

CHAPTER 22

Tribal Religion in South India

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INTRODUCTION

Primitive Tribal Groups (PTG)

There are 75 primitive tribal groups in India of whom five are in Kerala. The Primitive Tribal Groups identified in Kerala are: (1) Kurumba of Attappady (Palakkad District; 1267), (2) Kadar of Nelliampathy and Parambikulam forests in Palakkad district, and Sholayar Forest (Mukundapuram Thaluk) Thrissur District (1521), (3) Koragar of Kasargod District (1300), (4) Kattunaickan (Wayanad District; 11001), (5) Cholanaickan of Nilamboor (Malapuram District; 360).

The following are the most important criteria for the identification of a tribe as primitive tribal group:

- a. Free agricultural level technology
- b. Extremely low level literacy below 2%
- c. Near stagnant or diminishing population
- d. Practice of simple technology

Religious practices and beliefs are common features of the primitive world and pervade nearly every branch of human activity. Rituals accompany all activities, and spirits are invoked. But religion performs another vital function, because ancestral and other spirits are the bonds between the living, the natural, and the supernatural worlds. 'The performance of rituals consecrated to the spirits and deities at all stages of human life and endeavour establishes the primary primitive's place and position in the universe. Further, medical practices are hard, if not impossible, to disentangle from ritual, social and political customs which unite every aspect of primitive behaviour into a whole which defies partial analysis' (Clarke and Hindley 1975: 47). The primitive medical system, relying on herbs for physiological effect and the shaman for psychological effect, is detailed and complex.

Primitive populations adopt positive measures for the success of economic and ecological balance. Field studies have revealed that those places in sound ecological conditions are generally healthy and that disease is not a significant factor in checking growth of population. The example of the Jarawa of the Andaman Islands stands out in this regard. It has been surmised that there are two possible explanations: one that they suffer from a high rate of infant mortality; the other that the social and biological milieu operates towards population control. It seems that primitive communities have a deep commitment to the concept of population regulation. The methods of birth control among them are being unravelled gradually.

The Kurumbas of Attappady

The Kurumba is one of the primitive tribal groups of Kerala. Attappady is a high level valley (elevation range from 400 metres to 1700 metres + MSL) in the Western Ghat range, just south of the towering Kora Kundha range of mountains of the Nilgiris district, Tamil Nadu. The Bhawani River drains the area. The ridge of the Western Ghats constitutes the rain shadow. Attappady is an extensive east-sloping gently undulating plateau, sandwiched in between the Nilgiris to its north and the Palghat Hills to its southeast and west. Once it was heavily forested, but at present it is practically barren. The valley is in three distinct sub-regions: the south-western with denuded forests and human settlements, the north-eastern with scattered deciduous forest and townships and the northern-western, with heavy rainfall, is in the mountainous wet evergreen reserve forest. These roughly coincide with the settlements of the Muduga, the Irula and the Kurumba tribes, respectively. The estimated population of the Kurumba is 1,200. The Kurumba have been identified as a primitive tribe subsisting on shifting cultivation and collection of minor forest produce. The Irular have adapted to plough cultivation; the Muduga have been largely alienated from their land-holdings and subsist on farm labour.

Champion and Seth (1968) have classified the natural forests in this area as 'West Coast Tropical Evergreen Forest'. Some species may be abundant in one place and less common in others. It is not surprising that, over the centuries, the probably autochthonal Kurumba have achieved sustainable equations with these floristically rich environments. The important element in these equations has been the recognition of the curative power of the plant species when used in the treatment of specific individual diseases. However, we should not hastily jump into the conclusion that the Kurumba material medicine is only the reflection of a dead tradition.

Except for the Silent Valley, the forests in Attappady have witnessed violent human interference after Independence. With the opening of the area for the extraction of bamboos by the Gwalior Rayons, many of the indigenous species endemic to the area have been permanently lost. It is not now possible to ascertain whether they had in the past featured in Kurumba pharmacopoeia; if so they must have been substituted by several other species. The worst sufferers of the environmental degradation are the Kurumba of Attappady.

The Kurumba hamlets are located in the north-west part of the Valley. The Silent Valley Reserve Forest fringes their western boundary. The hamlets are distributed far and wide and the area is ridden with precipitous slopes and deep gorges. The annual rainfall ranges between 2500 mm and 4000 mm. Gusty winds with heavy rains lash the area for days together from June to August. The forests around their hamlets are rich in flora and fauna. The Kurumba have contacts with forest officers, forest labourers, petty traders and other non-tribals. They speak a dialect, which is an admixture of Malayalam, Kannada and Tamil.

Out of the total 19 Kurumba hamlets identified in 2003, 13 are situated in the Reserve Forests and the rest in the Vested Forests. The hamlets located in the Reserve Forest are; 1. Thadikhundu, 2. Anavayi, 3. Murukala, 4. Gottiyarkandi, 5. Kurukkathikallu, 6. Melethudukki, 7. Kadukumanna, 8. Galasy, 9. Thazhe Thudukki, 10. Kinatukkara, 11. Mele Anavayi, 12. Tazhe Anavayi and 13. Palapetta. The hamlets situated in the Vested Forests are: 1. Moolakombu, 2. Pazhayoor, 3. Edaveni, 4. Bhoothayoor, 5. Ooradom and 6. Anakkatty. It may be noted here that the number of Kurumba, hamlets increased from 16 in 1975 to 19 in 2003. According to 1971 and 1981 Censuses, the population of the Kurumba was recorded as 1014 and 1283 respectively. According to the ITDP, Agali, Palakkad the total number of families of the Kurumba is 518 and the estimated population in 2002 was 2400. According to the 1981 Census, the literacy rate in 2002 is 28% among the Kurumba. They are leading a nomadic life in the forests, practicing shifting cultivation on a wide tract of land. In the 1920s they were made to settle in permanent hamlets. Each hamlet has been assigned a territory, which varies from 40 to 300 hectares.

The number for households in a hamlet varies from 5 to 32 with an average of 15. The land is owned communally but cultivation is done individually by each family on separate plots. The Kurumba cultivate at a time nearly only one fifth of the total area in a hamlet. The remaining area is left unused. A particular plot is used for 2 or 3 years and then they shift to another. Finally they may return to the first plot after 12 to 15 years by which time it would have regained its lost fertility. They practise slash-and-burn cultivation within the territory assigned to them.

KURUMBA RELIGION

The Kurumba worship their ancestral spirits. The burial and post burial rites are elaborate which are attended with huge expenditure. The Kurumba also worship a number of Hindu deities, gods and goddesses along with their Karadaivam (Clan deity). They propitiate the clan deities and ancestral spirits. The Kurumba are known for their expertise in witchcraft and magical maneuverings such as Odivakkal, Mashivakkal etc. Other tribal communities of the area fear them. Among the Kurumba there are specialists in herbal therapy and they are widely sought after by their neighbouring tribal and non-tribal communities.

The Kurumba conduct numerous rituals and religious practices for preventing mysterious diseases, believed to be caused by the spirits of the dead ancestors. They

conduct 'Pachachavu', a post mortuary rite in honour of the dead ancestors. This involves a type of rigorous dance by the headman accompanied by men and women to the rhythm of drums and pipes. There is another ritual called "Seeru" in which they collect the right collar-bones from those who died 10 to 15 years ago and kept in a small chariot. These bones are worshipped for seven days. These bones are later preserved under a memorial stone. As many as 25 goats are scarified in honour of dead ancestors. They also collect the spleen of these goats, and give them as an appeasing offering to the dead.

Almost all Kurumba exorcists are males. They make talismans to ward off fever and evil influences for the tribesmen. The most feared Manthradis (Shamans) in Attappady are the members of the Kurumba community. One of them, Mudhamooppa aged 105, used to be called in on all occasions of sorcery and magic to propitiate or scare away the demons of disease. It has also been observed that the Kurumba are acting as exorcists to the other tribal communities of Attappady, namely Irula and Muduga, and also non-tribal people. They did offer much supernatural protection to the patients suffering from the sorcery of other malicious Manthradis. Mudhamooppa has a reputation as a medicine man, exorcist and Shaman. Mudhamooppa used to treat patients suffering from mental disorders and is still highly sought after by even non-tribals belonging to the neighbouring districts. His daughter, Chelli is also a well-known Shaman. She invokes both malevolent and benevolent spirits for causing and curing illnesses. She can convert friends into enemies it is said.

Valliamma, a Kurumba medicine woman, is a specialist in treating blood cancer, Asthma, paralysis, diabetes and madness. She has earned a name in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Her traditional medicines are flown to Gulf countries nowadays.

Their worldview and religious beliefs are the basis for the Kurumba theory of illness. They believe in supreme spirits like the *Kakkilinga*, also known as *Karadeivam*. Sometimes, he is identified with "Malleeswaran", a needle-shaped peak towering about 200 Mtrs. + MSL. Malleeswaran seems to be 'Sanskritised' Hindu deity, Lord Siva. The spirits of ancestors are worshipped, relics being often carried in wicker baskets, normally kept in the Mannukkaran's house. Female deities like *Mari*, *Kali*, *Velugan Patta*, *Benjaminthayi* etc. are believed to cause illness when displeased. Annual offerings are made to these deities. Dances and feasts accompany their propitiation. Malevolent spirits are always bent upon creating mischief including illness. An individual alone on a forest path is liable to the mischief. Such an attack is termed *Kannithattal*. When malevolent spirit attacks a person in the form of wind, it is called *Kattuthattal*. Children's diseases are believed to be caused by *Kattuthattal*. There are some gifted individuals among them, who have command over these spirits and who can order them to leave the victims alone. If this is done the concerned individual recovers his health.

Traditional Functionaries

The first of the category of functionary is the Mooppa, the paramount chief of the Ooru (hamlet) a man whose powers are now greatly diminished but who in earlier times was responsible for mediating between the community and the outside world.

The Ooru Mooppan is the headman of the hamlet and he has continued to mediate between the Kurumba and other tribal communities like Irula and Muduga of Attappady and also with forest officials on those issues that concerns the entire tribal community. He is assisted by a three member council of elders namely, *Mannukkaran*, *Kuruthalai* and *Bhandari*. He is responsible for mediating among the individuals on maintaining the customary law of the community and inflicting punishment on those who violate the code.

The *Mannukkaran* is another important member of the tribal council. He is responsible for agricultural practices of the Ooru. *Mannukkaran* should have adequate knowledge of the fertility of the soil and seeds to be sown for shifting cultivation. It is he who performs certain rites and ceremonies in honour of *Karadaivam* or village deity for bumper crops at the time of sowing and first harvest. *Kuruthalai* and *Bhandari* assist the Mooppan in his functions. Thus, *Mannukkaran*, the soil-expert-cum-priest in every Ooru is responsible for mediating between man and God. His ability to gain the attention of the village and win their support in crucial times depends upon the fertility of the soil and the cattle and also the well-being of the whole community.

The Kurumba rituals were conducted by a Shaman, a ritual curer Mudhamooppan. He was one of the three traditional healers specialized in individual curing rituals in Kurumba society. In this connection Moore G. Alexander observes. "But where Shamans do practice, they add two ritual complexes to the ritual life of their people. First are the rituals converting ordinary people into shamans. A.F.C. Wallace calls these "rites of salvation" whereby an individual changes an old identity for a new one (1969, pp. 138-156). Secondly, there are the rituals of curing of leading people from sickness into health. Shamans are ritual experts, individuals dedicated to their roles. Theirs is the first occupational specialization to emerge out of the universal roles apportioned by distinctions of age, sex, household and political leadership. Theirs is truly the oldest profession" (p. 129).

Shamans are mentioned often in the ethnographic literature. There are several accounts of the cures they affect, fewer of them become Shamans. The story of one Shaman I knew in my field work illustrates both sides of the Shamanistic complex, the conversion and the curing. The Shaman was a woman Chelli, the daughter of Mudha Mooppan. I came to know her as a friend and not simply as informant. She is one of the leading healers of her community. Like most of the Kurumbas she is a Kurumba who once spoke only Kurumba dialect but who never speak Tamil and Malayalam.

Anthropologists have often wondered how Shaman with all their hocus pocus are so widely considered as effective by their clientele, who keep coming back for more cures. Levi-Strauss has proposed that what makes Shamanism so effective as psychological process induced in the patient by the Shaman where by the patient listens to and believes as the Shaman symbolically acts out, or abreacts, a diagnostic myth.

Fire and Fire Making Techniques

The use of fire is almost as old as humanity. The Kurumba learnt many a thing from the nature and fire is one of them. Though it cannot be said with certainty as to when

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and where exactly Kurumba started using fire but it can be stated without the fear of contradiction that right from the beginning fire has occupied a very important place in the Kurumba's life. Preservation of fire was the first step toward gaining control over it. Once the tribesmen became convinced of the multifarious uses of fire, they learnt how to make fire through the process of friction. Initially fire was not meant for comfort and luxury but as a means of survival for the Kurumba. Later on fire became a part of religious rituals among them and the fire was and still is used as a sacred object for worship and invoking blessing; Gods or Goddesses of fire have been a part of Kurumba ecology and culture, folklore and mythologies.

Tattooing

The practice of tattooing is, perhaps, as old as painting. Interestingly this practice has been prevalent among the Kurumba. Different motives are attributed behind the practice of tattooing like the enhancement of beauty and sexual attraction, health, sign of identification, warding off evil spirits etc. Perhaps, except the pupils of the eyes, tattooing may be done on almost anywhere in the body but the most favoured parts are forehead, nose, arms and chest. Among the Kurumba tattooing is done by their own specialists and occasionally by professionals against payment at fairs and festivals.

Initially tattooing was done by sharpened bones of birds, fishes and other animals, but now one comes across mechanized devices for this purpose. Some of the marks found among Kurumba are floral designs, snakes, flowers, fishes, combs and sometimes simply names. The pictures of lions, swords and various gods and goddesses are also not rare as tattoo marks.

The Kurumba says that the fear of ferocious animals and warding off evil spirits is the prime motive behind ornamentation. Living in the midst of nature, the Kurumba used to preserve the nails and teeth of the lions and tigers, hoofs of swift animals and feathers of beautiful birds. Later he made them into ornaments and started wearing them. In this connection Mathur (1977) observes "a chain of beads with chequered colours is the most popular among the Kurumba women. These ornaments are bought from vendors of neighbouring markets. One of the most valuable ornaments is a chain made of coins. Old eight anna coins and four anna coins are seen riveted to a chain after making eyes for them. Some of the elderly women plug their ears with rolls of Palmyra leaf coloured red. Necklaces made of glass beads are also worn by young women. This corporal decoration is well loved by old men as well. They wear rings and ear ornaments. It is not unusual to meet an old Kurumba man with long hair which is oiled and combed."

Therapist, Midwife and Exorcist

The ritual functionaries are also concerned with the issues of health. These specialists are the midwife, the exorcist and the therapist. The midwife is concerned with the yet

unborn. The therapist deals with the problems of the living beings (women and animals), whereas the exorcist mediates between the tribal community and the ghosts of the dead. Each is thus relied upon for mediation in a well-defined sphere. This kind of mediation that separates the individual Kurumba from the problems of everyday life differs in its economic dimension from a comparable mediation in the Western world. We normally pay our physician for his professional services when we consult him, but the Kurumba does not pay him directly for any mediation and indeed it is by no means always the suffering individuals who make the decision to call in a mediator. A token fee, travel expenses or a small gift would constitute the material reward that most therapists would expect. The prestige that comes from serving their community is in fact a more important consideration for all mediators and most of the therapists and midwives are women in the Kurumba society, it is understandable that they would not be practising out of desire for material gain. The therapists try their best but their fellow tribesmen do not expect miracles from them. It is worth noting that the kurumba credit only their male exorcists with some miracle healing powers. Most of the Kurumba hamlets do not have their therapists but we have met two, Mudhamooppa of Anavoyi and Valliamma of Veerannur who lived in Palapetta and Chindaky respectively.

Generally when a therapist, particularly a midwife, goes to treat somebody she notes which girls are regularly present and over a series of cases in that particular Ooru, she slowly teaches them her craft of gynecology so that they can carry on after her. This is in fact what Valliamma, a famous tribal medicine woman, did and how she herself learnt from her uncle Mudhamooppa aged 105 and also from her husband's father.

A therapist among the Kurumbas often teaches the secrets of her craft to her daughters and sons and sometimes to the son's wife. No coercion is adopted; it is a self-selecting process for someone to become a therapist. The older ones want the younger generation to learn from them if they are properly motivated. All the younger therapists take charge of their Ooru (hamlet), thus the old ones need work less but, will handle the most serious cases and may be consulted by the young therapists or midwives. Even so, there are some who do not divulge professional secrets until they are about to die. These treatments include medicines for cancer and plants that can cure a girl's infertility and snake bite.

A therapist has his or her own condition for selecting and training another generation and tries to enforce his or her own standard of practice. Furthermore, the numbers of her or his patients dwindle when a therapist gets old. The youngest therapist is taking over treatment partly because the old hands may not be strong enough to deliver a child as many of the Kurumba women are turning to modern medicine. Thus, women therapists generally deal with gynecology and obstetrics, whereas men deal with skin diseases, defective limbs, deafness, snake bites, jaundice, dysentery etc. while women specialise on all illnesses affecting women and children. Otherwise, therapists of either sex do treat patients of either sex in so far as propriety will allow. The manner of treatment varies somewhat, however, in that male therapists often use spells (Manthram) in their curing techniques whereas female therapists rarely, if ever do, but rely more on herbal medicine.

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There is no school or other formal institution for training Kurumba therapists. When a Kurumba suffers from illness he first goes to a therapist in his own or a neighbouring hamlet (Ooru). If that therapist cannot affect a cure the patient goes to seek the advice of a more distant therapist who is reputed for his abilities with an appropriate treatment only. If the tribal medicine men fail to cure the patient he will go to an allopathic doctor who generally lives at Agali, the Block headquarters. If the treatment recommended by modern medicine man is too costly a poor tribal may be obliged to continue his treatment at the hands of a Kurumba therapist thus there is a considerable difference in the treatment of diseases among the Kurumbas of Attappady.

There is also some variation in respect of payments. It is usual to give a small fee to all therapists males or female, for any kind of treatment. Kurumba specialists like Valliamma or his son Ravindranath expects a fee from rupees 250 to 300 towards the cost of medicine for three weeks. Valliamma felt that charging heavy fees would make the therapist acceptable to all.

Midwives

Through the centuries there has been one special role outside of the family that has been held by the midwife. It has been a position that commands respect for the skill that she must have. Not every tribal women, of course, is a potential midwife, but the interested Kurumba women receive some training whenever a delivery occurs in the village. A midwife not only assists in the delivery of babies but she is also asked to minister the different health needs of parturient woman and the new born. She is trusted and consulted and becomes skilled as a healer of diseases as well. Sometimes she supervises birth among the domestic animals. Often there is more than one midwife in a hamlet. Other tribal women are asked to attend a delivery if they have helped one before. Nevertheless, other women come and watch. Barren women if they attend the delivery might become pregnant through the magic of activities. The small room where the delivery takes place therefore becomes congested and stuffy. A midwife is polluted by each birth for three days; if it is mother's first delivery she throws her clothes away; otherwise she just washes them.

Midwives and Exorcists

Midwives and exorcists are specialists; of course they differ in status. The midwife deals with pollution of blood and is always a female; the exorcists, who deal with the danger that spirits bring, are invariably males. The exorcist ranks higher in status and the midwife is lower in esteem compared to the more general therapists.

Protective Medicine

It is relevant to discuss protection in indigenous culture among the Kurumbas. In Kurumba indigenous society, the existence of evil ones like, enemies, sorcerers, wizards

and evil spirits and all ill-wishers is painfully real. The consciousness of these enemies is a major source of fear and anxiety. The Kurumba believe that all evil and pain have causes and are attributed to the above mentioned ill-wishers. Among the Kurumba of Attappady, there is a belief that every person has at least one known or unknown enemy called *Sathru*. The activities of *Sathru* can bring painful consequences. It may be abnormal behaviour, sudden loss of children and property, chronic illness and even death.

The belief in enemies as the main sources of all evil and bad occurrences is so strong that nothing happens naturally without some spiritual forces behind it. Thus the Kurumba believe that incidents like infant mortality, bareness in women, impotence in men, accident of any kind, dullness in school children and all other bad things are attributed to enemies of different kinds. Constant fear and insecurity may also be caused by hostile environment other than malignant forces.

Another major way of obtaining protection against enemies in tribal society in Attappady is the use of charms and amulets and charms are generally obtained from medicine men who are healers and diviners. They are used for diverse purposes but mainly as protective devices to prevent enemies, witches and wizards, and evil spirits from entering a house and attacking a person. It is also used to nullify all the attempts of enemies or sorcerers. They are prepared with different ingredients according to the purpose of the charm or amulets. Charms are tied with animal skin. Others are wrapped and tied with some black and white threads. Some also require the recitation of some potent words and prayers to go along with the charms for their effectiveness. Those words must be recited exactly according to the prescription of the medicine-man, otherwise it may not be efficacious. Charms are used by the Kurumbas during hunting to protect against wild animals' attack, snake bites and against wicked supernatural beings.

Religion and Illness

The tribes of Attappady worship a number of Hindu gods and goddesses like Siva (Malleeswaran), Subramanyan, Peroorswami, Mariamma etc. Their most important deity is Malleeswaran (Lord Parama Siva), whose abode is the Malleeswara Peak, the highest peak in the Attappady valley. They also propitiate Thondallur Mari or Thai (the goddess of smallpox and chicken pox) by making fowl sacrifices. Blood-stained dysentery is also attributed to Mariamma. Each hamlet has a small shrine or a sacred-spot beneath a tree or an overhanging rock where idols of these gods and godlings (mostly stones) are installed.

Annual offerings are made to these deities. The propitiation is accompanied by merry-making and feasts depending upon the economic condition of these tribes. But the annual propitiation cannot be postponed and has to be performed even if it is only on a token level. Failure to do this, they attribute, cause illnesses, and misfortune.

They also believe that the atmosphere is haunted by spirits both benevolent and malevolent. According to them the malevolent spirits are constantly on a lookout for creating mischief. An individual moving along on a desolate path, the forest area is

supposed to be highly vulnerable to such malevolent invasions. This kind of fright reactions is called *Kannithattal*. The symptoms manifested in such cases are shivering at nights, fainting at intervals and muttering of incoherent words. They think that it can also lead to madness. Malevolent spirits are moving in the form of whirlpools and hence are also called *kattuthattal* (*kattu*=wind). *Kattuthattal* is believed to be the cause of most of the children's diseases, and acute illness of the adults. The tribals of Attappady in general believe that there are certain individuals among them, who have command over such malevolent powers and can direct these powers as mercenaries to harm the rivals of those who seek their services. The two major magical beliefs associated with illness are called *odivekkal* and *mayyivekkal*. The *odivekkal* is appeased with the help of mercenary spirits whereas *mayyivekkal* is appeased by the administration of objects clandestinely after a magical spell over them into an individual's body. These objects include both herbal and animal poisonous matter like snake poison or tiger fat mixed with poisonous herbs. They suspect *mayyivekkal*, if somebody falls sick all of a sudden or somebody suffers fatigue during a journey. Indeed such magical attribution is quite predominant among the tribes of Attappady. It is also noted that patronizing tutelary deity, sexual rivalry, property disputes etc., generally lead to such things.

Whenever an illness persists irrespective of the usual therapies, their belief in such attributes gets strengthened. In such cases they try to identify the nature of such supernatural causes by divination techniques such as (a) *Kuriyedukkal* (seed counting) (b) *varamvenginokkal* (trance dance) (c) *kodankinokkal* (Scripture reading) etc. They ward off the identified malevolent invasions by (a) *pattuvekkal* (recitation of spells), (b) *bhootipidikkal* (ash smearing) (c) *ennayoothikodukkal* (application of charmed oil), (d) *mayyioothividal* (exorcizing), (e) *parissuvekkal* (votary offerings), (f) *thettukettal* (paying of fines) (g) *thakkidukettal* (talismans-tying) etc.

The Renowned Tribal Healers

Mudhamooppa

He died at the age of 105 in 2006. He was dignified in bearing and had the stamp of authority on everything he said and did. He had been the *Mooppa* or headman of *Anavayi* for more than fifty years. Married seventeen times, he had three surviving wives. He had travelled mostly on foot throughout Attappady and Nilgiris. He learnt medicine from his father *Kakki Mooppa* and from *Mallan*, his sister's father-in-law of *Veerannur*. The investigator has known him intimately for the past twenty-five years. His knowledge of medicinal plants was encyclopedic. In recognition of his expertise in tribal medicine, he was felicitated by the International School of Dravidian Linguistics Studies in 1992. He had established a new hamlet at *Palapatta*, where he had been granted forty hectares of forest land for cultivation on the bank of *Bhavani* river. He had about half a dozen children and a large number of grand children. *Chindan*, one of his sons, is currently his disciple, and will be carrying the torch of his knowledge.

Valliamma of Veerannur

Daughter of Chatha Mooppan, a medicine man of the Kurumba hamlet of the Kurukkathikal, Valliamma died at the age of 70 in 2005. She was expert in the identification of medicinal plants, preparation of medicines and treatment of diseases. She married Kakki, son of Patti, a Muduga of Veerannur, and the son of Mudhamooppan's eldest sister. Patti was a medicine man who had training under his father, Mallan. On marriage, Valliamma got the benefit of training under her husband and her father-in-law. When her husband died sixteen years ago, leaving a son and three daughters, Valliamma started practicing medicine herself. Two of her married daughters who were trained in traditional medicine passed away in the 1990s. Her son, Ravindran, discontinued his school studies after the third standard. He has inherited his mother's knowledge of ethno-medicine. She was famous and was sought after by non-tribal patients throughout the neighbouring districts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. She has now stopped her practice. Her youngest daughter and son are practicing the traditional medicine.

Valliamma did not charge any specific rate for her treatment in the past. She accepted whatever was given to her, it started from Rs. 51 onwards. She insisted on the offer of at least Rs. 15, as a tribute to the tribal deities, specifically worshipped by her, viz. Velungan Patta, Velungan Pattai, Karutha Patta, etc. It is said that her husband's father's wife Kaada went for harvesting in her fields and saw something shining on a plant. She returned home and took a new cloth, wrapped the plant and kept it in a pot in her house. This deity is now known as Asaraka Viira (male) and Asaraka Viira (female), and is worshipped in Valliamma's husband's house. She invoked their assistance whenever she started treatment and faces difficulty. Valliamma had displayed recently the pictures of the Hindu deities like Siva, Ganapathi etc. in her Puja room.

THE CHOLANAICKANS : CAVEMEN OF KERALA

The Cholanaickan are a diminutive tribal community identified as the most 'Primitive Cavemen' of Kerala (Mathur, 1975). They are the most primitive among the tribes of Kerala if not in the whole of India. They were only 350 souls in 1977 inhabiting the Karulai and Chungathara Ranges in the Nilambur Forest division of Malappuram District. The valley has an elevation of 4000 feet above mean sea level. It is about 100 kms away from Calicut and 60 kms from Malappuram, the district headquarters and about 30 kms from Nilambur, the Forest Divisional headquarters.

The Cholanaickans occupy the rocky caves in the interior of forest especially in the bank of the tributaries of the Chaliyar and Karimpuzha rivers. They call among themselves as Malanaickans or Scholanaickans. They call the Kattunaickans inhabiting the foothills as Pathikkar. The Pathikkar are known among themselves as Pathinaickans. They number about 500. Though there is generally no inter-marriage between the Cholanaickans and Pathinaickans a few cases of marriages between these have come

to our notice. The Cholanaickans and the Pathinaickans have been found to occupy the same cave.

The Cholanaickans are hunter-gathers and collectors of minor forest produce. In my earlier ethnographic note on the tribe (Mathur, 1977) it was noted that barter played a significant and useful role in their cultural life. In a nomadic-hunting and gathering society like that of the Cholanaickans every man is a hunter and every woman a gatherer since no other course is open to any individual. Various jungle products such as a dammar resin, ginger, cardamom, honey bees, wax, pepper, soapnut, wild arrow root etc., formed the articles for barter with Muslim contractors for rice, tobacco, salt, hill hooks, arecanut, dry fish, chillies, betel and household articles. Gardner (1966) has described the hunter-gatherer community as "individualistic culture". The food gatherers and collectors of minor forest produce maintained allegiance to individuals of the neighbouring villages whose orientation was essentially mercantile. In the words of Brian Morris (1977:227) "the social patterns and cultural life of these various Asian communities (Kadar, Veddas, Semang and Kubus) were remarkably alike, for they filled a similar economic niche and experienced the same kind of harassment and exploitation from surrounding agricultural people. But what is of equal interest with respect to those Asian communities is the seeming fragmentary nature of their social aggregates. In all these cultures the nuclear family functioned as the primary economic unit, and residential aggregates consisted essentially of one and five families camping together, either in temporary leaf shelters or rock caves".... What is of interest to us is the comparison between these cultures and the Cholanaickans of Nilambur who, while living in a forest environment inhabit in the rock cave settlements. However, their nomadism is limited to summer months only.

It is clear from the writings of Thurston (1909) and Vasudevan (1967) that the Cholanaickans, the Paniyans and Aranadans have been living in the Nilambur forest areas around the Karulai Range and in the private forest of the Chungathara Range which belong to the Nilambur Raja and other Zamindars. From the earliest times these tribal communities had important trading contacts with their neighbouring agricultural and trading communities. According to Brian Morris (1977) tribal communities inhabiting the Western Ghats had maintained trade contacts with their agricultural neighbours. During the Sangam period, the Tamil Kingdom had trading relations with the Roman Empire. Besides forest products like sandal wood from the Malabar coast, they exported peacocks, etc. The local Chieftains and Zamindars had control over the forests and royalties were accordingly levied on such forest exports. Furthermore, services of the local tribal people were placed at the disposal of the Rajas or the members of the families of the Chieftains when they went out on hunting expeditions. It has been explained (Mathur, 1976) how the Cholanaickans of Meenmutti maintained contacts with the British people and those of the Chungathara Range with the Brahmins of Palghat. This fact has been overlooked by several ethnographers of the tribal communities of Southern India who speak of these people as "Social isolates" or as aboriginals. The implication is that they are autochthones of the forest, without having contact with the people of the plains. Ehrenfels (1952:47-49) had held that the advent of the contractors at the beginning of the century had changed the Kadar food-

gathering subsistence economy to the collection of forest produce for barter. Ehrenfels, for example, maintained that the Kadars of Cochin were "isolated to their forests" for a long period and were not influenced by the 'plains culture'; Brian Morris holds "that there is ample evidence to show that the external trading contacts had been going on since earlier times among the South Indian hunter-gathering communities - the Kadar, Paniyan and Hill Pandaram". As far as the Cholanaickans are concerned as a hypothesis, I believe that the gathering of minor forest produce for barter played and still plays a crucial role in the cultural milieu of this hunting and gathering tribe and it is unfortunate to consider the Cholanaickans as isolates from the Hindu Society.

A Cholanaickan settlement is called Kallu Alai (Rock cave). All their caves (Alais) are not easily accessible. The Alais have no communication facilities. One has to walk 10 to 15 kms through dense forests to reach an Alai. Almost all the Alais are situated on the banks of the Chaliyar river and its tributaries. When rivers are in spate during the monsoon the Alais are totally inaccessible.

Chemams (Territories)

The Cholanaickans who number about 350 inhabit the mountain ranges of Nilambur. They live in caves (Alai). Each Alai is a kingroup hamlet (Mathur, 1977). Households belonging to a kingroup tend to congregate to a particular Alai. The Cholanaickans though living in scattered rocky caves in the interior forests, are always found on the banks of rivers. Although their homes are Alais, they wander about from one place to another in search of wide variety of berries, roots and tubers, nuts, honey, pith, leaves and many other minor forest produce. In fact, they lead a nomadic life throughout the year except the rainy season. They subsist on vegetable food and gather forest products for barter.

Two to three Cholanaickan families occupy a cave and there are three to five such settlements in a Chemam (territory). Each Chemam is presided over by a Chemakkaran (territorial headman). The name of the cave is invariably derived from a river, e.g. Karimpuzha Alai and Panapuzha Alai. A member of the tribe takes his name after a cave settlement, e.g. Panapuzha Kungan and Talipuzha Mathan. Similarly a Chemam (Territory) is named after certain families who form only a part, often a small part, but who nevertheless, are identified with the Chemam. The Chemam is "their land". The Cholanaickans use possessive pronouns in mentioning it. Not only do Cholanaickans speak of these persons and group as "owning" certain Chemam territories, but as prominent within it.

The economy of the Cholanaickans has been greatly disturbed due to restrictions laid down by the Forest Department on collection of the forest products. Besides, the existing practice of leasing the forest for collection of produce to the highest bidder in preference to a tribal Co-operative Society has reduced the Cholanaickan to the status of wage earners.

The Cholanaickans are food gatherers and hunters and they do not even raise kitchen gardens. The Muslim contractors are agriculturists living in the plains of Nalambur. These traders supply all essential household articles to the Cholanaickans

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in exchange of minor forest produce. They also supply rice and condiments on credit. This credit system is a means whereby the Muslim traders keep the Cholanaickans under their control. In order to release the tribesmen from the shackles of Muslim contractors, the Cholanaickans of the Karulai Range were brought under the purview of the Chokkad Girijan Service Society in 1977 and a collection shed was opened at manchiri under the supervision of the Society's agent. There is no direct supervision of day-to-day affairs at the collection shed and the Cholanaickans are left at the mercy of the agent. The tribesmen are being cheated by the Society's agent who adopt unscrupulous means like under weighment and unscientific grading of products, besides quoting a low price. The exploitation of the Cholanaickans goes on whether they are under a Society or under Muslim contractors. However, after the formation of Co-operative Society they have been induced to collect medicinal herbs and roots.

Food Gatherers and Hunters

The economy of the Cholanaickan is based on food-gathering, hunting, fishing and collection of minor forest produce. They gather food throughout the year. "They have excellent knowledge about different areas of the forest, where different kinds of roots, tubers, fruits, leaves, mushrooms and honey as well as minor forest produce and rare medicinal plants can be found in different seasons.

The main tool they employ for food gathering is a digging stick called Parai. Each family produces its own food. The people go for hunting in groups throughout the year unless they are prevented by the monsoon. Dogs are taken for help. Small nets made of ropes are used for driving small deer, rabbits, hares and monkeys into them.

Today the Cholanaickan of the Karulai range have been liberated from the clutches of the contractors and their agents consequent upon the opening of two collection sheds, one at Macheri, Myladipotti and other at Chakkikuzhi for collection of minor forest produce.

The Tribal Co-operative Society for the Cholanaickan development is under the administrative control of the Integrated Tribal Development Project, Nilambur. The store-keeper of the collection shed at Machiri employed by the Nilambur Tribal Cooperative Society seems to have some vested interest and no sympathy for the Cholanaickan. He supplies 10 kg or rice, tobacco, salt, chilly, matchbox and condiments in exchange of forest produces to a family every week. The Cholanaickan collect forest produces worth off Rs. 5 lakhs every year. It is reported that the Vanasamrakshana Samithy of the Forest Department would purchase the forest produces from the Cholanaickan in exchange of rice and other provisions. But the Vana Smrakshna Samithy has not yet taken the charge.

Cholanaickan Religion

The Cholanaickans worship the Mala Daivam (Jungle God) and ancestral spirits. A bell metal idol of an elephant with a mahout (Mala Daivam) is propitiated by them.

The idol is brought during the monsoon from the unknown cave in the interior jungle and installed in a sacred corner of the cave where women are prohibited to enter. Special pujas are conducted by them during this period. The deity is taken back to its original habitat as soon as the monsoon is over. Each Alai possesses an idol of the Mala Daivam and it is the responsibility of the Chemakkaran to bring the deity to the cave from the forest and return to its original resting place.

The Cholanaickans of Manna Alai in Talipuzha kept the idol in their Mana (hut) for six months together during the monsoon in 1974. The idol was brought in by the Chemakkaran from the Tandamala cave about 20 mks from the Manna Alai settlement. In olden times it was kept in a sacred corner of the Alai.

The Cholainacikans believe that the Mala Daivam will protect them from all hazards of food gathering and also from the dangers of floods in the area particularly during the monsoon when the rivers are in spate. Thus they worship their god for curing illness, for bumper forest produce and for saving them from all dangers. They believe that the Mala Daivam is the supreme authority of their ecosystem world. Thus the Mala Daivam is supposed to discharge several functions for the welfare of the tribe. They generally take a number of vows in honour of the Mala Daivam to insure themselves against insecurity. For instance, Kannan of Thalipuzha took a vow that he would propitiate the deity if he got a bumper crop from his cultivation. Mention may be made here that Kannan was the first Cholanaickan to adopt the slash and burn cultivation in the Cholanaickan land. After the harvest he fulfilled his vow.

The Cholanaickan also propitiate their ancestor spirits. They believe that the dead ancestors (male and females) protect them from the evil influences of lesser spirits. Prayers are offered and special vows are made to them whenever any member of the family gets sick. Gourds are generally waved over patients uttering certain mantrams for curing illness. Boiled rice, tobacco, betel leaves and arecanut are the main offerings given to them as well to their supreme god.

Apart from the Mala Daivam, the Cholanaickans also venerate Uliuruvu (metal image of a female tiger) and Kalai Uruvu (a new metal image of an ox). Like many other tribal communities of Kerala the Cholanaickans propitiate the spirits of dead ancestors. For instance, they worship the spirits of the ancestors from the fifth to tenth ascending generation. The metal images representing these dead ancestors are kept in the Devia Kottai (divine basket) along with other deities mentioned above. It is also interesting to point out that the Cholanaickans do not fall behind in worshipping high god. For instance, the Cholanaickans of Panchakolly (Chungathara) range venerate the high god Ganapathy and snake god (serpent). According to Thonna Mathan, the Chemakkaran of Alakkal Alai, a serpent continued to live in his Alai for more than three years. When the children got frightened, the Chemakkaran shook his body and shouted as an oracle that the serpent should leave the cave so as to ensure the protection of the children. The Chemakkaran told this author that the serpent god left the cave. The serpent god has not visited the cave for the last 10 years. However, Thonna Mathan as the tribal chieftain is called, venerates it for the welfare of the Cholanaickans and makes offerings during annual festivals. There are specialists among the Cholanaickans in magic and sorcery. In fact most of the Chemakkarans are magicians and sorcerers.

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Life Crisis and Belief System

No special puberty rites and rituals are observed among the Cholanaickans. However, the menstruating girl is secluded for four days in one corner of the cave. She is not allowed to touch the cooking utensils. On the fifth day she takes bath and thereafter she is allowed to resume her normal household work. The bath on the fifth day after puberty is called Neerattal. A woman during her menstruation period which is called "Thinka" is supposed to be unclean. Cohabitation is prohibited during this period.

Birth

A midwife (Othachi) is called in to attend to the expectant mother when labour pain starts. The wife of the tribal chieftain acts as a midwife. They have no separate place but temporary sheds of bamboo and leaves are constructed for delivery. The mother is secluded in this hut for 40 days. The midwives cut the umbilical cord of the child.

No name giving ceremony is performed among the Cholanaickans, but a name is selected by the Chemakkaran from the mother's line. Generally a child is named at the age of eight or ten.

Death

The Cholanaickans dig a shallow grave, only about waist deep for burial. The deceased is buried with the head towards west. They have their own burial ground. The personal belongings of the deceased are generally buried with the dead. It is the responsibility of the Chemakkaran of each Alai to arrange for the funeral procession and dig the grave. A minimum of seven persons are required for the funeral. The wife of the deceased accompanies the funeral procession to the burial ground. The bereaved members of the deceased family abstain from going out for food gathering for three days.

The Cholanaickans conduct the mortuary rites after a month or so when funds are available. The Chemakkaran officiates as the priest at this ritual. The kin supply rice, roots and tubers for conducting the rites. The ceremony is conducted either on Tuesday or Wednesday, depending upon the availability of funds. The Chemakkaran used a dark turban in olden days when he officiated as priest at the mortuary rites. A cotton head-gear has been substituted in recent times. The Chemakkaran consanguines and affines are fed on this occasion at night. Cooked rice is placed on a leaf for the dead. The kin and the Chemakkaran dance around the leaf throughout the night. On the following morning the Chemakkaran eats the rice. Boiled rice is placed on another leaf in the morning and the departed is propitiated by the Chemakkaran. This rice is also eaten by the priest after the worship. All dead ancestors are also worshipped on this day by offerings of rice, fish, curry and pepper.

The usual way of looking at religions is to regard all of them, or all except one, as bodies of erroneous beliefs and illusory practices. It may be said that the history of

religions had been in great part a history of error and illusion. In all ages men have hoped that by the proper performance of religious actions or observances they would obtain some specific benefit; health and long life, children to carry on their line, material well-being, success in hunting, rain, the growth of crops and multiplication of cattle, victory in war, admission of their souls after death to a paradise, or inversely, release by the extinction of personality from the round of reincarnation.

When we regard the religions of other peoples, or at least those of what are called primitive peoples, as systems of erroneous and illusory beliefs, we are confronted with the problem of how these beliefs came to be formulated and accepted. It is to this problem that anthropologists have given most attention.

There is another way in which we may approach the study of religions. We may entertain at least the possibility of the theory that any religion is an important or even essential part of the social machinery, as are morality and law, part of the complex system by which human beings are enabled to live together in an orderly arrangement of social relations. From this point of view we deal not with the origins but with the social functions of religions, i.e. the contribution that they make to the formation and maintenance of a social order.

There are many persons who would say that it is only true religion (i.e. one's own) that can provide the foundation of an orderly social life. The hypothesis we are considering is that the social function of a religion is independent of its truth or falsity, that religions which we think to be erroneous or even absurd and repulsive, such as those of some savage tribes, may be important and effective parts of the social machinery, and that without these 'false' religions social evolution and the development of modern civilization would have been impossible.

To my mind this is the product of false psychology. For example, it is sometimes held that funeral and mourning rites are the result of a belief in a soul surviving death. If we must talk in terms of cause and effect, I would rather hold the view that the belief in a surviving soul is not the cause but the effect of the rites. Actually the cause-effect analysis is misleading. What really happens is that the rites and the justifying or rationalizing beliefs develop together as parts of a coherent whole. But in this development it is action or the need of action that controls or determines belief rather than the other way about. The actions themselves are symbolic expressions of sentiments.

My suggestion is that in attempting to understand a religion, it is on the rites rather than on the beliefs that we should first concentrate our attention. Much the same view is taken by Loisy, who justifies his selection of sacrificial rites as the subject of his analysis of religion by saying that rites are in all religions the most stable and lasting element, and consequently that in which we can best discover the spirit of ancient cults.

That great pioneer of the science of religion, Robertson Smith also took this view. His view is as follows:

In connection with every religion, whether ancient or modern, we find on the one hand certain beliefs, and on the other certain institutions, ritual

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practices and rules of conduct. Our modern habit is to look at religion from the side of belief rather than that of practice.

Thirty-seven years ago (1908) in a fellowship thesis on the Andaman Islanders (which did not appear in print till 1922), I formulated briefly a general theory of the social function of rites and ceremonies. It is the same theory that underlies the remarks I shall offer on this occasion. Stated in the simplest possible terms the theory is that an orderly social life amongst human beings depends upon the presence in the minds of the member of a society of certain sentiments, which control the behaviour of the individual in his relation to others. Rites can be seen to be the regulated symbolic expressions of certain sentiments. Rites can therefore be shown to have a specific social function when, and to the extent that, they have for their effect to regulate, maintain and transmit from one generation to another sentiment on which the constitution of the society depends. I ventured to suggest as a general formula that religion is everywhere an expression in one form or another of a sense of dependence on a power outside ourselves, a power which we may speak of as a spiritual or moral power.

MALAPANTARAM

The Malapantaram, a food gathering hunting tribal community, live either in rock shelters or in thatched houses made of forest impart and planting leaves. They are mainly found in the higher reaches of the Pampa river of the Ranni and Manimala ranges of the Achenkovil river of the Pathanapuram range and Thalapara hill of the Shenkotta range of Pathanamthitta District.

The Malapantaram, who dwell in forest, worship forest deities. If the Malapantaram is polluted from outside he takes a bath and only then he returns to his home. In case if he fails to take bath, he invites the wrath of forest deities. Those who inhabit the Thalapara and the Aryankavu worship the mountains of Kotangi, Vattamala, Kotamala, Muthamala; they pray and say "oh hills protect us from mishap".

The Malapantarams are hunters and food gatherers and they subsist on a primitive economic system. "The larger the amount of territory necessary for the support of a given community, the looser the connection between the land and the people, and the lower the type of social organization" (Krishna Iyer: 110). In Ranni and Manimala Ranges, they generally live in families of two or three in a locality and move on to another when the food supply is exhausted. Thus they are a nomadic tribal group.

They are patrilineal and patrilocal. In the Pathanapuram Range, they have a Headman called Muppan, whose office is hereditary. He is also the ritual priest of the community, and here we observe a combination of priest and chief. The Muppan enjoys the privilege of free labour and quarter of the produce from the others. Those who go to procure food give a quarter of the produce to him.

Among animals they hunt are sambar, wild boar, black monkey, jungle squirrel, wild pigeon, and wild fowl. But they do not eat the flesh of bison, white monkey and

his utterances are accepted. Otherwise, they are not given heed to. After taking part in *Pettathullal*, which is an interesting ritual at *Erumeli* on the 27th *Dhanu*, January 10th, they begin their march to Sabarimala in easy measured stages at noon the next day and reach Azhutha in the evening. On the way, they offer fried rice and molasses to the crags in the *Peruthode* stream, as they are supposed to be the resting place of Sasta. On the 29th of *Dhanu* (January 12th), they reach the banks of the Pamba in the evening. At *Kallidam Kunnu*, a small pebble is dropped over the crest of the hill to prevent an *asura* who haunts the place from coming out and harming them. The *Pambavilakku* forms one of the most enchanting scenes at night on account of the illuminations and is considered to be in honour of Sasta, who is said to be cooking his food and dining among the Ayyappans that night in disguise and resting there on his way to Sabarimala. The next morning the votaries reach the Sabarimala pagoda, break a coconut on reaching Pathinettampadi, and worship the deity. They make offerings to Kochukadutha and Karuppuswami. At night comes *Makaravilakku*, when there is a procession from the shrine of Malikappurathamma to Ayyappan's shrine accompanied by illuminations. Next morning, they bath in Orakuzhithirtham and enjoy a feast. They then return home. Sasta's boons to votaries are phenomenal and enlarge the circle of his votaries. He protects them from all adversities in the jungle and averts all evil. (L A Krishna Iyer: 192).

The Malayarayan in Manimala makes offerings to the forest deities immediately after harvest in the month of *Kanni* (September and October). They also deserve celibacy for seven days. They make offerings to the five mountains, Thalaparamala, Azhamala, Puthiyamala, Pothenmala, and Savamparamala. The offering consists of one and a quarter measures of rice, fifty one coconuts, sandal, and tulsi leaves. The offering is made for each mountain separately, but in the case of Thalaparamala Mountain an extra coconut is offered. On this occasion a fowl is also sacrificed. The Malayarayan then calls out the name of each of the five hills and gets inspired. He then breaks all the coconuts one by one and utters some inspired talk. The offering is then partaken of by all the devotees. This generally takes place on a Tuesday or Saturday.

On the 28th of *Makaram*, the Malayarayan worship all the implements like the bill-hook, sickle and axe in a room along with seeds. Thorns of *Thodali* (*Zizyphus rugosa*) are kept over each implement. The door is then closed. After three days the room is opened at midday, and the men perform dance to the accompaniment of drummers and pipers. Coconuts are broken and fowls are sacrificed in honour of Bhagavathi. On the next morning, they collect their implements and go to their homes.

The Malayarayan believe that it is a bad omen for going anywhere if a man or woman is seen carrying a load of fuel or an old mat. A man coming with an ox or bill-hook is believed to be bad omen.

A Malayarayan woman is prohibited from visiting the crop for seven days during her menstruation; otherwise the yield will be very poor. Similarly they do not have sex in *Chingom*, *Kanni*, and *Tulam*, nor do they cultivate the land because their ancestor worship is now confined to Malayarayans who are killed by a tiger or wild elephant or who meet with an unnatural death as their spirits are believed to influence the welfare of the tribal people.

A metallic image is generally made in the case of unnatural deaths. A small box is made of vertical stones and capstone open in front on ceremonial days. It is worshipped on *Sankramam* days in *Vrischigom* (November and December) and *Medom* (April and May) annually. The image is washed and touched with sandal paste, and tulsi leaves (*Ocimum sanctum*) are placed over its head. It is then placed inside the stone box. Then they make offerings of raw rice, toddy and milk. Some drops of toddy are then sprinkled all round. A coconut is broken and fowl sacrificed. The rice is cooked and a small quantity is placed on a leaf at the foot of a pala or jack tree. All persons then clap hands, pray and return home after closing the opening with the stone lid.

As stated above, the Malayarayan worships five mountains namely, Thalaparamala, Azhamala, Puthiyamala, Pothanmala, and Savamparamala in Manimala. These steep mountains are worshipped because they are believed to possess a special local spirit who acts as their guardian. The natural object is propitiated, because it is believed to possess supernatural power. In other words the Malayarayan does not separate the spirit from the matter, but adores the thing in its totality as a divine being. Five stones symbolizing the five mountains are installed in a shed or outside and are worshipped on Onam and Vishu days.

Thalaparamala has the seat of honour in the shed. Azhamala is installed outside the shed owing to its fraternal relationship with others. The shed is purified and stones washed. Some raw rice, sandal paste and tulsi leaves are placed on a plantain leaf in front, while five coconuts are placed on another leaf. Fifty one archanas are made for Thalaparamala, and fifty for others. A fowl is sacrificed and coconuts are broken. The priests get an afflatus. He yells and screams out some prophetic words. Coconut and beaten rice are distributed to all. The raw rice is cooked and a small quantity is placed on twenty one leaves in honour of ancestor-spirits. Water is sprinkled and prayers offered. A ball of rice is placed at the foot of a jack tree. Prayers are again offered and they return home. (L A Krishna Iyer: 191)

In the Todupuzha Range, the Malayarayan has stone representing the hills. Outside the shed he keeps the image of a serpent. Every Saturday and Wednesday he lights a lamp. On *Sankramam* day in *Karkadagom*, he lights a lamp, throws coconuts on a rock and offers prayers. The serpent is worshipped so that he may have enough progeny and prosperity. Once in a year in the month of April, a *Pulluvanpattu* is performed.

The Malayarayans worship several mountains and hill deities including Sabarimala Sasta. It may be mentioned that the Pathinettampadi (18 steps) at Sabarimala represents 18 forest deities. Some of these forest deities are worshipped by Malayarayans also. "The worship of Sasta constitute an important feature of the religion of the Malayarayan. He worships the deity at Sabarimala and Arakulam. His worship at Sabarimala betrays many animistic features. The deity receives offerings from his votaries annually. The annual festival falls about the thirteenth of January and continues for five days. Sasta is very frigid in his tastes and expects a high standard of purity in his tastes and expects

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a high standard of purity in his votaries for fourteen days. They should abstain from meat and sexual intercourse. The Malayarayans go in batches led by *Periaswamy*, who is the head of the fraternity. During the period of abstinence, they propitiate Sasta, Karuppuswami, Kochukadutha, Ganapathi, and other crests of hills. The day before their march to Sabarimala, all the votaries put their kit together. It is believed that sexual indulgence would affect their crop. During the pollution period they do not cultivate their land.

PALIYAN

The Paliyan, one of the scheduled tribes of the Kerala, are found in the Vandanmet and Periyar Ranges of Idukki and Pathanamthitta District. A few of them have embraced Christianity. They inhabit the Cardamom Hills in the midst of cardamom cultivators at an elevation of 3000 feet. They have been much influenced by the cultural contact of the plainsmen. Their fertile land have been encroached upon by the settlers and they were forced to move to inhospitable regions by the advent of cardamom planters.

The Paliyan are patrilineal and patrilocal. Each hamlet has a head man called *Kanikkaran*. He is assisted by three other functionaries in settling matters relating to the social control and tribal council. Along with the plainsmen they also cultivate cardamom. They subsist mainly on shifting cultivation. During the period of sowing both men and women observe celibacy. The restriction is observed during harvesting. Any breach of this traditional custom entails harm to the crops. They also cultivate horticultural crops. They supplement their food crops by hunting and gathering.

Religion

The Paliyan worship Vanadevatha, Mariamma, Karuppaswamy and Kaaliyamma. The older generations among them inhabiting in the thick forest and depending on forest produce for their subsistence worship the forest deities in general and Vanadevata in particular. They pray for protection from wild games, better crops and forest produces like honey, fruits and tubers. Whenever they go for hunting they worship forest goddess by offering betel leaves, coconut plantain, sandal sticks etc. Honey is offered to Vanadevata immediately after its collection. Fresh honey is squeezed from the beehives into seven separate *couva* leaves (leaves of arrowroot) and then it is offered to seven goddesses of the forest.

The vanadevata is also worshipped when they cultivate their land and also after the harvest. Sarkarapongal or paalpongol is prepared and offered to Vanadevata, sarkarapongal is prepared with raw rice and jaggery and paalpongol is prepared with milk, raw rice and sugar. They believe that the Vanadevata will protect their standing crops from the wild animals.

Consequent upon the ecological and economic changes there has been changes in the traditional belief system among the Paliyan. They have started worshipping Gods like Ganapathy, Murugan and Ayyappan.

chakarapayasam. The rice pongal is cooked and offered to Mariamma. The rice pongal is prepared by the girls who are not matured. A white fowl is also sacrificed.

THE TODAS OF NILGIRI HILLS

The Todas, the most famous tribe of south India, have been studied by missionaries like Jesuit Priest Jacome Finico, Ling Cathrine and social scientists including River (1906), Walker (1986) and Paul E. Hockings. Rivers focus retention on the ethnography of the Todas. Walker has brought out the changes that took place among the Todas.

They were pastoral tribal people. They practised fraternal polyandry. Nowadays, they have started adapting monogamous marriages particularly Christian Todas. The Todas are segmented into two endogamous groups; Tarthars and Teivali.

Religion

The Todas still believe that the Toda, their buffalo herds in Nilgiri and the wood have been created by their god Tekkisy. They propitiate also Hindu gods and goddesses like Muruga, Vinayagar, Lakshmi, Saraswathi, etc., on account of their contact with the Hindu population. Many of them have embraced Christianity in the present days.

Consequent upon their contact with the Hindus of the neighbouring population, Todas go on pilgrimage to Sabarimala Ayyappa Temple in Idukki district, from the last two decades or so. It is interesting to note that even the Guruswami for Sabarimala pilgrimage hails from the Toda community. Some of them have gone on Sabarimala pilgrimage eighteen times. A few of them started naming the children as Ayyappan or Manikandan. In spite of their contact with Christianity and Hinduism, there does not seem to be any no need for the Todas to discard the traditional ritual aspects of Toda pastoralism.

Pastoral Life and Buffalo Herds

Writing on the pastoral life buffalo herds Sathya Narayan (2004) observed:

The economic and social life of the Todas revolved round large herds of their buffaloes. The religious observances, beliefs and legends are centred around buffaloes even now; the ritual aspect of Toda pastoralism remains intact. Two categories of buffaloes are recognized among the whole sock of buffaloes namely "sacred and ordinary domestic household buffaloes. Among the temple buffaloes different grades exist in terms of sacred and more scared and are attached with dairy temples of various patricians. Dairyman-priests exist for each patrician and for specific grades of temple buffaloes and they only milk these buffaloes observing strict codes to

maintain the purity of temples. In a ritually prescribed way, dairy man priests make butter by churning milk and the clarified butter (ghee) is sometimes sold outside but mainly used for domestic consumption as the quantity derived nowadays is too low even for domestic consumption. Any one including the priest never consumes the raw milk obtained from temple buffaloes. Only after turning it into butter milk can it be consumed. In the case of household domestic buffaloes, the man who possesses them can milk and even sell the raw milk.

Sacrifice of Buffaloes

There has been frequent controversies and disputes within the Toda society on the practice of sacrificing buffaloes. In consequence, the state Government had to interfere to settle the issues. Buffalo sacrifice usually takes place as part of the funeral ceremony before cremating the dead at the specific spot of the cremation ground. In this connection Walker (1986:223) says that buffaloes of appropriate grades can be sacrificed by striking them on the crown of their heads with the back of an iron axe especially meant for this purpose. The sacrifice is conducted in this way to release the soul of the animal from an undisfigured body so that it may join the deceased in the afterworld.

In the past, two to five buffaloes used to be sacrificed at a funeral. Nowadays, sacrifice of at least one temple buffalo in the case of male and one domestic buffalo (never a temple buffalo) for a female is made.

On the funeral day, the Todas of the opposite sub-group dance and sing in honour of the dead (people of the deceased person's sub-group do not join this dance) build the pyre, and catch the buffaloes (which would have been already earmarked just before the funeral) for sacrifice. It is the usual practice that when one sub-group observes mourning the people of the other sub-group remain somewhat jovial and busy. Some Todas including women are against the sacrifice of buffalo as it is a cruel practice. Some of the educated members of the Todas of the Seva Sanmarga Sangam in 1970 represented to the government to stop the blind faith in buffalo sacrifice in their funerals. In the early part of 1987 some young Todas protested in front of the District Collector's office of the Ootacamund, Nilgiris to stop this practice. According to Sathya Narayan (2004:243-244):

Between the middle of 1994 and October 1996 (during the period of present study) about 21 Toda deaths were recorded (14 males and 7 females). For 11 of the 14 funerals of males, buffalo sacrifice, i.e. temple buffaloes, was made; for three funerals of males (two from Inkithi patrician and from Myodr patrician, both belonging to Tarthars sub-group), no such sacrifice was made. In the case of female funerals, for four (two each from Tarthars and Teivali subgroups) buffalo sacrifice, i.e. domestic buffaloes, was conducted and for three funerals (two from Tarthars and one Teivali) buffalo sacrifice was not done. It should be mentioned here that only one

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buffalo was sacrificed in all the 15 cases of buffalo-sacrifice funerals in which no buffalo sacrifice was made, it is said that the deceased person, before his or her death, either expressed a wish of non-sacrifice of buffalo or did not say anything about it (which ultimately was left to the decision of the family members of the deceased to decide).

Funeral Music and Rites

In the past, the Kota tribe used to perform music for the Toda funeral and carry the sacrificed buffalo for consumption. This custom is no longer in practice. The Toda at present employ music bands from Ootacamund town to perform the funeral music. The sacrificed buffalo is sold to the traders in the beef market who visit the funeral spot on hearing the news from the Toda.

Each patrician has his own specified cremation ground. Sometimes, these are located far away from the hamlet where the death has taken place. Nowadays the tendency is to cremate the dead near the hamlet.

THE KURICHIAN OF WAYANAD

The average elevation of the Wayanad plateau above sea level is 3000 ft. The main tribal communities which inhabit the region are the Paniyans, Kurichians, Mullakurumas, UraliKuruma, or Vettu Kurumbas, Kattunayakans or Ten Kurumbas, Wayanad Kaders, Adiyans, Kunduvadiyans, Kalanadis, Tachanad Muppans.

The Kurichian call themselves as 'Kari Nayanmar'. The word 'Kari' has the meaning plough. Kurichian engage themselves in plough cultivation and hence the name Karinayar. Even among Nayars in central Kerala there is a sub caste called 'Vellaimanayar', 'Vellaima' means agriculture. These Nayars too got their name 'Vellaima' on account of their occupational specialisation in agriculture.

Writing on the Kurichians Mathur (1970) observes that "The Kurichians are one of the oldest inhabitants of Wayanad. There is a place called "*Kurichiat*" where they claim that they have fought along with the army of Kerala Varma Raja of Kottayam against the British. According to some historians the Kurichians protected the king for nine years until 1805 when he committed suicide. It was the Kurichians Commander, Talakkara Chandu who commanded the Kurichian army against the forces of the East India Company. The Kurichians also believe that they are the descendants of a Kari Nair woman. According to a tradition they came from Travancore in order to assist the Raja of Kottayam in the annexation of Wayanad after defeating the original Veda King. When they returned to their home they were excommunicated by their caste panchayat for the offence of crossing the Kora Puzha (Kora river). In the past, crossing of the northern parts of Malabar was treated as a caste offence. The Kurichians sought the assistance of the Kottayam Raja, who is said to have rehabilitated them in the Wayanad forests.

The Kurichians are aristocratic among the hill men of Kerala occupying the highest social status in the tribal hierarchy. They observe touch pollution against all

castes and communities except the Namputhiri Brahmins. They are skilled bow-men. They traditionally practised shifting cultivation in the extensive tracts and virgin lands. Majority of them today own lands. But a number of them have transferred their rights of possession to settlers particularly money lenders, merchants, etc. As many as 112 members of a lineage (*Mittom*) are found to be living in an extended family of Kaniambetta revenue village. According to 1961 Census, their population was 11,849 but increased to 15,700 in 1971. They speak a dialect of Malayalam.

The Kurichians are matrilineal. Among them we find matrilineal descent, matrilineal inheritance and succession and virilocal residence. It may be mentioned here that females leave their parental house after their marriage and shift to their husband's house. But immediately after the death of their husbands they return with their children to their natal house. The property of the Taravad or *Mittom* is managed by the eldest member who is called *piton* or *pooppnan*. There are more than 50 Taravads in Wayanad and each Taravad is divided into two six *Mittoms*. As has already been started most of the Kurichians own land. But a few of them were forced to transfer their land owing to indebtedness to money lenders and traders. This will be evident from the following cases.

Status of Kurichia Women and Belief System

We find in the Kurichian community, matrilineal society in which descent, kinship and other social relations are legally reckoned through the female. The Kurichian women have a considerable share in the tribal life. They even have an important role in the economic, social and ritual activities, a trait which influences all customs of tribal life including the institution of marriage and kinship. The Kurichians believe that the mother is solely responsible for the growth of the baby in the womb. These and other beliefs of the Kurichians mould their attitude towards kinship.

This outlook governs the rules of descent, inheritance, succession in rank, chieftain, hereditary offices, rituals etc. thus, social position is reckoned through the female line from a man to his sister's children, and this exclusive matrilineal conception of kinship is of paramount importance in the regulations of marriage. The working of these rules of kinship can be seen at the time of death. The rituals connected with burial, lamentation and mourning, etc. are based on the maternal kinship.

Status of Women in the Family

The head of the family among the Kurichians is called the *pooppnan*. He manages the property powers to punish any member of the family who violates the tribal norms. Men and women work jointly for the subsistence of the family, but the workload on the sexes is not equal. The Kurichian women do not bear the brunt of the drudgery and hard work. Indeed heavier jobs in the paddy fields and plantations are undertaken by men.

We have already stated that the kinship ideas of the Kurichians and other matrilineal tribal communities of Wayanad are based on the principles that everything

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descends through the female. The guardianship of a Kurichian family rests with the elders. In other words, the powers and functions are vested in the men of each generation, though they have to be transmitted by the women. However, in the observance of taboos and in the performance of rituals and ceremonies the woman does not enjoy the same privilege or rank as the man. No woman can ever become the head of a sub clan and thus she cannot be a chieftain.

The Kurichians prefer to have the first born to be a female as they believe that if the first child is a male the mother is bound to die at her third delivery. For instance, Kerri sister of Chappan *Poppas* (Marathi clan) of Kottathara village gave birth to a male child in the first instance. She died at her third delivery.

Ceremonially, there is an explicit difference in the behaviour towards female and male children. When a female child is born five women from the neighboring *Mittoms* (sub clan) are invited on the fifth day to bathe the new born and the mother, whereas four ladies are invited to do so on the fourth day in the case of a boy. The midwife (*pettichi*) is in charge of bathing the mother and the child in flowing water. On the ninth and fifteenth days nine and fifteen women are invited for a purificatory bath, besides a midwife from neighbouring *Mittoms*, irrespective of the sex of the child. But on the 21st and the 45th days, apart from the midwife, only two women are invited for a purificatory bath; it is only after the 40th day that the menfolk are allowed to see the mother and the new-born. A Kurichia woman is removed to an *Erokottupura* (a hut for confinement of women during their periods and birth) and she is confined there in this house for 60 days after her delivery. This house is generally located 200-300 yards away from the household. The Kurichians prefer to have the final purificatory bath of a woman after her delivery on a Sunday. They consider Sunday auspicious for the long life and health of the new born, his mother and his maternal uncle. Friday is inauspicious for a purificatory bath for it is likely to invite the wrath of evil spirits.

Magical practices and rituals associated with the birth are current among the Kurichians. A *Pettichi* (Kurichia midwife) is called in when the labour pain starts; she massages the mother's abdomen chanting a spell for safe delivery. Except rubbing oil on the abdomen of the expectant mother the *Pettichi* does really nothing to ease the labour pain. If the labour pain becomes acute and unbearable and there is delay in delivery, the *pooppan* (head of the *mittoms*) calls in the *Karthalakkaran* (oracle) and ascertains from him the reason for the delay in delivery by divination. If the oracle proclaims that the delay in delivery is due to the fact that the woman has committed adultery and has earned the wrath of the goddess Karumpuli Bhagavathy, the *pooppan* and members of her family vow to excommunicate her after delivery. For instance, a Kurichia woman was excommunicated from the Maradi clan a decade ago by the elders under the advice of the oracle. She was alleged to have committed adultery which caused delay in delivery. If a woman has committed delivery before her marriage a fine of 32 *panams* is levied from her family by the tribal council. In case adultery is committed after marriage it is the responsibility of her husband to pay the fine. Once a woman is excommunicated her death rites are also performed.

The Talikettu Kalyanam (Tali-tying marriage) used to be performed by the Kurichians of Wayanad. A Kurichia girl must, before puberty, go through the *Talikettu*

Kaliyanam. This ritual was performed by the lineage (*mittom*) every five or seven years for all unmarried girls. But the *Talikettu Kalyanam* was not generally performed for nine girls together belonging to nine different lineages at the same time. The important rite of this ceremony is the tying of a heart-shaped gold ornament (*tali*) with the help of a white silk thread round the neck of the girl by a bridegroom. The groom is paid his fees for the ritual, and he remains as the ritual husband (*machunan*) of the girl throughout his life, but he is not entitled to visit her again.

The Kurichians are patrilineal; the wife moves on her marriage, to the ancestral house of her husband and she lives with him till his death. Her children are brought up by their father and invariably return to their own lineage at puberty. A boy then begins to manage his *mittom* property under the direction of his *pooppan*. A girl shortly after marriage moves from the lineage house (*mittom*) by the common consent of her *pooppan* and her father; either to her *pooppan's* son or to the maternal nephew of her father.

Immediately after the *Talikettu Kalyanam*, the girl is given in marriage to a boy who is responsible for looking after her. However, she would not sleep with her husband until she attains puberty. Thus, the puberty ceremony of a Kurichia girl used to be celebrated at her husband's place in olden times. The celebration is held within a month of her menarche. Since the *Talikettu Kalyanam* has fallen into disuse, Kurichia girls are married off only after the attainment of puberty. The puberty ceremony takes place at the girl's father's house. The Kurichia girls are kept in seclusion after their first menstruation for 5 to 6 months during which period she is not allowed to see male members. The expenditure for conducting the puberty ceremony was met by her husband in former times. The post puberty marriage (*Kettukalyanam*) was initiated along with the *Talikettu Kalyanam*, the important rite of which was being the handing over of a loin cloth by the boy to the girl in the presence of his kith and her kin.

A Kurichia girl is now generally kept in seclusion for seven days during her first menstruation. On the seventh day she is bathed by the womenfolk of her husband's family as well as those of her family in a nearby pool between 6 and 8 pm. where the water is not stagnant. She must be dipped nine times in the flowing water. Thus it is the duty of the women belonging to the girl's mother and her husband's mother to give this ritual bath to the girl. When she returns home from her bath, a cow dung emulsion is sprinkled all the way as a purificatory ritual. It is the duty of the tribal chieftain of the groom's clan or his representative to perform the rite. A purificatory ceremony is also performed by sprinkling the water of the tender coconut around the dwelling house and family shrines. When the purificatory act is performed a wick lamp is lighted with a measure of paddy and rice each in the family shrines (*Nikal*) and the girl is taken clockwise around it by seven women at every circumambulation. Rice is sprinkled on her. The girl and the woman who conducts this rite are fed with vegetarian food. They are also presented with betel leaves. The mother's brother presents a loin cloth, ear-ring, and bracelet to the girl after the feast.

A Kurichia woman is in a state of pollution for seven days during her periods, and she becomes purified only on the eighth day after a bath in the morning. The women of a *mittom* have to live in an outhouse, a little far away from the main dwelling house, during their periods. They are enjoined to keep off the ancestor-shrines. The

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Kurichia women observe these restrictions even today during their periods. The important point to be noted here is that a Kurichia woman is required to avoid touching other members of her *mittom* and abstain from going near the sacred places on the ancestral estate. The safety and well-being of the *mittom* is believed to be in jeopardy if she does not observe these restrictions.

Both birth and death cause pollution to the members of the clan. This causes ritual impurity to all the members of the clan. This pollution does not disappear even if the impure person has a dozen baths a day. But, once the prescribed pollution period is over, the individual regains his normal ritual status after a bath. For instance, *pulakali* or death pollution may be described as the most acute. The members of the *mittoms* have to observe pollution for sixteen days. During this period they have to observe certain food taboos. The *pulakuli* is usually performed on the 16th day, but, sometimes when a *pooppan* dies special mortuary rites are performed on the 7th and 9th days. The body of the *pooppan* is usually cremated. No ritual mourning is observed for an infant; only the *pooppan* takes a bath and change his robes after the corpse is buried. The women are prohibited either from attending the funeral or visiting the burial ground when the charmed bones are collected.

The chief mourner among the Kurichians is the eldest nephew. The widow is a very insignificant mourner among them. Once her husband dies, she returns to her natal lineages, sometimes, even before the corpse is buried or cremated. However, she has to abstain from meat, fish, betel leaves and arecanut. Widows may not wear coloured garments and jewellery.

The women mourners are required to reverse their jewellery except the *tali*. The widow does not remove even that. The *tali* is removed when her *machunan* (ritual husband) dies. The Kurichia women-mourners dress themselves in a white shoulder cloth, the upper ends of which are tied into a knot in the front.

Women and Property

"Property among the Kurichian is inherited in the female line, but a male must be there to manage it. However, the case of widows is different. She returns to her natal *mittom* and her husband's property will be inherited by his sister's son. In no case can woman sell or transfer any property.

The *pooppan's* wife in a *mittom* is called the *Odakkarahi*. She has certain duties, functions and privileges which are as follows.

1. In Kurichia (*mittom*) lineage more than two members share the same kitchen. The women belonging to those *mittom* cook the food in rotation under the supervision of the wife of the *pooppan*. The *Odakkarathi* (wife of *pooppan*) measures the rice required by the *mittom* every day.
2. She is in charge of the post-puberty and post-delivery treatment of women in a *mittom*.
3. She is the mother of all women of a *mittom*, both affinal and consanguineal. She is addressed by all females of the *mittom* either as mother or grandmother.

4. She is in charge of reporting the ailments of any of the members of the *mittom* to the *pooppan*, whose duty it is to arrange divination by the oracle to ascertain the cause.
5. The *Odakkarathi* is responsible for furnishing information to the head of the *mittom* when a girl first menstruates.
6. The first sowing is done by the *pooppan* and the *odakkarathi*.
7. The first harvest is gathered by the *pooppan* and thereafter by his wife. It is only after this ceremonious harvesting that members start gathering the crop.
8. The first threshing and measuring of the paddy is also done by the *odakkarathi*. She does this after propitiating the *Munnam Daivam*.
9. We have already said that the *odakkarathi* is in charge of measuring the rice for cooking food. When the rice is cleaned and the water is drained by the women who are in charge of the kitchen for the day, the *odakkarathi* ceremoniously puts one handful of rice in the boiling water after propitiating the *Athiralan Daivam* (*Munnam Daiavam*).
10. She assists all the members of the *mittom* in rearing the dogs.
11. She is responsible for the maintenance of the sanitation of the *mittom*. The women who are brought to the *mittom* by marriage are expected to sweep the courtyard and plaster it with cowdung emulsion.
12. No married woman can visit her husband's *mittom* or their parent's lineage without the permission of the *odakkarathi*. She provides them with new clothes and money required for the trips.

The Kurichians believed that the woman is a necessity for a family. No maid servant is employed even by a rich Kurichia *mittom*. One of the elders say that their belief is that those who lead good family life need not go to Benares because they sacrificed many of their comforts for running the family. As a matter of fact, they believe that they are bound to go to paradise if they lead a normal family life, observing their dharma, morality and have compassion for animals.

Barren Women

The Kurichians believe that the women become barren due to the commission of sins during their previous birth. Barrenness is considered a punishment from god. When a woman fails to give birth to a child a Kurichian is permitted to take a second wife. The barren woman is looked down upon by the Kurichia society. Her husband's second wife enjoys a superior social status than the barren woman. But if the *odakkarathi* happens to be a barren woman (*Machi*) she is not debarred from enjoying her status and privileges. In that case the *pooppan* is not allowed to marry for a second time. In a house where there are two *odakkarathis* their status is determined by the degree of preference she gets from her husband. However, if she is barren, she does not enjoy a better status in family affairs.

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Status of Widows

When a man dies, his household continues to function as a productive unit with the aid of his brothers and nephews. The property of the deceased is at the disposal of the matrilineal kin but the chief claimants are his sister's children. The widow joins either her grown up sons or her own parents. Unless the deceased has not set apart a portion of his self-acquired property, she has no right to any share of her late husband's property. The remaining property is inherited by the adult sons and daughters of the deceased sister.

There is no lowering of the status of a widow in the Kurichia society if she remarries after the period of ritual mourning. Only very old women, who do not have recourse to remarriage, remain as widows. A widow is respected by her family. However, she is not given the place of a family counsellor. The traditional Hindu attitude is present among the Kurichians and a widow is considered inauspicious in ritual function. Even the widow of the pooppan has to return to her natal lineage. For instance, the Palliara pooppan's wife returned to her natal lineage when her husband Raman Pooppan died in 1973.

When a woman remarries her husband does not pay back the bride price (*Kana Panam*) of Rs. 5. On the other hand, when her first husband dies and she returns to her natal lineage, she gets back the amount.

Divorce is not very frequent among the Kurichians. However, whenever the husband and wife quarrel, the former repudiates the latter and the divorce proceedings are generally initiated by the husband. The frequency of divorce and remarriage is a matter of significance in determining the status of women in a society. Remarriage of a widow and divorce are something unthinkable among the orthodox Hindus. But among the Kurichians, men are free to divorce their spouses. When a woman wants to divorce her husband she goes to her *mittom* and refuses to return to her husband's *mittom*. When several requests from her husband's people for her return fail it is inferred that she is unwilling to cohabit together. In the meantime the elders go to her husband's place to negotiate the divorce. The husband has the right to excommunicate his wife for adultery. There have been many instances of a woman leaving her husband on account of incompatibility of temperament. It goes without saying that the children, in case of a divorce, always follow their mother. This is, no doubt, another reason why divorce is less popular with men, than with women.

The position of a daughter-in-law creates problems of accommodation and adjustment. She generally comes from a different lineage and is therefore confronted with altogether new social interactions. Like caste Hindus who live in joint families the Kurichia daughter-in-law is subjected to no lesser difficulties of adjustment, for she remains in her in-law's house throughout her married life. Husband and wife work together in productive and domestic spheres of the *mittom*. A daughter-in-law must stand five feet away from her husband's father. Similarly, a sister's daughter has to stand five feet away from her maternal uncle. The sister's daughter is responsible for helping the family and washing the clothes of her maternal uncle.

As soon as the daughter-in-law enters the *mittom*, she has to face her mother-in-law and her husband's *odakkarathi*. In olden days when the daughter-in-law was an immature girl, she was looked after by her husband's maternal uncle. The daughter-in-law is expected to do the household chores ungrudgingly and to perfection. A little negligence on her part does not generally provide her mother-in-law or the *odakkarathi* an opportunity to create a unpalatable scene. Consequently hot words are rarely exchanged in quarrels and filthy language is seldom used. The daughter-in-law is expected to know rudiments of cooking, sweeping the ground, milking the cattle and watching the crops. She is also supposed to know weeding the field, winnowing and threshing the paddy.

The husband has the exclusive right to his wife's consortium; he may either divorce or excommunicate for adultery. When the husband initiates the divorce proceedings he loses the bride price which her mother or brother has given him, and his children leave his *mittom* with their mother. A wife may seek divorce from her husband for cruelty and incompatibility. A marriage may sometimes be suspended if the brother-in-law engages in a serious quarrel with the lady's husband.

The failure of a woman to bear children is a misfortune that befalls her lineage but it is no reason for her husband to seek divorce. However, her prestige does suffer in many ways if she is barren.

The spouse is the chief mourner at the death of a man or woman but the mourning rituals are more strictly enforced against the wife than the husband. A widow continues to wear her *machunan's tali* around her neck. She removes it only at the death of her *machunan*. She is secluded for a long period of time than a widower.

If an adult belonging to a marriageable clan lives with a Kurichia girl he is compelled to marry her provided he is willing to pay a fine of Rs. 5. In case she becomes pregnant and her paramour refuses to marry her, she is allowed to deliver the child in her *mittom* and the baby is looked after by her maternal uncle. She is permitted to remarry.

When a man, whether married or unmarried, commits adultery with a married woman he is fined Rs. 5 by the tribal council. Similarly, when there is illicit sexual relations between unmarried boys and girls, boys are regarded at fault. They are forced to marry such girls. Punishment for adultery outside the tribe is excommunication. However, when a spinster commits adultery with a married man, the aggrieved wife can claim compensation from the erring woman for trespass upon her rights. But in such cases also the fine must be paid through the tribal council.

It has already been pointed out that the Kurichia women during their period and delivery are secluded and are prohibited from coming near the family shrines including those of ancestors. Kurichia girls are generally permitted to enter the compounds of the shrines before their menstruation. Once the Kurichia females start to cohabit with their husbands they are prohibited from entering the compounds of their shrines. They are allowed to enter these shrines only after menopause. No marriage was celebrated in olden days without the consent of the maternal uncle. Today even the consent of the groom is sought before marriage.

The Kurichia also subsist on toddy tapping. Even today Kurichiyas do not consider tapping toddy as a low level occupation. They believe that toddy is a food item and

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1. Villages where the Chenchus live with other tribal communities like Sugalis, Lambadis or Banjaras.
2. Villages exclusively inhabited by the Chenchus.
3. Villages inhabited by multi-ethnic population where they are found to live not only among different castes, but also with Muslims.
4. Most of the primitive tribe of the India believe that world is full of mysterious powers which tremendously influence their destiny. These powers are, generally, beyond the control of an ordinary people. The world around these unseen powers is believed to be teeming with them. These powers are either to be controlled or subordinated by some actions of occult practices or esoteric practices, rites and rituals or to be propitiated with offerings, prayers and sacrifices for perpetuation of the group through adjustments. These gradually created an institutionalized belief system-systematic practices, procedures etc. from the hoary past and thus created a monolithic structure of religion.

The Chenchus, being one of the primitive tribes of the India, have to control some mysterious powers by performing certain rites and rituals.

The Chenchus practise magic, through some experts, in order to control some spirits suspected to cause harm. They also worship certain gods and goddesses for prosperity and happiness.

According to Bhowmick (1992) that magic forms part of Chenchu religion as it involves commissioning the services of supernatural powers. By following some magical practices, certain desired effects are expected by the Chenchus.

The Chenchus perform magical rites only through divination. The Chenchu magic is broadly divided into two categories, viz.

- (1) White magic or protective magic and
- (2) Black magic or destructive magic.

The Chenchus employ white magic for curing the diseases and preventing illnesses. There are some persons who are expert in the white magic. They are locally known as Gaddecheppuvaru. These specialists prescribe remedial measures. These magical practices accompany incantations, using talisman, special propitiation, etc. They are the healers; they employ their craft exclusive for bringing fortunes for the people.

The Chenchus have their own indigenous technique on treatment with rare medicinal plants for different kinds of diseases. Some of the herbal medicines and their uses are given below:

1. If a woman suffers from pain at menstruation, she is given the juice of Yarrabilledu leaves. She has to take the same medicine for one or two days. During this period she should eat cooked rice and chilli powder with some ghee (clarified butter). She should not take milk or any sweet-meat during this period.

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2. The leaves of Dosari Aku, Jammi Aku, Tangedu Aku, Kanuga Aku, are ground to a paste and the juice is extracted and along with garlic is given to a woman in menstruation to prevent pregnancy.
3. If a Chenchu is impotent, he is advised to eat a tuber called Magosirigadda along with some sugar, so as to make him potent.
4. For curing snake bite, juice of strychnos colurine (Nagamusti) is administered. Its juice is poisonous, if consumed in normal course.
5. For curing all skin diseases, the powder of the roots of Margosa, Tamarindus, Physalis, Peruviana (Pamubudda) is applied.
6. For curing paralysis, the paste of Cissus, Quandrangularis (Nalleru) is used for four days.
7. Treatment of fever and coughs, by divination and sorcery.

For performing the rituals, the courtyard is cleaned. Some spot in the courtyard is smeared with cow dung paste. He makes a fire with wood at that spot. Sorcerer takes bath and sits in front of the fire. He applies the ash of Sambrani (incense) to his own head thrice. The persons, who come on behalf of the patient, are also directed to sit there in front of the sorcerer. One person sits behind the sorcerer, so as to hold him when the deity possesses him. The sorcerer starts playing Tappeta (a musical instrument) by shaking his head with increasing vehemence before the fire. He invokes all the deities, one by one. Finally, the deity that causes the fever possesses the sorcerer and through him her name is also revealed. Through him she also gives the reason for causing the fever and asks them to perform worship to her. Then they propitiate the deity and pray for curing the ailment. They also take vows and promise offerings, if the patient is cured. The patient performs worship to that deity after he has completely recovered. Sorcerer is given Rs. 5. as remuneration for his services. *Bhowmick (1992)*

Thus if a Chenchu suffers from fever a sorcerer comes for curing the illness. The sorcerer or the spirit doctor cleans the courtyard of the patient and places fowl, two coconut and three betel leaves which are important items for the ritual. He utters some incantation while two men catch the legs and the hands of the patient and move him round the area twice again uttering some incantations. The fowl is sacrificed. It is believed that the patient is cured.

Haimendorf had narrated another method of divination for curing the diseases. He observed that a few Chenchus are experts in divinations, an art which practiced in various circumstances. The most important requisite is an oval smooth river pebble called Sakuman Rai, which is a family possession and handed down from father to son. The diviner sits in front of the patient places the sacred stone on his own head and holds both hands open in front of his face, so as to catch the stone as it falls. Then he begins enumerating the names of gods and goddesses, pausing between each name to give the stone time to respond. If it slips into diviner's hands, it is a sign that the deity is not responsible, but if the stone remains on his

head, he knows that the deity last mentioned has caused the patient's illness. If the stone falls to the ground during the experiment, it is taken as sign that the patient will die in a short time. Once it has been established which deity is the cause of illness, offerings are promised in the case of recovery, but no rite is performed while the patient is ill. This method of divination is employed during difficult labour case, when the diviner tries to discover the God willing to help accelerate the delivery of the child.' *Bhowmick (1992) (pp. 189-200).*

The Chenchus worship gods like Rakta Veeradu, Onti Veeradu, Peddamma, Veerabhadru, Bhyravaswamy and Mysamma for causing harm to their enemies. The Chenchus believed Mysamma is a great "Shakti". She is a fearful goddess if she fulfils the desire of the devotee; she is propitiated with black fowls and goats. She is also offered *payasam* with rice and jaggery. The flesh of the sacrificed animal is cooked and eaten there.

The deity Peddamma is worshipped for ensuring the death of the enemy. The deity, Peddamma, is believed to take the form of a tiger and kills the rival. The person who prays to the deity for the death of his enemy never reveals this secret even to his closest relations. He even participates in the death ceremony of the enemy and fixes up a day soon after the ceremony is over for fulfilling his promise. He invites his kin-members and performs the worship to that deity.

There is a strong belief among the Chenchus that if a tribal makes a promise to the deity Peddamma, for helping him to stop drinking of liquor, he will get the desired result without fail. Bhowmick has pointed out

... in a village one person was killed by a tiger while he was going through the forest. Then the villagers went to the spirit medium or Gaddecheppuvadu, who is living in village Boyipenta for detecting the cause of his death. Then the spirit medium performed magical rites and detected the cause of the death. The villagers came to know that the person made a promise to the deity Peddamma, for helping him eschew his drinking habit. He took an oath before the deity that he should be killed by the tiger (another form of Peddamma) if he broke his promise and drank liquor from that time onwards. But that person did not give up his drinking habit. Consequently, goddess Peddamma took the form of the tiger and killed him. *Haimendorf (1943:199).*

Indeed magic seems to have played so prominent role in old Chenchu culture that there can be little doubt that the source of the black magic is to be sought in the contact with the neighbouring Hindus or Mohammedans, among whom the black magic is a widespread practice. *Bhowmick (1992)*

The Chenchus have some superstitious beliefs. The Chenchus are very particular in observing good and bad omen according to Bhowmick. Before setting out for any work or for a travel, they never fail to observe a bad omen or good omen. Some of the beliefs system are given below:

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1. If they see a cow early in the morning or if a cow or a bull crosses their way, it is considered to be a good omen.
2. While starting on some business, if a widow or a widower comes from the opposite direction, it is a bad omen.
3. If a dog comes without shaking its ears, but shaking the tail and goes forward, it is a good omen.
4. A fox or a rabbit or a snake crossing one's way is considered a good omen.
5. Seeing young children early in the morning is considered a good omen.
6. It is a bad omen if Gudlaguba (owl) and Gauntan akka (Fox) cry in the night. They think that some untoward thing will happen in that corner.
7. If the tiger roars during April-May, they consider that the coming year will bring them good rains and good days.
8. Falling of food from the hands is an omen indicating the arrival of relatives.
9. If a water pot falls down, it is considered a bad omen.
10. A married woman crossing the way is a good omen.
11. Coming across people who are bringing empty pots or fuel is considered to be an ill-luck, and it is expected to result in disappointment. *Bhowmick (1992)*.

Chenchus have specific interpretations of the consequences of dreams. The appearance of particular objects or individuals, etc. in dreams are believed to cause particular results. Some of the appearances in dreams and the associated results are given below by Bhowmick (1992).

<i>Object in dream</i>	<i>Consequent effects in real life</i>
1. Tiger	Appearance of Peddamma
2. Brahmin	Good omen
3. Gold	Starvation in future
4. Lion	Lord Narasimha
5. Illness in dream	Good health in actual life
6. Death of a person	Good health
7. He-buffaloes gores a person with horns	Indication of death
8. Goat	Bad omen
9. Eating of cooked rice	All sins will be washed off
10. Water	Message of a bad omen which will lend tears

Writing on the evil-eye, Bhowmick says that "evil eye is believed to be born with its possessor. Effects of evil-eye are very curious. If a person is suspected to have been exposed to the evil-eye, a spirit doctor is called in to attend the patient. He fixes up a day for performing magical rites. The patient is instructed not to take meals on that day. The spirit doctor himself cooks the food and makes the cooked rice into 3 balls. He utters some incantations slowly and waves the rice balls thrice around the patient.

of various articles, appointment of temporary priest for the performance of the ceremony are the phases of the celebration.

Food is cooked and eaten by the tribals along with consumption of liquor in profusion. This generally ends up in a cavalier manner and merry-making in accompaniment of dance. This is one of the items of celebration in which the villagers divest of their personal jealousies.

The Chenchus did not make animal sacrifices in honour of the deities like Lord Veerbhadra (son of Lord Shiva). Nandiswara (famous bull of Lord Shiva, Sri Rama (Lord Rama of the Ramayana as an Avatara), Nagamayya (the Cobra deity) are worshipped, without any animal sacrifice. But it is strange that they offer animal sacrifice to Tirumalaswamy (at Byrluti) Lingamayya (Lord Shiva-phallic symbol) in most of the Chenchu villages. Coconut, sundried rice, turmeric, vermilion, incense sticks etc. constitute the items of worship. But while sacrificing animals (goat or fowl) they offer some *payasam*, i.e. porridge prepared with milk and coarse sugar in front of the deity over a flat stone. The sacrificial animal is bathed with water and smeared with vermilion and turmeric paste on its face and the legs.

In this connection Bhowmick says:

...the Chenchus carefully observe whether the animal shivers or not. Shivering of head/body is treated as a sign of acceptance of the animal by the God. Then the animal is sacrificed. If in any case the animal does not shake or shiver its head or body even after sufficient time, they abandon the worship and fix up another convenient date. The animal must be beheaded with one stroke only. If it requires more than one stroke, it is considered a bad omen. The blood of the sacrificed animal is allowed to spill over the ground. After sacrifice, flesh is distributed to the participants.

The Chenchus worship Goddess Polerra the goddess of epidemic diseases like cholera, small pox, etc. She is worshipped with awe and fear as she is the controlling deity of the above diseases. They believe that if proper prayer, worship and sacrifices are made, she becomes pleased and benevolent. She is a malevolent deity by nature and wants blood offering, particularly the sacrifice of goats and fowls. She is worshipped once in a year. There is no fixed date for the worship. The tribal headman fixes a date in consultation with the village tribal elders. That date is communicated to the tribal people. She is worshipped on communal basis.

Bhowmick observes (1992):

The deity Amba or Ammavaru or Ammathalli refers to Bramaramba of Srisailam shrine. She is regarded as the daughter of the Chenchus and Mallikharjuna, her husband, as their son-in-law. She is represented by a stone. She is believed to be the most benevolent of the deities and is also connected with epidemic diseases. She is

offered animal or fowl sacrifices. The Chenchus have a strong belief that if they do not propitiate this deity with coconut, jaggery and fowl or goat, the deity will become angry and they apprehend sufferance from epidemic diseases. Propitiation of this deity with the above mentioned articles pleases her. The headman collects subscription from each family for purchasing the required articles and the goat for the ceremony. They break coconuts and burn incense. On that day, they are found in a state of drinking and dancing bout.

The deity Sunkamma is also a community goddess worshipped annually. The idol is well dressed with vermilion, garlands, flowers and also with ornaments. The Chenchus make sacrifice of goats and fowl in honour of the deity in accordance with their vows promised earlier. They break coconuts and burn incense sticks. One goat is generally sacrificed in the name of each clan to the goddess. At the end of the sacrifice, a big flame is lit and moved round the idol. After the worship, all the male and female folks drink liquor and participate in dance in accompaniment of the *Tappera* (local drums). After some time they come back to their respective houses. Thus, the ceremony ends.

CONCLUSION

In the above account of the religious beliefs and practices of various tribes of South India most of whom still follow their traditional way of life away from mainstream culture, we have discussed different aspects of their religious practices in the backdrop of their socio-cultural life. It is clear that their belief-system and ritualistic practices are influenced by the vagaries of their natural habitat and the struggle for survival in the midst of natural surroundings away from modern civilization. Some of the tribes are very few in number. In the present days, they find it difficult to cope with the changing circumstances and to keep up their traditional religious beliefs and practices. However, it is necessary to carry on research on the structure of their society, functioning of the institutions, view of life, belief system, ritual practices, customs and traditions so that better understanding about these indigenous people and their culture may be made. In this regard, the anthropologists have to play a vital role in the scientific study of these tribes.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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