

# **Etymology and Etiologic Tales of Tribes of Wayanad**

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## **Abstract**

The district Wayanad of Kerala state, India have the largest tribal population in Kerala with 8 scheduled tribes including *Adiyan, Paniyan, Mullukkurman, Kurichyan, Vettakkuruman Wayanad Kadar, Kattuniakkan and Thachaanadan Mooppan*. These communities have a number of symbolic oral narratives of how their community emerged, how they got their particular name, how the world began and how the people of their community first came in to inhabit in the world. These kinds of creation myths, founding myths, cosmogony myths and oral etiologic tales commonly develop in oral tradition and it has multiple versions in different areas. This paper explores the oral tales of the creation of each community and the origin of the name of the community. This paper aims to provide an analytical comparison between oral traditions of different communities regarding the origin of their communities name the etymology of their community name.

**Keywords:** *Etiologic Tale, Etymology, Tribe*

## **1. Introduction**

Many theories regarding the origin of any word usually do the rounds in linguistic circles. And when the word denotes the name of a tribe or community, its etymological origins usually reflect that particular tribe or community's appearance, livelihood, social status, cultural norms, their work tools and similar innate traits. Hence the names of their tribe or community originate, based on their own assumptions of their heritage or how they are perceived by other tribes or communities. Such etymological theories are ratified when one takes a look at the names of the tribes of Kerala. This study aims to trace the etymological origins of the names of the tribe names of all the the tribes found living in Wayanad District.

## **2. Research Problem**

A community derives its name from its innate lifestyle, cultural norms and the living conditions in which it finds or establishes itself. Since this is a study which seeks to understand the etymological origins of such names, it is but natural that this study will also help us in understanding the cultural traditions, way of living, livelihood patterns and peculiar characteristics of that particular community.

A term can have many derivatives, some of which can be traced to ground realities while others could have originated due to their associations with long-held myths or versions of history that got distorted over a period of time.

There are currently 8 known Tribal communities in Wayanad. This study is part of a holistic research conducted to understand the etymological and linguistic origins of these tribes

## **3. Objectives**

1. To explore all the names of each community
2. To analyse the origin of the community name
3. To explore the reason behind each etymology

## **4. Theoretical Framework**

### ***i. Etiologic Tale***

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines "An etiologic tale explains the origin of a custom, state of affairs, or natural feature in the human or divine world. Here we discuss some tales and myths which explain the origin of a particular community name.

### ***ii. Etymology:***

“The origin and historical development of a linguistic form(as a word) as shown by determining its basic elements, earliest known use, and changes in form and meaning, tracing its transmission from one language to another, identifying its cognates in other languages, and reconstructing its ancestral form where possible.”(www.merriam-webster.com). It is nothing other than the the history of a word.

### **iii. Tribe**

“A tribe is a collection of families, bearing a common name, members to which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain taboos regarding marriage profession or occupation and have developed a well assessed system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligation.” (D.N.Majumdar,1962)

## **5. Method**

### **i. The Participants**

Since the study is to analyse the etymology of the community name of each tribe, the interview was given to the headman and the age old people of each community. The communities selected for the research are 8 scheduled tribes including *Adiyan, Kattuniakkan, Kurichyan, Mullukkurman, Paniyan, Thachaanadan Mooppan, Vettakkuruman and Wayanad Kadar.*

**Adiyan:** Adiyans are found in Bavali, Panamaram, Kattikkulam, Karamed, Thirunelli, Tholppetti, Thrissileri and Vemam of Wayanad District. A matrilineal Tribal group, who were treated as bonded slave labourers by the landlords up to 1976. Now majority of them are agricultural labourers and some of them are marginal agriculturalist. As per the socio economic survey of Scheduled Tribes was conducted during 2008 with the participation of local bodies their population is 11221 (Male 5389, Female-5832. They spoke Adiya language as their mother tounge

**Kattuniakkan:** A particularly Vulnerable Tribal group distributed in Meppadi, Mutil, Padinjarethara, Pozhuthana, Thariyod, Vengappalli, Vythiri Thavinjal, Panamaram ,Begur, Noolppuzha Pulppalli, of Wanand and Karulay Nilambur , Pothukallu of Malappuram Districts. Jenu Kurumban and Ten Kurumban are the synonyms used for the Kattunayakan community. They spoke Kattunaikka language a dialect of Kannada and Malayalam. They are patrilineal and a forest dwelling, hunting and gathering community.This is the largest population among PVTG in Kerala with a total population of 19995 (Male- 9953, Female-10042)

**Kurichyan:** They are distributed in Kunjom, Periya, Thirunelli and Thrissileri of Wayanad and in Kannavam Forest range in Kannur and Kozhikkod. Majority of them are agriculturalists and well versed in hunting with bows and arrows. Their dialect is known as *Kurichya* language. They are very famous for their matrilineal social organization. They are the second largest community among Scheduled Tribes with a total population of 35909 (Male- 18129, Female-17780)

***Mullukkurman:*** A patrilineal and patrilocal tribal agriculturalist community found in Meenangadi, Batheri, Poothadi, Nenmeni, Meppati of Wayanad District. The community members are expert in hunting and their spoken language is *Mullukkuruma* language. The total population is 21375 (Male- 10625, female-10750)

***Paniyan:*** A Patrilineal slave tribe community until 1976s Bonded labour act, distributed in Wayanad, Kannur, Kozhikkod and Malappuram. They are the largest single tribal community with a population of 92787 (Male-45112, female- 47675). Their language is a dialect known as Paniya Language and now a days they are agricultural labourers.

***Thachaanadan Mooppan:*** A matrilineal community distributed in Meppadi, Ambalavayal and Kalppata of Wayanad District. In earlier days they are shifting cultivators and hunters. Now a days they earn through agricultural labour work. They are expert in carpentry and basket making. Their total population is 1649, and consists of 814 males and 835 females

***Vettakuruman:*** A patrilineal tribal community found in Begur, Tholppatti, Pulpalli of Wayanad District. They are the artisan tribes and well versed in Pottery, carpentry, blacksmithry and tools making and Basketry. Their language is known as Bettakkuruma language. The population of Vettakuruman is 6482 consisting of 3193 males and 3289 females.

***Wayanad Kadar:*** They are found in Kozhikkode and Wayanad district and entirely a different generic stock from Kaders of Cochin. They are matrilineal marginal tribes with a population of 673 consists of 348 males and 325 females.

## ***ii. The Profile: Area of the Study***

Wayanad is situated in the Eastern portion of North Kerala in India. It is a picturesque of Deccan plateau situated 700 meters and 2100 above the sea level. The district is in the Western Ghats and on its side Tamilnad and Karnataka situated. Wayanad is a place with full of plantations, forest and wild life and is well known for its agricultural prosperity. The study conducted in Wayanad. The area is concentrated with different types of tribal communities and a large settler population and mainly have a tribal

oriented

culture.



Fig. 1: Map of Wayanad District

### The Data Base and Methodology

Intensive field work was done in settlement of each community to collect primary data. Along with that secondary data are collected and used for the analysis. The researcher also used observation method, interview schedule method and questionnaire method. In this particular area of study there are a lot of secondary data available. So for comprehending a conceptual frame work , use of secondary source has also been made use. Many research thesis, journals, authoritative books and articles have been reviewed and used for the content analysis. Along with the social science research methodology the researcher also used methods of etymology like comparative method, philological method and dialectological data method

### Research Design

The research design is exploratory as well as descriptive in nature. The data available through content analysis of the secondary source data are found to be inadequate to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the objectives of the research. Hence and in depth primary survey was conducted.

### 6. Results

The community names of Kerala tribal families are endearing and curious at the same time. In addition, these names also epitomize the distinctive traits of that particular community. When the etymological origins of these names are looked into, it is seen to reflect the Place of Origin, Autochthony, Language spoken, Social status, behavioral aspects and the like.

Table 1 Showing Reason behind the Origin of Community Names

<b>Reason</b>		<b>Terms used</b>	<b>Name of the Tribe</b>
Habituation	Hill	Mala,	Malambandaram
		Malai,	Malai Arayan
		Betta,	Bettakuruba
		Kuru,	Kuruman
		kuricchi	Kurichyan
	Forest	Kadu	Kadu kuruba
		Kattu	Kattunaikkan
		Chola	Cholanaikkan
	Valey	Pathi	Pathinaikkan
	Land	Karavazhi	Karavazhi Pulayan
	Hilltop	Ul- nad	Ulladan
		Kudi	Malakudiya
Place of Origin		Eranad	Aranadan
		Thachanad	Thachanadan
		Kurumbranad	Kurumban
Occupation	Hunting	Veda	Malavedan Villu Vedan
		Betta	Bettakuruba
		Vettuvar	Malavettuvar
	Basket making	Korave	Koraga
	Gathering	Then	Then Kuruba
		Jenu	Jenu Kuruba
		Pal	Palkkurumban
	Begging	Erav	Eravaller

	Slavery	Adiyan	Adiyan
Autochthony	Indigenous man		Urali
			Ulladar
Original inhabitants			Muthuvan
			Malamuthan
			Mullakkuruman
Social Status	King	Kings of hill	Mala Arayar
			Malasar
		Kings of Forest	Chola naikkan
			Kattunaikan
	Kings of Valley	Pathinaikkan	
	Owner	Owner of the land	Kanikkaran
	Superior	Sovereign Kings of hill	Mahamalassar
	Inferior		Malakurava
Appearance	Skin tone	Dark	Irula
			Karimpalan
Basic of believing deities	Paliyan	The descendets of Elath Palichi, the wife of lord Palany Muruka	Paliyan

### ***Kurichyan***

There are many theories regarding the etymological origins of the *Kurichyan* community. The name, some say, must have originated from *kuruchi*, *kurushi*, *kuri*, *kuru*, *kurumbi*. The name signifies ‘mala/kunnu/hill’ which interestingly means the same in Malayalam, Tamil and Kannada (all Dravidian languages). Hence, *Kurichyan* denotes ‘people who live in the hills’.

Kuri + one who hails from there = kurichyan

Kuri + chiyan = kurichyan

Kuri + one who lives there = kurichyan

Kurishi inhabitant = kurichyan

The *Kurichyan* tribesmen are expert hunters, not just in hunting animals but also in hunting down their enemies with their bows and arrows. *Pazhassi Raja*, the king of *Kottayam*, brought with him these very same Kari Nairs (the dark skinned nairs) from South Malabar to take part in his famed war exploits.

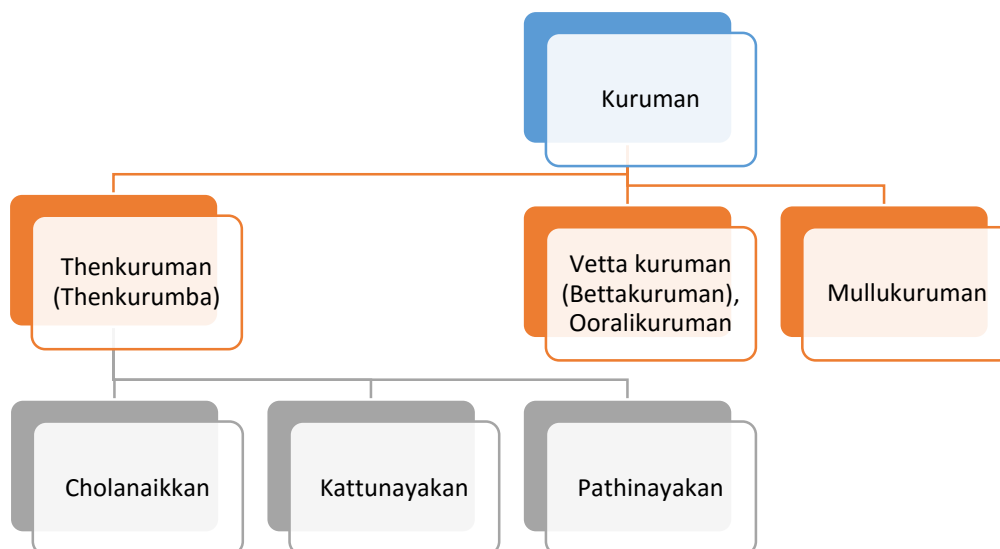
*Kurichyans* also share a belief that Kurichyans are those who always achieve what they set out to do i.e. hit their target (*kuri*). Another shared belief according to another research theory is that *Kurichyans* are those who fix (*kurikkuka*) a date for hunting and effectively carry out the same on the said date.

All these theories -be it one who inhabits the hills, or an expert huntsman, or one hits the target- have equal importance when seen in terms of linguistics.

### ***Kuruman***

The name *Kuruman* has many tribal groups in South India. *Kuruman* in Malayalam becomes *Kurumban* in Tamil. Take for example the Kurumba gothras of *Palakkad*. In Kannada, *Kuruman* becomes *Kurumban* with derivatives such as *Jenukurumba*, *Kattukurumba*, *Bettakurumba* etc.

The tribal group in Wayanad are primarily known as *Kuruman*. There are three main branches:



### ***Kuruman***



The etymological roots of all these three terms of *Kuruman*, *Kurumban* and *Kuruban* all converge in the root word *Kuru*. One who lives in a *kuru* (Hill) is a *Kuruman*.

Towards the end of the *Chera-Pandya-Chola* era, many indigenous kings conquered the hilly regions with sheer brute force. All such tribal rulers are termed as *Kurunila Mannar* by Tamil linguists *Pingalmuni*. Rulers of the hills (*kunnugaludeh rajav*) got shortened to *Kurumar* and *Kuruman* in its singular form.

The *Kurumbanaadu* region lies close to *Wayanad*. *Kurumbanaattileh aalukal* (people of *Kurumbanaadu*) must have in the course of time got shortened to *Kurumbanaadan* which got further shortened to the present *Kurumban*. They are the descendants of the *Pallavas*, according to *Thurston*

### ***Thenkuruman / Jenukurumba***

These tribesmen belong to a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) who earn their livelihood through traditional honey-gathering. *Jenu* in *Kannada* means honey. “The *Kuruba* is the name of the large shepherded community of *Karnataka* plateau. In *Mysore* they divided in to *Urukuruba* and *Kadukuruba*. *Kadu Kuruba* are further divided in to *Betta kuruba* and *Jenu Kuruba*” (*Misra 1975,P.i85*)

Since honey-gathering is their traditional means of livelihood, these tribesmen naturally got the name of honey-gatherers i.e. *Thenkurumba* or *Jenukurumba*.

In *Wayanad* and *Malapuram* regions of *Kerala*, *Thenkurumban* is known as *Kattunayakan* or *Kattunaikkan* which could have meant to denote the Rulers of the forest. Every *Kattunayakan* had a territory assigned to him. This particular territory was known as *Chemmam* or *Gumpam*. All power was vested with the *Chemmamkaars*. Members of other territory (*Chemmam*) had neither entry to this territory nor access to the food resources available on that particular land.

*Cholanayakan* and *Pathinayakan* are the other versions of *Kattunayakan*. *Chola* signifies inner woods/ thick dense forests. So *Cholanayakan* is one who dwells in the thick of the forests and who rules over it.

*Cholanaikkars* call themselves *Sholanaikkars* (King of the forests) or even *Malanaikkars* (King of the hills). *Pathinaikkars* too come from the same generic stock. The term denotes one who lives in a *Pathi* which signifies a hilly place of residence or a place of hiding or base of the hills. The members of this gothra are reluctant to mingle with outsiders. The mere presence of anyone other than their own have them fleeing off to the safety of caves or to the inner sanctum of the forests.

### ***Bettakurumba***

They are also known as *Uralikuruman* or *Vettakuruman*. *Betta* derived from the word *bottu*, means hill. *Uralikuruman* is one who guards (*Aalunnavan*) his birthplace (Ur) or one in whom power is vested to rule.

*Vettakuruman*: *Vetta* means hill. Since they reside amidst the hills, hence the name according to some etymologists, while others opine that the term originates from their expertise as tree-cutters (*maram vettunavan*). Since master craftsmen and skilled carpenters can be found from among these tribesmen, others believe that it is their cutting expertise that must have got them their name. They are however lousy hunters. Iyer is the only one who -in his books- comes up with a different theory that they were forced to flee at the point of flickering torches aimed at them. Apart from that, almost all agree that craftsmanship and building expertise constituted their main source of livelihood. They themselves called as *nammanchanda* means our people.

### ***Mullukuruman***

There are several theories regarding the origin of the term *Mullu*. While Goplan Nair terms it as a synonym for thorn, Thurston is of the opinion that *Mullu* itself came from the word *mula* (bamboo) and these Kurumans are expert in making bow and arrow with the bamboo.

When attacked by other native rulers, these tribesmen escaped fleeing through thorny paths -that's why the name- goes one theory, while another attributes the origin of their name to their sharp warrior skills akin to that of a thorn.

Some others believe that *Mullu* came from the word *Moolam* which means basic or primitive. They are considered as the most primitive tribesmen in Wayanad. They are the original inhabitants (Dr. Prashant Krishnan, 2013, P-5).

*Mulla Kuruman* are also known as *Mala Kuruman*; that means *Kurumans* of Hill.

### ***Thachanadan Mooppan or Thachanadan***

This community name is derived from the combination of two terms. *Mooppan* means leader. So the name suggests one who is the leader of the *Thachhunadan* territory. So *Mooppan* can denote leader as well as one who hails from *Thachunadu*.

If we examine *Thachunadan* more closely, we realize that the term originated from the root word *thachu* which means *thallu* (beating), thereby signifying those who fled a beating.

So *Thachhunadan Mooppan* is a Chieftain who wields power to beat his opponents or subjects.

Since *thachhu* is also synonymous with wood-work or carpentry, the term could refer to the leader of carpenters; however since carpentry is not a source of livelihood for these tribesmen, this theory does not hold good.

### ***Adiyan***

*Adiyan* means a slave, one who is subservient to those in power. Until the Slavery Abolition Act of 1976, these tribesmen were sold as slaves in the cattle-market, hence the name *Adiyan*. They were earlier called *Ravuler* which meant our own men, but with the passing of time, their status as slaves reinforced *Adiyan* as their gothra name too.

### ***Paniyar***

Even this name has the nature of the livelihood of these tribesmen reflected in its etymological roots. *Paniyar* is one who slogs in the fields, farms and granaries of their feudal lords, a servant or slave. *Pani* means work.

### ***Wayanad Kadar***

The name etymologically refers to foresters who live in Wayanad or primitive folks who are closely linked to forests or tribesmen who reside in forests, with the plural term *Kadar* referring to the tribe as a whole. *Kadu* means forest.

## **7..Conclusion**

When one considers the tribes of Kerala in general and that of Wayanad in particular, it is seen that the names of their *gothras* or communities reflect the geographical traits of their living boundaries, their source of livelihood and their status in society. These names do not reflect their own interpretation of their identity within their community, but are rather a commentary on their relation with the ruling class or other outside elements.

They are often destined to be known to the rest of the world by the names bestowed on them by successive governments or those in power. With just a word i.e. their gothra name, a host of characteristic traits of that particular gothra or community can be conveyed to outsiders. In-depth etymological studies of these names shed light on their status in society, their means of livelihood, the land and its physical features where they reside etc. Hence etymological research on such tribal names is an integral part of cultural studies.

## **Appendix**

### List of Informants

Kariyan, Kalan, Sindhu Krishnadas, Chomy, keli, Mari, Vellan, Jayanthi, and Ravisankar

## **Acknowledgement**

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