



Composite And Multi Lingual Culture Of Palakkad District

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Abstract

“Composite and Multilingual culture of Palakkad District” is a study to explore study on the phenomenon of Palakkad migration movement of different communities from other states to Palakkad throughout the period. The composite culture of the Palakkad district known for its multilingual communities reflects the diverse heritage of the region.

The history of Migration is a complex phenomenon, that has fascinated different scholars across disciplines. Many scholars have explored the historicity of migration process from different states of India particularly, Palakkad. Especially those people who have migrated from the neighbouring states of Kerala to Palakkad. From its vibrant festivals to its traditional art forms, Palakkad 's composite culture is evidence to the harmonious coexistence of different ethnic groups and their shared history. Basically, the society of Palakkad depended on agriculture which is their basic occupation and at the same time many migrated groups are contributing economic and cultural prosperity to this region. This study is an attempt to analyse the multi lingual culture Palakkad, that resulted in the formation of the Composite culture in the region.

Key points: Migration, Palakkad Gap, Tamil Brahmins, Agraharam, Theru, Moothan, Chetties, Rawthers, Andi, Pandarams, Vadugas, etc.

Composite culture has been the main stay of our society. Different literary sources refer to, a composite culture as a social and cultural unification where, diverse cultural, linguistic and religious elements co-exist and influence each other. This phenomenon has emerged in regions with a history of important collaboration among different communities, leading to a unique combination of traditions, practices and values. This blend creates a rich, multi-cultural environment where aspects like language, diet, art, music and customs reflect a combination of influences rather than a single dominant culture. In short, a composite culture can be seen as testaments to the historical exchange and mutual co-existence of various groups.

The Man lives on Earth and is inseparable from his geographical surroundings, from the close relationship with society and the nature of their influence. Rivers, climate, soil, Flora, and fauna are all part of the geological environment. Life originated and evolved in geographical environments. The histories of nature and human society are interdependent, and the social culture of man has been undergoing a great deal of transformation in the surrounding nature since the inception of Man. The evolution of composite culture is deeply mingled with the interactions between humans and nature. These interactions shape and are shaped by the ways in which different human communities interact with their environment and with each other.

Natural resources are becoming the means for upholding cultural life. Along with the progress of history, geographical environment also influenced in the changes in the social life. social development is also based on the climate, soil and geographical locations. The natural materials and human effort are combined to contour a better society¹. The study argues that ecological features played an important role in influencing pattern with individuals often drawn to regions endowed with attractive natural features. As mentioned as, the geographical and socio-economic factors facilitated the movement of the people from different cultural and linguistics backgrounds.

"Historically, India has been one of the greatest confluences of cultural stands, a laboratory of racial inter mixing of cross fertilisation of religious ideas and secular thoughts of co-existence of languages and dialectics, indeed a veritable microcosm of the globe".² India has been considered as a land of composite culture. Composite culture of India is the effect of many attacks as well as trade and commerce for last many years. Like India, Kerala is home to a multitude of communities, including Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others.

Palakkad, a district in Kerala, is a miniature of rich cultural diversity of India. Located on the border of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, Palakkad has evolved a unique composite culture that blends the traditions of both states. This paper explores the composite culture and multilingual heritage of Palakkad examining the historical, social and cultural factors that shaped this distinctive cultural landscape.

Palakkad was also known as Palakkattussery³. Some etymologists trace the word Palakkad from the word Palai nilam, which means "dry lands". It is believed that, the name is a fusion of two Tamil words pala a tree called locally pala (*Astoria scholaris*) that is found abundantly in Palakkad and Kadu which means forest.⁴ Historically the land scape of Palakkad District of Kerala exerts influence on the region's topography and climate. The Palakkad gap, a low land, mountain pass, facilitated the monsoon winds which contributes to the region's rain fall and agricultural productivity. Historically, the region has an extensive history of traditional agrarian society in these region. The region's abundant soil and water sources supported the extensive farming. As new crops like coconuts paddy and spices were introduced over time, the agricultural environment changed.

The renowned historians like Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier stated that "ecological uniqueness coupled with the geographical peculiarities determined the pattern of settlements in the rural villages of Kerala. Since the landscape is undulating and dotted with hills and terraces, Kerala has its paddy fields scattered among and garden lands confined to the red soil tracts."⁵

Palakkad district is famous for its pre historic remains. Especially the megalithic burials and monuments built of granite are the prime cultural evidence of the iron age found in the Palakkad region⁶.as mentioned as earlier, the district 's identity is deeply rooted in agriculture. The fertile are plains of Palakkad is known as the granary of Kerala, it concerts the importance of farming and agrarian traditions. These natural landforms and vegetation influenced and created economic and cultural prosperity of this area. The people utilized these natural resources have utilized the people differently. The people from the other states of India had arrived, and settled in different regions of Kerala. In the same way, in Palakkad, the natural resources provide some essential elements for Human Settlements.

The archaeological evidences like Stone tools and artifacts discovered in and around Palakkad indicate pre historic human presence especially of megalithic culture.⁷The region has a history of settlements dating back to very early periods. The early settlers formed the indigenous agrarian community in the area, they typically engaged in the agricultural practices. The river banks of Bharathapuzha and its tributaries played an important role in water supply, supporting deeply rooted farming practices in the local regions.

The origin of agrarian communities traced back to ancient times and the establishment of the settlements in the area is evidenced with the beginning of cultivation for sustenance. The study tries to states that, agricultural practices had evolved over generation that shaped the identity of the agrarian community in Palakkad. Traditional farming methods passed down through centuries, and continued to play an important role in the livelihoods of the people. The area became a blend of various cultures during the course of time due to commercial contacts and migration, shaping its unique socio- cultural landscape.

In the 7th and 8th century AD witnessed a series of interrelated socially and culturally significant transformations in the region. The Bharathapuzha region, was inhabited not only by the agrarian community but also the occupational groups. Through Palakkad Gap, many immigrants came to Kerala. Traders, religious groups different occupational groups etc. were migrated and contributed a composite culture in these regions.”⁸. According to the theory of migration fission the river had formed a complex range of interlocking and bounding groups on either side of the river bank.

The Palakkad gap or Palghat gap is a low mountain pass in the western ghats of which Kerala which played a crucial role in facilitating trade and cultural exchange between east and west coast of south India. This gap is the natural corridor that has historically allowed the movement of people, goods and concepts. “The Sangam period in the early half of the Ist millennium AD had reportedly witnessed constant movement of men and merchandise through the Gap”.⁹.

In the ancient and medieval times, different traders were taken place through the significant groups including Arabs, Jews, and Christians following the paths of these foreigners, another important groups like Buddhism, Jainism and several Hindu groups from different parts of India flourished on the banks of this river. Subsequently, Dravidian ethnic groups like Nairs, Ezhavas, Vellalas and others rapidly established themselves in the Bharathapuzha region which led to the emergence of heterogenous culture in Kerala.¹⁰

Over the centuries the Palakkad gap has been a factor for trade routes and has influenced the development of settlements and communities in and around Palakkad. Several theories have contributed for the

understanding of migration. Ravenstein, Evert.S. Lee Immanuel Wallerstein etc. offer diverse views to enrich our understanding of the complex nature of migration.

According to the theories, that people migrate because of matters that pull them towards a destination for stability and job opportunities and push them away from their place of origin because of poverty and conflicts. As mentioned as earlier, Palakkad gap contributed to the exchange of social practices, linguistic, and ethnicities between people residing on either side of western Ghats. The district has witnessed significant migration over the centuries. The blend of different linguistic and cultural groups in Palakkad has created diverse cultural environment. for examples, The Brahmins Rawthers, Moothans, Chetties, Andis, The Pandarams and Vadugas were migrated to these passes.¹¹The Jain temple in Palghat town provides proofs of the early settlements of the Jains in the states.¹²

The Brahmin migration of Palakkad has a historical root. In the case of Palakkad, particularly Tamil Brahmins hadmigrated to the region during different periods¹³. The rise of Brahmanical settlements in the river valleys of Kerala was one of the factors responsible for agrarian settlement that shows the character distinct from the rest of the state in South India. The majority of Brahminical settlements took shape only in the transition from the early historic period¹⁴.

"The Vedic tradition of Nila basin, once confined to the original Brahmin settlements, later spread to several neighboring villagers. The studies of scholars like, Kashikar and Parpola have identified several villagers like Alathur, Kalpatti, Mundur, Mannampatta, Valimbilimangalam, Cherpulassery, Chelakkara, KillimaSngalam, Mayannur, Mannannur, Kavalappara, Panjal, Cheruthuruti, Shornur, Karalmanna, Thiruvegappura, Etappal, Kannanur, Kumaranallur, Alannogode, Nannamukku, Karikkattu, Palanmi, and Pattambi, in the vast Vedic belt belonging to this area. "¹⁵This land-owning class transformed the economic and cultural pattern of the medieval Kerala society. Palghat was the focal point of Tamil brahminsThe Kerala brahmins and Palakkad Iyers,while both brahmin communities,show distinct cultural identities molded by their linguistic backgrounds and localhistories. Different historical references says that, the Kerala brahmins or Malayali brahmins are integrated in to the traditional Kerala culture, while the Palakkad Iyers blendTamil and Kerala influences, creating a unique cultural synthesis.

Kalpathy,Chittur, Thathamangalam, Pallipuram, Koduvayur, Mankara, Puthucode, AlathurOttappalam are the main settlement places of Iyers of Palakkad. Though much of Tamilakam witnessed wars and famines, there were safer places as well within the region that offered peace and protection and hence would have been ideal options for settling down.The migrants from Tanjavur, KumbakonamandMayavaram, who moved towards Palghat, passed through such safer places¹⁶. Several aspects of the lifestyle of the migrant Tamil brahmins had contributed to their collective identity of which the most important was their typically designed settlements known as theAgraharams.¹⁷Though many streets came into being in regions with strong Tamilbrahmins presence, one of them is the Kalpathy street which is a popular land mark in the history of Kerala.

The study argues that, the Palakkad Iyers have a rich cultural heritage that blends Tamil and Kerala traditions. For example, A Palakkad Iyers thrives in the variety of food available to them because of the extensive forte of menus from both Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Their unique life style is reflected in their food

and clothing. Their food practices highlight simplicity, health and devotion, while their clothing reflects a deep-rooted respect for heritage and tradition. The Kalpathy temple and annual festival, Ratholsavam, an important cultural event of the Tamil brahmins in Palakkad. Other communities are joined in the occasion and Music was another cultural contribution of Tamil brahmins to Kerala.

“The Moothans and Tamil Chettiyar who had moved to Palakkadu from Tamil Nadu, acted as a catalyst for the spread of Tamil culture in the region”¹⁸. Tharaka or Gupta community were also migrated from the neighboring state, included in the agro- trade groups of Palakkad district. “This group, although placed in the series of indigenous castes, is not strictly so and in point of rank should be placed on a par or above the low group of Nair. Muttans are originally Valluva, Vellala is Tamil race name, and Taraka is a commercial term. There are settlements of the Taraka people in Angadippuram. They migrated from the place “Marulothu Mangalam” in Tamil Nadu. The sculpture (Darushilpam) of Thirumandham Kunnu Temple was brought from Thurayoor village near Thrissinapalli of Tamil Nadu Ettuveetil Tharakan”.¹⁹ “The trade of the moothan community in Valiyangadi flourished. These merchants lived in known as “Moothanthara,”. As a city Gateway to the state of Kerala, Palakkad has flourished in trade. All kinds of cereals (Navadhanyangal), vegetables, Gold, textiles, etc. for sale. With the influence of this community, Valiyangadi and temple also flourished.”²⁰ As mentioned as, traditionally, the moothan community were traders and agriculturalist, with a strong presence of local markets. This economic role has influenced their social status and interactions within the broader community. The moothan community has preserved its unique identity adapting to the broader cultural context of Kerala.

Ravuthers played an important role in shaping the economic prosperity of the region. Diversity of Palakkad is reflected by the presence of Pattanies, a sect of Muslims who migrated from Karnataka during the reign of Tipu Sultan and Hyder Ali.²¹ “One of the impacts of the Portuguese infiltration to the Malabar Coast was the migration of the coastal oriented Muslims to the interior parts of Malabar. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Muslim traders and religious propagators began to move from coastal regions of Malabar to interiors.

The movement from the coastal regions was occurred by different causes, such as European infiltration to the coastal regions, especially the struggles with the Portuguese, the end of Arab trade in the Indian Ocean, the decline of the old-World System, the emergence of the New World System of the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean and others.”²²

Muslims began to find land for plantations, farming and other uses during the 17th and 18th centuries. In the interior regions of Malabar, their major trade location got worse. However, they went on as agriculturists, and began allied activities. The Mysore invasion of Malabar also had an impact on lives of the local Mappila Muslims in the 18th century.”²³

Tamil Ravuthers are traditionally traders. There are many streets in Palakkad that revive memories of Tipu Sultan's military march. Pattani Theru (street) is the center where Tipu's trusted lieutenants stayed and thus the street name was as Pattani Muslims. Tipu's horse cavalry also lived on this street. The Pattani Muslims also stayed at Daira Street near Mettupalayam. They were mostly traders, settled in Kerala border town of Palakkad.²⁴

As per immigration theory, the communities sought employment and emigrated, as evidenced by their immigration to new lands. The streets of the Shaliya were adopted in many sections of Kerala by weaving and in many places in and around the Temple. These communities are prominently seen in the south Indian states of Tamilnadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka.

Another important group were chetty community. Different types and subcaste of chetty communities had scattered in the region. They were multi lingual communities. Devanga Chetties, Andy Pandarams, Shaliya Chetties, Muthaliyar Chetties and Kaikkola are living indifferent parts of Palakkad. They were migrated from neighboring state. "This is a TAMILIAN immigrant caste divided with occupational specialization. The three similar castes are the PappadaChetti, who make Pappadam, Mundu Chetti who produce s hawks' cloth for coarse but popular quality and Enna (Oil) Chetti who extracts and sell oil, each of them is bilingual stays clustered in a compact area and still are recognized as aliens, all their goods are available at weekly markets of the Chetties in Kulapulli. A few families of an allied immigrant Tamil caste known as Kaikkola who have in recent years begun to assume the caste name Chetti, "²⁵. They shared ritual, traditions and cultural exchanges in the region upholding linguistic diversity and unity among different religious communities.

400 years ago, four different categories of Chetties were migrated from south Indian states to Mannarkkad area, Andhra Chetties, Komati Chetties, Kannada Chetties, and Tamil Brahmana Chetties were the immigrant's Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Kongini languages. TamilChetties were prominent in the trade activities. In the town, Chetties settlement places were known as "chetiyangady theru," The popular term, Chetty midukku "indicates the skill of Chetties in trade activities. Muthaliyar Chetti communities settled inMannarkkadregion. Their main occupation was weaving. Many categories of Tamil Chetties still live-indifferent partsof Palakkad region. Resources like soil, river, and forest, were the main attraction of the immigrant's settlements. ²⁶The chetty communities, through their diverse contribution to trade, culture and society, have played an important in shaping the cultural and economic landscape of Palakkad.

The historical and cultural history for communities like Andies, Pandarams and Vadugas are indeed limited. These communities often did not have written traditions, and their histories preserved through oral traditions. The rigid social hierarchies and casteism in Kerala significantly impact these communities. They were categorized as lower and they face systematicexclusion. Many are involved in traditional occupations, which might be undervalued. Alongside them, various other communities, both upper and lower castes have settled in this region. Nambudiris, Nairs, different caste and sub-castes of Ambalavasis and the presence of artisanal and servant castes like Ezhavas, Asari (carpenters), Tattan, (blacksmith) Karuvan (black smith) and others. The marginalized communities like cheruma, Panas, Parayas and others are also the integral part of the region.

The people belonging to Christian community who are influenced by the British rule has settled in multitude of streetsin Palakkad. The migration of Christian to Palakkad, like many other parts of Kerala has historical and cultural dimensions. In most recent times Christian communities have migrated for educational and economic development to Palakkad which attracted these families for settlement. ²⁷

The study argues that, the diverse caste composition has led to a unique composite culture. The interaction between mainly Tamil – Malayalam speaking has fostered a bilingual and bicultural environment. This is evident in the region's material culture and rituals, where customs in different communities.

Conclusion

The Migration of people from different regions to Palakkad brought cultural uniqueness in the region. The way of living, language, customs food, clothing etc. is distinctive for the immigrants. They become a reason to implement new changes in Palakkad without affecting the harmony among the people. New worship pattern and deities were worshipped. As a result, different types of festivals and rituals came into being. As the lifestyles of the immigrants and the actual inhabitants are diverse, they introduced new arts and crafts contributing to the development of the local economy. They might have faced many challenges while engaging in various occupations and commercial activities. Understanding the disparity and balancing the existence of different culture with forbearance and social integrity is appreciable. Every culture has its values and understanding these values by giving individual spaces, and putting everyone together creates mutual consideration while inflicting and accepting new cultures.

End notes

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