

Kurumbar and Muthuvan Tribes of Kerala **A Comparative Appraisal of Change and Continuity**

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Abstract

Muthuvan community is a major Scheduled Tribe community of Idukki district while Kurumbar is the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal (PVTG) community of the Attapady area of Palakkad district of the Kerala State. These two communities are geographically separated and culturally distinct. In the past both communities practised shifting cultivation as the primary means of livelihood and their socio-cultural life is also fine-tuned in accordance with that. However, over the years both the communities have adopted varying means of adjustments to cope with the changed socio-cultural surroundings.

Muthuvan and Kurumbar hamlets that are situated in the interior forest areas have large tracks of agricultural land/shifting cultivation areas. But in the case of majority of the hamlets of the Muthuvan community, which are at the fringe areas of forests or in the rural areas have lost a greater part of their landholdings and corresponding traditional way of life. However, even now majority of the hamlets of the Kurumbar community are in the forest areas, who still pursue their traditional life to a great extent. The paper is an attempt to analyse the trajectory of changes happened to the age old way of life of the two communities in a comparative perspective in response to their increased contact with the so called 'outside people' and the changes happened to the society at large.

Keywords: Muthuvan, Kurumbar, Shifting Cultivation, Density of Population, Nutritional Density

1.0 Introduction

The tribal communities are considered the indigenous people of India. They might have started their lives in the large river basins of central and western India and later fled to the present-day hilly forest terrains of various parts of the country due to the influx of 'aggressive, militant and greedy populations' into their age-old habitats. (see Trautman 1982). Before that, they were self-sufficient and self-reliant people in all aspects and were, in fact, rulers of the area, governed and ruled by their own customary norms and community leaders. (Pradeep 2017). Shifting cultivation, food gathering,

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and hunting were the major sources of livelihood. However, with the passage of time, owing to a multitude of changes including demographic shifts, many tribal communities have lost a greater part of their economic and social independence and have adapted to varying means of life, ranging from that of agricultural labourers to cultivators of cash crops, like any other population.

There are 37 Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities in Kerala and they contribute 1.45%¹ of the total population of the State. The STs are marginalised and disadvantaged sections of the State's population. However, it is through them and their counterparts in other States of the Indian Union² that the cultural and linguistic diversities of the country are greatly preserved, promoted and maintained. Although some tribal communities have lost a significant part of their distinctiveness over the years while living alongside other people, tribal communities such as Muthuvan of Idukki and Ernakulam districts of the State have retained many features of their tradition in a number of hamlets³ that have limited contact with outside world, and a few tribal communities like the Kurumbar of Attapady in Palakkad district still maintain a greater part of their traditional life even though they live in frequent interaction with the 'outside world and people'. Thus, the response of the various communities towards socio-cultural changes is not uniform, and the members have adopted varying means of adjustments to cope with the emerging scenario. The article is an attempt to study the trajectory of changes in the Muthuvan and Kurumbar communities and their age-old ways of life from a comparative perspective in tandem with the changes.

1.1 Methodology

Primary data on this topic were directly collected by the researcher through intensive field interaction by staying with the community members in their hamlets in 2016⁴. Members of the Kurumbar and Muthuvan communities were interviewed at random to collect details pertaining to their community's way of life from the 'traditional to the present'. The non-participant observation method was used in the field to get information about various aspects related to the topic. The observed data were recorded accurately and correctly to maintain the effectiveness of the method. Informal, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews were carried out to gather a wide range of information about the communities. The Case Study method had also been used to go deep into the behaviour pattern. Census and survey reports, as well as books, were consulted as secondary sources to support the discussion.

1.2 Traditional Life of Muthuvan and Kurumbar Communities

1.2.1 The Muthuvan

The Muthuvan community in Kerala is mainly concentrated in the Idukki, Ernakulam, and Thrissur districts of the State. Their population, as per the survey conducted by the Scheduled Tribes Development Department of the State in 2008, is 12305 (6273 Males and 6032 Females). (GoK 2013). Many of their settlements are either within or near forest areas. Marayoor, Kanthaloore, Edamalakudi⁵, Adimali, and Mankulam Grama Panchayaths in Idukki district, and Kuttampuzha Grama Panchayath in Ernakulam district, are the major habitation areas of the community. However, their way of life and socio-environmental conditions in the above-mentioned areas vary. The *kudi*⁶ (hamlet) within the forest areas maintains a greater part of their 'traditional' life, while those in rural areas that are in close contact with 'other people' have lost many features of their traditional ways of life.

Virippukrishi (a form of shifting cultivation) is their traditional means of livelihood, and they cultivate a wide variety of food grains that are used only for consumption. Ragi (Little Millet),

Maize (Sorghum), *Thina* (Italian Millet), *Varagu*, *Chama* Rice, Tomato, Carrot, Sweet Potato, Potato, *Cheeni Vala*, *Toppi*, *Mocha*, etc., are principal food crops cultivated by the Muthuvan community. They practise cultivation of mixed and multi-crops; it provides them with food supply at different periods of the year. Agricultural operations are done collectively by all the able-bodied *kudi* members, both male and female, and the first cultivation of the year starts with the ritual *ponneruvaipu/ponnerukettu* performed by an elder member of the *kudi*. A *katupooja* (forest ritual), a post-harvest festival, is performed by sacrificing a fowl to thank the forest gods and goddesses. There is no clear-cut demarcation of agricultural land among the families as they cultivate collectively. However, there is an understanding between the community members that each family take yield only from a particular portion of the agricultural land. Evidently, there is no clear-cut concept of family property in land in tradition. Yield from multi-crop cultivation is enough to meet the food needs of the community members. They produce for subsistence and believe in sharing ethics. The surplus producing household shares with the household(s) with shortage, and the community as a whole maintains a subsistence level of production.

Traditionally, Muthuvans built their houses using locally available materials such as wooden poles, mud, grass, etc. They erect large flat structures made of bamboo, timber, grass, etc., close to the mud wall of the houses to protect them from the fast-moving wind and rain. Almost all the works in a *kudi*, including house construction, is done through mutual reciprocation of labour appropriation. And the society is also organised to carry out the communitarian way of life. Each *kudi* has separate *savadi* (dormitory) for males and females, where younger members before marriage and in old age spend the night. There are separate leaders, namely, *valiyaezhanthari* for the male dormitory and *valiyaezhantharipillai* for the female dormitory.

Kani and *thalaivar* (headman of different ranks and performing different functions) look after the day-to-day affairs of a *kudi*. *Kani* has a major role in settling disputes amongst the community members, while *thalaivar* looks after the affairs of the members of a *kudi* with the Government Officials, especially from the Forest and Wildlife Department, Scheduled Tribes Development Department, and Local Self Government Department of the State Government.

Almost all the disputes in a *kudi* are settled through *panchayam*, a public meeting of all elder male members of a *kudi* in which anybody can present his/her case and argue in support of it. Anybody in a *kudi* who felt aggrieved, or wants to settle disputes, or raise any issues, including land disputes, with any other person or family can demand a *panchayam*. They have a *kuttam* (clan) system and follow *kuttam* endogamy and *matrilineal*⁷ descent. Any violator of the rules is ostracised (*ooruvilakku*) from the *kudi*. (Rajendran 2020). *Kooth* is the prominent traditional art form of the community and is performed during *Pongal*⁸ and other festivals. Both men and women participate in *kooth*, but in separate circles. There is no particular costume for *kooth*. However, during the Pongal festival, they would wear various costumes. Earlier, men performed *kooth* by wearing *urumal* (head gear). Women usually swing a small white cloth by holding it in both hands while performing *kooth*. *Asapattu*, *manatam*, and *mayilatam* are the other art forms of the community. *Muthikotty*, *urumbusi*, *kidumbity*⁹, and *kuzhal*¹⁰ are the musical instruments used during the performance of the art forms. Muthuvans have a high self esteem and consider themselves superior to other communities in the area, and try to 'keep a distance' from 'other people' including Scheduled Tribe Malal Pulayan community of their neighbourhood. This feeling of superiority is at the core of independent and self-reliant economic, social and political life.

1.2.2 The Kurumbar

The Kurumbar community belongs to the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) of the State, and its population occupies the second position amongst the five PVTGs. A vast majority of

Kurumbar (98%) are settled in Pudur Grama Panchayat, and the rest are in Agali Grama Panchayat. (GoK 2013). Both the Panchayats are part of the Attapady Block in Palakkad district. They are usually referred to as '*Palu Kurumba*' to distinguish them from the '*Alu Kurumba*' of the Nilgiri area of Tamil Nadu State. Their total population is 2251 (for details, see GoK 2013), and they live in Reserve and Vested Forest areas. The Census 2011 records their total population as 2586, with 1302 males and 1284 females. Their sex ratio as per the 'Scheduled Tribes of Kerala, Report on the Socio-Economic Status is 1000:996, while the overall sex ratio of PVTGs stated in the report is 1000:1010.

Panjakad Vellama, a mode of shifting cultivation, is the major economic activity of the Kurumbar. *Manookaran* is the soil and agricultural expert of the community, and he supervises the agricultural operations in a hamlet. Besides, *Manookaran*, a *Moopan* for looking after the entire affairs of a hamlet, and *Kuruthala* and *Bhandari* for assisting them in discharging their roles are the major functionaries of a hamlet. Usually, they belong to different *kurumbkal* (clans) and follow patrilineal descent, viz., children belong to the father's *kurumb*. All the members of a *kurumb* are considered as brothers and sisters, and one has to select his/her spouse from a different *kurumb*. Marriage by service, elopement, and negotiation are the types of marriage practices prevalent in the community. The community follows clan exogamy. Agricultural operations are started during the month of *Tai* (January) by clearing the field, and burning the dried-up shrubs take place in the month of *Pankini* (March). *Manookaran* initiates and guides the agricultural operations, and blessings and permission from the *karadaivam* (deity) of *Manookaran* are sought prior to the commencement of the agricultural activities. Only food crops such as Ragi (Little Millet), Maize (Sorghum), *Thina* (Italian Millet), etc., are cultivated, and the seeds are sown immediately after the first rain.

A house of a hamlet (there is no dormitory system) is build around a plain open space, where all the members of a hamlet sit together by evening, after the day's agricultural work or routine daily work, and spend the evening by singing and dancing. *Malat*, *uttat*, and *kooth* are the prominent art forms of the community. *Malat* and *uttat* are dance forms, while *kooth*¹¹ is a dance drama. Both men and women actively participate in the evening get-together. *Kuzhal*, *parai*, *davil*, *dampetta*, and *tala* are the musical instruments used along with the performance of songs and dance.

The above discussion shows similarity and differences in the life of members of two communities.

1.3 Changing Life Pattern of Muthuvan and Kurumbar Communities

Traditionally, the Muthuvan and Kurumbar communities enjoyed a self-sufficient and 'affluent' (see Sahlins 1974) life, even though their hamlets were situated in dense forests. Their land use pattern and economic organisation were adequate to accommodate the limited population of a particular hamlet. The forest itself was the source of livelihood for hamlets in the forests. When the carrying capacity of the resource base of a particular hamlet declined due to population rise, some of its members migrated and established a new hamlet. However, this kind of shifting of population to a different area and subsequent creation of a new hamlet has been facing hardships during the past few decades mainly due to the stringent laws pertaining to forest governance such as the Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972 and the Forest Conservation Act 1980.

Table 1: Population Growth of Muthuvan Community over the Census Decades

Census Decades	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Total Population of Muthuvan in EKM* & KTM*/IDK*	5123	7278	10650	13366	14901
Decadal Population Growth		42.06%	46.33%	25.50%	11.48 %
Rural	5122	7276	10647	13312	14874
Urban	1	2	3	54	27

Source : KIRTADS, Department, Government of Kerala.

*EKM= Ernakulam district, *IDK= Idukki district, *KTM= Kottayam district

The total population of the Muthuvan community is not separately mentioned in the Census data. (cf. Sandhya Sekhar and Sumalatha 2017) But it is clubbed together with the ‘Mudugar’ community, even though the community has no direct relationship with the Muthuvan community. Since the Muthuvan community is mainly distributed in Ernakulam and Idukki districts where there is hardly any Mudugar population, the total population of the Muthuvan community alone can be obtained by considering the populations of the communities in the above districts only. The ‘Muthuvans’ of Malappuram district are a different endogamous community, who are usually referred to in the local parlance as ‘Malamuthan’, and like the Mudugar mentioned above, the community has no similarity with the Muthuvans of Idukki and Ernakulam districts. Thus, the population of Muthuvans of Idukki and Ernakulam districts, as mentioned in the Census data, is taken into account as the Muthuvan population of the State in this study. However, the population of Muthuvan (Muduvan) is separately mentioned from that of Mudugar in the Scheduled Tribes of Kerala, Report on the Socio-Economic Status of 2013 and the figure is 19163.

Table 1 clearly states that the decadal rates of population growth of the Muthuvan community had been increasing up to 1991, then it showed a steady rate of decrease during the next two decades. And this decreasing rate of population growth may be due to the inability of the land area of the hamlets to support high density of population. Earlier, the nutritional density of the hamlets was high due to the low density of population, but with the increase of density of population without a corresponding increase in the net sown area, the community became compelled to look for alternative means to support the population. Along with these, the absence of a bulk of adolescence and youth population of the community for pursuing education by staying at faraway hostels and Model Residential Schools (MRS) decreases the availability of workforce for the agricultural operations of the hamlets.

The response of the Muthuvan population in various hamlets towards the above-mentioned changes is not uniform. Some hamlets abandoned *virippukrishi* and millet as a major crop in response to the availability of rice and other food items (popular among the ‘mainstream’ population) through the Public Distribution System of the Government as well as in markets. Currently, cardamom is the main crop of the people in many hamlets. The fall in price of cardamom at certain years, coupled with crop failure compelled the members of certain *kudi* to turn

to other cash crops such as areca, pepper, coffee, rubber, etc., for a living. It was reported during the field study that usually community members borrowed money from the businessman of the nearby markets to meet the cost of seedlings, labour, fertilisers, etc., for cultivating cash crops and during poor harvest and/or fall in price, many times they had to give the entire yield to them for repaying the debt. This, in turn, put the community members in a financial crisis and they used to sell their land holdings to members of their own community who could afford to purchase it or to other Scheduled Tribe communities such as Malai Arayan¹² or to lend their land on lease to the outside people from whom they borrowed money at the time of need.

To be precise, those *kudies* who have frequent contact with the ‘mainstream’ population abandoned cultivation of traditional food crop and shifted to cultivation of cash crop. As a result, they left a major part of their traditional land holdings in the forest areas as ‘uncultivated’ or fallow land, and a portion of this uncultivated land at a later point in time is taken away by the Forest Department of the State Government as forest land. They also either lease out a portion of their landholding to “other people” or sell it to members of the Muthuvan community who can purchase it, or to other Scheduled Tribe people to meet the expenses of cash crop cultivation or to generate income for livelihood and other expenses in life, such as marriage of children. There are several cases where landholdings of those who have greater contact with the so called ‘mainstream population’ have declined to one acre to 10 cent¹³. Along with these, by purchasing land from the Muthuvan families, other Scheduled Tribe people such as Malai Arayan became residents of the *kudi*. In the traditional *viripukrishi*, labour was collective and reciprocal in nature, thus absence of money wage. Thus, when the members of a *kudi* abandoned the practice of *viripukrishi* due to reasons mentioned above, often they were not able to cultivate cash crops in the entire land under their custody due to high labour and other costs. This in turn, led to the growth of large trees in their *viripukrishi* tracts situated in the forest areas, which at a later point of time were taken away by the Forest Department by treating it as forest land. *Kani* and *thalaivar* have lost their traditional command over their people, and many Muthuvans became active politicians of mainstream political parties. At present one of the District Panchayat Member of Idukki District Panchayat in Kerala is from the Muthuvan community. The shift towards the cash crops makes the community more individualised, and many features of the traditional mechanism of social organisation, such as *savadi*, vanished from the *kudies*. The communitarian life has been lost in many *kudies*. The community became more depended on the outside world to purchase essential commodities, and many among the community find a living out of manual labour.

Table 2: Population Growth of Kurumbar Community over the Decades

Census	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Total population of Kurumbar in PKD*	1319	1283	1820	2174	2586
Decadal Population Growth		- 2.72%	41.86 %	19.45 %	18.95 %
Rural	1318	1274	1794	2078	2303
Urban	1	9	26	96	283

Source: KIRTADS Department, Government of Kerala

*PKD= Palakkad district

Table 2 clearly shows that there was negative population growth of the community during the decade 1971-81. The rate of population growth during 1981-91 was very high compared to the next two decades, which shows that there might have occurred some kind of an omission from the part of the enumerators during the Census operation of 1981. There is only a slight decrease in the rate of population growth during 2001-11 compared to that in 1991-2001. All these reveal that the population of the community might have been at a more or less steady rate of growth over the years.

However, despite the rate of population growth and increased contact with the ‘outside people’, many hamlets of the community are still retaining a greater part of their traditional life, including rituals, ceremonies, and agricultural practices compared to those of the Muthuvan community. Many members of the Kurumbar community pursue cultivation of cash crops only on a portion of their agricultural land. The bulk of the land is kept apart for the traditional *panchakad vellama* (shifting cultivation) practices. More than 80% of Kurumbar families are still retaining their traditional *panchakad vellama* practices along with the practice of cash crop cultivation and innovations in agricultural plots. But as far as the Muthuvan community is concerned, only a few interior hamlets are now practicing traditional shifting cultivation, while the rest of the population has turned to the cash crops cultivated by the ‘mainstream’ population.

1.4 Changing Life of the Muthuvan and Kurumbar Communities

The sex ratio in the Muthuvan community is 976, while that of the Kurumbar is 996. (STDD¹⁴ 2013: 283). Out of the total 616 students of the Kurumbar community, 615 students (99.84 %) are from families settled in forest area. For the Muthuvan community, 3231 (79.25%) students out of 4077 are from families in forest area.

Table 3: Educational Status at Secondary and Higher Secondary Levels

Sl.NO:	Community	Population (Above five years)	SSLC	PDC/+2	Total	Percentage to Total
1	Muthuvan (Muduvan)	17171	557	260	817	4.76
2	Kurumbar (Kurumbas)	1888	117	73	190	10.06

Source: GoK 2013

Table 3 shows that the percentage of SSLC and PDC/+2 holders amongst the Kurumbar community (10.06%) is higher than that of the Muthuvan community (4.76%). Thus, the younger generation of the Kurumbar community is better equipped with the opportunities and understanding offered by formal education.

Table 4: Educational Status at Graduate and Post Graduate Levels

Sl.No:	Community	Population (Above five years)	Graduation	Post Graduation	Total	Percentage to Total Population
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1	Muthuvan (Muduvan)	17171	54	7	61	0.35
2	Kurumbar (Kurumbas)	1888	12	1	13	0.68

Source: GoK 2013

Table 5. Status of Professional Education and Diploma & Certificate Holders

Sl.N:	Community	Population (Above five years)	Engineering Degree	Medical Degree	Diploma And Certificate Holders	Total	Percentage to Total
1	Muthuvan (Muduvan)	17171	-	-	56	56	0.33
2	Kurumbar (Kurumbas)	1888	2	-	17	19	1

Source: GoK 2013

Table 4 reveals that the Kurumbar are better placed at graduation and post-graduation levels than Muthuvans. Table 5 reveals that there are no Medical degree holders amongst the Muthuvan and Kurumbar communities. However, there are two Engineering degree holders in the Kurumbar community. The table clearly shows that 01% of the Kurumbar community are professional degree and diploma holders, while the corresponding figure in the Muthuvan community is only 0.33%. The above mentioned tables clearly show that the level of educational attainments of the Kurumbar community is higher than that of the Muthuvan community, even though 99.51% of the Kurumbar population is in the forest areas.

Table 6: Status of Main Workers in the Age Group 15-59

Sl.No :	Community	Workers in Forestry Sector*	Workers in Agriculture and Allied Sectors*	Workers in Non- agriculture and Allied Sectors*	Govt. /Quasi Govt. Employee	Total Main Workers	Percentage of workers to Total Population
1	Muthuvan (Muduvan)	1647 (16.90%)	7299 (74.91%)	633 (6.5%)	165 (1.7%)	9744	50.85%
2	Kurumbar (Kurumbas)	551 (59.25%)	232 (24.95%)	110(11.8%)	37 (3.4%)	930	41.3%

Source: GoK 2013

Forestry Sector* =Collection of Forest Produces, Traditional Occupation, Collection of Herbal Plants, & Worker-Forest Area. **Agriculture and Allied Sectors***= Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, & Worker-Agricultural Sector. **Non-agriculture and Allied Sectors***=Petty Trade, Worker-MGNREGS, Worker-Non Agricultural Sector, &Plantation Labourer.

Table 6 states that the percentage of main workers is higher in the Muthuvan community. A total of 74.91% of workers among the Muthuvan community are in the agriculture and allied sectors, and 16.90% are in the Forestry Sector, which also includes shifting cultivation. But among the Kurumbar, the figure stands at 59.25% and 24.95 % in their respective sectors. The comparatively low percentage participation of the Kurumbar (59.25% compared to 74.91% of Muthuvans) in forest sector activities suggests a low incidence of shifting cultivation practice. Even though the percentage of workers to the total population is high in the Muthuvan community, their rate of representation in the ‘non-agriculture and allied sectors’ & ‘Government and quasi-Government sectors’ is low compared to Kurumbar. This reveals that the Kurumbar still retains a greater part of their traditional livelihood.

Table 7: Comparative Status of Families Based on Debt, Food Collection Methods, Drinking Water Facilities, & Access

Sl.No:	Community	Total Number of Families	Families in Debt	Families Collecting Food Articles Through Traditional Methods	Families Without Proper Latrine	Families Depending Others for Drinking Water	Families Without Proper Access
1	Muthuvan (Muduvan)	5106	3889 (76%)	11 (1.82%)	3971 (77.77%)	207 (4.05)	982 (19.31%)
2	Kurumbar (Kurumbas)	543	149 (27%)	64 (10.60%)	454 (83.61%)	1 (0.18%)	370 (68.65%)

Source: GoK 2013

Table 7 states that the percentage of “Families Collecting Food Articles Through Traditional Methods” from Muthuvan community is only 1.82%, while the corresponding figure among the Kurumbar is 10.60%, which in turn show their interest in pursuing their traditional livelihood means more than Muthuvan. The percentage of ‘Families Depending Others for Drinking Water’ is greater (4.05) in the Muthuvan community than that of Kurumbar (0.18), revealing that Kurumbar has better drinking water availability than Muthuvan. The majority of Kurumbar families (68.65%) have “no proper access”, while the majority of Muthuvan families have better connectivity. It indicates the increased detachment of the Kurumbar community from the “public at large” compared to Muthuvan. The majority of families from both the communities have no ‘proper latrine’. However, the figure is higher among the Kurumbar (83.61%) than among Muthuvan (77.77%). The above mentioned discussions clearly show that the Kurumbar have retained a greater part of their traditional life than Muthuvan, even though the later have better ‘modern facilities’.

Table 8: Community Wise Data on Families Based on Nature of Land Possession

Sl.No	Communit	Total	Land	Families	Families	Families	Allotment of
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	y	Number of Families	Less Families	Possessing Forest Land Without Title	Settled in Purampokku	Possessing Land Lords' Land & Encroached Land	Land Under Development Schemes
1	Muthuvan (Muduvan)	5106	53 (1.04%)	2482 (48.60%)	8 (0.16%)	41 (0.80%)	456(8.93%%)
2	Kurumbar (Kurumbas)	543	149 (27.44%)	56 (10.31%)	0	0	0

Source: GoK

Majority of the tribal settlements of the State are either in reserve forests or adjacent to it. Out of the 4762 tribal settlements 1518 (31.88%) are situated in forests. Among Kurumbar settlements 99.26% and among Muthuvan settlements 80.87 % are in the forest area. Coming to the population 99.51% of the Kurumbar population is in the forest areas while that of Muthuvan population it is 80.70 %. Table 8 reveals that none of the Kurumbar families are in possession of *purampokku* land¹⁵, encroached land, land belonging to landlords or land from development schemes, while a small proportion of the Muthuvan community possess all of the aforementioned category of land. The percentage of 'families possessing forest land without title' is lower among the Kurumbar community, but the percentage of landless families is higher compared to that of the Muthuvan community. The presence of common ownership of land may be the reason for the high rate of landless amongst the Kurumbar community. The above mentioned aspects show that the Kurumbar has been leading a life that is highly "not-dependent" on typical circumstances experienced by backward communities, including tribal people.

Anything that ensures human well-being is a part of the development process. Nowadays, an integrated approach to development has been accepted, and Goulet 1971; cited in Majumdar 2010:16) identifies three basic components in this direction, viz., *life sustenance, self-esteem, and freedom*. Life sustenance refers to accessibility to the basic needs such as food, housing, clothing, health and minimal education. Self-esteem means self-respect and independence. The feeling that one has some role in power-sharing and decisions making process boosts his/her self-esteem. Freedom rests on freedom from three evils – want, ignorance, and poverty and misery. One is free if they can choose and determine their own destiny. The Kurumbar community's trajectory of life, in terms of integration into the development process, is far better compared to that of the Muthuvanas, with reference to the aspects mentioned above.

1.5 Conclusion

The above mentioned discussions clearly show that the discourse, which refers to the "whole 'mental set' and ideology that encloses the thinking of all the members of a given society" (cf. Barry, 2012:170) present the Kurumbar and Muthuvan communities at different levels. The mainstream discourses, constituted in the interplay of modern power, in turn control and regulate communities living in its margins, including the tribes. It is to be noted that the worldviews and perspectives of the Muthuvan and Kurumbar tribal communities are quite different from that of the 'other people', and they are often at opposing ends with conflicting features. (Pradeep 2016:52-57). In general, the increased interaction between the tribal people and those of the "elite mainstream,

the other”, attracts the former to accept many features of the worldview of the latter, which in turn results in the extinction of many traditional socio-cultural features of tribal life. It also leads to the end of many sustainable sources of life for tribal communities among other things.

A large number of tribes in the State have been reduced to a “labour-feeder” source for society from their age-old life of self-reliance. This is true for many hamlets of the Muthuvan community, as the majority of their hamlets have shifted to settled cash crop cultivation rather than continuing their subsistence mode of traditional shifting cultivation practices of food crops. But as far as the Kurumbar community is concerned, a large number of the hamlets still retain their shifting cultivation practice of food crops.

The age-old shifting cultivation mode of livelihood of the communities is labour-intensive. But in recent times, the human power “supply” required for cultivation has been seriously affected since a large part of the younger generation are away from the natural socio-cultural surroundings of the hamlets as they pursue education at faraway Model Residential Schools (MRS) run by the Scheduled Tribe Development Department of the State Government. This, in turn, inculcates ‘a lack of interest’ amongst them towards the continuation of age-old agricultural and socio-cultural practices, which decelerate the continuation of many traditional cultural institutions and practices, and the practice of shifting cultivation as an important means of livelihood. As a result of this, many families have shifted to cash crops cultivation over a limited portion of their land and kept the remaining land uncultivated. This, in turn leads to the growth of large trees in the normal shrubby shifting cultivating areas in the forest, and the subsequent takeover of the land by the forest department. This, in turn, reduces the land-man ratio significantly.

In fact, only those tribal communities who can actively participate in the discursive practices of the State can adapt to the dominant discourses that govern the life of the majority people and thereby be able to lead a comfortable life. Many times during interaction with the so-called “mainstream people”, tribal communities abandon a greater part of their traditional life over a short period of time with a view to embark upon the “lifestyle of the other people”, but often fail to achieve the same. This, in turn, results in the loss of social security and sustainability offered by the age-old way of life without obtaining proper livelihood means and living circumstances in the society at large. The majority of the Muthuvan families are in this line, as evident from the above discussions, while the Kurumbar community is successful in retaining many ‘virtues’ of their traditional way of life during the process of their integration with the society at large.

Even though an ‘integration approach’ (Elwin 1959) has been advocated for the development of the tribal people since independence, many a time the so-called development ultimately leads to either ‘assimilation or isolation’ of many of the tribal communities. The change in way of life which has made inroad in most of the Muthuvan hamlets as mentioned above is ‘assimilative’ in nature while those in Kurumbar hamlets are an ‘integrative’ type. This may be due to the ‘distinct perspective/outlook’ gained by the Kurumbar community out of which the community is successful to retain its distinct identity by maintaining several aspects of its unique rituals and practices. At the same time, the society has adopted many features of the so-called life of the ‘society at large’.

Notes

1. The total ST population of the State is 484839. The population of the Marati community is not coming under the total ST population as per 2011 Census since Marati is not an ST community at the time of the Census enumeration.
2. There are 705 Scheduled Tribes in India as per the 2011 Census and they display almost an equal number of distinct cultures. These communities constitute 8.6% of the total population of the country.

3. The term 'hamlet or settlement' is used in this study to denote group residence of the Muthuvan and Kurumbar communities rather than the term 'village' as the residential spot consists of limited population and usually cut off either geographically or socially or both from the so called 'mainstream' populations.
4. The study was conducted in Anavayi, Kadukumanna, Melethuduku, Thazhethuduki, and Galasi hamlets of Kurumbar community and Vellakalkudi, Melvalasapetty, Edalapparakudi, Societykudi, Nooradikudi, Puthukudi and Kurathykudi hamlets of Muthuvan community. The field work was conducted within a period of six months but the total field work days were 30 days.
5. Edamalakudi is the only tribal Panchayath in Kerala, where the members of Muthuvan community are residing.
6. The tem *kudi* is used to refer to more than one hamlet.
7. One inherits his/her *kutam* from one's mother.
8. *Pongal* is the popular harvest festival of South India, especially among those whose mother tongue is Tamil.
9. *Muthikotty*, *urumbusi*, and *kidumbity* resemble drum.
10. A type of flute
11. Muthuvan use the term *kooth* to designate their traditional art form but Kurumbar usually refer their art forms not simply as *kooth* but as *maduraveeran kooth*, *vallikooth*, etc., depending on the hero/heroine of the story.
12. Land transformed between Scheduled Tribe people has legal validity.
13. **Acre** and **cent** are units of measurement of land. One cent is 1/100 area of an acre (435.6sq.ft).
14. STDD: Scheduled Tribes Development Department.
15. Government land which is usually situated either along with the water bodies such as streams and rivers or is attached with roads.

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