

The Lost Landscapes and Livelihood: A Case Study of the Alu Kurumba of Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu

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Abstract: *This paper attempts to understand the process of occupational transformation that has taken place among the Alu Kurumba tribe in the broader context of 'the changed Nilgiris situation' by placing emphasis on their local knowledge systems and natural resource use pattern. As already mentioned, the Nilgiris has been in focus for the last one hundred years due to expansion of the tourism industry, growth of plantations, horticulture, etc. The local knowledge systems of this community, about its environment in its own terms, have been documented before such knowledge vanish away from these modernizing tribal people. Another important contribution and significant finding of this study is that a clarification has emerged on the conceptualization of the social structure of the Alu Kurumba society. The earlier incorrect interpretation of the Alu Kurumba social organization by Dieter B.Kapp (1989), which remained unacceptable even to the Alu Kurumba community when explained, also got corrected through this study.*

Keywords: Alu Kurumba; Nilgiri; family; settlement.

INTRODUCTION

Alarming ecological instability and environmental degradation that have occurred in recent years has proved that the industrial or urban societies, due to their over-exploitative nature and greed have greatly destroyed the vital natural resources worldwide for their modern ways of living. Whereas it has been also understood through anthropological studies that the non-industrial societies who live in close association with nature for generations, have largely contributed for conservation of the natural resources either directly or indirectly by their non-destructive ways of utilizing the environmental resources. For centuries, the traditional village communities collectively managed their vital natural resources, mainly to meet their basic needs, thus ensuring a sustainable use of these natural resources. In fact, colonial rule brought in the first radical change in resource use in the Indian subcontinent and it gradually transformed natural resources for the growth of commercial economic activity and for generating revenue and profit. For instance, the commercially and industrially valuable crops replaced large tracts of indigenous mixed forests which had a high use value for ecological stability. Endorsing this

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perspective, this paper attempts to elicit the bits and pieces of traditional wisdom that is still remaining among a former hunter-gatherer tribal society, i.e. Alu Kurumba of Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu of south India. It must be noted here that, like several other hunter-gatherer groups, the Alu Kurumba too have been greatly subjected to rapid commercialization in their own ancestral landscapes and eventually got dispossessed of their traditional rights over the land and forest resources under the stringent forest rules and regulations.

AREA OF STUDY

The Nilgiris, popularly called 'Blue Mountains' in Tamil Nadu was chosen for this study as it happens to be an important biosphere reserve, identified as such under the 'Man and the Environment' programme launched by UNESCO. The Nilgiri mountains are located between 11°10' and 11°30' North latitude and between 76°25' and 77°00' East longitude at the junction of the Eastern Ghats and the Western Ghats, or Sahyadris, the two prominent mountain ranges that run almost parallel to the Coast lines of peninsular India.

Though the Nilgiris and its communities have been studied extensively by several agencies and scholars, a fresh study under the Anthropological Survey of India's project was felt necessary from the point of view of updating the earlier accounts and to document the occupational transformation that has taken place among the tribal communities. In order to document the rapidly vanishing indigenous ways of natural resource utilization and traditional practices of conservation, it has been decided to study a Scheduled Tribe in Nilgiris which was mainly dependant on natural resources but forced to change its traditional occupation recently. The Alu Kurumba tribe living in the mountainous forests of the Kotagiri-Mettupalayam stretches of Nilgiris, hunters and gatherers by tradition but now totally drawn into the plantation economy of the Nilgiri district, has been considered apt for the present study.

According to a study jointly conducted by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment (Bangalore), National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA - Hyderabad) and University of Massachusetts (USA) on the hilly regions of South-West Karnataka, Western Kerala and North-West Tamil Nadu i.e. Nilgiris, there has been a loss of one-fourth of the forest cover in Western Ghats between 1973 and 1995. The study attributed decrease in forest area primarily due to increase in plantations and agricultural areas as a result of population growth (Deccan Herald, September 9, 2000). In fact, from 1850s onwards the British had started promoting commercial crops in Nilgiris with the help of immigrant settlers. Large tracts of natural forests had been turned into coffee, tea, pine and eucalyptus plantations. In this process, a number of forest dwelling tribes such as, Irulas and Alu Kurumba also have been converted into small tea and coffee planters. The settlements of the

Irula and Alu Kurumba tribes, which were located in interior forests, were gradually shifted to the outskirts of forests and the Government allotted permanent residential sites to them. In spite of being drawn into the plantation economy, still, the Alu Kurumba and Irula tribes of Nilgiris, have been reported to be possessing immense knowledge of the flora, fauna and other natural resources of their original habitat. The fact is also that the ecological zone occupied by the Irula and Alu Kurumba tribes, i.e. the lower ranges in the eastern slopes of Nilgiris, comprises mainly reserve forests and is considered important for its bio-diversity. Until these areas were encroached by commercial plantations, the Irula and Alu Kurumba had remained primarily as hunter-gatherers and small millet cultivators using slash and burn method.

PEOPLE OF THE NILGIRIS: PAST AND PRESENT

The Nilgiri Communities and the terrain of the Nilgiri Plateau have long attracted interest because of their typical characteristics. The entire district is hilly and endowed with scenic beauty and forests. It is surrounded on the north by Karnataka State, northwest by Kerala State, on the south east by Coimbatore district and north east by Periyar district of Tamil Nadu State. Innumerable studies have been conducted on Nilgiris and its people during the last several years. The first report is by a European, Father Jacome Finicio, which tells us of the remarkable groups who shared the Nilgiri uplands during 1603. The Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas and Badagas formed a social system in Nilgiris; the Todas practiced pastoralism, the Kotas were artisans, musicians and cultivators. The Kurumbas and Irulas on the jungle edges of the plateau were gatherers, hunters and swidden cultivators. The Kurumbas also provided magical services to the other three groups and were much dreaded by them as sorcerers. These tribesmen knew that together they had been the sole inhabitants of the Nilgiri Plateau until the Badaga agriculturists arrived as refugees, beginning in the sixteenth century. The Badagas (a non-tribe) became the numerically dominant group and the main cultivating community in Nilgiris. The Kurumba provided the Toda, Kota and Badaga with honey, baskets, bamboo and rattan for house building. As sorcerers, the Kurumba were also said to remove or prevent misfortune among the Toda, Kota and Badaga. From the Toda, Kota and Badaga, the Kurumba obtained dairy products (from Toda), pottery, axes, knives (from Kota) and grains (from Badaga) in reciprocation of their magical services and supply of honey and bamboo.

From the early 19th century, when the British officials occupied the plateau and settled there around 1820s, the Nilgiri was transformed into an integral part of British imperial regime. As stated by Mandelbaum (1989) and Walker (1986), during the colonial period, a military base was built near Coonoor (known as Wellington), extensive tea and coffee plantations were established, missionary institutions were

opened up and Nilgiri was developed as a health and recreational resort for Europeans in South India. To work as plantation labourers and to do business, a lot of people migrated to these hills from plains (which now include Tamils, Kannadigas, Keralites including Moplah Muslims and Syrian Christians, Telugus, the Kutchis, the Sindhis, the Marwaris, the Anglo-Indians etc). The agricultural innovations introduced from the early 19th century onwards effected further economic change among these indigenous groups of Nilgiris. The Badaga farmers slowly became potato (and carrot, beans, cabbage, garlic, etc) cultivators and tea planters while Kurumba and Irula took up as plantation labourers in tea and coffee estates developed by the British. As Walker (1986) points out, the traditional interdependence of the indigenous groups in Nilgiris has almost ceased to exist, by atleast the beginning of this century.

THE KURUMBA TRIBAL CONGLOMERATION IN NILGIRIS

It must be mentioned here that the name Kurumba/Kuruba denotes a very big cluster of Kannada speaking shepherds who live in various parts of Tamil Nadu, especially in the plains bordering Karnataka State, and they are part and parcel of the village society and caste system of Karnataka Tamil Nadu. The Kurumba/Kuruba shepherd communities of the plains of Tamil Nadu enjoy the OBC status. Incidentally, the small forest dwelling groups of Nilgiris also use 'Kurumba' or Kurumban or Kurumbar suffixes with their independent names but they are no way connected to the caste or village society based Kurumba/Kuruba shepherd communities of the plains of Tamil Nadu. Therefore the Government maintains area restrictions in this case as 'Kurumbas (in the Nilgiri district)' at Serial No. 17 in the Tamil Nadu Scheduled Tribes list, mainly to distinguish the Nilgiris based small forest dwelling groups, and extend the Scheduled Tribe status only to these groups.

The different Kurumba groups of Nilgiris district are, 1. Alu Kurumba, also known as Pal Kurumba or Palu Kurumbar 2. Betta Kuru(m)ba also known as Urali Kurumba or Urali Kuruman 3. Mullu Kurumba also known as Kuruman or Mullu Kuruman and 4. Jenu Kuru(m)ba or Kattunayakan. Even today, the Government departments and the local administration in Nilgiris district, consider the Kurumbas as a single tribe for all practical purposes. No separate figures have been made or do exist for the distinct groups of the Kurumba cluster in Nilgiris.

The Alu Kurumba live mainly on the Mettupalayam-Coonoor-Kotagiri-Kundah mountain stretches of Nilgiris district and in the adjoining Silent Valley/Attappady areas of Kerala State. A section of this community also lives in Erode and Sathyamangalam forest areas in Tamil Nadu. It must be noted here that most of the earlier studies and documents on Nilgiris that make a mention of Kurumba or Kurumbas of Nilgiris as practioners of witchcraft, sorcery, and so on, in conjunction

with descriptions of the Toda, Kota and Irular tribes of Nilgiris, are all only about the Alu Kurumba subgroup and not the other subgroups.

The living areas of the Betta Kuru(m)ba (or Urali Kurumba) in Tamil Nadu fall only in the Gudalur and Pandalur taluks of Nilgiri district. The Urali Kurumba/ Urali Kuruman in Kerala and Betta Kurumba in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka States comprise one and the same group. The Betta Kurumba are also found to be living adjacent to the Jenu Kurubas in the Wayanad plateau, near the Bandipur National Park (Karnataka) and the Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary (Tamil Nadu).

The Jenu Kuru(m)ba occupy mainly the tri-junction area of Karnataka-Tamil Nadu-Kerala States i.e. the erstwhile Mysore- Nilgiris- Wayanad forested mountain stretches. In Tamil Nadu, the Jenu Kuru(m)ba, otherwise known as Ththen Kuruman or Kattunayakan, live only in Gudalur and Pandalur taluks. Description on the Jenu Kuru(m)ba, is provided under the entry Kattunayakan, another PTG of Tamil Nadu, who are listed separately at Serial No. 9 in the Scheduled Tribes list of Tamil Nadu.

The Mullu Kurumba settlements are found only in the Cherangode village Panchayat of Pandalur taluk in Nilgiri district, in and around Erumad and Kappala villages. But a large number of the Mullu Kurumba live in the adjoining Wayanad district of Kerala, constituting a single and integrated group irrespective of their distribution in two States. Except the Mullu Kurumba, the other three Kurumba subgroups speak a dialect of Kannada. The Mullu Kurumba speak a dialect of Malayalam and largely imitate the customs and practices of the Kerala communities. In Kerala, about 25,000 Mullu Kurumba are reported to live in approximately 250 settlements in the whole of Wayanad district.

The Population of Kurumbas, including all the Kurumba subgroups, and other PTGs living in Nilgiris, as per the 'Socio-Economic Survey of Scheduled Tribes in Nilgiris District' conducted during 2010-11 by the Tribal Research Centre, Ooty is furnished in Table 1.

The Alu Kurumba, who are scattered around the middle and lower belts of Nilgiri district live in 41 settlements in the Kotagiri, Coonoor and Kundah taluks of the district. As per the 2011 baseline survey, it is estimated that the Alu Kurumba alone constitute a population of 1765 with 529 households in Nilgiri district. Their habitations are usually suffixed with the terms *Kombai* or *Kombay* and *Oor* or *Ur*) e.g. Manja Kombai, Vellari Kombai, Kula Kombai, Kaval Kombai, Jogi Kombai, Pudur Kombai, Kalloor, Araiyoor, Baviyur, Kambaiyur, etc. According to the Alu Kurumba, the term *Alu* is said to denote milk in Kannada, and the same is denoted by the term *Pal* or *Palu* in Tamil. It should be noted here that when Thurston conducted study on the Kurumba tribe in Nilgiris, no such nomenclature like, Alu Kurumba was reported. The identity Alu Kurumba is said to be a recent development

Table 1

<i>Name of the PTG</i>		<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Toda	No.	673	697	1370
	%	49.12	50.88	100.00
Toda Christian	No.	125	113	238
	%	52.52	47.48	100.00
Kota	No.	991	1033	2024
	%	48.96	51.04	100.00
Alu Kurumba	No.	869	896	1765
	%	49.24	50.76	100.00
Betta Kurumba	No.	1584	1778	3362
	%	47.11	52.89	100.00
Mullu Kurumba	No.	726	699	1425
	%	50.94	49.05	100.00
Irular	No.	2974	3046	6020
	%	49.40	50.60	100.00
Kattunayakan	No.	1261	1219	2480
	%	50.85	49.15	100.00
Paniyan	No.	3881	4001	7882
	%	49.24	50.76	100.00
Total	No.	13084	13482	26566
	%	49.25	50.75	100.00

among the Kurumbas, probably a few decades old phenomenon, in Nilgiris. When asked about how they acquired this name, the Alu Kurumba in the study settlements responded that they were good and harmless like the milk, i.e. *Alu* (in Kannada) or *Palu* (in Tamil), hence they acquired the name Alu (or Palu) Kurumbas. It is quite possible that in order to clear out or impair the negative opinion vested on them by the local people, due to their traditional practices of sorcery and witchcraft, probably the Kurumbas (of this part of Nilgiris) themselves might have added up a new prefix of *Alu or Palu* (meaning milk) with their general identity of Kurumba, for an improved status and wider acceptability in the rapidly changing Nilgiri social system.

In the following pages, the original descriptions of the study made during 1998-99 are provided without alteration. The socio-economic details provided for the two selected settlements of Banagudi Solai and Baviyur also pertain to the 1998-99 survey and scenario.

SETTLEMENTS CHOSEN FOR STUDY

It has been already mentioned that the tribal community selected for the present study, i.e. the Alu Kurumba, live in 41 settlements through the long and narrow belt of sloping forest falling mainly in the Kotagiri, Coonoor and Kundah taluks of the Nilgiri district in Tamil Nadu. In most of these settlements, at present, the Alu Kurumba are found to be working as plantation labourers in tea and coffee estates of neighbouring Badaga community and in the estates owned by outsiders. Besides this occupation, with the technical and financial assistance of the UPASI (United Planters Association of South India) and Coffee Board (Government of India), many of the Alu Kurumba in these settlements have started developing their own small tea and coffee plantations as 'small growers', in recent years. However, in interior settlements, the Alu Kurumba still involve in their traditional occupations of slash and burn cultivation to cultivate small millets for self-consumption and ritual purposes, in the available small patches. Gathering of roots, tubers, herbs and collection of honey is still pursued by some of them besides their primary occupation of wage labour in tea and coffee plantations. That way, the traditional wisdom in retaining the indigenous knowledge on forest resources, and sustainable use of these natural resources, thereby indirectly contributing to the conservation of these resources, has not totally disappeared among the Alu Kurumba, yet. Keeping this in view, two settlements of Alu Kurumba have been chosen for study. One of the two settlements is chosen in such a way that it is located nearer to or at the periphery of forests and away from the urban agglomeration of the Kotagiri town, so that most part of the documentation of their indigenous knowledge on natural resources is accomplished here. A settlement called Baviyur, situated 30 kms away from the Kotagiri Town and falling exactly at the periphery of forests, has been chosen for this purpose. In Baviyur, both tea and coffee are grown. Plantation labour forms the secondary source of income for the Alu Kurumba here. Whereas, the other settlement chosen for study, namely, Banagudi Solai is situated close to the Kotagiri town at a distance of 8 kms, amidst the tea estates and villages of the dominant Badaga community. Banagudi Solai, is relatively a new settlement. As part of rehabilitation package, the Government of Tamil Nadu during late 1980s has developed small tea plantations here for the Alu Kurumba. Almost all the adults in this settlement work as plantation labourers, besides owning small tea gardens. The purpose of selecting Banagudi Solai for study is to document and understand the process of relocation, rehabilitation and the subsequent occupational transformation that has taken place among the Alu Kurumba community.

1. Banagudi Solai

It is exclusively an Alu Kurumba settlement, located within the Jackanarai village panchayat in the Kotagiri taluk of the Nilgiri district. It falls at a distance of 8

kms from the Kotagiri town bus stand. A mud road emanating from the settlement joins the bus stop or tar road, which is two kilometers away from the settlement towards south. The bus stop actually falls in the neighbouring Badaga village Kesalada. For minor grocery purchases, the Alu Kurumba visit either Kesalada village or the Moonu Road Tea Factory area, falling two kilometres north of the settlement. Using the pathways that run from the settlement through the tea gardens, they reach the Moonu Road Tea Factory area to make their purchases or to board the buses.

Medical facility to the Banagudi Solai settlement is extended by the Nilgiri Adivasi Welfare Association (NAWA) hospital at Kotagiri. An another hospital run by the NAWA at Kolikarai, 15 kms away from Banagudi Solai, also provides medical facilities to both Alu Kurumba and Irula tribes of this area. The nearest post office for Banagudi Solai is situated four kilometres away at the Aravenu village, which is falling on the Kotagiri-Mettupalayam highway.

Drinking water is supplied to this settlement from Kesalada village. Water taps exist at five different places inside the settlement without much use. Often, the motor that lifts water from the bore well (at Kesalada) goes out of order and remains unattended for months together. This time, for the last four months, there has been no water supply due to motor fault. However, a tap connected to the settlement through PVC pipe and bamboo splits from the nearby stream, provides limited water to the inhabitants almost throughout the year. The Alu Kurumba themselves have found out this alternate water supply system. This kind of natural water stream is termed as *madu* by the Alu Kurumba.

Street lamps have been installed inside the settlement but individual houses have not been provided with electricity connection. Five years ago, the Kotagiri Panchayat Union Office provided 'Solar lamp cum Battery' free of cost to all the families living in Banagudi Solai. Out of the 26 lamps provided, 20 were in condition and six were out of order, during our field work period. They use solar power to operate radio-sets and tape-recorders.

A Balwadi exists in the settlement to provide noon-meal and education to children below five years of age. The Nilgiri Adivasi Welfare Association (NAWA) runs Balwadi in several tribal settlements of Nilgiris, including Banagudi Solai under the Christian Children's Fund scheme. For primary education and above, children belonging to the Kota, Irula and Alu Kurumba communities attend a Tribal Residential High School at Aravenu, a place four kilometres away from Banagudi Solai.

As far as the existing housing facilities are concerned, out of the 38 households built in Banagudi Solai, 18 are old tiled houses constructed by Government in 1964 and the remaining 20 are concrete roofed houses recently built in 1990 through

Jawahar Rozgar Yojna scheme. All these houses are small in size with one living room and a verandah. A portion of the living room is used as kitchen.

Before proceeding further, a brief story of the settlement of Banagudi Solai needs to be furnished here, in order to understand the relocation and rehabilitation policies which were pursued with regard to the forest dwelling communities and also in the broader context of expansion of plantations and interference of the same in the tribal life in Nilgiris. Before 1964, there were only some bushes in the place where Banagudi Solai is located presently. At that time, the Alu Kurumba were living further down in a valley under forest cover, in a place called Manaliada. They lived there by cultivating small millets under the shifting cultivation method. Besides, they also survived by gathering wild food and earned some cash by growing mulberry and coffee. In order to evict the Alu Kurumba from interior forests and to relocate them in permanent settlements outside the forests, the settlement of Banagudi Solai was developed by the Government in 1964. By relocating the Alu Kurumba families living in Manaliada to Banagudi Solai, a place surrounded by tea plantations of the dominant Badaga community, the Government has been successful in reducing the dependence of Alu Kurumba on forest resources. The Alu Kurumba were subsequently forced to take up plantation labour as the primary source of survival. In course of time the mulberry and coffee gardens developed by them at Manaliada were also destroyed by wild animals. Meanwhile, the Government has taken steps to develop small tea gardens for the Alu Kurumba in their new settlement of Banagudi Solai. About 15 acres of forest land was converted for agricultural purpose in 1983 and in that land, each Alu Kurumba family was given 0.60-acre land for raising tea garden. During 1990, another 20 houses were constructed in Banagudi Solai by the Government to settle down all those Alu Kurumba who were still scattered in interior forests.

2. Baviyur

Baviyur is also an exclusive Al Kurumba settlement like Banagudi Solai. The bus stop for Baviyur is two kilometres away from the settlement. It is located 30 kms away from the Kotagiri town. Four or five buses a day ply from Solur Mattam (a Badaga village) to Garikkiyur through this area. Twice in a day, direct bus services are available from here to the Kotagiri town. For purchase of groceries, the Alu Kurumba in Baviyur and Irulas in the neighborhood settlements usually visit Solur Mattam, which is eight kilometres from Baviyur. For minor purchases, they visit a nearby Irula village called Mettukal (one kilometre from Baviyur) where 80 families of the Irula tribe live. There is also a primary school at Mettukal, run by the Tribal Welfare Department for the benefit of the entire tribal and non-tribal children of this area. A Tribal Residential School having upto eighth standard

has been built recently at Garikkiyur (8 kms from Baviyur). The Government also runs a Higher-Secondary School at Solur Mattam for both the tribal and non-tribal students. There is also a Primary Health Centre, Bank, Post Office and Police Station at Solur Mattam for the use of all the surrounding Badaga villages and tribal settlements. Baviyur comes under the Kengarai Village Panchayat in Kotagiri taluk.

In Baviyur, 27 households of Alu Kurumba exist. All these are built with the Government assistance. Out of the 27 houses, 12 were constructed in 1964; five in 1995 and the remaining 10 were constructed in 1996. The five houses built in 1995 are concrete roofed ones and the remaining are tiled houses. Water for drinking and other purposes is brought to the settlement from a nearby stream through iron-pipes laid by the Village Panchayat. There is perennial water supply to the settlement from this stream. Three water taps are provided inside the settlement for all the three lanes of houses. Street lamps are provided inside by the Village Panchayat and electricity is extended to some houses. In the evenings, the Alu Kurumba view television programmes through the colour television provided by the Village Panchayat.

Socio-economic Situation in Banagudi Solai and Baviyur (data of 1998-99)

In both the villages, all the households i.e. 38 households in Banagudi Solai and 28 households in Baviyur have been covered for employing household census schedules. A total population of 228 persons (133 in Banagudi Solai and 95 in Baviyur) inhabits both these settlements.

Out of the 133 Alu Kurumba living in Banagudi Solai, 62 i.e. 46.62 per cent are males and 71 i.e. 53.38 per cent are females. Whereas in Baviyur, the sex ratio is more or less equal. Out of 95 persons living in Baviyur, 47 i.e. 49.47 per cent are males and 48 i.e. 50.53 per cent are females. Both the settlements put together, out of the 228 persons, 109 i.e. 47.81 per cent are males, and 199 i.e. 52.19 per cent are females. Complete details on age-group wise and sex-wise distribution of Alu Kurumba in both Banagudi Solai and Baviyur are given in Table 2.

As far as the literacy of Alu Kurumba population in both the study settlements is concerned, it has been found that out of 228 persons, literates are 116 (50.88 per cent), non literates are 92 (40.35 per cent) and children below five years comprise 8.77 per cent i.e. 20 in number. An important point to be noted here is that in both the settlements, the literates are found to be more among males. None has reached the higher secondary level of education in both Banagudi Solai and Baviyur (1998-99 data). More information on level of education among males and females is given in Table 3.

Table 2
Distribution of Alu Kurumba by Age Group & Sex in the Settlements of Banagudisolai and Baviyur (1998-99 Data)

Age Group (in Years)	Banagudi Solai		Total		Baviyur		Total		For Both the Settlements		Total	
	Male	Female	No.	%	Male	Female	No.	%	Male	Female	No.	%
0-5	10	4	14	10.53	7	8	15	15.79	17	12	29	12.71
6-10	5	9	14	10.53	6	4	10	10.53	11	13	24	10.53
11-15	0	8	8	6.02	6	3	9	9.47	6	11	17	7.46
16-20	8	11	19	14.28	2	3	5	5.26	10	14	24	10.53
21-35	8	6	14	10.53	2	6	8	8.42	10	12	22	9.65
26-30	7	3	10	7.51	8	10	18	18.94	15	13	28	12.28
31-35	5	7	12	9.02	4	2	6	6.31	9	9	18	7.89
36-40	2	6	8	6.02	3	3	6	6.31	5	9	14	6.14
41-45	7	3	10	7.51	1	3	4	4.21	8	6	14	6.14
46-50	3	8	11	8.27	3	3	6	6.31	6	11	17	7.46
51-55	3	2	5	3.76	2	0	2	2.10	5	2	7	3.07
56-60	3	2	5	3.76	1	2	3	3.15	4	4	8	3.51
60 & above	1	2	3	2.26	2	1	3	3.15	3	3	6	2.63
Total (No)	62	71	133		47	48	95		109	119	228	
%	46.62	53.38			49.47	50.53			47.81	52.19		

Table 3
Literacy (1998-99 Data)

Level of Education	Banagudi Solai		Total		Baviyur		Total		For Both the Settlements		Total	
	Male	Female	No.	%	Male	Female	No.	%	Male	Female	No.	%
Upto V Std.	16	15	31	23.31	23	13	36	37.89	39	28	67	29.38
VI to VIII	14	7	21	15.79	14	4	18	18.95	28	11	39	17.11
IX and X	1	0	1	0.75	4	2	6	6.32	5	2	7	3.07
Above X	0	0	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00
Literate through NFE*	1	2	3	2.26	0	0	0	0.00	1	2	3	1.32
Total Literate	32	24	56	42.11	41	19	60	63.16	73	43	116	50.88
Non-literate	19	42	61	45.86	6	25	31	32.63	25	67	92	40.35
Children Below 5 Years			16	12.03			4	4.21			20	8.77
Total Population			133				95				228	

*NFE - Non Formal Education

Table 4
Marital Status (1998-99 Data)

<i>Status</i>	<i>Banagudi Solai</i>				<i>Baviyur</i>				<i>For Both The Settlements</i>			
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Married	34	34	68	51.13	23	23	46	48.42	57	57	114	50.00
Unmarried	25	23	48	36.09	23	16	39	41.05	48	39	87	38.16
Widow	0	13	13	9.77	0	7	7	7.37	0	20	20	8.77
Widower	1	0	1	0.75	2	0	2	2.11	3	0	3	1.32
Divorcee	2	1	3	2.26	0	1	1	1.05	2	2	4	1.75
Total	62	71	133	100.00	48	47	95	100.00	110	118	228	100.00

It has been found that the percentage of widows (8.77 per cent) is more than the percentage of widowers (1.32 per cent) in the total population of both the settlements. Sex-wise percentages of married and unmarried, widow, widower and divorcee categories in both the settlements are furnished in Table 4.

The type of house-construction existing in both the settlements, whether tiled, concrete or tin sheet roofed houses are furnished in Table 5.

Table 5
Type of House Construction (1998-99 Data)

<i>House Type</i>	<i>Banagudisolai</i>		<i>Baviyur</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Tiled House	18	47.37	17	60.72	35	53.03
Concrete Roof House	20	52.63	10	35.71	30	45.46
Tin Sheet Roofed House	0	0.00	1	3.57	1	1.51
Total	38	100.00	28	100.00	66	100.00

In Banagudisolai, out of 38 households, not a single house is electrified. Only electric street lamps exist in the settlement. Portable solar lamps are provided to many of them by the Government, free of cost. In Baviyur, out of 28 households, 7 households (25%) are electrified; electric street lamps also exist in the settlement.

Another interesting observation of the present study is that the medium sized households and small sized households are more among the Alu Kurumba. Percentages of three member households (21.21 per cent) and four member households (28.79 per cent) out number the other categories. Average size of household among the Alu Kurumba of both the study settlements put together is 3.45 (Table 6).

Table 6
Household Size (1998-99 Data)

<i>Size of The Household (No. of Persons)</i>	<i>Banagudisolai</i>		<i>Baviyur</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
1	4	10.53	2	7.14	6	9.09
2	8	21.05	5	17.86	13	19.70
3	7	18.42	7	25.00	14	21.21
4	9	23.68	10	35.71	19	28.79
5	6	15.79	2	7.14	8	12.12
6	3	7.89	2	7.14	5	7.58
7	1	2.63	0	0.00	1	1.51
Total	38	100.00	28	100.00	66	100.00

Table 7
Alliance Pattern (1998-99 Data)

<i>Type of Alliance</i>	<i>No. of Cases in Banagudi Solai</i>	<i>No. of Cases in Baviyur</i>	<i>Total</i>
Alliance in which woman is from Irula tribe	1	1	2
Alliance in which woman is from Jenu Kuru(m)ba tribe	0	2	2
Alliances in which man belongs to Nagara moiety (Intra-Community)	23	10	33
Alliances in which man belongs to Bellega moiety (Intra-Community)	22	10	32
Alliances in which man belong to Irapane	0	5	5
Alliances in which husband and wife belong to the same moiety (Incestuous)	1	0	1
Total	47	28	75

About 8 couples in Banagudi Solai live in the same households of their parents, e.g. married sons live with wife and children with their parents.

Details on the prevailing alliance pattern, incidence of inter-tribal alliance and intra-tribal alliance preference have been furnished in Table 7. It has been found that marital alliances with other tribes such as, Irula and Jenu Kurumba i.e. Kattunayakan who live in their neighborhood in Nilgiris have been allowed in certain cases but with some initial resistance among the Alu Kurumba.

The percentage of landholders, landless, wage labourers, tea and coffee growers in both the study settlements are furnished in detail in Table 8.

Table 8
Land Holding (Small Tea & Coffee Growers) (1998-99 Data)

<i>Category of Planters</i>	<i>Land Holders in Banagudi Solai</i>		<i>Land Holders in Baviyur</i>		<i>Total Land Holders in both the Settlements</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Only tea planters	22	57.89	6	21.43	28	42.43
Only coffee planters	0	0	1	3.57	1	1.21
Planters of both tea & coffee	0	0	14	50.00	14	21.21
Landless	16	42.11	7	25.00	23	34.85
Total	38	100.00	28	100.00	66	100.00

In Banagudi Solai, those who own lands possess only 1/4 to 1/2 acre per household; totally 7.75 acres of tea plantation is owned by 22 households (out of 38 households) in this settlement. In Baviyur, ownership of plantation varies from 1/4 acre to 1 acre per household; totally 11 acres of tea and 9 acres of coffee plantations are owned by 21 households (out of 28 households) in this settlement.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The Alu Kurumba community has its own geographical categorization of the region it inhabits with specific names. The Alu Kurumba traditionally reckoned about seven *Seemai* or regions in the Nilgiris and its adjoining stretches of mountains. For each *Seemai*, a headman called *Mudali* exists. Without the *Mudali*, no Alu Kurumba would take part in alliance, divorce, death, festivities or disputes. Headman of a settlement is termed *Oor Gowda* (*Oor* means village and *Gowda* denotes the headman). Priest of the settlement is called *Kudi Poojari*; the one who involves in sorcery and witchcraft is called *Odikara*. Medicineman is called *Maddhukara* (*Maddhu* means medicine in their language). One who forecasts future and tells fortune while in possession is termed as *Devakara*. The post of *Mudali* is hereditary, whereas, the *Oor Gowda* is elected by voice-vote by the people of the settlement. The remaining functionaries choose their own heirs from close kin.

As far as the information on social divisions existing among the Alu Kurumba is concerned, only Dieter B.Kapp (1989) has furnished some data on the Alu Kurumba social organization. Kapp (1989) mentioned in his paper that he conducted field-work among the Alu Kurumba during 1974-76 and Paul Hockings published that material in 1989. To our surprise, the data provided by Kapp on Alu Kurumba social divisions, especially his way of understanding and depicting their social organization has not been fully accepted by the Alu Kurumba now.

According to Kapp, “the Alu Kurumba are divided into two exogamous non-totemic phratries called *origa* and the *origa* in turn are divided into clans; one of these two phratries contains three exogamous clans while the other has four. They practise cross-cousin marriage between any of the clans forming each phratry. Within each phratry, the clans share a fictive brotherhood, however, so that intermarriage is impermissible. *Nagara* and *Bellega* are the two non-totemic phratries comprising clans as below:

<i>Nagara</i>	<i>Bellega</i>
1. <i>Kayigeru</i>	1. <i>Macole</i>
2. <i>Gobeada</i>	2. <i>Bellare</i>
3. <i>Irapane</i>	3. <i>Bellaku</i>

Children always belong to the clan and phratry of their father”.

During the present study, the above mentioned details provided by Kapp have been cross-checked with the elders living in various Alu Kurumba settlements. Also, a thorough analysis of individual clan and moiety affiliations of all the couples living in the study settlements of Banagudi Solai and Baviyur has been taken up. Now the following clarifications emerge about their social divisions and social organization after a thorough analysis of our data and also based on our discussions with the Alu Kurumba community.

We now make it clear that the two major divisions that divide the Alu Kurumba community into two, namely, *Nagara* and *Bellega*, are to be understood as two *koota* (or groups) and not as two *origa*, as mentioned by Kapp. *Nagara* and *Bellega* are *Jatthikaara* to each other; which means, one who is belonging to any of the exogamous clans comprised in the *Nagara* moiety is a *Jatthikaara* to one such person in the *Bellega* moiety. According to the Alu Kurumba who were interviewed during the present study, *origa* literally means 'those who copulated within the same (exogamous) unit'. They recollect that, in the past, a couple was excommunicated from their community because, belonging to the same clan they committed the sin of copulation in a place called '*Irapane*'. Children born to them and their descendants were called '*Irapaneyan*' and they were not accepted into the Alu Kurumba community, neither in *Nagara* nor in *Bellega*. So, they formed a separate (and very small) third group with the identity *Origaruru* or *Irapane*. In course of time, even now, both *Nagara* and *Bellega* exchanged spouses with the *Irapane*. Therefore, *Irapane* does not form one of the brotherly clans comprised in the *Nagara* phratry, as mentioned by Kapp. This aspect has been wrongly understood by Kapp. Pronouncing the term *Origa* and *Origaruru* is generally avoided by the Alu Kurumba, as it offends people and also sounds vulgar in their community. Rather, *Irapane* is used in place of *Origa* to denote this third small group, who comprise only a few families among the the Alu Kurumba.

More clans have been reported to be comprised within the *Nagara* and *Bellega* during this study, and they are mentioned below:

<i>Nagara</i>	<i>Bellega</i>
1. Arayur	1. Semmanarai
2. Moolasappey	2. Kandiru
3. Yerukkamalayan	3. Neeraga
4. Kallooru	4. Koombu
5. Malappura	5. Macole (Maasolay)
6. Aracode	6. Bellare and
7. Kayigeru and	7. Bellakku
8. Gobeada	

Probably when Kapp conducted his fieldwork, he might have missed to collect some of the above said clan names, as these are territory based. The two divisions of the Alu Kurumba community, namely, *Nagara* and *Bellega* were considered by Kapp as 'Phratries' which is a mistaken understanding of the Alu Kurumba social organization. Therefore, it is strongly proposed that, terming these two divisions as 'Moieties' is more appropriate as they actually fulfill the characteristics of only moiety and not phratry. This is the main contribution and significant finding of this study in our view.

RELIGION AND RITUALS

The religion of Alu Kurumba is essentially an ancestor cult. The peaks of the hills surrounding their settlements are identified with their own deities like, *Kumbadevar Bettu*, *Jadasaami Bettu*, etc. The suffix *bettu* denotes hill; they propitiate these deities annually by sacrificing goat and hen. Their main religious festivity is called *Kumbadevar Pooja*, celebrated usually during May or June. As the Alu Kurumba live very close to the Hindu Tamils, Badagas and others, they have also started worshipping Hindu gods now-a-days. As Kapp and Hockings (1989:242) observe, two Hindu gods, namely, Brahma (creator god) and Yama (god of death) play an important role in their mythology. Besides Brahma and Yama, gods such as, Indran, Suriyan, Chandiran and Sani too figure in their legends, which have roots in Hindu mythology and traditions. Acquaintance with and worship of Hindu deities like Sivan, Parvathi, Vinayagar, Murugan, Lakshmi, Ayyappan, etc are also fairly recent among the Alu Kurumba.

As far as the life cycle rituals of the Alu Kurumba are concerned, earlier accounts by Brecks (1873) and Grigg (1880) have noted that the Alu Kurumba hardly had any rituals to celebrate in their life. But Hockings (1989) mentions that Kapp made detailed accounts of their rituals in the study he conducted during 1974 to 1976.

It has been observed during the present study that the Alu Kurumba do conduct rituals at the time of birth, menstruation, marriage and death. In the ninth or eleventh month of birth of a child, they conduct tonsure ceremony (*Manda Keesuva Abbaa*; *Manda* denotes 'head'; *Keesuva* denotes 'shaving' and *Abbaa* means 'festivity') and ear boring ceremony (called *Kivi Kutthu Abbaa*; *Kivi* means 'ear'; *Kutthu* - 'boring') together for a child. Maternal uncle of the child conducts these ceremonies. A girl while attaining puberty is termed *Dodda Manushi* (*Dodda* literally means big and *Manushi* denotes a woman). A menstrual hut (*Saale Mane*) is erected by the side of the house to shelter the girl for eight days. After observing menstrual pollution (*Theettu*) for eight days, purificatory ritual using turmeric is performed for the girl. At the time of child birth also, similar pollution and purificatory rituals are performed for the delivered mother.

Marriage is termed *Madhuve*. For a man, his elder sister's daughter (*Sojje*), mother's brother's daughter (*Mamma Innu*) and father's sister's daughter (*Mummi Innu*) comprise the potential spouses for marriage. Marriage is generally conducted in groom's village. Patrilocal residence is their norm. Dowry in kind (utensils and cattle) is in vogue now. Both the parties share expenditures of marriage feast (*Madhuve Ittu*) and it generally involves a non-vegetarian meal. The gathering offers gifts or cash (*Moi*) to the newly wed couple. In olden days, black bead necklace (*Karu Mai*) formed the *thali* (marriage symbol) and the bridegroom tied it around the neck of the bride. Now-a-days, yellow thread or chain of coins (*Serappaani*) is used as *thali* (*Thalikanni* is their term for thali). For all the procedures of marriage, beginning from negotiation, betrothal and until the ceremony of marriage is conducted, the Alu Kurumba community elders namely, the *Mudali* (Chieftain), *Oor Gowda* (village headman) and *Jatthikaara* (elderly man from the other moiety) must accompany the parties and preside over the functions. Only on participation of these three functionaries, a marriage in the Alu Kurumba community gets its formal approval. Dance (*Aatta*) accompanied with songs (*Kathe*) and music (using a flute called *Arakolu*) concludes the marriage ceremony in the afternoon. Traditionally the Alu Kurumba resort to burial of the dead. Elaborate rituals are performed while burying the dead. In the case of death of a headman or chieftain, they follow the custom of cremation (out of respect for him). Now-a-days, it is observed that the Alu Kurumba erect a small stone slab inscribed with the image of the deceased on the grave. A few Alu Kurumba have acquired expertise in carving such stone slabs and they sell these stone slabs to their community men.

USE OF LAND RESOURCES IN NILGIRIS

Before going into the actual land management or land utilization pattern prevailing among the Alu Kurumba, some basic data and background of the plantation economy of Nilgiri district is furnished here first, for a better understanding of the problem. Of the total area of the district, only one fourth is cultivated. Non-food crops are cultivated in nearly 65 per cent of the area and food crops are grown in the remaining 35 per cent of the total cultivated area. Tea and coffee are the major non-food crops grown; tea is cultivated in over 50 per cent of the total area under non-food crop cultivation, mainly in Coonoor and Kotagiri taluks. Among the food-crops, potato is grown in large scale. Processing of tea forms the main industry of Nilgiris and there are about 185 tea factories functioning in this district. As vast area is under eucalyptus plantation, production of eucalyptus oil is pursued as an important cottage industry in Nilgiris. Forests occupy about 56.6 per cent of the total area of the district.

According to the information available at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) in Coonoor, tea occupies considerable acreage under plantation in the Nilgiri district.

The other plantation crops under cultivation include coffee, rubber, cinchona, pepper and cardamom, generally suited to the lower elevations of Coonoor, Gudalur and Kotagiri taluks.

It is reported that since 1984, the UPASI (United Planters Association of South India) and Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Coonoor, had been implementing lab-to-land programmes to develop small planters among the tribes of Nilgiri district. Through the diversification of agricultural enterprises, they have succeeded in turning many Alu Kurumba, Toda, Kota and Irula families as small growers of tea. In the two villages of the Alu Kurumba, namely Banagudi Solai and Baviyur settlements, the Krishi Vigyan Kendra, in association with the Nilgiri Adivasi Welfare Association (NAWA), the Tribal Welfare Department and Horticulture Department successfully implemented the lab-to-land programme. Through this, the Alu Kurumba and Irulas of Kotagiri taluk are now assured of a steady source of income; but the environmental impact of turning the natural forests into tea or coffee plantations has been a matter of controversy and concern for many, for the last few decades in Nilgiris

It is observed in the Kotagiri taluk (the area where Alu Kurumba concentration is more), that 74 per cent of the net cultivated area is covered by tea plantation and 14 per cent under coffee. Apart from tea and coffee, crops like, tapioca, ginger, lemon grass, cardamom and rubber are also grown in the Kotagiri taluk. As far as the Nilgiri district as a whole is concerned, in the total area of 2,54,381 hectares, area under forest is 1,43,359 hectares, and total cultivated area is 70,354 hectares; tea is cultivated in 54,974 hectares; coffee is cultivated in 9410 hectares; vegetables in 7268 hectares, fruit crops in 1396 hectares and cereals in 2593 hectares (Table 9).

As far as cultivation of different crops in the Kotagiri taluk is concerned, the sub-divisional office of the Horticulture Department in Kotagiri provides that tea is cultivated in 11081.69 hectares, coffee in 879.37 hectares, non-food crops in 548.54.5 hectares, vegetables in 427.22 hectares, food crops in 204.26 hectares, fruit crops in 123.68 hectares, oil seeds in 80.80 hectares, spices and condiments in 36.92 hectares, geranium in 16.00 hectares, cotton in 2.04 hectares; total area under cultivation is 13400.52 hectares. Under the Hill Area Development Programme, a number of villages (including the tribal settlements) have been identified by the Horticulture Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu to implement 'Watershed Development cum Crop Diversification Scheme'. Under this scheme, farmers cultivating below 10 per cent slope area are selected for vegetable cultivation and given necessary assistance. For raising tea and coffee plantations, farmers holding land in the 10 to 33 per cent slope area are identified and provided with coffee and tea saplings at subsidized rates.

Table 9
Details of Different Crops Grown in the District
(1998-99 Data)

<i>Crops</i>	<i>Area in Hectares</i>				<i>Total Area</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
	<i>Ooty</i>	<i>Coonoor</i>	<i>Kotagiri</i>	<i>Gudalur</i>		
I. Plantation Crops	12535	11627	10203	19671	54036	74.9
(a) Tea	11865	10915	8660	14431	45871	63.6
(b) Coffee	653	689	1479	5125	7446	11.0
(c) Other plantation crops	17	23	64	115	219	0.3
II. Tuber & Vegetable Crops	6660	1177	460	1140	9447	13.1
(a) Potato	2845	378	78	-	3301	
(b) Cabbage	594	93	74	21	782	
(c) Carrot	1627	542	78	-	2247	
(d) Other Tuber & Vegetable Crops	1594	164	240	1119	3117	
III Cereal Crops	4	18	80	1441	1543	2.1
(a) Rice	-	-	-	973	973	
(b) Wheat	2	18	6	-	26	
(c) Ragi	2	-	2	-	4	
(d) Minor Millets	-	-	4	-	4	
(e) Other Cereal Crops	24	-	68	468	560	
IV Spices & Condiments	374	105	37	2883	3399	4.7
(a) Ginger	-	-	-	584	584	
(b) Garlic	374	10	9	-	393	
(c) Areca nut	-	22	-	112	134	
(d) Other Spices & Condiments	-	73	28	2187	2288	
V. Fruit Crops	1099	106	679	598	2482	3.5
(a) Banana	-	5	20	205	230	
(b) Orange	326	78	588	241	1233	
(c) Pear	271	17	45	-	333	
(d) Mango	-	-	-	31	31	
(e) Other Fruit Crops	502	6	26	121	185	
VI. Other Crops	270	547	269	180	1256	1.7
Net Sown Area	20942	13580	11728	25913	72163	100.00

TEA AND COFFEE PLANTATIONS OF THE ALU KURUMBA

Traditionally, the Alu Kurumba were hunter-gatherers and slash and burn cultivators. They held lands under communal ownership when they practised slash and burn cultivation in the past. Different minor millets were cultivated in the past. But the practice of slash and burn cultivation has almost disappeared in Nilgiris due to the ban on the practice. Those tribes which practised slash and burn cultivation in Nilgiris, like the Alu Kurumba and Irular, are now completely absorbed in the plantation economy of this district. However, small-scale cultivation of minor millets using slash and burn method is still pursued by them in interior forest settlements in a restricted manner. The small quantity of millets thus cultivated is used only for own consumption and ritual purposes. The Alu Kurumba involve in slash and burn cultivation in the forest lands surrounding their settlements. They have not been given ownership or title deed (*patta*) for these lands.

Whereas, for the small tea and coffee plantations developed by the Government for the Alu Kurumba at present, conditional *patta* i.e. title deeds have been issued to individual families. It has been issued not only to the Alu Kurumba, but also to the Toda, Kota and Irula tribes in Nilgiris. By giving conditional *pattas*, the lands having plantations are fully secured to the tribals. No one can purchase or sell the lands given under conditional *patta* and these lands are classed as 'Revenue lands'. When tribal farmers are permitted by the Government to cultivate revenue lands (which are mostly situated in the fringes of reserve forest areas in the Alu Kurumba habitat) what actually happens is, every year the tribal farmer pays to the Government (to the local Revenue Dept. Authority i.e. Tahsildar), a fine of Rs. 5/- per acre, in case he used the land for vegetable cultivation (impermanent crops) or Rs. 20/- per acre, if he has made tea or coffee plantation (permanent crops) in that land. For the last 20 years, giving the land assignment i.e. conditional *pattas* has been stopped in Nilgiris, particularly for cultivation purposes. Only for house construction, the tribals are allotted a site measuring 1.5 cent per family with *patta* i.e. title deeds. For instance, in village revenue records of the Kotagiri Division, it is mentioned that "nearly 25 families belonging to the Banagudi Solai settlement are encroaching the government land by way of tea plantation; each family encroached land measuring 0.60 acre". What has actually happened is that, it is only the government, which has developed the tea plantation for these 25 families and helped them with all the assistance, but it is in the same government records, it is maintained that these lands are actually under 'encroachment'. This is how 'land ownership' actually exists in tribal landscapes of Nilgiris. However, while applying for loans from Banks or Cooperative Societies, the tribals surrender the Enjoyment Certificate of their conditional *patta* land to the Bank or Cooperative Society as 'surety'. The local Revenue Department in Kotagiri issues this certificate to the Alu Kurumba.

As far as the tea and coffee plantations possessed by small farmers in Nilgiris are concerned, the Horticulture Department gives tea plants to all the farmers at

the rate of Rs. 1/- per plant. The actual price of it is Rs. 3.50 per plant and a farmer is allowed a subsidy of Rs. 2.50/- per plant. In order to promote tea cultivation among the tribes in Nilgiris, even the price of Rs. 1/- per plant has been waived and the tribal farmers were given tea plants free of cost, when the Government agencies introduced tea plantations among them two decades ago. As part of the HADP, under the Integrated Water Shed Development Programme, according to the gradient of the slope, different crops are prescribed for cultivation in Nilgiris. If it is lesser than 10% slope, vegetable cultivation is promoted; for above 10% and below 33% slopes, tea cultivation is prescribed; for over 33% slope areas, silviculture is advised. Under silviculture, fruit crops, silver oak, eucalyptus and certain forest crops are promoted. Under the Integrated Water Shed Development Programme, farmers (including the Alu Kurumba and other tribal farmers) are identified according to the slopes they cultivate and encouraged to cultivate the right kinds of crops by supplying them with seeds/plants at subsidized rates.

In the settlements of both Banagudi Solai and Baviyur, where the study has been conducted, the KVK or Krishi Vigyan Kendra of the UPASI, have helped the Alu Kurumba in developing tea plantations for them. The KVK has given training on all aspects of tea cultivation to the Alu Kurumba here. As far as nurturing and maintenance of the tea plantation is concerned, the Alu Kurumba maintain their tea plantation relatively in a poor manner; in most of their tea plantations water sprinklers do not exist and sufficient fertilizers and insecticides are not applied to the tea plantation. So, the yield is also relatively less in their tea gardens. However, according to the Alu Kurumba, through the plantations and plantation labour, they are assured of a steady source of income now-a-days. On an average, a family is getting an income of Rs. 2,500/- per month from the 0.60 more of tea garden it owns (1998-99 data). Small tea factories, owned by the Badagas, mostly purchase tea leaf from Alu Kurumba as well as from other small tea growers (those owning 1/2 acre to 5 acres are termed as small tea growers) at their tea leaf collection centres near the villages. These factories are called Bought Leaf Factories and by giving the Alu-Kurumba farmers some advance money, every week, they secure the tea leaves from the Alu Kurumba. Every Saturday, the tribal and other small tea growers are paid money for the tea leaf they give to the Bought Leaf Factory during that week.

A point to be noted here is that the exposure of the Alu Kurumba to the plantation economy is not something new. Even during the period when they involved in slash and burn cultivation in the past, they often used to work as wage labourers in the tea and coffee plantations of the Badagas and others. In fact, some of the Irula and Alu Kurumba living in the Kotagiri here report that their parents developed small coffee plantations of their own, 60 years ago. For instance, in the Baviyur settlement, 14 of the 28 families still own coffee plantations ranging from 0.25 acre to 1 acre per family. These 14 families simultaneously hold small tea plantations

also. There are 7 landless (out of 28) families in Baviyur settlement and it is 16 families out of 38 in the Banagudi Solai settlement. Put together, out of the 66 families covered under the present study in both the settlements, 23 (35 per cent) are landless and 43 are land owning (i.e. small tea and coffee plantation owning) families. During the last ten years or so, a number of Alu Kurumba and Irulas in Kotagiri taluk, have been replacing their coffee plantations with tea-plantations, with the financial support of Tea Board, Government of India and UPASI in Coonoor. The tribal farmers and others in this area consider that tea plantations provide them a better income when compared to coffee. Only once in a year coffee is harvested; if the coffee crop fails, the loss is huge. Whereas, the tribal farmers pluck tealeaves every fortnight and supply the same to the small tea factories, for which they get a weekly payment. The Alu Kurumba admit that their standard of living has considerably increased now-a-days after taking up tea cultivation and plantation labour.

TRADITIONAL MILLET CULTIVATION

It has been already mentioned that in some of their settlements situated in interior forests or close to the forests, the Alu Kurumba involve in millet cultivation. In Baviyur and some other settlements, where the Alu Kurumba live very close to the forests, slash and burn cultivation, termed locally as *Ola bellamai* (*Ola* means 'burning' and *bellamai* means 'agriculture'), is still pursued by a few families as a subsidiary occupation for self consumption and for magico-religious purposes. Ragi, *saamai* and *navanai* are their essentially cultivated small millets. The Alu Kurumba begin all the magico-religious practices and rituals only after worshipping their ancestors by offering them with the cooked millets they grow. Most of these slash and burn fields are actually forestlands for which the Alu Kurumba do not have any title deed or *patta*. For slash and burn cultivation, small patches of shrubs surrounding their settlements are cleared and cultivated. Minor millets such as *navanai* (*Panicum italicum*), *raai* (ragi), *jola* (maize) and *saamai* (*Panicum miliare*) are their traditional food crops cultivated under slash and burn method i.e. *Ola bellamai*. Immediately after the harvest of these food crops, some portion of the grains are kept separately and preserved for future, to use as seeds. The portion meant for immediate consumption is termed *Ittu Battha* (*Ittu* literally means 'pudding or meal'; *battha* denotes 'ears of the crop'). The portion, which is preserved as seeds, is called *Vitthu battha* (*Vitthu* means 'seed'). They also grow tur and beans along with the small millets. The Alu Kurumba preserve the seeds of tur and beans, by mixing them with a paste made of lemon leaves and mud from ant-hills (*putthu mannu*). They still follow this method for preserving the seeds.

KITCHEN GARDENS

The Alu Kurumba generally meet their day-to-day vegetables and green needs from their kitchen gardens which they have developed around their houses or huts

inside the settlement. Domesticated roots and tubers (generally termed *gaasu*) such as, *bellada gaasu* (sweet potato), *nadu gaasu* and *poole gaasu* (tapioca), varieties of beans like *ola avarai*, *ketthu avarai*, *itthil avarai* and *baala avarai*, pumpkin (*poosani* or *kumbham*), papaya (*poppuli*), plantains, mango, jack-fruit, lemon, orange and pomegranate are grown in their kitchen gardens. Sometimes, they sell these to outsiders for urgent cash needs.

As far as consumption of meat is concerned, they keep poultry of their own. Individual households have their own poultry and a few goats in the settlements. Wild pigs are sometimes hunted and the meat is shared among them. Generally they avoid hunting wild animals due to restrictions of the forest department

FOREST RESOURCES

In this section, emphasis has been placed mainly on understanding the local (or native) knowledge system and indigenous resource utilization pattern. In the Nilgiri situation, after viewing the present livelihood conditions of the tribes living there, we have our own reservation in employing the term 'management' in the context of forest resource use by the Alu Kurumba. The minimal understanding of the term 'management' implies that we can talk about management of something only when certain amount of rights and control are being exercised on that particular thing. But, as far as the tribes like Alu Kurumba are concerned, neither they have any right nor do they have any control on the forest resources available in their habitat at present. In fact, the tribes in Nilgiris are literally controlled and managed by the Forest Department in terms of their access to forest resources. The tribes are allowed to collect only certain categories of Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) and there is a complete ban on hunting and slash and burn cultivation, their traditional modes of subsistence. To the extent possible, they are discouraged by the Forest Department to live in their original forest habitats. In fact, in many cases, they were relocated to the outskirts and foothills. So, in this section, an attempt has been made to present the 'still retained knowledge' of the Alu Kurumba on 'forest resources' and their indigenous ways of utilizing and conserving them.

The Alu Kurumba identify and use a variety of plants from the forests for various purposes, like, house construction, fire-wood, medicinal items and for magico-religious purposes. Trees such as, *Neri Mara* (*Neri* represents the name of the tree; *mara* literally means tree), *Perunja mara*, *Koli mara*, *Kunde mara*, *Bejjalu mara* and *Beedi mara*, which are considered stronger, are used as main and supporting beams in house construction. Different kinds of creepers naturally abundant in forests are identified and used as rope, e.g. *Ullathi Kanni*, *Biskotti Kanni*, etc. The term *Kanni* means creeper in their language. For thatching their huts, different species of grass such as, *pambey ullu* (*ullu* means grass), *Keyi pambey ullu* and *dhappe ullu* are generally used. Outer layers of bamboo and barks of

certain trees are also used as rope by the Alu Kurumba. They weave baskets, winnowing pans, traps for wild pigs, fish-trap (*koodu*) and mats from bamboo available in forests.

They identify a number of herbs in forests and use different parts of these herbs to cure ailments of their own people as well as outsiders. Roots (*gaasu*), barks (*pattai*), leaves (*thazhai*) seeds or nuts (*kaai or vitthu*) and fruits (*hannu*) of herbs are used by the Alu Kurumba medicinemen (*maddhu kara*) to treat ailments and diseases. For snake bite, paralysis, mumps, stomach ailments, fever, tumors, wounds, cuts and several other minor ailments, the Alu Kurumba apply and use their own medicines extracted from herbs. Those who practise sorcery use particular varieties of plants and leaves for performing black magic and for removing witchcraft. They involve in it only in specified spots inside the surrounding jungle. It is almost impossible to ascertain the names of those plants or herbs from the Alu Kurumba medicine men and magicians because they strongly believe that if names of such plant species are revealed to others, the medicines lose their effect and that act would also invite supernatural punishment.

They attach a lot of ritual significance to certain products obtained from forests. A resin (frankincense) called *dhoopa* collected by the Alu Kurumba priest in jungles, is the first and foremost thing to be lit in any Badaga village temple festivity in Nilgiri district. For every Badaga community temple in Nilgiri, an attached Alu Kurumba priest performs this service first, during the festivities. Similarly, the bark of *Dhoodai* tree (*Dhoodai Pattai*) is ground into paste and dissolved in water. This water, when sprinkled on people (women) under pollution, is considered to purify them from pollution. During puberty, marriage and removal of post-delivery pollution, sprinkling of this water is carried out on the people concerned and also inside their houses. Probably this is to be treated equivalent to the 'auspicious turmeric water' used for such occasions by the caste Hindu population living in the neighbourhood.

HONEY-COLLECTION

In some of their settlements, honey-collection is pursued as a subsidiary occupation during a particular season. The Alu Kurumba say, in the past, when there was a complete cover of natural forests in their habitat, they collected a lot of honey and it formed an essential item in their staple diet. Surplus of honey was exchanged for other items with the Toda, Kota and Badaga communities. But now such conditions have been reversed. They do not get sufficient honey even for their own consumption. They say that the plantations of tea, coffee and other crops of commercial forestry, like eucalyptus and pine, which started replacing a larger portion of natural forests of Nilgiris, have made a negative impact on all their subsistence activities, including honey-collection. The plant diversity of this habitat

has greatly diminished, resulting in less formation of honeycombs and reduced honey collection. The frequency of honey-hunting expeditions is greatly reduced now-a-days and the quantity of honey collected has also greatly decreased. In some of the folk songs sung by their women, the Alu Kurumba sorrowfully narrate this change i.e. how the *theyila* (tea) has taken away the *solai*'s (natural forests) and how their children are devoid of the honey which they used to cherish a lot in the past. They distinguish different kinds of honey depending on the size of the honey bee and its place of formation e.g. *Thoduva Jenu* (*Thoduva* represents tree-top and *Jenu* means honey), *Betta Jenu* or *Hejjenu* (*Betta* means 'hill-top'; *Hejja* - means 'big trees' here), *Kola Jenu* (*Kola* means 'stick'), *Kallu Kola Jenu* (*Kallu* denotes 'small boulders'), *Varai Jenu* (*Varai* represents 'rock-holes').

USE OF WATER RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION

As it is found in the location of several tribal settlements elsewhere, here too in Nilgiris, most of the Alu Kurumba settlements are situated closer to water sources, i.e. near forest streams and rivulets. Only in the case of relocated settlements, water is a scarce commodity. In the Alu Kurumba settlements, such as Kozhi Thorai, Kili Pey, Semmanarai, etc where they primarily involve in tea cultivation, the Alu Kurumba have brought water from nearby mountain streams to their settlements through PVC pipes. Water, which is flowing from a higher level, is brought down through PVC pipes and directly fitted to the water sprinklers erected in their tea gardens. Using the difference in altitude and naturally flowing pressure, the Alu Kurumba (and Irula) small tea growers in certain settlements of Kotagiri taluk, supply water to their tea gardens from the nearby perennial forest streams and rivulets. Because of regular water sprinkling, tea growers in these settlements have been able to see better yield, when compared to their kinsmen who are devoid of such locations and facilities.

As far as the drinking water sources of Alu Kurumba in the two study settlements are concerned, it has been observed that both the settlements (Baviyur and Banagudi Solai) are presently dependent on water directly flowing from rivulets and streams. In Baviyur, water is brought to the settlement through iron pipes (laid by the Village Panchayat) from a nearby forest stream and there is perennial flow of water throughout the year in this stream. For drinking, bathing, washing and all other purposes, water is sufficiently made available, with the provision of a water storage tank constructed by the Village Panchayat inside the settlement. In the case of Banagudi Solai settlement, though the Village Panchayat has laid the water supply system for its inhabitants, due to frequent failure of the system, the Alu Kurumba have permanently resorted to using stream water for their needs.

In Banagudi Solai, water from a nearby stream is brought to the settlement through PVC pipes and bamboo splits. During rainy season there is heavy flow of

water in this source and the flow becomes thin during summer. So, during the summer months, they manage by reducing their water consumption. For their tea gardens in the Banagudi Solai settlement, they have not been able to supply water due to unavailability of sufficient water in the surroundings. Whereas, in Baviyur, some of them, whose tea gardens are conveniently located, have been supplying water from the main storage tank, using PVC pipes and water-sprinklers.

Bigger streams are termed by the Alu Kurumba as *Halla*; small rivulets are called *Nalli*. When stream water stagnates in a pond on its own, then that source of water is called *Madu*. In case a pond is dug artificially to collect water from streams, it is termed *Neer Gundi*. Wells which are dug inside or near their settlements is called *Bavi*. In order to sustain the flow and availability of water at their water sources, the Alu Kurumba generally conduct certain festivities and magico-religious practices from time to time. Once in a year, during April-May i.e. in the Tamil month of *Chithirai*, the Alu Kurumba conduct a festivity called '*Ganga Pooja*' at their sources of drinking water. Sometimes, they club this festivity along with their main festivity of '*Kumba devar Pooja*'. Cleaning the drinking water sources, like ponds, forms the important activity of *Ganga Pooja*. Amla twigs (*nelli mara kattai*) are dropped into the pond, with the belief (and experience too) that water becomes clear and pure from the impurities. A plant called *Ola Chedi* or *Thaazha* is brought and planted at the pond itself. They say that the roots of this plant go deep into the soil, and pave way for water to emanate from the springs underground. The roots of this plant are supposed to touch the springs and activate upward flow of water from underground. On this Ganga Pooja day, they also tie up some amount of ragi grains in a piece of cloth and drop the same into the pond, their drinking water source, with the belief that water will never deplete in the pond. With these traditional water conservation practices, coupled with magic-religious beliefs, the Alu Kurumba maintain their water sources.

NATIVE GEOGRAPHICAL CLASSIFICATIONS

The etymology of the names of the villages or settlements of the Alu Kurumba (as well as other tribes living in Nilgiris) reveals that they had given names to their settlements based on certain criteria which are closely linked to nature. Some of those commonly occurring criteria are, abundance or occurrence or exceptional occurrence of certain flora and fauna at particular places in their landscapes, happening of certain incidents at a particular place or spot, and so on. Many of their settlements generally have a suffix *kombai*. When settlements are situated on hill slopes and are exposed to sunlight and warmth, they term them as *kombai*. Whereas those settlements which are situated on hilltops and in comparatively colder places, are known as *Bettur* (*Betta* means hill; *Ur* means village).

The Nilgiri mountain and adjoining plains have been classified by them into different *Seemai*'s like *Kunda Seemai*, *Mel Seemai*, *Keel Seemai*, *Betta Seemai*, *Baani Seemai*, *Thodanadu Seemai* and *Baradi Seemai*, based on the people inhabiting the region, relative altitude of the region, whether the region falls in forest area or in plains, etc. Literally the word *Seemai* means 'a territory' or 'region'. Older people of this community are well aware of these categorizations and the younger ones do not show much interest in learning these oral traditions.

The Kunda mountain ranges, falling closer to the Attapadi valley (Kerala) are termed *Kunda Seemai*. The *Mel Seemai* (*Mel* means 'upper') is situated in the adjoining Periyar district, and it is the same territory where the well-known poacher Veerappan and his associates took shelter. In *Mel Seemai*, kinsmen of the Nilgiri Alu Kurumba live in a few settlements and continue to maintain marital alliance with them. The *Keel Seemai* represents the Kongu region (having Coimbatore as the centre). The *Betta Seemai* represents the Nilgiri eastern slopes and the adjoining low lands. The *Baani Seemai* is situated close to Wynad and Mudumalai Wildlife sanctuary area. The *Thoda Nadu Seemai* denotes the Nilgiri uplands inhabited mainly by the Todas (*Thoda Nadu* actually means the region of the *Thoda or Thoduvar or Toda* tribal community). The *Baradi Seemai* comprises the Mettupalayam and Burliar hill ranges. '*Baradi*' in Alu Kurumba language denotes 'a sterile woman'. It is said that some of their kinsmen who lived in that area remained without any progenies for quite a long period. Hence that area itself was referred to as *Baradi Seemai*. These territorial categorizations of the Alu Kurumba are not much in vogue now-a-days, even among the older ones, because such knowledge has no practical significance to them now. But the knowledge is still retained by some of the elderly people among them.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this study, an attempt has been made to understand the process of occupational transformation that has taken place among the Alu Kurumba in the broader context of 'the changed Nilgiris situation' by placing emphasis on their local knowledge systems and natural resource use pattern. As already mentioned, the Nilgiris has been in focus for the last one hundred years due to expansion of the tourism industry, growth of plantations, horticulture, etc. Due to large-scale commercialization in Nilgiris, the natural resource base and the existence of the tribes living there have been greatly threatened in recent decades. From this point of view, documentation of the occupational transformation that has taken place among an erstwhile hunter-gatherer tribal community i.e. Alu Kurumba seems important and it has been modestly attempted in this paper. The local knowledge systems of this community, about its environment in its own terms, have been also documented before such

knowledge vanish away from these modernizing tribal people. Another important contribution and significant finding of this study is that a clarification has emerged on the conceptualization of the social structure of the Alu Kurumba society. The earlier incorrect interpretation of the Alu Kurumba social organization by Dieter B. Kapp (1989), which remained unacceptable even to the Alu Kurumba community when explained, also got corrected through this study.

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