HISTORICAL SETTINGS OF MALAYALI HILL TRIBES IN TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

Malayali hill tribes were inhabited by Vedans and that the Malayalis killed the men and wedded the women. Even today during marriages function, a gun is fired in the air to represent the death of the Vedan husband. The Malayalis termed themselves as Karaikkat Vellalas. The Malayalis of South Arcot call themselves as Kongu Vellalas. All the branches of the community living in different places agree that they are Vellalans, who emigrated from Kanchipuram, bringing with them their God Kariramman. Another point should be recorded here. In the wedding of Kalrayan in South Arcot, the priest who performs the marriage utter the word Kanchi as just before the tali is tied. It shows that the migration occurred from Kanchipuram. The Malayali of the Shervaroy call them Kanchimandalam Malayalis. Many called themselves as Vellala and Karalan. Malakkaran and Mala Nayakkan are also used as synonyms for Malayali.

Keywords: Historical settings-Kolli hills - Ancient Tamil society- Malayali Tribes -Keralities-

Introduction

There are some who believe that the Malayalis are the Keralities. Because some of their customs are similar to those of the Keralities. For example, the Kolli hills girls wear clothes of white cotton tied across their breast like the Keralities while few other Malayalis prefer tattooing. The Kolli Malayalis follow the customs and preventing tattooed persons from entering their house. The word Malayali means 'the inhabitant of the hills.' They are spread out in the prominent hills of Tamil Nadu such as Kolli hills, Those who live in those who live in Kolli hills. They are called as Kolli malayali.

The Malayali tribes who are living in Kolli hills, Pachamalai, Kalrayan hills, Shervaroyan hills and Jawathu hills are not the natives of these hills. During the sixteenth century A.D, they emigrated from Kanchipuram and moved westward and settled in these hills. They were living in remote areas and followed their own traditional customs and manners. However, during the twentieth century the tribals life pattern underwent radical changes as a result of their interaction with the people of the plains. The tribals were subjected to many changes and they began to adapt themselves to the new environment. They were also subjected to scientific temper and as a result a very bright and promising future is prograstigated. After examining all the views. One can arrive at the logical conclusion that the Malayalis are not natives of these hills and they came from Kanchipuram and became a tribe of cultivators, woodmen and shepherds. Even though they are scatted, they follow similar customs and traditional habits and have common administrative, socio-economic and religious system of life.

Tribes in Ancient Tamil Society

According to Tolkappiyam, the ancient Tamil society was based on fivefold classification of land namely Kurinji, Mullai, Marutham, Neithal and Palai. On the basis of occupation the people were also classified into Arivar (learned people), Ulavar (farmers), Malavar (tribes), Kurumbar (forest tribes) and Parathavar (fisherman). Though religion did not apparently exist, the people worshipped Murugan, Mayon, Indran, Varunan and Kottravai.

From third century B.C to the beginning of the third century A.D is considered as the period of the Sangam Age. The Chera, Chola and the Pandyas dynasties had predominantly ruled over a major part of Tamil Nadu ever since the Sangam period. After this, the Kalabhra rule started in Tamil Nadu and it continued till the sixth century A.D and this period provides an explanation for the disappearance of the settled order in the Tamil country as portrayed in Sangam literature. The Sangam literature refers to five fold divisions of land which determined the
occupation and culture of the people.5 Tribal groups in the hills spoke a variety of languages. The ancient Tamil literature testifying to the fact that the Tamils were the ancient human race.6 According to tradition, about millions of years ago, the rocks were formed in the hills of Pallavaram, Chennai, the Nilgiris, Palani and Anaimalai in Tamil Nadu. In these regions, the Tamils lived during the pre-historic times.

The Tamils of the pre-historic age had undergone several stages of transformation. In this process, the people of the Paleolithic period had used unpolished stone tools. Such tools were found in Chengleput, Noth Arcot, South Arcot, Madurai, Thanjore, Salem and Tiruchirapalli districts.7 The people of the Neolithic period also used polished stone tools. These have been found in the districts of Salem, Dharmapuri and Vellore. The Sangam classics speak of the existence of a well developed Tamil society. The Yarna (caste) system slowly began to develop and as a result the traditional Hindu society came to be divided into four classes viz., the Brahmns, Kshatriyas, Vysyas and the Sutras.8 The Adi Dravidas were called by different names such as untouchables, panchamas and schedule castes and scheduled tribes.9

The literary evidences reveal the fact that this region was inhabited by three tribes known as the Malavar, the Kosar, and the Kongar. These tribes existed during the Chera, Chola and Pandya period and were known for their war-like qualities. These tribes had their own kings who had their armies consisting of soldiers, horses, elephants and chariots. The king, it is said, often took the field and led the forces. The Malavars(tribes) especially were excellent soldiers. The Kosars were noted for their organizing capacity and truthfulness. The Kongars originally came from Kodagu (coorg) in search of pasture. The Kolli hills came under the control of these three tribes mentioned above.10

In course of time, the Malavars, Kosars and Kongars11 were defeated by their powerful neighbour namely the Cheras. The family of the Irumporai made inroads into the Kongu country. Kanaikal Irumporai’s, successor Olval Perumcheral Irumporai captured Karur and defeated Adigaman with Elini and two other chieftains at Tagadur (Dharmapuri). Adigaman Neduman Anji was the patron of the poete Avvai.11 He ruled over the whole of east Kongu including the hilly region of Salem. It was possibly the growing power of this chieftain that Perumcheral wished to destroy. It is said that the Adigaman was an ally of the Tondaiman of Kanchi and Ori of the Kollimalai and that he had inflicted a severe defeat on Kari of Tirukkoyilur.12

During Yanaikkal sey mantheran cheral’s time the first check came to the Chera rule over Kongu regime. He often fought with the Pandya king Neduchelian and the Chola king Perunarkilli and won several victories over them. For, it was during this period all the powers in the Kongu country passed into the hands of the Velir chieftains.13 There is no clear evidence about the origin of the Velir chieftains. There were seven outstanding persons among Velir chieftains. Vel, Aai and his successor, Titiyan had conquered the southern part of the present Coimbatore district. AyAndiran had his sway in the whole region from the Palghat gap to Cape Comorin. The other Velir chieftains, Velpagan, Velpari, Velieli and Ori had entrenched themselves in other parts of the Kongu region. Ori who was ruled in Kolli hills region of Namakkal district, kept the Pandyas and the Cholas away from Kongu region.14 Mountains were the residential areas of the last Sangam rulers. Ori was the ruler of hills. He is also referred to in the Sangam classics.

Kolli hills captivates the attention of people of different walks of life. Kolli hills is referred to in Sangam classics like Nattrinai and Kuranthogai. In the history of South India, Kolli hills plays an important role. The Sangam work Nattrinai refers to the plains around Kolli hills as Kollikkatram and it served as a border between Kongu and Chola countries. During the early centuries of the Christian era it is felt that this hill was under the control of Malavar Adhan Ori, a renowned ruler and one among the last seven philanthropists of Malavar. The Perunchitteravarar’s statement “Kolli Anda Val Vil Ori” (Purananur, 158:5) refers that he was an expert archer and as a result he was hailed name as Val Vil Ori.

From the references available in the Sangam classics, one can understand the fact that the Chera ruler subdued the Kolli hills after his victory over Ori. There are evidences in Silappadikaram to prove that Kolli hills became a Chera territory after Irumparai and after 9th century due to the victory of Cholas it became a part of the Kongu country. Tamil literature Padittru pathu speaks about the rule of the Kolli hills by the Chera ruler.15
Kollimalai copper plates were discovered from the Kolli hills region. The copper plates mention a king by name pon madathu anda manimudi maharaja. The epigraphical source refers to a king ponnerippanna. Both the records cited above can be paleographically assigned to the early tenth century A.D, Sundara Chola (975-970 A.D) had the prefix pon maligai tunjiya in his name. However it is possible to identify the Maharaja of Kolli hills region with Sundara chola due to some difficulties. Silappathikaram mentions the word adaham. The word literally means gold or golden. A place called Adahamadan is cited in the same epic and has been identified with Trivandrum in Kerala. Silappathikaram and Keralolpatti speak of places like Ponmandapam, Vellimandapam etc. So it is clear that Adahamadan can easily be associated with the Cheras. Tamil Nikantsus describe the Cheras as Kolli Verpan, Kollicchilamban etc. Ilango Adigal eulogises Chera as Vil Eluthiya Imayathodu Kolli Anda Kudavar Ko. Kulasekara alvar describes him as Kongar kon kolli-verpan. A literary record from Namakkal (near Kollimalai) mentions a king by name Mani kuttuvan.

In Nerivayil, a place belonged to the Cholas. However, there is no tradition or historical source connecting with them. The Neri hillock belonged to the Cheras and they deemed it a privilege to associate themselves with it. Hence it is obvious that the association of Pon with the Neri hill is significant. There is also a tradition of giving the prefix Pon to important places. From the above discussion it can be concluded that Pon Madathu Anda Manimudi Maharaja and Ponneri Panmar may be identified with the Chera kings of Kolli hills region. The references such as Kollipporuna (Padirruppatthru, 73) and Kolllankadcove (Silappathikaram, 24) etc, refer only to the Cheras. Many old Tamil literary pieces like the Kuruntogai reveals the contact between Kolli hills and parts of Tamil Nadu. The Arappaleeswarar temple is sung by Thirunavukkarasar and Arunagirinathar, a Thirthankara sculpture is also found in the Kolli hills.

The Kolli hills reminds one about Kolilippavai, which had been sung by many Sangam poets. The sages and celestials who undertook penance in Kolli hills were disturbed by demons. To destroy the demons, Viswakarma produced a beautiful lady like machine that functioned due to magical chants. It capitivated the demons towards it and it killed them all. The one which destroyed evils was given the name Kolilippavai. Kolilippavai was also called Kolli Kudavarari Deivan. The reference Valvil Ori Kolikku Kodavaraippavai (Kuruntogai, 100:5-6) suggests the presence of Kolilippavai during the period of Ori.

The Sangam classics states that Kolli hills comprised of many natural resources, scenic beauty and many plants during the period of Ori. Jackfruit or Pala was popular in this region. Paramar, had sung about the thick forests, animals and birds like peacock. In Narinai, the heroine is compared with peacock. It is also told that the fragrance of the beautiful hair was equal to that of the smell of the flower which blossoms at the rainy season. The jasmine and bamboo trees abound in Kolli region. In the Kolli hills the Kumilam trees used to offer many flowers. The fruits of that tree were food to the deers. The residents of Kolli region sold the tusk of elephants and purchased food. Such facts testify to the wealth and prosperity of the people of that region. Many Sangam works mention about the honey of Kolli region. As the area seems to be a rectangular plateau, it is also called as Chatturagiri. This hill is also called Rishyamaha Parvatham, Kolechuwaram, Kudavara etc. As it was the abode of Kollipaavai it was also called so. Even today the hill is called Kolli Malai.

The inscriptions available in the Arappaleeswarar temple of the Kolli hills suggest its popularity even from the 8th century A.D. One inscription refers to the grant offered by Sundara Chola to this temple. This hill located in the Kongu region was ruled by hunter rulers. When the Vellalas from the Tondai settled there; the racial strifes commenced. The Pugal Mangalam hero stone attest to this fact. Vettuvvar (hunters) were the ancient community people of Kongunadu. The Vellalas of Tondaimadu migrated to the Chola country. The Vellalas who settled in the Chola country after leaving Kaveri region settled at Kongu region by moving via Amaravathi, Noyyal and Bhavani river banks. They had fought with the hunters of that region.

The army of hunters which indulged in the war was referred to as Kunrudayan Kathai. The work Sarkarai Gounder Vamasavali calls the commander of the hunter’s army as Kongu Rayan. Cholan Paruvapattayam informs that Vellalas stayed at Vellalalar paddy after Tondaimandalam came under Cholamandalam. Kongudesu Rajakkal Kathai also states that after the arrival of the Cholas to the Kongu region, the Kongu ruler started his regime after winning over the hunters. Hence, it is evident that the Vellalas of Cholas country had endeavored to expand their
During the Chola period

The Cheras unable to settle their people in the west instead captured northern and southern areas and settled their people. The Cheras had many titles and among them the titles Kolli Verpan and Malayaman were notable. Such names indicate that those who could establish their sway over Kolli hills were called Kolli Verpan and the victors of other hills were called Malayaman. The Sangam works testifies to these facts. Adhiyaman waged a war with Thirudikkari and defeated him. Then Kari, with the support of Cheraman Perumcheral Irumporai killed Ori, the ruler of Kolli hills and reached the Cheranad. Then Irumporai defeated Adhiyaman at the battle of Dharmapuri alias Tahadu and the Cheras expanded their territories upto Kolli hills and Dharmapuri. It should also be noted that Kari, who lived first at Kongu country, then shifted to Thirukkoilur and made it as his capital.

Malayamans

Thirumudikkari hailed from the Malayaman clan. Thirumudikkari by including the clannish name Malayaman was called Malayaman Thirumudikkari. When the Chola’s founded their rule, the south western part of the South Arcot particularly along with Kallakurichi taluk (including Kalrayan hill) was the territory of Malayaman rulers. So it could be inferred that even before the Cholas, the Cheras ruled in this region.

The western side was a sea coast and hence they could not expand in that direction. As a result, few members of the Chera family moved towards east and settled in present Salem, North and South Arcot districts. The areas where they settled were also mountainous regions like the Chera territory and they gradually established chieftaincies there. As per Chera traditions, they were called Malayar. At a later date, they became Malayamans. The terms Malayar and Malayman should have corrupted into Malayalis. The Malaiyali tribes at present live in Kolli hills, Pachamalai and Kalrayan hills of Tamil Nadu.

During the Chola period

During the period of the Cholas, Maladu Nadu was also known as Chedi Nadu. Periyapuranam by Sekkilar and Vikrama Cholan Ula by Kulothungan attest to this fact. Sekkilar refers to Malaya (Maladu) as Chedi Nammatt Nidu Tirukkova-luri manni. Malayaman Nadu was ruled by minor chieftains. They were under the suzerainty of the Cholas. As they ruled Chedi Nadu, those chieftains were called Chedirayar. The inscriptions reveal that Malayamans of the 11th century also called themselves as Chedirayar. There were many people with the name of Chedi Rayar. Raja Raja Chedi Rayan I, Rajendra Chola Chedi, Rayan Vikrama Chola Chedi Rayan,Kulothunga Chola Chedi Rayan,Raja Raja Chedi Rayan II,Raja Gambira Chedi Rayan I,Vira Rajendra Chedi Rayan and Raja Gambira Chedi Rayan II were the Chedi Rayar kings of the Chola period. The Chedi Rayar was a notable ruler. It should be noted that he had called himself as Chedipar Kon. He was the contemporary of Kulothungan (1070-1120 A.D).

During the time of Kulothunga II (1133-1150 A.D) one member of the Vana clan served as guard of a portion of Magadha Nadu. He was called as Raja Raja Magadhi Nadalvan. He donated his income that is Perumbadi Kaval to the temple at Thittakudi. An inscription found in that temple testifies to this fact. In the 12th century Magadha Mandalam served as the capital of the Vanas. At that time, the Chola country was disintegrating. The minor chieftains utilised that opportunity and began to revolt. The Vanas were the chief among the rebels. They encouraged the internal strifes and gained by that. hills region.
During the Vijayanagar Period

The Magadai Nadu (Nadu nadu) or Malayaman Nadu which was one under the Cholas and Pandyas, later came in under Vijayanagar kingdom in 1360A.D. During that period the tribes of this region served as feudatories of Nayaks, Rayas and high level officials but were powerless.

The Ilavanasur temple inscription points out that during Saka 1454 (1532A.D) Achchuda Devaraya defeated and destroyed the Muslim and Wodayar armies. Within the boundaries of Malai Nadu especially in the Kallakkurichi taluk, the members of the Wodayar lineage were in large in numbers. They called themselves by different names such as Malayamans, Ahamudayar, Nathanar and Sundarman. The Wodayars called themselves as the descendants of one of the kings who ruled Malayaman. From the Copper plates it is understood that Achchutha Devaroyar, Vijayanagar ruler who ruled between 1532-1579A.D had issued grants. Jatavarman Sundara Pandya suppressed the Hoysala rule founded by Ballala I (1100-1106 A.D). He also defeated the Hoysalas who extended upto the banks of the river Kaveri. As a result, Magadai Nadu came under his control. Ballala I went upto Kanchipuram and won many wars. So it is obvious that upto the middle of 1215 A.D. this area was under the control of the Hoysalas and then upto 1279 A.D, it was under the Pandyas and then it passed under the control of the Cholas and the Vijayanagar rulers. After Malikafurs’ invasion it came under the control of the Muslim rulers. Hyder Ali and his son Tipu sultan also ruled this area.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Cheliya Tarayar were the Poligars in the China Salem region. The work entitled Thiruwani Tudu refers to Gangadara Cheliyan as follow viz:

Magadai Thirunadan Vanthan (Manjari – 219)
Ten Magadai Nadalan (Pillai, Varugai. 5)
Magadai Thirunadai(Pillai Ciruvare 3)

Such facts indicate the Cheliyars territory were called as Magadai Nadu. They were many people in the name of Cheliyar and Cheliya Tarayar:

Senkuvalai malai tirumaraban (Manjari – 152)
Verri arum aydar Kuvalai Cheliya (Nanneri – 13)
Melik Kodiyon (Manjari -155)
Melik Kodyiyan (Vannam)

All these things refer to the praise worthy nature of the Cheliya Tarayar and their flags. So it is clear that they were Vellalas. They must have been descendants of the branches of the Pandyas. Their ancestors due to their services under Pandyas as commanders or ministers must have obtained the title Cheliya Tarayar. They have even served as Poligars. All these places were given by the Englishmen. Now they are called as Nayinar. During Vijayanagar and British periods, they had functioned as Poligars. Philo Hirudaynath, the Anthropologist had given the following views while explaining how the civilized people became tribal people. When one ruler defeated and subdued the other and captured his territory, the natives out of terror left their area and became nomads, beggars, tribal and aborigines.

An analysis of the history of the tribals of Kalrayan hills indicates the fact that their ancestors were members of the ruling clan, warriors and frontier guards. This hill was familiar even during the history of the Chera, Chola and Pandyas. Then it came under the control of the Pallavas. From the sources it is evident that they were under Vijayanagar Nayak, Muslim and British ruler. During the British rule their Palayam territories had been altered. So at that time the Kalrayan hills should have been brought under Jaghirs.

Pre-Colonial Situation

During the pre-colonial period, the Kolli hills, were isolated from the mainstreams of Indian culture. The people of these hills were living in simple huts. H.Lefanu, in his Manual of Salem District published in1883 had given an account of their culture, literacy, the native doctors, their avocation and also the house types and dressing pattern. F.R.Hemingway in his Manual of Trirchirapoly District published in 1907 also endorsed the views of H.Lefanu.
Edgar Thurston, in his *Castes and Tribes of South India* published in 1909 has provided traditional account of the tribals of the Kolli hills.35

**Post Colonial Period**

After independence, the Government of India legalised their status through articles 341 and 342 of the Indian Constitution. The Directive Principles of State Policy and by implementing various welfare measures such as Large Area Multipurpose Society(LAMPS), Tamil Nadu Adi Dravidar Housing and Development Corporation(THADCO), Integrated Tribal Development Programme(ITDP) the government tried to promote the socio-economic conditions of the tribals. A separate wing named Tribal Welfare Department was established and it was authorised to take up suitable welfare measures to bring about a qualitative change in the life of the tribals. Other departments such as the Social Welfare and the Forest Department were also instructed to give top priority to tribal development. These initiatives produced positive effects on the tribals.36

**Malayali Tribes**

The word *Malai* denotes inhabitant of the hills. The Malayali are a Tamil speaking people who migrated from the plains to the hills in recent times. According to Thurston, the term *Malayali* has been derived from the words *Malai* meaning hill and *ali*-meaning person and is used to denote people who lived on the hills. Etymologically the word is derived from *Malai*-Hills and *ali*-inhabitants. The Government of India accorded the status of scheduled tribes to the Malayali.37 The Malayali people claimed themselves as Malayali Goundans, while members of other communities refer them by different names like Malayalis, Karalar, Goundars, Malai Jatikar and Kanchipuram Gounders.

The Malayali community predominantly lives in the hills of Tamil Nadu. The Malayali settlements are formed in the districts of South Arcot, North Arcot, Salem, Namakkal, Tiruchirappalli and Dharapur. In North Arcot district, they are living in the hills of Jawathu, Elagiri and Pudur Nadu. In South Arcot district, they are found in Kalrayans. In Salem district they are living in the hills of Yercaud (Sheroveroys), Kolli hills in Namakkal district, Pachamalai in Tiruchirappalli district and in Dharapur district they inhabit the Sithori hills. The Malayali emigrated from Kanchipuram. They took with them, three brothers of whom the eldest came to the Sherveryo hills and Kalrayan hills the second to the Pachamalai and the youngest to the Kolli hills. The Malayalis who live in Shervaroy hills and Kalrayan hills are called Periya (Big) Malayali or the Kanchimandalam Malayalis. The inhabitants of the Kolli hills are known as China (Little) Malayalis. Those from the Pachamalai hills are called Nadu (Middle) Malayali and their population as per the census of 1981 was 209,039.

**Origin of the Malayali Tribes**

The origin and migration of the Malayalis to the hills are shrouded in mystery. The legends *Nattukattu* say that some warriors belonging to Karalar community hailing from Kanchipuram came to Kalrayan hills subjugated the native’s and established their settlement.38 According to another legend, *Nattukattu* the Malayalis originally belonged to the Vellala caste of cultivators and emigrated from the sacred city of Kanchipuram to the hills, when Muhammadan rule was dominant in Southern Indian, they left Kanchipuram. They took with them, three brothers of who the eldest came to the Sherveryo hills, the second to the Pachamalai and the youngest to the Kolli hills.

According to another version, the exhortation by the Malayali deity Kariraman, prompted emigrants from Kanchipuram to shift to the hilly region.39 Another version states that a priest of Kanchipuram who happened to be the brother of the King, quarreled with the king, left the place and entered the Pachamalai regions with his three sons and daughters. These regions were ruled by Vedans and the Vellalans who resisted the new comers. But the invader defeated the natives and established their settlement. They gave their sister in marriage to a Tottiyan stranger in exchange for providing food. A curious custom that prevails in this region testifies to this story. Thus, the women of the Pachamalai Malayalis put aside a portion of each meal in honour of their Vedar ancestor before serving their husbands and the same custom is followed in marriages too. During the marriage function, the Malayali women wear a comb, which is said to have been a characteristic ornament of the Vedars. A sword and an arrow placed in the marriage function and remember the hunting habits of the Vedars.40
There is a view that the Mughal ruler Babur’s chieftain called Chilla Nayakkan invaded and captured the Kalrayan hills. The deity of the region Kariramman appeared in the form of a linga and on seeing this Chilla Nayakkan ran away. Kariramman appeared before the five brothers, who were the sons of Periya Malayalis of Kanchimandalam and presented the hills to them. The name Kalrayans was derived from the names of the fourth and fifth brothers Chinna Kalvirayan and Periya Kalvirayan. As a result of the appearance of the deity, the Malayalis call this hill as Kariramman malai.

An account regarding the origin of the Malayalis of the Jawathu hills in North Arcot furnished here under.

In 1332 A.D some Vedars of Kangudi asked the maidens of the Karaikkat Vellalas of Kanchipuram to marry them. They were scornfully refused and the Vedars of Kangudi kidnapped seven young Vellala maidens, whom they carried a way to Kangudi. To recover them, seven Vellala men set out with seven dogs, leaving instruction with their wives that if the dogs returned alone they should consider that they had perished and should cause the funeral ceremonies to be performed. Arriving at the Palar, they found the river in floods and crossed it with great difficulty, but their dogs, after swimming half away, turned back and returned to Kanchipuram.41 The men however continued their journey and killed the Vedars and retrieved their maidens. Then they went back home, but found that they had lost their wives who had become widows. As a result there were branded as outcastes. Then they married Vedar women and retired to Jawathu hills. There they took to cultivation and became the ancestors of the Malayali tribe.42

According to Francis, the editor of the South Arcot District Manual, that the Jawathu hills were inhabited by Vedans and that the Malayalis killed the men and wedded the women. Even today during marriages function, a gun is fired in the air to represent the death of the Vedan husband. The Malayalis termed themselves as Karaikkat Vellalas. The Malayalis of South Arcot call themselves as Kongu Vellalas. All the branches of the community living in different places agree that they are Vellalans, who emigrated from Kanchipuram, bringing with them their God Kariramman. Another point should be recorded here. In the wedding of Kalrayan in South Arcot, the priest who performs the marriage utter the word Kanchi as just before the tali is tied. It shows that the migration occurred from Kanchipuram. The Malayali of the Shervaroy call them Kanchimandalam Malayalis. Many called themselves as Vellala and Karalan, Malakkaran and Mala Nayakkan are also used as synonyms for Malayali.

There are some who believe that the Malayalis are the Keralities. Because some of their customs are similar to those of the Keralities. For example, the Kolli hills girls wear clothes of white cotton tied across their breast like the Keralities while few other Malayalis prefer tattooing. The Kolli Malayalis follow the customs and preventing tattooed persons from entering their house.43 The word Malayali means ‘the inhabitant of the hills.’ They are spread out in the prominent hills of Tamil Nadu such as Kolli hills, Those who live in those who live in Kolli hills of Namakkal district are called as Kolli malayali.

According to the Census Report of 2001, the total population of the Malayalis is 47.6 percent of the total population of the scheduled tribes of Tamil Nadu. Appearance wise they have short limbs and sturdily built body and are dark brown in complexion. They speak Tamil with a slang. The tribes of these hills dwell in huts called Kudusai or Kuraiveedu. These houses as mainly a single room apartment with provisions to keep cattle and fowls. Now a days the Malayalis live in titled houses and these houses are built by the government. Off late few houses with modern amenities are built by the Malayalis themselves.

The tribes initially utilised house hold articles such as Chatti(pot), Kooda, Moram, Thiri, Ural, some Aluminium vessels like Tumblers, Plates etc. Now a days, they use modern house hold articles such as Mixi, Grinder, Gas and Stove. This change occurred as a result of the interaction with the people those who live in the plains. The Malayali tribes used to dress up in a traditional manner. The men wear Somam (waisty) Thundu (towl) Kovanam (inner wear) and women wear colourful sarees. However off late, only elderly people were traditional dress where as the younger people have switched over to modern dress. These changes are also due to their contact with the people of the plains.

The tribal women wear a number of traditional ornaments such as Alandhamudichi, Moodi, Oale, Urattu, Koppu, Lolakku, Maatlu (ear) Kaapu (anklet) Valeya (bangle) Ceynu (chain) Neklic (necklace) and Mukkuthi (nose...
ring). The married women in addition to the ornaments mentioned above have Vinci and Thali. The present day tribal women have developed a likely for modern ornaments.

Over the years, the pattern of the family system of the tribes also changed. The concept of small family has increased and large size family decreased. This is due to the awareness of family planning and healthcare facilities. The marriage ceremonies of the Malayalis tribes is called Kannalam (wedding) and the preferred age is 21 as in the case of male and 19 as in the case of female. Most of the marriages are performed in the temple. The parents received their pregnant daughter at the time of seventh and ninth month of her pregnancy. In the past delivery is attended only by the midwife of their own community. Now a days, the pregnant women as taken to the primary health centre of the nearby town.

In the past, when the girl attains puberty, she is kept in Muttukudisa (menstruation hut). The women escort the girl to the hut during the period and they perform a ceremony called Theratty or Sadangu after thirty days that is at the end of the pollution period. However, now days the girl who attained the puberty is allotted separate place in the house itself. It is due to the impact of urbanization. The study also found out the fact that the Divorce and Remarriage is very common among the Malayalis. The tribals have a good village administration, The Village Panchayat meeting deals with various issues concerning the tribals. As a result of urbanization the younger ones contests the elections and become presidents of the panchayats and legislative assembly. Few Malayalis women have become members of the Tamil Nadu State Legislative Assembly.

The funeral practice is known as Periya Karyiam. The men stay outside the house and women in inside the house. The wailing is known as oppare. The dead body in most of the cases are buried in the slopes of the hills or in the nearby river stream. The Malayalis mostly are engaged in agriculture or do work relating to agriculture. 63% of Malayali tribes are working as agriculture coolies and only 1.67 percent of people are in government services. The Malayalis male earn Rs. 300 per day as daily wage and the women Rs 150. Work participation rate among Malayalis according to the 2001 Census was 59.5 percent Male and 40.5 Female. The Malayalis women are very hard working like their men.

The tribal economy has traditionally centered around land and other land based resources. Now days only a few Malayalis possess land. After independence, the tribes have lost most of their lands to the moneylenders. As a result they have no lands for their cattle to graze. They are quite miserable due to alienation of lands and indebtedness. The non-tribal from the plains to meet the credit needs of the tribal give the loans to them and when the tribals as unable to return the loans, the money lender occupy the lands and become the owner of the land. The Malayalis are very good cultivators. They cattle for cultivation of land. The principal crop cultivated as nell choolum, varagu, kelvaragu and rice. Animal husbandry, honey collection and hunting are other important occupations. In additions, they rear pigs, which is a potential source of income for the Malayali tribes.

The Malayalis worship Hindu gods and goddesses, such as Pattaven, Sivan, Perumal, Murugan, Marriyaayi, Kaaliyaayi, Ammen, Ankalammen, Paderiamman, Minnedian, Ayyannaru, Veetai Karuppu, Ellai Karuppu, Kamatchiyamman. Kariraman and Kollipavai. They are celebrating festival every year during the Tamil months of Thai and Vaikasi. During the festival time a goat is offered as sacrifice. The Malayalis have fundamental belief in spirits and supernatural beings. The Malayali tribes have a literacy rate of only 37.4 percent. This is because most of the youth are engaged in agricultural activities. Both the Central as well as the State Government have introduced many tribal welfare schemes. The Integrated Tribal Development Programmes (ITDP) and Tamil Nadu Adi Dravidar Housing and Development Corporation (THADCO) has brought about qualitative change in the living style of the Malayalis. Further, the Lamp society also plays an effective role in the empowerment of the Malayali tribes.

The State Government has opened a number of tribal schools and hostels. Text books and note books are supplied at free of cost to all the students. A positive feature is that as a result most of the Malayalis children attend
school and enjoy the benefits given by the Government. The Kolli hills, relatively untouched by commercial tourism and hence retain their natural beauty. These hills have been the top choice for nature lovers, hiking enthusiasts, trekking clubs and meditation practitioners. The State should take effective steps to improve the area as to make it more tourist-friendly. As a result of the detailed study of the various aspects connected with the Malayali tribes, the research scholar would like to offer the suggestion viz; The religious life of the people of these hills needs further research in term of its mythological and artistic contexts. Inscriptions and monument available in these regions can be utilized for the reconstruction of regional history.

India should initiate steps for the preservation of tribal culture. The government can also a setup separate museum for the preservation of the tribals culture. Awareness should be created among the people to protect and preserve the heritage as well as the archaeological monuments in the hills. The mass media can also be used for this purpose. The Kolli hills, may be converted into a hills tourist centre and will help to improve the standard of living of the tribals who in these hills region. Herbal plants are found aplenty in these region. The should not only be protected but also established a herbal medical centre and the people should be made to realize the importance of the herbs. The government should also take steps to improve the communication facilities, like providing good roads, telephone connections and wireless connection in tribal areas, this will help the tribal people to transport their commodities from the hills to the plains. Provision of communication network will help the tribal people to connect themselves with the main stream of the society. Guidance and counseling centre may also be setup in these hills. Likewise the government should be concerned about tribal education and establish school in all hamlets and appointed teachers. Further, separate schools for girls may be established in these hills and this will help to reduce illiteracy rate among the tribal women. Employment training programme may be organized at frequent intervals in these tribal areas and it will help the tribal people to be aware of employment opportunities. The tribes are the ancient inhabitants of the country. Hence, the government introduce tribals studies in the schools, colleges and universities.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the Malayali tribes who are living in Kolli hills, Pachamalai, Kalrayan hills, Shervaroyan hills and Jawathu hills are not the natives of these hills. During the sixteenth century A.D, they emigrated from Kanchipuram and moved westward and settled in these hills. They were living in remote areas and followed their own traditional customs and manners. However, during the twentieth century the tribals life pattern underwent radical changes as a result of their interaction with the people of the plains. The tribals were subjected to many changes and they began to adapt themselves to the new environment. They were also subjected to scientific temper and as a result a very bright and promising future is procrastigated. After examining all the views. One can arrive at the logical conclusion that the Malayalis are not natives of these hills and they came from Kanchipuram and became a tribe of cultivators, woodmen and shepherds. Even though they are scattered, they follow similar customs and traditional habits and have common administrative, socio-economic and religious system of life.

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