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### Labbai

#### Community of India

The Labbi, also known as Labbe, are a Tamil-speaking community distributed throughout Tamil Nadu, certain parts of Pondicherry, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Labbai means one who listened to the divine call first. They are traders and betel-vine growers. In Thurston's (1909) account, the Labbai are summed up from the Madras Census Report of 1901 as being "a Musalman caste of partly Tamil origin, having sub-divisions like Kodaikhal, Kodaiklar of Kodikkallacaram, the members of which are traders and betel vine (Poiper Betle) growers".

Nanjundayya and Iyer (1931) quote Col. Wilks, the historian of Mysore as follows: "About the end of the first century of Hejirah, or early part of eighth century A.D., Hijaj Ben Yusuff, Governor of Iraq, a monster abhorred for his cruelties even among the Musalmans drove some persons of the house of Hashem to the desperate resolution of abandoning forever their native country. Some of them landed on the part of Western Coast called the Concan, and the others to the eastward of Cape Comorin. The descendants of the former are the Navaits while those of the latter Labbai, a name probably given to them by the Arabian particle (modification of Labbick) corresponding to the English, 'Here I am'."

In Tamil Nadu, the Labbai are called Kodikkalkaran (betel-vine people). According to the 1931 census, the Labbai had a population of 374,929 (176,671 males and 1,98,158 females), returned mainly from Madras, Travancore and Mysore states.

Tamil is their mother tongue and they use the Tamil script. They are non-vegetarian and rice, *ragi* and wheat form their staple cereals. Some men consume alcoholic drinks occasionally.

They are divided into four distinct groupings: the Rawther, Labbai, Marakkayar and Kayalar. Since the generic name for the community is the same as one of the four subgroups, the term 'Labbai' is used here only for the subgroup, the whole group being termed Muslim Tamils. Slightly less than 5 per cent of Tamilnadu's population is Muslims, with perhaps 80 per cent of these (approximately 2 million) being Muslim Tamils.

The remaining Muslims, most of whom live in Tamilnadu's cities, belong to various other communities including the Mappillas, who are Malayalam speakers, and Urdu-speaking communities including the Shaikh, Sayyid, Sharif, Pathan, Ismaili, Navayat, Daudi Bohra, Wahhabi and a catch-all group, the Deccani.

The Muslim Tamils are descendants of Arab traders and local converts. They are an autochthonous population which bears the stamp of Tamil culture and the political heritage, not of conquest and rule such as northern Muslims have experienced, but of mercantilism and integration. Since they are the indigenous population, they speak Tamil as their household language.

Among those living in cities, Urdu is also frequently used, although it is less commonly claimed as a first language. Under the influence of Arab culture in certain coastal towns, such as Nagappattinam and Kayalpatnam, some Muslims