

Cross Section of Ethnic Culture in Lakshadweep: A Study

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Abstract

This paper through lights upon the various realm of Lakshadweep culture which makes it unique and rich. It discusses religious practices, customs, legends, core language in the 17th century, and literature and caste system of Lakshadweep community.

Lakshadweep and its culture very much in the forefront. It is believed that Hazrath Ubaid Ulla, the founder of Islam in Lakshadweep inspired the Hindu people of the ancient island to convert their religion. Thus Islam became popular to Lakshadweep and today each and every one in the island religiously follows the traditions of Muslim sects. Since Lakshadweep is situated near one of the beautiful states of India-Kerala it is but obvious that evidences of the cultural influences of that place are found in abundance.

KEYWORDS: Lava, ethnic, Lakshadweep, Koya, Melecheri, Island

Introduction:

Culture is the word for people's "way to life" meaning the way groups do things. Different groups of people may have different cultures. Culture is exhibited in people's writing, religion, music, clothes, cooking, and in what they do and is passed on from one generation to another. Cultures are what make countries unique. Each country has different cultural activities and cultural rituals. Culture is more than just material goods, that is things culture uses and produces. Culture is also the beliefs and values of the people in that country. It also includes the way people think about and understand the world and their own lives.

Lakshadweep culture presents a pulsating forum of diversified customs and rituals. Predominantly inhabited by followers of Islamic religion, the people of Lakshadweep celebrated many folk festivals by performing the popular dance from "Lava". Adding colour to the cultural vibrancy of the islands are the two art variations-"paricha kali and kolkali".

The religious customs that are followed by the people of Lakshadweep are all a part of the age-old religion which has moulded the beliefs of the local people in its own ways. From "muharram, Bakrid to Milad-u-nnabi and Id-ul-fitr, the festivals symbolize the vibrant culture of Lakshadweep. Lakshadweep is not just a land of unparalleled scenic beauty and stunning biodiversity, it has an intriguing history to narrate.

Discussion:

Like the rest of India, Lakshadweep too had to put up monarchical dominance and colonial rule in the past. Historical records confirm that the island was home to the cheras before the pallavas annexed it in the seventh century. By the fourteenth century, Lakshadweep fell in to the hands of Muslim. The Muslim rulers not only governed the

place but also left a lasting impression on the culture of the land. Although Lakshadweep came under the dominance of diverse rulers, very few empires managed to influence the land as much as the Muslim traders did.

The supremacy of the Arakkal family continued even after the invasion of the Portuguese and the Dutch rulers in the seventeenth century. Once the British East India Company completely took over the region in the eighteenth century, the Arakkal clan was forced to cede its power to the colonial rulers.

People of the islands are known for their honest and jovial nature with which they make the Lakshadweep culture a strong and attractive dimension of the place. Categorized in various sections, the people of Lakshadweep collectively form a unified platform. Aminidivi, Koyas, Malmis and Melacharis are the prime human communities of Lakshadweep. Belonging to diverse sects, they follow their respective religious rituals and also participate in the festivals of other groups with equal enthusiasm. The main languages of Lakshadweep are Malayalam and Mahal. The culture of these beautiful islands speaks the centuries-old religious traditions. At present most of the people of Lakshadweep are Muslims. Also there are several ethnic groups found in the place that populate the entire region of Lakshadweep.

Out of the thirty-six islands that form the archipelago of Lakshadweep, only ten are inhabited. Kavarathi is the headquarters of Lakshadweep islands. A majority of the population lives in joint families. Those who don't have government jobs, find their living from coconut tree plantation and fishing. Lakshadweep could be called as the hub of customs and rituals. We could observe a sense of unity in their works. Except Minicoy, all the other islands are ethnically the same, speaking the same language. Various local customs have sprung up in each island. Minicoy Islanders are experts in sailing. "Aminidivi" group is the original human community that once started habitation process in the land of Lakshadweep. An island named Amini was gradually formed by the local people which today are a bustling habitat of Aminidivis.

"Koyas" are yet another interesting ethnic group of Lakshadweep. Once referred by the name of "karanavar" or "Taravadis" those people used to preside over the panjayaths of the island. Usually the people of KOYA communities follow their own festival and uphold a separate and proud heritage of their own. Connecting the word sailor, the community of "Malmis" evolved under the supervision of the koyas. The people of this group are found serving the heads of koya community by transporting vessels from one place to another. Also some skilled Malmis workers also assist the KOYA people reading the nautical texts.

The Melacharis community is involved with the profession of gathering nuts of coconut trees. Known as the core working section of Lakshadweep, the community lives in the west of land. It can be said that the people of Lakshadweep are a true manifestation of cultural unification and social enrichment. Dishing out a delicious variety of sea-food with ample mix-up of coconut is the specialty of Lakshadweep cuisines. The culinary influence of Kerala is quite evident in the cuisines of Lakshadweep.

The obsession to colour gets reflected in their use of colour in every walk of life. Painting of houses, boats and even furniture of uniquely done, especially in Minicoy. In fact, villages of Minicoy have a definite colour for each of them and all houses of that particular village are painted the same colour. Replicas of boats painted in bright hues are also used for colouring homes. Lakshadweep music like its culture is reminiscent of Kerala because the people who inhabit Lakshadweep originally hailed from Kerala. Even language used Malayalam is same for both places.

Till the seventh century the predominant religion was Hinduism which changed later with the coming of Hazrath Ubaid Ulla and today 100 percentage of the population of Lakshadweep is Muslims. This explains the cultural mingling of art and crafts in Lakshadweep. Culturally, the people of Lakshadweep resemble very much with the kernelates. This fined reflection in the arts and crafts of Lakshadweep too. Over the years, those incidents resulted the in the development of a new cultural fabric interwoven with the old. Today the music of Lakshadweep highly influenced by Islam. Singing talk ballads depicting stories of the historical past is common during family occasions and festivals. The theme various from incidents relating to the arrival of Hazrath Ubaidulla in the archipelago of Lakshadweep, to the ransack of the islands by the Portuguese. The heliodor with his immense talent keeps everybody engaged in the stories. Marriage performance in variably see "Oppana" that refers to a song sung by a lead singer and followed immediately by a group of women.

Conclusion:

Lakshadweep has progressed phenomenally from the days when education in the union territory was limited to the sacred instructions of the Koran. The states reorganization act, 1956 marked a phenomenal change in the island's academic scenario. The first over government school to open doors in Lakshadweep was established at Amini on 15 January 1904. This was a landmark occasion in the island's academic history. The children attended the madrasas in the morning that was mandatory for securing their religious believes. The government schools in Lakshadweep taught only the fundamentals of arithmetic, Canarese and Malayalam. The Minicoy high school was the first school to be set up in Minicoy Island in 1891. The union territory also has its own Kendriya Vidyalaya and Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya that are centers of academic excellence. The Lakshadweep colleges are mainly affiliated to the University of Calicut. With the growing interest in higher education among the aborigines and the indigenes tribes, colleges started mushrooming in the ten inhabited islands of the exquisite archipelago.

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