**Summary of the UGC Minor Project entitled**

**THE ARCHAEOLOGY AND CULTURAL STUDY OF THE TRIBES OF THE WESTERN GHATS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE MANNANS OF IDUKKI**

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**Introduction**

The Western Ghats has been recognized as one among the eight ‘hottest’ hotspots of the world (www.iucn.org). In this context, this project investigates how, the dominant paradigm of ecology tends to ignore the archaeological heritage and the cultural landscape of the tribes acquired over several centuries. This research project attempts to revisit select areas of the Western Ghats in Kerala and understand the ethnic and cultural diversities of the tribes and how these diversities are linked to the archaeological remains of the region.

The objectives of the project included a) understanding the cultural dynamics of the Western Ghats through ethnographic documentation of the Mannan tribe in Idukki district, Kerala b) to apply ethnoarchaeological models of the processual school of archaeology to study the tribes of Western Ghats particularly in Idukki with emphasis on relation of the *adivasis* with landscape to contextualize the archaeological data from the region and, c) to document the cultural changes among the Mannan due to modernity and their cultural responses.

All the taluks in Idukki district were surveyed. Intensive survey was conducted in and around the Mannan settlements. One elder *kani* was interviewed in Thodupuzha taluk. Two elders from Kurichia tribe at Edakkalkudi and one woman representative of a self-help group in Ambalavayal panchayat both in Wayanad district were interviewed. Two tribe elders near Kollengode in Palakkad district were also interviewed. All these interviews have been documented. The archaeological and cultural remains in the Western Ghats was documented photographically. This was done through fieldwork in the select parts of the districts of Idukki, Palakkad and Wayanad. This helped to understand the cultural dynamics of the ethnic groups living in Western Ghats. Since ecological crisis is being emphasized, cultural dynamism has not received much attention. This has led to the irrefutable loss of cultural heritage both the tangible and intangible along with natural heritage such as the landscape.

The Western Ghats now has expanding settlements of peasants, planters and tourists. Barring these, fragmented tribal hamlets, prehistoric sites and scattered megalithic monuments are found in the Western Ghats. The focus was on the district of Idukki and the settlements of a prominent tribe; the Mannan.

The cultural dynamics of the tribes of Western Ghats have been under developmental stress due to modernity. Tribes are in contact with peasant migrants since early twentieth century. With increasing alienation from their traditional habitats, the cultural dynamics has lost many of its core values. Ethnoarchaeological approaches and tools used in understanding the Mannan tribe showed they had little continuity from the societies responsible for erecting the megalithic burial monuments and other archaeological remains found in the region. These cultural relics belong primarily to the Iron Age or even later.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

Within the limits and limitations of the study and on the basis of the results obtained the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. Maximum loss of cultural diversity is happening in Idukki district in Kerala due to decreasing forest cover. The *adivasis* who are the original inhabitants of the region are forest dwellers. So, deforestation led to loss of their habitat. Increasing developmental activities following deforestation, exposes archaeological remains in the region. This explains the increased reporting of such finds by the media, both print and audiovisual.
2. The major cause of change in the traditional forms of life of the tribes in Western Ghats including the Mannan is their constant interaction with the peasant settlers from Travancore and displacement from land.
3. As a response to these changes, most tribes have become ‘detribalized’. The Mannan is no exception.
4. The tribespeople of the Western Ghats classify cultural aspects into ‘high order’ and ‘low order’. The Mannan consdier their form of kingship as a high-order cultural aspect. Hence, they wish to retain it for the future. It defines their identity and is the most distinguishable aspect of their identity.
5. The loss of cultural dynamism is from lower order to higher order of cultural attributes. Such a classification of cultural attributes was noticed among all the tribes who were studied. This loss is more evident in case of smaller societies such as forest tribes.
6. The institution of kingship of Mannan is now preserved though a hereditary king with a council of elders from all *kudis.* The power is symbolized by certain symbols such as a sword, rituals of initiation of the king and a structure identified as their old palace at Kovilmala in Idukki district. This institution of kingship has helped them organize themselves into *kudis.*  Each *kudi* traces descent through their organic relationship with the original settlement at Kovilmala. There is an element of lineage- based society.

The implications of the study are relevant to the society both, present and future. The result of the study will be help in better formulating tribal rights and forest resources management sustainably. This will help reduce the pace of marginalization and alienation faced by the tribes of the Western Ghats. The *adivasis* can regain strength from their cultural aspects and regain their traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution and responses to cultural changes induced by modernity. The findings are crucial in situating and dating the chance finds being reported from various archaeological sites in the Western Ghats in Kerala. For the first time, tools and approaches from ethnography and ethnoarchaeology were applied to understand the meanings of archaeological remains with a view to go beyond documentation. The future should focus not only on the Western Ghats as a biologically diverse hot spot but also as a culturally diverse hotspot.