

# **A STUDY ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS OF THE PATTARIYAR COMMUNITY**

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## **Abstract –**

Pattariyar community is a Hindu community residing in the Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. According to mythology, the community migrated to its present habitat from Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu. Pattariyar means the Aryas who made silk and they are noted as being Tamil migrants, with their name being a corruption of Pattusaliyar. The caste system prevalent in India is to make divisions and fractions among different Indian people. It plays a significant role that is not in practice in other countries. It is a unique and individual social system prevailing only in India particularly based on birth with specific restrictions on marriage, food, and social intercourse. The caste offers wide scope for every individual to act as a unique person among the people of the area where they live. It is well known how the Pattariyars have been migrating to different places and living there. They have also been adjusting to different places they lived and accommodated with them, at the same time preserving their tradition. They consider themselves to have migrated from Ayodhya in the North and living here presently. The Pattariyars of Kanniyakumari district are known as 'Pattariyar' and those of Tirunelveli district are known by the name Adaviyar. The Pattariyars are a minority community and they are backward in their economic status. For this reason, they have been kept under the Most Backward Classes by the government for the past 40 years. Pattariyar means the Aryas who made silk, They are noted as being Tamil migrants, with their name being a corruption of Pattusaliyar. Within the caste, the distinctions of sub-castes are basic for each may be ranked hierarchically just as the caste is ranked with the larger system. Each individual is traditionally a member of both a caste and sub-caste. Thus the Pattariyar community is one of the ancient communities of Tamilnadu with a hoary past, distinct customs and traditions, and comprising of eminent personalities who have enriched the society.

**Key Words:** Pattariyar - Hindu community – Kanchipuram – Pattusaliyar - Social intercourse – Accommodated – Ayodhya - Most Backward - Tamil migrants - Customs – Traditions

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Society in the Indian sub-continent has been segmented into several religions and caste groups. Castes occupy various levels on the ladder of the Hindu social hierarchy. Pattariyars is a Hindu community residing in the Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. According to oral history, the community migrated to its present habitat from Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu. Pattariyar means the Aryas who made silk and they are noted as being Tamil migrants, with their name being a corruption of Pattusaliyar.

## **CASTE SYSTEM:**

The caste system prevalent in India is to make divisions and fractions among different Indian people. It plays a significant role that is not in practice in other countries. It is a unique and individual social system prevailing only in India particularly based on birth with specific restrictions on marriage, food, and social intercourse. The caste offers wide scope for every individual to act as a unique person among the people of the area where they live. So the caste system is another significant feature in creating and promoting fractions and divisions among Indians which enables them to strengthen their highness. Amidst its role as a means for creating a schism, it is not all removed in India. The caste system of that period was an occupational traditional and hereditary one. Aryanism did not allow the Tamils to follow the caste traditions adopted by the alien intruders. The Tamils, due to their customs and traditions, were unwilling to accept the Aryan form of caste divisions.

## **ORIGIN OF THE PATTARIYAR COMMUNITY:**

The Pattariyars a great weaving caste of the Tamil country are strongly represented in every Tamil district. In the south, chief weaving centers are Nakapali and Payakaraopetta in Sarvasiddi taluk (of Anakapalli district of Andhra Pradesh state) the Pattu sales in the letter of which turn out the fabric of fine thread enriched with much gold and silver lace which is in great demand in the Godavari and Ganjam district of Andhra Pradesh. The etymology of the word Pattariyar gives different but appropriate meanings from time to time and by narrowing down the differences a more accurate and acceptable meaning can be evolved. While chronologically tracing it from different ages, it vividly confirms the privileged position enjoyed by the Pattariyar. According to the Tamil Lexicon, the Vaisya sect was referred to by different names which included the term *Pattariyar* also. The very same text confirms the involvement of the Pattariyar community in

three main occupations namely cattle rearing, earning wealth, and cultivation. Later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the 'Pattariyars' were *dubashis* providing a link between foreign traders and the local market thus playing an important role in business transactions. The Pattariyar community over the years due to several factors developed several sub-divisions or sub-sects. The various factors which accounted for the division of the Pattariyar community were the migration of Pattariyars from one area to another, settlement in new areas, change in their food habits, and change in the social scene.

**PATTARIYAR BELONGS TO AYODHYA:**

Pattariyars consider themselves as Aariyans, they came from the northern belt of the country towards the southern side and inhabited there. They passed this information to their downline generations which have now become known to many. It is believed that they came to the southern land from Ayodhya and after crossing many villages they reached Tirunelveli. Among these, one section of the people moved further toward the south and another section moved toward the west. The people who moved towards the extreme south inhabited in the Kanniyakumari district. Through reliable sources it has been known that the people who live in Mayavaram, Veeranalloor, Pathamadai, and Kottar have moved from Ayodhya due to certain difficulties they faced there. Some of the people moved from Ayodhya towards the southwest to Kerala and are living in various places there. They observed Malayalam as their mother tongue. It is well known how the Pattariyars have been migrating to different places and living there. They have also been adjusting to different places they lived and accommodated with them, at the same time preserving their tradition. The Pattariyars of Kanniyakumari district are known as 'Pattariyar' in the records and those of Tirunelveli district are known by the name *Adaviyar*. This leads to the theory that most of them might have gone to different places and are living there with different names. Pattariyar has the custom of wearing the sacred thread on their body. But now most of them are not wearing it, except a few who continue to wear it. Pattariyars are vegetarians, but now many of them have changed as non-vegetarians. The Pattariyars are a minority community and they are backward in their economic status. For this reason, they have been kept under the Most Backward Classes (MBC) by the government for the past 40 years. [In the voting schedule, the one who is preferred most is voted for the post and he takes responsibility for the village and administration. The voted representative looks after the land details and those who have the voting right should pay the tax every year].

**WEAVING COMMUNITY:**

Weavers have always occupied a very important place in society since very early times, as clothing is one of the basic needs of man. References to the skill of the weavers are found in the Sangam works and the Sanskrit epigraphs of the succeeding periods confirm high position accorded to them. The weaving community in Madras is an entirely different race from that in Bengal and the north-western provinces. Also, the Telugu weavers are distinct from the Tamils and maintain no social mingling with them and they bear separate names, Even when the Telugu weavers move from their own country and settle among the Tamils and vice versa, they keep themselves distinct from the weaver tribes among whom they are located. The weaving community in the Thanjavur region consists of traditional indigenous as well as foreign stock. *Kaikolars* and *Chaliyas* were important indigenous groups, whereas the *Ceniars*, *Cedars*, *Kannadiyars*, and *Pattunulkarars* formed the foreign stock. Among the indigenous groups, the Kaikolas were found (scattered by) throughout the Thanjavur region.

**SILK WEAVERS:**

Pattariyar means the Aryas who made silk, They are noted as being Tamil migrants, with their name being a corruption of *Pattusaliyar*. According to tradition, Pattariyars migrated to their present habitat from Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu. This migration is recalled in oral tradition. It is learned that their migration was due to the quarrel with the king of Kanchipuram long ago. They also claim to have come from North India as silk weavers. Silk is a thread evolving from a worm, which is known as a silkworm. This insect is soft and light and white in colour. When it matures it becomes an insect. When it gets a place for building its nest in a mulberry tree, it surrounds itself with the secretion emanating from below its chin. That liquid when it comes in contact with air forms into thread. When this insect comes out of its shell, that shell is dipped in warm water, and silk thread is obtained from that. The silk weavers come originally from Gujarat reason and speak the language of that country.

**PATTUNOOLKARAR**

They are also known to have come from Gujarat. They consider themselves as Saurashtra Brahmins migrated from Saurashtra. Most of them are Vaishnavites and some of them are *Vadamar*. They have adopted the style of the Brahmins, but their women do not look like the Brahmin women. Their occupation is weaving silk thread. They were much respected as belonging to a high order during the time of Rani Mangammal who ruled over Madurai. They were driven out of their own country and they came to the southern lands and finally reached Madurai. They form four types of people; they are Gounder, Saliar, Vaithiyar, and Paudular, which is the same as Mudalvar, Moothor, Vaithiyar, and Vaitheegar.

**Pattinavar**

These are sea-faring people spreading over the land from River Krishna to Kanniyakumari, along the eastern seas of India, but they are different from the fisher folk. As they stay at the shore, they are also known as 'Karaiyar'. Pattinavar also means people (Pattinathullar) living in towns nearby the sea. Another version says that because they were silk for Lord Siva they were known as Pattanavar. There lived a man named Thasarajan who was ruling at Hastinapuram. He had no children and so he was observing 'thavam' (contemplation) to pray to Lord Siva. The latter accepted to his prayer and showed a pond full of lotus telling him to call his children. When that man did according to what he heard from Siva, there arose five thousand children. The eldest of them was bestowed with the rule of the country and the rest of them were given a lot of wealth. All others except the eldest boarded a ship and landed at places along the sea, befriending the inland 'Chembadavar' (fisherfolk), and were engaged in the profession of those at the sea. These Pattinavar make two tribes, they are *Chinna Pattinavar* and *Peria Pattinavar*. They have titles as *Ariyar*, *Iyayirathalaivar*, *Aryanattu Chettigal*, *Acchu Vellalar*, *Karaithurai Vellalar*, *Varunakula Vellalar*, *Varunakula Mudali*, *Gurukula Vamsathar*, *Pillai*, etc. These are considered at a higher status than the inland fisherfolk. The majority of them are Saivaites and they worship many other deities, their clan deities are *Kuttiandavan*, *Paavadairayan*, and *Padaithalai Theivam*. The leader of their tribe was *Yajamanan*. Their other customs are similar to that of the Hindus.

**EDUCATIONAL STATUS:**

Women were mainly doing weaving work. They made a weaving loom for themselves and did the weaving. They had to struggle to get some income for their family. Due to the current situation of the high level of education, they are now more involved in academic studies. Most of the people belonged Pattariyar community are literates who know to read and write. But people placed in high positions with advanced education are rare to find among these people.

**ECONOMIC STATUS:**

The Pattariyars are the most backward in their economic status. All those belonging to the Pattariyar community are not wealthy or prosperous. Most of them are middle class and backward in their economic status. As they were depending on their weaving profession earlier, they did not give importance to education. So they remained backward in economic status. Some of them are forced to discontinue their studies due to their poor economic background.

**CONCLUSION:**

The Pattariyars of Kanyakumari were the migrants of the Kanchipuram region. They had consistently held high positions in the society from the Sangam age to the modern period. Whenever there was an attempt at the degradation of their social status, they were quick to rise against that as it happened during the enumeration of the census of 1871, and very zealously guarded their social status. Though one speaks of the endogamy of a caste, traditionally each caste or jati has been a category embracing several endogamous sub-castes. Within the caste, the distinctions of sub-castes are basic for each may be ranked hierarchically just as the caste is ranked with the larger system. Each individual is traditionally a member of both a caste and sub-caste. Thus the Pattariyar community is one of the ancient communities of Tamilnadu with a hoary past, distinct customs and traditions, and comprising of eminent personalities who have enriched the society.

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