

**MULLUKURUMBAS OF
KAPPALA**

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MULLUKURUMBAS OF KAPPALA

Memoir No. 30

RAJALAKSHMI MISRA



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I wish to express my debt to my supervisor Dr P. K. Misra who guided my field work. His penetrating criticism while going through the manuscripts has made me reconsider many of my first rash statements.

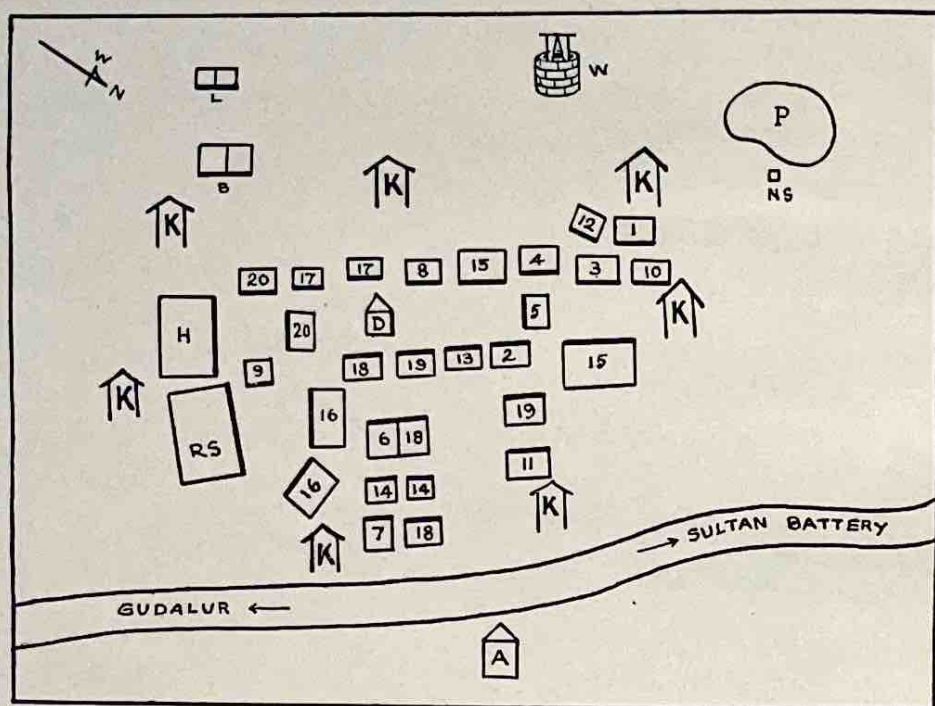
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PLAN OF KAPPALA



- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| 1—9 : Nuclear households | W : Well |
| 10—18 : Patrilocal extended households | L : Latrines |
| 19 & 20 : Fraternal joint households | B : Bathrooms |
| K : Kottil (husking shed) | H : Hostel |
| NS : Natural Spring | RS : Residential School |
| P : Pond (for bathing & washing clothes) | D : Deiva Perai |
| A : Athiralanmar | |

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

IS MULLUKURUMBA A DISTINCT GROUP ?

The people studied at Kappala, a hamlet in Erumad village, Gudalur taluk, Nilgiris district call themselves as Mullu Kurumbas. These people are referred as Mullu Kurumbans by Thurston (1909 : Vol. IV, 165), Mullu Kurumbars by Aiyappan (1948 : 95) and Mulla Kuruman by Luiz (1962 : 197). In describing the Kurumbas of Wynad, Calicut and Ernad taluks of Malabar, Thurston quotes the Gazetteer of that district to say that the Mullukurumbas belong to one of the three subgroups among the Kurumbas, the other two being Jenu Kurumbas and Urali Kurumbas. The Census records of 1961* have not recorded Mullu Kurumbas as a separate tribe. They are in all probability included either under Kurumans or Kurumbas. Aiyappan calls them as one of the tribes of Wynad (1948 : 92). Luiz describes them as the inhabitants of Calicut and Cannanore districts and also adds that they are a distinct tribe. During the course of my field work, I found the Mullukurumbas a strictly endogamic group of people, mainly distributed in Wynad taluk of Kerala. From the accounts of Luiz, Aiyappan and Thurston, it is learnt that the Mullukurumbas are a distinct tribe and that they are mainly distributed in the erstwhile Wynad taluk of Malabar, *i.e.*, the present Cannanore and Kozhikode (Calicut) districts of Kerala.

POPULATION

The population of the Mullukurumba tribe is not known separately because the census records have not included them as a separate tribe. The 1961 Census records have included Kurumans as well as Kurumbas in the list of Scheduled Tribes. The population of the Kurumans is 13,777 and that of the Kurumba is 999, for the whole State of Kerala, as seen in the Census records. Luiz has estimated their population at 7,000 (1962 : 198). The Mullukurumbas live in uniethnic settlements called *veedu* consisting of one to eighty houses. *Veedus* con-

*Verified at the Office of the Deputy Census Superintendent, Kerala State, Trivandrum

sisting of one to five houses or fifteen to eighty houses are a few. Luiz writes that a Mullukurumba *vedu* consists of about six to twelve huts. In an area of about fifteen miles radius, the Mullukurumba families live and this area is divided into four regions called *Kara Nadu*, *Kallu Nadu*, *Paaka Nadu* and *Neria Nadu*. Kappala is in the Kara Nadu. It's population is 159. It is said that there are over 300 *vedus* of Mullukurumbas in these four regions. If this statement of the Mullukurumba subjects is to be taken valid, then it is obvious that their population is more than 999, which has been shown as the total population of Kurumbas in the 1961 Census records. It appears, thus, that the population of Mullu Kurumba has been recorded under the head of Kurumans in the 1961 Census records. Until the Mullukurumba population is recorded separately, we may rely on the figure given by Luiz, *i.e.*, 7,000.

LANGUAGE

Thurston, quoting the Madras Census Report 1891, says that the Mullu Kurumbas speak Malayalam (1909 : Vol. IV, 166). Aiyappan (1948 : 95) also writes that the Mullu-Kurumbas speak Malayalam but Luiz states that they speak a dialect of their own called Kurumba which is an unintelligible dialect of Kannada with a good admixture of Tamil and Malayalam words and phrases and that they have no script of their own (1962 : 197). However, in this regard, I am inclined to agree with the observation of Madras Census Report, 1891 and Aiyappan. Those who had become literates before 1956, *i.e.*, before the re-organisation of States, adopted Malayalam script because Kappala was then in Kerala. Now Kappala is in Madras State and so the Kappalites learn Tamil script.

KAPPALA : ITS SURROUNDING AND PEOPLE

Kappala, the Mullukurumba *vedu* in which an intensive fieldwork was carried out from April 1965 to August 1965, to collect ethnographic data on the tribe, is a uniethnic hamlet consisting of twenty households living in 29 houses and falls under the administrative unit of Erumad village of the present Gudalur taluk in Nilgiris district. The inter-State boundary between Madras and Kerala is just three miles away on the west of this Erumad village. Until the reorganisation of States in 1956, this village was included in the Wynad taluk of the erst-while Malabar district. To-day, though the village is part of

Madras State there is preponderance of the Malayalam language and the Malayalee way of life here.

With reference to pre-British period, Aiyappan, (1948 : 92) describes this region of Wynad in the following words :

“The Wynaad taluk is geographically a part of the Nilgiris plateau. The eastern half of Wynaad contiguous with the Nilgiris and Coorg is inhabited by Kanara-speaking tribes and the western half, by Malayalam-speaking tribes. When the Nilgiri-Wynaad plateau began to be opened up by European planters, they found the country in the possession of a few landlords, chiefly Malayalees for, the whole of the Wynaad area, until its cession to the East India Company by Tippu Sultan was part of the dominions of the Raja of Kottayam. The actual cultivators were the tribes, such as the Kurichiyas, Mulla Kurumbar and Chettis”.

Erumad village, which is a part of the erstwhile Wynad taluk of Malabar, was amidst thick jungle till about three decades ago and was the abode of wild animals. The Mullukurumbas and the other tribes of this village and of neighbourhood had slain a tiger in Erumad only twenty years ago. Now, though the hillocks are still covered with thick green vegetation, the wild animals have vanished. Erumad village has a multi-ethnic population, both tribal and non-tribal. Among the tribes found here are the Chettis, the Mullukurumbas, the Urali Kurumbas, the Kattu Naickens and the Pariyans, while the non-tribal ethnic population comprises of the following castes and communities—Brahmin, Nair, Tiyan, Cheruman, Parayan, Harijan,* Christian and Mopla (Muslim). Formerly, there was only a cart track running through this village which has been converted into a metalled road about nine years ago. Buses now ply on this road, twice a day, between Gudalur and Chulliodu, the latter leading to Sultan Battery. A branch of post office and a branch of Tahsildar's office have been functioning here since a decade. There are also three schools in this village, namely, a high school, an elementary school and a primary school. The last is a residential school and it is situated in Kappala. This school, run by the Madras Government, is exclusively meant for the tribal children of the area.

*Though there are also Christians, they themselves Harijans.

There has been a continuous flow of the population from Kerala—specially that of the Christians and the Moplas, settling down in Erumad village. The latter have monopolised the trade while the former agriculture, in Erumad village. Tamil speaking ex-servicemen (Harijans) have been allotted plots of land here by the Madras Government to settle down and a separate settlement of these people has come up in this village. The native Chettis living in this village, however, continue to be the more prosperous people of this area.

There are only a few houses of the Urali Kurumbas and the Kattu Naickens in this village. The former were traditionally engaged in blacksmithy, pottery (handmade), carpentry and basketry. At present these people have given up trade in the first three occupations for various reasons. They now supplement their income obtained through basketry by working as agricultural labourers in the estates nearby. The Kattu Naickens who were hunter-gatherers till a decade ago are now agricultural labourers. The Paniyans who are considered to be the most backward among all the tribes of this village are described by Aiyappan as “..... agrestic slaves and sold with the land to which they are attached as slave labourers” (1948: 98). Though slavery has been legally abolished, a large number of them are still found to serve their traditional masters.

THE MULLUKURUMBAS

The Mullukurumbas are numerically the largest group in this village. There are four other veedus of Mullukurumbas in this village besides Kappala, namely, Nedungodu, Onimoola, Kappu Kunnu and Nari Valappu. There are a number of oral and written stories regarding the origin of this tribe.

Thurston quotes from the Madras Census Report, 1891, “.... the Kurumbas or Kurubas are the modern representatives of the ancient Kurumbas or Pallavas, who were once so powerful throughout southern India, but very little trace of their greatness now remains ... The final overthrow of the Kurumba sovereignty was effected by the Chola King Adondai about the seventh or eighth century A.D. and the Kurumbas were scattered far and wide. Many fled to the hills and in the Nilgiris and the Wynad, in Coorg and Mysore, representatives of this ancient race are now found as wild and uncivilized tribes” (1909: Vol. IV, 156).

Luiz sets aside the possibility of the Mullukurumbas being the modern representatives of ancient Kurumbas or the Pallavas but agrees with the claim of the Mullukurumbas that they are the *Vedas* (*Vedans*) of South India, who after coming into Malabar were called Kurumans (1962 : 198).

Aiyappan reports that " they (Mullukurumbas) are experts in hunting and are good shots with their bows and arrows. During the Kottayam Raja's rebellion against the English, the Mullukurumbas fought very valiantly with the Raja" (1948 : 95).

The Mullukurumba tradition has it that God Shiva and Goddess Parvathi descended on earth in the guise of hunter-couple to grant Arjuna, the epic hero, the boon of *Pasupathas-thiram* (a special bow and arrow). The Mullukurumbas further add that God Shiva created a band of hunters to accompany him and Goddess Parvathi at that time and that the descendant of those hunters are now known as the Mullukurumbas.

It is not so important to argue as to which account regarding their origin is true but Aiyappan's statement describing them as valiant and loyal soldiers, if correct, certainly shows their political awareness and loyalty towards the local Raja. The oral literature is to be taken as a mode of expression of a set of ideas instead of a set of rules (Leach : 1954 ; 268). With this, it becomes easier to understand the purpose of the traditional stories. The traditional story prevalent among the Mullukurumbas pointing to God Shiva as the creator of their ancestors goes to identify them with the Hindu population and validates their practice of hunting. There has also been a tendency among the tribals to raise their social status by associating themselves with the Gods and Goddesses of the Hindu pantheon (*cf.* Srinivas : 1962 ; 57). This gets confirmed in the case of the Mullukurumbas as we learn that they who claim God Shiva as their creator did not even worship Hindu Gods and Goddesses until recently.

There is no written record regarding the origin of Kappala veedu. The oral literature traditionally handed over says that two brothers living in the western Wynad about twelve generations ago were asked by the *Janmi* (landlord) of the region to go to Erumad and live near the *Athiralanmar* temple there so as to keep watch over that temple. The two brothers built two huts on the present site of Kappala and kept watch over the temple which is still there. After some generations, on account

of the expansion of the families, the elder brother shifted to another site about a furlong east of Kappala, while the younger brother's family continued to stay in Kappala. This is the only account available regarding the origin of this *veedu*.

To-day, the Mullukurumbas, as members of any other community are experiencing waves of changes. The factors like opening up of the area, the intrusion of the immigrants, the switch over from almost a subsistence economy to the present cash oriented market economy are affecting their traditional way of life. The aim of the present study is to write a descriptive and analytical account of the Mullukurumbas.

FIELD RESEARCH METHODS

Anthropological Survey of India had sponsored a programme to bring out brief monographs on little known tribes on the basis of rapid field work of three to four months. Nilgiris was assigned to me as the area for my study. After making a quick survey of some of the tribes of Nilgiris I selected the Mullukurumbas. The Mullukurumba men and women on first appearance looked traditional and friendly. They also showed some interest in my work. The Mullukurumbas have so far not been studied by any anthropologist and whatever material is available on them is in the form of short papers. These factors led me to select this group.

The settlement Kappala where I conducted my field work on the Mullukurumbas was selected on the advice of the local officials. In the first place, it has the largest number of Mullukurumba houses in comparison with the other Mullukurumba settlements in the region and it is also a part of the developing village, Erumad. Secondly, it is situated by the side of the Gudalur-Sultan Battery Road (*via* Cherambadi) on which buses ply regularly. Its situation was convenient to me. I also thought that I would get an opportunity to study the impact of recent developments on the life of the Mullukurumbas.

I stayed in Kappala for about four months (5th April, 1965 to 8th August, 1965). The field work was done mainly in Kappala *veedu*. In June 1965 when my supervisor (Dr. P. K. Misra) came to the field, I got opportunities to visit a number of the Mullukurumba *veedus* in Wynad taluk. This helped me to obtain a wider perspective of the data I obtained at Kappala.

A primary school is run in a big house in Kappala. I was given a room adjoining to this school to live in. Incidentally, on the first day of my arrival there, a death had occurred. I found that all activities (including cooking) in all the houses within the settlement were suspended. I was told that the hearths could be lit only after the dead body was taken away from the settlement for burial. Though it took nearly twenty-four hours for this, I starved along with them for the entire period. This attempt of mine to identify myself with them and to honour their customs, I think, went a long way in making them to come closer to me with confidence and friendly feelings right from the beginning.

I being a Brahmin and living comfortably in their company without any inhibition was taken very well by them and they helped me to develop a good rapport with them. I had no trouble in meeting and conversing freely with their women and girls at any time. During the day time, I visited the Mullukurumba houses and talked to the women. Some of the Mullukurumbas who showed keen interest in my work came in the evenings to the verandah of the school building in which I stayed along with some Mullukurumbas and I used to have long conversations with them. The Mullukurumba girls of the age group seventeen and above, who are yet to be married sleep together in a room in any house within the settlement. On my request these girls, six of them, started sleeping in the room I stayed.

Data collected through interviews and observation could be conveniently checked by me because I was quite intimate with young girls and women of Kappala. At times, whenever it was possible I also participated in their activities, for example, pounding rice, cooking, following their marriage and death processions and helping in two child births. I have also made a good collection of many of their artifacts right from the model of their houses to their agricultural implements.

I must particularly mention one old and two young men among the Kappalites who, from the very beginning showed interest in my work. One of them was educated upto S.S.L.C. These men on their own very much wanted that their 'history' should be studied and written. Sometimes when I visited some cultural specialists, they took notes along with me. They also acted as guides for me in the jungles, gave me reliable information and helped me to collect authentic data from others.

At no period of my field work, I faced any kind of resistance. I received excellent co-operation in my work from men, women and children alike, which helped me to collect reliable data in the short period at my disposal.

CHAPTER TWO

MATERIAL CULTURE AND DAILY LIFE

The Mullukurumbas live in uniethnic settlements called *veedu*. These Mullukurumba *veedus* have certain characteristics in common, which give them a striking and unique appearance by which they are easily identifiable, as belonging to this tribe. The cleanliness of the surroundings in the settlement, the neat rows of houses, the uniform colour scheme for walls and verandahs of all the houses in the *veedu*, the high roofs with their eaves reaching low, and covering the high verandahs, high plinths, the paddy husking sheds encircling the settlement site and the central temple house portraying the Mullukurumba women's artistic talents on all its four walls are the striking features of a Mullukurumba *veedu*.

The Mullukurumbas draw drinking water from the natural springs nearby. They are not inclined to draw water from the well dug under the Block Development Schemes in Kappala.

They go to nearby streams or ponds, for bathing and washing purposes. They have not adopted any of the modern sanitary systems. The Block Development Office has constructed some long, narrow drains on the ground, below the eaves to carry off the rain water and also used water but the Mullukurumbas do not throw the used water in these drains. In a few houses, the used water is collected in pots or tins and when they are full, the used water is thrown away on the ground outside the house. In other houses they throw the used water on the ground, outside the house, straightaway.

The agricultural fields, particularly paddy fields, are just adjacent to the settlement site. But, some plots on which shifting cultivation is done are a little away from the settlement, about one or two miles.

The burial ground for the Mullukurumbas is a little away from the settlement site. Kappala and Nedungodu (another Mullukurumba settlement in Erumad village) have a common burial ground and it is about three furlongs away from Kappala on its east.

Though every Mullukurumba settlement has not got a school, there is a residential school in Kappala, sponsored by

the Government of Madras. This school is meant for only tribal children.

HOUSE (PERAI)

The house of a Mullukurumba is a hut consisting of only one room. There are only three houses in Kappala with tiled roofs and all the other houses have thatched roofs. The Mullukurumba houses stand on a high plinth ranging between two to five feet. They have high plinths in order to reduce the effect of humidity. These houses are constructed by the Mullukurumbas themselves. The assistance of professional carpenters is sought by them only when they construct a house with a tiled roof. Mud, bamboo, wood and grass or paddy straw are largely used as material for the construction of their houses.

A vacant plot of land, about 15' × 20' in size, on the campus of the veedu is chosen for the construction of a new house. Six wooden pillars are first fixed in two rows about ten feet apart from each other, three on each row. A rectangular wooden frame is tied at the top of these pillars. The roof is then constructed on this rectangular frame. The peculiarity of the roof here is that the bamboo rafters which are spread on all the four sides of the roof are not tied to the central beam at the top. Holes are made at the tapering ends of the bamboo rafters and they are threaded on thin, long bamboos—one on either side of the central beam—in an intertwining fashion. The rafters are kept in position by the closely and horizontally arranged bamboo splits called *varichal*, which are tied to the rafters. The roof is thatched with either grass or paddy straw. Just before the onset of monsoons, the upper layer of straw on the roof is renewed each year while complete rethatching is done once in three years.

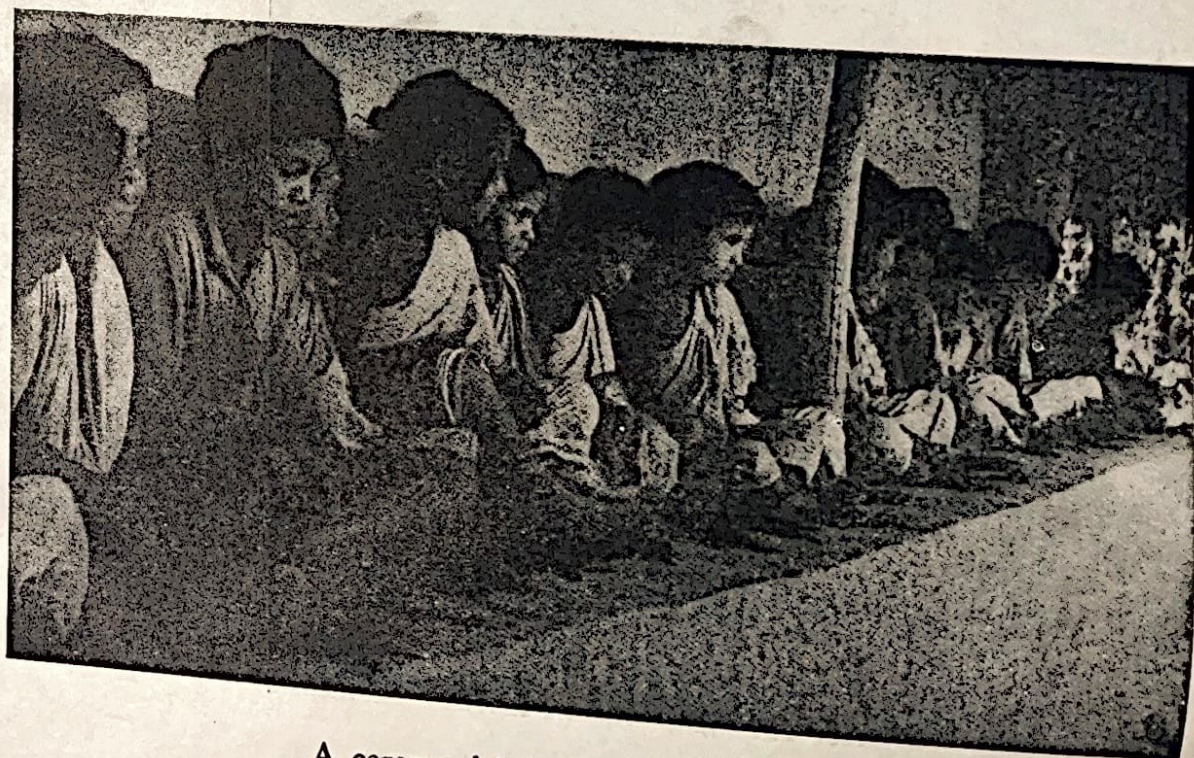
Panai (Terrace-like structure in a house) is next attended to, in the construction of a house. *Panai* is a plaited bamboo panel, placed over a set of cross beams below the roof but above the rectangular wooden frame, which resting on the six pillars of the house, supports the roof. A mixture of mud, paddy husk and cowdung is smeared on this *panai* to strengthen it. This terrace-like structure is used partially as a storeroom and also to dry boiled paddy during the rainy season. There is a bamboo ladder in every house to reach the *panai*.

Addam is a tray like structure, made out of bamboo splits and is suspended from the *panai* just above the hearth. Things

MULLUKURUMBAS OF KAPPALA



A Mullukurumba house



A ceremonial s

MULLUKURUMBAS OF KAPPALA



Girls dressed for puberty attainment ceremony



Traditional hair style

which are to be kept warm or which are to be dried quickly are spread on this.

The walls of a house are then built. A suitable quantity of paddy husk (known through experience) is mixed with clay and left wet for two or three days. The well mixed clay is made into lumps and placed adjacent to each other and then one above the other. Only two rows of clay lumps are arranged on all the four sides, in a day. After these two rows dry up, fresh clay lumps are made and piled to form the next two rows. This traditional way of building the wall takes a considerable time but the walls made by this method are said to be strong and lasting. Some houses in Kappala built in this traditional manner are said to be as old as sixty years and they have not been plastered also during this period. Incidentally, if this is true, it indicates that the Mullukurumbas led a settled life even six decades ago. However, this method of constructing the wall is now almost given up and instead, unburnt but dry, mud bricks of the size 8" × 12" × 4" are made out of the mixed clay with the help of wooden frames and are now used in the construction of walls. The plastering of the walls and floor is done with a mixture of clay, paddy husk and cowdung.

A Mullukurumba house has verandah in its three or four sides. This verandah is generally constructed high say 3 to 4 feet above the ground level. The houses which have high verandahs also have mud platforms of the width of one foot or so below the verandah running all round the house at a height of one or two feet. Some houses have two such running mud platforms, one above the other, the higher one being broader than the lower. People relax on verandah particularly during day time, as the low eaves extending over it provide cool shade. Ceremonial feasts are also served on these verandahs. The lower, narrow platform is useful in two ways. During the rainy season, people move about in the veedu by walking on these platforms without getting drenched. Secondly, those girls who have attained puberty and not married yet and also the young daughters-in-law who maintain the rules of avoidance, walk on these platforms because their faces will then be covered by the low eaves and this arrangement helps them to maintain the mores of their society.

The walls of a house and the floor inside are then plastered and levelled with clay. The walls of all the houses are painted

outside with a solution of the locally available red clay while the verandahs are painted with a deep grey solution obtained by mixing finely powdered charcoal, cowdung and water. Before these solutions dry up on the walls, various designs are drawn with fingers. The frequent colour washing of these verandahs give a lustrous look to these houses.

The hearth in every house is on its eastern side and this preference is explained by them as owing to sun rising in the east. *Chetna* as it is locally called, is invariably a large platform (about $4' \times 6' \times 1\frac{1}{2}'$) with two hearths on it. The vast space at the back of the hearths is used for keeping their utensils and pots containing water. On the other side of the house is a raised wooden platform called *param* on which bamboo baskets called *komma* are kept to store grains. They do not fix windows or ventilators for the free circulation of air. The door at the entrance is often a panel made out of split bamboos and tied to the wooden frame fixed there. The space left in between the roof frame and the roof give ventilation to the house.

UTILIZATION OF SPACE

The only room of the house is about $10' \times 12'$ in area and is used for all purposes. The *chetna* (hearth) is on one side of the room and *param* the granary stand is on the other side of the room. The *panai*, covering two-thirds of the ground space above the floor and beneath the roof is a terrace-like structure, on which are kept the implements such as bows, arrows, guns, agricultural tools, baskets, etc.; food articles such as roots and tubers they grow or collect, dried meat, boiled paddy (spread for drying during rainy season), etc. In the small bamboo tray, *addam* of the size $2' \times 3' \times 6''$ are kept salt, fish and other things which they have to keep warm. In the space left in the room, the inmates of the house eat and sleep. The husband, wife and children under eight years of age sleep in this room. All the children in the *vedu* who are above this age form their own groups (discussed later) on basis of age and sex and sleep together in some houses where there are spare rooms. Old people sleep either in a closed section of the verandah with some fire lit nearby or else in a small room constructed adjacent to the living room, for this purpose. If there are guests, the males sleep together on one side of the room and the females sleep together in another side of the room. At times, if there is a large number of guests, all the males sleep in the temple

house of the veedu and the females in the house. Their bedding is meagre—a mat, that is all. The head of the house may have a plank of wood or a folded gunny bag for a pillow. Very few have sheets to wrap themselves, but during cold season they light fire and sleep around it. The outer verandah is useful for them to relax during day time or to serve ceremonial feasts or to serve food for a menstruating woman and members of other tribes such as Uralis, Kattu Naickens or Paniyans. On one side of the verandah, a small opening is made to which is fixed a door. This serves as the fowl sty. Firewood is stored in the husking shed if the household has one or in the rear side of the house. The courtyard in front of the house is common for all the houses facing it and is used for drying crops like coffee seeds, pepper, ginger and turmeric, and grains like paddy, *ragi* and *samai*. The Mullukurumbas go to nearby fields or bushes for evacuation and then reach the pools or streams for ablutions. The Block Development Office has built two latrines (with septic tanks) and two bathrooms in Kappala. The Mullukurumbas are yet not able to appreciate the use of these latrines and bathrooms and continue their traditional habits of going to the open fields and streams.

FURNITURE

Sharpened bamboo pegs are driven in the walls to tie a rope on which they hang clothes or to hang any other thing such as fish basket, winnowing fan, etc., directly. *Uri* is a net work of coir ropes—a circular ring—suspended from panai by means of three ropes. Milk, curds, ghee, etc., are kept in these uris. In a few houses cots or benches are kept for sleeping. A bamboo ladder to reach the panai is an essential feature in every house.

KOTTIL

The shed in which the Mullukurumbas husk the grains is called *Kottil*. It is a space of about 6' × 6', encircled by low mud walls and having a thatched roof, supported by four pillars. Two or three wooden mortars are kept in this shed. Women carry the pestles from their homes and husk the grains in these sheds. Every household which can afford to install a kottil has its own kottil while those which cannot afford are allowed to use the existing kottils. These sheds are neither in a cluster nor always attached to the house to which it belongs, but are erected at almost equal intervals encircling the whole settlement. At times this kottil is extended longitudinally or a panai (a terrace

like structure beneath the roof) is laid to stock firewood during the rainy season.

The *koil veedu* (the temple house) is an essential feature of a Mullukurumba settlement, however, small it may be. The plan and the construction of this house is the same as any other house in a Mullukurumba settlement. The colour washing of the walls and verandahs of this is also similar to that of any other house in the *veedu*, but the women of the *veedu* show the best of their artistic talents on the walls of the temple house by drawing figures of animate objects, often difficult to name and also some designs with no geometric principle in it. Ceremonies connected with birth, puberty attainment, marriage and death are celebrated in this temple house.

CLOTHING AND ADORNMENT

DRESS OF MALES

A baby is kept nude till he is about one year after which a loin cloth becomes his only wear. At the age of four or five years, the boy is given a small length of cloth, either new or old to tie around his waist. It is at the age of ten or twelve that he is given *thorthu*, a towel like cloth, four cubits in length and about two cubits in breadth. It is a coarse cloth. After marriage, he usually carries an upper cloth called *pochu mundu* on his shoulder. This is the traditional dress of the Mullukurumba males. Now-a-days, the shirts, locally called *kuppayam*, are worn by most of the males, irrespective of their age.

On the occasion of his marriage, a man wears the *thorthu* and wraps his body with a long piece of white cloth (about eight cubits in length), torn in the middle and stitched together again. The motive for tearing it and then stitching it is not known to them. This stitched cloth is called *olli* locally. *Olli* rests on his left shoulder, leaving his right shoulder free. On death, the deadbody is dressed like a bridegroom, irrespective of the civil condition of the deceased.

In the daily life of a Mullukurumba, there are three items on his person which can be termed as insignia of a Mullukurumba. They are *peechang kathi* (a knife) which he always keeps inserted in the *thorthu* at the waist; *rool* (a silver waist band) and *paakku* (a small compartmented cloth bag in which *betelnuts*, *betel leaves*, *lime* and *tobacco* are kept).

DRESS OF FEMALES

A baby is mostly kept nude but is she seldom dressed in a *kattu thundu* (a small length of cloth either torn from an old, used cloth or bought in that size). This *kattu thundu* which wraps her body is tied on the left shoulder. As she grows, a piece of cloth called *kattu thundu* about three cubits in length wraps her body and tied on the left shoulder. When the girl is about five years old, besides the *kattu thundu*, a small length of cloth is tied round her waist too. A girl whose breasts have started developing wears *kachchai muri* (a cloth of eight cubits in length) folded in double, round her waist, over the small length of cloth which she wore upto her knees till then. This small length of the cloth, worn inside the *kachchai muri* is called *arai thuni* and serves as an underwear.

On the occasion of ceremonies connected with puberty attainment, a girl wears all the three items of dress mentioned above ; but the *kattu thundu* is worn in a different way. The knot does not come on the left shoulder, instead, the *kattu thundu* is brought beneath the arms and is tied across the chest, just above the breasts. This way of wearing the *kattu thundu* by Mullukurumba women is observed on the occasion of bathing a deadbody and also while receiving the purificatory oil on the *pulai* (pollution breaking) day after the death. Though this style of wearing the *kattu thundu* is exclusively reserved for only certain ceremonies connected with pollution, they could not explain the association between the two.

On the occasion of marriage, the bride wears the *kachchai musu* and instead of tying a *kattu thundu* on her shoulder, she wraps herself well with another *kachchai muri*, covering both the shoulders, neck, back and her chest also, leaving open only her face. The deadbody of a female is dressed like a bride, irrespective of the civil condition of the deceased.

Though all the Mullukurumba males have started wearing shirts, their women are very much traditional in their dress. Of the twenty households in Kappala, young girls in only two households wear bodice and blouse daily¹ instead of *kattu*

¹ In a third household, a nineteen year old girl who was going for wage earning started wearing blouse. As she was not sure of her parent's approval for this, she used to wear blouse after she had gone half way towards the work spot. In the evening, she would remove it on the way again. But after a month or so, her parents came to know about it and they beat her severely for this

thundu and they wear saris, when they go out of Kappala to attend a fair or a cinema. Even in these two households, the elderly women always wear kattu thundu and kachchai muri.

An aspect of dress in which the Mullukurumba males and females deviate from tradition is the way in which they wear the thorthu and kachchai muri. Traditionally they wore them high, just above the knees in the case of men and just below the knees in the case of women. Now-a-days, most of them wear their thorthu and kachchai muri quite low, almost leaching the ankles. Acculturation among the Mullukurumbas is also marked in their gradually giving up the use of coarse cloth and going in for clothes of a finer quality.

HAIR STYLES

MALES

Those men who have not cropped their hair tie it up above their left ear, as per the tradition. At present, only five men in Kappala continue to adopt this traditional style. All others crop their hair periodically. Till a decade ago, shaving and cropping were done by one to another, but now-a-days, most of them go to the saloons in Erumad village for a hair cut. The immigrant Hindu barbers also extend their services ungrudgingly provided they are paid for their services. However, during the ceremonial occasion, pulai (pollution breaking after death), the shaving of the heads of all male members of the veedu and those close male relatives who have come for the ceremony, is done by one or two young Mullukurumbas.

The Mullukurumbas have no head gear but during summer, they tie the *pochchu mundu* round their heads to avoid the heat of the sun. At times they wear *thoppi kodai* (a variety of hat made out of palm or coconut leaves). During rains they wear a long hood type of thing, made by Paniyans, out of split *odai* (a variety of bamboo). This hood protects the head as well as the back, while they are at work on the field.

FEMALES

Girls who have not attained puberty have a particular style of tying their hair, whenever their elders find leisure to help them in doing so. The smoothly combed hair is collected and tightly tied high at the back by means of some string usually twisted out of *kaiyon* fibre. Then the hair, hanging from the knot are folded three or four times over the knot itself and

tied tightly with the left out portions of the string from the knot, taking care to preserve the folded hair in a flat, spread manner. If they do not get help to tie their hair in this manner, these girls tie their hair at the back in a single knot as grown up girls and women do.

Whether one bathes regularly or not, one applies coconut oil to the head and combs the hair smoothly at least once in two or three days—a luxury they love to indulge in. Whenever they go out of their *veedu*, to either market or a cinema or a fair or another *veedu*, they first oil and comb their head and then put on a clean dress.

FOOT-WEAR

Mullukurumba men use foot-wear since a few years but their women do not use any foot-wear even now. Men buy ordinary slippers from Sultan Battery Market, about nine miles away from Kappala.

ORNAMENTS

Babies :

Black thread is tied round the wrists, ankles and waist of a new born baby. A few months later, *mull* or *minni* (rings for the ears) made out of silver, *kaa vala* (anklets) made out of lead, *nool* (a waist band) made out of silver, *kaivala* (bangles) made out of silver or glass adorn the babies, if the parents can procure them. The ornaments are worn till the babies are three or four years after which the distinction starts between the sexes, in the aspect of adornment.

Male children :

They wear either ear tops (*kammal*) or thick rings (*kadukkan*) made of silver or gold and silver *nool* (waist band), until marriage.

Female children :

Girls wear *kai vala* (glass bangles) *kammal*, *mani kella* (bead necklace) and *mookku patti* (nose top) until they get married.

Married men :

Men wear *kaathala* (ear rings of a particular design) at the time of marriage. In the past, *i.e.*, till two decades ago the men

continued to wear *kaathala* even after marriage but now-a-days they wear it only for the occasion. During marriage, they wear three plain silver rings on each of the fingers on the right hand, excepting the thumb. After the marriage, these silver rings are now-a-days removed and they wear gold rings instead, if they have.

Married women :

A girl gives up the use of her glass bangles, *kammal* and *mani kella* at the time of her marriage. Her new acquisitions after marriage are *kaathala* (same as those worn by men during marriage), three rings (silver) on all the fingers of the right hand, excepting thumb, *patta vala* (broad silver bangles), *chembodam* and *tholandhi* (two types of silver anklets) and *thali* (marriage badge) made of silver and gold plated.

Once one gets married, whether a man or a woman, one continues to wear the ornaments mentioned above till one's burial whatever be one's civil condition in between, whether widowed or divorced or remarried.

PERSONAL CLEANLINESS

The Mullukurumbas now give attention to their personal cleanliness and admit they were 'very dirty' till twenty years ago. Most of them do not bathe regularly even now—but those who work on fields are compelled to wash themselves thoroughly in some nearby brook or well to rid themselves of the mud and slush which get accumulated on their bodies during the course of work on the fields. Most of them in Kappala are agricultural labourers and are free on Sundays. They find it convenient on this day to bathe and wash their clothes. But there is no compulsion or regularity in bathing. On festival days like Vishnu, Onam, Sankranthi, etc., they bathe in the morning. Those who attend the bathing of a Mullukurumba dead body or its burial also bathe. All the inmates of a *veedu* bathe on the *pulai* (pollution breaking after death) day everytime there is a death in the *veedu*. The Mullukurumbas clean their teeth every morning but their spitting habit is an irritating sight to outsiders. They spit anywhere and everywhere—right in front of the verandah, to inside the lighted hearth. Their ignorance of hygiene is manifest in their habit of giving a solution of soot deposited above the hearth in lukewarm water to a woman, just after delivery, if there is delay in the ejection of placenta. There is a Mullukurumba woman in Kappala who had under-

gone a mid-wifery course of six week. This course was conducted by the State Government Medical Officers. Under this scheme they invited women from different tribes and backward castes to undergo the course and gave a stipend of Rs. 50/- to the trainees. The Mullukurumba woman who underwent the course, confesses that she took the course for gaining Rs. 50/- and not to learn anything new. She continues to conduct the child birth in her own traditional way.

FOOD

The staple diet of Mullukurumbas is rice. Even the new born babies, from their tenth or eleventh day onwards, are given well boiled rice made into a paste with salt for taste. From its tenth day onwards till it is about one and a half or two months old, a baby is fed with two to three teaspoonsful of rice cooked in a tiny pot on slow fire. This rice is given to the baby three times, in the morning, noon and evening, after warming it up each time. This rice is only to supplement mother's milk. As the baby grows the quantity of rice is also raised. When the baby is about one or one and a half years old, they start giving it boiled rice, which the adults take.

The children and the adults among the Mullukurumbas have three meals in a day. The first meal is taken by about six O'clock in the morning. The Mullukurumba women wake up at 5 a.m. or at times even earlier and get the *kanji* (rice gruel) and *sambandhi* (a paste of red chillies and salt) ready within an hour. During rainy season, in those houses in which there is *ragi* (a millet), the morning meal is *ragi dosai* (baked sheets of ragi flower mixed with salt and water). During the lean period which is from June to September, some of the Mullukurumbas who do not have either grains or the means to purchase them, boil the edible portions of unripe jack fruits and eat.

The noon meal is either rice (after straining the excess of water) if one can afford or *kanji* again. *Koottaan* (vegetables or mutton curry) is also made for the noon meal. The vegetables or the meat is first boiled. A little of turmeric, red chillies, salt, coconut, coriander seeds and onion are ground together on the rectangular grinding stone called *ammi* with the help of a stone roller and this paste is added to the already boiled vegetables or meat. If one can afford, one seasons mustard in coconut oil and adds it to the *koottaan*. In a ceremonial feast conducted during my halt in Kappala, in which about 250 persons were

fed with rice and koottaan, fifty litres of boiled rice was cooked. The koottaan was prepared out of five full bunches of raw banana (tender ones) and the following spices (the quantities used are indicated against each) :

Coconut	—	One
Onion (small size)	—	One litre
Coriander seeds	—	One hundred grams
Red chillies	—	Fifty grams
Salt	—	Half litre
Turmeric	—	Three pieces
Oil (coconut)	—	Hundred milli litres

At times, *saamai* (a millet) is cooked for the noon meal instead of rice.

The night meal is again rice and koottaan. Use of spices in the preparation of their daily diet is common only during harvest season, when they have enough cash to spend. During the lean period, *i.e.*, from June to September, the procurement of salt and red chillies is a hard job for some families.

As hunting has now become rare and not profitable too, the Mullukurumbas cook vegetables, almost daily. They are not tired of eating the same vegetables in its season at every meal for several weeks continuously. During summer, the women go in the afternoon for fishing and with the day's catch, the evening koottaan is prepared. In the preparation of fish koottaan, a little of the processed mango juice¹ is added, to give it a sour taste. Irrespective of the season each time the food is generally cooked fresh. However, the left over food is not wasted but consumed.

The Mullukurumbas do not eat beef but have started eating chicken and mutton about ten years. The meat of the wild boar is relished most by them while the meat of porcupine, deer, rabbit and wild forest goat is also taken by them.

The arrival of guests is a routine feature in the Mullukurumba social life. The guests are also treated with the same meals. If one can afford, one fries *pappad* in coconut oil for the guests but that is done only on the days of their arrival and departure. Dried fish procured from the market, and

¹ During the mango season mango juice is extracted from half ripe mangoes and boiled till it becomes a thick solution and stays in a semi-solid state. It is then filled in bamboo containers and preserved for the year.

roasted directly in fire is another delicacy with which a guest is treated, at times.

There are three special preparations of the Mullukurumbas, namely, *dosai*, *thengai choru* and *appam*, of which the first two are of ceremonial significance.

Dosai :—Raw rice is washed well with water and the water is allowed to drain off completely. A little of black gram* (after removing the black skin) is added to this rice which is then pounded by women in wooden mortars with the wooden pestle. Sieve is used to get the fine powder. Rice flour is then mixed with salt and buttermilk (if available) or else with water in a pot, the previous night. In the morning the rice flour solution is taken in a coconut shell ladle and spread on the heavy, circular, heated stone pan, kept on the lighted hearth. After a minute or two, the side of the circular rice cake is turned on the pan itself by means of a scraper like iron ladle. A minute later it is removed from the pan and thrown on a plantain leaf kept nearby.

Dosais are prepared in the morning of every festival. Besides, on the third day of marriage dosais in large numbers are prepared and made in two bundles, one containing 100 and the other 50. These bundles are first carried from the bridegroom's house to the bride's veedu for distribution there. Two days later, the bride's family has to prepare almost an equal quantity of dosais and send them in two bundles with the bridal pair for distribution in the bridegroom's veedu. This exchange of dosai bundles between the bride's veedu and bridegroom's veedu is essential and it marks the completion of the marriage ceremony. It is to be celebrated for all marriages whether first or subsequent. The children whose mother has not done this ceremony cannot be married. Thus dosai finds a great ceremonial significance in the Mullukurumba life.

Apart from the festive and ceremonial occasions, whenever women go to visit their married daughters or parents or other close relations, they prepare dosais, if their funds permit and take with them. Also, when a guest leaves the veedu, the family with which he/she stayed prepares dosais and gives a bundle of them to him/her provided it can afford.

* Whenever rice is pounded for preparing dosai, the quantity of rice taken is not less than five litres and also not more than fifty litres. To this quantity of rice, one to two handful of blackgram is added.

Thengai choru (coconut rice):—Raw rice cooked in coconut juice along with a little turmeric powder and salt is Thengai choru. This is prepared on the occasion of the celebration of puberty attainment of girls. It is also the last meal for every festival they celebrate.

Appam (a sweet dish):—Jaggery is added to rice flour and the two are mixed with just enough water for the dough to remain as a semi-solid paste. This is poured into the dishes of the heated stone pan. Three to five dishes are carved on this stone pan. A little of oil or ghee is poured on the flour in each dish. After a little while, with the help of a thin stick, the sides of the partially cooked cakes are turned within the dishes. When it is cooked sufficiently, they are transferred into a pot or basket. Appam is only a delicacy for them and has no association with ceremonies.

The marriage feasts among the Mullukurumbas mainly consist of rice and two koottaans—one with vegetable and the other with meat in it. Serving of *pappad*, banana chips, *payasam* (rice cooked in milk, jaggery and ghee) have recently been introduced in marriage feasts by a few who are economically sound.

There is no taboo on eating meat or fish during the mourning period. It is only on the pollution breaking day, known as *pulaikuzhi*, that fish or meat is not cooked. But on the *koottathu koottal* day which is celebrated two days after *pulaikuzhi* day, fish and meat are also cooked along with a separate vegetable curry for offering to the ancestors.

Coffee has been introduced in the Mullukurumba life since about fifteen years. Coffee seeds are roasted along with their outer shells, in an iron *kadai* (frying pan) till they become dark brown in colour and then pounded into fine powder. A little of this powder is added to a large quantity of water to which sufficient quantity of jaggery has already been added. After allowing the mixture to boil for two or three minutes, it is removed from the fire and the coffee powder is allowed to settle. The upper clear liquid is coffee. No milk is added. This coffee is served in large quantities to all—young and old. The youngsters drink it in porcelain bowls while the elders drink it either in brass pots or glass tumblers or at times in mud bowls too.

UTENSILS

The utensils seen in a Mullukurumba kitchen are but a few. Round pots made out of either mud or copper, with narrow mouths are used for bringing water from the nearby natural spring and for storing. Round mud pots called *chatti* with slightly broader mouths are used for cooking rice or *kanji*. Koottaan is prepared in a mud pot called *kalam*. This *kalam* has a wide mouth, about 10" in diameter and its depth is also less than that of the rice pot. In some houses an iron *kadai* (frying pan) is also seen, in which they fry pappad or coffee seeds and shells and also prepare koottaan in it. The Mullukurumbas eat their food in *choru mannam* (rice dish) and *koottaan mannam* (curry dish) which are mud dishes, about 10" and 5" in diameter respectively and about 2" in depth. Two small holes are pierced at the bottom of an empty coconut shell (half) and a thin, long (about 18") wooden strip is passed through these holes in such a way that it tightly fits into the holes and keeps the shell in position. This is the type of ladle which is found in every Mullukurumba kitchen. The dosai and appam pans, made of stone, and a thin spadelike ladle made of iron are also there in most of the homes. The rectangular grinding stone (*ammi*) and the stone roller (*kozhavi*) also come under the essential kitchen items in every Mullukurumba home. In some homes this stone is kept on the outer verandah while in the others it is within the house.

Ceremonial meals are generally cooked in large pots. Since ten years, the Kappala veedu is in possession of a huge circular copper vessel called *anda* which is about 8" deep and about 4' in diameter. This *anda* was bought from the money collected in the temple house and they cook rice in it only during auspicious occasions but not for *pulai* ceremony. Ceremonial meals are cooked inside the temple house and served on *koova* leaves to the people sitting on the verandahs of houses surrounding the temple house.

DRINKS AND DRUGS

Toddy and arrack are prepared and sold by non-tribals on Kerala borders. In Kerala there is no prohibition on liquor. Some of the Mullukurumbas buy drinks (toddy) and either consume it there only or carry the drinks to their veedus and then drink. Among the Mullukurumbas, men, women and children drink. A bottle of drink costs Rs. 2/- (in 1965). Drink is a part of the

bride price even now. When there is a guest in the house, the host treats him with drinks if the funds permit the host to do so.

Ganja (opium) was previously consumed by them but the prohibition of it has proved to be effective as it is not available now.

Chewing of betel nuts, betel leaves, lime and tobacco is very common among the Mullukurumbas—young and old, male and female. *Beedies* are smoked by men quite often but their women have not taken to it. However, there is one case of an old lady (about 75 years old) in Kappala who smokes beedies on the quiet.

TOOLS AND IMPLEMENTS

HUNTING

Peachang Kaththi: *Peachang kaththi* is a heavy knife and is made in various sizes, according to one's wish. The handle for this knife is made out of the deer's antlers if one is in possession of them or else a wooden handle is fixed.

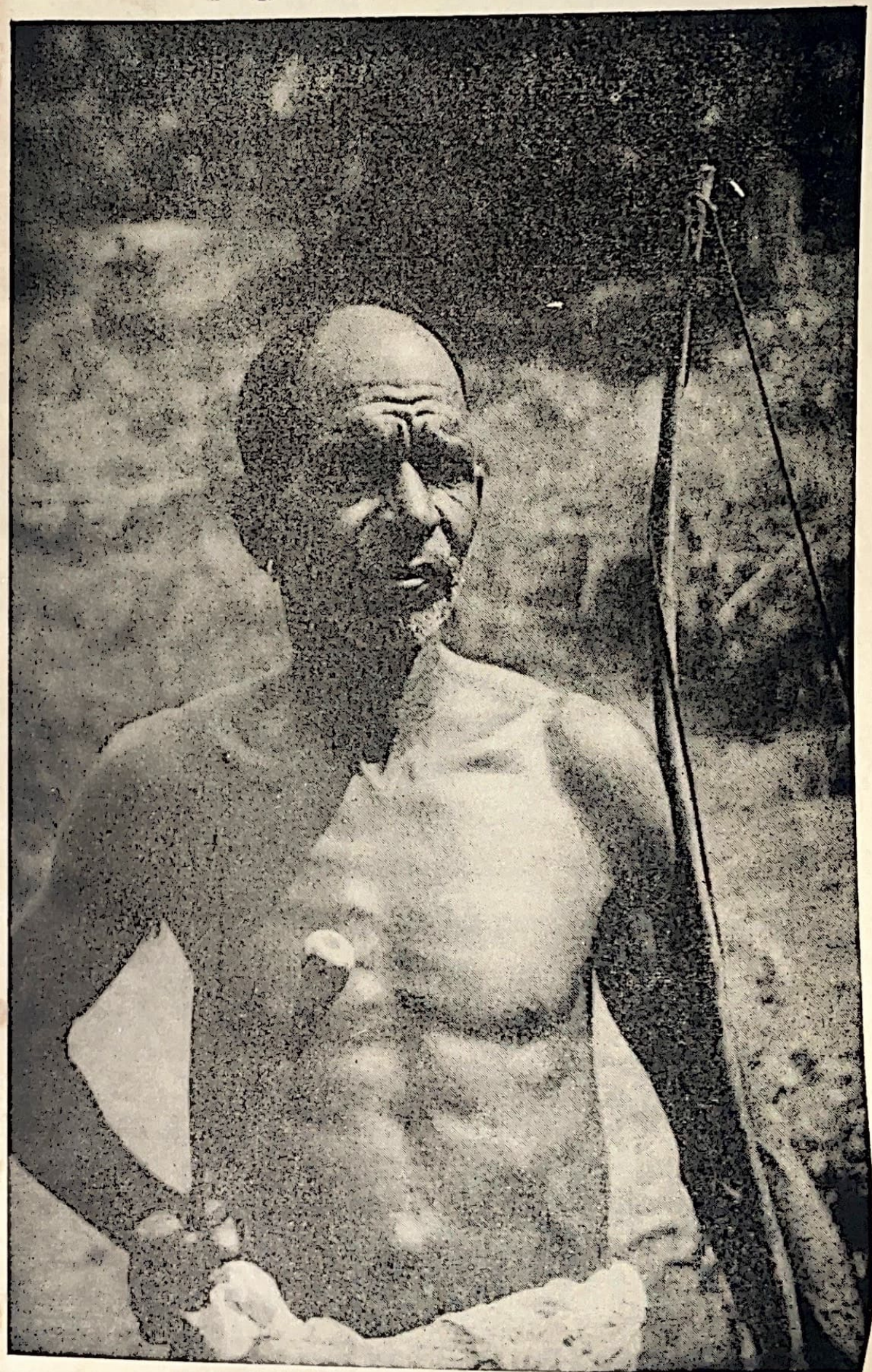
The sheath of this peachang kaththi is the dried leg-skin of a goat, with one end sewn, soon after the skin is drawn out of the leg.

This knife is used in cutting the branches and creepers that hinder their way while they go into jungles for hunting. It is with this knife that the animals killed are divided amongst themselves.

Vill (Bow): *Vill* is local name for bow and every Mullukurumba male possesses atleast one. On the occasion of Uchchala festival, even a newly born male baby should have a bow of its own. The bow is made out of bamboo. The bow string tied to the notches at the two ends of the bow is called *naan*. The bow for a child which learns shooting, is made from any bamboo but in making the bows for adults who actually participate in hunting in jungles, certain specifications are adhered to, in the selection of bamboo.

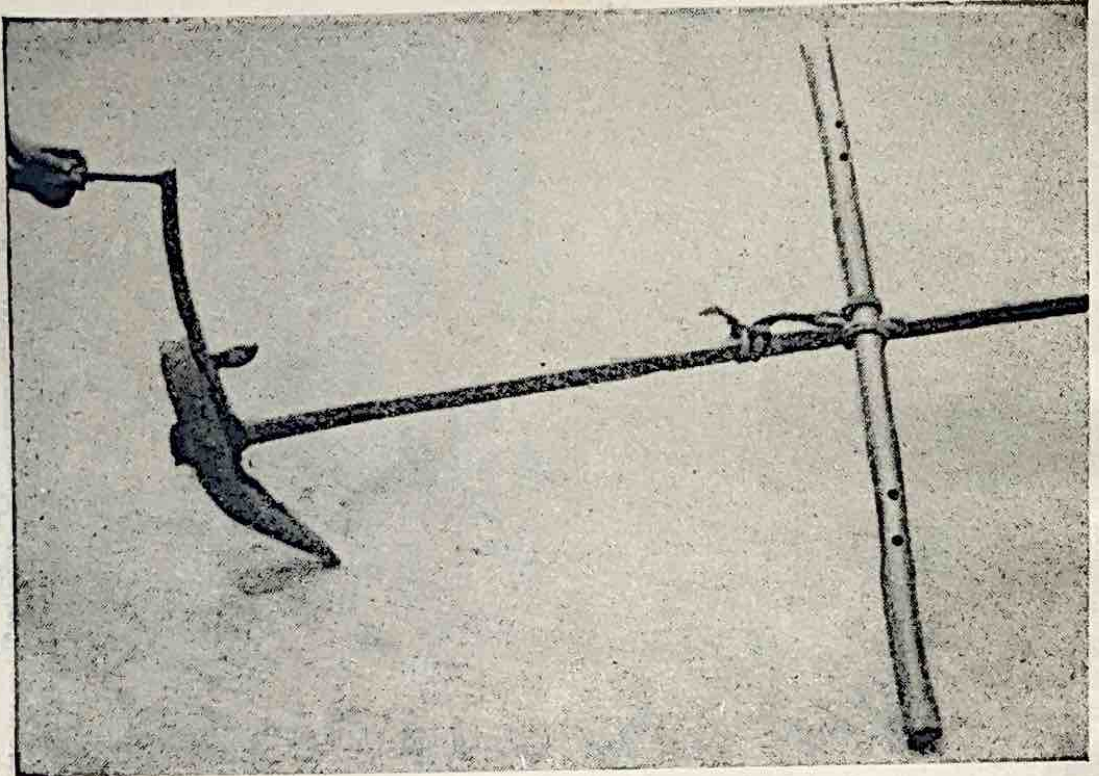
A bamboo which is 15 to 20 years of age is selected and only the middle portion of it, leaving out its two ends, is used for making the bow. This middle portion of the bamboo is split into a width of about one inch and notches are made at the two

MULLUKURUMBAS OF KAPPALA

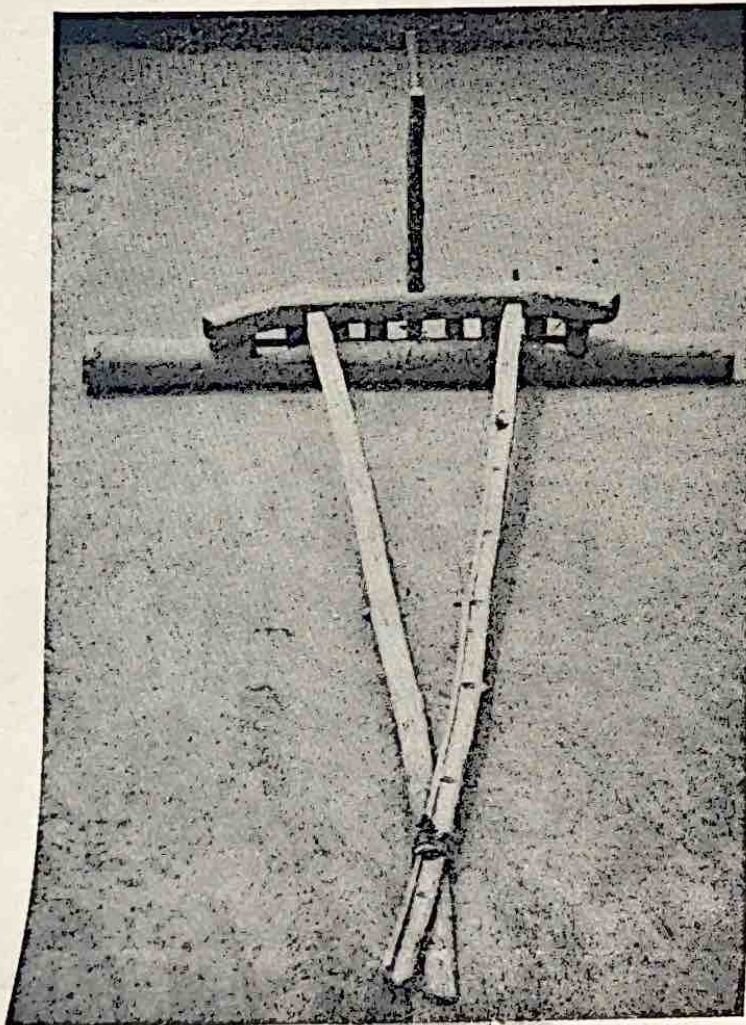


An expert hunter with (L to R) Ambu (arrow), Mottambu (round headed), Vill (bow)

MULLUKURUMBAS OF KAPPALA



Nenjal (Plough)



Cheruppu (Laveller)

ends of the split bamboo, its length being 60" to 80". Bow string, naan is made out of the fibre of *manali* plant available in the nearby forests. When the bow-string is drawn with the arrow fixed on it, the smooth side of the split bamboo of the bow is bent and faces the individual holding the bow. It is said that by this, the tension of the bow increases. When the bow is not in use, the bow string is kept loose by removing the loop from one of the two notches at the ends of the bow.

Ambu (Arrows): Mullukurumbas use three types of arrows :

a) *Panni ambu* :—This is a thin, strong stick of about 28" in length, with a sharp pointed end. This arrow is mainly used for practice shooting. Youngsters are taught shooting with this arrow. On the day of *Vishu* (Malayalam new year's day) festival all men, young and old, ceremonially practise shooting in the afternoon with this arrow. This arrow is made by the Mullukurumbas themselves.

b) *Mottambu* :—A thin strong stick of bamboo, about 28" in length, with a thick flat bottom is selected from the bamboo bush and the bottom is shaped as a bulb. There is a notch at the thin end of the arrow to fix it on the bow string. A little above the notch are fixed feathers around the shaft to steady the flight of the arrow when it is propelled from the bow string. The flat thick end of the arrow hits the aim. This arrow, generally used for shooting birds is made by the Mullukurumbas themselves.

c) *Ambu (arrow)* :—A long, thin shaft of 28" to 30" in length, with a narrow saw edged, iron blade fixed at one end of it is called *ambu*. The shaft is generally of bamboo. The length of the blade varies from 4" to 6" and used to be supplied by the Uralis (the artisan tribe of the region) in the past. There is no demand for arrows now because hunting has been abandoned as an occupation. A notch is made at the free end of the shaft to keep it in position on the bow string. A Mullukurumba carried one *mottambu* and two *ambus* along with a bow, whenever he went for hunting, in the past. Now-a-days, he carries only a *thokku* (gun).

Kundham (spear): Kundham is a long, wooden pole of about eight to twelve feet in length, with an iron spear head. The iron spear head is found to be of various sizes—one to two

feet long and two to three inches wide. These were also made by the Uralis in the past. Kundham is used in killing tigers.

Nari valai (Tiger net): Nari valai is the net plaited out of the thick coir spun by the Mullukurumbas themselves from the fibre of certain trees. This net is neither an individual effort nor an individual's possession. A few settlements use the same net. The net is big enough to encircle an area of about half an acre or even one acre of land. It serves like a fence when fixed and tied to poles. The net when fixed tightly comes up to a height of eight feet to ten feet from the ground.

Thokku (gun): Since two decades a few Mullukurumbas have come to possess guns. It is said that they received these guns as gifts from the European settlers in the nearby tea estates, in recognition of their merits in hunting. In Kappala, four households possess guns, out of which one has a double-barrel gun. Gun powder is bought in the market at Sultan Battery. Now-a-days, whenever the Mullukurumbas go for hunting, they carry a gun. Though the ceremonial value is still attached to the bows and arrows, they do not fail to recognize the utility of a gun.

AGRICULTURE

Kaththi: It is a heavy knife, eight to twelve inches in length and slightly bent at its upper end. To the lower end is fixed a wooden handle.

Kodali: It is the heavy axe used for chopping wood. Kaththi and Kodali are now bought in the market or from the local blacksmiths. Till a decade ago, Uralis, the artisan tribe, supplied these tools. These two tools are highly useful not only to clear the land and to practise shifting cultivation but also for meeting the domestic fuel demands.

Mammatti (Digging spade): The wooden handle of the *mammatti* is rather long—about 34" to 36" in length. The angle between the handle and the iron spade is nearer to right angle. With this type of spade, the worker does not have to bend much, when working. Digging spade, shaped in this style is found throughout Kerala.

Till a decade ago the iron spade was supplied to them by Uralis. The Mullukurumbas fitted the wooden handle to it, themselves. These days, machine made spades manufactured in

factories have flooded the markets at competitive prices and are bought by the Mullukurumbas.

Mammatti is here used for digging the ground, breaking the clots of mud and to turn the sod.

Nenjal (plough): *Nenjal* is the local term for plough. The ploughs here are light. The body and head of the plough are carved out of one piece of wood. The wood of *vengai* or *chadaichchi* tree is preferred for carving out a plough because the wood of these two trees is quite strong. The wooden handle is attached in front of the body of the plough by means of an iron, U-shaped nail called *cheenikkaal*. A wooden plug called *kongaani* is also driven through the head of the plough and the handle, a little above the *cheenikkaal* to keep the plough and handle, firmly in tact. The beam which is shaped out of palm or *eetti* tree passes through the head of the plough and the handle just touches it. The iron share called *kozhu* is nailed on the body of the plough. The yoke is made of bamboo and is called *nuham* locally.

The share, beam and handle are replaced once in a year while the body of the plough is replaced once in eight or ten years.

Cheruppu: The implement used in levelling the plots of land on the fields is called *Cheruppu*.

In this implement, a long, cylindrical block of wood usually from *eetti* or *konnai* tree—about 45" in length and about 4" in diameter with its ends slightly bent is the main piece. Eight to ten *pall* (teeth) are driven into this, equidistant from each other (leaving a distance of 2" between two teeth) and facing downwards. These teeth are made out of bamboo and each is about .35" thick and 2.5" wide. They protrude 4" after they have been fixed to the body. Handle is fixed in the centre. Two wide bamboo splits, taken for beams are fixed on the body, on either side of the handle and crossing each other towards their free ends. They are tied together at the crossing and the yoke is also tied at this place.

Slits are made on a thick bamboo called *mundam* which is about 7" in diameter and about 70" in length, in such a way that the above mentioned teeth get properly fixed into the slits. When the implement is drawn, the bamboo *mundam* levels the ground.

If the plot has wet clots of mud to be broken before levelling, the bamboo mundam is detached from the cheruppu and with the teeth the clots are broken first.

Oorchchai : *Oorchchai* is the weeding implement. About twelve teeth are fixed to a long, cylindrical piece of wood, the length of which is about 50" and the diameter 4" or 5". The protruding portion of the teeth is about 7" in length and the distance between any two teeth is about 3". The difference between the tooth of a cheruppu and the tooth of an oorchchai is that in the former, it is made of bamboo, is flat and almost uniformly wide throughout its length, while the latter is like a peg having a pointed end and is made of some strong wood.

Two wide bamboo splits fixed to the body of oorchchai, on either side of the central handle and crossing each other towards their free ends are tied together. Each is about eight feet in length and two inches wide. The yoke is tied at the place where these beams are tied together.

When the oorchchai is drawn on the fields, the teeth cut the weeds and the cut-weeds caught in between the teeth are also carried along, to the end of the plot. There, the handle is raised. Along with the handle, the body of oorchchai, with the cutweeds in between the teeth, is also raised and the weeds are shoved away by moving the handle to and fro.

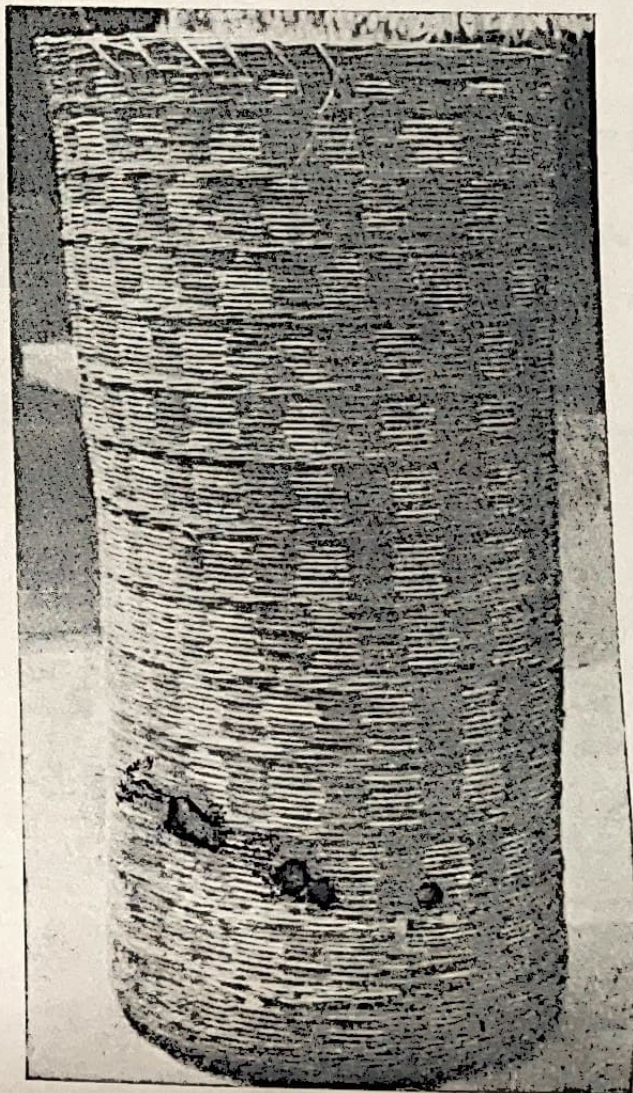
Eetti or konnai wood is preferred in making the body of cheruppu and oorchchai. The yoke is always made of bamboo in this Veedu by all its cultivators. Old, experienced Mullukurumbas make cheruppu and oorchchai without any external assistance.

Aruval : Sickle used for the harvest of crops is known as *aruval*. There are two types of sickles used here, one for cutting the paddy ears and the other for *ragi*. Both are crescent shaped and the chord's length in the case of paddy cutting *aruval* is about eight inches while that of the *ragi* sickle is about four inches. Both the sickles have plain but sharp edges. Formerly, the Uralis made the sickles for the Mullukurumbas but now the sickles are obtained either from the Muslim blacksmith in Erumad or from the weekly market.

Kokkai : A long stick with a forked end, used for stirring the paddy ears during the threshing operation, is called *kokkai*.

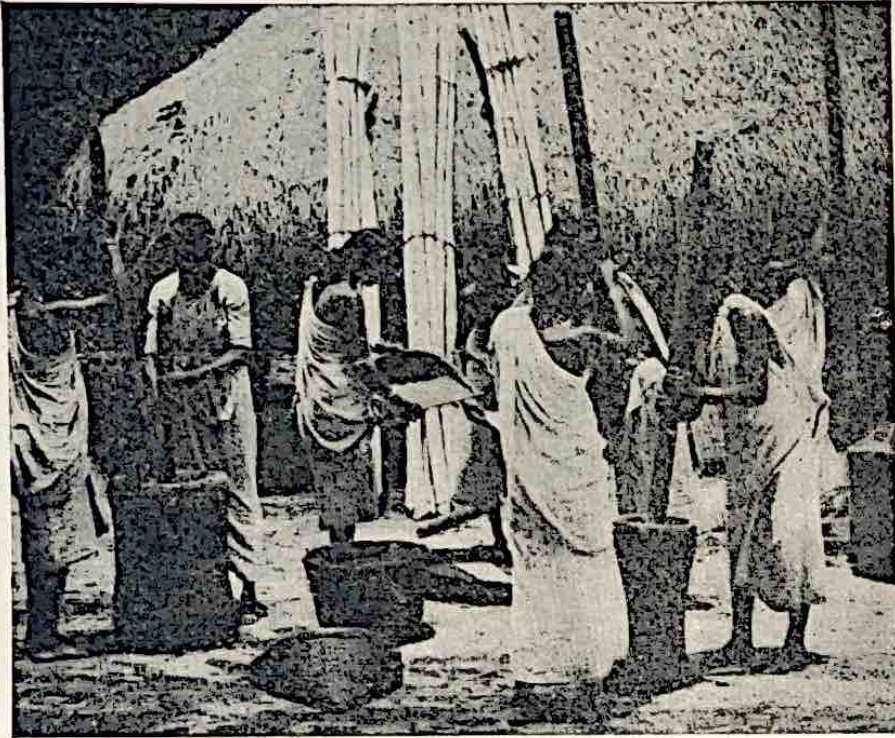


Carrying grains in a Pambai Saakku



Komma (grain storing basket)

MULLUKURUMBAS OF KAPPALA



Pounding rice



Cooking food

Muram : Muram is the local term for the winnowing-fan. It is generally made out of green bamboo. The Mullukurumbas prefer to use muram made by the Uralis.

Pambai Saakku : A rectangular bag in which grains are carried from one place to another is called *pambai saakku*. The speciality here is in the mode of carrying grains in this bag. After filling one-fourth of the bag with grains it is tied and the rest of the space in the bag is again filled with grain to its full capacity after which the mouth of the bag is tied tightly. The smaller bundle is kept on the head and the heavier bundle hangs down on the back. This mode of carrying weight seems easier to them in the hilly terrain than placing the full bag on the head.

The cloth for the bag is obtained from the Kannada merchants of Mysore and the Mullukurumbas stitch the bag themselves.

Komma : Huge granaries called *komma* locally and made by the Uralis out of bamboo splits are used for storing grains. The inner side of the *komma* is smeared with a thick paste of cowdung and paddy husk and allowed to dry up.

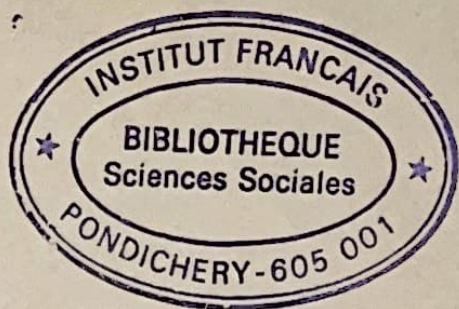
Ural and Ulakkai : Husking is done with the wooden mortar and pestle, called *ural* and *ulakkai* respectively.

Ural is a high cylindrical block of wood, about two and a half feet high and fifteen inches wide with a central depression of about five inches width and ten inches depth, at the top. The grain which is to be husked or pounded is put in this depression.

Ulakkai is a long, heavy, cylindrical wooden piece, about five feet in length and three inches in diameter. The wood of Naga (*Jambul*) tree is preferred for making ulakkai while the trunk of jackfruit tree or konnai tree is used for making ural.

The above are the various items of material culture found in a Mullukurumba veedu. In some households one finds all the above mentioned items, while in some other households certain items such as Oorchchai, Cheruppu, etc., and some jewels are missing. However, bows, arrows, a plough, a digging spade, a knife, an axe, sickles, fishing trap and basket, cooking pots, pots for storing water, dishes for eating, bamboo-split baskets called *komma* (to store grains), winnowing-fans, baskets, some jewels on the woman's body—at least ear-rings

and bangles, two sets of dress for each members, a grinding stone and a pestle, *oral* and *olakkai* (for husking paddy), mats for sleeping and a house to live in are the minimum possessions of each household.



CHAPTER THREE

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

Kappala, the Mullukurumba veedu which is now within the boundary of Madras State was a part of Wynad (Kerala) till 1956. Wynad habitats a number of tribes, namely Chettys¹, Kurichiyas, Mullukurumbas, Urali or Vettu Kurumbars, Kunduvatians, Karimpalans, Kadars, Pathians, Uridovans, Thachanad Muppans, Kanaladis, Adiyans, Paniyans, Pulayans, Jen Kurubars or Ten Kurumbars and Kattu Naickens (Aiyappan : 1948 ; 92). Of these Chettys, Mullukurumbas, Urali Kurumbars, Kattu Naickens and Paniyans are found at present in Erumad village, in which is situated the Kappala veedu and I prefer to call them the natives of this village. Members of various other castes and communities who now live in this village such as Nair, Aasari, Tiya, Izhava, Christian, Mopla (Muslim), etc., are only recent settlers in this village.

INTER-TRIBAL RELATIONS

The Chettys who are the richest of the whole lot enjoy the highest status locally. Among the natives of the village the Mullukurumbas are next to the Chettys socially and ritually while the Urali Kurumbas, Kattu Naickens and Paniyans follow in the descending order. This hierarchy is very obvious in the celebration of vilakku festival in the local temple in Erumad. The traditional allocation of places for each of these five groups in the temple premises on this occasion indicates this hierarchical order among them. Later, these groups participate in ceremonial dances. A lamp or fire is to be lit by each group before each commences its dance. Here, in the asking and receiving of a lamp or fire, the hierarchy mentioned above is confirmed again. Thus it is seen that the Mullukurumbas are lower only to Chettys in social and ritual status but lead the other three tribes, viz., Urali Kurumbas, Kattu Naickens and Panians (See Rajalakshmi ; 1966).

¹ The Chettys no longer call themselves as tribe but claim to be a clean caste.

In the economic sphere some Mullukurumbas work on the fields of Chettys for wages. The Kattu Naickens work on the fields of Mullukurumbas and Chettys, for daily wages. The Mullukurumbas and Chettys pay in kind or cash to the Urali Kurumbas who meet their demands of iron implements, pottery wares, baskets, etc., in which crafts the latter are proficient. The Panians, who are tied to the lands owned by the Chettys, owe certain obligations to Mullukurumbas on ceremonial occasions. They are paid in kind by the latter. Thus there are social, economic and ritual ties amongst the natives of Erumad, though each group may live in separate uniethnic settlements.

Relations with the immigrants: Members of various other castes and communities are now residing in Erumad village, to name some there are the Brahmins, Nairs, Tiyans, Cherumans, Aasaris, Parayans, *Harijans*, Christians and *Moplas* (Muslims). The Mullukurumbas who live in uniethnic settlements have little opportunity to establish social relationship with the new settlers in the surroundings. Secondly, those jobs to which the stigma of pollution is attached among the Hindu castes such as hair cutting, washing clothes, tanning the skin of the animals, etc. necessitate the upper castes to depend on the services of the lower castes which brings about a pattern of relationship between the upper and lower castes. But, in the case of these natives here, each group depends on its own members for such services thereby giving little scope for another people to enter into their daily life. Now-a-days, the presence of immigrants in the village and their willingness to extend services like haircutting and washing clothes to the natives also, provided the latter pay the prescribed charges for the services, have made the Mullukurumbas come in contact with the immigrants more frequently.

The Moplas who have established shops and are trading in provisions, pottery and other necessary items have started allowing the Mullukurumbas to buy things in their shops on credit also. The Christian immigrants here are keen to possess lands in and around the village. Hence they liberally lend money to the native population if the latter mortgages their land. Thus, the relationship of Mullukurumbas with Moplas and Christians is based mainly on economic transactions. It is observed that the Mullukurumbas address the Christians and the Moplas respectfully. Whenever the latter visited the houses of the Mullukurumbas they are permitted only upto the open

verandah, outside the houses. Tea or food is served to them on the verandah itself. The Mullukurumbas do not visit the houses of Moplas and Christians and they do not accept cooked food or coffee from them.

The next group of immigrants who are numerically large in Erumad village are Harijans. These Harijans are ex-servicemen from Madras State. The State Government has now given them plots of dry land, free of cost, to cultivate and settle down. These settlers have no money to lend or to do business and thus they are not recognised by the Mullukurumbas as economically superior to themselves. On the contrary the Mullukurumbas of this village have developed a hostile attitude towards these Harijans because according to the former, the latter are usurpers of the lands on which they practised shifting cultivation till about a decade ago. Members of other communities are only a few and there is no specific pattern of relationship between these people and the Mullukurumbas.

INTRA-TRIBAL RELATIONS

The Mullukurumbas are distributed in an area of about twenty miles in radius, Kappala being on the eastern fringe. The land on which the Mullukurumba population is spread is divided into four regions namely, *Kaara naadu*, *Pakka naadu*, *Kallu naadu* and *Naria naadu*. The Mullukurumbas as a tribe are strictly endogamic. Their tribal council headed by one chief belonging to *Kaara naadu*, was quite effective till about twenty years ago. This chief could control the whole society through the members from each of these four naadus. The central authority, considerably influenced to bring solidarity among them.

There are four exogamous clans within the tribe. The information regarding the origin of clans is very scanty, but they continue to identify themselves with one clan or the other. The clan descent is through mother and it has only ritual importance at present.

Lineages are traced through father for the purpose of inheritance of property and succession to office. Each Mullukurumba *veedu* is said to consist of families belonging to one lineage but there are a few *veedus* where there are more than one lineage. The Mullukurumbas attribute this to the loss of the track of genealogy, none the less the members of a *veedu* are considered to be kin. This is supported by extensive social

and ritual collaboration (See Nath, 1960 : 73). The members of the dispersed segments of the maximal lineage share birth and death pollutions and also collaborate at least on certain important ritual occasions. At times this maximal lineage covers more than one veedu. For example, it is believed that the two Mullukurumba veedus namely Nedungodu and Kappala, both situated within Erumad village were formed by the families of the two brothers, who first lived together in Kappala. Of the two brothers, the elder brother's family is said to have shifted to Nedungodu, leaving the younger brother's family in Kappala. Though the genealogy to establish the relationship between those two brothers and their present respective descendants in the two veedus, is now lost, there is no exchange of bride between the two veedus. The boys and girls consider themselves as agnatic kin, even if they belong to different clans. The oldest male member in the senior most generation amongst the members of the Nedungodu and Kappala veedus is nominated for the office of the *mooppan* (regional leader) for the five Mullukurumba veedus in Erumad. In the course of celebration of festivals or in a hunting expedition, the connected celebrations are first performed in Nedungodu and then in Kappala. Though there are three other Mullukurumba veedus in this village of Erumad, the tradition of kinship between Kappala and the other three Mullukurumba veedus is far less than that between Kappala and Nedungodu.

In Kappala there are four lineages at present though the people say that they all belong to only one lineage. Whenever there occurs a birth, marriage or death in any one of the four existing lineages, all the four lineages are affected by the event which means sharing pollution, labour and mourning.

In nutshell, the Mullukurumbas are organised on one side into four matrilineal clans and on the other into several patrilineal lineages. The clan gains importance only in the ritual aspects of life whereas in the inheritance of office and property, in the residence pattern and for authority, the society strictly takes into account the patrilineal lineages.

MULLUKURUMBA HOUSEHOLD

The Mullukurumbas call a household as *kudumbam*. The household is the smallest economic unit among the Mullukurumbas. There are twenty households in Kappala which can

be classified as belonging to the following three types, on basis of their compositions :

<i>Types of household (composition)</i>	<i>No. of household</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1. Husband, wife and their children ¹	9	45
2. Husband, wife, their unmarried children, their married sons, their wives and their children	9	45
3. Brothers, their wives and their unmarried children	2	10
Total	20	100

In the Mullukurumba society, a married son generally continues to share the hearth with his parents till they are alive, but often he has a separate house to sleep in. Of the first nine households, the heads of eight have lost their parents. In this category, the parents of the head of the ninth household are alive and live with their other married sons and unmarried children. As this particular man proved himself to be lazy and undependable, he has been given a house, a plot of land, other essential things such as a set of agricultural implements and a pair of bullocks and made to live separately with his wife and children. The composition of this type of household is typical of the nuclear family as defined by Murdock (1961 : 1).

The second type of household in Kappala includes three generations namely, the parents, married sons and unmarried children, and the children of the married sons. Fission in this type of household takes place by the time the grandson, *i.e.*, the son of the married son gets married. Three brothers, their wives and children lived together in Kappala with their mother, even after the death of their father. When the eldest

¹ 'Children' among the Mullukurumbas include step-children through either of the spouses, because all the children of a married couple, whether step-children or born of their present union, are treated equally in matters like kinship obligations, inheritance, status, etc. In spite of the fact that sons of a wife through her former husbands have the right, if they wish, to return to their real fathers' veedu any day and claim place there to live in.

brother was to marry his son, the three brothers established separate households. The eldest brother now lives with his wife, married son, his daughter-in-law, and his unmarried children. The second brother lives with his wife and unmarried children. The widowed mother lives with her youngest son. The reasons forwarded for her living with the youngest son were that this son was economically better off than his two elder brothers. Secondly, he also needed her services as a baby-sitter for his young children. The composition of this type of household is similar to that of the patrilocal extended family as defined by Murdock (1961 : 34).

The last type of household listed above includes brothers with their wives and unmarried children sharing the same hearth. In one of the two such households in Kappala, the younger brother is hardly nineteen years old and got married recently. His elder brother says that they (the brothers) would separate after his younger brother gets two or three children, to avoid clashes in the sphere of their economic enterprises. In the other household belonging to this type, the elder brother has no child and is seventyseven years old. He and his wife live with his younger brother, his wife and his children. This type of household can be classified under fraternal joint family according to Murdock (1961 : 33).

The three types of households discussed above are different in their composition when they are studied on the synchronic level. Seen diachronically, there are various stages in the developmental cycle of a household. A nuclear household having two generations (parents and children) grows into a patrilocal extended household consisting of three generations (grand parents, parents and children). When the grand parents die, their sons who are brothers, married or unmarried, live together as fraternal joint household until such time there is no clash among their wives in carrying on the household duties collectively and there is no economic clash among the brothers. For then, the expanded household breaks into several nuclear households again. Thus as a result of recurrent processes of augmentation and depletion by natural events like birth and death, and social events like adoption, marriage and partition, the geneological composition of a Mullukurumba household varies in different phases of its developmental cycle.

RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE MEMBERS OF A HOUSEHOLD

In whatever stage of fission or expansion a particular

household may be, the authority and control lie in the hands of the eldest male member. Thus, the father who is usually the eldest male member in a household has the maximum authority. The mother in the household is feared and respected next to only the father. Among the children, the eldest son has his own enviable status, as he is given more importance than others in the household, in every matter. The daughters-in-law of the household are given complete charge of household work—washing, sweeping, bringing water, husking grains, cooking, etc. During the peak seasons, they are to work on the fields also, besides attending to the household work. If there are more than one daughter-in-law in a household, then the work is shared by all the daughters-in-law. Hence a Mullukurumba girls prefers to marry into a household where there are more than one son.

The married daughters are mere honourable guests in their parent's houses. They seldom visit their parental homes and even when they do, it is only for short periods as they are tied down to their husband's homes throughout the year. The rare visits of the daughters to their parental homes make their children remain more attached to the paternal relations of the latter. Besides, after a son gets married, his mother retires from household work and looks after her son's children. This is another reason for the children to remain more fond of their paternal grandmothers. The rare and short visits of the married daughters are important in explaining the friendly relationship between them and the daughters-in-law of the household. The relation of daughter-in-law with the unmarried sisters of her husband is of double standards. She commands them to work during the absence of her mother-in-law, while during the mother-in-law's presence she herself submits to the authority of the mother-in-law.

The relationship between brothers and sisters is not always too close or intimate because of the existing age-groupings. Girls of each of the following age groups spend their leisure together and also sleep together in a separate room in any one of the big houses in Kappala.

- a) Seven to eleven years.
- b) Twelve to sixteen years.
- c) Seventeen and above (till marriage).

This arrangement is well suited with the plan of the Mullukurumba houses which contain usually *only one room*

in which the parents and the kids below seven years of age sleep. Among the Mullukurumbas, the junior siblings are to give respect to their elder ones, and this brings about a distance between them. As a result of this the younger siblings cannot always take certain privileges with their elder ones, whereas they can take all privileges with a friend who does not belong to their household. This perhaps has made the relationship between Mullukurumba girls or boys of the same age group but of different households, remain more intimate than between two real siblings.

Matters, especially those concerned with money, are decided by the father after a formal consultation with married sons, if it is an extended household (type No. 2). In the fraternal joint household (type No. 3), the eldest brother takes the decision. Even when the brothers are separated, they consult each other on important matters like marriage, sale or mortgage of property, magico-religious diagnosis and treatment of diseases, etc. The approval of the eldest male member of the lineage, *i.e.*, the real or classificatory¹ brother or uncle or grand uncle, is also taken before finalising the matter.

ACTUAL DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES AND WORK AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD

The authority of the man of the household rests not only in matters relating to finance for example property, important purchases, mortgaging or buying lands, building a house, etc. but also in granting permission to any member in the family who wishes to visit relations on a short holiday, arranging marriage, allotment of days work on the fields for himself and other adult members of his household, etc. His wife dominates the kitchen. The daughters-in-law and daughters receive instructions from her regarding the day's meal and the quantity to be cooked. The actual serving of the cooked food is however the privilege of the woman of the house. In her absence, her eldest daughter-in-law is given this privilege. The man seldom interferes in kitchen activities. However the relationship between a woman and her husband is that of subordination of the former to the latter.

AVOIDANCE AND JOKING RELATIONSHIPS

The relationship between the daughter-in-law and her real

¹ I include the agnatic kin in the *veedu*, under the term classificatory.

or classificatory father-in-law or her husband's real or classificatory elder brothers is that of avoidance. She does not look up at them nor does she exchange any talk with them. As far as possible, she avoids remaining in their presence or coming before them. But her relations with her husband's younger brothers—real or classificatory are quite friendly. While some married girls of Kappala were carrying water both on their heads and in their hands, a young Mullukurumba who was their classificatory younger brother-in-law teased them by taking his hands near their breasts. This action of his was not seriously viewed either by these girls or by the elders there. Similarly, a woman does not talk to her younger sister's husband. A man does not talk to the wife of his younger brother. Once two co-daughters-in-law were sleeping in a room. The elder brother came in and wanted to walk up his wife—but he found that his younger brother's wife was also sleeping near his wife. Tradition made him retreat and he called one of his classificatory sisters in the next house and asked her to wake up his wife. A man can maintain joking relationship with his wife's younger sister. People who stand in avoidance relationship to each other are said to belong to *theenda kulam* (untouchable clan) with respect to each other.

Though a daughter-in-law does not avoid remaining in the presence of her mother-in-law, every action of hers shows her respect for the latter—for example, unless it is essential, she does not sit in front of her mother-in-law, more particularly so when the classificatory mothers-in-law are around that place. The daughter-in-law does not take initiative in any work without taking the approval of her mother-in-law.

STRESSES AND STRAINS BETWEEN MOTHER-IN-LAW AND DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

The mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship among the Mullukurumbas becomes strained at times—particularly if the latter is not good at household work. In such cases the mother-in-law abuses the daughter-in-law for every mistake of the latter and by constantly carrying complaints against her to her son, persuades him to divorce his wife. Simultaneously there are also a few instances where the daughters-in-law have managed to subdue their mothers-in-law on account of their influence over their husbands. But subduing the mother-in-law happens only when she is a widow.

ADOPTION

Though the clan descent is through mother, childless and sonless parents adopt only a son and not a daughter, if at all they adopt. The Mullukurumbas are more concerned about the perpetuation of their patrilineal lineages and not of their clan. The adopted son does not change his clan but retains the clan of his real mother. A daughter, even if adopted, is always to be married and sent away to her husband's house whereas a boy, when adopted, will give a helping hand to them in their daily life, in every sphere. Besides, his wife, when he is married, will attend to the household work. The adopted son only at times gets that share of property which if he were a real son of his adopted father would get. Otherwise, normally he gets a nominal share and the rest of the property goes to the agnatic kin of his adopted father. In the few cases of adoption I came across I found the adopted son faithfully serving the adopted father.

Adoption is rather rare because in a number of households, new members are incorporated through the marriage of a man with a widow or divorcee. The new members are the sons and daughters of the new wife through her former husbands. The incorporation of these new members brings in problems in the Mullukurumba household. The man's children and the neighbours take it for granted that the step-mother is a partial and tale-carrying woman, always aiming at improving the prospects of her own children whether born to the earlier husbands or to the present husband. This bias hardly manifests itself before the father, for fear of his reactions. A loud talk is there about it among the children of the father or among those neighbours who love such indulgence. This unpleasantness and bias is minimum if the sons of the man are young and the children of the new wife are older than them. In this case the father's children get accustomed to a life of superordination under the mother's children.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TWO MULLUKURUMBA HOUSEHOLDS

For those within a household, others outside the household fall into two broad categories—those who are the former's kin and those who are unrelated. Among those who are related, the agnatic kin often live together in the same *veedu*. There are strong ties of relationship amongst them in the economic, social, and ritual spheres of life. If one requires assistance in his agricultural, hunting and housebuilding activities, he looks

forward to his agnatic kin—brothers and their sons. For celebrating a marriage and its associated ceremonies or when a death has occurred in one's house, one seeks the help of his agnatic kin. Particularly on the occasions of marriage and death, the group feeling manifests itself in their having collective responsibility at every stage. They contribute the required physical assistance during these occasions. In the sphere of performance of certain rituals such as the magico religious diagnosis and treatment of diseases and death rites, etc., one depends on his agnatic kin.

The role of matrikin is limited to rituals on important occasions like earpiercing ceremony, puberty attainment ceremony, marriage and death. Even on these occasions if by any chance the matrikin are missing, the eldest member in the agnatic group, belonging to the clan of the person for whom the ceremony is arranged, is asked to perform the ceremony. The clan member is taken for a matrikin as the Mullukurumbas inherit their clan through their mother. There is hardly any economic tie between a Mullukurumba and his matrikin.

KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

The Mullukurumbas irrespective of where they live use the same kinship terminology. The Mullukurumba kinship terminology is given in appendix I. In the following discussion, an attempt is made to examine briefly the extent to which the terminological classification in the Mullukurumba kinship system is consistent with the behaviour of relatives towards one another.

The role of matrikin among the Mullukurumbas is mainly during the celebration of rituals connected with life cycle. Even on these occasions, the matrikin are replaced by an elder among the patrikin who belongs to the same clan as that of the individual for whom the rituals are performed and whose matrikin are missing. This shows the little importance given to matrikin by the Mullukurumbas. However it is interesting to find that for every patrikin whom they refer by a kinship term, they have a term for the corresponding matrikin also. It is difficult to separate the terms as consanguinal and affinal because most of the terms are common for both.

Father's brothers are given status and respect almost equal to that given to father. If one's father is not alive and yet one has to conduct a negotiation—either material or social or

ritual, he has to take the guidance of father's brothers. Thus a Mullukurumba addressing or referring to his father's brother as *peyappan* or *eayappan* (elder father or younger father) according to his being elder or younger to his father is quite consistent. Their wives are correspondingly called *peyamme* or *eayamme*.

Similarly mother's sisters are treated with respect as one would treat one's mother. One also receives all sorts of attention and privileges from their mother's sisters as they got from one's own mother and hence one calls one's mother's sisters as *peyamme* and *eayamme* meaning elder mother and younger mother, respectively according to their being elder and younger to one's mother and their husbands are called *peyappan* and *eayappan*.

A Mullukurumba refers his mother's brother as *maman* or *ammavan*. He refers to his mother's brother's wife as *mami* or *ammayee*.

Father's sister being called *ammayee* requires an explanation. A Mullukurumba woman refers to her husband's sister's husband as *chetan* which means elder brother. As the Mullukurumbas observe avoidance relationship between mother-in-law and son-in-law, whenever a man visit his wife's house, his wife's brother's wife has to serve him food. To enable a healthy and cordial relationship prevail between the two—a woman and her husband's sister's husband—and to prevent conflict within the closely knit groups, the society has perhaps forced a fictional relationship on them—the woman to refer him as her *chetan* (elder brother) and the man to refer her as his *eattathi* (elder sister). Both using the terms for elder sibling, shows that the kinship is based on respect. When this fictional kinship is accepted by them, then for the children of a woman, her husband's sister's husband (who is a *chetan* to her) is *ammavan* and his wife *ammayee*.

The term *ammayee* is used by a Mullukurumba to refer to his/her mother-in-law also. Here it is interesting to bring in the various terms of kinship used by the parents of a Mullukurumba to denote the mother-in-law of their child. A woman refers to her son's or daughter's mother-in-law as *natha* (husband's sister) and a man refers to her as *pengala* (sister). The *natha* of a woman and *pengala* of her husband denote the same person, *i.e.*, sister of her husband. Earlier we have seen that one's father's sister is *ammayee* for one. Thus, a Mullukurumba referring to

his mother-in-law as *ammayee* may be taken to mean that he has married his father's sister's daughter. Again, it is seen that a woman refers to her daughter's or son's father-in-law as *angala* (brother) and a man refers to him as *aliyan*. *Aliyan* means wife's brother also. Thus we find that those kinship terms suggest that a Mullukurumba can marry his mother's brother's children also. The existence in current usage of all these terms bring in two explanations—one based on fictional kinships and the other based on the chances that, at least in the remote past, the cross cousins among the Mullukurumbas must have been potential mates. The Mullukurumbas do not approve of cross-cousin marriage and no such case anywhere was reported to me during the fieldwork. One of the old informants told me that fifty years ago, when he was a boy of about ten years, his parents performed his *talikettu kalyanam* (child marriage). In this ceremony, he married his father's sister's daughter and he added that he could have married his mother's brother's daughter also instead. Perhaps this practice of theirs, though in extinct now, the people, however, have retained these terms of kinship references.

Chetan, *eniar*, *eattathi* and *eniathi* are terms which include a large number of classificatory kins. The word *chetan* is the colloquial derivation of the word *jeshtan* which most of the people in Kerala use to denote elder brother. *Enian* or *anusan* is the derivation of *anushan* and denotes younger brother. If one among the sons of three brothers is to succeed to the office of *mooppa* (elder man), then the oldest among them succeeds to the office whether he is the son of eldest brother or of the younger ones. This shows the equivalence in status among the sons of the brothers, age being the factor to decide the authority. Hence the sons of a man and the sons of his brothers referring to each other as brothers is quite in agreement with their behaviour too. Clan descent being through the mother, in any ritual occasion the sons of all the sisters who are ortho cousins attain equal status and the oldest among the clan members is to initiate the ceremonies. Having equal status, the sons of sisters address each other as brothers—younger or elder. The same arguments hold good for the sisters who refer to each other as *cathathi* and *eniathi*.

The children of siblings of opposite sex are cross-cousins, who refer to each other as brother and sister according to the existing kinship terminology. Earlier we had seen that they were potential mates for *talikettu kalyanam*. But then, how

can they refer to each other as brother and sister? The talikettu kalyanam practice has become obsolete since about five decades among the Mullukurumbas. Further, whenever a woman on becoming a widow decides to marry again, she returns to her natal veedu with her children to live with her parents if they are alive or with her brothers. There if her brother's wife leaves her young child with the widowed sister-in-law and goes for work, and if the child is to be suckled, the latter suckles it whenever it cries. Thus her children and her brother's children are at times fed by the same breasts. It can be *vice versa* too—she might leave her child with her brother's wife and go for work during which time her child is suckled by her brother's wife. Secondly, veedu exogamy is observed by them. Further, to avoid internal conflicts, they do not encourage cross-cousin intimacies or affiliation and hence by making the cross-cousins use the terms for real siblings in addressing or referring to each other, they perhaps think that the rule of veedu exogamy can be preserved. From this angle, the cross-cousins addressing each other as chatan, enian, eattathi or eniathi is quite consistent.

The co-daughters-in-law referring to each other as eattathi and eniathi is in order from two angles. Firstly, there is no taboo in sisters marrying into the same veedu. As a Mullukurumba veedu is said to contain only agnatic kin, these sisters have to marry brothers—real or classificatory, there and thus become co-daughters-in-law too. Secondly, the stresses and strains between mother-in-law and daughters-in-law among the Mullukurumbas make the daughters-in-law share a common lot. As the daughters-in-law have no freedom to establish separate households as long as their parents-in-law are alive, the former in a household, who share a common lot adjust and live like sisters.

Aliyan in Mullukurumba kinship terminology refers to four kins, namely sister's husband (for a man and a woman), wife's brother, husband's younger brother and daughter's or son's father-in-law (for a man). This term is primarily meant for sister's husband. Wife's brother is also referred to as aliyan. In a marriage, the sister's husband of a bridegroom has the role of *kanam katti* which means the carrier of the *kaanam* (traditional bride price of Rs. 5½). On the marriage day, after reaching the bride's house, he is to give this *kaanam* into the hands of the bride's brother even if the bride's father and the bride's mother's brother (an elder among the clan kin) are

there. Only if the bride has no brother or if he is missing on that occasion, then the bride's mother's brother is chosen for receiving the *kanam* from the groom's sister's husband. However this preference for bride's brother can be presumed to show the equivalence in status between one's wife's brother and one's sister's husband. It is perhaps on the basis of this equivalence that the wife's brother is also called *aliyan*. It has already been explained how a man's daughter's or son's father-in-law comes to be referred to as *aliyan* by him, while discussing the term *ammayee* (mother-in-law). Lastly it is required to find the consistency in a woman referring to her husband's younger brother as *aliyan*. There is no taboo on sisters (real or classificatory) marrying brothers. Thus, husband's brothers can become the wife's sister's husbands and hence can be called *aliyans*. But then, a Mullukurumba woman refers by *aliyan* only her husband's younger brother. She has the respectful term *periaver* (elder person) to denote her husband's elder brother. The necessity for a different term of reference here is perhaps on account of the avoidance relationship that exists between a woman and her husband's elder brother.

Mahan refers to one's son, brother's son (for a man) and sister's son (for a woman). *Mahal* denotes one's daughter, brother's daughter (for a man) and sister's daughter (for a woman). A Mullukurumba expects and gets the same obligations from his brother's children as he would from his own children—*e.g.*, assistance in building a house or in the agricultural operations, etc., A son also expects reciprocal obligations from his father's brothers as he would from his own father. If he has lost both father and mother, very often his father's brother brings him up and settles him in life. Thus the sons of one's brothers are rightly called sons by one, among the Mullukurumbas. In a similar manner a man's brother's daughters are also daughter for him.

A woman takes the privilege of asking her sister's children, if they live nearby to assist her in transplantation of paddy seedlings, weeding and harvest. Besides, her children and her sister's children belong to the same clan and have equal status in all the rituals and are therefore called *mahans* (sons) and *mahal* (daughters).

Marumahan and *marumahal* refer to the children of siblings of opposite sex. *Maru* in the local dialect means next. One, takes the privilege from the children of one's sibling of opposite

sex, next to one's mahan and mahal and hence perhaps these children are referred to as marumahan and marumahal by one.

Use of classificatory terminology among the Mullukurumbas does not mean that they hold all who are classified under one term with the same piety or emotional attachment. The piety or emotional attachment is normally maximum in the cases of primary relationship which gradually wanes and is less clear-cut as the genealogical distance increases. At times, though a term is used for referring various kin, the Mullukurumbas have indices of identification for distinguishing between different relatives. At times they add personal name of the individual to the kinship term, e.g., 'Kesavan Chetan' which means the chetan (elder brother) whose name is Kesavan. In certain cases they prefix the name of the veedu to which a classificatory kin belongs, if he does not belong to the former's native veedu. But the former practice of prefixing the personal name is more popular.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TWO UNRELATED MULLUKURUMBA HOUSEHOLDS

The relationship between two unrelated Mullukurumbas is unstructured and unpredictable as in many other societies. They belong to different veedus because it is said that all living in the same veedu are necessarily agnatic kin belonging to a maximal lineage. Opportunities for two unrelated Mullukurumbas to become friends are limited. However, if such friends visit each other, they receive an affectionate reception. Drink and food are served and the friend is taken for hunting if the friend is a male and for fishing if the friend is a female. A Mullukurumba attends the marriages and deaths in his friend's household, not under compulsion but on his own will. During the field work not a single case of friends betraying each other or abusing their privileges was brought to notice.

MARRIAGE

Marriage and death are the most important events in the life of the Mullukurumbas.

Mullukurumbas are strictly monogamic and not a single case of polygyny or polyandry is known among them.

Modes of Marriage

Marriage by elopement or marriage by force was known and widely practised among the Mullukurumbas till thirty

years ago. In the case of marriage by elopement, the consent of both the boy and the girl was there whereas in the other, *i.e.*, marriage by force, the boy usually kidnapped the girl from the pond or riverside when she was bathing or washing clothes. The former type is locally called *odi koodal* (run and join) and the latter, *atru kadavu* (transporting from the riverside). There were arranged marriages in the past also, though few, in which the boy's father arranged the marriage of his son. This type of marriage is locally referred to as *veettu kadavu* through the house. *Atru kadavu* was so popular among them that now-a-days the Mullukurumbas have introduced a mock fight, to symbolize *atru kadavu* between the groom's party and the bride's party, in the *veettu kadavu* form of marriage. In this mock fight the groom's party pulls one hand of the bride, uttering the words, "come to our *veedu*, we have a big river there for fishing and bathing. Leave this place". The bride's party resists this by pulling the bride to their side, holding her other hand. The mock fight lasts for hardly a few minutes.

There is another form of marriage prevalent among the Mullukurumbas. It is locally called *mukka vazhi* (three fourths of the way) in which the bride, who is always a widow or a divorcee is met by the groom's party not in her house but somewhere halfway between her house and the groom's house. In all the various types of marriage, the residence after marriage is patrilocal.

All the above four forms of marriage conform to the principles of tribal endogamy, clan exogamy, *veedu* exogamy and kin exogamy. In the last two forms, the consent of the elders in the households of the couple is also there whereas in the instances of *odi koodal* and *atru kadavu* forms of marriages, this consent of elders is missing. The Mullukurumbas have the *pittu virundhu* (*dosai*—bundles carrying) ceremony*, to overcome this handicap and to regularise all marriages. This ceremony is performed for every marriage whether it is one's first or subsequent marriage and in whichever form it might be. According to their tradition, one cannot marry off one's children unless one has performed this ceremony with one's latest spouse. In the marriages arranged by elders, this ceremony is performed on the third day after the marriage where as in the *odi koodal* and *atru kadava* marriages, it is postponed till the bride's

*Described in the chapter on material culture.

people reconcile. A couple in Kappala had to wait for twelve years for this. This pittu virundhu ceremony brings about the reconciliation and regularisation of a marriage some day or the other because the exchange of dosai bundles between the two households of the man and his spouse indicates that the couple has agreed to recognise the union of the couple. Thus a Mullukurumba marriage, in any form described above is ultimately a regular, socially accepted union of a man and a woman.

Marriage regulations

In all these four types of marriages, tribal endogamy, clan exogamy and veedu exogamy are observed. Kin are also strictly avoided in the choice of a spouse.

If a Mullukurumba marries a girl outside his tribe or within his clan, he is excommunicated from his tribe, by the tribal council. Eight such excommunicated couples are now living in a place called Ambalamoola, about ten miles on the north-west of Kappala. Their households have formed an endogamic society of their own.

As the members of a veedu are said to be agnatic kin, the males and females of a veedu are normally related to each other as aunt and nephew, neice and uncle, mother and son, father and daughter, grand parent and grand child, brother and sister and so on. Since marriage within the kin group is avoided, they do not marry within their veedu, even if clan exogamy is possible within the veedu.

Besides avoiding one's own clan, one's own veedu and kin in the selection of a bride, the Mullukurumbas avoid a veedu in which a girl of their native veedu has been married. If at all they go in for such an alliance, they do not do it in her life's time. The reason forwarded by them is not convincing. When a girl gets married her kin receive the kaanam (traditional bride price of Rs. 5½) from her husband's kin. Now, if her kin take a bride from her husband's veedu, *i.e.*, her husband's kin, then her kin will have to pay the kaanam to the new bride's veedu, *i.e.*, her husband's kin. This amounts to her kin returning the kaanam money to their daughter's affines. The Mullukurumbas do not approve of this. They have no logical reason for this taboo other than their faith in following tradition. However they avoid exchange of brides between two vedus. Though this taboo does not prevent two uterine sisters

marrying into the same veedu, such instances are also not found.

Kulam, in Mullukurumba dialect refers to clan. There are four kulams among the Mullukurumbas which are called *vadakku*, *villippa*, *kathipa* and *vengada*. In Kappala, they do not accept brides from *vengada kulam* because a few generations ago a bride from *vengada kulam* was married into Kappala veedu and she behaved very badly in discharging household work and it is alleged that she was also licentious. She was not only divorced but since then they do not bring a *vengada kulam* girl in the Kappala veedu.

Traditionally the Mullukurumbas give Rs. 5½ as bride price and this is known as *kaanam*. But since about 30 years in addition to this they charge some more amount towards bride price which they call as *parisa panam*. They have learnt this practice, perhaps from the immigrants. *Parisa panam* offered for a girl was about twenty rupees till twenty years ago—but now the amount has shot up to hundred and at times even more. When the girls eloped or were taken away by force, their parents were in no way obligated to give them the silver jewels which a married Mullukurumba woman wears. Now-a-days in the arranged marriages, it is expected of the girl's parents to give her the jewels, which would easily cost not less than one hundred rupees, even if the bare minimum is given. A household loses an economic asset due to the marriage of the girl because she is a source of economic gain through her services both at home as well as on the fields. They are therefore naturally not inclined to incur further loss by giving her the jewels at their own cost. The amount is hence obtained from the boys' party in the name of *parisa panam* (bride price) by the girl's kin before marriage and the jewels for the girl are made out of that money. In those cases where the bride's household is too poor to arrange even a single meal for the marriage, *parisa panam* is utilized for giving the feast. In such cases *parisa panam* comes in the form of either cash or kind such as rice, pulses, etc. Besides the traditional *kaanam* and the *parisa panam*, drinks also form a part of the bride price. The bridegroom's party supplies country liquor to the bride's party, on the eve of marriage. Often they pay the cash to the bride's party to buy drinks themselves.

The *mooppan* (elder man) of the girl's veedu makes his demand of cash (Rs. 5/- these days) as well as a bottle (24 oz)

of drinks to give his formal approval for the marriage of the girl. This demand is also met by the bridegroom's party, otherwise the mooppan may not give sanction for the marriage and without his sanction and presence during the marriage, the wedding is not considered valid.¹

Though the bride price is collected in various names such as the traditional kaanam, the mooppan's fees, drinks and the parisa panam, the first three remain almost steady for all the marriages among Mullukurumbas, whether it is the first marriage of the subsequent marriage of an individual. But the parisa panam fluctuates depending on various factors.

If a boy and a girl have known each other and have decided to marry then the girl's people are not very insistant on the amount of parisa panam, for they know that if the marriage is not arranged on account of their demands, their girl would run away with that boy. But the current values have created an urge in them to go up in the social ladder by following the customs and practices of the people placed socially higher to them (cf. Srinivas, 1962: 46). Hence, to avoid the elopement of their girl, they agree to the terms of the boy's party without any bargain, even of the parisa panam offered for the girl is low according to local standards.

Those girls who have earned a bad name before marriage are valued at a price lower than those who have a good reputation. However, it is found that there is a demand for even an unmarried girl who is in an advanced stage of pregnancy, only if she had conceived through a Mullukurumba. Men who do not have enough funds to pay a high bride price go in for these girls.

Secondary Marriage

The rule of avoidance relationship between a man and his daughter-in-law keeps her off from him. His grown up unmarried daughters and sons are busy during the whole day—either in the household work or on the fields. In the nights these girls and boys sleep separately along with their age mates. Thus a widower is left lonely and uncared for. An old widower badly needs a wife to keep some fire alive near his sleeping

¹ During the field-work, there was an instance where the bridegroom's party did not observe certain traditions and hence the mooppan refused to attend the marriage. People on both sides—bride's and bridegroom's had to patch up the wrongs and plead the mooppan to attend the marriage and to make it valid.

place during the cold nights and to make him hot coffee whenever he longs for it. Those widows and divorcees who have no grown up and responsible son to live with, prefer marrying these widowers, provided their new suitors are not the kin of their previous husbands. They have to observe the other rules also in marrying for example, tribal endogamy and clan and veedu exogamy.

Divorce

On ideational level the divorce is sanctioned among them on various grounds, for example, either of the partners turning insane, either of the partners becoming unfaithful to the other; if the man is irresponsible and fails to support his family; if the wife is irresponsible and does not discharge her duties towards home or if the woman is barren. But in practice various factors are responsible for the separation and at times even minor reasons pave way for it. A fifteen year old incident was reported in which a girl did not wish to live with her husband because he was dark and not good looking. The reasons for separation given in public are not always the same as the actual cause for their separation.

The divorce cases are generally not taken to the tribal council but settled among the elder man of the veedu (*porunnavan*) and the elders of the concerned families. In those cases, where the woman refuses to live with the man, her people are to pay the compensation because the man had spent money while marrying that woman. If the man refuses to live with the woman, then he has no claim from the woman's party for compensation. In most of the divorce cases, the children accompany the mother but they always have the right to return to their father's veedu any day they like and can live with him or his kin, if he is no more.

Widowhood

Widows and widowers are rare in this community because they usually remarry. Those who continue to remain as widows do not suffer from any social condemnation. It is rather difficult to identify a widow from among a group of married women because there is no difference in their attire.

There are only three widows in Kappala and no widower. One of the three widows lost her husband at the age of sixty eight and her sons wanted her to look after their children. Hence, she continued to live with them.

The second widow was married into Kappala veedu when she was fiftyfour years old. She came as the fourth wife of an old widower, this being her third marriage. Eight days after her marriage, she became a widow again. Her step sons were indifferent to her. She had no brother to live with. It was because she did not get on well with her married son (through her former husband) that she married the old man at Kappala. His immediate death did not give her the encouragement to go back to her son again. Knowing her plight, some elders of Kappala suggested another proposal for her, which she was hesitating to accept, till I left the field.

In the instance of the third widow, she lost her husband when she was about forty years old. She had five sons and also some lands of her husband. She decided to stay on in Kappala under the protection of her sons. Her first and only daughter was already married.

If a woman decides to marry after becoming a widow, she normally leaves her deceased husband's veedu on the evening of the pollution breaking day which is usually on the third or fifth day after the death of a person. Her parents or brothers come to take her away, especially if she is young and unable to decide by herself the course of action she should choose. But as long as she lives in the veedu of her deceased husband, no Mullukurumba from outside will ask her in marriage.

IRREGULAR UNIONS

The Mullukurumbas are strictly monogamic but couples separate and get divorced on even precarious grounds. A man or a woman is permitted to marry any number of times—after widowhood or divorce. In spite of the wide opportunities given to the Mullukurumbas to marry and lead a married life, cases of irregular unions occur time and again. In all the cases of irregular unions which have been recorded, the woman involved is less than thirtyfive years of age. When the lives of these women are studied, three categories are found. Firstly, are those girls who are left unmarried even after attaining the age of twenty.¹ Some of these girls are involved in irregular

¹ The values of a Mullukurumba bridegroom in selecting his bride have now changed. He desires to have a fair complexioned girl with a thick lock of natural hair and does not mind overlooking the old standards that a woman should be capable of doing hard work. The new standards have made some girls in teens in Kappala get married leaving three of their seniors unmarried.

unions with men of their own veedu or at times from the neighbourhood also. Their going daily for wage earning brings them in contact with men of various castes and communities. This also at times provides chances for irregular unions.

In the second category fall those women who are married and who do not conceive for one or two years after their marriage. These women wish to conceive in some way or the other so that they can save themselves from divorce. It is perhaps because their woman somehow manage to conceive that the Mullukurumbas are not at all aware of the fact that men also could be sterile. If a couple remain childless for some years, the woman is divorced and the man marries again.

The third category includes those women who are married and living with their husbands and children. Among them, cases have been recorded where the males involved are either Mullukurumbas belonging to their veedu or outsiders, especially on the estates where they go for wage earning. In all the cases, where the males involved are from the same veedu as that of the women, it is said that the former are the sons through the earlier husbands of women who are later married into Kappala. It is taken for granted that these men have less of kin feelings for the local women and hence indulge in such activities.

In the cases of irregular unions, the involved men go free but the women are beaten heavily by their guardians—either father, brother or husband. Two such instances are given below.

A Mullukurumba learnt that his wife was having extra marital relationship with one of his agnatic kin¹ in his veedu. One night, he tied his wife to a pillar inside his house, and beat her severely. He also seared her wrist. His parents, brothers and sisters who all lived in the opposite house did not interfere even after hearing the sound of beating.

In another instance, an unmarried girl who was working in an estate was suspected by her elder brother and parents to have indulged in sexual acts with the estate supervisor. While questioning her on this, they spat on her face, beat her severely and even seared her on her hands and back with a burning log of wood. But then the girl was so adamant that in spite of the

¹ This kin's real father belongs to some other veedu when his mother was a wife of a man belonging to that veedu. After his real father died, his widowed mother was married into Kappala and thus this man who came to live in Kappala, became his kin.

best of their efforts to dissuade her from going for work, she insisted on continuing her working on that farm, defying the charges levelled against her.

To sum up, the modern developments in many spheres of life reach these people through the various mechanisms like the intrusion of advanced immigrants, the quick and cheap means of communication, radios, cinemas and many developmental schemes sponsored by the Government. In spite of all these agencies, there is no obvious structural change in the life of Mullukurumbas so far. The few changes which are seen in the Mullukurumba society are only organisational, for example their preference for arranged marriage as against marriage by elopement, their ways of spending on dress, cinemas, etc., While their principles of monogamy, tribal endogamy, clan exogamy, veedu exogamy are in tact, their values in the selection of a bride or bridegroom have changed now. The usual pattern of changes in the developmental cycle of a household through the processes of fission and incorporation (discussed earlier) still continue in the formation of their households. No change is observed in the maintenance of authority and rights of the elder members in households though a resistance for this authority is brewing up in a few households, among the younger generation. But it is still in the brewing stage only! The Mullukurumbas of Kappala are still maintaining their traditional distance with the natives of the region such as Chettys, Uralis, Kattu Naickens and Paniyans. They also continue to claim their ritual superiority over the immigrant Christians and Moplas, in spite of their economic subordination to the latter.

CHAPTER FOUR

ECONOMIC LIFE

Hunting and agriculture were the economic activities of the Mullukurumbas some fifteen years ago. Fishing and animal husbandry together with hand pounding industry which was mainly done by womenfolk, provided a supplementary income. A woman earned about five seers (one seer is about 1.25 litres) of rice for every fifty seers of paddy she husked. Local Chettis got this service from the Mullukurumbas. From agricultural products, particularly paddy, they managed to save some from their immediate consumption in order to obtain a precarious ability to buy the market commodities such as salt, spices, clothes, ornaments, etc., which they did not produce themselves. There was co-operation among the members of a veedu in most aspects of life, particularly economic. Their wants were also meagre then. This subsistence economy of theirs is affected now.

Causes for the disturbance in traditional economy are several. The clearance of forests in the surroundings of the places in which they lived has now considerably reduced the scope for hunting. Their increasing awareness to division of property and to have exclusive rights on one's own share has already put small holdings of lands in their hands and made them to face the problem of managing the uneconomic small holdings of lands. The demand for hand pounding of rice has been considerably reduced with the introduction of rice mills in the area, which in turn has adversely affected their income through this trade. Their demands for luxury articles like cloth, umbrellas, sandals, clothes, etc., have now increased. The custom of capturing or eloping with a girl in the past did not involve a heavy expense where as the present day arranged marriage requires a heavy sum for securing a bride. The shooting cost of living in the recent years has also made its own liberal contribution towards imbalancing their economy. In this chapter, I shall discuss in brief the present state of their traditional economic activities and also their new economic activities such as cash cropping and wage economy.

HUNTING

The whole of Wynad was a thick jungle until thirty years ago, providing a natural home for the animals. Now-a-days, they have given up regular hunting because with the clearance of forests, the animals have become rare.

Hunting is the main theme for most of their folk stories and folk songs. They have two types of dances—*cole kali* (a dance performed with the help of sticks) and *vatta kali* (a dance performed by men who stand in a circle). *Vatta kali* is said to be their traditional dance and some songs of *vatta kali* dance have hunting for their theme while all other dance songs are based on epics.¹ Their folk games are also focussed on hunting.

Hunting has a close association with the Mullukurumba marriage. On the third day after a Mullukurumba marriage, the couple visit the bride's house for two days. A formal hunting expedition is arranged in the bride's *veedu* during this period to honour the bridegroom. When a man visits his close kin or friends in the latter's settlement, they go for hunting even now.

Hunting has its own significance in their ritual life also. *Uchchala* is their traditional and most important festival. The chief of all the Mullukurumbas called *Appadu Thalaichal* decides over and declares a date in the month of Kumbha (February-March) for the celebration of this festival. On this day the *Vili nayattu* is ordered in every region even now, by its respective *mooppan* (regional leader). All the male members of the *veedu* are to participate in this ceremonial hunting with their bows and arrows. All the male babies, even if they are born just a few hours earlier are also taken by elderly men for a distance of one or two furlongs along with the procession, keeping a tiny bow and arrow in the hands of the babies. Then these babies and young boys (below fifteen years of age) are sent back to the *veedu* through the old women who accompany the procession for this purpose.

The importance of hunting in the Mullukurumba life which commences from his first *Uchchala* festival, continues even after he enters his grave because a bow and three arrows are kept beside the dead body of a male Mullukurumba, while burying it. The underlying belief is that these implements

¹The epics refer to Ramayana and Mahabhadata which the Mullukurumbas have adopted in recent times.

MULLUKURUMBAS OF KAPPALA

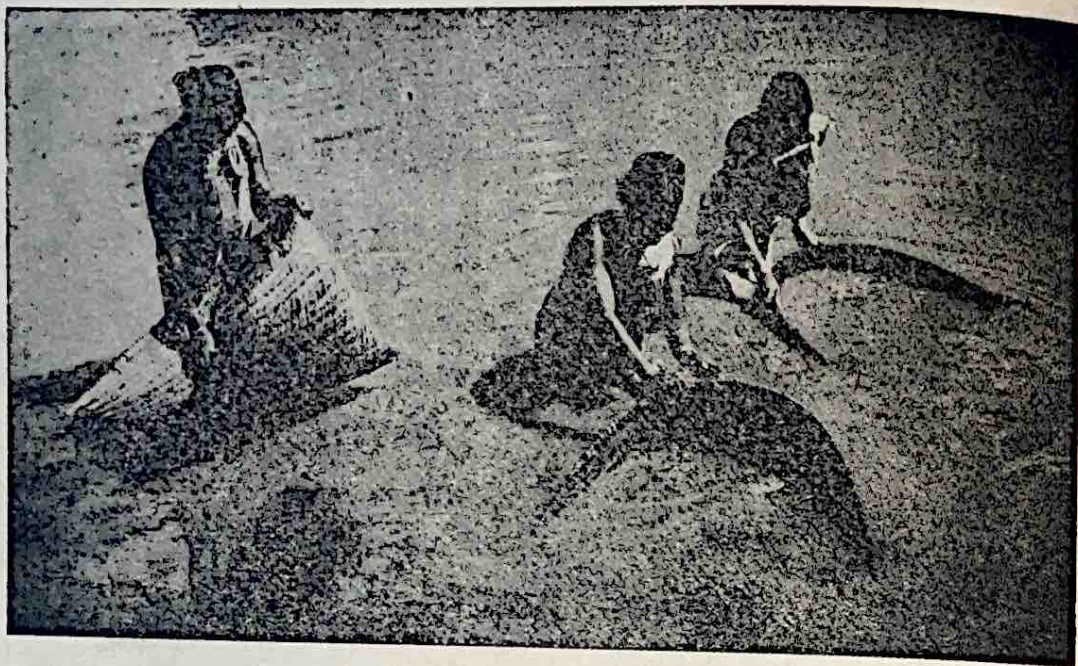


Vatta Kali

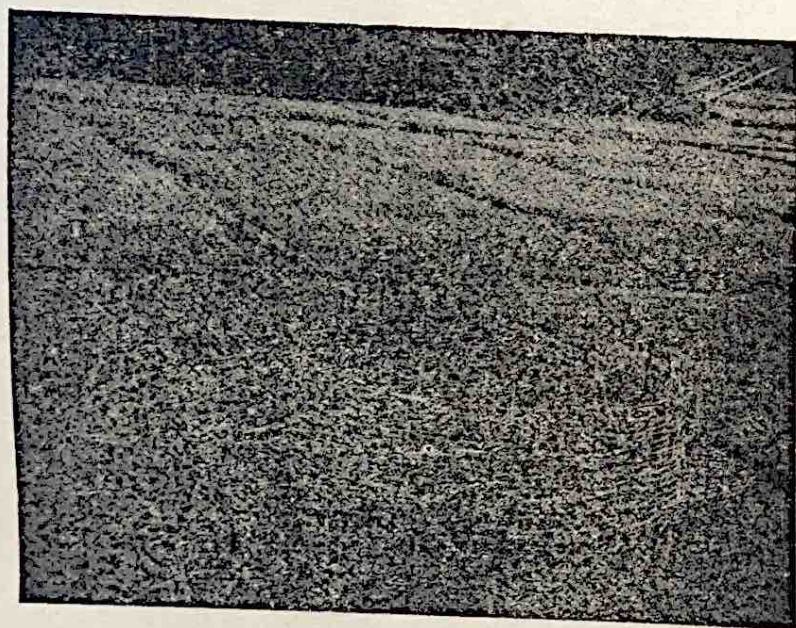


Fixing coles (paste smeared sticks)

MULLUKURUMBAS OF KAPPALA



Fishing



Aala (cattle pen)

would be essential for the deceased after his death also. Thus a Mullukurumba is born, lives and dies as a hunter.

SITE FOR HUNTING AT PRESENT

Since more than a decade, Nilambur forest is the only place where the Mullukurumbas of Kappala and the settlements nearabout go for hunting. This forest is about five miles by short-cut while it is more than 40 miles by road from Kappala. They prefer a shower of rains on the day prior to their starting as this helps them to follow the tracks of animals which leave imprints of their foot steps on the wet lands and slopes.

TOOLS FOR HUNTING

The special aptitude for hunting in a Mullukurumba and the skill in aims acquired right from his childhood are the essential tools which he possesses. His mechanical aids for hunting are *vill* (bow), *ambu* (arrow), *kundam* (spear), *peechang kaththi* (knife), *narivalai* (tiger net) and *thokku* (gun) which have been described earlier. Now-a-days bows and arrows are used more on the ceremonial occasions than during actual hunting. Thokku is carried atleast by one member in every party that goes for hunting in the Nilambur forest. The Mullukurumbas say that they got these thokku as gifts from the European settlers in the nearby estates, in recognition of their merit in hunting. In Kappala, four households possess guns out of which one is a double-barrel. They buy the gun-powder and lead from the market and make the lead pellets themselves, from the lead bought.

TYPES OF HUNTING

Nayattu : It is the local term for hunting. The Mullukurumba hunting can be divided into four types and each is known by a different name. These are *vili nayattu*, *valai nayattu*, *muyal nayattu* and *vilakku nayattu*. Of these, *muyal nayattu* is still in vogue among them.

Vili Nayattu : Vili is the local dialect means 'to call', and nayattu means hunting. Thus etymologically vili nayattu is a hunting by summoning the people. The regional elderman, called moopan summons them for hunting and the Mullukurumbas of not only his veedu but all the veedus over which he commands as the regional leader will participate in the hunting.

Valai nayattu : Valai locally means trapping. A Mullukurumba who either injures or atleast locates an animal in a nearby locality and wishes to go with his kin from his veedu to kill that game, invites the mooppan and the members of only his veedu for this hunting.

Muyal nayattu : Muyal nayattu means rabbit hunt. This type of hunting is taken up collectively by households and they generally get small animals, like rabbit, porcupine, tortoise, etc. Here the hunting party need not necessarily take the consent of the mooppan or all the men in his veedu. This muyal nayattu is arranged either among the close kins or in honour of important guests to the household.

Vilakku nayattu : Vilakku is the festival in the local temple, to celebrate Vishu, the Malayalan new year's day. Just a day earlier to this festival the Mullukurumbas go for hunting in the name of the deity in the local temple and the day's entire catch is given away to the temple authorities.

HUNTING EXPEDITIONS

Vili nayattu and valai nayattu involve observance of certain formalities. Five Mullukurumba vedus lie in the Erumad village and the mooppan for all these lives in Nedungodu, about one furlong away from Kappala. The Mullukurumbas have marked four centres on the outskirts of forests for this group of vedus where all the males would assemble whenever they go for vili or valai nayattu. These centres are called *Kappu chaal*, *Somadi chaal*, *Koli chaal* and *Andanjara chaal* and are situated about two miles away from Kappala, to its north, south, west and east respectively. They assemble at the previously appointed chaal. A number of them take their dogs along with them. As soon as all have assembled in the chaal, the mooppan invokes the communal deity Athiralanmar to guide them in their hunting expedition and to enable them to bring plenty of meat. They then marched forward in search of games with their bows, arrows and guns.

They eagerly look forward to big games such as deers, boars, etc. Once an animal is spotted, they disburse and try to encircle the space into which the animal is driven into. Who so ever strikes first shot on an animal gets an important portion of the animal as an extra share when it is finally killed and divided, whether first shot was fatal or not. They say that the first wound on the animal reduces much of its stamina and

later it becomes easier to kill it and hence the person who first scores a wound is given due recognition by the extra share.

In vili nayattu and valai nayattu which are initiated by the moopan, the animals killed are brought to the chaal from where the party starts for hunting. The mooppan is sent for even if he is not there and he has to make the first cut on it in the name of the deity. Then any one else can help him to cut and divide the game amongst themselves.

In the muyal nayattu and vilakku nayattu, the mooppan may or may not participate. In these two types of hunting, the Mullukurumbas go in the forest in batches. The basis of division of the game obtained in the vili nayattu, valai nayattu and muyal nayattu is given in the appendix II while the entire proceeds of vilakku nayattu are to be given away to the temple.

Tiger hunt

Among the Mullukurumbas hunting a tiger is a great sport. As soon as a tiger's presence is detected in the neighbourhood the Mullukurumbas lay the *nari vala* (tiger net) in that area, keeping a part of it open. Their songs and drum beatings make the tiger run wildly and the Mullukurumbas somehow manage to drive the tiger into the open portion of the net which is closed soon afterwards. Once the tiger has been trapped they do not rush to kill it immediately. They enjoy the sight of the tiger making frantic efforts to escape. Each time the tiger tries to escape they spear it away. This goes on for at least two days. During the nights they light fire on various places around the encircled area, sing songs and make merry. Their women, children and visitors from the neighbourhood also come to watch the tiger hunt. On the third or fourth day when the tiger is fully infuriated the Mullukurumbas hit it by means of a long spear (*kundham*), specially made for killing tigers. They feel greatly satisfied after killing the tiger.

Other uses of the game

The meat of deer and boar is much relished by the Mullukurumbas as compared to the meat of other animals. Though they kill the bear and the tiger, they do not eat their meat. The fat of tiger, according to the Mullukurumba is an effective cure for convulsion. Pepper soaked in the liquid of bear's kidney gives relief from bad cough while the pepper soaked in the liquid contained in its liver sets right a bad stomach.

Though the Mullukurumbas had freedom to hunt independently, normally they went in groups as cooperative efforts were necessary for the hunting of big games. The authority of mooppan was obvious from the privileges given to him in hunting—for example, to invoke the deity while starting for a hunting and to make the first cut on the killed game while dividing it. With hunting receding to the background the mooppan's power which is already affected on account of various political and social reasons is further reduced. The mooppan hardly summons the Mullukurumbas for hunting now-a-days excepting on the occasion of the *Uchchala* festival.

The Mullukurumbas have great enthusiasm for hunting and have a sort of emotional attachment for it. Their yearning for hunting is not much affected by the repeated fruitless hunting expeditions of late. During my four months halt in Kappala there were twentyone hunting expeditions, in groups of four to eight persons in each. There was a big expedition too in which all the members of the Kappala veedu participated and killed a boar. In the other expeditions, however, they were not successful.

Other benefits from forests

Forests have proved important to the Mullukurumbas in other ways too. Bamboos for making bows and also for building houses are obtained from the forests. Fibres of *Charupathi* (tree) *Kevili* (plant) and *Ooralam* (tree) are brought home for making coir out of them. Coir made from keveli fibre is used in plaiting mats while the coir from the fibres of the other two are used for tying the he-buffaloes to the plough.

Collection of fruits

The Mullukurumbas are fond of jungle fruits. The girls and boys who go for grazing the cattle on the hillocks collect fruits. At times grown ups also go for collecting jungle fruits. The fruits they get and the months during which those are available are listed below :

<i>Fruit</i>	<i>Months</i>
1. Naaval	Medam to Ridabam (April to June)
2. Kottai	Medam (April to May)
3. Echchali	Mithunam to Karkadagam (June to August)
4. Kurutti	Singam (August to September)

We find that from the month of April to September they usually get some fruit or the other. These fruits, however, do not substitute their meals and the Mullukurumbas also do not take any effort to grow these trees on their *thottam* (garden).

Bird catching

Besides animals, the Mullukurumba hunt birds also. They are fond of the flesh of almost all birds excepting crows, vultures, bats, owls, and eagles. They have bows and flat edged arrows (*mottambu*) to hunt birds. The other popular method by which the Mullukurumbas catch birds, is with a special paste called *vilanji* which is smeared on thin bamboo sticks cut for the purpose to a length of eighteen inches or so. These paste-smeared sticks called *cole* are fixed on the branches of trees to give the appearance of dried twigs, sometimes bunches of *shanbagam* fruits are also tied to these branches to attract the birds. If any bird sits either on the *cole* itself or on the branch and if its wings come in contact with the paste on the *cole*, the bird drops down. The paste sticking to the wings does not allow the wings to open and thus the helpless bird, however big or strong it might be falls and is caught by the Mullukurumbas hiding nearby.

Preparation of vilanji: The process of making this paste is an elaborate one. Almost equal quantities of milk from the *aini*, *koli*, *aththi* (fig) and *pala* (jack fruit) trees are collected, the total quantity of which generally does not exceed two seers. To the two seers of milk, thus collected ten seers of water is added and the diluted milk is boiled till the ten seers of water evaporates taking care to stir the contents constantly. The thick paste thus obtained is washed well with fresh, clean water. This paste can be preserved as it is, for eight or ten years. For immediate use, a part of it is taken out of the whole lump and boiled again with an almost equal quantity of water. When the water content evaporates the paste is cooled and sufficient quantity of castor oil or groundnut oil is mixed with it. Kerosene and coconut oil, they say, is not used on account of their evaporating and freezing qualities, respectively. Now the paste is ready for application on the sticks.

The paste coated on the sticks are effective for five to eight days, once they are stuck on the tree. In case these sticks get wet due to rains, the moisture is removed by keeping them hung just above the fire, at a safe distance. If the moisture is

not removed, mould will form on the sticks. These sticks are kept in a bamboo container, when they are not in use.

Sankrandhi festival and bird catching

The month of Karkadagam (July-August) is a bird catching month for the Mullukurumbas. Throughout the month the youngsters remain engaged in catching birds by fixing the cole on the trees. On the Sankrandhi day which falls on the last day of the month of Karkadagam all male members young and old, and young girls fix cole on the trees all over the area and await the birds. Some of them go as far as four or five miles away from the veedu for catching birds but all return home by sunset. In the night they eat dosai with curry made out of the flesh of the birds they caught after offering it to ancestors.

Sankrandhi was celebrated when I was in Kappala. Two households got ten birds each on that day, while out of the remaining eighteen households, sixteen got two to seven birds each. The two remaining households which did not get any bird, prepared curry with potatoes and red gram. This particular incident, in which two households did not get any bird but remained contented with potato curry, marks an important change in the life of the Mullukurumbas. Till a decade ago, it is said that this would not have been allowed to happen. The next of the kin or the next door neighbour would have shared their catch with such households. The veedu ties were then stronger and was marked by 'we' feeling.

POULTRY

Poultry-raising is exclusively done by women among the Mullukurumbas. The income accruing from poultry raising belong to the woman who raises them. During my field work I once witnessed a mother-in-law paying one rupee to her first daughter-in-law (both living in the same household) for a chicken belonging to the latter as the former required it for the magico religious treatment of her third son.

All over the settlement and more particularly around the *Kottil* (husking sheds) poultry are seen in dozens. Every house has a small shed on one side of its verandah for keeping their poultry in the night. In the day time they are left free to have their feed. Only chicken are fed with raw rice for a week or ten days after which they are also left free to have their own feed. The Mullukurumbas hang a winnowing-fan from the

rafters of the roof in the verandah, in which the hen lays eggs and hatches.

The eggs are seldom sold but allowed to hatch because a chicken fetches a better price than an egg, the cost of the latter being a rupee for eight (in 1965). The fact that the Mullukurumbas have a lot of faith in sacrificing chicken during the course of magico-religious treatments is perhaps another reason for their preference to get the hens hatched than selling them away as eggs.

FISHING

Fishing is an important occupation of the Mullukurumbas particularly of the womenfolk, because they are not only fond of fish but they are very fond of fishing too.

The women equip themselves with *Kortha* and *mean koodai*, when they go for fishing. *Kortha* is a strainer of the shape of winnowing-fan made out of bamboo splits.

The *Kortha* is divided into the water and then lifted up to allow the water to get strained and the fish, if any, will get caught in the *kortha* itself. The fish caught in this manner are slipped into the small, elongated *odai* (a variety of bamboo) baskets called *meen koodai*, tied to the necks of the women.

Men who occasionally go for fishing use circular nets, which they purchase from Calicut market.

A special method of fishing: In the past the Mullukurumba men and women adopted a special method of fishing. About ten to twenty kilograms of the bark of a particular tree called *naadan* was required for this kind of fishing. This bark was well beaten at home and made into fibre and bundled. These bundles were carried to the stream where they intended to fish. The fibre was spread on the stones lying on the bank or in the middle of the running streams and beaten, pouring water on it frequently. The essence of the bark gets mixed with the water poured on it and thus with the water in the stream too. An hour after the process had commenced, the fishes would be seen on the surface of the water due to the intoxicating effect of the essence of the barks, and then it was easy to catch them in big lots. This mode of fishing was usually done once or twice a year, in the month of April (See Haimendorf, 1962 : 77).

The Government has prohibited since a decade the practice of contaminating water in streams and rivers with *intoxical-*

ing elements. Hence this practice of beating the naadan fibre has now been stopped among them.

Since this method has been stopped some of them occasionally adopt another similar method of catching fish, the difference being that they can practice quietly the new method. Here they pound a mixture of tobacco leaves (of the second cutting) along with ash and leaves of *valli* plant. This powdered mixture is carried to the river and mixed in the running water without the knowledge of any outsider. This mixture also has the quality of producing a similar intoxicating effect on the fish as naadan has.

Only those streams are chosen for such fishing where the water gets collected in small, nearby ponds, so that after a particular time, they can catch the fish from that pond.

Season for fishing: Only during monsoon when the level of water rises in the streams and rivers, fishing is stopped—otherwise the Mullukurumba women go for fishing in the afternoon almost daily, throughout the year. In off-season, fishing is done only to celebrate or observe social or ritual event. For example, just as a bridegroom soon after his marriage is taken out for a hunting by the members of the bride's *veedu* similarly the women of the bridegroom's *veedu* take the newly wedded bride for fishing. This is a must and hence season is not taken into account. Whenever the married daughters of the *veedu* visit their natal *veedu* on a short holiday, going for fishing with their kinswomen in the *veedu* is a recreation they often indulge in.

Everytime a death occurs in a Mullukurumba *veedu*, *koottathu koottal* is celebrated on the third day after the *pulai kuzhi* (pollution breaking ceremony). According to the Mullukurumbas this *koottathu koottal* ceremony signifies the soul of the deceased uniting with the souls of the ancestors. On this occasion men go for hunting and women for fishing. That night both meat curry and fish curry are prepared and offered to all the ancestral spirits and the spirit of the newly deceased. Thus, it is seen that fishing for the Mullukurumbas is not merely an activity which supplements their economy but has also acquired social and ritual importance.

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

Cattle and dogs are generally reared by the Mullukurumbas—here cattle includes mostly he-buffaloes, buffaloes, cows and

bullocks. The yield of milk is very little from their buffaloes and cows—hardly half to one litre from each for the whole day. Cattle is also the source of manure for them. The dogs aid the Mullukurumbas in hunting and also keep a watch over their houses.

A household having sixty to eighty heads of cattle in its pen is said to have been a common feature till fifteen years ago. But now a household has hardly two to six cattle and three households in Kappala have no cattle at all. These cattle are fed on the grass and other vegetation on the slopes of hills. Young girls and boys, usually less than sixteen years of age or else old men and women who are no longer strong enough to attend to the heavy routine on the lands, tend the cattle. The services of young children are so much needed for this purpose that the parents refuse to send them to the school, even if the school is a free, residential one.

Cattle shed—Aala : The pen for the cattle is built on the field itself and known as *aala*. It is a circular enclosure built with bamboo splits. The size of the *aala* depends on the stock of cattle one has. The dung of the cattle is heaped on one side of this *aala*, for periodical use on the fields.

During the rainy season, the cattle are not kept in the above mentioned *aala* because the flooring of this *aala* will be very slushy. For this reason, in the rainy season they erect separate pens on the slopes of hills. These are rectangular in shape with two sloped thatched roofs. Thick barks of palm trees are spread on the floor. A rectangular trench is dug on the downward slope, parallel to the pen, into which the dung from the palm bark floor of the pen is collected.

Among the Mullukurumbas, the women milk the cows and buffaloes, once a day, in the mornings. In the past when tea shops were rare in the locality, they consumed the available milk in the form of curds and buttermilk. Now-a-days, there is a great demand for milk from the local tea-shops and the Mullukurumbas are selling the milk in these tea shops for ready cash.

Between the bullock and the he-buffaloe the latter is preferred by them for conducting their agricultural operations, though they could not convincingly explain the cause for this preference. The common explanation is that the bullocks neither maintain a good health nor give good service on the fields as the he-buffaloes do, under the existing climatic con-

ditions of the region. On the contrary, the immigrants of the region who also cultivate lands manage well with bullocks. The bias, of the Mullukurumbas in this respect has gone so deep that now-a-days when they get free bullocks from the Government, they often sell them away and buy a pair of he-buffaloes for their work.

TREATMENT OF SICK ANIMALS

The Mullukurumbas themselves treat the cattle for certain of their diseases. Even when there is a wave of an epidemic in the region, taking away heavy tolls of cattle, they attempt their indigenous treatment. They refuse to allow the modern veterinary doctors to treat their cattle and prefer losing cattle if it comes to that. Whenever they feel that the native treatment for their animals is of little use, they resort to magico-religious treatment. A few in their community have acquired proficiency in this line and the services of these men are requisitioned in times of need. At times they make vows to deities, for the cure of their deceased cattle. The Mullukurumbas have never traded in cattle nor do they even now after coming in contact with enterprising immigrants. They also generally do not make gifts of the cattle excepting in very special circumstances say for example, if there is a well-to-do Mullukurumba household and the daughter of that household has been married into a poor household or if her husband has lost all his fortune for some reason or the other, the girl's parents give her a pair of bullocks or he-buffaloes as gift.

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is also a traditional occupation among the Mullukurumbas. Till fifteen years ago, it was said that the Mullukurumbas attended to their agricultural work in the mornings, and that they went for hunting in the afternoons. Since fifteen years, with hunting becoming less frequent they concentrate more on agriculture.

The lands which the Mullukurumbas cultivate come under four categories as listed below :

- 1) *Vayal* : Vayal is the wet land in the valleys, where paddy is grown. These lands are owned by them since several generations.
- 2) *Thottam* : Thottam is the land, almost adjacent to the vayal, but on a higher level. Coffee, banana,

jack fruit, pepper, arecanut, ginger, mango, turmeric and some vegetables are grown on this land. They were previously Government owned lands which are now being gradually bought by them, the price ranging from Rs. 100 to Rs. 150 per acre according to the plot's location.

- 3) *Uzhavu parambu*: It is a dry land almost levelled on the slopes of the hills which is cultivated by ploughing unlike the *vettu parambu* land which is cultivated by slash and burn method. The cultivation on this land by the Mullukurumbas has become less in recent times for two reasons. First, that since 1958, these plots besides other lands have been allotted by the State Government to the new settlers; second, on account of the dwindling of their live stock there has been a lower supply of manure and therefore they find it difficult to continue to cultivate these lands. Only nine households in Kappala (45%) cultivate on Uzhavu parambu plots now. This land is cultivated by rotation of crops. In a cycle of three years, first they grow *ragi*, then *karthan* (a type of paddy) and finally *samai* after which they grow tobacco, chillies and root vegetables one after another, for about a year. The land is then left fallow for five years after which generally the same family takes it up and repeats the same cycle of cultivation.
- 4) *Vettu Parambu*: It is a plot of dry land, on the slopes of the hills, on which the cultivation is done by cutting the vegetation on it and burning it. The ash thus obtained is evenly spread all over the land after which the seeds are broadcasted. The same cycle of crops—*ragi*, *karthan* and *samai* are grown on the *vettu parambu* lands as on Uzhavu parambu lands but this cycle is not followed by tobacco, chillies and root-vegetables as grown on the latter. Once the cycle of *ragi*, *karthan* and *samai* is completed, the land is vacated and left fallow for about three to five years after which usually the same family takes up the plot for cultivation. Only four house-

holds practised vettu parambu cultivation in Kappala, at the time of enquiry.

It is said that a household which has more adult male members, takes up vettu parambu cultivation because a considerable amount of labour is required to clear the land. On the contrary, a household which has a good stock of cattle is said to go in for uzhavu parambu on account of its richness in the supply of manure. A family which is rich in manual power and also in its cattle-stock goes in for both vettu parambu and uzhavu parambu cultivation. There were only two households in Kappala which practised both vettu parambu as well as uzhavu parambu cultivation at the time of enquiry.

AREA OF LAND CULTIVATED

Till recently, the Mullukurumbas were quite contented with subsistence production, and hence they practised vettu parambu and uzhavu parambu cultivation only on limited areas of land—anything from twenty-five cents to one acre, however big and well to do a household was. As regards the vayal, a man cultivated only that quantity of land, the yield from which would suffice the wants of his household, even if he is entitled to more lands according to their inheritance rules. He permitted his brothers or other agnatic kin to cultivate on the rest of the lands. Thottam was also maintained by him in accordance with his requirements. But now-a-days, due to expansion of the family the lands inherited by any single household is not big enough for leaving a portion of it uncultivated. In some cases the situation has gone further bad, because the holdings have become smaller and uneconomic. Each household now cultivates whatever land is in its possession.

TECHNIQUE OF CULTIVATION

Preparation of vayal: The wet lands (vayal) on which paddy is grown is ploughed three or four times during the months of March-April and then manured with cowdung. The plots are ploughed again for another two times after which they are levelled with *cheruppu* (leveller). The vayal is then ready for sowing.

Preparation of thottam land: There is no special preparation of land in the case of thottam. Whenever the seedling of plants like coffee or arecanut or pepper or jack-fruit are to be

planted, pits of the required depth are dug and the seedling are planted.

Preparation of uzhavu parambu land: The dry uzhavu parambu lands are ploughed four times to uproot the grass and weeds. Later, just after a blossom shower in April, the land is manured with cowdung and ploughed again after which the seeds are sown on it.

Preparation of vettu parambu lands: The vegetation (not big tree) on the land is cut and allowed to dry. Then it is burnt in the month of March, before the onset of the monsoons. With a tiny spade, they scratch the earth to a depth of only 1" or 2" to loosen the soil superficially. The land is now ready for sowing the seeds.

IRRIGATION

The vayal is irrigated with water from the natural springs which are usually found adjacent to the lands. Cultivation on other lands depend on rains.

PREPARATION OF SEEDS

In case of paddy cultivation, seeds are processed before sowing. The dried and preserved seeds are mixed with cowdung. Later in the night, two big plantain leaves are spread on the floor and the mixture of the seeds and cowdung is transferred on the leaves. Two more plantain leaves are placed over this and some wooden planks are kept above them to keep the mixture pressed. This is allowed to remain like that for two nights. On the third night, some water is sprinkled on the heap of cowdung. By next morning the seeds usually germinate and the whole lump is bundled in a gunny bag and is carried to the field for sowing. The Mullukurumbas believe that the paddy seeds thus processed give a better yield.

Ragi and other seeds are not processed before sowing.

SOWING

Seeds are generally sown by broadcasting method on vayal, uzhavu parambu and vettu parambu lands. Transplantation of seedlings is practised only in case of paddy. In this method, the plots of land on which the seedlings are to be grown is well prepared by ploughing it several times, before and

after manuring it. On one plot called *kandam* locally, they sow twentyfive seers of paddy, by broadcasting method. One acre of land is generally divided into ten *kandams* and this area requires about seventyfive seers of seeds if transplantation method is adopted. The germinated seeds are sown in one or more plots according to one's requirement. Till the seedlings grow to a height of two inches or so, the plots are not watered.

In a period of forty days from the day of sowing, the seedlings normally grow to a height of eight inches to ten inches and then they are taken out from the wet ground. They are tied into a bundle when a handful of them are collected and left on the plot where it can remain alive for about thirtysix hours, floating on the water. All the seedlings are bundled in a day or two and the other plots on which the seedlings are to be planted are kept ready by then. The seedlings are planted uniformly on these plots, leaving a space of about six inches between two plants. This operation of transplanting must be completed within the sixtieth day after sowing the seeds but within thirtysix hours once they are picked from the *kandam*.

Those who have more lands and less man power prefer broadcasting method of sowing all over their lands as transplanting is quite a laborious and time-taking process. Those who possess less lands prefer transplanting method for three reasons. In the first instance, 100 seers of paddy seeds are required for sowing on an acre of land in broadcasting method while 75 seers of seeds will suffice, if the transplantation method is adopted. Secondly, there is a wider growth of weeds on the plots, when seeds are sown by the broadcasting method and thirdly the yield of crops is better if the transplantation method is adopted.

WEEDING

Weeding is usually done on all lands by hands excepting those plots on which the transplanting was done. On the latter, the weeding implement *oorchchai* can be used because the plants are grown in lines and equidistant from each other.

HARVEST

Six or seven months after sowing the paddy seeds the crops are harvested. It is generally the women who

harvest the crops with the help of sickles. The harvested crop is bundled and carried straight to the threshing place.

THRESHING

Almost every household has its own threshing floor called *kalam*. A thick branch of *konnai* tree is planted in the centre of the farm, to which three to five he-buffaloes are tied together in a series. These he-buffaloes walk around the central pole, treading over the sheaves of corn ears spread around on the threshing floor. With the trampling of the he-buffaloes over this bed of corn ears, the grains get detached. The grains are separated from the chaff by the winnowing process and the grains are stored in the granneries at home.

The same process of cultivation excepting the transplanting method is adopted in cultivating the other food grains, namely, ragi, samai, etc.

CULTIVATION OF TOBACCO, CHILLIES AND CHEMBU ON UZHAVU PARAMBU

On the uzhavu parambu on which the cycle of crops—ragi, karthan paddy and samai have already been grown, a temporary pen is erected to keep their cattle. The purpose of keeping the cattle here is to make the soil within the enclosure fertile with the urine and dung of the cattles.

Tobacco : The dung of the cattle is collected in a heap and tobacco seeds are strewn on it. A month later, when the seedlings have grown to a height of two inches, they are removed from the heap and planted there again after levelling the heap. This bed of young seedlings is covered with leaves (of any tree) to avoid direct rays of sun falling on the plants. The bed is watered both in the morning and evening, for about a fortnight. Often, with a thin stick, the soil around each plant is loosened. A particular variety of pest which destroys the tobacco plant in the nights gets lost after dawn and hence they go to the garden once in a way as early as 3 a.m. or so to check as to whether the plant is free from this pest.

The shoots of the plant are nibbled when the plant grows to a height of about two feet and after that the side growth alone is allowed. On account of this process, the leaves of the plant grow wider.

The tobacco plants are cut six months after the sowing of seeds. These plants are kept in the inner side of the roofs of their houses, for about two weeks to get dried. They are then spread on the open yards for a night so that the moisture softens the dried leaves. Early in the morning, the leaves are bundled and soaked in the water in which rice has been washed. The bundle is then taken out and pressed to drain the water away and again dried. These leaves can now be consumed. Excess is rolled in a mat and kept inserted in the roof again.

Chillies : In case of chillies too the seedlings are first grown. These seedlings are then transplanted on a well prepared bed. In about three to four months, the chilli plants start giving the yield.

Chembu : It is a long, thick root vegetable. The chembu which are preserved for planting purpose are cut into pieces, each not less than the size of a small orange. These pieces are planted at a depth of about six inches from the surface of the earth, taking care to keep the portion with the skin on it facing upwards. After the coming of shoots, the soil around is loosened with a thin stick once a month. In about eight months time, the yield is obtained.

CULTIVATION OF CASH CROPS

Ginger and turmeric : These are grown in the same way as chembu but the ginger and turmeric beds are covered with leaves to provide shade for the young plants, in the initial stages of growth.

Pepper : Pepper seedlings are first grown and then planted on the garden. It is a creeper and to facilitate its rapid and rich growth, a thick, tall thorny stem of a particular tree (*murukkan*) is planted firmly and two or three pepper plants are planted around it. These plants rapidly grow into big creepers around the thorny stem, as the thorns on the supporting stem offer good grip to the former. In about three years time, the pepper creepers give the yield.

Coffee : The Arabi coffee which was grown previously is not grown now and instead, Robust coffee is grown by them. The Arabi coffee plant's fruitful life is only for three to four years, but that of the Robust coffee is twelve to fifteen years. This has made them prefer growing Robust coffee.

Till now the Mullukurumbas have not taken up coffee plantation on a commercial basis. Until five years ago the coffee yield from their thottam was used for their domestic consumption but now on account of the economic pressure, they are selling away whatever yield they obtain to the Coffee Board and for their personal consumption they are using the shells of the coffee seeds.

Ginger, turmeric, pepper and coffee are grown on the thottam for sale. But jack-fruits, plantains, mangoes and arecanuts which are also grown on the same thottam are mainly for household consumption.

DIVISION OF LABOUR

Members of a Mullukurumba household have clearly demarcated duties to perform. The allotment of duties is based on age, sex and ability of each member.

The entire household is collectively responsible for its activities but the head of the household is the central figure controlling every activity. If he is not very old, then he is the principal worker in the agricultural activities. His adult sons and brothers if any in his household, help the head of the household in arriving at decisions and carrying them out. These adult men plough the land, sow seeds, weed with the help of oorchai, thresh the harvested crop, carry the grains home, prepare the lands for shifting cultivation (*Uzhavau* and *vettu parambu*), build *aala* (pen) for their cattle and collect pepper fruits from the trees in the season. In those households in which there are surplus hands some of the men go for wage earning by working as agricultural labourers. The men also bring fuel to the house and rethatch the roof once a year. They go to the Sultan Battery market whenever metal vessels for domestic use or clothes for marriage are to be purchased.

Women husk the paddy, cook, clean the house and utensils, fetch water and take care of the children. The grown up daughters and the women attend to transplantation of paddy seedlings, weeding by hand, harvesting, winnowing, manuring the field with cowdung and plucking coffee seeds also besides household duties.

Planting of ginger and turmeric is done by both men and women.

Old men and women who are not healthy enough to work on the lands take the cattle out for grazing. If their health does

not permit them to do this work also, they remain at home and look after the children. Only two old women, aged about 67 years and 78 years remained at home and looked after the children—whereas women nearing 50 and 60 years were found still working either on their lands or for wages. Some of the young boys and girls upto the age of 14 or 15 are attending schools now. But others of their age group who do not study, either look after the younger siblings in the house or take the cattle out for grazing. Children still younger in age just play about.

INHERITANCE

Traditionally, the Mullukurumbas owned only wet lands, vayal. From the twenty households at present, no one remembers to have heard anything like the communal holding of the property. The existing records in the tahsildar's office show that sixty acres of wet lands which was their major possession since long, is still in the name of one Sachchan (who lived four generations ago). In the subsequent generations of Sachchan, though collective labour and hearth were said to be in practice, there seem to have been oral instructions also from the male head of the household regarding the allotment of property to his heirs which were accepted as the final words and followed most faithfully, without any legal attestation or registration. As collective labour continued, this nomination of heirs and the share for each, did not carry much meaning. It is said that since the time the collective labour and common hearth of the veedu were disturbed and instead the actual division of property and inheritance were practised, the property owned by a man was divided among the male issues born to him and the ones brought by his wives from their former husbands. It was not made clear whether every son in a household gets an equal share in the property left by the head of the household or the property is divided into as many shares as the number of wives (with sons living) a man had, allowing the sons of each wife to divide their mother's share amongst the uterine brothers. The opinions of the Mullukurumbas of Kappala were divided on this issue. In two families which I studied from this aspect the heads of the households had sons born to them and also sons brought by their wives who were begotten through their earlier husbands. In both cases, it was found that the property was almost equally divided, as though all sons were born to him. Thus the second rule of inheritance that each wife with sons living gets an equal share and that her sons whatever be

their number, divide this share amongst themselves seems to be of recent origin, yet to be adopted popularly.

An informant at Kappala has three sons through his first wife and no son through his second wife, but the second wife has brought with her three sons, born to her through her first husband. According to tradition, the property of the informant should have been divided equally among all the six sons. But the grown up sons of his first wife who have some school education and have visited places from Ooty to Calicut and also moved with different types of men, have managed to convince their father and persuaded him to divide his property into four shares giving each of them one share and the fourth share to their step mother which could be divided among her three sons. This is a case of deviation.

However rich a Mullukurumba may be, daughters are not given any share in land even in the absence of male issues. He is permitted to adopt a son. He generally adopts a son born in his own settlement. In such cases of adoption, it becomes an obligation on the part of him to see that the adopted son is married and settled, as the marriage of a man among the Mullukurumbas involves a heavy expenditure. He then gives only a nominal share of his property to this adopted son, and leaves the bulk of it for his agnatic kin to inherit.

At times the wife of a Mullukurumba leaves her husband's veedu for good—either on a divorce or after widowhood. She then takes her young children also along with her. When the sons grow up, they have the option to either settle down in the veedu of their step-father (whom their mother has married later) or to go back to the veedu of their real father and demand their share of their father's lands, which their agnatic kin enjoy till then. Three such cases have been recorded in Kappala, where the sons who left Kappala along with their mothers on the death of their fathers, returned fifteen to twenty years later and got their share in their father's lands.

As regards the inheritance of cattle it is at times held in common, even when the heirs have established separate households. Under such circumstances, though the animals are marked for each heir, the pen remains in common and the responsibility of taking the cattle for grazing falls on the households in rotation. In Kappala, one particular family of three brothers have established separate households. At the time of

separation the property was divided. Each brother took charge of the lands he got as his share, and started his individual attempts of cultivation on his lands. Their livestock contained three pairs of he-buffaloes and two buffaloes. One pair of he-buffaloes was marked for each brother and they were to use only their respective pair in the agricultural operations on their lands. The two buffaloes were held in common by the three brothers and the milk and milk products were shared by them. But all the he-buffaloes and two buffaloes were kept in the same pen and taking the cattle out for grazing was done by every brother once in three days.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, most of the Mullukurumbas who possess lands are facing the problem of managing uneconomic small holdings of lands. With each generation, the plot of land inherited by each of their heirs is becoming smaller and smaller. As the income derived through their small plots of lands does not suffice them in meeting their various new demands, many a Mullukurumba finds it convenient to mortgage his land, which has a ready market. This habit of running to mortgage his land has made the Mullukurumbas get into debts. At the time of inquiry, nine households in Kappala had mortgaged part or whole of their lands and all other households excepting one had taken hand loans ranging from Rs. 25/- to Rs. 2,300/-. In some households, the yields from their lands are not sufficient to pay off even the interest on the loans. Ultimately these households are bound to lose their lands to their creditors when the principal and the accumulated interest levied on it become more than the value of the land. Many households have already surrendered the right for cultivating their lands.

The Mullukurumbas who have lost either their lands or the cultivating rights on their lands and also the Mullukurumbas of those households which have man power in surplus to what is actually required to till the lands in their possession, find wage-earning as the next opening for them to take out a living. They have neither the knack nor the capital to trade in any line like the immigrant Moplas. They are not yet sufficiently educated to get white collared jobs. The region is not an industrially advanced one, giving scope to the natives to enter factories as labourers. Here it is worth mentioning the case of two Mullukurumbas of Kappala who had passed seventh and tenth standards respectively and got employed as labourers in the Cordite Factory at Aravankadu (65 miles from Kappala),

Nilgiris District. One had served for six years and the other for two years. They could not adjust to the town life even after such long periods and returned to their *veedu*, (Kappala) after resigning their jobs there. The distance of the work spot from their *veedu* had an important role in their resigning the job. These two men are eager to take up any job within their locality (within a radius of five miles from their *veedu*). Another Mullukurumba belonging to Kappala is engaged as a cook by a Christian priest, living thirty miles away from Kappala. This man also told that he proposed to marry after a couple of years and that he will then give up his job and live in Kappala. His explanation for this plan is his unwillingness to live with his wife in a new atmosphere. The dislike of the Mullukurumba to settle down in a distant place may be attributed to the cultural incompatibility between the new environment and their own. The experience of the few who went out and their inability to adjust in a new area has made others also to remain in their *veedu* and work as wage-earners in the neighbourhood.

The region around Kappala has many agricultural estates on which either cereals or cash crops are grown. The Mullukurumbas who are already experienced in agricultural activities find it easy to work as an agricultural labourer on these estates. Since a decade, wage economy, particularly in the sphere of agricultural labour has become very popular among the Mullukurumbas.

There is only one household in Kappala which does not send any of its members for earning wages. All the other households have taken to this new occupation of earning daily wages. Neither all the members in a household go for wage-earning nor are all those who go for wages work as labourers throughout the year. In those households in which there is not sufficient work for the both men and women to remain engaged on their lands, usually the women are the wage-earners leaving the men to attend on their lands. During the days of abundance, that is just after harvest, they take some time off, from wage-earning.

The Mullukurumbas are absorbed as agricultural labourers in the large estates of Nairs and Chettys, within a radius of six miles from Kappala. Weeding in the garden (*thottam*) where coffee and pepper are grown, transplantation of paddy seedlings, harvesting and plucking of coffee fruits from the

plants are the usual work for which women are employed on a daily wage of one and a half rupees per head. Weeding in thottam, ploughing, turning the sod, picking of pepper from the creepers and any other tough work are given to the men who are paid a daily wage of two and a half rupees per head.

Those who are employed just for one or two days on an estate are paid every evening while those who are employed regularly in an estate for periods more than a week are paid once a week, every Saturday. Sunday is normally a holiday and hence the women find it convenient to clean their houses, wash their clothes and take a leisurely bath on this day. In the summer afternoons, they go for fishing too. Some of the wage earning men engage themselves in storing firewood on Sundays. Others bathe and relax for the day. In some households, attending the weekly market at Chulliodu is a routine for the men on Sundays.

WEEKLY MARKET

Chulliodu is a village situated at a place from where roads lead to Erumad, Mepadi and Sultan Battery. Chulliodu is about three miles from Kappala on its north west. A weekly market, locally known as *sandhai* is held here every Sunday. This is the nearest weekly market for the Mullukurumbas of Kappala and other veedus in Erumad village. One can buy clothes, tools and implements, baskets, pots, betel leaves, betelnuts, tobacco, provisions, vegetables and fish from this sandhai.

In the past these above mentioned items were brought to their doors by the roving Kannada and Mopla merchants—the former bringing clothes and the latter most of the other items. The Uralis brought baskets, pots, winnowing-fans and iron implements. The Mullukurumbas bought all these items on barter—in exchange of paddy. The cloth merchants who visit the Mullukurumba veedus even now, do not anymore agree for this barter on account of the restrictions on carrying of paddy from one place to another. The potter and the basket-maker (the Uralis) who get only a few seers of paddy for their commodities do not mind barter even now.

The expansion of the village Erumad which lies four furlongs away from Kappala has now minimised the Kappalites visiting the weekly markets, for two reasons. Firstly, most of the things they need are now available in Erumad itself. Secondly, they get the things from Erumad shops, often on credit.

The costlier items like ornaments and vessels are bought at Sultan Battery, a town nine miles north-west of Kappala. During the festive occasions, when Mullukurumbas attend fairs, either within their locality or outside, the girls get the opportunity of buying bangles and beads of their choice. Now-a-days their women who go to long distances for earning wages conveniently buy their wants which are not available in Erumad, in the markets near their work spot.

IMPACT OF THE PRESENT DAY ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Now I shall discuss briefly those changes which have come to them on account of their present day economic activities.

Hunting and agriculture were the main economic activities of the Mullukurumbas since many decades. Of these two, hunting—particularly of the big games, in the recent times has been on decline for reasons explained in the beginning of this chapter. Presently, the Mullukurumbas individually go in for hunting of small games which in the first place do not invite the attention of forest authorities (forest being reserved) and secondly do not interfere with their other economic activities. Big game hunting required a great amount of planning, skill and active cooperation of a number of people and in fact all the households in the *veedu* used to be involved in it. Such traits as these, were inculcated in a Mullukurumba from the very childhood.

Now, the old scenes of the big game hunting are rarely enacted leaving little scope for the Mullukurumba children to learn all that was connected with it. With the gradual decline of the big game hunting, cooperation among Mullukurumbas at *veedu* level has also decreased.

The other important economic activity of the Mullukurumbas is agriculture. They cultivated the lands in the past and continue to cultivate now also. The important change is that the Mullukurumbas who were contented with the subsistence cultivation in the past have now started growing various cash crops such as coffee, pepper, ginger, turmeric, etc. for commercial purpose besides growing paddy, for subsistence. Celebrating the coming in of new crop through the regional festival *puththari* has been adopted by the Mullukurumbas in the recent times. Most of the changes in the sphere of their agricultural activities are thus only extension of what there were previously.

One important result of their new venture in cash cropping is that it has strengthened the individual enterprises and further weakened the cooperation of households at *veedu* level. The new demands such as buying more clothes and that too of a good quality, paying high *parisa panam* (bride price), celebrating marriages on a grand scale by arranging loudspeakers and playing records, by spending more on feast, etc., require plenty of cash money for each household and these demands have accentuated their enterprises only at household level.

A big problem which some of the Mullukurumbas are facing now on account of the disturbance in the traditional economy is settlement of loans. Hunting requires very nominal cash investment where as agriculture, particularly, cash cropping requires a capital to cope with. They need funds to buy seeds and manure and also to employ labourers in the peak seasons. Besides this regular attention has to be given to the growing crops which means they cannot engage themselves in the other remunerative field open to them, *i.e.*, wage earning till the crops are ready for sale. Lack of capital together with their desire to meet the new demands described earlier have made many a Mullukurumba go in for debts at high rate of interest. The creditors are mostly Christians who have keen desire to possess more and more lands. Those who are unable to pay even the interest have already surrendered their right of cultivation and have taken to wage earning.

Wage earning which the Mullukurumbas have taken to since the beginning of this decade contributes a lot to their having a wider field of interaction now. Wage earning is taking the Mullukurumbas of Kappala daily to estates which are within a radius of six miles or at times even further away and makes them work with males and females from various castes and communities such as *Izhāvans*, *Tiyans*, *Kattu Naickens*, *Panians*, *Christians* and *Moplas*. They all take tea in the same tea shop near their work spot and from the same glass, without any commensal taboos. These opportunities have no doubt lessened the social distance between the Mullukurumbas and the others—but nevertheless, the social distance between them does exist. The Mullukurumbas still do not take cooked food from the *Christians*, *Moplas*, *Uralis*, *Kattu Naickens* and *Panians*.

The youngsters give away the cash money earned by them to their parents. Yet they have grounds now to demand money for cropping their hair in the hair dressing saloons opened by

the immigrants at Erumad and also for buying additional clothes. Some of the Mullukurumba girls buy glass bangles, bead necklaces, face powder and eye-tex (a black ointment applied in the eyes) as they have now learnt the use of these articles from their co-wage earners belonging to various communities. Those unmarried girls who go for wage-earning buy these articles often where as the one unmarried girl (aged 24) in Kappala who does not go for wage earning does not buy most of these items. Whenever money is given to her by her parents, she buys glass bangles and this also is seldom.

In a few instances, the misconduct of some Mullukurumba girls on the work spot where they went for wage earning was brought to the notice of their parents. The elders scolded the girls and at times even beat them, but then the issue was forgotten. So far Mullukurumbas of Kappala have not violated their marriage regulations namely tribal endogamy, veedu exogamy, kin exogamy and clan exogamy.

The disturbances in their traditional economy and the introduction of cash cropping and wage-earning have not brought structural changes in the life of Mullukurumbas. The formation of their households, their houses and equipments in their houses, diet, authority order at household level as well as veedu level, division of labour, economic activities, rituals connected with birth, marriage and death, etc., are all in the traditional pattern. Values for their traditional way of living have not changed among the Mullukurumbas of Kappala and this perhaps is responsible for no structural change in their life.



CHAPTER FIVE

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

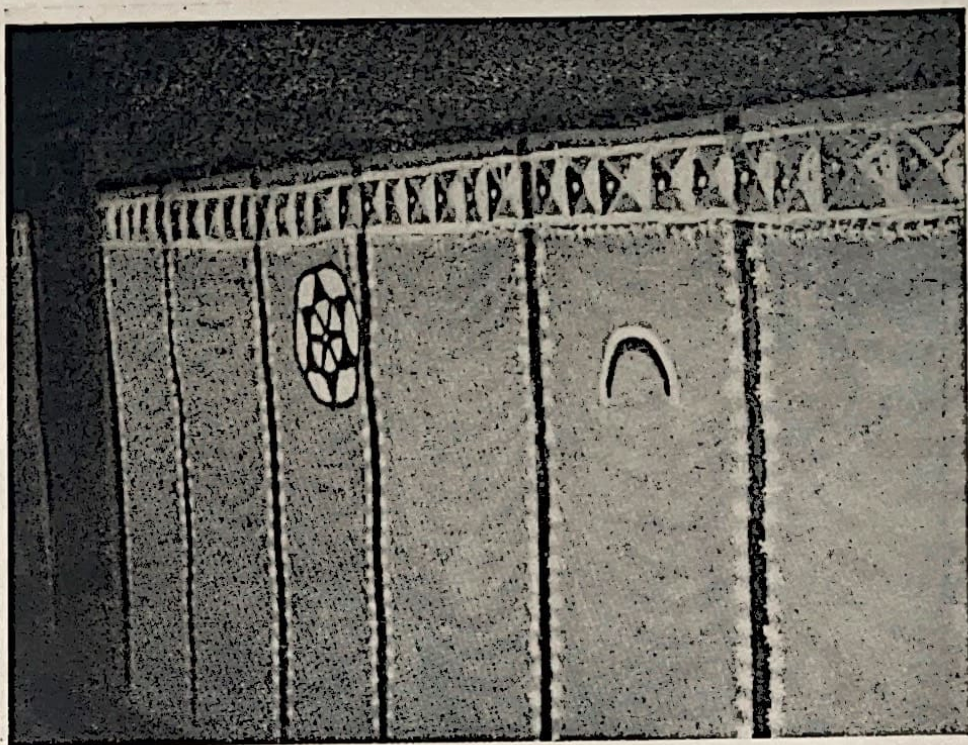
The religion of the Mullukurumbas has three main elements. Firstly is their *deiva perai* or *koil veedu* (temple house), which is found in every Mullukurumba veedu however small it might be. This *deiva perai* is the centre of celebration of all the rites and rituals connected with their life cycle. The deity which the Mullukurumbas traditionally approach for favours and worship is called by different names in different localities. Secondly, since a decade they have been occasionally attending temples of Hindu deities for worship. They have also adopted some of the Hindu festivals, for example, Vishu, *Sankrandhi*, *Onam*, *Puththari* and *Mannalam*. Lastly, they believe in the survival of the dead and in the authority of senior relatives even after their death.

There are few religious dogma for the Mullukurumbas and the infringers of these are punished by their chief. Their dogmas are centred around traditions and customary behaviour. Some of them are, not to eat beef, women not to put on blouses and saris but to continue wearing the traditional *kachchai muri* and *kattu thundu*, not to leave one's native veedu and live elsewhere indiscriminately, not to live in tile-roofed or terraced houses but to live in their traditionally patterned houses with thatched roofs, etc. It will be therefore more apt to describe Mullukurumba religion as a way of life maintained by traditions, conventions and customary behaviour.

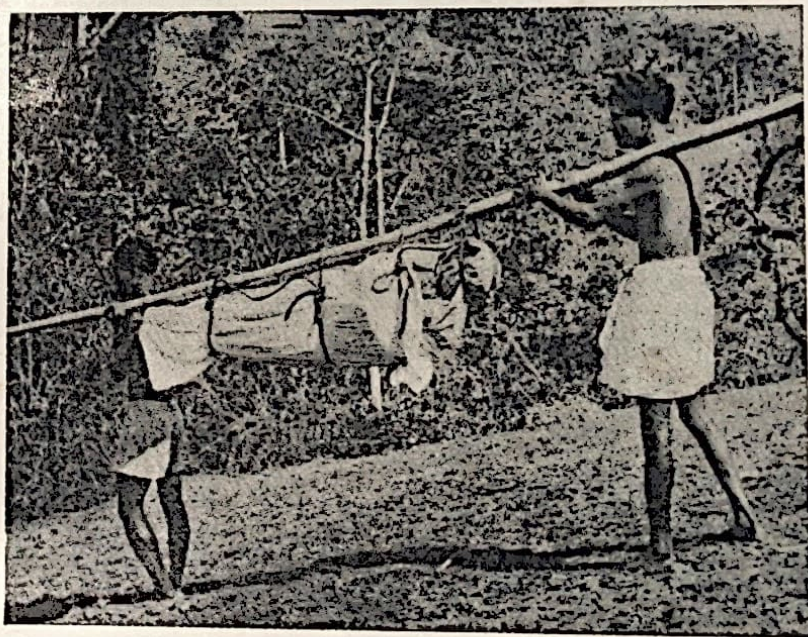
DEIVA PERAI

There is a *deiva perai* or *koil veedu* (temple house) in each Mullukurumba veedu. Its construction is in no way different from any other traditional Mullukurumba house in space and plan. The maintenance of this house is the responsibility of all the households in the veedu. There is no object of worship in this *deiva perai*. The significance of this *deiva perai* is that all the rites and rituals connected with the life cycle such as birth, marriage and death of the Mullukurumbas are performed here. There is no special office of priest among the Mullukurumbas to conduct the rites in this *deiva perai*. The *mooppan* (regional leader) or the *porunnavan* (leader of the particular veedu) is present when the rites are to commence and the clan members of the concerned individuals initiate the rites.

MULLUKURUMBAS OF KAPPALA



Design on the Deiva Perai walls

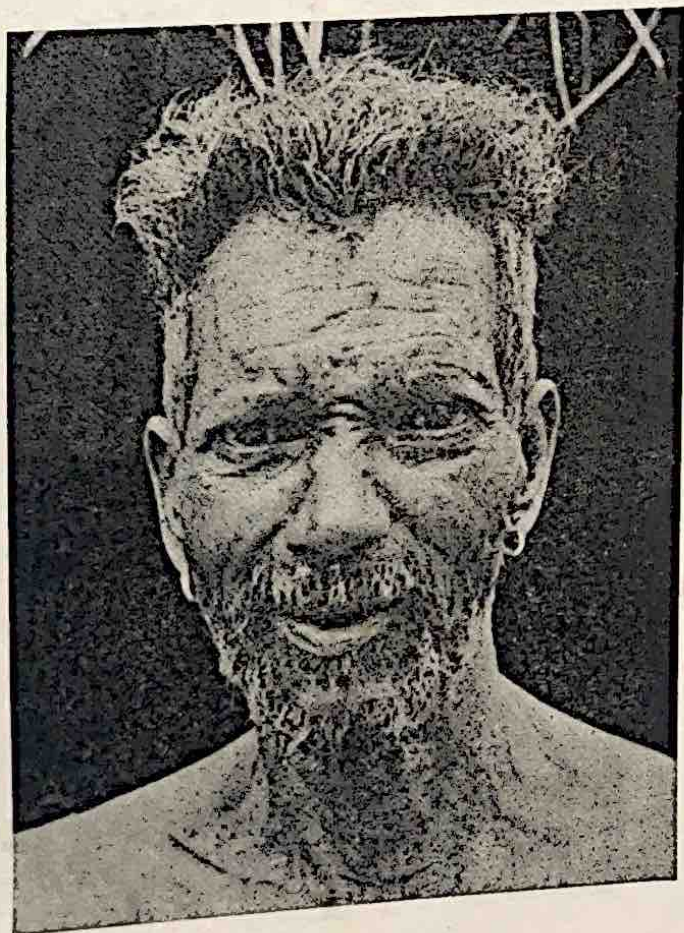


Carrying a corpse

MULLUKURUMBAS OF KAPPALA



Chaadurutti (Practice shooting)



1. P. unnavan

BIRTH RITUALS

On the ninth day after a child is born, the baby and its mother are taken into the *deiva perai* after a bath. Her parents or brother if they are alive or else her clan member in the *veedu* she lives, bring a piece of new cloth in which they receive the baby inside the *deiva perai*. Then *koova* leaf is spread in the *deiva perai* on which food cooked in her husband's house is served as an offering to the ancestors after which they all leave for her husband's house closing the door of the *deiva perai*. The food served on the leaf inside, in the name of ancestors is eaten by children later.

During the puberty attainment ceremony the food is cooked in the *deiva perai* and the girl or girls whose puberty attainment is being celebrated come as far as the verandah of the *deiva perai* to receive their food. After that all in the *veedu* are served food.

MARRIAGE RITUALS

When the bridegroom's father goes to the bride's *veedu* to ask for her in marriage, he first goes and sits on the verandah of the *deiva perai*. All the negotiations between bride's party and bridegroom's party take place in this *deiva perai*. It is here that the bridegroom's party pays the *parisa panam* to the bride's father and fixes the date for marriage. When the bridegroom's party arrives on the marriage day to take the bride to their house, the bride is met in this *deiva perai* and the mock fight takes place here. They are served food in this *deiva perai* only and from there, the bridegroom's party returns to its *veedu* along with the bride. Later when *dosai* bundles carrying ceremony is to be done, the *dosais* are to be made in the *deiva perai* only whether in the groom's *veedu* or bride's *veedu*, and also bundled there by the clan elder. Thus all rituals connected with marriage are performed in *deiva perai*.

This *deiva perai* is again the place where a newly married couple spend their first night together—usually in the bride's *veedu* when the couple return to bride's *veedu* on the third day after marriage, along with *pittu virandhu* (*dosai* bundles).

DEATH RITUALS

As soon as a *Mullukurumba* dies, his body is brought and laid in this *deiva perai*. Just before burial, it is brought outside the *deiva perai*, bathed, dressed and carried for burial. On the *pulai kuzhi* day (pollution breaking day), the *deiva perai* is

cleaned well and the purificatory oil is received by all the adult members of the *veedu*, in front of *deiva perai* from the clan member. Women after taking bath, bring water and cook the *pulai* meal in this *deiva perai*. After the meal is ready, food is served on a leaf in the name of ancestors and the *kulakaran* (the clan member who served purificatory oil) is also served food inside the *deiva perai*. It is only after this all others are served food. Third day after the celebration of *pulai kuzhi*, *koottathu koottal* is celebrated. This signifies the spirit of the newly deceased joining the spirits of the ancestors. On this day men go for hunting and women go for fishing. In the evening they cook fish curry, meat curry and also rice, all in the *deiva perai*. As soon as the meals are ready, they spread a number of *koova* leaves symbolising the presence of the ancestors and one more leaf in the name of the newly deceased. Food is served on all the leaves and doors of the *deiva perai* are closed. After ten or fifteen minutes the doors are opened and children are allowed to eat the served meal and all others are then served food.

Whenever someone falls sick among the Mullukurumbas, his/her guardian rushes to the *deiva perai* and hands over some money to the *mooppan* or *porunnavan* there, as his offering to the deity *Athiralanmar*. The *mooppan* preserves such offerings. During *Uchchala* (their annual hunting festival) he opens the bundle in which the money offered till the previous year has been bundled and the money collected during the current year is added to this bundle, in the name of the deity.

Some Mullukurumbas say that this bundle of money was buried in some place by the *mooppan* once in ten or fifteen years. Some others say that the Nair barber who was authorised by the Janmi of the region to issue purificatory oil to Mullukurumbas collected the money in the bundle once a year or once in two years. But during the past ten years, neither of the above has been happening. The Mullukurumbas of Kappala who continue to make cash offerings to their deity have utilised the collected money to buy a huge copper *anda* (huge, shallow circular vessel, about four feet in diameter and eight inch in depth) which they use for cooking rice whenever a feast at *veedu* level is held, on an auspicious occasion. They cook rice for *pulai* meal only in pots as *pulai* meal signifies a death.

Though there is no particular object of worship in a *deiva perai*, the Mullukurumbas of Kappala call their deity as

Athiralanmar. All the Mullukurumbas and the other four native groups namely Chettys, Uralis, Kattu Naickens and Panians who live in Erumad village say that they worship Athiralanmar. Mullukurumbas of other regions give various names for the deity they worship such as, Kariathan, Aarivilli, Karivilli, *Venur Thalaichal*, *Vettai Karumakan*. These are male deities. The female deities which these people worship are *Thampiratti* and *Malaiya Karung Kali*. *Small ambalam* (temple) for one of these deities exists separately in a locality. All the natives living in the surroundings of a particular *ambalam* attend it during the festivals.

The *ambalam* for Erumad village is in front of Kappala. The deity in the *ambalam* is Athiralanmar. A stone and a sword represent the deity in the *ambalam*. No document is available regarding the origin of this *ambalam*. According to the oral information obtained, this temple was built some two centuries ago by the then Nair Janmi of this region. Since then the Nairs were trustees and Chettys were priests performing worship in this *ambalam*. Later, about three generations ago, the trusteeship of the temple was transferred to the Chettys from and by the Nair landlords. Since few years the Chettys have engaged a Brahmin priest to conduct the worship in the *ambalam* although they were themselves the priests there till then. *Vilakku* (described later in this chapter) festival is celebrated with great enthusiasm in this *ambalam*. The Mullukurumbas used to go for hunting (*vilakku nayattu*) just before this festival and give the Chetty priest in the *ambalam* all the games they killed that day. But now, with the hunting expeditions turning out fruitless, they have stopped going for *vilakku nayattu*. This change is quite compatible with the change in the office of the priest in the *ambalam*. The Brahmin priest now offers only *payasam* (rice cooked in milk, water, ghee and jaggery) to the deity. During each festival, other than *Uchchala* (a hunting festival) some of the Mullukurumbas go to this *ambalam* and offer a coin or some rice to the deity and this is the income for the Brahmin priest. The priest also comes to the temple only on these festive occasions.

The temple for *Thampiratti* (female deity) is about three miles away from Kappala. Just after *Vilakku* celebrations in Athiralanmar temple, there are some celebrations in this temple which the Mullukurumbas attend. Brahmin priests perform the worship inside the temple. But all those natives who had taken

vows to sacrifice fowls or goats, make sacrifice of the animals themselves outside the temple, a little away from it.

However, it is necessary to stress here that though these ambalams contain deities worshipped by Mullukurumbas, the deiva perai of the veedu is more sacred a place for them than the ambalam.

IMPACT OF HINDU RELIGION

Only a few speak of Hindu Gods and Goddesses and claim that their ancestors were created by Shiva and Parvathi while majority show ignorance on these issues. A few Mullukurumbas have built a small shrine for Shiva in a place about 8 miles away from Kappala but no one conducts any worship there. I did not see the picture of any Hindu deity in any of the houses in Kappala. All the houses kept one brass lamp in which coconut oil was poured and a wick lying in this oil was lighted. It was only in two houses I saw the lamp being lighted daily. In all other houses this lamp was lit only on festive occasions. Their folk songs have episodes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata for their themes. During the month of Karkadagam, in most of the houses, men loudly read the epic Ramayana daily in the afternoon. When a marriage proposal comes for his daughter or son, a Mullukurumba now-a-days brings a copy of the Ramayana and closing his eyes, he opens a page. If that page contains description of some quarrel or death or any unpleasant incident, he drops the proposal. In the past marriage by elopement or capture was widely practised by them. Marriages arranged by elders are becoming popular only since 15 or 20 years.

FESTIVALS

The main impact of Hindu religion on Mullukurumbas is the celebration of various festivals. The Mullukurumbas eagerly look forward to the celebration of festivals and there are certain common features associated with their celebration festivals. To name some are the cleaning of their houses and the smearing of the verandahs with a solution of cowdung, charcoal powder and water just on the eve of the festival freeing themselves from agricultural work from the previous noon itself; having a sumptuous breakfast of dosai and bananas and a noon meal too. The married daughters take the opportunity to visit their natal homes during the festivals. In brief, the Mullukurumbas relax from their daily labour on fields, at well and enjoy

themselves during the festivals. They are unable to give the significance for all the festivals. Five out of the six festivals which the Mullukurumbas celebrate are Hindu festivals, celebrated by the bulk of the population, all over Kerala.

In Kerala, the twelve months of a year are named after the local terms for the twelve zodiac signs. The Mullukurumbas also name the months in a similar way. The local names of the months and the festivals celebrated by the Mullukurumbas are given below :

Month according to Malayalam calendar	Month according to Christian calendar	Festival	Remarks
Medam	April-May	Vishu	1st day of the month (New Year day)
Ridaham	May-June	—	—
Mithuram	June-July	—	—
Karkadagam	July-August	Sankrandhi	14th day of the month
Singam	August-Sept.	Onam	On the Thiruvonam star day during the month
Kanni	September-Oct.	—	—
Thula	October-Nov.	Puththari	Tenth day of the month
Vrichigam	November-Dec.	—	—
Dhanur	December-Jan.	Mannalam	During the whole month
Makaram	January-Feb.	—	—
Kumbham	February-March	Uchchala	Date chosen by the tribal leader and it is often on the first day of the month
Meenam	March-April	—	—

Of the six festivals celebrated by the Mullukurumbas, Uchchala is the traditional one. As regards the other five, though

it is obvious that the Mullukurumbas have adopted them from the Hindus it is difficult to say as to when exactly or how exactly each festival came to be a part of their ritual life. The Mullukurumbas themselves have no answer but they say that all these festivals are celebrated by them since the days of their forefathers. According to them the significance in general of all the festivals is that they should be protected from all evils and that they should live in plenty.

During the Vishu afternoon, the Mullukurumba men conduct practise shooting called *chaadurutti*¹—which is found among the Mala Ulladans of 'Pulikunnu'² also. In the night, all the natives of Erumad, including the Mullukurumbas, attend the Vilakku celebration in the Athiralanmar temple in Erumad. All the natives (males) excepting Panians sing and dance the whole night, while the womenfolk sit together in their respective places traditionally occupied by them, and enjoy the dances.

Sankrandhi is the occasion during which people of the various Hindu castes in Kerala make offerings to the spirits of their ancestors. On this day, the Mullukurumba men and women catch birds with the paste smeared *cole*. They make dosais and curry out of the bird's flesh and offer to the spirits of their ancestors and then eat and make merry.

Onam is popularly believed all over Kerala to be the festival celebrated to show their respect for the mythological king Mahabali. During the festival Onam, the Mullukurumbas of Kappala draw concentric circles and fill up the space between the circles with various kinds of flowers. In the centre is kept a clay lump which is also decorated with flowers. This lump symbolises the mythical King Mahabali. Some of the Mullukurumbas narrate the story of King Mahabali while many show ignorance to it. They eat well and relax for the day.

Puththari etymologically means new rice. This festival is to mark the coming in of new crop. On this day, the Mullukurumbas tie a bunch of paddy ears to their roofs and offer some money in the *deiva perai* with a plea to their God Athiralanmar to help them prosper more. After this, new rice mixed with

¹ A disc of about 3" or 4" in thickness, cut from the banana tree or any other soft-wooded tree, is rolled by one, while others standing in a line aim at the rolling disc, imagining it to be a running animal.

² Conducted fieldwork on the Mala Ulladans of Pulikunnu (Kottayam District) in 1966—a project sponsored by the Anthropological Survey of India.

jaggery and coconut scrappings is distributed to all who are present in the deiva perai.

A large number of devotees (from different castes and communities) visit the hill shrine of Lord Ayyappan, on Sabari hills, Kerala once in a year, during the *Makara Vilakku* festival *i.e.*, on the first day of Makara month (January—February). These devotees start worshipping Lord Ayyappan, for forty days, before this. The forty days worship before this Makara Vilakku is called *Mandala Vratam* all over Kerala. In Kappala this is referred to as Mannalam. Though the Mullukurumbas do not observe the Mandala Vratam as the caste population does, the former gives some rice, jaggery and some coin in the local temple of Athiralanmar, on any one day during these forty days. On the day on which a particular Mullukurumba family decides to give the rice, jaggery and coin, all its members bathe in the morning itself and go to the temple to make the offerings.

Uchchala is said to be the most traditional festival of the Mullukurumbas for two reasons. Firstly, the other communities and castes in the neighbourhood do not celebrate this festival. Secondly, their chief leader, Appadu Thalaichal has to decide the date for celebrating this festival in the month of Kumbha, taking the deity's approval through a *velichapadi* (oracle) and then announce it.

As for all the other festivals, the Mullukurumbas get themselves relieved from their routine work, a day prior to this festival, from the noon onwards. The men get busy in cleaning their bows and arrows while the women clean their houses and pound rice for preparing dosais the next morning.

On Uchchala day, the Mullukurumbas in all the households take dosais, bananas and coffee for breakfast after which the male members start taking bath. In the past (till two decades ago) they were not very particular about taking bath in the morning for every festival. After bathing they go to the deiva perai in their veedu and in the name of their deity Athiralanmar they hand over their cash offerings (quarter rupee to one rupee according to their convenience) to the porunnavan (elder man of the veedu) there. The porunnavan bundles all the cash received and keeps it in the deiva perai itself. It has already been discussed in the beginning of this chapter as to what happens to this bundle. After taking the afternoon meal, all the males (including babies) start on a hunting procession. After going a short distance boys who are younger than fifteen or sixteen years

of age and very old sickly men are sent back to the veedu. The women busy themselves in fishing. In the evening the women of Kappala carry their rations and reach Nedungodu veedu, the house of their elder ancestor. The food is cooked there jointly by all. The men also return by then with the games they hunt. Till the meals get ready, the Mullukurumbas dance *vatta kali* and *cole kali*. After the meals, the Uralis commence dancing to the accompaniment of their music which continues throughout the night. The next morning the Mullukurumbas of Kappala return to Kappala and attend to their cattle, clean their house, have some breakfast (the remaining dosais of the previous day's) and again go back to Nedungodu veedu with their noon's rations. Then they prepare thengai choru at Nedungodu and have it. In the afternoon at about 3 or 4'O clock, the Uralis start their dance once again. An hour or so afterwards, they receive their gift of sixty seers (75 litres) of paddy, betelnuts, betel leaves and tobacco and then leave. On the second day evening, while leaving Nedungodu, the Mullukurumbas of Kappala invite their kin in Nedungodu to come and have their meal in Kappala, the next afternoon. The next day, the Mullukurumbas of Nedungodu come to Kappala with their rations. All the men go for a hunting in the morning and return by afternoon. By evening the food is cooked and served, which mark the end of the festival.

At every meal cooked, both in Nedungodu and in Kappala, two leaves are spread in the *deiva perai* of the veedu in which the meal is cooked and the food is first served on the two leaves in the name of their ancestors.

SURVIVAL OF THE DEAD

The Mullukurumbas have a strong belief that an individual survives after death in the form of *pisasu* (ghost). They are very much afraid of the actions of *pisasu* for it is their belief that for the slightest provocation it will harm them in any manner it chooses. So they try to appease it at every stage.

At death, all the near kin such as married daughters or their parents-in-law, parents of the deceased's daughter-in-law, maternal uncle's children, paternal uncle's children, brothers, etc., bring mundu (white cloth) for the dead body, lest its spirit should get annoyed. While digging the grave, after digging a trench of the size eight feet long, two feet broad and about four to six feet deep, they dig a slit type of long hole on one side of the trench, through out its length, big enough to contain the dead body. Then the dead body is lowered into the trench and slid

into the slit shaped hole. Here the advantage from the point of view of a Mullukurumba is that when the trench is closed with mud, the mud will not press the dead body as it will be lying in the slit. They do this, not to cause pain to the body, even though it is only a dead body. They keep a little rice, meat, raw banana, betelnut, betel leaves, tobacco and a bow and arrows in the case of a male dead body and a sickle in the case of a female dead body, for the individual's life after death.

On the third day, they celebrate pulai kuzhi which marks the breaking of the pollution. Food is to be cooked and served to all the members in the veedu. They usually cook rice and vegetable curry on this day.

Two days later, that is on the fifth day after the death, some elderly men go to the burial ground in the evening. They reach the particular spot where they had buried the body five days ago and say, "Please come along with us" and walk back to the deiva perai in their veedu. That morning itself some men go for hunting and even if they do not get any catch they buy some meat from nearby market and return. The women also go for fishing that day and bring fish. Rice, meat curry and fish curry are prepared by evening in the deiva perai. Leaves are spread inside the deiva perai in the name of ancestors and one particular leaf is specially named after the newly deceased. As soon as the men returning from burial ground enter the deiva perai, food is served on all the leaves and all the Mullukurumbas leave the room closed and stand outside with the belief that the ancestors would eat only when not seen. About ten minutes later, they open the door and allow the children to have the meal served on the leaves and the elders are served food separately. This ceremony is called kottathu koottal meaning that the newly deceased has joined the ancestors. Due to the present day hard conditions, a household in Kappala offers only pulai meal to all in the veedu. On the occasion of kottathu koottal, it gives one meal per household in the veedu, whatever be the strength of the household.

During every festival, marriage and any other auspicious occasion, the Mullukurumbas do not fail to remember their ancestors. They make the offerings to them first and then serve all others.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

The Mullukurumbas associate every convention and customary behaviour of theirs with the wish of their deity. They

feel that it is a great offence to leave their native veedu and to live anywhere for their personal convenience without the permission of their deity. Even if one wishes to sever his relationship with his native veedu, he is expected to formally come out of the deiva perai with a bow and arrows in his hands and say that he will henceforth have nothing to do with that veedu and then leave the veedu. This he has to do in front of the mooppan or porunnavan. If he does not observe this formality, he is believed to meet with disasters. If one takes the permission of deity through the mooppan and lives elsewhere for his convenience, he is expected to perform all rituals only in his native veedu. During the fieldwork I saw the members of a Mullukurumba household (who lived some seven miles away from their native veedu, in order to be close to their fields) carry a dead body all the way to their native veedu for burial. This household celebrates all ceremonies and rituals in its native veedu only.

Again the convention demands the Mullukurumbas to live in their traditional houses with thatched roofs and their women to wear kachchai muri and kattu thundu. Three households in Kappala took fancy to build houses with tiled roofs. This was according to orthodox Mullukurumbas against the convention and hence against the wish of deity. To their right expectations, there was some calamity or sickness in all the three households which built houses with tiled roofs. These houses with tiled roofs are lying vacant. Girls and boys of various age groups sleep in the rooms of these houses and two houses have recently been given away for running the tribal residential school. So the fourth household took permission from the deity through the mooppan for building a house with tiled roof on the condition that it will not shift its hearth from its traditional house. This household has three couples already and another two sons to be married. So one couple sleep in the traditional house and the other couples and children sleep in the new house which contains four rooms.

As regards dress of women the Mullukurumbas are still conventional. A Mullukurumba who is still a member of the District Tribal Advisory Board, wanted to bring reforms in his household. When he got his daughter married, he made it a condition with the bridegroom's party that his daughter will wear a sari and blouse for the marriage and that they should take her to their veedu in that dress only. The bridegroom's party agreed and the marriage took place. According to the

Mullukurumba tradition, no one from the bride's veedu accompanies the bride, when she is taken to her husband's veedu by his people. So she went alone with them. As they approached his (husband's) veedu, one among the party got possessed by the deity which demanded that it will not tolerate the bride coming into the veedu in a sari. Immediately they compelled the girl to get into their traditional dress of kachchai muri and kattu thundu. The girl's father therefore does not talk to his son-in-law or his people. If young girls express wish to put on blouses, the elders are immediately afraid of the reactions of their deities. The school going girls who wear blouses, remove the blouses as soon as they return from school and wear the traditional dress.

One thing very striking here is that the Mullukurumbas who so strictly desire to follow the traditions in the name of the deity as far as the dress of a woman is concerned have been liberal in allowing the males to wear *kuppayam* (shirts) which is not their traditional dress. They are unable to explain the background for this differential view.

In the past, they attributed the failure in their hunting expeditions and accidents during the hunting as owing to the annoyance of their deity and their mooppan then invoked the deity and appeased it with offerings of toddy, betelnuts, betel leaves and tobacco. Now-a-days they have realised that the clearance of forests and the resultant lack of wild animals in the surroundings will not allow them to be successful in their hunting efforts. Acute illness and death are also attributed to the annoyance of deity or spirits of ancestors.

The Mullukurumbas do not bother about the ordinary, mild sickness like headache, pain in the body, slight fever, etc. They give some native medicines which they know of. If the fever or any other complaint persists for more than three or four days, they send for some one who has a knowledge of magico-religious treatment. There is one Mullukurumba in Nedungodu who has learnt it from some outsider and he is much in demand among the Mullukurumbas of this region. If the patient is a small baby, he blows air on it from head to foot and chants some prayers. If the patient is an elderly person, then he chants prayers, burns camphor and invokes the deity and ties a knotted thread round the neck of the patient. If the sickness does not respond to this treatment, they resort to *kodi* reading (S...

It is an art in which some Mullukurumba men have attained proficiency. It is believed that a Mullukurumba kodi reader invokes the deity and then allows himself to speak and act according to the wish of the deity. The hearer must be a person trained in this line because the dialect the kodi reader speaks at that moment cannot be understood by an average Mullukurumba. The hearer need not necessarily be a kodi reader himself.

The kodi reader sits facing west, in front of a well polished wooden plank on which he empties the handful of rice contained in a dried *koovalai kai* (a nut) shell. Rice obtained by removing the husks over the paddy with fingers is used for this purpose. Invoking the God he makes some designs on the heaped rice and takes out three or five pinches of rice, with the thumb and his middle finger. He then checks whether he had picked odd or even number of grains. Even number of grains predicts a smooth and automatic recovery from the sickness or trouble while an odd number of grains indicates the involvement of appeasing some dissatisfied spirit of an ancestor in the family of the sick person. The operation is repeated several times. The language used while reading the pattern of rice formation is the special dialect which they have learnt for this purpose. When the kodi reader says that a particular spirit is dissatisfied, the hearer if he knows this dialect argues that there cannot be any justification in that particular spirits dissatisfaction as it has been made offerings regularly or quite recently. Then the kodi reader pitches upon another spirit and it goes on till the hearer accepts to appease the spirit lastly discovered to be responsible for the present sickness or the trouble of the individual.

This art of kodi reading is generally learnt by a son from his father. Women are prohibited. It is said that in certain rare instances, any Mullukurumba who has faith in this art and who also has faith in the religious beliefs of Mullukurumbas can be taught. The kodi reader said that he will not accept those Mullukurumba boys who are in favour of bringing new reforms in the Mullukurumba society. He feels that "the course is a very rigorous one and needs a high degree of concentration to retain the deity in one's heart while reading kodi". The course is for seven days during which period the learner has to abstain himself from sexual pleasures and non-vegetarian food. If the learner is not the son of the teacher, then the former offers two bottles (24 ozs) of country liquor and five rupees also.

When a person is affected by persisting illness, the head of that household is expected to request the senior most male member in his *veedu* to help him in finding out the cause for illness through *kodi* reading. If he fails, he is subject to strong criticism of others later, particularly if the person dies.

If a patient is not cured even after *kodi* reading, they send for a *velichapadi*, who is believed to have acquired the capability of remaining in communion with God and of conversing with him. All the elderly male members of the *veedu* are present for the occasion. After invoking the deity, the *velichapadi* would tell them which deity is displeased and how it is to be appeased. By the time this treatment also fails the patient is already in the sinking stage. At times they then take the patient to a hospital. Often the patient collapses as the stage is too late and this helps them not to develop any faith in the allopathic treatment.

Now-a-days the Mullukurumbas try to receive treatment from outsiders also. During the field work, a Mullukurumba boy aged 22 fell sick. He was having fever for more than a week continuously. He was living with his mother and step father, as his father was no more. One morning a *kodangi* (a man who predicts the future and who is popularly known as Bududikki all over South India) visited Kappala. The mother of the sick man explained her son's sickness to him and requested him to cure her son. He demanded two rupees, some rice and a lamp with oil. When these were supplied, he drew some design on the verandah with a chalk piece and kept idols of some deities from his bag. He strew some turmeric powder on the idols, lighted the lamp, chanted some verses and then took out a copper sheet and scribbled something on it with a big needle. Then he folded it and bundled it in a piece of cloth and gave it with instructions that it should be tied round his neck. As soon as he realised that the Mullukurumbas present there (all were women) listen to him with rapt attention, he further frightened them by saying that some ghosts are troubling this man on and off. If the ghosts are to be driven away permanently, then rice has to be cooked in a cremation ground and chicken is to be sacrificed in the name of God and kept over the rice. As the Mullukurumba women do not go to the burial or cremation ground, she requested him to do it on her behalf. On his consent she bought a chick from her eldest daughter-in-law and gave him the chick, a new pot and a litre of rice. He demanded

one rupee for his services and she paid that also. There was no improvement in the patient's condition.

Within forty-eight hours, a Mopla came professing some knowledge in the field of magical cure of illness. This Mullukurumba woman—mother of the sick man, paid him one litre of rice, one rupee and betelnut, betel leaves and tobacco. He also chanted some verses and blew air on the face of the patient. He also gave a string to be tied round the neck of the patient and left the *veedu*. The patient was still not cured. Then she requested her husband to attempt *kodi* reading in which it was later understood that the spirit of his father was dissatisfied. They agreed to make some offerings and the man got cured within a week.

A Mullukurumba man who is a member of the District Tribal Advisory Board, speaks of reforms among Mullukurumbas all the time. He has also given his house in Kappala to the State Government to run a Residential School in it for all the tribal children of the region. But he would not permit the Urali, Kattu Naicken and Panian children to sleep in the *deiva perai* of Kappala. He managed to get another house in Kappala itself for the school children to sleep.

In spite of the impact of the various external agencies to which the Mullukurumbas of Kappala are now exposed, *e.g.*, good roads, cheap and quick means of transport, the intrusion of the immigrants, etc., their faith in their traditional religion is still firm.

CHAPTER SIX

SOCIAL CONTROL

The study of normative systems of primitive peoples have in the past produced many contrasting views. The impression of the early travellers was that the Man in primitive condition was savage and a condition of anarchy prevailed. Then came the opposite view based on the close observations of the early field workers—though by no means exhaustive, that a well ordered social system prevailed among the primitive people. Both the views of primitive anarchy on the one hand and of 'automatic conformity' on the other—have been shown by modern field workers to be exaggerations. There are laws and moral rules in all the societies but these are by no means adhered to by all or automatically. Thus, in this chapter I shall present the normative standards among the Mullukurumbas, the agencies which induce people to conform to those standards and the procedures adopted in dealing with deviant behaviour.

A study of all the forces of social conformity among the Mullukurumbas reveal that they have four agencies namely authority of elders, public opinion, religious beliefs and council of elders, to maintain social control.

Authority of elders is recognised by the Mullukurumbas at every level—in the household level, in the minimal lineage level, in the maximal lineage, *i.e.*, *veedu* level and also at the level of the community at large. In a household if children do not obey the orders of their elders, they are beaten. The fear of being beaten makes the children obey their elders. The children who do not understand the community norms are made to obey and get accustomed to them through fear for elders. A few examples are cited below. Once a Mullukurumba was away on a hunting expedition and returned on the evening of the third day. The eight year old daughter of his who had been sleeping with her mother for the two nights when he was away, wanted to sleep with her for the third night also. But the mother told her daughter, "Appan kovikkum, Nee poi nin koottathode kede"—which literally means that the father will get angry, you go and lie down with your group. This girl who had since one year started sleeping with her age mates, was thus compelled to go back to her age mates for fear of annoy-

ing her father. In certain households I came across some girls who were interested in receiving education from the nearby free residential schools but because their parents did not approve, they quietly accepted the household work and also worked as wage earners. A girl of nineteen years was beaten severely by her elder brother and parents because she insisted on wearing a blouse which is not the custom in their community.

The Mullukurumbas who learn to obey the elders right from their childhood, understand kinship obligations also as they grew up and respect the authority of elders at all levels—whether household or minimal lineage or veedu.

Piddington (1960: Vol. I, 326) says, "The force of the negative sanctions provided by public opinion is most clearly seen in those primitive communities where a man who has violated some important custom actually goes into voluntary exile or commits suicide because he cannot bear the shame of public humiliation". A case in which the grand daughter (daughter's daughter) of a Mullukurumba of Kappala committed suicide in her father's veedu some eight years ago, is in accordance with the above statement. The girl became pregnant before marriage on account of her friendship with a non-Mullukurumba in the neighbourhood of her veedu. She could not bear the shame of public ridicule and humiliation and so she hung herself from a tree in the night. When I met the mother of the girl during the field work and asked her about the cause for her daughter's death, she gave me a very different and a little unbelievable story. She said that her daughter had brought up a chick, which she was very fond of. One evening when she returned from the fields, she found that her father had already killed her chick for making curry for some important guest at home. This had upset her and she committed suicide that night. All the Mullukurumbas of Kappala deny this story and say that she committed suicide only on account of her conception before marriage, that too on account of her friendship with a man of the Izhava caste.

About fifteen years ago, a Mullukurumba of Kappala wanted to marry a girl who belonged to the Mullukurumba community but of his clan. He knew that the society would not permit this marriage and if he marries her in spite of it, the couple would have to suffer great humiliation and excommunication from the community. So he perhaps thought it was better to end his life rather than violate the mores of the society and thereby subject himself to public ridicule. He committed suicide.

Some examples to prove that the positive sanctions provided by public opinion are effective among the Mullukurumbas are given below. The daughters who have attained puberty but not married yet and the daughters-in-law are expected to live upto certain standards. If they covers their persons properly with the kachchai muri and kattu thundu they are called modest. If they do not come before men who are elder to them without proper reason, they are said to be well behaved. If they do their household duties efficiently then they are well appreciated. Particularly, a daughter-in-law, through good conduct and behaviour gets a good name from the public not only for herself but also for her natal family.

In the case of a man, he who is able to maintain his wife and children without exposing them to hunger or any other basic wants of life, is spoken high of while that man who leads an irresponsible life and does not provide food and clothes to his wife and children is subject to public scorn ; at times even his wife leaves him on a divorce, which makes him an object of ridicule in the society. Thus in order to be upheld as respectable person by the society, the Mullukurumbas realise their responsibilities and try their best to live upto the standards of the society.

In discussing about the early theories of religious genesis and evolution into monotheism, Edward Norbeck (1965, 215) says that the early theories "regarded religion as a means of promoting social solidarity and continuity through joint beliefs and acts and through the support it often gives to moral codes and other values of society". This is very true in the case of the Mullukurumbas.

The tradition of the Mullukurumbas to collectively conduct all the rites and rituals of their life cycle in their deiva perai go a long way to promote social solidarity among them. The responsibility of the maintenance of the deiva perai being on all the households in a veedu provides another opportunity for them all to work unitedly.

The Mullukurumbas believe in the survival of the dead in the form of pisasu. They are very much afraid of provoking it in the least, because it is said among them that a provoked pisasu will cause any disaster to the provoker.

During the field work, I attended one pulai kuzhi ceremony. Soon after the ceremonies started a government official arrived

in the veedu and wanted to see a Mullukurumba who is a member of the District Tribal Advisory Board. The children who received him communicated the message to the concerned individual. This man sent word through the children that the visitor should sit on the verandah of his house and that he will come shortly. As I was on the spot I could see his restlessness. He wanted to go and meet that official but he had not the courage either to leave that place or to call the visitor there. He said that he was afraid of hurting the sentiments of the deceased by breaking the custom by leaving the ceremonies in the middle and suffering the consequences on its provocation. This man normally advocates reforms among the Mullukurumbas. Three hours later, when all the ceremonies were over this Mullukurumba hurriedly took his bath and rushed to meet the official, without even wiping his wet body properly.

A Mullukurumba household is expected to serve meals to all in the veedu when it celebrates the puberty attainments of a girl or marriage or pulai kuzhi. During my field work, a household was celebrating the puberty attainment of a daughter. As funds of the head of the household were limited he could not give food to all in the veedu. So he gave one meal per household in the veedu, whatever was its strength. Though all his kin in the veedu knew of his monetary condition, no one either volunteered to help him financially or criticize the economic measure he had adopted.

A few days later, there was a pulai kuzhi ceremony in that veedu. The monetary conditions of the household which had to give the pulai meal was also equally poor as that described in the above case. But here the kin, out of fear for the dead, rose to the occasion, gave their voluntary contributions and arranged the pulai meal for all in the veedu. These two contrary situations and the earlier episode show that solidarity is maintained among the Mullukurumbas through their fear for the dead and beliefs in the life after death.

The Mullukurumbas normally conform to the norms and traditions of their society through the influences of the above three agencies namely authority of elders, public opinion and religious beliefs. Still, occasionally there are cases of violations which are settled by the council of elders among the Mullukurumbas. This council is called *mooppanmar koottan* (Meeting of elder men). It had an elaborate structure and much of its 'power' is now lost. Here by power, I mean "the ability to

forcefully compel the behaviour of others" (Fried : 1965, 181). This council was very much alive till fifteen years ago and since a decade it meets once a year only to decide the date for the Uchchala festival.

The Nair Janmi is at the apex of their council. He seems to have been only a nominal figure in the council because not a single case, to the memory of any Mullukurumba I came across, was referred to him. Then there is the Mullukurumba chief, the mooppan of the Appadu veedu, who is called Appadu thalaichal (elderman of Appadu veedu); beneath him are two thalaichals (elderman) called Kottoor thalaichal (elderman of Kottoor veedu) and Edoor thalaichal (elderman of Edoor veedu). Next in the descending hierarchy are the thirteen mooppans representing the various regions in which the Mullukurumba population lives. Each mooppan has a group of veedus, anything from five and above, under his control. Kappala veedu comes under the control of Erumad mooppan who lives in Nedungodu. Besides Kappala and Nedungodu, this mooppan controls three other Mullukurumba veedus, all lying in Erumad village. Each veedu in turn has a porunnavan (elderman) who is not included in the council of elders. These various offices, right from Appadu thalaichal to porunnavan in a veedu are hereditary in a way, in the male line. Women are not eligible for any of these offices. The oldest person in the senior most generation succeeds to the office of the elderman. It is easier to explain this diagrammatically.

The below diagram represents the male line in a veedu. A, B and C are three brothers; A's B's and C's are their sons and A's, B's and C's are their grand sons respectively. The age of each individual is given in the diagram itself and the thick numbers indicate the order of succession.

In the cases of **5** succeeding **4**, **11** succeeding **10** and **19** succeeding **18** kinship plays its role. Though **5** is the son of B and A has two more sons, **5** in virtue of age is the elder kin after **4** and succeeds. **19** and **20** are classificatory brothers of the same age. While succeeding **18**, **19** is given the office because he is the son of the elder ancestor. In the case of **11**, though he is one year younger to **12** in age, he becomes senior to **12** in virtue of his generation. **11** is the uncle (father's brother) of **12** and hence the former succeeds to the office. Thus in succeeding to the office of elderman, it is observed that belonging to the senior most generation is the first criterion and among the

members of the same generation, age is the deciding factor. If there is a tie here, then the descendant of the elder ancestor succeeds.

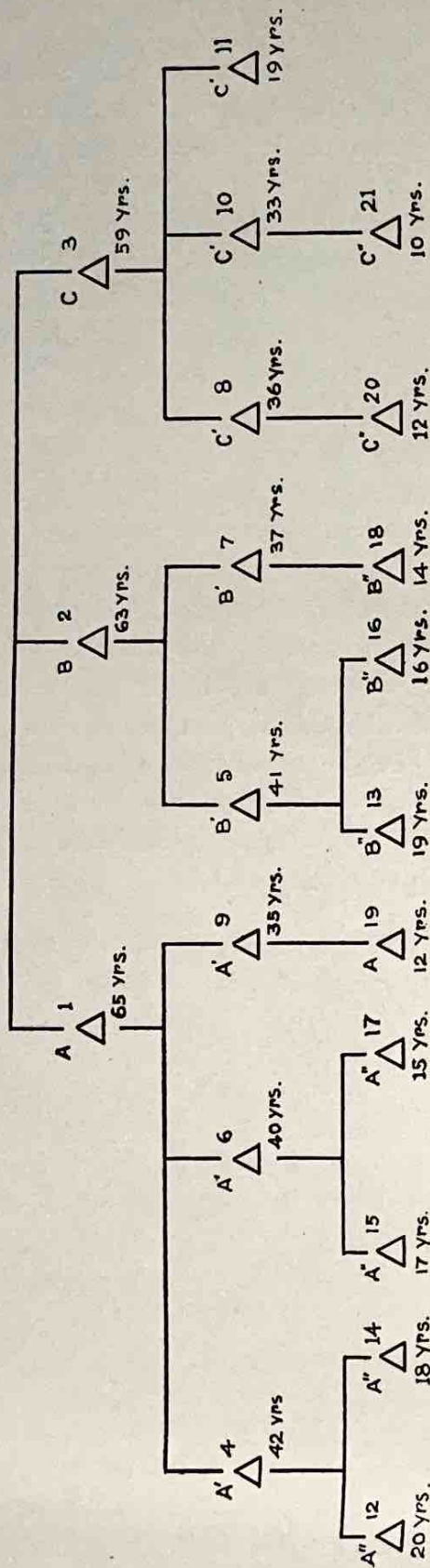


Diagram showing the order of succession in a family for the office of elderman

The duties of a porunnavan are to collect and preserve the offerings to the deity from the Mullukurumbas of his veedu during festive occasions and on any other occasion they choose to give, to be present for all the ceremonies in the deiva perai each time a rite or ritual is being celebrated, to keep a watch as to whether all the Mullukurumbas are observing the traditional customs and norms of the society and lastly to settle the divorce cases of members living in his veedu. The duties of a mooppan are to conduct vili nayattu (explained in the chapter on economy), to invoke the deity during hunting expeditions and also while making offerings to the deity, to give sanction for marriages of the Mullukurumbas living in the veedus under his control and to be present for the marriages, to preserve ennai (explained elsewhere in this chapter) for issue to the Mullukurumbas of his region, to report to the Appadu thalaichal all the cases of violation and lastly to attend the meetings of the council of elders. The three thalaichals of Appadu, kottoor and Edoor have also the same duties as a mooppan for the veedus under their control but they are also the key figures to decide cases. Appadu thalaichal has the privilege of levying fines.

The hierarchy within the council is said to have been fixed by the Nair Janmi, several generations ago. The Mullukurumbas say that they were the captives of the Nair Janmi and hence had to accept whatever the Nair Janmi dictated to them. It is believed that there are some copper plates containing the details as to how the Mullukurumbas became captives of the Nair Janmi, how the council of elders among the Mullukurumbas is to be organized and how the Mullukurumbas are to remain subordinate to the Janmi. These plates are suspected to be with some Nairs now. In spite of the best of efforts during the field work access to these plates could not be gained.

The Mullukurumbas have a very special way of claiming membership to their community. Whenever there is a child birth or puberty attainment of a girl or pulai kuzhi ceremony in a household, in a Mullukurumba veedu, the head of that household is to collect ennai (oil) from a Nair barber* and on the

* Only one Nair barber family has been authorised to give ennai (oil) to all the Mullukurumbas of Wynad. The Nair who now gives this ennai lives in kakkavayal about a mile from Meenangadi which is seventeen miles from Kappala. He is about fifty years old. He and his family members have given up the barber's profession. He had some lands but his two marriages and his ill-health compelled him to sell away his lands. Till about twenty years ago, he says he was getting about 100 rupees per year and also some paddy from the Mullukurumbas

occasions of the first two events, namely child birth and puberty attainment of a girl, he is to collect mathu (ash and water) from a Nair washerman*. The ennai and mathu are collected in bamboo containers called kuththi. These occasions are all connected with pollution-birth, puberty attainment and death. The ennai brought is to be annointed and the mathu is to be sprinkled on the heads of the concerned individuals and then they are to take bath. Only then, it is considered that they are rid of pollution. Each time they go to collect this ennai or mathu, they have to give quarter of a rupee. Besides, once a year each Mullukurumba veedu is expected to give some paddy to the Nair barber and washerman of their region. The Nairs deny ennai and mathu to those Mullukurumbas who have been ex-communicated from the community by the council of elders for some offence. Every Mullukurumba is proud of being member of his community and hence, in order to proclaim that they are not excommunicated and that they are true Mullukurumbas, it becomes their responsibility to rush for ennai and mathu every-time an occasion arises.

How these cultural specialists—the barber and the washerman rose to prominence in the life of the Mullukurumbas is not very clear. The Mullukurumbas say that the Nair Janmi whose

for the ennai he gave them. But now a days he gets hardly ten rupees from the mooppans who issue the ennai on his behalf. So he is now forced to become an agricultural labourer and earns two rupees a day. Every year, during the month of Meenam (March-April), this Nair barber goes to the Bhagavati temple in Manikunnu (about 21 miles from Kappala to its west), and gets one bottle (24 Oz) of oil (coconut) from that temple. He says that this oil has been used in annointing the deity Bhagavati's idol there. The Nair barber takes this oil to Appadu thalaichal and hands it over to him. Whenever any mooppan comes and asks for this ennai (oil) the Appadu thalaichal gives a little of it and this mooppan issues it to the Mullukurumbas of his region and collects the quarter rupee from each to pay the barber when he comes on his collection rounds once or twice a year.

* Four families of Nair washerman one in each of the four regions of Mullukurumbas have been authorised to issue mathu. These families at present live in Cherangodu, Kottampothu, Nellivayal and Poothadi. The Mullukurumbas of Kappala receive mathu from the washerman at Cherangodu which is about six miles from Kappala, to its north-west. Mathu literally means white cloth, but what the Mullukurumbas actually receive in the name of mathu is a pinch of ash and a little water in the bamboo containers (kuththi) they carry with them. Out of the four families of washermen which are authorised to give mathu to the Mullukurumbas, I could contact only two at Cherangodu and Nellivayal. In these families, both men and women give mathu to the Mullukurumbas for a payment of a quarter rupee each time. The washermen whom I contacted were young and they said that they get hardly Rs. 25/- each, per year from the Mullukurumbas. They have some lands to cultivate and they also wash clothes of Nambudiris, Nairs and Tiyans. Their women attend childbirth in the houses of Nambudiris, Nairs and Tiyans and what they get from Mullukurumbas is only a nominal amount.

captives were the Mullukurumbas had forced this system on them so that the Janmi can derive free services from the barber and washerman for all the members of his tarawad (matrilineal joint family), in lieu of the gains the barber and the washerman made from the Mullukurumbas.

As Nairs were matrilineal in succession and inheritance until recently, the right of giving ennai and mathu were inherited from the Nair barber and washermen by the sons of their eldest sisters. It is said that the Nair barber and the Nair washermen of Cherangodu were authorised by the Janmi to attend the meetings of the council of Mullukurumba elders and also to take a share in the fines levied on any Mullukurumba in order to expiate him from the guilt he was charged for.

Till fifteen years ago, the council used to meet once a year, in the month of kumbam (February-March), to discuss the cases brought to it. After that meeting if there was any necessity, then they used to meet during the year, before the next kumbam, meeting. The meetings were held in a place called *kundhani kazhakam*, about three furlongs away from Appadu veedu. This area seems to have been a thick jungle till a decade ago. Kundhani kazhakam was chosen because it was close to Appadu, the veedu of the Mullukurumba chief. The meetings were presided over by the Appadu thalaichal and attended by the Nair barber, washerman, kottoor thalaichal, Edoor thalaichal and the thirteen mooppans. A *velichapadi* (*oracle*) was also brought for the meeting. Those Mullukurumbas who have been charged with some offence were present. Women were not permitted to attend the meetings. If the case involves a woman, either her parents if she is unmarried or her husband would represent her at the meeting.

From the day an offence in a veedu was reported, till the case was decided, not only that particular veedu but all the veedus under the control of that region's mooppan were equally affected. The barber and the washerman were informed not to issue ennai or mathu to any one from these veedus. (This meant a loss of income to the barber and washerman and perhaps to compensate this loss they were authorised to attend the council meetings and to collect a share in the fine amounts levied on guilty persons). Denial of ennai and mathu was a matter of great shame to the Mullukurumbas—especially to the orthodox men. During this period of denial of ennai and mathu, these veedus had no face to enter any marriage negotiation. Hence

the affected veedus were much interested in seeing that the case was definitely settled at the earliest and helped the mooppan in getting the offenders on the spot.

Five type of cases, usually taken to the council were: (1) failure to collect ennai and mathu, (2) becoming pregnant illegitimately, (3) marrying a non-Mullukurumba, (4) marrying within one's clan and lastly (5) indulgence with one's (younger or elder) brother's wife. In the meeting, if the guilt was accepted by the individual charged, the fine was less and he was fined straightway. But if he did not accept the guilt, the Appadu thalaichal took the help of velichapadi and decided the case according to the words of the velichapadi in trance. If the velichapadi's words indicated to the Appadu thalaichal that the individual was really guilty, then he heavily fined the guilty man. Usually people went prepared to pay the fine amount—atleast partially, on the spot. Out of the fine amount, the Nair barber and washerman took half the amount and with the rest of the money drinks (country liquor) were offered to the deity and taken by all—particularly the thalaichals and mooppan. With the payment of the fine amount, the guilt or the wrong committed was expiated and all the veedu of the affected region once again started taking ennai and mathu.

Since more than ten years the Mullukurumba council of elders is not effective. It meets mainly to decide the date for Uchchala festival. Two years ago, an informant attended a meeting of the council of elders which met to decide the date for Uchchala. Appadu thalaichal named a day and got it approved by the deity through velichapadi. Before the velichapadi got out of the trance, the mooppan complained to the deity about a man in their community who deviated from the traditional behaviour by not collecting mathu and ennai. They said that this man did not even turn up for the meeting and hence the deity should kill him within a year. If the deity does not kill him during this period, they said that they will no longer celebrate Uchchala in a grand manner and also not make offerings to the deity.

Two years have passed and no disaster has befallen the family of that man who did not collect ennai and mathu. In spite of such instances where deviations do not bring any disaster, the majority of the Mullukurumbas still faithfully observe the traditions by way of taking the ennai and mathu. During my field work, there were two deaths, two childbirths

and one puberty attainment ceremony. In all the instances, ennai and mathu were brought but were not effectively used. During the pulai, when the barber's ennai was kept down in a dish for men and women to touch it first and then to receive oil from kulakkaran or kulakarathi respectively, only seven women and four men touched the barber's ennai. Perhaps this is the first stage in giving up the practice totally. Indulgence with one's brother's wife is now-a-days dealt with by the members of the concerned household. Illegitimate pregnancy is not considered as a very serious offence now-a-days unless it involves a Mullukurumba. A poor Mullukurumba who can not pay the high parisa panam (bride price), finds it convenient to marry a girl who has become pregnant illegitimately because her parents' demands are very nominal.

Expiation was not possible even by the council of elders in the case of marriage within the clan and marriage with a non-Mullukurumba. Even now these cases are not condoned. The couples are excommunicated straightaway and their parents are fined, if they wish to remain within the community. Eight such ex-communicated couples have established their households in a place called *Ambala moola*, about eight miles from Kappala, on its north-west.

Though the Mullukurumba council of elders has lost its 'power', the other three agencies of social control among them, namely authority of elders, public opinion and religious beliefs still have a good hold on the Mullukurumbas who continue to lead a traditional life.

APPENDIX I

Kinship terminology

Local term*	Meant for	
Muthappan	Father's father Mother's father	
Muthamme	Father's mother Mother's mother	
Peyappan	Father's elder brother Mother's elder sister's husband	
Payamme	Father's elder brother's wife Mother's elder sister	
Appan	Father	
Amme	Mother	
Ammavan or Maman	Father's sister's husband Mother's brother	
Ammayee or Mami	Father's sister Mother's brother's wife	
Eayappan	Father's younger brother Mother's younger sister's husband	
Eayamme	Father's younger brother's wife Mother's younger sister	
Amma Muthan	Father-in-law	
Ammayee	Mother-in-law	
Angala	Brother Daughter's or son's father-in-law	} (for a woman)
Chetan	Elder brother Father's brother's son Father's sister's son Mother's brother's son Mother's sister's son Husband's sister's husband	} (If they are elder to ego)
Pengala	Sister Daughter's or son's mother-in-law	} (for a man)
Achchi or Eattathi	Elder sister Father's brother's daughter Father's sister's daughter Mother's brother's daughter Mother's sister's daughter	} (If they are elder to ego)

*a) This is the term of reference. While addressing the elder, the younger uses the term given in the above list whereas the elder ones call their younger kin by name. Unless specified, the terms are applicable for both the sexes.

	Wife's brother's wife	(For a man)
	Elder brother's wife	
	Elder co-daughter-in-law	(For a woman)
Enlan or Anusan	Younger brother	
	Father's brother's son	} (If they are younger to ego)
	Father's sister's son	
	Mother's brother's son	
	Mother's sister's son	
Enlathi or Anusathi	Younger sister	
	Father's brother's daughter	} (If they are younger to ego)
	Father's sister's daughter	
	Mother's brother's daughter	
	Mother's sister's daughter	
	Younger co-daughter-in-law	(For a woman)
Purushan or Bartha	Husband	
Penn	Wife	
Periaver	Husband's elder brother	
Periavalu	Wife's elder sister	
Allyan	Sister's husband	
	Wife's brother	
	Husband's younger brother	
	Daughter's or son's father-in-law	(For a man)
Cheriavalu	Younger brother's wife	
Karanapadi	Co-son-in-law	
Natha	Husband's sister	
	Daughter's or son's mother-in-law	(For a woman)
Mahan	Son	
	Brother's son	(For a man)
	Sister's son	(For a woman)
Marumahan	Sister's son	(For a man)
	Brother's son	(For a woman)
Mahal	Daughter	
	Brother's daughter	(For a man)
	Sister's daughter	(For a woman)
Marumahal	Sister's daughter	(For a man)
	Brother's daughter	(For a woman)
Motte	Son's son	
	Daughter's son	
Mottethi	Son's daughter	
	Daughter's daughter	

APPENDIX II
Division of game in the various forms of hunting on basis of the role played by the individuals

Sl. No.	Role of the individual	Share in Villi Nayattu	Share in Valai Nayattu	Share in Muyal Nayattu
1.	The one who detects the track of the animal and then calls others for hunting.	One foreleg.	Here no prior detection of track of animal is done. All go for hunting together.	One extra share—when the balance in the end is divided equally amongst those assembled.
2.	The one whose arrow or bullet first hits the animal.	Head, that amount of flesh contained between the five ribs counted from the neck (called kannayee locally), the liver and a foreleg. (On return to their veedu, he is to make curry out of the head and kannayee, in the temple house and distribute it to all in the veedu. The liver is roasted on the ground, where the game is divided and all take it).	Same as in Villi Nayattu	Head and a hind leg.
3.	The one who first approaches the killed animal and calls others.	One half of the meat below the lungs and above the pelvic bone.	Same as in Villi Nayattu	—
4.	The one who reads the significance from the position in which the animal has fallen dead.	The other half of the meat below the lungs and above the pelvic bone. (If the significance is not read, then this meat is added to the common pool, which is divided amongst all the participants).	Same as in Villi Nayattu	One share extra than what each gets.

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|-----|---|---|-------------------------|--|
| 5. | Those who approach the killed animal second and third. | One piece of skin from the belly region, each. | Same as in VIII Nayattu | — |
| 6. | The one who carries the killed animal from the place killed to the place where the animal is divided. | Neck and intestine. | Same as in VIII Nayattu | Same as in VIII Nayattu |
| 7. | The one who cuts and distributes the animal. | One share extra than what each get as a participant. | Same as in VIII Nayattu | Same as in VIII Nayattu |
| 8. | Those who bring their dogs also along with them, for hunting. | A portion of a hind leg is divided equally among them all. (This portion will be 4 to 6 kgs. in a deer the total weight of the hind leg being about 40 kgs.) | Same as in VIII Nayattu | Same as in VIII Nayattu |
| 9. | The Mooppan (their regional representative in their tribal council). | That hind leg from which a portion has been cut already for dogs. (This is brought to the temple house of the veedu in which the mooppan lives and is distributed to all the households of that veedu). | Same as in VIII Nayattu | The mooppan usually does not participate in this Muyal Nayattu. |
| 10. | The landlord of that area. | Heart and the other hind leg. | Same as in VIII Nayattu | — |
| 11. | All the participants—whether active or not—in the hunting. | The rest of the meat is divided equally amongst all, keeping in view of the extra share to be given to the man who cuts and distributes the game to all. | Same as in VIII Nayattu | Same as in VIII Nayattu (Two extra shares are made, one for the man who cuts and distributes the animal and the other for that man who reads the significance from the position of the killed animal). |

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