CHAPTER III

Methodology

The literature review and the conceptual framework reveal that the top down development models and the dominant development discourses relying on positivist methodology do not give due importance to the voices and experiences of the Adivasis. This leads to imposing the perspectives of scientists or policy makers upon the people. The programme of ‘planning from the above’ that follows the positivist methodology neglects the voice of the people (Jayaram 2006). This study calls for an interpretive approach. The interpretivist thinking emerged from the German intellectual traditions of hermeneutics and the verstehen tradition in sociology. Proponents of this position aim at understanding the reality from the point of view of the subject who is living in that reality. In order to understand the meaning, one has to interpret the reality. Weber (1947) discusses some of the foundations of a systematic science of Verstehende Soziologie, a system of sociological categories in terms of the subjective point of view, that is, the meaning of things, ideas, normative patterns, and motives from the point of view of the persons whose actions are being studied. Weber stresses that sociology should develop the method of interpretive understanding. Benton and Craib (2001) note that Weber’s use of the word verstehen is sometimes translated as ‘empathy’, an emotional identification with the actors.

However, as Jayaram (2006) points out, Weber does not follow an anti-positivist perspective but is concerned that sociology should examine the meaning underlying social action, and further maintains that a positivistic type of explanation for such action is possible. Benton and Craib (2001) point out that Weber believes that the social sciences are primarily concerned with meaning, and in particular with individual meaning or the ways in which shared cultural meanings affect the actions of the individual. At the same time, Weber points out that the verification of subjective interpretation using cause and effect relations is something indispensable. According to Weber, the ability to grasp the subjective quality of human behaviour is dependent upon the sociologist’s ability to interpret the causal meaning of human action (Benton and Craib 2001) and thus he attempts to balance subjectivity and objectivity in his theoretical formulations. However,
as Benton and Craib (2001) point out, by causal adequacy, Weber does not mean what natural scientists mean by the term. For instance, he notes that it is not possible to give an over-arching or general account of the rise of capitalism, but he identifies a number of contributing factors which explain the reality, such as the legal and the economic preconditions for the rise of capitalism (ibid).

The main theme in hermeneutics is that the meaning of a text can be understood in relation to the whole. The part which was initially a passage from the Bible or the Greek classics now includes the written texts in general and the spoken word or any act. A hermeneutic approach meant that the parts can only be understood in reference to the whole and the whole in reference to the parts. Similarly, the ‘whole’ meant to place the text in its context, which meant taking into account the author of the text or social actors in an event, their background and socio-cultural environment from which a text or an act emerges. Any understanding thus presupposes a meaning context that within this context alone anything can appear meaningful. That means ‘our understanding cannot be a presupposition less comprehension of something given in experience’ (Tharakan2006:23).

The interpretive and hermeneutic approaches that give importance to the experience, voice and meaning of the subjects in their specific contexts have guided research in different fields such as feminist, phenomenological, critical and cultural studies. Feminist theories emphasise that knowledge is not separate from experience and stress the importance of subjectivity in their theoretical formulations while accepting the material base of women’s oppression. Further, feminist standpoint theories point out that the context from which one observes the reality shapes what he or she sees and thus knowledge is socially situated (Harding 1991). They stress the inquiry of social context, the power relations of ruling which organise everyday life for analysing experience (Smith 1987). They criticise the male bias in science and stress the plurality of knowledge as well as plurality of experience of different people and propose practice based theories instead of proved models. Thus, the feminist theory helps understand the multiple subjective experiences of Adivasis within the family, community, among different Adivasi communities and in the non-Adivasi ‘mainstream’ society and also helps to explore the multiple forms of marginalisation.
This study aspires to delineate and explain the perceptions and experiences of the Adivasis on development/marginalisation and follows an interpretive paradigm giving importance to the subjective experiences of the people. Since marginalisation is both an objective and subjective reality, this study attempts to understand this process in the socio-cultural and historical contexts as well as in the everyday lived experiences of the Adivasi communities. Thus, this study draws upon insights from feminist, phenomenological and critical indigenous methodologies.

At the national level as well as the state level, a huge administrative set up has been constituted for Adivasi development. At the same time, the literature shows that Adivasis are facing abject poverty and threat of extinction due to various issues. According to Lester (nd), using a phenomenological approach is effective in delineating the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives, which therefore challenges structural or normative assumptions. He points out that adding an interpretive dimension to phenomenological research, enabling it to be used as the basis for practical theory, allows it to inform, support or challenge policy and action. According to Tharakan (2006), a phenomenological methodology opens up the possibility of integrating the different goals of scientific enquiry, namely description, explanation, and critique by synthesising the empirical and interpretive elements of social scientific inquiry. Thus, phenomenology mediates positivist and anti-positivist methodologies without losing its centrality on subjective experiences and alongside, it elaborates the scope to an interpretive and intuitive realm in explaining the reality objectively. Das et al (2001) open a new area in anthropology with their phenomenological explorations of the subjectivities formed out of everyday violence as well as extreme forms of state violence and the ways people cope with or resist and address the complex nature of subjectivities. The consciousness of the subject and the meaning they give to their actions are also given due importance in the theoretical formulations of Scott (1985).

However, as Scott (1985) points out a pure phenomenology may not unravel the reality holistically as behaviour and speech can be automatic and unreflective and may not be raised to the level of consciousness. According to him, a careful observer must provide an interpretation of such behaviour which is more than just a repetition of the common sense knowledge of the participants. As an interpretation, it has to be judged by
the standards of its logic and its consistency with other known social facts. As Scott reminds, the observer/researcher cannot negate the possibility that human agents may also provide contradictory accounts of their own behavior or they may wish to conceal their meaning from the observer or from one another, of which they are scarcely aware. However, Scott also notes that there may be factors in any situation that shed light on the action of human agents. As Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008:135) point out, the ‘epistemological colonialism’ and the trends in modern development views indigenous knowledge as a commodity to be exploited. They point out that a critical dimension of the study of indigenous people involves the insights they bring into the epistemology and ontology of knowledge creation as ‘colonised’ people. The emerging indigenous methodologies affirm the multiple perspectives and multilogicality in understanding the complex social realities and the Adivasi’s experience of development (ibid). Denzin, Lincoln and Smith (2008) point out that the research is always moral and political and stress the importance of decolonising Western epistemologies using critical and indigenous enquiry. According to Battiste (2008), the indigenous people’s epistemology is derived from their immediate ecology, their perceptions and experiences, thoughts and memory and their spiritual worlds interpreted by their elders. Battiste stresses the need for reconstruction and renewal of indigenous people’s world views, environment, language and communication forms from within when they face threats of destruction of their language and cultures. While studying the colonised, subordinated, indigenous Maori groups of New Zealand, Smith (2005) argues that decolonisation and demystification of research methodologies are necessary to acknowledge and interpret the power relations and give voice to the marginalised groups. She stresses the importance of knowledge that indigenous people bring into the epistemology and research as colonised people. She affirms that representing the voices of the indigenous people are not enough but the spaces of marginalisation have to be transformed into spaces of resistance and hope and the research must contribute towards this transformation. Finally, referring to Lincoln and Guba (1985), Baviskar (1995) points out that there are multiple realities constructed by people in different ontological positions and inquiry into these multiple realities may not lead to a unified truth, but it enriches our understanding of divergent socially situated truths. Baviskar (1995) follows a bottom up approach in favouring the Adivasis instead of uncritically accepting the state’s representation of Adivasis. In the midst of contested
realities and interpretations about Adivasis, this study favours the Adivasi point of view and how they perceive state policies and programs.

**Methods of Gathering Information**

Qualitative studies are usually more intensive and in-depth in nature and choose small communities to get a holistic perspective about the phenomena by collecting data from multiple stakeholders and by using multiple tools for data collection. Ethnography has been found to be the most appropriate qualitative method to achieve the objectives of the study.

**Ethnography**

While historical write ups favour the one who invaded landscapes, the official constructs of development discourse favour the powerful and the dominant. From this point of view, Adivasis are perceived as uncivilised and ‘mainstreaming’ is the panacea prescribed by the dominant for their development. In this materialistic view of progress, their distinct cultures and their values are undervalued and neglected. In my experience of working with the Adivasi communities in Wayanad, I have noticed that the dominant communities and institutions in Wayanad perceive that Adivasis are culturally deficient and a homogenisation of culture is advocated instead of appreciating their differences.

Mathur (2006) points out that the native’s point of view is the fulcrum of ethnography and that a complete immersion into their culture is necessary to understand their perceptions and experiences of development, their values and motives. This calls for ethnographic field work. According to Bryman (2001) ethnographers immerse themselves in society and its culture to give a descriptive data through field work, a perspective of the meaning actors attach to their social world. According to Marcus and Fischer (1986:18), ‘ethnography is a research process in which the anthropologist closely observes, records and engages in the daily life of another culture - an experience labelled as the field work method – and then writes accounts of this culture, emphasising descriptive detail’. They point out that contemporary ethnography breaks through the cultural anthropology, which emphasises a general theory of culture and embraces a reflection of doing ethnographic field work and writing. They note that a good ethnography is one which explains the
conditions of field work, of everyday life and the micro processes capturing indigenous ideas, their meanings and subjectivity.

According to Hammerslay and Atkinson (1983), ethnography involves the ethnographer participating in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time observing listening and asking questions. According to Smith (2001) ethnography allows the researcher a degree of penetration into the inner working of an occupation or work setting that is not easily available by other methods. This research demanded a long period of stay (one year and six months with the Kurichias, and six months with the Paniya community) and interaction with the people, participating in their life world to interpret the meanings and processes in their life. The flexibility allowed in ethnography helped capture different perspectives of different actors from their respective sub universes and enabled comparisons and analysis of different perspectives. For instance, different perspectives and expressions on the development and practices of non-Adivasi and Adivasi actors gave more insights into the context than by concentrating only on Paniyas and Kurichias point of view.

Further, highlighting the flexibility and maximum scope of ethnography, O’Reilly (2005) notes that each ethnographer will choose the extent to which he/she wishes to incorporate historical or macro factors, the extent to which to be critical or to engage in cultural politics, and the range of methods to be employed beyond direct and sustained contact, watching, listening and enquiring.

Combining various definitions, O’Reilly (2005:3) gives a critical definition of ethnography stating that it is an ‘iterative-inductive research’ drawing on ‘a family of methods’, ‘involving direct and sustained contact with human agents which is context specific and produces a rich account that respects the irreducibility of human experience as well as the role of theory and the researcher’s own role, and that views humans as part object and part subject.

Multiple tools such as participant and non participant observation, in-depth unstructured interviews (for individuals and groups), interviews of key informants (elders, leaders, educated members etc. among Adivasis), group discussions, case narratives and informal conversations have been used for data collection. Different sites (their home,
work place, market, schools, hospitals, worship places etc.) have been observed to understand the unspoken processes and patterns in their experience of development. For in-depth interviews, the interview guide helped facilitate discussion and made sure that the major themes were covered. Participant and non-participant observation helped understand the inclinations, motives, and subcultures present in both the communities and their symbolic and material resistance and coping mechanisms.

While the Kurichias are very articulate, the Paniyas are generally reticent and not very forthcoming. The silence and withdrawal of the Paniya community may be the result of slavery and violence they have experienced from the settler communities for many years. Generally, they hesitate to say ‘no’ to the settler community if they call them for daily wage labour. They silently skip the labour except for rare occasions of confrontation. The non-Adivasi communities perceive this behaviour as laziness, dishonesty, pride due to government support etc. and they adopt different methods including distribution of liquor to get them for wage labour. Is the Paniya’s noncompliance a way of resistance to the settler community? Or in their culture is there no recognition or concept of daily wage labour? There were rare incidents of slave labour among the Kurichias and they articulated those experiences with anger and frustration.

According to Fetterman (1989) participant observation is the key method of ethnography and it demands participation in the lives of people under study and observation and recording of data. According to Upadhyaya (1999), participant observation combines the objective observation - the outsider’s view - with close interaction or participation in their social life to acquire subjective understanding from the inside. She highlights that with the immersion into another culture, a mental leap is possible to see the world from the perspective of another culture. I cannot claim that my experience was one of complete participation or complete immersion in all their activities and culture. My participation shifted from participation to observation to discussion. In their ritual celebrations, they tried to involve me as much as possible without breaking the boundaries. The Paniyas allowed me the freedom to enter their prayer rooms and see the activities of their religious functionaries. When it came to participating in the rituals of the Kurichias, my being a ‘non-Adivasi’ and a ‘woman’ posed limitations. Even their own women’s entry into the kavu, temple premise and daivappura (special room kept for
their ancestor gods) was restricted. I was cautious not to hurt the sensibilities of the participants as far as possible.

When it came to activities like wage labour, I could not participate in the same way as they did, but tried to be with them observing, discussing and sometimes helping. Fifteen years ago, while staying with an Adivasi family in Attappady, I realised that experience can differ even though I participated in the same activity. I approached the employer for wage labour with the Adivasi workers. First, the employer was hesitant to employ me and was wary about my identity. However, he agreed when I expressed my desire to work. Unfortunately, the work was cutting cotton plants for replanting and it was a difficult task for me. I worked hard and by evening, I had blisters on my hands; when the land owner noticed my hands, he asked me to not to work. More than an experience of subjugation, for me it was an experience of rejection. During the study period, unlike the other members in the family, I could not go get wage labour and support the Adivasi family with my wage earnings.

Field notes were prepared daily, based on observation, each day’s experience and informal conversations. The data collected included primary accounts of the study containing field work procedures, cultural narratives of the communities and the ethnographer’s personal and theoretical reflections. As experience and observation cannot be counted as complete evidence for explaining people’s motives and their views of reality, semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted with key participants as the principal means in eliciting data. According to Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Liao (2004), interviewing is one of the most important data gathering techniques of ethnographers, which helps to explain and understand the broad context of what one sees and experiences. To understand the changes over time, older members as well as youth, both men and women were interviewed. Other qualitative techniques like group discussions and case studies were also employed under the frame work of ethnography. According to Creswell (2007), in ethnography, the thrust is to understand how the culture works rather than to understand an issue or problem using a case as a specific illustration. Individual cases of health and illness among the Paniyas and Kurichias were collected to explain their health problems in the context of their experience of different systems of medicine. Informal conversations and unstructured interviews were conducted in their ‘natural
group gatherings’ (family gatherings or colony gatherings) as there was greater scope for free conversations and flow of ideas.

**Research Site**

The selected Paniya and Kurichia settlements became the core areas for in-depth study and the Panchayats in which their settlements were located became the next level for investigation. The whole of Wayanad district became the third level of investigation as development sites like Adivasi departments, District headquarters, schools and hospitals they utilise are spread all over Wayanad. As development/lack of development experience cannot be isolated from the broader context of Wayanad and its history, the broader location of Wayanad was selected to meet important officials. The land struggles and initiatives of the Adivasis for self development cannot be understood without exploring the broader context of Wayanad and the history of land ownership in the region.

![Fig 3.1: Wayanad District](http://tourskeralam.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Wayanad-Map.jpg) accessed on February 1st 2012.
The Panchayats with considerable Adivasi population and representation of both the communities were preferred for selection of settlements. The Panchayats selected for in-depth study were Edavaka, Mananthavady, Thirunelli and Thavinjal Panchayats in Mananthavady block and Ambalavayal and Noolpuzha Panchayats in Bathery block. Mananthavady block was given priority due to the significant presence of both Kurichia as well as Paniya communities. Thirunelli Panchayat in Mananthavady block and Noolpuzha Panchayat in Bathery block were selected due to their active presence in the Adivasi land struggle. Edavaka and Thavinjal Panchayats in Mananthavady block were appreciated for the better functioning of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), a programme implemented in all the Panchayats in Wayanad. The settlements in the interior areas, closer to the forests and ‘development’ infrastructure (schools, hospitals, markets, highways etc.), were included in the study to get maximum divergence in the data. The Panchayat and settlements selected for collecting primary data are given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block Panchayat</th>
<th>Gram Panchayat</th>
<th>Settlement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mananthavady</td>
<td>Edavaka</td>
<td>One Paniya colony</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>One Kuricha <em>tharavad</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thirunelly</td>
<td>One Paniya colony</td>
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<td></td>
<td>One Kuricha colony</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mananthavady</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Thavinjal</td>
<td>One Kuricha <em>tharavad</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bathery</td>
<td>Ambalavayal</td>
<td>One Paniya colony</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Noolpuzha</td>
<td>One Paniya colony</td>
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4 Thavinjal panchayt received the award for spending maximum amount for NREGS in Wayanad District and a Kurichiya Panchayat member Jaya from this panchayat spent maximum amount in her ward and came first in all India level.
In the chapters pseudo names are used to name the participants and the settlements to maintain anonymity. Tulsi Kurichia tharavad in Thavinjal panchayat was selected since elements of tharavad culture exist there alongside their better landholding, group agriculture and representation in the local Panchayat. The large number of voters in the tharavad and the special status assigned to the tharavad due to the large extent of landholding gave them a voice in the Panchayat and party politics. A Panchayat member of this tharavad became a Minister in 2010. In Thavinjal Panchayat, among the Paniyas, it was difficult to find a colony that had at least a minimum landholding and representation in the local Panchayat. In Ambalavayal Panchayat, Richur Paniya colony was selected as it partially satisfied these criteria. They had a landholding extending from 15 cents to 1 acre. In this colony, the leader of the oorukottam had initiated a struggle to protect their burial land and achieved success. A Paniyan from that area, and a relative of the oorukottam leader was selected as a Panchayat member. They had struggled for land and had achieved partial success in accessing land records. Arayal colony in Thirunelly Panchayat and Kunnil colony in Edavaka Panchayat were selected noticing the exceeding number of school dropouts. Arayal colony is interior, but Pathilkunnu is in the proximity of the school and other infrastructure facilities. The presence of a number of ‘unwed mothers’ was another criterion for selecting Arayal colony. Champa Kurichia colony in Thirunelly Panchayat was selected to include the nuclear families of Kurichias and to study the differences in development perceptions and experiences in comparison to the tharavad. The Adivasis’s history of bonded labour is very much connected with Valliyoorakkavu temple. So the Paniya community from Vally colony and Kurichia community from Karpuram tharavad closely associated with temple activities were also included in the study specially to collect data related to Valliyoorakkavu. Noolpuzha, Alippura Paniyan colony was selected as Paniya women and men from this colony actively participated in the Muthanga struggle as well as land struggle with their neighbours. The number of houses in a Paniya colony is not fixed but ranges from 9 to 50 in the study area and the size of a Kurichia tharavad also varies as the typical tharavad structure no more exists after the partition of property among the members.

While selecting colonies and households, variations in material conditions and household composition was maintained to get maximum divergence in data. Among Paniyas, Mooppan’s (male head of the Paniya settlement) family and in the case of
Kurichias, the Karanavan’s (traditional male head) family was included as they had more knowledge about the history of the entire settlement as well as the individual families in the settlement. Other criteria followed while selecting the household include

1) extended families having at least two generations in the case of Paniyas and tharavads (joint family) in the case of Kurichias

2) nuclear families from both the communities

3) families in which the householder or any member has at least primary education

4) families having school going children as education is one of the main themes in the study.

As development cannot be separated from the history and context, communities in the same settlement with a rather long period of stay (more than 20 years) were preferred for collecting data. For elaborate study, two tharavads, one from Mananthavady and another from Edavaka panchayat and two nuclear families in Champa were selected from the Kurichia community. From the Paniya community, one extended family and two nuclear families were selected from Edavaka, Kunnil colony; Thirunelly, Arayal colony and Ambalavayal-Richur colony.

Research Participants and Process of Data Collection

Informal conversation with Paniyas and Kurichias with an aim to do research started in 2006. My friends in other organisations as well as relatives in Wayanad helped me with some contacts in colonies and tharavads in some of the panchayats. Other areas were explored using the help of Adivasi promoters as well as through self exploration by collecting details from previously visited Adivasi settlements, from fellow researchers as well as from local people. As per the custom in the Adivasi community, the Paniya Mooppan or Kurichia Karanavan of the settlement has to be informed first and permission has to be taken from them for any interaction in the settlement. Even though such customary rules are fading in recent times due to increased involvement of the political parties in the colonies, it was necessary for building trust and assuring cooperation. For instance, their role as decision makers in the rituals and agriculture operations (especially in the case of Kurichias) has not yet changed and this has given
them certain authority over the community. My research began with visits to the houses in each Paniya and Kurichia settlement and engaging in informal conversations with them. Meanwhile, the informal conversations and interviews with some of the key persons helped me to understand the Adivasi development scenario in Wayanad which was helpful to formulate the objectives and methodology for this study. Since the rapport was built earlier, except in two newly included settlements, the insertion into the community was easy when I started my field work for the study in 2009.

Primary data was collected from the above mentioned settlements of Kurichias and Paniyas, and their Adivasi leaders and elders. Data was collected between the periods, April 2009 to April 2010. There were further visits to fill the gaps in the data at regular intervals. Key informants were selected while staying with each family. The main criteria in selecting key informants were resourcefulness and capacity to articulate their development experience in their day to day life as an individual and within their community. Even though more equitable sharing of power and consensus in decision making was seen among the members of the Adivasi communities, differential power relations was not totally absent among them. So there were efforts to include the powerful as well as powerless, the materially better off and the materially disadvantaged while selecting the key informants in an attempt to balance the power differentials. This helped in cross checking the data. When the key participants were not aware of the details of programmes such as NREGS and Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), others were called for help and discussion. Efforts were made to include people from different age groups for interviews and discussions. The age groups included were 16 to 30, 30 to 60 and 60 and above. Precautions were taken to give equal representation to men and women in the interviews and discussions. Other than this, Kurichia and Paniya elders, their religious functionaries and Karanavans or Mooppans were interviewed from other areas to understand their culture from different stakeholders. Flexibility was allowed and at times interviews ended in discussions and informal conversations. There were around 32 key informants, 16 from Paniya and 16 from the Kurichia community, who provided voluminous data for the research study.

State initiatives for the development of the Adivasis were probed, as well as the non Adivasi and official narratives regarding them. Informants from Adivasi communities
were not familiar with all the state policies, programmes and the administrative setup implementing these programmes. It seemed relevant to study the gap in the administrative understanding and interventions, and the Adivasi ways of understanding and functioning of the state initiatives. So in-depth interviews were also conducted with Adivasi leaders (even though a few were not residents of the selected settlements), political leaders, Adivasi development officers, non Adivasis, school authorities and teachers, health personnel and the leaders of different organisations and movements giving importance to their relevant area of involvement with Paniyas and Kurichias or Adivasi development initiatives. The ethnographic method gave scope to the multiple voices to be heard and analysed. Interviews were tape recorded if participants gave their consent. Interviews were transcribed and written in narrative form.

Secondary data was collected from various Adivasi study centers such as the Kerala Institute for Research and Training and Development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (KIRTADS) in Kozhikode, Swaminathan Research Foundation (SRF) in Wayanad, and other sources such as the Centre for Development Studies and State Archives both located in Thiruvanthapurum, the Solidarity Library and Pazhassi Library in Mananthavady and Thudi Kala Kendram at Eachom, Wayanad. Kerala University Library and Loyola College Library in Thiruvananthapuram were visited for collecting secondary data. Data was also collected from newspaper reports, local magazines and articles, Adivasi Development Departments, Schools, Educational offices, the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan Centre, Health Departments and Hospitals.

**Field Work Experience – A Few Glances**

I began my field work in Edavaka Panchayat of Wayanad district. It was a familiar area for me as both my brother and sister stay in that Panchayat. While going to Pathilkunnu Paniyan colony, people enquired about my purpose and I explained about my research study among Paniyas and Kurichias. One Muslim friend asked me in a teasing tone … “You are here to reform Paniyas? They will not change. Are you not interested to study about our community?” Within few days I understood that this was not an exceptional comment from one individual but the perception of the majority of the non-Adivasis in the area. I have not seen non-Adivasis engaging in friendly talk with the Paniyas except when they were required for work and business. When I started interacting with them,
engaged in friendly talk in small market centres, non-Adivasis started staring at me with a question mark. Going with them to the tea shops resulted in strange glances from the non-Adivasis. One day while going to a Paniya colony, a friend from the rich landed class enquired where I was going with the sleeping mats. I told him that I was going to a Paniya family to stay and they had only two torn mats and there were 8 members to sleep on those mats. Suddenly he said… “They are drunkards and lazy people and that is the only reason for their poverty. The Government is giving them free provisions and so they can stay lazy. Don’t try to make them lazier. My family also had nothing when we came as migrants to Wayanad and by hard work only we earned our living.” Perhaps, he was not aware of the fact that the huge chunk of land he worked to earn livelihood and owned as private property was the land over which the Adivasis wandered freely collecting firewood and food items until not very long ago. One day, Paniya women living near to his house told me that when they entered his land for collecting firewood his wife shouted at them “…do not take firewood from our land…. let it decay and become manure for the soil”. Paniya people were hesitant to share all these stories but when I started staying with them, sharing food with them, joining them in minor work and visiting them in their work site etc. they started treating me like an insider and the other non-Adivasis became ‘they’ while describing their experience to me. On the first day Paniya people were doubtful whether I will eat their food or not and they were happy and generous to me when I started sharing food with them. At the beginning they were doubtful because usually non-Adivasis do not eat from their houses even today in Kerala.

Fixing up time for interviews and attending rituals according to their timing was really a challenge to cope with in the beginning. On the occasion of therandu kalyanam (puberty) in Pathilkunnu colony the rituals started very late and all their relatives waited till past midnight up to 2’o clock for dinner. I felt tired and impatient after 12’o clock and started criticising them in mind for prolonging it till 2’o clock. Paniyas remained calm engrossed in their own roles like dancing, playing thudi and kuzhal (musical instrument like pipe), performing rituals, cooking etc. and I really appreciated their capacity to live in the present moment. Dancing with the Paniya women helped me to overcome my impatience. However, I realised my obsession with time, and with tomorrow. Boudieu’s reflections on time was apt here as he notes that discovery of time as something can be wasted or saved or the concept of lost time or well filled time is connected with the
capitalist money economy. The Paniya people are not found worried about not finishing the rituals according to the earlier plan and it appeared that for them time was not connected with past or future but stands still as the pre capitalist experience of time mentioned by Bourdieu in his work on ‘the attitude of Algerian peasants on time’.\(^5\) For the non Adivasi the time spent consciously unemployed becomes time wasted and it prevents rational calculation of the future and Paniyas enjoyment of leisure becomes lazyness in their view. It appears that, it is not just a clash between Adivasi and non-Adivasis but between two world views- capitalist and non capitalist or economy centered on money and economy centered on social embeddedness.

The general opinion of the non Adivasis about the Kurichia community was a positive one and few of them even promised to take me to the Kurichia tharavad, three km away from town. Since I knew a Paniya youth who had studied with a Kurichia youth from that tharavad, I decided to go with him. When the auto reached near the tharavad yard, the Paniya youth told the auto driver to stop. After getting down he said, “Now you go, I will wait here”. I forced him to come with me and then he said… “If I enter their yard they have to take bath. Why should I give trouble to that old Karanavan sitting there?” He explained how the pollution taboo was very strict earlier and how some of the educated younger generation move freely with them outside the premises of their tharavads now. But in the tharavad even now, they believe in the practice of pollution. While they show warmth and hospitality with other visitors outwardly, during the entire period of field work Paniya people were never seen entering Kurichia tharavad.

While meeting people from the political parties and administrative departments there was support as well as some resistance to share information suspecting that it was going to be a study critically looking into the administrative and policy level implication of development programmes to the Adivasis. An Anganwadi helper who promised to give all the details, did not cooperate and she said that the police had given her the duty of informing them if anybody came to stay with the Adivasis in their colony. She added that once people from Porattam (which literally mean fight and in her view a naxalite group in Wayanad) came and lived in the same house I was staying in. She said that the

Adivasis may get influenced by their ideology when they eat and stay with them. Even after sharing my history as a spiritual seeker and my work experience with the Adivasis elsewhere, she was not willing to share detailed information as she had during my first visit. As an Adivasi Mooppan in that colony said, she came as a dependent on the Adivasis, became an anganwadi helper and then a Panchayat member with the support of the Communist Party. Usually, researchers go to the colonies with the support of Adivasi promoters or a political party leader or some other non-Adivasi acquaintance. Since I had done the pilot study earlier in that colony there was no need for another person to introduce me. However, the non-Adivasis were not just curious but showed uneasiness about a strange woman staying with Adivasis without being introduced or accompanied by a locally known person. The area was ‘infamous’ for the Jenmi (land lord) brutality towards Adivasis and the ‘Naxalite’ resistance against them in the past.

Other initiatives such as teaching the Adivasi children was challenged in one colony. In Pathilkunnu Paniya colony, parents asked me to teach their children when I stayed with them to collect data. I was happy to contribute something to them in return for their time and the knowledge they had generously shared with me. But after one week of classes, a Hindu organisation (Muttil Vivekananda mission) sent a person claiming that it was their tuition centre. I told them that I was there only for a short period and asked them to teach regularly. They seemed relieved with my explanation but never returned. When I left for other colonies and tried to shift the class to my sister’s house so that one of my sisters could help them in their studies, the children attended the classes for one day and did not turn up later. There were comments “…is this an initiative for starting an Ambedkar model school here?” Gradually, I realised that the comments were from non-Adivasis who recruit Paniyas for work in distant Kodagu as well as from those who do petty business with them. All these initial experiences gave me a glimpse of the cultural politics and the power relations that exist among the Adivasi and non-Adivasis in the study area; it also revealed the importance of gathering information from non-Adivasis to understand their construction of Adivasis within the local context.

When I accompanied the Paniyas to the Panchayat and Adivasi development offices where they tried to procure necessary documents or avail themselves of some facilities, I realised the difficulties they faced. They were unaware of many schemes and their claims
were often rejected. The researcher’s identity and acquaintance with the Panchayat members helped the community members to avail themselves of some benefits.

In certain cases, the key participants among Paniyas were not aware of the laws and policies in favour of them. They used to describe them in one word, either “good” or “bad”. In such cases, I collected the leaflets and materials regarding the programmes and discussed them with the key informants in the second round of interviews to understand their viewpoints. Among the Paniyas, an overwhelming majority of those interviewed were ignorant or had only partial information about the laws and policies favouring them. The Kurichias were better in collecting details regarding the development programmes meant for them. There were Paniyas as well as Kurichias who were ignorant about the toll free number to register their complaints directly to the NREGS administrative cell and their right to apply for unemployment benefits in cases where the authorities failed to provide them with employment. There were whole Paniyan and Kurichiyan settlements that did not come to know about the adalat kept for clearing their complaints.

While a large amount of information is collected by state agencies, accessing official data for research is becoming increasingly difficult. Many departments maintained that the files were ‘not up-to-date’. Finally, I was compelled to use the Right to Information (RTI) Act to access some basic data regarding education and health. But even this did not help when I asked for details of the landholdings of Adivasis and big planters. I got either partial information or nothing at all. Some offices responded by asking me to search the files for data. When I went again to the offices, their excuse was that if there was a case in the court against any landholding, there was no provision to provide data. On repeated requests, they agreed to collect the data from the concerned departments, but were reluctant to show me important files. Considering this enormous delay in collecting information, I started enquiring about other sources. The taluka offices where big plantations were involved in ongoing court cases showed maximum resistance in sharing information. However, a sub collector who was dealing with the pending plantation cases in one of the talukas shared some data even though the hearing of cases was going on. A visit to the encroached sites and the Patta (land document) distribution sites helped me understand their feelings about their struggle and the processes of land distribution by the government.
I attended cultural festivals like Valliyoor kavu utsavam (festival), thira utsavam at Thonichal and Valad, where the Kurichias and Paniyas actively participate. I also visited Paniya and Kurichia kavus (sacred groves) at different places as there were no kavus in all the study settlements. Kurichia herbal medicine centres helped me understand how they differ from modern medical practices.

Situating the Self in the Field – Insider/Outsider

The Paniyas and Kurichias cooperated with me and considered me one among them. On my first visit, they asked me why I was not studying my own community and why this study was useful to them. I tried to tell them that there were many studies about my community, but the culture, self-development initiatives and voices of the Paniya and Kurichia communities were still part of the oral tradition and there was the possibility of losing it all if nobody wrote about it. They agreed that their ancestor’s knowledge about herbal medicines and the variety of food items were lost to us. There was little research on the communities and few had the chance of higher education. I affirmed that when their children opted for such initiatives, there would be no need for outsiders to write about them. One Kurichia youth asked why I described their culture as ‘rich’. He added that they did not want to be museum pieces for outsiders. This revealed the importance of lived in experience and reminded me of Gopal Guru’s argument that only a Dalit has the moral authority to study a Dalit group. I shared my previous work experience with the Korku Adivasis in Madhya Pradesh and brief interaction with the Adivasis in Attappady and Noolpuzha, and could convince the Kurichia youth that I was not romanticising their culture but trying to capture the nuances of their lives through an intersubjective experience. Another Kurichia friend said that generally non-Adivasis feel an aversion towards Adivasis and asked me how I felt. I told him that my acquaintance with Adivasi culture has shown me that they are a people who promote a culture that resists the capitalist culture centered on profit and greed. My answers perhaps removed some block and they started conversing with ease. However, there were occasions when they rejected my invitation to talk. There were limitations to plunge into their silence and behavioural patterns intuitively and give meaning to it. While visiting a research site in Karappuzha, one lady resisted talking and when I asked her once more, she was furious. However, I could understand and be empathetic to their silence since I have heard and read
experiences of their brutal suppression during the feudal period and continuing state suppression whenever they fought for land.

The intersubjective experiences and their narratives revealed some of their views and the meanings they made about their reality which are illustrated in the following chapters. I felt that to break the epistemological boundaries and totally align my thoughts and motives with them needed a lot of mutual understanding and proximity. The Paniyas who squat on the verandas (squatting at verandas is a usual practice noticed among Paniyas) of the shops in the town, started waving to me and talking freely, which they seldom do with a non-Adivasi. The school going Adivasi children on their return trip rushed into my sister’s house calling her chechy (local way of addressing one’s own sister and also used to call elders when there is a feeling of closeness) and sharing snacks and food with me and giving me information about new incidents in the colony. They started inviting me to stay with them, especially for special occasions. Women spoke freely about their burden of bringing up the family. Since I ate their food and drank their tea, they were free to ask for food and tea when they came to the house where I stayed. Usually Paniyas do not go to other people’s houses and ask for help or food even if there was a famine, unless they have a close bond. They were happy about my attempts to talk in their language and promised to teach me their dialect. These were all small external signs of the melting of boundaries between us. While I attempted to understand their reality, I cannot claim complete immersion into their culture and everyday life. As Bourdieu points out, the awareness of the distortion of looking into the life experience objectively can lead us to an imaginative leap into the shoes of the subjects of study. Thus, according to him ‘authority’ and ‘epistemological integrity’ can be produced by a reflexive encounter with the research participants.

In the case of Kurichias, the tharavad rules restricted my entry into their world. Since they still believe in the pollution taboo, they hesitated to allow me to stay in the tharavad rooms with them or enter their Daivappura (a room kept aside for their deities). They gave a single attached room for me to stay or invited me to stay in their nuclear families surrounding the tharavad.6 Their remarkable hospitality and expression of warmth

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6 Small houses were built around the tharavadu and partition of property was done among the members when the government stipulated the amount of landholding of a joint family by law.
removed the negative feelings about small exclusions. Their interactions were free and some of them even shared what could have been defaming their tradition. The discussions about untouchability were countered by their claims of cleanliness and minimum chance of infection and disease. It was time to stop the pollution taboo. But the strictness had really diminished and old members as well as children took courage to take me to inhibited areas like their temple, kavu and rooms in the tharavad even though they did not want to break the institution of tharavad. They could protect many of their rich cultural traditions like joint paddy cultivation with their traditional seed varieties and avoidance of chemical fertilizers, and the communitarian feeling and the divine blessing they invoke through rituals during cultivation. Further, the institution of tharavad gives legitimacy to their ‘sub-universes’ of perceptions and making meaning.\(^7\) The nuclear families I visited were out of the sub-universe of those who believed in untouchability and they allowed me to enter all the rooms including the kitchen. However, I experienced that the sub-universes were more rigid in modern institutions like hospitals and schools than in traditional institutions.

Berger and Luckmann (1967) give an illustration to the sub-universe of medicine. They point out that it is not enough to set up an impenetrable sub-universe of medicine but the lay public has to be convinced about the legitimacy of the sub-universe by intimidating the patient if they go against the advice of the doctor. They point out that the entire legitimising machinery will work to keep the lay person as a lay person and doctors as doctors so that both follow the rules without questioning them.

I cannot claim that I have been accepted fully as an insider; however, I had the experience of living with them for one week at a stretch or three days at a stretch at regular intervals in different seasons at different locations. The idea was to have an experience of the life in the colony across the seasons with varying employment opportunities. The time limit of the field work period also was a block to stay for longer periods as there were many settlements and sites to visit. For short periods, I could undergo the experience with whatever minimum facilities they had, but it was difficult. Sitting without any food all day and eating at night was familiar to Paniya families in the

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\(^7\) Berger and Lukman (1967) use the term sub-universe to denote a particular collectivity which produce particular meanings and within this collectivity these meanings are presented as objective reality.
lean season. The Paniya households where I stayed said that they did not get headaches even though they did not eat all day. But I could not do it, however much I wanted to and when they bought food for those who went for work, they were keen to share it with me. Sometimes, I tried to manage with black tea like the Paniya people did. When the children cried for food, they were sent to other houses where they cooked at least once during the day or they had to make do with black tea. In one colony, the anganwadi helped in distributing food occasionally to pregnant ladies and children at times of scarcity as the teacher was empathetic to their condition. Living with the families gave tremendous insights into their day to day activities.

**Data Analysis**

The research studies on Adivasi development mainly concentrate on a set of Government programmes and free provisions for them, but they are challenged by Adivasi movements as well as by academic writings. This study concentrates more on the issues related to the Paniya and Kurichia community resource base (land and forest). The areas of their education, health and employment have been included as indicators of development.

The analysis falls under the broad category of narrative analysis. According to Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Liao (2004: 705) what makes a text narrative is ‘sequence and consequence: Events are selected, organised, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience’. They point out that narratives do not speak for themselves but need interpretation when used as data in social research. For analysis, the emphasis was on the content of the text, on what is said as well as how it is said. Also attempts were made to connect personal experience and social structure in the analysis. The data is mainly in the form of oral narratives and events. Field notes and observational data were also used for analysis. The data were first categorised into four major themes connected with Adivasi development - land, employment and livelihood, education and health. Sub themes were identified and the data were arranged and shuffled under each sub theme to understand the meaning. Then the sub themes were rearranged under each broad theme to identify emerging patterns and theoretical inclinations. Close inspection of the narratives were attempted to sharpen the analysis and build arguments. Documents from different sources and theories were also used for further analysis and to substantiate the findings. Against the backdrop of the broader methodological context explored in this chapter, the next
chapter introduces the historical context and the specific socio-cultural and political contexts of the two communities selected for the study.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of the thesis became vast as development encompasses all aspects of Adivasi life which are interconnected. As a non-Adivasi with little proficiency in their dialects, I may have failed to capture some of the nuances.

Many areas can be identified for further study and deeper analysis such as the agricultural practices of the Paniyas and Kurichias, their similarities and differences from the modern practices of organic farming, an elaborate study of their social institutions, the pattern of transition as well as its continuity in the context of the modern development trajectory, their herbal and spiritual healing practices, an analysis of their folk songs and stories to understand their rich culture and world views, all of which can contribute to human and social development as they are based on values of ecological, social and cognitive justice.