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ETHNOGRAPHIC
STUDY
OF
SCHEDULED TRIBES :

MALEKUDIYA
AND
YERAVA

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W A L F R U D I Y A

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A BRIEF ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTE ON MALEKUDIYA - A SCHEDULED TRIBE

On either slopes of the Western Ghats from Agumbe in Shimoga district to Bramhagiri hills of Kodagu district there is a small tribal community which even within this small region is known under slightly different names in different places. In the tracts belonging to Dakshin Kannad district they are more popularly known as Male Kudiyaru and also as Kudiya or Melakudi. In Kodagu they are known as Kudiyaru and in Chikmagalur district they go under the name Malai Kudi or Maleru. Despite differences in nomenclature ethnologically all these persons constitute a single tribe which is also a Scheduled Tribe.

Among themselves the Malekudiyas are divided into three groups, namely Ooru Male Nalu Male and Adika. These tribals have adopted the dominant social practices prevailing in the places of their residence or among their masters. This sort of sublimation renders the task of identification rather difficult. Those in Dakshin Kannad have come under the Aliya Santhana system believed to have been instituted by the legendary Bhoothala Pandya. Those who occupied the top hills on the borders of Mudigere and Belthangady taluks have adopted Makkala Santhana and follow the practices of their Brahmin masters regarding marriage customs. Those who are in Kodagu have accepted the customs and manners of Kodavas as their model.

Several legends, prevalent among these people, throw some light on their antiquity in these areas. One such legend links them with the establishment of the famous shrine of Subrahmanya at Kukke. Another links them up with the Pandavas of Mahabharata times who were here for sometime during the period of their exile and granted these people with the right to appropriate the cardamom produced in this region. Another legend speaks of a Ballala king who it says has assured these people that he would return to them after the lapse of two spans of time, the length of each time span being uncertain. They claim that it is they who first brought the Bhoothas or spirits to the present Dakshin Kannad region. That these people are among the ancient settlers in the area is attested to by the fact that in the Kattu Kattales laid down by Bhoothala Pandya they too are covered and specifically mentioned.

Male Kudiyas have been rendering certain services in the ancient temples at Kukke Subrahmanya and at Dharmasthala. They are permitted to enter the temples upto the points upto which the other caste Hindu groups have an access. Therefore it is

conclusive that they have never been considered as a polluting class at any time. The inter-communal relationship that is prevalent indicates that they are considered as equal in status to the castes like the Billava of Dakshin Kannad.

In the matter of social organisation Male Kudiyas have to be considered as belonging to two groups. The majority of Oorumale group have the tradition of following the Aliya Santhana law of succession and inheritance. However several families of this group living around Subrahmanya are, it is reported, following Makkala Santhana law. Nalumale Malekudiyas are adhering to the Makkala Santhana law at all the places. Among the followers of Aliya Santhana there are large matrilineal households in which even thirty or more persons are found to live together and to partake of food cooked in a common kitchen. In such households the ancestral property of the family such as paddy fields and areca plantations are worked by all the members and the income thereof would go to the treasury of the joint family. Earnings through gathering of the forest products including cashew from cashew groves would be treated as the personal income of the individual concerned. In this family system the wife and the children of a male member have a place in the joint family only as long as he is alive. Soon after the death of such a male member his wife and children have to get away to their matrilineal family or fend for themselves as a separate unit.

Among those who are following the Makkala Santhana system there are practically no joint family households. Every grown up male who has married would set up a family of his own to lead an independent life with his wife and unmarried children. Widowed mothers and sisters-in-law however are looked after by the surviving male members.

Every caste which is covered by the Aliya Santhana Kattu is organised into 18 clans called Bari. The names of Baris are therefore common among many castes. Among Male Kudiyas the names of some of the Baris reported are as follows : Bangera, Saliyana, Pergade, Moolya, Chalyernai, Bunnalu, Balaserna, Karumberynaklu,-Gunderu, Bartheru and Bagiettenya. The lineage is reckoned through the mother for both sons and daughters.

Among the adherents of the Makkala Santhana system the clan organisation is rather confusing. In response to queries several among them report the names of the Baris mentioned above and add that they follow the same in the patrilineal line. On the other hand some among them report family names such as Kathyala, Kuntiyana, Kalkara, Kukmata, Sunalu, Beesilu etc. Marital alliance is not permitted between a man and a woman bearing the same family name. But beyond this restrictive aspect no one knows anything more about the clan organisation, the etymology of clan names and rituals.

The present trends indicate that the matrilineal joint families are also dwindling and the practice of setting up a nuclear family after the marriage is gaining in popularity among all sections of Male Kudiyas.

Institutions necessary for enforcing the tribal social norms have developed fairly well among Oorumale Male Kudiyas. There are however no pan-tribal control organisations. Male Kudiyas living in large numbers in a single village or in a cluster or nearby villages have the institution of Gurikara. Above him there is Magane Gurikara with jurisdiction and control over a larger area or group of villages, usually eight. Several such Maganes are grouped into a Hobli headed by a Hobli Gurikara. The office of the Gurikara is hereditary and runs in the matrilineal line. On the death of a Gurikara the eldest among his sister's sons would be made the next Gurikara. Settlement of marriages, resolving the disputes pertaining to the family life and property, organising the periodical worship of the Bnootha etc., are the duties looked after by the Gurikara. He is also an important functionary at the funerals and death ceremonies and it is generally he who directs the proper performance.

Among the Nalumale Male Kudiyas the institution of social control for the enforcement of social norms is very rudimentary. This situation seems to have arisen due to some historical reasons. Nalumale Male Kudiyas are originally the inhabitants of the four hills called Eli male, Ambate male and Banjar male in Belthangady taluk of Dakshin Kannad district and Bari male in Mudigere taluk of Chikmagalur district. The three hills in Belthangady taluk are in the limits of only one revenue village called Neriya while the other hill though belonging to another district is adjacent to Neriya. This Neriya village was the property of one Brahmin family till about the

1930s and later it was divided into two portions between two brothers. Thus all the Nalumale Male Kudiyas have all along been living under the patronage of one and only one master for over a century and perhaps more. The control of the Landlord and master has been more effective and their own tribal organisations for the purpose, if any, that might have existed much earlier have altogether vanished.

As in the matters of family and clan organisation there are differences in the customs related to the observance of life cycle ceremonies at birth, attainment of puberty, marriage and death. For the sake of clarity these are described in brief separately for each group.

The birth of a child is a welcome event among the Oorumale Male Kudiyas. But, it causes ritual impurity and generally a separate hut other than the normal residential one is used as the labour room and resting for the mother and the new born for 7 days. On the seventh day a Madivala i.e. the Washerman is invited to the house where he sprinkles some Fuller's earth (Chowluppu) as a purifying agent and also supplies a set of washed clothes for the family members. In return he gets some rice, coconuts and betel leaves. It is on this day that the child and the mother are admitted into the house. On the 12th day the head of the household fetches tirtha (sacred water) from some nearby temple and sprinkles it in the house and thereby terminates the pollution finally. Pollution affects the father of the child and also all the members of the mother's family such as her parents and siblings. The child is named by the Madivala on the seventh day itself. The child is put into the cradle of cane on the twelfth day by the family members.

There are no ceremonies associated with ear piercing or with the first shaving of the head. Attainment of puberty by a girl is an important event and is celebrated accordingly. The girl is considered as impure for seven days and is kept segregated, usually in the cowshed or the shed used for storing firewood. The day for celebrating the event is decided upon in consultation with the Gurikara. On that day the father of the girl has to present a new saree to the girl and arrange a feast to treat the relatives and fellow tribesmen. Subsequently also during the monthly periods the woman is regarded as impure and is segregated for three days from the other members of the family in a very strict manner.

The negotiations for the marriage are to be initiated by the parents or close relations of the youngman. Elders like the father and the mother's brother of the youngman accompanied by their Guṛikara visit the would-be bride's house and enquire whether her parents have the intention of carrying off their girl. If the alliance is acceptable, the fact is made known and the day for betrothal ceremony called Nishchithartha is immediately decided upon. On that day the betel leaves are exchanged. Formerly the marriage ceremony used to be conducted in the bridegroom's house. The relatives of the bride would go over to the bridegroom's house for the purpose at the appropriate time. But of late, marriages take place in the community halls and mostly in Dharmasthala. A special pandal resting on pillars of which one would be the trunk or branch of a milk-oozing tree is erected for the marriage. The main part of marriage consists of the ceremonial offering of the nose ring to the bride. Of late the custom of tying a Thali has come into vogue. The Dhare or the water-pouring rite is performed by the bride's mother's brother. During the feasting no meat or intoxicating drink is used.

The dead are cremated as a rule. The eldest male member of the matrilineal family acts as the chief mourner. Pollution associated with death is observed for a period of eleven days. When a man dies the event causes ritual pollution to the members of the matrilineal family and his own children remain ritually pure. On the eleventh day the ash mound is visited and rice mixed with turmeric powder is thrown all around as an offering. Food is offered in 16 plantain leaves. On the sixteenth day there is another food offering and thereafter also food offerings are made once every month during the first year after death. Annually during the month of Mesha the ancestral spirits are offered food and this rite is called Agel.

Among the Nalumale Male Kudiya's ritual pollution associated with birth is observed only for a period of 7 days. The name to be given to the child is selected by the Brahmin priest. The placenta is buried under a milk-oozing tree or Bagine palm along with a small cake of rice bran. The umbilical chord is cut by using a freshly cut piece of a vate plant (plant smaller but similar to bamboo).

A girl attaining puberty is kept segregated in a separate hut for a period of one month. Nowadays this period has been reduced to ten days. The girl is bathed

ceremonially on the seventh day by seven women and is given a new saree to put on. During the monthly periods the woman is regarded as impure and she has to stay in a separate hut meant for the purpose.

The initiative for the marriage should come from the side of the bridegroom. Once the alliance is finalised a Brahmin priest fixes up the date and time for celebrating the marriage rites. A separate pandal is put up for the marriage and the central pillar called Moortha Kamba should be the trunk or branch of a milk-oozing tree. The marriage is consecrated by the Brahmin priest who pours water over the joined hands of the bride and the bridegroom.

The dead are cremated. The funeral pyre is lit with two fires one representing the patrilineal family to which the person belongs and the other representing the community. On the fifth day ashes are gathered and formed into two heaps one at the place where the head rested and the other at the place where the feet rested. Then the ashes from the head side are put over that on the leg side. On this heap the pieces of bones that are collected and tied in a cloth are placed. A small platform is made and rice mixed with turmeric powder is taken by the handful and strewn over the platform. A pandal is erected over the platform and a few vegetables are tied to it. Close to this site a sapling like that of coconut or an arecanut is planted. On the 11th day rice flour is cooked and made into balls and offered to the dead on 11 plantain leaves. Meat can also be cooked on this day. On 16th day there is one more food offering ceremony and thereafter at the end of the first month also food is offered. Annually at the time of Deepavali the ancestral spirits are offered food.

Most of the Oorumale Male Kudiyas have been cultivating lands over the slopes of the ghats from a very long time. Plots measuring from two to eight acres are cleared and turned into paddy fields. Generally areca and coconut palms are raised in the fringe areas. Annually two or even three crops of paddy are taken. Formerly they were following the Kumri type of agriculture by burning patches of forest lands and sowing crops like paddy or jowar. Now this practice is discontinued. Collection of forest produce has been an important traditional occupation of the Male Kudiyas. Rampathre, betta (cane), soapnut, pepper and nux vomica are some

of the important items gathered. However the Government has set up co-operative societies for the collection and disposal of these products. Some of Male Kudiyas are at present depending on agricultural labour for earning a living. Beedi rolling has been taken up by a few women of this community.

The Nalumale Male Kudiyas have been working under the patronage of one master for a very long time. In former days wages were mostly being paid to them in kind and all their requirements used to be met by the master. All that they had to do was to work for him, ungrudgingly and keep up the traditional patron-client relationship. Cardamom collection in the forests and developing new plantations by raising nurseries was their main occupation. They used to work in the paddy fields also. But now they have all been granted lands by the Government or by their former landlord. They have taken to self cultivation in a humble manner. They supplement their earnings by working in the rubber plantations and also in the nearby coco plantations and areca gardens.

Government has set up a number of Ashrama schools for the Male Kudiyas. Besides there are tribal hostels both for boys and girls. Though not on any impressive scale it appears a steady stream of educated persons is coming out of the educational institutions. Several educated Male Kudiyas have secured jobs in banks and factories and have also entered the Government service.

Many of the agricultural colonies built for these people by the Government have made appreciable progress. The natural tendencies of the agriculturists that have been imbibed in them through centuries have at last found a solid expression, for several households among these people have now secured a few acres of land which they can call their own in every sense of the term. For the people of the matrilineal section, ownership of lands recently granted is free from the traditional restrictions imposed by the Aliya santhana law of inheritance.

The same cannot be said of the programmes sponsored for helping these people to raise cattle and buffaloes. The region in which they live is not suitable for the sophisticated varieties of cattle and buffaloes that are being supplied by the Government. Very few of the recipients of such animals have been successful in keeping the animals alive.

By tradition the Oorumale and Nalumale Male Kudiyas are separate endogamous groups and intermarrying was taboo. Nowadays this barrier has been over-come and more and more inter-group marriages are taking place.

Comparatively speaking one can say that Malekudiyas have responded well to the fast changing conditions in the country with more confidence in themselves and in their chances of betterment than many other tribes found under similar circumstances.

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Y F F A V A

Pages 1-13

A BRIEF ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTE ON YERAVA - A SCHEDULED TRIBE

Virajpet taluk of Kodagu district is one of the few taluks in the State which have a high proportion of population belonging to the Scheduled Tribes. Amongst these tribals of Virajpet, and also of Kodagu district as a whole, the Yeravas form a major component. All the chroniclers of Kodagu and the earlier ethnographers have noticed the presence of Yeravas in the district and have made some passing observations on their language, social customs and physical features. Hitherto the Yeravas have been considered as forming one single tribe consisting of three or four endogamous groups namely, Pani, Panjiri, Kage and Badaga. They are also said to have a dialect of their own called Yerava.

However, the field study conducted in the year 1983 reveals a different picture. The two numerically important Yerava groups, viz, Pani Yerava and Panjiri Yerava are actually two different tribes and each forms a part and parcel of a larger tribal community spread over the border areas of the three States of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The Pani Yeravas are a part of the Paniyan tribe found concentrated in the taluks of Gudalur in Tamil Nadu, South Wynad, North Wynad, Calicut and Cannanore of Kerala and Virajpet of Karnataka. Their dialect, called Paniyan, has been enumerated as a different language in the Nilgiri district from a long time. Panjiri Yeravas are a part of the Adiyani tribe of the Wynad area of Kerala. Their language, while it has similarities with the Paniyan, is different and can boast of a considerable amount of oral literature in the form of songs and legends. Of late, Kage Yeravas have been identifying themselves with the Pani Yeravas and have lost whatever distinctive features they might have had previously with reference to the Pani Yeravas. Badaga Yeravas consist of two small groups who report Kannada as their mother tongue. One of these groups identifies itself with Soligas claiming to be the descendants of a few Soligas who were stranded in Kodagu area, in the past, during the wars between Mysore and Kodagu kingdoms. Their folk literature too upholds such a claim. The other group claims to be identical with the Panjiri Yeravas but, has a tradition that their ancestors had to reconcile themselves and give up their social customs and language under certain historical circumstances. Except the fact that all these people have been more or less agricultural serfs of the land owning classes for a long time, there appears to be nothing in common among them. They have therefore been treated as different tribes for the purposes of this study. Badaga Yeravas follow the customs of the dominant caste Hindu groups of the locality.

Origin and History :-

Pani Yeravas trace their origin to a couple called Anjilath Appemuthi and Papalath Ammemuthi who are regarded partly as brother and sister and partly as husband and wife. This couple are said to have been ensnared in a net by the Lord of Ippimalai and enslaved thereafter. Since they were naked, they were provided clothes to cover their bodies. They were taught the rudiments of agriculture. Later, their descendants were used as slaves for the development of agriculture in Wynad area. Tradition has it that out of frustration, several attempts were made by these people to escape from slavery but time and again they were caught and were brought back. Having no other way out, they had to adapt themselves to the mean life of slavery.

That in the past the Paniyans were being bought and sold in the slave markets of Kerala is well attested by various authorities. The abolition of slavery by the British in the beginning of the 19th century and expansion of coffee plantation in the area virtually ended the era of slavery for these people. But they have, ever since, remained landless agricultural and plantation labourers.

Panjiri Yeravas trace their origin to a mythical couple who were made out of mud and infused with life by the grace of God. Known by the names Melarachai and Keezharithi, they settled down near Tirnelli, a sacred pilgrim centre of Kerala. Their original abode is pointed out as the place now known as Kudurekode which is situated near Tirnelli.

According to a legend, two heroes named Aryai and Banyai called for a meeting of people belonging to all communities to distribute land and seeds for cultivation purposes. Since Kalachithirai Balamagan the Panjiri Yerava leader attended it late and in an indecent dress his claims were ignored. However, he threatened the congregation that he would not tolerate the injustice done to him and raising his bow aimed an arrow at the sun and the moon. Being afraid of the consequences the two leaders gave him land in the forest which he could cultivate and take out crops such as ragi, and other inferior cereals. The services of Kalachithirai Balamagan to the community is remembered ever since and his spirit is offered food at the termination of every pollution caused by events like birth, puberty and death.

There are other legends which give a clear indication of the spread and development of the tribe as a farming community. In their folk songs various locations where

they spread out in the Wynad and Kodagu area are enumerated in detail. Betta Kurubas, another tribal group of the area, are said to have taken away the lands which once belonged to these people. As the name of their tribe which is Adiyar in the Wynad region, indicates they became agricultural serfs and were in the past, compelled to make an annual affirmation of their subordinate position. Among themselves they call their tribe Iryavuleru.

Family and Kinship :-

Pani Yeravas are patrilineal and for both males and females the descent is reckoned from the father. On marriage the woman gets affiliated to the clan of her husband. The clans numbering over sixty are too many.

Marriage within a clan is prohibited as it is treated as incestuous. In their terminology clan is called Tharana or Pattole. A local group is headed by Chemmi or Chemmakara. This Chemmakara arranges marriages and manages the marriage celebration as well as funeral and obsequial ceremonies. He is well versed in the modalities associated with the proper manner of conducting the rites and rituals. The priest is called Attali and he has a large stock of ritual songs committed to his memory. He is quite indispensable for the celebration of any important event like marriage, puberty, death and so on. In most of the cases he is the priest for the tribal and clan gods also.

Nuclear family consisting of the parents and their unmarried children is the rule in this society. Rarely do the aged parents condescend to live with their married children. However, the father and his married sons would be usually found living near to each other and having their own family establishments.

In contrast the kinship organisation of the Panjiri Yeravas is matrilineal. Males as well as females reckon the descent from their mothers. On marriage, the male continues to be a member of his natal family and lineage and remains an outsider with reference to the family and lineage of his wife and children. The clan is called Chemma. There are thirty-three Chemmas and these have been grouped under three phratries called Mandyus. Each Mandyu has a distinct presiding deity of its own. Most of the clan names correspond to place names.

There is a further grouping of the clans as related to each other as brother

and sister clans and marriage between such clans is also prohibited. There are 13 such groups. Even though marriage within a Chemma or with a sister or brother Chemma is prohibited, in the event of any inevitable union disregarding this taboo, the community takes steps such as adoption of the male or the female member into the fold of some other Chemma and overcomes the crisis. Besides, a deterrent fine is imposed on the erring members instead of ex-communicating them from the tribe itself.

Eldest male member of the Chemma is the Chemmakara. He is in charge of celebrating the rites and rituals that fall due from time to time affecting the welfare of the Chemma. He goes round the houses of the members of his group and collects subscriptions in the form of paddy and cash for this purpose. He also arranges marriage alliances for the members belonging to his Chemma. The priest is called Kanjaladi. He is the repository of all ritual songs and legends connected with their deities. In actual performance of rites he is helped by another functionary called Karmi. There are two categories of Karmis one for obsequial ceremonies and another for worship of gods, and of these the former is supposed to be of an inferior rank.

Among the Panjiri Yeravas also the nuclear family is the rule. In places where they live in considerable numbers they have a functionary called Kunjukara who looks after the communal activities in the area.

Material life :-

In the matter of material life there is much that is common between Pani and Panjiri Yeravas. Their settlement pattern may be divided into roughly three types. From a long time some of them have been cultivating lands belonging to the Forest Department. They have built huts or houses quite close to such lands. These are usually in the form of small clusters or isolated homesteads. This is one type. Since independence the Government has been helping them to build their own houses by providing assistance to them and granting lands also for purposes of house construction and cultivation. In some places the Government itself has built houses of the Janata type in rows and has allotted them to the tribals. Such colonies tend to be multi-tribal in composition. This is the second type. Thirdly, a large number of them have been residing in the huts or houses built on the lands of the landlords for whom they usually work. The first two types are more common among Panjiri

Yeravas while among the Pani Yeravas the third pattern is more common. Where the huts are built by themselves it is common to build them out of bamboo, mud and thatching grass. Where the Government has extended assistance in some form or the other it is usual to find a tiled house. Unbaked bricks, wooden doors and windows and Mangalore tiles are the materials used in all such constructions. The flooring material is usually the gravelly mud and the floor is periodically cowdunged.

Surroundings of their houses are kept clean and neat. It is a common practice among them to have a small patch of land with flower and vegetable plants. In view of the availability of adequate open space all round and the natural gradient found in the Kodagu district, sanitation is never a problem.

In the matter of dress, both the Pani and Panjiri Yeravas have nothing to distinguish them from the other poorer and labouring classes of the area. The usual dress of a male member consists of a lungi and a shirt. The dress of a woman consists of a saree worn in such a way that the two ends of the saree are brought around the right shoulder and tied into a knot to keep it firm in place, and a blouse. It is usual for both men and women to wear underwear and petticoats. Boys wear knickers and shirts while girls put on frocks. Of late modern trends have broken down the traditional restrictions regarding the use of footwear and more and more people are now seen using footwear. However, even now leather footwear is very rarely preferred.

Language and Education :-

The languages spoken at home by the Pani and Panjiri Yeravas are not identical. These have no script. No other script has been used for writing these languages either. Pani language has a few ritual songs and the Panjiri language has ritual songs and some legends. Both the languages are clearly Dravidian in origin but their exact place in the family of Dravidian languages can be decided only by a detailed study. The oral literature that has been preserved in the community is transmitted informally by the peers to those who are interested and are chosen for the purpose. This oral literature is regarded as the preserve of the male members only.

During the past fifty years modern education has been spreading among these people also, though at a slow pace. Ashram schools with facilities for boarding and lodging have been set up in this predominantly tribal belt in considerable numbers. Those who join some other general school are being provided with hostel facilities free

of cost. Several young men of the tribe have been benefitted by the training facilities offered by the Government in bee-keeping carpentry and fishery. Young women have been imparted training in tailoring and have also been helped to acquire sewing machines of their own. But all these measures have gone only a little way in making modern and technological education popular or catchy among these people. Their main complaint is that those who have undergone such training have not been able to find any avenue to employ their skills and have not secured any salaried employment either. There is only one Arts graduate among the Panjiri Yeravas and only a handful are matriculates. None has entered Government service in departments such as the police or the revenue. A few women have taken up the jobs such as that of an auxiliary nurse midwife or a nurse. Most of the parents are nowadays desirous of getting their children educated and are therefore admitting them to schools. Adult education has not made any headway. Most of the adult education classes that were enthusiastically started in the past have ceased to function due to non-attendance.

Economic Life :-

The Yeravas of both the groups are mainly dependent on agriculture for earning their livelihood. However, very few among them are land-owners and fewer still are those who have taken lands on lease from others. The lands they own are in almost all cases those that the Government has granted to the underprivileged at different points of time under one scheme or the other. There are a few cases of unauthorised occupation of Government lands as well. By and large, the Yeravas are agricultural labourers and their tradition of agricultural serfdom is even now lingering on though in a modified form. Several among them work on coffee plantations also as casual labourers during peak seasons.

They also work for wages in the forestry occupations under the auspices of the Forest Department. So also they collect some minor forest produce for the contractors for wages. A few are employed in hostels and such other institutions as cooks and servants. They do not have any special interest in animal husbandry, fishing and such other activities and they do not have any special skills either. They are thus manual labourers and among them both men, women and even children work for wages.

Life cycle :-

Among the Yeravas child-birth and the attainment of puberty by girls are events of considerable importance requiring the performance of certain rites and rituals. However it is marriage and death that are considered as the main events in one's life.

The marriage practices among both the groups are modelled after the ones prevailing among Kodavas, the dominant community of Kodagu. Some tribal notions are still lingering. The initiative for the marriage should come from the side of the bridegroom. After the acceptance of the proposal the bridegroom is required to supply a headload of firewood every day to the household of his would-be father-in-law. In addition, he has to supply cosmetics, betel leaves and coconut oil and such other sundry articles to the girl till the day of the marriage. The marriage usually takes place in the house of the girl. On the day preceding the day fixed for marriage, at his residence, the bridegroom is ceremonially bathed by the elders, after which he puts on a neat dress and is then made to sit on a mat. By way of blessings, grains of raw rice are strewn over his head by the assembled elders, including friends and well wishers from the neighbourhood belonging to other castes. As a token of their best wishes they offer the bridegroom some presents in cash or in kind. This rite is called Moortha. Thereafter all the relatives and friends are treated to a sumptuous meal. Afterwards along with his relatives the bridegroom sets out for the house of the bride in a procession. The timing is arranged in such a way that the procession reaches the bride's place at dawn of the following day, i.e., on the day of the marriage. As soon as they reach the place they are welcomed and offered drinks. The ceremony of Moortha would have been performed in a similar manner at the bride's place also on the previous evening. The bride and the bridegroom are bathed by their respective relatives and are asked to sit side by side on a mat. They are neatly dressed with new garments for the occasion. The bride is dressed in a red saree, red blouse and is adorned with several necklaces of beads of different colours. The bridegroom is dressed in a white dhoti and a white shirt. After they are thus seated on the mat the combined Moortha is performed. Finally the bridegroom stands up and offers his right hand to the bride so that she can hold it and stand up. This holding of hands is considered to be the most important rite of the marriage ceremony. Once this is over there would be a feast during which liquor is also served. Among the Pan̄i Yeravas the mother of the bride sits on the threshold of the house and stops

the couple. The bridegroom then places some amount of money in her lap. It is only then that the couple are allowed to proceed to the house of the parents of the bridegroom. A few days later the newly married couple set up a household of their own and start living separately.

The funeral practices among the Pani and Panjiri Yeravas are somewhat different and this in a way helps one to draw the line of distinction between the two communities.

(A) Pani Yerava :- As soon as a person dies, the Chemmi is informed. He sends messages to all the relatives and makes arrangements for the disposal of the dead body. The corpse is carried by the relatives to the graveyard and buried with due ceremony. Women also accompany the body. In the case of the death of a man his bereaved wife should remove the glass bangles and the bead necklaces with which she was all along adorning herself with, at the graveyard. The most important obsequial rite called Eyi, is held on the seventh day. On this evening all the relatives gather and a group of men visits the graveyard to bring home the spirit of the deceased. One of the female members of the household such as a sister of the deceased is selected to discharge the ritual functions such as bathing etc, and she is called the Kulikarathi or the bathing woman. It is her duty to cook rice in a new pot, serve it on three pieces of a plantain leaf and to eat from each one of the heaps of rice so served. The performance of this ritual is followed by a feast. Then the most important obsequial rite of the day, namely the song offering to the dead commences. The Attali sings the song to the accompaniment of the rhythmic sound produced by the ringing of bells. The song partly deals with the history of the tribe, narrating as it does the origin and the suffering that has been undergone by its members in the past. The final portion visualises a picture of the spirit of the dead joining the group of the spirits of all those who are already dead, by crossing seven stages or steps. The singing of the songs continues upto the noon of the next day. When it is over, a feast follows and then the assembled relatives depart for their homes. After a few months, one more celebration called Panderu is arranged. This is similar to the Eyi. Till the performance of this rite the surviving partner in case of a married couple, is not free to marry again. During the period of mourning which starts from the day of death and lasts till the day of performance of this final

ceremony he or she has to observe certain restraints regarding food, drink, and dress. On a convenient day, on completion of the paddy planting season every year, the spirits of the dead are offered a common feast.

(B) Panjiri Yerava :- Among the Panjiris also burial is the common practice. Womenfolk are allowed to join the funeral procession of the dead body only for a short distance. When it is felt that they have accompanied the corpse over a sufficient distance they are asked to sprinkle some water over the face of the dead body and return. In the case of the death of the husband, the surviving wife removes her bangles and the bead necklaces here and hands these articles over to her deceased husband's relatives. The most important rite is called Pani or Padimoond and it begins on the eleventh day. A sacred brass wristlet which would have been placed on the spot of burial soon after the burial and would be invested with the spirit of the dead person is brought home and offered worship and sacrifice. Finally, two rows of human forms are drawn on the floor with grains of rice to represent the spirits of the ancestors and also that of the deceased which is represented by the last figure in each row. The womenfolk of his Chemma will then start weeping and they eventually fall over these figures and wipe them out. This ritual is followed by a feast. Among these people it is usual to utilise all such occasions of congregation of their kinfolk for the settlement of outstanding disputes if any. The song offering begins soon after the meals are taken. One or more Kanjladis present on the occasion would sing these songs to the accompaniment of the beating of dudi and ringing of the anklet bells. This singing continues all through the night and lasts till the noon of the next day. Finally, an offering of food is made to the Kalachithirai Balamagan and all the assembled relatives are fed. After some months another rite called Koota is held. This is similar to the Pani, and the rite may be performed on a mass scale to appease in common, the spirits of several persons who died during the previous year. Until this rite is performed the surviving partner is not free to remarry and is also subjected by tradition to several restraints regarding his or her food, drink and dress. In the case of a widow her ornaments are returned to her during this occasion and mutual gifts are exchanged between the affinal kin. Annually, at the time of Shivaratri, a common feast is held in honour of the dead when food offerings are made.

Religion :-

The Yeravas have all along continued to follow the religion of their forefathers.

Among the gods they worship, there are three groups viz., their own gods, gods and goddesses of neighbouring regions adopted by them and the gods of the Hindu pantheon. This flexible approach has necessarily enlarged the pantheon very much. Pani Yeravas consider the Thambira and Thambiratti of Ippimalai as their supreme gods. When surprised or struck by grief it is common among them to exclaim "Ippi, Ippi". The other gods they worship are called Muthachis and are named after Ippimale, Neermale, Ponmale and Kalimale as Ippimale Muthachi etc. Besides, their progenitors Anjilathu Appemuthi and Papalathu Ammemuthi are also considered as divine beings.

Panjiri Yeravas worship their progenitors Melarachai and Keezharathi as gods. They consider the Perumal of Tirnelly as their supreme god. Each one of the phratries also have their gods. They are Pakathayya for Tirnelly Mandyu, Pookarimage Kariyappa for Badak Mandyu, Karichathai Mallammai for Podar Mandyu. Among these gods Kariyappa has distinctive features. He is said to be a bachelor. At the time of his worship the priest has to wear a cross thread just as the Brahmins do. He is offered only fruits, coconut and beaten rice as offerings. Among Chemma gods Kalappan of Kalakottai Chemma is well known.

Besides these distinctive gods of their own, the Yeravas worship several mother goddesses called by the generic term Amma. Piriapatnada Mari Amma is the most popular goddess. The songs depicting the greatness of such goddesses are widely known and are sung to the accompaniment of dudi. Muthappan, Pashana Murthy, Panjurli and such other Bhutas that are popular in Kerala and Dakshin Kannada are also worshipped. Of late, Venkateshwara of Tirupati, Nanjundeshvara of Nanjanagud and Siddappaji of Gadduge are gaining more and more popularity.

Spirit deities, Ammas and their own gods are offered animal sacrifice, arrack, incense, and lights. Brahmanical gods are offered only fruits and flowers. Going on pilgrimage to the shrines at Talakaveri, Bhagamandala and Irpu and attending the great annual fair of Kuttadamma at Kutta are also quite common among the Yeravas as among the rest of the Hindus of Kodagu.

The colonies of Yeravas usually have a small temple. In every house, in a separate corner, the pictures of gods and/or some such sacred objects are kept for worship. Among the Panjiri households it is quite common to notice one or two Achande Badi, literally the stick of the grandfather, (resembling a walking stick of

cane or a wooden staff with a metallic tip) among the sacred objects kept for periodical worship. As among other people among the Yeravas too it is the occasions of misfortune and sickness that drive the people to seek divine help and make offerings to their gods. Taking vows, divination and offering of worship and sacrifice are thus quite common.

The Yeravas do not have any clear concept of evil or sin. There are concepts of another world but not of hell or heaven. If any one speaks of such things it is obviously something that he or she has heard others talking about. Their folk literature does not contain any reference to hell or heaven and life after death.

Social Control and Leadership :-

Among the Yeravas, to a certain extent their own tradition and the expected norms of behaviour act as the agencies of social control. Absence of property among them has helped to ensure that there are very few, if any at all, disputes of a financial nature. Disputes that arise are mostly confined to marriage, familial and kinship matters.

Among the Pani Yeravas any difference that arises between a married couple is referred to the local elders who make sincere attempts at reconciliation. If it were to fail the elders permit the couple to sever the marital bonds and to choose other partners of their choice. Such a dispute does not lead to any violence or even a loss of face. The most important transgression of the marriage rule is a marriage within a Tharana or Pattole which is incestuous. If the concerned man and woman do not pay heed to the advice of the elders they are excommunicated. It is the duty of the elders of the immediate family such as father, elder brother or an uncle of such a man or a woman to persuade the deviant by all means to conform to the traditional rule. When and if a dispute arises between Pani Yeravas of separate settlements, the elders of both the settlements sit together and sort out the issue. This type of informal inter-settlement council is the only apex body of social control that can be found among these people. Attali, the priest, has a voice in all matters of life due to his knowledge of the tribal traditions. Chemmakara is yet another leader recognised in the community.

Among the Panjiri Yeravas any congregation of their fellowmen for purposes such as marriage or funeral rites turns itself into a forum for resolving any outstanding

disputes. Once an issue is raised the tendency is not to shelve it but to resolve it. Though the Kanjladis take a leading role in these matters every one, including women, make it a point to participate enthusiastically. Most of the disputes are related to the proper performance or otherwise of the rights and duties prescribed by the matrilineal system of kinship. While the tradition of succession and inheritance are even now regarded by some among them as inviolate, there are some others who feel that obligations cast on them are unreasonable in the present-day context. The local practices and laws of the land regard the children of a deceased person as claimants for whatever little property he has left behind. The performance of the Koota is the responsibility of the head of the matrilineal family of the deceased person. But this obligation is often neglected as it does not in any way directly affect the head of the family. Disputes also arise when the prescribed gift exchanges are neglected. The Kanjaladi may practically be considered as the real leader because his opinions are highly valued. Kunjukaras who function as the middle men between their own people and the outside world, especially the land owners and welfare officials are also important leaders of the community.

The educated persons among the Yeravas have not been able to provide any fresh leadership. Most of them are employed and are living away from the members of their own community. Under such circumstances they have not been able to mobilise and start any movement for the improvement of the social and economic conditions of their people. The traditional leadership has thus continued to retain its influence, though on a low profile.

Social Reform and Welfare :-

Since Independence the Yeravas have been benefited to some extent by the various social and economic welfare activities and programmes sponsored by the Government. Such activities are now being supervised by the Integrated Tribal Development Project, Madikeri, under a project co-ordinator. Education has received considerable attention. Several measures of economic assistance such as grant of lands, free supply of milch cattle as well as improved varieties of pigs and poultry birds and the like have been going on for quite some time now. But the most important welfare measure which has affected the life to any degree has been the establishment of colonies. This has freed several among the Yeravas from the stringent control of the landlords in all matters. They are now free to talk among themselves and to

receive outsiders with whom also they can freely exchange their ideas. They can also move about and take up employment or work at places of their choice and convenience. They are now able to send their children to schools. This change has however covered only a small section of the Yeravas. As between Pani and Panjiri Yeravas it is Panjiris who have moved in larger numbers into colonies. Likewise, among the Yeravas who have received land grants from the Government the Panjiris are in a majority. Yeravas in general have not taken kindly to dairying, piggery or poultry farming etc., in any appreciable degree.

Yeravas who are still residing on the lands of the landlords for whom they work are not in a position to derive any benefits from the Government-sponsored welfare measures, for they have no place which they can call their own. Even if they are interested and are able to arrange to secure a free supply of a cow or a bullock or a pig they have no place to keep such animals. Nor do they have enough facilities to feed such animals.

Perhaps the only way to see to it that the welfare measures really reach them is to make suitable changes in the welfare measures themselves. Instead of treating these tribals as passive recipients of help doled out to them it would be necessary to have a consultative machinery where the representatives of the people to be benefited have a voice to clearly indicate their needs and requirements and to spell out their plans of action for their own economic uplift.

The Yeravas by and large have retained their tribal traditions. They have retained their language, social systems and ideals of life in spite of the domineering influence of the neighbouring cultures. This has been possible under a peculiar set of circumstances including the geophysical conditions where they are found and the settlement pattern which permits very little interaction among communities. The scant attention that they have received from outside agencies appears to be an important factor that has helped them to preserve their tribal identity.

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