

HEALTHCARE PRACTICES AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGES OF MALAYALI TRIBES IN TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

Malayalis inhabit more in Kalvarayan hills. The Malayalis refer to themselves as 'Goundars' and claim themselves as the descendant of the 'Vellalar' caste of cultures. The Malayalis speak in Tamil. They were organized into various exogamous groups called vakuppar or atappu or kilai. Each atappu is composed of various smaller patrilineal exogamous groups called vitu. Each vitu consists of several families. Normally Monogamy is in practice among the Malayalis. The subsistence economy also includes fishing and occasional hunting of rabbits, deer etc. Through this occupation they are unable to meet their daily bread as not having regular income.

The Kalvarayan hills is located in southern extension of the Eastern Ghats, is a high mountainous region ranging under 1300m. And forms as one block in the Tamil Nadu Hills. The Kallvarayan Hills run through Arthur taluk in Salem District, Chengam taluk in Thiruvanamalai District and Sangarapuram Taluk in Villupuram District There are a number of streams and rivulets flowing in the Kallvarayan Hills.

Malayalis are constitutionally categorized as tribe in Tamil Nadu. It is observed that this community had undergone a lot of changes since 1960s as a result of acculturation, which are reflected in the family structure, marriage systems, juridical conventions, dress code, life style, religious practices, rituals, and community customs. The contingent cultural features that originally differentiated them from those of the mainstream have impaired considerably as in various institutional respects, they draw closer to the mainstream today. For instance, the practice of cross cousin marriage and the traditional 'trial' marriage system have almost disappeared.

The negotiation pattern of acquiring the spouse has changed in tune with the practice of the mainstream communities. The notion of hierarchy is well established but hardly articulated explicitly in the secular social space. It is implicitly expressed through various socio cultural practices of rituals and religious rights that enable some groups exercising control over the rest of the community in a very subtle manner. Despite all these structural changes, there is a struggle to maintain the Malayalis identity and keep the community unassimilated.

The paper also describes the traditional healthcare practices including their beliefs on causation of illness, health seeking behavior, role of traditional healers, public health measures, etc. It also highlights the continued existence of traditional health practices against the modern health systems.

Key words: *Health Seeking Behaviour, Malayalis, Traditional healers, PHC.*

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