



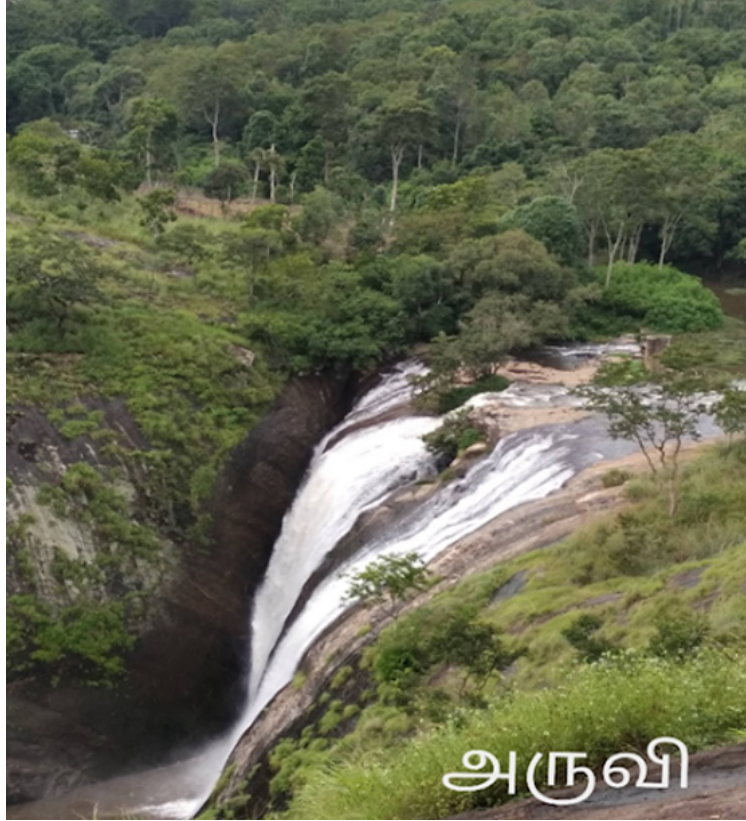
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<https://www.adivasilivesmatter.com/post/coexisting-with-nature-how-the-paliyars-of-tamil-nadu-earn-their-living>



# Coexisting With Nature: How The Paliyars Of Tamil Nadu Earn Their Living

*The following article by Murugeswari, depicts the interdependence of Paliyar tribe and the forests. It details the traditional occupation of the Paliyars and their way of living.*



Picture credit: Murugeswari

Out of the millions of people living globally, around forty crore are tribals. These tribes are divided into thirty-six categories. They have their separate languages and culture. Despite the linguistic and cultural differences, the basic tenet of tribals is living in harmony with nature, safeguarding it, preventing its exploitation, preventing its over utilisation and keep nourishing it, so that it continues to provide for their survival and living. The Paliyars of Kodaikanal, Tamil nadu, are one such tribe.

They worship towering trees, waterfalls, and high mountain ranges as their ancestors and forest angels. The Paliyars are engaged in occupations such as black stone flower (Pasan, kalpasi) picking, honey extraction, and tuber digging. They are also professionally dependent on the forest for their livelihood. Pasan (Kalpasi) is something we all know here in Tamil Nadu. It is a spice that can be added to daily food. Pasan (kalpasi) is a spice widely used in chicken powder, mutton powder, 'garam masala' and biryani spices.

Pasan (kalpasi) is one of the most used spices. It is derived from the bark of trees. They (kalpasi) are found growing on trees and rocks



Pasan/Kalpasi; Picture credit: Murugeswari

in dense forests, which are collected by the Paliyar tribals through “Uli’ (chisel). During the monsoon season, this occupation becomes extremely dangerous. Rocks and trees become slippery and hence it becomes difficult to navigate not only the forests but also to climb trees for the extraction of spices.

As the Paliyars enter forests for their daily occupations, they make sure to mark their paths as these forests are quite dense. They also worship the forest deities before beginning their work. Their closeness with nature is evident from the prayers they offer while worshipping the forests. They pray so that no harm comes to the trees and the forests that have been protecting them and providing for them since ages.

While extracting the spices, a single member of the Paliyar tribe climbs at least four or five trees a day. Paliyar women also indulge in the process of extraction of these spices. They also carry multiple kilos of the spice to markets in order to earn a living. While this is a dangerous occupation as poisonous life forms and big animals reside in this forest, it is comforting to see the ease of Paliyars here. They do not fear these forests and treat them as their homes.



Picture credit: Murugeswari

Honey collecting is another occupation of the Paliyars. The Paliyar people divide honey into three types: small, large, and stick honey. Audi, Thai and Masi(Tamil months) months are often chosen as the best time to take honey. They also divide the honeycombs according to the season of the month according to the month of flower honey, little honey, and good honey. They worship their forest angel before going to fetch this honey. They also worship the yellow-green flower, a flower that grows in these forests and has medicinal properties.

After worshipping for more than three days, these people go into the forest to collect honey. They do not use stones, knives, billhooks, or flames. They chase the bees away by '*unnikuchi*' (a kind of sound produced) at a distance of ten feet from the hive with beehives to repel the bees. They take some from the honeycombs and keep it on a rock. They state that putting away this honey on stones is a token of gratitude to the bees who gave them and the tree that gave these bees a place to live. The collected honey is then wrapped in a white cloth and squeezed into vessels. This honey is then sold in the markets as well as used for domestic consumption.

The Paliyars pass on the knowledge surrounding their traditional dance forms, forms of music, instruments and the art of identifying medicinal plants to their future generations through folklores and stories. Paliyar children not only learn to survive through this knowledge but also form an unbreakable bond with the forests. They learn to protect the forests and to live in harmony with them.



Picture credit: Murugeshwari

***"For them, the forest is life!"  
Life is their forest!  
Let's protect the forests and live a healthy life!"  
- Murugeshwari***

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