

## Distinctive Socio-Economic Life of Kattunayakkan Tribal Community

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### Abstract

Kattunayakans, one of the 75 “Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups” (PTGs) in India, are settled in parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. In Tamil Nadu, they inhabit the Gudalur and Pandalur taluk in the Nilgiris and Tirunelveli District. Traditionally, the Kattunayakans have been hunter-gatherers. They get their name from the words ‘kadu’ (forests) and ‘nayakan’ (leader/chief) connoting that they are the lords of the forest. They are also referred to by different names like Jenu (honey) Kurumbas and Thenu (honey) Kurumbas in different regions because of their expertise in honey collection. The Kattunayakan language which is referred to as nama basha (our language) by them is basically of the South Dravidian family, like most of the tribal languages.

### Introduction

In Tamil Nadu, the Kattunayakan tribe, referred to as forest chiefs, are an ethnic group with a wild and forest-based lifestyle, practicing their own unique traditional medicine and contemporary disregard for outside world culture. The Kattunayakan community is a hunter-gatherer tribal group. Their trade, food and medicinal practices are dependent on the honey available in the forest.

Few of these who live on honey and forest products have become Christians. Forests and forest products are vital to the Kattunayakan tribe living in Tirunelveli, Nilgiris and parts of the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu.

The Kattunayakan community is the largest ethnic group among India's 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs). They are an ancient tribe living in parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala and the Kattunayakans have traditionally lived as hunters and gatherers of honey and forest products. Kattunayak means the leader of the forest. The name Kattunayak is derived from the words 'katu' (forest) and 'nayakan' (leader). They are also called Jenu (Honey) Kurumbas and Thenu (Honey) Kurumbas because of their honey-harvesting prowess.

Like most of the tribal languages, "Namapasha" (our language) is a South Dravidian dialect of Kattunayakan. Their language is a mixture of Kannada, Malayalam and Tamil languages. Although the community of Kattunayakans lives in various districts of Tamil Nadu, Tirunelveli district has a large population of Kattunayakan community. Kattunayakas, usually live in groups. A place where the huts are grouped together is called a "badi". Houses are referred to as “Manai”. A small family structure consisting of husband, wife and unmarried children is mostly seen in them. After marriage, the couple should build a separate house.

The forest and its associated areas form the basis of the economy of the Kattunayakan people. All their food, drink, shelter and consumables are forest based. Their main occupation is hunting and gathering of forest products. Their main occupation is collecting cinnamon, nutmeg, wild pepper, yams, berry leaves and honey. The simple technical tools used by them to collect forest products and collect honey challenge the modern engineering tools of today. They are habituated to live within clearly defined forest boundaries.

The Indian Forest Protection Act drove many tribal families out of the forest. Kattunayaks who have left the forests work as day labourers in the fields, act as watchmen, mahouts and guides, and are also engaged in fishing and catching small birds and animals. They also work as labourers in rubber and coffee plantations. Many of the kattunayaks, who work as daily labourers, cultivate small yams, cassava, ginger, coffee, pepper and coffee near their homes. They are also skilled in handicrafts.

### **Socio-Economic Conditions of Kattunayakans**

Kattunayakans live and act as local groups based on territory. All the people living in a particular area belong to one group. Let's say People in this group are called "Sontha". (relatives). The mixture of Sime's composition is very fluid. Individuals can associate themselves with their parent's Sims and their spouses in a bilateral manner. Similar differences exist between local communities and even within clusters when it comes to the specifics of rituals, hut construction, clothing, and other aspects of daily life. Generally, each local group has its own unique economic, social, ritual and kinship system. People often interact with each other there.

All if not most people have family connections. There are no other pan-Nayakan social, ritual or economic exchanges or institutions. Local groups are not united even by kinship ties. Even Kattunayakan's close relatives often miss him after he leaves a particular local group and stops associating with him. Any interaction outside the immediate neighborhood, be it business, social or ritual, mainly involves non-Nayakans rather than Nayaks from other local communities. For example, the man may attend the festivals of their neighbors and with them they may also engage in various commercial activities. A local group is the enclosure of the practical Naikyan universe for each Naikyan.

The political system of the Kattunayaka was egalitarian like that of other hunter-gatherer societies. Nayak held no formal offices; There were two exceptions, neither of which were political. The model, or the first person in the area, is first. His primary task was to plan the annual celebration of the ancestors. Shaman finished second. The post was open to both men and women, young and old, and was a skilled position. It has no personal rights or obligations outside of shamanistic performance.

### **Economy of Kattunayakan Tribe**

Kattunayakans are currently in the last stage of economic transformation. Once a self-sufficient group in the forests, after leaving the forest, they became serfs under the landlords and were relegated to the shop floor of the society. Some of them have progressed to farming and small businesses. Most of the tribals who have settled in urban areas are in a complex environment where they earn their living through unskilled casual labour. Their daily income is earned through activities such as wage labour, agriculture and illegal forest encroachment and hunting.

Hunting was their unique social activity. For this they use snares and traps to catch rats, porcupines, lizards and birds. In the past, gathering wild food contributed significantly to their livelihood. During the harvest season, the entire family, including grown children, leaves home in search of roots, tubers, fruits, leaves, honey, antlers, etc. Additionally, they hunt and collect deer antlers to make sickle handles and sell them in neighborhood markets. Medicinal plants like Sadavari, Maramanjil, Bhavata, Patakakal etc. are collected for sale.

## Honey collecting Technique of Kattunayakkan

The Honey collecting power of kattunayakkans is immense. For this they have developed their own proprietary technology. Honey collection starts in April of the year and lasts for three to four months. Close friends or relatives go in pairs to collect honey. They mostly choose night time for collecting honey. Their custom is to drive away bees with smoke and collect honey. It is customary for one person to stand under the tree while the other climbs the tree using ladders with a knife, thread and basket to collect honey. They climb the tree, tie dry coconut leaves together and light it. The smoke causes the bees to leave their combs and then crawl towards the honey combs on tree branches, cut it and collect it. They hand over the collected honey to the man waiting under the tree. Climbing tall trees with honey pot, smoke products and other equipment is very dangerous. Only wild heroes are good at this.

It is also their custom to offer special pooja to the god before going to collect honey. It is called "Malakku koduthal" (i.e. handing over to the mountain). The tribal chief (elder) and honey gatherers together perform rituals to the god on the day of honey gathering. As part of the rituals, a small feast is also enjoyed. Such rituals are performed to get more honey and avoid accidents.

Even today the Kattunayakans follow certain practices related to honey collection activity. Each individual must identify which tree forms the honeycomb. Let others know about it. Because he alone has the right to take honey from that tree. Others are not allowed to take honey from that tree. The man who saw the formation of the beehive should clean and maintain the tree and its surroundings. If the owner of the tree is unable to collect honey, he can collect honey on his behalf. In some cases, these trees are even given as dowry.

There are no such restrictions in the case of collection of honey such as kolthane and Cheruthen. Anyone can take this type of honey. Kolthen is found in the branches of small trees. The caterpillar is often found between rocks, walls of houses and sometimes in underground nests of white ants. Cheruthen is more valuable than other honeys.

Kattunayakas also divide the honeyas , 'jenu', tudai and khetti. 'Jenu' means picking from the highest forest trees. It is said to be the best honey and full of medicinal properties. Tudai is found in the honeycombs in Ponda and Puttu. Ghetti Janu is stick honey. They collect honey only on the moon days. It is said that the best honey is obtained after the onset of monsoon. Apart from honey, they also collect and sell its wax to earn income.

Fishing and crabbing are often one of Kattunayake's pastimes. They grind a kind of fruit called **Karaikai** and mix it with water to catch fish. The fish become unconscious when it is mixed with water. Children and women. There is also fishing using basic equipment like bait. They catch crabs from holes in the fields.

They also produce coffee, tea, cinchona, pepper, garlic, ginger and cardamom. Vegetables like potato, radish, carrot are also cultivated. Very few of the Kattunayakan families have their own land. Some also have land lease agreements with local farmers and landowners. Due to their familiarity with trees and wildlife, Kattunayakans are employed by the forest department in the surrounding reserve forests and agricultural work. They also meet their economic needs by rearing chickens, raising baskets, selling eggs and birds.

## Conclusion

Kattunayakas hold a stick like a sulaam in their hands. Even though it is said to be used for forest work, the stick is closely related to their culture. Their worship may also be a reason for this. More than two and a half lakh Kattunayak communities live in Tamil Nadu alone. Living on the margins, the people of the community spend their time herding pigs, telling signs and selling seaweed beads. Even if they want to go for wage work, people of other communities do not give them jobs because of caste.

For those people who are economically backward, education remains an octogenarian. As an economic justice, there are very few educated people among the barbarian communities living in the shop. Caste certificate is the stumbling block for this.

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