Chapter 4

Lifecycle Structure of Tribals in Attapady: a Historical Sketch of Attapady Valley
LIFE CYCLE STRUCTURE OF TRIBALS IN ATTAPPADY
A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF ATTAPPADY VALLEY

Till the beginning of the second quarter of the 20th century, Attappady was inhabited almost exclusively by hill tribes. Several factors are responsible for the non-interventions in this area by outsiders. The most important has been the availability of adequate cultivable lands in the low and midlands around. Hence the area remained little exploited by outsiders and hence land degradation was marginal. Almost all areas in this virgin region were, before the intervention began, under thick forests and inhabited by tribes folk engaged in slash-and-burn cultivation. As the area was under thick forest and infested with-sucking leeches and wild animals, accessibility to this area became difficult for early settlers.

There are many restrictions for the enumerators to obtain data regarding tribals. Main reason is lack of postal and communication facilities. Hence, limited accessibility resulted in false census estimates. Until early 1950s, the agents of Zamorins of Kozhikode used to be the main source of information. These Chieftains did not have any dependable source of detailed information regarding the size of families of tribe's folk and their dependants. A monograph of the 1961 census series makes the following observation about the Kunlmbas of Attappady: "Inhabiting as they do, in the interior dense forest regions accessibility to them is ordinarily difficult" and notes that they had, therefore, been left out from the detailed ethnographic study (Kunhaman, 1983). Inaccessibility to the forest areas owing to the lack of infrastructure and attack of wild animals and availability of lands in the plain areas discouraged in-migrants to settle in Attappady. However, growth of population and rising demand for land for cultivation pushed succeeding generations of in-migrants into this area. Government policies also were helpful to settlers to make this area their destination.

Attapady was the Jennmom property of the Zamorine of Calicut in the early 18th century. The Zamorin entrusted the administration of this area to three Nair Chieftains, Mannarkad Moopil Nair, Palat Krishna Menon, and Eralpad Raja (Mathur, 1977). Moopil Nair got the larger portion of this area by pleasing the
Zamorin. Once, the Zamorin happened to stay at Moopil Nair's house. Being pleased with Nairs hospitality, along with Moopil Sthanam (the title of Mooppil), a vast area of land was given to him. In this way Moopil Nair got large areas of land in Mannarkad, including forest areas of Attappady. Nair was given an area approximately to the distance that a horse can cover in a day. However, Moopil Nair and other Jenmis were not much interested in cultivation of the leech-infested forest areas of Attappady. Their interest in this area remained to capturing elephants from the dense forests for use in temple festivals. Capturing of an elephant from Attappady was considered prestigious for the family and it was great news on those days. The chieftains had been given the right to collect land revenue at rates ranging from Rs 0.50 to Rs 1.25 per acre of land and forest produce by way of land revenue from Irulas, Mudugas, and Kurumbas. The tribe's folk had become tenants of these Jenmis, the chieftains.

The tribe's folk enjoyed the right to cultivate as much area as one was able to manage at the prescribed rates of land revenue. In practice, however, they were heavily exploited by the Kariasthans (Managers) of the Jenmis. In the meantime the Jenmis managed to get Jenmom Freehold Property Rights of these lands from the Zamorin. These three Chieftains were the oldest Jenmis of the Attappady Valley. As these landlords owned large tracts of land in the plains below, Attappady valley remained virtually intact and untouched by outsiders for a long time. The tribe's folk cultivated these areas in their conventional ways such as shifting cultivation, hunting, and collection of forest produce (Kunhaman, 1981). Jenmom right gave the landlords the inheritable right to collect usufructs and rent. These landlords also had the power to give their land on lease. Moopil Nair alone held 70 percent of the Attappady land. In the first half of the 20th century, a few new landlords were given lease rights on the western part of Agali, about 6000 acres were given on lease to one Kunhammed Sahib of Mannarkad.

Facilities like police station or post office were absent in Attappady till the close of the 19th century. However, a full contingent of village officers were appointed, and beat constables began entering the valley periodically and got the signature of the Adhikari (Village Officer) in their beat books. During the early decades of the 20th century, timber was the main product in the valley. Of the total
area, 21 hills in full and another hill in part belonged to the Government, the rest of the area was under dispute among the three Jenmis already referred to. The dispute led to frequent disturbances, which culminated in actual bloodshed in 1901. A solution was finally reached around 1908 by the Divisional Officer under Section 145 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Accordingly 44 hills and part of five others were awarded to Moopil Nair, 16 hills and parts of six others to the Eralpad Raja, 10 hills to P.K. Menon, and two hills to another Jenmi. Even after this division most of the areas remained undisturbed by outsiders due to easy availability of land in the plains of Mannarkad and nearby areas. (Kunhaman, 1981).

4.1 Settlement and demographic change

It is not clear from the available literatures who were the earliest intruders into this area. In the opinion of some old settlers that the earliest were the Tamil-speaking Gowdans who came to Attappady in the beginning of the 20th century mainly for buying forest produce. The early Gowndan settlers started cultivation in the land, which they managed to obtain by bribing the Kariasthans (Managers) of Jenmis. Gradually, they encroached into more lands in their vicinity. As there was shortage of local labour, these settlers brought workers from their native places under promise of higher wages (Mathur, 1975). A massive flow of people began during the 1950s in the eastern side of Attappady, mainly people from Thadakam and other parts of Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu.

Before the colonisation trend and the massive move of people began from south and central regions of Kerala to Malabar and Attappady, relatives and neighbours of the Jenmis used to visit Attappady for various purposes. Their intention was collection of forest produce from the tribe's folk. Malayalis from the plain came to this area, in the beginning for jobs in the plantations started by the Britishers and work in the forest land leased by landlords for timber extraction. However, many of these original in-migrants did not settle down in Attappady because of the difficult terrain. After a while they left Attappady leaving their possessions to new in-migrants.

After independence, rapid changes occurred in settlement patterns. The area was opened for logging and settlement through construction of all weather roads in
the region. The influential Communist parties of Kerala agitated for land reform under the slogan “land to the tiller”. However, this agrarian reform did not confer land rights on the Adivasis, because the Jenmis sold much of their lands to settlers from the plain land, especially Malayalis from Travancore and Tamilians from Coimbatore areas. After 1956, Malayalis migrated to Attappady mainly for work in timber-felling and extraction of forest produce. In-migrant population continued to increase till the end of the 1970s.

If the peak period of Malabar migration was 1951-60 (Tharakan, 1976; Joseph, 1988), the inflow of people to Attappady reached its pinnacle during 1961-1970. It continued its pace till 1980 and thereafter declined sharply. Pioneers of the in-migrants to Attappady reached the area mainly during the period 1951-60. The inflow reached its zenith during 1961-70, declined in the next decade and became insignificant after the 1980s (Sanathanan, 2000).

The whole demographic structure of Attappady has changed after the 1950s mainly due to uncontrolled influx of population. As a consequence, by the end of the 1960s demographic structure has turned to be unfavourable to tribals. During the 1940s, the tribal population of Attappady is estimated to be around 10,000 and the non-tribal population just a few hundred. According to the 1951 census, the proportion of non-tribal population to total population was just 9.68 per cent. The proportion rose to 67 percent in 1981 and 72 in 1991. And in 2001 it increased to 89 per cent. During 1951-61 the population in the area increased by 89 per cent, even though the increase of tribal population was only by 27 per cent. During this period the increase of settler population was at the exorbitant rate of 67 per cent. The next decade (1961-71) also presents a similar picture with an increase of total population by 88 per cent and tribal population only by 17 per cent. The growth of non-tribal population was by 21 percent. Thus, the original inhabitants of the area were marginalised. The tribals have been forced to adopt ways of life of the settlers which led to the ruin of their rich cultural heritage and freedom of living.

In the present context of tribal studies the need for study about the life-cycle structure of tribals in the study area is an essential factor. The tribe’s folk of Attappady have been classified in to three:
1. Irulas
2. Mudugas
3. Kurumbas

4.2 Irulas of Attappady

4.2.1 General characteristics

Irulas is a Dravidian tribe spread over the three states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala. They are also known as Ellurva, Iruliya, Kasovaurali, Radu, Pujari and Velliga. In Attappady a sub group known as Ettakkada Irulas is also found. The total Irula population in Attappady was nearly 24,370 in 2001. Their dialect is Irula. They communicate with others in Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam. In Kerala they use Malayalam script. Irulas in Kerala are the inhabitants of Palakkad district. They are seen at Atpothippara, Mayamudi, Palkampamdy, Kunapalam of Neelliyampathy hills and Pudhur, Agali and Sholayoor panchayath of Attappady Block (Luiz, A.A.D. 1962)

The term Irula is derived from the word “Irul” meaning darkness. They are rigid in their custom and manners. Yet, socio-economic pressure has compelled the Irulas to make structural change in their social life. Among the Irulas there are 11 clans (kulams), namely, Arumoopan, Samar, Karatty, Kurnagarn, Vellaka, Devana, Kuppli, Kupper, Pungar, Perathara and Uppli. A black bead necklace (keera pasi) is the marriage symbol for them. There are a number of legends existing among the Irulas about their origin. Primitive Irulas were food gatherers and hunters. Later they started living in chalas (huts) about six in a row, adjoining one another.

4.2.2 Life cycle structure of Irulas of Attappady

Marriage

Three kinds of marriages are in vogue among these tribes, viz, marriages by elopement, marriages by services, and arranged marriages. The girls are married after attaining puberty. The age of marriage among girls is between 18 and 20. Monogamy is the marital norm. Paying bride price is common. In case of arranged marriages among Irulas, parents of the boy visit the bride’s home with two iron rods. The tribal priest plays a significant role. The marriage rituals are performed in
bride’s home. Irula pays a bride price [periya panam] during the marriage. Traditionally it was Rs.102.25. They are very particular that marriages are exogamous and generally after puberty. Their ancient folksongs, customs and dances indicate that marriages by capture and elopement were common. Bride price is paid to the bride’s father, and if she is fatherless, to the senior brother to be shared equally by all brothers.

The Thali (marriage badge) is placed on the neck of the bride by the headman or an elder and the bridegroom does the tying. The thali tying ceremony takes place in a small pandhal erected for the purpose. In the past, bridegroom and the bride were made to stand a certain distance from each other. The bridegroom receives the thali from an elder member of the village and hands it over to the women of his family.

Divorce and desertion are common, and those who have parted are free to re-marry whomsoever they like, but the ceremony has to be in the quit form. At the instances of divorce the infant children remain with mother, and the adults are taken over by the father. When the wife has taken initiative for the divorce the bride price has to be returned. It is not necessary for a widow to remove the thali at the death of her husband, but she has to do so when she remarries. A widow cannot be taken as wife by her brother-in law. The marriages are usually a matter of personal choice. Among the primitive tribes the mother of the boy takes the initiatives to find a bride. She sets out on a Monday, visits the home of prospective bride, enjoys hospitality, and escorts the girl to her home. There she meets the boy and remains there for couple of days. If she is found unsuitable she is sent back and similar trails are conducted.

**Death**

When an Irula man or woman dies, the news is sent through an Irula male or a Kurumba to close relatives who immediately arrive on the scene to express their condolence. The burial of the deceased may even be delayed for two or three days to enable relatives living at distant places to attend the burial. At the instance of death a hut is constructed immediately where the corpse is laid, and singing and
The burial consists of seven sticks tied cross wise on two long sticks. The son or any other person acting as chief officiator has to shave his head. The headman, the senior nephew and son have to participate in the funeral ceremonies. Among some group the corpse is propped up in a sitting position with the legs crossed, and lowered in to circular grave. The widow places betel leaves in the mouth of the corpse. Some primitive groups bury a few grains of rice and a lamp with the dead, and the lamp. The eldest son performs the funeral rites, the Kurumba who assists during the funeral rites is given a vessel used by the deceased. Three days after the burial the second rite is performed. During this ceremony the son of the deceased shaves off his hair. The Irulas observe death pollution for six months to one year. After this, they conduct a purificatory ceremony.

Birth

Polygamy is a common practice in their society. After childbirth a woman is considered unclean for three months. The newborn is named on the seventh day. Boring the ears of both sexes can be at any time after six months. Very often the nickname indicating the colour, habit, nature or deformity of the body is used to describe a person. During the time of her delivery usually a midwife called “pettichi” will take charge of that custom. Among the Irulas the delivery of the child takes place at bride’s home. Birth pollution is observed for seven days. After delivery if the child is a boy they will tie the cradle on the 5th day. If the child is a girl they will tie the cradle on the 6th day.

Puberty

When a girl attains puberty, she has to reside in a special kind of “chala”. Pollution lasts for seven days. No men folk can enter the chala, only her friends and women folk can visit her. Special dresses and plates are used. On the 8th day the girl is led to the river by her sister-in-law and her friends. They will use the leaves of the “Kalle tree” as soap and oil for bathing. Before taking bath, the ‘chala’ where she resided for seven days of puberty pollution and the dress and all materials used by her will be burnt. After bathing the girl has to wear new dresses
and ornaments. Before completing one month a feast will be arranged in her home. The feast will be accompanied by dance and music.

**Settlement pattern**

Ooru or hamlet is a cluster generally of 25-150 households. Each ooru has a headman known as mooppan. His position is hereditary. His words are final in all social, economic, political, cultural and religious matters of hamlet. He is the connecting link between Government and tribal folk. In the present scenario mooppan is losing his position, power and influence.

Mooppan is assisted by the Vendari and Kuruthala. Vendari executes the decision of the ooru committee. His duty is to investigate in to the complaints of the tribals and to find out whether they are true or false. Kuruthala is the messenger. Kuruthala has a ministerial position and vandari (bhandari) may be compared to the Treasurer of the modern times. Mannukkaran is responsible for the agricultural process of the ooru. It is only after his performance of rituals and cultivation in his own land that others can start cultivating their land. He has good knowledge about the weather, soil, fertility and sustainability and to decide the appropriate time to begin cultivation.

**Dress and ornaments**

Tribal women use ordinary bangles and necklaces. Men wear a short piece of cloth around the waist and a towel on their shoulders. Women wear a piece of cloth around the waist in combination with the modern blouse.

**Political structure**

There used to be the hereditary Mannukkaran (knower of the soil). He was somewhat of a sacrosanct functionary in addition to being the agrarian specialist. He has lost both these roles with modernisation of agricultural practices and the sanskritisation of forms of worship. For the former the development agencies, while for the latter, a new institution of pujari has emerged. The village messenger (kuruthale), and the village accountant (bandari or vandari) have now very few functions, but the offices being hereditary, the bearers still continue to be identified as such.
Many deal with matters pertaining to youth (thalaveeni for female and thalaveenan for male) including the solution for youth problems. All matters of the ooru are decided by ooru Panchayath. All the above-mentioned persons and all men and women in the ooru are the members of the ooru Panchayath. Tribal women actively participate in the ooru Panchayath.

**Economic structure**

For generations the tribes used to collect minor forest produce from the dense forest, which provided them with food, medicine, and material for shelter. Minor forest produce (MFP) provided them also with income during the non-agricultural season. Since the tribe’s folk were able to get enough food grains from agriculture and enrich their diet with roots, nuts, honey, and fruits from the forest, they had little need to buy commodities from outside market.

**Agriculture**

Irulas are persevering and clever agriculturists. A few are shifting cultivators. What is cultivated depends on the soil and environment. Paddy, ragi, dhal, plantains, chillies and turmeric are grown in large quantities.

Traditional tribe’s folk practised slash-and-burn and shifting cultivation. Ash provided the manure for cultivation. They practised shifting cultivation on the forested uplands (kottikadu, literally meaning land to be cut and cleared), dry land farming with ploughing (erkadu, meaning ploughed land), and wet land, mainly paddy cultivation (gedde). Erkadu technology was probably an acculturation, cattle and ploughmen were hired from among the settlers. The main crops grown under this system were maize, ground nut and chillies. Rainwater was the chief source of irrigation. Since a great deal of the land under cultivation was on the hills or uneven surfaces, ploughing using animal was seldom practiced, soil was raked by human hands.

There were no separate plots for agriculture. They cultivated and made use of whatever parts of the forest they chose to cultivate. On the sowing day all the people in the village clean their houses and take bath. Mannukaran sleeps in the “kula daiva veedu” (room or house set apart for the dwelling of God) on that night.
Early morning a man from Karattikulam makes ragi and takes it to the Mannukkaran who goes to sow seeds with prayer. Nobody is allowed to see Mannookkaran sowing the seeds. Both men and women take an active part in agricultural operation, hunting, rearing and vending goats and poultry. Many have their own permanent cultivation on leasehold or Government lands. They also collect bamboo, firewood and forest produce and sell or exchange these for cereals and essentials. Their implements consist of chopper, wooden plough, spade and axe. When there is acute shortage of cereals, they live on roots, herbs and bamboo rice. They have now ceased to be nomadic. Settled life has definitely reduced crime, and improved their economy.

Minor forest produce collection

The deciduous forests were rich in various items like Accacia intsia and myroboams, which they used to collect. The whole family would move out during the collection season living off the small animals they could trap. They were not averse to eating rats in times of distress even white ants (termites) would be attracted by fires, collected and roasted, and eaten. They were expert collectors of honey from the hives of ferocious rock bees. The strongest would tie strong climbers to a tree at the top of the rock and descend by it down the face of the rock usually at night. They would drive the bees away with torches and collect the combs in hollow bamboo tied to their back. They would then be hauled back to the top before the enraged bees could get him.

Religious beliefs and practices

Natural forces, hill gods, and ancestors are the gods of Irulas. They will worship animals, trees, and stones also. In addition to these they will also worship Mariamma, Bhathrakali in every hamlet. At home they worship the God which is named as “Pasath” god. For the satisfaction of gods they have to conduct festivals every year. They will call these festival as “paruva Kondadukathe” they will sacrifice goats, hens etc for the satisfaction of God. A grand feast is also arranged during every festival.

Another kind of belief of Irulas is the “Malleswaran”. Here Siva is the principal God. This will last for seven days. Malleswaran Mudi is at a height of
6000 ft from the sea level. Irulas have strong belief in Siva. At the festival on Sivarathri, three kinds of tribals of Attappady assemble on the top of Malleswran Mudi.

**Inheritance of property and customary laws**

The Irula society is patrilinial. Whatever an Irula possesses is equally distributed among male heirs, i.e., son. Generally, the question of division of property occurs during the lifetime of father, then an equal share would be given to his heir or heirs and father would retain one share. The youngest son who would look after the parents and would get the parent's property after the death of the father. The women are barred from taking any share from their father's property. Contrary to this if one has only one female child then he can keep his son-in-law after the marriage of his daughter.

**4.3 Mudugas**

Mudugas live in remote forest settlements of the Attappady tribal area. They do not mind living within a short distance from Kurumbas and Irulas. But they always prefer to be as far away as possible from the civilized people of the plains. The Muduga settlements are found in forest areas near the river Bhavani that gives them drinking water. Regarding the history of the Mudugas, the Census Report states that Mudugas are believed to be the earliest immigrants of this region. They are of Tamil origin and are believed to be immigrants from Coimbatore district. The purpose of their immigration was an ambitious plan to extensive agricultural activities in the fertile virgin soil of Attappady forests. The history of their immigration dates back to 15th Century or even prior to that. The religion of this tribe is akin to Hinduism. They were, during the past, subjects of the Vijayanagar Hindu Empire. The Mudugas are worshippers of Lord Siva. Saivism (Worship of Lord Siva) is considered to be older than Vaishnavism (worship of Lord Vishnu). As the Mudugas are still worshippers of Lord Siva and are oblivious to any influence of Vaishnavism, it can be reasonably presumed that they had emigrated from the plains even prior to the propagation of Vaishnavism.
4.3.1 General Characteristics

As a tribe the Mudugas are shy and do not like the company of the non-tribal people of the plains. They like to have as little contact as possible with the outside world and do not like going to the adjacent town for getting their requirements. They buy their requirements of clothes and ornaments from the nearest weekly market and the daily requirements such as oil jaggery, match box etc, from the nearest shop.

The Mudugas consider themselves superior to the tribes like Kurumbas and Irulas, though they have marriage relationship with the Kurumbas. Even though they have contact with the Irulas they won’t allow them to enter into the huts and won’t eat in the huts of Irulas when they take part in the ceremonies, such as marriage etc. There are few instances of inter-tribal marriage relationships with Kurumbas. Only Kurumba girls are married to the Muduga males and no instance of a Kurumba marrying a Muduga girl. Mudugas marry Kurumba girls, and also as a rule they are not prevented from marrying Kurumba girls.

The Mudugas are very superstitious. If any unnatural death takes place they attribute it to evil forces. They believe in good and bad omens. They have their own auspicious days and time. Mondays are considered to be good days for ceremonial functions. Women of this community are industrious and they work as labourers in the field, collect tubers and other forest produces, weave mats and baskets. The Mudugas receive guests who visit their settlements and extend whatever help they can. They invite the non-tribal people of that locality known to them for their festivals and ceremonies. They help each other in agricultural operations, hunting, fishing etc. The Mudugas are generally black complexioned though fairer than the Irulas. They have average height and stout body. Generally they are snub nosed with somewhat pointed chin.

The Mudugas have not changed much by contact with the civilized people or by any of the welfare schemes, which the Government has implemented for the development of the tribes. They have a limited culture of their own which they maintain in that isolation. In the matter of education their condition is miserable. Generally the Mudugas are generous and hospitable, peace loving and God fearing.
Numerically Mudugas are the second largest tribal community in the Attappady area. According to the 1961 Census their population was 1881 which increased to 2746 in 2001. There are 18 Muduga hamlets in Attappady. They are, Chudakki, Thazhachundakki, Veerannuru, Karuvara, Ommale, Kallamale, Kottamale, Chittur u Chandakulam, Koravanpady, Ummathupadiga, Molakamby, Thekkumpanna, Abbannuru, Kottiyyuru, Pettikkallu, Kakkuppayy, and Mukkali.

4.3.2 Life cycle structure of Mudugas

Marriage

The first step in the process of marriage among the Mudugas is fixation of date. Usually the bridegroom’s party takes the initiative and try to get the consent of the bride’s party. Marriages are conducted only after the girls attain puberty. The bridegroom will be either her cousin (maternal uncle’s son or paternal aunt’s son) or any other suitable young man of the community.

As the first step the parent of the bridegroom will find out a girl and later they will inform this to their son. If the son is willing they will report this to the headman and request for his consent. On a Monday a group consisting of six people (headman, kurutale and his wife, vandari and his wife and the father of the bridegroom) will go to the girl’s hut. While going to the girl’s hut the bridegroom’s father takes with him tobacco, arecanut, betel nut and an amount of Rs. 1.50. After receiving the guests the girl’s father will enquire about the purpose of their visit. The ‘kurutale’ will reply that they visit there for a girl, and then the girl will be brought before them and the ‘kurutale’ will ask her whether she likes the proposed marriage or not. If she is willing the bridegroom’s father hands over the tobacco, arecanut, betel nut and the Rs. 1.50 to the ‘kurutale’. After having a feast from the girl’s hut all of them return to their own huts.

On the following day a group of six people from the bride’s side (headman, ‘kurutale’ and his wife, ‘vandari, and his wife, and bride’s father) visits the bridegroom’s hut to see the bridegroom and fix the marriage. The day and time of the marriage will be fixed in the presence of the headman. After that they will be feasted by the bridegroom’s parents and after the feast they return to their huts.
Usually marriages are conducted at the bridegroom’s residence on Monday morning. In the evening of the previous Sunday the bride’s party with the bride will come to the bridegroom’s hut. In connection with the marriage there will be a feast on Sunday and Monday at the expense of the bridegroom’s party. Till Monday morning the bride will be kept in the hut of the headman of ‘kurutale’ or ‘vandari’ under the custody of their wives.

The marriage ceremonies take place in a specially decorated ‘pandhal’ built in front of the bridegroom’s hut. The bridegroom’s mother adorns the bride with ornaments and new clothes and lead her to the ‘pandhal’ where the bridegroom is being seated on a mat, and seats her on the left side of the bridegroom. The important items of the marriage are to join the hands of the fiancés and garlanding. While ‘kurutale’ holds the right hand of the bridegroom, his wife places the right palm of the bride on the right palm of the bridegroom. They have to sit in this pose for a few minutes while the friends and relatives assembled there place ornaments and money before them as marriage gifts. Next step is garlanding which the wives of ‘kurutale’ and ‘vandari’ will do. Firstly, the wife of ‘vandari’ receives a garland from the bride’s parents and puts it on the neck of the bridegroom. Then the bridegroom’s parents give a garland to the wife of ‘kurutale’ and she puts this to the neck of the bride. Tying of marriage badge (talikettu) and exchanging of garlands by the bride and bridegroom are not practiced by this tribe.

After these ceremonies the bride and the bridegroom will be seated face to face on a mat and plantain leaf is placed in front of them. Then boiled rice and curries are served on the leaf. Both of them take a handful of rice and at first the bridegroom tries to feed the bride. But she avoids his hand, which is full of rice and tries to feed him the rice, which is in her hand. This is repeated for some time. Then they start eating. After eating the food the bridegrooms takes water in a goblet and pour it in the hands of the bride. While she washes her hand he throws the goblet away. Then she takes another goblet of water and pours it in his hand. When he starts washing she also throws the goblet away. Later they take water in separate goblets and wash their hands. After these ceremonies food will be served to all the people present there.
When the feast is over the bride and the bridegroom are seated on a mat before their parents, headman and his assistants. The wife of the ‘kurutale’ sits on the right side of the bridegroom and the headman’s wife on the left side of the bride. Other members are seated around them in a circle. It is in this function, the bride money is given to the bride’s parents which varies from Rs. 100 to Rs. 150. The bridegroom’s father gives the amount to the headman who gives it to the ‘kurutale’ and then the ‘kurutale’ gives it to the ‘vandari’. Again the vandari gives this amount to the headman. By holding the amount in his hand the headman tells the bride’s parents that they have taken the girl and if the marriage is divorced due to her misconduct, the amount will have to be refunded to them. Then he gives the amount to the bride and she hands over it to her father. From this amount Rs. 2.50 is given to the ‘kurutale’ and Rs. 1.25 to ‘vandari’. A mat is spread before the headman and the members present there put small amounts on the mat as gifts. From that collection the headman takes Rs. 20 and the rest is divided among the members. After this all the people return to their huts except the bride who has to stay in the bridegroom’s hut. There will be dancing and singing before the couple throughout the night and they are allowed to sleep together only on the 4th day of the marriage. In the evening of the next Sunday the bride and the bridegroom with his relatives (other than his father and mother) visit the bride’s hut and return on Monday evening. They have to carry rice, milk and curd along with them while they visit the bride’s hut.

Marriages by exchange, by service and by elopement are also rarely seen among this tribe.

Death

Any death is considered to be the concern of the entire settlement and full honours are given to the departed soul by beating drum and playing pipes. All members of the settlement including the headman should have to attend the death ceremonies. The corpse will be buried only on the 3rd day after death and till that time the members present there will sing and dance around the corpse, and only close relatives will mourn. Before burying the corpse they won’t cook anything in the hut.
All the ceremonial functions connected with death are done under the overall supervision of the headman. The corpse is washed, dressed with new clothes and placed on a bed made of bamboo poles. Then coins are placed on the mouth and forehead of the corpse. The sons-in-law and the brother-in-law carry the corpse to the burial ground, and a rectangular pit to a depth of about five feet is dug. The eldest son throws three handfuls of grains into the pit and then only the corpse is placed in the pit. The corpse is never placed flat in the pit, it is placed in a sitting pose by stretching the legs to the front. The head faces upwards and it is towards the south. From the cloth of the corpse three pieces are cut out by the son and placed one on the middle and the other two on both ends of the body. He throws three handfuls of grains and three handfuls of soil on the corpse. Weapons and utensils used by the deceased person are also put in the pit and the members present cover the pit with soil there. All the things brought along with the corpse are abandoned there. Before returning from the spot the son of the deceased person cut out a piece of ‘Darbha grass’ and by hitting this on the tomb he spells the name of the dead person. After taking bath in the river he returns to the hut accompanied by other members, and he brings the piece of Darbha grass to the hut. Then two vessels, one containing water and the other containing coconut oil, is placed before the son. He dips the piece of Darbha grass in the oil and holds it over the water by enchanting the name of the deceased. This is repeated twice. When the two drops of oil in the water join together, they believe that the ancestors in the heaven accept the soul of the deceased person. If the first two drops do not join, they will repeat the process till it joins.

The members in the hut observe pollution for 40 days. Giving a feast to the members who took part in the death ceremonies dissipates the pollution. Generally Mudugas do not have any other ceremonies by which the dead are remembered.

**Pregnancy and childbirth**

Before completing three months of the first pregnancy of a girl the news should be reported to the headman by her father-in-law, and later the headman informs this to her parents. On an auspicious Monday of the third month the girl’s parents visit her and give sweets, and on the next morning they take her to their
Hut. Her husband and his parents also accompany her. The girl’s parents have to arrange a feast for these people and after the feast the girl with her husband and parents return to their hut.

The birth of a child in a family especially the first delivery of a girl is usually an occasion for rejoicing. It is said that a system of using isolation shed (pollution hut) for delivery was prevalent among this tribe. But at present no pollution hut is being built, the delivery takes place in the living hut itself, i.e., on the ‘dinne’ of the hut. When the labour pain starts they arrange a labour room in the ‘dinne’ and the girl is segregated there and made to live there until the pollution is dissipated. The period of pollution is 6 days in the case of a female child and 7 days for a male child. Usually the mother of any one of the spouses will be attending the delivery and nursing the girl. On the first 7 days after delivery there is some restriction in the diet of the mother and she won’t be allowed to take any non-vegetarian food. She has to drink turmeric juice and ragi gruel mixed with salt and pepper. On the next day i.e. when the birth pollution ends the mother has to take bath in the river and wear new clothes. A feast is given to the relatives on that day and an amount of Rs. 15/- to Rs. 25/- and new clothes are given to the woman who nursed her.

During the pollution period no male member is allowed to see the mother and the child and it is on the 7th or 8th day the father can see his child for the first time. A waist chain of plantain fibers is being tied to the child by the grand mother and the father calls a name by beating a rod on the metal saucer, and the mother puts bangles to the child. The headman gives Rs. 10/- or Rs. 5/- to the child and later the members present there also give small amount to the child as gifts.

Though the birth pollution ends by 6 or 7 days the mother has to stay in the ‘dinne’ itself till she completes 30 days and she is allowed to enter the hut on the 32nd day only after taking bath in the river. But from the 7th or 8th day onwards she can take non-vegetarian food. For the first six months the infant will be fed only with the mother’s milk and on an auspicious day of the 6th month the members of the settlement give a feast to the mother, and on this feast the infant is given boiled rice by the mother or grandmother.
Puberty

When a girl attains puberty her father has to report this news to the headman and the headman informs this to the girl's relatives and other members of the settlement. In the case of puberty, pollution lasts for 7 days and on those days the girl should stay in the 'dinne' of the hut. During those days of her pubescence friends will be attending or nursing her and it is their duty to make her happy by singing songs or telling jokes. No male member is allowed to see her or she is allowed to see any male members during that period. On the 8th day there will be certain ceremonies and a feast in the girl's hut in which all members of the settlement except the 'mannukkare' attend. The expenses of the feast are met either by the girl's parents or by the members of the settlement.

Before the feast, the girl is led to the river by two elderly women (usually her sisters-in-law) for bathing. A wooden mortar which contains turmeric and flowers, and pestle is placed in front of the hut and on the way to the river the girl should hold the centre of the pestle while the women accompanying her hold the upper and lower parts of the pestle. They jointly raise the pestle and hit on the mortar three times. Then the accompanying women take the turmeric from the mortar and smear it and return to the hut. On the way the process of hitting the pestle on the mortar for three times is repeated and they jointly push back the mortar. Then they directly enter the hut without looking backward. Feast will be served to the members of the settlement only after the girl and the two accompanying women were feasted. The girl has to return all the ornaments she received from other women of the settlements on the day she attained puberty. The period of pollution in the case of menses is for six days and during those days the polluted woman has to stay in the 'dinne' of the hut.

Settlement pattern

The Mudugas live in clusters with twelve or so households in each settlement. The Muduga hamlets are referred to as 'ooru' and the huts a 'kure'. The small squatter huts are low ceilinged with the ceilings not exceeding five feet from the floor level. The huts supported by bamboo splinters and thatched with forest grass have small doors and low ceilings, they being so designed as to
withstand the onslaught of adverse climatic conditions and strong winds. The floors are plastered with cow dung, clay and soil. These huts ordinarily contain two small rooms, the backroom (ullara) is being used as kitchen and the front room (vettara) is for the storage of agricultural products and as the place of worship of the household deities. Besides these there is also an adjoining verandah in the front of each hut, as ‘dinne’.

Besides these huts, there are houses provided by the Government, which consist of a long hall separated into several apartments by brick walls. The apartments are brick buildings with tile roofs, which they refer to as “ottujure”. Although these are high ceilinged ones they are also provided only with two rooms and a front verandha.

**Dress and ornaments**

The apparel of men is sober and consists only of a handloom towel round the waist reaching up to the knee and the upper portion of the body is wrapped in a dhoti slung from the shoulders. Men are also seen wearing banians and rarely shirts are used. Elderly Mudugas toil in the fields with only the loincloth tied around the waist.

Women’s apparel consists of a brightly coloured strip of cloth five feet long and four feet wide referred by them as ‘cela’. ‘The ‘cela’ wraps tribal women folk from the upper part of the breast to the knee. While indoors the upper portion of their body is exposed and the ‘cela’ is tied around the waist, but while outdoors the top portion of their body is not exposed. All through Attappady area only Muduga woman was seen wearing skirt and blouse.

Both men and women have their earlobes punched. While the men folk are not seen wearing any ear studs, the womenfolk use ear studs and rings. The women wear nose rings on either side of the nose. Rings are used extensively by both sexes, while men wear only finger rings, the women adorn their fingers and toes with rings. Bangles made either of plastics or metals adorn the slender wrist of women. Necklaces around the necks are either of the black coir chord or of stones. The most priced piece of jewellery is the necklace of 25 paise and 50 coins.
interspersed with small rings held together by a coir chord (panamala). The other ornaments are made up of cheap metals. Gold is conspicuous by its absence in their adornments.

While women grew their hair long, men cut their hair frequently. Women’s hair-do is very simple, they roll the hair and are kept in a bunch behind their head. Men resort to tattooing infrequently. It is very common among women. They usually tattoo the figures of fish, rat, scorpion, crab etc in the hands, legs, chest, and forehead. They do not use oil on the hair or on the body. As the ladies go to the river for taking water they keep their body clean by washing, although they take bath rarely. Men do not take bath or wash their body regularly, only occasionally they go to the river and wash their body.

Political structure

Each Muduga hamlet is presided over by a headman (Muppe). The hamlets of Mudugas are reserved exclusively for themselves and are devoid of other tribes such as Irulas and Kurumbas. The headman is assisted in his administrative responsibilities by three men ‘Kurulate’, ‘Vandari’ and ‘Mannukkare’. The headman is kept informed of all the happenings in the settlement. All the ceremonies are presided over by the headman, these include deaths, marriages, births etc. The permission for hunting by the tribesmen is granted by the headman. He is the arbitrator of all disputes arising in the villages and is vested with the authority to punish the accused. The accused in the disputes are fined a penalty of not less than five rupees. The penalty due is apportioned along the headman and his assistants. In each settlement, opposite the hut of the headman, a thatched shed (cavati) is erected where guests to the settlements are entertained. As a rule, the guests are feasted on the food brought from outside, as it is taboo to serve food prepared within the village. Guests are free to cook their own food. The necessary arrangements are made by the headman and he is assisted by Vandari and Kurutale. All transactions conducted without prior permission of the headman are treated as null and void. A confession is extracted from those who indulge in these and suitable punishment is meted out. All decisions regarding the
administration of the settlement are made in the headman’s hut and attendance of all elder members of the community is obligatory.

In the absence of the headman all powers are delegated to the ‘Kurutale’ and ‘Vandari’. Though in the matters of administration all powers rest with the headman, the farming operations and the connected ceremonies are under the strict control and guidance of the ‘Mannukkare’. The position of the headman and his assistants pass from one generation to the next hereditarily by partrilineal law of succession. In the absence of major male heir for the headman, the administration is entrusted to the ‘Kurutale’ and ‘Vandari’ until the heir comes of age. In the event of the headman dying heirless i.e. without any male children, the post reverts either to his sister’s son or to his younger brother. An election is resorted to fill the post of the elder, should it fall vacant, with voting right to all members of the community, in the case where the deceased headman possesses no younger brothers.

Economic structure

The Mudugas had rights to private plots of land. Their principal agricultural products are chama, ragi, paddy, red gram, black gram, horse gram, cotton, groundnut, ginger, sweet potato, tapioca etc. All over the settlement the farming operations start simultaneously. With the prior permission of the headman, the ‘Mannukkare’ chooses a Monday, considered as an auspicious day for sowing as well as other religious ceremonies, proceeds to the plot with the seeds subjected to sorcery and initiates sowing a parcel of land, which would have been previously ploughed for the same purpose. Four days after the sowing initiation ceremony, the farming operation starts with accompaniment of music and songs, closely watched and guided by the headman and his assistant. Agriculture is characterized by labour sharing without the attendant crop share, the proceeds of the harvest remaining the absolute property of the owners. Community members who are polluted by birth, menses, death etc, are barred from working in the fields. In order to protect the standing crops from the degradations of wild animals both men and women take up residence near the plots till the harvesting is over. ‘Mannukkare’ apportions a share of the harvest due to him for his initiation ceremonies, for it is
believed that due to his good offices and services rich harvests are reaped. The products of the land is sold even before it is harvested, the proceeds of which are utilized for procuring other necessaries of subsistence. They seldom save for the rainy day.

**Occupation**

Besides working in their own fields their labour services are eagerly sought after to work in the fields of non-tribals. They work regularly and during farming season their services fetch the tribesmen Rs.4.50 and the women Rs. 3.50 a day. Others who do not choose to work in non-tribals land proceed to the interior areas to fetch the fruits of the forests. The forest provides these men with a good means of livelihood. The principal forest products are honey, cardamom, tuber etc. Domestication of animals is also quite common among these people. The community’s cattle, goats, fowls etc., are reared and led into the pasture by female children of the community. Generally they do not consume either egg or milk.

**Religious beliefs and practices**

The principal God of Mudugas is ‘Malliswaran’. It is believed that he is an incarnation of Lord Siva. The abode of ‘Malliswaran’ is the top of the hill known as ‘Malliswaramuti’. The legend is that the Mudugas have consecrated their idol there. The myth is that Lord Siva and Goddess Parvathi chanced to come to the Muduga settlements. The sight of this unfamiliar couple soon sent forth enquiries as to the purpose of their visit. On ascertaining it was found out that Goddess Parvathi wanted a light and ‘Puja’ everyday while the demand of Siva turned out to be light and ‘Puja’ once in a year. Parvathi’s demand was difficult to be met while at the same time Siva’s was well within their means. So they banished Parvathy and consecrated Siva’s idol atop the hill. To this day, the vow of the tribals at the request of Siva is observed unfailingly every year. At the foot on the way to the hill is the shrine of ‘Malliswaran’ where all tribals irrespective of age and sex are permitted.

Pilgrimage to the ‘Malliswaran’ peak is undertaken once in a year. Women are barred from participating in this pilgrimage. Men are required to subject themselves to a strict routine for seven days. Early in the morning they administer
a dose of turmeric milk, and only after this they are allowed to take any other food. Alcohol and flesh of animals are prohibited. Contact with women and the consumption of food prepared by them are disallowed. New utensils are used for the purpose. On the morning of the ‘Sivaratri’ day all in the settlements worship at the shrine of ‘malliswaran’ from whence they proceed to the bank of the river Bhavani. The participants of the pilgrimage carry with them offerings to the god, which consist of oil, coconut, banana, camphor, rice, jaggery, ghee etc. These are handed over to the priest who has specially arrived for the purpose of ‘puja’ from Nilagiri. He bundles the tributes to the god and places it on the head of the pilgrims for which he receives a token payment in the form of dakshina. The pilgrims then proceed to hilltop leaving behind others to wait for their arrival from the hill.

The pilgrimage is led by the ‘pujari’ with others following them closer on the heels. The whole atmosphere reverberates with chanting of the names of gods. The idol of ‘Malliswaran’ is unapproachable to all except the priest. All the ‘pujas’ and the accompanying religious rites are the sole responsibility of the priest, after he has denuded himself of all clothes. Besides lighting in the evening, a desert (payasam) is prepared with the ingredients, which are offered as tributes to the god. After the ‘puja’ they eat that desert and at night they entertain themselves with dance and music. Next morning they descend from the hilltop in the accompaniment of chants and proceed straight to the shrine of ‘Malliswaran’ from where they return to their settlement accompanied by others.

At the top of ‘Malliswaran peak’ a little away from the idol of Malliswaran are consecrated the idols of ‘Vakara Ayyappe’ and ‘Kakkilinge’ the former is the elder and the latter being the younger of his sons. It is believed that the idols of ‘Vakara ayyappe’ were consecrated little below the idol of Malliswaran because of the innate crookedness of his character. The legend is that the ‘Vakara Ayyappe’ punishes those pilgrims who proceed to the hilltop without the necessary regimen. He is offered the coconut and banana with hind side of it facing the idol. This custom has its roots in the belief that these gods consume only the shell of the coconut and the stem of the banana. It is believed by the tribals that the duty of ‘Malliswaran’, is to protect the community.
Next to ‘Malliswaran’ the most revered is the goddess ‘Mariyamma’. The shrine of ‘Mariyamma’ is at Thavalam in Attappady. She is very rarely worshipped, the reason for a visit is the time of the outbreak of smallpox epidemic. It is believed that she is the harbinger of all diseases, especially the deadly smallpox. The onset of smallpox is accompanied by a visit mostly by women and appeases the goddess by sacrificing a chicken. This is presented to the oracle of the village.

Apart from these gods and goddesses each hut has its own household deity known as ‘karudeyva’. The metal idol of ‘karudeyva’ is considered to be the embodiment of souls of the dead people. The ‘karudeyva’ is considered to be the protector of their property and lives. A lighted lamp is placed before the idol every day.

Social customs

For the purpose of marriage alliances the Mudugas are divided into four exogamous groups. They are, Karuttiga, Vellega, Kupuniga and Arura. The Karuttiga can take brides or give brides only to the members of the vellega group. They cannot have any marriage alliance with any other group. Likewise the members of the ‘kupuniga’ group can have marriage relationship only with the Arura group. The Mudugas encourage cross cousin marriages i.e., marrying maternal uncle’s or paternal aunt’s daughter. Polyandry is prohibited, but polygamy is practised in a restricted way i.e., when the first wife does not bear children or becomes unhealthy. Divorce and widow marriages are allowed.

4.4 Kurumbas

4.4.1 General characteristics

The Kurumbas live in about fourteen hamlets in the Attappady area of North Kerala, in Southwestern India, a forest region with an elevation ranging from 1,200 to 3,000 feet. Attappady literally means leech valley. The area is tropical in climate and vegetation, with occasional stands of cycas palms and certain thorny shrubs. The Kurumbas and their neighbors in the southwestern foothills and the Mudugas, have a similar ecological setting and settlement pattern. They share many cultural
features, have alliance relationships, and there is frequent social interaction between adjacent groups.

4.4.2 Life Cycle structure of Kurumbas

Marriage

Patrilinial exogamous divisions (kal) such as Bainanal, Meriyal, Ommathanal, Kunnanthanan, Murali, Sathan, Kulla sathan, Sadiyal, Thuppudanal, Kalpanachan, Egachal, Malakaranal, Mooliya and Kankula Chemmiyal, are found among the Kurumba as kal. This division, according to them, exists only for the regulation of marital alliances. But it is found that the division serves the purpose of descent and ancestry also. Besides these divisions, there are the janmam or locality denoting divisions such as Anchali, Aythur, Aruvaka, Nakkuvaka, Palappady and Pulluru which are losing their significance in these days.

The Kurumba’s marriage should be within the community but outside one’s own clan. The conventional type of marriage is between the cross cousins, i.e., maidinan and nadini, either paternal or maternal. Girls are married only after puberty while boys get married generally between 20 and 25 years of age. Generally, elders through negotiation arrange marriages. If the negotiations take time, then marriage by elopement occurs. In most cases, the boy and girl have met earlier and fallen in love. After the fixation of marriage the girl may live with her fiancé even before the ceremony. Polygamy is frequent, monogamy is presently affordable, though not a preferred norm. Polyandry is objectionable and is not in practice.

Both the sexes of the Kurumba can divorce for reasons of adultery, barrenness, cruelty, mal adjustment and desertion with the approval of nayanodi, their traditional council of the elders. If the wife wants divorce then the pariyam should be reimbursed. The children are always considered as the liability of the father. If a divorced couple wishes to live together again, they should seek the approval of nayanodi and pay thappu panam (cash fine). Widow/widower and divorcee are permitted to remarry. Sororate is permitted. Levirate is discouraged but not prohibited. Community endogamy is now not so strictly enforced.
Intercommunity marriages of the area are in prevalence and both the communities without any hesitation welcome such marriages.

The status of Kurumba women is slightly secondary. The right to inherit is denied to them. They participate in agricultural operations, collection of fuel, bringing potable water and cooking which are female chores. In social functions and religious spheres, the women have roles to perform. Women participate in it, but do not conduct rituals. Women work as wage laborers and contribute to family income. Among the Kurumba, delivery takes place at the husband’s house. Mother in labour is secluded to a corner of the hut. Her other relatives also avoid eating in this house. There is no pollution removal ceremony as such. On the eighth day, she takes a bath as usual and is considered free from pollution. After one year or so, the thalaierakka or shaving of head hair of the child has to be performed. They believe that the head hair which comes along with the birth is inauspicious and only after the removal of this the child can step into prosperity.

The Kurumba marriage rituals are performed at the bridegroom’s residence. The Mannookkaran, their priest-cum-agricultural expert is the chief officiator. It is said that, in the past, the marriage was celebrated for three days. On a Sunday, the bridegroom’s party excluding the bridegroom goes to the bride’s house. The next day, i.e. Monday, they bring the bride and her relatives to the bridegroom’s house. On Wednesday, the marriage rituals are performed. But, nowadays, it is reduced to a single day ceremony. The bridegroom, in front of all, hands over the pariyam to the bride, which she, in turn, makes over to her father. The pariyam may be paid in installments also. When this is over, the bride’s relatives hold the hand of the bride and place it on the bridegroom’s hand, while the bridegroom’s relatives hold his hand to receive the girl. The tying of Keera kallu follows this. Then all are treated to feast music and dance throughout the night in celebration of the consummation of marriage.

Kin terminology and the cross-cousin marriage rule regulate marriage and appropriate kinship behavior. Kurumbas have a Dravidian-type kinship terminology and practice bilateral cross-cousin marriage. A man is prescribed to marry a woman of the category naidini and a woman to marry a man of the
category maidine, the category that includes bilateral cross-cousins, no preference is expressed for either the paternal or maternal side. With no ceremonial event, the couple is considered married when the girl starts living in the boy's hut. Sharing food and labour and co-operating in domestic affairs are the basic features of Kurumba married life. Marriages crystallize as time passes, children and other indices accumulate, bride price is paid, and the community comes to recognize the union. Years ago there was the custom of bride-service (pennu vela) to the bride's parents for a period of two to three years. Bride price (pariya-panam), is given by the groom's family to the bride's. Bride price need not be paid strictly at the time of marriage but must take place eventually. The strong underlying rule of reciprocal exchange ensures that no marital union can escape the transaction of bride price. If not at the time of marriage, or later at the death of either of the spouses, or even as late as the second funeral, bride price has to be paid by the agnates, failing of which results in the husband's group's denial of rights to the wife and her children. Most exchanges take place at funerals, when affiances clear their long-pending marriage debts. Payment of the bride price ensures the transfer of rights to the woman's labour, to her sexual services, and above all to the children. Thus, it is both the wife's kin and the husband's kin who are concerned with payment. While the bride price payment serves to transfer to the husband's group all offspring of the bride, the bride herself and her clan identity are not completely transferred until her death. It is not uncommon for men and women to have a succession of two or more spouses in their lifetime, but they do not have more than one spouse at a time. Divorce or separation is easy and common. Widows may remarry and need not remain with the first husband's agnates.

Death

The Kurumbas bury their dead usually on the third day after death. The chief mourner is the eldest son. If an unmarried boy or girl dies, then the chief mourner is the cross cousin of opposite sex, i.e., the nadini or maidinan. The body is washed and covered in a new cloth, and kept in the verandah usually inside a booth made of plantain stems. If the body is of an unmarried person then the nadnini or maidinan should place the uruma panam, his/ her due towards the departed soul on the chest/breast of the body. They dance along with funeral songs
in the accompaniment of thugi (an indigenous drum). This is continued till the burial is complete. They have their own burial grounds near their hamlets. On the third day, the body is carried on a bamboo bier to the burial ground, where the grave is already made, and is lowered into it with its head pointing to the north. Along with the burial the pollution also comes to an end. Every fifth year or so, the Kurumba perform mortuary rites (cheeru) for the departed souls.

Birth

Among the Kurumbas, the delivery of the child takes place at the husband’s house. She is secluded in a hut. Her mother-in-law or any other elder woman act as a midwife. The pollution lasts for a week. On the eighth day, she takes a bath and is free from pollution. After one year or so, shaving of head hair of the child has to be performed. This is thought to be a sign of prosperity. They have their own methods of family planning and most of the families have only two or three children.

Puberty

On attaining puberty, a Kurumba girl is secluded for 14 days and on the 15th day, the puberty rite is performed. At this stage she will not resided in a separate hut. The girl should be residing in a different part of the same house. They will construct a separate curtain in that room. All other customs are like those of the Mudugas. The mother’s brother offers presentations to her. The girl, after seclusion is given a bath in the river and is dressed. A modest feast is optional.

Settlement pattern

The Kurumba hamlet (ooru) is a cluster of ten to 30 huts (koorai) mostly built contiguous to close kin. The rectangular bamboo hut is about six feet high, four feet on either side, and has a main room for cooking and sleeping and a front porch (dheett). The sloping roof is built with bamboo splits used as rafters tied with wild vines, a thatch of dharbha grass makes a rain-proof roof. The walls are plastered on the inside with clay. The hut has two roughly equal parts, one secular, toward the entrance (vettard), and the other (ullara) more sacred, close to the fireplace.
Dress and Ornaments

Earlier the males wore a loin cloth. Now they are seen in shirts and pants. Women wear cloth ties above the breasts below the armpits and falling the knees. On festive occasions, they wear a sari, blouses and brassieres. The females use ordinary ear rings and anklets, tattoo their forehead. They are non-vegetarian and eat beef and pork. Rice is their staple food. They also make use of wild roots and tubers. They use jungle fruits and milk products. Men and women smoke bidis, cigarettes and ganja. Many drink toddy and arrack. Adults chew betel with tobacco.

Political structure

The Kurumbas have their own traditional hamlet council (nayanodi), comprising the elders of the ooru (hamlet). The hamlet council of elders makes decisions for the tribe. The nayanodi is informal and takes its decision by consensus. The council decides all socio-economic and legal matters. The mooppan is the headman, next to him and almost of equal status is the mannukaran (priest-cum-agricultural expert). There is a bhandari (cashier) and one or two kurutalai (peons). All these offices are hereditary, and the eldest sons succeed. The nayanodis effectiveness depends usually upon the personality of the mooppan. All matters considered important enough are within its jurisdiction. The authority of the mooppan is not so blindly obeyed as it was in the past. Younger generation wants ‘modernization’ and they are willing to seek ‘outside leadership’ to achieve their ends. Their hamlets fall within the jurisdictions of three-gram panchayaths, to which some of them have been nominated as members. Panchayath now seeks to discharge some of the functions of the nayanodi. Access to the police is easier than it was. They function within the clan and do not accept anything from the clans.

Traditional Occupation

Kurumbas are shifting cultivators and they collect honey, wax, turmeric, and wild ginger, soap nut and wild cardamoms. Most of their hamlets are in thick forests. The licenses are given to each hamlet. Their cultivable lands are called kothukadu. Of late, they are cultivating ganja also. However, their subsidiary occupations are basket making, mat weaving, goat and poultry keeping and casual
labour. The tribe’s people know the art of body tattooing. They are experts in making mats and baskets. They sing and dance, when happy. They normally use drum and pipe as musical instruments.

**Religious Beliefs and Practices**

The Kurumba follow tribal religion. They worship Siva as the lord of Malliswaran Mudi, the highest peak in Attappady. The spirits of ancestors are worshipped as clan and family deities. Of the Hindu pantheon, they worship Siva as the lord of Malliswaran Mudi, the highest peak in Attappady. The ‘Banjamma pai’ and ‘Kakkalinga pai’ are two major deities of their pantheon. They make pilgrimage to Malliswaran Mudi on Sivaratri. Kurumbas will not construct any temple. They follow the history of the Dravidians. Life cycle rituals are performed or presided over by Mannukaran. He propitiates the deities controlling agriculture. Kurikaran, bhutikaran and pusari are recently evolved specialists for divination, exorcism and worship of ‘Sanskritised’ deities’ respectively. Amma puja, pai puja, Cheeru nombi (Sivaratri) are the major festivals of socio religious significance. They profess Hinduism.

The status of the women is slightly secondary in society. The basic right to inherit is denied to them. Their main duty, besides household, is on the field, collection of fuel, bringing potable water and cooking food. They participate in socio-religious functions. Attappady is the home of three tribal communities, the Irula, Muduga and Kurumba. The recent settlers (Malayali and Tamilian) are called vannavasi, i.e. those who came. The Kurumba and Muduga are like one people, and freely interdine and intermarry. They consider the Irula to be inferior. They have access to public buildings, schools, roads, wells and other water sources. They visit Hindu temples and participate in the festivals. A few are employed as last grade employees in the forest department.

**Social organization**

The basic unit of Kurumba social organization is the patrilinial descent group (koottatri). Each hamlet is associated with a particular descent group whose ancestors are believed to be the original inhabitants of the land. The founding descent group has final rights over the land and is governed by a council of elders.
A headman is the formal spokesman of the hamlet. With two assistants and the priest, along with elders of the hamlet, a panchayath is formed to settle disputes and discuss matters of any kind. The council members enjoy higher status and authority over others during political sessions and religious functions, but on the whole they are treated as equals with the common members of the hamlet.

Local groups or hamlets are not restricted to agnatic kin. They have free and equal access to wild food, water, materials for making shelters, tools, weapons, and to whatever wild products are used for trade. "Ownership" broadly means association, involvement, and identification with the area, rather than possession of something. Thus a person may shift residence from his native land to his mother's, his wife's, or to his father's mother's group. Ownership of land is collective, in the sense that all the descendants of a common ancestor are joint owners of the hamlet and its territory.

Individuals change residence for various reasons, for example, conflict between families or between kin groups in a particular hamlet, fear of sorcery, and bride-service. Close affines, when in need, may come to reside near kinsmen such as a wife's father, or her brother, or maternal kin, and cultivate a portion of their land. Men become residence group members where they live but lack rights to a wife's land. In some cases, daughters may use their father's land throughout their lifetime, but unlike sons do not inherit it, and consequently cannot pass it on to their children. However, it is not the individual or the family that matters, but the consent of the council members, especially the headman of the hamlet. Clothing, tools, and ornaments are relatively simple, personally held, and usually buried along with the deceased. No one depends on receiving such objects either by inheritance or by formal transmission.

Kurumbas tend not to concern themselves in daily affairs with nature and role of their descent groups. These factors give the impression that they lack a deeply rooted patrilineal ideology, which in fact forms the basis of their social organization. Though affines are co residents and form part of the hamlet's social life, even after generations they will not be taken into the descent group, identity through locality and descent are independent of each other. Kurumba religious
belief is based on ancestral veneration and fear. The ancestors are their best protectors, and are invoked with regular offerings and propitiated at the sowing and harvest ceremonies. Failure to do so is believed to result in infertile soil, poor crops, famine, disease, and other misfortunes. The Kurumbas bury their dead on the second or third day with great ceremony. After 40 to 50 years, another funeral is held when the bones of the deceased agnates are unearthed and, after prolonged obsequies, are reburied in a rock cave called “gobbe”.

The Kurumbas also invoke the spirits of their dead relatives for success in hunting. The hunting implements, especially the locally made guns, traps, and snares, are in the name of their ancestors, who are considered to be "hunting spirits". Hunters may invoke not only agnatic spirits, but also spirits of their dead affines like gardening magic is also practiced.

After the partrilineal koottam, the nuclear family is the most prominent discrete social group and always takes the form of a domestic unit. However, members other than the nuclear family also form part of a household. Moreover, the composition of the household frequently changes through a continuous pattern of separation and re aggregation of families and individuals. The basic requirement of a Kurumba household is the sharing of domestic activities by a man and a woman. Children also assist their parents in various activities, giving rise to a sex and age division of labor. Women and children mainly engage in gathering and collecting leaves, roots, tubers, and mushrooms. Men rarely engage in gathering. In certain cases, husband, wife, and sometimes children and older women go in groups for gathering. Fishing is done by women and children, collecting honey is done only by men, who are skilled in climbing trees and driving away bees. Hunting is also a male activity, a group of men proceed together into the forest for two to three days in search of game. Sometimes women also go along, particularly to assist their husbands by carrying tools and also in capturing small game.

Sharing is valued and meat is widely distributed within the hamlet. Game is apportioned to everyone who is directly or indirectly involved in the hunt. The one who shot the animal gets a major share. Smaller shares are given to the other hunters, affines, parents, and siblings. The rest of the meat is distributed at the kill
site among those who have come to cut the meat and carry it. So strong is the sentiment of sharing that after a major hunt all the households in the hamlets (and sometimes close relatives, especially sisters, residing outside the hamlet) receive a share. The sharing ethic is strong enough to prevent households from storing meat for their own consumption.

Since there is direct and immediate access to food and other resources, individuals can meet their own requirements as they wish. Neither kinship status nor age is a qualification for access to hunting and gathering resources. Anyone who wishes to hunt or gather can do so either individually or in association with others, thus placing a high value on individualism and autonomy. Away from the hamlet, the Kurumbas feed themselves by picking and eating berries and tubers. Children of both sexes often collect greens to cook for themselves.

All the members of the household co-operate in clearing land for cultivation. Men clear and set fire to the field, but ploughing, sowing, weeding, and harvesting are done by women. The female members of related households weed together as a unit. The households of primary relatives of either the husband or the wife usually reside close by and co-operate, interact, share labour, and form food-sharing households. Between the members of closely related nuclear households in a hamlet the obligations are more intense and social interactions are as frequent as among the members of a joint household. In fact, the degree of genealogical proximity, ranging from the household to the hamlet, determines the level of cooperation and sharing. Among primary kin, there is no strict rule of reciprocity, and even if the help is not returned, no one takes notice of it.

The two-section framework of Kurumba kinship terminology divides relatives into two categories, the agnates (anna-thampi) and the affines (macha-mamari). The fundamental opposition of sharing among the agnates and exchange between affines form a major axis of Kurumba social structure. Between affines there is the exchange of women, bride price, goods, and services. Among themselves, agnates share food, land, labour, and above all "agnatic substance." The perpetual flow of women between clans is reciprocated by the flow of goods, services, and bride price in the opposite direction, and this process is diachronic,
i.e., often as delayed reciprocity. Even though bride wealth payment is practiced, it is not only the immediate male agnates of the groom that provide the bride wealth. All the kin share the responsibility to contribute toward the bride price.

Social Change and Mobility

The Kurumbas were virtually illiterate but now they are conscious and send their children to far-away residential schools. The girls usually do not study beyond the primary school level. Even among the boys a few dropout after the primary school level, to assist their parents in earning a livelihood. They have comprehensive indigenous medicare. One of their mooppans is a famous medicine man. They do resort to modern medicine, in crisis. Electricity is not available. Their fuel resource is firewood. Their croplands are rained. They are unaware of chemical fertilizers and shun insecticides, which would be murderous to the sensitive ecology of their native forest. Under the ITDP, Balavadis and ICDS, free supplies of nutritional supplements are issued. Government pays fully for the support of their children at school. They have ration cards, but the fair price shops are far away. At their level of subsistence, savings and investment are meaningless concepts.