CHAPTER II

HABITAT AND ECONOMY

One often hears the layman remark, in talking about Muthuvans, that they are an unsteady people who, out of sheer lack of foresight, neglect the avenues to prosperity, a higher standard of living, and a settled mode of cultivation, by shifting from one site to another year after year. While the bare facts of the statement such as that Muthuvans are shifting cultivators practising the slash-and-burn mode of cultivation, are more or less true, a closer analysis of their habitat, economy and social organization will reveal the reason why shifting cultivation persists among them despite the apparent advantages of a settled mode of life. And, what is perhaps more important, it will also show that certain phenomenal and far-reaching, if gradual, changes have taken place in Muthuvan economy in the last few decades - decades which are characterised by the rapid expansion of tea and cardamom cultivation in the Muthuvan region. By far the most important of these changes is that the Muthuvan settlement is tending to become smaller in size, on the one hand, and relatively permanent, on the other. The

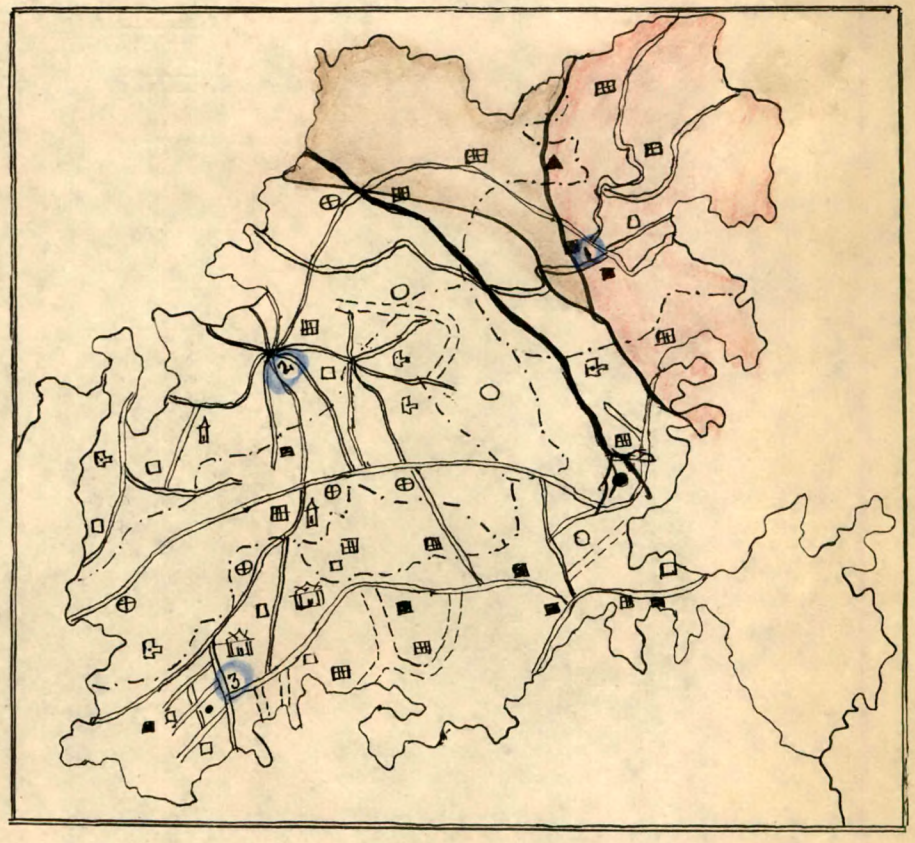
traditional Muthuvan hamlet is a mobile unit consisting of fifteen to twenty households. But as a result of general economic and demographic changes brought about principally by the expanding plantation industries, a new tendency towards relative permanency and smaller size of settlements is perceptible in Muthuvan economy and social organization. That this tendency is closely linked with general changes in the Muthuvan region is clear from the fact that the degree of permanency of settlement bears a direct relation to the physical proximity of a given hamlet to areas of general change. In other words, it is seen that a hamlet that is situated nearer to an area of concentrated economic changes tends to be more permanent, or move, if at all, within a shorter spatial range, than one which is situated farther from such an area. In this chapter an attempt will be made to describe and illustrate this phenomenon, but before doing that it would be well to give a general description of the physical features, climate flora and fauna of the Muthuvan region:

Muthuvans occupy the regions of deciduous and evergreen forests in the north-west part of the highlands of Travancore. The total extent of the area within which the Muthuvan settlements are situated is approximately

FIG.5

MAP OF KOTTAYAM DISTRICT SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF MUTHUVANS.

Scale 1" = 16 miles



Main Road

River

Traveller's Bungalow

P.W.D. Camp Shed

Rest House

P.&T. Office

Eastern Muthuvans

Western Muthuvans

1 Munnar

2 Muvattupuzha

3 Kottayam

700 square miles. About one-third of this region is under tea, cardamom and rice cultivation. Chief among these is tea which has been an organised agricultural industry on the estate system since the sixties of the last century. There are over forty tea estates, mostly belonging to European companies, in this region. In the tea plantation areas the forest has been cleared and one sees only vast stretches of hills and dales covered with the tea bush. The rapid development of this area, called the High Range, as a tea planting district has enabled allied industries and commercial enterprises to progress. In the centre of the High Range, at the confluence of three small rivers Kundala, Kanni and Nallatanni, the town of Munnar has grown. This is the most important town in all the highland region of Travancore, and is the head-quarters of the largest plantation company in the State, the Kannan Devan Hill Produce Company. Although not very large in size and population, Munnar is a beautiful town with modern amenities. It has schools, churches, fine shops and market, cinemas, clubs, transport and communicatio facilities, and a well-equipped, large, modern hospital belonging to the Kannan Devan Company. About five miles east of Munnar is the smaller town of Devikulam which,

being the head-quarters of the taluk (revenue sub-division) of that name, houses the Government offices. Until a few years ago, Devikulam was the head-quarters of a revenue division under European Commissioners. The extensive plantation region once belonged to the Poonjar Chieftains, from whom the European planters acquired the land on a ninety-nine year lease in about 1860.

Cardamom cultivation does not require the clearing of the forest. The plant grows in the shade of trees. The High Range, being fully occupied by tea gardens, do not offer much scope for cardamom cultivation. The chief cardamom cultivating area is the region south of the High Range which, for this reason, is called the Cardamom Hills.

Rice and other food crops have always been cultivated in the highlands by the hill tribes. This was, and still is, by the method of shifting cultivation, and occupied only small patches of hill slopes here and there. At the present time, however, as a result of increasing pressure on land in the midlands and lowlands, people from these regions have begun to colonise in forest clearings. Considerable tracts of forest have been cleared for food crop cultivation.

These facts were mentioned to indicate that even for the hill tribes who once looked upon the entire forest

region as their own, with only the wild animals as likely contestants, land is becoming scarcer. This is not as yet an acutely felt problem, but there is no doubt that before long the hill tribes will find themselves more and more restricted in their movements as a result of the expansion of agricultural industries, and colonisation.

Muthuvans are not the only hill tribe in this part of the highlands. At the western and north-eastern ends of the Muthuvan region are the Malankudi or Vizhavan, and the Malapulayan, respectively. The map of Travancore on page 14 shows the distribution of tribes. Each tribe keeps to its own region, by common understanding.

The Muthuvan region lies at elevations ranging from about 3,000 to nearly 9,000 feet above sea level; but there are no settlements at the highest altitudes. Most of the settlements are within altitudes of 3,000 and 6,500 feet, but there are a few on the western slopes at lower altitudes. The high mountain range lies on the eastern borders of the State, with a steady rise from south to north and west to east, so that the highest elevations are reached in the north-eastern region. The highest peak of all in the Western Ghats, the Anamudy (8,840 feet), which is also the highest peak in India south of the Himalayas,

lies in this region. Around Anamudy there are several peaks of lower altitudes, such as Eravimala (7,780 feet), Kattumala (7,800 feet), Chenthavara (7,664 feet), Karinkulam (7,500 feet), and Devimala (7,200 feet). All these peaks together make a horse-shoe formation with the opening facing towards the north-east. The plateau within this formation, with the town of Munnar in the centre is what is known as the High Range. As one proceeds westward from the High Range, the land slopes, gradually at first, and almost precipitously further on, until one comes to Neriamangalam where the Ghat section ends, and the midlands begin. Similarly, proceeding southward from the High Range, the Ghat section shows decreasing elevation until it touches the Indian Ocean, near Cape Comorin. Lying immediately south of the High Range are the Cardamom Hills which is an area of major concentration of Muthuvan settlements.

The vegetation changes with changing altitude. The entire region, with the exception of clarings for tea estates and colonisation, is thickly wooded, with deciduous forests at the higher places, and wild, evergreen forests at the lower elevations. It presents a fine example of the tropical forest at its thickest and wildest. Herds of wild elephants, the Indian bison, sambur, deer, and the

wild goat or ibex, the bear and the wild boar, tiger and the black leopard or cheetah, the chennai or Indian wild dog, and several varieties of monkeys and birds are fairly abundant in the forests. Few places in India, or indeed in the whole of Asia, can equal the Travancore highlands in its picturesque beauty, and the richness of its flora and fauna. The following description of a 'jungle trek' from Devikulam in the High Range, to Kumili in the Peermade Hills which lie about midway from north to south in the highland region, is well worth quoting:

> The way follows an old elephant path from Devikulam, a village near Munnar, southwards through the Cardamom Hills, to Kumili, the frontier station in Travancore in the Peermade Hills. Nothing could be more perfect than this trek. Some of the most inspiring scenery one could ask for is here. The wild flowers, many of which have never yet been names are marvellous ..... Yet civilization has threatened to enter here. If an when motor cars travel along this path, all will be changed. No more will tribes of monkeys leap from tree to tree and chatter noisily to those who walk below as they follow them through the sholas. No more will the black bear huddle himself on the pathway looking for all the world like a black rock until he rises to grasp his unsuspecting prey. No more will the elephant make tobbogan slides into the river. One would regret these changes and be thankful only that the leeches had to seek new places.
>
> The trek, sixty-five miles through the Cardamom Hills, is marked throughout by evidence of animals. Tracks of bison, sambar, jungle sheep, bears, tigers and elephants, may be seen fresh every morning. The hills are a veritable happy hunting ground for the man who is keen on

hunting. Tales amusing and pathetic are told by the tribesmen about the animals who share the forests with them.

The highland region of Travancore, comprising 46.5 per cent (3,566 square miles) of the area of the State, is one of the chief sources of revenue for the State, through forest produces such as timber, spices, medicinal herbs, bamboo, honey and wax, dammer, ivory etc. The forests abound in some of the finest varieties of timber such as the teak (Tectona grandis), Malabar blackwoo or rosewood (Dalbergia latifolia), ebony (Diosphyros assimilis), Anjili (Artocarpus hirsuta), jackwood(Atrocarpu integrifolia), Chambagam (Hopea parviflora), Venga (Pterocarpus marsupium), Thembavu (Terminalia tomentosa), white cedar (Dysoxylum malabaricum), red cedar (Cedrela toona), and Ventek (Lagerstroemia microcarpa).

Besides the timber trees there are also several trees yielding gums, resins and dyes. The venga tree (Pterocarpu marsupium) yields the gum kino or 'dragon's blood'. The gum is collected by incisions in the bark. There are two varieties of the incense dammer obtained from trees in the Travancore forests: the white dammer, product of the Payin tree (Vateria indica), and the black dammer, the product of Thellimaram (Canarium strictum). From the first of these, vegetable fallow for candles is also obtained. The

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1. Emily Hatch, op. cit., p. 149 et seq

Ailanthus malabarica, found in the evergreen forests of north Travancore, yields a resinous juice called muttippal which is burned as incense, and has also medicinal uses. The Butea superba, as well as its allied species Butea frondosa, yield the East India kino from tissues in the bark. The gum dissolves in water and contains a large proportion of tannin useful in the leather tanning industry. The Kattucheru (Holigana arnottiana) is one of the trees yielding the black lacquer varnish.

The bamboo, of which there are three main varieties, in Travancore forests, is a tree of manifold uses. To the hill tribes who use it to make hair pins and build homes, it is indispensible. The bamboo shoots and tender leaves form a major item of food for the elephant and the deer. The three varieties of bamboo in the Travancore forests are: the kal mulah or male bamboo (Dendrocalamus strictus) which has a thick, hardy stem growing to a height of thirty to fifty feet, and is an excellent natural ladder; the arambu or thornless bamboo (Oxytenanthera bourdilloni), which has a straight, hollow stem, reaching up to thirty feet; and the eeta (Ochlandra travancorica) which is a small variety, and is used for making baskets, mats, and many other household articles. T

The important spices are: cardamom (Elettaria cardamomum), black pepper (Piper nigrum), ginger (Zingiber officinale), and turmeric (Circuma longa).

A large variety of medicinal herbs and trees such as Kanjiram (Strychnos nux-vomica), Odallam (Cerebera odollum), Vettila Kasturi (Abelmoschus moschatus), lemon grass (Andropogon schaenanthus), karuva (Cinnamomum zeylanicum), Kasturi Manjal (Curcuma aromatica), Kadukai (Terminalia chebula), Thetti (Ixora coccinea), and Karumthumba (Anisomele malabarica), grow in the forest. These and other minor forest produces are collected by the hill tribes on behalf of the government or contractors.

Most important among the animal products of the forest is ivory, or the elephant tusk. The teeth, nails and bones of dead elephants are also valued as raw materials for various indigenous handicrafts for which Travancore is reputed. For the collection and delivery of all minor forest produces like ivory, honey and wax, dammer, spices and medicinal herbs, the government used to depend on the hill tribes. But later on a system of auctioning of rights to collect minor forest produces was introduced. Each year the right of collection is auctioned. As early as the first decade of the last century, this system appears to have been in vogue. Francis Buchanan, in his account of Mysore, Canara and Malabar, mentions the "drug-renters".[1] The drug-renters themselves, in their turn, depended on

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1. Francis Buchanan, Mysore, Canara and Malabar (London: Cadell and Davies, 1807), vol. ii, p.334.

the hill tribes for collection of the produces. This practice continues to this day. Where rights of collection are not auctioned, the hill tribes are expected to collect the produces and deliver them directly to officials of the Forest Department.

Wild life in the forest is abundant and varied, including several species of edible animals. The Indian elephant (Elephas maximus) is the most important wild animal in the Travancore forests. Foraging in the jungles in herds of five to fifteen or more, the elephant is a serious menace to the hill tribes whose food crops it eats. Another formidable beast of the forests, next only to the elephant in size, and much more abundant than the latter, is the Indian bison (Bos gaurus). This animal also feeds on the food crops of the tribal peoples, but being neither as persistent nor as fearless as the elephant, the bison is not quite as troublesom. There are four species of deer in the highlands, which are, the sambur (Cervus unicolor), which is as large as an ox, and is dark brown in colour; the spotted deer (Cervus axis); the rib-faced or Barking deer (Cervulus muntjac) and a small creature about the size of a hare, called the Mouse deer (Tragulus memiuna). The Nilgiri wild goat or ibex (Hemitragus hylocrius), the wild boar (Sus christatus), the sloth bear (Melursis ursinus), the chennai or wild

dog, and smaller animals like the porcupine (Hystrix leucura), and rodents like the hare and bandicoot are plentiful. Among monkeys, there are two types that are seen in large numbers: the white monkey (Macaca radiata), and the black monkey or Nilgiri lagur (Kasi johnii); the flesh of the latter is prized for its supposed medicinal properties. Two of the largest animals of the feline family, namely, the tiger, and the black leopard or cheetah, are also found.

The climate in the higher altitudes of the Ghats is temperate, with temperatures ranging from about 35°F in winter to about 80°F in summer. During the cold weather, frost nightly nips the vegetation, and in exceptionally cold winters, the thermometer has been known to fall below 20°F. Rainfall is generally heavy throughout the region, but there is considerable variation between different stations. The highest rainfall is at the foot of the Ghat section; December and January are the driest and coldest months, and June to September are months of heaviest rainfall, with July as the peak month. The following Table shows average rainfall in inches during each month in four selected stations in the Muthuvan region. The stations selected are Marayoor, Munnar, Santhanpara and Neriamangalam, which are shown in the map below. It may

be noted that the stations selected are so situated as to give a fair representation of rainfall at various points in the Muthuvan region.

TABLE VI

MONTHLY AND YEARLY AVERAGE RAINFALL IN THE MUTHUVAN REGION*

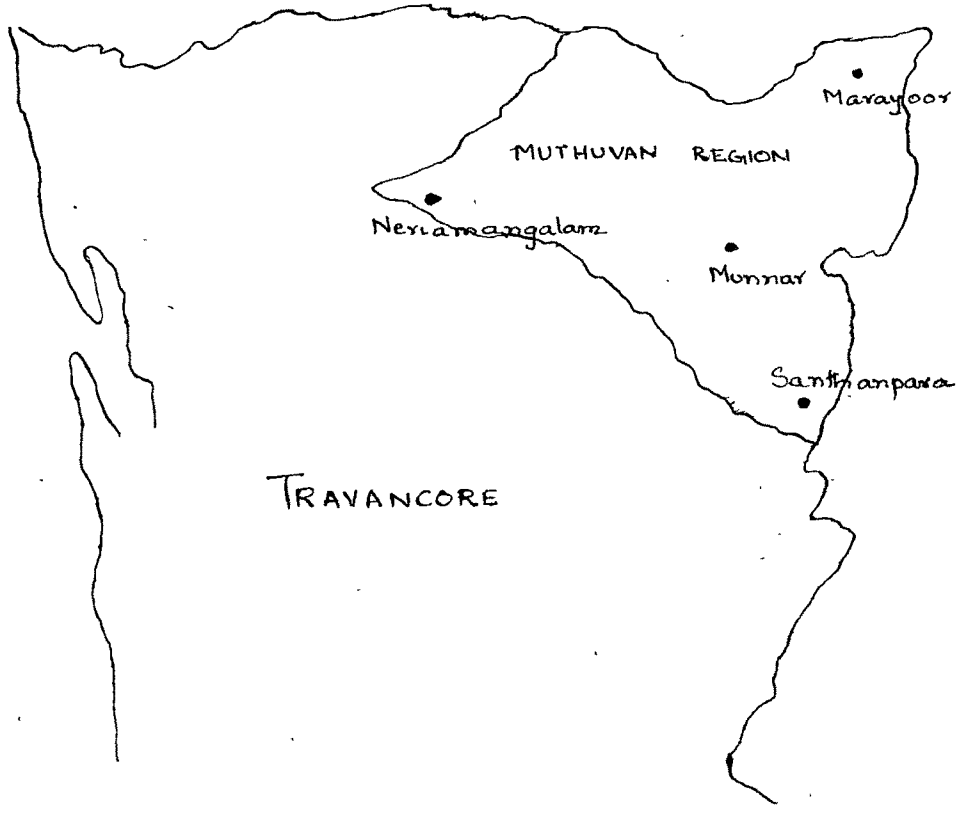
Stations	Jan.	Feb	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Yearly Aver.
Marayoor	2.7	0.3	0.7	3.0	3.7	6.9	8.8	5.4	4.7	9.4	9.6	4.1	59.3
Munnar	0.8	0.8	1.3	4.7	9.1	31.8	46.6	28.4	13.5	9.5	5.5	1.6	153.6
Santhanpara	2.0	1.3	2.1	4.6	5.3	10.3	11.0	7.1	5.4	13.0	9.5	3.4	75.0
Neriamangalam	0.6	0.6	3.5	7.2	25.1	32.0	46.9	27.4	21.4	28.5	9.7	3.2	206.1

* From the Travancore Directory, 1938, p. 97. The averages given are for varying numbers of years prior to 1937: Marayoor, 1916-1936; Munnar, 1913-1936; Santhanpara, 1909-1936; Neriamangalam, 1932-1936.

MAP OF THE MUTHUVAN REGION SHOWING STATIONS

SELECTED FOR DETAILS OF RAINFALL

IN TABLE VI



The above Table would seem to show that no month of the year is completely dry. That is because the figures regresent the averages over a considerable number of years. Exceptional rainfall in certain years during months which are normally dry, gives such a picture. In a normal year, the seasons are more or less as below:

February to May	:	the hot season
June and July	:	south-west monsoon
August and September	:	light showers
October and November	:	north-east monsoon
December and January	:	the cold season

Just before commencement of the south-west monsoon, strong winds from the sea sweep across the Ghats incessantly for several days. In certain years when the winds are particularly strong, they cause considerable damage to vegetation and houses.

One point to note is that there is much irregularity of seasons in Travancore, especially in the highlands. Sometimes there is far more rain than is good for the crops. It is a matter of vital concern for agriculturists to have rains at the right time and in the right quantity. Crop failure due to vagaries of the seasons affect the food supply of Muthuvans and other hill tribes whose

mainstay is agriculture. We shall see in a later chapter that when the monsoon fails to come at the right time, the Muthuvans perform propitiatory sacrifices to deities, attributing failure of rains to divine discontent.

Muthuvans subsist mainly by agriculture, the chief food crops being ragi (Eleusine coracana) and rice (Oryza sativa), in that order of importance among the Tamil-speaking eastern Muthuvans, and in the reverse order of importance among the Malayalam-speaking western Muthuvans. The order of importance of the two main food crops is not entirely without sociological significance. Ragi is an important food crop, along with rice, jowar and millets, for the Tamilian peasantry in the dry, arid plains east of the Western Ghats. Climatic and soil conditions also favour the cultivation of ragi in this region, for the plant grows well in dry, loose soil, and needs only sparse watering. The eastern Muthuvans keep in close social contacts with the Tamilian peasant population of the border country, and have continued to retain the tradition of ragi cultivation. Of late, however, rice cultivation is on the increase as settlements tend to become relatively permanent.

The western Muthuvans, on the other hand, being in closer contact with Malayalis whose staple diet is ri

cultivate more of rice than ragi. Besides this cultural explanation of dietetic preferences, it may also be added that the western slope of the Ghats being a region of heavier rainfall than the eastern mountainous region, is more suited for rice cultivation.

Apart from rice and ragi plots, all Muthuvans generally have small patches of forest clearings adjacent to the main plots, for cultivating curry vegetables like amaranthus, brinjals, cucumber, melons etc. Millet and other cereals are also grown on a small scale to supplement the food supply. Amaranthus is of particular interest because the Muthuvans cultivate it mainly for its seeds and only secondarily for its value as a green leafy vegetable. The amaranthus stalks are cut when the seeds are ripe. The seeds are dried and cleaned, and stored in earthernware pots or fruit shells or bamboo containers, to be used on special occasions or to entertain honoured guests. Puffed amaranthus seeds, mixed with honey, is a great Muthuvan delicacy.

The method of cultivation followed by Muthuvans offers a typical illustration of the practice of shifting cultivation. Shifting cultivation generally enjoins the practice of annual shifting of settlements too. This is a matter of great importance in Muthuvan social life and

village structure, and will be dealt with in the chapeter on Kudi (village) organization.

Shifting cultivation is the popular and customary method followed by Muthuvan, and indeed by all agricultural or semi-agricultural hill tribes of Travancore, for raising crops. The chief considerations in selecting a site are: (1) the lay of the land; a rugged and undulating section of the forest is discarded in preference to a flat and even site, or the slope of a hill. (2) The nature of trees and undergrowth in the area is important, because, in the first place, the presence of too many large trees is an obstruction to agriculture and, secondly, it is prohibited to cut the 'royal' trees like teak, sandalwood etc. While too many large trees is a disadvantage, an abundance of smaller trees, shrubs, and undergrowth is an advantage because these, when cut and fired, form an excellent fertiliser. (3) A third factor of importance in the selection of a site for cultivation is the availability of running water nearby. The highland is liberally interspersed with a large number of rivulets and streams which form the only source of water supply to the hill tribes and their cattle and crops. The hill tribes do not have artificial irrigation; they adopt the easier method of selecting for cultivation such sites as

are already naturally irrigated by running water.
(4) Lastly, the choice of site is governed by the availability of a suitable hamlet site not far from the cultivation site, affording easy accessibility to the crops.

These are only the practical, commonsense considerations in the choice of site. There is yet another important factor of an entirely different nature. This pertains to the arul (divine revelation) that the poojari (religious functionary) of the hamlet gets from the deities in his state of spirit-possession during the annual religious rituals preceding the shifting of hamlet. It is believed that the appropriate deity will speak through the medium of the poojari regarding the best cultivation site for the next year.

With due deference to practical considerations and oracular guidance, the final choice of cultivation site is made by the headman of each hamlet. It is also the duty and prerogative of the headman to lead the people of his hamlet to the selected site and perform the ritual tree-cutting. On an auspicious day determined by oracle or divination, the headman leads the boys and men of the hamlet in a formal procession to the chosen site to commence clearing operations. This takes place in the

Tamil month of Thai (January-February). The appropriate deities are propitiated before cutting the trees, as otherwise the spirits of the jungle are offended.

After the ritual tree-cutting by the headman, all the male members of the hamlet join in forest-clearing. The smaller trees and under-growth, and the overhanging branches of large trees, are cut and left to dry. Either before or after jungle-clearing, the headman roughly apportions the entire site among the households in the hamlet. Each household is taken as a unit and the allotment of land depends more or less on the number of mouths to feed. Normally, a man with five dependents is given more land than one who has only three; however, if the former has no adult sons or relations to work for him, a large plot will be unmanageable for him. Therefore, although the headman formally allots land for each household in the hamlet, an individual household may cultivate more than the alloted piece, or less, depending on its man-power. Relatively speaking, the only limit to the extent of land a family may cultivate, is its own needs and resources.

The cut trees and branches when dried are fired, and the first rainfall following this washes the potash and other chemical elements into the soil. Later, the ground is cleared of unburnt branches, stones and other

obstructions, and the soil loosened with a light hoeing.

The clearing operation is a communal undertaking, but the rest of the processes in cultivation such as preparing the ground, sowing, weeding, cutting the sheaves, threshing and storing, are done by each household separately with such help as it may be able to muster.

Little attention is paid to the fields after sowing, until the seedlings have grown high enough to attract the attention of the wild elephants and bison. These animals, roaming about in herds, have acquired a particular fondness for cultivated crops like ragi, rice, maize, millet etc., and cause untold havoc to the food crops of the hill tribes. Muthuvans are constantly vigilant to protect their crops from wild animals. One of the first things they do, following the clearing of a site for cultivation, is to construct watch-houses on tree-tops at strategic places in the field. The watch-houses, called Kerumadam (lit. climbing hut or hut for climbing) are strongly built so as to withstand the fury of the pre-monsoon gales of late May and early June. A house may last for two or three years, although it will have ceased to be used as a watch-house after the harvest. Near Muthuvan hamlets it is a common sight to see tree-top watch-houses remaining intact and in apparently usable condition, though partly concealed by

FIG. 7

A TYPICAL KERUMADAM (WATCH-HOUSE)

growing foliage, long after they have ceased to be used for the purpose they were originally meant to serve, and long after the fields they once helped guard from marauding beasts have ceased to be operative as sites of cultivation.

Sowing takes place in different months of the year. The following table shows the sowing and harvesting periods for various crops in one particular region. This is not necessarily typical, because rainfall and other climatic conditions vary from place to place.

TABLE VII

MUTHUVAN FOOD CROP PARTICULARS, SURIANALLE, 1954

Crop	Sowing	Maturing	Harvesting
Rice	Thai(Jan.-Feb.)	5 months	Ani(June-July)
Ragi	Chithirai(Apr.-May)	5 "	Purattas(Sept.-Oct.
Thena	" "	3 "	Adi (July-Aug.)
Chama	Adi (July-Aug.)	3 "	Aippasi(Oct.-Nov.)

Note: The months in italics are Tamil months. The staple crops are rice and ragi; thena(Panicum italicum) and chama(Panicum miliare) are minor crops. Column three shows the approximate time that each crop takes for ripening. In each crop there are different varieties, and the actual time taken by a crop to ripen depends on the particular variety of seed. Muthuvans prefer those which take longer to ripen, because they yield a more plentiful harvest.

Between sowing and harvesting, the Muthuvan are perpetually worried about the disastrous nocturnal visits of elephants and bisons to the cultivation site. Three or four men go into the field every night to keep watch. The worst enemy of the crops is the elephant; he is too frequently around, and is not easily frightened. Bison and wild boar do more harm by trampling down the plants than by gobbling it, but their visits are not too frequent. The watchers start for the fields at dusk, with one or two rifles between them, and remain in the watch-houses all night. The rifles, if fired at all, are fired with empty catridges, lest an elephant may be injured or killed. It is a serious offence to injure or kill the elephant, which is a 'royal' beast, unless it has turned rogue and become a menace to human life in which case permission is given through Gazette notification to destroy it. In spite of all they do to save the crops, the animals deprive the Muthuvans of a considerable proportion of their crops.

When the harvest time approaches, a common shed for storing and drying the sheaves is erected near the hamlet. This shed has a large platform of split bamboo or junglewood poles inside, at a height of three to four feet from the ground. The harvest of each household is stacked separately on the platform where it remains until dry. If there is too much rain and dampness a fire is kept burning underneath

the platform to speed up drying. When the sheaves are sufficiently dry, a clean, level court is prepared in front of the shed for threshing. Threshing is done by crushing the sheaves between the feet or by beating them with a flail. The grain is stored in large earthernware pots, partly in the house, and partly in the forest in an abandoned tree-house, or a rock cavity. The reason for storing grain in the forest is partly that the house is not large enough, and partly that they fear damage to the grain through fire, if stored in the house. Muthuvans do not generally keep articles of value in the house; they are still more particular not to leave toddlers and infants alone in the house, because they dread the possibility of a fire breaking out at any moment. This is possibly an echo of the tradition that they left Madura on account of the burning of the City by Kannaki. (See PP. 53 et seq. Supra)

The western Muthuvans have a practice of keeping a small share of each man's harvest of paddy in a specially constructed tree-house in the forest. This is a generous gesture of hospitality, the idea being that any lonely wayfarer may help himself to a meal off the grain. To enable him to do this, they also keep in the tree house the minimum equipment needed for pounding paddy and for cooking, such as an oral (wooden pounder), an olakka (wooden pounding rod), a winnowing tray, cooking pots,

FIG. 8

A KERUMADAM OF THE WESTERN MUTHUVANS FOR STORING GRAINS AND COOKING UTENSILS FOR WAYFARERS

ladles etc. A ladder to reach the tree-house completes the arrangement.

While it is tmue that, relatively speaking, the Muthuvans are free to cultivate as much land as they can or want to, there are certain government rules pertaining to cultivation by the hill tribes. The tribal population residing in the forests and Reserves are under the control of the Forest Department of the State. The relevant rules framed by the Forest Department in this regard are:

> The settlements of hill men residing in a Government Forest or Reserve shall be permanently fixed, and they shall not be permitted to shift from place to place, except temporarily with the special written permission of the Divisional Forest Officer, in cases of scarcity of water, outbreak of epidemics such as small-pox etc.
>
> The hill men shall enjoy the concessions of cultivating land free of tax* in the Government Forests and Reserves in which they live, to the extent of 5/8 of an acre per head for every member of a settlement above three years of age.
>
> (i) A compact block of land, comprising seven times the total area required for each settlement in a year, deducting the area of wet lands permanently under cultivation, shall be demarcated by the Forest Department (the hill men concerned providing labour free of payment), and 1/7 of that area shall be cultivated in any one year, so that the cultivation shall be carried on permanently in that block on a rotation of seven years.

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* This applies only to land under food crop cultivation. A nominal land tax has to be paid for land under cultivation of cash crops such as cardamom. (P.T.T.)

(ii) It shall be the duty of the headman to apportion the area among the several families of his settlement, subject to an appeal to the Divisional Forest Officer whose decision shall be final.

(iii) In cases of trespass or encroachment in a settlement, the headman shall decide such disputes, subject to an appeal to the Divisional Forest Officer whose decision shall be final.

No hill man shall be entitled to the grant of patta* for any land cultivated in a Government Forest or Reserve, however long his occupation of such land may be.1

These rules are not strictly enforced; nevertheless, they provide statutory means for controlling the residence, cultivation, nature of land-ownership etc. of the hill men. Even if the rules were enforced, limiting area of cultivation for individual households, a family of father and mother and two dependent children aged above three years, could cultivate two-and-a-half acres of land, which would be more than ample to meet the food requirements of the family, if fully used. In point of fact, however, the average extent of food crop cultivation by a Muthuvan family is only about three-quarters of an acre. Insufficient cultivation is the chief cause of seasonal food shortage for the Muthuvans.

Muthuvans are almost wholly an agricultural people,

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* patta means permanent ownership with right to sell, mortgage or bequeath. (P.T.T.)

1. Forest Manual (Travancore-Cochin State), pp. 166 et seq

depending solely on food crop cultivation as their direct means of food supply. But a slash-and-burn system of agriculture does not keep a man fully engaged. Between sowing and harvesting, the men pay very little attention to the crops except the nightly watch to scare away the foraging beasts. An occasional weeding is carried out by women. On the whole, the men have too much respite from agricultural work for a good part of the year. This enables them to engage in certain subsidiary occupations some of which may augment the food supply directly, and others may form sources of cash income which in turn is used partly to buy more food, and partly for other purposes.

Among the subsidiary occupations, hunting is important. Although Muthuvans live mainly on a vegetarian diet, they are fond of the meat of certain wild animals like the sambur, spotted deer, barking deer, the wild goat, mouse deer and the black monkey. The last-named is particularly valued as a diet for barren women to cure them of their malady. They abhor cow's meat and consider beef-eating a very despicable practice. Nor do they eat the meat of the gaur (Indian bison) because the animal is believed to be the vehicle of Lord Shiva and is therefore sacred. (In classical Hindu mythology, Shiva is represented as riding a bull). The domestic goat and fowl are specially

favoured meat, but these, being sacrificial, are generally cut only on ritual occasions, except that a hen or cock must be cut for a distinguished guest. Wild fowls and partridges are sometimes caught in traps and eaten.

Muthuvans hunt with rifles and air-guns nowadays. In every Muthuvan hamlet there are one or two rifles. In the dry spells of the year they organise hunting parties. These organised hunts last for two or three days. Any game shot during the hunt is shared by all and eaten in the forest itself, except that the head is usually brought home because it belongs to the boys of the bachelor hall. Muthuvans have a simple method of roasting meat or fish in the forest. A fire is made on the flat surface of a rock and kept burning until the rock becomes very hot. The ash and cinder are then swept off, and the meat or fish is placed on the hot surface and covered with green leaves. It is removed when sufficiently roasted.

The organised hunts are few and far between. More often, men go out singly or in pairs in search of game. Not all Muthuvans are good hunters, but there are some who have a reputation for marksmanship.

It seems that in the past Muthuvans used to resort to hunting as a more serious occupation than at present. For one thing, wild life is not as abundant now as it used

to be, and, secondly, the increasing pressure on land tends to make the tribal population adopt a settled way of life. Nearly a hundred years ago, Lt.Col.Doughlas Hamilton of the Madras Army wrote as follows about the Muthuvan method of catching ibex, or the Nilgiri wild goat:

> The High Range abound in ibex; every rocky crag and mountain has its herd, but they are exceedingly wild; both the Pooliars (Pulayas) and Moodoovars (Muthuvans) possess guns and they have periodical hunts after the ibex, which accounts for their being so shy; their mode of operation is as follows:- before the hunt takes place, they erect barriers of stout bushes at various spots along the passes frequented by the ibex. At every ten or twelve feet along the barrier there is a weak spot composed of light twigs with a running nooze or rattan surrounding it, the other end of the rattan being firmly secured to a post fixed in the ground. Having made these preparations, they proceed to drive the ibex towards the barriers, shooting any they can get a chance at on the way. The ibex on being driven up to the barrier rush at the weak portion of it and are caught in the noozes from which, owing to their curved homns, they cannot possibly extricate themselves, and are quickly despatched by the pursuers. The pooliars endeavoured to persuade me that very few ibex are captured this way, and that it was only the Moodoovars that hunted them; but from the numerous barriers I saw, it is, I imagine, a very successful method of capturing them.[1]

Muthuvans set the nooze trap even now, and an ibex or sambur is occasionally caught in this manner. Their increasing preoccupation with agriculture is a consequence

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1. Doughlas Hamilton, Report on the High Ranges of the Annamullay Mountains (Madras: The Fort St.George Gazette Press, 1866) p. 13.

of economic and demographic factors facing them in modern times. Previously, wild game seems to have added substantially to the general food supply of the Muthuvans. About fifty years ago, in answer to questions sent by Mr.Thurston of the Madras Museum, Mr.A.Ff.Martin wrote:

> All the animals the Muduvans catch are 'game' to them, though we would describe some of these only as vermin. They catch rats, squirrels, quail, jungle fowl, porcupine, mouse deer and fish, They kill with a blow-pipe and dart many small birds. The traps in use are varied, but there are three principal ones, one of which looks like a big bow. It is fixed upright in the ground to form a spring which can close with a snap a small upright triangle of sharp-edged bamboo to which it is connected. Into this any luckless small game may have intruded its head having been induced to do so by finding all other roads closed with a cunningly made fence. Another type of trap is a bent sapling from which a loop of twine or fibre hangs on to what appears to be the ground, but is really a little platform on which the jungle fowl treads and immediately finds itself caught by both legs and hanging in mid air. A third is very much the same, but of stouter build, the loop is upright and set in a hedge constructed for the purpose of keeping the fretful porcupine in the path. Passing along this the beast unconsciously releases a pin, back flies the sapling, and the porcupine is hung ...
>
> The Muduvans are adept at catching ibex, which are driven towards a fence with nooses set in it at proper points, causing the beasts to break their necks. Fish are caught in very beautifully constructed cruives, and also on the hook, while, on the larger rivers below the plateau, the use of the night line is understood.
>
> With the gun, sambur, ibex, jungle sheep, mongoose, monkeys, squirrels, martens are killed. Besides being a good shot, the Muduvan when using his own powder, takes no risks; the

> stalk is continued until game is approached sometimes to within a few yards, when a charge of slugs from the antiquated match-lock has the same effect as the most up-to-date bullet from the most modern weapon.[1]

These hunting implements are still in use, but hunting, even as a partial means of livelihood, has fallen in importance. The government rules regarding hunting and fishing by hill men are:

> The hill men may shoot game in wet weather from the 15th Vykasi to the 30th Karthigay* except such animals and birds as may be prohibited from time to time, and they may catch fish, provided that the poisoning of water or the use of dynamite or gunpowder for the purpose is not resorted to. For the purpose of this rule and for the protection of persons and property, each settlement may keep one gun ordinarily in the custody of the headman. The Government may, from time to time, lay down any restricitions in respect of these privileges.
>
> Proviso: In exceptional cases, the Government may authorise more than one gun being kept in a settlement.[2]

Although the enforcement of rules is difficult in the remote forest regions, the Muthuvans, and in fact most hill men, are generally trustworthy and law-abiding.

Fishing is a rare occupation for the Muthuvans of the High Range and Cardamom Hills, but in the western slopes

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1. A.Ff.Martin, quoted in History of the High Range Plantation District, North Travancore, by "The Old Campaigner" (Bangalore: The Scripture Literature Press, 1931)

* Approximately 1st June to 15th December.

2. Forest Manual, p. 168

of the Ghats where the rivers are larger and fish more plentiful, the Muthuvans engage in fishing almost daily. In the rainy season, when the rivers are full, some fish migrate into the upper reaches of the rivers for spawning; it is mainly during this time that the plateau Muthuvans, that is, the Muthuvans of Munnar and Devikulam, take to fishing. Nets, fish-traps and lines are used for catching fish. The western Muthuvans, most of whom live near the larger rivers, use the night line. This is the same as the ordinary line and hook except that it is left in the river overnight.

Among the plateau Muthuvans, cattle-rearing is an important subsidiary occupation. They rear buffaloes and cows, but only the buffalo is, for them, a productive animal. Cows are not milked at all; they say that cows are kept only for prestige. A man's wealth is reckoned in terms of the number of heads of cattle that he possesses. Muthuvans do not seem to have any sentimental or religions objection to milking the cow; it is something that is just not done.

Cattle, especially cows, are sometimes sold to plains people who may be either professional cattle dealers or agricultural colonisers. The experience of some of the latter who bought cows or heifers off Muthuvans for honest rearing has been very disppointing. They say that Muthuvan

cattle are of a semi-wild species which it is difficult to domesticate and which do not have the homing instinct like other cattle. There have been a few instances of Muthuvan cattle purchased by settlers being lost in the forest and eaten by tigers. The truth of the matter is, probably, that Muthuvan cattle, used as they are to a comparatively unfettered existence in the wilds, do not adjust easily to a docile, domesticated life. But even in instances where Muthuvan cattle have been successfully domesticated, their milk yield is very poor compared to other cattle, and therefore they are not very popular with prospective buyers. However, professional cattle dealers who scarcely have any intention of rearing Muthuvan cattle for domestic uses, are always pleased to buy cattle off Muthuvans. They are able to sell the animals to butchers at a good profit because of their high yield of meat. The original buying price itself will be low leaving a good margin for profit. Muthuvans, being generally ignorant of prevailing cattle prices in the market, are only too often persuaded to sell their cattle at comparatively low prices. Cattle are bought off Muthuvans on the assurance that they are to be reared in homes, because they cannot be persuaded to sell cattle for slaughter as they have an abhorrence of cow-slaughter and beef-eating which they

consider the worst of sins.

Honey is fairly plentiful in Travancore forests, and this forms a source of food, as well as cash income, to most hill tribes. The hill men recognise four different kinds of bees: (1) the perunth-ee, or large bee which hangs its huge combs to the branches of 'silk cotton' and 'Chini' trees; (2) the thoda or nadaya-ee, which makes its nest in hollow trees or in caves, often in large colonies; (3) the kossu or kotha-ee which suspends a small comb consisting of a double row of cells, from the branches of bushes; and (4) siru-ee, a very small bee which builds its nest in the crevices of trees. The honey of this species is bitter, and is not collected. The first species is valuable for wax, and the second for honey. Bees wax is a government monopoly, but not honey. Hill men are expected to collect beeswax and deliver it to the Forest Depots or to the government contractors. The same rule applies to other minor forest produces also, such as ivory, dammer, cardamom etc.

Muthuvans are particularly adept in the technique of collecting honey, and most of the Muthuvan men go about this occupation as often as they can. They travel up to ten or fifteen miles a day in pursuit of honey. When they locate by sight, smell or sound a tree or a rock cavity where there are bees, they stop to collect the honey, and

move on again. If the honey combs are on top of large trees, they ascend the height with the help of an improvised ladder. This is made by tying sticks for steps on the tree trunk, by cutting steps with the hatchet or bill-hook, or by driving pegs into the tree. If the nests are in caves, they let themselves down over precipices with the help of a rattan ladder. Some of the honey is consumed, and the rest is sold in the estates.

For collecting minor forest produces and delivering them at the Forest Depots, government have the following schedule according to which payment is made to the hill men. (See p.108 for Table)

In some parts the right to collect minor forest produces is put up for auction, and the different valleys or groups of valleys are allotted separately. The bidder who offers to deliver the greatest quantity of produces is accepted, and he has to deliver the quantity agreed on, subject to a penalty, but anything in excess of the stipulated quantity is the bidders' own property and can be used as he likes. It is a recognised custom that in order to collect the produces, the bidder shall order the hill men to collect for him without remuneration, he being a government contractor, a certain quantity per head, the total often being far in excess of his bid. The contractor then delivers to the Forest Department the quantity agreed on, and retains the rest as his profit,

TABLE VIII

RATE OF PAYMENT FOR MINOR FOREST PRODUCES*

No.	Produce	Descriptions	Price Rs.	As.	Ps.	Unit
1(a)	Ivory	I class weighing 18 lbs. and above per tusk	1	0	0	Pound
(b)	"	II class weighing below 18 but above 13 lbs.	0	12	0	"
(c)	"	III class weighing below 13, but above 7 lbs.	0	8	0	"
(d)	"	IV class weighing below 7 lbs. per trunk	0	4	0	"
2(a)	Cardamoms	with husk	5	0	0	Thulam@
(b)	"	seeds	3	12	0	"
(c)	"	chaff with husk	0	13	6	"
3	Wax	- - - - - - - - -	6	5	0	"
4	Dammer	- - - - - - - - -	0	13	6	"
5	Honey	- - - - - - - - -	2	8	0	Para Ⓢ

* These were the rates current at the end of 1952. Presumably they remain unchanged even now.

@ Thulam is a measure of weight equal to 20 lbs.
Ⓢ Para is a measure of size equal to 20 lbs.

while the hill men deliver their quota to the contractor, and exchange any further quantity they can collect for salt, knives, cloth or other articles. It is obvious that there is some exploitation of hill men by the contractors, but the relations between the two are often cordial. The contractor helps the hill men in times of need by advancing money or food grains. In places where the right of collection is not auctioned, the hill men deliver the products direct to the Forest Department. Forest produces not collected by government or leased to contractors may be collected by the hill men for their own consumption or for sale. These include pepper, wild ginger, yams, jack fruit, mango, tamarind etc.

Muthuvan women are experts in making various articles of household use such as baskets, mats and winnowing trays, out of bamboo, rattan, or reeds. They make these articles primarily for their own domestic use, but if there is anything in excess of their need, the men sell them in the estates or nearby markets.

The lemon grass oil industry was popular among the Muthuvans until recently. This is one of the indigenous industries of Travancore, and consists of the extraction of the juice of lemon grass (Cymbopogon flexuosus) by distillation. The grass grows wild in the midland and highland regions of Travancore. When there was a boom

in price of the oil a few years ago, several enterprising Muthuvans set up stills for distillation. Most of these are now in disuse, but it is a cottage industry that has much scope for development.

From ancient times cardamom has been one of the chief produces of the Travancore hills. This used to be an exclusive government monopoly, until private individuals and companies were allowed to cultivate cardamom. There are several cardamom estates in the highlands some of which are owned by European companies and the rest by private individuals. Muthuvans in the Cardamom Hills and High Range own small plots of land varying in size from half acre to ten acres. In view of the fact that the cultivation and collection of this spice plays a considerable part in Muthuvan economy, it is worthwhile mentioning it here. There are three types of cardamom in Travancore: (1) the makara-elam which is grown on the Cardamom Hills at an elevation of over 3,000 feet, and which, in the drier climate of that locality, ripen in the month of January. The scapes which bear this variety trail on the ground and the capsules containing the spice are likely to be eaten by field mice unless the garden is carefully weeded; (2) the kanni-elam which is found on the slopes of the hills to the west of the Periyar river, and at an elevation below 3,000 feet. In this too the scapes trail

on the ground, but the capsules are smaller and ripen in October; (3) the nila-elam or long cardamom of south Travancore. The plants of this variety are larger and the scapes stand erect. The capsules are longer, and not so broad as those of the kanni-elam; they ripen in October. In point of value, the three varieties are in the same order as above.

Until about the twenties of the last century there was no organized cardamom cultivation in Travancore; the plant grew wild sporadically in the shades of trees in the higher regions of the land, and hill tribes residing in the cardamom-growing areas used to collect the spice and deliver it to government or to forest contractors. In 1823 a special Cardamom Department was created and active encouragement given to the cultivation of the spice. Francis Buchanan who toured South India in the first decade of the last century has recorded as below about the state of cardamom cultivation in Travancore hills:

> The renter presumably the fore-runner of the present-day contractor trades with villages belonging to Travancore and inhabited by rude tribes called Visuar Vishavan or Coravan, Vucamar these are possibly the Muthuvans, for some Muthuvans are known as Vakas - plural, Vakamar , and Munnan. These tribes occupy a hilly tract ten days' journey in length, and are scattered through this extent in villages of ten or twelve huts. They use the cotu-cadu slash-and-burn cultivation, and collect the same articles with those above-mentioned and have besides cardamoms, which is the only thing that they sell to the renter who

> lives at Ani-Malaya(Anamalais.) In January they are brought to him fit for the market and he knows nothing of the manner in which they are prepared, only that they grow on the hills without cultivation. The Cadar (Kadar) inform me that their neighbours in the hills of Travancore know the places fit for cardamoms by obsérving in the woods places where some of of the plants grow. There the hill people cut all the trees, and give the sun access to the plants which afterwards shoot up apace. It is three years however, before they come to perfection. In the third and fourth years they produce abundantly and then die, when the wood is allowed to grow up and another part is cleared for a future crop. Between the 10th of January and the 9th of February, the fruit is fit for cutting. If the seed be to be preserved in the capsules or husks, the scapi or fruit-stems, before the fruit is quite ripe, are cut off from the root, and kept in a heap for some days; after which the capsules are separated from them by the hand. If the seed only be to be collected, the fruit-stems are allowed to ripen, until they become reddish, and until the birds begin to eat the seed. They are then cut, dried under the pressure of a stone for three or four days, rubbed with the hand to separate the seed.[1]

The simple method of collecting and curing observed by Buchanan has long since been replaced by more efficient, methods. When government encouragement was given to the cultivation of the spice, small owners carried on an inefficient cultivation. In 1896 government monopoly was renounced and another system of land tax was put into effect. This has enabled the expansion of cardamom cultivation.

In the last fifty years or so several enterprising

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1. Francis Buchanan, Mysore, Canara and Malabar (London: Cadell and Davies, 1807), vol. ii, p. 336 et seq. op. cit The words in paranthesis are mine [P.T.T.]

Muthuvans started cardamom cultivation on a small scale, but, unfortunately, several plots of cardamom land once owned by Muthuvans have, due to a variety of reasons, since passed on to the hands of traders or large-scale cardamom cultivators,. Some have mortgaged their cardamom plots to money-lenders; some have been induced to sell their land to owners of large adjacent estates at low prices; some have lost their land, wholly or partly, through the machinations of cleverer cultivators, or through their own gullibility; some have forefeited their rights of ownership through default of payment of land-tax to government; a few have forsaken their plots and migrated further east due to fear and anxiety induced in them by others with imaginary threats of legal proceedings or eviction; there are yet others who have been so indifferent to their cardamom plots that they are hardly able to recognise the plots they or their ancestors once owned.

A survey of cardamom holdings by Muthuvans in one hamlet consisting of fifteen households showed the following results: (see p.114for table).

The families represented in the above table are the entire family units of a particular hamlet; it is not claimed to be typical of Muthuvan cardamom holding, but it does bring out certain interesting features.

TABLE IX

MUTHUVAN CARDAMOM HOLDINGS[1]

House No.	Present holding	Previous holding	remarks
1	...	...	
2	...	...	
3	0.75 acres	...	Given by his father
4	1.00 acres	...	
5	5.00 "	...	
6	0.75 "	...	
7	...	...	
8	...	...	
9	...	6.00 acres	Mortgaged to creditors
10	...	...	
11	...	...	
12	0.75 "	...	
13	1.00 "	...	
14	...	1.00 "	Lost through default in payment of tax
15	3.00 "	...	

1. This survey was made in Pachappul kudi in 1952, 'Present holding' refers to the area of cardamom land held by the head of the household concerned at the time of the enquiry. 'Previous holding' refers to the area of cardamom land held at any previous time and but subsequently lost wholly or partly.

Out of fifteen families there are only nine who now hold or previously held any cardamom land. Of these, two have subsequently lost their holdings, one through mortgaging to creditors and the other through default in payment of tax.

Secondly, out of seven who are holders of cardamom lands now, one had his given to him by his father, and the others had apparently acquired the plots in their own life time and by their own initiative.

Thirdly, the extent of holding is very small, ranging from 0.75 to 5 acres. The average holding per family among the holders only is 1.75 acres, and the average per family taking all families is 0.80 acre.

Fourthly, only about 46 per cent of all families have any holding at all. The distribution of holdings among them is very uneven: two out of seven holding eight acres, and the remaining five holding only a little over four acres between them. In other words, twenty-eight per cent of holders possess sixty-six per cent of the land, and the remaining seventy-two per cent have only thirty-four per cent of the land.

One point of particular interest is that only less than fifty per cent of Muthuvan families in the village have cared to cultivate cardamom at any time. If a sample survey were taken, it is likely that the proportion would be considerably smaller, because the village selected was

situated in the midst of a cardamom growing region in the Cardamom Hills. Government have given much encouragement to hill tribes to cultivate cardamom. Although there is a regulation that no hill man shall be entitled to permanent ownership of land cultivated by them in a Government Forest or Reserve, however long his occupation of such land may be, there is a proviso to this regulation which says:

> The hill men may, however, be granted patta (permanent ownership) for cardamom lands in the tract set apart for the growing of cardamom, subject to the conditions that they shall not alienate such lands to anyone other than among themselves.[1]

In 1950, the government allowed five acres of land per family as sowjanya pathivu (free assignment) for cardamom cultivation, with a view to encourage hill tribes to cultivate the spice. This was later reduced to three acres, possibly on account of increasing demand for forest land from the plains people. Over and above the free assignment, each family was allowed to have up to sixty acres of forest land as kutthaka pattam (temporary lease) for twelve years, on payment of a premium of Rs.60/- per year for the maximum lot, or Re.1/- per acre per year, plus a land tax of Rs.3/- to Rs.5/- per acre per year depending on the fertility of the land and other considerations. Later, when the Agricultural Income Tax was introduced, the tax on land was reduced to a flat rate of Rs.1/8/- per acre per year.

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1. Forest Manual, p. 167.

Inspite of these concessions and inducements, Muthuvans and other hill tribes have not taken seriously to cardamom cultivation. There is no doubt that if they did so, they could earn a considerable income, and raise their standard of living.

It will be easy to dismiss Muthuvan apathy to cardamom cultivation as indolence or indifference, but there is more than that to this in fact, and one should look for deeper causes in Muthuvan economy and family structure. The Muthuvan family is an elementary unit consisting of father, mother and unmarried children. Very often, this means that the father is the only adult working man in a family. This is too small a man-power for cardamom cultivation which requires much attention. Transplanting and weeding must be done fairly regularly to keep the garden in good condition. At the time when seeds ripen they must be saved from rodents and birds. All the year round, the foraging elephants must be kept well off the gardens as otherwise they would trample down the plants. When the crop is ready to be collected, it takes several hands to harvest, dry, and store. A Muthuvan family with an average of one working man per family, can hardly hope to cultivate cardamom successfully and make an income out of it.

Apart from this fact of limited working capacity, there is also another reason for the scanty progress of cardamom cultivation among Muthuvans; this is related to their practice of moving hamlet sites every year. The hamlet sites, as well as the sites of food crop cultivation keep changing from year to year. Cardamom plots, on the other hand, are permanent. A people who practise shifting cultivation in respect of food-crops cannot easily combine this with a cash-crop cultivation which is of a permanent nature.

Nevertheless, there are Muthuvans who own sizeable plots of cardamom, some of which are fifty or more acres in extent. These people are all headmen of hamlets or heads of clans who can command the services of other fellow-tribesmen who are, politically and ritually, in subordinate positions. Besides, these people live in hamlets which are relatively permanent, and which, if they move at all, move within a small circle only. This, in fact, is one of the factors in Muthuvan economy that tend to decrease hamlet mobility in recent years.

Certain other factors which have brought about significant changes in Muthuvan settlement and in the method of cultivation can now be considered. Perhaps the most important of these factors is the increasing

pressure of population on land. The midland and lowland regions of Travancore are far too over-populated with the result that there is a constant movement of population eastward into the highland in order to spread themselves in a larger area of cultivable land. Added to this, there is the natural increase of population among the estate employees. In 1941 the density of population in the highland was 102 per square mile, but in 1951 it rose to 147.[1] Coming to the hill tribes themselves we find that their population has also increased considerably over the past few decades, although not to the same extent as among the plains people. According to Ward & Conner(1816-1820), there were only 2,761 hill men in Travancore.[2] This is possibly an under-estimation, and, in any case, certain parts of Travancore forests were not included in their Survey. Even with due allowance to the possible exclusion of some people and the under-estimation of the population of those included, we might say that in 1820 the hill tribes numbered only about 4,000. The number rose to about 9,000 by the year 1890, according to the Forest Department Administration Report of 1892.[3] In 1931 the number of hill tribes was about 23,000, and in 1941 it was about

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1. These figures are from Census Reports. The 1951 Census includes Cochin State.
2. Ward and Conner, op. cit, p. 111
3. See p.30 supra

23,500.[1] The Census statistics of hill tribes may not be entirely correct, but even after allowing for some discrepancies, the figures show a considerable increase in the population of the hill tribes. If we consider Muthuvan population alone, the increase is considerable: from 1,301 in 1931, it rose to 1,931 in 1941, which is 48.5 per cent increase. The present population is estimated to be about 2,400, which represents an increase of about 25 per cent over the 1941 population. All these facts go to show that there is increasing pressure of population on land in the Muthuvan region. It is still a long way from the optimum, but one has to consider that a large part of the highland is uninhabitable and uncultivable.

Tea and cardamom cultivation has expanded enormously in the highland region, particularly in the High Range, the Cardamom Hills and Peermade, within the last thirty years. This has given rise to an increase in trade and communications. There are motorable roads that reach almost any part of the highland now, whereas forty or fifty years ago there were only elephant tracks. Shops and trades to cater for the increasing population have sprung up everywhere. At one time it was a rare sight to

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1. These figures have been arrived at after deducting the numbers of midland and lowland tribes from Table III on p.13 , and rounding off the resultant figures to the nearest hundred.

see a tribal person at all because the tribes lived in forests and hill slopes which were then practically inaccessible to strangers, and tribal people did not venture into the main concentrations of 'foreign' population; but today on any highland road, shop or market, one comes across fairly abundantly, members of tribes that are predominant in the respective areas. (Most of the tribal people are easily recognisable in any crowd by their distinctive dress, dialect etc.) In the past, certain planters made attempts to induce the tribal peoples to take up estate labour as wage-earning coolies, with scarcely any success. It appears that inducements used to be offered more frequently and persistently during the pioneering days of the plantation industry, as we see from the quotation from Native Life in Travancore in the previous chapter.[1] None of these attempts seems to have borne fruit. There are many reasons why the tribal population refuse to lose their identity by allowing themselves to be integrated with the estate labour, by far the most important of which is that certain tribes like the Muthuvan, Mannan and Kanikkar consider themselves ritually superior to the ordinary coolie population. They observe certain prohibitions in the matter of eating, which

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1. See p.21 Supra.

they perforce will have to give up in a process of acculturation. Secondly, 'superior' tribes like the Muthuvan consider it morally and socially corrupting to associate with strangers. Yet another important reason is that estate labour is regimented labour and the work itself is very hard. All tribal people zealously guard their freedom; they would rather live in their own hazardous and simple way, than be commanded and driven for the sake of a secure cash income at the end of the month.

However, Muthuvans living in an around the Cardamom Hills, do not express any objection to working as store attenders or watchmen, in the cardamom estates in their area. In point of fact, a few young Muthuvan men have found paid employment in the cardamom estates. This is because these cardamom estates are owned by small-scale Tamilian planters from Bodinaickennur and other places in Madura district with whom the Muthuvans are generally on easy and friendly terms. Considering themselves as originally belonging to Madura, and as the inheritors of the Tamil culture, traditions and beliefs, the Muthuvans have little difficulty in acquiring and fostering friendly social intercourse with the Tamilian cardamom planters. Equally important is the fact that the work in these small cardamom stores or estates is of a very different nature from work on organised, large-scale tea plantations.

They are small family properties worked by a very small number of people, with little in the nature of regimented labour. The Muthuvans employed in these plots go for work during the day or night, as the case may be, from their hamlet to which they return at the end of the work. There is an increasing tendency among young Muthuvan men of the Cardamom Hills to take up paid work in the nearby cardamom estates, in preference to following the traditional food-crop-raising by shifting cultivation.

A few older Muthuvans have found other opportunities of casual or seasonal labour in forest-clearing, digging or road-making operations, without detriment to their traditional organization. Forest officials or contractors who wish to undertake any forest-clearing or road-making work have to draw upon tribal labour as any other labour is hard to come by. Such work is often casual or seasonal, and offers opportunities for Muthuvans to supplement their earnings or food supply.

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An important point that is sought to be brought out in discussions in this chapter is how present-day conditions in the physical environment of the Muthuvans have influenced their economy. However, before this point is taken up for consideration, it might be worthwhile to dispense with certain indidental and relatively unimportant matters such

FIG. 9

A PRE-ADOLESCENT GIRL CARING FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN IN A HAMLET IN THE ABSENCE OF OLDER PEOPLE

as Muthuvan food, dress and daily life. These may hence be briefly described here.

Muthuvans eat two meals a day, one in the morning and one in the evening. Between the two meals they drink plain tea if they can get it, or go without anything at all. They have an amazing capacity to do hard manual work with very little food, and to withstand hunger and cold. Even Muthuvan women and young persons carry heavy loads uphill over hills and rocks with no apparent sign of exhaustion. This is generally true of all hill tribes.[1]

The morning meal, which consists of a substantial dish of ragi or rice, and some curried leaf, vegetable or meat, is taken at about 8 A.M. This is a cold meal, being left over from the previous night. Women cook only once a day, in the evening, when a sufficient quantity is cooked so that there may be enough to be left over for the following morning. The wife serves the food to her husband and children in metal or earthernware dishes, or in baskets or leaves. After they have finished, the wife and other women eat. Each group eats off the same vessel. When the meal is over, the boys, girls, men and women go about their different tasks. If there is work to be done

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1. See also descriptions of Ward and Conner, and Mateer, pp. 18 et seq. Supra.

FIG. 10

THREE BOYS (WESTERN MUTHUVANS)

in the fields, all go there except a few boys who take the cattle out on the hill-sides to graze. If there is no work for boys in the field, they may all go with the cattle and roam about in the hills. The girls go to the nearest stream to fetch water for the evening's cooking and for any washing to be done. When sufficient water has been stored, they remain at home looking after the toddlers and young children. Adult women go into the forest to collect firewood, and edible roots, leaves and vegetables with which they substitute or supplement the normal food. March to June are the most difficult months for them, when food is scarce. At this time they depend to a great extent on wild roots such as the arrow root (Cureuma augustifolia), and the wild varieties of yam (Amorphophallus campanulatus), white kachil (Dioscorea aculeata), red kachil (Dioscorea rubellum), and chembu (Colacasia antiquorum). Men seldom remain at home during the day unless there is something to do at home or the weather is too bad; they attend to agriculture, visit the market, collect honey, or go out hunting. A Muthuvan hamlet is often frighteningly still and silent in the day-time, and presents a deserted appearance except for an old woman or two up and about the odds and ends of housekeeping, a howling mongrel, a bleating lamb, a few hens.

FIGS. 11, 12 & 13

FIG. 11

THE KONDOOSI (MAN'S HAIR PIN)

FIG. 12

THE PUKARI (WOMAN'S COMB)

FIG. 13

THE BILL-HOOK

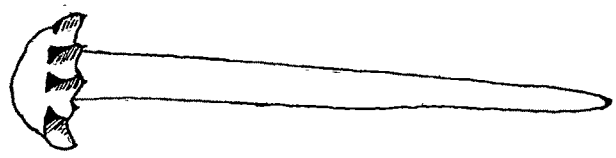

Fig: 1: THE KONDOOSI (man's hair-pin)

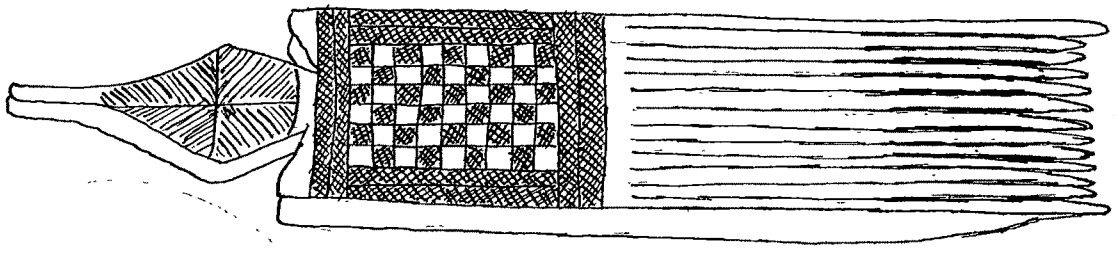

Fig: 2: THE PUKARI (woman's comb)

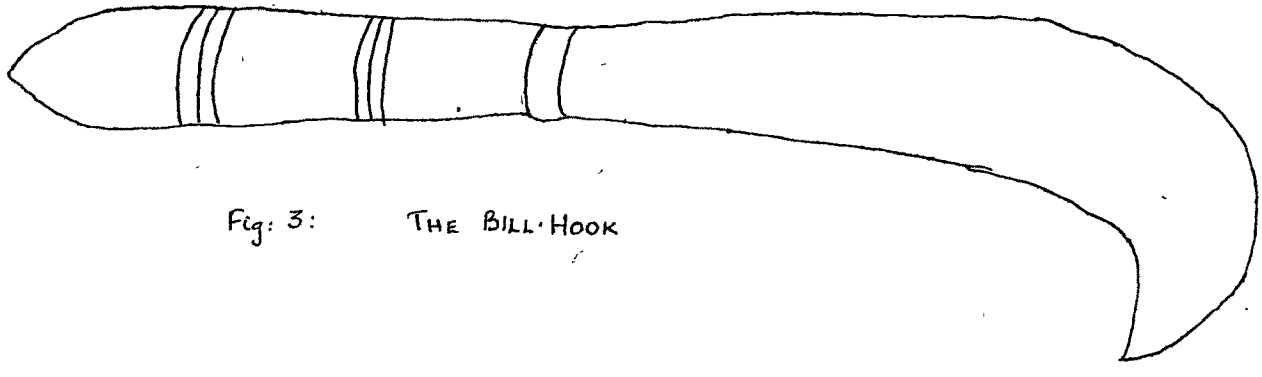

Fig: 3: THE BILL-HOOK

Muthuvan male dress consists of a full-length dhoti, a shirt and an urumal (turban). The turban is the mark of a man, and it is put on at the time of the boy's initiation into man's estate. It is fashionable to sport a moustache, and most young Muthuvans keep one on an otherwise clean-shaven face. A few older Muthuvans grow grow beards. After a boy has reached adolescence his hair is not cut; it is knotted at the back in an oblong shape, secured with a long wooden pin called Kondoosi, and covered with the turban. The distinguishing mark of a Muthuvan is the turban and the marappu, a coarse, coloured cotton fabric folded twice over and put diagonally over the back with two ends tied in front over the chest. Anything that he wants to carry is rolled in the marappu and slung over the back. A Muthuvan man never carries any load on his head; it is contemptible. "Only women carry loads on the head", they say.

The adult Muthuvasi (Muthuvan female) wears a white or coloured cotton pudavai, eight or ten yards in length. This is worn in such a manner as to cover the body from neck to ankle. The arms are bare. A pouch is formed at the back with one end of the pudavai in which mothers carry their breast-feeding babies. As between eastern and western Muthuvans there is a remarkable difference in woman's choice of dress. The former, being atuned to

FIG. 14

A YOUNG MUTHUVAN COUPLE WITH THEIR BABY AND A VISITING RELATION

(The Hut in the Background is the Chavadi - Bachelor Hall - of the Hamlet)

Tamil culture, are prone to wear bright-coloured pudavai, of the same kind as the Tamilian peasantry of the plains, whereas the latter, who tend to copy Malayali customs in externals, have a manifest preference for the plain white pudavai which is so common among Malayali womenfolk.

Muthuvans are very shy and retiring by nature. Men avoid strangers as much as possible; women and children are positively scared and flee at the sight of a stranger. In appearance the people are generally tall and handsome with pleasing features, and a brown or wheat complexion. A few Muthuvans are dark in complexion, but there is hardly any who may be described as black skinned. They are easily distinguishable from the indigenous tribes by their physical appearance and dress. The western Muthuvans are of darker skin than those of the east, but the former are cleaner in their person. Their huts are also cleaner and tidier than those of their eastern counterparts.

Most adult Muthuvans smoke beedi, (an indigenous tobacco, mixture rolled in the semi-dried leaf of a particular tree.) Chewing of betel leaves with areca nut, slaked lime and tobacco, is a universal habit among both sexes. The western Muthuvans are addicted to opium and arack (a strong-smelling, intoxicating drink obtained from fermented toddy), whereas the eastern Muthuvans rarely have the opium habit, but are fond of liquor of all kinds.

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FIG. 15

A HEADMAN'S DAUGHTER WITH HER YOUNG SON

(Note the Baby Sleeping comfortably in the Pouch at the Back of the Woman's Pudavai. The House in the Background is the Headman's House. The Barricade in Front of the House is the Cattle-pen)

Recent economic and demographic changes that have taken place in the Muthuvan region have considerable influence on Muthuvan habitat and economy. The most important change that these extraneous forces have brought about in Muthuvan social organization is that the hamlet tends to become relatively permanent. The traditional Muthuvan hamlet is a mobile unit which moves from place to place year after year following the choice of cultivation site. To-day, as a result of general economic and demographic changes in the region, a new tendency towards relative permanency is noticeable in Muthuvan settlement organization. That this tendency is closely related to general changes is clear from the fact that the degree of permanency of the village bears a direct relation to the physical proximity of a given village to the areas of general change. In other words, it is more or less true that a village that is situated nearest to the area of greatest general change, tends to be more permanent or move within a shorter spatial range, than one which is situated farther from such an area. Thus, in the High Range where there is intense cultivation of tea and a steadily increasing development of auxiliary industries and trades, and consequent influx of population, the Muthuvan hamlets are either permanent or they move within a very limited spatial range. In the Cardamom Hills, where the

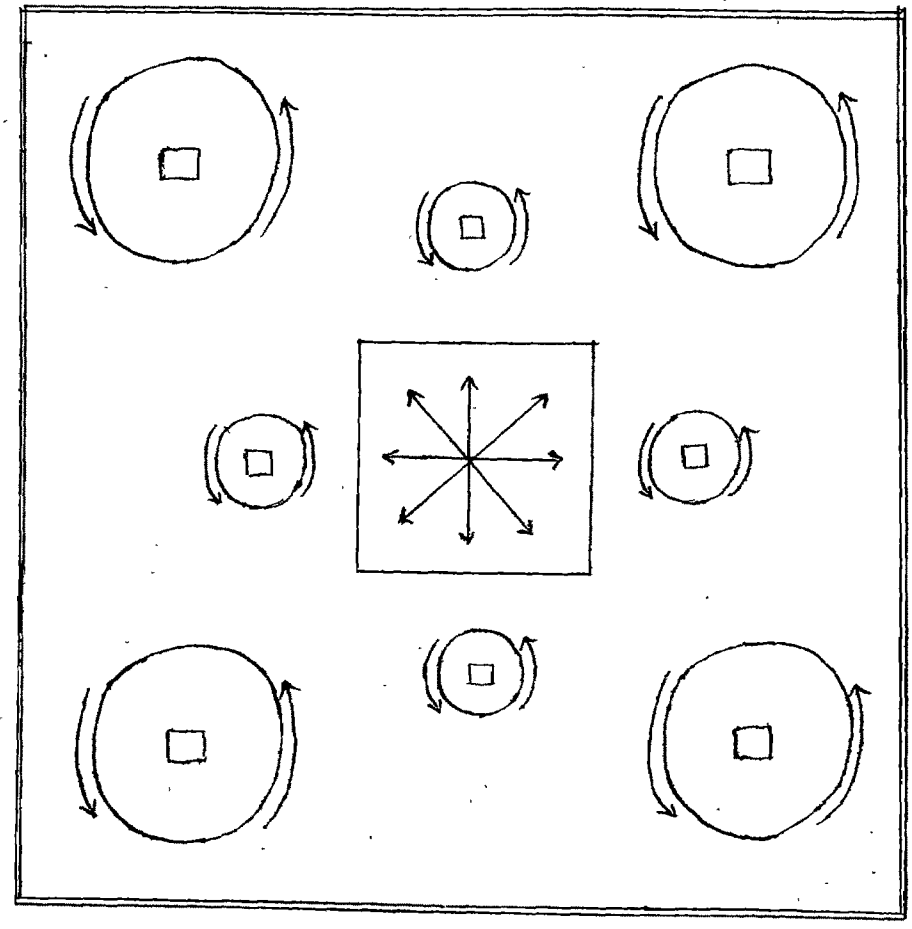
concentration of tea estates is less intense, and where pressure on land is less acute, the hamlets are considerably more mobile than those in the High Range, both in terms of frequency of movement, and of spatial range covered. In the region of the Western Muthuvans where the instrusion of people or money-crops is as yet scarcely felt, the Muthuvan hamlet continues to exist in the traditional pattern, or very nearly so. This phenomenon may be expressed in a diagramatic form as below: (See next page)

The central square represents an area of general change. The small circles nearest to this show the range of spatial mobility of hamlets which are represented by the small squares within each circle, and the larger circles that are physically more distant from the area of general change show the range of spatial mobility of the distant hamlets which are themselves represented by the squares within the circles. The range of mobility is not made to any scale; it is only meant to show the relative ranges of mobility of hamlets in relation to their spatial proximity to an area of general change.

It may be noted that the near hamlets are represented by very small squares, whereas the distant ones are represented by larger squares. This was done on purpose in order to show that the distant hamlets are demographically larger units than those nearer. It is easy to see why this is

FIG.16

PATTERN OF VILLAGE MOVEMENT IN RELATION TO AREAS OF GENERAL CHANGE



so. The near hamlets, being pressed for space and much restricted in their range of mobility, can sustain only a small number of people, whereas the distant ones, with their wider spatial range can sustain a larger population. It has been observed that the Muthuvan hamlets nearest to the tea and cardamom estates in the High Range and the Cardamom Hills, that is, hamlets near Pallivasal, Munnar, Devikulam, Chinnakanal and Surianalle which are places of concentrated general change, consist of about eight to fifteen families, whereas the more distant hamlets such as those in Marayoor, the Anjanad Valley and Poopara, consists of fifteen to twenty families.* In the western section of the Muthuvan region, that is, in places like Kiliparambu, Neriamangalam, Thattakkad and Kuttenpuzha, where no appreciable general change has yet taken place, the Muthuvan hamlets move within a still wider spatial range, and significantly, the western Muthuvan hamlets are the largest units of all consisting of twenty or more families.

Even in respect of the same hamlet, there have been noticeable changes in size and movement over a period of time. Thirty or forty years ago, Pachchappul Kudi was

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* Terms like 'near' and 'distant', or their derivatives, denoting geographical location, used in this paragraph must be understood to be in relation to any given area of general change.(P.T.T.)

a large, flourishing hamlet of about twenty-five families occupying an extensive hill tract of about twenty-five square miles adjoining what was then the southern and eastern boundaries of the Surianalle tea estate. Today, the boundaries of the estate have been pushed further south and east crowding the hamlet out of a considerable part of its original space. At the time of the writer's stay in this hamlet in 1953, it was still a fairly largish hamlet of fifteen families, but by the time of his last visit in 1955, it was reduced in membership to eight of the earlier fifteen families, with the addition of four recent entrants. Of the remaining seven families, one had moved out to a hamlet about a day's walk northward (about twenty miles in the hilly terrain), and the other six families, with the addition of two from a neighbouring hamlet, formed a new settlement in Muttukkadu Kandam. Altogether, in about half the space originally occupied by one hamlet of twenty-five families, there are now three hamlets, each consisting of eight to twelve families. (The third hamlet is one which had already been in existence for some years at the time of the writer's acquaintance with the area and the people. This too branched off from the parent hamlet at Pachchappul) In statistical terms this would mean that for roughly one unit of space available for a family in this area today, there were two-

and-a-half units thirty or forty years ago. This particular instance is perhaps untypical inasmuch as there is such wide disparity between available units of land now and before; nevertheless, the phenomenon itself is quite typical of changes in Muthuvan land utilization in the last half-century or so. The Pachchappul area has been exceptionally subject to commercial developmental changes within the last few decades which probably accounts for the unusual disparity here.

Prima facie, the reduction in extent of land available for cultivation and movement involves a reduction in agricultural productivity which has to be off-set by supplementary means of agricultural production or increase in purchasing power or both. In areas where Muthuvans are faced with such conditions they generally seek to do both by adopting permanent wet-land cultivation of food-crops like paddy and ragi, and by casual or seasonal earnings of cash income through wage-getting manual labour in digging, road-building or forest-clearing operations on behalf of contractors or government, or by accepting paid employment in cardamom estates.

The restriction imposed on mobility of hamlets by extraneous forces, chiefly tea cultivation, involves a serious limitation on the extent of land available for shifting cultivation of food-crops, with the consequence

that the number of people who could support themselves on shifting cultivation is lessened. This situation could be met by one of two ways or a combination of both: that is, either the hamlet must reduce itself to a smaller collection of family units, or there must be a progressively minimised dependence on land. In Muthuvan economy one often sees a combination of both. On the one hand, the Muthuvan hamlet in areas of change is increasingly becoming a smaller group, and, on the other, people are being persuaded to take more readily to wage-earning employment to augment their resources.

The general changes occuring within an area tend to affect the Muthuvan population in or near that area in three different ways. In the first place, the changes are always associated with an influx of outside population some of whom at least will eventually acquire forest land and settle as agriculturists, or will follow agriculture as a subsidiary occupation. This brings about in its wake an inevitable increase in pressure on land which means increasing restriction on the spatial mobility of tribal hamlets. This limits the number of people who can make a living by shifting cultivation within that range, and induces individual families to move further outward and attach themselves to their kinsmen in the more distant hamlets. Such outward

movement of individual families is not the only means by which a hamlet reduces its size; it is also achieved by splitting of hamlets as illustrated in the case of Pachchappul kudi above. It has been noticed that in the areas of major social changes, several Muthuvan hamlets which at one time used to have fifteen to twenty families, have since split into smaller hamlets of seven to ten families. What would now appear to be new Muthuvan settlements scattered over the hills and valleys are, in fact, only off-shoots of the one-time larger parent hamlets. It is true that the splitting of hamlet, by itself, only reduces the size of a hamlet without relieving the pressure on land, unless the separating section moves into a different region altogether. But the fact is that there are numerous small patches of unoccupied, cultivable areas in the High Range and Cardamom Hills which can sustain small hamlets of seven to ten families, but which are neither contiguous to each other nor large enough to sustain a hamlet of twenty families. It must be mentioned here that economic and demographic factors are not the only causes for splitting of villages. There are inter-personal conflicts which, no doubt, are at least indirectly related to the changing social and economic conditions in the region. As this aspect of the problem will be considered fully in the next chapter,

it is unnecessary to linger on the question here any longer.(See PP. 165 et seq. infra)

Secondly, the general changes in population and economy provide opportunities for wage-earning labour which were previously meagre, if not non-existent, other than in the tea estates; and, as we have already seen, several Muthuvans have in fact taken to manual labour of various kinds, some casual or seasonal, and some perennial. The effect of this is that among the Muthuvans in the areas of general change, there is greater dependence on a cash economy than before, and less dependence on a purely agricultural, subsistence economy as was the case in the past. This also tends to make Muthuvan hamlets relatively permanent or move within a relatively small range, so that people could remain in easy reach of places of employment or of markets where certain produces could be exchanged for provisions or clothing.

A third noticeable change in Muthuvan economy, as a result of general changes, is the increasing number of plots of permanent wet-land for rice cultivation. This is ofcourse inevitable when land is not too plentiful, and movement is restricted. For the Muthuvans who were used to the slash-and-burn economy, and had little or no experience of permanent, wet-land cultivation, this

new development is a marked departure from tradition. It is too early to say what effect this will have on land rights and inheritance, because this has only just begun to happen.