

Traditional Life, Livelihood and Plantations : A study among the Mullu Kurumba

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ABSTRACT

This paper is the outcome of a study conducted during 2000-01 under a IX Plan Project of Anthropological Survey of India entitled "Management of Environment and Natural Resources: Study on Traditional Wisdom in Tribal Societies". It focuses on the traditional life, livelihood and the dynamic process of occupational transition of the Mullu Kurumba tribal community in the backdrop of development of plantations in Nilgiris (Tamil Nadu) and Wayanad (Kerala). Maintaining a unique identity, the Mullu Kurumba, otherwise popularly known as Kuruman, even today reckon their distribution over Wayanad and Nilgiri districts in terms of certain traditional territories which cut across vast areas of plains, forests and hills of this region. While the non-tribal cultivators in their milieu have greatly commercialized their cultivation pattern towards cash crops, such as, ginger, areca nut, turmeric, pepper, tea, etc, the Mullu Kurumba continue to give priority to cultivation of food crops, such as, paddy, tapioca and plantain, not only for their own (family) food security but also as a matter of prestige and adherence to the tradition.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is the outcome of a study conducted during 2000-01 under a IX Plan Project of Anthropological Survey of India entitled "Management of Environment and Natural Resources: Study on Traditional Wisdom in Tribal Societies". The study focuses on the traditional life, livelihood and the dynamic process of occupational transition of the Mullu Kurumba tribal community in the backdrop of development of plantations in Nilgiris and Wayanad. Before we present the field data, it is worthwhile to look at some of the facts and figures on loss of forest cover in the Western Ghats of South India. According to a recent study jointly conducted by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment (Bangalore), National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA - Hyderabad) and University of

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Massachusetts (USA) on the hilly regions of South-West Karnataka, Western Kerala and North-West Tamil Nadu i.e. Nilgiris, there has been a loss of one-fourth of the forest cover in Western Ghats in the last 22 years. The study which estimated changes in forest cover between 1973 and 1995 in the southern parts of the Western Ghats using satellite data reveals a loss of 25.6 per cent forest cover in that period. Dense forest was reduced by 19.5 per cent and open forest by 32.2 per cent. The southern stretch of the Western Ghats covering an area of approximately 40,000 square kilometers has experienced the most significant forest loss during 1973-95. There has been a loss of 2729 square kilometers of forest with an annual deforestation rate of 1.16 per cent. The highest loss of open forest occurred in Kanyakumari and Kozhikode at an annual rate of 4.4 per cent. The study says that Malappuram (Kerala), Idukki (Kerala), Kanyakumari (Tamil Nadu) and Nilgiri are the other mainly threatened areas in the Western Ghats. The study attributes decrease in forest area primarily due to increase in plantations and agricultural areas as a result of population growth (Deccan Herald, September 9, 2000).

As far as the chosen study area of Nilgiris and Wayanad is concerned, the immigrant settlers to this mountainous region have turned large tracts of natural forests into coffee, tea, pepper, pine and eucalyptus plantations since the British period. In this process, a number of hunter-gatherer Adivasi groups (i.e. tribal communities) inhabiting the forests of the region, namely, Mullu Kurumba, Betta Kurumba, Kattunaikkan (otherwise called Naikkan or Jenu Kuruba), Irula, and Alu Kurumba have been turned into plantation labourers and small growers of tea, coffee and pepper. The expansion of plantations coupled with stringent forest rules and regulations have been the main causes for the occupational transition and resettlement of several Adivasi families living in this region.

For the present study, to understand the impact of plantations on the traditional livelihood and knowledge systems of a tribal community, the Mullu Kurumba, a hunting community by tradition, now drawn into the plantation economy of the Nilgiris has been considered apt and chosen. Though Nilgiris and its communities have been studied extensively, a study at this point of time in Nilgiris and the adjoining Wayanad has been felt necessary from the point of view of updating the earlier accounts and to record the process of occupational transformation that has taken place at the community level. The Mullu Kurumba comprise one of the prominent endogamous groups of the larger Kurumba tribal conglomeration distributed in the Western Ghats of south India.

The Kurumba Tribes

From the beginning, the Government listing had considered the Kurumbas (in the Nilgiri district) as a single community, without recognizing the different endogamous groups living very much within Nilgiris district and having 'Kurumba' or Kurumban or Kurumbar suffixes with their independent names. In Tamil Nadu, 36 communities have been listed as Scheduled Tribes. An entry 'Kurumbas (in the Nilgiri district)' is listed at Serial No. 17 in Tamil Nadu Scheduled Tribes list and it has been also notified as one of the six PTGs in Tamil Nadu. It must be mentioned here that the name Kurumba/Kuruba denotes a big community of Kannada speaking shepherds who live in various parts of Tamil Nadu, especially in the plains bordering Karnataka State, and they are part and parcel of the village society and caste system of Karnataka Tamil Nadu. The Kurumba/Kuruba shepherd communities of the plains of Tamil Nadu enjoy the OBC status. Incidentally, the small

forest dwelling groups of Nilgiris also use 'Kurumba' or Kurumban or Kurumbar suffixes with their independent names but they are no way connected to the caste based Kurumba/Kuruba shepherd communities of the plains of Tamil Nadu. The Government maintains area restrictions in this case as 'Kurumbas (in the Nilgiri district)' at Serial No. 17 in the Tamil Nadu Scheduled Tribes list, mainly to distinguish the Nilgiris based small forest dwelling groups, and extend the Scheduled Tribe status only to them.

The different Kurumba groups of Nilgiris district are, 1. Alu Kurumba, also known as Pal Kurumba 2. Betta Kuru(m)ba also known as Urali Kurumba and Urali Kuruman 3. Mullu Kurumba also known as Mullu Kuruman and 4. Jenu Kuru(m)ba or Kattunayakan. Even today, the Government departments and the local administration in Nilgiris district, consider the Kurumbas as a single tribe for all practical purposes. No separate figures have been made or do exist for the distinct groups of the Kurumba cluster in Nilgiris.

Geographical Distribution of Kurumbas in Nilgiris district

The Alu Kurumba or Pal Kurumba live mainly on the Mettupalayam-Coonoor-Kotagiri-Kundah mountain stretches of Nilgiris district and in the adjoining Silent Valley/Attappady areas of Kerala State. A section of this community also lives in Erode and Sathyamangalam forest areas in Tamil Nadu. It must be noted here that the ethnographic references made in earlier documents of Nilgiris under the name Kurumba as practitioners of witchcraft, sorcery, priests for Badagas etc were all only about the Alu Kurumba subgroup of the Kurumba cluster in Nilgiris.

The living areas of the Betta Kuru(m)ba (or Urali Kurumba) in Tamil Nadu fall only in the Gudalur and Pandalur taluks of Nilgiri district. The Urali Kurumba/Urali Kuruman in Kerala and Betta Kurumba in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka States comprise one and the same group. The Betta Kurumba are also found to be living adjacent to the Jenu Kurubas in the Wayanad plateau, near the Bandipur National Park (Karnataka) and the Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary (Tamil Nadu).

The Jenu Kuru(m)ba occupy mainly the tri-junction area of Karnataka-Tamil Nadu-Kerala States i.e. the erstwhile Mysore- Nilgiris- Wayanad forested mountain stretches. In Tamil Nadu, the Jenu Kuru(m)ba, otherwise known as Ththen Kuruman or Kattunayakan, live only in Gudalur and Pandalur taluks. Description on the Jenu Kuru(m)ba, is provided under the entry Kattunayakan, another PTG of Tamil Nadu, who are listed separately at Serial No. 9 in the Scheduled Tribes list of Tamil Nadu.

The Mullu Kurumba settlements are found only in the Cherangode village Panchayat of Pandalur taluk in Nilgiri district, in and around Erumad and Kappala villages. But a large number of the Mullu Kurumba live in the adjoining Wayanad district of Kerala, constituting a single and integrated group irrespective of their distribution in two States. Except the Mullu Kurumba, the other three Kurumba subgroups speak a dialect of Kannada. The Mullu Kurumba speak a dialect of Malayalam and largely imitate the customs and practices of the Kerala communities. In Kerala, about 25,000 Mullu Kurumba are reported to live in approximately 250 settlements in the whole of Wayanad district. As per the recent count made by the Wayanad District Administration, about 4000 families of Mullu Kurumba are distributed all over the three taluks of Wayanad district, namely, Sulthan Batheri, Mananthavady and Vythiri. A few other tribes, such as, Paniyan, Urali Kuruman

(also known as Vetta Kuruman or Betta Kurumba), Adiyar and Kurichian also live in sizeable number in the same Wayanad region. Among the non-tribal communities, who are actually recent settlers in this habitat, Waynadan Chetty constitutes a relatively old immigrant population when compared to the Mappilla Muslims, Christians and other Hindu communities.

The Population of Kurumbas, including all the Kurumba subgroups, and other PTGs living in Nilgiris, as per the 'Socio-Economic Survey of Scheduled Tribes in Nilgiris District' conducted during 2010-11 by the Tribal Research Centre, Ooty is furnished below.

Population of Kurumbas and other PTGs in Nilgiris district

Name of the PTG		Male	Female	Total
Toda	No.	798	810	1608
	%	49.63	50.37	100.00
Kota	No.	991	1033	2024
	%	48.96	51.04	100.00
Kattunayakan	No.	1261	1219	2480
	%	50.85	49.15	100.00
Irular	No.	2974	3046	6020
	%	49.40	50.60	100.00
Kurumbas	No.	3179	3373	6552
	%	48.52	51.48	100.00
Paniyan	No.	3881	4001	7882
	%	49.24	50.76	100.00
Total	No.	13084	13482	26566
	%	49.25	50.75	100.00

Household wise distribution

Name of the PTG	No. of Households	%
Toda	388	5.81
Kota	509	7.62
Kattunayakan	621	9.30
Irular	1635	24.48
Kurumbas	1743	26.09
Paniyan	1784	26.71
Total	6680	100.00

Population of PTGs with a break up of Kurumba subgroups in the Nilgiris

Name of the PTG		Male	Female	Total
Toda	No.	673	697	1370
	%	49.12	50.88	100.00
Toda Christian	No.	125	113	238
	%	52.52	47.48	100.00
Kota	No.	991	1033	2024
	%	48.96	51.04	100.00
Alu Kurumba	No.	869	896	1765
	%	49.24	50.76	100.00
Betta Kurumba	No.	1584	1778	3362
	%	47.11	52.89	100.00
Mullu Kurumba	No.	726	699	1425
	%	50.94	49.05	100.00
Irular	No.	2974	3046	6020
	%	49.40	50.60	100.00
Kattunayakan	No.	1261	1219	2480
	%	50.85	49.15	100.00
Paniyan	No.	3881	4001	7882
	%	49.24	50.76	100.00
Total	No.	13084	13482	26566
	%	49.25	50.75	100.00

Household distribution with a break up of Kurumba subgroups

Name of the PTG	No. of Households	%
Toda	323	4.84
Toda Christian	65	0.97
Kota	509	7.62
Alu Kurumba	529	7.92
Betta Kurumba	866	12.96
Mullu Kurumba	348	5.21
Irular	1635	24.48
Kattunayakan	621	9.30
Paniyan	1784	26.71
Total	6680	100.00

The Mullu Kurumba

The Mullu Kurumba with a population of 1425 people live only in 12 settlements (348 households), namely, Kaappu Kunnu, Oni Moola, Neduncode, Kappala, Nari Valappu, Thayya Kunni, Palliyara, Padicherry, Maada Kundu, Konnaadu, Kallichaal and Tharakolly in the Pandalur taluk of Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu.

About acquiring the name Mullu Kurumbar, Mullu Kuruman and Mulla Kuruman, they say that their name stand for “existing or remaining (i.e. Ulla) Kuruman”. According to a legend, when they lived in the jungles as hunters under their own chief Veda Raja, the local king, for certain personal reasons attacked and killed many of their people. A few survived the massacre and they had come to be called as Ulla Kuruman. In course of time, Ulla Kuruman came to be pronounced as Mullu Kuruman, Mulla Kuruman and Mullu Kurumbar. They say that the name Kuruman is used by the women of Mullu Kurumba community to denote their husbands. If a man or woman of this community wants to know from another woman of their own community about ‘where her husband is’, the question asked is ‘where is your Kuruman?’ Among the non-tribal communities, who are actually recent settlers in this habitat, Waynadan Chetty constitutes a relatively old immigrant population when compared to the Mappilla Muslims, Christians and other Hindu communities.

Ethno-geography of Mullu Kurumba Settlements

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

Tribal communities in Wayanad live in uni-ethnic as well as multi-ethnic settlements now, owing to the prevailing production, ownership and dependence patterns in the predominant plantation economy of this region. Distinct names exist for the uni-ethnic settlements of these tribes. For example, Mullu Kurumba settlements are termed Kudi

while the Paniyan, Naicken (i.e. Kattunayakan) and Urali Kuruman settlements are called *Paadi*. Villages of the Wayanadan Chetty’s are termed *Veedu*. The dwelling hut of the Mullu Kurumba is called *Pera* while the Paniya hut is called *Ppirey*. Huts of the Naicken (i.e. Kattunayakan) and Urali Kurumban are known as *Maney* and *Sitthaal*, respectively.

Colonization of Wayanad

About the ancient history of Wayanad, large scale influx of immigrants, development of plantations and alienation of lands from the indigenous tribes in Wayanad, Aiyappan (1992) makes a vivid description in his famous work on the Paniyan tribe. The Wayanad area, densely covered by malaria-ridden tropical forests, was perhaps one of the least hospitable areas for human habitation in prehistoric times. The Paniyans, Adiyans and other backward tribes probably represent the earliest food-gathering settlers of Wayanad.

They are referred to as Vedar (hunters) in the legends of Wayanad. The Kurichiyans and the Mullu Kurumbans were perhaps the first farming communities from the Malayalam speaking region to the west of Wayanad to migrate and settle down in Wayanad, while the Urali Kurumbar, Kattu Naicken and a few other tribes speaking Kannada language came down from the areas to the east of Wayanad (Aiyappan 1992:5). Writing on the history of the Paniyans and their enslavement, Aiyappan further notes that the establishment of the feudal administration of the Raja of Kottayam in Wayanad was the culmination of the process of colonization of Wayanad plateau by the people of the plains. There was also a smallscale movement of the people of Mysore into Wayanad from the east. Both these immigration movements were slow and very gradual and spread over several centuries beginning at least from the 5th century A.D. With the establishment of the feudal order under the Rajahs, the Nayar chieftains and their retainers parceled the available land among themselves, enslaving the Paniyas and other indigenous tribal communities. The Wayanad was divided into several nadas, each under a Nayar Christian.

The Kottayam Raja had palaces at various places in Wayanad with several temples attached to these palaces. Of these palaces almost nothing has survived, but the temples attached to them are still to be seen (Aiyappan, 1992:6-7).

On the subject of colonization of Wayanad and the subsequent marginalization of indigenous tribes there, Aiyappan (1992:23) further mentions that in the year 1931, out of the total population of 971,769, the tribal people alone constituted over 60 per cent of the population. But in 1971, the total population of Wayanad shot up to 4,13,850, of which only 73,439 were tribal people. In other words, the tribals have become a minority of less than 18 per cent over a period of four decades. Approximately from the year 1945, the Travancore Christians sold whatever they had in their villages and towns to purchase land in Wayanad where it was very cheap. They came to Wayanad in batches after batches, converted the jungle country into a vast farm land of coffee, tea, rubber, tapioca, pepper and other cash crops. In fact, the traditional crops grown in this region from the ancient times were rice, ragi and a few pulses. Soon coffee and tea plantations occupied an important place in the economy of Wayanad. Due to increased demand, pepper became the most important cash crop for all the farmers of Wayanad and trained on most of the fruit trees such as, mango and jack fruit and on special thorny trees such as the coral tree (Aiyappan 1992:18). Similarly, a large number of Muslims from Calicut and neighbouring places moved into Wayanad for trade and business. Gradually, a number of tribal people lost their lands at throw away prices to the Muslim traders also.

As the Waynadan Chetty were already living in Wayanad as a land owning community, with whom the Mullu Kurumba and other tribes were often employed as labourers, not much of tribal lands went into the hands of the Waynadan Chettys.

Now, the situation in Wayanad is that, most of the Mullu Kurumba are primarily dependent on hill crops cultivation such as, tea, coffee, pepper and ginger, either as small growers or as wage labourers in plantations. Those Mullu Kurumbas who have been able to retain a little of their ancestral agricultural lands i.e. Vayals, do cultivation of banana and paddy on their own. There are also a number of Mullu Kurumba families in both Wayanad and the adjoining areas of district involved in share-cropping (called Pangu) with the Waynadan Chetty, Christian and Muslim families who have settled in and around the Mullu Kurumba settlements.

The study settlements: Thayya Kunni & Chomadi

This is the main settlement taken up for study. Thayya Kunni is basically a Mullu Kurumba settlement. In the past the Mullu Kurumbas exclusively inhabited it. Now there are a number of non-tribal Christian, Muslim, Nayar and Tiyya families living closer to the Mullu Kurumba within this settlement as cultivators and traders. It is located at the Tamil Nadu-Kerala state borders and falls within the revenue village of Erumad in the Pandalur taluk of Nilgiri district. Within Thayya Kunni, there are 36 Mullu Kurumba families spread over in five small clusters of 16 households, 7 households, 6 households, 4 households and 3 households within a radius of half a kilometer. About 50 families of Christians, 25 families of Muslims, 15 families of Tiyya, 2 families of Nayars, 2 families of Chetty and 2 families of Kattunayakan also live in Thayya Kunni as cultivators, traders and agricultural labourers, in the lands most of which once belonged to the Mullu Kurumbas. That way now Thayya Kunni has become a multi-ethnic village comprising different tribe, caste and religious groups. Similar situation prevails in the next village of Pananchira also; there are 150 families of Christians, 60 families of Muslims, 30 families of Tamils, 10 families of Chetty and 5 families of Nayars living as cultivators and traders in Pananchira. These non-tribal families employ 30 families of Paniyars and 20 families of Urali Kuruman who live in the same Pananchira as their plantation and agricultural labourers.

For the Mullu Kurumba living in Thayya Kunni, the small township of Erumad, which falls two kilometers away from Thayya Kunni towards east, serves as the main marketing centre. The Paniyan, Kattunayakan and Urali Kuruman who live around Erumad make most of their purchases only in Erumad. Besides several grocery shops, in Erumad, there is a Post and Telegraph office, Police Station, a nationalized bank, a Govt. Higher Secondary School, Land Survey and Revenue Inspector's office and a few privately owned telephone booths. A Primary Health Centre (PHC) and a Government Tribal Residential (GTR) school exist at Kappala, which is situated two kilometers away from Erumad towards east on the way to Pandalur. All these basic facilities are availed by the tribal communities living around Erumad. A large number of tribal people living in interior settlements come out to work as plantation labourers as this region is full of plantations and predominantly dependent on plantation economy. To facilitate movement of plantation labour and plantation crops, almost all the tribal and non-tribal villages in Pandalur taluk are well connected by road.

The settlement of Thayya Kunni is basically a hillock and most of the Mullu Kurumba households in this hamlet are situated on the top of the hillock. On the slopes of this hillock, surrounding the households, coffee, tea, pepper, areca nut and jackfruit are grown. On the plains i.e. in the wetlands, paddy, a variety of banana called nendira vaazhai, tapioca and ginger are cultivated. This is the common pattern of cultivation of cash crops and food-crops in the entire Wayanad and lower slopes of the Nilgiris.

In Thayya Kunni, the Mullu Kurumba comprise a population of 150 (72 males and 78 females) whereas, the non-tribal inhabitants number around 450 people in this settlement. This situation itself serves as a proof and sample of the over-all scenario of large-scale non-tribal migration into the tribal belts of Wayanad and lower Nilgiris. Composition of population in the settlement of Thayya Kunni is furnished with age-group break-ups, and male, female percentages, in Table 2. In the same Table, a comparative picture of Mullu Kurumba population (with similar break-ups and percentages) living in another settlement called Chomadi, situated in the Sultan Batheri taluk of Wayanad district in Kerala, is also furnished. Distribution of various tribes in Wayanad district in different village panchayats is furnished in Table 1. As the Tables provided are very informative and easy to infer, no elaboration is attempted further.

Houses

Traditionally the Mullu Kurumba build their houses with mud walls and thatch the roof with grass or paddy straw. Floor and the verandah are smeared with cow dung. Due to the financial assistance they receive from Government to make tiled houses, most of the Mullu Kurumba have transformed their thatched huts to tiled houses.

In Kerala, it has been observed that the Government is providing funds directly to the tribals and to the Self Help Groups of that area, to construct the houses for STs. If individual ST families want go for a better construction, they can add some more money to the government funds and construct their houses. Money is disbursed to the beneficiaries in three phases. The point made here is, there is not much interference in providing assistance to the people in Kerala. Comparatively a better quality of housing and satisfaction is assured to the beneficiaries.

In Tamil Nadu, the house construction work is given to local contractors. They construct poor quality houses and greatly dissatisfy the beneficiaries. The amount sanctioned for construction of houses to the individual ST families at present is Rs. 34,000/- in Tamil Nadu while in Kerala, it is Rs. 75, 000/.

In Thayya Kunni, out of the 36 households, 33 (91.67%) are tiled houses, two are traditional thatched houses and one is a concrete roofed house. Whereas in Chomadi, out of the 31 households, 27 are tiled houses, only one is a thatched house and there are two concrete roofed houses. Details of various types of houses constructed at Thayya Kunni and Chomadi are provided in Table 4.

Education

As it is obvious in the Table 3, literacy is comparatively low among females than males in both Thayya Kunni and Chomadi settlements. In Thayya Kunni, 17.33% are non-literates while it is only 16.22% in Chomadi. Literacy attained by both males and females through Non formal Education is also furnished in Table 3 for both the settlements.

Until the reorganization of States in 1956, the Erumad village comprising Thayya Kunni and other neighbouring Mullu-Kurumba settlements was included in the Wayanad taluk of the erstwhile Malabar district. Most of the people of this area, including some Mullu Kurumba went to Malayalam medium schools those days. After it was included in the Gudalur taluk of Nilgiri district, the village of Erumad was provided with a school having both Tamil and Malayalam as medium of instruction. As this area is closer to Kerala and most of the population settled here is from the present Kerala, there is preponderance of the Malayalam language and Keralite way of life here, as mentioned by Rajalakshmi Misra, way back in 1965 itself.

Mullu Kurumban children from Thayya Kunni attend schools at Erumad as well as at Pananchira, the neighbouring village. Those preferring Tamil Medium School, attend the GTR School at Kappala or the Govt.Higher Secondary School at Erumad. The Govt.Middle school located at Panachira is exclusively a Malayalam medium school established in 1960 and run by the Gudalur Panchayat Union. Compared to the Tamil Medium schools, attendance is more in the Malayalam Medium schools in Gudalur and Pandalur taluks of Nilgiri district. A number of Mullu Kurumba children who complete their education in Malayalam medium schools here, go out to Kerala for higher studies and employment.

It has been reported by some of the teachers serving in the GTR schools of Garikkiyur and Kappala, in Nilgiri district that there are not sufficient teachers in the GTR schools to teach the children. A few teachers who are there in these schools, have to attend to maintenance of kitchen and hostels most of the time than teaching; often they also take leave to visit their native places as many of them are posted from the plains to the hill areas unwillingly, sometimes on punishment transfer, to the GTR Schools. It has been strongly felt that it is sufficient if the Government runs only hostels for the ST children. The ST children staying in these hostels should be helped to attend the schools meant for the non-ST children. When curriculum and medium of instruction/language of teaching is the same as in other schools, it appears to be a waste of resources to provide poor quality of teaching in the GTR Schools.

Social Organization

As mentioned earlier, every Mullu Kurumba settlement has a head referred to as Porunnavan. The Porunnavan lives with his wife referred to as Porunnathi in the Velia Pirai i.e. the temple hut. The Velia pirai is also termed as Theiva Pirai because the ancestors are believed to live inside this hut as 'spirits'. The Porunnavan, besides exercising social control as a settlement head also performs the role of a religious specialist while performing certain rituals inside this ancestral hut. All the members of a settlement, especially those families having strong consanguine ties and bondage are organized under this elderly man (Porunnavan). Next to him in authority within a settlement is termed

Poraththavan who usually happens to be the younger brother of Porunnavan. After the demise of Porunnavan, automatically the Poraththavan becomes the head of the settlement and he shifts to the Velia Pirai to live.

In the past, when the Mullu Kurumbas lived according to their own traditional territorial and geographical categories, they were organized under the *Mooppans* who were heads of territories called *Kunnu* which comprised several *Kudis* i.e. individual settlements. Now such higher traditional political offices like, *Erumadu Mooppan*, *Appaadu Thalaichil*, *Edur Mooppan*, etc have lost significance among the Mullu Kurumbas. Only the settlement head i.e. *Porunnavan* has some authority over the members of his settlement.

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

Religion

Though the traditional beliefs and ritual practices of the Mullu Kurumba largely surround their ancestor-cult based at their *Velia Pirai* (or *Theiva Pirai*), they are at the same time have been greatly Hinduized. The Mullu Kurumbas say that in Wayanad district, a number of local deity sites of the tribal people have been gradually taken over by the Devasam Board and these were turned into Hindu temples. Priests belonging to the Embrandiri community periodically visit these temples and conduct the fairs and festivities as per the Hindu calendar. The Mullu Kurumba perform their unique religious practices, centred around ancestor worship (*Kaaranamaaru Vazhipaadu*; *Kaaranamaaru*-ancestors and *Vazhipaad*- worship), only within their own *Velia Pirai*. Similar situation persists with the other tribal communities living in Wayanad. For instance, a Sivan temple called Veliamban Kotta exists near a Mullu Kurumba settlement called Munda Kuttri. In the Manuscript of Mckency (1810 A.D), this was mentioned as a fort. Now it is a Sivan temple, worshipped by all the tribals and non-tribals of this area. On the Sivarathri day, a grand festivity is conducted in this temple and it is now managed by the higher castes, Wayanadan Chettys and Nayars.

An another grand religious event which takes place now-a-days in Sulthan Bathery with the large-scale participation of Mullu Kurumba, Paniyan and other tribal people is *Mariamman Koil Thiruvizhaa* i.e. Mariamman temple festivity. It is conducted usually in the last week of February every year. In the past, the tribals were not allowed to take part in the *Vilakku* (Lamp) procession of this festivity. But now-a-days, along with the women from Nayar, Tiyya, Wayanadan Chetty and other caste Hindus, women from the Mullu Kurumba, Paniyan and Betta Kurumba tribal groups also join the *Vilakku* procession and carry the coconut-lamp (i.e. by pouring coconut oil in the cavity of the broken or half coconut, a lamp is made) in their hands. People living in Wayanad district, irrespective of their religious and caste affiliations, largely come to Sulthan Bathery to witness this festivity conducted by the Devasam Board (Hindu Temple Endowment Board).

The Hindu Religious Missions who actively involve tribals in the Hindu temple festivities say that they are doing so to counter the Christian missionaries who have a strong presence in these two districts. An instance pertaining to a place name in Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary tells us the religious activities that are subtly taking place here. There is a place called Gnaam palli close to Muthanga. The Mullu Kurumba say that they have only named this place as Gnaam palli in the past due to abundance of a particular plant called Gnaam (a creeper used by them as a rope) in this area. The word Valli denotes a creeper or wine in the Mullu Kurumba language. The place was therefore known as Gnaam Valli. Some time ago, a Hindu temple has been constructed at Gnaam Valli. The spot is now known as Ram Palli and it has been transformed into a small religious spot in the middle of the jungle route between Mysore and Sultan Bathery.

Identity and Tradition: Hunting

Old men of the Mullu Kurumban community both in Wayanad and Nilgiris, say that they are actually Vetans (Vedans or Vedars) i.e. hunters, from the Tamil speaking regions who took refuge in the jungles of Wayanad, a few hundred years ago. As they fled to these jungles from the ancient Kurumba (ra) Nadu (the term Kurumba (ra) denotes the name of the country and Nadu literally means 'country'), they were known here as Kurumban.

About acquiring the prefix 'Mullu' with their name 'Kurumban', they say that their name was actually Ulla Kurumban meaning 'existing' or 'remaining' Kurumban. According to a legend, when they lived in the jungles as hunters under their own chief Veda Raja, the local king, for personal reasons attacked and killed many of their people. A few survived the massacre and were called as Ulla Kurumban or Ulla Kuruman (Ulla means 'remaining' or 'existing'). In course of time, Ulla Kurumban pronounced as Mulla Kurumban and Mullu Kurumban.

Due to the ban imposed on hunting and also due to their full-time engagement in plantations and agriculture, the Mullu Kurumbas almost gave up the practice of hunting wild animals some decades ago. However, as a 'ritual', hunting is performed on certain festive and ceremonial occasions. About the significance of hunting in the ritual life of the Mullu Kurumba community, Rajalakshmi Misra states, "The importance of hunting in the Mullu Kurumba life commences from his first Uchala festival and continues even after he enters his grave because a bow and three arrows are kept beside the dead body of a male Mullu Kurumba while burying it. The underlying belief is that these implements would be essential for the deceased after his death also. Thus a Mullu Kurumban is born, lives and dies as a hunter" (1971: 56-57). Further she adds, on this hunting festivity day i.e. on the Uchchaaru (this is how the Mullu Kurumban actually term their festivity; not Uchchala), all the males of the settlement take part in hunting with their own bows and arrows. Even the newly born male babies are also taken by elderly men for a distance of one or two furlongs along with the hunting procession, keeping a tiny bow and arrow in the hands of the babies. Then these babies and small children are sent back to the settlement through old women who accompany the procession for this purpose. Even now, the same practice continues and it signifies how the act of hunting is so imbibed with the life and world view of the Mullu Kurumbas. In fact, in the vastly changed Wayanad scenario, the emotional attachment of the Mullu Kurumbas to 'hunting' and its expression through ceremonial hunting expeditions very much reveal us the phase of identity crisis that the Adivasi communities in general have been passing through or undergoing. It can be even

argued that their traditional identity as 'hunters' is preserved and reinforced through the continuance of this practice. Their hunting implements, once used to hunt 'big' games are still preserved in their *Velia pera* i.e. ancestral hut in every settlement but they are not used now-a-days. During the ceremonial hunting expeditions, they use small bows and arrows, to hunt only 'rabbits' in the neighbouring tea gardens and bushes.

A custom followed even today at the time of birth of a child reveals their obsession with their traditional occupation of 'hunting' and their identity as 'hunters'. Birth of a child always takes place in their ancestral hut called *Veliya Pera* (or *Velia Pira*) in which the head of the hamlet also ordinarily lives with his wife. All the hunting implements, most of which no longer used are kept inside their *Veliya Pira*. When a baby is born, if it is a male baby, a bamboo container (called *thalla* made by themselves) having a few arrows (*ambu*) in it, is brought near the baby and by shaking it, sound is made for the baby to hear that sound. The underlying belief is that this sound drives away the fear from the male babies and they will grow 'fearless'. Similarly, to the crying female baby, women make sound by beating the *muram* i.e. winnowing pan made of bamboo. The *ambunthalla* (bamboo containers having bows), *muram* and several such implements having significance to their tradition and customary practices are always kept inside the ancestral hut i.e. *Velia Pera* of the settlement. Keeping an arrow near the male babies and an *erivaalu* (sickle) near the female babies is also in practice. The kind of implements used in the above said rituals also symbolize the respective roles and duties these babies will be assuming when they are grown up or reach the adulthood. At the time of burial of the dead also, the custom of keeping an *erivaalu* along with the female corpse and a bow and arrow along with the male corpse is necessarily performed. Hunting also forms an important theme in most of their folk stories and songs. Some of the songs of *Vattakali* (a dance performed by men who circle around a lamp lit on the stem of a plantain tree) have hunting as the main theme. Whereas the songs pertaining to their other dance form *Kol kali* (dance performed with sticks in the same fashion by men) comprises songs mostly from Ramayana and Mahabharata.

As stated earlier, hunting of wild animals has been totally given up by the Mullu Kurumbas now. In the past, they used to hunt deer (*maan*), wild pig (*panni*), wild goat (*kela* or *kelayadu*) along with the rabbits (*muyal*). Now it is only ceremonial hunting restricted to the hunt of rabbits, for the purpose of continuing the tradition and training the children. Hunting is known as *Naayaattu* among the Mullu Kurumbas. *Naay* or *Naai* denotes 'dog' and *aattu* means 'play'. As dogs play major role in their hunting expeditions, i.e. in searching, agitating and catching the animals, they have termed 'hunting' as *Naayaattu* meaning 'play of dogs'.

When hunting is taken up in hills and jungles to hunt bigger animals it is known as *Malai Naayattu* (*Malai* denotes hill); when it is taken up in tea or coffee gardens i.e. in *chaay kandi* or *kaappi kandi* (*chaay* means tea; *kaapi*-coffee and *kandi* denotes garden), to hunt mainly the rabbits it is termed *Maala Naayaattu*. In olden days, they used to hunt wild goat (*kaattaadu*) and porcupine (*cooraain*) in the bushes and tea gardens. Now-a-days, they do not hunt these animals, as it is an offence. Bow, arrow and spear-head (*kundham*) were the essential tools of hunting in olden days. Now, for the rabbit hunting, which is termed *Muyalu kedaa*, a wooden stick of three feet length and one and half-inch thickness (called *kundu*) is used as the main tool. When dogs run into the bushes and agitate the rabbits taking shelter inside the bushes, they run away; men and boys who stand surrounding

the tea gardens and bushes chase the rabbits and with force throw the sticks on the rabbits to immobilize them. Often, the dogs only catch the rabbits on their neck. Men, after releasing the injured rabbits from the dogs, gift the ears of the rabbits to the dogs, for two reasons. First, it is a gift to the dog for its help in hunting and secondly it is said to induce the spirit of hunting in the dog. Sometimes, while going for rabbit hunting, they also carry *mottambu* (flat edged arrows) and *veri* (catapult) to hit the birds and jungle fowls.

Usually after finishing the noon meal, they take up rabbit hunting. Just before the sunset, they close the hunting and assemble at a particular spot to divide the catch. An elderly man divides it equally to all the participants of the expedition. Irrespective of age, every one gets equal share. Jungle fowls and birds, which are hunted on individual effort, are not shared and they belong to the individuals only. On normal days, the divided meat is taken to their individual households, cooked and eaten. On the hunting festivity day of *Uchachaaru*, the divided meat are taken to their respective *Velia pera* i.e. ancestral hut and there, it is collectively cooked by women. After offering it to their ancestors i.e. to their *kaaranamaars*, all the members attached to that *Velia pera* eat the food and the meat. The Mullu Kurumbas still maintain their own boundaries or territories for rabbit hunting. Only in their respective neighbourhood they do hunting and generally do not go far away to encroach others' territories. Sometimes, men and boys from the Paniyan, Betta Kurumba and Kattu Nayakan tribal communities, who live closer to the Mullu Kurumba settlements, also join the Mullu Kurumba hunting expeditions. Though the Mullu Kurumba consider them low in social status, they equally share the catch with these people.

Utilization of Forest Produce

As far as the identification and utilization of naturally available edible food items in forests, the Mullu Kurumba make use of varieties of fruits, edible roots, tubers and medicinal herbs from forests. They have their own indigenous way of classifying forest flora and fauna. For instance, thick forests are broadly termed as *Vanam*. Bushes are called *Kandi*. Tea and coffee plantations are also considered by them as belonging to the *Kandi* category, e.g. *Chaai Kandi* (Chaai-Tea) and *Kaapi Kandi* (Kaappi-Coffee). Trees are generally termed maram while shrubs are called *Mudichaan*. Wines and creepers are broadly termed *Valli*. All the grass varieties are classified as *Pillu*. Several species and sub species of *Maram*, *Mudichaan*, *Valli* and *Pillu* are identified by the Mullu Kurumbas. Uses of all these species in terms of their use as food items, medicine, materials to produce household and agricultural implements are still found preserved as traditional knowledge. The elders transmit this knowledge to their children through oral traditions, by taking them to jungles while going for gathering of wild tubers, roots and medicinal herbs.

The fruits (*Polam*) available in the wild are brought and shared in the settlement. Some of the wild fruits they often collect include, Irainji Polam (from *Irainji Maram*), Gnaaval Polam (from *Gnaaval Maram*), Kotta Polam (from *Kotta Mudichaan*), Soori Polam (from *Soori Mudichaan*), Ottangaali Polam (from *Ottangaali Mudichaan*), Panchikka Polam (from *Panchikka Mudichaan*), Chalarum Polam (from *Chalaru Maram*), Polangey Polam (from *Polangey Valli*), and Mookiri Polam (from *Mookiri Valli*). Jackfruit is termed *Polutthan Chakka*, guava is called Mangi Polam and Mango is called *Maanga*. Cashew

fruit is classified along with the mango and identified as *Aandi Maanga*. As far as using the forest resources for household use and consumption is concerned, by rule it is permitted for the tribals to use the fallen, dried and dead trees for construction and fire wood purposes.

Pride and Prestige: Cultivation

Though by tradition the Mullu Kurumba are hunters, they are also, by and large a community of small cultivators. They have their own land classifications and land-use practices. Along with the Wayanadan Chettys, the Mullu Kurumba also reported to have cultivated vast areas of the fertile Wayanad plains. Now they are either small farmers or agricultural labourers. Before going into the land use practices of the Mullu Kurumbas, let us look at the Government land classification.

Wetlands are classified as *Nanchai* and dry lands as *Punchai* (some times referred to as *karai*). The land allotted exclusively for construction of houses is termed as *Nattham*. The land meant for and used as road, channels, pathways, cremation ground and water tanks are classified as *Purambokku*. The Assessed Waste lands are classified in the Government records as *Anaadhi inam*. Actually, other than the individually owned *patta* lands, the remaining lands are generally classified as *Purambokku* i.e. Revenue lands. Within the Revenue lands, further sub classifications such as Village Grazing grounds, Assessed Waste lands, Unassessed Waste lands and *Nattaham* exist. Many Mullu Kurumba families who do not possess any cultivable lands, cultivate the Assessed Waste lands (which actually belong to the Government and not allotted to the cultivating families) by paying an annual penalty of Rs. 20/- per acre plus Rs.25/-. They enjoy an indirect ownership to these lands by passing on the rights of cultivation to their wards. Issuing of 'Assignment' i.e. *patta* for Revenue lands has been stopped in this part of Nilgiri district for the last thirty years or so. Hence, the alternative for Mullu Kurumbas and other tribal families living in Pandalur taluk is to enjoy the benefit of cultivating the Revenue lands by paying the annual penalty and land revenue tax. The District Collector has the authority to convert the *Revenue lands* as *Patta lands*. Actually, the tribals and non-tribals who cultivate the revenue lands are booked under 'B' Memo for Encroachment. By levying the penalty and tax, they are allowed to cultivate the revenue lands.

In the past, the Mullu Kurumba identified two categories of dry land based on the distinct methods of cultivation they followed namely, *Vettu Parambu* and *Uzhavu Parambu*. The term *Vettu Parambu* denotes the lands used for slash and burn cultivation; *Vettu* denotes 'digging' or slashing or cutting; *Parambu* means 'land' generally. Food crops, such as ragi (*paandi*) and *saamai* were mainly cultivated along with chilies and tobacco in the past on the *Vettu Parambu* i.e. on the swidden lands on the slopes of the hills, by slash and burn method. About thirty years ago, swidden cultivation almost came to be discontinued among the Mullu Kurumbas as they found new use of these hill slopes for planting pepper, areca-nut, coffee and tea.

The other category *Uzhavu Parambu* is also a dry land on the hills but located on the top of the hills; it is a leveled land where cultivation was carried out by ploughing. Rajalakshmi Misra (1971: 67) observes that during the late 1960's nine households out of the total 20

households existing in Kappala involved in Uzhavu *Parambu* cultivation. The Uzhavu *Parambu* lands were cultivated by rotation of crops. In a cycle of three years, first they grew ragi, then *karthan*, a variety of paddy and finally *saamai*. After which they planted tobacco, chilies and a few other local roots for about a year on these lands. Then the lands were left fallow for five years before repeating the same cycle. The *Uzhavu Parambu* cultivation also got discontinued due to allotment of these lands to new settlers by the State Government. Dwindling of livestock population and reduced availability of natural manure i.e. cattle dung also contributed to the discontinuance of cultivation in *Uzhavu Parambu* lands.

The Mullu Kurumbas contrast these two categories of dry lands, namely *Vettu Parambu* and *Uzhavu Parambu* against the *Vayals* i.e. wet lands in the valleys and plains where water sources are abundant. The term *Parambu* in their language actually denotes 'dry place' where there is no flow of water. First, *Vayal* is contrasted with the *Parambu* and then they identify subcategories for each of these two. As long as food crops and other local varieties of crops were cultivated the hill slopes and the leveled hilltops were broadly termed as *Parambu*. Over the last few decades, after developing pepper, coffee, tea and areca nut on the slopes, these *Parambu* lands came to be called as *Karai*. Now *Karai* means dry land slopes where pepper, coffee and tea plantations are raised as against *Vayals* i.e. wet lands.

The Mullu Kurumba have their own way of classifying cultivation and crops. The pattern of cultivation followed in the wetland *Vayals* is termed *Thannaandu Vilaa*. As cultivation cycle lasts for only one year and every year the cultivation process is begun afresh, it is termed *Thannaandu Vilaa*. The term *Thannaandu* signifies one year or current year and *Vilaa* denotes the crops under wetland cultivation, such as, paddy, tapioca (*kappa*), plantain (*vaazha*), sembu (a local edible root) and ginger (*inji*). Whereas, the pattern of cultivation followed in *Karai* i.e. on hill-slopes, is termed *Kaalaa kaala Vilaa*. Plantation crops, such as a pepper (*kuru milagu*), coffee (*kaappi*), areca nut (*paakku*), tea (*theyila*) and the jack fruit (*palaavu* or *chakkaa*) which are raised on hill slopes last for years together, hence called *kaalaa kaala vilaa*. The term *kaalaa kaalam* means 'years together' or 'for several years'.

Coming to the *Vayals* i.e. Wetlands, categories of *Vayals* are distinguished in terms of *Kandam* i.e. soil condition. *Ulavu kandam* or *Uzhavu kandam* denotes those *Vayals* where plough cultivation is possible; *Koravu kandam* denotes the marshy lands where plough cultivation is not possible and paddy only could be cultivated using simple agriculture implements like spade. Whereas in the *Uzhavu kandam*, paddy, banana, tapioca and ginger are grown. The *Aaathi kandam* or *Kaal Aaathi kandam* is also somewhat similar to *Koravu kandam* but less marshy. Here, only paddy is cultivated. Actually, the *Koravu kandam* and *Aaathi kandam* exist in valley like lands, exactly at the points where the hill-streams flow to the plains; the marshy wetlands situated alongside the perennial streams are cultivated with paddy.

Cultivation of paddy is termed *nanja krishi* and lasts for about six months. Sowing takes place in the month of *Medam* i.e. around middle of April. Transplantation is done during

Vidunam-Karkadam and harvest is conducted during *Dhanu-Magaram*. Seedlings i.e. *Gnaaru* are prepared in a separate plot. If availability of water is comparatively poor, instead of paddy, plantain, ginger and tapioca are cultivated. Generally the Mullu Kurumbas prefer to grow paddy, as it is their staple food. Almost all the Mullu Kurumbas grow paddy atleast for their own consumption. When his neighbour Muslim, Christian and Nayar families start taking up ginger, plantain and areca nut (and tea now-a-days) in the wetlands for making cash, a Mullu Kurumba never resorts to such practices. He prefers to grow paddy for his own family food security and it also involves a great prestige. Whenever the Mullu Kurumba visit their kin living in other settlements or attend communal ceremonies, the first and foremost question they pose to each other is 'how is the paddy crop this year?'. Even if a person has become relatively rich and makes money mostly by hill crops and plantations, growing paddy and talking about its yield in public gatherings is considered a pride for the Mullu Kurumba till today.

In their wetland cultivation, the Mullu Kurumba in Thayya Kunni use bullocks for ploughing. These bullocks are also hired to the other cultivators. Landless Mullu Kurumba work as agricultural and plantation labourers. Those who have little lands and sufficient working hands in their household usually prefer to work in their own fields to produce paddy for self-consumption. If they have no work in their own lands, then they go out to work for others. The landless Mullu Kurumba involve in sharecropping with the Wayanadan Chetty families and with the immigrant Muslim and Christian settlers. Sharecropping is called *Pangu*. Agreement for sharecropping lasts only for one year. If both the parties involved in sharecropping agree, it gets renewed for the next year.

Before the Christians and Muslims came in, the Mullu Kurumba involved in the *Pangu* method of sharecropping mostly with the Wayanadan Chettys. As land owners, the Wayanadan Chetty used to provide the Mullu Kurumba share-cropper, the seeds, fertilizers and pesticide in addition to the land. The Mullu Kurumba sharecropper contributed only his labour all through the cultivation cycle. If the crop is paddy, both the parties share the harvest equally. If the crop is plantain, the money obtained through its sale, is divided equally. Now the Mullu Kurumba take lands on lease (called *Paattam*) from the Muslim, Christian and Wayanadan Chettys mainly for cultivation of plantains i.e. *Vaazhai*. Plantain is a ten months crop. While entering into the *Paattam* agreement, the landowner is paid @ Rs. 7/= or 8/= per plantain plant. Usually 600 to 800 plants are grown in one acre and that way the landowner gets around 5000 to 6000 rupees. The cultivator bears the expenses of all items including the labour required for cultivation. It is reported that a minimum profit of Rs.6000/= per acre could be made in this venture. Now the *Pangu* (share cropping) and the *Paattam* (taking lands on lease) methods are the most prevailing modes of survival in the entire Wayanad. While the landless among the Mullu Kurumba attempt the above said methods of cultivation, the landless among the neighbouring Paniyans hardly attempt such *Pangu* and *Paattam methods*. They prefer to work only as farm labourers to the Wayanad Chettys, Christians and Muslims. The Mullu Kurumbas say that the Christian and Muslim settlers in Wayanad follow the trick of providing arrack and beef every Sunday (i.e. periodically) to their Paniyan labourers to keep them happy and to retain their cheap labour.

Alcoholism

The benefits of the developmental schemes implemented by various Government and Non Government Organizations among the Nilgiri tribal communities have been greatly nullified by rampant alcoholism prevalent among all these tribal communities. The district administration has to remove the liquor shops and illicit-liquor brewers from the tribal areas. Simultaneously there should be income generation schemes, improving the literacy and awareness programs for the tribal women. Strong campaign against alcoholism and other issues is to be taken up by the NGO's in the form of street plays using local themes through the local language.

It has been observed that different factions having loyalties to different NGO's exist within the tribal communities in Nilgiris and Wayanad. Even within a small tribal settlement, some amount of dislike between close kin has developed due to their loyalties to different NGOs, especially in the Gudalur and Pandalur taluks of Nilgiri district.

Reaching the Tribal Communities

In 1989, the Government of Kerala appointed Tribal Extension Workers to attend to the needs and problems of the ST people at the settlement or village level. They are recruited only from the ST communities and posted in their own or neighborhood villages. Most of the development work pertaining to the ST communities is carried out through these 'Tribal Extension Workers/Tribal Volunteers/ Social Activists.

The Tribal Volunteers get free uniforms and a monthly payment of Rs. 1,500/- from the ST Development Department. If they belong to the Primitive Tribal Groups i.e. PTGs, then the qualification required for this post is VIII Standard and for others it is Tenth Standard Pass. About 1,000 youths from ST communities function as Tribal Volunteers all over Kerala. They are about 300 each in Wayanad and Palakkad districts while in Idukki they are about 200 or so. They receive basic training in KIRTADS, a tribal research institute of the Kerala Government. The important duties of the Tribal Volunteers are to

1. Visit the tribal settlements everyday in the morning to review the study of children, sanitation of the settlement, etc; they also have to see that the children attend the lower primary school i.e. Balwadi in the settlement regularly .
2. Ensure the attendance of ST people in the Ooru (Colony or settlement) Sabha, Grama (Village) Sabha and Beneficiary committee (pertaining to housing, agricultural assistance, etc) meetings.
3. Identify the beneficiaries of various development schemes and assist them to apply for different welfare schemes.
4. Visit the sites of developmental works of the settlement or village to inform the concerned authorities about the progress.
5. Report the issues relating to health, drinking water, sanitation, and ration-supply to the concerned authorities.
6. Arrange for the medical treatment of the ST people using the facilities available with the ST Development Department.

7. Convene cultural programmes, like, traditional music, dance, etc periodically.

This kind of arrangement, using the tribal youth for development planning and implementation, do not seem to operate in Nilgiris district in Tamil Nadu. If such a scheme of appointing Tribal Volunteers is taken up uniformly all over the country, in all the districts where STs are concentrated, it will definitely make the development programmes reach the people. It will also bring down the rate of unemployment among the educated tribal youth.

Concluding Remarks

In a report on the Mullu Kurumba, Rajalakshmi Misra wrote in 1971 that the traditional council of elders in this community lost its significance and only the authority of elders at the settlement level was effective. As far as social control is concerned, the same situation prevails even today. By involving in ceremonial hunting expeditions on their festive days, the Mullu Kurumba strongly assert their traditional identity as 'hunters' even today and they take pride in it. Though largely dissociated from the forest resources at present, they do retain a vast knowledge of these natural resources still. While the non-tribal cultivators in their milieu have greatly commercialized their cultivation pattern towards cash crops, such as, ginger, areca nut, turmeric, pepper, tea, etc, the Mullu Kurumba continue to give priority to cultivation of food crops, such as, paddy, tapioca and plantain, not only for their own (family) food security but also as a matter of prestige and adherence to the tradition. Being victims of the overall downtrend in the prices of plantation crops, such as, pepper, areca nut and tea as a result of liberalization policies, and as marginal cultivators and wage labourers of the totally collapsed plantation sector, the Mullu Kurumba as well as other tribal and non-tribal marginal farmers of the Wayanad region now consider that cultivation of food crops would be their most dependable and sustainable option of livelihood.

Distribution Of Tribes In Wayanad District, Kerala (Figures During 2000-01)

Sl.No.	Name of Panchayat/ Municipality	Total no. of settlements	Total No.of families- Tribe wise						
			Urali Kuruman	Paniyan	Kuruman	Kattu nayakan	Kurichian	Kurumba	Adiyan
1	Kaniambetta	55	0	286	145	9	0	0	0
2	Kottathara	68	0	345	0	23	343	11	0
3	Meppadi	61	0	590	153	122	57	0	0
4.	Muttill	85	0	532	121	70	57	0	0
5.	Padirjaratha	47	0	302	0	26	107	0	0
6	Pozhuthana	42	0	244	0	21	49	0	0
7.	Thariodi	52	0	279	0	34	157	0	0
8.	Vengappally	42	0	290	0	6	91	0	0
9.	Vythiri	8	0	140	0	27	0	0	0
10.	Kalpatta	1	0	385	0	5	16	53	0
11.	Pulpally	67	0	404	337	395	0	0	10
12.	Poothodi	134	0	287	473	167	8	0	0
13.	Menangadi	85	0	250	690	70	10	18	0

Distribution Of Tribes In Wayanad District, Kerala (Figures During 2000-01)

Sl.No.	Name of Panchayat/ Municipality	Total no. of settlements	Total No.of families- Tribe wise						
			Urali Kuruman	Paniyan	Kuruman	Kattu nayakan	Kurichian	Kurumba	Adiyan
14	Ambalavayal	39	0	267	109	0	0	0	0
15.	Mullankolly	18	0	155	67	276	0	0	0
16.	Nemmani	81	10	692	470	52	0	0	0
17.	Noolpuzha	140	0	683	427	591	0	0	0
18.	Edavaka	85	0	437	0	0	253	0	42
19.	Manandvadi	84	0	198	17	0	178	0	198
20	Panamram	128	0	888	106	43	362	0	265
21	Thirunelly	111	0	258	192	389	265	0	575
22.	Thindermedu	41	0	235	0	0	192	0	0
23	Vellsmuda	53	0	595	0	20	140	0	0
24	S. Bathery	63	0	613	210	155	0	0	0
25.	Tharinjal	128	0	455	5	34	693	0	32
	Total	178		9818					

HOUSE CONSTRUCTION (as per the 2000-01 field study)

House Type	Chomadi		Thayyakunni		Both the settlements	
	No	%	No.	%	No.	%
Tiled house	27	87.09	33	91.67	60	89.55
Concrete	2	6.45	1	2.78	3	4.47
Thatched h.	1	3.23	2	5.55	1	1.49
Sheet	1	3.23	0	0	3	4.47
Total	31	100.0	36	100.0	67	100.00

OCCUPATION (as per the 2000-01 field study)

Occupation	CHOMADI				THAYYAKUNNI			
	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	%	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	%
Govt. job	15	1	16	10.81	3	1	4	2.67
Pvt. job	4	3	7	4.73	8	4	12	8.00
Wage labour	18	15	33	22.30	22	29	51	34.00
Non Worker	19	42	61	41.21	39	44	83	55.33
Self Cultivation	20	11	31	20.95				

ALLIANCE PATTERN BETWEEN CLANS (as per the 2000-01 field study)

	Clan of husband	Clan of wife	No. of alliances in Chomadi Settlement	%	No. of alliances in Thayyakunni Settlement	%
1	Kadiya kulam	Vadakka	2	6.45	9	25.00
		Villippa	3	9.68	2	5.56
		Venkata	0	0.00	2	5.56
2	Villippa kulam	Venkata	0	0.00	4	11.11
		Vadaka	8	25.81	8	22.22
		Villippa	0	0.00	1	2.77
		Kadiya	6	19.35	2	5.56
3	Vadakka kulam	Kadiya	2	6.45	3	8.33
		Venkata	2	6.45	1	2.77
		Villippa	8	25.81	2	5.56
4	Venkata kulam	Vadakka	0	0.00	2	5.56
	Total		31	100.00	36	100.00

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