

## CHAPTER – 4

### MANNANS - HISTORY AND TRADITION

The Mannans have a rich stock of traditional stories regarding their origin. Tradition has it that Mannans migrated to Kerala in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from Tamil Nadu. When Pandyas and Cheras were caught up in wars, a group of Mannans migrated into the deep dense forests of Kerala in search of raw materials used for making and buttressing chariots used by the Pandyans<sup>71</sup>. The silvery waters cascading from the high hills and the captivating greenery of the forest and the availability of adequate roots and tubers enamoured the Mannans and drew them to a life of ease, unbridled freedom in the forest. So, some of them implored the Pandyan Monarch to allow them to reside in the forest. After seeking permission from Pandalam and Poonjar rulers, the Pandyan Monarch gave sanction to carve out a space of their own. The dialect, dressing pattern, religious festival etc. support the claim that they are immigrants from Madurai, and not indigenous to Kerala.

Different ethnographers sketch the Mannan origin from Madurai like the other hill tribes of Travancore namely Muthuvans, Uralies and

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<sup>71</sup> Edgar Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, Cosmo Publications, 1909, p.452.

Paliyas. Anthropologists like Thurston<sup>72</sup> Krishna Iyer<sup>73</sup> and Luiz<sup>74</sup> support the tradition of immigration from Madurai. The Mannans are said to have been originally dependents of the King of Madurai, whom they, like the Uralies and Muthuvans, accompanied to Neriamangalam. Later on they settled in a portion of the Cardamom hills called Makara-Alum<sup>75</sup>.

Krishna Iyer describes that the cause of their immigration is said to be their quest for food. Being fond of animal food they thought that they could live comfortably on the Travancore Hills, which is abundant in Sambar, Black Monkey and other wild animals<sup>76</sup>.

Another version popular among the Mannans is that their ancestors were the revolting vassals of the King of Madurai<sup>77</sup>. They entered into the forest to collect wood and found better living conditions there. Thus they migrated to the forests in Kerala near Cumbum<sup>78</sup>. The migrants came to Kerala through Cumbum Mettu and settled in a

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.p.452

<sup>73</sup> Krishna Iyer, L.A., *The Travancore Tribes and Castes*, Vol. 3, 1941, Trivandrum, Govt Press, p.25.

<sup>74</sup> A.A.D.Luiz, *Tribes of Kerala*, 1962, Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh, p.70.

<sup>75</sup> Thurston, Op.cit. , p.452

<sup>76</sup> L.A.Krishna Iyer, Op.cit., p.25

<sup>77</sup> Gustau Oppert, *On the original inhabitants of Bharatavarsha or India – The Dravidians*, New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, 1998, p.101.

<sup>78</sup> Early writers like those of Nagam Aiya, E. Thurston, and T. K. Velu Pillai, identify Mannans as either Hill Tribes or aboriginal primitive tribes.

portion of the Cardamom Hills called Makara Alum which was bordering on the Madurai District.

The new area where they settled was under the Lordship of Poonjar chief who owned that portion of the Cardamom Hills. When Cardamom Hills fell into the hands of the Government of Travancore, the Mannans owe only nominal allegiance to the Poonjar chief though he is still an object of veneration to them<sup>79</sup>.

Mannans were dislocated from Cumbum Mettu for they were accused of forest encroachment and they came to Idukki. From there they migrated to the nearby places like Karikkummettu, Pandipara, Chembakassery Vazhavara, Krishnagudy and Vellayamkudy. Diseases like smallpox and Malaria took the lives of Mannans when they were in Vellayamkudi and Krishnagudy. Those who survived migrated to Kanchiyar. From there one group migrated to Adimali(Mannakandam) and another came through Sivagiri Mettu and settled at Mlappara.

They further migrated to Ummikkuppan, Thannikkudy and Mullathodu. There they collectively cleared the jungle and burned the debris and cultivated ragi, rice, maize and other vegetables. Being to a migratory disposition the Mannans have no proprietary interest over the

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<sup>79</sup> L.A. Krishna Iyer, op. cit., p. 203.

land they cultivate. They left the land in search of new fertile locality. Thus they further migrated to Medacanam and Poovarasu. From there they moved to Thekkady forest area.

## **DISTRIBUTION OF THE MANNANS**

In Kerala the Mannans are found mostly in the Idukki district. They are seen in the Devikulam, Udumbanchola and Peermed taluks. Irumpupalam, Chattupara, Machiplavu, Adimaly, Korangatti, Mankulam, Variyum and Anachal are the major dwelling places in the Devikulam taluk. Kattapana, Thovala, Vathikudy, Kozhimala, Murikkassery, Nedumkandam and Thoprakudy are the chief abodes of the Mannans in the Udumbanchola taluk. In Peermedu taluk, they are seen only in Kumily<sup>80</sup>. The Mannans are found living in close proximity with other scheduled tribes in different areas of Idukki district, ie Adimaly, Mankulam, Variyum, Irumpupalam and Kozhimala<sup>81</sup>.

The complexion of the Mannans varies from dark to light brown. They have dark eyes with wavy hair, broad type of noses and hairless bodies, possess only a thin beard and moustache. Krishan Iyer categorized the Mannans among the proto-australoids<sup>82</sup>. A number of

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<sup>80</sup> Boban Jose, *Tribal Ethnomedicine continuity and change*, New Delhi, APH publishing corporation, 1998 p.67.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p.68

<sup>82</sup> L.A.Krishna Iyer, , op. cit., p.47

informants told the investigator that the word “Mannan” denotes king. Actually this word comes from the term ‘Mannavan’ which means ‘king’ in Tamil. According to Luiz, the word Mannan is a corrupt combination of the words Mannu (earth) and Manushyan (man) to connote that they are the sons of the soil<sup>83</sup>.

### **LIVING SPACES: THE HAMLET**

The Mannans live in hamlets known as *Kudi* in Malayalam. Each hamlet consists of 30 to 80 house holds. In places where the government had allowed land, the Mannans have constructed their houses. Tribal hamlets are found in the fringe areas of forests, and in the interior forests. Chinnaparakudi in Adimaly, is the biggest Mannan hamlet covering an area of more than 300 acres of land. The Mannan Hamlet at PTR is in the forest fringe and the smallest hamlet covering only an area of 150 acres of land.

### **BUILT SPACE**

The traditional huts are built on a raised mud ground of rectangular shape. Each house is about 20 – 90 feet away from the next house. The houses are thatched with bamboo leaves or wild grass supported by wooden poles. These thatched houses have no ventilators

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<sup>83</sup> Luiz, A.A.D, *Tribes of Kerala*, Bharatiya adimjati Sevak Sangh, 1962, p.71.

and the room is filled with smoke while cooking. A small portion of the room is used for cooking food and the big portion is meant for sleeping. Some houses have a 'veranda' in the front side where guests can sit and talk. Usually there are 2 entrances, one in the front and the other at the back. Flooring is done with a mixture of cow-dung and charcoal. They use utensils made of bamboos, clay and leaves. They use baskets, kidiyams, bowls and mats made out of bamboo reeds.

The house and the surroundings are always kept clean. At sunrise the women clean the house and the premises with grass broom. All the members of the Mannan family spend the night in their own houses unlike the Muthuvans who stay in dormitories<sup>84</sup>.

### **DRESS, DECORATION AND DIET**

The traditional dressing pattern of the Mannans shows many similarities with that of the people of Tamil Nadu. The traditional style of dressing of a man is that a loin cloth tucked on the waist with a lot of folding in the front side. A cloth is brought round waist and tucked in there, one end is taken through the front side and passed over to the back through the left shoulder and the end of it is tucked either on the back or on the lateral side of the waist is the dressing pattern of the

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<sup>84</sup> Luiz, op,cit., p.67.

Mannathies<sup>85</sup>. The females wore no blouses as this cloth style covers the breasts<sup>86</sup>. They wear chains, ear rings, bangles, finger rings and anklets which are made of copper, silver and wood<sup>87</sup>.

## **OCCUPATION**

The traditional occupation of the Mannans was shifting cultivation. They followed the slash and burn method and would not stay in one place for more than 2 years. Now they have completely discontinued such mode of cultivation and are engaged in settled agriculture<sup>88</sup>. Ragi, paddy and millet are the major and traditional crops. They also cultivate tapioca, plantain and vegetables for their own consumption. Collection of minor forest produces like honey, sealing wax, tamarind, arrow root, wild pepper and firewood are other occupations. The Mannans (both men and women) are also engaged in fishing for livelihood and sell the catch to the local non tribals.

## **SOCIAL ORGANIZATION**

The social organization of the Hill tribes is endogamous in nature. Primitive people attached great importance to the rules of endogamy,

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<sup>85</sup> Field data - Mannakkudy

<sup>86</sup> Discussion with elders of Mannakkudy on 16.12.2005

<sup>87</sup> Discussion with elders of Mannakkudy on 18.01.2006

<sup>88</sup> Boban Jose, op. cit, p.73.

and the punishments inflicted on any breach thereof were very severe<sup>89</sup>. The Mannans are divided into two exogamous, matrilineal phratries called 'Aravakudy' and Panikudy'. The clans of 'Orumakkadu Panikudy', 'Kandamalathu Panikudy', Malakkadu Panikudy', 'Adukad nagamalayan', Muppankadu nagamalayan' and 'Vazhar nagamalayan' come under the Panikudy. The clans of 'Thekkida ailavan' 'Rajakattu ailavan', 'Chalukappattu urukaran', 'Purampula urukaran', 'Koompula urukaran', and 'Pulpura urukaran' belong to the Aravakudy. The mythological leader of the Aravakudy Phratry is 'Varakkooraliyan' and the Panikudy Phratry is 'Kadadu kumpilan'<sup>90</sup>.

## **SOCIAL CUSTOMS**

The Mannans observe pollution for ladies during their menstrual periods, in those days they are supposed to live in a separate hut known as 'Vannakura'<sup>91</sup> in their dialect. During this period the woman has to stay for 7 days in this separate hut. She must take bath daily and keep her body and clothes clean. Separate utensils are given to her to cook food and to store water to use by herself. She is given rice, vegetables and water for self cooking. She is not allowed to touch other utensils in the house and to fetch water from the well. She is neither permitted to

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<sup>89</sup> Velu Pillai T.K, op.cit, p.871.

<sup>90</sup> Boban Jose ,Op.cit. , p. 78.

<sup>91</sup> Vannakura is the menstrual hut of the women who stay during the menstrual periods.

pluck herbs or medicinal plants or roots of plants. She is also not allowed to move around freely or talk to the males in the hamlet. On the 7<sup>th</sup> day after taking bath, she is permitted to enter the main house.

### **CUSTOMS RELATED TO CHILD BIRTH**

When a woman is about to become a mother, she is lodged in a separate hut. Her mother and sisters keep her company and continue to be with her after confinement in the seclusion hut for twenty days. On the 21<sup>st</sup> day, she bathes, goes to the main hut and is lodged in a separate room, where she is served with food by her father or sisters. After a month she cooks her own food<sup>92</sup>.

### **NAMING THE CHILD**

Giving of names generally takes place on the 1<sup>st</sup> day after birth and generally a baby is named after a deceased or grand mother, uncle or aunt. A child is named after the members of the mother's clan<sup>93</sup> The males are known by the name- Raman, Thevan, Chakkan, Pandiyan, Olakan and Magan etc and the females are called by the name - Karuppi, Nachi, Pandichi, Vella Chakki, Rami, Thevi etc. The Mannans do not call each other by their names. If an elderly man has a daughter, he is called by others like Rami's thanthai (Rami's father). If he is younger,

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<sup>92</sup> Discussion with Elderly women of Mannakkudy 11-02-2006

<sup>93</sup> L .A. Krishna Iyer., op.cit, p.208.

he is associated as 'Cholo'. An elderly man is also called 'Acha' which literally means father. The brother-in-law of a Mannan is called Vethan and Sister-in-law, Vethi.

## **MARRIAGE**

The tribe forms the entire circle within which a man must marry. But within the circle there are sub-divisions, the person belonging to each of these sub-divisions are prohibited marrying from within it. These are called endogamous groups or clans. Marriage is not allowed within the clan<sup>94</sup>.

Velu Pillai notes, cross cousin marriage, marriage by capture and marriage by service are permitted among the Mannans and Muthuvans. Polygamy is allowed and polyandry is not infrequent. There is no uniform rule with regard to the age of marriage in the past<sup>95</sup>.

Mannans marry their maternal uncle's daughter. Before marriage the bride would stay with the bridegrooms' family for a period of one year, during which she must assist the would-be mother-in-law in all household works. The bridegroom also must stay with the bride's family for a term of one year during which he must prove his ability to do hard work. If both families find the relation good, then at the time of

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<sup>94</sup> T.K.Velupillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. I, 1996, pp. 870-71.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p.872

‘Kalavoottu’, the Mannan King, in presence of all the dignitaries in the community, would solemnize the marriage.

A woman after marriage retains her clan. A man marries a woman of a clan outside his phratry. Marriage generally takes place after a girl attains puberty. The Mannans marry early in life. The marriageable age in the case of males is 16 - 20 and above 12 is in the case of females.

The marriage ceremony lasts for a day and is celebrated in the bride’s hut. The bridegroom’s father presents the bride with bangles, rings of brass, a necklace of beads, ear-tubes and clothing, while the bride’s father presents the bridegroom and his parents with clothes. The bridegroom presents the bride with a comb of golden bamboo. On the appropriated day, the bridegroom goes in procession to the bride’s hut with music. On arrival, he bows before his parents and the elders present. The bride bows only before her parents. Both of them are then seated on a mat, the *tali* is tied round the bride’s neck by the bridegroom’s sister. After this the visitors are feasted, and with that the gathering disburses. The bridegroom remains in the bride’s hut, where a mat is spread in a special room provided for the married couple. After

some days, the hut is partitioned and the couple is given a separate room till they construct a hut to live separately.

The system of marriage by capture is also in vogue among the Mannans. If a woman refuses to return the love of a man, he forcibly takes her and stays with her ten or twelve days. When they are found together, they are brought back and given three lashes each and had to remit a fine decided by the Council of the elders, and the boy is made to swear that he would have the woman as his wife.

## **INHERITANCE**

The Mannans follow matrilineal form of inheritance. A married daughter gets nothing. Debts as well as property are inherited by the nephew. At present in Mannakudi, sons and nephew divide the property equally between them. Property which includes bill hook, vessels and cattle, goes to the nephew two years after the demise of a man<sup>96</sup>.

## **CUSTOMS RELATED TO DEATH**

There have been a lot of anthropological writings on funerary practices similar to that of the Mannan tribe in other parts of the world.

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<sup>96</sup> L. A. Krishna Iyer, *Social History of Kerala, Vol.1 – The pre Dravidians*, Madras, Book Centre Publications, 1988 , p.11

W.Eatwell (1872)<sup>97</sup>, J.G.Frazer (1886)<sup>98</sup>, Jose Boban (1998)<sup>99</sup> and E.H.Mann(2001)<sup>100</sup> give examples of the funerary practices existing in China, Germany, Kerala and New Zealand.

Like other tribes, the Mannans also had their old beliefs and practices and their own customs and manners connected with death. They bury the dead. They believe that a person after his death will become a God. He is called a '*Chavar*' which means 'one who is dead'. The ancestral spirit turned God is supposed to have superhuman powers and is regarded as a benevolent deity. They believe that the spirits of the ancestors always function as guardians of their children and crops. They too believe that the spirits of the dead ancestors can become malevolent if their funeral and post funeral ceremonies are not observed properly<sup>101</sup>.

The ancestors are worshipped as their protectors. When a man dies his brother-in-law washes the body in water and dries the body. He then put gingili oil in his head, and puts a vermilion mark on the forehead. The corpse is then wrapped in a new cloth and carried on a

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<sup>97</sup> Eatwell, W. "On Chinese Burials", *The Journals of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol – 1.1872, p.207

<sup>98</sup> Frazer, J.G, '*On certain Burial customs*', Vol.15, 1886, p.86

<sup>99</sup> E.H.Man, *Aboriginal in habitants of the Andaman Islands*, 2001.p.77

<sup>100</sup> Boban Jose, op. cit., p.120

<sup>101</sup> Ibid p.20

bier to the burial ground, where the pier is made ready. The grave is hip-deep in the case of man, and less deep in the case of woman. The corpse is lowered into the pit with the head towards the north and his belonging like the dress; utensils, knife etc. are also put in the grave. A handful of rice is strewn over the corpse, which is then covered with a mat and then a layer of bamboo leaves. The grave is then filled up with earth, and a thatched shed is erected over it to protect it from rain. One glass of water and a *Vakkathi* (Bill Hook) are kept on the top of the grave. And all the mourners then return home, take bath, and are given food. Pollution lasts for seven days and is observed by all the members of the same clan. On the 4<sup>th</sup> day, a measure of rice is cooked and is placed on a leaf over a mat. Along with it are placed *pan supari*, flower, and holy ash. The mourners sit round, and the pan supari is distributed. The offering of cooked rice is partaken of by the brother-in-law of the deceased and his kinsmen. The same ceremony is also repeated on the 8<sup>th</sup> day. A woman has to remove her *tali* on the death of her husband. On the expiry of a year, the mourners go to the burial ground and pour forth their lamentations over the loss of the deceased. The anniversary is celebrated at the expense of the brother-in-law of the deceased, when

all the relatives meet and an offering of beaten rice, fruits and coconuts are made.<sup>102</sup>

## **POWER STRUCTURE OF THE MANNAN TRIBE**

The Kings of the Mannan Tribe is known as '*Malans*' and they have four kings of whom only one is existing now. They are '*Vadakkoru malan*', '*Thekkida malan*', '*Nattu malan*' and '*Varakku malan*'. '*Vadakkoru malan*' is the superior one among them. Each king has jurisdiction over separate territories. These separate provinces are known as '*Thalanadu*', '*Adinadu*', '*Thekkida theruvu*', and '*Vadakkida theruvu*'. Only '*Varakku malan*' is surviving and is popularly known as the '*Raja Mannan*'.

The '*Raja Mannan*' is the King and formal head of the Mannan community. His residence is known as '*Aayira Perumkuda*'. The regalia of '*Raja Mannan*' are a sword, a rope, a copper bangle and a three-foot long cane stick, with silver rings at its tips. He inherits his office from his maternal uncle. He has authority to conduct the trial of the accused and punish if they are found guilty. There are two Ministers to assist the '*Raja Mannan*'. They are '*Kuttiyathu Kolan*' and '*Kandameyku Edadan*'. These two Ministers always accompany the

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<sup>102</sup> L. A. Krishna Iyer, *The Travancore Tribes and Cstes*, Vol.I,p.220

King wherever he goes. The Raja Mannan also has 8 'Kanis' or headmen, under him. The Ministers and the headmen execute the orders of the Raja Mannan. Each Kani rules over a particular hamlet on behalf of the Raja Mannan.

Mannans consider their King as equal to God. When the King dies, an idol is made in silver and kept at a particular place in the forest away from people's reach. During the time of 'Kalavoottu Mahotsavam'<sup>103</sup>, the Kanis and other dignitaries go to the forest and take out the idols of their ancestral Gods and bring it to the '*Ooru*'. The Gods are kept in a plat form made of reeds, for a single day. People come and express their grievances and bend their head before the Gods. Thereafter 'Koothu'<sup>104</sup> takes place. Koothu usually was performed in connection with functions like marriage or funeral. There is no authentic historical data about Koothu. The songs of Koothu had a definite connection with the sangam literature<sup>105</sup>. After Koothu, images of Gods are kept back in the forest at a secret place. At the end of

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<sup>103</sup> Kalavoottu is the harvest festival

<sup>104</sup> Koothu is a customary form of art

<sup>105</sup> The songs of Mannans for Kalavoottu shows an intend to the Sangam literature as they mostly deal with Chilapathikaram. This relationship may be viewed to understand the context of knowledge production in the community during that period. People in that age were Dravidians who had a common language and culture. The academies for literature functioned at Madurai had collected Pathupattu, Ettuthokai, Tholkappiyam, Chilappathikaram and Manimekhalai. Their reflections on familial and social relations and religious practices were totally different from that of Chaturvarnyam. Social stratification during Sangam period was on the basis of thinas.

*Kalavootu*, the king would give blessings to the people in the name of Gods. The king and other dignitaries sit together and decide on the next year's plan.

### **INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF A MANNAN HAMLET**

The head man (Kani), a formal leader, who executes the orders of the king is present in every hamlet. He has jurisdiction over a particular hamlet. His office is hereditary and his nephew is his successor. In certain cases the members of the hamlet select their head man. The council of elders select the next Kani in cases of death or illness due to old age. They select able, diplomatic persons who know the traditional rules, customs, religious rites etc. and after selecting the Kani, the Raja Mannan is informed of the Kani's name for getting approval.

A decorated cane stick given by the king is the spectre of the Kani. His orders are executed by his assistants. He is privileged to attend all the important functions like marriage, puberty rites, post funeral ceremonies etc. The hierarchy of officials are seen in a Mannan hamlet. They include the '*aaryiram kudiyanavan*', '*vaari kudiyanavan*', '*periya kudiyanavan*', '*ulanthari kudiyanavan*', '*valiya ulanthari*', '*elaya vattom*', '*thandakkaran*', '*thannipatha*' and '*keera patha*'. Each official has certain duties and privileges. Officials like *aaryiram*

*kudiyavan* and *valiya ulanthari* enforce law and order among the people in the hamlet. However women are not included in the hierarchical power structure. In each hamlet there is a council of elders known as *pothukootam* or *Panchayat*. *Kani* presides over the meetings. Issues of great importance are discussed and sought solutions<sup>106</sup>.

## **RELIGION**

Traditionally, the Mannans are animists and they have a pantheon of jungle Gods, household deities, ancestral spirits, hunting spirits, Gods of agriculture, Gods causing diseases and evil spirits. The abodes of these deities were either the caves inside the forest, or a peculiarly shaped stone on the summit of a big rock, or a mountain cliff which was not easily accessible. A deity may have a fixed abode and it is usually worshipped only at that particular spot.

The Mannans have a reciprocal approach towards their Gods. They expect some favours while making an offering to a particular deity. If they could not achieve the desired result, they discontinue the worship and seek the help of another God.

The Mannans have a hierarchy of traditional Gods. '*Karuman Perumal*' is the supreme God of the Mannans. '*Thindiyi, Kidakkum*

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<sup>106</sup> Field data, Mannakkudy on 06.03.2006.

*Thindilam Vellachy* occupies the second position '*Vazhar Aandavan*' '*Sherkila Devi*', '*Unchanthool Vadakkan*'. '*Mala Devi*', '*Shanthiyattamal*', '*Eruvakshyamal*', '*Meenakshiyamal*', etc. are some of the other traditional Gods. '*Bhoomi Devi*' is the Goddess of earth and '*Pulla vasy*' is the deity of agriculture.

Among the ancestral spirits, '*Nedumpura Karanavar*' is the most important '*Chavar*'<sup>107</sup> and '*Sherkkila Karanavar*' is the 2<sup>nd</sup> one. Other ancestral spirits are '*Kattuchavar*', '*Kula Chavar*', '*Muthuvan Chavar*', '*Urali Chavar*', etc. '*Sarppa Daivam*' is their snake God.

The Mannans believe that their traditional deities reside in the jungle groves and mountains and each God has an umbrella and a pole as his regalia. Each God has a servant known as '*Adiyan*' selected from the heads of the house holds. During the annual festival season the '*Adiyan*', functions as a mediator between the deity and the people.

Besides the benevolent Gods, there are some evil spirits. They are '*Kalan*', '*Karuman*', '*Thuthan*', '*Thuttan*' and '*Yaman*' and they cause diseases, '*Bhadrakali* or '*Valliyamma* or '*Maariamamma*' brings diseases like small pox, chicken pox and measles. '*Muni*' is the most important evil spirit who can abort the pregnancy of a woman. '*Thekkum*

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107 Ancestral spirit is called Chavar.

*Pathinettan Padiyan Aiyappan, Cherkkila Aiyappan* etc. are also considered as jungle Gods.

The Mannans also hold the belief in the sky Gods who protect the 4 sides of the sky. *Patty Mycakombil Thinkallum Vellachy* is the Goddess on the northern side of the sky, '*Kadal Mulluran*' on the western side, '*Madurai Meenakshy*' on the east, '*Sabarimala Aiyappan*' on the south are other sky Gods. They believe that these Gods even control the sun and the moon and also regulate the winds, rain fall, lightning etc. So they invoke the blessings of these Gods to get enough rain for their agricultural crops.

They believe that a person after his death will become a God and this spirit is supposed to have superhuman powers and is regarded as a benevolent deity.

Ancestor worship is an important feature of the traditional religion of the Mannans. Since the abode of their traditional Gods was forest groves, rocky cliffs, mountain peaks, rivers, huge trees etc. they used to go to these spots periodically and make offerings. They consider the animals like elephant and tiger and reptiles like cobra, as divine and avoid killing them. At present the mode of worship of the Mannans has changed radically.

## HEALTH CULTURE OF THE MANNANS

Instead of the wide spread medical systems like *Ayurveda*, *Allopathy*, *Yunani*, *Homoeopathy* and *Naturopathy*, traditionally various types of localised folk and tribal medical beliefs and practices based on magic and sorcery are practiced among the tribal communities of Periyar Tiger Reserve. Religious beliefs, moral codes, social values etc. had influenced the beliefs and practices of aetiology of illness and treatment. In primitive societies, cultural patterns and religious beliefs, economy and morality, social values and medical beliefs are all found together to form the 'health culture' of a community<sup>108</sup>.

In many cultures, ideas and practices relating to illness are inseparable from the domain of religious beliefs and practices and so people make periodical offerings and worship to the deities and ancestral propitiation ceremonies to ensure proper health of the community. Many scholars have described the beliefs in connection with charms, magical spells, witch craft, sorcery and evil spirits for causing and curing diseases<sup>109</sup>.

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<sup>108</sup> Karna, M.N., 1976, 'Etiology of diseases; a sociological study in the rural context', *Man in India*, Vol. 56, No.1, p.150.

<sup>109</sup> For details see- Edgar Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes in South India*, Delhi, Cosmo Publication, 1907, L.A.Krishna Iyer, *The Travancore Tribes and Castes*, Vol 111 Trivandrum, Government Press, 1941, Gnanambal, *The religions of the Uralai*, Bulletin of the Department of Antropology, Vol.IV, No.2, 1955, Troisi J, *Tribal religion, Relegious Beliefs and Practices among the Santals*, New Delhi, Manohar publications, 1979, Remesh Menon, "the influence of spirits", *India Today* Vol XIV, No.22,1988.

The Mannans also possess an ethno-medical system to combat the illness afflicting them. The use of various medicinal plants and the manipulation of supernatural forces through magical techniques are the two major parts of ethno-medicines of the Mannan. Ethno-medicine is influenced by other spheres of life like religion, morality, social values, economy, subsistence pattern, social mobility etc. Similar medical practices are mentioned in the writings of Radhakrishnan<sup>110</sup>, Mathur<sup>111</sup>, Jose Boban<sup>112</sup> and Guha<sup>113</sup>.

The *Vichakkaran*<sup>114</sup> is the most important functionary in the ethno- medical system of the Mannans. He has a good knowledge of the properties of various medicinal plants and with the help of magical techniques, he treats the patient. Besides the Vichakkaran, a Vaidyan, who is a herbalist, possesses vast knowledge about various medicinal plants and knowledge regarding its preparation is always seen in a Mannan hamlet.

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<sup>110</sup> Radhakrishnan, V.N, 1985, 'The Traditional Medicine of Kanikkars', *Kalpadenu*, Vol XIII, No. 3, 1985.

<sup>111</sup> Mathur, P.R.G, 1982, 'Anthropology of Tribal Medicine; disease and curing Techniques among the tribals of North Wyanad Kerala', *Man in India*, Vol 62, No.3, 1982.

<sup>112</sup> Boban Jose, K, 1998, *Tribal Ethno Medicine*, New Delhi, A.P.H.Publishing Corporation, 1998.

<sup>113</sup> Anima Guha, 1986 'Folk Medicine of the Boro-Kacharis – A Plains Tribe of Assam', in Budhadeb Chaudhuri (ed ), *Tribal Health*, New Delhi, Inter – India Publications, 1986.

<sup>114</sup> Vichakkaran means one who possesses knowledge. Vicha means Vidya or knowledge and karan means who possess something.

After considering the knowledge and ability of a Vichakkaran, the Raja Mannan gives the official title ‘Vathi’<sup>115</sup> who has a superior status in the community. There are *Aana Vathi*, *Puli vathi*, *Adipisha Vathi*, *Edassery Vathi* and *Nadukuda Vathi*. *Ana vathi* prevents the attack of wild elephants, while *Pulivathi* protects the people from the attack of Tigers and leopards. *Adipishavathi* checks smallpox and other diseases and *Edasserry vathi* saves the people from the attack of evil spirits and demons.

Ponnum Pujari is the mythological high priest of the Mannan community, who is selected by God himself. Since there is no Ponnum Pujari at present, the Mannans have lost their faith in the *Vathykal*, and believe that they fail to prevent the mishaps also.

The Mannans have special divination techniques known as, ‘Kodanki’<sup>116</sup>, ‘Poliva’<sup>117</sup> and ‘Peyattam’<sup>118</sup> to find out the cause of

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<sup>115</sup> The word Vathi is derived from a Tamil word Vadhiyar meaning priest. For details : P.Bhaskaranunni, *Pathonbatham Noottandile Keralam* ( Malayalam), Trissur, Kerala Sahitya Academy, 1988, p.414.

<sup>116</sup> Kodanki is a special divination technique of the Mannans to find out the cause of a disease. A divination board and paddy grains are used for finding the causes. The Vichakkaran spreads the paddy grains on the board and arranges the grain in three rows without touching each other and the priest removes two grains each till all the grains are finished. In the end if only one grain is left, it is assumed that there is nothing wrong with the patient. And if two grains are left, they think that they are proper. In order to solve it they carry on the same process until one grain remains.

<sup>117</sup> The offerings to various local gods which are kept in a secret place in their house for one year is called Poliva.

<sup>118</sup> Peyattam is a magical dance in association with divination techniques. These techniques, spells and rituals have a psychological impact on the patient and brings confidence and relief from all the ailments.

disease and its probable remedy. In Mannakkudy, Thevan Panchan is the only person who knows and employs this technique to find out the cause of diseases and he also advises solutions in the name of God *Kadal Mulluran*, the creator of paddy grains and other local jungle Gods and ancestral spirits.

## **ECONOMY**

In economic terms the Mannans are still one of the backward communities. One of the major handicaps is the non-availability and non-equitable distribution of adequate area of land for agriculture. In some places their land is either illegally encroached, or bought by non-tribals after paying a meagre amount of money or given the land on lease to the non-tribals. Those who have sufficient area of land are not interested in the art of cultivation. It is due to many factors such as crop damage caused by wild animals, low prices for their products, exploitation by middlemen, etc. Those who have insufficient land are forced to become wage labourers. Here they have to compete with non-tribals for getting jobs. Sometimes, they hardly get job for many days.

Usually the merchants of the nearby town, Kumily, lend money to these illiterate tribals and in turn they are asked to give their agricultural produces at a very low price. During off season, these merchants come as

angels to help them, but indirectly, they charge exorbitant rates of interest for the loan amount. The Mannans spend a lot of money on various social customs like puberty rites, marriage, deaths, etc. They too spend money to arrange the community feast. Even if they get a good amount of money during harvest season, they do not have the interest to save a part of it. Most of them spend money for the purchase of liquor, buying very costly clothes and other luxurious articles, visiting their relatives in the distant places and for pilgrimage visits. The result is that they become debtors. Poverty, ignorance and aversion to hard work are some of the factors causing their economic backwardness.

## **EDUCATION**

The Mannans are educationally also very backward and the rate of illiteracy is very high among the tribal parents. They have a natural hesitation in sending their children to schools and educating them. They do not seem to realise the necessity and importance of education. Most of the children after reaching 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> standard discontinue their education. Poverty and lack of motivation are the two major reasons for this situation. In the Mannan community the male children do not get much parental care after they reach an age of 13-14 years. Therefore such children often go for waged labour or collection of forest produces

to earn money. Most of the houses lack electricity and kerosene and the children find it difficult to study in the night. As the houses are very small the children will not get a calm atmosphere, which is essential for their studies.

In this chapter the researcher has discussed the socio economic profile of the Mannan community with a historical perspective.