day at the bride's residence. The attainment of puberty (sadagagradu) is celebrated. The girl is secluded in a separate hut (Tinnai) erected by the maternal uncle with bamboo. On the seventh day after a bath a ceremony is performed under the supervision of the maternal uncle. Elderly married women prepare seer (a container with cooked rice, a comb, a small arrow, a mirror and plantains) and give it to the girl. A vegetarian feast is given to the relatives.¹²

Malasar Ceremonial Expenses are

- Ear boring
- Puberty
- Marriage
- Delivery
- Death¹³

Educational Expenses

In Top slip the school has been upgraded to middle school as per G.O.Ms No113 school education dated 20.08.2004 and G.O. Ms. No 126 E & F, dated 29.07.2005. Sanction has been accorded for employment of one B.Ed. teacher and provision of basic infrastructure. At present there are 84 (boys 41 and girls 43) students studying in the school and managed by a single teacher. Recently one B.T. teacher has been posted to the Tribal school.¹⁴ After finishing middle school they go to near by towns like Sethumadai, Vettaikaran pudur and Anamalai.

Malasar Educational Expenses are

- Transport
- Stationary
- College Expenses
- Uniform ¹⁵

Welfare Measures for Development of Malasars

Tribal welfare measures implemented through Collectorate to provide basic facilities to tribals. Basic facilities like provisions, dwelling huts, formation of approach road drinking water facilities and land development work were provided to the tribals of Anamalais at a cost of Rs 3 crores through centrally sponsored scheme, innovative Jawahar Rozgar Yojana between 1996-97 to 2002 from 2003-04 to 2006-07, preferential treatment was given to the local tribals in the appointment to the post of forest watcher in relaxation of rules relating to age, physical measurement and education. ¹⁶

When the Forest Project plans (Kozhikamuthi) are implemented it will bring a lot of improvement to their economic lives. Transport, Solar power, Vegetable garden maintenance, Medical facility that are provided is bringing a lot of changes in their lives. ¹⁷

The Government has formed societies at Valparai and Topslip to help the Malasars to attain the minimum support price for their products. They can bring in their harvest from around their settlements and get a fair price. The gathered products from the forest also fetch a fair price which helps with their income. The Malasars not only sell their produce to the cooperative societies but they also can buy back essential items needed for them. The Public Distribution System gives free rations to all the people in their settlements which has improved their livelihood to a great extent. ¹⁸

Conclusion

Living in close proximity to forests as well as near commercial plantations, the tribal communities in the Anamalais have diverse approaches to utilization of land for agriculture, use of natural resources including forest produce and source of employment. ¹⁹ The economic aspects of tribal livelihood and resource used in this region conclude with a description of their economy and nature of dependence on natural resources.

END NOTES

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⁴ V.Ganesan, History of Anamalais, Teak to Tiger, Anamalai Tiger Conservation Foundation Tamil Nadu Trust, Pollachi ,2019 , p. 103.

⁵ Field visit to the range offices in Anamalai Tiger Reserve, Pollachi Division.

⁶ Interviewed :Mrs . Vanaja ,Headmistress,The Tribal Residential School,Topslip- Pollachi,09-11-2023.

⁷ Tribal and other Traditional Forest Lives (Recognition of Forest Rights) Rules 2006, 2012 section [3 (1) c] and

[3 (1) d]

⁸ Venkateswara Iyer, consolidated working plan of Coimbatore south division 1941-42 to 1954-55 p. 14.

⁹ Interview with Padma, Malasar woman, age 50, on 20-10-2022.

¹⁰ Singh K.S, People of India Tamilnadu Vol.XL part II, Anthropological survey of India, New Delhi 1997, p.905.

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¹² K.S.Singh, Op.cit., p.903.

¹³ Field visit to the Kozhikamuthi settlement by the researcher and interview with the eldest of the Malasars on 10.08.2022.

¹⁴ Dr. Rajeev k Srivastava IFS, Anamalai Tiger Reserve, tiger conservation plan 2014-15 to 2023-24, p.257.

¹⁵ Field Visit to the tribals settlement by the researcher and interview with the eldest of the Malasars on 12.08.2022.

¹⁶ V. Ganesan., Op.cit., p.77-78.

¹⁷ Micro-plan 2020-2025, Anamalai Tiger Reserve, Pollachi Division.

¹⁸ Proceedings of the Tribal Director, Chennai, R.C.No. TD/A3/6092/2023, Dated :19.04.2023.

¹⁹ Manish Chandi, Tribes of Anamalais Nature Conservation foundation, Mysore 2008, p.36.