

CHAPTER II.

THE VILLAGE.

The Malabar village is not formed of nucleated settlements and there is generally no obvious boundary separating one village from another. Each house is surrounded by garden land, small or extensive, with built up or fenced boundaries. Such dispersed settlements are usually continuous in stretches of lands separated by wet lands which are paddy fields in almost continuous expanse. Thus in most of the villages can be seen paddy fields surrounding or tending to engulf stretches of relatively elevated areas occupied by houses which are partly hidden off by lush growth of garden crops.

The rural population of Malabar in 1951 is 4,250,367 and the density of rural population for the whole district is 737.¹ Census Report of 1951 provides the following data regarding percentage of increase, rural concentration and distribution of rural population in villages of various sizes, small, medium and large.

1. Population per village is 2843.

2. Population in villages per thousand of the district population is 893.

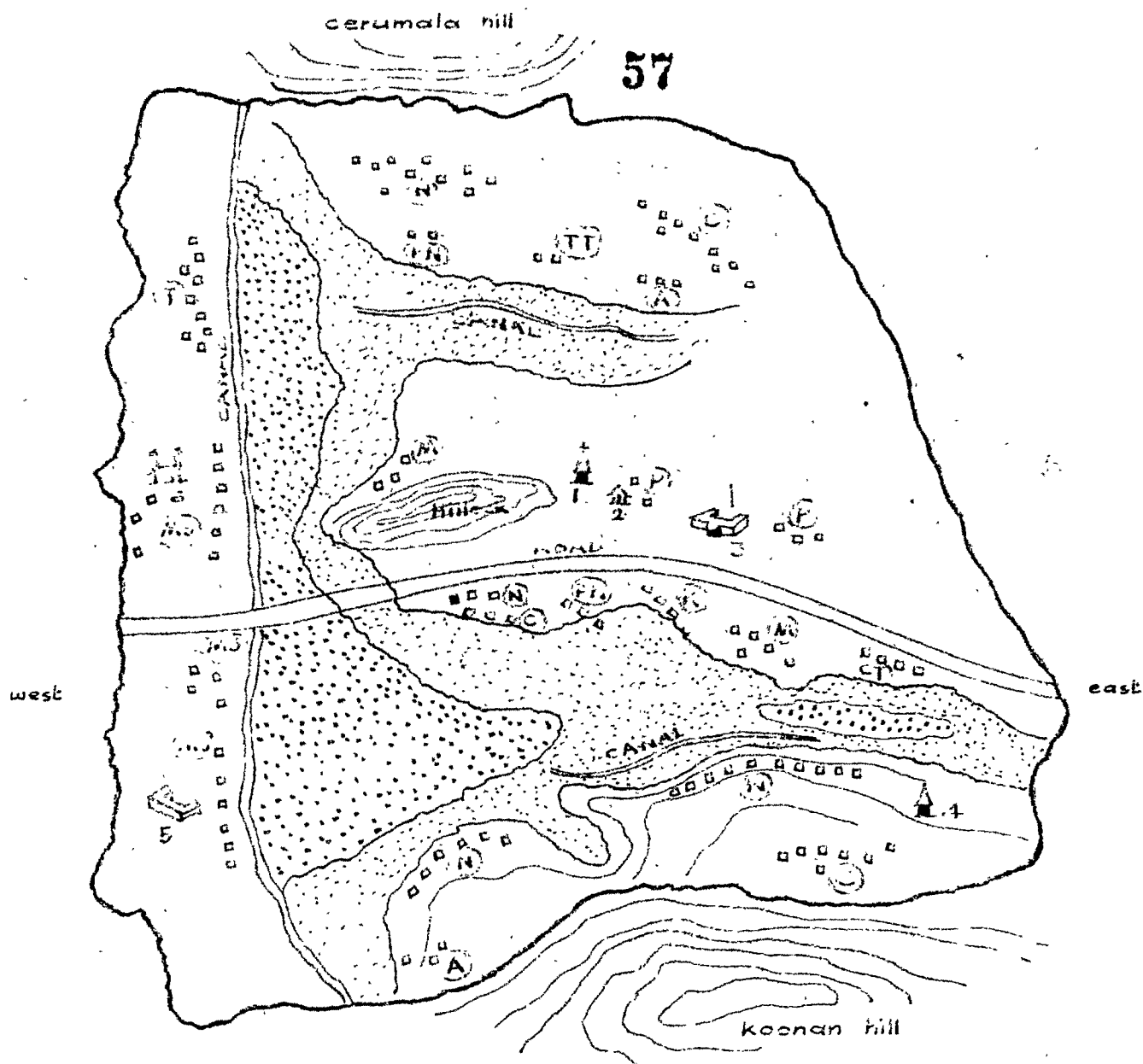
1. Census 1951, Part I, Report, Vol. III, Madras and Coorg, 1953, p.44.

3. Percentage increase in rural population. -
13.9 during 1921-31, 9.0 during 1931-41 and
19.6 during 1941-51.
4. Per thousand of ~~rural~~ ^{rural} population 535 live in
very large villages, i.e., having a popula-
tion of 5000 and over, 273 live in large
villages, i.e., having a population of 2000
to 5000, 175 live in villages of medium size,
i.e., having a population of 500 to 2000,
and 17 live in small villages, i.e., having
a population below 500.

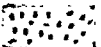
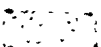

The British introduced the 'Amsam' and 'Desam' divisions in 1822 A.D. The old desams numbering 2212 were each too small to have separate village establishments and were therefore grouped into 429 amsams. Each amsam was placed under a village headman (Adhikari) and as far as possible the former Desavaris were appointed as Adhikaris. A Menon (the term given as a designation for the purpose) an accountant, and a small staff of Kolkarans (peons) assisted the Adhikari. After the settlement owing to increase of revenue, the number of amsams was raised to 736 and these were divided into 2222 desams. The desam was taken as a unit of survey and settlement and separate accounts have since then been maintained for each desam.² Census accounts treat desam as a village, since it is an administrative unit, except in Ponnani and Ernad taluks where amsams have been recognised as villages.³ In this study, unless otherwise^w stated, village means a modern desam.

2. Malabar District Gazetteer - (Madras, 1915), p.353.

3. Census 1951, *ibid*, p.45.



Sketch map of Munnurkode (not drawn to scale)

| | | |
|---|--|--|
|  | Wet lands - double crop | Total area: 2.04 sq. miles |
|  | Wet lands - single crop | Cultivated area in a seasonally normal year: |
|  | Permanent gardens or open areas for seasonal dry-land crops. | 792.03 acres. |
| | | (Further particulars: See Tables II & III) |

ROAD. - Not metalled, and not motorable except in summer.

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. A temple of Vishnu | 4. A temple of Bhagavati |
| 2. Nambudiri house | 5. Moslem Elementary school |
| 3. Hindu elementary school | 6. A mosque |

Houses of various castes:-

| | | | |
|------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| N.- Nair | MS.- Moslem | C.- Cheruman | PN.- Panan |
| P.- Pattar | T.- Tandan | CT.- Chetti | K.- Karuvan |
| M.- Mannan | TT.- Tattap | A.- Asari | |

Eric Miller observes:

"That the present day Desam can generally be called for sociological purposes, a village, with a recognizable community life of its own, is, I believe, mainly the result of the tremendous population increases during the last hundred and fifty years."⁴

The data discussed in this chapter were collected chiefly from the three villages which I studied, but as noted in the preface, the study was not strictly confined to these villages, and at random, data pertaining to neighbouring areas supplement as a matter of need. Of the three villages in Walluvanad taluk, the two, Munnurkode and Karattukursi, are located at about one and a half miles on either side of a road which eight miles southwards reaches Ottapalam which is for these villages the nearest town and railway station. Kolappulli, the third village, margined by a road at its western boundary is three miles north-east of the town and railway junction Shoranur and eight miles north of the town of Ottapalam. Its location by cross-country distance is only about six miles from Karattukursi although by road the distance is about fourteen miles. Trikkateri, Kuttikode, Panamanna, Cherpalcherry, Chalavara, Kizhur, Kolakkad and Vazhur, the villages of which mention is made in various chapters in this study are within about a radius of four miles from the village of Munnurkode. Of these, Trikkateri and

4. Eric J. Miller, 'Village Structure in North Kerala' in 'India's Villages', by M. N. Srinivas & others (West Bengal Govt. Press, 1955.) p.45.

Kuttikode, east to west, occupy the area between Munnurkode and Karattukursi. Ottapalam, a class III town with a population of 22,695 is the nearest town to all these villages except Kolappulli which has urban contacts with both Ottapalam (7 miles south) and Shoranur (3 miles west), a class III town with a population of 11,586. My observations in other villages mentioned in the preface, namely, Kollengode on the eastern border of Palghat taluk and Mullasserri and Valapad in the coastal taluk of Ponnani, have also enlightened some of the aspects discussed in this chapter.

Of the three villages, Munnurkode, Karattukursi and Kolappulli, relatively less attention was focussed on the third village. However, all the three villages together, for convenience, will be mentioned as villages of focal interest or more briefly focal villages. Each village may sometimes be referred to as the first, second or third village in the order mentioned here.

Extracts from census data of 1951 pertaining to a few of the villages mentioned providing details of area, cultivated area, population and division of population into livelihood categories are given in Table 2 that follows.

Although the descriptive accounts in this chapter are in the present tense, unless otherwise stated, the reference is to conditions which existed chiefly in the early decades of this century and continued until about the end of the forties.

Table 2.

Extracts from census data (1951) regarding area, population, livelihood classes etc. of a selected few of the villages mentioned.

| | Area in Square miles. | Occupied houses. No. of. Houses | House- holds. | Popula- tion. | Lite- rates. | Culti- vated area (acres)* |
|--------------|--------------------------------|--|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| Munnurkode | 2.04 | 348 | 363 | 2095 | 640 | 792.03 |
| Karattukursi | 0.67 | 150 | 150 | 893 | 415 | 300.35 |
| Kolappulli | 3.88 | 695 | 663 | 3633 | 1260 | 1390.68 |
| Trikkateri | 2.20 | 561 | 578 | 3357 | 864 | 1040.41 |
| Kuttikode | 1.00 | 229 | 238 | 1408 | 297 | 544.56 |
| Panamanna | 3.25 | 654 | 679 | 4099 | 1295 | 1385.41 |
| Kizhur | 2.38 | 198 | 212 | 1275 | 423 | 492.16 |
| Chalavara | 2.66 | 541 | 564 | 3131 | 935 | 1164.40 |

* The area given is as in a seasonally normal year.

Note:- The cultivated area for different villages does not show a uniform proportion to the total area of the respective village. This, in the light of my familiarity with these villages, is attributable to the hill slopes which are not useful for cultivation.

(Table 2 contd. next page)

Table 2. (Contd.)

| | Agricultural classes. | | | | Non-agricultural classes. | | | |
|--------------|-----------------------|------|------|-----|---------------------------|-----|-----|------|
| | I | II | III | IV | V | VI | VII | VIII |
| Munnurkode | 391 | 215 | 751 | 152 | 138 | 5 | N11 | 343 |
| Karattukursi | 96 | 398 | 260 | 7 | 39 | N11 | N11 | 93 |
| Kolappull1 | 615 | 511 | 503 | 105 | 415 | 223 | 36 | 1225 |
| Trikkateri | 126 | 830 | 2 | 254 | 349 | 213 | 6 | 1577 |
| Kuttikode | 90 | 540 | 296 | 181 | 57 | 10 | N11 | 264 |
| Panamanna | 182 | 1103 | 549 | 275 | 325 | 141 | 12 | 1506 |
| Kizhur | 171 | 208 | 713 | 99 | 12 | N11 | N11 | 72 |
| Chalavara | 215 | 813 | 1038 | 83 | 258 | 48 | 25 | 67 |

Livelihood Categories. -

Classes. I. Cultivators of land wholly or mainly owned and their dependants.

II. Cultivators of land wholly or mainly unowned and their dependants.

III. Cultivating labourers and their dependants.

IV. Non-cultivating owners of land, agricultural rent receivers and their dependants.

Non-agricultural classes - Persons

including dependants who derive their livelihood from -

V. Production other than cultivation.

VI. Commerce

VII. Transport

VIII. Other services and miscellaneous sources.

Note:- My familiarity with these villages permit me to make the following observations with reference to the livelihood categories. (a) Class IV people are more in the villages where Nair families are relatively large in number, and where they (class IV) are small in number, they are Nairs who own more land and hence their figure small. (b) Only caste-wise analysis can explain the disparity in the proportion of the eight classes in relation to the number of households in each village.

A detailed account of the castes and their relative rank will follow in the next chapter, but to consider the nature of the village community, a brief account of castes in Walluvanad taluk is at this stage necessary. Castes for this purpose can be grouped approximately based on their rank and the groups can be enumerated in the following rank order. (By rank I mean ritual status of a caste, and by ritual status, the relative evaluation of an individual or a non-caste group based on ritual considerations.)

Indigenous castes

1. Nambudiri Brahmins

Immigrant castes

- Pattar Brahmins
(also known as Iyer)
Imbrandiris

(The above are patrilineal)

(Castes below are matrilineal)

2. Ambalavasi castes
(i.e. temple servants)
Pisharodi, Variyar,
Poduval, Marar.
3. Samanathan castes
Eradi, Vellodi,
Tirumulpad, Kartavu.
4. Nair castes (upper group)
Kiriya Nambiar
Kiriya Nair
Sudra Nair
Charna Menon
Nair Panicker
5. Nair castes (middle group)
Charna Nair
Vattekat, Pallichan,
Ulladan, Anduran, Attikursi
6. Nair castes (lower group)
Veluthedan (washerman)
Vilakkatira (barber)

Indigenous castesImmigrant castes

(Castes below are patrilineal)

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 7. Eruthachan (or Kadupottan) | Mannadiar Tarakan Muttan |
| 8. Tandan (known as Iruvan, Chon or Tiyan in other places) Tandan Kurup, Ganisa Panicker | |
| 9. Mannan | Chetti |
| 10. Asari, Moosari, Tattan, Karuvan. | Kallan Muppan |
| 11. Pulluvan, Panan | |
| 12. Parayan, Nayadi, Malayan. | |

The rank order given here is to permit a convenient presentation of the outline of interdependence in terms of groups of castes. Within some of the groups the order of enumeration does not convey the exact relative rank of each caste. Often the relative rank is disputed particularly in the early decades of this century, but within one village, the relative rank is more or less settled and recognised. Each group and the few castes not mentioned here, nor significant in the main theme of this chapter, will be treated with relevant details in the next chapter.

Of the first five groups mentioned the upper group of Nair castes is the numerically largest and are chiefly non-cultivating kanam tenants. The second group, Ambalavasis, serve temples directly and some of them are kanam tenants of temple lands. The Samantans and Nambudiris can be broadly termed as janmi castes although the less wealthy

Samanthans hold kanam tenure. The sixth group, the lower group of Nair castes render services of a ritual and occupational nature to all other castes above them and they often have services to castes in more than one village. The seventh caste tends to confine its main service of teaching the three R's to the upper group of Nairs. All the castes below are polluting in the sense that they pollute the higher castes not only by touching but also by approaching closer beyond a prescribed scale of distance. The caste of Tandans, the eighth in the list, are toddy tappers, jaggery makers and holders of simple-lease tenure (verumpattam) and casual agricultural labourers. At least one family in one or a few villages has the hereditary right of handling some disputes of lower castes. The Tandan Kurup of this group is in some places the traditional instructor in gymnasium (Kalari) and is a specialist in massage. Ganisa Panicker is to the village the most important of this group serving as astrologer with a right to serve castes above within one or a few villages. The more essential of the services of the next caste, Mannan, is rendered by Mannan women and it is ritual purification of women of castes of Nairs and above after menstruation and delivery. The tenth group is of artisan castes, the carpenter, mason, bell-metal worker, goldsmith and iron-smith respectively in the order mentioned. The important service of Pulluvan of the next group is to propitiate snake-deities for the higher castes. The Panan of the same group supplies leaf umbrellas and castrates cattle.

The Cheruman is a caste of agricultural serfs devoted to agricultural labour of a wide variety serving the land owners and tenants of whom the bulk are the middle group of Nairs. The next group of castes may be regarded as semi-tribal each with a compact settlement on hill slopes, waste lands or jungle areas. The Parayan has bamboo matting and basketry and the removal and skinning of dead cattle as his chief occupation and he serves all castes of a few villages. The Nayadi supplies forest produce such as honey, fibre and some herbs and serves several villages. The Malayan is a gatherer and supplier of forest produce but he does not have standardised relations with the village folk as is the case with the Nayadi or the Parayan. The immigrant castes have by now become integrated into the rural social structure but except for the Imbrandiris who are temple priests they have no ritual services to the indigenous castes. They are, however, important groups of castes and their occupational services rendered without village-wise limitations will be considered in a later context.

The picture of groups of castes is not complete even in its summary form without mention of the families of rank and high wealth who originally belonged to Nair castes but are socially aloof from them by virtue of their rank. Such families known as Sthanis are mainly the former Desavaris and Naduvaris and those who got titles ascribed by pre-British chieftains for deeds of merit or for

holding offices of importance. The term Sthani connotes the meaning of rank with political rights and privileges ascribed in the past by pre-British rulers and held hereditarily by the same family. Sthani families, to which even Nair caste they originally belonged, are regarded as ranking above all Nair caste subject to certain limitations to be ~~aw~~ described later. The titles attached to such ranks are usually the original caste names and there are thus families of Sthani Nair, Sthani Panicker and rarely Sthani Variyar (a temple service caste). All Sthani families are janmis of considerable wealth and are in this respect on a par with the very wealthy janmis who mainly belong to the castes of Nambudiris and Samanthans.

A janmi whether Nambudiri, Samanthan or a Sthani has his retainers of Nair castes residing in villages where he owns lands and holding his lands under kanam, or less commonly under verumpattam, tenure. The retainers render ritual services and the large number of their families are located within the village of his residence and in a few neighbouring villages where he owns lands. Sudra Nairs are retainers of Nambudiris, Kiriyattil and Charna Nairs of Sthanis, and Kiriyattil Nairs and Charna Menons of Samanthans. Several of the janmis are also managers (Uralans) of temples of wealth and the tenants of temple lands are virtually under the overlordship of the janmi-manager. Such tenants belong to the upper group of Nair castes or to the castes of temple servants some of whom

hold the tenure as a right for their temple service.

The Nair tenants of a village related to the janmi through the tenure and through retainer services may be regarded as the core group in the study of the village structure. A village may be regarded as Sthani headed or Nambudiri headed or Samanthan headed according to the caste of the janmi even when the janmi owning most of the lands of the village is not residing there. The nature of the relations of the upper group of Nairs with the janmi and their command over, as well as their inter-caste relations with, lower castes residing in the village justify such a statement. It may be noted that there are, in parts of South Malabar, villages 'headed' (in the sense mentioned) by families of Rajas (pre-British rulers) or by a wealthy Nair janmi ranking below the Sthani. There are also instances of a very wealthy Nair kanam tenant or more rarely a verumpattam tenant of high wealth being regarded for all practical purposes as the head of one or a few villages in which he has got extensive lands held under tenure.⁵ It is important to note that whether a janmi or a kanam tenant heads a village it is always a large joint family that heads and not an individual. The picture of villages outlined here as being headed by a family is not

5. No case of a verumpattam tenant becoming such a 'head' has come to my notice but informants state that there are rare instances even in Walluvanad taluk particularly when verumpattam is held directly under a janmi or a temple.

so simple, for there are villages, although probably small in number in each taluk, under janman rights of several janmis. However, in an account of coverage over a taluk or taluks it is proper to generalise that in the villages the centres of power and authority are janmi families of Sthanis, Samanthans or Nambudiris or rarely families of wealthy and leading Nair kanam tenants some of whom had, by the close of last century, acquired janmam lands.⁶

The terms 'power' and 'authority' need an explanation to understand in what sense a village gets a good amount of unity and coherence in this century. Power and authority indicate "an individual's command over the actions of others, or, as a corollary, his own freedom of action..... Power might be taken to refer to an 'unexpected' command.... not thought of as a right but rather as a use of resources of any kind - physical, economic, based on belief and so forth; 'Authority' is always expected and de jure."⁷

The tenants of the upper group of Nair castes in a village, who, as noted, form the core group in the village, have power held by several families in varying degrees. They hold authority over their sub-tenants or

6. There are no Nambudiri families in Palghat taluk where big janmis are Nairs, Samanthans, and a few Mannadiyar families (originally an immigrant caste of Tarakan rank).

7. S.F.Nadel, Foundations of Social Anthropology, (Cohen & West, London) p.169.

cultivators but generally it is much less than that held by the family heading the village. Therefore they will henceforward be mentioned as families of the power group by which reference is to the group of Nair families holding power and some degree of authority over the lower castes and over the less wealthy and almost powerless families of their own caste. The bases of power come for a detailed consideration in a later context but suffice it to note here that factors such as caste rank, wealth in land, affiliations with centres of power and authority, positions in government service, local prominence for leadership qualities, contacts with those much highly placed in other villages, all constitute the bases of power. Broadly speaking, in the present context power and authority are based on the fact that caste rank is correlated to wealth in paddy lands. This fact has been pointed out in the previous chapter by stating that hierarchy of castes broadly coincided with hierarchy of groups holding different interests in land - janmam, kanam, verumpattam. There are instances of villages where upper group of Nair castes, or castes above them, are absent or in a minority without power, and castes below Nairs predominate. A village of this type comes under the grip of families of power in one, or sometimes a few, of the neighbouring villages.

Each of the majority of villages can thus be looked upon in terms of the family of power and authority and the

group of families of power, the latter usually belonging to the upper group of castes of Nairs. The power-group families though commonly are Nairs of the upper group, in some villages they are of the Samanthan castes, rarely of the Ambalavasi castes and not infrequently are instances of a combination of families of castes of upper group of Nairs and above, except Nambudiris, becoming the power-group.

The three villages studied can now be briefly mentioned in terms of the centres of power and authority. In Munnurkode a Nambudiri joint family which owns over 95% of the land resides with families of Sudra Nair retainers. In Karattukursi are Sudra Nair families, retainers of a Nambudiri family staying in the neighbouring village Chalavara and owning three fourths of the lands of Karattukursi. The two are thus Nambudiri-headed and each is only one of the few villages supplying retainer services of Sudra Nairs to their respective heads. Kolappulli is a village headed by a Sthani Nair who lives in Kavalappara, a village three miles away. Nearly three fourth of the lands of the village belongs to the Sthani Nair and it is one of the few villages where his retainers, the Kiriyaattil Nairs, reside. In each of the three villages families of power belong to the retainer castes.

A few observations on spatial distribution of castes in a village is pertinent here in order to get a graphic idea of the multicaste Hindu village. The sketch map of

Munnurkode that follows shows houses grouped caste-wise in different parts of the village as can be observed today. The other two villages have similar though not identical distribution of castes. Although the settlements (houses each with a compound) of Nairs and above are impressively dispersed, what is open to observation today shows a tendency to cluster. Partition of families in the last three decades and the desire to locate oneself as near to one's kin as possible lead to the closer grouping of houses. However, even in former times, the degree of closeness in grouping in one convenient site or the degree of dispersal along certain tracts, varied caste-wise. A few polluting castes such as the Tandans and carpenters (and Moslems) show a comparatively high closeness in grouping. My observation in other villages shows that among some castes is a tendency to live closer even when they can afford to stay in larger compounds. Such castes in decreasing order of their observed preference for dispersed settlements are Tandans, Artisan castes, immigrant castes, lower polluting castes of Parayan and Nayadi. It can however be remarked with reference to all the villages I visited, that wealthy Christians, Moslems and the very wealthy families of Tandans and of immigrant castes of Tarakans show a preference to have substantial houses in spacious compounds. In respect of Hindu castes it may be generalised that matrilineal castes have dispersed settlements while the patrilineal indigenous castes in descending order of rank show a

decreasing preference for dispersal, the exceptions being Nambudiris at the top of the rank order and Cherumans (agricultural serfs) among the bottom castes. The Nambudiris have the dispersal pattern of Nairs while the Cherumans are largely scattered in garden compounds owned by Nairs under garden-land-tenure. Miss Jan^aki in her paper on Geographical basis of rural settlements in Kerala has shown that there are several types of variations of dispersed settlements in Kerala and that nucleated villages exist in the ghat regions and parts of Palghat taluk and at cross-roads now developing into townships.⁸ What my observation shows is that, as already outlined, within a village there are caste-wise differences in the degree of dispersal. Again, I find that even in a nucleated village there is caste-wise difference in the compactness of grouping of houses. The most nucleated village which she ~~has~~ ^{has} pointed out in Palghat taluk is Kollengode, forty-five miles away from the focal villages of this study. I visited this village for a brief stay in connection with this study and I found that houses are grouped caste-wise

8. Miss V.A. Janaki, "Geographical Basis for the Distribution and Pattern of Rural Settlement in Kerala", Journal of the M.S. University of Baroda, vol. II, No.2, October, 1953, pp. 41-54.

In this paper the author has shown that (1) dispersed settlements have linear, uniformly spaced or semi-grouped pattern (2) Moslems, Christians and non-Malayalee Hindus have settlements of a rather nucleated nature (3) there are in some areas some nucleated villages of indigenous Hindu castes.

and houses of Nairs and above are less compactly grouped than those of the lower castes and particularly of the good number of immigrant castes in that border village.

Turning to the lower groups of castes enumerated, the distribution of several of them in the villages is governed by their customary right to serve higher castes of a specified area. This area varies with the nature of services but it is scarcely that it is confined to one village. The right to serve various castes in an area is a guarded heritage and an asset and is known by the term 'Avakasam'. The term means 'right' or 'privilege' and it involves both economic and ritual relations.

Avakasam services, from the vantage point of Nairs of the upper group, are chiefly those of barber, washerman, purifier of pollution after birth and death and funeral priest and of artisan castes. This group of Nairs, as noted, themselves render ritual services to Sthani Nairs, Samanthans and Nambudiris. Such families to whom the Nairs have to serve in a ritual capacity are very few and far between and it is therefore reasonable to think of the village as a locus of social relations in which the Nairs of the upper group and the avakasam castes are the major groups. Nairs of the upper group regard a few avakasam castes as the most essential: the birth-death pollution purifier and funeral priest (Attikursi), barber and midwife (Vilakkattira), washerman (Veluthedan), all of them belonging to lower groups of Nairs, and of the castes still

lower, the menstrual pollution purifier (Mannan), carpenter (Asari) and ironsmith (Karuvan) and astrologer (Panicker). The Cheruman is, strictly speaking, not an avakasam caste and has no ritual service but he is an essential caste of farm labourers in the village economy.

The recent studies of Eric Miller and Kathleen Gough dealing in the main or in part with the Malabar village contribute a great deal to our knowledge of the village community in Malabar. A reference to these studies also helps to confine the consideration of my field data to such aspects which may further enlighten our knowledge of the Malabar village. Miller in his article "Village Structure in North Kerala" provides a general picture of village structure in Malabar and Cochin.⁹ He deals with the evolution of the modern *desam* and the pre-British horizontal and vertical unity of castes, the former cutting across *desams* and thus presumably contributing to the unity of *nad* (district). The latter as seen in the vertical system of rights and obligations between castes was not confined to village boundaries but overlapped villages. He notes that this feature of overlapping was probably one of the factors contributing to the unity of the *nad*.

Regarding the present situation he notes:

"...it is very difficult nowadays in Kerala to point out

9. Eric Miller, op. cit., and "Caste and Territory in Malabar", *American Anthropologist*, vol. 56, No.3, June, 54. Kathleen Gough, "Changing Kinship Usages in the Setting of Political and Economic Change among the Nayers of Malabar", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. LXXXII, 1953.

to any unit as a clearly demarcated, coherent independent village community."¹⁰

Subsequently Miller has handled several of the same aspects in his paper on "Caste and Territory in Malabar" which shows territorial segmentation of the pre-British times as a correlate of a rigid caste system.¹¹ The studies of Gough and Miller show the nature of *desam* as a unit of limited self-sufficiency in the past as well as today. There is therefore no need to illustrate that the village in this century is often deficient of a few castes rendering important services to the various castes. In his second paper mentioned, Miller makes a specific analysis of caste in relation to local political structure. He shows that for various groups of castes the spatial range of social relations beyond *desam* varied but was confined within the *nadu*. The exceptions to this feature were the Nambudiris and in some aspects the Samanthans. This contributed to the unity

10. Miller, "Village Structure in North Kerala", p.50.

11. Miller, "Caste and Territory in Malabar", Miller notes that (1) the pre-British *nadu* was the possible limit to which lower castes below military Nairs could extend their social relations within caste (2) their relations with other castes were largely confined to the village (3) men of chieftain castes could and did tend to confine marriage to their chiefdom (4) political boundaries circumscribed the movement of military Nairs (5) "Only the military Nairs and higher castes had any internal organisation that extended to the boundaries (of the chiefdom) and beyond." (6) castes below Nairs had a smaller spatial range of social relations within caste although possibly the spatial limit was the *nadu* (the district or a chiefdom). Thus the rigid caste system existed correlated to these features and the unity of the *nadu* maintained.

within the larger territory, the chiefdom, and as he states "inhibited the growth of caste solidarity over a wide area."

There is clear overlapping of vertical interdependence among villages in this century. From the villager's point of view, as I learn it, this feature is desirable in view of the contiguous nature of the villages. This leads to inter-village attitudes of mutual concern and regard and curbs tendencies of a village unity from becoming aggressive against the interests of a neighbouring or contiguous village. The fact of relations such as those of lessor-lessee, master-servant, patron-client, devotee-deity, and relations of ritual cooperation and ties of kinship, all crossing village boundaries ensure harmonious attitudes at inter-village levels of contacts. Some of these relations, it will be seen in a later context, directly or indirectly contribute to the sense of interdependence and consequent coherence among castes within a village. The villager has an awareness of a certain amount of vertical interdependence instituted and otherwise, shared with neighbouring villages. It is this feeling or awareness which has to be recognised.

The village as noted is a limited self-sufficient entity, a fact which becomes further explicit in several contexts in this study. Kathleen Gough notes that the village structure of interdependence of castes in Malabar, inspite of the political changes imposed from outside remained intact throughout the 19th century.¹² This

12. K. Gough, op.cit.

sustained interdependence of castes, as my data show, with the fact of village as an administrative unit for a century, and the sense of security derived from the existence of a group of families of power and the village 'head', has created a 'We' feeling among the residents of the village. The village unity in this century is an outcome of this feeling and it finds collective expression in demands for common benefits such as schools, contribution to benefit funds and some offerings to temples at festival times exhibiting a village spirit to excel such offerings of other villages. Above all, in general, the unity can be found in the villager's speaking in terms of whatever the village can boast of in distinction to another and also in speaking in terms of one's village name as the common way of revealing one's identity to stranger's outside the village.¹³ It is important to note that some of the assets a village can boast of may apparently seem to be divisive rather than cohesive factors. For instance, village lands may belong to two or three janmis and the residents are thus under different centres of authority and power. But a resident of such a village would say "we have three janmis with interests in our village and we have thus contracts with three great centres." Similar attitude exists when two or three

13. Miller in his "Village Structure in North Kerala" states that in Cochin when two Nayars meet the mutual identity is revealed not in terms of their villages but in terms of the Nambudiri family whom they serve. I think this is rather the traditional pattern and even then there appears to have been the alternative of introducing oneself in terms of one's desam which is quite a common practice today.

territorial segments of a village are under right to worship and devote to annual festivals at different temples of which one or two are outside the village, as is often seen in the instance of a good number of villages. A villager would say "we have 'Tattakams' (temple-right areas) for three temples and all those deities are ours although only segments of our village, by right, participate in festival offerings." There is truth in such statements, as will later be seen in the patronage of a range of deities reputed for bestowing different benefits. Such features which apparently do not contribute to village unity are to be viewed from the villagers' point of view.

The Nair informants of any caste speak of their villagers as 'We' but on further enquiry it is found that the higher castes always leave out the immigrant castes and Moslems from the 'We' group. There is, as seen today, also a tendency to exclude Tandans living on the border areas and not working regularly on the village farms but devote to toddy tapping and other work in a number of villages. In Munnurkode (in 1955) a group of Pattar Brahmins (11 families) staying close to the Nambudiri house and Moslems (48 families) staying on the western margin marked off by a canal and Chettis (6 families) staying on the eastern corner are not recognised as integral parts of the village group. The Nairs (94 families) when questioned about their we-feeling also tend to exclude Tandans (11 families) staying in the Moslem sector

marked off by the canal. Information from other villages permit the general statement that indigenous castes living within the village boundary are usually regarded by higher castes as components of the 'We' group. However, there is a marked tendency to exclude castes living more compactly in one corner of the village living chiefly through means derived from outside the village and thus keeping off from regular sustaining interdependence with other castes in the village. This tendency in its feeble beginnings characterise the we-group feeling in the beginning of this century. This feature of exclusion of castes from the 'We' group also bears out that at least in this century cooperation of various castes in celebrating the annual temple festival of the chief village deity is not a satisfactory index of the enduring interdependence of the various castes throughout the year.

Miller speaks of the unity of a Malabar village in this century as a nebulous concept. One of the important reasons, as he discusses the subject, is the overlapping of avakasam services over several villages as when a family of washerman or barber or astrologer serves several castes in a few villages. I regard that this in itself cannot in the normal course adversely affect village unity for the reason that there is no sense of dependency on the giver of such services. Avakasam implies on the part of the giver (of services or goods) a right to give, and on the part of the receiver, a right to receive. The delivery

of what is given is not 'ex-godown' but at the doors of the receiver. A giver, if defaults, can be punished or coerced to resume his supply, and for this, economic sanctions can be used through or by the families of power or the centre of power and authority. As a corollary, the right to receive can be withdrawn from the receiver if he or his family has done a serious breach of his caste customs or violated the more important of the norms of inter-caste relations.

In view of this feature of avakasam services, the factors adversely affecting village unity should better be recognised in some other fields of inter-village dependence. Avakasam services are required at specified occasions and there is a minimum quantity of such services expected from avakasam families. Beyond this minimum a non-avakasam family may be sought from outside one's village to render services of the avakasam category. This is done through the interest in the choice of specialists for reasons of quality of service and it is a common feature regarding services such as astrology and carpentry. Generally, specialists such as ironsmith, carpenter, astrologer and very rarely bell metal worker, all rendering services not exclusively ritual, may be sought from outside retaining the avakasam specialists to render the minimum services required. There are, again, specialised occupations of an 'open' nature which are practised by several castes, and services of such specialists, irrespective of their caste,

are sought from outside one's village. Astrology, Ayurvedic medicine, curative and destructive magic, child therapy, home tuition in the three R's, instruction in music, curing cattle disease, 'Kathakali' (a form of Malabar drama) and massage (a quack physiotherapy) are occupations of this category. Even if families specializing in these exist in one village, occupational specialists of this category are often chosen from outside one's village for reasons of quality and confidence. For unskilled or semi-skilled labour such as bund making, quarrying bricks and casual labour to supplement farm work there is often need to depend on neighbouring villages and the preference for quality sometimes maintains such dependence. In general, services of a rather contractual nature exist alongside avakasam services often competing against and pushing the latter to the minimum required. Possibly, these features limiting the village unity in varying degrees in different villages must have existed in pre-British times.

My data provide an explanation of the need for sharing services of some avakasam families among a few villages. From my material on fraternal polyandry in South Malabar I find that the avakasam castes of Tandan, Panicker, Mannan, Pulluvan and all artisan castes practised fraternal polyandry until the early decades of this century, and traces of it among them can be seen in Walluvanad taluk today. They have patrilineal extended family and virilocal residence. Their growth of population was thus much

restricted while the higher castes except Nambudiris had no factors curtailing growth of population for the last 150 years. All Nairs practised non-fraternal polyandry, but as I have shown in my paper on Polyandry in Malabar, it had a limited distribution and a rapidly decreasing incidence.¹⁴ The polyandrous patrilineal families could, under the institution of avakasam, serve the increasing population of Nairs who were spreading into villages of sparse population. Thus, the nature of avakasam tended to obviate the problem of receiving essential services from castes, who, under the institution of polyandry, lagged behind their 'master' castes in the growth of population. At the same time the possibility of competition of the kind mentioned was a proper incentive to avakasam specialists such as artisans and astrologers to be skilful and not deteriorating in the quality of their 'monopolistic' services for the villagers.

A certain amount of vertical interdependence within the village was always a minimum requirement most desired by the higher castes. This is evident from the history of villages of Munnurkode and Panamanna as could be gathered from scrappy information obtained from very elderly informants. The Nambudiri family in Munnurkode came there from thirty miles away nearly six generations back and started

14. K.Raman Unni, "Polyandry in Malabar", Sociological Bulletin, Indian Sociological Society, March, 1958 and September, 1958, pp.62-79 and pp.123-133 respectively.

This paper relates to Nair polyandry. My material on fraternal polyandry has not been published.

permanent residence since most of the lands there and in two contiguous villages belonged to it. They brought with them three Sudra Nair families as their retainers from their original home village and another five from three different villages where they owned lands. Until their arrival the village had only a few polluting castes and a few Nair families of castes below Sudra Nairs. The village had a Kalari (gymnasium) location and Kalari-gift-land although the building of the Kalari disappeared over eighty years ago. This and a few other evidences show that the village was once under the Sthani Nair family of Trikkateri.¹⁵ All avakasam castes are said to have been brought there by the Nambudiris and the Nairs but nobody knows when they came although there are memories of their having come from different villages near and far. In the village of Panamanna one Sudra Nair family from Munnurkode went and settled down over 150 years ago until which time that village was peopled by Nair castes of the middle and lower groups and some polluting castes. There is a subsequent history of this family becoming wealthy and powerful and a dozen other families of the same caste and a few avakasam families of different castes settling in that village.

15. How the Nambudiri got lands is not known. There are two small patches of land in the village which belongs to a segment of the zamorin's lineage and one patch which belongs to Trikkateri Sthani Nair. From the existence of the Kalari-location and gift lands and the title 'Kurup' given to a low caste Nair family enjoying the income from the land, it appears that the village was once under Trikkateri Sthani Nair.

Enquiries about the history of these and other villages show that there is no formalised means to record or remember it. Nor does it dwell in the 'folk memory' except vaguely for the recent past of a little over a century. More probing enquiries meet with the frequent answer that the village has as great an antiquity as the family which 'heads' it, or as ancient an origin as the temple of the patron goddess. The villager's indifference to think of the remote history conveys that the village unity is not augmented by any memories of a continuous history. Informants were better equipped with some knowledge of the power families and of their powerful members of the past, who, during the past hundred years and more, held command over and control of inter-caste relations.

Interests and affiliations of higher caste families of upper group of Nairs and above considerably cross the village boundary. This feature, per se, does not impair the sense of dependence on the part of the lower castes which is the core fact of village unity. The nature of such interests and affiliations may be categorised as those connected with wealth in land outside the village, social relations chiefly pertaining to marriage, relations designed to increase one's power, and patronage of deities far and near. These categories are related to the feature of vertical mobility of families within the higher castes which comes for analysis in a later chapter. However, it may be noted in this context that the families which

successfully maintain these categories become more prestigious and worthy of dependence in the eyes of several castes in the village.

Miller does not recognise the existence of families of power who may be identified in almost every village. This is perhaps due to his concern with the traditional *desam*, the main subject of his paper, which can be best described in terms of a *Desavari* or a *janmi* who headed and almost reigned over it. However, Miller recognises the *de facto* power of *Adhikari* (the revenue officer and village-head of the *amsam*, or a group of villages) when he belongs to a family of traditional wealth and high standing.¹⁶ But even when the *Adhikari* has no local eminence and power beyond what he can officially command, there is, as I find, atleast one family in nearly every village commanding respect of lower castes and controlling inter-caste relations from glaring deviations. In part, the existence of some aspects of power of such families is attributable to the institution of '*Pramanis*' which served the *desam* from very early times and has even today not disappeared. In almost every *desam* of pre-British times, a few, one to five or six, men of intelligence noted also for their soundness of judgement in settling small differences between the *desam* residents, acquired the designation *Pramanis*. They chiefly belonged to the Nair castes and impartially handled small local disputes

16. Miller, "Village Structure in North Kerala", pp.45-46.

related to inter-caste relations, property or breach of customs. Their offices were not hereditary and often their services overlapped desams particularly when a desam did not have any Pramani. Pramanis also known as 'Nattukaryasthan' (literally, those who handle local affairs), exist in this century, often one or two or more serving a group of villages. The terms Pramani and Nattukaryasthan have different connotations but the roles associated with each can hardly be clearly distinguished. And atleast in this century, roles of Pramani and Nattukaryasthan can be seen resting in the same person who either rose to prominence partly because of the power resources of his family or whose local importance led to the recognition of his family as powerful.

Thus we see that the village unity of this century can be located in the vertical interdependence of castes living within the village, and the associated we-feeling which is partly a result of coresidence in an area recognised as an administrative unit. We have also noted the significance of the families of power in fostering among the rest of the village residents a sense of dependence on them. The role of power families in nurturing a sense of security among the rest also emerges from the foregoing considerations.

From the point of view of vertical interdependence a village may be regarded as nearly representative if there are castes of Nairs of the upper group, a few atleast of the

avakasam castes and the caste of agricultural labourers. Castes rendering services of a non-avakasam category are more limited in their distribution than the castes rendering avakasam services and they stay more compactly in one village, often close on the roadside or in a sparsely occupied stretch of land of a multicasite village. Occupationally, they are the granite-stone worker, lime burner, foot-wear maker, weaver, betel leaf cultivator and dairyist and potter. Several of these are sought for at different times in a representative village and they can therefore be regarded as complementary castes. Relations with them are of a contractual nature but a few families of them may, any time, atleast in the beginning of this century, be considered as a welcome addition to the village, and land would be provided by the janmi-head to accommodate them. Such castes stay in groups, few and far between, on the lands of a janmi-head or on the lands of a wealthy Nair family and thus owe allegiance to a master family as their landlord and local protector.

There are villages where Nairs are absent and a few castes below them have settled. These are villages which have been pointed out as coming under the families of power or janmi-heads located outside. The castes seen in such villages are Chettis (weavers and hawkers of cloth), Tarakans (dairying, betel leaf cultivation and miscellaneous jobs), Kadupottans (miscellaneous jobs) and Tandans (toddy tapping, jaggery making and manual labour). Often, a good number of

Moslem families also stay compactly in one part of such a village. Numerically, one or two castes predominate in such a village and all castes render services to a few neighbouring villages as an important means of their subsistence. Their sense of dependency on a few villages in the neighbourhood is diffused but they regard themselves as secure under the power of a few wealthy families, often one or two, in a neighbouring village, with whom they have lessor-lessee or tenant-cultivator relationships. Such master families regard them as a reserve of labour force, or a source of non-ritual and miscellaneous services which can be commanded at occasions such as of large-scale feasts. The village of Viramangalam contiguous to Munnurkode and Trikkateri has Tarakans and Tandans and a few Moslems but there are no Nairs and it comes under the Sthani Nair family of Trikkateri which owns a major part of that village lands. Kolakkad and Mangot are other villages of this type falling within a radius of three miles around the focal village of Munnurkode.

A village of this category as Viramangalam may be termed 'feeder village' as a conceptual distinction from the multi-caste village with higher castes. Such a village feeds other villages in the neighbourhood with goods and services and got fed by them with payment in cash and kind.
