

AN OVERVIEW OF ETHNIC FOOD HABITS OF VETTAKURUMAN TRIBAL COMMUNITY OF KERALA

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ABSTRACT

Tribes are the most significant part of our nation. Tribal communities have certain official status according to the constitution of India. They have their own indigenous knowledge and cultural richness. They all have their own distinct Language, too. They have ethnic knowledge about medicines, foods, and forest gathering. They cultivate most of their food items through different periods. Some food items are collected from the forest, and some with the help of the tribal promoters and officers from the tribal department. Kerala has 36 tribal communities. This study is an overview of ethnic food information. This paper mainly focused on the vital food gatherings of one of the most important tribal groups of Kerala state Vettakuruman tribal community.

Keywords: Vettakuruman, Ethnic food, Tribal communities, Indigenous knowledge, etc

INTRODUCTION

The ethnical people, the original occupants of India, constitute a significant part of this vast nation. Their heritage, ritualistic characteristics, and artistic beliefs, especially the fabulous knowledge, are reflected in the observances. still, their unique life is being lost currently in some areas, yet maintaining or arranging the durability of that lost heritage has come an intimidating challenge. Not only this, but also the pivotal changes that are reflected in the natural Language, life, and their attitude towards nature. therefore, Thus, this paper evaluates the peculiarities of the diverse food habits of Vetta Kuruman, tribal communities of selected settlements in Kerala. For this paper, data was collected from Begur and Kalluvayal colonies in the Wayanad district of Kerala.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Many scholars, including Edgar Thurston, Lewis, and William Logan, have studied this community. Comparative studies of various research studies and books were taken for Review. 'Adivasikalum Adivasibhashakalum 'by K. Velappan, 'Gothra jeevitham mayunna vamsheeya mudrakal' by Mini PV, Oral literature collection of Vettakuruman community by Dr. Syam S K and Dr. K. S. Pradeep Kumar. Works such as 'Betta, Tribal Handbook and Action Plan for the Protection, Promotion and Documentation and Creation of Script for Kerala tribal languages by Dr. SyamSK, Language of Bettakuruma by Gail Coelho, Ritualistic Music of Tribal People by Dr. Indu VMenon, Oral Literature of Vetta Kuruman Communities by Dr Pradeepkumar and Dr. Syam SK, A definition of Shamanism in Temenos by Ake Hultkrant, Along with this, Research publication series volume 3, 4, 5 parts tribal study report from KIRTADS by Dr Syam SK were taken for Review.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The world of modernity is creating changes in tribal communities from their unique and inherent culture of life. The unique lifestyle of the tribal community is devastated by certain factors nowadays. Even then, maintaining the continuity of that lost heritage has become a significant challenge. The devastation has been happening to the unique identity of the tribal community. Ethnic Language, medicine, unique art forms, clothing, particular beliefs, customs, food habits etc, are the essential elements of tribal identity. The core reason for the loss of tribal identity is the fluctuating cultural environment and the younger generation's lack of awareness or interest. Also, the endangerment of the tribal languages, the immense influence of contact languages, and environmental changes in collecting food items may be other reasons. All the cultural peculiarities, ritualistic characteristics, and knowledge of ethnic food in the tribal community lack their identity. So, documenting this type of ethnic food habits and interesting forest gathering food knowledge without any leakage is essential.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main aim and objective of the study is to understand essential food habits and pieces of information of the Vettakuruman community in some of the settlements of Wayanad district in Kerala state.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This study has been employed with direct methodology. Data were collected directly from the field. Participatory Observation and explanatory approaches were used in this study.

DATA COLLECTION

Data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources to achieve this study's objective and conduct the investigation. Primary data was collected through extensive fieldwork among the community. Structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with the community's selected vital informants to understand the Key aspects of the Ritualistic ceremony. Secondary data will be gathered from books, Journals, Websites, articles, Newspapers, published and unpublished reports, and Official records.

RESEARCH SITES

For this paper, data was collected from Begur and Kalluvayal colonies in the Wayanad district of Kerala.

RESEARCH TOOLS

A questionnaire has been formulated, and information has been collected through direct visits to the tribal area. Several elderly members were selected as informants and participated in this data collection.

DATA ANALYSIS

A detailed analysis was done after the primary data collection process was complete. Qualitative analytical approach was adopted for the analysis of the data.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Vetta Kuruman Tribal group has a diverse cultural identity and food habits related to all customs. It has been observed that some changes are there in between settlements. Their terminology connected with the food items is entirely different. This study helps to identify the diverse indigenous food habits related to the cultural identity of the Vetta Kuruman Tribal people.

POPULATION

10.42 crore Indians are notified as 'Scheduled Tribes' (ST), of which 1.04 crores live in urban areas. STs constitute 8.6 percent of the country's population and 11.3 percent of the rural population. According to the 2011 Census of India, the Scheduled Tribes population in Kerala is 4,84,839 (1.5 % of the total population). The State of Kerala belongs to the central tribal belt of India. The tribes of Kerala are mainly settled in four districts viz, Wayanad, Idukki, Palakkad, and Kasargode. 35.82% of the tribal people are settled in the Wayanad district. Wayanad district has the highest number of tribals (1,51,443) in Kerala, followed by Idukki (55,815), Palakkad (48,972), and Kasargod (48,857) and Kannur districts (41,371). According to the 2011 census, the population of Vettakuruman is 739. Out of this, 346 are men, and 393 are women. As per the Report of the Socio-Economic Status of Kerala Tribes by ST Department, Govt of Kerala 2013, the total population of Vetta Kuruman Community is 6482 consisting of 3193 males and 3289 females, the family size is 3.81, and the sex ratio is 1000: 1030 respectively.

VETTA KURUMAN COMMUNITY

Vetta Kuruman is one of the essential groups from the 36 tribal groups in Kerala. This group is recognized as a tribal group in the 2002 Amendment and has been separately included in the list—Thirunelli, Nenmeni panchayats of Wayanad district Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. Vetta Kuruman tribal group is also known as Uralikuruman or Bettakkuruman. Up to the 2001 census, they are enumerated as part of Kuruman, but after the 2002 Amendment, Vettakkuruman has been included in the list. Vettakuruman is included because of this daily practice of hunting (Luiz 1962 263, Damodaran 1974: 75). Those interested in hunting are called Vetta Kuruman. (Nair 1992:2021). Some folk etymologists opine that the term originates from their expertise as tree-cutters (maram vettunavan). Dravidian Etymological Dictionary says that the term betta is derived from the words viṭam, viṭari, viṇṭu means mountain in Tamil, and in Kannada, betta and bettu means big hill. In Kota tribal language Vetm and bet means mountain. In Toda tribal language pot means mountain. Many other Dravidian languages have term like betta (Kodagu), and bottu (Tulu meaning is high) (Emeneau, 1982: 5474). So etymologically speaking, the term Vetta means hill, mountain, summit, and high. The Vettakkuruma speech form is a mixture of Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam. Their speech form is traditionally known as uralibhasha, nangbaje, nanguemakk baaje .

A mythical story is associated with the origin and other practices of Vetta Kuruman community. They are believed to have originated in Neruthimalai near Muthumalai on the border of Tamil Nadu. There are so many versions of the same myth that varies in settlement to settlement. In the colonies, Vetta Kuruman lives with a different outlook on life and lifestyle, unlike other communities. They are called Artisan tribes. They are very efficient in making craftwork, Pottery, basket making, arrow, and Agricultural equipment. They have got their perspective on their routine, belief, and customs. The headman is known as Megalan, and he is the sovereign authority. The wife of Megalan is Megalathi, who enjoys authority and a position similar to Megalan. The Megalan takes decisions and supervises all ceremonies from birth to death. Each clan has this headman Megalan an assistant, Pattali, and clan ancestors called Ajjan and Ajji, within a geographical area called thitt'or Mann'.

FOOD HABITS OF VETTAKURUMAN COMMUNITY

A variety of tubers

The main tubers used for Bettakurumar food are Narlu (/nārəə/), Kuddha (/kudda/), Talppe (/talppe/), Nurank (/nūrāñk/), Bethankank (/bettāñkāñk/), Eunchankank (ēñcañkāñk), Penangkank (/penāñkāñk/), Natkkank (/nāṭñkāñk/), Kagilkank (/kāgilkāñk/), Shakankank (/śakañkāñk/), Binnank (/binnāñk/), Earthkank (/erttākāñk/), Nooradan (/nūrādan/), Kavuth (/kāvūttə/), Neelkank (/nīlkāñk/), Chonkank (/cōṇkāñk/), Camkank (/kyāmkāñk/), /etc. They are obtained in summer and used for food. Chongkank (/cōṇkāñk/), Kyamkank (/kyāmkāñk/) and Nooradan (/nūrādan/) are obtained in June, July and August and used for food.

Beliefs associated with tubers

Along with the use of wild tubers for food, many beliefs are associated with them. According to such beliefs the tubers are going to be collected, collected and used. There is a belief among the Vettakurumar that one should not touch one's nose with a knife while going to the forest to collect tubers. Because it is a belief that if you touch your nose, then after cooking hundred of them, it will not be cooked. Vettakurumar are people who believe that there is a very close relationship between the sprouting tuber and the sprouting person. Because the size of the tuber depends on the size and thickness of the person doing the rooting. This is also a belief. Perhaps the point is that skinny people are not allowed to dig yams when they go to the forest. At the time of picking the tuber, do not take some of it, step on the vine of the tuber, cross or mix the broken tuber. Apart from the belief that the quantity of tubers obtained will decrease, respect, respect and duty to nature or the forest can be seen in these beliefs. The community members believe that one should not speak while chanting Adnkank (/adənəkāñk/). In ancient times, tuber was the staple food used by the tribal people to overcome hunger. Therefore, it is possible to find some knowledge in the tribal communities in literary forms that is traditionally passed down only through word of mouth in relation to collecting tubers and making them into food. As such there are many songs about and referring to tubers in the Vettakuruman community.

Leafy Vegetables and uses

A variety of leaves/chips were a staple in the early ethnic diet. The role and influence of leafy vegetables is great in providing some relief from hunger by cooking and curries. Apart from having some benefits for the body, leafy greens are also a group of medicines. The leaves and stems are eaten in various forms, cooked and curried. As such, the main types of leaves used for food are Kierekiri (/kīrēkiri/), Chauthekiri (/cauttēkkiri/), Otumkethevela (/oṭumkaittavēlā/), Erumkele (/erumkele/), Chinpirele (/cinpirele/), Kankekiri (/kāñkēkiri/), Takoch (/tākōcə/), Ibandekiri (/ibaṇḍakkiri/), Kebakelthol (/kebakelttōl/), Cobalthol (/kūbaḷttōl/), Kurukatekiri (/kuRukaṭēkkiri/), Muringele (/muriññale/), Kumbalele (/kunbaḷele/), Bhotumbale (/bhotumbāḷe/), Cammola (/kyammoḷa/), Taguri (/taguri/) and Kaginka (/kagiñkekkiri/) etc. The bark and bark of the forest are also used medicinally. Steamed for toothache with the skin of the banana. Nunch Wichele (/ṇanñviccele/) is used for manure bites. Boiling salt and dipping your feet in it will make the manure bite worse. Also, its fruit is used for fishing.

Kankekiri (/kāñkēkiri/) is a poultice used to relieve stomach pain. Small leaves of Kanikonnachappa (/kaṇikonṇacappa/) are used in case of stomach congestion. Guava juice is also used for diarrhoea. Diarrhea and abdominal pain are treated with some supplements. Roasting a piece of grass and rubbing its juice on the stomach will relieve diarrhea and stomach pain. A type of kayam stalk (/kyamtaṇṭə/) found in the field is very good for urinary retention. Bankon bark (/bañkaṇṭōl/) is poultice for sores (wounds). There are certain beliefs about the use and method of taking the chips. Nuggethol (/ṇuggettōl/) leaves are used for food in all months except the month of Karkkidakam. It is believed that drumsticks are poisonous during those days. Also, no religious ceremonies are performed during the month of Karkkidakam. Some of the Vettakurumar believes that the month of Karkkidakam belongs to the bad time and that God will not listen.

Vegetables and fruits

In the past, fruits and vegetables available in forest areas were largely used as food. Today the availability of such fruits is very less. Vettakurumar believes that whatever fruits are eaten in the forest, the body can only get benefits. But today the fruits available from the shops are ripened with the addition of many deadly pesticides and brought to the markets. Eating them causes various physical problems. Cheerapannu (/cīrappaṇṇu/), Kotepannu (/koṭṭeppaṇṇu/), Nellpannu (/ṇeRəḷəpəṇṇu/), Chunkai (/cūṇkāyə/) and Kitchunkai (/kiccūñkāyə/) are the fruits and nuts that the Bettakurumar used to eat from the forests in the early days. There are two types of (/ṇeRəḷəpəṇṇu/), Kattunjavai (/kāṭṭuñaval/) and Nattu njavai (/ṇāṭṭuñaval/) and native rice. Kichunka (/kiccūñkāyə/) has a bitter taste. It is used as medicine. Apart from these, there are Tadichippannu (/taṭicippaṇṇu/), Iunchapannu (/iñcappaṇṇu/), Melarthakpannu (/melattakkappaṇṇu/), Moodlpannu (/mūṭḷappaṇṇu/), Takkappannu (/takkappaṇṇu/), perkattilmankai (/peRəkaṭṭilmāñkai/), Pottolppannu (/pōṭṭōḷppaṇṇu/), Kirimurupannu (/kirimuRuppaṇṇu/), Kankekiripannu (/kāñkēkirippaṇṇu/), Katmutnga (/kaṭmuṭñña/), Panankai (/pāṇankāyə/), Panarpuli (/paṇārpuli/), Kotkapuliye (/koṭkapuliye/), Bolparkai (/bolpparkkayə/), Jeermakai (/jīrmakkayə/) etc A few other fruits are foraged and eaten from forests and bays. These are readily available in forests and are rarely harvested.

The simple belief that any fruit is good for the body is also very important to tribal people. Eating /kaṭmuṭṭā/ will cure mouth ulcers. Kethole (/kaitōle/) is a medicinal fruit. Potoḷpannu (/pōṭṭōḷpannu/) is a fibrous fruit found only in the Gulf. Kankekiripann /kāṅkēkirippannu/ is blue in color. Panankai (/pāṇankāyā/) is rare now. Tribal people are characterized by a variety of beliefs. It becomes a part of life itself. In the early days, there were certain beliefs among them when they went to the bays and forests to pick and eat fruits. But even today, all that remains between them. It is believed that there are devils under the fruits such as kottapannu (/koṭṭapannu/) and tadichippannu (/taṭicchippannu/) during fruit picking in the forest. The devils hang from the tree so that the branches of the tree knock them down, and when they hear the noise of men, they rise. Also, there is a belief that there are pratas under the fruit tree at noon. Another belief is this. When you go to pick fruit in the forest or in the forest, you should not sit in a shady place where you think you are going to rest. Because it is believed that there will be devils in the place that looks like that and therefore one should sit looking at the next place. It is believed that if you sit down, you will suddenly feel drowsy and tired and all these things are done by devils. So, during the afternoon, there is less time to go near the fruit tree. The fruit of the "Panemera" (/pāṇemeRa/) tree is eaten and its tuber is used medicinally. It is used as a remedy for stomach aches and bleeding. The peel of the /ṇeRəḷəpəpannu/ (blackberry) is used for stomach ache and the peel of Neetagai /ṇītagāyā/ (gooseberry) is used as a remedy for toothache. Crushed pepper stalks and steamed in hot water are very effective for toothache. It is medicinal. Fruits are mostly obtained in the months of June and July. If you take the skin of /pūṇṇəmeRe /and smell it, it is good for to reduce the pain of stomach worms and vomitting. In this way, it is used to cure sudden diseases like cough, fever, etc.

Different types of honeys and beliefs.

Various types of wild potatoes, fruits, vegetables, and chips were important in the early diet. Apart from this, VettaKurumar also used honey which is one of nature's gifts. It can be seen that the honeys obtained and collected from the outer and inner forests are used not only as food but also as medicine among the tribal communities. Pitilthenu (/piRRiltēnu/), Kirithenu (/kiritēnu/); There are two types of Colthenu (/koltēnu/), Kuthenu (/kutēnu/)/Merathenu (/meratēnu/) and Penticolthenu (/pentikoltēnu/) etc. collected from the outer forests and interior forests. Kritenu /kiritēnu/ is the honey found on the earthen floor of the house. A type of bee called Karinginappi (/kariniṇappi/) also belongs to the honey family. Kutenu (/kutēnu/) and Kritenu (/kRitēnu/) are the most common honeys found in the jungles. "Kutenu" /kutēnu/ is the most widely used medicinal honey. Apart from sugar, cholesterol, inflammation, cold, jaundice, cough, tuberculosis etc., honey is used for facial beauty and reducing body bloat. Even if it is the Thenkurumar who collects honey and sells it for a living, the Vettakurumar knows about honey collection and the method of honey collection. Potha (/pottā/), Erua (/eruva/), Thishpetti (/tiṣṣpetṭi/) and Tambar (/tāmbāRā/) are used for honey collection.

Honey collection is done by smoking the hot horn and removing the bee. There are some stories and beliefs associated with the use of different types of honey for food and medicine among the Vettakurum. Bees prefer to nest in the largest trees such as banyan and banyan. bees will make their nest in the tree they like. Prepare to nest after checking the size and

shape of the tree. Honeycombs are preferred to be placed in uninhabited places. It is believed that bees ask the tree for permission if they like a nesting tree. There is also a belief among the Vettakurumars that a tree branch with a honeycomb will never break.

Cumin (mushrooms)

Vettakurumar also uses various types of mushrooms that are readily available in the outer and inner forests during the rainy season. Mushrooms used for food are Akum (/ākumməṇ/), Manangkal Kumnu (/maṇṅkālumməṇ/), Thekal Kumnu (/tekalkumməṇ/), Pital Kumnu (/piṭralkumməṇ/), Karadi Kumnu (karaṭikumməṇ), Bonkarn Kumnu (/boṅkārəkumməṇ/) and Ene Kumnu (/enekumməṇ/).

CONCLUSION

This paper reveals a short overview of the beliefs and customs of forest food items used by the Vettakuruman community. From the facts stated above, it is clear that a number of community people following their traditional food items from the forest. Vettakuramar met their daily necessities like food gathering to a large extent from the surrounding forest areas. Such a diet provided good nutrition and relief from most diseases. Myths related to food acquisition, oral songs, etc. show that nature has an influence on different aspects of the life of the Betta Kurumar. Hence this paper is focused on the forest gathering food items of the Vettakurumat community, and apart from that they are using Raagi, rice meat fish etc.

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