

**DEATH, FUNERAL AND THE ANCESTORS:
CULT OF THE DEAD AND THE MALABAR TRIBES**

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*A written account
submitted for the examination of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
Of the University of Calicut*

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DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that this written account entitled *Death, Funeral and the Ancestors: Cult of the Dead and the Malabar Tribes*, is the record of research done by me under the supervision of **Dr. K.J. John**, Reader, Department of History, University of Calicut, and it has not been previously submitted for the award of a degree, diploma, or other similar title of recognition.

Calicut University
30.08.2006

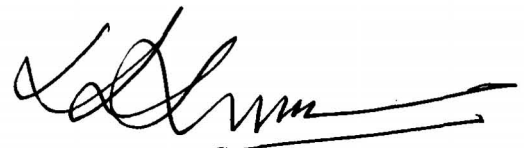
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this thesis, *Death, Funeral and the Ancestors: Cult of the Dead and the Malabar Tribes*, submitted for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History of the University of Calicut is a bonafide record of genuine research done by **Manjula Poyil** under my supervision and no part of this has been submitted for any degree before.

Calicut University,
30.08.2006



Supervising Teacher

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PREFACE

The present study is a follow-up work of my M. Phil Dissertation *Hero Worship in Medieval Karnataka: a Study based on Hero-stone Inscriptions*. Although the two studies may appear dissimilar outwardly in terms of the subject matter and geographical focus, both are in fact related topics and, on the whole, deal with the problem of death and human concerns about it. The conviction behind Hero-stones, too, was nothing but the fears and concerns about death and after-life. Though strictly confined to tribal affairs and to the geographical canvas of Malabar, this study is a pioneering attempt in a largely neglected field of knowledge. The attempt to limit the scope of the study was not just for the sake of research convenience but it is also hoped to throw some fresh light on the contribution of the tribal people towards the cultural heritage of Kerala. Similarly, it is supposed to bring out the relationship between the tradition of Kerala and the cultural practices of the present day tribal peoples. Attempts at linking anthropological studies with archaeological and historical ventures also are few and far between. Against this backdrop the present study attempts to analyze how far the tribal people, who are by and large insular till recently and who still follow simple modes of life without undergoing relatively low level of acculturation or integration, retain ancient patterns of traditions and primitive cultural ethos. The present study is expected to contribute something in that direction.

Although the laity is largely ignorant of the internal differences among the various tribal communities, any serious observer of the tribal culture would be surprised by the kind of dissimilarities that prevail over the various tribal groups of Kerala. There are rich landlords among them against the ordinary tribal who strives for a living; highly civilized people against the surprisingly primitive; heavily ritual-ridden against the extremely simple; Malayalam speaking tribes against the Tamil or Kannada speaking ones, and so on. The slow process of integration into general society is supplemented by a similar process of Sanskritization. The identity of the tribal people as the zealous custodians of an ancient culture and their unwillingness to enter into the modern life is fast

becoming a thing of the past. Since anthropologists are preoccupied with the study of the life and culture of the contemporary tribal society, the historicity of rites and beliefs are largely neglected. That most of the historical studies are focused on the problem of the tribal land issue has greatly spoiled the situation. This overemphasis on the land question has had its impact in the form of a gross ignorance of the history of the tribal communities.

What probably discouraged such investigations may not just be the relative difficulty in tapping information from the tribal people but the distorted notions that come to stay on the backwardness and uncivilized modes of their life systems. Centuries-old exploitation by the people of the plains has converted a large section of the tribal people into arch opponents of all the outsiders. There is a widespread belief among them that outsiders are taking advantage of the great treasure of their traditional knowledge that the tribes possess on various fields, especially in herbal medicine. Still, the readiness of a few to disclose matters to non-tribes would astonish us. Certain tribal people have realized that these studies would after all be advantageous to them. Gifts in money or materials would no doubt have allured some of them to that direction.

The wholehearted cooperation of the tribal people is the essential precondition for the success of any study on their cultural life; but to gain their goodwill is not an easy thing to achieve. For the present work 27 tribal communities had to be approached and studied about. There were long periods of despair with some crowning moments of success and delight in this difficult venture. For the tribes, death is not just a matter of loss and grief but a horrifying event as well and, as the funeral ceremony is a very sacred occasion, the situation assumes an extremely religious halo in which the participation of outsiders is vehemently looked down upon. The bad treatment meted out to the tribes by the non-tribal people and the extreme deprivation of them has sown suspicion in their minds against all outsiders. Thus there is an inherent antipathy in every tribal mind against a non-tribal. This manifests as a revolt of the tribal ethos against non-tribal culture. Naturally they are reluctant to open up their minds to the non-tribes who are considered intruders. Even in this prevailing situation of

animosity, and more so in the midst of economic strains, I was able to gather relevant information. Recent developments in information technology, communication networks and transportation facilities have been of great help to undertake the research work with considerable ease. Even field work was not as difficult as it would have been some five or ten years ago, if looked from the point of view of accessibility and traceability.

In the preparation of this thesis, I have received a good deal of encouragement and help from various people. First and foremost, I should express my thanks to Dr. K.J. John, under whose supervision this study has been conceived and completed. My words can only inadequately convey my gratitude to him.

Sincere thanks are due to Professor Shireen Ratnagar who, in the midst of a tight seminar program at the University of Calicut, found time to discuss certain aspects of the topic and to make some valuable suggestions. I am grateful to Professor M.G.S. Narayanan for the useful discussions I had with him on the research topic and for his services as the former chairman of the ICHR. Thanks are due to Dr. Suresh Patil, Superintending Anthropologist, Anthropological Survey of India, Mysore, for sharing with me his observations on the discipline and methods of anthropology. I extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Anandabhanu, Head of the Department of Anthropology, Palayad Centre, University of Kannur, for enlightening me on the basic issues of Anthropological research. I remember with gratitude the services rendered by Dr. S.M. Mohamed Koya, former H/D of History, University of Calicut, for his encouragement and support. I also express my thanks to Dr. K.N. Ganesh, Head of the Department of History, University of Calicut, for his support and encouragement. Thanks are due to Dr. P.R.G. Mathur and Dr. Seetha Kakkoth for their valuable suggestions.

I remember with a sense of gratitude a few individuals, without whose support it would have been almost impossible for me to accomplish the field work. Vinod and Preetha Vinod of *Maithri*, an NGO of Palakkad, rendered me great services in helping to meet the tribal people of Parambikulam region. Murugan of the Irula settlement of Vayalur who is also a student of M.A.

History, Farook College, Calicut, and Rajan, of the same settlement and an employee of AHADS have been extremely helpful in collecting useful information from far-off settlements of Attappadi. H. Dinaruddeen and P.E. Usha of AHADS helped me in identifying important tribal settlements of Attappadi. Haridas, a tribal promoter at the AHADS, and an inmate of the Kadukumanna Kurumba settlement, assisted me in getting a passage to many Kurumba settlements. Krishna Gireesh, Forest Officer, Karulai Range, Nilambur, gave me the necessary permission to visit the Mancheri Cholanaikkan colony in spite of the prevailing strict official restrictions. Benny of Karulai and Moyinkutty of the Cholanaikkar Co-operative society extended me all cooperation in meeting the Cholanaikkans and Aranadans. Subrahmanian, Member, Mampad Panchayat, introduced me to the Malamuthans of Veettikkunnu. Ratheesh, M.A. student, Department of History, university of Calicut, provided me the required facilities at Pulpally by helping to contact the tribal people of the area and by arranging accommodation.

Thanks are also due to informants of various tribal settlements of all the districts of Malabar, all of their names cannot be mentioned here as the list itself is very large. Special thanks are due to Ramesh of the Muduga settlement of Chindakki (Asst. Secretary, Adivasi Kshema Samiti, Palakkad District), Murugan Mooppan of Thadikkundu, Pacha Mooppan of Thodikki and Burman Achan of Anavay (all Kurumba), Gopalan (*Gotramahasabha* activist, Tirunelli), C.V. Balan (Secretary, Tachanadan Mooppan Charitable Society), Kakkottara Kelu of Vellamunda (Kurichiyar), Palliyara Raman (prominent Kurichiya and a leader of the B.J.P), Adiyān *Mooppan* Kuruman of Trissileri, Chemmaran (Ex. President, Ulikkal Panchayat) and Alacheri Chaman of Parikkalam (both Karimpalar). Homage is paid to P.K. Kāḷan, Ex. President, Thirunelli Panchayat and the well-known promoter of tribal art forms of the Adiyāns, for wholeheartedly allowing me to attend a *Gaddika* and inviting me to partake in a *Kakkappula* performed under his guidance.

The staff of the various libraries and other repositories inside and outside Kerala deserves special thanks for providing the necessary facilities for study and

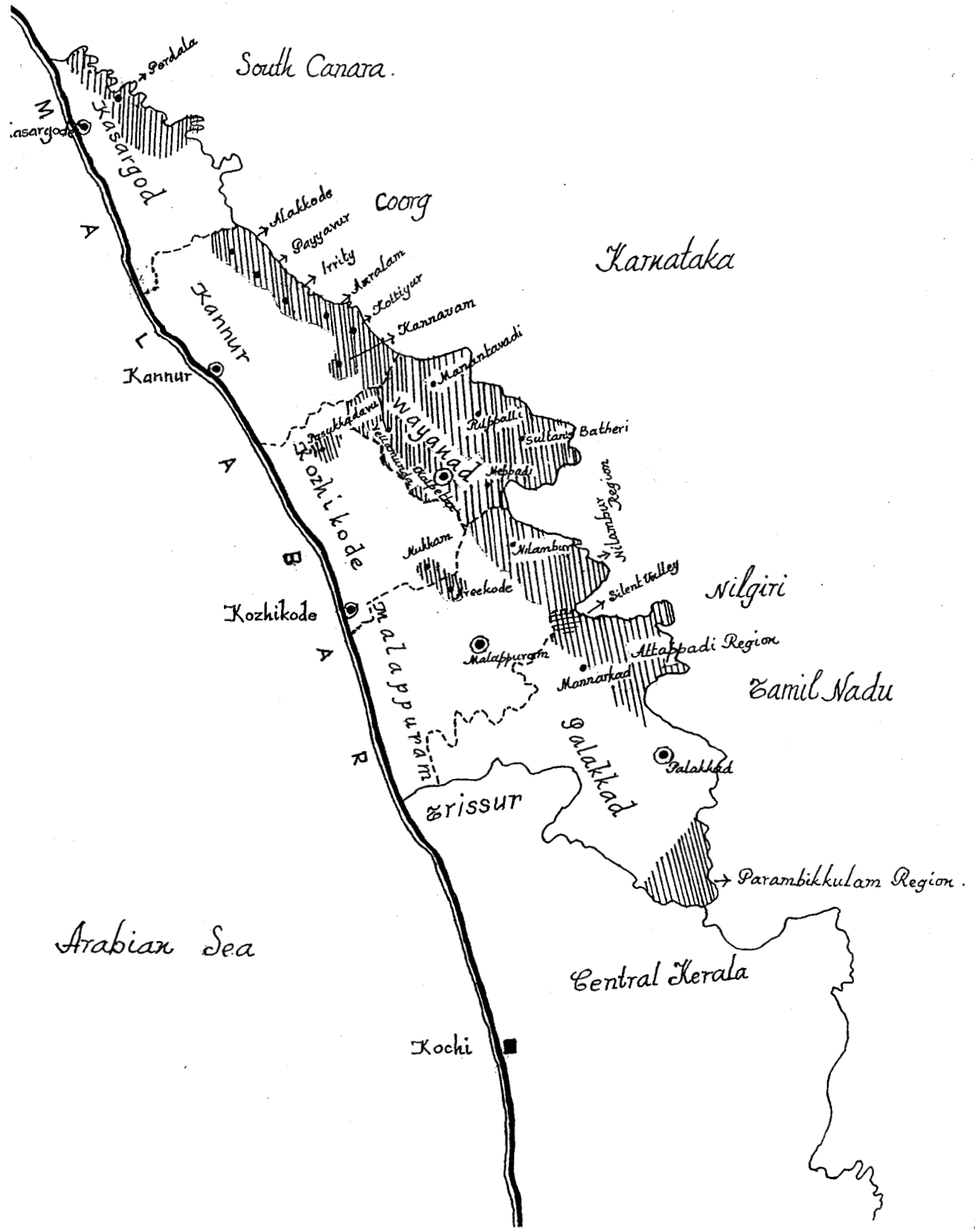
reference. Thanks are due to the staff of Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, Madras University Library, Chennai, Connemara Library, Chennai, Tamil Nadu Archives, Chennai, Madras Museum Library, Chennai, Mysore University Library, Anthropological Survey of India, Mysore, Library of the Department of Anthropology, Palayad, University of Kannur, Regional Archives, Calicut, C.H. Muhammed Koya Library, University of Calicut, History Department Library, University of Calicut, AHADS, Attappadi and KIRTADS, Calicut. Special thanks are due to Sankaran of C.H.M.K.S. library of Calicut University, Neena of KIRTADS Library, and Abdul Majeed of Calicut Archives.

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The ultimate word of gratitude is reserved for my husband, M.R. Manmathan, whose cooperation and personal sacrifices during the entire course of my research work far transcended the call of duty. I owe a lot to my parents especially to my father, K. Radhakrishnan, for keenly going through the draft of the thesis despite infirmities of old age. I recall with a prick of conscience, how my little daughter Anamika bore with fortitude my total withdrawal into research work, leaving her alone to carry on with her school assignments and without caring to attend to her small needs.

Manjula Poyil

TRIBAL AREAS OF MALABAR



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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

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

¹ G. Griegson ed., 'Of Death' in *Essays of Francis Bacon*, Oxford, 1937, pp. 9-11.

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

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

² E. O. James, *Prehistoric Religion: A Study in Prehistoric Archaeology*, London, 1957, p. 28.

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

Death customs of the tribes in Kerala, as a subject of study, has been a neglected area of study for social scientists till recently. Much of the existing works on this area focus on the practices of caste-Hindus. Despite the fact that the entire tribal life functions around the basic ideal of the cult of the dead, most of the anthropological studies have either ignored or missed this aspect and have focused mainly on the socio-economic structure of tribal life without attempting to link the two aspects. This phenomenon may probably be attributed to the element of mystery that prevails over the tribal religious

practices, and due to the unfriendly nature of the tribesmen. Collection of information relating to the cult of the dead had hitherto been almost impossible. It is only in the recent times that they have started disclosing such matters to outsiders. As far as archaeological studies are concerned, there is an overwhelming concentration on Megalithic monuments. Even the authorship of the megalithic builders is still an enigma. Archaeological excavations are yet to be undertaken in the graveyards of the present day tribal settlements to establish the Megalithic survivals among the tribes. Though disagreement continues to prevail over the hypothesis that the present day tribal people of Kerala are the direct descendants of the Megalithic builders, they still follow many practices associated with megalithic culture. Against this backdrop, the present study investigates the nature of anthropological data on death customs. It also tries to enquire into the evolutionary history of the cult of the dead on the basis of archaeological data.

Objectives of the Study

1. To trace the connection between Megalithic burial and tribal burial and to see the scope and extent of megalithic survivals among the tribes of Malabar. A comparative study of the excavation reports of Megalithic sites with the cult of the dead of the Malabar tribes would serve this purpose. The

study of extant megalithism would also be nourished by the contention that the little communities of Malabar still follow certain megalithic practices.³

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

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

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

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

³ K.J. John, “The Megalithic Culture of Kerala” in *Recent Advances in Indo-Pacific History*, edited by V.N. Misra and Peter Bellwood, New Delhi, 1978, pp. 485-489.

⁴ J. Fabian, *Time and the Other*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1983, p.3.

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

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

Methodology

The tribal groups under study are selected on the basis of the cardinal defining features outlined by Robert Redfield to identify a typical human community.⁵ All the tribal communities under study satisfy the four cardinal features noted by Redfield.

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

⁵ Robert Redfield, *The Little Community: Viewpoints for the study of a Human Whole*, Chicago, 1962, (Fifth Impression), p.4

2. Compactness: the community should be small, so small that either it itself is the unit of personal observation or else, being somewhat larger and yet homogenous, it provides in some part of it a unit of personal observation fully representative of the whole.
3. Homogeneity: Activities and states of mind are much alike for all persons in corresponding sex and age positions; and the career of one generation repeats that of the preceding. So understood, homogenous is equivalent to "slow-changing."
4. Self-sufficiency: The community is self-sufficient and provides for all or most of the activities and needs of the people in it. The little community is a cradle-to- the-grave arrangement.

We have two sets of data for the study of the present topic, one relating to death and burial rites and the other relating to post-burial funeral ceremonies to mark the parting-off of the departed soul to the other world (such as the secondary burial or depositing the relics of the dead like bones and ashes in places called ossuaries⁶). Because of the unpredictable nature of death and due to the poor communication and transportation facilities to the tribal areas, information regarding the occurrence of death could not be reported sufficiently early so as to enable a non-tribal to study the funeral rites of the deceased directly. A more important reason for the inability of an

⁶ The term 'Ossuary' is noted to have been first used by Sidney. B. Hartland in James Hastings ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. I, Edinburgh, 1964, p.442.

outsider to attend a death or burial of a tribal is that many tribes still do not allow non-tribes to see the corpse or to participate in the burial. While death to them is an occasion steeped in sentimental value, funeral is a significant religious ritual in which the participation of an outsider is looked down upon as an unnecessary interference. The present situation of tribal wrath and restlessness consequent to the unfortunate Muthanga incident⁷ has also made data collection through field work more difficult everywhere in the tribal region especially in Wynād. Ehrenfels, who worked among the Kādar of Cochin for more than three years in the 1950s to study them, lamented later that he was not able to attend even a single funeral ceremony⁸. Even after fifty years the same situation prevails. Hence, primary data on death and burial have to be acquired through interviews with people who are in the know of things like the aged and experienced persons, funeral functionaries, etc. Yet, a few post-burial funeral ceremonies like the *Chīru* of Iruḷas/Kuṟumbas/Mudugas, *Kākkappula* of Adiyāns/Paṇiyas, *Pēnakeṭṭu/Kūḷiyāṭṭam* of Karimpālans and *Nikalāṭṭam* of Kuṟichiyas could be attended. Though the atmosphere of tribal animosity and widespread suspicion about the intentions of the researcher still cause great hardships for a student of

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

⁸ U.R. Ehrenfels, *Kadar of Cochin*, Madras, 1952, p.168.

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

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

⁹ Cited in Richard. M. Ketchum, "Memory as History", *American Heritage*, Nov. 1991, p.143.

is that their memory contains two sets of data only- one about the past as a whole and the other about the present- the first one has been retained as myths. As is rightly observed, for most savages, myths communicate life experiences and cultural roots.¹⁰ Thus data relating to the evolution of the death customs have to be acquired from different scant resources including anthropological studies, interview reports and tribal folk songs. The theoretical studies of scholars on other tribal societies elsewhere have rendered considerable guidance in arriving at proper conclusions.

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

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

¹⁰ Ashish Nandy, "Cultural Frames for Social Transformation: A Credo" in *Between Tradition and Modernity: India's Search for Identity*, edited by Fred Dallmayr and G.N. Devy, New Delhi, 1998, p. 259.

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

The informants consist of nine categories. First, the headmen of various tribes of the selected settlements; second, religious functionaries like the oracles (in some cases the headman himself may act as the oracle); third, *teyyam*¹¹ dancers of tribes like the Māvilans, Karimpālans and Kaḷanādis; fourth, funeral functionaries like *Changāthi* of Kuṛichiyas and Karimpālans, *Karumi* or *Kaṛmi* of Adiyāns and Māvilans, and *Maṅṅūkkāran* of Iruḷas,

¹¹ *Teyyams* (etymologically derived from Sanskrit *daiva*) are deities impersonated in ritual dances of the Kannur and Kasargod districts of Kerala. After the harvest season, until the onset of monsoon, people gather around shrines to celebrate the festival of *teyyam*. The performer of the *teyyam* invokes the spirit, gets possessed and becomes a medium. In a state of identification with the divinity the performer bestows his grace and manifold blessings on the worshippers. The translation of emotional reactions into ceremonial representations gives *teyyam* rituals a stability they would not otherwise possess. The rituals are rigidly observed by the people and have become time-honoured conventions. Some *teyyams* are performed every year, some every alternate year, some once in a while, some once in three, seven, twelve or twenty-four years. A feature unique to *teyyam* is that although the festival is conducted by a particular caste or community, it is performed for the prosperity of the entire village. There are many communities performing *teyyam* of which Vannans and Malayans are the dominant. For details see Balan Nambiar, "Tai Paradevata: Ritual Impersonation in the Teyyam tradition of Kerala" in *Flags of Flame: Studies in South Asian Folk Culture*, edited by Heidrun Bruckner, Lothar Lutze and Aditya Malik, New Delhi, 1993, pp.139-163. Also see J. Richardson Freeman, "Performing Possession: Ritual and Consciousness in the Teyyam Complex of Northern Kerala", *Ibid*, pp. 109-138; KKN Kurup, *Cult of Theyyam and Hero-worship in Kerala*, Calcutta, 1973.

Mudugas, Kuṛumbas and Malasar; fifth, aged men above sixty years; sixth, middle-aged persons between forty and fifty years; seventh, young men between twenty and thirty; eighth, specialist grave-diggers; and lastly, bier-makers. In order to establish the connection between Megalithic culture and the primitive cult of the dead followed by the tribes, reports of Megalithic excavations in Kerala have been studied in association with the grave deposits of the tribal people. Besides, literary sources, dating from the Vedic age to the modern era, pertaining to the cult of the dead, are analyzed to examine the relevance of the theories put forward by eminent archaeologists and anthropologists on this subject.

Study Region

The present study focuses on the aborigines of the Malabar¹² region, covering an area from the Pālakkād to the Kasargōd districts of the Kerala state. This area is very rich in tribal population with more than 27 different tribal communities (official estimates may vary), each having its own distinct identity. Some fifty years back most of them lived in thick forests which sustained their livelihood. They lived in harmony with nature without causing any imbalance in the ecosystem. Their archaic form of life had helped them to

¹² Malabar is the ancient name for the entire Malayalam territory situating from the northern landmark of Mount Deli to Cape Comorin. In the British period it came to be attached with the northernmost political division of Kerala which was the only Malayalam speaking district of the Madras province. It consisted of the six districts of the present state of Kerala such as Pālakkād, Malappuram, Kozhikōde, Wynād, Kannūr and Kasargōd. In 1956, the erstwhile district of British Malabar was merged with the two princely states of Cochin and Travancore to form the state of Kerala.

retain their identity in the social, political, economic and religious spheres of life. The alienation of tribal lands to non-tribes combined with the new forest policy of the Government after 1952 caused considerable damage to their traditional way of living. Not only are they deprived of an access to their forest homelands but most of them were also forced to find subsistence through wage labour under the estate owners or a migrant settler. These adverse circumstances have greatly obliterated the nature of their life which was based on the tradition of harmony with the surrounding ecosystem. We are now witnessing the slow uprooting of a rich tribal culture. The phenomenon of the intrusion of non-tribal cultural ethos into the tribal milieu is noticed in all the tribal regions and it is eroding much of their cultural exclusiveness and identity. Even the cult of the dead, which is an integral, or primordial, part of their religion, is being invaded by external cultural influences. In the fast changing socio-economic circumstances it would be very difficult for any community to maintain these practices intact.

The selection of Malabar as a unit of study is dictated by certain important historical and cultural considerations. The British contact had a profound and overwhelming influence over the tribal people of this region which was not evident to the same degree among tribal people of other areas of Kerala. Penetration into tribal areas through the introduction of new landlordism, new forest policy, plantation industry, missionary activity or ethnographic/ anthropological ventures, all have had their sweeping impact on

the culture and world view of the tribal people. All the tribes under study inhabit the western slope of the high ranges or the adjoining forests and plains of the Western Ghats, except the three tribes of Aṭṭappādi. Aṭṭappādi is situated on the eastern slopes of the Western Ghats close to the Nīlgiri Hills. This area is noted for its unique tribal culture. Iruḷas, Mudugas and Kuṟumbas are the three tribes of this region of whom the last two tribes do not evince much differences in their socio-cultural practices. As the Aṭṭappādi region is close to the Nīlgiri, Coimbatore, Mēṭṭupālayam and Salem districts of Tamil Nādu, the tribes of Aṭṭappādi were able to maintain cultural contacts with the Tamil tribes like the Tōdas, Kōtas and Badagas which is reflected in their language, lifestyle, religious practices and funeral ceremonies.

There are 152 Iruḷa settlements in Aṭṭappādi of which Vayalūr, Shōḷayūr and Puthūr hamlets were selected for the field study. Each Iruḷa settlement has a tribal council with a headman or *Mūppan*, *Vaṇḍāri*, *Kuṟutalai*, *Maṇṇūkkāran* and *Talaivar*. The office of the *Mūppan* is hereditary. *Vaṇḍāri* deals with economic matters, *Maṇṇūkkāran*, the 'Knower of the Soil', supervises agricultural activities and funeral functions, *Kuṟutalai* is the messenger of the headman and *Talaivar* is the general servant of all others. The presence of this council is compulsory at the time of every funeral and the *Maṇṇūkkāran* is in charge of fixing the spot of the grave. At the time of sowing and reaping, the *Mūppan* and *Maṇṇūkkāran* invoke the ancestors and make offerings to them for a better yield. There are seven exogamous

clans among the Iruḷas and they are *Veḷḷaga*, *Chamban*, *Kaṟṟikaḷ*, *Kupḷikaḷ*, *Kuṟunākan*, *Pēratharau*, and *Ārumūppa*. Among these clans, *Kuṟunākan* is the 'dominant clan,' as per the concept of Evans-Prichard, and has a privileged position in funeral ceremonies: they occupy the frontline on such occasions.

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

Another important tribal area in the Pālakkād district is the Paṟambikulam hill region which is a reserve forest area and wild life sanctuary

now. The best known tribe here is the Kādar or 'Dwellers in the Forest'. There are ten Kādar settlements in this region. The two hamlets selected for the survey are Erumappāra and Paṛambikulam Dam site. A council of ten members under the headman or *Mūppan* decides matters concerning funeral ceremonies. Malasar (meaning 'people living in mountains') is another tribe of the same region settled inside the Paṛambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary. Sungam and Anchām Colony settlements provided data for the study. The main religious functionaries of the Kādar are *Mūppan* and *Maṇṇūkkāran*. Like the Aṭṭappādi tribes, Kādar and Malasar use decorated biers for carrying the dead. The funeral of the Kādar is accompanied by music and dance. The third tribe of this area called Malamalasar ('Kings of Mountains')¹³ is a very primitive tribe settled in the inaccessible forests of the higher elevations of the Paṛambikulam region. Primary data was collected from the two settlements of Nāhaṛūt and Anchām Colony. Their headman or *Talaivar* is the chief officiator in the funeral ceremony. In early days they used to deposit the corpse in the crevices between two rocks. The fourth tribe of this area is the Ēṛavāḷans or Villuvēdar ('Hunters using bows and arrows'). Fieldwork was conducted at Narippāracheḷḷa and Sarkāṛpathi colonies. Their chief religious functionary is the *Mūppan* or headman and their funeral ceremony is

¹³ According to A.A.D. Luiz, their name has its origin from a combination of the two words *Arassan* (king) and *Mala* or *Malai* (hill) to connote 'King of the Forest'. See A.A.D. Luiz, *Tribes of Kerala*, New Delhi, 1962, p.136.

accompanied by music. Like the Kādar and Malasar, they also use decorated bier for carrying the corpse.

The Nilambūr region, well known for its evergreen forests and teak plantations, is noted for three major primitive tribes of Kerala - the Chōlanāikkans, Aṟaṇādans and Āḷar. The Chōlanāikkans are the only known cavemen of Kerala. They inhabit the reserve forests of the Karuḷāyi and Chunkathara ranges of Nilambūr. Till recently they had led an insular life. Their abodes are the natural caves in the rocks known as *Kallu-Aḷai* meaning rock cave. There are eighteen such *Aḷais* and each one accommodates two to three households and is a kin-group hamlet. There is no clan organization among them and each *Aḷai* is a territorial unit. The head of a settlement is the *Chemmakkāran* who looks after the welfare of families within his territory.. He is the chief officiator of funeral ceremonies. He is the custodian of *Daivappura* or house of ancestors and the metal images of deities like *ānē uṟuva* (an elephant) *uḷi uṟuva* (a female tiger) *āḷu uṟuva* (a human being) and *kāḷai uṟuva* (an ox). Mānchēri is the nearest settlement of the Chōlanāikkans, where there is a cooperative society (established in 1977) for collecting forest produces from them in return for daily necessary goods, and it is the meeting place of all the tribesmen every week. These weekly gatherings provide the researcher ample scope for procuring useful information directly from them.

The Aṛaṇādans are settled in seven hamlets of which two, namely Kōṭṭupāra in Karuḷāyi and Chōkkād were surveyed for the present study. They are the only tribe in Malabar who don't have a headman now though the office of headmanship was prevalent among them in former days. In each family the eldest male member performs the funeral ceremonies. Āḷar, the third primitive tribe, is semi-nomadic even today and are found in the Idimaṇṇa settlement of Akampādam near Nilambūr (They are also found in some parts of the Pālakkād and Triśśur districts) Their chief ritual functionary is the headman or *Tharāvadukāran* who acts as the oracle as well.

There are two more tribes in the Nilambūr region namely Malamutthans and Malappaṇikkans. Both these tribes follow strict pollution rules even today. The Malamutthans are popularly known as *Mala-Nambūthiris* or *Mala-Nāirs* because of their surprising insistence on touch and distance pollution. A prominent Malamutthan settlement is Vīṭṭikkunnu near Mambād. Malamutthans at Chōkkād near Nilambūr are basically different from those of Vīṭṭikkunnu in their beliefs and practices and tradition reveals that they were banished from the main tribe due to their non-insistence on pollution rules. Even in funeral matters they have eschewed their traditional identity and are highly Sanskritized now. The funeral rituals of the Malamutthans are officiated by the headman or *Mūppan*. Malappaṇikkans are seen at Vaṭṭavaram and Badapuṛam near Mambād, Vadakkumpādam and Kaḷiyāra in Nilambūr and Karikkād in Manjēri. The Malappaṇikkan

settlements of Vaṭṭavaram and Badapuram provided sufficient primary data. The eldest *Kāranāvar* or *Mūppan* is the chief functionary in funeral ceremonies.

Wynād, geographically a part of the Nīlgiri plateau on the South-Western side, is inhabited by the eleven different tribes of Adiyāns, Paṇiyas, Kuṛichiyas, Muḷḷakuṛumans, Ūrāḷikuṛumans, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Thachanādan Mūppans, Wayanādan Kādars, Wayanādan Pathiyans, Kuṇḍuvādiyans, and Kaḷanādis. Adiyān is one of the main tribes of Wynād, who call themselves as *Ṛāvuḷar*, which means 'human being' in Kannada. The word Adiyān, which means slave or serf, was given to them by their landlords. This tribe is mainly concentrated in the Tirunelli, Triśśilēri and Vēmam villages of Mānathavādi Tālūk of Wynād. There are seventeen *Chemmam* or clan in the whole tribe. They are *Tirunelli*, *Badakku*, *Pothuru*, *Kallila*, *Kalankode*, *Mommota*, *Muthira*, *Anchila*, *Puthuru*, *Edamala*, *Kachala*, *Nālappādi*, *Magayi*, *Vullakutt*, *Panēlu*, *Saith* and *Cheruvālika*. Among these, three clans namely *Thirunelli*, *Badakku* and *Pothuru* are 'dominant clans' and are known as *Mantu*. Each *Chemmam* or clan has a leader called *Chemmakkāran*. Below the *Chemmakkāran*, at the settlement (*Kunnu*) level there is the *Kunnu Mūppan*, also called *Kunnukkāran*. Above these two is the *Nāṭṭumūppan*, i.e. the chief of the tribe, and *Kanalādi* (his assistant). Both the *Nāṭṭumūppan* and *Kanalādi* are well-versed in *Śāstrā*, the ritual chanting during the time of funeral ceremonies and marriages. *Śāstrā* describes details such as the myth of the

origin of the tribe, names of all their settlements, names of all clans, three *Munts*, origin of man, origin and uses of various organs of the body, origin of various diseases, origin of writing, Gods and Goddesses, the great ancestors and finally, death. Other important functionaries are the *Thammādikkāran* or oracle and *Karumi*. The main duty of a *Karumi* is to conduct funeral ceremonies in the proper way on the directions of the *Nāṭṭumūppan*. The *Karumi* is selected only from the *Nālappādi* or *Edamala chemmams*. The presence of all the above mentioned functionaries is compulsory during the time of a funeral ceremony. Various hamlets of the *Tirunelli* and *Triśśilēri* villages were visited to collect data on the *Adiyāns*.

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

¹⁴ C.A. Innes, *Malabar Gazetteer*, edited by F.B. Evans, Kerala Gazetteers Department, Government of Kerala, reprint, 1997, p.135.

Āṭṭāḷi thus: “A combined hymnist, ritualist and medium-dancer, engaged for rituals in honour of the Gods, the spirits of the dead, and for exorcising evil spirits who possesses persons.”¹⁵ Paṇiya settlements such as Koṭṭameradu near Pulpaḷḷi and Tēthār colony near Sulthān Bathēri in Wynād and Āyirakkaḷam and Ambalathaṭṭu colonies at Iritty of Kannūr district are surveyed for the present study.

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

¹⁵ Aiyappan. A, *The Paṇiya: an Ex-slave Tribe of South India*, Calcutta, 1992, pp. 78-82.

connection with the Kādar of Paṛambikulam. Each settlement has a head or *Ejmān* who officiates over the funeral ceremonies. Kaṇṇivayal Colony of Puḷinjāl near Veḷḷamuṇḍa is taken as a sample settlement for data collection. The Kuṇḍuvādiyans are concentrated in Kuṇḍuvādi, Veḷḷamkolli, Chīyambam, Iruḷambam, Pākkam, Perikallur, Pālakkolli and Poṛakkād. They have five clans namely *Karadan*, *Kuṇḍuvādiyan*, *Veḷḷamkolliyan*, *Chīyamban* and *Nālapādi*. The eldest male member of each clan is appointed as the headman of that clan. Members from Nālapādi clan alone can become oracles among the Kuṇḍuvādiyans. The headman or *Chāchappan* or *Kāraṇavar* officiates during funeral ceremonies and the participation of all the five headmen is compulsory on such occasions. The three Kuṇḍuvādiyan settlement surveyed are Tēlampatta, Chīyambam and Iruḷambam. Kaḷanādis are the only tribe who are *teyyam* dancers by profession. Their settlements are concentrated in Chīyambam, Appād, Nāykaṭṭi, Tēlampatta and Pākkam. Their headman or *Mūppan* is the chief officiator of the burial ceremonies. An important point to note is that the grave-diggers of the Kaḷanādis are Paṇiyas whom they call *Modali*. The Kaḷanādis were met at Tēlampatta and Pākkam. The Wayanādan Pathiyans live in Tēlampatta, Kidangād and Nenmēni. There are no clustered settlements for the Pathiyans, they live in individual households. They are segmented into five *Illams* or clans known as Kazhampillam, *Vaṭṭathillam*, *Mūrillam*, *Anchillam* and *Nālillam*. The

Nālillakkar has the right to inform the news of death to all others. Tēlampatta Pathiyan settlement provided us the necessary research data.

Three tribes of Wynād who share the ethnonym 'Kuṟumba/Kuṟumar' are Kāṭṭunāikkans or Jēnukuṟumar, Ūrāḷikuṟumans or Vēṭṭakuṟumar and Muḷḷakuṟumans. In the area adjoining Karnataka, Kāṭṭunāikkans are known as Jēnu-Kuṟumbas and in the Tamil region as Tēn-kuṟumar. Ūrāḷikuṟumans are known in Karnataka as Bēṭṭa-Kuṟumbas. The Kāṭṭunāikkans are a primitive tribe found in Karuḷāyi and Chunkathara ranges of Nilambūr (where they are known as Pathināikkans), Paśukkadv region of Kōzhikode District, Kidangād, Puṟakkādi, Pulpaḷḷi, Nūlpuzha, Maruthōnkara and Taruvaṇa of Wynād. They are popularly known as Tēn-kuṟumar or Jēnu-Kuṟumbas because of their expertise in honey collection. Their headman or *Mūppan* is the chief officiator of funeral ceremonies and, like the Chōlanāikkans, they too have *Daivappura*. Primary data on the Kāṭṭunāikkans were collected from their settlements of Nadavalli, Guṇikaparamb and Ānappāra in Wynād and of Muṇḍakkadv in Nilambūr. Ūrāḷikuṟumans are found in Tirunelli, Puṟakkādi, Kalpetta, Kuppathōd, Ponginichkallūr, Chēdelat, Nūlpuzha and Kidangād. Till recently, they were nomadic food gatherers and hunters, a fact which can be deducted from their name Vēṭṭa-kuṟumar or 'hunting people'. They are strict followers of the rules of pollution just like the Malamutthans, Malappaṇikkans or Kuṟichiyas. Their headman or *Ajjin* officiates over funeral functions. Their priest *Bijakkālan* plays an important role in matters dealing with the spirit of

the dead which is known as *Daivam Kāṇal* or 'calling in the spirit of the dead'. Data on them were collected from the settlements of Kuppachi, Tirunelli and Thoppetta. Muḷḷakuṟumans have a distinct identity and they share the same social and economic position of the Kuṟichiyas. They are concentrated mainly in Nūlpuzha, Idangād, Sulthān Bathēri, Muṭṭil, Puṟakkādi, Koṭṭappādi, Kuppāthōd, Pulpaḷḷi, Vēmam, Tirunelli, Muthanga, etc. Their settlements are divided into four regions namely Karanādu, Kallunādu, Pākkanādu and Narianādu. Their headman or *Pōruṇōn* and his assistant *Pōrāthōn* supervise funeral ceremonies. Each settlement has a *Daivappura* as the abode of ancestors and Gods. Important settlements like Pākkam have separate *Daivappuras* for Gods and ancestors. Pākkam, Thirumukham and Koranjivayal colonies provided all the necessary information regarding funeral ceremonies.

The Kuṟichiyas, the most popular and land-owning tribe in Malabar are found in Wynād district and certain areas of Kaṇṇūr district adjoining Wynād. In Kaṇṇūr, their main settlement is in the Kaṇṇavam forest region. They are also found in Kānjirakkolli and Kīzhpāḷḷi. In Wynād they are found in Mānanthavādi, Panamaram, Tirunelli, Kalpetta Kambaḷakkād, Ēchōm and Pulpaḷḷi. They still live in large matrilineal joint family houses called *taṟawāds* (Similar to that of the Nairs). Each *taṟawād* consists of thirty to hundred members. The Kuṟichiya tradition speaks of 108 *taṟawāds* of which only 57 exist now. Their headman or *Piṭṭan* or *Pūppan* or *Kāraṇavan* is the

chief functionary in funeral rites and he acts as the oracle too. There is another funeral functionary called *Changāthi* who has a ritual role in washing the corpse. Each *taṛawād* has a *Nekal-muṛi*, the room of the great ancestors and a portion of the kitchen is set apart for *Pēna* or the revered wives of the great ancestors. Well-known Kuṛichiya *taṛawāds* are Paḷḷiyara, Maṭṭal and Kakkōṭṭara in Wynād and Edamana in the Kaṇṇavam area. Important Kuṛichiya settlements surveyed included Paḷḷiyara and Kakkōṭṭara in Wynād and Aṛakkal in Kaṇṇavam.

The main tribes in Kaṇṇūr district are Malayālar, Māvilāns and Karimpālans. Malayālar is a very small community of the Āṛaḷam forest. Their main settlement is the Vīṛpād area. They are divided into the four *Illams* or clans of *Palyāṭ*, *Mēppāṭ*, *Uṇṇikōt* and *Veḷiman*. Each family has a *Kāraṇavar* who is the chief functionary in funeral ceremonies. The Māvilāns are a tribe found in Vayakkara, Thadikkadav, Padiyūr, Kallyāt, Nediyaṅga and Payyāvūr. There are two subdivisions among them - Tuḷu Māvilāns and Chingathān Māvilāns. The present study deals only with the Chingathān Māvilāns. There are 36 clans or *taṛawāds* among them, each one having a *Mūppan* or *Thaladiyan* and a *Kaṛmi*. *Kaṛmi* is the funeral functionary of the Māvilāns. The Māvilān settlement of Vathilmada Bhūdān Colony at Payyāvūr has served the necessary study data. Karimpālan settlements are found at Padiyūr, Nuchiyād, Nediyaṅga, Thenkarachāl, Parikkaḷam, Mundayād, Ālakkōd, etc. The tribe is divided into five clans or *Illams*: Chappili,

Puthuśśēri, Paḷḷath, Machini and Kalla. Each clan has a *Changāthi*, who belongs to another clan, and who performs the funeral rites. Field work is conducted in the two settlements of Muṇḍayād and Parikkaḷam.

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

The funeral practices of all the aforesaid tribes are influenced, and to an extent determined, by the mode of subsistence of each one of them. Thus we find variations in the cult of the dead among the tribes who are largely food gatherers and hunters and those who are bonded labourers and settled agriculturists. Tribes like the Kādar, Malasar, Malamalasar, Chōlanāikkans, Āḷar, Aṟaṇādans, Ēṟavāḷans, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Malamutthans and Malappaṇikkans belong to the category of hunter-gatherers. Others like Kuṟumbas and Mudugas practice slash and burn cultivation along with hunting and gathering. Adiyāns and Paṇiyas are agricultural and plantation labourers, who were bonded labourers till very recently. Kuṟichiyas,

Muḷḷakuṟumans, Wayanādan Pathiyans, Thachanādan Müppans, Kuṇḍuvādiyans, Kaḷanādis, Wayanādan Kādar, Iruḷas, Karimpālans, Māvilāns and Malayāḷar are settled agriculturists who are small-scale or large-scale landowners and practice plough cultivation. Ūrāḷikuṟumans and Koṟagas depend mainly on craft work, like pottery making and basket making, for their livelihood. Almost all tribesmen, apart from their traditional forms of livelihood, also practice wage labour as a part-time occupation. The funeral rites of the first category of tribes are not elaborate or very expensive and they propitiate the ancestors through offerings of honey and meat of wild animals. The second category of tribesmen has elaborate secondary funeral rites, with blood sacrifices. Adiyāns and Paṇiyas, who form the third category, have an elaborate system of funeral rites, a well-established hierarchy of ritual functionaries, a highly exploitative system of priesthood and a great record of funeral songs. The fourth category of tribes has a highly 'Hinduized', elaborate funeral customs. It is among these tribes that the ancestors acquire a more pre-eminent status and ancestor worship takes a clear and definite form (others have only vague and abstract ideas of their ancestors). Some among them like the Kaḷanādis, Karimpālans, Māvilāns and Kuṟichiyas propitiate their ancestors through *teyyam* cult. The funeral rites of the last category of tribes are less elaborate owing to their poverty. They do not have the wherewithal to undertake expensive funeral rites. Thus the funeral practice of food gatherers and hunters are different from those of the bonded labourers or

settled agriculturists. The more primitive the modes of subsistence of a tribe, the less elaborate and less expensive are its funeral practices.

CHAPTER 2

SOURCES AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

For the study of the patterns of the disposal of the dead and the cult of ancestor worship among the tribes of Malabar, we have various kinds of sources. Any attempt at contriving an authentic account of these aspects requires a careful survey of the traditional literary sources, archaeological data and anthropo-sociological studies and reports. Such data should be verified through elaborate field studies as well.

Literary Sources:

The most baffling problem that confronts the student of the cult of the dead of the tribes in Malabar is the near-absence of literary evidences. We have no direct literary evidence on this topic but only general references to burial practices and ancestor worship in India that date from the Vedic period¹ to the *Sangam* Age.² The most striking point, when we go through these literary sources, is that rituals and ceremonies associated with the tribal-

¹ The date assigned to the *Rg Vedic* period is 1500 BC to 1000 BC while that to the *Later Vedic* period is 1000 BC to 500 BC. See R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*, New Delhi, 1983, pp.23, 58.

² There is no consensus among scholars regarding the period of the *Sangam* literature. For KAN Sastri, (*A History of South India: From Pre-historic Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar*, Madras, 1975, Fourth Edition, p.115) it falls into the first three or four centuries of the Christian era. Ilamkulam Kunjan Pillai puts it to the first 4 or 5 centuries of the Christian era (*Studies in Kerala History*, Trivandrum, 1970, p.135). But Rajan Gurukkal, in his article "Forms of Production and Forces of Change in Ancient Tamil Society", *Studies in History*, (ns), 5(2), 1989, p.159, assigns a time bracket of six centuries from circa 300 BC-AD 300 to the *Sangam* Age. He also argues that the term *Sangam* is inappropriate because the so-called *Sangam* works were not contemporaneous since there was a time lag of many centuries between the actual composition and the final compilation. He suggests that the works may be called "Ancient Tamil Anthologies" and the age "the period of Ancient *Tamilakam*".

burial and worship of the ancestor conforms to a great extent to the descriptions detailed in them. Literary evidences are based on tradition rather than on direct experience. So it is clear that funeral ceremonies of the tribes are largely traditional and seem to have persisted for many centuries. However a few practices have become obsolete, though the tribes still remember them.

The Vēdas contain the earliest literary records on the cult of the dead. Some of the funeral practices of the Vedic people have striking similarities with the practices of the Malabar tribes. This doesn't mean that the latter were accommodating the Vedic practices. The coincidence can simply be explained with reference to the semi-tribal character of the Vedic culture and the universal traits of tribal practices. The *R̥g Vēda* mentions *Anagni-dag-dha* (X, 15:14) or burial and *Agni-dagdha* (X, 16:10, X 16:1, 6) or cremation. We also find verses dedicated to the custom of complete burial in the *R̥g Vēda* (X, 18:11). From these verses it is quite clear that the burial is the oldest method of the disposal of the dead. But cremation was more popular during the Vedic period. Most of the verses concerning funeral ceremonies are dedicated to cremation than to burial. These two methods exist among the Malabar tribes though burial is more popular than cremation. Max Muller, quoting from *R̥g*

Vēda X, 14:9 gives the Vedic description of various rituals performed during the course of cremation.³ The hymn says:

‘Go away, disperse, and remove from hence,
The Fathers have made this place for him-
Yama grants him this resting-place,
Sprinkle with water day and night.’

It is supposed to be addressed to the spirits hovering round the place of burial. *Yama* is the God of the Fathers, and he is supposed to have assigned this place to the dead person as his final resting place. When it is said that the place is sprinkled with water day and night, this implies that it ought to be thus honoured by the relations of the dead. (A similar tradition is followed by the *Iruḷas*. When they reach the place of burial, with the corpse, they throw stones in the *Koppai* (graveyard) exhorting the spirits hovering there to keep away from that place as it has to be set apart for the newly dead).

Another funeral practice of Malabar tribesmen, addressing of the newly dead by the ritual performer at the time of the retreat of the attendees from the graveyard, finds a striking parallel in the *Rg Vēdic* verse 10.18.3:

³ F. Max Muller, *Collected Works of Max Muller: Anthropological Religion*, New Delhi, 1977, p.245. (First Published 1892)

“We living men, survivors, now return
 And leave the dead; may our oblations please
 The Gods and bring us blessing! now we go
 To dance and jest and hope for longer life”.

After this they proceeded homewards, the younger walking in front, the elder behind. But before re-entering the house, they purified themselves by chewing leaves of the Nimba tree, and by touching fire, grains of barley, and water. During one night they cooked no food, and for three nights ate nothing containing salt.⁴

Ṛg Vēda X, 14:8 mentions that heaven is the place or home of the dead. In this heaven there is light and every form of happiness. The spirits of the dead are material enough to enjoy the most material things such as Soma, milk, honey and *Sura*, as also the sound of singing and the flute. *Ṛg Vēda* X, 135:1 speaks of a fig-tree where *Yama* drinks with the Gods. *Yama* was the first of the mortals who died and found out the way for many to the realm where he reigns- death is his path.⁵ The concept of heaven and *Yama* are popular among the tribes like Kuṛichiyas and Muḷḷakuṛumans who are greatly influenced by Hinduism. *Ṛg Vēda* X, 15:6 mentions that on the third or the tenth day, the collection of the bones is made and they are buried in an urn.

⁴ Monier Williams, *Religious Thought and Life in India: Vedism, Brahmanism and Hinduism*, New Delhi, 1974, p.283.

⁵ V.M. Apte, *Social and Religious Life in the Grihya-Sūtras*, 1939, p.290.

Offerings to the fathers (corresponding to the later *Śrāddhas*) are referred to in *Rg Vēda* X, 15:6.⁶ The tribes in Malabar collect the bones of those who are cremated on the third or fifth or seventh day in earthen pots and offerings are made to their ancestors and the newly deceased. *Atharva Vēda* XVIII, 2:34 mentions two ways of disposal known as *Paropta* or casting out and *Uddhitah* or exposure of the dead.⁷ These two modes of burial were popular among the primitive tribes in Malabar like the Kāṭṭunāikkans, Malamalasar, Kādar and Chōlanāikkans till very recently. The *Atharva Vēda* develops the idea of hell or *Naraka-lōka* as the place of darkness. This concept also exists among the tribes of Malabar.

The *Āraṇyakas* and *Sūtras* of the post-Vedic age describe different modes of disposal and funeral ceremonies followed by the Vedic people. The *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* chapter III informs us that when the heart departs from the body, the body is eaten by the dogs and the birds tear it into pieces. The body gets such an end due to the absence of the heart. This may indirectly refer to the custom of casting out the dead body to be devoured by the birds and beasts.⁸ In early days of their history Malamalasar and Kādar followed this type of disposal of the dead. *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* also mentions about the transmigration of soul, which is the latest development in the tribal belief of soul after death. The *Chandōgya Upanishad* VIII: 8, 5

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.292.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.293.

⁸ K. Krishnamoorthy, "Literary References to the Disposal of the Dead in Ancient India", *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. LII, Parts II & III, Aug-Dec. 1974, pp.303-304.

makes a reference to funeral. From *Aśvalāyana Sūtra* IV.1 we get the exact picture of a grave used by the Vedic community for the disposal of the dead. It gives us the details of the factors to be taken into consideration in the preparation of a burial pit for a dead person. "If he dies, let someone have a piece of land dug up, south-east or south-west (of the village) inclining towards the south or the south-east; others say, towards the south-west. It should be as long as a man with out-stretched arms, one fathom (*vyāma*) in breadth, and one span (*vitasti*) in depth".⁹ Similarly the tribes in Malabar follow measurements and direction while preparing a grave. The same *Sūtra* gives a clear picture of a graveyard. "The place (*śmaśāna*) should be free on all sides and rich in plants. If they should be thorny and milky, let it be said before. One requirement of a burning ground (*śmaśāna*) is that the water should run round it on all sides".¹⁰ The graveyards of most of the tribes in Malabar are situated inside the forest near rivers or streams.

The *Śrauta Sūtra* VI 10:2 sets forth certain rules as to how the dead body of a person should be treated before it is taken to the place of burning. "When he dies they take him out on the sacrificial path (or, according to others, not on the sacrificial path), and perform the adornments of the dead in the place where the sacrificial vessels are cleaned. They shave the hair of the head, the beard, and the hair of the body. They anoint him with spikenard and

⁹ F. Max Muller, *op. cit.*, pp.242-243.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.243.

put on him a wreath of spikenard. Some clear the body of its contents and fill it with sprinkled butter. They then cut off the seam of a new piece of cloth and cover the body so that the other seam is turned towards the west, and the feet remains uncovered. The sons should keep the piece that has been cut off”.¹¹ The tribes of Malabar wash the dead body and anoint it with turmeric paste or sandalwood paste. They wrap the body in a new cloth. Tribes like Thachanādan Mūppans and Kāṭṭunāikkans tear the cloth and keep a piece of it for later ceremonies. The *Śṛāuta Sūtra* also contains details about funeral processions. “They now carry his fires and his sacrificial vessels to the same place. The old people follow with the dead, in odd numbers, and not in couples (that is not men and women together). Some say (that the dead should be carried) on a car drawn by cows... Then follow the relatives...the old men first, the young ones last. When they have thus reached the place, the performer walks, three times, round the spot...”¹² The tribes in Malabar carry all belongings of the dead and are followed by all male members. Women are not allowed to accompany the funeral procession. The corpse is carried on bamboo/wooden bier. After reaching the graveyard, the followers of the corpse circle the grave three times or seven times.

The *Grihya Sūtras* mention two categories of the spirits of the dead, the *Pitrs* or the spirits of the mythical ancestors and *Prētas* or the spirits of the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.242-243.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 244-245

lately departed. It also specifies two types of ancestral offerings to *Pitṛs* known as *Pitṛ-yajna* or daily sacrifice and *Paṛvaṇa-śṛāddhas* which is performed on the *Paṛvaṇa* or the day of the new moon.¹³ The best example of the concept of *Pitris* in Malabar is the *Nekal* or *Muni* of the Kuṛichiyas. The Kuṛichiyas make daily offerings to their deified ancestors. In addition to this special offerings are made to them on *Kaṛkkidaka-vāvu* or the new moon day of the month of *Kaṛkkidaka*. *Paraskara Gṛihya-Sūtra* mentions two kinds of funeral offerings for the newly departed souls known as *Ēkōddishṭa* and *Sapindikaraṇa*.¹⁴ Similarly, the tribes in Malabar give food offerings to the newly departed on their graves and in their houses till the end of pollution.

The epic *Mahābhārata* gives us valuable information about tree burial which is a popular practice among the tribes in the western world. In the *Vana-parva* of *Mahābhārata*, we find that the Pāṇdavas who were sent in exile (*Ajnātavāsa*) by the Kauravas concealed their weapons on a *Sami*-tree. In order to conceal their identity and to save their weapons they told the people that they were tying the corpse of their mother who had died on the way, on the top of the tree.¹⁵ The *Śatapatha Bṛāhmaṇa* XIII: 8, 2:1 mentions the building of tumuli or mount or tomb over the grave.¹⁶ Tribes like the Karimpālans, Kaṣanādis, Māvilāns and Wayanādan Kuṛichiyas follow the practice of preparing platforms over the grave. We get information of the

¹³ V.M. Apte, *op.cit*, pp295-296.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.307.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp295-296.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.307.

preservation of the corpse for short periods from *Satyāsadha Śrayudha Sūtra*, *Vaikhana Śrayudha Sūtra*, *Ramāyaṇa* and *Vishṇu Purāṇa*. *Satyāsadha Śrayudha Sūtra* (29, 4-29) and *Vaikhana Śrayudha Sūtra* (38-21) insist that the corpse of the *Ahitāngi* should be placed in a tube or trough filled with sesame oil and brought home in a cart. In *Ramāyaṇa* (*Ayōdhya-kāṇḍa* 66, 14-16, 76.4) the body of Dasaradha was kept for several days in a tube with oil till the arrival of Bharatha. The *Vishṇu-purāṇa* (IV, 5.7) reveals that Nimmi's body did not decompose and looked fresh owing to its coverage with oil and redolent substances.¹⁷ In former days tribes like Iruḷas, Mudugas, Kuṛumbas and Kādar kept the body of the dead for more than four days before burial. In order to prevent from decaying, they smeared turmeric paste and gingelly oil on the corpse.

The Buddhist and Jain literature also furnish valuable information regarding various methods of the disposal of the dead. The Jain text *Laḷithā Visthāra* (p265) speaks of the custom of leaving the dead bodies to the mercy of wild beasts and birds. *Dhammapāda* commentary (i) p. 59, an early Pāli text of the Buddhist period, mentions two kinds of burial grounds- *Alhana* and *Sivathika* for the disposal of the dead. The first was the place where the dead bodies were cremated and the second one, the place where the corpses were thrown away to undergo the natural process of decay or to be

¹⁷ K. Krishnamoorthy, *op. cit*, p.304.

devoured by wild beasts. The *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* portrays the death and cremation of Lord Buddha.¹⁸

Kautilya's *Aṛthaśāstra* speaks about punitive taxes imposed upon persons violating the rules regarding the disposal of the dead. A tax of 12 *paṇas* was imposed upon those who interred or cremated the dead body beyond the demarcated burial ground. A similar tax of 50 *paṇas* was imposed on those who threw the human corpse inside the city limits other than the cremation ground.¹⁹ Each tribal settlement in Malabar has its own burial ground and the dead body of an outsider is not allowed to be buried there. Such cases are viewed severely by the tribal council.

Kalidāsa in his *Raghuvamśa* (VIII, 95, p182) describes death at holy places like Pṛayāga, the confluence of the Yamuna and Sarayu.²⁰ The Chinese traveler Hieun-T-Sang who visited India during the time of Harsha describes the various methods used by the people of that time for the disposal of the dead. He mentions about water burial, cremation and interment.²¹ Baṇa, the court poet of Harsha, in his work *Harshacharita* (p.164) mentions the cremation of Prabhākaravaṛdhana, Harsha's father on the banks of the river Saraswathi.²²

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 307-309.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.307-308.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

The ancient Tamil anthologies²³ also furnish valuable information on the burial practices. They mention different modes of burial practices that existed in South India. The *Puṛaṇānūru* deals with the burial ground, urn burials and cremation. The term used in *Puṛaṇānūru* (verses 228, 256, 356) for graveyard is *Kādu*. Other words also are used in connection with the term graveyard. *Puṛaṇ-gādu* means wasteland adjoining the forest used for the burial of the dead. *Mudu-kādu* or *Mudūr* is the place set apart for the burial or cremation of the dead body of the ancients or old men. *Puṛaṇānūru* (225 lines 7-8, 238 lines 1-5, 240 lines 7-9, 244 line 3, 237 line 13, 356 line 1-4, 359 lines 1-8, 360 lines 15-16, 362 lines 12-21, 363 line 10, 364 lines 10-13) mentions “the graveyard (*Kādu*), the place of the ancients on the outskirts of the town or on the skirts of the hilly ground, an expanse of blackish or alkaline soil overgrown with the tree-spurge (*Euphorbia antiquorum* or *Kaḷḷi*) and other xerophytes and many thorny shrubs, full of buried urns, where, even during day-time, the owl from its hole in the old tree hoots, where the ‘red-eared’ cock and the *Poguvāḷ* bird sit without fear on the conical heap (of stones) above the lids inverted over the burial-urns, where the vulture descends on its many foot-paths which cross each other and the strong-billed crow flies as it likes, where they grasp the carcasses of the dead and eat the white

²³ See for details K.R. Srinivasan, “The Megalithic Burials and Urn-fields of South India in the light of Tamil Literature and tradition”, *Ancient India*, No.2, July 1946, pp.9-16.

flesh till their mouths reek of the odour, and where lie strewn fragments of white bones and numerous stones concealed by the over-growth of jungle”.²⁴

The Tamil epic *Maṇimēkhalai* mentions five modes of the disposal of the dead: “*Suduvōṟ – Iduvōṟ - Todu Kuḷippaduppōṟ – Talvayinadaippōṟ - taliyīṟkavippōṟ*” (Ch. 6, 11, 66-67). This five-fold division of the mode of disposal of the dead occurs in the epic in the context of the description of a graveyard of the Chōla capital, Puhar or Kaviripūmpaṭṭinam. *Suduvōṟ* are those who are cremated, *iduvōṟ* are those who are cast away or exposed to the action of natural forces or wild animals, *todu-Kuḷi-paduppōṟ* are those whose the dead body are interred in pits dug into the ground, *tal-vayin-adaippōṟ* are those who are interred in subterranean cellars or vaults and *taliyīṟ-kavippōṟ* are those whose bodies are placed inside burial urns with lids inverted tightly over them.²⁵ The first and the third modes of burial exist among the tribes in Malabar today while the second one has completely disappeared. Vault-burial and urn-burial are also absent among them today- they have no idea about them at all. But the fourth mode of burial continues among them in a completely different form: most of the tribes bury the dead in graves with a side chamber dug inside it.

The *Padirrupattu* in one context speaks about *mannār-maraitta tali vanni manrattu-vilangiya-kāde* (44 lines 20-23). This means that the

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.12.

graveyard (*Kādu*) where the burial-urn (*tali*) that entombed the king lay was the vast expanse below the *vanni* (*Prosopis spicigera*) tree. This shows both the custom of urn-burial and the manner in which the royal funerals were performed in those days.²⁶ *Puṛānānūṟu* also mentions cremation and the following are the examples: verses 231: 1-4 by Auvaiyār on the death of the chief Nedumananji, verse 240: 7-10 by Kuṭṭuvan-Kīraṇār on the death of the Veļ chief of Āy, verse 244:1-7 by the Chēra king Chēramān Makōtai on the death of his queen etc.²⁷ From these verses it is evident that during the period of early *Tamiḷakam* cremation was preferred for chiefs and kings. This may be attributed to the steadily advancing process of Aryanization in South India. Similarly the tribes in Malabar generally choose cremation for their revered elders and dignitaries. Pereyin Muruvalar in his verse in praise of the Pandyan Nambi Nedumjeliyan refers to different kinds of funerals in *Iduka-venṟo Suduka-venṟo Padu-kuḷi-p-paduka* (*Puṛam* 239: 20-21). Here *Iduka* stands for exposure and burial, *suduka* for cremation and *Padu-kuḷi-p-paduka* for inhumation.²⁸ All these three modes of burial exist among the Malabar tribes. *Tōlkāppīyam* (portion 60) *Puṛānānūṟu* (verses 221, 223, 232, 260, 261, 263, 264, 265, 314, 306, 329 and 335) *Ahanānūṟu* (131) and *Ahanānūṟu* give

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

information about *nadukal* which is explained as a tall stone planted over a grave.²⁹ This practice is absent among the tribes of Malabar today.

Though the tribes in Malabar have a rich folklore tradition, they contain only scant references to funeral rituals. Exceptions to this are the *Śāstrā* or ritual chanting of the Adiyāns, *Kākkappāṭṭu* and Grave-digging songs of Paṇiyas and funeral dance songs of Iruḷas, Mudugas and Kuṟumbas. However, the folk memories of people all over Kerala, including some of the tribes, contain rich information on the megalithic burials and graveyards found all over the land. Among the tribes in Travancore dolmens are known with names which convey the meaning 'stones of the monkeys of India'. The people of Anjanad valley call them '*Vāli-vīdus*'³⁰ or abodes of the monkeys. The Ūraḷis, a tribe in Travancore, call them *Pāndukuzhis*, pits made by the Pāndūs or Pāndavās to whom are ascribed all mysterious monuments. In Perambra they are known as Pandavan Kadu.³¹ Menhirs are popularly known as *Vāthamkolli* among the people of the Cardamom Hills of north Travancore. At Ānappāra near Trichur they are known as *Pulachi-kallu*, – i.e., reminiscent of a memorial stone on a battle field and commemorates a Pulaya woman (*Pulachi*) who died at the spot. The rock-cut tombs and simple funerary monuments are considered as places of *Samādhi* of sages in the Malabar

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Bali is the mythical monkey king of Ramayana. This is part of aryanization or hinduization.

³¹ See K.J. John, 'Perambra', 1979, "New Light on Kodakkals of Malabar", in *Indian Archaeology, New Perspective*, edited by R.K. Sarma, New Delhi, pp.148-154.

area.³² In the Dēvikuḷam area rock-cut caves are known as *Pancha-pāṇḍavaṛ Madangaḷ* or *Pancha-pāṇḍava-padukka*. The graveyards which contained large pyriform urns (*Muthumakkachādi/ Muthumakkathāzhi*) surrounded by stones are called *Kurangu-paṭṭada*. Megalithic sites are locally called *Kurangupaṭṭadai* which has sometimes been taken to mean the workshop of the monkeys and associated with a legend relating to the monkey hoards that followed Rama. K.R. Srinivasan argues that the modern name *Kurangu-paṭṭadai* is a corruption of the Tamil name *Kurakkupaṭṭadai* or *Kurakkuppaṭṭadai* which means ‘a sculpture or tomb lowered into the earth’. This can only refer to stone cists.³³ Iḷamkuḷam observes that as the Brahmins used to denote Dravidians by the word *Kurangu* (monkey), the term *Kurangu-paṭṭadai* came to mean Dravidian cemeteries.³⁴ Ehrenfels notes that the Kādar of Cochin call the burial monuments *muniar*, the chambers of the *munis* or spirits.³⁵

Previous Studies

The significance of funeral ceremonies and belief in after-life has been a subject of study among social scientists from the nineteenth century. While some have attempted to reconstruct the history of the origin of religion among primitive peoples, others have formulated theories on it. Many of them have

³² L.A. Krishna Iyer, *Kerala Megaliths and their Builders*, Madras, 1967, pp.15-30

³³ K.R. Srinivasan, *op. cit.*, p.9.

³⁴ Iḷamkuḷam, “Kurangukalude Pattada”, in *Annathē Kēralam*, Kottayam, 1959, pp.126-147.

³⁵ U.R. Ehrenfels, *Kadar of Cochin*, Madras, 1952, p.200.

also analyzed various aspects of the cult of the dead. The religious belief of the aborigines received a great impetus with Charles Darwin's formulation of the Theory of Evolution in 1859. Edward B. Taylor, who is popularly known as the founding father of Anthropology, was greatly influenced by Darwin's theory. The credit of having laid the foundation of an anthropological study of religion belongs to him. In 1865 he published his work *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* and an article in *Fortnightly Review* entitled "The Religion of Savages". In 1871 he elaborated his idea of Animism or Spirit Worship basing on these two works and wrote *Primitive Culture*. His idea of Animism arose in the context of dream and death experience. A body-soul dichotomy was perceived in dream and projected into the death situation in which the survival of the ghost-soul after destruction of the body was postulated. He argued that "once the basic premise of an animistic ideology-belief in the existence of spiritual beings and souls had been developed, the path was laid for eventual development to later stages of religious ideology. But before the second stage was reached, the original belief in souls and spirits had come to include beliefs in malevolent spirits or demons, and in the spirits of the ancestors."³⁶

The contemporary of Taylor, Lubbock, accepted the theory of animism in his work *The Origin of Civilization*. He points out that dreams are intimately associated with the 'lower' forms of religion and maintains that

³⁶ For details see Edward B. Taylor, *Primitive Culture*, London, 1871.

they were the basis of belief in the life after death.³⁷ The publication of these two works opened a new chapter in the study of funeral practices and life after death of the primitive peoples. Both Taylor and Lubbock gave particular attention to the primitive beliefs in the metamorphosis of soul into ghost. They are of the opinion that the first cult known to humanity was the cult of the dead, first offerings, offerings to the dead and thus the first rites were funeral rites. Though their ideas about the origin of religion have declined in recent years, their concepts of immortality of human soul and ancestor worship remain a major factor of the religion of all the aborigines today.

The first critic of Taylor and Lubbock was the famous sociologist-cum-philosopher Herbert Spencer. In his work *The principles of Sociology* he criticized them on the ground that ancestor worship was a 'family cult' and family was considered to be absent in the early stages of human culture. This cult could not have served as the progenitor of other types of religious institutions. Examining the religious beliefs of primitive people, Spencer wrote on the transformation of ancestor spirits into deities and the growth of funeral rites into the cult of the dead and eventually into religious worship. He traces the genesis of supernatural beings through various stages. According to him, the belief in the continued existence of soul, offerings at funerals, ghost-propitiation 'for a subsequent interval', 'persistent ancestor

³⁷ Lubbock, *The Origin of Civilization*, 1902, pp.225-27, cited in Jack Goody, *Death, Property and Ancestors: A Study of the Mortuary Customs of the Lodagga of West Africa*, London, 1962, p. 14.

worship', 'worship of distinguished ancestors' subordinating that of the undistinguished and the worship of the deities³⁸ are the various stages in the genesis of supernatural beings. Spencer's schema appears to agree with the religious beliefs of the primitives even today.

Following Taylor's ideology, James G. Frazer wrote an article *On Certain Burial Customs as they Illustrated the Primitive Theory of the Soul* which was published in 1886. He was of the opinion that burial customs of the primitive men are motivated by their fear of the spirit of the dead. He also points out the various precautionary methods adopted by the primitive men to pacify these dreaded spirits.³⁹ The same year James Yarrow, H.C published an article *Introduction to the Study of Mortuary Custom among the North American Indians*. This is probably the first comparative study of mortuary practices published in the West. He laid emphasis on the status and social differentiation within the same tribal community. He says: "The mortuary customs of savage or barbaric have a deep significance from the fact that in them are revealed much of the philosophy of the people by whom they are practiced...A complete account of these (burial) customs in any tribe will

³⁸ Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, Vol. I. New York, 1896, pp.294-305.

³⁹ James. G. Frazer, "On Certain Burial Customs as they Illustrated the Primitive Theory of the Soul", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 15, 1886, pp.64-104.

necessitate the witnessing of many funeral rites, as the customs will differ at the death of different persons, depending upon age, sex and social standing".⁴⁰

Jevons, who accepted Spencer's schema of ancestor worship and rejected Taylor's theory, wrote in his *Introduction to the History of Religion* "like all other private cults, the worship of ancestors was modelled on the public worship of the community; and as the family is an institution of later growth than the tribe or clan, the worship of family ancestors is a later institution than the worship of the tribal god".⁴¹ The first archaeological approach to this subject was done by a French archaeologist D. Viollier. His work in French is entitled *Essai sur les rites funeraires en Suisse des orgines ala conquete romaine*. He is of the opinion that "we study burial to gain information on religion and beliefs".⁴² Since then archeologists began to analyze human burials for the reconstruction of the bygone cultures.

In 1912, Emile Durkheim, the famous French sociologist and one of the critics of the Taylor-Spencer approach, questioned them on three grounds: first, religion as the belief in spiritual beings, second, the body-soul dichotomy from dream experiences, and third, ancestor worship as the elementary form of religion. In his work, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* he argued that "the ancestral cult is not greatly developed ...except in advanced societies

⁴⁰ James Yarrow, H.C., "Introduction to the Study of Mortuary Custom among the North American Indians", *Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, Vol. I, 1886, pp.3-5.

⁴¹ Jevons, *Introduction to the History of Religion*, 1902, p.13 cited in Jack Goody, *op.cit.* p.16.

⁴² D. Viollier, *Essai sur les rites funeraires en Suisse des orgines ala conquete romaine*, 1911, Paris, p.123, cited in Binford, *op. cit.*, p.209.

like those of China, Egypt, or the Greek or Latin cities; on the other hand, it is completely lacking in the Australian societies which...represent the lowest and simplest form of social organization which we know...if the cult of dead is shown not to be primitive, animism lacks a basis".⁴³ He accepted funeral rites and rites of mourning, but denies calling them as cults. He says: "It is not a simple group of ritual precautions which a man is held to take in certain circumstances; it is a system of diverse rites, festivals and ceremonies which all have this characteristic that they reappear periodically. Thus no cult of the ancestors except where sacrifices are made on the tombs from time to time, when libations are poured there on certain more or less specific dates, or when festivals are regularly celebrated in honour of the dead".⁴⁴ One of the defects of Durkheim's criticism is that he failed to distinguish between ancestor worship and cult of the dead and universal nature of ancestor worship.

Northcote W Thomas in his article "The Disposal of the Dead in Australia" (1908)⁴⁵ Joseph. H. Toulouse, in his article, "Cremation among the Indians of New Mexico" (1944)⁴⁶ and D.S. Davidson in "Disposal of the Dead in Western Australia" (1948)⁴⁷ published the results of their researches

⁴³ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, London, 1947, pp.63-65.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Northcote W. Thomas, "The Disposal of the Dead in Australia", *Folklore*, 19, 1908, pp.338-408.

⁴⁶ Joseph H. Toulouse, "Cremation among the Indians of New Mexico", *American Antiquity*, 10, 1944, pp.65-74.

⁴⁷ D. S. Davidson, "Disposal of the Dead in Western Australia", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 92, 1948, pp.71-97.

among the aborigines in Australia and America for the historical reconstruction of the disposal of the dead. Their studies pointed out a feature of funerals of tribes of these areas, i.e., the differentiability of mortuary treatment within the same tribal society. They point out that this phenomenon might have been caused due to the cultural mixing or hybridization in their past.

J. G. Frazer, in 1912, published his famous work *Golden Bough: a Study in Magic and Religion*,⁴⁸ a multi-volume work which ran into 12 volumes. Chapter 16 of the second volume is dedicated to the transmigration of human souls into animals. Frazer selected examples from tribes and communities all over the world. The 32nd chapter of *Aftermath: a Supplement to the Golden Bough*,⁴⁹ which is a corollary to the earlier volumes, contains elaborate description of beliefs among tribes and communities in many parts of the world of reincarnations of dead into animals and birds, of souls-day and of external soul in folk custom.

A new dimension to the study of the disposal of the dead was introduced by 1914 with an emphasis on the orientation of the disposal of the dead. These studies enabled the ethno-archaeologist in the direction of the original home of the forefathers of various tribes and belief in life after death. In order to reach the land of the dead the tribes all over the world

⁴⁸ J.G. Frazer, *Golden Bough: a Study in Magic and Religion*, Part V, Vol. II, London, 1912.

⁴⁹ J.G. Frazer, *Aftermath: a Supplement to the Golden Bough*, London, 1936.

dispose the body facing the land of their forefathers. The first attempt towards this direction was made by W.J. Perry in his article "The Orientation of the dead in Indonesia" (1914).⁵⁰ Followed by Perry, H.J. Rose wrote "Celestial and Terrestrial Orientation of the Dead" (1922)⁵¹ and R.H. Steele "Orientation of the Maori Dead" (1931).⁵²

A different line of thought developed by J.G. Frazer in his two works *The Belief in Immortality and Worship of the Dead*, 3 Volumes⁵³ (1913-24) and *The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion*, 3 Volumes⁵⁴ (1933-36). He pointed to the hostile nature of the spirit of the dead and to the tribal belief that a man is more hostile to his descendants after his death than during his lifetime. He collected examples of various precautionary measures adopted by different tribes in almost all parts of the world to ward off such hostilities. The basic feature of these works is that they laid great emphasis on the cultural similarities among the tribes the world over.

In 1921, J. M. Taylor wrote his work *The New Stone Age of Northern Europe* in which he studied about the changes in the mode of disposal of the dead throughout the world. According to him, "the changes in the mode of disposal of the dead are evidently the results of changed views concerning

⁵⁰ W. J. Perry, "The Orientation of the dead in Indonesia", *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 44, 1914, pp.281-294.

⁵¹ H. J. Rose, "Celestial and Terrestrial Orientation of the Dead", *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 52, 1922, pp.127-140.

⁵² R.H. Steele, "Orientation of the Maori Dead", *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 40, 1931, pp.81-85.

⁵³ J.G.Frazer, *The Belief in Immortality and Worship of the Dead*, 3 Volumes, London, 1913-24.

⁵⁴ J.G.Frazer, *The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion* 3 Volumes, London, 1933-36.

the future life”.⁵⁵ The first elaborate monographical study of primitive tribes was done by A. R. Radcliff Brown. He wrote his famous work *The Andaman Islanders* in 1922. He developed his argument on the cult of the dead on the basis of its societal impact on the tribal world. He says: “Death constitutes a partial destruction to the social cohesion, the normal social life is disorganized, the social equilibrium is disturbed. After the death the society has to organize itself anew and reach a new condition of equilibrium”.⁵⁶ In another work *Structure And Function In Primitive Society*, he declared that: “in my own experience it is in ancestor worship that we can most easily discover and demonstrate the social function of a religious cult”.⁵⁷

Bronslow Malinowsky develops his theory of religion on the basis of the reactions and fear of humanity towards death. In 1925 he wrote *Magic, Science and Religion*, and reprinted it as *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* in 1955. He maintains that death in a primitive society is much more than the removal of a member. By setting in motion one part of the deep forces of the instinct of self-preservation, it threatens the very cohesion and solidarity of the group and upon this depends the organization of that society... (the) ceremonial of death... counteracts the centrifugal forces of fear, dismay and demoralization and provides the most powerful means for reintegration of the group’s shaken solidarity. He continues that the dominant

⁵⁵ J. M. Taylor, *The New Stone Age of Northern Europe*, New York, 1921, p.123.

⁵⁶ A. R. Radcliff Brown, *The Andaman Islanders*, London, 1922, p.285.

⁵⁷ A. R. Radcliff Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, Glencoe, 1952, p.163.

feeling among the survivors is one of horror at the corpse and of fear of the ghost is only a half truth (“which means no truth at all”). The emotions aroused, he claims, are extremely complex and even contradictory; this results from an intermingling of two elements, love of the dead and fear of the corpse. The fear of the corpse, he sees, as fear of annihilation, against which man has erected funeral customs and the belief in life after death”.⁵⁸

Camilla H. Wedgwood analyses burial practices in Melanesia based on the social status of the deceased. In her article *Death and Social Status in Melanesia* she finds a great gap between the burial of children and adults, women and men, wealthy people, efficient and important persons and magicians. The funeral of wealthy and important persons is performed elaborately while others are given less importance.⁵⁹

A.L. Kroeber, in his article, *Disposal of the Dead* questions differentiability in mortuary practices within the same society and utility of mortuary practice for the reconstruction of history. He observes: “These variations between adjacent peoples, and numerous instances of co-existence of several practices within one population, constitute a powerful argument for instability”.⁶⁰ In his second criticism he points out two reasons for the same. Firstly, mortuary customs exhibit ‘unstable histories’. Secondly, they vary

⁵⁸ B. Malinowsky, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, New York, 1955, pp.47-53.

⁵⁹ Camilla H. Wedgwood, “Death and Social Status in Melanesia”, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 57, 1927, pp.377-97.

⁶⁰ A.L. Kroeber, “Disposal of the Dead”, *American Anthropologist*, 29, 1927, pp.308-15.

independently of behaviour 'which' relates to the biological or primary social necessities. The mortuary practices of few communities are stable and majority practices change radically and rapidly and even within a single cultural unit an absence of correlation between mortuary customs and social organizational and technological variables.

In 1928 E.O. James studied about the much less popular method of the disposal of the dead, namely cremation, among the tribes in Western world in his article "Cremation and the Preservation of the Dead in America". The basic principles behind cremation, according to him, "is associated with belief in an after-world in the sky; burning the physical remains releases the soul which is then transported to the celestial after-world via the ascending smoke".⁶¹

Effie Bendann's *Death Customs: an Analytical Study of Burial Rites* appeared in 1930. Her study is based on an intensive investigation of burial practices in India, Melanesia, Australia and North East Siberia. She followed a comparative method and traces the similarities and differences in burial practices of these selected areas. She finds out differences and similarities in burial practices according to the rank, sex, age, taboos, status, environment, physical condition and totemic concept of the deceased.⁶²

⁶¹ E.O. James, "Cremation and the Preservation of the Dead in America", *American Anthropologist*, 30, 1928, pp. 214-42.

⁶² Effie Bendann, *Death Customs: an Analytical Study of Burial Rites*, London, 1930.

Erminie W. Voegelin in an article entitled "Mortuary Customs of the Shawnee and Other Eastern Tribes," published in 1944, presented an ethno-historical study of 114 years of the mortuary practices of the Shawnee tribe. Through this article she pointed out the stability in the burial practices of this tribe and emphasized that for more than hundred and fourteen years their treatment of the corpse, funerary practices and construction of graves remained unchanged.⁶³

Leo W. Symmons selected a fairly new and forgotten theme i.e. the attitude of primitive tribes towards the death of aged and disabled members in his work *The Role of the Aged in Primitive Society* (1945). He portrays the pathetic condition of such members whom their society forcefully expelled from their group and compelled them to die alone. He points out the act of gypsy tribes like Lapp of northern Europe, the Bushman and Chippwa of Africa and Yakut of Siberia. According to Symmons, the hazardship of climate, lack of food and diseases during the course of migration compelled them to abandon their sick and very old. The aged Chippwas were killed by their own sons. An interesting aspect of this misfortune is that after death they are revered as ancestors.⁶⁴

Gordon Childe in his article "Directional Changes in Funerary Practices during 50000 years" examines the changes that had taken place in

⁶³ Erminie W. Voegelin, "Mortuary Customs of the Shawnee and Other Eastern Tribes", *Indiana Historical Society*, 1944, Pre-historic Research Series 2, pp.225-444.

⁶⁴ Leo W. Symmons, *The Role Of the aged in Primitive Society*, New Heaven, 1945.

the modes of burial for about 50000 years. He says that 'cumulative tendencies' or trends in one direction are comparable to those that are clearly manifest in his (man's) material culture.⁶⁵ Childe noted changes in the modes of the disposal of the corpse, place of burial, grave goods and sepulchral monuments. He has quoted a number of references from the European and West Asian sites to show that in the Stone Age both the extended and flexed modes of burial were in vogue, but in Copper-Bronze Age and early Iron Age, there was a tendency to adopt extended burial in the place of contracted burial. There was also changes in the selection of burial places, i.e. change was from the habitation sites to burial cemeteries. He also found that with the progress of civilization the use of grave goods usually witnessed a comparative fall and burial in settlements were often less richly furnished than burials in cemeteries. The case of sepulchral monuments also shares the same nature of the grave goods. In early days sepulchral monuments were spacious than later stages because later periods found diminishing proportion of social labour and energy.

Vinigi Grottanelli examined the position of the body inside the grave in his article "Burial among the Koma of Western Abyssinia". He mentioned the practice of flexing the body inside the grave just like the foetus in uterus which is the symbol of rebirth. Before disposal, the Komos tied the hands and

⁶⁵ V.G. Childe, "Directional Changes in Funerary Practices During 50000 years", *Man*, 1945, Nos. 3-4, pp.13-19.

legs of the corpse. Grottanelli says that they tried to prevent the spirit of the dead to their original home.⁶⁶

In 1956 John Maringer wrote *The Gods of Pre-historic Man*. According to him, primitive man's reaction to the experience of death is reflected in his treatment of the corpse, to a considerable extent in what we call burial and they believed in after-life. He says that ancestors are their Gods and it is evident from their burial position. He takes his example from *La ferrassie dordegne*, a grave in Western Europe. "The position in which he often buried his dead, namely that of sleep would seem to indicate that he conceived of death as a form of sleep. The sleep was regarded as a transitional stage prior to an awakening in another world, it is hard to say. Here we find a certain placing of the dead in the direction of the setting sun. Possibly the west was believed to be the land of the dead".⁶⁷

A penetrating field study of the Nuer in Nilotic East Africa was done by E. E. Evans Pritchard in his *Nuer Religion*. This work characterizes the study of the concept and role of supernatural forces like spirit of the dead in Nuer religion. He explains the role and influence of *Kwoth*, the God of

⁶⁶ Vinigi Grottanelli, "Burial Among the Koma of Western Abyssinia", *Primitive Man*, 20, 1947, pp.71-84.

⁶⁷ John Maringer, *The Gods of Pre-historic Man*, London, 1956, p. 18.

Nuer, who is a pure spirit. According to Pritchard, he is like a wind or air, he is everywhere and being everywhere, he is here now.⁶⁸

The first comprehensive investigation of archaeological evidence relating to pre-historic religion is found in the work of E.O James' *Pre-historic Religion: a Study in Pre-historic Archaeology*.⁶⁹ James points out that the germs of the cult of the dead are found in the Paleolithic burial ritual. He traces the evolution of the cult of the dead from the Paleolithic period through the Neolithic and reaches the zenith in the Megalithic period. He elaborately mentions the idea of the cult of the dead in the three great civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Harappa and is of the opinion that the cult of mother-goddesses, phallic-worship, mummification and sky-gods originated from these civilizations. A noted feature of this work is that he was the first archaeologist who compared the cult of the dead of the pre-historic man with that of the aborigines of the present day.

In 1960 Rodney Needham and Clodia Needham translated into English Robert Hertz's "Contribution a une etude sur la representation collective de la mort" which was originally written in French in 1907. They translated this work under the title "A Contribution to the study of the Collective Representation of Death" and included it in the book edited by them entitled *Death and Right Hand*. Hertz developed the central notion of his thesis on the

⁶⁸ E.E. Evans Pritchard, *Nuer Religion*, Oxford, 1956.

⁶⁹ E.O. James, *Pre-historic Religion: a Study in Pre-historic Archaeology*, London, 1957.

basis of body-soul dichotomy. He says: "there exists a kind of symmetry and parallelism between the condition of the body, which has to wait for a certain time before it can enter its final tomb, and the condition of the soul, which will be properly admitted into the land of the dead only when the last funeral rites are accomplished".⁷⁰ Hertz has two notions about secondary burial. "One, death is not completed in one instantaneous act, but is a lasting procedure which in many cases is only considered terminated when the dissolution of the body has ended. Second, death is not mere destruction but a transition: as it progresses, so does rebirth; while the old body falls to ruins, a new body takes shape with which the soul- provided the necessary rites have been performed- will enter another existence".⁷¹ He laid great emphasis on the social differentiation in mortuary practices within the same society. Though the disposal of the body of a dead child was not a public event like that of the disposal of a deceased matured person, the grief generated was perhaps greater than that of the burial of the elder persons. Moreover, unnatural deaths like suicides and accidents, because of their horrifying nature, called for a different mortuary treatment. "Within the same society the emotions aroused by death vary extremely in intensity according to the social status of the deceased..."⁷²

⁷⁰ Robert Hertz, "A Contribution to the study of the Collective Representation of Death" in *Death and Right Hand*, edited by Rodney Needham and Clodia Needham, London, 1960, p.48.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.48.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.76.

Arnold Van Gennep's French work *Les Rites de Passage* was translated into English in 1960 as *The Rites of Passage* by M. B. Vizedom and G.L. Caffé. Gennep made the observation that primitive peoples regard a life cycle as a journey from one stage of existence to another which he called the liminal stage. Life cycle passes through the phases of birth, puberty, marriage and death. According to him, these stages are critical points of human existence which require supernatural help, if a person is to make a safe transition from one stage to the next. He termed these stages as rites de passage or rites of passage, and in one guise or another they may be found in all societies. Of all the rites of passage those that occur most regularly in primitive societies are concerned with death. Many religious rites are performed for the departed soul to enter the world of the dead among which mourning customs take a pre-eminent role. To attain the goal of satisfactory existence in after-life, death rituals are retained by the people.⁷³

Jack Goody presented a comprehensive and detailed treatment of the funeral ceremonies of two tribal communities in West Africa, Lodagaa and Lowiili in his work *Death, Property and the Ancestors: a Study of the Mortuary Customs of the Lodagaa of West Africa* (1962). These two tribes are noted for their ceremonial rituals in burial practices and ancestor worship. Through a description of their funeral ceremonies Goody tried to examine the part played by their newly dead and their ancestors in their social, political

⁷³ Arnold Van Gennep, *Les Rites de Passage*, Paris, 1909.

and economic life. He is of the opinion that the ancestors exercise a considerable influence upon the organization of descends groups, the mode of inheritance and property distribution among these two tribes.⁷⁴

M. Bloch, in his work *Placing the Dead* (1971), has attempted to link the existing practice of secondary funeral among the Merina of Madagascar with the idea of fertility cult. Among the Merina, there are two kinds of funeral rites: an individual funeral which occurs very soon after death and a secondary funeral, often collective funeral (*Famadihana*) which occurs at least two years after. The corpses are placed in the ancestral tomb during this time and it is not performed for all people. It is performed only after the flesh is fully decayed. One feature of the secondary burial is that “when the men replace the bodies in tombs, the shrouds which covered them during the ceremony are thrown out, and the women fight over them since sleeping on the shrouds helps fertility. Fertility is also stimulated by dancing - especially with the corpses- during Famadihana”.⁷⁵

Louis Binford in an article “Mortuary Practices: Their Study and their Potential”⁷⁶ gives a comprehensive list of previous studies of a hundred years from 1871 to 1971 of the cult of the dead. The list includes works such as articles, monographs and general studies. Binford tried to redress the

⁷⁴ Jack Goody, *Death, Property and the Ancestors: a Study of the Mortuary Customs of the Lodagaa of West Africa*, London, 1962

⁷⁵ M. Bloch, *Placing the Dead*, London, 1971, p.159.

⁷⁶ Louis. R. Binford, “Mortuary Practices: Their Study and their Potential” in his own work *An Archaeological Perspective*, New York, 1972.

atheoretical and underdeveloped character of mortuary archaeology. He offered the general proposition that treatment in death was primarily determined by one's social position in life and that socio-political complexity and mortuary elaboration were positively correlated. His researches provided evidences for the social evolution of mortuary practices and their correlation between material remains and social structure.

The Collected Works of Max Muller: Anthropological Religion has been republished by the Asian Educational Services in 1977. This collection contains lectures delivered by Max Muller on various topics associated with religious practices of which Lecture V is dedicated to the study of the character of ancestor worship. He criticized Spencer's notion that ancestor worship is the root of every religion. He observes: "What I protest against is the attempt to make ancestor worship the only source of all religion. It is one source of religious sentiment- nay, it is a very important source, but it is second in importance, and second in origin, as compared with the worship of the powers of nature. It is only as following after Physical Religion that what I call Anthropological Religion or the discovery of something divine in man and more particularly in the departed or in our ancestors, can be properly treated and rightly understood".⁷⁷ Lecture IX elaborately mentions funerals in

⁷⁷ F. Max Muller, *Collected Works of Max Muller: Anthropological Religion*, New Delhi, 1977, pp. 143-144. (First published in 1892).

Vedic literature, Roman funerals, Savage funerals, Polynesian funerals and state of soul after death.

J. Watson's article "Of Flesh and Bones: the Management of Death Pollution in Cantonise Society" is included in *Death and Regeneration of Life* edited by Block and Parry. The Cantonise of Africa follow double burial; they first bury the corpse in a coffin and leave it there for approximately seven years. After that they collect the bones in a ceramic urn for secondary burial. The secondary burial occurs only after decades or even generations after death. It is not performed for every one. In this article Watson laid great emphasis on the death pollution of Cantonise as a regenerating force. He says: "There appear to be two aspects of death pollution; one associated with the release of the spirit and the other associated with decay of the flesh. Danger arises when handling anything that has been in direct contact with the corpse. This aspect of pollution is passive; it has no volition and affects everyone equally. The aspect associated with the spirit, however is active and extremely unpredictable...Among the Cantonise, it is women rather than men who are expected to assume the burden associated with death pollution...Thus, we find that married daughters and daughters-in-law play leading roles in funerary ritual. Their most important ritual act takes place during the final phase of the first funeral ceremony and involves rubbing their unbound hair against the coffin, hence exposing themselves to the pollution of death. It appears that the passive aspect of death pollution are essential for the biological

reproduction of the agnatic line: by exposing themselves purposively to pollution, married women may be incorporating the fertility of the deceased—embodied in the flesh—into their own bodies. Women’s ritual actions at funerals therefore seem to indicate that there is a direct link between passive pollution and the release of the deceased’s life ‘essence’ or fertility, a fertility which must be managed and transferred to the next generation...Men on the other hand, avoid the corpse whenever possible, but deal freely and enthusiastically with the bones. Furthermore, women do not become ancestors. Their bones are preserved out of respect but are never mixed with men’s bones. Finally, the ancestral rites are performed by men for men, in the total absence of women”.⁷⁸

V. A. Alekshin in his article “Burial Customs as Archaeological Source” addresses the interesting problem of the reconstruction of social, economic and cultural history on the basis of archaeological sources. He formulated his ideology on the basis of six informational units. The first one reflects the ideas of people about the world of the dead. By studying burial customs we can trace the notion of early man towards death. Second informational unit covers problems of the cultural genesis. This can mean the birth of a new archaeological culture as a result of social and economic contacts between neighbouring cultural traditions. When one archaeological

⁷⁸ J. Watson, “Of Flesh and Bones: the Management of Death Pollution in Cantonise Society” in *Death and Regeneration of Life*, edited by Block and Parry, Cambridge, 1982, pp.156-182.

culture is succeeded by another there may be a complete or partial replacement of funerary practices. The third unit makes it possible to characterize the social position of various groups in ancient societies by age and sex. Alekshin points out that burial ceremony changed according to age, sex and economic aspects. There is a difference in the burial of the aged and children, men and women, agriculturists and hunters. These changes are reflected in the use of grave goods. The fourth informational unit examines social stratification within ancient societies. It is evident from grave goods that the funeral practices changed according to the status of a person. Investigations of the social differentiation of ancient societies should be accompanied by functional analysis of composition of grave goods assemblages. Fifth unit enables to trace the evolution of forms of marriage and the family in primitive societies. On the basis of examining double, triple and collective burials we can establish the relationship by marriage of the persons. The sixth unit pertains to certain demographic aspects of the life of people in ancient times, life expectancy, causes of death, diseases, injuries and changes in stature.⁷⁹

Maria Lepowsky wrote about the role of ancestors of the people of Vanatinai, an island of South East New Guinea in her article "The Way of the Ancestors: Custom, Innovation and Resistance". Vanatinai is a remote island

⁷⁹ V. A. Alekshin, "Burial Customs as an Archaeological Source", *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 24, No.2, April 1983, pp. 137-150.

in Pacific Ocean. The aborigines of this region followed the old ways of living of their forefathers and this old customs of living was known among them as *taubwkragha*. Their ancestors played a significant role in their economic and social aspects of life. Even the prolonged British colonial rule could not change their attitude towards traditional customs. To keep the stability of the old ways of living they conducted long journeys in canoes for the collection of shell disc necklaces, axe-blades of polished green-stone and ceremonial valuables, which were used by their forefathers. They accumulated great wealth through the performance of magic and rituals in order to conduct elaborate feasts for their ancestors. Their old ways of living, according to Maria Lepowsky, make them prosperous and happy.⁸⁰

In 1993, A. C. Lehmann and J. C. Myers in their article "Ghosts, Souls and Ancestors: Power of the Dead" criticized Spencer's idea of ancestor worship as the first religion. According to them many societies still at the hunting and gathering level do not practice ancestor-worship. They pointed out that the best example for it is the Arunta of Australia. They criticize the concept of universality of ancestor worship. But they identify the existence of the concern for the ancestor among the aborigines. They are of the opinion

⁸⁰ Maria Lepowsky, "The Way of the Ancestors: Custom, Innovation and Resistance", *Ethnology*, Vol. XXX, No.3, July 1991, pp.217-235.

that “although the worship of ancestor is not universal, a belief in the immortality of the dead occurs in all cultures”.⁸¹

Lyle B. Steadman, Craig T. Palmer and Christopher F. Tilley also criticize the universality of ancestor-worship in their article “The Universality of Ancestor Worship”.⁸² They point out a reason for the inability to recognize the universality of ancestor-worship is that the term is often reserved for those societies where the dead are explicitly called by a term that is translated as ancestor, thus excluding societies whose religious practices concern ghosts, shades, spirits, souls, totemic plants and animals, or merely the dead. They formulated their ideology on the basis of the work of Swanson’s *The Birth of the Gods*. From this study they found that in sixteen cultures ancestor-worship is absent, and in eight cultures though ancestors are present the nature of their activity is unspecified.

A debate has recently originated over the viability of the social and ideological reconstruction of pre-historic cultures on the basis of mortuary analysis by Izumi Shimada, Ken-ichi Shinoda, Julie Farnum, Robert Corruccini and Hirokatsu Watanabe. In their article “An integrated Analysis

⁸¹ A. C. Lehmann and J. C. Myers, “Ghosts, Souls and Ancestors: Power of the Dead” in Lehmann A. C. and J. C. Myers eds. *Magic, Witchcraft and Religion*, Mountain View, California, 1993, p.283.

⁸² Lyle B. Steadman, Craig T. Palmer and Christopher F. Tilley, “The Universality of Ancestor Worship”, *Ethnology*, Vol. XXXV, Winter 1996, No.1, pp.63-76.

of Pre-Hispanic Mortuary Practices: a Middle Sican Case Study”,⁸³ they examined thousand year old Middle Sican shaft tombs on the North Coast of Peru for the social and ideological reconstruction of pre-historic culture. The authors adopted a new method of study by using bio-archaeology. This work integrates analysis of mitochondrial DNA, inherited dental traits, developmental health and diet, placement of interred individuals and associated grave goods and data from ground-penetrating radar surveys. These examinations show that shaft-tombs reflected a broader social organization and were a part of a plant elite symmetry that overlying monumental adobe mount served as the physical focus of ancestor-worship.

Tony Walter wrote about a new way to dispose of human corpses known as plastination for display, in his article “Plastination for Display: a New Way to Dispose of the Dead”.⁸⁴ This new method is conducted with the help of medical technique and it is not a religious ritual. Through this method a corpse may be transformed from unstable/wet-to-stable/dry. This type of a plastinated body is exhibited in the Body-World Exhibition at Brussels. Tony Walter says: “In long run, though, precisely because plastination is so permanent, demand for donors may prove limited”.⁸⁵

⁸³ Izumi Shimada, Ken-ichi Shinoda, Julie Farnum, Robert Corruccini and Hirokatsu Watanabe. In their article “An integrated Analysis of Pre-Hispanic Mortuary Practices: a Middle Sican case Study”, *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 45, No. 3, June 2004, pp.369-402.

⁸⁴ Tony Walter, “Plastination for Display: a New Way to Dispose of the Dead”, *The Journal of The Royal Anthropological Institute Incorporating Man*, Vol. 10, No. 3, Sept. 2004, pp.603-627.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.624.

Besides these works, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Volume I and VI, edited by William Bendann, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Volume I and IV, edited by Mircea Elide, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Volume I, edited by James Hastings, *A Dictionary of Archaeology*, edited by Warwick Bray David Trump and *Encyclopedia Asiatica Comprising Indian subcontinent, Eastern and Southern Asia*, Volume II, edited by Edward Balfour, give us a detailed analysis of burial practices and ancestor cult of people all over the world.

The different methods of the disposal of the dead of the tribal population of different parts of India were studied towards the close of the nineteenth century. But these studies are marked by their emphasis on information than interpretation. E.T. Dalton wrote his famous work *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* in 1872. This brilliant study opened a new chapter in the study of Indian primitive peoples. It examines not only the social, political and economic life of the popular tribes like Oraon, Kharia, Khāsi, Nāga, Kūki, Lepcha and Muria tribes but also their funeral customs.⁸⁶

F.T. Cole examined the Santhāl belief in the life after death in his article "Santhāl Ideas of the Future". The Santhāls of Chōtanāgpur believe in

⁸⁶ E.T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1872

life after death and they always remembered their ancestors through festivals and feasts. But they erect no memorial for their ancestors.⁸⁷

M. J. Walhouse in his article "Contracted Burials"⁸⁸ studied the Abor of the Brahmaputra valley. They bury the dead in very small graves in a sitting posture. This is the first reference to contracted burials among the aborigines in India.

J. Avery was the first person who examined the religion of Indian aborigines. In his article "The religion of the Aboriginal Tribes of India"⁸⁹ he said that all tribes believe in life after death. The most important feature of tribal religion according to him is ancestor worship and homage to the dead during the time of burial.

William Crook⁹⁰ in 1899 studied primitive methods of burial and cremation all over the world with special reference to India. He is of the opinion that burial was more popular than cremation.

Among studies on Indian tribes there are a few monographs which deserve special consideration. They give us detailed descriptions of the funeral practices of the concerned tribes as well. Such studies include P.R.T. Gurdon's *The Khasis*, (1907) Col. J. Shakespear's *The Lushei Kuki Clans*

⁸⁷ F.T. Cole, "Santhāl Ideas of the Future", *Indian Antiquary*, 1878, Vol. VII, p.273.

⁸⁸ M. J. Walhouse, "Contracted Burials", *Indian Antiquary*, 1878, Vol. VII, p.182.

⁸⁹ J. Avery, "The religion of the Aboriginal Tribes of India", *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. XIV, 1885, p.125.

⁹⁰ William Crook, "Primitive Rites of the Disposal of the Dead with Special reference to India", *Journal of Anthropological Institute*, XXIX, 1899, pp.271-294.

(1909), Major A Playfair's *The Garos (1909)*, T.C. Hudson's *The Naga Tribes of Manipur (1911)*, S.C. Roy's *The Birhors: a Little Known Tribe of Chotanagpur (1925)*, Verrier Elwin's *The Muria and Their Ghotul (1947)*, Sir Wilfred Grigson's *The Muria Gonds of Bastar (1949)*, L.P. Vidyarthi's *The Maler, (1963)*, P.G. Shah's *Tribal Life in Gujarat (1964)*, W.H.R. Rivers's *Todas Vol. I (1984)*, Antony R. Walker's *The Toda of South India: a New Look (1986)* and William E. Marshall's *The Todas: Their History and Ethnography (1989)*.

In 1915 S.C. Roy in his article "Orientation of Grave-stones and Houses in Chōtanāgpur"⁹¹ elaborately mentioned the funeral ceremonies of the Birhōrs of Chōtanāgpur. Among the Birhōrs burial was the popular method among the poor people and rich tribesmen alone practiced cremation. He gives the following description about burial. They dug a grave measuring 6' x 3' and dead body is laid flat in the grave-pit with its head pointing to the north. The corpse is covered with a piece of cloth and a few coins are placed inside the mouth of the corpse. There is a variation in the grave goods of men and women. They placed a miniature hunting net, an axe, two small sticks, tobacco, lime, a brass plate for men and bundle of chop fibers for women. The grave is filled with earth and covered with small blocks of stones. In the case

⁹¹ S.C. Roy, "Orientation of Grave-stones and Houses in Chotanagpur", *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society I*, 1915, pp.277-280.

of cremated body, bones are collected on the seventh or ninth day after death and put under a stone slab.

In the very next year S.C. Roy published another article "A Lepcha Funeral".⁹² The Lepchas of Darjeeling bury the dead in the sitting posture. They place the corpse on the bier in the same posture as when it is laid in the grave. A silver coin is put in the mouth of the deceased. The body is buried along with the bier and the grave is filled with earth and stone. A longish stone is erected in the upright position on the grave. The practice of burying the dead in the lying position is not unknown to them and in such cases as well they erect a stone at the top of the grave and make offerings to the dead.

In her article entitled "Mummification and Cremation in India",⁹³ published in 1930, Mary Levin argued that mummification was practiced before the mode of cremation became prevalent in India. The author refers to the practice of rubbing the dead body with fat and immersing it in oil. But we do not find any other reference to the mummification of the dead body in Vedic or other literatures.

In 1936 R. C. Roy in his article "Notes on the Chawte Kuki Clan"⁹⁴ mentioned the burial custom of this Manipuri tribe. They are noticed to bury the corpse in the grave-pit and the burial ground is situated outside the village.

⁹² S.C. Roy, "A Lepcha Funeral", *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* II, 1916, pp.475-480.

⁹³ Mary Levin, "Mummification and Cremation in India", *Man*, Feb. 1930, No.18, pp.29-66.

⁹⁴ R. C. Roy, "Notes on the Chawte Kūki clan", *Man in India*, XVI, 1936, pp.135-155.

The body is placed in the pit on its back, the face being upwards. Funerary offerings include old clothes, weapons and ornaments of the deceased. After burial, the pit is filled up with earth and a small mound of earth is raised over it. A human figure is carved on the post planted in the middle of the grave.

Haribishnu Sarkar in his article "Disposal of the Dead at the Indus Valley and its Survival Among the Aboriginal Peoples of India"⁹⁵ made an attempt to classify the different methods of disposal of the dead in Indus valley and to trace their continuity among the aboriginal peoples of India on the basis of John Marshall's classification of burials in Indus Valley namely, (1) complete burial of double character, (2) the so-called fractional burial preceded by an exposure process, and (3) the post-cremation burial. According to H. Sarkar, the majority of the present aboriginal tribes of India continue the practice of the above three methods of disposal of the dead.

Clement W. Meighan made an attempt to discern some regularity in the pattern of mortuary customs as practiced in Southern India in his article "Mortuary Customs in Southern India".⁹⁶ For writing this article he consulted manuals of the states of Andhrapradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, Census reports and Ethnographic accounts. By examining the mortuary practices of two hundred castes and tribes in the aforesaid states, he identified

⁹⁵ H. Sarkar, "Disposal of the Dead at the Indus Valley and its Survival among the Aboriginal Peoples of India", *Man in India*, Vol. 31, No.1, 1951, Jan-Mar, pp.23-32.

⁹⁶ Clement W. Meighan, "Mortuary Customs in Southern India", *Eastern Anthropologist*, Vol. V, 1951-52, No. 4, pp. 143-164.

their methods of disposal, burial position, burial marks, funeral biers, secondary burial, orientation and the differentiation between cremation and burial within a group. He found that among these castes and tribes both burial and cremation are followed and status differentiation was the basic feature among them.

R. Nebesky de Wojkowitz examined the funeral ceremonies of Lepchas, the main aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim in his article "Ancient Funeral Ceremonies of the Lepchas",⁹⁷ he points out that Buddhism made changes in funeral practices. There were different spirits in the old Lepcha tradition and they accepted burial in early days. Today because of the influence of Buddhism the dead are burnt on pyres and the ashes immersed in rivers. They conducted an elaborate funeral ceremony and it was customary to allow the dead to be buried in graves if they opted for burial.

M. Topno who was a member of Munda tribe studied the funeral rites of the Mundas of Ranchi. In his article "Funeral rites of the Mundas of Ranchi Plateau"⁹⁸ he observes that due to the influence of Christianity, the Mundas who followed cremation gave up this practice and adopted burial. But they followed secondary burial and deposited bones after the sacrifice of a goat, under a flat stone slab.

⁹⁷ R. Nebesky de Wojkowitz, "Ancient Funeral Ceremonies of the Lepchas", *Anthropological Studies in Lucknow*, Vol. V, Sept. 1951/Aug. 1952, pp. 27-40.

⁹⁸ M. Topno, "Funeral rites of the Mundas of Ranchi Plateau", *Anthropos*, Vol. 50, 1955, pp. 715-734.

David.G. Mandelbaum⁹⁹ conducted a penetrating study entitled “Social Uses of Funeral Rites”, in which he examines how funeral ceremonies maintained a bond of unity in tribal society. According to Mandelbaum a funeral ceremony is personal in its focus and is societal in its consequences. To prove his argument he examined the secondary funeral of the Kota of Nilgiris and of two American-Indian tribes: the Hopi and the Cocopa. The funeral of the Kota and the Hopi are attended by the whole social order and is a major event of the tribal life. But the Cocopa funeral was a brief and hurried affair. For Kota and Hopi, funerals are occasions of social solidarity. Mandelbaum says that “death ceremonies, like other cultural forms are changed in time by those who use them as a result of changes in their social, cultural and psychological environment; yet the fundamental psychological and social purposes which are accomplished by funeral rites remain quite similar”.¹⁰⁰ He also says that funerals are quite dissimilar in specific detail but are seen quite alike in mood.

G. S. Ghurye compares Egyptian and Indian funeral practices in his article “Egyptian Affinities of Indian Funerary Practices”.¹⁰¹ He draws a parallel between the practices of the Egyptians and many Indian castes and tribes on grounds like the preservation of the dead body,

⁹⁹ David. G. Mandelbaum, “Social Uses of Funeral Rites”, *The Eastern Anthropologist*, Vol. XII, No.1, Sept-Nov. 1958, pp.5-24.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.23.

¹⁰¹ G. S. Ghurye, “Egyptian Affinities of Indian Funerary Practices” in *Anthropo-Sociological Papers*, Bombay, 1963, pp. 80-94.

representations of the dead, graves and grave goods, orientation of the body and position of the body inside the grave.

Two elaborate works on burial practices, Purushotham Singh's *Burial Practices in Ancient India: A Study in the Eschatological Beliefs of Early Man as Revealed by Archaeological Sources*¹⁰² and S.P. Gupta's *Disposal of the Dead and Physical Types in Ancient India*¹⁰³ were published in 1970 and 1972 respectively. The former work is the periodic and state-wise study of the burial customs practiced in India based on archaeological data. He examined Stone Age burials in Langhnaj, Baghai Khore, Bagore, etc, Neolithic burials at Nāgarjunakonda, Pikhlihal, Utnūr, Brahmagiri, Hallūr, Burzahom, T. Narsipur, chalcolithic burials at Harappa, Megalithic burials in South India and Iron Age burials in North India. One of the noted features of this work is that it mentions the disposal of the dead among the aborigines in Chōtanāgpur plateau, Assam, Orissa, central and South India. H. D. Sankalia, who wrote the foreword to this work criticized that Dr. Singh studied this area without proper excavations. The latter work dealt with the mortuary practices of the pre-historic and proto-historic peoples of India. Gupta examines the funeral practices of the Vedic, Indus and Megalithic peoples and has very significantly demonstrated that among the same people there are different practices varying with different circumstances. He also points out that through

¹⁰² Purushotham Singh, *Burial Practices in Ancient India*, Varanasi, 1970.

¹⁰³ S.P. Gupta, *Disposal of the Dead and Physical Types in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1972.

examining the skeletal remains from the graves we can prove the physical types of men in ancient India. His study also reflects the socio-political and religious conditions of the communities and aborigines.

Piers Vitebsky presents his study of the Sōra tribe of Eastern India in his work *Dialogues with the Dead : The Discussion of Mortality Among the Sora of Eastern India*.¹⁰⁴ The Sōra is an aboriginal 'tribe' who live in the forested hills around the borders of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. In every Sōra village almost every day, people conduct dialogues with the dead through the mouth of a shaman who speaks to them in a trance. A dialogue is always associated with the performance on or promises of a sacrifice by the living to the dead. Piers Vitebsky laid emphasis that these dialogues with the dead moulded the activities of Sōra society and individual.

The earliest, but scanty, evidences on funerals of the Malabar tribes appear in the two studies of Edgar Thurston namely, *Ethnographic Notes on Southern India*, 2 Volumes (1906) and *The Castes and Tribes of Southern India*- 7 Volumes (1909). Treading the path laid down by Thurston, C. Gopalan Nair compiled his *Malabar Series-Wynād: its Peoples and Tradition* (1911) which was followed by L.K. Anantha Krishna Iyer's *Castes and Tribes of Cochin* (1912). Subsequently, works like K. Gnanambal's two articles "Funeral Rites among the Kanikkar of Travancore" (1952) and

¹⁰⁴ Piers Vitebsky, *Dialogues with the Dead: The Discussion of Mortality among the Sōra of Eastern India*, New Delhi, 1993

“The Religious Beliefs of the Urali” (1955), A.A.D. Luiz’s *Tribes of Kerala* (1962), P.R.G. Mathur’s *The Tribal Situation in Kerala* (1977), T. Madhavamenon and Sasikumar. M. eds., *A Handbook of Kerala Vol. II* (1996) and T. Madhavamenon ed., *Encyclopedia of Dravidian Tribes, Vol. I & II* (1996) also made their entry. Almost all of these works are general studies on tribes and castes and provide only scattered information on funeral practices and even these are on lines followed by Thurston without much alteration. The only exception to the above mentioned works is Ehrenfels’ *Kadar of Cochin* (1952), which was the first monograph on a single tribe in Kerala, based on intense field study, and which covered detailed account of funeral practices of the Kādar.

A. Aiyappan, the well-known anthropologist of Kerala, studied the ancestor worship of the Kuṛichiyas in his article “World view of the Kuṛichiyas: a little known matrilineal tribe of Kerala”.¹⁰⁵ He describes the role of Kuṛichiya ancestral spirits –*Nizhal*- and female ancestor spirit- *Pe:na*- in their day-to-day life. These two spirits look after the welfare of a Kuṛichiya *taṛawād* and offerings were made in their honour. They are installed in the best room of a *taṛawād* and they are the mediators between a Kuṛichiya and his family god. A monographic study by the same author on Paṇiyas entitled *The Paniyan: an Ex-slave Tribe of South India* gives us detailed description of

¹⁰⁵ A. Aiyappan, “World view of the Kuṛichiyas: a Little Known Matrilineal tribe of Kerala” in *Tribal Culture and Tribal welfare: Selected Papers by Prof. A. Aiyappan*, edited by Umacharan Mohanty, Madras, 1988, pp.117-140.

Paṇiya burial, death-pollution and ancestral ceremony called *Kākkappula*.¹⁰⁶ He says that “rites connected with death are the most spectacular and consequently the most expensive of the ceremonies conducted by the Paṇiyas”.¹⁰⁷ He noticed the differences in the burial of men and women as well as the slight regional changes in their burial practices. He also gives an interesting account of the songs chanted by *Āṭṭāḷi* or shaman during the time of releasing the *Nizhal* (shade) or spirit at *Kākkappula*. Analyzing the ritual elements in *Kākkappula*, Aiyappan noticed that the Paṇiyas attempt a small scale imitation of a temple festival.

L. A. Krishna Iyer, who extensively studied the Megalithic culture of entire Kerala, points out for the first time the similarity between ancestor worship of the Megalithic period and the tribal practices. In his two important works, *Kerala Megaliths and their Builders* (1967), *The Pre-historic Archaeology of Kerala* (1948) and in his article “the Disposal of the Dead among the Primitive Tribes of Travancore”¹⁰⁸ pointed out that certain Travancore tribes like the Mala- Arayans erected dolmens over their graves like the Megalithic people. In his famous work, *Travancore Tribes and Castes* in 3 Volumes, he studied the burial customs of various tribes of Travancore and found that burial was the common mode of the disposal of the dead and they deposited grave goods along with the corpse.

¹⁰⁶ A. Aiyappan, *The Paṇiyas: an Ex-slave Tribe of South India*, Calcutta, 1992.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.140.

¹⁰⁸ L.A. Krishna Iyer, “The Disposal of the Dead among the Primitive Tribes of Travancore”, *Man in India*, XIX, 1939, pp. 61-62.

In 1971 K.J. John undertook extensive fieldworks in the Wynād region to establish the survival of the Megalithic culture among the primitive tribes of the area. In his first article, "Early Man in Wynad"¹⁰⁹ he gives a picturesque description of the history and geography of this hill tract. In this article, and with more details in another article, "The Megalithic Culture of Kerala"¹¹⁰ he attempted to draw a line between ancient Megalithic culture and its survival among the little communities and tribal population of Malabar. He argues that the majority of the tribes who live in the Sahyādri ranges practice a burial custom which is very close to Megalithism of the ancient days. He finds evidences for the continuation of Megalithism and the cult of the dead among the tribes akin to those living in the Sahyādris. It affirms to the prevalence of ancestor worship among both tribes and Hindu castes in the form of *Muthappan* cult and *teyyam* ritual dance. He says: "The continuity of those aspects of Megalithic culture centered on the cult of the dead is manifested in the surviving ghost worship and ritualistic ghost dances of the little communities of Malabar, and in the burial customs of tribes in isolated areas in the Sahyādri ranges."¹¹¹

After A. Aiyappan, anthropological studies on the Malabar tribes were few and far between for a long period which was revived in the 1980s by B. Anandabhanu of the Department of Anthropology, Palayad who published a

¹⁰⁹ K.J. John, "Early Man in Wynād", *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol. II, Part.2, 1975, pp.125-131.

¹¹⁰ K.J. John, "The Megalithic Culture of Kerala" in *Recent Advances in Indo-Pacific Pre-history*, edited by V.N. Misra and Peter Bellwood, New Delhi, 1978, pp.485-89.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.487.

series of studies on tribes like the Chōlanāikkans and Adiyāns. He along with P. K. Misra, in 1980, wrote an interesting article entitled “Boundary Maintenance among Cholanaikkan: the Cavemen of Kerala”.¹¹² They pointed out that the territorial boundaries of the Chōlanāikkans were zealously guarded and maintained largely by the cult of spirit-possession and principles of natural justice. The life force of a dead man remains in touch with the living people; their help is sought whenever such a necessity is felt. The life force of the dead manifests itself through one of the living Chōlanāikkan, usually the chieftain. The solution to a community or individual problem lies in his intervention. These solutions are sacred and are to be necessarily carried out. *The Handbook of Kerala* contains an article of Anandabhanu “Tribal Religion in Kerala”¹¹³ in which he goes through the basic traits of the religion of all the tribal communities of Kerala. He identified four features of the tribal religion. One, animist (nature worship alone); second, worship of ancestral spirits and supernatural beings such as tribal gods, goddesses and ghosts; third, worship of gods and goddesses of Hindu religion; and four, converts to Christianity. His two other articles, on Adiyāns, the first in *Encyclopedia of Dravidian Tribes*, Vol. II¹¹⁴ and the other in

¹¹² P.K Misra & B. Anandabhanu, “Boundary Maintenance among Cholanaikkan: the Cave-men of Kerala”, *Man in India*, Vol. 60, 1-2, 1980, pp. 51-59.

¹¹³ B. Anandabhanu, “Tribal Religion in Kerala”, *The Handbook of Kerala*, edited by T. Madhavamenon, Trivandrum, 2000, pp. 194-198.

¹¹⁴ B. Anandabhanu, “Adiyān”, *Encyclopedic Profile of Indian tribes*, edited by Sachidananda and R.R. Prasad, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 11-15.

Encyclopedic Profile of Indian tribes,¹¹⁵ throw light on the ancestor worship of the concerned tribe.

Besides these noted works there are numerous general studies in Malayalam on the life and culture of various tribal communities. Though extremely scanty and mainly narrative, they give us a few data on tribal funerals. They include Nettur. P. Damodaran's *Ādivāsikaḷudē Kēraḷam* (1974), Ambatt Sukumaran Nair's *Ādivāsikaḷudē Nāṭṭil* (1974), P. Somasekharan Nair's *Paṇiyar* (1976), K. Panoor's *Kēraḷathilē Āfrica* (1987), A.R. Narayanan Nair's *Kāṭṭārum Avarudē Kaḷamozhikaḷum* (1989), Chummar Chundel's *Karutha Kalakaḷ* (1991), Sreenarayanan Mavoor's *Chōlanaykkarum Kākkappūkkaḷum* (1992) and P. Unnikrishnan Kallil's *Aṭṭappādi: Ādivāsikaḷude Dēvabhūmi* (2004). A few articles in Malayalam, like K. Panoor's "Paṇiyar" (1959), M.S. Prakasham's "Wayanāṭṭilē Paṇiyar" (1974) and "Wayanāṭṭilē Kuṟumaṟ" (1978), M. Jamaluddeen's "Veḷicham Thēdunna Guhāmanushyaṟ" (1978), V. Viswambharan's "Kaḷanādikaḷ" (1984), and P.G. Padmini's "Wayanāṭṭilē Thēnīchakaḷ" (1995) also deal with some aspects of the cult of the dead of the concerned tribes.

A few Doctoral Dissertations in Anthropology also throw some light on the funeral practices of the tribal communities. They include B. Ananda Bhanu's *Social Development in a Pre-agricultural Society- Cholanaikkan:*

¹¹⁵ B. Anandabhanu, "Adiyān", T. Madhavamenon ed., *Encyclopedia of Dravidian Tribes, Vol. II*, edited by T. Madhavamenon, Trivandrum, 1996, pp. 1-7.

The Cavemen of Kerala (1984), Viswanathan Nair's *Tribal Health and Medicine in Kerala: a Study in Inter-relationship between Habitat, Health, Medicine, Society and Culture* (1985), Kumaran Vayalēri's *Kuṛichiyarudē Jīvithavum Samskāravum* (1992), K. S. Sreekumar's *Kēraḷiya Kalā Pārambaryam: Iruḷar, Mudugar, Kuṛumbar Ennivarudē Kalārūpangaḷē Adisthānamākki Oru Padanam* (1992), M.J. Jose's *Karimpālarudē Nādōdi Samskāram* (1994), B. Bindu's *Socio-economic Changes among Three Wynad Tribes: a Study of Kaṭṭunaikkan, Adiyān and Muḷḷakuṛuman in Eco-cultural Context* (1997) and Seetha Kakkoth's *Three Tribes of Nilambur Valley: A Study in Interrelationship Between Habitat, Economy, Society and Culture* (2001).

Archaeological Studies

One of the important aspects in the study of the cult of the dead is regarding its origins. Earliest visible archaeological evidences for the existence of the cult of the dead are the Megalithic monuments found scattered all over the world in various forms of monumental architecture. There are scholars who hold the view that Megalithism is still a living institution on the ground that similarities exist between the tribal customs associated with the death rites and the Megalithic cult as is understood from the grave goods and the funeral monuments. The deposition of the personal belongings like weapons, implements, ornaments of beads, gold, iron and

copper, daily utensils, pottery, clothes and food articles in the burial pit is a universal tribal practice just like that of the Megalithic builders. Whereas the second feature of the practice of the erection of monuments of stone over the burial spot is found among a few tribes only. The survival of Megalithism among the Indonesian tribesmen was first studied by W. J. Perry in his work, *The Megalithic Culture of Indonesia*.¹¹⁶ According to him three types of Megalithic monuments viz, Menhirs, Dolmens and Stone Circles are constructed by tribal people even today. Perry's concept of living Megalithism has been followed by many scholars like A. Riesenfeld, in his work *The Megalithic Culture of Melanesia*,¹¹⁷ Glynn Daniel in his three works, *The Pre-historic Chamber-tombs of England and Wales*, *The Megalithic Builders of Western Europe* and *The Pre-historic Chamber-tombs of France: a Geographical, Morphological and Chronological Survey*¹¹⁸ and V. Gordon Childe in his *Pre-historic Communities of the British Isles*.¹¹⁹

In India, V. Ball has recorded the living tradition of erecting Menhirs and Dolmens over the graves of the Kol tribes of Chōtanāgpur in his article "Stone Monuments in the District of Singbhum Chotanagpur."¹²⁰ He recorded that a Menhir is erected for each man, woman and daughter of the family. The

¹¹⁶ W. J. Perry, *The Megalithic Culture of Indonesia*, London, 1918.

¹¹⁷ A. Riesenfeld, *The Megalithic Culture of Melanesia*, Leiden, 1950.

¹¹⁸ Glynn Daniel, *The Pre-historic Chamber-tombs of England and Wales*, London, 1950; *The Megalithic Builders of Western Europe*, Harmondsworth, 1958; and *The Pre-historic Chamber-tombs of France: a Geographical, Morphological and Chronological Survey*, London, 1960.

¹¹⁹ V. Gordon Childe, *Pre-historic Communities of the British Isles*, London, 1940.

¹²⁰ V. Ball, "Stone Monuments in the District of Singbhum Chotanagpur", *Indian Antiquary* I, 1872, pp. 291-292.

Menhirs are scattered throughout the Kol settlement areas and are arranged in groups either in straight line or an arc. He found thirty Menhirs in one group.

W. F. Sinclair studied about Karambhars of Kaladgi district in Central India. In his article "Karambhars and Dolmens"¹²¹ he says that they bury their dead and raise a dolmen over the remains. These dolmens are of miniature size with a height of 18 inches and consist of four stones on the four sides and covered with a capstone.

M. J. Walhouse in his article "Sepulchral Customs, Existing and Pre-historic"¹²² studied the Munda and Ho burial customs. They buried the dead in earthen urns under one or more big stone slabs lying flat on the ground or supported by small pieces of stone at the corners. A. Playfair in his work *The Gārōs*¹²³ examined the burial practices of certain Gārō clans like Abeng, Chisak and Kima. The first two clans of the Gārō tribe after cremation collected bones in a pot which is buried in the earth outside the deceased's house. A small shrine is built over the spot and offerings of food are made. Among the Kima two to four feet high memorial posts are put up in front of the dead man's house after cremation.

¹²¹ W.F. Sinclair, "Karambhars and Dolmens", *Indian Antiquary VI*, 1877, p.230.

¹²² M.J. Walhouse, "Sepulchral Customs, Existing and Pre-historic", *Indian Antiquary VII*, 1878, pp.44-47.

¹²³ A. Playfair, *The Gārōs*, London, 1909.

T.C. Hudson who wrote *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*¹²⁴ observed that ancestor worship is common among the Nāga tribes of Manipur and stones are erected in honour of the dead in the same way as the Khāsis.

In 1932 H. Walters conducted a journey across the Pandoo hills in Bengal to examine the burial practices of the Khāsis. He published his observations in his article "Journey across the Pandoo Hills, Near Silhet in Bengal." He noticed some two to three hundred stone seats under the trees. The stone seats consist of circular solid stone slabs supported by upright stones set on end, which enclose the space below. They vary from two to eight feet in diameter. The Khāsis practice post-cremation burial. The dead bodies are burnt on the spot set aside¹²⁵ for the purpose; their ashes are collected and put into earthen pots which are deposited under these stones. He found similarity between Khāsi memorials and 'cromlechs' of Wales and Cornwall.

C. Von Furer Haimendorf in his "Megalithic Ritual among the Gadabas and Bondos of Orissa"¹²⁶ extensively studied the Megalithic monuments erected by these two tribes. He found that these two tribes erected Menhirs in honour of the dead.

¹²⁴ T.C. Hudson, *The Nāga Tribes of Manipur*, London, 1911.

¹²⁵ H. Walters, "Journey Across the Pandoo Hills, Near Silhet in Bengal", *Asiatic Researches XVII*, 1932, pp.502-503.

¹²⁶ C. Von Furer Haimendorf, "Megalithic Ritual Among the Gadabas and Bondos of Orissa", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal IX*, 1943, pp.149-178 (Letters 3rd Series)

Varrier Elwin examined the burial practices of Maria Gōnds in his article 'Funerary Customs in Bastar State'.¹²⁷ He observes that upright Menhirs found in Bastar were twelve feet in height, six feet in breadth and one foot in thickness. The erection of Menhir in honour of the dead among the hill Marias is an occasion of social gathering and involves much expenditure on the part of the deceased's family.

The existence of Megalithism among the South Indian tribes was first noticed by Fergusson in his *Rude Stone Monuments of All Countries*.¹²⁸ He found that the Kuṛumbas of the southern hills erected Megalithic Dolmens in that region.

J. W. Brecks in his exhaustive work *An Account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilgiris*¹²⁹ points out that the Kuṛumbas of the Nilgiris cremate the dead and bury a few post-cremation bones in *Sāvu-manē* (death-house) or cromlechs of three upright stones with a covering slab. These cromlechs are said to have been made by their forefathers.

M.J. Walhouse in his article "On Some Formerly Existing Antiquities on the Nilgiris"¹³⁰ analyses the similarities between the Toda burial monuments and Megalithic tombs. Like the Megalithic people they mark their graves with stone circles.

¹²⁷ Varrier Elwin, 'Funerary Customs in Bastar State', *Man in India*, XXV, 1945, pp.85-133.

¹²⁸ James Fergusson, *Rude Stone Monuments of All Countries, Their Age and Uses*, 1872, p.476.

¹²⁹ J. W. Brecks, *An Account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilgiris*, London, 1873.

¹³⁰ M.J. Walhouse, "On Some Formerly Existing Antiquities on the Nilgiris", *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. II, 1873, pp.275-278.

Robert Sewell in his *List of Antiquarian remains in the Presidency of Madras*¹³¹ mention that the Sōra erected Megalithic memorial stones in honour of the dead in their last funeral ceremony known as 'Guar'. The memorial stone usually measures 2'x1' and is thrust in the ground by digging a small hole. Two full-sized buffalos are sacrificed at the time of its erection. The Kois of the Gangem district erect dolmens and Menhirs over the remains of the dead. Sewell noted large number of rude cairn-like huts in these areas.

Findings by some other scholars like Gordon Childe, "Megaliths",¹³² V.D. Krishnaswamy, "Megalithic Types of South India",¹³³ K.R. Srinivasan and N.R. Bannerjee, "Survey of South Indian Megalithis,"¹³⁴ H. Sarkar, "Some Aspects of Megalithic Culture of India"¹³⁵ and V. Rami Reddy, "Megaliths in India-Past and Present"¹³⁶ also allude to the same point of view that Megalithism is a living tradition. The only tribe in Kerala who are still found to erect dolmens in honour of the dead is the Malayarayans of Travancore. Most other tribes, while not erecting burial monuments, deposit grave goods during the time of funeral. They also scoop out side chambers

¹³¹ Robert Sewell, *List of Antiquarian remains in the Presidency of Madras*, Madras, 1882, p. 2.

¹³² V. Gordon Childe in his "Megaliths", *Ancient India*, No.4, July 1947-Jan. 1948, pp.5-13.

¹³³ V.D. Krishnaswamy, "Megalithic Types of South India", *Ancient India*, No.5, Jan.1947, pp.35-45.

¹³⁴ K.R. Srinivasan and N.R. Bannerjee, "Survey of South Indian Megalithis", *Ancient India*, No.9, 1953, Special Jubilee Number, pp.103-115.

¹³⁵ H Sarkar, "Some Aspects of Megalithic Culture of India", *Puratatva*, 11, 1977-80, pp.49-55.

¹³⁶ V. Rami Reddy, "Megaliths in India-Past and Present" in *New Trends in Indian Art and Archaeology*, S.R. Rao's *Seventieth Birthday Felicitation Volume*, Vol. I, edited by V.U. Nayak and N.C. Ghosh, New Delhi, 1992, pp.37-44.

inside the burial pit. This fact underlines the need of an analysis of the reports of the excavations conducted at important megalithic sites in Kerala.

Megalithic Studies and Excavation Reports:

1. William Logan, 1887.¹³⁷ Logan made the first attempt for a systematic classification of the burial monuments of Malabar. He divided them into four categories according to their typical characteristics and exemplified them through illustrations. Following is the rude categorization of Logan.

- a) Megalithic remains
- b) Excavated caves
- c) Caves with massive urns (*kudakkallu*) and massive sepulchral urns without caves.
- d) Modern small-sized sepulchral urns.

A fifth class, which Logan considered as not been authoritatively connected with sepulchral uses, but evidently belonged to the Megalithic period of class one, is the *Thoppikkallu* (hat-stone). Specimens of the first category were found in Kalladikōde mountain peak of Pālakkād and it contained iron implements, weapons and earthen pots. The second category was found in Kuttiyēri and Trichambaram of Taḷiparaṃba and Padinyāttumuṟi of Calicut. Logan called these monuments death-houses as they contained

¹³⁷ William Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. I, Madras, 1951, reprint, pp.179-182

earthen vessels, iron weapons and implements. The third category was a large sepulchral urn placed inside an excavated chamber. It contained earthen-ware pots of advanced type from which Logan inferred that society had begun to pay attention to ornamenting the vessels in domestic use. He also found a connecting link between the massive half-baked earthen ware urns in the excavated chambers in the *Kudakkallu* with the Malayāḷi practice of using small sepulchral urns of the fourth category. The charred bones of the deceased are placed in the urns as a temporary resting-place only, and are, as soon as convenient, removed and cast into the fresh water of the holy rivers. But in former days there was evidently no intention of ever disturbing the relics after they were put in their final resting place. He surmised that the burial in urns was emblematic in the return of the individual to the womb of Mother Earth and the protuberance on the bottom of the urn under this supposition would signify that it was representative of the *osuteri*.

2. A.H. Longhurst, Calicut, 1911-12.¹³⁸ A rock-cut tomb was discovered in June 1911, on a private land to the left of the road from Malāpparaṃba to Chēvāyūr about five miles away from Calicut. Longhurst examined the tomb and found a circular rock-cut chamber with a domed roof, supported in the centre by a short round pillar tapering from the top to bottom, the entire structure, including the pillar, being hewn out of the solid laterite rock. The

¹³⁸ A.H. Longhurst, "Rock-cut Tomb near Calicut", *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report*, 1911-12, pp.159-160

interior is very small, measuring only 7' 6" x 7' 8" and 3' 9" in height. The most important findings were earthen-ware vessels like a broken earthen-ware tray, 2' 3" in length, 1' 3" in width and about 2" thick, having a raised rim running all-round, the ends of the tray being slightly rounded off. Attached to the under surface were originally 8 little legs, about 1 ½" in height, so as to raise the tray from off the ground. Inside, was found a mixture of fine red earth, ash, and little pieces of bone, which was covered with an earthen-ware lid similar in size to the tray. It appeared to represent a miniature sarcophagus, and, judging from its small size, may have contained the remains of a child. The other vessels were of the ordinary Indian pitcher or *Chaṭṭi*-type still in use.

3. A. Aiyappan, Feṛōke, 1933.¹³⁹ The Feṛōke site, where there were seven or eight tombs, was discovered by Prof. Jouveau-Dubreuil in the beginning of the year 1931, and he assigned them a Vedic (Aryan) origin. One of these rock-cut tombs at Chenappaṛambu was examined by Aiyappan. Fragments of Black polished ring-stands and lids (conical) were found here in plenty. Pieces of charcoal and bones, a large pyriform urn, 2' 5" in height and 1' 4" in diameter across the mouth were discovered from inside the cave. A notable peculiarity of the urn is that it has six claw-like projections on the inside of it just below the neck region. Other important findings were a large pyriform

¹³⁹ A. Aiyappan, "Rock-cut Cave Tombs of Feroke, S. Malabar", *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, Jan. 1933, p.299-314.

urn of coarse half-baked clay, a large oblong bath-tube like vessel about 2' in length and 1' in height, with 12 small, solid legs, few etched tabular carnelian beads inside it, four four-footed urns somewhat rounded with reddish coloured and polished surface remaining only in patches here and there, about a dozen vessels of the pitcher-type with wide mouths, a large tripod 9" high with its ring 9.5" in diameter, and an iron dagger.

4. B.K. Thapar, Pōṛkaḷam, 1948.¹⁴⁰ Systematic investigations of the Megalithic sites in Kerala began with B.K. Thapar's Pōṛkaḷam Excavation. Pōṛkaḷam was the most extensively excavated Megalithic site of Kerala. In fact Pōṛkaḷam is a site of multiple monuments such as huge dolmens, port-hole cists with stone circles, rock-cut caves and urn burials and *topikals*. Thapar excavated an urn burial here. The large pyriform urn measuring 3' 2" in height with a diameter of 1' 2" at the mouth and 2' 9" at the bulge had been buried in a cylindrical pit of nearly 3' diameter and scooped out in the hard laterite rock to a depth of 5' 3". A rough step or shallow ramp was provided in the southern side of the pit. Funerary offerings were made at two stages: inside the urn at the base and overlying the lid on the urn. In the first phase the funerary goods included seven earthenware pots, three iron implements, including a tanged dagger and 48 beads. Of the last, as many 41 beads were of etched carnelian alone. The remaining ones include a terracotta bead and seven beads of an indeterminate metal. Human remains consisted of a few

¹⁴⁰ B.K. Thapar, "Porkalam Excavation", *Ancient India*, No.8, 1952, pp.3-15.

bones in the central part inside the urn. At this stage the urn was covered with a lid. The pit was also packed up to the top level. The second group of offerings was placed over the lid of the urn. These included 18 pots of Black-and-Red ware and all-Black ware. Over this offering, a low mound of gravelly loose earth was raised. This mound was covered with a granite cap-stone brought from the neighbouring outcrop, three-fourth of a mile away. Finally a circle of a dressed laterite block measuring 16 feet in external diameter was made. A date of third century B.C. to first century A.D. has been assigned by him to the urn-burial of Pōṛkaḷam on the basis of typological evidences.

5. Mehta & George, Machād, 1978.¹⁴¹ Two cists were excavated here. Beads of various shades and dimensions made of carnelian, jasper, glassware, wax, bone, horn and quartz crystals have been uncovered. Pendants of 'paste' were also unearthed. Other interesting objects are grinding stones. Large amount of human skeletal remains is available. Existence of the practice of cremation is also suggested based on the occurrence of the remains of charcoal fragments and ash. The availability of copper and bronze presupposes the circulation of non-local goods through some forms of exchange.

¹⁴¹ R.N. Mehta and K.M. George, "Megalithics at Machad and Pazhayannur, Talappilli Taluk, Kerala State, 1978" (Report of the Excavations conducted in 1974, Baroda MS university Series 15)

6. Mehta & George, Pazhayannūr, 1978.¹⁴² This site is noted for its iron-melting technology. The analysis of a metallic hook has revealed that it contained 99.62% pure iron and was free of air bubbles, which indicates contemporary level of metallurgical skill. This study has also revealed that the folding and forging techniques were employed in iron working. The presence of copper and bronze goods here points to the circulation of non-local goods. The remains of charcoal fragments and ash are also found here.

7. K. J. John, Citṛāri, 1972;¹⁴³ Pērāmbṛa, 1982;¹⁴⁴ Naduvil, 1989.¹⁴⁵ At Citṛāri near Paṭṭānūr in Kaṇṇūr district, one of the 13 laterite rock-cut caves was examined. The cave was marked by a circle, having the diameter of 8.12 meters. The pottery consisted of Black-ware and Red-ware having the shape of vases and bowls. The two pottery bowls which treasured the bone relics were covered over with lids and the rest were without covering. Out of the 13 pots recovered, only two were containing charred bones and surprisingly among the fragments of pottery, shreds of Neolithic, pinkish-ware having the shape of the channel spouted bowl and grey-ware, were conspicuous. To the south of the cave is a trapezium-like pit which was probably used by the builders of the cave tombs for exposing the dead body in order to collect the relics to be placed in the ritualistic urn and to be preserved in the cave tomb.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ K.J. John, "Rock-cut Cave Tombs of Citrari- Some new Light on the Rock-cut Cave Tombs of Malabar", *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol. I, Part IV, Dec. 1974, pp. 383-387.

¹⁴⁴ K.J. John, *op.cit.*, (n-31)

¹⁴⁵ K.J. John, Unpublished Excavation Report of Naduvil, Kannur District, Calicut University, 1989.

That the rock-cut cave tomb builders were essentially ancestor worshippers and the burial here seems to be fractional which indicates a ritualistic association as indicated by the trapezium like pit. The empty jars found in the caves were originally meant for preserving water and that water was revered or at least appreciated as an essential source for agriculture.

A *Kodakkal* was excavated at Pērāmbṛa. The interior chamber was quadrangular at the base and conical at the top. In the technique and fabric the pyriform jar of Pērāmbṛa resembles that of Pōṛkaḷam and that of Maski. The main pottery-type was a large pyriform jar of dull-red ware with an out-turned externally round-collared rim, carinated neck, convex shoulder and globular profile tapering to a truncated round base. The finding of bronze bowls is also the noted feature of this site.

At Nendravattom of Naduvil, near Taliparamba, eight rock-cut caves and twelve hood-stone circles were excavated. The circle was made of 12 laterite quadrantal stones and seen above the ground. Each hood-stone was planted in rock-cut ditches in a circular form with its major portion projecting above the ground. There was a rock-cut passage below the ground outside the circle which led to a subterranean rock-cut chamber. The chamber had a monolithic concavely carved out stone seat with two circular legs and this seat carried secondary burial remains. On the floor of the cave was found a fragile bronze vase, unidentified bronze equipment, iron sword, iron dagger, tridents,

knives, chisels, iron saucer lamps, iron tripod, a crystal bead, a quartz bead, earthen vases, ring stands and pot rests.

8. T. Satyamurthi, Mangād, 1992.¹⁴⁶ The Urn burials at Mangād reveal post-cremation fragmentary burials. On the basis of two C-14 dates from Mangād, scholars in recent times have argued that Iron Age began in Kerala around 1000 BC. The excavation revealed a deposit of humus varying from 10cms to 20cms. The humus is 20cms in the northern side of the site and reduces to 10cms as it slopes down to the south. All the urns were found to be sealed by layer-2 consisting of compact gravel and brownish soil. Significant findings in layer-2 include two terracotta fragmentary sprinklers of grey-ware. Besides these, the findings include iron slags (the percentage of iron in these slags varies from 18.8% to 66.5%), 30 carnelian beads among which 20 are etched, bone pieces, charcoal, wedges, long cutting knife, sickle, tanged knife and blades.

9. P. Rajendran and C.S.P. Aiyar, Arippa, 1991.¹⁴⁷ Excavation of a double-chambered cist has revealed fragments of human and animal bone relics which included cranial parts of an infant less than six months old, bone fragments of an adult and some animal bones. Copper objects and gold sheets

¹⁴⁶ T. Satyamurthi, *The Iron Age in Kerala: Mangadu Excavations*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1992, Government of Kerala.

¹⁴⁷ P. Rajendran and CSP. Aiyar, "A Preliminary Report on the Characterization of Copper and Gold Ornaments of the Arippa Megalithic Culture in Kollam District, Kerala, South India", *Man and Environment*, 22:2, 1997, pp. 61-66.

are also reported. The burial objects include a copper bangle, and two copper ear-rings covered with very thin gold sheets.

10. Rajan Chedambath, *Kuṟumāśseri Excavation, 1997*.¹⁴⁸ From here, beads of various shades and dimensions made of carnelian, jasper, glassware, bone, horn and quart crystal have been uncovered from a number of burials. Remains of rice husks were also discovered.

11. Ummichipōyil, 2003.¹⁴⁹ Archaeological Survey of India, Kerala Circle, conducted excavations at Ummichipōyil, the latest Megalithic site discovered in Kerala. This site offers a dozen rock-cut caves from where large quantity of pottery and iron implements were unearthed. The pottery included black-and-red ware and pure red- ware types. Sarcophagus burials are also evident at Ummichipōyil.

Although inferences from the aforesaid excavation reports do not perfectly agree with the present day tribal funeral practices, and to a large extent even disagree with them in terms of burial patterns and the nature of grave goods, it doesn't presuppose a discontinuity of the practice by the successors. The *Sangam* works, which are held to be contemporaneous with

¹⁴⁸ Rajan Chedambath, "Investigations into the Megalithic and Early Historic Periods of the Periyar and Ponnani River Basins of Kerala", PhD Dissertation, University of Poona, 1997, Pune.

¹⁴⁹ The full report of the excavation is not published yet, only abstracts are available in published and presented papers. For a brief sketch of it see Jayasree Nair, "Survival of the Neolithic in the megalithic: Excuse on Ummichipoyil Evidence", Presented Paper, SAP Seminar on *Cultural History of Malabar: From Early settlements to the Formation of the State*, Department of History, University of Calicut, Feb. 16-18, 2006. Also see Jayasree Nair, "Towards New Interpretative Possibilities: A Case of the Megaliths in Kasargod", Proceedings Volume, *International Seminar on Kerala History*, Kerala Council of Historical Research, Thiruvananthapuram, March 16-18, 2006.

the late phase of the Megalithic culture, suggests the feasibility of a long continuity of these ancient death customs. Early twentieth century ethnographic studies also refer to certain burial customs which are not present among the tribes of Malabar today. All these would lead us to presume that the tribal people were following some of the Megalithic practices till very recently and that it was due to the steady process of acculturation that their death customs underwent drastic changes making it difficult to identify the link with the ancient tradition today.

CHAPTER 3

DEATH AND FUNERAL RITES

The fear of the dead and the precautions taken through funeral rites against the return of the spirit of the dead are universal. Both anthropologists and archaeologists study about death, funeral rites and grave goods to reconstruct the contemporary social structure. Malinovsky, who widely studied various cultures of the world, suggests that there are two conflicting attitudes towards the dead: “death shakes the moral life of the society and public ceremonials are required to restore the cohesion of the group”.¹ V.A. Alekshin, the well known archaeologist, points out two fundamental components of funerary practices: “the first of these is ritual—the activities sanctioned by tradition that occur before, during, and after the burial and are considered essential to the transfer to the other world of deceased members of the community, both those forming its nucleus and others related by blood. The second characterizes the social position of the departed. It consists of the collection of material elements—the burial structure, the assemblage of grave goods, and the position of the deceased—required for a person of a particular age and sex to be transported to the other world. The combination of these two components of the burial rite makes up the standard (traditional) funerary

¹ Malinowsky, *Magic, Science, Religion and other Essays*, New York, 1954, PP.52-53.

customs of any archaeological culture. These two fundamental components must not be considered in isolation one from the other".²

Unique and Universal traits

Death for the tribes all over the world is only a separation of the soul from the body. That is why the needs of the dead man could hardly be imagined as different from that of the living man. Human approach to death and funeral rites is universal in nature and the tribes of Malabar are no exception. This can be established by comparing their practices with those of the tribes in other parts of India as well as of the whole world. Though ethnically and culturally world tribes have many similarities, and a lot more in their funeral practices, certain striking differences can also be noticed. It is upon such varied features that we have to analyze the twin processes of death and funeral rites. Prominent among the similarities are the following:

1. Those who die of suicide or of murder or those ostracized are not buried in the same graveyard meant for the community. Certain locations are allotted for them within the graveyard or outside because their spirits are considered as dreadful.
2. Status differentiation is found in the funerals of headmen, elders/dignitaries, those who die unnatural death and of children.

While the funeral ceremonies of all others are public events, those of

² V.A. Alekshin, 'Burial Customs as an Archaeological Source', *Current Anthropology*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2, April 1983, pp.137-138.

children and those who die of unnatural causes are conducted swiftly and quietly and only a small section represent it. The reason might be that deaths of children are common events.

Blauner suggests that “degree of grandeur of a person’s funeral directly reflects his or her status in that society and that this, in turn, corresponds to the intensity of loss felt at the person’s death...”³

3. Unmarried young women are buried after decorating their bodies with ornaments, flowers, colourful dresses etc just like brides who are decorated during the occasion of the marriage. But the custom practiced by certain tribes in Africa and Australia of subjecting the corpse of an unmarried girl for intercourse by a man is altogether absent among the tribes of Malabar.
4. Certain regional variations in death customs, particularly on the level of conservatism, are found in the funeral practices of the same tribe in different localities. For example, the practices of Kurichiyas of Wynād and Kaṇṇavam and of the Malamutthans of Viṭṭikkunnu and Chōkkād differ considerably.
5. In funeral rites males have a privileged position, particularly the eldest son of the deceased, which evidently conveys the male-dominated or patriarchal character of the tribal social structure. Those who have no male issue to inherit him/her, are considered to

³ R. Blauner, “Death and Social Structure”, *Psychiatry* Vol. XXIX, 1966, P 378-394.

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be unfortunate. The funeral rites performed without a son has little significance; the soul never reaches the land of the dead and it has to keep on wandering.

6. In the case of death during pregnancy or at the time of child birth, the tribes follow certain special rites because the spirits of such women are dreadful and ferocious.
7. Orphans do not have any ceremonies connected with burial except in the case of Kurichiyas of Kaṇṇavam because there would be nobody to bear the expenditure in the case of such persons.
8. Tribes all over the world appoint specialized grave-diggers. Death for the tribes is the re-entry into the womb of the mother (earth). So they make comfortable graves for the deceased just like that of mother's womb.
9. The tribes in Malabar after completing the burial rites observe a period of *pula* or pollution. Similar custom prevails among tribes all over the world known as period of mourning.
10. All tribes consult oracles to find out the cause of death.
11. Deceased children will not have any biers to carry them to the graveyard; they are carried in the arms by the elders.

There are certain striking differences as well and they are the following:

1. Unlike the tribes the world over, sinners or those who die of unnatural causes are not denied funeral rites in Malabar (except among the Kuṛichiyas and the Māvilāns) because they consider every person as equal before death. Pollution is observed for them as also the rites attached with burial but no ceremonies are conducted for them including the final funeral ceremony.
2. Unlike women and children of other tribes of the world, women and children of tribes of Malabar are not allowed to follow the funeral procession except in the case of certain tribes like Chōlanāikkans, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Koṛagas and Aṛaṇādans because in olden days the graveyards were situated in thick forests far away from the settlements. They are also considered to be more susceptible to the fear of the dead. The possibility of menstrual pollution also prohibits women's participation.
3. Unlike the other tribes of the world, the tribes in Malabar debar menstruating women from participating in funeral rites; they are treated as highly impure.
4. Unlike the other tribes of the world, the tribes of Malabar do not follow twin burial, i.e. more than one corpse buried in the same pit

because a grave is considered to be the sole property of a single person and he is the only master of it.

5. Unlike other world tribes, burial and cremation are the two forms of disposal of the dead in Malabar today. Earlier they had practices such as abandoning or casting off the dead.
6. Unlike among tribes of other parts of the world where the role of the headman of the tribe is only nominal in funeral ceremonies, among the Malabar tribes headmen have a pre-eminent position in all functions connected with death in his hamlet. In this respect his role is the most important factor to be reckoned with in funeral practices.

Causes of Death

Owing in part to its early, sudden, and unexpected impact, primitive people have not frequently accepted the phenomenon of death as a natural and normal event. Even though it has been recognized as the ultimate fate of every man, it has quite generally been thought to originate from some blunders or oversight on the part of some and to be caused primarily by magic and sorcery.⁴ The tribal people consider the following as the various causes leading to death:

⁴ Leo. W. Simons, *The Role of the Aged in Primitive Society*, New Heaven, 1945, p. 218.

I. Unnatural: Death caused by evil spirits⁵ and witchcraft belong to this category. The forces of darkness and annihilation act in mysterious ways striking terror in the hearts of people. The evil forces either strike directly at the victim or work in an indirect way through intermediaries. Generally intermediaries are sorcerers. The most prevalent form of sorcery among the tribes is *odi-vidya*.⁶ The concept of natural death due to ageing and atrophying of human body is generally alien to the tribes. For them every death is non-natural. Frazer suggests that “there is a difference between death due to direct action of spirit, and death attributed to the indirect influence of sorcerers. If the death is caused by witchcraft, the guilty one must be found and killed, whereas, if it is brought about by the action of a demon, it cannot be avenged”.⁷ This faith in non-natural death is universally recognized by all the tribes. Frazer quotes Clement to give an example from North Western Australia where every illness is ascribed to the *dguno*, an evil spirit otherwise known as the *Warunga* or *Warruga*.⁸ In the island of *Nvalso*, one of the New Hebrides, we hear of the belief firmly established in the minds of the natives that nobody dies a natural death except as a result of violence or poison or

⁵ Spirits of those who die a non-natural death like through suicide, murder or epidemic.

⁶ The sorcerers follow black magic known as *Odividya*. According to tribal belief, the performer of the *Odividya*, known as *Odiyan*, kill his opponents after mutilating their limbs. This way of killing is known as *Odichu Kollal*. All tribes attribute the death of a pregnant woman to *Odividya*. The *Odiyan* kills a pregnant woman or dig the grave of the buried pregnant woman and remove the foetus to make a kind of medicine for using it against his enemy.

⁷ J.G. Frazer, *The belief in Immortality and the Worship of the dead*, Vol. I., London, 1913, p.27.

⁸ Clement, “Ethnographical Notes on the Western Australian Aborigines”, *Archives Internationals*, Vol. XVI, 1904, p. 8.

sorcery.⁹ The *Wakelbura* of South East Australia believe that no strong black would die unless someone had placed a spell on him.¹⁰ The Andamanese attribute a sudden death to the jungle or the sea spirit, with whom the deceased may recently had been in contact.¹¹ The same belief prevails among almost all tribes of Malabar in varying degrees. It is much stronger among tribes like the Aṛaṇādans, Mudugas, Thachanādan Mūppans, Kuṛumbas, and Ājar. The Aṛaṇādans believe that death of a person occurs only due to the malevolent activities of the spirit.¹² When a Muduga dies of heart attack, they believe that it is caused by the *odi-vidya* committed by members belonging to the Pulaya, Cheruma, or Tiyya communities. The same reason is attributed to the death of a pregnant woman.

II. Death caused by the spirits of the departed: The spirits of the dead are thought to confer many benefits on the survivors if they are propitiated by their deeds or they would bring on them many evils and calamities like disease, death, etc. R.H Codrington says that for the Melanesians any sickness, that is serious, is believed to be brought about by ghosts or spirits.¹³ Kotvalia, a tribe in Gujarat believes that sickness or sudden death of either human beings or animals are caused by dead ghosts and witches. They consult

⁹ Deniau, "Croyances religieuses et mœurs Indigènes L'île malo" *Missions Catholiques* Vol. XXXIII, 1910, P 315, cited in J.G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-7), p. 48.

¹⁰ Alfred. W. Howitt, *Native Tribes of South East Australia*, London, 1904, p 471.

¹¹ Albert Muntch. S.J.A.M, *Cultural Anthropology*, New York, 1933, p.102.

¹² K.S. Singh ed., *People of India: Kerala*, Vol. XXVII, Part III, New Delhi, 2002, p. 22.

¹³ R.H. Codrington, *The Melanesians, Studies in their Anthropology and Folklore*, Oxford, 1891, p. 194.

Bhuva (traditional priest) for help and treatment.¹⁴ According to tribal belief, the only solution for this unpleasant state of affairs is the proper disposal of the dead. Ājar believe that they can wreck vengeance upon their opponents by propitiating the spirit of their eldest deceased *Kāraṇavaṛ* called *Kāvu* which can unleash evil spirits who implicitly carry out all orders given to them in the most ruthless fashion. These evil spirits, in obedience to the sorcerers command, can kill the enemy sought to be eliminated.¹⁵ The Koṛagas and Māvilāns believe that the spirits of their ancestors have the power to move in the form of winds and kill anyone.

III. Escape of the Soul from the body: According to Bendann, tribal people sometimes attribute death to the escape of the soul from the body.¹⁶ Supporting Bendann, Hartland writes: “From Siberia to Australia, Pugot Sound to the islands of Eastern Archipelago, means are employed to prevent the soul from wandering and to bring it back to the body. The permanent loss of the soul means nothing more than death”.¹⁷ The Birhōrs of Bengal give a little water to the person who is nearing death, and then leave him alone, keeping the door wide open so that soul may have a clear passage! The family members lament loudly so that the rumble made by the soul is drowned in the

¹⁴ Harish Doshi in Sachidananda and R.R. Prasad ed., *Encyclopaedic Profile of Indian Tribes*, Vol. II, Delhi, 1996, p. 520.

¹⁵ Told by Kethan, the *Mūppan* of the Idimanna Ājar settlement of Nilambur.

¹⁶ E. Bendann, *Death Customs: an Analytical Study of Burial Rites*, London, 1930, p. 38.

¹⁷ Hartland in *Hastings Dictionary*, Vol. IV, P 412, cited in E. Bendann, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.

noise.¹⁸ The belief of the escape of the soul from the body is more popular among tribes like the Iruḷas, Kuṟumbas, Mudugas and Kuṟichiyas. They call the soul *Nikal* (shadow or spirit. It is the colloquial variant of the term *Nizhal*). As far as the Melanesians are concerned, “the soul, *Talegi* or *Atai*, goes out of the body in some dreams, and if for some reason it does not come back, the man is found dead in the morning”.¹⁹ The Ēṟavāḷans think that the soul goes out either through the mouth or the eyes whichever is open. Chōlanāikkans believe that “death occurs when the soul leaves the body in the form of air”.²⁰ Kuṟumbas also hold the same belief. According to them death occurs when the soul escapes from the body through the mouth in the form of air. Likewise the Kuṟichiyas and Paṇiyas believe that *uyiru* or the soul leaves the body through the feet in the form of air.

IV. Natural i.e. Will of God: The idea of the attribution of death to the will of God is a new phenomenon in the case of tribal religion and it is brought about by the slow and steady process of external contact of the tribes with the Hindu, Christian and Muslim communities. This is a recent development as a result of acculturation. This process is more popular among agrestic communities like the Adiyāns and Paṇiyas of the plains of Wynād. In New South Wales, says Frazer John, when a native aborigine is killed in battle or is

¹⁸ K.P. Bahadur, *Castes, Tribes, and Culture of India Vol. III: Bengal, Bihar and Orissa*, Delhi, 1977, p. 74

¹⁹ R.H. Codrington, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

²⁰ N. Viswanathan Nair, *Tribal health and Medicine in Kerala: a Study in Inter-relationship Between Habitat, Health, Medicine, Society and Culture*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Calicut, 1985, p.66

severely wounded that he dies or is crushed to death by the falling branch of a tree, or dies from some other visible cause, his comrades do not wonder because the manner of the death is manifest.²¹ In India, “when a Bhil dies, the Bhopa or witch-finder, is called in, seated on a wooden platform, and near him is placed a large earthen pot with a brass dish covering the mouth. This is beaten by two men of the tribe, who at the same time sing the funeral dirge. The spirit of the deceased is now supposed to enter the Bhopa, and through him to demand what it wants. If the man has died natural death, his spirit calls for milk, and repeats through the Bhopa the words he used just before death”.²²

V. Tracing out the cause of death: Various methods are employed by different tribes to find out the cause of death—whether it is natural or unnatural. Howitt points out such a practice of South East Australia: “Before the body was lowered into the grave, the medicine man, standing at the head, spoke to find out who caused its death, and received an answer from another medicine man at the foot of the grave”.²³ The method the Gōnds resort to is of a different type. “The chief mourner takes a stick, and saluting the pyre, takes the ashes. If any unburnt cloth or food articles are found, it indicates that the deceased was the victim of black magic”.²⁴ In Malabar, the Muḷḷakuṟumans,

²¹ Frazer John, *The Aborigines of New South Wales*, Sidney, 1892, p.78.

²² W. Crook, *Races of Northern India*, New Delhi, 1973, p.254.

²³ Alfred. W. Howitt, *op. cit.*, p. 464.

²⁴ Haimendorff, 1979, *The Gonds of Andhrapradesh*, p.364, cited in *Encyclopedia of Dravidian Tribes*, Vol. I, edited by T. Madhavamenon, Thiruvananthapuram, 1996, p.280.

Kuṛichiyas and the Paṇiyas have the custom of consulting the *Kōmaram*²⁵ to find out the reasons for the illness of a person and his fast deteriorating health. Among the Kuṛichiyas, when a person is on his death bed, the Oracle is called in and through him the *Malakkāri* (Kuṛichiya goddess) is consulted. Sometimes the head of the *taṛawād* acts as the Oracle. The Oracle falls into a trance and *Malakkāri* reveals through him the real cause of the illness as also whether the person would survive or not. To find out the cause of death the Kuṛichiyas resort to another method. They keep a goblet of water, in a corner of one of the rooms of the main house, for the first seven days after the funeral. Every day the water is replaced after observing its level in the goblet. If the water level is found to fall, the death is thought to be unnatural. When a man is about to breathe his last, the Paṇiyas consult an Oracle. This practice is called *Śāstram Nōkkal* (examining the *Śāstra*). Two different methods are employed for this. In one of these methods, small bells are put in a winnowing basket and rocked to and fro. The tinkling of bells affects the oracle and he gets possessed. He then proclaims the nature of the illness as well as the time of death of the person. In the other method, a handful of rice is spread on the floor and counted. If the number is odd, death is certain and if it is even the person will survive. This process is repeated a specific number of times and the final verdict is pronounced as per the aggregate result. When a person is about to die, the oracle of Muḷḷakuṛumans, who acts as the representative of

²⁵ *Kōmaram* is the Malabar equivalent of the western shaman or oracle.

their Goddess *Pūthādi Bhagavathi*, gets possessed and invites her to sit in the *Daivappura* (abode of Gods and ancestors). Putting a spouted vessel filled with water inside the shrine he propitiates the spirits of the ancestors. At last, he speaks out the secrets surrounding the illness and also the time of death of the concerned person as revealed to him.

Similarly, on the death of a person in their hamlet, the Koṛagas consult their oracle to find out why it happened. This ritual is called '*Daivam Kayaral*'. The headman of the dead person's hamlet supported by three other headmen of neighbouring hamlets summon the spirits of the deceased ancestors with the help of the winnowing baskets called *Thaduppan* held in their hands. When the spirits appear, all the headmen get possessed and tremble vigorously and through them the spirits announce the true reason of the death. The Aṛaṇādans, on the seventh day after the death of a person, call their oracle (*Kalladikkāran*) to ascertain the cause of the person's death. He jingles an anklet in a winnowing basket and the dead man's soul enters into the oracle's body. He then announces the cause of death. This is known as *Nālivekkal*. The practice among the Adiyāns is that, on the day of *Chemmapula* (13th day of death), two persons stand in opposite directions, facing each other, carrying two arrows made of bamboo in their hands. When the *Kanalādi* (the ritual functioner) performs certain rites, the sharp ends of the two arrows, held by the two, bend by their own and touch together. Among the Kaṇṇavam Kuṛichiyas, at the second day of the funeral, the

Kāraṇavar places two brass vessels containing water before the mourners and perform a ritual called *Mozhi Paṛayal* (*Mozhi* is a kind of prayer or ritual chanting). Then, while he addresses *Muthappan* (the ancestor deity), the soul of the dead enters into the body of one of the mourners and he becomes possessed and speaks out the secrets behind the death.

Omens of Death

The faith in omens as prophecies of death is universal, though not much popular elsewhere as it is in Malabar.²⁶ According to the Malabar tribal tradition, when a person is on the brink of death, certain animals or birds of the premises of the settlement, or of the nearby forest area, are believed to make certain inauspicious sounds or lamentations intermittently to inform the arrival of death. It is considered that these birds and animals are the messengers of death. Among the sounds of birds, the loud lamentations of *Kālankōzhi* or Collared Scops owl (*otus bakkamoena*) are the most horrible. This dreadful bird, which forebodes death, is known among the tribes by various names.²⁷ Besides, lamentations of other birds like Woodpecker²⁸

²⁶ It is popular among various Hindu communities as well.

²⁷ The Kuṛichiyas of Kaṇṇavam call them as 'Muthuḷ', Aṛaṇādans as *Kottachāthan*, Malamutthans as *Kūvaḷan*, Kādar as *Kōṭṭan*, Urāḷi Kuṛumans as *Kodakoḷai*, Wayanādan Pathiyans as *Chuṭṭūppan*, Karimpālans as *Kuthichudu*, Mudugas as *Kōṭṭan* and *Gudipichāthu*, Malapanikkans, Thachanādan Mūppans, Malayāḷar and Kaḷanādis as *Kālankōzhi*, and Kuṇḍuvādiyans as *Kālanpakki*.

²⁸ While the woodpecker is 'Sekina' for Iruḷas, Kuṛumbas and Mudugas, it is *Chevina* for the Kadar.

(*Dinopium benghalense*), Greater Coucal/Crow Pheasant²⁹ (*Centropus Sininsis*), Magpie Robin³⁰ (*Copsychus Saularis*), Jungle Babbler³¹ (*Turdoides Striatus*), Brahmini Kite³² (*Haliastur Indus*), Asian Fairy Blue Bird³³ (*Irene Puella*), Jungle Crow³⁴ (*Corvus Macrorhynchos*) and Koyel³⁵ (*Eudynamys Scolopacea*) are also omens of death. Certain sounds like the trumpeting of elephants³⁶ (*Elephas Maximus*) or their blaring cry of anger and the howling of dogs³⁷ (*Canis Familiaris*) are also omens of death. The crow, which is believed to be an omen of death, is also the bearer of the soul of the deceased.

We cannot find many instances of the faith in omens that may forebode death on a world scale. Frazer quotes an interesting example from the tribal practice of West Africa. The Paga people who are the natives in the interior of the Gold Coast believe that the life of a man or woman is identical with that of his crocodile, *alter ego*. (They believe that human souls reside in crocodiles and hence every person will have his/her own crocodile) When he is born the

²⁹ It is called *Perumāṭṭi* by Kuṟumbas, Mudugas and Iruḷas.

³⁰ Aṟaṇādans call it as Puḷḷathi.

³¹ It is *Kariyilakkiḷi* for Malasar and *Poṭṭantha* for Ēravāḷans.

³² Jungle Babbler is *Anth* for Chōlanāikkans, *Peruthal* for Thachanādan Mūppans, *Masāṟu Pāṟu* for Iruḷas.

³³ Among the Paṇiyas it is popular as *Pipa*.

³⁴ Crow is the messenger of death for the Ēravāḷans, Paṇiyas and Adiyāns. (Adiyāns have the belief that the direction in which the crow turns its tail down and wail, a person living in a settlement of that direction would definitely die).

³⁵ Kalanādis believe that the cry of a *Kuil* (Koyel) at night would bring a death.

³⁶ Elephants are omens for the Cholanaikkans.

³⁷ For Malayālar, Kuṇḍuvādiyans, Wayanādan Kādar etc.

crocodile is born; they are ill at the same time; they die at the same time. It is said that when a man is at the point of death, one can hear at night the groaning of his crocodile.³⁸ The Mewahang Rai, a tribe of East Nepal believe that if the death occurs at night, the dogs howl in a particular way because they can 'see' the ghost (*cāp*). Also a certain bird called *malami cara* is said to announce death by its chirping.³⁹

In Malabar, the Thachanādan Mūppans believe that the fall of a green tree is symbolic of an imminent death in the community. An interesting belief among the Karimpālans is that the spirits of their ancestors named *Pēna* or *Kūḷiyan* would appear to them in their dreams to inform them of their death in advance. The professional oracles among them called *Kalaśakkār*, thereafter, perform a ritual to test the veracity of this information. They sprinkle a little toddy and invoke the spirits of the ancestors to guide them to arrive at the right decision. As a result, the Oracles become possessed by the spirits of the ancestors and they act as the mouthpiece of these spirits and accordingly pronounce whether the information conveyed in the dream is right or wrong. It is also important to note that though a large majority of tribes have implicit faith in omens, a few tribes like the Kāṭṭunāikkans, Koragas and Malai-Malasar have no belief in omens at all.

³⁸ A.W. Cardinall, *The Natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast*, London, p. 39, cited in J.G. Frazer, *Aftermath: a Supplement to the Golden Bough*, London, 1936, pp.472-473.

³⁹ Martin Goenzle, "The Making of Good Ancestors: Separation, Transformation and Exchange in Mewahang Rai Funerary Rights" in Elizabeth Schombucher and Claus Peter Zoller ed., *Ways of Dying: Death and its Meaning in South Asia*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 51.

Offering water to the Dying Person

When a person is believed to be on the verge of death, all his kith and kin should assemble at his hamlet and remain with him until he recovers or dies. If it is certain that the death of a person is imminent, every one of his close relatives drops a little water into his mouth. The performance of this rite of administering water to the dying man by his close relatives is prevalent among tribes all over the world. The responsibility of performing this rite lies with the closest relatives of the dying person. For example, if a father or mother is on his or her deathbed and is sinking fast the sons and daughters of such a person should perform this rite. If it is the husband who is about to die, his wife performs this rite and vice versa. Nephews and nieces are to perform this rite in the case of uncles and aunts of matrilineal communities. William. E. Marshall says: "when on the point of death, the last office his kin perform for the relative is to give him milk, if only a drop or two to drink".⁴⁰ Among the tribe named Keer/Kir of Madhya Pradesh when a person is dying, a family member puts milk and *Ganga-jal* in his mouth.⁴¹ Offerings of food and drink to the dead before burial are frequent in the lower culture; sometimes as among the Tho of Northern Tongking, they are even placed in his mouth.⁴²

⁴⁰ William. E. Marshall, *The Todas: Their History and Ethnography*, Gurgaon, 1989, p.171.

⁴¹ T.K. Vaishnav in Sachidananda & R.R Prasad ed., *op. cit.*, p.409.

⁴² E. Sydney Hartland, in James Hastings ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Edinburgh, 1964, p.418.

Among the Malabar tribes, in the case of the Paṇiyas, the *Mūppan* or head of the clan is given precedence over the relatives in administering the last drop of water to the dying man. The close relatives of the dying man are allowed to perform this rite only after the *Mūppan* has performed it. At the moment of death, if no close relatives are present, any member of that settlement may serve water to the dying man. In the past, the drink given at the time of death was just fresh water but now water from rice-gruel, hot water etc. are being served. According to Campbell, water is poured into the mouth of the dying to keep the spirit from coming back, now apparently to keep evil spirits from returning to the dead body.⁴³ While the Kuṛichiyas give tender coconut water at the time of death, Paṇiyas and Malayālar give ordinary coconut water; but the Paṇiyas insist that coconut water be served in a folded plantain leaf. The Māvīlāns, when they find a person who is about to breathe his last, cut a coconut and pour its water out. Muḷḷakuṛumans give the dying man the holy water kept inside *Daivappura* or the Temple House.⁴⁴ When a person's death is imminent, Mudugas serve him with freshly prepared ragi soup. Kāṭṭunāikkans serve the dying person with curds, Kādar with black

⁴³ J. M. Campbell, "Notes on Spirit Basis of Belief and Custom", *The Indian Antiquary*, Vol. XXIV, Feb. 1895, p.29.

⁴⁴ Rajalakshmi Misra, *Muḷḷakuṛumbas of Kappāla*, Calcutta, 1971, pp.83-91, uses the terms *Daivappura* and *Kōyilvīdu* as being used by those of Kappāla for mentioning the Temple-House but those of Wynād use only the first term. Christoph Von Furer Haimendorf, "Ethnographic Notes on Some Communities of Wynad", *The Eastern Anthropologist*, Vol. VI., Sep.1952-Aug.1953, uses the term 'god's house' for *Daivappura*. Before burial the body of a *Muḷḷakuṛuman* is kept inside the *Daivappura* for sometime. Thirumukham, Pākkam and Cheṛiyānmāla settlements have two *daivappuras*, one for the dead ancestors and the other for gods and goddesses. Their main gods are *Pūthādi Daivam*, the god of agriculture, cattle and children; *Kūḷiyān*, god of climate; *Kali*, goddess of epidemics and *Mudiyampuli*, god of marriage and hunting. *Mudiyampuli* is first referred by F. Fawcett, "Notes on the Rock Carving in the Edakkal Cave, Wynad", *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. XXX, 1901, p.409.

tea, Malasar with milk diluted with water and Malai Malasar spiced sauce mixed with water from rice-gruel. Wayanādan Pathiyans and Wayanādan Kādar take a bowl of water mixed with basil leaves. Then they immerse a golden ring in it. This water is served to the dying person. Kaḷanādis use water in which basil leaves, flowers and rice are immersed for serving the dying man. Chōlanāikkans give the dying person water mixed with medicinal herbs and Āḷar use fresh water kept in an earthenware for this purpose. Aṟaṇādans believe that only those who are treacherously murdered by sorcerers through *Odi-vidya* ask for water while dying.

Announcement of Death

Regarding the nature of death announcement, J.Goody observes: “Death is a matter of public concern both within the settlement and beyond its boundaries. It is announced in three ways. The moment of death itself is marked by the loud wailing of women; it is these lamentations that inform the immediate neighbourhood, which consist mainly of members of the local sector of the deceased patri-clan. Later the playing of xylophones spreads the news to the whole settlement as well as to nearby parishes, and the particular tune indicates whether it is a man or woman who has died”.⁴⁵ The Oraons of Jharkhand, after the death of a person, inform people from the same clan as

⁴⁵ J. Goody, *Death, Property and the Ancestors: A Study of the Mortuary Customs of the Loddaga of West Africa*, London, 1962, p. 52.

well as the in-laws; the Mama and the Phupha are especially called.⁴⁶ Among the Maria Gōnds of Madhya Pradesh, the death of a person is announced by the beating of a drum.⁴⁷ The tribes of Malabar also practice ritualistic wailing in the event of death, which is a form of death announcement.

It is a commonly accepted custom among all the tribes to first inform the news of a death, in person, to the headman.⁴⁸ He has the right to send emissaries to inform headmen of other settlements and close relatives living away. But in the case of tribes like the Iruḷas, Mudugas, Kuṛumbas and Malasar, it is a council of elders that collectively decide to choose and send of the messengers. Only the clansmen were informed of the bereavement of a person in the past. The reason for this was that tribes like Malamutthans, Malappaṇikkans, Ūraḷikuṛumans and Kuṛichiyas had followed strict rules of pollution as practised by caste Hindus like the Nairs and Nambūthiris. As inter-tribal marriages are becoming a common occurrence now a days, ritual differences are slowly losing their value. There is an interesting point regarding the number of messengers to be sent by the headman. Only groups of even numbers like 2, 4, etc. should be chosen because, according to their belief, odd numbers are symbols of obstacles. Normally messengers are not sent during night time because, they believe, spirits of the dead and sorcerers

⁴⁶ Abhik Ghosh, *History and Culture of the Oraon tribe: Some Aspects of their Social life*, New Delhi, 2003, p.137. (Māma is mother-in-law's brother and Phūpha is father's sister)

⁴⁷ K.P. Bahadur, *Caste, Tribes and Culture of India: Vol. II., Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra*, Delhi, 1977, p.78.

⁴⁸ As regards those tribes for whom headship itself doesn't exist now or has become obsolete, such as *Araṇādans* and *Ēravālans*, this custom has already lost its relevance.

freely roam about during that time and would cause them trouble.

The headmen of some tribes like the Iruḷas, and Mudugas have been following certain peculiar traditions: their messengers carry a bamboo stick, a *śīlakkuda* (cloth umbrella with a bent handle) and a knife as symbols of death.⁴⁹ In the case of the Iruḷas, when the messengers reach a hamlet to inform death, the headman and *Vaṇḍāri* approach them and the *Vaṇḍāri* receives in hand the bamboo stick, which symbolically indicates the acceptance of the news of death by them. Afterwards, while leaving, the stick is returned to the messengers. Death in an Adiyān settlement is first informed to the *Kunnu-mūppan*. He in his turn communicates the matter to *Karumi*, *Nāṭṭu-mūppan*, *Kanalādi* and the relatives of the deceased. Messengers of *Kāṭṭunāikkans*, *Kuṇḍuvādiyans*, *Paṇiyas* and *Adiyāns* also carry with them bamboo/cane sticks. *Kāṭṭunāikkans* carry *Muddhiyam* or divine stick, *Paṇiya Mūppan's* staff, *Adiyāns Bethavadi*⁵⁰ and the *Kuṇḍuvādiyans* a cane and a knife.

According to the tradition of the Malamutthans, aged members cannot act as messengers. The nephew of the deceased should himself act as the

⁴⁹ Revealed in an interview by the *Mūppan* and the *Vaṇḍāri* of the Iruḷa settlement of Vayalūr
⁵⁰ Ananda Banu, in Sachidananda and R.R.Prasad ed., *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Delhi, 1996, p.12; B. Bindu, *Socio-economic Change among Three Wynad Tribes, a Study of Kāṭṭunāikkan, Adiyān and Muḷḷakuruman and their eco-cultural Context*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Anthropology, Palayad, 1997, p.167; and Seetha Kakkoth, *Religious Rites and Festivals among the Adiyān of Thirunelli*, Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, Dept. of Anthropology, Palayad, 1991, p.50, all have referred to the Adiyāns as carrying Kunthavadi while going out for informing the news of the death. In fact Kunthavadi is the official staff carried and kept by the *Mūppan* which he will never alienate with.

messenger. Instead of carrying a stick, which is customary among a large number of tribes, they carry a towel in their armpit. The messenger is not supposed to look back once he starts the journey. The Kaḷanādis first inform a death to their headman called *Kāraṇavar*.⁵¹ The Aṇṇādans send one or two members to other settlements to inform their clansmen. The Chōlanāikkans who live in dense forests and in natural caves called *Aḷais*, were not able in the past to inform the death to their relatives living in distant areas. Now, to inform kinsmen of distant areas they employ paid messengers. Malamutthans who live on a hill top have no right to inform the news of death to Malamutthans living on another hill. The belief is that if the norm is violated, a second death would certainly ensue. Sending two persons as messengers was compulsory among the Malappaṇikkans in early days but today only a single messenger is sent. It is also to be noted that among Malappaṇikkans a person who is ostracized is not informed about the occurrence of death within the tribe. Among the Āḷar, it was compulsory that the son of the deceased should himself inform the death to members of all other settlements, failing which no one from other settlements would attend the funeral. Due to the lack of human consideration involved in this practice, the Āḷar do not continue this practice today. Now-a-days they send two representatives to other settlements to inform about the death. In the case of Wayanādan Pathiyans, a death should

⁵¹ After informing the eldest *Kāraṇavar*, the next one in rank, the *Kāraṇavar*-to-be, is intimated.

first be informed to the *Nālillakkār*, a group within their clan who alone are entitled by custom to inform the matter to other members of the clans.

The Karimpālans first inform a death to their head called *Kāraṇavaṛ* and then to the *Changāthi*⁵² who is the officiator of the burial rituals. Karimpālans follow this ancestral code to avoid discords and clashes that may arise within the family and among clan members with regard to the nature of funeral ceremonies. The decision of the *Changāthi* is final and unquestionable. If the deceased has married daughters it is customary to inform the families of their husbands. Like the *Changāthi* of Karimpālans, the *Kaṛmi* should officiate over death ceremonies for the Chingathān Māvilāns. So it is compulsory to inform him about the death personally. This should be done by the headman or his nephew. The Muḷḷakuṛmans first inform their head called *Pōruṇōn* and subsequently the *Pōrāthōn*.⁵³ These two dignitaries together take decisions regarding the sending of messengers to other settlements to inform the relatives of the death. The Kāṭṭunāikkans inform about a death in the tribe to their head called *Mūppan* or *Mānga* or *Kāraṇavaṛ*, *Valiyachan* or *Modali*. He sends messengers with *Muddhiyam* or *Daivavadi* (divine stick) to other

⁵² The office of the *Changāthi* is essential for all such deeds as the burial of the dead, feeding the kinsmen of the dead and serving toddy to ancestors and relatives. The entire Karimpālan tribe is divided into five clans or Illams- *Chappili*, *Puthussery*, *Pallath*, *Machini* and *Kalla*. Each clan has a *Changāthi* to perform the burial ceremonies who should be from outside the clan of the deceased. For e.g. the *Changāthi* of the *Chappili* clan can be from any one of the other four clans. *Changāthi* is selected according to the *Pattōla* or scripture and it stipulates which one of the other four tribes the *Changāthi* of one clan should be from. *Changāthi* is the chief officiator during other occasions like marriages as well.

⁵³ *Pōruṇōn* is the first rank headman while *Pōrāthōn* is the second in rank who is to replace the first at his death.

settlements. Kāṭṭunāikkans are the most primitive, the most backward and the most deprived of all the tribes and this deprivation is reflected in their attitude to rituals and ceremonies. Normally they attach little importance to social functions.

Certain tribes like Malamutthans, Āḷar and Iruḷas had a firm belief, in the past, that messengers should first be sent to inform their masters¹ or *Janmis* before passing the news of death to others. Iruḷas had Maṅṅarkad Mūppil Nair, Āḷar and Malamutthans had the Raja of Nilambūr, Adiyāns had Addiga of Tirunelli, Paṅiyas had Kuppethod Nair, Thachanādan Mūppans had Kalpetta Nair, Māvilāns and Karimpālans had Kalyaṭ Nambiar and Koṛagas had the *Dhani* as their lords or masters. With the disappearance of landlordism, this practice too has come to an end. Kuṛichiyas of Kaṅṅavam had believed that the Adhikāri or the Village Officer had the right to be informed first of the news like those of birth, marriage and death. If the Paṅiya *Mūppan* dies the elders of the tribe beat a kind of drum called *thudi* which is symbolic of the death of the headman. Till recently the Kāṭṭunāikkans had blown a pipe to announce the death of all their tribesmen, which was called *Chīnam Viḷi*. In the past all matters dealing with death was considered as a humane service but today this too is slowly becoming a monetary service. For e.g. tribes like Chōlanāikkans make payments to their messengers. For most of the tribes, not all deaths are informed like this. In the case of those who face evil death like suicides, death by accident or

epidemics, the body has to be disposed of immediately; only the immediate relatives are informed.

Attendance

On receipt of the news of a death, relatives and kinsmen should compulsorily attend the ceremony. The attendance in a funeral is compulsory for kinsfolk and clansmen because the dead person would enumerate the number of attenders and may wreak vengeance upon the ones who are absent. Tribal ancestors prescribed this kind of a tradition to strengthen the bondage and spirit of cooperation among them. It had taken many days, sometimes three or four, to start the burial ceremonies in the past. Funeral was delayed in the past due to many factors. First, the arrival of the messenger imposed an obligation on the persons who received the message to attend the ceremony and it took a very long time for tribesmen, particularly the aged, to reach the hamlet of the deceased. Second, funeral ceremony could be started only after the return of the messenger. This was to ascertain that all those who were to be informed of the death had received the information. The advent of motor vehicles has now made intimation to people of distant areas much easier than before. It is compulsory that those who have been informed should attend the function. The tribes like Iruḷas and Kuṇḍuvādiyans have imposed certain penalty on the defaulters. If a Kuṇḍuvādiyan headman or his nephew (who should attend in his absence) fails to participate in the funeral, the headman of

the deceased man's settlement imposes a penalty of a bottle of toddy, 25 paise and betel leaves with arecanut which is customarily called '*Thettum Pizhayum*'.

Among the Iruḷas, at least three persons including the headman from every hamlet should attend the ceremony. If any hamlet fails to do so, the headman of the deceased person's hamlet takes certain punitive measures against the offending hamlet. The members of such a hamlet are excluded thereafter from participating in social engagements. So everyone considers it imperative to avoid such a contingency. Therefore they have devised a system to deal with this problem. As soon as the representatives from other settlements reach the spot carrying the bamboo stick, the *Vaṇḍāri* receives them and keeps their sticks in his custody till all the functions are over. While they return, the sticks are handed over to them. In the case of the Kādar, if the relatives who are expected to attend the funeral ceremony do not arrive even after a reasonable span of time, a committee of ten persons including the head of the hamlet is formed to review the situation arising from the non-arrival of the relatives and to decide to proceed with the funeral ceremony. In that case the committee has the responsibility to explain why such a decision had to be taken.

It is a common belief that if a husband or wife dies and the other spouse fail to attend the funeral of the deceased, then he or she would have no

claim over his or her children or property. Moreover “if a woman dies, her kin are directly concerned to see she is given a proper burial; in the case of a man’s death, the widow’s kin publicly reaffirm the rights and duties towards her”.⁵⁴ Among the Gōnd and Bhūmia of Jabalpur, a messenger is sent by the deceased person’s kinsmen and affines in other villages. “It is particularly urgent that his *nat* relatives, his sister’s husband and the children of his father’s sisters arrive. For, the eldest of the *nat* relatives has to act as the master of ceremonies and has to perform certain rites after the patient’s death”.⁵⁵

Wailing

The first intimation of the occurrence of a death in a family is the loud lamentations by the close relatives of the deceased. The wail commonly begins just before the death. Wailing is an expression of grief common to all human beings. But in the case of the tribes it is more ritualistic than emotional. Durkheim gives the exact nature of wailing thus: “one weeps, not simply because he is sad, but because he is forced to weep. It is a ritual attitude which he is forced to adopt out of respect for custom, but which is in a measure, independent of his affective state”.⁵⁶ In many cases men and women join together in wailing while in others it is confined to women. As

⁵⁴ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁵⁵ Stephen Fuchs, *The Gond and Bhumia of Eastern Mandala*, Bombay, 1968, 2nd edn, p. 335. The group of families which a Gond or Bhumia is in relation to affinity is called *nat* (relatives). *Nat* relatives in Gond and Bhumia society play a more important role in the wedding and funeral ceremonies.

⁵⁶ E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, London, 1947, p. 397.

each person approaches the hamlet, where the body lies, he/she begins the prescribed wail. "Where the funeral doesn't take place the same day, the wailing often breaks out with fresh force on that occasion; and it is kept up for periods of varying length among different peoples—from a few hours to months or even years. Naturally in the latter case it is only certain relatives (chiefly widows of the deceased) who indulge in it, and only at stated times of the day. Widows and other relatives, among many peoples, go to wail at the grave. The wailing is renewed at certain intervals of time - on the anniversary of death, or at certain feasts, or on the occasion of the exhumation of the bones".⁵⁷ The Yēnadi, a tribe of Andhra Pradesh is the only exception to this common tradition: "No wailing, no weeping is prevalent among the Yenadi".⁵⁸

A particular feature of tribal wailing is that the wailing is followed by eulogizing the good deeds of the deceased through songs and words. This type of wailing is known among the tribes in Malabar as *Patham Paranju Karayal*. Among the Gōnd and Bhūmia of Jabalpur, after a death "the women begin to wail and mourn, and to sing dirges, while even the men are not ashamed of showing their sorrow and of shedding some tears."⁵⁹ Wailing is a common form of lamentation in connection with ceremonies at Bank Islands

⁵⁷ E. S. Hartland, in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p. 416.

⁵⁸ L.P. Vidyarthi & Rai, *The Tribal Culture of India*, Delhi, 1977, p. 300, cited in T. Madhavamenon ed., *op. cit.*, p.280.

⁵⁹ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p.335.

at Malenesia.⁶⁰ Among the tribes of Malabar, soon after a death, the relatives and clansmen of the deceased are transported into a frenzy of excited behaviour. They cry, wail and scream from the time of death with intervals till the disposal of the body. As each person approaches the hamlet where the body lies he/she begins to wail. The Iruḷas call their wailing as *Varam Cholli Paṛayal*. Till the final funeral ceremony, such as the *Kanji-chīṛu* of the Iruḷas, the *Chīṛu* of the Mudugas/Kuṛumbas and the *Kākkappula* of the Adiyāns/Paṇiyas, the wailing is kept up at intervals. For Bendann, “noise is a potent factor in driving away the ghosts”.⁶¹ Thus wailing is practiced to ward off the evil effects which the spirits of the deceased might have upon the living.

Leor Halevi, in a recent article, has demonstrated the way the ritual of wailing underwent a transition in the Islamic society from the pre and early Islamic to the later Islamic. He writes: “Wailing for the dead, the ritual against which Khalif ‘Umar I reacted, was a dramatic form of expressing bereavement. Muslim women would scream *wa rajudah, wa jabalah, wa ‘nqita‘u zahrah*, for example, meaning ‘Oh the man! Oh, the mountain! Oh the severance from the household!’ This was a poetic form, rhyming after a fashion, lamenting the separation of the beloved person from his environment. Women were widely regarded as the most talented composer of

⁶⁰ R.H. Codrington, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-267.

⁶¹ E. Bendann, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

poetry of lament. They saw their poetry as the product of *dhikr* or memory, whose operation (*tadhakkur*) must be understood as a vigorous, wearisome and melancholic exercise in remembering the deceased, as well as the injustice of it all. Even so, the poems were not celebrated as deliberate acts of remembrance, but rather as spontaneous and improvised expressions of sorrow. This poetry, which reflects the ritual complex vividly, was often violent in its emotional force, frequently goading the tribe to avenge the killing of the beloved. Not only did women shriek and lament in ululation, they also scratched at their cheeks, drawing blood, and tore at their hair, directing their violent emotions against themselves. The ritual sometimes culminated in the tearing of the front of the garment to expose the area between the women's breasts, as a sign of mourning. Traditionally women had wailed outdoors, during the funeral procession and at the cemetery. But increasingly, as we shall see, they were forced in these contexts to confront Muslim men who despised wailing as an 'uncivilized' ritual that challenged the new Islamic order".⁶²

Refraining from Work

During the time between the death and the funeral, it is the duty of all kinsmen and outsiders to pay their respect to the deceased by suspending their work. For the close relatives of the deceased (sons, daughters, nephews,

⁶² Leor Halevi, "Wailing for the Dead: The Role of Women in Early Islamic Funerals", *Past and Present*, No. 183, May 2004, pp.3-39.

nieces, husbands, wives, etc.), on the other hand, refraining from work is a part of death pollution and it has to be continued till the end of the *pula*.⁶³ Other clansmen suspend their work only on the day of the funeral. This tradition is strictly followed by the tribes in Malabar even today. An interesting practice of the Malaimalasar is that they “observe silence and refrain from work and keep on wandering on the day on which death occurs”.⁶⁴ Upto very recent times the Adiyān widow/widower had to follow an exclusively puritan and insular life for a full year till the culmination of the *Kākkappula*, which marked the end of the period of pollution. Similar practices can be cited from other tribes. For instance, after a death, a Khāsi family has to undergo ‘sang’ or taboo, and during the period, no manual work can be done.⁶⁵ In many communities, the day of death of any of its members is devoted to mourning and work is suspended. This practice is prevalent among the Konds of Orissa and Enadi of Andhra Pradesh.⁶⁶ In Siberia “all labour in the entire settlement used to be stopped when a Koryark died until his cremation. No one went for hunting or sealing, nobody went to fetch wood, and women did no sewing”.⁶⁷ Among the central Eskimo, “singing and dancing are forbidden during the first days after a death. Moreover, for three

⁶³ The period of pollution varies from tribe to tribe but normally it is 5,7,9,11,13 or 16 days or in the case of certain others, 3 or 4 months, 1 year etc.

⁶⁴ L.P. Vidyarthi & Rai, *op. cit.*, P 300, cited in T. Madhavamenon ed., *op. cit.*, p.280.

⁶⁵ P.R.T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, Delhi, 1975, Reprint, p.135.

⁶⁶ L.P. Vidyarthi & Rai, *op. cit.*, p. 299, cited in T. Madhavamenon ed., *op. cit.*, p.281.

⁶⁷ Jesup Exped vi 104, cited by Hartland in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p.419.

days, no one is allowed to work on iron, wood, bone, stone, ice, snow, leather, to empty the oil-drippings from lamps, or to clean lamps; woman may not comb their hair or wash their faces, and all sexual intercourse is forbidden. It is believed that the soul stays with the body for three days after death. During that time any violation of the tabus affects it so much with pain by way of retaliation it brings heavy snow falls, sickness and death".⁶⁸

Attitude towards the Corpse

The universal attitude towards the corpse is made up of mystical and supernatural elements. Yet physical contact with it arouses a strange feeling of disgust mingled with fear. There are certain exceptions to this. According to Frazer, when a Sulka of Melanesia dies, his relatives come and sleep besides the corpse.⁶⁹ Among the Fijians, Wilkes observes, "the female mourners kiss the corpse".⁷⁰ Bronislaw Malinowski depicted the feeling of the bereaved survivors in these words: "The emotions are extremely complex and even contradictory: the dominant elements, love of the dead and loathing of the corpse, passionate attachment to the personality still lingering about the body and a shuddering fear of the gruesome thing that has been left over, these two elements seem to mingle and play into each other".⁷¹ Among the

⁶⁸ Boas, *Eskimo of Baffin Land*, 1901, pp.131-144, cited in Hartland in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p.419.

⁶⁹ J. G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-7), p. 399.

⁷⁰ C. Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition 1838-42*, Vol. III, Philadelphia, 1845, p. 96.

⁷¹ Malinowsky, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

Todas, a “corpse must never be left unattended. Keeping vigil is the duty of the female relatives, and the widow of a dead man must stay with his body constantly, not leaving it unless it is absolutely necessary for her to go out”.⁷² Among the Dieri of Australia custom insists that the relatives of the dying man should divide themselves into two groups, one comprising of his near relatives, and the other his distant ones. While those of the first group sit close to the dying person, and even after his death throw themselves on the body, those of the other group remain at some distance.⁷³ Among the Muḷḷakuṟumans when a mother or father dies their children sit near the head and the feet. If a husband dies, wife sits near the head and children at the feet.

After death, generally the corpse of a tribesman is allowed to remain in the place where he breathed his last. Tribes like the Kādar, Paṇiyas, Muḷḷakuṟumans, Āḷar and Malasar later remove the dead body to the verandah. In the case of the Muḷḷakuṟumans it is taken to the *Daivappura*. No tribe allows the dead bodies of those who commit suicide or are killed by animals or are murdered by other men to be placed inside the house or in the *Daivappura* as in the case of the Muḷḷakuṟumans. The Kuṟichiyas do not allow even the body of those who died in hospitals to be brought inside the houses. As other tribes follow this tradition on account of the fear of the factors involved in unnatural deaths, the Kuṟichiyas and the Malamutthans of

⁷² Antony. R. Walker, *The Toda of South India: a new Look*, Delhi, 1986, p.215.

⁷³ Alfred. W. Howitt, *op. cit.*, p.447.

Vīṭṭikkunnu do it in connection with the rules of pollution and they follow the practice strictly even today.

The tribes use varied terms to indicate a corpse. The term *Marippu* is the common word used by most of the tribes such as Kaḷanādis, Thachanadan Mūppans, Kuṇduvādiyans, Kuṛichiyas and the Paṇiyas. The Malasar, the Malamalasar, and the Ēṛavāḷans use the term *Ponam*. *Chāvu* or *Śāvu* is the term used by the Iruḷas, Mudugas, Kuṛumbas, Kādar, Wayanādan Pathiyans, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Muḷḷakuṛumans and Adiyāns. *Thadi* is the term used by Chōlanāikkans, Āḷar use the word *Chammu* and *Puṇam* is the word used by Koṛagas. The term *Śavam* is used by Malappaṇikkans, Malamutthans, Karimpālans and Malayāḷar. Kuṛichiyas consider the use of the term *Śavam* as a matter of disrespect to the corpse. Ūraḷikuṛumans do not use any term for the corpse. In their case, the word that indicates the survivor's relationship to the deceased person is used to denote the dead body also. Thus the corpse is father, mother, uncle, etc. because of the fear of the potent power of the corpse. For instance, "the Kiwai Papuans of British New Guinea avoid mentioning the names of the dead in particular of those who have recently died, and are feared after death. They say that to do so would be a way of calling on the ghost, who might respond to the call, and cause sickness. It would be impolite also to mention a name which might renew the sorrow and

evoke the lamentations of the kinsfolk of the departed”.⁷⁴ Similarly, among the primitive aborigines of the Andaman islands, says A.R. Brown, “the names are not mentioned during the period of mourning which lasts several months. If it is necessary to refer to a dead person, he is spoken of as ‘he who is buried by the big rock’ or ‘he who is laid in the fig tree’, or otherwise mentioning the place of burial”.⁷⁵

With the exception of the Karimpālans, all other Malabar tribes place the corpse on a mat of grass or sack spread on the floor. The Karimpālans place it on a bench or desk, which may be a recent phenomenon. It is sinful for a man to die lying down on the bare floor or earth; the mother earth would be annoyed if a corpse is laid on her bare chest. This may be the reason why the relics of the dead are kept on a stone-cut pītam in megalithic burials. According to Goody, among the Lodagaa of West Africa, it is sinful for a man to die lying down, as if he were a slave with no one to take care of him, and a payment should be made to the earth-priest who provides two poles of ebony (*gaa-diospyros mespiliformis*) with which to move the corpse.⁷⁶ Among The Gōnd and Bhūmia of Jabalpur, the *nat* relatives lift the corpse from the cot (*katya*) and gently place it on the floor on an old sheet spread in the corner

⁷⁴ G. Landtman, *The Kiwai Papuans of British New Guinea*, London, 1927, p.293.

⁷⁵ A.R. Brown, *The Andaman Islanders*, Cambridge, 1922, pp. 112-121.

⁷⁶ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

cleansed for the purpose.⁷⁷ The eyelids of the corpse are let closed and the two fore-toes as well as the two thumbs are tied together with pieces of clothes. Instead of cloth pieces, the Koṛagas use the thread from the bark of *Danda* tree (Madār plant) to tie the thumbs and toes. It is customary for them to plant a Madār tree at each settlement for this purpose. Frazer opines that “by tying up or mutilating and maiming a corpse he simultaneously ties up or mutilates and maims the dead person’s ghost”.⁷⁸

R.Browsmyth says that “the Diery of central Australia used to tie the great toes and thumbs of a corpse together to prevent the ghost from walking”.⁷⁹ The Todas tie the two foretoes of the corpse together with black thread.⁸⁰ E.M. Curr evaluates: “when a man dies it is a very widely-spread custom for the relations to tie up the limbs of the corpse securely, so as to prevent his coming out of the grave in the shape of a ghost”.⁸¹ The Malamalasar, as a practice, didn’t tie their thumbs or toes. They believe that if they tie the dead, the spirit would not be able to walk or eat. Similarly, the Paṇiyas do not tie the mouth of the corpse because, they believe, the dead man would be unable to eat and chew. The Kuṛichiyas too didn’t tie the

⁷⁷ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p.336.

⁷⁸ J.G. Frazer, *Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion*, Vol. II, London, 1934, p. 63.

⁷⁹ R. Browsmith, *The Aborigines of Victoria*, London, 1878, 1, P 119, cited in Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-78), p. 63.

⁸⁰ Antony. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, pp.214-215.

⁸¹ E.M. Curr, *The Australian Race*, p. 44, 1886, cited in J.G, Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-78), p.63.

thumbs and toes, but they have now started doing it. The Ēṛavāḷans tie the mouth and head of the corpse separately.

It is important that the eyes of the corpse should be kept closed immediately after death. The Ēṛavāḷans put pieces of turmeric on the eyelids to get it closed. Among the natives of Halmahere or Gilolo, a large island to the west of New Guinea, when anyone dies and his eyes remain wide open, they say that he is looking round for a companion; hence someone else will die soon. So they are always careful to weight the eyelids of a corpse, generally with a ryksdollar, in order to keep them shut".⁸² Among the Gōnd and Bhūmia, when the patient has breathed his last, a near relative closes his mouth and eyes.⁸³ In contrast to this, Akoa pigmies laid the dead body in a seated position with arms crossed over his chest and with eyes opened 'to see the spirit'.⁸⁴

Today most of the tribes in Malabar place, near the head of the corpse, a *Nilaviḷakku* or a lighted oil lamp, two pieces of a broken coconut and burning incense sticks. According to Campbell, "the origin of burning incense in religious services seems to be partly to please the guardian and partly to scare evil spirits".⁸⁵ The use of these materials is a recent development; in the

⁸² J.M Van, Baarda, Fabelen, *Verhalen en Oveeleveringen der Gabelareezen*, cited in Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-78), p 98

⁸³ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p.336.

⁸⁴ Carleton. S. Coon, *The Hunting Peoples*, London, 1972, p. 332.

⁸⁵ J.M. Campbell, *op. cit.*, Vol. XXIV, September, 1895, p.262.

past they used to burn only dammer (the resin of *Canarium Strictum*) popularly known among the tribes as *Pungila* or *Kungilyam* or *Pantham* or *Kunthirikkam*. Besides, at the head, the Kaḷanādi places a cucumber; Kāṭṭunāikkans betel leaves and arecanut; Kuṛichiyas two pieces of coconut with its water; and Kādar, a measuring jar full of raw rice, black tea in a tin-cup and cooked rice in a plate: all these being placed in a large vessel. If the deceased Kāṭṭunāikkan is a male, a lamp is lit and kept near the body along with coconuts and beedi (local cigarettes). If the deceased is a female, beedi is not kept. In the case of female, the offerings are placed near the head.⁸⁶

Among the Khāsis a small basket (*Kashang*) containing pieces (*Dykhot*) of the sacrificed animals is hung up over the head of the corpse. A dish containing eatables and betel-nut, and a jar of water are placed near the head of the corpse by way of offering refreshment to the spirit of the departed.⁸⁷

Among the Loddaga the senior mourner takes some bunches of guinea-corn-heads (*Kagin*) from the granary and lets them fall around the dead body. He also drops other produces of the field, *Na'angmin Bum Burezaa*, all gods' planted things.⁸⁸

It is customary for certain tribes to put money on certain parts of the body of the dead. Āḷar, Kuṛichiyas and Kuṇḍuvādiyans place twenty five

⁸⁶ B. Bindu, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

⁸⁷ P.R.T. Gurdon, *op. cit.*, p.133.

⁸⁸ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

paise in the mouth of the corpse soon after the death. Frazer remarks: "many people have been in the habit of supplying their dead with money or its equivalent to enable them to defray the expenses of the journey to the other world".⁸⁹ The "Kakhyens of Burma put a piece of silver in the mouth of a corpse 'to pay ferry dues over the streams the spirit may have to cross'.⁹⁰ A rupee coin is placed in the mouth of the dead by the Ollar Gadaba of Orissa and relatives deposit coins near it.⁹¹ Deposits of coins, particularly Roman coins, were found in the megalithic tombs of South India along with the relics of the dead.

Tribes have devised various means to deal with the bewilderment or fear of untimely deaths. When a Wynadan Kurichiyan dies at night, all clansmen sit around the body and start singing and laughing. No Kurichiyan should sleep or weep. The funeral song recited by them is called *Nāṭṭupāṭṭu*. Among Kondakammara of Andhra Pradesh if the dead body is not disposed of by the evening and it has to remain overnight, all the male members of the village gather at the deceased person's house and spend the time by singing songs.⁹² Among the Akoa Pigmy if a person died at night, the deceased

⁸⁹ J.G. Frazer, *op.cit.*, (n-7), p. 193.

⁹⁰ Anderson, *Mandalay to Momeien*, London, 1876, p. 143, cited in J.G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-7), pp. 193-194.

⁹¹ V. Subrahmanian and D. Jesuratnam in Sachidananda and R.R. Prasad, ed., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 482.

⁹² Jha, *Readings in Tribal Culture*, NewDelhi, 1982, p. 102, cited in T. Madhavamenon ed., *op. cit.*, p.280.

person's eldest son sings the death song, while an uncle responds.⁹³ The Malayālar recites hymns from the Rāmāyana sitting beside the body. (Even in illiteracy, they had learnt it).

There are certain other techniques to ward off the fear of the dead. The Malamutthans of Viṭṭikkunnu have recently started the practice of drawing two circles on the floor, around the corpse, with rice and paddy respectively. Campbell reminds that "spirits fear circles, and cannot cross them".⁹⁴ And, after removing the dead body for disposal, they dig out the soil of the floor where it was allowed to rest because of the fear of pollution. Among the Adelaide tribe of the Australian aborigines, when the body is lifted upon the bier, the ground upon which the man died is dug up by wives or women related to him with their long sticks, occasionally assisted by men. A little heap of earth is thus formed, supposed to contain the 'Wingko', or breath that has left the body, and which this digging is intended to set free.⁹⁵

In the past, the Iruḷas, Kuṟumbas, Mudugas and Kādar, did not bury the dead immediately. They kept the body for three or four days. In order to prevent the body from decay, Iruḷas smeared turmeric paste on the corpse, while the Kādar forced large quantities of Gingelly oil down the throat of the dead person. Both the Kuṟumbas and Mudugas, immediately after death, put

⁹³ Carleton. S. Coon, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

⁹⁴ J.M. Campbell, *op. cit.*, Vol. XXV, March 1895, p 128.

⁹⁵ J.G. Frazer, *Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion*, Vol. III, London, 1936, pp. 74-75.

the dead body seated in a yogic posture. Piles of wood and grass are lighted to create a large fire in order to give light and to allay fears about spirits. Campbell remarks that light and fire terrify all that is evil and this belief had prevailed over many ancient peoples including the Persians, Greeks and the Romans.⁹⁶ Kuřumbas and Mudugas engage in singing and dancing all through these days which are forms of spirit worship as well.

Attachment to the Birth place

It is the earnest desire of every tribesman to sleep in the lap of his own homeland. Thus the funeral has to be invariably done at one's own birthplace. H.J. Rose, who wrote about celestial and terrestrial orientation of the dead, says that "the dead are buried near, or in, their old homes because they are wanted back again, in the form of babies born of women of their own clan, tribe or family".⁹⁷ "In Malanesia", Seligman reports, "at Kawaiawta the body of a man who dies away from his village must be brought to his native hamlet by his sister's children"⁹⁸. Similarly, in Western Australia, "dying persons especially those dying from old age, generally express an earnest desire to be taken to their birth-place that they may die and be buried there. Parents will point out the spot where they were born so that when they become old and

⁹⁶ J.M. Campbell, *op. cit.*, Vol. XXIV, January. 1895, pp. 18-19.

⁹⁷ H.J. Rose, "Celestial and terrestrial Orientation of the Dead", *Journal of the royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 52, 1922, p. 127-140.

⁹⁸ Seligman, *Malanesians*, p.725, cited in E. Bendann, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

infirm, their children know where they wish their bodies to be disposed of".⁹⁹ Akoa Pigmies of Australia are reported to have believed that a "person died far away from the settlement is a bad omen and this kind needs special sacrifice to appease the ancestor spirit".¹⁰⁰ Dalton records that among the Oraoans even when one of them dies far away from home, his relations will, if possible, sooner or later, recover the fragments of his bones, and bear them back to the village, to be deposited with the ashes of his ancestors.¹⁰¹

It is customary for all tribes of Malabar, except the Kāṭṭunāikkans and Ūraḷikuṟumans, to conduct the funeral ceremony of the deceased persons of their settlements in their own hamlets though they may have been buried elsewhere. For this the inhabitants of the settlement must receive concrete proof of their death outside their hamlet. On the reaching of the report of the death of a man away from his hamlet his close agnatic kinsmen leave to find out the truth. If the corpse is in a good condition they bring it with them and bury it in his/her native settlement. If this is not possible, may be due to the distance or the bad condition of the body (for instance, if death occurred because of the attack of wild animals), the burial service is celebrated first at the place of death and later at one's own settlement. The case of the Kāṭṭunāikkans is that if one dies at a far off place, the disposal and all the funeral ceremonies are done at that place itself. In the case of the

⁹⁹ Dawson, *Australian Aborigines*, p. 62, cited in E. Bendann, *Ibid.*, p. 228.

¹⁰⁰ Carleton .S. Coon, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

¹⁰¹ E.T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1872, pp. 261-62.

Ūraḷikuṟumans when a man dies away from the settlement, three dignitaries from the deceased person's settlement go there and perform the funeral rites, *Daivam Kāṇal*,¹⁰² etc. The burial of a married woman is conducted at her husband's graveyard with the consent of her relatives and headman.

An interesting story about a Chōlanāikkans's love for his abode is told by an informant.¹⁰³ A Chōlanāikkans named Chellan who was a native of Meenmutty Alai,¹⁰⁴ had come to stay in a cottage allotted to the Chōlanāikkans by the government at Mānchēry. He lost one of his legs in an encounter with a wild boar. When he was seriously ill, he abandoned the Mānchēry settlement and reached Meenmutty Alai which is in the dense jungle and far away from Mānchēry. In this miserable condition, he spent three days there and then died.

Bier-making

For most of the tribes of Malabar, the graveyards are situated away from their hamlets and hence, the dead body has to be transported to the spot through an inhospitable terrain. It cannot be safely carried to this place by a single person or two; group effort is required. It also presupposes the necessity of some device to reduce the strain of carrying a corpse through a

¹⁰² In certain ritual functions or occasions like the last rites, disease, etc their priest *Bijakkālan* summons the ancestor-souls.

¹⁰³ V. P. Moinkutty is the agent of the Nilambūr Tribal Cooperative Society at Mānchēry Cholanāikkan hamlet.

¹⁰⁴ *Alais* are caves or natural rock shelters where they live even today.

difficult terrain. To enable two or more members to carry it, they prepare biers. From the ritual point of view as the corpse is polluting, people avoid physical contacts with it. Moreover, the sight of the corpse itself is fearful; it is needless to say that touching it generates even greater fright. On the morning of the funeral day a bier is prepared by expert bier-makers of the settlement. The method of bier making and its name varies from tribe to tribe. But the stuff used for its preparation in most cases are bamboo poles and bamboo sticks and in certain cases, wooden poles.

The bamboo bier used by the Adiyāns and the Malamutthans of Viṭṭikkunnu are known as *Kaṭṭil*. They take two long bamboo poles and place them on the ground parallel to each other. Then these poles are connected with strong fiber strings at equal intervals. It has the appearance of an improvised stretcher made of bamboo poles and stretched strings. It is customary that two *Karumis* with knives send by the *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* should collect and bring the required wood/bamboos to make the bier. The Chōlanāikkans, Malayāḷar, Malappaṅikkans, Thachanādan Mūppans, Karimpālans, Paṅiyas and Muḷḷakuṟumans prepare bamboo biers which look like ladders. The Chōlanāikkans, Kuṇḍuvādiyans, Kaḷanādis, Muḷḷakuṟumans, Wayanādan Pathiyans and Paṅiyas call this bier as *Thandu* or *Athippēri*. The Koṟagas call the bier *Bhadru*, the Malayāḷar and Thachanādan Mūppans *Paṟam* and Malappaṅikkans *Paricha*. For the Wayanādan Pathiyans, the bamboo stretcher is known as *Padam*. The Māvilāns used to make the

wooden stretcher with two poles of a tree named *Maruthu* (*Terminalia Alatha*).

The Malamutthans of Viṭṭikkunnu still follow the tradition that if a person dies while lying on a bamboo screen he has to be taken to the graveyard on the same screen folded round and fixed on to two wooden poles of *Punnamaram* (*Indian Laurel tree*) with the help of the vines of the *Kayyōna*. In the case of the Paṇiyas, the bamboo for the bier has to be first cut by their headmen. In the first half of the twentieth century, A. Aiyappan had observed that a Paṇiya bier is made of banana stems, two pieces about eight feet length, and seven short bits about eighteen inches in length serving as cross pieces.¹⁰⁵ This clearly indicates the changes that have been taking place in their funeral practices. Recently the Malappaṇikkans, instead of preparing the bier, the ritual significance of which is slowly disappearing among them, has started using benches for transporting the corpse. In former days Thachanādan Mūppans had not allowed outsiders to prepare the *Paṇam* but today no such restrictions exist. Today, they along with the Karimpālans, use coffins made of *Pāla* tree (*Alstonia Scholaris*), *Murikku* (*Erythrina Indica*) etc. instead of biers. The Kuṛichiyas of Wynād make bamboo biers only for their headman or Kāraṇavaṛ while for other members, like the Kuṛichiyas of Kaṇṇavam, they use a ladder like stretcher called *Thandum Nārum*. They

¹⁰⁵ A. Aiyappan, *The Paṇiyas: An Ex-slave tribe of South India*, Culcutta, 1992, p.140.

prepare their bier with two poles of *Poṭṭāmi* and from its bark they make three long fibre strings which are then used to make a ladder-like stretcher.

The Wayanādan Kādar use the bamboo stretcher made from two bamboo poles on which a wooden plank is fixed. Āḷar make their stretcher with the help of two bamboo poles with bamboo sticks arranged in 'V' shape between them. The stretcher called *Saṭṭaibadi* of the Kāṭṭunāikkans is made with bamboo stems and wild creepers. Bamboo pieces are tied vertically and horizontally with creepers to get the appearance of a stretcher. Among them custom insists that the headman himself has to cut the bamboo poles needed for bier making.

An interesting tradition is followed by the Ūrāḷikurumans in preparing bier which they call *Kaḷukāyal*. Experts are appointed for collecting particularly tall bamboos with curved tips. Such bamboos are extremely rare. If an extra-ordinarily tall bamboo with a curved tip is found and a bier is made out of it for a dead person, such a person is believed to have been fortunate. He is deemed to have had a long fruitful existence and to have completed a full life cycle. On the other hand dead persons who have had to use biers made of ordinary bamboos are presumed to have had incomplete lives and premature deaths. The bamboo selected by the expert is cut into two long pieces and nine splints are also taken from it. The two poles are tied by

strings made from the fibers of a vine called *Kivirikaḷai*. The bamboo nodes are cut off before the preparation of the bier.

Among the Kaṇṇavam Kuṛichiyas, when a death is confirmed to have taken place, the kinsmen immediately throw a sickle out of the house which is symbolic of the occurrence of pollution. Those who stand outside the house at that time will have to take the sickle thrown from the house and go for collecting stem and fibre for making the bier. This process is known as the collecting of *Thandum Nārum*. It is a tradition among them that the first splint of wood cut is collected and kept in the lap of the wood cutter.¹⁰⁶

The tribes of Aṭṭappādi and Paṛambikulam make particular type of decorated biers like those of the Todas, Badagas and Kottas of the Nīlgiris which anthropologists call funeral cars. Clement. W. Meighan gives a description of the funeral car thus: "The use of a funeral car is a custom which has a somewhat wider distribution. The term 'car' is actually a misnomer, since the funeral car is in no sense a vehicle of transportation. Instead, it is merely an elaborate structure in which the corpse lies in state before it is cremated or buried. The corpse is transported to the funeral car on a cot or litter, and is laid at the bottom of the car. The car is decorated with ribbons and sometimes with belongings of the deceased and is dismembered by the

¹⁰⁶ Kumaran Vayaleri, *Kuṛichiyarude Jeevithavum Samskāravum*, Current Books, Kottayam, 1996, pp.47-48.

assembled crowd before the disposal of the body".¹⁰⁷ The Kotas of the Nilgiris have an elaborate ritual; a car "about fifty feet high is made of bamboo and sticks, decorated with flowers, the body is placed in it over a bit of animal skin, tobacco, grains and implements used by the departed re deposited in it, before it is taken in procession to the place of burial".¹⁰⁸

All the three tribes of Vīṭṭikkunnu prepare bamboo stretchers with certain kinds of elaborate decorations. The Iruḷas take two bamboo poles and prepare a ladder-like bier known as *Sapṛam*. Like the Ūraḷikuṟumans, the Iruḷas follow a set of traditional rules in the collection and use of bamboos. At first they collect three bamboos from the forest and cut it into equal pieces. Their belief is that after preparing the funeral bier, no piece of bamboo should be left unused; if any piece remains, another death would follow. They take four bamboo poles and fix them upright in the ground. Only the elder members have the right to fix the four posts. The ladder-like bier is placed in between the four posts and then firmly fixed to them. A thin bamboo stick is attached to the upper end of each upright post and the free ends of the thin sticks are tied together into a pyramid top. Then the three sides of the stretcher and the pyramid top is neatly covered by colourful saris. The stretcher is then decorated with gilt papers and by fixing stems of plantain

¹⁰⁷ Clement. W. Meighan, "Mortuary Customs in Southern India", *Eastern Anthropologist*, Vol. V, No.4, 1951-52, p.149.

¹⁰⁸ L.A.K. Iyer and Balaratnam, *Anthropology in India*, Bombay, 1961, p.176 cited in T. Madhavamenon ed., *op. cit.*, p. 282.

trees on the four posts. The stretcher is now removed from the earth taking utmost care to see that the whole thing remains intact. Among the Iruḷas the entire process of the decoration of the funeral car is known as *Gudikkeṭṭu*. Same types of cars are made by the Kuṟumbas and the Mudugas. The only difference between the Iruḷa and the other two in the making of the funeral car is that, the Kuṟumbas and the Mudugas do not dig the earth and fix the four posts in the ground; instead, they keep the poles upright using brick pieces, stones or cement hollow-bricks (the practice of using bricks is of course a recent development). For the Kuṟumbas the stretcher is called *Kūdākāram* and for the Mudugas, *Kaṭṭakkāl*.

The Kādar and Malasar prepare the same type of decorated biers and the former call it *Kaṭṭal* and their decorated portion *tēru*. They neither place the brass pot nor the umbrella on it. The Malasar put the corpse in a bamboo box and it is upon this box that they construct the *tēru*. Before laying the dead body inside the *tēru*, the *Maṇṇūkkāran* propitiates the spirits by making a mark of blood on his forehead and on that of the corpse, and also on the four posts of the *tēru*. The blood for this is taken from cutting a cock's leg. Subsequently the cock is sacrificed. Campbell observes that blood seems to keep off spirits. In China, when a person is sick or possessed by evil spirits, goat's blood is smeared on his forehead.¹⁰⁹ The Kādar doesn't prepare the *tēru* for infants, pregnant women and those who die of epidemics. The Ēṟavāḷans

¹⁰⁹ J.M. Campbell, *op. cit.*, Vol. XXIV, 1895 May, p.125.

prepare a bamboo stretcher with decorations which is known as *Pallāk* or *Patāka* and the decoration is called *tēru*. Unlike all others, they place four brass pots on all the four corners of the *tēru* and one on the top. The *tēru* is prepared only for the dignitaries among them. If a *tēru* is prepared for the husband, it is compulsory that one should be prepared for the wife too when she dies. All the tribes who make funeral cars put their dead bodies inside it in a sitting posture.

The Malamalar use a bamboo cot called *Pallākku* without any decorations. The Aṛaṇādans is the only tribe who doesn't have a bier to carry the deceased as they bury their dead near their houses. Like the Malabar tribes, the Keer/Kir, a tribe in Madhya Pradesh, make *Kathi* (bier) with the help of bamboo and grass strings.¹¹⁰ Among the Australian aborigines of Adelaide, when a man dies, a rude bier is prepared by fastening together ten or twelve branches, so as to form the radii of a circle.¹¹¹ But, however, the use of bier in the transportation of the corpse to the graveyard doesn't appear to have much recognition among tribes elsewhere.

Grave-digging

The grave is the residence of the departed, so the tribes all over the world have their own graveyards and specialist grave-diggers. On the Gold

¹¹⁰ Sachidananda and R. R. Prasad ed., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p.409.

¹¹¹ W. Wyatt, 'Some Account of the Manners and Customs of the Adelaide and Encounter Bay Tribes' in *The Native Tribes of South Australia*, Adelaide, 1879, p.74, cited in J.G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-95), pp.164-65.

Coast, among the Tanala of Madagascar, among the Nicobarese, and some of the British Columbian tribes the families have common burial grounds.¹¹² The Gōnds and Bhūmias have their own burial grounds and their burial ground is known as *Mar-ghat*.¹¹³ In the case of Malabar tribesmen, there are strong traditions associated with graveyards and strict rules regarding grave-digging. *Chodalai* is the common term for the graveyards among tribes such as Paṇiyas, Kuṇḍuvādiyans, Muḷḷakuṇmans, Āḷar, Mudugas, Malaimalasar and Kuṇumbas. *Chudukād* is the word used by Thachanādan Mūppans and Malasar for their graveyards while it is *Chudalakkād* for Malamutthans, Malappaṇikkans and Kuṇichiyas.

In very old days, due to great fear of the dead, most tribesmen had buried their dead anywhere in the forests much afar from their hamlets in a very casual and hasty manner; but today they have a common graveyard. Some graveyards are close to their settlements while in many cases they are far away. Each settlement has its own graveyard; the area of most of these graveyards is small and can accommodate only less than a hundred dead bodies. Thus the settlers are compelled to bury the dead in the same spot again and again. In the course of digging if they come across the skeletal remains of a dead body buried earlier, custom requires that a second grave should never be dug; the remains should be put in the burial pit and buried

¹¹² James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p. 423.

¹¹³ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

along with the new body. Majority of the tribes believe that digging of a second grave would invariably bring about a second death. All those who get a pristine spot are considered to be truly fortunate.

The grave diggers are required to undergo an apprenticeship in the work. At the bottom of the graves, almost all tribes prepare a side cavity, or an inner chamber, which too appears to be universal in practice, in order to put the whole body inserted inside.¹¹⁴ The tribes give us two explanations for this practice: to save the body from the falling of soil upon it while filling the grave and to prevent the soul from escaping from the grave. The Egyptians in the latter part of the pre-dynastic period had devised a special type of grave called 'Pit-cave' in order to prevent the earth used to fill up the grave from touching the body. It consisted of a shaft terminating in a recessed chamber.¹¹⁵ The Theddora of South East Australia believes that the dead do not always remain in the grave but at times come out. Thus their graves are dug in cylindrical pits with a side chamber in which the dead body is placed, surrounded by pieces of wood. This arrangement is for the purpose of providing the Egress if such is ever desired by the deceased. Among the Ngarlgo, we find graves made like a well with a side chamber; again, they were constructed by digging out a cavity just as we find among the

¹¹⁴ As all the tribes consider burial at the graveyard as extremely sacred, no outsider is allowed to either witness the ritual or excavate the graveyard. Therefore all the information on it comes from oral sources and field study.

¹¹⁵ G. S. Gurye, *Anthropo-sociological Papers*, Bombay, 1963, p. 71.

Theddora.¹¹⁶ Kondakammara, a tribe in Andhra Pradesh, make a side tunnel at the bottom of the pit into which the body is kept.¹¹⁷ The Iruḷas, Aṛaṇādans and the Kādar follow a different practice; they make a small inner hole, as the area of head-rest, at the southern wall of the pit and is called *Thalakkuzhi*. For all the tribes dead body is extremely sacred and so it has to be properly buried; but the reason behind the practice of making a cavity seems to be to protect the corpse from being eaten away by wild animals. Scooping out a side chamber presupposes considerable amount of expertise and, therefore, the grave diggers are required to undergo an apprenticeship in the work. The geological factors¹¹⁸ combined with the cultural influence of the migrant settlers have now induced certain tribes to imitate the Christian practice of coffin burial; the Kuṛumbas, Karimpālans and the Māvilāns have almost shifted to this practice.

The Adiyāns bury the dead in the north-south direction for which they dig a pit of about 3 or 4 feet in depth and nearly 9 feet in length. Then a six or seven feet long central cavity, large enough to hold the corpse, is made at the bottom of the pit in the north-south direction along one of the sides of the pit by scooping out earth. The corpse is laid securely in this side chamber. Their graveyard is known as *Kidākkai* and the Celt, *Śavagundu*. During the time of

¹¹⁶ Alfred. W. Howitt, *op. cit.*, p.462.

¹¹⁷ V. Subrahmanyam & D. Jesuratnam in Sachidananda & R.R. Prasad ed., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 482.

¹¹⁸ While digging, if they come across impregnable rocks, custom doesn't allow them to shift the grave to another spot; so grave-digging is always a nightmare for them. The use of coffins mitigates these tensions: there is no fear of the falling of soil on the body, of the attack of wild animals or of the escape of the soul.

Celt-digging, their *Naṭṭu-Mūppan* and *Karumi* enquire about the progress of the digging with a question: “*Akam Kiṭṭiyō?*” (Have you got the Celt?) And the diggers reply in the positive or negative or as “*Buddhimuṭṭāyi*” (it is difficult).

Among the Paṇiyas, the headman (*Chemmi*) is considered to be the owner of the graveyard and he has to symbolically start the digging process after receiving a nominal fee from the family of the dead. (Earlier, it was 7 panams, i.e, Rs.1.75, for a spot seven feet in length and three feet in width. The fee for such a piece of land now-a-days is ten rupees.) It is reported that in former days, the *Chemmi* threw out a spade and a knife from the deceased person’s house to be collected by the daughter of the deceased person’s brother and later to be handed over to the *Chemmi* himself.¹¹⁹ He then appoints four specialists for digging the grave. A pit nine feet in length, three feet in width and three to four feet in depth is dug with a cellar at the bottom of the grave. The cellar is called *Aḷḷēkkuzhi*. Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Edgar Thurston attested to the same practice of making a ‘receptacle for the corpse’ at the bottom of this excavation by scooping out earth from the western side on a level with the floor.¹²⁰ The *Chemmi* digs up four clods of earth first and this is kept apart, care being taken that it does not mingle with the soil deposited around the grave while digging.

¹¹⁹ M.S. Prakasham, “Wayanātilē Paṇiyar”, *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, 1974 July 14-21, p.20.

¹²⁰ E. Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India*, Part I, Delhi, 1975, Reprint, p.144.

The Ūraḷikuṟumans call their graveyard *Chodalakaṇḍi*. Their burial pit is six feet deep; like the Paṇiyas they too insist that the soil removed should be spread evenly on all four sides. The grave-diggers do not use shirts and it is important that they should not perspire while at work. The headman has the right to start digging. Particular areas are set apart for infants, for those who commit suicide and for those who die in the hospitals. The grave-digger dismantles the spade and carries the metal-head and the handle separately before and after the work; the handle should be fixed on the metal-head only at the time of work. After filling the grave, if excess soil was found in heaps over the pit, it implies that the person has died prematurely and if enough soil is not left over the pit, the person is assumed to have completed the full span of life. If a suckling child dies, it has to be buried under the *Pāla* tree (*Alstonia Scholiris*). This practice reflects the intense emotional attachment of a mother to her child and indicates that even after death the child can grow by sucking the milk-like sap of the tree instead of its mother's breast-milk. Today the Ūraḷikuṟumans make a bamboo box and put the dead body inside it and bury it in the grave. Sometimes, instead of a box, they use a mat folded in the shape of a box and after laying the body inside the grave they cover it with this folded mat from the top.

The graves of the Aṟaṇādans are six feet in length and three feet in width with a special inner hole scooped out at the head portion to insert the head of the dead person. There is a unique practice among them. The relatives

of the deceased place a bottle of toddy in the graveyard before the digging starts. In the past it was meant for the consumption of the grave-diggers. Since the graveyard was located in the middle of dense forests, they had to muster courage to carry on their work in such hostile environment, consumption of toddy served their purpose. Now, as they have started burying the dead in the premises of the houses, a change has taken place: the toddy is drunk by the near relatives themselves. The Māvilāns, too, used to provide toddy to the grave-diggers as a means to avoid the fear of the dead.

It is customary among the Kāṭṭunāikkans for the headman to mark the spot of the burial pit with the help of a stick, called *Badukka*, which he carries to the graveyard. They dig a pit 3 feet in depth and scoop out an L-shaped cavity towards the side. The soil from inside the grave should not be left unused; it has to be piled over the grave. They call their graveyard *Chudumālai* or *chodalai* and the side cavity as *Hoddamaṇṇu*. The Kāṭṭunāikkans are reported to have a peculiar rite at the graveyard. The whole funeral party, in chorus, requests the dead person to dig the grave by himself by saying “*Bēga Ninagulla Manai Bēga Akku, Ithu Minaketta nīnthalē Āppathille. Bēga Nanga hokku. Nāna Hottēkku Thīni kāne. Śathavanu Ini Onthum Kānē*”.¹²¹ (Your grave should be dug by yourself; we don’t have much time to waste for it; we want to return fast; we have to satisfy our hunger; the dead doesn’t have any more worries).

¹²¹ Cited in K. Panoor, *Kēralathilē Africa* Kottayam, 1989, pp. 123-124.

As regards the Kuṇḍuvādiyans, if a married woman dies at the home of her husband, existing custom insists that the *Pādi Mūppan* (headman of the settlement of her native hamlet has to purchase a piece of land in the graveyard of her present settlement by paying twenty five paise to the *Pādi Mūppan* of that settlement. One should rest permanently only on one's own land. Among the Māvilāns, at every death, the funeral officiator called *Kaṛmi* demarks a six feet land in the graveyard and it is for him to start the digging, ceremonially, by scooping two or three clods of earth. The sons or nephews are prohibited from the digging work. For the Kaḷanādis the Paṇiyas should act as the grave-diggers whom they call as *Modali*. They dig a six feet deep grave with a side cavity. The soil removed from the head portion of the pit has to be kept apart for filling the grave; this portion of soil should first be sprinkled over the corpse. As a reward for their service in grave-digging, the Paṇiyas are given paddy, rice, new clothes and money. The Muḷḷakuṛumans generally dig deep, trench-like graves which are of six feet depth; but the Muḷḷakuṛumans of Nadavayal and Sulthan Batheri make a side cavity in addition. Tradition doesn't allow cavities to be dug at Koranjivayal and Pākkam, which are the foremost Muḷḷakuṛumans settlements. The spades and knives needed for the digging purpose are supplied by the headman. In former days the nephew of the deceased fixed the place for digging and later this responsibility fell on the shoulders of the sons of the deceased.

Both the Malayālar and Wayanādan Pathiyans prefer cremation to burial and hence graves are unnecessary. They bury only dead infants and youths. These two groups also don't have common burial grounds; they cremate the dead at the precincts of their own houses. The adoption of cremation appears to be a fairly recent practice, a clear evidence of ritual acculturation. The Wayanādan Kādar has no specialist grave-diggers; for them the kinsmen dig the graves. They have almost abandoned their old practice of making cavities called *Mādi*; today they use bamboo coffin and just bury it inside the grave. It is the right of the headman to start the digging of the grave. While, in former days, the Thachanādan Mūppans started grave-digging only after the corpse was washed and brought to the graveyard, now they insist that the dead body should be washed only after the grave-digging is finished. Their graveyard, which was earlier called *Chudukād*, is now known as *Śavappaṛambu*. Before laying the dead body inside the grave, seven wooden sticks of the same thickness are laid crosswise at the bottom of the pit. In addition to this, a specially thick stick is placed inside the pit for the head of the dead body.

The Koṛaga graveyard is known as *Kuṭṭa*; their headman fixes the spot of the burial and start the digging process himself with a ceremonial three scoops. Now-a-days the Koṛagas bury the dead in the neighbourhood of their houses. The Kuṛichiyas-graveyard is known as *Chudalakkād*. The relatives of the dead place a spade, a knife and an iron bar on the way to the graveyard.

The Kāraṇavar of the Taṛawād selects the grave-diggers, bier-makers and water-carriers. He appoints five persons for digging the grave, three for making the bier and two for bringing water. It is the *Nattu-mūppan* who starts the digging and grave-diggers generally are his heirs. The Kuṛichiyas, too, dig side chambers or cavities called *Thollu*; but those for men should be at the right-hand and for women at the left-hand sides of the pit. If the soil removed from the pit is found to be in excess to the need, which is symbolic of an imminent second death, the oracle is consulted. He tosses a coin and if the desired side of the coin is got, there will be nothing to worry. The process is repeated three times, six times or nine times; the average of the results decides the fate.

The Chōlanāikkān graveyard is called *Śavunḍi*; the grave is dug with a depth upto one's waist and with a side chamber called *Mada*. Near the *Mada* they dig another inner chamber to deposit the dearest belongings of the dead person. They give a nominal amount as wage, called *Chāvupaṇam*, to the grave-diggers. The Malamutthans dig a special type of grave. They first dig an unusually wide pit which is six feet in length. Then in the middle of this pit they dig another narrow, rectangular pit of the same length. A bamboo screen is laid at the bottom of this pit (in the case of Malamutthans of Chōkkād, bricks are laid at the bottom of the pit) and the corpse is placed upon it. Before starting the grave work, among the Malappaṇikkans, the eldest *Kāraṇavar* circles round the house three times and then hand over digging

tools to the workmen. After the pit is dug, they make small holes in a row at equal intervals on the two lateral walls of the pit and put small cross-bars of wooden pieces to provide a platform just above the bottom of the pit and thus make an improvised cot for the corpse. The Āḷar follow the same practice of the Malappaṅikkans; their headman called *Tharawāṭṭukāran* clears the spot selected as the burial place and then symbolically removes the two spade-ful of soil from the right side to the left and from the left to the right. The Āḷar of Munderi and Kapp settlements demand a payment if they help other Āḷar men in digging graves for the funeral.

For the Kādar the cemetery is called *Chudalakkāvu*; they dig a five to six feet deep burial pit with a cavity. Before the starting of the grave work, they perform certain pujas or ritual oblations at the graveyard; the bier-makers as well as the grave-diggers offer coconut, banana and incense sticks to the deceased ancestors. While digging, they remove the soil from the pit and deposit it in the opposite direction — i.e. the soil from the south is deposited in the north and that from the west is deposited in the east. Among the Malasar, the *Maṅṅūkkāran* of the hamlet throws a stone into the graveyard and prays to the ancestors: “open the door; the new king is coming”. The spot where the stone fell is being chosen as the site for digging. The grave is six feet deep and it has a lateral cavity known as *Thurangam*. They give the grave-diggers liquor as remuneration for the work. Malamalasar call their graveyard *Chudukād*; the headman decides the ideal spot for the burial.

According to the Malamalasar tradition, only six graves are permitted to be dug in a graveyard. The deceased are buried in one of the six graves. It is believed that burial in any grave other than the six may lead to the eventual collapse of the whole settlement. The eldest brother of the deceased should start the digging work which is followed by others.

The Ēṛavāḷans have a common graveyard for three to four settlements together, so the same spot is used again and again for burying. Their pit is six feet deep and six feet long. They make side chamber or *Thurangam* only for those who have *tēru* and also for those who raise this demand as their last wish. Iruḷas graveyard is *Koppai*. While approaching the cemetery, an expert among the grave-diggers (probably *Kurutalai*), will announce: “*Ūrāṟu Varigāṟu; Kādāṟu Olinthu Pōyi*” (hamlet-dwellers are coming; forest-dwellers should quit”). Their burial pit is 6feet long and with a width of 3feet and has *Thalakkuzhi* or cavity for head rest. The Muduga graveyard is *Chudalai* and their cavity is called *Aḷḷēkkuzhi*. Thurston’s splendid description of the ideal behind the Muduga grave-digging, at the beginning of the twentieth century, runs thus: “For man, judged sufficient if the grave-digger, standing on the bottom, finds the level of the ground upto his waist, but, for a woman it must be upto his armpits. The reason is that the surviving women do not like to think they will be very near the surface but the men are brave, and know that if they lie north and south, nothing can harm them, and no evil

approach".¹²² No such belief, or any gender distinction in grave digging, is found to exist today. Among the Kuṛumbas, the *Maṅṅūkkāran* finds the spot of the grave; he, after a moment's prayer, fixes a stump on the site of his choice shown by his inner eye. The grave is six feet deep and has a side cavity called *Aḷḷēkkuzhi*. For the Kuṛumbas, the sons-in-law of the dead should make the grave. Recently they have started coffin burial and in this case anyone can act as a grave-digger. In certain Kuṛumba settlements there are special graveyards exclusively for children. The Wayanādan Pathiyans and Malayāḷar, today, use graveyards only for burying the orphans; others are disposed off in the premises of their own houses.

Funeral Dance

Funeral dance and music represent an important phase in the tribal practice of spirit worship. It is through music and dance that they allay the fear of the spirits of their dead. Campbell argues that music, dance and songs are used by men as a medium to scare the spirits of the dead.¹²³ Such practices are popular among the tribes of Africa, Australia, America, Eastern India and the Nīlgiris in Tamil Nadu. After placing the corpse inside the funeral 'car', all the Badaga of the Nīlgiris proceed to dance round the 'car' to the music of the Kota band¹²⁴ (the Kotas are another tribe in the Nīlgiris and are the

¹²² E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. V, New Delhi, 1975, p.95.

¹²³ For details see J.M. Campbell, *op. cit.*, June 1895, pp. 165-168.

¹²⁴ E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. I, Delhi, 1975, Reprint, p.112.

musicians of the (Todas and Badagas). Among the Lodagaa of West Africa, the dancers start from the perimeter of the circle formed around the funeral stand, dance toward the corpse, then break off and retire to the places where they were sitting. Their dance is accompanied by the sound of the xylophone.¹²⁵

The custom of funeral dance and music has had no roots among the Malabar tribes except among those in the Aṭṭappādi and Paṛambikulam regions of the Pālakkād District. This great exception is supposed to have been brought about by the great cultural links that the tribes of this area had kept with the tribes of the Nīlگیرis and Coimbatore areas for whom dance and music is a must in funeral rites. After the purificatory rite, the corpse is removed from the house and is laid on the specially prepared decorated bier in the courtyard. All the men and women assemble at the courtyard and all those who have not already saluted the corpse do so. A group of clanswomen who have gathered at a corner of the bier make a loud wailing. No differences can be noticed between the funeral dance and music of the Kuṛumbas and the Mudugas. Men and women together form a circle around the funeral bier and dance and sing in honour of the deceased. The close relatives of the deceased person do not participate. Anyone of any age, who has expertise in dance or music, could join the group. The musical instruments used are *Dhaviḷ*,¹²⁶

¹²⁵ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, p.103.

¹²⁶ It has the shape of a *Chenda* (drum), the two sides of which are covered with cow's skin.

Kohal,¹²⁷ *Jhālra*,¹²⁸ *Perai*¹²⁹ and *Dhambatta*.¹³⁰ These instruments are played by experienced elders. Dancers wear anklets while dancing. Unlike the *Mudugas* and *Kuṟumbas*, for the *Iruḷas* funeral music and dance starts only at the time of the removal of the body to the cemetery and with the dismantling of the funeral bier. The following is an *Iruḷa* funeral song:

Ā Chakka Athaka Chakka

Kūkke Maṇṇu Nimanth Vāru

Ā Chakka Athaka Chakka

Mēlē Vaṭṭē Peṇ Maka

Ā Chakka Athaka Chakka

Ādiya Vaṭṭē Peṇ Maka

Ā Chakka Athaka Chakka

Āṭṭathukku Vāyinkō... rrr...urr...rrr...urr

Ā Chakka Athaka Chakka.¹³¹

The *Iruḷa* funeral dance is known as *Ūttāttu Paṟai* and that of the *Kuṟumbas* and *Mudugas* as *Ūṭṭāṭṭu* or *Malayāṭṭu*. In olden days each settlement had a collection of all musical instruments; today these are being hired from professional band troops. Songs and dance actions have a

¹²⁷ Blow pipe

¹²⁸ Cymbal-like instrument made of brass.

¹²⁹ An earthen pot covered with the skin of the cow and rope (like the *Pulluvakudam*)

¹³⁰ A kind of drum

¹³¹ Sung by Kaṇṇamma, 65, of Vayalur *Iruḷa* settlement of *Aṭṭappādi*.

mourning effect. The steps of the dancers perfectly suit to the tune of musicians and the tunes go on changing in its course. The wailing clansmen occasionally join with the dancers and singers and the process of wailing and dancing proceeds one after the other.

The Kādar and Malasar of Paṛambikulam follow the same practices of the tribes of Aṭṭappādi. But the musical instruments of the two differ. They use instruments like *Chendai*,¹³² *Uṛumi* or *Udukkū*,¹³³ *Karimbu* or *Kuzhal*.¹³⁴ The traditional funeral dance of the Kādar is called *Āṭṭam*. Among the Malasar funeral dance is not a must today but for the funeral of the elders songs are compulsory. The Ēṛavāḷans have lost this tradition because of their migration to the plains. In the past their women engaged themselves in traditional wailing along with songs. Their instruments were *Matthāḷam* or *Koṭṭumaṛa*,¹³⁵ big and small, and *Koval* or *Kuzhal*. These also have become things of the past. Aṛaṇādans have a particular kind of grave dance after the cremation of the body: under the leadership of their headman who wears a garland of small bells on his waist, the Aṛaṇādan men sing and dance around the grave. But it is customary among all tribes not to dance or play music in the event of an unnatural death like suicide, death in pregnancy, death by epidemics or death during rainy seasons.

¹³² Tambore

¹³³ Small drum

¹³⁴ Blow pipe

¹³⁵ Small drum

The funeral dance and music have undergone some modification in recent times owing to the intervention of the communities of the plains. Formerly the musicians had played traditional tribal mourning tunes. Today tunes of the musicians are based on eastern and western popular songs from the cinema. These dances and songs are now confined to just five or ten minutes or at the most continued upto an hour. In olden days starting with the death they ended only with the burial. Now they hire musical instruments and have to pay for that. A person who dies with no relatives or successors is denied of these privileges today as nobody comes forward to meet the huge expenditure incurred in this respect.

Bride price

Instead of dowry, which is popular among the larger communities, the system of bride price prevails among the tribes in Kerala as well as over the entire tribal world. The bride price plays a vital role in the funeral ceremonies of the tribesmen in Malabar. If a married male fails to pay the full amount of the bride price to his father-in-law before his wife's death, he along with all his clansmen will not be allowed to participate in his wife's funeral ceremonies. Moreover he doesn't have any claim over his children. Similarly, at his death, the wife's relatives would refrain from his funeral ceremonies. So the payment of the bride price in time is a vital tribal law for banishment is a crime the worst feared of and punishment the most shameful. Today tribal law

allows certain concessions regarding the bride price. A committee consisting of members from both the husband's and wife's part, under the authority of the headmen of each side, points out solutions upon certain conditions. The defaulter therefore is allowed sufficient time for payment; now-a-days, no one is denied the right to participate in the last rite of his wife.

The bride price among the Iruḷas, Kuṟumbas and the Mudugas is commonly known as '*Pariyapaṇam*'. In early days it was only after paying *Pariyapaṇam* that the funeral of the husband was allowed by his wife's clansmen. At that time the value of *Pariyapaṇam* was below Rs.100/ (it varied from Rs. $1\frac{1}{4}$ to 2 to $7\frac{1}{2}$ to $50\frac{1}{4}$). The bride price currently in practice ranges from Rs. $101\frac{1}{4}$ to $501\frac{1}{4}$ and to $1001\frac{1}{4}$. The practice of the payment of *Pariyapaṇam* is still followed by all the three tribes, though symbolically. The other tribes of Malabar are not much particular in the payment of the bride price now. Among the Lo Dagaba, unless the second installment (*doe*) of bride wealth has been paid, the husband's agnates do not have the unequivocal right to bury the body of the dead woman. It is said of them "they don't own the dead body" (*be be so a ku*). If the wife's lineage wished to enforce the claim, they could arrange for a third party to scatter some ebony leaves outside the husband's compound; after this act no one will dare to continue with the funeral, since the Earth has now been invoked".¹³⁶ Among

¹³⁶ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

the Gōnds, the bride price (*Sukh*) is fixed at nine silver rupees.¹³⁷ All the above mentioned rules regarding bride price in Malabar are applicable to the Gōnds as well.

Washing and other Rites before Burial

In the event of a death, the corpse along with the close agnates of the dead, have to undergo a series of purificatory rites. Washing of the corpse is the prominent earliest care. Among all tribes of Kerala great care is taken in regard to the toilet of the corpse. The significance of purifying the dead body with water is explained by W. Crook: "As the body is cleansed from physical pollution, so the soul likewise is purified".¹³⁸ All the methods of purification of a corpse are concerned with the removal of various kinds of dirt of which the most important are: intercourse with wife/husband, illness, the clothes worn by a man/woman etc. The tribes all over the world believe that the body dirt makes a dead man defenseless against certain sorts of malevolent attack by evil spirits.

After the arrival of all the relatives and clansmen, the preparations for washing the deceased person's body starts under the direction of the headman. But in the case of the Adiyāns, Kuṛichiyas, Karimpālans, Paṇiyas, Ūrāḷikurumans and Māvilāns, all funeral rituals are performed under special functionaries i.e., *Changāthi* or *Mūnnāman* or *Mūnnān* for the Karimpālans

¹³⁷ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p.273.

¹³⁸ William Crook, *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, Vol. I, Oxford, 1926, p.37.

and Wayanādan Kuṛichiyas; *Karumi* for the Adiyāns and Māvilāns and *Bijakkālan* for the Ūraḷikuṛumans. Likewise, the funeral functionary or funeral shaman of the Sora of Eastern India is known as *Sanatung Kuran*¹³⁹ (who are normally women) and that of Stlatum H of British Columbia are *Wultzewultzeta*.¹⁴⁰ Among all tribes in Malabar, the dead body of the headman/his wife has to be washed by their children, nephews or nieces. In the case of ordinary tribesmen, all clansmen apart from the sons, nephews and nieces, also actively participate in the purificatory rites. While in the Western world washing of a corpse is the duty of the female members of the clan, in Malabar, the corpse of men are washed only by men and that of women only by women. The only exception was the Thachanādan Mūppans among whom, in the early days, the corpse of a person belonging to the clan, irrespective of gender differences, were washed by aged female members; but they too have changed the practice now. “Among the Loddaga of West Africa...those women from the neighbourhood who are acquainted with the funeral procedures gather there to arrange for the bathing of the corpse. There are two points to note about the women who carry out these tasks. First, they are classificatory ‘wives’ and ‘sisters’ of the deceased...Second, these arrangers of the corpse are always women of advanced age...It is prescribed that these women should have passed the menopause, that they should, to use the

¹³⁹ See Piers Vitebsky, *Dialogues with the Dead: The Discussion of Morality among the Sora of Eastern India*, New Delhi, 1993, p. 18.

¹⁴⁰ Charles Hill-tout, “Report on the Ethnology of Stlatum H of British Columbia”, *Journal of Anthropological Institute*, Vol. XXXV, (n.s), 1905, p. 137.

Lodagaa phrase, have turned to 'men' (*Lieba daba*)".¹⁴¹ Among the Gōnds and Bhūmia of Jabalpur, a man's body is bathed by his male relatives, a woman's body by women.¹⁴²

It was not customary among many tribes in Malabar to wash the corpse in former days. The fear of the dead coupled with the hostile environment of their dwellings and circumstances around had compelled them to leave the corpse anywhere in the jungles or to bury it hurriedly without any purificatory rites. It was their contact with the people of the plains that had led the tribes to adopt their ideas and rituals associated with the purification of the dead body. On the world scale, certain tribes use cold water and others hot water to wash the corpse but the Malabar tribes had used only cold water for the purpose and several tribes including Karimpālans, Ūrāḷikurumans, Thachanādan Mūppans, Adiyāns, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Kuṇḍuvādiyans, Wayanādan Pathiyans, Māvilāns, Kaḷanādis, Paṇiyas and Malayāḷar have opted for hot water, in recent times. Those who use cold water explain that it cools the soul as well as the body of the dead and facilitates an easy travel to the other world, while hot water would burn the soul as also the body and make the spirit furious and ruthless. On the other hand, the exponents of the use of hot water contend that, hot water lends warmth to the soul and makes its journey to the other world easier and more pleasant. Among the Khāsis the body is bathed in warm water from

¹⁴¹ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, pp.55-56.

¹⁴² Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p.336.

three earthen pots.¹⁴³ Similarly, the old Lodagaa women of West Africa wash the dead men in hot water.¹⁴⁴ The Sora of Eastern India wash the dead in cool turmeric water.¹⁴⁵ If an Akoa chief died, body is carried by his clansmen into the forest for drying. Several months later they took the dried body and placed it in the stream for cooling it. There it would remain in the cold, which Pigmies fear, and its spirit could not wander to harm them.¹⁴⁶ It is also to be noted that tribesmen like Chōlanāikkans, Malamalasar and Āḷar even today do not wash their corpse at all.

Among some tribal groups certain preliminary rites have to be performed before washing the dead body. In Malabar, all tribes shave the beard of the male corpse before washing it. In the case of Paṇiyas the shaving of the corpse is done by the nephew of the deceased. Tribes like Wayanādan Kādar, Iruḷas, Paṇiyas, Ūrālikurumans, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Kuṇḍuvādiyans and Kuṇumbas anoint the dead body with turmeric paste before washing it. Others like Kaḷanādis, Māvīlāns, Aṇṇādans, Malamutthans, Malappaṇikkans and Wayanādan Pathiyans smear oil (Gingelly oil in former days and coconut oil today) on the corpse and then wash the body using soap. Karimpālans use only soap for washing. The use of soap is evidently a recent development and is indicative of the fast growing process of culture change. Kuṇichiyas and

¹⁴³ P.R.T. Gurdon, *op. cit.*, p.132.

¹⁴⁴ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, p.56.

¹⁴⁵ Piers Vitebsky, *op. cit.*, p.49.

¹⁴⁶ Carleton. S. Coon, *op. cit.*, p.334.

Malayālar use only coconut oil for smearing on the dead body. In the past Malayālar had used a kind of shampoo prepared from certain leaves like that of the hibiscus for applying on the corpse. The Mudugas, Thachanādan Mūppans and Adiyāns apply both turmeric and coconut oil on the corpse before it is washed. The Muḷḷakuṟmans wash the corpse in turmeric water using soap-nut in place of soap. The Koṟagas wash the corpse after smearing turmeric powder and coconut oil. Māvilāns, Kaḷanādis and Karimpālans never use soap for bathing the body of dignitaries like the oracles, *teyyam* dancers, etc. because they consider such persons as divine personalities and using artificial things like soap would pollute the corpse. The Malasar do not wash the body of dead women because they are afraid of the spirit of the female soul and consider even the touching of the dead body of a female as harmful to them. The Ēṟavāḷans smear a combination of turmeric, *tumba* (*Leucca indica*) and *Erukku* (*calotropis*) on the corpse before washing it. A.A.D. Luiz' description of the Aṟaṇādans's practice of washing the corpse is that the "Aṟaṇādans bury their dead and are anxious to dispose the corpse in the best manner possible. Often poverty prevents them from anointing the corpse".¹⁴⁷

Anointing the body before washing is a universal practice. The dead body of an Ollar Gadaba of Orissa is massaged with turmeric while it is being bathed.¹⁴⁸ Among the Ho of Bihar, the body is smeared with turmeric and

¹⁴⁷ A.A.D. Luiz, *Tribes of Kerala*, Delhi, 1962, p.30.

¹⁴⁸ M. Jha, *op. cit.*, p.103, cited in T. Madhavamenon ed., *op. cit.*, p.281.

oil.¹⁴⁹ The Lodagaa of west Africa rubbed the corpse either with Kabur, the black, greasy by-product of shea butter, or else with chewed ground nuts — in order to remove all the body dirt (deo, deghr).¹⁵⁰ Campbell points out the need of anointing oil as: “oil is a medicine; oil heels wounds; and, rubbed over the body, relieves cramps, seizures, and weariness. Oil is also both food and drink. It is a giver of light and giver of heat. For all these reasons few spirit-scarers are either so powerful or so popular as oil”.¹⁵¹

Certain tribes have their own special practices with regard to the washing of the corpse. In the case of the Muḷḷakuṛumans, if the deceased is a female, her sisters-in-law or her uncle’s daughters wash the corpse; if it is a male, it is washed by the nephews or the brothers-in-law. The head and feet of the corpse are placed on pieces of wood on this occasion. It has been observed that if a man dies, water for washing his body has to be drawn from the well by his sisters. It is the dead man’s uncle who should first pour water on the corpse. He is followed by the headman of the tribe. Then it is the turn of the dead man’s sisters to do so and then only the other relatives pour water on the dead man’s body.¹⁵² The pot used for this purpose should invariably be made by the Ūraḷikuṛumans. Each house will have such kind of pots which are kept inside the *Daivapura*. After all such purificatory rites, the corpse is taken to

¹⁴⁹ Mitra Sarkar, in Sachidananda & R.R. Prasad ed., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p.343.

¹⁵⁰ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, p.56.

¹⁵¹ J.M. Campbell, *op. cit.*, Vol. XXV, March 1896, p.79.

¹⁵² M. S. Prakasam, “Wayanātilē Kurumar”, *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, 1978 Oct. 8.

the *Daivapura* and placed inside. The Kāṭṭunāikkans, before washing the corpse, “send a person to bring a *Nelli* (crab), two kinds of tree barks and a leaf. Once they are brought, the body is given a bathe”.¹⁵³ After the arrival of all the relatives, the *Modali* or headman orders to wash the corpse. A stone is placed in one corner of the hut and the *Modali* first pours turmeric water followed by his wife and then by others. The Ūraḷikuṟumans, Ēṟavāḷans and Malappaṇikkans, after washing the body, put the pot used for it upside down. It is again used only after the end of the period of pollution as, they believe that, everything connected with the corpse is equally polluted. As regards the Malappaṇikkans, only the hands and legs of the body were washed in former days; full body wash is a recent development among them. If a person of a particular clan among the Thachanādan Mūppans dies, he/she is washed by members of another clan only.¹⁵⁴ They are the only tribe who untie the knots of the thumbs and big toes before washing; though they tie them down afterwards. Chummar choondal records that before washing, fresh turmeric pieces are pound in a mortar and mixed with water; oil is smeared on the corpse and then using the freshly prepared turmeric water the dead body is cleaned.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ B. Anandabhanu, “Kāṭṭunāikkār”, in K.S. Singh ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 591-592.

¹⁵⁴ Among the Tachanādan Mūppans there are so many clans like *Māmanmār*, *Kottanmār*, *Mādanmār*, *Mundanmār*, *Mattuppathi*, *Chēnnanmār*, etc. the tradition of the Tachanādan Mūppans insist that members from the clan should not wash the corpse and it should be from members of another clan. For example, *Mādan* for *Chēnnan* and *Chēnnan* for *Mādan*.

¹⁵⁵ Chummar Choondal, *Karutha Kalakal*, Trissur, 1991, p. 52.

In the case of deceased Adiyān headmen/elders a temporary thatched shed is constructed for washing the dead body. By applying oil all over the corpse and rubbing it thoroughly, they make the corpse a little more supple and then bend its arms in a Yogic posture. After washing, the corpse is taken to the western corner of the shed. In the case of the common clansmen, arrangement for washing the dead body is made by enclosing a place using empty sacks. After washing, the body is taken to the courtyard and is placed in the north-south direction.

When a Kuṇḍuvādiyan dies, two female heirs of the deceased person, wearing bodice, boil water in an earthen pot and all kinsmen, as well as clansmen, pour three handfuls of water on the corpse. The Malayāḷar, Kaḷanādis and Malamutthans place their dead body in a plantain leaf in a sitting posture for washing; the Kaḷanādis make a temporary *pandal* of cloth for washing the dead body. Likewise, the Koṛagas wash the corpse in a sitting posture on a mat. In earlier days they used the spathe of areca palm for this purpose. Four headmen, including that of the hamlet of the dead, pour a pot of water each on the corpse. Though only females can bathe the body of a female corpse, water should be poured by men.

The Kuṛichiyas of Wynād follow a peculiar tradition in washing the corpse; before washing, all the ornaments of the woman/man are removed from the body except a ring in the case of women and a *Kadukkan* (ear-ring)

in the case of men. Coconut oil is anointed on the body in a particular manner: two persons, consisting of the *Changāthi* and a close relative of the dead, stand on either side (left and right) of the body and anoint oil on the two halves of the body simultaneously. Starting from the toes they proceed upwards and reach the head. Then they anoint the upper arms, lower arms and finally the hands and the fingertips. In the case of women, the function is performed by the wife of the *Changāthi* assisted by one of the relatives of the dead. The *kuduma* or the tuft of hair is untied while washing and tied again after it. For washing, water should be taken by the son or the nephew of the deceased in an earthen pot. Washing starts from the feet and proceeds upwards to the head. Regarding the peculiar gestures shown during the washing process, Goody remarks: "Anointing the body is a part of the normal routine of bathing, but what I call the ritual of pretended gesture (*tun*) is specific to funerals. These pretense rituals serve to point up an occasion that is marked off from the ordinary, and they can therefore be considered as an example of those rituals of reversal, so often found in funeral ceremonies, in which actions are performed in a manner different from, and often opposed to, the ways appropriate in normal circumstances".¹⁵⁶

When a Kādar man dies, his body is washed by his son/s, and in the case of a woman this duty is performed by her daughter/s. Among the Iruḷas, the eldest son has to take a pot-full of water from a nearby stream and only

¹⁵⁶ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, p.60.

this water has to be used for washing the dead body. In the case of the death of a female too the son has to bring the water from the stream, though the body is washed by female members. In the event of the absence of a son, the nephew has the right to do it.

After washing, all the tribes bedeck the corpse with new clothes; the only exception being Ūraḷikuṟumans among whom wearing of clothes after washing is taboo. For the Malasar the clothes worn before is not replaced by a new one even after washing. Among the Adiyāns, after washing, the corpse was covered upto the neck with a black *mundu* for men and a black sari for women till recently. Now they dress their corpse in ordinary clothes instead of black mundu or black saree. K. Panoor writes that the Paṇiyas believed that the wearing of a new dress was the prerogative of the dead; no men alive should wear new robes. If they happened to wear a new one, they smeared soil on it to give the dress an old look.¹⁵⁷ Bedecking the corpse with new and good clothes, which is a universal practice, is done with meticulous care; otherwise, the tribes fear, they would incur the wrath of the spirits of the dead. L.A Krishna Iyer points out the need for dressing the corpse with new clothes thus: “the dead body is washed and well dressed in new garments, for the spirits should enter the spirit world in the best array”.¹⁵⁸ Among the Gōnds,

¹⁵⁷ K. Panoor, “Paṇiyar”, *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, July 5, 1959, p.11.

¹⁵⁸ L.A. Krishna Iyer, *Social History of Kerala: the Pre-Dravidians*, Vol. I, Madras, 1968, pp. 126-127.

after the body is washed in oil and turmeric, it is covered with new cloth.¹⁵⁹ Among the Penobscot Indians of Maine when a person died, he or she was dressed in his or her best clothing, complete with ornaments, and wrapped in birch bark.¹⁶⁰ The Kādar, Adiyāns, Paṇiyas and Kāṭṭunāikkans also comb the hair of the corpse after smearing oil on the head.

In addition to the washing of the corpse, there are certain other rites prevalent among the tribes of Malabar. The Iruḷas “to purify their corpse put crushed and moistened turmeric into its mouth. This, it is believed, will facilitate the eternal rest of the soul of the departed in the domain of their lord”.¹⁶¹ The Mudugas and Kuṟumbas put a pinch of turmeric and a four Anna (25 paise) coin on the forehead of men/women and in the pockets of men after they are washed and dressed. The Muḷḷakuṟumans put a coin dipped in sandalwood paste into the mouth of the corpse. The tribes believe that the money is to be used by the deceased as ferry fees to cross the river of death. Today all tribes place near the corpse a *Nilaviḷakku*, burning incense sticks, dammer and broken coconut. Campbell argues that the yellow colour (turmeric), fumes of incense sticks and fire from *Nilaviḷakku* scares away the evil spirits.¹⁶² But the real reason seems to be that the medicinal qualities of turmeric and the fumes from the incense sticks and the fire of the burning

¹⁵⁹ Haimendorff, *op.cit.*, p. 373 cited in T. Madhavamenon ed., *op. cit.*, p.281.

¹⁶⁰ Carleton. S. Coon, *op. cit.*, p.335.

¹⁶¹ *Census of India 1961*, Vol. VII, Kerala, Part VI G; Village survey Monographs- Tribal Areas, M.K. Devassi ed., p.2: 78.

¹⁶² J.M. Campbell, *op. cit.*, Vol. XXIV, June 1895, p156, Sep. 1895, p.262.

lamp, all together, ward off harmful insects from damaging the corpse and check to an extent the bad odour emanating from it.

Certain tribes and a few tribes in the case of their dignitaries, in Malabar, follow the universal practice of putting a mark on the forehead of the dead body after washing it. Thus a mark is made on the forehead of all the deceased among the Kuṛichiyas, Adiyāns, Wayanādan Pathiyans, Wayanādan Kādar, Paṇiyas and Muḷḷakuṛumans, the *teyyam* dancers of Kaḷanādis, Māvīlāns and Karimpālans and *Kōmaram* or oracles of all tribes. These tribes believe that without a mark on the forehead after burial, the person's spirit will become wild and beastly. The Kaḷanādis, Māvīlāns and Karimpālans mark the forehead of their dead Teyyam dancers with turmeric paste, Kuṛichiyas with *bhasma* or ash, Wayanādan Pathiyans and Wayanādan Kādar with sandal paste, Paṇiyas with turmeric paste and Adiyāns with raw rice paste. The Muḷḷakuṛumans smear sandal paste on the forehead of men and turmeric on that of women. The Andamanese, after shaving the corpse's head, place a lump of olive-coloured clay called *dela*, just above their foreheads. This applies to men, for women usually place the *dela* on the top of the head.¹⁶³ Among the Chippewa, a tribe in America, if a person happens to be a member of the Grand Medicine Society, his *mid* (medicine) bag was placed under his arm. Frequently his face, moccasins, and blankets were painted with brown fungus and vermillion. A round spot of brown was placed on each

¹⁶³ E.H. Mann, *The Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands*, Delhi, 1975, Reprint, p.73.

cheek over it and was painted with a horizontal line of vermillion.¹⁶⁴ Among the Koṛagas, in case the deceased happens to be a *Muṭṭaidē*, a woman whose husband is alive, a vermilion mark is made on the forehead after the body is washed.¹⁶⁵ Like the Koṛagas, among the Oraons “the body is washed and wrapped in a white cloth, and if it is a married woman, her husband is alive, oil mixed vermillion is applied”.¹⁶⁶ A married woman, who dies while her husband is alive, is fortunate according to the Brahmanical Hindu concept.

The Ēṛavāḷans, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Malayāḷar, Adiyāns and Māvilāns walk in a circle round their corpse after purification. “The custom of walking round the corpse or the grave is found in the culture of central Eskimo, the Russian Leppis, the Buriate, the Shans and the Arawakks of British Guyana. There can be little doubt that the rite is magical, intended to keep the dead in the grave and prevent him from disturbing the survivors”.¹⁶⁷ The Ēṛavāḷans walk round the body thrice throwing rice on the corpse each time. Before taking the corpse to the graveyard, the Māvilāns bow before the dead and go around it thrice throwing rice. Paying homage to the dead before the burial is a universal practice. Among the Todas of the Nīlگیرis, all those present go one by one to the corpse, go down by the side of the bier and touch the body with

¹⁶⁴ *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin*, 86, Part I, pp.73-74 cited in Albert Muntch S.J.A.M, *op. cit.*, p.106.

¹⁶⁵ S.T. Das, *Life Style: Indian tribes: Locational Practices*, Vol. III, New Delhi, 1989, P. 176.

¹⁶⁶ L.P. Vidyarthi & Rai, *op. cit.*, p.298 cited in T. Madhavamenon ed., *op. cit.*, p.286.

¹⁶⁷ Hartland, in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p. 426.

their foreheads.¹⁶⁸ In Montenegro, everyone who attends a funeral must kiss the corpse.¹⁶⁹ The Kāṭṭunāikkans circle round the corpse seven times with lighted oil lamps made of *Churakka* (gourd shell) in their hands. The Malayālar go round the corpse thrice after purifying themselves by bathing. Among the Adiyāns, the relatives and clansmen touch the head of the corpse of their headman/elders and, after prostrating before it, walk round it thrice. But the touching of a corpse is avoided by other clansmen, particularly non-kinsmen, because they believe that touching or even the proximity to the corpse cause defilement. In Malabar, a *teyyam* dancer, whichever tribe he may belong to, shuns touching a corpse even though it may be that of a very close relative of his. He is bound by tradition to maintain absolute purity. So he keeps away from all people (even remotely) related to a dead person. He abstains from taking food from a deceased person's house and he refrains from staying in his own house in case death occurs in his family.

The Kaḷanādis place the corpse of the *teyyam* dancer, after washing it, inside a shed made of cloth. Nobody has the right to see the corpse at that time except those who decorate the body and its face. The deceased *Teyyam* dancer is then dressed up in the same costumes with the same make-up and facial paintings of the *teyyam* which he used to perform when he was alive. Three or four persons engage themselves in beating the *thudi* till the

¹⁶⁸ W.H.R. Rivers, *The Todas*, Vol. I, Jaipur, 1986, p. 343.

¹⁶⁹ Hartland in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p. 426.

decorations are over. It is believed that the god who has possessed the deceased *teyyam* dancer will quit his body only after the completion of the ritual of decorating and dressing up of the corpse. If this ritual is not properly performed, there is the great danger of an immortal god being interred in the grave along with the mortal being. The Kāṭṭunāikkans sprinkle holy water brought from the temple on the corpse for purifying it. Campbell reminds us that the holy water that has been touched by the religious teacher or in which the *Sāḷagrāmam* stone has been dipped is believed to have special purifying powers.¹⁷⁰ In the case of dignitaries, they wave flowers around the corpse to exorcise evil spirits.

Among the Adiyāns, the corpse of the headman/elders are placed in a sitting posture on a bamboo chair; the eldest son of the deceased will hold the head of the corpse or will put a Y-shaped stick at the back of the head in order to prevent it from drooping. It is also observed that if the *Chemmakākrān*/headman of the Adiyāns die, the corpse after being washed, a *paṭṭu* or red silk cloth is tied around its head with a peacock feather and an anklet is tied on his legs. A bamboo chair is prepared and the corpse is put in a sitting posture. It is carried to the grave in the same bamboo chair.¹⁷¹ The bamboo chair is prepared by the *Kaṛmi*. The *Perumans* or elder male members who are well versed in *Śāstra* recitation stand near the corpse

¹⁷⁰ J.M. Campbell, *op. cit.*, Vol. XXIV, Feb. 1895, p. 29.

¹⁷¹ C. Narayanan Nair, *Kāttārum Avarudē Kalamozhiyum*, Trissur, 1980, p.96.

reciting it. Rice, paddy, lighted *Nilaviḷakku* and 21 rupees are placed near the head of the corpse. The chanting of the *Śāstṛa* and beating of *tudis* are also performed for ordinary clansmen. In the case of ordinary clansmen, the Adiyāns place rice, coins, bells, metal lamp, six *tappubaḷa* (the rituals associated with *tappubaḷa* have almost vanished now) and a tray (which is meant for collecting money from people attending the funeral ceremony) near their head. The corpses of women are laid in the verandah and *Śāstṛa* is recited from the courtyard. After reciting the *Śāstṛa*, they prostrate before the dead person and throw money and betel leaves on the corpse. The headmen also do the same. All these are later collected by the *Karumi*. Similarly, among the Loddaga of West Africa, when the corpse is ready for funeral, the musicians standing near the corpse play tunes in their xylophones glorifying the achievements of the dead. There are words for these tunes, but, as usual with Loddaga xylophone music they are rarely sung. For men his achievement as a farmer, hunter, etc. is stressed and in the case of a woman it is the loss to her husband that is stressed. Among the first act of anyone coming to funeral is to halt before the dead body, cast some cowries at the foot of the corpse, and then stand in front of the xylophones and toss more shell money on the instruments that are being played. The former contributions are collected by the grave diggers, the latter by the musicians.¹⁷² Unlike the Adiyāns and the Loddagas, among the Badagas, a peculiar type of

¹⁷² See J. Goody, *op. cit.*, pp. 77, 80.

recitation is practiced. The recitation is an after-death confession of a dead man's sins and is made by an elder of the tribe standing at the head of the corpse. He waves his right hand during each line towards the feet. The recitation is repeated thrice, and a few Badagas repeat the last words of each line after the elder.¹⁷³

The Kunduvadiyāns and Wayanādan Pathiyans after washing the corpse put into its mouth crushed areca nut and betel leaf in case the dead person was in the habit of chewing betel leaf when he/she was alive. In the case of the Paṇiyas, a towel is tied around the head of the corpse of the headman, turmeric paste is applied on his forehead and 25 paise coin is stuck on it. Beating of the *tudi* and blowing of the *chīni* (pipe) are also part of the traditional ceremony connected with the burial of the headman. In the case of ordinary Paṇiya, Aiyappan observes, "a small measure of rice is placed on a leaf near the head, and on the rice is placed a coconut cut into halves. The water from the coconut is collected in a saucer and placed near the leaf with rice. Over the rice is placed a lighted cotton wick. With a leaf-spoon, the *chemmi* and other functionaries pour a few drops of the coconut water into the mouth of the corpse. While doing so, the *Chemmi* says: "so long you gave us water. This is the last time we give you something. Hereafter, we cannot give you anything". If the deceased is a man of some means, rice will be placed at the foot/end and also on the sides and 25 or 50 paise coins will be placed on

¹⁷³ For details see Edgar Thurston, *op. cit.*, (n-124), pp. 113-16.

all the four heaps of rice. Then the *Chemmi* collects the rice and coins on one large banana leaf and hands the whole of it to the son of the deceased man, saying “in the presence of the functionaries of the hill of the region (*nādu*), with the knowledge of the people of the region, here I hand over these to the heirs”. The son receives the rice etc. in a piece of cloth and keeps the bundle on the small platform for the ancestral spirits inside the hut. It remains there for seven days”.¹⁷⁴

In the event of the death of an eldest brother, among the Kuṛumbas, his cross cousins called *Maithini*, bathe the corpse. Each one of them dip his/her right hand in a vessel of oil and puts the back of the hand on the chest of the corpse placing 5 or 10 *paṇams* and then puts the palm of the same hand on his/her own chest. If a sister dies, her cross cousins called *Maithina* perform the same rite. The back of the hand indicates the dead and the palm the living and the money given, called *Uṛumaipaṇam*, is for the expenses in the other world. The tribes like the Wayanādan Pathiyans and the Koṛagas decorate the corpse with flowers and Malamalasar with a garland of flowers. Among the Kondakammara of Andhra Pradesh the corpse is washed with water and decorated by turmeric, vermilion and flowers.¹⁷⁵ According to Lillian Eichler, “decorating corpse and graves with flowers and wreaths is an old custom handed down to us through many generations. The Egyptians adorned

¹⁷⁴ A. Aiyappan, *op. cit.*, pp.140-141.

¹⁷⁵ Subrahmanian and D. Jesuratnam in Sachidananda & R.R. Prasad ed., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p.469.

their Mummies with flowers, and the mourners carried flowers in their hands".¹⁷⁶

Another rite connected with the corpse before its burial is a custom called *Kōdiyidal*. The essential feature of this ceremony is that the close relatives of the dead put new clothes, white for men and brightly coloured ones for women, on the corpse. It is an auspicious ceremony and it takes place in the middle of a crowd, who are gathered round the corpse. If a husband dies, the *Kōdi* is supplied by his wife's relatives and vice versa. In the case of the death of the father/mother all their married daughters' husbands and their relatives, and relatives of the wives of the married sons and other close relatives of the deceased have to bring *Kōdi*. In early days bringing new clothes were the right of the close relatives but today anyone can bring it and put it on the corpse. This new development has come as a great relief to certain poor tribes like the Aṣṇādans, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Koṟagas, Malamalar, Malasar, Ēṟavāḷans and Āḷar; for in the past out of sheer poverty they had to use fresh leaves for covering the corpse. G.S.Ghurye, who by making a comparison of the funeral practices of Egyptians and Indians, observed that new cloth, sometimes more than one, was spread over the body before it was cremated.¹⁷⁷ Among the Todas, there is a ceremony called *Kachutthi* (*Kach*: cloth, *utthi* or *utiti*: he puts). The essential feature of this ceremony is that a

¹⁷⁶ Lillian Eichler, *The Customs of Mankind*, Vol. II, Delhi, 1988, p. 675.

¹⁷⁷ For details see G.S. Ghurye, *op. cit.*, p.83.

cloth is given by a relative of the dead person to those who have married into his family, and the cloth is placed on the dead by the wives of those of whom it is given. This ceremony takes place at the funerals of both sexes and for members of all clans.¹⁷⁸ In the case of the dignitaries like headmen, *teyyam* dancers, elders and oracles etc. the tribes use *Paṭṭu* or red silk cloth along with *Kōdi* as a mark of respect. The *Kōdi* put on the corpse is never taken back but the *Paṭṭu* will be removed and reused. While all others spare the facial part while covering the corpse, the *Kādar* covers the whole body including the face. Before burial they remove the cloth that covers the face of the corpse and tear it into two pieces and these are used to keep the things that the deceased person had habitually used when he/she was alive (like betel leaves, beedis, etc.) in accordance with his/her personal preferences and tastes. These things are bundled in two pieces of cloth by tying them in knots. The materials inside the bundle are to be replaced from time to time. The funeral cloth of *Kāṭṭunāikkans* is known as *Hossabeṭṭa* or *Hossachela* and of the *Malappaṇikkans* as *Mūdupadam*.

The ceremony of *Kōdiyidal* is *Kōdivirikkal* for the *Iruḷas* and they along with the *Mudugas* share a special custom associated with it; as purchase of new clothes was very difficult in the past due to the want of money in an emergency caused by an unfortunate or unexpected death or due to the absence of shops in the nearby areas, they used to keep a few clothes in an

¹⁷⁸ W.H.R. Rivers, *op. cit.*, p.358.

earthen pot called *Paśathuchaṭṭi* (*Pijād Chaṭṭi* for the Mudugas) and it was from this set of clothes that the *Kōdi* for the corpse was taken. The clothes kept in the *Paśathuchaṭṭi/ Pijād Chaṭṭi* howsoever old or damaged were treated as new. Every house had a *Paśathuchaṭṭi* in the past but now with the process of urbanization this practice has almost lost its relevance and continues only symbolically in a new form among the Iruḷas: the *Mūppan* in his house keeps an earthen pot called *Madam* containing pieces of cloth to be utilized by the whole settlement.

The widow/widower also has to perform certain rites which are common to all tribes of Malabar. Compared to a widow, restrictions laid upon a widower are less stringent. In Malabar on the death of her husband, the marriage-badge (*tāli*) is removed from the neck of a widow and her bangles are broken. In some cases, the *tāli* is thrown into the grave and in other cases it is tied with the legs of her dead husband. In early days the widow had no right to remarry, though she was young, or to wear coloured dresses or ornaments or to bedeck her hair with flowers. But widow marriage is allowed today, widows are also allowed to wear coloured dresses and ornaments; after one year or at the completion of the pollution period, all ornaments are returned to them except the *tāli*. (The ceremony marking the completion of the pollution period for the Iruḷa is *Kanji-chīru*; for the Mudugas and Kuṟumbas it is *Chīru*; and for the Paṇiyas and Adiyāns it is *Kākkappula*). If the ornaments are not returned by her husband's relatives, she is not supposed

to wear any, even if married, and has to remain unostentatious all her life. In most cases it is the widow's sisters-in-law who have the right to remove the *tāli* and to break the bangles after the death of her husband; but among the Iruḷas, Mudugas and Kuṟumbas it is done by the widow's brothers-in-law; among the Kādar another widow who is called *Mundachi* undertake this responsibility; among the Ēṛavāḷans it is performed by the dignitaries/headmen/brothers/nephews. The Kādar, Malasar and Ēṛavāḷans follow a practice even today by which the *Manjakkayar tāli* (Yellow yarn) tied by bridegroom during the wedding day is removed and is tied on the leg of the husband's corpse. At the time of dismantling of the funeral car, the Badaga widow is brought close to the cot, and removes her nose ornaments (*ela mukkuthi*), and other jewels.¹⁷⁹ The Malaimalasar, along with the *tāli*, tie a few strands of hair of the widow on the leg of the dead husband. Among the Iruḷas it is compulsory that the knot connecting the big toes of the right and left feet of the corpse has to be untied by the widow in the case of the husband, and the widower in the case of the wife. If a husband/wife among the Mudugas or Kuṟumbas dies, the hair on the left side of the head of the wife/husband has to be cut and tied on the leg of the corpse; in the case of the wife it is done only if she has no intention of getting remarried. Naturally, aged wives are exempted from this practice. This custom is known as *Sēma Cheyyal*. The Malasar also perform the same ritual but they don't insist on the

¹⁷⁹ E. Thurston, *op. cit.*, (n-124), p.113.

hair from the left part of the head; for them hair from any part of the head will do. Cutting the hair or tying it on the corpse's limb is a universal practice. The significance of this rite is to break off all relations with the deceased. A Badaga widow of the Nilgiris removes a bit of wire from her earrings, a lock of hair, and a palm leaf roll from the lobe of the ear, and ties them up in the cloth of her dead husband. Before the procession starts for the burning ground, some female relatives of the dead man tie locks of their hair round the toes of the corpse.¹⁸⁰ Among the Chechens of the Caucasus the long queue of hair of the widow of the deceased is cut off and thrown into the grave.¹⁸¹ For the Mudugas the widow has to perform another rite: taking an earthen pot on her head and a brass pot in her hands, she goes to a nearby stream, takes a dip in it and fills the pot to the brim. In the earthen pot is pure stream water whereas turmeric is added to the water in the brass pot. After carefully covering her head with a cloth, she then returns to the house with the pots of water and goes round her husband's dead body thrice. The elder/younger brother of her husband then pierces the earthen pot on her head thrice with a sharp knife making the water from it fall on her deceased husband's body. At the end of the third round she breaks the pot at the feet of her husband by throwing it backward taking particular care not to look behind. The smashing of the pot, according to Aiyappan, symbolizes the destruction by death of the

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Hartland, in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p. 431.

body.¹⁸² The Malasar also follow a similar practice. When a Wayanādan Kuṛichiyān dies, his wife and children prostrate before the corpse, circle the body thrice and then entrust the *Mūnnāman* and nephew the responsibility of the burial. Certain tribes like the Thachanādan Mūppans, Kāṭṭunāikkans and the Paṇiyas bedeck their dead man/woman with ornaments or other sacred or beautifying articles. The Thachanādan Mūppans adorn their dead women with bangles, necklace and a black thread around her wrist while a black thread is tied around the waist of the dead man; the black thread is intended to ward off evil spirits. In olden days it was compulsory for the Kāṭṭunāikkans to make a deceased woman wear certain specific ornaments after the washing of her body like the *Ungāram* (finger-ring), *Vangāram* (necklace) and a nose-stud. Then only her body was taken to the grave.¹⁸³ This is not strictly followed now. Among the Paṇiyas, in the case of the death of a male the *Kūṭṭan Baḷa* (Chemmi's bangle) is put on his hand and in the case of the death of a female *Kallubaḷa* (beads necklace) is tied around her neck.¹⁸⁴ In conclusion it has to be noted that a dwelling where death has occurred, the whole place is cleaned and cooking is done only after the completion of the burial.

¹⁸² A. Aiyappan, *op. cit.*, p.142.

¹⁸³ Sreenarayanan Mavoor, *Chōlanāikkaram Kākkappūkkalum*, Kottayam, 1972, p.65.

¹⁸⁴ V.K. Tandon in K.S. Singh ed., *op. cit.*, p. 1185.

Disposal of the Dead

“The chief objects of the proper disposal of the corpse” Sidney Hartland observes, “and the fulfillment of all the rites and customs in connection therewith, are to free the living from the defilement of death and to give rest to the deceased”.¹⁸⁵ The disposal of the corpse has taken a variety of forms among tribes all over the world. They are inhumation, cremation, water burial, sitting away in vaults or canoes or houses, scaffold burial, exposure or simple abandonment, mummification, dismemberment, etc. In their early history, the tribes of Malabar had followed mainly three forms—exposure or simple abandonment, inhumation and cremation. Almost all tribes in Malabar today follow the two methods of inhumation and cremation, and the same tribe follows both practices, though in different contexts. Luiz Binford points out three reasons for mortuary variability among the same group—one, the limiting effects of environment, obtaining at the time of death, on the free exercise of all forms of body disposal; second, mutual effects of inter-societal contacts in producing amalgamations or replacements of ritual forms; and third, the characteristics recognized as relevant to the relationships either severed or established at death between the deceased and the remaining members of a society.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Hartland in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p. 419.

¹⁸⁶ Binford. R. Lewis, *An Archaeological Perspective*, New York, 1972, p.218.

Exposure or simple abandonment of the corpse had two forms: one, the corpse being taken to a place in the forest bundled in leaves or a grass mat and left leaning against a tree or in the crevice between two rocks and exposed to the action of scavenger beasts. This kind of the disposal of the corpse was practiced by Malabar tribes like the Kādar,¹⁸⁷ Malamalasar¹⁸⁸ and Kāṭṭunāikkans¹⁸⁹ in early days. Among the Khāsis of North East India, the corpse is placed in a hollow tree and the next development is the use of a tree trunk as a coffin.¹⁹⁰ The Australian tribes and Tasmanian tribes practiced exposure; it was usually on a rude platform of boughs or in the branches of a tree.¹⁹¹ The Hopis of America placed the bodies of their dead in blankets and deposited them with food offerings among the rocks of the Mesas.¹⁹² Among the Veddas of Ceylon, the body would be left where it was or placed in a crevice between rocks to protect it from wild animals.¹⁹³ The second type of abandonment was the leaving of the corpse in the dwelling cave with the desertion of the cave and resettlement at a new place. Cave dwellers of Malabar like the Chōlanāikkans and Malamalasar had followed this practice till very recently. They had lived in steep mountain ranges and it was difficult for them to practice pit burial. The Pueblo tribes of the south west of the

¹⁸⁷ E. Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. III, New Delhi, 1975, Reprint, p.23; L.A. Krishna Iyer, *Social History of Kerala: the Pre-Dravidians*, Vol. I, Madras, 1968, p.127.

¹⁸⁸ A.A.D. Luiz, *op. cit.*, p.139.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.90.

¹⁹⁰ Hartland in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p. 482.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

¹⁹² Albert Muntch. S.J.A.M, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

¹⁹³ K. N. O. Dharmadasa ed., *The Vanishing Aborigines: Sri Lankan Veddas in Transition*, Delhi, 1990, p. 120 cited in T. Madhavamenon ed., *op. cit.*, p. 282.

United States, in a similar way, buried their dead in their cave dwellings.¹⁹⁴

The Kabin Nāgas also place the dead in caves hollowed out in the side of a hill.¹⁹⁵

Inhumation is the placing of the corpse in a pit dug in the ground and filling the grave after covering the body with earth. This is the predominant pattern of disposal today among all tribes in Malabar. Along with inhumation, Malabar tribes prefer cremation in certain special situations: males and females above the age of sixty, headmen and others who are popular and efficient, even if less than sixty, oracles of Kurichiyas and *teyyam* dancers of Kaṣanādis are normally cremated. Clement Meighan observes: "it will be seen that in most of the status differentiations, cremation is the honorific form of disposal of the dead".¹⁹⁶ Like the tribes in Malabar, the Gōnd and Bhūmia of Eastern Mandala buried only unmarried, children, or persons who have met with sudden death, either by accident or by an epidemic like cholera, small pox or who have committed suicide. All married adult members and prominent members are burnt.¹⁹⁷ In Port Jackson of South East Australia, the tribes buried young people and those who had passed middle age were burnt.¹⁹⁸ The Malabar tribes have come to accept the Hindu method of cremation due primarily to their recent proximity to the Hindu settlers: a large

¹⁹⁴ Hartland in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p. 424.

¹⁹⁵ M'Culloch, *Account of the Valley of Munnipore*, p.52, cited in Bendann, *op. cit.*, p.214.

¹⁹⁶ Clement Meighan, *op. cit.*, p.152.

¹⁹⁷ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

¹⁹⁸ Alfred. W. Howitt, *op. cit.*, p. 463.

number of them were wage labourers of one or the other Hindu *Janmi* in former days. Cremation is the placing of the corpse in a funeral pyre made of a pile of wood sufficient in quantity to ensure the reduction of the body to charred bones. The ashes required further disposal, which took different forms among different tribes, that is, floating in streams, rivers or canals and kept in an earthen jar and buried later.

Certain tribes like the Malamutthans, Malappaṅikkans and the Thachanādan Mūppans had followed a strange custom in the past: after removing the corpse out of the house they burnt down the house both to prevent the return of the dead spirit and to escape from the fear of pollution. Same practice has been noted to exist among various world tribes. Among the Savaras, an important hill tribe of Southern India, on certain days, every house in which a death has taken place during the last two years is burnt down. After this, the ghost of the deceased (*Kulba*) is supposed to give no more trouble, and does not come to reside in the new hut that is built on the site of the burnt one.¹⁹⁹ Among the Jaguas, an Indian tribe in the upper valley of Amazon, when a death has taken place, the survivors burn the hut of the deceased and build a new one.²⁰⁰ In early days, this system was followed by tribes like the Malamutthans and Malappaṅikkans since they were followers of strict rules of pollution. *Census of India (1961) Kerala* observes:

¹⁹⁹ E. Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. VI, New Delhi, 1975, Reprint, p. 328.

²⁰⁰ G. Osulati, *Explorations Delle Regioni equatoriali lung oil Napo ed il fiume delle Amazzoni* (Milan, 1850), p.209 cited in Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-95), p. 19.

“Malamutthans do not allow a person to die in his dwelling house. The moribund person is taken out of the house before he breathes his last. If anyone happens to die lying within the hut, it will be considered polluted and will be burnt down”.²⁰¹ Thachanādan Mūppans used to burn their huts along with all the belongings of the deceased after disposing of the dead. Even today, because of fear, all tribes abandon and burn their houses if anyone dies of epidemics like small pox or cholera, or if anyone commits suicide, inside a house.

Cremation was not a popular practice among the tribes of Malabar who very rarely follow this practice even today. There are two reasons for the unpopularity of this method: firstly, it is more expensive than inhumation, and the poor economic condition of most of the tribes in Malabar compel them to choose less expensive methods like inhumation; and secondly, general attitude towards cremation is that if they resort to it, the soul of the deceased will perish along with the body. Cremation is more popular among the tribes who have close contact with the Hindus and who are comparatively better off economically and socially such as the Kuṛichiyas, Muḷḷakuṛumans, Wayanādan Pathiyans, Wayanādan Kādar, Malayāḷar, Karimpālans and Māvilāns.

²⁰¹ *Census of India 1961: Kerala Part IX-H, Village Survey Monographs: Tribal Areas*, M .K. Devassi, 1974, p 246.

Beside these, mention may also be made to the observations of some foreign as well as Indian anthropologists about a particular type of disposal, that is, disposal after the dismemberment of the corpse (like the hands, legs, head, etc.). But no tribe appears to have any idea about such a practice today. This may be a wrong notion received by the scholars from the practices of the Iruḷas, Mudugas, Kuṟumbas, Kādar, Malasar, Ēṟavāḷans and a few others who perform special rites for their dignitaries. All these tribes put the corpse in a sitting posture on the funeral car in order to perform special funeral rites before the disposal of the body and after reaching the graveyard they try to straighten the corpse and this leads to the mutilation of the limbs. M.K. Devassi reports about the Paṇiyas: "...before throwing sand into the pit, the corpse is mutilated, by severing head, hand and legs from the torso. This, according to them, is to prevent the ghost of the dead taking back the body and moving about 'playing the living'. It is their faith that the ghost of the dead cannot take back the mutilated body and it is thus made invalid".²⁰² Neither the elaborate studies on Paṇiyas by Dr. Aiyappan nor the present fieldwork among them gives any hint to substantiate this observation.

Just before taking the corpse to the graveyard, certain last rites are performed at the house of the deceased. The Kaṇṇavam Kuṟichiyas take coconut oil and water in separate coconut shells/gourd-shell (*Churakka*). The eldest son/nephew of the deceased takes oil and rubs it on the forehead of the

²⁰² M.K. Devassi, *op. cit.*, p 246.

corpse and then he smears it on all parts of the corpse with the back of the right hand without removing the clothes that cover the body; the process is repeated thrice. The same process is performed, again three times, by using water as well. They take the corpse from the courtyard with the chanting of a prayer and after getting the consent of the clan deity and ancestors (or *Nikal*), with the *Changāthi* acting as the officiator. This rite is known as *Mozhi Parayal*. Among the Malasar, in the case of the death of a wife or husband, the surviving partner chews betel and areca nut and spit it on the head as well as the feet of the deceased. Among the Lodagaa of West Africa if a homicide is dead, before burial another homicide chews a portion of the root of *soro* (*Cochlospermum tinctorium*), and the reddish fragments are spat on the dead man's left arm.²⁰³ J. Abbot points out that 'spitting is resorted to avert evil'.²⁰⁴ The Māvilāns put a few grains into the mouth of the corpse before taking it to the graveyard. The nearest relatives of the Oraons, likewise, make offerings of rice to the dead and put rice into the mouth of the corpse.²⁰⁵ Ūraḷikuṟumans place a coin or a piece of metal between the lips of the corpse. The Iruḷas, Mudugas and Kuṟumbas carry their bier to a special place nearby, before being taken to the graveyard. This place of temporary stay is called by the Iruḷas as *Kainappally* or *Sirukidapally* and it is here that the decorations on the bier known as *Gudiketṭu* is dismantled and cut into

²⁰³ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, p.63.

²⁰⁴ J. Abbot, *Indian Ritual and Belief: The Keys of Power*, New Delhi, 2000, p 34.

²⁰⁵ K.P. Bahadur, *op. cit.*, (n-18), p.69.

pieces. It is compulsory to cut every inch of this decoration in order to prevent the recurrence of another death or a repeated use of the bier. At the time of the dismantling of the *Gudikeṭṭu*, traditional Iruḷa music and dance is performed for five minutes. If the deceased is an orphan, the body will not be taken to this place. It is here that the widow's *tāli* is untied by her brother-in-law to signify her attaining the status of widowhood. The brother-in-law of the dead is called *Kokunthanmār* and his sisters rub the chest of the corpse thrice with the back of their hands and then go to the house of the dead not turning back or touching any of the belongings of the dead. Women and children are permitted to accompany the corpse upto the *Kainappally*. Mudugas and Kuṟumbas throw away the decorative parts dismantled from the bier at a spot called *Idukād* after cutting it into pieces. The decorations on the funeral car such as the brass pot and umbrellas are taken back by all the three tribes. Like the Iruḷas, Kuṟumbas and Mudugas, the funeral car of the Badagas of Nīlگیرis is stripped of its trappings and is hacked to pieces in an open space between the house and the burning ground.²⁰⁶ The Malasar throw away the broken pieces of the earthen pot, which is used during the time of removing the widow's *tāli* in the *Idukād*. The Koṟagas abandon two or three clothes of the dead in a place called *Pāla Pādaṇa*.

²⁰⁶ E. Thurston, *op. cit.*, (n-124), p. 113.

All the tribes wrap the corpse in two or three *Kōdi* or new clothes. They spread a mat or cloth or a plantain leaf on the bier and tie the corpse with the help of ropes or vines of particular plants or fibers taken from particular trees. Even in this case, the tribes of Malabar follow certain particular tradition. The Malayālar and Kuṛichiyas spread only that particular plantain leaf on the bier, which was earlier used to lay the body for washing. The Aṛaṇādans spread a mat on the floor and cover it with old clothes of the dead. Then they place the corpse on the mat, put new clothes over it and tie the mat round the corpse at three points of the body: at the chest, at the waist and at the legs. The Koṛagas tie the head, waist and legs of the body with the *Nāṛalvaḷḷi* vine. The Kuṛichiyas of Kaṇṇavam tie the corpse with a seven-piece-fibre-rope known as *Kāvulṇāru*. The Wayanādan Kuṛichiyas use coir rope for this purpose and the Karimpālans, the *Nāṛalvaḷḷi* vine. Wrapping of the corpse before burial is a universal practice. The Gōnd and Bhūmia place bundles of grass on the bier. A sheet is spread over the grass and the corpse is laid on it, with the face upward. The body is covered with another cloth and fastened to the bier with strings tied crosswise over the body, to prevent it from falling off.²⁰⁷ Among the Wonkongru of the Lake Eyre district of Central Australia, as soon as a man dies his body is tightly bound up with hair or fibre rope until it is a stiff package.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

²⁰⁸ G. Home and G. Aiston, *Savage Life in Central Australia*, London, 1924, pp.162-163, cited in Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-78), p. 120.

The corpse is laid in a lying posture on a bamboo bier or on a frame supported by wooden poles by all tribes except Iruḷas, Mudugas, Kuṟumbas, Kādar, Malasar and Ēṟavāḷans who convert their bier into a funeral car and place the corpse inside it in a sitting posture. In Aṭṭappādi and Parmbikulam regions, if two persons die together, a big bier is made and the dead bodies are placed in sitting posture face to face. But other tribes in Malabar make separate biers for separate dead bodies even if death strikes the victims at the same instant. Placing the corpse on the bier both in lying and sitting postures is a universal practice. The Gōnds and Bhūmia laid their dead on the bier in lying posture.²⁰⁹ The Akoa pigmies carry the corpse of their chief on a strip of bark in a lying posture to the forest; but they place their common people in a seated position with their arms crossed over their chests.²¹⁰ Ramalingam, the Iruḷa *Mūppan* of Vayalūr, informs that the Badagas of the Nīlگیرis, who use funeral cars just like the Iruḷas, laid the corpse in the bier in seated posture. The Koṟagas and Ēṟavāḷans break a coconut at the time of placing the corpse on the bier. Similarly, before lifting the bier Khāsis throw a handful of rice and water from a jar outside and a goat (u'lang sait ksuid) is sacrificed. According to Gurdon, these are purificatory ceremonies.²¹¹ Among the Malasar, the corpse carriers lift the bier up and lower it down twice before leaving to the graveyard. According to Campbell the object of lifting appears

²⁰⁹ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

²¹⁰ Carleton. S. Coon, *op. cit.*, pp. 332-334.

²¹¹ Gurdon, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

to be to lessen the risk of spirits entering the person lifted.²¹² The tribes like Malasar and Ūraḷikuṟumans use bamboo coffins, the Kuṟumbas, Māvilāns and Karimpālans use wooden coffins and Malappaṇikkans, wooden benches for placing the corpse. The Ho of Bihar use a very ornate coffin of wood for their respectable personalities.²¹³ The Eskimo and Indian tribes of the North West of America use coffin or grave box of wood. According to Eskimos, grave boxes kept the dead people's shades "...from wandering about as they used to do; besides, it was bad to have the dogs eat the bodies".²¹⁴

The carriers of bier/coffin should be close affines of the deceased, particularly sons, except in the case of Māvilāns and Koṟagas. According to the tradition of Māvilāns and Koṟagas, the nephews have the right to carry the bier, but it is compulsory that the sons should touch the four corners of the bier; in the former days of *Marumakkathāyam*, sons had little role in the funeral procession, nephews not only carried the bier but also stood on the four sides of it. In the absence of son/sons, the carriers are nephews/brothers/brothers-in-law/ husbands and in the case of mother, sons-in-law. Four persons usually carry the bier, except in the case of Chōlanāikkans, Āḷar, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Koṟagas and Kaṇṇavam Kuṟichiyas, for whom two persons carry it. The Muḷḷakuṟumans of Thirumukham and Pākkam colonies of Wynād and the Aṟaṇādans do not use biers or coffins to

²¹² J. M. Campbell, *op. cit.*, Vol. XXIV, Nov. 1895, p.316.

²¹³ K.P. Bahadur, *op. cit.*, (n-18), p. 66.

²¹⁴ Hartland in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, pp.425-426.

carry the corpse to the graveyard and bury the dead in the precincts of their settlements. Besides, more men are needed to carry the corpse without the help of a bier. So, among the Muḷḷakuṟumans, the corpse is carried by four persons and, among the Aṟaṇādans, by six. In the case of the Muḷḷakuṟumans of settlements other than Thirumukham and Pākkam, the sons carry the bier upto the border of the settlement, thereafter it is carried by other clansmen to the graveyard. The dead body of the Kolgha tribe in Gujarat is carried to the cemetery on a bamboo bier. It is placed on the shoulders of four persons, who are generally close relatives of the deceased.²¹⁵ Similarly, among the Mewahang Rai of East Nepal, the close relatives are the carriers of the corpse.²¹⁶ The tribes in Malabar, like the Kiwai of British New Guyana²¹⁷ and the Gōnds and Bhūmias of Jabalpur,²¹⁸ carry the dead body to the grave head foremost because they believe that if they carry the corpse in the reverse order there is a chance for the returning of the ghost to their hamlet.

It is a common practice among tribes of Malabar (except among the Kāṭṭunāikkans) not to put the bier on the earth while carrying it to the graveyard. The Kāṭṭunāikkans place it on the ground at three points on the way; at each point the carrying group hands over the bier to a new group. According to the Ūraḷikuṟumans tradition, the carriers are not supposed to

²¹⁵ Sachidananda and R.R. Prasad ed., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 405.

²¹⁶ Martin Goenzle, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

²¹⁷ G. Landtman, *The Kiwai Papuans of British New Guyana*, London, 1927, p. 257 cited in J. G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-95), p. 31.

²¹⁸ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

sweat while walking. The Wayanādan Kuṛichiyas' tradition sanctions all male attendees of the funeral procession to carry the bier one by one before the procession reaches the graveyard. The tribes in Malabar believe that if the bier breaks while being carried to the graveyard, the deceased is an evil person. The bier is accompanied by all male members who have gathered at the house of the dead, headman of the settlement, headmen from other settlements and other functionaries (in the case of the Māvilāns, Adiyāns, Kuṛichiyas and Karimpālans). The dignitaries like the headmen and the functionaries walk at the head of the funeral procession. Among the Mewang Rai of Eastern Nepal, procession is headed by sons-in-law followed by close relatives carrying the corpse, the main mourners (sons, wives, etc.), the wailing women and others.²¹⁹ Women and children are not allowed to follow the funeral procession except in the case of Āḷar, Chōlanāikkans, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Malayāḷar, Kuṇḍuvādiyans, Ūraḷikuṛumans and Thachanādan Mūppans. Malayāḷar do not allow the widow and the children of the deceased to accompany the funeral procession. (Usually tribes in other parts of India as well as the world over allow women to follow the funeral procession. The tradition of the tribes in Malabar, as also of the Gōnds and Bhūmia, thus is exceptional). The Kaṇṇavam Kuṛichiyas' tradition prescribes only seven persons to accompany the bier.²²⁰ While speaking about the funeral procession of the Thachanādan Mūppans, A.A.D. Luiz says: "the widow

²¹⁹ Martin Goenzle, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

²²⁰ Kumaran Vayaleri, *op. cit.*, p. 47-48.

follows the funeral procession with a pot of rice which she places in the grave”.²²¹ Today tribes allow aged female members to follow the corpse to the graveyard. The main reason for the discouragement of women and children are: 1) In the past the graveyards were situated in thick forests far away from the settlements; unlike men it was not easy for women to reach the graveyards; and 2) all tribes are very much concerned about the problem of menstrual impurity. They fear that if polluted women accompany the corpse the spirit of the dead and other spirits in the graveyard will get infuriated and might unleash calamities. In the past, outsiders were not allowed to accompany the funeral party; even British officials were not able to watch a funeral ceremony. However, changes are slowly taking place today in this respect.

Along with the corpse the relatives carry the entire belongings of the dead and also the special articles needed for the funeral rites to be performed en-route and at the graveyard. The Kāṭṭunāikkans carry with them a bundle of rice, three pieces of pastry prepared from rice powder, a bunch of plantain leaves, one coconut, betel leaves, turmeric, two tree barks, one leaf and a crab (*Nelli*). “Paddy and Ragi in certain quantities are tied in a cloth and kept on the shoulder of the *Mudali*, who holds a stick in his hand...while walking the *Mudali* throws away the grains (*danasalladu*) from the bundle. Some are thrown on the body too. It is done thrice and each time the *Mudali* sits on the

²²¹ A.A.D Luiz, *op. cit*, p.228.

bier with his stick".²²² Similarly the Hos of Bihar²²³ and the Lodagaa of West Africa²²⁴ throw grains on the corpse, which are supposed to be the food for the dead. Same practice exists among the Mudugas, Kuṛumbas and Malamalasar. The headman of Mudugas and Kuṛumbas, walking in front of the funeral procession, carry a cane basket known as *Thekku* containing a knife, an axe, a spade, some cooked rice, water and pastry like Ragi *ada* along with grains like Chama, Kora and *Thuvara*. As he goes on waving the basket, the grains in it start falling down. This practice is known as *Vīṣippōrath* among the Mudugas, and *Deṣai Ūrippōkath* among the Kuṛumbas. The Malamalasar throw groundnut, dried rice and mustard all over the way to the graveyard. The Malasar gather stones while walking with the bier. After chanting some magical spells they throw these stones into the forest on their way to the graveyard in order to prevent the attack of evil spirits of the forests. In the same way, the Aherayas of North India throw some pebbles in the direction of the pyre. The popular explanation of this practice, says W. Crook, is, in order that 'affection for the dead may come to an end'; the real object is to bar the return of the ghost.²²⁵ Among some tribes in Ureparapara (in Malenesia) the ceremony of driving away the ghost is peculiar and remarkable. "Bags of small stones and short pieces of bamboo are provided for the people of the village and are charmed by those who have the

²²² B. Anandabhanu in K.S. Singh ed., *op. cit.*, P. 592.

²²³ K.P. Bahadur, *op. cit.*, (n-18), p. 64.

²²⁴ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, p.78.

²²⁵ W. Crook, *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, Vol. II, London, 1926, p. 57.

knowledge of the magic chant appropriate for the purpose. Two men, each with two white stones in his hands, sit in the dead man's house, one on either side. These men begin to clink the stones one against the other, the women begin to wail, the neighbours - who have all assembled at one end of the village - begin to march through it in a body to the other end, throwing the stones into the houses and all about, and beating the bamboos together. So they pass through till they come to the bush beyond, when they throw down the bamboos and bags".²²⁶

Kuṇḍuvādiyans take a *Kōdi* or new cloth from the corpse before leaving to the graveyard and tie mustard, paddy and ragi on the four corners of the cloth which they carry along with them. Among the Kaṇṇavam Kuṛichiyas, the nephew of the deceased person keeps a few splints in his lap, while moving to the graveyard, which he had collected while cutting the poles for the bier. Other members carry a handful of raw rice with husk, bundle of betel leaves, an arrow/sickle (arrow, if the dead is a male and sickle if it is a woman). Among the Lodagaa of West Africa, along with the body of a man, his bow and quiver are kept and in a woman's lap will be placed her personal basket (*tiib pele*) or shrine basket and in her hands an unscrapped calabash bowl is kept.²²⁷ The Mewang rai of Nepal kept curved knife (*Khukuri*) for a

²²⁶ R.H. Codrington, *op. cit.*, pp. 270-71.

²²⁷ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

man and a sickle (*Khurpa*) for a woman.²²⁸ The Kaṇṇavam Kuṛichiyas sweep the place where the body is laid with a broom and collect the dust in a spathe and carry it along with the corpse. The Lodagaa of West Africa also sweep the place and according to Goody, “to sweep the dust is also to cleanse the house of deceased, for dirt has the generalized significance of ‘mystical defilement’. Sweeping is therefore an act of purification”.²²⁹ The Wayanādan Kuṛichiyas carry a bundle of un-boiled rice, an arrowhead (for men), a knife (for women) and also water in a bamboo pole. The Muḷḷakuṛumans carry an arrow for men and a sickle for women. The Karimpālans carry along with them an arrow, a stick known as *Pēnakkōl*, a bundle of rice and a new earthen pot. Similarly, among the Ho of Bihar all clothes of the dead person, his ornaments and agricultural implements and also any money he had with him when he died are carried along with the corpse.²³⁰ The Herbert river tribes in South East Australia bury a man with his weapons, his ornaments and everything he had used in his life.²³¹

Most of the tribes are very particular that the funeral procession should move in absolute silence for fear that any noise may wake up the spirit of the dead as also other evil spirits of the premises. In contrast to this tradition, the Paṇiyas “believe that the ancestor spirits are eager to gather around the soul.

²²⁸ Martin Goenzle, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

²²⁹ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

²³⁰ K.P. Bahadur, *op. cit.*, (n-18), p. 66

²³¹ Alfred. W. Howitt, *op. cit.*, p. 464.

Hence, to drive out these spirits people accompanying the corpse make loud noises and cry out".²³² When the corpse reaches the graveyard, tribes like the Pañiyas, Muḷḷakuṟumans, Kāṭṭunāikkans and Koṟagas circumambulate the grave with the bier. The Pañiyas circle the grave seven times, while Muḷḷakuṟumans, Kāṭṭunāikkans and Koṟagas circle it three times. The Muriya Gōnds of Busthar²³³ and the Mewing Rai of East Nepal²³⁴ circle the grave with the bier three times in anti-clockwise direction. Tribes, whose burial position is in the north-south direction, place the bier in the graveyard in the same direction while for others it is in the east-west direction. The grave is dug also as per this direction. For the Kaṇṇavam Kuṟichiyas a *Pāla* tree is a must in the graveyard because, it is believed that, the dead will suck the milk-like sap of the *Pāla* tree in order to quench its thirst and also it is believed to be the abode of the spirit of the dead. Only after going round the *Pāla* tree three times, they put down the bier in the graveyard. Similarly among the Gōnds a *Mahua* tree²³⁵ (*bassia lattifolia*) and for Maflu of British Guyana a kind of fig tree²³⁶ is a must. A grown up man among the Gōnds is cremated under a Mahua tree, particularly if he had been fond of liquor in his lifetime. Since liquor is distilled from the flowers of the Mahua tree, it is believed that the need of the man's spirit will be met even after his death. The

²³² N. Viswanathan Nair, *op. cit.*, p. 179-180.

²³³ B.H. Mehta, *Gonds of the Central Indian Highlands*, Vol. I, New Delhi, 1984, p. 331.

²³⁴ Martin Goenzle, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

²³⁵ K.P. Bahadur, *op. cit.*, (n-47), p. 79.

²³⁶ Williamson, *The Maflu Mountain People of British New Guyana*, p. 259, cited in Bendann, *op. cit.*, p.198.

recognition of the tree as an object worthy of worship is a common feature of animism or spirit worship throughout the world. Tribes whose burial position is in the north-south direction place the bier in the graveyard in that direction while for others it is placed in the east-west direction. While digging the grave, the rules regarding the direction in which the corpse has to be laid is strictly adhered to. The Iruḷas, Mudugas, Kuṟumbas, Kādar and Ēṟavāḷans, after putting the bier down in the graveyard, straighten the corpse, which is in sitting posture. Among certain tribes, particular clan members like the *Kurunāgar* among the Iruḷas and *Mattillakkār* among the Adiyāns alone have the right to stand in front of the grave to watch the disposal of the dead.

Inhumation as a means of disposal is followed mainly for burying infants, young persons, unmarried young people, pregnant women, the oracles of all tribes (except that of Kuṟichiyas), *teyyam* dancers of Māvilāns and Karimpālans, those who die of epidemics, and all those who die of unnatural causes (like those who commit suicide, or those who are killed by wild animals). The graves prepared for inhumation by the tribes have certain special features. These features are graphically described by W. Crook and the graves for inhumation prepared by the tribes of Malabar conform to his description: “shelf or niche-burial in which the corpse is deposited in a chamber or cavity excavated in the side of the perpendicular entrance to the grave, seems to be based on the intention of preventing the incumbent earth

from resting upon the corpse and thus incommoding the spirit".²³⁷ The tribes in Malabar inhume or cremate the dead only in the morning, at noon or in the evening, i.e., never after sunset. The custom of not burying the dead after sunset is a universal practice. Tribes believe that when rays of the sun fall directly on the grave, the souls of the dead may be warm and may rest in peace. But after sunset evil spirits roam about the graveyard and may attack the corpse and the funeral party. The Manansa of South Africa and the Negroes of the Lower Niger bury the dead in the evening, i.e. before the sunset.²³⁸ On the other hand, in the Southern Nicobar islands burial take place at dawn in order to prevent the shadows, that is the souls-of-the attendants, from falling into the grave and being buried with the corpse.²³⁹

If an infant dies, almost all tribes bury them within the premises of the settlement. The grave of an infant is not like that of an adult: it is a mere ordinary pit. According to Carleton S. Coon, "when a baby dies, the rites are minimal because the child's personality has not yet become well enough established to affect many persons outside the immediate family".²⁴⁰ Tribes like the Ūraḷikuṟumans, Wayanādan Kuṟichiyas, Malamutthans and Kādar keep milk in the grave of infants. The Ūraḷikuṟumans and Kaṇṇavam Kuṟichiyas bury them under *Pāla* tree (*Alstonia Scholaris*) which has milk

²³⁷ W. Crook, "Death and Disposal of the dead" in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p.482.

²³⁸ Hartland in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p.426.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Carleton. S. Coon, *op. cit.*, p.329.

like sap. It is believed that the child grows by sucking this sap. Ūraḷikuṛumans keep milk in a *Chamatha* leaf (*Butea Frondosa*) on the grave after burial. No infant is given a normal funeral, and mourning is confined to the parents alone, which is noticed to be a universal phenomenon. When a baby dies among the Gōnd and Bhūmia, its father carries it away in his arms. Only nearest relatives accompany the body. The Gōnd will bury the infant near the root of Mahua tree in belief that the milk of the Mahua flowers will nourish the baby.²⁴¹ Among the Negroes of West Africa and some of the Bantu and Nilotic people of British New Guyana, rights are denied to children who are indeed, often thrown out into the bush.²⁴² Another tribe in British New Guyana Maflu bury the children of their chief in the fork of a kind of fig tree.²⁴³

Among the tribes in Malabar, for those who die of unnatural causes, special areas are allotted in the graveyard for disposal. Among the Birhos, a primitive tribe of Chōtanāgpur, the corpse of a person who succumbed to unnatural death is buried in a place apart from where other corpses are buried.²⁴⁴ Among the Sulkas of Melanesia those who face unnatural death are placed on rocks or on scaffolds in the forest or are buried on the spot where

²⁴¹ K.P. Bahadur, *op. cit.*, (n-47), p. 79.

²⁴² Leonard, *Lower Niger*, 1906, p. 168, cited in Bendann, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

²⁴³ Williamson, *The Maflu Mountain People of British New Guyana*, p. 259, cited in E. Bendann, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

²⁴⁴ S.C. Roy, *The Birhors*, Ranchi, 1925, p. 266.

they met their death and are not buried in their houses.²⁴⁵ If anyone commits suicide inside a house, the house itself, along with all the belongings of the deceased, is burnt at the completion of the funeral. Sometimes the inmates abandon the house to settle in another place. The Kaṇṇavam Kuṛichiyas cut the branch of the tree if a person commits suicide by hanging on it right before the burial. The bodies of those who die in hospitals are sprinkled with consecrated water before being taken to the hamlet in order to discourage the return of the spirit to the hamlet along with the corpse. Like the Kuṛichiyas, Ewe tribes of Togo in West Africa cut down the tree on which a man has hanged himself and it is buried along with his body in the grave.²⁴⁶ Moreover all tribes dispose the bodies of all those who die of unnatural cause as quickly as possible without performing all the funeral rites in detail. Besides, before filling the graves of such persons or of sorcerers engaged in black magic, some special magical rites are performed inside the grave by efficient oracles or sorcerers.

In the event of several deaths together due to epidemics such as small pox or cholera the dead bodies are buried in separate graves without any rituals. In the past, most of the tribes had left the corpses in their houses and had burnt the houses along with their bodies and had abandoned the whole settlement. The Mudugas used to bury those who die of epidemics in

²⁴⁵ J.G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-7), pp. 399-400.

²⁴⁶ J. Spieth, *Die Ewe-Stamme* (Berlin, 1906) pp. 272-73 cited in Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-95), pp.143-4.

Annakkuzhi or at the place used for keeping grains. Among the Māvilāns and Karimpālans, the burial of a dead *Kōmaram* or of a dead *teyyam* dancer and the burial of those who die of small pox are commonly known as *Bhandāram Thāzhthal*. According to their belief, the germs of small pox are sowed by *Chīrumba Bhagavathi*, the goddess of small pox. This goddess is also known by the name *Vasūrimāla Thampurāṭṭi* (*Vasūri* means small pox and *māla* means garland; together means the goddess who wears the garland of small pox germs). Therefore they consider small pox as a divine disease and those who die of it are treated as blessed. In addition, the *Kōmaram* and *teyyam* dancers are taken as divine personalities so that even if they die without any disease, symptoms of small pox are believed to be found on their body and they are disposed of only with an offering of turmeric powder and money to *Chīrumba Bhagavathi* through its functionary known as *Āyathanmār* (who are *Tiyyas* by caste).²⁴⁷ For the Gōnds, small pox is believed to be caused by *Gurhimātha* or *Singār Mātha*. She applies tattoo marks on the body of the patient (scars of small pox are like the tattoo marks). They believe that application of medicine in small pox is believed to be offensive to the goddesses and consequently avoided. Sometimes a goat is sacrificed to the goddess.²⁴⁸ Regarding the old practice of the Iruḷas, A. A. D. Luiz observes that “there is evidence that in their early society those who suffered from

²⁴⁷ They believe that patients of small pox, too, are cured by the goddess after accepting the offerings and by throwing turmeric powder on him/her.

²⁴⁸ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, pp. 324-25.

malignant diseases were buried under a heap of stones (*Kallusāvu*) or were exposed to be eaten by animals”.²⁴⁹

In the event of the death of a pregnant woman, some tribes of Malabar follow certain strange practices. In the case of the Kuṛumbas the corpse of a pregnant woman is never carried to the grave by old men but only by young men. In the case of tribes like the Muḷḷakuṛumans, Ūṛaḷikuṛumans, Wayanādan Pathiyans, Kādar and Ēṛavāḷans, the foetus of the pregnant woman should be dissected before burial: just after the corpse is lowered into the grave a person from another tribe performs the act. The Ūṛaḷikuṛumans believe that child delivery will be easier if the traditional rite called *Daivam Kāṇal* is performed. The Thachanādan Mūppans place a betel leaf over the belly of the dead pregnant woman and cut it into equal halves. It is a symbolic dissection of the belly; the parts of the betel leaf will be removed before filling the grave. The Paṇiyas make a cross mark on the belly of the dead pregnant woman with a knife which, too, symbolically, serves the same purpose. Among the Wayanādan Kuṛichiyas, when a pregnant woman die, a miniature *Īttupura* or apartment or confinement room, with a small cradle and a vessel containing milk for the baby, is constructed after burial. Malasar dissect the stomach but do not remove the foetus. The Kuṇḍuvādiyans place a wet cloth on the belly of the pregnant woman with the objective that the infant may not get fresh air; unlike others, they want the infant to die along with the

²⁴⁹ A.A.D. Luiz, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

mother. Among the Lodagaa of West Africa, if a woman dies in childbirth, she cannot be buried without the child first having been removed from her belly. Consequently if the mother was interred with the infant in her belly, the anger of the Earth Shrine would be aroused against the survivors. A postmortem operation has therefore to be performed, and this can be done only by a homicide whose medicine protects him against the mystical consequences of dissecting corpses.²⁵⁰ Among the Gōnd and Bhūmia if a woman dies in advanced pregnancy, her body is sometimes cut open, the child extracted and, if dead, buried in the arms of its mother. This was done in a village in the southern part of eastern Mandala in Jabalpur. At other places the child is buried separately.²⁵¹

The death of an unmarried man/woman entails certain special rites. The corpse is decorated just like a bride or bridegroom. The body of the unmarried girl is dressed up with new colourful costumes, earrings, nose-studs, bangles, anklets and necklaces and with stickers on her forehead. Her hair is bedecked with flowers and floral garlands are put on her body. The male youth also is decorated in good manner before burial. Unlike the tribes in Malabar, in the funeral of an unmarried Toda girl, the corpse was made to go through a form of marriage ceremony. An unmarried boy was selected from among the relatives of the deceased girl and a marriage ceremony was

²⁵⁰ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, p.63.

²⁵¹ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

conducted between the deceased girl and the boy.²⁵² Among the Wayagga of Mount Kilimanjaro in East Africa, when an unmarried young man dies his family looks out for a woman whom they may marry to his ghost in the spirit land.²⁵³

Before lowering the corpse into the grave, the tribes clean the grave as well as the side chamber and spread mat or leaves or bamboo screen or sticks or bricks at the bottom. Tribes do not allow direct contact between the corpse and earth. The Pañiyas spread seven leaves of a plant called *kuḷākki*; the Thachanādan Mūppans lay seven sticks; the Muḷḷakuṟumans place three sticks of *thānni* tree, Aṟaṇādans, Malamutthans of Viṭṭikkunnu and Āḷar first spread a bamboo screen followed by clothes over it; Malappaṇikkans and Malamutthans of Chōkkād use bamboo screen or bricks; and all the remaining tribes use mat inside the cavity before placing the corpse. The knots that tie the thumbs and toes are cut before lowering the corpse into the grave by either the eldest son or the nephew. About the Pañiyas, Aiyappan says: “The knots tying the thumbs and big toes are cut by an affine who looks towards the East while doing so. He is believed to be looking at the sun-god”.²⁵⁴ The band on the waist of the corpse has to be cut by the headman by sitting at the foot of the corpse with his back towards it. Among the Adiyāns, on the death of their

²⁵² For details see E. Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India*, Part. II, p.105; W.H.R. Rivers, *op. cit.*, pp.391-395.

²⁵³ Hon. Chas. Dundas, *Kilimanjaro and its People*, London, 1924, pp. 249sq, cited in Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-95), p. 240

²⁵⁴ A. Aiyappan, *op. cit.*, p.141.

Mūppan, before the disposal of his body, they have to utter his name, the name of his father and that of his grandfather. At the grave a close affine, may be his son, with the consent of the new headman, stand at the head of the corpse and another son at the feet (for the Adiyāns, the Kaṛmi) and both together slowly lower the corpse into the grave by slightly bending its head. Two persons standing at the bottom of the grave receive the corpse and push it into the special cavity made inside the grave for keeping it (For Iruḷas, Kādar and Aṛaṇādans, the head only is pushed into the cavity). Thereafter the cavity is covered with the same article used for placing the corpse in the grave. Belongings of the deceased are lowered inside the grave along with the corpse and are kept inside it. Those who use coffins lower the corpse with it with the help of a rope; there is no relevance for cavity in this case. All the belongings of the dead are put inside the coffin and the coffin is closed with bamboo or wooden leaves.

There are certain rites to be performed at the grave just before burial. The Koṛagas, after lowering the corpse in the grave, remove the cloth from the face of the dead, address the dead person by his/her name thrice and serve porridge and betel leaves into the mouth. The grave diggers of the Koṛagas, “stand at the edge of the grave in opposite direction, facing each other, and exchange the bill hooks used for digging the grave three or five times. It is believed that by doing so the spirit of the deceased becomes confused and

fails to recognize them and, therefore, does not harm or haunt them".²⁵⁵ Just like the Koṛagas, among the Gōnd and Bhūmia two men stand in opposite direction of the grave, one at the head and the other at the foot. One throws his axe over the pyre at the other man standing on the other side of the pyre. The latter throws the axe back. This ceremony is repeated thrice.²⁵⁶ The Kāṭṭunāikkans pour coconut water after putting betel leaves, areca nut and a small quantity of food items into the mouth of the corpse. Two pieces of bamboo taken from the bier will be kept at the head of the corpse. Tribes like the Māvilāns, Kaṣanādis, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Thachanādan Mūppans, Mudugas and the Ūraḷikuṛumans cut off a piece of cloth that covers the body of the corpse. Among the Mudugas the son of the deceased person cuts off three pieces from the cloth that covers the body and places one piece at the waist of the corpse and the other two at the head and the feet respectively. The Ūraḷikuṛumans tears the four corners of all the clothes that are put on the corpse. The Kāṭṭunāikkans tear only those parts of the clothes that stands over the mouth and the eyes. The Māvilāns tear the part of clothes at the eyes, ears, mouth, and at the anal and urinary parts of the corpse. Tearing of the cloth is meant for the free movement of the spirit.

At the grave, tribes like the Chōlanāikkans wave a bronze or iron ring of the deceased, three times, over the corpse. It is believed that the spirit of

²⁵⁵ S.T. Das, *op. cit.*, p.176

²⁵⁶ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p 338.

the dead man enters into this ring, known as *Daivamōtiram*, and it is kept in the *Daivakoṭṭa* later. The Wayanādan Kādar throw rice into the grave and sprinkle rose water after circling the grave thrice. The Mudugas spread kora over and under the corpse. Among the Karimpālans, the son or the nephew of the deceased carry a stick known as *Pēnakkōl* and stand in front of the grave along with seven others who may not be the relatives of the dead. All of them together circle the grave thrice and throw rice into the grave. Then the four persons standing at the head of the grave and the other three at the feet ask thrice: '*Pēna Ēttō?*' and one among them reply '*Ēttu*'. After the funeral this *Pēnakkōl* is stuck on the grave in order to keep the spirit away and to prevent its return. Similarly, the Kukata, an Australian tribe, place digging sticks at the grave to keep the spirits away.²⁵⁷ Among the Wayanādan Kuṛichiyas the person who starts digging the grave sits at the head of it intertwining his legs, takes water in his folded hands and throws it into the grave with his right hand. Then he intertwines his palms and later straightens them. He then clenches his fist and stands up with legs in the intertwined position. He repeats the whole action three times which the other grave diggers repeat subsequently.

Giving food to the dead after lowering the corpse within or outside the grave is a universal practice. The Mewang Rai of East Nepal kept a bamboo container with beer and six small parcels of cooked rice, etc. at the head of the

²⁵⁷ Carr, *The Australian Race*, Vol. I, p 87, cited in E. Bendann, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

dead.²⁵⁸ The Gōnd and Bhūmia pour half a pound of purified butter and an equal quantity of ramtila oil on the chest of the corpse. For a wealthy man even more butter and oil are used.²⁵⁹ The Rajbanis of Bihar offer milk, ghee and rice to the dead at the burial place.²⁶⁰ The Ojibwas who deposit their dead on the ground and cover them with a light roofing of poles and mat, as soon as this is finished, they sit in a circle at the head of the grave and present an offering to the dead of meat, soup or fire water.²⁶¹ Almost all the Malabar tribes serve food to the dead at the grave, either placed along with the corpse inside the pit or laid over the mound of the grave.

Throwing handful of earth on the corpse by the funeral party after lowering the corpse into the grave is a universal tradition. As regards the tribes of Malabar, it is the headman of the dead person's settlement who throws the first handful of earth into the grave and then it is followed by other close relatives. But some tribes have special traditions in this regard. It is compulsory for the Chōlanāikkans to keep apart a handful of the first dug earth which has to be thrown into the grave first. Tribes like the Muḷḷakuṟumans, Iruḷas, Koṟagas, Māvilāns and Ēṟavāḷans insist that earth should be thrown three times on the corpse. The Māvilāns throw earth only after circling the grave thrice. Tribes like the Kādar and Malamalasar throw

²⁵⁸ Martin Goenzle, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

²⁵⁹ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

²⁶⁰ K.P. Bahadur, *op. cit.*, (n-18), p. 69.

²⁶¹ Hartland in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p. 435.

earth by sitting at the feet of the grave and with one's back facing it. In the case of the Ūraḷikuṛumans and Kuṛichiyas all members of the funeral party throw earth into the grave. Among the Malamutthans, the eldest person, after going round the grave seven times, throw earth on the corpse. Among the Malappaṇikkans, in the event of the death of a father, his eldest son has to sprinkle earth first. As regards the Malayāḷar, the headman throws earth first, he is followed by women and lastly by men. Among the Paṇiyas, the *Āṭṭāḷi* circles the grave loudly calling out the names of the dead ancestors and in the meanwhile throws earth into the grave. It is a tradition among the Paṇiyas to invite the *Āṭṭāḷi* formally and make payments for his services. Among the Mudugas the son of the deceased person throws three handful of soil along with three handfuls of grains. The Todas also have the earth throwing ceremony which is known as *Puzhuptmi* but it is confined only to the funeral of a male.²⁶² Among the Mewang Rai of East Nepal, after lowering the corpse, everybody throws some earth into the grave.²⁶³

In the matter of filling the graves, tribes follow certain ancestral traditions. All the earth that is kept at the sides of the grave while digging should be used to fill the grave. The Thachanādan Mūppans and Āḷar use, leaves along with earth, to fill the grave. The Malamutthans, Adiyāns, Chōlanāikkans and Aṛaṇādans make earth mounds after filling the grave. For

²⁶² For details see W.H.R. Rivers, *op. cit.*, pp. 344-46.

²⁶³ Martin Goenzle, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

the Kalandis, the grave should be dug, and be filled, by the Paṇiyas who are their customary grave-diggers. The Koṛagas and Paṇiyas use thorns along with earth to fill the grave. For filling the grave, Paṇiyas use thorny creepers known as *Koṭṭamuḷḷu*. *Koṭṭamuḷḷu* alternates with layers of earth seven times. (*Ēzhupoḷi Maṇṇum Ēzhupoḷi Muḷḷum*). An interesting song of the Paṇiyas describes their method of filling the grave.

Kālukku Bōṭṭutha Maṇṇu, Thilēkku bechum;

Thilēkku Bōṭṭutha Maṇṇu, Kālukku Bechum;

Idabari Bōṭṭutha Maṇṇu, Balabari Bechum;

Balabari Bōṭṭutha Maṇṇu, Idabari Bechum;

Bāyo...Bāyo...Bāyo.

(The earth at the feet be placed at the head;

The earth at the head be placed at the feet;

The earth of the right be placed at the left;

And the earth of the left be placed on the right;

Come...Come...Come.)

All tribes in Malabar, except the Malasar, dispose of the dead in an extended or lying position facing upward. But there are reported cases of exceptions as well. Edgar Thurston observes: “among the Malasar, the dead are sometimes buried in the sitting posture in a hollow scooped out in one side

of the grave”.²⁶⁴ An instance of burial in a sitting posture in a circular grave at Sarkārpathi is reported by Jakka Parthasarathy who says that the body of Malasar is usually buried in a prone position.²⁶⁵ The Gōnds of Jabalpur²⁶⁶, the Wichita of North America and the Brignans of Ivory Coast,²⁶⁷ all bury their dead in extended position. The orientation of the dead, in most cases, is in the north-south direction but for a few it is in the east-west direction.

Among the Māvilāns, after filling the grave, the *Kārmi* recalls the name of the deceased and the name of the father of the deceased and then beats on the grave with a stick of the *Maruthu* tree (*Terminalia Alata*). This practice is known as *Thacthezhunnēlpikkal* and which denotes the waking up of the spirit of the dead and expelling it from the grave. In Hood peninsula of British New Guyana, tribes take special measures like beating of the floor as among the Māvilāns.²⁶⁸ Among the Lepcha of Tibet, the priestess goes to the grave and beat against the tomb stone several times.²⁶⁹ The Kādar fix incense sticks on the grave. The Kuṇduvādiyans spread mustard, paddy and *ragi* over the grave. *Aṛaṇādans* fix a hollow stalk of papaya leaf (*carica*) at the mouth of the corpse right through the grave to enable it to breath, drink and consume food. The Kuṛumbas and Mudugas throw grains over the grave

²⁶⁴ Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. IV, 1909, p.398.

²⁶⁵ Jakka Parthasarathy in T. Madhavamenon ed., *Encyclopedia of Dravidian Tribes*, Vol. II, Thiruvananthapuram, 1996, p. 240.

²⁶⁶ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

²⁶⁷ Hartland in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p.425.

²⁶⁸ E. Bendann, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

²⁶⁹ R. Nebesky de Vojkowitz, “Ancient Funeral Ceremonies of the Lepchas”, *Anthropological Study in Lucknow*, Vol. V, Sept. 1951-Aug. 1952, p.33.

from the head to the feet. In the case of the Malappaṅkians, the eldest son of the dead takes a vessel containing *Ponnum Nīrum* given to the deceased earlier and encircles the grave seven times followed by others. After filling the grave the Kaṅṅavam Kuṛichiyas place the bier over the grave along with the splint kept in his lap by the nephew. An arrow is then stuck on the splint if the dead is a male or a sickle if it is a female. Afterwards all the members of the funeral party chew betel leaves and areca nut and spit it on the grave.²⁷⁰ In North Eastern Rhodesia, all spit on the grave when it is filled up; and return to the village without looking back.²⁷¹

Addressing the ancestors at the grave after internment is a universal practice through which the addressees compel the ghost to leave the place of burial. Among the Paṅiyas the *Chemmi* or the headman standing at the feet of the grave with a pot of water mixed with cow dung and ash of hay tosses it towards the head. Then he scatters rice over the grave and addresses the dead ancestors saying “you have been separated now (from us by the soil). I leave you through water (by having a bath). With the six by quarter three leaves, you go and rest in the *tēru mana* (the chariot house) of the Fathers, Grandfathers and Grandmothers of yesterday”.²⁷² Similarly, the Chōlanāikkans spread rice over the grave and addresses the ancestors: “She/he has left us and is now with you; you should look after him/her and

²⁷⁰ Kumaran Vayaleri, *op. cit.*, pp.47-48.

²⁷¹ Hartland in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p. 433.

²⁷² A. Aiyappan, *op. cit.*, p.142.

each should adjust with the other.”²⁷³ (എങ്ക അബുത്തേക്കരുത്, സത്തൽ അബുത്തേക്കരുത്; എത്തകം വേഗം പൊരുത്തപ്പെടുക്ക്, എന്ന കൈയിലില്ല എന്നകൈ; സന്തോയത്തു എന്ന തൈവം ഒറത്തു). The Kurichiyas of Wynād throw raw rice carried by them three times over the grave while circling the grave thrice. The remaining portion of the rice is kept in a plantain leaf and is placed at the feet of the grave. Then they return telling their ancestors “we lived together; now you are left for yourselves and we are left for ourselves”. (ഞങ്ങൾ ഒരുമിച്ചു ജീവിച്ചു; ഇനി നിങ്ങൾ നിങ്ങളാലെ, ഞങ്ങൾ ഞങ്ങളാലെ). After filling the grave, the Ūraḷikuṟumans addresses their ancestors by saying: “We have handed over our beloved to your care; you may look after him well” (ഞങ്ങളുടെ പ്രിയപ്പെട്ടവനെ നിങ്ങളെ ഏൽപ്പിച്ചു; നിങ്ങൾ കാത്തു രക്ഷിച്ചു കൊള്ളണം). Among the Oraons, when a corpse has been carried to the cremation ground to be burnt, women put rice into the dead man’s mouth saying “Take it, now you have given us up. Now you have seen your way. Go, taking with you all your sicknesses, and sins”.²⁷⁴ Among the Southern Amis, a tribe of Formosa, at a burial it is customary for one of the family to throw a handful of earth on the grave and, address the deceased: “You shall not return”.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ M. Jamaluddeen, “Velicham Thedunna Guhāmanushyar”, *Mathrubhumi weekly*, 1978, Feb.19, p.30

²⁷⁴ S.C. Roy, *Oraon Religion and Customs*, Ranchi, 1928, p. 173.

²⁷⁵ J.W. Davidson, *The Island of Formosa*, London, 1903, p.579, cited in Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-7), p.171.

Before starting the funeral procession, the Karimpālans cook rice in a new earthen pot, carry it along with them, serve it to the dead in a plantain leaf and keep it at the head of the grave. Then the earthen pot is put upside down, over the grave, with a hole being pierced in it. This rite is known as *Oṭṭālam Kamizhthal* which is evidently meant to prevent the waking up of the spirit till the completion of the last rite or *Kūḷiyākkal* and the small hole on the pot is for the spirit to breath. Subsequently, they draw a picture of *Kālan* at the head and of *Kūḷiyan* (ancestor spirit) at the feet of the grave with turmeric powder, rice powder and charcoal. It is to please the god of death *Kālan* (the Hindu god) and the spirit of the dead *Kūḷi*. A similar custom prevalent among the Kāṭṭunāikkans is noted by Anandabhanu: “In a piece of cloth, taken out from savuchela, a crab is crushed along with turmeric with a stone kept at the side of the head. The juice is then smeared on everybody’s hands except women. The crushed crab is then kept on the burial ground. The cloth piece is kept inside the hole of a tree”.²⁷⁶ The juice of crab, according to their concept, is a purificatory agent and the cloth is kept away because it is polluted.

The Adiyāns have a special rite to ward off the grave-spirit called *Chudalappēyi* before disposing of the dead. The gravediggers place some cooked rice mixed with turmeric powder over the grave. The *Kaṛmi* standing at the head of the grave takes a piece of grass and, holding it, sprinkles water from a bamboo pot on the dignitaries present there such as the *kunnukkāran*

²⁷⁶ B. Anandabhanu, in K.S. Singh ed., *op. cit.*, p. 592.

and *Chemmakākran* of the hamlet of the deceased, the *Chemmakākran* of three *mants* (clans of highest status such as Badakku Mant, Pothuru Mant and Thirunelli Mant), and also on the parents of the deceased (if they are alive). Later on the *Kaṛmi* cuts the bamboo bier into pieces, fixes one of the pieces vertically at the centre of the grave with a *thappubaḷa* tied on it and the remaining pieces are spread all over the grave. Holding some paddy in his right palm and an axe in his left hand, he circles round the grave. To conclude the rite, “one of the *Kaṛmis* stands on the eastern side of the grave holding a knife and another on the western side holding an axe. One who holds the axe hands it over to the other *Kaṛmi* across the grave. The second *Kaṛmi* removes the blade from the handle”.²⁷⁷ Similar practices exist among certain other tribes as well. The spirit that haunts the burial ground of the Gōnd and Bhūmia of Jabalpur²⁷⁸ is known as *Marjekol* and of the Lepchas²⁷⁹ as *Mazom mung* (in the form of black dog)

Among the Koragas, after filling the grave, two headmen, one belonging to the settlement of the deceased and the other of another settlement, sit in opposite directions at the grave, one at the feet and the other at the head. A white pebble tied with the vine of *pāthāḷa pūvaḷḷi* is exchanged between the two headmen thrice. The headman of the local hamlet repeats the words ‘*sargathari keṭṭaṇam*’. The second headman while receiving the stone

²⁷⁷ Seetha Kakkoth, *op. cit.*, pp.54-55.

²⁷⁸ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

²⁷⁹ R. Nebesky de Vojkowitz, *op. cit.*, p.33.

replies thrice: '*keṭṭaṇam*'. The stone tied with the vine is then hidden somewhere on the grave. It will remain there unless the vine is eaten by cattle. The loss of the vine is supposed to cause harm to the family of the deceased. It is the spirit of the newly dead that is tied to the stone and it is meant to avoid its return. The Thachanādan Mūppans, after filling the grave, make a miniature hut known as *paḷḷippura* at the head of the grave with mud. Two persons, one standing at the feet and the other at the head of the grave, with long thorny creepers, known as *Īngamuḷḷu*, in their hands then demolish the miniature hut using these thorny creepers. The Papuan tribes of New Guyana, likewise, erect a hut on the grave.²⁸⁰ Among the Lepchas of Tibet if a man was buried, a "wild boar's nest"- a small shelter in the form of a nest- was erected with the help of some twigs and dry leaves, the idea probably being that the nest should provide a temporary shelter for the *Muk-nyam* (the spirit of the dead) who according to the belief of some Lepcha clans stays for seven days on the burial ground.²⁸¹

Tribes used to keep thorny plants on the graves to protect the corpse from being carried away by wild animals. This is no longer necessary today, but the practice still continues. Almost all tribes use thorny plants like either *koṭṭamuḷḷu* or *īngamuḷḷu* for the purpose. Tribes never use these thorny plants as fuel. The Ūraḷikuṛumans place the thorns in a special manner. Two persons

²⁸⁰ Hartland in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p. 433.

²⁸¹ R. Nebesky de Vojkowitz, *op. cit.*, p.33.

standing, one at the head and the other at the feet, in opposite directions at the grave holding pieces of thorny plant known as *īngamuḷḷu*, walk clockwise and place it over the grave. The Paṇiyas use the vine of the thorny creeper called *Kāyavaḷḷi* or *Chīkulavaḷḷi* on the grave. The *Kāyavaḷḷi* is supported by the four clods kept at the four corners by the *Chemmi* while digging the grave. The *Chemmi*, takes a spade, and keeps a knife on his waist. He throws the clods from the feet towards the head. He also fixes a stick known as *Sankakkōl* at the head. After filling the grave the Gōnd and Bhūmia place thorns on the grave to protect it against jackals and other carrion-eating animals.^{282 2} Among the Sea Dyaks of Borneo the last persons who leave the grave plant sharpened stakes in the ground, so that the spirit of the dead may not follow them to the house, the stakes planted in the ground are meant to prevent its return.²⁸³

As a burial mark most of the tribes place stones, sometimes one, normally two, or at times three, over the mound of the grave. The stones are laid at the head; head and feet; or at the head, waist and feet. Tribes like the Koṛagas, Thachanādan Mūppans, Malayāḷar, Ūraḷikuṛumans, Karimpālans, Muḷḷakuṛumans, Aṛaṇādans, Malappaṇikkans and Māvilāns put three stones. If no stones are found to mark the grave, the Ūraḷikuṛumans ‘borrow’ them from nearby graves after seeking permission from the ‘owner’ of that grave. Tribes like the Wayanādan Pathiyans, Kaḷanādis, Āḷar, Mudugas, Kādar and

²⁸² Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

²⁸³ E.H. Gomes, *Seventeen Years Among the Sea Dyaks of Borneo*, London, 1911, p 138, cited in Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-78), p. 33.

the Kuṇḍuvādiyans use two stones to be laid over the grave. Anthropologists like Edgar Thurston, L.K.A.K. Iyer and A.A.D.Luiz all have opined that Kādar has no burial marks.²⁸⁴ A.A.D.Luiz says: “They erect nothing to mark the location of the grave, and the absence of graveyards and edifices popularized the incorrect presumption that the Kādars eat the dead”.²⁸⁵ The Kādar graves found at Erumappara in the Paṛambikulam area proves that the above opinion is unfounded. A few tribes like the Kuṛumbas, Iruḷas, and Ēṛavāḷans use only a single stone as burial marker. The Malamalasar and Malamutthans of Viṭṭikkunnu, on the other hand, do not put stones at all on the graves since they believe that, by doing so; the corpse will have to suffer the weight of the stone, which will only invite the wrath of the spirit of the dead. Similarly the Adiyāns, Paṇiyas, Malamutthans, Kuṛichiyas and Chōlanāikkans have no grave marks. Edgar Thurston gives an interesting description of the grave marks of the Mudugas: “the Muduga grave has a little thatched roof about six feet by two, put over it. A stone weighing twenty or thirty pounds is put at the head, and a similar stone at the feet. These serve to mark the spot when the roof perishes or is burnt during the next grass fire”.²⁸⁶ Rangī, a Muduga woman of Aṭṭappādi, revealed that the rich among them used to make thatched roofs over the grave, but the practice as such do not exist today. The Malayāḷar, Wayanādan Pathiyans, Kaḷanādis, Māvilāns and

²⁸⁴ E. Thurston, *op. cit.*, (n-187), p.23; L.K.A.K. Iyer, *The Cochin Tribes and Castes*, New Delhi, 1987, p.13; A.A.D. Luiz, *op. cit.*, pp.63-64.

²⁸⁵ A.A.D. Luiz, *op. cit.*, pp.63-64.

²⁸⁶ E. Thurston, *op. cit.*, (n-122), p.95.

Kurichiyas (who have started living in nuclear families) construct stone platforms over the grave, later. The stone platform of *teyyam* dancers of Kaṣanādis and Māvilāns are known as *Bhandārathaṛa*. Marking the grave is a universal practice. In the case of the Gōnd and Bhūmia, after burial, a mound of big boulders is piled over the grave.²⁸⁷ The tribes in New South Wales use one kind of stone to mark the grave of a man, and another to designate that of a woman.²⁸⁸

After burial, all tribes cut the bier into pieces and put it on the two sides of the grave. The Gōnds of Jabalpur and the Akoa Pigmy, too, follow this practice. The stones and roots removed from the grave while digging are also placed around the grave in a circle. Tribes plant flowering plants like shoe flower (*hibiscus rosa sinensis*), araḷi (*nirium*) and sacred basil (*osmium sanctum*) on the grave mound. Tribes like the Wayanādan Kādar plant flowering plants at the four corners of the grave. But those like the Malamutthans, Malamalasar and Kaṣanādis do not plant anything on the grave at all because, they believe that the plants will grow by eating up the flesh of the deceased and also will cause hindrance to the soul in coming out of the grave. Planting trees over the grave is not popular among tribes outside India. The Kooch or Rajbansis of Bihar plant a twig of *tuḷasi* (basil) over the

²⁸⁷ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p 339.

²⁸⁸ Thomas, *The Natives of Australia*, p.199 cited in E. Bendann, *op. cit.*, p 203.

grave.²⁸⁹ The Malayālar never allow grass to grow over the grave; they clear off the grass over it periodically. Tribes believe that if the plants sprout over the grave, the deceased was virtuous, who had performed good deeds in his/her life, and if there are no sprouts, the deceased was vicious. Tribes like the Iruḷas, Koṟagas and Kāṭṭunāikkans place flowers and leaves over the grave after filling it.

The tribes in Malabar generally believe that if the deceased was a good person it will not rain till at the end of the burial even if it is the rainy season. The arrival of the rain after disposal is an index to the virtues of the dead. At the completion of the burial, among the *Araṇādans*, the *Mūppan* with a chain of bells in his waist, along with other elder members of the settlement, dance around the grave. Meanwhile the *Mūppan*, in a state of trance, pronounces the needs of the ancestors of the deceased.

Paul Barber points at the following demerits of the disposal of corpse through inhumation:- 1) disposal by burial is slow because of the need to dig a grave, with considerable labour, especially in rocky soil; 2) burial renders the body inert slowly; 3) with burial, the handling of the body may be minimal. Usually the corpse is washed, often by a person who specializes in this function and the water, washed cloth, and soap are disposed off as potentially dangerous; 4) it is fairly labour intensive; and 5) it may prove impractical

²⁸⁹ K.P. Bahadur, *op. cit.*, (n-18), p. 69.

during epidemic.²⁹⁰ Despite all these drawbacks, the tribes of Malabar prefer to continue with inhumation; cremation as a general practice is still unpopular to them. But unlike the tribes in Malabar, majority of tribes in other parts of India prefers cremation to that of inhumation except for deaths caused by unnatural reasons. However, cremation is not much popular among tribes of other parts of the world. Cremation as a method of disposal is opted by the tribes in Malabar mainly for selected individuals like the aged males and females (irrespective of any status differentiation), for headmen and others who are efficient (although they are not aged), for the oracles of the Kuṛichiyas and for the *teyyam* dancers of Kaḷanādis. But certain tribes have recently started accepting cremation on a large scale. The increasing contact with the Hindu population has induced them to accept cremation. Tribes like the Kuṛichiyas, Muḷḷakuṛumans, Wayanādan Pathiyans, Malayālar, Karimpālans and Māvilāns, who have by now recognized cremation as the normal form of disposal, have long been in contact with the Caste Hindus. The faith behind the adoption of cremation as a way of disposal has been pointed out by many anthropologists. Albert Muntsch S.J.A.M. argues that “cremation was probably associated with the idea that smoke and fire would bear the deceased aloft to a spirit home”.²⁹¹ According to E.O. James, “Cremation is associated with belief in an after world in the sky; burning the physical remains releases the soul which is then transported to the celestial

²⁹⁰ Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death*, London, 1988, p. 168.

²⁹¹ Albert Muntsch S.J.A.M., *op. cit.*, p.103.

afterworld via the ascending smoke”.²⁹² While J.P. Parry remarks: “those who die a ‘good death’ are cremated, cremation ... is a sacrificial ritual which not only results in the rebirth of the sacrificer but is also a more generalized source of life and fertility, even of cosmic renewal”.²⁹³

Compared to pit burial, cremation is very simple. Firstly, a very small ditch is dug according to the length of the corpse and coconut shells, wood etc, are spread in it. The corpse is laid over it in the east-west direction and firewood (of mango tree) is heaped over the corpse; the eldest son or nephew lights the pyre. Among the Muḷḷakuṟumans, cremation is not compulsory for the aged persons. But if any *Kāraṇavar* put it as a death-wish his body should accordingly be cremated. The Kaḷanādis, before cremating the body of the *teyyam* dancers remove all their costumes and ornaments. For the Wayanādan Pathiyans, logs of the mango tree, pieces of sandalwood and a piece of gold are must for cremation. An observation indicating retreat from cremation comes from the Chōlanāikkans. Chellan of Mānchēry Chōlanāikkans settlement informs that cremation had once existed among them; brushing up his memory he recalled that his great grandfather, who died in his late eighties, was cremated by using *chōlamāvu* or logs of the mango tree from the forest. Excepting this, there is no further evidence to prove the existence of the practice of cremation among the Chōlanāikkans in the past nor do we

²⁹² E.O. James, “Cremation and Preservation of the Dead in North America”, *American Anthropologist*, 30, 1928, pp. 214-242.

²⁹³ J.P. Parry, *Death in Banares*, New Delhi, 1994, p.226.

notice a continuation of the practice today. They are strict followers of pit burial now. In cremation, it is evident that, the Malabar tribes follow the same methods and principles that other tribes follow elsewhere. Among the Ollar Gadaba of Orissa the pyre is made of boughs of mango trees. Rice is thrown over the body and the son or the brother lights the pyre.²⁹⁴ The funeral pyre of the Tasmanians of Australia is made of logs piled in a square each ties at right angles to the one below it, until the pyre was three feet high. Then they filled the interstices with dry grass and fern, and set pieces of brushwood on end all around it, to a height of about ten feet, leaving an opening for the body. Then everyone among them set the fire.²⁹⁵

Among the Māvilāns, clans like *Pokkili*, *Etchipuram* and *Badichiyān* have been practicing cremation for a long time. They fill the grave with earth on the seventh day after cremation by chanting magical spells. They also offer *bali* to the deceased. Clans other than these three have not accepted cremation yet. Any Mavilan from outside the aforesaid three clans can marry a person from any of these clans. If the person who marries into any of these clans is a female she and her children follow the practices of their clan burial. They plant basil on the head and feet of the cremated area. For the dead *Kāraṇavar* of the Wayanādan Kuṛichiyas of Palliyara, Moothedath and Pilavukāvu settlements, the Kuṛichiyas follow a special custom. All the kinsmen of the

²⁹⁴ M. Jha, *op. cit.*, p.104, cited in T. Madhavamenon ed., *op. cit.*, (n-24), p. 283.

²⁹⁵ Careleton. S. Coon, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

deceased assemble at the *taṛawād*. The headmen and the oracles of other *taṛawāds* also will be present there. On this occasion, the clan deity of the *taṛawād*, for instance *Paḷḷiyara Bhagavathi*, enters the body of one of the close affines of the deceased and he gets possessed. He is then entitled to become the next *Kāraṇavaṛ* or *Kōmaram* of that *taṛawād*. This practice is known as *Kōṛam Vāhzcha*. The Wayanādan Kurichiyas cremate the *Kōmarams* of Mattal and Palliyara and also of the Kurichiya settlements beyond Valliyūr-kāvu. Cremation among Karimpālans is known as *Naśippikkal* or destruction. In former days they used to cremate the dead with the logs of jackfruit tree and *Kumbil* tree; but coconut shells are increasingly used today. Seven persons stand at the head and another seven at the feet. The nephew who stands at the head, lights the pyre first, followed by others. On the seventh day of the burial, they raise a mound over the grave and perform *Oṭṭālam Kamizhthal* and draw pictures of *Kālan* and *Kūḷi* if disposal is by inhumation.

Paul Barber points out certain merits of cremation: 1) it fulfills quick disposal; 2) it is most successful, for it may render the body completely inert and even reduce it to inorganic ash, so that it no longer 'does' anything at all.²⁹⁶ But cremation is found to have two main drawbacks. Firstly, it leads to the total destruction of the material culture of a vast human group. Secondly, it is not affordable to the poor and the needy tribes.

²⁹⁶ Paul Barber, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

Orientation of the Dead

Tribes all over the world lay particular emphasis on the orientation of the dead while disposing the dead. Universally there are four types of directions according to the position of the head —North-South, South-North, East-west and West-East. There are various studies regarding the orientation of the body with respect to cardinal directions. In one of the earlier studies on the topic, E. B. Taylor remarked: "Orientation of the body in death with respect to cardinal directions seems to be the working out of the solar analogy, on the one hand is death at sunset ...a new life at sunrise".²⁹⁷ Rose, who studied celestial and terrestrial Orientation of burial, says that celestial orientation is related to a belief in a continued life of the dead man at a celestial land of the dead, orientation being in the direction the deceased must travel in their journey to the land of the dead. The terrestrial orientation is related to a belief in reincarnation since the body is aligned toward the location where the soul must reside before being reborn.²⁹⁸ W. J. Perry, who studied the orientation of the dead in Indonesia, says that the direction of orientation of the body at death is toward the original home of the forefathers.²⁹⁹ Johannes Maringer, in his studies about the religion of the prehistoric man, reported that in Western Europe, there is a custom of placing

²⁹⁷ E.B. Taylor, *Primitive Culture*, London, 1871, p. 508.

²⁹⁸ H.J. Rose, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-133.

²⁹⁹ W.J. Perry, "The Orientation of the Dead in Indonesia", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. LIV, 1914, p. 285.

of the dead in the direction of the setting sun, possibly the west, believed to be the land of the dead.³⁰⁰ Susan Elizabeth Ramirez, in a comment to the article “An Integrated Analysis of Pre-Hispanic Mortuary Practices: a Middle Sican’ Case Study” of Iszumi Shimada, et al, says that the orientation of the face of the principal personage in burial at Sican is looking west which may indicate his watchful awaiting of a successor God or Lord coming from that direction.³⁰¹

In the case of the tribes of Malabar, we find only two directions: South-North and West-East. Almost all tribes of Malabar place their deceased in the grave facing the north, the body oriented in the North- South direction with the head towards the south. It probably matches with W.J. Perry’s observation: “The Kei islanders intern their dead toward the north. The body is placed with the head to the south and the feet toward the north so that when rising, the deceased will face the land of the dead”.³⁰² Gurdon says that the Khāsis place their deceased on the pyre with the head to the west and the feet to the east. Tradition represents them as coming from the east.³⁰³ A few of them like the Chōlanāikkans, Ūraḷikuṟumans, Mullukurumans and Kāṭṭunāikkans place their dead in the East-west direction. The Karo-batak, before burial, places the corpse on a stool facing toward the west and they

³⁰⁰ Johannes Maringer, *The Gods of Prehistoric Man*, London, 1956, p. 18

³⁰¹ Susan Elizabeth Ramirez, Comment to Iszumi Shimada, Ken-ichi Shinoda, Julie Farnum, Robert Corruccini and Hiro Katsuwatanabe, “An Integrated Analysis of Pre-Hispanic Mortuary Practices, a Middle Sican’ case study”, *Current Anthropology*, Vol. LV, no.3, June 2004, p. 395.

³⁰² W.J. Perry, *op. cit.*, p.283.

³⁰³ P.T. Gurdon, *op. cit.*, p.113.

also look upon the land of their origin in the land of the west.³⁰⁴ In the universal tribal context, the orientation of the dead for all headman and dignitaries are normally different from those of commoners³⁰⁵ while in Malabar no such distinctions are applicable to headmen. But those who are cremated like the great dignitaries including oracles³⁰⁶ and *teyyam* dancers³⁰⁷ and those who die of divine epidemics like small pox³⁰⁸ are oriented toward the west. We are told that those who bury the dead in the north-south direction believe that their original homeland is the South and that the spirit of the departed in order to reach the abode in the other world will have to travel southward and pass through the land of their origin. The ritual songs of the Adiyāns called *Śāstras*,³⁰⁹ chanted during the occasions of marriage and death, mention various places of the southern region, which may denote their original habitat. The East-west direction implies that the dead man would be availed of fresh light and heat of the sun even after reaching the land of the dead.

³⁰⁴ Kruijt, *Het Animisme in den Indischen Archipen*, p. 371, cited in E. Bendann, *op. cit.*, p.211.

³⁰⁵ In Tenimber and Timor-laut we find two directions of orientation- eastward for chiefs and other celebrated members of the community and westward for commoners. See W.J. Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

³⁰⁶ Oracle of all tribal communities.

³⁰⁷ *Teyyam* Dancers of Karimpālans and Māvilāns.

³⁰⁸ It is a commonly held belief that small pox, the divine decease, is caused by the wrath of the Goddess of Small Pox called *Vasūrimāla Thampurātti*.

³⁰⁹ *Sastra* songs are transmitted through oral tradition.

Feeding the dead before and after burial

Offering food and drink to the dead before and after burial is a universally followed tribal practice. It is aimed at: 1) preventing the spirits of the dead from returning their homes for food, and 2) alleviating their hunger, thirst, etc. The spirit of the dead, it is held, has the same food habits of the living beings. In Malabar, tribes like the Kādar, Aṛaṇādans, Chōlanāikkans, Malamutthans, Malappaṇikkans, Thachanādan Mūppans, Wayanādan Pathiyans, Malasar, Malamalasar, Māvilāns, Kāṭṭunāikkans and Āḷar follow the tradition of offering food to the departed souls before burial. In the case of the Kādar, “after death and seven days following the burial, a *vīdhu* (portion) of the daily food will be placed in a three-stringed pending fibre vessel-holder for the deceased person. The food will be consumed by elderly family members only, after it has been kept for sometime in the container”.³¹⁰ This practice continues even today. Similarly, the chief mourner among the Baiswar, a hill tribe in Mirzapur, lays out food for the ghost everyday along the road to the cremation ground.³¹¹ Some of the Papuan tribes plant taro beside the grave for getting fruits to the dead till he reaches the land of the

³¹⁰ U.R. Ehrenfels, *op. cit.*, p. 168

³¹¹ William Crook, *Tribes and Castes of the North western India*, Vol. I, Delhi, 1974, Reprint, p.108.

dead.³¹² The Aṛaṇādans also follow the practice of offering food to the spirits of the dead. The Kādar place food, for seven days, on the way to the graveyard. The Chōlanāikkans place a vase full of porridge, curry, favourite pastry and roasted fish for seven days at the spot where the body was allowed to rest inside the house. At the death of an Ainu, a tribe in Japan, a large cup of food or a cake of millet and water are placed by the head of the corpse. The dead man is invited to partake of this offering with words: “this is a good bye feast made especially for you”.³¹³ The Oraons place boiled rice and milk in the mouth of the body after washing the corpse.³¹⁴

When a breast-fed child of the Viṭṭikkunnu Malamutthans dies, the mother’s milk collected in a vessel is placed inside the house where the body is laid. It is believed that otherwise, the spirit of the child will suckle the mother’s breast causing it to dry up. It is a commonplace knowledge that if the breast of a mother is not suckled by the child, it will naturally dry up but this is interpreted as being caused by the spirit of the deceased child. They believe that if the mother’s milk is offered daily to the spirit, the process of the drying up of the milk can be delayed. In Tanembar and Timorlaut, when children under two years of age die, the mother milks her breast into their

³¹² ZVRW XIX 163, cited in Hartland in James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p.428.

³¹³ Batchelor John, *The Ainu and their Folklore*, p.556, cited in E. Bendann, *op. cit.*, p.156.

³¹⁴ K.P. Bahadur, ed., *op. cit.*, (n-18), p.64.

mouths before burial.³¹⁵ Among the Great Andamanese, the mother places a shell containing some of her own milk beside the grave, obviously in order that the child's spirit, which is believed to haunt its late home for a few days, may not lack nourishment.³¹⁶

The close relatives of the Wayanādan Pathiyans, after washing the body, give water to the dead. The Malamutthans pour water containing basil leaves, gold, flowers etc. into the mouth of the corpse thrice. This is known as *Ponnum Nīrum Kodukkal*. It is compulsory for the daughter-in-law to give water to her mother-in-law after the purificatory rites. This custom prevails among the Malappaṇikkans as well. Among the Baheliya of Mirzapur, when a man is dying, he is taken into the open air and gold, Ganges water, and leaves of the Thulasi (*Osimum Sanctum*) put into his mouth.³¹⁷

The Malamalasar serve cooked rice and fried rice to their dead before taking to the graveyard. The Kāṭṭunāikkans keep cooked rice, curry and water for their deceased on the grave. The Āḷar, after burial, keep gruel in a folded plantain leaf at the head of the grave. The Mudugas who goes before the funeral procession takes a basket containing Chama, Kora, etc with him. He sways the basket to and fro so that grains from it are thrown off on either side of the path to the graveyard. This basket is known as *Thekku*. The grains that

³¹⁵ Riedel, P.306, cited in Hartland, James Hastings ed., *op. cit.*, p. 428.

³¹⁶ E.H. Mann, *op. cit.*, p.74.

³¹⁷ William Crook, *op. cit.*, (n-311), p.108.

remain in the basket emptied on the grave after the completion of the burial. This practice is prevalent among the Kuṛumbas also. The throwing of grains on the grave among the Kuṛumbas is known as *Dēsē Ūrippōkath*. After lowering the corpse in the grave, the Koṛagas remove his/her face-cloth and give gruel and crushed areca nut, betel leaf calling his/her name thrice. Thachanādan Mūppans break a coconut into two halves and place one-half at the feet and the other at the head of the deceased before filling the grave. They also throw rice on the corpse after circling the grave seven times. The Māvilāns throw rice thrice on the corpse before placing it on the bier. The Malasar throw ground nut, fried rice and mustard on their way to the grave.

The Kuṛichiyas of Wynād take some raw rice on a plantain leaf and throw it on the grave thrice and keep the remaining portion of it near the feet of the corpse. The Kaṇṇavam Kuṛichiyas keep water in a coconut shell on the grave after burial. Karimpālans after burial cook rice in a new pot and a portion of it is kept in a plantain leaf at the head of the grave. The pot used for cooking is placed upside down along with the remaining cooked rice, on the grave and a hole is made on this pot. This is known as *Oṭṭālam Kamizhthal*. After bathing, they keep water in a folded leaf near a flowing stream for the spirit of the dead to alleviate his/her thirst.

The Adiyān gravediggers carry cooked rice mixed with turmeric powder in a plantain leaf while going to the graveyard for digging the grave.

After filling the grave they place one portion of it on the grave to please *Chudala-pēyi*, who is the owner of the grave according to their tradition. The remaining portion is consumed by the grave-diggers. The Paṇiyas place a pot of gruel inside the grave before filling it. The chief mourner (nephew) of the Kaṇṇavam Kuṛichiyas put a few grains of rice into the mouth of the corpse. The eldest son of the Mudugas throws three handfuls of grains into the burial-pit and then only the corpse is placed in it. Thachanādan Mūppans throw mustard, paddy and ragi on the grave after filling it.

Grave goods

The practice of depositing all the belongings of the deceased, either in the grave or upon it, is worldwide. Disposing of the personal possessions of the dead points to a belief in life after death. Shereen Ratnagar explains: “There is no simple formula which explains the occurrence of objects in graves: in some societies grave goods reveal the perception of the afterlife, in others they have to do with the social persona of the dead, in at another context they have to do with ritual contamination associated with death”.³¹⁸ Both fear of the dead and affection for him/her is the basic reasons behind this tradition. The food, water, clothes, ornaments, utensils and implements of men/women are deposited in the grave. The dead must be gratified with food and with all his/her most cherished worldly possessions. Moreover, right from

³¹⁸ Shereen Ratnagar, “Archaeological Perspectives on Early Indian Societies”, in Romila Thapar ed., *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian Society*, Bombay 1998, p.34.

the beginnings of civilization, when a man died, his entire movable property was left with his body to escape from the fear of the dead and death pollution, which would attach to everything closely associated with the deceased. According to Bendann, men had deposited goods in the graves to provide for the wants and comforts of the deceased and thus to prevent 'walking'.³¹⁹ Today poverty prevents most tribesmen from depositing all the belongings of the deceased in the grave.

The archaeological importance of the grave deposits is pointed out by V. A. Alekshin in an article "Burial Customs as an Archaeological Source".³²⁰ Some of his observations related to the study of burial goods in ancient agricultural societies of the Near East and Central Asia are applicable to Malabar tribes as well. The major points of Alekshin can be summarized as: 1) the burial customs record differences in productive activities between men and women; 2) burial deposits in the case of women appear to be richer than those of men owing to the large quantity of ornaments placed in their graves; 3) the burials of infants are practically devoid of grave goods; and 4) the special respect enjoyed by persons of very advanced age is also reflected in burial customs.

The Wogal tribes in Australia are very particular in burying everything of a dead man with him. Even valuable articles such as spears and nets are

³¹⁹ E. Bendann, *op. cit.*, p.120.

³²⁰ V.A. Alekshin, *op. cit.*, pp.137-138.

included, indeed, a canoe, too has been sacrificed in this manner and pieces of it placed in the grave. 'Everything belonging to a dead man was put out of sight'.³²¹ The Savara of Southern India burn their dead, and with the body they burn everything that the dead man had; his bows and arrows, his dagger, his necklaces, his reaping hook for cutting paddy, his axe, some paddy and rice and so forth.³²² As regards the tribes in Malabar, besides clothes and ornaments made of precious and semi-precious stones, they deposit their daily utensils and implements. Along with the Kādar corpse, there will always be a rice-pot, a curry-pot and a coconut-shell-spoon for a woman and a knife and a *Paṛakkōl* or digging rod for a man. Now-a-days they also deposit a small tin pot for drinking tea. All these are put inside a cloth bag and are buried beneath the feet of the corpse. The Malasar deposit the favourite dishes of the deceased along with a *Koth* (a small spade) for women and a knife for men; depositing ornaments are against their established tradition. They also deposit a coin, cooked or fried rice, areca nuts and a few betel leaves. The Ēṛavāḷans bury beedi, betel, arecanut and tobacco for their headman/elders. The Kuṇḍuvādiyans deposit a small *Ural* (Stone mortar for pounding grain) and *Ulakka* (metal or wooden pestle) for men and a broomstick for women. The Malamutthans never deposit iron weapons or vessels because, they believe

³²¹ Alfred. W. Howitt, *op. cit.*, pp. 461-462.

³²² F. Fawcett, "An Aboriginal Hill People of the Eastern Ghats of the Madras Presidency", *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay*, I, 1886, p.249.

that, the spirit of the dead may use them against their enemies. They put rice, salt and chilly inside the grave for the dead to prepare the food for themselves. The Thachanādan Mūppans throw rice into the grave for the spirit of the dead. In former days the Malappaṇikkans had buried boxes, betel leaves and arecanut; today they have stopped this custom of depositing these belongings of the deceased in the grave.

The Koṛagas place a porridge pot and a knife outside the grave after filling it, whereas the Āḷar put cooked rice in a leaf-bowl and place it near the head of the corpse inside the grave. As the Paṇiya tradition does not permit them to deposit old clothes of the deceased along with the dead, they are burnt. It is compulsory among them to deposit sandals, walking-sticks, a sickle, a piece of iron, a pot of porridge, betel leaves, areca nuts, tobacco and lime in the grave of the deceased. Today they have avoided the practice of burying their implements, vessels or ornaments. The Kuṛichiyas of Wynād keep a small knife for their women and an arrowhead for their men tucked in the right side of the mat in which they cover the corpse. The Kuṛichiyas of Kaṇṇavam bury arrowheads for men and a sickle for women. K. Panoor writes that if they don't do so, souls of the deceased lament that they have been unjustly denied their essential tools and weapons.³²³ The Kuṛichiyas of both the areas also place a wick-lamp, a broken coconut and a goblet of water

³²³ K. Panoor, *Kēralathilē Africa*, Kottayam, 1989, p.60.

near the feet inside the grave. This lamp is meant to be used for the journey to the dark world of the land of the dead. Like the Kuṛichiyas, the Muḷḷakuṛumans also deposit bows and arrows and knives with men and sickles with women while burying. Kāṭṭunāikkans place betel and tobacco for the headmen near the head of the corpse inside the grave. Wayanādan Pathiyans throw one or two small pieces of gold inside the grave.

The Chōlanāikkans place axes, digging rods, knives, pots, cooking vessels and rings made of copper or brass inside the graves. Karimpalr put a porridge pot on the grave in an upside down position (*Oṭṭālam Kamizhthal*). In earlier days Adiyāns kept a *tappubaḷa* under the head of the corpse inside the grave, and on the grave was kept rice cooked in turmeric water in a plantain leaf. This was meant as food for the spirit of the grave called *Chudalapēyi*. The Kaḷanādis place a new earthen pot with holes containing millet, ragi and rice, in an inverted position, at the head of the grave. The Iruḷas keep a lamp near the head of the corpse inside the grave supposedly for the journey of the dead to the other world and to cook food. Like the Iruḷas, the Kondakammara of Andhra Pradesh place on the head a traditional oil lamp and then the lamp is closed with a rock.³²⁴ Among the Mewang Rai of Eastern Nepal the main mourners and the elders light wicks and throw them on to the coffin: *dagbatti* (sign lights): one onto the head end of the coffin, one in the middle, one on to the foot end. The dead relative is asked to use it

³²⁴ Subrahmaniam and Jesuratnam, in Sachidananda & R.R. Prasad ed., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 482.

for cooking food. "O mother, light a fire and cook yourself rice".³²⁵ The Mudugas deposit grains like Kora and Ragi inside the grave. They place cooked millet and Ragi *ada* for boys/girls, which have to be prepared by their aunts. For men they deposit knife, *koth* or a small spade, an axe, money and a sickle and *koth* for women. They also place a cane basket known as *thekku* on the grave which contains grains like millet (andropogon sorghum), kora and a small spade. (A Muduga, who was employed as a forest guard, is said to have thrown fifteen-sovereign-gold-chain of his deceased wife into the grave before filling it). If their grave goods are found stolen, they believe that they are taken away by the evil spirits. The Kuṛumbas also follow the same tradition of grave good deposition. The Kāṭṭunāikkans deposit their belongings such as vessels and implements, along with a walking stick, at the head of the grave; the ornaments of a deceased woman will be placed over the mud heap.

Rituals on the return from the Burial ground

At the end of the funeral, all those who have taken part in it should return to the hamlet of the dead, after taking bath in either a river or a stream and with wet clothes, without turning or looking back. This, too, is a universally recognized tradition. After the funeral of a Waga Waga of British New guinea, the relatives who have participated in the funeral ceremonies and

³²⁵ Martin Goenzle, *op. cit*, p. 53.

also the women and children of the deceased, go to the sea and bathe.³²⁶ The burial ground of the Oraon is always near a river, stream or tank. After the burial, all must bathe and return to the village.³²⁷ The Akoa Pigmy after burying the dead returns without looking behind them, and wash their hands and feet.³²⁸ Among the Todas of the Nilgiris, when the cremation is over, the chief mourner bows, touching his forehead to the stone, kept in the foot of the pyre and turns to leave the cremation place without looking back. Each person who has attended the ceremony follows, bowing to the stone and departing without a backward glance.³²⁹ Tribes the world over believe that even after the purification of their body and clothes, the spirit of the dead may accompany them to his/her home. Before the return of all those who have attended the funeral, kin-women take bath, and subsequently, they clean the house of the dead as well as its premises, all utensils and clothes, and then sprinkle water mixed with cow dung all over the house. Keer/Kir, a tribe in Madhya Pradesh after the burial return to their houses, break their earthen pots and purify their houses by washing them with cow dung and water.³³⁰ After a death the winter house of a Thompson River Indian of British Columbia was purified with water in which tobacco and Juniper had been

³²⁶ Charles G. Seligman, *Malenesians*, p.611, cited in Bendann, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

³²⁷ See K.P. Bahadur, *op. cit.*, (n-18), p. 70.

³²⁸ Carleton. S. Coon, *op. cit.*, p.333.

³²⁹ Antony. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, p.277.

³³⁰ Sachidananda and R.R. Prasad ed., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p.409.

soaked and fresh fir boughs were spread on the floor each morning.³³¹

Certain tribes, all over the world, have some special rites to be performed after burial and the attendant purification. The Baheliya mourners of Mirzapur chew the leaves of the bitter neem tree and pass their feet through the smoke of burning oil.³³² Among the Kakhyen of Upper Burma mourners returning from the grave strew ground rice along the path and clean their legs and arms with fresh leaves. Before re-entering the house they are purified with water by the medicine man with a sprinkle of glass.³³³ There is a strange custom among the Mudugas and the Kuṛumbas of Attappady that while returning from the graveyard, the son of the deceased person should collect a few pieces of dry and green high-growing grass known as *tharuvappullu*. The womenfolk, after bathing, bring water in a *Padi* or litre-jar (measuring jar), and it is placed at the spot where the funeral car was placed earlier. Then the headman makes arrangements for a ritual known as *nikal nīr kuthu*, which is called *nikal edukkāvu* and *nikal kuthrath* among the Kuṛumbas and Mudugas respectively. This rite has to be performed by all the close relatives of the deceased. The green grass piece symbolizes the newly deceased person's soul whereas the dry ones, the ancestors' souls. At first the green piece of grass is dropped into the water in the litre-jar followed by the dry pieces invoking the

³³¹ James Tiet, *The Thompson Indians of British Columbia in Jesup North Pacific Expedition*, Leiden, 1900, p.331 cited in E. Bendann, *op. cit.*, p.131.

³³² William Crook, *Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, Vol. I, London, 1926, p. 109.

³³³ P.J.A. Anderson, *Mandalay to Momiens*, London, 1876, p.144, cited in JG Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-78), pp. 103-04.

names of the ancestor souls of the deceased like, say, father, mother, maternal and paternal uncles, brothers, sisters etc. If the two grass pieces immediately join together, it is believed that the particular ancestral soul, whose name has been invoked, has taken up the newly deceased soul. It means that the dead is the beloved relative of that ancestor. If the two pieces remain separate, the process is continued till the merging of the two grass pieces take place. This is a simple method to find out which one of the ancestral souls accepts the guardianship of the newly deceased soul. But the ceremony presupposes that it is just a parental acceptance of the soul by his/her kin-souls and that they continue to roam about among the people; his/her soul gets salvation and reaches the land of the dead only with the completion of the *Chīru* or the second and final funeral ceremony. Those who face unnatural death will have no *Nikalkuth* performed on the day of the burial, which will be done on the day of *Pachachāvu*. Afterwards the water in the litre-jar is poured out and it is put upside down till it is used again for another *nikal nīr kuthu*. The two tribes also use oil (gingelly oil in the past and coconut oil today) at times when *tharuvapullu* is not available. While using oil, the two drops, one indicating the dead and the other an ancestor should merge together just like the grass pieces.

For the Chōlanāikkans, when they return from the graveyard after burial, a person from the house of the dead sprinkles water on them from an

earthen pot and makes a cut on the floor with a knife. Before burial, the headman waves a ring, which symbolizes the dead soul, over the corpse and then drops it into a vessel of water. If the ring stands erect at the bottom of the vessel, the soul of the dead is supposed to be happy and if it falls flat, it is not so. To make the soul happy, offerings like tobacco and coins are given. After this ceremony, the ring is kept in a basket known as *daivakkotta* or divine basket for three years. After this period it is handed over to the headman and his wife and they keep it forever at the *daivappura*. In the case of the Adiyāns, after the funeral rites, the *Naṭṭu-mūppan* distributes the fees paid to him by the relatives of the dead. Then the *Kaṛmi* has a bath and he is followed by others. Among the Karimpālans, an arrow, which is carried by one among them during the time of the burial, is brought back on the completion of the burial, and the subsequent bath, and is fixed on the ground near the house in an erect position. It is not compulsory for the Koṛagas to have bath after burial; they just wash their hands, legs and face. When they return to the hamlet of the dead, a special purificatory rite known as *Maryādi* is performed. A woman relative of the dead takes water mixed with cow dung in an earthen pot and sprinkles it on the members of the funeral party with the help of the leaf of a jackfruit tree. S.T. Das observes that the device used to sprinkle cowdung water differs from one locality to the other: Koṛagas of Karkal town in Mangalore use mango leaf for sprinkling purposes. Then they bring some

burning coal and keep it on the spot where the corpse was laid. This ceremony was repeated three times: first after the burial, then on the next day morning and finally in the evening of the same day.³³⁴

In the past, the kin-women of the Malayālar discarded the mat, pillow and the bed used by the deceased in the wilderness; but the practice no longer exist today—now all the materials are cleaned and reused. The Ūraḷikuṟumans, after the funeral, smear cow dung on their body, plunge into a river and return home with wet clothes. Those who do not bathe or get their clothes wet remove their clothes and wear new ones on return. The relatives of the deceased immerse the funeral party in clouds of smoke emitted from a vessel containing burning dammer. They also smear ashes from the hearth in order to prevent the attack of the spirit of the dead. The Kuṇḍuvādiyans rub the members of the funeral party three times with burning incense stick. The Iruḷas, just after the return of the funeral party, clean all the domestic utensils. They also clean the floor of their houses by washing them with cow dung, and then all of them pray before a *Nilaviḷakku*. Before the introduction of *Nilaviḷakku*, they used to pray at the place where the corpse was laid. Nevertheless, the house where death occurred should not be cleaned nor should the relatives have bath for three days. Among the Kādar, the funeral attendants pray before the *Nilaviḷakku* with folded hands. The last person,

³³⁴ S.T. Das, *op. cit.*, p.178.

who reaches the house, after the funeral, should kick down the live coal that is kept in a coconut shell; this rite is intended to avoid a second death in the hamlet. The Malasar return home from the graveyard one after another in a row; the first person in the row has to take a stone from the graveyard which is handed over to the second person en-route and the process is continued till the stone reaches the hands of the last person. The last person in the row, finally, makes a hole in a tree in the graveyard with the help of a chopper and keeps the stone inside the hole. By doing so, it is held that the spirit of the deceased loses all contact with his/her relatives and would never enquire about them thereafter. Then all of them wash themselves and return to the hamlet. When they enter the courtyard a burning stick is thrown from inside the house of the deceased. The last person turns round and kicks away the burning coal kept in a coconut shell. Like the Malasar, Among the Gōnd and Bhūmia of Jabalpur, at a few yards from the house of mourning, the master of ceremonies stops and with the toes of his left foot picks up a pebble. Without bending down, he lifts his foot till his hand can reach the pebble. Then, without turning round he hands it to the next man following him, who in the same manner gives the pebble to the man walking behind. Thus the pebble passes from one man to the other till the last man throws it over his shoulder backwards.³³⁵ As far as the Malamalasar are concerned, while returning from the grave, all the attendants have bath and move in wet clothes and the

³³⁵ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

women relatives at home rub their heads and legs with burning incense sticks. All these rites have to be performed by the last person of the funeral party; in addition, on entering the courtyard, he has to turn round and kick with his toe the live coal kept there in a coconut shell. The funeral party of the Wayanādan Kādar circumambulate a set of materials kept inside the house of the dead such as a *nāzhi* heaped with rice, a *Nilaviḷakku* and a pot of *bhasmam* or ash; and after taking a little ash they get out of the house.

On the day of the funeral, universally, the food for the funeral party is prepared by the neighbours. In Samoa (Malenesia) those who touched the dead were most careful not to handle food for days, they were fed by others.³³⁶ Among the Agariya, a small tribe in Mirzapur, on the day of funeral “no fire is lit and no cooking done in the house that day. The food is cooked at the house of the brother-in-law (*Bahnnoi*) of the dead man”.³³⁷ The food served during the day is generally known among the tribes of Malabar as *paṭṭinikkanji*. In the case of the Adiyāns, the *Kaṛmi* is given some gruel first and later on he serves food to others. Unlike other tribes, the Kādar, after the burial, conduct a feast in one of the houses of the settlement, other than that of the deceased; the curry that is served should not contain turmeric powder. The practice still survives. Like the Kādar the Gōnd and Bhūmia the *nat* relatives

³³⁶ Turner, *Samoa*, p. 145 cited by Bendann, *op. cit.*, p.106.

³³⁷ William Crook, *op. cit.*, (n-332), p. 7.

prepare a dinner for all funeral guests.³³⁸ Among the Koita on the first or second day following a death a burial feast (*Bowa*) is held.³³⁹ Tribes all over the world believe that the souls of all deceased ancestors and of the newly dead come back for such a feast.

Funeral Expenditure

To meet the funeral expenditure, an amount is collected, during the course of the ceremony, from those attending it and the relatives of the deceased person have to make a special contribution towards it. In most cases, the family members of the deceased take up the expenditure for the funeral. In the case of a widow/widower, his/her relatives meet the expenditure. The heads of expenditure consist of payments to the headmen, to the bier makers, to the grave diggers and to the suppliers of food, and also for sending the widow and children to their natal home. In former days, in Malabar, the *Janmi* of each settlement had made a contribution including money, new clothes and grain for the purpose. A noted instance is that of the Mooppil Nair, the *Janmi* of the Iruḷas, who made a contribution of 200 to 300 rupees, six bundles of rice, etc. White cloth of six meters was used to make the six bundles which was called '*Āru Muḷam Khandāvu*'. Even today the relatives of the former *Janmi* of Karimpālans called Kallyāt Nambiar extend helps to them in the event of the death of the person who acts as the oracle. The *Janmi* of

³³⁸ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 342.

³³⁹ Charles G. Seligman, *Malenesians*, pp.162-166, cited in Bendann, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-148.

Wayanādan Kādar contributes sixteen panam, a new mundu (white cloth) and a mat. After bathing, the corpse is laid in the mat given by the Janmi. In the case of Wayanādan Paṇiyas, their Janmi contribute one bundle of betel leaves, 25 areca nuts, a mundu and coconuts to meet the expenditure of funeral. The contribution for funeral is compulsory among many tribes as a matter of tradition.

In the case of Adiyāns, a metal plate is put near the head of the corpse and those who attend the funeral put some money in it according to their financial capacity. This money is used for meeting the needs of their ancestral ceremony called *Kākkappula*, for payment to the *Karumi*, the gravediggers, bier makers and for other expenses. The payment to gravediggers is Rs.200 and nominal amounts are paid to all others by those who participate in the funeral ceremonies. This is known as *Dharmam Kodukkal*. If the husband dies, relatives of the widow had to prepare food for the members of the whole family for which they had to pay a nominal sum, say Rs.5 or 10, the relatives give Rs.100 to the headman. He takes Rs.20 from it and gives Rs.10 each to the *Karṃi* and to the *Kanalādi* and the remaining part is divided among the *Kunnukkār* and *Chemmakkār*. The relative must altogether pay 27 *tappubaḷa* (bangles made of copper for the following purposes: 8 for the cot; 10 for the grave; 1 for applying sandal paste and 8 for other ceremonies),³⁴⁰ a practice, which has now been almost abandoned. As in the case of the Adiyāns, the

³⁴⁰ Seetha Kakkoth, *op. cit.*, p. 56. (one *Thappubala* equals 20 Rupees)

Kuṇḍuvādiyan custom insists that each participant of the funeral ceremony should pay 25 paise, which is known among them as *Marippupaṇam*. The contributions are immediately recorded and the defaulters have to pay it within a period of 16 days. This amount is set apart for the expenses of the *Adiyanthiram* or the pollution ending ceremony.

In the case of the Paṇiyas, the relatives of the deceased male contribute Rs.125 to the widow and those of the female Rs.300 to the husband's family. "The *Chemmi* is believed to be the owner of the burial ground and is paid 7 *paṇams* (Rs.1.75) for the 7ft into 3ft spot for the grave".³⁴¹ Moreover, if a father or mother dies, their children have to distribute betel leaves to those who attend the funeral. The Paṇiyas, who serve as gravediggers for the Kaḷanādis are paid in money, cloth, rice and paddy. The Iruḷas, Kuṟumbas and the Mudugas pay their musicians. The Chōlanāikkans, Ēṟavāḷans and the Aṟaṇādans appoint paid gravediggers of whom the last group pays Rs.1500 for the gravediggers. Among the Ēṟavāḷans if a father or mother dies his/her brothers and sisters should contribute for buying the oil, clothes, soap and flowers required for the ceremonies. Just like the Paṇiyas, the Chōlanāikkans pay Rs.10 to the *Chemmakākran* or headman who finds out the spot for the burial. Among the Karimpālans, nephews and nieces had spent money to meet the financial expenditure earlier, now this is the responsibility of the sons and daughters. Among the Kāṭṭunāikkans, their clansmen help them to buy new

³⁴¹ A. Aiyappan, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

clothes, betel leaves and arecanut for the funeral purposes. In the Kuṛichiya tradition, deceased male's relatives bring along with them 500gm. of oil, tender coconut, a bundle of betel leaves and 30 seers of rice (*Chāvāri*). This is collectively known as *Chāvu paṇam*. Among the Kaṇṇavam Kuṛichiyas, all relatives of the deceased bring with them paddy. This is known as *Machunan Paṇam*. The Malasar place a towel near the grave and attenders of the funeral throw money in it. The Malasar and Kāṭṭunāikkans are helped by their close relatives and clansmen to meet the funeral expenditure. In the case of Malamalasar the married elder daughter should contribute money for funeral. In former days the Malamutthans considered it sinful to collect money from relatives and clansmen to meet funeral expenditure. Today collecting money from relatives and clansmen has become a custom with them also. Moreover even if a person happened to be disposed of in another settlement, the funeral expenditure should be borne by the kinsmen of his/her native hamlet. This expenditure among the Ēṛavāḷans is known as *Moyippaṇam*. To meet the funeral expenditure most of the tribesmen are helped financially by their present employers today.

We get similar examples from the practices of other tribes. The Oraons keep a basket and an earthen jar by the side of the dead body for the visiting friends and relatives to drop paddy into these.³⁴² Among the Todas funeral contributions in money may be made by any relative, and all those who have

³⁴² K.P. Bahadur, *op. cit.*, (n-18), p. 64.

married into the family of the deceased. The buffaloes for funeral are given by the husbands of the daughters of a man. Contributions of food are received from various relatives, who also contribute certain of the object used for the adornment of the body. Each relative gives a waist-string called *pennār*, made of black and white thread, which is put round the body of the corpse.³⁴³ The Lodagaa of West Africa place baskets at the foot of the funeral stand and grain is put in this basket by each member of the clan sector who is head of a compound.³⁴⁴ "Contribution to the funeral expenses include Funeral Water (*Kuur Kwo*), money that is offered to the senior mourner by his friends so that he can buy beer for himself and his guests, individual contributions to the grave diggers, which are thrown... at the funeral stand, and to the musicians, which are cast upon the xylophones...gifts offered to the deceased by friends, lovers and others in the course of their speech...and major contributions to funeral expenses consists of the twenty cowries collected from persons standing in certain specific relationships to the deceased".³⁴⁵

Pollution and Associated Ceremonies

Right from the time of death, the family of the bereaved, along with other close relatives is plunged into a state of death pollution called *Pula*. All over the tribal world, death entails a condition for the adequate expression of

³⁴³ For details see W.H.R. Rivers, *op. cit.*, pp.395-97.

³⁴⁴ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

³⁴⁵ For details see *Ibid.*, pp.157-159.

which we must have recourse to the Polynesian word '*Tapu*'. In English the word *Taboo* is usually employed to mean pollution or defilement. Tradition has enforced many prohibitions upon the mourners after the death of a person. In the past the tribes in Malabar were strict followers of taboos, associated with death, but recently drastic changes have been taking place in matters like the period of pollution, its strictness etc. Earlier, the period of pollution was normally 41 days and in the case of a widow/widower, normally one year. If anyone had dared to break this law, the defaulters were punished by tribal councils. He/she may have to pay for the guilt and had to re-observe the penance for a further period. (For instance, the practice of *Tappubaḷa*, among the Adiyāns). Today conditions of poverty have forced the tribes to reduce the period of pollution; most of the tribesmen are not able to abstain from work for more than one or two weeks. Tribes of other parts of the world follow a similar practice of mourning, instead of pollution. But the taboos among the tribes in Malabar are drastically different from those followed by the mourners elsewhere in the world. For instance, cutting of the hair or shaving, during the period of pollution, are strictly prohibited or are taboo among the tribes in Malabar (as also among many tribes in India); but it is not so among tribes outside India. But all of them strictly follow dietary restrictions; widow/widower has certain special pollution rites; and just like the wearing of white clothes among the Malabar tribes, they too have pollution marks like shaving of the head or blackening of the body. In the Tonga islands the entire

population shaves their heads as a sign of mourning.³⁴⁶ If a widow/widower or other near relative of a deceased native of Mafulu prefers, he/she may abstain from eating the favourite food of his group.³⁴⁷ The Mundas observe three to nine days' mourning. Two days' mourning is observed by the Khariar. The mourning period for the Birhōrs and for Juangs is seven and twelve days respectively. During this period men do not shave. They abstain from oiling the hair and observe certain restrictions of diet and work.³⁴⁸ A great number of net collars and armlets, and a long petticoat are worn by Warma widows (Melanesia) when in mourning. The widower in addition wears the leg-lets and a special belt.³⁴⁹ A Koita widow and other relatives of the dead man must abstain from such articles of food as the deceased was especially fond of until after the funeral feast six months later.³⁵⁰

Death pollution affects entire kinsmen along with all those who have been brought into contact with the corpse. The period of mourning varies among different tribes; it depends upon the relationship of the mourners to the dead, or upon his rank, and ranges from a few days to many months or even years. Death of a member in a community inflicts a wound not only on the relatives but also on clansmen as a whole. The tribes use the period of pollution to fill the absence of the dead and to heal the wound created by the

³⁴⁶ Word, *Congo Cannibals*, p.43 cited in Bendann, *op. cit.*, p.90.

³⁴⁷ Williamson, *The Mafulu Mountain People of British New Guinea*, p. 247, cited in E. Bendann, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

³⁴⁸ K.P. Bahadur, *op. cit.*, (n-47), pp. 64-65.

³⁴⁹ Seligman, *Melanesians*, pp.276-77, cited in Bendann, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

departed. It is a universal norm that a male is the chief mourner in death but as per the Malabar tribal tradition, the eldest son is the chief mourner and he, along with other close relatives, perform all the obsequies; in the absence of the eldest son the younger sons may perform the funeral rites and if the deceased has no male issues, nephews (brothers' or sister's' sons) will have to perform the rite. If an unmarried boy or girl dies, the chief mourner is the cross-cousin of the opposite sex, i.e., the *Maithunan* or *Maithuni*. Among the Kolgha tribe in Gujarat, the chief mourner is the eldest son, brother, or the husband of the deceased.³⁵¹ Among the Lodagaa of West Africa, the close male kin act as a chief mourner. But in the case of a married male his wife is the chief mourner and vice versa. The close mourners of the Lodagaa tied a hide in their hands or neck. Those tied with hide include not only parents, but husbands and wives. The use of hide is limited to the persons who are presumed to lose most by death, and of these a husband suffers hardest of all.³⁵² In the past almost all tribes in Malabar had followed matriliney except the Malasar, Māvilāns and the Wayanādan Pathiyans. Among the followers of matriliney, the chief mourner was the nephew of the deceased; even today, the nephews perform the funeral rites among the Kuṛichiyas and Koṛagas, though they don't have any right over the property of their uncles. It is also compulsory that all the sons and daughters of the deceased person observe

³⁵¹ T.B. Naik, M.J. Masavi, and G.P. Pandya in Sachidananda & R.R. Prasad. ed., *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 465.

³⁵² See Goody. J., *op. cit.*, pp.86-121.

pula. The importance of the son as the chief mourner is reflected in an Ēṛavāḷan proverb, ‘*Thahappinu Thalai Makan; Thāyikku Iḷai makan*’ (Eldest son for the father and youngest son for the mother). Among the Mewang Rai of East Nepal, the chief mourner for the dead father is the eldest son and for the mother it is the youngest son. If the eldest Kāraṇavaṛ dies among the Thachanādan Mūppans, either his sons or his brothers act as mourners.

The normal period of pollution among the tribes in Malabar is 1, 3, 7, 9, 11, 13 or 15 days. This is only a general statement for exceptions occur in the case of certain tribes. Chōlanāikkans have a three-day pollution period. Tribes like the Aṛaṇādans, Kaḷanādis, Paṇiyas, Muḷḷakuṛumans and Wayanādan Pathiyans observe a seven-day pollution period. Malayāḷar, Ūraḷikuṛumans³⁵³ and Koṛagas have nine days’ pollution. Malamutthans and Adiyāns generally observe pollution for 13 days. In the case of the Adiyāns, they have to obtain the consent of their *Mūppan* (headman) to observe *Pula*. For this they have to pay five hundred rupees and a full *para* (measuring vessel) of rice besides oil, soap, betel leaves, areca nuts and a bundle of firewood. This practice is called *Kōlum Valliyum Keṭṭal*. The period of pollution for Āḷar, Kādar,³⁵⁴ Kāṭṭunāikkans, Thachanādan Mūppans and

³⁵³ C.A. Innes, *Malabar Gazateer*, Vol. I, F.E. Evans ed., reprint, 1997, p. 136 points out that the Uralikurumans do not have any pollution. A similar opinion is presented in C. Gopalan Nair, *Wynad: its People and Traditions*, Madras, 1911, p.73. But today’s case is of course different. This may be a clear instance of acculturation.

³⁵⁴ Stephen Fuchs, *The Aboriginal Tribes of India*, New Delhi, 1973, p. 272 and J.H. Hutton, *Census of India, 1931*, Vol. III, *Ethnographical*, p.214, have described Kadar as having no pollution. But field studies have revealed that they, like any other tribe, practice strict pollution rules.

Kunduvādiyāns is fifteen days. Differing from the general pattern, Māvilāns and Wayanādan Kādar have sixteen days' pollution. Malappaṅikkans have 12 days' pollution and for the Malasar and Malamalasar the pollution period is eight days.

Longer periods of pollution were prevalent in the past and at times it extended upto six years or more. In former days the Iruḷas had a pollution period of three or four years; but at present it has been reduced to six months'. Likewise, in former days the Mudugas and Kuṟumbas had a pollution period of six years. Their pollution period which commenced on the day of death, extended upto the final funeral ceremony of the *Chīru* —which took place only after six years. Now-a-days, the pollution period has been reduced to a year. Because of the stringent dietary restrictions to be observed for a very long period, the mourners naturally become vegetarians by the end of the pollution period.

But these periods of pollution are applicable only in the case of the death of a matured person, while the death of an infant causes no general pollution and impurity is confined to his/her parents only and it lasts for the day of the death only. In the event of a death in the course of a death pollution, the pollution of the second death has to be observed separately and only after the expiry of the first, though the *Adiyanthiram* (second funeral) may be common. The making of the earth mound over the ash remains for

those cremated are done at the third or the seventh day. The period of pollution for dignitaries like *Kōmaram* or *teyyam* dancers is normally ninety days. The observation made by A.A.D. Luiz about a practice among tribes like the Malappaṇikkans, Malayālar and Māvilāns that the women who have “died while in pollution have to be buried by women and men keep away for fear of evil”³⁵⁵ has not been substantiated by my field work among the respective tribes.

Following are the vows to be taken by the mourners during the period of pollution:

1. Do not bathe till the close of the pollution period. (This taboo now no longer exists, but among tribes like the Kuṛichiyas, the widow/widower are not allowed to use oil or soap for bathing)
2. Do not chew betel, areca nut or tobacco.
3. Do not change clothes (Today changing of clothes is permitted)
4. Avoid delicious food.(meat, fish and oil are to be avoided)
5. Refrain from work
6. Abstain from sexual intercourse
7. Do not visit temples or houses of other people

³⁵⁵ A.A.D. Luiz, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

8. Keep indoors
9. Avoid all entertainments (participation in marriages or festivals)
10. Do not conduct marriages within the family of the dead.
11. Maintain silence as far as possible
12. Refrain from shaving, oiling and cutting off hair and nails because the remnants of these are likely to contaminate the food that is offered to the spirit of the dead person
13. Refrain from touching others
14. Prepare food by oneself and to restrict the consumption of food to one or two times a day.
15. Do not remarry during this period.
16. Widow/widower should refrain from wearing any ornament or coloured dresses; wearing of white clothes is compulsory for the mourners.

There are certain specific aims in taking such vows. First of all, they are aimed at strengthening and purifying the soul of the dead. Secondly, they are offerings to the deceased. Thirdly, they express a touch of affection by the close relatives towards the deceased. Finally, they aim at sending the deceased to the world of the dead without any hindrance.

Silence is a general norm to be followed during the time of pollution and is also a symbol of mourning. Maintaining silence, after a death in the hope of avoiding the attention of the spirits, is a universal practice. "In Indonesia, during the first few days after death", writes J.G. Frazer, "the inhabitants must keep perfectly quiet. No noise must be made, dancing or singing is forbidden, music must not be heard, rice must not be pounded, nor coconuts thrown down from the trees. The intention is that no sound should meet the ear of the soul to indicate the way to its home".³⁵⁶ Similarly, among the Lhota Nāgas of Assam, in the event of an unnatural death, the mourners should keep silence for six days.³⁵⁷ Besides all these restrictions, certain other vows are also taken by the tribes in Malabar. The Wayanādan Kādar place a lighted *Nilaviḷakku* in the room of the deceased till the end of pollution and perform *bali*, i.e., offering of food to the crow, from the seventh to the sixteenth day. Among the Gōnd and Bhūmia of Eastern Mandala, during the course of the purificatory ceremony of those who attend the funeral in the graveyard a woman stands by with a light (*Diya*) in her hand in front of the house. As soon as the anointing with oil is over, she carries the light inside and places it on a shelf in the wall. The light is kept burning.³⁵⁸ Among the Ewhe of Togoland, who bury the dead under the hut, a fire is maintained during the whole period of mourning, and strongly smelling herbs

³⁵⁶ J.G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-95), p. 39.

³⁵⁷ William Crook, *op. cit.*, (n-332), p.239.

³⁵⁸ Stephen Fuchs, *The Gond and Bhumia of Eastern Mandala*, Bombay, 1968, pp. 341-42.

are burnt in it to keep the ghost at a distance.³⁵⁹ There appears to be two contradictory reasons for keeping the lamp in the room of the dead till the end of pollution: 1) to warm up the spirit and 2) to keep away the spirits. The Wayanādan Pathiyans perform *bali* from the very next day of the death upto the sixteenth day. If the crow refuses to eat it, they throw the food in a stream. A similar practice exists among the Aheria, a small tribe in Central Daub, who throw cakes to the crows who represent the souls of the dead.³⁶⁰ The Nounoumaus of the western Sudan believe that the soul of every human being is at once in the man and in the crocodile. When the crocodile dies, the man dies the day after. If the crocodile loses an eye the man loses an eye, and vice versa...When a crocodile is about to die, it comes into the village of the person whose soul is lodged in it. When it dies they wrap the carcass in white clothing and bury it, and sacrifice fowls to it. Then the man whose soul was in the crocodile dies in turn.³⁶¹ “The custom of offering rice to the crows occur in all parts of southern India”, opines Clement Meighan, “among all grades of castes and even among some of the hill tribes. In parts of India, the belief behind this custom is that the soul of the dead person will return in the form of a crow and partake of the offering, so that the rice actually constitutes an offering to the spirit of the deceased.....The universal traits of this custom are one, the rice is offered only to crows; other animals and birds

³⁵⁹ Globus, XXXi, p.432, cited in James Hastings, *op. cit.*, p. 432.

³⁶⁰ William Crook, *op. cit.*, (n-311), p. 45.

³⁶¹ J.G. Frazer, *L Tauxier Le Noir du Soudan*, pp.192sq, cited in Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-38), p. 471.

are driven away if they attempt to eat the rice; second, it is considered an unfavourable omen if no crows come along to eat the rice".³⁶²

In former days after burial, the Thachanādan Mūppans demolished the house of the deceased and all the settlers of that *Pādi* or settlement abandoned that place to settle in another *Pādi*. But the scarcity of land compelled them to give up this practice. Among the Korwas, a tribe of Central India, when a man dies, his hut is broken down and the family does not inhabit it again.³⁶³ Among Makonde, a South African tribe, when anyone died in a village, the whole population deserted it, saying that it was a bad spot.³⁶⁴ E.C. Parsons holds that "funerary destruction of property is partly prompted by the desire to prelude ghost walking, to keep the ghost from coming after his own, after what has been and still is a part of himself".³⁶⁵ After the funeral, they place a lighted lamp in the room of the deceased along with the mat on which the dead body was laid. On the third day, a woman relative of the deceased after cleaning an earthen pot cooks half-a seer of rice in it and empties it on a plantain leaf and places it on the mat along with a glass of water. Sitting on a new mat, spread near the old one, the headman along with other kinsmen of the dead partake of the cooked rice. As leader of the group, the first person to take this rice is the headman and he is followed by the others. Thereafter the

³⁶² Clement. W. Meighan, *op. cit.*, p.144.

³⁶³ R.V. Russel, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, London, 1916, p. 498.

³⁶⁴ D. Livingston, *Last Journeys*, London, 1874, Vol. I, p. 28, cited in Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-95), p.14.

³⁶⁵ Cited in Albert Muntsch S.J.A.M, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

headman sitting on the mat throws the plantain leaf over the mat of the dead person in the eastern direction. The belief is that the land of the dead is in the east and the departed soul residing there would partake of this offering. Later, the headman, after putting betel leaves on the mat of the deceased, rolls it and ties it on the beam of the room of the dead. This is known as *Pula Keṭṭuka* or *Āvath Keṭṭuka*. Among Thachanādan Mūppans if a husband dies, the chief mourner is his wife or vice versa. A shed known as *balipandal* is made outside the house; from the fourth day onwards the widow/widower and their relatives, after having bath in the early morning, stay there till the end of the pollution. In the past, the practice of making balipandals did not exist, the mourners sat in the courtyard braving extreme weather conditions and darkness of night. The women mourners wear the traditional dress of Thachanādan Mūppans even today till the end of pollution. Among the Lhota Nāgas, a tribe of Assam, when a death by accident has taken place, the friends of the dead man build a little shed and put some clothes and food in it. On the day after the death, an old man lights a fire in front of the house and sacrifices a cock. All the members of the family come out of the house stark naked and, after stepping over the fire, enter the shed, where they remain six days without speaking to anyone, their food being provided by friends.³⁶⁶ The widows and widowers of the Shuswap of British Columbia are forbidden to touch their own head and body. They must sweat all night in the lodges which

³⁶⁶ William Crook, *op. cit.*, (n-332), p.239.

they construct for the purpose and bathe regularly, after which they rub their bodies with spruce.³⁶⁷

The Kuṇḍuvādiyans, before lowering the corpse into the grave, take away one of the *Kōdis* put on the corpse. After burial the chief mourner covers his body with this cloth and sits in the room of the dead till the end of pollution. At nighttime the mourner must sleep on a plain mat with a long white cloth spread adjacent to the floor. A (spouted) vessel filled with water and in which some betel leaves are put is placed nearby. The vessel is covered by a plantain leaf which has been gently heated in order to make it supple. In the morning the mourner examines the changes that have occurred; 1) in the cloth spread on the floor, 2) in the betel leaves immersed in the vessel, and 3) in the level of water inside it. If any change is noted the mourner comes to the conclusion that the spirit of the dead has visited the room on that night. (It is quite likely that the cloth may get crumbled, betel leaves may lose their colour and the water level in the vessel may fall due to evaporation). The Ūrāḷikuṛumans during pollution avoid vegetables that stain clothes like the bitter gourd, green banana, etc.

As matriliney is still dominant among the Kuṛichiyas of Wynād and as the *taṛawād* or joint family system is still powerful, on the event of a death, either in the *taṛawād* or in the independent houses outside, the dead body is laid at the *taṛawād* and is buried in the common graveyard and all the funeral

³⁶⁷ Boas, *Sixth Report on the Western Tribes of Canada*, p.91, cited in Bendann, *op.cit.*, p.132.

ceremonies including the rituals of pollution, are observed there. Death pollution affects all the members (normally not less than thirty) of the Kuṛichiya *taṛawād*. The most important rite to be observed by all the members of the *taṛawād* is the daily bath. A group of mourners sit in the room of the dead for the first three days after the death without sleeping. They chant songs continuously and this is believed to prevent the entry of evil spirits into the *taṛawād*. They also place water in a goblet about which reference has been made earlier. Before the burial, Kuṛichiyas take the waist-thread, a knife, a coin and a lime-box all of which are put in the courtyard to fix the date of the *Adiyanthiram* or the closing ceremony of the pollution period. The *Kāraṇavaṛ* of the *taṛawād*, the *Nāṭṭupūppan* or the head of the clan and the family members fix the date of the last rite avoiding Tuesdays and Fridays which are considered inauspicious. The body of those who die of unnatural reasons will not be allowed to be taken into the *taṛawād*, but pollution is observed by the family members. The Kuṛichiyas of Kaṇṇavam during the period of pollution wash their body with *tāḷi*, a kind of shampoo made from the vine called *paṛatāḷi*; they also use the bark of the rosewood tree for washing. This bark has to be taken only with the help of a sharp-edged stone and by a non-kinsman. The mourners, at intervals, remind the persons standing outside the house about pollution so that they may not enter the house. On the second day of the burial the person who cuts poles for making the bier pounds the paddy and cooks the rice in the courtyard of the dead

person's house. The relatives of the dead in the house go for bath in streams or river and return to the house. They consume gruel with the help of a folded jack leaf and again go for bath. This gruel is known as *Paṭṭiṇikanji*.

On the seventh day of pollution the chief mourner and relatives of the Wayanādan Pathiyans go to the cremation ground and collect the bones and ashes in a heap. They offer cooked rice to crows on plantain leaves in three directions and return to their house. Among the Muḷḷakuṛumans the ashes of those who are cremated are floated in a small stream by the daughters of the deceased in the special area allotted for that purpose. The daughter-in-law of the deceased, after bathing, wear wet clothes, prepare food and place it where the body has been cremated to be taken by the crow. This rite is performed for three consecutive days, starting from the day of death. On the day of death a son or a close relative spreads a mat on the floor of *Daivappura* and invites the deceased person's spirit to lie there. According to tradition, if they do not formally invite him he will not come. Like the Muḷḷakuṛumans, the corpse among the Santhals is cremated near a stream and the remnants of bones are in due course carried in a basket and placed in the current of the Damodar River.³⁶⁸ The Akoa Pigmies, after cremation, collect the ashes on pieces of bark and throw them into a stream or marsh.³⁶⁹ For a whole year, the widow/widower of the Adiyāns is not supposed to laugh, have bath, change

³⁶⁸ G.S. Ghurye, *The Scheduled Tribes*, Bombay, 1959, Second edition, p. 256.

³⁶⁹ Carleton. S. Coon, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

clothes, shave, cut hair, eat delicious food (he/she should eat only cooked rice with green chillies), use ornaments or wear coloured dresses, take medicine in illness or pray. They should use only plantain leaf, instead of plates for taking food. He/she also has to refrain from remarrying during this period. If any one violates these taboos, they will be punished with a *thappu* and boycotted by others. But today they are allowed to bathe without using oil and soap, to change clothes and to go for work; the restrictions imposed upon shaving, cutting of the hair and eating delicious food still persist. It is not possible now to refrain from work for long: earlier kinsmen, clansmen and the *janmi* had supplied grains and vegetables for a full year, which was enough for their sustenance. Decline of agriculture and the *janmi* system led to the adoption of work based on daily wages, and with the break-up of the traditional feudal bondages the customary practices too have disappeared.

Death entails certain strict restrictions upon the widow/widower. For instance, in the Kutu tribe of Congo, widows observe mourning for three lunar months. They shave their heads, strip themselves almost naked, daub their bodies all over with white clay, and pass the whole of the three months in the house without speaking.³⁷⁰ In the Mekeo of British New Guyana a widower forfeits all civil rights. He is an outcast in the true sense of the term. He is not allowed to go in public, he cannot cultivate his garden and is

³⁷⁰ Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-95), p. 41.

forbidden to fish or hunt except at night.³⁷¹ We find that the Adiyān widow is allowed to take bath only at the night-time. After the death of the spouse, a Toda widow/widower wears the cloak in a particular way: “The cloak of the surviving spouse is pulled over his or her head during the funeral and worn like this until the end of the ceremony. The spouse uncovers his or her head just before bowing to the stone after the pot-breaking rite. In times past, when a second funeral was held, the widow’s head had to stay covered until the pot-breaking at the end of the second ceremony, perhaps more than a year later....A woman suffering from funeral pollution cannot receive butter from the dairy. A man in this state may, however continue to milk domestic buffaloes”.³⁷² The widow/widower of the *Aṛaṇādans* should sit in a corner of the house after preparing food for his/her wife/husband and he/she ought to eat only the food prepared and served to his/her deceased spouse. After a central Eskimo is buried the mourners shut themselves for three days in the hut in which he died.³⁷³ Among the Mewang Rai of East Nepal, the *Kiriya Putra* (i.e., the main mourner) even abstains from eating rice altogether and sits in the most sacred corner of the house not being allowed to speak.³⁷⁴ A widow of the Malamutthans has to put a wet cloth over her head till the end of the funeral pollution.

³⁷¹ Guis ‘Les Canaques: Mort-deuil’, *Mission Catholiques*, Vol XXXIX, 1902, P. 208, cited in Bendann, *op. cit.*, p.236.

³⁷² Anthony. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, P.234.

³⁷³ Boas, “Central Eskimo Sixth Annual report”, *Bureau of Ethnology*, 1888, p. 614 Cited in Bendann, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

³⁷⁴ Martin Goenzle, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

The *Araṇādan* mourner takes an anklet in his hands till the end of the pollution; he puts it down only while washing or eating. The mourners and the family members take food only twice during the mourning period. Among the Koṛagas, other families do not accept food or water from the deceased's family in mourning for nine days in case the deceased happens to be a child and fifteen days in case of an adult.³⁷⁵ The Chōlanāikkans and the Malamutthans of Chōkkād prefer to fast during the day of the death; but the Chōlanāikkans serve black tea and food to all those who attend the funeral ceremony. Among the Malamutthans of Viṭṭikkunnu, on the third day of death pollution, a Vannan (a man belonging to washerman caste) arrives to purify the house of the deceased by sprinkling water mixed with cow dung and he is given a feast in recognition of his service. This purification ceremony is called *Mūnnāntali* or *Muntali*. The custom is that the remaining portion of the food of the feast should be distributed among all the Vannāns of that locality. The tribesmen are to suspend work till the completion of this ceremony; otherwise the knife they use for clearing the forest would cut their own body. Similarly among the Rajpur of Orissa, only on the tenth day all used clothes are washed by the washermen and males get their hair cut and females get their nails cut by the barber. Thereafter all take purificatory bath.³⁷⁶ The Malappaṇikkans on the seventh day of pollution perform a rite known as

³⁷⁵ S.T. Das, *op. cit.*, p.178.

³⁷⁶ Bhageerathi Choudhury in Sachidananda and R.R. Prasad ed., *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, New Delhi, 1998, p. 867.

Kaṇṇōk, one similar to that of the Parayar. The ceremony is related to the body purification of the relatives who gather and wail together at the spot where the death took place. Before the commencement of wailing the bodies of the relatives are purified by sprinkling water mixed with basil leaves by the headman.

Among the Māvilāns the *Kaṛmi* tears out a small piece of cloth from the dress of the deceased at the time of the burial. The nephew of the deceased wraps his knife³⁷⁷ with this cloth and puts it inside his waist belt. For three days he has to take bath by plunging in a stream with the knife there and the cloth is eventually floated in the running water on the third day. The cloth floated away symbolizes the body of the deceased. On the second day of pollution the nephews prepare at the back part of the house a kind of porridge which would be consumed by three persons-this is called *Pattinikkanji*. As in the case of the Māvilāns, the chief mourner of the Wayanādan Kādar takes away a piece of cloth from the many ones put on the corpse. After bathing in a *Kēṇi* (temporary well on the river bed), he soaks it in water, squeezes it and then covers his head with it. Then, he covers a wooden stool inside the house with a new cloth and puts a brass pot on it, filled with water drawn from the well by himself- which has to stay there till the end of pollution. He himself prepares food, places the cooked rice along with *pāpad* in the courtyard with his left hand, and then taking a spouted vessel filled with water with both his

³⁷⁷ The belief behind which is that the spirits are scared of metals like iron.

hands prays to his ancestors as well as to the spirit of the newly dead person and then offers food to the crows. Likewise, the Ūraḷikuṟumans offer water and cooked hand-pound rice to the deceased inside the house. They believe that till the end of the pollution period the spirit of the dead visits the house everyday.

Among the Karimpālans, apart from the close relatives, a long chain of people outside the family circle, including the grave-diggers and the carriers of the corpse, too get polluted and they have to abstain from work during the pollution period. These results in severe economic strain for the people under pollution so the Karimpālans are very particular that the period of pollution should be strictly observed and successfully completed. This is because any evidences to the contrary may end up in a punitive extension of pollution for a further period of 3 months. In the same way, the Toda clansmen who participate in the earth-throwing or *Puzhutupimi* ceremony, diggers, bier-carriers, dairyman etc are polluted along with family members. A person who has incurred *ichchil* or pollution remains so till the next new moon.³⁷⁸ The grave digger of Huppa Indians sits in silence near firewood away from the rest and each night goes to the grave carrying over his head a bough of Douglas Spruce so as not to glance at the sky or at anyone, thereby contaminating them. After various other ceremonies, his clothes and dishes are hid on the fourth day and then are thrown into the river. Finally all those

³⁷⁸ W.H.R. Rivers, *op. cit.*, pp. 367-371.

who have been under taboo are washed again with medicine and again they bathe.³⁷⁹ The Karimpālans keep water in a leaf bowl and food in a plate inside as well as outside the house till the end of the pollution. As regards the Paṇiyas, the headman, after putting cooked rice on the grave, offers it to the crow for seven days after a death. A. A. D. Luiz points out that “when a death occurs, during the busy week of agricultural operation, when refraining from which would affect their earnings considerably, they have a ceremony by which the spirit of the deceased is preserved in a pot and the ceremonies are conducted when they are free”.³⁸⁰ The chief mourner among the Paṇiyas ties holy threads round his arms, his waist and his legs till the end of pollution so that he may not be harmed by the spirit of the dead. The chief mourner and two others among the Malamalasar take food only once in a day till the end of pollution. The mourners among the Iruḷas eat only porridge without salt or fried Chama. The Mudugas on the night of the burial day draw a circle with ash in the courtyard of every house in the settlement where death has occurred. They believe that otherwise the spirit would deposit the pieces of the body of the dead in the pots of the clansmen and the ash circle is intended to prevent this calamity. They offer cooked rice to crows till the end of pollution placing it in a plantain leaf on the winnowing basket somewhere inside the house. It is customary among the Paṇiyas to appoint the deceased person’s sister’s or brother’s daughters, who are known as *Melikkārathi* or

³⁷⁹ Goddard, *Life and Culture of the Hupa*, pp 72-73, cited in Bendann, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

³⁸⁰ A. A. D. Luiz, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

Balikkārathi, to perform certain special rites. She bathes and fasts daily and prepares food for the mourners. She also offers cooked rice to the spirit three times daily for three days till the end of the last rite. Among the Adiyāns, on the second day of the death of a husband/wife, the *Chemmi* of the settlement tonsures his head as part of pollution. According to Bendann, the belief associated with hair-cutting is that the spirits attach themselves to the hair.³⁸¹ After the funeral of a Toroas, a sub-caste in Toda clan, close male relatives shave their heads completely while close female relatives cut their ringlets to chin level.³⁸² The widow and widowers of a departed native of the Hood peninsula in British Guyana also shave their heads and blacken their bodies.³⁸³

The Kāṭṭunāikkans, Malappaṇikkans, Malasar, Malamalar, Iruḷas, Mudugas, Kuṟumbas, Ēravāḷans, Adiyāns, Koṟagas and the Paṇiyas have the custom of revisiting the grave after the burial. The Kāṭṭunāikkans do it on the day the pollution ends; the Malasar on the next day of the termination of pollution. They also pour milk into the hole left on the grave on the removal of the green stick stuck there at the time of burial. The Iruḷas call their grave-visit *Maṟuthadi Pāḱku*. Mudugas and Kuṟumbas call it *Maṟusāvu* and *Maṟuthadi* respectively. To the Malamalar it is *Maṟunāḷu Nōḱkal*, and is on

³⁸¹ E. Bendann, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

³⁸² Anthony. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, p.233.

³⁸³ J. G. Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-7), p. 204.

the next day of the burial. On the seventh day also a group of ten or twenty members, consisting of both men and women, once again visit the grave. The Iruḷas, Mudugas, Kuṟumbas, Adiyāns (3 persons) and in the case of Ēṟavāḷans a group consisting of the *Mūppan* and five others visit the grave on the second day after the funeral. The grave-visit of the Paṇiyas is really interesting: on the first day three persons visit the grave, on the second day two persons and on the third day the Chemmi or the headman alone visits the grave. The Koṟagas visit their grave only at the time of *Adiyanthiram* or last rite. The tribes in Malabar believe that the visit to the grave is a must for they have to ascertain whether the dead has come out of the grave or the body of the deceased has been carried away by the sorcerers. In the past, due to the fear of the dead, they had buried the dead in a hurry in shallow pits, which might most probably have led the corpse to be carried away by wild beasts; the visit was intended to inspect this state of exigency and to rebury the corpse if necessary; but despite careful and scientific burial in recent years, the old practice continues in a ritualistic manner. Like the tribes in Malabar, those of the other parts of India and the world over follow the practice of grave revisit. Among the Warramunga of Australia a mound of earth is raised on the exact spot where a man died. A few days after the death a visit is paid to this spot to see if the tracks of any individual or living creature can be found. By such

marks the totem of the culprit is found.³⁸⁴ Among the Todas of the Nilgiris, “on the following morning after burial, a close male relative (father, son or husband) returns to the cremation site. If any part of the corpse has survived the flames, he will re-burn it and then sweep up the ashes into a pile”.³⁸⁵ Through the pollution period the tone of death changes from grief to resignation and finally to acceptance. Pollution ends in most cases with the bathing of the mourners and kinsmen, cutting of the hair and moustache by the male and taking of non-vegetarian food. Besides this, for tribes such as Karimpālans and Kuṇḍuvādiyans, *Pula* is removed by sprinkling consecrated water from the temple. In the past, the *Changāthi* of the Karimpālans after bathing from the temple pond and taking sacred water from the temple return to the house without speaking to or touching anybody to avoid the water being polluted. The pollution of the deceased *teyyam* dancers of Māvilāns, Karimpalrar and Kanaladis end only after the sacred rites are performed by the Nambūthiris on the day of *Adiyanthiram*. Likewise the relatives of a deceased Kodayam Kottai Maravas bathe on the sixteenth day after a death and on the seventeenth the *Puṇyagavachanam*, or purification, takes place, followed by an oil bath taken by the *karmakarta* or funeral

³⁸⁴ Spencer and Gillen, *Northern tribes of Central Australia*, p. 526, cited in E. Bendann, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

³⁸⁵ Anthony. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, p.228.

official.³⁸⁶ In Samoa (Melanesia), the fifth day of mourning is a day of purification. The inhabitants bathe the face and hands with hot water, and then they are regarded as 'clean' and resume the usual time and method of eating.³⁸⁷

On the day of the abolition of Pula, the mourners of the tribes like Wayanādan Kādar, Mullukurumar and Kuṇḍuvādiyans follow special modes of bathing. In the case of the Wayanādan Pathiyans, on the final day of the Pula, the *Munnūttan* (a Caste man) sprinkles oil over the mourners and on those who had touched the corpse. A cloth is spread on the courtyard and all the mourners keep their foot on it before going for bathing. In the past Kuṇḍuvādiyans bathed either in streams or rivers, then they wore clothes washed by *Vaṇṇāthi* (woman from washermen caste). These clothes had been taken from the house of the dead on the day of the death. The washed clothes are known as *Vaṇṇāthi Māttu*. All mourners and relatives of the dead Muḷḷakuṛuman gather before the *Daivappura* on the day of the end of the pollution. They are supplied with gingelli oil for bathing. The uncle of the deceased supplies oil to men and the sisters of the deceased to women. In the past the person who brought this oil was an oil monger known as *Kandāmala Nair* who was called *Eṇṇa-Nair* or *Pola-Nair* by the Muḷḷakuṛumans. As a

³⁸⁶ Fawcett, "The Kondayamkottai Maravas, a Dravidian Tribe of Tinneveli, Southern India", *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, London, 1903, Vol. XXXIII, pp.57-65.

³⁸⁷ Turner, *Nineteen years in Polynesia*, p. 288, cited in Bendann, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

reward for his service, he was presented with dried meat. He poured the oil with a folded leaf of the jack tree with his right hand. But this practice has disappeared from their funeral rites today. It is compulsory even today to receive oil in the right hand and after smearing it on the body, nobody is supposed to enter his/her house without bathing.

In former days *Adiyanthiram* of the deceased was fixed after the disposal of the dead, by the headman and the close relatives of the departed. At that time it was a tradition among the tribes that all those who attended the funeral should definitely participate in it. There was no need of formal invitation. Today the headman and the close affines formally invite all those who attend the funeral rites. Recently tribal relations too are becoming formal. In this respect the Wayanādan and Kaṇṇavam Kuṛichiyas and Koṛagas follow certain peculiar customs. The day is fixed by the *Kāraṇavar* and the close relatives after bringing the waist thread, coin, and lime box of the dead (all these have been removed from the corpse and kept carefully) to the verandah. The Kaṇṇavam Kuṛichiyas on the day of the abolition of pollution grind the barks of *Vāka* tree (*Acacia Adoratissima*) and soak it in a mixture of cow dung and tender coconut water and sprinkle it over all parts of the house of the deceased to remove pollution. All mourners bathe after smearing *Vāka* paste on their body. Among the Koṛagas, the three *Nāṭṭu Mūthavar* who get possessed on the occurrence of death, announce the day of the *Adiyanthiram*. Among the Gōnd and Bhūmia of Eastern Mandala on the

third day after the funeral (*Tijra*, the third day), relatives and fellow villagers again assemble at the house of mourning and ask the head of the family on what date he will be able to perform the great funeral feast. If at the moment the deceased person's family cannot afford the heavy expenses of such a feast, it may be postponed to a more convenient time. If the funeral feast is to be postponed, the head of the mourning family informs the caste elders of his decision and gives them a rupee for liquor. He also invites all the men who attended the funeral for a dinner.³⁸⁸ On the fifth day after the funeral of Santa Cruz islanders (in Malenesia) a feast commemorates the end of the burial ceremonies.³⁸⁹

The worship of the newly departed begins from the day of the *Adiyanthiram*, and thereafter the deceased becomes a member of the land of the dead.

Sending of the Widow and Property Distribution

Death not only represents loss, grief and rituals but it entails certain social and legal responsibilities too. In former days, in the case of the death of a married male, after the deceased had been buried and the necessary rites performed, the family of the deceased had the duty of disposing of the deceased person's property and sending of his wife to her natal home. Almost all tribes of Malabar, in the past, had followed matrilineal system of

³⁸⁸ Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

³⁸⁹ R.H. Codrington, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-64.

inheritance and the head of the family according to this system was the *Kāraṇavaṛ* or eldest maternal uncle. He had the right to look after his nephews, nieces and sisters. If a niece became a widow, it was the duty of the *Kāraṇavaṛ* to look after her and her children. Moreover, many tribes in Malabar didn't permit widow marriage even though the widow was young or childless. That was why it became compulsory to send a widow to her natal home. Besides, the system of bride price had been in prevalence and that provided her a share in her husband's property.

Today, the customs associated with widowhood has lost their rigidity; widows are sent off just symbolically to their natal homes, and they return after the end of funeral rites. In the case of tribes like the Māvilāns, the widow keeps herself away in a neighbouring house and returns after a few hours. Widow marriage is permitted now in the case of young women and they can inherit her dead husband's property too. The childless and aged widows after the funeral rites return to their natal homes. Earlier the family of the dead male had no right over their children but now with the development of patriarchal norms children are being treated as the members of the family of the deceased male. The Kādar, Malasar, Ēṛavāḷans, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Koṛagas, Malayāḷar, Wayanādan Pathiyans, Kaḷanādi, Paṇiyas, Iruḷas, Mudugas, Kuṛumbas, Aṛaṇādans, Chōlanāikkans, Malamutthans, Malappaṇikkans, Āḷar, Thachanādan Mūppans and the Kuṇḍuvādiyans today send their widows,

symbolically, to their natal homes. Among the Malamalasar, even today, widows are not allowed to remarry even if they are young or childless.

In widow marriage, the tribes in Malabar follow certain peculiar traditions. Among the Malayālar, a widow is not allowed to remarry her brothers-in-law and the widower his sisters-in-law. Similarly the Chōlanāikkans do not allow men to remarry their elder sisters-in-law. The Iruḷas do not allow widowers to remarry their sisters-in-law. On the contrary the Kuṟumbas allow the widow to remarry the husband's elder or younger brothers or any clansmen of her deceased husband's settlement, but with the consent of her own parents. If she dies in her second marital life, her dead body has to be taken to her natal home by her parents. If a young Thachanadan Mūppan -widow engages in a second marriage, she has to pay a *Kāṇappaṇam* of 25 paise to her husband's *Pādi Mūppan*. Her marriage is conducted in a simple manner without any rituals at her husband's *Pādi*. The Muḷḷakuṟumans also allow the widower to marry their sisters-in-law.

The widows in the past were sent off from the deceased husband's house almost empty-handed. Among the Wayanādan Pathiyans, a widow was given just a piece of cloth by the *Kāraṇavar* of the deceased husband and she was not supposed to have any right to take anything else from her husband's house. If she had male children, they were given the father's knife and vessels. The Wayanādan Kādar, on the other hand, sends the widow with new

clothes and the utensils that she had used like the spouted vessels and bronze plates. The Mavilan widow was given new clothes, money, and a piece of *Pudava* (the new piece of cloth handed over by the husband to the wife) and her children were entrusted to the care of the widow's *Kāraṇavaṛ* at the time of marriage by her dead husband's *Kāraṇavaṛ*. If a woman died in her husband's hamlet, her utensils and clothes were brought back by her *Kāraṇavaṛ* to her natal home.

Among the Muḷḷakuṛumans, there is a strange ritual associated with widowhood after the husband's death. On the completion of pollution the brothers of the widow try to take her and her children to her natal home forcibly but, the oracle, who gets possessed by the spirit of the deceased husband, in a frenzy puts her forcibly into the *Daivappura*. If she is childless, this rite is not performed. Among the Karimpālans, a widow is taken by her *Kāraṇavaṛ* to her natal home after receiving her utensils, her husbands' implements and new clothes. If a widow dies, after her *Adiyanthiram* her brothers return her children to her husband's *Kāraṇavaṛ* with an offering of toddy and money to her clan deity and with the consent of the *Changāthi*. This custom is known as *Pathum Muthalum Kodukkal*. Among the Kaṇṇavam Kuṛichiyas, after an ancestral ritual known as *Pōthiyāttam*, a widow is given 16 rupees as *Kāṇam* along with her husband's movable properties by her father-in-law and the younger brother-in-law. Among the Wayanādan Kuṛichiyas, two or three years after the last funeral rites, the

widow is sent to her natal home. She is given a *Nilaviḷakku*, a vessel, a sickle and an amount of money as expense for one year. Among the Adiyāns, at the end of one year, i.e. at the time of *Kākkappula*, the widow is given a *Kiṇṇam* or brass vessel, a new sari and some ornaments by her deceased husband's family. Likewise the deceased wife's family gives a new shirt, a *mundu* and three hundred rupees to her husband by his deceased wife's family. If the widow of an Ūrāḷikuruman has grown up children, she either stays at her husband's house, or returns to her natal home after receiving new clothes from her father-in-law or mother-in-law. Among the Kuṟumbas, the widow asks her parents to give her a share from their cattle. It is known as *Śīta*. Among the Thachanādan Mūppans, when a widow leaves after her husband's death, "his relations give her one *pothi* (50 seers) of paddy, an earthen pot, a scythe, a spade, a cloth and a bottle of oil".³⁹⁰ In the past, among all tribes, on the death of the headman, his property was inherited only by the male issues since both the office of the head and his property, was strictly patriarchal and patrilineal. This tradition is slowly changing today.

The nature of property distribution among widows has certain universal characteristics. "In the case of a West African tribe known as Lo Wiilli, the widows are inherited with deceased person's patrilineage. Only members of the same or alternate generation can marry her without repayment of bride wealth, and a further restriction prevents elder 'brothers' from

³⁹⁰ C. Gopalan Nair, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

marrying the widows of junior siblings. If a Lo Wiilli widow marries anyone other than a member of the dead man's patrilineage, then this group are entitled to demand the return of the whole of the bride wealth so far paid".³⁹¹ Among the Gōnd and Bhūmia, a widow may return to her own parents the expenses which the family of her late husband incurred at her remarriage. If a widow has no children, she often prefers to return to her parents. After her husband's death, a woman should remarry one of her kinsmen. As a matter of fact, her husband's younger brother (*Dewar*) has the first right to marry her whether he already has a wife or not. If the younger brother of the deceased husband surrenders his right over the widow, another man may marry her if she consents.³⁹²

³⁹¹ J. Goody, *op. cit.*, pp. 333-334.

³⁹² Stephen Fuchs, *op. cit.*, pp. 303-305.

CHAPTER 4
ANCESTOR WORSHIP AS TRIBAL
RELIGION

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

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

absolute ruler of all ancestral spirits. The actual clan head (the oldest man) derives his absolutism from his association with the ancestral spirits, whose power he can invoke to enforce his decrees.¹

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

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

¹ Cited in *Ancestor Worship. com* (source: Leslie Spier, University of New Mexico)

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

² E.B. Taylor, *Primitive Culture* ii, London, 1871, p.113.

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

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

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

³ Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, i, New York, 1896, p.411.

Hoebel and Everett. L. Frost affirms the static nature of tribal religion thus: “Social conservatism is a characteristic feature of ancestor-worshipping religions. The ancestors as (mere) preceptors do not favour change from the social practices, they knew while alive. Since they punish moral lapses with death and illness and their standards are the old ones, the religious sanctions toward conformity are powerful”.⁴

Name of the Dead and their Visiting Times:

The names of the spirit of the deceased vary from tribe to tribe in Malabar. It is called *Pēyi* by Iruḷas, Kāṭṭunāikkans, and Āḷar. Mudugas and Kuṟumbas call it *Pijād*. Karimpālans, Māvilāns, Thachanādan Mūppans, Kaṇṇavam Kuṟichiyas and Adiyāns call it *Kūḷi*. The name assigned to it by the Koṟagas is *Kuḷa*. For Muḷḷakuṟumans it is *Chāthi* and for Malasar, Ēṟavāḷans, Kaḷanādis, Wayanādan Kādar, Aṟaṇādans, Chōlanāikkans and Malappaṇikkans it is *Pṟētam*. Malamalasar and Paṇiyas call it *Kaṟuppu* and *Pēna* respectively. It must be noted here that in certain cases the spirit of the dead is given a special name by some of the tribes. This is perhaps due to the peculiar circumstances that led to a person’s death or because of any other similar valid reason. For instance, while the Karimpālans normally call the spirit of the dead *Kūḷi*, it is called *Vīran* if the death of the person is the result of suicide. Similarly, among the Kāṭṭunāikkans, an unmarried dead person’s

⁴ E. Adamson Hoebel and Everett. L. Frost, *Cultural and Social Anthropology*, New York, 1976, p.360.

spirit is known as *Virika* instead of *Pēyi* which is the general name. Among the Malasar, the spirit of a dead woman is *Mōhini* instead of *Prētam*. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Buchanan reported that the Paniya maintained such a distinction between two kinds of spirits: “after death, the spirit of good men becomes ‘*Cūlis*’ while those of bad men are called ‘*Paynays*’”.⁵

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

Land of the Dead:

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

⁵ Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, Vol. II, New Delhi, 1988, p.493.

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

The path leading to the land of the dead is hazardous. Tribes believe that spirits have to pass through long dark caverns to reach the abode of the dead. In anticipation of such a long journey, tribes like the Iruḷas and the Kuṛichiyas keep oil lamps along with the corpses in the burial pits so as to enable the spirits to light up the dark and dangerous path leading to their destination. Certain other tribes believe that spirits will have to cross rivers to reach their abode in the other world and they keep money with the corpses or in the mouths of the corpses so as to enable them to pay the ferry charges. Only spirits of good people reach the land of the dead while the spirits of evil people reach a place of raging fire, hot water and wild beasts. According to

Francis Buchanan, “Cadar after death, the spirits of good men reside with a God named *Mudivirum* while those of wicked men go to a bad place”.⁶

Tribes like the Karimpālans, Thachanādan Müppans, Malamutthans, Malappañikkans, Kuṇḍuvādiyans and Ēṛavāḷans believe that spirits of the newly dead merge with those ones who are already in the land of the dead, which they believe, is situated in the sky. The Kuṛumbas believe that spirits live on a hill, which lie a little away from their settlement and is known as *Nikālumalai*. The Muduga abode of the spirits is known as *Lōka*. The *Lōka* is divided into two: the benevolent spirits go to *Mel-Lōka* and malevolent spirits to *Ādi-Lōka*. For the Iruḷas the abode of the spirit of the benevolent is the *Lōka* of flowers and of the malevolent spirit is the *Lōka* of worms. The abode of the spirits among the Ūrālikuṛumans is the *Daivathār Mandapam* and among Muḷḷakuṛumans and Kāṭṭunāikkans it is *Daivappura*.

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

⁶ Francis Buchanan, *op. cit.*, p.339.

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

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

⁷ Umacharan Mohanty ed., *Tribal Culture and Tribal Welfare, Selected Papers by Prof. A. Aiyappan*, Madras, 1988, p.121.

⁸ Cited in Hartland from *Transactions of Royal Asiatic Society* i, 72, 1b, xii, in James Hastings ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Edinburgh, 1964, p.452.

canoe, or at all events a piece of one, beside a grave, to enable the soul of the dead to voyage to *Adiri*, the land of departed spirits".⁹ The Gārōs had believed that the souls of the dead can never find their way unaided to the spirit-land; so at the cremation-ground they kill a dog and burn it with the corpse to guide the dead man's soul to *Chikmang*, the land of souls.¹⁰

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

Spirit as Shadow:

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

⁹ G. Landtman, *The Kivai Papuans of British New Guinea*, p.264, cited in Frazer, *Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religions*, Vol. I, London, 1933, p.185.

¹⁰ W.W. Hunter, *Statistical account of Assam*, London, 1879, ii, 154, cited in Frazer, *Ibid.*, p.189. This is in striking similarity to the archaeological findings of dog burial at the Neolithic site of Burzahom.

perishes and the other aspect - the shadow of the person - is transformed into spirit. This shadow travels to the world of the dead. Sometimes the shadows of evildoers enter into animal or human bodies and cause trouble to their kinsfolk. Alfred Metraux observes that a considerable number of South American tribes identify souls with the shadow or as reflection in water or in mirror.¹¹ The Bhūmia and Gōnd also believe in shadows as expressions of dead men. The Bhūmia believe that after death the shadow (*chaen*) becomes an evil spirit (*māri, Bhūt*), which remains near the spot where the corpse was buried or cremated. The Gōnd, on the other hand, prefer to catch the shadow of the deceased in a fish or frog and by some exorcism try to confine it permanently to their house.¹²

Reincarnation of the Soul:

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

¹¹ Alfred Metraux in Leach ed., *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, New York, 1972, p.1051.

¹² Stephen Fuchs, *The Gōnd and Bhūmia of Eastern Mandala*, Bombay, 1968, p. 354.

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

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

¹³ H. Meyer, *Die Barundi*, p.118, cited in JG Frazer, *Aftermath: A supplement to the Golden Bough*, London, 1936, p.349.

¹⁴ WH Furness, "The Ethnography of the Nāgas of Eastern Assam", *Journal of Anthropological Institute* XXXII, 1902, p.463.

Types of Spirits: Benevolent and Malevolent

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

Benevolent spirits and their services to the kinsfolk

Benevolent spirits are revered as house-spirits or domestic deities. Susan Elizabeth Ramirez makes the following remark on the services done by the ancestors to the living and vice versa. “The living periodically visited the complexes to request health and fertility from the ancestors and conduct propitiating rituals, often burning food offerings, singing and dancing. People

believe that they depend on the dead for life, fertility and prosperity".¹⁵ In the Malabar tribal context, the services of the benevolent spirits are solicited in the following situations:

1. **In Hunting:** Tribes like the Malasar, Malamalasar, Kādar, Chōlanāikkans, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Ūrālikuṟumans, Kuṟumbas, Mudugas, Iruḷas and Āḷar, who engage in hunting activities, invoke their ancestors by making offerings to them like cooked food, coconut, bananas, betel leaves and areca nuts before they go out for hunting so that they may succeed in their venture (in their search for game). After returning from hunting, they offer a portion of the cooked meat to their ancestors and only after that they taste their share. Before going out for hunting, some of the mountain people of Formosa invoke the spirits of their ancestors to provide them good game.¹⁶ The Gōnds also make offerings to their ancestors to secure good hunting. The worshipper offers his cherished living objects like cocks, rabbits, etc. to the dearest ancestors.¹⁷

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

¹⁵ Susan Elizabeth Ramirez, Comment to the article of Iszumi Shimada, et al, "An Integrated Analysis of Pre-Hispanic Mortuary Practices, a Middle Sican' case study", *Current Anthropology*, Vol. LV, no.3, June 2004, P 394.

¹⁶ Shinji, "The Life of the Mountain People in Formosa", *Folklore XXVIII*, 1917, p.125.

¹⁷ B.H. Mehta, *Gōnds of the Central Indian Highlands: A Study of the Dynamics of Gōnd Society*, Vol. I, New Delhi, 1984, p.344.

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

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

¹⁸ Fr. Lambert, "Moeurs et superstitions de la tribu Belep Les missions catholiques", xi, 1880, p.239, cited in Frazer, *op.cit.*, (n-9), p. 76.

¹⁹ R.V. Russel, *Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces of India*, iii, London, 1916, pp.105-107.

flowers of the season till he has offered a few drops to the spirits of his forefathers²⁰.

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

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

²⁰ Saratchandra Roy, *The Bihōrs*, Ranchi, 1925, p. 112.

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

In the case of the Kuṛichiyas, before going out for sowing, the *Kāraṇavar* or *Kōmaram* gets possessed and makes offerings of coconut, tender coconut and banana to the *Muni* and to other family gods. The Bavenda of Northern Transvaal invoke and propitiate the ancestor spirits before the sowing and reaping of the corn. In October or November, when the land is ready for sowing, a pot, containing seeds of eleusine, Kafir corn and all the other crops that are to be sown, is carried to the corn field where the family assembles. There a priestess, who is usually the sister (*makhadzi*) of the head of the family, addresses the ancestral spirits, saying “here is food for you, all our spirits; we gave you of every kind of grain, which you may eat. Bring to

us also crops in plenty and prosperity in the coming season".²¹ The Muria Gōnd in India, at harvest time when grain is taken to the threshing floor, throw a little grain to one side, and later collect and eat it in honour of the dead.²²

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

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

²¹ H.A. Stayt, *The Bavenda*, London, 1931, pp.252sq, cited in Frazer, *op.cit.*, (n-9), p.90.

²² B.H. Mehta, *Gōnds of the Central Indian Highlands*, Vol. I, New Delhi, 1984, p.340.

household brews much beer for the day, and a small pot of the beer is set apart for every dead member of the family and kept for two days, after which the beer is drunk by the living.²³ The Lākheres of North East India perform a sacrifice in October to the spirits of their ancestors to induce them to make the crops abundant, the domestic animals fertile and healthy and to give good hunting. At the same time the sacrifice is intended to please the spirits of the rice and maize and to prevent them from leaving the village. For this ceremony the Lākheres make a broad road, in front of the village for the spirits of the dead to come along, and when it is ready the men of the village march in procession up and down the road, with drums and gongs beating to meet the unseen visitors and escort them to the house where the sacrifice is to take place. After this solemn march the Lākheres of one particular village (*Chappi*) visit the graves of all people who had died within the last three years and place handfuls of every kind of food and flour on the graves for the spirits of the graves to eat. The sacrifice to the dead on this occasion consists of seeds of every kind of food crop anointed with the blood of a fowl. It is deposited at the foot of the main post at the back of the house.²⁴ Among the Tonga of South east Africa the regular national offerings is that of the first fruits to the ancestral spirits.²⁵ The Oraons of India offer the first fruits of the upland rice and of *panicum miliari* to the ancestral spirits at their two annual festivals,

²³ W. Munzinger, *Ostafrikanische Studien* (Schaffhausen 1864), p.473, cited in Frazer, *op.cit.* (n-9), p.90.

²⁴ N.E. Parry, *The Lākheres*, London, 1932, p.445.

²⁵ H.A. Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe* ii, 403sq, cited in Frazer, *op.cit.* (n-9), p.99.

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

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

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

²⁶ Sarat Chandra Roy, *Oraon Religion and Customs*, Ranchi. 1928, p.33.

tribes like the Kaṣanādis, Māvilāns and Karimpālans act not only as oracles for the Gods but also for the ancestors.

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

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

²⁷ R.H. Codrington, *The Melanesians*, Oxford, 1891, pp.209-210.

²⁸ Piers Vitesbsky, *Dialogues with the Dead*, New Delhi, 1993, pp.1-6.

²⁹ William Crook, *Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, Oxford, 1926, p184.

reveals solutions for their troubles. The oracular communication with the ancestor-spirit sometimes happens in the dreams of the mediator (shaman or oracle or *Kōmaram*) also. The Kiwai, a Papuan people of British New Guinea, believe that they can obtain oracular communications directly from the ghosts by questioning the dead man at his grave or by sleeping on the grave, in which case the soul of the departed will visit the sleeper in a dream and give the desired answer.³⁰ The Bhūmia and Gōnd of Jabalpur regard that, in addition to body and shadow, there is in man his life-spirit which is called *Jiw* or *Pran* or *Hansa*. The life-spirit survives the death of a man; it is brought to *Bhagwan*. It has the shape of the man in whom it dwells, but it is small-sized, not bigger than a body. It can leave the body in sleep. The wandering of the life-spirit is revealed to a sleeping man through dreams.³¹

8. **Benevolent Spirit as the Guardian Deity:** It is a universally held concept among tribes that all dead ancestors are not to be adorned with equal status in the realm of ancestor-worship. JG Frazer observes: “on the death of a distinguished man his ghost retains the powers that belonged to him in life, in greater activity and with stronger force; his ghost therefore is powerful, and so long as he is remembered, the aid of his powers is sought and worship is offered to him”.³² In Malabar, the spirits of the founders of a family or *tarawād*, who were efficient, powerful, courageous and benevolent in real life,

³⁰ G. Landtman, *The Kiwai Papuans of British New Guinea*, p.295, cited in Frazer, *op.cit.*, (n-9), p.121.

³¹ Stephen Fuchs, *The Gōnd and Bhūmia of Eastern Mandala*, Bombay, 1968, pp.354-355.

³² J.G. Frazer, *op.cit.*, (n-9), p.34.

are revered as gods. Though spirits of common men are worshipped as protectors of their clan, family and children, the founder-spirit has a pre-eminent position. The founder-spirit is considered as the guardian deity of the family, lineage or *taṛawād*. E.B. Taylor observes: "the worship of a dead ancestor as a guardian is recorded from all parts of the world".³³ Among the Bantu tribes of Africa, every lineage and clan has its distinct ancestral deities, who are gods to their descendants but who are ignored by the members of other kinship groups.³⁴ The Birhōrs rever their ancestral spirits, which each family installs in an inner tabernacle or shrine of the hut and propitiates with offerings of food and drink.³⁵

The guardian deities of Malabar tribes, worshipped from generation to generation without any break, despite the overwhelming contacts the tribes have with people of an advanced technology, render valuable services to their kinsfolk and protect them from the attack of malevolent spirits. There are no visual images for these spirits except that their presence is felt through certain material belongings kept in a special room of the house or *taṛawād*. Of course, not all tribes in Malabar have such guardian deities. Tribes like the Kuṛichiyas of both Wynād and Kaṇṇvam, Āḷar, Koṛagas, Paniyas, Kaḷanādis and Karimpalāns have such kinds of ancestors. A room of the *taṛawād* of each Wayanādan Kuṛichiyān, known as *Koṭṭil* or *Nikal Muṛi* (shadow-room), is

³³ E.B. Taylor, *Primitive Culture*, Vol. II, London, 1871, p.187.

³⁴ E. Adamson Hoebel and Everett L Frost, *Cultural and Social Anthropology*, New York, 1976, pp. 358-359.

³⁵ Saratchandra Roy, *The Birhōrs*, Ranchi, 1925, pp.305.

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

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

³⁶ P.R.T. Gurdon, *The Khāsis*, Delhi, 1975, p. 112.

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

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

³⁷ Told in an interview by Kelu, Kāraṇavar of Kakkottara Kuṛichiya Tarawād, Vellamunda, Wynād, 18th April 2005.

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

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

³⁸ Kathleen Gough, "Cult of the Dead Among the Nayars", in *Traditional India: Structure and Change*, edited by Milton Singer, Philadelphia, 1959, pp. 242-243.

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

The Paṇiya believe that spirits of good persons become benevolent spirits. Hence they believe that their good and great ancestors have become *Pēna*. These virtuous ancestors who have supernatural powers are worshipped as guardian-spirits. Remnants of clothes of their illustrious ancestors are preserved by the Paṇiya in a six-inch square box called *Pōya* made of Palmyra leaves. This box is provided with a lid, which has a small hole in it so that coins may be inserted in the box. This sacred box is hung on the roof in a corner of the headman's room. The old clothes inside the box are believed to be symbols of the spirits of their great ancestors. A raised mud platform called *taṛa* is erected in the corner of the room exactly below the *Pōya*. During annual festive occasions the *Chemmi* light a ritual oil lamp and offer their great ancestors cooked rice, *papad* and curries on the *taṛa*. The other members of the hamlet offer coconuts and money. Special offerings are made when

epidemics like cholera occur. A rite known as *Maraduchavittal*³⁹ is performed by the *Āṭṭāḷi*, before the *Pēnathara*, to cure a disease. The patient is asked to sit facing the *Pēnathara* while the *Āṭṭāḷi* invokes the displeased spirits by burning an incense stick and as he gets possessed he drops the coins known as *Maradu* (fine) offered by the relatives of the patient on the floor, stamps on it for a while and requests the spirits to accept it. If the coin had fallen on the *Pēnathara* it is symbolic of the acceptance of the offering by the Pēna. The coins are collected later by the *Chemmi* and are put into the *Pōya* box and are later used for the annual ancestor-ceremonies. Women who are in their menstrual period are not allowed to enter the room of *Pōya*.

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

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

³⁹ Viswanathan Nair, *Tribal Health and Medicine in Kerala: a Study in Interrelationship Between Habitat, Health, Medicine, Society and Culture*, PhD Dissertation, University of Calicut, 1985, p.187

appear in their dreams and warn them. Tribes of Malabar in early days had kept a portion of their daily food to their ancestors; conditions of poverty combined with a slow erosion of ritual rigidity have led to the giving up of this practice today. Well-off tribes like the Kuṛichiyas, Muḷḷakuṛumans, Malayālar and Wayanādan Pathiyar continue this practice even today.

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

The tribes in Malabar offer food and money to their ancestors on auspicious occasions like marriage, birth of an infant or the naming or ear-boring ceremony of a child. On these occasions, the headman of the settlement

takes a leading role in the celebrations. The *teyyam* dancers of tribes like the Kaḷanādis, Karimpālans and Māvilāns consult their ancestors before performing the *teyyam* of a particular ancestor-deity and make offerings to them of money, betel-leaves and areca-nuts. The tribes have now started going to Sabarimala, the temple of Lord Ayyappa, after undergoing the usual fasting and austerities of 41 days. Before leaving their hamlet for the pilgrimage they offer sacrifices and prayers to their ancestors.

It is a custom among the Kaṇṇavam Kuṛichiyas to consult their oracles on the functions to be held before and after the solemnizing of a marriage. Thus matters such as the fixing of the day and time of the marriage, the solemnizing of the marriage, the functions to be held on the reception day, etc are consulted with the oracles. The matters are discussed and sanctified by the oracles at the residence of the bride and bridegroom respectively. They chant the *mozhi* to propitiate the ancestral-spirits and family deities. The bridegroom and his party enter the house of the bride only after making offerings to the ancestors, and remembering the *Kāraṇavars* of seven generations. Bride's oracle accompanies her on the journey to the house of the bridegroom with his party. When they reach the house, the oracle chants the *mozhi*, cuts a branch of the Pāla tree and puts it on his neck and gets possessed. The Pāla tree is believed to be the abode of the spirits and through the branch the spirits enter his body. The oracle asks questions on family matters and the relatives of the bridegroom answer them.

The Karimpālans perform a ritual known as *Kūḷiyādikkal* one year after a girl's marriage. The headman, *Āṭṭiyan*,⁴⁰ *Changāthi* and the nephew of the married woman go to the husband's house and make offerings to the *Kūḷi* of that settlement. It is also known as *Kalasa-nritham* because the *Āṭṭiyan* carries a brass pot on his head and dances in frenzy. Dressed up in new clothes, with a red silk round his waist and holding a dagger in his right hand, the *Āṭṭiyan*, after making offering in money and toddy to the ancestors of married woman's settlement, analyses the post-marital situation, points out the shortcomings if any and gives advice to the couple for a happy and prosperous life. The ritual is also intended as an offering to the ancestors of the husband's settlement who looked after the girl for the whole year.

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

⁴⁰ *Āṭṭiyan*, who is also known as *Āttukāran* or *Āruthal*, is the mediator between the living and the dead. Whenever there is an exigency the ancestors enter into the body of the *Āṭṭiyan* to get him possessed and engage in a dialogue with his kin relatives. Karimpālans consult him during occasions like famines, crop-failures, regular occurrence of diseases, barrenness of women or during the election of *Tarawāttu Kāraṇavar*. If anyone wants to become an *Āṭṭiyan*, he should pray his ancestors and, according to their belief, great ancestors appear in his dreams to advise him to accept an efficient and famous *Āṭṭiyan* as his teacher. After getting disciplined, he learns the method of *Ādal* and he accepts it as a profession only at the consent of his teacher. The suffix *Kūḷi* or *Āttukkāran* is added to the name of all such persons.

is performed in individual houses. The *Āṭṭiyan*, who is the chief functionary in rituals connected with *Karkidakavāvu*, wears a red cloth around his waist and carries a sword in his hand. He is helped by another functionary. Inside the house of the *Kāraṇavar* they place a lighted wick in a ritual ladle (*hōmakkayil*) and wave it around a winnowing basket which contains a large number of ritual items like a bottle of toddy, a vessel full of milk, Bengal gram, peas, black gram, green gram, sugar, jaggery, papad, banana, sugar candy, beaten rice, rice and a coconut etc. This ritual is accompanied by the ringing of bells, chanting of magical spells, throwing of rice and flowers (like basil flowers, *Kūvaḷam* (*Crataeva Religiosa*) and *Chrysanthus*) and sprinkling of water from a spouted vessel⁴¹ on the winnowing basket. A cock is then sacrificed and its blood is spread on the winnowing basket while the *thōttam* songs are sung.

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

⁴¹ Spouted vessel, called *kindi* in Malayalam, is used in almost all ritual occasions among the caste-Hindus. It is an important item used in rituals associated with *teyyam*. The use of this vessel by the *Karimpālans* may be due to their links with the *teyyam* cult.

30kgs of rice, 12 coconuts, 2 litres of coconut oil, 1 kg tobacco, betel leaves, areca nuts, a piece of red silk and a bottle of arrack. All members of the neighbouring settlements are invited. Cooked rice along with a coconut broken into two halves, betel leaves, tobacco and areca nuts are offered to the images displayed in the courtyard of the *Daivappura*. The *Chemmakākrān* gets possessed and standing before the images predicts future developments. At the end, the images, covered in a new red silk piece and kept in a new basket, are again put inside the *Daivappura*. A feast is served to the invitees subsequently.

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

Remembering the great ancestors and making offerings to their spirits is a universal custom among all tribes. They celebrate spirits-day and offer feast to the ancestors every year. The Gōnds of central India worship the spirit of the dead in a family on the third day after a death and on every Saturday

and feast-day.⁴² If there is a problem either personal or familial which cannot be solved by the tribal council, tribes like the Kuṛichiyas and Kāṭṭunāikkans summon their ancestral spirits and make offerings to them and request them to find a solution to the problem. The Kuṛichiyas perform a ritual called *Nekalāṭṭam* in times of misery or distress. By offering beaten rice, tender coconut and toddy, the oracle requests *Muthappan*⁴³ to bring in the spirit of a particular ancestor. The ancestor spirit, by entering into the person of the oracle, reveals through him solutions to the concerned problem. In Kannavam the *Nekalāṭṭam* is performed in the *Kāvus* whereas in the Wynād it is staged in the courtyard of the *tarawad*.

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

⁴² Hislop, *Aboriginal Tribes*, 25, Gazetteer, 278, cited in W. Crook, in James Hastings Ed. *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, Edinburgh, 1964, p.452.

⁴³ Muthappan is originally an ancestor-spirit, now worshipped as a Hindu deity all over Malabar. Muthappan cult is a clear instance of the internalization of tribal ancestor-cult by the Hindu communities. This God has two important shrines, one at Kunnathūr Pādi and the other at Paraśśinikadavu. The former is treated as *his* original home. The ritual functionaries at Kunnathur are Nairs while at Paraśśinikadavu they are Tiyyas. This god is propitiated through *teyyam* and the favourite offerings are toddy and dry fish. Muthappan *teyyam* is performed at individual houses as *Vellāṭṭam* and its less ritualistic performance (simple offering by a Tiyya functionary not in *teyyam* costumes) is known as *Payamkutti*. Both are done for prosperity or to recover from disease or misery. *Nekalāṭṭam* differs from both in that it is not an offering to Muthappan but to the kin-ancestors.

solutions for the problems of the devotees, one by one, they offer him water and betel leaves. He assures them protection from all kinds of evil elements and ill health.

Malevolent Spirits and the harms caused by them:

The spirits of those who die of unnatural causes become malevolent. It is obvious that the spirits of those who are murdered, those who commit suicide, and those who are victims of epidemics like small pox become malevolent. Besides these, the spirits of women who die unmarried or in pregnancy or in childbirth become malevolent. Likewise the spirits of evil sorcerers also become malevolent when they die. Benevolent spirits are sometimes transformed into malevolent in two ways: first, if they are left unattended or are not propitiated regularly by their survivors and, second, if they are misused by evil sorcerers. J.G. Frazer defined the characteristics of the malevolent spirits thus: "The spirits of all who have died a violent death are classed among the dangerous ghosts. Their span of life has been cut prematurely short; they feel that they have been wronged, and seek to avenge themselves on the authors of their death if can discover them. And since, in their wrath, they do not always discriminate nicely between the innocent and the guilty, they may become a danger, not only to individuals but to a whole community".⁴⁴

⁴⁴ J.G. Frazer, *Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion*, Vol. III, London, 1936, p.103.

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

The following are the important activities of the malevolent spirits:

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

⁴⁵ Interview with P.K.Kalan, on 10th April 2005. Also see, Subin Manathavadi, "Kalan: Kala, Jeevitham, Samarakalam", *Madhyamam Sunday Supplement*, 30th October, 2005; Seetha Kakkoth, Ganthika Maadal", *VaidyaŚāstram*, Special Tribal Issue, 28, July-August 1997, pp.44-45. Also see K.J. Baby, *Nattugaddhika*, Bangalore, 1996.

⁴⁶ R.V. Russel, *Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces of India*, iii, London, 1916, p.360.

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

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

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

⁴⁷ J. Rosoe, *The Bagesu and Other Tribes of the Uganda Protectorate*, Cambridge, 1924, pp.159sq, cited in JG Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-9), p.156.

habit of erecting memorials to the dead. It is thought that, if these taboos were not observed, the dead man's spirit would carry off with it to the other world, the spirit of rice and of all other edibles, and that consequently there would be a famine.⁴⁸ Similar beliefs in the power of the dead to cause famine by withholding the rain are held by Bantu tribes in South Africa, particularly by the Pondomisi tribe. In 1891 it happened that there was a time of intense heat and severe draught. So the tribe ascribed the calamity to the wrath of a dead chief named Gwanya, at the treatment of one of his descendants. To appease his angry spirit cattle were slaughtered as peace offering on the banks of a pool and the flesh was thrown into the water, together with new dishes full of beer. Apparently the soul of the offended chief was mollified by these attentions and he withdrew his ban on the rain.⁴⁹

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

⁴⁸ N.E. Parry, *The Lākheras*, London, 1932, p.414.

⁴⁹ G. Mccall Theal, *Records of South Eastern Africa* vii, 1901, p.400, cited in Frazer, *Op. cit.*, (n-9), p.140.

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

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

⁵⁰ A. Bastian, *Indonesia: Il Timor and Unleegende Isehn*, 1885, p.3, cited in Frazer, *Ibid* p.134.

⁵¹ E.H. Mann, *On the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands*, Delhi, 1975, p. 86.

⁵² N.E. Parry, *The Lākhers*, London, 1932, p. 380.

⁵³ A. Grandier et. G. Grandier, *Ethnographic de Medagascar* ii, Paris, 1914, pp.245 sq, cited in Frazer, *op. cit*, (n-9), p.108.

Methods adopted for exorcising the Spirits: 7

The tribesmen of Malabar consult the *Kōmaram* (experienced sorcerer) or their headman for exorcising a malevolent spirit that has possessed any of their members for which they make payments to the exorcist. Among the Malayālar if a person is possessed by a spirit, a sorcerer from his own settlement is consulted and he disposes the spirit from the affected body by invoking it and persuading it to enter into a silver image and this image along with the spirit in it is submitted to holy temples like Thirunelli, Rāmēśwaram or Pāḷani.⁵⁴ The Kāṭṭunāikkans, Kaḷanādis and Koṟagas consult their headman, and he after chanting magical spells ties a magical thread on the hand of the possessed person.

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

⁵⁴ A. Aiyappan attests to a practice of offerings to Dakshinamurthi at a temple near Mullurkara in the erstwhile Cochin state for driving away pestering spirits who cause diseases. See Aiyappan, "Primitive Medicine at a Malabar Temple", *Man*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 80, 1936, pp.61-63.

in the form of pictures drawn or words written. In the third method after handing over a pot of diluted turmeric water to the affected person, the *Chemmi* starts singing in accompaniment with the *thudi* and the ringing of bells. Suddenly the affected person begins to run out of his/her house and stops near a *pāla* tree (which is the abode of the spirits) and keeps standing there in a leaning posture. Chasing him/her, the headman takes off some strands of hair from his/her head and ties it on a nail. The nail is then fixed on the tree along with the hair. In effect the spirit is now bound to the tree using the nail and the strands of hair.

The Wayanādan Kādar's method of driving out of malevolent spirits is simple. The *Kōmaram*, in consultation with the affected person's ancestors and with the consent of their goddess *Māriyamma* (*Tamil* Goddess who causes insanity and epidemics like small-pox) drives out the possessed spirit at the time of her festival. The method of the driving out of the possessed spirit among the Māvilāns is called *Nikkal*. This is performed in three ways. As per the first method, the sorcerer makes some astrological calculations known as *Rāsi Vekkal*, in order to find out a way to drive out the spirit. After chanting some magical spells he ties a black thread on the wrist of one of the hands of the affected person and directs him to take special care to see that this hand does not get wet for three days. In the second method, after recalling to the mind the great ancestors, the sorcerer takes a long stick, places his palm horizontally on one end of the stick to measure a three inch-space. Addressing

the names of the dead relatives of the affected person he cuts off the measured end of the stick. Then he makes an exact measurement of the length of the stick. On the ascertaining of the difference between the lengths of the stick before and after it is cut off, the sorcerer can come to a decision whose spirit has entered the body of the affected person and how strong it is. The third method is to ward off strong spirits, such as those of the suiciders known among the Māvilāns as *Vīran*. They never offer blood sacrifices to such spirits as it would help to strengthen their devilish powers. To drive out such spirits, the sorcerer beats the affected person heavily with a cane. Afterwards the sorcerer invokes the spirit and persuades it to enter into a pot (or a brass vessel) and covering it with a red silk cloth, installs it in the Payyāvur Siva temple or Māmānam Temple.

If a Malappaṇikkan is affected by a malevolent spirit, prayers along with offerings of a cock and a pot of toddy are made to *Maladaivam*. The sorcerer draws a *Kaḷam* (magical square) and finds out a solution to drive out the spirit from the affected body. Among the Malappaṇikkans there is a folk dance known as *Ayyarukaḷi* (which has almost become extinct but is about to be revived now). It resembles the *Kōlkaḷi* of the *Māppiḷa* Muslims of Malabar. Instead of sticks (*kōl*) used by the *Māppiḷas* the Malappaṇikkans clap hands in rhythm to make sound in accordance with the song and footsteps. They dance around a wooden mortar on which a kerosene lamp along with a brass vessel and seven betel leaves, areca nuts and pepper are placed. The dance, which

starts at night, continues till sunrise. The dancers chew betel leaves and areca nuts in order to refresh themselves and eat pepper to clear their voice. In the course of the dance one of the spectators gets possessed by an ancestor-spirit and it begins to reveal through the person its complaints such as skipping of offerings which are due, requests for a resting place, etc. The headman accepts the demands of the spirit and by throwing rice on the face of the affected person he installs the spirit on a cactus plant. By making its presence on a festive occasion like this the spirit may be trying to attract the attention of the people towards some of their vital issues.

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

The Chōlanāikkans believe that headaches or stomachaches or other diseases are caused when malevolent spirits invade the head or abdominal

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

If a person of the Kādar tribe is possessed by a spirit, the headman of the tribe acts as the priest. He sits beside the man who is possessed and cracks a whip and asks the spirit to leave the body. Malamalasar smear ashes taken from the hearth on the forehead of the possessed person. Among the Ēravāḷans, in case of spirit possession, the sorcerer asks the person to sit on the floor and draws a rectangle around him/her and four circles on the four corners of this rectangle. This is known as *Chakram Veṭṭal*. Then clansmen

start singing and dancing and the affected person moves away from the place. At that moment clansmen put a pyre on the rectangular *Kaḷam* and then place live coal into the hands of the affected person. He/she hands over this to the headman, which is symbolic of the handing over of the spirit. Then the headman takes a strand of hair from the head of the possessed person and binds it on a nail. This nail is later fixed on a *Pāla* tree.

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

The Karimpālans adopt three kinds of rituals to drive out the spirit from an affected body. The first one is *Āṇimantram*. If the possessed spirit is a *Vīran*, they consult an efficient sorcerer. The sorcerer, wearing white clothes with a red band around his waist, draws a *Kaḷam* on the courtyard of the

Piṇiyāḷ (affected person), prepare *Kuruthi* (blood-like liquid prepared by mixing turmeric and lime in water) in a brass pot and asks him to sit on a wooden plank before the *Kaḷam* and the *Kuruthi*. Then the sorcerer gets possessed, chants magical spells, circles the *Piṇiyāḷ* three times, and taking a nail from the *Kuruthi* waves it from the feet to the head. Then he blows air on the nail and makes the spirit enter into it. Finally he fixes the nail on a *Pāla* tree, *Kānjiram* or jacktree. The second method is *Kumbaḷam Kothu*. A big ash cucumber and a knife are placed on the *Kaḷam* and the sorcerer pours *Kuruthi* over them. He draws four lines on the top of the ash cucumber with a paste of lime and turmeric. The sorcerer chants magical spells and circles round it three times. All this time the *Piṇiyāḷ* sits in the *Kaḷam*. A stem of a basil plant along with leaves is taken by the sorcerer and he waves it from the feet to the head of the *Piṇiyāḷ*. The basil stem is then placed on the ash cucumber. He then takes the knife from the *Kaḷam*, becomes possessed, chants magical spells, circles the *Piṇiyāḷ* three times and stands in the northern corner of the *Kaḷam*. He cuts the ash cucumber into four pieces with a boisterous laughter, which symbolizes the destruction of the evil spirit. The ash cucumber pieces are then taken to a sacred place. The most effective method of exorcising the spirit is the *Pāvarīthi*. The *Piṇiyāḷ* wears a new cloth, sits on a wooden plank before a rectangular *Kaḷam* drawn by the sorcerer in the courtyard of the *Piṇiyāḷ*'s house. Inside the *Kaḷam* is placed a brass pot full of *kuruthi* on the right corner of the right side of the *Kaḷam*. Besides the brass pot of *Kuruthi*, a

big plantain leaf containing an extinguished wick, rice, fried rice, beaten rice and a coconut broken into halves is placed in the *Kaḷam*. A doll with four legs, of the same height of the *Piṇiyāl*, is made from *Vāzhappindi* (banana-stem) and is placed before him. Wearing a new white cloth and a red band around his waist, the sorcerer holds a cymbal in his hand and sits in front of the *Piṇiyāl* on a wooden plank. An astrologer who sits by the side of the sorcerer proclaims which spirit has affected the person. Then one of the persons who have gathered there sings a ritual song called *Poṭṭan-pāṭṭu* praising lord Siva, who is the lord of the spirit-world, accompanied by the beating of a brass vessel with a stick. The song ends with the supposed entry of Siva in the *Kaḷam* in a chariot. The sorcerer after praising the *poṭṭan-daivam* (Lord Siva) throws rice and sprinkles *Kuruthi* on the *Piṇiyāl* while chanting magical spells and installs the spirits into the *Vāzhappindi* doll. Then the *Āṭṭiyan* gets possessed by the ancestor-spirit and through him it proclaims that the *Piṇiyāl* is saved from the control of the evil spirit. As the *Piṇiyāl* is relieved of the spirit, the ancestor, through the *Āṭṭiyan*, asks the relatives to make *nercha* to him (in the form of money). If the affected person laughs loudly or faints or bites the teeth, they are symptoms of the escape of the spirit from the body. It is also reflected in the form of the falling of the branches of either the jackfruit tree or plantain tree. The sorcerer drags the doll through the courtyard, walks a long distance along with it and stops at a sacred place. He kills a cock there and sprinkles the blood on the doll. This is done as blood offering to the spirit

to alleviate its thirst. The doll is interned in a pit after chanting the following words: now the spirit is inside the doll; live according to the rules of the earth; Sivan is mighty.⁵⁵ All the time the *Piṇiyāḷ* sits in the *Kaḷam*. After the return of the sorcerer *poṭṭan pāṭṭu* is resumed to send back Siva to the sky-world. If the spirit refuses to leave the body he/she is beaten with a cane, pulled out by the hair, his/her body is burnt with fire or *kuruthi* is poured until the *Piṇiyāḷ* quits the body with a scream.

Among the *Ūrālikuṟumans*, if a person is suspected of being attacked by a malevolent spirit, the *Bijakkāḷan* performs a magical ritual known as *Daivam Kāṇal* by getting possessed by the ancestor-spirit. He sweeps the four corners of the room of the affected person and throws the dust out of the courtyard of the house. Then he installs the spirit in a nail and fixes the nail on a Banyan tree. Among the *Kuṇḍuvādiyans*, a possessed person is liberated by an oracle, through a simple ritual and by throwing rice over the affected person. The affected *Kuṟumba* is treated by a medicine man. After chanting magical spells he keeps stones in the four corners of the house of the affected. In order to prevent the attack of a spirit the *Iruḷas* tie a piece of cow skin on their waist thread. If a *Muduga* or *Iruḷa* is affected by a spirit the sorcerer performs certain rites at night in perfect darkness. Taking a gourd shell in his hands, with gourd seeds in it, he rattles it from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. for three

⁵⁵ “ഇച്ചത്രവെല്ലാം ഇപ്പാവമോളിൾ പുമിയോടും പുല്പത്തോടും അനുതരിച്ചു പോക; ശിവൻ കരുവനാൻ.”

days. When a Kurichiya is suspected of being affected by a malevolent spirit, a ritual known as *Nūlu keṭṭikkodukkal* or tying of the charmed thread is performed. The sorcerer, after the recitation of magical spells, takes a black or white thread and makes knots on it at intervals by chanting of magical spells at each knot. He ties this charmed thread around the waist, neck or hands of the affected person to save him from the spirit that has possessed him.

Types of the Malevolent Spirits:

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

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

it, however, in great fear, and hang magic strings about them, while others smear their faces with a magical powder, in order that the ghost of the suicider may not molest them.⁵⁶

2. **Spirits of those killed by Animals:** As most of the tribes still live in forest areas, deaths resulting from the attack of wild animals are frequent among them. They believe that spirits of evil-doers enter into the body of wild animals like elephants, tigers, wild boars etc and through them they kill their foes. In order to overcome such calamities the tribes of Malabar, while going out for hunting or for collecting forest produces and firewood, make offerings to the ancestors and to the *Malankāḷi* or the goddess of the forest. The Oraons, of Chōtanāgpur believe that the spirits of persons who have been killed by tigers assume the form of tigers and prowl about at night near their old homes which they seek to enter. To drive away these unquiet spirits, the help of a spirit-doctor is called in.⁵⁷ Among the Kiwai Papuans of British New Guinea, the spirit of a man killed by a crocodile is called *Sibara-Adiri*. It is thought to carry on its back a ghost crocodile, which it may throw upon another man who is then doomed to be killed in the same way. In order to lay the ghost of a man killed by a crocodile the people build a small hut; like that erected on graves, at the place where the man met his death, and put food inside. They wish the spirit to remain there and say to them “do not come back to where people are

⁵⁶ Spieth, *Die Ewe-Stamme*, Berlin, 1906, pp.272-277, cited in Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-45), p.143.

⁵⁷ S.C. Roy, “Magic and Witchcraft on the Chōtanāgpur Plateau”, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, XIV, 1914, 346.

living. You are now a ghost: stay here, this is your house". If this is not done, the ghost, who does not wish to be alone will come and fetch one of his friends to suffer the like fate.⁵⁸

3. Spirits of Pregnant Women or those who died in Child-birth:

Tribes of Malabar believe that spirit of such women becomes evil spirits soon after their deaths. In order to prevent the return of such spirits, they consult efficient sorcerers from outside their community. The sorcerer, with the help of some propitiatory rites, installs such spirits in iron bars or nails and throws them along with the corpse inside the grave during the burial. The Oraons firmly believe that every woman who dies in pregnancy or child birth becomes an evil or dangerous spirit (*Bhūth*), if steps are not taken to keep her off, she will come back and tickle to death those whom she loves best in life. Arrived at the burial place, they break the feet above the ankle, twist them round, bringing the heels in front, and then drive long thorns into them.⁵⁹

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

⁵⁸ G. Landtman, *op.cit.*, pp.283sq, cited in Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-45), p.173.

⁵⁹ Rev. P. Dehon, "Religion and Customs of the Uraons" in *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol.i, No. 9, Calcutta, 1906, p.139.

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

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

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

⁶⁰ N. Adriani and AC Kruijt, *De Bare's-sprckende Toradyas Van midden-celebes* ii, cited in Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-45), p.193.

⁶¹ S. C. Roy, *Oraon religion and Custom*, Ranchi, 1928, p.69.

⁶² P.A. Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria*, p. 245, cited in Frazer, *op. cit.*, (n-45), p. 122.

sorcerer. After one year if she wishes to remarry she makes offerings to her husband's spirit and to his ancestors. The same is the case with a widower. Among the Savaras of Andhra, whoever marries a widow must perform a religious ceremony, during which a pig is sacrificed. The flesh, with some liquor, is offered to the ghost of the widow's deceased husband and prayers are offered by the priest to propitiate the ghost so that it may not torment the woman and her second husband.⁶³ Among the Wajagga of Mount Kilimanjaro in East Africa, when a man marries a widow, he purchases the right to do so from her late husband by sacrificing a goat to his ghost, for the dead man is supposed to retain all the rights that he had in life.⁶⁴

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

⁶³ Edgar Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. vi, New Delhi, 1975, p.321.

⁶⁴ B. Gutmann, *Das Recht der Dschagga munden*, 1926, p.52, cited in Frazer, *op.cit.*, (n-45), p.221.

the bride.”⁶⁵ Among the Todas of the Nīlgiris, ceremonies of marriage are performed for the benefit of the ghosts of all the unmarried dead.⁶⁶

Memorials for the Dead:

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

⁶⁵ J. Von Klaproth, *Reise in den Kaukasus und nach Gorgien*, i, 616 sq, cited in Frazer, *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Edgar Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India*, Part I, Delhi, 1975, pp. 179-180.

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

Merging of the Departed Spirit with the Ancestor-spirits:

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

***Kūṭṭathil Kūdal* of the Kaḷanādis**

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

⁶⁷ Stephen Fuchs, *The Gōnd and Bhūmia of Eastern Mandala*, Bombay, 1968, p.362

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

***Vetchūṭ* of the Kuṇduvādiyans**

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

who is the custodian of the spirits, the kinsmen of the dead offer him rice, vegetables and money. The feast for those who had committed suicide is served outside the house.

***Daivam Kāṇal* of the Ūrālikuṛumans**

Among the Ūrālikuṛumans, the *Bijakkāḷan*, is the ritual performer, and he officiates the function that marks the merging of the spirit of the dead with the ancestor-spirits known as *Daivam Kāṇal* or *Ātmāvinē Viḷikkal*. Every Ūrālikuṛuman settlement has a *Daivathāṟ Mandapam* or abode for ancestors, where the *Bijakkāḷan* summons in the *Binjē* or spirits. This ritual requires ‘three mats and two fires’ (*Mūnnu Pāyum Randu Thīyum*). The mats are first spread on the courtyard of the house of the dead. In one of these mats, the aged male members sit together facing the east while in another one, the aged female members sit facing the west. In between the two mats, on a third one, the *Bijakkāḷan* sits with burning fires on his two sides. The aged male members raise provoking questions and, in the meantime, the spirits of ancestors enter the body of the *Bijakkāḷan* and he gets possessed. He begins to spell the first letters of the names of the ancestors while the aged female members start singing. Their songs are just a play on letters and words spelt by the *Bijakkāḷan*. The *Bijakkāḷan*, by putting bells in a winnowing basket and falling into a trance, shouts the reason for the death of the newly departed. If the spirits of the ancestors are agitated, the *Bijakkāḷan* will not get possessed

and, on such occasions, the oracles of the neighbouring tribes like the Adiyāns, Paṇiya or Kāṭṭunāikkans are consulted. The spirits of those who commit suicide are not supposed to join the ancestors. After the completion of the ceremony of *Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal*, a feast is arranged. In earlier days, the *Bijakkālan* was paid in money but in the present days he is more interested in toddy than in money.

Adiyanthiram of the Wynadan Pathiyar

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

Akathūṭṭal of the Wayanādan Kādar

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

help of a *Nambūthiri* Brahman. Later the pot containing the soul is installed in the Thirunelli temple.

Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal of the Māvilāns

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

Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal of the Koṟagas

The Koṟagas, on the day of the *Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal*, make a hearth on the backyard of the deceased person's house with three big stones and put a big

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

***Adiyanthiram* of the Kāṭṭunāikkans**

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

begin to dance along with the blowing of *cheeni* (pipe). The very next day after *Adiyanthiram*, the oracle goes to the grave and the spirit of the dead person enters his body. He then installs the spirit that has entered his body in the *Daivappura* and offers it betel leaves and areca nuts.

Adiyanthiram of Malayālar

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

Karumāthi of Kādar and Malasar

The Kādar conduct the *Adiyanthiram* on the sixteenth day of death. Edgar Thurston calls it as *Karumanthram*.⁶⁸ A spot in the nearby forest is selected for this purpose and it is cleared of trees and shrubs. If the deceased is a married man, it is customary that the widow should start the clearing work first. Then they construct a temporary thatched shed there, make a hearth with big stones and put an earthen pot on it containing water. This place is known as *Kanjikkaḷam*. Digging three small pits and besmearing them with the paste

⁶⁸ Edgar Thurston, *op. cit.*, (n-67), p.143.

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

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

***Karumāthi* of the Ēṛavāḷans**

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

plantain leaf. On this occasion all the ancestors and the spirit of the just departed partake in the feast together.

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

Adiyanthiram of Malappaṇikkans

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

Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal of Malamutthans

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

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

***Pongalchōru* of the Malamalasar**

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

***Chāvali* of the Thachanādan Mūppans**

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

Chāvali is limited to two days, the second day's ceremonies are spread over to the other two days.

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

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

and elder members of all the 36 *pādis* assemble at the courtyard of the departed and find out solutions for family disputes, calculate the number of attendees from all *pādis* and hand over this report to the headman of the host settlement. This is known as *Karimpadam Veṭṭuka*.

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

If the deceased is a *Kāraṇavar* or headman, there is an additional ceremony, that of selecting the next headman. This is done by the *Kōmaram*, who enters into a state of trance after being possessed by the spirit of the deceased *Kāraṇavar*. The stick of the headman, which is the symbol of his authority, would be kept in a bundle of similar other sticks of former headmen (called *Kāṇayam*) , tied together along with peacock feathers, deer horn (a replica of a branch of a tree if horn is not available) in a tuft of grass known as

Tharippappullu. The *Kōmaram* puts the bundle on the head of the brother of the departed *Kāraṇavar* to proclaim him as the next headman. The practice is known as *Kāṇayam Kodukkal*. The office goes to his son only if the *Kāraṇavar* has had no brothers. The *Kōmaram* also orders to distribute the belongings of the departed to his children.

***Adiyantharam* of the Muḷḷakuṟumans**

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

After bathing the women return in wet clothes carrying earthen pots full of water from the *Daivakkēṇi* (pond dug by the ancestors). The wives of the *Pōruṇōn* and *Pōrāthōn* cook five seer of rice in a special earthen pot inside the *Daivapura* (this blackish pot with graphics on the side of their necks is

specially made for this ritual by the Ūrālikuṟumans by mixing earth with ghee). While cooking no ladle should be used for stirring the rice and it should be dry-cooked with little water left. This cooked rice is served on a plantain leaf with jaggery-mixed-scratched coconut, Mampayar-thoran, Vāzhathōran, red chilly and coriander and is kept inside the *Daivappura*. The Vāzhathōran is prepared out of the remaining portion of the green plantain fruit which was cut at the time of the burial and was kept inside the *Daivappura*.

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

spirits and the remaining being consumed by the relatives gathered there. A grand vegetarian feast follows.

***Pothiyāṭṭam* or *Bhagavathiyāṭṭam* of the Kuṛichiyas**

The Kannavam Kuṛichiyas perform a ceremony known as *Pothiyāṭṭam* or *Bhagavathiyāṭṭam* at the house of the deceased on the seventh day of the death. During this ritual performance they request their ancestors to receive the spirit of the newly dead. In the case of an unnatural death this ceremony is conducted at the *Kāvu*⁶⁹ instead of the house. For the ceremony two functionaries known as *Mozhikkāran* and *Āṭṭakkāran* are necessary. They fast before the ritual and worship *Bhagavathi*, the mother of God Ganapathi. The *Mozhikkāran* starts *Mozhi Paṛayal* and the *Āṭṭakkāran* enters into a trance (It is believed that he is entrusted by the goddess to save the spirit of the newly dead from evil spirits). According to the Kuṛichiya belief, before merging with the ancestors the spirit of the newly departed will be in the control of evil spirits. As the *Mozhikkāran* continues his performance, three more persons too get possessed who, with brass vessels on their hands enter into a violent frenzy along with the *Āṭṭakkāran*. The Kuṛichiyas believe that it is the evil

⁶⁹ *Kāvu* or 'sacred grove' is physically a piece of garden or forest land, but what culturally defines it is that it is dedicated for the exclusive use of particular deities: it is 'guarded' in *their* interests. In this capacity, the groves usually adjoin or are a short distance from an associated structural temple or shrine, though sometimes the sacred structure may be within the *kavu* itself. Individual *Taṛawāds* have separate *kavus*; there are common or village or community-wise (caste or tribe) *kavus* as well. It was here that *Teyyams* were performed. With *Sanskritization*, most of these shrines are getting Brahmanised. The traditional patterns of worship (blood sacrifice, members from within the group acting as priests, etc.) are also being slowly replaced. For a detailed description see J.R. Freeman, "Gods, Groves and the Culture of Nature in Kerala", *Modern Asian Studies* 33 (2), 1999, pp.257-302.

spirits that have entered into the body of these three persons and *Bhagavathi* through the *Āṭṭakkāran* is attempting to save them from the evil spirits. These attempts continue for a long time and finally the *Bhagavathi* succeeds in her attempt.

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

Among the Kannavam Kuṛichiyas there is a custom that an orphan can perform one's own last rites during his/her lifetime by offering *Pindam* in the *Pāpanāśini* at Thirunelli. Those who have direct heirs, or even distant relatives, to observe one's post-burial rituals are not supposed to do it. Balakumar, one of the Kuṛichiya informants at Kannavam revealed the

incident of his father having offered the rite concealing his identity. When the man died, the ancestors appeared in Balakumar's dreams to inform him of his father's soul as wandering without being accepted in the spirit-world. He continued to see his father in dreams standing beyond the courtyard of his house. He, along with other Kuṛichiyas, believes that the ancestors were punishing his father for having acted against their will.

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

***Kūḷiyākkal* of the Karimpālans**

Among the Karimpālans, the merging ceremony of the newly departed spirit with the ancestors is known as *Kūḷiyākkal*. This is done on the day of *Adiyanthiram* or on the first anniversary of the death. There are three stages involved in this ritual such as *Thāypeṭṭa Kūḷikeṭṭu*, *Pēnakeṭṭu* and *Kūḷikeṭṭu*.

The spirit of the newly dead before *Kūḷiyākkal* is called *Pēna*. In early days the expense of this ritual was met by the nephews of the dead.

On the day of the *Adiyanthiram* they prepare a rectangular berth, with bamboo sticks and a new cloth is spread over them, known as *Kundam*. Then a bottle of toddy is placed at the centre of the floor of the berth. The persons, who had performed the rite of *Oṭṭālam Kamizhthal* during the burial, repeat it again and after bath, carry porridge in a pot and go to the spot where the arrow was stuck during the burial. They place the pot of porridge there and then circumambulate the arrow and the porridge-pots thrice chanting (the *mozhi*): “if there is any ghost, come to the courtyard”.⁷⁰ Afterwards one of them pulls out “the arrow and goes to the *Kundam*, circumambulates it thrice and wait for the others to come. Meanwhile the relatives of the departed pour a little toddy in the bottle kept under the *Kundam*. Now the spirit enters the body of any one of the relatives of the dead causing him to faint. This is the indication of the entry of the spirit into a person’s body. Returnees from the grave circle the *kundam* three times, pour toddy in the bottle and remove the new cloth over the *kundam* with the arrow in their hand. A vegetarian feast is served for all and toddy is distributed among all the elder male members. It is interesting to note that special pots of toddy are presented to the gravediggers for their

⁷⁰ “ചത്ത പ്രേതോണ്ടെങ്കിൽ നീന്റെ മിററത്തേക്ക് പോരി”.

service. A famous saying about this is “three pots for the cremated and one for the buried”.⁷¹

Stage 1: *Thāypeṭṭa Kūlikeṭṭu*: It is also called *NayaṭṭuVīran Thāypeṭṭa Kūlikeṭṭu*. The *Thāypeṭṭa Kūli* is the first great ancestor of each Karimpālan *taṛawād*. He is popularly known as *Thāypeṭṭa Katri Ammōn* or *Nāyāṭṭukodi Vīran*. The two functionaries of the ritual are the *Peruvannān*⁷² and the *Āṭṭiyan*. *Peruvaṅṅān* is the chief functionary who decorates his body with *teyyam* costumes such as red silk cloth with tinsel around his waist (*Adukkum Chorayum Minniyum*), silver anklets on his ankles, painted bangles on his hands, ornaments like *Pūkkōṭṭu*, *Chennikkāthu* and *Thalappāli* on his head, beard and moustache (taken from wild goat or monkey) along with face painting and besmeared vermilion marks on the forehead and the chest. The *Teyyam* sits on a *Pīṭam* while the *Āṭṭiyan* stands beside carrying a bow and arrow in his hand. The *Kāraṅavar* of the newly departed chants *mozhi*⁷³ three times and throws a handful of rice each time on the face of the *teyyam* and blesses him. Then *Āṭṭiyan* chants *thōttam: Vāzhka daivamē Polika Daivamē* (Hail God, help us prosper) and hands over the bow and arrow to the *teyyam*.

⁷¹ “ചത്ത ശവത്തിന് മൂന്നു പാനി; മറ മാടിയതിന് ഒരു പാനി”.

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

⁷³ This is the *Mozhi*: “ഇതാ തായ്പെട്ട കത്രിയമ്മോനെ, ഇന്നു വീണ പേനത്തെയ്യത്തിനെ കെട്ടി കൂട്ടത്തിൽ കൂട്ടുമ്പോൾ തായ്പെട്ട കത്രിയമ്മോനെയാണ് കെട്ടി നിങ്ങളാലെ തിരുപ്പേരു വിളിക്കുന്നത്.” (Hey the great ancestor, when the spirit of the newly dead is staged as *Teyyam* to merge it with the group of ancestors, it is done in your name and in your person). cited in M. J. Jose, *Karimpālanmarude Nadodi Samskaram*, PhD Dissertation, University of Calicut, 1994, p.299.

The *teyyam*, getting possessed, starts dancing with the chanting of *mozhi*.⁷⁴ At the end he sits on the *Pītam* and the first stage of the ritual comes to an end.

Stage 2: *Pēnakeṭṭu*: While the *teyyam* takes rest on the *Pītam*, arrangements are made for the next stage. Rice and coconut halves are kept in a brass vessel; a wick is lighted and placed on one of the coconut halves; two persons- one standing in front of the *teyyam* and the other at his back- carry a canopy made of new white cloth over his head. This is known as *Thālappoli Pidikkal*. Then *Kāraṇavar* chants *mozhi* three times addressing the newly dead: “If the spirit is alive as shade or dragon-fly, come and help get possessed”⁷⁵ and each time he throws a handful of rice on the *teyyam*. Then *Āṭṭukāran* chants the *thōttam*: *Vāzhka daivamē Polika Daivamē*. At this stage a member of the *taṟawād* faints, as if possessed by the spirit of the dead, canopy is removed and the *teyyam dancer* pours tender coconut water or toddy into the person’s mouth to wake him up.

Stage 3: *Kūḷikeṭṭu*: It is at this stage that the spirit of the newly departed joins with *Nāyāṭṭukodi Vīran Thāypeṭṭa Katri Ammōn*. The *Mozhiparayaḷ* of the *Kāraṇavar* is repeated here.⁷⁶ After the completion of the *mozhi*, the *Āṭṭiyan* circumambulates the *Teyyam* three times and gets possessed. Then he hands

⁷⁴ The *Mozhi* is: “എന്താ അനന്തിരവനേ ചങ്ങാതി, ഞാൻ ചൊല്ലി വിശേഷിപ്പിക്കുന്നതൊക്കെ കേൾക്കുന്നുണ്ടോ? എന്റെ നെഞ്ചത്തെ പാലും കൊള്ളിയും വലിച്ചു മോത്തെ കരി തേച്ചു ഓമനമുള്ള തൃപ്പേരുകൊണ്ടു എന്നെ തായ്പ്പെട്ട കൃത്രിയമ്മോന്റെ കയ്പുറത്തിരുത്തി”. cited in *Ibid*.

⁷⁵ “പേനയെ ചത്തിട്ടു നീകലോ തുമ്പിയോ ഉണ്ടെങ്കിൽ ഉടനെ വന്ന് ഉറഞ്ഞു തരണം.”

⁷⁶ The *Mozhi* is: “ഇതാ നിന്റെ നെഞ്ചത്തെ പാലും കൊള്ളിയും വലിച്ചു മനം കുന്നം വേലനെ വിളിച്ചു കെട്ടിച്ചു ഓമനയായുള്ള തൃപ്പേരുകൊണ്ടു മറുകുട്ടി (ൗലേയുവേല വേല 1മാല 1ഉ വേല ൨ലമൗ)യായിട്ടുള്ള കാരണോർക്കു, നായാട്ടുകൊടിവിരനായ കാരണോർക്കു.” cited in M.J. Jose. *op.cit*, p.299.

over the bow and arrow to the *teyyam* and repeatedly request him to give him a place to stay.⁷⁷ All the while the *teyyam* will go on chanting: *Vāzhka daivamē Polika Daivamē*. At the end he chants the *mozhi* by which the *Pēna* is converted into a *Kūḷi*⁷⁸ and it thereafter comes to be known as *Marukutti*. Here the *teyyam*, instead of the *Āṭṭukāran* chants *Vāzhka daivamē Polika Daivamē*. Then he removes the decorations. This is followed by a feast served to all. Later the *Marukutti* is installed in the room of his/her house or in the *Kūḷithara* or *Kūḷikkōṭṭam* attached to the house of the *Kāraṇavar*. The moment they are installed, they are addressed as *Dharmadaivam* (Righteous God) and they are deemed to look after the welfare”of the *taṛawād*. All these rites for a dead married woman will be performed at her natal home and her spirit becomes the ancestor of that *taṛawād*.

***Kunnupula, Chemmappula and Kākkappula* of the Adiyāns**

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

⁷⁷ “നീ എന്നെ കുളിയാക്കി; എനിക്കൊരു മിറം തരണം”

⁷⁸ This is the *Mozhi*: “ഇടിലോകത്തു ചൊൻ പോലവൻ വഴി വളർന്നു. അവനെ കൊണ്ടുത്തരുവാൻ ആരാണുള്ളത്? അതിനായിട്ടുള്ളതാണ് കാലൻ. കാലവലയും കാലത്തൊട്ടിയും കൊടുത്തു കാലവല കൊണ്ടു മുടവീത്തു. കാലത്തൊട്ടി കൊണ്ടു കുത്തി അമർത്തി തീർക്കായുസ്സു പിടിച്ചു. തിരുനെല്ലി ഭഗവാന്റെ വലഭാഗത്തു കൊണ്ടു ചെന്നു. തിരുനെല്ലി ഉടുട്ടു കഴിക്കാൻ എന്തു വേണം? ഇരുന്നാവുരി അരി വേണം. ഒരു തേങ്ങ വേണം. എന്താ അനന്ത്രോനേ ചങ്ങാതി, ഞാൻ വിവരിക്കുന്നതെല്ലാം കേൾക്കുന്നുണ്ടോ? അനന്ത്രോനേ, ചങ്ങാതി, ഞാനെന്റെ നെഞ്ചത്തെ പാലും കൊള്ളിയും വലിച്ചു എന്റെ മോത്തെ കരി തേച്ചു മന്നം കുന്നം വേലനെ വിളിച്ചു ഓമനയായുള്ള തൃപ്പേരുകൊണ്ടു എന്റെ തായ്പ്പെട്ട അമ്മോന്റെ കയ്പുറത്തു മറുകുട്ടിയായിട്ടുള്ള കായിനോനെ നിർത്തി”. Cited in *Ibid*.

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

1) *Naḷukēṭṭu*: It is also known as *Kuriyedukkal* which means the fixing of the date of the *Kunnupula* and is conducted two days before it. The relatives of the departed collect *Puthari* and if the ritual is for two or more deaths, the rice should invariably be measured and is shared among the functionaries. On this day *Karumi* along with *Kunnu-mūppan* carry a pastry made of rice known as *Dośa*, fried rice, pounded paddy, water, cow dung water, cooked rice, cooked rice mixed with turmeric, *Vāka* powder (Acacia Adortissima) and *Chiva* (soap-nut) powder to the grave. On the way to the grave a portion of the food is eaten by the *Karumi* and the *Kunnu-mūppan* on the assumption that unless otherwise the soul of the dead would hesitate to partake of the food offered to him/her. *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* and two *Karumis* stand by the side of the grave and recite *Śāstra*. The food items are offered to the ancestors, *Chudalapēyi* and a portion of it is kept on the grave of the newly departed. While one of the *Karumis* sprinkles cow dung water on the grave in accordance with the *Nāṭṭu-mūppan*'s recital of the *Śāstra* to ward off the *Chudalapēyi*, the other *Karumi* simulates the act of beating off the *Pēyi* with a stick in all the directions

(north, east, west and south) from which it may approach. This is the way of saving the spirit of the newly departed from the *Chudalapēyi* and helping them to partake of the food. Then all those present there return to the house of the dead and *Karumi* erects the middle post for the *Chappara* or *pandal* on the courtyard of the dead. A moderate feast is served to the relatives afterwards.

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

the *Kunnukkāran*. This cock (with more ones) is then sacrificed by the *Karumi* in honour of the *Chudalapēyi*. Betel leaves, areca nuts and oil are carried by the *Kunnukkāran* and all these are shared among the functionaries. They apply oil on their head.

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

3) *Pindamidal*: on the second day morning in accordance with the orders of the *Nāṭṭu-mūppan*, a close woman relative of the departed carries a winnowing basket full of *Kuthari* (hand-pounded rice) and hands it over to a *Peruman* (aged man sometimes ex- *Nāṭṭu-mūppan*). On the courtyard of the departed, which was besmeared with cow dung paste earlier, a lighted wick is

kept in a plantain leaf facing the east. The *Peruman* with the winnowing basket circles the plantain leaf thrice and stands before the house of the departed and places the basket on the courtyard facing towards the west. Taking rice from the winnowing basket he draws a symbolic picture of the departed (large in size for the males and small for females). On completion he places the winnowing basket on the figure. When the *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* recites *Śāstra* and the *Peruman* beats *Thudi*, another *Peruman* remove the winnowing basket from upon the figure. As and when the basket is removed, the *Perumāṭṭis* or aged women from inside the house come out running with loud wailing and sitting around the figure erase it with their left hands. The wailing continues till the *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* asks them to stop it. Before getting back into the house, their hands are washed by the *Chemmakākran*'s wife. Entering the house they resume loud wailing. The *Peruman* who drew the figure circles round the *pandal* with the winnowing basket and places it in the *pandal* accompanied by the beating of the *Thudi* and blowing of the horn. While the *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* stands inside the house with a lighted wick on a plantain leaf in his hands reciting *Śāstra*, the *Karumi*, after placing four lighted wicks at the four posts and a bundle of them on a banana stem at the middle post of the *pandal*, returns to the house. Then he along with a *Peruman* comes out of the house each carrying a bundle of rice. *Karumi* cleans the *pandal*, distributes rice among the functionaries and all of them consume fried chicken offered to the *Chudalapēyi* the previous night.

4) *Alāvupaṭṭu*: It is the *Śāstra* recitation about many aspects of the history of the Adiyāns, such as their origin, and the details of their settlements and divine places. All functionaries except *Karumi* and *Chemmakākran* participate in it. While the *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* and *Kanalādi* recite *Śāstra*, three *Perumans* ring bells and three others beat drums. The *Śāstra* recalls the story of how the Adiyāns, as they had no heirs to inherit, decided to kidnap two boys named *Ārya-paithal* and *Vāṇiya-paithal* from *Āryadēśa* and *Vaṇiyadēśa* with the consent of the two goddesses of these two areas namely *Āryāmba* and *Vāṇiyāmba*. Adiyāns believe that they are the descendants of these two princes. Special references are made in the *Śāstra* recitation, which lasts for an hour, about two main Adiyān settlements of Tirunelli and Trissileri, their divine places like ValliyūrKāvu and Pākkam Kōtta, origin of man, origin of his body parts, diseases, death, burial, various clans and the clan of the *Karumi* called *Nālpādi*.

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

stop exchanging them and ring them using their right hand only. Later on they consume porridge and fried fish.

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

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

8) *Muram Keṭṭu*: The *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* and *Kanalādi* take two winnowing baskets and tie two anklets each on them stretching from one end to the other at its front part. Holding these baskets in their hands and covering their whole body with a red cloth and, with the *Kunnukkāran* and the *Chemmakākran* by

their sides, they sit in the *pandal*. The *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* recites *Śāstra* and gets possessed. Then *Kanalādi* asks questions concerning the causes of the death and the present condition of the spirits of the newly dead and other ancestors. Through *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* the ancestors reply and the *Kanalādi* conveys it to the kinsmen of the dead person. The following is the transliteration of the *Śāstra* song, which contains the reply:

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

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

⁷⁹ Sung by Kuruman of Triśīlēry.

is a male and a black sari if it is a female. The *Chemmakākran* keeps it in his house till the *Kākkappula* is over. A grand feast is served after this ritual.

Chemmappula:

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

Kākkappula or Valiya Kākkappula or Kūṭṭam:

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

the *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* to stop it, they stop wailing and come out of the room. Then the *Karumi* offers food mixed with turmeric paste to the *Chudalappēyi*. All other rites from *Pindamidal* to *Pēyimadakkal*, will be repeated in *Kākkappula* also as in the case of the other two *pulas*.

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

In the next morning the *Karumi* washes the male mourner/ widower in hot water applying oil and soap. The *Karumi* shaves him and dresses him up with new clothes given by the *Chemmakākran*. In the case of a female all these are done by the wife of the *Chemmakākran*. Then he/she is covered with

a long cloth and is taken to the *Chemmakākran*'s room. He/she is now known as *Nannākunnavan* or *Nannākunnavaḷ* respectively (the one who is relieved of from a longer pollution). He/she is served a grand feast in the presence of the *Karumi*, *Nāṭṭu-mūppan* and all others. After this ceremony he/she is permitted to lead a normal life.

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

***Cheriyā Kākkappula* and *Valiyā Kākkappula* of the Paṇiyas**

The Paṇiya perform two post-burial rituals known as *Cheriyā Kākkappula* or *Pulathōyam* and *Valiyā Kākkappula* for merging the dead with their ancestors and to remove the death pollution. On the seventh day of the demise the Paṇiya conduct *Cheriyā Kākkappula*, and if their financial condition is not sound, the ritual is postponed. It is performed under the guidance of the *Chemmi* with the assistance of the *Āṭṭāḷi*. The ritual starts on the seventh day morning with the dancing of young men accompanied by the beating of *thudi* and blowing of horns (*Chīni*), which are supplied to them by the *Chemmi*. For the ritual *Chemmi* wears *Kūṭṭanbaḷas*, or the traditional

bangles, and bead necklaces. The *Āṭṭāḷi* smears sandal paste on his forehead, arms and chest and wears a red cloth round his waist, bangles on his wrist and bead-strings round his neck. He also wears a cloth head gear and pellet-bell strings on his legs.

The *Chemmi* takes two winnowing baskets, puts two kilograms of husked rice in one of them, and an equal quantity of paddy in the other, and places the two on the floor at a distance from each other. Near these two, he places two earthen pots, two leaf-spoons and lighted wicks. Then he sits down in between these two winnowing baskets and takes a small quantity of rice and paddy in each leaf-spoon. He puts the rice taken from the left winnowing basket to the pot on his right side and vice versa. Then he stands up holding these two winnowing baskets, moves them up and down three times facing the four directions one after the other. Then he keeps these baskets on the *Pēnathara* inside his house. The *Āṭṭāḷi* carries a walking stick given by the relatives of the departed which symbolizes the ancestors. After receiving it he stands near the *Pēnathara*, gets possessed and begins to dance. Then he comes out of *Chemmi's* house and sits on an *Ural* (mortar) in the courtyard. The *Āṭṭāḷi* takes a winnowing basket containing strings of bells and starts shaking it singing which would mean: "let the name of the newly dead be added to the account leaf of the ancestors". The Paṇiya believe that the old shade (ancestors) keeps an account of the dead, the idea of which may have been

borrowed from their Hindu neighbours.⁸⁰ A. Aiyappan describes the rituals and ritual songs that accompany them as follows: “During the next phase of the rites, after an interval, the *Āṭṭāḷi* impersonates the spirit of the recently dead. Before doing so he begins with the following salutations:

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

Oh, true god: I touch your feet

I touch the feet of Mother Earth below.

God Kinati, I touch your feet

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

I touch your feet doing the rites properly.

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

Ninety six sibs (kud’i)

Three leading countries (na:d’u)

Four leading towns

Known own-territories,

Herd of other territories,

In the sight of (men of) all these

⁸⁰ A. Aiyappan, *The Paniya: an Ex- slave of South India*, Calcutta, 1992, p. 146.

In this ceremonial shed

for 32 *nazhika* of the night

for 64 *nazhika* of the day

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

Let my excretions big and small be stopped

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

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

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

Let this be conducted (properly)

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

“The *Āṭṭāli* further requests the shades (the dead of yesterday) to help and direct his work for the sake of ‘the dead of today’ (recently dead) just as the *Kūṭṭan* or leader of a gang of farm labourers directs his men. He needs the help of the shades to conduct the ceremonies today as they were yesterday, i.e., in the past.

“Getting now possessed by the spirit of the recently dead, the *Āṭṭāḷi* begin to speak in personal terms to his relatives who surrounded him. With tears in his eyes, he speaks in poetic prose. The relatives, too, shed tears.

My relatives, my heirs!

My married wife!

Children born to me!

My lineage members!

My sib members!

This has happened to my body and head

And you have therefore suffered sorrow.

My people of ten districts! My eleven clans!

My people of five districts! My neighbours

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

My married wife! My children

Without sleep, without food,

Through the 32 watches of the night

On the day fixed, let me wait and try

Day and night, without urinating or defecating

Let me sing shaking the bells in the winnows,

And get my entry made in the leaf (account)

“The *Āṭṭāḷi* then proceeds to the courtyard and sits down near a little heap of rice on a plantain leaf. By it is kept winnow with pellet bells and also betel leaves and areca nuts. He then distributes these chewing materials to the assembled elders saying, “now I give the customary betel leaves and tobacco for the assembled people here to get their approval (of the whole proceedings).”⁸¹

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

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

⁸¹ A. Aiyappan, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-148.

cooked rice offered to the dead are poured out at the foot of a plantain tree. Then *Chemmi* sprinkles cow-dung/tender-coconut water (Aiyappan writes that a mixture of coconut or gingelly oil and soap-nut powder is used for the purpose⁸²) for removing pollution and afterwards all take bath. Then *Āṭṭāḷi* is given a sweet pastry in order to end his fasting. All close relatives of the departed present money to him according to their ability and rice and cloth are given by the family of the departed. After the guests have all left, Aiyappan says, “rice on three large plantain leaves on one row and on a dozen small bits of leaf in a second row is again offered to the shades at the *tina*. After sometime the older among the mourners eat the rice from the large leaves and the rice on the twelve small bits is thrown away.”⁸³

Valiya Kākkappula:

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

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

covered with black and white clothes, is erected only after a procession led by the *Chemmi* along with a band of musicians. The *Chemmi* and the *Āṭṭāḷi* sit near the post till the completion of the work of the *pandal*. There is music and dance afterwards.

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

coconut water on the polluted persons, cuts a lock of hair from the top of their heads and asks them to go out for bath.

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

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

***Kanji-chīru* of the Iruḷas**

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

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

house of the dead but it is done at Siva temple at Pērur in Tamilnad now a days. Here there is a separate place and a functionary for this purpose.

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

***Chīru* of the Kuṛumbas/Mudugas**

In Attappādi among tribes like the Kuṛumbas and Mudugas, the funeral will not be complete until the bones of the dead are taken out from the graves and are deposited in a sacred place or ossuary. Till the end of this secondary burial, the dead man is not at rest and pollution is not at an end. Before the secondary burial both Mudugas and Kuṛumbas perform an urgent ritual, called *Pachachāvu*, for the dead who had faced unnatural deaths. The spirits of such persons are dreadful and hence their powers have to be reduced as far as possible before the completion of the last ceremony called *Chīru*. For *Pachachāvu* they erect the same type of funeral car that they erect during the time of the burial. The images of the departed are made out of the grass called *Tharuvappullu* and placed on a chair inside the funeral car. The female mourners and relatives sit around the chair wailing and invitees and other

members of the settlement dance around the car day and night for three days. All those who are invited are given feast on these days. On the afternoon of the third day the grass image is taken out of the chair and burnt in the graveyard. *Nikalnīrkuthu* is performed subsequently. The close relatives of the departed rub the water used for this ceremony on the chest, enter the houses of the beloved wailing loudly and then all invitees disperse.

The last post-burial ceremony of the Kuṛumbas and Mudugas is the *Chīru*, which is conducted after the death of 101 members of a settlement,⁸⁵ hence it takes 10 or 20 years or more between two *Chīrus*. The lag between two *Chīrus* is also caused by the huge expenditure incurred in celebrating it. The *Chīru* of a settlement is decided by the tribal council in consultation with the *Mūppan* and the tribal council of the Thodikki Kuṛumba settlement who are the chief ritual functionaries for a *Chīru* in any Kuṛumba/Muduga settlement. Custom insists that it is the chief functionaries of the Thodikki hamlet who decide the date of the *Chīru* after receiving a nominal *dakshina* of either 1½ or 5½ rupees and offerings to *Karudaivam* (the Kuṛumba deity) are made. It is particularly important that the *Chīru* is fixed to be conducted on a date before which sowing activities in all settlements should be finished.

⁸⁵ Burmanachan, aged around 90 and an inmate of the Anavay Kuṛumba settlement, told that 101 deaths should precede the performance of a *Chīru*. But his opinion is refuted by other less aged men who hold the view that economic position determines the timing of the ceremony. The contradictory viewpoints evidently reveal the changing positions of the tribes towards rituals and are a pointer to the gradual relaxation of ritualistic orthodoxy.

Just after fixing the date of *Chīru*, messengers are sent to invite members from all the Kuṟumba settlements and also from the Muduga settlements where they have kin-relatives now (because in recent times both the tribes have started intermarrying) and the nearby Iruḷa settlements. The premises of the whole settlement are cleaned and a temporary mess hall is constructed. Each household in the settlement should contribute one sack of rice and a money payment of 500 to 1000 rupees. A week before the commencement of the *Chīru* the *Mūppans* and *Maṇṇūkkārans* of 16 settlements (8 settlements in former days) in association with all the functionaries and elders of the settlement join together to perform a special rite called *Kallukku Rāyi Āṭṭu*. They pound ragi on a big grinding stone to prepare a pastry with ragi powder so that this may be offered to *Karudaivam* of the settlement at the house of the *Maṇṇūkkāran*. This rite is known as *Māth Vekkal*. On the seventh day after this the *Chīru* should invariably begin. On all these seven days the *Maṇṇūkkāran* should fast and on the three days of the *Chīru* he should abstain from bathing and changing of clothes.

Certain other arrangements are necessary for the *Chīru*. Generator, Halogen lamps and cooking vessels are hired from the nearby town of Mannārkkād. In early days they used grass torches and firewood for light and cooking vessels were collected from the households where they were kept for this purpose.

A specially decorated funeral car called *Gudikkeṭṭu* is prepared for *Chīru*. For its preparation six experts from the Thodikki settlement arrive a day in advance of the *Chīru*. They go to the nearby forest for collecting wooden poles for the construction of the *Gudiketṭu*, the first piece of which should be cut by the *Maṇṇūkkāran* of the settlement. The upper portion of the *Gudikkeṭṭu*, which resembles a pyramid, is finished by the early morning of the first day. It will have three steps and will be decorated with gilt papers. The pyramid top will be adorned with a colourful umbrella. Music and dance starts just after its preparation (refer funeral dance). The chamber, called *Gubbē* in which the bones are kept, is prepared only after sunrise by fixing four wooden poles upright on the soil and by covering its three sides with colourful saris. After the completion of the *Gudikkeṭṭu* and the chamber *Nikalnīrkuthu* is performed. It is done for those who had died due to unnatural causes and for whom *Pachachāvu* has not been performed.

To collect the clavicle a group of tribesmen under the leadership of the headman visit the graveyard. The clavicle of the person who had died first after the last *Chīru* is collected first. The clavicles of women who had been married into other settlements and who had died and been buried there are collected next. The bones of the deceased persons of the settlement where *Chīru* is organized is collected only on the first day and after the completion of the preparation of *Gudikkeṭṭu*. If a clavicle is not traced out, a ring made of silver or *Tharuva* grass is substituted and is dropped into the grave addressing

the name of each deceased and taken back. The Mudugas call this clavicle *Ponnellu* and the taking of these bones out of the grave is known among them as *Nikaleduppu*. The bones collected are smeared with turmeric paste and are washed and covered in a new cloth. The *Maṅṅukkāran* of the settlement carries a brass pot of water and accompanies the *Mūppan* who carries the bones to the settlement. When they reach the outskirts of the settlement they are received by the villagers with the accompaniment of musical instruments. The headman of the settlement hands over the bundle of bones to the Thodikki *Maṅṅukkāran* who stands in front of the *Gudikkeṭṭu*. The *Mūppan* retires to his house, takes a long stick and hands it over to his *Maṅṅukkāran*. On receiving the stick in his hand the *Maṅṅukkāran* enters into a frenzy and points out the faults committed by the inhabitants. At this juncture his wife unties her hair and joins her husband in his frenzy. Meanwhile the Thodikki *Maṅṅukkāran* puts the bones inside the *Gubbē*. The womenfolk approach the *Gubbē* and start group-wailing. All the assembled people disperse and a feast is served to all. As there were strict ranks of hierarchy and rules of pollution among different tribes, there was a peculiar practice in serving food to the non-Kuṟumba invitees. They were either given raw rice and curry materials to prepare food separately by themselves or were served with food prepared by some Kuṟumbas separately. Within the purity-pollution syndrome, which was very strong even among the tribal people till recently, raw food is considered

as the purest of food or neutral.⁸⁶ The custom of serving rice and other items to non-clansmen is known as *Padi Kodukkal* and it now prevails only symbolically.

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

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

⁸⁶ Bernard. S. Cohn, *India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization*, New Jersey, 1971, p.113. Cohn argues that purity-pollution continuum may be illustrated by the hierarchy involved in the categories of food and the processing, giving and receiving of food.

is not alive. It is customary to pay a nominal amount as *Pariyapaṇam* even if it had already been completely paid off. All the invitees come and bow before the *Mūppan* and are rewarded with an amount of money. At the end of the ceremony the *Mūppan* gives rupees ten each to the headmen of other settlements to buy betel leaves and areca nuts. The longer the interval between two *Chīrus*, the longer will be the duration of the ceremony of *Pariyapaṇam* Collection since it involves larger number of deaths and larger number of individual dealings.

On the third afternoon seven men go to the nearby river carrying seven small earthen pots, bathe in the river, collect water in the pots, return and place them around the *Gudikkeṭṭu*. Seven male goats are bathed in the river and are made to circle the *Gudikkeṭṭu* before being sacrificed. (The number of the goats may vary according to capacity). It is imperative that two of the seven goats should be brought by the two senior most sons-in-law of the hamlet known as *Thalai-māppiḷa* and *Chinna-māppiḷa*. Both the goats should be white coloured ones and that of the *Thalai-māppiḷa* should be the biggest of the lot. Both *Thalai-māppiḷa* and *Chinna-māppiḷa* wear white dresses and white head gears and hold black umbrellas. They also carry bundles containing 30kgs of rice with them which is kept in the house of the *Mūppan*. They circle the *Gudikkeṭṭu* three times along with the goats. The remaining five goats are carried on their shoulders by five persons moving them up and down amidst boisterous howls by people who accompany them. Before

sacrificing the goats the *Thalaimāppiḷai* sprinkles water mixed with turmeric over the heads of the goats. The shaking of the heads by the goats is taken as the granting of permission by them for sacrifice. The goats are sacrificed one by one by the *Thalaimāppiḷai* by hitting on their heads with the back of an axe. After sacrifice the goats are drawn into the *Gubbē* and meanwhile the women gather to wail. When the wailing ends, men and women with broomsticks, winnowing baskets and wooden pestle start dancing around the *Gudikkeṭṭu*. Goats are later removed for being cooked. A non-vegetarian feast with the meat of the goats is served at night to all the people gathered there.

Dancing and music continue all through the night. There will be some kind of dance-drama at night like the *Jogiyāṭṭam* or *Erumayāṭṭam*. In *Jogiyāṭṭam*, 16 male actors take part among whom 8 wear male costumes and the remaining 8 are dressed as females. The actors play the role of husbands and wives and enter into dialogue among themselves on familial or communal matters. Three middle aged male characters who wear white turban, white shirt and White *mundu* and colourful overcoats represent the *Mūppan*, *Vaṇḍāri* and *Kurutalai*. *Erumayāṭṭam* is an interesting play between two characters, one dressed like a she-buffalo and the other like its calf. The calf attempts to suck the milk of the mother while the latter kicks it away. The play continues for a long time with its many-sided details.

On the fourth day, before sunrise, the *Gudikkeṭṭu* is dismantled and the parts are thrown away on the way to the graveyard after cutting every part into pieces or sometimes burning it. Later the bones are taken to the sacred spot where the remains of the ancestors are kept. This place is situated in the forest away from the settlement known as *Nikālumalai* or shadow-land. The bones or rings are kept either in the hollow of a tree or a stone structure which is known as *Māḷikai* or *Mathinati*. A portion of the feast prepared on the previous night is taken along with the bones and are offered to the ancestors at the *Māḷikai*. After returning, the *Maṅṅūkkāran* takes a ceremonial bath and throws away the dress that he had been wearing for the last three days. This is indicative of the removal of pollution. The premises of the settlement are cleaned and a ceremonial meal is prepared and is eaten by all from the same plate. This is the symbol of the forgetting of all disputes and the reunion of all on behalf of their ancestors.

Similar examples for after-burial funeral rites are reported from other parts of the world. On the Timorlaut and Tanember islands, ten days after the burial of a warrior who had fallen in battle, the people of the village assemble on the shore, the men armed and the women in festival array. An old woman calls back the soul with wailing. A bamboo with all its leaves is then erected in the ground, a long-girdle on the top. This bamboo is regarded as ladder, up which the soul climbs to its destination. The Sernitu (a sort of priest or shaman) pronounces a eulogy on the deceased punctuated by the applause of

the audience. When from the movement of the bamboo it is judged that the soul has climbed to the top, the bamboo is severed in two and the loin-girdle burnt, to prevent the soul from subsequently wandering about causing mischief. A dish containing rice and egg, previously provided for the ceremony, is also broken to pieces. Appeased in this way, the soul betakes itself to the little island of Nusnitu, of the North west coast of Seelu, one of the islands of the group, which is believed to be the dwelling place of souls.⁸⁷

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

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

⁸⁷ Cited by Hartland in James Hastings, *Op. cit.*, p.443

⁸⁸ For details see M. Block, *Placing the Dead*, London, 1971, pp. 221-222.

⁸⁹ J. Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones, the Management of Death pollution in Cantonese society" in *Death and Regeneration of Life*, edited by Block and Parry, Cambridge, 1982, pp.156-182.

⁹⁰ W.H.R. Rivers, *The Todas*, Jaipur, 1986, pp.391-395.

presently undergoing a steady and drastic process of acculturation or what has rightly been described as 'Sanskritisation'.⁹¹ Tribal values are slowly being replaced by dominant Brahmanic Hindu norms. The internalization of Brahmanic cultural traits is evidently manifest in the realm of tribal religion. Tribal religion, which in its basics was animism incorporating ancestor-worship, is slowly giving way to a faith in Hindu gods and temple-oriented mode of devotion. In the present circumstances where ancestors themselves are accorded only a secondary position in the tribal religious pantheon, ancestor-worship cannot be continued for long with the same intensity and devotion. The erosion of the doctrinal base would make the ancestor-cult only secondary or marginal in the tribal pantheon in the near future.

⁹¹ M.N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India*, Calcutta, 1952, p.30.

CHAPTER 5
DEATH CUSTOMS IN THE TRIBAL
CONTEXT:
CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The application of the foregoing data may lead us to certain important derivations. We may first note that the entire tribal tradition is now losing its purity and originality and is either being dissolved into the mainstream dominant tradition or being swallowed by non-tribal ethos. The typical tribal characteristics of ignorance, unambitious life, subsistence economy, readiness to believe others and the general habit of honouring debt all have made them unsuitable creatures for the modern life and have provided the necessary spiritual background for outsiders to exploit them in the most brutal way. The only option to total ruin is to get adjusted with the non-tribal social milieu at the sacrifice of age-old tribal values. As they have been besieged from outside, and as they are unable to withstand the external pressures, the tribal people will have to succumb to it. The result is their gross alienation from their traditions and values. This alienation has had its inevitable reflection even in the sphere of the cult of the dead. Funeral rites have been the most important occasions of social gathering and have played a pivotal role in reaffirming tribal unity and cohesion and settling disputes of various kinds. With culture change and with the consequent erosion of faith (also with the encroachment of the governmental authority through the agencies of the

police and law courts), such gatherings are now fast losing their use value. On the other hand, the new generation has started identifying funeral rites as instrumental in bringing about their economic decline. They also slowly recognize the exploitative role of the priestly class in perpetuating these outmoded rites for their own benefit.

This should not lead us to presume that tribal life is a blend of unmitigated virtues and a panacea for the ills of the value-less, spiritually void modern life. There is a tendency among many to perceive the tribal set up with a great sense of reverence and nostalgia and to uphold its greatness. Leaving aside the simplicity and great many virtues of tribal life, the functioning of some of the most reactionary forces within the tribal society such as the domination of patriarchal values and priestly deception would surprise even an ardent sympathizer. While all kin-clansmen bear the burden of priestly authority and exploitation, women as a class suffer the hardships of extreme gender discrimination. And all these are in the name of tradition and faith.

The archaic character of tribal life has also been an area of great interest. There is a tendency among anthropologists to look at the tribal practices as a continuous unchanging system with very little efforts at the application of the notion of change with continuity. Thus most of the tribal practices are observed to have a long historical continuity reaching up to

prehistoric times. Not only their social and economic systems but also even their religious and cultural traditions are seen as primitive and static. Thus they are living traditions of antiquarian practices. There has also been a tendency to draw a parallel between Megalithism and tribalism since some of the tribals are found to follow a few megalithic traditions. They are regarded as the lineal descendants of the megalith builders. As the true authors of the Megalithic culture are still behind the curtains, this question may continue to haunt historians and archaeologists.

Acculturation/ Sanskritization

The life and culture of the Malabar tribes have long been undergoing a slow process of transformation as a consequence of the contacts with the culture of the more advanced peoples of the surrounding areas. Sociologists, anthropologists and archaeologists together have described this process of culture change through culture contact as 'acculturation'. The concept of acculturation has been defined as "...those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first hand contact...".¹ Terms such as 'disintegration', 'fusion' and 'assimilation', in contrast, have been used to describe changes resulting from contact. Stated at an intermediate level, the study of acculturation is envisaged as an assessment of both important conditions of contact and the consequences of these

¹ Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton and Melville. J. Herskovits, "Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation", *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 38, 1936, p.149 (pp.149-152).

conditions for the major facets of the cultures involved.² Even contacts are of different varieties, labeled by terms such as ‘antagonistic contact’, ‘exploitative contact’ and ‘philanthropic contact’.³ “Common to all descriptions of change resulting from contact is the notion that change has direction: first, change on the part of members of one culture away from the rules governing their traditional structured activities without internalization of the rules of the other culture; and second, change towards the rules governing the structured activities of the other culture. In the first instance, which we call *alienation*, the rules of the culture are abandoned; in the second instance, which we call *reorientation*, the rules are altered by processes of internalization to bring them into line with those of other cultures”.⁴

In the Indian context D.D. Kosambi recognizes the reciprocal nature of acculturation. He observes that “acculturation in India was a continuous process extending over the millennia, very difficult to date for that very reason. It was not at base a violent action, since both the more advanced and less advanced elements in the formation of a new society borrowed from each other”.⁵ Meanwhile, the process of acculturation that has been going on among the Hindu castes in India is observed to be different from the normal

² Bruce. P. Dohrenwend & Robert. J. Smith, “Toward a Theory of Acculturation”, *South Western Journal of Anthropology*, 18:3, Autumn, 1962, p. 31.

³ *Ibid.*, p.37. The term ‘philanthropic contact’ is used to describe the contact between missionaries and the non-Christian local peoples.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

⁵ D.D.Kosambi, *An introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, 1990, p. 50.

process of acculturation and, to understand this complex process, M.N. Srinivas devised a new conceptual category namely 'Sanskritization'. He clarifies: "The Caste system is far from a rigid system in which the position of each component caste is fixed for all time. Movement has always been possible, and especially so in the middle regions of the hierarchy. A low caste was able in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and tea-totalism, and by sanskritizing its ritual and pantheon. In short, it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites and beliefs of the Brahmins and the adoption of the Brahmanic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though theoretically forbidden. This process has been called Sanskritization in this book, in preference to Brahmanization as certain Vedic rites are confined to the Brahmins, and the two other 'twice-born' castes".⁶ Sanskritization thus presupposes not only an assimilation of the practices of the dominant castes but also the acceptance of the Brahmanical view of the Hindu society.

Census of India 1901, Madras contains the following passage on the process of tribal cultural adaptation as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. "The forest and hill tribes, however, are well-known to be undergoing a slow process of Hinduizing, or rather Brahmanization, as a result of their contact with the Brahmin customs of their neighbours on the plains, and to often pay a sort of reverence to the Hindu gods while they simultaneously

⁶ M.N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India*, Calcutta, 1952, p.30.

worship their original spirit deities".⁷ Thus large scale acculturation, which of course includes considerable Sanskritization, has taken place among the Malabar tribes not only in the realms of the social system and behavioural patterns but even in the death customs. However, a large number of the tribes of Malabar were forest dwellers and had depended on food gathering for a livelihood. They were relatively insular. Some of these tribes like the Cholanaikkar have only recently come into contact with non-tribal people. But it is quite interesting to note that even among the most primitive tribes, and in spite of their late entry into the mainstream, the volume of acculturation is tremendous and they are slowly on a path of absorption into the Hindu religious pantheon. At the socio-religious level three kinds of relationships are crucial in bringing about these changes. First, their familiarity with Hindus of various castes; second, their relations with Christian and Muslim settlers; and third, inter-tribal contacts. While contacts with the Hindus helped to familiarize them with the Hindu gods and rituals and avail them to acquire a space within the Hindu religion (though at the lowest rank), nearness to people of other communities like the Christians and the Muslims have made them aware of the needs of social advancement. A large number of tribal people, especially the Kurichiyas, have also been converted to Christianity which has definitely enhanced their social mobility. Inter-tribal cultural exchanges are no less important since there were clear hierarchies and rules of

⁷ *Census of India 1901* Vol. XI Madras Part I (Report), p.39.

pollution even within them which was greatly restricting the scope for unity and co-operation.

The relation of tribal people to Hinduism is quite different from their relation to Christianity or Islam. The main reason for the tribal attraction towards Hinduism is that Hindu rituals tend to be the modified form of the tribal practices and tribal religion. Thus they were able to acquire a Hindu way of life and hinduising their gods and goddesses without sacrificing much of their traditional practices. As even the tribal social structure resembled a crude form of caste system with higher and lower ranking tribes and with strict rules of endogamy and pollution, the Hindu way of life doesn't appear alien to them. But this is not the case with other religions; those who were converted were unconditionally asked to relinquish all their previous and 'primitive' traditions. It is unthinkable for tribal people, who are extremely ritual-ridden, to sacrifice their ritual identity for any cause however great they may appear to be. The deep faith in ancestors also has stood against embracing new faiths. This may account for the relative low level of religious conversions among the tribal people. Conversion of lower caste Hindus to other religions were accomplished due to the less ritual-oriented character of their cultures. On the other hand, Kurichiya converts and some tribes of North-east India who have been attracted to Christianity have not compromised on the basics of their traditions.

The process of acculturation in Malabar was perhaps intensified by the establishment of the colonial power. It began with the expansion of external political power into the tribal areas and took a momentum with the migration of the land-hungry peasants to the hitherto unused forest lands. With the advent of westerners a mixture of colonial interests including the increasing economic pressures led to the British expansion into the tribal areas. Although we know that Pazhaśi Raja had his political power over the tribals of Wynad, most of the primitive communities were out of the purview of it. But with the establishment of the British power, tribal areas were brought under control. Through stringent forest policies, the freedom of movement of the tribal people in the forests was considerably curtailed. By appointing upper caste intermediaries as Janmis and tax collectors in the tribal areas, they were not just been converted into the subjects of the state but their sovereignty over their landed possessions was being alienated. The conversion of a major area of forest lands into plantations also brought about considerable scope for external influences. Thus tribal people were exposed to unknown and alien norms and traditions which they were forced to absorb piece-meal in course of time.

In recent times the pace of migration of non-tribal people to the tribal areas gave a revolutionary impetus to the process of acculturation. But its nature varied according to the familiarity of the tribal people with one or the other religious community with which they happened to co-exist with. As

Christians and Muslims were in the forefront of migration in recent times, they were influenced most by the linguistic and cultural traditions of these settlers. The role of migration in adversely affecting the life of the tribals of Malabar mainly by alienating them of their traditional lands, and by subjecting them for ruthless exploitation and placing them at an inferior social status have been recognized as a historical fact.⁸ But even in this great wave of cultural erosion at the socio-economic sphere, the tribal situation reveals extremely limited and a slow process of absorption of external variables in the beliefs and practices associated with death customs. And even the limited elements of accommodation are from the upper caste Hindu traits and the least from Islamic practices.

The following are the major areas of acculturation in the realm of death customs and funeral rites of the Malabar tribes.

1. The tribal attribution of the cause of death to the will of God. Earlier most of the tribes had identified death as unnatural and caused by the attack of some kinds of malevolent spirits. Now they have started telling about *Āyussu* (life expectancy) and *Vidhi* (destiny) as detrimental in the ending up of one's life.
2. Many tribes now hold the concept of *Swarga* or heaven and *Naraka* or hell and keep faith in *Kālan* (yama) as the god of death. The former tribal

⁸ P.T. Sebastian, *Christian Migration to Malabar*, PhD Thesis, Calicut University, 2002, p.328.

belief was that the spirits of the dead lived either in the premises of their hamlets or in a nearby hill. The ghosts of the dead ancestors, who were also worshipped, were thought to be proximate enough to attend a call, anytime. The faith in *Swarga* and *Naraka* evidently stand against this cherished tradition. The identification of a god of death also negates the tradition.

3. The recent introduction of the faith in rebirth and reincarnation of souls into the tribal pantheon is the most important instance of 'Sanskritization'. The dead were never thought to be reborn either as animals or birds nor were the crows treated as the carriers of the souls of the dead.⁹ We notice that it is those tribal groups who are dependants of the upper caste Hindus and therefore more acquainted with upper caste norms and traditions that offer Bali to the crows during the pollution period.

4. The present day tribal belief in the omen of death as well as other auspicious or inauspicious omens doesn't appear to have a continuity of tradition and more possibly is an influence from the plains. The best example of this is the faith in the crow as a bird of omen. As crows are not familiar to the forest dwellers, ritualistic traditions associated with it should certainly be an external influence.

⁹ Even the dominant tribes like the Kurichiyas didn't have such a faith. See, Dr. Kumaran Vayaleri, "Kurichiyasude Mithukalum Avarude Sankalpangalum", *Vaidyasastram, Special Tribal Issue*, 28, July-August 1997, pp.36-37.

5. Offering *Puṇyāham* (sacred water collected from temples) or water from a pot containing basil leaves and gold pieces to the dying person and to the corpse before the funeral are definitely an element of 'Sanskritization'. The Basil plant is sacred for the Hindus in all ritualistic occasions and water mixed with it equals the Ganga water.

6. Lighting *Nilavilakku*, using *spouted vessel* placing coconut-halves and rice in a plate near the corpse is a later cultural intrusion. Coconut or rice cultivation was not a part of the traditional subsistence agrarian economy of majority of the tribals and therefore were items never used in any sacred rituals. With the expansion of market economy the traditional diet was replaced with rice and with the intrusion of Brahmanic ideals rice began to be used in ritual occasions like marriage and death in the form of being placed in a brass plate (*taḷika*) or brass pot (*Paṛa*). Same is the case with *Nilaviḷakku*; the tribal people were absolutely ignorant of using edible oil for lighting lamps.

7. Tribal people have started reciting Ramayana sitting beside the corpse from the time of death to the funeral. Not only that the practice is a high caste Hindu tradition but also that most of the tribals were not acquainted with *purānas* like the Ramayana till very recently.

8. Drawing circle with rice/paddy around the corpse. Though not popular among all tribes, this is a new practice borrowed by tribes like the Malamutthans from the high caste Hindus.

9. Practices such as washing the corpse, *Kōdiyidal* (especially *paṭṭu*), decorating corpse with flowers, putting vermilion marks on the forehead, and removing *tāli* before burial are recent cultural devices at the occasion of a funeral. The tying of *tāli* or a badge of marriage around the neck of the wife by the husband and which is supposed to be a life-long mark of subordination was strictly a Brahmanic practice. Even the Nair form of marriage was *Pudamuṟi*, i.e., tearing of a piece of cloth during marriage. Attaching the wife of the dead man with certain symbols of widowhood through special kinds of rituals was a practice prevalent only among the Namboothiri and other Brahmins of Kerala. Although corpse was sacred for the tribals, fear of the dead had persuaded them to keep a distance from it in former days and so rituals dealing with the touching of the body like either washing it or spreading *kōdi* over it was never followed.

10. Like the funeral functionaries among the Hindu castes, (Mārān for Nairs and Mūssad, Eḷayath or Athikkuriśśi Nair for Nambūthiris,) many tribals have such functionaries. *Changāthi* is the ritual functionary at death for both the Wayanādan Kuṟichiyas and the Karimpālans while *Karumi* and *Karmi* are those for the Adiyāns and Māvilāns respectively. The only

difference is that the functionary of the tribals is from the same tribe. But from the fact that such offices prevail among those tribal communities who were closer to the upper caste Hindus from very early days, help substantiate this argument.

11. Like among the caste Hindus many tribes observe the ritual of smashing the pot at the feet of the corpse. This ritual is more popular among tribes like the Pañiyas who are having close contacts with the high ranking Hindus.

12. The custom of payment to all funeral functionaries for their services - for grave-diggers, bier-makers, death messengers and funeral functionaries - is an imitation of caste-Hindu practice because among the tribal people the concept of payments for services didn't exist at all. Among them services for all social functions including death were voluntary. The commoditization of services is a relatively recent phenomenon even for the upper castes and for the tribals it is certainly the absorption of a non-tribal norm.

13. Recently most tribes have reduced the duration as well as the rigidity of death pollution. The early years of the twentieth century had witnessed a conscious attempt on the part of many Hindu castes in this direction. It was an attempt to realize the importance of the value of time in the emerging busy material life as well as an attempt to apply reason in analyzing rituals leading to identify them as superstitious. Although many tribes have not started

examining the rituals that they follow from a scientific or rational spirit, inability to keep away from jobs for a long time has forced them to cut short the period of pollution. The condemnation of even the very practice of pollution at the hands of the migrant Christian or Muslim settlers also might have made its impact on these lines.

14. Formal invitation is now necessary for both kinsmen and clansmen to attend the last rites. Earlier, intimation of death entailed a responsibility on the part of all to participate in the last rite as well. Now tradition and tribal ethos have given way to formalism and middle class notions of individual pride.

15. Most of the tribes have been vegetarian during the course of pollution (*pula*), but blood sacrifices, alcoholic drinks and non-vegetarian food was essential for the ceremony to mark the end of it. Today, restrictions on hunting and animal sacrifices combined with a penetration of Brahmanic values have induced most tribes to prefer vegetarian food being served at the feast that marked the end of pollution. Avoidance of blood sacrifices and preference of vegetarianism are supposed to erase the erstwhile wild character of the tribal people and help accommodate them into the Hindu fold.

16. An associated practice is the merging of the ashes and bones of the deceased person into the River Pāpanāśini at Tirunelli. This practice presupposes not only the identification of the land of the dead away from the immediate surroundings but also a faith in temples and temple-oriented

rituals. It also is an indication of the acceptance of Brahmanical priesthood other than the tribal functionaries and the concepts of *papa* (sin) and *punya* (virtue) since the last rites at Tirunelli are performed at the office of a Brahmin priest.

17. Offerings to ancestors at special occasions like on the New Moon day, *Oṇam*, *Vishu*, etc is a recent development. Popular festivals of the plains like *Oṇam* or *Vishu* had not been celebrated by the tribal people till very recently. Besides, they were not familiar with the *Karkidakavāvu*, since they were not aware of the Malayalam month of *Karkidakam* nor did they have their own calendar.

18. Recently the tribals have started seeking the help of efficient Brahmin or Nair sorcerers to ward off evil spirits. Tribes who had the faith in, or fear of, evil spirits had their own sorcerers to control them in the event of attacks from them. Now with the pursuance of external sorcerers they are not only declaring their incapacity in dealing with their own spirits but also are willingly accepting the cultural invasion of upper caste Hindus.

19. Among the Malamutthans death pollution had ended only with the wearing of a cloth by the mourners washed by the *Vaṅṅāns* (traditional washerman) known as *Vaṅṅāthimāttu*. Such a practice was common among many high caste Hindus. It is significant that the *Vaṅṅans* had served only upper caste Hindus to remove death or menstrual pollution by helping wash

clothes and their ritual relationship with tribal Malamutthans would open a new space for more discourses. Whether it is an instance of cultural adaptation or a residue of the of the Malamutthan tradition before their segregation into a tribe is not clear. There are certain possibilities for the second inference because the Malamutthans call them as *Mala-Nambūothiris*,¹⁰ and tribes like the Kuṛichiyas are believed to be castes transformed into tribes.

20. Certain tribes have started the construction of cement platforms over the relics of the dead in the upper caste Hindu model. It is interesting to note that this practice is being imitated by the tribals from the upper caste Hindus like the Nairs and not vice-versa.

21. The Aṭṭappādi tribes have a tradition of celebrating *Śivarātri* and worship at the Mallēśwaran temple on that day after making pilgrimage to the Mallēśwaran peak nearby. The Mallēśwaran temple is a Śiva temple and it is constructed in the traditional Hindu style, where an Iruḷa priest performs ritual functions in the Brahmin way. Faith in Hindu gods and temples are on the rise and the Ēṛavāḷans at Muthalamada were seeking the assistance of a Brahmin

¹⁰ See M.G. Sasibhushan, "Malamuthanmar: Kaattile Namboothirimar", *Vijnana Kairali*, XXIII: 3, March 1992, pp.213-215; M.P. Sivadasa Menon, "Mala Nayanmar", *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, Jan 26, 1958, pp.33-34, 80; Abdullakutty Edavanna & Satheesh Chalippadam, "Malamuthanmar", *Vaidyasastram, Special Tribal Issue*, 28, July-August 1997, p.38. *Census of India 1931 Vol. XIV Madras part I (Report)* makes a general observation on the problem: "The Primitive tribes represent the conquered in an impact of civilization. The defeated in any battle seek a refuge where pursuit is difficult and communities conquered in a clash of civilizations will generally be found where they retain a separate existence, in the remoter and more inaccessible tracts", p.318.

priest for the preparations of the construction of a temple there when we visited the settlement.

22. Like the caste Hindus the tribes have started consulting *Kaṇiśan* (or *gaṇikan*, the astrologer by caste) at the time of funeral rituals to be informed of the pros and cons of death as well as the measures to be taken against flaws or sins.

23. The use of the Sanskrit word *Pṛetam* for the spirit of the dead is an instance of cultural accommodation. The term generally used by all tribes was *Pēyi* or some other local variants like *Kūḷi*. That the more acculturated tribes use the term *Pṛetam* itself stand as testimony to the non-tribal origin of it.

24. Besides, inter-tribal relations are fast progressing through cultural exchanges. But the volume of inter-tribal adaptation is relatively minimal when compared to 'Sanskritization' since there is always a tendency towards upward mobility, particularly to merge with the mainstream society. Still we have evidences of inter-tribal marriages, like that among the Iruḷas, Mudugas and the Kuṛumbas which has started influencing the insular character of the funeral practices.

25. In recent times because of the advancing market economy, tribesmen have started using many materials available in the market during the occasion of the funeral and post-burial ceremonies. For instance most tribes use incense sticks instead of dammer, rice instead of ragi, new cloths instead of old or

preserved ones as *kōdi*, and soap and oil for washing the corpse at the time of funeral and most of the items needed for the last rites. In former times even the grand second funeral of the Kuṛumbas were organized with natural goods available at their disposal.

26. The Christian missionaries who have been active among the Indian tribes for more than a century have offered them a more fertile life. Their work has made a powerful impact on the North-eastern tribes in the form of large scale conversions. The main converts are the Nagas, Kukis, Khasis, Garos, Oraons, Santhals. In South India a section of a few tribes like the Todas, Kuṛichiyas, Koṛagas, Paṇiyas, Āḷar and Uḷḷādans have also been attracted to Christianity. These conversions have suddenly made an impact on tribal funeral practices reorienting them on the lines of the Christian norms. They have shifted their practice from animism to monotheism as well. On the other hand, the constant contacts with the Christian settlers and Christian missionaries in Malabar have failed to make a considerable influence on tribal religion either by attracting them on a large scale to Christianity¹¹ or by transforming their funeral rituals substantially, except that a few tribes like the Kuṛumbas, Karimpālans and the Māvilāns have started using coffins for burying the dead by imitating the Christian practice.

¹¹ P.T. Sebastian, *op. cit.*, p.320.

27. Islamic religious rituals attracted the tribals even less, especially those among Malabar. A few tribes in other parts of India like the Meos of Rajasthan and Meerut, Gujjar of Jammu and Kashmir and tribes in Lakshadweep islands have been converted to Islam. The rigidity of Islam and the disinterest shown by the Muslims in getting converts among the Malabar tribes have been basic to this phenomenon. Even in the region of the present day Malappuram district where Muslims constitute the majority of the population, tribesmen have not been converted into Islam. The great contempt shown by the Malamutthans towards Islam,¹² though has not been explained satisfactorily, is a specimen of the general tribal attitude. But certain rare traits of adaptation are visible. The Chōlanāikkans are observed to use words like *Khabar* for the corpse and *Khabaradakkam* for funeral due to their close contacts with Muslim traders of Karuḷayi.

Megalithism as a Living Tradition

Megalithism, which is the practice of erecting huge funerary stone edifices called Megaliths to mark the presence of a burial, was very popular and widespread among many people of the world. Generally speaking, Megaliths are huge stone structures or mortuary houses built up generally of large, dressed stones erected commonly to protect the relics of the deceased ancestors. Although on the world scale this practice dates back to the

¹² M.P. Sivadasa Menon, "Malanāyanmār", *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, Jan. 26, 1958, pp. 34, 80.

Neolithic period, in India it surfaced during the Iron Age. In the context of Kerala, the megalithic period is associated with the Iron Age and is characterized by a culture as observed in other parts of India. The most popular type of megaliths namely the underground rock-cut chambers, containing a rock-cut cot along with a central pillar (or without the pillar) and with a side entrance, scooped out of the laterite bedrock resembles that of a house. The typical Kerala variety of Megalith called *Kodakkallu* though present the profile of a giant mushroom, contains a square chamber inside it sheltering the relics of the deceased ancestors. We can infer that the megalithic people who erected these mortuary monuments were placing the burial remains of their ancestors in a safe and everlasting chamber so that the spirits of the dead ancestors will not return to the world of the living to molest their life. Annual propitiation followed by rituals would keep the spirits of the dead remain benevolent.

The difference in size, shape, form and structure of these ritualistic monuments may be adaptations to the physical features of the habitat. James Fergusson, who was the first to study them in 1872 in terms of their architectural features, christened them as 'megaliths' and took such a view which he expressed in the title of his book *Rude Stone Monuments in All Countries* (which ranged from the Iberian peninsula to the Indian subcontinent and beyond); more surprisingly G. Childe in 1948 wrote a paper entitled "Megaliths" on a similar basis, with a map, visually relating the 'megalithic'

tombs of Southern India (from the 10th century BC to the beginning of the Christian era) to those of Western Europe where, as we now know, they go back to the fourth millennium BC. These mortuary house complexes along with a distinct material culture appeared in different parts of the world in different contexts. Because of the confusion prevails with regard to the classification of megaliths of South India, Lawrence Leshnik termed them as *Pāndukal* complex.¹³ K.J. John, who first termed it as *Nadukal* complex, later renamed it as *Nāṭṭukal* complex.¹⁴

The cultural equipment of the megalithic community comprised Black-and-Red ware, legged jars and iron implements. Other grave goods discovered from them in Kerala include legged jars, All-black-ware, Russet-coated ware, sarcophagi, gold ornaments, beads, bronze objects, defensive and offensive iron weapons, agricultural equipments like sickles and horse bridle. Megaliths are found on all terrains of Kerala, from the coastal tract to the Western Ghat ranges. At the level of technology, both the structures and the associate finds presuppose high sophistication. Urn burials or *Muthumakkal Thāzhi*, found all over Kerala, though considered as a megalithic type, have no lithic appendage as in the case of *Kodakkals* and *Thoppikkals*. But the essential content of the culture comprising black-and-red ware pottery, grave goods, iron implements, etc are present in the urn burial sites. Whenever an urn burial site is marked by

¹³ Lawrence Leshnik, *South Indian Megaliths: the Pandukal Complex*, Wiesbaden, 1974.

¹⁴ K.J. John, "Nattukal Culture" (Mal) in *Kerala Times Annual*, Ernakulam, 1989.

a standing huge stone, as in the case of *Pulachikals* found at Aṭṭappādi, Trichur, Perumbavur, Wynad, etc, they are categorized as Menhirs. Whenever an urn burial is sealed by a hemispherical hat-stone, they are classified as *Toppikkal*.

The material remains from the megalithic sites in Kerala unquestionably establish a tradition of life oriented towards the cult of the dead with a deep faith in the next world and a high level of divinity accorded to the ancestors. The absence of other symbols of worship combined with the commonality of burial relics suggests the preeminence of ancestor cult in the spiritual life of the Iron Age people of Malabar. There is a striking parallel between the megalithic cultural traits and the present day tribal practices. The importance given to the cult of the dead and to the spirit of the deceased ancestors, the unflinching faith in the ancestors as the divine entity, the still continuing practice of grave goods deposition and the peculiar types of grave-digging with side cavity, marking the grave with stone circles, all would help to establish this hypothesis positively. If megalithism is taken not just as a practice of constructing burial tombs, which is only a material manifestation of the concept of monumental architecture, but as a cult attributing specific emphasis on animistic religion and life after death, the absence of the erection of funerary superstructure would not dissuade us from focusing on tribal burials as a continuation of Megalithic culture and from categorizing tribal people as the inheritors of the Megalithic builders of Kerala.

The erection of Megalithic monuments is a living tradition among a number of tribes of Burma, Indonesia, Thailand, Melanesia, and also of the Indian subcontinent. The Khasis, Garos, and Nagas in North-eastern India, the Mundas, Oraons, Hos, Bondos, in Eastern India, the Gond and Baiga in Central India, and the Kota, Kurumba (of the Nilgiris), Toda and Gadaba in South India still follow the tradition of erecting memorials for the dead.¹⁵ A striking feature of the funeral monuments of the present day tribes is that they are miniature memorial stones. The tribes of today erect memorials only after performing an elaborate secondary burial. They collect remains from the grave and keep them in sacred places or clan ossuaries and erect commemorative stones over it to mark the burial site. Haimendorf notices that the Megaliths of the tribal folks of today are, with comparatively few exceptions, memorials unconnected with graves or burning grounds. Those of Iron Age are closely associated with graves. He adds that the distinctive port-hole opening which will be found to characterize many of the megalithic cists of southern India 'does not occur among any of the tribes of middle India, who bury their dead in Megalithic graves, such as the Mundas and Gonds'.¹⁶ Thus though with substantial structural changes, megalithism continues to be a living tradition in many parts of India.

¹⁵ See Sir. Mortimer Wheeler, "South Indian Megaliths" in *Early India and Pakistan*, edited by Glynn Daniel, London, 1968, pp.150-168; Rami Reddy, "Megaliths in India: Past and Present", in *New Trends in Indian Art and archaeology*, Vol. I, edited by V.U. Nayak & N.C. Ghosh, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 37-44

¹⁶ Furer Von C. Haimendorf, "The Problem of Megalithic Culture in Middle India", *Man in India*, Vol 25, 1945, pp. 73-86.

Traces of Megalithism in the form of the erection of burial tombs are still evident among a few tribal people of Kerala. The Mala Arayans of Travancore even today erect miniature dolmens for the dead.¹⁷ They are reported to have been erecting it when a man dies an unnatural death.¹⁸ The Kuṛumbas of the Nilgiris cremate their dead and bury a few post-cremation bones in *Savumane* (death-house) or small cromlechs of three upright stones with a covering slab. These cromlechs are said to have been made by their forefathers, and which are reused by them. The Kurumbas of Malabar do not practice cremation but bury the dead and make a circle of small stones around the grave.¹⁹ It is noticed that the Kuṛumbas of Aṭṭappādi today worship menhir-type idols in their shrines, which may have been the relics of their funeral memorials of the past. Similarly, the Kādar of Erumappāra who were resettled from Paṛambikuḷam some 30 or 40 years ago have stone circles around three graves of their most respected ancestors. The practice of marking burial sites with one or two stones or to put a heap of stones over the grave is followed by many tribes even today.

Likewise, other features of the megalithic culture such as the deposition of grave goods are widespread among them. Excavation reports of Megalithic burials of the Iron Age have revealed the prevalence of the practice of burying the dearest possessions of the deceased person in the grave along

¹⁷ L. A. Krishna Iyer, *The Pre-historic Archaeology of Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1948, p.18.

¹⁸ L. A. Krishna Iyer, *Kerala Megaliths and Their Builders*, Madras, 1967, p.51.

¹⁹ J.W. Brecks, *An Account of the primitive Tribes and the Monuments of the Nilgiris*, London, 1873, pp. 54-55.

with the dead body.²⁰ This practice is common among all Malabar tribes. Goods being deposited in the graves include knives, sickles, spades, digging sticks, needles, axes, fishing hooks, bow and arrow, pottery, ornaments, coins, clothes and cooked or raw food materials. Gender differences can also be noticed in the grave goods with materials such as ornaments, daily utensils and sickles predominate over the graves of women. In recent times grave good deposition is getting less and less popular because of the increasing awareness of their material value which is chiefly due to the process of the advancing acculturation.

L.A. Krishna Iyer and K.J. John have argued that Megalithism is still a living tradition among the people of Malabar. But Krishna Iyer notices that while megaliths are commemorative rather than sepulchral today, they have lost their funerary significance by getting associated with the gorgeous, but unrelated, memorial feasts.²¹ John identifies three important areas of megalithic survivals in the present day society, both tribal and non-tribal. First of all, it survives in the form of the worship of the ancestor, particularly among the Vayñans, Malayans, Theyans and Nairs. Secondly, the practice of offerings to the spirits of the ancestors on special occasions is a fossilized behaviour from the past. And finally, tribal burial practices like the peculiar

²⁰ B.K. Thapar, *Recent Archaeological Discoveries in India*, Unesco, Paris, 1985, pp. 104-120; also see Glynn Daniel and Paul Kzaerum, eds., *Megalithic Graves and Ritual*, Moesgard, 1969, passim and B.K.Gururaja Rao, *The Megalithic Culture in South India*, University of Mysore, 1972.

²¹ L. A. Krishna Iyer, *op.cit.*, (n-18), p.62.

kind of grave digging and grave good deposition, construction of stone circles or making burial marks with stones over the graves are a continuity of the megalithic tradition. Let us quote him in detail:

“The continuity of those aspects of Megalithic culture centered on the cult of the dead is manifested in the surviving ghost worship and the ritualistic ghost dances of the little communities of Malabar, and in the burial customs of tribes in isolated areas in the *Sahyadri* ranges. Most of the traditional houses of the little communities contain a room dedicated to the dead ancestors, in which are placed small low stools or *peethams*. It is believed that a particular ghost comes to sit on each of these on days when offerings are made. The spirits of the dead ancestors are regularly propitiated on the New Moon days of *Karkidakam* (July-August) and *Thulam* (Oct-Nov). Food is cooked in the kitchen and a large portion is placed on a plantain leaf for each of the ancestor-spirits...Toddy and arrack were traditionally served along with the meal. If a dead ancestor is known to have enjoyed special foods during life, he receives a large portion of these foods during the ceremony.

“Dead heroes, powerful ancestors, and persons who died prematurely in accidents or from contagious diseases are worshipped on a large scale by the little communities of Malabar in the form of *theyyams*. During the performance of the *theyyam* ritual the dancer achieves identification with the spirit of the dead ancestor... *Theyyams* are also known as ghost or mask

dances. In the north of Kerala, there are hundreds of ancestral *theyyams* and now a few are being worshipped as sanskritized deities.

“In aristocratic households of north Kerala the spirit of the dead ancestor and the presiding deity of the lineage segment (*tarawad*) may be housed together in an ancient shrine. A *theyyam* dance will be performed annually in front of this shrine along with rituals for the dead ancestors. Another practice indicating ritualistic continuity of Megalithism is the cult of Muthappan. The little communities of Malabar offer *payamkutti* to the Muthappan, the dead ancestor, on occasion of difficulty, misfortune or need.

“Tribal burial customs are also significant. The majority of the tribals who live in the *Sahyadri* ranges practice a burial custom, which is very similar to the Megalithism of the ancient days. A rectangular pit is sunk in the ground and a side chamber is excavated at the bottom for the body, which is accompanied by pots containing food and water and grave goods such as bow and arrow, a bill hook, a sickle, and other tools closely associated with the deceased. The pit is then filled with earth and boulders, sealed with huge stones, and earth is piled in a heap above”.²²

²² K.J. John, “The Megalithic Culture of Kerala” in V.N. Misra and Peter Bellwood Eds., *Recent Advances in Indo-Pacific History*, New Delhi, 1978, pp. 487-489. John also argues that *payamkutti* is a ceremony which redeems debts due to the ancestors in order to improve the fortunes and well being of the living. It is in accordance with the traditional belief that if the ancestors are propitiated, all misfortunes that may cast a shadow over the members of the *tarawad* will be averted.

It thus becomes clear that Megalithic traits persist strongly among the Malabar tribes in various forms such as the peculiar kind of grave-digging with cavity or side chamber, grave good deposition and ancestor cult. As already noted, deposition of grave goods is still popular and widespread among them. And till very recently, the items deposited were strikingly in conformity with those discovered from the megalithic graves. Tribes who dispose of the dead in a special kind of grave with an interior cavity may be following the megalithic tradition of building subterranean rock-cut chambers as mortuary houses. The prevalence of specialist gravediggers, special kinds of rites performed before the commencement of grave digging and offerings to the dead at the grave after the funeral, all substantiate this presumption. Ancestor worship is common among the tribes of Malabar and till the recent intrusion of Brahmanical Hinduism among them their religion was nothing but animism incorporating ancestor worship or cult of the dead.

The problem of Gender in Death Customs

No other realm of tribal life is so discriminatory in its approach to women as that of funeral ceremonies, for these rituals deny them a space and voice. Not only are women set aside as silent spectators but they are even forced to bear the worst kinds of victimizations. Even among matrilineal tribal communities patriarchal norms dominate. Gender disparity is clearly reflected in all spheres of tribal funeral rites, as in the case of the upper caste Hindus.

Though the scope for individual freedom is greatly restricted in the social life of a clustered tribal hamlet, women enjoyed relatively larger possibilities for sovereignty and freedom of action at the material level. Of course there are restrictions on her sexuality and social intercourse but as the system of nuclear family is the established norm, women get more opportunities and freedom at home for decision-making and autonomy. But this relative freedom shrinks considerably as far as their social interventions particularly regarding marriage and death are concerned. On the death of their husbands tribal women are subjected to some special rituals associated with intimating the fact of their widowhood in public which though are not as humiliating as the custom of shaving of the head in the case of the Brahmins, evidently reflect certain elements of gender discrimination. The voicelessness and marginal role of women in funerals stand explicitly against the cherished nostalgic notions of gender equality in tribal social life.

The role of women in Malabar tribal society has been severely circumscribed by tradition. In the Indian context funeral rites are entirely a male domain where male chauvinism is articulated in the most visible form. All tribes in Malabar prefer male issues to perform the funeral rites and to inherit family property. The chief mourner of all tribes is the eldest son/nephew or the nearest male relative of the deceased. Apparently tribal tradition discourages women from participating in the event. Among the Malabar tribes there are strict taboos against women on occasions like

menstruation, pregnancy, etc which severely restricts their participation in sacred rituals. Such restrictions are not important or detrimental to tribes elsewhere in the world.

The restrictions on a tribal widow, as in the case of an Adiyān widow, were very stringent when compared to those on a widower during death pollution. An Adiyān widow in early days was to lead an extremely austere life and was not supposed to come out of the hut. But a widower was granted certain concessions and if he violated the pollution rules, punishments accorded to him was less stringent than that to a widow. In the matter of the violation of pollution rules, especially those related to chastity, a widow was unconditionally ostracized from her tribe. Most of the tribes also insisted that a widow should sever all her relations with the dead husband's house just after the burial ceremonies were over. In former days she was denied any right in the property of her deceased husband except that she was given a few of his implements. Widow marriage was strictly prohibited in the past and tribes like the Malamalasar still hold fast to this tradition.

Generally, women are excluded from all kinds of religious functions and are prohibited from entering sacred places or ancestral shrines especially during their polluting state. This prohibition is related to the whole concept of bad sacredness associated with emissions of the body. Kathleen Gough's observations on the marginal role of women in the cult of the dead of the

Nayars in matrilineal *tarawāds* find similar parallels in the tribal tradition.²³ As the matrilineal system of the Nairs had failed to provide either a space for female autonomy or gender equality, the tribal communities who were mostly matrilineal treated women almost in a similar way. But the status of women in tribal society greatly varies from that of the women of upper caste Hindus who traditionally play a very minor role in economic production and consequently are subordinates in the legal sphere. Although childbearing, cooking and other domestic affairs are the sole responsibility of the females even in the tribal society, their relatively higher role in economic production provide them greater autonomy. Gough remarks that the exclusion of women from participation in sacred functions expresses in a formal manner the notion that the power which women derived from them was polar and even antipathetic to the legal and economic power of men and that it also relates to the general position of women in the society.²⁴

In Malabar the role and decision of the headman and funeral functionaries are unquestionable while their wives have no such rites to perform. But this is not the case of the wives of African or Australian tribesmen who have to perform so many rituals before burial. Unlike among Malabar tribes, washing the corpse of both men and women elsewhere is carried by elderly female folk under the guidance of the headmen's wives and

²³ Kathleen Gough, "Cult of the Dead Among the Nayars", in Milton Singer ed., *Traditional India: Structure and Change*, Philadelphia, 1959, p. 242.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.246.

after the burial all other purificatory rites are performed by them. The only important ritual which is performed by a tribal woman in Malabar is the untying of the *tāli* or the marriage badge of a married woman at the death of her husband. The tribes of Aṭṭappādi and Paṇambikulam allow a certain amount of female participation in rituals associated with death and funeral. But even this is confined to just dancing along with their male counterparts. In all other matters women are passive spectators. Even in the dance-drama *Jogiyāṭṭam* attached to Kuṛumba *Chīru*, in which a few characters are females, women are not allowed to play a role.

The tribal tradition in Malabar forbids women from joining in funeral processions or attending the funeral ceremony at the graveyard. This is not the case with tribes elsewhere where even children accompany the funeral procession and attend the burial. In Malabar, apart from the existing taboos on women one reason for the sanction against them was the peculiar terrain of the tribal areas: most tribal cemeteries in early days were situated in thick and distant forest lands inaccessible for the females.

No tribe in Malabar offers women the position of a ritual functionary. From the headman to the oracle, men dominate. (This is not just the case of the Malabar tribes but tribes all over India follow the same tradition. But we are surprised by a unique case of the Sōṛas; among the Sōṛas women act as

oracles.²⁵) Women are not allowed to give offerings to the ancestors even during special occasions. Women ancestresses are also conspicuous by their absence among most tribes. They are never revered as founding mothers of a family or a *taṛawād*. The only exception is the *Pēna* of the Kuṛichiyas. But the way the Kuṛichiyas treat the *Pēna* clearly exemplifies the gross neglect that they occupy in the tribal pantheon. *Pēna* is installed in a dark corner of the kitchen and her presence is informed only by an oil lamp. Instead, it is quite interesting to note that the most horrific malevolent spirits are those of pregnant and barren women. Besides, a lion share of the expenditure of the funeral rites are to be born by the married daughters of a hamlet. The only right of a widow's family over her husband's family is that if her deceased husband had not paid the bride price before his death to his wife's father, father-in-law had the right to withhold the funeral of his son-in-law (and even this was not the right of the widow).

The only important duty/ritual performed by tribal women in Malabar is to wail loudly at the time of death till the disposal of the corpse in intervals and also at the time of the last rites. On the death of a tribesman/woman, kins/clanswomen gather at the house of the deceased to cry aloud for the dead. Unlike the tribal women in Malabar, their counterparts in Africa or Australia have an equal status in funeral rites. Here women make preliminary

²⁵ Piers Vitebsky, *Dialogues with the Dead: the Discussion of Mortality among the Sora of Eastern India*, New Delhi, 1993, p.5.

preparations for disposal while engaging in traditional wailing. But their wailing is different from the Malabar tribes. They scratched at their cheeks, drawing blood and tore at their hair, directing their violent emotions against themselves. They wailed outdoors during the funeral procession and at the cemetery.²⁶

Varier Elwin's opinion about tribal women is noteworthy in this context: "the most important thing about the tribal woman is that she is a woman. I stress this because there is sometimes a tendency to regard the tribal people as though they were something altogether apart from ourselves, almost as if they were of a different species. It is important, therefore to emphasize that the tribal woman is, in herself, exactly the same as any other woman, with the same passions, loves and fears, the same devotion to the home, the husband and children, the same faults and the same virtues".²⁷ Ehrenfels has argued that the common traits of womanhood present among the tribal woman and the present day secondariness of them, in relation to the male segment, is not to be mistaken as a continuity of tradition but is certainly an aberration brought about by the culture contact with people of the plains. He acknowledges that a certain division of labour between sexes is found even in a semi-food gathering economy- women will mainly be engaged in procuring the vegetarian part of the common diet and men will more often be out for

²⁶ Goody, J., *Death, Property and the Ancestors*, London, 1962, p.86-99.

²⁷ Varier Elwin, "Tribal Women" in *Indian Women*, edited by Devaki Jain, New Delhi, 1976, p. 213.

hunting. However, both sexes play a comparatively equal role, not only in the economic, but also in the family and spiritual aspects of life among such a group of people. "The agent which undermined the formerly existing independence of aboriginal womanhood, therefore appears to have been the example of intruding people and civilizations among whom women held a less independent position".²⁸ Ehrenfels' millenarian approach of course, at least, doesn't match with the position that tribal women have been holding in the religious and sacred realms and there is very little possibility to argue that it is a later innovation. Rivers reported that among the Todas although women have greater freedom, they are unimportant in ritual life. The exclusion of women from the dairy cult, the culture-focus of the Todas, reflects the attitude of the community towards the sex.²⁹ He doesn't seem to have taken into consideration the role of pollution, associated with both menstruation and child birth, in all primitive societies undermining women's claim for equality particularly in the spiritual sphere. In matters of funeral rites, they were certainly a poor lot having been extremely sidelined with little right to speak for themselves. And it perfectly conforms to Gayatri Spivak's comment: "...the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant...the

²⁸ U.R. Ehrenfels, "Aboriginal Womanhood and Culture Contact", *Eastern Anthropologist*, Vol. III, No. 1, Sep. 1949, p.48.

²⁹ W.H.R Rivers, *The Todas*, Vol. I, Jaipur, 1986, p.566.

subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow".³⁰

Social Uses of Funerary rites

As in other parts of the world, tribal funeral and death ceremonies are public events in Malabar and therefore are occasions of tribal solidarity. They serve to reaffirm kin-clan ties and provide possibilities for cultural interaction. Though funeral rituals are overtly organized in honour of the dead, in the practical sense they benefit the living. David Mandelbaum, who extensively studied the social uses of funeral rites, opines that "rites performed for the dead generally have important effects for the living. A funeral ceremony is personal in its focus and is societal in its consequences".³¹ A similar observation is made by Raymond Firth for whom a funeral rite is a "social rite par excellence. Its ostensible object is the dead person, but it benefits not to the dead, but the living".³²

The tribal tradition in Malabar insists on the participation of all close relatives, members of nearby settlements, friends and functionaries from all clan settlements in funeral and after-burial rituals. That is why envoys are sent to spread the message of death in all clan hamlets. Death according to the tribals is the most sacred ritual and representation in it is a must. Those who

³⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson & Lawrence Gossberg, Chicago, 1988, p 287.

³¹ David Mandelbaum, "Social Uses of Funerary Customs", *The Eastern Anthropologist*, Vol. XII, No. 1, Sep.-Nov. 1958, p.5.

³² Raymond Firth, *Elements of Social Organization*, London, 1951, p.63.

fail to attend the ceremony, and fail to account for his/her absence in the tribal council, are debarred from all future tribal affairs. Those who can satisfactorily justify their absence will be relieved of with the imposition of a fine. The Adiyāns have devised an extremely practical and priest-benefiting system to deal with acts of indiscipline: they impose penalty on the defaulters with the imposition of *Tappubaḷa*, the number of which may vary according to the nature and gravity of the fault. Thus the event of death functions as an occasion for both the reestablishment of tribal solidarity and the enforcement of tribal laws.

Death in a settlement and the attendant rituals help in eliminating factionalism among the tribal people because, apart from relatives and friends, the recalcitrant too participate in them keeping aside all kinds of disputes. All the members assembled at the hamlet of the deceased person cooperate in one or the other functions, either in making the bier, digging the grave, helping in washing and other purificatory rites or in arranging the facilities for ritual dancing (if they have had the practice). The neighbors of the dead persons prepare food for the attendees of the funeral after the disposal.

The death of an earning member, either male or female, makes the condition of the family pitiable particularly in the case of a widow. She and her children have to live at the mercy of the other members of her husband's family or her own natal family or other clansmen. The time honoured custom

among the tribes in Malabar strongly asks for relief and help extended to such persons by the relatives and all members of the settlement. Evidences for such cases are found among the Adiyāns. An Adiyān widow/widower is under pollution for a whole year. On all these days he/she is materially and morally supported by the clansmen. Moreover, certain tribes insist that all those who are gathered at the house of the dead should come forward with financial help or provisions for meeting the expenses of the funeral and last rites.

The clansmen of a deceased person also play a considerable role in reducing the sorrows of the kin-members of the dead by giving them the necessary psychic support and help to bring them back to normal life. All close women relatives of the dead lived together with the family of the bereaved till the end of pollution and make all arrangements to successfully complete the course of pollution.

Among all tribes in Malabar last rite or secondary burial is a ritualistic festive gathering for reaffirming kinship ties. The best example of such gatherings is the *Kākkappula* and the *Chīru*. Tribal people deliberately create a festive mood on these occasions since their tradition pay the utmost care in sending the spirits of the dead to the other world in the most joyful manner with the accompaniment of music, dance and grand feasts. All these are done not only for pleasing the spirits of the dead but also to honour those who had helped the family of the deceased. These family gatherings and collective

enjoyments help in weilding tribal unity and reducing ill-feelings among the tribesmen.

The greatest use of funeral rites in promoting community interests is their role in settling disputes among clansmen. In that sense they act as legal and juridical institutions. The last rites of all prominent tribes entail the judicial sitting of the tribal elders and functionaries in which all familial and extra-familial discords within the tribe would amicably be resolved. That no other ritual occasion provides for such an elaborate legal and judicial arrangement is an index to the social role of funeral ceremonies in the material life of the tribal people. The *Kūṭṭam* of the Adiyāns at the occasion of the *Kākkappula* is a classic example of such a system of tribal jurisprudence. Similar instances are the *Cheeru* of the Kuṟumbas/Mudugas, the *Kanji-chīru* of the Iruḷas, *Inangusabha* of the Karimpālans during *Kūḷiyāṭṭam*, *Karimpadam Veṭṭuka* of the Thachanādan Mūppans during *Chāvali* and the *Kākkappula* of the Paṇiyas. These politico-juridical assembling, even while serving to reproduce the primitive and exploitative form of priestly dominance, has been instrumental in maintaining a kind of order and discipline, with a high sense of moral force, within the tribal community.

Faith in ancestors and the rituals to commemorate them also play an almost similar social function. Kathleen Gough's observations on the patron-like role of the Nair ancestor-ghosts are equally applicable to the tribal

situation.³³ Although the lineage spirits have only subsidiary judicial functions, their cult served in several ways indirectly to maintain right relationship within the tribe. First, a headman who respected and correctly propitiated his own forebears provided a role model of piety for his clansmen in their relations with the living elders. Second, the ancestor spirits provided some sanctions against a headman's ill treatment of his wards. The headman (along with other functionaries) must keep his clan in good order because if he does not do so the lineage spirits may inflict suffering on all, including himself. Third, the ancestor-cult obviously provides one explanation for the cause of misfortunes, and offers a course of action whereby these may supposedly be allayed. Further, the clan's collective responsibility for its misfortunes in a sense make the ancestors a common threat to its members, for all may suffer from their anger. The ancestor cult thus enhances the sense of unity and common destiny of clan members. Ancestresses also acquire considerable amount of moral authority over the kinsmen since they are believed capable of harming the clan members for any flaws in the existing norms of sexual discipline.

Funerary Rites Causing Economic Drain

Extensive funeral ceremonies and elaborate post-burial last rites are a great drain on tribal resources and is a grave menace to the stability of the

³³ Kathleen Gough, *op. cit.*, pp. 246-247.

subsistent tribal economy. The unbearable weight of tradition, combined with the inability to realize the negative role of funeral customs in bringing about an economic decline, have promoted an uninterrupted continuation of these practices. Normally the expenses incurred for a funeral is beyond the capacity of a family or settlement to bear with. Among majority tribes the expenses of death should invariably be borne by the concerned family. Among certain others, there is a custom of receiving contributions but these have to be repaid later. Among the two tribes of Aṭṭappādi, the Kuṟumbas and Mudugas, while expenses for burial are the responsibility of the kinsmen of the dead, post-burial ceremony (*Chīṟu*) is a common venture, the expenses of which are shared among the whole inmates of the settlement. (The expenses of *Pachachāvu*, on the other hand, has to be borne by the relatives of the dead) But that too doesn't minimize the burden, since such rites are extremely grand and are hence heavily expensive. The long chain of funeral ceremonies among the Adiyāns ranging over a whole year with many stages like *Kunnupula*, *Chemmapula* and *Kākkappula* for a single death imposes unbearable economic burden on a family and may produce in an outsider an extreme sense of sympathy towards the victims.

The heads of expenditure in the event of a death include those incurred at the time of death and burial and those at the time of the *Adiyānthiram*. Soon after the occurrence of death, messengers have to be sent and they have to be paid for their service. A lot of materials such as new cloth or *Kōdi*, oil,

coconut, incense sticks, mats, betel, areca nut and tobacco, have to be purchased. Functionaries like bier-makers and grave-diggers have to be paid and arrack served. Although these expenses may appear trivial to an outsider, it is difficult for an ordinary tribesman to meet them and hence he has to borrow money from an outsider, most probably his employer or the nearby merchant, entailing a future obligation. Expenses at the last rite are even more heavy with provisions for the feast, arrangements and decorations, payments to functionaries, etc etc. In the case of *kūliyāṭṭam*, the Karimpālans pay a relatively high amount for the *teyyam* dancers, drummers and musicians and a significant amount is spent on liquor also. Although priestly exploitation is not a marked feature of all tribal communities, those tribes among whom it exists like the Adiyāns and Paṇiyas, its magnitude is certainly alarming. On the whole, in one way or the other, individually or collectively, funeral rites cause heavy damage to the standard of living of the tribal people. Their surplus resources are drained and economic improvement is curtailed. They fall into a debt-trap which invariably lead to their pauperization by perpetuating their poverty, deprivation and life-long bondages.

No less important is the drain caused by the deposition of goods in the graves, which is a common ancestral tribal heritage. As noted earlier, goods deposited include cloth(e)s, weapons, implements, ornaments, etc. The disposal of those goods, which could have been reused even for many generations, is a dismal loss to the tribal economy. Slowly this fact has

dawned upon the new tribal generation and they have started to disregard tradition and faith. This welcome change is brought about both by the massive impact of acculturation and by the slowly deteriorating material condition of the tribal people.

It is an interesting fact to note that tribes who are being more acculturated realize the importance of the drain through funeral rites. Similarly tribes who have been owner-cultivators like the Kuṛichiyas and Muḷḷakuṛumans spend less and less on them. Thus culture contact with the people of the plains, particularly migrant Christian cultivators, and the awareness of reinvestment in agriculture have been instrumental in determining the level of funeral expenditure and the mode of grave goods deposition. Though very slow in its pace, education also must have had a considerable impact on them. Despite a high level of acculturation, tribes like the Paṇiyas and Adiyāns still spend high amounts on them and thus perpetuate their economic dependence as well as material backwardness. Dignitaries like Kāḷan and Paḷḷiyaṛa Rāman strongly advocate the limiting of funeral expenditure in the context of the tribal deprivation but these attempts at change have not made a strong headway. They have submitted themselves to both ritualism and alcoholism. Among the tribes of Attappadi and Paṛambikuḷam, funerals are expensive but it is relatively more expensive among Aṭṭappādi tribes than among any other tribe in Kerala and this may be due to their semi-food gathering character and contacts with the Nilgiri tribes.

Tendency for limiting of funeral expenditure is not strong among them. It is quite interesting to observe that tribesmen do not complain much about the burden caused by funeral expenses may be because their belief in ancestors is so deep rooted that even culture change has had little impact on them.

Funerals have not been that much expensive nor have been causing life long indebtedness in the past. Funeral services were free and obligatory and materials used were available locally. There was no show or pomp associated with them earlier. Even for the funeral feast they depended largely on forest produces like different varieties of tubers, honey, fruits, mushrooms and bamboo shoots and hunted meat. Now with the restrictions on free passage into the forests, and more stringent vigilance on hunting, all the materials needed for the funerals have to be purchased from the market. This has had far reaching effects on tribal communities. First, it is a great drain of resources and manpower to the tribals and they are subjected to the exploitation of external elements like merchants and money lenders. To repay the money borrowed, they have either to sell their products at arbitrary rates or have to work for nominal wages for prolonged periods. Some tribals are reported to have borrowed loans from banks to conduct funeral ceremonies and the failure in repayment has led to the attachment of their landed property by the bank authorities. One of the main reasons for the aggreestic communities like the Adiyāns and Paṇiyas to live as chattels till recent times was their over-insistence on funeral rituals and the consequent self-pledging for meeting the

funeral expenditure of a kin-member. Second, the prohibition of hunting compelled tribals to accept a change in their funeral diet with a shift towards vegetarianism in their feasts and ancestral offerings. This fact in association with the advancing forces of Sanskritization together has induced many tribes in recent times to turn to vegetarianism. Even among tribes that still practise non-vegetarianism the number of animal and bird sacrifices have been reduced drastically. Moreover, such tribes now-a-days opt for domestic animals/birds for sacrifice in place of hunted ones.

In certain tribal communities the nature and extent of priestly exploitation is really alarming. Such a trend is more prevalent among dependant tribes like the Adiyāns and Paṇiyas and is present to a limited extent among the Karimpālans, Koṛagas, Iruḷas, Kuṛumbas, etc. Tribal tradition facilitates the functionaries to exploit their clansmen to the maximum in rituals and celebrations connected with death whereas such exploitation is not possible on occasions like marriage. They extract compulsory levies in the form of money, clothes, and provisions like rice from each family who conduct the function. Priestly exploitation also includes penalty imposed for even silly faults and fee collected for settling disputes. The Adiyān *mūppans* impose fines in the form of tappubaḷa for even trivial shortcomings leading to the perpetuation of the distress of their own compatriots. The practice of *Manṭri Virikkal* among the Iruḷas also is a similar instance of resource

allocation for the functionaries although the element of force and punishment is not present.

Certain necessary and welcome changes are nevertheless apparent in the direction towards limiting the funeral expenses. Most of the tribes have reduced the period of death pollution since it is found to cause unnecessary inconveniences for all the kinsmen and at the recognition that a long pollution period is a wastage of time. Moreover the obliteration of the traditional tribal ethos has made the subsistence of the mourners very difficult. They are not supported by any, for their fellow-tribesmen are as poor as themselves. They cannot depend on the forest, as in olden days, for their daily requirements. Hence it is difficult to refrain from work for long. The days of the last rites also have been cut short by tribes like the Thachanādan Mūppans who earlier had three-day *Adiyānthiram* called *Chāvali* has now been reduced to two-days'. A similar trend is visible among many other more acculturated tribes. Even the most ritual-ridden tribe like the Adiyāns has now started organizing *Kākkappula* collectively at one *chemmam*, for many deaths together in a year, in an attempt to reduce the expenditure. On the whole, the awareness that is slowly spreading among all tribes, but which may not be openly visible among all, is that funerals are so much unproductive that they not only destroy even the slightest chance for making reinvestment but even make survival impossible. Now-a-days grave goods deposition has become just nominal, that valuables are now no more enclosed with the corpse. Thus a slow replacement

of animistic faith by Brahmanical Hinduism and tribal rituals by Hindu ceremonies has formed a convenient environment for this silent transformation.

Appendix I
TRIBES OF MALABAR
(District-wise Distribution)

I. KANNUR

1. Karimpālans
2. Kuṛichiyas
3. Malayāḷar
4. Māvilāns
5. Paṇiyas

II. KASARGOD

1. Koṛagas

III. KOZHIKODE

1. Kuṛichiyas
2. Paṇiyas

IV. MALAPPURAM

1. Āḷar
2. Aṛaṇādans
3. Chōlanāikkans
4. Kāṭṭunāikkans
5. Malamuthans
6. Malapaṇikkans
7. Paṇiyas

V. PALAKKAD

1. Ēṛavāḷans
2. Iruḷas
3. Kādar
4. Kuṛumbas
5. Malamalasar
6. Malasar
7. Mudugas

VI. WYNAD

1. Adiyāns
2. Kaḷanādis
3. Kāṭṭunāikkans
4. Kunduvādiyans
5. Kuṛichiyas
6. Muḷḷakuṛumans
7. Paṇiyas
8. Thachanādan Mūppans
9. Ūṛāḷikurumans
10. Wayanādan Kādars
11. Wayanādan Pathiyans

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Appendix II
LIST OF INFORMANTS

	Tribe	Names	Age	M/F	Ritual Status
1	Adiyāns	P.K. Kāḷan M.P. Kāḷan Kuṟuman Chokkuran Javuni Bālakṛishṇan Surēsh Māra Kuṟumātti	70 65 75 50 45 36 30 65 68	M M M M M M M F F	Nāttumūppan Kunnumūppan Expert in Śāstrā Song Karumi Chemmakkāran Grave-digger Bier-maker Perumātti -do-
2	Āḷar	Kēthan Chāthan	62 48	M M	Tharawāṭṭukāran Grave-digger & bier-maker
3	Aṟaṇādans	Nīli Kīran Kaṇṇan Veḷḷan Kīran Nīli Pramōd	46 60 55 70 78 48 28	F M M M M F M	Nil Headman Grave-digger Nil oracle Nil Nil
4	Chōlanāikkans	Chellan Chellan Vijaya	64 42 35	M M F	Chemmakkāran Grave-digger Nil
5	Ēravāḷans	Āṟān Maṇiyan Pazhaniswamy Chinnaswamy	45 55 47 40	M M M M	Bier-maker Headman Grave-digger -do-
6	Iruḷas	Rāmalingam Kāramada Kaṇṇamma Murugan Rājan Veḷḷinkari Rangan	55 70 65 22 22 30 45	M M F M M M M	Headman Vaṇḍāri Nil Ritual Dancer -do- Maṇṇūkkāran Kuṟutalai

7	Kādar	Kumāraswamy	60	M	Headman
		Kuṇḍumaṇi	43	M	Grave-digger
		Padmini	38	F	Nil
		Lakshmi	55	F	Nil
		Jayanthi	18	F	Nil
8	Kaḷanādis	Thimman	60	M	Teyyam Dancer
		Nambṛu	80	M	Headman
9	Karimpālans	Chemmaran	54	M	Kāraṇavar/Ex-President, Ulikkal Panchayat
		Kunjirāman	58	M	Oracle/ Teyyam Dancer
		Chaman	75	M	Oracle/Teyyam Dacer
		Balakṛishnan	45	M	Changāthi
		Chāppan	60	M	Āṭṭiyān
		Jānaki	56	F	Nil
10	Kāṭṭunāikkans	Aṇṇu	80	M	Headman
		Māran	70	M	Grave-digger
		Kuṭṭan	70	M	Bier-maker
11	Koṛagas	Mathadi	80	M	Nāṭṭumūthavar
		Amaṇāth	35	M	Grave-digger& Bier-maker
12	Kunduvādiyans	Sathyan	45	M	Bier-maker
		Kunjikkaṇṇan	51	M	Grave-digger/Headman
		Maṇi	39	M	Nil
		Śivadāsan	29	M	Nil
		Gōpināthan	40	M	Nil
		Narāyaṇan	40	M	Nil
		Sarōjini	45	F	Nil
		Gowri	70	F	Nil
13	Wayanādan Kuṛichiyas	Kēḷu	45	M	Kāranavar & Oracle
		Veḷḷan	60	M	Grave-digger
		Paḷḷiyāra Rāman	62	M	Kāranavar
		Saraswathi	35	F	Nil
		Dēvaki	68	F	Nil
14	Kaṇṇavam Kuṛichiyas	Chandu	63	M	Kāranavar
		Bālakumaṛ	45	M	Grave-digger
		Govindan	45	M	Bier-maker

15	Kuṛumbas	Baṛmanachan	85	M	Headman (former), Anavāi Maṇṇūkkāran, Anavāi Headman, Thadikkundu Kuṛutalai, Thadikkundu Maṇṇūkkāran, Thadikkund Headman of Todikki Grave-digger & Bier- maker Ritual Dancer
		Kuppan	60	M	
		Murugan	45	M	
		Veḷḷi	60	M	
		Māthai	45	M	
		Pachamūppan	50	M	
		Surēsh	35	M	
Haridas	25	M			
16	Malamalasar	Chinnappan	70	M	Headman/grave-digger Bier-maker Nil Nil
		Kaṇṇappan	60	M	
		Lakshmi	56	F	
		Kāḷiyamma	70	F	
17	Malamuthans	Kṛishṇan	62	M	Headman Grave-digger Nil Bier-maker Member, Mampād Panchāyat
		Nārayaṇan	62	M	
		Jānaki	68	F	
		Nārayaṇan	38	M	
		Subrahmaṇyan	38	M	
18	Malapaṇikkans	Keḷan	70	M	Headman Artist, Ayyarukaḷi Grave-digger & Bier- maker Nil
		Rāmakṛishṇan	45	M	
		Sankaran	58	M	
		Rohiṇi	67	F	
19	Malasar	Māhāli	29	M	Grave-digger/ Bier- maker Headman
		Muthuswāmy	58	M	
20	Malayāḷar	Peruvāṇi	70	M	Kāraṇavar
21	Māvilāns	Keḷan	85	M	Headman Kaṛmi Teyyam Performer Nil Nil
		Othenan	75	M	
		Kaṇṇan	70	M	
		Nārayaṇan	28	M	
		Suśīla	45	F	

22	Mudugas	Rangi	46	F	Nil
		Ushāmaṇi	27	F	Tribal Promoter,
		Rājan	26	M	AHADS ¹
		Ramēsh	26	M	Grave-digger
		Ayyappan	65	M	Asst. Secretary, AKS ² ,
Murugan	58	M	Pālakkād District. Musician & Dancer Headman		
23	Muḷlakuṛumans	Chimṛan	57	M	Headman/Gravedigger
		Kāppi	80	M	-do-
		Karuṇākaran	80	M	-do-
		Dēvaki	50	F	Nil
		Rādhākṛishṇan	35	M	Bier-maker
		Divya	17	F	Nil
24	Paṇiyas	Gaḷli	80	M	Headman
		Ammiṇi	45	F	Nil
		Nunjan	37	M	Grave-digger
		Māran	75	M	Āṭṭāli
		Karimban	70	M	Bier-maker
		Śāntha	45	F	Nil
		Śreedharan	45	M	Nil
25	Thachanādan Mūppans	Rāman Kuṭṭy	75	M	Headman
		Bālan	40	M	Secretary, TMCS ³
		Devaki	44	F	Nil
		Jānaki	65	F	Nil
26	Ūrāḷikurumans	Gōpālan	36	M	Activist, GMS ⁴
		Subhāsh	30	M	Grave-digger
		Sathīsh	28	M	Bier-maker
		Kumāran	65	M	Bijakkālan
		Jayanthi	42	F	Nil
27	Wayanādan Kādars	Kaṇṇan	80	M	Headman
		Surēsh	42	M	Grave-digger
28	Wayanādan Pathiyans	Nanjunda	70	M	Kāraṇavar
		Śāntha	50	F	Nil

1. AHADS: Attappadi Hill Area Development Society
2. AKS : Adivasi Kshema Samiti
3. TMCS : Thachanadan Mooppan Charitable Society
4. GMS : Gotra Maha Sabha

Appendix III
Funeral Index: Tribe-wise

Name of Tribe	Term for Corpse	Term for Graveyard	Term for Cavity	Term for Bier	Term for Last Rite	Term for Spirit	Orientation	Pollution days
Adiyāns	Chāvu	Kidākkai	Śava-Gundu	Kaṭṭil	Kākkappula	Kūḷi	North-South	13 days
Ājar	Chammu	Chodalai	Nil	Manjam	Nil	Pēyi	N-S	15
Aṛaṇādans	Not known	Not known	Thala-kkuzhi	Nil	Nil	Pṛētam	N-S	7
Chōlanāikkans	Thadi	Śavundi	Mada	Thandu	Nil	Pṛētam	East- West	3
Ēṛavāḷans	Ponam	Chudukād	Thurangam	Pallāk/ Patāka	Karumāthi	Pṛētam	N-S	5 or 7
Iruḷas	Sāvu	Koppai	Thala-kkuzhi	Sapṛam	Kanjichīru	Pēyi	N-S	6 month
Kādar	Sāvu	Chudala-kāvu	Thala-kkuzhi	Kaṭṭal	Karumāthi	Pṛētam	N-S	15
Kaḷanādis	Marippu	Chodalai	Aḷa	Thandu	Kūṭṭathil Kūdal	Pṛētam	N-S	7
Karimpālans	Śavam	Chodalai/ Chudukād	Nil	Param	Kūliyākkal	Kūli	N-S	3, 7 or 11

Kāṭṭunāikkans	Chāvu	Chudumālai /chodalai	Hoddamaṇṇu	Sattai-badi	Nil	Pēyi	E- W	15
Koṟagas	Punam	Kuṭṭa	Nil	Bhadru	Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal	Kuḷa	N-S	9
Kunduvādiyans	Marippu	Chudala	Nil	Thandu	Vetchhūṭ	Pēyi	N-S	15
Kuṟichiyas	Marippu	Chudalakkād	Thoḷḷu	Thandum Nārum	Pōthiyāṭṭam /Bhagavath- iyāṭṭam	Kūḷi	N-S	15
Kuṟumbas	Sāvu	Chodalai	Aḷḷēkkuzhi	Kūdākāram	Chīru	Pijād	N-S	1year
Malamalasar	Ponam	Chudukād	Nil	Pallāku	Pongalchōṟu	Kaṟuppu	N-S	10
Malamuthans	Śavam	Chudalakkād	Nil	Kattil	Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal	Kūḷi	N-S	13
Malapaṇikkans	Śavam	Chudalakkād	Nil	Paricha	Adiyanthiram	Pṛētam	N-S	15
Malasar	Ponam	Chudukād	Thurangam	Thēru	Karumāthi	Pṛētam	N-S	9
Malayāḷar	Śavam	At house premises	Nil	Param	Adiyanthiram	Pṛētam	N-S	9

Māvilāns	Śavam	Chudala/ Śmasānam	Nil	Not known	Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal	Kūḷi	N-S	16
Mudugas	Sāvu	Chodalai	Aḷḷēkkuzhi	Kaṭṭakkāl	Chīru	Pijād	N-S	1year
Muḷḷakuṟuman s	Chāvu	Chodalai	Aḷa	Thandu	Adiyanthiram	Chāthi	E- W	7
Paṇiyas	Marippu	Chodalai	Aḷḷēkkuzhi	Thandu	Kākkappula	Pēna	N-S	7
Thachanādan Mūppans	Marippu	Chudukād/ Śavappar- ambu	Ala	Paṟam	Chāvali	Kūḷi	N-S	15
Ūrālikurumans	Nil	Chodala- kandi	Nil	Kaḷukāyal	Daivam Kāṇal	Muthru	E- W	9
Wayanādan Pathiyans	Chāvu	Nil	Nil	Padam	Adiyanthiram	Pēna	N-S	7
Wayanādan Kādars	Śavam	Chodalakkād	Mādi	Thandu/ Manjali	Akathūṭṭal	Pṛētam	N-S	16

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GLOSSARY

<i>Ada</i>	Pastry made of rice/ragi powder and jaggery for being used in ancestral rituals.
<i>Adhikāri</i>	Village officer in Malabar.
<i>Adiyānthiram</i>	Last rite/pollution ending ceremony.
<i>Akanānūru</i>	An ancient Tamil work.
<i>Akathūṭṭal</i>	Last rite of Wayanādan Kādar.
<i>Aḷai/ Kallu-Aḷai</i>	Natural rock shelters where the Chōlanāikkans live.
<i>Aḷāvupāṭṭu</i>	A part of the <i>Sastra</i> song of the Adiyāns recited during <i>Kunnupula/ Chemappula/ kākkappula</i> .
<i>Aḷḷēkkuzhi</i>	Cavity of the graves of Paṇiyas, Iruḷas, Kuṟumbas and Mudugas.
<i>Āṇimantram</i>	A Karimpālan method of driving out the spirit from an affected body.
<i>Annakkuzhi</i>	Pits in which Mudugas used to bury the victims of epidemics.
<i>Āṭṭāḷi</i>	Kōmaram/oracle of the Paṇiyas
<i>Āṭṭam</i>	Funeral dance of the Kādar
<i>Āvath Keṭṭuka</i>	Thachanādan Mūppan ritual of tying the rolled mat, on which the corpse was laid before burial, on the beam of the room of the dead person's house.
<i>Āyathanmār</i>	Ritual functionaries for the funeral ceremony of dignitaries like <i>teyyam</i> dancers and <i>Kōmarams</i> of both Karimpālans and Māvilāns.

<i>Ayyarukaḷi</i>	Folk dance of the Malapaṇikkans.
<i>Badukka</i>	The stick used by the headman of the Kāṭṭunāikkans for marking the spot of the burial pit.
<i>Bali</i>	The ritual of offering of food to the crows by the mourners during death pollution.
<i>Balikkārathi</i>	The Paṇiya female functionary who performs certain important funeral rites after a death. (also called <i>Melikkārathi</i>)
<i>Balipandal</i>	Temporary shed for the mourners to observe pollution among the Thachanādan Mūppans.
<i>Bethavadi</i>	The stick carried by the Adiyān messenger while going to inform the news of a death.
<i>Bhadṛu</i>	Bier of the Koṛagas.
<i>Bhaṇḍāram Thāzhthal</i>	The term for the special kind of burial of a <i>Kōmaram/teyyam</i> dancer/victims of small pox.
<i>Bhaṇḍārathāra</i>	Stone platform built over the grave.
<i>Bhūṭha</i>	Great ancestors of the Koṛagas.
<i>Bijakkālan</i>	Ūraḷikuṛuman priest
<i>Binjē</i>	Term for the soul among Ūraḷikuṛumans.
<i>Chakṛam Veṭṭal</i>	The Ēṛavāḷan method of driving out a malevolent spirit from an affected body.
<i>Chammu</i>	The Ālar corpse.
<i>Changāthi</i>	The officiator among the Karimpālans/Kuṛichiyas in such important rituals like marriage and death.
<i>Chāthi</i>	The Muḷḷakuṛuman term for a ghost.

<i>Chāvali</i>	Last rite of the Thachanādan Mūppans.
<i>Chāvu</i>	Term for corpse among Iruḷas, Mudugas, Kuṟumbas, Kādar, Wayanādan Pathiyans, Kāṭṭunāikkans, Muḷḷakuṟumans and Adiyāns.
<i>Chāvu paṇam</i>	Funeral contribution of clansmen among the Chōlanāikkans. It also means wage to the grave-diggers.
<i>Chemmakkāran</i>	Headman of a clan among the Adiyāns.
<i>Chemmam</i>	A clan unit among the Adiyāns.
<i>Chemmapula</i>	Second stage of the <i>Adiyānthiram</i> of the Adiyāns.
<i>Chemmi</i>	The Paṇiya headman.
<i>Chīru</i>	Last rite/second funeral of Kuṟumbas & Mudugas.
<i>Chodalai</i>	The common term for graveyard of tribes like Paṇiyas, Kunduvadiyans, Muḷḷakuṟumans, Ālar, Mudugas, Malaimalasar and Kuṟumbas.
<i>Chodalakandi</i>	Graveyard of the Ūraḷikuṟumans.
<i>Chudalakkād</i>	Graveyard of Malamuthans, Malapaṇikkans and Kuṟichiyas.
<i>Chudalakkāvu</i>	Kādar cemetery.
<i>Chudalappēyi</i>	Grave-spirit of the Adiyāns.
<i>Chudukād</i>	Graveyard of Malasar, Malamalasar and Thachanādan Mūppans.
<i>Chudumālai/chodalai</i>	Graveyard of Kāṭṭunāikkans.
<i>Churakka</i>	Gourd shell used in ritual occasions, especially for warding off spirits.

<i>Daivakkoṭṭa</i>	The divine basket kept in the Daivappura of the Chōlanāikkans in which the ring which is supposed to contain the spirit of the dead is permanently preserved.
<i>Daivam Kāṇal</i>	Calling the soul of ancestors among the Ūraḷikuṟumans at occasions like marriage, Pregnancy, diseases and also during the last rite.
<i>Daivam Kayaral</i>	The Koṟaga practice of consulting their oracle to discern the reason behind a death.
<i>Daivamōthiram</i>	The ring into which the spirit of a deceased Chōlanāikkan is invoked and kept in the <i>Daivakkoṭṭa</i> .
<i>Daivappura</i>	The abode of deities and ancestors of the three tribes of Muḷḷakuṟumans, Kāṭṭunāikkans and Chōlanāikkans.
<i>Daivathē Viḷikkal</i>	Ancestor-consulting ritual of the Kāṭṭunāikkans.
<i>Dēsai Ūrippōkath</i>	A peculiar custom of throwing grains in the funeraprocession of Mudugas.
<i>Dhambaṭṭa</i>	Drum used by the Iruḷas in ritual occasions.
<i>Dhani</i>	The feudal lord of the Koṟagas in former days.
<i>Dhaviḷ</i>	A musical instrument of Iruḷas.
<i>Erumayāṭṭam</i>	Dance-drama performed during the <i>Chīru</i>
<i>Gaddika mādal</i>	Ritualistic method of disease-curing among the Adiyāns.
<i>Gubbē</i>	The chamber of the <i>Gudikkettu</i> in which the bones are kept during the <i>Chīru</i> .

<i>Gudikkeṭṭu</i>	Terms for a) Iruḷas: Decorations on the bier; b) Kuṟumbas & Mudugas: Funeral car for <i>Chīru</i> .
<i>Hoddamaṇṇu</i>	Side cavity of the Kāṭṭunāikkān grave.
<i>Hossabēṭṭa/</i>	Funeralcloth among the Kāṭṭunāikkāns.
<i>Hossachēla</i>	
<i>Idukād</i>	The place where Kuṟumbas abandon the decorative parts of the bier after the burial.
<i>Īngamuḷḷu</i>	Thorny creepers put over or inside the grave.
<i>Īttupura</i>	Miniature confinement room, with a cradle and a vessel containing milk, constructed after the burial of a pregnant woman, by the Wayanādan Kuṟichiyas.
<i>Janmi</i>	The feudal lords of former Malabar.
<i>Jhalṟa</i>	Cymbal-like musical instrument of the Iruḷas.
<i>Jogiyāṭṭam</i>	A kind of dance-drama performed during the <i>Chīru</i>
<i>Kainappaḷḷy</i>	The place where Iruḷas throw away the decorative parts of the bier.
<i>Kai-Pidippikkal</i>	A stage in the <i>Kunnupula/ Chemappula/ Kākkappula</i> .
<i>Kākkappula</i>	Last stage of the <i>Adiyānthiram</i> of the Adiyāns/Last rite of the Paṇiyas.
<i>Kālan</i>	The Hindu god of death.
<i>Kalladikkāran</i>	The Aṟaṇādan oracle.
<i>Kallukku Rāyi Āṭṭu</i>	Date-fixing ceremony of <i>Chīru</i> .
<i>Kaḷukāyal</i>	The bier of Ūraḷikuṟumans.
<i>Kanalādi</i>	The assistant of the Adiyān <i>Nāṭṭumūppan</i> .

<i>Kāṇappaṇam</i>	Nominal fee that a young Thachanādan Mūppan-widow should pay to her husband's <i>Pādimūppan</i> for getting the sanction for her second marriage.
<i>Kāṇayam</i>	The bundle kept by the headman of the Thachanādan Mūppans in which his customary stick along with sticks of former headmen are tied together.
<i>Kaṇjichīru</i>	Last rite of the Iruḷas.
<i>Kaṇṇōk</i>	The ritual observed by the Malapaṇikkans on the seventh day after a death to get delivered from death pollution and for purifying the body.
<i>Kāraṇavar</i>	a) Eldest maternal uncle; b) senior-most ancestor c) headman of the Kaḷānadis.
<i>Karimpadam Veṭṭuka</i>	The gathering of elders among the Thachanādan Mūppans during <i>Chāvali</i> for solving all disputes.
<i>Kaṇmi</i>	The chief funeral functionary of Māvilāns.
<i>Karudaivam</i>	The Kuṟumba deity.
<i>Karumāthi</i>	The common term for the last rite among Malasar, Ēṟavāḷans and Kādar.
<i>Karumi</i>	The chief funeral Functionary of Adiyāns.
<i>Kaṟuppu</i>	Term for ghost, Malamalasar.
<i>Kaṭṭakkāl</i>	Funeral car of the Mudugas.
<i>Kaṭṭal</i>	Decorated bier of the Kādar.
<i>Kaṭṭil</i>	Bier of the Malamuthans of Viṭṭikkunnu.
<i>Kāvu</i>	The great Ancestors among Ālar.
<i>Kidākkai</i>	The Adiyān graveyard.

<i>Kōdi</i>	New clothes used for covering the corpse.
<i>Kōdiyidal</i>	The ritual of putting new clothes on the corpse by the close relatives of the dead.
<i>Kohal</i>	Blow pipe of the Iruḷas.
<i>Kōlum Valliyum Keṭṭal</i>	The Adiyān practice of payment to the <i>Mūppan</i> for getting his consent to observe <i>Pula</i> .
<i>Kōmaram</i>	Oracle, Shaman.
<i>Koppai</i>	Iruḷa graveyard.
<i>Kōṟam Vāhzc̣ha</i>	The initiation ceremony of the new <i>Kāraṇavar</i> (headman) among Kuṟichiyas.
<i>Koth</i>	The small spade buried with a Malasar female corpse
<i>Kūdākāram</i>	Funeral car of the Kuṟumbas
<i>Kuduma</i>	Tuft of hair.
<i>Kuḷa</i>	Term for the Koṟaga ancestor-spirit.
<i>Kūḷi/ kūḷiyan</i>	a) Ancestor-spirits of Karimpālans; b) term for the ghosts of Karimpālans, Māvilāns, Thachanādan Mūppans, Kaṇṇavam Kuṟichiyas and Adiyāns.
<i>Kūḷikkōṭṭam</i>	Temple-house of the Karimpālans where their great ancestor is settled.
<i>Kūḷiyādikkal</i>	The Karimpālan ritual performed once in a year after a girl's marriage.
<i>Kūḷiyākkal</i>	Karimpālan ritual of merging the souls of the newly dead with the ancestral souls.

<i>Kūḷu Vekkuka</i>	The ritual of offering food to the soul of the newly dead at the grave on the day of the last rite among the Kāṭṭunāikkans.
<i>Kumbaḷam Kothu</i>	Another Karimpālan method of driving out the spirit from an affected body.
<i>Kunnu Mūppan</i>	The headman of an Adiyān hamlet or <i>Kunnu</i> .
<i>Kunnupula</i>	First stage of the <i>Adiyānthiram</i> of the Adiyāns.
<i>Kuṟutalai</i>	The messenger of the headman for all the three Aṭṭappādi tribes.
<i>Kūthu</i>	Puranic dance-drama performance during the <i>Kanjichīru</i> .
<i>Kuṭṭa</i>	Graveyard of the Koṟagas.
<i>Kūṭṭam</i>	The dispute-settling assembly of the Adiyāns during a <i>Kunnupula/ Chemappula/Kākkappula</i> .
<i>Kūṭṭan B(V)aḷa</i>	Paṇiya <i>Mūppan (Chemmi)</i> 's bangle.
<i>Kūṭṭathil Kūṭṭal</i>	The general term among all Malabar tribes for the ceremony that mark the merging of the soul of the newly dead with the ancestor-souls.
<i>Machunan Paṇam</i>	Funeral contribution among Kaṇṇavam Kuṟichiyas.
<i>Mada</i>	Side chamber/cavity of Chōlanāikkan grave.
<i>Madam</i>	Earthen pot kept by the Iruḷa <i>Mūppan</i> containing funeral cloths.
<i>Mādi</i>	Side chamber of Wayanādan Kādar's grave.
<i>Maithini/ Maithina</i>	Cross cousins among the Kuṟumbas.

<i>Maṅṅūkkāran</i>	Funeral functionary of Malasar, Iruḷas, Kuṟumbas and Mudugas.
<i>Mantri Virikkal</i>	The sitting of the Iruḷa elders, during a <i>Kanjichīru</i> .
<i>Mantu</i>	Term for the three high-ranking Adiyān clans of Thirunelli, Badakku and Pothuru.
<i>Maraduchaviṭṭal</i>	A rite among the Paṇiyas for curing a disease. The <i>Āṭṭāli</i> acts as the ritual performer in front of the <i>Pēnathara</i> .
<i>Marippu</i>	The term for corpse among the Kaḷānadis, Thachanādan Mūppans, Kunduvādiyans, Kuṟichiyas and the Paṇiyas.
<i>Marippupaṇam</i>	Funeral contribution among Kunduvādiyans.
<i>Marumakkathāyam</i>	Matriliny.
<i>Marunāḷu Nōkkal</i>	Customary grave visit among Malamasar after burial.
<i>Maṟusāvu</i>	Customary grave visit among Mudugas after burial.
<i>Maṟuthadi</i>	Customary grave visit among Kuṟumbas after burial.
<i>Maṟuthadi Pākkku</i>	Customary grave visit among Iruḷas after burial.
<i>Maryādi</i>	Purificatory rite among Koṟagas after the funeral.
<i>Māth Vekkuka</i>	Food offering to the ancestors among Kuṟumbas.
<i>Modali</i>	a) The Kāṭṭunāikkan headman; b) Paṇiya grave-diggers of the Kaḷānadis.
<i>Moyippaṇam</i>	The funeral expenditure paid to another settlement by the Ēṟavāḷḷans if a death and disposal takes place there.

<i>Mozhi Paṛayal</i>	Ritual chanting among the Kuṛichiyas and Karimpālans.
<i>Muddhiyam</i>	The divine stick of the Kāṭṭunāikkan headman.
<i>Mūdupadam</i>	Funeral cloth of Malapaṇikkans.
<i>Mundachi</i>	The Kādar widow
<i>Muni</i>	Souls of great men among the Kuṛichiyas.
<i>Mūnnānthaḷi</i>	Death-pollution removing ceremony among the Viṭṭikkunnu Malamuthans.
<i>Munnūttān</i>	A low-ranking caste among the Hindus who acts as the ritual functionaries for Wayanādan Pathiyans.
<i>Mūppan</i>	General term for the tribal headman.
<i>Muṛam Keṭṭu</i>	A stage in the <i>Kunnupula/ Chemappula/ Kākkappula</i> .
<i>Muṭṭaidē</i>	A deceased Koṛaga woman whose husband is alive.
<i>Nālivekkal</i>	The Aṛaṇādan practice of consulting an oracle to understand the cause of a death.
<i>Nālillakkār</i>	A Wayanādan Pathiyan clan, who should first be informed of the news of a death.
<i>Nāḷukeṭṭu</i>	The date-fixing ceremony of <i>Kunnupula/ Chemappula/ Kākkappula</i> .
<i>Nāṭṭumūppan</i>	The chief of all the Adiyān settlements.
<i>Nāṭṭupāṭṭu</i>	Funeral song of Kuṛichiyas.
<i>Ne(i)kal</i>	Soul (shadow) Iruḷas, Kuṛumbas, Mudugas and Kuṛichiyas believe that spirits move as shadow.
<i>Nekalmuri: (Koṭṭil)</i>	The room dedicated to ancestors among Wayanādan Kuṛichiyas.

<i>Nikal nīr kuthu</i>	Rite among Mudugas/Kuṟumbas in order to merge the soul of the newly dead with the ancestor-souls.
<i>Nikālumalai</i>	The hill abode of Kuṟumba ancestors.
<i>Nikalāṭṭam</i>	The ritual performed by the Kuṟichiyas during times of misery or distress.
<i>Nilaviḷakku</i>	Brass oil lamp used in ritual occasions.
<i>Odi-vidya</i>	Sorcery.
<i>Ōlakeṭṭu</i>	A stage in the Adiyān <i>Kunnupula/ Chemmappula/ Kākkappula</i> .
<i>Orisādu</i>	The rite observed by the Chōlanāikkans for the removal of malevolent influence by blowing air on the patient's body.
<i>Oṭṭālam Kamizhthal</i>	Immediate post-burial funeral ceremony among the Karimpālans.
<i>Pachachāvu</i>	Post-burial funeral ceremony of Kuṟumbas/ Mudugas for those who had died of unnatural causes.
<i>Padam</i>	Bier of the Wayanādan Pathiyans.
<i>Pāla Pādana</i>	Place where the Koṟagas abandon two or three clothes of the dead before the burial.
<i>Pallāk/Patāka</i>	Bamboo bier of Ēṟavālans.
<i>Pallākku</i>	Bamboo bier of Malamalasar.
<i>Paḷḷippura</i>	Miniature mud hut made by the Thachanādan Mūppans at the head of the grave after filling it.
<i>Pandal</i>	Temporary shed prepared during a festive or ritual occasion.

<i>Paṛakkōl</i>	Digging rod buried with a male corpse by the Kādar in the grave.
<i>Paṛam</i>	Bier of both the Malayālar and Thachanādan Mūppans.
<i>Paricha</i>	Bier of the Malapaṇikkans.
<i>Pariyapaṇam</i>	Bride price among the Iruḷas, Kuṛumbas and the Mudugas.
<i>Paśathuchaṭṭi</i>	Earthen pot kept in an Iruḷa house to keep funeral clothes.
<i>Patham Paranju</i>	
<i>Karoyal</i>	Funeral wailing
<i>Pathum Muthalum</i>	Custom of sending of the widow among the Karimpālans.
<i>Kodukkal</i>	
<i>Paṭṭiṇikkanji</i>	a) Food prepared for the funeral party by neighbours of the dead; b) Porridge prepared among Māvilāns by the nephews of the dead on the second day of pollution and consumed by three mourners.
<i>Paṭṭu</i>	Red silk cloth: a) used for spreading over the dead body; b) worn by ritual functionaries.
<i>Pāvarīthi</i>	The most effective Karimpālan method of driving out the spirit from an affected body.
<i>Pēna</i>	a) Spirit of the dead among the Paṇiyas b) Ancestress of the Kuṛichiyas.
<i>Pēnakeṭṭu</i>	Last stage of the Karimpālan ritual of <i>Kūḷiyākkal</i> .

<i>Pēnakkōl</i>	A stick that is supposed to embody the spirit of the dead among the Karimpālans.
<i>Peṟai</i>	A musical instrument of the Iruḷas.
<i>Perumans</i>	Elder male members among the Adiyāns.
<i>Pēyi</i>	The term for spirit among Iruḷas, Kāṭṭunāikkans, and Ālar.
<i>Pēyi Madakkal</i>	The last stage in the <i>Kunnupula/ Chemappula/ Kākkappula</i> .
<i>Pijad</i>	Term for spirit among the Mudugas and the Kuṟumbas.
<i>Pijad Chatti</i>	The Muduga variant of <i>Paśathuchaṭṭi</i> of the Iruḷas.
<i>Pindamidal</i>	Drawing the symbolic figure of the dead person with raw rice, during <i>Kunnupula/ Chemappula/ Kākkappula</i>
<i>Piṇiyāl</i>	The spirit-affected person among Karimpālans.
<i>Piṭṟs</i>	Sanskrit word for Ancestors.
<i>Ponam</i>	Corpse, for Malasar, Malamalasar, and Ēṟavālans.
<i>Pongalchōru</i>	The last rite of Malamalasar.
<i>Ponnum Nīrum</i>	The rite of offering the last drops of water to the dying
<i>Kodukkal</i>	person among Malamuthans.
<i>Pōrāthōn</i>	Second headman among the Muḷḷakuṟumans.
<i>Pōruṇōn</i>	The Muḷḷakuṟuman headman.
<i>Pōthiyāttam/</i>	Last rite among the Kuṟichiyas.

Bhagavathiyāṭṭam

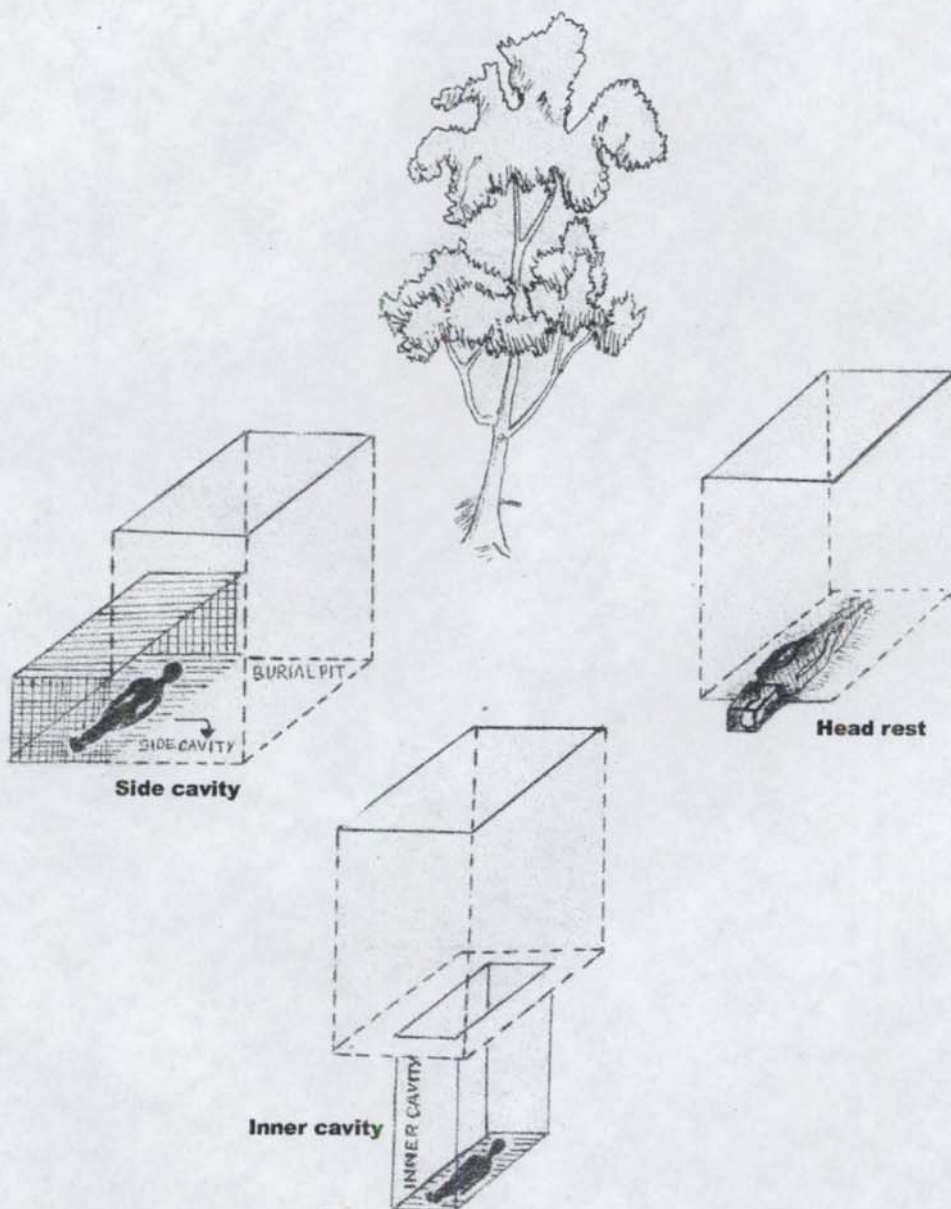
<i>Pōya</i>	Box in which the Paṇiyas keep the remnants of clothes of their illustrious ancestors
<i>Prētam</i>	Term for spirit among Malasar, Ēṇavālans, Kaḷānadis, Wayanādan Kādar, Aṇṇādans, Chōlanāikkans and Malapaṇikkar.
<i>Pula</i>	(Death) Pollution.
<i>Pulathōyam</i>	Another name of the <i>Cheriyā Kākkappula</i> of the Paṇiyas.
<i>Punam</i>	Term for corpse among the Koṇagas.
<i>Pungila/Kungilyam/</i>	Dammer
<i>Pantham/Kunthirikkam</i>	
<i>Puṇananūṇu</i>	An ancient Tamil work.
<i>Sapṇam</i>	Funeral car of the Iruḷas.
<i>Śāstrā</i>	Ritualistic songs of the Adiyāns.
<i>Śāstram Nōkkal</i>	The Paṇiya practice of consulting an oracle when a person is about to breath the last.
<i>Sattaibadi</i>	Bier of the Kāṭṭunāikkans.
<i>Śavagundu</i>	Side chamber of the Adiyān grave.
<i>Śavam</i>	Term for corpse among Malapaṇikkar, Malamuthans, Karimpālans and Malayāḷar.
<i>Savu</i>	Term for corpse among the Iruḷas, Kādar, Kuṇumbas and the Mudugas.
<i>Śavundi</i>	Chōlanāikkan graveyard

<i>Sēma Cheyyal</i>	The practice among Mudugas and Kuṛumbas of tying some strands of his/her hair on the leg of the corpse by the widow/widower.
<i>Shapplai-piṭṭu</i>	Food offering to ancestors among Iruḷas.
<i>Śīta</i>	A share from the cattle property demanded by a Kuṛumba widow from her father.
<i>Sṛāddha</i>	Last rite of the Brahmins.
<i>Tarawād</i>	Matrilineal Joint family.
<i>Teyyam</i>	Ritual dance of North Malabar.
<i>Thadi</i>	Corpse of the Chōlanāikkans.
<i>Thaduppan</i>	Winnowing basket used by Koṛagas in ritual occasions.
<i>Thalakkuzhi</i>	Space for head-rest in the graves of Iruḷas, Aṛaṇādans and Kādar.
<i>Thammādikkāran</i>	Oracle among the Adiyāns.
<i>Thandu</i>	Bier of the Chōlanāikkans, Kunduvādiyans, Kaḷanādis, Muḷḷakuṛumans, Wayanādan Pathiyans and the Paṇiyas.
<i>Thandum Nārum</i>	Bier of the Kaṇṇavam Kuṛichiyas.
<i>Thappubaḷa</i>	Medium of payment for fines among the Adiyāns.
<i>Tharavāṭṭukāran</i>	Headman of the Malapaṇikkans.
<i>Thatchezhunnēlpikkal</i>	A symbolic act performed by the <i>Karmi</i> of the Māvilāns to wake up the spirit of the dead at the grave after a burial.

<i>Thekku</i>	Cane basket carried by the Muduga headman to the grave during burial.
<i>Thēru</i>	The decorated bier of Malasar.
<i>Thettum Pizhayum</i>	Penalty among Kunduvādiyans for not participating in a funeral.
<i>Thoḷḷu</i>	Side chamber of the Kuṛichiya grave.
<i>Thudi:</i>	Small drum, musical instrument.
<i>Thurangam</i>	Side chamber of the graves of Malasar and Ēṛavāḷans.
<i>Tolkāpiyam</i>	Ancient Tamil work on grammar.
<i>Ucchāl</i>	Harvest festival of Muḷḷakuṛumans.
<i>Ūṛthariyan/</i>	Headman of Koṛagas.
<i>Nāṭṭumūthavar</i>	
<i>Uṛumaipaṇam</i>	Money kept with the corpse by the Kuṛumbas during burial for the expenses of the spirit in the other world.
<i>Ūṭṭāṭṭu/Malayāṭṭu</i>	Funeral dance of Kuṛumbas and Mudugas.
<i>Ūṭṭāṭṭu Paṛai</i>	Iruḷa funeral dance.
<i>Valiya Kākkappula</i>	Last rite of the Paṇiyas, which should be performed for continuous three years.
<i>Vaṇḍāri</i>	The functionary who manages economic matters among the Iruḷas, Mudugas and Kuṛumbas.
<i>Vaṇṇāthi</i>	Washerwoman (by caste their occupation is washing)

<i>Vaṅṅāthi Māttu</i>	Cloth washed by the washerwoman, necessary for removing death pollution among Malamuthans and Malapaṅikkar.
<i>Varam Cholli Paṛayal</i>	Ritual wailing in death.
<i>Vetchūt</i>	Last rite of the Kunduvādiyans.
<i>Vīdhu</i>	A portion of the daily food offered to the spirit of the dead among Kādar.
<i>Viṣippōṛath</i>	The Kuṛumba variant of <i>Dēśai Ūrippōkath</i> .

DIAGRAMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THREE TYPES OF BURIAL PITS





Kurichiya Tarawad: Kakkottara



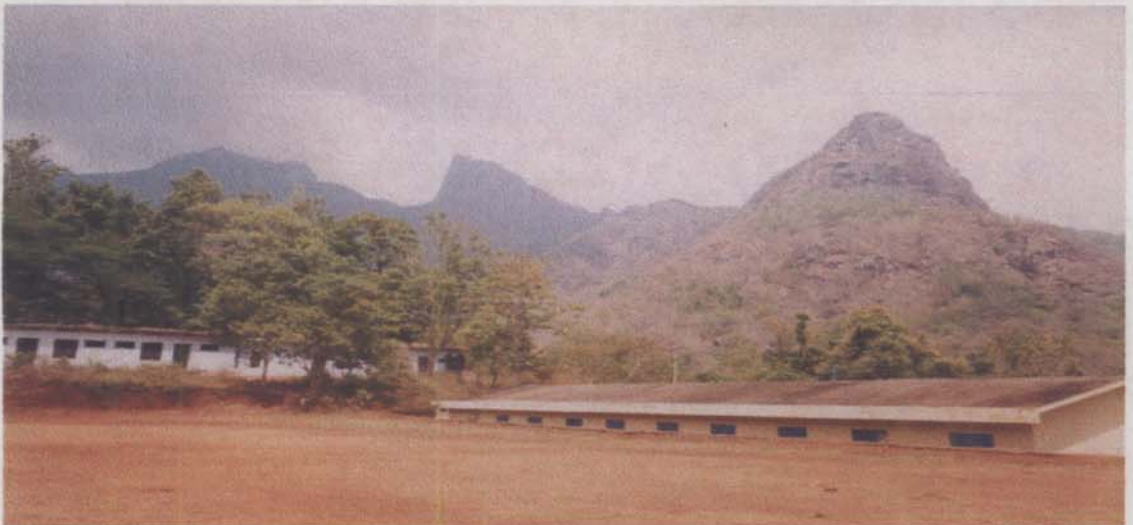
Idols: Kurumbar, Anavay



Malleswaran Temple: Attappadi



Idols: Kurumbar, Anavay



Malleswaran Peak: Attappadi



Old Daivappura: Mullakurumar: Pakkam



New Daivappura: Mullakurumar, Pakkam



Daivappura: Cholanaikkar, Mancheri



Koolikkottam; Karimpalar



Daivappura: Kattunaikkar; Anappara



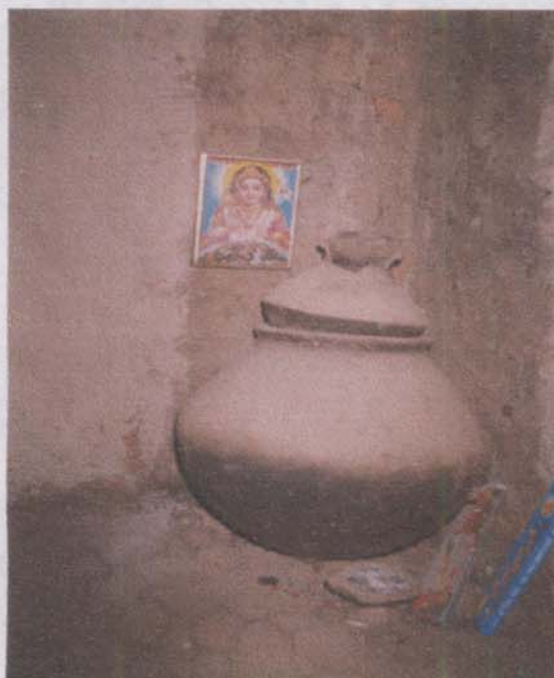
Shrine of Karudalvam: Kurumbar, Thadikkundu



Nekal Muri: Kurichiyar; Kakkottara



Room for Pe:na: Kurichiyar, Kakkottara



Madam: Irular



Cooking Pot for Ancestors: Mullakurumar



Pijad Chatti: Mudugar



Ancestor-Images: Aranadar



Hearth inside the Daivappura: Mullakurumar



Hearth at the back of the Dainappura: Mullakurumar



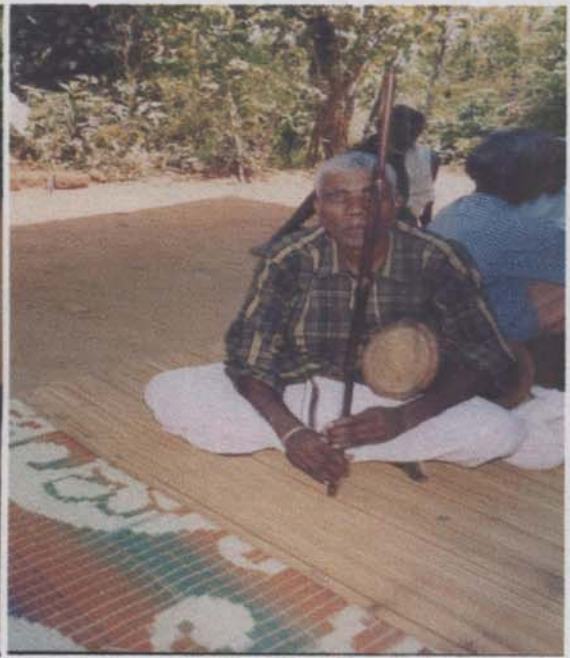
Aavath Kettal: Thachanadan Mooppans



Kaanayam: Thachanadan Mooppans



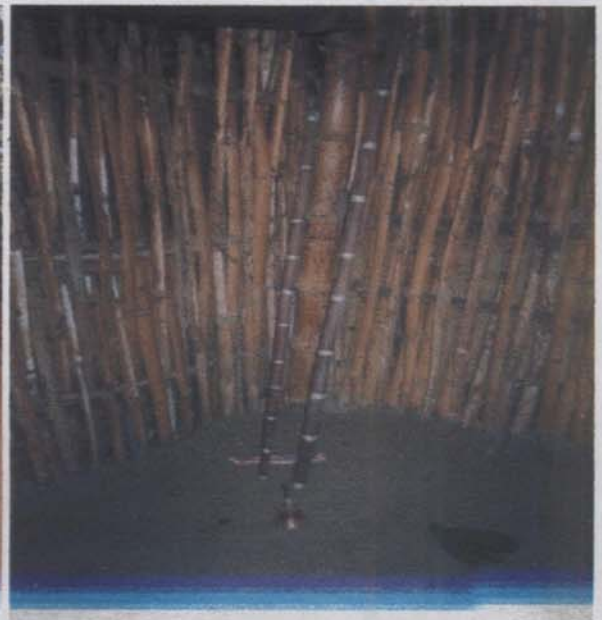
Mooppan with Thappubala; Adiyans



Bethavadi: Adiyans



Kunthavadi: Adiyans



Muddhiyam: Kattunaikkar



Gaddhika Madal: Adiyans



Dancing at Death: Irular



Musicians at Death: Irular



Ramarkoothu: Irular



Dhambatta & Dhavil: Irular



Ceremonial sending of the widow: Karimpalar



Funeral Car: Irular



Corpse on bier: Irular



Grave-digging: Irular



Sapplai-pittu, Irular



Grave: Aranadar, Karulai



Burial Ground: Kadar, Erumappara

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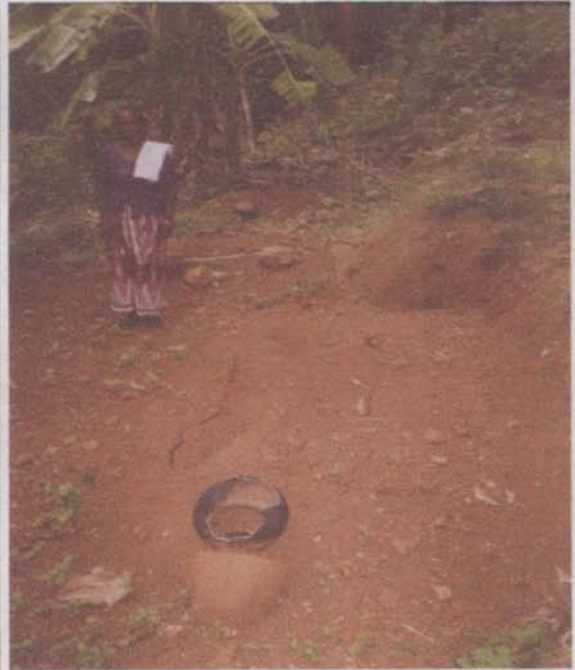
Grave: Kadar; Erumappara



Graveyard: Koragar, Perdalam



Grave with Pot and knife: Koragar



Ottalam Kamizhthal: Karimpalar

KS



Ritual Functionaries in the Pandal: Kakkappula, Adiyans



Ritual Sacrifice: Kakkappula, Adiyans

Alavupattu: Kakkappula



Winnowing Baskets with Bells for Muramkettu

Muramkettu: Kakkappula, Adiyans



Thaypetta Koolikettu: Karimpalar



Thalappoli Pidikkal: Koolikettu



Spirit Possession: Koolikettu



Attayan at Koolikettu



Funeral Car: Pachachavu; Kurumbar



Gudikkettu: Kurumba Cheeru



Thadikkundu Mannookkaran at the Cheeru



Sons-in-law with Goats and Bundles of Rice: Cheeru

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Relics of the dead in the Gubbe: Cheeru



Ritual sacrifice: Cheeru



Group wailing After Sacrifice: Cheeru



Ritual Dancing: Cheeru



Clown in the Cheeru



Dining Hall: Cheeru

INB 4963.

