Chapter 2

Tribes in Coimbatore District
TRIBES IN COIMBATORE DISTRICT

Tribals are the early settlers of Coimbatore region. The proportion of the tribal population is not evenly distributed in the region. The primitive tribes Irulas are living in Thondamuthur, Periyanaicken Palayam, Karamadai, and Madukarai panchayat unions. The dispersed tribes Muduvar, Malasar, Eravalar, Kadar, Pulayan, and Maha Malasar are living in Indira Gandhi Wild Life sanctuary of Annaimalai hills in Pollachi taluk of Coimbatore district.

Irulas

Irulas are a tribal community living in different parts of India. The Irular are the second largest scheduled tribe of Tamil Nadu. The names, Irula, Urali Irular, Velliyan and Velliyan are used to designate them in different regions of Tamil Nadu. In Tamil Nadu, they live in three distinct regions and they have different local dialects as Coimbatore group, Nilgiri group and Velliyan group. In Tamil Nadu, they are settled in nine districts, namely, Chengalpattu, Salem, Nilgris, Coimbatore, South Arcot, North Arcot, Thiruchirapalli, Thanjavur, and Kanyakumari. The Irulas are mentioned only in 1941 census report.

Government of India has approved Irulas as primitive tribes in Tamil Nadu. The Irulas are seen in the Gobichettipalayam and Coimbatore Taluks of the Coimbatore district in Attapadi valley and in the Wallesvanad of Malabar and on the adjacent Nilgiri slope. In Coimbatore forest district, the Irulas are living in reserve forest areas of Coimbatore division. Most of the Irulas are living in Thondamuthur, Perianaickenpalayam, Karamadai and Madukkari panchayat union areas.

The name Irula is derived from the Tamil work “Irul” meaning “darkness” or “night”. The name could refer either to the darkness of their skin or to the jungles they inhabit and hunt in. Anthropological literature says that Irulas belong to the Negrito (or Negroid) race that is one of the six main ethnic groups that add to the racial mosaic of India. Negroids from Africa were the oldest people who have come to India.
The Irula are known by several names such as Irular, Irulas, Iruliga, Iravan, Iriligaru. They also call themselves as Poosari, while their neighbours refer to them as Erullolu, Irulas, Shikari, and Pujari. In Coimbatore district they are familiar as Pampu Pidikkiravan (snake catcher) or Pampukaran (snake man).

Irulas were originally living in Kongunadu, one of the macro divisions of Tamilnadu. The Tamil lexicon gives three meanings to the world “Kongu”. Pollan of the flower, honey and fragrance all which are directly referable to the country that went by the name ‘Kongunadu’. The Irulas were pushed out by the people from the plains. Irular legend says that once they lived in and around Perur then an important trade in ‘Kongunadu’ center. These people were displaced from their homes. Their chieftain, named Kovan or Koyan, led their exodus to the Coimbatore plains, where he founded “The New Town of Koyan” or “Koyaputtur” that is present day Coimbatore.

Irulars can be classified into various subgroups based on linguistics and social variations, as Malenadu Irular, Kasaba, Vettakara Irular, Uruli Irular, Villiyan. The Vettakara Irular, commonly known as Irular Pallar are largely concentrated in Coimbatore district, especially in the mountainous and forest areas of the Vellaingiri hills and Siruvani hills and the adjoining plains of the contiguous western ghats.

Kulams

Locally clan is called as Kulam. The clan name descends from father to son and a membership in a clan would give a person his social identity within the tribe. The patrilineal clan divides the Irula into exogamous divisions. According to Thurston, the Irulas are divided into fourteen exogamous clans, namely Kuppey, Sambar, Pungey, Karatiga Kurunegey, Kalakati, Deveney, Koduvey, Paratha, Kuppili, Uppili, Vellai, Kuppar, and Anumoopu. In Coimbatore district seven kulams of Irulas are living. They are Perayar kulam, Samba kulam, Vellaiga Kulam, Kapilika kulam, Kurunagar Kulam, and Pumalai karatika kulam. Among them Peragar and Vellaiga are considered as sister clans and so matrimonial alliances are not permitted between them.
The Irulas are on an average of short and below medium height and exhibit a long and narrow head shape. Their facial profile, in general, is broad with a broad and high forehead and a moderate skin implying an overall face, with a short and broad nose.

**Language**

The Irula dialect is a South Dravidian group of languages. It has been classified as Tamil, Malayalam subgroup. The result Irula language belongs undoubtedly to the south Dravidian sub-family, which are more or less "Tamiloid" or "Kannadoid" or "Malayalam".

The language of Irula is not to be considered direct ‘descendants’, ‘branched-off’ dialects of proto-Tamil, or proto-Kannada, or proto-Malayalam but rather speech forms which were evolved by the tribal communities- originally linguistically non-Dravidian, from mixtures of various pre-Tamil, pre-Kannada, pre-Malayalam dialects which were from 2500-2000 years ago super imposed on these (Negrito-cum-proto Australoid) tribals by the conquering Dravidians.

**Birth**

Confinement of the Irula women takes place in the husband’s house and the girl’s mother attends her along with other elderly women of the same Pathy. But nowadays the women go to the hospital for delivery. Even during the pregnancy, and after delivery, the health department workers visit regularly and vaccinate both the mother and the child. Birth pollution is observed for nine days. On the ninth day, they clean their house completely and ceremonial bath is given to both the mother and the child. After three months they take the child to the temple for naming ceremony. In the early days they named only the God and Goddesses or grandparents’ names to their children, but at present the situation is changed.

**Puberty Rite**

The Irular puberty ceremony is called nere abba. When a girl attains puberty after ceremonial bath, she is secluded in a small temporary hut made of green twigs and leaves. The girl’s maternal uncle or elder sister’s husband constructs this temporary hut. On the seventh or ninth day the purification ceremony is held. On that day, the priest
brings a pot full of water from the river and pours it over the head of the girl. In some hamlets, the girl is taken to the river for the ceremonial bath, accompanied by elder ladies.

**Marriage**

Marriage is a social security for the Irulas. They strictly follow the monogamous form of marriages. They prefer marriage alliances between the maternal uncle and niece and between cross cousins. Child marriage is not in practice. Marriage through negotiation, exchange and elopement are the common ways of acquiring mates. In the case of arranged marriages, the parents visit the bride’s house with two iron rods. The priest of the village who is known as *Jatti* plays a very prominent role in their marriage. He fixes the date for the marriage. The Irula marriage usually takes place on a Monday, Wednesday or Friday. They pay a bride price (*peirya panam*) during the marriage. Their wedding takes place at the bridegroom’s house under a small *pandal*. In the earlier days, the bridegroom and the bride were made to stand a certain distance from each other. The groom receives the *thali* from an elder member of the village and hands it over to women of his family. The tying of the *thali* is done by the wife of a close relative of the groom, or even by the wife of the officiating priest. Nowadays this practice has disappeared and both the bride and the bridegroom are sitting in the same *pandal*. Figures of goddess Lakshmi is carved in their *thali*. In addition to the *thali*, the married women should wear a black bead (*Keera pasi*) around her neck. A toe-ring, vermillion mark and a black bead are the symbols of married women. Dowry is not in practice. They don’t have the practice of registering their marriages. They trust their God and Goddesses, elders and the officiating priest than in registering their wedding. Nowadays inter-caste, inter-clan and inter-religious marriages are also taking place. Such couples are also accepted by the Irula society. The newly wedded couples live away from the natal families.

**Divorce**

Divorce is permitted with social approval and divorced person may remarry. If both the husband as well as the wife mutually seek divorce, they have to assemble in the
panchayat. The elder people who were present at the time of their marriage, discuss over the matter, and give divorce. If they have children divorce is not permitted. In the case of ladies, elder people or the family members do not arrange for the second marriage for a divorcee or a widow. But if any one comes forward to live together, Irular society never secludes them.

Death Ceremony

The dead are either buried or cremated by the Irulas. The death pollution is observed for sixteen days. If a young girl dies, they have the practice of worshipping her every year on that day as Goddesses. They worship the parents or elderly members of the family after their death.

Religion

The Irulas follow tribal ways of worship. There is a strong Hindu influence. Their God is Rangaswamy. Their temples are found in four places. They are Rangabettu (Rangaswamy peak), Karamadai (Vaishava Hindu Temple) and Ranganatha temple in the Biligirirangan hills. In addition to these temples, in each pathi they have a Marriaman temple. They also Kongarantima, Kaniamma, and Bagavathi. Every year in the month of Chittirai (April – May) they have festivals in their marriamma temple for seven days. They have family deities also.

The Irulas celebrate religious festivals like Amman Nonbu and Sivarathiri. In addition to their own they observe most of the Hindu festivals like Diwali and Pongal.

Folklore

The Irular community has its own traditional folk songs. Both men and women sing these songs, which contains the unwritten record of their culture and reflect the tribal socio religious and cultural life. They have their sayings, proverbs and riddles also.

Ur Panchayat

Each Irula hamlet functions as a social unit partially in self-governement. In every ‘Ur’, there is a head man called Muppan. He plays a very important role in the socio-religious life of the Irulas. They pay respect to Muppan, obey him and invite him for the wedding and the funeral feasts. All disputes are settled only in the council (Nayasabha),
headed by the Muppan. Cases regarding adultery, rape, divorce and theft are decided only in this council. During that time all the members of the tribal council are usually present. Muppan is the executive, legislative and judge in all the matters regarding the hamlet. Nowadays the authority of the Muppan is sometimes questioned, especially by the younger generations, who are educated and employed with non-tribals.

Irula Women

The Irula women prefer to call themselves as ‘Villiard women’, that is bow and arrow, because they are the ‘Villiard’ for their men and the Irula society as such they are called as Brahmanical tribe because of their cleanliness.

Occupation

Hunting and gathering, trapping of birds and animals, and shifting cultivation are daily wage labours. Irulas are experts in snake catching and good in recognising and collecting medicinal herbs also. They have small plots of land near their pathis, in which they grow cereals. Irula women engage in basket making to improve their economy. Irula women are as useful as the men and more industrious than the Tamil coolies.

Muduvars

Muduvars are a community of forest dwellers, who inhabit the bordering wild regions of TamilNadu and Kerala. According to Aiyappan (1948) the Muduvar or Mudugars are a tribe of hill cultivating community in Coimbatore, Madurai, Malabar and Travancore Districts. The name is spelt Muduvar in English but in Tamil, as pronounced ‘Muthuvuvar’ or ‘Muthuvannal’. The Muduvar are called ‘thakappan makkal’, sons of the father’ by the plainsfolk.

Origin of Muduvars

Muduvars do not claim to be indigenous of the hills. Ethnologists and anthropologists agree that the ancestral home of the Muduvar was in the Pandya country. During a war in the Pandya kingdom, Muduvar fled to the hills, carrying their children on their back in Tamil, Muthuvu. Hence they are known as Muduvar. Another account says that when they left Madurai, they carried away the Goddenes Meenakshi of Madurai with them on their back to Neriyamangalam. The Muduvar even now carry their loads
on the back and every woman carries their babies on the back and not on the hip as other Indian women do. The Muduvar rank high in point of precedary among the hill tribes. That is why they are called ‘old -people’ (Mudu –Old)\textsuperscript{33}.

At Bodinayakanur, a pregnant woman was left behind and they eventually went to the Nilgiris with their offsprings. The bulk of the tribe went to the hills of Travancore. So there is an enemity between the Nilgiri people and the Mudvar. The Nilgiri people rarely visit Bodinayakanur but if by chance they met any Muduvar, they do not speak\textsuperscript{34}.

The Muduvar rank high among the hill tribes. They were originally ‘Vellalas’. Muduvar have distinctly a plain country origin as may be judged by their colour and features. It is believed that, they were living in the plains and driven to the hills by the Mohammaden invaders at the end of eighteenth century\textsuperscript{35}. Thourston found a mixture of east coast and west coast culture in them.

Clans

The Muduvar have six exogamous clans and their clans are further divided into forty-eight lineages. A clan is called a \textit{kuttam} and a linage is a \textit{vamsam}. Besides this division, there are location-based groups called ‘van man’ (place of birth) such as ‘Nattukullu thode’, ‘kerrpara thode’, ‘pockulum palayanthathe’, ‘palaemora’, ‘ulakki thode’ and ‘kurthode thannali’. The Zamorin, the ancient ruler of Calicut for administrative purpose, made these divisions\textsuperscript{36}.

The Muduvar live at present in the elevated slopes of the Anaimalai hills\textsuperscript{37}. Their peculiar turbans easily identify older Muduvar males, but this turban wearing habit is slowly disappearing among the young.

Marriage

The Muduvar are an endogamous group. The usual forms of marriage are by service, elopement, capture and arrangements. Like Kongu people, they prefer to marry their sister’s daughter or the daughter of the maternal uncle or paternal aunt. Most of their marriages are arranged marriages. If both the parents agree for the proposal the bridegrooms family goes to brides settlement. When the bridegroom’s party is reached to the bride’s family, the bride and her parents hide in the forest, then the bridegroom and
his family start searching them in the forest. While searching the bride, the groom’s family carries a new sari, a comb, a bangle and a necklace. The bridegroom usually finds the bride in the forest within one or two days. When the bridegroom finds the bride in the forest, he drapes the sari over her, puts the comb in her hair and slips on the bangles and necklace. The very physical union between them lead to marriage and generally they stay in the forest till the next morning. Finger-rings and bamboo combs are the symbols of the married women. This comb is made by the groom himself and is ceremonially fastened on to the hair of the bride. Monogamy is the norm but polygamy is permitted on the grounds of bareness and ill health.

**Birth**

Muduvars follow simple post-delivery rituals. The Muduvar women deliver a child in a lonely hut. Post delivery pollution is observed for nine days. On the ninth day after a ceremonial bath, mother and the child enter into the house. The child is named on the same day and community feast is arranged on this occasion. The names of the gods and goddesses and their ancestors were usually given to them, as kanjan, karrupukunji and kunjitha for boys and karupayae, koopi and Paisi for girls. But at present movies influence more in naming their children. Among the Muduvars, tonsorial rites are performed only for boys at the age of six.

**Puberty**

The Muduvar make a temporary hut for the girls on attaining puberty. The hut is called *tennaividu* or *molukavidu*. Pubertal pollution is observed for five days and it is terminated with a ceremonial bath. After the ceremonial bath, when the girl enters into her house, friends and neighbouring girls greet her by sprinkling water on her. After blessing from her parents, she goes to her maternal uncle’s house. There her uncle gives her new sari and feast to all the Muduvars of the settlement. This ceremony is called as *Telacatanku*. After their rituals the older girl takes her to the girl’s dormitory, which is known as *Kumarimattam*, there they welcome her with their traditional songs and dance.
Youth Dormitory

A significant feature of the Muduvar community is grown up unmarried boys and girls sleep in separate dormitories constructed on either side of their settlement. The boys dormitory is called as Jantari Madam and girls dormitory is called as Kumari Madam. This girls’ dormitory is looked after by an elderly women and Muduvan boys are under their elantary thalaivar. This elantary thalaivar is the second most powerful person in their community. He and his team help the Muduvar settlement in needy times and in return they get paddy and chicken. Muduvar consider their boys as their main work force of their settlement and community.

Divorce

Divorce is permissible with religious sacrament for reasons like adultery and maladjustment. Either the husband or wife can seek divorce. Divorcee, widow and widower are permitted to remarry. If they are not for second marriage, and decided to live alone, they are not allowed to live either with their relatives or family members, they are asked to live only in bachelor’s hall meant for young boys and girls.

Death Rituals

The Muduvar bury their dead far from their settlement. They bury the dead, laying the corpse north- south. They believe that a tiger or cheetah will not eat a dead body lying north of south. They believe in life after death, so they erect a thatched structure over the burial place and keep a heavy stone over the grave to serve as an identification mark. Like the Kongu people, if a person dies on Saturday, the body is buried together with a live chicken. Death pollution is observed for seven days. On the seventh day they have their turbans as a mark of respect to the person who died. Death rites are conducted by the poosari (temple priest).

Religion

The Muduvar are Hindus and they worship a number of spirits also. They worship the nature like the Sun, river and forest. Palaniandavar, Meenakshi and her husband Sookuru, Baghavathi are the deities worshipped by them. The priests, who belong to their
own community act as *poosari* and performs all the rites. They have family as well as clan deities too. They celebrate Pongal and Deepavali like the neighbouring people.

**Folkore**

They have folk songs and folk tales. Both women and men sing songs on ceremonial occasions like marriage and religious festivals.

**Panchayat**

The head of the Muduvar tribal panchayat is called the Muppan or *Maniyakkaran*. He is assisted by a group of elders. This panchayat deals with the cases like adultery, rape, divorce and theft. This council has the right to impose fines on the wrongdoers. The post of the Muppan is hereditary. If the Muppan has no son, then his son-in-law succeeds him. The Muppan belongs to the Malvaka lineage of the Mela clan. The Moopan acts as a priest, judge and a folk-doctor.

**Occupation**

In the early days, Muduvars were cultivation labourers. They were shy and afraid of Europeans. They were somewhat nomadic, usually shifting their residence after a year or two. At present they are living in permanent settlements and their contact with the neighbouring people has made a lot of changes in their society and economy. Muduvars are food gatherers and hunters also. At present they are agriculturalists. The state government has allotted lands to them in the reserve forest area. In addition to agriculture, they collect minor forest products, rearing the cattle and poultry. It is the work of the Muduvar women to collect firewood and fetch water. They even take part in agricultural activities and in collecting minor forest products. The Muduvar women make baskets, mats, grain containers and winnowing fans for household use.

**Position of Muduvar Women**

Regarding the social status of Muduvar women, she is not considered as equal to man in her social and religious activities. Women are allowed to sing and dance in ceremonies, but not to talk to outsiders without prior permission of the chief of the settlement. And in her religious activities she is permitted to visit the temple only on Pongal day. In regard to her property rights, all male children of the family have equal
rights to their ancestral property, but their parents usually give household articles and one-fourth of their cattle to their daughters.

The Muduvar’s contact with the neighbouring people change them in the social, economic and religious practices. The state government and the NGOs are playing an important role in creating awareness on modern methods of agriculture, cattle breeding, etc. Their children are becoming educated and few Muduvar are working outside the settlement also.

**Malasars**

Malasars are also known as ‘Malayar’ or ‘Malai Arasar’. The government of India has identified them as Malasar and given them the status of scheduled tribe. The Malasar who is also described as a forest tribe is classified in to three grades viz, those who live on the hills, those who live on the slopes, near the forest of the hills and those who live on the plains.

The Malasars are divided into two sections as the *Nattu Malasar* and *Kongu Malasar*. These two sections differ in racial features. The Kongu Malasar are taller, darker, with a flatter nose and thicker lips. This may be due to a racial mixture with other tribes, possibly the Kadar and Irular. The Nattu Malasar are medium sized, wavy haired, light-colored and generally of Mediterranean type. Kongu Malasar are perhaps connected with the Malayalis of Shevaroys of Kollis, who were driven up from the plains due to some political upheavel.

**Origin of the Malasar**

The Malasars believe that they were the original inhabitants of Kongunadu, the present Coimbatore district. In Coimbatore district they are found in the Anaimalai hills into low jungles of Pollachi and Udumalpet taluks. They are called as dispersed tribes and most of them are living in Indira Gandhi wild life sanctuary area in Pollachi division. Their major settlements are found in Sarkarpathi, Sethumadai, Narikkalpathi, Meenakshipuram, Nellimedu, Ettithurai and Ponnarammanthurai in Anaimalia panchayat union.
Language

The Malasar speak Tamil among themselves and with others. They use the Tamil script. Some of them are conversant with Kannada and Malayalam. They are sturdier in built but have not the characteristic features of regular hill men.

Occupation

They depend on hill cultivation and as daily labourers as baggage coolies. They are lazy and will take a week’s wage in advance and drink it away. The Malasar always keep a bow and a few arrows ready to use it against the wild animals. They are employed in operations connected with the catching and the training of wild elephants. So some of the Malasars are appointed as mahouts by the forest department.

The Malasars do not have any social divisions like Irulars, but there is an economic and occupational hierarchy among them. The Malasar who cultivate their own land are considered superior to those who work as labourers for a non-tribal land owner.

Marriage

Malasar practice exogamy as far as the paternal lineages are concerned. They prefer to marry cross cousins; that is father’s sister’s daughter. Child marriage is not in practice. Monogamy, polygamy and junior sororate are the different forms of marriages permitted by their society. They acquire their mates by service, mutual consent and negotiation. Most of their marriages are fixed by negotiations in the presence of their Muppan. Nowadays mates by service are not in practice. In the early days they married off their girls before puberty and the marriage took place after the tenth year. But nowadays this is not in practice. Bride price has to be paid to the bride’s father, and a sari to the brother’s mother. According to Aiyappan, the husband’s family goes to the bride’s house with the wedding sari, called the korrai pudavai and after being entertained they fetch the bride over with her people for the wedding. The bride’s parents handover the girl and depart after an entertainment. In the past, marriages were celebrated over for three days, but it is reduced to two days. After betrothal ceremony the elders fix the day for the marriage, usually the Malasars marriage takes place in bride’s house. Their marriage procession takes place in the night and they cover all the streets of their
settlement, accompanied by musicians and dancers. It is a patrilineal society and couples live in the neolocal residence after marriage.

Delivery

The Malasar community has pre-delivery rituals and post-delivery restrictions for pregnant women. The pregnant women are taken to her natal house for first delivery. A separate hut is usually reserved for confinement. In the early days an elderly women attend the delivery and birth pollution was observed for fifteen days. Nowadays deliveries are taking place only in the nearby maternity hospitals and birth pollution is observed for seven or nine days. On the seventh or ninth day, both the mother and the child gets purification bath and enter into the house. Even after their ceremony the mother and the child are considered unclean for three months. Naming ceremony and ear boring ceremony are in practice. Till the naming ceremony the common name 'pulla' for boys and 'pottai' for girls are given. The Nattu Malasar have adopted the mother right system, while the kongu Malasar are patrilineal. The naming of a child is done in the third month, by the poosari, who gets inspired into an oracle-velichapadu and announces the name. The common names are Mallan, Maran, Karupan, Tamman, Chadayan, Velli, Pidari, and Kali for males and Arasi, Malli, Karthi, Chettichi and Nayithri for females.

Puberty Ceremony

The Malasar celebrates the attainment of puberty. The girl is secluded for seven or nine days. The maternal uncle erects a separate hut for this girl. On the seventh of ninth day after a holy bath, the puberty ceremony (seer) is performed. Family members, relatives and the neighbors are invited for the same.

Religion

The Malasar worship Hindu deities and observe Hindu festivals. They worship Kaliamma, Ponnalaatha, Vannadevadai, Mahagaliatha, Mariatha, Achcharyamman and Verrabhadran. They celebrate their temple festivals for seven days. They don’t have the practice of worshipping spirits. According to Aiyappan, the Malasar belief in spirits is, he will not injure another for fear, which is, his spirit may injure him. The belief is that each
one has some spirits at his or her command. They have a separate priest called Sadayan who performs their death rites, cures ailments and exorcises evil spirits.

**Panchayat System**

The panchayat exists in each settlement of the Malasar. The Muppan is the head of the panchayat. The panchayat usually meets in the Kailamman temple premises in the belief that people would not dare to speak lies before the Goddesses. The Muppan plays an important role in the socio religious, economic and political matters. Their panchayat consists of Muppan, Ponna muppan, thalaivar, vanderi and manailkaran. In the early days the muppan prescribes the work to be done in the landlord's fields, and heard complaints. But nowadays his judgment or his advice is not sought by the youngsters. So the panchayat is losing its significance.

**Occupation**

Malasar' traditional occupations are trapping of birds and animals, animal husbandry and collection of minor forest products. Now most of them are working in the tea plantation and government has given land to them for cultivation. So, their primary occupation is agriculture. They are experts in catching and taming wild elephants.

**Eravallan**

The Eravallan also called Eravallar, Villivedan (hunters with bow and arrow) and Ambu Villu Vedan, are one of the forest tribes of Tamil Nadu. They resemble primitive tribe, like other aboriginal tribes of Tamilnadu.

**Kulam**

The Eravallan are endogamous. They have six exogamous clans; Karuppu Kattu Keli, Pappu Kattu Keli, Meli Keli, Villiri Kattu Keli and Kari Kattu Keli. Each clan is a patrilineal totemic group. Among these clans, Karuppu Kattu Keli is considered as superior than the other clans. They do not eat pork and also do not kill snakes. Another clan Male Keli also does not kill lizards.

**Origin of the Eravallan**

Eravallan, the forest tribe inhabits in Coimbatore district and Malabar. They are also in Chittoor and taluk of Cochin. The Eravallan in Kerala and in Tamilnadu are in a
similar situation. In Tamil Nadu they are living in the Anaimalai hills and spread over to Pollachi and Udumalpet taluks of Coimbatore district. Most of their settlements are found between the paddy fields and the forest. After the construction of Amaravathi dam, four Eravallan settlements namely Mungaliyadipadi, Petriyapadi, Kumbabarapadi and Valavadendak Kartittu were settled near Amaravathi Nagar. Most of the Eravallan settlements are under the range of Indira Gandhi wild life sanctuary. Even though their language is Tamil, few of them speak Malayalam.

The Eravallar considered them superior to other tribal communities such as Irular, Pulayar, Malasar, Maha Malasar and Kadar. They do not even allow them to enter into their settlements, as they believe that they may cause pollution. They treat the Irulars as inferior because they eat rats, and Maha Malasar and Pulayar because of their beef eating practice. But at present the situation is slowly disappearing among the youth. According to Aiyappan, they are truthful, honest and faithful servants. Regarding their customs they largely conform to the standards of lower Hindu caste of the region.

**Marriage**

Monogamy is the norm among the Eravallar tribe. In the early days, pre-puberty marriages were very common, but nowadays their girls are married only after puberty because of the awareness created by the health department and the influence of the neighbouring non-tribals. An Eravallar can marry his father’s sister’s daughter or mother’s brother’s daughter. Most of these marriages take place after negotiation. Three types of marriages were common among them, as arranged marriage, marriage by elopements and marriage by service. All present marriage by service is not in practice. In the early days if both the parents agree for the proposal, the wedding day is fixed. And the parents of both the bride and the bridegroom meet their respective landlords and inform the news. The landlord gives paddy and meets a part of marriage expenses. But at present all marriage expenses are borne by the bridegroom’s parents. Bride price is in practice. The marriage rituals are performed at the bride’s residence and the bride’s father hosts a marriage feast. All most all their marriage rituals resemble the neighbouring non-tribal Hindus. Toe-ring and yellow thread are the married women’s symbols. They do not
register their marriages. The premarital relationship of a girl is tolerated, but after marriage, they cannot have extramarital relations. An Eravala male may have a joking relationship with his elder or younger brother’s wives and girls have a joking relationship with their maternal uncles.

**Birth**

The pre-delivery rituals are performed by the Eravallars. Deliveries take place in a small hut erected some distance from their *pathi*. Elderly women look after the delivery in those days. Nowadays deliveries are taking place only in the nearby government hospitals. Delivery pollution is observed for fifteen days. Naming ceremony and first feeding of cereals are also observed in their family temples. Eravallar children are tonsured at the age of three or five in their temples. During that time the role of the maternal uncle is very important like that of the non-tribal Hindus. He presents new clothes to the child for such rituals.

**Puberty Rites**

The puberty rite is called as *Therattu Kalyanam*. The maternal uncle or sister’s husband builds a separate hut in front or at the side of the house. The hut is made of either green reed or green Palmyra leaves. She stays in the hut for seven or nine days. During that period she is not supposed to see any man. Every night women dance and sing before the hut. The puberty ceremony takes places only at night. For this ritual, the maternal uncle presents her a sari and other clothes. After wearing the new clothes, she takes the special food prepared for her. The Muppan is a special invitee for this ritual. At the end of the programme both men and women sing and dance. In their folklore, they have few special songs, especially to sing during this occasion.

**Divorce**

Divorce and remarriage are permitted in Eravellar society. Divorce is permissible if either spouse can seek divorce. But the Muppan tries his best to unite them instead of separating them. There are some exceptional cases also. Widowers, widows and male and female divorcees can remarry.
Religion
Eravallars believe that spirits reside in rocks, trees and hilltops. They have influence over particular families of villages and must be offered gifts of food to satisfy their hunger. They worship Muni (ghost) for the protection of their cattle and to get good harvest. Their clan deities are Karuppurayan and Kannimar. In addition to these Gods, they worship Marithai, Karuvalatha, Kondamma, Sedambaratta and Kali. They worship the spirits of their ancestors and believe that those who have led a good life are reborn as human beings.

Folklore
The Eravallar has a rich folklore. It consists of folk songs, folk tales, proverbs, riddles, group songs, wedding and sowing songs. The Eravallar women sing these different songs while working. They have a variety of musical instruments as Kottumara, Paramurra and wind instruments like Kovalu (pipe).

Panchayat
The headman of an Eravallar settlement is called Muppan. This is hereditary post. This Eravallar tribal local council consists of three members namely Muppan, Kottukaran, who is a policeman of the settlement and tandakkaran, who acts as a messenger, carrying news to the settlement. Cases related to adultery, rape, divorce and theft are discussed and settled in this council. Muppan's judgement is final. He plays an important role in the socio-religious activities of the Eravallar settlement.

Death Ceremony
Eravallar buried their dead. They place a stone near the head and another on the left side. Death pollution is observed for fifteen days. During their funeral rites they offer cooked rice to the corpse. They have the practice of worshipping their ancestors.

Economy
Eravallar are originally a small forest tribe but they are no longer a community of hunters and gatherers. A few of them are cultivators and others are wage laborers. Nowadays they have started to work in farms. Eravallar ladies are the supporters of their
family. Self Help Group schemes not only made them actives but it is also helping them to improve their social and economic status also.

Kadars

The Kadar are primitive, forest tribe whose unique customs are strange to the present day. The Kadar community is having other names like Kadir and Kadan. The word Kadan in Malayalam is forest dweller. Kadan represents a singular person and its plural form is Kadar. The tribe thus got their name because of their exclusively forest habitat69. The community has neither title nor any surname.

Origion

The origin of the Kadar is vague. The short stature, dark skin, thick lips and frizzly hair may indicate similarity of Negrito. Both men and women are in habit of chipping of their front teeth70. It is said to be a painful operation. But now their custom is slowly disappearing.

Kadar the most primitive tribe of south India is distributed in Cochin and Coimbatore71. In Coimbatore district their settlements are located on the steep slopes of Anaimalai hills, amidst dense forest or tea plantations. The Kadar tribe of the Anaimalai Hills in Coimbatore district are the oldest inhabitants of India72. Kadars had migrated from a place called Vannanthurai in foothills of the Anaimalai hills to their present habitation, following a British called Masi Dorai, who was in search of land suitable of tree planting 73.

In the early stages the Kadars were found only in the Anaimalai hills of Pollachi taluk in Coimbatore district, later few of them were migrated to Salem and Tirunelveli district. The remaining Kadars are found in Pollachi and Udumalpet taluks of Coimbatore district inside the territory of Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary. Their current settlements are Paramakadavu, Pannikuli, Nadungundrum, Udumanparai, Kallar, Ethakuli, Kambara, Punach and Mavadappu74.

Actually they were nomadic inhabitants living in smaller communities and shifting from place to place in the jungle. They made a rough shed covered over with leaves and keep a small fire burning throughout the night to keep the animals' away75.
But the traditional life style of the Kadars has changed and now they are living in permanent settlements and Government has constructed Kutcha houses under Government housing schemes. Few of them are even living in traditional one-room huts which they built.

**Language**

The Kadar language is close to the Dravidian language. Tamil and is locally called as Kadar Basha, which has no script. With others they converse in Malayalam and in Tamil. The Kadars observe community endogamy. They do not have any social divisions. Socially they were chandalas. There is mutual pollution between Kadar and Malasar and they have only little intercourse with each other. They consider themselves to be superior to the Malasar.

**Marriage**

The Kadar are endogamous. They are conscious of their location, distribution and settlements. Marriage by negotiation is common among them. Cross-cousin marriages are usually avoided. There is no bride price but they are exchanging gifts between the parents. The bridegroom’s mother ties the thali and the bride’s father put the turban on the groom’s head. The couple links the little finger of their right hands and walk around the pandal and then sit and exchange betel. Men and women dance separately during the marriage feast. Another traditional type of marriage was, a kadar goes out of his own village and lives in another for a whole year, during which period he makes a choice of wife. At the end of the year he returns to his own village to affect the contemplated union. Then he goes away again to the village of his bride and gives her a dowry by working there for another year. He then makes presents of cloth and iron tools to the girls’ mother, after which follows a feast, when completes the ceremony. Now this practice is given up. A Kadar has to present a comb made by himself to his bride in their settlement for the feast. Monogamy is the norm but polygamy is still practiced to get a male offspring. In such case man is living in one hut with his wife and his second wife is living in a separate hut. In the early days the larger number of wives a man has, the richer
and more esteemed he is. Polyandrous form of marriage is completely absent among the Kadar.

**Divorce**

Divorce is permitted on grounds of adultery, bareness, and male impotency and also due to cruelty. Either the husband or wife can approach the Kadar tribal council for divorce. After the declaration of divorce, children are liable to their father. But they do not have strict rules concerning payment of compensation to the aggrieved party but the tribal Kadar council decides the compensation according to the situation.

If the wife dies, husband can remarry again his wife’s younger sister but sororate or levirate are not in practice. Widows cannot remarry, but may stay as concubine.

**Birth**

Pre-delivery or post-delivery rituals are not in practice among the Kadars. Wearing the mundu above the breast and throwing a second cloth on the left shoulder and under the right armpit indicate pregnancy. Delivery is done in the sitting posture. The girl’s mother and other old women attend the delivery. Soon after the birth the mother and the child are bathed in warm water. For two or three weeks their traditional herbal medicine is given. They observe delivery pollution for ten days. But after confinement women are unclean for three months and in their settlement Muppan presides these functions. Maternal uncle’s role is also very important in this social custom.

**Puberty Ceremony**

Puberty pollution is observed for seven days. All these days, the girl is secluded in a separate hut. On the seventh day, they perform the puberty rites. In every settlement of the kadar, there is a secluded small hut, called in their dialect *ettavati* which is used as menstruation or pollution hut by the Kadar women during their menstrual period.

**Religion**

The Kadars have two hill Gods, brother and sister as Malavay and Malakutti. According to Kadars they were the first two living beings on the earth that have come from the interior of the earth. They were considered as the first Kadar man and woman, and they created mountains, taught them to wear clothes and use of fire and how to cook.
food also. Elderly Kadar still worships the rising sun and single elephant, but younger generation has given up this practice. Stomachache is being worshipped by kadar tribes. They have their village and regional deities. Their priest belongs to their own community. They have the practice of offering animal sacrifice to their deities like the neighboring plainsman. Nowadays their traditional deities are forgotten or ignored and they are worshipping Murugan, Muruyan and Ayyappan. In addition to all these gods and goddesses, they have faith in ghosts, demons and evil spirits also.

**Death Ceremony**

The Kadar buries their dead either in their own land or near their settlement, laying it with the head upward facing the south. Their death ceremony is simple and they do not observe death pollution. The Kadars believe that their ancestors occasionally appear to them in dreams. At every offering they give a share to their ancestors.

**Folklore**

The elders among the Kadar are well versed in folklore, which describes their origin and nomadic habits. Their folksongs are sung and both men and women with the help of wind instruments perform folk dances.

**Panchayat**

The Kadar headman is known as Mupppan. They select their headman either based on the seniority of age or the person who has the ability to talk on behalf of their community to outsiders. This Muppan post is not a hereditary one. He has to present in all the socio-economic activities of their settlement. He is the head of the panchayat council; some times he acts as a judge. At present, the importance of Muppan is considerably reducing.

**Occupation**

Traditionally the Kadors were hunters and food gatherers. Their primary occupation is collecting forest products. They are skilled in trapping elephants and experts in honey collection. They are famous snake charmers and claim to know a leaf, which is antidote to the venom. They are experts in making baskets by using *ithai* leaves. They are skilled in making Bamboo gates and mats. Nowadays their skill in basket
making is reduced because the forest department has put a lot of restrictions to use bamboo in the forest. But most of the forestlands are not cultivated by them because the land has no protection from wild animals. Some of the Kadars are plantation labourers. Few of them are in government jobs. Many of kadar ladies are engaged in SHG activities.

**Pulayan**

The Pulayans have been aptly described by the phrase ‘The Pulayan of the wild looks’. The word Pulayan is said to have derive from ‘Pula’, meaning pollution. It is believed that in some areas of Anna District, the Pulayan believe they are the descendants of kundotti, a woman belonging to the kundan group of the Pulayan of Chirakkal, who acts as mid wife and in consequence, the Pulayan are considered by other communities, to be polluted.

The Pulayan are referred as Malai Pulayan and Thanda Pulayan. The Pulayan who dwell in south Malabar and Cochin are called Thanda pulayan.

**Origin**

According to Thurston, the Pulayans are divided into eastern and western sections. The former were the slaves of Duriodhana of the Mahabharatha, and the latter were attached to the Pulayans.

At present the Pulayans are settled mainly in the Anna and Madurai Districts. In Coimbatore District their settlements are located at Thirumurthy hills, Kurumalai, Kali Patti, Essal Thattu and Mauvabu. Tamil is their mother tongue, and they are using Tamil script.

Kodandhur lies 7 kms off the Udumalpet Munnar highway from the Chinnar check-post on the Tamilnadu border. This is one of the biggest settlement with eighty-seven Pulayiyar families, living here with a population over three hundred.

Pulaiyars are timid and lazy. They are ‘inveterate liars’ and it is impossible for a stranger to get reliable information from them. They are remarkable for their enormous length of their hair. They would not cut it but arrange it into six or eight plaited coils gathered into single lock at the back of the head. But at present only elders and traditional
people are doing this hairstyle, others the younger generations, who are all mingling with
the neighbouring communities, are not practicing this.

**Kulam**

The Pulayans are socially divided into clans. They are familiar with the term *kootam* for clan. Each kootam in their unit is associated with a deity. Their kootams are kovam kootams or kovam kootm, kudian kootam, Sir mum kootam, Ringam kootam, Sinnandi kootam, karmadi kotam, Perumum kootam, and Vemblian kootam. Matrimarial alliances within the same kootam is strictly prohibited. They concede higher status to some of the high caste Hindus and claim superior over communities such as Pallam, Parayan and Chakhiliyan. But constitutionally they are placed under the category of Scheduled Castes in Tamilnadu.

**Marriage**

The Pulayans follow endogamy at the community level and exogamy at the clan level like the plainsmen in the Kanga region. They can marry the mother’s or brother’s daughter or father sister’s daughter or elder sisters daughter. Most of their marriages are arranged marriages, by negotiation. After negotiation the two families exchange betel leaves and areca nuts in a function called *Nichayathartham*, to confirm the marriage. In the early days their marriages took place in the bridegroom’s residence but now a days they perform their marriage ceremonies even in the public hall. Usually they conduct their marriage ceremonies in front of their clan deity. After exchanging garlands, the bridegroom ties the *thali*. The marriage symbols are the *thali* and toe-ring. Their *thali* consist of glass black beads. Bride price is not in practice. Monogamy is the norm, but polygamy is allowed in case of bareness and sickness. They live in nuclear families.

**Divorce**

Divorce is permitted among the Pulayans. Either spouse can initiate divorce. The elders of the community decide the matter. Both male and female divorce, widows and widowers can remarry.
Birth

The Pulayans are not observing pre-delivery or post delivery rituals. After delivery both the mother and the child are given bath. Their children are usually named after their family or clan deities or their ancestors. At the age of seven, they arrange for tonsuring ceremony at their family deity’s temple.

Puberty Ceremony

The Pulayans observe puberty rites. the girl is secluded for three days. On the third day after a ceremonial bath they arrange for a function, for which all their relatives are invited. The role of the maternal uncle is a very significant one. He offers a sari, blouse, comb, mirror and cosmetics.

Death Ceremony

The dead, among the Pulayan are buried, the dead body is bathed and covered with white cloths before burial. The body is buried in a prone position. The eldest son performs the last rites. Death pollution is observed for three days. On the third day, they offer food to the departed soul, which is known as karumathi. To end the pollution, they sprinkle cow-urine in and around the house. They do not have the practice of worshiping their ancestors like other tribal communities.

Folklore

They have an oral tradition of folk sayings and folk-lore. They perform folk dance during festivals with the help of musical instruments like Nayanam, Kulal, Matalam and Kaithalam.

Religion

The Pulayans are Hindus. They have their family deities called clan deities. They have village deities like Mangalanthan, Karumalayan, Ranganathan, and Chockanathan. They celebrate their temple festivals for three days or five days.

Traditional Panchayat

The Pulayan community has a council to settle all their disputes. This council consists of elder members of their community. This council is a very powerful organization. It deals with the cases like rape, divorce, theft etc. and imposes cash fines.
In the early days, the council even has the power to excommunicate the guilty. But nowadays due to their awareness, exposure and development in education people particularly the younger are not for it.

**Occupation**

Agriculture is their main occupation. A few Pulayans own small bits of land, ranging from one to two acre acre. Most of them are agricultural labouourers. Some of them are experts in basketry and wearing.

**Position of Women**

The status of women in the Pulayan community is lower than men. They do not have any rights, even in their ancestral property; they are the main source for the economic development of their family. Most of them are coolies. They participate in social and religious functions but not in the mechanism of social control.

**Maha Malasar**

**Origin**

The Maha Malasar are also described as ‘Malai Malasar,’ ‘Maha Arasar’ and ‘Kumatti Makkal’. The local people alone address them as Kummattai makkal. The term Maha Malasan might have been derived from the words maha (big) and malasar (king of the hills). Thurston did not deal with the Maha Malasar separately, but mentions them with Malasar. But the census of India in the year 1961 expresses the view that the Malasar are different from Maha Malasar tribe with distinctive physical features. Maha Malasar are taller than Malasar, well built, dark brown, and have prominent nose and thin lips. They are unique kind of people as the facial features of all the people of this community are very much the same, because all marriages generally happen not only within the own community, but also within their settlements.

The Maha Malasar are identified as a small tribal community in Tamilnadu and particularly found in Pollachi and Udumalpet taluks of Coimbatore District. Like Malasar, Maha Malasar also belonged to the present Coimbatore District. They are found particularly in the Indira Gandhi wild life sanctuary in Pollachi taluk. Most of their settlements are found in Nagooroothu, Sarkarpathi, Kumbitti, Palaganar, Sinnarpathi, Koomatti and Aliyar dam areas.
Kumaatti is one of the forthest settlement that are still accessible by road around twenty-six kms from the Topslip range office. Kumaatti has a total of twenty-seven houses with an over all strength of around one hundred and fifty. The Maha Malasar speak Tamil among themselves and with others they speak either in Tamil or in Malayalam. No social division exists among the Maha Malasar like the Irulas. The self-perception of the Maha Malasar at local level is high because of their practice of pure vegetarianism.

Marriage

The Maha Malasar is an endogamous group and they do not have exogamous divisions. They marry their cross cousins, and also the elder sisters daughter. Monogamy is the norm but in the case of infertility polygamy and junior sororities are allowed. In the past the girls are married before they attained puberty, but nowadays it is disappeared. They follow four modes to get their life partners like, capture, elopement, service and mutual consent. At present most of the marriages are arranged by negotiation, but even now some people follow the practice of service. In such case the boy has to live in the girls' house for at least from a month to a year and if the parties are satisfied the marriage is agreed. Bride price is prevalent among them. In the past wedding was celebrated for four days and now it is reduced to two days. Wedding took place at the bride's residence and the bride's father gives a feast after the marriage, which is to be followed by a group dance. They consider Mondays and Wednesday auspicious for their marriage. After marriage the couple establish a new household. The marriage pendent (thali) is the symbol of married women.

Birth

Maha Malasar has the practice of cerebrating pre-delivery rituals. The pregnancy women are taken to her natal home for delivery. In the past the delivery took place at their house with the help of midwife of the same pathi. Nowadays it is changed. They have the awareness of going for regular checkup during their pregnancy and for vaccination. But they follow the traditional practices like giving honey or sweet water to the newborn by the grand parents or elder people of the family. Birth pollution is
observed for seven or nine days. On the seventh or ninth day, after giving a ceremonial bath, they are taken into their place after three months, but in the past, this ceremony took place even after a year, because they were waiting for the prophecy name from their God by dream. Usually the child is named after a deity. Nowadays it is disappeared because they have a fancy for the names of the actors and actresses. On the third of fifth year girls have their earlobes boring ceremony. The maternal uncle of the child plays a significant role in this function.

Divorce

Divorce cases are not found among the Maha Malasar, but divorce is permissible in their community. Both the husband and wife approached the Muppan. The Muppan would try his best to solve their problem or misunderstanding, and if the Muppan and his council felt the need for separation they give divorce. Usually divorce is give on reasons like desertion on grounds of barrenness, chronic sickness or impotence. There is no divorce compensation. After the divorce the children are the liability of both the parents. Both male and female divorces are allowed to remarry. Widows are also permitted to remarry, but such marriages take place not by negotiation. Widow remarriage is called as marukannalam and a divorce’s remarriage is called as ‘randatharam’.

Puberty

The Maha Malasar performs pubertal rituals. A separate hut is constructed for the girl by her maternal uncle outside the house [Thinnai]. Pubertal is observed for twenty-seven days. During these days, an old woman keeps her company in the hut. On the twenty-eighth day after a ceremonial bath the girl is taken to her house. The role of the maternal uncle is a very significant one in this occasion. The relatives are invited for a feast.

Religion

The Maha Malasar are Hindus. They consider Malai Deviam (God of the Hill) as their community deity. They worship the forest goddesses as Vanadevathai. They have the practice of worshiping the nature also. The names of their Gods and Goddesses are Vanabadra Kaliamman, Banathiamman, Ponnadamman, and Nagoropthamman.
Nowadays they worship Lord Muruga and Lord Siva and they are going to pilgrimage to Palani and Thrivannamalai. They celebrate the temple festivals for seven days. During these days they offer cooked food with jaggary to the Goddesses.

**Death ceremony**

The Maha Malasar bury their dead in the forest, place the head towards the east. While carrying the dead body to the burial ground the adult throw small stones in to the valley to chase the evil spirits that might be following the dead body. They observe death pollution for seven days. On the third day they perform the last rites known as *karumathi*. They have the practice of worshiping their ancestors by offering annually.

**Traditional Panchayat**

The Muppan, male leader, head the Maha Malasar settlement with outstanding abilities like knowledge of the forest and skills in hunting. A peculiar matter in the community is the council includes a *ponnu thalivi* (female leader) also. The Muppan and the *Ponnu thalaivi*, settle all the disputes and problem of the settlement. But the Muppan, (male head) acts as a priest also. In the past if any person violates the traditional norms by disobeying the council he or she would be socially boycotted. Nowadays the younger, and the literates respect their Muppan but not ready to obey or to follow their traditions. So slowly the power of the council is disappearing. But even now the Muppan is invited for all their household functions like marriage, puberty rites, naming ceremony, ear boring ceremony etc. Muppan should be present on the death rites without fail.

**Folklore**

The Maha Malasar have their folksongs and folklore and dance, which are performed by both men and women. They have their own percussion musical instruments, such as the *potti, peepi and urumai*.

**Occupation**

The Maha Malasar were traditional food gatherers hunters. They change their livelihood by collecting minor forest produce like soap nuts, honey ginger and turmeric and they were exchanging their goods with trades for food grains and cloths. But
nowadays, the forest department has appointed them as wage labourers. They make excellent reed mats and baskets using no implement other than their billhooks. Indira Gandhi wild life sanctuary has started a co-operative society to provide a full time profitable employment to the tribals.

The Maha Malasar youth cut their hair while elder man keeps it large and find it in a tuff. The women put their hair into middle and knot it at the back. They pierce their earlobes and plug the holes either with scrolls of palm half or with round wooden pieces. They have a grace of wearing plenty of silver and glass colour beads around their neck, and they wear a thick anklet called as thandai.

At present the Maha Malasar community is taken care by Indira Gandhi wild life sanctuary in their economic development. Sarava Siksha Abian is taking care of their children’s education. The state Government is running a fair price shop near their settlement.

**Changing – Patterns in Socio – Religious practices**

The family is the basic unit of tribal society. Their general social economic and religious activities are centered round their family. There are two types of families, distinguished on the basis of the number of family members as nuclear family and joint family. In Coimbatore District among the tribes, most of the families are nuclear families. After the marriage, the parents arrange for a separate house for the couple and they are considered as a family\textsuperscript{108}. The nuclear family is the tribal way of living. Among the respondents, 84% are in nuclear families.
Marriage:

Marriage is an important social institution among the tribes. Much importance is attached to the marriage of tribal girls. Education and economic empowerment becomes secondary, when it comes to marriage. Marriage is seen as the ultimate goal in the lives of tribal women\textsuperscript{109}.

Government of Tamilnadu is giving financial assistance for marriage of poor scheduled tribe girls whose parental annual income is below Rs.6000\textsuperscript{110}.

Age at the time of tribal girls marriage is very important factor that indicates the status of tribal women and her place in the family.

**Fig.2** Percentage of tribal women’s age at the time of marriage
In this survey it is revealed that, 43% of the tribal ladies were married before the completion of 18 yrs, but 53% were married after 18 yrs.

Once the tribes were very much orthodox, and inter tribal marriages were not preferred by them. But nowadays the trend has changed. Inter-kulam marriages are taking place among the tribes. Even they get their life partner from the neighbouring states like Kerala and Karnataka. The tribals strictly follow clan system. These clans descent through father and after the marriage of the girls they are taken in to the clan of their husbands. Even Government of Tamilnadu is giving a financial assistance for partners in mixed marriage. Assistance is given up to a limit of Rs.2000/- to those who are suffering from hardship precipitated by mixed marriage. To avail this one of the partners should belong to Scheduled Tribe community. The annual income of the family should not be exceeded Rs.8000/- and for this applications can be submitted only after one year from the date of marriage.

**Divorce:**

Divorce is permitted in tribal social customs, but not frequently. The bareness of women, lack of faith and uncompromising attitude are the common causes for divorce. Among the respondents only 4% are divorcees.

**Re-marriage:**

Widow remarriage is allowed. But no sacred thread ‘Thali’ is tied on the occasion of the remarriage of the widow. It is obligatory on the part of the widow to invite all-important persons in the hamlet for feast. However second marriage is not celebrated as grand as the first. The children of the widow by the previous marriage are taken charge of by her former husbands’ relatives. Divorcees can also re-marry. But in most of the cases, they live with whom they like and trust.

**Dowry:**

Bride price is not practiced in the tribal society. Mostly all the tribal family members are all most economically equal whether they are below poverty line or above poverty line, dowry is not expected or demanded. So there is no dowry death among the tribal people in Coimbatore District.
Decision making power:
In general, the tribal women enjoy more information in different spheres of life in comparison with Caste Hindu women. In social matters and family life, tribal women are far more emancipated. Regarding decision-making, it is found that in the families, decision is taken by their husbands but before taking decision the matter is placed before the family members, especially wife for discussion.

Property Rights:
Even though tribal women shoulder heavy economic responsibilities with men, the tribal customary laws deny their equal rights to property. The system of inheritance among most tribals, unsustainably favor only the right to maintenance, and not any right to posses land belongings from the father or their husbands. A right to land has not become accepted because the forest departments own the land. So before marriages, she has only a right of maintenance from her father’s property and after marriage she enjoys from her husbands’ property.

Dress and Ornaments:
In Coimbatore District, traditional pattern of dressing is given up by the tribals. Mostly the neighbouring non-tribals in their dressing influence them. Particularly youngsters are influenced by movies in their dressing pattern. For decorative purpose, tribals use various materials like flowers, seeds, beads etc. They wear ornaments for ear, nose, neck and for arms and legs.

Fertility
Fertility indicates the actual reproductive performance of a woman. The capacity of a woman to bear a live child is termed as fertility. A woman is considered as fertile if she has given birth a child.

Among the respondents, 68% of the ladies are having 1-2 children, 24% are having 2-4 children and 8% of them are having more than four children. No barren women is recorded or seen or heard by the author.
Fig-3 Percentage of number of children for tribals

Tribes consider children as their assets. They always welcome girl child. Particularly they wish to have first baby as girl baby because they have a belief that by first girl child Goddess has entered in to their family.

**Female Infanticide**

Tribal women enjoy a high status compared to their non-tribal counterparts. In the tribal society, both boys and girls are treated alike. No religious ceremony is performed without the active role of women. So female infanticide is not known to them.

**Health**

Health is now considered as the fourth minimum need next to food, shelter and clothing. In the early period the tribal communities were steep in superstition and not ready for modern medicine. But nowadays, the tribals have confirmed faith in allopathic medicine.

The 73rd and 74th conditional Amendment Acts provide power to local self-government bodies for women and child development. Health welfare, which has a direct
bearing on the health of women and children are included in the eleventh scheduled provisions.

Since 1981, a separate Tribal Development planning cell has been functioning to co-ordinate the planning, monitoring, evolution of the health care schemes for the welfare of scheduled Tribes. Multipurpose workers were appointed for 3000 populations in tribal areas as against the norms of 5000 populations in general.

The Tribal Development planning cell advised the state Government for annual Medical Examination of Scheduled Tribes. For this Mobile Health check up teams are departed to tribal hamlets.

The National Nutrition policy 1993 recognised the problem of malnutrition and under-nutrition among the tribal women and children. The Department of Women and Child Development through its nationwide programme of Integration of Child Development Service (ICDS) continue to provide the needed health service for the benefit of tribal children, adolescent girls and expectant and nursing tribal mothers. Children below three years are given special attention. Malnourishing children falling in to grades III and IV are given extra diet. Immunization of children and pregnant women, prevention of early detention of childhood disabilities, iron and folic acid tablets to pregnant women, intensive dose of vitamin A, every six months and iron folic tablets to children are part of the service.

There is Health workers, Anganwadi workers, primary teachers and other peripheral functionaries to look after the tribes. It is also aimed at inculcating desirable attitude and behavioral patterns in children coming to Anganwadis. To promote health conscious among women and to improve their capabilities to look after the health and nutritional needs, women and children, health and nutrition education is imparted to them.

In Coimbatore District the health service in the tribal areas by the government is poor in shape. The exiting health centers are far away from their hamlets. Vehicle facilities are also not available for there tribes. Health centers for the tribal people are listed below:
1. Karamadai - Karamadai Block - Karampalayam Village Panchayat
2. Sirumugai - Karamadai Block - Sirumugai Town Panchayat
3. Seeliyur - Karamadai Block - Tholampalayam Village Panchayat
4. Pirimaliyam Palayam - Madakkarai Block - Tirumdiyum Palayam
5. Matham Palayam - P.N.Palayam Block - Belichi Panchayat
6. 24 Veerapandi Pudur - P.N.Palayam Block - Jambukundi
7. Pooluvapatty - Thondamuthur Block - Pooluvapatty Town Panchayat
8. Kalviram Palayam - Thondamuthur Block - Vadavalli Town Panchayat
9. Karadimadai - Thondamuthur Block - Thenkarai Town Panchayat
10. Sethumadai - Annamalai Block - Sethumadai
11. Peria Podur - Annamalai Block - Periapodur
12. Valparai - Valparai Town Panchayat
13. Mudis Nagar - do
14. Sholayar Nagar - do
15. Aliyar Nagar - do

In Coimbatore District, NGOs and philanthropists have come forward for tribal health care. Swami Dayande Saraswathi inaugurated Swami Dayananda Jayavarthanavelu Tribal Rural Hospital, situated at Anaikatti on July 1st 2004\textsuperscript{118}. Aim for Seva was launched with a view to help the tribals to improve their life style and living standard. This movement was dedicated to the provision of health care, primary education, nutrition for children, women empowerment, and drinking water etc\textsuperscript{119}. And with the help of G.Kuppu Samy Naidu Memorial Hospital a thirty-bedded hospital was started to provide medical service at Annaikatti\textsuperscript{120}.

Miss Vijaya, a tribe from Annaikatti, after the completion of her Nursing course, she is not ready to work in the city or town. She is serving for her own tribal community to come out from superstitions beliefs, and she in encouraging the fellow tribal girls for empowerment. For her noble service, Lion’s Club of Coimbatore has honored her with the title “Women actives”\textsuperscript{121} of the year 2006-2007.
Worship

The original religion of the tribal population in India is commonly characterized as ‘animistic’. In their faith, they exercise vital stewardship over earth resources and environment. According to them, mountains, rocks, rivers, trees etc are believed to be inhabited by deities and spirits. Their religious practices often involve setting aside forest and other lands as sacred preserves for wildlife, spirits and deities. They worship the forest as ‘Mother Goddesses’. They concentrate more on the spirit of earth or of the heavenly bodies, Sun, Moon and Stars. Even the spirits of diseases are believed to exist and they must be propitiated.

Due to shifting cultivation, they pay special veneration to the fertile soil, the Mother Earth with offerings of not only flowers and fruits but also domestic animals like chickens, goats, pigs, and even buffaloes. Shifting cultivation is firmly rooted in the religion and mythology of the tribes.

The tribes have faith in High-God. The concept of a ‘High-God’ is very likely indigenous in the tribal religion. The high-god is a personal God, distinct from and superior to all other deities and spirits. When the tribes came into contact with the non-tribal Hindus they began to identify them as high-gods. Among the High-Gods, the Mother Earth comes first. She receives mainly bloody scarifies. She is known as ‘Kali’, ‘Durga’ or ‘Parvathi’. ‘Amman’ festival is celebrated with dance and drama. On such occasions they wear new cloths.

Seven sisters, the Goddesses of diseases are worshiped by the tribes. They are venerated especially during the outbreak of epidemics like cholera, small-pox, chicken-poxt, plague etc.

They worship various Hindu deities like Vishnu, Shiva, Hanuman, Ravan, and Andavan Samy, Murugan and Maleswaran. Ayyappan is widely venerated by the tribes. He is a tribal God, who has been adopted by the non-tribals.

Tribes worship their Gods usually inside or outside the village, often on the bank of a wild stream and the village Gods at their shrine in a village or on the outskirts and the household Gods in their houses.
The tribes perform special rites for their ancestors on the occasion of death, because they believe in the survival of the soul after death. They sacrifice animals like hen or cock on such occasion.

The tribals firmly believe in the efficiency of black magic and witchcraft. An evil spirit that will make him sick and die when he has committed an offence against the tribal law may possess a person. Occasionally a series of crimes are committed either in the pursuance of magic practice or in defense against them to revenge them. For them the evil eye or the utterance of a curse and has bad omen which causes sickness. Dreams can also bring bad or good omens.124

Tribes treat their guest as God and serve them befittingly. Even though they don't have anything to eat, the guests are never left hungry and are always looked after by the host family members.125

**Christianity among the Tribes**

Christian missionaries aimed at the tribes. The early efforts failed to bear fruits due to various reasons like alien race, colour, culture, language etc. prayers were organised among the tribes in the region in the second half of the nineteenth century. In most of the tribal areas, Christian missionaries work as NGOs. The churches also render service among the tribes. Church has taken efforts to liberate them from the fear of evil spirits, and superstitious beliefs. And it has established centers of education, and extensive medical service.126

Among the tribes, Hindus are the most numerous; as big as 95%. Christians come next in order even though they constitute only 4.8% and only .2% are Muslims. Thus Hindus are the largest religious group in the study area.
Change Trend in the Tribal Life Style

Changes are the order of the days. Tribal life style also undergoes transformation.

Housing

Changes have already crept in because of influence the non-tribes; development of road, transport and communication and also because of NGOs and Government sponsored welfare measures. The Government is implementing various welfare schemes for the upliftment of tribals by the tribal welfare Department. The Government has constructed group house in Coimbatore District, under various schemes viz. Indira Awaaz Yojana, ‘Pradhan Manthri Gramaodaya Yojana’ and upgradation of group houses, from 2001 onwards. In all settlements, the existing thatched roofs were replaced by providing G.I sheet roofing along with cement flooring.

Indira Awaaz Yojana (IAY)

The objective of IAY is to provide housing to SC/ST and communities living below poverty line. The houses are built with a unit cost of Rs.32000/- for normal soil
and Rs.34000/- for difficult areas. Funding pattern for this scheme is 75% from centre and 25% from state from 1999-2000 onwards.

**Basic Minimum Services**

The Government of Tamilnadu funds the Basic Minimum Service Scheme. Under this scheme, 35 houses have been taken up exclusively for the tribal population dwelling in the Reserve forest of Karamadai Range.

**Table: 2 Distribution of 21,803 ST households and the type of Houses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of house</th>
<th>Number of House holds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grass, thatch, Bamboo wood, Mud houses</td>
<td>3,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polythene</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titles</td>
<td>11,422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slate</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asbestos</td>
<td>1,496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brick</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>5,004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other material</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 2001 census

**Drinking water facilities**

Tribal areas are mostly hilly and rocky and therefore there is a considerable shortage of water. The natural springs and streams have dried up due to clearing of vegetation or felling trees. Small check dams at higher elevation and tube connections were provided in some area. Digging wells and pumping water from the tube wells and also in use in several tribal hamlets 128.
Table: 3 Source of drinking water and its location for 21,803 ST households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number of House Holds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tap</td>
<td>15,514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand pumps</td>
<td>1,996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube well</td>
<td>1,386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well</td>
<td>1,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pond (or) lake</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River</td>
<td>775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other</td>
<td>417</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 2001 census

Public Distribution System

It is a scheme by which essential items like rice, sugar, kerosene etc are sold to the card holders (deserving families) at a subsidized rate or fair price. The benefactors are the people of below poverty line. Naturally the tribes are covered under this scheme. Public Distribution shops are located in the following map.
Fig: 5 Public Distribution shops and its location in Tribal habitats
PeriyanaickenPalayam Blocks:
16. Rayaaroothuputhur

Thondamuthur Block:

Udumalaipettai Block:

Anamalai Block:
10. Santhi Asrumam 11. Kilkattupathy

Valparai Panchayat:
4. Nedukandru 5. Udumamparai

Karamadai Block:
4. Seenkuli 5. Gobanari 6. Alankandi

Madhukkarai:
Approach roads:

Formation of approach roads in the tribal settlements is provided by ‘Innovative Jawahar Rozzer Yojana’ (IJRY) scheme. In this component, whenever paving of rough stones and construction of culverts have forwarded possible, approach pathway for the tribal settlements.

Solar light

In most of the settlements, solar lights have been installed to protect the tribals from wild life during night. In Karamadai Panchayat Union, at Odanthurai village twenty five solar street lights were installed.

Table: 4 Distribution of 21,803 ST households by sources of lighting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number of Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>14,659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerosene</td>
<td>6,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solar energy</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other oil</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No light</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2001 census

Solar power fencing is also provided around the habitations as a protective measure against wild elephants. This scheme is an eco-friendly effort to wear away biotic pressures and aims at creating alternative employment opportunities for the tribals.
Tribal women at Sadivayal hills, located at the foothills of Siruvani observed the 'solar cooking demonstrations' by Nerd society (NGO)\textsuperscript{131}, which would help the tribal women to avoid entering into forest for firewood and they can also enjoy a smoke-free cooking environment.

In Coimbatore District, ten solar pumpsets had been installed in the tribal settlements for pumping water from the streams for drinking as well as agricultural purposes.

The biogas plant are very popular non-conventional energy scheme. DRDA through its efforts has created awareness amongst the tribal people. Biogas based power generation plant was introduced in Thalanji, tribal settlement, located 6k.m from the main road in Amaravathy forest range of Udumalpet taluk\textsuperscript{132}. This project is not only expected to lit up the lives of the tribes, but also, meet their cooking demands of the womenfolk.

**Communication facilities**

A coin-Box operated cellular phone was installed in the twin tribal settlements of Sembukkarai and Doomanur\textsuperscript{133}. This would be helpful for the tribal people to stay in touch with the family members, who go out from hill for work, and for conveyance like a jeep in an emergency.

**Recreation facilities**

Government of Tamilnadu had provided television and Reading rooms in their settlements. Community halls were also constructed as 'Samudahayakoodam' in their settlements for social gatherings.
Table: 5 List of 21,803 ST households having Banking service and other specified Assets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assets</th>
<th>Number of House Holds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banking service</td>
<td>4,366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>8,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>8,101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>2,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle</td>
<td>6,981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scooter, Motorcycle</td>
<td>4,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car, Jeep, Van</td>
<td>868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the specified assets</td>
<td>8,280</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2001 census

Thus one can easily notice the changes that are taking place in the tribal life style in general and among the tribal women in particular. Clothings have changed; their earnings have improved; traditional worship is fading away by giving room to elaborate practices and pilgrimages; folk acts are disappearing. They are switching over to allopathic medicine from the age-old herbal cures. Changes can be seen in marriage pattern family life and religious practices. Regarding modernization they are moving towards the mainstream.
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