

PROMINENT THEMES OF TAMILNADU HISTORY

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Belief and Ritual System of the Malayali Tribes of Pachamalai in Tamil Nadu

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The *Malayalis* are the agricultural tribes inhabiting the hilly regions of Salem, Namakkal, North Arcot, South Arcot and Tiruchirappalli districts of Tamil Nadu. There are three divisions among the *Malayali* tribes. Those who live in the Shervaroy hills of Salem and the Kalrayan hills of Kallakurichi taluk in Vilupuram and South Arcot districts are called the *Periya Malayalis*. Those who live in the Kolli hills of Namakkal district are called the *Kolli Malayalis* and those who live in the Pachamalai in Thuraiyur taluk in Tiruchirappalli and Gangavalli taluks in Salem districts are called as *Pacha Malayalis*.¹

There are thirty six tribal communities in Tamil Nadu and the *Malayalis* under study come under the twenty fifth position in the list of Scheduled Tribes. According to the Census Report of 2001, the Scheduled Tribe population constitutes 6, 51,321. *Malayali, Irular, Kattunayakan, Kurumbans* and *Kondareddis* together constitute 85.3% of the Scheduled Tribes population of Tamil Nadu. With a population of 3,10,042 the *Malayali* Tribes, the single largest tribal community, constitutes 47.6 % of the state population.²

Agriculture is the main occupation of the *Malayalis*. Formerly they were good hunters but at present there is not much scope for hunting on account of forest reservation. They snare small animals and hunt wild pigs. They are good cultivators and their tribal belt is fairly long. They have developed their culture in terms of customs and traditions. Most of the people in the tribe is uneducated and they communicate in their own dialect. Their settlements are underdeveloped. After independence, several measures have been undertaken to uplift their lives.

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