INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Cult of the dead is a fundamental element of the spiritual culture of humankind. It is a byproduct of human reactions towards death. Though death is the inevitable end of all mortals, it is remarkable how greatly human reactions vary regarding death. Some welcome it, others don't openly discuss it and some others try to forget it because of its haunting nature. Francis Bacon gives us a striking account of death in his famous Essay II- "Of Death" written in 1625: "Men fear death, as children fear to go in the dark...It is as natural to die as to be born; and to a little infant, perhaps, the one is as painful as the other".¹

Death is not the absolute finality for the primitive people. All of them believe in the immortality of the soul. The soul, after death, according to their concept, becomes spirit either malevolent or benevolent. Performing funeral rites and worshipping them are two basic techniques of dealing with these two kinds of spirits. That is why in tribal societies the funeral rites are quite elaborate. Tribes believe that they can control the power of the spirits through these rites and while in control the spirits can be made use of for their well being; but when they get out of control they acquire disastrous capacities. Primitive people don't have an idea of natural death. They take death as a

result of the anger of the spirits and as the malevolent activities of sorcerers making use of these spirits. The fear of the unnatural character of death compels them to undertake a series of funeral rituals, periodic feasts and daily offerings on behalf of the dead in order to pacify the spirits. Thus, death customs raise the mental power and self-confidence of the tribal people to overcome the fear of the dead. A noteworthy feature of the tribal cult of ancestor worship is that each tribal family has its own ancestors and offerings are made only for them.

Ceremonial burial and worship of the ancestors have been prevalent among humans from prehistoric period onwards. Neanderthal man was the earliest human being to leave the first tangible evidences on concerns over death. “They found expression in the preservation of the skull and the extraction of the brain, ceremonial internment in either the extended or contracted positions with flint implements, and sometimes animal in a grave containing ochreous powder with an abundance of shells and other ornaments thereby colouring them red. This widespread custom of coating the corpse with red ochre clearly had a ritual significance. Red is the colour of living health”\(^2\). It is evident from this that the disposal of the body and the practice of preservation of the corpse for future ceremonies was known to the Paleolithic people. With the rise and development of Neolithic culture, the disposal of the dead came to be more elaborate and various types of burials

such as pit burial, stone erection (stone henges in England) and cave burial appeared. The cult of the dead underwent a fundamental change after the spread of Chalcolithic culture. Various methods of inhumation like ‘fractional burial’, collective internment, etc. were reported from India (Indus Valley) and the Western world. With the Bronze and Iron Ages, the predominant mode of disposal of the dead became inhumation and cremation. These two practices are still followed by aborigines and they are considered as more effective in preventing the return of the dead to molest the living. Funerary practices and the cult of the dead became a characteristic feature of human civilization when Megalithic culture laid its roots in all parts of the world. The huge sepulchrals of Megalithic culture and grave goods found in them are the authentic sources of information for the cult of the dead and in certain aspects it is identical with the cult of the dead of the surviving primitive peoples.

Death customs of the tribes in Kerala, as a subject of study, has been a neglected area of study for social scientists till recently. Much of the existing works on this area focus on the practices of caste-Hindus. Despite the fact that the entire tribal life functions around the basic ideal of the cult of the dead, most of the anthropological studies have either ignored or missed this aspect and have focused mainly on the socio-economic structure of tribal life without attempting to link the two aspects. This phenomenon may probably be attributed to the element of mystery that prevails over the tribal religious
practices, and due to the unfriendly nature of the tribesmen. Collection of information relating to the cult of the dead had hitherto been almost impossible. It is only in the recent times that they have started disclosing such matters to outsiders. As far as archaeological studies are concerned, there is an overwhelming concentration on Megalithic monuments. Even the authorship of the megalithic builders is still an enigma. Archaeological excavations are yet to be undertaken in the graveyards of the present day tribal settlements to establish the Megalithic survivals among the tribes. Though disagreement continues to prevail over the hypothesis that the present day tribal people of Kerala are the direct descendants of the Megalithic builders, they still follow many practices associated with megalithic culture. Against this backdrop, the present study investigates the nature of anthropological data on death customs. It also tries to enquire into the evolutionary history of the cult of the dead on the basis of archaeological data.

Objectives of the Study

1. To trace the connection between Megalithic burial and tribal burial and to see the scope and extent of megalithic survivals among the tribes of Malabar. A comparative study of the excavation reports of Megalithic sites with the cult of the dead of the Malabar tribes would serve this purpose. The
study of extant megalithism would also be nourished by the contention that the little communities of Malabar still follow certain megalithic practices.³

2. To prove the universality of the beliefs and practices connected with death and the disposal of the dead and the cult of ancestor worship in the light of anthropological evidences from all over the world. The term universal is used here in the sense “that which is applicable to a large number of instances” rather than “the whole world at all times”⁴

3. To study the impact of the process of acculturation on the burial practices and the modes of ancestor worship of the tribes of Malabar with special reference to the twentieth century, with the help of written records and field data.

4. To evaluate the relevance of the theory of social utility of funeral rites in the tribal context of Malabar and to assess the role death customs play in maintaining tribal unity and solidarity. The study also intends to observe the future course these rites will take in sustaining such social roles in the atmosphere of the fast changing material milieu.

5. To analyze the effects of the cult of the dead on the chronically backward tribal economy. Many tribes spent lavishly on funeral rites, just like the upper caste Hindus of Kerala of the pre-modern days. This drains them of

their meager economic resources and thus perpetuates their destitution by eliminating even the distant possibility of an economic revival. And, attempts at ritual reform are yet to appear among them.

6. To assess the role of gender in the cult of the dead. In sharp contrast to many tribal people elsewhere, women are afforded only a marginal role in funeral practices among the tribes in Malabar. Same kind of discrimination is noticed in the case of ancestor-worship as well: worship of women ancestors is rare among them. The megalithic graves of Kerala also indicate the same feature: the relics of the dead women and children are deposited in the simple urn burials along with the ornaments used by them.

Methodology

The tribal groups under study are selected on the basis of the cardinal defining features outlined by Robert Redfield to identify a typical human community. All the tribal communities under study satisfy the four cardinal features noted by Redfield.

1. Quality of distinctiveness: where the community begins and where it ends is apparent. The distinctiveness is apparent to the outside observer and is expressed in the group consciousness of the people of the community.

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5 Robert Redfield, *The Little Community: Viewpoints for the Study of a Human Whole*, Chicago, 1962, (Fifth Impression), p.4
2. Compactness: the community should be small, so small that either it itself is the unit of personal observation or else, being somewhat larger and yet homogenous, it provides in some part of it a unit of personal observation fully representative of the whole.

3. Homogeneity: Activities and states of mind are much alike for all persons in corresponding sex and age positions; and the career of one generation repeats that of the preceding. So understood, homogenous is equivalent to "slow-changing."

4. Self-sufficiency: The community is self-sufficient and provides for all or most of the activities and needs of the people in it. The little community is a cradle-to-the-grave arrangement.

We have two sets of data for the study of the present topic, one relating to death and burial rites and the other relating to post-burial funeral ceremonies to mark the parting-off of the departed soul to the other world (such as the secondary burial or depositing the relics of the dead like bones and ashes in places called ossuaries\(^6\)). Because of the unpredictable nature of death and due to the poor communication and transportation facilities to the tribal areas, information regarding the occurrence of death could not be reported sufficiently early so as to enable a non-tribal to study the funeral rites of the deceased directly. A more important reason for the inability of an

\(^6\) The term 'Ossuary' is noted to have been first used by Sidney. B. Hartland in James Hastings ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. I, Edinburgh, 1964, p.442.
outsider to attend a death or burial of a tribal is that many tribes still do not allow non-tribes to see the corpse or to participate in the burial. While death to them is an occasion steeped in sentimental value, funeral is a significant religious ritual in which the participation of an outsider is looked down upon as an unnecessary interference. The present situation of tribal wrath and restlessness consequent to the unfortunate Muthanga incident\(^7\) has also made data collection through field work more difficult everywhere in the tribal region especially in Wynād. Ehrenfels, who worked among the Kādār of Cochin for more than three years in the 1950s to study them, lamented later that he was not able to attend even a single funeral ceremony\(^8\). Even after fifty years the same situation prevails. Hence, primary data on death and burial have to be acquired through interviews with people who are in the know of things like the aged and experienced persons, funeral functionaries, etc. Yet, a few post-burial funeral ceremonies like the Chīru of Iruḷas/Kuṟumbas/Mudugas, Kākkappula of Adiyāṇs/Paṇiyas, Pēnakēṭṭu/Kūliyāṭṭam of Karimpālans and Nikalāṭṭam of Kuṟichiyas could be attended.

Though the atmosphere of tribal animosity and widespread suspicion about the intentions of the researcher still cause great hardships for a student of

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\(^7\) The tribes of Wynād, under C.K. Janu and Geethanandan, led an 'enclosure movement' on state-owned forest land at Muthanga near Sulthan Batheri, on Feb. 19, 2003, in order to find a solution to the tribal land question which led to clashes with the police leading to the death of a tribesman and a policeman. It gave way to strong police measures which nearly silenced them and brought the tribal agitation to a temporary stalemate. For a detailed account of the incident see dailies Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi and Madhyamam, Feb. 20 & 21, 2003; also see Frontline, 20: 6, Mar. 15-28, 2003, pp.42-48.

tribal culture, a pre-arranged post-burial funeral ceremony can at least be attended, since it is carried out according to a schedule and such ceremonies are mostly in the immediate post-harvest season of March-June. Moreover, the tendency to exclude outsiders from attending post-funeral ceremonies is not as intense among tribes today as it was in former days.

Since the study is conceived also as an enquiry into the evolutionary process of the funerary customs and beliefs, historical evidences on structural and super-structural changes have to be obtained. The most important obstacle in this direction is the paucity of data relating to them. Written evidences are very rare, even the rare ones do not give much importance to funeral customs, much less to the element of change within continuity. Because of the difficulty involved in tapping information directly from the tribal people, many of the writers were just repeating what Thurston or Krishna Iyer had reported about them. Most of the anthropological studies at our disposal deal with contemporary tribal life alone, may be due to the widespread notion of the stagnant nature of the cultural traits of the primitive communities of Malabar. Hence folk memories and folk tradition of the tribal people have to be greatly depended upon. Looking from the point of view of Carl Becker’s concept of the role of memory in history writing, “every normal person knows some history.”\(^9\) But the major difficulty in acquiring information on the course of evolution of tribal life from the tribes themselves

is that their memory contains two sets of data only— one about the past as a whole and the other about the present— the first one has been retained as myths. As is rightly observed, for most savages, myths communicate life experiences and cultural roots. Thus data relating to the evolution of the death customs have to be acquired from different scant resources including anthropological studies, interview reports and tribal folk songs. The theoretical studies of scholars on other tribal societies elsewhere have rendered considerable guidance in arriving at proper conclusions.

The gender position of the present researcher has also created many obstacles in the way of the study, particularly in data collection through field work. Most of the tribes still insist on ritual purity and certain kinds of gender-oriented defilements of which menstrual pollution stands predominant. So women are neither allowed to enter into the rooms associated with the ancestors nor to see the funeral artifacts kept inside them. Though a limited number of outsiders are now allowed to participate in funeral rites, due to tribal sanction it is rather difficult if not impossible for women to participate in it.

Although certain tribes like the Malayālar, Wayanādan Pathiyans, Kunduvādiyans and Kalanādis are now excluded from the list of Scheduled Tribes in the latest Census Report, they are included in the present study list

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since they still follow tribal traditions in their funeral practices. In order to collect primary data through field work, a long period has to be spent among tribes visiting at least two settlements of each tribe and data has to be acquired through various modes of fieldwork consisting of interviews, graveyard-visits, and participation in post-burial funeral ceremonies. Among the tribes of Malabar, only a few such as Kuṟichiyas, Muḻakurumans, Karimpālans, Māvilans, Wayanādan Kādar, Wayanādan Pathiyans and Malayālar willingly allow outsiders to participate in funerals and in ceremonies of deceased ancestors.

The informants consist of nine categories. First, the headmen of various tribes of the selected settlements; second, religious functionaries like the oracles (in some cases the headman himself may act as the oracle); third, teyyam11 dancers of tribes like the Māvilans, Karimpālans and Kaḷanādis; fourth, funeral functionaries like Changāthi of Kuṟichiyas and Karimpālans, Karumi or Kaṟmi of Adiyāns and Māvilans, and Manaṅkkāran of Iruḷas, 

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11 Teyyams (etymologically derived from Sanskrit daiva) are deities impersonated in ritual dances of the Kannur and Kasargod districts of Kerala. After the harvest season, until the onset of monsoon, people gather around shrines to celebrate the festival of teyyam. The performer of the teyyam invokes the spirit, gets possessed and becomes a medium. In a state of identification with the divinity the performer bestows his grace and manifold blessings on the worshippers. The translation of emotional reactions into ceremonial representations gives teyyam rituals a stability they would not otherwise possess. The rituals are rigidly observed by the people and have become time-honoured conventions. Some teyyams are performed every year, some every alternate year, some once in a while, some once in three, seven, twelve or twenty-four years. A feature unique to teyyam is that although the festival is conducted by a particular caste or community, it is performed for the prosperity of the entire village. There are many communities performing teyyam of which Vannans and Malayans are the dominant. For details see Balan Nambiar, “Tai Paradevata: Ritual Impersonation in the Teyyam tradition of Kerala” in Flags of Flame: Studies in South Asian Folk Culture, edited by Heidrun Bruckner, Lothar Lutze and Aditya Malik, New Delhi, 1993, pp.139-163. Also see J. Richardson Freeman, “Performing Possession: Ritual and Consciousness in the Teyyam Complex of Northern Kerala”, Ibid, pp. 109-138; KKN Kurup, Cult of Theyyam and Hero-worship in Kerala, Calcutta, 1973.
Mudugas, Kurumbas and Malasar; fifth, aged men above sixty years; sixth, middle-aged persons between forty and fifty years; seventh, young men between twenty and thirty; eighth, specialist grave-diggers; and lastly, bier-makers. In order to establish the connection between Megalithic culture and the primitive cult of the dead followed by the tribes, reports of Megalithic excavations in Kerala have been studied in association with the grave deposits of the tribal people. Besides, literary sources, dating from the Vedic age to the modern era, pertaining to the cult of the dead, are analyzed to examine the relevance of the theories put forward by eminent archaeologists and anthropologists on this subject.

Study Region

The present study focuses on the aborigines of the Malabar\(^\text{12}\) region, covering an area from the Pālakkād to the Kasargōd districts of the Kerala state. This area is very rich in tribal population with more than 27 different tribal communities (official estimates may vary), each having its own distinct identity. Some fifty years back most of them lived in thick forests which sustained their livelihood. They lived in harmony with nature without causing any imbalance in the ecosystem. Their archaic form of life had helped them to

\(^{12}\) Malabar is the ancient name for the entire Malayalam territory situating from the northern landmark of Mount Deli to Cape Comorin. In the British period it came to be attached with the northernmost political division of Kerala which was the only Malayalam speaking district of the Madras province. It consisted of the six districts of the present state of Kerala such as Pālakkād, Malappuram, Kozhikōde, Wynād, Kannūr and Kasargōd. In 1956, the erstwhile district of British Malabar was merged with the two princely states of Cochin and Travancore to form the state of Kerala.
retain their identity in the social, political, economic and religious spheres of life. The alienation of tribal lands to non-tribes combined with the new forest policy of the Government after 1952 caused considerable damage to their traditional way of living. Not only are they deprived of an access to their forest homelands but most of them were also forced to find subsistence through wage labour under the estate owners or a migrant settler. These adverse circumstances have greatly obliterated the nature of their life which was based on the tradition of harmony with the surrounding ecosystem. We are now witnessing the slow uprooting of a rich tribal culture. The phenomenon of the intrusion of non-tribal cultural ethos into the tribal milieu is noticed in all the tribal regions and it is eroding much of their cultural exclusiveness and identity. Even the cult of the dead, which is an integral, or primordial, part of their religion, is being invaded by external cultural influences. In the fast changing socio-economic circumstances it would be very difficult for any community to maintain these practices intact.

The selection of Malabar as a unit of study is dictated by certain important historical and cultural considerations. The British contact had a profound and overwhelming influence over the tribal people of this region which was not evident to the same degree among tribal people of other areas of Kerala. Penetration into tribal areas through the introduction of new landlordism, new forest policy, plantation industry, missionary activity or ethnographic/anthropological ventures, all have had their sweeping impact on
the culture and world view of the tribal people. All the tribes under study inhabit the western slope of the high ranges or the adjoining forests and plains of the Western Ghats, except the three tribes of Aṭṭappādi. Aṭṭappādi is situated on the eastern slopes of the Western Ghats close to the Nīlgiri Hills. This area is noted for its unique tribal culture. Iruḷas, Mudugas and Kurumbas are the three tribes of this region of whom the last two tribes do not evince much differences in their socio-cultural practices. As the Aṭṭappādi region is close to the Nīlgiri, Coimbatore, Mēṭṭupālayam and Salem districts of Tamil Nādu, the tribes of Aṭṭappādi were able to maintain cultural contacts with the Tamil tribes like the Tōdas, Kōtas and Badagas which is reflected in their language, lifestyle, religious practices and funeral ceremonies.

There are 152 Iruḷa settlements in Aṭṭappādi of which Vayalūr, Shōḷayūr and Puthūr hamlets were selected for the field study. Each Iruḷa settlement has a tribal council with a headman or Mūppan, Vaṇḍări, Kuruṭalai, Maṇṇukkāran and Talaivar. The office of the Mūppan is hereditary. Vaṇḍări deals with economic matters, Maṇṇukkāran, the ‘Knower of the Soil’, supervises agricultural activities and funeral functions, Kuruṭalai is the messenger of the headman and Talaivar is the general servant of all others. The presence of this council is compulsory at the time of every funeral and the Maṇṇukkāran is in charge of fixing the spot of the grave. At the time of sowing and reaping, the Mūppan and Maṇṇukkāran invoke the ancestors and make offerings to them for a better yield. There are seven exogamous
clans among the Irulas and they are Vellaga, Chamban, Karṭṭikāl, Kupplikal, Kurunākan, Pēratharau, and Āṟumūppa. Among these clans, Kurunākan is the ‘dominant clan,’ as per the concept of Evans-Prichard, and has a privileged position in funeral ceremonies: they occupy the frontline on such occasions.

Mudugas live in 18 settlements of which Chindākki, Mukkāli and Viṭṭiyūr are selected for our field study. Mudugas also have a tribal council similar to that of the Irulas. But, instead of the Talaivar, they have another functionary named Jāṭhikkāran who officiates over marriage functions. Kurumba settlements are 14 in number of which Thadikkundu and Āṇavāy were surveyed. Though the Kurumbas follow the same social system and religious practices of those of the Mudugas, the former are more primitive in terms of subsistence patterns and social relations. The Āṭṭappādi Kurumbas are entirely different from all the three Kurumbas/Kuṟumas of the Wynād region in terms of rituals and cultural practices. All the three tribes of Āṭṭappādi use funeral cars or decorated biers and, just like their counterparts in the Nīlghiris, the funeral ceremonies are more elaborate with singing and dancing accompanied by instrumental music. Except the Irulas, all others have elaborate secondary burial ceremonies.

Another important tribal area in the Pālakkād district is the Paṟambikulam hill region which is a reserve forest area and wild life sanctuary
Now. The best known tribe here is the Kādar or ‘Dwellers in the Forest’. There are ten Kādar settlements in this region. The two hamlets selected for the survey are Erumappāra and Paṟambikulam Dam site. A council of ten members under the headman or Mūppan decides matters concerning funeral ceremonies. Malasar (meaning ‘people living in mountains’) is another tribe of the same region settled inside the Paṟambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary. Sungam and Anchām Colony settlements provided data for the study. The main religious functionaries of the Kādar are Mūppan and Maṇṇūkkāran. Like the Aṭṭappādi tribes, Kādar and Malasar use decorated biers for carrying the dead. The funeral of the Kādar is accompanied by music and dance. The third tribe of this area called Malamalasar (‘Kings of Mountains’) is a very primitive tribe settled in the inaccessible forests of the higher elevations of the Paṟambikulam region. Primary data was collected from the two settlements of Nāhaṟūt and Anchām Colony. Their headman or Talaivar is the chief officiator in the funeral ceremony. In early days they used to deposit the corpse in the crevices between two rocks. The fourth tribe of this area is the Ėṟavāḷans or Villuvēdar (‘Hunters using bows and arrows’). Fieldwork was conducted at Narippāracheḻḷa and Sarkārpathi colonies. Their chief religious functionary is the Mūppan or headman and their funeral ceremony is

13 According to A.A.D. Luiz, their name has its origin from a combination of the two words Arassan (king) and Mala or Malai (hill) to connote ‘King of the Forest’. See A.A.D. Luiz, Tribes of Kerala, New Delhi, 1962, p.136.
accompanied by music. Like the Kādar and Malasar, they also use decorated bier for carrying the corpse.

The Nilambūr region, well known for its evergreen forests and teak plantations, is noted for three major primitive tribes of Kerala – the Chōlanāikkans, Āṟaṇādans and Āḷar. The Chōlanāikkans are the only known cavemen of Kerala. They inhabit the reserve forests of the Karuḷāyī and Chunkathāra ranges of Nilambūr. Till recently they had led an insular life. Their abodes are the natural caves in the rocks known as Kallu-Āḷai meaning rock cave. There are eighteen such Āḷais and each one accommodates two to three households and is a kin-group hamlet. There is no clan organization among them and each Āḷai is a territorial unit. The head of a settlement is the Chemmakkāran who looks after the welfare of families within his territory. He is the chief officiator of funeral ceremonies. He is the custodian of Daivappura or house of ancestors and the metal images of deities like ānē uṟuva (an elephant) uḷi uṟuva (a female tiger) āḷu uṟuva (a human being) and kāḷai uṟuva (an ox). Mānchēri is the nearest settlement of the Chōlanāikkans, where there is a cooperative society (established in 1977) for collecting forest produces from them in return for daily necessary goods, and it is the meeting place of all the tribesmen every week. These weekly gatherings provide the researcher ample scope for procuring useful information directly from them.
The Aranāḍans are settled in seven hamlets of which two, namely Köttupāra in Karulāyi and Chōkkād were surveyed for the present study. They are the only tribe in Malabar who don’t have a headman now though the office of headmanship was prevalent among them in former days. In each family the eldest male member performs the funeral ceremonies. Ālar, the third primitive tribe, is semi-nomadic even today and are found in the Idimaṇṇa settlement of Akampādam near Nilambūr (They are also found in some parts of the Pālakkād and Triśṣur districts) Their chief ritual functionary is the headman or Tharāvadukāran who acts as the oracle as well.

There are two more tribes in the Nilambūr region namely Malamutthans and Malappaṇikkans. Both these tribes follow strict pollution rules even today. The Malamutthans are popularly known as Maḷa-Nambūthiris or Maḷa-Nāirs because of their surprising insistence on touch and distance pollution. A prominent Malamutthan settlement is Viṭṭikkunnu near Mambāḍ. Malamutthans at Chōkkād near Nilambūr are basically different from those of Viṭṭikkunnu in their beliefs and practices and tradition reveals that they were banished from the main tribe due to their non-insistence on pollution rules. Even in funeral matters they have eschewed their traditional identity and are highly Sanskritized now. The funeral rituals of the Malamutthans are officiated by the headman or Mūppan. Malappaṇikkans are seen at Vaṭṭavaram and Badapuram near Mambāḍ, Vadakkumpādam and Kaliyāra in Nilambūr and Karikkād in Manjēri. The Malappaṇikkkan
settlements of Vaṭṭavaram and Badapuram provided sufficient primary data. The eldest Kāranāvar or Mūppan is the chief functionary in funeral ceremonies.

Wynād, geographically a part of the Nilgiri plateau on the South-Western side, is inhabited by the eleven different tribes of Adiyāns, Paṇiyas, Kurichiya, Mullakurumans, Urālikurumans, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Thachanādan Mūppans, Wayanādan Kādars, Wayanādan Pathiyans, Kuṇduvādiyans, and Kaḷanādis. Adiyān is one of the main tribes of Wynād, who call themselves as Rāvulār, which means ‘human being’ in Kannada. The word Adiyān, which means slave or serf, was given to them by their landlords. This tribe is mainly concentrated in the Tirunelli, Triśilēri and Vēmam villages of Mānathavādi Talūk of Wynād. There are seventeen Chemmam or clan in the whole tribe. They are Tirunelli, Badakku, Pothuru, Kalliila, Kalankode, Mommota, Muthira, Anchila, Puthuru, Edamala, Kachala, Nālappādi, Magayi, Vullakutt, Panēlu, Saith and Cheruvālika. Among these, three clans namely Thirunelli, Badakku and Pothuru are ‘dominant clans’ and are known as Mantu. Each Chemmam or clan has a leader called Chemmakāran. Below the Chemmakāran, at the settlement (Kunnu) level there is the Kunnu Mūppan, also called Kunnukkāran. Above these two is the Nāṭṭumūppan, i.e. the chief of the tribe, and Kanalādi (his assistant). Both the Nāṭṭumūppan and Kanalādi are well-versed in Śāstra, the ritual chanting during the time of funeral ceremonies and marriages. Śāstra describes details such as the myth of the
origin of the tribe, names of all their settlements, names of all clans, three
*Munts*, origin of man, origin and uses of various organs of the body, origin of
various diseases, origin of writing, Gods and Goddesses, the great ancestors
and finally, death. Other important functionaries are the *Thammādikkāran* or
oracle and *Karumi*. The main duty of a *Karumi* is to conduct funeral
ceremonies in the proper way on the directions of the *Nāṭṭumūppan*. The
*Karumi* is selected only from the Nālappādi or Edamala *chemmams*. The
presence of all the above mentioned functionaries is compulsory during the
time of a funeral ceremony. Various hamlets of the Tirunelli and Triśśilēri
villages were visited to collect data on the Adiyāns.

The Paṇiyas constitute the largest single Scheduled Tribe in Kerala.
Apart from Wynād, they are also found in some parts of the Kaṇṇūr,
Kozhikkōde and Malappūraṃ districts. Just like the Adiyāns, they were
bonded labourers under the landlords of this region. Innes reported that “their
headmen are called *Kuṭṭan* and collectively *Mūppanmār* (elders), whence the
whole caste is often loosely spoken of as *Mūppans*...The *Kuṭṭan* is the priest
and he is assisted by a *Kōmaram* or oracle.”¹⁴ The term *Kuṭṭan* is now not in
use. Today each settlement has a *Chemmi* or headman and he and his wife are
the leading personages during the occasion of a funeral. The important
religious functionary is *Āṭṭāli*. A. Aiyyappan observes the functions of an

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¹⁴ C.A. Innes, *Malabar Gazetteer*, edited by F.B. Evans, Kerala Gazetteers Department,
Aḥṭūli thus: “A combined hymnist, ritualist and medium-dancer, engaged for rituals in honour of the Gods, the spirits of the dead, and for exorcising evil spirits who possesses persons.”\(^{15}\) Paṇiya settlements such as Koṭṭameradu near Pulpalli and Tēṭhār colony near Sulthān Bathēri in Wynād and Āyirakkalām and Ambalathaṭṭu colonies at Iritty of Kanniūr district are surveyed for the present study.

Tribes like the Wayanādan Pathiyans, Wayanādan Kādar, Thachanādan Mūppans, Kuṇḍuvādiyans and Kaḷanādis are found only in a few settlements. The Thachanādan Mūppans are concentrated in Kalpetta, Mēppādi, Muṭṭil and Ambalavayal panchayats of Wynād. They inhabit 36 pādis or settlements, each having a Mūppan and two assistants. There are more than twenty clans among them of which the most important are Māmanmār, Mangalanmār, Kōṭṭanmār, Mādanmār, Chēnnanmār, Mundanmār and Mattuppathi. When a person belonging to a particular clan dies, the dead body should be washed only by members of another clan. For example, at the death of the member of a Chēnnanmār clan, the dead body is washed only by a person of Mādanmār clan. If a Kāraṇavar of a pādi dies, all the remaining 35 pādi headmen and pādi members should compulsorily attend the funeral ceremony. Interviews were conducted with people of Kallumala, Chīṅgavallam and Ōdavayal settlements. The Wayanādan Kādar live in Thariyōd, Vellamunda and Požhuthana villages of Wynād. They have little

connection with the Kādar of Paṟambikulam. Each settlement has a head or Ejmān who officiates over the funeral ceremonies. Kaṉivayal Colony of Pulįnjāl near Veḻamunda is taken as a sample settlement for data collection. The Kuṇduvādiyans are concentrated in Kuṇduvādi, Veḻamkolli, Chiyambam, Irulambam, Pākkam, Perikallur, Pālakkolli and Poṟakkād. They have five clans namely Karadan, Kuṇduvādiyan, Veḻamkolliyan, Chiyamban and Nālapādi. The eldest male member of each clan is appointed as the headman of that clan. Members from Nālappādi clan alone can become oracles among the Kuṇduvādiyans. The headman or Chāchappan or Kāraṇavar officiates during funeral ceremonies and the participation of all the five headmen is compulsory on such occasions. The three Kuṇduvādiyan settlement surveyed are Tēlampatta, Chiyambam and Irulambam. Kaḷanādis are the only tribe who are teyyam dancers by profession. Their settlements are concentrated in Chiyambam, Appād, Nāykaṭṭi, Tēlampatta and Pākkam. Their headman or Mūppan is the chief officiator of the burial ceremonies. An important point to note is that the grave-diggers of the Kaḷanādis are Paṉiyas whom they call Modalī. The Kaḷanādis were met at Tēlampetta and Pākkam.

The Wayanādan Pathiyans live in Tēlampatta, Kidangād and Nenmēni. There are no clustered settlements for the Pathiyans, they live in individual households. They are segmented into five Illams or clans known as Kazhampillam, Vaṭṭathillam, Mūrillam, Anchillam and Nālillam. The
Nälillakkar has the right to inform the news of death to all others. Tēlampatta Pathiyan settlement provided us the necessary research data.

Three tribes of Wynād who share the ethnonym ‘Kuṟumba/Kuṟumar’ are Kāṭṭunāikkans or Jēnukuṟumar, Ürāḷikuṟumans or Vēṭṭakuṟumans and Mул்ளakuṟumans. In the area adjoining Karnataka, Kāṭṭunāikkans are known as Jēnu-Kuṟumbas and in the Tamil region as Tēn-kuṟumar. Ürāḷikuṟumans are known in Karnataka as Bēṭṭa-Kuṟumbas. The Kāṭṭunāikkans are a primitive tribe found in Karuḷāyi and Chunkathaṟa ranges of Nilambūr (where they are known as Pathināikkans), Paśukkadav region of Közhikode District, Kidangād, Purakkādi, Pulpaḷḷi, Nūlpuzha, Maruthōṅkara and Taruvaṇa of Wynād. They are popularly known as Tēn-kuṟumar or Jēnu-Kuṟumbas because of their expertise in honey collection. Their headman or Müppan is the chief officiator of funeral ceremonies and, like the Chōlanāikkans, they too have Daivappura. Primary data on the Kāṭṭunāikkans were collected from their settlements of Nadavalli, Guฎikaparamb and Ānappāra in Wynād and of Muṇḍakkadavu in Nilambūr. Ürāḷikuṟumans are found in Tirunelli, Purakkādi, Kalpetta, Kuppathōḍ, Ponginichkallūr, Chêdelat, Nūlpuzha and Kidangād. Till recently, they were nomadic food gatherers and hunters, a fact which can be deducted from their name Vēṭṭa-kuṟumar or ‘hunting people’. They are strict followers of the rules of pollution just like the Malamutthans, Malappaṇikkans or Kuṟichiyas. Their headman or Ajjin officiates over funeral functions. Their priest Bijakkaḷan plays an important role in matters dealing with the spirit of
the dead which is known as *Daivam Kāṇal* or 'calling in the spirit of the dead'. Data on them were collected from the settlements of Kuppachi, Tirunelli and Thoppetta. Mullakurumans have a distinct identity and they share the same social and economic position of the Kurichiyas. They are concentrated mainly in Nūlpuzha, Idangād, Sulthān Bathēri, Muṭṭil, Puṟakkādi, Koṭṭappādi, Kuppathōd, Pulpaḷḷi, Vēmam, Tirunelli, Muthanga, etc. Their settlements are divided into four regions namely Karanādu, Kallunādu, Pākkanādu and Narianādu. Their headman or Pōruṇōn and his assistant Pōṟāthōn supervise funeral ceremonies. Each settlement has a *Daivappura* as the abode of ancestors and Gods. Important settlements like Pākkam have separate *Daivappuras* for Gods and ancestors. Pākkam, Thirumukham and Koranjivayal colonies provided all the necessary information regarding funeral ceremonies.

The Kurichiyas, the most popular and land-owning tribe in Malabar are found in Wynād district and certain areas of Kaṇṇūr district adjoining Wynād. In Kaṇṇūr, their main settlement is in the Kaṇṇavam forest region. They are also found in Kānjirakkolli and Kīzhpaḷḷi. In Wynād they are found in Mānanthavādi, Panamaram, Tirunelli, Kalpetta Kambaḷakkād, Ėchōm and Pulpaḷḷi. They still live in large matrilineal joint family houses called *tarawāds* (Similar to that of the Nairs). Each *tarawād* consists of thirty to hundred members. The Kurichiya tradition speaks of 108 *tarawāds* of which only 57 exist now. Their headman or *Piṭṭan* or *Pūppan* or Kāraṇavan is the
chief functionary in funeral rites and he acts as the oracle too. There is another funeral functionary called *Changāthi* who has a ritual role in washing the corpse. Each *tārawād* has a *Nekal-muṟi*, the room of the great ancestors and a portion of the kitchen is set apart for *Pēna* or the revered wives of the great ancestors. Well-known Kurichiya *tārawāds* are Paḻliyara, Maṭṭal and Kakkōṭṭara in Wynād and Edamana in the Kaṇṇavam area. Important Kurichiya settlements surveyed included Paḻliyara and Kakkōṭṭara in Wynād and Aṟakkal in Kaṇṇavam.

The main tribes in Kaṇṇūr district are Malayāḷar, Māvilāns and Karimpālans. Malayāḷar is a very small community of the Āṟalām forest. Their main settlement is the Vīṟpād area. They are divided into the four *Illams* or clans of *Palyēṭ, Mēppēṭ, Uṇṇikōṭ* and *Veḷi-man*. Each family has a *Kāraṇavar* who is the chief functionary in funeral ceremonies. The Māvilāns are a tribe found in Vayakkara, Thadikkadav, Padiyūr, Kallyāṭ, Nediyangā and Payyāvūr. There are two subdivisions among them - Tuḷu Māvilāns and Chingathān Māvilāns. The present study deals only with the Chingathān Māvilāns. There are 36 clans or *tārawāds* among them, each one having a *Mūppan* or *Thaladiyan* and a *Kaṟmi*. *Kaṟmi* is the funeral functionary of the Māvilāns. The Māvilān settlement of Vathilmada Bhūḍān Colony at Payyāvūr has served the necessary study data. Karimpālan settlements are found at Padiyūr, Nuchiyyāḍ, Nediyangā, Thenkarachāl, Parikkaḷam, Mundayāḍ, Ālakkōḍ, etc. The tribe is divided into five clans or *Illams*: Chappili,
Puthuśseri, Pallath, Machini and Kalla. Each clan has a Changāthi, who belongs to another clan, and who performs the funeral rites. Field work is conducted in the two settlements of Munḍayād and Parikkaḷam.

Koṟagas, a very primitive tribe in very poor economic conditions, live in the South Canara district of Karnataka and the adjoining parts of the Kasargōd district of Kerala. They are found in Perdāla, Bēla, Manjēśwaram, Hösbettu, Mudibiri, Uppinangādi, Mankalappalli and Nārampādi of the Kasargōd Taluk. The chief funeral functionary is the headman or Ürthariyan or Nāṭṭumūthavar. According to their belief, dignitaries become Bhūtha after death and are worshipped as teyyam. The two settlements surveyed include Perdāla and Bēla.

The funeral practices of all the aforesaid tribes are influenced, and to an extent determined, by the mode of subsistence of each one of them. Thus we find variations in the cult of the dead among the tribes who are largely food gatherers and hunters and those who are bonded labourers and settled agriculturists. Tribes like the Kādar, Malasar, Malamalasar, Chōlanāikkans, Āḷar, Aṟanādans, Eravāḷans, Kāṟṭunāikkans, Malamutthans and Malappāṇikkans belong to the category of hunter-gatherers. Others like Kurumbas and Mudugas practice slash and burn cultivation along with hunting and gathering. Adiyāns and Paṇiyas are agricultural and plantation labourers, who were bonded labourers till very recently. Kuṟichiyas,
Mujjakurumans, Wayanadan Pathiyans, Thachananadan Muppans, 
Kunduvadiyans, Kalanadis, Wayanadan Kadar, Irulas, Karimpalans, Majilans 
and Malayalar are settled agriculturists who are small-scale or large-scale 
landowners and practice plough cultivation. Urlikurumans and Koragas 
depend mainly on craft work, like pottery making and basket making, for their 
livelihood. Almost all tribesmen, apart from their traditional forms of 
livelihood, also practice wage labour as a part-time occupation. The funeral 
rites of the first category of tribes are not elaborate or very expensive and they 
propitiate the ancestors through offerings of honey and meat of wild animals. 
The second category of tribesmen has elaborated funeral rites, with 
blood sacrifices. Adiyans and Paniyas, who form the third category, have an 
elaborate system of funeral rites, a well-established hierarchy of ritual 
functionaries, a highly exploitative system of priesthood and a great record of 
funeral songs. The fourth category of tribes has a highly ‘Hinduized’, 
elaborate funeral customs. It is among these tribes that the ancestors acquire a 
more pre-eminent status and ancestor worship takes a clear and definite form 
(others have only vague and abstract ideas of their ancestors). Some among 
them like the Kalanadis, Karimpalans, Majilans and Kurichiyas propitiate 
their ancestors through teyyam cult. The funeral rites of the last category of 
tribes are less elaborate owing to their poverty. They do not have the 
wherewithal to undertake expensive funeral rites. Thus the funeral practice of 
food gatherers and hunters are different from those of the bonded labourers or
settled agriculturists. The more primitive the modes of subsistence of a tribe, the less elaborate and less expensive are its funeral practices.