ANCESTOR WORSHIP AS TRIBAL RELIGION

CHAPTER 4

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Ancestor worship was a universal form of religious expression, which emphasized the influence of deceased relatives on the living. It is not a religion in and of itself, but a facet of religious expression, which recognizes an element beyond human control. This form of worship is at the core of people's religious practices such as in China, tropical Africa, Malaysia and Polynesia. Aspects of this type of worship have been traced to the ancient Egyptians, Romans and the Hebrews, but the worship last mentioned was more of a reverence for the dead.

Ancestral cults are very common in most of tropical Africa. Here family members include the ancestors as well as the living. The elder members control the juniors as their forebears controlled them. The basis for such control is the continuity of family ties. In Dahomey, West Africa, ancestral spirits are of three ranks: the spirit founders of the clans, those who died before genealogical records were kept, and the known dead. At intervals, the recent dead are honoured by certain rites incorporating the ancestors. Yearly there is worship with dancing, when distinguished ancestral spirits 'alight' on the heads of men to spiritually possess them. Each clan has a mythical pair of founders, whose son, as the oldest of ancestors, stands as the
absolute ruler of all ancestral spirits. The actual clan head (the oldest man) derives his absolutism from his association with the ancestral spirits, whose power he can invoke to enforce his decrees.¹

In China, the main importance of this worship is the continuity of the family and reverence for the wisdom of the elders. The practice is very ancient extending back before 1000 BC. The practice, essentially a family affair, is held in homes and temples and consists of prayers and offerings before tablets. It is accompanied by elaborate burial systems, and afterwards visiting the graves with deep respect and a horror of trespassing on or despoiling the graves. The practitioners participate in the worship out of filial virtue without any sense of fear of gain which helps to preserve a strong sense of family solidarity. A state worship of Confucius, which may coincide with the family worship, involves an extension of reverence for the wisdom of the elders, a mark of respect and honor for a great teacher rather than giving to those honored power over human affairs.

In the tribal context, ancestor-worship is still a universal form of religious expression. All primitive people believe in the immortality of human soul. From cradle to grave life of the primitive man is centered on his great ancestors and all virtues and failures of his life is attributed to the intervention of their spirits. Tribal religion may be described as animism or spirit-worship,

¹ Cited in Ancestor Worship. com (source: Leslie Spier, University of New Mexico)
of both malevolent and benevolent. During the 19th century anthropological theorists Edward Burnett Taylor and Herbert Spencer deemed ancestor worship to be a first inchoate religion (not as one phase). They assumed that primitive people were unable to comprehend the unseen. Taylor remarked: "The worship of the Manes, or ancestors, is one of the great branches of the religion of mankind. Its principles are not difficult to understand, for they plainly keep up the social relations of the living world. The dead ancestors now passed into a deity, simply goes on protecting his own family and receiving suit and service from them as of old; the dead chief still watches over his own tribe, still holds his authority by helping friends and harming enemies, still rewards the right and sharply punishes the wrong."² A somewhat similar, but more elaborate, idea of ancestor-worship is outlined by Herbert Spencer. He writes: "'Anything', which transcends the ordinary, a savage thinks of as supernatural or divine: the remarkable man among the rest. The remarkable man may be simply the remotest ancestor remembered as the founder of the tribe; he may be a chief famed for strength and bravery; he may be a medicine-man of great repute; and then, instead of being a member of the tribe, he may be a superior stranger bringing arts and knowledge; or he may be one of a superior race gaining predominance by conquest. Being at first one or other of those, regarded with awe during his life, he is regarded with increased awe after his death; and the propitiation of his ghost, becoming

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greater than the propitiation of ghosts which are less feared, develops into an established worship. There is no exception then. Using the phrase ancestor-worship in its broadest sense as comprehending all worship of the dead, be they of the same blood or not, we conclude that ancestor-worship is the root of every religion".3

Although the opinions of Spencer and Taylor on the origin of religion are questioned by later anthropologists, as also by sociologists and archaeologists they are not without relevance. Tribal cult of ancestor-worship has pervaded from generation to generation, from tribe to tribe and from place to place only with slight modifications caused by the process of acculturation. The basic features of ancestor-worship, as pointed out by Taylor and Spencer, among all tribes have been the same and tribes even today are found to follow some aspects of animism.

All tribes in Malabar have great ancestors as their founding fathers and they are eulogized through burial rites, ritual offerings, folk tradition etc. The ancestors guide the tribe through their headman, oracle or Kōmaram or Teyyam dancers. It is these functionaries who act as intermediaries between clansmen and the ancestors. Tribes in Malabar are not ready for any compromise on the basic features of the modes of ancestor-worship, which their forebears are believed to have introduced. Anthropologists E. Adamson

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Hoebel and Everett. L. Frost affirms the static nature of tribal religion thus:

"Social conservatism is a characteristic feature of ancestor-worshipping religions. The ancestors as (mere) preceptors do not favour change from the social practices, they knew while alive. Since they punish moral lapses with death and illness and their standards are the old ones, the religious sanctions toward conformity are powerful".  

**Name of the Dead and their Visiting Times:**

The names of the spirit of the deceased vary from tribe to tribe in Malabar. It is called *Pēyi* by Iruḷas, Kāṭṭunāikkans, and Āḷar. Mudugas and Kurumbas call it *Pijād*. Karimpālans, Māvilāns, Thachanādan Müppans, Kaṇṇavam Kurichiyas and Adiyāns call it *Kūli*. The name assigned to it by the Koṟagas is *Kula*. For Muḷḷakurumans it is *Chāthi* and for Malasar, Ėṟavāḷans, Kaḷanādis, Wayanādan Kādar, Aṟañādans, Chōlanāikkans and Malappaṇāikkans it is *Pṛētam*. Malamalasar and Paṇiyas call it *Karuppu* and *Pēna* respectively. It must be noted here that in certain cases the spirit of the dead is given a special name by some of the tribes. This is perhaps due to the peculiar circumstances that led to a person's death or because of any other similar valid reason. For instance, while the Karimpālans normally call the spirit of the dead *Kūli*, it is called *Viran* if the death of the person is the result of suicide. Similarly, among the Kāṭṭunāikkans, an unmarried dead person's

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spirit is known as *Virika* instead of *Pēyi* which is the general name. Among the Malasar, the spirit of a dead woman is *Mōhini* instead of *Prētam*. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Buchanan reported that the Paniya maintained such a distinction between two kinds of spirits: “after death, the spirit of good men becomes ‘Cūlis’ while those of bad men are called ‘Paynays’”.

According to the tribal tradition benevolent spirits, on the completion of funeral rites, proceed to the land of the dead. They revisit their old homes and kinsfolk only on auspicious occasions or in needy times. But malevolent spirits always hover around their houses, settlements and graveyards. Their favourite wandering time is early morning, evening or midnight. They are extremely dangerous on Fridays, Tuesdays and New Moon days for their ability of causing evil reaches the peak on these days. So these days are considered to be inauspicious.

**Land of the Dead:**

Tribes all over the world make necessary arrangements for the comfortable journey of a dead person’s spirit to the next world to join his/her ancestors residing there. According to the tribal tradition of Malabar, only on the completion of the last rites or *Adiyanthiram* his/her spirit can reach the land of the dead. In Malabar economic instability of the tribes compel them to

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postpone the *Adiyanthiram* for one or two years. For the same reason, tribes like Mudugas and Kurumbas conduct the last rites of a deceased person only five or ten years after his/her death (in the form of secondary burial). Any delay in the sending off the spirits to the other world through the last rites, according to the tribal belief, causes the spirits of the dead to wander about. Similarly, the spirits of the persons who have had to face unnatural deaths also are doomed to wander about. These refugee-spirits, during the interval between their death and the last rites, dwell on trees like the *Pāla* (*Alstonia Scholaris*), the Banyan (*Ficus Indica*) or the *Kānjiram* (*Nux Vomica* or *Strychnos*).

The path leading to the land of the dead is hazardous. Tribes believe that spirits have to pass through long dark caverns to reach the abode of the dead. In anticipation of such a long journey, tribes like the Irulas and the Kurichiyas keep oil lamps along with the corpses in the burial pits so as to enable the spirits to light up the dark and dangerous path leading to their destination. Certain other tribes believe that spirits will have to cross rivers to reach their abode in the other world and they keep money with the corpses or in the mouths of the corpses so as to enable them to pay the ferry charges. Only spirits of good people reach the land of the dead while the spirits of evil people reach a place of raging fire, hot water and wild beasts. According to
Francis Buchanan, “Cadar after death, the spirits of good men reside with a God named *Mudivirum* while those of wicked men go to a bad place”.6

Tribes like the Karimpālans, Thachanādan Mūppans, Malamuthans, Malappanikkans, Kuṇduvādiyans and Ėṟavāḷans believe that spirits of the newly dead merge with those ones who are already in the land of the dead, which they believe, is situated in the sky. The Kuṟumbas believe that spirits live on a hill, which lie a little away from their settlement and is known as *Nikāllumalai*. The Muduga abode of the spirits is known as *Lōka*. The *Lōka* is divided into two: the benevolent spirits go to *Mel-Lōka* and malevolent spirits to *Ādi-Lōka*. For the Iruḷas the abode of the spirit of the benevolent is the *Lōka* of flowers and of the malevolent spirit is the *Lōka* of worms. The abode of the spirits among the Īrālikuruṟumans is the *Daivathār Mandapam* and among Muḷḷakuṟumans and Kāṭṭunāikkans it is *Daivappura*.

A strikingly different concept of the Other World is found in the belief of the Wayanādan Kuṟichiyas. They are much more philosophical and ardent in their belief of life after death. They believe that when the last rites are over, spirits of great men of outstanding caliber go to the world of the Four Mothers. (The Four Mothers are *Akathūṭamma, Arayil Bhagavathi, Chenchidichi Amma* and *Karimpil Bhagavathi*). These Four Mothers are the four forms of the Goddess *Pārvathi*, the wife of Lord Siva. The spirits of great

personalities are permitted to return to the earth and live with their kinsfolk. The process of bringing back such spirits is described by A. Aiyappan thus: "The living have to seek the help of the old shades of the clan, the mediator-God and Malakkāri (clan deity) to bring them down to the spirit-world and conduct elaborate rites spread over two to three years. When a shade (Nikal or spirit) comes down, its medium, now possessed, rolls down on the ground. This is characteristic of this class of super humans. In the final act of the drama, while the shade's medium is still in trance, the shaman of the senior shade requests shaman of the mediator-god to lead the new shade to the shrine-room of the household. The mediator-god leads the new shade by the hand to the room where he remains for ever or till transferred to another branch household".7 The spirits of great men and women, who act as intermediaries between clansmen and other ancestors, are called Muni and Pēna respectively. The spirits of good personalities merge with the Panchabhūta- i.e. air, water, sky, fire and earth. A belief, similar to that of the Kuṟichiyaś, exists also among the Bhils of Khandesh and Central India. Their faith in Māthās or divine mothers8 resembles closely with that of the Four Mothers of the Kuṟichiyaś.

The belief in the land of the dead is a universally prevalent phenomenon. The Kiwai of British New Guinea are "accustomed to leave a

7 Umacharan Mohanty ed., Tribal Culture and Tribal Welfare, Selected Papers by Prof. A. Aiyappan, Madras, 1988, p.121.
canoe, or at all events a piece of one, beside a grave, to enable the soul of the
dead to voyage to Adiri, the land of departed spirits." The Gārōs had believed
that the souls of the dead can never find their way unaided to the spirit-land;
so at the cremation-ground they kill a dog and burn it with the corpse to guide
the dead man’s soul to Chikmang, the land of souls.

Today the concept of Swarga and Naraka are becoming more popular
among the tribes in Malabar due to their increasing contact with Hindu,
Christian and Muslim communities. Just like the caste-Hindus, the Kuṟichiyas,
Kaḷanādis, Malayālar, Muḻakurumans and Wayanādan Kādar float the ashes
and bones of cremated persons in the river Pāpanāsini of Tirunelli in Wynād.
The Hindu faith in Kālan (god of death), as approaching men with a rope in
his hands to carry their spirits after death, on the back of a buffalo, is
becoming popular among these tribes.

**Spirit as Shadow:**

To treat spirits of the dead as shadows is a universally followed
tradition. Certain tribes in Malabar realize the spirit as Nikal (Nizhal in
Malayalam) or shadow. This idea is popular among the Iruḷas, Mudugas,
Kuṟumbas, Paṇiya and Kuṟichiyas. These tribes believe that human essence
has a dual aspect. After death one aspect of the essence - the physical body -

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This is in striking similarity to the archaeological findings of dog burial at the Neolithic site of
Burzahom.
perishes and the other aspect – the shadow of the person – is transformed into spirit. This shadow travels to the world of the dead. Sometimes the shadows of evildoers enter into animal or human bodies and cause trouble to their kinsfolk. Alfred Metraux observes that a considerable number of South American tribes identify souls with the shadow or as reflection in water or in mirror. The Bhūmia and Gōnd also believe in shadows as expressions of dead men. The Bhūmia believe that after death the shadow (chaen) becomes an evil spirit (māri, Bhūl), which remains near the spot where the corpse was buried or cremated. The Gōnd, on the other hand, prefer to catch the shadow of the deceased in a fish or frog and by some exorcism try to confine it permanently to their house.

Reincarnation of the Soul:

Tribes all over the world believe in the concept of the transmigration of souls. Most of them think that spirits of the dead are reborn as animals, birds or human infants. Important tribal heroes or leaders are believed to be reborn as new infants in the wombs of other women. The faith in rebirth inspires many tribes to respect certain species of animals and birds which are believed to be creatures carrying the spirits of the ancestors. The Barundi tribe of Africa believes that the souls of the dead migrate into snakes, lions and leopards, which live in the sacred groves around the graves. From there the

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snakes wander to visit the huts of their families, where they are regarded by the mother as the souls of their dead children and are fed with milk.\textsuperscript{13} Some of the Nāgas hold that the spirits of the departed after undergoing a cycle of changes in a subterranean world are reborn on earth in the form of butterflies or small houseflies, only however in that shape to perish for ever. Hence when these small flies alight on the wine-cups of the living, the Wassails will not kill any of them for fear of destroying someone of their ancestors.\textsuperscript{14}

A few tribes in Malabar believe in the transmigration of spirits. Tribes like the Muljakurumans, Adiyāns, Paṇiya, Wayanādan Kādar, Malayālar, Kaḷanādis and Kurichiyas believe that spirits transmigrate into crows. Māvilāns and Koṛagas think that spirits travel in the form of wind. For the Malamutthans, the spirits enter into the body of animals like dogs, cats, monkeys and birds like Kirpēy (woodpecker). The Mudugas believe that the spirit of an evil sorcerer transforms into a Guma or owl, while the Kādar believe that it takes the shape of a cock. In the case of Ėravālans, they believe that a deceased person’s spirit takes the shape of a dog or cock or a cottonwick. The Malamalasar thinks that spirits transform and travel in the form of bears.


\textsuperscript{14} WH Furness, “The Ethnography of the Nāgas of Eastern Assam”, \textit{Journal of Anthropological Institute XXXII}, 1902, p.463.
Types of Spirits: Benevolent and Malevolent

Spirits of the dead are identified as belonging to two categories on the basis of the nature of death of the deceased persons and on the basis of the services/harms rendered by them to the tribe while they were alive. The spirit of those who die of natural causes and render valuable services to their kinsfolk are known as benevolent spirits. The spirits of those who face unnatural deaths and cause trouble to their kinsfolk in various ways are treated as malevolent. The benevolent spirits are worshipped by their kinsfolk through offerings and prayers while malevolent spirits are exorcised with the help of benevolent spirits, Komarams or family deities. Each tribal family has its own benevolent or malevolent spirits and good/evil deeds of these spirits affect them alone. The attack of a malevolent spirit of one family upon another family or of one tribe on another tribe is a rare case and it happens only if the spirit is misused by an evil sorcerer.

Benevolent spirits and their services to the kinsfolk

Benevolent spirits are revered as house-spirits or domestic deities. Susan Elizabeth Ramirez makes the following remark on the services done by the ancestors to the living and vice versa. “The living periodically visited the complexes to request health and fertility from the ancestors and conduct propitiating rituals, often burning food offerings, singing and dancing. People
believe that they depend on the dead for life, fertility and prosperity". In the Malabar tribal context, the services of the benevolent spirits are solicited in the following situations:

1. **In Hunting:** Tribes like the Malasar, Malamalasar, Kādar, Chōlanāikkans, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Ürālikurumans, Kurumbas, Mudugas, Iruḷas and Āḷar, who engage in hunting activities, invoke their ancestors by making offerings to them like cooked food, coconut, bananas, betel leaves and areca nuts before they go out for hunting so that they may succeed in their venture (in their search for game). After returning from hunting, they offer a portion of the cooked meat to their ancestors and only after that they taste their share. Before going out for hunting, some of the mountain people of Formosa invoke the spirits of their ancestors to provide them good game. The Gōnds also make offerings to their ancestors to secure good hunting. The worshipper offers his cherished living objects like cocks, rabbits, etc. to the dearest ancestors.

2. **In Fishing:** All tribes in Malabar engage in fishing. Before starting their venture they take their fishing net or fishing hook in their hands and pray to the dead for a good yield. The Belep, a tribe of New Caledonia, used to

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make offerings to the skulls of their ancestors to invoke their spirits before
they went out to fish on the reefs.\textsuperscript{18} The Gônds of Gandala, in Central India,
from time to time, organize fishing expeditions in which all the men of a
village take part. On such occasions the women make a mound or platform in
front of the house of the leader of the party, and on this platform the fish
caught are afterwards laid. The leader thereupon distributes the fish among the
people, leaving one fish on the platform. Next morning this fish is taken away
and placed on the grave of the leader’s ancestor, doubtless as an offering of
thanks to the dead man’s spirit for the fish, which he is supposed to have sent
to the people.\textsuperscript{19}

3. **In Honey Taking**: When men belonging to tribes like the Ājar,
Chōlanāikkans, Iruḷas, Kāṭṭunāikkans, and Īrālikumans go out for
collecting wild honey, they pray to their ancestors to help find a rich beehive.
Kāṭṭunāikkans, who are popularly known as Tēn-kuṟumār (honey-kuṟumār)
among the other Wynād tribes, believe that their ancestors would lead them
towards trees with numerous beehives even in thick forests. They also help
them to climb on gigantic trees and, because of their benevolent care, no bees
would sting them while collecting honey. After collecting honey they offer a
portion of it to their ancestors. A Birhor will not sip honey from certain first

\textsuperscript{18} Fr. Lambert, “Moeurs et superstitions de la tribu Belep Les missions catholiques”, xi, 1880,
p.239, cited in Frazer, op.cit., (b-9), p. 76.
flowers of the season till he has offered a few drops to the spirits of his forefathers.

4. **In Collecting Tubers:** Roots and tubers are the main items of food of the primitive men in all parts of the world. Tribes like Malamutthans collect tubers from jungles not only as a food item but also as medicine for curing diseases and improving health. They are nourishing food unless they are too young and watery. Before starting to go out for the collection of tubers, with digging sticks in their hands, they make offerings to the dead to bless them with plenty of rare tubers and roots.

5. **In Cultivation or Harvest:** Tribes in Malabar who engage in agricultural activities (mostly shifting cultivation) like the Kuřichiyas, Muljakurumans, Adiyāns, Paṇiya, Karimpālans, Māvilāns, Malayālar, Thachanādan Mūppans, Iruļas, Kuṛumbas, Mudugas and Kuṇḍuvādiyans seek the blessings of their ancestors for the fertility of the soil and a good yield. Before going to the field for sowing the seed and for harvesting the crops, tribes make offerings to the ancestors. Among the Mudugas, before sowing a ceremony known as *Māth Vekkuka* is performed at *Pēyi-kūra* (abode of the spirit) in *Maṇṇūkkāran*’s house. At early morning womenfolk in the settlement go out to bathe with empty-bellies, carrying earthen pots on their heads and a brass pot containing turmeric in their hands. After bathing each of

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*Saratchandra Roy, The Birhōrs, Ranchi, 1925, p. 112.*
them fill her earthen pot and drink some water from it. They also fill the brass pot with water mixed with turmeric. Returning to their hamlet they prepare millet. The cooked millet is served on seven banana leaves inside the Pēyi-kūra. Afterwards the Mūppan and Maŋŋikkāran symbolically sow a handful of grains (like millet, kora etc.) in the field and return to their settlements. Womenfolk pour water mixed with turmeric on their feet. Then they serve cooked millet and curry for seven men. Women are not allowed to eat food in Pēyi-kūra for fear of defilement. In early days, women with earthen pots of water on their heads used to fall into a state of trance. They remained trembling till the entire water in the pot got emptied. The Iruḷas keep seeds for the first phase of sowing in the Madam (a big earthen jar) which is kept in the area set apart for the ancestors at the house of the headman.

In the case of the Kuṟichiyas, before going out for sowing, the Kāraṇavar or Kōmaram gets possessed and makes offerings of coconut, tender coconut and banana to the Muni and to other family gods. The Bavenda of Northern Transvaal invoke and propitiate the ancestor spirits before the sowing and reaping of the corn. In October or November, when the land is ready for sowing, a pot, containing seeds of eleusine, Kafir corn and all the other crops that are to be sown, is carried to the corn field where the family assembles. There a priestess, who is usually the sister (makhadzi) of the head of the family, addresses the ancestral spirits, saying “here is food for you, all our spirits; we gave you of every kind of grain, which you may eat. Bring to
us also crops in plenty and prosperity in the coming season". The Muria Gônd in India, at harvest time when grain is taken to the threshing floor, throw a little grain to one side, and later collect and eat it in honour of the dead.

Tribes all over the world celebrate the festival of harvest, every year after the harvest, in honour of their ancestors and as a means of thanksgiving. The harvest ceremony among the tribes in Malabar, known as Puthari or new rice ceremony, is celebrated on the 10th of the Malayalam month of Thulâm. Among the Mullakurumans each house in a settlement places a handful of rice from the first harvest in the Daivappura on that day. Rice cooked from the newly harvested paddy and curries prepared out of the first vegetables of that season are also served in plantain leaves for the ancestors. The Kuṇduvādiyans of Irulam offer oblations in sweet pastry, cooked rice, curries and meat to the ancestors inside a room of the taṟawād of their founding fathers. Kuṟichiyyas of both Wynād and Kannavam offer the ancestors cooked rice and Neyyappam (a sweet pastry from rice powder) made of the grains of the first harvest. A practice found among the Irulas is that they keep the first fruits of the harvest for the ancestors in the Madam (an earthen jar) kept in the headman’s house.

The Barea of East Africa celebrates a festival in honour of the dead by way of thanksgiving every year in November after the harvest. Every

household brews much beer for the day, and a small pot of the beer is set apart for every dead member of the family and kept for two days, after which the beer is drunk by the living. The Lākhers of North East India perform a sacrifice in October to the spirits of their ancestors to induce them to make the crops abundant, the domestic animals fertile and healthy and to give good hunting. At the same time the sacrifice is intended to please the spirits of the rice and maize and to prevent them from leaving the village. For this ceremony the Lākhers make a broad road, in front of the village for the spirits of the dead to come along, and when it is ready the men of the village march in procession up and down the road, with drums and gongs beating to meet the unseen visitors and escort them to the house where the sacrifice is to take place. After this solemn march the Lākhers of one particular village (Chappi) visit the graves of all people who had died within the last three years and place handfuls of every kind of food and flour on the graves for the spirits of the graves to eat. The sacrifice to the dead on this occasion consists of seeds of every kind of food crop anointed with the blood of a fowl. It is deposited at the foot of the main post at the back of the house. Among the Tonga of South east Africa the regular national offerings is that of the first fruits to the ancestral spirits. The Oraons of India offer the first fruits of the upland rice and of panicum miliai to the ancestral spirits at their two annual festivals,

these offerings must be made to the dead before the living may partake of the new crops.26

Among the Muḷḷakuruṟumans a harvest festival known as Ucchāl is also conducted at Pakkam in Wynād in Feb-March (Kumbham 1st Malayalam month) every year. Other tribes like the Kāṭṭunāikkans, Papiya and Īrālikuruṟumans also participate in this festival. On the day of Ucchāl the Muḷḷakuruṟumans of each settlement used to conduct a traditional hunting expedition and offer the ancestors a portion of the cooked meat and rice in the Daivappura. This custom is slowly vanishing out due to the stringent restrictions on hunting imposed by the government and is now being replaced by purely vegetarian offerings.

6. Benevolent Spirit acting as Oracles: The ancestor spirits of efficient and courageous persons are supposed to render services to their surviving kinsfolk in times of doubt, danger or distress through either direct counsel or by advice through mediums like the teyyam dancers, Kōmarams or efficient sorcerers. When a spirit enters the body of a mediator, he gets possessed; tribes of Malabar consult such mediums to trace out the cause of deaths, crop-failures, regular occurrence of diseases, and barrenness of women and also to foretell the future. The ancestral spirits through the medium can also provide solutions for the pressing problems of the living tribes. The Teyyam dancers of

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26 Sarat Chandra Roy, Oraon Religion and Customs, Ranchi. 1928, p.33.
tribes like the Kaḷanādis, Māvilāns and Karimpālans act not only as oracles for the Gods but also for the ancestors.

Consulting oracles is a universal tribal practice. The Melanesians believe that the knowledge of future events is conveyed to them by a spirit or ghost speaking with the voice of a living man, one of the wizards, who is himself unconscious while he speaks. In the Solomon Islands both men and women can be possessed and inspired by ghosts, and there are professional mediums whose services are employed when anyone wishes to ascertain the cause of sickness in a particular case.27 The Sōṛa, who live on the borders of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh, conduct dialogues with their dead through a shaman in trance.28

7. **Benevolent Ancestors as Dream Images:** Ancestors render their valuable services to the living, by advice or prophesy, through dreams. In the words of William Crook, "the spirits of the dead reveal themselves in dreams".29 Tribes in Malabar, like the other tribes around the world, are believers in dream images and believe that ancestors visit their beloved survivors in dreams. The spirit of a father/mother appears in the dreams of his/her most beloved offspring alone. They give advice on important matters, warnings against dreadful enemies, information about names and other details of medicinal herbs, remind about offerings he/she has to make and, of course,

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28 Piers Vitesbsky, *Dialogues with the Dead*, New Delhi, 1993, pp.1-6.
reveals solutions for their troubles. The oracular communication with the ancestor-spirit sometimes happens in the dreams of the mediator (shaman or oracle or Kōmaram) also. The Kiwai, a Papuan people of British New Guinea, believe that they can obtain oracular communications directly from the ghosts by questioning the dead man at his grave or by sleeping on the grave, in which case the soul of the departed will visit the sleeper in a dream and give the desired answer. The Bhūmia and Gōnd of Jabalpur regard that, in addition to body and shadow, there is in man his life-spirit which is called Jiw or Pran or Hansa. The life-spirit survives the death of a man; it is brought to Bhagwan. It has the shape of the man in whom it dwells, but it is small-sized, not bigger than a body. It can leave the body in sleep. The wandering of the life-spirit is revealed to a sleeping man through dreams.

8. **Benevolent Spirit as the Guardian Deity:** It is a universally held concept among tribes that all dead ancestors are not to be adorned with equal status in the realm of ancestor-worship. JG Frazer observes: “on the death of a distinguished man his ghost retains the powers that belonged to him in life, in greater activity and with stronger force; his ghost therefore is powerful, and so long as he is remembered, the aid of his powers is sought and worship is offered to him”. In Malabar, the spirits of the founders of a family or tarawād, who were efficient, powerful, courageous and benevolent in real life,

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32 J.G. Frazer, *op.cit*, (n-9), p.34.
are revered as gods. Though spirits of common men are worshipped as protectors of their clan, family and children, the founder-spirit has a pre-eminent position. The founder-spirit is considered as the guardian deity of the family, lineage or *taria wid*. E.B. Taylor observes: “the worship of a dead ancestor as a guardian is recorded from all parts of the world”. Among the Bantu tribes of Africa, every lineage and clan has its distinct ancestral deities, who are gods to their descendants but who are ignored by the members of other kinship groups. The Birhôrs rever their ancestral spirits, which each family installs in an inner tabernacle or shrine of the hut and propitiates with offerings of food and drink.

The guardian deities of Malabar tribes, worshipped from generation to generation without any break, despite the overwhelming contacts the tribes have with people of an advanced technology, render valuable services to their kinsfolk and protect them from the attack of malevolent spirits. There are no visual images for these spirits except that their presence is felt through certain material belongings kept in a special room of the house or *taria wid*. Of course, not all tribes in Malabar have such guardian deities. Tribes like the Kuritchiyas of both Wynâd and Kaňñvam, Ālār, Koŗagas, Paniyas, Kaļanâdis and Karimpalāns have such kinds of ancestors. A room of the *taria wid* of each Wayanâdan Kuritchiyan, known as *Koṭtil* or *Nikal Muţi* (shadow-room), is

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dedicated for the ancestor-spirits called *Nikals*. Some of these ancestor-spirits, consecrated here along with the clan deities, are the spirits of great warriors who had fought heroically against the British in the Pazhassi revolt and who are also treated as the founding fathers of those ταρωάδs. These founding fathers cum ancestors are specially known as *Muni* and their wives as *Pēna*. The place allotted for the *Pēna* is in the kitchen block and they are supposed to look after the welfare of the womenfolk in the ταρωάδ and are respectfully called *Pēna-Mutthāchi* (great grandmother). The Khāsis too revere deceased ancestress named *Ka Iawbei* (grandmother). *Ka Iawbei* is the primeval ancestress of the clan. In former days during family quarrels or dissensions amongst the members of the same clan, which it is desired to bring to a peaceful settlement, it was customary to perform a sacrifice to the first mother. *U Thawlang*, the first father and the husband of *Ka Iawbei* was also revered.36

A lighted lamp is always kept in the *Koṭṭil* or *Nikal Muri*. A wooden stool, weapons and customary sticks are the material symbols of *Muni* or *Nikal*. The *Muni* looks after the general well being of the ταρωάδ which includes measures for economic prosperity, germination of seeds, providing good yield, maintenance of discipline, punishing the guilty, and looking after the welfare of the men-folk. *Pēna* looks after children, protects chastity of unmarried girls/women and cares for the welfare of the womenfolk. During

the delivery time of a pregnant woman, special offerings are made to Pēna for the protection of the child and the mother. According to the Kurichiya belief during the time of delivery Pēna enters into the hands of the Pettichi or midwife and separates the child from the mother harmlessly. At times when offerings are made to the Pēna, a brass oil lamp is kept lighted. Pēna is extremely powerful and there is a saying among the Wayanādan Kurichiyas that “half-a Pēna equals thousand gods”\(^{37}\). Among the Kannavam Kuriciyar the most popular and powerful ancestor is the Edamana Muni of Edamana taṟawād at Koṭṭiyur.

Kathleen Gough observes the prevalence of a similar practice among the Nayars of central Kerala. She writes: each traditional Nayar house contains a room devoted to lineage ghosts. Within the shrine are placed small, low stools (Pīṭams). On each of these it is believed that a particular ghost comes to sit on the days when offerings are made. Regular offerings are made only to kāraṇavans, for only kāraṇavans hold legal authority and only their names tend to appear in documents, which survive for posterity. The lineage ghosts are regularly propitiated on the New Moon days of Karkidakam (July-August) and Thulam (Oct-Nov). Food is cooked in the kitchen by women of the matrilineal household and a large portion is placed on a plantain leaf for each of the ghosts. It includes curried meat and vegetables, fried paddy,

\(^{37}\) Told in an interview by Kelu, Kāraṇavar of Kakkottara Kurichiya Taṟawād, Vellamunda, Wynād, 18th April 2005.
beaten rice, fruits and sweets, puddings of various kinds. Toddy and arrack were traditionally served along with the meal. If a dead Kāraṇavār is known to have enjoyed special food during his life, he receives a large portion of these foods. The living Kāraṇavār places the leaves before the stools in the presence of men junior to him in the property group and then closes the door of the shrine. After a few minutes the Kāraṇavār reopens the door and distributes the food to be eaten by all members of the taṟawād. Women take no part in offering the food and may not enter the ancestral shrine in this day. They are also forbidden to enter it during menstrual and birth pollutions, and all members are forbidden during the fifteen days of pollution following death. If offerings are made correctly to the ghosts, they will help to preserve the taṟawād from misfortune. Lineage ghosts have some concern with the taṟawād's internal morality as well. Conversely, failure to propitiate the ghosts correctly is the offence most likely to provoke retribution.38

The great ancestors of the Koṟagas are known as Bhūta and are supposed to exercise a great influence on the welfare of the family. These Bhūtas are worshipped in the form of teyyam s (without having the ornamental pomp of the popular teyyam dance) on every auspicious occasion. The well-known among such Bhūtas are Ajjana-Bhūta (grandfather) and Ajj-Bhūta (grandmother). Every settlement has a Bhūtasthān as the meeting place of the

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spirits with a stone seat beneath a Madār tree. The guardian spirits of the Kalanādis are the two founding fathers of the clan, known as Muthachchanmār (grandfathers). All the spirits of the dead Kalanādis merge with these two grandfathers. The great ancestors of the Ājar are Kāvu who are the bearers of the spirits of the deceased to the land of the dead. Unlike other guardian deities, Kāvu is both benevolent and malevolent at the same time. It becomes malevolent when it is misused by evil sorcerers.

The Paṇiya believe that spirits of good persons become benevolent spirits. Hence they believe that their good and great ancestors have become Pēna. These virtuous ancestors who have supernatural powers are worshipped as guardian-spirits. Remnants of clothes of their illustrious ancestors are preserved by the Paṇiya in a six-inch square box called Pōya made of Palmyra leaves. This box is provided with a lid, which has a small hole in it so that coins may be inserted in the box. This sacred box is hung on the roof in a corner of the headman's room. The old clothes inside the box are believed to be symbols of the spirits of their great ancestors. A raised mud platform called tāra is erected in the corner of the room exactly below the Pōya. During annual festive occasions the Chemmi light a ritual oil lamp and offer their great ancestors cooked rice, papad and curries on the tāra. The other members of the hamlet offer coconuts and money. Special offerings are made when
epidemics like cholera occur. A rite known as Maraduchavittal\textsuperscript{39} is performed by the Āṭṭāḷi, before the Pēnathaṇa, to cure a disease. The patient is asked to sit facing the Pēnathaṇa while the Āṭṭāḷi invokes the displeased spirits by burning an incense stick and as he gets possessed he drops the coins known as Maradu (fine) offered by the relatives of the patient on the floor, stamps on it for a while and requests the spirits to accept it. If the coin had fallen on the Pēnathaṇa it is symbolic of the acceptance of the offering by the Pēṇa. The coins are collected later by the Chemmi and are put into the Pōya box and are later used for the annual ancestor-ceremonies. Women who are in their menstrual period are not allowed to enter the room of Pōya.

Among the Karimpālans, the founding father of a tarawād, who is also the guardian deity, is known as Nāyāṭṭu kodivirān Thāypetta Kathriyammōn. He is the receiver of the spirits of the departed and is settled in a special house known as Kūjikkōṭtam, constructed in his honour and attached to the house of every headman.

9. **Souls' Day:** It is a universally observed practice for tribes all over the world to specially remember the spirits and to make special offerings to them. The spirits are worshipped daily, in festive seasons, auspicious and ceremonial occasions and on annual days. Tribes believe that unless the spirits are worshipped through offerings, they always cause trouble to their kinsfolk,

\textsuperscript{39} Viswanathan Nair, *Tribal Health and Medicine in Kerala: a Study in Interrelationship Between Habitat, Health, Medicine, Society and Culture*, PhD Dissertation, University of Calicut, 1985, p.187
appear in their dreams and warn them. Tribes of Malabar in early days had kept a portion of their daily food to their ancestors; conditions of poverty combined with a slow erosion of ritual rigidity have led to the giving up of this practice today. Well-off tribes like the Kurichiya, Mullakurumans, Malayalar and Wayanadan Pathiyar continue this practice even today.

The Malabar tribes, due to the fast developing process of acculturation, have started celebrating festivals like Ögam, Vishu, etc. On these festive occasions all tribes offer a feast to their ancestors. All dishes prepared are kept inside a room of the house which is kept closed for some time. Then the room is opened, the family members consume all the food kept there. Tribes like Kattunakkans, Mullakurumans and Cholanakkans keep dishes inside the Daivappura, later on to be eaten by their headmen. The Paniya of Wynad, a day before Ögam, i.e., on Uthradam, prepare a feast and keep it inside the house for their ancestors. On the day of Thiruvögam, they place a plantain leaf inside the house and keep on it half-a-seer of rice, a coconut broken into halves and lighted wicks. The Kannavam Kurichiya conduct a special ritual known as Ögam Kāhal. On this occasion a Kōmaram, possessed by an ancestor-spirit, enters into dialogues with the kinsfolk and bless them.

The tribes in Malabar offer food and money to their ancestors on auspicious occasions like marriage, birth of an infant or the naming or ear-boring ceremony of a child. On these occasions, the headman of the settlement
takes a leading role in the celebrations. The *teyyam* dancers of tribes like the Kaļanādis, Karimpālans and Māvilāns consult their ancestors before performing the *teyyam* of a particular ancestor-deity and make offerings to them of money, betel-leaves and areca-nuts. The tribes have now started going to Sabarimala, the temple of Lord Ayyappa, after undergoing the usual fasting and austerities of 41 days. Before leaving their hamlet for the pilgrimage they offer sacrifices and prayers to their ancestors.

It is a custom among the Kaṉṇavam Kurichiyas to consult their oracles on the functions to be held before and after the solemnizing of a marriage. Thus matters such as the fixing of the day and time of the marriage, the solemnizing of the marriage, the functions to be held on the reception day, etc are consulted with the oracles. The matters are discussed and sanctified by the oracles at the residence of the bride and bridegroom respectively. They chant the *mozhi* to propitiate the ancestral-spirits and family deities. The bridegroom and his party enter the house of the bride only after making offerings to the ancestors, and remembering the *Kāraṇavars* of seven generations. Bride’s oracle accompanies her on the journey to the house of the bridegroom with his party. When they reach the house, the oracle chants the *mozhi*, cuts a branch of the Pāla tree and puts it on his neck and gets possessed. The Pāla tree is believed to be the abode of the spirits and through the branch the spirits enter his body. The oracle asks questions on family matters and the relatives of the bridegroom answer them.
The Karimpālans perform a ritual known as Kūliyādikkal one year after a girl's marriage. The headman, Āṭṭiyān,40 Changāthi and the nephew of the married woman go to the husband's house and make offerings to the Kūli of that settlement. It is also known as Kalasa-nritham because the Āṭṭiyān carries a brass pot on his head and dances in frenzy. Dressed up in new clothes, with a red silk round his waist and holding a dagger in his right hand, the Āṭṭiyān, after making offering in money and toddy to the ancestors of married woman's settlement, analyses the post-marital situation, points out the shortcomings if any and gives advice to the couple for a happy and prosperous life. The ritual is also intended as an offering to the ancestors of the husband's settlement who looked after the girl for the whole year.

All tribes in Malabar consider Karkidakavāvu (New moon Day) as Spirits' Day. That day the tribes in Malabar keep food in the main room of the house beside a lighted Nilavīlakku. On this day the Karimpālans offer Pitr-bali to the ancestors, which they call Gurukāraṇavanmārkku Kodukkal. (Offerings to the ancestors on such festive and sacred occasions are known as Kūlivīlakku). Whereas in early days the function was conducted at the house of the Kāraṇavar in which all members of the tarawād had taken part, today it

40 Āṭṭiyān, who is also known as Āṭtukāran or Āruthal, is the mediator between the living and the dead. Whenever there is an exigency the ancestors enter into the body of the Āṭṭiyān to get him possessed and engage in a dialogue with his kin relatives. Karimpālans consult him during occasions like famines, crop-failures, regular occurrence of diseases, barrenness of women or during the election of Tarawātu Kāraṇavar. If anyone wants to become an Āṭṭiyān, he should pray his ancestors and, according to their belief, great ancestors appear in his dreams to advise him to accept an efficient and famous Āṭṭiyān as his teacher. After getting disciplined, he learns the method of Ādal and he accepts it as a profession only at the consent of his teacher. The suffix Kūli or Āṭtukkāran is added to the name of all such persons.
is performed in individual houses. The Āṭṭiyaṇ, who is the chief functionary in rituals connected with Karkidakavāvu, wears a red cloth around his waist and carries a sword in his hand. He is helped by another functionary. Inside the house of the Kāraṇavar they place a lighted wick in a ritual ladle (ḥōmakkayil) and wave it around a winnowing basket which contains a large number of ritual items like a bottle of toddy, a vessel full of milk, Bengal gram, peas, black gram, green gram, sugar, jaggery, papad, banana, sugar candy, beaten rice, rice and a coconut etc. This ritual is accompanied by the ringing of bells, chanting of magical spells, throwing of rice and flowers (like basil flowers, Īḷavāl (Crataeva Religiosa) and Chrysanthus) and sprinkling of water from a spouted vessel on the winnowing basket. A cock is then sacrificed and its blood is spread on the winnowing basket while the thōttam songs are sung.

Apart from these occasions, on the death anniversary too, tribesmen offer food to the ancestors. The Chōlanaikkans propitiate the ancestors and make offerings to them annually. The Chemmakākran or the headman of each settlement who is the custodian of the Daivakkoṭṭai is the chief functionary on this occasion too. All images inside the Daivakkoṭṭai are taken out and displayed on a red silk cloth. The Chemmakākran wears a red cloth and a black headgear. This function is conducted in the evening and it requires

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41 Spouted vessel, called *kindi* in Malayalam, is used in almost all ritual occasions among the caste-Hindus. It is an important item used in rituals associated with teyyam. The use of this vessel by the Karimpālans may be due to their links with the teyyam cult.
30kgs of rice, 12 coconuts, 2 litres of coconut oil, 1 kg tobacco, betel leaves, areca nuts, a piece of red silk and a bottle of arrack. All members of the neighbouring settlements are invited. Cooked rice along with a coconut broken into two halves, betel leaves, tobacco and areca nuts are offered to the images displayed in the courtyard of the Daivappura. The Chemmakākran gets possessed and standing before the images predicts future developments. At the end, the images, covered in a new red silk piece and kept in a new basket, are again put inside the Daivappura. A feast is served to the invitees subsequently.

The tribes of the Aṭṭappādi region celebrate a grand festival at the Mallēswaran temple on the day of Śivaratri. The day is also celebrated by a pilgrimage to the Mallēswaran peak, after undergoing some kinds of ritualistic penances. On this day all members of the three tribes make food offerings to their ancestors. Moreover, whenever tribesmen pass through the graveyard, they stop there for a while and pay homage to the ancestors by making offerings like betel leaves and areca nuts.

Remembering the great ancestors and making offerings to their spirits is a universal custom among all tribes. They celebrate spirits-day and offer feast to the ancestors every year. The Gōnds of central India worship the spirit of the dead in a family on the third day after a death and on every Saturday
and feast-day. If there is a problem either personal or familial which cannot be solved by the tribal council, tribes like the Kurichiyas and Kattunäikkans summon their ancestral spirits and make offerings to them and request them to find a solution to the problem. The Kurichiyas perform a ritual called Nekalaṭṭam in times of misery or distress. By offering beaten rice, tender coconut and toddy, the oracle requests Muthappan to bring in the spirit of a particular ancestor. The ancestor spirit, by entering into the person of the oracle, reveals through him solutions to the concerned problem. In Kannavam the Nekalaṭṭam is performed in the Kavus whereas in the Wynäd it is staged in the courtyard of the tarawad.

The ancestor-consulting ritual of the Kattunäikkans is known as Daivathē Vilikkal. The headman, who performs the role of the oracle, requests the spirits, who are their Gods, to find the solution to a problem. The oracle wearing red clothes, and getting possessed rattles the Churakka (ash gourd) shell and enters into a dialogue with the spirit seeking the reasons for the present difficulties and enquires about remedies. While he points out the

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43 Muthappan is originally an ancestor-spirit, now worshipped as a Hindu deity all over Malabar. Muthappan cult is a clear instance of the internalization of tribal ancestor-cult by the Hindu communities. This God has two important shrines, one at Kunnathur Padi and the other at Paraśṣinikadavu. The former is treated as his original home. The ritual functionaries at Kunnathur are Nairs while at Paraśṣinikadavu they are Tyiyas. This god is propitiated through teyyam and the favourite offerings are toddy and dry fish. Muthappan teyyam is performed at individual houses as Vellalṭṭam and its less ritualistic performance (simple offering by a Tyiya functionary not in teyyam costumes) is known as Payamkutti. Both are done for prosperity or to recover from disease or misery. Nekalaṭṭam differs from both in that it is not an offering to Muthappan but to the kin-ancestors.
solutions for the problems of the devotees, one by one, they offer him water and betel leaves. He assures them protection from all kinds of evil elements and ill health.

Malevolent Spirits and the harms caused by them:

The spirits of those who die of unnatural causes become malevolent. It is obvious that the spirits of those who are murdered, those who commit suicide, and those who are victims of epidemics like small pox become malevolent. Besides these, the spirits of women who die unmarried or in pregnancy or in childbirth become malevolent. Likewise the spirits of evil sorcerers also become malevolent when they die. Benevolent spirits are sometimes transformed into malevolent in two ways: first, if they are left unattended or are not propitiated regularly by their survivors and, second, if they are misused by evil sorcerers. J.G. Frazer defined the characteristics of the malevolent spirits thus: “The spirits of all who have died a violent death are classed among the dangerous ghosts. Their span of life has been cut prematurely short; they feel that they have been wronged, and seek to avenge themselves on the authors of their death if can discover them. And since, in their wrath, they do not always discriminate nicely between the innocent and the guilty, they may become a danger, not only to individuals but to a whole community”.

The malevolent spirits molest the living in various fearful ways by causing many forms of sickness, epidemics, mental disorder, female barrenness, and calamities like draught, famine, storm or flood. Financial loss, crop failure and the deaths of babies or pregnant women or cows may also result from the ghost’s displeasure. Moreover, the malevolent spirits enter into the body of his/her own relatives and frighten the kinsfolk. All these evil characteristics of malevolent spirits have a universal nature. Domestic animals like dogs, cows, cocks, etc. can recognize the arrival of invisible malevolent spirits and from their unusual behaviour tribesmen come to know of their presence. They can also experience the presence of the spirits from unusual alarming sounds or from the tempting fragrance of certain flowers of trees like the Pāla. They enter into the body of any one of their relatives or into the body of any domestic animal of their old hamlet. The following ones are pointed out as symptoms or behavioural changes in the spirit-affected persons/animals: first, domestic animals suddenly fall down and die without any cause; second, giddiness, high temperature etc are found in the affected persons; third, the victim is plunged into a state of babbling, frequent fainting, wailing, laughing or tormenting others; and finally, scratch marks appear on the face and body of the prey.
The following are the important activities of the malevolent spirits:

1. **Causing Illness**: In accordance with universal tribal belief, all tribes in Malabar ascribe sickness to the malevolent activity of spirits. To ward off such spirits and to cure the disease, they consult the headman/Kōmaram who tries to deal with it by tying magical threads around the wrist of the affected person. If this fails they consult their medicine man who tries to cure it by applying some medicinal herbs after paying homage to the ancestors and clan deities (if the tribe has any). If this too fails, they finally consult efficient sorcerers who try to exorcise the spirit through blood sacrifices. The best example of the curing of the spirit-affected disease of a person is the *Gaddika mādal*, or the ritualistic method of disease curing, found among the Adiyāns. P.K. Kālan, the only surviving expert of this ritualistic form of treatment today, has explained the importance of it for the Adiyāns.45 Among the Mundas of Central India, when a person is sick, his friends attribute the sickness to the anger of some god or ancestral spirit. So they wave a handful of grain over the patient and then carry it to the village priest (*Bhumka*).46 The Bambuas, who are a wild and turbulent mountain tribe living on the western slopes of the great Ruwenzori range of Uganda, attribute illness to the action of ghosts. A medicine man, when on being consulted, declares that a

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particular case of sickness was caused by angry ghost of a member of the sick
man’s own family.47

2. **Causing Death:** All kinds of death are attributed to the malevolent
activity of spirits. The tribes consult the *Kömaram* or oracle first to find out
the reason for, or the agency behind, the sudden death of a kinsman. Then he
suggests the ways for exorcising such spirits to avoid further deaths in the
future. Tribes also strictly follow funeral rites prescribed by their great
ancestors in order to prevent the return of malevolent spirits who cause
calamities like death. The oracle, who gets possessed, throws rice over his
kinsmen and digs iron nails on the four quarters of the hamlet to prevent the
arrival of the spirit.

3. **Causing Calamities like Famine and Draught:** All tribes of Malabar
believe that malevolent spirits have the power to prevent rainfall and thereby
cause draught leading to the failure of crops and to famine. Recently a great
draught and crop failure occurred in Wynăd and tribesmen in one voice
attributed it to the activities of the malevolent spirits. When consulted, oracles
of various tribal settlements directed remedial measures including sacrifices,
offerings and prayers. There are evidences of many world tribes laying faith in
such powers of the malevolent spirits. The Lăkers believe in the power of the
spirits of the dead to create a famine by blighting the crops. They are in the

47 J. Rosoe, *The Bagesu and Other Tribes of the Uganda Protectorate*, Cambridge, 1924, pp.159sq,
habit of erecting memorials to the dead. It is thought that, if these taboos were not observed, the dead man’s spirit would carry off with it to the other world, the spirit of rice and of all other edibles, and that consequently there would be a famine. Similar beliefs in the power of the dead to cause famine by withholding the rain are held by Bantu tribes in South Africa, particularly by the Pondomisi tribe. In 1891 it happened that there was a time of intense heat and severe draught. So the tribe ascribed the calamity to the wrath of a dead chief named Gwanya, at the treatment of one of his descendants. To appease his angry spirit cattle were slaughtered as peace offering on the banks of a pool and the flesh was thrown into the water, together with new dishes full of beer. Apparently the soul of the offended chief was mollified by these attentions and he withdrew his ban on the rain.

4. **Causing Calamities:** According to the tribal belief, the malevolent spirit enters Ādi-Lōka or Naraka, which is situated beneath the earth, after death. When they try to come out from the underground that causes calamities. Although earthquake is not a common occurrence on the Western Ghats region, tribes like the Kurichiyas attribute any geological movements like landslide to the wrath of the malevolent spirits. The natives of Timon, an island in the Indian Archipelago (an island of Sumatra) think that an earthquake is produced by the spirits of the dead underground who are

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struggling to force their way up the surface of the earth.\textsuperscript{50} The Andaman islanders hold that earthquakes are caused by some mischievous male spirits of their ancestors.\textsuperscript{51}

5. **Causing Barrenness in women:** A married woman who has no inheritance is considered as an ill omen among all the tribes of Malabar. They attribute the barrenness of women to the activities of the malevolent spirit. To exorcise such spirits, efficient sorcerers tie magical threads on the affected woman’s wrist, waist or neck or smear ashes on their forehead. Among the Lākher, when a wife dies childless, the misfortune is ascribed to the displeasure of her deceased parents, who are preventing her from having offspring. So, to appease their angry spirits, a fowl is sacrificed and cooked with rice, and the meat and rice are placed on the graves of the barren woman’s parents.\textsuperscript{52} Similarly in Imerina a province of the Madagascar, when a woman does not conceive for a certain time after marriage, she consults a diviner, who, after examining with his divining apparatus, informs her which of the ancient inhabitants of the land or which of her own ancestor is offended with her; and what sacrifice she must offer to appease the angry spirit of the dead in order to obtain a child.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{51} E.H. Mann, *On the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands*, Delhi, 1975, p. 86.
Methods adopted for exorcising the Spirits:

The tribesmen of Malabar consult the Kōmaram (experienced sorcerer) or their headman for exorcising a malevolent spirit that has possessed any of their members for which they make payments to the exorcist. Among the Malayāḷar if a person is possessed by a spirit, a sorcerer from his own settlement is consulted and he disposes the spirit from the affected body by invoking it and persuading it to enter into a silver image and this image along with the spirit in it is submitted to holy temples like Thirunelli, Rāmēśwaram or Pāḷani. The Kaṭṭunāikkans, Kaḷanādis and Koṛagas consult their headman, and he after chanting magical spells ties a magical thread on the hand of the possessed person.

The Paṉiya followed three methods to drive out the spirit from a possessed person. The Chemmi or headman mixes milk with the juice of Kaitha (Pandanus tree) in a certain proportion and pours it into a vessel and this vessel is buried near the courtyard of the affected person. It is believed that the magical combination of milk and kaitha juice in the vessel is effective in driving out the spirit. The second method is Kaḷari Ezhuthal for which one seer of paddy, a cock and a coconut are needed. Taking some paddy the headman draws magical figures and writes certain magical formulas with his fingers. It is believed that the spirit enters into his fingers and reveals its needs.

A. Aiyappan attests to a practice of offerings to Dakshinamurthi at a temple near Mullurkara in the erstwhile Cochin state for driving away pestering spirits who cause diseases. See Aiyappan, "Primitive Medicine at a Malabar Temple", Man, Vol. XXXVI, No. 80, 1936, pp.61-63.
in the form of pictures drawn or words written. In the third method after handing over a pot of diluted turmeric water to the affected person, the Chemmi starts singing in accompaniment with the thudi and the ringing of bells. Suddenly the affected person begins to run out of his/her house and stops near a pāla tree (which is the abode of the spirits) and keeps standing there in a leaning posture. Chasing him/her, the headman takes off some strands of hair from his/her head and ties it on a nail. The nail is then fixed on the tree along with the hair. In effect the spirit is now bound to the tree using the nail and the strands of hair.

The Wayanādan Kādar’s method of driving out of malevolent spirits is simple. The Kōmaram, in consultation with the affected person’s ancestors and with the consent of their goddess Māriyamma (Tamil Goddess who causes insanity and epidemics like small-pox) drives out the possessed spirit at the time of her festival. The method of the driving out of the possessed spirit among the Māvilāns is called Nikkal. This is performed in three ways. As per the first method, the sorcerer makes some astrological calculations known as Rāśi Vekkal, in order to find out a way to drive out the spirit. After chanting some magical spells he ties a black thread on the wrist of one of the hands of the affected person and directs him to take special care to see that this hand does not get wet for three days. In the second method, after recalling to the mind the great ancestors, the sorcerer takes a long stick, places his palm horizontally on one end of the stick to measure a three inch-space. Addressing
the names of the dead relatives of the affected person he cuts off the measured end of the stick. Then he makes an exact measurement of the length of the stick. On the ascertaining of the difference between the lengths of the stick before and after it is cut off, the sorcerer can come to a decision whose spirit has entered the body of the affected person and how strong it is. The third method is to ward off strong spirits, such as those of the suiciders known among the Māvilāns as Vīran. They never offer blood sacrifices to such spirits as it would help to strengthen their devilish powers. To drive out such spirits, the sorcerer beats the affected person heavily with a cane. Afterwards the sorcerer invokes the spirit and persuades it to enter into a pot (or a brass vessel) and covering it with a red silk cloth, installs it in the Payyāvur Siva temple or Māmānam Temple.

If a Malappanikkkan is affected by a malevolent spirit, prayers along with offerings of a cock and a pot of toddy are made to Maladaivam. The sorcerer draws a Kaḷam (magical square) and finds out a solution to drive out the spirit from the affected body. Among the Malappanikkkans there is a folk dance known as Ayyarukali (which has almost become extinct but is about to be revived now). It resembles the Kōl kali of the Māppila Muslims of Malabar. Instead of sticks (kōl) used by the Māppilas the Malappanikkkans clap hands in rhythm to make sound in accordance with the song and footsteps. They dance around a wooden mortar on which a kerosene lamp along with a brass vessel and seven betel leaves, areca nuts and pepper are placed. The dance, which
starts at night, continues till sunrise. The dancers chew betel leaves and areca nuts in order to refresh themselves and eat pepper to clear their voice. In the course of the dance one of the spectators gets possessed by an ancestor-spirit and it begins to reveal through the person its complaints such as skipping of offerings which are due, requests for a resting place, etc. The headman accepts the demands of the spirit and by throwing rice on the face of the affected person he installs the spirit on a cactus plant. By making its presence on a festive occasion like this the spirit may be trying to attract the attention of the people towards some of their vital issues.

Malamutthans consult a Panikkar (a person from an astrologer caste) who after Rāsi vekkal (astrological calculations) finds out the needs of the affected spirit and relatives fulfill the needs of the spirit. This method of sending away the spirit to its abode in the other world is known as Nāji Vekkal. In yet another method, adopted by the Malamutthans, the headman draws three lines on his fore-arm with lime and measures these lines from the fore-arm to the palm with a finger. The headman then rubs his palms while uttering magical spells. This is known as Kaṇakkku Nōkkal. From the measurement of the lines on his forearm the headman can infer correctly all details about the spirit that has entered the body of a particular person.

The Chōlanāikkans believe that headaches or stomachaches or other diseases are caused when malevolent spirits invade the head or abdominal
parts of the body. They adopt a method known as *Orisādu* or removal of malevolent influence by the blowing of air on the patient’s body. Sitting on the back side of the patient and by facing him/her, the *Chemmakākran* chants magical spells and blows air repeatedly from the centre of the head to the rest of the body. He repeats this for a long time and massages the head or abdomen of the patient lightly. All the while the relatives of the patient circle him silently. According to their belief, by doing so the patient is saved from the control of the evil spirits. Another method among them is known as *Charadu-Orisādu*. For this method a cotton thread is separated from a piece of cloth and the *Chemmakākran* blows air on this thread reciting magical spells and making a few knots on the thread. Through this act the *Chemmakākran* invokes the benevolent spirits and they get into each of these knots. Then he ties the thread around the neck or hands of the patient. If a child is possessed by a malevolent spirit, its parents blow air through their mouth on the forehead and ears of the affected child three times.

If a person of the Kādar tribe is possessed by a spirit, the headman of the tribe acts as the priest. He sits beside the man who is possessed and cracks a whip and asks the spirit to leave the body. Malamalasar smear ashes taken from the hearth on the forehead of the possessed person. Among the Ėṟavāḷans, in case of spirit possession, the sorcerer asks the person to sit on the floor and draws a rectangle around him/her and four circles on the four corners of this rectangle. This is known as *Chakram Veṭṭal*. Then clansmen
start singing and dancing and the affected person moves away from the place. At that moment clansmen put a pyre on the rectangular *Kalam* and then place live coal into the hands of the affected person. He/she hands over this to the headman, which is symbolic of the handing over of the spirit. Then the headman takes a strand of hair from the head of the possessed person and binds it on a nail. This nail is later fixed on a *Pāla* tree.

The Tachanadan Mūppans call spirit-possession *Kāttu Thaṭṭuka*. In early days the *Kāraṇavar* who knew sorcery could drive out the spirit from the affected body. Today the *Panikkār* after chanting magical spells ties a thread on the hand of the affected. Among the Mullakuruṁans the headman marks the forehead of the affected person with *Bhasma* or sacred ash. After chanting magical spells he ties a thread on the hand of the affected. If the affected is a child, he/she is made to sit on a plantain leaf and *Bhasma* with sandalwood paste is smeared on its forehead. Then the spirit is made to enter into a nail and the nail is fixed on a *Pāla* tree. The sorcerers of Malasar tie a magical thread on the hands of the affected person in order to drive off the malevolent spirits.

The Karimpālans adopt three kinds of rituals to drive out the spirit from an affected body. The first one is *Āṇimantram*. If the possessed spirit is a *Vīran*, they consult an efficient sorcerer. The sorcerer, wearing white clothes with a red band around his waist, draws a *Kalam* on the courtyard of the
Piñiyāḷ (affected person), prepare Kuruthi (blood-like liquid prepared by mixing turmeric and lime in water) in a brass pot and asks him to sit on a wooden plank before the Kaṭam and the Kuruthi. Then the sorcerer gets possessed, chants magical spells, circles the Piñiyāḷ three times, and taking a nail from the Kuruthi waves it from the feet to the head. Then he blows air on the nail and makes the spirit enter into it. Finally he fixes the nail on a Pāla tree, Kānjiram or jacktree. The second method is Kumbalam Kothu. A big ash cucumber and a knife are placed on the Kaḷam and the sorcerer pours Kuruthi over them. He draws four lines on the top of the ash cucumber with a paste of lime and turmeric. The sorcerer chants magical spells and circles round it three times. All this time the Piñiyāḷ sits in the Kaḷam. A stem of a basil plant along with leaves is taken by the sorcerer and he waves it from the feet to the head of the Piñiyāḷ. The basil stem is then placed on the ash cucumber. He then takes the knife from the Kaḷam, becomes possessed, chants magical spells, circles the Piñiyāḷ three times and stands in the northern corner of the Kaḷam. He cuts the ash cucumber into four pieces with a boisterous laughter, which symbolizes the destruction of the evil spirit. The ash cucumber pieces are then taken to a sacred place. The most effective method of exorcising the spirit is the Pāvarithi. The Piñiyāḷ wears a new cloth, sits on a wooden plank before a rectangular Kaḷam drawn by the sorcerer in the courtyard of the Piñiyāḷ’s house. Inside the Kaḷam is placed a brass pot full of kuruthi on the right corner of the right side of the Kaḷam. Besides the brass pot of Kuruthi, a
big plantain leaf containing an extinguished wick, rice, fried rice, beaten rice and a coconut broken into halves is placed in the Kalam. A doll with four legs, of the same height of the Piṇiyāl, is made from Vāzhappindi (banana-stem) and is placed before him. Wearing a new white cloth and a red band around his waist, the sorcerer holds a cymbal in his hand and sits in front of the Piṇiyāl on a wooden plank. An astrologer who sits by the side of the sorcerer proclaims which spirit has affected the person. Then one of the persons who have gathered there sings a ritual song called Poṭṭan-pāṭtu praising lord Siva, who is the lord of the spirit-world, accompanied by the beating of a brass vessel with a stick. The song ends with the supposed entry of Siva in the Kalam in a chariot. The sorcerer after praising the poṭṭan-daivam (Lord Siva) throws rice and sprinkles Kuruthi on the Piṇiyāl while chanting magical spells and installs the spirits into the Vāzhappindi doll. Then the Āṭṭiyan gets possessed by the ancestor-spirit and through him it proclaims that the Piṇiyāl is saved from the control of the evil spirit. As the Piṇiyāl is relieved of the spirit, the ancestor, through the Āṭṭiyan, asks the relatives to make nercha to him (in the form of money). If the affected person laughs loudly or faints or bites the teeth, they are symptoms of the escape of the spirit from the body. It is also reflected in the form of the falling of the branches of either the jackfruit tree or plantain tree. The sorcerer drags the doll through the courtyard, walks a long distance along with it and stops at a sacred place. He kills a cock there and sprinkles the blood on the doll. This is done as blood offering to the spirit
to alleviate its thirst. The doll is interned in a pit after chanting the following words: now the spirit is inside the doll; live according to the rules of the earth; Sivan is mighty. All the time the Piṇiyāl sits in the Kaḷam. After the return of the sorcerer potṭan pāṭṭu is resumed to send back Siva to the sky-world. If the spirit refuses to leave the body he/she is beaten with a cane, pulled out by the hair, his/her body is burnt with fire or kuruthi is poured until the Piṇiyāl quits the body with a scream.

Among the Ūrālikuṟumans, if a person is suspected of being attacked by a malevolent spirit, the Bijakkāḷan performs a magical ritual known as Daivam Kāṇal by getting possessed by the ancestor-spirit. He sweeps the four corners of the room of the affected person and throws the dust out of the courtyard of the house. Then he installs the spirit in a nail and fixes the nail on a Banyan tree. Among the Kuṇduvādiyans, a possessed person is liberated by an oracle, through a simple ritual and by throwing rice over the affected person. The affected Kuṟumba is treated by a medicine man. After chanting magical spells he keeps stones in the four corners of the house of the affected. In order to prevent the attack of a spirit the Iruḷas tie a piece of cow skin on their waist thread. If a Muduga or Iruḷa is affected by a spirit the sorcerer performs certain rites at night in perfect darkness. Taking a gourd shell in his hands, with gourd seeds in it, he rattles it from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. for three
days. When a Kurichiya is suspected of being affected by a malevolent spirit, a ritual known as Nulu keṭṭikkodukkal or tying of the charmed thread is performed. The sorcerer, after the recitation of magical spells, takes a black or white thread and makes knots on it at intervals by chanting of magical spells at each knot. He ties this charmed thread around the waist, neck or hands of the affected person to save him from the spirit that has possessed him.

Types of the Malevolent Spirits:

Malevolent spirits belong to different categories on the basis of the various modes of unnatural deaths. These spirits are dangerous and dreadful. This induces tribes all over the world to adopt necessary measures to pacify them.

1. Spirits of suicides: Tribes look down upon suicides as contrary to the will of the ancestors and believe that spirits of such persons will not be accepted in the land of the dead. They hover around their kinsfolk and trouble them. That is why suicides are rare among tribes the world over. In order to ward off the ferocious spirits, tribes of Malabar wear magical pendants or tie iron pieces on their waist threads. A similar case is reported from Africa. Among the Ewe tribes of Togo in West Africa, when a man commits suicide by hanging himself on a tree and when this becomes known, if it is night, no one but the relations of the person who committed suicide will go to look for the body, but only in the next morning other people go in search of it. They do
it, however, in great fear, and hang magic strings about them, while others smear their faces with a magical powder, in order that the ghost of the suicider may not molest them.  

2. **Spirits of those killed by Animals:** As most of the tribes still live in forest areas, deaths resulting from the attack of wild animals are frequent among them. They believe that spirits of evil-doers enter into the body of wild animals like elephants, tigers, wild boars etc and through them they kill their foes. In order to overcome such calamities the tribes of Malabar, while going out for hunting or for collecting forest produces and firewood, make offerings to the ancestors and to the *Malankāli* or the goddess of the forest. The Oraons, of Chōtanāgpur believe that the spirits of persons who have been killed by tigers assume the form of tigers and prowl about at night near their old homes which they seek to enter. To drive away these unquiet spirits, the help of a spirit-doctor is called in. Among the Kiwai Papians of British New Guinea, the spirit of a man killed by a crocodile is called *Sibara-Adiri*. It is thought to carry on its back a ghost crocodile, which it may throw upon another man who is then doomed to be killed in the same way. In order to lay the ghost of a man killed by a crocodile the people build a small hut; like that erected on graves, at the place where the man met his death, and put food inside. They wish the spirit to remain there and say to them "do not come back to where people are present".

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living. You are now a ghost: stay here, this is your house". If this is not done, the ghost, who does not wish to be alone will come and fetch one of his friends to suffer the like fate.  

3. Spirits of Pregnant Women or those who died in Child-birth:
Tribes of Malabar believe that spirit of such women becomes evil spirits soon after their deaths. In order to prevent the return of such spirits, they consult efficient sorcerers from outside their community. The sorcerer, with the help of some propitiatory rites, installs such spirits in iron bars or nails and throws them along with the corpse inside the grave during the burial. The Oraons firmly believe that every woman who dies in pregnancy or child birth becomes an evil or dangerous spirit (Bhūth), if steps are not taken to keep her off, she will come back and tickle to death those whom she loves best in life. Arrived at the burial place, they break the feet above the ankle, twist them round, bringing the heels in front, and then drive long thorns into them.  

Among the Toradeyas of Central Celebes, as additional precautions against the ghost of a woman dying in child-birth, an old woman will smear chalk on the cheek of the corpse and sometimes the stem of a banana-tree is placed in

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the coffin with her to make her think it is her child, and so to soothe and pacify her perturbed spirit.60

4. **Spirit of the Slain:** The tribes in Malabar believe that if a person is murdered it is through the *Odi-vidya* of an evil sorcerer who is made use of by the enemies of the victim. The spirits of such dead persons are very dangerous because they try to wreak vengeance upon the slayer and would be always in search of him. In order to pacify the wrath of such spirits, not only the relatives of the slayer but the whole hamlet of the murdered person as well offer sacrifices to him/her including feasts. Efficient sorcerers are also consulted and on their advice magical nails are stuck at the house of the slayer to prevent its return. Among the Oraons, the angry spirit of a murdered man is propitiated by sacrifice and is sometimes reckoned among the ancestral spirits of his murderer.61 Among the Ibibo of Southern Nigeria, when a murderer thinks that he is haunted by his victim’s angry ghost, he offers a dog in sacrifice to the offended spirit.62

5. **Spirit of Dead Spouses:** Among the tribes of Malabar, if a wife loses her husband she takes certain preventive measures to ward off her deceased husband’s spirit. Apart from observing the vows of pollution in the strictest possible manner, she wears magical threads and pendants prescribed by the

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sorcerer. After one year if she wishes to remarry she makes offerings to her husband’s spirit and to his ancestors. The same is the case with a widower. Among the Savaras of Andhra, whoever marries a widow must perform a religious ceremony, during which a pig is sacrificed. The flesh, with some liquor, is offered to the ghost of the widow’s deceased husband and prayers are offered by the priest to propitiate the ghost so that it may not torment the woman and her second husband. Among the Wajagga of Mount Kilimanjaro in East Africa, when a man marries a widow, he purchases the right to do so from her late husband by sacrificing a goat to his ghost, for the dead man is supposed to retain all the rights that he had in life.

6. **Spirit of the Unmarried**: The spirits of the unmarried ones are extremely dreadful because they died with ungratified pleasures and unfulfilled dreams that make them envious towards other kinsfolk who lead happy married lives. That is why tribes all over the world conduct posthumous marriage ceremonies for unmarried ones. In addition, tribes in Malabar bury the unmarried persons with all the wedding costumes. These measures may satisfy and pacify such spirits and will not induce them to roam about lustfully. Among the Ingush of the Caucasus when a man’s son dies, another man whose daughter is dead will go to him and say: “your son may need a wife in the other world; I will give you him my daughter. Pay me the price of

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the bride.” Among the Todas of the Nilgiris, ceremonies of marriage are performed for the benefit of the ghosts of all the unmarried dead.

Memorials for the Dead:

The practice of erecting memorials to the dead, like the grand monuments of the Megalithic people, is not customary among tribes in Malabar today. Instead, some tribes erect stone platforms over the graves of the dead. Tribes like the Karimpālans, Māvilāns, Malayāḷar, Wayanādan Pathiyans and Kuṟichiyyas construct stone platforms plastered with cement for their deceased dignitaries. On these platforms they light lamps daily, keep flowers and make offerings on auspicious occasions. Economic instability prevents other tribes to construct such memorials over the graves. The Mudugas, who had erected thatched roof for the ancestors in early days, do not follow it today. The Māvilāns and Karimpālans make strong platforms called Bhandārathāra for the dead teyyam dancers. The Malayāḷar, Kuṟichiyyas and Wayanādan Pathiyans construct platforms for the dead on the caste-Hindu model. On the contrary, tribes like the Malamalasar do not take any such measure since they believe that memorials over the grave are hindrances for the spirits to come out of the graves; they also are likely to become furious in such circumstances. The custom of erection of stone platforms for prominent men also exists among the Gōnds. Their platform

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(Chaura, i.e. square) is about five feet long and is of the same breadth and about four or five feet in height. The platform must be built of stones or bricks with mortar or cement, not with mud. In the platform, the kinsmen of the deceased bury a brass vessel containing four or five rupees.67

Merging of the Departed Spirit with the Ancestor-spirits:

The ritual of sending away the spirits of the dead permanently to their abode in the other world, a few days after the burial, is marked by a grand feast attended by all the kinsmen and clansmen. This practice is almost universal in nature. The tribes in Malabar generally call their last rite Adiyanthiram or Kūṭṭathil Kūṭal. Unlike among others, the burial ceremonies of the Attappādi tribes like the Kurumbas and Mudugas are not complete till the secondary burial or re-burial in which the bones are removed from the graves and are safely put into ossuaries. Until this ritual, the dead man’s spirit is not at rest, and death pollution is not supposed to end. Secondary burial too is a universal practice.

Kūṭṭathil Kūdal of the Kaḷanādis

Many tribes perform the last rites a few days after burial. The Kaḷanādis place the spirits of their newly deceased persons to the care of their two great forefathers (Karaṇavars), who are believed to have founded the tribe. It is believed that these forefathers bestow their blessings on every

member of the tribe, living or dead, from their shrine at Pulpalli. On the 25th of the Malayalam month of Kumbham (March), a grand festival is conducted at Pulpalli in honour of these forefathers. It is also an occasion for the family of a deceased Kalanadi to merge the spirit of their beloved with those of the forefathers. Before the starting of the festival three members of the deceased person's family enter into fasting, according to the directions of their Kāraṇavar. In commemoration of the departed person the great ancestors are served with cooked rice, chicken, fish and sweet pastries on the day of the festival. A similar feast is also given to the newly dead. The entire ceremony is known as Kūttathil Kūdal.

_Vetchūṭ of the Kuṇḍuvādiyans_

Among the Kuṇḍuvādiyans, the abode of the spirits is the house of the Kāraṇavar or the first headman (who is officially known as Karadan at Irulam). On the 1st of the Malayalam month of Kumbham (March), a grand festival is organized in the temple attached to the Karadan's house at the end of which a feast will be arranged for the spirits there. The headman selects a few members of the family of the dead to prepare food for the ancestors after undergoing a course of fasting. The kin-members invite the recently dead to partake of the food along with the other ancestors by addressing them by their names. The feast consists of one bottle of toddy, cooked fish and wild meat. This ceremony is known as _Vetchūṭ_. As a mark of respect to the headman,
who is the custodian of the spirits, the kinsmen of the dead offer him rice, vegetables and money. The feast for those who had committed suicide is served outside the house.

**Daivam Kānal of the Üralikuṟumans**

Among the Üralikuṟumans, the *Bijakkālan*, is the ritual performer, and he officiates the function that marks the merging of the spirit of the dead with the ancestor-spirits known as *Daivam Kānal or Ātmāvinē Vilikkal*. Every Üralikuṟuman settlement has a *Daivathār Mandapam* or abode for ancestors, where the *Bijakkālan* summons in the *Binjē* or spirits. This ritual requires 'three mats and two fires' (*Mūnnu Pāyum Randu Thiyum*). The mats are first spread on the courtyard of the house of the dead. In one of these mats, the aged male members sit together facing the east while in another one, the aged female members sit facing the west. In between the two mats, on a third one, the *Bijakkālan* sits with burning fires on his two sides. The aged male members raise provoking questions and, in the meantime, the spirits of ancestors enter the body of the *Bijakkālan* and he gets possessed. He begins to spell the first letters of the names of the ancestors while the aged female members start singing. Their songs are just a play on letters and words spelt by the *Bijakkālan*. The *Bijakkālan*, by putting bells in a winnowing basket and falling into a trance, shouts the reason for the death of the newly departed. If the spirits of the ancestors are agitated, the *Bijakkālan* will not get possessed
and, on such occasions, the oracles of the neighbouring tribes like the Adiyāns, Paṇiya or Kāṭṭunāikkans are consulted. The spirits of those who commit suicide are not supposed to join the ancestors. After the completion of the ceremony of *Kūṭathil Kūṭal*, a feast is arranged. In earlier days, the *Bijakkālan* was paid in money but in the present days he is more interested in toddy than in money.

**Adiyanthiram of the Wynadan Pathiyar**

The *Adiyanthiram* for the newly dead are performed on the sixteenth day of the death. Over the mound of earth raised on the grave a *Matam* or small hut is constructed with banana stems and the spirit is served with a feast beside lighted incense sticks. Today they float the bones and ashes of cremated persons in the *Pāpanāšini* River at Thirunelli where the Hindus offer the last rites of the deceased persons traditionally.

**Akathūttal of the Wayanādan Kādar**

The Wayanādan Kādar conduct a ritual called *Akathūttal*, or dining inside, on the sixteenth day of a death. They serve a grand feast for the spirit of the newly dead in front of a lighted *Nilavilakku*. In the past there was a special room for this purpose. On the 41st day, after placing food on the grave they invoke the spirit of the deceased and persuade it to enter into an earthen pot. The pot is then closed tightly. All these magical rites are done with the
help of a *Nambūthiri* Brahman. Later the pot containing the soul is installed in the Thirunelli temple.

*Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal of the Māvilāns*

The Māvilāns first prepare a ritual *pandal* in the courtyard for the ceremony of the *Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal* by fixing four small posts and covering the top with thick white cloth. Plantain leaves are then placed inside the *pandal* and a human form, which is supposed to be the portrait of the dead, is drawn over the leaves with rice-grains. Cooked rice and water are then offered to the ancestors inside the *pandal*. The mourners thereafter take a handful of cooked rice and mix it with some soil and, with this in their hand, they go to a nearby stream for a dip in it and return to the house. On their return a grand feast is served to all those who attend the ceremony. The *Karmi* then performs the ritual dance of the *Kāraṇavar teyyam*. He pronounces the names of the persons who had died previously one by one. On hearing the name of a departed person pronounced his/her relatives come forward and offer beaten rice and dried rice to the teyyam. They also tie a bath towel on the *teyyam*’s head. Finally the *teyyam* pronounces the name of the newly dead and asks his/her kinsmen to do the same. A vegetarian feast is served on the occasion.

*Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal of the Koṟagas*

The Koṟagas, on the day of the *Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal*, make a hearth on the backyard of the deceased person’s house with three big stones and put a big
rice-pot containing water on it. When the water start boiling, the headman or \textit{Nāṭṭumūthavar}, after washing the rice, puts it into the boiling water loudly recalling the names of the kin-ancestors of the newly dead person. The cooked rice is served with curry to all those who attend the ceremony. Meanwhile, the womenfolk make another, but small, hearth and prepare a special kind of pastry with the powdered raw rice. When the pastry is ready, the headman, after prayers, puts it into a decorated basket with plantain leaves spread inside it. While carrying the basket to the graveyard, a fire is set on the place where the corpse was laid. Then four women (who include kinswomen as well as non-kinswomen) calls out the name of the newly dead. Before the headman reaches the graveyard with the basket, a male relative takes a small branch of the \textit{Nochi} tree and beats on the grave three times to wake up the spirit of the newly deceased from slumber. Then the person who had earlier concealed the white pebble tied with a wine in the grave at the time of the burial takes it out. Then the headman arrives at the graveyard with the basket and serves the pastry to the spirit of the newly dead in a plantain leaf. For the ancestors, he serves it in the leaves of \textit{Dandala} or \textit{Kidachi}. Water from rice gruel, betel leaves and areca nuts are also placed along with the pastry. The family members are not supposed to taste the food until it is served to the spirit of the newly dead and to the ancestors.
Adiyanthiram of the Kattunaiikkans

Among the Kattunaiikkans it is conducted either on the seventh or eleventh or thirteenth day of a death. A non-vegetarian feast is arranged for the newly dead, the ancestors and to all those who attend the ceremony, after cleaning and washing the floors and courtyard of the house with cow dung. The headman, accompanied by the close relatives of the dead, carry a portion of the feast along with coconut, banana, betel leaves and areca nuts in a basket to the graveyard. If the deceased is married, all these items are carried to his/her grave by his/her sister. After cleaning the grave, they place all these things in a plantain leaf on the grave. This rite is known as Kulu Vekkuka. All the people stand a little away from the grave for about fifteen minutes. Three boys of the same age, approximately of seven or eight, cover their heads with clothes and sit behind the plantain leaf containing the food items. They consume a small quantity of the food from the plantain leaf. After this, the headman removes the stick which was thrust in the grave at the time of the burial. It is believed that the headman can see the image of the dead person through the smoke that comes out from the hole caused by the removal of the stick. Meanwhile the headman gets possessed and, moving from the grave to the hut of the dead, he shouts the reason for his/her death. Then the relatives take a glass of water and add a few drops of coconut oil/caster oil. If the oil mingles with the water, it is believed that the spirit of the dead person is free and has attained salvation. After the feast known as Thithi, men and women
begin to dance along with the blowing of cheeni (pipe). The very next day after Adiyanthiram, the oracle goes to the grave and the spirit of the dead person enters his body. He then installs the spirit that has entered his body in the Daivappura and offers it betel leaves and areca nuts.

**Adiyanthiram of Malayālar**

Malayalar conduct the Adiyanthiram on the 41st day of a death. On that day the kinsmen of the deceased serve the dead with a feast inside the house on three plantain leaves. The chief mourner who had been fasting, eat a small quantity of food from one of these three leaves. He invites children to come inside the room to partake of the remaining portion. The food in the other two leaves is distributed among the children who stand outside the room. This is followed by a grand feast served to all those who attend the funeral.

**Karumāthi of Kādar and Malasar**

The Kādar conduct the Adiyanthiram on the sixteenth day of death. Edgar Thurston calls it as *Karumannthram*. A spot in the nearby forest is selected for this purpose and it is cleared of trees and shrubs. If the deceased is a married man, it is customary that the widow should start the clearing work first. Then they construct a temporary thatched shed there, make a hearth with big stones and put an earthen pot on it containing water. This place is known as *Kanjikkalam*. Digging three small pits and besmearing them with the paste

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of cow dung, they pound paddy in them. When the water in the earthen pot
starts boiling, a handful of pounded rice is put into it by addressing the name
of the newly dead. A feast is prepared subsequently and is served to all the
participants. Kādar start dancing then with the accompaniment of music. All
the women who attend the funeral wail sitting around the widow (if the
deceased is a married man).

The Malasar conduct the Adiyanthiram or Karumāthi on the seventh
day of death. They prepare rice, chicken, fish and different varieties of pastry.
After distributing a handful of the pastry to seven children, they serve the
remaining portion among all the participants. A vessel of toddy, with a glass,
is then placed on the grave. On the day of Karumāthi, a portion of the grave
will be besmeared with cow dung and, when it dries up, rice powder is
scattered over it. When a group of persons, including the mourners, spread on
the ground their clothes that they have been wearing, the ants, which were
collected and put inside a snuffbox earlier, are set free. The ants enter the
cloth of that person whom the spirit of the dead likes the most. The person on
whose cloth the ants enter start crying loudly. The ants are again put into the
snuffbox and the box is kept at the head of the grave. Rice powder covered in
the leaf of a maddar plant (calotropis) also will be placed at the same spot.
Karumāṭhi of the Ėṟavāḷans

The Ėṟavāḷans conduct their last rite on the fifth or seventh day of death. On that occasion a cock is sacrificed on the spot where the corpse was laid. Rice and meat of the cock are prepared for being served to the crows. After cleaning the way to the graveyard they draw a square with seven or nine or fourteen columns on the floor with rice powder. On this day they place leaves of the Pāla tree, and on these leaves dried cow-dung balls on which Arhar grass are stuck are laid. The early visitors to the grave of the newly dead keep rice-balls on the Pāla leaves. Since the number of these rice-balls should not exceed fourteen in all, the late comers to the grave, instead of placing separate rice-balls, just put cooked rice over the same rice balls already laid there. Two persons standing outside the square columned figure watch whether the crows partake of the rice-balls. After the crows have eaten the cooked rice, the feast is served to the invitees. A portion of the food is kept in a winnowing basket and is offered to the dead on the grave. Those who placed rice-balls should dip their hands in water kept in an earthen pot on the head or bottom of the figure. Finally, while a person pours water into the earthen pot kept under the Pāla tree on the graveyard; all persons gathered there symbolically join in this sacred act by placing their hands over the hands of the person pouring water. On the sixteenth day the close relatives of the dead perform a ritual known as Karumāṭhi and offer a feast to the crows in a
plantain leaf. On this occasion all the ancestors and the spirit of the just departed partake in the feast together.

For the Ajar, the bearer of the spirit is their great ancestor known as Kāvu. The relatives of the newly dead offer water and pray to him to carry away the spirit of the newly dead person. Then the headman takes a handful of paddy from a winnowing basket and rubs it with his two hands. Naturally, some of the paddy is dropped down. If the remaining portion in his hand is an odd number (i.e. 1, 3 etc) it is indicative of the dead man’s ill-fate; the Kāvu will not accept him. If the remaining paddy is an even number, it is a good omen: Kāvu accepts his spirit and takes it along with him. A feast is served to the newly dead inside the house and, subsequently, to others. In former days, the relatives of the dead donated paddy, papad etc to the dead man’s family.

Adiyanthiram of Malappāṇikkans

Malappāṇikkans conduct the Adiyanthiram on the fifteenth day of a death after receiving their washed clothes brought by the Vanṇāṭhi (washerwomen). On that day an image of the dead is made of grass and placed on a plantain leaf, along with rice and flowers in a brass vessel and these are covered with another plantain leaf. The eldest son carries this leaf with its contents on his head while the Vanṇāṭhi places a washed white cloth over the leaf to cover it. Then he, along with the other relatives, moves to the nearby river, takes a dip in it and immerses the image in the water.
**Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal of Malamutthans**

The Malamutthans of Chokkād, on the fifteenth day of death, offer *bali* to the crows. The mourners after bathing in a river cook rice. They keep basil leaves, *Karuka* grass and raw rice along with three balls of cooked rice on a plantain leaf and offer it to the crows. Thereafter a feast is served to the invitees. Among the Malamutthans of Vittikkunnu, on the seventh day of death, all those who had attended the funeral visit the grave and offer food along with betel leaves and areca nuts to the spirit of the newly dead and to other ancestors. This ritual is known as *Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal*. A moderate feast is then served to the participants of the ceremony.

Tribes like the Āṟaṇādans and Chōlanāikkans does not have elaborate rituals associated with the function of the merging of the spirit with the ancestral spirits. The Āṟaṇādans by using their magical powers transmit his/her spirit into inanimate objects like *Malāch* (anklets), *Kudamāṇi* (bells worn round the neck) and *mani* (bells attached to waist belts) and are kept by the eldest male members of each family. These objects, which are sanctified by the presence of the ancestors, are worn by them till their death and thereafter they are passed on to their successors. The Chōlanāikkans, by employing magical powers, transmit the spirit of the dead to a brass or iron-ring known as *Daiva-mōtiram* and keep it in the *Daivamana* (house of ancestors and gods).
**Pongalchōru of the Malamalasar**

The pollution-ending ceremony of the Malamalasar is very simple. On the fourteenth day of the demise, they conduct a *pūja* for the newly dead. All members of the settlement stay inside their houses during the time of the *pūja* since the spirit of the departed has a special inclination to wander around the settlement on this occasion. The thing that was favourite to the dead person while he/she was alive, along with a coconut, bananas and cooked rice are offered to him/her on this occasion. This offering is known as *Pongalchōru*. According to their belief the spirit of the newly dead enters into his/her favourite article and remains there forever.

**Chāvali of the Thachanādan Mūppans**

The last rite or *Chāvali* of the Thachanādan Mūppans used to last for three days, starting from Friday and ending with Sunday. In early days their pollution period was 41 days and *Chāvali* was performed probably one or two years after a death because of economic difficulties. Today it is conducted on the tenth day of every death and, contrary to the earlier practice, is limited to two days (starting on Saturday and ending with Sunday). It is a recent innovation meant to reduce expenditure and to avoid the wastage of time. In the past throughout the pollution-days the chief mourners sit inside the *Pulapandal* (temporary shed constructed during the pollution period on the courtyard of the dead). They fast till the end of the *Pula*. Today, as the
Chāvali is limited to two days, the second day’s ceremonies are spread over to the other two days.

According to the old system, on the first day (Friday), in one corner of the Pula-pandal a hearth is made and an earthen pot full of water is put over it. When the water starts boiling, the Kōmaram puts a handful of rice into the pot, followed by the headman. This is known as Ari Kazhuki Kūṭṭuka. The mat that had been tied on the roof of the room of the dead after the body had been removed from it, is untied and placed inside the pula-pandal. A plantain leaf is kept on this mat and mourners serve cooked rice and curry in it to the spirit of the newly departed. Rice gruel is distributed among the relatives and other people gathered there.

On the second day (Saturday) the mourners do not eat anything prepared from rice and drink black coffee only. Others take food from their own houses and all sleep at the house of the departed on that night. The headman of the deceased person’s hamlet would consult a Panikkar (astrologer) to find the reason behind the death three or four days before the Chāvali. In former days, instead of the Panikkar, they had consulted their own Kōmaram. The Panikkar finds out the causes of death through astrological calculations and gives a written account of it on a palm leaf to the headman. This astronomical calculation is known as Chanam Vekkal. The headman reads out the contents of the palm leaf during this day. After this all headmen
and elder members of all the 36 pādis assemble at the courtyard of the departed and find out solutions for family disputes, calculate the number of attendees from all pādis and hand over this report to the headman of the host settlement. This is known as Karimpadam Veṭṭuka.

On the third day rice is prepared at the pula-pandal and is served to the departed. A portion of this is distributed among the mourners. Then a grand feast is prepared by the members of the opposite clan (for e.g. if a person from Mankadanmār clan dies the feast is prepared by members of the Köttanmār clan). To meet the expenditure of the feast each household of the 36 pādis present money and one kilogram of rice. The headmen or Kömaram of other pādis, taking water in a coconut shell pour it on the legs of the headman of the departed hamlet. They sit on a mat facing east and throw the coconut shell in the western direction. The feast is then served and the mourners break the fast with this meal.

If the deceased is a Kāraṇavar or headman, there is an additional ceremony, that of selecting the next headman. This is done by the Kömaram, who enters into a state of trance after being possessed by the spirit of the deceased Kāraṇavar. The stick of the headman, which is the symbol of his authority, would be kept in a bundle of similar other sticks of former headmen (called Köṇayam), tied together along with peacock feathers, deer horn (a replica of a branch of a tree if horn is not available) in a tuft of grass known as
Tharippappullu. The Kōmaram puts the bundle on the head of the brother of the departed Kāraṇavar to proclaim him as the next headman. The practice is known as Kāṇayam Kodukkal. The office goes to his son only if the Kāraṇavar has had no brothers. The Kōmaram also orders to distribute the belongings of the departed to his children.

Adiyantharam of the Mullakurumans

Among the Mullakurumans, on the day of the Adiyantharam, womenfolk of the settlement go out for fishing after a ritual bathing. The first fish captured is believed to be the newly dead and is kept on the bank of the stream or pond. If the fish jumps into the stream he/she is believed to be reborn. They also believe that if they get no fish at all, the dead is greedy of fish and if fish is captured in plenty, it is vice versa. When the fishing is over, the women return to the settlement. The wives of the Pōruṇōn and Pōrāthōn and two other elder females clean the house and its premises. Then they fry and pound five seers of rice, mix it with jaggery and eat it. Then, after being served with gingelly oil in their right hands by the sisters of the dead person they go for bathing.

After bathing the women return in wet clothes carrying earthen pots full of water from the Daivakkēni (pond dug by the ancestors). The wives of the Pōruṇōn and Pōrāthōn cook five seer of rice in a special earthen pot inside the Daivappura (this blackish pot with graphics on the side of their necks is
specially made for this ritual by the Ürālikuruμuμans by mixing earth with ghee). While cooking no ladle should be used for stirring the rice and it should be dry-cooked with little water left. This cooked rice is served on a plantain leaf with jaggery-mixed-scratched coconut, Mampayar-thoran, Vāzhathōran, red chilly and coriander and is kept inside the Daivappura. The Vāzhathōran is prepared out of the remaining portion of the green plantain fruit which was cut at the time of the burial and was kept inside the Daivappura.

There was a custom among the Mullakuruμuμans to keep one of the many earthen or wooden vessels used by the departed to feed him/her on the day of his/her last rites. As the stocking of a large number of vessels for this purpose has become inconvenient, this custom is discarded today. The ancestors are now fed in plantain leaves. At the time of offering food to the ancestors and the newly dead inside the Daivappura the wife of the headman and the wife of his assistant cover their chests with saris. One of the four women, who are entrusted with the duty of serving the different dishes, serves cooked rice on 101 plantain leaves while the second serves jaggery and coconut, the third Mampayar-thōran and the fourth Kāyathōran and fish curry. Two special plantain leaves with dishes are kept inside the Daivappura, one for the greatest of their ancestors and the other for the spirit of the newly dead. Then the doors of the Daivappura are kept closed for some time. The whole ceremony is called Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal. After opening the doors of the Daivappura, the Pōrunōn and Pōrāthōn eat a portion of the food served to the
spirits and the remaining being consumed by the relatives gathered there. A grand vegetarian feast follows.

*Pothiyāttam or Bhagavathiyāttam of the Kuṟichiya*as

The Kannavam Kuṟichiya perform a ceremony known as *Pothiyāttam* or *Bhagavathiyāttam* at the house of the deceased on the seventh day of the death. During this ritual performance they request their ancestors to receive the spirit of the newly dead. In the case of an unnatural death this ceremony is conducted at the *Kāvu* instead of the house. For the ceremony two functionaries known as *Mozhikkāran* and *Āttakkāran* are necessary. They fast before the ritual and worship *Bhagavathi*, the mother of God Ganapathi. The *Mozhikkāran* starts *Mozhi Paṟayal* and the *Āttakkāran* enters into a trance (It is believed that he is entrusted by the goddess to save the spirit of the newly dead from evil spirits). According to the Kuṟichiya belief, before merging with the ancestors the spirit of the newly departed will be in the control of evil spirits. As the *Mozhikkāran* continues his performance, three more persons too get possessed who, with brass vessels on their hands enter into a violent frenzy along with the *Āttakkāran*. The Kuṟichiya believe that it is the evil spirits and the remaining being consumed by the relatives gathered there. A grand vegetarian feast follows.

69 *Kāvu* or ‘sacred grove’ is physically a piece of garden or forest land, but what culturally defines it is that it is dedicated for the exclusive use of particular deities: it is ‘guarded’ in their interests. In this capacity, the groves usually adjoin or are a short distance from an associated structural temple or shrine, though sometimes the sacred structure may be within the *kavu* itself. Individual *Tarawāds* have separate *kavus*; there are common or village or community-wise ( caste or tribe) *kavus* as well. It was here that *Toyyams* were performed. With Sanskritization, most of these shrines are getting Brahmanised. The traditional patterns of worship (blood sacrifice, members from within the group acting as priests, etc.) are also being slowly replaced. For a detailed description see J.R. Freeman, “Gods, Groves and the Culture of Nature in Kerala”, *Modern Asian Studies 33* (2), 1999, pp.257-302.
spirits that have entered into the body of these three persons and Bhagavathi through the Āṭṭakkāran is attempting to save them from the evil spirits. These attempts continue for a long time and finally the Bhagavathi succeeds in her attempt.

The success of the Bhagavathi and the failure of the evil spirits are manifested at the end of the ritual in the form of the fleeing of the three possessed persons. After sometime, when they return, the Āṭṭakkāran pours Kuruthi into their brass vessels and drives them away to the jungles. Then the Āṭṭakkāran invokes the spirit into a Neythiri (lighted wick dipped in ghee), puts it into an earthen pot and hands it over to the relatives of the departed. The relatives put this wick inside the house of the dead, which is known as Akam Kūṭtuka. When the three persons possessed by the evil spirits return, the relatives of the dead offer them cocks because there is a general belief among the tribes that evil spirits are fond of cock’s blood. But it should be noted that the three persons do not taste any blood at all today (as against the earlier practice); instead, they drink some kuruthi as a symbolic act.

Among the Kannavam Kurichiyas there is a custom that an orphan can perform one’s own last rites during his/her lifetime by offering Pindam in the Pāpanāśini at Thirunelli. Those who have direct heirs, or even distant relatives, to observe one’s post-burial rituals are not supposed to do it. Balakumar, one of the Kurichiya informants at Kannavam revealed the
incident of his father having offered the rite concealing his identity. When the man died, the ancestors appeared in Balakumar’s dreams to inform him of his father’s soul as wandering without being accepted in the spirit-world. He continued to see his father in dreams standing beyond the courtyard of his house. He, along with other Kurichiyas, believes that the ancestors were punishing his father for having acted against their will.

Among the Wayanadan Kurichiyas instead of the Mozhikkaran and Ītakkaran the performer of this ritual is the Kōnthalakkaran or Kōmaram. He fasts for seven days before this ritual. The Kōmaram in a trance points out the cause of the death and the liabilities of the dead person and keeps a new cloth on the Pītam praying to God Ganapathi (who is the obstacle-removing Hindu deity) to make the passage of the dead person’s spirit to the other world safe. According to their belief after performing Bhagavathiyāṭṭam, spirits of good persons merge into Panchabhūta and those of evil-doers wander around the tarawād houses.

Kūliyākkal of the Karimpālans

Among the Karimpālans, the merging ceremony of the newly departed spirit with the ancestors is known as Kūliyākkal. This is done on the day of Adiyanthiram or on the first anniversary of the death. There are three stages involved in this ritual such as Thāypeṭṭa Kūlikeṭṭu, Pēnakeṭṭu and Kūlikeṭṭu.
The spirit of the newly dead before Kūliyākkal is called Pēna. In early days the expense of this ritual was met by the nephews of the dead.

On the day of the Adiyanthiram they prepare a rectangular berth, with bamboo sticks and a new cloth is spread over them, known as Kundam. Then a bottle of toddy is placed at the centre of the floor of the berth. The persons, who had performed the rite of Ottālam Kamizhthal during the burial, repeat it again and after bath, carry porridge in a pot and go to the spot where the arrow was stuck during the burial. They place the pot of porridge there and then circumambulate the arrow and the porridge-pots thrice chanting (the mozhī): “if there is any ghost, come to the courtyard”. Afterwards one of them pulls out “the arrow and goes to the Kundam, circumambulates it thrice and wait for the others to come. Meanwhile the relatives of the departed pour a little toddy in the bottle kept under the Kundam. Now the spirit enters the body of any one of the relatives of the dead causing him to faint. This is the indication of the entry of the spirit into a person’s body. Returnees from the grave circle the kundam three times, pour toddy in the bottle and remove the new cloth over the kundam with the arrow in their hand. A vegetarian feast is served for all and toddy is distributed among all the elder male members. It is interesting to note that special pots of toddy are presented to the gravediggers for their

70 "’வேலு வுட்பாற்றுத்தலைக்கு விளையாடு விளையாட்டை விளையாட்டை’"
service. A famous saying about this is “three pots for the cremated and one for the buried”.

Stage 1: Thāypeṭṭa Kūlikeṭṭu: It is also called NayaṭṭuVirān Thāypeṭṭa Kūlikeṭṭu. The Thāypeṭṭa Kūli is the first great ancestor of each Karimpālan tarawād. He is popularly known as Thāypeṭṭa Katri Ammān or Nāyāṭṭukodi Virān. The two functionaries of the ritual are the Peruvānān and the Āṭṭiyān. Peruvānān is the chief functionary who decorates his body with teyyam costumes such as red silk cloth with tinsel around his waist (Adukkum Chorayum Minniyum), silver anklets on his ankles, painted bangles on his hands, ornaments like Pūkkottu, Chennikkāthu and Thalappāli on his head, beard and moustache (taken from wild goat or monkey) along with face painting and besmeared vermilion marks on the forehead and the chest. The Teyyam sits on a Pīṭam while the Āṭṭiyān stands beside carrying a bow and arrow in his hand. The Kāraṇavar of the newly departed chants mozhī three times and throws a handful of rice each time on the face of the teyyam and blesses him. Then Āṭṭiyān chants thōttam: Vāzhka daivamē Polika Daivamē (Hail God, help us prosper) and hands over the bow and arrow to the teyyam.

71 “നായമാത്രമേ ശരീരം മാറ്റി, നിങ്ങളുടെ യോഗത്തിൽ ആംശമായി ഒരു പൊളി പ്രായുക;”

72 Peruvānān is the title ordained to great and experienced teyyam dancers by dignitaries like the Chirakkal Raja or Kurumathur Namboothiris. (teyyam dancing is the traditional duty/right of such castemen as the Vannans, Malayans and Karimpālans)

73 This is the Mozhī: “കെട്ടി പെട്ടികൊട്ടും അതിരുത്തിത്തൂ, എവിടും വെച്ച് സമൂഹസ്വദേശായം കേട്ടി കഷ്ട്കൂട്ടി അവസാനമായം സെക്കായ അവസാനതായം കെട്ടി കൊഴിപ്പിക്കം ശ്രീലേഖനം ഉടയ്കളായം,” (Hey the great ancestor, when the spirit of the newly dead is staged as Teyyam to merge it with the group of ancestors, it is done in your name and in your person). cited in M. J. Jose, Karimpālanmarude Nadodi Samskaram, PhD Dissertation, University of Calicut, 1994, p.299.
The *teyyam*, getting possessed, starts dancing with the chanting of *mozhi*. At the end he sits on the *Pitam* and the first stage of the ritual comes to an end.

**Stage 2: Pēnakette:** While the *teyyam* takes rest on the *Pitam*, arrangements are made for the next stage. Rice and coconut halves are kept in a brass vessel; a wick is lighted and placed on one of the coconut halves; two persons— one standing in front of the *teyyam* and the other at his back— carry a canopy made of new white cloth over his head. This is known as *Thālappoli Pidikkal*. Then *Kāraṇavar* chants *mozhi* three times addressing the newly dead: “If the spirit is alive as shade or dragon-fly, come and help get possessed” and each time he throws a handful of rice on the *teyyam*. Then *Āṭṭukāran* chants the *thōttam: Vāzhka daivamē Polika Daivamē*. At this stage a member of the *tarawād* faints, as if possessed by the spirit of the dead, canopy is removed and the *teyyam dancer* pours tender coconut water or toddy into the person’s mouth to wake him up.

**Stage 3: Kālīkette:** It is at this stage that the spirit of the newly departed joins with *Nāyāṭṭukodi Vīran Thāypeṭṭa Katri Ammōn*. The Mozhiparayal of the *Kāraṇavar* is repeated here. After the completion of the *mozhi*, the *Āṭṭiyan* circumambulates the *Teyyam* three times and gets possessed. Then he hands

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76 The Mozhi is: “...” cited in M.J. Jose. *op.cit*, p.299.
over the bow and arrow to the teyyam and repeatedly request him to give him a place to stay. All the while the teyyam will go on chanting: Vāzhka daivamē Polika Daivamē. At the end he chants the mozhi by which the Pēna is converted into a Kūli and it thereafter comes to be known as Marukutti. Here the teyyam, instead of the Āṭṭukāran chants Vāzhka daivamē Polika Daivamē. Then he removes the decorations. This is followed by a feast served to all. Later the Marukutti is installed in the room of his/her house or in the Kūlithara or Kūlikkōttam attached to the house of the Kāraṇavar. The moment they are installed, they are addressed as Dharmadaivam (Righteous God) and they are deemed to look after the welfare of the taṟavād. All these rites for a dead married woman will be performed at her natal home and her spirit becomes the ancestor of that taṟavād.

Kunnupula, Chemmappula and Kākkappula of the Adiyāns

Unlike other tribes the Adiyāns conduct a highly ritualistic and prolonged post-burial death ceremony, lasting for a whole year, which consist of a three-day long three-staged Adiyanthirams such as Kunnupula, Chemmappula and Kākkappula. A group of ritual functionaries including the

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77 “m7 θεγαλλ ηςρυμπος; θεγαλλος ηςρυμπος αθάντος νομος”

78 This is the Mozhi: “δεξιώσεω ετεραις επιστήμης εκκεντρικά ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής επιστήμης κεφαλής ηςρυμπος θεος κεφαλής επιστήμης κεφαλής θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής επιστήμης κεφαλής ηςρυμπος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής επιστήμης κεφαλής ηςρυμπος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάν τος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθάντος θεος κεφαλής ηςρυμπος αθά

Cited in *Ibid*
Karumi, Chemmakākran, Nāṭṭu-mūppan, Kanalādi, Kunnu-mūppan, among others officiate the function in the presence of all the relatives of the newly departed. The first of these is known as Kunnapula or Kuntupula. It is compulsory to conduct this ritual within 13 days of a death. The Kunnupula is conducted under the guidance of the Kunukkāran or Kunnu-mūppan and it involves many stages.

1) Naṭukeṭṭu: It is also known as Kuriyedukkal which means the fixing of the date of the Kunnapula and is conducted two days before it. The relatives of the departed collect Puthari and if the ritual is for two or more deaths, the rice should invariably be measured and is shared among the functionaries. On this day Karumi along with Kunnu-mūppan carry a pastry made of rice known as Dośa, fried rice, pounded paddy, water, cow dung water, cooked rice, cooked rice mixed with turmeric, Vāka powder (Acacia Adortissima) and Chīva (soap-nut) powder to the grave. On the way to the grave a portion of the food is eaten by the Karumi and the Kunnu-mūppan on the assumption that unless otherwise the soul of the dead would hesitate to partake of the food offered to him/her. Nāṭṭu-mūppan and two Karumis stand by the side of the grave and recite Śāstra. The food items are offered to the ancestors, Chudalapēyi and a portion of it is kept on the grave of the newly departed. While one of the Karumis sprinkles cow dung water on the grave in accordance with the Nāṭṭu-mūppan's recital of the Śāstra to ward off the Chudalapēyi, the other Karumi simulates the act of beating off the Pēyi with a stick in all the directions.
(north, east, west and south) from which it may approach. This is the way of
saving the spirit of the newly departed from the Chudalapêyi and helping
them to partake of the food. Then all those present there return to the house of
the dead and Karumi erects the middle post for the Chappara or pandal on the
courtyard of the dead. A moderate feast is served to the relatives afterwards.

In the evening when all the four posts of the pandal are fixed, the
karumi takes branches of Nhâval tree (Promna Herbacea), ties one branch on
the middle post, circles round the pandal with the remaining branches and
throws them on the roof top. Then mats are spread both on the floor and on
the top of the pandal (in former days straw was used to thatch the roof of the
pandal). All functionaries sit in the pandal facing the east and burning fires
are kept outside on its four corners which represents the four mants- south
Tirunelli mant, north Badakku mant, east Vellappu mant, and west Cheruvall[i
mant. All the functionaries except the Karumi carry three Thudis (drums),
anklets and Kuzhal in their hands and pray to the ancestors. The Nâttumâppan
ties a red silk cloth on his head while others use red cloth only. Along
with the functionaries the main relatives of the departed sit in a circle. While
the womenfolk engage in preparing a pastry known as Ada made from rice
powder, jaggery and coconut for being eaten by women mourners, the
functionaries spent their time in talking and chewing betel leaves. The
relatives bring four Thappubala in a brass vessel and the Kanalâdi
circumambulates it with a cock (fowl in former days) and a coconut given by
the Kunnukkāran. This cock (with more ones) is then sacrificed by the Karumi in honour of the Chudalapēyi. Betel leaves, areca nuts and oil are carried by the Kunnukkāran and all these are shared among the functionaries. They apply oil on their head.

2) Kūṭṭam: Kūṭṭam is the assembly of the elders in which disputes within the settlement and among the families are settled. The Chemmakkāran counts the number of the invitees and if anyone is found absent he sends the Karumi to bring the person along with him. At their arrival the Chemmakāran enquires about the reason for their absence and punishes them with a fine of one Thappubala. For serious issues fines vary from 5, 8 and 16 (1 Thappubala equals 20 rupees). The family of the departed has to pay the Karumi 50 rupees (it was 1 Thappubala in former days). The Kūṭṭam will last till the morning if there is a large number of cases and the judgements are pronounced on the third or the last day. At the end of the Kūṭṭam when the Nāṭṭu-mūppan recites Śāstra, the Karumi stands up holding the middle post of the pandal with his two hands and as the recitation is over, he salutes it.

3) Pindamidal: on the second day morning in accordance with the orders of the Nāṭṭu-mūppan, a close woman relative of the departed carries a winnowing basket full of Kuthari (hand-pounded rice) and hands it over to a Peruman (aged man sometimes ex- Nāṭṭu-mūppan). On the courtyard of the departed, which was besmeared with cow dung paste earlier, a lighted wick is
kept in a plantain leaf facing the east. The *Peruman* with the winnowing basket circles the plantain leaf thrice and stands before the house of the departed and places the basket on the courtyard facing towards the west. Taking rice from the winnowing basket he draws a symbolic picture of the departed (large in size for the males and small for females). On completion he places the winnowing basket on the figure. When the *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* recites Śāstra and the *Peruman* beats Thudi, another *Peruman* remove the winnowing basket from upon the figure. As and when the basket is removed, the *Perumāṭṭis* or aged women from inside the house come out running with loud wailing and sitting around the figure erase it with their left hands. The wailing continues till the *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* asks them to stop it. Before getting back into the house, their hands are washed by the *Chemmakākran’s* wife. Entering the house they resume loud wailing. The *Peruman* who drew the figure circles round the *pandal* with the winnowing basket and places it in the *pandal* accompanied by the beating of the Thudi and blowing of the horn. While the *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* stands inside the house with a lighted wick on a plantain leaf in his hands reciting Śāstra, the *Karumi*, after placing four lighted wicks at the four posts and a bundle of them on a banana stem at the middle post of the *pandal*, returns to the house. Then he along with a *Peruman* comes out of the house each carrying a bundle of rice. *Karumi* cleans the *pandal*, distributes rice among the functionaries and all of them consume fried chicken offered to the *Chudalapēyi* the previous night.
4) *Alavupattu*: It is the Śāstra recitation about many aspects of the history of the Adiyāns, such as their origin, and the details of their settlements and divine places. All functionaries except Karumi and Chemmakākran participate in it. While the Nāṭṭu-mūppan and Kanalādi recite Śāstra, three Perumans ring bells and three others beat drums. The Śāstra recalls the story of how the Adiyāns, as they had no heirs to inherit, decided to kidnap two boys named Ārya-paithal and Vāniya-paithal from Āryadēśa and Vāniyadēśa with the consent of the two goddesses of these two areas namely Āryāmba and Vāniyāmba. Adiyāns believe that they are the descendants of these two princes. Special references are made in the Śāstra recitation, which lasts for an hour, about two main Adiyan settlements of Tirunelli and Trissileri, their divine places like ValliyūrKāvu and Pākkam Kōṭta, origin of man, origin of his body parts, diseases, death, burial, various clans and the clan of the Karumi called Nālpaḍi.

5) *Olakeṭṭu*: The theme of the Śāstra recitation during the time of Olakeṭṭu is the origin of writing in the world. At first God distributed palm leaves to all humans to learn the art of writing. They were over by the time of the turn of the Adiyāns. Taking the pieces of palm leaves that fell on the earth and burning them, God put the ashes on the tongues, foreheads and chests of the Adiyāns. That caused the Śāstras to be in the oral form and not been written down. During the course of the recital the Nāṭṭu-mūppan and Kanalādi go on ringing the bells exchanging them from one hand to the other. Finally they
stop exchanging them and ring them using their right hand only. Later on they consume porridge and fried fish.

6) **Kai-Pidippikkal:** This is the merging of a newly departed spirit with his/her ancestors. If the newly departed is a son/daughter of departed parents, they are not going to be merged with their parents. Instead, they are handed over to their late elder brothers or sisters and if they don’t have any, to other distant relatives. Only after merging the newly departed spirit with a member of the earliest generation whom they remember, followed by the next one, and so on, that they entrust him/her into the hands of the brother/sister who was the latest to die. It is a wonder that the *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* and *Kanalādi* can recall the names of the departed brothers/sisters of more than ten generations. After recalling the names of five pairs of brothers and sisters he recites the Śāstra to merge them with the ancestors and thus the process continues thereafter. During the time of the ritual the *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* and the *Kalanadi* cover their heads with a piece of red cloth so that their minds may not stray.

7) **Pēyikunanathi:** Reciting Śāstra the *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* invokes the spirit of the newly departed into a brass plate (*Thalika*)

8) **Muram Keṭṭu:** The *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* and *Kanalādi* take two winnowing baskets and tie two anklets each on them stretching from one end to the other at its front part. Holding these baskets in their hands and covering their whole body with a red cloth and, with the *Kunnukkāran* and the *Chemmakākran* by
their sides, they sit in the pandal. The Naṭṭu-mūppan recites Śāstra and gets possessed. Then Kanalādi asks questions concerning the causes of the death and the present condition of the spirits of the newly dead and other ancestors. Through Naṭṭu-mūppan the ancestors reply and the Kanalādi conveys it to the kinsmen of the dead person. The following is the transliteration of the Śāstra song, which contains the reply:

“Beloved sons and daughters, nephews and nieces, I am no more. What use is there on expending your thoughts and words on me? Sow whatever is left with you and let that sustain your lives. I am going to be reborn into a new life free from all sorrow. None of my words are false. False spirits, beguiling winds, and the brilliance of the emerging sun have not misguided me. Meditate on me for your good in this world as well as the other world. I will come to you in your hour of need as god or goddess or as a flight of birds. Think of me when you are in trouble. You will be saved from all your faults and shortcomings”.79

9) Pēyi Madakkal: The spirits are sent back to their world by the Naṭṭu-mūppan through Śāstra recitation. Then the Karumī takes some rice mixed with turmeric paste, circumambulates the Naṭṭu-mūppan and places it on the ground addressing the Chudalappēyi. The Naṭṭu-mūppan returns the brass plate to the Chemmakākran, covering it with a white cloth, if the dead person

79 Sung by Kuruman of Triśilēry.
is a male and a black sari if it is a female. The Chemmakākran keeps it in his house till the Kākkappula is over. A grand feast is served after this ritual.

**Chemmappula:**

The Chemmappula or Pathimūnnintannu (meaning, on the 13\textsuperscript{th} day) is supposed to be conducted on the 13\textsuperscript{th} day, as an individual ceremony, but economic pressures have forced the Adiyāns to delay it for as long as six months and if another death occurs in the meantime in any of the Chemmams of the same settlement, it is performed as a collective ritual for more than one person. The Chemmappula is conducted under the leadership of the Chemmakākran. The close relatives of the departed of the Chemmams gather money and entrust it to their Chemmakākran. When he gets enough money for the ritual, he informs the Nāṭṭu-mūppan and he fixes the date. The Chemmakākran, Nāṭṭu-mūppan and Kanalādi make the arrangements for the ritual. All the Chemmakākrans bring brass plates containing the money collected during the time of the burial. These brass plates are carried to the pandal at the time of Chemmappula. After counting the money the Nāṭṭu-mūppan returns all brass plates for they have to be used during the Kākkappula. In all other ritual details the Kunnupula and Chemmappula resembles each other.
Kākkappula or Valiya Kākkappula or Kūṭṭam:

It is performed for three years continuously after a death and is conducted at the house of the Chemmakākran. It is customary that no Kākkappula should be conducted after the beginning of the festival at Kutta, a centre of pilgrimage for the Adiyāns. (As pollution ends only with the Kākkappula, a widow/widower will not be otherwise able to participate in the festival). In many details Kākkappula resembles the other two pulas. In place of the five posts of the Chappāra of Kuntupula and Chemmappula, the pandal of Kākkappula must have nine posts. In Kākkappula, the Nāṭṭu-mūppan collects one kilogram of rice from each house of an Adiyan settlement. All functionaries along with the male relatives go to the nearby river to bathe and after offering food to the ancestors partake of the meals together. Then they decide the date for the collection of Thalappothi-nellu or Mūrtha-nellu. This is the first bundle of paddy offered by married women of the settlement to the Chemmam of the deceased, and is collected by all Chemmakākran from each house of the concerned Chemmam. After gathering sufficient amount of paddy Kākkappula begins. Unlike the two other pulas, the Kūṭṭam ritual is performed on a wider scale and all disputes are settled during this occasion. (This very factor makes Kākkappula inaccessible to an outsider, as it is witnessed by the worst kind of fury and anger). In Kākkappula the Nāṭṭu-mūppan asks all married women to go inside the house, where the brass tray is kept, and wail. They go on wailing by sitting around the brass tray. On hearing the order from
the Nāṭṭu-mūppan to stop it, they stop wailing and come out of the room. Then the Karumi offers food mixed with turmeric paste to the Chudalappēyi. All other rites from Pindamidal to Pēyimadakkal, will be repeated in Kākkappula also as in the case of the other two pulas.

A rite that is special to Kākkappula is the Vettikakettu which starts on the night of the second day. The Chemmakākran who is in charge of the Kākkappula brings two small bundles of betel leaves and areca nuts to the pandal. The Nāṭṭu-mūppan, after reciting the Śāstra, puts one piece of areca nut on each betel leaf while, recalling the name of each ancestor, and places each betel leaf along with areca nut in a row on the ground. The Karumi takes a winnowing basket with a knife in it and keeps it outside the pandal. The Nāṭṭu-mūppan recites Śāstra and asks all the men who have given Thalappothi nellu (except those who are observing pula) to shave off their beards. Each one has to pay Re.1 to the Karumi to carry out this formal ceremony. After the completion of this function all male invitees drink and dance in accordance with the beating of the thudi, blowing of the horn and jingling of the anklets till the next morning.

In the next morning the Karumi washes the male mourner/ widower in hot water applying oil and soap. The Karumi shaves him and dresses him up with new clothes given by the Chemmakākran. In the case of a female all these are done by the wife of the Chemmakākran. Then he/she is covered with
a long cloth and is taken to the Chemmakākran’s room. He/she is now known as Nannākunnavan or Nannākunnavał respectively (the one who is relieved of from a longer pollution). He/she is served a grand feast in the presence of the Karumi, Nāṭṭu-mūppan and all others. After this ceremony he/she is permitted to lead a normal life.

The Nāṭṭu-mūppan recites Śāstra and gives brass tray to the concerned Chemmakkār. The Chemmakkāran who conducted the Kākkappula removes the cloth covering the brass tray. He receives Thappubāḷa and shares it with the Nāṭṭu-mūppan and the Karumi. Later all Chemmakkar return the brass tray to the respective deceased families and permit them to use them again. With this ritual the Kākkappula comes to an end.

**Cheriya Kākkappula and Valiya Kākkappula of the Paṇiyas**

The Paṇiya perform two post-burial rituals known as Cheriya Kākkappula or Pulathōyam and Valiya Kākkappula for merging the dead with their ancestors and to remove the death pollution. On the seventh day of the demise the Paṇiya conduct Cheriya Kākkappula, and if their financial condition is not sound, the ritual is postponed. It is performed under the guidance of the Chemmi with the assistance of the Āṭṭāḷi. The ritual starts on the seventh day morning with the dancing of young men accompanied by the beating of thudi and blowing of horns (Chīnī), which are supplied to them by the Chemmi. For the ritual Chemmi wears Kūṭṭanbaḷas, or the traditional
bangles, and bead necklaces. The Āṭṭāḷi smears sandal paste on his forehead, arms and chest and wears a red cloth round his waist, bangles on his wrist and bead-strings round his neck. He also wears a cloth head gear and pellet-bell strings on his legs.

The Chemmi takes two winnowing baskets, puts two kilograms of husked rice in one of them, and an equal quantity of paddy in the other, and places the two on the floor at a distance from each other. Near these two, he places two earthen pots, two leaf-spoons and lighted wicks. Then he sits down in between these two winnowing baskets and takes a small quantity of rice and paddy in each leaf-spoon. He puts the rice taken from the left winnowing basket to the pot on his right side and vice versa. Then he stands up holding these two winnowing baskets, moves them up and down three times facing the four directions one after the other. Then he keeps these baskets on the Pēnathara inside his house. The Āṭṭāḷi carries a walking stick given by the relatives of the departed which symbolizes the ancestors. After receiving it he stands near the Pēnathara, gets possessed and begins to dance. Then he comes out of Chemmi's house and sits on an Ural (mortar) in the courtyard. The Āṭṭāḷi takes a winnowing basket containing strings of bells and starts shaking it singing which would mean: “let the name of the newly dead be added to the account leaf of the ancestors”. The Paniya believe that the old shade (ancestors) keeps an account of the dead, the idea of which may have been
borrowed from their Hindu neighbours. A. Aiyappan describes the rituals and ritual songs that accompany them as follows: "During the next phase of the rites, after an interval, the Āṭṭāḷi impersonates the spirit of the recently dead. Before doing so he begins with the following salutations:

Oh I: Svara Oh Creator, Oh Kina:tiye (Ganapathi):

Oh, true god: I touch your feet

I touch the feet of Mother Earth below.

God Kinati, I touch your feet

I touch the feet of seven-four-fourteen Bhagavatis.

I touch your feet doing the rites properly.

"He then prays that during the long ceremony he may be helped to refrain from answering the calls of nature and to conduct the ceremonies faultlessly. The following is a part of his song:

Ninety six sibs (kud’i)

Three leading countries (na:d’u)

Four leading towns

Known own-territories,

Herd of other territories,

In the sight of (men of) all these

---

In this ceremonial shed

for 32 nazhika of the night

for 64 nazhika of the day

Till I count and enter (in the account) the names of the recently dead for the ancestors

Let my excretions big and small be stopped

In the sight of (the people of) the four countries and eleven dynasties

Till (the dead) are counted and written on gold and admitted (with the Grandmother)

Let not room be given for complaints in the assembly (panti)

Let this be conducted (properly)

Let not this ceremonialist in the public pandal be found with.

"The Āffāli further requests the shades (the dead of yesterday) to help and direct his work for the sake of ‘the dead of today’ (recently dead) just as the Kūffan or leader of a gang of farm labourers directs his men. He needs the help of the shades to conduct the ceremonies today as they were yesterday, i.e., in the past."
“Getting now possessed by the spirit of the recently dead, the ʾĀthāli begin to speak in personal terms to his relatives who surrounded him. With tears in his eyes, he speaks in poetic prose. The relatives, too, shed tears.

My relatives, my heirs!

My married wife!

Children born to me!

My lineage members!

My sib members!

This has happened to my body and head

And you have therefore suffered sorrow.

My people of ten districts! My eleven clans!

My people of five districts! My neighbours

My little children of my little! My father! My sons! My heirs!

My married wife! My children

Without sleep, without food,

Through the 32 watches of the night

On the day fixed, let me wait and try

Day and night, without urinating or defecating

Let me sing shaking the bells in the winnows,

And get my entry made in the leaf (account)
“The Āṭṭāḷi then proceeds to the courtyard and sits down near a little heap of rice on a plantain leaf. By it is kept winnow with pellet bells and also betel leaves and areca nuts. He then distributes these chewing materials to the assembled elders saying, “now I give the customary betel leaves and tobacco for the assembled people here to get their approval (of the whole proceedings).”

Sometimes Cheriya Kākkappula is performed for more than one person if there are many deceased children. On such occasions porridge is prepared in the name of the departed children. The Āṭṭāḷi recalls the names of each of the dead child and sets apart a single grain of cooked rice (Vattu) from the porridge in the name of each child and another grain in the name of the ancestors. In this way they are joined with their ancestors. Later the porridge is poured under a plantain tree.

On the third day morning of Valiya Kākkappula, the Melikkārathi or Balikkārathi (daughter of the sister or brother of the dead person) cooks rice, Chemmi carries it with water to the grave and place it there in three plantain leaves. Then he summons the crows to partake of the food in honour of the dead. The same process is repeated in the courtyard and the Pēnathara. Standing before the offerings in the Chemmi’s house, the Āṭṭāḷi sings farewell songs and the relatives of the dead wail. After a while, the water and

81 A. Aiyappan, op. cit., pp. 146-148.
cooked rice offered to the dead are poured out at the foot of a plantain tree. Then *Chemmi* sprinkles cow-dung/tender-coconut water (Aiyappan writes that a mixture of coconut or gingelly oil and soap-nut powder is used for the purpose\(^8^2\)) for removing pollution and afterwards all take bath. Then *Āṭṭāḷi* is given a sweet pastry in order to end his fasting. All close relatives of the departed present money to him according to their ability and rice and cloth are given by the family of the departed. After the guests have all left, Aiyappan says, “rice on three large plantain leaves on one row and on a dozen small bits of leaf in a second row is again offered to the shades at the *tina*. After sometime the older among the mourners eat the rice from the large leaves and the rice on the twelve small bits is thrown away.”\(^8^3\)

**Valiya Kākkappula:**

The pollution of a death of a Paṇiya is removed only with the *Valiya Kākkappula*. Like among the Adiyāṇs the ritual of the Paṇiya is conducted continuously for three years after a death and it is compulsory to be finished before the starting of the *Uch:chāl*. The invitees present two seers of rice in a bundle to the relatives of the departed to meet the expense of the *pula*. Each bundle of rice is measured by a small *mana* (measuring jar). A day before the ritual a *pandal*, made of seven bamboo poles and thatched with palm leaves is constructed on the courtyard of the departed. The middle post of the *pandal*,

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\(^8^2\) Ibid.

\(^8^3\) Ibid., p. 149.
covered with black and white clothes, is erected only after a procession led by the Chemmi along with a band of musicians. The Chemmi and the Āṭṭāḷi sit near the post till the completion of the work of the pandal. There is music and dance afterwards.

On all the three days of the Valiya Kākkappula cooked rice and sweet dishes for each of the dead are prepared by the Balikkārathi. All the stages of the Cheriya Kākkappula, from the wearing of the ritual dress by the Chemmi and the Āṭṭāḷi to their being possessed with the handing over of the stick by the relatives of the departed are repeated in Valiya Kākkappula also. Then the Āṭṭāḷi recovers from his state of trance and he places the ancestor’s walking stick near the decorated post inside the pandal and distributes betel leaves and areca nuts to the elders sitting there. He also places a nali (wooden measuring jar) full of rice and a coconut shell full of water near the decorated post. The Āṭṭāḷi later suspends a betel leaf and an ash cucumber on the middle post using a string. This ash cucumber is later broken into pieces and is distributed among the Chemmi and the elders sitting inside the pandal. On the third day before dawn these pieces are secretly thrown into the forest. According to the Papiya belief the ash cucumber and the betel leaf have spirit-scaring powers and in the presence of them evil spirits do not enter into the pandal to disturb the spirit of the recently dead. The crushing of the cucumber symbolizes the destruction of the evil spirit. Then the Chemmi sprinkles cow dung/tender
coconut water on the polluted persons, cuts a lock of hair from the top of their heads and asks them to go out for bath.

In the case of women mourners, after bath they wear new clothes and the Chemmi's wife smear sandal paste and rice paste on their foreheads and faces. According to Aiyappan, “after their bath the women ‘sacrificers’ are dressed in new loin cloth, waist sash and a breast-cloth tied in the Kuṟumbas or Kuṟichiya fashion and the downy hair on their forehead and temple-trimmed.”84 Then each of the women mourners accompanied by women companions move in a procession led by the Chemmi, who carries a brass-plate containing rice and a lighted wick, to the pandal. This procession circles the pandal three times and they are followed by the Āṭṭāli. While the womenfolk return to their houses, the Āṭṭāli throws rice on their head. On reaching the house they take dinner inside the house. On the second day night the close affines of the departed sleep inside the pandal and on the third day morning they dismantle it. As they have participated in the functions and have touched the mourners, they are believed to be polluted and should take a purifying bath. At the end of the Valiya Kākkappula the spirit of the recently dead becomes a regular member of the ancestor world.

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84 Ibid., p. 151.
Kanji-chīṟu of the Irulas

The last rite of the Irulas is Kanji-chīṟu. In early days it took three or four years to conduct this ceremony because the family of the departed should collect 100 kilograms of ragi for this purpose. Today it is performed perhaps after the completion of pollution. Before the ceremony, the mourners undergo fasting during which they eat a pastry known as Shapplai-pitṭu prepared from ragi powder. The chief ritual of Kanji-chīṟu is Mantri Virikkal (mat-spreading). The headman of the deceased settlement, headmen from all Irula settlements, one member each from all sub-castes and ritual functionaries like the Vaṇḍāri, Maṇṇūkkāran and Thalaivar sit in a circle in mats spread in the courtyard. Every invitee puts money into the mats according to his financial position. The money collected in this manner is divided among the relatives of the departed and among all the dignitaries who sat in the dias.

Under the guidance of the headman of the hamlet of the departed a non-vegetarian feast is served (earlier vegetarian food was the custom). A portion of the feast is kept on the grave of the dead and for all other ancestors at the graveyard. During this time the stone that had been placed at the head of the grave at the time of the burial is turned down and gingelly oil or coconut oil is poured over it. (The sub caste Kuplikar pours milk in place of oil). Another important ritual is tonsuring of the head of the chief mourner (normally the eldest son of the dead). In early days this rite was done at the
house of the dead but it is done at Siva temple at Pērur in Tamilnad now a days. Here there is a separate place and a functionary for this purpose.

On the occasion of Kanji-chīru, the funeral music and dance are performed once again. At night a dance-drama called Kūthu is performed. The theme of the drama is taken from popular puranic stories. Most important among them are Harischandran Kūthu, Kovilan Kūthu, Ramar Kūthu and Nana Chandri Kūthu. Outstanding performers are presented and paid by the audience.

Chīru of the Kuṟumbas/Mudugas

In Attappādi among tribes like the Kuṟumbas and Mudugas, the funeral will not be complete until the bones of the dead are taken out from the graves and are deposited in a sacred place or ossuary. Till the end of this secondary burial, the dead man is not at rest and pollution is not at an end. Before the secondary burial both Mudugas and Kuṟumbas perform an urgent ritual, called Pachachāvu, for the dead who had faced unnatural deaths. The spirits of such persons are dreadful and hence their powers have to be reduced as far as possible before the completion of the last ceremony called Chīru. For Pachachāvu they erect the same type of funeral car that they erect during the time of the burial. The images of the departed are made out of the grass called Tharuvappullu and placed on a chair inside the funeral car. The female mourners and relatives sit around the chair wailing and invitees and other
members of the settlement dance around the car day and night for three days. All those who are invited are given feast on these days. On the afternoon of the third day the grass image is taken out of the chair and burnt in the graveyard. *Nikalnirkuthu* is performed subsequently. The close relatives of the departed rub the water used for this ceremony on the chest, enter the houses of the beloved wailing loudly and then all invitees disperse.

The last post-burial ceremony of the Kuṟumbas and Mudugas is the *Chiru*, which is conducted after the death of 101 members of a settlement,\(^8^5\) hence it takes 10 or 20 years or more between two *Chirus*. The lag between two *Chirus* is also caused by the huge expenditure incurred in celebrating it. The *Chiru* of a settlement is decided by the tribal council in consultation with the *Mūppan* and the tribal council of the Thodikki Kuṟumba settlement who are the chief ritual functionaries for a *Chiru* in any Kuṟumba/Muduga settlement. Custom insists that it is the chief functionaries of the Thodikki hamlet who decide the date of the *Chiru* after receiving a nominal *dakshina* of either 1\(\frac{1}{2}\) or 5\(\frac{1}{2}\) rupees and offerings to *Karudaivam* (the Kuṟumba deity) are made. It is particularly important that the *Chiru* is fixed to be conducted on a date before which sowing activities in all settlements should be finished.

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\(^8^5\) Burmanachan, aged around 90 and an inmate of the Anavay Kuṟumba settlement, told that 101 deaths should precede the performance of a *Chiru*. But his opinion is refuted by other less aged men who hold the view that economic position determines the timing of the ceremony. The contradictory viewpoints evidently reveal the changing positions of the tribes towards rituals and are a pointer to the gradual relaxation of ritualistic orthodoxy.
Just after fixing the date of Chiru, messengers are sent to invite members from all the Kurumba settlements and also from the Muduga settlements where they have kin-relatives now (because in recent times both the tribes have started intermarrying) and the nearby Iruļa settlements. The premises of the whole settlement are cleaned and a temporary mess hall is constructed. Each household in the settlement should contribute one sack of rice and a money payment of 500 to 1000 rupees. A week before the commencement of the Chiru the Müppans and Manňükārans of 16 settlements (8 settlements in former days) in association with all the functionaries and elders of the settlement join together to perform a special rite called Kallukku Räyi Āṭtu. They pound ragi on a big grinding stone to prepare a pastry with ragi powder so that this may be offered to Karudaivam of the settlement at the house of the Manňükāran. This rite is known as Māṭh Vekkal. On the seventh day after this the Chiru should invariably begin. On all these seven days the Manňükāran should fast and on the three days of the Chiru he should abstain from bathing and changing of clothes.

Certain other arrangements are necessary for the Chiru. Generator, Halogen lamps and cooking vessels are hired from the nearby town of Mannārkād. In early days they used grass torches and firewood for light and cooking vessels were collected from the households where they were kept for this purpose.
A specially decorated funeral car called *Gudikkeṭṭu* is prepared for *Chīṛu*. For its preparation six experts from the Thodikki settlement arrive a day in advance of the *Chīṛu*. They go to the nearby forest for collecting wooden poles for the construction of the *Gudikettu*, the first piece of which should be cut by the *Manṇūkkāran* of the settlement. The upper portion of the *Gudikkeṭṭu*, which resembles a pyramid, is finished by the early morning of the first day. It will have three steps and will be decorated with gilt papers. The pyramid top will be adorned with a colourful umbrella. Music and dance starts just after its preparation (refer funeral dance). The chamber, called *Gubbē* in which the bones are kept, is prepared only after sunrise by fixing four wooden poles upright on the soil and by covering its three sides with colourful saris. After the completion of the *Gudikkeṭṭu* and the chamber *Nikalnīṛkuthu* is performed. It is done for those who had died due to unnatural causes and for whom *Pachachāvu* has not been performed.

To collect the clavicle a group of tribesmen under the leadership of the headman visit the graveyard. The clavicle of the person who had died first after the last *Chīṛu* is collected first. The clavicles of women who had been married into other settlements and who had died and been buried there are collected next. The bones of the deceased persons of the settlement where *Chīṛu* is organized is collected only on the first day and after the completion of the preparation of *Gudikkeṭṭu*. If a clavicle is not traced out, a ring made of silver or *Tharuva* grass is substituted and is dropped into the grave addressing
the name of each deceased and taken back. The Mudugas call this clavicle *Ponnellu* and the taking of these bones out of the grave is known among them as *Nikaleduppu*. The bones collected are smeared with turmeric paste and are washed and covered in a new cloth. The *Maṇṇūkkāran* of the settlement carries a brass pot of water and accompanies the *Mūppan* who carries the bones to the settlement. When they reach the outskirts of the settlement they are received by the villagers with the accompaniment of musical instruments. The headman of the settlement hands over the bundle of bones to the Thodikki *Maṇṇūkkāran* who stands in front of the *Gudikketṭu*. The *Mūppan* retires to his house, takes a long stick and hands it over to his *Maṇṇūkkāran*. On receiving the stick in his hand the *Maṇṇūkkāran* enters into a frenzy and points out the faults committed by the inhabitants. At this juncture his wife unties her hair and joins her husband in his frenzy. Meanwhile the Thodikki *Maṇṇūkkāran* puts the bones inside the *Gubbē*. The womenfolk approach the *Gubbē* and start group-wailing. All the assembled people disperse and a feast is served to all. As there were strict ranks of hierarchy and rules of pollution among different tribes, there was a peculiar practice in serving food to the non-Kūṟumba invitees. They were either given raw rice and curry materials to prepare food separately by themselves or were served with food prepared by some Kūṟumbas separately. Within the purity-pollution syndrome, which was very strong even among the tribal people till recently, raw food is considered
as the purest of food or neutral. The custom of serving rice and other items to non-clansmen is known as *Padi Kodukkal* and it now prevails only symbolically.

There will be Music and dance throughout the three days except on occasions where there will be some special kind of rites associated with the *Chīṟu*. Music and dance is meant to entertain the spirits. There are three types of performances: dance accompanied by song and instrumental music, dance and music according to the tunes of the blowing of *Kohal* or pipe and dance without song but accompanied by instrumental music. To add colour to the performance and to entertain the viewers two actors play buffoonery along with the dancers, imitating monkey-gestures.

There will be no rituals on the second day of the *Chīṟu* except the continuous play of dance and music. On the third day a particular function called the collection of *Pariyapanam* is held at the office of the *Mūppan* of the settlement and in the presence of other headmen and other prominent functionaries. While all the functionaries sit together on mats in an open area, relatives of the dead married males approach them to clear off their marital liabilities and thereby close their accounts of the dead in this world. If any deceased male had failed to clear the full payment of the bride-price, his relatives should pay it off to his wife’s father or to any of her relatives if father

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86 Bernard. S. Cohn, *India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization*, New Jersey, 1971, p.113. Cohn argues that purity-pollution continuum may be illustrated by the hierarchy involved in the categories of food and the processing, giving and receiving of food.
is not alive. It is customary to pay a nominal amount as *Pariyapaṇam* even if it had already been completely paid off. All the invitees come and bow before the *Mūppan* and are rewarded with an amount of money. At the end of the ceremony the *Mūppan* gives rupees ten each to the headmen of other settlements to buy betel leaves and areca nuts. The longer the interval between two *Chīrūs*, the longer will be the duration of the ceremony of *Pariyapaṇam* Collection since it involves larger number of deaths and larger number of individual dealings.

On the third afternoon seven men go to the nearby river carrying seven small earthen pots, bathe in the river, collect water in the pots, return and place them around the *Gudikkeṭṭu*. Seven male goats are bathed in the river and are made to circle the *Gudikkeṭṭu* before being sacrificed. (The number of the goats may vary according to capacity). It is imperative that two of the seven goats should be brought by the two senior most sons-in-law of the hamlet known as *Thalai-māppila* and *Chinna-māppila*. Both the goats should be white coloured ones and that of the *Thalai-māppila* should be the biggest of the lot. Both *Thalai-māppila* and *Chinna-māppila* wear white dresses and white head gears and hold black umbrellas. They also carry bundles containing 30kgs of rice with them which is kept in the house of the *Mūppan*. They circle the *Gudikkeṭṭu* three times along with the goats. The remaining five goats are carried on their shoulders by five persons moving them up and down amidst boisterous howls by people who accompany them. Before
sacrificing the goats the *Thalaimăppiilai* sprinkles water mixed with turmeric over the heads of the goats. The shaking of the heads by the goats is taken as the granting of permission by them for sacrifice. The goats are sacrificed one by one by the *Thalaimăppiilai* by hitting on their heads with the back of an axe. After sacrifice the goats are drawn into the *Gubbē* and meanwhile the women gather to wail. When the wailing ends, men and women with broomsticks, winnowing baskets and wooden pestle start dancing around the *Gudikkeţtu*. Goats are later removed for being cooked. A non-vegetarian feast with the meat of the goats is served at night to all the people gathered there.

Dancing and music continue all through the night. There will be some kind of dance-drama at night like the *Jogiyăţtam* or *Erumayăţtam*. In *Jogiyăţtam*, 16 male actors take part among whom 8 wear male costumes and the remaining 8 are dressed as females. The actors play the role of husbands and wives and enter into dialogue among themselves on familial or communal matters. Three middle aged male characters who wear white turban, white shirt and White *mundu* and colourful overcoats represent the *Mūppan, Vaṇḍāri* and *Kurutalai*. *Erumayăţtam* is an interesting play between two characters, one dressed like a she-buffalo and the other like its calf. The calf attempts to suck the milk of the mother while the latter kicks it away. The play continues for a long time with its many-sided details.
On the fourth day, before sunrise, the Gudikkettu is dismantled and the parts are thrown away on the way to the graveyard after cutting every part into pieces or sometimes burning it. Later the bones are taken to the sacred spot where the remains of the ancestors are kept. This place is situated in the forest away from the settlement known as Nikālumalai or shadow-land. The bones or rings are kept either in the hollow of a tree or a stone structure which is known as Mālikai or Mathinati. A portion of the feast prepared on the previous night is taken along with the bones and are offered to the ancestors at the Mālikai. After returning, the Manṇükkāran takes a ceremonial bath and throws away the dress that he had been wearing for the last three days. This is indicative of the removal of pollution. The premises of the settlement are cleaned and a ceremonial meal is prepared and is eaten by all from the same plate. This is the symbol of the forgetting of all disputes and the reunion of all on behalf of their ancestors.

Similar examples for after-burial funeral rites are reported from other parts of the world. On the Timorlaut and Tanember islands, ten days after the burial of a warrior who had fallen in battle, the people of the village assemble on the shore, the men armed and the women in festival array. An old woman calls back the soul with wailing. A bamboo with all its leaves is then erected in the ground, a long-girdle on the top. This bamboo is regarded as ladder, up which the soul climbs to its destination. The Sernitu (a sort of priest or shaman) pronounces a eulogy on the deceased punctuated by the applause of
the audience. When from the movement of the bamboo it is judged that the soul has climbed to the top, the bamboo is severed in two and the loin-girdle burnt, to prevent the soul from subsequently wandering about causing mischief. A dish containing rice and egg, previously provided for the ceremony, is also broken to pieces. Appeased in this way, the soul betakes itself to the little island of Nusnitu, of the North west coast of Seelu, one of the islands of the group, which is believed to be the dwelling place of souls.87

Secondary burials of the Kuṇumba variety exist also among many tribes. It is very popular among the Merina and Cantonese villagers in Madagascar. Among the Marina it is known as Famadihana, and they store the remains of the dead in ancestral tombs.88 The Cantonese follow a system of double burial and store the remains in earthen jars.89 The Marinas undertake secondary burial two years after a death and the Cantonese seven years after. The Todas of the Nilgiris also perform elaborate and expensive three-day secondary burial known as dry burial.90 (For them, burial ceremony is called Green Funeral).

It thus becomes clear that the entire tribal life in Malabar has been revolving around the cult of ancestor-worship. However, the very ideological basis of this faith is now facing a serious crisis. The entire tribal life is

88 For details see M. Block, Placing the Dead, London, 1971, pp. 221-222.
presently undergoing a steady and drastic process of acculturation or what has rightly been described as 'Sanskritisation'. Tribal values are slowly being replaced by dominant Brahmanic Hindu norms. The internalization of Brahmanic cultural traits is evidently manifest in the realm of tribal religion. Tribal religion, which in its basics was animism incorporating ancestor-worship, is slowly giving way to a faith in Hindu gods and temple-oriented mode of devotion. In the present circumstances where ancestors themselves are accorded only a secondary position in the tribal religious pantheon, ancestor-worship cannot be continued for long with the same intensity and devotion. The erosion of the doctrinal base would make the ancestor-cult only secondary or marginal in the tribal pantheon in the near future.

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