

ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

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VETTUVAN OF KERALA

OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR GENERAL, INDIA
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FOREWORD

The Constitution lays down that “the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the weaker sections of the people and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes all forms of exploitation”.

To assist States in fulfilling their responsibility in this regard, the 1961 Census provided a series of special tabulations of the Social and Economic data on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are notified by the President under the Constitution and the Parliament is empowered to include in or exclude from the lists, any caste or tribe. During the Census operations the enumerators frequently face the problem of identifying the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In the President’s notification, though in some cases, the names of the sub-castes and sub-tribes and synonyms are given, there are many cases where such names have not been provided in the list. The Census enumerators, therefore, require guidance about the acceptance or rejection of claims that they come across during the operations of some communities to be treated as sub-castes or sub-tribes of the notified Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. For this purpose, the Census Organisation has thought it wise to undertake detailed ethnographic studies in respect of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of India. This is also in conformity with the past Census tradition of presenting authentic ethnographic account of Indian communities.

For conducting the ethnographic studies, a number of ancillary operations are undertaken by the Social Studies Unit of the Office of the Registrar General, India, as well as the staff of the superintendents of Census Operations in the various States. These ancillary operations include: (i) compilation of available information on each Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe and preparation of bibliography in respect of them; (ii) preparation and interpretation of maps showing distribution of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes over time and space; and (iii) special studies on cultural, technological and economic changes taking place among the various tribal communities.

Dr. B. K. Roy Burman, Deputy Registrar General, Social Studies, assisted by Shri N. G. Nag, Officer on Special Duty and Shri H. L.

Harit, Research Officer, is co-ordinating all these studies at the Central level.

Shri M. S. Prakasam, of the Registrar General's Office conducted the field investigation on the Vettuvan of Kerala and drafted this report under the guidance of Shri A. M. Kurup, the then Research Officer of the same office. The editing was done by Shri A. M. Kurup and Dr. B. K. Roy Burman.

I avail of this opportunity to extend my warm thanks to all my colleagues who have undertaken various studies on different aspects of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of India.

A. CHANDRA SEKHAR
Registrar General, India

PREFACE

As an adjunct of 1961 Census, preparation of ethnographic monographs on a number of selected Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and ethnic groups with special status and ethnographic glossaries on all Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been taken up by the Census Organisation.

In India the census organisation has a long tradition of undertaking ethnographic studies. Besides, there are certain reasons why, for its own operational purposes, it is necessary for the census organisation to take up such studies. During census operation, the census organisation is required to make a complete enumeration of all the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the country. The ethnographic studies are required to establish the identity of the various communities including their segments. The social boundaries of various communities are not always rigid, they are in a state of flux. Ethnographic studies are required to keep track of these changes as well, otherwise comparison of consecutive census figures would give altogether wrong picture in respect of them. There is another aspect of study in respect of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in which the census organisation, as well as the welfare and planning agencies are interested— it is ethno-demography. In 1961 Census separate tables were prepared in respect of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes on the following items:—

- (i) industrial classification of persons at work and non-workers by sex,
- (ii) age and marital status,
- (iii) education,
- (iv) religion,
- (v) persons not at work classified by sex and type of activity for Scheduled Castes,
- (vi) persons not at work classified by sex and type of activity for Scheduled Tribes,
- (vii) mother tongue and bilingualism for Scheduled Tribes.

The data available in these tables are to be analysed in respect of each Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe, so that the historical and cultural factors responsible for the demographic pattern can be identified and the impact of the emergent demographic pattern on the social structure can be determined.

The insight gained by the census organisation, through ethnographic studies of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes will be useful for interpretation of the demographic pattern for the country as a whole. Recent studies show that in India even now, it is difficult to correctly appreciate the various social and economic processes without reference to caste. On the other hand, in the interest of ultimate national goal, caste is not being recorded in census, except in case of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The insight gained through ethno-demographic studies of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is, therefore, of invaluable help for census.

At the same time, such study is very much useful for planning of development activities among the castes or tribes concerned. For instance, if the census shows that great deal of diversification of occupation has taken place among the Parayans of Kerala, it is important for the planners to know whether the community consists of a number of disconnected segments or whether it means that a great deal of individual mobility is taking place where the main focus of community is other than traditional occupation. Again, when among the Bauris of Orissa, it is found that a very high proportion of the population is engaged in agricultural labour and next to them a high proportion is found in

cultivation and also that there is considerable diversification of occupation, the following questions of sociological and practical importance arise:—

- (a) What is the historical relation between the agricultural labourers and the cultivators among the Bauris of Orissa? The census data suggests one of the two possible developments, namely, (1) Bulk of the Bauris were cultivators and by a process of degeneration of their economy have become agricultural labourers, (2) on the other hand, it is also possible that the bulk of them were agricultural labourers and through a process of improvement of their economic condition, many of them have become cultivators.
- (b) The fact that a considerable diversification of occupation has taken place, suggests that the economy has not remained in a stagnant condition. Here, it is to be examined whether the diversification is the result of upward mobility, and what is the actual process by which the diversification has taken place.
- (c) The social dimensions corresponding to the diversification in economic life have to be examined. It is also to be examined whether in spite of diversification of occupation, the ethos of particular occupation, for instance agriculture, continues to be dominant. In that case, diversification might have created problems of adjustment in values and attitudes.

Instances can be multiplied, but it is not necessary. What have been stated above, are enough to bring out the significance of ethno-demographic studies for planners.

The above dimensions of ethno-demographic studies have evolved through stages. In 1960 at the instance of Shri Mitra, Registrar General of India, a questionnaire for collection of ethnographic data was circulated among the Census Superintendents. In October, 1961, the Handicrafts and Social Studies Unit was set up in the office of the Registrar General of India, to co-ordinate the ethnographic studies and a few other ancillary studies, like village surveys, handicrafts surveys, etc. In December 1961, a study Camp was organised in Delhi, where the personnel engaged in ethnographic studies, handicrafts studies and other social investigations in the office of the Census Superintendents participated. In the study camp, it was considered that the ethnographic notes would mainly aim at making an objective assessment of the state of development of the different scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the context of the changes taking place in technology, economic organisation and total culture pattern of the country. It was further suggested that the primary focus of the study should not be on the exotic elements of the cultures of the different castes and tribes. It should be on the efforts of the communities concerned, to adjust to the modern conditions of life. In the light of the above decisions of the Study Camp, rapid ethnographic studies have been carried on by the staff of the Superintendents of Census Operations as well as by the Handicrafts and Social Studies Unit of the office of the Registrar General of India; in different parts of the country. These rapid surveys have brought out a number of methodological and operational problems. In May and June, 1966, two Ethnographic Study Camps were held at Kurseong and Hyderabad, where personnel from the office of the Registrar General of India as well as from the offices of the Census Superintendents participated. In the Study Camp held at Kurseong, the Secretary, Tribal Welfare, West Bengal, and Director, Tribal Welfare, West Bengal, also participated. In this Study Camp, an integrated frame for preparation of ethnographic notes was discussed and adopted. A copy of the same may be seen at 'Annexure I'. In addition to the studies in respect of each scheduled caste and scheduled tribe separately, a number of subsidiary studies were undertaken by the Handicrafts and Social Studies Unit of the Office of the Registrar General of India, for gaining insight into a number of problems of general nature, which have bearing on the different aspects of the lives of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes of the country. These subsidiary studies are as follows:—

1. Shifting cultivation in Santhal Parganas of Bihar and Garo Hills of Assam.

2. Pattern of Rehabilitation of displaced tribals of Rourkela.
3. Socio-economic survey of the Scheduled areas of Rajasthan.
4. Socio-economic developments among the hillmen of North-East India.
5. Social structure and cultural orientation of Christians converted from scheduled castes.
6. Traditional rights of scavenging as claimed by scavengers in urban areas.
7. Grouping of castes and tribes with reference to occupation and inter-group and intra-group comparative study on the basis of the data available in earlier censuses.
8. Social mobility movements among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

On the basis of each of the subsidiary studies indicated above, a separate monograph is under preparation. It is also proposed to prepare separate monographs on a few scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and ethnic groups with special status in each state. Besides, ethnographic glossaries are proposed to be prepared in respect of all scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. For this purpose about one lakh references have been indexed.

The present report on the Vettuvan is one of the monographs included in the series of the ethnographic studies. The field investigation was carried out by Shri M. S. Prakasam, under the guidance of Shri A. M. Kurup, the then Research Officer, of the Office of the Registrar General, India. The draft note was prepared by Shri M. S. Prakasam. It was finally edited mainly by Shri A. M. Kurup and I shared some of the responsibility.

I take this opportunity to express my thanks to all the colleagues who collaborated in this project.

Shri A. Mitra, Registrar General of India for 1961 Census, whose farsighted initiative is responsible for Social investigations in a large number of fields including ethnography, deserves thanks of all students of Indology. I have been benefited not only by his inspiration, but also by his valuable suggestions in connection with the ethnographic studies as well as the other studies, conducted by the Handicrafts and Social Studies Unit.

The tradition built by Shri Mitra, has been continued by Shri A. Chandra Sekhar, the present Registrar General of India. Under his guidance, the scope of the Social Studies by the Census Organization has been further expanded. In spite of his other preoccupations, he has gone through the final drafts of the ethnographic notes and given a number of valuable suggestions. I avail of this opportunity to express my gratefulness to him.

B. K. ROY BURMAN

CHAPTER I

Name, Identity, Origin and History

Predominantly a caste of cocoanuts pluckers, the Vettuvans have their largest concentration in Trichur district of Kerala. Under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Lists, (modification) order 1956, they have been notified as a Scheduled Caste, throughout Kerala except Malabar district. In Tamil Nadu they are scheduled in the Kanyakumari district and Shenkottah taluk of Tirunelveli district, which were parts of Trivandrum-Cochin before the reorganisations of States.

Etymologically, in the local parlance, "vettu" means cut, and 'vettuvan' means 'one who cuts', or, in other words 'those who are engaged in cutting or plucking cocoanuts'.

According to Ananthakrishna Iyer, "the Vettuvans, also called as Vettuvan Pulayans" form the lowest sub-tribe among the agricultural serfs of the State (1909, T).

Except in Narakkal and Kadamangalam, where they are also addressed as Kanakkan, in other areas, the members of the community like to be called as Vettuvan. The higher Castes address them as Kanakkan, only to affront and derogate them, since Kanakkan, Padanna or Padanna Kanakkan means an inferior caste.

In Narakkal and Kadamangalam, the term Valiyakanakkan is used even by the Vettuvan themselves to denote their headman. Simultaneously, their neighbours belonging to the higher castes, specially address the members of the community as Kanakkan. The fact that the Vettuvans use the term Valiya Kanakkan or head Kanakkan for their headman, suggests that the name Kanakkan was associated with them even in past. Here it is noted that coonubial relationships are reported to exist between the people known as Kanakkan of Narakkal and Kadamangalam and those known as Vettuvans elsewhere, particularly Mailipadam, Manaloor and Lokamaleswaram. This suggests that inspite of difference in name in different areas they constitute the same caste.

About the origin of the term, Kanakkan, a legend as reported from ponnur is given below.

Kanakkan literally meant accountant, and he was associated with the higher castes in the past. Once a Kanakkan or Kanakkapillai (accountant) of this group was walking by the side of a paddy field where he met a Nambutiri Brahman ploughing the field. The latter asked the former to relieve him for a while to make water. The Kanakkan placed all his account books by the

side of the field and took charge of the plough. The Nambutiri collected all the account books and fled the place leaving the Kanakkan to his own fate. This Kanakkan happened to be the chief of the caste: when he was cheated out of this traditional occupation, his caste fellows had to follow suit. Those who took the job of plying the country dugout cannoes, were named as *Padanna Kanakkan*; those who went for fishing, came to be known as *Cherudi Kanakkan*; and those who took to cocoanut plucking were called Vettuvans.

The mythical common past of these groups is not however reflected in their present day social distance. They assert that there is no relationship among themselves. During the field investigation four different groups with Kanakkan as the root of their caste name came to notice. They are Padanna Kanakkan, who are engaged in plying country dugout cannoes, Cherudi Kanakkan, who do fishing, Chunnampu Kanakkan who make lime out of shells and Eradi Kanakkan who are engaged in plucking cocoanuts. But all these people are considered as inferior to them in status by the Vettuvans. In the past the Vettuvans considered them as untouchables. But in the eyes of the caste Hindus the Vettuvans and the different groups of Kanakkans were the same people; no status differentiations among them were recognised.

Ananthakrishna Iyer has reported that "the Vettuvans, were also called as Vettuva Pulayan". (1909, I.). The field enquiries in various parts of the State have not revealed the existence of any such division among the Vettuvans. However, in connection with the field survey conducted for collecting information on Pulayan, another scheduled caste in Kerala, it has been found that a section of the caste in Kandakkadavu is known as Vettu Pulayan or Vettuva Pulayan or simply Vettukar, but have nothing to do with the Vettuvans.

In different published sources the Vettuvans are mentioned as agricultural serfs, shikaris, collectors of forest produce, experts in hedging, fencing, cocoanut plucking, jungle cultivators and basket-makers, (Census of India, 1901, XV, 184; Iyer, 1909, 128; 1908, Gazeteer, 138; and Thurston, VII, 395).

The main occupation of these people today has been found to be cocoanut plucking in all the areas. At Narakkal and Kadamangalam, this is their sole occupation, while in Trichur district, where they have greater concentration they prac-

tise agriculture as their subsidiary occupation. There are slight variations in their occupation in other areas also, but, by and large, coconut plucking remains their main source of income.

There is hardly any authentic information about their ethnogenesis and ethnic history. Myths and legends connected with their origin are also scanty; at least few people appear to be aware of the same. However, a folktale collected from Trichur district is reproduced here.

Once the mischievous sons and grand sons of Lord Krishna made an effigy of a pregnant woman and placed it in front of a sage who was undergoing hard penance, only to disturb him and make fun. They asked the sage to predict the sex of the child which the effigy was supposed to be bearing. The sage resented very much their frivolous behaviour and predicted that it would be an iron pestle which would be instrumental to their being completely wiped out of the earth. Soon after this the effigy has turned to be living woman. She gave birth to an iron pestle, just as the sage had predicted. The boys in utter fear of the consequences, pounded this pestle into fine grains and threw the same far into the sea. The iron fillings floated on to the sea-shore and were transformed into a kind of grass called 'Eyam pullu'. After some-time the boys unknowingly plucked these 'Eyam-pullu' and playfully threw the same at each other. As the 'Eyam Pullu' struck them they died one after another.

The last bit of the iron pestle, thrown off in the sea with the fillings, was swallowed by a fish which was got trapped in a fisherman's net. The iron piece was removed and thrown away by the fisherman's wife while trying to cut it into pieces, for cooking. A hunter took this piece and made an arrow out of it and went out for hunting. When he was tired he took rest under a banyan tree. On this tree was seated Lord

Krishna on a branch concealed by the foliage, grieving about the fate of his children and grand children. Only his blue and rose coloured feet were exposed. The hunter accidentally looked upwards and mistaking the feet as a multi-coloured bird, shot at it. Lord Krishna fell down wounded. To the hunter, who was puzzled and grief stricken, Lord Krishna told not to worry because, as per the curse of the sage it was to happen, and thus consoled him. Lord Krishna sought his abode in heaven.

This news spread like a wild fire and those who had arrived on the scene cursed the hunter, who was responsible for the death of Lord Krishna. They said that he and his progeny was named as 'Namba Vettuvan' or those hunters who could not be trusted. They were considered as down trodden and as time passed the term 'Namba Vettuvan' was simplified as 'Vettuvan'. The present Vettuvans are considered as the descendants of this unfortunate hunter. They give credence to the story since in the past these people were engaged in hunting.

Thurston narrates a legend about the mythic origin of these people. "One of their tribe men went and asked a higher caste Nayar to give him one of his daughters in marriage. The Nayar offered to do so on condition that the whole tribe would come to the palace and dance on berries and each one who fell to be shot with arrows. The tribe foolishly agreed to the condition, and went and danced, with the result that, as each one tripped and fell, he or she was mercilessly shot dead with arrows. A little girl who survived this treatment was secretly rescued, and taken away by a compassionate Nayar, who married her into his family. From this union, the present day Vettuvans affirm their origin is to be traced. Upto this day they hold the caste of that particular Nayar in great veneration." (1909, VII, 396—taken from Madras Mail).

CHAPTER II

Distribution and Population Trend

The community is spread over seven districts of Kerala namely Palghat, Trichur, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Alleppy, Quilon and Trivandrum. The largest concentration however is in Trichur district with 25,096 souls of 82.2% of the total population of Vettuvans in the state as per 1961 census. In Trichur district, Manaloor, Narakkal, Aikkaranad, Lokamaleswaram, etc. are the areas of greater concentration being the centre of cocoanut plantations.

The total population of the Vettuvan who form 0.17% of the total population of Kerala, as per 1961 Census is, 28,095 out of which 14,091 (50.15%) are males and 14,004 (49.55%) are females. They constitute 1.96% of the total population of the Scheduled Castes of the State.

During 1961 Census a total of 141 persons have been returned from Tamil Nadu, with 61 females and 80 males.

The talukwise rural population of Vettuvan in Kerala State, as per 1961 Census is given below:

| District | Taluk | Population |
|--------------------|----------------------|------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 1. Palghat | Chittur | 4 |
| 2. Trichur | Talappilly | 72 |
| | Trichur | 17,212 |
| | Cranganore | 2,465 |
| | Mukundapuram | 3,343 |
| 3. Ernakulam | Parur | 1,084 |
| | Alwaye | 8 |
| | Kanyannur | 110 |
| | Cochin | 504 |
| | Thodupuzha | 3 |
| 4. Kottayam | Devicolom | 20 |
| | Udumbanchola | 6 |
| | Meenachil | 202 |
| | Vaikom | 2 |
| | Kottayam | 240 |
| | Changanassery | 97 |
| | Kanjirappally | 508 |
| | Peermade | 10 |
| 5. Alleppy | Shertalai | 1 |
| | Kuttanad | 111 |
| | Karthegappilly | 1 |
| | Navelikkara | 315 |
| 6. Quilon | Karunagappally | 25 |
| | Kottarakkara | 17 |

| 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---------------------|------------------|--------|
| 7. Trivandrum | Trivandrum | 1 |
| | Nedumangad | 9 |
| | Total | 26,317 |

It is to be noted that during the present century, the population of the Vettuvans has registered a spectacular rise. It was only 7,395 in 1901 as against 26,317 in 1961. If Trichur district alone is taken into consideration, the population was 3,811 in 1901 as against 23,096 in 1961. This extraordinary rise cannot be accounted for by natural growth. Large scale migration of Vettuvans from outside is also not known. The other possibility is that persons who were earlier returning themselves by other names, later on returned themselves as Vettuvans. But who can be these people? As noted earlier Kanakkans claim that they are same as Vettuvans. But the Census data show that against 3,751 persons in 1901, 22,397 persons returned themselves as Kanakkan in 1961. Hence the possibility of the number of Vettuvans being inflated by the Kanakkans returning themselves as Vettuvans, seems to be very little. The question therefore remains an open one, requiring further research.

As per 1961 Census, the sex ratio for the Vettuvan population of the State is 994 females for every 1,000 males while the state average is 1,022 females per 1,000 males. In the rural areas, it is 992 Vettuvan females and urban areas 1,020 Vettuvan females per 1,000 Vettuvan males. That is to say, the average sex-ratio and the rural rate falls much short of the state average while the urban rate is comparable to possible explanation is that in urban areas the Vettuvans are mainly engaged in construction work and the bulk of such workers are females.

Out of the total population of 28,095 souls 6,063 males and 5,769 females come under the '0-14 age group'. A total of 5,946 made and 6,221 females belong to the '15-44 age group'. Under '45 + group' 2,081 males and 2,013 females have been returned. Only one male and a female have come under the 'age not stated' group.

In the rural sector, a total of 26,317 persons with 13,211 males and 13,106 females have been returned. Urban areas on the other hand account for 1,778 persons with 880 male members and 898 females. In other words 93.67% of the Vettuvans live in rural areas while 6.33% are urban dwellers.

CHAPTER III

Physical Characteristics

Available published literature on the community does not throw any light on the physical characteristics. During the present study somatoscopic observations of thirtyfive members of the community, both male and female, were made in different areas.

The stature of the male varies from 154.78 cms. to 166.37 cms. with an average of 156.99 cms. In the case of female this varies from 137.16 cms. to 142.24 cms. the mean of which works out to be 139.70 cms. Skin colour ranges from dark-brown to brown. Out of the 35 cases 15 were dark-brown, 14 brown, 5 chocklate and one yellow brown. Hair form for the majority of the

cases were low waves. Twentyseven persons were having low waves, five deep waves, three medium waves and only one curly. Nose depression of thirty one cases were shallow and four medium. Nose-wings were normal for thirty four individuals and flared in one case. In all the thirty five cases eye slits were straight. Slight (medium) epicanthic fold was present in one case only and absent in the rest.

Thus the Vettuvans are a short statured people with dark brown to brown skin, having low wavy hair, shallow nose depression, straight eyes without epicanthic fold.

CHAPTER IV

Family, Clan, Kinship and Other Analogous Divisions

The Vettuvans are patrilineal people. Though a small number of extended families are found among them, the general tendency is towards nuclear families, consisting of the husband, wife and unmarried children. When a son is married he shifts to a new house built by him, with the help of his parents and brothers, at least before the first issue.

To make a new house, one normally approaches a landlord in the absence of some land of one's own, and requests for the latter's permission to construct a house on his plot of land. If the landlord allots him a plot of land, he is also required to look after, the coconut grove surrounding his house and for this he gets some remuneration which normally consists of 4 to 6 coconuts per month. In some cases coconut leaves are also given for thatching the house. With the new land legislations, however, seldom does a person get permission to make a house in the compound of a landlord.

Even when brothers live separately, sometimes they continue to have economic ties. For instance 'K' lives in the ancestral house, with his wife. He does not have any issue. His two brothers live separately from him, but their financial conditions are not good. 'K' keeps with him one child of each of his brothers by rotation; also he renders financial assistance to them from time to time. During festive occasions like Onam and Vishu he presents new clothes to all the children of his brothers.

Descent is reckoned through the male line. The taravad or ancestral home goes either to the eldest or the youngest son. The parents like to stay in the Taravad, with the son who acquires it. Normally they do not have any land of their own, to be partitioned. Only recently, some of them have acquired some land from the Government under the colonisation scheme. Whatever little property they may have is distributed among the sons. The married daughters do not have any claim over the ancestral property; they however can stay in the Taravad, whenever they visit the family.

During festive occasions like Onam and Vishu the daughters who are married out, visit the Taravad and have feast with the parents. So also, parents are invited to their houses. During such occasions the parents are given presents in the form of dress and cash.

In case of partition the house and the household equipments are evaluated by a mediator or

a respected old man of their caste; after that the same is equally divided amongst the sons. The son who acquires the house pays off the shares of all others in cash. Sometimes valuable household equipment like brass vessels and utensils are divided equally. Landed property is divided according to the number of coconut trees present in it.

Thurston, has reported that the Vettuvans divided into endogamous sub-divisions called "Koddi and Peringala". He further states, "they are divided into fourteen illoms, which seems to be named after the house names of janmis who they serve" (1900, VII, VII, 399). But during the present study, any endogamous sub-division was not found among them; besides their Taravads were not found to be named after those of the landlord, on whose lands their homesteads are situated.

Kinship

The system of relationship among the Vattuvans reflects the essential characters of classificatory system.

As for example the term *Appappan* is used for father's father, mother's father, father's father's brother, father's father's sister's husband, father's mother's brother and mother's father's brother and all the males in that line. To differentiate between the elder and younger among these terms *Valiya* (big) and *Cheriyā* (small) are prefixed with the corresponding terms. The term *appan* and *amma* are used for father and mother respectively.

For, father's father's father and those above, the term *Muthappan* is also used. (*Mutha* means elder).

The term *Ammama* is used for father's mother, mother's mother, father's father's brother's wife, mother's mother's sister, father's father's brother's sister and all those females in that line. Here also terms like *Valiya* and *Cheriyā* are prefixed to indicate the age. The term *Achan* is used for father's sister's husband and mother's brother along with *Valiya* and *Cheriyā* are prefixed to indicate age. *Ammayī* is used for father's brother's daughter. Terms *Valiya* and *Cheriyā* are prefixed to denote the elder and the younger respectively. *Pappan* is used for father's younger brother and mother's sister's husband. *Valiyappan* is the term used for father's elder brother and *Veliyamma* for mother's elder sister. For younger ones *Cheriyamma* is used. All elder brothers are addressed as *Chettan* and elder

sisters *Chechi*. Younger brothers and sisters are referred as *Aniyan* and *Aniyathy* respectively and addressed by their respective names. In the case of younger brother's wife she is addressed by name and referred as *Aniyathy* and elder ones *Chettathy*. For husband the term *Bharthavu* and wife *Bharya* are used as terms of reference. Husband addresses the wife as *edi* or by name; wife, will do it by *Aye* or *Ningal*. In case they have issues technonymy is used by the wife to refer her husband as the father of so and so. *Aliyan* is the term used for wife's brother, and sister's husband. But younger ones are usually addressed by their names. All the elder issues of father's sister and mother's brother, are addressed as *Chettan* and *Chechi* respectively for male and female. Younger ones are addressed by name or as *Aniyan* and *Aniyathy*; *Ammayiyappan* is used

as a term of reference to denote husband's father and wife's father. So also, *Ammayiyamma* is used for husband's mother and wife's mother. Those who are unrelated are addressed according to their age, by any of the terms except those for relations through marriage.

In most cases the terms of reference and the terms of address remain the same. Only in rare cases descriptive terms are used to explain the relationship while referring to a relative.

Patrikin solidarity is strong among the Vettuvans. This is evident from the fact that all in of gatherings during ceremonious occasions more importance is given to the relations on father's side who are informed about the occasion and invited without failure, though invitations to the mother's taravad are also sent.

CHAPTER V

Dwelling, Dress, Food, Ornaments and Other Material Objects Distinctive of the Community

Settlements of the Vettuvan are of dispersed type with the huts spread among the cocoanut grooves, as is the usual pattern in the coastal Kerala. Because of this peculiar nature of the settlement pattern, it is difficult to find, where one village ends and from where the other starts.

In the past there was strict observance of pollution in respect of the low castes and they were required to construct their houses bearing in mind the pollutable distance prescribed for the different communities. At present such restrictions have virtually disappeared; but even then the Vettuvans tend to live side by side in the same cluster. There are however cases where Brahmin, Goudasaraswatha Brahmin, Nair, and Ezhava others so called pure castes are found to reside in the neighbourhood of the Vettuvans.

Most of the Vettuvan dwellings are enclosed by a bamboo fence all around with an improvised gate in front and rarely at the rear. This demarcates their compound from the courtyard. Both *Kuchcha* type huts and laterite walled houses with tiled or leaf-thatched roof are met with. Each house has a courtyard in the front. So also a urinal-cum-bathing shed is made in the compound at the rear.

Normally the houses of Vettuvans are not huddled together to form an exclusive colony of their own, except, in some Harijan colonies set up by the Government through Harijan Welfare Department. At Narakkal, one of the two areas of the present study, there is a mixed type of neighbourhood population consisting of Scheduled Castes like Pulaya, Kurava, etc. and educationally backward communities like Ezhava, Arayan, etc. The light house Harijan colony, at Narakkal sea-shore was on the other hand found to be exclusively inhabited by the Vettuvans.

There is no hard and fast rule for the arrangement of the houses. They are, more or less, sprinkled. At Trichur, Lokamaleswaram and Kadamangalam the Vettuvan houses are found sprinkled among that of communities like Nambutiri, Nair, Ezhava, etc. All these go to show that though unapproachability to the higher castes is practised within the premises of one's own household, there is no segregation or isolation of their settlements.

By and large, the houses of the Vettuvan face towards the east as is the normal practice in the area. The *Kuchcha* type of huts are one roomed. One corner of the room serves as the kitchen. It has an entrance at its front. The floor may be

either made out of laterite, smeared with cow-dung or simply sandy.

Three types of houses are found at Narakkal Kadamangalam, Manalloor and Aranattukara.

(i) The low roofed *Kuchcha* type is built out of bamboo frames and thatched with plaited cocoanut leaves. It has got improvised cocoanut-leaf-walls without windows. (ii) the normal or medium type has got bamboo-mat-walls and laterite floor. In this case the windows are made out of bamboo splints. Plaited cocoanut leaves are used to make the walls. (iii) *Pucca* types are with laterite or brick walls with or without plastering, tiled or leaf thatched roof, with or without cement floor and with sufficient ventilation. One of the houses at Trichur was found electrified. *Pucca* type houses are more in vogue at Mailipadam, in the Trichur town limit.

A *pucca* house is normally two roomed with a verandah in front and a kitchen, usually at the right side. The kitchen has a small ventilator for the smoke from the hearth to pass through. Both rooms are used for sleeping purpose; one for males and the other for females. The rooms are connected by a door in between. The first room has two windows, one on the front wall and the other at the back or on the side wall. The next room may also have one or two windows. From this room there is a door to the kitchen from where it is opened by a door to the small verandah outside, at the rear of the kitchen. In some cases there may have one door at the back of the first room leading to a small verandah through the entire length upto the kitchen.

The plinth is made out of laterite or a mixture of clay, sand and pith (*chakarichoru*), the latter got from retted cocoanut husk. The walls are made out of plaited cocoanut leaves, fixed on bamboo frame-work and covered with bamboo mats in some cases. For those without laterite walls the roof is supported by four corner pillars of cocoanut wood or hard bamboo. The doors, often made out of cocoanut wood, are fixed on the wall with its bottom at the plinth level and the two side bars touching the roof. Window frames are made out of cocoanut wood or even bamboo splints and their shutters out of wooden planks, which are fixed on to the frame through iron hinges. More often bamboo framework covered with plaited cocoanut leaves or bamboo mats, serve the purpose. Many of the windows are found without shutters. If the windows are made out of bamboo splints the size will normally be $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet by $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet.

All the houses with bamboo mat or plaited cocoanut-leaf-walls have bamboo roof without ceiling to keep the thatching light, to avoid strain on the wooden pillars. Cocoanut leaf thatching is changed once a year.

In case of laterite or brick walled structures, the roof is made out of cocoanut or other wood or even by bamboo according to the financial position of the family. Both tiles and cocoanut leaves are used for covering the roof. At Mailipadom, in Trichur town limit as mentioned earlier the house of 'K' was found *pucca* and electrified. He constructed this house from the proceeds of the ancestral property he sold out. To construct a house, as the first step, the doors, windows, including their shutters and the framework for the roof are got made by the carpenter on payment of daily wages. Bamboo or cocoanut wood is preferred for this purpose: as it is cheap.

The next step is the marking of the plinth on an auspicious day, by an expert carpenter, the *Stanakkaram*, who is paid Rs. 5 to Rs. 10 and a light refreshment. In case of a small hut however, a poor Vettuvan would not feel necessary to engage a carpenter. He would do the job himself.

Trenches are now made along the boundaries of the ground plan and they are filled with a mixture of clay, cocoanut pith and sand to form a one foot high ridge over the surface. At the four corners of this ridge, poles made out of bamboo or cocoanut wood are fixed; and above this the roof frame is mounted and thatched. Before the ridge is dried up bamboo splinters are fixed in a row in the middle line to form the frame work of the wall. Doors and windows are also set up at this stage.

The frame work for the walls is made strong by fixing necessary splinters or supports in between. This is afterwards covered with plaited cocoanut leaves or bamboo mats or both. This may again be reinforced by fixing bamboo splinters at intervals of 8 to 10 inches.

The floor is strengthened and then plastered with a mixture of clay and charcoal powder or cow-dung. In the space provided for kitchen two or three hearths are made out of the same mixture used for the plinth and daubed with laterite paste. These hearths have openings in front to feed fire-wood and three projections over which pots rest. Now the house is ready for occupation.

The persons who are employed for the construction of the house are paid in cash. Close relatives may help in the construction of the house as a mark of kinship solidarity, are however given only food on the days of work.

Normally no elaborate ceremony is observed, during the occupation of a newly built house. Some, however, sprinkle all over the house holy water brought from the temple. In all the cases

most of the nearest relatives or atleast the inmates of the parent households are invited and a simple meal is served. Now-a-days some perform house-warming ceremony,—*palukachal*, by boiling a quantity of milk over the newly made hearth in the same manner as is done by the so called other higher castes in the area.

For the purpose of drinking water, a pond or a well is dug near the house, normally towards the left corner of the kitchen. Community wells owned by the Panchayat are found in the colonies. Those who do not have any pond or well may collect water from the neighbourhood.

The Vettuvans attend to nature's call by squatting on the fallow lands near about their huts. Though aid is being given by the Harijan Welfare Department for the construction of bore-hole latrines, the paucity of suitable sites for the same is hampering this programme. Habits of the people too contribute to a certain extent, as they do not like to have latrines near their source of drinking water.

Very rarely do they possess cows but they rear goats which are kept in thatched extensions at the rear of the house.

Laterite or rock pieces representing their deities are kept at a convenient clean corner of the compound, away from the kitchen side.

Rubbish swept from and around the house is dumped at the foot of a tree so that it can be used as fuel afterwards.

Dress

A lot of change have taken place in the dress habits of the Vettuvan. Traditional dress of men consisted of a short loin cloth extending upto the knees while the women used *muri*,—a six cubit loin cloth, tucked on the loins. The upper part of the body was kept uncovered in the case of males as well as females. This pattern is still prevalent among the elderly folk, with the exception that they use piece of cloth to cover the upper part of the body upto the bosom. The dress of men consisted only of a small loin cloth extending upto the knees. Those days, wearing a loin cloth beyond the knees amounted to affront to the upper castes and hence, it is reported that none dared to use a loin cloth extending beyond the knees. Male children invariably wore a strip of public cloth, called *konakam*, tucked on either side of a loin belt of thread, to cover the genitals.

At present the female folk use a four cubit loin cloth which extends up to the ankle, under which is used a smaller loin cloth known as *adimandu* (*adi*=underneath. *Mandu*=cloth) serving the purpose of a petticoat, when they are at home or while at work outside the house. The body is covered by the young women, with a

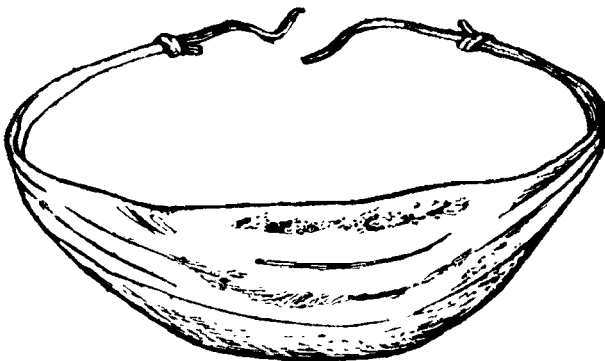
blouse or *choli* of the modren stitch under which a bodice is invariably worn. The elderly women may, however, dispense with this under-garment.

In recent years, it has been noticed that a few young women use *saries* while going out or during festive occasions. Elderly ladies however, use loin cloth, and blouse and also a piece of second cloth to cover the upper part of the body. The second cloth is worn in such a manner that both the ends pass backwards over the shoulders, and the front part is spread over the bosom.

Girls of about 8 to 16 years use skirts (Paa-vada) and blouse. Afterwards they change to loin cloth and blouse or *saree* and blouse. Upto the age of 7 or 8 they use skirts or even, *thorthu* (a kind of bathing towel) while at home. During festive and other special occasions they use skirts and blouse of variegated colours and designs. Normally the skirt reaches upto the knees. A school going girl uses half *saree* (a second cloth worn over the left shoulder to cover the bosom) along with skirt and blouse. A few of them wear even modern brassiers.

At home, men wear simple dress,—a four cubit loin cloth extending upto the ankle, occasionally folded to facilitate easy movement of the legs. Undergarment is used by the younger generation. But elders still use a strip of cloth called *konkam* or *Thora* in place of the under-wear to cover the genitals fixed through a thread tied around the groin. Normally the body is kept bare. Rarely, men of the younger generation use sleeveless *banians*.

When at work they use a small loin cloth, called *thorthu* around the loin which serves a duel purpose. Besides using as a loin cloth it also serves the purpose of toilet towel. The *thorthu* reaches upto the knee. A *thora* or *Konakam* is used invariably under the *thorthu*. The *thorthu* is fixed around the loin by means of a thread, a belt made out of leather, plastic or even the spathe of arecanut tree, to be more safe while climbing the trees. Some may use a second *thorthu* as a turban.



Belt

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Boys use *nicker* and still younger ones go completely naked or use a *konakam* at best. School going boys use trousers and shirts or loin cloth and shirts.

The youngsters, when they go out, use a loin cloth, around their loin, under-neath which there may be one undergarment. Using *banians* and neatly tailored shirts on such occasions is very common. Many of them are found using handkerchiefs.

Here it is interesting to note that the observation made by Thurston and the *Gazetteer* of Malabar regarding their former dress. According to Thurston, "They have two endogamous Sub-divisions called *Kodi* and *Peringala*. The women of the former wear cloth while that of the latter dress in leaves, which they wear only around their waists, and renew daily." In the *Gazetteer* of Malabar it is recorded....."they are distinguished by the survival amongst their women of the custom of dressing in leaves, their only clothing being a kind of double fan-shaped apron of leaves tied round the waist with a rolled cloth". (Vol. VII, pp. 394—404). If these observations are correct, a tremendous change has unduobtedy taken place in the sartorial habits of the Vettuvans.

Ornaments

As in the case of many depressed castes, in the past, the Vettuvan women were not allowed to wear any gold ornament. They wore only a type of *thoda* (ear ornament) made out of wood, lead, or brass, on the dilated ear lobe. They, very often wore a scroll of pandanus or cocconut leaf ribbon called *olachuttu*. Around the neck they wore a black thread. Even the marriage badge or *Tali* (a heart shaped small gold plate with a ring attached at the top to pass the thread) made out of gold, was worn only as a ritual and later on it was dispensed with. Thus sometimes during marriage a *tali* was borrowed from the goldsmith. A beaded necklace, *kallumala*, was the common ornament worn by many of the women.

Men wore in former days, an ear ornament, *kadukkan*, prepared out of iron, copper, or brass, in the pierced ear lobe. It was a ring with a small block of metal at the front side. On their previous ornaments, Thurston reports, "their males wear ear-rings of brass and their females adorn themselves with nose, fignure and neck ornaments of brass or beads" (1909, VII, p. 398).

The erstwhile restriction for wearing gold ornaments are no more today. The Vettuvans now prefer, if they can afford, to wear all types of ornaments made out of gold. Their improved social status, economy and education, have also partly contributed to this urge. They have adopted all modern types of gold ornaments which are common with the other people in the region.

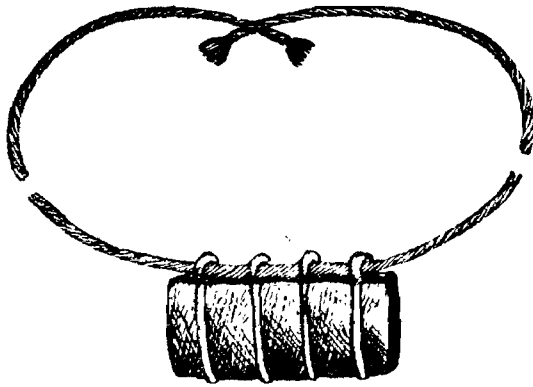
Females have started continuously wearing *tali* with chain, made out of gold, after marriage. During the first phase of this change they started using the traditional 'banyan leaf' shaped *tali* made out of gold, strung on to a black thread called *karuppu charadu*, as marriage badge. Some made it as a flat rectangular Shellac stuffed gold case, about four cms. long half a centimetre thick and $1\frac{1}{2}$ cms. wide. Four or five rings are attached on the upper edge to pass the thread. This ornament is called *elassu*. Even now this is found among the older women. There is another type of *elassu* which is cylindrical in shape. In some cases this *elassu* is used as an amulet stuffed with some magical notes, 'capable' to ward off evil spirits. These notes are prepared by a magician or mantravadi belonging to other higher castes, like Nair or Ezhava. *Tali* and *elassu* are prepared by the goldsmith (Thattan) who is paid in cash. The price of these items differ according to the quantity and quality of gold made use of.

The present trend is different. There are a few who still use the traditional type of *tali* with

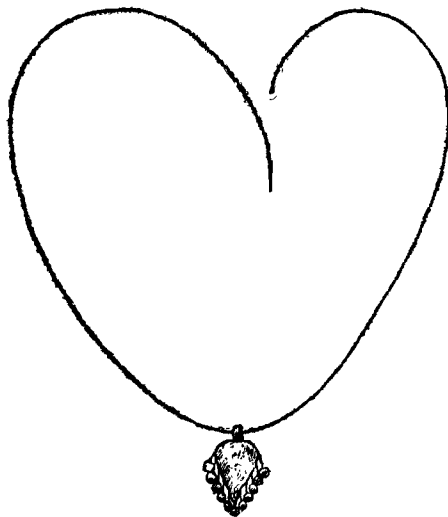
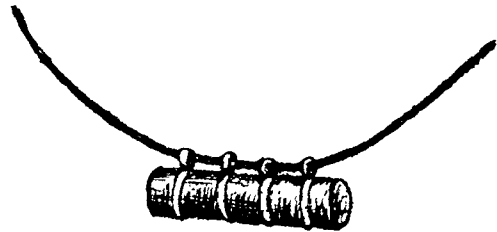
a gold chain, as it is less expensive. Most of them prefer to have a marriage badge, with a locket of modern design, with suitable chain.

They, including old women, have completely left *thoda*, the ear ornament of the former times.

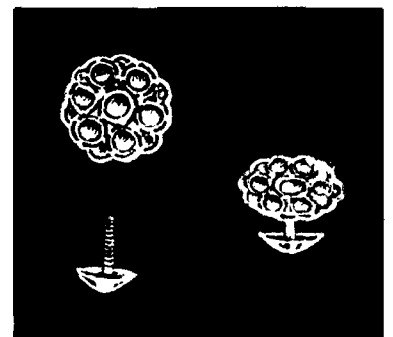
Modern studs, (*Kammal*) gold ring and pendants (*Gimikkies*) have replaced the old types of ear ornaments. *Kammals* are of different sizes with a circular convex front piece with designs on it and a screw at the back. Coloured agates are sometimes affixed to decorate the front piece. Star shaped studs with a single stone affixed to each are worn by children. The screw fits into a small narrow pipe which is the continuation of the front piece and which passes through the pierced ear lobe. The *gimikkies* or pendants, are inverted bowl shaped, hollow, ornamented gold pieces with artificial pearl or gold beads attached at the edges. They are hung from the ordinary *kammal* by means of a small chain of $1\frac{1}{2}$ cms. in length. The *gimikkies*, as they are more expensive ranging from Rs. 150 to Rs. 200, are found rarely.



Elassu

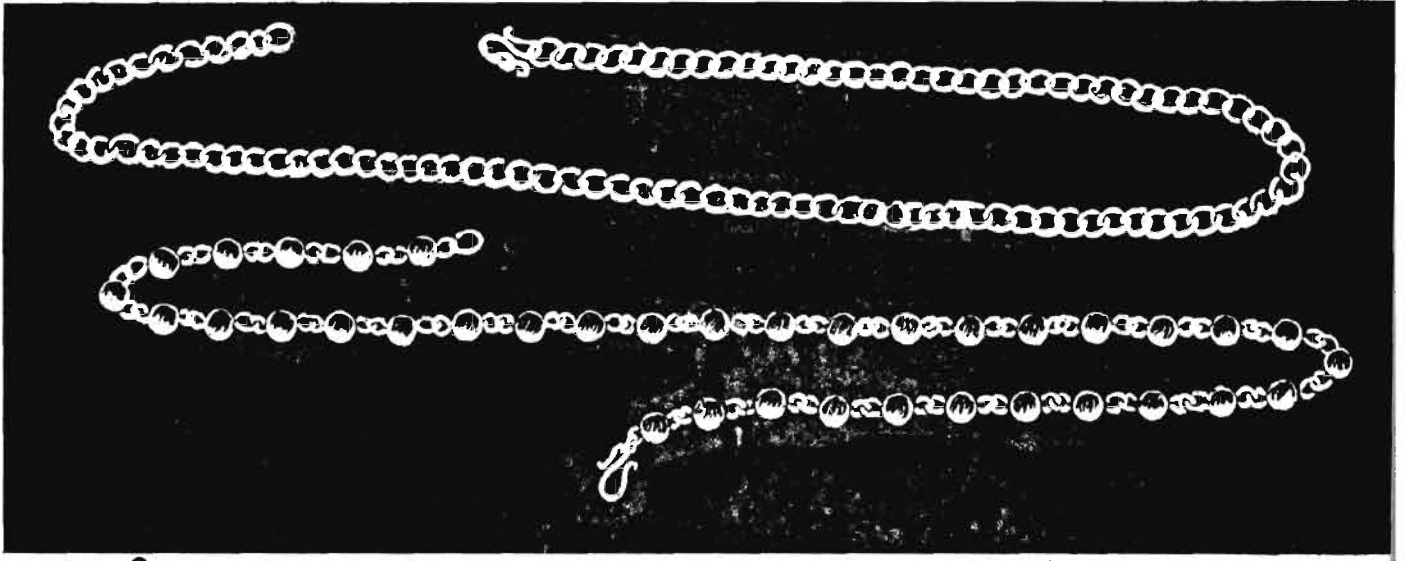


Tali Chain

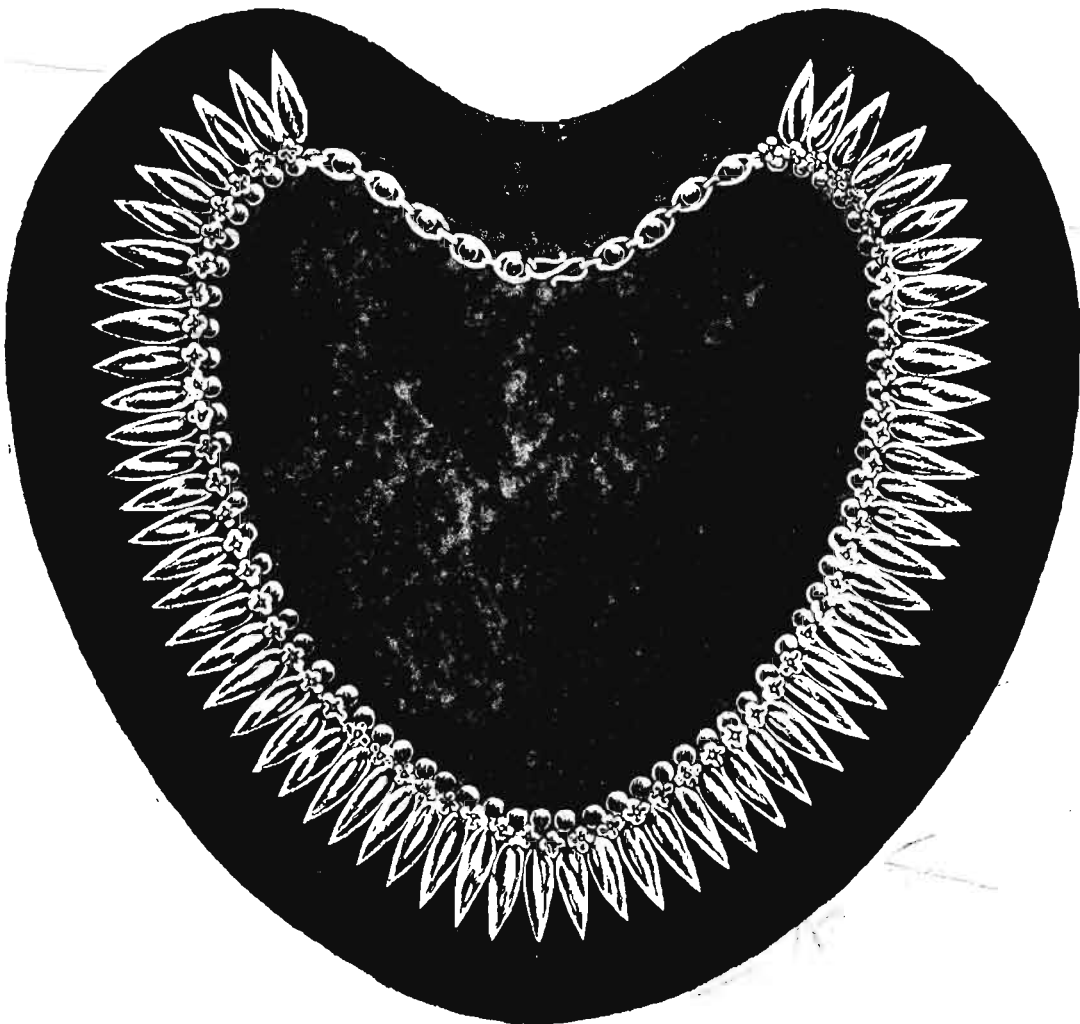


Kammal

Different types of necklaces used by Vettuvani



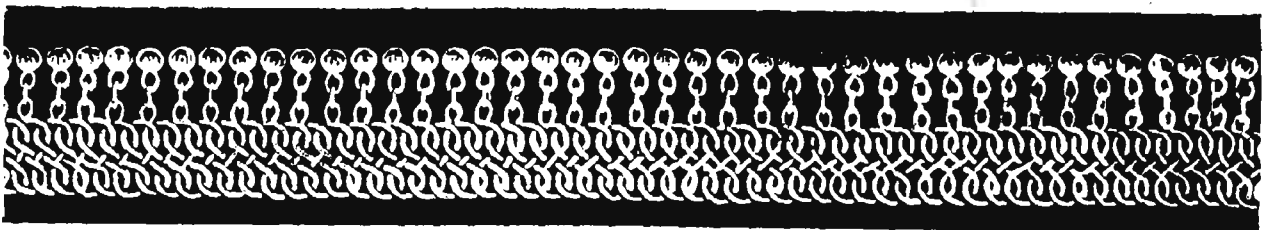
Necklace



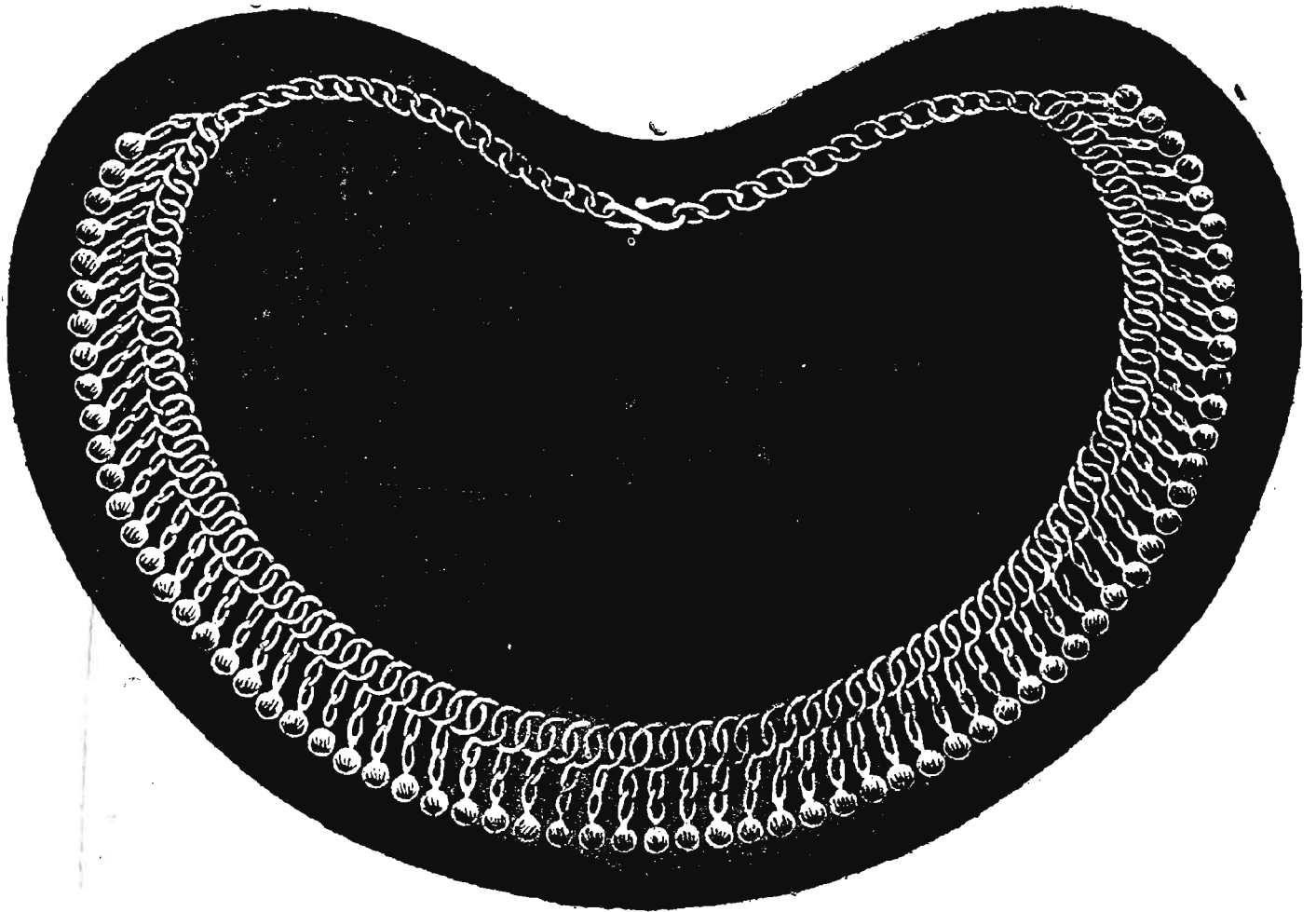
Necklace



Necklace



Necklace



Necklace

Another ear ornament in vogue now is the ear-ring. Both gold as well as cheap ones are used.

Necklaces of different designs named *Muthumala*, *Kasumala*, *Alankaramala*, *Panamala*, etc. are also worn by them, though rarely.

Kasumala is the one which has 20 to 50 circular gold discs attached to a chain, in a row each covering half of the one below, with a gold chain for the rest of the portion and having a hook to fix around the neck. In some cases at the inner edge of these discs gold beads are also set.

Alankaramala has three rows of oval shaped discs arranged in one line, breadthwise attached with hooks, thus giving space in between the discs. This also has a hook to fix the ends and a locket at the middle. The size, shape and design of the locket differ according to preference.

Panamala like *Alankaramala* has circular gold discs of the size of paise, attached each other with gold beads and chain, in two rows.

Muthumala is made out of small hollow gold beads of the size of pepper seed or still smaller,

on a chain and having a hook at the loose ends. This has normally no locket. But locket can also be attached with it if found necessary.

Simple ordinary chains out of small circular, oblong or even rectangular rings attached to one another are also used, with or without lockets, as a necklace or *Mala*.

For hand, though rarely, bangles of different designs are used by the Vettuvan women. Normally they use cheap bangles in rubber, plastic or glass.

Finger rings made out of gold and stainless steel are used rarely. Bangles out of gold, rubber or glass are also used.



Vala

On the waist they wear *Thudal* or Chain made out of silver as that of the higher castes. This may be either *pookkulakkanni* or *vattakkanni*. *Pookkulakkanni* is in the form of cocoanut flower stalk and *Vattakanni* is a chain of small, broad, circular rings attached together.

Males wear only finger rings, that too, very rarely. Star shaped *Kadukkans* or studs with only one agate piece fixed are found used, as car ornaments. But this too has become out of date. *Kadukkan* is now being used only by very old people.

Personal Decoration

It is reported that in former days men used to grow long hair, tie the same into a lock and keep it on one side of the head as is done by the women in whose case however the lock is at the back. Younger children, on the other hand, used to have a close crop at the top. They shaved off the hair around it to form a circular block in the centre.

Hair cutting was, in former days, a sort of mutual obligation since they had no barber of their own nor they were allowed to enter the barber's saloon.

According to Thurston, the *Kodi* division kept their hair long and *Peringala* division had top knots (Vol. VII, pp. 394—404).

Today, the males crop their hair, in the same manner as other castes of the region. They are also not barred from using barber's saloons.

Females normally tie the whole hair into a lock at the back. But during festive occasion they may plait it into one or two parts. This is usually found among school going girls and educated ones. Many other designs are also adopted, particularly by those belonging to the younger generation. The locks of hair are beautified by using hair pins, flowers, coloured cloth-ribbons, etc.

Though keeping of moustache among men was not in vogue, they have adopted this recently. Now it is difficult to see a youth without moustache. They grow beard only during pilgrimage, religious ceremonies or in fulfilment of some vow.

Both sexes belonging to the younger generation have started using cosmetics like perfumed hair-oil, talcum powder, face cream, etc.

Females apply, sandal wood paste mixed with vermilion on the forehead and make marks (tikle) of varying size and shape. They also apply *Kajal* or *Kanmashy* (lamp black) on their eye lashes. Foot wear of leather, plastic or rubber, are becoming quite common among the males. Wrist watches are also found now-a-days with many males.

Food

Vettuvans are non-vegetarians; many of them even eat beef.

Rice is their staple food. But due to scarcity of rice, it is often substituted by wheat and tapioca. Other food items include pulses and tubers like elephant yam, colocasia, amorphophalus, sweet potato, etc. which are purchased from the market.

The food habits of the Vettuvans do not differ from those of the local population. Their day starts with personal cleanliness. After attending to nature's call they clean the teeth with either charcoal or scrolls of mango leaves. Taking of tea has become very common. The women folk at home have a cup of black tea which may be sweetened by molasses. This may be taken along with tapioca. The earning members go to the nearby tea-shop for their break-fast consisting of *Puttu*, a local rice preparation, curry and tea. *Puttu* is a preparation of rice flour and cocoanut crests. Rice flour, to which salt is added for, is slightly wetted and stuffed into a bamboo tube about 8" in length. It is then put in a narrow mouthed pot containing some water, which is kept boiling over a hearth. Cocoanut crests are added to the mixture of rice flour and allowed to be steamed sufficiently. The cooked *puttu* is pushed out of the bamboo tube with the help of a rod. Now-a-days due to scarcity of rice it is replaced by wheat flour. *Puttu* is considered as the best item which gives enough energy for carrying out arduous tasks like tree climbing, ploughing, etc. Since these people are much addicted to tea they spend a good part of their daily income at the tea-shops.

Rice gruel, with one curry (side dish) made out of tapioca or a *Chutney* prepared from dried fish or simple chilly and salt mixed with cocoanut oil, form the lunch. Those who are away from home at the work-spot normally have their lunch in a hotel. Otherwise they have it at their home. Those who go for work may have their evening tea at the tea-shop.

The night-meal is their principal food. The women folk start assembling ingredients for the supper as soon as the earners return from work. As they live normally on hands and mouth, the daily requirements are purchased out of the wages earned during the day.

At times and during festive occasions they prepare meat if it is within their reach. On festive occasions they may prepare sweet dishes as well. A special item called *Neyyapam* or *Ennayappam* is prepared, out of rice flour, molasses and cocoanut crests mixed and fried in cocoanut oil. This is prepared especially during the *Vishu* festival. *Unniyappam* which is smaller in size is also prepared in the same way. So also is *Kallappam* or *Vellayappam* which is prepared out of rice flour mixed with water, sugar and

toddy. It is kept overnight to ferment and is then fried on a hot pan smeared with oil.

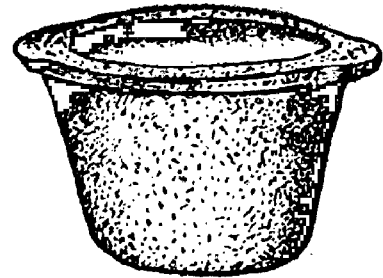
Formerly they consumed much toddy at the tavern during evenings. But now, most of them have stopped this habit due to the fall in their income and soaring cost of living. Some of them, still consume some toddy after a day's hard work, which according to them, 'has a tonic effect'.

In the matter of serving food at home preference is always given to the elder male members. The females normally take their food after the male earning members have had theirs. In this arrangement often the women folk may have to be contented with whatever is left behind.

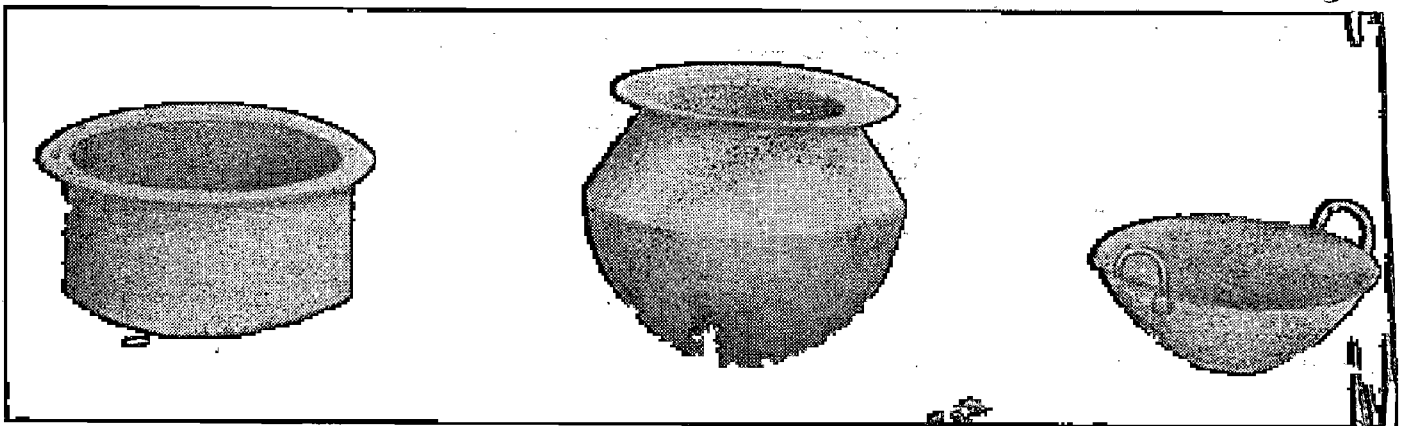
The females are not expected to dine along with the males, including their husbands. They take their food in the kitchen while the male members dine sitting in the varandah or in the adjacent room. A husband and wife may rarely visit a tea-shop and share tea with snacks.

Cooking utensils consist of a few earthen pots (*Kalam*) and those which are made out of soft

stone named *kalchatty*. Earthen lids (*chatti*) may also be used as plates. Those with narrow mouth, used for collecting water are known as *Kutam*. Vessels out of copper or brass are also rarely found. These, if meant for cooking will have tin coating inside. The plates used for serving food, made out of brass, are called *Kinnam*. Other vessels used for serving food include earthen plates (*chatti*), enamelled iron plates and alluminium plates, of varying sizes according to the use they are put to.



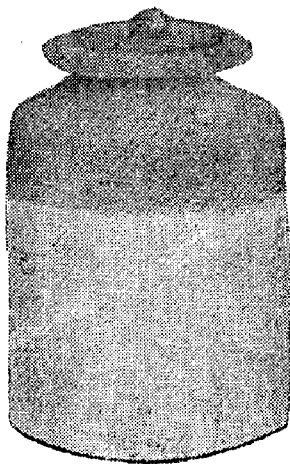
Kalchatty



Takala

Kalam

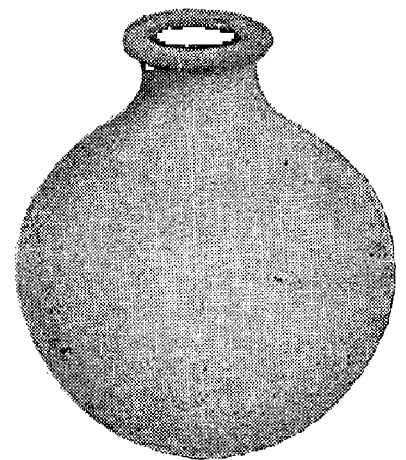
Chèena Chatty



Bharani



Kalam



Kutam

Cupped Jack tree leaves serve the purpose of spoon while for transferring and stirring food long handled cocoanut shell ladles are used. Metal or glass tumblers or occasionally porcelain bowls and earthen *chattis* are used for consuming water.

For pounding rice and dehusking paddy wooden mortar (*Ural*) and pestle (*Ulakka*) made out of cocoanut wood with iron rings at the tips are used. Granite mortars (*Kallural*) are also found used in a few cases. Winnowing fans of bamboo splints called *Muram* are used for winnowing and other purposes.

Puttu as mentioned earlier, is the most common and purely indigenous dish of the Malayalam coast. This is prepared with the help of a contrivance called *Puttukuzhal* which is a simple bamboo tube of about 8" in length and having a nodal septum at one end. This septum is perforated to allow steam to pass through. This end is also wrapped with some cloth so as to enable it to fit in properly with the mouth of the pitcher emitting, steam. The *Puttu Kuzhal* is a common contrivance found in every house.

For grinding purposes a granite slab having an approximate size of 20×10×6 inches, called *Arakkallu* is used. The grinder (*Pulla* or *Pulla Kallu*), is a phallic shaped rock piece with rough surface, about 12 inches in length and 4 inches in diameter at the middle, and is rolled over the slab to and fro to crush the required things. The surface of the *Arakkallu* is made rough by chiselling. The slab is kept on a raised platform for easy manipulation.

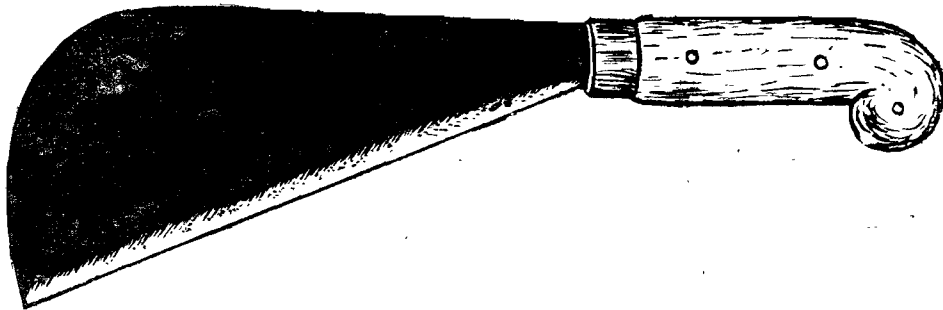
Besides the above, different types of knives (*Kathy*) and baskets (*kutta*) made out of bamboo strips and pandanus leaves are used for day to day use. The bigger *Kutta* are used for carrying things as headload and smaller ones are used for seiving water out of cooked rice, washing sliced vegetables, etc.

The baskets made out of Pandanus leaves are called *vatty* and those out of cocoanut leaves are called *Vallams*. The former is used for carrying rice or some other things while the latter are used for collecting dried leaves, fuel wood, etc. A smaller folding type of *Vatty* of the size of a big leather purse is used to carry betel leaves, arecanut, tobacco and lime, used for chewing.

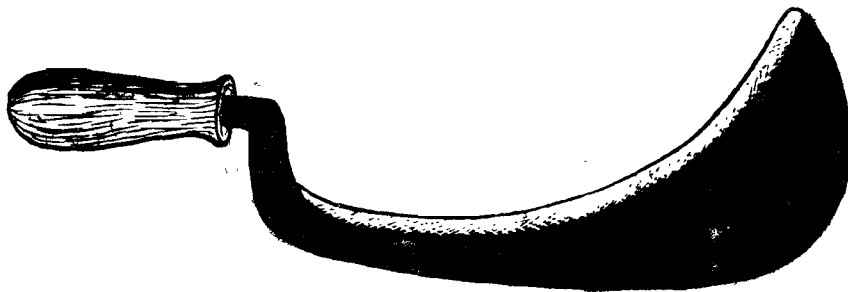
The main implements used for economic pursuits are the following:—

Since their main occupation is cocoanut plucking their main equipment used for this is *Vakkathy* or *Vettukathy* (Billhook). The *Vettukathy* has two parts, the blade (*kathy*) and the handle (*pidi*). The blade is a broad metal piece with a sharpened edge, suitable to cut bunches of cocoanut and leaves. It is about 12 to 15 inches long and 3 inches broad, at the broadest point with a short pointed end. The short handle is about 6 inches in length and is made out of buffalo horn or wood.

The *Vakkathy* found at Narakkal and Kedamangalam areas are different from the *Vettukathy* of other areas. It has got a hook above the handle to be hooked on the shoulder while climbing. The cylindrical handle is about 3 to 4 inches in length and the blade is about 12 to 14 inches

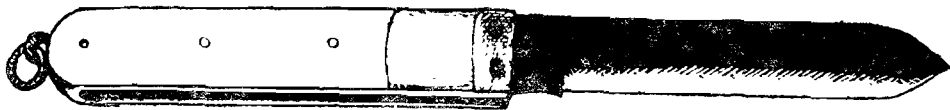


Vettukathy



Vakkathy

Different types of knives used by Vettuvan



and has a sharp edge. The breadth at the broadest point varies from 3 to 3½ inches. The *pidi* or handle is made out of buffalo horn or wood decorated with copper or brass rings and designs.

In Trichur district instead of the 'C' shaped hook strip of cocoanut leaf stalk, *Tadu* 6 to 9 inches long is used.

To climb upon the tree they use a bamboo ladder called *Eni*. This is a hard bamboo pole, with varying length from 12 to 15 feet, having strong and close nodes to fix their feet. It has two small wooden pieces fixed in the form of 'V' at the top, so that it helps the *Eni* to be fixed on to the trunk of the tree. With the *Eni* they can climb to some height easily. *Eni* is commonly used during rainy season when the trunk is slippery or when the tree has protective coverings of thorn bush etc.

The other accessory necessary to climb upon the trees, is a ring called *Talappu* made out of either the strong bark from the inner side of the cocoanut leaf stalk, or a rope. It is 8 to 9 inches in diameter. This is worn around the feet and then the feet are gripped on to the trunk and hop up with the hands held around the trunk. While not in use the *Talappu* is kept around the head. All portions of the body which get rubbed by the *Talappu* get a hardened scar due to constant use. Thus it is easy to identify a tree climbing Vettuvan.

In Trichur district they use another type of *Talappu* which is made out of coir yarn plaited together to the required length. This is passed around the trunk and the ends are held tight by both the hands, stretching it hard over the trunk. The whole body which is supported by this is drawn upwards and thus the feet are fixed at a higher level, on the trunk. This sinuous movement is repeated and the person reaches the crown of the tree.

To fix up the small *dhothi* around the loin, they wear a leather or a plastic belt. Even the arecanut spathe is used for this purpose. A piece of arecanut spathe is cut in the form of an elongated

triangle and to the two ends are attached chords and tied around the waist. This is found more in Narakkal and Kadamangalam.

In areas where they have agriculture as subsidiary occupation, the following tools are used.

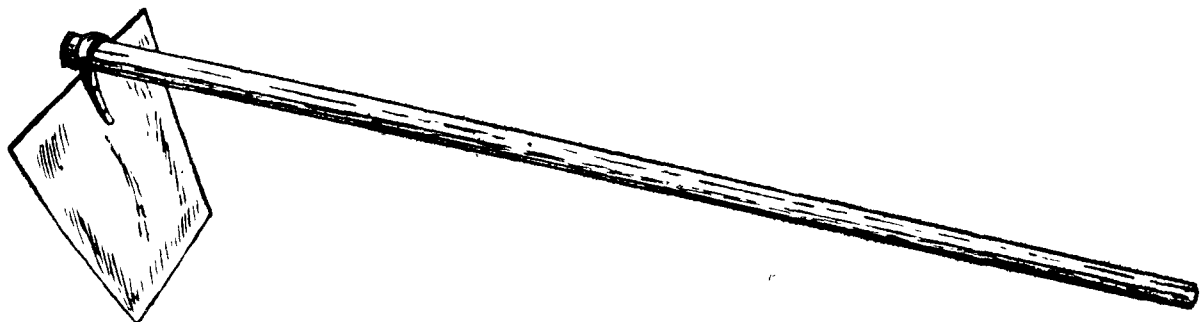
For loosening earth, clearing ponds and canals they use an implement named *Toomba* (spade). This is more in vogue in Lokamaleswaram area. It has a rectangular iron blade which tapers a bit at the sharp end, meant to cut earth. At the opposite end there is a horse shoe shaped piece welded to the blade, called *Kozha*. In this *Kozha*, one end of the long handle, (*Toomba Kai*) which is about 7 to 8 feet long and made out of arecanut trunk, is fixed. Since it is fixed at an angle of 70° it pierces well into the earth and pick up a good quantity of the same.

Thekkukotta

Thekkukotta is a conical basket used for bailing out water from canals and ponds. It is woven out of bamboo splints and strengthened by rope yarns. A thick paste of cow-dung or tar mixed with paddy husk is daubed over the surface of the basket to make it water proof and to prevent it from getting spoiled due to dampness. To the tapering bottom and to its two corners above, thick rope yarns are fixed. Sometimes, if the basket is bigger a pair of rope yarns are fixed, to each corner above, which will enable to lift more water in the big basket. According to the number of yarns two persons for the smaller and four for the bigger are engaged. They lower the basket, dip in the water to fill it and lift to the surface pulling the rope and stretching the body backwards. By stretching the ropes at the bottom a bit more, the basket and the water is bailed out. This process is repeated and the whole water is bailed out from the tank or canal.



Talappu



Toomba

Mammatty

Toomba can be used only in those areas where there is sandy or loose earth. For loosening hard earth an implement called *Mammatty* is used. *Mammatty*, like *Toomba*, has an iron blade, but is somewhat square in size with a cylindrical wooden handle of 3 to 3½ feet in length. Here also the handle is fixed through a circular ring welded on to the rim of the blade. The blade is of the size of 7 to 8 inches square.

Kuzhikkathy

Kuzhikkathy or *Kaikottu* is another implement used to make loose the laterite deposit. *Kaikottu* handle is similar to that of *Mammatty*. But the blade is narrow with a sharp end and is a foot long. It is used to make pits and loosening laterite earth.

Nukam (Yoke)

This is a long cylindrical wooden rod of 6 to 7 feet in length with a pair of slender smaller rods passed vertically, one foot apart, on either side. Within these rods the neck of the bullocks find place while ploughing. This also regulates the movements and direction of the bullocks.

Kalappa or Kari (Wooden Plough)

This is the traditional plough used by them. It has a wooden rod of 6 to 7 feet in length with wedges so that it can be adjusted according to the height of the bullocks used, for ploughing. The distance can also be adjusted. This end of the rod is tied on to the *yoke*. The lower

end is fixed to a 'L' shaped block of wood having a plough-share and a handle. The former effectively pierces into the earth while the latter, 2 to 3 feet in length, is used as a handle to regulate the movement of the plough.

The plough used for wet cultivation may have a flat piece affixed above the plough-share to keep off mud getting deposited on its surface.

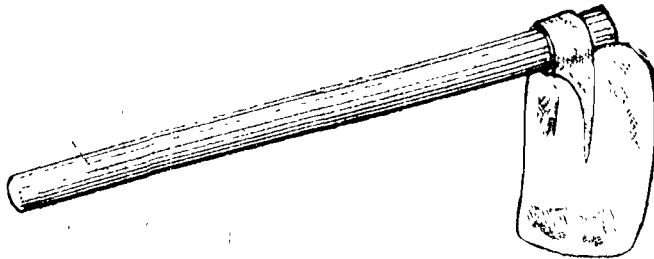
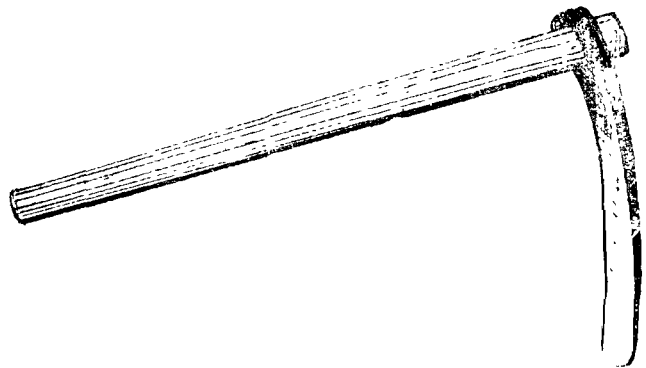
Harrow (Kattacherippu) or mutty

This is a 'T' shaped implement used to break clods of clay. The free end of the vertical limb is attached to the *yoke*. There is another type which has got so many vertical 'teeth' fixed to the horizontal limb. This is used for clearing off the weeds around the seedlings and to make the ground more loose.

In some cases both types of *Kattacherippu* are mixed in one. For this the horizontal bar of the ordinary one is bored 3 to 4 inches apart and small iron rods of 6 to 8 inches in length with a head or hook at one end are passed through these holes. This is also called *Pallumutty*. All these rods are connected at the top by means of a rope passing through the 'eyes' of the rods. If not in use, these rods are removed and *Kattacherippu* is used for breaking clods of clay.

Katathady or Katta Mutty

This is a large wooden hammer used for breaking clods, with a head made of a block of wood of 1 foot and a 6 to 7 feet long wooden handle.

*Mammatty**Kuzhikkathy*

Koonthali

This is a small axe like implement got fixed to a vertical long handle. This is used to clear the around each seedling and to make the earth loose.

Maram: (Urcha Maram)

There are two kinds of *Maram*, one is named as *Kurumaram* and the other *Netumaram*. *Kurumaram* is made concave at one side by scooping off the wood, with a handle fixed on to it. From both ends of the plank a hook with a small chain is attached. While in operation, two half split bamboos are attached to each one of these chains and joined in front. This end is attached to the *yoke*. While the bullocks move, the plank is pressed hard to make the clods of earth smashed and levelled. This *Maram* is used in wet cultivation.

The other one, called *Netumaram*, also used in wet cultivation, is a concave rectangular plank with two hooks attached apart in the centre of the concave surface and a handle on the upper edge at its middle. The bottom edge tapers. The plank is attached to the *yoke* by means of two ropes. While in operation the plank is kept vertical, one person holding the handle while he presses the plank with one of his foot. The plank is kept vertical or slanting according to the requirements. Another person regulates the movements of the bullocks.

Both the types are together known as *Urcha Maram*.

Chakram (Persian Wheel)

This is made out of wood, and used for bailing out water from fields. This wheel consists of a number of wooden leaves of about 4 to 5 feet in length varying from 7 to 12 in number. The leaves are fitted to a circular hub, and interconnected with planks attached parallel to the hub so that these are not tilted away from it with the force of water falling upon it. An iron rod used as a central axis is fixed at the centre of the hub so that it can be fitted in the box like

case called *Pathi*, which is more or less rectangular in shape. Wooden bars are also fixed on both sides of the hub. Sometimes the hub is fixed in a semicircular box with a triangular base.

The base of the triangular box is planted at one end of the field in which direction the water is to be gravitated. The wheel is fixed on the grooves provided for purpose by means of the projecting central axil, on either side of the hub so that it can be rotated freely. On either side of the wheel bamboo supports are put-up to enable the workers who operate the wheel to sit on them and push the leaves with their feet, for propelling the wheel. One person also sits at the tip of the box on a similar support. He touches the edge of every leaf with his feet as the wheel rotates thus increasing the momentum. The number of workers employed for this differ from 2 to 20 as per the intensity of operation and size of the wheel. As the wheel is rapidly rotated, water is bailed out or in, by the leaves, which forms the teeth of the wheel. In most cases small *Chakrams* with 9 or 10 leaves are used.

Sickle (Aruval)

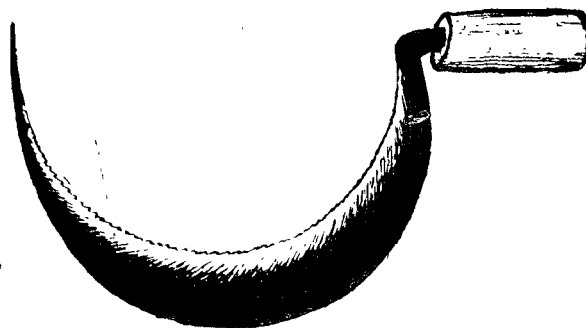
Sickle is found used especially in all areas where agriculture forms the subsidiary occupation although there may be difference in its shape from area to area. In Lokamaleswaram, the Sickles are simple with sharp edge. They are crescent shaped with cylindrical wooden handle of 4 to 5 inches in length.

Those found in other areas of Trichur district are with serrated edge and with a bit wider arch.

Both these are used for harvesting. Stalks of paddy are brought together using the beak shaped tip of the sickle and caught in the *grip* to cut it afterwards. The serrated edge gives a good grip though it needs practise to operate it.

Pattukotta (Winnowing Fan)

The half egg shaped bamboo basket with a beak at one end is found especially in the areas where they practise agriculture. This is used for winnow-

*Aruval*

ing and transferring paddy. The *Pattukotta* is smeared with cow-dung paste so that it becomes leak proof and last long.

All implements used for agricultural operations are owned by the Landlord except the sickle which is possessed by the Vettuvans.

Besides, those described above, used for agricultural operations, the following implements are used for their day-to-day life.

Mazhu or Kotaly (Axe)

This is an implement used to split fire wood block into pieces or felling trees. There are different sizes of axes. In Ernakulam district it is called *Kotaly* and in Trichur it is called *Muzhu*. This has got an iron blade 10 to 11 inches in length with a broad and sharp end, opposite to which is a ring to fix the wooden handle of 2½ feet long. The handle is fixed parallel to the sharp edge of the blade enabling it to pierce the wood when forcibly cut.

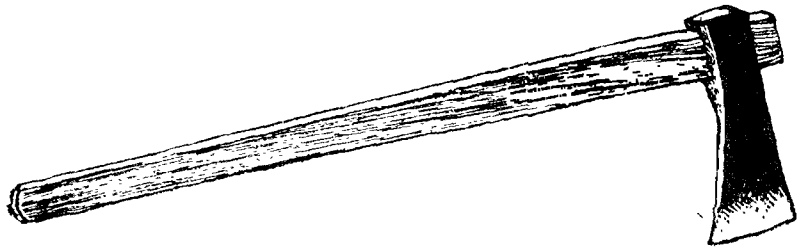
Mazhu

Entirely different from the ordinary axe, found at Manaloor and Edakkulam, is the *Mazhu* used to cut out laterite deposits into rectangular blocks, to be used for construction purposes. The blade is rectangular in shape with a hole at one end to fix a handle of a foot in length, vertical to the blade.

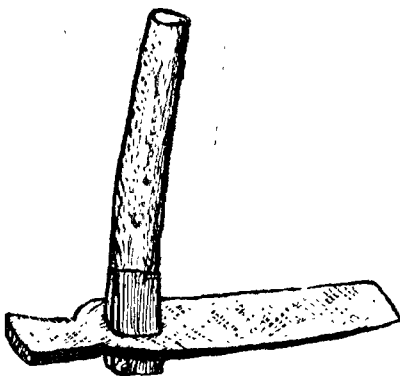
Choolu (Broom Stick)

There are two types of broom sticks, one used for cleaning the floor inside the house and other for cleaning the courtyard. The one which is used to clean the room is long and made of narrow ends of cocoanut leaflet ribs. The narrow ends make it flexible to sweep off dust and waste. The one which is used to clean the courtyard is cut and made shorter to be more effective when used.

The things swept out are taken in a piece of arecanut spathe called *Pala* and thrown away at the foot of a cocoanut tree, and burnt afterwards.



Kotaly



Mazhu

CHAPTER VI

Environmental Sanitation, Hygienic Habits, Disease and Treatment

The Vettuvans keep their surroundings neat and clean by sweeping and dusting the rooms and the courtyard. Early in the morning the courtyard is swept and water sprinkled to welcome 'Mahalakshmi', the goddess of prosperity, as they put it. They use water in place of cow-dung water used by higher castes. The waste and rubbish are thrown at the foot of cocoanut trees, a few yards away, which afterwards may be used as fuel or burnt and the ash, used as manure.

Interior parts of the house are swept at least once a day or whenever it is found necessary. If the floor is not cemented, the rooms and *verandah* are daubed with cow-dung paste, once in a month. A mixture of charcoal powder and cow-dung may also be used for this purpose. This is attended to by the female folk of the house.

Stone walled houses are white washed rarely. In most cases these bare walls are left with dirty scars and dust. Tiled roofs are often found unclean and covered with spider webs. But leaf thatched roofs are cleaned at least once in a year during re-thatching. Kitchen is always found unclean with much soot deposited on the roof and the walls.

Most of the households have a urinal-cum-bath-shed meant for females. The males urinate by squatting at the foot of a tree or by the side of the fence, a little away from the house.

On the other hand most of the households do not have any special arrangement for attending to nature's call. They use some open space or fallow lands, which are away from the settlement. Some use canal sides for this purpose and still others construct an improvised latrine by its side using a few poles and covered by plaited cocoanut leaves. Children defecate at the foot of a tree or a bit away from the courtyard which is afterwards thrown out in the canal or far off from the settlement with the help of two pieces of broken earthen pots or *Toomba*. Washing after defecation is done in the bath shed or canals as the case may be.

They clean their teeth daily, early in the morning with charcoal or mango leaf. Generally charcoal which is readily available in the hearth, or charred paddy husk (*umikkari*) is used for this purpose.

Most of them take bath once a day, usually in the evening, after work. But children are less cared and left free in open grounds to play with earth and thus are found infected with scabbies and itches.

Washing of soiled cloth is done normally once in a week using washing soda, soap, or decanted liquid from ash mixed in water. The cloth is dipped in cow-dung solution, squeezed and kept over-night to be washed in the next morning. In spite of this their daily dress seen to be dull and dirty. But they use clean dress while they go out or on ceremonial occasions.

Pots and plates used for serving meals are always washed after meals, then and there. It may be washed again in the morning before cooking. A kind of fruit known as *Varuppan puli* is used for cleaning vessels.

The information received from some of the Physicians of the areas covered by this study indicates that, most of the illness found among the Vettuvans are concerned with the digestive system. The other common diseases met with among them are common fever, cold and croup.

Owing to their traditional occupation of tree climbing, their body is thought to emit a peculiar odour. The palms and soles become hardened due to constant rubbing with cocoanut palms forming corns. These sometimes cause pain and trouble in tree climbing.

The incidence of chronic and acute diseases is low. For all serious ailments they approach the Ayurvedic, Homoeopathic or Allopathic physicians according to their means and nature of disease. For common cold they take toddy boiled with pepper seeds or black tea with dried ginger (*chukku*), pepper and jaggery. For over exhaustion or muscular fatigue, they consider toddy as the best medicine. For mothers, after delivery, they give a decoction prepared by boiling some herbs, in water prescribed by physicians, mixed with ginger juice.

In case of hysterical fits, magicians (*Mantravadi*) from Ezhava caste are consulted and generally an amulet (*yendram*) made of silver, copper, tied around the neck, waist or upper arm, to ward off evil spirits which are believed to be responsible for the disease. For other diseases like anaemia, fever, etc. they may resort to this method and simultaneously use medicines.

They may also resort to propitiation of their deities at the time of disease or take vows for the speedy recovery. Offerings are also sent to the nearby temple, in cash or kind. At Kedamangalam there is a place called Kalikolankara where there is a Kaly (Bhadra Kali) temple. The deity in this temple is offered with puddings which they prepare in front of the temple and take back the rest of the consecrated offerings.

This is called *Pooja choru*. Still another offering made to this deity is called *Thendu*. Both these are prepared out of rice, jaggery and plantain mixed with turmeric powder, which is a good disinfectant and an item of preference for Kaly (Bhadra Kali). If any part of the body is found affected they promise a model of the same to be prepared out of the above mentioned ingredients and offered to the deity. They believe that this

will cure the defect. Those who cannot go to this temple will send the offerings through somebody who visits that temple.

Now the incidence of offerings of this type and performing *mantras* have become less among the Vettuvan due to their confidence in modern medicines, especially in injections, for which they are crazy.

CHAPTER VII

Language and Literacy

Mother tongue of the Vettuvan is Malayalam which according to Grierson's classification belongs to the Dravidian group. They speak this language with a peculiar accent, in those areas where they are concentrated. Those who reside at Narakkal and Kedamangalam, speak with a short accent while those in Trichur district, especially at Manaloor, Aranattukara, Mailipadom, speak with a peculiar type of intonation, which they share with the other local population.

In the 1961 Census separate figures of literacy and levels of education attained by this community are available. According to it, out of a total of 28,095 souls 7,073 are literates accounting for 25.19 per cent. This, when compared to the general literacy rate of the state of 55 per cent is rather too low. But when compared to the literacy of Scheduled Castes (24.7 per cent) it is encouraging. Males account for 140,91 souls of which 4,438 are literates while 2,635 females are returned as literates out of a total of 14,004. Thus, the male literacy rate for the community is 31.50 per cent and that of the female is 18.82 per cent. The total population of Vettuvan for the rural area is 26,317 out of which 13,211 are males and 13,106 are females. The percentage of literacy for the rural area is 24.15 per cent which is far below 45.1 per cent, which is the average for the State. The percentage of literacy in the rural sector among the male Vettuvans is 30.91 per cent and that of females 18.27 per cent while the state average is 53.55 per cent and 37.48 per cent respectively. The total population returned from the urban area is 1,778 out of which 880 are males and 898 are females. Their percentage of literacy is 32.45 per cent with 28.30 per cent male literates and 27.06 per cent female literates. When compared to the state average for the same area viz. 54.94 per cent, 62.79 per cent and 47.01 per cent

respectively for total, male and female the Vettuvans remain at a very low level of literacy 19.2.

The levels of education achieved by the Vettuvan, when analysed, depicts a very gloomy picture. The bulk of the literates, 3,427 males and 2,057 females, have been returned as literates without any educational level which forms 77.02 per cent male and 75.8 per cent of female literates.

Of the total male literates 71.97 per cent belong to the rural areas and 5.25 per cent belong to the urban sector. In the case of females it is 71.69 per cent in rural and 6.38 per cent in urban areas.

Of the males who have education upto primary or Junior basic 18.45 per cent belonged to rural and 1.98 per cent to urban areas. In the case of females of the same category 17.23 per cent are from the rural and 2.47 per cent from the urban sector.

Among the 104 males who have reached upto Matriculation or higher secondary 2.01 per cent were returned from rural area and 0.34 per cent from urban area. Out of the 59 (2.24 per cent) females of the same literacy group 1.94 per cent belonged to rural area and 0.38 per cent to urban area.

Out of the total population, 2 females from rural area are holding non-technical diploma not equal to degree. Only one male from the urban area, out of the total population of 1,778 is holding University degree.

As no information regarding the literacy achievements of the community for the previous decades are available it is difficult to show the changes taken place in the community. But it can be safely surmised on the basis of the age-group data that the Vettuvan have taken to education in the recent past.

CHAPTER VIII

Economic Life

Vettuvan are traditionally coconut pluckers. Even to this day, in most of the areas of concentration of these people, such as Parur, Narakkal, etc., where coconut cultivation is predominant, coconut plucking continues to be their main occupation. In some other areas like Trichur, where both coconut and paddy are raised they work both as coconut pluckers and agricultural labourers. Those living near towns attend to diverse occupations. Female folk may also engage themselves in coconut leaf plaiting, mat weaving, etc as a subsidiary occupation.

It is reported that Vettuvan in the past were "jungle cultivator and basket makers, (Malabar, Gazetteer, 1908—138), emancipated agricultural serfs, hunters by occupation, *shikaris*, collectors of forest produce and a field labouring class" (Census of India, 1931, Cochin, Vol. XVII, Part-I, p. 275, 1901, Madras, Vol. XV, p. 184 and 1911, Travancore, Part-I, Vol. XXII, page 269 and Iyer, 1909, pp. 128—134). Thurston reports that they lead a hand to hand existence on the wages which they obtain for hedging and fencing and plucking coconuts.

During the 1961 Census, quantitative data on the economic activities including participation rate of the Vettuvan have been collected. Out of

the total population of 28,095 Vettuvans, 11,926 which accounts for 42.45 per cent are returned as workers. Participation rate of the males and females in this community works out to be 51.37 per cent and 33.47 per cent respectively. In the rural areas however 51.53 per cent males, 34.80 per cent of females are returned as workers. But in urban areas it is 49.09 per cent and 17.59 per cent respectively. Thus the participation rate of the females is considerably low which explains the nature of occupation of the community viz., coconut-plucking in which the males only are engaged.

According to the Census returns the main occupations in which the bulk of the people engaged are 'other services' including coconut climbing, agriculture and agricultural labour and mining and quarrying. Other minor occupations in which they are engaged are, household industry, manufacturing other than household industry, construction, Trade and Commerce, Transport and Storage and Communications. Six of them have been returned as employed in scavenging also.

The table furnished below gives the sex-wise participation of the Vettuvan population in active economic life by 1961 census.

TABLE FOR WORKERS AND NON-WORKERS ENGAGED IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF WORKS

| | As cultivator | | Agricultural labourer | | In mining, quarrying, livestock, forestry, fishing, hunting, plantation, orchards and allied activities | | | |
|---------------|---------------|---------|-----------------------|---------|---|---------|--|--|
| | Males | Females | Males | Females | Males | Females | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | | |
| Total | 192 | 97 | 1,206 | 1,760 | 1,737 | 35 | | |
| Rural | 182 | 85 | 1,194 | 1,736 | 1,567 | 35 | | |
| Urban | 10 | 12 | 24 | 170 | .. | 2 | | |

| | Household industry | | In manufacturing other than household industry | | In construction | | In trade and commerce | |
|---------------|--------------------|---------|--|---------|-----------------|---------|-----------------------|---------|
| | Males | Females | Males | Females | Males | Females | Males | Females |
| | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| Total | 100 | 315 | 173 | 245 | 82 | 8 | 81 | 32 |
| Rural | 98 | 315 | 157 | 202 | 41 | 8 | 68 | 29 |
| Urban | .. | 16 | 43 | 1 | 1 | .. | 13 | 3 |

| | In transport, storage and communications | | Other services | | Non-workers | | Scavenging | |
|---------------|--|---------|----------------|---------|-------------|---------|------------|---------|
| | Males | Females | Males | Females | Males | Females | Males | Females |
| | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 |
| Total | 179 | 31 | 3,529 | 2,164 | 6,852 | 9,317 | 4 | 2 |
| Rural | 147 | 29 | 3,353 | 2,092 | 6,404 | 8,577 | 3 | 2 |
| Urban | 32 | 2 | 176 | 72 | 448 | 740 | 1 | .. |

As mentioned earlier the economy of the Vettuvan is based on the economic resources of their habitant. In certain areas they are mainly coconut pluckers while in others, they are mostly engaged in agriculture either as cultivators or as agricultural labourers. Even in the latter areas, coconut plucking is pursued as a subsidiary occupation. For example at Kadamangalam and Narakkal their main occupation is coconut plucking, except a few educated who are employed in government and private service. They rarely go for other jobs. A few of them however work as casual labourers.

But in the areas like Mailipadom, Aranattukara, Manaloor and Lokamaleswaram the situation is different. At Mailipadom, which is very near to Trichur town, only few found employed as coconut pluckers. Some work in the town as coolies and cart pullers and some others have taken up government jobs. The rest are employed as coconut pluckers and agricultural labourers.

At Manaloor and Aranattukara the position is still different. These are areas where both coconut and paddy cultivation are in abundance. So the Vettuvans have adopted coconut plucking as well as agricultural labour.

At Lokamaleswaram most of the men are employed as manual labourers in coconut cultivation, earth work in ponds and canals, retting of coconut husks, etc. They also work in the paddy fields as agricultural labourers. Some of the females too work to supplement their family income. At Narakkal and Kadamangalam plaiting of coconut leaves is the main occupation for the females. At Cranganore, Manaloor, Aranattukara and Mailipadom, they are engaged in plaiting of coconut leaves, mat weaving and in agricultural operations.

Cocoanut Plucking

As stated earlier, coconut plucking is the traditional occupation of the Vettuvans. They are engaged for the purpose by those who own coconut plantations. Plucking of coconut is normally done once in 30 to 45 days.

With the *Vettukathy* fixed by the help of a *Thada* tucked in the loin cloth, or with *Vakkathy*

hooked on to the shoulder, and *Talappu* on the head the Vettuvan goes up along the *Eni* which is fixed at an angle of 50° to 60° against the tree. When he reaches the top of the *Eni* he wears the *Talappu* around the feet and grip on to the trunk and with its help he climbs up. Reaching below the crown, coconut bunches and leaves which are ripe are felled. By experience, either feeling the weight or shaking the fruits, he is well versed in recognising the ripe bunch from the unripe ones. Normally only one bunch is cut. He goes up on the crown only when there is any necessity to check up the presence of pests, cutting the spathe or cleaning the crown. If necessary fresh leaves are also cut, which are used for thatching purposes. It takes 5 to 10 minutes to climb an average tree. One can climb 80 to 100 trees a day.

The felled cocoanuts, leaves, etc. are collected by the coolies employed for the purpose.

After plucking all the cocoanut for the day, the Vettuvan has to separate the fruits from the bunches by cutting off the stalks. These are then counted rolling them in pairs backwards by both hands. For every hundred they use the term *Alaku*, which is used only for this purpose.

The leaves are to be split into two halves, after cutting off both the ends and making the stalk slim. These leaves are dried in the sun and kept hanging on strings to keep them safe from white ants. These are afterwards soaked in water and plaited. The cuttings are dried and used as fuel. Tips of the leaves, called *Tunju* are used for fencing also.

For plucking cocoanuts and cutting leaves from 100 trees, one is paid Rs. 6.50 to Rs. 8.50 and 4 to 5 cocoanuts. The *panippadan* or head coolie can take one coconut extra which in the local parlance is known as *Kothuthenga*. For the purpose of lunch each one may be allowed to sell a coconut. In former days splitting of coconut leaves formed a part of Vettuvan's duties, but now they are paid at the rate of Rs. 1.50 per hundred leaves.

It is considered the duty of the Vettuvans, who are employed for coconut plucking, to check

up the crown of the trees for pests, like the rhinoceros, beetle, country rats, etc. and to tie up iron strings on the slanting palms to prevent them from getting uprooted during monsoon season.

For all the miscellaneous work they are paid either in kind or in cash according to the quantum of work done.

Cocoanut Leaf Plaiting (Oolamutachil)

Vettuvan women are expert in cocoanut leaf plaiting. Before plaiting, the dried leaves are kept immersed in water in a canal or a pond for a day or at least a night to make them soft and flexible. These are then taken out and plaited by passing one leaflet above the other to form an oblique cross-hatching pattern. Alternative leaflets are used as warps and wefts. These are again dried in the sun and stacked over a platform prepared out of dried leaf stalk of cocoanut, called *Madal* or *Kavalam madal*. This is to keep the plaited leaves a bit raised above the ground so that they may not get spoiled due to dampness or eaten away by white ants.

For plaiting every 100 half-leaves an amount of Rs. 3.75 is paid.

Mat Weaving

In Trichur district, some Vettuvan women are engaged in mat weaving as a subsidiary occupation.

First the pandanus leaves are collected and the thorns on the edges and the midrib removed by means of a knife. Then these leaves are rolled in bundles and kept in the sun for drying. When properly dried, these may be seasoned by keeping them above the hearth. These leaves are afterwards split into fine strips which are used for weaving different kinds of mats. Mats used for sleeping purpose are made with fine strips while those used for drying paddy know as *Chikkupaya*, are made out of rough and broad strips. The time taken for making a mat depends upon its size. Normally a person can complete 3 sleeping mats in two days. A sleeping mat is sold at Rs. 1 to Rs. 1.50. The price of the mats vary according to their quality and season of demand. For example during the harvest season the *Chikkupayas* are in demand and so are costlier, whereas rainy season is the slack period. Normally the deals are effected through the agent.

At times a worker may be engaged on daily wages for the preparation of *Chikkupaya* in which case Rs. 2.50 and one meal may be given as wages. He takes about six days to complete one and, if sold fetches Rs. 15 to Rs. 20 depending on the size and quality of the weave.

Rarely, during leisure hours, especially during rainy season, they make containers called *vatty* out of pandanus leaf strips. Each one is sold at

30 to 40 paise per piece as per the size and demand. During harvest these are in great demand and hence are costlier.

Matalutallal (Beating retted cocoanut husks)

Occasionally Vettuvan women, especially of Narakkal and Kadamangalam, are employed in beating retted cocoanut husk to separate fibres out of them. The retted husk is kept on a piece of cocoanut wood (*Tady*) and beaten with another cocoanut wood rod (*Vadi*). Thus the fibres are separated from the pith and dried in the sun. Afterwards they are willowed with a stick. A female worker can process 50 husks a day for which she gets Rs. 1 to Rs. 1.15 including willowing charges.

Paddy Cultivation

As in other areas of the State Pulayan are the traditional agricultural serfs holding traditional duties and obligations with the landlords. In Trichur district, however, many Vettuvan work as agricultural labourers in paddy cultivation.

There are two types of paddy cultivation viz. dry and wet, the former being the summer crop and the latter monsoon crop, locally known as *Meda Krishi* and *Kanni Krishi* respectively.

To have an idea of the various agricultural operations in which the Vettuvan are engaged in, it is useful to have a short description of the operations of the summer and the monsoon crops.

Dry Cultivation

This is done after harvest in the Malayalam month of Makaram (Jan.-Feb.). Periodical ploughing and smashing of clogs are done for five to seven times. Sowing is done in the month of Medorm (April-May) after either mixing the seed with manure dust, when it is called *Podivilidal* or without manure, called *Vellu Vithidil*. In the latter case manuring is done later. Periodical weeding and manuring may also be done.

Wet Cultivation

This is done during the month of *Chingous* (August-September) normally before the *Onam* festival. In this case the fields are water-logged and hence called wet cultivation. Here also ploughing is done for seven times within a period of three to four weeks.

Manure in the form of green leaves, cow-dung, etc. are mixed while ploughing.

When the field is ready either seeds are broadcast or saplings, grown earlier in a nursery, are transplanted. Periodical weeding may also be done. Harvesting is done, in this case, in the month of *Makaram* (January-February).

During the period in between a wet and a dry cultivation, some may raise a cash crop like gingly.

For agricultural operations, except harvesting, males are paid Rs. 4 to Rs. 5 and females 75 paise to Rs. 1.50 per day. For harvesting 1 measure of paddy out of each 10 measure is paid (or 1 out of 9 or 8 depending on the area) after drying and winnowing the seeds. In Trichur district the usual working period is half a day up to noon for which males are paid Rs. 2 and females 75 paise.

Other economic resources include monthly salary or daily wages for those working in government or private concerns. As daily wages they get Rs. 4.50 to Rs. 6. Monthly wages differ according to the nature of the contract of employment.

In other words, now-a-days, every work is paid in cash except in the case of harvesting which brings them paddy for their own consumption.

CHAPTER IX

Life Cycle

Birth

Stoppage of menstrual flow for a month is suggestive of conception. No particular elaborate ceremony is normally attached with pregnancy. However, in case the expectant woman feels some uneasiness, which is considered as due to the wrath of evil eye or evil spirits, some magical threads are got prepared through a Wizard belonging to the Kakkala (Kurava) caste or even by Muslims (known as *Musaliyar*) and tied around the neck to ward off the evil effects. The thread, enchanted with some spells, is made with many knots. It is dipped in turmeric powder brought from the *Bhagavaty* temple, of Cranganore. The turmeric powder from this temple, offered to *Bhagawathy* during the *Bharani* festival, is considered as the best cure for such ailments. Sometimes the expectant is seated on a stool in front of the Kurava, who chants some spells and moves his magic stick, made out of deer horn, around her head. *Musaliyar* makes a talisman (*Enthram*) out of palm leaf or silver foil, with some magical inscriptions noted on a sheet of paper or lead foil, which others can read only 'at the risk of their life' and attached to a string around the neck.

At Kadamangalam, it is reported that another ceremony called *Muram Uzhiyal* is practised during pregnancy. On a convenient day before the 7th month, a Kurava girl is invited at the husband's place who encircles an old winnowing fan around the pregnant woman's head and throws it away. This is supposed to ward off the evil spirits.

Offerings are also promised to temples for a safe delivery, checking threatened abortion or any other type of ailment during the pre-natal period.

Now-a-days, for most of the ailments, they approach a medical practitioner. A few, however, still perform the above-mentioned magical cures besides consulting doctors. They undergo all types of treatment, like Allopathy, Homeopathy and Ayurvedic depending on the financial position. There are a few who do not resort to these magical practices and depend only on medical treatment. After the sixth month, the expectant mother is not allowed to go outside the compound of her household or to wander in the village after night-fall, as it is believed that during this time of the day the malevolent spirits roam about. She is also not allowed to see any dead body and is required to keep away from any incident that gives her mental shock or fear. During this period she is not allowed to do any hard work which needs more exertion to the

body. But all these restrictions are enforced only when she can afford to do so. In most of the cases due to economic difficulties she may be forced to work even during her advanced stage of pregnancy.

During the 7th month there is a ceremony called *Pettinu Konduvoral* (bringing for delivery in case of the first pregnancy). For this, on a previously arranged auspicious day, the parents of the expectant woman visit her. They, along with a few more invitees, if economy permits, are treated to a vegetarian feast. The woman is now escorted to her parents' house, where she continues to observe all the restrictions. In former days, it is reported, they used to give some money to her, so that the same could be distributed among her husband's parents and elder relatives.

During the 9th month there is another ceremony called *vayaru kanal* (Seeing the belly). On an auspicious day the parents of the boy visit the woman and present to her some sweets which may differ from area to area. *Neyyappam*, or *Ennayappam* (made out of rice flour mixed with molasses and fried in oil), *halwa* and plantation are the normal sweets prepared during the occasion. The boy's parents invite some relatives also on this day. All are treated to a feast.

When labour pain starts, she is removed to one corner of the house or in a separate room which should be away from the kitchen. This space used for delivery is called *Ettappura* or *Pettupura*. For convenience she is asked to lie down, normally on her back with legs stretched apart, on a mat, spread on the floor. Thurston however, reports a peculiar custom prevalent in the former days, which sounded strange to the informants during the present investigations. "Amongst the Vettuvan, when labour begins, the woman is put in a hole dug in a corner of the hut, and left there alone with some water till the cry of the child is heard" (Thurston, VII, 399).

During child birth, she is assisted by a local midwife, normally of the Ezhava caste, or by an experienced old woman from their own caste, called *Vayattatti*. At Narakkal she is called *Aya* while at Trichur she is designated as *Thottamma*. At Parur in place of *Vayattatti*, the *Enangathi*, wife of *Enangan* (the *poojari*) attended in former days. As the Enangan system is no more in vogue, a *Vayattatti* is engaged. In the event of some complication the woman is taken to a hospital for necessary medical aid. Some promise offerings to the nearby temple for a smooth delivery. The

placenta is disposed off by the *Vayattatti* or the mother of the girl, in a pit in the *Marappura* and a stone kept over it. *Marappura* is bathing enclosure made out of plaited coconut leaves, at the back of the house, for the exclusive use of the confined woman.

The new born baby is cleaned and bathed by the *Vayattatti* using soap or *incha* (soft fibrous tissue made out of the bark of a creeper) and warm water. A large arecanut spathe is used as a bath tub to bathe the child.

The mother is also got washed, dressed in new clothes and may be made to take rest.

The woman is made to starve on the first day. At Narakkal and some centres of Trichur district, she is given a decoction of black pepper boiled in water. At Kadamangalam it is a decoction prepared out of two varieties of lucas flowers, dried ginger and the saltish carbon deposit on the roof of the kitchen called *Illanathunkari*, boiled in 32 ozs. of toddy and taken one oz. each in the morning and evening for the first four post-natal days. A decoction prepared by boiling some herbs as per the prescription of the *Vayattatti* may also be administered. In case of stomach pain they give diluted arrack added with pepper and dry ginger powder, once or twice a day.

For the rest of the days, up to the 28th day the mother and child are bathed preferably two times a day in warm water. *Kajal* (black collyrium) or soot collected on the surface of a porcelain plate, from a burning oil wick is applied in the eyes of both mother and child. They say, if *Kajal* is not applied, the eyes become brownish instead of the preferred black eyes. For subsequent days the child is washed by an elderly woman. For improper shape of the child's head the *Vayattatti* smears oil and massage it lightly, pressing it into normal shape. The child is given only mother's milk for 28 days. Four different herbs, rolled in a plantain leaf-strip and after keeping over fire for some time, are squeezed and two drops of the juice given to the child twice a day, for a few days "to clear the stomach". Turmeric powder mixed with milk is also given for four days "to clear the throat and voice." For the first 28 days, excepting the first day, the mother is given cooked rice and pepper or chilly powder mixed with salt and coconut oil only.

During former days, when pollution was strictly observed, *Vayattatti* abstained from eating any sort of food on the first day while attending the delivery. At Trichur, they some times consume toddy. She may also be given one measure of rice with all provisions necessary to make two or three dishes and 2 to 5 rupees.

The present system of remuneration for the *Vayattatti* or *Aya* is always in cash which varies

from Rs. 5 and more, according to the nature of duty and financial position of the parties concerned.

Partly because of the difficulty in engaging a mid-wife for long and partly because of the problem of keeping the parturient women aloof, the period of pollution has been reduced to the minimum. Now, therefore, the mother of the confined woman has, in most cases, replaced the paid *Vayattatti*. She, however, will be careful in not entering the kitchen before a purificatory bath.

The news about the delivery is carried to the husband's family by the girl's father or some other elder member of that locality who may not be related to them. The husband visits his wife and child as early as he can. The parents of the husband visit the mother and child on the third day. This is called *Perukanal*. At Narakkal Rs. 2 to Rs. 5 is given by his parents to the *Vayattatti* which they call *Vayattatti panam* in recognition of her services. They also bring with them one or two pairs of dress or cloth pieces, one or two tins of talcum powder and two or three cakes of soap, for the child. At Trichur they send some rice and Rs. 5 to be given to the mother of the confined woman. At Manaloor, in Trichur district, the custom is to deliver sweets prepared out of molasses and rice flour. On this occasion a feast is also arranged in their honour.

In the past the period of pollution lasted for nine days for a boy and seven days for a girl after which period the woman was to report to the landlord with whom she used to work. Now the pollution lasts for 15 days.

On the 15th day, the confined woman is bathed in a nearby pond helped by the *Vayattatti* or an old woman of their caste, or in the absence of both or her mother. The floor of the room which she was using for these days is daubed with cow-dung, and all other things she might have used during her confinement are washed and sprinkled with cow-dung water or holy water from the temple to remove pollution. Holy water is sprinkled in the other rooms also. The *Vayattatti* is feasted well this day. She is also purified by sprinkling cow-dung water or holy water. The ceremony is called *pettukuli*. In the past at Kadamangalam the *enangathy* who used to attend the delivery was given on this day 8 *puthan* (local coin) and a measure of rice. The purification ritual is completed with the confined woman, after her bath, salutes and touches a lighted lamp and *nira* (a measure) holding betel leaves and arecanut in her folded hands. Only after this ceremony the woman is allowed to touch the cooking utensils and enter the kitchen. For the first 28 days she is not expected to take any non-vegetarian dish especially fish. It is believed that by taking fish the taste of the same will be present in the mother's milk and the child vomits when fed with that milk.

On the 28th day, *irupathettu* ceremony is performed when, if purse permits, relatives and friends are also invited. The husband's parents and sisters visit the mother and child and give presents which may consist of a rupee coin, a *dhoti* and some oil. These things are meant for the *Vayattatti* who had attended the mother and child. Now-a-days, in the absence of *Vayattatti* a woman belonging to the Ezhava caste may officiate as the *Vayattatti* who is paid an amount in cash by the husband's parents. At Pallippuram village of Ernakulam district Madhavi and Karthiyayini, both from Ezhava community, who are experienced local *Vayattattis* reported that they get this amount while they attend the delivery of Vettuvans. Madhavi is more educated and trained and so always demand cash payment while Karthiyayini being only experienced and not educated, receive traditional payments, in kind.

After a feast on the 28th day, husband's parents escort the mother and child to their house, husband's sister carries the child since the mother is not expected to exert during this period.

Before she leaves on the 28th day the parents of the girl are expected to present her, depending on the economic position, some ornaments in gold; (chain, bangle or ring with or without a silver chain around the waist, to the child), irrespective of the sex of the infant.

Mother's milk is the only food for the child during this period, of 28 days. Some Rasayanam (tonic) made out of herbs, milk, ghee molasses, etc. is given to the mother for three months to recoup her health.

Naming Ceremony

To-day naming ceremony or *peruvili* as it is locally known, has lost much of its significance when compared to the most expensive ceremony of the past. Now, name is given, normally, at the time of putting the child to school. However, rarely, a few Vettuvans still follow the rituals connected with naming combined with first feeding. They take the child on the 56th or 90th day or even afterwards to the nearby temple, accept some *nivedya* (sacred offerings) or sweet and salute the deity. The father smears a little of this offering on the lips of the child and calls a name in the right ear, in front of the deity, preferably when the main door of the temple is kept open.

In Trichur district there are a few who still practice the traditional form of feeding-cum-naming ceremony in a more simple way. They may or may not invite the relatives. The child is washed and dressed in new clothes. A lighted lamp and a *Nira* (full measure of rice), over which are placed a cocconut and few betel leaves with arecanut are arranged. The child is placed on the lap of its father who sits on a stool, in front of the lighted lamp. He gives the child

some rice mixed with tamarind and salt, smearing a bit upon the lips. Then he calls the child thrice by the selected name in the right ear. Normally in the past they preferred the grand parents' name.

At Narakkal the father of the child places some money in the hands of the child just after naming.

At Trichur still another simple form of the ceremony is followed. The child is bathed and dressed, seated on the lap of the father, in the presence of all inmates of the house and a name is given which is approved by others. Neither the lamp nor the *Nira* is kept. Naming is done always on an auspicious day.

In the past the ceremony was quite expensive and colourful. Although no *nira* nor lighted lamp was used, an expensive feast was held inviting all relatives and friends who were expected to offer the child some present, such as a dress or some money. Lighted lamp and *nira* are later adoptions.

At Manaloor, in Trichur district it is reported that there was a custom of informing the landlord before-hand. This was always done through the head or *Avakasi* of the respective area. The *jenni* (Landlord) had the right to suggest the name of the child.

Further the parents of the mother of the child tie a black thread in which is strung a gold bead (*Rudraksha*), around its neck. The child is expected to wear it only on that day since they were not allowed to wear gold ornaments during those days, being an untouchable caste. Now all these complex ceremonies have been dispensed with.

Unlike in olden days when the usual names being Adima, Inkaran, Kunjan, Bouni, etc. for male and Kali, Ponni, Paru, Chakki, Kotha, etc. for females the recent trend is to adopt names used by the higher Hindu castes. Krishnan, Sankaran, Kumaran, Suresh, Babu, etc., are the common names for males while the females are named Chandrika, Radha, Chandramathy, Vilasini, etc. At Pallippad there is, a Vettuvan boy by name *Thamburan* (lord) a term used to address the high caste people. His father's name is Adima, meaning slave. Adima proudly states that as he is called as *Adima*, meaning slave, he would like to hear others calling his son *Thamburan*, meaning lord.

Ear Boring Ceremony

Ear boring, as a ritual, is no more practised. It only serves the functional purpose of holding the ear ornaments among the women folk. The males rarely get their ears bored. A pharmacist or a nurse in the hospital or a goldsmith would do this job on payment.

Ear boring in the past was more elaborate, and painful to the person concerned. The ceremony was called *Kathu Kuthu Kallyanam*. It was done normally at the age of five to six. This could even be postponed even to a later age in case of financial difficulties and other inconveniences.

Avakasi (head Vettuvan) and *Enangan* (Poojari) together with relatives and friends were invited in the *Kathu Kuthu Kallyanam*. The child was bathed, well dressed and asked to stand in front of a lighted lamp by the side of which a *nira* (a measure of rice), a cocoanut, some betel leaves and arecanut are placed. *Enangan* initiates the ceremony by marking with lime the spot on the ear lobe to be bored. Then somebody, who is an expert in the art, pricks and pierces the lobe with a thorn of the *Kara* plant. Cocoanut oil is smeared when it is pierced. The thorn is now cut at both sides leaving a small portion in the hole.

Avakasi (head Vettuvan) and *Enangan* (Poojari) are seated on their traditional seats, *Palaka*, on the verandah. Both *Avakasi* and *Enangan* get one *dhoti* each from the child's father's family while the *Enangan* gets the *Nira* of Paddy and cocoanut. Members of the mother's family and other relatives present the child with one *dhoti* each.

This is followed by *Thandankku Vari Vilambal* (serving of beaten rice) and serving of toddy. The latter is consumed then and there while the former is packed and carried home. Now, all are treated to a non-vegetarian feast.

In the case of a girl the thorn is removed after one or two days and then put a bamboo piece called *Korattu*, rolled in pepper leaf smeared with oil to dilate the lobe. This is replaced with bigger ones at intervals until the hole got dilated to bear a bigger roll of dry pandanus leaf with a pepper leaf cover. At last a roll of lead sheet substitutes the pandanus leaf roll. Due to the weight of the lead the ear lobe is got dilated to fit in an ear ornament called *Thoda* made out of brass. This custom was practised in all areas.

Still another method was also reported to be practised by them. With the seed of *Nux Vomica* plant a clip was made which when clipped to the ear lobe, formed a hole by causing a deep ulcer there in between the clip. This was got healed up and then dilated as mentioned above.

Puberty Ceremony

Puberty ceremony, locally known as *Thirandu Kallyanam* or *Kettukallyanam* was a significantly grand ceremony for the Vettuvans in the past; when the menstruating girl would also be formally married to some one by investing a *Tali* (marriage badge) on the neck of the girl. This custom was prevalent among the Vettuvan of Lokamaleswaram and Kadamangalam. Now it is a simple ceremony and passes off without much rituals.

At present though it is called *Thirandu Kallyanam* or *Thirandu kuli Kallyanam*, the custom of tying *Tali* around the neck of the girl has been completely abandoned.

When a girl comes of age the news is passed on by her mother to at least seven women in the neighbourhood. She is at once escorted to a corner of the back courtyard of the house, away from the kitchen. The assembled women take her to a bathing shed and pour one pot full of water each, over her head. She thus bathed and dressed in fresh cloths, is escorted to a corner of a room away from the kitchen and seated on an wooden stool. Now onwards till the pollution is over she uses separate plates to take food, uses separate pot for taking bath, and sleep on a separate mat. On all the six days she takes her bath before sunrise helped by her mother.

Pollution lasts for 7 days during which period she is not expected to go outside the compound and take part in any ceremony. In Trichur District she is not even expected to look at the sun, lest, it is believed, she should loose her eye sight.

On the seventh day, the same seven women take the menstruating girl for the ceremonial bath in a nearby pond. She takes bath followed by others. She is now dressed in fresh cloth. By this time her mother daubs the floor of the room with cow-dung which she was using and cleans all the things she was using, by sprinkling cow-dung water over them. The girl in pollution is also brought in front of the house and ritually purified by sprinkling cow-dung water over her. In some cases it has been reported that they collect holy water from the temple to be used in place of cow-dung water.

The assembled women are treated to a feast if possible, otherwise paid 25 n.p. each. At Mailipadom in Trichur district in one such ceremony 14 women were invited. This is a ceremonious occasion for women only.

During subsequent periods the woman has to keep away for 3 to 4 days. But even this is not rigidly followed due to inconvenience caused to their work and also owing to the impact of the customs of neighbouring communities who do not rigidly follow these restrictions. However, most of them try to refrain from cooking and entering kitchen. It is less rigid at Narakkal, Mailipadom and Kadamangalam while it is still more rigid at Manaloor and Aranattukara.

At Kadamangalam it is reported, this ceremony used to have elaborate rituals, colourful and very expensive. The polluted girl had to be bathed on the first day by seven women with some rituals and an unrelated boy gave her a tender cocoanut, to drink the sap. For the succeeding 6 days she was bathed by her mother or elder sister. On the seventh day was the ceremonial

TABLE SHOWING AGE AND MARITAL STATUS ACCORDING TO 1961 CENSUS

| Age Group | Total persons | | | Never Married | | Married | | Widowed | | Divorces/separated | | Unspecified status | |
|----------------|---------------|--------|--------|---------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------------------|--------|--------------------|--------|
| | Total | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| All Ages | 28,095 | 14,091 | 14,004 | 8,505 | 7,130 | 5,182 | 5,311 | 341 | 1,316 | 63 | 246 | .. | 1 |
| Age 0—14 | 11,832 | 6,063 | 5,769 | 6,060 | 5,766 | 3 | 3 | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. |
| Age 15—44 | 12,167 | 5,946 | 6,221 | 2,432 | 1,352 | 3,413 | 4,357 | 59 | 201 | 42 | 211 | .. | .. |
| Age 45+ | 4,094 | 2,081 | 2,013 | 13 | 12 | 1,765 | 951 | 282 | 1,015 | 21 | 35 | .. | .. |
| Age not stated | 2 | 1 | 1 | .. | .. | 1 | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | 1 |

purificatory bath, when the above mentioned boy invested a *tali* around the girl's neck provided by her mother. She kept this *tali* if the boy selected was to become her future husband. Otherwise she removed it on the 16th day and the boy had to be paid 4 *puthans* after the purificatory ceremony, signifying the end of the boy's claim over the girl.

At Lokamaleswaram more or less the same ceremony was practised except that the boy got a remuneration of Rs. 4.50 from the future husband in case the girl was married to different person. At Trichur, on the other hand, the *Tali* was tied either by her future husband or by the *Enangan* himself.

Marriage

As in other Hindu castes of the region, marriage among the Vettuvan is a socio-religious ceremony binding a man and a woman, to live as husband and wife. Normally monogamy is the practice among the Vettuvan. Stray instances of polygyny are also reported from the various regions where the present study was conducted. No case of polyandry has, however, been reported.

Marriage within the community is the norm. But stray cases of inter community marriages do occur with the cooperation of the parents of the parties concerned. Though the younger generation relish this idea as a step towards social reform, the elderly ones are still against such marriages.

The normal age for marriage of a boy is 25 to 30 and girl 16 to 20. As per the 1961 census figures marriage within the age-group 0—14 is only negligible (3 males and 3 females in a population of 28,095). 27.66% of the total population was returned as married within the age-group 15—44. This consists of 24.22% males and 31.11% of the females. The next age-group is 45+ which accounts for 9.67% of the total and comprises 12.53% of males and 6.79% of the

females. Only two persons come under the unspecified age-group. In short, child marriage is almost unknown among the Vettuvans. The nature of their occupation too demands late marriage as the boy may be able to establish a separate household only after the age of, say, twenty or twentyfive. Data collected during 1961 census on marital status may be seen above.

In the past, Iyer reports, "Girls are married rarely before but generally after puberty. The average marriageable age of a girl is between twelve and fifteen, while of the boy is between sixteen and twenty." (1909, I, 128—134).

Cross-cousin marriage and between those bearing the same *taravad* name are prohibited. According to Iyer "Marriage within the clan (*taravad*) is prohibited but permissible between the members of the *taravads*. They do not observe the custom of a young man marrying the daughter of his maternal uncle" (1909, I, 128—134).

"The Vettuvans are generally monogomists", reports, Iyer, "but some have two wives. The junior wife or sister has always to obey and respect the senior wife. They reside in one and the same hut; but in the event of quarreling they are either located separately or one of them is turned out. A woman can not have more than one husband, but a widow may marry her brother-in-law or anybody, she likes". (1909, I, 128—134).

It has been reported that in the past, spouses were acquired either by elopement or by rendering service. Arranged marriages too were widely prevalent. Marriage by service, as a custom, is almost extinct now. In this system of marriage the boy shifted to another village and worked with somebody from whose house he intended to select his bride. He, after becoming a member of the household, even sharing the expenses for food, starts love-making with one unmarried girl of his choice, for which her parents also gave tacit approval. Some such courtship may

lead to illegal pregnancy. In such cases negotiations started for an urgent and early marriage. Otherwise the ceremony was got done through the efforts and co-operation of the parents of both the partners and the head Vettuvan of the area. In case the boy had sneaked away after becoming responsible for the pregnancy, he was caught through the heads of the respective areas and forced to marry to girl. In this case the normal ceremonies were not resorted to and hence it was most inexpensive. But since this alliance was not established with the prior consent and approval of the respective area heads, it was considered as an offence. So both the bride and the bridegroom were to pay to their respective heads a penalty ranging from Rs. 10 to Rs. 15. A part of this penalty was shared by the heads leaving the rest for those *Karamurikkar* (those families who were under his control) of his jurisdiction.

For marriage by elopement, which is also not in vogue now, on an appointed day the lovers ran away to another village and took shelter with some relative or friend. They sometimes surrendered to a *genmi* who always welcomed this, being in need to work for him, gave them shelter. The heads of the respective areas who were informed by the parents fixed the penalty which might not go beyond Rs. 15. The penalty was paid and the marriage approved, allowing the couple to return home.

A third type, which is reported prevalent in Trichur district a hundred years back was the one arranged by the *genmi*. During the harvest, while the agricultural serfs were being served with their wages or *valli* in the form of paddy the *Karyasthan* (personal assistant of the *Genmi*) with the approval of the *genmi* measured the *Valli* of a boy together with that of a girl who was also working there symbolic of an intended union between the two. No one dared to disobey the wishes of the *genmi*. The boy and the girl and their parents, therefore, had to agree to this and the 'couple' lead a married life.

It is reported that the following qualities are appreciated for a bride. Brown or light complexion, curly hair with moderate length, slim and healthy body, good family background and character. For the bridegroom, one should be healthy and capable to look after a family and should have a good moral background.

A normal arranged marriage involves some negotiations and rituals attached to it. "Their marriage customs are very like those of Tiyyars excepting that the feasting and revelry are not so pompous in their case" reports Thurston. (VII--1909, 399). Marriage negotiations are initiated from the boy's side. For this purpose are engaged some middlemen, who need not necessarily be related and for whom "this is not at all a source of income but, only as a service to their

community since each and everybody may have to seek this sort of help one day or the other," as they put it. It is also done through contacts between the parents and friends of the parties concerned. At Manaloor and Mailipadom *Enanigans* too do this mediatory job.

On a convenient day after informing the girl's family in advance, the father of the boy or his mother's brother or both go to see the girl. This is called *pennu chodikkal* (asking for the girl) or *pennu kanal* (seeing the girl), as it is called, in Ernakulam district. The guests are received and seated on mats in the verandah. A feast or refreshment is served to them depending upon the time they make the visit. Normally it in the morning and so tea is served. Invariably the girl is asked to serve the stuffs to the guests so that they get a chance to see her. They may ask a few questions to her to be sure that "she does not possess defective tongue or ear." She appears with all her make-up and neat dress to impress them.

If the boy's party approves the girl they start the negotiations including the amount of marriage payment to be made usually such payment includes golden ornaments and other valuable present to the girl. If they reach an agreement the guests are treated to a vegetarian feast. The day for visiting the boy's house to see the boy, is also fixed then and there.

On the appointed day, to meet the boy, which is called *Gherukkan kanal*, the father of the girl along with his wife's brother visits the house of the boy. They are also treated to a strictly vegetarian meal or tea. They also see the boy and talk to him to have an idea about him. If they approve of the alliance both the parties consult some astrologer who normally belongs to castes like Ezhava, Nair, Brahmin, etc., and find out whether the stars of the boy and the girl agree for a matrimonial alliance. For this job the astrologer is paid Rs. 4 to Rs. 5 by the boy's party.

Unlike in the past, at present the boy is free to express his opinion to choose his bride. Formerly he was not expected to go to the girl's house to see her. So also the girl was not expected to express her likes and dislikes, and her parents' decision was final and irrevocable. Now the boy chooses a day and visits the girl at her house or neighbourhood. One or two of his close friends, may accompany him. In most cases he visits a neighbouring house. The parents of the girl purposely make her fetch water from the pond of the neighbour so that the boy gets a chance to see her. If the boy is visiting her house, tea is served by the girl so that he gets a chance to see her. The girl too can have a look at the boy from some corner of the fence or house.

At Trichur and Cranganore a custom is still prevalent among them. The boy is asked to visit

the nearby temple during a festive day. The girl with her people also visits the temple. This gives them chance to see each other. At times if found necessary, the boy is even allowed to stay one night at her house, on the pretext of lack of conveyance for him to return to his house.

If the boy and the girl approve the proposal the parents go further with the negotiations. In the matter of approval the boy has more freedom when compared to the girl who is normally persuaded by the parents to accept their suggestion. At Manaloor and other areas the girls have yet to become free to express their resentment towards the proposal.

The auspicious day for *Acharakallyanam* (betrothal) is fixed with the help of the Kaniyan (Astrologer). On the day of *Acharakallyanam* the boy's father, his eldest sister, her husband, with one or two relatives and neighbours (sometimes mother also) visit the girl's house. The boy's father gives Rs. 5 to the girl's father as *Acharam* (advance) in the presence of others. The party is treated to a vegetarian feast. *Acharakallyanam* is otherwise known as *pennu urappikkal* (fixing up the girl). It is considered a breach of trust if after *Achara Kallyanam*, the girl is married to somebody else.

At Mailipadom, within the Trichur town area there is a custom which might be a recent adoption from neighbouring Christians. Two pairs of dress including, saree, blouse, petticoat, bodices, etc. for the girl are also given together with the *Acharam* or advance.

On this day (*Acharakallyanam*) they also discuss matters connected with the number of persons who may accompany the bridal procession on the day of marriage, the amount or *Dakshina* or *Kakkalacharam* as it is called at Trichur, to be given to the father of the girl in the marriage booth etc. If convenient and possible, they may even fix up the auspicious date for marriage by an astrologer (Kaniyan); Normally this is done afterwards taking into account the convenience of both the parties. Formerly, "when a match is approved of by the parents of the bride and bridegroom necessary negotiations and settlement of the day for wedding are made at the hut of the former in the presence of the *enançan* (middle-men) and relatives of both sides. The bride's money is four rupees and four annas, out of which one rupee six annas and six paise paid on the spot, and the number of guests from the bridegroom's side to attend the wedding is also fixed, reports Iyer, (1909, I, 128—134).

At present to fix an auspicious day and time for marriage on an appointed day relatives from both sides approach the astrologer (Kaniyan) and get it prescribed on two sheets of papers, on cash payment. One is given to the boy's party

and the other taken by the girl's party. This is called *Kallyanam kurikkal* or fixing the date of marriage.

All the friends and relatives are invited two or three weeks in advance so that they can prepare themselves for their contributions to be made on the day of marriage. The officials of the *Vettuva Samajam*, their communal organisation, if exists in the area, are also informed. A representative of the *Vettuva Samajam* joins in all the discussions and negotiations after the proposal as a witness.

In most of the areas, since the Vettuvans are tenants, their respective land-lords are informed of the marriage. The more tradition-bound elders present to the landlord a bunch of plantain, some flattened rice, etc., while inviting him to take part in the marriage.

The landlord or *jenmi* in return presents them with some rice, cocoanuts, fuel and Rs. 10 to Rs. 15. At Narakkal and Parur only money and few cocoanuts are given in return.

The boy's party makes necessary purchases well in advance. They include *Putava* (dress) for both the boy and the girl and also for the mother of the girl and his relatives. The girl's dress consists of one or more sarees, same number of petticoat, blouses and bodice. The boy's dress includes one double *dhoti*, a shirt of his own liking out of cotton, nylon, or even terylene and a pair of underwears and banian. One lady's umbrella for the girl and gent's type for boy, together with all toilets for the girl, are also bought.

A marriage badge (*tali*) in gold is also got prepared from a goldsmith by the boy's party to be invested on the neck of the girl during the time of wedding. It may be strung on a gold chain or a black thread depending on their economic position.

The girl's party also has to purchase dress for the girl and for other family members. A set of dress for the bridegroom to be worn during his stay at the girl's house may also be prepared.

Though these are the usual arrangements certain available items may sometimes be overlooked in case of financial stringency.

The former dress of the bride and the groom, it is reported, consisted of only a *loongi* called *pavumundu*, and an upper cloth. The groom used to wear, in addition, a turban and carry a knife with a silver case and chain.

A week before the marriage, rice and other commodities meant for the feast are procured. The necessary utensils for preparing and serving food are assembled at least a day in advance. Few mats may also be purchased or taken on rent to be used by the invitees.

Close relatives and friends of the respective parties arrive a day or two in advance. They may extend a helping hand to the hosts in making necessary arrangements for the marriage celebration.

A *pandal* is erected in front of the bride's house, using bamboo and plaited cocoanut leaves which are either borrowed or purchased. This *pandal* is meant for the rituals, serving feast and seating guests. This work is done by the male members present there.

Cooking in connection with the bridal feast starts from the previous evening since in most cases marriages are solemnised during the morning. Working till late at night they prepare the different items of food stuff and keep the same ready by early morning. The items include cooked rice, different types of curries, pickles, *pappad*, plantain chips, ripe plantain, and sweet pudding called *payasam*, prepared out of cereals or non-cereals cooked with molasses and cocoanut milk. In short it has to be a strict vegetarian feast unlike the non-vegetarian feast served in the past.

The bridegroom, who had a hair cut previously, on a convenient date, gets a clean shave on the day at the nearby barber's shop or by oneself. After bath he wears the marriage dress, *kallyana kottu*, and gets ready for the procession to the bride's house. He carries with him an umbrella. He is accompanied by his close relatives such as sister, sister's husband, maternal and paternal uncles, etc., and neighbours, numbering about 15 or 20, as had been decided upon earlier at the bride's house. At Trichur and Manaloor area there was a custom of donating to the bride's household Rs. 2 to 3 per head if the guests exceeded the previously agreed number.

His sister (elder) carries the bride's dress (*putava*) and *Tali* in a leather bag owned or borrowed, together with two garlands, preferably of jasmine flower. One of the elder members of the party who belongs to his parent's side acts as a *Kananayan* or head of the group. He carries the *Dakshina* or *Kakkalacharam* the amount to be given to the (father of the bride at the time of *Tali* tying.

In Trichur district as the *Enangan* presides over the ceremony, he may carry the things meant for the bride.

The bridal party is received at the gate of the *pandal* where the bridegroom is greeted by the bride's brother and seated on a chair or mat. All are offered *pan*, *beedies*, and cigarettes as the case may be.

Reporting on the marriage procession of the past, Iyer says, "on the morning of the lucky

day chosen for the wedding, the bridegroom, purified by a bath, and dressed in a neat piece of cloth with a second one hanging loosely on his shoulder, and a suitable covering for his head, goes to the hut of the bride, accompanied by his parents, uncles, relations, and friends, who are welcomed and seated on mats in a decorated *pandal* put up for the time being in front of it." (1909, I, 128—134).

A lighted lamp is placed normally on the clean floor and rarely on a table with a *nira* (a measure of rice) over which is placed a cocoanut. In Trichur district, sometimes this rice is kept on a piece of plantain leaf (*Narakkila*) instead of *Edangazhi*, (a measure) which is borrowed from the wealthy neighbours. At Narakkal, in addition *Tulasi* flower, beaten rice, (*avil*) fried paddy (Malaru), plantain, molasses and incense are also placed. A lithograph of Lord Shiva or Subramania or Sree Narayana Guru* is also kept to witness the scene, the latter being more common in Trichur district.

The bride is dressed up by bridegroom's sister (Bride is called *pennu* or *Manavatty* and Bridegroom *Chekkann* or *Manavalan* in the local parlance) and brought to the *pandal* by her at the auspicious hour of *Mohoortam*. The bride is seated at the left side of the bridegroom on a mat, facing towards the east. At Trichur they may even stand on two pieces of plantain leaves. Recently, it has been observed, the bridal couple may be seated on chairs kept on either side of a decorated table.

The *Dakshina* or *Kakkalacharam* is placed in a plate in front of the couple together with the *dhothi* for the bride's mother (*Ammayiyamma putava*) by the *Karanavan*. The amount which may range from Rs. 15 to Rs. 100 or more is always kept in a betel leaf with one arecanut and is taken away by the father of the bride.

At Lokamaleswaram there was a custom by which the bridegroom had to give Rs. 4.50 to that person who (not related to her) had tied a *Tali* around the neck of this girl at the time of her puberty ceremony. Only after this the girl could be married to another man since she was proposed as his legitimate bride. The amount thus given was called *Avakasa panam*.

The *Poojari* or the *Enangan*, as the case may be, breaks the cocoanut and sprinkles the sap on the couple when the bridegroom, invests the *Tali* on the neck of the bride which is later tied by the former's sister. The *Enangan* is paid Rs. 4 to Rs. 5 besides the *nira* and the cocoanut.

At Narakkal only few *Tulasi* flowers are thrown over the couple praying for a happy married life to them. In many cases the rituals here are attended to by Ezhava or Nair *poojaris* from the

*A saint cum Social reformer of Kerala from the Ezhava caste (1854-1928) whose main preaching was one caste, one religion and one God for mankind.

nearby temples who are given Rs. 5 to Rs. 10. He does it by chanting some *mantras* (spells) and asks the bridegroom to invest the *Tali* around the neck of the bride, which is then tied by the bridegroom's sister. The wedding comes to a close with the exchange of jasmine garlands by the bridal pair and their circumambulation of the marriage booth.

At Mailipadom the couple is given some sweet pudding made out of rice cooked in Milk. This ritual is called *Madhuram Kodukkal* (giving of sweets).

"The expenses of the bride's parents in connection with the wedding are almost self-supporting, for, the sum of money is raised by subscription either in coin or in kind received from the castemen who are invited. The bridegroom's parents have also to spend a similar sum." (Iyer, 1909, I, 128—134). The subscription rates vary in different places. At Narakkal, Parur and Lokamaleswaram the minimum is Rs. 3 while in Trichur it is Re. 1. Close relatives, however, subscribe from Rs. 10 to Rs. 100 according to their economic position. The father of the girl makes an inventory of the donations and gifts given to her which helps him to donate an equal amount to the donors when occasion arises.

All the connected rituals over, the guests are treated to a feast, men and women seated in separate rows. At Narakkal and Kedamangalam the bride and the bridegroom also partake food in the *pandal* itself along with others, while in Trichur district they are usually served in the inner apartment. The feast is followed by serving of betel-leaves and nuts and country cigarettes.

At the end of the feast the girl is presented with some brass vessels worth Rs. 100 to Rs. 150, by her parents. These are displayed in the *pandal* and an itinerary prepared together with the ornaments given to her. In those areas where the *Enangan* officiates he retains the list. Where there is a branch of the *Vettuva Samajam* or *Vettuva Maha Sabha* the secretary or the president who attends the marriage keeps the list after having endorsed by both the bride and the groom. The association is paid Rs. 3 to Rs. 5, a system copied from the local S.N.D.P. Yogam, a social organisation of the Ezhavas. If in case divorce takes place this list becomes handy to settle the case.

The bridegroom's party along with the bride, on the same evening or the next morning starts for his home. The bride before she starts for the husband's place salutes her parents by touching their feet thrice.

"At the time of his departure", in the past, states Iyer, "he has to pay his bride's maternal uncle and her sister four anna and a half each, and to her paternal uncle and her sister two

annas and a quarter and betel-leaves. This is called *Kaimatakkuka*, and is probably the survival of an old custom of the bridegroom's paying some thing to each members of the bride's family as a reward for permitting her to accompany him." (Iyer, 1909, I, 128—134). This custom is observed even today.

In the past, *Vatikkaran*, *Valiyakanakkan* or *Avakasi* invariably presided over all the rituals, social ceremonies including the marriage. He sees through all the rituals, seated on a stool kept on a mat spread in the *verandah*. At the end of the ceremonies he was given a couple of annas as a token of respect. Today, however, as mentioned earlier, a representative of their social organisation or the *Enangan*, as in Trichur area, formally presides over the functions, indicating a marked change in the traditional social control.

The party after reaching the groom's place is received at the gate by his mother, and other relatives and lead to the *pandal* where the father, mother and maternal uncle of the bridegroom sprinkle water with betel-leaf-lips over the head of the bride thrice from a brass vessel. The bride bows in reverence and touches their feet thrice. Thus they welcome her to their house. She is always instructed to enter the house by stepping in with her right foot first, a custom universal in the Malayalam country.

On the same day on a day later a party from the bride's house comprising her brother, sister, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, father's brother and some relatives not exceeding the number of persons who had attended the marriage from the bridegroom's side call at the groom's house which is called *virunnu*. They are feasted here who afterwards take back the couple with them. In former days, it is reported, the *Virunnu* was celebrated after a week.

The couple stays, at the bride's house for three or four days at the end of which the girl's brother with some other relatives escorts them back to the bridegroom's house.

After this they are invited by close relatives like mother's brother, father's brother for second *Virunnu* or third *Virunnu* respectively. Normally with the second *virunnu* all the ceremonial visits are over. Afterwards the couple visits leisurely the relatives of both the mother's and father's side.

Divorce

Infidelity on the part of wife, difference of opinion, poor economic conditions, etc. sometimes pave the way for severing of the marital bond.

If the marriage was conducted through the mediation of *Enangan* or any *Karanavar* (elderly person) of the group he is approached to effect divorce. But on the other hand if the *Vettuva*

Samajam was involved it is informed about the case. The mediator, in the first instance after hearing the complaint, tries to effect a compromise, failing which divorce is advised.

In case of divorce, the boy has to return all those he got as presents during the time of marriage, failing which their cost as fixed by the mediator. The man is entitled only for the *Tali* he had tied.

There is no hard and fast rule regarding the maintenance of the children born out of such a wedlock. In some cases it has been found that the children are kept by either of the parents or sometimes the responsibility is shared, but for the children at breast who always go with the mother. One case was reported from Narakkal with all the children left with the father. Two cases were reported from Kedamangalam where all the issues were left with the mother. In yet another case reported from Lokamaleswaram the divorced man who is a social reformer and politician looks after his children, sharing with his brother's family.

Widow marriages are allowed. Describing the conditions in the past Iyer reports as follows: "Divorce is easy with them and a man can repudiate his wife on the score of some serious misconduct, in which case he can leave her in charge of her parents and get back the purchase money. The man who next mates with her will pay him. The wife also, on some dislike or other, may separate herself from her husband, and the children, if young, will follow the mother, while grown up children remain with the father" (1909, I, 128—134).

Death

When a person is about to die he is brought down and laid on the floor if he was lying on a cot. This is due to the belief that the soul of a person, when he dies lying on a cot, will hover about the earth in *Trisangu Swarga*, without getting into heaven or hell. As soon as the man is dead his eyes are closed properly and the limbs are kept straight or stretched in the normal form, to avoid an awkward posture.

The dead body, draped in a white shroud, is laid on its back over a mat with its head directing towards the south and a lighted oil lamp behind. It is believed that the presence of the lamp keeps away *yama* or *kalan*, the god of death, who may come to take away the soul. Information of death is sent round through a neighbour of the same caste to the kiths and kins of the dead. In places as in Manaloor the *genmi* too is informed, who usually sends the cloth for draping the corpse. The *genmi* in such cases demand an early burial because only after that he can get his food cooked at home.

The mourners may seat around the corpse, lamenting and remembering the latest conversa-

tion and deeds of the dead. Nobody takes food except tea before the burial.

After all the near relatives arrive, the corpse is smeared with some oil and then washed in tepid water using soap or *incha* (bark of a creeper). It is now draped in some new white cloth, (*kodi*) and laid in a *pandal* or *verandah* on a plantain leaf with the head directing towards the south. A strip from the *kodi* is torn out and kept as a memento by the chief mourner, generally the eldest son. Slight variations in rituals connected with the treatment of the corpse may be found in different areas. As for example at Trichur some cocoanut sap is sprinkled into the mouth of the dead with the help of the blades of *darbha* grass by the *Enangan*. This is then repeated by every relative assembled there. Elsewhere this custom is not prevalent.

In the meantime the chief mourner known as *Talappulakkaran*, takes a dip in the nearby pond and in this process an earthen pot kept on his shoulder is also filled. He along with the pot of water takes seven rounds around the corpse and at every round the *Enangan* strikes the pot with a pointed knife allowing water to trickle out. At the end of the seventh round the chief mourner facing south throws the pot backwards breaking it at the feet of the corpse. A little water left in one of the broken pieces is sprinkled over the corpse once again by the *Enangan* who also tears off a strip of cloth from the *Kodi* known as *sesham* to be worn on the wrist of the chief mourner as mark of identification.

Before the corpse is carried to the burial ground, the relatives of the dead, particularly those related through marriage, offer their homage by spreading a piece of new cloth over the corpse. This ritual is called *kodiyidal* (offering of new cloth). Sometimes, a few may jointly perform this through contributions.

Except at Narakkal, where they cremate the dead, in all other areas burial is the form of disposal. The dead body draped in *Kodi* may be carried on a bier now in some areas an wooden coffin is used—to the already prepared grave. It is carried round the grave thrice before laying in the grave with its head directing towards the south. *Enangan* hands over three handfuls of earth to the chief mourner, which he throws into the pit, standing at the head and facing away from the pit. This is followed by other relatives and finally the grave is filled leaving a ridge over it. All return home after a purificatory bath. In some areas the male members may visit the country toddy shop, the expenditure for which may be met by contribution from among the assembled.

In case the dead is an adult married person a ritual called *Baliyidal* (appeasing the spirit of the dead) is performed every day for fifteen days.

Every day starting from the second day of death the chief mourner, after a purificatory bath cooks some rice which is made into balls (*pinnami*) and offered to the crows. This is a recent ritual adopted from the neighbouring caste Hindus.

The *Tadimazhakkal* ceremony is performed on the night of the seventh day when the *Enangan* and others who had helped for the burial go to the graveyard and level the ridge above the pit, by their hands. The *Enangan* now makes a paste of rice powder in toddy with which a crude human model of about 18" is made. This is placed on a leaf on the middle of the grave. He fixes small pieces of palm leaves at the joints of the image and sprinkles toddy over them. The ritual may be over with a visit to the toddy shop.

On the 15th day all join the *Bali Karma* and offer *Pinnams* (rice balls) which are later carried by the Chief mourner over his head to a river, sea or at least a pond and feed the fish.

On the night of the fifteenth all those rituals performed at the burial ground are repeated at the *Thindu* which is later levelled.

Pulaveddal (removal of pollution) ceremony is performed on the 16th day followed by a *Pathinaru Adiyanthiram*, or feast. The *Enangan* sprinkles cow-dung water over all those who are polluted. The *Sesham* of the chief mourner is removed and burnt off. All take bath and partake of a vegetarian feast. A special dish, *Mathada* prepared out of rice flour, cocoanut crests and cumin seeds, is served to the chief mourner and the *Enangan*. The rituals come to a close after the *Enangan* ceremonially severs a little hair from the head of the chief mourner after which he can crop his hair and shave the beard, if any.

In the past, the death anniversary called *Chatham* was celebrated every year, when a small feast was also arranged. The ceremony is no more in vogue. All the other basic rituals relating to death continue to be the same. In former days, Thurston reports, "The dead are buried among the Vettuvan—the grave is filled in with layers of earth and stones, to prevent dogs and jackals from disturbing the dead body. The members of the family fast for the night. The pollution lasts for fifteen days, and on the night of the fifteenth day they fast." (Thurston 1909, VII, 403). However, minor variations with respect to the finer elements of the rituals are reported from different areas.

At Narakkal there is the custom of a contributory feast called *Kannakku* or *Vellam kudi* in which the affinals contribute things like tender cocoanut, beaten-rice, plantain, etc. or some cash to purchase the above. The custom of *Kodiyidal* is not practised here. For the last thirty years they cremate the dead. Ezhavavathy (barber of the Ezhava caste) preside over the ceremony.

Tadimazhakkal is not performed at Narakkal though *pinnams* are offered. Instead, on the fourth day the ashes are collected in cocoanut leaf baskets (*Vallams*) and thrown in the sea. A *Tulasi* plant may also be planted at the spot. Recently a few of them have started disposing of a part of the ash in some sacred river like *Periyar* on the *Sivarathri* day as is practised by the local caste Hindus. In the case of elderly persons an *andubali* (death anniversary) may be performed by one of the sons.

It has been reported that in former days, at Aranattukara, there was a practice of keeping a stone, collected out of the grave yard on the 7th day, on a wooden stool (*peedapalaka*) at a sanctified corner of the house. This stone representing the soul of the departed was worshipped and offered sweet preparations on special days and festive occasions.

All the areas except Narakkal have a burial ground of their own. At Narakkal, as it was believed that burial caused contamination of water, they were forced to adopt cremations of the dead. Now, only the corpse of infants are buried. Those who meet with their death due to small-pox, leprosy and other communicable diseases are buried on the sea shore or at some other place far away from the habitation.

The fate of the soul is determined as per the nature of deeds he or she had done while alive. It is generally believed, that those who were good, pious and truthful got their abode in heaven and others in hell. The souls of those who met with unnatural death however hover above the earth and trouble others and of those who died while pregnant will transform into a globular spirit, emitting fire at times, called *innanchakky*. They wander in the night to do harm to the pregnant women. In such cases, too much mustard seeds are sprinkled in the grave so that they might "remain inside the grave counting those seeds." This, they believe, will keep the spirits busy during night and therefore may not come out.

CHAPTER X

Religion

Vettuvan religion revolves round the beliefs mainly in spirits and ghosts, though some of the deities of the Hindu scriptures are also propitiated. Their faith in the Brahminical Gods has been of recent origin. The spirits and ghosts they propitiate can be grouped under two types:—

- (i) Those malevolent ones which when properly propitiated can be used to hurt or kill an enemy;
- (ii) Those benevolent ones which cure diseases or other ailments like deafness, blindness, fever, hysterical fits, madness, etc.

The spirits in the first category include *Bhairavan*, *Chathan* and *Karinkutty*. The second category include *Bhadrakali* or *kali*, *Malankurathy*, *Muthappan*, and pan-Hindu deities like *Ganapathy* and *Bhagavathy*, adopted recently. *Muthappan* is the ancestral spirit and is considered as the presiding deity of the Vettuvan.

Karinkutty, *Bhairavan*, *Chathan*, *Bhadrakali* or *Kali* and *Malankurathy* are described as ambivalent, personally doing good when propitiated and creating troubles when neglected. Rough hewn stones representing these deities, are located under a *Michelia Chempak* tree or *Hibiscus Rosasinansus*, in one corner of the compound around the household. This area is always kept clean. The stones are kept on wooden stools or platforms made out of laterite stones or bricks. In front of these stones are fixed wooden pegs on which are attached metal spoon like wick lamps in which oil is poured and lighted during the time of propitiation. These lamps are lighted every evening and on auspicious and festive days. Fowls, green cocoanuts and fruits are offered on festive days.

One case was noted from Kadamangalam in which a stone represented Lord Subramania and worshipped as such.

Stones representing *Muthappan*, the ancestral spirits of the Vettuvan are invariably seen in all villages. *Muthappan* is supposed to control and watch their day-to-day activities, being the *Appuppan* or eldest grand father. Toddy and arrack are offered with special sweets to *Muthappan* on *Sankaranthy* and new-moon days.

In Trichur, it has been observed, a few households worship many small pieces of stone kept on an wooden stool at one corner of a room,

each stone supposed to represent each dead man of the family. This corner should be away from the kitchen and not normally frequented by the women, particularly when they are in their period.

Offerings to *Muthappan* or other ancestral spirits are done both outside and inside the house. Whenever a special dish is prepared, a part of it is offered to these with a pot full of water, kept there for an hour. Afterwards it is consumed by the younger folk at home. On other occasions offerings are made outside.

Chathan and *Karinkutty* are differentiated according to the intensity of their devilish actions. According to their conception *Chathan* is a spirit, which is invisible and lacks thumb. So, when people are certain about the presence of *Chathan* in a house, they take some precautionary measures against his mischiefs. They tie all the material things in bundles as he cannot, it is believed, untie them without using the thumb.

Chathan, though malevolent, can do harm to his master's enemies only if directed to do so through some prayers and offerings. But, if displeased, he might retaliate the master himself with added force.

The presence of *Chathan*, they believe, may be felt with certain unusual happenings. In the first instance he knocks at the door or tumbles utensils on the ground and throws them at the inmates. This is followed by pelting of stones, throwing fire and lastly depositing faecal matter in cooked food, which is considered to be the climax of his wrath. *Karinkuty-Chathan* or *Karinkutty* is more dreadful than *Chathan*. So offerings are made to both *Chathan* and *Karinkutty* to appease them, by the aggrieved.

Malankurathy, *Bhadrakali* (*Bhagavathy*) and *Yekshi* are believed to be responsible for certain diseases. *Bhagavathy*, for example, is responsible for epidemics like small-pox and chicken-pox. Like *Yekshi*, *Bhadrakali* is also blood thirsty and is malicious and malevolent. They need to be properly appeased with offerings, failing which they cause blood dysentery, vomiting of blood, hysterical fits, etc. Fowls are sacrificed to propitiate *Bhadrakali* and *Yekshi*. The former is believed to be much fond of filthy and sexy songs. So during *Kumbha Bharani* festival at Cranganore *Bhadrakali* temple the devotees sing filthy songs as a part of their propitiation,

Thurston has to say the following on the religion of the Vettuvans. "The Vettuvans profess the lower form of Hinduism. Their chief gods are Chevva, Chathan and also Nambutiri Tampuran. They give regular offerings to them, lest the gods should become angry, and cause serious calamities to the members of their families. Images of gods are made of belmetal and worshipped in their huts. The deceased ancestors are also worshipped as gods, to whom are given a different kind of offerings They worship Kali also. Kumbha Bharani is an important festival for them. On the morning of this day, tunes are played in honour of the goddess. There are special songs called Thottampattu. Sacrifices are offered to this deity very early. A puja (worship) is also performed for the sword, anklets and bells worn round the loins, all placed in front of the deity, and songs are again sung. One of them turns a Velichappad (oracle) who speaks as if by inspiration, wearing the above ornaments, they go to the temple, in front of which they empty out on a mat a few paras of paddy and again play and sing." (1906, VII, 401).

The present trend is to adopt all Brahminical gods, like lord Subramania, Lord Shiva, and Ganapathy. This phenomenon appears to be the result of their desire to elevate the social status. Lithographs of these deities are kept on the walls of the houses and worshipped by lighting lamps and fuming incense during the evening. Together with this some have their traditional deities as well. In recent times, influence of political ideologies, has made many youngsters believe in neither traditional deities nor Hindu deities.

The Vettuvan have no temple of their own, worth the name, except at Narakkal, where lord Subramania is installed in a bamboo thatched structure situated on the sea shore of the Harijan Colony. They may also worship the deities of caste Hindus in their temples except that of the Gouda Saraswatha Brahmins.

Festivals and Fasts

Nalpathonnu—*Nalpathonnu* is the festival celebrated in praise of their traditional deities worshipped at home. This falls during the month of February-March. The head of the household observes *Noimbu* (*observance*) for 41 days taking only vegetarian diet and leading a pious life. On the forty first day the surroundings of the area where the deities are seated cleaned and decorated with tender cocoanut leaves and spathes of plantain tree-trunk. They make *kalams* (*alpana*) on the floor using rice flour, turmeric powder, powdered carbon and dried and powdered mango leaves, in front of these deities. The particular *kalam* which is meant for the person under trance, and sacrifice of the fowl is called *Guruthi kalam*.

Special preparations like *Pooja Choru* (rice cooked with molasses, cocoanut shreds and turmeric) loddy, arrack, etc. are offered to the deities. At times fowls are also sacrificed. One or more persons including the chief or Velichapped (specialist in trance or oracle) develop hysterical fits, profess to be oracles with the spirits of the deities in their bodies in incorporal form. Others consult him about the future events and his advice is thankfully sought, and acted upon. The fowl sacrifice is substituted by cutting an ash guard and pouring over it blood red mixture of lime water and turmeric powder. Sometimes, the Velichapped drinks the blood of the sacrificed fowls. He even tries to cure some diseases especially fits, by whipping or threatening and sometimes suggesting some offerings to different deities whose wrath had caused the ailments.

After sometime the *Velichapped* falls in the *Guruthi Kalam* (a prescribed space) and rolls. Cold water is poured over him especially over the head and laid on a mat spread on the verandah. After the spirits have left, he becomes normal. The oracle wears a special dress on the occasion, consisting of *Aramani* (a brass belt with small bells) and anklets. He may also carry a sword in the right hand.

Bharani—This is a festival held in the *Bhagavathy* temple at Cranganore, in the middle of March every year in which Hindus from different parts of the State take part. The lower castes like Vettuvan have a day allotted for them, after *Karruthindal* ceremony.

Offerings such as rice flour, green cocoanut, fowl, plantain turmeric powder, black pepper, etc. are made to *Bhagavathy* whom, they believe, is responsible for small-pox. Sanstified oblations like, turmeric powder are considered a panacea for many ailments like body pain, fever, vomiting, etc.

At the temple both men and women join the folk dance and songs. The songs are filthy and vulgar which the deity likes most. The fowls meant for sacrifice are made to fly with legs tied which the temple authorities later-on put to auction. Though sacrifice and singing of filthy songs are prohibited the latter continues unabated.

Makaraulakku—This festival, celebrated during the month of *Makaram* (January-February) at the *Bhagavathy* temple at Cranganore with illumination, decorated elephants, tomtom, pipes, etc., is a festive occasion for the Vettuvans. They take part in the festivities along with other caste Hindus.

Mandala Pooja—This is related to the pilgrimage to *Sabarimala* (Sabari Hills) where *Sastha* or *Sabarimala Ayyappan* abodes in a small temple. This falls during January of each year.

The devotee observes the life of an ascetic for forty-one days (*Noimbu* days) wearing *Rudrakdamala* (sacred chains) and black dress and subsisting on vegetarian meals with two or three times prayers and other 'observances'. After this they pack their bundles with provisions and offerings (*Kettu nirakkal*) and start for the pilgrimage in a team with an experienced leader called *Pazhamakkaran*. They reach *Sabari* hill before the illumination day (*Makaravilakku*) to get a glance of the diety.

Pazhanikku Pokku (Pilgrimage to Palani)

There is no fixed period for this. All Hindus including Vettuvan go for this. This is a pilgrimage to a temple at Palani on the Palani hills of Tamilnadu where lord Subramania abodes.

Sivarathri

This festival falls in the month of February. The whole of *Sivarathri* day and night is devoted for the worship of Lord Shiva, who abodes in a temple on the banks of river Periyar at Alwaye.

On this day offerings are also made in the form of rice balls (*Pinnam*) to the souls of their dead ancestors.

Onam

This is the national festival of the people of Kerala which the Vettuvan also celebrate, during the month of August. It is celebrated to commemorate the reign of *Mahabali*, an Asura king who ruled the land when plenty and prosperity prevailed every where. It is believed that the king visits every household in Kerala on the *Thiru Onam* day when he is welcomed with all pomp and pleasure.

Vishu

This festival is celebrated by all the Hindus of Kerala. It falls in the month of *Medom* (March-April). In Trichur district the day is considered by the Vettuvans as the death anniversary of Ravana, the Asura king of Lanka. Vettuvans prepare special sweets like *Neyyappam* and other dishes on the occasion to celebrate the day.

CHAPTER XI

Leisure, Recreation and Child-play

There is no organised form of recreation among the Vettuvan. During leisure hours and on off days the males used to assemble at tea shops*. Topics ranging from local news to latest political developments in the country come under the purview of their discussions. Some may read news papers and others listen to it. During the evening it is a regular affair for them to visit a tea-shop to have a glass of tea and some snacks. To meet the expenditure a couple of cocoanuts which they get by way of wages may be sold to the shopkeeper usually at cheaper rates. Occasional visits to the toddy shop "to relieve themselves of the body pain", as they put it, is also resorted to. When they are more free the males

engage themselves in playing cards or some local type of chess called *Kallikali*, and *Pakita Kali* with or without any stake.

Movie films are becoming more and more popular and men visit the film shows often. A recent trend among the young educated folk is to utilise some leisure hours in the nearby library or reading room or even engage themselves in some social service for their community.

The women folk seldom get time for recreation as they find themselves busy in household duties, besides wage earning. However, at times they snatch some time to go to a movie or to a nearby festival.

*It is a centre of gossip in rural Kerala where all the news are discussed.

CHAPTER XII

Inter Community Relationship

In the past, when the patron-client relationship was more strong, the Vettuvans were expected to attend to some duties of their landlords without fail and the *genmi* (Landlord) in his turn had to fulfill certain duties towards the former. Death, marriage, puberty and festive occasions used to be the time when these reciprocal duties were rendered.

At the time of the death of the *genmi* or any member of his family the head Labourer *Panippattukaran* (*Panippadam at Narakkal*) had to go to the *genmi's* house and extend all help. He and his family had to lament over the death. He had to make firewood for cremation and fuel for the feast, and make *Thoranam* (made out of tender cocoanut leaves which are cut in 2 feet length and stripped into two or three parts). *Thoranams* are hung on coir ropes, tied on both sides of the route from the *pandal* to the cremation spot, through which the corpse had to be carried for cremation. He had to make the roof to be fixed above the funeral pyre, out of plaited cocoanut leaves and bamboo frames. He is the person who made the *Vallam* or basket out of plaited cocoanut leave, to collect the ash from the pyre, on the 4th or 7th day after cremation.

Similarly, the death of a Vettuvan had to be informed to the *genmi*, and the latter gave a cloth to cover the dead body, some paddy, a few cocoanuts and some times Rs. 4 or 5 to meet the extra expenditure may also be given. The *genmi* extends all possible help to bury the dead in his land. At some places, as for example at Aranathukara, the members of the *genmi's* family cooked meals only after the burial.

At the time of marriage of any member of the *Muthalalan's* (*genmis'*) family, the Vettuvan who was his *Kudiyani* (tenant) or *Panippattukaran* (Chief labourer) had to present some vegetables, fruits and *pappad*. He had to go there and do all sorts of odd jobs, such as making fire wood, transporting necessary things to make the *pandal* etc. In return, he and his family were feasted by the *genmi* and given a share to carry home.

During the marriage of a Vettuvan he had to make some presents to the *genmi* and informed him well in advance about the wedding. He was given some paddy or rice, or cocoanuts and some cash ranging from Rs. 5 to 15. Some vessels and implements, used for the preparation of the feast were also borrowed. The couple was expected to call on the *genmi* as soon as the marriage was over. Further during the puberty of a

Vettuvan girl the *genmi* was informed, who used to supply all the necessary ingredients meant for the feast connected with the ceremony.

On festive occasions, like *Onam*, the *Kudiyani*—Vettuvan or *Panippattukaran*—Vettuvan, had to present the *genmi* with some plantain bunch (*Onakkula* for *Onam*) and some other vegetables. In return, during *Onam*, the *genmi* used to give one *dhoti*, some money and some rice and cocoanuts for a feast. On the fourth *Onam* day they get a full feast for the complete family and also a share to carry home. During the *Vishu* festival they got Re. 1 to Rs. 2 from the *genmi* as *Vishu Kaintettam*: (a present given on the *Vishu* day).

With the advent of money-economy and progressive legislative measures like the minimum wages act, land reforms, etc. the patron-client relationship has weakened much. Educational progress and political awareness among the younger generation are the other factors which paved the way for the weakening of this bond.

At present, at the time of death of their *genmi* or somebody at his household their Vettuvan are not made to lament compulsorily, but may do so as per their free will and relationship with the deceased. The death of a *Vettuvan-kudiyani* may or may not be intimated to the *genmi* and on the latter's part, he may or may not help the Vettuvan. There is absolutely no compulsion on the part of either party.

During the marriage now-a-days, at the *genmi's* house, a Vettuvan labourer is engaged to attend to the odd jobs for which he is paid in cash and on the day of the marriage he is given a sumptuous lunch. The marriages at the Vettuvan's house need not necessarily be informed to the *genmi*, but if informed, it is without presentations. During festive days like *Onam*, *Vishu*, etc., the practice of offering presents to the *genmi* is very rarely practised.

Unlike in olden days, the polluting distance has also shrunk very much. The Vettuvan are now allowed to enter upto the courtyard of a Nair. Some progressive among the Nair employ them as kitchen servants. Most of the Ezhava households allow them to enter in their house. The Vettuvan youth can touch and mingle with the educated youths among Nair and Ezhava. The Vettuvan have free access to barber-shops and tea-shops, unlike in the past.

Still, among all these castes, particularly the Nair and other so-called superior ones, there are

a few (mainly the elderly persons) who grumble when the Vettuvan collect water from the common pond or he enters the latter's premises.

The Vettuvan are allowed to enter all temples except those of Gouda Saraswatha Brahmin and make offerings and propitiations. Unlike in the past all roads are now open for them. As a survival of the former custom even now some elderly Vettuvan keep away a bit when the higher caste elderly members approach. Social status enjoyed by the Vettuvan in the past is revealed through the following observations of Iyer.

"They eat at the hands of Brahmins, Sudras, Kammalars and Ezhavas, but never anything prepared by Velan, Panan, Velakkathalavan (barber) Kanakkan and Koodan. The low castes below them in status are Pulayan, Nayadi and

Ulladan. They consider themselves superior to Pulayans, and are careful not to be polluted by them, when they approach one another they feel themselves polluted. A Vettuvan who is polluted by a Nayadi or an Ulladan fasts for seven days, subsisting on water, tender cocoanut and toddy. On the eighth day he bathes and takes his regular meals, lest they believe that their gods become angry and disappear. As Chandalas of the plains, any distance less than sixty-four feet will pollute the higher castes. They stand at a distance of twenty four feet from the Kammalans, while Nayadis and Ulladans stand four from them. Owing to their disabilities and low wages, many turn either Christians or Mohammadans, and work for wages of two and half to three annas worth of paddy a day. (Iyer, 1909, I, pp. 128-134).

CHAPTER XIII

Structure of Social Control Prestige and Leadership

The Vettuvan society has a mechanism of its own for social control at the village level. The headman and the *Enangan* form the two important links in the social structure of the community. This traditional social structure is gradually undergoing changes. The present leadership is a combination of the traditional and the modern. Wherever the traditional leadership has grown weak the modern set up has taken its place. The headman of the Vettuvan goes by different names in different areas. At Narakkal, he has been named *Vatikkaran*; at Kedamangalam he is *Valiyakanakkan* while in all areas in Trichur district he is known as *Avakasi*. The headman is selected by the elders of the community unlike in the past when "the Vettuvan headman was appointed by the *genmi* and was called. *Kiran* or sometimes *Parakutti*" (Thurston, VIII, 399). He is the main authority to take important decisions concerned with the social life of the Vettuvan. He is to be informed of all events of life such as marriage, birth, puberty and death, all breaches and offences committed by the members, and also any other matter connected with the smooth running of the society. This headman acts as a middle man between his caste people and the *genmi* or *Tanpuran* and people from higher castes.

On the headman of the Vettuvan, Anantha-krishna Iyer says "The village headman is called *Kurupan* or *Kanakkan* who has a subordinate called *Kaikkaran*. He has the power to call on and preside over a meeting, to enquire into the breaches of caste rules, such as theft, adultery and the like, and to punish offenders in accordance with the opinion of the majority. The decisions are enforced as pain of loss of castes, fine, and even thrashing. The headman has always a share of the fine and the balance is spent on toddy". (Iyer, 1909, Vol. I, Pages 128—134).

Enangan was the priest at Narakkal and Kedamangalam. Iyer considered the *Enangan* as a

middleman. At Narakkal *Enangan* was considered as inferior in status to Vettuvans. There were some particular families among them from whom were selected the *Enangans*. The eldest son succeeds at the death of one *Enangan*. *Enangan's* wife is called *Enangathy* who had also some duties to perform during the puberty ceremony. The institution of *Enangan* however has now been disintegrated.

In Trichur *Enangan* is the *Karmi (Poojari)*. But he is never considered inferior in status. This is a sort of mutual obligation without any loss of status. *Enangan* has to do all the rituals connected with death, marriage, birth, etc. while the *Enangathy* attends to the puberty ceremony. But this system is dying out now from here also.

Thurston informs "The priest who officiates at their ceremonies are selected from among their own tribes or *Enangans* whose express recognition is necessary to give validity to the performance of the ceremony" (Thurston, 1909, VII, 399).

Wherever the traditional association had died out the new caste organisation known as *Vetuva Maha Sabha* took up the position of controlling their society. It has branches, in one name or other, throughout Kerala wherever these people have concerned. In recent times that too is degenerating, with the only function of registering marriages left behind. It has been observed in the field that in all the centres where the branches of the Sabha once worked have now reduced to name only. At Narakkal there exists a Labour Union for cocoanut pluckers under the guidance of a leftist political party. It is known as *Akhila Vypeen Thengu Kayatta Tozhilali Union*, an organisation which stands for fixation of wages and settlement of dispute. The leaders of the *Maha Sabha*, at Lokamaleswaram, particularly one Subramanian, a political worker, are trying to get the union reorganised. It appears that the disintegration of the caste association is largely due to the strengthening of political parties.

CHAPTER XIV

Social Reform and Welfare

Taking cue from the teaching of Shri Narayana Guru, the prophet who established the *Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam*, an organisation standing for social equality and economical and educational prosperity of the Ezhava Community, the Vettuvans organised themselves into an organisation in 1928 to fight for social justice and remove social disabilities. The organisation also worked for promoting educational and cultural causes.

The *Akhila Cochin Vettuva Maha Sabha*, was the first of this kind founded by an Ex-Minister of the State, Shri Kochu Kuttan. Upto 1950 it was working effectively. After that, due to political awakening and then by difference in political outlook the office bearers and members have resigned. It has afterwards revived by the leftist leaders in 1952 at Cranganore. Now they are trying to integrate the different branches. In the former Travancore area it is still working as *Vettuva Samajam*. Since these people are more concentrated in former Cochin area more branches of the association were formed there. After the reorganisation of the State of Kerala the name of the central organisation was changed to *Akhila Kerala Vettuva Maha Sangham* and the former associations became its constituents.

During different periods of its working the *Mahasabha* tried to implement social reformatory measures such as banning of *Thirandu Kallyanam* (Puberty ceremony) ear boring, bride price, patron-client system, etc., in which they have succeeded to some extent especially at Cranganore and Lokamaleswaram.

The *Mahasabha* had sent representation to the Government and Harijan Welfare Department requesting them to implement fully the ban in untouchability, allot land for Harijan colonies, sanction more funds for housing, education and water supply. It attained some benefits by bringing these issues to the attention of the officials. At Narakkal there is another trade union called '*Akhila Vypeen Thengu Kayatta Tozhilali Union* organised by the Vettuvans which is fighting with the employers for proper remuneration. Whenever there is some problem between the landlord and the labourers, both parties approach the Association and get it solved.

Now most of their able social reformers have turned their attention to political parties and have become political leaders. The association,

now come in the picture only, on the occasion of marriage, divorce and simple disputes.

The Harijan Welfare Department are implementing some welfare schemes to improve the general conditions of Harijans including Vettuvans, from 1957. Following are the different measures being implemented for the amelioration of the Vettuvan.

1. Education

- (a) Scholarship and stipends (Secondary education).
- (b) Re-imbusement of tuition fees.
- (c) Mid-day meals to students.
- (d) Stipend for Scheduled Caste Students studying in the Central Fishery Co-operatives.

2. Economic uplift

- (a) Subsidy to technically trained persons.
- (b) Grant for agricultural implements.
- (c) Improvement of colonies.

3. Health, housing and other schemes

- (a) Construction of houses.
- (b) Acquisition of house sites.

Inspite of all the development activities adopted by the Government, the Vettuvans are not satisfied. Most of them complained about the insufficiency of the educational facilities and grants they were enjoying. They wanted more and more grants to meet the expense of the school going children. They aspired for more colonies, established by the Government. At Narakkal the colony dwellers complained about the lack of space for attending to nature's call. The Block Development Office had laid a programme to provide them concrete slabs to construct pit latrines. But they refused to accept the scheme since they thought that this would spoil their drinking water in ponds, as the houses were huddled together in a compact area. They wanted to have a space away from their settlement.

Un-employment for the educated youths, who are reluctant to take up the traditional occupation or other manual labour is another problem they are facing. Even many of the certificate

holders from the Model Welfare centres who are trained in ratton work, carpentry, weaving, etc. find no avenue for employment. This has caused an apathy among the young men in joining the training courses.

The Vettuvan are not satisfied with the grant allotted for house construction, as in their opinion the amount is inadequate to construct a house according to the approved plan. The subsidy granted to technically trained persons to

start their own workshop is also not enough to meet their requirements.

With all these changes they are facing humiliation from a few higher castes. As for example, while they fetch water from the ponds, they are not allowed to fill their pots themselves, but have to wait for a member of the caste Hindu family to fill for them. In spite of all legal measures untouchability is still practised by some higher castes.

VETTUVAN BIOGRAPHY

Koran

Sixty year old Koran of Nedupuzha in Trichur district had a chequered career. He was one of the 13 children, 10 males and three females, born to his parents out of whom only three including himself are alive today. Koran was born at a place called Panamukku, 5 miles away from Nedupuzha, to which place his father migrated later. In his childhood, his father worked in *Kolkrishi*, a kind of paddy cultivation in which water has to be bailed out from the fields before sowing, with a local Nambuthiri *Jenmi* (Landlord). He joined his father in *Kolkrishi* when he was hardly 16. He recollected the payment they used to receive during those days, generally in kind (3 measures of paddy) or, very rarely, in cash amounting to 2 to 3 annas.

The common names for males during Koran's childhood, were Koran, Kandan, Chathan, Pallan, Thevan, etc., while the women were named Kotha, Kurumba, Chakki, Pully, Kali and so on. Koran felt that in former days the names of lower castes could be easily distinguished from those of the higher Hindu castes, while today the same is not possible. As for example, he pointed out the names of some of his grand children whose names run as follows: Sankaran, Pushkaran, Kartikeyan, Subramanian, Gopi, etc. (all males) and Remany, Sumathy, Latika, Uma, etc. (females). In fact, these are the common names of caste Hindus as well.

Koran married at the age of 28 when his bride was 22 years old. The bride was usually known as Kotha of *Velunthangi* while he himself was called Koran of Palliyam. Those days, a few cases are reported even these days, each Vettuvan family was named after the family (*Tharwad*) name of the landlord with whom the family was attached. Thus, Koran belonged to Palliyam family and Kotha belonged *Velunthangi*. The children used to follow the family (*Tharwad*) names of their father.

Koran left agriculture and started a small "business", as he puts it. He used to collect mangoes, tamarind, jack Fruits, etc., from villages and sold them in the Trichur town. For some time he continued his trade with success. Later on, when he incurred some loss, he left the "business" and fell back upon agricultural labour. For the last few years he is working as a *Mestri* (Supervisor) to look after the agricultural operations of a local *genmi*. During the agricultural season he gets 5 rupees per day as wage and after harvest

20 *paras* of paddy. (One para is approximately equivalent to 13 kgs.) During the off season no regular payment is received. However, something may be given in kind as and when he attends to some odd work. After the death of his father he had to sell their house to his *Karanavan* in order to pay off some of the debts he had incurred in connection with his "business". Later, he made some money and paid off the debts. Now, he has got his own house and about 70 cents of land which he purchased from the money he saved. He has five sons and one daughter. His wife died about 25 years back when many of the children were still young. Even then he did not marry a second time. The daughter, the eldest of all the children, has been married to a person who is working as a peon in the local Panchayat Office. All the sons have been married and all of them work as either agricultural labourers or general coolies. None of them is technically illiterate though none has even passed the primary standard. Koran is now anxious to see that all his grand children are sent to school and got educated.

Koran is very happy over the present social developments. He painfully recalled some of the former occasions when he had to run back as there was no place, the lane being narrow, to clear the way for the Nambuthiri or Nayar landlords coming from the opposite direction. Those days, a Vettuvan has to be about 100 yards away lest he should pollute the Nayar or Nambuthiri. The caste Hindus while walking through the thoroughfares produce the sound "Ha" when the "untouchables" are to move away if they happen to be within prohibited distance. At the landlord's house he could not go beyond the *Padi-pura* (the boundary gate). Rice gruel was served in plantain leaves or arecanut spathe, kept in small pits made for the purpose. The recipient, who may be standing at a distance, will be ordered to consume the gruel after the person who serves the gruel move away from the place. In schools the children of the unfortunate "untouchables" were segregated.

According to Koran, these social evils started receding with the leadership of Narayana Guru Swamy, a staunch fighter and leader of Ezhava community. The Swamy wanted untouchability to be effaced from the social scene. Thanks to the leadership of Shri Narayana Guru, today, Koran proudly narrated, the 'untouchables' could sit in the schools along with the children of the higher castes, can walk along the thoroughfares

without fear and can have a look at the local Hindu deities. The higher castes allow the Vettuvans to go up to the threshold of their houses.

The Government, Koran acknowledged with gratitude, are trying to do their level best to ameliorate the social and economic conditions of the so called "untouchables"; subsidies for the construction of houses, for agriculture, etc. are granted scholarships are awarded to the school going children. These ameliorative measures would go a long way for bringing the Vettuvans on par with the other Hindu castes. May be because Koran is in contact with the urban areas since long; he is aware of the Untouchability Act and other protective measures envisaged for removal of social disabilities.

2. Manikkan

Manikkan, 45, of Panamukku, is usually known as Manikkan of Panakkil, a family name he received after the name of his landlord's *Tarwad*. He was born at Panamukku and studied up to the third standard in a local primary school. He married at the age of 19 when his spouse was only 13. He had 12 children out of whom 6 are alive today.

He started working as early as in his 12th year, when his father left this world. He learnt all the tasks connected with agricultural operations from his *Karanavan* with whom he worked at a Nayar landlord's *Tarwad*. Later, when he was about 30 years old, he left the landlord and started working with anybody who offered him daily wages. Now he is mostly employed in fence making. He gets six rupees per day as wages. His wife Kali also helps him in augmenting the economy of the family. She gets 2½ rupees a day, whenever she goes for work. Generally, she gets work during the agricultural season only. Transplanting and weeding are the usual work she does. During harvest she gets about two measures of rice for one *Para* of paddy harvested and thrashed (one *Para* = 10 measures). Manikkan rarely goes for harvesting.

His eldest daughter Sunathy is 20 years old. She is married to a person by name Gopalan who is engaged in daily wage earning. Gopalan does all sorts of odd jobs including agricultural operations. Gopalan's father is engaged mainly in coconut plucking. The second child, Raghavan studied only up to 7th standard. As the prospects of getting a white collar job was remote, he has been initiated into the work which Manikkan has been doing. Thus, the father and the son join together in fence making or assembling of bamboo thorn for the purpose.

Manikkan has a house of his own which he has purchased with the money he has saved. His mother still lives in the *Tarwad*. She is about 65

and attends to some odd jobs in order to earn her daily bread.

Manikkan is critical about the Government's attitude towards the Vettuvan. According to him, the well-to-do Vettuvan take away the lion's share of the facilities provided to their community. He pointed out that the educated Vettuvan approach the Government authorities to get all facilities for themselves while the uneducated ones are left uncared for. He feels that education would perhaps remove these disparities. He has, therefore, decided to continue the education of his four other children. Three of them are boys and one is a girl.

Regarding the social disabilities, Manikkan feels that since his childhood he was brought up in an atmosphere where he did not undergo the troubles, his father and grand father had. In his childhood his father used to narrate the disgrace they received at the hands of the higher castes. Today they can go to any barber's shop and get their hair dressed, enter any tea shop or hotel and eat food stuff sitting along with other members of the Hindu castes and there is absolutely no restriction in using public facilities. However, the Nambuthiri and Nayar would not like the Vettuvan to enter their houses. This, Manikkan hopes, would also be vanished soon.

Manikkan narrated the difference between the former days and the present days with regard to the facilities provided for worship at Vatappinni temple, an institution belonging to the Nayar of the area. In the former days, the Vettuvan were allowed to see the activities of the temple only from a distance. Today, they join the Nayar in celebrating the activities of the temple, though they are not allowed to enter the *sanctum sanctorum* of the temple. The Vettuvan of Panamukku celebrate the annual festival of Vattappini temple in cooperation with the Vettuvan of two other Desams, namely, Nedupuzha and Padukara.

3. Velayudhan

Velayudhan, aged 30, hails from Edathuruthi in Chavakkad Taluk of Trichur district, works as a clerk in the District Harijan Welfare Office, Trichur. He is still a bachelor which, according to him, is nothing new to his community. He says that in this area the normal marriageable age for men of his community is 25 years and that of women is approximately 20 years. Velayudhan passed the Secondary School Leaving Certificate examination from a school at Verunnam about 7 miles from his house.

His father is engaged in odd jobs such as fence making, agriculture labour, coconut plucking, etc. on daily wages. His father's brothers too are engaged in such odd jobs. He is the first person to change the traditional occupation in his family.

Karuppan, his father and Neeli his mother, are very happy over it.

Velayudhan has one brother and four sisters. His brother, Narayanan, and his sisters, Padmakshi, Sarojini, Nalini and Chandramati all lived together along with their parents in their ancestral house. The eldest of the four sisters who has studied up to 8th class has been married to a person who is a truck driver. She lives with her husband separately. The second daughter has studied up to 6th class and is yet to be given in marriage. The last two sisters are still studying, the elder in 9th class and the younger in 3rd class.

Velayudhan passed the S.S.L.C. examination in his 20th year and started searching for a job finally getting one after two years. His first assignment was in the Harijan Welfare Department itself but was posted to Ernakulam. He stays in a lodge and goes home on the week ends or on other holidays. Velayudhan states that at times he feels like asking his parents to leave their present occupation, but when he looks to the economic conditions of their family, he does not feel like doing so. He is interested in the amelioration of the community but feels sorry that he can not spare much time. He continues to be a member of the Vettuva association of his area.

He complains of the discrimination meted to the Vettuvan of his taluk. According to the President's order, Vettuvan of the former Travancore-Cochin area only are listed as Scheduled Castes. The Chavakkad taluk has been integrated with Trichur district from the erstwhile Malabar area and as such the Vettuvan of this taluk are not considered as Scheduled Caste. Velayudhan emphasised that Vettuvan of both the areas are one and the same and they inter-dine and inter-marry. He does not find any reason why the Vettuvan of Chavakkad taluk should not also be included under Scheduled Castes. The Kerala Government, he says, have, however, included the Vettuvan of this taluk under the list of eligible communities and as such they are entitled for some educational concessions normally allowed to Scheduled Castes. He urged that steps should be taken to remove this anomaly.

According to Velayudhan, by and large, this community is homogenous. Exceptions, however, in respect of inter-marriage with other communities are reported from different areas. He cited the example of one or two young educated men of his community who marry young educated Pulayan (Cheruman) girls who are employed in some government offices. Though there were difficulties in the beginning, these alliances have later been socially recognised.

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ANNEXURE

FRAMEWORK FOR ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

I. Name, Identity, Origin and History

1. Name, synonym, sub-caste/sub-tribe as in President's Order and as in other published sources such as Census reports, monographs etc. Grouping with other castes and tribes during various Censuses. Affinity with other castes and tribes according to recognised authorities.
2. Etymological significance of the name; names by which the community is referred to by (a) others and (b) itself.
3. Identification of the community by occupation or any other way of life.
4. Myths and legends connected with the origin and history of the community and its segments. Historical references and popular beliefs about history and migration of the community.

II. Distribution and Population Trend

1. Area where found; population and concentration in the State and outside. Physical aspects of the areas of concentration.
2. Numerical strength in 1961 and population variation from 1901—1961. Sex ratio, age-groups, and rural-urban distribution in 1961.

III. Physical Characteristics

1. Racial stock; appearance & affinity with other known communities.

IV. Family, Clan, Kinship and other Analogous Divisions

1. Family: size (observed & published), Types, residence after marriage, descent, lineage and its economic and religious function, and inheritance.
2. Clan/*gotra* and sub-clans; names, etymological meaning clustering of clans, belief and mythology about origin, status among clans, clan and regulation of marriage (preference and prohibition) occupation and clan, clan and rituals, clan and food (restrictions, prescriptions, etc.)
3. Others: Phratry, Dual organisation like moieties etc., as in 2 above.

V. Dwelling, Dress, Food, Ornament and Other Material Objects Distinctive of the Community

1. Settlement: Village site, location, settlement pattern (agglomerated, nucleated, dispersed, sprinkled, isolated, amorphous, star-shaped, horse-shoe-shaped, linear, rectangular, circular or ring-shaped, etc.) and variations; regional pattern vis-a-vis pattern of the community.
2. Neighbourhood pattern on the basis of religion, castes (Caste Hindu, untouchables) Tribes, etc., with segregations, if any, and the basis thereof.
3. Dwelling unit, compound, entrance, source of water, the use of different parts of the house (latrine, cattle shed, isolation huts, etc.). Shape (square, round, irregular, etc.) storyes, nature of floor, plinth, wall, roofing, thatching, ventilations and doors, materials used, decorations and embellishments, temporary structures.
4. Dress including head-gear and foot-wear—used ordinarily, on ceremonial occasions and special occasions, sex-wise and according to majority or minority. Dress of priests and office bearers, variations.
5. Ornaments: use, material used, from whom obtained, variations according to sex and age.
6. Personal decoration: tattooing; mutilations (chipping of teeth, etc.), hair cutting how done, purpose, attitude and variation according to sex and age.
7. Food and drink: materials (staple and others), Prescriptions and prohibitions fuel, utensils and mode of preparation; practices connected with serving and taking of food; preservation of food and rituals, if any.
8. Equipments connected with economic pursuits, religion and ritual; how procured, material used, construction, manipulation and purpose.
9. Other household equipments. As above.
10. Equipments connected with recording of time, space and weight and their methods of use.

VI. Environmental Sanitation, Hygienic Habits, Disease And Treatment

1. Environmental sanitation, settlement, disposal of night soil, garbage, etc.
2. Hygienic habit: cleanliness of body, teeth, dress, houses, utensils, etc.
3. Diseases: incidence, local names, interpretation of the causes: symptoms, diagnosis and cure—persons and methods involved.
4. Modern systems of medicine and attitude of the community towards it.

VII. Language & Literacy

1. Ancestral language: classification according to Grierson, persistence of ancestral language and literature.
2. Mother tongue: classification according to Grierson; bilingualism and multilingualism, regional language.
3. Information collected during 1961 on language and literature.
4. Education and literacy: Traditional and modern attitude, information collected during 1961—literacy and levels of education.

VIII. Economic Life

1. Economic resources: Land, community land, individual ownership and types of land possessed and land utilised.
2. Forest wealth; Flora and fauna; Nature and extent of right in the forest, forest utilization.
3. Fishery, Livestock and others.
4. Working force: Sex-wise, urban and rural variation and comparison of the same with the region.
5. Non-workers.
6. Industrial classifications: details as collected in the field and comparison with that of the 1961 Census figures traditional occupation and changes in the pattern; Main and subsidiary occupations.
7. Forced labour, bonded labour, client relationship (jajmani) payment.
8. Seasonal migration connected occupation: recruitment, formation of working groups.

9. Nomadic movement cycle and occupational pattern.
10. Shifting cultivation: method, implements and equipments, produce, participation, cycle of rotation, measures to regulate shifting cultivation and its impact.
11. Terrace cultivation: as above.
12. Income and expenditure: Sources of income, expenditure on food, clothing, house, education, social functions and others.
13. Other aspects of economic life.

IX. Life Cycle

A. Birth

1. Beliefs and practices connected with conception, barrenness, still birth, miscarriage, abortion, child death, regulation of sex, etc.
2. Pre-natal and natal practices: residence, diet, work, toboos, etc. delivery place, assistance, equipments used in delivery, position during delivery, severance of umbilical cord (who does and how done) disposal of placenta.
3. Post natal practices: Confinement and segregation, ceremonial pollution, diet for mother and child, rituals.
4. Protection and care of child and training.
5. Attitude towards birth of child: Preference about sex, preference about number, segregation of sex, etc.

B. Initiation

1. Initiation ceremony; descriptions.
2. Pre-marital sex relations within the community, outside the community, sanctions and taboos.

C. Marriage

1. Age at marriage for both sexes, prohibited degrees of relationship, preferences, widow remarriage (preferences and taboos).

Civil status and social status.

Types of marriage: monogamy, polygamy (Polyandry and polygyny).

4. Selection of spouse: qualities, valued for bride and groom, mode of selection, procedure.
5. Modes of acquiring mate: by negotiation, force, intrusion, elopement, etc.
6. Terms of settlement: Payment of bride price, dowry service, exchange, adoption, etc.
7. Ceremonies connected with marriage: details including who presides over the marriage and services of functional castes.
8. Statistical data as per 1961 Census.
9. Divorce: Reasons and procedure.

D. Death

1. Concept about death, measures to ensure future well being of the soul, measures to avert harm by the spirit.
2. Methods of disposal, burial, cremation, exposure, floating on water, etc.
3. Preparations for disposal of dead, informing friends and relatives, treatment of the dead body, digging of pit, etc. for disposal. How carried, who carry, who accompany, place of disposal, methods of disposal, norms and taboos.
4. Ceremonies connected with disposal.
5. Death rites: details.
6. Monuments: Tombs, megaliths, etc.
7. Pollution: duration, restrictions in work, food, dress, shaving, hair cropping, sex life, etc., removal of pollution.
8. Mourning: mourners and duration.

X. Religion

1. Deities: supreme deity, benevolent deities, malevolent spirits, presiding deities of village and other aspects of life including occupation, clans, *gotras*, etc.
2. Place of the deities in the regional pattern and Brahmanical and other traditions.
3. Rituals and concepts associated with the pantheon.
4. Spots associated with the deities, pilgrim centres and methods of worship.
5. Religious functionaries.

6. Calendar of festivals and their observance.
7. Concept of soul, hell, heaven, rebirth, trans-migration of soul, etc.
8. Sects and denominations: name, distribution, beliefs and practices, etc.
9. Statistical information.

XI. Leisure, Recreation & Child Play

1. Use of leisure time: (male, female, children and adult) seasonal variation in leisure time.
2. Recreation, their mode and extent, for males, females and children.
3. Leisure and recreation with reference to work.

XII. Relation among Different Segments of the community

Recognised Segments—name, basis (territorial, ceremonial, social, prestige, religion, sect, education, age, etc.). Inter-relationship among various segments, status of the segment, status of women.

XIII. Inter-community Relationship

1. Ceremonial relationship: Service by Brahmins, traditional service by castes like barbers, washermen, etc.
2. Pollution by touch or proximity to high caste Hindus, use of wells, admission to temple.
3. Secular relationship: model for other communities; dominance due to economic resources, political status, social status, etc.
4. Bridge role, buffer role, alliance and antagonism of the community.

XIV. Structure of Social Control, Prestige and Leadership

1. Social control: levels of Social control, community level, regional level, hereditary, special functionaries, etc., social control by other agencies.
2. Mode of acquiring offices.
3. Control exercised by traditionally recognised leaders, functionaries of statutory bodies of the region, powerful individuals belonging to the community, etc., at the regional level and local level.

4. Relationship between spheres of social control and agencies of social control.
5. Leadership: for social change, for technological change, for political action and for other organised activities in the community level, regional level and local level.
6. Social prestige: method of gaining social prestige (by performing ritual, merit of feast, associating with historical association, etc.) symbols of social prestige.

XV. Social Reform & Welfare

1. Social reform movements: intensity; reasons (for raising social status, establishing traditional norms, for westernisation, etc.) History and impact of the movements.
2. Social welfare: agency, religious organisation, community as a whole Govt., official and non-official Role of the Social Welfare measures and impact.

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