CHAPTER IV

Paniyas and Kurichias of Wayanad
Socio-cultural and Political Context

This chapter provides the broad historical, socio-cultural and the political contexts for the study, and the experiences of Paniyas and Kurichias have to be located within this context. An exploration of the historical background of the area, a brief discussion about the two communities and the development policies and programmes of the state have been attempted to understand and draw insights about the processes of development/lack of development of the Adivasis. Against the background of state initiated policies and programmes, the Adivasi responses and land struggles are discussed towards the end of the chapter.

Wayanad: The Historical Context

Wayanad was traditionally known as the land of forests (Nair 1911). There are different versions about the origin of the name Wayanad, that it was derived from the word Vayalnadu (the land of paddy fields) or Vananadu (the land of forests) and that it was the land of forests as well as paddy fields (Nair 1976).

There is considerable evidence about the new Stone Age civilisation as historical proof for the existence of organised human life in Wayanad, centuries before Christ. The earliest record of a ruling family in Wayanad is available in the shape of rock inscriptions in the Edackal cave of Ambukuthimala and this throws light on the bygone era and civilisation. This cave discovered in 1894 by a British Administrator was identified as a habitat of Neolithic people on the basis of the nature of representation on the cave walls (Gurukkal 1995). Based on the rock inscriptions in the Edackal caves in Wayanad, it has been presumed that Astroloid groups lived in the region prior to the arrival of the Dravidians and the Aryans (Gurukkal 1995).

From the oral tradition, it is evident that there were trade routes to Wayanad in the pre-colonial period and that the thick forests of Wayanad supplied part of the timber for the sea trade from Calicut port (Cherian 1999). However, the role of the Adivasis in early
trade is not known. There is a memorial in Lakkidi in Wayanad of an Adivasi chieftain who disclosed the route from Tamarassery to Wayanad to the Britishers, and was treacherously killed after the disclosure. Kunhaman (1989) points out that till the middle of the 17th century, Wayanad was inhabited exclusively by different hill tribes in separate geographical divisions and ruled by Adivasi chieftains. Historically, the Adivasi communities of the Malabar region became the least developed among the Adivasi communities of Kerala. This is attributed to the socio-economic and geo-political conditions that prevailed in the region (ibid).

Some glimpses of early history of Wayanad are available in William Logan’s Malabar Manual and from oral traditions in the form of songs and legends. Logan (1989) observes that the country was formerly held by Vedar Rajas ruling the Vedars (wild hunters) and thus the belief that Wayanad has been the home of many aboriginal tribes driven up from the low country of Malabar is probably true. It is believed that Wayanad came under the rule of two neighbouring kingdoms of Kottayam and Kurumbranad in the late 14th or 15th centuries (Johney 2001). According to the oral tradition, the king of the Kuruman Adivasi community in Wayanad was defeated by the Kottayam and Kurumbranad kings and Wayanad came under their rule. The Rajas of Kottayam introduced a settled form of government in Wayanad and brought several Nair families from the coastal land. They divided the country into Nads or small divisions and placed them under Nair chieftains for purposes of administration (Nair 1911, Mundakkayam 2002). The Nair chieftains became hereditary holders of the lands and derived a share of the produce instead of regular rent. All administrative powers rested with Nair chieftains and they treated Adivasis as inferior beings and used them for hard manual labour. Even though Adivasis were enslaved by the migrants, they were free to use forest land and its resources by giving a minimal rent in the form of forest produce to the Nair landlords (Logan 1989).

The conquest of Wayanad by the Mysore Sultans had a significant impact on the property rights of the indigenous communities. After Hyder Ali invaded Wayanad in 1766 AD and brought it under his rule, the migration of Muslims to Wayanad, which had started in the 16th century accelerated (Johney 2001). During this period, large areas of forests were mortgaged by the Nair landlords to certain Muslim merchants who exercised the rights of the original proprietors. This affected the customary rights of Adivasi people
and curtailed their access to agricultural and forest lands (Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2007).

After the defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1792, the province of Malabar was ceded to the British, but Wayanad was excluded from it. Tipu handed over the entire region to the British after the Sreerangapattanam truce. The Kottayam Rajas who were ousted by Hyder Ali and who helped the British in overthrowing the Mysorean power, were restored to their original status of rulers of Wayanad by the British (Kurup 1986). Wayanad thus came under the administration of Pazhassi Raja, the then ruler of Kottayam. Subsequently, the British turned hostile and this was followed by encounters between the British and Kerala Varma Pazhassi Raja of Kottayam, and Wayanad became one of the main centres of anti-British struggle in the Malabar province under the English East India Company. Pazhassi Raja fought the British till his death in 1805. After that Wayanad was under British colonial rule until 1947. Kurichias who were experts in martial arts were part of Pazhassi Raja’s army.

The entry of the East India Company into Wayanad stands out as the most significant part of the onset of ‘modern civilisation’. Wayanad was used for raising plantations and large scale cultivation of cash crops such as tea, coffee, pepper and cardamom. This district is one of the biggest foreign exchange earners of the state in India due to its cash crops and there is the complaint that it is not given the consideration and attention it deserves by the powers at the centre and state levels in various development programmes (Johney 1995). Wayanad has an agricultural economy and there are no major industries in Wayanad. The severe drought in 2003 in a high rainfall district like Wayanad is clear evidence of the destruction of balance in the eco-system. This has affected agricultural practices, yields and prices and the availability of wage labour. Further, alienation of forest lands, village commons and other landholdings led Adivasis to material and cultural alienation. The transition of landless Adivasis was quick, from forest dependence to slavery, to bonded labour and to wage labour.

The Current Scenario

Wayanad is one of the beautiful hill stations located in the Western Ghats on the north eastern part of Kerala state. The District Headquarters at Kalpetta is at a distance of 76
km from the sea shores of Calicut. Its boundaries are North, Coorg and Mysore (Karnataka); South, Malappuram District; East, Nilgiri (Tamil Nadu) and West, Kannur and Kozhikode districts. During the colonial period, Wayanad was part of the Malabar district of the Madras Presidency, directly under British rule. The present district of Wayanad was formed by merging parts of Calicut and Canannore districts on November 1, 1980 as the 12th district of Kerala. A large part of Wayanad is forested and covered by plantations.

Despite the large forest cover and plantation economy in Wayanad, poverty among the Adivasi communities is estimated at 60.4 per cent (Chathukulam and John 2006). The level of extreme poverty is indicated by the fact that 32 starvation deaths were reported among the Adivasis in 2002 from a single Panchayat, Noolpuzha in Wayanad district (George 2004). Wayanad district has the highest proportion (37.4%) of the Adivasi population in the state, but they constitute only 17.4 per cent of the district’s population (Census of India 2011a). Adivasis who had been in the majority in Wayanad a century ago became a minority over a period of time (Aiyappan 1992).

The Adivasi communities of Wayanad are socio-economically and culturally diverse and include Paniyan (44.7 per cent), Adiyan (7.1 per cent), Kattunayakan (9.9 per cent), Kurichian (17.4 per cent), Mullukuruman (17.5 per cent) and Uralikuruman (2.7 per cent), (Menon 2010). Kurichias and Mullu Kurumans own land and practice settled agriculture; Paniyas and Adiyans are mainly wage labourers with a few who own land; Kattunayakans depend on forest labour for their livelihood. Occasional forest labour and collection of non timber forest produce contributes to their income. The Urali Kurumans were traditionally artisans and today, most of them are agricultural labourers (Centre of Excellence 2006). The landholding pattern and the nature of occupation are also different among these Adivasi groups.

The two communities under study are Paniya and Kurichia communities of Wayanad district. They represent two large tribal communities in Wayanad and have distinctive socio-cultural economic and political status and experience in the state initiated development programmes. As these two communities present maximum diversity in their social organisation, cultural heritage and practices and development experiences in terms
of land and livelihood, they have been selected for this study. The following section discusses the socio-cultural background of the Kurichias and Paniyas.

**Paniyas and Kurichias: The Socio-Cultural Contexts**

As per the census of 2001, among the 35 Adivasi communities in Kerala, the Paniyas form the single largest group (22.5%), followed by the Kurichias (9.0%). In Wayanad, the Paniyas constitute 44.7 per cent and the Kurichias 16.9 per cent of the Adivasi population in Wayanad (Census of India 2011b).

The Paniyas, being the original inhabitants of the area, are considered aborigines (Nair 1911). Nair describes their past as savage tribes living in caves and thick forests, enslaved by the *Goundar* land owners. Gradually, they spread to the Wayanad hills and neighbouring places like parts of Coorg and Mysore. An old *Chetti*’s narration is given in the 1961 Census, according to which the Paniyas were living in the interior of Wayanad hills until they came into contact with the plains people. They used to gather on festive occasions to collect the leftover food from discarded leaf plates of the *Chettis*, and flee to the forest uttering ‘ippi – ippi’. Once, the *Chetti* decided to trap them by using nets. The Paniyas entered as usual and the *Chetti* trapped them and used them for agricultural operations. They were living in the forests eating wild food and they wore no clothes but leaves and barks.

Different authors have different opinions about the exact location of the origin of the Paniyas. Aiyappan (1992) points out that according to Paniya legends, their origin is Ippimala, a mountain near the Banasuran hill in West Wayanad. However, the exact location is unknown to the Paniyas and they believe that their great forefathers whom they refer to as Uthappan and Uthamma were trapped by Wayanadan *Chettis* (Wayanadan Goudar in another Mooppan’s description) while gathering food and enslaved. However, they are perceived as the original inhabitants of Wayanad region according to this myth. According to Gopalan Nair (1911), *ippimala* is near the Thamaracherry Ghats. However, according to Aiyappan there are no traces of *Chettis* in Thamarassery Ghats. In their *penappattu* (the song they sing during the death ritual beginning on the seventh day), they narrate the story of their origin from Ippimala and remember all their ancestors beginning from *Uthappan* and *Uthamma* who negotiated with god in the creation process.
The Kurichias are also considered one of the oldest inhabitants of Wayanad (Mathur 1977). According to Balakrishnan (1983), the Kurichias, Paniyas and Kadars lived in the heart of the high range Durga forests before the arrival of the Namboothiris, Nairs and Ezhavas (different caste groups). According to him, they had no contact with Namboothiris and Nairs before they settled in the forest region. About Kurichias there are other constructions- for instance, that they are warriors from the Kari Nair community brought by Pazhassi from the southern part of Malabar (Aiyappan and Mahadevan 1990). According to Vayaleri (1996), this location is reasonable as there are Kurichias in the Kannavam areas, which is part of southern Malabar. At the same time, he doubts their origin as Kari Nairs. In a personal interview with him, K.K Annan an ex-MLA from the Kurichia community said that they were not brought from Travancore area by the Pazhassi Raja as some authors have written. In his enquiry about the family of the Rajas at Kottayam, Travancore he found that it is a baseless argument. He believed that Kurichias are one of the early inhabitants of Malabar. He maintained that their presence in Kannur and Kozhikode districts shows their traces in the Malabar area rather than in Thiruvithamkur. Kurichia’s olipporu (guerilla type war) with Pazhassi against the British and their special talent in olipporu gives further evidence that they knew the nooks and corners of Wayanad forests and this is another inference for their being the inhabitants of Malabar forests before Pazhassi.

The Paniya settlement was known as Padi (settlement) and it consisted of many Chalas (huts) where individual families lived. Now nobody is using these terms and their settlements are commonly known as ‘Paniya colony’, a term given by the state. During the feudal period and early independent period, Paniyan’s huts were built on the fringes of their employer’s dry land or paddy fields and thus a settled way of life began. At present, they are settled in the same area or in a different location in government built colonies, in tiled houses with two or three small rooms and a kitchen.

The Kurichias traditionally lived in large matrilineal joint families known as mittam (now referred to as tharavad), each a self contained unit with hills and fields. The main house was usually big and multi-roomed. The main room is reserved as the abode of ancestral spirits. There is a special room for the karanavan or head of the family and a series of attached rooms or separate sheds around the main building constitute the living
quarters of the married members and their young children. When the members in the family increase, separate *pandals* (sheds) are built but they share a common kitchen and dining room. They were known for their massive joint families ranging from 30 to 100 members and matrilineal heritage in the past. During field work, it was observed that Kurichia’s houses are situated in the middle of their agricultural land. The values of their joint family system is not completely destroyed even though many of them have shifted to a nuclear family set up by building separate houses in the premises of the *tharavad*. Even though the land has been partitioned among the members in several *tharavads*, there are no clear boundaries and the impression created is one of being under a landlord. They meet in the *tharavad* for rituals and festivals and for joint cultivation. Out of the 107 *tharavads*, 56 continue to remain undivided as an institution for continuing their traditional practices even though the property was divided among the members when the state restricted the extent of landholding of a joint family. The Kurichias consider themselves to be higher in the social order and still observe pollution taboos in their *tharavad* against all castes and communities except Brahmans. There are also myths to connect their origin to Brahmans. Kurichia elders from one *tharavadu* claimed that their ancestors were Brahmans of the hill whose entire *tharavad* was devastated in a landslide except for a girl child who was brought up by other castes. Their present *tharavad* was built by her successors. The Kurichia nuclear families separated from their *tharavad* due to various reasons such as breaking the *tharavad* customs and not following the practice of touch pollution. The touch pollution practices still hinder the active interaction among the different Adivasi communities unless they gather around a radical cause like struggle for land. It has been observed that even now Paniyas are not called for work in Kurichia *tharavads*. Even in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) organised in Kurichia *tharavads*, Paniyas were absent.

According to Balakrishnan (1983), different Adivasi groups in Wayanad kept their distance from each other to observe clan purity. However, he points out that these ordinary observances took the form of caste hierarchy and exploitation with the arrival of Namboothiri Brahmans in the area and they institutionalised and used the caste system to further their self interests. Ajit (2002) in his book *Bhoonijati Bandhanam* (land, caste bondage) describes the strong connection between caste hierarchy and land ownership. Higher castes used lower castes for production of profit by utilising their slave labour and
the lower caste was meted cruel penalty and subjugation for breaking the conventions. They made the rule that each high caste can relate only with the caste just lower to them and this can be perceived as a much planned activity to use the lower castes for exploiting their labour for production process in a smooth way through their higher caste category. At the same time, the lower caste cannot deal with the upper caste and this blocked the possibility of resistance. Discussion with some of the Kurichia elders and also some non-Adivasi elders made it clear that the Adivasi observance of clan purity did not lead to exploitative production relations that existed between the castes. On the other hand, the Kurichias were reported as the most generous people and the non-Adivasi settlers misused their generosity and innocence and exploited them. According to Kjosavic and Shanmugaratnam (2007), there existed a social stratification in the organisation of work during the early period. However, in the analysis of Aivu (which describes the way in which Kuruma community is organised, their ideology and relationship with other Adivasi communities)\(^8\) they point out that even though the Kurumar observed touch pollution with Paniyas, they accepted their rights unlike in the caste system. Likewise, Paniyas never reported exploitation by Kurichias other than their pollution practice, unlike their experiences with the non Adivasi jennis and settlers who exploited them.

Against this backdrop, being a landed class, the Kurichias enjoy a higher social status even in recent times in the local Wayanad context. They were skilled in martial arts and well known as a warrior community. Their behaviour (similar to the erstwhile practice of untouchability in the caste system) towards other communities, matriliny similar to the Nair caste, historical association with the political power derived from being part of the army of Pazhassi Raja\(^2\) and the economic advantage of having received large tracts of land as grants and rewards for their military service contributed to the higher social status of the Kurichias among the Adivasi communities in the region. In contrast, the identity of belonging to the slave caste from pre-colonial times has placed the Paniya community on the lowest rung among the Adivasi and also in the hierarchy of the caste and class structures. The Paniyas were exchanged and sold even at the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century though the Indian Penal Code had declared slavery a crime in 1883 (Therakam 2010).

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\(^8\) Aivu is ‘the political-economic and social-spiritual code of conduct of the Kurumar, passed down from generation to generation…’(Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2007)
The traditional practice of untouchability kept a Paniyan 20 meters away from the others even during the early period of independence. Although the poor and landless among the Kurichias were ill-treated by the landed class, it was not as severe and brutal as the treatment meted out to the Paniya community.

The Kurichias valued hierarchy and discipline within their *tharavad* and considered disobeying elders a major offence (Aiyappan and Mahadevan 1990). In contrast, the Paniya community has a flat kinship structure with an elderly male as the head of the community, the *Mooppan*. There was far greater age and gender equality among the Paniyas than among the Kurichias. The Paniyas mainly speak a dialect of their own called the Paniya *Bhasha* at home, which has no script. It has been identified as a member of the south Dravidian family closely related to Malayalam, with borrowings from Kannada and Tamil languages. The Kurichias speak the North Malabar dialect of Malayalam (Menon 1996). They use both Malayalam and their dialect and are more bilingual than the Paniyas. Only for special occasions and ritual celebrations, when their elders gather, do they use their dialect. There are clear differences in other cultural practices like the dress pattern and the ornaments they use. In the Paniyan community, the male members wear *mundu* or a loin cloth. The women wear loin cloths around the waist, reaching just above the knees, with both ends brought up and knotted together through the arm pit, at the right, covering the breast. A sash (*aratti* in Paniya language), red or black in colour is worn around the waist. A fold of *aratti* is used as a miscellaneous container (Menon 1996).

They used to collect leaves and other food items in the *aratti* and it was a dress suitable for their lifestyle. Paniya women used to wear bead necklaces and ear ornaments made out of brass and various types of beads and leaves. Old ladies still use earrings made of dried leaves of *kaitha* (*pandanus*) or dried leaves filled with bee wax on one side and small red seeds on the other. Now the younger generation has given up most of these distinctive styles and adopts ‘modern dresses’ and hairstyles and ornaments (Menon 1996). During field work, women and girls were seen wearing saris, churidars and ornaments they got from the market and boys wore pants or jeans and shirts. Even though

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9 For detailed description of Paniyas and Kurichias traditional dress, ornaments etc. refer Menon (1996).
youngsters changed their dress pattern, they reported that non-Adivasis made insulting remarks about the Paniya’s traditional dress and styles. It is also observed that non-Adivasi people who adopt a simple and genuine lifestyle are teased at times by saying that they follow ‘Adivasi culture’.

In the Kurichia community too both males and females used to wear a loin cloth, which reached below the knees. Kurichian women used to go out without covering their breasts like the upper caste non-Brahmin women in Kerala. When that system changed in Kerala, Kurichias also started wearing a piece of cloth knotted above the left shoulder covering their breasts. Now they wear dresses like sari, churidar, mundu and blouse or ‘nighty’ (at home) except the very old women (above 70).

When Paniyas worship ‘Gulikan’, ‘Kooli’, ‘Kuttichathan’ ‘Mariyamma’, ‘Muthappan’, and ‘Valliyooramma’, Kurichias worship ‘Malakkari’, ‘Karimbil Bhagavathy’ and ‘Athiralan Theyyam’ with special reverence. Kurichias also worship Kuttichathan, Gulikan, and Valliyooramma and according to them, they are seasonal deities who are worshipped seasonally. Both communities are particular in worshipping their gods (Paniyas mostly use the word padichavan and Kurichias use daivam) and following their traditional rituals to keep away the wrath of the gods. However, ancestor worship and adoring nature in their rituals are common in both the communities. Kurichias in their tharavads keep ‘daivappura,’ a special room for their ancestral god, Muni. The Paniyas keep a sacred place called ‘thina’- an elevated platform made of mud inside the Paniya house to venerate their ancestor gods. During rituals, Paniyas use the kulapperu (clan name) of their uttappanmar (ancestors) to address their ancestral gods. Kurichias use the term, ‘nekal’ to represent the spirit of the ancestors during their ritual, while Paniyas use the term ‘nizhal. The photos of Hindu gods in Paniya and Kurichia houses were very common during field work (photo 1&2). There are many festivals that the Paniyas and Kurichias celebrate in their settlements as well as in public places. Some of the festivals of Paniyas and Kurichias observed during field work were the famous Valliyoorkavu festival, at Valliyoorkavu temple and Thira festival in various temples. Both these festivals are now organised by the Hindu community. Paniyas and Kurichias from the field claimed that Valliyoorkavu temple was their temple and that it was captured by others. Mundakkayam (2002) and Johney (2001) report that the two famous
temples, Valliyoor and Thirunelli in Wayanad, once belonged to Adivasis. In Valliyoor, the Paniyas reported that there was a traditional post called ‘Adichuthali’ (washer man) given to an Adivasi Mooppan who did the cleaning of the temple area, washing of utensils, bringing leaves and firewood for temple etc. from the beginning of its official functioning. The temple is surrounded by Paniya, Kurichia and Adiya settlements even today (2009-2010). These are proofs to believe that it was an Adivasi worship place before Nairs and Nambiar took over the management.

However, alternative developments in the ownership of the temple were also noticed among the Paniyas during field work. Three km away from Valliyoor temple and near the Mananthavady taluk headquarters, there was another temple, Chundakkunnu Mahalakshmi Kshethram owned by a Paniya family. It was situated in the Paniya colony and they reported that the divinity of that place was revealed to them. Nanthan in Chunda colony, Mananthavady reported, “We call Brahmins for pooja so that people from all castes will participate but the ownership will not be given to the Hindus or the government as we did in Valliyoor. Now we know to develop it further and organise the temple activities and twice a week (Tuesday and Friday) we are able to give nercha bhakshanam (food which is blessed and offered to the devotees) to all the devotees using the offerings we get”. They have made thara (sacred space) for Paniya god Gulikan, Kurichia god Malakkari as well as Hindu god Ayyappan and Ganapati (photo 3). However, this can be described as an alternative temple organisation initiated by the Paniya community resisting the existing hierarchical models of ownership of temples. At the same time, the purity/pollution taboos and the assertion of Brahminical superiority in conducting pooja unravels the Hinduisation process of Adivasi spiritual practices.

The Kurichia community also claimed that they were the main worshippers at the ‘Gurikkilal Bhagavathy’ temple at Valad and ‘Malakkari–Siva’ temple at Thonichal, both located within the study area. In the historical process, caste Hindus became the owners and organisers of these common worship places and it was gradually owned by the Devaswom.10 When the Kurichias lost their hold on the community temples and kavus in

10 Devaswom is a socio-religious trust with the government or community nominated members as trustees to manage temples and its assets to ensure smooth functioning. ‘Deva’ means god and ‘swom’ means ownership in Sanskrit language.
public places, they built temples in their *tharavads* and maintained *kavus* (sacred groves) in their private land. However, the Kurichias have better representation in the temple proceedings during festivals as compared to the Paniyas. During the *thira* festival, the Kurichias can perform their *thira* dance in the main yard, while the Paniyas are segregated and have to perform their dance in another compound. In the Thonichal temple, the Malakkari *thira* performed by the Kurichias was attended by thousands of people from all castes and communities (photo 4). But the Paniya ritual dance performed in the next compound as part of *Thira* had only a few people as audience as the remuneration given to them is not enough to organise it elegantly (photo 5).

*Vishu*, an agricultural festival in the month of April, is celebrated all over Kerala. On the occasion of *Vishu*, the Kurichias as well as the Paniyas have their own special rituals in their settlements (photo 8). *Onam*, the harvest festival of Kerala celebrated in the Malayalam month of *Chingam*, is also celebrated by the Paniyas and Kurichias. Kurichias in the *tharavad* celebrate Onam and Vishu elaborately. The lack of money prevented the Paniyas from performing these celebrations elaborately. Until about thirty years ago, it was common for Paniyas from the same clan (a group of closely knit and inter related families) to join for celebrations in their Mooppan’s house. Earlier, Paniyas carried food items like rice and leafy vegetables with them while going to the celebrations. These were also occasions to share paddy earned as wages with the clan. However, the sounds of *thudi* and *kuzhal* (small drum and pipe like musical instrument of Paniyas) played during celebrations and their colony gatherings till three decades ago have became rare in recent years. According to Aiyappan (1992), before the massive migration of plainsmen into Wayanad, every evening one could hear the happy music of the Paniya’s pipes from some settlement of theirs. He points out that for Paniya men and women and their gods, music and dance were essential. However, during death rituals, Paniya women did not dance the way they did at other festivals and rituals. Dance and music were however, not an integral part of Kurichian’s religious rituals even though the occasions of consulting god through shaman and embodying the experience in trance was practised among them.

The main rituals related to life cycles among the Paniyas as well as the Kurichias were puberty rites, marriage and death rituals. Both communities reported that they celebrate these rituals without incorporating much from outside cultures. The colonies
and *tharavads* in the study area reported that unlike olden times, there was a lack of religious functionaries who had the gift of getting into a trance and invoking the spirit for healing, blessing and giving advice as god’s spokesperson. If they do not have the religious functionaries in their locality, they call them from other colonies and *tharavads* during the rituals. Both the communities follow ancestral worship and reported that they rigorously observe taboos and rituals associated with death.

The Kurichias stated that before they used to celebrate *thirandu kalyanam* (puberty celebration) and *thalikettu kalyanam* (engagement) very elaborately and marriage without much festivities. But today that trend is changing and marriage is celebrated elaborately with exchanging of garlands and clothes, tying *tali*, exchanging rings and conducting a marriage ceremony in the temple as part of enculturation (photo 9). However, the custom of giving dowry and conflict associated with the dowry system is seldom reported among the Kurichias especially among those living in *tharavads*. According to the Kurichias in *tharavads*, the transition is slow, but in nuclear families the change in ritual practices is quicker but not uniform. It depends on the circumstances they live in, the employment they hold and so on.

Puberty celebration was usually done on the seventh day of the first menstruation and the pubescent girl is separated to *orappura or theendarippura* (a separate house built in Kurichiya *tharavads* to separate the polluted) or to a separate room till the purification ceremony is over. During menstruation girls had to stay separately for seven days, but now after four days, girls start going to school as the elders are less stringent. In the case of Paniya girls, it was observed that the puberty celebration was postponed until the family gathered the resources to meet the expenses. K.J Baby’s *Guda* (a film released in 2001) depicts the story of a young Nayaka Adivasi girl and her impoverished family who were forced to postpone the puberty ritual for one year due to lack of resources. The Paniyas also confine the girl to a corner of the house during menstruation and do not

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11 In Kurichia tradition there is a ritual called *thalikettu kalyanam* during which the *muracherukkan* tie *tali* for his future wife before she is ten years old.

12 For elaborate description of the traditional rituals of Kurichias during puberty, marriage and death, see Aiyappan and Mahadevan (1990).

13 The word ‘guda’ literally mean a hut made by the Nayaka Adivasis to separate the girl at pubery till the puberty ritual.
allow her to enter the kitchen, touch others or cook food. They take a bath and sprinkle cow dung water in their rooms, yard and the premises to remove the pollution before resuming their daily routine. The Paniyas celebrate puberty as well as marriage with equal importance from the beginning and continue the trend even today. During marriage, new rituals of garlanding, *tali kettal* and change in dress are reported among them (photo 10). According to them, these changes are only superficial but their core community values and customs have remained intact. The custom of *penpanam* (bride price) still continues and this enhances the status of Paniya women.

The Kurichias as well as the Paniya community believe in life after death and they believe that their souls live with evil spirits until they complete the rituals beginning on the seventh day of mourning to grant them rest. They believe that the rituals during death and burial are necessary for transfer of the deceased soul to the other world. They believe that the dead man’s soul can enter a human body through the shamans of *nizhal* or *nekal* (literally shadow, the spirit of the ancestors who contributed to the prosperity of the community and family) and they free the soul from all evil spirits through ritual performances to merge their spirits with the ancestral spirits. The Kurichias believe that the ancestors who lived a respectable life, looked after the matrilineal kith and kin and protected their land will become *munis* (ancestor gods) and they keep special *daivappura* (special room for their ancestor gods) to venerate them. Gathering as a community for solving the conflicts and breaches of community rules through rituals and dialogue was common in both the communities during the life cycle rituals, festivals and other solemn occasions. It was observed that the shaman dance to invoke the spirit and ward off the evil spirit exist in both the communities even though the interest in performing this ritual is diminishing among the youngsters with the influence of modern education and media. While the Paniyas call the ritual performer *Attali*, the Kurichia call him *Changathi*. One Paniya, *Attali* said that he had to sing continuously for one day and night (24 hours) to give rest to the deceased soul (photo11). However, in both the communities the headman, (in Paniya’s case the *Mooppan* and in Kurichia’s case the Karanavan) (photos 14 &15), has a special role in the ritual practices during death. Paniyas moan during the death ritual but the Kurichias divert the moaners with folk songs which are similar to *vadakkan*
in tune, rhythm and heroism. Kurichias crack jokes to distract the blood relatives and friends from their pain and affirm their warrior history as a self assertion of their identity. Even though they have undergone mild forms of slavery and exploitation under the jennis and settlers, they regain their identity as warriors by reciting vadakkan pattukal during the death ritual and by reciting their stories of valour against the Pazhassi.

In one Paniya colony, death rituals have changed, for instance, instead of keeping the dead body in a bier made out of banana stems according to their tradition, it is kept in a coffin box as the communist party brought it for them. However, there were old people in the colony who were not happy with such changes in the rituals related to death. Also at times, the Paniyas postponed the rituals if there was no way to gather money for the purpose. The Kurichias keep strict observances of conducting the rituals on time as they are relatively better off economically.

Further, the difference in the socio-economic status of the Paniyas and the Kurichias was reflected in and reinforced by the perceptions and attitudes of the non-Adivasis towards them. The constructions of the Paniyas as ‘thieves’, ‘liars’ and ‘lazy’ are used to legitimise the non-Adivasi behaviour of violence towards them. In contrast, the non-Adivasis often refer to the Kuricha tharavad and their ‘adyathvam’ (of high social rank, aristocratic and cultured). A retired headmaster said, “The Kurichias are the most trustworthy ‘Nairs’ brought by Pazhassi to fight against the British. They are very honest and keep their word, not like the Paniyas who are liars and inconsistent in their work.”

However, despite their higher status compared to the Paniyas, the Kurichias do not enjoy the social status equivalent to the other upper castes and classes in society. For instance, the non-Adivasis underplay and disregard the Kurichias’ historical role in the anti-colonial struggle. For instance, a non-Adivasi from the Edavaka Panchayat commented, “Oh, what could the Kurichias have done with their bow and arrow when the British came with their guns!” Ignoring the fact that the Kurichias fought the British even after Pazhassi’s death, he praised only the Nair warriors in Pazhassi’s army. The non-

14 A collection of Malayalam ballads of medieval region present the saga of Nair heroes like Aromal Chekavar.

15 For an elaborate description of traditional rituals of Paniyas during puberty, marriage and death, see Aiyappan (1992).
Adivasi constructions thus not merely reinforce the divide between the Kurichia and the Paniya communities but through their deft narratives constitute ‘Adivasi’ and ‘non-Adivasi’ identities as distinct categories with inherently inferior and superior traits. The construction and reconstruction of the Paniya and Kurichia identities and cultural features were alive in the field. Non-Adivasis construct the community and cultural features of Paniyas and Kurichias and similarly Adivasis construct the cultural features of non-Adivasis. This study also discusses how these constructions affect the self perceptions and development/marginalisation experiences of the Paniyas and Kurichias. Although these constructions of differentiation as superior and inferior are contextual and related to specific events and experiences in history, they strengthen the structures of inequalities in the Wayanad context.

**The Socio-Political Context: Land Tenure System and Bonded Labour in Wayanad**

The ancient land tenure system in Malabar of which Wayanad is a part was almost like the feudal system of tenures prevalent in medieval Europe. During this period, the caste system was prevalent and the land rights corresponded with the hierarchy of social gradation with Brahmins at the top and untouchables at the bottom. Kunhi Krishnan (1993) observes that the King made grants of lands to Brahmins, the members of the priestly class even though they did not cultivate or supervise the agricultural operations. The Nair chieftains also got lands from the King as a reward for their military services to him. These land grants were continued on a hereditary basis. Such *Jenmam* lands were in turn leased out in ‘Kanom’ tenure to persons belonging to the next highest caste such as *Nairs* and *Nambiars*, who maintained close relations with both Brahmin landlords and Nair chieftains. These lands are further sub-leased under ‘verumpattam’ tenancy to Ezhava Muslims (Kunhaman 1989). None of them engaged in manual labour and the work on land is done mostly by hill tribes or by lower caste communities. The scarcity of workers in the field led to the development of slave labour and an extensive market for such labourers (ibid).

While exploring the brutal slave history in Malabar, Banaji (1933) points out that they did not even have the chance to complain about the daily violence meted out to them.
Tribes especially Paniyas and Adiyas were the worst victims of two centuries of slavery under feudal landlords and that history was unique to Wayanad. When planters first began to settle in Wayanad (part of Malabar) they purchased the land along with the Paniyas (Kunhaman 1989). In this system, the slave was treated as an object and the masters owned the life of the slave. The number of slaves among tribal people increased due to the interest in land and cultivation of the migrant population and the division of land among them through the multi tier tenure such as kanam, verumpattam etc. In addition to agricultural operations, slave labour was used for gold mining in Wayanad, an important source of revenue for the early Malabar Rajas. Since it was risky to work in the mines, labour was not available for this work and hill tribes were therefore employed (Kunhaman 1989).

The tribes of Wayanad were attached to one landlord and were traditionally known as kundal panikkar (bonded labourers). The bonded labour (kundal pani) existed mainly among the four tribal communities of Wayanad – Paniyas, Adiyas, Wayanad Pulayas, and Kattunayakas and to some extent among the Kurichias (Mathur 1977). By advancing a small amount of money ‘nippupanam’ during the festival period, the tribal people used to pledge her/his labour for the whole year for daily meals and a pittance in kind. At the beginning stage, this slavery extended to the whole family and it lasted their entire life. This bonded labour system was institutionalised around the temple, ‘Valliyoorkavu’ and the annual festival there. This gave social and religious sanction to the bonded labour system and the Adivasis feared Valliyooramma who punished those who did not obey and keep their promise to the landlords. The Paniyas were beaten to make them work and punished for their disobedience (Panoor 1963). Panoor compares the slave trade of Paniyas in Valliyooravu to the cattle trade in the market.

The colonial land policy in Malabar was influenced by their interest in land revenue and in creating a few superior right holders on land to act as British agents (Varghese 1970). The British identified and interpreted three types of rights-holders in land: 1) Jenmis or freeholders who hold their lands either by purchase or by inheritance, 2) Kanamkars or mortgagees, to whom an actual delivery of the land appeared to be made, although the money taken was not proportionate to the value of the land, and 3) Verumpattamkars who were tenants-at-will (ibid) According to colonial interpretations,
the landlords or *jenmis* possessed the entire rights in the land. *Kanamkar*/mortgagee, is one who has land pledged to him in security for the interest of money advanced to the *jenmkar/jenmi*. The British government in India took the above reports as the basic principles on which land revenue was to be settled. During Warden’s term as the collector of Malabar (1804-1816), *Jenmis* were ascribed the sole ownership of the landed properties of Malabar, and this was accepted by the British administrators unconditionally and steps were taken to legalise their assigned ownership right (ibid). The civil court also accepted the position that the *jenmam* of Malabar was absolute private property (ibid).

Thus, the creation of private property rights in this region occurred through the power of colonial discourses and the legitimisation of the same using the British legal system that was transplanted in India. The interpretations made by Warden as regards different land tenures – *Kanam* as mortgage and *verumpattam* as mere tenancy at will did not take into consideration the customary practices of the people over centuries (Varghese 1970). Further, the British even recognised all the waste lands in the region as the private property of the *Jenmis*, thus recognising every inch of land in Malabar including Wayanad as *jenmam* land. The Paniyas remained agrestic slaves, and *Kattunaikkar* withdrew further into the forests (Kjosavic and Shanmugaratnam 2007).

The colonial rulers, however, chose to ignore their own rules when those rules did not subserve their hegemonic interest. Thus, in Wayanad a new form of property rights called Government *Jenmam* (in contrast to private *jenmam*) was created. In 1848 the Pazhassi escheats, that is the land owned by the late Pazhassi Raja, was taken over by the colonial government and was declared as government *jenmam* land. The cultivators of the government *Jenmam* land, mostly indigenous communities such as Kurumar and Kurichiyar, were then forced to pay rent directly to the government, as the government acted as the *Jenmi* (Kjosavic and Shanmugaratnam 2007).

Later, some British writers after careful study of the ground realities pointed out that the declaration of the entire lands including wastelands as *jenmam* lands based on the complex customary property rights obtained in Malabar and therefore unwise (Varghese 1970). The first serious attempt to question the British interpretation of the *jenmam* as dominium was made by William Logan who was appointed the special commissioner to enquire into the tenancy rights in connection with the peasant unrests. He concluded that
the wrong interpretation of Jenmam as freehold by the British courts completely upset the customary land tenure system in Malabar.

British rulers allowed continuing slavery for not disturbing the economy (Aiyappan, 1992) and their abolition of slavery was only namesake. Even after the abolition of bonded labour by Kerala state in 1963, different forms of slavery existed among the Paniyas in the form of annual engagements to work for a farmer who gave the labourer a lumpsum advance. According to the government report till 1983, 823 bonded Adivasi labourers were identified in Kerala and since then no further cases have been reported (Aiyappan 1992). All the identified bonded labourers have been said to be rehabilitated in the projects envisaged for them and the government claims that they are given regular employment in these projects. They are also provided houses and other basic amenities (Adivasi Sub Plan, Government of Kerala). However, the statements of the Paniyas reveal that many of them are still struggling for basic amenities.

During the colonial period, modern private property rights were established in Wayanad region through the imposition of colonial laws. By establishing the concept of private proprietorship, the British gave protection to a powerful landed class and made them the rent collecting agents under the British authority. Customary agreements were replaced by written agreements which could be produced in the courts of law if necessary (Kunhi Krishnan 1993). Colonial juristic concepts of res nullius (land that has not been conferred by sovereign belongs to the sovereign) and terra nullius (land that belongs to none) subjugated the concept of community rights and territorial rights of tribal communities. The concept of private property and legal ownership were alien to the tribal communities who followed community rights over land (Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2007). Unlike in Travancore where the Hillman Settlement Act of 1903 gave special protection to tribal communities, in British Malabar, especially in Wayanad, the tribal communities could be sold along with agricultural land or pledged or even taken on lease, but the Kurichias were exempt from the slave trade (Chathukulam and John 2006). The marginalisation of tribal communities that started in the feudal period was strengthened in the colonial period through the enforcement of different land laws and labour legislations.

The impact of historical factors such as feudal and colonial governance, deforestation, migration and land grabs by non-tribal communities, and the growth of plantation and
cash crop economy on the ‘landed’ and the ‘bonded’ tribal communities would have been very different with consequences for their later ‘development’.

**State Policies**

The policies adopted by the Indian state after independence were in continuation of the commercial and revenue approach of the British to increase state income. The extensive deforestation, growth of plantation economy under colonial rule and state initiated food crop cultivation changed the land availability and ownership pattern and consequent labour requirements of the region and affected the tribal communities drastically. With the Forest Acts and the Land Reform Act the condition of Adivasis deteriorated further.

**Forest Rights**

The colonial administration had established state monopoly over the forests by the end of the 18th century with the Forest Act of 1864 which empowered the British empire to declare any land covered with trees as government forest by notification. The roots of Adivasi alienation from forests lie in the policy of reserving forests during colonial rule (Sarin 2003). The focus of the colonial policy was on extraction of forest resources for commercial purposes and revenue generation neglecting the livelihood needs of the Adivasis (Saravana nd). He points out that plunder of timber, other forest resources and establishment of coffee, tea and other plantations I then forest region became a source of decline of the environment and affected the Adivasis adversely. Sarin (2003) argues that the colonial government was more responsive to local claims than the post independent state. For instance, she points out that the colonial state institutionalised the settlement of existing local rights in the IFA of 1927 by constituting village forests for meeting local needs of fuel and fodder. She criticises the state forest policies as well as the constitution of the Central Empowerment Committee (CEC) by the Supreme Court which views all lands with trees as forest and the reinforcement of its management responsibility to the Forest Department (FD), the biggest institutional landlord in the country.

There has been progressive depletion of forests in the district due to the forest policies of the colonial administration and the Indian state, with its large scale introduction of capitalist interest in forest wealth. Prasad (2003) points out that in 1803 when the East India Company established the monopoly to cut trees, people resisted and Colonel
Watson, a police officer was appointed as conservator to suppress the resistance. According to Prasad, the British government tried to acquire forest land many times and Adivasis resisted their move.

Finally, with the Forest Act of 1927 the rights of Adivasis over forests were reduced to mere privileges conferred by the state. The Forest Policy of 1952, the Wild Life Protection Act of 1972 and the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 further reduced these privileges of the people to concessions of the state in the post independent period (Bijoy nd). The Kerala state’s Forest Conservation Act of 1980 displaced the Adivasis from their lands in the forested areas and declared those areas as forest reserves. There are further attempts to discard even the concessions as indicated by the draft ‘Conservation of Forests and Natural Eco Systems Act’ that is to replace the Forest Act and the amendments proposed to the Land Acquisition Act and the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution (Bijoy 2001).

According to Kjosavic and Shanmugaratnam (2007), the migration process gathered momentum in the 1940s with the ‘grow more food campaign’ and when the private forests used by the Adivasi communities, especially the Paniyas and Kattunayakas, were taken over by the settlers for cultivation. Also, under the Wayanad colonisation scheme, land was allotted for ex-service men from the Second World War period and this also had detrimental effects on common the property rights of the Adivasis (ibid). Further, Prakash (2002) observes that in the 1960s, the migration intensified due to the private forest bill and land reform policies and it destroyed the ecological balance of the area as well as the Adivasi economy and life support systems by occupying their forest habitats.

According to Prakash (2002), migration to Wayanad destroyed the forest ecosystem as they indulged in deforestation for cash crop cultivation, oil grass cultivation, fuel and fodder. This resulted in soil erosion, climate change and failure of food crops. The yearly rainfall in the 1960s in Wayanad was 3441 millimeter and it reduced to 2000 millimeter in the 2000s. Kurichia’s punam (slash and burn) cultivation practices and hunting was also affected due to lack of availability of forest land and this in turn affected their health and their livelihood (ibid).
Prakash (2002) points out that the law to convert private forest into vested forest was passed in 1971 from which 50 per cent was earmarked for Adivasis. On May 10, 1971 government took over the responsibility with an ordinance and on August 23, 1971 permission was given by the president. But these lands have been encroached upon by the non-Adivasis and the government is endeavouring to regularise the encroachment instead of distributing it to the Adivasis. Further, against this law, Grasim Industries who bought 12000 hector private forests from Nilamboor Kovilakam approached the High Court and the court abolished the private forest law. However, the Supreme Court again passed the private forest law. This indicates the anti-Adivasi stand of the legal apparatus, which completely negates the customary laws of Adivasis.

**Madhava Menon Committee.** To study the private forest law and to implement the conditions in private forest law, the Government appointed a Committee under Madhava Menon as special officer. During the enquiry, the Madhava Menon Committee found out that without any record many Adivasis lived in the vested forest for centuries and the committee recommended that they should be given back their land from the vested forest (Prakash 2002). In the wake of this recommendation, many cases were filed related to vested forest and forest tribunals were established to settle the cases (ibid). In the 1971 law, there was no provision for appeal. But when the private forest law was amended in 1977, they included the clause to go for appeal. From 1978 onwards high court cases began between the government and private forest owners. The Government accepted defeat in the cases and the vested forests were captured back by *jenmis*, plantation owners and companies. After the Madhava Menon Committee recommendation to give the vested forest to the Adivasis who had lived there for centuries, those who got the forest land through court cases started evacuating Adivasis using force (ibid). So the vested forests which the government acquired returned to private parties and the Adivasis did not get the 50 percent of the vested forest recommended by the Committee. In fact, they lost even the forest land they had used earlier for their livelihood. Big plantation owners continued to occupy the vested forest. Thick forests were converted into cash crop plantations and

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16 Through the private forest vesting and Assignment Act 1971, the ownership and possession of all private forests in the state of Kerala shall transferred and vested in the government free from all encumbrances and the ownership of any other person in any private forest shall stand extinguished
later for purposes of tourism due to the failure and loss in cash crop cultivation (ibid). Prakash points out that the government used the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 to avoid giving vested forest land to Adivasis, but the same government allowed cash crop cultivation and occupation of forest land for tourism development. This clearly indicates the anti-Adivasi policy and lack of political will of the state to take decisions in favour of Adivasis. For instance, Prakash highlights the occupation of Nelliampathy forest by plantation owners where Adivasis had lived for a long period.

Later, the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill, 2005 recognised the close relationship of the Adivasis with the forests and the historical injustice done to them through displacement. However, the subsequent Scheduled Tribe and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006, diluted the Adivasi preference by including other forest dwellers in the purview of the Act and by extending the cut-off date. Even though the Act purported to address the historical injustice done to the Adivasis, it has not materialised in the implementation of the Act and the experience of the two Adivasi communities is analyzed in detail in the chapter on land issues.

**Land Reforms**

Land has been a major issue for Adivasis from the time of independence. It was the essential component around which Adivasis were mobilised in Wayanad as their land and common property resources got alienated from their hands in the feudal, colonial and post colonial periods. The Adivasis were not beneficiaries of the Kerala Land Reform Acts that abolished the ‘Landlord –Tenant' system as they became victims in the process of such reforms.

As part of land reform, the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill (KARB) introduced by the communist ministry of Kerala in 1957, was a landmark in the history of land legislations in post independent India. However, many modifications were made due to agitations led by landlords and political parties. Continuing pressure of the landed interests resulted in the dilution of KARB. As a result, the KAR Act of 1960, excluded plantations and all the adjacent and scattered agricultural land within the boundaries of plantations by broadening the definition of plantations. This redefinition of the provision in the Act relating to plantations has to be seen in a serious light concerning the Adivasi population
who followed a subsistence model of economy (Radhakrishnan 1989). The Amendment also permitted the eviction of labourers from small allotments of land given for hutments within the plantations. Further deletion of the provision invalidating land transfers after December 18, 1957 reduced the availability of surplus land. The one year time guaranteed to the *jenmis* for resumption of tenanted land also gave time for the *jenmis* to transfer lands securely (ibid). This again turned against the rights of the peasantry and Adivasis.

The land ceiling reform forced *jenmis* to sell the land to the migrants at cheaper rate. The Paniya community became one of the worst victims as they were bonded labourers and had no record for land ownership. The Paniyas and Kurichias lost the common lands they had used for livelihood when the state took ownership of surplus land and waste land. The state policy of surplus land included the land where a plantation was not established or there was no plan to raise a plantation by the landlords in the near future. According to Rammohan (2008), the land ceiling reform that was expected to release land to the landless was severely inadequate with the exemption of plantations and the landlords evading reforms through family partition arrangements.

Owing to continuous mobilisation and protest from *jenmis* and Devaswoms from different parts of the states, KARA was further diluted to Kerala Land Reforms Act (KLRA) and according to Radhakrishnan (1989) it is a mutilated version of the KARB as it eliminated the core provision of the earlier bills which allowed the rights of *jenmis* to transfer land to the tenants. It provided the *jenmis* and tenants to work out transfer of ownership mutually through the Land Tribunals (ibid). Also it allowed further exemptions in ceiling, such as cashew estates with an area of ten acres or more in one block, pure pepper or pure coconut gardens of more than five acres etc. (ibid). The leftist coalition government attempted to restore the major provisions of the KARB by amending KLRA in 1969 (ibid). However, the holding of untitled land and surplus land by the planters in Wayanad discussed in the later chapter on Land reveals the flaws in implementation.

The plantation based model of development implanted by big companies and rich landlords with lavish support from the government has displaced many tribal people from their homelands and their work, as vast areas are occupied by them. Land was purposely converted into rubber plantations for overcoming the ceiling laws and there was no effective machinery to restrain this practice (Kunhi Krishnan 1993). Raman (2002) points
out that the issue of land availability for distribution to the Adivasis could have been sorted out if the government was ready to redistribute the lands of big planting companies who have vast tracts of uncultivated land.

During the period of migration to Wayanad, the Devaswom managers and landlords allotted land to migrants under tenancy rights. In some cases, these lands were earlier under the tenancy of tribal people. But when landlordism was abolished and the tillers became owners, tribal people were left out. Settler farmers acquired the land in the garb of tenants to ‘tribal landlords’ and the tribes lost their land as the settlers attributed the position of landlords to them. The Adivasis had no other option but to become agricultural labourers and refugees in their own land (Raman 2002; Kunhaman 1989). Also the landlords started leasing out the land for minimum remuneration to outsiders realising that their surplus land would be taken away by the government and tribal people could not claim the land on which they had worked for years. The long process of legislative deliberation and implementation also was a stumbling block for the illiterate tribes in claiming land.

The policy of occupation of wastelands also affected the Adivasis as they were not competent enough to occupy such lands and get legal sanction for the same. With the occupation of waste lands, tribal people lost the village commons they used freely before. In the KRA Act of 1960, land belonging to religious, charitable or educational institutions of ‘public nature’ and public trust were exempted from the purview of the Act (Kunhi Krishnan 1993). This helped in the mushrooming of Religious institutions and NGO organisations in the area at the cost of alienation and dispossession of Adivasis.

Further, Ajit (2002) highlights that the conversion of food crops to cash crop plantation economy and the destruction of vast areas of paddy fields and forest was not the choice of farmers but the result of imposition of political power through the means of tax exemptions and other incentives especially during the land reform period. He points out that in Kerala between the 1940s and the 1990s, the paddy fields reduced by 6 lakh acres. The destruction of paddy fields was a major blow to the Paniya community as these fields were the reservoirs of their food and employment.
When the Land Reform Act was passed, the feudal concept of ownership changed. However, the capitalists were not touched. For instance, the plantations - small holdings as well as estates were not touched in the land reform under the name of development. All the natural vegetated land with varieties of plant species has been taken up by the government and distributed to the Kudiyans and Marupattakkars (the tenants), taking a small amount from which one share goes to the jennis. Thus, during land reform, these common lands which were freely accessed by the tribal people for livelihood purposes came under strong private ownership with land records. This shows the vested interest of the state to promote capitalist forms of cultivation with trading interests.

According to Bijoy and Raman (2003), the Kerala Land Reform Act was manipulated to suit the interests of the non-Adiwas people as they took land on short term lease for cultivation from the Adivasis. Accordingly, the Adivasis became ‘landlords’ and the non-Adiwas immigrants in turn registered themselves as tenants. Later the non-Adiwas immigrants claimed patta and the Adivasis became dispossessed. As Rammohan (2008) points out, the land reform enacted for garden land and rice fields was primarily a tenancy reform with transfer of land to intermediate and small tenants that left out the landless masses. Thus, the Paniyas, the landless Kurchiias and the non-tenant Kurichiias were at a loss, but Adivasi landlessness and land alienation was ignored during the implementation of land reforms.

Kerala Scheduled Tribes Act, 1975

The Debar Committee recommended in 1960 that all Adivasi land alienated since January 26, 1960 had to be restored to Adivasis. Considering the large scale land alienation, the Indian government promulgated an Act in 1975 called the Scheduled Tribes Act (restriction of transfer of land and restoration of alienated lands). This Act makes all transaction of Adivasi land during 1960 to 1976 invalid and states that they be restored to the original owners. However, it took fifteen years after the Debar Committee recommendation to enact the Kerala Scheduled Tribes Act 1975 (Singh 2001). The Government’s lack of sensitivity towards the tribal population is again revealed in the reluctance showed to restore their alienated land according to the Kerala Scheduled Tribes Act, 1975. It took a long time to formulate the Act in 1986 and by the time the politically powerful migrants opposed the implementation of the Act.
In 1988, Dr. Nalla Thampi Thera, a non-Adivasi physician and activist filed a petition to the High Court seeking the restoration of alienated land by implementing the 1975 Act. In October 1993, the High Court ordered that all alienated land be restored and all cases of land alienation be settled within six months. The United Democratic Front (UDF) and Left Democratic Front (LDF) government tried to make amendments in the 1975 Act but the governor foiled the attempts. The case dragged on till the court issued a deadline that the alienated land be restored by September 1996. The Bill was amended in 1996 legalising all transactions that took place with the Adivasis during the period, 1960-86 and those that did not exceed one hectare from restoration. However, most of the land alienated was less than a hectare in area and the greatest number of encroachments occurred before 1986. The president, K.R Narayanan pointed out that the amendment to the Act was in violation of the Constitution. Raman (2002) observes that the 1999 amendment twisted the Adivasi land question further by deciding encroachments up to five acres (less than 2 hectares) of land were to be ignored. Also the land to be given in compensation to the Adivasis was halved from more than two acres to one acre to achieve more gain to the settler farmers (ibid). The State government ensured that the new bill did not go to the President of India by putting it under ‘agricultural lands’- a state subject. Further, Raman (2002) points out the linguistic twist that happened in the 1999 Act - ‘The Kerala Restriction on Transfer and Restoration of Lands to Schedule Tribes’- the word ‘alienated’ denoting the lands captured by the settlers was removed from the Act. In August 2000, the High Court declared the controversial provisions in the new 1999 Act as unconstitutional and pronounced that the state government had willfully disobeyed the direction of the court to restore alienated lands and charged the state with contempt of court. The state government challenged the High Court judgement in the Supreme Court. As Bijoy (2002) opines, imposition of alien laws regulating ownership and an insensitive and biased administrative machinery alien to Adivasi culture contributed to the land alienation and marginalisation of Adivasis.

The 1996 amendment Bill was perceived by the Adivasis as an attempt to legalise the alienation of their land and they expressed their protest under the leadership of C.K Janu supported by the CPI (ML) group by organising an agitation before the state assembly (Singh 2001). Every single encroachment became legitimised and democratic, political
and legal avenues of the dominant system neglected the survival needs of the Adivasis (Bijoy 2002 see also Raman 2002).

In Kerala, the total number of applications for land restoration under the 1975 KST Act was 8,754 as on April 4, 1991 claiming 9,909.4522 hectares (Bijoy 2006). The government considered 8,088 applications requesting to restore 6,817.28 ha of land as valid. Only 463 applications were disposed off and an area of 544.5602 ha was restored. Over 3,000 applications were rejected for want of adequate documentation or recorded proof of ownership of land (Bijoy 2006). The Adivasis experience of the recent processes of land distribution under the KST Act will be discussed in the analysis chapter.

Critically examining the political lethargy in the issue of tribal land alienation, Bijoy and Raman (2003) point out that even though the CPI led Kerala government unanimously passed the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction on Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act, 1975, they remained inactive as regards its implementation. The situation today is that neither political parties nor the non-governmental organisations are found to be supporting the tribal communities in retrieving their alienated land (Centre of Excellence 2006). However, the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha (AGMS), a movement led by C.K Janu (Adivasi leader in Wayanad from Adiya community) has revived the land issue of Adivasis in Kerala.

**Other Constitutional Provisions - PESA, TSP**

After independence, constitutional provisions were made to protect tribal communities for their development. Article 244 of the Constitution provides for the administration of the scheduled areas in accordance with the Fifth Schedule and Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Kerala has not taken steps to bring tribal villages or habitation under the Fifth Schedule despite recommendations from the Dilip Singh Bhuria Committee. As a result, the constitutional provisions for self governance available at least in law have been denied to the tribal communities in Kerala (Bijoy 2006). The provision of Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act – commonly known as PESA came into effect from December 24, 1996 by which the 73rd amendment extended to the Fifth schedule areas envisioning self rule was therefore not applicable to Kerala.
During the Fifth Five Year Plan, the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) strategy of tribal development was introduced to address the issues of backwardness among tribal communities. TSP included strategies to promote the tribal’s standard of living through development activities as well as to protect them from exploitation through legal and administrative support (Manjula 2005). The Act to prevent Adivasi land alienation and the act to abolish bonded labour was passed in 1975. As part of TSP in Kerala, a separate government department was set up for tribal development in 1975 to rectify the drawbacks and speed up socio-economic development. During this period, more Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDPs) started functioning (ibid). The TSP that commenced in 1975 was decentralised during 1984 to the district level. Kunhaman (2002) points out that even though there was slight improvement, the approach was top down and the centralisation was shifted to the district level. As part of the Ninth Five Year Plan campaign, hundred per cent of the Tribal Sub Plan money was transferred to the Panchayati Raj Institutions but they faced difficulty in delivering the services and again fifty per cent was entrusted with the Tribal Development Department and 50 per cent with the Panchayats (George and Krishnan nd). The Tribal Development Department planned programmes in the areas of education, health, house construction, and other development programmes. However, studies show that the programmes catered to regional development more than to the welfare of Adivasis and thus benefited the non-Adivasis (ibid). According to Kunhaman (2002) these programmes were not more than organised charity and the reason for failure was the thrust on quantitative investment rather than qualitative achievement. He points out the flow of a large part of TSP to physical infrastructure development and the resultant non tribal migration into tribal areas with the improvement of infrastructure which further impoverished the Adivasis. He notes that tribal development has become a ‘bureaucratically dispensed charity’ and Adivasis became more dependent without any decision making power.

Kerala’s Decentralised Planning

The bureaucratic proceedings are so complex that it is difficult for tribal people to become partners in the development initiatives meant for them. There are too many levels of administration to pass any message or to implement any programme and tribal people become totally handicapped since their system is totally different and they are not
equipped with negotiating skills. The district planning approach was described as the first attempt at plan decentralisation in Kerala even though it was a bureaucratic decentralisation. The passing of the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India in 1993 formally recognised the authority of district, sub district and village level elected bodies (Panchayati Raj Institutions). As part of decentralisation, the Kerala government passed the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act in 1994, which intended to enhance the power of the Gram Sabha and the accountability of the Gram Panchayat. During this phase of decentralised planning, the planning campaign aimed at transforming the already decentralised bureaucratic planning at the district level into a democratic one (George and Krishnan nd).

In the process of decentralisation planning in the state, the concept of *Oorukoottam* (Tribal Gram Sabha) was introduced giving tribal people an opportunity to participate in their development planning. The new *Oorukoottams* (Tribal Gram Sabha) came into effect during 2003-04 with a vision of rejuvenating traditionally existed tribal community structure and self governance. George and Krishnan (nd) point out that the recommendations made by the Gram Sabha can be accepted or rejected by the executive council, but the recommendations of the *Oorukoottam* are binding on the executive council of the Panchayat. Kunhaman (2002) appreciates the new space created through *Oorukoottam* and people’s planning, but later studies show that even though *Oorukoottams* were envisioned to give voice to the tribal people in the planning process, in actual practice this was not more than a mandatory formality to be fulfilled by local level panchayats and Adivasi communities were side lined again. The elected tribal members of the Panchayat and *Oorukootam* head are driven by the political party to which they are affiliated and the community interests are not brought out in the decisions (Centre of Excellence 2006, Manjula 2005).

Once the Kerala State Planning Board (KSPB) realised that the *Oorukoottams* are not functioning well, it introduced the concept of tribal promoters, a group of tribal youth matriculate or above, selected by KSPB to work in the tribal hamlets and report back about the real local needs/demands of each of the tribal communities, envisioning more participation. Instead of finding out the root causes in their lack of participation, KSPB integrated *Oorukoottam* to the existing bureaucratic set up. Even though the system
makes the tribal promoters dysfunctional, a study conducted in Panamaram Panchayat reveals that they are aware of the influence of the politicians and corruption of the bureaucracy (Manjula 2005). This study also revealed a great difference in the participation of the Kurichias and the Paniyas in the Oorukootham planning process. This again indicates the social stratification among different categories of tribal people as an outcome of the development initiatives and various other factors.

As the discussions in the preceding sections show, when feudal land lords used the caste hierarchy system for its legitimacy, the colonial rule used its administrative set up to assume and force its superior scientific rationality and technology to exploit and alienate Adivasi communities in Wayanad. The increasing commercialisation of forest lands, agriculture and other common property resources caused maximum damage to the Adivasis and their subsistence economy. The state policies as a whole have been criticised by various scholars. According to Cheria (nd) the welfare programmes created contempt in the encroacher migrants towards tribal communities perceiving them as the beneficiaries. Bijoy and Raman (2003) observe that the progressive state of Kerala with its famed political will brings forth efficient implementation of ‘development projects’ including social forestry and eco-tourism adding injury to the tribal ethos, culture and welfare. Wayanad is described as a tourist spot and it is declared a tourist district by the Kerala government. Bijoy and Raman (2003) point out that these development trends further destroy the natural resource base of the area, affecting tribal communities, the most marginalised groups, who still depend on nature for their livelihood in manifold ways. As pointed out by others, the development programme itself creates dependency and reduces tribal communities to objects of charity and they are treated as lesser human beings (Cheria nd). It emerges from the discussion that state policies do not reflect the connection between Adivasi development and their access to land. Further, state policies do not respect the customary rights and cultural practices of Adivasi communities while implementing the land policies and other development programmes. Against this background, the response of Adivasis through their historical struggles for land and dignity are discussed. State policies in a way made the Adivasi communities more vulnerable and they responded to it through various resistant movements.
Adivasis’ Responses to Historical Exploitation and Development Policies

The failure of the colonial and independent state to address the Adivasi issues has led to various resistant movements. Adivasi demands were repeatedly thwarted even in the policy formulations of the state and underscored by the successive governments of the state. Inspite of the recommendations by the Debar Committee and the Madhava Menon Commission, the state disregarded Adivasis demand for land. Inspite of the availability of land there was no political will to restore Adivasi alienated land or to distribute land to the landless Adivasis. When the colonial rule introduced oppressive agricultural taxes to appropriate Adivasi land and labour and when Adivasis were pushed to the margins by the modern state, they were forced to plunge into resistance. Among many resistance movements in Wayanad, the Kurichia revolt in 1812, the so called ‘Naxalite’ struggle in Wayanad, the Ambukuthi, Cheengeri and Panavally land struggle, the AGMS strike at Secretariate, Thiruvananthapuram, and the recent, well known Muthanga struggle in Bathery, Wayanad are historical struggles led by Adivasis.

Kurichia Revolt

After the defeat of Pazhassi Raja, the Kurichias broke out in rebellion challenging British domination. The Kurichia revolt in 1812 is important as this is the first struggle in South India that the Adivasis organised against colonial and feudal exploitation, against intolerable levels of taxation and asserting their rights, even though it has not been given much credit by historians (Jacob 2006).

Until the arrival of the British, there was no systematic land tax system, though the Mysore regime made attempted to collect some tax. The share given to the landlord also was nominal in the form of gifts. The change from tribute paying to rent paying system achieved momentum during the colonial period; in 1806, the pattanikuthi (rent-tax) system was introduced by Warden, the then collector of Malabar. According to this system, a part of the produce had to be given to the landlord as rent and a part to the government as tax, and the tax had to be paid in cash. This was a double burden on the cultivators and raised serious protests from the agricultural communities that resulted in an uprising in 1812 led by the Kurichias and the Kurumas who were land owning communities (Logan 1951, Johney 2007). Johney (2007) points out that on March 25,
1812 they disarmed the company force which was in Wayanad and they occupied the control of the road to Wayanad. The posts of British armed forces at Bathery and Mananthavady were attacked. This rebellion lasted for six months and after the suppression, the colonial administration disarmed the Kurichias who were skilled hunters and archers, recognising their strength to fight against them. According to Kunhaman (1998), this is the first peasant uprising, but historians have not evaluated it in the context of the British policies and the beginning of the agricultural sector in Wayanad. This taxation was introduced by the Britishers to own agricultural land in Wayanad (Kunhaman 1998, Prasad 2003). Kunhaman points out that due to lack of commercialisation of agriculture, money was a rare commodity with the Adivasis and the British rulers hoped that the introduction of tax in terms of money would alienate Adivasis from their land and they could appropriate land and labourers easily for developing British plantations. This exploitative policy was recognised by the Kurichia community and they organised the struggle and British rulers were forced to remove the new tax policy.

It emerges that the Kuricha struggle, being an anti feudal and anti colonial struggle based on agriculture, has great relevance in the agricultural policies of the state, but they are not depicted as heroes of war against the British and against capitalist agriculture for revenue generation. However, they themselves reaffirmed their great role in the struggle against the British by erecting the monument of Thalackal Chandu, the famous Kurichia warrior. Kuricha leaders assert their identity as the leaders of an anti-colonial struggle and use the symbolic and cultural capital around it to organise themselves and act collectively. When official history neglects their great share in fighting against colonial rule, the young generation of Kurichias uses their collective memories to reconstruct their history. Das et al (2001) explore the reclamation of history by the marginalised Kui and Cree community for recognition of their own voice through discursive formulations and new ways of performing identity.

The ‘Naxalite’ Movement in Wayanad

In 1966, Varghese a radical communist leader committed to the cause of the poor became the secretary of the Karshaka Thozhilali Union in South Wayanad and he organised many strikes for the rights of Adivasis against the landlords. During the 1960s, the communist
parties tried to mobilise Adivasis against the local landlords for better wages. This helped the party enter into Adivasi areas and gain their support. However, complex issues such as restoration of land, forest legislations, curtailing their rights etc., were not a priority for the party. Those who were sympathetic to Adivasi issues organised the ‘Wayanad Adivasi Swayam Sevak Sangh’ (WASSS) that included all Adivasi communities. WASSS protested against alienation of land and the levying of tax for Adivasi farmers.

Varghese left the Communist Party when it stood against the communist ideologies and joined the Naxalite leader Kunnickel to fight for poor agricultural labourers who suffered bondage under landlords. In 1968, they organised a struggle in Pulpally, Wayanad against the Madras special police camp, the Forest Department and Pulpally Devaswom authorities who were trying to evict nearly 70,000 farmers who had settled in a forest area. They attacked the houses of two landlords and distributed the food grains stocked there among the Adivasis (Krishnakumar 2005). In another strike, one landlord was killed and this led to the unleashing of police force to suppress the Adivasis and their leader, Varghese. It is reported that innocent Adivasis were hunted by the police in their suppression of the Naxal movement and many of their women were sexually exploited. Varghese’s strike against landlords and his martyrdom for the Adivasi labourers shook the land lord - labour relationship in Wayanad (Johney 2001).

In Thirunelli Panchayat, they treasure the name Varghese and call him Peruman (The term which Adiya community use to address their elder people respectfully) for his contribution to the strike against the local landlords for better wages and rights of poor peasants and Adivasis. Raman from Chempankolly colony hesitated to call Varghese a naxalite. He remembered few names, Varghese, Uthaman and Raghavan, the radical left leaders who represented the Adivasi cause during the 1960s and 1970s. The brutal killing of Varghese is still alive in their minds and they say that today there is no committed leader like Varghese for addressing Adivasi issues. According to them, if Varghese were alive today he would not have allowed the political parties and bureaucrats to be corrupt to this extent.
In recent times, even criticism against the ruling party is labelled as Naxalism. There is a recent trend of branding people who critically evaluate the ruling party without engaging in any militant action as Maoist or Naxalite. Varghese’s murder and the declaration of emergency stopped the struggles of the Adivasis for two decades. However, since 1992, Adivasi mobilisation to reclaim their traditional rights over land has been revived under the leadership of Adivasi leader, C.K Janu. This movement was a response to the historical exploitation of Adivasis by the feudal, colonial and post-colonial state. When the Adivasis realised that the government was not taking any initiative to restore their alienated land and was reluctant to address their plea for allotting land to the landless, the Adivasis began occupying land through various land struggles.

**Land Struggles at Ambukuthy, Cheengeri and Panavally in the 1990s**

Fifty per cent of the land restored by the government under the Kerala Private Forest (Vesting and Assignment) Act of 1972, was meant for distribution among Adivasis (Singh 2001). When the Adivasis came to know about this rule, they started their struggle to occupy land which was meant for them. Adivasis identified 128 acres of vested forest in Mananthavady area and realised that half of it was already encroached by non-Adivasis and that the government had issued records for that (Prakash 2002). However, in 1994, when the Adivasis occupied the land and built 220 huts, the Forest Department and the police suppressed their move by harassing them and by arresting the encroachers. When the Adivasi occupants went to participate in a rally to affirm their land right, the Forest Department burned their huts. The Adivasis lead their rally to Ambukuthy in protest and the police arrested 317 Adivasis and filed case against 133 Adivasis (ibid). Adivasi women started a relay hunger strike in front of the Revenue Divisional officers’ (RDO) office and they rebuilt their huts in the vested forest and started living there again. C.K Janu and Surendran, a Dalit lecturer in DIET Wayanad started a hunger strike and the collector promised them an immediate solution. However, the collector could not do anything due to lack of political will (ibid) and they could not restore the land. Even  

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17 During my work, a foreign researcher reported that one Paniya in his study area was depicted as a naxalite by a political party. I have known this Adivasi man living with his wife and nine children. He was participated in Ambukuthy land struggle with Janu and has critiqued party politics and the government development model.
though the Adivasis approached the National Human Rights Commission for restoring their land at Ambukuthy they could not do anything (ibid). The court cases against the Adivasis who participated in this struggle are still going on.

After the aggressive land struggle at Ambukuthy, Mananthavady, Adivasis began the struggle in Cheengeri Rehabilitation project, where the government’s promises to distribute the project land to the Adivasis were not met and the social security measures failed. Two hundred and forty nine people entered the project land at Cheengeri, set up huts, occupied hundred acres of the project land and started their struggle on January 26, 1995 (Prakash 2002). Cheengeri Colony Samrakshana Samiti (A wing of South Zone Adivasi Forum) gave a petition to restore the land meant for them in the project but could not pressurise the government and they resorted into forceful occupation (Local Support Team 2010) Using the police, the state brutally suppressed their struggle and arrested 224 Adivasis including women and children and released them after keeping them in Kozhikode jail for 11 days. Janata Dal volunteers burned the huts that they had erected and the government immediately constructed a barbed wire fence to protect the land from further encroachment (Prakash 2002). The local Adivasi organisation, Cheengeri Colony Samrakshana Samithy remained vigilant and continued its struggle and the petitions filed from 1995 to 1998 bear witness to their protest (Local Support Team 2010). However, in a project meant for the Adivasis, they could achieve title deeds and that too for a few only after the historical struggle at Muthanga in 2003.

After the Adivasi struggle at Cheengeri and their release from jail, they marched to Panavally on March 5, 1995 under the leadership of C.K Janu and occupied 18 acres of forest which was earmarked as vested forest (Prakash 2002). The Adivasis erected huts in the area and started cultivating. The Forest Department burned their huts, arrested three people but they were released when Adivasi leaders negotiated with the authorities. They came back and again set up their huts and the police burned their huts again and arrested 102 Adivasis including children below five years. When they were released, they set up their huts again, started cultivation and proved that their determination could not be suppressed even with continuous harassment (ibid). Land occupation at another site, Panavally also challenged the idea that different Adivasi groups cannot come together for protest and proved the possibility of a pan Adivasi identity around the issue of land as
Adiya, Paniya, Kattunayaka and Kurichia communities together occupied the land at Panavally. However, the state continued the suppression of Adivasi land strikes using its police force even though their demands were within the provisions of the Indian Constitution. The history of breaking promises of distributing land to Adivasis was continued by the government and the land struggle achieved momentum from 2001.

**Intensified Land Struggles from 2001**

The Adivasi struggle reached its height when successive governments in the state failed to restore Adivasi land, despite several laws enacted for this purpose. All democratic, political and legal avenues in the dominant system neglect the survival need of Adivasis and their struggle intensified from 2001. In 2001, the Adivasi Dalit Samara Samiti (ADSS) led a forty eight day long agitation, by erecting Adivasi huts in front of the state secretariat at Thiruvananthapuram which came to an end with an agreement by the government to provide land for Adivasis.

Instead of solving the land question of Adivasis, the government first tried to buy the struggle by issuing a master plan to rehabilitate Adivasis on September 4, 2001, a day before the meeting with the Adivasi leaders (Singh 2001). The leadership strongly objected and insisted on land distribution. The Government failed to acknowledge the Adivasi struggle and tried to threaten them into submission by giving a stern warning. On September 19, 2001 A.K Antony, the then Minister of Kerala announced that the Adivasi struggle would not be restrained. Again the Kerala SC/ST minister, M.A Kuttappan promised to develop an Archery Institute, an Adivasi Medicine Research Institute, an English medium school along with some short term measures to pacify the agitators and to divert them from their agenda of five acres of land. By September 22, 2001 the Centre gave permission to establish a National Institute of Engineering for SC/ST students in Kerala. The Centre also sanctioned Rs.70 crores for the project to rehabilitate Adivasi families. The Government came forward with promises to identify 10,000 acres of land for distribution within two months and to give at least one acre of land to each landless Adivasi family (Singh 2001). On the meeting scheduled for September 25, 2001, the government included various political parties and Singh points out that the government sought to weaken the voice of the Adivasi committee by including the political parties claiming to represent the Adivasi community in the negotiation.
Their struggle at the secretariat achieved national attention and they received interstate support from civil society, writers, social activists and media persons. The government was forced to accept the historical necessity of giving land to the Adivasis in Kerala and to sign the agreement with AGMS promising land and implementing the Fifth Schedule. For the first time in the history of the Adivasis, their demand for land was agreed to and signed by the state; this will be remembered forever in Kerala’s Adivasi development history.

The major demands of the struggle committee was five acres of land for the landless and for all those with less than an acre of land, with a support programme for a period of five years to reach self sufficiency; the declaration of all Adivasi habitations in the state as ‘Scheduled Area’ under the Fifth Schedule of Article 244 and implementation of the Supreme Court judgement on the land restoration case. Under sustained pressure, the government agreed to provide five acres of land to each Adivasi wherever possible and accede to their other demands. The government also promised to distribute the land by January 2002. On the Government’s agreeing to this promise, the Adivasis withdrew the struggle on October 16, 2001 after 48 days of continuous struggle over land and livelihood. The Government constituted the Tribal Resettlement and Development Mission (TRDM) to carry forward the agreement in consultation with the people. The TRDM recommended that land distribution be started in January 2002 and completed within a period of five years. The High Court also directed the government to complete the distribution process by August 2006, but the order was not materialised.

The formation of Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha (the Grand Council of Adivasis, AGMS), an extra parliamentary instrument of the people was a significant result of the 2001 land struggle. AGMS has achieved popularity and attention from different parts of the world with the Muthanga struggle in Wayanad. The AGMS was founded in 2002 and is headed by C.K Janu. It has formed 2000 Ooru sabhas (groups formed in different Adivasi hamlets) from 36 Adivasi communities of Kerala and formed a state presidium constituting 160 members for its activities of restoration of their land. It was spontaneously formed after their historical struggle for Adivasi land in front of the secretariat of Kerala. The success of the 2001 struggle lay in the Adivasi’s success in securing the promise of the government to distribute one to five acres of land. But the
agreement and promises remained dysfunctional and Adivasi resistance reemerged at Muthanga.

**Resistance at Muthanga**

When all the promises and agreements made by the government to distribute land to the Adivasis in 2001 were broken, the Adivasis plunged into another struggle by entering the Muthanga plantation and declaring self rule. Even though the Adivasis were once again brutally suppressed in the struggle, the Adivasi land issue gained national and international attention and support. The development concept designed for Adivasi people was challenged thoroughly with this struggle. When the government depicted this struggle as encroachment, the Adivasis defined it as a 're-entry' into their home land (Prasad 2003).

Adivasis proclaimed at Muthanga: ‘....thousands of refugees going to their ancestral lands conversing with the spirits of the mountains with ease, as though they got back their freedom that they lost centuries ago’ (Janu and Geethanandan 2003). However, the people whose belief system is rooted in ancestral worship and nature worship were deprived of land, the very base of their identity, culture, belief system and survival. In Muthanga, they tried to reclaim it through word and action. They related their land with their ancestors. They reconnected their ownership to land by pointing out that their ancestors were buried there. More than land records and evidence, the Adivasis always value and stress their relationship with ancestors and the customary practices of their community for accessing the resources of land.

When land becomes the central issue, Adivasis transcend all differences - ethnic, class and party differences and converge. So Adivasi identity, culture and mobilisation in Wayanad is not just a romantic idea, but a highly contested political and cultural concept revolving around land and its resources that they lost in the historical process. However, there are enough incidents of disowning their Adivasi identity and culture to evade the exclusion and stigmatisation by the dominant group who attach backwardness with adivasiness. Today their affinity for modernity and progress and acceptance by the larger community results in identity conflict. As Osella and Osella (2000:10) point out, ‘identity is always multiple, and always composed of interwoven threads of caste, class, religion,
party affiliation, family, house name, occupation, gender, age and locality”. According to them, identity has at least four levels of meaning and association, for the person, ontologically; for others, looking at and placing the person within various social arenas; for the community, presenting a group face to itself and to other groups and finally for the analyst as outsiders looking in. So they suggest a person’s identity is as dependent upon the behaviour of the neighbours as upon the self, and thus shifts in identity or status should be worked out in groups. However, AGMS was transcending the stigmatised identity contributed by the dominant group and expanded their consciousness to perceive their Adivasiness as a cultural and political right centred on land right and self management.

Steur (2009) however, criticises that Janu is romanticising the Adivasi identity and culture by creating the illusion of a pan Adivasi identity. However, in Muthanga, she proved that it is possible to transcend the ethnic, class and political boundaries among different Adivasi groups if they organised themselves around the issue of land right and other unique cultural aspects of Adivasis like nature worship and ancestor worship. According to Kujur (2010), the Adivasi consciousness has emerged to promote their rights and privileges because their very survival is at risk. As Xaxa (1999) points out, the identity now being expressed by the term, ‘Adivasi’ is an expanded identity cutting across tribes bearing different names, speaking different languages or dialects. It appears that Janu is not romanticising the Adivasi identity but affirming the cultural and political right of the Adivasis with an expanded consciousness. However, we cannot deny the fact that notions and practices of untouchability exist among different Adivasi groups as a shadow of the past when they are not politically conscious about their cultural rights and common threads as Adivasis.

Adivasi leaders in the colonies were disheartened and one of them challenged the state by pointing out, “We are not yet given the Promised Land. At least if we are released from the court cases in connection with the land strikes we could have earned our livelihood peacefully”. This resistant movement indicates that the land question of Adivasis is unresolved in Kerala, the state which achieved worldwide acclaim for its development model as well as land reforms. Baviskar (1995) in her study on Anjanvara Adivasis and their struggle, points out the subordination of Adivasis by the State. She
highlights the Adivasi construction of ‘state as a thief’ looting their resource base contradicting the image of the state as a benevolent provider and this is relevant to Wayanad too.

According to Kunhaman (2007), redistribution of assets and resources must be the responsibility of the State and development must be that of the community. He points out that ‘development’ is an abstract concept and it can be materialised only if decomposed to right to land, food security, employment, education, health and shelter. While talking about development indicators, education and health take precedence and the Kerala model is appreciated for its achievements in education and health. Against the background of tribal development initiatives and Adivasi responses, we will look into the current experiences and perceptions on education, health, labour, employment and land in the analysis chapters. The next chapter examines how Paniyas and Kurichias perceive and experience the present institutions and the process of education.