

Ethnoecology of Kadar Community

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Abstract

The tribal people are the poorest people in the country and they rely on hunting, agriculture, and fishing to live. Non-tribal people have always found entertainment in tribal literature and culture. A significant portion of tribal literature is derived from oral tradition. It is regarded as a treasure that should be safeguarded. Songs and chants performed on special occasions like births, deaths, or ritual performances make up the majority of tribal literature. Ethnoecology refers to the ecological component of indigenous knowledge. This paper focuses on the ethnoecological knowledge of the native population in the Western Ghats biodiversity hotspot. It also investigates the Kadar communities' ecological linkages. The rainfed regions of the Anamalai region of the Western Ghats are home to Kadar. The Kadar community is aware of several ecological relationships and the climate. Ethnoecological information offers a wealth of opportunities for ecological theories, processes, and biodiversity protection.

A fundamental aspect of Indian civilization is its diversity and the existence of several societies. The varied fabric of India is inextricably linked to its tribes. Nearly every facet of Indian culture and civilization is influenced by the country's tribal culture, customs, and rituals.

Every tribe has its own way of living and thinking. Everybody has one's own culture, values, morality, traditions, and customs. There has also been a significant blending of cultures among Indian tribal groups. Each tribal culture has a unique culture that is evident in its very features.

With many traditions being passed down orally, tribal literature reflects the experiences, cultures, and hardships of tribal people. It frequently focuses on themes of identity, exploitation, and resistance. The literary works produced by and about tribal societies that examine identity, the effects of outsiders, dangers to their existence, and resistance to exploitation are collectively referred to as tribal literature.

Many indigenous populations in India have not been impacted by contemporary life. With more than 84.4 million tribal people, India has the highest tribal population in the world. The poorest population in the nation are tribal people, also referred to as Adivasis, who still make their living from farming, fishing, and hunting. About 16.6% and 8.6% of India's population, respectively, are members of Scheduled Tribes.

The extensive oral traditions of these societies are demonstrated by the large portion of tribal literature, especially songs and dance forms, that are passed down orally from one generation to the next. Since the heritage of tribal resistance serves as the inspiration for tribal literature, the language and location of tribal uprisings are important. Tribal literature is constructivethat defends the rights of tribal communities to defend their resources, land, and self-determination while also opposing discrimination.

India is renowned for having a wide variety of languages. There are more than 1600 languages from seven distinct language groups, many of which are maintained and preserved orally. The nation's oral heritage dates back up to 3500 years and continues to flourish now. Kadar language is one among them. The nation's unwritten languages outnumber its written ones. Both tribal and non-tribal people speak these languages, and migratory and marginalized societies continue to do so today.

The aim of this study is to shed light on the ethnoecological knowledge of Kadar community among India's tribes and how they contribute to the overall cohesiveness and sense of belonging. Oral tradition of Kadarsis a means of self representation and empowerment.

Due to a lack of institutionalized support, the majority of our oral literature is in danger of disappearing. The predicament is made worse by the fact that these languages have no written form, which makes the traditions fearful of extinction. Indigenous and traditional knowledge about the environment, history, and society is preserved through oral traditions. Kadar community is very particular to use the Kadar language among their people, even when they know languages like Malayalam and Tamil.

With little political or economic significance, the majority of tribes are centered in heavily forested areas. Hunting and gathering or subsistence farming have historically been the main economic pillars of the majority of tribes. India's many tribes have preserved their religion and culture in spite of the significant changes brought about by urbanization and industrialization. Kadar is a typical community in this regard. The tribal people still adhere to their culture, religion, and values in spite of the quick speed of modernization.

Ethnoecology refers to the ecological component of indigenous knowledge. The Kadar community of Western Ghats biodiversity has strong ecological linkages. The rainfed regions of the Anamalai region of the Western Ghats are home to Kadar. The Kadar community is aware of several ecological relationships and the climate. Ethnoecological information offers a wealth of opportunities for ecological theories, processes, and biodiversity protection.

Ethnoecology is the ecological component of indigenous knowledge that encompasses ecological processes and the interactions between people, animals, plants, and the physical components of the surrounding environment. The Kadars are one of the five Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups in Kerala and one of the 75 PVTGs nationwide. According to a recent survey there are 2556 Kadar people living in 22 settlements. Each village has a head, or the chief (Mooppan), who serves as the village's leader, who mediates internal conflicts, makes decisions when called upon, and interacts with other village or clan leaders. The oracle, known as "Thaivamaali," is revered in traditional worship and is regarded as God's representative. "Vichayaali" is familiar with rites and chanting. Their traditional physician, known as the "Marunthaali," is knowledgeable about medicinal herbs and their uses. The best months for the Kadar to gather Minor Forest Produces are March, April, and May. They gather a great deal of wild honey and sell it. The majority of their economy is derived from wild honey.

Their primary diet consists of rice with tubers and roots. According to Thurston, the Kadar diet consisted of fish, python, sheep, poultry, and bamboo seeds. They use palms to create toddy. A 'Kombukathi' (chopping knife) is always carried by the Kadars, and they use it for the majority

of their livelihood activities. Their ability to use the ‘Kombukathi’ to clean and gut the fish is incredible. They gather fish, honey, and tubers using a variety of traditional tools. They excavate the roots and tubers with a “Paarakol,” or digging stick.

‘Choondivillu’ (catapult) and ‘Villu’ (archery) are used to hunt birds and small animals. The Kadars are polytheists, and they worship stone statues as a representation of God.

The gods worshipped are Attuvacheriyamma, Vanathevathi, Kali, and Maladevaathikal

This decade has seen an increase in interest in the ethnic knowledge of the indigenous groups that inhabit and surround tropical forests, both for its knowledge worth and its potential to help us comprehend ecosystems in their entirety. One important element that permits the ecosystem’s longevity and sustained reliance on the local dependent population is the traditional knowledge of the area. Understanding biodiversity is crucial when taking ethnic knowledge into account. An insight of how ethnic cultures perceived their surroundings is provided by ethnoecological knowledge.(Marten 1986)

Kadars make use of vocabulary like ‘Adak’ for green leafy vegetables. Because of their extensive ethnic knowledge of plants and the forest habitat, the Kadars developed a precise method for classifying ethnic flora. The Kadar people possess extensive ethnic knowledge of the faunal richness of the area in which they reside. The endemic indigenous group’s traditional ethnic knowledge reflects the Anamalais’ high level of diversity and richness in the Western Ghats. According to ethnic terminology, the Kadar are aware of 50 animals, 167 birds, 30 reptiles, three amphibians, 33 fish, and 19 insects.

For certain animals, the Kadar holds spiritual significance. They are thought to have descended from elephants, wild gaurs, and Malabar whistling thrush. They have a code name for tigers, which is “Mattan.” When they are in the forest, they do not utter the words “Variyanpuli” or “Puli” (Tiger). They refer to it as “Mattan” instead. They consider it an act of deference that can prevent tiger attacks. There are 63 vulnerable and endemic plant species in Kadar’s ethnofloristic variety, with six being Near vulnerable, 18 being Vulnerable, and 14 being Endangered.

Hereditary wealth that is fundamental knowledge innate to the indigenous group is known as ethnomedical knowledge. Regardless of the familial structures, elder men and women in the Kadar community share traditional ethnomedical knowledge. The Kadar ethnic group stands out from other ethnic groups due to their unique knowledge of their culture and way of life. The Kadars consume six tender shoots, seven rhizomes, twelve tubers, fourteen seeds, six masticators, thirty-one leafy vegetables, fifty-one edible fruits, and six masticators.

Kadar’s ethnoecological knowledge is heavily influenced by their way of life and cultural understanding.

Kadars harvest four primary varieties of honey from the tropical evergreen forest. “Vanthen” “Kurunnan,” “Kottaan” and “Karinthan.” The season, floristic diversity, wild plant flowering phenology, vegetation, and rainfall of the area all affect the kind, amount, quality, and odour of honey.

Kadars lighten their bodies so they can climb trees more easily. Moonless nights are the ideal time of year to gather honey. At night, they will return and offer prayers to their god for abundant honey and safe working conditions in their dangerous line of work. As a traditional practice of sustainability, the Kadars often only gather the forest’s basic goods. The main elements that guarantee inclusive and sustainable honey collection are a number of taboos and beliefs. One of the things that is said to represent a Kadar man’s aptitude and potential is the marking of honey and harvesting skills. There is practically any discussion of the Kadar’s disagreement over honey gathering.

The Kadar community's ethnoecological knowledge includes 50 species of wildlife and 351 kinds of plants. The community's resources were severely impacted by the relentless forest deterioration, and ancient residents like Kadar were frequently displaced. Every geographical element of their surroundings, including mountains, rocks, valleys, rivers, rivulets, etc., has a special term among the Kadars. Some locations, like "Keezhmayikal" and "Melmayikal," have names that reflect the intricacy of the topography; these two-place directions are complicated. The word "Mayikal" has an unclear meaning. 'Kozhimodak' is a place of worship. A few historical events inspired the names of several places.

The Kadar ethnic group used distinct terms to identify the four seasons. "Variyakalam" refers to the Southwest Monsoon, which lasts from June to September. Most Kadar choose to live in forests during this intense rainy season, gathering fish, edible fungi (called "Kumin"), leafy vegetables (called "Adaak"), and tubers (called "Thettam"). They claim that the appearance of big moths on tree barks and the sound of cicadas spreading across the forest, which signals the arrival of monsoon rain, are signs of the start of the South-West monsoon. Because Tamil Nadu is the source of the wind, the North-East monsoon is known as "Kongamaya." "Kulirkkalam" is the Kadar name for the winter season, which begins in December and lasts till February. An important season for gathering minor forest products from the forest has begun, as indicated by this.

As the water level in rivers dropped and rivulets and small streams dried up, butterflies and moths turned to the land for nourishment, making the March–May summer season, known as "Vedakkaalam," an ecological indication of the time. The majority of the Kadar's ecological knowledge focuses on relationships between species, whether they be with climate, topography, or other species. They can be referred to as autecological since they observe and distinguish it as a species' relationship together with its breeding biology and life cycle. In a similar vein, they clarify how communities or populations interact and work together in response to natural changes, resulting in processes like "ecological succession" or ecosystem development. The Kadar community is well aware of how the ecosystem is developing as a result of interactions between various species, and they believe that each species is essential to this process.

Earlier people thought that Kadars are causing havoc to the forest and ecosystem by looting the forest. After thorough and in depth study, it is clear that through their eco-friendly and indigenous way of living, they are people who preserve the forest and environment. Besides, their ethnoecological knowledge is additional benefit to the ecosystem.

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