

# **Socio-Cultural Changes and Healthcare Practices of Malayali Tribes in Kalrayan Hills, Tamil Nadu**

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## **Abstract**

Malayalis of Kalrayan Hills are constitutionally categorized as tribe in Tamil Nadu. It is observed that this community had undergone a lot of changes since 1976, which are reflected in the family structure, marriage systems, juridical conventions, dress code, life style, religious practices, rituals, and community customs. A five month long ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in Pulavupadi to understand the socio-cultural changes and its impact on health practices of the Malayalis. Participant observation and in-interviews with key informants were used to acquire information about them. This paper presents how 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. Similarly the ritual autonomy of the community has impaired as is evident from the growing practice of hiring Brahmins for officiating their marriage related rituals. In short though it is considered as a homogenous community, it is understood that it is a stratified society with economic differentiation. 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. 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**

Social Transformation of Tribes; Traditional Health Practices; Tribal Health; Health Seeking Behaviour; Socio-Cultural Impact on Tribal Health