

Religious Customs Of The Kadar Tribes In Anaimalai Region

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ABSTRACT

The usual elements of tribal religion, such as Animism, Naturalism, Totemistic belief and taboos, magic, polytheism, and the fourth figure, are also found in the tribes of south India. The Malarayans of Kerala, for example, consider some kinds of stones to be symbols of deities and believe that the dead ancestors have become gods who protect their families. Belief in animism prevails among the Todas. According to this form, man's life is supposed to consist of powers, elements, ghosts, etc., which is impersonal and also "sapless phantoms" of which no image can be made and no definite idea can be formed. Tribal religion is considered to come in line with popular Hinduism. Hutton has remarked that tribal religions represent, as it were, surplus material not yet built into the temple of Hinduism. Elwin is of the view that the distinction between tribal religions and Hinduism is the previous classification into animism, and Hinduism is meaningless. Tribes make offerings to the spirits of local hills, streams and other objects of nature. Naturalism is observed in the worship of the sun. South Indian tribes believe in nature worship. Belief in magic is a feature of the religion of the Kadar, Paniyans, Nayadis, Ullandans, and some tribes, and some even think that they can make themselves invisible and accomplish some act. Ancestor worship is a favourite concept. The tribes invoke the spirit of their ancestors to obtain their blessing by burning a lamp. They have several death ceremonies that are related to ancestor worship. They also have a variety of Gods. Each village and even each area has its particular deity. The religious rituals of the Kadar tribes are jubilantly celebrated with feasting and dances. The usual hierarchy of priests and functionaries is used to conduct religious ceremonies.

Keywords: Kadar, Tribes, Anaimalai, Customs, Religious Rituals

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Tribal religion is based on traditions and beliefs. Their rituals are aimed at solving day-to-day problems in life. Objects of worship are things of nature such as trees, rivers, mountains, the sun, the moon and the earth. Rituals are mostly performed collectively and transmitted orally. The Tribal worldview is grounded in natural events and life experiences. Anaimalai is situated in the Western Ghats, and its hill ranges are spread across the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. There are a diverse number of indigenous communities living in the Anaimalai. This region, known for its scenic beauty, is a visual treat. Apart from the forest, the hill is also famous for the plantations, elephant reserve, water reserve, floral reserve and anthropological reserve as it is inhabited by six Indigenous people viz, Kadar's, Muduvars, Malasars, Malai Malasars, Eravalars and Pulayars which had home to more than 36 settlements of different ethnic indigenous tribal communities. This is unique to the entire Tamil Nadu and probably the only protected area with diverse groups of indigenous people. Kadar, Muduvar, Malasar and Malai Malasars tribal communities live near the Anaimalai hills, chiefly the Pulaiyars and Eravalars along the lower elevations. They are nomadic and seminomadic and depend on non-timber forest produce. They cultivate some food crops, but their methods of cultivation are primitive and limited.

1.2 ANAIMALAI

The Anamalai hills are known today as one of the world's most biodiversity hotspots, especially as they fall along the Southern Western Ghats. They are rich in endemic flora and fauna in forests ranging from dry scrub jungle along the eastern foothills to the thick, wet ever, ever-green forest of the upper reaches, including the Valparai. Some of the hilltops are covered in grassy meadows and forest valleys, which are unique ecosystems found only along the higher elevations of hilltops. The region is composed of a series of hill ranges running in the north-south direction and valleys with drainage pouring from streams into rivers that eventually reach the Arabian Sea on the West coast.

1.3 TRIBES OF THE ANAMALAIS

There are four different tribes, namely Muduvar, Kadar, Malasar and Pulayar, and they live on the Anamalai hills. There are a diverse number of indigenous communities living in the Anamalais. Anamalais is worth to be designated as an elephant reserve, water reserve, floral reserve and anthropological reserve as it inhabited by six Indigenous people viz, Kadars, Muduvars, Malasars, Malai Malasars, Eravalars and Pulayars, are the Indigenous tribal communities. This is unique in the entire Tamil Nadu and probably the only Protected Area (PA) with diverse groups of Indigenous people. Kadar, Muduvar, Malasar and Malai Malasars tribal communities live near the Anamalai hills, chiefly the Pulaiyars and Eravalars along the lower elevations.

1.4 KADAR TRIBES

The Kadirs or Kadans inhabit the Anaimalai or elephant hills and the great mountain range, which extends thence southward into Travancore... The Kadars are the most well-known tribal community of the Anamalai hills. They occupy both its eastern and western regions covered by forest hills, valleys, riverside regions, and lower slopes of hills, now divided into Kerala and Tamilnadu. Even though they were in different places, they identified themselves as a community divided into groups by geographical affinity. They are not clans, but identity members assume due to location, matrimony evidence is the primary change for their translocation to occur often. Though matrimonial and religious practices have been adopted from the plains, remnants of an egalitarian, multi-lateral system with equal emphasis on maternal and paternal lines. Some bilateral cross-cousin marriages, occasional polygamy and predominant monogamy with easy diversity continue to remain.

1.5 SETTLEMENTS

Kadar land lies at the tri-junction of the Coimbatore district of Tamilnadu and the Palghat and Thrissur districts of Kerala. They are distributed in Parambikulam, Thekkady, Nelliampathy, and Sholayar in Kerala, Anamalais, and the Valparai plateau in Tamilnadu. Thurston and Rangachari (1909) described their settlements as consisting of nearly constructed huts made of bamboo deftly split with bill-hook and divided off into verandahs and compartments using bamboo partitions. They are nomadic and seminomadic. They cultivate some food crops, but their methods of cultivation are primitive and limited. The Kadars are the first primitive of the hill tribes in the Anamalais. The word Kadar, in Malayalam, means the "dweller" of the forest (plural-kadars). Etymologically, the word Kadar is derived from the Tamil word Kadu, which means forest. The tribe got the name because of their exclusive forest habitat. Earlier writers have used various terms, such as "Kadir". The Kadar have been considered as a human strain of considerable antiquity. They are short in stature, dark-skinned with flat noses and slightly thicker lips than those of the other hill tribes.

1.6 RELIGIOUS RITUALS AMONG THE KADAR

Usually, the village headman is the priest. From all this, we find that the Kadar religion has become more intermixed with Hindu worship and other things. Our analysis of the beliefs and practices relating to the supernatural being among the tribals in general reveal that whatever the way of life, whether gathering or hunting or cattle herding, the tribal enacted his myths through rites and rituals, dances, and songs, fear and taboos, thus confirming his belief in the supernatural invisible. Imperceptible force, not individually but collectively, matters to him, and that is social survival. Adivasis practice various tribal religions that differ from Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. These often involve the worship of ancestors, village and nature spirits, the last associated with and residing in various sites in the landscape 'mountain-spirits', 'river-spirits', and 'animal-spirits'. The religion of a tribe is simple. Religious beliefs and behaviour are not treated as something apart from other kinds of beliefs and behaviour. Religion permeates all aspects of their life. Tribal life and society cannot be fully understood without understanding their religion. The tribal people observe their festivals, which have

no direct conflict with any religion, and they conduct marriage among themselves according to their tribal customs.

1.7 ANCESTORS (KARANAMARKAL) WORSHIP

The tribal people often involve the worship of ancestors, village and nature spirits, the last associated with and residing in various sites in the landscape, 'mountain spirits', 'river spirits', and 'animal spirits'. No individual, community, society or nation can be without a religion. It is to be noted that Man and religion have been connected since time immemorial. Different people follow different religions in the world. Religion is an inseparable part of human life. It is not separate or distinct from human life or human practices. It also helps manage human life. One cannot imagine human life without religion. Therefore, religion teaches values like truth, pity, giving alms, justice, kindness towards other creatures, love, righteousness, tolerance, sympathy, emotions, righteous deeds, devotion, faith, compassion and so on. Man tries to follow their religion by practicing devotional activities, prayer and worshipping.

1.8 RITUALS RELATED TO THE HONEY COLLECTION

Before they go out on a honey-collecting expedition, they offer to their ancestors. They also invoke their ancestors when they go out to hunt or collect jungle produce. They believe that their ancestors helped them to find abundant food and protect them against wild animals. They also worship the haunting spirits of the tribes of Anaimalai Venerate hill deities whom they locate on the crests and tops of hills. Thus, the famous god of these tribes is Mala Deivam, God of the Hills.

1.9 MALA DEIVAM WORSHIP

The Kadar worship Mala Deivom or Makannimar (sylvan deities). Apart from the Malaideivam, there seem to be a lot of deities worshipped among the Kadar, like Pakutlatha, Athuvasariyamma, Anakulam Bhaghavathi Amman, Vanathevatha, and Iyappasamy. A stone is set up beneath a Teak tree called a Kannimara and Masaniyatha, a female figure which is also worshipped. They also worship Kali, Ayyappan and Malavazhi, the ruler of the hills. Bell, lamp, and pot incense are used as the pooja items. In addition to these, they also use weapons like scythes and spears. Traditional beliefs, festivals, rituals, ceremonies, and nature worship Indian tribal communities have a rich tradition of festivals, rituals, and ceremonies that are deeply connected to their religious beliefs and cultural practices. These festivals, rituals, and ceremonies are often associated with the natural cycles of life, such as the changing of the seasons, and are performed to honour the spirits of the land, the ancestors, and the gods. Animism, in its complete development, consists of the notion in souls and in a destiny state, in controlling deities and subordinate spirits, the doctrines of the one almost ensuing in a few forms of lively worship. Thus, in primitive societies, faith is having that means of the notion in religious beings. The practices of worship are about animals, nature, the Sun, the Moon, and fire. Tribal rituals and ceremonies are essential elements of their cultural structure. These ceremonies are often conducted to seek the blessings of nature, appease deities, and mark important life events such as births, marriages, and deaths.

1.10 POOJA AND WORSHIP

The poojas are conducted by a man called Ur-poor sari. He sings songs called 'Padam Solluthal' to drive away diseases and evil spirits. A raised platform under the shade of a tree is considered a temple. The temples are huts. The images of their deities are stone-shaped. Spear and scythed arrows are placed near the deities in the temple. Onam and Vishu are the crucial festivals they celebrate.

1.11 NATURE WORSHIP

Rainwater is the leading resource for the tribal people. They offer prayer to nature for seasonable rain and the stoppage of rain. They put numerous small holes in the pots and placed this pot over the image of the goddess Mariamman. The pot's water flows like rain and cools down the deity. This kind of custom reduces the deity's anger, and she makes the rain fall into the rain for the welfare of the Kadars. The Kadar believe that they can also stop the rain through prayer. They create fire and put a piece of iron on it. Then, hang a coconut over the fire, and like water in the coconut evaporates slowly, the rain also will get stopped slowly. These kinds of beliefs give them confidence and security.

1.12 SUPERSTITIONS

The Kadar have faith superstitions like Pilli and sunyam and believe their sufferings are due to black magic. To cure their disease, the Kadar do not go to the hospital but to the temple priest. The priest gives some to God incessantly for curing them from diseases like fever, stomach ache, and cough. The possessed Kadar is brought to the temple, and the priests chant mantras at midnight to drive out the evil spirits. With neem leaves, the priest bears the possessed person's body and orders the spirit to not only the Kadar but also the villagers in Tamilnadu. All Kadar peoples follow the Hindu Religion, customs, and rituals. Their religious beliefs include worshipping jungle spirits, a kindly creator couple, and local forms of Hindu deities.

1.13 ESWARAN WORSHIP

The idea of the supreme deity 'Eswaran' or 'Andavar' is very much dormant in them. Besides propitiating the sylvan deities and Ayyappan, they also worship the spirits of the Dead. The Kadar of Vazhachal propitiate 'Mala-Daivams' (Sylvan deities) and 'Ayyappan'. These are considered benevolent deities, and offerings are occasionally made to them. Even those who stay away from Vazhachal pay their respect to these deities by occasional Offerings. In the Parambikulam area, Kadar Gives offerings to the Sylvan deities on the 28th of Makaram (Sankramam). On this day, Kadar of the various settlements assemble either at Karumthalappara or Athirappally and pay their Homage to the 'Maladaivams' (Sylvan deities). Those who cannot reach this place, for some reason, may send offerings through someone else. The offerings include arrack, cocoanut, betel leaves, tobacco, frankincense, fruits, raw rice, and jaggery. Women are not allowed to go nearer to the place of worship as it is believed that the 'Maladaivams do not like the presence of women.

1.14 OFFERINGS

Offerings for the 'Maladaivams' are placed on pieces of wild plantain leaves, and ten lighted candles are placed around them. Devi dancers possessed by the 'Maladaivams' dance and tell oracles. They would declare the shape of things to come, whether there would be trouble from wild animals, whether plenty of honey would be available, whether the collection and gathering would be abundant, whether contagious diseases were to spread in the settlements, etc. The propitiation of 'Maladaivams' is followed by that of 'Ayyappan'. He is always invoked in the same manner as in the case of 'Maladaivams' except for fifteen lighted candles kept around the offerings.

1.15 SPIRITUALISM AND INVOKING KUNDALINI

If the devil dancers, believed to have assumed the spirits of the Maladaivams, express dissatisfaction at the offerings made to them, they are again propitiated in the individual settlements. The expenditure for the same is shared equally by all the members. Regular priests or *poojaries* are not presenting the Kadar society. On the occasion of Makara Sankramam, two elderly Kadar who know the art of 'itch-dance' perform the same. These devil dancers should have been blessed by Maladaivams in their dreams and possessed some magical powers. They are capable of doing black magic, diagnosing diseases and prescribing medicines. Thus, the *poojari* and *mantravadi* are combined into a single person. Before becoming a *poojari* person possessed with the power of *Maladaivam* has to observe continence for a long time. He takes meals prepared only in bamboo tubes. He retires into forests occasionally to have communion with the 'Maladaivams'.

To test the efficacy of this spiritual power, a few Kadar approaches him to find a remedy for a sudden illness in a child or the like. He suggests, after performing certain rites, the causes for the disease and the remedies to be performed. If the patient is relieved of an ailment, the magical power of the medicine man is confirmed. After that, he becomes the socially accepted *poojari-cum-mantravadi*. In the 1961 Census, the Kadar are returned as professing Hinduism. Festivals *Onam* and *Vishu* are the two most important festivals celebrated by the Kadar. The Kadars are a food-gathering jungle tribe of South India spread out in the Nelliampathy and Kadacheri mountains in the erstwhile Cochin State. Now, parts of Kerala. They are also to be found in the Anamalai hills of the Coimbatore District of Tamilnadu. Kollegal taluk of South Kanara forms part of Karnataka State.

FIRE TREADING (WALKING) CEREMONY

The fire walking festival is an annual festival of Kadars celebrated in June. It is a significant religious event for the Kadars in the Erumaiparai settlement.

1.16 POLYTHEISM

The Kadar religion is primitive polytheism. However, the Hindu religion has crept in here, as in the case of

other tribes, to bring about notable changes in the traditional religion of the Kadars. The important deities of the Kadar are Ayyappan and Goddess Kali. Maruti, and Malavashi. The Kadar have faith in the existence of spirits, particularly natural spirits. The rising sun is worshipped among the Kadars, and small temples are also in the area for worship. The Kadar attaches much importance to the matter of being blessed by spirits. Demons and deities and also ancestral spirits. This can be seen during celebrations of festivals and ritual and social undertakings on all occasions considered necessary; the Kadars invoke the blessings of deities and ancestral spirits.

1.17 VISHNU WORSHIP

Vishu is celebrated on the first day of the month of Medam in Malayalam. Like other Hindus, perhaps due to cultural contact, the Kadar believe that the ensuing year's fortune depends on what they see on that day. The sight of a golden or yellow colour is considered to be auspicious. For this purpose, they keep a few burns, best of 'Konna' flowers, the colour of which is yellow, in front of every hut to be seen early in the morning on the *Vishu* day. A communal feast is arranged on this day, for which all the settlement members contribute their share in kind or cash. The *Moopan* collects the subscription and supervises the festival performance. That night is spent dancing and making merriment. Drinking of arrack is a part and parcel of the celebrations. Traditionally, *Omanis* are considered by the Kadar as a day on which they receive presents from the Maharaja of Cochin. Before the formation of the Travancore-Cochin State, the Maharajas of Cochin sent new clothes as presents to the Kadar Chief. However, *Onam* Day is celebrated as a festival occasion when they all indulge in a sumptuous feast. If pocket permits, children are given new dresses. In the evening, all assemble in front of the *Moopan's* hut, where they perform folk dance under the influence of arrack. The religion of the Kadars is a crude polytheism and values the worship of stone images or invisible gods. It is, as Mr. Bindley expresses it, an ejaculatory religion, finding vent in the names of the gods and demons. The Tribal worldview is grounded in natural events and life experiences. Their cosmology is socially practical, i.e. existential, but un-interpretative. Faith in the supernatural is structured in a tribal society. According to the 1961 census of India, it would appear that about 89 % of the tribals claimed to profess Hinduism, and five per cent had converted to Christianity. Most of the tribals in India follow some or other form of Hinduism. This is mainly due to the tribals' contact with their Hindu neighbours. Christianity was introduced among the tribal groups during the British rule.

1.18 CONCLUSION

Almost all the tribal religions across India believe in the existence of spiritual powers. The most essential life problem is dealing with these powers to ensure individual and collective well-being. The solution for this is to seek conciliation and communion with the more definite and potent personal spirits and to deal with the more indefinite and impersonal forces through control, expulsion or avoidance through appropriate rites, ceremonies, spells and taboos. The religion of a tribe is simple. Religious beliefs and behaviour are not treated as something apart from other kinds of beliefs and behaviour. Religion permeates all aspects of their life. Tribal life and society cannot be fully understood without understanding their faith.

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