CHAPTER III

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC INTRODUCTION TO THE
MUTHUVAN TRIBE

Muthuvans are one of the 36 notified tribes of Kerala. Muthuvan kudys are located in the Western Ghat region of Munnar in the Idukki district of Kerala. This region is considered as the Kashmir of Southern India. Munnar is also known for its tea plantations. Edamalakudy is situated about 40 km away from Munnar town and it is the first tribal panchayath of Kerala. This panchayath abode the largest Muthuvan kudys of the region. One should walk about 19 km through the forest to reach the Muthuvan kudy. And to travel through this forest it is necessary to take permission from the forest department; there is no other way to reach Edamalakudy. This destination is reached after a journey from the height of 7800 feet to 3200 feet down. Edamalakudy consists of twenty eight kudys which is scattered in 36,000 hectar of land area within the reserved forest. Each of the kudys consists of twelve to forty families. The total population of Edamalakudy is 2013 (Tribal Development Department 2011). There is one civil supplies centre (common distribution centre) run by the Department of Civil Supplies, Government of Kerala which covers all the twenty eight kudys. Other public institutions that function in Edamalakudy are the Government Lower Primary School (LP), Forest Community Hall, Forest Substation, a health sub centre which is under the Primary Health Centre, Munnar eleven Anganwadis of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and a Girijan Co-operative Society. There are Single teacher schools in most of the kudys either run through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) or through the Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP). There is no other outside agency or NGO that work in Edamalakudy. Earlier, Edamalakudy was one of the 13 wards of Munnar Grama Panchayath. Government of Kerala declared Edamalakudy as a tribal (grama) panchayath in the year, January 2010. It is the first tribal (grama) panchayath of Kerala. The Lower Primary School (1-4th classes), health sub centre, Girijan society and the civil supply centers are located

28 Local governing body
29 Lower primary school conducts classes upto 4th standard and the medium of instruction is Malayalam
30 Single-teacher schools being run in single rooms managed by a single teacher and include classes from 1st to 4th standard.
close by and the area is referred to as Societykudy. Recently added section to this Societykudy is the temporary panchayath office. Eventhough the Edamalakudy is declared as an independent Panchayath in 2010 and have a separate office in the Kudy, the secretary of panchayath functions from the Munnar Panchayath office and visits Edamalakudy once in a month. Therefore, the people have not yet started availing any facility of an independent panchayath.

**Structure of the Kudy**

When, one walk towards the cluster of twenty eight kudys, Ampalapadikudy is the first kudy that we come across as we enter the Edamalakudy. There is a stream that divides the Ampalapadikudy from the other kudys. Ampalapadikudy connects with other kudys through a concrete bridge across the stream. This stream flows and reaches the Periyar river. The water from this stream is used for bathing and washing clothes. The stream is divided into two sections; the one section of the stream is used by the male members of the Kudy and the other section by the female members of the kudy. The water of the stream is cold. All the members of the kudy except the new born babies use stream water for bathing.

The field work for the present study was conducted in Andavankudy and Ampalapadikudy. Andavankudy has a history 70 years and Ampalapadikudy has a history of about 10 to 12. The two kudys differ in their practice and performance of rituals. Andavankudy has more number of houses when compared to that of Ampalapadikudy. There also exist structural differences between these two kudys which is discussed throughout the thesis. In Andavankudy the traditional chavadi and thinnaveedu still exist. But, in Ampalapadikudy the system of chavadi does not exist anymore and the thinnaveedu is used only by the menstruating women. Most of the younger ones of Ampalapadikudy are in cities for education and therefore one can see only small kids in the kudy. During the vacation when these younger ones come to kudy the girls sleep at Jamanthi’s house along with her Mother. The thinnaveedu of Ampalapadikudy is always empty and only the menstruating women stay there and there is no practice of night stay of girls in the thinnaveedu. Therefore, the thinnaveedu in Ampalapadikudy is exclusively used during menstruation by the women. There is a house in the kudy where a young man stays alone and therefore, his house is used as chavadi. All the gatherings and activities that usually take place in a chavadi happen at this house. Even, the guests are accommodated in his house. The men also watch movies in this house.

The thinnaveedu in Andavankudy is used for night stay of girls and during the menstruation
women also use thinnaveedu. This thinnaveedu is crowded during the night. The thinnaveedu is divided into two sections, in one section of the thinnaveedu menstruating women and girls stay and on the other side non menstruating women stay. This system which I could see in AmpalapadiKudy was not existent in any other kudys of Edamalakudy or at Marayoor Muthuvan kudys. All the kudys have the traditional system of chavadi and thinnaveedu as a public property of that kudy except in Ampalapadikudy.

Ampalapadikudy radiates a different feel compared to other kudys in terms of their level of education, the availability of general facilities like infrastructure and toilets and the way they receive the outsiders. Each kudy has a Kani and a Thalaivar. Kani is the chief of the kudy and mainly takes care of all the matters related to the kudy and of the members living in these kudys. Thalaivar deals with all the matters between the kudy and the Panchayath or with the government on behalf of people. Each kudy selects the Kani and Thalaivar by open voting, and ask them to discontinue the post if people are not satisfied with the performance of the Kani or the Thalaivar. The twenty eight kudys of Edamalakudy are controlled by a common Kani and a Thalaivar. There is a special bond between each and every families of the kudy. Every night before going to sleep all the families in the kudy ask each other whether they had adequate food. It is part of their every day culture.

The kudy closest to Ampalapadikudy is Andavankudy, which is ‘traditional’ in terms of its existence and practices of rituals when compared to that of Ampalapadikudy. Andavankudy consists of about fourty families. However, the number is not stable always. The families do shift from one kudy to the other. There is an anganwadi center and a single teacher school in Andavankudy. The helper in the anganwadi center and a single teacher school in Andavankudy. The helper in the anganwadi belongs to the kudy, but the school teacher is an outsider who stays in the kudy with her husband and three year old daughter. The anganwadi teachers of both the kudys are from outside the kudy and are hardly seen in the kudy. The anganwadi teachers visit these anganwadis once in two months or in three months for three or four continuous working days and on the rest of the days the helper manages the anganwadi.

Andavankudy is one of the biggest and oldest kudy of Edamalakudy. The concrete buildings that exist in this kudy are of the single teacher school and the anganwadi structures. The houses in these kudys are made up of mud and are built by the Muthuvans themselves. There is a big thinnaveedu and a chavadi. Thinnaveedu is small when compared to that of a chavadi. It is always

31 Thalaivar is the second headman of a particular kudy
32 Who also works as a teacher in another single teacher school in another kudy
crowded during the night. It does not have much space to accommodate all women who are menstruating and those who come to the thinnaveedu for sleeping. Thinnaveedu, is usually located between the bushes and trees, therefore is not easily visible to the outsiders.

People of Andavankudy are hard working. During the daytime, I could not see anyone in the kudy as they are all working in field. By evening, all the residents come back from work. Once they are back from the field, the women get busy with the preparation for supper. While the women take responsibility of preparing food after coming back from the work in the field the men take charge of constructing and maintaining the mud houses. Women also help men in mud plastering. The houses in the kudys are not in a row on one hill, they lie scattered on the up and down terrains.

**Muthuvans’ Entry to Kerala and Edamalakudy**

At present, the Muthuvans are scattered across forest area of Idukki District, especially in the Marayoor, Suryanelli, Mattupetty, Mankulam, Kuttampuzha, Pooyamkutty and Edamalakudy area of the district. The most secluded Muthuvan settlement is the Edamalakudy; their customs and practices have not yet merged with other tribal or general populations due to their geographic isolation. Edamalakudy, as the name indicates, is situated amidst the mountains, and is surrounded by reserved forest.

There are oral histories related to Muthuvan’s passage to Kerala from Tamil Nadu. A Muthuvan named Palanivel, aged 43, from Andavankudy described one such story. The Muthuvans who were scared of Pandian warriors fled from their earlier habitat in Tamil Nadu and reached Munnar area with all their belongings and settled in different parts of Idukki district. Another version goes like this: the wrath of Goddess Meenakshi fell upon Madurai and the city was burning. During the time of disorder in Madurai, the Muthuvans carried the statue of Goddess Meenakshi on their muthuku (shoulder) and reached the Suryanelli area of Idukki and therefore the name Muthuvans. The Muthuvans belonged to Suryavamsham and therefore, the place came to be known as Suryanelli.

The third version of the story was narrated by Rathnamma, the Muthuvan woman: the Muthuvans came from Madurai and went to Poonjar king requesting for land. The king appointed them as the

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33 It says Muthuvans are originally from Tamilnadu who later came to Kerala
34 Pandians were one of the four dynasties who ruled the Tamil territory.
35 They carried the goddess on their back.
36 Dynasty of sun
servants of the king. She says her people have the evidence, supposedly the king’s sword in their
possession. It is also said that a woman from the royal family joined the Muthuvan community
through marriage, and her offspring belonged to the sub clan of Moothassery. There is a custom
which is practiced even today that, if any Muthuvans goes to Sabarimala\textsuperscript{37} for pilgrimage, a
member\textsuperscript{38} of the Poonjar palace would come and receive the Muthuvans on their way. The
Muthuvans connection to the Tamil culture is evident from their language, interest in the Tamil
symbols like yellow thread worn by married women which represents the status of marriage and
from their fondness for glass bangles. The older Muthuvan women most commonly speak Tamil.

Mayilswami Muthuvan, a seventy year old from Marayoor has another version of the story about
the name of their tribe. There lived Kovalan and his wife Kannaki in Madhurai which was then
capital city of the Pandyan king. Once, Kovalan was trapped by a goldsmith in the name of
stealing the queen's anklets. The anklet Kovalan posessed was that of his wife Kannaki. Kovalan
was punished by the king. Kannaki goes to the kings court, proves the injustice by breaking the
remaining anklet she had with her. The anklets of the queen was filled with pearls and while
Kannagi's anklets were filled with ruby. The guilt of his hasty decision kills the king. After the
death of the king ancestors of Muthuvan’s left Madurai with Kannaki. On the way Kannaki
could not walk and therefore, they carried her on the muthuku (back/shoulder). And it is
therefore, they are known by the name Muthuvan. These stories therefore, point out the fact that
the Muthuvans belonged to the Pandyan dynasty.

The Muthuvans started living in this forest area since 1946. They came from the Chenkulam
Kundala the dam reservoir area. The Muthuvans were displaced from the reservoir area during the
time of the dam construction. Once, Pattom Thanu Pillai, the then Chief Secretary of Kerala, was
on his way to Munnar, the Muthuvans blocked him on the road in order to present the
displacement issue before him. The chief secretary agreed to solve the issue and promised to shift
the Muthuvans to Edamalakudy area. Initially, seven families migrated to Edamalakudy; after a
year, others also joined them. Further, the director of Tribal Development Department, T
Madhava Menon, supported them by establishing basic facilities in the area which included a
public distribution centre.

\textsuperscript{37} The most popular place of piligrimage in Southern part of India situated which is situated about 65
kilometers from Poonjar palace.
\textsuperscript{38} When I asked about this to a person belonging to Poonjar palace he said he has not heard about this
story.
Family System, Customs and Practices

Chavadi and thinnaveedu are the community sleeping quarters, the two sets of dormitories, which are found in every kudy. The Muthuvans separate the boys and girls who are above the age of 8-10 old. Thinnaveedu is a place in the kudy, which is used by the unmarried girls for their night stay. Women who are menstruating also use thinnaveedu for their stay as they are believed to cause pollution to others. Unmarried men and the boys stay in the chavadi during the night. The traditional house structures of the Muthuvans had one room and this room was used as a kitchen, bedroom and for all the other purposes. Therefore, the use of chavadi and thinnaveedu by the younger ones in those days provided sexual freedom for the parents during nights. Every evening between 06PM -08 PM the children got to the chavadi and the thinnaveedu. The children do not have to be told about going to the dormitories. They do it by seeing their peers going to the dormitories during the night.

Chavadi is a big mud, rectangular shaped hall with an entrance in the front. There is no other form of ventilation in the room. There is a fire pit lit at the center of chavadi for providing warmth. Every night, when they go to the chavadi for their night stay, the boys carry two sticks of firewood. There is no furniture kept in the chavadi. The things that are kept in the chavadi include sleeping mats, drums and bells. These are all vital parts of the activities in the chavadi. In the morning the sleeping mats are folded and tied to the bamboo sticks of the roof. The chavadi is normally empty during the day. According to Das (1989) the utilities of youth dormitories were to avoid the restricting role of children in their parent’s sexual life. But this system not only exists as an aspect for the sexual privacy of parents. Alternatively, the chavadi also functions as a club, place for juvenile happiness, non-formal school, training center and helps in making of the kayarumakkal into a mature Muthuvans. Chavadi also acts as a preparatory school for the children. At the same time, for the community, the chavadi is a labour pool, a common shelter, a place for accommodating visitors, a space for convening meetings to decide on performing ritual ceremonies like Pongal and organising political events. Moreover, the intertwining of the Muthuvan social organisation with the ritualistic as well as materialistic functions of the chavadi confirms to us that the chavadi have multiplicity of functions in the Muthuvan settlements.

The menstruating girls are made to stay separately in the thinnaveedu. The thinnaveedu of some of the kudys has two compartments. In one compartment the women who are menstruating are

39 Boys
40 Pongal is a harvest festival in Tamil Nadu
made to stay and in the other compartment the *elamtharimakkal* or *elamtharis* and non menstruating women stay. In those thinnaveedu’s which has one room without compartments, the menstruating women are made to sleep in one corner of the room and they keep a distance from the others. Thinnaveedu is situated a little away from the row of houses, hidden between the bushes and grasses. The chavadi is well built and maintained when compared to that of thinnaveedu.

During the field work I stayed in Ampalapadikudy. At times, I stayed in the Maniyamma’s house and sometimes in a separate house nearby. During my stay in a separate house someone would always come to stay with me during the night. If anyone was staying in the thinnaveedu and needed a company I would accompany them and stay in the thinnaveedu. When Vasanthi went to stay in the thinnaveedu I too accompanied her. It was during the monsoon time and the roof thatched with dried grass was leaking. While, we were sleeping on the floor water started pouring over us and had to keep changing the place from one part of the thinnaveedu to the other inside the room. A hearth was in the center, fully lit during the night. Vasanthi, kept her feet very close to the fire without fear. I was scared of the hearth, wondering if my blanket would catch fire while I was asleep. Therefore, I kept myself away from the hearth. I was curiously watching Poomari sleeping calm, even when her feet were almost touching the fire.

**Clan System**

Muthuvan has a complex and a secret clan system known as *kootam*. Usually, they do not discuss about the hierarchy in the kootam to any of the outsiders. The Anganwadi teacher, who has been working in Edamalakudy for the last twenty years, has not even heard about this kootam. When I asked Mayilswami from Marayoor, an old Muthuvan man about the kootam, he hesitated to respond, he said,

This question is difficult for me to answer. You ask someone else. I was purposefully hiding this matter from you. You can ask anything else about us I am ready to answer but not about kootam. I cannot tell you this. Forgive me. I was praying that you would not ask me about it (Field notes 2009).

They consider it as a secret to be kept amongst them. Even when someone in between the conversations gave me some hints about kootam, they would ask me not to share with any of the other Muthuvan about the information that they shared with me. They have four clans among

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41 Girls
42 Clan
namely Kaniyattukootam, Ellukoottam, Sosannakoottam, Poothanikoottam. All these clans have sub clans. All the clans except the Poothanikoottam have a king group and a minister group. Marriage within the same clan is not allowed. If they do so, ooruvilakku will be imposed on them. The child inherits the kootam of the mother. Usually, the Kaniyattukootam, Elavanattaya and Elayamuttam are the king group which can have marital relation with the Ellookoottam which is the minister group (Vendikkara). Ethissery, Balatharavakka and Pachimuthavakka are the royal sub clans among Ellukoottam and Vellari is the royal sub clan among Sosanna koottam. Even the small children know about the clan system and to which clan their parents belong to. Once Manju, a six year old girl from Ampalapadikudy, who usually accompanied me to the stream, asked me: “Which clan do you belong to?” I simply said, “I belong to Kaniyattukootam”. Suddenly she said “Oh that is my father’s kootam. But I belong to Ellookoottam.”

Panchayam

A meeting of Muthuvan with concerned representatives from the kudy is referred to as panchayam, in other words, panchayam is their decision taking body. Muthuvans have their own norms and rules. If anyone violates the kudy rules, they would be called up and asked for explanation. If the person cannot give a convincing explanation, the panchayam will punish them depending on the nature and gravity of violation. Panchayam is convened mostly on issues related to marital relations. A festival celebration or the renovation of a chavadi also may come up in the agenda of the panchayam. Mainly, the members of the same clan are the decision making authority in the panchayam. The members from Ellokoottam clan are considered as the ministerial group and they hold the key positions in the panchayam. Other prominent members of the other kudys also participate in the panchayam and support in the process of decision making. Any member of the kudy can attend the panchayam and have the freedom to express their opinion. The women usually are scared to express their opinion in the panchayam wondering if they would be asked to give explanations. Generally, all the Muthuvans accept the decisions of Panchayam and the decisions are acceptable and never imposed on anyone. But, deviation from the kudy norms leads to severe punishment. The candidate for the general election and the president of panchayath are decided by the Kani. Muthuvan consider Kani as the highest authority who decide on all the matters related to them. However, there have been instances when the panchayam could not take decisions especially in the case of certain marital conflicts (explained in Chapter VI).
Ooruvilakku

Ooruvilakku (excommunication or isolation) is imposed on those who marry outside the Muthuvan community and also for having extra marital relationships with people from the same clan. Marriage within the same clan is strictly prohibited. If it happens to be so, it is a punishable offense and they will be sent outside the forest (ooruvilakku) and no communication is encouraged even with the parents and the siblings. Ooruvilakku is imposed on other issues also.

In 2009, an incident led to declare ooruvilakku on three of the Muthuvan men: for removing ornaments from the dead. As per the Muthuvan tradition they do not remove the ornaments from the dead body even if it is gold ornaments. Usually, the men wear earrings and rings. Some of the women wear chain and almost all of them have earrings. They buy ornaments from the money that they save from of their cardamom cultivation. These three Muthuvan men from Edamalakudy dug the chudalaparamba43 and took out the gold ornaments from the dead. They sold the ornaments and divided the money among themselves. No one knew about this, though many of the Muthuvans became suspicious of their sudden economic boom. One day, after consuming alcohol, one among the three men in a semi conscious state boasted about the theft to others. Thus, everyone came to know about the incident. Panchayam was called and ooruvilakku was imposed on these three Muthuvans. The panchayam asked them to replace the ornaments that they have taken within two months. But, they could not replace the ornaments. Hence, people from the kudy lodged a complaint with the police. At present the three men who took the ornaments are in jail. This is the only case that is reported to police from the Muthuvans of Edmalakudy, otherwise all the problems are handled and settled by the panchayam. The wives of the two men left them and came back to their parents’ house, but one stood up with her husband and therefore, even she had to face the ooruvilakku. Since, she did not have any other place to go she still stays in Edamalakudy. The Andavankudy kani was sharing water with her through pipeline44; people asked him to stop the water sharing with the family whose member was punished with ooruvilakku, and if the Kani did not stop giving water to that family, the people of the kudy warned him that they will execute another ooruvilakku on him. Immediately, he discontinued giving water to that particular family. The family members of those who are under ooruvilakku are not allowed to contact their other relatives. If any ooruvilakku happened in the

43 The place where the dead bodies are buried-burial place
44 Water for drinking and cooking reach the kudy and every courtyard through a plastic tube from streams in the forest. Usually one source is shared by 2 or 3 houses with single pipe connection. Each house can Connect and disconnect and after their use they connect it to the next house.
kudy it is informed to entire Muthuvans, so that everyone keeps a distance with the one who is under ooruvilaku. If anyone is in contact with the one under oroovilakku he or she will be punished with ooruvilaku.

**Agriculture Practices and Food Habits**

Most of the Muthuvans in Edamalakudy possess their own land. The state government has given them the land for agricultural purposes but without a deed certificate. Some of the Muthuvans do not have land but they take land for lease. The main agricultural crops grown by the Muthuvans include finger millet, paddy, tapioca and cardamom. They grow two rounds of paddy in a year. Muthuvans of Mulakuthara kudy in Edamalakudy cultivate pepper as well. A family may have thirty acres of land and some others just one acre of land. In spite of that, they work for each other for sixty rupees per day. Some of them owns shed for drying paddy and finger millet and they let others use their shed. Those who have cardamom cultivation have the shed for the storage purpose as well as for drying the raw cardamom. The Muthuvans take firewood from forest for drying cardamom with the permission from the forest staff, but they charge them thousand rupees per shed; for those who do not have a shed, the employees of forest department charge one kilogram cardamom annually. Along with agriculture Muthuvans collect the wild tubers and honey from the forest.

Muthuvans rear goats and chicken. But, they use neither the milk nor the egg; they believe goat milk is for goat kids and keep the eggs for breeding. Muthuvans eat the meat of goat and chicken. Their food timings vary depending on their work. They usually go to work by 10 am in the morning and are in the field up to 03 pm in the afternoon. Muthuvans often drink black tea without sugar. They eat twice a day that is by 09 am and 06:30pm. Their daily menu includes rice and finger millet, *katti or korangatti*\(^{45}\). The cost of rice is Rs.5.50/- kilogram in the civil supplies center; the price is higher in Edamalakudy as compared to that of other places, resulting from higher transportation charges. Loading charges upwards (to outside the kudy) is high, around Rs. 8 per Kilogram, while downwards (towards the kudy) it is less, only Rs.5.50 per Kg. Now, the government incurs the loading charges and therefore, Muthuvan also avail the rice with the same rate as it is outside the Edamalakudy. For the scheduled tribe Goverment of Kerala provides 22 kg rice in a month for Rs 1 per kg. This has brought changes in their food habit. The place of their

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\(^{45}\) *Katti or korangatti* is a dish prepared from finger millet. Powdered finger millet is put in to boiled water, stirred well with two sticks, and made into a paste
staple food ragi is now taken over by rice. They prepare one curry *sambar* or *adaka*, a curry prepared out of a green vegetable or its varieties along with rice. They never cook more than one side dish. Muthuvans rarely use vegetables and mainly use pulses like yellow gram and red gram. Women on their way back home from the field collect green leaves, wild vegetables, mushroom and tubers for supper. But, the availability depends on season. Some months they hardly get anything. Especially during the monsoon season with heavy rain and wind they cannot go out to collect anything and it is difficult to survive during those months. However, of late, these practices are changing. Traditionally, the staple food of the Muthuvans was finger millet; which at present is taken over by rice. Most of the households do not keep sugar, though some of the households keep jaggery. Very rarely, do they use milk powder and that too is used for children. However, in Marayoor area those who have cattle use milk. There is a kudy in Edamalakudy named Kavakkattukudy, where they rear cows but never use its milk. They use the cow dung as manure and for flooring. They cultivate orange, mango and lemon in some areas. Guava is a common fruit found in almost all the kudy. They also collect *rudraksha* and *kunthirikkam*, which is also known as *thelli* in Muthuvan language from the forest and sell it through the Girijan society.

**Livelihood**

Women, including young and old - pregnant and lactating, form the major workforce in the agricultural activities of the Muthuvans. The Muthuvan women are hard working; they work in the field during the day time. Men do support in agricultural work. Many young men are also engaged in loading work. They carry goods like rice and other necessary items to the kudy and carry cardamom and other forest products outside the kudy. These are the contract work given by Government of Kerala. Once, they are back in the evening from the field they cook the food. Every evening they prepare rice from the grain that they collect from the field. Alongside, they look after their family too. They collect vegetables from the forest and different varieties of green leaves, *pottukai*, mushrooms and tubers. Some of them collect crab and fish from the streams. However, at times, they may not have any vegetables to have along with rice; on such days they eat rice with salt.

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46 Elacocarpus or Rudraksha in English it is utrasun bead  
47 Frankincense  
48 A tiny round wild vegetable
Women never sit idle. During their free time, they make mat with the use of rattan plates, for sleeping and drying of the grains. They also make *kutta* and *vatti* from rattan which is used for agricultural and cooking purposes. Earlier, there were no utensils and vessels that were available; even when it was available they never reached people living in the kudy. Therefore, they made vessels with rattan, for domestic purposes. They used to share food from one vatti. For carrying water, they used big bamboo trunks. In earlier days, instead of cloth, they used the bark of *Arali* tree; it was crushed and used as cloth and blanket. The cotton of *kunthapana* tree is used to make fire. They put this cotton in between two white stones and crush the cotton in between, which create spark. Nowadays, they use the modern utensils brought from the market outside for domestic purposes.

Muthuvan men take honey from the forest but they hardly use it for themselves; they sell it through the Girijan Cooperative Society. For one liter of honey, they get one hundred and ten rupees. They go deep inside the forest with a group of 8 to 10 members for collecting honey. They come back after few days and share the honey equally among the groups. Muthuvans of the Marayoor cultivate sugar cane and prepare jaggery in the traditional way. *Pulthailam* is another main source of income of the Muthuvans. They also grow vegetables, mainly cabbage. In Edamalakudy, Muthuvans cultivate cardamom, accepting an advance of some fifty thousand rupees or so from a business man named Appachan from Anakkulam, and give him cardamom in return. He hands over the money to a Muthuvan in the kudy, who later collects cardamom from all the Muthuvans, stores in his shed and distributes money among them. Usually, the Muthuvans never sell cardamom to the Girijan Society as the outsiders pay them more money than the Society. And as outsiders pay an advance, people in the kudy can use the advance money for cultivation. Merchants in Anakkulam collect tons of cardamom from Edamalakudy. Vasanthi says, “Anakkulam merchants will be in peril if the cardamom is not grown in Edamalakudy in sufficient quantity.”

Women, usually go once in a week to collect firewood and go more than once in a week, if there are any special needs. They need firewood for cooking; the fire in the hearth is always kept lit and usually they leave a pot of water boiling for black tea. Old women sleep near the hearth during

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49 Round basket for carrying things
50 Wide square basket used for cleaning pulses and paddy for cooking
51 A tree named Nerium
52 A variety of palm tree
53 Lemon grass oil
the night. They need to keep themselves warm in the cold weather of Edamalakudy. In the night, they keep the fire lit in the centre of the kudy, in order to chase away elephants. If there is a special function like marriage, adiyantiram\textsuperscript{54}, and festivals like Pongal, they collect firewood daily. In case of marriage and adiyantiram, the firewood collection is the responsibility of the unmarried girls, the Elamtharimakkal.

They carry firewood sometimes from faraway places in the dense forest. Each kudy has a specific area prescribed for collecting firewood within the forest; people from Andavankudy go to collect firewood from the area that is prescribed to them and those from Ampalapadikudy collect from the area prescribed to them. They usually, store the firewood outside their houses, vertically on the outside wall, which protects the firewood from getting wet in the rain.

**Housing**

Muthuvans have a tendency to build their house in the interiors of forest, especially in places where people from outside cannot reach. The Muthuvans build the houses in a unique way. At first, they prepare a bamboo frame on the plane foundation for the wall and then cover the frame with mud from both the sides and plaster it well (picture is attached in appendix). This process makes the walls very smooth and strong. During the rainy season, they make a temporary leaf or rattan cover for this wall to protect it from rainwater. They use bamboo sticks for the roof and cover it with a tin sheet or from grass or from rattan leaves. Traditionally, they used grass or rattan leaves instead of tin sheet. On the bamboo sticks, they tie their things and valuables. They fold the currency notes and other valuables to keep inside the bamboo hole in the roof as it is considered as the safest place in the house.

The floors of the Muthuvan houses are made out of mud. Occasionally, the floor is plastered and repaired with the use of mud. In the kudys where they rear cattle, Muthuvans use cow dung for flooring. Houses that are built by the government have concrete and cement flooring. However, those houses are few in number. The Muthuvans prefer mud floor over the cement floor. They say, the cement floor is very cold. Even during and after the delivery, women sleep on the mud floor. If someone gets ill, they sleep on the mud floor near the firewood hearth. They do not use any bedding other than that of a handmade rattan mat. They use folded jute sack as pillow and bed, so they keep the jute sacks they get from ration shop. About seven to eight women may sleep

\textsuperscript{54} A ritual associated with death after 30 days
on the floor in a small room. Mouse and insects are plenty in the room where the finger millet sacks are stored.

The people living in Andavankudy complained to me that I was not sleeping in their kudy, so I decided to stay in Andavankudy. One evening, I carried my beddings from Ampalapadikudy to Andavankudy. Many people invited me for dinner and I joined two of the families and shared their food. After having dinner I thought of staying with other girls in the thinnaveedu but, it was crowded. Therefore, Seematti, Devi and I decided to sleep at Devi’s house. When we reached her house Devi’s mother and a woman were getting ready to sleep. We three were then accommodated in the kitchen. That was a small narrow room where one could not even stretch the legs fully. But, no one seemed to have any discomfort except me. If we were to sit or stand in that room, the eyes would burn with the fumes from the hearth; but if we lie down on the floor, the fumes will go above us. Seematti did not have a proper blanket to cover herself. When I asked her about it she said “I am not feeling cold”. When Devi heard this she replied saying “She always says that, but it is because she doesn’t have a blanket”. Seematti looked at me and smiled.

**Dress and Make-up**

The women usually drape sari. There are two ways of draping the sari; one is *Melpardava*\(^{55}\), which is the dress of all the unmarried girls and of the married who do not have children. But, the way of draping is different; the married women put a knot on the shoulder. The other way of draping sari is called *marady*, which is the usual Indian style of wearing sari and is commonly found among the general community too. Now, the women have started wearing nighty or gown like maxi. However, the elderly women and some men are not happy with the change and they criticise the ‘progressives’ who wear ‘modern’ dresses. Muthuvan women do not wear slippers. If they are going outside, they carry the slippers in the hand and wear it when they reach the outskirts of their kudy.

The Muthuvan women always put a knot in their hair on the head, which is referred to as Kondakettu. The hair without *konda*\(^{56}\) is considered as a bad omen. All the married and the unmarried women wear bangles. The unmarried girls wear less jewellery when compared to that of married women. Very few women wear gold chain. They wear nose studs on both the sides of nose. Muthuvan women usually do not wish to wear neat and good dresses. They say “in this

\(^{55}\) Photograph is attached in the appendix

\(^{56}\) Tying hair on the back like a ball
forest who is going to observe us”. They always drape untidy wrinkled saris. Aged women usually have only one sari. When they take bath in the river, they remove the sari and blouse, wash it and leave it for drying. While the clothes are drying they take bath with the skirt, which they usually wear under the sari. They wear the wet skirt after bath and wrap the half dried sari over. Then, they come home and sit in front of the fire. Even if the dress is torn, they do not mind it. Some women stitch their torn dress and use it to the maximum. Some of the aged women drape sari without blouse in melpudava style. This shows that their dress culture has changed and maradi way of draping sari is being adopted from the outside by the Muthuvans.

Generally, none of Muthuvans use undergarments; even though the younger ones would like to use the older women do not allow them to use undergarments. They consider all these as new things and as an encroachment over their traditional world. They consider these things as invasions that would change their culture. I have noticed that the some of their saris, made of polyester are fully wrinkled and so the width is shortened. Old Muthuvian women never allow the younger ones to comb their hair, wear slippers, and use umbrella even during rain or hot sun. Therefore, the girls who have lived outside for the purpose of their education are in a dilemma whether to use these things or not. They are using all these things outside Edamalakudy and they never tie their hair in konda style when they go out of Edamalakudy. Whereas, in Marayoor the culture is more like that of outside world, the Muthuvans here frequently interact with outsiders and are trying to adapt to the modern way of living.

Muthuvan women are different from other tribes of Idukki in terms of appearance. The Muthuvans mostly have fair complexion. There are few cases in Marayoor in which the Muthuvan women got married to men from outside (non Muthuvian). In Marayoor, older women also go outside and get to see the culture that exists outside. Therefore, the older women of Marayoor are not rigid in following their traditional practices and they do not ask the younger ones to follow every aspect of their culture and accept change, where as in Edamalakudy the women especially the older women never go outside occasionally. They go out of Edamalakudy during emergencies. Therefore, they are still not open to change.

Men wear shirt and long dhotis. The old men use a thalappavu\(^7\), a cloth knot that cover the whole head. Old men wear earrings with stones and glass. Mostly, men wash their cloths by themselves. The Girijan society of Edamalakudy sells warm cloths, saris, blouse, underskirt, underskirt.

\(^7\) A cloth knot over the head
shirts, dhotis, frocks and skirts for children. They also store kitchen vessels, bangles and slippers that are generally for men. Men are allowed to wear slippers.

**Festivals**

Pongal is a harvesting festival in the *thai* month of Tamil. It is the most celebrated festival in Edamalakudy. During Pongal season, they cook chicken. The Muthuvans keep chicken meat as a sacrificial offering in front of their gods. They rear chicken and goat to use them during this special occasion. Most of their prayers and *puja* are related to forest and its survival. In the forest certain places are considered as god's place. Those places are considered as pure. Women are not allowed to enter these places. On Pongal day men go in groups and perform *puja* in such places. They celebrate pongal in an exuberant manner spending liberally. If a famine, agricultural loss or any other financial crisis occurs, they call up a panchayam and decide not to celebrate pongal in that particular year. Their financial status is always a determining factor of their festivals and their grandeur. Muthuvans celebrate pongal for weeks. Each kudy selects a week and people from other kudy come to celebrate with them. During the days of pongal Muthuvans have lots of fun; boys during the pongal season dress up like girls, enter into all the houses and even indulge in ‘mischievous’ adventures like pouring muddy water on each other. Vasanthi, once reflected that during the last Pongal her house lock was broken by the boys from Andavankudy as she was not at home when they went to meet her. They met her on their way back when Vasanthi was coming back from the stream after washing clothes and they told her “we could not open your house it was locked”. It was only after she reached home that she saw that the lock was broken and the kitchen was full of mud and water.

*Kartika*\(^{58}\) is another important festival. It is during this festival that the Muthuvans clean their houses and all the other furniture like wooden benches which is used for keeping water. They paste new patches of mud on the wall. During the festival season they change their jewelry and dress. Some vendors visit the kudy with bangles, sari and other fancy items during the festival season. They also carry kitchen utensils, catering to the needs of people living in the kudy. I saw Jamanthi, a young woman aged 22 years from Ampalapadikudy, buying a lot of bangles for herself, for her niece and for her mother; she also bought a fairness cream for her mother. Women compelled me to buy some bangles and they said it is only the widows who are not allowed to wear bangles and everyone else should wear bangles.

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\(^{58}\) Karthika is a tamil festival which is associated with light
Rituals and Ceremonies

Urumalkettu\textsuperscript{59} is the ceremony for boys, performed when the boys reach the age of 12-16 and it is on this occasion that the boys are made to wear the long cloth over the head for the first time. Traditionally, the Muthuvan men never used to cut their hair. They used to tie their hair under a 3-4 meter long cloth worn over the head, which is called thalappavu\textsuperscript{60}. If a Muthuvan removes the thalappavu it means some sad thing has happened in the kudy, like death. Nowadays, the Muthuvan men cut their hair. The boys are made to grow hair for sometime before the ceremony of the urumalkettu and after that ceremony they readily cut it. It is the uncle's son who performs the rituals on this day. On this day the boy is taken to all the houses in the kudy where he is mocked by the family members by throwing mud water and cow dung on him. In the evening the boy's family invites all the members of the kudy for feast. The boy removes the cloth from the head within a week or a month depending on the convenience of school going children. School vacation is considered as the favourable time to perform urumalkettu.

Kondakettu is a ritual performed when a girl reaches the age of eleven or twelve. Her maternal cousin (sister) and friends tie her hair like a ball, konda. The girl begins to wear melpudava on the same day. From that day onwards, she is supposed to knot her hair always and she is never allowed to open her konda in front of others especially men. They wash their hair and tie the wet hair. A Muthuvan woman is made to open her hair at the time of her husband’s death.

Thalemutt is another important ceremony in a girl’s life, which celebrates menarche. They celebrate it like a marriage ceremony. Traditionally, soon after the ceremony of thalemutt the marriage of the girl used to be arranged. Nowadays, in Ampalapadikudy people celebrate kondakettu and thalemutt on the same day. Sometimes, if the girls are studying outside Edamalakudy and staying in the hostel; the ceremony is arranged when they come to the kudy during vacation. However, in Andavankudy people celebrate kondakettu and menarche as two different rituals. Not many girls from Andavankudy are studying outside. Earlier, Muthuvans performed these two rituals separately even in Ampalapadikudy and now, that is merged together in Ampalapadikudy. But, Muthuvans of Andavankudy perform it separately. In this kudy we can observe transformation in the practices of rituals. School going children's convenience is the prior concern of Muthuvans of Ampalapadikudy in performing these rituals.

\textsuperscript{59} A ritual when a boy is made to cloth knot over the head for the first time
\textsuperscript{60} Turban
Marriage
Marriage takes place between cross cousins. Traditionally, the first girl child should go in marriage to the paternal sister’s son (The details of marriage is described in the next chapter). The age of marriage is 14 to 20. In some cases girls marry after the age of 20. In olden days the marriage was a one week celebration for the entire kudy. The ceremony begins when the bride's friends hide the bride and the groom and his friends should find her out. Friends of the bride roam in the forest and sing *ashappatu*\(^{61}\) and misguide the boys. The people in the kudy do not go for work on these days. Every member of the kudy enjoys the playful atmosphere. Finally, either they find the bride or the groom and his friends plead her friends to show the bride. It is then, the bride and groom meet with each other and the marriage ceremony begins. However, this custom is not practiced in the recent times. Now, the groom comes to bride’s kudy, stays there for about two or three days without appearing in public, takes the bride, and goes to his kudy. In between the girl’s father gives a dinner to all people in the kudy. The groom's father also arranges a dinner at his kudy after the groom and bride reach their kudy after marriage. The groom is supposed to bring *pudava* (bridal sari) for the bride.

Dialect
The language that Muthuvan use as their medium of communication does not have a script. It is closely linked to Tamil and Malayalam. Most of the Muthuvans can follow Malayalam. In the schools, the medium of instruction is Malayalam. Therefore, the younger generation, who attend the schools, can easily follow Malayalam. But, in the case of older women, they use only Muthuvan language and some of them could follow Tamil as well. Even in the Muthuvan language they use two words or expressions for one and the same thing: for example if any outsiders ask them about thinnaveedu, they say it is *valapra* and for *korangatti* (a food item prepared from finger millet) they say it is *katti*. The same way they use *satram* for chavadi. Further, they have their own symbols for communication. For example, if a man removes urumal, which is tied over his head, it indicates death of someone in the kudy. In the same way Muthuvans make particular sound for certain events. Krishnankutty from Girijan Society explained one such incident. Once he was talking with Palaniswamy at Societykudy. Suddenly, they heard a particular sound from the Puthukudy side. After hearing that, Palaniswamy said, 'blood is seen' and he ran to that place. This shows they have some symbols for communication.

\(^{61}\) A song related to marriage and menarche which explains their beauty and physical maturity
which is understood by Muthuvans and not by others, which may be helping them to get support from others those who are not in the kudy but somewhere near the premises.

**Education**

Muthuvian children avail primary level education either from the Government Lower Primary School (LP School) or from the single teacher school that are present in the kudy. Some of the kudys do not have single teacher school facilities too. So the children from those kudys need to go either to government LP school or single teacher school of nearby kudys.

At another level, the teachers in the Government Lower Primary School are not regular in Edamalakudy. There are four teachers appointed on the basis of daily wages. The teachers divide their work with each other. For example, two teachers stay and work for 15 days and take leave for 15 days and on these 15 days the other two teachers will come to the school. Therefore, they work in rotation. The teachers are not given any accommodation and have to stay in the school itself. In every kudy there is a single teacher school. In the single teacher school, one teacher takes care of the students from first standard to fourth standard. Mid day meal is available for the students in the single teacher school. The number of students in these schools is low. The children are registered in both the single teacher school and the Government Lower Primary school and students collect uniform from both the schools. Alternatively, they attend classes in both the schools. When the single school teacher takes leave for about three weeks to one month, the children from this school attend the classes in Government LP School. The facilities for accommodation of the teachers are limited and so no one wishes to stay for long in the forest area. The single school class room is a three sided open building and one side is attached to a very small room where the teacher is supposed to stay and the students mid day meal items also are kept in the same small room. There are no proper toilet facilities for the school teachers. In Edalaparakudi a single school teacher, named Vijaya, stays at a stretch for three months in the kudy and then takes leave for one month. The performances of students of this school are better compared to other single teacher schools in Edamalakudy and mostly 3 to 5 students clear the MRS (Model Residential School) screening test and get admission every year. Vijaya is the most favourite teacher among Muthuvans. People in her kudy always support her even in her financial needs. Vijaya once told me that once she did not have any money to go home and when she told someone in the kudy, they collected rupees three thousand and five hundred immediately and gave her. Students, who joined the model residential school at Munnar after their basic education with Vijaya teacher still, send her letters. They keep rupees twenty or fifty in each letter that they
send through their parents. When I asked for her response she replied, 'they are giving it happily, so I take it'.

There are eleven anganwadis in Edamalakudy. The first anganwadi was established in 1995 and subsequently the others were also established. But, the performances of these anganwadis are inadequate. Anganwadi workers are from outside the kudy. The anganwadi teachers are not provided with any accommodation arrangements and the toilet facilities. The teachers who stay in the Edamalakudy feel alienated from the outside world as they cannot communicate with their families and have to face unfamiliar food habits and living situations. Therefore, they hardly stay in the kudy. They stay there for about five days or so once in two months. The anganwadi helpers are from Muthuvan kudy and they manages the activities of anganwadi in the absence of the anganwadi teachers. The anganwadi helpers do things in their own way; if there is any family rivalry, the helper would not supply the food to children from that particular family. All the children are registered in anganwadi but, they go to the anganwadi occasionally. In most of the cases one anganwadi is for two kudys. The children from the other kudy also come and when they come the helper prepares for those children and serves them. Food distribution is the only activity done by the anganwadis of Edamalakudy. At times, the children come to the anganwadi and return back since the helper may not be in the kudy. The anganwadi helper also work as ASHA in the kudy. They have to go to the hospital along with patients and on these days the anganwadi remains closed. Once, on the way to the kudy I met two anganwadi teachers along with an ICDS supervisor. That was the first time any supervisor was visiting to Edamalakudy as it is not possible for the supervisor to visit every day or even occasionally. Due to the lack of facilities the authorities cannot force any teachers to go and stay in Edamalakudy. In some of the kudys the anganwadis have buildings with proper roofs and are well built rooms. Even, in such anganwadis it has a single classroom, where they store the food items, educational items, and prepare and serve food too. In some kudy they do not have even this facility. The anganwadi there function in a hut adjacent to the helper’s house, without proper walls. Usually, the helper and the surrounding families in rainy season use this hut for drying their cloths.

Education is not a subject that the people in the kudy are excited about. Majority of them do not show any interest to send their children to the school, due to many reasons like distance between the kudy and the school, streams on the way and the presence of wild animals on the way. Parents’ escort is essential to reach the schools, but the parents are often busy with their agricultural work. Rain and seasonal work in the forest are the other obstacles for the education of
the children. Children often have to go to the forest to collect items like *pathiripoove* and *ottavarakkay* or *rudraksha* and other forest products along with their parents. In the entire Edamalakudy Vidhyalakshmi is the only girl who has completed her higher secondary education. Four boys have completed matriculation (SSLC). The medium of instruction in schools are Malayalam or Tamil; both are difficult for the Muthuvan children during the initial days of their schooling.

**Lineage**

Middle aged women do not tell their names if we ask them. They are ashamed to tell their names. Women never say their husband’s name. They are referred by attaching their children’s name like Sangeetha’s mother or Aiswarya’s father. Muthuvans are matrilineal community. Children get equal share of inheritance of assets from both parents, irrespective of their gender. The route of clan system is through the mothers. The children inherits mothers lineage of clan.

The Muthuvan women are not allowed to go out of kudy alone and in case of violation she has to make a public statement in front of the temple saying, “I am pure and I will not go again alone” and if not she will not be taken back in the kudy. Women are not allowed to talk to the strangers and with the men from other clan. When a woman is walking in a narrow path and if any man comes across, the woman should give him the way; not only that, she should hide herself from that man by turning her back or disappearing in the bushes. However, woman has the right to hold the property and money that she earns. She can spend that money as she wishes. In many of the Muthuvan families in Edamalakudy, women are the breadwinners; they work hard in the field and do all the household chores. Men consult their wives before taking any decision regarding family.

The Muthuvan women who are working as anganwadi helpers have to go to Munnar for collecting their salary from the ICDS office. They form a group and go to Munnar. One of the helper's husband always accompanies them. Maniyamma, an anganwadi helper and ASHA from Ampalapadikudy, comments on this as ‘Why is this man always coming with her? He never give any freedom to her, she could have come alone with us. Instead of that, he accompanies every where she goes’. This shows Maniyamma’s enjoyment of freedom and the confidence she has on doing all alone. But, at the same time responding to this incident Lekha said 'that is her husband,

62 A wild medicinal flower, botanical name is Stereospermum Colais
he has the right to accompany her and the wife must be happy about that’. Lekha cannot find any problem in the existing practices in their culture.

Earlier they followed marumakkathayam\(^63\) system i.e. descent to the eldest son of the eldest sister (Thurston, 1909). Probably one may hand over a blanket or any items used by him to his nephew. Those days they did not own any land. At present the system of marumakkathayam is not followed. The parents share their property to sons and daughters equally.

**Health Care**

Once or twice in a month the Health department organises medical camp in the kudy. One or two doctors, three health inspectors and three junior public health nurses attend the camp. Health department has a sub centre under the Primary Health Centre in Edamalakudy. It opens during the time of health camp, otherwise the sub center remains closed. When they come for the visit, they stay in the centre for two days and visit the kudy. The response of the people to the health camps is good. Pregnancy checkups, fever, cough, fracture, snakebite are the common cases reported during the camps.

Doctors in the medical camp cover the fracture using bamboo sticks and its plates and then cover it with a cloth bandage. The Muthuvans also have learnt to do this treatment; as they cannot wait for the next medical camp in case of emergency. Snakebite is another common problem found in this area. Muthuvans apply their herbal medicines and also drink their own urine, which is considered as good treatment for snakebite. Drinking own urine is considered as good as the antibodies produced against the venom will reach the body. That helps to recover from the poison that has entered into the body.

They have medicines for the reproductive health care too; they have medicines to deliver the baby if it dies in the womb. Maniyamma, a 44 years old woman from Ampalapadikudy said, “We have our own medicine for choosing the sex of the child and also for sterilization.” However, these medicines are known to only a very few people. They will not give the medicine for sterilization unless the couple already had six or seven children. *Pooja*\(^64\) is another method of treatment. If any

\(^63\) Literally refers to inheritance by sister’s children as opposed to sons or daughters

\(^64\) A kind of prayer with water and the person who perform pooja give the water to the patient or needy one
difficulty occurs during the pregnancy period they will give the water after reciting some prayers *othuka*\(^{65}\) to the pregnant women.

Muthuvans, have strong faith in black magic. They often believe that the diseases and accidents occur as a result of black magic performed on them by others. Elsayi, a middle aged woman and an Anganwadi helper from Andavankudy, explained how her son once got fever:

> He got first prize in the district level athletic competition from the school. After that he had fever, so we concluded that it was because of the black magic done by the student who got the second prize. He had an eye problem a month before, and then we went to a priest at Marayoor to do some remedy for this black magic. This is a strong spell; that is why it appeared again (Field notes 2008).

Lekha 39 years old woman from Ampalapadikudy, also supported the argument:

> He was ill because of the black magic; I also had a similar problem. I got a severe pain all over my body and my entire body started aching. I went to Marayoor and met the priest to get it resolved. I know the person who did the spell on me. They used to take any part of the body like hair and do the black magic. Otherwise, they do it on an egg and put it somewhere around our house (Field notes 2008).

They consider sickness and misfortune primarily as attacks by the spirits. During the time of pooja in front of temple a woman from the kudy may be 'possessed' by the god. She then predicts things and at the same time the woman starts moving to and fro in a rhythmic way. Many old women in the kudy practice exorcism and say each one's disease is because of the evil spirit. Nakulan, 47 years old man from Andavankudy says,

> I did not have belief in this earlier. Once, my two year old grandchild got fever and she was not eating anything. So we took her to Shaman and she said her great grandmother's spirit has possessed her. He asked us to perform some pooja in the name of the grandmother. We performed the pooja and the fever disappeared. After this incident I started believing in this (Field notes 2008).

The medical team commented positively on the quality of Muthuvans’s food intake: finger millet is rich in iron and calcium and inclusion of green leaves and crabs are very healthy. Nutritional deficiency is not common in the region. Nevertheless, since they do not have a consistent system of balanced diet, one can find instances of malnutrition among Muthuvans. The tribal community is generally highly receptive of the medical camps. They provide firewood to the medical camp for their cooking needs. But, sometimes medical officers and health inspectors carry firewood on their head while coming back from the kudy to their destination of stay after each camp. They

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\(^{65}\) This also another version of pooja which is also performed with the help of water and shower it on the body.
cover maximum population in Edamalakudy for vaccination during their visits. Muthuvans do come forward for vaccination and there are no instances of resistance. Since, the children in Edamalakudy rarely see outsiders and the school teachers, the health workers happen to be the only outsiders they come across. Therefore, many children run away from the outsiders, scared of ‘the needles’ considering any outsider coming to the kudy is a doctor.

Epilepsy is considered as a contagious disease; therefore epileptic patients are completely isolated and discriminated in the kudy. His movement is restricted to a particular place. I met a 6 year old boy at Periakudy, Marayoor. He was always around his home. He is not allowed to go into the chavadi and his father made a small room for him attached to the house. People in the kudy call him nooyi, which means patient. If an epileptic person dies others do not attend the funeral. People think that dead body of that person can also spread this disease. After the death of an epileptic patient others will not accept even water from that family for a certain period. Epilepsy is considered as a big curse not only to the patient but to the family also.

Entertainment and Communication

The major source of entertainment for the Muthuvans is movies, especially the Tamil movies. Nowadays, the members of the kudy, both male and female separately gather in a house and watch movies after dinner. They are familiar with all the Tamil actors and they enjoy the jokes in these movies. Though, they do not have electricity they have solar panel. Some of the houses have television. They bring the Compact Disc of movies, and most people in the kudy watch movies sitting in a group. Even though, they have black and white television they enjoy watching movies. They even put the names of the actors and actresses for their kids. The main entertainment is during their festivals. They save money for the season of festivals and spend on the days of festivals.

Tobacco chewing is a common practice among the Muthuvan men and women. They say that it is good for the cold climate. One practical use of tobacco is to treat leech bite especially when they work in the cardamom fields. In case of leach bite they chew the tobacco and put it on the leech which then gets detached and thus the blood flow from the wound is stopped. Alcohol consumption is common among few of them. The outside people who load goods to the kudy are the carriers of alcohol to the kudy. Muthuvans who consume alcohol say it relieves them from the chest pain after work. Many other beliefs related to alcohol consumption exist. If a person is not able to walk from the kudy or from town to kudy due to fever or pain, alcohol intake helps them
to recover. Earlier, outsiders used to come and sell alcohol in the kudy; but, now the forest staff has banned that business completely. Therefore, the Muthuvans have to go to the town to get the alcohol.

Palanivel says, “If a person is going to die pour a little alcohol in the mouth, he will survive for some more hours.” Maniyamma says, “Alcohol is very good for women who have undergone sterilization. The internal wound will heal soon and the pain is not felt”.

Few Muthuvans have mobile phone connection and that too mostly the men. Maniyamma, is the only woman who has a mobile for herself. They hardly have net work in the forest. They know particular spots in the kudy where there is network in their mobile phone. Another issue regarding the mobile phone connections are that even through Edamalakudy is situated in the state of Kerala, the network their mobile phone obtains is from the tower which is situated in the area belonging to Tamil Nadu. Therefore, for all the Kerala SIMs Muthuvans have to bear the roaming charges.

**Death**

Muthuvans consider death as an integral part of life. When there is an incident of death in the kudy, everyone in the kudy gather and mourn for the dead person and they speak about the good nature and good deeds of the dead person. None of the Muthuvan from the in the kudy would go for work for three days. Old people remove their thalappavu and thus, spread the news of the death to all others in the kudy symbolically. If you find a Muthuvan coming without thalappavu, it means he has some sad news to give. Only after all the messengers reach back to the kudy, they would take the body to the burial place which is referred to as chudalaparambu. Each kudy has their own cremation place; the body is carried to chudalaparambu, by selected men who carry a sickle in their hand.

After bathing the body, it is placed on a mat usually made by rattan. They make a coat with rattan and bamboo, keep the body on that and then the body is covered with small sticks. They keep certain agricultural tools like *thumba* near the body. It is believed that before the adiyanthiram the spirits will not accept the dead person to work. So for thirty days the dead should be fed along with other dead folks; this is why the relatives of the dead person keep agricultural items

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66 spade

67 The ritual taking place after the 30th day of person's death, in it all kudy people and the dearth persons relatives are invited for food.
alongside the body. They bury the body with all the jewels, without removing even gold jeweleries on the body. A white cloth is placed over the face of the dead body and then the people lift the rattan and carry the body away. Another group of people dig the pit. Only the person who knows the mantra removes the white cloth of the corpse. This white cloth is handed over to the widow or widower. After the funeral this white cloth should be kept without showing it to others and she or he should cover their head with it after taking bath on the thirtieth day.

During burial, the head of the body is kept facing upwards and placed in the direction of north to south. The grave has a little thatched roof, put over it. A stone is put at the head and a similar stone at the feet. The dead person’s son stands at the head-side of the body and he would first throw the mud over the body. If a woman dies, the husband first sprinkles the mud. The depth of the grave is, for a man, judged sufficient if the grave digger, standing on the bottom, finds the level of the ground up to his waist. But for a woman, it must be up to his armpits. They keep the dead body of a woman in the surface level and cover with leaves and mud. But in case of a man Muthuvans keep the body deeper. They believe women do not want to go away from the earth and so they keep their body at the surface level and since men are brave their body is to be kept in a deeper place. All the men who go to the burial place take bath and come back to the kudy. The widows and old women after taking bath prepare food for men who were engaged in the burial rituals. The widow opens her hair and the next day her friends tie her hair. She will not take bath for thirty days. The son (if is the father who has died) and the immediate relatives also will not take bath for 30 days. On the third day they have adiyanthiram and after 30 days another one, when all relatives and people in the kudy gather and share a meal. If it is the death of an elderly person that they commemorate, then they dance after the meal.

Suicide is very common among the Muthuvans. Most of the suicide cases are associated with marital conflicts and sexual relationship outside marriage. This is common in all age groups, but is more among adolescent girls. Once, three girls in Andavankudy decided to commit suicide together, but one withdrew at the last moment. The other two asked the girl not to tell anybody and they went ahead and committed suicide by hanging themselves from a jack fruit tree. By seeing this, a boy from the same kudy commented, 'see, two big jack fruits are hanging from the tree'. They take death as a normal event in life. One common method of suicide is by hanging. Other methods are consumption of calypso, a poison used in cardamom plantation or by putting camphor in the mouth and jumping into deep water. People here do not take suicide as a serious matter. Mayilswami says, 'it is so common even outside that it is not considered as a matter of
concern'. It is observed that the number of suicide among Muthuvans is higher than many other tribal groups of Idukki. In the year 2008 from Idukki district itself 63 people belonging to tribal community committed suicide, in which 18 suicides were from Muthuvan (Tribal Development Department Survey 2008).

**Conclusion**

The Muthuvan culture in Edamalakudy is vibrant and colourful with rituals and associated practices. The rituals and practices are unique when compared to other tribal groups of Kerala in terms of their place of living and their system of dormitory. The Muthuvans prefer to live a secluded life, separated from the mainstream land. They have their own system that takes care of the administration and functions of kudy. They avail things for their survival from the forest which include raw materials for the house construction, food and medicine. Therefore, they hardly have to go out to the mainstream society.

Muthuvans are the least educated tribes of Kerala (69.78%). Moreover, they have low sex ratio and that too in the age group of below six years is 943 (census 2001). Most of the deliveries take place in the kudy itself. According to National Family Health Survey (2005), Idukki is one location, where women get least antenatal care and least trained attendants support during the delivery. The numbers of home deliveries are also the highest in Idukki when compared to that of other districts of Kerala. They have their own system of living inside the forest and at times the external interventions spoil their closeness to nature and push them into a dilemma of being torn between 'tradition' and 'modernity'.

The next chapter explores how a girl grows up in a Muthuvan kudy. It also tries to describe the role of systems and rituals in a girl’s life. Further, it looks at the symbols, idioms, fear and punishment associated with these practices. The next chapter also attempts to understand how the concept of gender operates within these practices.