also found in these districts. According to the 1991 census, the total scheduled tribe population in this district is 25,048, which constitute 15.98% of the total tribal population of the state.

The Kurumba houses known as "GUDLU" are temporary constructions in the forests. The traditional occupation of the Kurumbas is food gathering, like collection of honey and forests produce. They are also cultivating millets like ragi and samai on a small scale mainly on hill slopes and mountain ridges. Honey fetches considerable remuneration for the Kurumbas. It is relished much by the public. Honey is collected mostly in the summer months from the cliffs, rocky crevices and the branches of giant trees. The supplement their usual diet with ample quantity of honey. Kurumbas are known to possess keen eyesight, gained possibly from constant watching of the honeybee to the hives. Now, they are mainly engaged in agriculture and those who do not own lands work as casual agricultural labourers. The Kurumbas are hard working people, but the economic condition of the Kurumbas is very poor.

Chapter III

KURUMBAS OF THE NILGIRI DISTRICT

Kurumbas of Nilgiris fall into several categories and live mostly on the bordering slopes of the district. These habitations are usually suffixed with the terms of kombi (or kombai) and Oor (or Ur) the religion of Alu Kurumbas is essentially an ancestor cult. The peaks of the hills surrounding their settlements are identified with certain deities.
Traditionally, Alu Kurumbas were hunter-gatherers, slash, and burn cultivators. Now they are fully dawn into the plantation of the Nilgiris either as small growers of Coffee and Tea or as wage laborers in large Tea and Coffee plantations. Gathering of roots, tubers, herbs and collection of honey is still pursued by many of them has seasonal activity in their neighborhood forests. Day to day needs of vegetables and green to get from their kitchen gardens. They identify and use a variety of plants from the forests for various purposes, like, house construction, firewood, medicinal items and for magico-religious purposes. The Kurumbas must be regarded as very old inhabitants of this land, who can contest with their Dravidian relatives the priority of occupation of the Indian soil. The two rival tribes have in reality become so intermixed with each other, that is according to the temporary superiority of the one or the other, the same district is at different times know as valanadu or kurumbanadu, while in some instances, when both tribes are living apart from each other.

Concentrated the Nilgiri district of Tamilnadu, they prefer to themselves kurumbar, while others refer to them as Kurumba, Kuruba, Kuremna and Kuruman. Etymologically Kurumba means one who tends sheep. Though there are some Kurumba living in the plain area of the state, they have not been notified as a scheduled as a

264 Gustav Oppert., On the Original Inhabitants of Bharatavarsa or Indian, Madras 1894, p.216.
Scheduled Tribe. Only those who are living in the Nilgiri district of Tamilnadu are included in the list of the Scheduled Tribes. The 1891 census report states that the Kurumba or Kuruba are the modern representatives of the Ancient Kuruba Pallava, who were once powerful throughout Southern India. They live on hilly terrain covered by forests. It may be noted that the community under discussion differs in many ways, especially in their customs, from the Kurumba who inhabit the plains. They speak among themselves as a dialect of Kannada, The South Dravidian language, and Tamil spoken with others. They use the Tamil script. A powerful race called Kurumbas or Pallavas, about whom much has conjectured but little known once held sway over much of South India but was overthrown about the ninth century C.E., by the Chola dynasty of Tanjore. It is usually supposed that the scattered communities of Kurumbas of kurubas which are found in many parts of the presidency. The descends of refuges belonging to this race, who fled other wilds form their conquerors, but there is no real evidence that this is so. The Kurumbas of the plateau reside in rude hamlets known as mottas or kambais, which is usually place on or near the slopes and mud dethatched with grass. This word kambai forms part of the names of several villages on the edges of the plateau and apparently denotes that these were once Kurumba settlements. Their language has a great many


266 R.Gate, Ruggles., Kurumbas on the Nilgiri Hills of Southern India, Mankind Quarterly, 1 (4), 1961, pp.258 -76.

words belonging to, and seemingly borrowed from, the Toda a race doubtless due merely to their local position midway between that race and the Irulas, who strange mixture of the various low country languages forms of another portion of the Kurumba vocabulary. They have no written character and their tongue is rather a slang of corrupted dialects than a language.\(^{268}\) They speak among themselves a dialect of Kannada, South Dravidian language and Tamil is spoken with others. They use the Tamil script. H.B. Grigg appears, he says that, in the low country they are called *kurubas* or *curubaru* and are divided into numerous families, such as the *ane* or *elephant*, *naya* or *dog*, *male* (*malai*) or hill Kurumbas. Such a distinction between mountain Kurumbas and plain kurubas cannot establish.\(^{269}\) The Rev. G. Richter will find it difficult to prove that the Kurubas of Mysore are only called so as shepherds, and then no connection exists between these Kurubas and the Kurumbas. Lewis Rice calls the wild tribes as well as the shepherds Kurubas, but seems to overlook the fact that both terms are identical and refer only to the ethnological Kurumba.

**Divisions of Kurumba Tribes**

There was a lot of confusion and uncertainty in identifying the district divisions among the Kurumbas. While expressing their opinion Dieter B. Kapp and Paul Hockings (1986) of the subject of divisions among the Kurumbas stated that, “confusion about

\(^{268}\) W. Ross King., *Aboriginal Tribes of the Nilgiri Hills*, London, 1870, pp.41-42.

divisions within the Kurumba tribe or tribe has characterized nearly all subsequent account of them.\textsuperscript{270} three classes among the Kurumbas, they are:

1. Mullu Kurumbas
2. Naya Kurumbas
3. Pania Kurumbas

Breeks further\textsuperscript{271} expressed that in 1871 census which counted 613 Kurumbas under (12) categories. There are:

1. \textit{Botta kurumba}
2. \textit{Eda kurumba}
3. \textit{Karmadia Kurumbas}
4. \textit{Kurumba Okkiliyan}
5. \textit{Male Kurumbas}
6. \textit{Mullu Kurumbas}
7. \textit{Anda Kurumbas (pal Kurumbas)}
8. \textit{Naya Kurumbas}
9. \textit{Kurali Kurumbas}


10. Malsar Kurumbas

11. Pania Kurumbas and

12. Jain Kurumbas

In the present century of the census of India has identified at least five divisions among the Kurumbas. They are:

1. *Alu (or) Pal Kurumbas*

2. *Jen Kurumbas*

3. *Urali Kurumbas*

4. *Betta Kurumbas*

5. *Mullu Kurumbas*

Kurumbas as very old inhabitants of the Nilgiri hills. The origins of the different Kurumba groups are still mystery and debatable but Kurumbas of Nilgiri district claim that they trace their origin and migration with the boarders of Wynaad (Kerala state) Gundalpet (Karnataka state) and Attapady (Kerala state) in and around Nilgiri plateau. In Nilgiri district, the Kurumbas are living in the Taluks of Coonoor, Kothagiri, Kundha, Gudalur and Pandalur, Taluk wise distribution of Kurumbas settlements and their different sub-groups communities’ these 35 Kurumba settlements are located in Coonoor

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Taluk. 26 Kurumbas settlements are located in Kothagiri Taluk; 11 settlements in Pandalur Taluk. 24 settlements in Gudalur taluk.274

**Kurumba Kinship System**

The Kurumba kinship model struggles to retain the interactive dynamics of a local and patrilineal social formation. The composition of average Kurumba family is nuclear oriented with the husband, wife, and unmarried children.275 The average size of Kurumba families is four to five individuals. The common practice is to have an independent household immediately after marriage for the husband and wife.

**Alu Kurumba**

Alu Kurumba of Tamilnadu. Alu Kurumba and Hal Kurumba are their synonyms and often they are referred to as Kurumba. They speak a dialect of the Dravidian language Kannada among themselves, but in Tamil with others.276 They read and write in Tamil. A separate population figure of them is not available. The men drink toddy (kallu) and distilled liquor.277 The Alu Kurumba have several exogamous clans, namely *Nagara, Kaigery, Irapan, Gobeada, Bellega, Beeraga, Bellare, Masole, Macole* and *Ballaku*. The first four clans from a *Phratty*. The last five clans from another group. These *Phratty*

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277 D. Kapp. And P.Hockings., The Kurumba Tribes in Blue Mountains the Ethnography and Biography of A South Indian Region, Delhi 1989. p.31.
groups exchange mates. In this community, one can marry his mother’s brother’s daughters or his father’s sister’s daughter. Girls get married after attaining puberty. Monogamy is the normal. Thali, toe rings (menji), nose stud (mukuthi), ear rings (kadiku) are the marriage symbols for women. Earlier married men used to wear an ear stud (kattu kadiku). Bride price paid the form of cash and cattle. Divorce is permissible and either spouse can initiate the proceedings. Divorce can be granted by the village council (ur panchayat), widowed and divorced person of either gender are allowed to remarry.

Women

The Alu Kurumba women generally do household work and assist their men in economic activities. The majority of the women are engaged as plantation laborers. They graze the cattle on hill slopes and collect roots. In addition, tubers as well as other minor forest produce. The ethnic groups recognized as Kurumbas were foragers and food-gatherers mostly residing in the southern and eastern part of the Nilgiris. Their dwelling-place, as the name Kurumba, meaning ‘jungle-dweller’ in Badagu suggests, is typically in isolated jungle areas. Previous accounts describe them hunting and snaring birds, mammals and fish and gathering wild foods from the jungle. Like the Irula, sharing is commonplace. Food, tools, articles of clothing and even money is shared among kin according to need, able to be subject at any time to the (mutual) obligation of sharing, property is potentially a common rather than private possession. This obligation of sharing

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practiced also by a Kurumba sub tribe the Nayakas (northwestern Nilgiris) and described by Bird-David\textsuperscript{279} as a constant “idea that one should share space, things and actions with others”, is for the Kurumbas, more kin and less community-orientated. Kurumbas’ mutual obligation of sharing generally stops at kin boundaries. The Irula, in contrast, appear to stand in between Kurumbas and Nayakas in this respect.\textsuperscript{280} The practice of sharing also stands as a counterpoint to the sense of indebtedness engine economic transactions with outsiders. Having received payment in kind in advance or a loan of goods, Kurumbas and Irulas, are link by debt to certain outsiders, and often exhorted to repay by labor or minor forest produces. In the exchange of goods and services between tribes, the Kurumbas had closest ties with the Badaga. Kurumba settlements were often located close to Badagas communes, where they provided medicine and sorcery, together with forest produce and woven products. This exchange exhibited a defined set of mutual obligations. According to Kapp and Hockings, “Kurumbas are expected to supply the Badaga commune with three baskets cane or reeds” In return, the Badaga would often give the Kurumba salt, coarse sugar, cloth and grain, the latter grown on fields upon which the Kurumbas themselves were often expected to work. The Kurumba males might also be expected to serve as security guards for a Badaga commune, performing both guard duties against malign sorcery, and occasionally curing Badagas ailments. For these


reasons, Kurumbas were considered ‘associates’ of the Badaga, although some consider bonded-labor a more accurate term.\textsuperscript{281} The marriage is solemnised at the bridegroom’s house by the tying of the Thali a vegetarian feast is given to all invitees. They bury the dead body, each hamlet of Alu Kurumba has a separate burial ground, and each family has a specific burial place there. The malose clan members cremate their dead and dispose of the ashes and bones in a nearby steam.\textsuperscript{282} Alu Kurumbas have two death ceremonies, one at time of death, they have elaborate funeral rites and another called ‘Gurumane’ which they perform once in a year or once in two years the whole Alu Kurumbas of that village for the people died during the year.\textsuperscript{283} The Alu Kurumbas believe in two souls, one is the big soul (dodda ujevu) and small soul (kunna jevu). At the occurrence of death, the big soul along with the visible shadow leaves the body while the small soul along with the invisible shadow lingers in the dead body until the moment of cremation. Then the small soul is said to quit the body and take up its home in a long water-worm people, which after every death is placed by the Alu Kurumbas inside a dolmen (nalupdi), located near the cemetery. Here, the small dwells, but it may also leave its abode and hover around, although not hover around, although not however beyond the boundaries of the cemetery. The separation of the small soul, which is bounds to the earth, from the big

\begin{enumerate}
\item Paul Nicholas Anderson., \textit{Commodification, Conservation and Community}: An Analysis and a Case Study in India, Edinburgh, 2000, pp.32.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, p.33.
\end{enumerate}
soul lasts until the celebration of the dry funeral and them the small soul and the invisible shadow to form and inseparable unit forever.\textsuperscript{284}

**Livelihood**

The Alu Kurumba is mainly dependent on the forest for their livelihood. Some of them own small area of land, on which as they have planted tea, coffee, and mulberry with the support of government agencies and voluntary organizations. Most of these people are plantation laborers. Some of them have taken up sericulture, bee keeping, and horticulture.\textsuperscript{285}

**Houses and Food**

A typical Alu kururmba village or motta (or kombai) is making up of five to six huts scattered on the steep wooded slopes of the Nilgiris. Individually huts stand alone on a flattened piece of land and are home to a nuclear family. Constructed from a bamboo backbone with walls made of criss-crossing bamboo strips and grass, that is often fortified with mud and cow dung and support a tiled roof. A small partition, a meter deep and a meter high, divides the interior space into the kitchen and the living room.\textsuperscript{286} The kitchen or ittumane(food house) has a narrow one foot-high ledge running the length of a wall. This ledge holds the fireplace and the utensils. Steel vessels have


placed the traditional bamboo vessels and leaves used flattened *verandhas* or *thinnamanne* that is use for social purposes. The Kurumba ancestors gathered *honey* and cultivated small patches of *raagi, saamai* and other grains for food and survival.\textsuperscript{287}

**Economy**

They collect tubers, leafy vegetables, fruits, medicinal herbs, bark and roots, *honey, beeswax, resin, vines and timber*. Possessing a detailed knowledge of medicinal plants, which, together with (highly esteemed) honey that they prefer to collect, they developed a specialized high-value, low volume foraging strategy. Much of their sustenance derives from the Forest and from modest cultivation. However, their agriculture, once slash-and-burn, was never practiced in the systematic manner characteristic of more sedentary tribes. They also keep a few poultry and goats, although less so than the Irulas.\textsuperscript{288}

**Ornaments**

Advanced metallurgical techniques are evidenced in the jewelry: repose, casting, wiredrawing, soldering, granulation, filigree, and stone setting. Gold, carnelian, bronze, and agate were all used in the varied items that have been found. One in the British


Museum parallels our own small specimen of gold wire: "A fragment of broken loop-in-Loop chain".289

**Religion**

The Kurumbas had originally no special god, nor idols, not any peculiar religious belief of their own. Their earliest object of religious worship, however, appear to have been rough rounded stones, which in some way inspired them with a belief as representing the great super human powers. The weird aspect of the imposing immovable stone hills, which braved the strongest storms amidst torrents of rain and flashes of lighting impressed most probably these children of nature to such an extent, that mountains, rocks and even smaller pieces of stones appeared to them the most appropriate representation of the deity. It may be perhaps added, that such kind of material is most easily set up and does not require any art of adjust it. This stone worship has survived among the Kurumbas to the present day. A stone to which is worship is paid stands often-in caves or in the middle of circles, likewise formed of stone, but it must not linga. The stone circle is with its centered piece is known among the naive as Kurumba Kovil or temple of Kurumbas. This stone is called as Hiriyadeva or great god.290 Stones washed and moulded in the steams are picked to represent their clan gods or *kulla deva*, the adopted Hindu gods as *Kali Amman* as well as the spirit of their ancestors. Although the *kulla gods* were probably born out of primal fears and respect for their environment,


through the years forged an association with *saivate* beliefs. The two important festivals are that of the *harvest festival* and *pongal*, in the month of *karthikai* and *sankaranthi* on *pongal* day the new crop is offered the kulla god before being shared between the villagers. On the religious day of *sankaranti* they worship their deceased. A yearly worship is conducted on stream banks for those who have passed away during the year. The Alu Kurumba accept water and cooked food form other groups of the Kurumba, Toda, Badaga, and Irula, as well as from to the local communities but not form the Kota. Some Kurumba are the officiating priests at Badaga hamlets and fields\(^{291}\). Each Badaga district has its own Kurumba priest, who comes up at the plough season, and sows the first handful of grain and at the harvest time.\(^{292}\)

**Sorcery**

The Kurumba religion is said to animistic but included ancestor worship. Rocks, trees, animals, and spring water are worshipped and from a focal point for songs, folklore and legend in which, as an oral culture, much of the Kurumbas collective memory is stored. The enactment of folklore, legend, and song there by reminds the Kurumba of his or her past, encouraging a sense of belonging, at the same time as it reaffirms his or her connection with the forest and spirits that are integral to their


meaning. Particularly, renowned for their society, the Kurumbas, and the Badagas believe to be the most effective of all south Indian sorcerers: he can kill people as a distance with a spell, can secretly remove internal organs from the living can rape women without their knowledge, can enter a locked door and can change into and insect or any sort of Mammal." Because of Kurumbas were, often held in fear and suspicion by neighbouring tribes. Early descriptions refer to the Kurumbas “having fear of the Kurumbas thus by no means prevented them from attacks by other tribals” and references to the Kurumbas are often with accounts of Badaga and Kota attacks on individual Kurumba families, which continued as late as the beginning of this century.

**Funeral Ceremonies**

Their Funeral ceremonies of the Badagas, they call their relatives together at the last, and those who can afford it administer a small gold coin (the Birianhana) to the dying man. After death they erect a small teru(car) hung with cloth, and place the corpse under it. Round the car, they dance to the flames. Nothing is burn with the body, the car,

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and the cloth. After cremation, it was not usual to take further trouble; the ashes and remains are left to the jackals and the winds.\textsuperscript{296}

The ideographic designs of the death ceremonies of the Kurumba community, primarily, are derived from the matrix of a regenerative ethno culture. The passage from life to death is seen as a Tran’s figurative process from a lower plane or a super level of reality occupied by the spirits of ancestor-gods of animistic dimensions. The pre-burial and the post-burial rites are symbolic indicators of a collective unconscious embedded with strategies of real communications.\textsuperscript{297} The lie collectively of the community evolves a cultural modeling system though their rituals and dance song recitals to enter in to the realms of imaginative or unconscious productivity. It is still a custom among the Kurumbas to retrieve the right clavicle of the buried person on the fifth day after the burial. There will be an elaborate post-burial collective ceremony on the fifth day.\textsuperscript{298} A dance ritual known as \textit{nikaluneru koothu} to make the ancestral gods to receive the dead in to their domain accompanies keeping the dead body for three days before burial. There will be collective feasts on all the three days.\textsuperscript{299} The belief that the spirits of the dead


\textsuperscript{298} Nurit Birrd David., \textit{“Inside’’ and ‘‘outside’’} in \textit{kinship usage the Hunter-Gatherer} Naiken of South India. \textit{Cambridge Anthropology}, 1983, pp. 47-57.

\textsuperscript{299} L.Guemple., ‘\textit{Teaching Social Relations to Inuit Children},’ in \textit{Hunters and gatherers}: Oxford Berg,1988, p.312.
ancestors live on a hill known as *nikalumalai malikai* still hangs on to Kurumba psyche.\(^{300}\)

**The Art**

The Kururumba art is an expression of its socio-religious fabric. The male members of the temple caretakers traditionally practice the art, or pries to the Kururumba village. The women of the family contribute to the decorations at home in the form of borders around the door and windows and *kolams* on the floor. Other Kurumbas are not allowed to practice the art. The canvas for the painting is the outer wall of the temple and the house. The figures representing their gods and the Kururumba man express Kururumba beliefs and the milestones of the village and the tribe. The artist also draws inspiration from his life. The figures are made up of lines are minimal in style. Lines, independent and concentric, drunk and simple geometric figures are the basic elements. The figures also stand free of any depiction of their natural environment. The define context is the surface on which they are painted. Four colors are used traditionally: Red (*Semma Manna*) and White (*Bodhi Manna*) are soils, black is obtained from the bark of a tree (*kari maram*) and green from the leaves of a plant(*kaatavari sedi*). A piece of cloth is use to apply the colors onto the cow dung prepared walls.\(^{301}\)

**Jenu Kurumbas**

\(^{300}\) Dr.Ramachandra Mokeri., *Adivasi Kurumba Corpses Perform their own Burial*, Calicut University, 2000, p.5.

A Kurumba or Kurumba group who derive their name from Jenu or honey which they used to collect from the forest. They inhabit a plateau area, which is characterized by moderated climate, low humidity, thin forest, and medium rainfall. They speak locally called Jenu Nudi, is a dialect of Kannada, one of the South Dravidian languages. They speak to others in Kannada. They use Kannada script. The Jenu Kurubas derive the name from their occupation. They are traditionally honey gatherers. 'Jenu' means honey and 'Kuruba' means tribe. These people roam the forests in search of honey, edible tubers, fruits, etc. History has it that the Jenu Kurubas used to supply elephants to the Chola and the Pallava Kings. The Todas dread the sorcery of the Kurumbas more than that of their own sorcerers. They believe that the sorcery of the Kurumbas is much more dangerous and cannot be remedied. If, it is found that a Kurumba has made a man ill, the only thing to be done is to kill the Kurumba. The belief in the magical powers of the Kurumbas probably arose from the fact that the slopes of the hills on which the Kurumbas lived were extremely magicians and it often happened that a visit to a Kurumba village was follow by an attack of fever of a severe kind.

Marriage Ceremony

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Marriage with one’s father’s sister’s daughter, the mother’s brother’s daughter and the elder’s sister’s daughter is practiced among them, adult marriages preferred and alliances are generally made through negotiation. A few cases of marriage by *elopement* have been reported. The people are monogamous. A marriage pendant and *toe rings* are the marriage symbol.\(^\text{305}\)

**Tatoos and Painting**

The *Jenus* bear *Tattoos* on their arms and most of their *Tattoo* patterns are natural. They include leaves, bugs, snakes, animals and things that can be associated with their once rustic tribal lifestyle. Parvati, a Jenu woman, informs that the *Tattoos* are done in remembrance of loved ones. The Jenus do not *Tattoo* by themselves; there are fisher folk who come to do the job for them. The Jenus do not have the concept of “Painting”; at least not Painting in its traditional today’s usage. They draw animal pattern and leaf patterns on the walls, and do not have any specific reasons for their art.\(^\text{306}\) Apart from floral patterns that the author saw on some walls, the only other pattern that met the eye was from a picture of an Onam flower pattern that Parvati proudly showed. One exception however was in the Maanemule Hadi where one of the houses sported a proper


“Kolam” (a pattern created with dots and lines) as it is known in Tamil Nadu. The walls of the Jenus however sported patterns of another kind. Ever wall was adorned with arc-like waves that were made using a stick; some houses even had patterns of a dog’s paw overlapping the waves. When asked of the patterns served any purpose, the Jenus answered in the negative. They believed it was only for attractive purpose. Perhaps the real reason is lost to them today. The Jenu children also carved figurine toys out of wood that can be considered functional arts for their women.

**Mullu Kurumba**

*Mullu Kurumbas*: The word Mullu means arrow or thorn, but can also be related to the word *mula* (bamboo), which grows profusely in this area and is an intrinsic part of their culture and occupation. The Mullu Kurumbas are bowmen and hunters, who consider that they belong to the Veduvar (hunting) tribe. Traditionally, the Mullu Kurumbas were a forest people dependent on food gathering, hunting of small game, extensive fishing carried out mostly by women, and slash and burn agriculture. Today they have become settled agriculturists cultivating either their own land or work as labourers for big landowners and Coffee and Tea plantation owners. As marginal farmers, they cultivate both dry and wet lands. In dry fields, they raise spices such as

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pepper and ginger and crops like Coffee and plantains. They cultivate paddy in the swampy wetlands. A very small percentage is employed in the private and public sectors, and a few Mullu Kurumbas run petty shops. The Mullu Kurumbas speak a Kannada dialect called Kurumba bhasha with an admixture of Tamil and Malayalam words. They live in Uni-ethnic settlements in the Wayanad district of Kerala, and there are 10 settlements of theirs in Pandalur Taluk with 8-12 households in each settlement. Their houses are neat, clean, and aesthetic with a colour wash to the walls and designs. They are arranged in a planned manner around one or more quadrangles at the centre of which is a temple house, called deiva perai or koil veedu (god’s house). This is of the same design as the other houses and its walls are decorated with various designs drawn and inscribed by the men at the time of its construction. A separate shed for husking harvested grain is also put up near the temple.

The elders’ council is called Mumpanmar kuttam (meeting of the elder men). The Porvu-nnavan, a religious ritual head, and the Veliccapati, who acts as a diviner during council meetings, assist the hereditary chief, Mumpan. This council settles all cases of

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311 Paul Hockings., (ed.)., *Blue Mountains: The Ethnography and Biogeography of a South India Region*. New Delhi, 1989, p.3.
violation of social norms and maintains social solidarity. With the breakdown of community life and values, the authority of this council has been considerably eroded.\textsuperscript{313}

**Ethno-Geography of Mullu Kurumba Settlements**

Maintaining a strong identity and homogeneity, the Mullu Kurumba even today reckon their distribution over Wayanad and Nilgiri districts in terms of certain traditional territories which cut across vast areas of plains, forests and hills of this region. Colloquially they say ‘Naalu Naadu (four countries), Moonu Kunnu (three hills), and Thekkum Koor Aruvadhu (sixty villages in the south)’ comprise their traditional territories which presently fall over a large portion of Wayanad and a small portion of lower Nilgiris. The term *Naalu* means four; *Naadu* denotes country; *Moonu* means three; *Kunnu* means hills; *Thekku* means South and *Aruvadhu* means sixty. Their traditionally recognized four countries are 1. Paakka Naadu 2. Kaara Naadu, 3. Kellu Naadu, and 4. Neria Naadu. The three hills inhabited by the Mullu Kurumba from time immemorial are 1. Kottur Kunnu 2. Yedur Kunnu and Madur Kunnu. The other region covering the sixty Kuruman i.e. Mullu Kurumba villages fall mainly close to Tamil Nadu and some of the villages include, Kappala, Erumaadu, Thayyakunni, Kaappu Kunnu, Palliyara, Aalatthur, etc. It is reported that, each *Naadu* i.e. country had a *Kaaranamar* as its chief and each *Kunnu* had a *Mooppan* or *Talachil* as its chief. For every Mullu Kurumban village, a headman exists with the title *Porunnavan*. Tribal communities in Waynaad live in uni-

ethnic as well as multi-ethnic settlements now, owing to the prevailing production, ownership and dependence patterns in the predominant plantation economy of this region. Distinct names exist for the uni-ethnic settlements of these tribes. Mullu Kurumba settlements are termed Kudi Poraththavan who usually happens to be the younger brother of Porunnavan. After the demise of Porunnavan, automatically the Poraththavan becomes the head of the settlement and he shifts to the Velia Pirai to live.  

Religion

The religion of the Mullu Kurumbas is animist and their principal deity is Boothadai Deivam or god Kirathan. They worship other deities like Thambirathi, Malam-puzha, Deivam Kali and Mariamma. With their integration into mainstream society, they have also begun to observe festivals like Vishu, Onam and Sankranthi. Though the traditional beliefs and ritual practices of the Mullu Kurumba largely surround their ancestor-cult based at their Velia Pirai (or Theiva Pirai), they are at the same time have been greatly Hinduized. The Mullu Kurumbas say that in Wayanad district, a number of local deity sites of the tribal people have gradually taken over by the Devasam Board and these were turn into Hindu temples. Priests belonging to the Embrandiri community periodically visit these temples and conduct the fairs and festivities as per the 

314 B. Kapp, Dieter. and Paul Hockings., The Kurumba Tribes in Blue Mountains, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1989, p.56.
316 Ibid., p.76.
Hindu calendar. The Mullu Kurumba perform their unique religious practices, centred around ancestor worship (*Kaaranamaaru Vazhipaadu; Kaaranamaaru*-ancestors and *Vazhipaad*-worship), only within their own *Velia Pirai*. Similar situation persists with the other tribal communities living in Wayanad. For instance, a Siva temple called Veliamban Kotta exists near a Mullu Kurumba settlement called Munda Kuttri. In the Manuscript of Mckency (1810 C.E) this was mentioned as a fort. Now it is a Siva temple, worshipped by all the tribals and non-tribals of this area. On the Sivarathri day, a grand festivity is conducted in this temple and it is now managed by the higher castes, Wayanadan Chettys and Nayars. An another grand religious event which takes place now-a-days in Sulthan Bathery with the large-scale participation of Mullu Kurumba, Paniyan and other tribal people is *Mariamman Koil Thiruvizhaa* i.e Mariamman temple festivity. It is conducted usually in the last week of February every year. In the past, the tribals were not allowed to take part in the *Vilakku* (Lamp) procession of this festivity. But, now-a-days along with the women from Nayar, Tiyya, *Wayanadan Chetty* and other caste Hindus, women from the Mullu Kurumba, Paniyan and Betta Kurumba tribal groups also join the *Vilakku* procession and carry the coconut-lamp in their hands. The Hindu Religious Missions who actively involve tribals in the Hindu temple festivities say that they are doing so to counter the Christian missionaries who have a strong presence in these two districts. An instance pertaining to a place name in Wayanad Wildlife

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Sanctuary tells us the religious activities that are subtly taking place here. The word Valli denotes a creeper or wine in the Mullu Kurumba language. The place was therefore known as Gnaam Valli. Some time ago, a Hindu temple has been constructed at Gnaam Valli. The spot is now known as Ram Palli and it has been transformed into a small religious spot in the middle of the jungle route between Mysore and Sultan Bathery.\(^{319}\)

**Social Organization**

Every Mullu Kurumba settlement has a head referred to as Porunnavan. The Porunnavan lives with his wife referred to as Porunnathi in the Velia Pirai i.e. the temple hut. The Velia Pirai is also termed as Theiva Pirai because the ancestors are believed to live inside this hut as ‘spirits’.\(^{320}\) The Porunnuvan, besides exercising social control as a settlement head also performs the role of a religious specialist while performing certain rituals inside this ancestral hut. All the members of a settlement, especially those families having strong consanguine ties and bondage are organized under this elderly man (Porunnavan). Next to him in authority within a settlement is termed Poraththavan who usually happens to be the younger brother of Porunnavan. After the demise of Porunnavan, automatically the Poraththavan becomes the head of the settlement and he shifts to the Velia Pirai to live.

\(^{319}\) C. R. Sathyanarayanan., *Scheduled Tribes of Nilgiris District*, a Report prepared under the “Socio-Economic Survey of Scheduled Tribes in Tamil Nadu”, Ooty: Tribal Research Centre, Govt. of Tamil Nadu. 2011, p.13.

\(^{320}\) T. S. Natarajan., *Tribal Habitats of Nilgiri District*, Udhagamandalam , Nilgiri,1985, p.34.
In the past, when the Mullu Kurumbas lived according to their own traditional territorial and geographical categories, they were organized under the *Mooppans* who were heads of territories called *Kunnu* which comprised several *Kudis* i.e. individual settlements. Now such higher traditional political offices like, *Erumadu Mooppan*, *Appaadu Thalaichil*, *Edur Mooppan*, etc., have lost significance among the Mullu Kurumbas. Only the settlement head i.e. *Porunnavan* has some authority over the members of his settlement.\(^{321}\)

The Mullu Kurumba society divides into four *Kulams* i.e. exogamous clans. Wherever, the Mullu Kurumbas live, the members should be belonging to any one of the four *Kulams*, namely, Vadakka Kulam, Villippa Kulam, Kaadiya Kulam and Venkata Kulam.\(^ {322}\) Marrying within their own *Kulam* is prohibited. The woman who marries a man belonging to the same clan (or *Kulam*) is termed *Kola Ponnu* (*Ponnu*-girl) and is excommunicated. Similarly, when a man commits this ‘breach’ of communal norm, he is termed *Kola Kuruman* and excommunicated. It is said that such couples went and formed a separate settlement of their own, called *Vaaladu*, which falls near Ayyan Kolli.

**Identity and Tradition: Hunting**

Mullu Kurumban community in Nilgiris, they are actually Vetans(Vedans or Vedars) i.e. hunters, from the Tamil speaking regions who took refuge in the jungles of


Wynaad, a few hundred years ago. As they fled to these jungles from the ancient Kurumba(ra) Nadu (the term Kurumba (ra) denotes the name of the country and Nadu literally means ‘(country)’), they were known here as Kurumban. About acquiring the prefix ‘Mullu’ with their name ‘Kurumban’, they say that their name was actually Ulla Kurumban meaning ‘existing’ or ‘remaining’ Kurumban. According to a legend, when they lived in the jungles as hunters under their own chief Veda Raja, the local king, for personal reasons attacked and killed many of their people. A few survived the massacre and were called as Ulla Kurumban or Ulla Kuruman (Ulla means ‘remaining’ or ‘existing’). In course of time, Ulla Kurumban pronounced as Mulla Kurumban and Mullu Kurumban. Due to the ban imposed on hunting and due to their full-time engagement is plantations and agriculture, the Mullu Kurumbas almost gave up the practice of hunting wild animals some decades ago. However, as a ‘ritual’, hunting is performed on certain festive and ceremonial occasions.³²³

**Pride and Prestige: Cultivation**

In the past, the Mullu Kurumba identified two categories of dry land based on the distinct methods of cultivation they followed namely, Vettu Parambu and Uzhavu Parambu. The term *Vettu Parambu* denotes the lands used for slash and burn cultivation; *Vettu* denotes’digging’ or slashing or cutting; *Parambu* means ‘land’ generally.³²⁴ Food crops, such as ragi (*paandi*) and *saamai* were mainly cultivated along with chilies and

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tobacco in the past on the *Vettu Parambu* i.e. on the swidden lands on the slopes of the hills, by slash and burn method. About thirty years ago, swidden cultivation almost came to be discontinued among the Mullu Kurumas as they found new use of these hill slopes for planting pepper, areca-nut, coffee and tea.\(^{325}\) Though by tradition the Mullu Kurumba is hunters, they are also, by and large a community of small cultivators. They have their own land classifications and land-use practices. Along with the *Wayanadan Chettys*, the Mullu Kurumba also reported to have cultivated vast areas of the fertile Wynaad plains.\(^{326}\) Now they are either small farmers or agricultural labourers. Before going into the lands use practices of the Mullu Kurumbas.

**Betta Kurumbas**

Betta Kurumba is a Dravidian language spoken in the Nilgiri Mountains of the state of Tamil Nadu and in adjoining areas of the states of Karnataka and Kerala, in Southern India. Exact information on the number of speakers of Betta Kurumba is not available because census surveys in India do not accurately distinguish between several ethnic groups in this region who call themselves ‘Kurumba’.\(^{327}\) A section of the Betta Kurumba community continue to live in separate hamlets within the forest, called *paadis*, which consist of a group of 6-8 houses surrounding a small central meeting hall. Three

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such hamlets at Theppakadu, within the government-run forest reserve. Houses within the hamlets was constructed with bamboo and grass; but in recent years, the government has built concrete houses with zinc sheet roofing, partly as a “developmental” effort and partly to reduce the Kurumbas’ use of forest materials.\(^{328}\) Thus, the Betta Kurumbas are being induced to gradually give up their self-reliance. Other traditions in the community are also in a state of flux: women vary in whether they adopt the mainstream practice of wearing Sarees or maintain their traditional clothing, a cloth wrapped around the body stretching from the armpits to the knees, and a short shawl to cover the shoulders. The community maintains several of their traditional religious practices, but has also adopted some of the local practices of mainstream Hinduism, such as the annual pilgrimage to the Ayyappa temple at Sabarimalai in Kerala.\(^{329}\) Betta Kurumbas are also referred as kattu or kadu Kurumbas. At local level, Betta Kurumbas are referred also a forest dwellers and friends of wild elephants. They used to live interior forest area, even inside stone caves or near river stream. Most of the Betta Kurumba are found at the tri-junction of Karnataka, Kerala and Nilgiri district of Tamilnadu. They speak Kannada with others and use the Kannada script. Their social divided into three Ane(elephant), bevina(neem tree), and kolli (fire). They are normally monogamous, prefer to cross cousin and uncle niece marriage. The symbol of married status for women is the tali with black beads and


residence after marriage is part local. Family type is nuclear. All his sons share the property of diseased person equally.

**Women in the Society**

The women of this community participate in all domestic, social, and economic activities. The birth of the first child takes place at the natal home of the mother, away from the main house. Pollution caused by birth is observed for seven days, whereas the postnatal restrictions last for three to five months. The tonsure ceremony for children is observed after one year. The puberty rite *muttu*, is observed for girls. The marriage is performed at the bridegroom’s residence where the bride and bridegroom exchange *acacia nut* and betel leaves and the bridegroom ties a Thali on the brides’ neck. The primary occupations of the kadu Kurumba or *cultivation, agricultural labour, basket making* and *rolling of beedies*. Some of them have received agricultural land on lease form the government.³³⁰ Yajman is the hereditary headman of their traditional community council. This council deals with intercommunity disputes and imposes cash fines on those who violate social norms. They are Hindus and have faith in local deities like *mugappaji, bomma devaru* and *madappa*. The sacred specialist’s serving them is from his or her own community. The observe most of the Hindu festivals. They use *magic, sorcery*, and witchcraft for the treatment of ailments.³³¹

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Urali Kurumba

They are Kannada-speaking Kurumbas who have migrated from Mysore, where larger numbers of them live. Earlier they used to live in the depths of jungles and were hunters, musicians and artisans; but nowadays they live adjacent to big villages and towns and are hence called Urali Kurumbas, the word ‘ur’ meaning village. Alternatively, they may live close to their non-tribal property owners or near their own cultivable fields. Their community headman is called Mudali or Ejaman, and their traditional tribal council is called Oorukoottam. Their religion is also animistic and they worship spirits like Kuttichathan and the goddess ‘Bhagwati’ in stone form. But, some of them also visit faraway sacred centre’s of Karnataka like Dharmasthala, Udupi, Mookambika and also Tirupathi. Their community has an oral tradition with much folklore and many folk songs. They have wind and percussion musical instruments and both men and women participate in the dances. The Urali Kurumbas are more integrated into mainstream life and culture than the Mullu Kurumbas.\(^\text{332}\)

Like the Mullu Kurumbas and through a similar process the majority of them today are agricultural and tea and spices plantation labourers. A few have lands and cultivate Spices like ginger, pepper, and cardamom. Some are occupied in animal husbandry, or in the collection and sale of minor forest produce, while others continue to hunt small animals and wild birds, which they sell in the market. Alternatively, they live

by carpentry and *black smithy* and the practice of traditional *handicrafts* such as *basketry, pottery*, or the making of *bamboo mats* and winnows. Some of the women work as domestic house cleaners, while some Urali Kurumbas are permanent employees in public and private sector undertakings.\(^{333}\)

**Pottery**

The utensils manufactured by the Uralis are for the limited local markets and for those naives of wynaad who have a fancy for local goods. Larger vessels are beyond the skill of the Uralis and are usually supplied from the plains or by non-Wynaad potters who have settled recently in that area.\(^{334}\) The clay is usually taken from the fields and is *grayish–white* in color. It is beaten well with a wooden pestle till it is wax like in consistency, and then it is made into lumps of approximately the same size as the vessels that are to be make for them.\(^{335}\) No temporal material is added the lumps clay are then given, by hand, the rough shape of the vessels to be made, and then rounded by beating with a wooden mallet. Pot making among the most primitive tribes is women’s work, but it was taken over by men after the discovery of the wheel. Among the wheel-using Tamil potters, the decoration a painting of the pottery are the special tasks allocated to the

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women, men doing the rest of work, but among the Urals only women work as potters in conformity with the primitive sociological norm.\textsuperscript{336}

**Habitat and Settlement**

Trees of the top canopy occasionally grow to 30 to 40 meters and most of the trees are large evergreen species with dense foliage and straight trunks covered with epiphytic orchids, ferns, mosses, and creepers.\textsuperscript{337} The secondary stratum of the forest comprises small trees with an average height of 10 to 20 meters, followed by dense shrubby stratum and a less continuous herbaceous stratum. The annual rainfall varies from 500 mm from the Coimbatore side to 1200 to 1500 mm in the dense evergreen forest in the western and southern part of the valley. The Kurumba ‘hamlet’ (**ooru**) is a cluster of 10 to 30 ‘huts’ (**koorai**), with 60 to 200 patrilineal related individuals. There is considerable long-term stability of group membership and relatively long occupation of settlement. The Kurumba are mainly hunter-gatherers who also subsist on shifting cultivation on hill slopes. Though the Kurumba inhabit different habitats, there is no consequential ecological difference in environment, and they share and exploit the same forest biomass and similar ecosystem within the Nilgiri forest.\textsuperscript{338} The two tribal groups are similar in many respects

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in spite of speaking different dialects, and they intermarry and are bound together in socio-cultural mutualism that is quite ancient. Kurumba exhibit features such as close residence and trade relation with agricultural communities, as well as very specialized exploitation and inhabitation in secondary forest, both common to the hunter-gatherer groups of India.\(^{339}\)

Kurumba huts are relatively small and constructed using simple materials like bamboo and strong vines or bark strips for tying the poles and rafters. A hut typically consists of one living room, which is also the place where cooking is done. Every hut has a rectangular earthen base with a ‘linear front porch’ (deetti). Huts of close kin are erected in linear rows attached to one another with a ‘long single joined porch’ (ottideetti). The sloping roof structure is built of split bamboo rafters tied with vines overlying the cross poles. The walls are made of split bamboo interwoven like basketwork and plastered on the inside with clay. The floor is neatly plastered with a mixture of cow dung and clay and is cobbled with water-worn pebbles.\(^{340}\) The interior of the hut is divided into two roughly equal parts, vettara, a more secular space towards the entrance, and ullara, a more sacred space near the fireplace where large slow burning logs are kept during cold winter nights.


The Kurumba Economy

The Kurumba economies are a flexible mixture of activities, like most indigenous societies, mainly depending on shifting cultivation supplemented by hunting, gathering, collection and trade of forest produce at the times, working as wage laborers for outsiders. This situation can be seen as one of the opportunistic changes in subsistence strategies evidencing changing conceptions of the problem of making a living in the forest, especially concerning limited carbohydrate resources and relations between foragers and non hunter-gatherers.\footnote{N.Bird-David., The giving Environment: Another Perspective on the Economic system of the Gatherer-Hunters, Current Anthropology, USA, 1990, pp.31, 189-196.}

Hunting

The other major component of the Kurumba diet is the meat and fat provided by hunting. The hunting territory can be divided mainly into two types: a) the farmland (kadu) is surrounding the hamlet where they occasionally trap small animals like rabbits, mongoose, large bush rats, wild fowls, and few other varieties of small birds and b) forest (sole) where they hunt animals such as wild boar, deer and antelope. Hunting is mostly a male activity where groups of men, both agnates and affine, gather and proceed into the forest in search of game for one or two days.\footnote{R. Bergman., Amazon Economics: The simplicity of Shipibo Indian wealth, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Microfilms Int, 1980, p 21.} The Kurumba do not usually hunt in large groups. The number of men in a hunting group usually varies from two to six. Even when a group of six men hunts together, they do not use collective techniques such as
driving or surrounding the game. Men proceed into the forest in the evening along with provisions of rice, red-gram, tea-powder, sugar, and salt for consumption during their stay. Sometimes, they depend on wild fruits and tubers or on small animals and birds. Once they enter the forest, they move with extreme patience and silence. Hunters communicate only through whistling sounds. They do not usually spend more than a day in the forest and always intend to return to the hamlet by dawn. During the night, they hunt with the help of powerful headlights with which they can easily notice the movements of animals and identify them from their glazing eyes. The shape and the distance between the eyes help them identify game. The game is shared equally among all those who participate in the hunt and if the game is sizable, a share is given to all other households in the hamlet.\textsuperscript{343} Apart from the normal share, the inner meat (i.e., heart and liver) and a thigh go to the person who shot the animal. A small portion of the inner meat is offered to the hamlet’s ancestral spirit (\textit{pattan}) and to the spirit in whose name he has used the weapon (\textit{arivu}). The animal is carried to a suitable place, usually close to a stream not far away from the hamlet, where the butchering or slaughtering takes place.\textsuperscript{344}

\textbf{Social Organization of Hunting}

Among the Kurumbas, it is the corporate group, the clan, which owns the land and has primary rights over its plant and animal resources. However, people from other


groups and hamlets are never restricted from hunting and gathering in the clan’s territory. At times, hunting groups were also composed of husband and wife. Further, kin composition shows that the sharing of labor and cooperation in economic activities are not restricted to the household or the close agnatic circle, but also includes closely related affined residing in the hamlet thereby reducing the occurrence of economic units strictly on descent line. Sharing and food exchange among the Kurumba is a highly institutionalized daily activity. It is necessary that those who obtain game share with those who did not. The Kurumbas believe that even small game should be shared among all members of the hamlet to avoid the craving (daham) they feel for meat.345 However, small game is often shared only among the members of the hunting party and their close kin. Large game animals are always widely shared. In such cases, the unit of sharing widens to include more relatives other than the regular food-sharers (beetekarar). The Kurumbas, like their neighboring caste groups, manage to raise smaller livestock like goats and cattle. Almost all the households rear dogs and chickens. Other than the animal protein from chicken eggs and the occasional goat and chicken they slaughter, the Kurumba largely look to hunting and fishing to provide them with the animal protein they need. With the exception of a few kinds of creatures like frogs, snakes, monkeys, jackals and dogs, they regard any animal as edible. Thus, as Dwyer and Minnegal observed for the Kubo, the success of Kurumbas hunting depends on various components of its

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organization such as broadly based prey selection, diverse strategies, role specialization, sharing of meat, and absence of major sanctions associated with hunting.\footnote{P.D.Dwyer., and M. Minnegal. \textit{Hunting in Lowland, Tropical Rainforest: Towards a Model of Non-Agricultural Subsistence.}, \textit{Human Ecology}. 1991, \textit{pp.19}, 187- 212.}

**Shifting Cultivation**

Though the Kurumbas resort to hunting and gathering, these activities never override or interfere with shifting cultivation, their primary source of food. Although food is widespread in the Kurumbas environment, such foods are seasonal, insufficient and have high production cost. Land is abundant and one can cultivate any extent of land according to his or her capacity; thus, agricultural produce is the major source of carbohydrates. The method of cultivation by clearing and burning fresh field is \textit{karikadu krishi}, and the usage of previously cultivated plot is \textit{pakkakadu krishi} (‘old field-cultivation’). Ownership of land is collective, in the sense that all the patrilineal descendants of the founding ancestor are the joint owners of the hamlet and its territory.\footnote{J.F.Eisenberg., \textit{Op.cit}, pp. 267-278.} Regarding the right to land, it is not the absolute freedom of the individual or the family that matters, but the consent of the council members especially the ‘headman’ (\textit{moopan}) of the hamlet. Close families, when in need, may come and reside along with their wife’s father, wife’s brother, or maternal kin, and cultivate a portion of their land. In some cases daughters use their father’s land throughout their lifetime. Nevertheless,
the above should not be taken to conclude that these are amorphous units with fluid composition and vague social boundaries.\(^{348}\)

The Kurumbas represent a transition between forager and cultivator exhibiting features of both social organizations. Though they are Patrilineal by descent, the system shows bilateral tendencies of a flexible and loosely structured system. This shift from a complete forager to that of a forager-grower is reflected in the change from the use of land as a ‘subject of labor’ which fosters an immediate-return system allowing a process of sharing representing an egalitarian type, towards use of land as an instrument of labor resulting in a delayed-return system. Expansion of cultivation implies control over both land and people leading to more structured forms with family and lineage as productive units. The forager-farmer subsistence pattern is not a mere transition state between two ways of life, “rather, it is an adaptation to certain environments in which it arises and persists, and the people who exhibit this adaptation share many features of subsistence style with societies described as hunter-gatherers or foragers. The entire membership of the hamlet prefers to cultivate in the same area and they shift from one area to another collectively. They usually cultivate an area for 2-3 years and the fallow period may be around 8-12 years, which is sufficient for the forest recovery.\(^{349}\) Expansions are an adaptive subsistence economy in tropical forest environment as long as population


density is low and sufficient land is available for active cultivation and shifting from one area to another. First year gardens, newly cleared from the forest, have a higher level of fertility than second or third year gardens, since their burning returns nutrients to the soil. Moreover, as Flowers at all. Note, “High biomass, higher level of fertility, soil moisture, and sufficient organic matter in the soil are the conditions suitable for slash-and-burn agriculture.”

Predominant crops cultivated by them are finger millet, little millet and red gram. Also grown in small quantities are amaranth, bean, cow-pea, mustard, and several varieties of cucumber. The planting pattern involves poly-culture or mixed cropping. Since often there is a single predominant crop, their development can be said to be a ‘millet field’ or a red-gram field. However, this “helter-skelter” planting of crops of different varieties and heights does not necessarily result in a “canny imitation” of the tropical forest as Geertz, and others speak out, it nevertheless helps in protecting the soil from leaching by heavy rains and limits weed growth and nutrient loss due to heat by partially shading the ground. Cotton, maize, dry-land rice, etc., are planted as a single crop in separate gardens. Small quantities of taro, yam, banana, sorghum, tapioca, and maize are grown near their huts. These, backyard plantings often are a source of emergency rations. In shifting cultivation, household members cooperate with one another in almost all its phases from clearing the trees and bushes till the harvest. Certain

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activities in the cultivation process however are sex-linked and need special skills. The various seasonal activities involved in shifting cultivation. Men are responsible for clearing the early set of fields and the women are responsible for most of the subsequent care of the fields, though men and women may assist. Clearing of fields (kadu saveral) involves cutting small trees, clearing bushes and shrubs, and collecting branches and twigs into piles for burning when they are dry. This is done at the onset of summer, usually by mid-February or early March. The major part of shifting ‘cultivation’ (kadu pani), such as cutting furrows in the soil, sowing (kethal), weeding and harvesting are done mainly by women. Normally women of closely related households (beethekarar) collect for these activities, especially weeding and harvesting.352

Since clearing is tedious work and needs more labour, most fields are cleared communally with the help of kinsmen or beethekarar. However, individual families do sowing seeds in prepared fields. Red gram (tuvari) seeds are sown in shallow holes dug with sticks. Three holes spaced three inches apart in a triangle form a unit, and the units are spaced at an average distance of three feet apart. After a week, when the red gram seedlings are about 4-6 inches in height, the other seeds (finger millet, little millet, mustard and amaranth) are mixed together and scattered helter-skelter in the field.353 This is called kora-same kethal. Kora and same seeds are mixed in a ratio of 6:1 liters per


acre along with a handful of mustard and amaranth seed. Then they cut furrows in the soil, turning it over with a hoe (kothu) so that the seeds sown are covered by soil. **Amara** (‘pea’) is also sown simultaneously so that the creepers can climb on to the red gram plant and grow. Occasionally, men slash the tall shrubs, which grow among the tuvari (‘red gram’) crop, down. Hoes (kothu or kuntali) with narrow blades or hook shaped branches of small trees are the most frequently used implements in soil preparation, which is done mainly by women. Small sickles (kora-kathi) used for harvesting. Men use knives (kathi) for slashing and cutting of shrubs and trees.\(^{354}\)

**The Ciru**

According to Kurumba tradition, the concluding post-burial ceremony of Ciru is to be conducted on the occurrence of every 101 deaths in a settlement. Hence, the time-span between two Cirus will be more or less to 10 or 20 years. This traditional norm is no longer respected and a time lag of 20 or 30 years between 2 Cirus is a common occurrence now, because of the huge expenditure entailed in celebrating it. The Ciru of a settlement is decided by the tribal council of that settlement in consultation with the Muppan and the tribal council of the Todikki Kurumba settlement who are the chief ritual

functionaries in matters regarding Ciru in any Kurumba settlement of Attappadi.\footnote{355} It is the prerogative of the chief functionaries of the Todikki hamlet to decide the date of the Ciru after ensuring that the customary offerings to Karudaivam (the Kurumba deity) have been made and the necessary nominal daksina of either 1 1/2 or 5 1/2 rupees has been paid. It is particularly important that the Ciru is to be conducted in the months of April-May on a date before the onset of the monsoon and after the sowing activities in all settlements have been finished.\footnote{356} It is imperative that all the Kurumba settlements should be invited to take part in it for which messengers are sent after fixing the date of the Ciru. Kurumbas have kin-relatives (because in recent times both the tribes have started intermarrying) and the nearby Irula settlements are invited. The heavy expenditure of the ceremony met from the mandatory contributions collected from every household of the settlement. A very important preliminary rite of the Ciru is the Kallukku Rayi Attu, performed a week before the commencement of the Ciru, in which the Muppans and the Mannukkarans of the 16 Kurumba settlements, along with all the other functionaries and the elders of the host settlement, take part. They pound \textit{Ragi} on a big grinding stone to prepare a pastry so that this may be offered to Karudaivam of the settlement at the house


of the Mannukkaran. This offering to Karudaivam is known as Math Vekkal. On the seventh day after this rite, the Ciru should invariably begin.\textsuperscript{357}

**Medicinal Plants**


*Ageratum conyzoides* L. (Asteraceae), “Nasar soppu”. An erect, annual herb flowers pale-blue white, common leaf juice is orally given as a cure for cough and cold.

*Erythroxylum monogynum* roxb. (Erthoroxylaceae), “Jeevadalli maram” A Small branched tree with white flowers, common in Mudumalai wild life sanctuary. The oil extracted from the wood and stem bark is used to cure all types of acute skin disease.

*Passiflora foetida* L. (Passifloraceae), “Narati chedi”, A climbing herb, flowers bright pink common. The plant made into paste with water and applied externally on joints to sure from arthritic problems.

*Tectona grandis* F (Verbenaceae), “Thekku” Large deciduous tree with white bark flowers yellow planted. Hot water decoction of powdered bark is given to pregnant women to ease childbirth and to mitigate abdominal pain during labour.

**Oxalis corniculata** L. (Oxalidaceae), “Pulichen segae”, A small hirsute herb with yellow flowers, common in waste place. The whole plant extract in water is orally given for piles and used as a febrifuge.

**Psidium guajava** L. (Myrtaceae). “Koyyapazham” A branched tree with white flowers, cultivated for its edible fruits unripe fruits with equal quantity of mango bark (Mangifera indica) are powdered and decoction made with hot water is orally given for abdominal discomfort gastric troubles and ulcers in stomach.

**Side cordifolia** L. (Malvaceae), “Arathae” A woody, branched herb or sub-shrub flowers yellow, common. Leaf past is applied on the site of snakebite as an antidote to get rid of poison.

**Tectona grandis** L. (Verbenaceae) “Thekku” A large deciduous tree with yellow flowers, planted. Hot water decoction of powdered bark is orally given to pregnant women to ease childbirth and to mitigate abdominal pain during labor.358

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### Chapter IV

**ECONOMIC LIFE OF KURUMBAS**

Tribals are mainly distributed in the forest areas of the country through the ages. From time immemorial, tribal communities constitute an important segment of Indian