CHAPTER: VI

About the Tribes
CHAPTER VI
ABOUT THE TRIBES

6.1 KORAGA TRIBE

Koragas are the distinct primitive tribes inhabited in the northern tip of Kerala and South Cannara district of Karnataka State. The basic attributes of the primitive tribes are pre-agricultural stage of development, stagnant population and very low literacy rates (Ashokan, 2007). In Kerala for historical and social reasons, the Koraga tribal communities are found only in the northernmost district, Kasaragod, and though they are concentrated in the neighbouring state of Karnataka. In fact, the socio-economic lives of the Koragas are more miserable than other primitive tribal groups of Kerala or South India and remain socially and culturally isolated from the mainstream population.

6.1.1 Origin

The origin of Koraga tribe is a debatable one and there are a number of myths about the origin of Koraga community. Koragas are believed to be the ancestors of a defeated dynasty, which was driven to forests and subsequently became slaves to the mighty. Another legend is regarding the issues of a Brahmin woman by a Sudra. It is said that the social unacceptability of their children in the caste-dominated society was so rigid that the children were looked down upon with contempt and their future generation was named as Koraga.

According to Thurston (1975) Koraga was a subgroup among the Chandalas, offspring of high caste Brahmin or Kshatriya women and Sudra men. They were subdivided into 15 classes, of whom the Koraga are the lowest. Another story reported by Thurston (ibid.): a Chandala invader, Habashika defeated Angara Varman, the local ruler of Manjeswaram and ruled for 12 years. A neighbouring ruler treacherously proposed a marriage between his sister and Habashika; when the bridegroom with his retinue came for the nuptials and discarded their weapons, they were set upon and massacred. The Chandala fled into the forests, where they were reduced to penury. Some were driven to the seashore without any dress, there to be hanged. The executioners found them covering their nakedness with leaves, took pity on them and allowed them to go on condition that they would wear no other garments. This semi-
historical myth would indicate that the present condition of the Koraga is a result of "secondary primitivisation".

6.1.2 Language

The language spoken by Koraga tribe shows variations and it has some resemblance to Tulu and Kannada. They have very little interaction with other communities. The language of Koraga is also called, Koragar, Koragara, Korangi or Korra Koraga. It is coming under the category of Dravidian language. The common language spoken by the tribe is a mixture of Kannada and Tulu, as they are belonging to Tulunadu. Tulunadu comprises an area which includes the districts of Udupi and Dakshina Kannada in Karnataka State and Kasaragod district of Kerala State. The language is also not intelligible with Muddu Koraga, a language spoken by the Koraga tribe in Kerala. It is further classified into the Southern Dravidian family. Koraga is a spoken language and generally not written, whenever it is written it makes use of Kannada script. According to Bhat (1971), there are 4 dialects, Onti (spoken in Udupi), Tappu (in Hebri), Mudu (in Kundapura), Ande (in Mangalore).

6.1.3 Distribution

The Koragas are seen mostly in rural areas of Kasaragod district of Kerala state and a considerable number of Koragas are seen in Karnataka State also. Due to their unhygienic way of life all other communities were used to observe untouchability with Koragas. In earlier days they used to remove carcasses and ate the decaying flesh of dead animals but nowadays it is not seen anywhere. On the basis of their clothing habits Koragas were classified as ‘Sappu Koraga’ and ‘Kuntu Koraga’. Those who use garments of leaves were called ‘Sappu Koraga’ (sappu means leaves) and other group who used clothes are called ‘Kuntu Koraga’. The Kuntu Koraga covers two sections of Koragas viz. Badiyadika group and Pulikoor Group. Out of the 111 Koraga families living in Pavoor colony, a major portion is following Christianity and is known as Christian Koraga. In fact, all Koragas in plain areas use clothes. Nowadays sappus are also using clothes. In Kasaragod District, Koraga live in 52 settlements distributed in Kasaragod and Manjeswaram blocks (Map 3). There are two settlements in Kasaragod block, one each in Kasaragod Municipality (Vidhyanagar colony) and Mentalloor Panchayat (Pulikur colony). In Manjeswaram Block, there are 50 settlements distributed in the following Panchayats, viz. Badiadka (6 colony), Meencha (6 colony), Vorkady (7 colony), Paivalike (11 colony), Puthige
(3 colony), Mangalpady (5 colony), Bellur (1 colony), Enmakage (6 colony), Kumbla (4 colony) and Manjeswaram (1 colony) (see Plate 4).

6.1.4 Population

According to Stuart (quoted in Bhat 1971:1), there were 4,355 people reported as Koraga in the 1891 Census. The 1971 Census reported their population in Kerala and Karnataka together as only 724, which must have been due to under-enumeration. The 1981 Census furnished the Koraga population of Kasaragod as 1098 (Ramal993: Unpublished, Sasikumar, 1996). A survey conducted by PRG Mathur (unpublished) of 251 households in 53 hamlets spread over 34 villages in Kerala including Kasaragod Municipality, Kumbla and Manjeswaram, which led him to estimate this section itself as comprising 1100 Koraga individuals. In Kerala, the bigger concentrations of Koraga are found in Peradala, Bela, Shiribagilu, Koipady, Enmakaje, Paivalika viages.

Table 2- Panchayat wise population of Koraga

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No:</th>
<th>Panchayat name</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Madhur</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Kasaragod Municipality</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Karadukka</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Enmakaje</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Badiyadka</td>
<td>407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Kumbla</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Bellur</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Manjeswaram</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Mangalpdy</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Vorkady</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Meencha</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Paivalike</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Puthige</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A large fraction of the Koraga are engaged with basket making (Plate 5). In olden days a few were engaged in scavenging. They used to beg rather than undertaking agriculture activities or minor forest produce collection. Koragas were
KORAGA SETTLEMENTS AND LIFE STYLE

A. Pallathadukka Koraga settlements  B. Badiyaduka Koraga colony  C. A Koraga house built by the Govt. at Puthige  D. Old Koraga couple at Kumbla Koraga settlement  E. A Koraga lady with her child  F. A Koraga tribal head at Badiyadukka
experts in crocodile capturing and they used to eat its flesh. Now none of this occupation could give them the subsistence level income for their livelihood. The conventional Koraga houses are thatched huts with grass or leaves, with open sides. Now more than 80% families have received departmental houses. The traditional God of Koraga is sun. Mariarnma and Kata (swami) are their popular Gods. However, the new generation is interested in worshipping the Hindu Gods (Plate 2 D).

6.1.5 Conversion of Christianity

According to the 1981 Census, 99.95% were Hindus; 0.05% was Christians in Karnataka, while in Kerala, 76.87% were Hindus 23.13% being Christians. Mathur's unpublished survey covering the period 1977-78 indicates that out of 255 households studied in Kunjathur, Iavur and Udayavara villages of Kasaragod, there 55 households who had embraced Christianity (personal communication).

6.1.6 Social Organization

The Koraga have remained traditional in their way of life style. The lowest social status they had in the local hierarchy has not changed. Das (1989: 150) identified Ande, Soppina or Suppu, Vatra, Kuntu, Kappadu, Tippi, Vanti, Kappatur, Bangaranna, Kammaranna and Mangaranna as endogamous sub groups. Each of them claimed superiority and higher status over the others, but the Ande Koraga was placed at the lowest. Thurston (1909) reported that Ande Koraga individuals had to hang a pot from their necks; they had to spit into it as they were strictly forbidden even to spit elsewhere. They had to take special permission to enter towns and villages during day, their presence at night in these habitats being completely prohibited. The endogamous subgroups are arranged in exogamous clans locally known as Bali. Each has its own bhuta or spirits ancestors represented by animate or inanimate objects. For example, the dumadi bhwta is associated with the Upparu clan and is represented by a wooden bench; the punjural bhwta is symbolized by the bronze image of a pig and is associated with the Peddanna clan (Das, 1989 & Panoor, 1963). Matrilineage prevailed among them in the past and is mother's clan. The authority was vested in their mother's brother. He had the right and responsibility to arrange their marriages and to perform all the important ceremonies relating to their life cycle rituals (Mathur, 1977). Monogamy is prevalent practice, even though polygamy is not prohibited. Sub-tribe endogamy and clan exogamy are strictly observed. If a woman of a higher section have sexual relation with a man considered to be of a lower group, it is a
serious offence, entailing punishments like shaving the head of the culprits, heavy fines, etc. Marriage with cross-cousins is not preferred but is permitted.

The hut of Krag has two or three sloping roofs of bamboo and grass or plaited coconut leaves thatch around a raised platform about 25 cm high. The eves come so low that one has to kneel while entering it through the small doorway. It has two parts, one serving as the kitchen and the other for living. Over the past couple of decades, the Government has built several brick and tile houses for them at Badiadka, Puthige, Kumbadaje etc. (Plate 4 A & C). A number of houses in a colony built for Koraga families in Badiadka were unoccupied because they were afraid the local population objected to their staying there and the Koraga were afraid of possible persecution. These conditions are of course rapidly changing and Koraga families learn fast. They used to prefer black or dark coloured clothes because the dirt would not show; they often did not have another piece to wear and so could not keep them washed or changed. The men normally wore a scanty piece of cloth round their loins; in the old days, the women could dress themselves only in leaf skirts worn round their waist. These have all changed now; males wear mundu, or lungi. A shirt may be worn when going out; some use under garments. When they go out on visits or outings, the men wear a cloth turban. While at work, both men and women wear a hard cap made of the areca nut spathe (muttapalai) which protects them from sun and rain and from contact with loads they may carry on their heads. It has a small fold inside where coins and currency notes may be kept, when doffed. It also serves as a convenient cup for drinking in the "old days", tea shop keepers would serve them tea only in their caps as their touch would "permanently" pollute precious cups and vessels and make them unacceptable to their more affluent clients. The women prefer saree and blouse for normal wear. They copy and adopt the prevalent fashions to the extent their purse allows. Sometimes they cut an old saree into two pieces and wear them as mundu at home. Elderly women do not mind being semi naked in the villages. The men could not afford ornaments nor were fond of them, but nowadays they wear brass and silver rings. Young women are extremely conscious of their dress and appearance and many of them, with their large lustrous eyes, are very pretty. They keep their dresses hanging coquettishly around their faces, adorned with flowers. Married women may wear a tali, but this is not obligatory (Das, 1889). Tattooing was common in the past, and known as kochchuvadu. Women had marks on their foreheads in the shape of a
PLATE - 5

A. Basket making, with the stem of *Calycopteris floribunda* Lam. a view from Kasaragod town. B. Peeling of stem before making baskets. C. Constructing base of the basket. D. Removing unwanted parts after completion. E. Final stage of basket making. F. A Koraga lady engaged in basket making in Badiyadukka colony.

BASKET MAKING

A. Basket making, with the stem of *Calycopteris floribunda* Lam. a view from Kasaragod town. B. Peeling of stem before making baskets. C. Constructing base of the basket. D. Removing unwanted parts after completion. E. Final stage of basket making. F. A Koraga lady engaged in basket making in Badiyadukka colony.
half moon or a circle and men on their left arms. It is now almost gone out of vogue.

Rice porridge is the preferred food, along with pulses and common vegetables. Roots and tubers collected from the jungle and tapioca, a little quantity grown in their compounds and the bulk purchased from the market, provides the staple when rice is scarce. The habit that their neighbours most detested was their preference for the carcasses of dead cattle which was their main protein source. When an animal dies, the owner notifies the Koraga families, five or six of them drag the carcass away and the meat is distributed among whole community. Mathur (ibid.) reported that the "Koraga do not cook the meat. The meat is generally kept in their huts for a week or so before consumption". They preserved the flesh for a few days and ate it until it was finished. The skin and bones are sold to the Muslim traders for a pittance. In the old days, the owner would pay a small amount to the Koraga for removing the carcass.

6.1.7 Economic Activity.

Traditionally the Koraga were agrastic slaves bought and sold along with the land by the masters. They used to be paid wages of paddy and rice along with salt when they worked for their masters. But they obviously did not like this obligation, as they preferred to living by making and selling baskets (Das, 1889; Mohanti, 2004) (Plate 5). They make a variety of basketry items like winnowing fans, cradles, baskets for carrying grains and baskets for carrying manures. The raw materials used for making baskets are bamboos, canes and varieties of creepers available from the jungles. The important plants are Leea asiatica (L.) Ridsd., Lantana camera L., Helicteres isora L., Bambusa arundinacea (Retz.) Willd, Calycopteris floribunda Lam., Calamus hookerianus Becc. etc. (Plate 5) The Koraga males would go to the forest about 40 Km. away in expeditions extending over a few days, and collect these, bring them home and the entire family would take them to the roadside, which was their workshop as well as sales point (Plate 5 A). A bill hook (kathi) and a thick needle (dabhanu) are the implements needed. Even though they are not expert agriculturists, they raise plantains, jack and other fruits and cashew in their small holdings. A few have taken to unskilled agricultural labour (see Plate 26 A). Some living near the forests has taken to collection and sale of honey and firewood. Some Koraga ladies are also engaged in beedi making as a part of income source nowadays (Plate 6 F).
KORAGA TRIBE - LIFE STYLE

A. Koraga lady, Karmina engaged in basket making
B. Rosi Alvaris, an old Koraga informant
C. Muntu, a Koraga informant at Kumbla colony
D. A typical Koraga family at Pallathadukka colony
E. Rama, an old Koraga informant
F. Korga lady engaged in beedi making
6.2 MAVILAN TRIBE

Mavilan tribal community are inhabitants at the northern districts of Kerala especially in Kasaragod and Hosdurgh Taluks of Kasaragod district and eastern hill places of Thaliparamba Taluk of Kannur district. According to Gothra heads (Gothra mooppanmar) they were inhabited in the forest in ancient times. But now they are living inter mingled with the local society. They are also distributed in some other places of south Canara districts of Karnataka. In the past, they were dependant on forest and forest produce. They had been leading a hunting, gathering and agriculture way of life until the encroachment of Janmi (landlord) to their habitat.

6.2.1 Origin

A number of opinions have been existing regarding the origin of the Mavilan Gothra. According to one belief some of the people residing in the forest were using the leaves of the plant known as Mavu (*Mangifera indica* L.) as cloths and they were called as Mavilan, which eventually turn to the name of the community. The first description on Mavilan community was published by Edgar Thurstan (1906) in his Ethnographic notes on Southern India. According to him Mavilan were Thuluvar (Thulu language speaking people). Mavilan are described in Madras Census Report (1901), as small tribe shikaris (hunters) and herbalists, who follow makkathayam (inheritance from father to son), and speak corrupt Tulu. Tulumar (native of the Tulu country) and Chingattan (lion-hearted people) were returned as sub-divisions. However, the real derivation must be sought in Tulu or Canarese, as it seems to be a Canarese caste. These people are found only in the Chirakkal Taluk of Malabar. Their present occupation is basket making. Succession is from father to son, but among some it is also said to be in the female line (Thurston, 1975). It is recorded in the Gazetteer of Malabar that the Mavilans are divided into Tulu Mavilans and Eda Mavilans and sub-divided into thirty illams. (Krishnan, 2002). They are employed as mahouts (drivers of elephants), and collect honey and other forest produce; their headmen are called chingam (simham means lion) and their huts mapura (Madhavan, 1984; Singh, 1993; Raju, 2002). Aiyappan (1948) had done his study as a part of the enquiry undertaken by the Aboriginal Tribes Welfare Enquiry Committee. He argues that the Mavilans are a North Malabar tribe omitted in the 1941 Census and he supports the view both of Thurston and Stuarts (Aiyappan, 1948). In The Tribes of
Kerala, (Luiz, 1962) discusses the customs of 48 tribes in Kerala. He had tried to record the details about the origin, life style, social structure, rituals and so on.

6.2.2 Population

According to 2011 census report their population is about 26572 within the state. Out of this, 12310 are males and 12800 females. In Kannur district, their population is 4403, out of which 2200 are males and 2203 are females. In Kasaragod district their population is 222574. Out of 39 Gramapanchayats their distribution is only restricted in 17.

Table 3- Panchayat wise list of Mavilan population

<table>
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<tr>
<th>No:</th>
<th>Panchayat</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Kanhangad municipality</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Pallikkere</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Pullur Periya</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Balal</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Kodom Belur</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Kollar</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Panathady</td>
<td>954</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Bedadka</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Kuttikkole</td>
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<td>West Eleri</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Kinanur</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>East Eleri</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Kayyur Cheemeni</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Pilicode</td>
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</table>

6.2.3 Distribution

The culture, rituals and believes of Mavilan are unique and posses an ethnic identity of their own. Their major settlements are seen in Chengala, Puthigae,
Karadukka, Kodom, Belloor, Kinnanur, Karimthalam, Badiyadukka, Balal, Kallar and Panathady panchayats of Kasaragod district (Map 3).

6.2.4 Language

The Mavilan tribes inhabiting in the Kasaragod district use a special type of language within the community. It is an intermingled language of Malayalam, Kannada and Tulu. But the Mavilans inhabiting in the Thaliparamba Taluk of Kannur district speaks Malayalam for communication. According to the tribal heads Tulu was the language in olden days.

6.2.5 Rituals and beliefs

At present Mavilan tribal community constitute 13 families (Kudumbam). In early days the right to take decision on the marriage of his slave Mavilan was done by the local ruler (Kovilakathe Thampuran) (Kunjambu, 2011). The marriage within the family was not allowed. They preferred to settle in colonies by making huts in the agriculture areas, in order to protect their crops from the attack of wild animals and mostly they are involved in group farming. In these groups the oldest person becomes the colony head (Colony Mooppan) (Plate 7 A), and he is the authority for rituals and ceremonies.

The marriage process of Mavilan tribal community is unique and the parents of bride will be given with a ‘Kaanam’, that is a particular quantity of paddy and fixed amount of money (Anjekaal Panam). But now all these olden system are replaced and they are adopting modern systems as a part of modern civilization.

Mangalamkali was a very popular and unique dance form prevailed among the Mavilan tribes related to marriage ceremonies. Today it is very popular folklore art among the societies. Theyyam forms play a very important role in the social, cultural and ritual aspects of Kasaragod district. Theyyam is a highly ritualistic dance, well preserved with its rare and grotesque make-up and costume. It represents a glorious period of folk-life in Kannur, Kasaragod as well as in Kerala. The gods and goddesses are supposed to come in our midst through the medium of the possessed dancers and converse with us on matters of even contemporary significance. It is sometimes found that Theyyams pronounce judgments on temporal matters and give blessings to the believers. In north Malabar even though more than ten communities perform Theyyam thiras, the Mavilan dominates among them for performing this ritual dance mostly in rural areas. There are two types of Theyyam forms- Malayalam forms
PLATE - 7

MAVILAN TRIBES

A. Mavilan tribal head, Valiya Mani at Panathur settlement
B. Kumbha, a Mavilan informant at Pariyaram
C. A Mavilan lady sitting in front of the house built by the Govt.
D. Raman, a Mavilan informant
E. Umbichi, Mavilan informant wearing cap made of spathe of Areca nut tree at Belur
F. Group discussion with the tribes at Kammadi
(speaking Malayalam) and Tulu forms (speaking tulu). They perform more than 35 Tulu forms and are called Tuluvuttha Theyyam. The Theyyam dance is performed during the festivals of the shrines. It had grown through centuries to its present form. Theyyam is essentially a human creation; it has an absolute relationship with man in giving vent to his strong feelings against injustice and wickedness and his desire to maintain the well-being of the society (Suresh, 2003). The head gear or the mask, made of locally available materials from nature and painted with natural colours, assumes a grotesque and archetypal image with the blending of highly artistic and emotive display. The folk singer, while he sings out in a loud voice, accompanying Theyyam or along with his own dancing steps, uses simple, but effective language and straight, but thought provoking images.

6.2.6 Food habits

The raw rice is pounded and made to porridge and taken. A lot of wild edible plants are taken for meeting their nutritional source. Wild leafy vegetables, edible fruits, tubers, rhizomes, mushrooms, honey etc. were the main nutritina supplements. All these raw materials provide nutrient supply and also provide income for their day to day life. This hidden nutrient resource harvested by the Mavilan tribal people and made use wherever and whenever available.

6.2.7 Economic activities

Mavilan tribes were landless in olden days and are agriculture labours of land lord (Janmi). Mostly they preferred shifting cultivation (Suresh, 2010). Shifting cultivation, slash and burn is an ancient form of agriculture practiced by between 200 and 500 million people around the world today (Joseph and Cornell, 2006). The shifting cultivation is started in the first day of Malayalam month ‘Dhanu’. Multi cropping system is practiced, mainly for ‘landlord’. While working in the fields they wear a particular type of cap made of spathe of areca nut tree (Plate 7 E).

Every member in the family work together. The persons who were not able to work in the fields were engaged in making artifacts especially different types of baskets. Nature of work was different on the basis of age (Kunjambu, 2011). 8-12 years old children has assigned to keep away the crops from birds and insects. 15-18 years were assigned to feed cattles. Mature people for work in the fields. Old ladies were assigned for making mats (Plate 26 C).
PLATE - 8

MAVILAN TRIBE

A. Traditional Mavilan worship place (Pathi) where the Theyyam dance performed at Panathady
B. Worship place a view from Kodom Belur
C. Mavilan tribal settlement at Kleenippara
D. A Mavilan tribal hut at Kallar
E. An old Mavilan couple
F. Raman, Mvilan informant at Bedadukka