

CHAPTER I
I N T R O D U C T I O N

India is a land of immense variety, not only in its physical features, climate and natural resources, but also, and perhaps more so, in its people, languages and culture. People at various stages of civilization from the very primitive to the highly advanced, and of various racial ancestries from the Negrito to the Nordic are found in this vast sub-continent. Successive advents of peoples of highly varied cultural and racial types into the land for thousands of years, have forced the original inhabitants, and possibly some of the subsequent settlers, into the relative security and freedom of the forests and hinterland of the country. These peoples who are found all the way from north to south, and east to west, form the tribal population of India. No exact estimate of their numbers has ever been made, nor will it be possible, due to a variety of reasons. Census figures of tribes vary greatly from one Census to another, not so much due to natural demographic variations as to changing definitions and criteria in classifying peoples. The comparatively recent classification of a section of people as 'Scheduled Tribes' is a political, rather than strictly ethnographic,

classification. Equally misleading is the classification of people according to Religion, as for instance, Hindus and Animists, or Hindus and Tribals. Kingsley Davies says: "Most inaccurate figures on religion in India are those covering the 'Tribals' (or 'Animists' as they were called prior to the 1931 Census)."¹

There is considerable dove-tailing between the lower forms of Hinduism and the higher forms of tribal religion; so that, it is impossible to draw a line of demarcation. In point of fact, there is hardly any form of tribal religion in India in which all deities of the Hindu pantheon are totally absent. If we adopt a crude criterion in classifying peoples by religion, any person in India who is not a Muslim, a Christian, or the follower of some other religion that is quite distinct from Hinduism, is a Hindu.

In order to give a rough indication of the tribal population of India we may once again refer to Kingsley Davies.

1. Kingsley Davies, The Population of India and Pakistan. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 188.

TABLE I
DISTRIBUTION OF TRIBALS (INDIA)*

Year	Number(000's)	Percent of Population
1881	6,427	2.57
1891	9,112	3.26
1901	8,185	2.88
1911	9,594	3.17
1921	9,072	2.97
1931	7,630	2.26
1941	8,775	2.26

* Kingsley Davies, Population of India and Pakistan p. 191

The Census of India, 1951, affords further illustration of the confusion between 'Tribes' and 'Tribal religionists', as also of the growing tendency of peoples once classified as 'Tribals' to return themselves as Hindus. According to the 1951 Census, there are 19.1 millions of 'Scheduled Tribes' in a total population of 357 millions, or very nearly 5.3 per cent. At the same time, in the classification of peoples according to religion, there are only 1.7 millions, or 0.47 per cent who are classified as 'Tribals'.

not correct

The tribal population of India vary considerably in race and culture from one region to another. According to Guha, the aboriginal population of South India consists of a very small proportion of Negritos, and a large proportion of Proto-Australoids. Negrito ancestry is ascribed to the Kadars of Cochin and the hill Pulayans of Travancore and Cochin. The Irulas of Wyanad¹ show traces of Negrito element.² The same view appears to be held by Hutton also³. Further support for this view is given by Mr.L.A.Krishna Iyer, with evidence from Travancore. He writes:

The existence of a Negrito strain in the aboriginal population of South India has received additional evidence in Travancore. It has been observed by Lopicque and Dr.Guha among the Kadars and the Pulayans of the Cochin State, and by Dr.Hutton and myself among the Uralis and the Kanikkar. Spirally curved hair has been observed by me among the Uralis, the Kanikkar, the Malavetans, the Malapantarams, and the Vishavans. They are followed by the Proto-Australoid (Pre-Dravidian). This type is found among the aboriginal tribes of Central and Southern

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1. Mr.R.L.Rooksby who did field work among the Kurumbas in Wyanad informs me that there are no Irulas in Wyanad as far as he knows. There are some in the lower slopes of the Nilgiris and in the Attappadi Valley.(P.T.T)
 2. B.S.Guha, "Racial Elements in the Population", Oxford Pamphlets on Indian Affairs, No.22 (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1944), pp. 9 et seq
 3. cf.J.H.Hutton, Caste in India (Cambridge: The University Press, 1946), p.7.

India, and is closely allied to the Veddahs of Ceylon, the Toalals of Celebes, and the Sakais of the Malay Peninsula. The Malavetans, the Muthuvans, the Kanikkar, and others may be regarded as representatives of this group.

At present there are no distinctly Negrito communities in India, nor has any trace of a Negrito language been discovered. But distinctly Negrito features not only crop up continually from the Himalayan slopes to Cape Comorin, but also abound in great megalithic monuments which help us to some extent to unravel the history of their remote past. The observations of Dr. Hutton, Dr. Guha and myself go to show that Negrito features crop up among the Kadars and the Pulayans of the Cochin State, and the Uralis, the Malapantarams, the Kanikkars and the Vishavans of Travancore.

It is interesting to point out that megalithic monuments are largely found on the High Ranges of Travancore. Dolmens, menhirs and alignments are found in the region of the Uralis, the Mannans, the Malayarayans, and other jungle tribes of Travancore. Mr. Perry points out that, all the world over, megalithic monuments exhibit such similarities of structure that they must have been the work of a people showing a common culture. It is also worthy of notice that the reality of a stone-using people is evidenced by the use of stones for graves by some of the hill tribes even now. The dead are buried and a stone is planted at the head and the foot of the grave by the Uralis, the Muthuvans, the Mannans and the Malayarayans.

Systematic excavations still await the spade of the archaeologist in Travancore. Ward and Conner made the earliest of excavations in the State. According to them, all the tumuli appear to be of a period earlier than the Iron Age. Mr. Bourdillon once picked up a bronze lamp from one of the tumuli. No skeletal remains have been so far unearthed to bear any direct evidence of the Negrito race in Travancore. Judged by the nature and contents of the objects found, the

megalithic remains of the Deccan and South India are said to reveal a uniform culture, and it is considered that the megalithic remains of Southern India are Post-Vedic and later than any similar remains of the Central Indian plateau, from whence the culture would seem to have spread southwards While 'Pre-Dravidian' is their time-honoured appellation, Dr. Eickstadt would call them 'Weddid' and Dr. Guha, 'Nishadic'. Dr. Hutton has labelled them 'Proto-Australoid' after Sewell.¹

The above observations on the tribal population of India are meant to be no more than a brief introductory background to the place of Muthuvans, the subject of this study, in the general tribal population of India. The question as to which is tribal population and which is not need hardly be touched here. It would appear that the beliefs of the Muthuvans themselves regarding their origin counter the arguments for classifying them as a tribe because it is claimed that they were originally part of the peasantry of Tamilian South India. However, the fact remains that they are classified as hill tribes and that they manifest a tribal organization in their social structure. They may, therefore, be treated as a tribe.

Muthuvans are largely confined to the former Travancore State of South India. In order to understand them more fully, it will be necessary to add a note on the tribal population of the State. For statistics and

1. L.A. Krishna Iyer, The Travancore Tribes and Castes (Trivandrum: Travancore Government Press, 1941), Vol. III, pp.47 et seq

general description of the tribes, one has to depend on the State Census Reports, and on brief accounts appearing in other publications, as systematic studies on them have hardly been made. In common with aboriginal populations all over India, the Travancore tribes increasingly tend to consider themselves Hindus. Apart from this, large numbers are being absorbed into the general Hindu population as a result of migrations and change of occupation. Therefore, Census figures are only approximate indications of the tribal populations of the State. In this connection, it would be worthwhile to consider the views of the Census Commissioner of Travancore for the Census of India, 1941, regarding the tribes of Travancore:

Before 1901 tribal religionists had been grouped along with the Hindus. In the last four Censuses they were recorded separately, their number being, however, found steadily to decrease each time. In 1921 they numbered 12,637, but in 1931 only 2,907 persons returned themselves under tribal religion, though the numerical strength of the total tribal population was 128,838. The rest had obviously been absorbed partly in the Hindu and partly in the Christian fold, as is evidenced by the fact that in the present Census 97 per cent of the Tribes have returned themselves as Hindus, the rest as Christians, and none under any tribal religion whatever. The complete disappearance of the Tribal religionists is due to their gradual

* (It is not stated how this figure was arrived at
~~in Table III~~ In Table III on P. 13, the population of Tribes in 1931 is stated to be 128,843. No explanation is available to reconcile the difference of 5. P.T.T.)

absorption into the major religions. Development of easy means of communication resulting in increasing migration and settlement of the Tribes in plains has considerably facilitated this process. The inclusion of the Tribes among the Hindus in the Census operations of the last century as well as their actual absorption into the Hindu fold in vast numbers in recent years might have been due to the close affinity of tribal forms of worship to Hindu rituals. The polytheistic conception underlying the tribal religion was essentially Hindu in character. Naturally enough, the Pulaya, the Muthuvan, the Malayarayan, the Mannan and the Kanikkaran, originally worshipping some indefinable power or spirit supposed "to reside in the primeval forest, in the crumbling hills, in the rushing river or in the spreading tree", slowly took to the more refined aspects of popular Hinduism and accepted as titular deities, Sastha, Subramonya, Kali, or Meenakshi, Gods and Goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, who are often associated with hills and forests. In the later stages of evolution, when the idea of religion took a more concrete shape, proselytising them into other faiths must have become easy. In the discussions that follow, therefore, tribal religion is not given separate consideration, since of the 132,682 persons enumerated under Tribes, 129,081 have returned themselves as Hindus, and 3,601 as Christians.¹

This further shows the confusion between 'Tribals' and 'Tribal religionists' which has already been referred to. The question whether or not a person stops being a 'Tribal' on change of faith, is open to dispute. In most instances, conversion to Islam or Christianity entails loss of membership of the tribe: the convert is outcasted.

1. A. Narayanan Tambi, "Travancore", Census of India, 1941, Vol. XXV (Trivandrum: Travancore Government Press, 1942) Part I, pp. 123 et seq.

But from 'Tribal religion' to Hinduism cannot be considered a change of faith, only an improvement in nomenclature. The term 'Tribal religion' is itself confusing because it does not lend itself to definition. After all, the so-called 'Tribal religion' is only a lower form of Hinduism which itself is hard to define. For our purpose, it would perhaps be best to disregard the 'religious' classification, and consider only the ethnological classification.

It is impossible to get comparative figures for the various tribes from one decade to another in recent times because no two Censuses since 1928 give figures for all tribes. From an examination of all the decennial Censuses of Travancore from 1881 onwards, it is seen that the most detailed Census statistics of Tribes is contained in the 1931 Report. The 1881 Census mentions only four tribes, whereas the 1891 Census mentions six. In 1901, the number of tribes listed rose from six to fourteen, but fell to thirteen in 1911 and remained the same in 1921. The 1931 Census gives figures for fifteen tribes. By 1941, however, the number decreased to twelve. The Census of 1941 is the last Census for Travancore as a separate State. In 1949, Travancore and the adjacent State of Cochin were merged to form the United State of

Travancore-Cochin.* The 1951 Census is therefore the Census of Travancore-Cochin. This would not have seriously affected the figures of population changes of tribes, if only detailed figures were available, because the dispersion of the tribes across the former boundaries of the two States is insignificant. However, the 1951 Census omitted the detailed enumeration of each individual tribe, and gave only combined figures for all 'Scheduled Tribes' within each of the four administrative divisions of the State. Besides, of the fifteen groups mentioned as Tribes in the 1931 Census, only eight were included as such in the 1951 Census. Four have been split according to habitat and included partly under 'Scheduled Castes'. It seems that the criterion adopted in dividing a tribe and including it partly under one category and partly under another is whether the portions concerned continued to live in the hills or migrated to the plains. The former were included under 'Scheduled Tribes', and the latter under 'Scheduled Castes'. The remaining three were either merged with like groups or listed under

* Since this was written, the States Reorganization Act of the Government of India came into force whereby the Malayalam-speaking areas of the West Coast including most of Travancore-Cochin, the former Malabar district of Madras State, and a portion of South Canara district, formed the Kerala State.

different names. The following table shows the distribution of 'Scheduled Tribes' by administrative divisions, sex and habitat according to the Census of 1951.

TABLE II
POPULATION OF SCHEDULED TRIBES
IN TRAVANCORE-COCHIN, 1951.*

<u>District</u> 1	<u>Persons</u> 2	<u>Males</u> 3	<u>Females</u> 4	<u>Rural</u> 5	<u>Urban</u> 6
TRAVANCORE-COCHIN	26,580	14,148	12,432	26,118	462
Trivandrum	7,721	4,115	3,606	7,563	131
Quilon	3,008	1,538	1,470	2,839	169
Kottayam	11,110	5,627	5,483	11,034	76
Trichur	4,741	2,868	1,873	4,655	86

* U.Sivaraman Nair, "Travancore-Cochin," Census of India, 1951, Vol. XIII (Delhi: Government of India Publications Branch, 1953) Part II, p.254 (I have ascertained that this Table has been reproduced exactly as in the original source; but there are some apparent disparities for which no explanation was available. The total of Column 5 must be 26,091. Similarly the total of Rural and Urban for Trivandrum must be ~~131~~ 7,694.P.T.T.)

An examination of the comparative figures for the population of tribes in Travancore according to the Censuses of 1931 and 1941 will be more rewarding. These two Censuses are crucial for any discussion of tribes in Travancore. The 1931 Census, listing as it does the largest number of individual tribes, appears to be the

most comprehensive survey; the 1941 Census, being the last pre-merger Census of Travancore is also the last Census of tribes in the State. (See p. 13 for Table)

In the 1941 Census no person has been returned as Malankudi, Malapulayan or Thantapulayan. However, the classification of Tribes remained the same as in the 1931 Census. In the words of the Census Commissioner (1941) of the State:

The Table corresponds to Table XVIII of the 1931 Census.

The classification of Tribes is the same as that adopted in 1931. Of the 132,682 persons returned under tribes, 129,081 are Hindus and 3,601 are Christians. No one has been returned under tribal religion. In the enumeration of tribes in the 1941 Census, it is found that no one has returned himself as Malankudi, Malapulayan or Thantapulayan, a classification which existed in the 1931 Census.¹

The most exhaustive account so far available of the tribal population of Travancore, is Mr.L.A.Krishna Iyer's Travancore Tribes and Castes, published in three volumes between the years 1937 and 1941, during his tenure of office as Officer in charge of the Ethnographic Survey of Travancore. Mr.Krishna Iyer appears to have followed the classification of 1931. The geographical distribution of tribes by natural divisions is given below, following

1. A.Narayanan Tambi, op.cit., p. 86

TABLE III

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION OF TRAVANCORE TRIBES,
1931 & 1941*

	<u>Tribes</u>	<u>Locality</u>	<u>1931</u>	<u>Population</u> <u>1941</u>	<u>Variation</u>
(a) 1.	Kanikkaran	Trivandrum Divn.	6,659	7,527	868
(b) 2.	Kuravan	Quilon	95,295	99,209	3,914
3.	Malankudi	Kottayam	166	-	-166
4.	Malapentarem	Quilon	187	176	-11
5.	Malapulayan	Kottayam	254	-	-254
6.	Mala-Urali	Trivandrum	916	41	-875
7.	Malayarayan	Kottayam	3,187	2,739	-443
8.	Mannan	"	1,276	1,372	96
9.	Muthuvan	"	1,301	1,931	630
10.	Neyadi	"	144	75	-69
11.	Paliyan	Quilon	483	591	108
12.	Thantapuleyan	Kottayam	795	-	-795
13.	Ullatan	Quilon	5,121	4,987	-134
14.	Vetan	Kottayam	11,737	11,667	-70
15.	Vettuvan	Kottayam	1,322	2,367	1,045
		Total	128,843 ^(c)	132,682	3,839

(a) Includes Malavelan
(b) " Malankuravan and Malayadiyan
(c) " Malavetan

* From A. Narayanan Tambi, "Travancore", Census of India, 1941, Part I, Table xiv
(To identify 'Locality' see map of Travancore on p. 13)

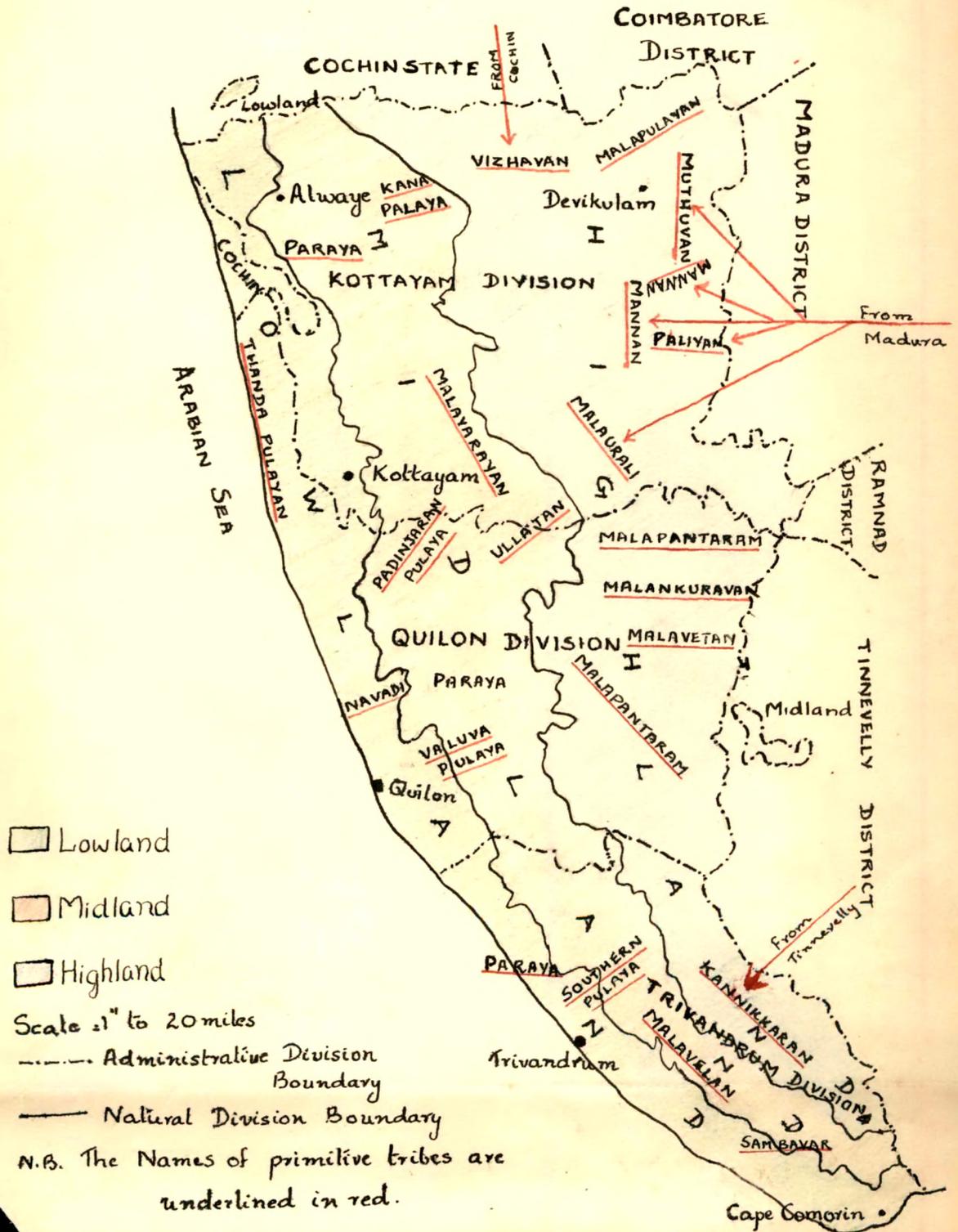
② See foot note on p. 7

FIG. 2

MAP OF TRAVANCORE
Showing the Geographical Distribution and the
Past Migration of Primitive Tribes
(Acknowledgement to Mr.L.A.Krishna Iyer)

MAP OF TRAVANCORE

Showing the Geographical Distribution
and the past migration
of Primitive Tribes



Mr. Krishna Iyer.¹

A. Highland (Hill tribes)

1. Kanikkar in the forests of Vilavancode, Nyyattinkara, Nedumangad, Pathanapuram, Shencotta and Kottarakara taluks.*
2. Malapantarams scattered in the higher reaches of the Pamba and Achenkoil rivers, and at Thalapara and Kannupalli of the Shencotta taluk.
3. Uralis in Peermade and Thodupuzha taluks.
4. Paliyans in Peermade taluk.
5. Mannans on the Cardamon Hills to the south of Panniyar river in the Peermade and Devikulam taluks.
6. Muthuvans on the Kannan Devan and Cardamom Hills in the High Range Division.
7. Malapulayas in Anjanad in Devikulam taluk.
8. Malankudi or Vishavans in the Idiyara Valley of north Travancore.

B. Highland and Midland

9. Malevetans in the taluks of Pathanamthitta, Pathapuram, Nedumangad, Chirayinkil and Neyyathinkara.
10. Malankuravans in south, central and north Travancore, in the Highland and Midland regions.

C. Midland

11. Malayerayans in the Ranni Reserve Forest of

1. L.A. Krishna Iyer, op. cit., p. 2 et seq

* A taluk is a revenue sub-division. The whole state is divided into 30 taluks. [P.T.T.]

Changanacherry taluk, and in Minachil and Thodupuzha taluks.

12. Ullatans in the midland region of Ranni Reserve forests.

13. Parayas in Thovala, Agastiswaram, Eraniel, Kunnathur and Kunnathunad taluks, and in the Cardamom Hills.

D. Midland and lowland

14. Pulayas in all taluks north of Nanjanad.

15. Nayadis in Karunagapalli taluk and north Travancore.

Each tribe has a tradition of its own concerning its origin. It is interesting that some of these traditions, such as those of the Ullatan and Paraya, seek to claim Brahminical descent of the tribe. The Kanikkar, Mannan, Muthuvan, Urali and Paliyan believe that they originally belonged to the Tamil country whence, for various alleged reasons, they migrated to the Travancore Hills. Among these non-indigenous tribes, the Kanikkar are believed to have come from Tinnevely district, and the other four from Madura district. However, the people of the plains have their own theories about the origin of the tribes, ascribing the colonization of the hills to sage Agastya who came from the north.

It is said that sage Agastya repaired to Dwaraka (Tamil, Tuvarupathi) and taking with him eighteen kings of the line of Sri Krishna, eighteen families of Vels or Velirs, and others, moved to the south with the Aruvalar tribes who appear to have been the remnants of the

Kurumbas. The Kurumbas appear to be the remnants of a great and widespread people, who erected the dolmens, and form one of the pre-Dravidian tribes of South India. Agastya had the forests cleared and built kingdoms settling there the people he brought with him. This migration is said to have taken place about 1075 B.C. Popular tradition supports the theory of Agastya's conquest of South India. The foot-prints of Agastya in his adventurous journey to the south are said to be visible at various places and the stages of his travels are marked by the little Asramas (hermitages) he set upon his way. The Travancorean holds in great veneration the Agastyar peak, where Agastya is said to live even today, and his image is installed and worshipped at the Olakarivu waterfall on the Asambu hills in Thovala taluk, at Marutuamala near Cape Comorin, at Nagercoil, and other places. The adventures of Agastya are relevant to the extent that he is said to have played a conspicuous part in reclaiming primeval forests in southern India and making them fit for human habitation. Even to this day, the Kanikkar of South Travancore curse their enemies by swearing by Agastya, and make annual offerings to him at Agastyar peak.

The Epic and Puranic legends contain traditions relating to the physical characters of the aborigines (Nishadas). The Bhagavata Purana describes the Nishada as black like crows, very low-statured, short-armed, having high cheek bones, low topped nose, red eyes, and copper-coloured hair. His descendants are distributed over the hills and forests. The Anamalai Hills in southern India form the refuge of a whole series of broken tribes. They are characterised by dark hair, short stature, and broad nose. Since the physical features of the Puranic Nishadas indicate their affinities to the so-called pre-Dravidians, Mr. Chanda considers the short-statured and broad-nosed jungle tribes as the modern Nishadas representing the old Nishada race. 1

1. Ibid, pp. 29 et seq

The earliest recorded Census of Travancore was taken about the year 1820, according to which, only 2,761 are returned as hill tribes. A much larger number, 98,974, are returned as predial slaves. Lieutenants Ward and Conner, in their Memoir of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States (1816-1820), devotes some attention to the castes and tribes of these States. This is one of the earliest accounts of its nature; for that reason, and also in view of the fact that it is not possible to obtain the Memoir at present, except in a very few libraries, it is thought worthwhile to quote in full their general remarks on the hill-tribes.

A few wild but inoffensive mountaineers share amongst them the whole of the hilly parts. It is difficult to fix their total, but they are not numerous. Influenced by all the prejudices of caste, they are divided into several distinct tribes, who have little intercourse with each other, but their character is similar, or only distinguished by minute shades; it partakes of the rude wilderness of their hills, but is in no instance ferocious. Though living in clans, they know little of that union and attachment that belongs to such an association. Each society has its petty chiefs; most of them owe general allegiance to the Rajahs of Fundalum and Puniatu; caprice leads them to occasionally transfer their fealty called Mopen to the South Kunnsecar, whose authority rather domestic than despotic, is willingly submitted to. Their mode of life too is everywhere the same, subsistence being chiefly derived from the spontaneous produce of the wilderness through which they roam. The spoils of the chase (of which they often rob the chennai) yields a precarious addition, and the collection of hill products

affords the means of obtaining the few coarse luxuries suitable to their taste. Wicker-work (made from the bamboos) in which they are very ingenious, is the only art they practise. They are not exempt from the fever common to the hills, but are in general hardy and endure privation with stoicism - a virtue that the wretchedness of their situation too often calls into action. Of migratory habits, they move about in small hordes, necessity alone leads them to the inhabited parts where no inducement could persuade them permanently to remain. In their rambling tours, they carry a staff or pike, a knife stuck in the girdle, and sometimes bows and arrows, for they have no fire-arms: a basket slung at the shoulders contain some few necessary utensils, and followed by their dogs and women, the latter loaded with the younger children and other impediments of the family, they wander from one place to another as caprice or convenience may dictate. Their huts are soon erected, often on rocks or trees, a security against tigers and elephants - their fellow occupants of the woods, with whom they share or dispute possession: conversing amongst themselves they are unintelligible to those from the inhabited parts; this however only arises from the dissonant sound conveyed by their harsh and abrupt utterance. Each tribe is intimately well acquainted with the tract, considered particularly its own, and on whose precincts they do not admit encroachments: they trace as by instinct its devious paths, and decide with almost unerring certainty on the number and variety of animals that may have lately traversed them. They are restrained, or confine themselves to one wife or mistress, often their niece - a connection aimed at securing the purity of the race: the offspring in most cases is considered as belonging to the mother; their superstitions are said to have a favourable influence on their morality, but the women subject to every species of hardship and drudgery, can have but little leisure or disposition to be incontinent. Their dress only differs from that of the Nairs, in covering the upper part of the person with an abundance of cloth, but it is an equivocal benefit, cleanliness being in this instance sacrificed to decorum, as convenience is to ornament, in encumbering the ears with pendants and loading the neck with countless strings of

beads, decorations little adapted to their vagrant mode of life. They are haunted by a variety of superstitions; large tracts of forests sacred to some ideal spirit: however great the temptations their productions might offer are scrupulously avowed by them; some regard the head with particular veneration, and will not carry any burthen on it. Women under certain circumstances, or when parturient, are objects whose approach or contact is dreaded; in the latter case they are removed to a hut some distance from the village being supposed to pollute it by their presence, and the event trusted to the unaided operations of nature. These mountaineers are small in person, often of a meagre appearance, but have the usual Hindoo lineaments except the Cowders (Kadar), whose flattened nose, robust make, dark complexion, occasionally curly hair, and large white teeth, filed into the form of a saw (some other classes of hill people observe a similar practice) give them an African appearance, though their features are by no means so harsh.)¹

It is remarkable how little the hill tribes have changed in their customs, manners, beliefs and ways of life in the hundred-and-thirty-odd years that have gone by since the time of the survey by Ward & Conner. Their description of the hill tribes would apply with little change to present-day conditions, especially in areas where tea or other plantation industries have not noticeably come in the way of the pursuits and livelihood of the hill tribes. The Rev. Samuel Mateer of the London Missionary Society, who spent many years in Travancore during the

1. Ward and Conner, "Memoir of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States," (1816-1820): Heber Drury (ed) Selections from the Records of Travancore (Trivandrum: His Highness the Rajah's Press, 1860), pp. 137 et seq

latter half of the nineteenth century, has left a short account of hill tribes in his Native Life in Travancore. A few extracts from his account of hill tribes are given below for the interest they hold as materials for comparative reference, as well as for their scarcity value as descriptions of the hill tribes of a past generation.

The hill men proper number close upon 12,000; and Ulladars, a hunting caste, 2,829. The Vedars are scarcely mountaineers, being found rather at the foot of the hills, and in a social condition very similar to that of the Pulayars. These hill people are most numerous in Neyattinkara district, where fully a fourth of their whole number are found; the others are scattered over the mountains north and south of this centre.

These remarkable people are very rude and primitive in manners, and are generally regarded as the aborigines of the country. Bishop Caldwell, however, considers that they are not, like the Tudas (Todas) of the Neilgherries, (Nilgiris) the surviving representatives of the earliest inhabitants of the plains, but, like the hill tribes of the Pulneys, the descendants of some Hinduised low-country people who were driven to the hills by oppression, or who voluntarily migrated thither.

.....

The hill men will not eat with Shanars or Illavars (Ezhavas), or still lower castes, but will take food cooked by Sudras (Nairs). They do not eat the wild ox or buffalo, nor the grey or Hanuman monkey, but only the black species. They gather wild honey in the clefts of rocks and branches of trees, and bring it home, or for sale, in joints of bambu. Being great smokers of tobacco, which they grow for their own consumption, they stop work frequently when employed on estates in weeding or clearing, to indulge in a smoke.

Till recently, none possessed wealth in coin, only hatchets, billhooks, knives, hoes and other tools. Their trap for the wildboar and tiger are made with rough timber supported on a spring which falls and lets down the whole weight upon the animal's back. They have no weapons, but are very ingenious at wickerwork or bambu, rattan and reed. Their circumstances have greatly improved of late wherever coffee estates have been opened and worked; but those who are unwilling to take work are driven further into the hills in search of fresh lands. 'The fate of the hill-Kings', says Mr. Honiss, 'is rather sad. For ages past they have boasted of being the undisputed lords of the primeval forests. The elephant and tiger were their only foes; but with snares and traps they could hold their own against these enemies. But they could not resist the onward march of a superior race. The planter approaches them in a peaceable way, offering wages for their hire, but demanding as his right the land he has purchased. The proud men of the woods decline to herd with coolies, and work like common people. As soon as the planter's axe is heard, the hill-kings pack their traps and desert their homes to establish themselves in another valley. In this way they have been driven from hill to hill and from valley to valley, until some have found now a safe resting place in the dense jungles of the lowlands of Travancore. If the planter wishes to penetrate some unexplored jungle, or cut a path in some out-of-the-way place, the hill men are ready to assist, and it is the universal testimony that they are more faithful to their engagement than their more civilized brethren from the plains. 1

In order to complete this description of the hill tribes of Travancore at various periods of time between approximately 1800 and 1900, with reference to available literature on them, we may also add a note on "The Hill

1. Samuel Mateer, Native Life in Travancore (London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1883), pp. 63 et seq.

Tribes of Travancore", which appears as appendix II of an administration report of Travancore Forest Department by a European Conservator of Forests who, previous to attaining that position, appears to have been the Deputy Conservator of Forests in the State, and had been deputed to make an exploration of the forests of the State. An old copy of this report, with many pages in the beginning and in the end missing, came into my hands some time ago. It was not possible to find the name of the author, or the date of publication of the report, but it appears to have been published in 1891 or 1892. Fortunately, the appendix on hill tribes is available in full. Being a report by a Forest Department official engaged on the special task of exploring and reporting on the forests, its sections on hill tribes, though brief, is a correct, first-hand account. For this reason it is particularly valuable as a general description of the hill tribes at the end of the last century.

The hill men of Travancore number between 8,000 and 10,000 persons, who live scattered through the forests of the State from the extreme south to the confines of Cochin. Preferring those parts of the country which are least inhabited and therefore abound in game, they retire before the approach of civilization and are to be found most numerous where the absence of competition gives them greater freedom and more room to carry out their cultivation. At the same time they like to be within reach of bazaars where they can procure salt, cloths and

knives, and other necessaries in exchange for forest produce.

These peoples are divided into 12 or 14 tribes who live apart, and whose members do not intermarry with those of other tribes. Each tribe or clan has a certain tract of country which is considered to belong to it, and even each village of a tribe has its land allotted to it, and no one would dare to encroach on the land assigned to another clan or another village without permission. Thus the Uralies and Mannans look on the Periyar as the line of demarcation between them, the former living to the west and the latter to the east of that river, save where in one or two places each clan has allowed the other to clear land on its side of the river for temporary occupation.

Though split up into so many tribes these hillmen probably sprang from two or at most three sources. The Kanies, Malayadayars, Kochivalens, Hill Pandarams, Uralies, Vishavans, Ulladans and Kadars are dark-skinned, and many of them have short noses and thick lips and possess African features. It is probable, therefore, that they are descended from the original inhabitants of the country, and that their ancestors took refuge in the forests to escape being reduced to slavery like their Pulleyar (Pulayan) congeners. The Arayans are, as far as my observation goes, fairer-skinned and more intelligent, and they are possibly descended from a superior race, a supposition which is borne out by the fact that the Hill Pandarams owe a sort of allegiance to them. All these tribes speak Malayalam.

The Muthuvans, Mannans and Palliyar(Paliyan), on the other hand, speak a language much more like Tamil than Malayalam, and they have admittedly immigrated from the Tamil country to the Travancore hills at a comparatively recent date. Moreover they intermarry with the Tamils of the plains even at the present time.

As regards appearance, the Muthuvans, who claim superiority over all other tribes are

probably the tallest, and have the best features of all, with aquiline noses, beards and moustachios. The Mannans and Palliyar have, as a rule, little hair on their faces, but they are pleasant looking, bright and quick. I have not come much in contact with the Arayans, but the other tribes are quieter and slower, just as the Malayalee is more leisurely in his movements than the Tamil.

The men of these hill tribes are often very sturdily built and muscular, from the abundance of food they obtain and the healthy lives they lead, though often living in unhealthy localities. This is especially the case with the Kadars and Kanies (Kanikkars). Their senses are, from constant use, keenly developed, and they can hear sounds and see objects which other people would not notice. For the same reason they can bear fatigue, and endure hunger and thirst, more readily than natives from the low country.

The numbers of the various hill tribes are probably decreasing. This we know to be the case in some cases. For instance there were not long ago five or six camps of Mannans to the south of Kumili, whereas now there are only two; On the other hand, the Palliyar of the Cardamom Hills are increasing.

Smallpox carries away many, and it is rare to see an old man. When this scourge does appear they generally leave the sick to take care of themselves, with a little food handy, and themselves move away to some other place, hoping thereby to escape the contagion. Cholera also sometimes appears, and fever carries off a certain number. As they have no medicines to counteract the effects of these diseases nature just takes her course, and the mortality is great.

With the exception of Kadars who can scarcely be said to be hill men of Travancore, as they live more often in British territory of Cochin, and the Hill Pandarams, all the tribes

clear land and raise crops of paddy or ragi, as the case may be. In addition to these grains, they grow plantains, tapioca, pumpkins of various kinds, yams and chillies, so that, as a general rule, they are very well off. Unless some accident happens, the supply of grains which is carefully stored in granaries or in huts in trees, lasts till the next crop, but if the quantity is insufficient, the hill men go out and dig for yams and other roots, or collect the fruit of various trees, though it cannot be said that any of them are very pleasant to eat.

All the hill men eat fish, which they catch by nets, by lines or by poisoning. The Uralies who live near the Periyar are especially clever fishermen. The flesh of most animals is acceptable to them, and some of them have a particular liking for that of the large black monkey (Simnopithecus johnii), but with the exception of some Kanies and Arayans, none of them will eat, or even touch, the flesh of the bison. The hill men often possess guns, but some of the Kanies still use the bow and arrow.

Besides the grain they grow, most of the hill tribes raise a little bhang and tobacco, the leaves of which they dry and smoke, but as they do not know how to prepare them they are always very glad to get any properly cured tobacco that may be offered them. Many of them are sadly addicted to the use of opium, which they have got into the habit of taking to alleviate pain, or to mitigate the bad effects of fever.

The hill men are as a rule truthful, and much more reliable than men from the low country. From living such a free and easy life they are independent, and do not like to be driven. They have therefore to a certain extent to be humoured. They are said to be very moral, and most of them make a point of sending away their women folk on the arrival of any stranger at a village. The Mannans are less particular. They are good-tempered

and easily pleased, and they may often be heard shouting with laughter at the anecdotes or remarks of some of their number.

For a person travelling from place to place and not staying long at any one spot it is not easy to collect much information about the religion of the hillmen. They seem to worship some beneficent Deity, who is supposed to inhabit one of the neighbouring hills, and whose favour they are desirous of retaining, but they pay more attention to mitigating the anger of malignant demons who are supposed to be ever on the watch to do them harm. Thus as I was travelling once on the Cardamom Hills, I wanted to gather the fruit of the common Hill Cycas (*Cycas circinalis*) when a Mannan stopped me, and said that one of their number had once eaten some of the fruit there and got very ill after it, so that a demon must live in that place. On another occasion I wished to enter a patch of forest on the crest of the Kalicani-para ridge, but I could get no one to follow me. I was told as a reason, that once on a time a Mannan had entered the same bit of forest and had never been seen again and that this forest was haunted by a very powerful demon to whom they made yearly sacrifices

.....*
among the Muthuvans, and Mannans, and perhaps some others the headship is hereditary, and here perhaps the office carries with it more power, the headman among the Kanies being nothing more than the leader. Each village is independent of the others, save perhaps among the tribes mentioned, who often owe some sort of allegiance to one particular headman, thus the Muthuvans of all the Neriamangalam hills look on Baka Muthuvan as their chief, and the Mannans of the Cardamom Hills are nominally under the head of the Varakil Mannans.

As the cultivation carried on by the hill men is not permanent, they are obliged to change their homes at short intervals. Where the soil is fertile, they remain perhaps two or three years in one place, sowing grain one year, and then obtaining a crop of tapioca or plantains the next year from the same land. Most of the tribes move every year, clearing a bit of forest

* A couple of lines missing here.

in January, reaping the grain in September and clearing another piece of forest the following year. As the changes are so frequent it is not worthwhile for them to build permanent houses, their homes are therefore constructed merely of reeds very neatly put up, and generally clean, which last just one year. Some of the tribes prefer to have their huts of small size scattered about their clearings, each family occupying a separate building, but others, like the Mannans, build one or two large houses with many rooms in one central place. The Kanies vary their cultivation and thus remain several years in one spot, and they have in many places planted jack, arecanut and other fruit-bearing trees, the produce of which they sell in the bazaars, but their huts are all temporary.

The Arayans alone build more permanent homes, always selecting some steep hillslope away from elephant tracks. Here they terrace the hillside, build houses with mud walls, and plant useful trees around them, but they shift their cultivation from spot to spot in the neighbourhood.

As regards clothing, most of the tribes living on the lower slopes of the hills wear little else but the loin-cloth, but the Mannans and still more the Muthuvans, whose homes are in a colder climate, wear heavier upper clothes as well, and are glad to get coats or blankets.

All the hillmen are expert trackers, and from their knowledge of the country, the facility with which they use their knives in clearing paths, and their endurance they are invaluable as guides to any one travelling in the forests. They are also much in request for running up huts, which they do in a surprisingly short time. The Forest Department employ them also to collect ivory, dammer, and cardamoms, and are entirely dependent on them for getting wax and honey from the lofty trees and precipices on which the bees swarm.

Though these hill tribes have many characteristics in common, they really differ

from each other very considerably, thus the Uralies are better cultivators than the others and know much more about trees, while the Palliyar(Paliyans) are better sportsmen. The most curious tribe is that of the Hill Pandarams. They live on the fruit of the Cycas, on fish, and fruit, and the pith of the sago palm, and on any roots they can dig up. They do not clear land nor sow paddy, and they live generally in caves. They are exceedingly timid and no inducement can make them come out and show themselves.

The following is an estimate of their numbers beginning from South Travancore.

Kanies from the South up to the Chentroni valley

On the Palli and Parali rivers	11 villages..	300 person
On the Kotha river	22 "	400 "
On the Ney "	22 "	400 "
On the Karumana "	14 "	300 "
On the Vamanapuram "	8 "	300 "
On the Kalleda river	3 "	300 "
		2,000

Palliyar(Paliyan)

On the Kalleda and
Acchankovil rivers 2 villages .. 50 persons

Malayadyar(Malankuravan)

On the Kakkad(Rani) river
near Nanattapara 30 "

Hill Pandarans

On the Bamba river (Rani) 3 or 4 gangs 100 "

Kochivalans

On the Valiyar (Rani) 2 villages 50 "

Ulladans

On the Palayi river 100 "

Arayans

Scattered along the foot of the hills in numerous camps from the Valiyar to Thodupuzha 4,000 persons

Vishavans (Malenkudi)

At the foot of the hills on the Periyar, 3 gangs 50 "

Uralies

On the hills to the west of the Periyar, 23 villages 700 "

Palliyar (Paliyan)

On the Cardamom Hills near Vandamettu, 3 " 200 "

Mannans on the hills east of the Periyar up to the foot of the High Range 2 " 70 persons

1. Sundra Pandya Mannans,

2. Varakil Mannans (including Udamanshola) 12 " 600 "

3. Lower Periyar Mannans 2 " 100 "

4. Kovar Mannans 1 " 50 "

820 "

Muthuvans

1. Baka Muthuvans to the west of High Range 200

2. Santhapara Muthuvans to the south of H.R. 100

3. Devikolam Muthuvans on the H.R. 100

4. Anjinada Muthuvans to the east of H.R. 400

800

Total

8,900 "

These rather lengthy quotations from other works were thought justifiable on account of their value in presenting an overall picture of hill tribes in Travancore at various periods of time. What is perhaps more important is the fact that the works from which these descriptions were obtained have long been out of currency and are hard to get at in most libraries. For this reason too it was thought worthwhile to reproduce the descriptions when the writer got access to them in the India Office Library in London. It is not claimed that all that has been written (and quoted here) is ethnographically correct; but it may be assumed that they have an undisputed value as background information regarding hill tribes. What most strikes the student of any section of the tribal population of Travancore is the numerous points in which one section shows similarity with other sections; and this, despite the vastly divergent traditions and beliefs that each section holds in respect of its origin, past history and social position. If an explanation is wanted to account for the similarities, it is that, for one thing, an identical physical environment leads people, in course of time, to pursue common practices in earning a livelihood, and, secondly, the human instinct of imitation plays its part in inter-group contacts. At the same time

there is a tenacity with which each group perpetuates the distinguishing features of its social organization and highlights the manner in which, in those particulars they are a class apart from others. It would seem that a distinction is possible between the technological and social aspects of culture. The former is concerned with material pursuits calculated to produce food, shelter and other necessities of life, whereas the latter is what confers distinction, individuality and stability of organization. Between the two, the former is subject to change, adaptation to environment, learning and imitation; the latter is change-resisting, and independent of learning and imitation other than by social inheritance. In the course of the following pages in which a particular section of the tribal population of Travancore is described, some proof will be found for this assumption although the chief task of the study is to describe the habitat and social organization of the tribe, and to analyse some problems of anthropological interest that arise from it.

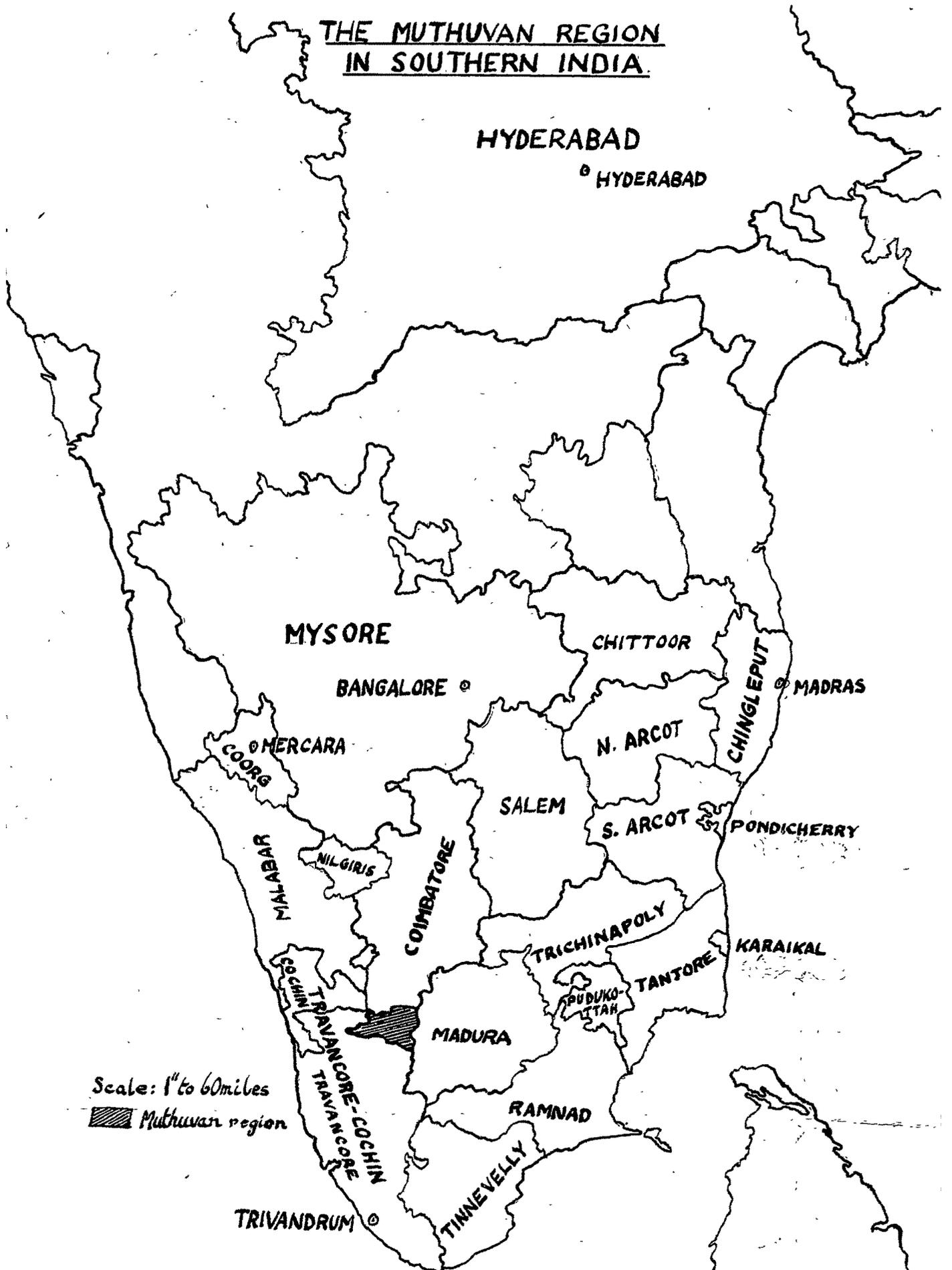
The Muthuvan is a numerically small hill tribe residing chiefly in the north-eastern hilly tracts of the former Travancore State. Muthuvan traditions and popular beliefs bear some relation to the history of Travancore and the adjoining district of Madura.

FIG. 3

THE MUTHUVAN REGION IN SOUTHERN INDIA

(It will be noted that this is a Pre-States Reorganisation Map, but the Idea is to Show the Muthuvan Region in Relation in Peninsular India as a Whole, and not in Relation to the Exact Boundaries of States and Districts.)

THE MUTHUVAN REGION
IN SOUTHERN INDIA.



Occasional references to historical facts and pseudo-historical popular beliefs will, therefore, be necessary in this chapter. However, to begin with, a brief description of the geographical features of the State will be helpful.

* * * * *

Travancore State lies at the south-western extremity of the Indian peninsula, between $8^{\circ} 4'$ and $10^{\circ} 22'$ north latitude, and $76^{\circ} 14'$ and $77^{\circ} 38'$ east latitude. It is bounded on the north partly by Cochin State and partly by the Coimbatore district of Madras State; on the east by the natural mountain barrier known as the Western Ghats; on the south by the Indian ocean; and on the west by the Arabian Sea. (The 'Western Ghats' is a misnomer as far as Travancore, and indeed the entire West Coast, is concerned, because the Ghats lie to the east of this region forming the hinterland of the coastal strip from Gujarat to Cape Comarin. They are Western only to the people on the other side of the Ghats. As they constitute the bulk of the population of peninsular India, the Ghats have come to be known as Western Ghats). The State is a narrow strip of territory, 174 miles long; its breadth varies from 75 miles at the northern border to 30 miles at the southern extremity, giving it an angular shape. Its total area is 7,662 square miles. Compared with the adjoining districts of Madras State,

it is about four-fifths of Madura, nine-tenths of Coimbatore, one and one-fourth of Malabar, and one and one-third of Tinnevely. Compared with some of the other former Native States, it is about one-twelfth the size of Hyderabad, one-fourth of Mysore, and seven-eighths of Baroda.*

According to the last Census of the State before its integration with Cochin, namely, the 1941 Census, its population was 6,070,018. The total population of Travancore and Cochin together in 1951 was 9,280,425. Between 1941 and 1951 the increase in population in the two States together was 23.7 per cent. Assuming that the percentage of increase was the same in the two States, the population of Travancore in 1951 is estimated to be about 7,500,000. Among States in India, Travancore is unique in that it has a large Christian population, the origin of which dates back almost to the first century of the Christian era. The distribution of population by religion, in 1941, was: Hindus, 60.5 per cent, Christians 32.3 per cent, and Muslims 7.2 per cent. With a literacy percentage of 54 per cent, the State is educationally the most advanced in India. Its economy is predominantly agricultural, and 84 per cent of the population is rural. Both Travancore and Cochin are thickly populated

* These comparisons apply to the time when Hyderabad, Mysore and Baroda were autonomous native States and Malabar was a district of Madras State.

States, the average density of population being 1,015 per square mile which is one of the highest in any part of the world. Geographically, both States can be divided into three distinct natural regions of highland, midland and lowland. The distribution of population in these regions is highly varied. The highland region is sparsely populated, and going westward the density of population increases phenomenally until the highest density is obtained in the coastal region. The following Table shows the distribution of population by natural regions, as well as the relative size of each region in Travancore. (See p. 37 for table)

The main agricultural produces of the State, in order of extent of area under cultivation, are rice, cocoanut, tapioca, pepper, rubber, tea, ginger, sugarcane and coffee. Tea and Coffee are cultivated in the highland; rice, cocoanut, tapioca and sugarcane in the lowland and midland; pepper, rubber and ginger in the midland and highland.

A heavy annual rainfall, a warm humidity of the atmosphere and a fairly uniform temperature throughout the year are the characteristic features of the climate of the State, as of the Malabar Coast generally. The seasons are mainly controlled by the two periods of rainfall, viz., the south-west monsoon from June to August, and the retreating or north-east monsoon from October to December. December to February is mainly a clear bright season with fairly cool

TABLE IV
DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION BY NATURAL REGIONS,
TRAVANCORE, 1941*

<u>Regions</u>	<u>Area in Sq. miles</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>	<u>Density</u>
Lowland	1,374	17.9	2,805,626	46.2	2,042
Midland	2,722	35.6	2,900,808	47.8	1,066
Highland	3,566	46.5	363,584	6.0	102
TOTAL	7,662	100.0	6,070,018	100.0	

* A. Narayanan Tambi, "Travancore", Census of India, 1941, Vol. xxv, Part I. The 1951 Census is of the integrated State of Travancore-Cochin; but the proportions of natural regions and population remain substantially unchanged. [P. T. I.]

nights, the average minimum temperature being 74°F and the maximum 87°F. From March to May, the atmosphere gets hotter and more moist and during the latter half of the period, clouding increases and afternoon thunder showers occur. The average maximum temperature during this season is 89°F and has never risen above 93°F. The southwest monsoon bursts on the coast towards the end of May and is usually associated with a depression or storm. June to September, when the southwest monsoon holds sway, is the season when nearly two-thirds of the annual rainfall are received. Skies are heavily clouded and rainfall occurs on about 25 days each in June, July and August. During October and November when the southwest monsoon retreats and the north-east monsoon establishes itself over the country, the intensity of the rainfall increases slightly. During this season there is more rainfall on the hills than on the plains. The annual rainfall is heavy and is also fairly regular and uniform. Two essential features of the distribution of the rainfall are its progressive increase from the south to the north and a similar increase from stations on the coast to stations at the foot of the Ghats. The average rainfall at Trivandrum is about 67 inches, at Cochin about 115 inches, and on the Cardamom Hills on the Western Ghats, about 200 inches. As the State receives the benefit of both monsoons, complete failure of rains, and famines, are unknown; this does not, however, rule out the possibility of the seasonal distribution of rain being unfavourable to the agriculturist. There are occasionally heavy floods in the basins of some rivers causing considerable damage to crops.¹

The progressive increase in rainfall from south to north, and west to east is a distinct feature. The highland region covering the eastern portion of the State, and occupying about 47 percent of the total area, gets an annual rainfall ranging from 100 inches in the south to over 200 inches in the north. In the midland region rainfall varies from about 55 inches in the south

1. U.Sivaraman Nair, op. cit., Part IA, p. 3 et seq.

to 140 inches in the north. This region occupying about 36 percent of the total area, is characterised by uplands of varying elevation through which flows a large number of rivers. The lowland region which occupies only 18 percent of the area is under extensive rice and cocconut cultivation. Rainfall in this region varies from 35 inches in the south to 110 inches in the north.

The face of the country presents considerable diversity, although its general character, except in the southern parts, is extremely abrupt and mountainous. The coast, and the area for a short distance along the borders of the lake, is generally flat; retreating from it the surface immediately becomes unequal, roughening into slopes which gradually combine and swell into the mountainous amphitheatre that bounds it on the East, where it falls precipitately, but terminates less abruptly on the South. The collected villages, waving plains, palmyra topes, and extensive cultivation of Nunjanaad, resemble in every particular the neighbouring district of Tinnevely, except that it in no measure partakes of its comparatively arid sterility. Approaching northward, this fertile plain is succeeded by the rugged surface of the true Malayalim; some few champaign tracts enclosed within this ocean of forest relieves the uniformity of the Sylvan scene. The extent lining the coast for its whole length presents a fertility so near the sea that imparts a peculiar character to the landscape. This rich and variegated tract is flanked by a mountainous barrier, and is finely contrasted with the sombre magnificence and desolate solitude of those wilds of which the elephant seems the natural master; and though the landscape may be too much made up of this wild scenery, it boasts many striking localities and peculiar beauties, if not of the sublime, at least romantic and picturesque kinds. The eye is arrested by the wild rocky precipitous

acclivities and fantastic forms assumed by the mountains in the more southern parts, but proceeding north the bold and elevated contour of this Alpine tract is less sharply defined; a few rugged cliffs and spiry points or conical summits alone breaking through the sameness of its rounded and sombre outline. This appenine dissolves into clustering hills and romantic inequalities, at whose feet wind innumerable valleys, presenting (Particularly in the middle parts) the most delightful landscapes, whose natural beauties are embellished and diversified by the prospect of Churches and Pagodas. Indeed the endless succession of houses and gardens scattered in picturesque disorder over the face of the country, gives it entirely a different appearance from the other coast, the nudity of whose plains is unfavourably contrasted with the robe of florid and exuberant vegetation that for a great part of the year clothes Malayalim. The Arreka and Cocoonut everywhere fringe those picturesque and sequestered glens which gradually expand into the extensive plantations and cultivated lands that skirt the sea and lake. This space is enlivened and fertilized by innumerable rivers and pastoral streams, whose borders are crowned with groves and cultivation that everywhere following their winding course, present a unique, interesting, and charming scenery, infinitely more diversified than most other parts of the Peninsula, and one that would indicate abundance. This is especially the case in Kootanaad; the watery flatness of this fertile fen is relieved by the gardens and habitation so thickly strewn over its surface which exhibits a net-work of rivers meandering through the verdure they create.¹

The name Travancore is the anglicized form of Thiruvithamcodu, which is itself a corrupt rendering of Sri Vazhum Codu, meaning the Abode of Prosperity or the Abode of the Goddess of Prosperity. According to the Imperial Gazetteer, the State takes its name from

1. Ward and Conner, op. cit. pp. 23 et seq.

a village called Tiruvidamcoodu in Eraniel taluk, thirty miles south of the capital, Trivandrum.¹ In ancient writings, it is also referred to as Karma-bhumi, signifying that the spiritual salvation of the inhabitants of this land depends entirely on good actions, as contrasted with the East Coast, called Gnana-bhumi or Punya-bhumi, where a man obtains salvation by mere birth, irrespective of actions, as the land itself is said to be consecrated ground.²

The predominant language of the State is Malayalam, a language that has close affinity with Tamil; 84.7 percent of the population are Malayalam-speaking, and 14.4 percent are Tamil-speaking. The Tamil-speaking population is confined largely to the southern taluks of Travancore which are contiguous with the adjoining Tamil district of Tinnevely. In the Shencottah taluk, which is an enclave of Travancore within the Tamil region, the population is entirely Tamil-speaking.³ In the highland taluks of Peermade and Deviculam the majority (66 percent) are Tamil-speaking, but this is an immigrant and floating

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1. Imperial Gazetteer of India (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1928), Vol.xxiv, p. 1
 2. cf. V.Nagam Aiya, The Travancore State Mammal (Trivandrum: Travancore Government Press, 1906), Vol. I, p. 1
 3. The southern taluks of Travancore, and the Taluk of Shencottah are now parts of Madras State consequent upon the reorganization of states in November, 1956.

population composed of the tea and coffee plantation workers. According to popular legend, related in the ancient Brahmanda Purana, and the later literary works Keralamahatmyam and Keralolpathi, all the land extending from Gokurnum (modern Goa) to Cape Comorin lay submerged by the sea at one time. Parasurama, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu, reclaimed the land from sea by hurling his parasu (battle-axe) from Gokurnum which was then, apparently, the land's end of India. The axe fell at what is now Cape Comorin. And, so goes the legend, the sea receded from the entire area traversed by the axe, and in its place arose lush land. The land thus reclaimed forms the present-day States of Travancore and Cochin, the district of Malabar and parts of South Canara. These separate units form the Malayalam-speaking region of Kerala.¹ Parasurama brought colonies of Brahmins from the north to inhabit the land, established Sastha temples along the Ghats to guard the country, and instituted laws.

Travancore, together with Cochin and Malabar, formed the ancient Chera Kingdom of south India. The reign of the Cheraman Perumals (Kings of the Chera line) continued until about the fourth or fifth century A.D. When their power waned, and the country was divided into various

1. With the reorganization of States on linguistic basis in November, 1956, the Malayalam-speaking region of Kerala has in fact become the Kerala State.

petty kingdoms. Some of these were held by descendents of the Chera Kings themselves. The royal house of Travancore traces descent from the Cheras. The Pandya and Chola Kings who were contemporaries of the Cheras in the region east of the Ghats, are also referred to as having held suzerainty over Kerala at various times. But the early history of the country is shrouded in mystery, legends and pseudo-history. Between the tenth and fifteenth centuries there were internecine wars between Travancore and its neighbouring Kingdoms. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, Travancore was only a petty Kingdom lying south of Trivandrum, the present-day capital. The great warrior-King Martanda Varma (1729-1758) subjugated all the Chieftaincies north of the State up to the border of Cochin and annexed them to his territory. Martanda Varma is, therefore, rightly called the maker of modern Travancore. There was some further expansion in the reign of Rama Varma, successor to Martanda Varma, and the present boundaries of the State date from the second half of the eighteenth century. It may be of interest to record that Travancore is perhaps the only State in India that was never conquered by the British. However, when the rise of Hyer Ali and Tippoo Sultan in south India in the latter half of the eighteenth century menaced the safety of the State, it entered into alliance with the East India Company for protection, and was since then

under the suzerainty of the British Paramount Power.

Culturally and linguistically Travancore is one with its northern neighbour State of Cochin and the erstwhile British Indian district of Malabar further north of Cochin. All three regions form the West Coast of India from Kasergode in the north to Cape Comorin in the South. Administratively Travancore was, until recently, an autonomous unit within India like other Native States. India's attainment of independence in 1947 made little change to its character as an administrative entity, but in consequence of the general policy of integration of States followed by the States ministry of the Government of India, Travancore and Cochin were united to form one State, called the Travancore-Cochin State, in 1949. Even this proved to be only an interim arrangement, because, in 1956, with the coming into force of the States Reorganization Act which envisaged the reorganization of States on a linguistic basis, the Malayalam-speaking areas of Travancore-Cochin and Malabar were constituted to form the new Kerala State.

The people of Kerala are predominantly agriculturists by profession, and Hindus by religion. Among Hindus, the largest single group is the Nair with its many sub-

castes. The system of matrilocal residence and matrilineal inheritance among Nairs have attracted the attention of sociologists and anthropologists the world over. It must be mentioned, however, that matriliney continues to be fairly widely prevalent only in Malabar and Cochin, whereas in Travancore the system has been quite extensively replaced by patrilocality and patrilineal inheritance. Here matriliney continues to be prevalent only in a few ancient Nair houses as well as in the royal family.

* * * * *

This foregoing account of Travancore tribes, and the geographical features and history of the State was considered necessary in order to gain a proper understanding of the Muthuvans who form the subject of this monograph. The name of the tribe is spelt differently by different writers, for example Moodavenmars (Ward and Conner, 1820), Moodoowars (Hamilton, 1865), Mutuvans (Aiyer, 1903, and Nagem Aiya, 1906), Muduvans (Martin, 1905, and Hatch, 1933), Muduvar (Thurston, 1909). In most of the later references to the tribe, their name is spelt Muthuvan (Krishna Iyer, 1939, and Census Reports, 1931, 1941, and 1951). It would appear that this is the correct spelling of the name of the tribe. In Malayalam and Tamil the name is written മുതുവാൻ and முதுவார் respectively, and the

correct English rendering of either is Muthuvan.

Thurston mentions that in Tamil the name of the tribe is pronounced Muthuvar, Muthuvanal, and that outsiders sometimes call the tribe Thangappanmargal, a title sometimes used by low-caste people in addressing their masters.¹ But one does not hear this term used in referring to Muthuvans nowadays. As for Muduvar or Muthuvar, it would seem that these are only the plurals of Muduvan and Muthuvan, respectively. In Malayalam and Tamil, the suffix 'ar' in a name otherwise ending in 'an' denotes the plural; for example, Pulayan, Pulayar; Kuravan, Kuravar; Kadan, Kadar. Muthuvanal is only a variation of Muthuvan so as to denote respect and courtesy, its literal meaning being, the Muthuvan man, or the Muthuvan people.

Numerically, the Muthuvan is a very small tribe. It has already been stated that according to the latest available Census of the tribe (1941 Census), they number only 1,931. (See Table III, p.13) It is estimated that the present population of the tribe in Travancore is approximately 2,400.

Muthuvan population shows phenomenal variations from one decade to another. This may partly be due to

1. Edgar Thurston, Castes and Tribes of Southern India (Madras: The Madras Government Press, 1909) vol. v, p. 86.

errors in estimation, and partly due to the fact that large numbers of Muthuvans, as well as other hill-tribes fall victim to small-pox and malaria causing decrease in population in certain years. Infant mortality is also very high. The following table shows Muthuvan population in Travancore according to the decennial Censuses from 1891.

TABLE V
MUTHUVAN POPULATION IN TRAVANCORE,
1891 to 1941 *

<u>Year of Census</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Variation</u>
1891	1,077	-	-	-
1901	808	409	399	-269
1911	379	195	184	-429
1921	257	122	135	-122
1931	1,301	649	652	1,044
1941	1,931	979	952	630

* In the 1951 Census, which in the Census of Travancore-Cochin and not of Travancore alone, the Muthuvans were included, with various other tribes, under the category of Scheduled Tribes, and figures for individual tribes are not available.

The variations are too great to be accounted for by natural causes. Even allowing that the decreases may be due to epidemics, it is difficult to explain the phenomenal increase of more than 500 percent from 1921 to 1931, by natural causes. Outward and inward movement of population might be a plausible explanation, but there has been no unusual migration or influx during this period. One is therefore led to conclude that a major proportion of the variations is possibly due to under-estimation.

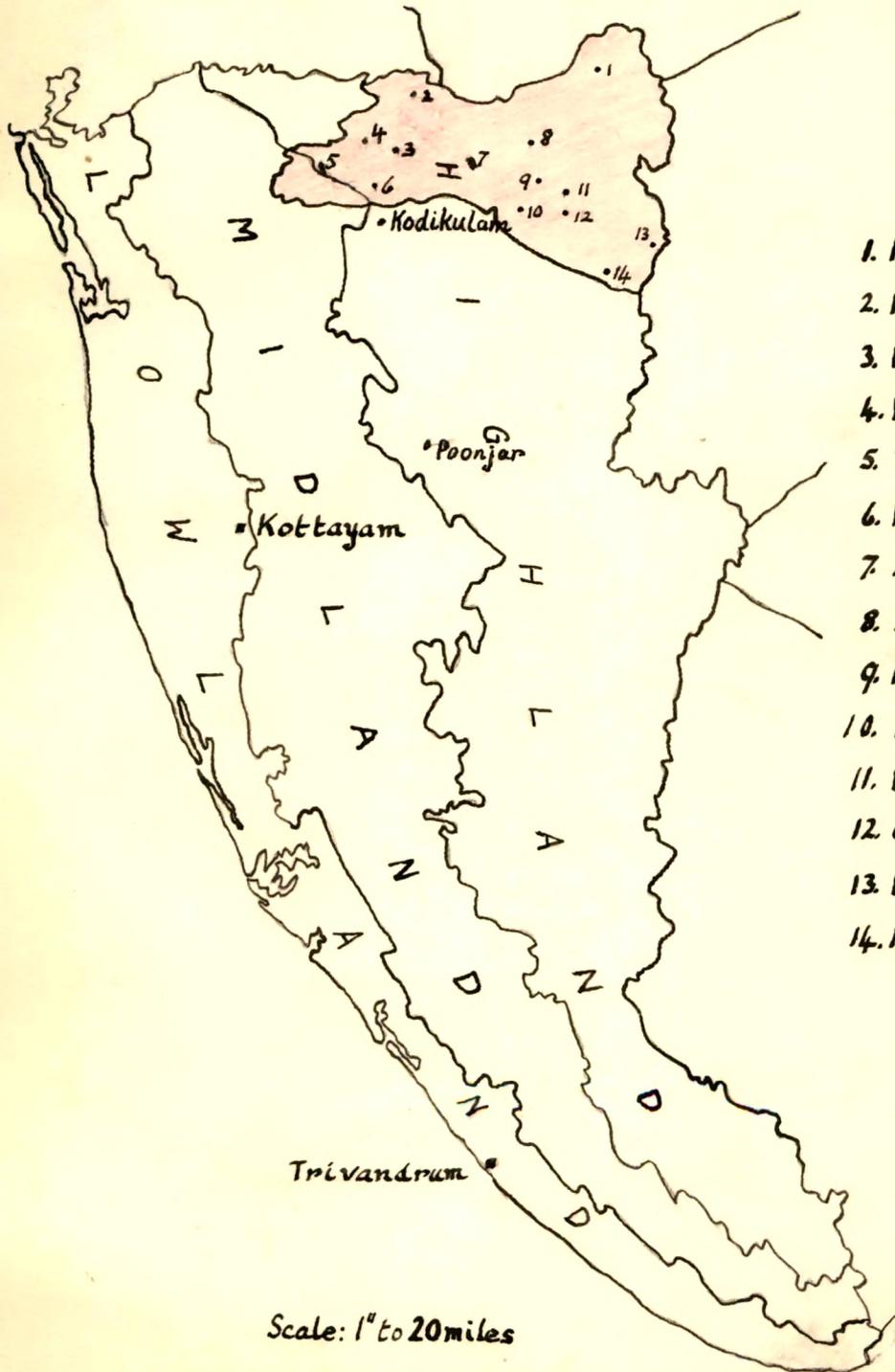
Muthuvans are distributed in small scattered hamlets of ten to twenty households, in the Devikulam, Thodupuzha and Moovattupuzha taluks of Kottayam district. The Muthuvan region covers approximately 700 square miles, or about one-tenth of the total area of Travancore. Within this region, the Muthuvan hamlets are widely scattered, and there are also other tribes in similarly scattered hamlets. The Census of India, 1901, mentions that Muthuvans are found in Mannankantam, Anakulam, Trikkarnalal and other hilly tracts of Thodupuzha taluk.¹ This omits the large number of Muthuvans in the High Ranges, the Cardamom Hills and the Anjanad valley in the eastern parts of Devikulam taluk. Mr.L.A.Krishna Iyer's

†. N.Subramanya Iyer, "Travancore", Census of India, 1901, vol. xxvi (Trivandrum: The Malabar Mail Press, 1903), p. 350.

FIG. 4

MAP OF TRAVANCORE
Showing the Distribution of Muthuvans
(Acknowledgement to Mr.L.A.Krishna Iyer)

MAP OF TRAVANCORE
SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF
MUTHUVANS



1. MARAYOOR
2. KILIPARAMBU
3. KUNJIYAR
4. POOYAMKUTTI
5. THATTAKAD
6. KUTTENPUZHA
7. ANAKULAM
8. ANAMUDI
9. MUNNAR
10. PALLIVASAL
11. DEVIKULAM
12. CHOKKANAD
13. BODIMETTU
14. POOPARA

Scale: 1" to 20 miles

Muthuvan region

ethnographic survey of Travancore, published in 1939, gives a more detailed account of the distribution of Muthuvans. According to this, Muthuvans are found in Marayoor, Kiliparambu, Kunjiyar, Pooyankutti, Thattakkad, Kuttanpuzha, Anakulam, Anamudi, Munnar, Pallivasal, Devikulam, Chokkanad, Bodimettu and Poopara.¹ These are not individual hamlets, but localities of major concentrations within each of which there are several hamlets. Mr. Krishna Iyer also mentions that there is a Muthuvan hamlet in the British Anamalais, and another in the Zamindari forests of Bodinaickenur in Madura district. Muthuvans themselves mention that there are a few hamlets outside the borders of Travancore, including one in the Chalakudi Forest Range of Cochin State, but it may be observed that Census Reports, Manuals or Gazetteers of these districts do not mention the existence of Muthuvans in the respective areas. This fact does not, however, contradict the existence of Muthuvans outside Travancore; it only shows that there is no appreciable Muthuvan population outside Travancore, or that what is there has not been noticed.

In this connection, we may refer again to Thurston's account of the Muthuvans, in which he states that Muduvars

1. L.A. Krishna Iyer, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 3

or Mudugars are a tribe of hill cultivators in Coimbatore, Madura, Malabar and Travancore.¹ It is necessary to comment on this because Muduvars and Mudugars are not the same. The Muduvars - meaning Muthuvans - are found mainly in Travancore with only insignificant dispersion into the neighbouring districts of Coimbatore and Madura, and Cochin State. The Mudugars, on the other hand, are found only in Malabar, and they are a different tribe altogether.

A point of great importance in respect of distribution of the Muthuvans is that there are two district sections of Muthuvans, with significant cleavages between the two in respect of traditions, folklore, beliefs and certain culture patterns. The differences are in fact so obvious that it has even been suggested that the two sections are really two different tribes. It is impossible to subscribe to this view, because the identity between the two sections in respect of rituals, kinship structure, rules of inheritance, village organization and economy override the differences in traditions and folklore.

Muthuvans themselves recognise the existence of two sections among them. While each respects and

1. Edgar Thurston, loc. cit.

acknowledges the other as equals and kinsmen of a bygone past, their regional distribution is such as to make any effective social intercourse between the two almost impossible. As it is necessary to refer to the two sections in the course of the discussions, it will be convenient to use some distinguishing term for each. The people themselves have no precise identifying term for the two sections, but refer to each other by definitions such as 'those who came with Kannaki', or 'those who went over to the Chera Rajah', or 'those who became Malayalis', or again, 'those west of Kallar'. All these descriptive references bear close relation to traditions and habitat. The easiest method is perhaps to refer to the two sections as 'eastern Muthuvans' and 'western Muthuvans'. The distribution of the two sections is roughly as follows:

Eastern Muthuvans: Marayoor, Anamudi, Munnar, Palliyasal, Devikulam, Chokkanad, Bodimetta, Poopara. (Numbers 1, ^{and} 8 ^{to} and 14 in the map on page 49)

Western Muthuvans: Kiliparambu, Kunjiyar, Pooyamkutty, Thattakkad, Kuttanpauzha, Anakulam.

(Numbers 2 to 7 in the map.) See also map of Kottayam District on page 71.)

The region of the eastern Muthuvans is roughly within the Anjanad valley, the High Ranges and the

Cardamom Hills, all of which are in the Poopara Forest Range in Devikulam taluk. The region of the western Muthuvans is within the Idiyara and Neriamangalam Forest Ranges in the Moovattupuzha and Thodupuzha taluks.

In order to understand the differences between the two sections, we need to go into the traditions of the tribe. According to Muthuvan tradition, they originally lived in Madura whence they migrated into the hilly tracts of Travancore on account of troubles in their own country. There are different versions of the story of their migration into the hills. It is necessary to sort the stories and assign each to the section to which it belongs. The belief about the reasons for leaving Madura is the same among both sections, the difference being in the alleged circumstances of the exodus.

Muthuvans connect the cause of their flight from Madura with the story of Kovalan and Kannaki in the great Tamil epic of Silappadikaram, which dates from about the second century A.D. It will be superfluous to go into the whole story of Kovalan and Kannaki here, but the last part of it concerns Muthuvan beliefs. According to the story, Kovalan, a young merchant prince of Kaveripattinam or Puhar (in modern Tanjore district)

lost all his wealth by consorting with a courtesan named Madhavi. After several years he repented and returned to his loyal wife Kannaki. Being impoverished, Kovalan decided to go to the City of Madura to make a fresh start in life. Kannaki followed him. When they reached the outskirts of the City, a sheperdess offered them hospitality in her house. Next day Kovalan proceeded into the City, capital of the renowned Pandyan King Nedunjeliyan, with one of the anklets of Kannaki with the intention of selling it to raise money. In the market place he saw the palace goldsmith and asked him if he could estimate the price of a rare anklet suitable for a queen. Only a few days ago the goldsmith had stolen one of the anklets of Kopperundevi, the queen of Nedunjeliyan. The King accuses the goldsmith of the theft, but gave him a week's time to prove his innocence by producing the jewel and the thief. When Kovalan showed Kannaki's anklet to the goldsmith, the latter thought this was an excellent opportunity to save himself by putting the blame on Kovalan. He detained Kovalan in his house saying that he would get a good offer for the anklet from the King himself. He forthwith went to the King and reported that he found the jewel and the thief. Later in the day, the King's officers executed Kovalan on the charge of stealing the queen's anklet.

Hearing of Kovalan's execution, Kannaki took the remaining anklet and went to the palace raving that for this unjust execution the City will be consumed by flames. The palace guard reported to the King, "Sire, a terrible lady resembling some fierce goddess is waiting at the gate. She is as self-confident as Korravai, the goddess of Victory, and as terrible as Kali. She has with her a priceless anklet, and her face is stained with tears". Kannaki was then conducted to the King's presence. After revealing her identity, she proved the innocence of her husband by dashing the anklet on the floor. Her anklet contained the purest rubies whereas the queen's anklet had pearls inside.

At that very instant the Royal Umbrella fell down and the King's Rod of Justice became crooked. The King exclaimed in agony that he is unfit to be a ruler. Praying, "May this sin end with me and not affect the royal lineage", he fell down and died. Seeing this the queen also fell dead by his side.

Kannaki, mad with grief at the loss of her husband and determined on terrible retribution, twisted off her left breast and hurled it over the City crying, "If chastity can produce fire, then let this City of the unjust King be burnt to ashes. May all be burnt except

the righteous ones and Brahmins, cows, chaste women, old people and children". At once Agni, the God of Fire, appeared before Kannaki in the form of a Brahmin, blue in hue, with a red tuft and milk-white teeth, and said, "I shall carry out your orders". He then opened his mouth and the City was enveloped in flames.

Kannaki said to herself, "I shall not rest till I join my lord". She went to the temple of Korravai, the Goddess of Victory, and broke her golden bangles in token of her widowhood. Then she left Madura by the western gate, exclaiming, "My husband and I entered this City together by the eastern gate; alas, I am going out alone, by the western gate". She walked along the flooded banks of the Vaigai river like one possessed, reckless of all dangers. Finally she reached the hill sacred to Neduvel and rested in a grove. Some hill folk went to her and struck by her beauty and dignity asked, "Are you the divine Valli, the consort of Vela?" "No", she said, "I am the unfortunate one who lost her husband by the unjust act of the great Pandyan, and set Madura in flames in my anger. I am waiting to be taken to heaven by my husband". When fourteen days had passed, Indra, the lord of Heaven, came down to the hill with Kovalan, in a celestial chariot, and took Kannaki to heaven. The King and people of the country acclaimed her as the Goddess of

Chastity and built a temple in her honour.¹

These are the essential elements in the story of Silappadikaram or Kovalan and Kannaki. Its authorship is popularly ascribed to Ilango Adigal, the younger brother of the Chera Emperor, Senguttuvan, who lived in the second century A.D. It is impossible to say whether the story is wholly a work of imagination, or there is some element of contemporary or past history in it. It is probable that at some time there was a disastrous fire in Madura. In any case, the Muthuvans believe that they fled from Madura when Kannaki caused the burning of the City to avenge the unjust execution of her husband by the Pandyan King.

The common points in the beliefs of the two sections concerning their exodus from Madura, end here. The further traditions of the two sections in this respect proceed in different directions. The western Muthuvans believe that Kannaki, on hearing the news of the unjust execution of her husband, assumed the form of Bhadrakali, the dreadful Goddess of Destruction, and avenged her husband's death by consigning Madura city to flames. She then proceeded

1. The story narrated here is based on Kovalan and Kannaki, (The story of Silappadikaram Re-told), by A.S.Panchapakesa Ayyar (Madras: The Alliance Co., 1947, 2nd ed.)

westward until she reached the Malayala Desam (land of Malayalam-speaking people), dominion of the Chera King, and settled there under the name of Santhiattu Bhagawati. Some of the people who escaped the fire followed Kannaki and settled in the Travancore forests. These people are the western Muthuvans, and hence their name, "those who followed Kannaki". The region in which they settled belonged to a family of petty Chieftains called Kodikulom Karthas, and hence they became vassals of the Karthas. To this day, the western Muthuvans claim to be the people of the Kodikulom Karthas, although the Karthas have long since ceased to be ruling Chieftains. The family, however, appears to be still extant in the village of Kodikulom in Thodupuzha taluk.

The eastern Muthuvans, on the other hand, believe that they followed a Pandyan prince into the hills. When Kannaki caused Madura to be burned, the younger brother of the Pandyan King escaped from the City and fled for safety to the Travancore hills. He was followed by a band of loyal subjects. Kannaki, in the form of Bhadrakali, pursued the prince but the latter evaded her and eventually reached the hills. Kannaki gave up the pursuit and settled in Malayala Desam (the land of Malayalam or the Malayalam-speaking region) as a goddess whom the western

Muthuvans called Santhiattu Bhagawati, and the eastern Muthuvans called Malayalathu Bhagawai because of her association with the Malayalam-speaking region.

The Pandyan prince and his followers lived an unsettled, wandering life for some time. He then purchased all the land south of Pachamalai(Pollachi), north of Poonjar, west of the Ghats, and east of Kallar, from the Chera King. He settled his people in the newly-acquired territory and assigned various titles, authorities and duties to the notable men in the group for the governance of the settlements and the settling of disputes among the people. He first reigned for a period of fourteen years at a place which, in commemoration of a miraculous event, came to be called Muttukkad. The miracle is that when the King sowed paddy, the crop yielded was Muttu(pearls) instead of paddy. Hence the place was called Muttukkad (forest of pearls). There is a similar legend attributed by Muthuvans to a place called Sokkanad (land of gold) where the King sowed paddy and harvested Sokkam(gold). The King later moved south-west through Vellamtharu (present Vellathooval), Pandyanpara (present Vandiperiyar), Vengaloor and Kidiyanoor, until he reached Poonayattu (Poonjar) where he built his palace and fortress. He reigned there for another fourteen years at the end of which he crowned his sister's son as

his successor, and went over to Marayoor to lead a life of devotion and penance. He built a temple there which the Muthuvans call Thinnanchepra Kovil and eventually became the deity of the temple. The people who followed the Pandyan prince, and settled in the hills east of Kallar, are the eastern Muthuvans. They call themselves the people of Poonayattu Perumal, whereas the western Muthuvans are the people of Kodikulom Karthas.¹

There is a legend regarding the name Muthuvan. Muthuvans believe that they were originally Vellalas, an agricultural Tamil caste. When they left Madura, they carried on their muthuvu (back) the idol of Goddess Meenakshi and hence they are called Muthuvan - he who carries things on his back. Some Muthuvans say that they are called so because during their exodus from Madura they carried their children and belongings on their back.

We have so far been dealing with Muthuvan beliefs regarding their early history. As these are legendary with little or no verifiable detail, it is not easy to determine the time when the Muthuvans settled in Travancore. There can be little doubt that they originally belonged to the Tamil plains east of the Ghats. The question as to when they came to Travancore can only be answered with

1 See Appendix 1

guesses and speculations. Muthuvans themselves are unable to give any clue in the matter. If one were to believe the story of the burning of Madura by Kannaki and the consequent exodus of Muthuvans to Travancore, they must have settled in the hills in the first or second century A.D., for, the story is set in this period. But this conflicts with the tradition regarding the Pandyan prince who founded the Poonjar principality which is the most important and perhaps the only clue in determining with some historical evidence the time of the coming of the Muthuvans to Travancore. The Poonjar principality was founded over a thousand years after the time when the events of Silappadikaram are supposed to have taken place.

There is also the view held that the Muthuvans probably came into the Travancore hills at the time when the Telugu Naickers took possession of Bodinaickenur in the fourteenth century, or that they were driven to the hills by the Muhammadan invaders in the latter half of the eighteenth century. On this point Thurston writes:

The approximate time of the exodus from Madura cannot even be guessed by any of the tribe, but it was probably when the Pandyan Rajas entered the South, or more probably when the Telugu Naickers took possession of Bodinaickenur in the fourteenth century. It has also been suggested that the Muduvans were driven to the hills by the Muhammadan invaders in the latter

part of the eighteenth century. Judging from the two distinct types of countenance, their language and their curious mixture of customs, I hazard the conjecture that when they arrived in the hills they found a small tribe in possession with whom they subsequently intermarried, this tribe having affinities with the West Coast, while the new arrivals were connected with the east.¹

The conjectures about the arrival of the Muthuvans could be multiplied almost indefinitely. The history of south India for about seventeen centuries from the beginning of the Christian era was characterised by wars and the rise and fall of various dynasties such as the Cheras, Pandyas and Cholas, and of military adventurers like the Muhammadan generals from Delhi, and the Telugu Naickers. One might well say that the Muthuvans, as well as other non-indigenous tribes of Travancore like the Mannans, Uralis and Paliyans, might have been displaced from their original home in the Tamil country at any time during this long period of internal troubles, foreign invasions and changing fortunes of rulers. However, the traditional belief of the eastern Muthuvans that they came with the Pandyan prince who founded the Poonjar principality in Travancore helps us to be more specific about the time of arrival of atleast that section of Muthuvans. The few and fragmentary references about the

1. Edgar Thurston, op. cit., p. 87, et seq.

Poonjar principality that one could glean from history may therefore be adduced. The Poonjar Chieftains, or the Poonayattu Perumals, as they are generally called, are a family of landowners in north Travancore. They are of Tamil origin and are descendants of the ancient Pandya dynasty of Madura. Until the middle of the eighteenth century when King Marthanda Varma of Travancore annexed the northern principalities and petty kingdoms to his own territory, the Poonjar family ruled over the extensive hill tracts of Peermade and Devikulam, and parts of the Thodupuzha taluk. They were sovereign rulers with the title of Rajah which continues to this day in the family. Not many years ago, the Travancore royal house entered into marital alliance with the Poonjar house when Princess Karthika Thirunal, first Princess of Travancore, was married to Col. Godavarma Raja, a prince of the Poonjar house.

As regards the founding of the Poonjar principality, only brief references are available in historical accounts. Writing of the extensive hill tracts of northern Travancore, Emily Hatch says:

These hills were bought by a wandering ruler from Madura from the Tekkenkur (Modern Changanacherry) Raja. They were known as the Poonjar lands or principality, so the descendant of the Pandyas took the name of Raja of Poonjar.

No date is given, but the transaction was probably in A.D. 1190. When the Raja of Travancore conquered the Raja of Tekkenkur in A.D. 1756, he automatically assumed authority over the Poonjar principality which was reduced to a Zemindari with large tracts of jungle land, valuable because of the hill produce and the demand for land by European planters. 1

The date given viz., A.D. 1190, as the probable date of the transaction, is important. Shungoony Menon, the historian of Travancore in the last century, also mentions a date very close to this as the date of the founding of the Poonjar principality. But according to him, the Poonjar Rajah appears to have obtained his territories as a gift from King Adithya Varmah of Travancore, and not from the Tekkenkur Rajah, in the same manner as the Panthalam Rajahs, another princely family of Madura who emigrated to Travancore in the tenth century A.D. obtained lands as gifts from the then rulers of the country. Menon writes:

In like manner, the present Poonjar Rajah, who was a close relation of the Pandyan dynasty emigrated to Travancore, and the hill territories of Poonjar were assigned as the residence of his family, during the reign of king Adithya Varmah of Travancore in 364 M.E. (1189 A.D.) 2

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1. Emily Hatch, Travancore (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 123, et seq
 2. P. Shungoony Menon, A History of Travancore (Madras: Higginbotham & Co. 1878), p. 92.

A more detailed account of the Poonjar Rajahs is given by Nagam Aiya.

The Poonjar Chief belongs, it is said, to an ancient off-shoot of the Pandyan dynasty of Kings that left Madura, their capital, and sought refuge in the fastnesses of the Western Ghats, about five or six centuries ago. The tract of land called Poonjar was purchased by them from the then holder, the Rajah of Thekkumkur. According to a petition submitted by the Valia Rajah of Poonjar in October 1897 to His Excellency the Governor, one of his ancestors, it would appear, fled from Madura, underwent a series of trials and tribulations in the then inaccessible regions of the West Coast, having been driven from place to place without a hospitable shelter. The condition of such a life told on him and on many members of his family, who one by one succumbed to disease and death till at last one descendant managed to discover their present land Poonjar and settled down there. The law of succession also changed with the change in the fortunes of the family, incidental to a life in the midst of the Marumakkathayam population of the Malabar Coast. On the annexation of the territories of Thekkumkur and Vadakkumkur to Travancore, the Poonjar Rajah, who had rendered valuable services to the Travancore Maharajah in his conquest, came to be considered as a subject ally of the Maharajah.

No exact date of the founding of the principality is given here, and even the approximate date given does not correspond to the dates given by the two previous authors. Nevertheless, from all these, the following facts are clear:

Firstly, the Poonjar Chieftains originally belonged to Madura and they are either direct or collateral

1. V.Nagam Aiya, op. cit., vol. iii, p. 402

descendants of the Pandyan Kings. It is worth mentioning here that up to the present day, official documents of the family begin with the words, Madura Meenakshi Sahayam (by the Grace of Madura Meenakshi). Meenakshi is the deity of the famous temple at Madura. In the village of Poonjar, which is the seat of the family of that name, there is also a temple dedicated to Meenakshi, with a pancha loha pratima (five-metal idol) of the deity in it.

Secondly, the family was displaced from native Madura, and sought refuge in the Travancore hills, due to internal dissensions or foreign aggression. They led a wandering, unsettled life for some time before they obtained vast hill tracts in Travancore, wither as purchased property or as generous gifts from the hospitable Travancore rulers, and established themselves on secure footing with Poonjar as capital and seat of the family.

Thirdly, they adopted marumakkathayam (rule of matrilineal succession) which was the prevailing law of succession in their host country. It is said that the Pandyan prince of the first emigrant generation died without a male issue, and was succeeded by his sister's son. Thenceforth, matrilineal succession became the rule in the family.

Fourthly, the principality was founded in the Thirteenth century A.D. or some time thereabout. It would seem from Nagam Aiyar's account that it was one of

the descendants of the original emigrant prince who founded the principality. If this is so, it is probable that some considerable period of time elapsed before the family established itself finally at Poonjar after the first emigrant generation entered Travancore at the close of the twelfth century, A.D.

The beliefs of the eastern Muthuvans concerning their royal masters, the Poonayattu Perumals, are essentially the same as those noted above, except that they are unable to give any date. Assuming that they came into the hills with the Pandyas, it may be said that the eastern Muthuvans settled in the Travancore hills at the end of the twelfth century or early in the thirteenth.

The western Muthuvans came presumably earlier than this. This is only a vague hypothesis derived from the facts that they live at lower elevations further inland from the Ghats, and that they are said to be the people who went over to the Cheras. The Chera supremacy in Travancore preceded the Pandyas. There is also a tradition that Cheran, Pandyan and Cholan were brothers, Cheran being the eldest; but this can be no more than a euphumistic manner of expression of the chronological sequence of the ascent of the three dynasties. One may venture to suggest that when the western Muthuvans are referred to as 'those

who went over to the Cheran', it probably indicates that they were the earlier arrivals.

It is possible that in course of time small numbers of emigrants from the Tamil country joined the original settlers. Indeed, Muthuvans themselves say that there were subsequent emigrations from Madura country to the Travancore hills. The history of Madura between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries was particularly turbulent with repeated invasions and sudden, violent changes in the fortunes of its rulers. Important among such upheavals were the Muhammadan invasion of 1310-'20 under Malik Kafur, and the overthrow of the Muhammadans by the Vijayanagar Kings in 1372. These and other disturbances in the country had forced people into the comparative safety of the wooded hills of the Ghats. This is a possible explanation of the presence of several hill tribes in Travancore who originally belonged to the Tamil country east of the Ghats.