

**ADIVASI-KURUMBA CORPSES  
PERFORM  
THEIR OWN BURIAL**

***A study based on the Alienation of culture, performance and development of  
the Adivasi-Kurumbas of Attapady***  
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**(KRP/00/155/1997)**  
**RESEARCH PROJECT THESIS**  
**SUBMITTED TO THE KERALA**  
**RESEARCH PROGRAMME ON LOCAL LEVEL**  
**DEVELOPMENT**  
**CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**  
**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**  
**12 OCTOBER 2000.**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This KRPLLD Research Project of the Centre for Development Studies, Tiruvananthapuram has become much larger in scope than it was originally proposed and approved.

The unstinted support from the KRPLLD and its Programme Co-ordinator Dr. K. Narayanan Nair in particular, made the process of this action-oriented research to reach a level of innovative fulfilment. I express my love and deepest gratitude to the KRPLLD and Dr. Narayanan Nair.

The performative research work was greatly assisted by many, but the Adivasi Kurumbas demand immense love and thanks for co-operating whole-heartedly with the discourse. I would also like to express my heart-felt thanks to the following organisations and persons in particular:

- **The Tribal Welfare Club** in Dasanur, Attapady, under the leadership of the Adivasi Activist, Sri. D. Narayanan. From beginning to end, all the members of the club and the hamlet people of Dasanur continued to support the project in every possible way. The veteran performers of **Harischandra Koothu**, Sri Venthan, Sri. Murugan, Sri. Bomman, Sri. Resan Master and Sri. Vinod supported the performative fieldwork in every way.
- The non-Adivasi research group comprising Sri. Unni Kohinoor and the School of Drama Staff, Sri. K.R. Mohanan, Sri Gangadharan, Dr. B. Anathkrishnan, Sri. Purushothaman, Sri. Remesh Babu, Sri. Krishnan and my colleagues and students of School of Drama.
- Dr. P. P. Pillai, Director, Institute of Planning and Applied Economic Research, Dr. John Mathai Centre, Calicut University for giving permission to affiliate the research programme with the Institute.
- The I.T.D.P. Agali and AHADS for providing valuable secondary data.
- Dr. N. Viswanathan Nair, Director, KIRTADS, Kozhikode.
- Bins Studio, Trichur for their co-operation in Video-documentation, editing work etc
- Mr. Sahir and his associates at Infratec, Calicut University for the computer work connected with the research.
- Sri. P. V. Valsaraj and Sri. Om Prakash of Calicut University for giving artistic assistance for the lay out and design of the photo-plates and the cover.
- Sri. K. Radhakrishnan, Deputy Mayor, Trichur Corporation for the humanitarian infrastructural assistance to start the Home for Destitute Adivasi Children-**Kanagam** -- with its **Centre for Alternative Education for Adivasis** in Dasanur.
- Special love and thanks to my wife Usha, and sons Manu and Jones for the hardships they suffered during the project phase.

Love to my brother Sada and family for their everlasting inspiration.

PREFACE  
**THESE FRAGMENTS I HAVE SHORED  
 FROM THE KURUMBA RUINS**

*Manne nambilelayya maramirukku  
 Marathe nambilelayya ilayirakku  
 Ilaye nambilelayya poovirukku  
 Poove nambilelayya kayirukku  
 Kaye nambilelayya namirukku  
 Namme nambilelayya natrirukku  
 (An Adivasi -Kurumba song)*

[Entrusted and nurtured by earth, the tree grows, hey you  
 Entrusted and nurtured by trees, the leaves grow, hey you  
 Entrusted and nurtured by leaves, the flowers grow, hey you  
 Entrusted and nurtured by flowers, the fruits ripe, hey you  
 Entrusted and nurtured by fruits, the *Adivasis* live, hey you  
 And entrusted and nurtured by us, the land survives, hey you].

This intersubjective document of culture, performance and development of the *Adivasi Kurumbas* of Attapady is at one and the same time a document of human barbarism and oppression. The attempt made in the following chapters, sums up the action-oriented creative research discourse on the primordial *kurumba* socio-cultural dynamics. The performative analysis is duly substantiated by video-documentation of the process of research. What has become obvious, ultimately, is the fast pace of fragmentation of the outer and inner self of the 1612 *kurumbas* who have become the tragic victims of development that takes place within the world-renowned Kerala Model of social transformation. The *Adivasi Kurumbas* inform us:

If you want to participate in the burial rites of the *kurumbas*, take any route, starting from any place. Come at any time or at any season. It makes no difference to the burial. Only thing you should do is to put off reason and logic. Because you are here not to verify or submit a report on us. But be careful: "What the dead had no speech for when living, they can tell you being buried: the voice of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living".

And these fragments of *kurumba* reality and unreality 'tongued with fire', I have shored from the forests of *Adivasi* ruins in Attapady.

Calicut University  
 Date:12-10-00

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## Chapter One

### THE DESIGN OF DISCOURSE

#### 1.1. EPIGRAPH : THE IDEOGRAM OF THE KURUMBA IN THE PARROT'S BODY

*Years ago, a sorcerer of the Kurumba tribe used to come daily to the villages of the Kotas, kill the Kota men, and sleep with all the beautiful women. The Kotas talked about it to each other a lot and wanted to find a way of killing him off. As he had done similar things to the neighbouring Toda tribesmen, the Kotas and the Todas also talked to each other and came to a decision, "Let's hide near the path at the edge of the forest, waylay that black Kurumba, and cut him to pieces," they said. And so they did.*

*When the Kurumba came walking that way, they jumped on him cut off his arms and legs, and threw them in all directions. But as they were happily returning, telling each other how good it was to kill the evil sorcerer, the arms and legs they had thrown about suddenly came together and that black Kurumba was right in front of them, standing in their path, laughing his head off. He said, "Hey, you Kotas, you Todas, so you killed me, did you? Look, I've come back. You useless fellows, you think you can kill me like that?" The Kotas and the Todas were dumbstruck at this miracle and said, "Look at this wonder! What can we do against such a man?" Then in great fear they went home to their villages.*

*Within weeks, many good men among the Kotas and the Todas died and their wives became wailing widows. The villages were filled with the sound of lamentation.*

*The Kurumba was pleased with himself. "I took my revenge, a head for a head!" he said to himself and laughed with great satisfaction. He came every day to the village, pronounced his charms from a distant field, and whatever woman he thought to would come to him of her own accord, alone, and give herself to him.*

*But, as they say, the sorcerer's wife knows more than the sorcerer. So it was with that black Kurumba's wife. She changed herself into a kite and came flying over all the seven villages of the Kotas. She too had her charms, which she would utter: then all the strong handsome men would come by themselves, sleep with her, and go home by evening. She took the men, and her husband, the black Kurumba, took the women. The villagers said "One day his downfall will come" And it did.*

*One day, he was sitting under a hill-guava tree, eating his fill of the fruit. A parrot sat on one of the branches, lamenting and screaming in great sorrow. The Kurumba understood the language of birds. So he asked, "Hey, parrot, why are you crying so much?"*

*The parrot said, "What can I say? My husband, who was life of my life, died today. I'm heartbroken and I can't stop crying. Who will end my grief?"*

The black Kurumba's heart melted with pity for her and he wanted to comfort her somehow. So he himself entered into the body of the parrot that had died. In an instant, the parrot came alive and flew with a whirr to his wife.

The parrot wife was happy and kissed the male parrot and said, "You tricked me. You wanted to test me. You pretended to be dead and made me cry and watched me, didn't you? You males cannot be trusted. You don't have hearts like us". Then they flew around each other, and the female suddenly saw the Kurumba's body lying dead under the tree. The dead man's mouth was open; his arms and legs were stretched straight out.

She said, "Poor man. Only a few minutes ago, he was talking to me. He took pity on my grief. I must do something in return". Then she took a leaf of the tree and prayed to God, saying, "If I'm a true parrot, please grant me of the tree and prayed to God, saying, "If I'm a true parrot, please grant me a boon. Just as I wept for my mate, this man's wife must be weeping her heart out for him somewhere. Till she comes and finds him, please grant that no dog, jackal, tiger or any other wild beast shall touch his body. May it lie here just as it is now". With that prayer, she threw the leaf on the body of the Kurumba, and the two birds flew away with a whirr of wings to the next forest. There were a thousand parrots in that forest, singing and laughing. It was like God's world.

This forest was near a pear orchard next to one of the Kota villages. All the parrots used to go there and eat the fruit merrily. The owner of the orchard was angry with the birds and planned one day to spread a net and catch them. He made a net with cords from a fibrous tree, spread it out, and scattered a lot of fruit on it.

Next morning, the entire flock of a thousand parrots were caught in that net. They were screaming and crying, "We're caught! We've fallen into the hunter's hands!". All except the Kurumba parrot-remember, he was a man and he knew many tricks.

He said in parrot-words to all the other parrots, "If you fly up and down like that, you'll be snared even more. He will pick us up one by one and kill us all. If you want to save your life, listen to me". They said, "What, what? Tell us."

He said, "It's very simple. When the hunter comes here and touches you, shut your eyes and play dead. Then he'll think, 'These birds are dead', and throw us down one by one and say, 'One, two, three...' When he counts upto a thousand, we shall all fly up together in the air with a big whirr and fly high and escape". They all came to an agreement before the hunter arrived.

When he came, all the birds looked as if they were dead. "Strange," he said to himself, "I didn't put out any poison anything, and they're all dead!". He felt bad about it. "If I cook them and eat them, I may get sick. Let's see how many there are". Then he began to pick them up one by one, throw them down, and count: one, two, three...

When he had almost reached the end, he said, "Nine hundred and ninety nine!" and the knife in his life hand came down with a

thud. The Kurumba parrot that had taught the other nine hundred and ninety-nine parrots the trick said aloud, "One thousand!" and all the parrots who heard it and the thud of the knife suddenly flew up in a great whirr of wings and escaped into the sky. But the Kurumba parrot that had taught them the trick was caught in the hunter's hand.

The hunter was angry: "Those naughty parrots have tricked me. I'll cook this one and eat it and crunch its bones. I'll twist its neck, kill it, pluck all its feathers, dress it well, and make a broth of it". But when he seized its neck, it spoke: "Hey, hunter! Don't kill me. Take me home. I'll bring you prosperity if you take care of me. If you cook me into a broth, you'll hardly have a mouthful."

The hunter was amazed and said, "This is a wonder. In all my born days, I never heard a parrot like this. It speaks our language and talks so well. Even if someone gave me a thousand rupees, I wouldn't kill it". Then he kissed it and smoothed its feathers, took it home, and showed it to his wife and children and mother. When the parrot spoke, it was so wise that none of the elderly men and women were equal to it.

The news soon spread to all the seven Kota villages that the hunter had found a parrot that could talk of life and death and all the affairs of men. People came to see the magic bird. And anyone who came brought a measure of grain and gave it to the man. Soon his house overflowed with grain and he became very prosperous.

It is a Kota custom to have a dancing-day during a funeral. On that day they eat opium poppy, get high, and laugh and sport day and night. On one such day, the village headman's wife got high on opium and went to see the parrot. As she stood here, one leg on a step, she exposed her thighs, and the parrot rebuked her: "Are you a prostitute or a wife for your husband? Are you a man or a woman?" The headman's wife was humiliated and left the place without a word, walking away slowly.

That night, she went and lay on the mat next to her husband, who was also high on opium. When he turned to her, she turned away, saying: "If you can't end my sorrow, go to sleep". When he asked her what her sorrow was, she told him, "Bring me that parrot that talks. If you don't, I'll die!" She even took an oath. So the headman said, "Even if it costs a thousand rupees, I'll bring it to you. Now turn around and put your arms around me". She hugged him and kissed him all over, lifted him over her body, and they made love.

Just as he was about to come, she held him tight between her thighs. He could not finish. He was willing to give her anything she asked for. She said, "Touch my eyes and take a oath that you'll bring me the parrot. The I'll release you". He was unable to bear it any longer. He said, "I'll bring you that parrot, even if it costs me many buffaloes. Now release me and let me finish". He then touched her eyes, and she released him happily.

She didn't sleep that night, and woke up her husband early and sent him off to the owner of the parrot. The headman said to him, "Touch my head and give me a promise". The hunter didn't want to offend him, so he touched his head according to custom and promised

him. Then he asked him what he wanted. The man said, "take my buffaloes and give me your parrot. How many buffaloes do you want?"

"I didn't know what you were going to ask" the hunter said, "I can't give you my parrot".

The headman said, "But you touched my head and promised".

So they began to quarrel, till the village elder called them. The headman said, "he touched my head and made me a promise. Now he's going back on it". The hunter said, "I touched his head and promised, not knowing what he was about to ask". The elder said, "That matters little. You touched his head and made a promise. Keep it. In this caste we say, "When we have promised with our mouths, we must be willing to sell even our mothers!" So give him your parrot".

The hunter was afraid of the judgement that would fall on him, so he took five milch buffaloes and gave the headman the parrot. But just as he was about to give it away, the parrot said to the hunter "That woman was showing her thighs without any care for propriety, so I rebuked her. That's why she wants me. She's going to kill me. So before you give me away, pluck one of my feathers and put it in the pocket of your cloak. Then I won't die. I'll come alive in your pocket".

The hunter did just that and hid a feather in his pocket before he gave the parrot to the headman, who was very pleased with the wisdom of the talking bird. He took it home and said to his wife, "I paid five milch buffaloes for it, and it is a wise bird. Take good care of it", She said she certainly would and asked him to make a cage for it, which he did.

She put the parrot in the cage and hung it in front of her and said, "You stupid parrot! You insulted me. You abused me. I'm going to prick you with this needle every day".

The woman gave it seed and treated it well in her husband's presence. Then when he left the house, she would prick it with her long sewing needle and make it scream.

When he came home that evening, the parrot complained to the headman, "Father, your wife pricked me with a sewing needle and hurt me in my behind". When he called her and asked her about, she said, "How can you listen to this foolish bird? The bird said, "She came the other day, all drunk with opium, and showed her thighs, so I rebuked her, That's why she's doing this to me". The husband didn't fully understand it. So he said, "Give it some seed and look after it carefully", and went away on his business.

The woman stabbed the bird with her long needle between its ribs. The bird died at once, but its life returned to the feather in the hunter's pocket.

Soon the bird's body began to smell. When the woman told her husband that the bird was dead and was stinking, he took it and threw it on the rubbish heap. He thought, "I lost five milch buffaloes by listening to this woman". She thought, "Even if it cost five buffaloes, it doesn't matter, I'm glad I'm rid of it".



Meanwhile, the feather in the hunter's pocket said to him, "Father, there's a corpse under a tree on the little hill. You'll see some fun if you rub this feather on the face of that corpse".

The man thought this was a wonder and that he would go to the hill and look for the corpse. But it was late, so he decided to set out in the morning. That night in the Kota village, a grandfather had a dream. This is what it said: "we've had a quiet time these five or six months. We haven't been troubled by the black Kurumba. His life is in a feather in the pocket of a hunter. The hunter will come today and rub the feather on the dead Kurumba's face. Then the Kurumba will come to life and he will trouble you just as he troubled you before. Get up. Go at once and take that feather from the hunter's pocket and burn it with ten bundles of fuel on your dancing-ground. Otherwise you'll have no peace in the streets of your village. You'll suffer again as you suffered before".

The old man got up at once and asked his wife to light the lamp. If anyone dreams, it's the custom of the Kotas to light the lamp and tell others the dream. That's what the old man did. Then he gathered some people and sent them to find the hunter with the feather in his pocket. They knew who he was; they found him sleeping, woke him up, and asked him to come with them to the hill where the corpse lay. But first they ordered him, "Show us the feather", and he did. The feather said, "There's a corpse under a tree on the little hill. If you carry me there and rub me on its face, I'll show you some fun".

When they heard it speak, the men said, "Our elder's dream was a true dream. Our god spoke in that dream. It also said, "Gather ten bundles of fuel! Twirl the fire-sticks! Light a fire, and burn the feather!" And the young men did just that.

When the flames were high and the feather was burning in the middle, it cried, "Father, Mother, I'm dying!" Then it hissed like a burning corpse and died. They all danced round and round the fire. The next day, when they went to the little hill, they found the dead body at the foot of the tree. The corpse was as fresh as if the man had died just that day.

They said to one another. "That bad Kurumba is dead. We won't be troubled by him any more". Then they carried off the body and threw it into a big gully. From that day on, the village prospered and lived without fear.

After a few months, they heard the news that the black Kurumba's wife had waited and waited for his return. When he had not come back even after six months, she grieved over him, became thin, thin as a stick, and she too died.

The people began to say, "That hunter was a good man. That's why God did this. He saw to it that the black Kurumba would become a parrot, and that through him grain and buffaloes would come to the hunter". Then they lived and ate well and prospered.

That's the story of the Kurumba in the parrot's body.

**Folk Tales From India**

Ed. By A. K. Ramanujam, Penguin Books, 1991. pp 306-312.

## **1.2. THE SUBJECT-FOCUS**

The subject of this ethnographic discourse is the *Adivasi Kurumba* society subsisting in the most interior dense forests and mountain ranges of Attapady in Palakkad District, Kerala State. An integrated model of three-dimensional network that involves the subject's alienated culture, performance and development serves as frames of reference for the process of discourse which inevitably functions on ideological undercurrents. The major focus, thus, is on these three realms of expressive ideograms specific to the *Adivasi Kurumba* society scattered in 15 hamlets in the north-west part of Attapady.

The attempt here is to firmly grasp how the *Kurumba* society confer meaning and significance to their life situations, how the *Kurumba* people historicise and dehistoricise themselves in the process of their day to day performance, both material and cultural. The discourse-interpretation thus is not merely documentation of empirical reality. It is descriptive but not merely conventional description. Therefore the study, which involves extensive fieldwork of performative dimensions aims to reach the organic levels of mutual interpretation of the cultures of both the researched and the researcher.

The inter-subjective matrix of the subject of discourse would reflect a conscious necessity to see the other as the subject rather than as the object of discourse. In this sense, this performative-discourse on the culture, performance and development of the *Kurumba* society becomes one of action-oriented ethnographic research, and to be precise, a discourse that heightens the possibilities of inter-subjective cultural action-narratives of empowerment and liberation. The danger of getting lost in the subject of discourse was present at every juncture of field work. Preventive measures were identified as and when required.

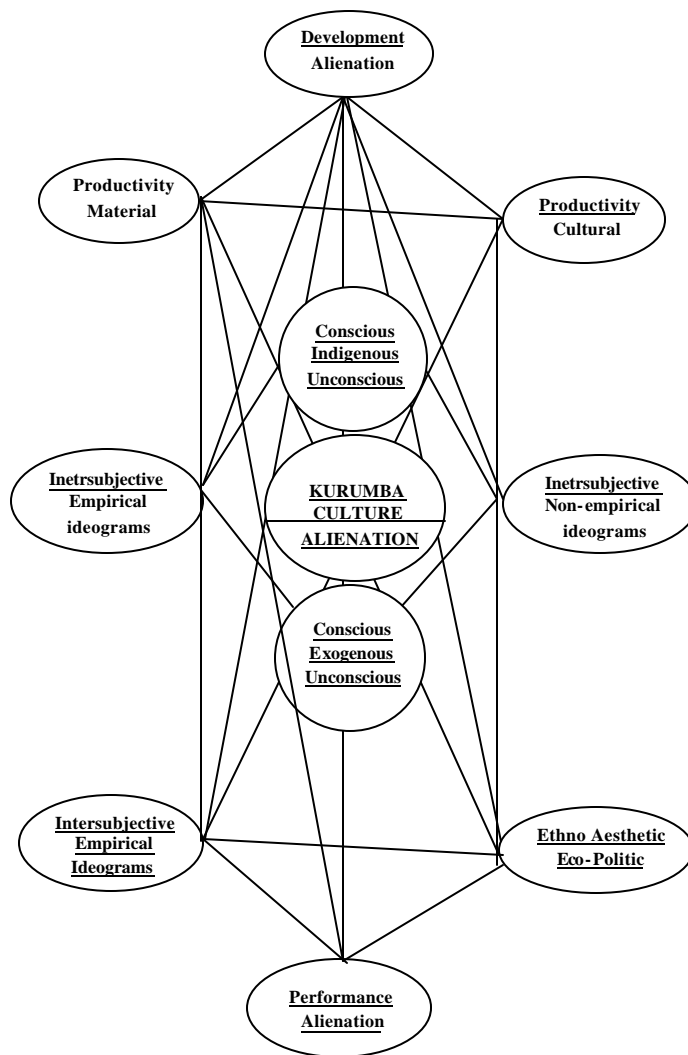
## **1.3. CULTURE -PERFORMANCE- DEVELOPMENT IDEOGRAM**

Since the three-dimensional conceptual framework of the research discourse is of fundamental significance throughout, the way the terms are used may be in order.

The notion of culture, performance and development which this discourse would advance in the process of ethnographic analysis of the *Kurumba* dynamics hinges on the concept of productivity. The basic assumption is that culture -performance-development ideogram in action and manifestation is generative in terms of the relations between the material conditions of existence of the *Kurumba* social units and their productivity as representations which create expressive plenitude. In other words, the major concern of the study involves both the realms of material and cultural productivity specific to the *Kurumba* condition.

The epistemological determinants of this three-dimensional generative design is clearly located in the desire for an inter-subjective understanding of the expressive and inexpressive energy modules specific tot the *Adivasi Kurumba* community. Culture-performance-development is assumed as an analytical category that seeks to enter deep into the empirical and non-empirical configuration of the subject of discourse.

The ethnographic framework of the study is conceived here not as the study of *Kurumba* social formation without history, but seeks, its latent structures of being and becoming, which ultimately is determined historically both through time and space.



**Figure 1 - Culture - Performance - Development Ideogram**

#### 1.4 PERFORMANCE - IDEOGRAM CONCEPT

The concept of performative ideogram is based on the visual ideology of representing a psycho-physical experience through the interaction of the conscious and the unconscious of inter-subjective performance. The inter-subjective performative ideograms are subjected to macro and micro-level analysis. It is inevitable then, that an action-oriented research programme has to generate action-oriented ideograms that function as liberating or empowering organisms.

#### 1.5. OBJECTIVES

Culture-performance-development assumes political connotations in the context of the *Kurumba* society being given special status by the constitution of India. (Article 341 and 342 of the constitution of India, have empowered the President of India to specify some groups Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes by public notification). Our constitution enjoins on the State the responsibility to promote, with special care, the economic, educational and cultural interests of the 'Scheduled Tribes' and to give them all kinds of protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

The successive Five Year Plans have done more harm than benefits to the *Adivasi Kurumba* society. Almost all the schemes specially meant for the *Kurumbas* ended in failure. An evaluation report in this regard states:

Decades of development have not had the desired impact, on these socially economically and educationally handicapped groups and a majority of the Scheduled Tribes are still below poverty line and they face spatial problems, peculiar to them.

(State Planning Board, *An Evaluation Study on the Kerala State Development Corporation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes: Evaluation Services. 44* Trivandurum, 1983. p.1).

The present study attempts to look at the *Kurumba* crises with the following objectives:

- i. An intensive study of the process of alienation of the *Kurumba* society in relation to their culture, performance and development.
- ii. An attempt at evolving alternative action-oriented models of sustainable local-level emancipation that would contribute to a genuine *Kurumba* renaissance.

#### 1.6. SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

All the 15 *Kurumba* hamlets in Attapady would come within the framework of the study. For in depth performative discourse, four hamlets are selected based mainly on eco-political- alienation status:

- i. Bhoothayoor and Yedavani hamlets are chosen from the vested forest regions as specific case study hamlets far removed from the mainstream economic and cultural centres controlled and manipulated by non-*Adivasis*.
- ii. Anavayi hamlet is chosen as one hamlet that could be reached by road during non-rainy seasons and which is under direct contact with the underworld *abkari* and narcotic mafia who employ and exploit the *Kurumba* people for clandestine cultivation of narcotic *ganja* and brewing of country liquor.

- iii. Kadukumanna hamlet as a model of extreme deprivation and one which is far removed from the *Kurumba* hamlets but which keeps in their memory the stray pictures of the *Adivasi* past full of fantasies, dreams and fragmented cultural expressive modules. The hamlet remains at the brink of total extinction.

The coverage of the discourse is extended to the other *Kurumba* hamlets which also face threats of total alienation.

### **1.7. METHODOLOGY IN ACTION**

Exposure to theatre arts and acting in particular has induced me to think of performativity in theatre as closer to life than almost all other expressive practices. The immense amount of theatrical energy inherent in our day to day life and the subtle ways in which the accomplishments of the ruling class enact most theatrically in front of our lives are perceived as methodological apparatuses with rigorous potential.

Highly inter-subjective in design and execution, this discursive dramatic mode of interaction with the audience has been time and again tested by me for the sole purpose of exploring the in-built organic potential for investigative research field work.

Hence, the performative methodology evolved by the researcher-performer with the help of a performance group, inter-subjectively generated vast amount of empirically real and unreal ideograms, from the deeply mystified and fragmented labyrinths of the *Kurumba* psyche. The process of this performative interaction brought to light the latent developmental urges of the community in a language of aesthetic violence during the field work sessions.

The traditional *Adivasi* theatre group organised for the purpose of this investigative interaction through their theatrical presentations also contributed much in generating information charged with authentic verbalisation touching up on the *Kurumba* peoples' unconscious revelations. These ethnographic performance ideograms were video-documented as integral parts of methodological operation for further analysis aimed at action-oriented empowerment specific to the community.



### **1.8.1. PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS**

The most challenging situations in the course of field work as far as the non-*Adivasi* research group was concerned, centred on the interface with ecological dimensions of the area of study located in the deep forests and high altitude mountain ranges ridden with dangerous slopes and deep gorges. For the non-*Adivasi* research group from outside Attapady, research fieldwork became a kind of warfare with the hazardous remoteness of the study area. For the *Adivasis* in the group it was like a return to their hills and forests of collective unconscious. The mobility specific to the *Adivasis* of Attapady seems to be vertically determined from an ecological perspective. The gravitational pull of the vertical mobility, almost totally devoid of horizontal movement patterns generate a hypothesis connected with vertical and circular imagination and thought process peculiar to the *Kurumba* society.

**1.8.2.** The in built resistance of the *Kurumbas* to entertain strangers, especially those who come to 'study' them as 'objects' was experienced by the team at every hamlet. In Kadukamanna hamlet, it even went to the extent of being forcibly pushed out of the hamlet with violent threats.

**1.8.3.** In Boothayoor and Yedavani hamlets, there were aggressive intimidations from the narcotic mafia during the performance sessions. They suspected the researcher-performers as excise guards in disguise.

**1.8.4.** Another problem was that of the team being thought of as a government agency performing gimmicks to cheat the *Kurumbas*. The distrust in this regard is highly symptomatic of the hidden anguish against all official policies of *Adivasi* development.

**1.8.5.** All these major problems were sorted out amicably by the *Adivasi* performance group which remained as the integral part the project work throughout.

**1.8.6.** Absence of women-researchers in the team affected the totality of methodological inventiveness. Researchers specialised in multi - disciplinary studies in the field of social sciences seem to be the most essential part of research projects of this kind to avoid cognitive reductionism of every kind.

### 1.9.2 STUDY AREA

SI No	Name of Hamlet	No. of house holds	Area in Hectares	Population		Total	Age 18 and above		Total
				Male	Female		Male	Female	
<b>RESERVE FORESTS</b>									
1.	Anavayi	54	3.05	132	139	271	73	78	151
2.	Kadukumanna	29	5.15	86	75	161	38	38	76
3.	Thadikundu	27	5.575	66	73	139	33	36	69
4.	Gottiarkandy	25	2.25	60	64	124	30	132	62
5.	Murukala	8	5.75	21	26	47	10	10	20
6.	Kurukkathikallu	20	4.65	56	62	118	25	30	55
7.	Galasi	6	2.25	19	22	41	8	7	15
8.	Thazhe Tuduki	22	5.425	61	49	110	30	28	58
9.	Mele Tuduki	47	5.3	122	126	248	64	63	127
10.	Kinattukara	4	2.50	14	18	32	6	6	12
<b>VESTED FORESTS</b>									
11.	Bhoothyoor	34	6.275	77	75	152	40	35	75
12.	Yedavani	20	9.95	50	46	96	28	28	56
13.	Moolakombu	9	5.575	15	16	31	9	12	21
14.	Pazhayur	6	2.75	22	20	42	10	7	17
	<b>Total</b>	268	66.45	801	811	1612	404	410	814

Table prepared with available data from three sources:

- i. Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) Profiles. 1999.
- ii. Attapady Hills Areas Development Society's documents. 1999.
- iii. Direct field survey by the Performance-Research-Group (PRG) in four hamlets - Bhoothayoor, Yedavani, Anavayi and Kadukumanna and also, *The Survey Report of Tribal lands and collection of data of the Tribals at ITDP Attapady (1982).*





### 1.10. AVAILABLE LITERATURE ON **KURUMBA SOCIETY**

The 961 page report in two volumes, titled **Survey Report of Tribal lands and collection of Data of the Tribals at I.T.D.P Attapady** published by the Kerala Government in 1982 gives a shocking picture of the tragedy that is being enacted by the three *Adivasi* groups of people in Attapady; *Kurumba*, *Muduga* and *Irula*.

Studies on Kerala history often black out the *Adivasi* belt and even the most recent **Kerala Charitharam** jointly written by the eminent modern historians, Dr. Raghava Varier and Dr. Rajan Gurukkal, has very little to say on the socio-historical significance of the *Adivasis* of Kerala.

Comprehensive fieldwork has not been undertaken by anyone so far with special focus on the performative culture and development of the *Adivasis* of Attapady. Even the one and only one project report on **A Decade of Kurumba Development-An Appraisal, Impact Analysis and Future Action** by Dr. N. Viswanathan Nair of KIRTADS (Kerala Institute for Research Training and Development Studies of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) gives negligible importance to the problematic of the performative culture of the *Kurumbas*. It gives only a cursory glance at the plight of the *Kurumbas* even after a decade of developmental programmes beginning from 1976.

Other significant secondary sources that give descriptive details on the *Kurumba* social formation are mentioned below:

1. **Castes and Tribes of Southern India**(1909)-Edgar Thurston, Madras Government Press
2. **Tribal situation in Kerala** (1988)-P.R..G Mathur
3. **Tribes of Kerala** (1962)- A.A.D. Luiz
4. **Karutha Kalakal** (1991) – Dr. Chummar Choondal. This book demands special mention as it makes a humanitarian attempt to look into the cultural factors that contribute to the marginalised subsistence of the *Adivasis* of Kerala in general.

The *Oorumuppan* of Anavayi hamlet *Gande*, said to us:

Lot of people like you, and to be very frank, more dignified and more clever than you people – have visited our hamlets to ‘study’ us and to make us decent citizens of this land, mostly from Government and foreign Agencies. But look at our hamlet, look at our children. What have they got? No education, no good food, cholera deaths every year; young men and women are dying of consumption. Yes, we know -you people will also ‘study’ us. ‘Study’ how we die a death so insignificant...

He just most cynically laughed away our sincere efforts to convince him of our action-oriented research programme in which the *Kurumbas* and *Adivasis* of Attapady will function as the subject and not the objects of study. His laughter gained more intensity - the tragic intensity of a disappearing act.

### 1.11.1. PERFORMANCE RESEARCH GROUP (PRG)

The Research Group here in after termed as Performance-Research-Group (PRG) was composed of the following members belonging to *Adivasi* and non-*Adivasi* social units.

1.11.2. *Adivasi* Performance Group (composed of *Adivasi Irulās* of **The Tribal Welfare Club**, Dasanur, Sholayur Panchayat).

### 1.11.3. HARISCHANDRA KOOTHU PERFORMERS

Sl.No	Name	Age	Occupation	Hamlet
1.	Sri. Murugan	60	Chief Performer/Agriculture	Guliyur
2.	Sri. Venthan	72	Veteran Actor/Agriculture	Guliyur
3.	Sri. Ramen	60	Veteran Actor/Agriculture	Pattisalai
4.	Sri. Bomman	50	Veteran Buffon/Agriculture	Pattimalm
5.	Sri. Nanjan	45	Musician /Agriculture	Pattimalom
6.	Sri. Resan Master	48	Musician/ Music-teacher	Karivatom
7.	Sri Vinod	25	Musician/Music student	Karivatom
8.	Sri Shaktivel	25	Young Buffoon/ T. T. C. student	Mattathukad

### 1.11.4. TRIBAL WELFARE CLUB MEMBERS

9.	Sri. D. Narayanan (Chief Research-Associate and co-ordinator)	35	Actor/writer/organiser & clerk in I T. D. P. office, Agali	Dasanur
10.	Sri. Arumugam	28	Performer/Driver	Dasanur
11.	Sri Kutti	26	Performer/ Driver	Dasanur
12.	Sri. Velan	25	Performer/Unemployed	Dasanur
13.	Sri. Maruthachalam	32	Performer/unemployed	Dasanur
14.	Sri. Ravikumar	25	Performer/ Polytechnic student	Dasanur
15.	Sri. Rajendran	30	Performer/TTC Holder	Dasanur
16.	Sri. Babu	30	Performer/Driver/Cleaner	Dasanur
17.	Sri Sivakumar	18	Performer/Labourer	Dasanur
18.	Sri. Senthil	18	Performer/ Labourer	Dasanur
19.	Sri. Kaliyappan	26	Performer/Driver	Dasanur
20.	Sri. Babu	25	Performer/ T. T. C. holder	Dasanur
21.	Sri. Nanjappan	32	Performer/Labourer	Dasanur
22.	Sri Palanisami	17	Performer/Labourer	Dasanur
23.	Sri. Rangasami	25	Performer/Labourer	Dasanur
24.	Sri Kittan	40	Performer/ Driver	Dasanur
25.	Sri Suresh	30	<i>Kurumba</i> associate/ organiser/ performer/Resource person	Bhoothayur

### 1.11.5. RESEARCH GROUP-KRPLLD (CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES)

Sl.No	Name	Age	Occupation	Hamlet	
26.	Dr. Ramachandran Mokeri	50	Researcher/performer/ Actor Buffoon	Asst. Director, School of Drama	Calicut University
27.	Sri. Unni Kohinoor	35	Performer/Research	Casual labourer	Calicut

			Associate		University
28.	Sri. K. R. Mohanan	45	Performer/organiser	Electrician, School of Drama	Calicut University
29.	Sri. Gangadharan K	52	Artist	Photographer, School of Drama	Calicut University
30.	Sri. Purushothaman	32	Artist/Fieldinvestigator	Field Asst., School of Drama	Calicut University
31.	Sri. Ramesh	35	Artist/Cameraman	Field Assistant, School of Drama	Calicut University
32.	Sri. Santhosh V.	25	Video-Cameraman (professional)	Bins Studio Trichur,	Trichur
33.	Ajith K.	25	Camera Assistant (professional)	Bins Studio Trichur	Trichur
34.	Bannish	25	Video-Cameraman (professional)	Mujasaba Studio Calicut University	Calicut University

### 1.12 PRG'S MUSIC INSTRUMENTS, AUDIO-VIDEO EQUIPMENTS ETC.

<b>1. Music Instruments</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <i>Perre</i> – the <i>Adivasi</i> drum</li> <li>ii. <i>Davil</i> – the <i>Adivasi</i> drum</li> <li>iii. <i>Kohal</i> or <i>peeki</i> – <i>Adivasi</i> pipe/wind instrument</li> <li>iv. Harmonium</li> <li>v. <i>Mrdangam</i></li> <li>vi. <i>Tabla</i></li> <li>vii. <i>Cymbal (ilathalam)</i></li> <li>viii. Ankle-bells</li> </ul>

<b>2. Audio-Video Equipments</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Video camera (VHS/SVHS/High-8)</li> <li>ii. Accessories</li> <li>iii. Power generator (Kerosene) (To some hamlets in the valley)</li> <li>iv. Tape – recorder</li> <li>v. SLR cameras</li> <li>vi. Camera Tripod</li> <li>vii. Cassettes (audio-video)</li> <li>viii. Kerosene cans.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>3. Box of costumes and make-up for the performers.</b></li> <li><b>4. Food packets.</b></li> <li><b>5. Aluminum vessels for preparation of food</b></li> <li><b>6. Torch lights</b></li> <li><b>7. First-aids</b></li> </ul>
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### 1.13 THE THEORY/PRAxis NEXUS OF IDEOGRAPHIC DISCOURSE -OBSERVATIONS

The PRG was equipped with inter-active ideograms for the preformative generation of creative empirical narratives interwoven with dormant psycho-physical expressivity of both the researchers and the researched. The major ideograms of experimental fieldwork are classified below:

No	Ideograms	Performers	Generative method
1	<b>Harischandra Koothu</b> in its edited version meant for field work/performance research	Traditional <i>Adivasi</i> performers with their style of acting which is dance/trance oriented	Researcher-Performer-Bufferoon acts as a catalyst initiating inter-active modules of performance ideograms
2	<i>Malleswara</i> myth as rituals of regeneration/sexuality	PRG and the hamlet people together enter into dance/trance performance	Researcher-Performer-Bufferoon and the <i>Adivasi</i> -Bufferoon intervene to give comic relief to the torturous ritual enactments
3	Dance/Song/Music nexus	PRG and the hamlet people in unison. Researcher-Bufferoon as onlooker/performer.	Observation-participation by the researcher. Act of deciphering the alphabet of <i>Adivasi</i> dance configurations
4	Exogenous poetic-performance ideogram composed from the poem, <b>Kiratavritam</b> written by Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan	Solo-performance by the Researcher-Performer-Bufferoon assisted by the <i>Adivasi</i> -Bufferoon and PRG musicians. Researcher - Performer becomes a generative catalyst throughout.	Transactional ideographic discourse initiated by the hamlet people themselves.
5	Discussions that initiate performatic discourse between the PRG and the hamlet people inter woven with songs and parables and riddles	Chief Research Associate D. Narayanan acts as the primordial <i>Adivasi</i> Chieftain to generate inter-subjective revelations	Oriented towards generalizing paradigms of material productivity and the primordial cultural productivity.
6	Pre-expressive, expressive and post-expressive situational observation	Researcher-performer and PRG	Ethno-graphic configurations of the <i>Kurumba</i> through 'rites of passages'.

The conceptual framework of data-analysis is formulated from a performative perspective. The data may be correlated with personality characteristics (age, gender, attitude and with socio-cultural traits); income (occupation, poverty); or behaviour (agricultural leadership, decision making, integration). One may thus create an innovative model of performetric research depending on the antecedents and consequences of innumerable performative configurations. For instance, it may be

possible to study the impact of hamlet solidarity on productivity, both material and cultural. This attempt therefore, is to explore the performative configurations of the *Kurumba* society with the help of ideograms generated through inter-subjective articulations, both material and cultural.

**1.14.** As there is no performetric analytical model to depend on for an indepth analysis, the major focus will be mainly on the structures of feelings and emotions that get performed as ideograms during the PRG'S interface with the *Adivasi Kurumbas* of Attapady.

**1.15.** An attempt at developing a performetric analytical model of socio-cultural research will be made as part of this action-oriented- ethno-research project. The performance-centred ideograms of *Kurumba* experience, it is hoped, would ultimately evolve a multi-disciplinary performetric processual model of empowering dynamics.

## Chapter Two

### METHODOLOGY IN PERFORMANCE

#### 2.1. THREE PHASE METHOD

The performative methodology of the discourse on the *Kurumba* society has three chronologically separated phases in relation to the KRPLLD project. i. Pre-project Phase ii. Project Phase iii. Post-Project Phase.

#### 2.2. PRE-PROJECT PHASE

The newspapers of Kerala brought in reports on the rising death-toll of the *Adivasis* (mainly *Kurumbas*) of Attapady during the months of June, July and August 1996. (The copies of newspaper reports are appended at the end of the chapter)

#### 2.3. CORPSES FROM ATTAPADY

Deaths due to poverty, famine and cholera did not carry any weight as for the main stream society of Kerala was concerned. As a theatre person I wanted to project the plight of the *Adivasis* through theatrical means. The urge was too powerful that I was able to organise some ten youths who were loading and unloading workers near the Calicut University School of Drama in Trissur. The presentation of the improvised play *Corpses from Attapady* took place on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1996.

#### 2.4. MODE OF PRESENTATION

The mobile theatre presentation used the entire Trichur round around the *Vadakkunnathan* Temple starting from the Municipal Bus stand end, a distance of around 3 Kms. A youth, Sunil Kumar, was wound up in a torn mat and made to lie as a corpse on a hand-drawn trolley. Two in the group, Krishnan and Parameswaran, with their *chendas* (country drums) were the announcers of the news of the arrival of an *Adivasi* corpse from Attapady. I was to draw the trolley through the round impersonating myself as an 'Indian Buffoon' celebrating the 49<sup>th</sup> year of our National Independence. The remaining six in the group (Balan, Tilakan, Anandan, Ramesh, Mohan and Chandran) were the mourners carrying small plastic national flags high in their hands and at times beating on their chests along with mournful outbursts like:

(*Enthoru marana Swathanthram itu?*) (What a fantastic dead freedom is this?)

Jubilant outbursts in the form of songs and dance followed at times, like:

*Aha! Cholera maranam!*  
*Aha! Pattini maranam!*

(Aha! Cholera deaths so fine!  
Aha ! Starvation deaths, very fine!

*Swathanthrathin pattinimaranam!*  
*Ananthikku! Aratuu!*  
*Nooku! Attapadiyil ninnu Savangal!*  
*Varu varu! Arku Venam! Arkuvenam!*  
*Arku Venam! Varu Varu!*  
*Aha! Rebate! Rebate! Rebate*  
**Aha! Nammute Swathantharathinu**  
**rebate,... rebate**

Poverty death of independence!  
 Rejoice! Rejoice till you sink!  
 'Look! Fine corpses from Attapady!'  
 Come out! Come out! Who wants it  
 Who wants it! Who wants it!  
 Aha! Rebate! Rebate! Rebate  
 Aha! Rebate for our independence!)

The performance started at 10.15 A.M. immediately after the official Independence day ceremonial police parade at the Thekkinkadu ground. The funeral-procession-play was performed at selected places for the assembled crowds along the round and culminated at around 12.30 P.M. Songs and dialogues were all improvised so as to create responses and curious questions from the crowd. The inter-active theatre experiment generated immense energy which was found later to be of invaluable magnitude in conducting inter-subjective fieldwork which became aesthetico-empirical in orientation.

A variant version of this theatrical theme of the *Adivasi* deaths was presented in Kozhikode City in the thick of the *Onam* Tourist extravaganza on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1996. This time the theatre group consisted of only two actors, Mr. Unni Kohinoor and myself who later became one of the research – associate-performer of the KRPLLD project on the *Kurumba*. The deaths were continuously reported in the newspapers.

The immediate provocation for the Kozhikode performance was a reported case of a dead body of an *Adivasi* from Attapady died of cholera lying unclaimed in the mortuary at the Calicut Medical College.

This time, the method adopted was almost the same as before; the corpse on a trolley being pulled by me, the Indian Buffoon, through the crowded streets of Calicut City. The enactments at different corners were purely inter-subjective in which the spectators at times became spect-actors during the performance. Interrogative performance-paradigms slowly became charged with energy sources for generating unforeseen situations of inter-subjective revelations on the objective reality.

## **2.5. TOWARDS THE ADIVASI REALITY**

The attempt to get a direct glimpse into the catastrophic *Adivasi* question of alienation got further motivation from the nascent struggle of the Attapady ***Girijan Sevak Samithi (GSS)*** for the alienated *Adivasi* lands. Video-documentation of the struggle for the lost lands in which hundreds of *Adivasis* participated was undertaken as an individual research project without financial assistance from any source.



Theatre activism, as part of a struggle to generate models of inter-subjective performance, prompted me to put up improvised theatre pieces in relation to the ongoing land struggle in Attapady. Presentation of inter-active theatre modules that project the struggle of the *Adivasis* for their lost lands and their cultural identity were performed in several *Irula* hamlets near Agali with the support of the *Adivasi* activists. Mr. Unni Kohinoor and Mr. Krishnan (Electrician, School of Drama) and myself enacted the sequences of participatory theatre pieces in Tamil and Malayalam on themes of alienation.

## **2.6. ON THE PERFORMANCE MODELS: OBSERVATIONS**

- i. The most significant aspect of the inter-subjective performative models presented outside and inside Attapady revealed the vast potential lying embedded at the core of the theatrical energy that could trigger collective participational urge for action-oriented research in the field of social sciences.
- ii. What became more evident was the flexibility of the *Adivasi* audience in becoming active spect-actors, if given the performative opportunity. Their theatrical interventions were more or less spontaneous.
- iii. Theatre-ethnology seems to open the doors of empirical narratives interwoven with aesthetic and cultural undercurrents of multiple dimensions. Psycho-theatrical experiments with the *Adivasi* reality paved the base for evolving a performetric analytical framework.
- iv. The only crisis felt at certain junctures was the possibility of the theatrical inter-ventions getting 'emotionally-oriented' towards the *Adivasi* crises. The actor's subjective crisis of getting dissolved or 'going native' in the process was taken note of and preventive techniques to get out of pure subjectivity were evolved.
- v. This was precisely at this point of crisis that KRPLLD project came as a defense mechanism as well as a source of support to enlighten the performative activism along the line of action-oriented ethnographic research discourse. The whole attempt at deriving strategies for performative research on the *Kurumba* society in the process became meta-theatrical in every sense of the term.

## **2.7. PROJECT PHASE**

The pre-project phase evolved a methodological substratum for the fieldwork discourse of the project. The major methodological systems of analysis derived are recorded below:

## **2.8. MALLI NATAKAM**

The unifying myth of *Malleswara* and its generative configurations that activate the outer and inner life of the *Adivasis* of Attapady in general is theatrically modulated in the form of a play *Malli Natakam* in Tamil, performed by the *Adivasi* youths belonging to *Irula* community. The play was co-authored and directed by me and Sri. D. Narayanan, an *Adivasi* of *Irula* community, who became my chief research-associate. The production of the play and especially the process of production did reveal the latent power of the *Adivasi* myth that permeates the material expressivity

of the *Adivasis* of Attapady in general, along with their on fertility-charged aesthetico-cultural articulations of reality.

The myth of *Malleswara* remained as the most powerful discourse denominator that could extract the psycho-physical sources of energy specific to the *Kurumba* in relation to the *Mudugas* and *Irulas* who get slowly absorbed in the mainstream cultural centres and institutions.

## **2.9. SIVARATRI: THE ETERNAL – PERFORMANCE - NIGHT**

*Sivaratri* or the ‘night of *Siva*’ still remains the most significant collective expression of the psycho-physical culture of the *Adivasis* of Attapady in its most flexible manifestation, in spite of its non-*Adivasi* structures of codification.

The ethno-methodological discourse with the *Kurumba* based on the fertility cult of *Malleswara* was structured theatrically and performed by the *Adivasi* research associates in *Kurumba* hamlets. The strategy was charted out for the purpose of generating primordial impulses that would throw light on the peculiar ethno-energy- centres in their psychic life. The trance-like situation in which women enact through their hysterical body movements along with their men projects the hallucinations of their reality-past, present and future.

The research exploration into the dark interiors of their psychic dynamics got video-documented for an depth analysis. The concept of fertility and connected ritual performances during the *Sivaratri* festival are analysed from an eco-political and gender perspective. Sensuality and sexuality specific to the *Kurumbas* is also explored using the performative body language as a source of regenerative impulses.

Ethno-music and language connected with the fertility myth act as cultural indicators of a society's inner rhythms, melodies and harmonies.

## **2.10. MALLESWARA MYTH IN REHEARSAL**

As stated already, the mytho-theatrical exploration during the rehearsal process of the play, *Malli Natakam* was primarily determined by psycho-physical improvisatory methods. Ethno-music specific to the *Adivasis* of Attapady served as the locus of physicalisation supported by collective dance-song combines. An ideographic representation of the performance-principle evolved through the rehearsal process would articulate the multi-structured material and aesthetic culture of the *Irula*, *Muduga*, and *Kurumba* social formation in Attapady filled with performetric variables and ambiguities.

## **2.11. FROM ETHNO-THEATRE TO EVERY DAY LIFE**

The meta-performative programming evolved through the theatrical performance of ***Malli Natakam*** and the improvisatory presentations of the myth as visual discourse on the *Malleswara* myth extended itself to the once most-popular ***Harischandra Koothu*** performed by the *Adivasis* themselves. The performance magnitude of the *Koothu* seems to inhere the unconscious narrative technique of a theatrical therapy that situates itself in the material and ethno-spiritual dimensions of the *Adivasi* life. The traditional practice was to perform the story of the famous *Aryan* myth of *Harischandra*, his wife *Chandramati*, and their son *Rohitswan*.

The texture of the myth and its performance is analysed from a perspective of hybrid-cultural ethos that regulates the ethical dynamics of the *Adivasis* of Attapady in general. The in-built value-system in the myth-story-structure still holds on as an ideal model based on truthfulness in its sublimity interlaced with family and gender harmony. A detailed analysis is made as base for performative and inter-subjective fieldwork in the *Kurumba* hamlets.

The theatrical performance of the *Koothu* used to be presented on seven full nights in the past. But the alienated *Adivasis* in the process of their distancing from their old moorings perform the play by shortening its duration to one night starting from around nine in the night till dawn with little break times in between dramatic events.

The theatrical events end with the visit of the performers to every household in the hamlet for blessing the family along with performative inquiries on the physical and material well-being of the members of the family unit. Most often the questions focus on the health of the family members and on their material productivity integrated with eco-cultural dynamics. This last sequence was found to be of great significance in the context of performative field-work which does not function at all on pre-structured questionnaire models.

The PRG therefore included the grand old traditional *Adivasi* performers of ***Harischandra Koothu***, Sri. Mallen, Sri. Vendan, Sri. Maruthan, Mr. Vellan, Sri. Resan Master, Sri. Vinod, Sri. Nanchan, Sri. Kakki and Sri. Gandan. Certain sequences from the *Koothu* were separated and performed for opening up inter-active performance and non-performance sessions that focus on the psycho-physical networks of *Kurumba* culture in relation to their productivity and developmental aspirations. The sessions were video-documented.

## **2.12. POETIC TEXT-PERFORMANCE AS INTER-SUBJECTIVE FIELD WORK**

The famous modern Malayalam poetic-text ***Kiratha Vritham*** by Katammanitta Ramakrishnan got performatively stratified for the purpose of inter-subjective enactment, which it was hoped at the outset, would unravel some of the hidden energy sources of *Kurumba* culture and psyche.

This intercultural theatre praxis dwelt on the 'Researcher-Performer-Bufferoon' role playing derived by me in which performance becomes the process of inter-subjective ideological transaction between the performer and the subject of discourse. The objective of this methodological strategy was the generation of responses and inter-pretative models of expressions from the *Kurumba* spectators themselves. The poetic-text primarily acts as the stimulus-energy base for the active construction of meanings as the performance events proceed.

### **2.13. ETHO-LINGUISTIC TRANSACTIONAL METHOD**

The linguistic perception and experience of the *Adivasi Kurumba* society remain still as a vocal (utterance) category without scripts for representation. The medium of instruction imposed on them is either Malayalam or Tamil based on the simplistic academic notion that the *Adivasi* spoken language is just a mixture of Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada. This is questioned on the basis of a primary perception and recognition of *Adivasi* language as non-intelligible and non-communicative to Tamil and Malayalam speaking people. Attempts to represent their linguistic utterances were undertaken by the group with Mr. D. Narayanan as the chief architect for the construction of an independent *Adivasi* script.

The linguistic endeavour finds its performative instances in the *Kurumba* hamlets where the discourse conducted by Sri. Narayanan impersonating as the ancient Chieftain of the *Adivasis*; and myself as the interrogative Performer- Bufferoon. The study of the verbs and denominating strategies involved in the *Adivasi* language of the *Kurumbas* are done from an inter-disciplinary perspective which incorporates eco-philosophical and psycho-physical categories of cognition and expressivity.

### **2.14. COLLECTIVE ETHNO-DANCE-MUSIC AS PERFORMANCE NARRATIVES**

The *Kurumbas*, unlike the 'mainstream-fed' *Adivasis* of Attapady still hold on to their collective expression through dance, song and music. Their conception of the world, the centripetal circularity of their movement patterns inter-linked with their social life and criteria of beauty are all looked at from a perspective of subconscious mobility drives.

The *Adivasi Irulas* of the research-group evolved a method of their on indigenous inter-subjectivity which generated instances of the proto-Dravidian energy principles inherent in the *Kurumba* culture. This contributed much to the painful aesthetic dimensions of the empirical *Kurumba* narratives of the present. The PRG gained insights into the aesthetic mobility of the *Kurumba* in the process by collectively participating in the rhythmic dance situations in every *Kurumba* hamlet. A cross-cultural analysis of the dance of the *Kurumbas* and the dance of the forests that surround them is also attempted.

### **2.15. INTRA-CULTURAL AND INTERCULTURAL CRISIS IN ACTION**

The three *Adivasi* social groups, *Kurumba*, *Muduga* and *Irula* have intra-cultural and societal contradictions that contribute to accelerate the pace of the *Adivasi* alienation. Discussion with the elders of the three communities brought forth very sensitive issues of historical and cultural significance. The isolated *Kurumbas* in the interior forests of Attapady are still looked down as inferiors and even as untouchables by the elders of *Irula* community in particular. But the new generation of educated *Adivasi* youths look at the *Kurumbas* as their most unfortunate brethren. The rationale for segregatory impulses is analysed.

Inter-cultural contradictions are the most powerfully negative as felt by the *Kurumba* community as a whole. The serious question of their being the victims of subjugation on all fronts of their fragmented existence demands not just a research-oriented analysis but alternative action-plans to be taken up by human rights activists along with *Adivasi* youths. The State as well as all its functionaries including liquor barons and absentee-*ganja* landlords has their agents in the midst of a 'primitive' social formation inflicting tortures unimaginable. This aspect gets analysed in the chapters to follow:

## **2.16. EMPIRICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC SURVEY**

The primary and secondary database including the intra-societal and inter-societal levels of day to day existence of the *Adivasis* are codified from a two dimensional perspective. The methodological instances primarily generated the survey results from the performative and inter-subjective spheres of transactional sessions of considerable length.

The secondary database constitutes the official records from the Panchayat offices of Pudur in particular where all *Kurumba* hamlets subsist. Political party functionaries, voluntary social workers, ITDP, AHADS, Christian Missionary organisations and knowledgeable *Adivasi* and non-*Adivasi* elders were full of information, most often of falsified and highly imaginative. Almost all the sessions got video-documented.

## **2.17. MAJOR DRAWBACKS OF THE METHODOLOGY**

It was felt that only when boundaries between self and non-self dissolves and collapse that we can speak of any fieldwork methodology as transcending the crude rationalistic parameters confronted by the Research-Performers with their unbounded selves. We are then 'ourselves' in the field, trying to decipher and understand social reality which is never static but always in a state of flux. In this sense, the self of the researcher is not external to, or different from the subject, whose life and being is often internalised or reproduced by the researcher. This in effect, presents the ethnological 'other' which actually is the subject and not the object, as central not only to the research but also in transforming the life and consciousness of the researchers. This does not amount to the researcher romantically becoming a 'native *Adivasi*', but fulfils the task of finding

alternative strategies, sometimes subversive, in changing the researched subject towards the multitudinous realms of mutually interpretative, action-oriented programmes that lead towards powerful impulses of liberation.

Lack of purely empirical methods of investigation and conventional fieldwork limited the scope of the study. A symbiotic model evolved through empirical – non-empirical nexus, it was hoped, would throw much light on the *Kurumba* reality than the conventional method of fieldwork.

If there was a co-ordinated attempt at evolving models that seek perfection with the collaboration of social scientists from major realms of knowledge, the result would have been different. Performative method has always a pull towards collective ecstasy which often blocks the research group from developing discourse to a serious level.

The methodological strategies of releasing immense energies that lie in the unconscious of the *Kurumba* often has a tendency to forget the time factor as it leads to unending sessions of collective expression. The researcher's cognitive faculties tend to forget the objective of the project. This danger happened to be challenged from time to time during the process.

The Researcher-Performer's attempt to distance himself from the performance to observe closely the difference between the pre-expressive, expressive and post-expressive phases of the performing *Kurumbas* gave rise to a suspicion of the project's motive. This was mainly because of the total distrust of the *Adivasis* on research programmes conducted by the official bodies from time to time as developmental rituals.

The performance-research has the peculiarities of an action-oriented approach, and this often forces, especially the non-*Adivasi* settlers, and the police forces and government officials, to think of the programme as being conducted by some 'extremist' political organisation; as the process of transaction often becomes charged with highly political and ideological questions.

## **2.18. THE THEORY AND PRAXIS OF PERFORMATIVE DISCOURSE - A PREFACE**

The conceptual framework of ethno-performative-discourse got activated on a level of mutual interpretation of cultures through transactional determinants derived from the concrete situations of the subjects of study. Learning about one's own culture in the context of the study of another culture changes the total orientation of the discourse to that of an ideological struggle against all forms of oppressive forces intersecting the researcher-researched at one and the same time.

The ethno-performative praxis, thus becomes a subversive political act that aims at the empowerment of communities that are involved. The developmental or rather the strategies of liberating performativity prompts the researchers and the researched to physicalise some of the fundamental sources of liberation that evolved through the process. Thus, the methodology of performative discourse crosses the boundaries of the official transactions to one of effective and participatory cultural programming with elemental initiatives from the society of the subject of study.

Thus, the postproject-phase involves the creative endeavour of the *Adivasi* community to establish its own multi-faceted identity in relation to the ideological expressivity of the research group and the *Adivasi* community as a whole. The idea that emerged was to have a 'collective' that could unleash the energy sources for an *Adivasi* renaissance. The methodology of research, with in a short span of time, became so productive and aesthetically imaginative.

### **2.19. POST – PROJECT PHASE: KANAGAM - A FOREST OF DREAMS**

**The action-oriented research programme sponsored by KRPLLD culminated in giving shape to a home for destitute children belonging to the three *Adivasi* communities, *Kurumba*, *Muduga* and *Irula* of Attapady.**

*Kanagam* which means 'forest' or 'towards forest' in the *Adivasi* language, started functioning from 26 January (Republic Day) 2000 on a hillock in Dasanur hamlet. The thatched shed shelters 12 destitute children of unwed *Adivasi*-mothers and orphans from different hamlets. Funds in cash and kind are collected from individuals and attempt at generating income from the six-acre barren plot of land belonging to the *Adivasi* members of the registered body of the ***Tribal Welfare Club, Dasanur (Reg. No. 282/88)*** is being done on a long-term basis. The theatre group organised under the banner of the club to produce the play ***Malli Natakam*** gradually transformed itself in to ***Kanagam*** which functions solely under the creative initiative of the *Adivasi*s themselves, though supported by the Research-Performer-Buffer and the like. Given below is a blue print of the vision that guides the ***Kanagam***.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Part I

## THE FORESTS OF IDEOGRAMS

### 3.1 PROLOGUE

The *Kurumba* hamlets and the eco-system abound in psychophysical ideograms of an *Adivasi* tradition moving towards material and cultural extinction. Dying images of an unbroken narrative of alienation articulate through the *Kurumbas* in every level of their material subsistence. The realms of culture, ethos, eco-dynamics and day to day life of the *Kurumbas* are permeated with fragmented ideograms of subjugation and slow and steady massacre.

### 3.2 THE MYTH OF MALLESWARA IN ACTION

The *Adivasi* myth of *Malleswara* remains still as the only significant mythological configuration that releases the collective social energy of the *Adivasi* communities, *Kurumba*, *Muduga* and *Irula*. The seven-day long festival of *Sivaratri* gives rise to a pattern of collective *Adivasi* mobility both on the physical and psychological levels. The gravitational pull is towards the *Malleswara Muti* (the lofty mountain top on which the *Malapoojaris* (the hill priests) light the lamp three times to be seen to everybody gathered in the *Chemmanur Sivan Koil* which for the *Adivasi* is a focal point in time and space that gives sustenance to all their creative urges for the year to come after *Sivaratri*.

### 3.3 THE MYTHO-THEATRICAL INTERVENTION

The mytho-theatrical discourse on the *Malleswara* cult generated the source for an in depth inter-subjective analysis. ***The Tribal Welfare Club*** of Dasanur happened to be the nucleus of the ethnographic configuration of this theatrical discourse that led through intense rehearsals towards presentation in different *Adivasi* hamlets. The operational strategies of producing performative modules that lie inherent in the structure of feelings of the *Adivasi* community are codified to reveal a reality that reminds one of great tragic plays. The enactment of this grand tragedy of *Malleswara* integrated with cults of fertility had three definite stages of development, 1) Pre-rehearsal, 2) Rehearsal 3) Presentational.

Pre-rehearsal participation in the *Sivaratri* festival evolved ideograms of the performative energy of the *Adivasis* manifesting in differing frequencies and modulations. The kernel of the myth as performed during the seven days and six nights got represented in the performance text of the play. The multiple layers of the myth were taken into account while shaping the play ***Malli Na takam***. The rehearsal camp of ten days duration provided deeper thrust to the concept of the proto-Dravidian fertility cult that unifies the female-male energy specific to the *Adivasis* of Attapady.



*Malleswara* is both *Siva* and god of love, *Kamadeva*. The fertility god and goddess *Siva* and *Parvathi* seems to be the energy nexus of all creative impulses, mainly of sexuality, that activates the *Adivasi* society. The manifestations of these sources of liberating energy find intertwined in every level of *Kurumba* experience. A. K. *Koomaraswami* in *The Dance of Siva* observes:

How supremely in power and grace this dancing image must appear to all those who have striven in plastic forms to give expression to their intuition of life!... no artist of today, however great could more exactly or more wisely create an image of that Energy which science must postulate behind all phenomena. . .

Nature is inert, and cannot dance until *Siva* wills it. He rises from his rapture and dancing sends through inert matter pulsing waves of awakening sound, and lo! matter also dance appearing as a glory round about him. Dancing, he sustains its manifold phenomena. In the fullness of time, still dancing, he destroys all forms and names by fire and gives new rest. This is poetry, none the less, science (1957, p.228).

The poetic dimensions of sensuality and sexuality permeate the *Adivasi* performative forms like song-dance-music collective. The sensual intimacy with the forests, hills, valleys and the animal world generates unbridled male/female energy cycles.

### 3.4. PERFORMANCE MODULE: THE PHALLIC IDEOGRAM

The *Sivaratri* festival in Attapady revolves around the axis of *Sivalinga* worship in the Chemmanur *Sivan koil* lasting for seven days. The major offering to the deity is oxen made of clay by the *Adivasis* themselves which abound in the premises of the *Koil*. *Siva/Shakti* (*Parvathi*) character development in the play dwelt on this image of *Sivalinga* as the dominant visual capable of energising the visual alphabet of the play. *Shakti* as performed by Janaki (18) and Shaktivel (19) in the play provokes one to look into the intricate principles of male/female sexuality and fertility.

### 3.5 OBSERVATIONS

i The eco-diversity of the Attapady hills and forests in which the *Adivasis* had been forced to settle in the 1920s by the British government was the first and most powerful act that controlled and regulated the *Adivasi* mobility that was central to a nomadic social matrix.

ii The *Kurumbas* in particular, were forced to settle in the most interior part of the dangerous forests as they were supposed to be the most 'primitive tribe' which practised necromancy and shamanism. It seems to be the main reason why the other communities of *Irula* and *Muduga* even now practice untouchability against the *Kurumbas* in certain areas of their intra-societal system. For instance, *Irulas* and *Mudugas* of Attapady would not drink water, from a *Kurumba* home or eat what *Kurumbas* prepare.

iii This aspect of segregation gets dissolved in the context of their collective participation in the *Sivaratri* festival for which *Kurumbas* trek the forests and hills for hours to reach the Chemmannur *Sivan Koil*.

iv The *Adivasi* sensibility in relation to the eco-political structure of their social existence manifest in multifaceted ways. Their discourse with nature takes us into the realms of a primordial culture that make explicit the interrelated networks of the proto-Dravidian images of the eco-system:

NO	NATURAL REGIONS	ECO-SYSTEM	STAGE OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT	DIVISION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE
1.	<b>Palai</b> Practises of <i>Palai</i> observable in four other regions due to inter-regional mobility	Sandy desert land  Most unproductive geographic formation	Nomadic life and hunting.  Sacrificed animals to dreaded spirits later to develop as <i>Kali-Siva</i> worship.  Worshipped stones that symbolise ancestor gods.	<i>Kallar /maravar</i>  Nomadic tribes of adventurous deeds. Lived by plundering from other regions.
2.	<b>Kurinji</b> Home of exotic flowers of the forest hills.	Mountainous regions  Home of Romantic love at first sight. Seyon, the ever youthful god, Murugan is a boy lover, god of hills and serpents.	Semi-nomadic life  Hunting with bows and arrows. Famous in later Tamil romantic poetry as heroes of romantic love.	<b>Kuravar</b>  Hunting and dancing. Dance and songs in praise of nature-Animism.
3.	<b>Mullai</b> Forest-hill valleys	Forest tracts between the uplands and plains below.	Pastoral Life Tending cattle and playing on flute, <i>Kohal</i> .	<i>Idaiyar - Ayar, Konar Mayon</i> The are the dark hued gods.
4.	<b>Marudam</b> River as source of energy	Lower river valley  <i>Pongal</i> harvest festival. Collective expression of fertility	Agricultural life  Cotton that gives protection to body clothes, huts made of wood shifting type houses.	<i>Vettalar</i>  Controllers of floods. Developed irrigation system.
5.	<b>Neydal</b> Sea Shore	Sea fishing and sailing	Relations with sea and land produces rhythms of mystery.	<i>Paradavar</i>  Male canoes sailed into sea. The black sea myth. ( <i>Karumkadal</i> myth).

The above paradigm of the anthropo-geographic system of the pre-Aryan Dravidians as expounded in *Tolkapiyam* (ancient Dravidian grammar text) informs us of a highly developed consciousness of performative culture specific to each eco-system. The *Kurumba* social unit manifests the fundamental principle of the *kurinji* region that overlaps towards *palai* and *mullai*. The eco-dynamics articulates through the surrounding forests, hills and the sky above as the visible images that surround them.

### 3.6. TRANSCENDING THE PRESENT

All aesthetic reproduction of the lived reality, it seemed, attempt to cross the frontiers of that reality to the realms of wishful fantasies and dreams of exit from experiences that are tragic and pathologically repulsive. The trance - performance of women and men in front of the iconographic representation of the phallic energy nexus-the dark *Sivalinga* in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the *Koil* - articulates a different dialect unintelligible to the non - *Adivasis*.

An old lady in the traditional *Adivasi* dress and with a stick in her hand was the first to get possessed in the process of the wild rhythmic beats and shouts and dance of the people. She started having fits of possession in front of the *Koil* courtyard. *Adivasis* are enthralled to find the lady possessed. They heave sighs of relief as if god has appeared before them in the form of a trance. They start worshipping the possessed lady. The trance continued in front of *sivalinga* encircled by flames of fire. The strategies of communication with elemental phallic energy sources throw open the doors of a supra-reality that is inter-subjective in its manifestation or rather wildly self-destructive in the proper sense of the term. The self gets dissolved in the trance in which the whole environment becomes terribly mobile. A transactional analysis of the supra-real situations tends to reveal the inner contradictions of being alive in situations 'exotic'.

It is the eco-centric body language that articulates itself with the phallic image. The repetitive gestural articulation of the hip of the lady as if being thrown away into the distant forests acts as wild messages of invitations to everybody to move in to the deep forests of desire. This body-language of sexuality abounds in their sublime pelvic movements, sometimes like that of a wild forest swayed by storm, sometimes like that of a mountain stream passing through dark rocks of latent memories.

Their men and women, when they dance together to different indigenous rhythms sing together their intimate songs of the ancient lovers, songs of separation and coming together to add further boost to the attempt to live on fantasies, thereby breaking all orders of imposed confinement.

The entranced individuals, most of them women, both young and old, sometimes spit and ejaculate unintelligible syllables of fury and ecstasy which the *Adivasis* think of as the orders of the spirits of *Siva* and *Sakti*, to the people gathered.

### **3.7. MALLI NATAKAM: REWRITING MYTH**

The generative alphabets of the ethno-performative unconscious did gradually shape the theatrical images of death and regeneration in a language unintelligible to the mainstream theatre practice. The structure of the myth as articulated in the *Malli Natakam* serves as the indicators of the contemporary value-system that interferes at every juncture in the life of the *Adivasis*. The improvised script of the play and its performative process of composition opened up new challenges related to mutual interpretation of the myth in various ways.

*Malli Natakam* and its presentation in different hamlets cleared the way for the PRG towards the *Kurumba* hamlets. The attempt to perform the play in the *Kurumba* hamlets remains cancelled. The young girls of the theatre group numbering nine found it impossible to trek the forests and hills lying in remotest parts of Attapady. It also came to be known that the parents of the girls did

not give permission to the girls to go to *Kurumba* hamlets. Theatre, even among the *Adivasis* is looked down as an activity befitting the lowest or 'sudras' (as *Natyasastra* says). In dance-song-music-ensemble, the collective energy of the hamlet people gets formulated as vibrations of a harmonious symphony.

### 3.8. OBSERVATIONS ON MALLI NATAKAM

- i. *Malli Natakam* happened to be the first theatrical experience of the members of the **Tribal Welfare Club** meant as a ground plan for conducting the project work in the *Kurumba* hamlets.
- ii. The myth as a narrative that speaks of incest motif and the grand tragedy that haunted the mythical father, mother and their daughter *Malli*, remains significant. The death of fertility significantly connected with the collective death of the father, mother and daughter is treated as a springboard of energy that could sublimate the spheres of *Adivasi* re-productivity in all fields of their labour.
- iii. *Malli Natakam* gave instances of the *rites of passage* in its most poignant manner that gets represented as images of dramatic intensity in the play. Puberty rites, marriage rites and death rites get explicated as performative modules specific to the *Adivasis*.
- iv. Rehearsal schedules were arranged in Dasanur hamlet. The public rehearsal spaces in the hamlet forests and the banks of the rivulet, *Kodankara pallam* created situations of highly inter-subjective discussions on the myth. Almost all the elder men and women of the hamlet had something to say on the presentation.
- v. The improvisational method employed primarily for the purpose of activating the imaginative dynamics of the performers led to the internal contradictions with in the design of the myth.
- vi. One major argument put forth by Sri. Manikkan master is that *Malleswara* myth is an Aryanised version of the *Sivashakti* cult which came to dominate the *Adivasi* myths of their own *Karadeivams* (god of a particular *kulam* or endogamous group) and nature. According to the learned *Adivasi* schoolteacher, *Siva* and *Sakthi* came later, because in every hamlet they had their own places of worship where animistic spirits in inanimate objects of nature are worshipped. He said:
 

We still worship our forefathers and mothers, as our gods or spirits that exist with our lives working as sources that release a liberating energy from the feeling of continuity.

He was emphatic:

*Siva-sakti* principle is well and good. But we still hold on to the *Adivasi* tradition that is proto-Dravidian in origin.
- vii. Studies on iconography have insisted that more than one element of *Siva's* iconography show traces of primitive and probably non-Aryan origin. "The matted hair, ornaments of skull and snakes, as also the wild dance in which the god is often pictured, recall the appearance and practice of wild shamanism among ancient communities" (D. H. H. Ingalls, ***An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry***, Harvard University Press, 1965. P.69).
- viii. Co-ordinating the generated energy in the youths of the **Tribal Welfare Club** was made easier as the rehearsal process was a space that made every one intimate, to the extent of the researcher and his associates from outside being treated as people who could stay in their hamlets.
- ix. The male domination in general among the *Adivasis* has drained the creative energy of the females to such an extent that even young girls who had roles in the play always looked for

guidance from men. Gender crisis has reached unimaginable dimensions mainly as a result of constant consumption of illicit country liquor and addiction to *ganja*.

- x The production of the play resulted also in the physicalisation of the focal situations in the play from purely inter-subjective discourse perspective. The stage was thus set for the projection of the *Malleswara* myth as a generative intervention in the *Kurumba* hamlets, of course, with the absence of the females from the theatre group.
- xi This theatrical intervention into the material and aesthetic culture of the *Adivasis* in general from an ethno-mythical perspective taught the researcher and his team certain lessons on mutual interpretation of cultures. At the same time, this also energised the researcher's performative dynamics from hitherto unknown perspectives.

### **3.9. HARISCHANDRA KOOTHU-DESIGN AND METHOD**

The *koothu*, a traditional *Adivasi* theatre performance, in the good old days, used to be performed on seven consecutive nights in *Adivasi* hamlets. The grand-old-performer of this vanishing art form, Sri. Vendan tells:

I know all the lines of the seven-day play by heart. I used to take seven days penance before presenting the play. Now, no one wants us. They want that cinema stuff...

The play is there with in the psychophysical layers of the lives of the grand old team of the *koothu*. Two of them have gone to better-of Tamil Nadu hamlets of their brethren. But when somebody calls them for performance they leave behind everything and come. Only males perform the role of females. The chief performer of the team, Sri. Vendan has a lady's long hair grown and kept ready for any eventuality.

### **3.10. THE DRAMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE KOOTHU**

The story line with many variant versions had its descriptive base in the ancient Sanskrit text, *Devi Bhagavatham-Saptamaskanda*. The Dravidian version in old Tamil (*Sentamil*) has its focus on the travails of Harischandra, his wife Chandramathi and their son Rohitaswan.

The legendary kind Harischandra renowned for his adherence to truth and sacrifice gave away everything including his kingdom to the sage Viswamithra for being truthful to his vow. The deceitful Viswamithra who was not satisfied wanted everything that was left with him. Harischandra was forced to sell his wife and child and still the promised sacrifice remained unfulfilled. He sold himself to a king of the lowest of castes, a Chandala Raja, and was forced to do the duty of the keeper of a crematorium. The wages he got for doing the burial of the dead had to be given away to the sage as his debt was not paid yet. To create matters of worst kind, his master Chandala Raja ordered him to cut to pieces the dead body of his own son, Rohitaswan, who did die of snakebite. Chandramati came to the cremation ground in search of Rohitaswan. They together decide to immolate themselves on the funeral pyre of their son, but was saved the ordeal by divine intervention.

The enactment of this grand theatrical narrative takes at least seventy hours as its total duration (roughly ten hours every night). The performers themselves have edited the version suited to every hamlet during the course of the enactment that last for 10 hours, starting from eight or nine in the night. The discussion with the *Koothu* performers culminated in a consensus of performing only those situations that are highly emotional, in the *Kurumba* hamlets to be visited by the PRG. Permission was sought for the Researcher-Performer-Bufferoon to intervene at certain situations during performance to make the fieldwork more inter-subjective. The total performance group was composed of 32 persons including the non-*Adivasi* Research team of six persons.

### **3.11. THE KOOTHU IN ACTION-RESEARCH**

The tragedy of Harischandra was presented in the *Kurumba* hamlets of Bhoothayur, Yedavani, Anavayi and Kadukumanna. In Bhoothayur the *Koothu* was performed for the whole night as requested by the Oorumoopan Sri Nanchan and the young men of the hamlet.

All arrangements for the *Koothu* were done by the hamlet people for the performing group to begin the play at about 9pm after the food. The Oorumoopan arranged to collect a handful of rice and bengal gram from every household to be given to the performance group so that they prepare their own food for the night. The *Kurumba* hospitality was similar to the practice of the *Irulas* and *Mudugas* when a *Kurumba* visits a hamlet. *Kurumbas* still feel inferior to the other *Adivasi* communities, as their living conditions are dangerously pathetic.

### **3.12. PERFORMANCE MODULE: ONE**

A live fire pit in the centre of the common courtyard inflames the hamlet's performative urge. The research group of *Irulas* begins their customary singing accompanied by harmonium, *perre*, *davil*, *mrudangam*, *kohal* and *tabla*. The *koothu* team completes their make-up and costume change.

The Researcher-Bufferoon and the traditional *Adivasi*-Bufferoon of the *Harischandra* theatre group also get ready with their comic make-up and costume. The whole group of performers salutes the hamlet people who react in the same way. Mutual respect gets established. It was observed that performance for the *Adivasis* is a serious productive activity like that of hunting or agriculture. The ritual observance of fasting and obeisance to the *karadeivams* and to the mother-earth and sky before performing agricultural activities in their forest tracts extends to their performance in the cultural fields of wishful dreams and wild fantasies innumerable. The interlacing of the productivity factor both in the material and cultural subsistence happens at every juncture of their life-system.

The introductory sequence of the play was a collective rendering of salutations to every object in nature including their ancestor *karadeivams*. Praising lord *Muruga*, the eternal boy-lover, is central to the prologue of the play. The performers seek everyone's blessing. The manner of performer-spectator relationship is established by placing both hands in other's arms and then bending the forehead to touch them saying *vanakkam*.

The initial attempt to feel the body of the spectators shows the levels of bio-dynamics involved in *Adivasi* performance principles. The costumed impersonation of the actors in a performance gives them an aura of a dignified creator who practices the art of being and becoming. A network of performative energy has begun to circulate in the hamlet. The placing of hands and forehead together is a performative configuration that affirms the concept of performance as the domain of the spectators as well.

### 3.13. ACTORS-SPECTATORS ENERGY IN CIRCULATION

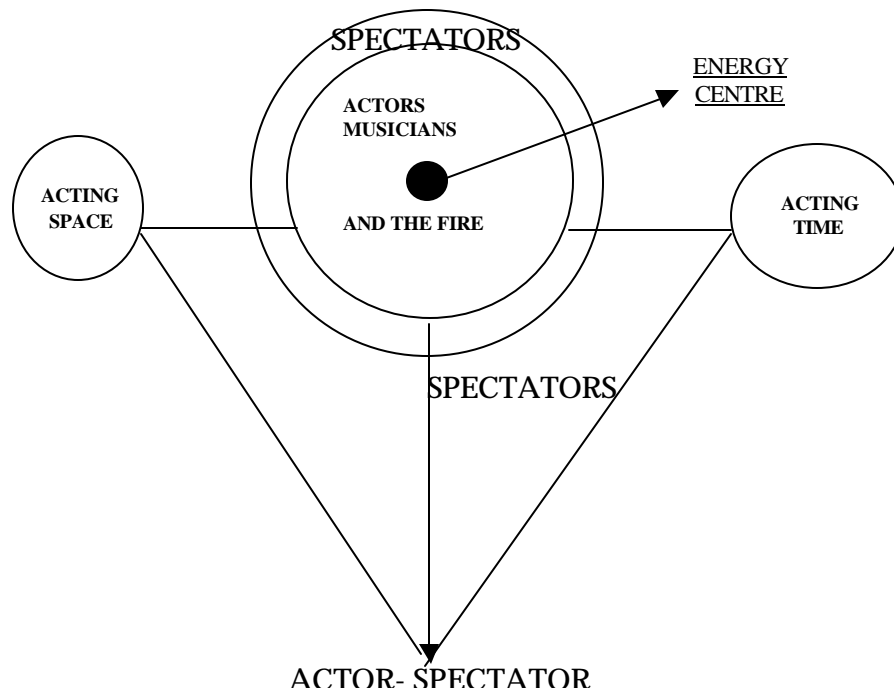


Figure 5. Performance Energy Diffusion

Actor-spectator flexibility motivates inter-subjective expressivity to a maximum limit. After the prologue of the play is sung in unison, it is the responsibility of the buffoons to introduce the play in their own terms articulated in the form of dialogues with the spectators. The traditional buffoon role is performed by an experienced comedian, Sri. Bomman, with the Researcher-Buffoon as his co-actor. Together they come stepping to the rhythm of the drums and goes round the acting area saying: *Vanakkam peryorkale, thayimarkale, Vanakkam Inda Adivasi Komaliyin Vanakkam* (Salutations to you, all you big people, all of you).

**The Researcher-Buffoon (R.B):** *Vanakkam - Anpulla Adivasi Makkale... Inda Vanthavasi* (encroacher) *komaliyin vanakkam*. [Salutations to all, to all *Adivasi* brethren, salutations from this encroacher-buffoon].

**Adivasi- Buffoon(A.B):** (Still dancing) We're presenting ***Harischandra Koothu*** this night in Bhoothayur. (To *Vanthavasi*-buffoon) Hey, *vanthavasi komali*, where are you from? Tell them... quick... the play is getting ready.

**R. B:** (Dancing like a circus clown and sings)  
*Ulakathile oorellam thandi* (Passing through all the hamlets of the world)  
*Nanee Attappadi ooru thedi vanthen* (I came in search of this Attapady)  
*Inthe Bhoothaooru vanthen* (Yes, to this Bhoothayur, I came )  
*Vanthavasi komali naan* (I, the encroacher-buffoon, here)

(Gestures and postures of *the very big man of the cities* are acted out to the hilarious applause of the *Adivasis*)

**R. B:** (Now on the energy track) Do all of you know the story of *Harischandra*?

**Spectators(SPEC):** (together) yes, yes, we know... we have seen the performance...

**A. B:** Tell *Vanthavasi komali*, Why you like the play?

**R. B:** Tell me tell me.

**SPEC1:** It's a good story. *Harischandra* is good... *Chandramati* is good... And the *komali* is very good.

**A. B and R. B** (They dance holding hands together as if enjoying the participation from the people) why is *Harischandra* good?

**SPEC2:** (An old woman stands up) *Harischandra* never does anything wrong. Never tells lies... never cheats anybody...

**R. B:** But he sold out his wife and son like goats! That's too cruel...

**SPEC3:** (*Oorumoopan*) He sold them to keep his word. Such a great king doing all kinds of most shocking menial jobs... How can a person become *Harischandra*... impossible. (All among the spectators seem to agree as seen by the collective nod of heads listening to the *Moopan*)

**A. B:** Which do you prefer, *Moopan*. Your wife and children... or truth...

**R. B:** For us *Vanthavasi* its our wives and children and all our wealth (Laughs in contempt) For you it may be truth. Is it *Moopan*? Truth doesn't fill the stomach!

**Moopan:** (A bit perplexed) we need good families and truthfulness, that's all, and of course . . . food!  
 (Again the collective nod of the people)

**R. B.:** (To another) what about you? Do you live like *Harischandra*?

**SPEC4:** How can I samy? We are all poor people... Only kings can live like that. What good is truth! It can't give you food! As you said. For that you need money!  
 (He seems to be a bit intoxicated)

**SPEC (a woman):** Stop you, talking like that. You need more money for the poison arrack!

(**A.B.** and **R.B.** dance round hilariously and the spectators enjoy the lover's dance of the buffoons for which the crowd clapped in unison with rhythms. They retreat dancing. *Harischandra* and *Chandramati* enter ceremoniously singing salutations to *Siva*, *Ganapati*, *Malleswara* and other animist spirits familiar to the *Adivasis*).

The analytical models of pre-expressivity, expressivity, and post-expressivity specific to the *Kurumbas* are evolved out of performance modules like the above. Ethno-ideological analysis is



attempted as a first step. The legend of *Harischandra* most intimately internalised by the *Adivasis* informs us of their social system's defence mechanisms that counter the uninhibited expressions of deepest human urges. The family unit in the *Kurumba* hamlets is ideologically conditioned to accept such a male-oriented defence mechanism for fear of chaos. The haunting presence of such micro-cultural models in *primitive communities* that exist outside the mainstream invite attention to the meaningful kinship dimensions of a culture that struggles for stability and order. The *Harischandra* performance-model in the context of the present conditions of the *Adivasis*, thus began to generate new visual ideograms. As the presentation of the *Koothu* was drastically edited to suit the fieldwork, there were innumerable interludes of ten to fifteen minutes duration. All such interludes were meant for intervention by the buffoons. A documented evidence of such interventions so essential to understand the performative unconscious of the *Kurumba* psyche transformed themselves in to meaningful discourse ideograms.

The two buffoons enter into a second level of intervention. The text of the dialogue with the spectators and the generated energy attempts to reach levels of heightened performative articulations through dance -song-music synthesis. The situation of the play was a highly emotional one where we find an emotionally turbulent Chandramati who falls faint hearing her husband say:

I'm going to sell you  
To keep my vow to *Viswamitra*

The enactment had powerful communicability as the audience did express their disapproval of the scheme of the diabolical intentions of *Viswamitra*, who represents negative fertility. The women emotionally whispers aloud:

Poor *Chandramati* being sold out! All because of that demon *Viswamitra* !  
(Gender affiliation becomes so distinct and intimate).

Some three or four old women come towards *Chandramati*, bowing their heads. They give coins as offering to *Chandramati*, the symbol of woman's endurance. The buffoons enter mocking *Chandramati* with their comic steps around her and at the same time saying to the spectators:

**A. B:** How's it? Indeed she deserves it? Don't you think so?

**R. B:** Don't you think so? What will you do in such situations, sister? (address the spectators, male and female, inducing them to react)

**SPEC1: (female):** How can you say that? She is very pure as our *Bhavani* river.

**SPEC2: (Female):** Think of the way *Chandramati* acted - fantastic!

**A. B:** Women need such experiences. They are made very obedient (mocks all women around. **R B** joins the *tamasha*)

**SPEC5 (male):** Women must be made loyal to their husbands.  
To have such an obedient loving wife is a boon!.

**R.B:** Hellow! Do you want to beat your wife? With your hands and bamboo-sticks?

**SPEC1:** I have the right to beat her if she misbehaves like bad women, you know when a woman is bad everything is lost.

**R. B.& A.B:** (together) correct... correct... correct...

**R. B:** (to the woman) what do you think? Do you want to beat your husband?

**Woman:** No. He is my beloved husband!

**R. B:** How about you? If your husband sells you! What will happen?

**SPEC3 :(female)** I'll resist even If he is Harischandra. . .

(Everyone has the urge to react to the interventions by the buffoons. They are liked very much by the *Adivasīs*. They give more coins to the buffoons at moments of high jubilation and merry making)

**Moopan:** Silence! Why make such a fuss. Our women are most faithful to their husbands. They look after their husbands and the children. Keeps everything clean. We worship them. We love them. (Some body from the audience sings aloud)

Women are like forest fire  
They eat us like forest fire  
They are the feast of the forests  
Deep and dark forests around  
They are like forest-fire  
(the song continues for some time)

**(A. B & R.B** repeat the lines and dance and the crowd beats the rhythm along with the music group).

Not far way in the deep forest was a fire-the fire brewing country liquor to be sold in *Adivasi* hamlets and outside. Almost fifty percent of the *Kurumbas* in the Bhoothayur hamlet are addicts either to *ganja* or dangerous *arrack* as revealed by an on the spot survey the next day. We saw around ten women (middle aged) smoking *ganja* during the performance in the open. One senior member told us later:

Even our girls and boys use *ganja* and *arrack*. Two women in the hamlet had become mad. Of course, we now live by the *ganja* plantations -all our young and old...

The performance energy diffused so far could activate the spectators' energy centres to a level of high intensity especially of those who were under the influence of intoxicants. When the group of performers dance, some from the spectators also start dancing to the enjoyment of a section of the crowd especially of youngsters, both male and female.

The gender-status of the *kurumbas* plays the most-powerful governing role in the unconscious socio-political power structures of the *Adivasi* community. The ethno-analytical strategies of societal equilibrium are all centred on male-dominated ideological bearings. The *Malleswara* myth and the associated rituals serve the purpose more than any in fulfilling the purpose of the regimentation specific to the *Adivasīs* women as *manaivi* (of the house) is made for the home. Men as *atai* (higher thing) are hunters in the deep forests of *Adivasicultures*. "Yes, it was like that in the past", as the elders of the hamlet say. The *Adivasi* concept of equality and collectivity as glamorised ideal concepts of perennial harmony as pictured by many ethnologists is just another myth. This myth imposed on *adivasi* culture made the researcher's methodology as one that attempted to resist further romanticising of the *Adivasi* culture. The *Kurumba* culture and life situations are wrought with present realities that are totally destructive and inhuman.

The highly imaginative *kurumba* songs illuminate the lost glory of a social formation that has developed its own ethos and aesthetics. The women as elemental destructive force seemed to be highly charged with the under tones of the *kurumba* female sexuality which is most virulent and violent to the core. The men folk attempts to resist the explosive female principle of *kurumba* productivity. The parents of a young *kurumba* girl who was married away to a young *kurumba* youth immediately after the rites of passage connected with her attaining maturity said to us: "Young girls are like bombs, you can't keep them at home for long. That's our way".

The *koothu* started again with *Chandramati's* lamentation on the loss of her husband. *Harischandra* goes through tortures unimaginable for a king. He manages to come through triumphant from every crisis.

**Harischandra:** What if I'm forced to sell her...  
 For glory lies in being honest  
 And I'm a hunter after honesty  
 To keep my truthful works in fine shape

The travails of *Harischandra* are performed most pathetically but at the same time the *Adivasi* buffoon starts mocking the situation in all its aspects. The genuine support goes to the buffoon. He gets the energy feedback as spontaneous outbursts erupting out from the most desired sensual experiences. They reveal everything to the buffoon. He is the only performer close to their heart. Other characters have a stiffening presence, which contributes to define, regulate and sanctify the *Adivasi* value-system. That sequence ends with the face of the king *Harischandra* transforming to that of a most desperate being.

The two buffoons enter crying profusely feeling the plight of *Harischandra*. Their cry is fictive as known to everybody and they start laughing while the two cry as best as they can.

**A.B:** (still crying) Where are the gods who protect the righteous?

**R.B:** (still crying) where are the gods who protect the kings and emperors and ministers?

(Linking of gods and ministers of gods had a sudden energy burst in the audience)

**SPEC1:** (male) Yes, our ministers don't protect anybody. Gods of course protect as they could...  
 How many are there for the Gods to protect?

**A.B:** Why don't the ministers protect the righteous people like you?

**R.B:** Will they protect you?

**SPEC:** (*Moopan* intervenes) we are poor people (he slowly becomes emotional and shiver holds him) *Malleswara* protects us-Don't you think so (he asks the crowd)

**Crowd :** Yes! Yes!

**Moopan:** (comes to the centre of acting area and speaks to *Harischandra*)

Oh! *Harischandra*- This is not an *Adivasi* story-It's the story of the people outside. The story (he looks at the people) slowly swallowed us. We're in the belly of the story. We like to be in our own mothers' bellies of forests... Not in anybody else's...

**Buffoons :** (Claps their hands) rightly said....rightly said. You are the real *Moopan* ! Though you are little drunk. Speak up- speak-out and sing and dance Like us. (They dance as circus clowns).

(The *Moopan* tries to imitate the buffoons. The whole people of the hamlet rise up to encourage the *Moopan* who slowly emerges in to a trance)

**Moopan** : (Imitating the clown dance) You know, *Malleswarastory* is not an *Adivasistory*. (He looks at everyone including the music party and bows) I want to act our story of *Benjami Thai*, our ancient mother (dancer slowly becomes possessed. Two people hold on to his hands)

Yes! There was a forest (he starts singing and dancing)

Yes! There was a river

Yes! There was our *Benjami Thai*

*Benjami Thai* is a river

River from the sky

From sky to the earth

She starts dancing in floods

She starts dancing as forests

Our *Bhavani Thai* our *Bhavani Thai*

(Two or three join the *Moopan* in dance and song along with the buffoons. Before the *Moopan* leaves away into his fantasies again, an old woman starts moving towards the performers, who get ready for the continuation).

**The old woman**: Stop! Stop! I have to say something to you *Moopan*... Bring back my girl to me...all of you...who has killed her? I know *Moopan*... you know *Moopan*... (The old woman is said to have lost her daughter who was raped and killed in the forest by somebody. She is a bit out of her control)

**Moopan**: Oh mother-help me (to everybody) I am seeing those people coming here to give us tobacco... we chewed. We worked for their tobacco-They gave us *ganja*- They protect us but the river is there... To wash everything away... Oh god! Have mercy on me and my people... (He suddenly springs up and shouts) I'm your *Raja*.. *Adivasi Raja*.. Bring my crown... Bring my people...

(Some organisers manage to take away the *Moopan*. The state of trance comes to an end when some one presses the centre of his upper forehead. That is the usual practice).

The total flexibility of the *Koothu* opens up all doors for anyone from the spectators to come over to the actors'-circle and to perform what ever she/he wants. The leading actor has the right to control.

*Moopans* of hamlets always intervene, may be to make his power felt and they often tend to fall in trance during the process. The interventions, they say, is a device that is used by the spectators to become actors and to express what is burning in them. It seems to be a psychotherapeutic device that gives purgatorial satisfaction to the individuals concerned. It gradually became very obvious that participating in the dramatic event pacifies the pent-up anguish of the community through individual participation in the performance. This unconscious or supra-conscious communication network is analysed in another chapter.

The performative argument that the legend of *Harischandra* and myths of *Malleswara* are foreign to their indigenous cultural roots take us forth in to the dark realms of the unrecorded past of the *Adivasi* communities which were basically nomadic. The hunter -metaphor that often rises up in their burst outs during hallucinatory situations unconsciously gets glorified. The whole life principle seems to evolve on the subjectivity of hunting as food gathering and its ritualised manifestations. The perception designs itself into that of the dialectics of the hunter himself being the hunted, just as the dancer himself is the dance. The culture of hunting as a performative principle in the lives of the *kurumbas* evolved itself into a working hypothesis during the course of the *Koothu*-discourse.

It is past midnight. The whole setting of this play, the lofty hills, forests and the fire at the centre of the hamlet silhouetted against the snowing sky makes the enactment a kind of unearthly event, that happens in nowhere place and nowhere time. The actor Murugan (Chandramati) announces the next scene to be that of a *Kanni* (Young maiden), known as *Kummiyattom* (The dance of young women).

The *mise-en-scene* consists of a boy impersonating the role of a maiden who is haunted or hunted by men. This is not merely meant as a pure source of sheer foolery but performs the present in its complex network. It is the criticism or mockery of the present generation of *Adivas* by themselves. Two others apart from the buffoons join to embarrass the maiden.

*Chandramati* dances and makes the *Kanni* dance praising *Genesa* (the boy-lover-god, *seyon*). They dance around followed by the four buffoons making gestures of mockery along with distorted dance-imitation. When the song is over the *Adivasi* buffoon cries out as if in great pain: (A rhythmic event)

Ah! Mother-(indicating every part of his body which gives rise to heightened excitement)  
 She, the dear-hearted pains me here  
 Pains me there - pains me here  
 Here, there, here, here, here...  
 There, there, here, Oh! Oh! Oh!  
 Oh! My forest-flower  
 Come to me, come to me  
 And take my pain away...

(The other buffoon enjoys dancing to the tune)

**New Buffoon** : (Starts another *Kurumba* song) For the *Moopan* I give one pot

For the father I give one pot  
 But for you I give you three pots...

(The song is repeated by the audience).

**R.B.:** Oh, my *Adivasi* maiden

Shall I take you home  
 To give you to my father  
 Mother, my wife and children  
 Will you come with me, dear!

(there is total uproar among the audience – they clap)

**Kanni:** (begins replying – an improvised song being sung for her by *Chandramati*/actor)

I won't come! I won't come  
 To meet any mothers-in-law  
 I will go to my forest in the sky  
 To meet my forest lover  
 To my forests I go...

(Buffoons harass her again)

**A.B.:** I am your forest

And your forest lover  
 A hunter-and I am the hunter  
 I want you-you are my prey...

(He dances around her with erotic gestures)

**R.B.:** What is your forest like? My beautiful maiden

What is your forest lover like?

**Kanni:** (replies in the improvised version supplied by Chandramati. Starts dancing).

My forest is a sky  
 Full of stars and  
 A sun and a moon  
 I will live with the hunter sun  
 On day and on nights  
 I fall in the hands of moon...  
*La la la la la la la la*  
*La la la la la la la la*

(Every one applauds *Kanni's* performance) Exit *Kanni*.

**(The Buffoons' conference)**

**A.B.:** That girl is gone and the world is dark...

**A.B.:** I will go with her...

**A.B.2:** No. I will go with her (They fight)

**R.B.:** (intervenes) This *Vanthavasi komali* says to you all!

We in our place won't go after girls like this!  
 (mockingly) Why do we go after women?  
 They should come behind us-Don't you think so!

**SPEC1:** Hey - *Vanthavasi komali* - Don't make fun of us! It is the *Vanthavasis* who are after our women (He get up-goes to the actors circle and speak to *Vanthavasi* Buffoon who acts frightened) Hey, Your men - they've destroyed our sisters, mothers, daughters. They made us slaves by giving *ganja* and *arrak*... We drink! Our songs, dance and everything you take away in your camera-Our women - you made them slaves...

(The **R.B.** frowns and acts shivering throughout)

**R.B.:** (fearfully) why do they do this?

(The old lady who came earlier comes in)

**Old lady:** Hey, *komali* - They kill our daughters But they give us *ganja* (she smokes) What if our daughters are killed. They give us *arrak*... Hey, *komali* - Do they give *ganja* and take the girls away in your place?

**R.B.:** In our place, we have police. They took after our daughters.

**SPEC1:** *Vanthavasi komali*-Why do you sell us? Why do you buy us?

Why do you kill our daughters? Why do you kill our lands?

(The leader Chandramathi stopped the inter-subjective discourse all on a sudden by singing a song in praise of *Siva* and *Sakti*).

Each investigative intervention by the R.B. and the resulting expression of anguish produces subtexts of powerfully articulating images. *Kanmiyattom* celebrates the sense of freedom visualised by young maidens at the process of getting matured into a dark world of horrifying images of slow massacre of the innocence in the Attapady valley. Everyone knows the kind of destructive give and take by outside mafia that takes place in the hamlet of Bhoothayur. But nothing can be done. "Even the almighty *Malleswara* is silent", as one old lady responded very passively. The socio-economic factor that controls the *Kurumba* system is discussed at length in chapter four. After invoking *Siva* and *Shakti*, the play continues into the endurance test that is being conducted on Chandramati by the agent of Viswamitra. Chandramati and her son Rohitaswan hold on courageously. The spectators, especially the females, were very silent witnessing the ordeals being enacted. Chandramati finally faints and is supported by the two buffoons. Old women come offering money

to Chandramati as if out of compassion. Chandramati is brought to normal state by sprinkling water on her face and the upper fore head pressed by Harischandra himself. The buffoons leave them and start their round of comic relief.

**A.B:** Hey, *Vanthavasi komali* - What will you do with the *Adivasi Koothu*? You sell and get lot of money isn't it? I know! You're fooling everyone here!

**R.B:** I'll explain it to my students! This is what I would do! I'll show it to the people, I'll show it to everyone! How poor you're! How tragic your life is! How easy it's to buy you! Selling it is easy! I know! Selling myself is more profitable! You know, we also sell ourselves to big people there.

**SPEC 1 (male):** (standing up) Hey, *komali* - Are your children like our children, sick and dying?

**R.B:** We take our children to hospitals. If we give money to the doctors, then, the sick begin to walk. That's a trick we privately practice.

**SPEC 2 (male):** Where's the doctor, here? Where's the money?

**SPEC 3 (female):** To meet a doctor we're to walk from morning to afternoon - by that time doctor goes home! Why this, *komali*?

**R.B:** My children go to a good school. Where there are good teachers! What about your children?

**A .B:** (making fun of the spectators) Look at them! Look at their children! All dirty, top to bottom, dirty, ha, ha, ha!

**R.B:** Do you children go to school?

The improvised song of Chandramati calling their ancestor gods to help the *Adivasi* people stops (Dialogue at this stage).

“Let the *karadeivams* protect you, your children and your forests, from outsiders and fierce animals, the *raja* of the forests (the wild elephant king) will protect you”.

(The actor goes in to slow rhythms of a frenzy through which he, as Chandramati expresses herself as an *Adivasi* or *Kurumba* lamentation):

Who is going to protect you  
From these forests-from your poverty  
From your sickness  
The sickness of these hamlets  
Where have your sons gone?  
Where has your daughters gone?  
Where has our gods gone?  
They all go with the white-dressed  
Big men from Coimbatore-Malappuram and Palakkad  
Who is going to protect us?  
Who is going to tell us the  
Story of our elephant *rajas*  
The story of our dear bears  
*La le la le la le la le la le la le*

(An *Adivasi* dance begins in slow rhythms to reach the height of a collective hallucination. They call to all their Gods for protection. The participatory dance seems to attain the sphere of a *Kurumba* ritual of fertility).

Come, all my *Adivasi* sons and daughters

To the dance of the forests  
 The mother dances the father dances  
 The children dances... all our ancestor -gods  
 Dance with us  
 To get rid of all afflictions to get rid of all evil  
 To get rid of all our enemies  
 By witchcraft we'll burn them... by our black magic...  
 We take their inside out, by sorcery we make them asses!  
 Asses that carry the weight of all these mountains!  
 Come! All our gods! To this *Bhoothayur!*

The dance –ritual culminates as the actor Chandramati gets exhausted under possession. He is taken away into an anti-room. All the *Adivasi* participants in the dance-ritual go back to the places. Their comments are documented here in order:

**An old man:** Its like as it rained; as it thundered-let me have a *beedi*...

**A woman:** What a *Koothu*-my boy. Its as if the gods have come to Bhoothayur to play the *Koothu*.

**A young woman:** We could have continued. But Chandramati fainted. We would do it till the break of dawn. (To another girl) Are you tired?

**Girl :** What? Tired! I want to dance. (The reaction came out spontaneously as they moved towards their area. It continued loudly to be stopped by the entry of the two buffoons now in great merry-making mood. They dance mimicking animals and then impersonating Harischandra and Chandramati)

**A.B :** I'm Harischandra! *Raja* Harischandra

**R. B. (like a woman) :** Then I'm Chandramati (They walk together like King and Queen taking farcical movements)

(The crowd enjoys with roaring laughter and applause)

**R. B: (to A.B) :** Dear Harischandra! Why don't you rule the people of Bhoothayur! Our *Kurumba* brothers and sisters! We'll be king and queen to them.

**A. B.:** Yes, Chandramati (To the people) I am your King-buffoon!

**R. B. :** I'm you Queen-buffoon! What boon you want from your King Harischandra (gives a slap on his bottom as if inviting the spectators to have their share of performance)

**AB:** Ask me the most urgent boon you want now?

**R. B :** (dance like Chandramati) The most urgent boon you need! One by one (he makes them laugh with his gimmicks. They're still out in their performative space through seated and standing as individuals)

**SPEC-Actor1 :** Want the most beautiful *chela* (sari) in the world for my wife (He hold his wife in an embrace for some seconds. Others enjoyed his acting. They shout: "It's super. It's super"

(The English world 'Super' came to the *Adivasi* hamlets from the Tamil films the young men see in Agali. This finding came out in post performance discussion).

**A.B. :** (sings) "I will get the *chela* for your wife form the 'big shop' in the forest there..."

**S.A.2 :** I want a good *biriyani* from Coimbatore...



**R.B** : Come ! lets go to Coimbatore... To eat the 'Big *Biryani*' hill over there! What do you want (to a young maiden).

**S. A 3** : (Young maiden-bit embarrassed) I want my hands full of bangles made of glass. . .

**A. B** : (Coaxingly) Come with me, my sister love, I will get you bangles made of glass from the *Bhavani Tai* (Mother *bhavani*-river in Attapady)

**S.A.4** : (A boy of around 18). I want to act in a film with Rajani Kant! In the role of a hero! Singing and dancing and fighting! Dishum! Dishum!

**R. B** : Why not come and act in a Malayalam film full of beautiful stars!

**S.A.4.** : No Malayalam! I like Rajani! (lot of youngsters shout: Rajani, Rajani)

**A. B** : What boon you want!

**S.A.5** : (Old man). I want to die! I want to be with my ancestors! Happy ancestors...

**R.B** : How many of you want to die and be with you ancestors out there? Raise you hands! Raise your hands! (No one, not even the old man raises his hand but there is a loud murmuring): "we don't want to die"

**R.B** : (sings making fun of them) You don't want to die even when you live like hungry rats in empty rat-holes (laughs aloud).

**S.A.6:** (Another old man sings echoing the lines. He is intoxicated)

Yes, we're rats, yes! We're rats  
With empty bellies and empty homes  
But they come! With there *ganja* eyes  
*Ganja* nose! *ganja* hands  
They give us their *beedies*  
They give us their *arrack*  
They give our sons their jobs  
They give our daughters their children...

(He gets up and dances)

It's the forest of *ganja* king  
His great mansions touch the sky  
Our heads touch the grounds  
Touch the madness of the forest love  
*La le la le la le la le la le*

(He murmurs some words of abuse to everybody and walks into the darkness of a post-midnight fantasy-ritual. The two buffoons in exaggerated embarrassment look at every one in the audience-every one laugh seeing the buffoons bewildered. The play is to continue with another lamentation by Chandramati).

The three dimensional paradigm-'Culture-Performance-Development'-as a referential frame gradually becomes mobile and organic in its manifestation as the inter-subjective dramatic outbursts serve as indicators of an in depth ideological analysis. Cultural productivity as a central variable in social-science research has immense potential and validity and the recognition of this fact paved the way for a performative data analysis. The analytical framework was gradually evolving through the performance matrix of the *Harischandra Koothu*. Quantitative analysis of the generated qualitative

data from the performance field work was abandoned in the beginning itself, after a lot of introspection and discussion on the reliability of such an analysis which is reluctant to take in to account the dynamic process of the ideational (ideation: the faculty in human mind to generate ideas, sensations and perceptions that are not immediately present to our sensory perception) functioning and malfunctioning of the human brain. What gets gathered from performatively generated discourse is just the denotative and connotative expressive modules of energy that may get stratified from various perspectives of theory and praxis.

This particular interface module emits energy particles of various power gradations; the most important being the urge to get liberated from the multiple shackles of enslavement both from governmental and private sources. There happens an unconscious process of opening and re-opening up of the doors of perception of a 'primitive' community that gets discarded as social waste in the forests that get denuded in one way or another.

### 3.17 RITUALS OF POWER

The performance of the play then goes through the pathetic event of untimely death of the son, Rohitswan, of Harischandra and Chandramati. He is bitten by a cobra and the agony of the mother is portrayed as 'ritual of death and re-birth' in the end. In between, the two buffoons enter and entertain the spectators with their acrobatics suggestive of male/female confrontations. Rohitaswan's death and its emotional performance evoked the spirit of oneness even in the presence of death. This most dramatic situation gives the best opportunity for the theatre group to capture the sympathy of the spectators. Some spectators crossed-over to the area where a small piece of cloth was spread before the dead body of the child and put money in the cloth. An amount of 40 rupees was lying on the cloth. Chandramati collects the money in the piece of cloth itself. This piece of cloth with money remained in her hands till the end of the play. The buffoons go near Chandramati and ask for something. She moves away. The buffoons begin crying at the top their voice asking the spectators to intervene. They plead to Chandramati: 'Give the Komalis something'.

**A.B. :** Yes! Give the *komali* something

**R.B.:** No! I don't want it. What is money for? Its dignity that counts. And by the way (to the audience). Where did you get this money? (No one answers). You robbed the *Vanthavasis* hey?

**S. A.1 :** No, *komali* ! (He gets up) we get it for working.

**R. B :** (mocking laughter) Yes from the *ganja* men? Every one knows. Ha, ha, ha!

### 3.18 NARCOTIC IDEOGRAMS

At this point a highly intoxicated *Adivasi* youth came shouting abuse against the whole gathering. This performance module is most significant as the play is enacted in the open, in the presence of the *ganja* agents who fear external interventions of any kind. Actually, the *Moopan* had informed the agents of the performance. The performative intervention by the spectators shows the potential of this action-oriented research methodology to know by first hand the power -structures at work in the *Kurumba* hamlets. The socio-economic-political-aesthetic network gets manipulated to

the extent of slow but steady extinction of a primordial narrative of existence unfamiliar to the mainstream mega-world.

There was total chaos for half an hour and the drunken *Adivasis* supported by the gangsters demanded the termination of the play. The *Moopan* put forth a compromise formula that the buffoons won't speak a word against them. It was accepted and there after till the end, the two buffoons acted without words. The performance of the audience when the *ganja* gang reacted with great fury signifies the oppressive system at work in the *Kurumba* hamlets. It was the women among the spectators that strongly protested against the *ganja* gang's intervention. They were heard asking: "Hey-wicked man" (addressing the drunken *Adivasis*), "You got enough in your belly. Go lick their asses". And to the *ganja* gang they said: "Have your tricks in the forest, not in our hamlet. What right you have to disturb our *Koothu*".

And, there were fist to fist fight between the drunken *Adivasis* and some youths of the hamlet. The *Moopan* and some other elders played the pacifying role. It was three in the morning. They all sat through in the cold and mist. The play continued. The buffoons communicated using their body as receiver and transmitter of messages. The silent inter-subjective articulation of the psycho-mechanical complexities experienced by the mind and body gets projected vocally on the one hand and through the use of body language specific to the immediate demand on other hand.

The two buffoons acted out the agony of being gagged and that took the actor Chandramati to perform as one who is being dragged away by some to the forest. She is also gagged and the struggle of the body in spasms produced a kind of bewildered silence in the spectators whose faces expressed the elemental tragedy of a dying race. It silently communicated the anguish at being made silent in one of the most powerful expression of collective performativity. Hundreds of eyes fixed firmly on the actors and the collective rapport of their mind and body inclined towards the acting area reveals a traumatic level of the *kurumba* psyche. Some old women were heard cursing the *ganja* men: 'Go to the devils, you contractors' The social contract between the *Kurumba* collectives and the anti-social mafia get more and more clear during the course of performative visits to the other *Kurumba* hamlets. An old woman gives assurance to the buffoons: "I'll took to it. They won't do anything. Speak! Speak out!" Somebody says to her: "shut up you, oldy"

The buffoons gradually absorbed the energy emitting out from the spectators after many a time appearing as just dumb-buffoons. The *Adivasi* buffoon starts singing during one interlude, an improvised song:

*La lale lale lale*  
*Lala lala lale lale...* (He starts dancing)  
 Let any body come, I'll dance  
 I'll sing and dance  
 Hey, *vanthavasi komali*, come!  
 Let the police come!  
 I'll give him my bum!

**R.B.** : (joins the song and dance) let the *gowndan* come (*gowndas* are Tamil landlord contractors) I'll give him this side (shows front of his hip)

(The spectators suddenly enthralled by the acting energy start singing with the buffoon)

Let the big merchants come  
 I'll give them my legs (kicks with his leg)  
 I'll give them my fists (shows his fist)  
 Come! Sing and dance!  
 The sun is getting up from our forests! Come!

Everybody rejoiced. Some were rushing to the acting area to give money to the buffoons for the courage shown: "You're men! Real men!" They said.

### 3.19. *ADIVASI-VANTHAVASI* INTERFACE

The *Adivasi-Vanthavasi* mode of discourse is primarily based on exploitation on all fronts. Absentee landlords of *abkari* and *ganja* production have started regulating the time/space designs of the *Kurumbas*. This hypothesis stands on testing grounds of this performative analysis. Performative mechanisms of the body in articulating their urges, preferences, choices and their vision of life is envisaged as part of the analysis of the discourse narratives above. The *Koothu* was gradually moving towards the final act of the king, queen and their son being elevated to the heights of glory and triumph. It is well established in the version of performance that it was by divine intervention that the play ends most optimistically to the satisfaction of all those who have assembled.

The performance of this last scene was the most powerfully articulated one. The intensely tragic situation of the father and mother standing on both sides of their dead son enacted through dance/trance nexus. The buffoons could see the eyes of some men and many women filling with tears. The buffoons also start crying comically. The expression on the faces of the spectators suddenly changed to that of sudden relief. They laugh and sigh in great relief. Then there was an interlude. The two buffoons carry-over the situation with their usual pranks and games. They would play a game of pairs, one becoming a husband and the other a wife; or master and slave or a peasant and his ox etc.

**R.B.** : Why did you cry, my dear ones! Seeing the dead boy, father and mother?

**A.B.** : What is there to cry? Poor guys... It's a play, not real death...

**R.B.** : Tell us why you filled your eyes with tears?

**An old man** : We feel sad for the three, no end to their sufferings, just like ours... We feel we are the sufferers

**A.B.** : (Laughs in derision) poor guys...

**R.B.** : What happens when a man dies?

**SPEC2** : He goes to live with his ancestors!

**A.B.** : Then we should be happy – not sad!

**SPEC3** : (a woman) This body goes to the worms and the spirit lives with us...

**SPEC3** : (an old man-sings) Death is a seed that we sow in the field it To reap the harvest of life... (He repeats the song which continues with the images of 'death as productivity' in all its real and unreal sense).

**Moopan**: Its like an harvest festival which we had once, in which collective dance and singing are most prominent. We celebrate life and death.

**SPEC4** : Even then, we mourn the death for seven days.

**SPEC5** : Death is not an end... That's why we feel sad only for seven days (He says this most sarcastically)

**A.B.** : (to a very old woman) Are you afraid of death?

**Old women** : me? No... Death will come like a new husband to take me away into the dark forest. Why should I fear? (Laughs) Chandramati announces the outline of the last scene and begins the song of benediction to *Malleswara*.

### **3.20. CULTURING LIFE AND DEATH**

The death and its eco-ethnic signification specific to the *Kurumbas* are to be analysed along with their performative behaviour during the ritualised days and nights that follow each death. The culturing of death and life is at best productive and the urge to share the energy of the collective solidarity becomes predominant during times of death more than during a birth in the hamlet. Some one during the discourse was head muttering in pent-up anguish: "Our life is more tragic than death! Hell with our life! hell with all these games of *Koothu* (To Chandramati) Hey-Chandramati- are you not tired acting through out the night...?"

Chandramati's reactions to this would sum up the liberating moments of ecstasy at 'becoming the other unconsciously and to live like another person with different characteristics'. The elemental energy transmigration involved in these performance modules gets analysed in the chapter to follow.

The acting out of all travails in imaginative body language models comes to a finale full of fertile optimism and hope. The transmigratory energy employed throughout by the performers and the spectators articulates in alphabets of aesthetic expressivity. The tragedy enacted throughout the night with the tragi-comic interventions by the buffoons and spectators enter a peaceful realm of ecstasy enjoyed both by the performers and spectators along with the break of dawn. Ritualistic oblations to the spirits and gods of *Kurumbas* (*Karadeivam*) are held by lighting a fire with twigs of trees in which everyone participates. The songs of obeisance to the ancestral spirits are acted out joined by many from the spectators who have entered the acting area without any reservation what so ever. The spatial and temporal mobility factor acts as an indicator of the flexibility of *Adivasi Kurumba* performance practice which does not want to have any walls in between the actors and spectators.

### **3.21 POST-PERFORMATIVE EXPRESSIVITY**

The post performative expressivity of the *Kurumbas* that is specific to the nightlong enactment is of great significance in the context of the creative research programme; An 'ideogram' of performative survey is implicit in the visit of the PRG to every household in the hamlet after performance. The people in each household wait with great reverence for the arrival of the team in their costumes with musical instruments. The main objectives of these visits are:

- I. to bless every member of the household,

- II. to hear from the members of each household of their specific problems that disturb them from to time to time, mostly in connection with their day to day life,
- III. to receive some material assistance if possible from every household in cash or kind,
- IV. to say goodbye to everyone personally which contributes a prestigious status of individuality to each household in contrast to the collective aesthetic experience.

### 3.22. INTERACTIVE IDEOGRAPHING

The performers are received usually by lighting a lamp (ordinary kerosene lamp) held in hand by any female member especially by unwed young girls who have passed through their rites of puberty. All the members appear at the door to receive the *Koothu* performers singing devotional songs.

**Actor/Chandramati/Leader:** Blessings on you! Let good things happen in the family  
 Let a good harvest light your bellies  
 Let a good hunting festival take place here  
 Let all the gods come to you bless you!

All the performers repeat the song in unison. The family members, then, steps down to the front of the house. The performers bless them with holding their hands together and touching it with their foreheads and then:

**Chandramati:** How goes the family, brother?

**A mother:** It moves some how or other (*eppatiyo samy!*) Children are sick, samy! See how they look... (she shows the three children who are between 8 and 12. They're obviously sick. They have anaemic face, thin body with bulging bellies and are in torn and dirty trousers. The mother is also weak and fragile. The father with a big white moustache is unhealthy by normal standards).

**Chandramati:**(sings) "May good health be showered upon the children... May good crops lift up your hearts. Are the crops good this year?"

**A father:** We only have ragi? Every one works for the contractor, samy.

(The contractor is the *ganja -arrack* agent) (Indicating the girl who holds the lamp).

This girl should get married... But no money to meet the expenses.

**Mother:** They give twenty rupees for one, Samy - working from dawn to dusk! Two of my sons work for them all the time- They spent every paisa they get on dress and cinema.

**Father:** Make them come home, samy... We haven't seen them for days.

( He was on the verge of tears)

**Chandramati:** Let all the devil spirits get away from the family... Let good things happen... Your sons will come back with in seven days... Your daughter's wedding will be over with in seven months. (The actor behaves as in a possessed state while uttering these prophetic words)

(The family offers some money, around five rupees to the actors who sing another song of praise to god *Murugan* and leave for the next door).

### 3.23. HOUSEHOLD VISITS CONTINUED

Out of the 34 family households in Bhoothayur visited by the PRG, 29 families have almost similar expressions of their predicament with minor variations. 12 families had no father to look after the daily affair. Women manage the whole show.

- i. one such family said: "We have four mature girls... They don't go for work now because the contractor's people harass them... They sit idle. No work in the fields... The house needs repair... The walls are cracked... Lots of money for clothes..."
- ii. Another said: "Life is hard without a man... All daughters - four in number...I work in the field-*rugi* crop was good... All of us work in the field... We make bamboo baskets... and sell... We have 6 goats. We sell them in *chanda* (market)... But who will look after my daughters if I'm dead... Her uncles are cruel-drunkards-three- All work for the contractor... and they're bad... But we won't go for that work... I've four daughters, all mature..."
- iii. Another family: "Please make our men folk sensible... They drink from morning to night... They sell *arrack* and *ganja*... They come home intoxicated and... Make fights with every one... Even with the child... And the dog as well... Its hell..."
- iv. Another family: "With out a man its hell... No one to hold on to... He died of drinking... I've only one boy... He said its not his child... But the contractor's... But all of us are contractor's people... They give us our daily bread... Not people of the Church-they also come... Every month-reading something from a book... They give us some money and chocolates to the children... They took one of our children to their school... He is given food, shelter, clothes and education..."

(Their expression of destitution always becomes like reciting a poem with its own pattern of rhythm). Their verbal expressions have intonations and rhythms of an eco-ethnic ideogram, which is a significant indicator of a society's linguistic expressivity)

- v. A family of a mentally deranged woman of middle age with her sister to look after her. she shouts from inside: "I won't come to the hospital... To wear your *chela* and blouse... To sleep with you! I won't come" (She comes out to show her healthy body in traditional dress and smoking a *beedi*) Who are you people singing... Ah! Sing the song of the *Karadi* (bear) to me... I am the *karadi*... Who cheated your young men... Don't come near! I'll kill you... With my magic charm... Sing a song for me... the *karati* song...

Chandramati begins singing and dancing in great vigour joined by the other performers, part of *karadiyattam* which has great connotative energy that could inspire the *kurumbas*. The woman slowly join the dance and the researcher - buffoon stepping out of the dance circle watched the body language being articulated by the woman. This performative ideogram acts as one of the most significant psycho-physical articulations of the *kurumba* tragedy. The woman at one point is shocked to find herself in the dance group and comes out shouting abuses at everyone and retreats in to the hut. A little later the mournful cry of the woman is heard from inside with occasional verbal ejaculations: "Don't leave me to the tigers They've torn me to pieces on the rocks... *Bhavani* *Thayi* laughed..." The performers leave for the next house. The women are the most exploited of the *kurumbas*.

### 3.24. VARIANTS

Five households showed extremely differing versions of reactions:

- i. One family shut the front door from inside saying nothing. The team performed without any one to receive their blessings. When asked about their behaviour to the people who followed the PRG, they said:

Those people never mix with anybody-father, mother and two sons. Even their children are not allowed to mix with our children. They're thinking of shifting to Agali. They also work for the contractor. Only the contractor's people visit them-eat with them-drink with them.... They've lot of money, its said. They've a camera. They took your photos of the *koothu* tonight.

- ii. Another family didn't show any respect even to the *Adivasi* performers. A youth among them said:

You have come to sell us to somebody outside! That somebody gives you (to the performers) money and makes you drink! They (pointing his finger at the non-*Adivasis*) take all photos. To sell, that's what people say. They're more dangerous than our contractors who give us jobs and money. These people won't even give a photo to us. They are the government people getting thousands... (He continued. Everyone looks at the researcher-buffoon for a moment) He stood up and addressing directly to the Research-Buffoon and the *Adivasi* performers.

**The Young man:** I've studied up to pre-degree... You know! How our people live... You said you came is study... You know! How our people live... You said, you came to study us... Ha!... You know how people like you is cheating us! You know how many had come to study us. They look around and take some photos especially of our women. They give the photos to the newspapers... and make lot of money... Look, the government announced in newspapers last week... One month's free ration kits to *Adivasis* of Attapady dying of hunger... free rations to be brought to each hamlet... No one came with the food-kits... Instead you come with your *koothu* and cameras, getting "funded" money from these 'outsiders'...

(That youth was later interviewed and he said: "I'm a nexalite activist-Red Flag group. I studied in Victoria College-my name is Vellan, the name of my grandfather. But these people won't understand politics. They always drink... smoke *ganja* and dance in the nights. They won't sent their children to school... of course, in the school they don't learn anything. Teachers are always away for fieldwork as the Headmaster says. By the way, of you say you're not government people. Are you people of any political party?

The PRG said no. PRG's chief *Adivasi* associate Sri. D. Narayanan told him: "Hey Vellan, my friend, these are people of theatre. They put up plays in their places revealing our wretched condition to the people outside. Suddenly he turns and asks the R. B:

"Hey, *Vanthavasi komali*; Are you cheating us with your research. What use is our culture to you. What do you do with it. Make money and become famous?

**R. B. :** Hey, friends, I'm a teacher! Teaching theatre. Theatre to me is like hunger, like freedom. As real as hunger and freedom. I dream of theatre as the reality of the oppressed and alienated bursting forth as in a collective ritual performance that could change the reality itself. (a highly emotional mixture of Tamil and Malayalam, R. B. performed these words and starts singing: "*re re ri re ri re ro ...*"

**The young man:** *Mannikkanam Sar* (Sorry Sir)

R.B's performance ideogram had its effect on everybody or so was felt the disturbing silence. Chandramati broke the silence with a most passionate rendering of an old *Kurumba* song supplemented with improvised lines starting from the present condition of the *Adivasis*. The content of the song goes like this:

Who did look after the orphans!



It was their grandfather and grandmother  
 How did their grandparents die?  
 They went to the forest to get tubers  
 For their three orphans they love...  
 And then what happened? And then what happened?  
 An evil spirit from beyond the forests  
 Killed them for their evil sports...  
 And then what happened? And then what happened?  
 The orphans searched all the forests...  
 For their very old grand parents...  
 The evil spirit cried out to them  
 In the voice of their grand parents:  
 "We're coming! we're coming  
 Go back, go back, we're coming..."  
 They went home followed by the evil spirit  
 Who asked them in the voice of their grand parents:  
 "I want the tubers, for I'm hungry  
 I'm shivering of cold, look..."  
 He saw the baby sleeping in the cradle...  
 And what did the orphans do? And what did...?  
 The orphans thought of ways to escape  
 They did what they decided...  
 "Let us give food to the evil spirit  
 And while he eats, we will ask him -  
 We want to go out to shit..."  
 He forgot the children while he ate  
 But once he knew, rushed behind  
 The orphans who reached the big rock...  
 And when they saw, the evil spirit has almost reached them,  
 They prayed:  
 "Oh! if our The forefather *Kurumbas* -  
 If they've truth and bravery in them  
 Let this rock break into two"  
 - In to two equal halves the rock did part!  
 The orphans jumped in between with fear and prayed:  
 "If our grand parents have *Kurumba* blood  
 In them, let the two halves join again!"  
 At last the spirit did reach the rock  
 And asked the children how they escaped!  
 And what did the orphans do? What did...?

They told him, "we entered the rock  
 Through that small hole" - they showed...  
 They asked the spirit to put its tail through the hole  
 And what did the evil spirit do?  
 He inserted his tail as much as he could...  
 The orphans inserted red-hot iron  
 In to the belly of the evil spirit  
 And, then, what did the orphans do?  
 They prayed: "if our grandparents have  
*Kurumba* courage in them  
 Let the rock break into two halves again..."  
 And the rock did open its mouth once again  
 And they saw the spirit seated dead!  
 And they saw the whole forest full of tomatoes  
 And they said: "We've enough vegetables,  
 And now let us have *ragi*"  
 And *ragi* was given to them!  
 They prayed to their grand parents:  
 "We want good huts to live"  
 And good huts were made for them!  
 "And now we want goats and cattle"  
 And they had lot of goats and cattle!  
 "And now we want fields to cultivate"  
 The whole forest was given to them!  
 The whole land was given to them!  
 The whole sky was given to them!

The whole hamlet seemed to be relieved of all fatigue and depression.

### 3.25. THERAPEUTIC IDEOGRAMS

Many from the nearby huts came out. The musical recitation and the dance that mixed with it acted like a psycho-therapeutic ideogram on the people around and on the performers as well. The ethnic specificity of the *Kurumbas* emerges from a complex network of images that articulate different notes in the dark symphony of alienated suffering.

i. The third family admonished us very seriously about our mockery of the contractors. One contractor was sitting in front of the hut on a bench, He said: "I don't know who you're but we're here on business. And we won't allow anybody to disturb us. You, know, its only because of our business that these wretched creatures eat and live."

**R.B. (to the contractor :** Sorry for our mistake. We were just playing... We're only theatre people.

Then the woman of the family, said:

"Yes! They're our saviours. Our children eat because of them. We're thankful to them." At this moment, the *Moopan* came there and intervened:

"You know, these Chettans are very good people. (To the contractor) The whole hamlet says sorry to you. Pardon us. These performers are our friends. They are also good people. No harm. The contractor takes a fifty rupee note and hands over to the Actor/Chandramati. He receives it with great respect and with the usual touching of hands and forehead.

The *Kurumba* interface with the illicit contractors need special attention as the relation has become of one of co-existence which triggers new images of *Adivasi* subjugation beyond normal limits.

ii. The fourth family started crying immediately on seeing the performers. The woman of the family said through her tears and sobs:

My child is terribly sick. He is going to die. Come inside and look! (PRG went inside) A child of four or five was lying on a torn mat with no sign of life except for the shrill sound of asphyxia. The actor Chandramati sat near the child and muttered syllables of a kind of exorcist incantation, and then put some turmeric powder around the child in a circle. The actor continued his chanting and his body started shivering ... He stood up and moves around the child in a state of possession. He bursts out in fury looking at the child: "Who asked you to come here! Leave or I'll get my rod. The rod of hot iron... Keep away-keep away... (He tells everyone around) He's gone! It's a *peyi* (evil spirit) A vengeful one! the child is safe now" The R.B. places some money in the hands of the mother.

### 3.26. SHAMANISTIC HEALING

The *Kurumba* society still believes in mystic healing practices and the ethno-shamanism occupy a prestigious position in the community. The *Adivasi Irulas* and *Mudugas* of Attapady still keep in their minds the belief that the *Kurumbas* have super-natural shamanistic powers. The performative ideograms of psycho-physical healing functions on narration's of the *Kurumba* vision of a healthy society.

i. The fifth household generated associated ideographical patterns that commutative the tragic fragmentation of *Kurumba* society. The husband/ senior male member - is in Agali Health Centre getting ready for the amputation of his right leg. It was later classified by the *Giriswasthya*, (A new department of I.T.D.P., which is organised for a survey of the health status of *Adivasis* in Attapady) officials that a disease known as TAO (*Thrombo Angitis Obliterance*) has been detected in the hamlets of *Kurumbas* in particular, and also in other *Adivasi* hamlets. The symptom is that gangrene affects the feet and gradually the whole of leg becomes lifeless and gangrene –infected. The only way out is to amputate the leg to prevent further degeneration of the cells throughout the body. The major cause of this, the doctors Agali Health Centre says, is the illicit *arrack* consumption and pronich addiction to *ganja* smoking. The wife of Kakki (the patient) said: "My husband cried out to me: 'I don't want my leg to be amputated. I want to walk'..."

**A.B.** : What was his occupation, sister?

**Wife:** He worked for the contractor, brewing country *arrack*, drinking it from morning onwards till he falls asleep... We've size children-all little birds... What can I do! I've suffered enough... Please do something for us, not just the blessings, we're had enough blessing...

**R.B** : Is the disease common, sister - among your people?

**Wife** : Yes many in *Kurumba* hamlets have the disease, unable to walk, intolerable pain-even in young men... of course, they're looked after by the contractors.

(The actor Chandramati conducts a kind of *pooja* inside the hut for about five minutes and comes out).

**Actor/Chandramathi : (to R. B.)** They want some money ... they have nothing to eat... and the children are sick the hut is empty...

The PRG talked to her for sometime and she wanted just fifty rupees. She was hesitant to ask for more. The PRG gave her hundred rupees and the woman started crying. The performative cycle in the hamlet of Bhoothayur came to a temporary halt. Individual interactions followed during the day that threw more light upon the generated ideograms. The documented ideographic configurations are submitted to micro-level analysis in the chapters to follow.

## Part II

### THE INTERSUBJECTIVE *KURUMBA*

#### **3.ii.1. *KIRATHAVRITHAM* THE LEGEND OF THE FOREST-HUNTER**

The inter-subjective perception of the *Kurumba* expressivity got activated by means of another performative strategy designed with the help of a famous Malayalam poem, *Kirathavritham*, (The Legend of the Forest-Hunter) written by Katammanitta Ramakrishnan. The focus of the poetic ideogram is on the juxtaposition of the *Adivasi* past and present. The eco-political and cultural realms alienated by the encroachment of *Vanthavasis* (outsiders) get romantically portrayed in the poetic text with its inner-weavings of the political ideology of Marxism - Leninism often construed as of an extreme variety.

The strategy of this specific poetic performative fieldwork executed with the collective participation of the Performance-Research-Group and the *Kurumba* spectators in the hamlets of Boothayur, Yedavani, Anavayi and Kadukumanna may be systematically stratified to get at the root of the tragic contradictions at work in the *Kurumba* psychic reality. The generation of ideographs associated with the in-built mechanisms of ideological transactional analysis is recorded below.

#### **3.ii.2. SOLO/COLLECTIVE FRAMEWORK**

The performance of the poetic text by the Researcher-Performer-Bufferon function on a public arena for the collective exploration of ideological programming of the *Kurumbas* in relation to a three dimensional framework of performance, community development and culture. Viewed from this theoretical perspective, what happened during the solo-performance in the beginning became a collective generation of ideographic data along with a process of collective analysis.

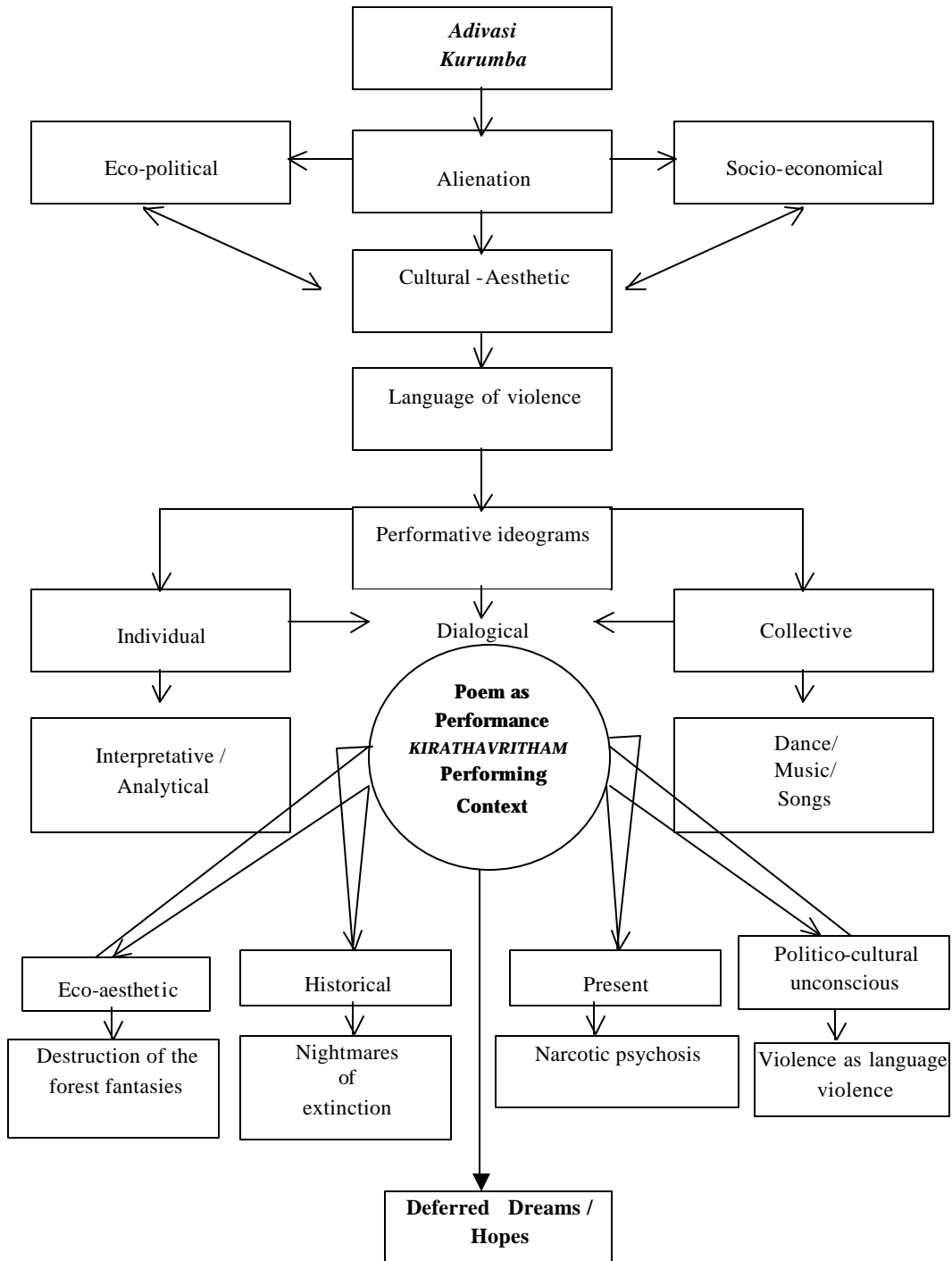
The framework acted as a point of reference for the individual /collective transactional expressivity of the *Kurumbas* in the Reserve Forest hamlet of Kadukumanna.

#### **30.ii.3. KADUKUMMANNA IN PERFORMANCE**

The *Kurumbas* of Kadukumanna hamlet on top of a mountain range exist almost at a height of 800 metres above the valley of Attapady. It takes four hours to reach the hamlet after a dangerous journey through thick forests and mountainous slopes. The population status is recorded:

<b>H o u s e h o l d s</b>	<b>Population</b>		<b>Grand total</b>	<b>Age 18 years and above</b>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>		<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
29	86	75	161	35	30	65

**3.ii.4. THE ONTOGENETIC CONFIGURATION OF *KIRATHAVRITHAM* PERFORMANCE**



**Fig 6. Kirathavritham Configuration**

The PRG's entry into the hamlet was greeted by an expression of violent fury of the *Kurumba* youths. They did not want the group of thirty-two people to enter the hamlet with video and still cameras. They warned us: "If you use the camera in the hamlet we'll shoot you with our country rifles". The explosive situation was handled carefully by the group leader Sri. Narayanan and Sri. Muthu, a *Kurumba* youth from Anavayi hamlet who guided us to Kadukumanna. The reason for their violent reaction was expressed regretfully during the performance of *Kirathavritam*.

### 3.ii.5. INTERACTIVE SESSIONS

The *Harischandra Koothu* preceded the performance of the poetic text on the previous night. The *Koothu* interaction was similar in many respects with the intensive fieldwork performance done in other hamlets of Bhoothayur, Yedavani, and Anavayi. But the exceptions remain as powerful ideographic indicators that look deeper into the problematic psychophysical culture of the *Kurumbas*. All those exceptions are made to undergo intensive analytical procedures interwoven with the empirically obvious. Informal group discussions were held during the day on various problems specific to the Kadukumanna hamlet.

It was around 7.50 p.m. that the Researcher-Bufferoon got ready for the solo-performance assisted by one of the *Adivasi* Bufferoons of *Harischandra Koothu*, Sri. Saktivel. Both buffoons decided to help each other. The PRG begins their orchestrations using all the *Adivasi* and non-*Adivasi* music instruments. The wild rhythms and the shrill music of *kohal* made the darkening forest - hills and sky dance together to the music of the *Adivasi* artists. Everyone, in the hamlet came eagerly to witness the performance of a *Vanthavasi* and gathered in a big circle around the fire pit which has become very live with the frenzied dance flames. The music came to a stop. The *Moopan* of Kadukumanna, *Dathi meke Velli* announced to the gathering:

My dear hamlet people! The theatre man from Kozhikode is going to play for us. Please sit around. Our buffoon is also with him. We ask for the blessings of the contractors who are present here.

The performance focus was to be on the three aspects of *Kurumba* culture - eco-centric fertility, cultural roots and social alienation - that involves the crises in every aspect of their lives. The ideographic interaction begins with a farcical salutation by the two buffoons meant as relief to the tension of being spectators and actors. The music accompanied in full swing.

### 3.ii.6 ECO-POLITICAL IDEOGRAMS

The R.B. improvises a lullaby to begin his experiment with the *Kurumba* reality:

**Re ri re ri re ro re re ri re ro**

I've had a dream yesternight...

How the ants together killed an elephant!

(R.B. suddenly changes the situation by making the *Adivasi* Bufferoon a slave and drives him around like an animal).

Work, you my slave, in the field  
And utter no such nonsense dreams anymore!



Beware, the poisonous cobra is somewhere in that bush!

**R.B.:** (continues)

**Re re ri...**

I've seen my sister being molested  
And her blood has made  
All the flowers in the forest, red!

**Re re ri...**

(This module of performance, it seemed, did deeply communicate to the spectators. There was dead silence on their faces as if they were actually witnessing the rape of their innocent identity).

**R. B.:** (asks the audience in a highly relaxed tone) "How's my acting" And immediately came the reaction from every side: "Very good! Very good!"

**R.B.:** Okay, Thank you... Now I begin... (He starts his fragmented enactment of the poetic text).

**R.B.:**

Hey! Look... the ancient hunter stands  
In the middle of the burned down forests!  
His eyes twisting with anger as that of an infuriated cobra  
He stands there with a country torch of fire pierced on his chest...

**R.B.:** (takes a prepared torch that was lighted from the flames of the fire in the middle. In this posture he moved towards the audience in circle a and then) What has happened to my forests...? (To a spectator) What happened to your forests!

**SPEC1:** (after a brief moment of hesitation)... our forests are fast disappearing...

**SPEC2:** The government has taken away our forests... once the forest was ours...

**SPEC3:** (a women of around fifty as if in a dream)... Now, it's a *ganja* forest... *Moopan* suddenly interferes and shouts, "stop it! Stop it! Don't be a thankless ass..."

**R.B.:** (to the *Adivasi* Buffoon as if to change the subject) Hey, *Komali* - Ask them what their grand parents used to do in the forests? About their past...

**A. B.:** Their grand parents used to make elephants and tigers with their black magic!

**SPEC4:** That's false- you ask grand father, *Nancha thatha*!

**R..B.:** Who is *Nancha thatha*? (Someone gets up. A very old man in his eighties or nineties) Tell us *Nancha thatha*? Tell us everything...

**Nanchan :** (Comes towards the fire pit. He is bent like a bow but is healthy. He addresses R. B.)

You want to know! I tell you... I tell You... used to go hunting in to the forests... With our bow and arrows. Have you seen one? No? Hey, somebody bring a bow... I'll show this *Komali* our old trick... (A boy brings a bow and an arrow and gives to the old man. He starts to use the bow and arrow trying to stand erect. He fails, but shows it to R. B.). This is it. We used to hunt spotted deer (*pulliman*), wild goat (*kattadu*) wild boar (*kattukaradi*) etc. we had our wicker traps also. You know how many birds we used to trap. *kurali*, *chikkidi pakk*i, *pinakku*, *onkilu*, *ingadi koyi* etc. (The oldman's nostalgia makes his eyes glow with youthful memories) We fish in summer and monsoons. You know the names of fish... *Pakkari*, *Malanku*, *bral*, *varathi* etc... Oh! How tasty they were, fried on fire. What else do you want to know... (The old man is a bit exhausted and leaves the acting area muttering): "These young chaps don't know anything *ganja* and *arrack*" (He turns back to R. B. who has been captivated by the way in which the old man performed his

nostalgia. Old man shouts to R. B): You know, *Komali* we used to have lot of honey, we drink honey and liquor (*Kalle*) made of forest fruits and dance all night (He goes back to his seat).

(Suddenly the R. B. keeps the torch near the fire and starts to dance, performing the lines of the poem. This time to be mimed by the A. B:

Where has his father gone?  
 What did his mother do?  
 His father, he saw in the sky  
 When being eaten away by the fire. . .  
 The forest of fire  
 Ran in serpentine twirls. . .  
 But the hunter remained  
 Crying out his anguish in steps of fury. . .  
 What has happened to our children?  
 The brave hunters who went inside.  
 The deep forests to collect honey!  
 When will they come and meet their mates?  
 They were brave and healthy sons of mine  
 What has happened to the forest maidens?  
 Who were dancing all the time in their forests?  
 They went inside the forests to collect flowers!  
 For the spring festival!  
 What has happened to me?  
 Intoxicated with that fruit-juice-intoxicant. . .  
 What has happened to me?  
 And my sons and daughters  
 Mothers and sisters. . .  
 They're not seen around. . .

The performance maintained a mixing of the serious and the comic to provoke the *Kurumba* psyche.

**R.B.:** (To a spectator/young woman)

They're not seen around  
 What has happened to them!  
 What has happened to your brave youths?

**Young woman:** (closes her eyes and speaks out her passionate self)

They'll come! one day, *komali*  
 To take us away into dark forests  
 To the kingdom of beauty  
 Mixed with honey and love

(It is part of an old love song of the *Kurumba*, sung collectively in dance sessions of the youngsters even now. The lady opens her eyes wide and they were illuminated with the light of burning fire).

**R.B.:** (To a young man who seemed to be a little intoxicated). Could you please come over to this *Komali*, to explain what exactly you want your life to be, please come!...

**Young man:** (Standing up) can I sing a song?

**R.B.:** Why not? (He starts singing and moves towards the acting area. He begins to dance supported by the PRG's music orchestration)

There lived once in this forest  
 Two sisters  
 (To the spectators)  
 And what did the elder sister do?  
 (Some one from the spectators)  
 Elder sister was grinding *ragi*

From here onwards the song was in the form of questions from the youth and the answers coming collectively from the spectators. Three *Kurumba* youths joined the young man in his song and dance which suddenly became more vibrant.

**Youths:** (Together )And what did the younger sister do?

**Spectators:** The younger sister asked for some *ragi* bran. . .

**Youths:** And what did the elder sister do?. . .

**Spectators:** The elder sister refused to give the bran. . .

**Youths:** And what did the younger sister do?. . .

**Spectators:** Younger sister saw her sister going to fetch water. . .

**All together:** And she went inside the hut and cried; and she said, "if her parents were alive they would have looked after her well. . .".

**Youths:** And what happened afterwards?

**Spectators:** Weeping, weeping ... she wished aloud "Let the roof of the hut be my back..." And it became so!

**Youths:** Weeping, weeping... she wished aloud "Let the white stones outside be my teeth" And they became so!

**Spectators:** Weeping, weeping... she wished aloud "Let the *ragi* chaff become my ears" And it became so!

**Youths:** And weeping, weeping... she wished aloud: "Let the mortar become my legs" And it became so!

**Spectators:** And weeping, weeping. . . She wished aloud "Let the pestle become by trunk" And it became so!

**Youths:** And weeping, weeping. . . she wished aloud: "Let the broom become my tail" And it became so!

**Spe ctators:** And when the elder sister came back Her younger sister became an elephant!

**Youths:** Yes, she became an elephant big! And look ! The hut was not there!

**Spectators:** And look! the hut was not there! And in its place stood her sister, now an elephant!

**Youths:** And what did the elephant do?

**Spectators:** The elephant sister took the pot of water from her sisters head!

**Youths:** And then!

**Together:** The elder sister was kicked and stamped... And she was torn in to pieces by  
 Her elephant sister! And then the elephant walked  
 Into the deep and wild forests. . .

The tempo of singing and dancing was so enthralling and even the **R.B.** became a part of it. The ancient streams of *Kurumba* memory indicate the structure of collective unconscious specific to the community. The mode of performing the parable is also rich in interactive dynamics that constructs models of contradictions inherent in their day to day life. The *Kurumba* performance ideogram charged the whole hamlet people and the PRG with challenging performative energy. The Researcher-Performer continued with much more vigour:

**Re re ri re ri re ro...**

I've had a dream yesternight. . .  
How the ants together killed an elephant. . .  
The ants united to kill an elephant

**Re re ri re ri re ro...**

(The performer springs up with the burning country torch in his hands)

Hey! look ! the ancient hunter stands  
In the middle of the burned down forests  
He stands there with the burning torch  
Held deep into his heart!

(The performer again starts interacting again)

They came from far away places  
And then they did what ever they could. . .  
They climbed over our hills  
And burned down the green of our lives!  
(And with steps of vengeance he danced, singing)  
With my stone axe I'll shatter them Into pieces  
And their shattered pieces will flow in the river  
They have made this place unclean  
They have destroyed my '*Kulam*' (clan)  
What shall we do to reclaim our lost glory?  
My brothers and sisters!  
How can we be fertile again? Tell me!  
Tell me how we can live like human beings?  
(He reaches out towards the spectators)  
Tell me my brother! Tell me my sisters!

(There are expressive glows in the eyes and faces of the 'most wretched' of Attapady)

**SPEC1:(male)** There's no hope! Look at us! Look at our children! they don't learn anything their heads are full of lice. That's why we shave their hair off! Even gods can't help us! but our ancestors and *karadeivams*. Speak to us in our dreams: "Some day you'll get back everything you lost!" Can I believe them! because its too late!

(He is intoxicated, most possibly of *ganja*. The whole place was filled with *ganja* smoke. "That's how the hamlet folk relax!" Said an old man, smoking a narcotic *beedi*)

**R.B.:** Is there no hope for you? Tell me! My sister! Tell me!

**Spectator:** (A young woman) We 're doomed sir, only when we sing and dance we hope for better days...

**Spectator:** (A man speaks out) What my wife said is true! But some are lucky. Some are taken away to *Ashramams* far away - they get food and education. . . Then they don't like us... Because they're educated in town! They become '*dorais*' (white men)

**R.B.:** Don't you have schools nearby!

**Moopan:** We've one in Anavayi. You know how far it is? And there are no teachers. They come only to collect their pay. When we tell them they say: "You children are unfit for schooling. They don't understand a thing, and they are stinking. They don't wash. they're filthy". (All the children among the spectators sit still watching)

**An old woman:** What is it, *Samy*? Look at our children? You know, how many died due to cholera. Some big people came to see our children dying! And you know what they said! "You give your children good food" (she laughs). "You should drink good water" (people laugh). "Send them to school" (everyone laughs). "Send the dying children to their schools without teachers (they all laugh at the ignorance of 'big people' from big cities).

**SPEC:** (another old woman): We should teach them a good lesson. They spend lots of money on us. They spend lots of hollow words on us. To make us better. All the money and free ration during the time of cholera went to someone's pocket. We should teach them a lesson. They've destroyed everything we had... ( She goes on narrating the *Adivasi* anguish).

(To the *Kurumbas*, 'they' means the government officials and the whole structure of developmental apparatuses functioning for the betterment of *Adivasi* condition but ultimately against their interests. One educated young man (pre-degree passed) wanted to react).

**Youngman:** (He walks towards the performer and speaks to him like a character in a play) Our people here are tired and sick. They won't stand together. Only in dance we feel we're one. But otherwise we're after some master from outside. . .(He is stopped by the *Moopan*)

**Moopan:** Don't say that. We work for them. They give us our wages. We're happy in one way or other. During the rainy season we have no work. We cant even go out to *Mukkali* to collect the free ration due to flooding of the river. The government does nothing.(They get heavy rain during the months of June and July and all their hamlets remain as islands with flooded water all around).

**Another young man:** Government people have no sense in them. They only want to keep the records clear. You look at our huts. We made all those on our own with bamboo. The housing fund never reached Kadukumanna. They say we're all illiterate animals. Even our own people who are better of in the plain below don't care for us. May be because we live far away from all of them.

**R.B.:** (in his attempt to make the *Kurumbas* optimistic, continues performing)

'Yes, the day'll come like the fiery sun

Yes, the day'll come when

Your children will get good education

Yes, the day'll come when

They get good food to eat'.

The ancient forest hunter dreams.

The enchanting dreams of a future

Filled with love and warmth and dignity. . .

(One young man who seemed to be inspired by the whole situation interrupts the performer).

**Young man:** Shall we do the *Karatiyattam*, all of us together. . .

**Spectators:** (a big section of them) yes, *Karatiyattam*, shall we begin, *Moopan*?

**Moopan:** Yes, but not now! You begin with some other. *Karatiyattam* is always the last one. Don't you know?

(*Karatiyattam* (bear-dance) used to be played as the last of a dance - session for reasons unknown to the *Kurumbas*. It shows not just a preference but the manner in which certain performances are categorised by the *Adivasis* themselves. *Karatiyattam* is one of the most popular fertility dance ideograms of the *Kurumbas* which needs specific analysis.

### 3.ii.7 THE PERFORMING *KURUMBA*

It was obvious that the *Adivasi* collective has now reached a high level of expressive urge. The traditional music instruments start the orchestrations and six or seven women were seen moving towards the acting area. They were inviting others as well. More fuel is put in the fire-pit. The flames go up dancing wildly. The **R.B.** moved back to the spectator-space to observe the multiple narratives of their collective dance-song articulation)

*Moopan*: (to the spectators) why don't you join- I'll also dance with you... (The session get started by seven women and four men, gradually to be joined by the majority of spectators)

**La la la le la le la le...**

**La la la le la le la le...**

There was once a princess, charming  
Who was sister to King, so loving  
And she was the only sister the King had

**La le la le...**

The King would never send her out of palace  
For fear of being charmed by some one  
For fear of being charmed by sun or moon  
For fear of being charmed by hills and rivers  
She would never come out of the palace  
She would never come out of her four walls

**La le la le...**

The king would weigh her every morning  
And every evening  
With flowers from the garden on one side  
And his sister on the other side of the balance  
And everyday the number of flowers  
Remained the same with out a change.

**La le la le...**

The princess remained alone in her palace-room  
With maidens singing songs  
All the time to please her.  
All the maidens were fearful of the king  
For they were ordered to sing continuously.  
And if they stop singing, there heads would be chopped off...  
And they sang for days and nights together  
Even when the princess was sleeping and dreaming

**La le la le...**

(More people of all ages were joining the circle of dancers, both male and female)

Everyday after the weighing was over  
 The princess would tell her singing maidens:  
 "Let me go out and see from where the light of day comes!  
 Let me go out and see from where the heat of day comes  
 Let me go out and see who brings the light and heat!"

**La le la le...**

The princess ran out and looked around and up.  
 In the sky she saw the fiery sun looking at her  
 With a flaming eye and the princess fell unconscious.  
 The king came running, the queen came running.  
 The whole country came running hearing the news!

*La la la le la le. . .*

The King ordered the *Kurumba* healers to come!  
 And all the *Kurumba* healers came!  
 With all their charms and herbal knowledge!  
 The king shouted: "Cure her, bring my sister to  
 Her conscious self or I'll chop your heads off!"  
 The princess opened her eyes when everyone prayed. . .  
 And murmured: "I love that fire in the sky, I love  
 The sun in the sky and I want the red-hot sun"  
 And at once, 'she became pregnant', so said  
 All the *Kurumba* healers to one another  
 Fearing the king's wrath, and as usual  
 The king weighed her that evening and, look!

*La le la le. . .*

And look! the weight of the princess was more. . .  
 He ordered the healers to speak out  
 And no one opened their mouths  
 But a black crow in the sky shouted  
 Aloud: "oh! You naughty king!  
 Your sister is with a child in her belly  
 And the child inside her is like red-hot sun"  
 The enraged king shout ed to all guards around  
 Take this uncouth disobedient princess  
 To some unknown land and cut her to pieces and  
 Give them to the vultures waiting for rotten corpses!"

*La le la le. . .*

(The tempo of the dance movements begins to gain momentum along with the shrill music of the forests)

The guards took her to an unknown forest  
 And they grieved: "We can't kill this enchanted princess  
 With a growing son inside her" and  
 One said: "We'll leave her in the forest and  
 We will kill a bear with our swords and  
 Show the blood to the enraged king"

*La le la le la le. . .*

The princess gave birth to a fiery child

With anklets of fire on its legs, and he grew up. . .  
 Like a forest fire that cannot be extinguished!  
 And one day the boy asked his mother princess  
 "Oh! Mother, tell me the truth! Who my father is?  
 And tell me the way to reach my father who hides from us"  
 And next fine morning the princess showed  
 The rising sun over the hills and forests that's home to them!  
 And said: "My boy! That' your father moving up  
 Higher and higher in the sky, giving light to the world around".  
 And the son set off to meet his father  
 Towards the other end of the hills and forests.  
 La le la le la le. . .

(The tempo of singing and dance reach crescendo)

The boy climbed the mountains high  
 And reached the end of the earth in the evening  
 And at the end of the earth he met  
 An old man-the sun in disguise - who asked:  
 "Hey, boy, where are you upto?" And he replied:  
 "I'm in a hurry to meet my missing father  
 Who is coming down to the earth and to  
 Tell him, my mother is waiting for his return"  
 The old man said" Don't go in search of your father...  
 For he is cursed by the earth-mother to live in fire"  
 And he continued: "I give you this box and  
 This box contains everything you and your mother want.  
 And don't op en it when you go back to hand it  
 Over to your mother and if you open it before  
 You reach your eighteenth year, mind you,  
 You've to offer me one of your fingers!"

*La le la le la. . .*

The boy promised and went back with the box  
 And on his way back he opened it to see what it holds!

*La le la le la. . .*

He saw the earth in full glory in the box!  
 He saw the sky full of stars and moons and suns in it!  
 He saw the seas and rivers and all the fish in it!  
 And he saw the most beautiful maidens  
 And they were singing and dancing!  
 And he forgot the promise he made to the old man. . .  
 Who was his father-sun in disguise

*La le la le la. . .*

The boy passed through seasons and reached his eighteenth year. . .  
 And his eighteenth birth day was his wedding day!  
 And as he took the charming bride's hand in his. . .!  
 He and his mother saw a fiery cobra  
 And it was reaching for the bride and bride groom!  
 And it was the father who had come in disguise!  
 And the cobra asked: "My boy, you forgot



The promise you made to an old man seasons back"  
 And the young man in regret placed his middle finger  
     In the open mouth of the cobra  
         Remembering the promise he had made.  
 The boy's mother recognised the fiery cobra  
 And allowed her son to do as he promised  
     The cobra gave a loving bite on the finger!  
 But allowed him to take away the finger from its mouth!  
 The finger came to be known as '*pampu viralu*' (snake finger)  
     The father, mother and son and his wife  
         Lived together in the hut for the night  
     And when the bride and bridegroom woke up  
 They saw only two shining stones where the father and mother slept!  
 And every morning they wait outside their hut for the father-sun!  
 And the mother-princess who hides inside her husband-sun!  
         *La le la le la. . .*

The finale of this particular dance appeared to move towards a collective trance-like situation. The women seemed to experience a kind of exhilaration that emerged gradually from the enactment of a psychosomatic therapeutic session. The hyper-conscious psycho-somatic ideogram opened up many layers of the complex net work of significations peculiar to the *Kurumba* socio-cultural dynamics.

### **3.ii.8 IN CELEBRATION OF SURVIVAL**

The collective dance/trance song sequences of the celebration of *Kurumba* survival in a world of alienated subjugation continued till the break of dawn. The break up of the sequential performative ideograms that were enacted is given below as indicators of the cultural life of the subject of exploration. The most popular expressive ideogram of *karatiyattam* got performed as the final dance-music segment, as is the usual custom.

### 3.ii.9 DANCE -SONG -MUSIC IDEOGRAMS

SI No.	<u>Name of dance ideograms</u>	Focus motif	Interludes
1.	The maiden who was made of pearls	Gender-revenge	Heated discussion for five to ten minutes on the selection, and preferences of dance events
2.	Human beings against natural spirits	Super real-unreal configurations	Black-tea served to everyone. Consumption of Illicit liquor, <i>ganja</i> smoking visuals suggestive of a world of fantasy.
3.	Birds in conflict	Crow as most cunning	The outsider contractors in discussion with some women performers very informally. Secret bargains are being made.
4.	Another popular song dance <i>cinmodorai</i>	Abstractions on fertility	Two young contractors highly intoxicated want to dance with the collective. They don't seek permission from anybody. Their utterances are suggestive of intercultural sensuality.
5.	In praise of the <i>Moopan</i> and other functionaries	The <i>Kurumba</i> hierarchy and power structure	<i>Moopan</i> , <i>Bandari</i> and <i>Kuruthale</i> join together in their demand for the particular dance.
6.	<i>Karadiyattam</i> (The bear-dance)- <b>PRG</b> is invited by the animistic <i>Moopan</i> and others to join the dance. Signifies urges of sexuality.		The country <i>arrack</i> is served openly to anybody who wants. No gender difference noticed. Many in the <b>PRG</b> join.

### 3.ii.10 ON THE MATERIAL CULTURE

The configurations of *Kurumba* material culture got documented after few hours of rest. The **PRG** mixed with youngsters of the hamlet to generate information on the hamlet's acts of survival. The documented data analysis is done from an ideographical perspective based on the interface between empirical and performative practices.

The intensive field work done in the *Kurumba* hamlets of Bhoothayur, Yedavani, kadukumanna and Anavayi is co-ordinated for the purpose of getting at the multi-faceted cultural dynamics of the alienated *Kurumba* community of *Adivasis*. The specimen ideograms presented in this chapter will be supplemented by innumerable fragmented ideographic observations gathered from primary and secondary sources, both material and cultural.

## Chapter Four

### Part I

## THE REALITY IN PERFORMANCE

### 4.1. DISMEMBERING *KURUMBA*-IDEOGRAMS

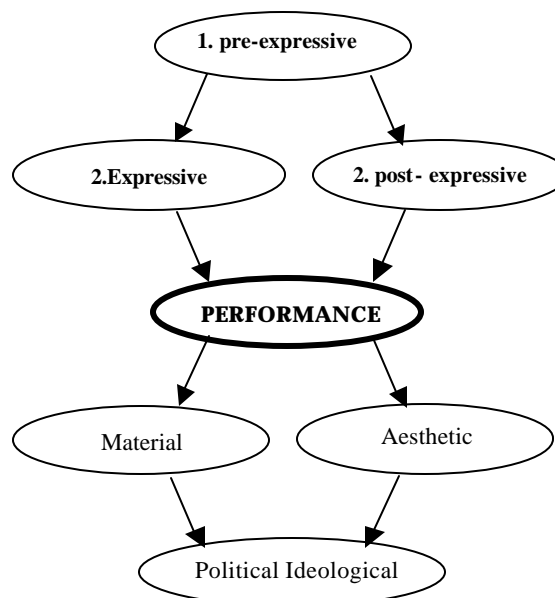
The ideographic analytical configuration of *Kurumba* ethnicity is based mainly on two propositions:

- i) The sources of generative knowledge and strategies of analytical interpretation of seemingly independent subjects are constituted collectively through forms of organic discourse networks that activate the subjects and objects at one and the same time.
- ii) The epistemological thrust of the analytical procedure functions on a theoretical plane which seeks to allow more space to inter-subjective ideograms that are polyphonic and heterogeneous in manifestation.

The conceptual designs of subjectivity and objectivity therefore become problematic from a political and ideological perspective. It was felt that more than any other operative mechanisms, this ideographic analysis makes a demand to orient itself to the socio-political reality embedded at the core of every day life of the subject of study. The performative ideograms of culture, performance and development documented through intensive participatory fieldwork are categorised as audio-visual representations of an ethnological system as done below.

### 4.2. *KURUMBA* IDEOGRAPHIC CONFIGURATION

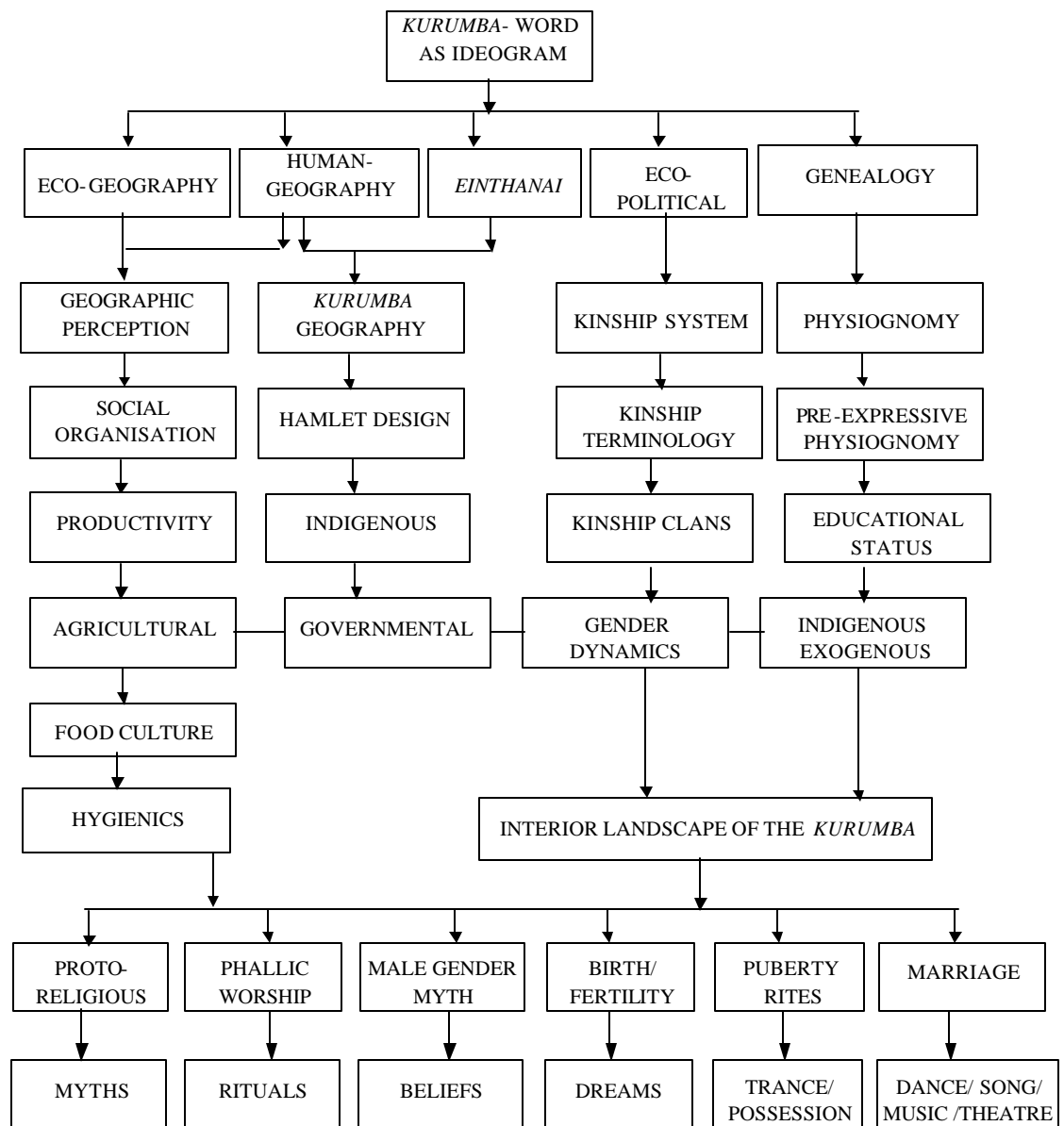
The *Kurumba* ideograms that evolved through action-oriented fieldwork are programmed from a three-dimensional organic perspective:



**Figure 7. *Kurumba* Ideogram**

Pre-expressivity is construed as the mixing up of two performative realms, the pre-material and pre-aesthetic. Pre-material expressivity is the state of being before entering into the nexus of productive forces and productive relations that sustain life. Pre-aesthetic denotes the state of being before entering into cultural productivity which stimulates the desire to exist. The political or ideological underpinnings of the ideograms motivate or force the subject to perceive the present as predestined and irrevocable. Thus, the ideograms constructed by the *Kurumbas* through their material and aesthetico-cultural productivity in relation to the above-mentioned three-dimensional determinants intersected by indigenous and exogenous forces are stratified from a performetric perspective.

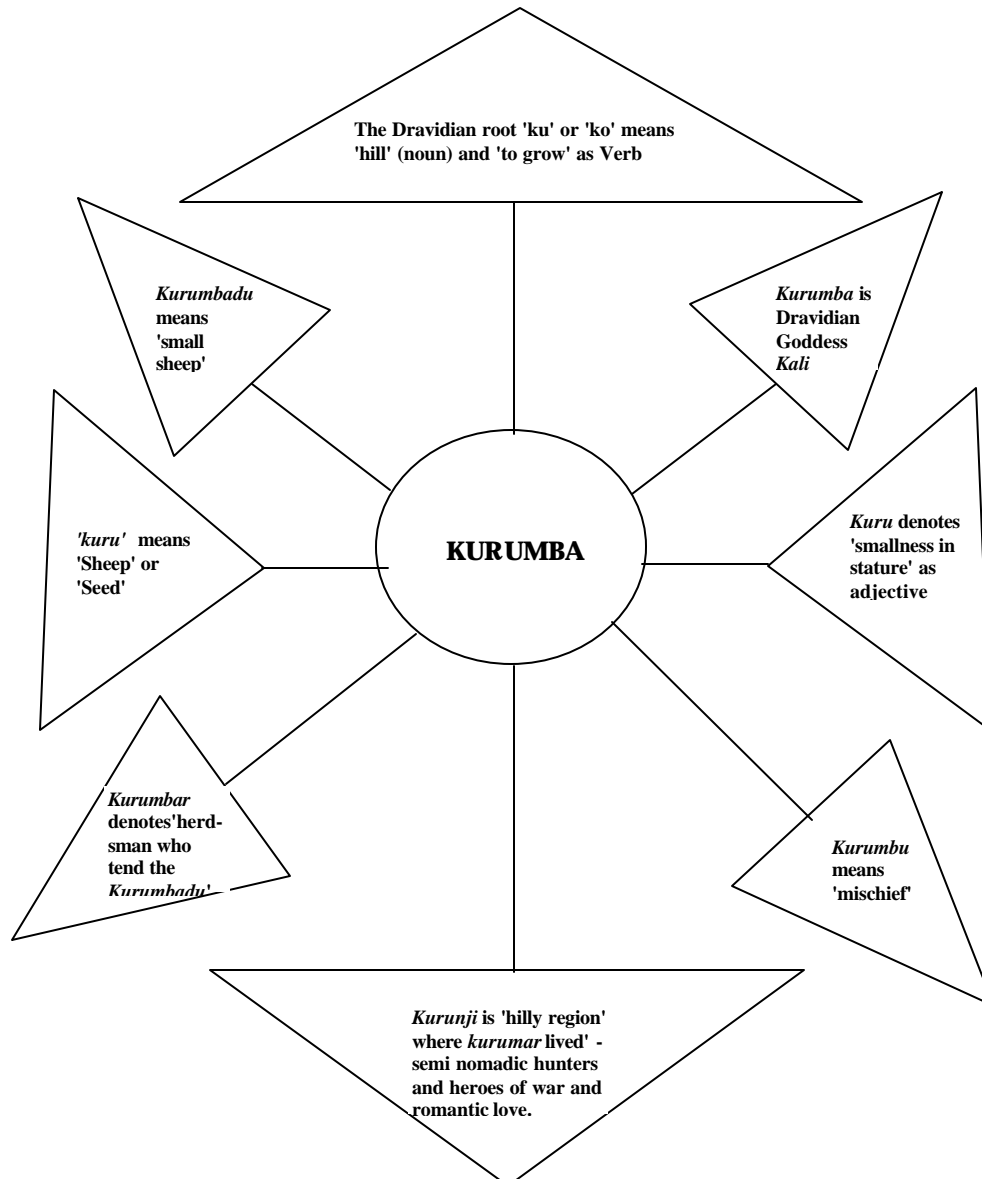
#### 4.3. STRATIFIED *KURUMBA*-IDEOGRAMS



**Figure 8. The Word-Ideogram**

These ideograms of the *Kurumba* social formation act as multiple indicators of a process of transition through time and space, specifically articulating the problematics of identity. The indicators, it is assumed, are the potential actors in their specific roles enacting a socio-political drama of intense tragic dimensions. What follows is the analysis of the empirically 'real' and 'unreal' ideograms of the performing *Kurumbas*. The performers and the performance become one and the same at certain junctures of analytical programming.

#### 4.4 KURUMBA: THE WORD AS IDEOGRAM



**Fig 9. Word-Ideogram**

Sources of etymological significations: i. *Tholkapiyam* - Dravidian grammar text. ii. *Agananuru* iii. *Purananuru* iv. *Natrinai* v. *Kurundogai* (Dravidian anthologies of poems on love and war dated, second Millennium B. C.)

#### 4.5. ETHNO-AMNESIA

The etymological derivation of the word *Kurumba* thus activates the inner dynamics of an ethnographic ideogram with interactive meanings that illuminate the word as a process of cultural modelling system. The word becomes a psychophysical living organism possessing its own logic of functioning which in the present context of the *Kurumbas* becomes much more problematic. The historicity of the word and its multiple connotation get alienated from a reality which acts as ethno-amnesia.

The denotative function of the word *Kurumba* as an ideogram in the present, loses all its significance in its relation to the social dynamics of the *Kurumba* community life. The 'pastness' of the *Kurumba* past is almost wiped out from the memory of even the grand old men of the community.

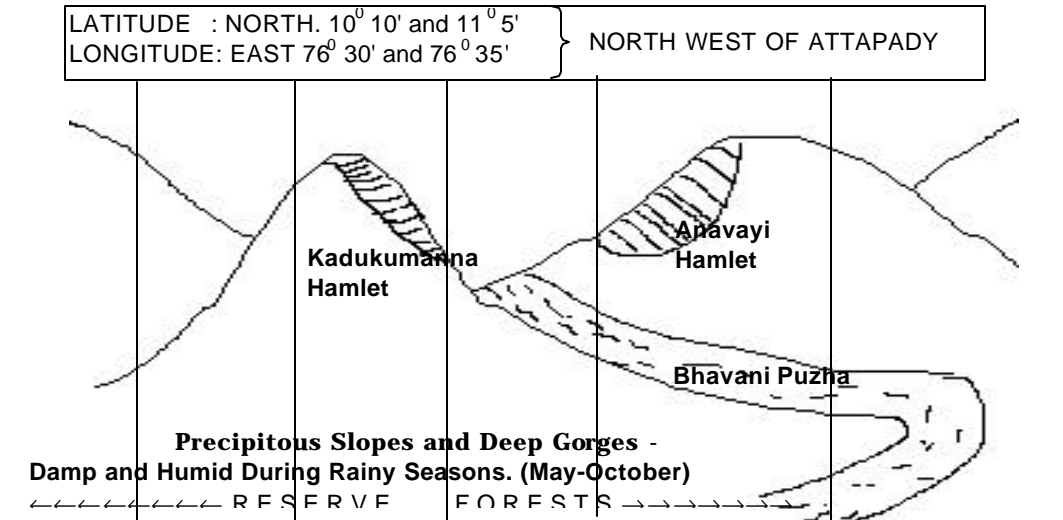
Yes, I know these forests and hill for the last so many seasons. My father and grandfather used to tell me, 'we're *Kurumbas*'. They told me, "we came to these hills from a black ocean". There was a war between the black ocean and white-ocean and we were defeated and we came to the forests.

So said Sri. Mari, *Oorumooapan* of Kadukumanna who must have been in his eighties. The word ideogram to almost every elder *Kurumba* men and women we interviewed sound hollow. "We're *Kurumbas*, there are different *Kurumbas*, that's all we know we're different from *Irulas* and *Mudugas*. But we're *Adivasis* we don't know the meaning of the word *Kurumba*". So were the reactions. But the word retains a demarcating connotation that represents the *Kurumbas* as having a distinct identity among the *Adivasis* of Attapady, It is this inherent identity which seems to have lost its centre of gravity through a process of change in the domains of economic and cultural productivity. The world *Kurumba* gains deeper significance in the process.

#### 4.6. OBSERVATIONS

- i. The ethno-amnesia involves a problem of space-time continuum in which the sequence of the order of things represents a hallucinatory network. The structure of memory as revealed through dialogic interaction shows a distinct pattern of ordering that is not sequential in structural formation. Instead, there is a hallucinatory ordering system that hinges on the permutations and combinations of isolated and fragmented consciousness.
- ii. The dialogic interactions revealed the 'inability' of the community to represent meanings with the logic of sequence. Words to the *Kurumbas* seem to sprout from their body to fulfil the function of subsistence and therefore the remembrance of things past gets concretised in the present as indicators of the multiple layers of productivity.
- iii. The memorial signification of the past remains not simply as words but as icons that project the present without going down memory lane. The *Kurumbas* express their past as present in the forms of their beliefs and rituals.

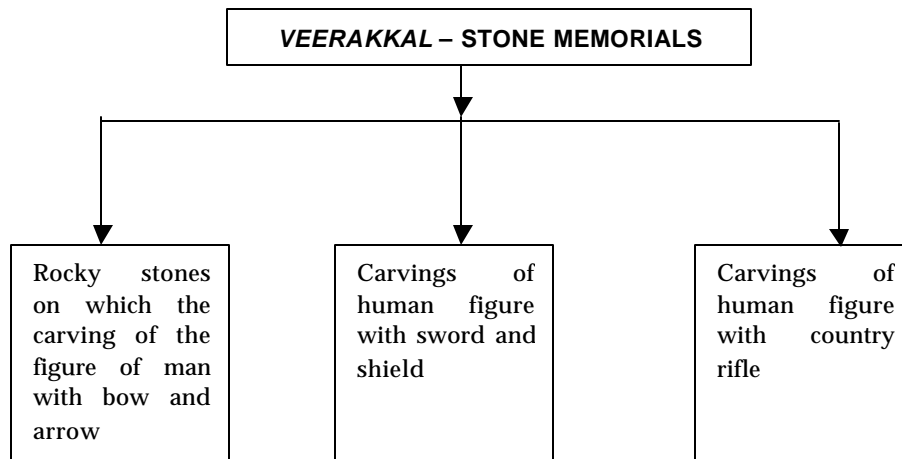
#### 4.7. THE KURUMBA GEO-GRAPHY



**Figure 10. Kurumba Hamlets**

Status	Elevation	Rivers	Rain Fall	Area	Population
The most under-developed area in Kerala State	3500 - 4500 ft above mean sea level	1. Bhavani 2. Siruvani And their tributaries	Annual rain fall ranges between 2500-3000mm	66.45 hec.	1612 (14 hamlets) Male - 801 Female - 811

The undulating mountain ranges with thick forests, the dangerous *Bhavani Puzha* (river) and the valleys have their invisible impact on the environmental perceptions of the *Kurumbas* who live in this geographic network. The 14 scattered hamlets of the *Kurumbas* which come under Pudur Panchayat are isolated islands of 'primitive' culture. It is from the banks of *Bhavani Puzha* which runs through the primordial forests where the *Kurumba* hamlets are located. Paleolithic remains of ancient social formations were discovered in 1983 by Dr. P. Rajendran, U. G. C. Research Associate, Deccan college, Pune. These remains were mostly discovered on the banks of *Bhavani Puzha* in Pudur, Narasimukku, Seerakkadavu, Mukkali and Agali. The mountains-forest-river confluence had its share of paleolithic images that are kept in the Archeological Museum in Trichur. The general characteristics of these historical documents of culture known as *veerakkal* (stones placed on the burial site of great warriors) may be classified as done below:



**Figure 11. Veerakkal Stones**

The most significant of these stone images is that of hunting. The stone with the image of a hunter with his bow and arrows along with the figure of a wild animal whose body is pierced with an arrow has a height of 3 feet and width of 4 feet. Though the figures depict different stages of historical transformation, they indicate with proof the fact of human habitation in the study area environment of the *Kurumbas*.

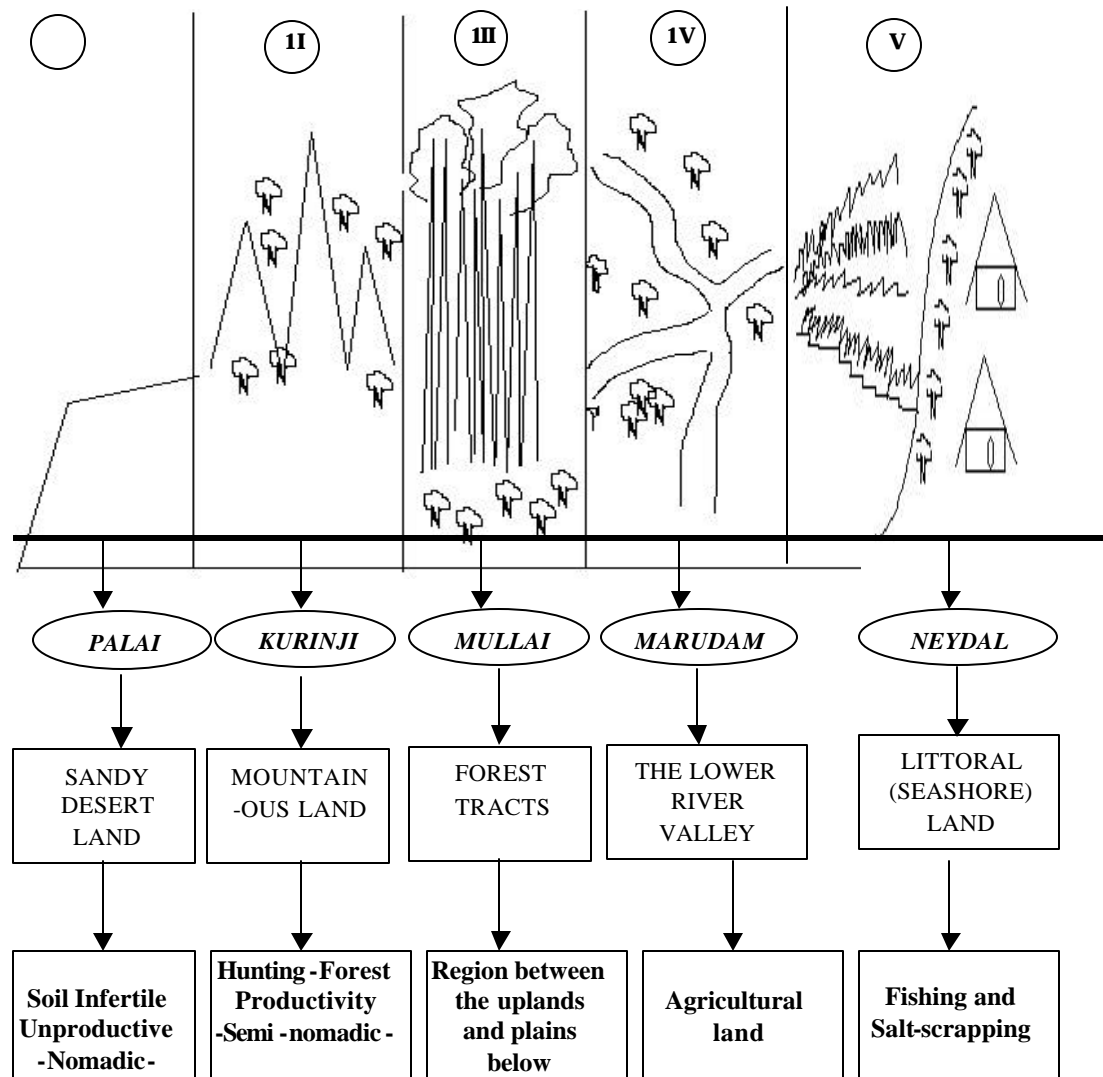
#### **4.8. HUMAN-GEOGRAPHICAL IDEOGRAMS**

The *Kurumba* geo-graphical perceptions are generated from their interface with the environment that reminds one of the Dravidian *einthinai* paradigm. The five-fold stratification of the landscape interwoven with the elemental presence of human performativity (both material and aesthetic) gets represented profusely in ancient Tamil *Sangam* literature. The human geographic model acts as a derivative force in the context of the *Kurumba* present. Brian J. Murton in ***Geography and the Study of South India*** says:

In the *Sangam* literature the actual objective landscapes of the Tamil country became "The interior landscapes of Tamil poetry" (A. K. Ramanujam, ***The Interior Landscape*** (Bloomington", Indiana University press, 1967) p.108). The fivefold classification reflects an appraisal of the important settings in which the men of South India lived at the time. (***Essays on South India***, ed. By Burton Stein, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1976, p.94).



#### 4.9. THE STAGE DESIGN OF *EINTHINAI*:



**Figure 12. Eco-Design**

#### 4.10. HUMAN - GEOGRAPHIC - CULTURE - SYSTEM

The *Einthinai* system (five-fold indigenous ecographic cultural system explicated in *Sangam* literature) provides a meaningful ethno-dimension to the word *Kurumba*:

Sreenivasa Aiyangar, P.T. (1995): **Weaving in wool is as ancient as weaving in cotton; it was essentially an industry of *mullai*, (the pastoral-stage region) in the less fertile parts of which lived the *Kurumbas*, the class of herdsmen who tended the *Kurumbadu* (small sheep) and wove from its**

fleece the *Kambalam* ten thousand years ago as they do today. (*Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture, Asian Educational services, Delhi, 1995. P.47.*)

**Luiz, A.A.D (1962):** Their (*Kurumbas*) name is said to have originated from their early occupation of tending '*Kuru*' (sheep). It is also possible that their name originated from the Tamil word '*Kurumbu*' (mischief), because in their savage state they were very arrogant and mischievous. (*Tribes of Kerala*, Bharathiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh, New Delhi P.116. 1992).

**Dr. Shortt, J and Ouchterlony, S (1868):** ...in fact they got the nickname '*Kurumbas*' because of their innate cruelty and their being small in stature (*An Account of the Tribes of the Neligheries*, Madras Government Press, 1868, P.46).

**Thurston, Edger (1906):** The *Kurumba* or *Kurumbas* are the modern representatives of the ancient *Kurumbas* or *Pallava*, who were once so powerful throughout Southern India, but very little trace of their greatness, now remains. In the seventh century, the power of the *Pallava* kings seems to have been at its zenith, but shortly after this, the *Kongu, chola* and *chatukya* chiefs succeeded in winning several victories over them. The final overthrow of the *Kurumba* sovereignty was effected by the *chola* king Adondai about the seventh or eighth century A. D., and the *Kurumbas* were scattered far and wide. Many fled to the hills, and in the Nilagiris and Wynad, in Coorg and Mysore, representatives of this ancient race are now found as wild and uncivilised tribes (Madras Census Report, 1891). (*Caste and Tribes Southern India, Vol . IV* Cosmo publications Delhi, 1975, P.156).

**Subramanian. K.R, (1929):** Thondai nadu, the homeland of the *Pallava*, was inhabited by the *Kurumbar* or *Aruvar* or *Aruvalar* according to a Mackenzie Manuscript and early-Tamil literature. (*The Origin of Saivism and Its History in the Tamil Land* (supplement to the Madras University Journal, Madras, 1929, P.16)

**Rt. Rev. Robert Caldwell, (1956):** There is a distinct tradition that the inhabitants of that part of the *Chola* or *Sora* country which lies between Madras and the Ghats, including Arcot as its centre where *Kurumbass* or wandering shepherds-nomads-lived for centuries after the Christian era. (*A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages*, University of Madras. Reprinted 1956. P.93)

**Dr. IlanKulam Kunjan Pillai, (1967):** *Kurumbas* belonged to the wandering shepherd community of the *Sangam* period. (*Kerala in the Fifth and Sixth Century*, NBS Kottayam, 1967 P.23)

**Kayyettu Kalaikkatchi Kuzhu (1968) States:** *Kurumba enpathu palainilacharpulla oor enpathaippulappatuthm* (*Kuruborainadu* is the famous region in Kerala history where *Kurumba* of the *Palaitthinai* situated. (*Kayyettu Kalikktchikzhu*, 1968. P. 68)

#### 4.11. KURUMBA GEOGRAPHIC PERCEPTION

The geo-graphic perception of the *Kurumbas* is enmeshed with their cultural unconscious and gets manifested in various expressive structures of their day to day life. The conceptual framework of geo-graphic or environmental perception hinges on the *Kurumba* ideograms of his immediate surroundings as well as those of his 'remembered' psycho-physical images from the past. Without falling a victim to environmental determinism, it is possible to locate the positive and negative processual network of geo-graphic perception activating the *Kurumba* society.

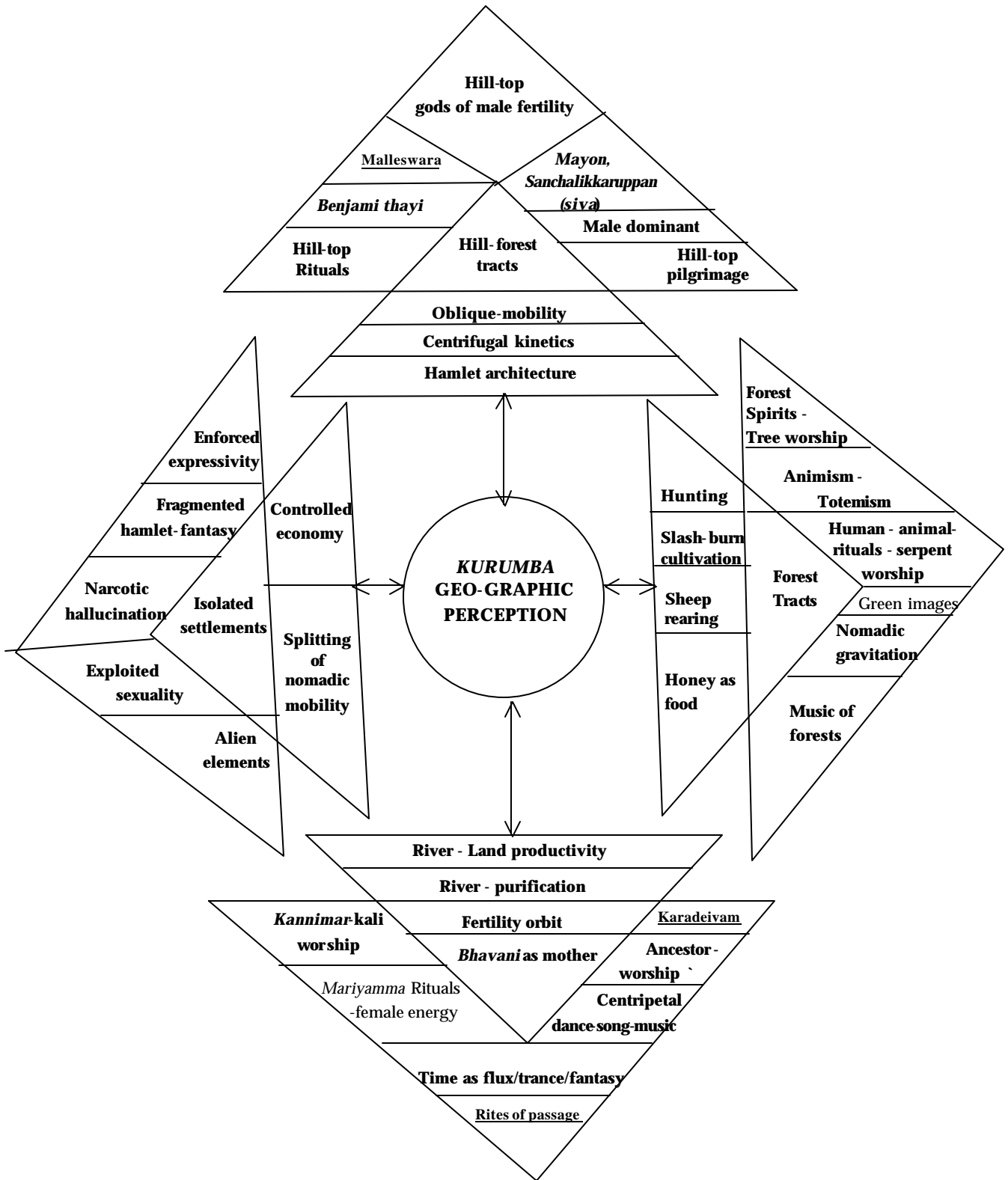


Figure 13. Geographic-Perception-Ideogram

#### **4.12. ECO-GEOGRAPHIC OBSERVATIONS**

The *Kurumba* life system is organised in the context of its environment that acts as a primary source of energy that shapes the matrix of material culture and expressive urges. What follows is the descriptive classification of the environmental ideograms of the *Kurumba* perception interlaced with their past, present and future.

The performative fieldwork absorbed much to the conceptual indicators of environmental dialectics of the *Adivasi Kurumbas* encapsulated in the Reserve and vested forests infested with alien forces of subjugation. The geo-graphic perceptions get contaminated by new modes of productive forces and relations of production imposed on them by the contractor– mafia of narcotic enterprises. The degenerative process of geo-graphical and environmental onslaught accelerates the process of alienation of the *Adivasi* community's cultural and material development to dangerous limits.

#### **4.13. ECO-POLITICAL CRISIS**

The eco-diversity factor in relation to the Silent Valley and Attapady regions were been located by social scientists and described in terms of absolute empirical space; but little attention has been given to the contextual spatial organisation of the forest communities like the *Kurumbas*. The questions generated during fieldwork discussions and performances are significant in the context of developmental alienation of the subject of discourse:

- i. How do primitive *Kurumbas* interact with their eco-graphic environment?
- ii. How do these people cognise and perceive space and environment?
- iii. How do *Kurumbas* make resource allocation decisions in the new contexts of enforced alienation?
- iv. How do these questions relate to the immense potential for planning and development?

The eco-geographical research aimed at evolving organic models of *Adivasi* development is still a dream unfulfilled. What is done—that too in the most despicable manner – at best is the creation of new regional divisions or the mechanical description of existing patterns for the sake of fund allocation by agencies like ITDP and AHADS. Eco-geographical process ideograms can contribute to a better understanding of the eco-political problems involved in the multi-faceted structures of *Kurumba* alienation and exploitation.

#### **4.14. GENEALOGICAL IDEOGRAM-CHARTING**

The *Kurumba* genealogy abounds in super-imaginative fantasies as well as highly subjective derivations from legends and fables collected from various sources. What is attempted here is a deconstruction of the *Kurumba* myths and legends by performative networks based on inter-subjective interface with the

Kurumba present. A genealogical chart makes clear the multiple structures of Kurumba social formation through spatio-temporal struggles. The investigation done through performative interface revealed the following factors:

- i. The *Kurumbas* were driven away from their original moorings in Nilagiri district on account of a war.
- ii. They were the children of *Kakkalinga (Siva)* and *Mariyamma (kali)*. *Kurumbas* have another belief that they are the children of *Malleswara*.
- iii. The *Kurumbas* were driven to the forests because of their indulgence in shamanism and witchcraft.
- iv. The *Kurumbas* are still considered as people having immense super-natural powers.
- v. The *Kurumbas* have a feeling that they are the most inferior and 'primitive' of the three *Adivasi* sections - *Muduga*, *Irula* and *Kurumba*.
- vi. The *Kurumbas* are divided into three groups with their separate identities:
  - a. *Mullu Kurumba* (Practitioners of witchcraft and black magic)
  - b. *Jenu* (honey) *Kurumba*-*'theri'* *Kurumba* (Honey collecting group)
  - c. *Urali Kurumba*. (Land-owning group).



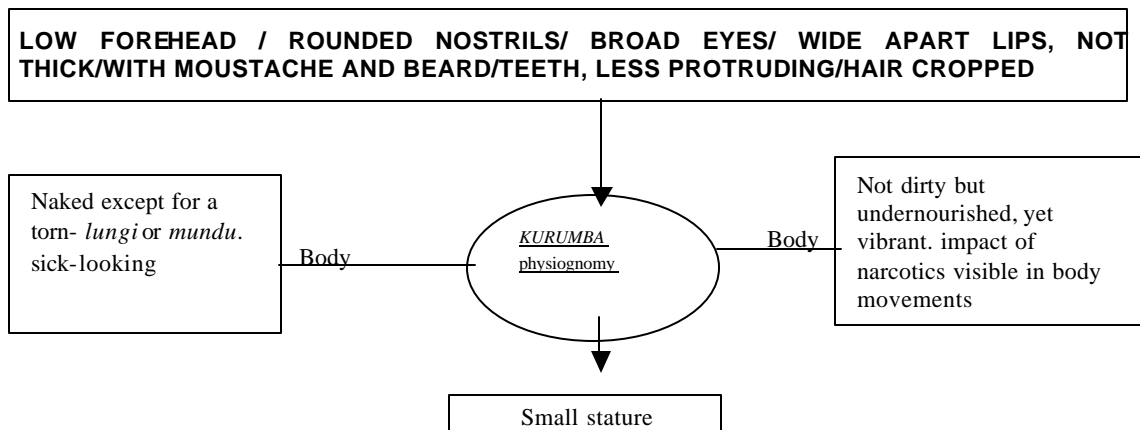
#### 4.15. KURUMBA PHYSIOGNOMY

**Sherring M. A. (1975):** They are supposed to have come from Malayalim. In stature, and in general appearance, these people present a sharp contrast to the *Thodas* of the uppermost ridges of Neilgherries. Short and ugly with matted hair, large mouth and bleared eyes and altogether of a strange figure given to necromancy and dark secrets (*The Tribes and Castes of the Madras Presidency*, Cosmo Publications, Delhi. 1975 Reprint of 1909 edition p.85.)

**Dr. Shortt, J. (1868):** *Kurumbas* are small in stature and have a squalid and some what uncouth appearance from their peculiar physiognomy, wild matted hair, and almost nude bodies... They have widened nostrils exposed; breath of nostrils one inch and five lines, ridge slightly depressed. The hair is long and black, and is grown matted and straggling, somewhat wavy, and is sometimes tied into a knot, with a piece of cord on the crown or back of the head, while the ends are allowed to be free and floating. They have scarcely any moustache or whiskers, and a straggling scanty beard; occasionally one is met with who has a full moustache, whiskers and beard. They are as a body sickly-looking, pot-bellied, large mounted proganathous, with prominent outstanding teeth and thick lips. . . frequently saliva dribbles away from their mouths. (*An Account of the Tribes of Neilgherries*, Madras, 1868. P.46. )

The detailed description of the physiognomy of the *Kurumbas* by Dr. Shortt presented in 1868 and the *Kurumbas* as we see today provide us with powerful indicators of socio-cultural transformation that happened within a period of more than hundred years. A figurative description based on direct observation follows.

#### 4.16. PRE-EXPRESSIVE PHYSIOGNOMY



**Figure 15. Kurumba Physiognomy**

The *Kurumba* expressions are generally otherworldly but tragically dynamic. Older women tie their hair at the side of the head. Young women and girls have their very lengthy dark hair plaited at the back. They

wear cheap sarees and blouses of very dark colours. Many of them have maxigowns. The children generally are undernourished and unhealthy. Their bodies get covered with dust, as their games are all earthbound.

The most significant expression is that of intoxicated and wounded innocence on the face of the majority. They look tired but terribly relaxed. The body becomes more expressive and agile during collective dance sessions.

The pre-expressive format makes explicit the physiognomic unconscious of the *Kurumbas* in relation to their day to day life. The observations may be classified as follows.

#### 4.17. PRE-EXPRESSIVE *KURUMBA*

<u>Silence</u>	Pre-Expressivity	Expressive body language
	Body	
<u>Passivity</u>	Communication becomes restricted	While talking hand become very active as if to support every syllable
Earthword looks	Broken words	Wide gestures
Silent trance	Words mixed with tobacco	Shivering postures
Smoking as escape - mechanism	Smell of <i>arrack</i>	Words as spit
Squatting for hours at a stretch	Smell of shit	Shitting posture
Picking of lice from others' hair by women	Body mobility represented as charged with urges to escape the reality	Every gesture has a rhythm symptomatic of lethargy .
Children held tight over the shoulders	Looking beyond the horizon	A body language of centrifugal fragmentation
Listening to film songs from radio	Their fragmented reality gets enacted in daily life Ex: <i>kittumbo thinnum, muttumbo thoorum</i> (eat when you have, shit when you feel)	Girls' body language is fertility – oriented. Even the walk or climbing hill is communicative of fertile vibrancy.
Basket making	Day to day reality embedded in spoken words and body language	Sense of being watched makes gestures and movements more intense
If intoxicated, smile at nothing	Sickly children with blank expressions	Camera invites the urge to be expressive
Total stasis of body/body becomes blank	Children, dogs and goats play together	The unconscious urge to get concretised in photographs.
Generation of fantasies	Labour and productivity oriented towards the unconscious	Fantasy/trance/ hallucination/ fragmented collective, unconscious expressivity /becomes more 'real' than reality



The physiognomic pre-expressivity is suggestive of being imprisoned in the hamlet habitat with its intercultural hybridity. The colour tones of the skins of children suggest mixing of blood. The exploitative mechanisms indicate gradual changes in the physiognomic structure of the *Kurumba* society getting mutilated beyond recognition. But the poverty factor has a degenerative effect on the health and well being of the *Kurumba* social units.

#### **4.18. KURUMBA KINSHIP SYSTEM - OBSERVATIONS**

The *Kurumba* kinship model struggles to retain the interactive dynamics of a patrilocal and patrilineal social formation. The composition of average *Kurumba* family is nuclear-oriented with the husband, wife and unmarried children. The average size of *Kurumba* families is four to five individuals. The common practice is to have an independent household immediately after marriage for the husband and wife.

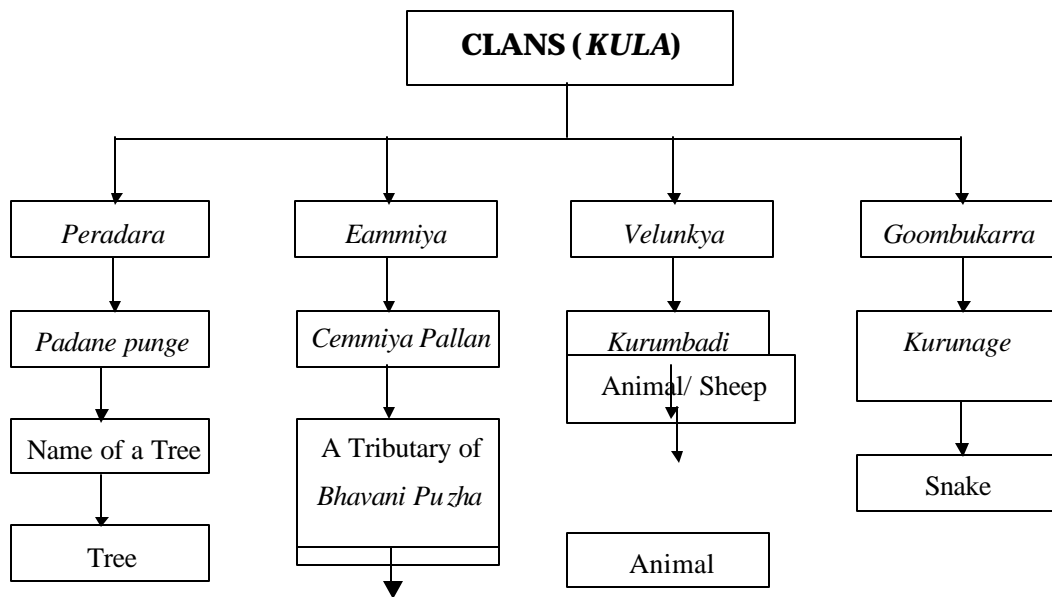
- i. A male member is to be the head of the family.
- ii. His power consists in making decisions with regard to every aspect of family life and social interactions.
- iii. Material productivity is controlled by the male head of the family and women act as subordinates.
- iv. Democracy within the family is male-oriented. Male-authority cannot be questioned.
- v. The aged parents and grandparents live with one of their sons most often on a rotational basis.
- vi. The collective land holding of the family and the process of inheritance is in the male-line. The male-members share the land equally.
- vii. There is always an attempt to strengthen the relation between the two lineages of the father and mother. Marriage with mother's brother's (*maman*) daughter (*nadini*) is preferred in this regard.
- viii. Marriage within the same clan is not permitted.
- ix. The marriage of a widow by the brother of her deceased husband is prevalent (levitates). Marriage between the husband and wife's sister after the death of the wife is also prevalent (sororities).
- x. Divorce resulting from adultery committed by the wife forces the wife or wife's parents to pay back the bride money.
- xi. *Kurumbas* are monogamous. Polygamy is socially acceptable in the case of the most powerful males in the hamlet like *Oorumoopan* (hamlet chief) *Bandari* (hamlet cashier) *Kuruthalai* (person who runs the errands), *Mannukkaran* (agricultural expert) etc.
- xii. Premarital sex is most prevalent especially in the context of productivity pattern based on exogenous exploitative invasion.

#### 4.19. KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

	ENGLISH	KURUMBA VARIANT 1	KURUMBA VARIANT – 2 (HYBRID)
1	Father	<i>Amma</i>	<i>Appe, Appa, Acha</i>
2.	Mother	<i>Agve</i>	<i>Ouwa, Ma, Amme</i>
3.	Wife	<i>Pendu, Agala, Engu</i>	<i>Pendukari, Pennu, Pariya, Manaivi</i>
4.	Husband	<i>Atal</i>	<i>Kanavanu, Parthavu,</i>
5.	Father's father	<i>Acha</i>	<i>Achane</i>
6.	Mother's mother	<i>Ache</i>	<i>Achi, Talle</i>
7.	Mother's brother	<i>Mame</i>	<i>Maman</i>
8.	Wife's brother	<i>Mainthrine</i>	<i>Maithinen</i>
9.	Son	<i>Make</i>	<i>Maken</i>
10	Daughter	<i>Makale</i>	<i>Makalu, Mole</i>
11	Daughter's husband	<i>Marumake</i>	<i>Marumaka</i>
12	Son's wife	<i>Marumakale</i>	
13	Daughter's daughter	<i>Perathi</i>	
14	Daughter's son	<i>Peran</i>	
15	Husband's father	<i>Mame</i>	
16	Husband's mother	<i>Mami</i>	
17	Wife's father	<i>Mame</i>	
18	Wife's mother	<i>Mami</i>	
19	Father's elder brother	<i>Doddappa</i>	
20	Elder brother	<i>Anne</i>	
21	Elder sister	<i>Akki</i>	
22	Younger brother	<i>Tamma, Thampi</i>	
23	Younger sister	<i>Tangi, Tange</i>	
24	Elder brother's wife	<i>Attige</i>	
25	Younger brother's wife	<i>Kondi</i>	

#### 4.20. KINSHIP CLANS

The four clans or *Kulas* of the *Kurumbas* provide very illuminating clues on the intricate network of an indigenous societal-relation-system. The evolution of this *kula* or 'blood-relation' system is not traced out yet. The endogamous units must have developed at different periods of the *Kurumba* history. Each *kulam* bears the name of a tree, river, animal, snake etc. This symbolic correlation between objects in nature also suggests the subtle strategies by which generative systems are evolved for the sake of maintaining stable social balance among differing urges. Consanguinity provides a logical status to the individuals of a social unit that differs from other intra-societal groups. A classification is made below:



**Figure 16. Kurumba Clans**

The *Kurumba* clans *peradara* and *velunkya* can have marriage relations with each other. *Cemmiya* can have marriage relations only with *goombukara*. This consanguinity system still maintains a living force within the *Kurumba* hamlets.

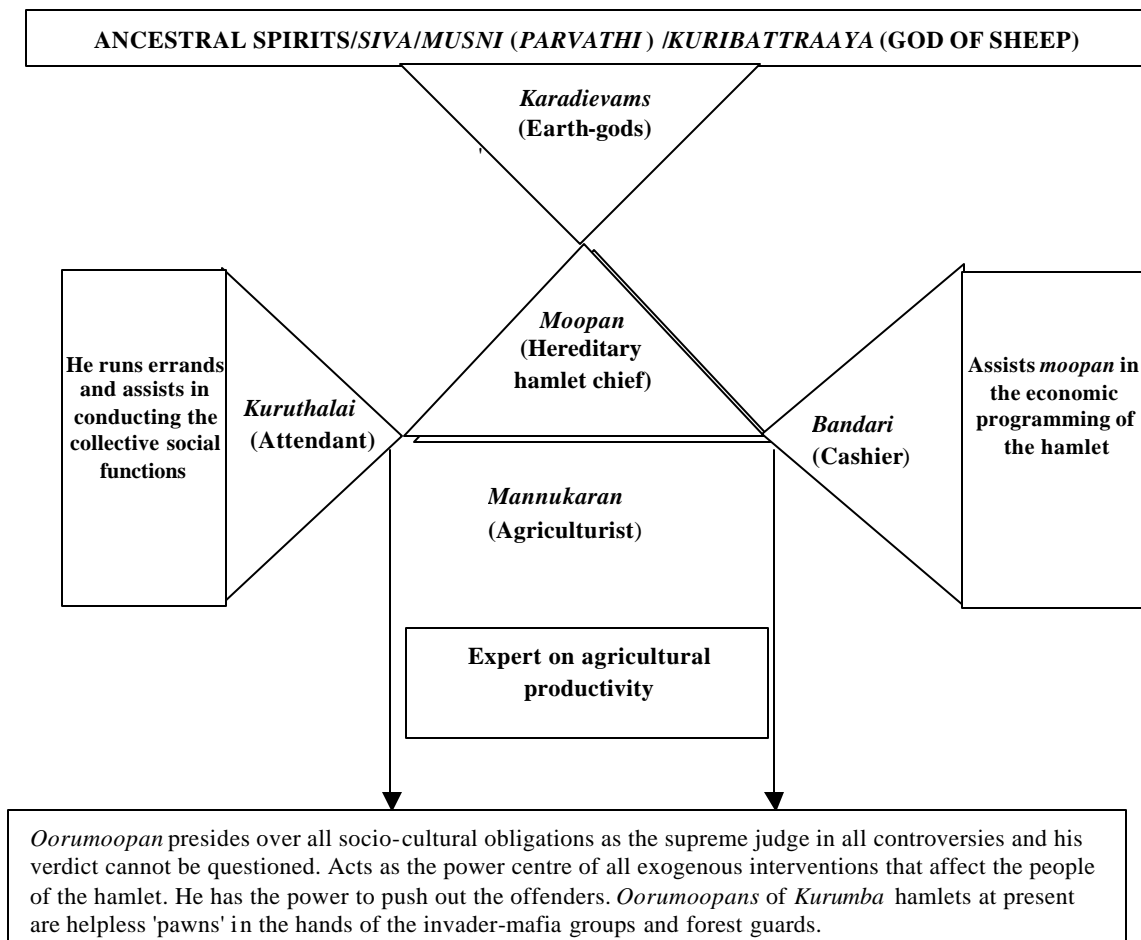
#### 4.21. OBSERVATIONS

- i. The clan system holds within it the structure of totems and taboos which has become very flexible and often in conflict with the pace of alienation.
- ii. The performative sessions in *Kurumba* hamlets generated the unconscious ideograms of the urge to maintain purity of blood within the *Kurumba* collectivity.

- iii. The contradictions related to the mixing of non-*Adivasi* stock with the *Kurumbas* in their productive relations drastically transform the consanguinity-motifs of the *Adivasi Kurumbas*.
- iv. The movement pattern of the psychic energy of the *Kurumbas* gets ideologically conditioned to suit the new systems of exploitation and alienation.
- v. The symbolic significance of the totemic distribution of clans with tree, river, animal and snake as their signs of ethnic purity projects a signalling system specific to the *Kurumbas*. Each clan attempts to derive their productive energy in relation to their own conceptual framework of uncontaminated purity which is very much peculiar to the Dravidian psyche and culture.
- vi. Every *Kurumba* clan has a totemic avoidance (taboo), an animal, bird, tree or river. The clansmen are forbidden to violate the sanctity conferred on them.

#### 4.22. SOCIAL ORGANISATION

The social organisational-ideograms of the *Kurumbas* are explored and analysed according to the ideational patterning of power balances that constitute the productivity factor in the multiple realms of their material expressiveness. The following diagram explicates the intricacies involved:



**Figure 17. Organisational Ideogram**

The hamlet power centre was always the *Oorumoopan*, who acted as the socio-political leader. The three dimensional network supported by the supernatural *Karadeivams* of the *Kurumbas* aims at the peaceful co-existence of the hamlet people based on collective productivity. The observations on the present functionality of this socio-political system with its in-built dynamics of local-level planning reveals the multiple contradictions involved.

#### **4.23. OBSERVATIONS**

- i. The power hierarchy in a *Kurumba* hamlet is enmeshed with its psycho-physical productive energy sources.
- ii. The exogamous clan system of the *Kurumbas* in the context of the societal power structure has lost its organic principle of self-contained and self-sufficient urges within the *Kurumba* community.
- iii. The changing patterns of productive forces and productive relations accelerate the process of alienation from its ancient physical and metaphysical evolution through centuries of progression. They do not feel at home with the past or present and is undergoing the convulsions of being nowhere.
- iv. A regenerative mechanism is also at work in the hamlets due to the inflow of income from their labour in the narcotic fields owned by outsiders.
- v. The *Kurumba* youths have intimate contact with the outsiders and the result is obvious from their change in dressing and physical appearance influenced by the non-*Adivasis*. The organisational power relations undergo tremendous changes as a result of this inter-cultural productive contradictions.
- vi. The field-work exposed the gradual breakdown of the contexts of ethnic authority.
- vii. In spite of the subtle strategies of exploitation, especially of the women folk, by forces alien to the hamlet people, the *Oorumoopan* and other social functionaries adopt a stance of enforced compromise.
- viii. The effect of this tragic compromise that gives sustenance to their day to day life needs in-depth analysis. A tentative appraisal is attempted from a performative perspective in part II of this chapter.

#### **4.24. HAMLET DESIGN**

All the fourteen *Kurumba* hamlets are situated far away within remote areas in the forests and that too at the top or slopes of hills near the *Bhavani puzha* or its tributaries in the north west part of Attapady. The habitats are located on hill tracts with natural precipitous rocky ridges and deep gorges at heights ranging from 2000 to 3000 feet above the mean sea level. Every hamlet has households ranging from 4 to 54 with an average of 19. Within the forest land allotted to each hamlet, the hamlet-people used to engage in slash and burn cultivation. The indigenous huts in multi-linear pattern from the general layout of the hamlet design. The linear pattern most often selects raised edges on the slopes with greater width enough for constructing row of huts. The urge to feel secure prompts such a selection of hamlet habitat.

The typical *Kurumba* hut (*kuure/alai/salai*) is relatively very small with front room (*vettare*), a front *varanda* (*dinne*) and a back room (*ullare*). The huts are built with interwoven bamboo-reeds at times covered with mud as wall with roof thatched with wild leaves tied together. The three types of huts constructed by the *Kurumbas* themselves project their ethno- architectural innocence:

- I. The most indigenous of improvised huts have no walls because of the thatched roof coming down very low, nearly touching the ground. For some walls made of bamboo reeds and mud, the height would go upto 3 feet.
- II. Some huts have side walls of about 5 feet high with front and back covered with wild grass-weavings on bamboo poles.
- III. A much better or the best type of indigenous huts has walls on all sides, and a door made of wooden pieces nailed together in front and back.

In all these huts a portion of the room at the back or in the middle are used as kitchen. This part is always at a lower level than the ground level. The heights of the huts usually range between 8 to 10 feet. The length and breadth of an indigenous hut is about 7 or 8 feet: 7 or 10. Almost every hamlet has one or two papaya trees behind every hut. For the special purpose of the hamlet people to congregate, every *Kurumba* hamlet has a wide courtyard facing each hut in the hamlet. In one or two hamlets (Kadukumanna and Gottairkandy) four or five huts are constructed close to one another. The goats are always kept on both sides in front of the huts tied to the corner poles.

#### **4.25. OBSERVATIONS**

- i. The architectural imagination of the *Kurumbas* exposes their romantic cultural traits. Every hut has the look of temporality in its construction even in the context of enforced settlements in the most interior forests.
- ii. *Kurumbas* generally do not keep their homes clean. The surrounding atmosphere usually is unhygienic.
- iii. The hamlets frequented by the *Vanthavasis* (outsiders) look different (Yedavani, Bhoothayur, Thadikundu and Anavayi). The courtyard is always swept clean.
- iv. The aesthetic imagination involved in the shaping of the walls with inter-weavings of bamboo reeds is specific to the *Kurumbas*. Their expertise in making bamboo-baskets and accessories is creative to the extent of generating different designs of different sizes, in spite of the baskets being sold in markets far away.
- v. The houses constructed by the governmental agencies like the ITDP under various schemes remain as symbolic representations of unfulfilled rights of the most wretched of the Kerala society.

#### **4.26. KURUMBA ECONOMICS OF PRODUCTIVITY**

The forests of abundant resources assumed an ever-significant dimension to the nomadic unconscious of the *Kurumbas*. The entire economic life of the nomadic *Adivasi Kurumbas* before the 1920's (the decade in which the 'primitive tribe' of *Kurumbas* was forced to settle in the remotest interiors of the dense forests of Attappady for reasons discussed in part II) revolved around hunting,

fishing, honey collection, sheep rearing and slash and burn shifting cultivation. This aboriginal economics of self-subsistence gave way to a more complex and enforced model of economic life. Each hamlet was allotted a fixed area of forestland for collective cultivation (66.45 hectares for 268 households in 14 hamlets: an average of 0.25 hectares to each household). The demand imposed on the *Kurumbas* by the British for developing an altogether unfamiliar productive design must have had its deeper psycho-physical impact on them. Dr. Shortt (1873) observes the economic life of the *Kurumbas* living in the dense jungles at the slopes and base of hills:

The various dry grains, chillies, Indian corn/yarns, and some of the commonest vegetables are grown by them in extremely small quantities, but, as a rule, they do not cultivate. Frequently, a piece of jungle is rudely cleared, the soil roughly broken up and such seed sown as they can obtain from the villages in the vicinity. When their cultivation is at some distance, the family remove thither during harvest time, inviting their friends to join, and reaping only so much as is requisite for their immediate wants. The grain so reaped is broken between stones into rough meal, and boiled into porridge or baked into cakes. They never store the produce of their harvest, or preserve any for future occasions, but eat while they can procure it, living in idleness and making merry while the supply lasts. Sometimes the community unites and live on the produce of a single family, moving in succession from one patch of cultivation to any other, and when the whole of the cultivated plots are exhausted there is no other resource left for them but to fall back on the produce of their fruit trees in the neighbourhood, such as the Jack and Plantain, with other wild fruits; or the community scatters, each family taking a different direction towards the jungles, in search of honey, edible roots, and fruits. They are fond of the chase and are expert in waylaying and destroying animals, either by nooses, nets, or crude constructions of stone gains. Thus they frequently live on the flesh of the *Sambhar*, spotted deer, squirrel, wild cats, rats, snakes etc., sometimes they engage themselves labourers and are very expert in felling jungles and forests, cutting wood, squaring timber etc. but don't take kindly to other kinds of manual labour. Frequently, they are so hard pressed from want, that the men take to the jungles, and the women to the villages in the vicinity, where they crave for and receive the refuse rice, rice-water etc; and will sometimes do a little work in cleaning, winnowing or grinding grain, for which they receive wages from the women of the different villages, in the shape of small quantities of cooked food or grain. (**An Account of the Tribes of the Neilgherries**, Madras Government Press, 1868, p.49)

Along with the descriptive account of Dr. Shortt on the economics of *Kurumbas* recorded in 1868, we read the paper on ***Forest Legislation and Tribals*** by Sharad Kulkarni in which he comments on the forest policy formation by the British in 1855 as part of which a memorandum on forest conservation was issued by then, Governor General Dalhousie:

For the first time an attempt was made to regulate the collection of forest produce by the forest dwellers. Thus, the socially regulated practices of the local people were to be restrained by law. (***Forest Legislation and Tribals: Economic and Political Weekly***, Vol XXII No. 50 Dec. 1987, p.2143.)

Kulkarni observes the 'National Forest Policy' of 1952 as well:

NFP, in a way is an extension of the colonial British policy and it was laid down that the claims of the communities living in and around forests should not override national interests. *Ibid*, p.2144.

The *Adivasis*, through legislation was forced to settle in the forest by the British and then the independent government of India, thought mainly of increasing the revenue from forests, treating *Adivasis* as the enemies of forests. Thus, for the first time in the history of Indian socio-economic mobility of the *Adivasis* was curtailed and a new subjugating productive system got imposed on them. This is highly relevant in the context of the new productive forces and relations at work in the Reserve and vested forests where the *Kurumbas* live.

#### 4.27. AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY

The traditional food-gathering productivity of the *Kurumbas* based on forest produce has been challenged by the governmental policies oriented towards enforced agricultural productivity. The slash and burn cultivation of '*ragi*' (*Eleusine covacana*) *Avara* (*doli chos labbab*) and *Chama* (*panicum miliaceum*) is still very familiar to the *Kurumbas*. Their major staple diet was *ragi*. They also used to cultivate vegetables like tomato, *brinjal*, chillies, beans, *keera*. The age-old habit was to cultivate only limited quantities of all these agricultural products. Even before harvest, contractors from outside come to the hamlets to buy the produce. The *Kurumbas* do not depend or trust the '*Kurumba Girijan Service Co-operative Society*' which was formed on 1.1.1976 as part of the 'Tribal Welfare Department's' policy to look after the interests of the *Kurumbas*. The discussion with the *Oorumoopans* and hamlet people revealed the following points:

- I. When the KGSC was started, the officials and the *Kurumbas* were highly enthusiastic. Various schemes to promote agricultural and other allied activities were discussed.
- II. The schemes implemented for the overall development of the *Kurumba* hamlets with particular thrust on agricultural productivity failed due to reasons beyond the control of the *Kurumba* beneficiaries.
- III. The new mode of agricultural patterns advocated by the officials concerned could not take the *Kurumbas* into confidence.
- IV. Instead of developing an agricultural infrastructure with the co-operation of the *Kurumbas*, the policy implementation was attempted at from a purely one-dimensional bureaucratic angle. An illusion was created among the hamlet people that everything will be looked after by the Tribal Welfare Department. Thus, the urge for betterment of productivity was subdued forcing the *Kurumbas* to look for sustenance towards the forests and *Vanthavasi* underworld.
- V. The private contractors paid more for forest produce than the KGCS. The growth centres or markets where the hamlet people could sell or barter their forest produce are 10 to 15 kilometres away from the hamlets.
- VI. The general tendency among the *Kurumba* agriculturists is to sell the major portions of their produce without keeping much for the periods of scarcity.



- VII. During the lean months *Kurumba* women collect tubers, fruits, nuts, roots etc. from the forests for sustenance.
- VIII. Hunting has become a risky affair because of the forest guards and the alien contractors. The economy built on hunting and forest produce has been changed forever.
- IX. The ethno-economic system, thus changes its course towards an inter-cultural economic productivity almost similar to that of master-slave system.
- X. The governmental measures and expensive schemes meant for accelerating the process of *Kurumba* developmental productivity failed miserably. But the alternative economy based on contract-labour developed by the alien illicit narcotic cultivators who employ the *Adivasis* in their vast plantations of *ganja* gave a face lift to most of the *Kurumba* hamlets. Money flow into the hamlet increased at a greater pace as never before, creating drastic societal breakdowns.
- XI. The majority of *Kurumba* men and women have become contract-labourers of the *ganja* mafia and illicit breweries of country liquor which has established itself as the dominant forest economic activity for the last 10 to 15 years.
- XII. The economic culture that changes the whole life system of the hamlet people has its pathological and socio-cultural havoc of formidable dimensions.
- XIII. The multiple dialectics of the productive interface and its manifestation in the aesthetic and cultural dimensions are correlated to get at the root of the crisis of alienation being experienced by the *Kurumba* community.
- Dr. N. Viswanathan Nair of KIRTHADS** observes: It can be stated that all the schemes implemented for *Kurumbas* have done more harm to *Kurumbar* than giving benefits. The schemes ended in failure experiences. In this process, the *Kurumbar* have lost confidence in all categories of officers. The failure of the schemes can be attributed to incompatibility of the schemes with *Kurumbar* culture, bureaucratic apathy, lack of tribal involvement etc. (***A Decade of Kurumbar Development, An Appraisal, Impact Analysis and Future Action***, Kerala Institute for Research Training and Development studies of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Research monograph. 1985. P.36.)
- XIV. The question of imposing a productive model based on mechanical derivatives upon an organic economic dynamics of the aboriginal social formation of the *Kurumbas* needs to be answered from the perspective of ideology and politics involved in the whole concept of *Adivasi* development policies of the ruling class.
- XV. What is central to the total productivity of the *Kurumbas* seems to articulate through their performative practices evolved through the struggle between material life and cultural life. The continuity of the organic struggle had to face the challenges of the mainstream cultures of varying dimensions. These cultural disjunction or ruptures that generated multiple levels of alienation upon the psycho-physical life of the community is of enormous dimensions.
- XVI. It was felt very clear that the powerfully built organic productivity patterns of an ancient social unit demands a longer transition period as the new models of productivity are often imposed without inter-linking it with every aspect of their social life with tremendous elemental urges for change. The hegemonic concept of fixity or homogeneity is employed blatantly by the ruling ideologies of power on the 'primitive' *Kurumba* community. Thus, only an organic productivity model based on local level planning and development in the specific sense of the term should be evolved. This was felt as the most formidable challenge faced by the action-oriented research programme.

#### 4.28. FOOD CULTURE/ HYGIENICS

Food comes first and hygienics comes later in the life-vision of the *Kurumba* community as is the case with all systems of social formation. The food habits of the *Kurumbas* have a built-in relationship with the eco-centric economic, ethno-cultural and meta-physical psychic performances. This intricate relationship may be classified strategically as part of an attempt to unravel the tragic *Kurumba* ideograms of multi-faceted alienation process.

What Dr. P.R.G Mathur observed in 1977 with regard to the *Kurumba* poverty is most tragically obvious even today. Though the flow of money into the *Kurumba* hamlets has increased, the resulting economic status can be explained or interpreted as a case study of inter-cultural economic problematics. The outward transformation in matters related to dress, ornaments and cosmetics makes the reality opaque to the extent of forcing the hamlet people and the development agencies of the Government speak of better living standards of the *Kurumbas* than they had previously.

The hygienic factors are so alarming that *Kurumba* children are the most affected, [41 out of 60 deaths in 1996 due to cholera (named as dysentery death by the authorities) are of children below the age of 12 years]. The death by malnutrition, 'dysentery' and tuberculosis is a common phenomenon every year during the lean months of June, July and August. The huts and surroundings are often littered with waste and dirt where children and dogs are allowed to play by the elders who go out into the narcotic productive fields of alien contractors.

#### 4.29. OBSERVATIONS

- i. The huge amount of funds allotted for developing alternative agricultural projects during the seventies and eighties turned up as absolute failure mainly due to official mismanagement. Dr. Viswanathan Nair observes (1985):

The funds spent on agriculture development were largely on cultivation of tapioca, ginger, coconut, coffee plantation and distribution of agricultural implements. During 1981-82 tapioca cultivation has been started at a cost of about Rs.60,000 in Anavayi hamlet. The entire cultivation was fallen into neglect after the 5<sup>th</sup> month without weeding and proper fencing .... Thus, the cultivation turned into a mockery with government fund and turned up as the worst ever demonstration one can think of. (**A Decade Of *Kurumba* Development; An Appraisal, Impact Analysis And Future Action**, KIRTADS, 1985-P.22).

- ii. The discussion with the *Kurumbas* of various hamlets revealed the following facts:
  - a) The cultivation of unfamiliar cash crops like tapioca, ginger, coffee, coconut etc could not activate the productive urges of the *Kurumbas* who were for centuries depending on hunting and forest produce as means of subsistence. No efforts to educate them on alternative productive practices were undertaken so far. This observation affirms the necessity for an organic methodology to be evolved for locating the cultural

factors involved in productive practices especially of ethno-centric communities like the *Kurumbas*.

- b) Hunting, fishing and forest produce collection are curtailed by the forest guards. The food intake from these sources has stopped and the result is a societal crisis that leads to sheer poverty which gradually forced the *Kurumbas* to become part of a clandestine productive force that ultimately emasculate the remnants of a primordial culture.
- c) The net result seems to be the psycho-physical alienation from all that was essential to the *Kurumbas* to survive in the forests where they were forced to settle. This happens in the midst of the famous Kerala Model of local level planning which aims at empowering the people to become their own masters.
- d) The high infant mortality rate and the increasing cases of sexually transmitted disease along with the other common ailments persisting in the *Kurumba* hamlets indicate the destructive present in which *Adivasi Kurumbas* fall as victims beyond redemption. The modes of their cultural expressivity are filled with the deadly images of this life situation.



#### 4.30. GENDER-DYNAMICS

In the patrilineal and patrilocal framework of the ethno-cultural model of the *Kurumba* society, woman's status is essentially inferior to that of men. Contrary to the usual glorification of the gender symbiosis among the *Adivasi* communities, the factor of power-hierarchies within the social structure inclusive of the gender is significantly prominent. Even within the framework of unfettered spatio-temporal freedom enjoyed by the *Kurumbas* during the stages of hunting and shifting cultivation, the women had to be the custodians of children as men were forced to go into the forests. P.R.G. Mathur observes that "...however, matriarchy or supreme domination of the women is not found in any tribal communities of Kerala". (*Tribal situation in Kerala*, Kerala Historical society, 1977. P.197).

The property inheritance model of the *Kurumbas* reveals the inferior status of women in not having any right on property. In socio-economic or political decision making women have no say at all. Women usually feel at home in being subordinates to men. Gender equality and female dominance is most explicit in the collective dance-performances inter-woven with elemental forces of fertility. Women get possessed very easily and the female trance situations are looked at with extreme respect and sanctity. Unwanted frequent child births drains the health and wild charm of the women even in their youth. The older generation struggles to maintain the psycho-physical characteristics specific to its fading memories in their physical appearance and mobility. But the gender crisis among the new generation gets more complex and exploitative in its representations as a result of the invasion of their hamlets by the agents of narcotic productivity. Narcotic addiction among *Kurumba* women opens out new avenues for elemental exploitation, women get alienated from their self and body, as the process of subjugation becomes more intense. A male child is looked upon as a gift of god *Malleswara*. A female child is not usually given any divine sanctity. Birth of a male child is conceived as highly auspicious for the clan.

#### 4.31. OBSERVATIONS

- i. The memories of uncontrollable fertility embedded in the oral narratives of *Kurumba* performance-ideograms generate a sense of tragic alienation from the dynamic images of the past.
- ii. The material culture of the *Kurumbas* maintains a nuclear structure as far as male-female principle is concerned.
- iii. The male-domination in the social-life of the *Kurumbas* supplemented by the intoxicant culture absorbed from the outside agents and their accomplices often lead to the breakdown of the psycho-physical structure of the *Kurumba* family-system.
- iv. The women becoming addicts of intoxicants and illicit liquor seem to be the tragic enactment of unconscious resistance against the oppressive male-centred fragmentation in their day to day life.

- v. The *Kurumba* community feels totally alienated from their body and psyche both by the mainstream policy makers and the highly intricate systems of new productivity.

#### 4.32. EDUCATION IDEOGRAMS: INDIGENOUS AND EXOGENOUS

The *Kurumba* educational matrix expresses itself in two major domains of their social life- indigenous and exogenous. This categorisation is interactive in the sense that indigenous and exogenous factors intersect each other creating *Adivasi* knowledge generation centres ineffective and unimaginative to the core. Sri. P.C. Sanal Kumar, (Director, Kerala State Scheduled Tribes Development) (July 1998) writes:

“The *Kurumba* literacy rate is below 2%.....The great majority of Scheduled Tribes people have no land of their own. Those who had limited lands with them have lost their lands. The labour commission report says that the real reason for their poverty is land alienation.... The number of unwed mothers among these people are on the rise. There are 200 unwed mothers in Wynad District alone.... (*Janapatham*, Public Relations Department, vol.7 july 1998. P.10)

The *Kurumbas* have a language of their own which is not a mixture of Malayalam, Tamil and Kannada as is simplistically classified by experts on Tribal development studies and policy framers. The language *Kurumbas* speak is not intelligible to those who know Malayalam or Tamil. Their linguistic utterances if analysed in depth would probably throw light into their Proto-Dravidian characteristics. The attempt to develop written characters for the *Adivasis* spoken language is undertaken by Sri. D. Narayanan of *Kanagam Tribal Welfare Club, Dasanur* as part of a struggle to redefine the *Adivasi* identity.

The medium of instruction in Malayalam or Tamil imposed upon the *Kurumbas* by the state Educational policy makers obviously alienate the *Adivasi* children from their own linguistic culture which did condition their verbal expressivity through centuries. The schools meant for *Kurumba* children fall into two categories:

<b>Government Tribal welfare Lower primary Schools</b>			
Amavayi L.P. School		Gottiarkandy L.P School	Paloor L.P. School
Medium of instruction	Malayalam	Tamil	Malayalam

The location of the schools in Gottiarkandy changed due to pressure from the Tamil immigrants and the *Kurumba* enrolment has come down to a minimum of 5% which gives a shocking picture of the educational status of the *Kurumbas*. The literacy rate of the *Kurumba* community is just 1.9% in 1999. (Total population of *Kurumbas* is 1612 and those below the age of 18 years are 798). Out of the 5% of *Kurumba* children nearly 2% study in Tamil medium school at Gottiarkandy and the rest in Malayalam medium. If this trend goes on there will be a divided

community of *Kurumbas* who acquire Malayalam and Tamil linguistic cultures which would create conflicting areas of alienation within the *Kurumba* social system.

#### 4.33. OBSERVATIONS

- i. The ethno-centric cognitive system specific to the *Kurumba* community has been subjugated by the state educational policy of one-dimensional mainstream homogeneity. The changing determinants of the eco-cultural system which goes through a process of fragmentation has not been recognised by the authorities concerned.
- ii. The *Kurumba* children suffering from chronic malnutritional deficiencies find themselves unsuitable to the kind of education imposed on them. They remain illiterate as the procedure of knowledge absorption is totally unscientific. The governmental efforts in the realm of *Adivasi* education has a destructive potential which affects the isolated society's elemental cognitive urges. The observations made by the hamlet people serve as indicators of this phenomenon.
- iii. The *Oorumoopan* of Gottiarkandy, Sri. Maruthan observes that *Kurumbas* do not send their children to the schools meant for their children mainly because of two reasons:
  - a) Even after the completion of four years of primary education the children remain illiterate as before. Those who come as teachers get their transfers to other places mainly because of adaptability problems with the strange environment isolated from all kinds of modern communication systems. The special incentives given to the teacher often remain as false promises.
  - b) There is no teaching methodology so far developed to impart education to the *Adivasi* community and the teachers complain of communication problems with the children and their parents.
- iv. The Kadukumanna hamlet Moopan, Sri. Mari, observes:
  - a) "So far only 3 boys and 2 girls have passed S.S.L.C. and that too not from Attapady but as adopted children by Christian missionaries and other charitable institutions. The 'Tribal Hostels' where our children are supposed to stay and study remain empty except on days when the lumpsum grant is paid once in a while".
  - b) Sri Remesh of the same hamlet who has appeared for the Pre-degree examination from Govt. Victoria College, Palakkad, said: "If we live in these forests as coolies of those outsiders, our youngsters will destroy themselves becoming unredeemable addicts of narcotics. Even 10 year old children smoke *ganja beedies*. It's better we get out of these forests once and for all". "What will happen to your ethnic culture then? He was asked. Ramesh replied: "That talk of ethnic culture is sheer rubbish. Its an invention of those high-cultured people to appropriate all that our people are capable of. Only through education can we *Kurumbas* think of breaking all the fetters on us".
- v. What Mr.Ramesh said opened up the inner logic of the multiple contradictions that a vanishing ethno-society is enmeshed with.
- vi. The ideological implications of the strategies of glorification of 'primitive' ethno-centric societies as representatives of 'pure culture' are dangerous to the core. The result is always charged with machinations of subjugation in essence.

## Part -II

### THE UNREALITY IN PERFORMANCE

#### 4.ii.1. THE INTERIOR LANDSCAPE OF THE *KURUMBAS*

The exterior manifestations of material cultural-narratives discussed so far seem to be incomplete without directly relating them with the inner life of the community. The ideographic configurations of the psychic dimensions and the processual patterning of their productive abstractions are perceived and conceptualised from a micro-perspective of psycho-physical theatricality.

#### 4.ii.2. PROTO-RELIGIOUS IDEOGRAMS

The *Kurumba* narratives of proto-religious expressivity have their multiple matrices in the eco-biological sphere of inter-active communication as is evident from secondary sources. P.T. Sreenivasa Iyengar (1995) observes:

In the *palai* lived the nomad tribes of adventurous warriors; as the soil of the region where they dwelt was infertile and totally unproductive, they lived by preying upon the wealth accumulated by the dwellers of other regions. They sacrificed animals and, at times, men too, to the dreaded local gods or goddesses; deities have been, in comparatively recent times, idealised and turned in to aspects or subordinates of the world-mother, *kali*, or of her husband, *sivan*. Many of their sacrificial stones, called in earlier times *kandali* have become the objects of worship in shrines that have grown around them. They also planted stones in memory of the heroism of their dead heroes exhibited in wars or on other occasions, and worshipped the stones. (*The Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1995, P-22.)

The major characters in the proto-religious-psycho-physical drama of the *Kurumbas*, who were once thought to belong to the *palaithinai*, from where, as a nomadic tribe they moved along the other geographic-cultural settings, have inter-*tinai* overlapping of articulations. The dense forests, hills and rivers as participatory spectators in the psychodrama generated visual dynamics that activated their daily life and imaginative aesthetic culture.

The theme of proto-religiosity becomes mobile on a plane of collective offering of the performing self to the primal energy myths or modules of imaginative fantasies. A diagrammatic representation of this system of social energy circulation exemplifies the intricacies involved. The character lineage as a dialectical interaction process is made evident in the following ideogram.





#### 4.ii.3. IN CELEBRATION OF FERTILITY

The *Kurumba* culture of worship is a complex system of communication that weaves and interweaves the structures of feeling of a community that had gone through innumerable agonies and ecstasies of survival. The elemental human urges find expression in the design of shaping the gods, goddesses, ancestral spirits and the clan deities. This image-shaping spirit is never static in the sense that *Kurumbas* accept and absorb the codified designs of worship they happen to meet with. The *Malleswara* myth with obvious Aryan overtones is an obvious example.

The multi-dimensional worship system of the *Kurumbas* has its most dominant manifestation in the worship of *Malleswara* who is *siva* and *kamadeva* (the god of carnal love) at one and the same time. This conceptual duality, *siva/kamadeva*, seems to be one of the most significant collective representations of fertility celebrations and rituals.

#### 4.ii.4. PERFORMETRIC INDICATORS

The *sivalinga*-cult among the *Kurumbas* in particular, and the *Adivasis* of Attapady in general, acts as a source of elemental male energy. This powerful source of male energy symbolised as erected phallus and worshipped by the *Adivasis* serves as a dominant indicator of the dormant productive urges of a community in crisis.

The phallic dimensions of the myth of *Malleswara* and the *sivaratri*-rituals embedded within it have multiple structures of meaning drawn from the bio-geographical and eco-cultural sources of *Adivasi* ethnicity. The structure of the myth as the most generative of all symbolic signification related to the *Kurumbas* has been inter-subjectively analysed through the participatory production of a play, *Malli Natakam* enacted by the *Adivasis* themselves. The findings derived out of the enactment and the ritualistic models of celebration connected with *sivaratri* festival has generated innumerable ideograms of meta-cultural inter-subjectivity.

#### 4.ii.5. PHALLIC IDEOGRAM

The ancient Sanskrit text *Lingapurānam* (Chapter 1. P.17) observes that *siva* appeared to *Vishnu* and *Brahma* as a 'pillar of fire'. The 'luminous phallus', 'encircled with thousand wreaths of flame'. The phallic worship ideograms of the *Kurumbas* are inseparably bound up with the phallus-emblem of *sivalinga* which acts as the most dynamic gravitational energy centre of almost all socio-cultural impulses of the *Adivasis* of Attapady.

In *Rigveda* (R.V.vii 18. 17), the *sivas* are mentioned as 'one of the tribes opposed to the Indra-worshipping Tritsus'. Considering this observation along with many others that occur in the *vedas*, the phenomenon of the worship of the phallus image of *siva* even in the present day contexts of *Dravidian* and non-*Dravidian* communities force us to assume that this kind of worship was universal in ancient India. ***Common life in the Rgveda and***

***Athavaveda-An Account of the Folklore in the Vedic Period***, Chandra Chakraborty, Punthi Pustak, Culture, 1977. P.12)

The *Sivalinga* in Chemmanur hamlet *koil* is consecrated continuously for seven days during *Sivaratri* festival with milk, honey, ghee, flowers and *om namasivaya* incantations. Every *Adivasi* household makes varieties of offerings to the pitch black granite *Sivalinga*. The clay models of oxen are brought on the day of *Sivaratri* to be offered to the *Sivalinga*. Most of the hamlet-people bring tens and hundreds of tiny clay models of oxen painted in different colours as offering to the *koil*.

#### **4.ii.6. MALE-GENDER MYTH IN ACTION**

It is believed that *siva* and *sakti* (*parvathi*) appeared as a hunter-couple in a *Muduga* hamlet. They were received with divine offerings by the hamlet-people. *sakti* demanded them to worship the couple everyday with everything that they could offer. But *siva* requested *parvathi* not to insist on the demand and asked the people to do divine consecration only once in an year on the day of *sivaratri*. The people made fun of *parvathi's* greed that made her angry and she left the hamlet unaccompanied by *siva*. The *Mudugas* consecrated, it is believed, *siva's* idol at the top of *Malleswara Muti*, the highest peak in Attapady.

#### **4.ii.7. MALLESWARA MUTI**

The undulating hills and protruding peaks that penetrate the sky fills the geo-physical landscape of Attapady which functions as the setting of the socio-drama being enacted by the *Kurumbas* who feel fettered with their scenic design. The *Malleswara Muti* for them, is not just a peak that has a design similar to that of the head of *siva* with the long winding hair on top. The peak communicates to them in multiple narratives of a psycho-drama enriched with elemental fertility/sexuality/ fecundity. The eternal night of fertility as symbolically represented in the theatriality of *sivaratri* informs us of the cultural- psychosis ingrained in the uprooted dialectics of the *Kurumba* desires. The communication network of this grand enactment of elemental desires inherent in a community performs the libidinal surplus in forms powerfully symbolic. The fertility myth functions as phallic worship in which the bio-geographical configurations participate, as if in the cosmic sexual act of *siva* that results in the birth of *subrahmania* or *mayon*, the eternal boy-lover-god.

#### **4.ii.8. INCEST IDEOGRAM**

The incest motif which is central to the myth of *Malleswara* explains the mysterious dilemma of society entombed in the dense forests of elemental desires which get symbolically performed in collective fantasies during the *sivaratri*. The eternal night of the dance-drama attempts to transcend the realms of material and aesthetic culture of the *Kurumbas* and the struggle continues in the context of invading exogenous cultures. The performative ideograms that constitute the *Malli Natakam* orchestrate the incestuous phallic unconscious of the *Adivasi* psyche

fragmented to the core by the developmental interface with the state policies and the immigrant 'narcotic missionaries'. The elemental symbiosis of the cult of *siva* and the cult of *kamadeva* constructs the urges of unconscious emancipation interwoven in the fertility ideograms of the *Kurumba* community.

#### **4.ii.9. RITES OF PASSAGE - PERFORMANCE IDEOGRAMS**

The day to day life of the *Kurumbas* is suffused with inter-subjectivities that are conventionally codified as reciprocal performativity of ethno-obligations, hopes and aspirations. All the rites of passages of the *Kurumbas* --birth, puberty, Marriage, death etc. -- function as the synergy of multiple symbolic-cultural operations that become collective models of resistance against cultural emptiness and stasis. The performative structure of these rites are seen as cultural packages of a society's persistent urges for change in contexts of isolated confinements.

**James, E.O (1957)** observes: From cradle to the grave human existence has seemed to be in a state of flux 'never continuing in one stay', a dying to be born again, exemplified in the decay and degeneration in nature. This has called forth a series of *rites de passage* at critical junctions to obtain a fresh outpouring of life and power. (*Prehistoric Religion*, New York: Oxford University Press 1957, p.143)

The *Kurumba* elders of many hamlets were emphatic when they observed that:

Every serious event or happening in our bio-physical (*udampayiru*) composition is death followed by regeneration. Death comes at every moment like a husband to meet his wife. *Malleswara* gives children to them as well.

#### **4.ii.10. BIRTH-FERTILITY IDEOGRAM**

The ethno-centric belief that every child born in a *Kurumba* family is the divine offspring of the hill god, *Malleswara*, is gradually vanishing from the collective unconscious of the *Kurumbas*. Every birth in the hamlet used to be celebrated collectively with the participation especially of all the members of the clan to which the child belongs. The most significant part of the festivity used to be the feast (*cheeru*) for which every family contributes *ragi*, *chama*, *tuvara* (red gram), honey and hunted animals and birds. The basic similarity of the congregation during the birth of a child with festivities connected with post-hunting, post-harvesting, marriage and death serves as indicators of the *Kurumba* society's productivity model. These ceremonies are always rounded off with a collective feast and dance. The birth ceremony used to be celebrated on the seventh day after the birth of the child when the mother's birth-pollution is over. The naming of the child takes place on the seventh day. As the ceremonies of this kind eat away all the resources of the *Kurumbas* keep for learn months, the collective feast is abandoned these days. The dance-song-combine continues till the break of dawn on the eighth day. The birth of a child is always associated with the concept of continuity. But the overriding concern with material subsistence obliterates all kinds of divinity attributed to childbirth in a family.

#### 4.ii.11. ACCULTURATION IDEOGRAM

The inter-cultural social drama of *Kurumba* reality permits one to look at the genetic transfiguration that activates the present *Kurumba* community from the perspective of fast-evolving process of acculturation. The birth-ceremonies of *Kurumba* hamlets articulate two major conflicts of genetic disorientation arising out of imposed productivity in which they are forced to participate. The face of the unwed mothers and their children scattered in the interior forest-hamlets of the *Kurumbas* portray the structure of a primordial reproductive design that has lost its centre of gravity. The collective celebration of fertility gives way to a sense of false stability to the *Kurumbas* who have surrendered themselves to the new gods of the forests.

#### 4.ii.12. CONSANGUINITY CRISIS IDEOGRAM

The performative exploration of the *Kurumba* hamlets provided powerful audio-visual images of the new generation of mothers and children who are gradually getting alienated from their consanguinity kinship system and micro-cultural sense of belonging. The performing images of these mothers (wed and unwed), their children and the impact of illegal immigrants construct powerful crisis ideograms of a disappearing act being enacted by the *Kurumba* community. (The state and its functionaries earmark enough funds for their funeral rites). The young unwed mother who is just sixteen or seventeen continues singing the *Kurumba* lullaby in the dark forests of lost memories:

*La le la le la le la le*

*La le la le la le la le la ...*

*Sinnadore, Sinnadore, Sinnadore*

(My little chief, my little chief, my little chief)

*kattukkulle tenukkaka ponthare*

(who has gone to the forests for honey)

*Sinnadore, Sinndore, Sinnadore*

*Karati koote kattukkule ponathare*

(who has gone to the forest with the bear)

*Oh-Sinndore, Sinndore, Sinnadore ...*

*La le la le la le la le la ...*

#### 4.ii.13. BIRTH AS TRANSMIGRATION IDEOGRAM

The idea of birth as rebirth or transmigration of the soul of an ancestor was central to the *Kurumba* vision of life and death. It was assumed, the elder *Kurumbas* say, that the spirit of an ancestor (god) usually enters the body of the new born child as the re-incarnation of the clan-totem. 'It is like the home coming of a clan-deity after a long absence'. The Yedavani *Oorumoopan*, kakki said: "The birth of a child then becomes a clan-festivity and the child is named after an ancestor to strengthen the clan structure. But, these days, names also come from outside the forest like immigrants".

#### **4.ii.14 PUBERTY AS FLOWERING OF THE COMMUNITY**

A temporary hut is made of the branches of trees with green leaves and twigs for the girl who attains puberty among the *Kurumbas*. She will stay in the hut for seven days with a young girl who has gone through puberty rites. On the ninth day a purification ceremony is held by pouring a potfull of water from the *Bhavani Puzha* over the head of the girl. The girl is then taken to the river for a perfect bath. The temporary hut is burned down. The young maiden's entry into the hamlet after the bath is construed as rebirth. The usual collective feast accompanied by dance, song and music is held till the next morning. The symbolic new life begins with the feeding of two children by the girl herself. The puberty customs of the *Kurumbas* have undergone tremendous changes due to the mode of change that has uprooted the whole life cycle rituals of the community. What remains as fragmented narratives of its primal passage energy gets manifested through a ritual game known as *kaithattukali* (game of beating palms) and puberty dance-song rituals that take place on the seventh night after the first flowering of the female.

#### **4.ii.15. KAITHATTUKALI**

The flowered female sits in the middle of the hamlet courtyard surrounded by the young girls, women and menfolk. Their musical instruments are ready for a collective orchestration after the *kaithattukali* ritual game. Ornaments made of metal coins, multi-coloured bangles, turmeric paste, comb made of wood, wild jasmin (*mulla*) garlands, honey, *ragi putt* (boiled balls made of *ragi* paste) and a mirror for the maiden to look at herself are gathered in front of her. Water from the *Bhavani Puzha* is stored in pots. The ritual procedure becomes active in a stage by stage manner:

- i. The maiden is asked to stretch her palms.
- ii. The girls around sprinkle water into her palms saying. "This for your head"
- iii. When the maiden attempts to drink the water from her palms all the girls sitting around obstruct her by beating their palms on the palms of the initiate in joyous mood.
- iv. This process repeats like:

"This for your eyes

This for your face

This for your neck  
This for your breasts  
This for your belly"

- v. the process of symbolic cleansing of the whole body of the maiden gets obstructed as a game and the maiden at a particular state gets possessed.
- vi. The elder woman sitting near the maiden presses the forehead of the girl for some seconds to get her released from the possession and then pours the water in the pitcher over the head of the maiden. The girl is purified of all evil spells and charms.
- vii. The *kohal* (pipe) begins the shrill notes of an indigenous symphony supported by *perre* and *davil* (*Adivasi* drum).
- viii. The maiden in a state of semi-possessed drowsiness is looked at with reverence by the hamlet people as one who have gone through the process of a divine transmigration
- ix. The collective act of make-up of the girl with the materials (turmeric-paste, colour, powders made indigenously) meant for decoration and propitiation which were already placed in front of the maiden. Flowers of different colours are tied on her hair.
- x. The whole hamlet partakes in the song-dance-ritual constituted with powerful ideograms of passionate fertility.

#### **4.ii.16. DRAMATICS OF MALE-FEMALE STRUGGLE**

The fusion of female fertility with that of the dominant male-energy principle encapsulated in the myth of *Malleswara* got structural, visually in the dramatic production of *Malli Natakam*. The in-built resistance with in the male-dominant ideogram of the *siva/kama deva* principle acted as the dramatic matrix to signify the process of cross-fertility which exposed the one-dimensional phallic unconscious of the *Kurumba* social formation. The *siva* principle seems to articulate an alien dialect of subjugation of the female fertility specific to the *Kurumbas*. The animistic *Kurumba* culture with all its innate conflicts and rites of passage configurations reflected the lost glory and innocence of a lost social unit.

#### **4.ii.17. MARRIAGE AS PASSAGE TO REPRODUCTIVITY**

The *Kurumbas* have through their evolution become monogamous. The ethno-impulses to get into polygamous relationships are prevalent. Marriage relation still is thought of as a clan-based arrangement. But intermarriages with other *Adivasi* groups and non-*Adivasi* groups happen as the kinship system gets degenerated. The purity of blood-relations have just become a myth that operates beneath the conscious reality.

**Edger Thurston (1907)** writes: Among the jungle *Kurumbas* of the Nilagiris, there is as a rule no marriage rite. A man and a woman will mate together, and live as man and wife. And if it happens that in a family there has been a succession of such wives for one or two generations without the woman deserting her man in favour of another, it becomes an

event, and is celebrated as such. The pair sit together, and pour water over each other from pots. They then put on new cloths, and a feast is partaken of. (*Ethnographic Notes in Southern India Part-I*, Cosmo publications, Delhi, 1995, P.64)

Thurston also notes from A. Rajah Bahadur Mudaliar's manuscript that, "Among the jungle 'Kurumbas of the Nilgiris it is said to be the custom for several brothers to take one wife in common, and they do not object to their women being open to others also". (*Ibid*, p. 114)

The ideograms of *Kurumba* marriage system of the present gathered from a performative perspective speak differing versions. Marriage ceremonies have now become events of intoxicant frenzies generated by the interventions of 'alien cultures' and schizophrenic behaviour of the *Kurumba* elders and youths that have become bonded labourers of the new productive culture of exploitation.

#### **4.ii.18. MARRIAGE AS SOCIAL DRAMA**

The *Kurumba* marriages are like social dramas in which the bride and bridegroom act as characters controlled by certain abstract ethos derived from the past and the present. As the male members grow up as adults they seldom act according to the norms of the age-old clan system. Marriage with the mother's brothers' daughter (*nadin*) was preferred in the past for building up a strong clan-based familial system. The taboo connected with marriage with in the same clan has broken down mainly due to promiscuity, as explained to us by the hamlet elders. In the past children belonged to the husband in case of divorce. Adultery is not frowned upon as in the past. The disintegration of the *Kurumba* social formation transforms every kind of ethno-centred familial network leading to cultural vacuum.

#### **4.ii.19. A MARRIAGE IDEOGRAM**

*Marutha Moopan* of Tadikundu narrated this arranged marriage ideogram for the research group with the help of his associates:

- i Fixing the marriage: Bridegroom's hamlet *Moopan*, *Kuruthale* and his wife; *Bandari* and his wife and the father of the bridegroom visit the bride's hut. (The bridegroom may be the cousin (*maithinan*) or any other suitable young man even from other *Adivasi* societies. (In some cases a non-*Adivasi* from Tamil Nadu or Kerala intermarry)
- ii The bridegroom's father takes with him tobacco, arecanut, betel leaves and an amount of Rs. 2 or 2.50 with him while going to the girl's home.
- iii The girl is brought before them.
- iv *Kuruthalai* asks the girl whether she likes the proposed marriage.



- v If the girl agrees the bridegroom's father offers the tobacco, arecanut, betel leaves and the money to the *Kuruthalai*.
- vi There is a traditional feast in which many participate in the end.
- vii The same pattern is repeated the next day in the bridegroom's house.
- viii The marriage thus arranged (betrothal), comes to an end with another feast.

Marriages take place usually on Monday mornings at the bridegroom's residence.

#### **4.ii.20. CEREMONY**

- i. The ceremonies are conducted in a specially constructed pandal in front of the bridegroom's hut. The bridegroom's mother and sisters and relatives adorn the bride with ornaments and new cloths.
- ii. She is made to sit on a mat on the left side of the bridegroom.
- iii. The most significant act is the mutual garlanding and placing of palms on each others'.
- iv. *kuruthalai* holds the right hand of the bridegroom and *karuthalai's* wife places the right palm of the bride on the right palm of the bridegroom.
- v. After the exchange of garlands the bride and bridegroom sit face to face on a mat and a plantain leaf is placed in front of them.
- vi. Boiled rice and curries are served on the leaf for both.
- vii. The bridegroom attempts to feed the bride first.
- viii. But she avoids his hand and instead tries to feed him first. This is repeated for sometime to the merriment of the guests.
- ix. Then they start eating.
- x. The bridegroom pours water on bride's hand after the eating session.
- xi. While she washes her hands, he throws the pot of water away.
- xii. The bride takes another pot of water and pours the water on his outstretched palms.
- xiii. When he starts washing his hands she throws away the pot.
- xiv. They wash their hands after this amusing game.
- xv. Then comes the collective hamlet-feast.

The custom of paying bride-money is prevalent in the *Kurumba* community. It varies from Rs. 100 to 150. The bridegroom's hamlet *Moopan* holding the money in his hand proclaims to the whole gathering: "We're taking the girl with us, and if the marriage is divorced due to her misbehaviour the bride-money should be repaid to us. He gives the amount to the bride and she offers it to her father. A small portion of the amount is given in public to the *kuruthalai* and *Bhandari*. The night is filled with dance singing and drinking. The married couple could sleep together only on the fourth day of the marriage". The *Moopan* continued: "These days marriages are very expensive

because of the feasts. we are forced to meet the money-lenders who are around. We work for them and repay with interest". (How much is the interest, *Moopan?*, some one asked...)

"We don't know, but for every hundred rupees we are to pay twenty rupees extra. We repay by working in their forestlands. Whenever we ask, they give us money. And there is work. No problem..."

These ideograms are very eloquent on the celebrations of man-woman communication systems embedded in family formation though chained by bonded labour and subtle exploitative mechanisms imported from outside.

#### **4.ii. 21. FUNERAL-PASSAGE-RITUALS**

**Mr.walhouse (1877)** writes of the *Kurumba* death-rites: After every death among them, they bring a long water-worn stone (*deva kottakallu*) and put it into one of the old cromlechs, which are sprinkled over the Nilagiri plateau. Some of the larger of these have been found piled up to the capstone with such pebbles, which must have been the work of generations. Occasionally, too, the tribes mentioned make small cromlechs for burial purposes, and place the water-worn pebbles in them. (*Indian Antiquity*, IV, 1877 quoted in Thurstone's *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India* part I. p. 147)

It was reported to us by the *Oorumoopan* of the *Kurumba* hamlet of Kurukkathikkallu, that, "The *Kurumbas* in earlier times deposit a bone from the pyre in a *Savamane* (death house) made by our forefathers." (*Savamane* is a small cromlech surrounded by upright stones and bears some resemblance to the more ancient cromlechs found on the hills).

#### **4.ii.22. DEATH AS GENERATIVE IDEOGRAM**

The ideographic designs of death ceremonies of the *Kurumba* community, primarily, are derived from the matrix of a regenerative ethno-culture. The passage from life to death is seen as a transfigurative process from a lower plane to a supra-level of 'reality' occupied by the spirits of ancestor-gods of animistic dimensions. The pre-burial and the post-burial rites are symbolic indicators of a collective unconscious embedded with strategies of reality communications. The live collectivity of the community evolves a cultural modelling system through their rituals and dance-song recitals to enter in to the realms of imaginative or unconscious productivity.

It is still a custom among the *Kurumbas* to retrieve the right clavicle of the buried person on the fifth day after the burial. There will be an elaborate post burial collective ceremony (*cheeru*) on the fifth day. Keeping the dead body for three days before burial is accompanied by a dance-ritual known as *nikaluneru koothu* (invitation ritual to receive the ancestor spirits) to make the ancestral gods to receive the dead in to their domain. There will be collective feasts on all the three days.

The belief that the spirits of the dead ancestors live on a hill known as *nikalumalai malikai* (celestial abode on the hill of the dead) still hangs on to *Kurumba* psyche. The prayer-dance expresses their longings in verbal ideograms:

Your spirit we consecrate  
 In the castle on the hills of our dead ancestors  
 You be with them, as our saviour  
 Happy in their midst  
 And do good to our lands and fields  
 And do good to our *oorus* (hamlets)  
 And bless us with your hands divine

Ceremonial meals are served to every one and the ritual dance continues. The funeral songs are innumerable and are obvious that every song is organically programmed for dance-performance. A specimen dance-song can illuminate the multiple layers of the *Kurumba* psyche.

The mourners collect themselves in a circle and go round and round with their arms on each other's shoulders and they dance, sometimes crying, and sometimes breast –beating and sometimes in possessed ecstasy. The breast-beating, dance-song ritual is the most elaborate of all sequences and a fragment of this is given below:

Oh! My husband, oh my beloved hunter god!  
 Have your *teru* reached  
 The abode of our ancestor gods  
 On the hills of pearls and honey-combs ...  
 We beat on our breasts so hard  
 And the milk is flowing out in to the *Bhavani* !...  
 We beat our breasts and cry  
 And is it proper you go without me in your *teru* ...  
 We beat our breasts in joy  
 For you're with our ancestor gods  
 But how could I wander  
 Through the forest, through the banks of *Bhavani*  
 All alone...

The dance-song seems to have no end and its movements and gradual growth is felt as a performative journey which often trespasses in to the lands of mysterious fantasies mixed up with the real and the unreal.

## Part - III

### THE *KURUMBA* REAL / UNREAL NEXUS

#### **4.iii.1. *KURUMBA* WORLD AS A STAGE - IDEOGRAM**

The *Kurumba* world is not, of course, a stage, but 'the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify', in the sense in which Erving Goffman observes in his seminal work, ***The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*** (1959:72). The ideographic representation of the *Kurumba* reality in performance as experienced by the Performance- Research - Group (PRG) in specific contexts of inter-subjectivity is identified for the sake of codifying the interplay of the structures of experience of a 'primitive *Adivasi*' social formation. The structures of experience, as methodologically construed, revolve around three phases; pre-expressive, expressive and post-expressive. This essentially involves the ideographic application and analysis of the socio-theatrical performative life of the *Kurumbas*. The performance of every day life of the *Kurumbas* have a processual structure of distinctive ideographic connotations which may be classified as follows:

- i. A perceptual configurative nexus of pleasure and pain as experienced in the process of labour oriented towards subsistence and sustenance.
- ii. Conceptual transformations of experience absorbed from the multi-structured kinetic images from the past.
- iii. The structure of feelings from the past and present images of the socio- dramatic compositions.
- iv. The meanings generated as events of the past and present intersect in the conscious and unconscious of the performing *Kurumbas* resulting in formulating value-systems.
- v. The totality of experience and its resultant variables of meanings and value-systems get expressed in variety of forms, verbal and non verbal.
- vi. This ensemble of *Kurumba* experience can at best be scrutinized through inter-subjective introspection as attempted by the PRG.

#### **4.iii.2. PRE-EXPRESSIVE SIGNALLING SYSTEMS**

The unrehearsed autobiographic compositions of the *Kurumba* cultural self get articulated most powerfully in their day to day pre-expressivity paradigms of verbal and non- verbal ideograms. The ideological implications of these signalling metaphors act as the primary indicators of a psycho-physical state of being of the most isolated and alienated of communities in Kerala. What is attempted here is the expression of the most inexpressible.

#### **4.iii.3. THE SPATIO-TEMPORAL IDEOGRAMS**

The *Kurumbas* occupy a limited and restricted spatio-temporal reality imposed on them by the Forest Acts of the British (1855) and ***Indian Forest Act*** (1927). The nomadic and semi-

nomadic spatio-temporal unconscious of unlimited mobility of the *Kurumbas* in contrast to their confined present generates innumerable audio-visual models of pre-expressive messages.

#### **4.iii.4. KURUMBA HAMLETS AS SURREALISTIC PAINTINGS**

The *Kurumba* hamlets resemble surrealist paintings with fragmented images of human suffering, inaudible cries of agony and imagined ecstasies. The scattered visuals of intoxicated men whose faces speak volumes of agonised sufferings and women with forlorn looks of tragic longings fill the hamlet canvas that melts away in time and space, serve as common denominators of the pre-expressive *Kurumba* reality. Going beyond the crude empirical matrices and descriptive analytical categories, the pathological outbursts of chronic malnutrition and anguished cries of children 'embellish' the spatio-temporal dynamics as if in the surrealist paintings of Salvadore Dali. The denuded hills and the hill gods of their ancestral past witness the scenes of their dying culture without a murmur. A look at the 'painted canvas' of kadukumanna hamlet surrounded by the deadly slopes of precipitous rocks and gorges would provide the infrastructure for an indepth pre-expressive understanding of the *Kurumba* reality.

#### **4.iii.5. KADUKUMANNA CANVAS**

- i. The hamlet composition resembles an ethno-centric hospital ward with no doctors or nurses or medicines. Like sick infants the patients do not perform but remain as fallen victims in a culture from the heights of isolated innocence.
- ii. Four or five dogs whose bodies are completely filled with scabies lie in the middle of the courtyard with the expression of a great loss on their open eyed faces. At times, they scratch their body violently with their legs.
- iii. Some boys or girls below the age of five or six play with a goat-kid nearby. They look bathed in dust. Some are naked and some have worn out knickers. The goat-kid enjoys the company.
- iv. The former *Moopan* of the hamlet, Sri Maruthan, is seated in front of his hut in a 'toilet-posture', his palms joined as if in prayer. (It was informed later that he had lost control of his senses after the death of his wife, two years ago. sometimes he walks down the slopes to the banks of *Bhavani puzha* in search of his wife, takes a bath for hours and come back to sit again waiting in front of his uncared hut).
- v. Young girls are seated in front of a hut taking lice from each other's hair which seems to be the most time-consuming past-time of the *Kurumba* women in every hamlet.
- vi. A youth of about eighteen years sits before his hut with an expression of emptiness on his face. He had fallen down from an old bridge over the *Bhavani* while bringing a heavy load of rice from the Mukkali ration shop, about 10 kms away from the hamlet. Every part of his body is fractured and the brain injury has made him dumb forever. He is given food from the hamlet families in turn. A faint smile comes up on his face when someone goes towards him. It seems he understands everything but he cannot express what he wants. This most dominant image that has fragmented itself into thousands of silent pieces serves as signalling signatures of the spatio-temporal alienation or psycho-physical obliteration of the *Adivasi Kurumbas*

- vii. The still life representation of reality is made rhythmic by the pounding of *ragi* by a pestle (*lekke*) in a wooden mortar (*rellu*) by two women. This rhythm is specific to the *Kurumba* culture of food processing. Mortars and pestles are scattered here and there as silent symbols of sustenance. Earthen and aluminium pots are seen in front of some huts.
- viii. An elderly woman is seen cutting *keerai* leaves. Some young men in the company of non-*Adivasis* are playing cards near a *pettikkadai* (box like shop) run by a non-*Adivasi*. Colourful bangles and garlands of 'panparag' are hanging in front of the shop.
- ix. Old men and women are seated in closet postures in one corner of the courtyard, some smoking beedies, and their gesticulations with hands and nodding of heads convey a desperate sense of futility.
- x. The present *Oorumoopan*, Sri Mari, sits in front of his hut with some old men drinking black tea mixed with dialogues of anguish as the PRG enters with their cameras, drums, harmonium and *Kohal* (a wind-type musical instrument). They find it difficult to make their heads stand erect. Their heads gravitate towards the earth as the result of smoking the narcotic *ganja*. (In all the *Kurumba* hamlets, the posture of majority of men is with their heads down as if looking at the earth searching for something they have lost. This phenomenon, it is commonly believed, is due to excessive intake of *ganja* smoke which makes it impossible to hold the head stand erect on their shoulders. The non-*adivasis*, call these *Kurumbas*, *boomikannans* (those who always look at earth) just because of this strange body posture of sitting as if for defecation with the head down and eyes fixed to the earth).
- xi. The olfactory images of the hospital-ward like hamlets articulate the psycho-physical landscape of the *Kurumba* reality as organic sensory perceptions of pre-expressive dynamics. The hamlet premises are permeated with the foul smell of open-air defecation usually done by children which doesn't get cleaned properly. What the parents of the children do at times is to cover the defecation with some mud pushed on to it with their legs. The dirt and thrownout rubbish get accumulated in different corners of the hamlet generating strong offensive odour not at all repulsive to the hamlet people.
- xii. The most drastic olfactory image that contaminates the surrealist 'hospital' premises is the pungent smell of the *ganja* smoke being generated from various groupings in the hamlet. Elder women can be seen smoking *ganja* beedies in the open. Even children aged twelve or thirteen smoke the intoxicant. Most of the *Kurumbas* have become addicts of *ganja* which promote a sense of amnesia filled with wild fantasies. They articulate them through wave-like expressions of terrible illuminations on their face and eyes. The dangerous passivity being induced by the narcotic experience gets transformed into violent outbursts of anguish against each other when the narcotic effect gets enhanced by the intake of illicit country 'arrack'. Their breathings smell mortuaries when they speak out.
- xiii. The hamlet is painted in dark-coloured dresses worn especially by the women. Dark gray, green and red seem to be the most dominant colours in a predominantly black and white canvas.
- xiv. The auditory images are constituted by a network of constant coughs reminding one of tuberculosis mixed with incoherent mumbblings.
- xv. The entry of PRG into the hamlet abruptly changes the choreographic pattern already described and the team is greeted with threats and warnings if the camera is operated. Most of the young men become violently vigilant. The sudden change in their pre-expressive lethargy demand further probings into the fragmented *Kurumba* reality in the context of bonded labour in the narcotic fields of culture imported into the *Kurumba* productive system.

- xvi. Pre-expressive labour expended mainly in the narcotic fields is supplemented by a distribution/sale system in which the *Kurumbas* are the carriers of the narcotic finished products to various secret centres of commercial deal. The involvement in the narcotic racket sometimes takes many *Kurumbas* into police custody followed by incarceration for months.
- xvii. The *Kurumba* women are also used as carriers of narcotics in a strange manner. Their dress - traditional, as well as sarees - is stitched with hidden pockets all over in the inside to fill with narcotic to be taken to the secret sale centres.
- xviii. The interior physical landscape of *Kurumba* hamlets thus is filled with the most miserable *Adivasis*. It is a tragic ensemble of the government -sponsored dilapidated huts and the indigenous ones built of bamboo wattle walls and wild grass-thatched roofs. Mostly uncultivated agricultural fields on the slope of hills stay calm with patches of wild bushes. Here and there beside the *Kurumba* huts stand some plaintain and papaya trees. Slash and burn cultivation of *ragi, chama, tuvara* and *keera* etc. has given way to the vast forest cleared fields of *ganja* plantation which lie beyond the accessible limits of the excise squads. It is also reported by some officials (whose names they said should not be revealed) of the government departments of Tribal Welfare that all the narcotic plantations in the north-west of Attapady function as a nexus of clandestine network in which politicians of almost all hues, high-ranking police and forest officials, highly established businessmen and *abkaris* are actively involved. One officer said : "Let them make money but why do they destroy the wretched *Kurumbas*. They live like the old African galley slaves but remain in the same place".

"What about the impact of 'Peoples Planning' being implemented through the Panchayats?".

One from the PRG asked and the officer reacted instantly:

They are not given any idea about 'Peoples Planning'. I have been working here for the last ten years. What we always do is to make new and new projects for *Kurumba* development. Funds do come. But inspite of all planning efforts and projects, the contractors flourish beyond imaginable limits (as if telling a secret, he said) : Political leaders of all parties are not interested in the welfare of these *Adivasis* because they are not potential vote-banks. And there is no one to question. What use doing your kind of 'research work'.

He smiles, but not like a typical bureaucrat.

The poetics of the dying acts of the *Kurumba* pre-expressive drama reverberates with the memories of a nomadic culture that cannot be dissociated from the archetypal patterns of their performative expressivity. The spirit of a splendid regeneration that is autobiographically enmeshed within their aesthetic urges seems to function as the only positive signalling system with immense potential for their empowerment even in the context of bio-cultural alienation and slow extinction of their innate identities.

#### **4.iii.6. PRE-EXPRESSIVE TO EXPRESSIVE**

**The theatrical elements involved in the pre-expressive modes of behaviour of the *Kurumbas* do not presuppose a one dimensional analysis of material-oriented modes of production. What matters is the complex symbiotic network that contribute to the representation of the psycho-physical**

productivity of the *Kurumbas*. The *Kurumba* sensory perceptions generated from their day to day interaction through labour in specific conditions of power-relations urge them to get out of their confined physicality to realms of imaginative productivity. The elemental urge to dramatise themselves and their world of agonies and ecstasies through symbolic acts and rituals of regeneration paves the way for cultural productions of sustenance required for continuities. The consciously patterned performative realms, like rituals, song-dance; theatre and games of children and adults have specific sensorial perceptions that determine the *Kurumba* identity. In their pre-expressive activities, the *Kurumbas* are not at all aware or conscious of their body movements, expressions on their faces or their gesticulatory mannerisms. In ritual, song and dance, theatre performance and even in states of trance, the *Kurumbas* are chronically conscious of their relationship with the external reality that drives them away from their sense of belonging.

#### **4.iii.7. EXPRESSIVE RITUAL IDEOGRAMS**

The cultural productivity of the *Kurumbas* gets represented on an ideological framework of animism which is primarily three dimensional:

- i. They attribute conscious life to nature and every object around them;
- ii. They believe in the existence of spirits separable from bodies;
- iii. They make configurations of gods from the spirit of their ancestors. They also worship gods who came as immigrant settlers in their geo-cultural habitat. *Malleswara* seems to be the most significant example.

#### **4.iii.8. COLLECTIVE ECTASY IN RITUALS**

The dominant ritual patterns of the *Kurumbas* are shaped by the productivity cycles which include the rites of passage as well. The space-time factor pertaining to the rituals therefore is interlaced with seasons of sowing, harvesting, birth, puberty, marriage and death. The collective metaphorical narratives of culture like *sivarathri*, absorbed and assimilated by the *Adivasis* as their own celebration of fertility have their ethnographic significance in the re-shaping of their perceptual-conceptual dialectics:

- i. Almost all the *Kurumba* rituals have a symbiotic relationship between collective unconscious hunger and collective feasting (*Cheeru*).
- ii. Every ritual has three major levels of development; the performance of consecration, collective dance-song propitiation and the collective feast followed by night long dance-rituals.
- iii. Almost all the dominant rituals are male-centred and programmed by the male hamlet-hierarchy. The women are not allowed to consecrate but are considered highly essential for the generation of male-female-collective energy required for the performative practices, both material and cultural.
- iv. The *Kurumbas* worship a female goddess *Benjami thayi* and their ancestor gods



(*karadeivams*) like *Muthan* and *Vanchi Ammal*. The makeshift *koils* are full of dark granite stones with semi pointed edges. They resemble serpent hoods.

- v. The serpent-worship rituals are very popular and the songs and dances praise serpents as gods possessed with the spirits of ancestors.

The rituals of the *Kurumbas* in the present do lack the vitality and intensity which the elder generation experienced (as explained to PRG). The reasons are all centred on the pathological nucleus of poverty and alienation on all planes of their daily life in the hospital-ward like hamlets. The Tamil cinema culture has its deep rooted impact on their psychic-dimensions, in their behaviour, their mannerisms and their worship of heroes like Rajanikanth. But their ancestral-worship-rituals and funeral-rituals have inbuilt ethno-strategies that maintain an unbroken link with their past:

- i. Puberty rituals are performed with in the specific framework of clan relations for the sake of limiting the amount to be spend on such occasions, mainly for the most essential feast. Same is the case with puberty, marriage and funeral rituals.
- ii. The most expensive funeral rituals, therefore, are performed with lengthy intervals of three to five years. The collecting of the right clavicle bone of the buried takes place only at this time. But the collective feast (*kanchicheeru*) is never clan-based but functions on a wider canvas that celebrates the elemental collective unconscious of the Adivasi *Kurumbas*, *Mudugas* and *Irulas* of Attapady. Gende *Moopan* of the Anavayi hamlet explained to the PRG of the recent *Kanchi cheeru* celebrated in Anavayi: "The kanchi cheeru was celebrated after a gap of five years. The collective feast required seven quintals of rice. Every one in the hamlet contributed in cash and kind".

#### **4.iii.9. THE KURUMBA RITUAL CONFIGURATION**

**The centripetal configuration of the *Kurumba* rituals articulate the alphabets of an organic social system that programmed its network of productivity and power structure on specific terms of ideological reference:**

The centripetal energy based productivity interacts with various levels of image-generation which gets fractured at every point. The centrifugal contradiction developing at a fast pace in the *Kurumba* condition seems to destroy the very structures of feelings and emotions of a community. Some rituals survive as monuments of a culture which cannot withstand the onslaught of exogenous exploitative mechanisms.

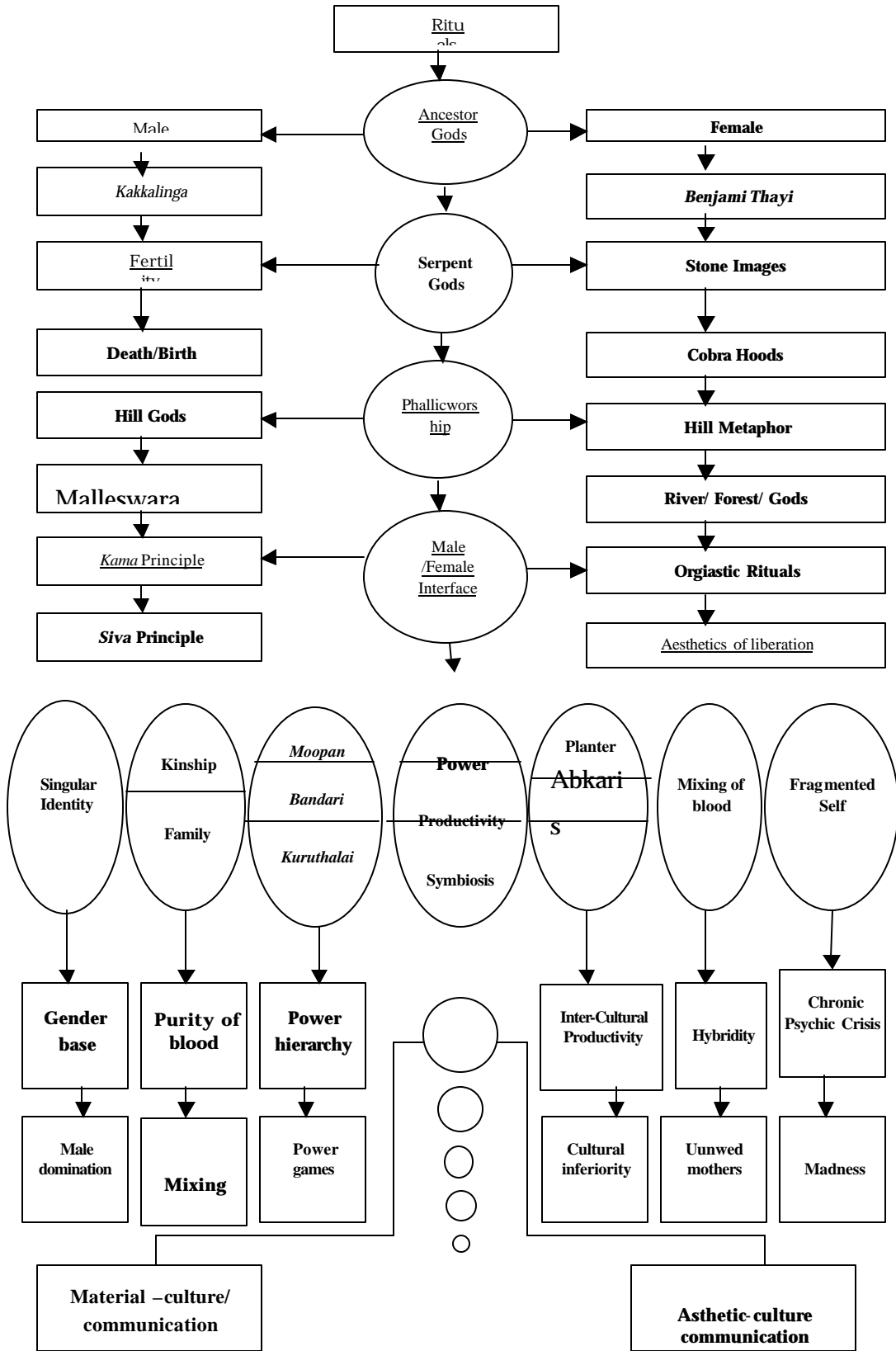


Figure 17. Ritual Indicators

## Chapter Five

### CONCLUSION: THE PERFORMETRICS OF *KURUMBA* MASSACRE

#### 5.1 PERFORMETRICS

The word 'performance' with its Indo-European base or root *per* (to attempt, venture, risk) etymologically means the processual sense of 'bringing to completion' of 'accomplishing'. To perform the *Kurumba* ethnography, then, is the process of creating the intersubjective data matrix of the *Kurumba* experience and its specific action-meanings. The attempt made here as a finale to the performative discourse on the *Kurumba*, is the construction of an organic performetric model of analysis based on the productivity principles of the *Kurumba* social unit. The basic unit or modulus of performance may be termed as 'performeme' which could act as a constant or coefficient that expresses through action-matrices. Performance culture, here becomes the focal point of intersection of all forces at work in a social structure at a particular spatio-temporal condition. From an ideological-praxis perspective, performance culture matrix has the subversive potential to act radically as the mother-matrix of all socio-political matrices that can unleash the human urge for freedom. In this sense, a performetric cultural discourse has an action-oriented correlational impetus embedded at its core. The 'performemes' with in a social frame work function as energy variables of performance-culture praxis. The performative field work done within a span of two years (1998-2000) in the *Adivasi* habitats of the *Kurumbas* in particular did reveal to the researcher and his associates a functional performetric mother-matrix at work in the *Kurumba* culture. The quantitative and qualitative action-variables within the mother-matrix tend to overlap as if to overshadow the boundaries of the empirically 'real' and 'unreal'. A diagramatic representation makes clear the argument.

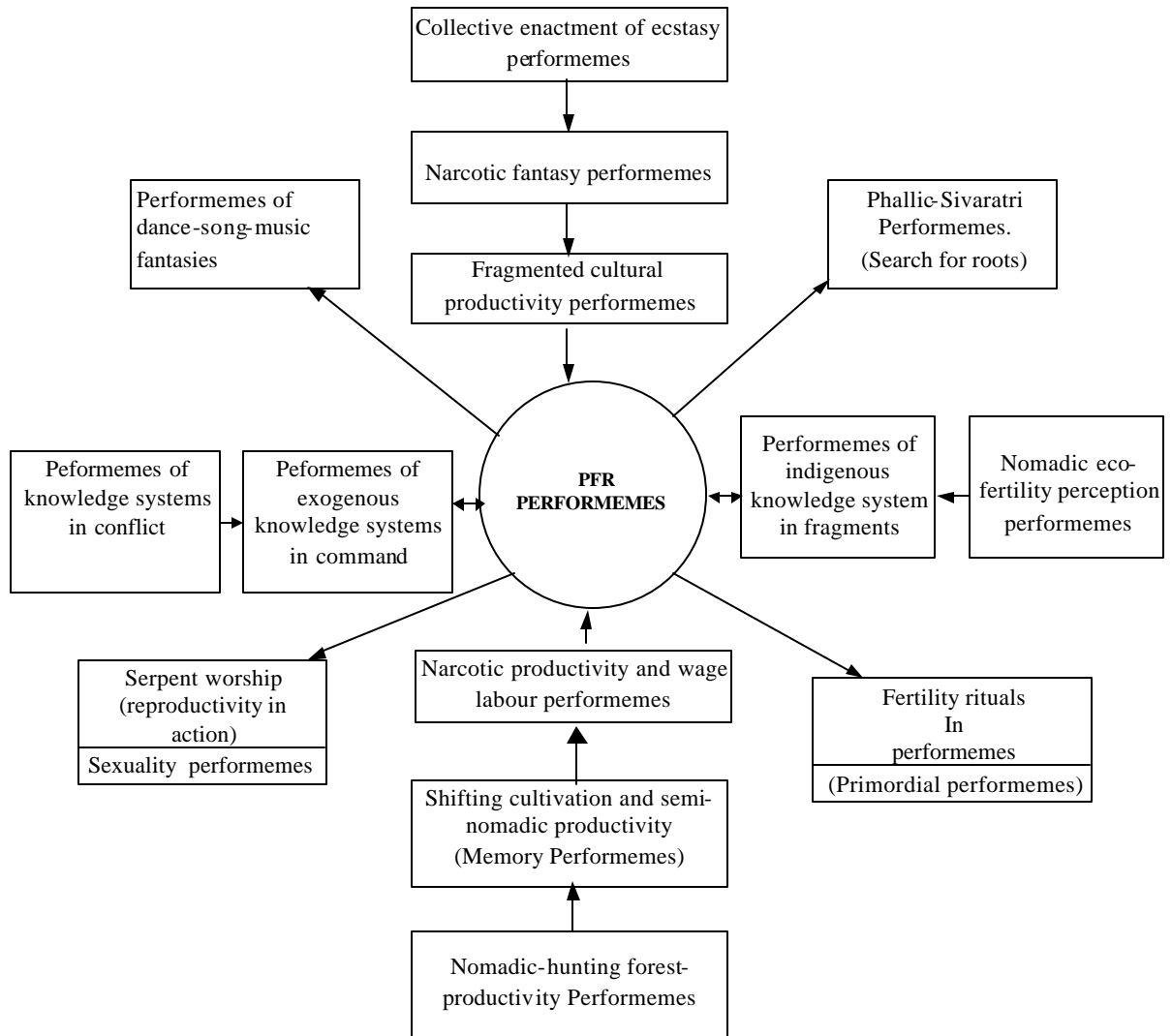
#### 5.2. PERFORMANCE-CULTURE MATRIX

This generative performetric outline composed of specific determinants of action-variables in *Kurumba* performance culture got evolved through the performative experimentation data base explicated in chapter three and four. This experimentation in essence becomes an inter-cultural action for freedom of both the researchers and the researched. Each ideogram experimented through performance-interaction got activated as an ensemble of performemes. The metrical behaviour of these performemes in action became clearly obvious during the inter subjective performance sessions. The most clear evidence of metrical behaviour got manifested in the dance-song-music combine performemes that are co-ordinated in accordance with centrifugal and centripetal energy variables. A multi-disciplinary analytical strategy is indispensable for the evolution of a perfect model of performetric analysis.



Based on this general outline – conceptual framework performatrics a detailed analysis of a most dominant *kurumba* performeme – phallic – fertility – ritual – is undertaken as a specimen case.

### 5.3. PHALLIC FERTILITY-RITUAL (PFR): PERFORMEMEIC CONFIGURATION



**Figure 19. PFR Performemes**

The PFR performances variables were generated and metrically correlated within the structure of a theatrical event, *Malli Natakam*. The psycho-theatrical discourse with the *Adivasi* condition got performatrically improvised by a group of *Adivasi*s. The nucleus of this performatric enactment was the nexus of *Kurumba* productivity in conflict with the innocence of indigenous knowledge systems. The theatrical configuration of the PFR performemes got evolved through the generation of the multiple variable of *Adivasi* productivity.



### 5.5. PERFORMETRIC ANALYSIS: FINDINGS

The performetric analysis of the PFR correlated with the performative patterning of the theatrical event of *Malli Natakam* brought out the following findings.

- i. *Sivalinga* still seems to hold the key to the psycho-physical matrix of the performance culture of *Kurumbas* in particular and the *Adivasis* in general.
- ii. The sex-fertility energy factor gets sublimated in almost all the productive forces and relations in which the *Kurumba* community is enmeshed with.
- iii. *Sivaratri* constitutes for them the most powerful cyclical rejuvenation mechanism that activates the fragmented present of the *Kurumbas*.
- iv. The incest myth of *Malleswara* acts as a powerful warning signal of a community's self-defence system in operation to maintain social equilibrium.
- v. The consecration of the two dominant phallic images (*Sivalinga* icon in the *sanctum sanctorum* of Chemmanur *Siva koil* and the cosmic phallic dimension of the *Malleswara muti*) with trance- migratory rituals project the productivity principle of the *Kurumbas* with its uprooted animistic perceptions.
- vi. The *Kurumba* puberty rituals, though fragmented beyond recognition, theatrically articulated the celebratory levels of the *Adivasi* indigenous knowledge system. The ritual configuration gets manifested as the flowering of a community's fertility network that evolved processually through the productive system of shift-burn forest agriculture. The purely nomadic perceptions of reality also get correlated with the semi-nomadic visions of productive and reproductive culture.
- vii. The *Kurumba* perception of puberty and menstrual blood reminds one of the seminal observation made by George Thomson:

It is important to observe that the magic of human fecundity attaches to the process, not to the result... to the lochical discharge, not to the child itself; and consequently all fluxes of blood, menstrual and lochical, are treated alike as manifestations of the life-giving power inherent in the female sex. In primitive thought menstruation was regarded quite correctly, as the process of the same nature as child birth... (*Studies in Ancient Greek Society*, 1, London 1949. pp.205-209)

Every birth in the *Kurumba* family gets perceived not just as a rebirth of a lost link in the chain of continuity but as the manifestation of a community's flowering. All the performemes of puberty rituals signal towards the process of birth-death-rebirth cycle.

VIII. The agony and ecstasy factors articulated through verbal and non-verbal performemes by the *Kurumbas* during performative interface fall mainly into two categories:

- a) The vital generative impulses from the *Kurumba* past unconsciously clings on to the phallic-fertility systems of nomadic perceptions, while at the same time, getting adapted to the post-nomadic productivity patterns. "Its good; those good old days", one old *Kurumba* woman said. "But those days won't fill our children's belly", She added.
- b) The chronic addiction to narcotic *ganja* and country *arrack* generated new performemes of phallic-fertility fantasies in the *Kurumba* present. Cross-cultural fertility ritual modules are violently active in the *Kurumba* hamlets creating an atmosphere of 'narcotic consent' to any type of violation of the basic rights of the community. The performemes of narcotic consent act as

powerful indicators of the *Kurumba* alienation. The interventions of the forest mafia during the performance sessions are self evident.

- ix. The performetric analysis of the phallic- fertility ritual performemes reveals at best the *Kurumbas'* adaptability to any productive system alien to their indigeneous one. The collapse of the *Kurumba* indigenous systems of knowledge has already taken place due to exogenous interactions. The common place notion that *Adivasis* constitute a rare species to be maintained as social museum pieces has to be challenged at any cost. All kinds of intellectual and humanitarian mystification in this regard has to be re-examined in the light of the fast pace of extermination of the *Kurumba* innocence through lop-sided developmental efforts and oppressive narcotic productive system.

The phallic-fertility performemes act as the most regenerative sources of energy even in the context of oppressive strategies of containment of the *adivasi kurumbas* by exogenous forces. The other socio-cultural performemic configurations of the *kurumba* system were also scrutinised using the performetric analytical outline. And the researchers are not equipped to evolve a comprehensive multi-disciplinary analytical framework. Yet, the performative research in this regard foregrounded the last scenes of the great tragedy of the *kurumbas* performing their own funeral rites.

#### 5.6 PERFORMETRICS OF KURUMBA FUNERAL RITES: LAST ACT SCENE ONE

(A song dance-music fusion performed by 62 unwed-mothers of the 15 hamlets of the *kurumba* is on the move in a circle near a vast *ganja* plantation of almost 10 acres. The time exactly is the *Kurumba* break of dawn, enveloped by thick dewy mist and dangling songs of forest birds. The unwed-mothers dance their ancestral song of fertility, the Bear-song).

##### The Bear-Song

Ee le le karati	[Ee le le, dear bear
Adivasi karatikalum	Adivasi bears, all...
Ee le le karati	Ee le le, dear bear
Manumukiruthuva karati	Leap out of the earth, you bears...
Ee le le karati	Ee le le, dear bear...
Mannainkuyi karatikalo	Oh, bears that leapt out of this earth
Ee le le karati	Ee le le, dear bear...
Chemmanur va karati	To chemmanur, you come bears
Ee le le karati	Ee le le, dear bear...
Adivasi karati lege	Hey, the Adivasi bear comes!
Ee le le karati	Ee le le, dear bear...
Vanthavasi karatikalam	Hey, settler bears also come
Ee le le karati	Ee le le, dear bear...
Patakkiruthu vakarati	For the battle, you come, bears
Ee le le karati	El le le, dear bear...]

(As for the *kurumbas*, bear is a masculine fertility design. It is believed to have received all its elemental energy modules from the sun, says the *kurumba* elders. The bear-song is programmed by the *kurumbas* as the final swan-dance-song-music combine of each and every ritual session especially of their funeral rites.)

All the 1612 *Adivasi kurumbas* have gathered at the funeral ground to perform their own funeral rites once and for all. For them, death is just an occasion for collective celebration of life. They are aware that the dead will transform themselves into their *karadeivams* (ancestor gods).



Hence, they celebrate death like a rebirth in the family. The corpse they planted, the *kurumbas* believe, would leap out like a bear someday. The *Bhavanipuzha* is seen moving lethargically touching softly the site of burial, flanked by lofty mountains and *Malleswara muti*. The unwed-mothers take their children and join the *kurumba* congregation.

Now, the great circular dance-song-music funeral ritual begins all on a sudden. It is the *kurumba* symphony of death in performance. Many are playing the drums *perre* and *davil*. The old performers of *kurumba koothu* are playing *kohals*. All men, women and children join the dance ritual which is chronologically composed of passage rite sequences linked with birth-death-rebirth cycle.

*Somebody's* announcement is heard through innumerable speaker-boxes hanging from the branches of huge trees around. During the announcement, one half of the congregation begins to work on the half finished *Sava mancha teru* (a big conical structure made of green-bamboo-wattle-reeds tied together reaching a height of around 18 feet. It has a flat base at a height of 4 feet on which the dead corpses are to be placed one by one) to be carried away in the most dignified way to the *nikalumalai malikai* (celestial abode of the hill of the dead). The other half engages itself in the preparation of food for the *savu kanchicheeru* (the last grand collective feast). Every *kurumba* has with him/her all the *ragi*, *chamad*, *tuvarai*, and rice left at home to be used for the last rites. Hundreds of flags of different colours with different symbols on them are seen flying above the burial ground like birds of prey.

#### **5.7. SCENE TWO: PROF. M.A. OOMEN SPEAKS:**

A mention must be made about a vulnerable group which did not benefit from the land reform measures. The reference is to the nearly 0.26 million tribal population inhabiting the mountainous regions which has settled down as cultivators, giving up traditional practice of shifting cultivation... With the progress of tribal development (more and better roads, transport facilities, colonisation schemes, land development etc.) there has been a regular influx of non-tribals in these areas. With the progressive monetisation which followed, the need-based subsistence economy of the tribals has been shattered driving them into debt traps. It became easy for the trespassers, traders and money lenders to dispossess the illiterate tribals. (*Essays on Kerala Economy*, Oxford and IBH, Madras, 1993).

#### **5.8. SCENE THREE: CONFERENCE OF BIRDS OF THE SAME FEATHER**

The burial ground suddenly becomes a conference hall. Huge birds in full suit come flying and take their appointed chairs. They come chanting *mantras*....

**Bird one:** *Lokasamastha sukhino Bhavanthu*...(let all the beings on earth be happy...)

**Bird two:** *Inquilab Zindabad*...

**Bird three:** *rama rajyam varename*.. (let the regime of Ram be established)

**Bird four:** *Mahatma Gandhi ki jai*... (Victory to Mahatma Gandhi...)

**Bird five:** *Adivasis* have nothing to loose but their chains... and their forests and lands....

**All birds:** (together) But their chains... and forests... and lands.

**Bird six:** But the kingdom of god is within them...

**Bird seven:** we give peoples' power to the *Adivasis*...

**Bird eight:** we give *ganja* and *arrack* to the *adivasis*.

**Bird nine:** We give our own children to the *Adivasis*...

**Bird ten:** We give enough power to the unwed *adivasi* mothers...

**Bird eleven:** We give them power-looms...

**Bird twelve:** Then we give them education...

**Bird thirteen:** But they say: "we don't want 'this' education"

The birds begin to dance singing the famous Bob Marley song: "we don't want this education". The *savamancha teru* and *kanchi cheeru* food are almost ready. The dance of the birds comes to an abrupt stop when the announcement by a former *Adivasi* activist Sreedharan is heard through the loudspeakers.

#### 5.9. SCENE FOUR: SREEDHARAN SPEAKES:

There has been substantial alienation of land and forests from a set of real forest dwellers to non-tribals. Though legislation to restore the loss back to the *Adivasis* called the Kerala Scheduled Tribes Act (Restriction of Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) was passed in 1975, it has not been implemented. The rules under the Act were framed and notified in the Gazette only on October 20, 1986. This clearly shows the indifference of the governments towards the most vulnerable section of Kerala society which has become a tragic victim of development rather than a beneficiary. As for the *kurumbas* they've nothing to loose, as they've already lost everything most valuable.

The dance of the *kurumbas* begins again all on a sudden but at a faster pace. Now, it is broad day light. The waters of Bhavani glitter with the narcotic-smeared-smile on her fast-flowing face. The song-dance-music, now is based on the *kurumba* youthful days of bravery and love at first sight.

#### 5.10. SCENE FIVE: HEROIC LOVE SONG - DANCE-MUSIC FUSION

The *kurumba* congregation gets invigorated by its fantasies of their past and present. They sing:

The festival is over, the drums are silent  
Do you want to know what she thought then?  
I will tell you her thoughts...  
This maiden wore a leaf garment  
And with the garment dangling on her lap  
She walked along the forest hills...  
There arose in the forests a swelling sound  
Of laughter, of the followers of great hunter *Ori*,  
The triumphant hunter -lord of *kelli*  
Who was killed by *Malaiyama Tirumudikari*  
Saw *kari* enter the great forests of *ori*...  
The festival is over, the drums are silent...

The *savamancha teru* is ready for the last journey. The *kurumbas* dance most vigorously around the *teru*, beating their hands in violent rhythms. The mobility pattern of their body language

has its gravitational axis at the pelvic energy centre of the dancers. The movements are infused with a violent poetics of fertility.

As if from nowhere emerge the postmodern local-level researchers to attend the conference on 'the last days of the great *kurumbas*' sponsored by Indian and foreign funding agencies. The dance comes to a sudden halt. The researchers have with them their lap-top computers, cameras, mercenary *Adivasi* fieldworkers (called of 'Activists' by the agencies) and mineral water bottles. The *kurumbas* go back to their work of giving final touches to the *sava teru*.

### 5.11. SCENE SIX: CONFERENCE OF FUNDED RESEARCHERS

**The Japanese consultant Fujimare Speaks:** Ours is a battle for afforestation at any cost. As a test case our funding amounts to meagre 219 crores. We give you seven years to finish the project. You need watersheds in every development unit, on behalf of the Japanese foundation, I invite you experts to undertake a sightseeing trip to the Aboriginal city of Tokyo! To See for yourself our strategies of afforestation and watershed development. Warm welcome to Japan...

**A funded Researchers speaks:** What use is the Kerala Scheduled Tribes Act of 1975, if the *Adivasis* get back their primordial forests and watersheds! Thanks to Japan and to our dear *Adivasis* as well... Now, the time is ripe for a trip to Tokyo. To Tokyo with love for the most oppressed of our great Kerala Model.

**A funded Folklorist speaks:** The *Adivasi kurumba* culture is part of our grand narrative tradition of Indian folklore. What the government and the funding agencies should do is to convert the Reserve Forests into an *Adivasi* sanctuary, with protective walls around. Mind you, Alan Dundes said: "The folk aboriginal life and culture should not be taken outside its context. The next generation of folklorists would find no aboriginals to do their research on".

**A Director of *Adivasi* Development speaks:** Look! The government has spent Rs. 163,25,218 for the development of the *Adivasis* of Attapady during the period 1990-1997 and that too apart from the 219 crores of Japanese aid through AHADS (Attapady Hills Area Development Society). But, the *Adivasis* are happy with *ganja* and country *arrack*. They're lazy and dirty. They don't send their children to school.

**Another Director speaks:** Their girls get pregnant because all of them are licentious. Even for a piece of tobacco they submit themselves to anything. Look at their kids. They all have the features of the mainstream culture of Kerala and India. As all great modern sociologists of culture observe: "The best possible strategy of development of an off-mainstream community is, as always has been in human history, to cross-fertilise the community through mainstream reproductive relations".

**Another Director speaks:** yes, its true, its true... But these *kurumbas* are the worst of the three. They don't wash themselves. They practice black magic. They're well looked after by the *ganja* and *arrack* landlords. Sometimes they die of cholera. Sometimes their legs get chopped off due to over-intake of narcotics and country *arrack*. The disease is known as *Thrombo Angitis Obliterance*, TAO in short!

**Another funded Researcher speaks:** I think, an action-oriented performetric research would ultimately throw rays of twilight on the alluring charm and beauty of the *kurumba* massacre that has been taking place for decades. There is very little chance of the *kurumbas* coming out of their forest fantasies to enact their last violent performetric rituals in front of our most enlightened corridors of power. Please take care!

**A 'somebody' researcher shouts:** Bull shit!

**Another** : Just imagine! The high-tech potential of cultural tourism and the 'Adivasi sanctuary'. We should have an action-oriented workshop on this subject.

**Another** : Just think of exporting the *Adivasi* culture to lands beyond the seas... Even to the United States of America!

**Another** : Why not?

**Another** : Why not? We're paid to do research, mind you!

The most powerfully humanitarian laughter of multi-national funding agencies is heard aloud through the speaker boxes for almost 15 seconds. Every researcher stands up to salute the invisible gods of laughter. The *Adivasi* and *Vanthavasi* Research-Bufferoons get ready for their last comic interlude of the *kurumbas*. The congregation is now performing the collective ritual of appeasing its elemental hunger.

The collective feast is enveloped by the announcement through the speaker boxes. The *kurumbas* don't listen at all to the speech.

## 5.12. SCENE SEVEN: COMIC INTERLUDE: THE IMPERIAL DESIGN

As *somebody's* long speech is heard, the two buffoons enact the role of CNN reporters with two huge microphones in their hands. They also enact the statements to enhance the intensity of their tragi-comic buffoonery.

**Somebody speaks :**

"In recent years the Department of Defense (DoD) has been confronted with many problems which require Support from the behavioural and social sciences...The Armed Forces (USA) are no longer engaged solely in warfare. Their mission now include pacification, assistance, "the battle of ideas", etc. All of these missions require an understanding of the urban and rural populations with which our military personnel come in contact-in the new "peacefare" activities or in combat. For many countries throughout the world, we need more knowledge about their beliefs, values, and motivations; their political, religious and economic organizations; and the impact of various changes or innovations upon their socio-cultural patterns... The following items are elements that merit consideration as factors in research strategy for military agencies. Priority research undertakings: (1) methods, theories and training in the social and behavioural sciences in foreign countries... (2) programs that train foreign social scientists... (3) social science research to be conducted by independent indigenous scientists... (4) studies based in the U.S that exploit data collected by overseas investigators supported by non-defense agencies. The development of data, resources and analytical methods should be pressed so that data collected for special purposes can be utilized for many additional purposes... (5) collaborate with other programmes in the U.S and abroad that will provide continuing access of Department of Defense personnel to academic and intellectual resources of the "free world", (U.S. Defense Science Board, *Report of the Panel of Defense, Williamstown, Mass, 1967, quoted by Edward W. Said, in Representing the colonized Critical Enquiry 15 (winter 1989 p. 214)*

**Researcher-Bufferoon**: There are armies of scholars at work politically, militarily, ideologically. Am I one such cultural mercenary, tell me *Adivasi* Komali, Tell me... (He laughs self-contemptuously)

The *Kurumba* congregation has now reached a level of trance-like orgiastic feasting which reminds one of the enactment of the most torturous postharvest fertility rituals of the *Kurumbas* (see photograph). Furious outbursts of deep rooted elemental hunger are heard mixed with the violent musical scores of the *Kurumbas*. All outbursts stop when the speech is heard:

**5.13. SCENE EIGHT: DR. NALLA THAMBY THERA SPEAKS:**

I want to show the world how all political parties and non-tribals have joined hands to exploit the poor tribals. If my Memorandum to the President of India fails to have the desired effect I will take the issue to the United Nations....

(Dr. Thera brought pressure on the State Government to implement the **Kerala Scheduled Tribes Act** (1975) by obtaining an order to that effect from the Kerala High Court).

The dance-trance feast ritual reaches heights of collective communion that obliterates all border lines of reality communication.

**5.13. SCENE NINE: THROMBO ANGITIS OBLITERANCE: THE DANCE OF THE LIMBS**

There follows a post-orgiastic state of tragic tranquillity. Along with the slow beating of time on the drums, everyone gradually rise with an amputated limb of one's own leg held tight by both the hands. As the backdrop of this fragmented visual, rise the dancing flames of vast *ganja* plantations on fire. The 1612 *Kurumbas* are now dancing on one leg with the other limb in their slow-moving arms. Drops of blood can be seen oozing from the amputated limbs. The *kohal* with its piercing notes intensify the energy modules of the one-leg dance-trance of the *Kurumbas*. A variant version of the traditional Bear-Song sung by the unwed-mothers in the beginning accompanies the one legged ritual dance.

**The one-legged Bear-Song**

*Le le le le le le*

*Le le le le le le*

*Le le le dear bears...*

Come for this kanchi-cheeru and dance with us...

Come for this last feast to meet the white bears...

Bear, bear-come and dance with us on your one leg

With us on our one leg... on our only leg...

Like the way we dance... like the way we sing

On our one and only leg...

(The funeral bear-song gradually gains momentum along with vibrant rhythmic beats)

The festival is over, the drums are silent

Do you want to know what she thought then?

Do you want to know what he thought then?

Do you want to know what the *Kurumbas* thought then?

I'll tell you... I'll tell you...

All the *Kurumbas* gather round the *Sava mancha teru* which would ultimately take them to the *nikalumalai malikai*. One by one they lie down on the bamboo platform. The last *Kurumba* steps in on the platform and lies down quietly and the music stops. There is no one on the burial ground to

move the *teru* to its final point of destination. But the *teru* moves on... unattended... unlamented... Flags of every political party are seen fluttering like birds of prey above the burial ground. Their number increase. The *Kurumba* in the parrot's body (the only remaining *Kurumba*) sings from the top of a huge tree as if nothing happened.

#### 5.14. SCENE TEN: PARROT'S SONG

The *Kurumba* understood the language of birds...  
 And he asked: "Hey parrot, why are you crying?"  
 And the parrot cried: "My life of my life,  
 My husband died and who will end my grief?"  
 The black *Kurumbas* heart melted with pity...  
 And he wanted to comfort her some how...  
 So he entered himself into the dead body of the parrot...  
 And in an instant her life of life came alive!  
 That's how the black *Kurumba* became a parrot  
 And his wife had waited and waited for his return...  
 And the *Kurumba* wife still waits for her husband's return...  
 And she is lean and hungry waiting for years and years...

The *Kurumba* parrot pierces itself through the forest towards a remote hillock in Dasanur. Innumerable unwed-mothers are seen climbing up the hill with children on their shoulders. They all reach the thatched shed on top the hillock. The shed is filled with little children's faces. The song of the *Kurumba* parrot-teacher is heard above the unintelligible *Adivasi* syllables of little children inside the *Kanagam* shelter.

#### 5.15. SCENE ELEVEN: KANAGAM DREAMS

##### The Parrot's Song

<i>Oti vilayatu papa</i>	[Run, run, my child and play
<i>Nee oyinthirukkalakatu papa</i>	Do not stay lazy, you my child
<i>Kooti vilayatu papa</i>	Play with every one, you dear
<i>Oru kuzhanthaye vayyate papa</i>	Do not stay away all alone, my child
<i>Chinnam chiru kiliye pole</i>	Like a charming tiny swallow
<i>Nee thirinthu parantu va papa</i>	Flying, twirling, you come my child
<i>Vanna paravakalai kandu</i>	Look... look at those colourful birds
<i>Nee manathil makizhchi kollu papa</i>	And be delighted you, my child...
<i>Pathakam cheyyavere kandu</i>	And if you see those who do wrong
<i>Payamkollalaktu papa</i>	Be not a coward, dear child...

The great Subramania Bharati's Song (*Papa Pattu*-song for children) continues. The children sing together, the liberating songs of Attapady forest-hill fantasies.

#### 5.16. THE KURUMBA EPITAPH

Where are the flowers gone?  
 They're grown as children!  
 When will they ever learn?  
 When will they ever be?  
 Where are the children gone?  
 They've grown as young men!  
 When will they ever learn?  
 When will they ever be?  
 Where are the young men gone?

They've grown as heroes!  
 When will they ever learn?  
 When will they ever be?  
 Where are the heroes gone?  
 They've grown as graveyards  
 When will they ever learn?  
 When will they ever be?  
 Where are the grave yards gone?  
 They've grown as *Kurumba* flowers!  
 When will they ever learn?  
 When will they ever be?  
 Where're the *Kurumba* flowers gone?  
 Where're the *Kurumba* flowers gone?

### 5.17. POST-SCRIPT

The *Kurumba* adaptability to any system of productivity explicates the flexible texture of the *Adivasi* community's indigenous systems of knowledge. The act of demystifying the hegemonic theoretical constructs based on the romantic notions of 'purity and sanctity' of *Adivasi* culture, seems to be the most challenging task before this action-oriented research programme. These romantic constructs, though extremely charming in their glorifications, curtail the possibilities of genuine research interventions into the complexity of the cultural network of the subject of study. The state and its apparatuses of culture act as the 'real protectors' of all ancient social formations.

### 5.18. OPERATION THEATRE: IN MEMORY OF THE *KURUMBA*

The Researcher-Buffoon is now in the middle of the *Kurumba* graveyard and is putting on a doctor's coat over his buffoon-costume. The visual suddenly changes to that of an operation theatre in a hospital. The corpse of an old *Adivasi Kurumba* is placed on the operation table. Suddenly all the lights in the theatre burst out and the Researcher-Buffoon-Doctor puts on the white gloves and takes out a huge knife for the *Kurumba* post-mortem. (The theatre is full of *Kurumba* corpses waiting for their turn). The Researcher-Buffoon-Doctor begins the ordeal. He opens the skull of the *Kurumba*. A poem (Courtesy to Bertolt Brecht) on the '*Kurumba* Spring Time' flows out from the white brain of the black *Kurumba*:

-i-

Springtime is a memorial tomb in Attap ady  
 The play of the lovers begins anew  
 That's only when they come together  
 One gentle caress  
 From her hunter-youth's  
 Hand of love  
 Makes the maiden's breast  
 Starting to tingle  
 [Twinkle twinkle little stars  
 How I wonder what you're]  
 Her least glance will make his arrows spring...

-ii-

A new found light  
 Reveals the forests and hill gods  
 To these lovers of foregone ages  
 In spring time.  
 At a great height the *Malleswara* takes his bow  
 And arrows  
 And the flocks of birds are on their move.  
 The air is turning warm with falling honey-dews.  
 The days and nights are  
 Getting long and the fields  
 Play the fertile games of rites and rituals  
 Inflamed with the light of the immense...

-iii-

Boundless is the growth of all trees and all grasses  
 In spring time.  
 Incessantly fruitful  
 Is the land, are the valleys, the forests.  
 And the earth gives birth to the new  
 Heedless of caution.

The Researcher –Buffoon-Doctor takes out the *Kurumba* brain in his glosed hands. All the lights go off. The white pigeon-like brain of the *Kurumba* continues singing of spring time.



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