



# Life and History of the Mudhuvar Tribe

## Introduction:

The lives of humans are somehow unified from birth to death. Although human life is a combination of happiness and suffering, people's lifestyles are seen to change according to the environment they live in and the facilities available to them. Even the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter differ according to their living conditions. According to the level of knowledge of man, the life status of the people is also changing as it is seen to change from the gesture of his speech to the state of transition. In this way, we will see about the life of the "Mudhuvar people".



A Mudhuvar Tribe woman with her child

## About Mudhuvar:

Compared to the other hill people living in the hills of Kerala, the *Matuvar* tribal people are considered to have been living there since the beginning of time. These tribes are living in 87 places in the Idukki district in Kerala and hilly areas of Anaimalai, Madurai and Bodhinayakanur in Tamil Nadu.

"Mudhuvan who can live in Kerala - is called *Malayalam Mudhuvan* and *Mudhuvan* who can live in Tamilnadu are called *Pandiya Mudhuvan*." - a researcher named Joshua mentioned in his research book. The people of this tribe live in the hilly areas of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

## Mudhuvar Name:

Three reasons are given for the name *Mudhuvar*.

1. When people left the Pandian country due to war, they carried Meenakshi (God) idols on their backs.
2. It can be learned from three stories that when people left Madurai they carried the statue of Meenakshi (God), Pandian's dead body and children. Also, *Mudhuvar* does not think of themselves as hereditary forest-dwelling tribes.

3. They also believe that their forefathers belong to Madurai according to the lore passed on among them. It is believed that they settled in the forests as a result of wars or disturbances during the rule of the Pandya kings. Also, when they came from Madurai to the hills, they carried their children on their backs, so they were called Mudhuvar. According to another opinion, the name Mudhuvar is said to have come from carrying the image of their goddess Meenakshi Amman on their backs when they left Madurai.

In particular, none of the elders could specifically say when they settled in the forests. "But they must have migrated either when the Pandya king invaded the South or when the Telugu Nayaks conquered and ruled Bodhinayakanur in the 14th year. According to another, when the Mohammedans invaded the South in the late 18th century, they were left behind in the forests," says Hector Thurston. Due to these ideas, these tribes are known as *Mudhuvar*.



Mudhuvar people

### ***Mudhu*- Ancient people:**

He says, "*Mudhu* means 'old' and the word *Mudhu*, which means 'old', should be combined with 'V' to form *Mudhuvar*. The reason for the name *Mudhuvar* must have come from the ancient people."

Bhaktavashala Bharati also found that other tribe people call *Mudhuvar* (*Mudhuvar* means elder, ancient people) the tribe as elders. By this, we can know that they are older (ancient people) than other tribes. Literary evidence also suggests that the *Mudhuvar* were an archaic people.

### **The story about ancient *Mudhuvar*:**

The forefathers of the elders lived in Madurai city once upon a time. They made their living by trading and farming. All their buying and selling took place there. They used to live there taking women and giving women. They used to live their lives in love and harmony with each other. They claim that their ancestors lived in Madurai during the reign of the Pandya king.

During that period, Kannagi's husband Govalan came to Madurai to do business and was caught by the guards and killed because of a wrong decision. Kannagi gets furious after knowing what happened. Kannagi asks for justice. Queen of Chastity Kannagi burns Madurai when justice is lost.

The people of Madurai, who had been prosperous till then, leave their residences and possessions and leave Madurai on that day. Those who left are taking refuge in neighbouring countries. No nation came forward to accept them. So, they have no choice but to take shelter in the forests and mountains. The Mudhuvar separated from each other and looked for a way to survive in the forest and set up small tents there. As there was a conflict between them as to who was the greatest, due to frequent quarrels, they split into two groups and moved from one forest to another. Then the situation arose where they had to choose a leader for themselves and follow his orders. The leader was called "*Kudithalaivan*" (leader of the community)," says Selvapperumal. These tribal people worship Kannagi as a deity. It is still a practice among people to go to Kodungallur with garlands around their necks for goddess Kannagi. Kannaki worship is called Bhagwati worship.

They are maintaining the above position till today. The *Mutuwar* tribal people have a leader. A woman who is a widow is not approached by anyone, regretting her birth benefit and fearing what will happen next is seen even today among the *Mudhuvar* tribal people.



The Mutuwar Tribe

### **Native:**

The fact that the *Mudhuvar* are native to Tamil Nadu, to Madurai raises doubts that the *Mudhuvar* may be Tamilians. Also, they differ from other tribes in their way of life. As tribals, however, they have restrictions on marriage, lifestyle, etc. Seeing all these things, there is a possibility that the *Mudhuvar* are Tamils.

### **Story of Native:**

The story of the *Mudhuvars'* origin reveals their faith and their reason for living in the forest. The Pandya king's body is buried at a place called "Seranthodu" near Adimali (this is the border between Pandya Nadu and Cheran Nadu). It is said that Pandian will be born again, on the day of his birth there will be a rain of stones and flowers, and on that day we will come back to the country.



The tribe's lifestyle mostly consists of agriculture

### **Conclusion:**

It can be assumed that the name *Mudhuvar* may have originated from the ancient meaning of "Kudi". The name *Mudhuvar* may have come from the fact that women still carry children on their backs today. Although the period of migration is different, we can learn from the stories that they migrated from the Pandyan country. This article presents different views on the *Mudhuvar* lifestyle than other tribes.

### **References:**

1. Bhaktavatsala Bharati, Cultural Anthropology.
2. K. Irajendran, Life of the Mudhuvar Tribals
3. R. Reena, Biography of Mudhuvar.

*This article is created as a part of the Adivasi Awaaz project, with the support of Misereor and Prayog Samaj Sevi Sanstha.*