



SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF MELAPALAYAM IN TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

This research article examines the social and economic life of the people in Melapalayam, a town located in the Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu. Melapalayam is a dynamic settlement with a rich cultural heritage, and its people display a unique blend of traditional values and modern influences. The study delves into the socio-cultural practices, community structures, and the role of local institutions in shaping daily life. It further investigates the economic activities that sustain the community, focusing on agriculture, trade, and small-scale industries. A significant portion of the population relies on agriculture for their livelihood, with crops like paddy, coconut, and vegetables being the mainstay. Additionally, the town has seen an increase in service and trade-based employment, especially in the retail and construction sectors. The research explores the challenges faced by the people, including limited access to advanced education, healthcare, and infrastructure. It also discusses the transformation of traditional livelihoods in response to urbanization, technological advancement, and economic shifts. By analyzing Melapalayam's social fabric and economic dynamics, this study offers insights into rural-urban transitions and provides a comprehensive understanding of how local communities adapt to changing economic and social landscapes in contemporary India.

Key words

Melapalayam, Tirunelveli, social and economic life of the people.

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Introduction

Melapalayam a sub area of Tirunelveli is located in Southeastern part of TamilNadu. Melapalayam the headquarter of present Tirunelveli Municipal Corporation Zonal office is situated six hundred and five kilometers to the South of Chennai on Tirunelveli – Nagercoil railway line and Palayamkottai – Ambasamudram highway.ⁱ It lies between 8° 5' and 9° 45' North Longitude and 77° 20' and 78° 20' east latitude. It is situated at a very little distance of about one Kilometer to the Thampiraparani river and at the banks of Palayam Channel. The Palayam Channel is running in a

semi circular shape touching the ends of many of the streets of this town in the west north and east. It is five kilometers away from Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli-Junction and Tirunelveli town. These four towns situated in tri-angular shape at equal distance. This town is bounded by Tirunelveli Junction (Veeraraghavapuram) in the north, Palayamkottai in the east. Karungulam, Munnirpallam, Melaseval and Gopalasamudram in the west and Paddy fields in the South. In 1983, Melapalayam Municipality comprises of Kulavanigarapuram and Keelaviraraghavapuram inner parts of Melapalayam revenue areas. As



per the Melapalayam Municipal Annual Report of 1981. Melapalayam town situated within the area of 16.83 square kilometers and the population of this town was 57680 in 1981 and rose to 68381 in 1991. In 2011, the Population was raised into more than two lakhs.

Melapalayam got its name by its location at the westernside of Palayamkottai. Another view is that the word “Melor Vazhum Palayam was shortened and came to be known as Melapalayam. A third view is that about forty Arabians from Egypt came to this place with the intention of spreading Islam and settled here which was then known as MangaiNadu or MangaiNallur and they called the place as Melarvazhumpalayam which was subsequently shortened as Melapalayam.

The ancestry of Melapalayam date back to the Megalithic age and Iron age. The evidences for this civilization had been discovered in Kunnathur Parambu near Melapalayam. In the early period Tirunelveli region including Melapalayam was called ThenPandya nagaram, Southern city of Pandya country because Madurai was the capital city of Pandya, it located northern side from Tirunelveli. Hence Tirunelveli called Then Pandya nagaram or Southern city of Pandya country.

Social life of the People

Social conditions of the people of Melapalayam discussed in various aspects and the social habits and customs, ornaments and food habits. A discussion of the Social conditions shows that the two new religions namely Christianity and Islam did much change the people. People of different castes like Muslims Maravas, Pallar, Parayers, Yadavas, Barbers, Vannars, Kammalas are dwelling in Melapalayam. Muslims constitutes the major portion of the Population in Melapalayam. The Population of Melapalayam in 1971 was 47,728. In 1981, it raised to 57680 and in 1991 was 68381. In 2011, the population was raised into more than two lakhs. In Melapalayam the Muslims are generally engaged in beedi Companies and in business. A Considerable numbers of Muslims are outside Melapalayam

engaging themselves either in business or as workers in the business centers.

The Muslims of Melapalayam adhere to the teachings of Islam and are active participants in religious observances, including daily prayers (Salah), the observance of fasting during Ramadan, and the celebration of key Islamic holidays such as Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. The town is home to several mosques, which are focal points of religious and community activities. These mosques also serve as educational centers, offering religious education to children and adults, thus ensuring the preservation of Islamic values and traditions. Social life in Melapalayam is closely linked to Islamic practices, with a strong emphasis on family values, respect for elders, and community solidarity. The social fabric is tightly woven through communal gatherings and support networks. Family and marriage customs are deeply rooted in Islamic principles, and social events, such as weddings, are celebrated with grandeur, involving the entire community. The Maravars constitute another important caste in Melapalayam next to the Muslims. Maravas are engaged in different professions like, agriculture, money lending, mansons and Milk Vendors. The Pallars and Parayers are form minor community in Melapalayam. They are engaged themselves in agriculture. The Kammalas are well organized community in Melapalayam. They are engaged themselves in making gold ornaments. Polishing stones and making iron and wooden materials. Few families of Yadava Community are living in Iyyarmanai at Melapalayam. Cattle rearing is their main occupation. The Nadars Community forms only a microscopic minority in Melapalayam. They were originally today tappers and Palmyra climbed. Arunthathiyers are very limited in Melapalayam. They are generally employee as scavengers sweepers and work as cobblers. Barbers setup small shop for hairdressing in Melapalayam. The barbers or Vannans are engaged in laundry work. A study on the Social life of the people of Melapalayam reveals that the Muslims form the major community. They occupies the major portion of



the areas and economically well off when comparing with the other communities. Though they form the majority, there is no communal strife in Melapalayam. All the communities irrespective of their caste and religious Co-operating for the smooth way of life. Here it is noted that there exists a mutual understanding among the various communities.

Economic Life of the People

The following features highlight the economic conditions of this Region agriculture, measurement of the land, tax system, occupations like spinning and weaving, beedi making, Pottery, trade and commerce and transport and communication. Melapalayam is swarmed of beedi making units that provide job to thousands of inhabitants. Wages earned from beedi making is the main source of income to the people. A striking feature is that females and children are working along with the male labours in the units, very few of the people of the town area are engaged in foreign trade. The weavers weave lungis, towels and bed sheets. The locally made carpets are well known all over the district and even exported to England. A section of inhabitants carry on farming. Arable lands in Melapalayam are irrigated by channels and seasonal rains. In 1915, a woman from Bombay came to Melapalayam and settled at Samayanakadai Mohideen Moopen street made beedies at her house then supplied to the local market. In 1920, Mr. Savukana of Alapillai street manufactured beedies at his house and sold them in local market and nearby villages.

In 1922, the Kamal beedi company was established. From 1935 onwards several beedi making units began to function. During 1937 – 1938 Chavi beedi Vairam mark beedi, Hanifa beedi works etc., were setup. Between 1950 to 1960 beedi making units like No. 5 Beedi, Syed Beedi, Kaja Beedi, M. S. P. Beedi, Yanai beedi, Chamathi Beedi units were setup. At present nearly 25 units with 85 branches are functioning. For the welfare of the weavers Melapalayam weavers Co-operative production and sales society was established on 16th, September,

1936. The star oil mill was started in 1949 by Janab K. M. Mohamed Abubacker and Janab Ibrahim. Jawahar Oil Mill was started in 1965 by Janab J. K. Ahamed Ali and Janab M. A. S. Mohamed Abubacker and Janab S. M. Ibrahim. Crescent bone Mill was started by Janab V. A. M. Kaja Mohideen in 1989 for making fertilizers.

Conclusion

The social and economic life of the people of Melapalayam in Tirunelveli district is a complex interplay of traditional practices and modern economic influences. The community, while deeply rooted in agricultural activities, is gradually adapting to the changing dynamics of urbanization, industrialization, and globalization. Agriculture remains the backbone of the economy, with significant reliance on crops such as paddy, coconut, and vegetables, but there has been a notable diversification into trade and service sectors. The emergence of small-scale industries and retail businesses has altered the local economic structure, offering new avenues of employment and income generation. Socially, the town remains closely knit, with strong community ties and a rich cultural heritage. However, challenges persist in terms of access to quality education, healthcare, and infrastructure, which continue to hinder the full realization of the community's potential. While technological advancements and urban expansion bring new opportunities, they also pose a risk to traditional livelihoods and cultural practices. The people of Melapalayam are undergoing a transitional phase, balancing the preservation of their heritage with the demands of modern economic and social life. For sustainable development, there is a need for targeted policies that address infrastructure gaps, enhance educational opportunities, and promote inclusive economic growth, ensuring that the community benefits from both its traditions and modern advancements.



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