CHAPTER IV
TRIBES IN TRANSITION

Trapped in the geographical seclusion of dense forest and long rivers, the tribal communities in the district were cut off from the mainstream and direct forces of social changes. Naturally, their cultural ethos and material culture were different resulting in the formation of a distinct life ethnicity and identity. This ethnic identity is the base of their culture and it regulates their individuality, behaviour and pattern of life. It was a community within a larger community. Robert Redfield calls this type of group as ‘Little Community’\(^1\) of little tradition\(^2\). According to him, Little Community is a small group of individuals living together, which are having their own culture, and largely away from large complex culture\(^3\). He has opined that little communities or small communities have been a predominant form of human living through out the history of humanity.\(^4\) These little communities are generally in a state of isolation and their culture and tradition are confined to this little or small

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\(^2\) Robert Rdfield developed two concepts of great and little traditions to study a civilization. One was formal, written, literate and reflective few. On the other hand, another is informal, oral, illiterate and unreflective many. Redfield called the former as ‘great tradition’ and the latter as ‘little tradition’. He observed that the great tradition is cultivated in schools or temples located at different places. These places were visited by peasants. He also observed teachers and priests are mediating between the two traditions. In addition, the little tradition works itself out and keeps itself going in the lives of unlettered in their village communities. Robert Rdfield, *Peasant Society and Culture*, Chicago, 1973, pp.41-42.

\(^3\) Ibid

\(^4\) Ibid
surrounding area which is called ‘culture area’.\textsuperscript{5} This particular geographical situation has been a determining factor of moulding the culture of these little communities, which is called ‘geographic determinism’.\textsuperscript{6} As S.C. Sinha has observed that, the tribals “are isolated in ecology, demography, economy, politics and other social behaviour from other ethnical groups. Such historical image differentiates the tribal communities from the non-tribals and provides tribal identity.”\textsuperscript{7}

They have been interacting with ecological system since time immemorial and their interaction with environment has been successful. In the past, these tribes were simply hunters and food gatherers. Forest has been their traditional homeland. Each group had its own territory in which its members hunt animals and collect forest produces for exchange. Such a territory was often quite extensive because the survival of such a group mainly depends upon the produces that the nature offers by if self. The forest dwellers found wild-growing fruits in trees and edible roots and tubers in the jungle to supplement their food. The forest also provided them necessary timber and bamboos for house building and for the manufacture of various implements. They also collected honey, medicinal herbs and other minor forest produces, which they could sell, or barter in the weekly markets or exchange centres. They hunted in the jungle and fished in the rivers that flow through their

\textsuperscript{5} Clark Wissler, \textit{The American Indian}, New York, 1922, p.218.  
habitat and could supplement their vegetarian diet with meat. Slash and burn cultivation was an integral part of the tribal economy. The tribes that preferred shifting cultivation deliberately chose hilly forest areas as their habitats. Moreover, the shifting cultivators always lived with forest alone and found ample time and leisure to get away from the full routine of monotonous farm work through hunting or fishing or the collection of jungle produce. Thus, it could be assumed that, the tribal life was eco-friendly in character and was adjusted to the physical environment through the process of ‘ecological adaptation’.

Redfield designated little communities as ‘an ecological system’ after analysing the pivot role that ecology plays in moulding the personality and identity of the little communities. The report of a Committee on Forest and Tribals by the Government of India states that the tribal communities “are not only forest dwellers but also, for centuries, they have evolved a way of life which, on the one hand, is woven round forest ecology and forest resources, on the other ensures that the forest is protected against depredation by man and nature.” But now, a general restlessness is taking place among the tribals of the region as they are passing through a period of transition. Their tribal tradition is now losing its purity and originality and is either being dissolved into the mainstream or being swallowed by non-tribals. Their social, economic, religious and cultural aspects are undergoing changes and they face...
the problem of identity crisis. This transition is the net result of the increased contacts with the more advanced non-tribals and the consequent acculturation.

The process of cultural change through cultural contacts has been described as acculturation. Acculturation can be defined as “those phenomenon which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first hand contact.”\(^\text{11}\) In the Indian context, the process of acculturation is reciprocal in nature. D.D.Kosambi states “acculturation in India was a continuous process extending over the millennia, very difficult to date for that very reason. It was not at base a violent action, since both the more advanced and less advanced elements in the formation of a new society borrowed from each other.”\(^\text{12}\) D.N.Majumdar has referred to the concept of transculturation among the Hos of Singhbhum that reflects the reciprocal impact of tribal culture on the Hindu castes living in tribal villages.\(^\text{13}\) M.N.Srinivas developed the concept of Sanskritization to denote the acculturation process among the Hindu castes in India. Sanskritization is a process whereby a low caste acquires a higher position in the caste hierarchy by adopting the customs, rites, beliefs and way of life of the ‘twice-born’ or dwija.\(^\text{14}\) It represents cultural mobility within the framework of the established

\(^{13}\) D.N.Majumdar, The Affairs of A Tribe: A Study in Tribal Dynamics, Lucknow, 1950, p.3.
\(^{14}\) M. N Srinivas, Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South Indis,Bombay,1952, p.30.
great tradition and the stratification system of caste. The sanskritization of a group has usually the effect of improving its position in the local caste hierarchy. It normally presupposes either an improvement in the social or economic or political position of the group consciousness resulting from its contact with a source of the great tradition such as pilgrim centres or monastery or proselytizing sect. He asserted that this concept of Sankritization is also applicable in relation to the tribes.\textsuperscript{15}

McKim Marriott modified the great and little traditions of Redfield and argued that the twin concepts of “Universalization” and “Parochialization” are operating in the socio-religious systems of Indian villages.\textsuperscript{16} According to him, the concept of Universalization refers to the “carrying-forward of materials which are already present in the little traditions which it encompasses.”\textsuperscript{17} The opposite process, which of Parochialization, is defined as the “downward devolution of great tradtional elements and their integration with little traditional elements. It is a process of localisation.”\textsuperscript{18} These two processes are complementary to each other. The study of one in isolation of another is not possible to understand the Indian civilization as a whole. He is of the opinion that “an indigenous civilization is one whose great tradition originates by a


\textsuperscript{17} McKim Marriott, ed.,\textit{Village India: Studies in the Little Community}, Chicago,1955, p.197.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}, p.200.
Universalization”\textsuperscript{19}, while these great traditions are localised by Parochialization.\textsuperscript{20} Finally, Marriott pointed out that these processes are by their nature, not restricted only to the Hindu culture, but are applicable to all other cultural dimensions of great and little traditions.\textsuperscript{21}

Hinduisation is another traditional process of cultural change among the tribals. L.P.Vidyarthi attests that 89% of the tribals of India have acclaimed themselves under the fold of Hinduism.\textsuperscript{22} G.S. Ghurye calls the tribals as ‘Backward Hindus’ after observing the impact of Hinduism on tribals.\textsuperscript{23} Hinduisation is a continuous process of imbibing and borrowing Hindu cultural traits from the neighboring Hindus and accordingly the tribals gradually get accommodated in the larger society\textsuperscript{24}. Bose calls this as ‘Hindu method of tribal absorption’\textsuperscript{25} Hinduisation has been a dominant acculturative phenomenon among the tribes of Malappuram district. Though the tribals of the district have increased contacts with neighboring non-tribal people like Christians and Muslims, their relation to Hinduism is quite different. The

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p.197.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p.200.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p.218.
\textsuperscript{22} L.P.Vidyarthi, \textit{The Tribal Culture of India}, Delhi, 1976, p.455.
\textsuperscript{23} G.S.Ghurye, \textit{The Scheduled Tribes}, Culcutta, 1963,p.20.
\textsuperscript{24} The reverse process is called tribalisation. S.L. Kalia described the process of tribalization occurring in Jaunsar- Bawar in Uttar Pradesh and in the Bastar region of Madhya Pradesh. According to this process, high caste Hindus temporarily resident among tribal people take over the latter’s mores, rituals and beliefs, which are in many respects antithetical to their own. S.L.Kalia, “Sanskritization and Tribalization”, \textit{Bulletin of the Tribal Research Institute}, Chindwara (Madhya Pradesh), Vol.2, No.4, 1959, pp. 33- 43. In the process of tribalization, according to M.N. Srinivas, the representatives of the great tradition may succumb to the little tradition, which seems to have happened occasionally. M.N.Srinivas, \textit{op.cit.},(n-15), p.19.
main reason for the tribal attraction towards Hinduism is that Hindu culture especially of the beliefs, rituals and ceremonies tend to be the modified forms of the tribal practices and tribal culture. Besides, the Hindus were the earliest immigrants to the area and from the very early periods, itself there have been several points of contact between the Hindus of the area and the tribal communities living within it. The cultural changes among the hill tribes of Kerala in the beginning of the 20th century, has been described as follows: “The forest and hill tribes, however, are well known to be undergoing a slow process of Hinduizing or rather Brahmanization, as a result of their contact with the Brahmin customs of their neighbors in the plains, and to often pay a sort of reverence to the Hindu Gods while they simultaneously worshipping their original spirit deities”.

This is a process of transformation from isolation to assimilation.

The assimilation of tribal population into the mainstream has been taking place through out the period of history. The smaller tribal communities with primitive hunter gather life were the major victims of cultural domineering. Tribal communities with larger population and settled agricultural life could maintain their identity, to a great extent, because of their numerical strength and resultant adaptive ability. During the pre-historic period, the cultural transformation from hunter-gatherer to food producer was a slow process. The cultural transformation that took place in human history

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during the last thousand years on earth was very fast “Ten thousand years ago, the entire population of the earth subsisted on hunting and gathering, as their ancestors had done since the dawn of culture. By the time of Christ, eight thousand years later, tillers and herders had replaced them over at least half of the earth. At the same time of the discovery of the New world, only perhaps 15% of the earth’s surface was still occupied by hunters and gatherers, and this area has continued to decline at a progressive rate until the present day, when only a few isolated pockets survive.”  

The period 5th Century BC to 2nd Century AD was very crucial in the transformation of Kerala tribal society. It was during this period when Kerala coast witnessed the emergence of port-towns like Musriz because of the increased international trade by Greeco-Roman merchants through the Red Sea. The chief items of exporting were mainly spices such as cardamom, cinnamon, ginger, turmeric and pepper. The steadily increase in demand for oriental spices and subsequent growth in maritime trade created the situation that required more labourers in collecting the hinterland resources. Such historical situation led to the movement of tribals form the eastern side of the Western Ghats to its west. With the increasing interest of foreign merchants in the resources of Kerala, the geographically isolated region from pan Indic influences, was ripe for change from primitive tribalism and nomadic past.

Agricultural produces and many other rich raw materials of the hinterland in Kerala formed the resource base for the growth of port-towns, especially of Musriz, in the pre-Christian era. It appears that the continuous interaction with the West Asian merchants in increasing trade and commercial use of Kerala ports perhaps culminated in the ascendency of a chiefdom\textsuperscript{29} in the megalithic society of Kerala.\textsuperscript{30}

The history of tribal transformation in Malappuram district, Kerala in general, goes back to the period of Brahman migration to the area. The history of the Brahman community in Kerala is the history of the transformation of the traditional society because of the contacts with a group of advanced material culture. This element worked as the agency, which afflicted Kerala to a great tradition of Indian civilization reorienting the semi-tribal society, and polity in Kerala on the classical Hindu lines . . . The success with which the Brahmans met in Kerala was the success of better agricultural techniques and better organizing ability in a society that was yet to emerge from tribal status. With the growth of the Brahman settlement the reciprocal cultural assimilation/acculturation was also started. The non-Hindu society was reoriented on Hindu lines.\textsuperscript{31} The process of tribal acculturation in the district


\textsuperscript{30} It is evident that by the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Century B.C, the territory has emerged into a kingdom and found mentioned in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 13\textsuperscript{th} Edicts of Asoka as one of the important peripheral principalities of the Mauryan empire.

\textsuperscript{31} Kesavan Veluthat, \textit{Brahman Settlements in Kerala}, University of Calicut, 1978,p. 11.
was also intensified with the British colonial expansion in the region. The conversion of major areas of forest into plantation opened wide scope for external influence. “The symbiotic relationship suffered a setback during the colonial rule when forest was looked upon only as a source of maximization of profit and not as a vital link between human habitat and the larger environment.”

The large scale immigration of peasants from the plains of the Southern Kerala with advanced technologies and new methods of cultivation gave a new impetus to the process of acculturation. “The immigration adversely affected the tribals by alienating them from their traditional lands and by subjecting them for ruthless exploitation and placing them at an inferior social status.”

The modern factors that are responsible for the tribal transformation include urbanization and industrialization, tribal development schemes, modern education, modernization of communication and administration, missionary activities and the like are of recent origin, and the external factors which do not emerge as a result of normal contacts of the tribal people with the non-tribal people of the area. The transformation of tribal life is taking place in different places of the district at different levels as a process of natural change as they are coming in contact with other communities and with the effect of the welfare measures. Within the last fifty years non-tribal

population influx has been taking place in the region. Virgin forests have been cleared for the planting of teak and rubber. The vast tribal habitat of the district, except a few, has been invaded by the advanced people with improved technologies who have settled there in large numbers. Many of the tribals are brought and rehabilitated in the countryside that also made them contact with the modernized. Penetration of tourists, administrative officers, missionaries and immigrants in the form of cultivators, planters, etc into the tribal areas accelerated the tribal contact with outside world.

Administrative headquarters, roads and communicative facilities in their areas have also facilitated the tribe- non-tribe interaction in all means. For the collection of daily useful goods and for the selling of forest produces they have to contact the modern exchange centres. In all these, the tribal people are in contact with the advanced people regularly. Such contacts are due to the improvement of communications, particularly the construction of motorable roads. In the past, communication between tribals and non-tribals was very difficult as the roads and other means of transport were inadequate. In the past, bullock-carts, buffalo-carts were used. A drastic change had occurred in the field of transport and communication in Malabar under Mysorean rule. Tipu Sultan, “the pioneer of roads in Malabar”\textsuperscript{34} had constructed a vast net work of roads in Malabar including the hilly area.\textsuperscript{35} No

\textsuperscript{34} Evans and Innes,\textit{ Malabar Gazetteer}, Vol. I, Madras,1951,p.267.

\textsuperscript{35} Some of the important roads that had been built by Tipu are Calicut- Tamarassery, Battery- Kozhikkode, Malappuram-Tamarassery, Farook- Coimbatore, Chaliyam- Chettuvali etc. For more details, see \textit{Ibid.}
part of Malabar was left without roads. The Tamarassery Ghat, up which a steep gunroad ran, was the meeting place of no less than four roads, two led, by different roads from Malappuram and two from Calicut, one following more or less the line of the present Mysore road and the other passing through Feroke and Chathamangalam. Feroke (Ferokabad), Tipu’s capital of Malabar, was connected with the Karukkur Ghat, by the road, which runs through Kondotty, Edavanna and Nilambur, and with Coimbatore.\textsuperscript{36} These, roads facilitated easier travel and communication on an unprecedented scale via the Ghat. The British, with commercial interest, extented the Malappuram-Tamarassery road up to Nilgiri tea plantation and the railway line from Sornur to Nilambur teak plantation\textsuperscript{37}. In 1910, Manjery Motor Service started from Manjery to Calicut connecting the hinterlands. However, at present by the development of modern means of transport and communication, the gap between the tribals and non-tribals has been reduced considerably. The non-tribal intrusion into the tribal areas as forest contractors, tourists, merchants and their visit to the tribal areas to collect the farm and forest produces from the tribals became common. In return, they catered to the daily needs of the tribals and provided a meeting place for interaction between the tribals and the non-tribals. The degree of interaction varies according to both topological and

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., pp268,269.

\textsuperscript{37} The railway line connecting Kadalundi and Tirur was first opened for traffic by the Madras Railway company on 12\textsuperscript{th} March 1861 and was extended to Kuttippuram on 1\textsuperscript{st} May 1861. Sornur-Nilambur railway line was opened for traffic on February 1927. It passes through the eastern border of Malappuram district. Nilambur road, Vaniyambalam, Thuvvur, Melattur, Pattikkad, Angadippuram and Cherukara are the stations in the line in the district.
ecological factors. Small groups in remote areas are less likely to be affected by the contacts with outsiders than the rehabilitated. We can characterize them in the category of what A.L.Kroeber termed ‘part- societies’ with ‘part-cultures’ forming a class segment of a larger unit of civilization.\(^38\).

Cities and towns are the focal points of cultural change. In this regard, Nilambur town and other minor towns like Edakkara, Chungathara, Vazhikkadavu, Moothedam, Karulai, Pookottumpadam, Kalikavu, and Karuvarakundu are the active centres of cultural interactions in the area. Historically, they were the early exchange centres, later emerged as towns. However, not all the tribals of the area have regular contacts with these towns they occasionally offer visits there.\(^39\) Penetration of market economy and consumerism also intensified the tribal contacts with these urban centres. This urban-rural network\(^40\) acts as a medium for the mutual communication of great and little traditions and of other cultural differences between and among tribes and non-tribes. The cultural innovations of these urban areas would naturally spread to the interior tribal areas. S.C.Dube observes that “The inspiration

\(^38\) According to Kroeber, the communities like peasants exist in an intimate relationship with cities and towns. They produce the material items they need for life but depend on markets to sell their forest produces and to buy items which they cannot produce themselves. A.L.Kroeber, *Anthropology*, New York, 1941, p.248.

\(^39\) On the occasions like *Nilambur Pattu*, Onam, Vishu, Deepavali they come to the Nilambur town. The chief motives of their visit during these occasions except *Nilambur Pattu* are observing cinema and drinking alcohol.

\(^40\) Robert Redfield referred to this process as ‘folk-urban continuum’. According to him, in folk-urban continuum or folk urban dichotomy, folk society comes in contact with urban society and inherits certain characteristics, so a folk society has certain characteristics of urban. It is between illiterate and literate, between undeveloped and developed, between simple and complex societies. Robert Redfield, *op.cit.*, (n-1), pp.135-148.
and lead for modification in the traditional ways definitely come from the urban areas, brought in to the village community by semi-urbanized people or inspired by the example of urban relatives…The rural communities clearly take the lead from the urban areas, although not without hesitation, misgivings, doubts and an initial resistance.”41 Thus, the presence of these towns is an important factor in determining the degree of acculturation that is taking place in the interior tribal areas.

The tribe, non-tribe interaction should be conceived as a socio-cultural process. The pattern of interaction has changed with increased communication. In some areas, the pattern of interaction is co-operative than competitive. Generally, the pattern of interaction seems to be exploitative though co-operation appears to be the general norm. Now the interaction is increasing as a socio-economic interdependency between the two. The resultant effect of these interactions is acculturation, especially in the field of material culture. The level of acculturation differs from tribe to tribe according to the rate of interaction with great tradition and modern culture. The rate of change is very high among the tribals inhabit in the main land or villages comparing to those live in the interiors of the forest.

Occasional instances like festivals, weddings, plays, dances, musical concerts, recitations, etc., have great role in accelerating tribal tranformation.

These are called ‘cultural performances’. According to Milton Singer, each cultural performance has “a definitely limited time span, a beginning and an end, an organized program of activity, a set of performers, an audience, and a place and occasion of performance.” In cultural performances, cultural traits are disseminated and transmitted through the ‘cultural media’ of song, dance, instrumental music, verbal texts, plots and themes, the scene of the performance, etc. The festivals like Nilambur Pattu, other temple festivals or pooram are the major cultural performances in Malappuram district that profoundly influence the culture of the tribals in the region. It is notable that Robert Redfield observed temples as the major centres where Greate tradition is being cultivated and priests as the mediators between the Greate and Little traditions. Modern amenities like T.V, radio, telephone, electricity, roads etc. also facilitate these cultural exchange processes.

As a part of mainstreaming the tribals, the Government of India has been implementing various schemes and programmes since independence. Kerala has special departments to promote the welfare of the tribes. In 1975 the state has created a Department of tribal Welfare under a Director of the status of a senior officer of the Indian Administrative Service. All the

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43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 *Nilambur Pattu* is a well-known ancient festival held at the Vettakkorumakan temple at Nilambur Kovilakom in the month of February. *Vettakkorumakan* (*Kirata Moorthi*) is the deity of the tribals. The festival is celebrated as the festival of Eranad. People of all walks of life irrespective of religion, caste and community participate in the festival, which give it a secular tinge. Tribals of the area largely participate in the festival.
46 Robert Redfield, *op.cit.* (n-2), pp.41-42.
programs of tribal welfare are administered by this department, which also run a tribal Research and Training Centre. Formerly the Department of Harijan Welfare was in charge of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. At present, in Kerala, there are seven\textsuperscript{47} Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) offices and nine\textsuperscript{48} Tribal Development Offices functioning well with the Government’s special interests for the tribal population. Besides, KIRTADS (Kerala Institute for Research, Training and Development Studies for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) functions at Calicut with the aim of encouraging researches and studies on the backward classes. ITDP Nilambur has been planning and implementing various schemes for the upliftment of the tribes in Malappuram district. Non-Government organizations (NGOs) devoted to this task have accelerated the Government’s efforts.

The tribal development programmes also accelerate the detribalization process. Since Independence, the governments in both the Centre and the State have paid special attention to the upliftment of tribals and tribal areas. The Constitution of India has accorded them special status and legislations were enacted by the Government to protect the tribal’s interest in the mainland as well as in the forest. Indeed the Constitution has included separate Schedule for this purpose. The major constitutional provisions include

\textsuperscript{47} They are Nedumangad, Kanjirapally, Thodupuzha (Idukki), Agaly (Attappadi), Nilambur, Kalpetta (Wynad) and Kannur.

\textsuperscript{48} They are Punalur, Ranni, Muvattupuzha, Chalakkudi, Palakkad, Kozhikkode, Sulthan Bathery, Mananthody and Kasargode.
reservation of seats in the Union Parliament and State Assemblies, the Union and state bureaucracies and in the educational institutions run or assisted by the state. Moreover, lakhs of rupees are earmarked every year in terms of various schemes of housing, education, health, drinking water, electrification, sanitation, transport and communication etc. to raise the tribal people to the level of the advanced neighbors. Though only a small section of the community is the beneficiary of these schemes such programs have profound influence on the traditional way of life of the tribals.

As a part of compulsory education, educational institution or facilities from pre-primary onwards, are provided in tribal areas. Tribal children study in the educational institutions along with the children of advanced communities of great tradition. As Robert Rdfield observes, schools are the active theatres where Great tradition is cultivated and teachers are the mediating persons between the Great and little traditions.\[^{49}\] Moreover, nowadays the more progressive tribal boys and girls are going to colleges for higher education. They are the better agents of modern life. Living among students of advanced communities they begin to hate their own way of life, and adopt whatever they find as the elements of modernity among their fellow students. When they return to their habitat, they become models for others to imitate. The vernacular taught is not the vernacular of the tribes, but that of the state. The medium of instruction is also the language of the state. If the

\[^{49}\] Robert Rdfield, op.cit., (n-2), pp.41-42.
teacher is a member of the local tribe, he may use the tribal language in the
class for convenience. The textbooks for teaching language and literature
contain materials from the life of the advanced communities and have no
reference to the tribal life or tribal ideas. Books on history only teach the
history of the elite or advanced and totally ignore the achievements of tribal
heroes and tribal life.

Christian missionaries have been the active agents of cultural change
among the Indian tribals since the British rule. Their activities have profound
influence among the tribals in the North-Eastern parts of India in the form of
large scale conversion. However, in the case of the tribals in Malappuram
district the impact of Christianity has been felt the least. The tribal conversion
into Christianity or Islam is not reported.

MATERIAL CULTURE

The material culture of the tribals in the district is rapidly changing. In
the past, these tribals were hunters and food gatherers and lived in forest
where they built small huts with forest wood. But now, as a part of the
schemes for modernizing tribals, most of them are rehabilitated in the houses
of modern types built by the government of Kerala. Most of these houses are
electrified and many have the modern amenities like T.V, radio and telephone.
A very few live in their traditional caves and houses. Destruction of forest has
affected the traditional home construction. Their traditional household articles
are replaced by steel, aluminum, bronze, plastic, and fiber materials. In the past, earthen pots and bamboo were used for storing and cocking food. But today, they rarely use earthen pots. They do not make domestic utensils themselves but buy from markets. The market economy and consumerism have changed their life.

The changes in the acquisition of new habits and styles are noticed in their dress and ornaments. The old style of tribal dress and ornaments are now giving place to the new styles of cloths cut and stitched in urban style. Dress pattern of these tribals has changed to a considerable extent irrespective of group, age, sex and economic conditions. In the past, their men had only cloths around the waist down to the knee while the major portion of the body remained uncovered and their women had only a chela. But today, these tribes, even the primitive groups like Cholanaickan and Kattunayakan, wear the modern dresses like shirts, mundu, pants, lungis, T-shirts, sarees, churidar, maxies, blouses of various colours. Most of them wear footwear when they go out. They are aware of the cleanliness and washing soap is largely bought from the market. All their dresses are bought from the market. Many tribal women use cosmetics due to the great influence of the modernity by contact with urban centres. In the past, both men and women used ornaments made by them, which include bangles, earrings, finger rings, necklaces and nose rings. Now traditional ornaments are used rarely even by old women. The ornaments of the new generation include bangles, ear-rings, finger rings, necklaces and
nose rings of gold, silver, glass and jade. This change is mainly due to the influence of market economy and lack of knowledge of the new generation about the technology of making the traditional cultural outfits. They also have watches. Those who wear their traditional mode of dress and ornaments are very few and majority of them come from the primitive tribal group viz, Cholanaickan and Kattunayakan. The primitive fire making technology is prevalent only among the tribal communities like Cholanaickan, Kuttunayakan, and Kattu Paniyan who live in remote hilly areas.

The traditional food pattern of the tribals has also changed a lot. The modern food items have over powered the indigenous food articles. Formerly their staple food consisted of jungle roots, fruits, tubers etc. However, these days they prefer rice as their staple food. Cholanaickan and Kattunayakan still consume their food from jungle along with rice. They also engage in hunting and fishing though not regularly. The change in the food habit from natural rich protein to less nutritious one has reduced the resisting power of their body and became victims of many diseases. They also become unaware of the traditional medicinal practices due to large scale dependency on modern allopathic medicine. Smoking beedi and cigarette and chewing betel have been in vogue among almost all groups.

The important change in the economy of the tribals of the district is the transition from gathering roots, tubers, and wild fruits for consumption to the
collection of minor forest produces on a large scale for sale. This entry in to a cash economy has come about mainly by the activities of the Girijan Co-operative Marketing Society, an organization set up by Government for the benefit of tribal population where they are paid in cash and with that cash they buy grain for daily consumption. Urban commodities available in the markets improved the life style of these ethnic groups. Attraction towards urban consumerism and life style will naturally demand for more cash that obviously put pressure on the forest resource system. But the large scale deforestation has altered this resource system. Due to the frequent contact with the market and the non-tribals, their dependence on forest has changed. In the past, tribal economy was mainly based on agriculture and forests. Now collection of forest produces has become the primary source of income and wage labouring is only secondary. Only the tribals who still live in the interior forest have occasionally done hunting and fishing. Fishing habitats have developed as they mingle with non-tribal labourers engaged in forestry operations during the summer. It is Chaliyar that provided them fish.  

Due to the unauthorised alienation of tribal land and deprivation of tribal forestry right, entry in to the market economy etc, the tribal economy has been seriously affected. The large-scale immigration of non-tribal

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50 There are various fishing techniques prevalent in the area. They are, erupadakkam or thotta that is, throwing cracker in to water firing when fishes gathered, especially in the night, in the interior areas it is called thotta eriyal or thotta idal means throwing thotta. Other methods are, Minkudu or kuruthi (placing bamboo net basket where water falls), fishing by poison, fishing using rod and line, fishing by bailing out of water, and picking fishes up using choonda.
peasants and subsequent pressure over land promoted a complete transformation in the tribal economy. The tribal mode of production got impoverished and the shifting cultivation almost disappeared. At the same time, they are not aware of the modern agriculture technology. The problems are also accelerated by the commercialization of agriculture by the British. Roads and modern communication facilities also favoured the penetration of market economy. Their old exchange system, the barter system, has completely disappeared and Girijan Co-operative society acts as an agent of exchange through market economy in the tribal areas.

Pastoralism is not found among the tribes of the district. A pastoral society relies more upon animal wealth than on agriculture production. Cattle rearing is not found practicing. At the same time, it is noted that these tribes do not engage in agricultural operations. Shifting cultivation was an integral part of their economy that existed up to the recent times. Now some tribes produce a few agriculture items like plantain fruit, coconut, areacanut, tapioca, and various kinds of tubers and roots for their daily needs and not for market.

Increased contact with non-tribals and the intensification of economic dependence on outsiders are undoubtfully leading to an erosion of the

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51 Tribal societies are food-producing groups. Slash and burn cultivation involves the production of food without the intensive use of land, a large labour force and complex mechanized technology. Their technological implements or tools are simple and traditional. They are usually got from natural resources.

cohesion of the tribal communities. The dominance of non-tribal settlers has virtually destroyed the self-sufficiency and freedom of actions of the tribals in their habitats and they no longer constitute a cohesive social entity. The belief in tribal tradition and their eagerness to maintain them tend to live in isolated communities separate larger communities, and wherever it is possible, they choose isolation. However, their isolation is not complete, because they are becoming a part of modern social and economic systems. Now and then, they visit some weekly markets and exchange centres for selling the forest produces and buying commodities such as salt, oil, rice, coffee, betal, beedi, alcohol etc. Gradually they have, to some extent, been sucked in to the money economy. Cash earnings also enable them to emulate some of the customs of the non-tribal people. This economic transformation or deprivation of traditional tribal economy is the basic factor that promotes cultural changes among the tribals in the district. In this way, we can describe this phenomenon as ‘cultural osmosis’.

SOCIAL MILIEU

The social structure of the tribes is also changing. A tribe is composed of a number of component parts integrated in a particular manner. Each set of

53 Osmosis is a botanical term denotes the spontaneous passage or diffusion of water or other solvent through a semi permeable memberane. If a solution is separated from the pare solvent by a memberane that is permeable to the solvent but not the solute, the solution will tend to become more dilute by absorbing solvent through the memberane. Likewise, if two cultural groups with low and high cultural concentration exist in the same region, the groups with low cultural concentration will naturally absorb the cultural traits of the high groups.
components is usually based on particular principle and serves a particular need of the society. The culture of a tribe has a steel-frame over which the cultural traits adhere and produce its distinctive character. This steel-frame of a social structure is the rock-basis of the tribal culture. Whenever its framework is weakened or destroyed by external or internal forces, the social structure of the tribes will be disintegrated.

In the past, the tribals were strict followers of social customs and traditions. But now, it is seen in a state of decline and confusion. The tribe is divided into a number of clans or gotras each of which is again sub divided into a number of families. The principle that integrates the different members of each of these groups is blood relationship. All the members of a clan trace their descent from a common ancestor, which is one of the basic features of tribalism. The principle of blood relationship is the base of the family and which regulates marriage and sexual relations among the tribals. People of the same blood cannot unite in marriage and therefore, cannot indulge in sexual relations. Modern culture has affected the functioning of the principle of blood relationship and the clan system. In marriage customs, some changes occurred recently. Traditionally the tribes were endogamous but recently many of them seek exogamous marriage alliances. This transition from endogamy to exogamy is found among the primitive tribal groups in the district owing to the internal and external factors. In the case of Cholanaickar, they were the strict followers of endogamy till recently, it is mainly due to the paucity of
females they have no choice in mate selection within their socially acceptable kin group. The aged people among these groups are complaining the selection of life partner from outside breaking the clan ties and regulations. The meagre demographic profile of the tribal communities limits the scope of the mate selection within the clanish groups. Among these communities, multilateral cross-cousin marriages are preferred to such alliances with any other kin relations. Hamlet exogamy is rarely observed.

In the past, marriage by capture usually occurred without previous agreement and nowadays the capture of the bride is frequently staged as a mere formality in order to avoid the expense of the wedding ceremonies. This change occurs due to the increase of the self identity of tribal women. The present market economy enables tribal women to earn though a small amount by selling forest produces and they become independent and more self-reliant.

Many Hindu customs in the tribal society have been noticed during the time of marriage ceremony as a result of large scale Hinduisation. It is also a process of Parochialization. Tying *tali* or a badge of marriage around the neck of the wife by the husband, *pudamuri*, i.e., tearing of a piece of cloth during the marriage etc. are the Hindu traditions. Some tribals in the district also began to observe the *Panigrahana* ceremony (the bridegroom is taking the hand of the bride), *Lajahoma* ceremony (the bride offering fried grains to the

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54 According to the I.T.D.P Census of 2006, the sex ratio of Cholanaickan is 128:193.
brigroom), Saptapathi ceremony (the bridegroom leads the bride for 7 steps around agni or pitha ) and Grihapravesa (the new couple is greated with a lamp- Nilavilakku). These practices are not common among all tribal groups in the district.

The social order that used to regulate the interaction of tribes rooted in the same or related traditions, could not withstand the presence of intruders motivated by aims and an alien value system entirely distinct from those of the indigenous population. In some areas where the massive immigration of larger communities has caused complete fragmentation of the tribal communities, nothing is left of the latter’s indigenous authority system. The effectiveness of traditional authority system has sharply declined and Moopan system has totally disappeared. Today, the erstwhile tribal heads have no power and their prestige and respect, which they used to enjoy, are gradually evaporating. The only two groups still follow the rudiments of little tradition are Kattunayakan and Cholanaickan. But their Moopans do not enjoy the power and respect that they enjoyed in the past. They are ineffective in imposing authority. They are not able to give any kind of effective leadership in dealing with non-tribes. There exists no mechanism to punish the erring members or social offenders within the community.

The major reasons for the break up of the traditional social system are, firstly, the commercialization of the tribal economy and subsequent
individualistic tendencies antagonistic to the traditional institutions. Because of the penetration of market economy, the economic differentiation between men and women is becoming compatible with the large-scale participation of tribal women in the economic activities. In the traditional economy, *Moopan* was a unifying force as a collector and distributor of forest produces. Secondly, the disappearance of traditional faiths and beliefs among the new generation. In the past, *Moopan* was considered as the custodian of the spirits and deities and it is believed that through the mercenary spirits he could inflict punishment in the form of accidents, health maladies, natural calamities, and induce sufferings. Therefore, the negation of his will invite the wrath of the ancestor spirits and deities. This belief helps him in controlling the community. The *Cholanaickan* headman command authority mainly because of the belief that disobedience can invite retributory punishment inflicted using command over spirits and deities by the *Chenmakaran*\(^5\); and thirdly, the *Moopans* have no power to enjoy superiority among their community as the tribal community has partly become a part of the universal community. Their role is decreasing due to the enormous increase in the bureaucracy and the increasing number of Government employees visiting tribal colonies and thus the headman is no longer an essential link between the colonies and the administrators. This change in the headman’s functions seems to have a

harmful effect on the sense of the responsibility of many tribal heads. No longer are they mainly concerned with the welfare of the entire community but they think primarily of their own short-term material advantages. Thus, it could be assumed that the changes in the social structure among the tribals of the district are not explicable only in terms of the concept of ‘cultural borrowing’ but rather in terms of economic factors.

In the past, almost all tribes of the district had followed matrilineal system and the head of the family, according to the system, was the Karanavar. He had the right to look after his nephews, nieces and sisters. If a niece became widow, it was the duty of the Karanavar to look after the children. The break up of joint family system is another factor that accelerated the disappearance of tribal social cohesion. The joint family system in the tribal society was very much conducive to the development of the habit of cooperation and discipline in the interest of the common good. Recently, married couples tend to set up their own households as early as possible, and the children of such nuclear families grow up in an atmosphere very different from that of the joint family of their ancestors.

RELIGIOUS MILIEU
The acculturative process is highly profound on tribal religion. Traditionally, these tribals were the followers of animism,\textsuperscript{56} shamanism,\textsuperscript{57} polytheism, and naturalism (worship of nature) and worshippers of ancestor spirits. The traditional tribal religion has been evolved from the ardent relationship of the tribes with nature. Thus, they venerate the spirits of forests, mountains, rocks, rivers, lakes, even single trees and of the heavenly bodies, the Sun and the Moon. The tribals treat the supernatural forces, the spirit of the ancestor with fear and reverence. They believe in the existence of the soul after death and in the re-birth. In recent times, the ancient tribal faiths and forms of worship have more or less disappeared due to the large scale influence of great tradition. Majority of the tribes of the district have embraced the beliefs and customs of the great tradition. Rapid Hinduisation has been going on and a greater part of their faith and customs are Hinduised. Hinduisation is a process of acquiring the cultural traits of the neighboring Hindus. The tribes in the district have been influenced by certain tradition of

\textsuperscript{56} Animism is the belief in innumerable spiritual beings concerned with the affairs of human beings and capable of helping or harming men’s interests. The theory believes that an immaterial soul (\textit{anima}) is the principle of life. For animists, all spots and places are holy as they are the seeds of spirits. Animals, plants, trees, ponds, rivers, stones, hills or mountains are all abodes of spirits. The dead are no exception to this rule as they still exist through soul or are reborn in the sake of offspring. Edward B. Taylor argues that, as the religion originated as beliefs in soul, anmism was the ancient form of religion. As souls were numerous and worshipped in different occasions in the form of ancestor worship, this created belief in polytheism, which following the processes of cultural evolution, reached at a state of monotheism, the great belief of civilized people. Edward B. Taylor \textit{Primitive Culture}, London, 1871, p.81.

\textsuperscript{57} The term \textit{shaman} refers to a man or woman who serves a society as a part time religious practitioner. He is believed to have some supernatural powers to cause illness and death and to cure illness. Usually, a \textit{shaman} is possessed by a spirit, but sometimes, he ritually commands a spirit helper. Elman R. Service, \textit{op.cit.}, New York, 1978.pp.212-217.
the communities around them. The major neighboring communities in all the areas have always been Hindus. As a result, from the very early periods there have been several points of contacts between the Hindus of the area and the tribal community living within it. The nature and extent of contact vary from semi isolation to complete assimilation. Most of the tribes would like to introduce themselves as Hindus. They use Hindu names, visit Hindu temples and make offerings, worship Hindu gods, and celebrate Hindu festivals. Many of the tribals have no shrines of their own. They are not averse to pilgrimage to different pilgrim centres. They do undertake pilgrimage along with the Hindu co-labourers to Lord Ayyappa temple, Sabarimala, which is a major pilgrim centre of the Hindus. This pilgrimage practice developed among them probably because of the presence of a large number of Hindu forest labourers who undertake a Sabarimala pilgrimage. They also observe fast and ritual purity for 41 days like other pilgrims. It is believed that, the worshipping of this deity could ensure safety from wild animals and calamities. During the fasting period, abstinence of alcohol, avoidance of woman, vegetarianism etc are practiced. None of these tribal people read the Hindu sacred scriptures viz, Ramayanam, Maha Bharatha, Bhagvat Gita etc. At the same time, they cherish these Ithihasa tales heard from the temple storyteller. It does not prevent them from identifying with the local Hindus in religious life. We may describe this process as ‘peripheral Sanskritization.’ By adopting the customs
and practices of caste Hindus, the tribals acquire a kind of social recognition and become a part of caste hierarchical system.

It is evident that many tribals worship Hindu gods and goddesses like Rama, Krishna, Bhaghavati etc. A story that exists among the Paniyans at Adyanpara regarding the footprints on the rock at Adyanpara waterfalls is as follows:

“These foot prints are of their god Rama. The hill near the waterfalls is the seat of Rama and when Rama was passing towards north he slipped on the rock.”58 They consider this place as holy and until recently, they performed pujas there. The northern part of the waterfalls is called Ambumala. The Paniyans of Ambumala have a story regarding the origin of the name Ambumala. “Once Valiya Thampran (Rama) and Chariya Thampran (Lakshman) were hunting, the arrow of Chariya Thampran returned back while that of Valiya Thampran did not return. Then with the help of the Paniyans, they made a search for the arrow and they found it hanging on the top of the hill and the arrow later got changed into a piece of rock. Thus the hill came to be known as Ambumala.”59 (In Malayalam, ambu means arrow and mala means hill). Both stories show light in to the Rama worship of Paniyans. It is noticeable that among the tribals, who were dependants of the

58 Personal Interview with Kuttan, Paniyan colony, Adyanpara, 22.05.05.
59 Personal Interview with Velutha, Ambumala, 21-05-05.
upper caste Hindus and who had more acquaintance with great traditions, Hinduisation process is very dominant.

The tribal belief regarding the death and life after death is undergoing changes. Earlier they believed that death is caused by the acts of malevolent spirits. Now many of them have belief in _ayus_ (life expectancy) and _vidhi_ (fate), and in _swarga_ (heaven) and _naraga_ (hell) which will be rewarded as per the deeds of the persons. Faith in rebirth and reincarnation of soul into the tribal pantheon is the most important instance of Hinduisation among the tribals in the area. Many of the tribals of the district consider the plants like _tulasi_ (_ocimum sanctum_) and _pipal_ (_ficus religiosa_) tree as holy and many of them have a _tulasithara_ in front of their houses where they offer poojas and perform _Vilakkuthelikkal_ (lighting the lamp) regularly. Lighting _nilavilakku_, using spouted vessel, placing coconut halves, rice or paddy and burning incense near the corpse is a recent development. Tribes like _Mala Muthans_, draw circle with rice or paddy around the corpse. Recently the tribes of the district began to seek help of Brahmins for _Pujas_ and ceremonies. Offering _Punyaham_ (sacred water collected from temples) to the dying person and to the corpse before the funeral is also the influence of great tradition. These tribals had not celebrated the popular festivals like Onam and Vishu, but recently they began to celebrate them. Besides, they also came familiar with

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Karkidakavavu\textsuperscript{61} and they make offerings to ancestors and pay visit to Hindu temples during these special occasions. Some of them were not aware of the Malayalam month \textit{Karkidakam} nor did they have their own calendar.

Though the tribals of the district have increased contacts with neighboring non-tribal people like Christians and Muslims, their relation to Hinduism is quite different. Nilambur was one of the major pockets of Christian migration from Travancore even from the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century onwards. But the constant contacts with these Christian settlers in the area have failed to make a considerable influence on tribal religion and no more conversion occurred. In the district, Muslims constitute a majority of the population, but the tribesmen hardly been converted to Islam. This is mainly due to the disinterest in getting converted among the tribals. However, certain traits of adaptation are visible. For example, \textit{Cholanaickar} use the Arabic terms \textit{Khabar}\textsuperscript{62} for the grave and \textit{Khabaradakkam} for funeral ceremony and \textit{Paniyans} use the term \textit{Mayyath}\textsuperscript{63} for corpse. This is mainly because of their frequent contact with Muslims. Majority of the tribals in the countryside are familiar with Allah and Christ.

\textbf{LIFE CYCLE}

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\textsuperscript{61} The \textit{vavu bali}, offered on New Moon days in the Malayalam month of Karkitakam, (July-Augest), is an important custom connected with ancestor worship.

\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Khabar} and \textit{Khabaradakkam} are the two terms used by Muslims for grave and funeral ceremony respectively. In Arabic, the word \textit{Khabar} means grave.

\textsuperscript{63} Muslims use the Arabic term \textit{Mayyath} for corpse. In Arabic, it means corpse.
Many significant changes are occurring in the life cycle rituals and ceremonies. Strict observance of the life cycle ceremonies related with puberty, pregnancy, birth and death, and annual festivals like daivomkotuti, adiyanthiram are some of the characteristics of tribalism. Now these ceremonies are not strictly followed by the tribals. The first reason is their poverty. The ceremonies required huge financial expense, as most of them demand grand feast to the gathering. Secondly, most of the members of the new tribal generation are unaware of these customs and traditions. Thirdly, the educated tribal youth consider the observance of these customs and ceremonies futile. Fourthly, since most of their celebrations are connected with agricultural operations any fluctuations in this will also reflect on their rituals and ceremonies. All these aspects together with the fast percolation of the seeds of modernity wiped out the age old customs and traditions of the tribal society.

Summary

The disappearance of tribal characteristics and consequent identity crisis is the most significant feature of the tribal scenario of the district. Tribal life was eco-friendly in character and was adjusted to the physical environment since time immemorial through the process of ‘ecological

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64 Report of the Committee on Tribal Economy in Forest Areas, 1967, states that the huge expense required for the observance of life cycle ceremonies is one of the major reasons of tribal indebtedness. ( Government of India, Department of Social Welfare, Report of the Committee on tribal Economy in Forest Areas, New Delhi, 1967, p.9.
adaptation’. The particular geographical situation of Malappuram district trapped the tribals in a state of isolation. Naturally, their cultural ethos and material culture were different resulting in the formation of a distinct life ethnicity and identity. This ethnic identity is the base of their culture and it regulates their individuality, behaviour and pattern of life. In order to preserve their cultural identity and tradition they have developed some habit of quiet withdrawal. Now, their social, economic, religious and cultural aspects are undergoing changes and they face the problem of identity crisis. This is a transformation from isolation to complete assimilation.

The factors that are responsible for the tribal transformation can be divided into two: traditional and modern. The traditional process is characterised by the impact of certain traditions of great communities on the tribals. These processes are explained in the concepts like Sankritization, Hinduisation, Universalization and Parochialization, etc. The modern factors include urbanization and industrialization, tribal development schemes, modern education, modernization of communication and administration, and the like are of recent origin, and the external factors that do not emerge as a result of normal contacts of the tribal people with the non-tribal people of the area.

The changes in the life style of tribal people have been caused by contacts with naturally more advanced and politically more powerful and
socially mobilized populations. These advanced people are the active agents of modernity. In those areas where there was a massive immigration of advanced populations, there occurred a complete decline of traditional authority system or control over resources because they increasingly began to depend on economic forces over which they had no control. The contact with modern advanced society is a dangerous one as it adversely affects the material culture, social, economic, religious and moral life of the tribal people. The eco-friendly peace-loving tribals are becoming the victims of the alluring evil habits of the affluent society. Their moral life is shattered. Liquor plays havoc on their moral concepts and health. They become diseased in body and mind.

The history of tribal transformation in Malappuram district, Kerala in general, goes back to the period of Brahman migration to the area. The history of the Brahman community in Kerala is the history of the transformation of the traditional society as a result of the contacts with a group of great tradition. With the growth of the Brahman settlements, the reciprocal acculturation process was also started. The non-Hindu tribal society was reoriented on Hindu lines. The process of tribal acculturation in the district was also intensified with the British Colonial expansion in the region. The conversion of major areas of forest into plantation opened wide scope for external influence. The large scale immigration of peasants from the plains of
the Southern Kerala with advanced technologies and new methods of cultivation gave a new impetus to the process of acculturation.

The changes in the tribal culture of the district are not only explicable in terms of the concept of ‘cultural borrowing’ but rather in terms of economic factors. Commercialization of the tribal economy and subsequent individualistic tendencies antagonistic to the traditional institutions, the economic differentiation between men and women is becoming compatible with the large-scale participation of tribal women in the economic activities. In the traditional economy, Moopan was a unifying force as a collector and distributor of forest produces. The transition from traditional economy to the market economy led to the break up of the traditional social structure. Moreover, the tribals do not strictly observe the life cycle rituals and ceremonies, as they required huge financial expenses, as most of them demand grand feast to the gathering. Thus, in the present context, the economic condition of the tribals is a determining factor in the maintenance of the tribal tradition, which Franz Boas termed as ‘economic determinism’.

The transformation of tribal life is taking place in different places of the district at different levels as a result of acculturation as they are coming into contact with the communities of great traditions and other communities and with the effect of the welfare measures. The level of acculturative process is very high among the tribals living in the main land or villages like

65 Franz Boas, op.cit., p.256.
Paniyans, Aranadans, Mala Panickan, Kuruman and Mala Muthans. At the same time, the rate is very low among the Cholanaickan, Kattunayakan and Kattu Paniyan as they still live in the interiors of the forest. It means that the area of habitation is a determining factor of culture change.