

A Visit to the Ethnic Nayakkar Community People who are Unaffected by the Gilts of Modernity

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Abstract

Culture is an instrument which shapes the society, formulates the groups, and created the community. Unlike other entity of the world, which is purely regulated by the universe, culture is exclusively framed by humankind for the smooth relationship between mankind and environment. This travelogue points out the bizarre relationship between the contemporary world and the culture-bounded society, between long-established people and the current environment by providing a strong example of the people who startled the research scholar's childhood through their unique cultural practices. They are categorized under 'Nayakkar' community. The travelogue points out an inevitable bond between Environment, People, arts, and their cultural practices of this people who are living in a world where modernity peeks. Through these travelogues, the importance of being eco-friendly in the showground of modern world is highlighted.

Keywords: Environmental Studies, Travelogue, Cultural Studies, Thottiya Nayakkar.

A person who knows his origin could lead a comfortable life in this spoiled modern environment. To focus on future, it is necessary to know something about the past. The idea of modernity adds sophistication to one's life, but it has its negative impact of disrupting the values of the past and the values of tradition. Tradition is used as an instrument to vitalize the modern culture but in the name of modernity, people wipe out its ideals from the society. This paper exhibits the in-depth observation of the ethnic people whose lives are rooted through tradition

and culture of the past. These people are trying to preserve their identity in possible ways. They are staying among the common people who are totally impacted by the ills of modernism. Surprisingly, their strong rooted tradition doesnot change from its core. From my childhood, I have wondered about their “bizarre” practices especially during the festival times and it raised so many questions pertaining to their culture and environment. In today’s scenario, these people’s practices tend to protect the environment without doing any alteration.

They are named as Nayakkar community. Though this community lives in many districts, this paper focuses mainly on the natives who live in Desiyamangalam, Tottiyapatti, Villukaaranpatti, Dasinayakanur, Kuppamettupatti, Kudikaranpatti, Komalipuram which come under Karur district of Tamilnadu. At present, nearly fourteen thousand people of this community live in that surrounding.

KambalathuNayakkar or ThotiyaNayakkaris is a clan of people of Dravidian descent. They are referred to by different names such as ‘Rajakambalathu Nayakkar’, ‘Kodanki Nayakkar’. The ancestors of Nayakkar community were considered to be warriors and the name ‘Nayakkar’ means, the ruler of small regions or ‘Kuru NilaMannargal’.



And these Dravidian people dwell in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala. The etymology of their community’s name itself derives the connectivity towards all these states and their Dravidian identity is thus proved.

- Nayakar = Thampan, Veeran, father, in everything they are supposed to be superior.
- Nayaku = ("Naidu" in Telugu)
- Nayakar = Nair (Malayalam)

These Dravidian people dwell in Tamil Nadu and talk in a type of Telugu dialect where they added a lot of Tamil words in-between.

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The people are still warriors in the way they try to establish their identity and traditional lifestyle amidst modernity and its demands. Their participation in our country's freedom struggle was remarkable. Due to so many practical difficulties, most other Nayakkar communities adapt to the modern society. But the people of Thotiya Nayakkar community don't want to give up their culture and tradition for the sake of worldly pleasure. It appears that the Legend 'Veerapaandiya Kattabomman' came from the same crew.

The people of Thotiya Nayakkar community are firm followers of their cultural practices and they have many strict measures pertaining towards their weddings, rituals, ceremonies, work, and their attires. Despite those procedures, it seems that they don't want to detach themselves from their culture. Inter-caste and inter-community marriages are totally banned by them, especially by the Thotiya Nayakkar community. Ruthless punishments are givento the people who do not follow the customs and rituals. Despite being different from other people of other castes, etc., they are quite friendly to them and greet them in a good way. Most of the people donot want to share their unique cultural practices to others and they always remain introverts when it comes to the practices of gods which symbolically explain the cause of not sharing their life-style to others. The people believe that sharingmight harm their customs and practices which are not established and recommended in other communities. This community has some specific practices. One such can be seen during gods' festival time. All the old ladies of the crew are not supposed to wear blouse and they need to doside-bun hairstyle which is illustrated in the following picture.



Hunting is their hobby, and they raise hunting dogs along with their children. They eat rabbits, squirrels, and monitor lizards. Pearl millet and sorghum form part of the ingredients for most of their dishes. Farming is their first and foremost occupation for their living but due to lack

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of water in their surroundings, many of them are turned to be woodcutters for firewood. Though they live in poverty, they do not give preference to money and never give up their customs for it.

The community got its real attention in Pongal festival (Pongal is the four-day festival in Tamilnadu to commemorate the sun during harvest time in the month of January). On the occasion of 'Maattu Pongal', the third day of the festival to praise the cattle, Nayakkar people gather along with their sacred cattle in a region called 'Ayyarmalai' (a mountain temple where Lord Siva is believed to have incarnated as 'rathnagiriswarar'; it is located ten kilometers away from Kulithalai) to celebrate 'Maattu Pongal' through the dance 'Devarattam'. "Devarattam" (means "dance of the gods") is the folk dance performed by a group of people in a straight alignment in south and eastern part of Tamilnadu. The dance involves fast and fluent movements according to the rhythmic sound of Urumi mellam (Urumi- kind of skin instrument drum), an hour-glass shaped drum that is struck on one side and rubbed on the other side with a curved (boomerang-shaped) stick. When they scratch, their Urumi with a bamboo stick, the hundreds of dancers start throwing wonderful steps with the piece of cloth tied in their hands and a turban on their heads which they call as 'uruma'. The Nayakkar men should compulsorily wear 'uruma' during all the time. Their performance is 'Devarattam' performed in all kinds of celebrations like wedding, their temple festival and in their most dignifying cattle festival. The performance was a feast for the eyes of audience, and it is pleasure to watch their unique steps merge with the beat.



In Ayyarmalai, nearly thousand people from thirty villages gather and perform their rituals to their God. The dance performance on that day is crucial for them and certain notable things that they do during festival are attention-grabbing.

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1. Thotiya Nayakkar people let their jokers ('Komali') to throw a 'door to door' tell-tale performance to collect the money. And they are not supposed to use that money for their own purposes; instead, they spend it for the benevolence of their Jakkama's Temple. When they arrived for this year, they collected fifty thousand rupees through their performance, and it is going to be spent for their dear almighty 'Jakkama'. The costume of 'komali' possesses a lot of admirable components to retain its humor. One such thing is 'cowry shells'; they have arranged 'cowry shells' on the surface of mouth to duplicate their teeth and a petal of banana flower as their tongue which sticks out from mouth. They do have Cat-like Moustache and beard which is made out of some dried grass or straw. They usually travel to nearby villages to do their act.



2. The second most important part of Pongal festival is "Saalai karuthu Maadu". It is a cattle competition in which lots of different oxen from various villages compete and they need to jump over the flower garland. It replicates a running race, a race for the animals. Though the competition resembles a famous south-Indian sport Jallikattu, where men have to compete over an ox, this sport is exclusively between oxen. They consider this as their prime sport and its victory as their soul pride. The reward for the

victory is quite remarkable. The keeper of champion ox does happily receive a lemon as an award. After that, people worship that ox as their God.

3. The people are not interested in their education, and they possess low literacy level. They give much preference for agriculture since they believe hard-earned food and proper shelter are the prime sources of living. This community people let their cattle free without tying their nose rope and it reflects their concern towards the equality of animals which may be considered as the root base of eco-centric environment. During their living style, one thing is very much certain, that is, 'being traditional is never so bad' and it helps the human society to keep up their body and mind healthy. The women of Kambalathu Nayakkar community prefer to rely on the traditional household possessions like mortar and pestle, stone-hand grinders (roller stone placed on the flat stone for grinding to be done), copper vessels, and clay pots for their kitchen. The traditional way of cooking let them to stay healthy and most of the orthodox Nayakkar community people never visited allopathic doctors in their lifetime.

The Nayakkar people follow their rituals seriously. In the performance of one ritual, men and women are not supposed to wear shirts and blouses since, from their view, it reflects the westernized culture. And it has been a sign of their denial of transformation towards modernization. Even today, men of that community follow their customs by wearing 'kadukan' (studs) and 'Urumaa' (turban), which they should follow from the age of five till their death.

A beautiful poem in Tamil literature defines the brave nature of this clan, especially of their women crew.

"Peyarellam pomman thimman
Oorellam patti thotti
Veerathil kambalathu vadukar kootam
Pengalo adilum kaatam" (kalanchipatty, 2012)
"பெயரெல்லாம்பொம்மந்திம்மன்
ஊரெல்லாம்பட்டிதொட்டி
வீரத்தில் கம்பளத்துவடுகர்கூட்டம்
பெண்களோ அதிலும் காட்டம்"

Kambalathu Nayakkar's women are the pioneers of 'Feminism'. They ruled out the stereotype of society by getting married to men who are younger to them. Each and every aspect of their appearance reflects their unique culture, and it is totally different from the present

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modernized system. They have a habit of collecting their fallen hair to make a bun to do Nayakkarkondai which is exceptional and attractive. Their exclusive hairstyle, exceptional Sari draping, and beautiful ornaments stand as testimony to the indigenous style.

KambalathuNayakkars still go for the multiple marriages (polygamy). They do not regret having many children and they readily follow the joint family system. The community people are known for doing Necromancy (Black magic). They forbid wearing slippers inside their village's sacred points. The women avoid foods from outsiders. Polygamy (multiple marriages) continues in their community.

They have a good relationship towards cattle and land and treat these like gods. Their way of life presents one of the models of Environmentalism, which, however, requires more detailed study. The culture and tradition of Kambalathu Nayakkar community may be described as Eco-Centric to some extent.



They use naturally-extracted Neem oil for their hair. Farming is their main source of income. The villages that they belong have red soil for the cultivation. So, the cultivation of tapioca is largely done there. They consume Pearl millet and all-natural sorts of seasonal vegetables on a regular basis which enables them to lead a healthy life.



The tiny Eco-friendly homes are made of clay, straws, and stone. And they do leave some space for their beloved cattle. They make almost all the necessary tools by themselves which allow very little space for ‘Artificial things.’ At present, the clan is very particular not to allow modernity to infringe on their traditional lifestyle. These people are not scholars; they do not know about Global Warming, Ozone Depletion, Green House Effect, Environmental issues; yet they are trying to protect nature by planting trees, using Eco-Friendly products, also by showing their respect towards other species and let the animals to use its own space in this surrounding.

The true spirited Kambalathu Nayakkar will never wear chappals in his life, and it reflects their respect towards the mother land. They do agriculture with the help of their beloved animals. We notice that they are lovers of ‘Nature’ and they actively protect nature without trying to alter it.

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