

APPENDIX II

A NOTE ON "THE ABORIGINES OF THE HIGH RANGE"

by

"The Old Campaigner"

From: History of the High Range Planting District, North Travancore (Bangalore: The Scripture Literature Press, 1931)

The Note, part of which has been quoted in an earlier Chapter (See pp. 102-103) is reproduced here for whatever interest it might have for students of Travancore Aborigines. But apart from this, it has a historical interest also as it contains a comparatively detailed section on Muthuvans, quoting from Mr. A. F. Martin's pamphlet on the tribe which formed the chief source of information on Muthuvans for Thurston in preparing his well-known accounts of Castes and Tribes of South India. There are several factual errors in "The Old Campaigner's" account of the aborigines, brief as it is, and in Mr. Martin's account of Muthuvans; but no attempt is made to correct the errors here.

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There are several aboriginal tribes on these hills. Among them are the Muduvans, Mannans and Ooralers living at all elevations; the Palians and Pooliahs, sometimes

called Kuravas, living on the lower slopes of the hills.

Outside the concession boundary, there exist hill villages; of these the hamlet of Vattavadai ^{is} ~~as~~ the biggest. Next comes a place called Koiloor not far distant; and then farther east is the small village of Kottacombu.

On the north-east slopes of the Kannan Devan Hills there can be seen from the higher parts of the northern outlet road small villages dotted about on the hills. These are called the Anginadu or hill country of five villages. They overlook the big valley of Talliar. Marayoor is the oldest, most long-standing, and best cultivated among them. The inhabitants are rice-growers. The people who cultivate the land for the Marayoor villagers are Pooliahs.

At an elevation of 2400 feet and somewhere near Mankolam, Muduvans are known to live. They are seldom seen by Europeans.

On the Cardamom Hills there may still exist a tribe of dwarfs, but little is known of them. The late Mr. J. D. Munro collected a little information about them. Mr. A. W. Turner had the luck to come across one. When seen he was eating part of a jungle sheep raw. These people are said to bring cane ready for tying, and honey, and place them on a tree stump in the jungle. Then they hide, and wait for the Muduvans to take them and put salt and onions in their place.

In 1905 in answer to questions sent by Mr. Thurston

of the Madras Museum, Mr.A.Ff.Martin wrote a pamphlet on the Muduvans:-

"The Muduvans are wholly illiterate. Of late years one man was induced to come away from his village to learn to read and to write Tamil. This he succeeded in doing in a small way, but soon dropped the tedious learning. Their dialect is their own, but is allied to Tamil with a few Malayalam words. There are no subdivisions of the caste. No one must marry outside the caste.

"They are called 'Muduvans' because they carry all their loads on their backs, even to tin trunks and kit cases. The women carry their children on the back in a sort of loop of their cloth made for the child to sit in. The end of the cloth is fastened tightly on the left shoulder to prevent the child from falling.

"Their only one important festival is 'The Pongal,' a new year's day when all who visit the village, be they who they may, must be fed. It occurs about the middle of January. Their dwellings are small, rectangular, rattan flat-roofed huts, made of jungle sticks and grass; both walls and roof; and are very neat in appearance. Where grass is scarce as in big forests, the leaves of a broad-leaved variety of Eetha take its place. The caste seems to be settled on the northern portion of the Cardamom Hills, and in the High Ranges of Travancore; there is also believed

to be a Muduvan village on the British Anamallais.

"The office of the headman is hereditary and follows the Marumakkatayam, i.e., descent to the eldest son of the eldest sister.

"The 'Swamyars' who spend their time in talking to the Sun or Moon as their brethren and in supplication to mysterious and unknown beings, are of the usual sort, and if they live a celibate life they are greatly esteemed. For those who live principally on milk, in addition to practising the other virtue, the greatest reverence is felt. Such an one occurs only once or twice in a century.

"Marriages are arranged by friends or more often by cousins on the mother's side of the bridegroom. These request the hand of a girl or woman from her parents. If they agree the consent of the most remote relatives has also to be obtained, and if every one is amicable, a day is fixed and the happy couple leave the village to live a few days in a cave by themselves. On their return they announce whether they would like to go on with it or not. In the former case, the man publicly gives ear-rings, a metal (generally brass) bangle, a cloth and a comb to the woman, and takes her into his hut. The comb is a poor affair made of split Eetha or perhaps of bamboo, but it is the essential part of the ceremony.

"If the probationary period in the cave has not proved

quite satisfactory to both parties, the marriage is off and the man and the woman are both at liberty to try again with someone else. In the original selection the woman has no choice, but the man has. No presents are interchanged between the contracting parties and their respective families. The tying of the 'Tali' is said to have been tried in former days as part of the marriage ceremony, but as the bride always died the practice was stopped. No one may marry outside the caste.

"All the animals the Muduvans catch are 'game' to them, though we would describe some of them only as vermin. They catch rats, squirrels, quail, jungle fowl, porcupine, mouse deer and fish. They kill, with a blowpipe and dart, many small birds. The traps in use are varied, but there are three principal ones, one of which looks like a big bow. It is fixed upright in the ground to form a spring which can close with a snap a small upright triangle of sharp-edged bamboo to which it is connected. Into this any luckless small game may have intruded its head having been induced to do so by finding all other roads closed with a cunningly made fence. Another type of trap is a bent sapling from which a loop of twine or fibre hangs on to what appears to be the ground, but is really a little platform on which the jungle fowl treads and immediately finds itself caught by both legs and hanging in mid-air. A third is very much the

same, but of stouter build, the loop is upright and set in a hedge constructed for the purpose of keeping the fretful porcupine in the path. Passing along this the beast unconsciously releases a pin, back flies the sapling, and the porcupine is hung. If fouled in any way he generally uses his teeth to advantage and escapes.

"The Muduvans are adept at catching ibex, which are driven towards a fence with nooses set in it at proper points, causing the beasts to break their necks. Fish are caught in very beautifully constructed crüives, and also on the hook, while, on the larger rivers below the plateau the use of the night line is understood.

"With the gun, sambhur, ibex, jungle sheep, mongoose, monkeys, squirrels, martens, are killed. Besides being a good shot, the Muduvan when using his own powder, takes no risks; the stalk is continued until game is approached sometimes to within a few yards, when a charge of slugs from the antiquated match-lock has the same effect as the most up-to-date bullet from the most modern weapon.

"The implement 'par excellence' of the Muduvan is the bill-hook, from which he never parts company, and with which he can do almost anything, from building a house to skinning a rat, or from hammering sheet-lead into bullets, to planting maize.

"Tattooing is not practised.

"Branding is not resorted to."