

Traditional cultural practices, customs and beliefs of Paliya tribes inhabiting in Idukki district of Kerala

Angala Mathew^{1*#}, Anto Mathew^{2#} and Babuji Mathew¹

¹Bishop Abraham Memorial College, Thurithicadu, Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India

²St. Thomas College, Kozhencherry, Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India

[#]Current address: Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute
Palode, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India

*angalamathewjntbgri@gmail.com

Received: 14 April 2018

Accepted: 05 May 2018

Abstract

Paliya are one of the predominant tribal communities with their unique culture, traditional customs and life style. Eventhough they are low in number, they have their own peculiarities. This tribe live in the hilly regions of Peermedu and Udumpanchola Taluks of Idukki district in Kerala and some in regions of Tamil Nadu. The present paper discusses their traditional cultural practices, customs and beliefs that include historical account of the tribal community, cultural practices associated with their life cycle, social control of their community, religious beliefs and practices, traditional art etc. Nowadays most of these customs are not practiced by them.

Keywords: Historical account, Material culture, Social control, Religious beliefs

1. Introduction

Paliya are the Dravidian tribe living in the southern Western Ghats mountain rain forests in India, especially in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. They are traditionally nomadic hunter gatherers, honey hunters and foragers. Yams are their major food source. In the early part of the 20th century the Paliya dressed scantily and lived in rock crevices and caves. Most have now transformed to traders of forest products, food cultivators and beekeepers. Some work intermittently as wage labourers, mostly on plantations. In Kerala, they are distributed in Peerumedu and Udumbanchola Taluks of Idukki district (Fig. 1). The Paliya settled down in Kerala had migrated from Gudalur, Madurai district of Tamil Nadu. The tribe is relatively a small group when compared to other tribal groups inhabiting the Idukki district (Fig. 2). The Paliya speak a

dialect of Tamil. Their culture seemed to be a mixture of Tamil and Malayalam traditions (Angala *et al.*, 2016).

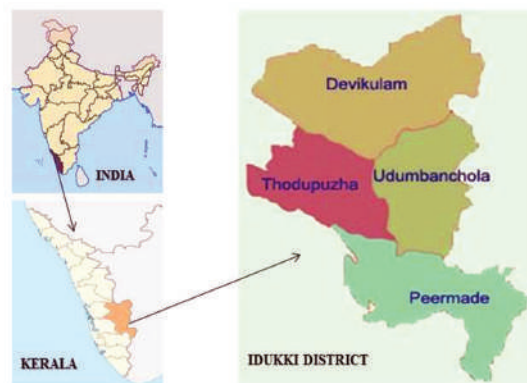


Fig. 1. Location of study area

This tribal group inhabiting in Idukki district is known in different names Palleyan, Palliyan, Palliyar and Paliya. According to Tribes of

Kerala (Luiz, 1962) though all these names have been earlier listed as separate communities in the list of Scheduled Tribes in Kerala, all these names are used for the same tribal community. The present paper discusses their traditional cultural

practices, customs and beliefs that include historical account of the tribal community, cultural practices associated with their life cycle, social control of their community, religious beliefs and practices and traditional art.



Fig. 2a. Interacting with Mr. Aravi, Kani of Kumily settlement. **2b.** Vijayamma, an aged woman from Pachupillakudy explain traditional practices. **2c.** Iswariamma Chinnakkutti an aged woman from Chakkupallam settlement. **2d.** Most aged man in Kumily settlement.

2. Materials and Methods

The present study has been conducted at seven Paliya settlements in Kumily, Vandan medu, Chakkupallam, and Kattappana Gramapanchayaths of Idukki District in Kerala. Basic information about Paliya tribes was obtained from the Tribal Development Officer, Kattappana and Peermedu and the Promoters of the tribal development. The authors collected some information about the Paliya from

available reports and literature. Their settlements in Kumily and Chakkupallam are known as *Paliyakkudi*, meaning Paliya settlement. In Vandanmedu Gramapanchayath, the settlements are ‘Anakkara IMS’, ‘Pachupillakudi’, ‘Kadasikadavu’ and ‘Hemakadavu’. In Kattappana Gramapanchayath, the Paliya tribe inhabit in the ‘Sivalingakudi’. The settlements and the number of families in each are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Name of the tribal settlements with the number of families in seven settlements

Sl. No.	Name of the tribal settlement	No. of families	Religion
1	Kumily Paliyakudy	170	Hindu Paliya
2	Chakkupallam Paliyakudi	111	Hindu Paliya

3	Sivalingakudi	45	Hindu Paliya
4	Pachupillakudi	44	Hindu Paliya
5	Kadasikadavu	16	Christian Paliya
6	IMS Anakkara	72	Christian Paliya
7	Hemakadavu	16	Christian Paliya

The method employed to collect primary data were interviews, observations, genealogies, case histories, group discussions and interviews in structured schedules. The field work was conducted during the year 2012 November - 2017 November.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Historical account of the Paliya

According to Thurston (1909), the Paliya were described as nomadic and food gathering tribe. They subsisted mainly on the roots, leaves, wild fruits and honey. They supplemented their food with the meat of the animals like sambar, wild boar, etc. They used to trap these animals in pit falls carefully covered up with twigs and leaves. They lived in grass huts, sometimes on platforms up trees, in caves under rocks. They hardly covered their body with grass or leaves. Weddings were conducted without ceremonies. This description throws some light on the way of life of the Paliya in the past.

The meaning of the name Paliya could not be collected from the Paliya living now. They do not remember about the origin of their name. But in Luiz account (1962) it is seen that the Paliya claim that their name originated from 'valli', a palichi (Paliya female) who was the wife of God Subramanyam. It is also mentioned that it may be a corrupt form of Pallien connoting a good tracker. According to Gardner (1972), Paliya is a regional expression of Paraiyan, 'the ancient'. In different works the Paliya are spelled differently like Paliya, Palliyan, Palliyar. In the census report the Paliya are enumerated as Palleyan, Palliyan and Palliyar. In different places the people might have spelt it differently. They are also referred to as Paliya or Paliyanmar by other caste people.

No authentic account of the origin of the

Paliya tribe is available. One set of scholars hold that they were the early Dravidians driven to the hills by the Aryan while another set of scholars maintain that they are the descendents of people who took shelter in these hills when the carnatic wars were raging in the southern districts.

The Paliya of Kerala are said to have migrated from Gudalur in Madurai district of Tamil Nadu. According to Iyer (1939), formerly the Paliyas of Vadanmettu lived in Nelliyan, Puliyadi and Tamarakulam near Gudalur. They migrated to the Cardamom hills in Travancore on the advice of a Pandaram chief. Another popular legend is that the chief of the Kallar at Madurai had two wives. As a result of dissension between the two, the children of the junior wife took shelter in the hills for fear of maltreatment and their progeny came to be known as Paliyas. The Paliya living now in Thekkady, Kumily also said that their ancestors had migrated from Gudalur in Madurai district in Tamil Nadu. But they do not remember vividly the reason for migration to this place. They say that they had migrated to the Cardamom hills of Travancore during the reign of a local king to take refuge in these hills and they were called Paliya.

Some information on the Paliya is available in Castes and Tribes of South India by Thurston (1909). A brief account of the life of the Paliya is given in 'Travancore Tribes and Castes' by Iyer (1939). Luiz, 1962 has described the Paliya of Kerala very briefly in his book 'Tribes of Kerala' (1962). Gardner, 2000, has studied in detail the Paliya of Madurai and Ramnad districts (1972, 1993 and 2000). No detailed study has been done on them in Kerala. The present attempt therefore has been made to conduct a study on socio-cultural practices among the Paliya tribes of Kerala.

3.2. Material culture

The Paliya who were leading a nomadic way of life had very simple and a few material possessions in the past. They used to shift from one place to another in search of edible tubers and fruits. Temporary huts were constructed for that reason. Those were made of bamboo, reeds and a kind of grass called '*pothapullu*' (*Pennisetum polystachion* (L.) Schult.). Their implements included only iron bill look and digging stick. Now the material possessions of the Paliya are not that meagre compared to that of the past. Changes have taken place on account of the impact of cash economy as well as for the continuous contact with the other advanced communities. They are increasingly using the material items of the other advanced communities. The material possessions of the Paliya are not uniform in all their settlements. Those who are economically well off have good number of personal belongings.

The ground plan of the hut was rectangular in shape and these vary in sizes. Plinth was not raised. The roof was thatched with reed leaves and *Pothapullu*. The whole structure of the huts rests on wooden posts. Walls are made of grass, bamboo wattle and reed leaves. Some of the huts were lacking doors. The huts having door were also made of splitted bamboo, reed leaves and *pothapullu*. The doors were fastened to the walls by means of string.

No partition wall was made when the hut was occupied by a single household. It is mainly a single roomed house. The space in the hut was used for both cooking and sleeping purposes. Hearth was made in one end of the hut by keeping three stones in triangular position. In some of the huts *paranu* (a platform like structure made of bamboo or reeds) was made for keeping things to be dried. The utensils were kept by the side of the hearth. The clothes and other things were hung from the wooden pegs or bamboo rods of the walls. During winter and rainy season they sleep around the fire. So fire wood was burnt in the middle of the hut which was called *kanapu*. There was only one entrance in the hut. In some

of the huts more than two households live. In such cases partition walls were made. Bamboo wattle or reed leaves are used for making partition walls.

The material used for the huts were wood, bamboo, reeds and *pothapullu* which are available in the forest. Both men and women participate in making the hut. Generally women help in bringing the necessary articles such as wooden post, bamboo pole reeds, grass, etc., from the forest. Fixing the wooden posts into the ground, thatching the roof, etc., were done by men. While thatching the roof the women assist the men in providing the necessary articles on top of the bamboo structure. Sometimes the Paliya employ their fellow men for making the hut and they are paid for their service.

3.3. Life cycle

Birth, maturity, marriage, reproduction and death are the five basic and universal events a human being experiences in the whole of his or her life span. Here, the episode starts from child birth and passes to various stages which sanction an individual certain status in the community and which prescribe certain role to perform. The role as an individual first changes into multiple roles when enters it into a family set up and then to a group.

3.3.1. Pregnancy and child birth

There is no ceremony associated with the pregnancy of a woman. The Paliya make separate hut called *vannapura* for delivery of women. Mother and the other elderly woman in the settlement act as midwives. Soon after the birth of the child, the mother and the baby are given hot water shower. The mother is given hot rice mixed with *pulithanni* which is prepared out of tamarind water, garlic, pepper and cumin seeds. The mother and the baby leave the hut and enter the main hut on the seventh day.

3.3.2 Thotti sastram

Thotti sastram is performed on the eighth day of the birth of the child. On that day the baby is put in the *thotti* (cradle) for the first time. *Thotti* is made of cloth and rope. New cloth is bought

for this purpose. The relatives are invited during this occasion and a feast is given to them. It was the general practice in the past that the men did not accept the food cooked by the women on the *thotti sastram* day. On that day the men cooked food for themselves. Naming ceremony is not celebrated among the Paliya. Name is given when the child is one or two months old and sometimes after a year.

3.3.3. Mudiyeduppu

Cutting the hair of the child for the first time is known as *mudiyeduppu*. Generally it is done when the child completes one year. The presence of *mama* (mother's brother) is required on this occasion. The hair of the baby has to be cut first by the *mama*. The maternal uncle is given *dakshina* and those who can afford to give *veshti* (dhoti) they give *veshti* too. The *mama* and *mami* take food from the child's house on that day. Those who can afford to give feast to the relations do so on such occasions.

3.3.4. Puberty ceremony

The Paliya celebrate the attainment of puberty of their girls. The Paliya term for puberty ceremony is *chadangu*. When a girl attains puberty, she is secluded in a separate hut called *vannappura*. The information is sent to the relatives, *Mami* (mother's brother's wife) comes to see her with neck chains of cheap metals and glass bangles on the same day. During this period she should not see the face of any male members. Male members are not allowed to go near the *vannappura*. Whenever she comes out of the *vannappura* she should cover her face by means of a cloth. Food for the girl is provided in the *vannappura*. Food is cooked by her mother or other female members. During night female members like *madini* (mother's brother's daughter or father's sister's daughter) or *akka* (elder sister) is allowed to sleep with her. *Vannappura* is destroyed on the day of the purificatory bath. Generally purificatory bath is given on the sixteenth day. Those who cannot afford to meet the expenses for the ceremony on the sixteenth day postpone it for one month or more. On the day of *chadangu* the girl is taken

for bath to the nearby stream by her mother and other relatives like *mami*, *madini* etc. Seven *paathies* (channels) are made on the bank of the stream. She goes around in each *paathi* and dips into the stream. After the dip, *madini* gives her medicated water mixed with some kind of leaf to drink. She takes seven dips into the stream. After the seventh dip, same water is sprinkled on her by *madini* in order to purify her from any pollution. Then she is dressed up with new clothes. In the past, *mama* used to bring new clothes for the girl. At present, father buys new clothes for the girl. The girl returns to the hut carrying a *kudam* (pot of brass or aluminium) filled with water on her head. She prepares *ponkal* (rice) in that pot which is given to everybody who assemble there at that time. When the rice is boiled, it is believed that it should spill uniformly around the pot. If not, it is regarded that she has confronted with some male members during this period. The ceremony follows with a feast. It is generally arranged in the evening so that all the members in the settlement will be present. In the past, they used to sing and dance on such occasions. Nowadays, they are forgetting their traditional songs and dances. A plate containing betel leaves and areca nut is kept in front of the girl. Relatives who come for the ceremony put cash/coins in that plate. The menu of the feast includes rice and vegetable curries. There is no ceremony associated with the maturity of a boy.

3.3.5. Marriage

Age for marriage for a Paliya girl is eighteen years and that of a Paliya boy is twenty two years. The Paliya express that a Paliya should not marry one's blood relatives. On a query as to whom they should marry and whom they should not it is said that a Paliya marries according to the *mura*, *i.e.*, they can marry their cross cousins and the cross cousins are their potential mates. Marriages among cross cousins are approved. Parallel cousins are treated in the same level as one's own brothers or sisters.

At present two types of marriages are found among them. They are called *Chernmathu* and *Kalyanam*.

Chernathu: In the case of *chernnathu* elaborate rites are not observed. In this system, a boy and a girl fall in love with each other and they start living together after informing their parents. There are number of cases of this type of marriage. The women who have undergone this type of marriages do not have *tali* (gold piece having cup shape with a yellow thread hung from neck). They tie only a thread without *tali*.

Kalyanam: The negotiated marriage is known as *kalyanam*. The negotiation is carried out between the parents of the bride groom and the bride. The initiation has to come first from bride groom's side. The boy and the girl are given a chance to see each other. If the boy and the girl like each other, then the day for the marriage is fixed by the parents of the bridegroom and the bride. The date of marriage is intimated to the relatives either through orally or through *mangala patrika* (invitation cards). In the past marriages were performed mostly in bride groom's residence. At present it is performed in bride's residence too. There is no rule regarding the selection of venue for the marriage. It depends upon the economic position of the bridegroom's and bride's party. No dowry is given at the time of marriage. These days, those who are economically well off give their girl some gold ornaments, clothes and utensils. In some cases, the bride receives some ornaments from the bridegroom if the bridegroom belongs to economically rich family.

A *pandal* is erected in the courtyard for the marriage rites. It is decorated with flowers and plantain trees. A *thirikallu* (grinding mills) is placed in the middle of the *pandal*. If the wedding is performed in bridegroom's residence the bride's party goes there on the wedding day. The bridegroom's party buys dresses for the bride which consists of *chela* (silk sari), *chatta* (blouse). *Tali* is also bought by the bridegroom. The bride's party buys dresses for the bridegroom which consists of *veshti* (dhoti), shirt and *melmundu*. A group of women and men help the bride and bridegroom to wear their wedding dresses respectively. The bride is taken to the *pandal* by *madini* and she is asked to stand on the

upper half of the *thirikallu* and the bridegroom is asked to stand on the lower half of the stone. The feet of the bridegroom are washed with *haldi* water (water mixed with turmeric powder) by his *madini*. First the bride and bridegroom exchange flower garlands for three times. Then *tali* is tied by the bridegroom round the neck of the bride. Next the bride and the bridegroom are led to the hut and they are made to sit on a mat. Rice balls are given to them. The bride and the bridegroom exchange their rice balls thrice. The wedding is followed by a feast. The expenses of feast are shared by both parties.

3.3.6. Death ceremony

The term for burial ceremony is *ilavu*. When death occurs the information is sent to relatives. The relatives residing in other settlements will attend *ilavu*. The Paliya bury the dead. The burial ground of the Paliya is away from the respective households. They call burial ground as *Savakkotai*.

When a person dies, the body is placed on a mat and is anointed with *bhasmam* (ash of cow dung). It is covered with a white cloth. Incense sticks are burnt. A coin is kept in the centre of the forehead of the dead body which is given to the person who dug it for putting the dead body when all the relatives arrive, the body is taken to the burial ground. Bath is given to the dead body. Seven pots of water is required for bath. The water is carried by seven female members. If the deceased is a male then the bath is given by male members. If the deceased is a female then the bath is given by female members by applying oil and soap on the body. After the bath is over, the body is anointed with *bhasmam* and the body is covered with *kodi* (new cloth). It is customary that the relatives should bring *kodi* to put over the body. All the relatives put *kodi* over the body and the body is kept in the pit and the pit is filled with soil. The elder son carries a pot filled with water on his head and moves three times round the pit and on the third round the pot is dropped the ground towards the direction of feet of the dead body. Some betel leaves, betel nut or *beedi* and the implements like *vaakkathi*, stick etc., are

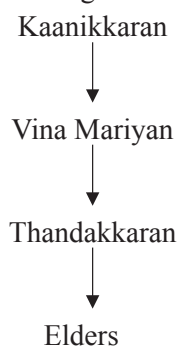
buried along with the dead body. It is their belief that if these are not buried along with the dead body the deceased will come for their belongings and do harm them. To avoid this, personal belongings of the dead are buried along with the dead body.

Food is not to be cooked in the house where the death occurs. *Kanji* is prepared in the relative's house and supplied to the members of the family. Food is cooked in the house on the second day after the burial ceremony.

Kanji is offered to the dead for three days. It is kept in a small vessel in the centre of the hut. Clothes which belonged to the deceased are also kept by the side of *Kanji*. They believe that the dead person comes and eats *Kanji*. They repeat this for three days. On the third day the elder son of the deceased goes to the burial ground with milk and cow dung. He smears cow dung over the grave and milk is also sprinkled over it, which is called "*moonnam kuzhimezlnikal*". The ceremony ends with this.

3.4. Social control

The Paliya had political institution consisting of *Kaanikkaran* as the head, *Vina Mariyan* and *Thandakkaran* as assistants. *Kaanikkaran*, the headman of the village is also known as *Veetukani*. The *Veetukani* is in charge of the regulations of social affairs. Law and order is maintained among the Paliya through the following offices.



Generally the village, headmanship is hereditary. The Paliya have chosen the headman '*Thakappanvazhi*' meaning patrilineal. The eldest son inherits the right of *Kaanikkaran*. In the absence of a son the right is passed on to the brother or brother's son. As the village head,

the *Kaanikkaran* commanded respect from all the members of his group. His presence and opinion is highly valued in all the social and ritual matters of the village. The disputes and quarrels in the village were brought to the notice of the *Kaanikkaran* who settled them with the assistance of *Vina Mariyan* and *Thandakkaran*. *Kaanikkarathy* the wife of *Kaanikkaran* was also looked upon with respect.

The positions of *Vina Mariyan* and *Thandakkaran* were also hereditary as *Kaanikkaran*. The *Vina Mariyan* was responsible to find the offenders and bring them to the *Kaanikkaran* for enquiry and settlement of the case. The *Thandakkaran* was empowered with the duties of punishing the accused as per the verbal judgement of the *Kaanikkaran*. He also took care of organising labour for cultivating the land and for plantation work. Adultery, marriage with outsiders, marriage within blood relations and extra marital sex relationships were viewed as high offences for which severe punishments were imposed. The punishments are of two major types. Type 1: The offender was beaten up after he was tied up to a *mullumaram* or *murikkumaram* (a kind of tree with thorns all over the trunk). Type 2: The offender was made to stand in hot sun bending his body and carrying a heavy grain grinding stone on his back.

3.5. Religious beliefs and practices

Majority of the Paliya owe their allegiance to Hinduism. About 22% of the Paliya have been converted to Christianity. The Hindu Paliya refers to the converted Paliya as *vedathil cherunnavar*. The Paliya believe in the worship of *Vanadevatha*, *Maariamma*, *Karappuswamy* and *Kaaliyamma*.

3.5.1. Vanadevata

The older Paliya who inhabited in the thick forest and depended mostly on forest produce for their subsistence worshipped the forest goddess, *Vanadevata*. They sought protection from wild animals and prayed for more yield from the forest like honey, fruits and tubers. The Paliya worship the forest goddess when they go for honey collection. They offer betel leaves,

coconut, plantain, sandal sticks. Honey is offered to *Vanadevata* immediately after its collection. Fresh honey is squeezed from the beehives into seven separate leaves of arrow root. It is offered to seven goddesses of the forest. The *vanadevata* is also worshipped when they cultivate their land and also after the harvest. *Sarkarapongal* or *paalpongal* is made and offered to *Vanadevata*, *sarkarapongal* is prepared with raw rice and jaggery and *paalpongal* is prepared with milk, raw rice and sugar. They believe that the *Vanadevata* will protect their standing crops from the wild animals. With the change in their ecology and with the starting of new economic activities there have been changes in their traditional beliefs and practices. The importance associated with the worship of *vanadevata* is diminishing.

3.5.2. Maariamamma

Maariamamma is the most popular deity among the Paliya, regarded as the goddess who is responsible for chicken pox and small pox. Every year in the month of May most of the Paliya visit the *Maariamamma* temple at Veerapandi in Cumbam taluk in Theni district in Tamil Nadu. A festival called *veerapandi thiruvizha* is celebrated in the month of May. People of different communities from different places visit the temple during this period. With regard to the origin of the *Maariamamma* temple the Paliya said that the temple was founded by their great grandfather.

Vellayad and *Veeramma* narrated the story as follows; Once their great father went to Veerapandi to buy betel leaves and areca nuts. He went through the thick forest. On the way he met an old woman sitting under a tree. The old woman asked him where he was going and what for he was going? He told her that he was going to buy some betel leaves and areca nuts. Having told the same he started his journey. The woman stopped him asking how much betel leaves and areca nuts he required. She told him she would give him the same. So she asked him to stop the journey. But the man was wondering how she could give him the things he wanted. But to his surprise a plate with full of betel leaves and areca

nuts appeared before him within no time. The man collected the things from the plate and he took rest for some time under a tree. While he was taking rest the woman approached him saying that something was crawling on her head asked him to see what it was. The man complied with her request and looked on her head. At the very first sight the man felt astonished seeing so many eyes on her head. So he could not look further. The woman enquired the reason for it. He told her about the thing which he saw on her head. The woman told him that she is *Maariamamma* and they are seven sisters and they did not have any abode to sit in and she asked him to build a temple for them. Hearing this, the man said, "I am penniless, how can I build a temple for you? Then the woman advised him to beg money from the people and she would be with him for his support. The man went for begging. Wherever he went he got money without any difficulty. By begging from house to house he earned a lot of money and spent the money in constructing a temple for *Maariamamma*. Thus the Paliya believe that the *Maariamamma* temple was constructed by their ancestors. The Paliya visit the *Maariamamma* temple at Veerapandi in the month of *medarn* (April-May) to attend the *Veerapandi tiruvila*. Whenever they are in trouble with the illness like measles, chicken pox, small pox, etc., they pray to *Maariamamma* for the early recovery from the illness and make now to offer something to *Maariamamma*. During the time of festival they visit the temple to fulfil their vows.

Another story narrated by Aruvi from Kumily settlement related to *Marriamma* is; Long ago, the Paliya settlement had *Vasoory* (small pox) outbreak. The disease spread widely day by day. In this situation a mother sent her son to another village to escape from this disease. The son walked through the forest. While he was taking rest a woman approached him and asked the reason for his journey. He explained his situation. After that the woman gave a pot full of water to him and advised to sprinkle the water in his village to recover from *Vasoory*. With her advice the boy started his travel to his own village and after some time, the same woman

came in front of him and said that something was crawling on her head and asked him to see what it was. The boy looked on her head. At the very first sight the boy felt astonished seeing so many eyes on her head. The woman told him that she is *Maariamamma*. The boy went back to his village and sprinkles the water all over the village to get relief from the disease. In meaning of this, the Paliya every year during April- May goes to the forest and worship *Maariamamma* as gratitude. They come back from the fest with seven pots of water and sprinkle it throughout their settlement.

3.5.3. Karappuswamy

Karappuswamy is the tutelary God of Paliya. He is worshipped for prosperity. Some are of the opinion that *Karappuswamy* is the brother of *Maariamamma*. Every good deed starts from the worship of *Karappuswamy*. In Chakkupallam settlement, there is a shrine for *Maariamamma* and *Karappuswamy*. There the *Maariamamma* festival is celebrated for three days in *chittiramasam* (April-May).

Karappuswamy is worshipped on the first day of the *Maariamamma* festival. Some rice and ten rupees are collected from each household for meeting the expenses for the *puja* offerings. This consists of coconut, banana and *pongal*. A black sheep is also sacrificed on that day. The rice mixed with the blood of the sheep is thrown up and they believe that the rice would not come down. The meat is cooked in the forest and rice and meat are served for everybody. There is a separate *pujari* performing *puja* for *Karappuswamy*. *Thandakkaran* conducts the *puja* for *Karappuswamy*. The man goes to the forest on the previous day of the festival so as to be free from the contact with them women. The woman after having bath, cook rice and goes to the forest with the cooked rice on the *puja* day. The offerings include tender coconut, turmeric, either *paalpongal* or *sarkara pongal*. Rice *pongal* is prepared and offered to *Maariamamma* first. The rice for the *pongal* is to be prepared by girls who have not attained puberty. A white fowl is also sacrificed on that day. The Paliya have a *pujari* to perform the *puja* for *Karappuswamy* and

Maariamamma. The *pujari* is a hereditary position among them. The Paliya observe the festivals like *Deepali* and *Pongal*. During festival days they do not go for work. They take bath on the festival days and wear new clothes and cook rice and more than two items of vegetable curries.

3.6. Paliya Koothu/Nritham

Paliya Nritham is the traditional art form of Paliya tribe in Idukki district, Kerala. Though '*Ezhamathu Palichi*' is their ancestral god, Paliya tribes are true devotees of *Mariyamamma*. *Paliya Nritham* or *Paliya Koothu* is an art form performed during the festivals held at *Mariyamamma* temple. Performers wear colourful dresses made of the bark of *Acacia intsia* (L.) Willd. (Soap Bark) and other naturally made costumes. *Mulam Chenda* (a percussion instrument made of bamboo), *Nagara*, *Udukku*, *Urumi*, *Jara* and *Chilanga* are the musical instruments used for *paliya nritham*.

4. Conclusion

The Paliya tribal community have rich traditional cultural practices, customs and beliefs. The practices are transmitted orally through generations. But nowadays, these are eroding from the society rapidly. There are several reasons for loss of these indigenous practices. Some of them are influenced by non-tribal culture and the present generation do not show interest in gaining or preserving the valuable tribal knowledge. Therefore documentation of traditional practices is very useful for next generation and need to be preserved for posterity.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to Paliya tribal community inhabiting in the Kumily paliyakkudi, Chakkupallam paliyakkudi, Anakkara IMS colony, Pachupillakudi, Kadasikadavu, Hemakadavu and Sivalingakudi of Idukki district, Kerala.

References

- Angala Mathew, Babuji Mathew and Ajesh T P 2016. Ethnomedical survey of medicinal plants having antipyretic effect used by Paliya tribes in Idukki district of Kerala Journal Traditional and Folk Practices, Vol. 02, 03, 04(1); pp 178 – 184.

Traditional cultural practices, customs and beliefs of Paliya tribes

Iyer L A K 1939. The Travancore Tribes and castes. Government Press, Trivandrum.

Gardner P M 1972. The Paliyas. In: Bicchieri, M. (ed.). Hunters and Gatherers Today. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. pp. 404-447

Gardner P M 1993. Dimensions of subsistence foraging in South India. *Ethnology*. 32:109-44

Gardner P M 2000. Bicultural Versatility as a Frontier Adaptation Among Paliya Foragers of South India, Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston.

Gardner P M 2000. Respect and nonviolence among recently sedentary Paliya foragers. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Blackwell Publishing, 6(2):215-236.

Luiz A A D 1962. Tribes of Kerala. Published by Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh, New Delhi.

Rajasekharan S, Vinodkumar T G Nair, Navas M, Latha P G 2013. Traditional/Folk Practices of Kerala-Case studies, *Journal of traditional and Folk Practices*, Vol 01, No.1 pp 50-68.

Thurston E. 1909. Castes and Tribes of South India. Vol IV. Government press, Madras