



Traditional Knowledge System of Kaani Tribes in Kanniyakumari District

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Abstract: The Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve at the southern tip of Western Ghats, India - is home to a large tribal community known as the “Kaani” with a rich cultural legacy and traditional wealth. The Kaani people were traditionally nomads, but around the 18th century, they began to settle down and live in communities, their communities are located in four districts: Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam, in Kerala, and Kanniyakumari and Tirunelveli in Tamilnadu. The name “Kaani” means “Land Proprietor,” and there are 47 Kaani tribal hamlets in the Kanniyakumari region called “Kaanikudi.” A tribe chief known as *Mootukkaani* is in charge of each hamlet, and with the assistance of his subordinate chief, *Vilikaani*, he oversees the group following customary regulations. A tribal priest known as ‘*Pilathikaani*’ is present in every *Kaanikudi*; he is thought to possess superpowers and is well-versed in medicinal knowledge from his forefathers. Here, diseases are cured by two types of practices: one by using natural herbs as medicine and the other by spiritual healing called ‘*Saththu Pattu*’ Their traditional houses, known as “*Eer madam*,” are constructed atop trees using bamboo and palm leaves, which enable them to protect themselves from dangerous predators. Despite being governed by rules and regulations, the livelihood of the Kaani remains highly dependent on nature, their mother source. The Kaani people have continued to live in isolated areas and strictly followed their traditions and customs.

This paper is based on fieldwork conducted in 2022 in villages near the Pechiparai and Kodayar dams in Kanniyakumari district. Interviews with elderly Kaani healers provided insights into their medicinal and ritual practices. In this study, the Kaani people’s ancient wisdom has been thoroughly detailed.

Keywords: Culture, ethnic medicine, Kaani, Kaanikudi, Settlement, Traditional knowledge, Tribes.

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Introduction

India has been home to several ethnic groups from ancient times; it is also known as a nation of various cultures and subcultures. Even in this age of growing industrialisation in the plains, the roots of numerous Indigenous people who live in a varied ecological setting, from woods to hilly terrains, with distinctive cultural traditions, have never been destroyed, making India the world's second-largest primitive ethnic group. According to D.N. Majumdar and T.N. Madan (1956: 24), tribes are social groups connected in language, traditions, beliefs, and practices; they also recognise social distance from other people and are territorially integrated. Although primitive tribes have inhabited India for centuries, their origins and lineage remain largely undocumented. It was only during the colonial era that serious ethnographic research on these communities began. Scholars such as Enthoven in Bombay, Thurston in Madras, Crooke in the North-West, and Russell in Madhya Pradesh initiated preliminary studies and census documentation of India's diverse ethnic groups (Majumdar & Madan, 1956: 242). As a result, research in this field has significantly expanded over time.

The term "Scheduled Tribes" was first defined in Section 366(25) of the Indian Constitution. Before their constitutional recognition, these communities were known by various terms, such as hunter-gatherers, nomadic tribes, and primitive tribes. Following their inclusion in the Constitution, "Scheduled Tribes" became the widely accepted designation. There are six scheduled tribe divisions in the Kanniyakumari district, including primitive tribes. These include Kaaniyan, Kaanikaran, Kattunayakan, Kuluvar, Malaikuravan, and Malaivedan (Vincent, 2004: 11). Although six ethnic groups resided in Kanniyakumari, their settlements were relatively small. However, the Kaanikaran ethnic group was the predominant ethnic group in this district. They were widely spread throughout the Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve. They still have long-standing customs and beliefs that continue to be held to, making them a significant tribal population in the district.

Aim

Every ethnic group possesses a rich cultural heritage, often characterised by a vast reservoir of traditional knowledge and wisdom passed down through generations. However, this conscious wealth of information is typically conveyed orally and lacks written documentation. The Kaani people, for instance, have unique traditional knowledge that has been transmitted from their ancestors as oral tradition, without any traceable written records. The current objective of this study is to document these unique traits of the Kaani

people residing in the Kanniyakumari region on the Agasthyamalai hills. By recording their oral traditions, the study aims to preserve their rich cultural heritage for future generations.

Previous study

Research on the Kaani tribes commenced only in the early twentieth century, coinciding with the beginning of global ethnographic studies. A thorough work of the distinctive traits of different social groups in South India was conducted in 1909 by Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari, who published their findings in seven volumes under the title "*The Castes and Tribes of South India*." This book describes the Kaani as a nomadic group with 10 family divisions that mostly resided in the highlands of Southern Travancore. The anatomy, habitation pattern, and social organisation of the Kaani tribes are portrayed in detail in this research. According to N. Kunjan Pillai's 1931 "*Census of Travancore*," the Kaani tribes are recognised as Primitive Tribes and are residents of South Travancore, they are known as 'Kaanis' and 'Velans', dwelling both within and outside the forests, this book also describes their customs and ceremonies. In his 1937 book *Travancore Tribes and Castes*, L.A. Krishna Ayer discussed how the Kaani were a paradigm for social evolution since they quickly moved from an uncivilised stage to an evolved social structure and eventually began interacting with their neighbours. In "*Tamizhalaga palangudi Makkal*", a book by Agathiyalingam, published in 1972, Balakrishnan provided a thorough history of the Kaani tribes, including their customs, beliefs, and way of life.

Study Area

The current study was conducted in Kanniyakumari, a district that is located between latitudes 08°05' to 08°35' North and longitudes 77° 06' to 77° 35' East (see Map 1) and marks the southern tip of India. The Agasthyamalai range of the Western Ghats, which ends in Kanniyakumari, consists of numerous small hills. The Kaani tribe traditionally lived in the regions surrounding these hills. There are four taluks in this area: Kalkulam, Vilavancode, Agastheeswaram, and Thovalai. Of these, Kalkulam and Vilavancode hold the largest concentrations of Kaani people. There are several Kaani communities in the lower Kodayar and Pechiparai Dam, and considerable attention was paid to this region.

The Kaani

The word "Kaani" means "land proprietor," also known as "*Malaiarasar*," which means "the ruler of mountains." People living inside the forest are

named Kaanikaran, whereas members who live beyond the mountains are called *Velanmaar* (Spearman). They were originally nomads, according to their folklore, and they began to live settled lives around the eighteenth century. During the reign of King Marthanda Varma of Travancore (1729–1758), several new land revenue system plans were put into place, one of which was to give lands to the Kaani people (Perumal, 2012: 44). However, this remains a folktale, as it was said that King Marthanda Varma sought assistance from these people during a dire situation, and they saved his life. As a result, he granted the Kaani people ownership of the whole forest, making them the indigenous inhabitants of the Travancore highlands (as revealed in an interview with informant Saraswathi in 2021).

In each tribal hamlet or settlement, five to six families usually resided. Sometimes, a settlement may contain as many as twenty to twenty-five households. Every home is relatively distant from the other, and no homes are visible nearer to one another. There are 47 such settlements or hamlets in the Kanniyakumari district (Selvaraj, 2015: 93, 94) and are categorised into six main areas: *Vadakkamalai*, *Kombamalai*, *Keelatuvilai*, *Mevattuvilai*, *Katruva*, and *Elaraipatru*. People live in various types of homes called *Manai*, *Kaadu*, *Portrai*, *Kuzhi*, and *Parai*; the temple or sacred place in each community is known as *Koduthikalam*. Each village comprises five to twenty-five houses, with a three-person administrative team and a tribal council called *Paattapirai* (Vincent, 2004: 14). Administration is controlled by the chief headman, subordinate headman, and ritual healer, known locally as *Mootukaani*, *Vilikkaani*, and *Pilathikkaani*, respectively. The headman plays the role of law-maker, protector, and giver of justice and eventually heads marriages, ceremonies, and all-important decisions taken by him. *Vilikaani* (the subordinate headman) assists *Mootukaani* in all activities. *Pilathikaani*, serving as the physician, healer, and priest, performs all the ritual practices for the ethnos from birth to death. The Kaani people were divided into 10 groups under the term “*Illam*,” created primarily for the marriage system and property possessions. These 10 divisions may broadly be divided into two categories: *Annantambi* and *Machambi*. *Talamillam*, *Kayillam*, *Perunchillam*, *Mangotillam*, and *Thenillam* are among the divisions of *Annantambi*; *Mootillam*, *Perumanillam*, *Palamillam*, *Vilanattillam*, and *Kurumillam* are among the divisions of *Machambi* (Thurston & Rangachari, 1909: 174–175).

Traditional Knowledge System

The traditional knowledge system refers to the skills and wisdom passed down through generations within an ethnic community. These traditions

include cultural activities, folkloric songs, and tales exclusive to each tribe, frequently transmitted through oral traditions. For many periods, humans depended on nature to fill their needs, especially tribal people who had special intellectual power in this sense- like which activities are essential to living with nature? What should be eaten and what shouldn't be eaten? The medicinal value of herbs and knowledge of adaptation to the surrounding environment were all orally passed and protected within their group. These are collectively called the Traditional Knowledge System (Mageswaran, 2020: 26). The Kaani communities have diverse perspectives on the use and sustainability of natural resources. Being primarily forest dwellers who have long relied on forests for nourishment, they have developed extensive knowledge about utilising nature effectively.

Living

Through their long-standing rituals, religious practices, and beliefs, the Kaani have maintained a peaceful relationship with their environment, leading to a distinct way of life. They have had a high geographical knowledge and have used it to shape every part of their existence. Their greatest value is the wisdom they inherited from their ancestors—which they acquired orally, without any written records. In the early stages, once people began to live a settled life, they constructed shelters over trees, a tradition still somewhat used today, known as *Eermadam* (see Figure 4). It resembles a loft built above a tree with bamboo steps attached for climbing up (Vincent, 2004: 18). They currently reside in small huts and roofed houses. They first consult the *Pilathikaani* to select a location free of spiritual energy and perform *poojas* to utilise wild woods and plant resources to construct their homes. Their houses are built of flattened bamboo walls, natural grasses like half a grass, coconut and palm leaves for the roof, and mud and cow dung for the floors. Houses are typically constructed with six pillars, which resemble the legs of the mother, father, and kid that make up a family, believing that their descendants would prosper if they build homes in this manner (2009: 27–28). Most of their houses are single-roomed and known by *Paadi*, *Kudi*, and *Kaanipatti*.

Culture and tradition

The distinctive rituals and practices the Kaani observe are appropriate for their surroundings. Their traditional clothes are made of leaves and bark, named in their native language as *Marauri* (as told by Meenachi, an informant in a personal interview in 2022). By adopting their attire designs to suit ordinary

people's current trends, they have modernised themselves. For them, gold decorations have little aesthetic value; instead, they wear conches, shells, and beads strung with black thread. Women typically wear many nose rings and earrings, and their foreheads are adorned with crescent-shaped tilak (Jothi, 2018: 70-71). They call their language *Malabaksha* (language of mountains), a mixture of Tamil and Malayalam (Perumal & Sundaram, 2001). Both men and women contribute equally to the family's wealth. Women occupy esteemed positions within their families, and moral values are held in high regard among them.

The *Pilathikaani* guides the Kaani people in their continuous religious beliefs and rituals. Since he only learned all of the medicinal herbs, customs, religious ceremonies, and all the laws and regulations from the ancient *Pilathikaani*, he is also considered a knowledge transmitter. They follow their own aboriginal religious belief, worshipping natural guardians titled in the name of 'Savu' (see Figure 1). Each division has its *Savu* God, who is the prime deity of their division, and the Kaani do not build temples for worship. Instead, they make a temporary worshipping place and perform all ritual practices there; their offerings to God are known as *Koduthi* (Arulselvi, 2016: 29), and the location where they are offered is known as *Koduthi kalam* (see Figure 2). Traditionally, several kinds of *Koduthis*' (see Figure 3) are celebrated on different days, each with a unique collection of customs and ceremonies. Ancestors and natural angels are honoured with fear and respect, and all festivals begin with their worship. They believe that if they worship a stone in the forest in remembrance of their ancestor, it would come and assist them in hunting animals and save their lives from wild creatures. Hence, many such stones are seen all around their region.

Life with wild animals

Because they live deep within the forest, they have built their homes and agricultural plots to be well-protected from wild animals. To keep these creatures at bay, they use drums that produce loud sounds, which serve as a medium to scare the animals away. These musical instruments are crafted from materials readily available in nature, showcasing their skilled craftsmanship. Some examples of these instruments are listed below.

- *Adi Udukkai* - It is made up of long bamboo. The top half of the bamboo is hollowed in the centre, and a broken piece of bamboo is stuck in the bottom half of the bamboo stick by inserting it inside the hollow area.

- *Kudukkai* - It is also made up of bamboo pieces with another stick used for rubbing; when the stick rubs against the bamboo piece, it makes a loud noise.
- *Nanthini* - A hollow bamboo pipe is made, and two sticks are used to beat over the hollow pipe and produce a noise (Sargunam, 2017: 47-48).
- *Kal vil* - A stone bow; instead of an arrow point, they use a stone.

These tools do not merely serve their primary functions, but the users are also keenly aware of the behaviours of wild animals. Consequently, they have meticulously planned their actions based on this knowledge. They possess the skills to manage wild animals and can effectively deter them without causing harm. To prevent elephants from invading their fields, they construct deep ditches around the areas they cultivate (Kumar, 2014).

Fishing and honey gathering

Kaani are known for their familiarity with local water sources and their currents, which greatly enhances their fishing success. They utilise a long, basket-like fishing net known as a *Thoori* (see Figure 10), characterised by a long body, a wide opening, and a narrow bottom with a handle attached. During fishing, the *Thoori* is positioned against the water's current in a constricted area to allow fishes in considerable numbers to enter the net, after which they close it. Occasionally, they employ termites as bait to draw in large quantities of fish, as well as fruits referred to locally as *Nanchanguru*, which can incapacitate the fish. At night, they attach small lights to worms and other fish feeds, which they place in the water to attract more fish (as told by informant Krishnankaani in a personal interview in 2022).

Before engaging in the honey collection, the *Pilathikaani* perform rituals and poojas. They follow the paths indicated by the honey bees to reach the hive. Upon arrival, they summon their crew using some other term for the term "honey," as it is believed that using the actual names could prevent them from obtaining honey. They use burning cotton to create smoke, which helps to disperse the bees. After gathering the honey, they leave a portion on the rocks as an offering to the guardians of nature, believing this act will increase their honey yield in subsequent collections. They typically collect three varieties of honey: *Thoduthen*, which is found on small rocks and trees; *Siruthen*, located on houses and walls; and *Thookanthen*, which is gathered from elevated rocky hills (Palanisami, 2009: 71).

Food

Kaani consume both meat and vegetables, and they mostly rely on the foods that are in season. They primarily eat foods that are thought to have healing benefits. Their main foods are rice, millet, ragi, honey, and other tuber vegetables. Dishes made up of Tapioca are the signature dish of Kaani tribes (Sejin, 2019: 128). These roots are carefully harvested, cleaned, and boiled until they become soft. After the boiling process, the tapioca roots are smashed to a smooth consistency, to enhance the flavour, turmeric powder, grated coconut, and bird-eye pepper are added, giving the dish its unique taste and colour. The Western Ghats are renowned for their diverse selection of fleshy fungi, making energy-rich mushrooms an essential part of the local diet. The Kaani community possesses a deep knowledge of edible and nonedible mushrooms, a skill passed down from their ancestors and identifying mushrooms based on their appearance. Various types of mushrooms are collected in the morning using bamboo baskets. After being washed two or three times, the mushrooms are powdered with rice and boiled in water to add flavour, chilies and grains are also included and stewed together (Sargunam et al., 2012: 150-153). A greater quantity of dairy products is incorporated into their meals. Both men and women regularly consume toddy, which is featured in all ceremonies; they produce their toddy from palm sap. They make full use of the crops and their byproducts throughout the seasons when they are harvested.

The following edible items are typically available each month:

- **January:** Cardamom, Ginger, Potato
- **February:** Potato, Honey, Tapioca Cassava
- **March:** Honey, Banana
- **April:** Pulses, Onion, Mustard
- **May:** Sugarcane, Cereals
- **June:** Plantain, Millet
- **July:** Pigeon pea, Millet, Various tubers
- **August:** Plantain and various tubers
- **September:** Cardamom, Plantain, Tapioca Cassava
- **October:** Two types of yams known as Neduvan Kilangu, Nooran Kilangu, and Cardamom
- **November:** Ginger, Sweet potato
- **December:** Sugarcane (Perumal & Sanmugasundaram, 2021: 71)

They eat all the animals they hunt, including deer, wild boar, squirrels, rabbits, millipedes, turtles, snails, crabs, snakes, and freshwater fish. However,

they strictly refrain from eating beef due to certain sacred beliefs and customs (told by informant Vijaya in an interview). Their daily diet includes produce such as jackfruit, pineapple, mango, sweet potatoes, pomegranate, corn, green beans, and bananas. Mornings begin with porridge, while in the evening, they prepare and consume fresh rice, keeping the remaining food submerged in water for breakfast the following day; this porridge is eaten regularly each morning with bird's eye chillies. Cassava tubers are eaten daily as porridge for lunch and accompanied by grated coconut during the evening meal.

Their traditional way of cooking is known as '*Kal Kaayuchuthal*' (see Figure 7). While foraging in the deep forest, they utilise this cooking technique by starting a fire with dry wood. They place a cobble-sized stone with a flat surface on the fire until it's hot enough. Once heated, leaves are spread over the stone, and cassava tubers, fish, and naturally occurring bird-eye pepper are placed on top. After covering these ingredients with leaves, another heated stone is placed over them (see Figure 9). They do not add salt during this cooking process, as the stone provides sufficient salinity to the food. Consequently, when they go fishing and hunting, the only spice they carry is turmeric, as other necessary materials can be easily found in nature (as told by informant Bhagavathi).

Medicinal Knowledge

Ethnic communities typically use two methods to treat their mental and physical illnesses: one is via spiritual healing, and the other is through the use of natural plants (Mageswaran, 2020: 27). In the same way, Kaani possess these two pieces of wisdom, which they learned from their forefathers. The ritual-based approach is primarily performed by their spiritual song, "*Chattupattu*," which is sung on a "*Kokkara*" (see Figure 11). *Chattupattu* consists of ceremonial songs directed toward protective deities and natural spirits. *Kokkara* is a slender hollow iron tube, approximately six inches, with a long chain needle. The *Pilathikaani* grasps this iron tube in his left hand while employing his right hand to slide the needle along the pipe from top to bottom in a particular rhythm. Typically, these activities commence in the evening and last until dawn throughout the night. During the performance of *Kokkara*, the *Pilathikaani* leads by singing, and others follow his lines, which is how the *Chattupattu* is carried out. Participants firmly believe that the *Pilathikaani* could relieve many sufferings through *Chattupattu*. A designated location is chosen, and through song, they first eliminate negative energies and human influences from the area. This space is prepared with coconut, and *Alathangu* leaves (a type of palm leaf), known as "*Chattumaadam*," specifically arranged for the *Chattupattu*

performance. All rituals are celebrated with various forms of *Chattupattu* (as told by informant Kunjiramankaani).

Chattupattu comes in over twenty varieties, with regional variations. Among them, 15 are listed below.

1. Karthigaichattu
2. Kathiruvilakichattu
3. Kottapinichattu
4. Mayankovilchattu
5. Melogakoilchattu
6. Naayatuchattu
7. Vayitru pongalaichattu
8. Pinichattu
9. Rayichattu
10. Valaikattichattu
11. Vilavilakichattu
12. Kappalakaichattu
13. thuyilunarthichattu
14. Pirappicheddukumchattu
15. Kirushichattu (Arulselvi 2016: 136)

Second, they possess extensive knowledge about all the herbs in Agasthyamalai and their medicinal uses; a few of these are listed below,

1. *Amanakku* seed oil (Castor oil plant) is used as medicine for constipation (as told by an informant, Kumaresan).
2. The Bark of a Shami tree, locally known as *Vanni maram*, is powdered and mixed with water and is taken for 21 days to cure Asthma.
3. Beverage from one of the species of palm tree locally known as *Alathangupanai* is used to treat kidney stones (as told by an informant, Srirangan).
4. Garlic paste with honey taken orally for reducing abdominal pain during pregnancy (as told by an informant, Srirangan).
5. Indian nettle, called *kuppaimeni* in their region, is taken as a medicine to cure fever, cold, and cough.
6. *Kadukkai* (Myrobalan) fruit extract is used for asthma treatment (Pushpakarani & Natarajan, 2014: 59).

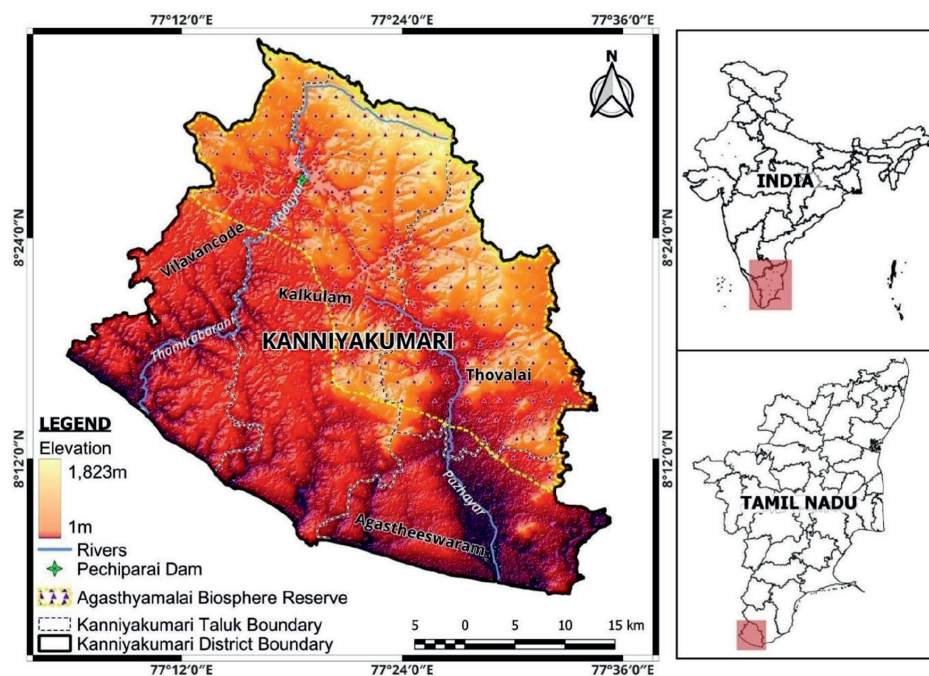
7. *Kandankathari* (yellow-berried nightshade) fruit powder is used as tooth powder to heal toothache and swelling (As told by an informant).
8. *Keelanelli* (Stonebreaker) plant juice is used to treat jaundice.
9. *Kuntimuthu's* (Coral bead vine) leaf paste is applied over the swelling area for cure (Rani, 2017: 41).
10. *Kuppaikerai* (Tropical green amaranth) is also eaten to improve eyesight (as told by an informant, Banumathikaani).
11. Leaves of *Karisalamkanni* (Bhringraj) mixed with cow milk are used as a medicine for jaundice.
12. Leaves of *Manathakali* (Black nightshade) are taken as medicine for mouth ulcers,
13. Leaves of Thorn Mimosa, known as *Karuvela Maram* in their native language, are used for gargling to relieve toothache.
14. Lemon leaves are used as a remedy for vomiting.
15. *Manjal Arali* (yellow oleander) with Neem oil is applied externally for leprosy (as told by informant, Krishnankaani).
16. *Mudakkathan's* (balloon vine spinach) smoke is used to reduce asthma.
17. *Nayuruvi* (prickly chaff flower) plant used to treat dog bites. Leaf paste is applied externally on the area for three days for this treatment.
18. The neem tree has various uses: its leaves are used to treat chickenpox, the stem is boiled with salt water and consumed to purify the blood, and neem smoke is used to relieve colds and coughs (as told by informant, Valli).
19. *Perumthumbi's* (Malabar catmint) root paste is applied externally to the head to cure headaches.
20. *Ponnankanni keerai* (Sessile joy weed) is cooked and eaten regularly to improve eyesight.
21. Powdered bark of Jack fruit orally given with hot water to reduce throat infection.
22. Powdered root of *Kovaikkai* (Ivy Gourd) with hot water is taken as a medicine for Diabetes (Rani, 2017: 78).
23. The Powdered stem bark of the Kapok tree mixed with tamarind water will cure stomach aches.

24. *Sangupushpam's* (Blue pea) fruit paste is applied externally to get rid of insects and scorpion bites (Pradeesh et al., 2020: 994).
25. *Seekakai* (Soapnut acacia) plays a vital role in hair care, dried fruits of that plant mixed with hot water are used for hair washing to remove dandruff and hair fall (Rani, 2017: 42).
26. *Sothukattalai* (Aloe vera) is boiled with coconut oil, and this oil applied continuously in the head helps to reduce headaches and act as a cooler.
27. Stem paste of *Pirandai* (Adamant Creeper) is taken after food to regularise menstruation (Pradeesh et al., 2020: 994).
28. Consuming Bird Eye Pepper, known locally as *Kandari Milagu*, taken on an empty stomach cures blood clotting while incorporating it regularly into meals helps reduce blood pressure (as told by informant, Poomalai).
29. Tubular yam powder mixed with tamarind is used as medicine for piles.
30. *Vasambu* (sweet flag), dried tube powder, is taken orally for one month to cure nervous disorder.

Some Suggestions

Here are some suggestions following our research into the traditional knowledge system of the Kaani people:

- The government may implement additional initiatives to enhance the living conditions of this group, such as introducing housing schemes and allocating arable land to them.
- Encouraging ecotourism in these communities could elevate their quality of life. It will provide them with opportunities to engage with people from outside their area.
- Teaching them social interaction skills could help them share their eco-friendly products and traditional medicinal knowledge with the broader community.
- It is vital to establish tribal markets outside their territories to provide a platform for selling their eco-friendly products. Currently, only one market in Vadasery serves these tribes, which is insufficient.
- Documenting the valuable ethnobotanical knowledge held by the clan's tribal physicians is crucial in the present context. As globalisation



Map 1: Location Map of Study Area (credit-Don Wesley)



Figure 1: One of 'Savu' deity

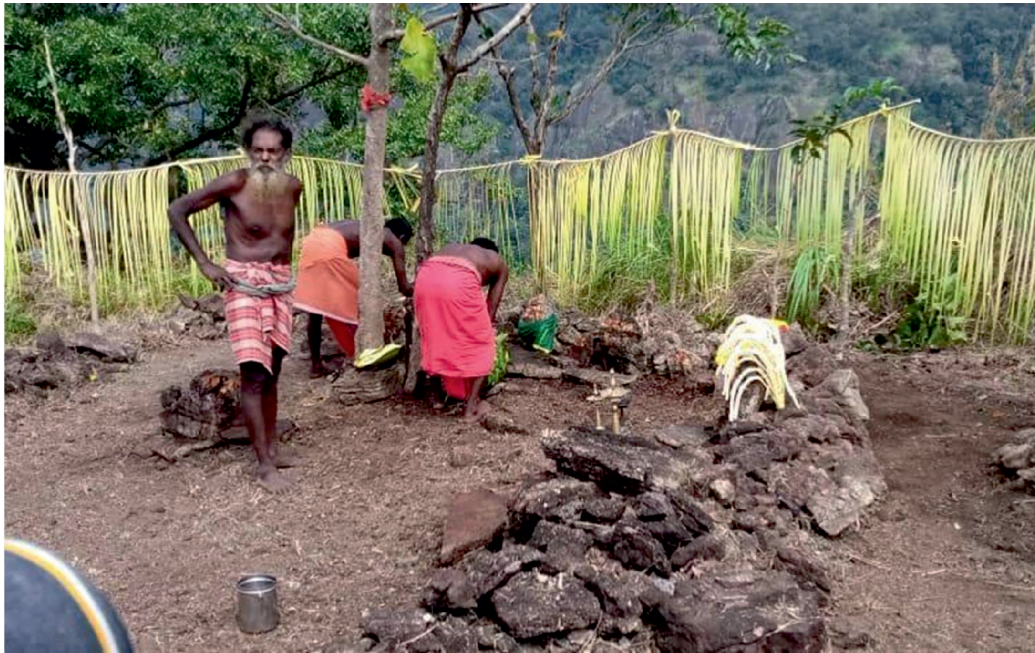


Figure 2: Scene of performance of Poojas and offerings in a *koduthi kalam*



Figure 3: Karthigaikoduthi- Festival celebrated in the Tamil Month of Karthigai



Figure 4: Eermadam-Treehouse (Source: Banumathikaani, Vellambimalai)



Figure 5: Model of a hut built using bamboo sticks and Wild grasses



Figure 6: Another Model of a hut



Figure 7: Food prepared by using their traditional method, *Kal Kaychuthal*



Figure 8: Heating stones for starting cooking



Figure 9: Placing cassava tubers and fish over the hot stones



Figure 10: *Thoori* - Bamboo basket used to catch fish



Figure 11: *Kokkara* – Musical instrument played during their rituals



Figure 12: *Pilathikaani* doing rituals using *Kokkara*

and industrialisation progress, the unique traits and knowledge of traditional Indigenous groups are increasingly at risk, making it vital to raise awareness within these groups about safeguarding their intellectual heritage.

- Initiatives should be included in organising numerous workshops within the Kaani community to explore the tangible and intangible aspects of their culture.

Conclusion

The study provides more insightful information on the Kaani indigenous ethnos in the Kanniyakumari district and is a modest attempt to document their distinctive characteristics, such as their beliefs, worship, and intellectual traditions. They only know a great deal of knowledge through oral tradition, which is slowly disappearing. Their administrative system, family, and social design exhibit a tremendous intellectual pattern to the outside world, and they only know how to live in harmony with nature. However, because the current generation is not adhering to the traditions, their beautiful natural way of life is being destroyed. Therefore, the Kaani people need to preserve their wisdom before it vanishes. A comprehensive investigation is necessary to save the more concealed information about the Kaani group.

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