



Socio cultural and agricultural practices of kurichiyar tribe in Wayanad: A historical analysis

Sanal VR¹, Muhammed Atheequ PP²

¹ M.Phil Scholar, Department of Sociology, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India

³ Ph.D Scholar, Department of Sociology, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

Kurichiyar are a matrilineal tribe of Kerala distributed mainly in wayanad and Kannur districts of Kerala, India. They are one of the Scheduled Tribes of Kerala practicing agriculture. The Kurichiya consider themselves higher than all other social groups around them, to include even the Brahmin. They observe the "highest levels of ritual purity", considering even the touch of a Nambuthiri Brahmin to be polluting. Joint family system is common among the Kurichiyar. Society is divided into lineages headed by lineage heads. They are experts in hunting. Untouchability is prevalent among them. Majority of Kurichiyar possess some land. They are forward in educational status than other tribal communities. Present study delves with socio cultural and agricultural practices of kuruchiyar tribe.

Keywords: agricultural practices, kuruchiyar and tribe

Introduction

Traditionally, the term 'tribe' has been used for those groups of human beings whose place of residence is situated in remote areas like hills, forest, coasts and islands and whose style of life is quite different from the present day civilized men. Local indigenous people residing in this place of the word are termed a tribe or tribal, to distinguish them from other people of the world. India is one of the countries having a large concentration of tribal population. In this it ranks second in the world. There are 573 different tribal communities spread all over India. According to 2011 census, Indian tribes constitute 8.14 % of the nation's total population. There are 573 communities recognized by the Government as STs. In 8.14% of Tribal population 55% of ST's, concentrated on eastern and central self and 28% all western tribal. In this only 6% of STs Population consist south self-including, Kerala, Karnataka Tamilnadu, Andrapradesh. The total tribal population of Kerala is 364159. The state has a total of 35 ST and all have been enumerated at 2011 census.

Food Gathers and Hunters

The tribal communities, who live in and around the forests, are exclusively dependent on forests for their livelihood. They regularly report to collection, gathering and hunting in the nearby forest. Their entire style of life revolves round the forest. Such tribe, though numerically less are distributed in several parts of the country.

Shifting Cultivation

As part of forest economy certain small scale tribes practice slash and burn or shifting cultivations. Hill cultivation is a seasonally regulated sequence of activities designed to open up and bring under cultivation patches of forest lands especially in hilly regions. Such hill cultivation practices go under a variety of local names in India. Shifting cultivation is

practiced by 2.6 million tribals who constitute 8.7 percent of the population.

Shifting cultivation has been readjusted to the needs of increased production. Iron implements are being used in place of wooden ones. A variety of crops is grown, including cash crops, to suit to the demands of the market. The shifting cultivation is being increasingly combined with Terrace cultivation and wet cultivation in the foothills and low lying areas. Shifting cultivation is associated with the system of communal or collective ownership of land and use of labor. In southern districts of Orissa such lands are controlled by the village Headman. The system of shifting cultivation is primitive and a plot of land is cultivated for two consecutive years. In the first years, only one crop is usually grown and in the second year by of crops is usually rises. Thereafter the land is left as a fallow for twelve to sixteen years, but in the recent years recuperative period has been minimized to three to five years for non-availability of virgin land for the purpose.

Settled Agriculture

The major bulk of tribal population in India about 80% is agriculturist, though they too supplement their economy with collection, gathering hunting, and fish catching. Tribal agriculture has been characteristic as unproductive, because of lack of appropriate skill non application of proper inputs, lack of irrigation facilities and uneconomic holdings, land alienation, indebtedness and lack of ability to agriculture with credit institutions further aggravate the problems of the agricultural tribes. They continue to depend upon their primitive agricultural implements. They raise mostly one crop during the monsoon season. In few cases they go in for a second crop in the winter. Barring a few individuals (for tribal chiefs and the elites) most tribal farmers marginal or sub marginal and nominal agriculturists. Therefore, such tribal

formers are agricultural labours most often for earning daily wages they resort to seasonal migration.

Agricultural Tribe –Kurichiyans

In Kerala State, India, Kuruchiyans are an exceptionally interesting tribe possessing a complex culture economic self-sufficiency and following a commune type of living their massive joint families maintain a matrilineal heritage. They are mainly agriculturists, herders and hunters. Co-operative farming is common among them; equally in owning property, all amenities of life space and food etc. form a fascinating feature of this tribe. They form a socialistic tribal community and they have been following these principles for the past several centuries. Kurichiyans are very honest and hardworking tribal community. It is difficult to find another similar tribe in the world. Many of their joint families are perhaps the largest such households in the world today. Their rites - de- passage and matrilineal are very close to that of the Nayers of Malabar.

In fact the occupational diversification is very less in this community. Most of them are owner, agriculturist, followed by a very few wage laborers and a negligible number of employed persons in the permanent service (Govt /private) sectors. The occupational category has been ordered in a linear from the low level of wage paid workers to the higher land of owner – cultivators and finally of nontraditional occupations in the service sector (permanent employs) in the context at gender proportion is found in the traditional Occupation of agriculture (own land) and the least in the nontraditional sector.

Tharavadu System of the Kurichiyar

The kurichiyans follow matrilineal and live in joint families with 30 to 100 members. Each mittom constitutes the economical self-sufficient unit of kurichiyar society. The senior most male is the pittan (puppan, karanavan) and the head members of three to four generations live together sharing a single kitchen. All the ancestral property is owned collectively and inherited strictly matrilineal. The wives stay with the husband, but the children remain in the fathers house hold only till they are five or six years old: they then go and join their mother's mittom. When her husband dies or if she is divorced the wife also leaves his household to rejoin her natal family; she never loses her membership of that. This combination of partly patrilocal (uxovilocal) residence and matrilineal descent even though described as "dysfunctional" by some others, had been characteristic of North Kerala Nayers of centuries and continues among the kurichiyar.

Only the pittan has the right to sell, mortgages or lease the property. He discusses important issues with all members of the lineage and entrust his duties to a suitable nominee on occasions. He normally will not sit in a line along with the other members at feast. He ensures that they are properly done under his supervision by a junior member. He is deeply conscious of the welfare and cohesion of the family. If any pittan fails in discharging these onerous responsibilities, the dissatisfied members invoke a deity, menanaman Deivam ("the third God"). This may induce the unsatisfactory pittan to step down. The rest invoke the blessing of the ancestors (Nizhal) and a new pittan is chosen.

The pittan's wife known as ammayi or odakkarathi although she is not a member of the mittom, has to shoulder several responsibilities and enjoy certain privileges. She is in charge of the management of cooking and allotting different duties to the other women members of the household, of life cycle rituals and ceremonies, she has to partner her husband, the pittan. She reports the problems, complaints and suggestions of the female members to the pittan, who is normally unapproachable to them. It is her duty to announce the onset of the puberty of the family girls. She maintains strict discipline among all the females in the household, including the wives of junior members.

Now there are 56 kurichiya Tharavads in Wayanad. Many of the tharavads are large and wealthier. Now the kurichiya Tharavads are disintegrated into nuclear families. It is because of the Governmental intervention kurichiyans also enjoyed the reservations and facilities provided especially in case of electricity, agriculture development funds, housing loans, sanitary facilities, self-employment loans, education funds reservation etc. Now the Tharavad land property is divided into 5-10 cent for constructing small huts. It is mainly for demanding housing loans from government.

Tharavad Property

Kurichiya tribes dislike to sale their land because kurichiyans have such a close relationship with this land. Still the kurichiyans do agricultural practices for better production and their own consumption. They self-produced the agricultural products for their own consumption. Land is the virgin imagination of kurichiyans. The land is not destroyed by kurichiyans. So kurichiyans not prefer to use chemicals and pesticides for cultivation purpose. Kurichiyans are hard workers. From morning to evening they work in their land. Kurichiyans are closely related to their land. Kurichiyans also cultivate vegetables, cash crops, medicinal plants along with paddy. That's why they are self-sufficient.

Karanavar: The Economic Head

In every tharavad, there is a karanavar. He is the head of the tharavad. He is the socio - economic and political head of the tharavad. He controls and co-ordinates all the economic activities, day to day routines and all the financial transactions. He also had some roles in the religious activities. Under his initiation, most of their economic activities "especially agricultural operation and the related ceremonies would start. The karanavar controls all the financial matters related to the therattukalyanam (puberty ceremony), harvest, festival etc. While therattukalyanam and harvest, they invite all the family members of the tharavad. At the time of therattukalyanam all the members assemble in the Tharavad and they also provided financial assistance, either in cash or kind. Kalorakkaran (Changathi) has an important role in all the activities. He supervise all the financial transactions, expenditure, etc. Related to the function. Therattukalyanam is the most important ceremony performed by them.

Sharing Work and Income

Rice Cultivation and Animal Husbandry are the main livelihood of kurichiyans. Normally men are engaged in Animal husbandry and vegetable cultivations. Women are participated

in rice cultivations. They are experts in collection of seeds, Natipani or Ngarunadeel, weeding, manuring etc. In the various stages of farming majority of the work is done by women. Wealth control is mainly by male members especially by karanavar. Animal husbandry, cash crop cultivation, vegetable cultivation also generate surplus income among kuruchiyans. Therefore the level of expenditure is very low compare to others. But now days the new generation is not interested in agriculture works. Most of them selected new jobs in Government and other sectors.

Inheritance of Property

Traditional inheritance of kurichiyar property continues to be strictly on the matrilineal line. Under their system individual ownership of property does not exist. Property is jointly owned by a family and all members are commonly benefited by the property legally, however, it is vested in the name of the karanavan who heads the clan. For property transaction like selling mortgaging and leasing, the karanavan alone has the legal right to do so. When a taravad becomes too big to maintain, the senior members jointly and unanimously decide to remove a few members of the mittom to a new household in the nearby place owned by them. This decision will be finally placed before their Muni and only with his consent and blessings obtained through the shaman and they act on their convenience. Such a newly separated household is called a pandal. Even if a new household is created for the members of the same lineage and a certain amount of land is allotted to them for maintenance that land continues to be owned by the lineage as a whole and the legal rights over the land are vested with the karanavan of the lineage. In fact many such new establishments came into being under many kurichiyar clans. For instance, the kakkotra clan has now eleven separate mittoms (lineage) under it (for details see the section of taravad, erupura and pandal).

The partitioning of a major matrilineal joint family into a group of smaller matrilineal joint families is also done strictly on matrilineal basis. However the karanavan's children may get a certain amount of cash or landed property which he earned through his own efforts and which should not be part of the common ancestral property which he earned through his own efforts and which should not be part of the common ancestral property. Of course, the karanavan's children also get full they get from their father. Other senior members next to the karanavan in the joint family normally would not have resources to share with their own children and therefore they seldom support their children.

Material Culture of Kuruchiyans

Dress and Ornaments

Till about 1930 or so, the kurichiyans wear loin cloth (mundu) which reached a few inches below the knees while the Nayar had their mundu which reached down to the heel. Kurichiyar women covered their torso with a piece of cloth knotted above the left shoulder. Kurichiyar men when they go out to the bazaar wore a shirt. Earlier they used to wear old shirts given by their Nayar masters, but later they began to get their

own shirts stitched by tailors in the bazaars.

Tools Implements

Every kuruchiyar family has their own set of carpenter's tools and seldom requires the help of professional carpenters and blacksmiths, plough etc, and palm leaf umbrellas, basket, wickerwork are made by themselves. They purchase axes, bill books and nail from the market. The bow and arrows used to be constant companions of the male kuruchiyar and a sickle that of the female (pannor 1971:51:52) kurichiyar children of kannavam are found "armed" with pellet bows, using stone pebbles as pellets for bringing down birds and small animals. (Sasikumar, field work). Mathur pointed out that some of the rich kurichiyars like Raman of Palliara Mittom have and operate tractors. They also have several of the 'modern conveniences'.

Bows and Arrows

They used to make the bow from fire hardened bamboo staves. The cords came from the roots of various plants sun with the great care. They had a variety of arrows, the heads being fashioned from iron which they used to get from the local market in the recent past. For birds and small game, the arrow head was in the shape of a blunt knob with the diminution of wild life protection the bows and arrows are now carefully preserved in the family armories.

Food Habits

Ragi porridge used to be their main food which they would take at lunch time. They are non-vegetarians. The flesh of all types of birds except crows and eagles, fish etc, according to the fortunes of the hunt, provided the side dishes. Tubers and fruits, milk and milk products, dried meat from occasional large animals like deer, all add variety, of vitamins and proteins. Nowadays, rice has replaced ragi and is taken thrice daily, as gruel at breakfast and at lunch and solid food at night, along with vegetables. They are very fond of Palmyra Toddy; they used to distill it themselves before the British made it a source of revenue, and independent India followed suit. They were not very fond of coffee and tea in the past, but nowadays are taking to these beverages, both males and females chew areca nut, betel leaves and tobacco and younger generation of males have become fond of smoking beedies and cigarettes.

Religion

The kurichiyar social structure is a part of the larger whole of the social system of Kerala. Kurichiyar religion has to be considered as a part of their culture with its own specialties, and also with certain similarities of the larger cultural context of Kerala at many points. That's why it has some familiarity with the religion of Kerala Hindus. The kurichiyans, especially the elderly person, do not attach any importance to the goddess of Valliurkavu. Hence it can be inferred that the Hindu goddess did not find any place in the kurichiyar pantheon. The annual festival at farmers of Wayanad as the kurichiyans do not employ *paniya* slaves, they had no use for the slave market at this temple. Until recent times, the kurichiyans had their own, almost exclusive world of gods with

Malakkari at its focus.

Life Cycle Ceremonies

Child Brith: They believe that only the woman is responsible for the growth the baby in her womb. They prefer the first born to be a female; otherwise the mother would die at her third delivery. The delivery is in a confinement hut (eukolpura) about 200- 300 meters away the main house. She stays there for sixty days after delivery under the care of a midwife (pettichi) who rubs her abdomen with oil in order to ease the pain. If there is delay or difficulty, the puppan goes to the karthalakkaran (oracle) who divines the reason. When cutting the naval cord, the sex of the newborn is announced by bending a bow and drawing its string if it is male and by beating a broom against murrum if a female (pannor 1971: 62). The Pettichi bates the mother and the child in flowing water, if the newborn is male four women from neighbouring mittoms are invited on the fourth day to bathes the mother and child. In the case of a female baby five women on the fifth day. Two women suffice for the subsequent purifactory baths on the 21st and 45th day. Male relatives can see the mother and child only after the 40th day.

Pandal - Pattu

Pandal – pattu is the third social event of rites –de- passage for kurichiyar girls after the birth and ear boring events. It is a function exclusively arranged for a group of girls numbering five, seven or eleven depending upon the availability of girls in all the mittoms belonging to the same clan. Girls selected for this should have attained the age of five and above but should not have attained menarche. The auspicious days considered for holding this ceremony are Tuesday, Friday or Sunday. For kruichiyans, Thursday and Friday are socially important days of the week.

For organizing a pandal- pattu ceremony the Karanavan of the tharavad (main ancestral mittom in consultation with his brothers, cousins, nephew and most importantly, the moonman of their family, decides a date for it. After tentatively fixing the date, they seek the blessing of their Muni, Moonnam deivam and Malakkari and send a message to all the lineage Mittoms to send the girls meant for the function along with their parents, maternal uncles and other members to the taravad atleast a day before the function. On the previous day of the function, the poles for the pandal will be installed in front and adjacent to the western building. The poles will be fixed by the moonman after cutting them from a palamaram which has plenty of white juice. Perhaps it symbolizes fertility. Subsequently the members together erect the structure of the pandal. The size of the pandal will be according to the number of girls included for the function.

On the next morning, preparations for the ceremonial bath of the girls and all other relatives and invitees will be arranged. The oil kept in the temple of Karimpili Bhagavati and in the room of Nizhal “(muni) will be given by Muthachi (the senior most lady member in the family) first to these girls and then to all other. They all take abath in the stream escorted by the Muchchi, Ammayi and other elderly ladies who are in equal numbers to the number of girls considered for the function. Meanwhile, the moonman and others attending the function will take bath. After which the girls escorted by the elderly

ladies will be brought to the boundary of the courtyard on the eastern side, where the moonman will sprinkle punyaham on them as well as on the pandal, temple and the house-premises. The girls will be taken to the temples / rooms of karimpili Bhagavathi and Muni and after worshipping there, sandalwood paste is applied on their foreheads by the Muthachi. By this time the pandal would have been ready and decorated with bunches of ripe plantains, lighted old lamps, and bowls with paddy and rice. Each item is equal to the number of girls. The flower of coconut tree with is fixed on the bowls. All this symbolizes the sacredness of the function and fertility. The girls will be seated in a row on the order of their age from left to right i.e. The eldest one on the extreme left begins the recitation of the pandal - pattu song which will be repeated three times at the time of tying the tali by the Ammayi around the neck of each of these girls. The tali may be made of gold or silver and is prepared specially by the Karanavan. The tying of tali is done by seniority.

Theruttu Kalyanam (Puberty Ceremony)

The term theruttu kalyanam means puberty marriage; it may be called the puberty celebration. It is considered to be the fifth event of rites –de-passage of kurichiyar girls. The other events are the functions related to birth, ear boring, pandal pattu and kettu kalyanam. This function is meant to announce the eligibility of a girl for marriage and to declare her as an adult person who is qualified for leading a family life. Unlike pandal pattu, which was a major child marriage celebration in the past, this function is being celebrated now on a grand scale, despite the constraints of finance. When a girl attains puberty, she knows that she has to leave the house. She usually hides near the houses out of shyness and social pollution. When the girl does not appear for meals and is missing in this house, the elderly women will assume that she has attained menarche and may be out of the house. They search for her in the nearby bush (jungle in the old day) and direct her to the erupura (Orakkottil) which is a house meant for secluded living of women during menstruation for six days and after delivery for 27 days. These times are considered to be socially polluting. During these periods, they should not though others, enter the buildings, the premises of temples and the room of the Muni. They also should not face the men. They can take rest in their rooms or work in isolated agriculture fields.

On hearing the news that particular girl has attained menarche the karanavan will summon the Moonman and discuss this matter with other senior members of their taravad and the clan. If they are not financially handicapped or if it is possible to get contributions from their lineages, they will fix a date for celebrating the theruttu kalyanam. If the family is not financially sound and co-operation with the taravad is not good, theruttu kalyanam may be Orakkotti Moonman and karanavan play very important roles in deciding on this matter, normally the puberty ceremony will be fixed within 30 days after attaining menarche. During this period the girl may take bath everyday but she will take a bath for purification on the 7th day if theruttu kalyanam is delayed. If it is not delayed the population removal bath may coincide with the theruttu kalyanam day.

On the day of theruttu kalyanam the karanavan, shaman,

Moonnaman, and most of the relatives of the clan will assemble at the taravad or the mittom where the function is being celebrated. They reach the place around five P.M. and will take their seats under a newly erected pandal or on the verandah of the main building, very soon the important persons (karanavan, shaman, moonnaman (s) and head of the host mittom and other senior pittans of the local area) will inspect the arrangements made and the mistakes, if any, committed by the members of the host house hold. If there are omissions they will demand a penalty from the head of the house. On its payment the way is cleared for the function. If the host household has any financial problems, all other mittoms of the clan, moonnaman's house (for a taravad 2-3 families may act as moonnaman) may share necessary items like rice, spices, vegetables, money etc. these would have contributed at least one week before the ceremony. They will be collected and stored in the room of the Muni.

The function requires some wild meat and fish. In the past it was very easy to get meat through hunting but now hunting in the forest is prohibited. However, the kurichiyans do it ritually and get some meat. They do not slaughter domesticated animals or buy meat from shops for such ceremonial occasions. Even today girls invariably follow this practice religiously fearing that they will face many problems from the anger of goddess karimpilli Bhagavathi. They think they may otherwise become sterile, or die during pregnancy. Therefore, it is a living custom which exists among most of the kurichiyans.

Kettu Kalyanam (Marriage)

The actual marriage among the kurichiyas takes place in a most simple and non-pompous style with very little expenditure. On the other hand they celebrate the puberty ceremony in great style. This assumes greater importance throughout the history of the kurichiyas. It marks the formal announcement of adulthood of a girl and her availability for marriage. Before arranging a formal marriage, several informal and direct as well as indirect contacts take place between the senior members of the parties concerned. First of all they come to know about the availability of a suitable marriageable girl through her puberty ceremony. This news will be kept in mind by the elders in the family for considering the girl, if suitable for their nephews.

For girls they consider the marriageable age from the time of attaining puberty. A girl after puberty will not be kept unmarried for long because for the kurichiyans girls the puberty ceremony is the initiation of arrangements for her marriage. Generally, kurichiyans girls attain puberty by the age of 13 to 15 years. However, for boys there is no definite criterion like this. The marriage of boys can appear and physical growth reached the adulthood stages all this may take place around the ages from 16 to 20 years.

When the karanavan and other elderly members of a mittom informally ascertain the availability of a suitable girl they send a message to the head of the concerned mittom informing him of their visit on a particular date for bringing the girl to their mittom as a bride for one of the nephews of the karanavan. The karanavan sends a small group consisting of either himself or a nominee, the karanavan's wife, the Muthachi, the moonnaman and his wife. They will be treated with all

hospitality at the bride's mittom.

For the bride, the groom's party will carry a veshti for wearing and a towel for covering the breast, which was the traditional dress of kurichiyans women in the past. These clothes will be handed over to the bride by the Muthachi. After a brief feast the girl will be dressed with these clothes brought by the groom's party. Then the girl will touch the feet of the karanavan, muthachi and Ammayi of her mittom and pray in front of the Muni's room. With this she leaves for her husband's mittom along with the groom's party. On arrival at the groom's mittom, she will pray in front of the Muni's room and is taken by the Ammayi to the room of the Muthachi or any other room where a widow or a single elderly woman is staying. She may reside there for about a week. During this time the boy will be summoned formally by the karanavan who informs him that a girl has been brought for him. Meanwhile the boy would have come to know through his friends about the arrangements made for getting a girl for him. He would not have seen the girl before except on social occasions. Only after the 5th day and before the 8th day of her arrival the girl will be allowed to stay with her husband in a separate room. On the 8th day she will pay her first after marriage to her own mittom. During this period, there are instances where the boy may decline the girl and marriage may be dropped. In such case, the girl will be sent back to her mittom. Now –a –days, in certain kurichiyans mittoms, permission is given to boys and girls to see each other before marriage and only with their consent the elders arrange for their marriage.

On the 8th day after the girl is brought to her husband's mittom she is taken to her own mittom for virunna (eighth day virunna). On that night the relatives will have a small feast along with the guests from the husband's mittom who accompanied her. After the feast the people will sing a typical song for some time. The peer groups will crack jokes and enjoy themselves for a couple of hours during the evening. The song that they sing on this occasion is full of meaning. The next morning the husband's party will return to their mittom along with the girl.

Death

When a person is on his death bed, the oracle is called in the prays to malakkari offering a few coins and tries to fend off the end by tying three knots to a thread. The dead are believed to go to the world of the four mothers, extreme care is taken to maintain ritual purity. when a puppan dies the body is generally cremated. it is burial for the rest. The occurrence of death is first reported to the nattupuppan, who conveys the news to the neighbouring mittom and the relatives. Every mittom has its specific burial ground. The nattu puppan resides over everything a bow and arrows for the male dead and a sickle in case of females are placed at the head of the corpse when the body is placed in the pit with the head towards the south. The pit is then filled. Pollution last for 16th day but additional rites has to be observed for deceased puppans on the 7th or 9th day also.

Family Organization

Kurichiyans of wayanad followed matrilineal family system over generations. The manifestation of matrilineal life can be

seen in several aspects such as leadership and its succession, property inheritance, management of the family on an egalitarian basis, first name of the family members and rites – de- passage, however, the matrilineal family system is under great strain today with the impact of the social changes taking around them. The notion of such changes comes largely from the patrilineal pattern followed by the Nayers and the Tiars (who were once matrilineal), the patrilineal Muslims and the Christian immigrants from the Travancore region. Nevertheless, in most of the rural and landowning Kuruchiya families throughout Wayanad district, either a complete matrilineal system or a transitional matrilineal system with provisions to provide minimum wealth to one's own children through personal earnings or from a part of the profits of the ancestral property (definitely with the consent of continues to have the ownership of landed property and leadership control over the younger generation desire to have a patrilineal set up

Kinship

Typically matrilineal kinship patterns prevail. An individual identifies himself throughout his life with the matrilineage and the mitter of his mother's nativity. He is brought home by his maternal uncle when about 5 or 6 years old to grow up along with his cousins and his uncle's children until the latter are respectively taken along by the maternal uncles to their matrilineal mitters. His sisters stay until they are married; then they go off to their husband's home where they remain until they are widowed or divorced.

Though the puppan's wife manages the housekeeping, it is Muthachi or eldest female of the matrilineage who is the ritual head, enjoying many privileges and facilities. She has the pride of place in the ceremonials and rituals, brings in the bride to the grooms place, and leads other ladies at the coming of age young children. even if she is a widow there is no diminution in her status or functions. Strict avoidance observed between group up brothers and sisters. If by accident, a brother happens to touch a sister, a fine has to pay to the Gods of the mitter and all the women undergo a purificatory bath. A man stands at least eight feet away from his elder brother's wife. But the mother's brother's wife (ammai) as the potential mother –in – law is not subject to taboo. (Ayyappan 1990-31)

Corresponding to the enangan of the Nayers, there is the institution of an affinal relationship known as Munnaman (cengati). A family belonging to a clan different from that to which a concerned matrilineage beings will be chosen as its munnaman mitter, the relationship being reciprocal. Depending on the importance of the functions to be attended to, the puppan or a junior member of the families concerned could officiate. His involvement is required at all major rites, and as a witness in important transactions. He also act as a middleman for the selection of a bride sometimes even acting as a priest. parents make comparisons and to club all the children together rather than provide individual attention. In a nuclear family, the responsibility of the culture, traditions and values that a child grows up with, lies on the parents. Many a times, due to lack of time, parents are unable to devote enough time to those aspect of child rearing this problem is not faced in a joint family setup, where culture, tradition and

values get transmitted. from a whole range of people to children.

Economic Activities of Kuruchiyans

The chief occupation is agriculture, most owned land even though the British confiscated the bulk of their holdings. They adopted settled cultivation with paddy in the low areas and shifting cultivation with ragi, sorghums etc. in the upper lands. They would leave considerable areas under the natural vegetation, encouraging the survival of a wild life population which they would keep optimally culled by their favorite occupation of hunting with bows and arrows with the incursion of encroaches and settlers much of the lands of the kurichyar families fell into their hands and were denuded.

Agricultural Practices

Paddy cultivation was joint occupation in which all the members of the lineage were involved, outside labour being rarely required. There was a sex based division of labour the men doing ploughing and the women, the planting and weeding. They used to take two crops per year (nenca and punca) depending on the availability of water. They also cultivated banana, ginger, tapioca etc., most have converted their uplands holding into coffee plantations.

Animal Husbandry

Grazing the cattle in the forest was the task of juniors or the old. Nowadays the number of cattle is becoming less owing to the scarcity of grassy land. Agriculture is the main economic stay of the kuruchiyans of Wayanad. The rearing of cattle provides them adequate manure for their agriculture activities. In the past, they had several numbers of cattle. Now it is reduced to thirty two. These include buffaloes, bison, cows and bulls. They rear cattle on the slope of the mangalassery Hill. Karanvar assigns the duty of rearing the cattle among the *taravad* members. If the persons is not fit for the rearing, then, it would be handed over to another members of the taravad.

Hunting

Kuruchiyans were compulsive hunters and expert trackers. Though they use firearms they favored the bow. In a group they would surround a hill; some would enter the forest with dog and shower the animals they found with arrows. Animals fleeing from the carnage would be killed off by the kuruchiyans standing around. The Mediator God" is invoked if there are signs of his displeasure. Men observe continence for three days. The women sweep the courtyard and surroundings of the shrines before dawn and take care to keep the brook concealed. The weapons of the chase are cleaned and purified by sprinkling coconut water on them. The physical fitness of the hunters and the dogs is ensured. They are very critical of those who miss their aims.

Other Occupations

They have a natural aversion towards working, under the command of others, especially as "coolies" and take recourse to this means of livelihood as the last resort. Some of them have been rehabilitated from erstwhile bounded labour and are employed in the Sugandagiri Girijan Co-operative Farming

Society some of the educated young have accepted Government jobs. According to 1981 census 34.4% were workers of whom 45.96% were excommunicated kuruchiyans convert to Christianity.

Agricultural Practices of the Kuruchiyans Joint Farming System

Kurichiyans in Wayanad follow joint family system and joint Farming System. Kurichya Tharavad property belongs to matrilineal. Each joint Family have owned large number of agriculture land. Their economy is mainly depend on animal husbandry and paddy cultivation. This occupation is the livelihood of kurichiyans. We can find 40 - 60 families in several tharavads of kurichiyans and around 300 members in each Tharavad.

Paddy Cultivation - Different Types of Seeds

In Wayanad about 168 types of paddy seeds were cultivated by kuruchiyans and non-tribal people. But now it is seen 74- 75 types of paddy seeds in cultivation. Among the kuruchiyans - 40 types Rice seeds were collected and preserved for cultivation. Usually, they cultivate crops twice a year. They name it as nancha and pancha.

Nancha Cultivation

Nancha cultivation starts during rainy season. The period of cultivation is from June – July to November –December. Nancha is a type of cultivation in which all the members of the same tharavad are working together. On the occasion of theerattukalyanam, harvesting of paddy, religious occasions and festival they utilize their own yields, especially, paddy and vegetables, for preparing the feast. The main seeds sown for nancha cultivation are veliyan, thondi chomala, gandakasala, chennal, kaima, etc. There are three types of kaima, namely, uranima, koothadikaima and jeerakasala. Veliyan are of two types, namely chettuveliyan and palveliyan. The types of Chennal are valiyachennal and kanichennal.

Manure is not needed for the nancha cultivation. Therefore, the cost of production is very less. Eruputtal (ploughing) is conducted in Meenam (March – April) and the stored cow dung would be taken from the aala (cattle shed) and put in the field. The first step of this process is called erupakkathekkal. They prefer Wednesday or Saturday, seven days after veluthavavu (full moon) for doing this. In Dhanu (December – January) and Makaram (January – February). They prepare field for sowing by clearing the land. Male members are engaging in the sowing activity and are conducting on the special day of Ayilyam or Makam in kumbham (February – March). Odaykaran would take seed of paddy with cow dung in a winnowing pan and sow the seeds at first. He is doing this. Subsequently, the Changathi and all others, including children, carry out the same. After some days, the sprouted paddy will be brought and plant in the equipped field. It is done before 15th of idhunam (July 1st). The first parichunadal (replanting). It is done at first by the karanavar followed by his wife of karanavar and all other members of the tharavad would carry out the work.

Pancha Cultivation

Pancha is a kind of cultivation in which each family cultivate paddy independently for their own needs. It is a recent phenomenon among the kuruchiyans of Wayanad. The main seeds they used for pancha cultivation are kanchana, aathira, thriveni etc, these are new varieties of seeds cultivated by the kuruchiyans. This cultivation started only 15 years back. The pancha cultivation mainly conducted on their joint property land. The karanavar divide the land of each family belonging to the same tharavad. For pancha cultivation, they use chemical manures for increasing the growth of the paddy. For each family's cultivation all the other family members join and do the work. Co-operation and interdependence. In Dhanu (December – January), pancha cultivation starts and prepares the field. The entire process is same as that of the nancha cultivation, except in manuring. They use fertilizers 3 or 4 times intermittently. The paddy would be ready for harvest after three months. I. e, in kumbham (February - March). The seeds are referred as ilamvith. In this cultivation, the husking process is done by using tractors. It is a new trend among the kuruchiyans. There are several advantages and of joint farming system.

Shifting Cultivation of Kuruchiyans in Wayanad

In the forest ecology, the economic life of the kurichiyans revolves round what is known as paramba cultivation. The practice of shifting cultivation was also done on the hill slopes. They were well aware of the fertility of land, climate and geographical condition and also acquired the techniques of cultivation. They cultivated different kinds of food grains such as Muthari (jowar), Chama (grain) karuthanelle (paddy) black in colour, kaduk (mustard), cholam (Maize), thena, etc. This practice was done on the same site for 2 or 3 times continuously and then shifting to other places. There are certain distinct phases in shifting cultivation which bring closer interaction between Nature, man, and spirit in a series of situations. The paramba cultivation among the kurichiyans has the following stages, namely,

1. Selecting and cutting of forest
2. Buring and removing of woods
3. Sowing
4. Weeding
5. Watching
6. Harvesting
7. Worshipping

Conclusion

Kuruchiyans were the pioneers to have settled in Wayanad during 1st to 3rd Century AD. Initially they were hunters, later they were engaged in agriculture and trade. They adopted settled cultivation with paddy in lower areas and shifting with ragi and sorghum in upper areas. They left a considerable area under natural vegetation, encouraging the survival of wildlife population. The population of the wildlife would be under check as hunting with bow and arrow was their favourite hobby. With incursion of settlers, much of the land of Kuruchiyans fell into their hands and the lands were denuded. This rich biodiversity in the natural vegetation

provided them enough nutrients for the crops. The birds in the wild forest offered mechanical control of pests. They also hunted the wildlife and birds and brought wildlife population under control.

References

1. Thankur Devendra, DN Thakur. Tribal Agriculture and Animal Husbandry. DEEP DEEP publication Pvt. Ltd F-159 Rajouri Garden, New Delhi: First Edition 1994-2009.
2. Bagchi KK. Agrarian Crisis, Farmers suicides and livelihood security of Rural Labour in India. Volume II Abijeet publication Delhi, 2008.
3. Reddy Narasimha D. Agrarian Reforms, land Markets and Rural Poor. Concept publishing Company, New Delhi, 2009.
4. Singh KK, Ali S. Integrated Rural Development Programme Retrospect and prospect publication sarup & Sons New Delhi, 2001.
5. Behura N, Mohant KK. Anthropological Economics Tribal
6. Developments & Globalization Dominant Publications and Distributors New Delhi first Edition, 1997-2009.
7. Naidu P.R Financing in Tribal Economy in India. ASDhyan Publishers & Distributors New Delhi, 2009.
8. Aiyappa K Mahadevan. Ecology, Economy, matriliney and Fertility of kurichiyas. Neeraj publishing House. Delhi. 1990 First Edition, 1990.
9. Narayan Sachindran the Dynamics of Tribals Developments issues and challenges. Gyan publishing house. New Delhi, 2002.
10. Mahendran T. Agricultural Development in India Abhijeet Publication. Delhi, 2008.
11. Thakur Devendra, Thakur DN. Tribal Development and planning. Deep & Deep publications Pvt. Ltd. Delhi (First Edition 1449), 2009.
12. Naidu PK. Tribal Development in India a Curtain raiser. Adhyayan publishers & Distributors New Delhi, 2009.
13. Ahuja AK Akojha. Welfare and Tribal Development Administration AALEKA publications. Jaipur, 2009.
14. Kashyap GB, Garg JP. Rural India vision and action Land Reforms and agriculture.