

The Kurumbas' Relationship to the "Megalithic" Cult of the Nilgiri Hills (South India)

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1. Introduction

"The distribution of prehistoric monuments like dolmens and menhirs follows the zones of the primitive tribes of India" (Ananthakrishna Iyer 1961: 18). They "are found chiefly in Assam, Chota Nagpur, and South India" (cf. also Leshnik 1974: 1). In South India, they "exist over the Godavari Valley, and more commonly over the Krishna Valley, and on both sides of the Ghats through Coimbatore as far as Cape Comorin. There is a great concentration of dolmens in Bellary. Stone circles, cairns, dolmens, and menhirs are found throughout Kerala, in Coimbatore, the Nilgiris, Salem, North

Arcot, Kurnool, Anantapur, Coorg, and Mysore" (Ananthakrishna Iyer/Bala Ratnam 1961: 76). And it is, in particular, the State of Tamil Nadu which not only "has remained the best-served region archaeologically till recently," but also represents "archaeologically one of the richest provinces in the subcontinent" (Gururaja Rao 1972: 63).

"Since the publication by Brecks (1837) [misprint for 1873] on the megalithic¹ monuments of the Nilgiris, the megalithic monuments of Tamil Nadu have attracted the attention of as many as seventy antiquarians, amateur archaeologists, scholars and the institutions alike on account of their curious and imposing structures. They continue to baffle scholars regarding their date, authorship and origin" (Narasimhaiah 1980: 109; similarly, p. 3).

The Nilgiri Hills, today a small district of Tamil Nadu, altogether covering 2543 km.², constitute a massif some 1500 km.² in area located at the point of union of the Eastern and Western Ghats. The plateau is generally in the elevation of 2000-2500 m., its highest peak, Doddabetta, touching the 2670 m. contour line. The Bhawani River forms the natural boundary of the plateau on the south and the Moyar River on the north where the district borders the Karnataka State. On the west, it adjoins the Wyanad plateau (Kerala State), on the east, the

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¹ For the inadequacy of the label "megalithic" in the South Indian context, cf. the arguments put forward by Leshnik (1974: 1): "Undue emphasis on certain of the constructional elements, and reference to European analogies has given rise to the label 'megalithic burials.' Collectively, these early burials in South India are usually referred to as the 'megalithic complex.' But the inadequacy of the term becomes more than usually evident when it is made to include quite plain burials such as urns deposited in pits marked only by fist-size stones arranged in a circle. The lithic character of such burials is unimpressive and certainly they cannot be called megalithic."

Coimbatore District (Tamil Nadu State) (cf. Das 1957: 140 f.; Hockings 1980b: 6 f.; Ramachandran 1980: 2).

According to Gururaja Rao (1972: 103), the numerous antiquities distributed throughout the Nilgiri region, viz., dolmens, stone circles, cairns, barrows,² have to be regarded as forming "a separate group by themselves"; for, "their general horizon is so different from regular peninsular megalithic culture that they may, in the least, be considered only as an aberrant group or as a distant cousin of the South Indian megalithic culture" (Gururaja Rao 1972: 269; cf. also Leshnik 1974: 254 and, for particulars, Noble 1981: 49). "The Nilgiris, like the Palani Hills, are centrifugal areas or areas of isolation in the words of Subba Rao. These regions have become the refuge of a number of backward tribes, the cultural disjuncta, who have continued to live till the modern times in long-extinct cultural stages. And some of these tribes,³ as in some other regions of South, Central and Eastern India, have retained some customs derived from and reminiscent of the long-dead megalithic culture" (Gururaja

Rao 1972: 103 f.; cf. also Walhouse 1877: 41 f.).

The traditional ethnic groups of the Nilgiris are as follows:

- a) the pastoral tribe of the Todas who herd buffaloes and process milk;
- b) the artisan tribe of the Kotas doing blacksmithery, carpentry, and pottery, but being also cultivators;
- c) the tribes of the Kurumbas (= Ālu and Pālu Kurumbas);⁴ and
- d) the Irulas, both traditionally being occupied with food gathering, hunting, and – later on – with swidden cultivation;⁵ and
- e) the agricultural community of the Baḍagas who, in the 16th century A. D., migrated to the Nilgiri Hills from Karnataka (Hockings 1980b: 13).

From among these communities, it is, above all, the ancestors of the Todas⁶ who "have most often been associated with the burials, and following them, the Kurumbas⁷, but other peoples, not now inhabiting the Nilgiris, have also been proposed, among them the Indo-Scythians (Sakas) or Druids as they were

² For catalogues, cf. Brecks 1873: 72–110; Sewell 1882: 224–229.

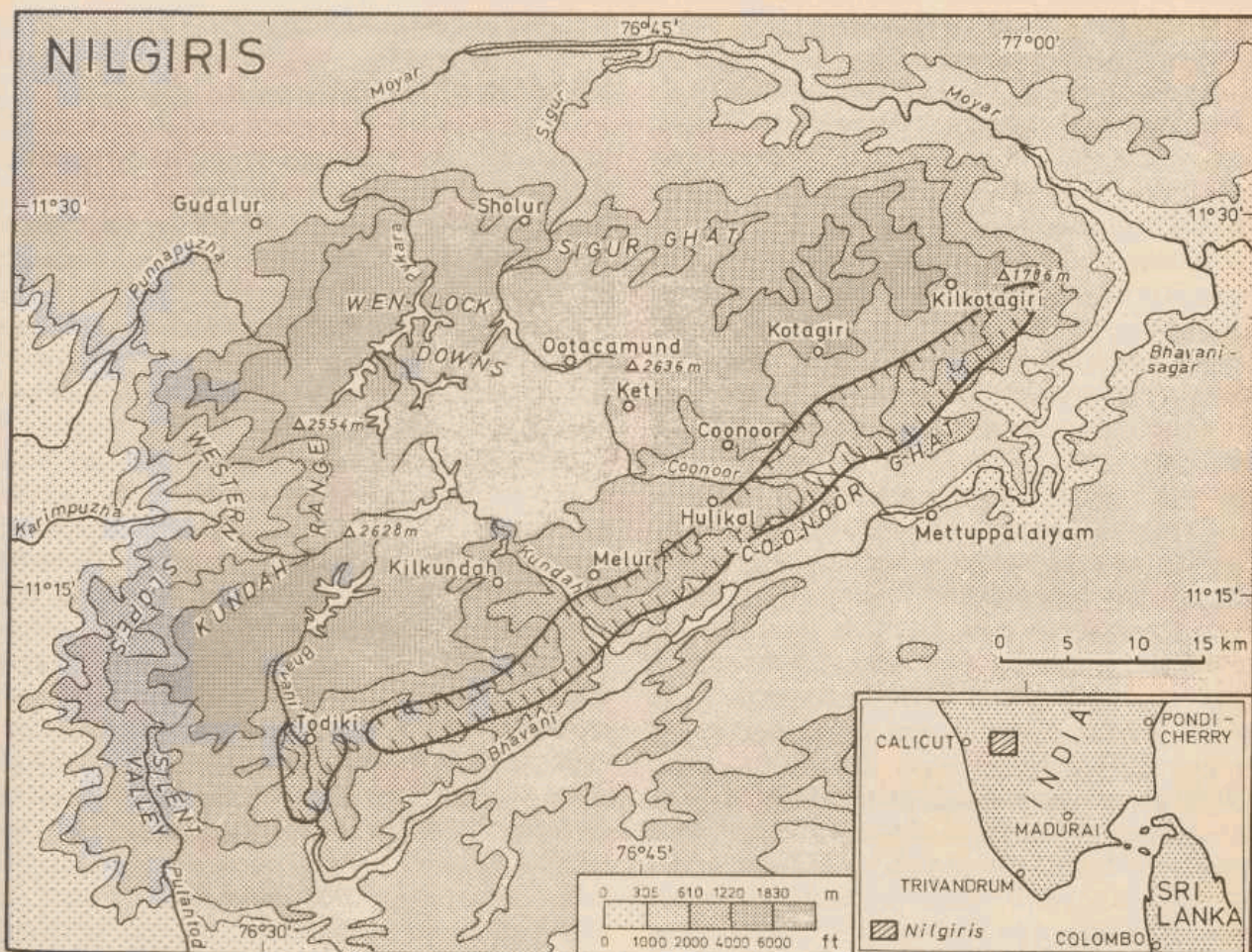
³ As for example: the Kurumbas (Fergusson 1872: 479; Brecks 1873: 110; Walhouse 1874: 96; 1877: 41 [quoted by Ananthakrishna Iyer 1935: 366]; Ananthakrishna Iyer/Bala Ratnam 1961: 77; Leshnik 1974: 35 f.; Noble 1981: 44; et al.); the Muḍugas (personal observation); the Irulas (Walhouse 1874: 96; 1877: 41 [quoted by Ananthakrishna Iyer 1935: 366] et al.); the "Hill Coorubar of the Pulmanair plateau" (Thurston 1899: 194); the Pulayans (Leshnik 1974: 3 [after Williams 1969: 607]); the Malayarayangans (Fergusson 1872: 479 [quoted by Brecks 1873: 105, 110]; Walhouse 1877: 41; Grigg 1880: 242; Ananthakrishna Iyer/Bala Ratnam 1961: 77; Gururaja Rao 1972: 352; Leshnik 1974: 93, 119; et al.); the Kurubas (Gururaja Rao 1972: 352); the Kurubhar, a shepherd caste of the Kaladgi district (Sinclair 1877: 230 [quoted by Jagor 1882: 238]; Thurston 1906: 147; Ananthakrishna Iyer 1935: 366; Leshnik 1974: 119); the Raj Gond of Hyderabad; the Gonds of Bastar; and the Mundas of Chota Nagpur (Leshnik 1974: 11); the Bondos and Gadabas (Gururaja Rao 1972: 352; Leshnik 1974: 11); the Khasis (Ananthakrishna Iyer/Bala Ratnam 1961: 77, 177; Gururaja Rao 1972: 352; Leshnik 1974: 3, 11 [after Roy 1963]); the Nagas (Leshnik 1974: 3, 11 [after Hutton 1926]). In general, cf. Ananthakrishna Iyer 1938: 58–61 and also Narasimhaiah 1980: 201.

⁴ "Kurumba" is a collective term for the following seven Kurumba communities: Ālu Kurumbas (south-western, southern, south-eastern, and eastern slopes and glens); Pālu Kurumbas (south-western slopes and uplands); Muḍugas who very often style themselves as Kurumbas (south-western foothills); Bēṭṭa Kurumbas (north-western and northern foot-hills); Jēnu Kurumbas (northern foot-hills); Muḷḷu Kurumbas and Urāli Kurumbas (western foot-hills). When the term Kurumba is used by Toda, Kota, and Baḍaga speakers as well as by previous authors, it generally refers to the Ālu and/or Pālu Kurumbas, the latter being a sister tribe to the former (cf. note 55). For more information regarding the Kurumba tribes, cf. Kapp 1978a: 167 ff. = 1978b: 109 f.; 1982a: XXV ff.; Kapp/Hockings 1981: 1 ff.

⁵ "... it seems entirely possible that their earlier ancestors primarily depended upon gathering" (Noble 1981: 48; cf. also 51).

⁶ According to Hough 1829: 85; Congreve 1847: 83 f., 92; Das 1957: 152; Gururaja Rao 1972: 104, 351; et al. For a discussion of this theory, cf. Metz 1864: 12; Gururaja Rao 1972: 271, 352; for objections to it, cf. Rivers 1906: 444, 446, 715; for a rejection of it, cf. Marshall 1873: 8.

⁷ According to Metz 1864: 124 f.; Shortt 1868: 45 f. = 1869: 272; Walhouse 1873: 276; Hodgson 1880: 127; cf. moreover, Shortt 1868: 52 = 1869: 278; Brecks 1873: 96; Oppert 1896: 214; Leshnik 1974: 254.



Habitat of the Ālu Kurumbas and – around Todiki – of the Pālu Kurumbas

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also called"⁸ (Leshnik 1974: 255; cf. also 1970: 87).

In his learned paper on "Nilgiri Dolmens (South India)" (1976), William A. Noble devoted himself to the stone circles and dolmens, both unsculptured and sculptured, of the Nilgiri region, thereby discussing in detail the past and present relationships of each of the traditional Nilgiri communities to a "megalithic" cult.⁹ He

of beings not a foot high, who existed before mankind and were destroyed at a flood which overwhelmed the earth"; Metz 1864: 125 f. ("a very wicked race of people, who, though diminutive in stature, were at the same time powerful enough to raise the large blocks of granite"); similarly, after Metz, Jagor 1882: 238; Shortt 1868: 45 = 1869: 271 ("the followers of the Pandean kings"); Marshall 1873: 8 ("a people antecedent to themselves [= the Todas]"); Rosner 1959: 182 ("a race of pygmies assisted by Hares and Porcupines"). [For similar folklore traditions regarding "megalithic" sites in other parts of South India, cf. Rosner 1959: 179 ff.; Ananthakrishna Iyer 1961: 19; Leshnik 1974: 2, 3, 33, 93, 250.] – For claims laid to some of the antiquities by some of the Nilgiri groups, cf. Congreve 1847: 90 f. (Todas); Metz 1864: 13 (Todas); Brecks 1873: 54 (Kurumbas), 105 (Baḍagas and Kotas); Grigg 1880: 213 (Kurumbas); Oppert 1896: 214 (Todas). – For attitudes shown towards them, cf. Hough 1829: 85; Congreve 1847: 84; Shortt 1868: 52 = 1869: 278; Blavatsky 1930: 37 f.; Gururaja Rao 1972: 350, 351 f. (Todas' absence of knowledge); Metz 1864: 13 f., 124; Walhouse 1874: 95; Oppert 1896: 214; Rivers 1906: 444 f., 446, 714;

⁸ According to Congreve 1861 ("Druids"); Marshall 1873: 10 ("members of certain Turanian tribes"); Congreve 1847: 92 ("a Pandyan people"); cf. also Metz 1864: 124 ("a race now extinct"); Brecks 1873: 96 ("extinct race"); cf. moreover, Hockings 1975: 38.

⁹ For traditions which are current among the Nilgiri communities with regard to the authorship of the antiquities being, however, at home in the intermediate realm between myth and history, cf. Congreve 1847: 118 ("a race

arrived at the conclusion that "it is most logical to relate stone circles to herders and dolmens to gatherers / hunters or later farmers."¹⁰ It is likely that stone circle builders preceded the Todas, and descendants of stone circle builders may now form a Toda moiety [cf. Noble 1976: 108 f.; 1981: 46; Hockings 1975: 47, 48]. Of the four remaining traditional Nilgiri groups, the farming Kurumbas¹¹ have probably erected most dolmens." And he added: "A search for other sites at which Kurumbas store their water-worn memorial stones [cf. 2.4.1] should be conducted. Careful enquiry about place names and folk tale events related to Kurumbas will improve our understanding of the areas once occupied by Kurumbas" (Noble 1976: 125).

The present study is intended to add to Noble's observations and findings by focusing on the past and present relationship of the Ālu (and Pālu) Kurumbas to a "megalithic" cult, on the basis of data which I had the opportunity to collect during a two years' field stay in the Nilgiri Hills (May, 1974, to May, 1976). Although the collected material is, by no means, as exhaustive as it ought to be, I shall present and discuss it in this study holding that any kind of material which might enlighten our views with regard to the probable originators of the dolmens and other lithic remains of the Nilgiris should be made known and accessible to the scholars concerned.

Gururaja Rao 1972: 350 (Todas' absence of interest or regard); Congreve 1847: 90 f.; Metz 1864: 125; Shortt 1868: 52 = 1869: 278; Walhouse 1873: 276; Noble 1976: 109, 1981: 27 (Kurumbas', Todas', Kotas' or Baḍagas' exhibition of veneration); Metz 1864: 124 f. (Baḍagas' and Kotas' exhibition of fear).

¹⁰ Similarly, in a more recent paper (1981: 22) where Noble, in support of this concept, points to the "locational differences" (stone circles: "on summits or ridges at higher elevation"; dolmens: "within valleys or on nearby slopes at lower elevation"). – For a general discussion of the question whether nomadic, pastoralist, or agricultural groups have to be made responsible for the erection of "megalithic" monuments in South India, cf. Leshnik 1974: 247, 249 f. who favours nomadic herders; cf. also Narasimhaiah 1980: 201 ("nomadic tribal folk") against Ramachandran 1980: 69 ("agriculturalists").

¹¹ Cf. also Noble 1981: 47. Accordingly, Metz 1864: 125 [quoted by Oppert 1896: 214]; Shortt 1868: 45 f. = 1869: 272; Hodgson 1880: 127.

2. Unsculptured Dolmens

2.1 Definition and Description

In general, the "dolmens are built of unhewn blocks of stone. There are two kinds of dolmens, those consisting of four stones, three supporting stones and one cap-stone, leaving one side open [= dolmen proper], and those in which the fourth side is closed by a stone [= kistvaen]. In the latter case, the fourth stone has a circular opening in it" (Anantha-krishna Iyer 1961: 19).

The Nilgiri kistvaens and dolmens are described by Brecks as follows: "By kist-vaen [is meant] a vault of large stone slabs, closed on every side, but sometimes with a round hole in one of the walls, with or without a surrounding stone circle or tumulus.¹² ... By cromlech [= dolmen], a similar enclosure open on one side" (1873: 72). A more exact description is given by Noble (1976: 98): "Nilgiri dolmens are variants from a basic form which ideally has three vertical orthostats at ninety degrees to each other and an overlying capstone. The upper and outer surfaces of most capstones lie between sixty and 120 centimeters (two and four feet) above the ground. An orthostat rising above 120 cm. (four ft.) will occasionally cause at least part of a capstone to lie higher" (cf. also Noble 1981: 2 f., 23).

2.2 Names Given to, Location, and Alignment of Dolmens

According to Brecks (1873: 72), dolmens "without sculptures are called by the Baḍagas, Gattige kallu,¹³ throne or seat stones, and the

¹² "... locally known as Moriyaramane, or the house of the Moriyas, a bygone tribe" (Gururaja Rao 1972: 107).

¹³ "Those without sculptures are called by the Baḍagas Gaddige Kallu – the throne stone" (Gururaja Rao 1972: 107). – Cf. Kannada *gaddige*, *gadduge*, *garduge* throne, seat of honor; Tulu *gaddigè* id.; Telugu *gaddiya*, *gadde* id. / Hindi *gāḍī*, *gaddī* id. Turner, s.v. *gāḍī* (DBIA 73). – Cf. Tamil *kal* stone, pebble, etc.; etc. (DED 1091); Ālu Kuṛumba *kallu* stone, rock; gem.

modern ones used by the Kuṛumbas are called *Bīra kallu*,¹⁴ hero stones, or *Sāvumane*."

bi:ra-kallu, however, is a term used by the Badagas to denote sculptured dolmens, as I was intimated; and by "*Sāvumane*" (Ālu Kuṛumba *ca:vu-mane*), something, quite different from a dolmen, is understood by the Ālu Kuṛumbas (see 2.2.2).

The name, generally given to dolmens by the Ālu Kuṛumbas is *na:lu-paḍi*,¹⁵ meaning "the measuring vessel of the shadows." Thus, the character of these lithic structures is clearly manifested as being closely related to the funeral rites and practices and, specifically, to the soul-belief of the Ālu Kuṛumbas.¹⁶

The site where the forefathers of the Ālu Kuṛumbas erected the dolmens, which "generally lie within valleys or on nearby slopes at lower elevation" (Noble 1981: 22), is called *gobe* by the Ālu Kuṛumbas of the Kundā area, and *gove*¹⁷ by those living in the Kōtagiri area. The meaning of *gobe/gove* is somewhat similar to that of *duve* (no etymology available), both being names for cemetery, burial, or cremation ground. Whereas the so-called *duve*, which is located in more or less close proximity to the *gobe/gove*, constitutes the place where the bodies of the deceased are disposed of, either by burial or by cremation (see 2.3), the *gobe/gove* represents the dwelling-ground of the spirits of the dead (see 2.4).

From this, it is obvious that, as a rule, there is a necessity for every Ālu Kuṛumba hamlet to be provided with a *duve* and a *gobe/gove* as well.

At such *gobes/goves*, two, three, or even

more dolmens, some being larger than the rest, have been found, a fact that induced Noble to the comment: "A tendency to align dolmens is evident" (1976: 121; cf. also 1981: 23). Writing on the "Kavalkombai" (= Kāval-ūru) platforms (see 4.1) and small dolmens (see 3.), Noble speaks of "the functional needs for several dolmens at some sites" (*ibid.*).

Regarding the stone platforms (see 4.1) which are to be seen in close proximity to the cemetery of Kāval-ūru, Noble offers the following explanation, obviously arrived at by questioning his Ālu Kuṛumba informants:

"On one side each of two joined platforms is dedicated to an ancestor brother and his descendants; a separate platform on the same side is dedicated to women who came from the outside and married Kavalkombai men. On the opposite side the same arrangement is repeated" (1976: 121).

This explanation, no doubt, gives some clue as to the alignment of dolmens (or, stone platforms). Based on my inquiries, I am able to add to Noble's explanation by naming the actual reasons behind. Accordingly, the number of dolmens (or, stone platforms) at a *gobe/gove* corresponds to the number of clans and sub-clans (*o:riga*)¹⁸ which are represented by the inhabitants of a hamlet. Thereby, the largest dolmen (or, stone platform) is always reserved for that clan which the majority of the villagers belong to and which, as a rule, is at the same time also the clan of the forefather who once founded the hamlet; the smallest being assigned to a clan which is represented by some women who were taken as wives from other hamlets.

2.2.1 Clan Organization and Marriage System

With regard to the clan organization and the marriage system of the Ālu Kuṛumbas the following should be noted.

Originally, the Ālu Kuṛumba tribe was divided into two exogamous, non-totemic clans,

¹⁴ Cf. Kannada *bīra* a hero, a brave man, a warrior (KKED). / Sanskrit *vīra*- a man, (esp.) a brave or eminent man, hero, chief (MW). - Cf. note 13.

¹⁵ Cf. Tamil *nīṛal*, *nīṛal* shade, shadow, etc.; etc. (DED 3046); Ālu Kuṛumba *na:lu* id. - Cf. Tamil *paḍi* a weight (= 100 palam), the ordinary measure of capacity (= 8 ollocks), etc.; etc. (DED 3187); Ālu Kuṛumba *paḍi* a certain measure of capacity; vessel measuring one *paḍi*.

¹⁶ Cf. Noble 1981: 3: "Most dolmens cannot be related to the depositing of human remains, but some are indisputably associated with either the ritual for or memorialization of the dead."

¹⁷ Cf. Tamil *kuvavu*, *kuvai* heap, pile, etc.; etc. (DED 1449).

¹⁸ = *o:ri* + plural suffix *-ga*; cf. Tamil *pōri* rival; Koḍagu *po-ri* male buffalo; etc. (DED 3708); Kannada *hōri* bull calf; bullock; Tulu *bōri* bull; ox (DED 3754).

the Nāgara and the Bēllega clans, the names of which correspond to those of the two forefathers who were their founders.¹⁹ In the course of time, three sub-clans split off from the Nāgara clan, viz., the Kayigēru, the Gobeāḍa, and the Īraṇe clans, while two sub-clans branched off from the Bēllega clan, viz., the Mācole – also called Bēlḷare –, and the Bēlḷaku clans. The names of all these sub-clans are thereby in accordance with those of certain sites where the respective founders had once settled.

The mode of marriage followed by the Ālu Kuṛumbas is the cross-cousin marriage, which takes place between the Nāgara clan and its sub-clans on one hand, and the Bēllega clan and its sub-clans on the other hand. Thereby the sub-clans occupy the status of “younger brothers” as against their respective main clans. To express it in other words: a Nāgara boy or one of his “younger brothers” may choose a girl from the Bēllega, Mācole/Bēlḷare, or Bēlḷaku clans and vice versa. Children always adopt the clan name of their father; hence, a girl will not lose her paternal clan affiliation after marriage.²⁰

Herewith, the much disputed question concerning essence and purpose of the alignment of dolmens (or, stone platforms) is satisfactorily explained. For examples, see 2.4.4.1 and 4.1.

2.2.2 The Term “Sāvumane” (*ca:vu-mane*)

According to Breeks (1873: 54, 72), Grigg (1880: 213), and Thurston (1906: 147), both the latter relying upon the former, the term “Sāvumane” (*ca:vu-mane*) is used by the “Kurumbas” (= Ālu Kuṛumbas) to denote a dolmen. This information, however, is incorrect. With regard to the actual meaning and function of what the Ālu Kuṛumbas call *ca:vu-mane*, the following may be pointed out.

¹⁹ Of the previous authors, only Yeatts (1932: 369) mentioned the names and significance of these two clans: “They have two divisions, Nagar and Belagar, which operate only for the purpose of exogamy; no apparent difference survives between them.”

²⁰ Cf. Kapp 1978a: 170 = 1978b: 111; 1980: 434f.; 1982a: XXIV; Kapp/Hockings 1981: 3f. – A detailed account of the betrothal and marriage ceremonies is under preparation.

ca:vu-mane means “death-house” or “house of the dead,”²¹ and this is neither a lithic structure like the dolmens nor located at *gobe/gove* or *duve* sites. In former times, the Ālu Kuṛumbas followed the custom of erecting a particular hut in the centre of every hamlet which had no peculiar shape, but resembled an ordinary hut the interior of which measuring about 4 1/2 by 5 1/2 meters. This hut served exclusively for keeping the bodies of the deceased after their removal from the family hut, generally, for a period of about two or three days, i. e., until the day on which the funeral was to take place. This hut was called *ca:vu-mane* by the Ālu Kuṛumbas. Although the necessity of having such a “death-house” is no longer felt by the Ālu Kuṛumbas, the existence of that custom of old is still remembered by the old people and, certainly, also by some Baḍagas who, I presume, might have communicated the term “Sāvumane” to Breeks along with an erroneous explanation.

2.3 Modes of Disposal of the Dead

Among the previous authors on the subject, there has been great confusion with regard to the disposal of the dead of the Ālu Kuṛumbas. Do they bury or, do they cremate them? Or, if both is followed, to whom is given a burial and to whom a cremation? Let me cite a few examples selected at random:

“All those who die under one year old are buried, but if older are burned” (Birch 1838: 107).

“Should a [smallpox] case terminate fatally the body is burned” (p. 108).

“Their dead are sometimes burned, sometimes buried; in either case, with as little form or trouble as possible” (King 1870: 46).

“The Kurumbas near Rangaswāmi’s Peak told me that some Kurumbas buried their dead, but that they themselves burned theirs” (Breeks 1873: 54).

²¹ Cf. Tamil *cāvu* death, ghost; etc. (DED 2002); Ālu Kuṛumba *ca:vu* death, case of death; funeral, obsequies; dead person, corpse. – Cf. Tamil *maṇai* house, dwelling; etc.; etc. (DED 3911); Ālu Kuṛumba *mane* house, hut; room.

"They burn their dead" (Grigg 1880: 213).

"The dead are generally burnt, the mudali²² and his family however being buried and also small children. There is occasional variation in these details" (Yeatts 1932: 369).

Thus, the problem seemed not to be solved easily. A more thorough investigation into the matter, however, would have avoided the confusion and proved fruitful.

According to what I was told by the old people in various areas, it can be summarized that, originally, the Ālu Kurumbas buried their dead and that the custom of cremation was a later innovation, whether copied from the Todas or, from the Hindus, nobody is able to say today.²³

The custom of cremating the dead penetrated all the Ālu Kurumba hamlets from the utmost south-west to the extreme east of the Nilgiri slopes. However, it has to be emphasized that in all those hamlets where the old traditions are still maintained to a great extent, *i. e.*, hamlets which are chiefly inhabited by families belonging to one of the two main clans, cremation, as a rule, takes place only in the cases of the death of the first headman (*maṇiagara*)²⁴ and the second headman (*talevaru*)²⁵. Taking this into account, we have to regard this

mode of disposal of the dead as a kind of honourable funeral.

In those hamlets, on the other hand, where the customs of old are more and more on the decline, *i. e.*, hamlets which are mainly occupied by members of the sub-clans, the differentiation between burial and cremation became blurred completely and, today, both burial and cremation are made use of indiscriminately. This is, above all, to be observed in the Kōtagiri area where the Ālu Kurumbas live in close contact with the Baḍagas with whom they are, at least in that part of the hills, on comparatively good terms. There I was told that, in general, the dead are disposed of according to their own choice expressed during lifetime. But, if a death occurs during the period of monsoon and there are (heavy) showers on the funeral day, they will resort to burial, as a rule. Since, during the rainy season, there is scarcity of dry wood and, as the Ālu Kurumbas are too poor to be able to afford ghee to pour on the funeral pyre which the Todas make use of profusely in such cases, it becomes obvious that they give preference to burial during that season.

2.4 Funeral Rites

The funeral rites observed by the Ālu Kurumbas are very elaborate and, to some extent, distinct in the case of men, women, and children; with men, there is a further distinction according to the rank or office the deceased was holding during his lifetime, as in the case of the first and second headman and the priest (*maṇṇugara*)²⁶. As there is no space here for giving detailed descriptions of the funeral rites of the Ālu Kurumbas,²⁷ I shall limit myself to those rites which are performed subsequent to

²² Ālu Kurumba *modali* first headman; cf. Tamil *mutali* head, chief, religious leader; etc. (DED 4053). – The term *modali*, beside that of *maṇiagara* (cf. note 24), is used by the Ālu Kurumbas as a title for the first headman of a hamlet.

²³ Cf. Gururaja Rao 1972: 318: "... it is clear that cremation was not one of the prevalent methods, burial in different types of graves being the common method of disposal among the megalith-builders of South India. But in course of time, especially after the Mauryan times, the Vedic culture made its effective impact on South India on an ever increasing scale and in the field of the disposal of dead, burial was gradually replaced by cremation of the body and some of the die-hard megalith builders were driven into the hilly regions like the Nilgiris, the Palanis or into the narrow coastal belt across the Palghat ranges and Cardamom mountains."

²⁴ Cf. Tamil *maṇiyakkāraṇ* headman of a village, etc.; etc. (DED 3825).

²⁵ Cf. Tamil *talaivaṇ* chief, headman, lord; etc. (DED 2529); Ālu Kurumba *talevaru* = *pluralis honorificus*. – For some information on the offices of the two headmen, cf. Kapp 1980: 437.

²⁶ Cf. Tamil *maṇ* the earth, world, earth as an element, dust, dirt, dry ground, soil, etc.; etc. (DED 3817 (a)); Ālu Kurumba *maṇṇugara* a man who is concerned with soil, *i. e.*, (in particular) with sowing and harvesting ceremonies, = priest. – For particulars regarding this office, cf. Kapp 1980; moreover, 1983: 730f. sub 2.2.3.

²⁷ A detailed account of the funeral rites ("green funeral" and "dry funeral") is under preparation.

(a) the "green funeral" (*acce-ca:vu*),²⁸ *i. e.*, the actual funeral, and (b) the "dry funeral" (*bara-ca:vu*),²⁹ *i. e.*, a kind of memorial funeral, by giving special regard to the respective function of dolmens in them.³⁰

The brief synopsis of the funeral customs of the Ālu Kuṛumbas given by Noble (1976: 120) can be disregarded, as he was not informed correctly. In general, Ālu Kuṛumbas when questioned by strangers, are not inclined to furnish correct, leave alone, detailed informations as far as their customs are concerned. I, too, had to suffer from this experience during the first two months of conducting fieldwork among them.

2.4.1 The Function of Dolmens at the "Green Funeral"

As soon as the interment is completed, the husband of a sister of the deceased – in the case of the burial of a man – or, the wife of a brother of the deceased – in the case of the burial of a woman –, takes in both his/her hands a long water-worn stone which has been brought along by him/her to the cemetery, and proceeds to the foot-end of the grave. Here he/she stops, pronounces the deceased's name, then walks round about the grave in a clockwise manner, three times in all, thereby pausing each time for a short while at the foot-end of the grave and pronouncing the name of the departed relative. Having completed the three rounds he/she makes for the dolmen reserved for the deceased's clan, and places the water-worn stone upright in its interior. Subsequently, the food and drink offerings for the spirit of the departed which have been brought along by the relatives, are deposited at the entrance of the dolmen. The food offerings consist of boiled rice, gruel made from millet, and vegetable curry; the drink offerings, of water and coffee. While in

former times the offerings were served in earthen vessels, nowadays aluminium plates and cups are in common use. In addition to the food and drink offerings, betel, chewing tobacco, and Bīḍis are also offered to the spirit of the departed.³¹

In case of a cremation, the procedure is the same, the only difference being that the rites described above are not performed subsequent to the cremation, but on the morning following it. The rounds are then made around the spot where the cremation has taken place.

The placing of water-worn stones inside dolmens as forming a part of the funeral rites of the Ālu Kuṛumbas, was noticed and mentioned by several previous authors, *e. g.*, Breeks (1873: 54, 105); Walhouse (1873: 26, 1877: 41) [quoted by Thurston 1906: 147; Thurston/Rangachari 1909: 169; and Ananthakrishna Iyer 1935: 365]; Grigg (1880: 213, 242); Yeatts (1932: 369); Ananthakrishna Iyer/Bala Ratnam (1961: 177) [after Fergusson 1872]; and, more recently, Noble (1976: 120 ff. and 1981: 44).

While the Ālu Kuṛumbas simply call these stones *kallu*, "stones," the Baḍagas, according to Breeks (1873: 103; cf. also p. 101, footnote; p. 104, 105), term them "*Deva-kotta-kallu*" (Baḍaga *deva koṭṭa kallu*), meaning "god given stones." This term, spelt *devva koṭṭa kallu*, is also mentioned by Walhouse (1873: 276, 1877: 41).

Besides this custom, also that of making food and drink offerings to the spirits of the departed is reported by some authors, *e. g.*, Metz (1864: 126), Breeks (1873: 105), and Ananthakrishna Iyer/Bala Ratnam (1961: 177); more details of both these customs, however, not having come to their notice.

We have to deal now with the significance and function of the water-worn stones. What do

²⁸ Cf. Tamil *paccai* greenness, etc.; etc. (DED 3161). – Cf. sub note 21.

²⁹ Cf. Tamil *vaṛam*, *vaṛaṇ* drying up, drought, etc.; etc. (DED 4355 (a)). – Cf. sub note 21.

³⁰ Memorial funerals are also celebrated by the other Nilgiri communities, *viz.*, the Todas, Kotas, Baḍagas, and Irulas; cf. also sub note 40.

³¹ Cf. Breeks 1873: 105: "... but the practice of the Kurumbas leads us to suppose that they [the kistvaens and cromlechs] may have been purely memorial, and have contained only perishable offerings of rice, etc., such as are made by the Kurumbas and by the Kols of Chota Nagpore." Cf. also Noble (1981: 23) who opines that "there is no evidence to identify dolmens as being permanent depositories for the remains of the dead. They can, in a few instances, be linked with funeral ritual. They have served primarily for the memorialization of the dead, or for worship."

they represent? Walhouse (1873: 276) and Yeatts (1932: 369) take the view that they „represent the deceased.” Ananthakrishna Iyer/Bala Ratnam (1961: 177) go one step further and hold that “the spirit of the deceased ... is supposed to dwell in the pebble,” whereas Noble (1976: 120) opines that “there seems to be no positive identity of stone with departed spirit”; more recently, however, describing them as being “related to spirits of the departed” (1981: 44). Grigg (1880: 242) simply mentions that the (Ālu) Kuṛumbas “attach a superstitious reverence” to these stones.

From among the cited views, that by Ananthakrishna Iyer/Bala Ratnam (1961: 177) represents the most correct one, though being not satisfactory. For a better understanding of the significance and function of the water-worn stones, it is necessary to give here a brief sketch of the Ālu Kuṛumbas' concept of soul.

2.4.1.1 Concept of Soul

“The Ālu Kuṛumbas hold a dualistic concept of soul, whereby each individual is endowed with two souls, the so-called Big Soul (*doḍḍ-ujuru*)³² and the so-called Small Soul (*kill-ujuru*)³³. Moreover, they distinguish between two shadows, the Visible Shadow (*to:ro: na:lu*) and the Invisible Shadow (*to:ra:da na:lu*).³⁴ Thereby the Big Soul goes always together with the Visible Shadow, whereas the Small Soul is closely connected with the Invisible Shadow. During lifetime the two souls and the two shadows are inseparably united; when the after-life starts they are separated only to join finally and form an inseparable unit during the life in paradise. Lifebreath is not regarded as being associated with soul” (Kapp 1982b: 518; cf. also Kapp/Hockings 1981: 20).

³² Cf. Tamil *toḻṭa* big; etc. (DED 2875). – Cf. Tamil *uyir* life (animal or vegetable), soul, living being, etc.; etc. (DED 554).

³³ Cf. Tamil *cil* some, few, small, slight; etc. (DED 1308). – Cf. note 32.

³⁴ Cf. Tamil *tōṅṅū* to be visible, etc.; etc. (DED 2942). – Cf. note 15. Ālu Kuṛumba *to:ro:* = relative participle non-past, *to:ra:da* = negative relative participle, of *to:r-* to become visible, etc.

When a person dies, the Big Soul along with the Visible Shadow leaves the body or, to be more precise, it is dragged out of the body by *Emme-Rāja* or *Emme-Daruma-Rāja*,³⁵ the “Buffalo-King” or “Buffalo-Justice-King”, the Lord of Death, and sets out for the region of the ancestors (*ma:yaⁿ-lo:ka*)³⁶, the abode of eternal bliss or paradise of the Ālu Kuṛumbas, which, however, is reached only after a long burdensome journey.³⁷ The Small Soul along with the Invisible Shadow, on the other hand, lingers in the dead body until the moment of interment or cremation, after all the relatives have come and paid reverence to the deceased. Then the Small Soul along with the Invisible Shadow quits the body and hovers close to it. As soon as, after completion of the funeral, the deceased's brother-in-law or sister-in-law who holds the water-worn stone in his/her hands, has pronounced the departed's name for the last time and prepares to start for the dolmen, the Small Soul along with the Invisible Shadow takes up its abode in the stone which henceforth serves as its dwelling-place, for a long time to come.

But the Small Soul along with the Invisible Shadow is not confined to its abode; it is, however, free to leave the stone and roam about at will, though not beyond the boundaries of the cemetery. Only once in a year, at the time of the death-anniversary, the Small Soul along with the Invisible Shadow will pass over

³⁵ Cf. Tamil *erumai* female buffalo; etc. (DED 699). – Cf. Tamil *tar(u)mam* virtuous deed; statute, ordinance, law, sacred law; ... duty; justice, righteousness; etc. (TL). / Sanskrit *dharma*- what is established, law, duty, right (CDIAL). – Cf. Tamil *irācaṅ*, *irācā*, *rācaṅ*, *rācā*, *rājā* king, ruler, etc. (TL). / Sanskrit *rājan*- chieftain, king (CDIAL).

³⁶ Cf. Tamil *māyam* illusion, false appearance; deception; hypocrisy; falseness, treachery; spiritual ignorance; dream; uncertainty, instability; wonder, astonishment; beauty; wickedness, lasciviousness; blackness (TL). / Sanskrit *māyā*- supernatural power, skill, illusion, fraud, compassion; Pali, Prakrit *māyā*- illusion, trick, fraud (CDIAL). – Cf. Tamil *lōkam* world (TL). / Sanskrit *lōka*- free space, world; space, territory; people; Pali *lōka*- world; Prakrit *lōga-*, *lōa-* world, people (CDIAL).

³⁷ For particulars concerning the Ālu Kuṛumbas' concept of *Emme-(Daruma-)Rāja* who corresponds to the *Yama* of the Hindus, cf. Kapp 1982b, especially, 519 f. = Kapp/Hockings 1981: 21 ff.

the bounds set to it and come to the family hut in order to enjoy the food and drink offerings which the family members have placed there in memory of the departed, by extracting the flavour and essence from them.

But, as already alluded to above, the Small Soul along with the Invisible Shadow will not have to abide in the water-worn stone for ever. It has to stay there till the next celebration of the "dry funeral," a kind of grand memorial funeral being performed only once or twice in a century in memory of all fellow-tribesmen who have died since the celebration of the previous one. At such functions which are celebrated village-wise, as a rule, all the inhabitants of the adjoining hamlets and villages, including Baḍagas, Todas, and Kotas, are invited to take part (see 2.4.2).³⁸

2.4.1.2 Veneration for Dolmens and Cairns

According to Shortt (1868: 52 = 1869: 278), the (Ālu) Kuṛumbas "are said to hold in respect, and make offerings at, the different cairns and cromlechs met with on these Hills. . . ." Similarly, Walhouse (1873: 276) reports that they "also pay worship to some of the cairns and cromlechs on the plateau, in which they believe their old gods reside." One day, during the last century, when Metz "felt a curiosity to open a cairn," the following occurred: "Much to my surprise however the Badaga headmen present would not permit me to do so, not on account of any objections they had themselves to make, but because, as they said, it was the residence of the god of the Kurumbas, who came up frequently from Mulli³⁹ in order to worship the god of their forefathers. This is the only occasion on which I have ever known any of the hill tribes venerate a cairn, as the depository of the ashes of a deceased ancestor" (1864: 125).

To some extent, these allusions to the Ālu Kuṛumbas' veneration for dolmens and cairns are correct, although such sites are not the

³⁸ For the Ālu Kuṛumbas' concept of soul, cf. also Kapp 1982b: 518f. = Kapp/Hockings 1981: 20f.

³⁹ = Mulli, a hamlet, which, however, is – at least today – inhabited by Irulas.

residences of "gods," as is obvious from the foregoing. Any member of the Ālu Kuṛumba tribe, when finding himself in great trouble or, when having met with severe calamities, will visit the dolmen reserved for his clan or also the grave of his grandfather or father.

There he will put down some offerings for the spirit of his ancestor, grandfather or father, generally, consisting of some of his favourite food or drink during lifetime or, simply of some quantity of chewing tobacco and the like. Then he will start praying to the spirit of the departed imploring him to help him in getting rid of his distress. This will, according to the belief of the Ālu Kuṛumbas, never fail its object, as the spirits of deceased close relatives are always considered benevolent, provided that they are properly honoured by depositing food and drink offerings in a corner of the family hut at their respective death-anniversaries.

2.4.2 The Function of Dolmens at the "Dry Funeral"

The "dry funeral" is, as already mentioned, celebrated only once or twice in a century.⁴⁰ It will be performed only then, when the main dolmen of the hamlet, usually the largest one, is found filled with water-worn stones as far as its "entrance," and the people of the hamlet can afford to raise a large sum of money which is needed for an appropriate performance of this function. This will, of course, take some generations, depending on the size of the particular dolmen. If, however, the villagers are not in a position to raise enough money, the function may be delayed. This might have been the case quite often, and would be substantiated by the fact that, at some sites, dolmens were found full with stones by their first discoverers: "Some of the larger of these have been found piled up to

⁴⁰ Accordingly, also among the Baḍagas: "In each commune the Baḍagas are supposed to hold a massive memorial ceremony whenever one generation level has altogether died out, or else when sixty years have elapsed since the previous ceremony" (Hockings 1980b: 108). Among the Todas, Kotas, and Irulas, however, the "dry funeral" is generally celebrated one or within one year after the "green funeral."

the capstone with such pebbles, which must have been the work of generations" (Walhouse 1877: 41 [quoted by Thurston 1906: 147; Thurston/Rangachari 1909: 169; and Ananthakrishna Iyer 1935: 365]; similarly, Walhouse 1873: 276).

In such cases, however, where dolmens full with stones were found in the neighbourhood of then existing Baḍaga villages with no Ālu Kurumba hamlet nearby, it would point to instances where whole populations of Ālu Kurumba hamlets, at some bygone time, had been forced by Baḍaga (?) settlers, to give up their ancestral hamlets and to retreat to the slopes further down, thus being deprived of visiting their dolmen sites for ever (see 2.4.3).

In the following, the rites observed by the Ālu Kurumbas at the "dry funeral," as prescribed by the old traditions, are sketched briefly, as far as the water-worn stones are concerned. It may be noted that, from area to area, there are slight variations regarding the performance of this function; these cannot be dealt with here separately.

On the first day of the memorial funeral, the oldest male members of each family of the hamlet proceed to the dolmen site (*gobe/gove*), taking baskets along with them. Having arrived there, one after the other steps up to the dolmen reserved for his respective clan and takes out as many stones as clan members of his family have passed away as far as that day or, rather, as many as he is able to remember. (According to what I was told by my informants, the elders will not fail to remember all of them; for, all stones have to be removed from the dolmens on that day.) While taking out the stones and putting them into the baskets brought along, each of the elders pronounces the respective kinship term of his departed relatives, one by one; by no means, however, their respective names. As soon as all the stones have been removed from the dolmens, the elders, without turning back, make for a spot not far from the dolmen site where, usually, a particular variety of tall reed grass (*ba:mbe-ullu*)⁴¹

⁴¹ As for *ba:mbe*, no etymology is available. - Cf. Tamil *pulgrass*, grass family (e.g., bamboo); etc. (DED3528). - This kind of reed grass is, by the way, used by the Ālu Kurumbas for thatching their houses.

is to be found growing, carrying the stone-filled baskets along. There they kneel down and, taking the stones out of the baskets, one by one, and holding them in both their hands, they call aloud the respective kinship terms of their deceased relatives, thereby watching closely the tall blades of grass before them. Now, when they see a single blade of grass moving violently, immediately after a kinship term has been pronounced, this is plucked and, at the same time, the stone thrown far away. This is repeated until there is no stone left in the baskets.

The Ālu Kurumbas believe that the Small Souls along with the Invisible Shadows will give up the stones as their abodes, as soon as the respective kinship terms have been called aloud, and will choose the blades of grass as their next temporary dwelling-places which, once occupied, they are said to shake.

When all the stones have been substituted by blades of grass, the family elders take them home in their baskets. At home, each of the elders places the blades of grass collected by him on a small piece of new unbleached cloth, and adds pieces of bones along with some small ornaments of his deceased relatives which, beforehand, he has secured from a certain site where these relics are kept and preserved for this purpose until that day (see 3.2). Having arranged all these items in due manner, he wraps them up in the cloth and, by tying this "bundle" together with the help of three pieces of thread, he gives it the shape of a small puppet.

When all the family elders have finished shaping the "soul-puppets" of their deceased, they are arranged on a bier which is then placed underneath a huge, elaborately built and decorated five- or seven-storeyed funeral car.

The bier is, later on, taken to the cremation ground where it is laid on a pyre along with all the component parts of the funeral car which, before, has been dismantled for that purpose. Then everything is burnt to ashes, whereupon a grand feast is held.

As soon as the cremation of the "soul-puppets" is over, the Small Souls along with the Invisible Shadows are, according to the belief of the Ālu Kurumbas, freed from being bound to earth. Forthwith they are said to soar up

and betake themselves to the region of the ancestors, the paradise, where they unite with their "counterparts," the Big Souls along with the Visible Shadows, to henceforth reside there as ethereal beings in peace and comfort for ever.

In concluding this chapter, I should like to point out that, although the Ālu Kuṛumbas, to a great extent, have been able to preserve their ancestral traditions from the intrusion of Hindu thoughts so far, it is only a question of time until the beliefs and practices of old will fall into oblivion. For, among the younger generation of the Ālu Kuṛumbas, the all-pervading Hindu influence is already much in evidence, today. So, it is some ten years now since young Ālu Kuṛumbas have started visiting Śaiva shrines and temples to offer Pūjā there (cf. also Kapp/Hockings 1981: 18 and Kapp 1982b: 518). And it is, among others, in particular the beliefs and practices circling around death, which are gradually on the decline. So, I doubt very much whether any "dry funeral" will be ever celebrated in the future, although its performance seems to be imperative when we bear in mind the Ālu Kuṛumbas' concept of soul. This refined and complex notion, however, is, in its entirety, known today by the old people only who, naturally, are unable to call a halt to the gradual acculturation process which the young people succumb to.

2.4.3 The Function of Dolmens at Other Rituals

As to the function of dolmens at other rituals, we find the following reference in Brecks (1873: 103): "The cromlech at Jakata Kambē is interesting, as being the place of the yearly sacrifice performed for the Badagas of the Jakanēri Grāma by their Kāni Kurumba." The Kāni-Kuṛuma,⁴² as he is called by his own people, represents a particular category of

⁴² = 'the Kuṛumba to whom offerings are (to be) given (in exchange for services rendered by him)'; cf. Tamil *kāṇikkai* voluntary offering, gift to a temple, church, guru or other great person; etc. (DED 1209).

priest whose functions are confined to the celebration of certain rituals for the Baḍagas. While nearly all previous authors on the subject became aware of this priest office, most of them made also mention of or, gave more or less brief descriptions of some of his hereditary duties (Birch 1838: 103, 105; Graul 1854: 303 f.; Metz 1864: 116; Shortt 1868: 50 f. = 1869: 276 f.; King 1870: 45; Brecks 1873: 53 f. [the only reference naming this priest's title as „Kāni Kurumba"]; Grigg 1880: 212; Thurston 1912: 300 f.; Jagor 1914: 50; Noble 1976: 118 ff.; Hockings 1980b: 124 ff. ["the Kurumba watchman"]; Kapp/Hockings 1981: 9 ff.; et al.).

With regard to the Kāni-Kuṛuma's office as well as to its possible origin, the following may be set forth.

In days of yore, so I was told by some old people of the tribe, when the seven ancestors of the Ālu Kuṛumbas moved up the Nilgiri Hills and took possession of them, they parcelled out the whole area among themselves, by dividing it into seven districts, called *ci:me*.⁴³ Then each of the seven ancestors built a village in the centre of the district allotted to him.⁴⁴ Now, when, in the 16th century, the Baḍaga farmers left Karnataka and started migrating to the hills, they first met with the Ālu Kuṛumbas. Having gained their confidence, they made friends with them and were permitted to settle down in the neighbourhood of the Ālu Kuṛumba villages.

⁴³ Cf. Tamil *cīmam*, *cīmai* boundary, limit; country, territory, province, district; etc. (TL). / Sanskrit *śiman-*, *śimā-* parting of the hair, boundary; Pali *śimā-* boundary; Prakrit *śimā-*, *śimāā-* boundary, field (CDIAL).

⁴⁴ The seven original villages are said to be the following: (1) Kāval-ūru, (2) Oja-ūru, (3) Eruka-male (-ūru/-kōmbe) (area between Coonoor and Kallār, on the right side of the Coonoor River); (4) Bambale-ūru or -kōmbe (not identical with the new hamlet of Bambale-kōmbe built by the Government), (5) Cengall-ūru or Cengallu-kōmbe, (6) Nīr-ae-ūru or -kōmbe (area between Coonoor and Kundā); (7) Kīe-ūru or Aṭṭa-bare(-ūru/-kōmbe), as it is more commonly called (Kundā area). -*u:ru* is the common term used by the Ālu Kuṛumbas to denote hamlets of their own; cf. Tamil *ūr* village, town, city; etc. (DED 643). Beside *u:ru*, however, the term *ko:mbe* is likewise in use; cf. Tamil *kumpai* settlement (esp. of Pañcamas); Kannada *kompe* small village or hamlet, hut; etc. (DED 1441); Baḍaga, Kasaba *kombe* Ālu Kuṛumba hamlet (Zvelebil 1982: 50).

And soon the Baḍagas started clearing the forest and tilling the ground.⁴⁵

It must have been in those times, I presume, that the office of the Kāṇi-Kuṛuma was called into being. (Unfortunately, none of the tribal elders was in a position to confirm this conjecture, unequivocally.) If we take into account that the group of those men who hold the office of the Kāṇi-Kuṛuma, at no time, *i. e.*, as far back as the old people are able to recollect, exceeded seven in number, that they always hail from the seven original villages each, the office being hereditary, and that their sphere of responsibility is limited to the Baḍaga village located within the boundaries of their respective village districts, the above presumption seems very likely.

The Kāṇi-Kuṛuma's scope of duties,⁴⁶ mainly, includes the performance of the sowing as well as the harvesting ceremonies; moreover, he plays an active rôle at the celebration of the *Māri-Abba*, a festival in honour of the Smallpox Goddess, as well as, at least formerly, at the annual buffalo sacrifice, and at obsequies (cf. also Kapp 1980: 438).

The observation made by Breeks (1873: 103) which I quoted above, is mentioned by Noble (1976: 113). Referring to it, he points out: "The place name indicates the past presence of a Kurumba hamlet. As local Badagas believed a village existed here (FRANCIS 1908: 338), it is probable that settling Badagas forced the Kurumbas away."

Two dolmens which are located in the Kētti valley, obviously serve the same purpose as that mentioned by Breeks and remind us of a formerly existing Ālu Kurumba hamlet in that area of which, however, no trace whatsoever is left, today. "This site in the Badaga heartland is used on only one day in each year. During the *Hirodayya* Festival, which takes place before the July-August main crop (*karbokam*) harvest, a Kurumba on Saturday sits in the intact dolmen and weaves a garland of wheat stalks"

(Noble 1976: 118). The whole ceremony which I had also the chance to witness, is subsequently described by Noble (1976: 118 f.).

Another such site is in proximity to the Baḍaga village of Mēlūr (Kundā area), where "a small dolmen and fire-walking pit are located close to the Badaga Mahalinga Temple [see 5.4], and it is to this temple that a Kurumba comes each year to perform preplanting ritual which starts the annual agricultural cycle" (Noble 1981: 18).

It is hardly necessary to point out that the fact that Kāṇi-Kuṛuma priests preferably choose old and long since abandoned dolmen sites to be often found today in close proximity to Baḍaga villages, for performing rituals for this community, clearly reveals that the sacredness of the spot, its former affiliation to the Ālu Kurumba tribe and its original function and significance is still felt by them and, possibly, also by some of the Baḍaga elders.

The fact that, today, many dolmen and cairn sites are seen in areas totally occupied by Baḍagas and also by Todas, that, moreover, village names in those areas point to a former Ālu Kurumba presence (cf. Noble 1976: 123), raised the theory that settling Baḍagas, in the course of time, forced the Ālu Kurumbas downhill.

So, Noble opines: "Kurumbas are a shy and retiring people who retreated when pressures from outside became too intense or when landscape became too tamed. Settling Badagas and, particularly, the pronounced population increase among Badagas – with accompanying landscape changes – drove Kurumbas away" (1976: 117 f.; similarly, also pp. 121 and 124).⁴⁷

Metz, however, who, during the last century, worked as a missionary among the Nilgiri communities for more than forty years and, hence, must have been familiar with these communities more than anyone else – at least

⁴⁷ Cf. also Noble 1981: 47: "... the concept of the Kurumbas being a refugee group descended from, perhaps, the earliest inhabitants of the Nilgiris. These people were refugees in the sense that they retreated into wilder areas after lands they had once used were first appropriated by Badagas, and later by Englishmen as well – who primarily needed land for plantation agriculture." Cf. moreover, Kapp/Hockings 1981: 8.

⁴⁵ There is, however, also "a widespread belief that the Kotas and Todas [later on?] helped the Badagas to settle in the Nilgiris (for a Kota version see Emeneau 1946/2 [= Part 4]: 255–260)" (Noble 1976: 111).

⁴⁶ A detailed account will be published in due course.

with the Baḍagas whom to Christianize he devoted most of his time –, holds a different view. According to him, the (Ālu) Kuṛumbas were forced to leave the plateau of the hills long before the Baḍaga settlers arrived. "There are strong grounds for supposing that the Kuṛumbas once occupied and cultivated the plateau of the Hills, and were driven thence by the Todas into the unhealthy localities which they now inhabit, on the pretext of their being a race of sorcerers,⁴⁸ whose presence was a bane to happiness of the other hill tribes. Several spots near the Baḍaga villages bear the name of 'Motta'⁴⁹ to this day, and traces of houses are still visible; and in one place a stone enclosure for buffaloes is to be seen, which, as I gather from an old piece of Baḍaga poetry, formerly belonged to a rich Kuṛumba, who was murdered by the Todas, at the instigation of the Baḍagas" (1864: 122 f. [quoted by Oppert 1893: 242 f.]).

Metz further adds: "I have mentioned reasons above for supposing that eight or nine centuries ago, about which period I believe the Todas first settled on the Neilgherries [= Nilgiris], the Kuṛumbas were in possession of the table land; I may also state that this is further distinctly asserted in a tradition preserved by the Kotas" (1864: 124). Unfortunately, however, Metz does not give details of the Kota tradition alluded to.

Thus, the former presence of the Ālu Kuṛumbas on the upper regions of the Nilgiri Hills seems to be evidenced by sound facts; but, as we are not and, most likely, shall never be in a position to detect the real reason for their

retreat from the plateau, we have to be content with the theories offered.

2.4.4 Examples of Dolmens

2.4.4.1 The Bāvi-ūru Dolmens

Bāvi-ūru is an Ālu Kuṛumba hamlet situated on the eastern slopes of the Nilgiri Hills. Not far from it, on top of a small hill in the middle of the forest, there is the dolmen site of the hamlet. Three dolmens are aligned there (see Fig. 1 a), the central one being the largest, measuring about 80/83 cm. (height) by 115 cm. (breadth) by 150 cm. (length). It contains a great number of water-worn stones. Four small, more or less rectangular stones with carved figures (*cele*)⁵⁰ stand in front of the stone pile, three of them showing male figures and that on the far right, a female one (see Fig. 1 b). Approximate measurements (from the left to the



Fig. 1 a: The Bāvi-ūru dolmens

Fig. 1 b: Contents of the central dolmen

⁴⁸ For their practising black magic – whence they were often termed the sorcerers of the Nilgiris –, the Ālu and Pālu Kuṛumbas were and still are feared greatly by other Nilgiri communities, especially by the Todas, Kotas, and Baḍagas (Harkness 1832: 83, 84, 87, 110 f., 112, 131; Birch 1838: 107; Graul 1854: 300, 303; Metz 1864: 116 ff.; Shortt 1868: 51 = 1869: 277; King 1870: 45; Brecks 1873: 50; Grigg 1880: 212; Thurston 1912: 232 ff.; Jagor 1914: 50, 57 f.; et al.).

⁴⁹ = a term used by the Todas, Kotas, Baḍagas, and Irulas to denote an Ālu Kuṛumba hamlet: Toda *mut*, Kota *motm* Kuṛumba village (DED 4204); Baḍaga, Irula *motta* id.; cf. Tamil *muttam* agricultural tract (TL). Cf. Brecks 1873: 50 (f.); Zvelebil 1982: 50.

⁵⁰ Ālu Kuṛumba *cele* stone representing an ancestor, a god; ancestor stone, god's image; statue, idol; cf. Tamil *cilai* stone, rock; . . . statue, idol; etc. (TL). / Sanskrit *śilā*-rock, crag, lower millstone; Pali *silā*- rock, stone, quartz; Prakrit *silā*- stone slab (CDIAL).

right): 45 cm. by 23 cm.; 50 cm. by 28 cm.; 28 cm. by 20 cm.; 28 cm. by 20 cm.

Noble who had also the chance to view this site, remarks while commenting on these stones: "'Good Kurumba' is inscribed in recent Tamil characters on the stone with a praying figure" (1976: 121). In this, he is, however, mistaken; for, the words of this inscription run "*Palla Kurumaṇ*," meaning "Palla of the Kurumba tribe," and not "*Nalla Kurumaṇ*."⁵¹ Palla was the name of an influential Ālu Kurumba chieftain who flourished in the second half of the last century.

On the stone which is to be seen on the far left, showing a man in a standing pose, the words "*Cenna Kurumaṇ*," i. e., "Cenna of the Kurumba tribe," are engraved in Tamil characters. Cenna was also the name of a former Ālu Kurumba headman.

Both these stones which were placed inside the dolmen in memory of two former headmen, are the work of Tamilians from the low country, as I was informed by my Ālu Kurumba guides. The other two stones, however, which are modelled in a completely different manner, were carved by Irulas by order of the Ālu Kurumbas. This is also mentioned by Noble (1976: 125).

One of these stones, being the second from the right, which shows the standing figure of a man, does not give the inscription of a name but only that of the year "1930" to indicate the year of this headman's death. The other stone on the far right, however, showing a woman in an upright position, bears a Tamil inscription which runs thus: "*Eriyaṇ maṇaivi Tippe* 10. 3. 1958," meaning "Tippe, wife of Eri(y)a," the date being that of her death. Tippe was the first wife of Eria, who held the office of the first headman (*maṇiagara*) of Bāvi-ūru. I had the opportunity to meet this aged, but vital and imposing headman several times during my stay in the Nilgiri Hills, the last time in March, 1976, when I found him hopelessly ill. He passed away shortly after.

Stones of the kind like those four described above, are placed inside dolmens only in

honour and memory of eminent headmen (*maṇiagaras* as well as *talevarus*) and, occasionally, of their wives. This, however, does not appear to be an old custom, but rather a more recent development.

With regard to the two smaller dolmens standing on the right and left of the large one, both measuring about 20 by 40 by 40 cm., Noble points out: "The two lesser dolmens are available for food and drink offerings" (1976: 121). Here, he was not informed correctly. For, both these dolmens fulfil the very same function as the larger one; the only difference being that the large one is reserved for the Nāgara clan, whereas the small one on the left is assigned to the Mācole/Bēllare, and that on the right to the Bēllaku clans. Of the small dolmens, by the way, the right one contained a few water-worn stones in 1976, obviously not, however, when Noble viewed this site in 1963 (cf. Noble 1976: 121).

For reasons of completeness, I should like to mention that at a distance of about two meters in front of the three aligned dolmens, seven stones of medium size (about head-size) are arranged at nearly regular intervals to form a line. They are meant for demarcating the site on this side, as I was informed.

2.4.4.2 The Mottāḍa Dolmen

Mottāḍa is the name of a former Ālu Kurumba hamlet, long since extinct, which was situated in the Kundā area, at some distance of Manja-Kombai, nowadays a Baḍaga village, and not far from the two Ālu Kurumba hamlets of Kīe-ūru or Aṭṭa-bare⁵² (= Old Aṭṭa-bare) and Niḍiṅgāl-ūru (Nedugal Kombai) (= New Aṭṭa-bare). The only traces left which give evidence of the former presence of Mottāḍa, are (a) the dilapidated remains of a large circular and a smaller rectangular stone wall which, according to my informants, had once served as enclosures of corrals for buffaloes and buffalo calves, respectively (see Fig. 2); and (b) an old dolmen

⁵¹ Cf. Tamil *nalla* good, fine, excellent, etc.; etc. (DED 2986).

⁵² Aṭṭa-bare was, by a mistake, described by me as an extinct hamlet in a previous paper (1983: 721, sub 2.1.3).



Fig. 2a: Remains of a corral for buffaloes (Mottāḍa)

Fig. 2b: Remains of a corral for buffalo calves (Mottāḍa); with my Ālu Kuṛumba informant Mādi

which, to my knowledge, has not been discovered and viewed before.

This dolmen is of a very low type, the height being only about 30 cm. The three side-walls are not built by single stone slabs, but by several stones (broken stone slabs?), whereas the capstone is formed by a large slab about ten cm. thick, measuring about one by one meter. The front is half closed by a small stone slab on the left side. Inside, there are only a few water-worn stones. What is worth mentioning is the fact that this dolmen is surrounded by a stone circle, the diameter of which being about two meters. Inside the stone circle, there are two *kunde* trees (no etymology available) and outside, at a distance of about two to three meters to the right and to the left of it, two emblic myrobalan trees (*Phyllanthus emblica*) (*nelli-mara*)⁵³ each of which having at its bot-

⁵³ Cf. Tamil *nelli* emblic myrobalan, *Phyllanthus emblica*; etc. (DED 3115 + 3114). – Cf. Tamil *maram* tree, wood, timber; etc. (DED 3856).

tom three upright stones which, in either case, represent a shrine dedicated to *Munīspura* (see below, 8.1).

Close by, a peculiar wooden structure is to be seen, made from branches of the emblic myrobalan tree (see Fig. 3). It consists of ten rude pillars, about one meter in height, which being bifurcated at their tops hold a roof formed by several straight branches. When I viewed the spot, I found this roof thickly covered with soil and overgrown with grass and various plants.

On my inquiries, my Ālu Kuṛumba guides informed me that this structure was erected in memory of a priest who, on this spot, first had killed his wife, then himself during one disastrous night in the last century, in order to escape the murderous hands of Todas and Baḍagas who had come to kill him and his wife, after they had cruelly slain all the inhabitants of the hamlet of Mottāḍa, under the pretext of their being sorcerers.⁵⁴



Fig. 3: Wooden memorial structure (Mottāḍa)

A similar structure, its significance, however, not any more known today, is to be found at the *gobe/gove* of Aṭṭa-bare. It consists of

⁵⁴ Such massacres are reported to have occurred several times during the last century (cf. Birch 1838: 107; Grigg 1880: 299; Balfour 1885: 637; Thurston 1912: 233 f.; Kapp/Hockings 1981: 13 f.; et al.).

four pillars two of which are formed by stubs of emblic myrobalan trees and the other two by upright stones, and a large stone slab resting on them.

2.4.4.3 The Toḍiki Dolmen

Another old dolmen of the same low type as that described above which has also escaped discovery so far, I had the opportunity to view in the jungly uplands of the south-western parts of the Nilgiri Hills which are still untouched by "civilization" and, hence, present us with the unharmed beauties of nature such as, today, we do not come across any more elsewhere in the Nilgiri Hills. This area situated on the upper course of the Bhawani River, is long since the homeland of the Pālu Kurumbas, a sister tribe of the Ālu Kurumbas,⁵⁵ who have migrated to that area several centuries ago, originally coming from the Kundā region.

In all, there are nine villages inhabited by the Pālu Kurumbas. "Their main village is called Toḍiki which goes also by the name of Bāni after the Bhawani River on the bank of which it is situated"⁵⁶ (Kapp 1978 d: 512).

Starting from Toḍiki, I reached, guided by two young Pālu Kurumbas, after about one and a half hour's walk which was marked by some difficulties – as there is no foot-path leading to the spot, my guides had to cut a passage through the dense forest –, the old original settlement of Toḍiki. It is situated half way up a hill, not far from a tributary of the Bhawani River joining it from the right. Several densely overgrown large stone platforms which once formed the groundworks of former house-sites, and two large circular more or less intact stone

walls which once served as enclosures of buffalo corrals, announced the former presence of a large flourishing village. According to a tradition of the Pālu Kurumbas, this site had been left long ago, after a great disparity of views had arisen between two brothers who headed the then leading families of the village. They broke with each other, whereupon each of them followed by their respective families and supporters, left the village and went further downstream to found a new village each. One of the then newly founded villages constitutes the present Toḍiki.

Not far from the original Toḍiki, I was shown an old dolmen which was in a rather ruined condition (see Fig. 4). Its broken capstone was, on three sides, supported by several small stone slabs (broken remains of, originally, three stone slabs?), the front side being nearly totally closed by two stones. Whether any water-worn stones were in its interior, I am unable to say as I was not permitted by my guides to remove the front stones and have a look inside.



Fig. 4: The Toḍiki dolmen

Close by, there is a large stone circle which will be dealt with later on (see 6.3).

⁵⁵ "From various facts, e. g., similar clan organization, corresponding religious beliefs and practices, customs, oral traditions, etc., it appears to be evident that both tribal groups must once have formed one uniform community. Today, however, the two groups speak different languages" (Kapp 1978 d: 512). For particulars concerning the languages of the Ālu and Pālu Kurumbas, cf. Kapp 1982 a, especially XXVIII f., and 1978 d. – Intermarriage is, to some extent, observed by the two groups unto this day.

⁵⁶ "By the latter name it is widely known among the Ālu Kurumbas, Badagas, Kotas and Todas (Po-ny) of the Nilgiris" (Kapp 1978 d: 512).

3. Miniature Dolmens

3.1 The Function of Miniature Dolmens as Depositories for Food and Drink Offerings

While describing the burial ground of the new Ālu Kuṛumba hamlet of "Kambalakombai"⁵⁷ located below Coonoor, Noble (1976: 121) states: "Nearby are aligned three small dolmens in which gift offerings are left. One, in 1963, contained cashew nuts, jackfruit, boiled rice, puffed rice, and dhal [*Cajanus indicus*] placed on a banana leaf. In another dolmen were two empty aluminium cups, but they must once have contained liquid for a departed spirit." Again, in examining the cemetery of the old Ālu Kuṛumba hamlet of "Kavalkombai" (Kāval-ūru), Noble found a miniature dolmen located between stone platforms and the cremation ground, which was used for the same purpose (1976: 121).

Two miniature dolmens answering also the above purpose, I had the chance to view when visiting the cemetery of the Ālu Kuṛumba hamlet of Cēmbugēre, which is located in a forest above the ghat road leading from Barliyār down to Mēṭṭuppālaiyam. Both these dolmens stood very close to two aligned stone platforms each, one being located at a distance of about two and a half meters to the left of the first platform, the other, of about two meters behind the second one. The latter contained a few empty aluminium cups which had once been filled with coffee (see Fig. 5). While, according to my informants, one of these small dolmens is destined for keeping food and drink offerings to the departed spirits of the Nāgara clan, the other one is reserved for offerings to deceased members of the Bēllega clan.

Since miniature dolmens which only function as depositories for food and drink offerings to the departed spirits, are, as a rule, found only in the vicinity of stone platforms, it is obvious that, in those areas where stone platforms are used in the function of dolmens of the



Fig. 5: Miniature dolmen with aluminium cups which contained drink offerings (Cēmbugēre)

common kind, the Ālu Kuṛumbas must have felt the functional needs for dolmens; moreover, that stone platforms are nothing else than later alternatives or substitutes for the common dolmens. This is further evidenced by the practice of the more traditional Ālu Kuṛumbas who still use dolmens for the keeping of water-worn stones, to deposit the offerings to the departed spirits at the entrance of such dolmens.

3.2 The Function of Miniature Dolmens as Depositories for *eluvu-paḍis*⁵⁸

Traditionally, miniature dolmens serve a different purpose than that named above, namely, as depositories for *eluvu-paḍis*, meaning "measuring vessels of bones," i.e., small receptacles containing a few relics of the departed. There are separate miniature dolmens for each clan, as in the case of the common dolmens.

I came across one such miniature dolmen when I was given the occasion to view the cemetery of the old Ālu Kuṛumba hamlet of Aṭṭa-bare which is located in the Kundā area, on a steep slope below Manja-Kombai. It was

⁵⁷ In the course of my field-work, I never came across an Ālu Kuṛumba hamlet bearing this name. There is, however, a new, Government-built hamlet called Bam-bale-kōmbe in that area (cf. also note 44).

⁵⁸ Cf. Tamil *elumpu* bone; etc. (DED 714). – Cf. note 15).

roughly built and stood at the foot of a slightly overhanging massive rock. Inside, there were a few (rusted) iron tins which contained small pieces of bones and, in some cases, small thin copper bracelets (see Fig. 6).



Fig. 6: Miniature dolmen with *eluvu-paḍis* (Aṭṭa-bare); at the back of it, my Ālu Kuṛumba informant Laccuma

Regarding the significance of the *eluvu-paḍis*, the following explanation was given to me by my informants.

Originally, the u Kuṛumbas followed the custom of opening the graves of their departed relatives, at the day of their respective first death-anniversary, in order to secure a piece of either a rib-bone or the collar-bone and, in the case of a deceased woman, in addition to this, a piece of jewelry such as a ring or a bracelet. These relics were put inside small bamboo vessels (later on, substituted by tins) which were then placed in small dolmens located close to the burial ground. After the lapse of one

year, the receptacles were removed from the small dolmens, taken to the pertinent large dolmens and buried in front of them to the right. There they were kept until the day of the celebration of the "dry funeral" when they were dug up and the relics along with blades of grass shaped into "soul-puppets" (see 2.4.2).

This custom of opening the graves, however, has long since been given up – the young Ālu Kuṛumbas, today, shuddering at the very thought of following it. Thus, in the case of a burial, no relic is secured any more and, consequently, there would be no compelling need for *eluvu-paḍis*. But, in the case of cremation adopted later on, the practice of securing some relics of the deceased has survived and is continued as, for instance, by the Ālu Kuṛumbas of Aṭṭa-bare. Thereby, the procedure is quite identical with that described above, the only difference being that the relics (including ornaments) are collected on the day following an incineration.

A variation of this practice of old is that of placing the *eluvu-paḍis*, instead of inside a miniature dolmen, at the foot of a particular sacred tree standing close to the cremation ground, and covering them with a stone slab. This practice is chiefly observed in those areas in which the Ālu Kuṛumbas have taken to the use of stone platforms for dolmens. Though altered, the old custom has been maintained in so far as the *eluvu-paḍis*, one year after cremation, are brought from the sacred trees to the respective stone platforms to be buried in front of them to the right. This may serve as a further evidence of stone platforms as representing alternatives or substitutes for dolmens.

It seems likely that, in those areas, the Ālu Kuṛumbas once well remembered the more ancient tradition of placing food and drink offerings to the departed spirits at the entrance of dolmens and, consequently, built small dolmens close to the stone platforms to answer this purpose; possibly, because they hesitated to put the offerings on top of the open unsheltered platforms.

4. Alternatives or Substitutes for Dolmens

4.1 Stone Platforms

In the foregoing chapter, I have already given some reasons which suggest that stone platforms represent alternatives or substitutes for dolmens. The question, however, for what reason the Ālu Kuṛumbas, in some areas, altered their ancient custom by taking to stone platforms in favour of dolmens, will have to remain unsolved, as the tribals themselves are not in a position to furnish any clues to it. The fact, however, that stone platforms are secondary development of dolmens is obvious; for, as a rule, stone platforms are only found near hamlets which were founded and, until today, are (chiefly) inhabited by members of the sub-clans, thus proving these hamlets to be later settlements. Bearing this in mind, we might well proceed on the assumption that, at some such hamlet or other, stone platforms were built instead of dolmens, for the simple reason that the former are far easier to be constructed than the latter, an innovation which, subsequently, was followed also by the leaders of other newly founded hamlets.⁵⁹

Stone platforms which are called *kēṭṭaḍa*/*kaṭṭaḍa*⁶⁰ by the Ālu Kuṛumbas, are rectangular or, rather square structures the edges of which are built by unhewn stones, and their interior usually filled with soil to the top. Their dolmen-like function is indicated by the fact that, after funerals, water-worn stones are placed upright on top of these structures.

On the outskirts of the old hamlet of "Kavalkombai" (Kāval-ūru), Noble was shown "a cremation ground, burials, and stone platforms upon which are placed water-worn memorial

stones" (1976: 121).⁶¹ He describes and comments upon these platforms as follows: "On one side each of two joined platforms is dedicated to an ancestor brother and his descendants; a separate platform on the same side is dedicated to women who came from the outside and married Kavalkombai men. On the opposite side the same arrangement is repeated. In 1963 there were ninety water-worn stones on the six platform tops" (*ibid.*). In complementing Noble's observation with regard to the assignation of the six platforms, I should like to add that two of the platforms are reserved for the Nāgara and Bēllega clans and the remaining ones, for four sub-clans each. The presence of so many stone platforms side by side demonstrates that Nāgara and Bēllega men very often must have taken their wives from families belonging to sub-clans whence it became necessary to erect additional platforms, dedicated to the departed spirits of the respective sub-clan members.

Another example of stone platforms is to be seen not far from the Ālu Kuṛumba hamlet of Cēmbugēre. There, only two platforms are erected side by side, one of them being assigned to the Nāgara clan, the other to the Bēllega clan. On top of each of the platforms, I noticed several water-worn stones.

4.2 gove-mane

Close to the hamlet of Andi-aṛe which is located on the eastern slopes of the Nilgiri Hills, to the east of Bāvi-ūru, there are to be found the highly interesting remains of a large house-like structure which, to my knowledge, has not been discovered and described so far (see Fig. 7). As it presents itself today, this structure is formed

⁵⁹ To the question whether this innovation may be explained as having originated in imitation of the practice of the neighbouring tribe of the Irulas who, for a similar purpose, use stone platforms instead of dolmens (cf. Noble 1976: 124; Zvelebil 1982: 91), a clear-cut answer cannot be given, since this practice might have been adopted by the Irulas from the Ālu Kuṛumbas as well.

⁶⁰ Cf. Tamil *kaṭṭaṭam* building, etc.; etc. (DED 961).

⁶¹ As Kāval-ūru is regarded by the Ālu Kuṛumbas as being one of the seven original villages (cf. note 44), we should expect dolmens rather than stone platforms. Since this is not the case, I think it likely that the present Kāval-ūru does not represent the original village of that name. It is possible that, as in the case of "Old Toḍiki" and "New Toḍiki" (cf. 2.4.4.3), the original Kāval-ūru was once abandoned and its name conferred to a hamlet founded later in the neighbourhood. Unfortunately, I missed inquiring into this matter.

by three comparatively low stone walls at ninety degrees to each other, measuring about 80 cm. in height, the front being unclosed. Altogether eight wooden pillars are, at regular distances, planted inside along the walls of the structure. Five additional wooden pillars which are topped by movable capitals, stand in its centre (two; but there is evidence for a third one which is missing today) and along the line marking its "entrance" (three) (see Fig. 7 a). This makes fourteen pillars in all if we add the missing one. Moreover, I noticed three wooden beams the ends of one of which resting on two pillars which stood along the back wall, the other two lying on the stone walls.

All the pillars and beams which are rather weather-worn, bear embellished sun and moon carvings as well as various other ornamental engravings. It may be noted that sun and moon symbols were found on nearly all sculptured

dolmens of the Nilgiri Hills (cf. Brecks 1873: 101, 104; Noble 1976: 99, 102, figure 4).

From the present condition of this house-like structure, we may conclude that it must once have been covered by a thatched roof which was supported by the eight wooden



Fig. 7: *gove-mane* of Andi-are



Fig. 7 a: Examples of wooden pillars with movable capitals (on the top of the precipitous rock in the background,



there is said to stand a memorial statue; cf. 7.2)

pillars fixed in the ground along the inner walls.

Alongside the back wall, there are four spots which serve the purpose of dolmens. This is not only indicated by the fact that these spots are marked by greater or lesser quantities of water-worn stones to which, in three cases, stones bearing sculptured figures were added, but also by the custom followed by the present-day Ālu Kurumbas of Andi-are to bury the *eluvu-paḍis* in front of the water-worn stones to the right.

These four spots functioning as dolmens are dedicated to the departed spirits of the following main and sub-clans (from the left to the right): Bēllega, Nāgara, Mācole/Bēlḷare, and Bēlḷaku.

At the spot assigned to the Bēllega clan, only one water-worn stone along with a sculptured stone showing the figure of a former headman was found in 1976 (see Fig. 7 b). Next to it, there is a large pile of water-worn stones with a stone sculptured in memory of a previous Nāgara chief placed on top of it against the wall (see Fig. 7 c). Then comes the spot reserved for the Mācole/Bēlḷare clan which was also marked by a heap of water-worn stones and, besides, by a stone depicting the Hindu god Viṣṇu along with his consort Lakṣmī (!) (see Fig. 7 d). And finally, on the far right, at the spot dedicated to the Bēlḷaku sub-clan, there were only a few water-worn stones. With regard to the stone showing Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī, it has to be pointed out that the present-day Ālu Kurumbas of Andi-are are by no means aware of its true significance. They described it to me as being a stone sculptured in remembrance of a former eminent headman and his wife.

Thus, the function of the house-like structure is rather evident. It serves for housing places which fulfil the function of dolmens. This is further evidenced by the term by which the Ālu Kurumbas call this structure, namely *gove-mane* meaning "house of or on the dolmen site" or "house of dolmens" (cf. notes 17 and 21).

I should like to point out here that the *gove-mane* of Andi-are represents the only instance of an alternative or substitute for dolmens of such a kind which came to my notice in the course of my field-work. Although there



Fig. 7 b: Spot assigned to the Bēllega clan

Fig. 7 c: Spot assigned to the Nāgara clan

Fig. 7 d: Spot assigned to the Mācole/Bēlḷare clan

is no doubt that the Ālu Kurumbas of Andi-are have long since used this *gove-mane* in a dolmen-like function, I presume that the Iṛulas have to be regarded as its probable originators. This would be corroborated by the striking similarity which the so-called memorial huts or temples to be found on the burial grounds of Iṛula hamlets bear to the *gove-mane* of Andi-are: "Next to the back walls in their memorial temples, such as the one at Koppayur, there are stone-edged earthen platforms upon which water-worn memorial stones are collected.

Some standing sculptured stones may be arranged along the front edge of each platform. A memorial temple is enclosed on three sides by brick and mortar walls and has a steeply sloped thatched roof" (Noble 1976: 124).

A more exact description is given by Zvelebil (1982: 91) who, however, is based on Noble (1968): "The memorial temple (*go-peku-re*, *koppeku-re*, *go-pe*, *koppe*) is a rectangular structure having an open front, a U-shaped brick wall surrounding the other three sides, and a thatched roof with short crest. Roof rafters extend over a ridgepole above two king-posts, ultimately supported by posts within the wall, and pole plates surmounting posts outside the wall. Overlapping rows of grass thatch are tied onto horizontal split bamboo lashed over the rafters. Within the memorial temples, against back walls, there are shallow earthen altars where streamworn memorial stones (*kal-lu*) and occasional sculptured stones are lain and heaped up." Cf. also the description which Zvelebil gives of the burial ground of the Irula hamlet of Kūnjapeṇe: "The graveyard was termed *koppe*. Every clan (*kula*) has its own *koppe*. What I was shown was the *kupparṭu koppe*, the burial ground of the Kuppe clan (or, to be more precise, the burial ground and memorial hut of the Eļeco-le division of the Kuppe clan), and of the Pe-radavaru clan. On one side of the graveyard were two memorial huts, called *koppeku-re* or *koppemane* [cf. Ālu Kurumba *gove-mane!*]. The huts had two carved pillars, thatched roofs, and inside along the back wall were neatly arranged hundreds of streamworn stones around three considerably larger stones in the middle" (1982: 161 f.).

So, it seems rather obvious that the *gove-mane* of Andi-are originally represented a memorial hut of the Irulas and that, consequently, Andi-are is to be regarded as a former settlement of this tribe. The question, however, for what reason this site was left by the Irulas to subsequently become occupied by the Ālu Kurumbas, will have to remain unsolved. In any case, we have here a unique instance of Ālu Kurumbas adopting and integrating within their customary practices, an installation of a neighbouring tribe meant to serve a purpose similar to that of dolmens. To my knowledge, this is

the only case of Ālu Kurumbas storing waterworn stones in house-like structures.⁶²

5. Sculptured Dolmens

5.1 Location, Description, and Significance

In the Nilgiri Hills, there are altogether fourteen sites with sculptured dolmens,⁶³ seven of which are found "on the outskirts or within hamlets or villages where Badagas reside" (Noble 1976: 111). The remaining seven sites are also located at areas now totally occupied by Baḍaga farmers, though not in close vicinity to their settlements.

"The sculpturing on most dolmens was done by aligning figures in horizontal levels, with a tendency to start near the inside tops of orthostatic stones and work downward upon one level after another. Some levels are divided into compartments. The number of levels on a stone ranges from one to five. But there are also dolmens in which the surfaces of orthostats have animal and human figures which were willfully spread to develop themes. Above the top horizontal level or near the top of a composite panel there may be sculptured a sun and a moon. Above some uppermost levels there is either a single sculptured bull or a bull accompanied by people in acts of worship and, perhaps, a deity's image. Most sculptured figures are crude and it is noteworthy that human female and male figures are shown in close association. Most depicted males bear weapons and are either in body contact with or are closely accompanied by women. Some depicted females were probably the remembered surviving relatives of dead male heroes, but frequent suttee⁶⁴ symbolization indicates that many

⁶² Cf. Noble 1976: 125: "I found no evidence of Irulas storing stones in dolmens, or, *vice versa*, of Kurumbas storing stones in constructed temples."

⁶³ Cf. Noble 1981: 8: "From all that can be gleaned by the writer, it appears that no other area in India has such a concentration of sculptured orthostats within dolmens."

⁶⁴ = Satī; cf. Sanskrit *satī*- her ladyship, your ladyship; a good and virtuous or faithful wife (esp. applied in later use to the faithful w^o [popularly called Suttee] who burns herself with her husband's corpse; etc. (MW)

female figures honor those who committed suttee or sacrificial suicide after their husbands died" (Noble 1976: 98f.; cf. plate 1, g, h; plate 2, a, b, c, d; figures 3, p. 101; 4, p. 102; 5, p. 104).

According to Metz (1864: 126), the sculptured dolmens were intended "to commemorate the exploits of the heroes, in whose honor they were erected;⁶⁵ for which reason hunting and other scenes are sometimes sculptured upon them..."

5.2 Relationship to the Baḍagas

According to Breeks (1873: 72), sculptured dolmens "are called by the Baḍagas, *Sela kallu* [cf. notes 50 and 13], by the Kurumbas and Irulas, *Bīra kallu* [cf. notes 14 and 13], stones of a hero, and by Todas and Kotas *Pāḍavaru mane*, Pandava's houses."⁶⁶ *bīra-kallu*, however, is a term commonly used by the Baḍagas and Irulas to denote sculptured dolmens, and not by the Ālu Kurumbas (see below, 5.3).

"The Baḍagas do not directly claim the dolmens as being erected and sculptured by their ancestors" (Noble 1976: 111). Even more than a hundred years ago, when Breeks questioned the Baḍagas as to the origin of the sculptured dolmens, they told him that "they do not know who made" them (1873: 105). From this ignorance, Breeks concluded: "I think, however, that if their forefathers had really been the builders of any, the Baḍagas would have retained some more definite tradition of the fact, as their original stories and songs go back at least a century and a half. Some of them are from low country legends probably very much older, and they have distinct ideas as to their migration from the plains, which none of the

other tribes have" (1873: 105; but see below, 5.3).

It is a fact, none the less, that Baḍagas pay worship to most of these sculptured dolmens (cf. Walhouse 1873: 276; Noble 1976: 112, 113, 114), and that they exhibit marked respect when approaching them. "Baḍagas who showed me the [Shōlūr] dolmens removed their turbans, knelt, and prayed (hands on dolmen rims, and then bowing heads to the hands)" (Noble 1976: 114).

"In that they exhibit emotional attachments to the sculptured dolmens," Noble takes the view that "generations of illiterate peasants possibly continued an increasingly vague link with sculpturing which honored activities by ancestors" (1976: 111).

Contrary to this view, however, Walhouse (1873: 276) opined that this "is only an instance of the Hindu propensity to venerate anything that appears mysterious or sacred, and argues no other connection with the remains."

Noble, anyhow, arrives at the conclusion that "the Baḍagas are the most likely traditional group with ancestors involved in sculpturing" (1976: 117; cf. also 1981: 47). He bases this assumption on the observation that frequently the Satī and Śaivite symbolization is depicted on the sculptured dolmens, thereby pointing out that the Baḍagas who are Śaivites, "honor and have strongly integrated deified satis into their religious system"⁶⁷ (*ibid.*; cf. also 1981: 39 ff.).

However, Noble's views refer only to the sculpturing and not to the erecting of these dolmens; for, "if Baḍagas had erected dolmens for this purpose, why are there no sculptured dolmens at Bergani and Ketti?" (1976: 118). Furthermore, he notes that "the large majority of Baḍaga hamlets and villages do not have dolmens nearby" (*ibid.*). So, he proposes "that Kurumba dolmens close to Baḍaga settlements

⁶⁵ Cf. also Noble 1981: 38 ("honoring male heroes only"), 40 ("male heroes and *satis*"), 8 ("sculptured commemoration of periodic tragic events").

⁶⁶ Similarly, Gururaja Rao 1972: 107: "The sculptured ones are called by the Baḍagas as *Selakallu*, by Kurumbas and Irulas, *Birakallu* or *Virakallu*, by Todas and Kotas *Pandavaramane* or the House of the Pandavas."

⁶⁷ Cf. Hockings 1980: 20f.: "Up till the eighteenth century the shortage of marriageable women, which had prompted fraternal polyandry, was somewhat aggravated by the practise of *sati* among Ha:ruva, Gauda and perhaps Torea [= clans] widows. This custom came to an end, probably under Moslem influence, before the British reached the hills, and Baḍaga widows have remarried freely ever since, while polyandry has disappeared."

were appropriated for the sculpturing honoring heroes and satis" (*ibid.*).⁶⁸

Noble concludes the chapter dealing with the Baḍagas' relationship to a "megalithic" cult and, in particular, to sculptured dolmens with the qualifying comment that "it would be misleading to ascribe all sculpturing in dolmens to the Baḍagas; this primitive art must also reflect some activities by others who visited the Nilgiris or inhabited them for some time" (*ibid.*; cf. also 1981: 48 f.).

5.3 Relationship to the Kurumbas

Sculptured dolmens are called *naṭṭa kallu*,⁶⁹ meaning "planted stones," by the Ālu Kurumbas. According to their sayings, those dolmens had once been sculptured by stone-masons from the low country by order of their forefathers, for memorizing noble deeds of former village headmen and heroes. When we consider the function of dolmens within the scope of the funeral rites of the Ālu Kurumbas, it becomes obvious that the orthostats of the dolmens offer themselves as the appropriate places for honouring their heroes by sculpturing their deeds in them. The observation that, besides the unsculptured dolmens, also the sculptured ones had once been used by the Ālu Kurumbas for storing water-worn stones and, thus, had once fulfilled the very same function, was already made by Breeks in the last century. In the course of his survey, he found water-worn stones at most sites (cf. Breeks 1873: 101, 103, 104, 105). So, a relationship of the Ālu Kurumbas to the sculptured dolmens appears to be evident. To the question, however, whether the ancestors of the Ālu Kurumbas have to be considered as being also responsible for the sculpturing, a clear-cut answer cannot be given, as we cannot rely upon the declarations of the present-day Ālu Kurumbas only.

⁶⁸ In his 1981 paper, however, Noble points out (48 f.): "As the writer found no positive proof that the Kurumbas themselves have ever sculptured orthostats in dolmens, the possibility remains that Baḍagas and others were responsible for the construction of and sculpturing within at least some dolmens."

With regard to the former history of the Kurumbas, various theories have been evolved by previous authors which cannot be dealt with here in detail (among others, cf. Breeks 1873: 55–65; Oppert 1893: 242–260; Stuart 1893: 289; and, in particular, Scherman 1942: 17–25; moreover, Leshnik 1974: 20, 33, 93, 254). The most common theory runs as follows:

"The Kurubas or Kurumbas are said to be the modern representatives of the ancient Kurumbas or Pallavas who were once very powerful in South India; but there is very little trace left of their former greatness anywhere. In the seventh century, the power of the Pallava kings was at its zenith. It gradually declined owing to the rise of the Kongu, Chola and Chalukya chiefs. The final overthrow of the Kurumba sovereignty was effected by the Chola king Adondi about the seventh or eighth century A.D.⁷⁰ This led to the dispersion of the Kurumbas far and wide. Many fled to the hills of Malabar, Nilgiris, Coorg, Wyanad and Mysore. Thus during the long lapse of time, they have become wild and uncivilized, and have, owing to their comparative isolation, lost their ancient culture" (Nanjundayya/Ananthakrishna Iyer 1931: 68; based on Stuart 1893: 289).

In summarizing the various theories, Scherman (1942: 24 f.) arrived at the following conclusion with which I largely concur:

„Der Ursprung der Kurumba ist so wenig zu ergründen, wie der der Pallava. Berthold Laufer, belesen und erfahren wie selten ein Kulturhistoriker, warnte mit Recht davor, die Zeit mit Ursprungsproblemen zu vergeuden. Wir dürfen annehmen, dass der Kurumba-Grundbestand dravidisch war: Telugu- und Tamil-Sprecher mit (wann auftretendem?)

⁶⁹ *naṭṭa* = relative participle past of *naḍ-* to plant, set (up), fix (into the ground); cf. Tamil *naṭu* to set up (as a pillar, pole, mast), plant, set, etc.; etc. (DED 2958). – Cf. note 13.

⁷⁰ "One of these chieftains, the Pallava prince Nandivarman II, was defeated on the south bank of the Kaveri River, not far from the Nilgiris, and later fled to a nearby hill-fort (Hayavadana Rao 1930: 564). This, we suggest, was the historical background to the advent of Kurumbas and the introduction of at least some of the megalithic burials on the Nilgiris" (Hockings 1975: 47).

Sanskrit-Einschlag. Der Beschäftigung nach, die sich erst spät strengeren Kastenvorschriften anschmiegte, waren sie überwiegend Hirten, Schafscherer, Wollweber (cf. *Mysore Tr.* 4.59 [1931]); ein jetzt längst von der Bühne abgetretener Kriegerstand befehligte die Kämpfe mit der Pallava-, Coḷa-, Hoysala- und Vijayanagara-Dynastie. Diese Fehden führten zu Absplittierungen; ganze Abteilungen wurden in die Wälder versprengt und kamen körperlich und kulturell herunter.“

Thus, the present-day Kuṛumbas of the Nilgiris, a collective term for the Ālu Kuṛumbas, Pālu Kuṛumbas, Bēṭṭa Kuṛumbas, Jēnu Kuṛumbas, Muḷlu Kuṛumbas, Ūrāli Kuṛumbas, and Muḍugas (cf. note 4), may well be considered as the modern representatives of ancient warrior tribes who once inhabited the plains of South India. After encountering calamitous defeats, the survivors fled and dispersed seeking shelter in the jungly areas of the Nilgiri Hills. While settling there, they were forced to completely change their former mode of living and adapt themselves to their new surroundings and so, in the course of time, experienced a gradual re-development into tribes of foodgatherers, hunters, and – later on – shifting cultivators.

The only historical tradition, however, which has been preserved by the Ālu Kuṛumbas is to the effect that, in days of yore, their ancestors migrated to the Nilgiri Hills coming from the south.⁷¹ This is substantiated by the distribution of dolmens and the location of old village sites of the Ālu Kuṛumbas (cf. Noble 1976: 123). That their immigrating forefathers carried weapons along with them, is also well remembered by the old people. According to what I was told, these weapons are said to exist until this day, being kept in certain well-hidden mountain caves, altogether seven in number, which are located in the surroundings of each of the seven original villages (see 2.4.3). The exact location of these caves which are difficult of access, however, is known only to the priests of

those villages. The rock caves which, besides the weapons, contain also some other items (see 7.1), are dedicated to the ancestors of the tribe and, hence, are held in great veneration.

Unfortunately, in spite of employing all my power of persuasion, I did not succeed in my attempt to inspect at least one such cave. Although some of the headmen had given their consent to this effect, the attempt failed because of the persistent reluctance of the respective priests to guiding me to such a spot. They were very much afraid of the spirits of the ancestors who, had they desecrated a cave by showing it to me – a stranger –, would have taken revenge of a grave consequence on the tribe. So, I had to content myself with a description of the weapons which are kept in a cave in the Kundā area, within the district boundaries of the old hamlet of Kīe-ūru or Aṭṭa-bare. The inhabitants of this hamlet had several opportunities to see them at the annual festival celebrated in memory of the mythic ancestress of the Ālu Kuṛumbas, Kurupaḍe-Tāyi,⁷² when the weapons were sometimes taken out of the cave by the priest and worshipped at the site of the Mottāḍa dolmen (see 2.4.4.2). This is, however, not done any more, as I was informed.

According to my informants who made the shape of the weapons known to me by drawing them on the ground with a stick, the Aṭṭa-bare cave contains the following weapons:

- a) three iron bows with curved ends, slightly concave in the centre, about 120 to 150 cm. in length;
- b) two feathered arrows with iron heads, each about one meter in length;
- c) six spears, called *ba:ṇa*,⁷³ with sickle-shaped iron heads of about 20 to 25 cm. in diameter, each about 180 cm. in length (a well-known ancient Indian weapon!);
- d) three common iron spear-heads, each about 15 cm. in length;
- e) three dagger-like curved, double-edged

⁷¹ Another tradition tells us that the Ālu Kuṛumbas originate from the Nilgiris (Kundā area) whence they migrated down to the plains (Mēṭṭuppālaiyam, Nellithorai and Coimbatore area), and that they were driven back to the hills later on.

⁷² = “Mother of the ‘multitude’ or ‘army’ of the Kuṛumbas”; cf. Kapp 1980: 435 f., sub note 3.

⁷³ Cf. Tamil *vāṇam* arrow; rocket, fireworks, fire; etc. / Sanskrit *bāṇa-*, *vāṇa-* arrow; Hindi *bān* id., rocket (DBIA 327).

short swords, called *caṇḍe-katti*,⁷⁴ "battle-knife", the outer edge of which topped by one and the inner edge by two large teeth, each about 50 cm. in length;

f) five common swords, each about one meter in length; and, finally, obviously a later addition,

g) eight muskets.

These weapons the existence of which, however, is only proved by the statements of my informants, would unmistakably point to the forefathers of the present-day Ālu Kurumbas as having once belonged to a tribe of warriors, thus corroborating the theory set forth above. Although these weapons have not and, definitely, will never be shown to an outsider, the detailed descriptions given by my informants suggest that we certainly cannot blame them as being boasters; for, if we presume so, how should they have acquired knowledge of weapons including their respective shapes which they had never the opportunity to see? (Note, for instance, the sickle-shaped spears or the "battle-knives"!)

With regard to the practice of Satī which, according to Noble (1976: 114ff.), was common among the forefathers of the Baḍagas, I should like to quote Breeks who, while discussing the former history of the Kurumbas, writes, thereby relying on two previous sources: "We find that the Muthaliars and Vellārzhars, from whom the Kurumbas had tried to extort homage (*Mad. Jour.*, VII., p. 321; *Cat. Rai.*, III., p. 422), 'at length went to a barber's, and, promising a gift of land, asked of him counsel how to destroy the Kurumbas. It was the custom of the Kurumbas that, if one of their people died, the whole family should have the head shaved; one of the seniors of the tribe of Kurumbas died, and by custom the whole tribe at one time sat down to have their heads shaved.'" Here, Breeks notes: "I cannot find that any such custom now exists among the Kurumbas of the Nilgiris." In this respect, he is, however, mistaken, as this custom still prevails, to my knowledge, at least among the Ālu and Pālu Kurumbas. Breeks

continues: "The aforesaid barber, on this occasion, charged all his assistants each one to kill his man, which they did, by each one cutting the throat of the person shaved. The women thus suddenly widowed, had a great fire kindled, into which they leaped and died.' No local habitation is assigned to this story, but an allusion to Sadras suggests that the massacre took place in that neighbourhood" (1873: 65; quoted by Oppert 1893: 240; reproduced in other words by MacLeane 1893: 222).

This report may be counted as an evidence for the ancient Kurumbas having practised Satī, a practice which, by the way, prevailed with many warrior tribes of India. Hence, the sculpturing of dolmens might as well have been conceived in the minds of the forefathers of the Ālu Kurumbas.

5.4 Remarks on the Mēlūr Dolmens

On the outskirts of the Baḍaga village of Mēlūr located in the Kundā area of the Nilgiri Hills, there are two aligned groups of sculptured dolmens. They belong to the finest specimens of this kind to be found in the Nilgiri Hills, being "outstanding examples of composite panels" (Noble 1976: 103).

One of these dolmens (see Fig. 8) in which "the height of artistry among the sculptured Nilgiri dolmens was achieved" (Noble 1976: 103), bears an inscription in Tamil characters. Noble comments on this inscription as follows: "A complete or even partially clear message cannot be deciphered, but workers at the Government of India Epigraphy Department (then centered at Ootacamund) dated the characters to about the 12th and 15th centuries A.D. However, the same lettering had previously been dated to the 13th and 17th or 18th centuries A.D. (CHAKRAVARTI 1935-36: 97)" (1976: 105; cf. also 1981: 39).

For the sake of completeness, I should like to add here that, in the last century, the Tamil scholar G.U. Pope had already undertaken a decipherment of the inscription concerned, obviously at a request made to him by Breeks who reports on this as follows:

"This inscription, which Dr. Pope has kind-

⁷⁴ Cf. Tamil *caṇḍai* conflict, quarrel, fight, war; Malayalam *caṇḍa* quarrel (DEDS S360). - Cf. Tamil *katti* knife, cutting instrument, razor, sword, sickle; etc. (DED 1012).



Fig. 8: Sculptured dolmens (Mēlūr)

ly deciphered as far as possible, does not throw much light on the history of the cromlechs. It is, he says, 'in Tamil, not at all old, the letters being rudely fashioned, but not essentially differing from those in common use. But the writer was a very ignorant person, and the spelling is barbarous. The end of each line has been broken off, and it is thus impossible to give a connected translation.

It reads thus: "In the Vegudānya⁷⁵ year of the month Sittirai⁷⁶ (April–May) in the Aswini Nakshētra⁷⁷, the 42nd cycle of the Saka⁷⁸ year 1518 (the character which I suppose to be 5 is ௫⁷⁹, which as a numeral is unknown) ... for a gift ... for a tiger ... this writing." ...

⁷⁵ Tamil *vekutāṇiya*, *pakutāṇiya* the 12th year of the Jupiter cycle of sixty years (TL). / Sanskrit *bahu-dhānya*-N. of the 12th or 46th year in a 60 years' cycle of Jupiter (MW).

⁷⁶ Tamil *cittirai* the 14th *nakṣatra*, part of Virgo; the first month of the Tamil year, April–May (TL). / Sanskrit *citrā*- the 12th or 14th asterism; Prakrit *cittā*-; Pali *citta-māsa*- the month Caitra (CDIAL).

⁷⁷ Tamil *acuvīṇi* the first *nakṣatra* (TL). / Sanskrit *aśvinī*- the head of Aries or the first of the 28 Nakshatras (MW). – Cf. Tamil *naṭcattiram* star; lunar constellation; period during which the moon is passing through an asterism' (TL). / Sanskrit *nakṣatra*- an asterism or constellation through which the moon passes, a lunar mansion (MW).

⁷⁸ Sanskrit *śaka*-(*kāla*-) the Śaka era (beginning A. D. 78, and founded by King Śāli-vāhana) (MW).

⁷⁹ Pope was correct in supposing this character to denote the Tamil numeral 5 which, more exactly, is written as ௫.

I have tried to piece together the rest, but can hit upon nothing that commends itself to my own mind.'

This appears to be the record of a grant, but throws no light on the origin of the cromlechs. To whom was the grant made? Saka 1518, *i. e.*, A. D. 1596, is late enough for the Baḍagas, but they do not seem to know anything of the cromlechs, and were, or professed to be, ignorant even of the existence of the second group which was hidden among some bushes" (1873: 102).

I may add here that the Mēlūr dolmens are not paid any kind of veneration by the present-day Baḍagas of this village.⁸⁰ On my inquires, they described the site to me as being a sacred place to the Ālu Kuṛumbas who confirmed this view. The sacredness of this site, however, must once have been felt by the former Baḍagas of Mēlūr, in so far as they had selected a spot not far from the dolmen site for constructing a temple dedicated to Śiva. The legend referring to the origin of the Mahāliṅgavāmi Temple, as it is called, which is current among the Baḍagas of Mēlūr, closely resembles the stories which circulate all over Hindu India with regard to the origin of various shrines and temples.

"A cow, the story runs, had a calf. She would give no milk, however, for her master, but ran off to a shola (forest) close by his house. He followed her one day, and watched to see why she went there, and saw her go to a stone image and pour over it the milk from her udders. He then went and fetched a spade, and tried to dig the image up, but could not reach the bottom of it; and whenever the spade touched the stone, it drew blood. He went and told the story in the village, so the villagers built a shrine over the image and worshipped it as the god Mahāliṅga" (Whitehead 1921: 126).⁸¹ The original shrine was, later on, converted into a temple.

⁸⁰ Several times, I even found ashes and charcoals inside the sculptured dolmens, remainders of fires kindled by Baḍaga boys to warm themselves while tending cattle there.

⁸¹ For a discussion of such temple origin legends, cf. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1978.

6. Stone Circles

6.1 Definition, Description, Location, and Assignment

Stone circles, also termed "cairns" by some of the previous authors, "identify actual funerary sites" (Noble 1981: 23). Breeks defines a "cairn" as "a circular enclosure formed either by a rough stone wall, or heap, or by single stones. Toda, *Phin* [= Rivers' *pun*]; Badaga, *Hok-kallu*, navel stone" (1873: 72). The three types of cairns found on the Nilgiri Hills are described by Breeks (1873: 73) as follows: "... one, commonly called the drawwell kind, consists of a dry circular wall;⁸² others seem never to have been regularly built up, but the circle is enclosed by a heap of rough loose stones, sometimes built more carefully on the inner side of the circle, or faced inside with larger slabs, but sloping outside into a tumbled heap. A third kind consists merely of a circle of stones; sometimes of long stones laid round on a sort of ridge sloping inwards, sometimes of common rough stones embedded in the surface soil."

Noble, on the other hand, arranges the stone circles into only "two series: one with stones piled into walls, and another with individual stones forming circles" (1976: 96).⁸³ He then gives a thorough description of all the variants of the two series (similarly, Noble 1981: 28 f.; cf. also p. 9 ff.).

Whileas "the Nilgiri dolmens generally lie within valleys or on nearby slopes at lower elevation," the stone circles "for the most part stand on summits or ridges at higher elevation" (Noble 1981: 22). During his survey conducted in 1962-1963, Noble found stone circles "mainly above or close to 1829 meters (6000 feet) and in

the north-western Nilgiris or close to the northern rim. However, some circles are or were sprinkled over the region to the south and east" (1976: 94).

In 1873, Breeks noted that "of late years the cairns have been generally attributed to the Kurumbas or to an extinct race." However, he pointed out that "those who held these views ... seem to have been unaware of, or to have overlooked, the significant fact that the Todas even now burn their dead in a circle of stones⁸⁴ and bury the ashes there" (1873: 96). And he arrived at the conclusion that "on the whole, I think it is more satisfactory to assign the cairns to the Todas than to an unknown race" (1873: 99).

Noble's conclusion is to the same effect when he opines that "it is most logical to relate stone circles to herders"; he, however, qualifies this view by adding that "it is likely that stone circle builders preceded the Todas, and descendants of stone circle builders may now form a Toda moiety" (1976: 125).⁸⁵

The reasons for ascribing the stone circles to the pastoral tribe of the Todas have been mainly based upon the objects excavated at those sites.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ = "Āzāram" (Toda *o-so-rm*) or "pun" / "Phin" (Breeks 1873: 24, 72; Rivers 1906: 337-404, 444 f., 712 f.; Gururaja Rao 1972: 107).

⁸⁵ Hereby, Noble bases upon Hockings who, after the excavation of a stone circle on the summit of the Paikara Hill, raised the theory that the "Tōwfiḷy section of the Todas were descended from Kurumbas living in the Mysore plains, who fled to the hills in the eighth century on the occasion of the Pāṇḍyan attack. ... They settled in a fairly restricted area beside other Todas already there, who were the ancestors of the superior To:ṛḥaṣ moiety" (1975: 47). After a discussion of his theory, Hockings sums up as follows: "It is thus apparent that there is a certain amount of evidence, some archaeological, some linguistic, and some historical, for supposing that people who around the eighth century A. D. built circles like the Paikara circle were refugee Kurumbas from Mysore, and that they became the founders of the Toda moiety known as Tōwfiḷy" (1975: 48).

⁸⁶ "All we know about the people, is derived from the grave goods, deposited in these monuments and the mode of the disposal of the dead and methods adopted in the erection of these monuments" (Gururaja Rao 1972: 63). But cf. also Leshnik 1970: 99 = 1974: 266 f.

⁸² More precisely, Ramachandran 1980: 55: "The draw well megalith is rubble built, circular or near circular structure, obviously with a hollow interior, using rather big stones at the bottom and smaller ones towards the top."

⁸³ Leshnik (1970: 88 = 1974: 256) too differentiates only two types: "The cairns appear either as simple rubble heaps, or when more carefully constructed and intact, they have the shape of draw-wells. Beneath the covering, at the ground surface level, lie thin, rectangular stone slabs."

6.2 Contents and Dating Attempts

The excavations yielded the following grave goods (classification after Leshnik 1970: 88 = 1974: 258):

a) pottery, the "surface color" of which "ranges between light red and buff" (Leshnik 1970: 88 = 1974: 258), consisting of wheel-turned pots of various sizes and shapes; plain, concave lids, and lids surmounted by figures; "among the creatures commonly depicted in the lids and figurines" are "people on horseback, buffaloes, humped and non-humped cattle, and sheep" (Noble 1976: 97f.; cf. also Hockings 1975: 42f.);

b) bronze vessels, "ranging from saucer to vase and ovoid to round in shape" some of which "are finely decorated" (Noble 1976: 98; cf. also Hockings 1975: 41f.; Ramachandran 1980: 64f.);

c) implements and weapons, like "iron spear points, javelin or arrow points, razors, sickles, and knives. Among the knives are swords and daggers, and even a short sword like that used by Romans and a distinctive double-edged, broad-bladed, double-guarded dagger" (Noble 1976: 98);⁸⁷

d) jewelry, consisting of "bronze rings, gold ear, finger, and nose rings, and beads of agate, carnelian, and glass" (Noble 1976: 98), and other pieces (cf. also Hockings 1975: 41); and

e) miscellaneous objects, including "a circular bronze ring, hollow and externally grooved about the circumference" and "a flat, round bronze mirror with a brief tang which serves as a handle" (Leshnik 1970: 98 = 1974: 266).⁸⁸

⁸⁷ "The innumerable and the variety of iron weapons such as the lance, spear and spear-heads, arrow-heads, sword, daggers, etc., would be a pointer towards, besides hunting, to the martial character of the megalithic-folk" (Ramachandran 1980: 70).

⁸⁸ For particulars, cf. Naik's catalogue (1966) "covering artifacts mainly collected by Brecks and now housed in the British Museum, London. This will eventually be supplanted by a more comprehensive catalogue of Nilgiri artifacts in the British Museum, now being prepared by J. R. Knox, Assistant Keeper of Oriental Antiquities" (Noble 1981: 34). Cf. moreover, Leshnik 1970: 88-98 or 1974: 258-266 who bases upon Congreve 1847: 108; Brecks 1873: 106, 126-137; Walhouse 1873: 277.

With regard to the attempts to date the stone circles, Noble sums up: "He [Leshnik] concludes that pastoralists interred the artifacts in a period running from the third into the fifth centuries A. D. HOCKINGS (1972: letter) excavated a site near Paikara in the northwestern Nilgiris and obtained a single C-14 date which approximates 1040 A. D.⁸⁹ The findings, therefore, suggest that the Nilgiri stone circles date to A. D. times only and were mainly built in a period somewhere between the 200s and 1000s A. D." (1976: 98).⁹⁰

6.3 Possible Relationship to the Kurumbas

When we examine the objects excavated at stone circle sites, among them, in particular, the implements and weapons, the theory of assigning those burial sites to the ancestors of the present-day Todas does not appear to be very convincing – unless we favour Hockings' rather speculative theory (cf. note 85); for the Todas, since they are known to us, have never used any such tool or weapon of the kind excavated, the only exception being a dagger-shaped knife, called *kaṇ koty*,⁹¹ which is burnt along with a corpse. When Metz held the view "that the cairns were constructed by an agricultural race, which the Todas never were" (1864: 124), he based this view on the frequently excavated implements of husbandry, *i. e.*, sickles and bill-hooks. But, "the only agricultural implements which have appeared in these investigations, are sickles. These may have been used for cutting

⁸⁹ Hockings even suggests, "as a hypothesis rather than a certainty, that the Paikara pit-grave reported here dates to about the eighth century A. D." (1975: 45).

⁹⁰ According to Naik 1966: 143: "within the period A. D. 700-1100"; Hockings 1975: 45: "perhaps even a period from roughly 300 B. C. to A. D. 1200"; Noble 1981: 44: "Most prehistoric remains were probably constructed between 100 A. D. and 1100 A. D. In the case of dolmens, from what was previously written, we know that none can be dated to earlier than Century 1200 A. D."

⁹¹ Toda *kaṇ koty* dagger-shaped knife burned with corpse (DED 1012). – Brecks 1873: 99: "*Kāfkatti*, a large curved knife" (cf. also Rivers 1906: 714).

grass and bushes" (Brecks 1873: 99).⁹² And Hockings (1975: 39) points out "that these tools – sickles and knives – to not have to connote real agriculture, but merely jungle collecting activities or swidden gardening similar to what the modern Kurumbas do."

That the Ālu Kurumbas, even by the time the English came, did not solely depend on food-gathering and hunting, but also practised swidden cultivation, growing several kinds of millet and various garden plants such as the banana, mango, jack, and the like, is a well-known fact.⁹³ The only implements which, in those times, were in usage among the Ālu Kurumbas, consisted of bill-hooks, simply called *katti*, "knife" (cf. note 74), of sickles, called *koyilu-katti*,⁹⁴ "harvesting knife" or "sickle", and of digging sticks, called *ko:li-baji*.⁹⁵

The fact that sickles, weapons, and jewelry count among the objects found at stone circle sites, may be related to the custom of the Ālu Kurumbas to bury (or, cremate) along with the corpse of a man,

- a) as many sickles as he leaves sons behind him (in case of a cremation, a comparatively late innovation, the sickles are afterwards removed);
- b) one or several favourite implements consisting, in former times, usually of weapons and, nowadays, of bill-hooks, walking sticks, and the like; and
- c) one or two pieces of jewelry (usually, finger-rings) which he never parted with during his lifetime.

This applies also to women who were and

are always buried (or, later on, cremated) along with all their jewelry and one or two favourite implements.

That the ancestors of the present-day Ālu Kurumbas must have been in the possession of weapons, is indicated by their statements regarding the seven mountain caves in which the weapons of their forefathers have been kept until this day (see 5.3).

The above facts, I think, may not be overlooked as they point to a possible relationship of the Ālu (and Pālu) Kurumbas to the ancient burial sites represented by stone circles.

This relationship seems to be further evidenced by my discovery of a very fine example of a stone circle of the "draw-well kind," in close neighbourhood to the Toḍiki dolmen described above (see 2.4.4.3). When I inspected it in 1976, I found it densely overgrown by a wild vegetation. If my attention had not been drawn to it by my Pālu Kurumba guides, I would not have noticed it. The inner diameter of this stone circle was of about three to four meters, the outer diameter of about one meter more. The name given to such stone circles by the Pālu Kurumbas, is *bu:mi-cembu*,⁹⁶ meaning "(copper) vessel of the departed spirits."

This stone circle represents, to my knowledge, the only example of such a structure located close to a dolmen. An excavation of this site would certainly enlighten our views on the subject, but I doubt very much whether the present-day Pālu Kurumbas would ever allow such an undertaking as they still exhibit a deeply felt veneration for this old burial site.

⁹² Similarly, Noble 1981: 36: "A sickle may be used for cutting forage grasses, and bill hooks are useful in the removal of shrubby growth or in firewood collection." – Leshnik 1974: 249: "... and still today in India, the sickle retains its function as an all-purpose cutting implement even if its primary adaption is for harvesting grain crops."

⁹³ Cf. Noble 1976: 122 who bases upon several previous authors quoted, 1981: 47f.; Kapp 1978a: 169 = 1978b: 111, 1982a: XXIV, 1983: 2f.; Kapp/Hockings 1981: 6f.

⁹⁴ Cf. Tamil *kuyil* reaping, cutting; etc. (DED 1763). – Cf. note 74.

⁹⁵ Originally made of the wood of the *ko:li* tree whence it is called *ko:li-baji*; cf. Tamil *kōli* sp. privet, *Ligustrum perrottettii*; etc. (DEDS S²32). – (?) Cf. Tamil *vācci*, *vāycci*, *vāṭci* adze; etc. (DED 4375).

6.4 Ālu Kurumba Grave Sites

In general, Ālu Kurumba graves are marked by placing either a single rough stone or, a small heap of rough stones at the head side (see Fig. 9); or, by a series of rough stones laid close to each other so to form a circular outline, *i. e.*, a stone circle. Graves of headmen, however,

⁹⁶ Pālu Kurumba *bu:mi* ghost, spirit (no etymology available). – Cf. Tamil *cempu* copper, gold, metal vessel, liquid measure; etc. (DED 2282).

may also be marked in a different way, namely, by erecting, on top of them, rectangular earthen platforms of varying height (from about 20 to 80 cm.), the edges of which being formed by walls of unhewn stones; thus resembling the stone platforms which, at some areas, are used as alternatives or substitutes for dolmens (see 4.1).



Fig. 9: Ālu Kuṛumba graves (Bāvi-ūru)

If stone circles or stone platforms of this kind are furnished with one, two, or even more tall stones planted in their interiors or on their tops, they represent, according to my informants, the grave sites of eminent ancestors, especially, of chieftains and their wives. (In this context, it may be noted that one to four tall stones or stone slabs were found lying in the interior of nearly all Nilgiri stone circles.)

In the forest stretching above the ghat road not far from Barliyār, I came across the grave of a former Ālu Kuṛumba headman which is fashioned after the method described last. On the grave, there are three upright stones and at its head, a small stone plate into which the name of the deceased headman, Malla, had been engraved in Tamil characters (see Fig. 10).



Fig. 10: Grave of a former Ālu Kuṛumba headman at a religious centre (Kenjukūru)

A similarly built grave site, however, with higher walls, I was shown on the outskirts of the Ālu Kuṛumba hamlet of Cēmbugēre. The grave is located on a small level ground which interrupts a steep jungly mountain slope. As this site was (and is) regularly used by a herd of wild elephants as a resting place, the grave was in great disorder when I inspected it in 1975. Two tall stones lay flat on the top of the destroyed grave, the taller of which showing the very crude engraving of a human being (see Fig. 11). (As soon as we had reached the site, my guides at once set themselves to restore the original condition of the grave). According to the statements of the then headmen of Cēmbugēre, these stones had been planted on top of the grave in memory of a forefather ranking as the founder of Cēmbugēre, and his wife who were buried there.



Fig. 11: Grave of the founder of Cēmbugēre and his wife with two tall stones one of which showing the crude engraving of a human being, with Ālu Kuṛumbas

Ancestor graves of this kind are found on the outskirts of nearly all Ālu Kuṛumba hamlets: "Every Kombai has two plain upright stones on a raised platform, one supposed to be male, the other female" (Yeatts 1932: 369).

7. Ancestor Stones and Memorial Statues

This and the following chapters draw the reader's attention to further, so far unknown lithic "monuments" and remains of the Nilgiri Hills which figure(d) in the religious and social life of the Ālu Kuṛumbas.

7.1 Ancestor Stones

As already mentioned, the ancestors of the Ālu Kurumbas, at the time when they migrated to the Nilgiri Hills, divided the whole area into seven districts and built, in their respective centres, the seven original villages (see 2.4.3). Somewhere on the outskirts of each of those villages, there is said to exist a nearly unapproachable, well-hidden rock cave which had been cut and fashioned by the immigrating forefathers to whom it was, later on, dedicated (see also 5.3).

Long since, the exact location of these seven rock caves is only known to the priests of the seven original villages who handed down this secret to their respective successors in office only. No other person is allowed to come near to, leave alone, enter such a cave. The caves were described to me as being accessible only by means of rope ladders. Their entrances are said to be small and their interiors comparatively spacious.

With regard to the contents of the caves, I was given the following information. At the backside of each cave, seven tall stones are arranged upright to form a semicircle; seven more stones, smaller though, are planted just in front of the former. They represent the seven ancestors and their wives. Besides the ancestor stones, the caves contain the already mentioned weapons (see 5.3) and, as far as the rock cave of Kīe-ūru or Aṭṭa-bare is concerned, the following objects:

- a) three stone slabs of about 120 to 130 cm. in height;
- b) a silver idol representing the mythic ancestress, Kurupaḍe-Tāyi (cf. note 72);
- c) a small silver horse;
- d) about 60 small silver umbrellas being votive offerings of a more recent date; and, finally,
- e) a copper pot half filled with old gold and copper coins.

On my inquiries concerning the legends of the coins, I was told that most of them are worn-out to such an extent that no detail of the original legends can be discerned. The rest of the coins turned out to bear legends in Arabic characters. When my informants told me that the remaining coins would bear more or less

legible characters, however, different from the Tamil ones, I showed them samples of several scripts, among them Nāgarī and Arabic/Persian/Urdū specimens, whereupon all of them immediately pointed to the latter.

At the day of the annual festival celebrated in honour of the mythic ancestress of the Ālu Kurumbas, Kurupaḍe-Tāyi, at the site of the Mottāḍa dolmen (see 2.4.4.2), sometimes her idol, the horse, the umbrellas, the pot with the coins, and, formerly, also the weapons were taken out of the cave by the priest and brought to that spot. After all these sacred objects had been carefully washed in a nearby rivulet by one or two assistants to the priest,⁹⁷ they were arranged by the priest in front of the dolmen and paid particular worship. Then they were again brought back to the cave.

Since, however, no outsider has, so far, been given the chance to make sure of the existence of the ancestor stones as well as of the objects which the caves are said to contain, by seeing them with his own eyes, we have to content ourselves with the statements given on this matter by the Ālu Kurumbas.⁹⁸

7.2 Memorial Statues

In the course of my collecting oral traditions of the Ālu Kurumbas, I was once told the story of an ancestress who had escaped a formidable massacre at which all the inhabitants of an old Ālu Kurumba hamlet had been murdered by Baḍagas on the pretext of their having killed

⁹⁷ Fortunately, one of my main informants, Laccuma (* 1949) of Nīḍiṅgāl-ūru (Nedugal Kombai), happened to have held this office for quite some time whence he was in a position to furnish all particulars regarding the contents of the cave.

⁹⁸ Another such rock cave which is located in the surroundings of Eruka-male (-ūru/-kōmbe) (cf. note 44), is said to contain even a gold idol representing an ancestor. The exact location of the cave, however, is not any more known today. It so happened that, at some bygone time, the village priest died before he could pass on this priestly secret to his successor in office, whereupon the small opening of the cave "closed by itself," as I was assured by the old people.



Fig. 12a: Rock, nearly totally hidden by a wild vegetation, with a cave below its summit containing a memorial statue (below Geddai)

Fig. 12b: Opening of the rock-cut cave

some people of the Baḍaga community by sorcery (cf. 2.4.4.2 and note 54). The story ended with the mention of a statue which had afterwards been sculptured to memorize her wondrous escape at the site where she had hidden herself.

It cost me much time to persuade the story-teller to show me that site, but finally he consented. It was near the Kundah Bridge whence we started following the Kundah River upstream. After a long strenuous walk, partly within, partly along, the nearly dried up bed of the rocky Kundah River, we finally reached a smooth vertical rock of about fifteen meters in height which, nearly totally hidden by a wild vegetation, rises by the left bank of the river, situated at some distance below Geddai (see Fig. 12a). The rock has a small circular opening, about one meter below the summit, behind which I could recognize a small artificially cut cave containing a statue (see Fig. 12b). As I did

not have binoculars with me which would certainly have been of some help, I was unable to discern details of the statue and, therefore, cannot comment on it. Even the slide shot with a 200 mm. tele-lens does not disclose more than the outlines of the statue. I had climbed the rock from the left side, but only to find out that an access to the cave can only be attempted by means of a rope-ladder to be let down from the top of the rock. This is meant as a hint for any future investigator of that site.

In the eastern part of the Nilgiri Hills, at some considerable distance from the Ālu Kurumba hamlet of Andi-aṛe, there is said to stand, on the top of a precipitous rock sloping down to the plains, another memorial statue of an ancestor of the tribe (see Fig. 7a). I was told, however, that the summit of this rock is to be reached only at the risk of life, on account of heavy winds blowing always at that site.

What circumstance did the Ālu Kurumbas

of past generations induce to place memorial statues of ancestors at nearly inaccessible sites? The only answer to this question at hand is that they were obviously very anxious to preserve statues of this kind for a long time to come. Hence, they had to select sites at which the statues would for ever be safe from an eventual desecration or demolition, either by human beings or wild animals, especially, by wild elephants.

8. Shrines and Religious Centres

8.1 Shrines

Ālu Kuṛumba shrines are marked, either by one or, in certain cases, by three upright stones. Such shrines are found all over the past and present settlement areas of the Ālu Kuṛumbas, e.g., at the edges of forests, inside dense forests, on hill tops, by the banks of rivulets and rivers, and so on. When located at the edge of a forest, the shrine is dedicated to Aruvu or Aruguru, the tutelary spirit of the forest, its inhabitants and produces, *i. e.*, the "Lady of the animals";⁹⁹ at other sites, to deified mythic ancestors, such as Kuṛupaḍe-Tāyi (in the Kundā area) or Gumba-Dēvaru (in the Kōtagiri area); to Munirāvaḷa, a powerful fierce spirit which is propitiated annually by the sacrifice of a buffalo; and, finally to Munīspura, the guardian spirit or tutelary deity of the Ālu Kuṛumbas, who takes charge of the well-being of the tribe, provided that, once a year, he is duly propitiated by the sacrifice of a goat. It is in the two latter cases that the shrine may as well consist of three upright stones, the central one of which thereby being the tallest.

8.2 Religious Centres

In a forest above the ghat road leading from Barliyār down to Mēṭṭuppālaiyam, there is a religious centre which has long since been given up, as I was informed by my guides. It is the

same site where also the grave of the former chieftain, named Malla, is situated (see 6.4).

On the far left, there are aligned five (partly broken) clay images, obviously meant to represent an ancestress (Kuṛupaḍe-Tāyi?), with five upright stones standing before them. A long and curved (rusted) knife which must have been used ritually, for killing animals to be sacrificed, is fixed in the ground upright in front of the stones (see Fig. 13a).



Fig. 13: Religious centre (Kenjukūru)

- a) Five clay images, obviously representing an ancestress, with stones and a knife planted before them
 b) Three upright stones and a spear planted close to them

To the right of this former sacrificial place, three upright stones, each being of a different

⁹⁹ For some information concerning Aruvu or Aruguru, cf. Kapp 1983: 723, sub. 2.1.4.

height, are to be seen; moreover, a (rusted) iron spear planted in the ground close to the stones (see Fig. 13b). Next comes the already described grave of Malla (see Fig. 10). Close to the right of the grave, on a level with its head side, there stands a single tall stone.

Finally, on the far right, we find a low rectangular platform edged by stone walls on the top of which, right in its centre, there is a clay horse, now slightly broken. To the right of the clay horse, but near to the front wall, a (rusted) trident is fixed in the platform soil (see Fig. 13c).



Fig. 13c: Platform with a clay horse and a trident planted on its top

Unfortunately, the present-day Ālu Kuṛumbas of Kenjukūru, the hamlet affiliated to this site, were not in a position to furnish a satisfactory explanation concerning the significance and function of this place of worship, excepting the spot forming the grave of Malla.

9. "Megalithic" Prisons

On the outskirts of the Ālu Kuṛumba hamlet of Niḍiṅgāl-ūru (Nedugal Kombai) in the Kundā area, on top of a hill, I was shown an interesting "megalithic" structure, now situated in the midst of a tea plantation. As it presents itself today, the structure consists of twelve large orthostats, now partly sunk in the ground, which are arranged to form a rectangle, its interior measuring about two by two meters (see Fig. 14). At the front side of the structure,

there is, between two orthostats, a narrow gap which once served as entrance.

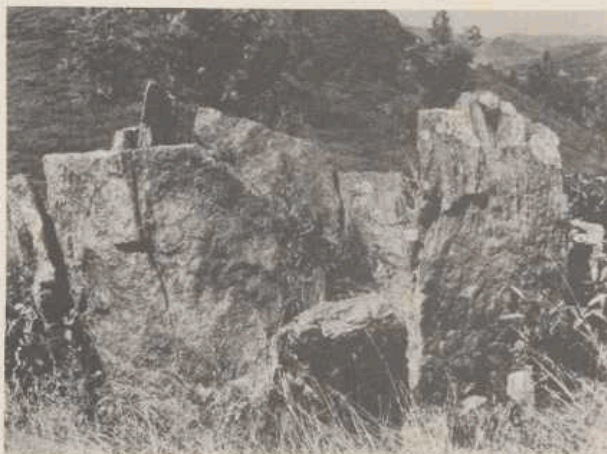


Fig. 14a: "Megalithic" prison (Niḍiṅgāl-ūru)

Fig. 14b: View from another side, with my Ālu Kuṛumba informant Laccuma

In the language of the Ālu Kuṛumbas, this dolmen-like structure is called *naṭṭa kallu biṭṭa maṇḍe*¹⁰⁰, meaning "planted stone(s) – liberated head(s)," a term which was explained to me as being their old expression for "prison."

According to the informations gathered from the old people, the original shape of this "megalithic" prison was as follows: In the centre of the rectangular room enclosed by the twelve large orthostats, then measuring about 1.80 to two meters in height, there were two tall

¹⁰⁰ For *naṭṭa kallu*, cf. note 69; *biṭṭa* = relative participle past of *biḍ-* to leave, quit, liberate, release, etc.; cf. Tamil *viṭu* to leave, quit, part with, etc.; etc. (DED 4419). – Cf. Tamil *maṇṭai* mendicant's begging bowl, earthen vessel, head, skull, etc.; etc. (DED 3831).

stone pillars planted at a distance of about half a meter to each other, the tops of which overtopping the orthostats forming the walls. The structure was roofed by large capstones furnished with two openings from which the two pillar tops projected forth.

In olden days, each of the seven original villages was provided with one or two prisons of this kind, which had always been built on hill tops. The delinquents, *e.g.*, murderers, frequently recidivous thieves, men who raped girls, were made to stand between the two stone pillars whereupon their hands and feet were fastened to the pillars by means of iron chains which were procured by the Kotas. The period of time they were made to spend there, depended on the crimes committed by them and was fixed by the council of elders of the respective village.

Noble makes mention of a dolmen-like structure the description of which might prove it to be the remains of another such "megalithic" prison:¹⁰¹ "The feature on Bilikal Betta once had more than ten orthostats forming walls of a rectangle approximately 1.25 (four feet) by 2.5 meters (eight feet). There is now no proof that this feature was covered with capstones. If it had been, a dolmen classification would hold. Because of its location high on a slope and in close proximity to a stone circle, the feature is in any case distinct from the dolmens discussed so far" (1976: 118).

The fact that, in former times, the Ālu Kuṛumbas erected and used "megalithic" prisons for sentencing delinquents, may certainly be valued as an evidence for their having once occupied a far higher stage of culture than it presents itself today and, moreover, might point to a martial past of the tribe.

10. Miscellaneous Lithic Remains

10.1 "Megaliths"

Noble noted that "in Kota villages there are megaliths at sites where men gather to chat,

¹⁰¹ Unfortunately, I had no opportunity to view this site during my field-stay in the Nilgiris.

relax, or settle vital issues" (1976: 109). "Megaliths" which answer the same purpose, are also found in the centres of Pālu Kuṛumba hamlets; so, for instance, in Toḍiki (see 2.4.4.3) where, however, the largest slab of the "megalithic" group is not any more in a vertical, but in a horizontal position (see Fig. 15). This spot was, by the way, preferably chosen by the Pālu Kuṛumbas whenever they wanted me to take photographs of them.



Fig. 15: Headman of Toḍiki with wife and son standing on a large stone slab which forms a part of a "megalithic" site in the centre of Toḍiki

Fig. 16: Toda boys and a microlithic site with a miniature temple in front of it (Poḥma-ṣ mund)

A similar site consisting, however, of microliths rather than "megaliths," is to be seen close to the Toda mund of Poḥma-ṣ (Rivers' Path-mârs) located in the south-western parts of the Nilgiri uplands, not far from Avalanche (see Fig. 16). It is noteworthy that this spot is considered a sacred place by the headman of the

hamlet (represented, by the way, by one house only), for which reason he had built a miniature temple from cement in front of the microliths. In this small "temple" fashioned after the traditional Toda huts, he keeps some sacred objects, among them an image of the Hindu god Viṣṇu resting on the snake Śeṣa which he declared to personally have brought from the peak of the Malēspura (Maleśvara) mountain, which is sacred to the Todas, the Pālu Kuṛumbas, and the Muḍugas.¹⁰² With regard to the original significance and function of this site, however, nothing was known to the Toda headman.

It may be noted in this context that the utilization of "megalithic" sites as meeting-places etc., is a practice common all over South India. This was already hinted at by Shortt (1868: 46 = 1869: 273) who noticed that such sites "may be frequently seen in the Cuddapah, Kurnool, Bellary, and other Districts, where large slabs of gneiss or blue lime stone are placed in the villages under some shady trees, and on which, during their leisure moments, the men squat themselves to discuss the gup of the day or the more important affairs of their agricultural operations. These places also form the head-quarters of the Village PUNCHAYETS during their sittings."

10.2 Circular and Rectangular Cairns

The term "cairn" is used here to denote a large pile of unhewn stones of at least one meter in height and about one and a half meters in diameter.

Cairns of a circular shape are found all over the Nilgiri Hills, chiefly, on hill tops. They are called *ko:mbe-kallu*, meaning "hamlet stone(s)," by the Ālu Kuṛumbas (cf. notes 44 and 13), and are said to have been built by their forefathers in order to mark the foot-paths leading from one hamlet to another so that a tribesman, while being on the way to some

distant hamlet, may find his bearings; thus, serving as "signposts."

Cairns, on the other hand, which have a rectangular shape, usually, with three upright stones planted on their tops, were explained to me as boundary marks. They are said to have been erected by the founders of the seven original villages on the summits of hills, which offered themselves as natural boundaries, in order to delimit each of the seven village districts, whence they are called *ci:me-kallu*, meaning "district stone(s)," by the Ālu Kuṛumbas (cf. notes 43 and 13).

11. Concluding Remarks

The great amount of material presented and discussed in the foregoing chapters, demonstrating the significance and function of dolmens and various other lithic remains of the Nilgiri Hills in the religious and secular life of the Ālu (and Pālu) Kuṛumbas, cannot but be valued as strong evidences for the Ālu (and Pālu) Kuṛumbas' past and present relationship to the "megalithic" cult of the Nilgiri Hills.

With these hitherto largely unknown evidences before us, we would be entitled to ascribe the Nilgiri antiquities to the ancestors of the present-day Ālu (and Pālu) Kuṛumbas rather than to any other of the Nilgiri communities.¹⁰³ However, to arrive at clear-cut, final conclusions, more searching has to be done, ethnographically as well as archaeologically. Speculations of whatever kind, as, for instance, that offered by Hockings (1975: 47, 48; cf. note 85) saying that the present Tōwfiḷ moiety of the Todas are descendants of former "refugee Kurumbas from Mysore," are, no doubt, suggestive and may contain a grain of truth, but do not lead us a great step further. At the

¹⁰² The Muḍugas who inhabit the south-western foothills and the adjacent Attappady Valley (cf. note 4), live in close contact with the Pālu Kuṛumbas; and, considering each other as relations, both tribes intermarry not infrequently.

¹⁰³ Cf. Hockings 1975: 39: "Although we have no very thorough study of Kurumba death practices, their continuity with those of the ancient culture is apparent." Cf. against that, according to Noble: "There is some likelihood that ancestral Badagas, Kotas, Kurumbas, and Todas were in varying ways related to the Nilgiri prehistoric remains or to the sculpturing within dolmens" (1981: 51).

present stage of our knowledge, I think it more advisable to contribute to it by collecting and presenting as many data as possible in relation to the Nilgiri "megalithic" cult, rather than to dwell on hypotheses, though attractive and tempting, but unprovable.

Comprehensive accounts of the past and present beliefs and practices as well as of oral traditions of each of the other Nilgiri communities pertaining to the "megalithic" cult, are still desiderata. Further thorough investigations and excavations of "megalithic" sites as those undertaken by Hockings on the Paikara Hill (cf. Hockings 1975) are likewise desirable. And particularly in this respect, there is much left to be done; for, to use the words of Noble (1981: 51), Nilgiri archaeology is still in a state of infancy.

The present study is based on materials which were collected in the course of linguistic and ethnographic field-work conducted among the Ālu Kurumbas and Pālu Kurumbas (as well as among the Muḍugas) of the Nilgiri Hills, South India, during the period of May, 1974, to May, 1976.

Above all, I wish to express my thanks here to the German Research Association (DFG) for sponsoring the field-research; to Mr. J. D. Rajiah, Retired Deputy Tahsildar, Ootacamund, for accompanying me on all my tours and excursions in the Nilgiri area as an interpreter and as a friend; and to all my Ālu and Pālu Kurumba informants, particularly, to Laccuma, Niḍiṅgāl-ūru (Nedugal Kombai), for the untiring assistance afforded to me in the collection of the data.

Abstract. — Since the time the English "discovered" the Nilgiri Hills of South India in the early 19th century, the numerous antiquities scattered throughout that region, viz., dolmens, stone circles, cairns, barrows, etc., have attracted a great number of investigators of varied provenance. But unto this day, these witnesses of a once flourishing "megalithic" culture have continued to puzzle the scholars who studied them, with regard to their authorship and date. From among the present Nilgiri communities, viz., the Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas (Ālu and Pālu Kurumbas), Baḍagas, and Irulas, it is, above all, the Todas and the Kurumbas whose ancestors have been associated with the antiquities, unanimously.

The present author aims at corroborating one of the two theories set forth, by devoting his study to an investigation into the Kurumbas' past and present relationship to the "megalithic" cult of the Nilgiri Hills, on the

basis of a great amount of hitherto largely unknown material which was collected among the Kurumbas in the course of a two years' field-stay. The materials presented and discussed in this study have been arranged according to the following main topics: unsculptured dolmens; miniature dolmens; alternatives or substitutes for dolmens; sculptured dolmens; stone circles; ancestor stones and memorial statues; shrines and religious centres; "megalithic" prisons; and miscellaneous antiquities. [South India, Kurumbas, Megalithic cult]

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