

CHAPTER - III

TRIBES IN MALABAR: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE

This chapter is a descriptive account of the tribes of Malabar. The main interest of this chapter is to provide the reader a basic idea about the different tribes existing in Malabar. First I will provide a brief discussion on different tribal areas. Major part of the chapter is a discussion on the tribals of Wynad. The area, its history, different tribal groupings living there are discussed. It also provides a brief account on the customs and practices of various tribes living here. I have often resorted to a discussion on the economic life as well. These descriptive accounts, along with the succeeding chapter, will form a background to understand the socio-economic transformation experienced in the colonial and postcolonial period.

Malabar: A historical overview

Malabar District was an administrative unit of British India and a part of the Madras State after independence. It is a narrow strip of land sandwiched between the Western Ghats and the Arabian sea, and lying between latitude 10° and 12 30' and longitude 75° and 77°. It is primarily a coastal area and very irregular in shape, almost cut off from the influence of the other Dravidian groups of the peninsula by a high range of mountains.¹ It is rounded on the west by the Arabian sea, on the north by south Kanara District, and on the east by the western Ghats, and the princely state of Cochin to the south. From the time of Cosmas Indoco-Pleatstes (AD 522-547) down to the 11th or 12th century AD, the word 'Mala' was applied to the coast by

¹ *Guide to the Records of the Malabar District 1714-1835*, Vol. I, Madras, 1936, p. 7.

Arab navigators, and the seafaring populations, who flocked here subsequently for pepper and other spices, called it *Malibar*, *Manibar*, *Mulibar* or *Munibar*.² The Arab geographer Yaqut (1179-1229) is the first to give us the name 'Malabar', Ma'bar.³ The name Malabar was not in general use until the arrival of the Europeans and the word is most probably a fusion of Dravidian Mala (Hill) and *Puram* (region) derived or westernised into *bar* may therefore be taken to mean the hilly or mountainous country, a name well suited to its physical characteristics. The meaning, hill country, is therefore, synonymous with the meaning of Malayalam, but probably fortuitously so. Malabar was frequently confused with Ma'abar.⁴

The Malabar region formed part of the ancient kingdom of Chera for centuries. It became part of the Vijayanagara Empire in the 15th century, with the breakup of the Empire in the mid 16th century the region came under the rule of a number of local chieftains, notably the Kolathiris of North Malabar, Zamorins of Calicut and Valluvakonathiris of Walluvanadu. The region came under British rule in the 18th century, during the Anglo-Mysore war and it was organised into a District of Madras Presidency. The district was properly divided for administrative purpose into 9 taluks, each of which was subdivided into amsams or parishes, which were made up of desams or hamlets. Belonging to it also is the taluk of British Cochin, consisting of 19 isolated bits of territory in the native states of Cochin and Travancore; and attached to it also are the villages of Tangasseri and Anjengo in Travancore, the Laccadive island and Minikoy. The major taluks in British Malabar were 1. Wynad, 2. Chirakkal, 3. Kottayam, 4. Kurumbranad, 5. Calicut, 6. Ernad, 7. Ponnani, 8. Walluvanad, 9. Palaghat, 10. Cochin, 11. Laccadive. The

² William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol. I, New Delhi, 1995, p. 1.

³ S.M. Nainar, *Arab Geographer*, Madras, 1990, p. 19.

⁴ As quoted in Roland E. Miller, *Mappil Muslim of Kerala*, Madras, 1876, p. 18.

British district included the present districts of Kasargod, Kannur, Kozhikode, Wynad, Malappuram, much of Palakkad and a small portion of Trissur. During the British period the Malabar area was divided into two areas as North and South. North Malabar comprises present Kasargod and Kannur districts, Mananthavadi taluk of Wynad district and Vadakara taluk of Kozhikode district. Leftover area is South Malabar. With India's independence, Madras presidency became Madras state, which was divided along linguistic lines on 1st November 1956, when Malabar district was merged with the Kasargod district immediately to the north and the south of Travancore-Cochin to the South to form the state of Kerala.

(i) Tribes in Malabar

Tribal communities are found in all districts of Kerala state. They are concentrated in different regions and may be divided into seven major territorial groups taking into account their historical, ethnic and socio cultural relation.⁵ Among these the first 5 areas are in Malabar. The tribal communities in these areas are in the Western Ghats which separates Kerala from the adjoining districts of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

1. Kasargod tribal area:- This tribal zone comprises of the two taluks: Kasargod and Hosdurg. The major tribal communities living in this region are the Koragas and Maratis. Koragas is one of the most backward primitive tribes of Kerala. The Maratis (Marathas), are seen at Adoor, Delampudi, Bandadukka, Padre and Bayer of Kasargod Taluk and Panathadi of Hosdurg Taluk. The name has originated from the Marathi language they speak. The early Sanskrit writers described the whole of the Deccan plateau as Maharashtra and as such the name can be one that refers to the place of

⁵ The seven tribal regions in Kerala are Kasargod, Wynad, Attappady, Nilambur, Parambikulam, Idukki and Trivandrum.

habitation as well.⁶ This tribe speaks a poor dialect of Marathi with many Kanarese and Malayalam words and phrases.

2. Attappady Tribal Area:- This valley is one of the prominent forest regions of Kerala and is situated in Palakkad district. The valley is bounded on the north by Nilgiris, on the south by Manarkad taluk, and on the west by thick forest, of which the Silent Valley is one of the few stretches of the virgin forest land of the Perinthalmanna taluk of Malappuram district. The major tribal communities living in this valley are Irular, Mudugars and Kurumbas. They are seen at Pothupara, Mayanmudi, Palakapandy of the Nalliampathi hills, Chittoor taluk, Sholayar valley, Perinthalmanna taluk and in the Walayar forest of the Palakkad taluk. Their name is reported to have originated from their own description of their colour as Irula (dark).⁷ Their patois is described as a dialect of Tamil with many Kanarese words and phrases. The dialect of those in Kerala includes quite a lot of Malayalam phrases. The Kurumbas identified as one of the primitive tribes of Kerala, is mainly found in Attapady valley.

3. Nilambur Tribal Area:- This tribal area of the forest division is situated in the Manjeri taluk or Ernad taluk of the Malappuram District. The valley is bounded on the North by the Kozhikode district, on the east by the Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu, on the south by Nilambur valley and on the west by Manjeri taluks' Head Quarters. The valley is divided into 3 forest ranges, viz., the Nilambur Range, Chungathara Range and Karulai Range. The Cholanaikkan, one of the Primitive Tribes of Kerala, is the major tribe inhabiting in the forest ranges. This tribe is said to have migrated from the neighbouring forest of Mysore. They speak a mixture of Canarese and Tamil.

⁶ A.A.D. Luiz, *Tribes of Kerala*, New Delhi, 1962, p. 181.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Their settlement is called *kallu alai* (rock cave shortened to Alai).⁸ Traditionally they have lived in the interior forest of the valley.

4. Parambikulam Tribal Area:- This area is located in the Chittoor taluk of Palakkad district. One major tribe in this area is the Kadar of Cochin. They are seen at Pooyamkutty, Orikombankutty, Muthirachal, Pothupara and Kollengode forest of Chittor Taluk. Their name connotes that they are *aal* (people) of *kadu* (forest).⁹ They have nothing in common with the Kadar of Wynad and are considered as one of the Primitive Tribes of Kerala.¹⁰

So far I have given a very brief sketch of the different tribal areas within Malabar. Hereafter I will be giving a detailed discussion on the Wynad tribal area. This detailed discussion is imperative since it will form a background for our major discussions in the succeeding chapters.

5. Wynad:- Wynad, one of the taluks of the erstwhile Malabar District, geographically, is a mountainous plateau on the rest of the Western Ghat, and lies between North latitude 11° 26' 28" and 11° 58' 22" and East longitudes 57° 46' 38" and 76° 26' 11" and is bounded on the North by the Virajpet taluk of Kodugu district, on the east by Heggadadevankote and Gandlupet taluks of the Mysore district of Karnataka State and the Gudalpur taluk of Nilgiri district of Tamilnadu, on the South by Ernad taluk of Malappuram district and Kozhikode taluk of Kozhikode district, and on the West by Quilandy and Badagara taluks of Kannur district. Wynad is a continuation of the great Mysore plateau, and lies above the crest of the Western Ghats. The average height of the plateau is about 3000 feet above the sea level and located at a distance of about 76 km from the seashore of Calicut in the Western Ghat. As a hilly tract which constitute 2132 Sq. Km, i.e., 5.49 percent of the total area

⁸ P.R.G. Mathur, *Tribal Situation in Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1977, p. 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁰ Interview with K. Panoor, Thalassery, 5.6.2007.

of the Kerala state, lying about 900 m above mean sea level. The 37.97 percent of the total geographical areas of the district are forest, consequently the cropping pattern is also suitable to the terrain of the land. The main cultivations are cash crops as well as paddy, tapioca, and the plantain. Other crops grown include coffee, tea, cardamom, pepper, cocoa, rubber, turmeric and ginger. Additional cash crops were started in this area after the large scale migration of the Travancore population.¹¹

The early history of Wynad is shrouded in mystery. But the name of Wynad is found in the inscriptions of Hoysala Chiefs.¹² In a later inscription of the 15th century the plateau is mentioned as Bayinad. It is obvious that formerly the country was known as Bayalnadu and later corruption made it Wynad. It is said that the history of Wynad in connection with the tribes starts with the Kudumbiyi family who held sway over Wynad and must be accepted as an established fact as mentioned in the Malabar Gazetteers.¹³ But it is impossible to fix the period when they lived and reigned. The Kudumbiyi family as the rulers of Wynad, were the original inhabitants of this area. Dr. Oppert speaks of 'Kudumbam' as identical with 'Kudumbi' and 'Karumban' and it is possible that 'Kurumbas' were the original inhabitants of Wynad during the reign of the Kudumbiyil tribal family.¹⁴ The Vedar Kings, later rulers of Wynad, were the successors of this Kudumbiyil family. The authority of Vedar rulers over Wynad declined with the encroachment of the

¹¹ A. Aiyappan, *et al.*, *Ecology, Economy, Matriliney and Fertility of Kurichians*, New Delhi; 1990, p. 45.

¹² As quoted in K.J. John, 'Early Man in Wynad' in *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol.2, part 2. Trivandrum, 1975, p. 126.

¹³ C.A. Innes *et al.*, *Madras District Gazetteers - Malabar* (Reprint), Madras, 1951, p. 502.

¹⁴ As quoted in C. Gopalan Nair, *Wynad - Its People and Tradition*, New Delhi, 2000, p. 14.

neighbouring Kottayam rulers.¹⁵ The tradition has undergone various changes and there is no ample evidence to give a correct account of how the Kottayam Raja became the rulers of Wynad. But it is sure that there are several historical stages through which Wynad has passed before it became part and parcel of the British Empire.

Wynad as a taluk in Malabar never lowered its head to the powerful Mysore rule and defied the British colonial power until its rulers fell. The forces of Mysore ruler Hyder Ali were devastating Malabar in 1766 and the rulers of Kottayam had fled for safety to Travancore. Thus Wynad remained undisturbed under the sovereignty of *Padinhare Kovilagam* (Western Branch) of which Keralavarma Pazhassi was the head, until 1773, when a Mysore army passed through the Thamarassery ghat on its way to Calicut.¹⁶ Pazhassi resented the action of the senior Raja and refused to submit to the Mysore rulers with whom he was engaged in desultory warfare from 1787 to the beginning of the Third Mysore War in 1790. Robert Tylor, Chief of English settlement at Tellichery, came to an agreement with Kerala varma Pazhassi raja that the company would assist and protect the Raja and do everything in their power to render him independent of Tipu, the son of Hyder Ali. The war was waged, and under the treaty of peace dated 18th March, 1792, Malabar was ceded to the company by the Sultan of Mysore.

The influence of the Kottayam regime was supreme when the Wynad finally passed into the British hands. During this period Wynad proper was divided into *Nadus* or small divisions and placed under Nair chieftains for the

¹⁵ Tradition points a time when a line of Vedar kings held sway, and the story goes on to record that an ill-judged capture of a Kshatriya pilgrim to the famous Tirunelli shrine led to the invasion and subjugation of the country by the Kshatriya Princess of Kottayam and Kurumbranad; C.A. Innes, *et al.*, n. 13, p. 502.

¹⁶ C. Gopalan Nair, n. 14, p. 27.

purpose of administration.¹⁷ There were 11 ancient nadus.¹⁸ When Wynad came under the British there were no major changes (except some minor changes) till the formation of Kerala state.¹⁹ In 1830 the Nilgiri plateau was attached to Malabar but later in 1843 it was transferred to Coimbatore leaving the Kundah range in Malabar. The three amsoms of Munnadan, Cherankod and Nambolakkod were transferred to the Nilgiri district in 1877.²⁰ In the area forming a new amsom Peria was formed by bifurcating Edavaka amsom and another, Vythiri, comprising a portion of Kurumbala amsom. Pulpally desom which formed part of Kuppathode amsom was later transferred to Puthadi amsom in 1844. Thus there were 7 amsoms in north Wynad subdivision,²¹ and 6 amsoms in south Wynad.²² In pursuance of a decision in 1859 to conserve the forest throughout the Madras presidency under the British rule, it became imperative to have a survey on Government escheat and private forests. The mapping of the then Wynad taluk was immediately taken up, but by 1882 it covered only one-third of the taluk.

Tribal Situation in Wynad

Being an abode to many tribal communities Wynad has the largest tribal concentration among the districts of the state and is considered as the 'Holy land of Adivasis' in Kerala.²³ The southern part of this district forms

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁸ Muthornad, Porunnanur, Nallurnad, Ellurnad, Wynad, Kurumbala, Edanatussakur, Muppainad, Ganapathipattom, Munnadan and Nambolakkad.

¹⁹ S.C. Bhatt (ed.), *The Encyclopedic District Gazetteers of Kerala - Southern Zone*, Vol. 2, New Delhi, 1997, p. 873.

²⁰ C.A. Innes, *et al.*, (ed.), n. 13, p. 502.

²¹ Edavaka Arthara, Thondernadu, Porunnanur, Nallurnadu, Ellurnadu, Anjuthara and Kappathod.

²² Puthadi Arthara, Kurumbala, Edavakalassakur, Muppainad, Munnadan and Ganapathipattam.

²³ Nettur Damodaran, *Adivasikalude Keralam*, Kottayam, 1974, p. 28.

the extensive Wynad plateau, which is acclaimed to be an "ethnic museum".²⁴ The historical reason for this tribal concentration in Wynad may be its geographical nature. The settlement of tribal communities in those areas is on the Western Ghats which separates Kerala from the adjoining districts of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. After the formation of the district, it has been identified that Wynad is a land of twelve tribal communities.²⁵

By 2001 census the tribal population of Wynad is 1,36,062 (M. 67,394, F. 68,668); i.e., 17.43 percent of the total population of the district.²⁶ The present tribal population of Wynad constitute 37 percent of the total tribal population of Kerala. This tribal population is distributed in three taluks of Wynad consisting of eight panchayaths of Mananthavadi taluks, seven panchayaths of Sultan Batheri taluk and 10 panchayaths of Vythiri taluk as given below (Table I).

TABLE 5
**Distribution of Individual Tribal
Population in Taluks of Wynad District by Sex**

Taluks/District	Population		Male		Female	
	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%
Mananthavadi	47276	6.31	24474	3.13	24802	3.17
Sulthanbattery	52591	6.73	26058	3.33	26533	3.39
Vythiri	34195	4.38	16862	2.16	17333	2.22
District Total	136062	17.43	67394	8.63	68668	8.79

Source: Census 2001

²⁴ *Tribal Sub-plan, Government of Kerala, Trivandrum, 1974, p. 6.*

²⁵ Adiya, Adiyar, Adiyar (these are together listed as Adiya) Kurichia, Paniya, Kattunaikka, Mullukuruma Uralikuruma, Wynadan Kadar, Karimbalan, Malayarayan and Thachanad Muppan - The list prepared on the basis of settlement lists of three Tribal Blocks in Wynad.

²⁶ *Census, 2001.*

In the matter of tribal development in the district there are three Tribal Blocks, such as Mananthavadi, Sulthan Batheri and Kalpetta. Each of these tribal communities has its own specific culture and traditions, even though they are distributed in the same ecological niche. Of all the tribes in the district some are more important as far as the study is concerned. These are Adiya, Paniya, Kattunaikka (agricultural labourers), Uralikuruman (artisans) and Mullukuruma and Kurichia (land owning cultivators). They are numerically dominant and are distributed in Wynad as given below (Table II).

TABLE 6

Distribution of Major Six Tribal Population in Wynad District

Tribes	Person		Male		Female	
	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%
Adiya	9936	7.3	4785	3.3	5154	3.7
Paniya	60801	44.6	29759	21.8	31042	22.8
Kattunaikka	2039	8.8	6052	4.4	5987	4.4
Mullukuruma	25083	18.4	1757	29.21	12511	9.1
Kurichia	22939	16.8	11625	8.5	11314	8.3
Uralikuruma	3466	2.5	1700	1.2	1766	1.2

Source: Census 2001

The cultural profile of these people represents different socio-economic categories. So, it is to be noted that the tribes in Wynad lack homogeneity and we find social hierarchy among them, many of whom are very important even on all Kerala context. An important demographic fact is that half of the tribal population in Wynad is concentrated in pockets where it is outnumbered by the nontribals.²⁷ It indicates that the migration of nontribals to the tribal areas has reduced them to a minority.

²⁷ Interview with Pankajakshan, Tribal Development Officer, Kalpetta, 10.11.2008

Social Life

The tribal communities are concentrated towards the southern end of the western Ghats. Clearer traces are found in the Wynad region of an early and primitive culture whose continuity may be traced in its traditional way of life.²⁸ The social history of these communities has to be reconstructed on the basis of myths, traditional accounts, literary references and recorded history of the regions of their concentrations. Many of these tribes are autochthonal and their myths are closely connected with the region of their present habitat. Their tradition indicates that they never knew of origination from an area other than their present habitat. Thus, the social setup of these communities in Malabar are varied from region to region as well as tribe to tribe. A tribe is known for their social norms and are considered as a self-contained unit.²⁹ Central to this social organisation of tribal life is the *clan* which can be considered as the immediate grouping above the individual's family or lineage and thus the first point of contact between the individual and society.³⁰ Each community is divided into clans, normally multiple, rarely dual.³¹

Adiya - In Wynad this tribe is mainly distributed in the areas of Eddapally, Cherar, Kuppathod, Tirunelli, Trissilery and Venom Village of Mananthavadi taluk. They are also concentrated in the adjoining areas of Kannur district and Kodagu in Karnataka state. No settlements are seen within the Government Reserve Forest. Their name is reported to have originated from an old rule that they should maintain a distance of *aar* (six) *adi* (feet) from others to avoid pollution.³² The word Adiya also connotes a 'slave' or vassal attached to a

²⁸ K.J. John, *n.* 12, p. 127.

²⁹ Andre Betaille, *Society and Politics in India*, London, 1991, p. 57.

³⁰ T. Madhava Menon, (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Dravidian Tribes*, Vol. II, Trivandrum, 1996, p. 188.

³¹ *Madras Handbook*, New Delhi, 2005, p. 107.

³² A.A.D. Luiz, *n.* 6, p. 26.

person of standing.³³ They prefer to be known as *ravuler* (in their own dialect it means “our people”)³⁴. Their subjugation is attributed to *embrandiris* (Tulu Brahmins), another migrant cultivator group to Wynad from Krnataka .³⁵ They have practically none of the external features of tribes except the curly hair and dark skin. A dialect of Kannada is their mother-tongue, and is unintelligible to others. Those who settled in Kerala can converse in Malayalam. Their language is influenced by Malayalam and Kannada which they speak at home with their kin groups, with others they speak Malayalam. Their language within the community exhibits a number of peculiarities which marks it off from Malayalam as well as from other tribal speeches in the district.

The Adiyas have some legends regarding their origin. Adya claim that they were *pujaris* (priests) in the Bhadrakali temples have been recognised by scholars like A A D. Luiz who observes that North Malabar has been their home for centuries and it is probably that they came to Kerala with Chettis and Brahmins of Mysore, and continued to be their agricultural serfs.³⁶ By social division among the Adiyas there are 17 *Chemmam* (clan) which are matrilineal and exogenous. Of these, three are known as *mantu* because they enjoy a higher status.³⁷ The first *mantu* is superior in terms of position others are in forms of authority. The *mantus* are generally named after the location of the settlement.³⁸

³³ The word 'Adiyan' is used to denote a single individual, 'Adiyar' being the plural.

³⁴ B. Francis Kulirani, 'The Shriking Livelihood Strategies of the Paniyar', in <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?>

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ A.A.D. Luiz, *n.* 6, p. 28.

³⁷ Tirunelli *mantu*, Badakku *mantu* and Pothura *mantu*.

³⁸ K.S. Singh, *People of India - Kerala*, Vol. 27, Part .1, New Delhi, p. 144.

The Adiyas have the institution of the headman in all their settlements. Each *Chemmam* has a leader, *Chemmakaran*. His office is not hereditary; the senior most member of the clan from among all the families is the incumbent. They are below the chief of the tribe, *nattumooppan*, immediately below whom are the *kanaladis* (assistant). Below the *Chemmakaran*, at the settlement (*kunnu*) level, is the *kunnumooppan*, also called *kunnukkaran*. He looks after the affairs of the settlement during various ceremonies.³⁹ Other important personages are *thammadikkaran* (oracle), a member of *karmi* whose specific duty is to attend to the burial of the dead, and all ceremonies are conducted in connection with funeral rites under his control.

Paniyas

The Paniyas, one of the largest tribal people in Kerala, are mainly found in Wynad district and neighbouring areas of Karnataka as well as Nilgiri district. Even in the beginning of the 20th century they were the largest tribal group.⁴⁰ The Paniyas are the only tribe who are scattered throughout the district. They are the most ancient inhabitants of Wynad.⁴¹ The migration of people to Wynad with better farming skill resulted in the subjugation of these people for labour which gave rise to the emergence of new ethnonym *paniyar* –signifying *panikkaar* (workers).⁴² Their name is the modified form of the Malayalam word *panikkaar* (labourers). As agricultural coolies they are a necessity in a country where it is difficult to secure labourers for work in the paddy fields.

³⁹ T. Madhava Menon (ed.), *n.* 30, Vol. II, 1996, p. 2.

⁴⁰ C.A. Innes et al., *n.* 13, p. 135.

⁴¹ James Wilkinson, et al., (eds.) *Primitive Tribes and Monuments of Nilgiris*, New Delhi, 1983, p. 3.

⁴² B. Francis Kulirani, *n.* 34, p. 27.

Anthropological studies in 1957 proved that they are related to Negrito strain.⁴³ The physical features of the Paniyas represent presumably one of the oldest groups among the tribes.⁴⁴ Buchanan viewed them as a rude tribe in Wynad.⁴⁵ As common observation shows they resemble the Negrito tribes in their curly hair and thick lips. Their cephalic and nasal indices indicate a resemblance to African origin. Body hair is sparse but baldness of the head is rare. Traditionally they were with muscular bodies and could sustain hard physical labour. A common belief based on their general appearance prevailed among the European planting community that they are of African origin, and descended from ancestors who were wrecked on the Malabar coast.⁴⁶ This tribe, as a primitive ethnic strain, are likely to have been autochthones of the area, who sought shelter in the wilds of Wynad when enslavement of their kinsmen was going on in the plains. They could not sustain their freedom, for the master class followed them into Wynad to exploit the land with enslaved Paniya labour. Traditionally the Paniyas were food gatherers.⁴⁷ Some argue that they were engaged in agricultural labour only later in the absence of chances to food gathering.⁴⁸ With the establishment of feudal order under the Rajas, the Nair chieftains and their retainers parcelled the available lands among themselves and the Paniyas lost all vestiges of freedom.⁴⁹ It was Thurston who proposed another version of 'Ippi hill' origin

⁴³ L.A.Krishna Iyer, *Social History of Kerala*, Vol.1, Madras, 1968, p. 18.

⁴⁴ K.J. John, *n.* 12, p. 120.

⁴⁵ Francis Buchanan, *A Journay from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, Vol. II, Madras, 1870, p. 154.

⁴⁶ Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. VI, Delhi, 1975, p. 57.

⁴⁷ L.A Krishna Iyer, *Kerala and Her People*, Palaghat, 1961, p. 70.

⁴⁸ L.A Krishna Iyer, *et al.*, *Anthropology in India*, Delhi, 1966, pp. 56-7

⁴⁹ A. Aiyappan, *The Paniyas - an ex-slave tribe of South India*, Calcutta, 1992, p. 8.

of Paniyas and later it got momentum in the writings of others.⁵⁰ But Thurston and others could nowhere locate the Ippi hill in Wynad but later this hill has been located near Banasura peak.⁵¹

As per the earliest studies of Luiz and others there were no clans and social gradation in the Paniya society. If there is any difference it was based on economic grounds.⁵² But later studies, have pointed out that the Paniyas adopted a dual descent system . Though a full fledged double descent system has not been noticed among the Paniyas, a combination of both paternal and maternal affiliation in some rudimentary forms is found among them. Every individual belongs to a clan and a gen. The gen is no less exogamous than a clan. The double exogamy is extended by the rule forbidding marriage in the father's clan as well as that of the mother.⁵³ The residence is patrilocal. While the patrilineal clan was called '*kulam*', the matrilineal identification was to be a *kudumbam*.⁵⁴ Matrilineal descent group is called *illam* or *kulam*; some typical names were *munnilam*, *anchillam*, *aarillam*, etc. in which the first component is a numerical. Aiyappan points out that the Paniyas do not club clan into moieties: they do not want to limit their circle of exogamy to narrow groups.⁵⁵ They also tend to identify each with the lineage name of their masters, for e.g., the serfs of '*Ettil Nambiar*' would describe themselves as '*Ettil Paniyas*'.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Thurston proposed this version of origin as per the information of Nair landlords that 'when excited the paniyas utter the word 'ippi' and that leads to the presumption that they had their origin on the Ippi hills". Edgar Thurston, *n.* 45, p. 58.

⁵¹ T. Madhava Menon, *n.* 30, p. 303.

⁵² A.A.D. Luiz, *n.* 6, p. 219.

⁵³ P.R.G. Mathur, *n.* 8, 1977, p. 168.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ A. Aiyappan, *n.* 49, p. 82.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

They dwelled in small villages, each consisting of four or five huts, which are called *madum*.⁵⁷ The Paniya community has the institution of headman called *kuttan*. It is stated that *kuttan* used to be appointed at every settlement by the Nair landlords; his major responsibility was to account for the actions of everyone in the settlement.⁵⁸ The investiture of the *kuttan* with power of office is celebrated with a feast and dance, at which a bangle is presented to the *kuttan* as a badge of authority. Each *nadu* or traditional group of villages had a patrilineally hereditary headman called ‘*koyma*’. Under him, there were “*Chemmis*”, the actual head of each settlement, and they were assisted by messengers called *Karayma*, but occasionally matrilineal also.⁵⁹ The office of *koyma* is virtually extinct; his traditional role was to preside over all social activities and meetings of elders to settle disputes. As the *chemmis* had parallel powers in their respective settlement his role was more of an appellate authority. He was entitled to various payments for approving and validating functions. It is in the pronominal system that Paniya differs mostly from Malayalam. It is similar in this regard with Adiyas. Among Paniyas they speak a very corrupt dialect of Malayalam with an admixture of Tamil and Tulu words and phrases which is difficult for others to understand.

Kattunaikka

Kattunaikkas are largely found in Wynad district. They live in the deep forests of high mountains of Kidanganad, Purakadi, Pulpalli, Noolpuzha, Maruthonkara, Taruvana and Nallurnad area of Vythiri Taluk. They are also known as Kadu or Shola Nayakans and Jenu or Teen Kurumans.⁶⁰ The

⁵⁷ Francis Buchanan, *n.* 45, p. 154.

⁵⁸ Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. IV, p. 64.

⁵⁹ as quoted in T. Madhava Menon, *n.* 30, p. 306.

⁶⁰ A.A.D. Luiz, *n.* 6, p. 86.

former name is popular in the Telugu and Kanarese speaking areas; the latter and alternate name Kattunaikan in the Tamil and Malayalam speaking areas. Some scholars state that the ethnonym Kattunaikka correctly connotes the fact that they are the *nayakas* (chiefs) of the *kattu* or *kadu* (forest). The alternate name, Jenu or Teen Kurumba, referred to the collection of honey which is one of their major occupations. They are said to have migrated from the neighbouring forests of Mysore. As a primitive tribe they were formerly completely isolated and thus lived by hunting, fishing and collecting food.⁶¹ So, they did not have any contact with outside people. It is also stated that they have nothing in common with the Urali Kurumans and Mullukurumans though they are all included in the popular generic name. This people are tall, long armed and black skinned with curly or wavy hair.

The Kattunaikkas have practically nothing to narrate regarding their origin and early history. They claim to be autochthones of the Western Ghats, and that is admissible, even though they have nothing to state in support of the claim.⁶² There is nothing known about the early clan divisions and rules, but it is stated in the report of a survey that there are three 'sects' among them, viz., *Malanaikkan*, *Kattunaikkan* and *Panninaikkan*.⁶³ They do not intermarry, as there are no subdivisions among the Kattunaikkans themselves. They are an endogamous tribe, which is patrilineal and matrilineal. The evidences regarding the disposal of the implements of the deceased further indicate that the Kattunaikkans follow the patrilineal rule of succession.⁶⁴ Their dialect consists of words and phrases drawn from all the Dravidian languages, and those in Kerala use more Malayalam.

⁶¹ P.R.G. Mathur, *n.* 8, p. 76.

⁶² A.A.D. Luiz, *n.* 6, p. 87.

⁶³ *Report on Socio-economic survey of tribals in Kerala 1976-78*, Trivandrum, 1979, p. 165.

⁶⁴ A.A.D. Luiz, *n.* 6, p. 87.

Mullukuruma

As early inhabitants of Wynad, Mullukurumans are mainly found in the panchayaths of Noolpuzha, Kidanganad, Muppainad, Muttil, Parakkadi, Tirunelli and Mananthavadi of the district and also in the adjoining areas of Gudalur taluk in the Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu. They have been referred to as Mullukurumbans by earlier writers like Thurston (1975) and Aiyappan (1948). But it was A.A.D. Luiz (1962) who referred to them as Mullakurumans.⁶⁵

The Mullukurumans have nothing definite to state regarding their origin. They believe that their present name is a creation of the Nairs of Wynad during the Nair supremacy. Being closely associated with Nair landlords they adopted a lot of their customs and ceremonies. So they claim racial superiority over the Jenu-kuruman and Uralikurumans as the three groups are known by the same generic name.⁶⁶ They consider the other tribal groups as low and polluting and avoid association with them.

As to how they came to be known by this general name is lost in obscurity. It is said that there is a possibility that the early feudal lords of Wynad used the term Kurumans for all working classes, especially agricultural labourers having a similar occupation and this tribe came to be known by that name.⁶⁷ No detailed information is available regarding the existence of *Kulas* (clans) but some references indicate that there are four

⁶⁵ The prefix '*Mulla*' may have originated from Mula (Bamboo) which provide them with an important occupation; they cut and sell it or make useful articles with it for sale. It is also possible that it originates from Mullu (thorn) because they used to live in the midst of thorny shrubs. Mullu also refers to their popular weapon, the arrow, without which these sturdy and well-made mountaineers are seldom seen.

⁶⁶ A.A.D. Luiz, *n.* 6, p. 198.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Kulas traced through the mother. The four *kulas*, namely *villappa*, *kathika*, *vadakku* and *vengade*, regulate marriage alliance.⁶⁸ There is also evidences to indicate that in the past they followed the matriarchial rule but at present they have adopted the *makkathayam* (patriarchal rule of succession).⁶⁹ Among them, community endogamy, *kulam* and *kudi* exogamy is the rule. There is no hierarchy among the *kulas*. They have the institution of headman known as *mudali*, who presides over the meetings of the elders and govern their social affairs. He can be identified by the silver bangle worn on his right arm. His consent is necessary before launching new ventures, finalising marriage arrangements and taking decisions pertaining to the community. The office of the headman is hereditary; the son succeeds his father, if he is found to be unfit, the senior nephew gets the status. The language spoken by them is described as 'Kurumba', which is an unintelligible dialect of Kanarese with a good admixture of Tamil and Malayalam words. They take pride in the fact that their unwritten language has a good vocabulary.

Urali Kuruman

In Malabar the Urali kurumans are inhabitants of Wynad District. They are mainly found in the north-eastern and central parts of the district, with concentration in Tirunelli, Panamaram, Poothadi, Noolpuzha, Mullankolli, Kaniampatta, Ambalavayal and Nenmeni panchayaths. They are also found in the forest regions adjacent to the neighbouring forest area of Karnataka state, where they are known as Jenu Kurumba. They should be considered as the most ancient inhabitants of the Western Ghats who can rightly contest with the early Dravidians for priority of occupation. So they are one of the few tribal artisans in India.⁷⁰ This tribe like the other divisions attract the

⁶⁸ K.S. Singh, *n.* 38, p. 743.

⁶⁹ Interview with Karvarnan, a retired Sub-Engineer, Kalpetta, 3.8.2008.

⁷⁰ T. Madava Menon, *n.* 30, 1996, p. 366.

attention by the influential role their ancestors played in the history of India, and the deplorable position they now occupy. They are accepted as the modern representatives of the ancient Kurumbas (Pallavas) who were supreme in South India till the beginning of the eight century when they were repeatedly defeated by the Chalukyas and finally overthrown and scattered by the Chola kings.⁷¹

Some indications in their culture show that the Uralikurumans were the nomadic food gathers and hunters. They lived in small scattered settlements to minimise food problems, and as protection against wild life. The members in their settlements are always closely related. In the centre of each settlement, there is an open shed called '*Chavadi*' for common use. The *Chavadi* is used as dormitory for young boys and bachelors.⁷² Uralikurumans are segmented into exogamous groupings known as *keera* (house), and there are hundreds of them. They are grouped into four classes, *mooroli*, *eytholi*, *aroli* and *elthare*. These are patrilineal descent groupings.⁷³

The *mooroli* and *eytholi* are considered most popular in Wynad. There are also some internal status groupings within the clan, termed as *karanavan*, *mooppan*, *elime*, each selects a *megalan*(headman) considering the status of the candidate.⁷⁴ Now-a-days these kinds of divisions are completely forgotten by the younger generation and little importance is paid to these even by the elder generation.⁷⁵

The Uralikurumans have the institution of *mooppan* (headman) and though his early status and popularity have considerably decreased he

⁷¹ A.A.D. Luiz, *n.* 6, p. 238.

⁷² K.S. Singh, *n.* 38, p. 750.

⁷³ T. Madhava Menon, *n.* 30, p. 367.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Interview with Kumaran, a Kuruma Community activist, Kalpetta, 3.8.2008.

continues to be consulted and obeyed. All groups do not have the headman. In some settlements their headman is called *ajjan*. Their social problems, especially disputes, are discussed and decided at the tribal panchayat consisting of elders presided over by the headman. There is no definite rule regarding the choice of the headman. The office is either hereditary or elective, but once elected he holds office for life. Only little work has been done on the speech form of Uralikuruman and it is clear that their speech is not simply an admixture of Kannada and Malayalam. It has its own distinctive features and is very different from the other tribal dialects of the area.

Customs and Practices

The restrictions that existed by weight of custom, convention, or practice have become the imperative rules of tribal social life. Some prohibitions are directly concerned with both sexes in tribal society in which they live and aim at the control of desires. Many of the taboos in tribal social life are astonishing. Social taboos prohibit conversation, and all forms of association between men and women of marriageable age. Traditionally, among most of the tribes a man avoids conversation with the maternal and paternal aunts, mother-in-law and senior sister-in-law. The taboos are in the form of pollutions in connection with puberty, women in menses, marriage, birth and death and others related to social and family life.

1. Childbirth

Childbirth is an occasion for strict enforcement of taboos among the tribal communities. The mother and child are segregated in a corner with their belongings till the termination of the pollution period and this period

varies from tribe to tribe.⁷⁶ Tribes like Kurichia and Mullukuruma have their own permanent separate huts. Uralikurumas also have separate huts especially put up for the purpose and burnt later.⁷⁷ Usually only women in their settlement attend to the mother and child. In the past, generally delivery used to take place at a bride groom's house and every tribe has its own *bethikkaarathi* (midwife) to attend delivery. Traditionally, if there were any delay in delivery their ancestral spirits were consulted through divination. The difficult deliveries among the Kuruchias were believed to have been caused by the moral transgressions of the women with other men. An oracle would divine this, if this indeed be the case, the delivery is gone through, but she may become an outcaste soon after.⁷⁸ Among the Uralikurumas woman is helped at her delivery by a *tambarakkan*(mid-wife) and a special *binj* (worship ritual), termed *ajjadath* is performed in case of difficulty.⁷⁹ Now all are taken to hospitals for delivery.⁸⁰ The childbirth among the Kattunaikkans is known as *kasu erika*.⁸¹ Mullukurumans celebrate the birth of a child on the third day after birth and on the 28th day they name the child, generally given by mother's brother. Among the Uralikarumas the naming is probably done by megalan, or by a respected elder person. The names of youngsters indicate that the traditional names are replaced by modern names. The cereal feeding ceremonies were done in the houses but now many go to temples at Tirunneli, and Parasinikadavu.⁸² For Adiyas and Paniyas the birth is not an occasion for important rituals. There are no differences attending to the birth of male or

⁷⁶ Interview with Kunhippennu, a midwife among the Kururmas, Mananthavadi, 11.10.2007.

⁷⁷ A.A.D. Luiz, *n.* 6, p. 243.

⁷⁸ T. Madhava Menon, *Handbook of Kerala*, Vol. II, Trivandrum, 2002, p. 728.

⁷⁹ T. Madhava Menon, *n.* 30, 1996, p. 367.

⁸⁰ Interview with Rahgu, Tribal promoter, Mananthavadi, 12.10.2009.

⁸¹ K.S. Singh, *n.* 38, p. 590.

⁸² Interview with Sarika, tribal promoter, Mananthavadi, 12.10.2009.

female progeny. Whereas the matrilinear Kuruchias prefer the first born of any couple to be a girl. They also believe that if the first born is a male, the mother will die at her third delivery.⁸³ The Kurichias celebrate the birth of female child more than that of a male. Five neighbouring Kurichia ladies are invited on the 5th day to bath the newborn baby, only four are invited on the 4th day for the same purpose if the baby is male. When cutting the naval cord of the newborn among the Kurichias, the sex is announced by bending a bow and drawing its string if it is a male; by beating a broom against a wicker basket (sieve) if otherwise.⁸⁴ It is only after 40 days the male members are allowed to see the mother and child.⁸⁵ All tribal groups refrain from hunting and work during the period of pollution connected with birth and death. These taboos compel the tribal folk to lead a pure life when the agricultural operations are to be started.⁸⁶ Almost all tribes firmly believe that while they roam in the forest dominated by Shasta they should be pure.

The process of social integration through childhood training period attain a very important landmark with the coming of age. In the case of female child, this is unmistakably characterised by the menarche: This is well marked in most tribal communities. All tribes observe the taboos in connection with puberty and women in menses. On the first appearance of menarche, the girl is segregated in a separate hut. The Kurichias have such permanent separate huts known as '*theendaripura*' (*erakottupura* or *ettapura*). For Mullukurumas, a separate portion is put up to form a temporary room in the veranda and the girl is segregated from them for seven days.⁸⁷ In some tribes, the responsibility for constructing it falls on specific kinsmen. Among

⁸³ P.R.G. Mathur, *n.* 8, p. 150.

⁸⁴ T. Madhava Menon, *n.* 78, p. 728.

⁸⁵ Interview with Chandran, Vazhamatta, 12 .5.2008.

⁸⁶ Interview with Choman, agricultural labourer, Thavinhal, 13.10.2007.

⁸⁷ T. Madhava Menon, *n.* 30, p. 283.

the matrilineal tribes, this is from the matrikin.⁸⁸ The seclusion hut is usually about 30 metre away from the main house and the period of seclusion varies from 5 to 30 days. Usually the purification bathe at the end of the seclusion period is an occasion for rituals and observances. This puberty ceremony is known as *thirandukalyanam*. Among the Adiyas the purification ceremony is held at night and the girl is brought in procession after the purification bathe on the 15th day, and may be postponed until they have money.⁸⁹ When a Kurichia girl attains puberty, she is segregated and made to hide under a bush known as *kaadukayaral* (escape to forest).⁹⁰ This information is first given to the *nadumoopan* (territorial headman) and the neighbouring Kurichia households are also informed about the menarche. The wife of headman and other women assemble at the girl's house and she is brought from the bush and they give her a bathe in the river. She is kept in the seclusion hut.⁹¹ Traditionally the Paniya women in pollution were not segregated in a strict manner as in the case of other primitive tribes. They have no major celebration and ceremonies.⁹² Mullukurumas perform the puberty ceremony which consists of making an offering to the *kula deivam* (family deity). It is also known that, in the past, in order to keep away the evil spirit the Paniya girls take a knife along with them wherever they go out during the seclusion period for the Kattunaikka girls it was an arrow. Among some tribes gifts and money are presented by relatives during this period. Although puberty celebrations are now rarely found among the tribal communities polluted persons are not supposed to go near the temple, and other sacred places.

⁸⁸ L.K. Krishna Iyer, *Travancore Tribes and Castes*, Vol. I, Thiruvananthapuram, 1937, p. 101.

⁸⁹ T. Madhavan Menon, *n.* 30, p. 4.

⁹⁰ K.S. Singh, *n.* 38, p. 716.

⁹¹ D. Chacko, Kannattumodi, *Kurichiarude Lokam*, Trivandrum, 1994, p. 31.

⁹² Interview with Nanchan, Pullpalli, 13.10.2007.

Marriage as a secular occasion and the climax of long preparations is a time for total social involvement in the life of tribal communities. There might have been a period of promiscuity and sexual freedom among the tribes of ancient period, but later marriage by capture, service, exchange and purchase developed. But now all these kinds of marriages do not exist except marriage by purchase. Divorce, desertion and remarriage are very common among all tribes and they observe the rule of exogamy, namely the rule to select a wife outside connected clans.⁹³ Their social customs have prescribed certain circles as forbidden degrees, and those who violate the rules are severely dealt with. Tying *taali* (marriage badge) is an important event. In the past, *taali* consisted of a string of beads and shells. Neither bride price nor dowry was payable among the Kurichias, though bride may be decked out in ornaments according to the financial status of the family.⁹⁴ Marriage is settled through negotiation. When negotiation fails, a run away (elopement) marriage is resorted to. Parents attach no stigma to run away marriages among the Paniyas and Adiyas. In the case of elopement among the Kattunaikka, if anyone of them, boy or girl, fall sick, the reason behind the illness is sought through divination and oracle.⁹⁵ In some cases, the girl is sent back to her house, if decided through divination. Among the Kurichias large numbers have been ex-communicated for marriage within the forbidden degrees. Marriage between cross cousins is preferable. Though male kinship is becoming more and more popular the marriage with children of mother's sister or children of father's brother is objectionable. The rule of the matriarchal household observed while choosing a bride through matriarchy is fast disappearing. *Murapennu* (daughter of the maternal uncle or paternal

⁹³ Tribal endogamy and clan or lineage exogamy is the rule among the tribal communities of Malabar.

⁹⁴ T. Madhava Menon, *n.* 78, p. 727.

⁹⁵ K.S. Singh, *n.* 30, p. 591.

aunt, cross cousin) is the popular bride. Some tribes like Kurichias, Kunduvadiyas and Kalanadis actually raise a claim for the *murappennu* (girl) or *murachekkan* (boy). However, this is an objectionable degree of marriage among the Adiyans, Kattunaikkan, etc. who prefer a girl from a non-related family, and marrying outside the tribe is not permitted.⁹⁶ Though monogamy is the general rule plurality of wives is considered as sign of wealth. In some Kurichia Tarawads the elder members have two wives. *Levirate* (marrying the widow of a deceased brother) and *sororate* (marrying the sister of a deceased wife) are both common. There appears no restriction on remarrying widows and divorced women, but at such ceremonies the usual celebrations are commonly absent.⁹⁷

The marriage ceremony among the Paniyas is of very simple nature. Apparently a bride is selected for a young man by his parents. Their traditional marriage ceremony is conducted under the influence of Paniya Chemmi. As per the information of Thurston the *chemmi* or *shemmi* is a sort of priest or minister. He was appointed, in olden days, by the chieftains under whom the Paniyans worked, and each *chemmi* held authority over a group of villages. The office is hereditary, but, should a *chemmi* family fail, it can be filled up by election.⁹⁸ When a Paniyan decides on marrying, his master gives him 10 *kalakams* (25 seers) of paddy, 5 yards of cloths and 12 *annas* of which 4 *annas* is paid on the settlement of the marriage, the balance 8 *annas* called *kappala panam*, being sent through the *mooppan* (headman) of bride's party to her master.⁹⁹ There is another picture of Paniya marriage that a husband has to make an annual present to his wife's parents and failure to do so entitles

⁹⁶ A.A.D. Luiz, *n.* 6, p. 21.

⁹⁷ Interview with Kunhan, tribal activist, Kalpetta 3.8.2008.

⁹⁸ Thurston, *n.* 45, p. 65.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, also see C. Gopalan Nair, *n.* 14, p. 102.

them to demand their daughter back.¹⁰⁰ This annual present was called *anhayippanam* among the Paniyas in the past.¹⁰¹ The Mullukuruman have a different approach. In their traditional form of marriage the girl's mother's brother would tie the tali and get some *dakshina* (kanam).¹⁰² Their marriage often takes place at their *deivapura* (family deity).

Among certain tribal communities, marriages used to be solemnised before or after puberty. Child marriage has been noticed as an imperative rule among the Thachanadans and Uralikurumans, etc. Among Thachanadans the 'child wife' is expected to start life immediately with the adult husband. Among other tribes even though marriage might take place before puberty, cohabitation is not permitted till after puberty. Presently marriages in all the tribes of Malabar take place after puberty. *Talikettukalyanam* and *kettukalyanam* (Pseudomarrriage) before a girl attains puberty are common among the Kurichia community and the ceremony is known as *Pandal Pattu*. It is a function exclusively arranged for a group of girls numbering 5, 7 or 11 depending upon the availability of girls of every lineages belonging to the same clan. The girls should have attained the age of five and above, but should not have attained menarche.¹⁰³ Talies used at these ceremonies are different to those used at actual marriage. The father or uncle of the girl ties the tali.¹⁰⁴ This pre-puberty marriage is quite different from *thirandu kalyanam* (a ceremony to announce that a girl has attained puberty). Many communities term it kalyanam, viz. marriage, so symbolic and similar it is as a harbinger of coming marriage. It is believed that the auspicious days for this ceremony are Tuesday, Friday or Sunday. A special pandal with upright

¹⁰⁰ as quoted in Edgar Thurston, *n.* 45, VI, p. 64.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Kuppan, a Paniya Muppan, Mullankolli, 11.10. 2007.

¹⁰² K.S. Singh, *n.* 30, p. 745.

¹⁰³ Interview with Raman, Kakkottara, 18.3.2008.

¹⁰⁴ A.A.D. Luiz, *n.* 6, p. 23.

fashioned from the *paala* tree (*Alstonia Scholaris*) is put up after prayers to the gods. The next morning the girls are ceremonially bathed with oil brought from the temple of goddess administered by the eldest lady of lineage. After bath, the girls are brought to the pandal and seated in a row: the *moonnaman*, usually an affinal relative, ties the tali around the neck of the girls in order of seniority by age.¹⁰⁵ This is not concerned with marriage but age.¹⁰⁶ Although the ceremony of Pandalpattu disappeared completely many decades ago due to the collective decision of the elders of the Kurichia tarawads, some of these customs are included in the ceremonies of *thirandu kalyanam* and marriage.

The social customs of tribal people are most conspicuously expressed through their rituals in connection with the dead. Dead are buried in all tribal groups in Malabar. Burying is a custom of considerable antiquity among the primitives of Kerala, especially with the people who are non-aryans. Dravidian tribal communities do not believe in a rebirth of the departed soul, they believe that the departed soul continues to hover around the living, unless propitiated, it could cause evil, but if kept happy, it would help them. The rituals attending death and the disposal of the body are oriented towards these objectives.¹⁰⁷ In most of the tribal communities the body is kept at or in front of the house of the dead to accord a last opportunity for friends and relatives to share in the grief and, often, to contribute some unsolicited but much needed financial aid.

It may be that cremation became unpopular on account of the cost involved and the rule forbidding fires in the forest. Even among those who adopt cremation, the bodies of young children or those who died in an

¹⁰⁵ A. Aiyappan *et al.*, n. 11, pp. 63-64.

¹⁰⁶ K.T. Ravivarman, *Marumakkathayam, Gotramarumakkathayavum, Vadakkan Sambradayangalum* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 2004, p. 192.

¹⁰⁷ T. Madhava Menon, *Encyclopaedia of Dravidian Tribes*, Vol. I, Trivandrum, 1993, p. 280.

epidemic are usually buried.¹⁰⁸ The great respect for the dead seems to have been an outstanding characteristic of the tribal communities. Washed and covered with a new cloth the corpse is placed on a bamboo bier, carried to the cemetery, and very gently lowered into the grave with the head facing towards south. The burial systems of all tribes are not the same. It is heard that formerly some tribes like Paniya and Malapandaram used to bury the dead at the place of death, burn the hut and surroundings and leave the place,¹⁰⁹ whereas the Kattunaikkans bury the dead in a solemn manner near their habitation and thereafter it was customary to desert the locality and even carefully avoid visiting the place. Presently this practice no longer exists due to lack of enough land. The Kurichias bury the dead with an arrow, if a male, and a scythe if a female. The system still continues without change.¹¹⁰ All others except the Kadar place a stone or two in the position of the dead to mark the location of the grave. The Uralikurumans have deeper graves for women than for men and have no explanation to offer for this.¹¹¹ The Uralikuruman, Kalanadis, Kattunaikkan and Tachanad moopan of Wynad make a cellar on the side of the grave, push the body into it, and then fill the grave with soil. Adiyas bury the dead, but have no rules regarding the location or depth or direction of the grave.¹¹² Among the Paniyas the graves are four or five feet deep and the bottom is scooped out from the western side on a level with the floor throughout the length of the grave, so as to form a receptacle for the corpse, which, placed on a mat, is laid there with its feet to the north.¹¹³ Among those who follow matrilineal system the senior nephew

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Kunhan, Kurichia social worker, Mananthavadi, 11.10.2007.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with M. Geethanandan, Social and Political Worker, Kannur, 5.5.2009.

¹¹⁰ Chandu, Kurichia elder member, Edamana, Mananthavadi, 23.3.2009.

¹¹¹ A.A.D. Luiz, *n.* 6, p. 25.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹¹³ Edgar Thurston, *n.* 58, p. 65.

is the chief mourner and he is the one who performs the funeral ceremonies among others it is the eldest son. A woman who had died at the time of pollution has to be buried by women, and men keep away for fear of evil. A pregnant woman is given a far-away grave, and a flat stone placed over it, because her spirit is considered to be very mischievous.

The rituals continue after the disposal of the body. The observance of pollution commences with the announcement of death, and lasts for various periods, depending on the community concerned. The Adiyas observe pollution for 13 days, and members of the family avoid fish, meat and oil during this period. Earlier, if the deceased was a married woman and whose husband survived, he should not bathe, change cloths, shave or cut the hair of his head for one year.¹¹⁴ A widow need observe these restrictions only for 13 days pollution period. The end of the period is marked by *kunnupula*, a purification ceremony consisting of ritual songs, and magico-religious rites for the propitiation and welfare of the departed spirit. The Paniyas observe death-pollution just as the higher classes of Malabar, and the period of observance varies according to the particular class or castes to which their master belongs.¹¹⁵ The news of death is sent around, the *chemmi* and others assemble and all the rituals are performed under his control. Their pollution is for 7 days (arapula or 'half pollution'), during which the close relatives of the dead should not chew betel or take non-vegetarian food and must refrain from shaving or using oil. The closest matrilateral relatives, viz., brothers, sisters, etc. observe the *kakapula* (full pollution) of 12 days.¹¹⁶ But on the morning of the 7th day the *kaakapula*, *karipula* or *karukapula* is also

¹¹⁴ T. Madhava Menon, *n.* 30, p. 282.

¹¹⁵ T.K. Gopala Panikkar, *Malabar and Its Folk*, New Delhi, 1995, p. 162.

¹¹⁶ T. Madhava Menon, *n.* 30, 1996, p. 308.

performed.¹¹⁷ It is said that between the harvest festival and Vishu, if the year has gone well and the community is rich enough, the *valia* or grand *kakkapula* may be conducted. This is the most elaborate of all Paniya festivals. This ritual begins with a dance by the young men. Thus the burial system of tribal communities in Malabar varies in their ritual ceremonies and socio-cultural aspects.

Economic Life

Tribal economy was basically different from the general economy. It is a part of the tribal society and it is true in the sense that it is spread in the totality of society. It is the nature of the tribal economy and their economic life that determine the features of culture. In tribal society people live close to the physical environment which supports them and determines their economic activities, which were essentially of subsistence type in which the production is for direct consumption.¹¹⁸ In its close association of indigenous tribal production and social organisation, a seven-point framework has been given to illustrate the basic features of tribal economy, such as, forest based economy, unit of production consumption and pattern of labour being the family, simple technology, absence of profit in economic dealings, the community as a co-operative unit, periodical market and interdependence.¹¹⁹

Agriculture in the beginning was not the means of subsistence of the tribal people. It was hunting, fishing and gathering that constituted their economic activities. They led a life which relied on forest and allied activities. The basic household production was supplemented by occasional co-operation between families for hunting or the setting up of a camp. It is stated that in the past tribals as a whole never had the concept of ownership of

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ B. Kuppaswami, *Social Change in India*, Delhi, 1993, p. 109.

¹¹⁹ P.K. Mohanty, *Cultural Heritage of Indian Tribals*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 196.

land for they felt that they could not own their 'mother'. They considered land(earth) as mother. A community's position was determined by the organic relationship it established with the land. The nomadic tribes, who were engaged in food gathering and hunting had never felt the need to possess a piece of land. And those who were agriculturists pursued shifting cultivation and once they were settled, the mere fact that they used the land gave them the feeling of owning it - operational right. Land, thus, plays a more vital role in the economic life of forest dwellers. It is not only a resources of subsistence and income but also a part of their social and cultural life.

A diversified modern occupation is not the predominant means of livelihood for any of the tribal communities. They are generally engaged in forestry and food gathering, settled agriculture, agricultural labour, animal husbandry, minor household industry and miscellaneous occupations. Shifting cultivation as the subsidiary means of livelihood was more widespread. But restrictions began to be placed on this type of cultivation during the later half of the 19th century in Malabar. Then it declined and only a small portion of the tribals especially Kurichias are engaged in it. This reflects also a change in the traditional consumption habit of the tribes in regard to food grains.¹²⁰ An important aspect of tribal agriculture in Malabar is the near-complete disappearance of shifting cultivation and pursuing settled agriculture. The Kurichias and Kurumas, as the earliest shifting cultivators, were the first tribal communities to follow settled agriculture in Wynad.¹²¹

The tribals of hills and forests took agriculture along with the migrated people from the plains. Their agriculture was characterised by unproductive and uneconomic holding, indebtedness, lack of credit facilities and lack of irrigation facilities. The tribal people who had practised such crude method

¹²⁰ M. Kunhaman, *Development of Tribal Economy*, New Delhi, 1989, p. 69.

¹²¹ Interview with K. Panoor, Thalassery, 23.1.2007.

of agriculture further suffered from absence of adequate road and transport and seasonal migration, consequently the general question of modernisation continued to remain problematic. This is the historical reality which should be kept in mind while analysing the situation of tribal land alienation. The subsequent displacement of tribal cultivators from the land resulted in a high proportion of them being reduced to the status of agricultural labourers.

It is observed that there are inter and intra regional variation in the distribution of land, cropping pattern and market participation among the tribal holdings in Malabar. The Kurumas of south Wynad is more advanced than the people in north Wynad.¹²² Whereas the Kurichias of northern Wynad is more advanced as many of them are land holders than their counterparts in the south. Such economic and cultural differentiation between tribes of south and north Wynad is conspicuous among them.¹²³ This variation also affect the income and expenditure pattern among the tribal households of Wynad region. The variation appears in the characteristic tribal agricultural labour force and impact of these variations influences the determination of the wage system. It was revealed only through a survey during the 1970s that there was no other area in the state with such a complicated system of wage payment.¹²⁴ In south Wynad there were different kinds of wages and wage rates which varied largely among the tribals, each wage rate changing with the category of workers - male, female on the one hand, with nature of work - agriculture, farm operation and non-farm operation on the other. According to the survey as much as 48 different wage patterns have been found to exist among the tribal labourers in Wynad.¹²⁵ About 72 percent of them completely depend on

¹²² P.G.Padmini, *Kaattujeevithathinte Spandanangal* (Mal.), Thrissur, 2001, p.41.

¹²³ Interview with Raghavan, Kalpetta, 3.8.2009.

¹²⁴ *Report on socio-economic survey of tribals in Kerala 1976-78*, Trivandrum, 1979, p. 72.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

wage and this undue dependence on wage income causes much fluctuation in their earnings. The wage rate varies from one seer of paddy to Rs. 8.50 per day. Nearly 63 percent of bonded labourers get a wage between Rs. 3-4.99 while 15 percent get below Rs. 3 and 14 percent between Rs. 5-5.99. The remaining workers mainly farm or plantation labour earn at a rate of Rs. 8, or more per day.¹²⁶ It can be inferred that payment of wages in cash and kind are preferred. In south Wynad there exists all the three possible system of payment of wage in cash alone, in kind alone and both in kind and cash. The combined system of payment is more prevalent while that in kind alone has the least preference.¹²⁷ In Wynad, after independence the labourers receive wages in the form of cash only. This wage rate in terms of cash has been reduced to 22 in number, that rate vary from Rs. 1 to Rs. 20.¹²⁸ Most of the tribal groups had to take to wage earning under some system virtually equivalent to wage slavery. So an intriguing aspect to note in this is that the prevalence of a dual market for agricultural labourers is invariably lower than that obtained by their counterpart. The survey has revealed that a good number of tribal workers are very reluctant to disclose the actual wage received as they are afraid of their employers.

Although the tribals in Wynad are habitating in the same ecological situation they are leading different economic lives as they are engaged in their traditional occupations. The communities like Paniya, Adiya and Kattunaikka are living in grinding poverty: the means of livelihood are limited and they have to work very hard to get a bare subsistence. The Paniyas experienced the trauma of immediate transition from food gathering state to slavery,

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹²⁷ The concept of paid labour in a way was alien to India and might have been brought by the British into India for the first time, K.G. Gurumurthy, *n.* 116, 1996, p. 326.

¹²⁸ *Report on socio-economic survey in Kerala, 1976-78*, Trivandrum, 1979, p. 28.

bonded labour and financially to free wage labour status, but also faced many socio-economic problems. The economic life of the Paniyas was one of the tragedies that has been enacted in many parts of India and never again being able to recover fully from the first great blow.¹²⁹ When the British opened up the area for farming tea and coffee the paniyas were employed for low wages the prosperity of Wynad as an exporter of coffee, cardamom, pepper, etc. has been founded on the profuse sweat of many and the occasional blood of the martyred Paniya families.¹³⁰ Later many independent native entrepreneurs entered the plantation business and they bought them along with coffee plantation. After they were caught by nontribals and brought to the outside of the forest, for which there were many legends, they continued to be slaves. When there are no agricultural work, they rely completely on forest for their food. They are skilled agricultural labourers, especially for paddy cultivation, but not so for plantations.¹³¹ Wage they receive is extremely disappointing, and so such poverty continues to be a sad aspect of their life. Wage was given as food for work and most often food gathering continued to be a major source of their livelihood. At a later phase it appeared that wages were given in kind. All members of the Paniya family assume responsibilities for working the fields in order to meet the economic needs of the family.¹³² Their children do not regularly attend the school as they are actively participating in the economic pursuits of the family and their boys are engaged in the cattle rearing of the landlords and girls are engaged in the domestic chores. Thus the Paniyas present a picture of a tribe who have become proletarians in an agricultural economy. The fast growing agricultural hinterland of Wynad in the wake of cash crop production naturally led to the emergence of small

¹²⁹ A. Aiyappan, Paniya, *An Ex-Slave tribe of South India*, Culcatta, 1992, p. 81.

¹³⁰ T. Madhava Menon, *n.* 30, p. 305.

¹³¹ Interview with Muthu, Plantation worker, Vythiri, 14.4.2007.

¹³² Interview with P.R.G. Mathur, Palakkad, 4.2.2009.

towns in interior villages. Such towns became the hub of commercial activity throughout Wynad.¹³³ The wage earning tribal labourers became totally dependent on the market for the food, clothing and other household requirements

The Adiyas also were agrestic slaves attached to the land and used to be bonded to their masters. As low paid agricultural labourers their settlements are located on hillocks in the revenue lands, and in close proximity to the farms where they work. In olden days the average daily wage of a man was reported to be two seers of paddy, and for a woman something less.¹³⁴ The annual tributes were received from the master but the total receipts for a year were not enough for a life without want. Their cultivating households were operated on tiny parcels of land where the scope of investments was limited by two major factors, viz., the non-availability of holding and the low level of household income.¹³⁵ Although they were nonskilled agricultural casual labourers the hunting and collecting of MFP were known to them. Later they practiced animal husbandry and settled cultivation in homesteads and surplus lands allotted under the development programmes being subsidiary occupations.

The primary means of livelihood of tribes is labour and food gathering is the secondary source of subsistence. The traditional economic activities of some tribes are mainly confined to the forest. The Kattunaikkans are in different stages of economic development. Based on their sources of livelihood, they can be classified into various categories such as (i) food gathers, and landless labourers (including bonded labourers) who work on land and nearby forest regions for primary means of livelihood;

¹³³ Francis Kulirani, *n.* 34.

¹³⁴ A.A.D. Luiz, *n.* 6, p. 29.

¹³⁵ M. Kunhaman, *n.* 118, p. 42.

(ii) temporary cultivators who own less fertile land which is significant for their living; (iii) cultivators who own fertile land and (iv) employees as mahout in forest department and the *Devaswom* (temple).¹³⁶ The main occupation of Kattunaikkans other than shifting cultivation is the collection of MFP, which they handover to the co-operative societies. They are experts in collecting wild honey and wax. The former is partly consumed and partly sold or exchanged for essentials. Their shifting cultivation was mainly of coarse grain. But they continue to roam long distances in search of roots, fruits and honey. They always carry a *kuzhikol*(stick) in their hands which is intended for digging roots.¹³⁷ During such roaming they leave their belongings such as utensils and implements, or keep them in holes of big trees or caves.¹³⁸ Until the abolition of bonded labour, they used to be bonded for nominal payments. Both sexes work, but they cannot be described as enthusiastic and hard workers. Except the limited numbers employed by the forest department as watchers, the rest lead the life of food gatherers; some others have entered service as plantation and farm labourers. Those in forest plantation raise cash crops and this aptitude for cultivation was developed only after the middle of the 20th century. As limited groups, that are settled and rear and vend poultry, pigs and goats to supplement their income.

The Uralikurumans lead a distinct economic life as they are the only artisan group among the tribal communities of Malabar. They manufacture earthenware utensils following one of the most primitive technologies.¹³⁹ It is assumed that their technique is the survival of a primitive craft. Their material life reveals their skill in crafts. In the traditional tribal economy of Wynad their handmade pottery without potter's wheel is famous; they possess the

¹³⁶ K.S. Singh, *n.* 38, p. 593.

¹³⁷ C. Gopalan Nair, *n.* 14, p. 112.

¹³⁸ K. Panoor, *Keralathile Africa* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1965, p. 119.

¹³⁹ A. Aiyappan, 'A Primitive Handmade Pottery', in *Man in India*, Vol. 34, No. 197.

Neolithic technology in this regard.¹⁴⁰ They are expert blacksmiths and make iron implements like arrow heads, knives of various types and axes. The arrowheads are made for other hunting communities and on the eve of the kurichia revolt it was they who largely supplied spearheads and arrowheads. The agricultural equipments supplied by them are baskets, bamboo umbrellas to other communities like Nairs, Nambiars and Warriors of this area, for which they were paid in paddy in the past. Their handicraft materials were in great demand from Kurichias and other agriculturist communities of Wynad. There was a close connection between the environment and their economic pursuits. They cut and fashion wooden artefacts, do carpentry for the local tribal housing, and fashion iron pieces salvaged from the wheels of bullock carts or purchased from the market, in ploughshare, arrowheads, etc.¹⁴¹ In addition to retaining the traditional occupation, they have become settled cultivators, and agricultural labourers. As labourers they are useful and their services are always welcomed in the tea estates.¹⁴² Artisan occupations have now become subsidiary subsistence strategies. They also find employment under the Forest Department in maintaining the plantation, collecting seeds, fire-watching, etc. Though a few have lands of their own allotted from the forest, they are averse to cultivating, preferring to neglect them, advantages of which have been taken by the 'settlers' who either just encourage them, or 'take them on lease' – a euphemism for a permanent alienation for a one-time payment of a pittance. Some Uralikuruma families have been settled in the government sponsored plantation projects; they are gradually adapting themselves to the changed conditions there, being the last among the tribal communities to accept the innovation.

¹⁴⁰ T. Madhava Menon, *n.* 30, p. 366.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² C. Gopalan Nair, *n.* 14, p. 72.

The Mullukurumans are economically better off and have shown a favourable attitude towards education and get maximum benefits. They have taken to school education readily. Several have completed their education successfully and obtained tertiary employment in various government departments. Most of the tribal members in government service in Wynad are Mullukurumans. Traditionally this community was land owning cultivators. They practised both shifting cultivation and settled cultivation. In olden days extensive stretches of fertile and unoccupied land were at their disposal. Their main crop is paddy which is cultivated in the fallow and flat lands as well as on moderate slopes. Generally each household has three categories of land.¹⁴³ Formerly these tribes were permitted to raise cash-crops and ragi or rice in the cleared reserve forest areas. All, including children, engage themselves in collecting forest produce like fruits, roots, etc. during various seasons. Poultry and animal husbandry are usually the concern of the women, who use the side income so obtained. Women also used to be engaged in hand pounding paddy for local land owning families of other communities like Nairs and Wynadan Chettis.¹⁴⁴ A few are employed by the Forest Department and are seen evoking after regeneration areas, clearing forest and planting the cleared areas. This community in many ways always showed a cordial economic relationship with other communities, especially nontribals.

The economy of Kurichias is based on agriculture. Traditionally they adopted shifting cultivation with ragi, sorghams, etc. in upper lands and settled cultivation with paddy in low areas. As a land owning class they lead a comparatively better standard of living. Their houses are close to some rice

¹⁴³ First is vayal (wet land), second is the higher land adjacent to the vayal is thottam that support coffee and banana etc., the third is the slope land (vettuparamba) literally meaning slashed dry land - T. Madhava Menon, *n.* 30, p. 282.

¹⁴⁴ C. Gopalan Nair, *n.* 14, p. 70.

fields cultivated by themselves. Ragi cultivation was a major item which formed their staple food in the past, but now they have almost given up this cultivation. The Kurichias followed a system of collective agricultural ownership and management in the case of raising paddy, and raising plantation crops like coffee, pepper, banana, tapioca and ragi and these crops are cultivated for their common consumption or benefit and they are pooled by the Karanavan with assistance of all members of the clan and lineage.¹⁴⁵ In this kind of cultivation outside labour is rarely required. This collective farming relieves them from much of the suffering in their economic life.¹⁴⁶ Individual cultivation is a recent phenomenon which motivates the Kurichias to continue collective farming in spite of social change. The sex based division of labour is largely seen among them, the men doing the ploughing and women, planting and weeding.¹⁴⁷ Hunting was a major activity of male members of the Kurichias as it was also a part of rituals, and they do not slaughter domesticated animals or buy meat from shops for such ceremonial occasions.

Cattle-rearing forms an integral part of economic life, but it is facing a threat today due to the lose of grazing land. They maintain a large number of cattle mostly for cow-dung. It is stated that there was a symbolic relationship between human beings and animals, animals and agriculture, agriculture and human beings. This reflects the primitive and traditional form of the agricultural economy of the Kurichias.¹⁴⁸ Presently the economic life of the Kurichias is also affected by their high rate of occupational mobility. The majority of them have sought this mobility primarily through new

¹⁴⁵ A. Aiyappal, *et al.*, n. 11, p. 46.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Chandran, Vellamunda, 28.3.2008.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

employment opportunities.¹⁴⁹ Though they usually live by cultivation some of them already have obtained jobs in the Forest Department as forest guards, watchman, etc. and in the Postal Department as postal runners or amsham peon.¹⁵⁰ Even now many of the postmen in Wynad district are Kurichias. Some others have taken to white-collar jobs and plantation labour. As they do not go out as labourers many have been given two and a half acres of land within the Government Reserve Forest for pepper cultivation, and some have extensive plantation of pepper and others have cash crops. The capitalist mode of production in agriculture has helped the economically sound tribal communities to engage in non-agricultural economic activities.

Bonded Labour

Bonded labour among the tribals of Wynad is a summation of their socio-economic life in the past. Wynad as a major tribal area where the tribals were predominantly the agrestic slaves of the traditional janmies and continued to exist as bonded labourers. The situation of the tribals in these areas, due to the multifaceted activities of the British Government, immigrants and the capitalist class, prepared the background for the emergence of pauperised, illiterate groups among the tribals, who were gradually driven into the vicious circles of bonded labour. Wynad was prone to the institution of bonded labour significantly from the period succeeding the advent of colonial rule. The socio-economic structure also enhanced the process of exploitation on a wider scale. The poor tribes became the target of exploitation by the chieftains and overlords who imposed various obligations on them with the gradual spread of the higher productive organisation of caste

¹⁴⁹ J.R. Reghu Ramdas, 'Occupational Mobility among the Kurichians of Kerala' in R.C. Swarnakar, *Indian Tribes*, Jaipur, 1995, p. 210.

¹⁵⁰ Edgar Thurston, *n.* 45, p. 128.

society under Hinduism.¹⁵¹ From comparative isolation and dependence on exchange and barter, the tribal people were brought into the vortex of monetization in their relation with nontribals who had increasing access to them. This led to the emergence of money lenders and indebtedness. The obligation to return the loan was to be discharged by the surrendering of labour at less than market rate of wage, on obligatory basis, at the call and behest of the lender. Such system of obligation to serve under the other was termed bonded labour.¹⁵² This socio-economic framework was in fact partially responsible for the smooth running of these inhuman system.

The most dehumanising elements of bounded labour appear among the Paniyas and Adiyas. Under the worst socio-economic surroundings, they were compelled to sell their family members permanently for some amount of money. This system consists in a person agreeing to serve out a loan he may take from money lenders or landlords. Though money loans are small in amount, the manipulation of account is so arranged as to require the debtor to spend his lifetime as a bondman, and not infrequently even his sons may be found paying out his father's debt by similar services. By the norms of this system a relation is created under unwritten conditions between the tribes and landlords. In many instances, the relationship lasts for years, sometimes for the whole life.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Surajith Sinha, 'Rethinking about tribes and Indian Civilization', in B. Choudhury *et al.*, (eds.), *Tribal Development in India*, New Delhi, 1982, p. 10.

¹⁵² Bonded labour means 'a labour who incurs or has or is presumed to have incurred a bonded debt' - Bonded labour system (Abolition) Act, 1976, Section - 2.

¹⁵³ *Report of the Commission for SC/ST, 1971-72*, Govt. of Kerala, Trivandrum, 1973, p. 216.

The system of bonded labour existed in different names throughout the country.¹⁵⁴ Aiyappan terms this labour as forced labour and in the areas of Madras Province it falls under two distinct heads, *vetti* and *gothi*. In case of *vetti*, the labourers are paid a meagre wage by the contractors or other business people to whom they are under some obligation.¹⁵⁵ Such labour among the adiyas is known as *kurugotpani* and among the Paniyas it is *kundalpani*.¹⁵⁶ In Wynad it is locally known as 'Kundalpani' as it is older than the British rule. So it is a relic of the old feudal past and implies an obligation on the master to maintain the bonded labourer throughout the year by funding work. The centre of the bonding contracts was the famous temple of the regional Mother Goddess of the Valliyurkavu shrine near Mananthavadi and the contract was made during the temple festival.¹⁵⁷

Bonded labour being a social and economic evil practiced by the influential high castes on helpless tribals of Wynad have deprived them of their living conditions. The increasing population of tribal folk which suffered from shortage of land offered a tempting field for recruitment of bonded labourers.¹⁵⁸ The only exception to this practice in the district was the

¹⁵⁴ It was known as *sagri* in Rajasthan, *gothi* in Orissa, *vetti* in Anthra Pradesh, *jeetha* in Mysore, *naukrinama*, *mahidari*, *harvashi*, *hali*, *kamia*, etc. in Madhya Pradesh, *vet* or *begar* in Maharashtra.

¹⁵⁵ A. Aiyappan, *Report on the Socio-Economic of the Aboriginal Tribes of the Province of Madras*, Madras, 1948, p. 21.

¹⁵⁶ Somasekharan Nair, *Paniyar* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1976, p. 29.

¹⁵⁷ The temple dedicated to the Mother Goddess, manifested in the three principal form of Vana Durga, Bhadrakali and Jala Durga, is an important place of worship for the tribal communities. The festival starts from 1st of Meenam for 14 days. On all these days foods are given to all devotees by the Revenue Department and Forest Department - *Grama Panchayath Development Records*, Vol. 137, Trivandrum, 1997, p. 99.

¹⁵⁸ N.K. Bose, *Tribal Life in India*, New Delhi, 1971, p. 42.

landed Kurichias.¹⁵⁹ But it is known that some Kurichias became bonded labourers probably on account of excommunication and resultant forfeiture of property.¹⁶⁰ Mathur reported that the members of other tribal communities including even the comparatively better off Mullukuruma got indebted and had to serve for temporary periods as bonded labourers.¹⁶¹ The name for the loan received by the Adiyas and Paniyas on the eve of their recruitment is known as *vasloorkavupanam*,¹⁶² *vallorkavupanam*, *nilpupanam*, *kundalpanam*, etc.¹⁶³ The most significant feature of the system was that a Paniya pledges the members of his family to work for the creditor for which they get only daily meals *paika* (meals) and a pittance in kind. The wage given to them in the form of kind is *vally* (raw paddy) and the work for this *vally* is known as *vallipani*. Besides this, some other benefits like *kallum mannum* were also sanctioned.¹⁶⁴

Since most of them are engaged in agriculture and allied activities the landlord accommodates them within his cultivating lands to look after the fields. Earlier a small patch of the paddy field was kept unharvested for the share (apportionment) of the bonded labourers as *kundal*. From the 1970s onwards, instead of such share bonded labourers used to get a fixed measure

¹⁵⁹ Jose Chathukulam, 'Issue in Tribal Development: Recent Experience of Kerala', In Govinda Chandra Rath (ed.) *Tribal Development in India*, New Delhi, 2006, p. 184.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Kopi, a Kurichia elder member, Palott, Mananthavadi, 15 2. 2007.

¹⁶¹ P.R.G. Mathur, n. 8, p. 98.

¹⁶² C.P. Yadav, *Encyclopedia of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes* (ed.), Vol. 13, New Delhi, 2000, p. 3.

¹⁶³ T. Madhava Menon, n. 30, Vol. II, p. 336.

¹⁶⁴ *Kallum mannum* is the permission for collecting the remaining paddy grains with soil and stones from the field after harvesting - *Municipality Development Records - Kalpetta*, Wynad, Vol. 164, Trivandrum, 1997, p. 15.

of paddy every year until the abolition of this system.¹⁶⁵ Besides the Valliyurkavu Temple the tribals were also recruited as bonded labourers in Ponkuzhi temple festival day in the month of Meenam at Muthanga village of Wynad.¹⁶⁶ The venue of such recruitment sometimes was in the houses of landlords.

Wynad was totally vulnerable to the worst form of exploitation. Though this evil system was not peculiar to tribal communities alone it was most pernicious for tribals in Wynad area where the Paniyas and Adiyas were disposed of with their land during the feudal period and at the commencement of the British rule. The system as a continuation of the prevalence of the institution of slavery was enforced by the exploitation of social benefits of the tribals. In the beginning of the 20th century the system of slavery became a widespread phenomenon and it was because of the attitude on the part of the tribal people that they were enslaved as bonded labourers. Even in the modern period it exists as an aftermath of this system, a proverbial laziness among these tribal people. This system as a whole enslaves a person and his family for generations as their *kundal panikar*, with less mobility to come into contact with the outside world.

¹⁶⁵ A male bonded labourer got 2 potis. One poti is equal to 5 Palaghat para as kundal.

¹⁶⁶ P.R.G. Mathur, *n.* 8, p. 98.