

ON THE ORIGIN OF THE *KATTUNAYAKAS* OF NILGIRIS

M. CYRIL NAYAGAM

Department of Botany, Government Arts College, Udthagamandalam – 643 001

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents an account of the origin of Kattunayakas, one of the tribes of the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu.

INTRODUCTION

By tribe we imagine primitive societies. But anthropologists define tribe as a collection of groups of people, who share patterns of speech, basic cultural characteristics and in the traditional sense a common territory. The most important feature however is that members of a tribe feel that they have more in common with each other than with neighbouring groups.

Actually “indigenous” or aboriginal people represent a population which has been subjugated to or is dominated by the superior culture (Aiyappan 1963).

THE LEGENDS

We know as a fact that when tracing the records of any nation or country as far back as possible, we arrive at a period all authentic or probable accounts cease. We have then reached the prehistoric stage. What occurred during that epoch an never be verified. When the mist of historic darkness disappears from the plains and mountains of a country, the existing inhabitants and their dwelling become visible. Whether these are in reality the first settlers and their abodes first erected is another question which does not properly belong to the domain poluvas, put to death

the Malayalas, terrified king Kala and entering into Nila Mountain offered up the peak to the Lakshmi of victory. This is the first mention of the names today and Nilgiris. The Sanskrit forms of the latter niladri, Nilachak also occur in other inscriptions of about the same date. A. Grant of 1920 A.D., says that Vishuwardhana “turned the nila mountain into a city” and another of 1141 states that the ruler of Nirumgundanad, by order of Ebenad and Hiriyanad, laid sieze to kukulla fort, above the fort of Nilgiri fort, burnt the fort, slew the son of Nayaka or perhaps the chief of the fort for joining fight with the enemy’s force who opposed him, routed them. (Francis 1908).

Here it may be inferred that the koteya Nayaka and his people were afraid and probably entered the deep jungles and may be called the kattunayakas themselves. From this angle they are older than the tribes of Nilgiris, and may be next to that of the todas.

Another inscription of 1527 records that Krishna Raja Nayakar, the right hand of Krishna Deva Maharaja (the greatest of the vijayanagar line) granted certain person the village masanahalli in Bayanad. This Masanahalli, is now called Masanagudi. In This Masanagudi region also kattunayakas

are seen whose ancestors might have had some relation with the Krishna raja Nayakar. (Francis 1908).

In the “castes and tribes of southern India” (Thurston and Rangachari 1975), it is said in the Malabar Wyanaad, the jungle Kurumbas are known as kattunayakans.

Thurston and Rangachari may be wrong in equating kurumbas with kattunayakans. The two classes of hill tribes are practically identical with some slight differences. The former does not eat monkey’s flesh, which the latter does there by lowering themselves in status. The former gathers honey and the

latter does not. The former does not take the meals prepared by the latter, whereas the converse is permissible, Beyond these differences the two tribes have same customs, manners and language, Nowadays these tribes are employed as elephant mahouts, farm and estate labourers.

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