

CHAPTER III

CASTES AND OTHER GROUPS

There is no word in Malayalam for sub-caste. The word 'Jati' might mean caste or a division of it with a local label. In this study what are usually called sub-castes in Malabar are mentioned as castes. This is justified for a few reasons: (1) references to the various divisions of castes such as of Nairs and Ambalavasis are available in literature on castes of a very early period. It appears that the identity of such divisions were well established as early as that period and each division therefore deserves to be treated as a caste. (2) until about a few decades ago the divisions called sub-castes emphasised their identity in terms of expressions of differentiation from other divisions. (3) the restriction on interdining, the hierarchical order in which the divisions are arranged and the very existence of the divisions, or most of them, can be traced back nearly to as early as a period as the end of the reign of the Perumal Kings.¹

1. Dr. S.K.Nair in his article (in Malayalam) "Kerala Castes 'Customs' Determination" in the Mathrubhumi Weekly, Kerala State Special Issue of October, 28, 1956 mentions of an old work dealing with the subject which he came upon while examining eighteen books (? or versions) of the title 'Keralolpatti' (Origin of Kerala). Dr. Nair's account shows that most of the Nair castes now heard of and some now regarded as obsolete are mentioned in that book as

Castes in the three villages and the strength of these castes in each village in terms of the number of families are presented in the table below. The table shows: (1) castes in the three villages with their strength in terms of number of families (2) castes which are not in the village but render occasional or rare services (3) castes which are not in the villages but known to the high caste informants as important castes who have or are eligible to have relations with families of the power group as landlords or as affinal relations. Castes of the upper group of Nairs and above who are not in the three villages and are not marked as service castes are of this category.

The table is thus a composite one to facilitate description in this and the following chapters. The whole list of castes may be regarded as nearly exhaustive of the castes of Walluvanad taluk.² The castes in the table

 having been organised and assigned their due place by Jagadguru Shri Sankara (8th century A.D.) Attur Krishna Pisharodi in his 'Kerala Charitram' (in Malayalam), Part I, Ramaniya Printing House, Trichur, 1932, mentions that all castes and the divisions of each caste had, by the time of the last Perumal (828 A.D.) become established in their rank order and intergroup relations.

2. An exhaustive list of castes, even of one taluk, from published sources is not possible to be prepared for such information does not tally with what can be observed in a group of neighbouring villages. Malabar Dist. Gazetteer (vol. I, p.96, 1951 ed.) states: "... where the same caste is common to two tracts the sub-divisions are often different and sometimes sub-divisions bearing the same name have a different social status in different places. Thus as a general rule the sub-divisions of Nayers in north Malabar class for class, rank higher, or considerably that they do, than the corresponding sub-divisions in south Malabar."

are enumerated in approximate order of their ritual rank, and order on which Nair informants generally tend to agree. The rank between groups of castes is usually not disputed but the rank of individual castes within a group is often uncertain. The rank of each caste, however, will become clarified in the course of description of the castes in this chapter.

Note on the Table:-

1. The number of households in the table is taken from the official village-head's (Adhikari) food-ration register which is maintained with accuracy upto 1949. The register permits caste-wise divisions of families and also to clarify doubts with selected informants since names of members of families are almost invariably given in the register with the caste name prefixed or suffixed.
2. In the table the indigenous castes are arranged into groups and numbered serially but the immigrant castes, known to this day as having come from outside, are numbered as A, B, C and so on.
3. The term family is used here as interchangeable with the term household which here means residence group of parents/guardians and children, in all ~~be~~ from two to a few generations, having a common kitchen and jointly owned property.
4. Column I shows very approximately the degree of requirement of the occupational services of each castes to the village residents in general from the point of view of the upper group of Nair Castes. Sign 'X' shows that the caste is required rarely, sign 'XX' that it is required occasionally and sign 'XXX' frequently. This degree of requirements has reference largely to conditions in the beginning of this century.
5. The dominant occupation of each caste, when a caste is known to possess one, or its role in the rural economy is mentioned in the last column.
6. Castes below Nairs who are not marked as required for service serve the village through the weekly market and they also supply goods or services to order.

Table 3

Table of Castes

Note:- Column I. - X - Services required rarely
 XX - Services required occasionally
 XXX - Services required frequently.

Castes	Villages and number of households in each			Predominant occupation/ role in the economy
	Munnur- kode	Karattu- kursi	Kolap- pulli	
I	II	III	IV	V
<hr/>				
<u>Patrilineal Castes</u>				
1a. Nambudiri Brahmins.				Landlords (Janmis)
Nambudiripad	1	-	1	
Bhattatiripad	-	-	1	
Nambudiri	-	-	6	
Bhattatiri	-	-	-	
A. Imbrandiri	-	1	-	Priestly
B. Pattar Brahmin	11	-	-	Miscellaneous
1b. Moosad	-	-	-	Priestly jobs
Ilayad	1	-	-	-do-
<u>Matrilineal</u>				
2. Ambalavasi castes				Temple service
Nambissan*	-	-	-	
Chakkial*	-	-	-	
Nambiar				
Pisharodi	-	-	14	
Variyar	5	2	1	
Poduval				

* These two Ambalavasi castes are patrilineal.

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	1	2	3	4	5
Marar					
Kurup					
3. <u>Samanthan castes</u>					Landlords
(a) Tirumulpad	-	-	-		
Vellodi	-	-	-		
Eradi	-	-	-		
Nedungadi	-	1	-		
Kartavu	-	-	-		
(b) Sthanis	-	-	-		-do-
4. <u>Nair castes</u>					
<u>Upper Group</u>					
Kiriyam Nambiar	-	3	25		Chiefly kanam tenants
Kiriyam Nair	-	-	120		
Sudra Nair	61	47	12		
Charma Menon	3	3	3		
Nair Panicker	1	-	-		
5. <u>Nair castes</u>					
<u>Middle Group</u>					
Charma Nair	-	-	2		Serve higher castes in speci- fied ways and are verumpattam tenants.
Vattekat	X	2	6	40	
Pallichan	X	1	1	13	
Ulladan	X	11	2	-	
Anduran		-	-	-	Make ritual mud pots.
Attikursi	XXX	15	-	3	Ritual pollution purifier.
Chotha Nair	XXX	-	-	-	Priests

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		1	2	3	4	5
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6. <u>Nair castes</u>						
<u>Low Group</u>						
Veluthedan	XXX	1	-	3	Washerman	
Vilakkatira	XXX	4	1	4	Barber	
<u>Patrilineal Castes</u>						
7. Tarakan	X	-	-	-	Betel leaf and agriculture.	
Muttan	X	-	-	-	Trade and agriculture.	
Kadupottan (Eruthachan)	X	-	-	-	Miscellaneous	
C. Chetti	X	6	2	28	Cloth, Oil, 'Pappadam'	
8. Ganisa Panicker	XX	4	-	2	Astrology	
Tandan Kurup	X	-	-	1	Massage	
Tandan	XX	11	31	88	Toddy, agricultural labour.	
9. Mannan	XXX	4	2	15	Ritual pollution purifier and local masons.	
10. <u>Kammalan castes</u>						
<u>Artisans</u>						
Asari	XXX	12	4	19	Carpenter	
Moosari	X	1	-	2	Bell metal work	
Tattan	XX	4	3	5	Goldsmith	
Karuvan	XXX	5	-	10	Ironsmith	
D. Kallan-Muppan		-	-	-	Granite stone work	
Kollan		-	-	1	Cobbler	
E. Kurikkan		-	-	6	Field labour and animal transport	
F. Kumbaran	X	-	-	16	Potter	
11. Pulluvan	X	-	-	-	Snake propitiation	
Paravan	X	-	-	-	Chunam maker	
Panan	XX	8	5	6	Umbrella making	

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1		2	3	4	5
12. Cheruman	XXX	77	24	128	Agricultural labour
13. Parayan	XX	-	-	-	Bamboo, mat and articles
Nayadi	X	-	-	-	Begging and supply of forest produce.
Malayan		-	-	-	Honey and forest herbs.
Mappila i.e. Moslems		48	26	16	Miscellaneous

Rank of Castes:-

When the castes are divided into groups of castes as shown in the table there is a considerable degree of consensus of opinion among the villagers regarding the rank of each group. Almost equally pronounced is the agreement on the relative rank of castes residing in the village or visiting that village frequently for services or in other capacities such as affinal relatives and the representatives of landlords who reside elsewhere and own lands in the village. Thus, undisputed opinion among informants on ranking is confined to castes which are known in contexts of frequent and direct interaction. The immigrant castes low in the social scale below Nairs have among them an unsettled ranking. This feature is partly consequent on their scattering and absence of co-residence of several of them in the same village. The arrangement of indigenous castes into groups of hierarchical

order is facilitated by the fact that between groups there is an impressive gradient of ranking well known to the villagers.

The groups of indigenous caste of Tandans and below can be termed as polluting castes in the sense of approach pollution (or atmospheric pollution) as distinct from pollution by contact. The polluting caste on the basis of the degree of pollution they impart may be grouped into upper, middle and low. The groups 8, 9, 10 and 11 form the upper group, 12 can be placed as the middle group and 13 the low group. Nairs and above can be regarded as caste-Hindus, and among them Nair castes can be grouped into three, the upper, middle and low as see shown in the table. Groups of castes above Nairs do not permit of such a division and will, when necessary, be referred to by specific names.

Before proceeding further it is profitable to note the sense in which terms such as status and rank are used in this study.³ 'Status' used without a qualifying adjective is taken to mean position in society or group,

3. T.H.Marshall in his article "A Note on Status" in Dr. Ghurye Felicitation Volume, Ed. K.M.Kapadia, (Bombay, 1954) shows the variety of meanings in which these terms are used and the difficulty of accepting such meanings exclusively.

Nadel, S.F. in Foundations of Social Anthropology, Cohen & West (London, 1954) p.171, defines the terms in a slightly different manner but rather more precisely. My definitions given here are partly derived from these two. I find that their definitions cannot be accepted to describe conveniently the caste structured society of this century. The relevance of my definitions where it appears necessary, will be pointed out in later chapters in the foot notes.

the dynamic or behavioural aspect of it being 'role.' Status does not here imply the relative valuation as high and low. Rank refers to the well recognised grading assigned to a status or a group on the basis of criteria which are or tend to be already defined or understood. By 'social status' I shall mean the total of prestigious assets of several categories. It implies evaluation by members of the community and thus it refers to position in the hierarchy of social prestige. It is synonymous with what some writers phrase as social standing. An evaluation as high or low confined to one field is expressed here by such terms as secular status, ritual status and economic status.

The description of castes that follows consists mainly of such features and aspects which should constitute the background required for the chapters that follow. The present tense used refers to the conditions obtaining in the first decade of this century.

Description of the Castes

The Nambudiris:-

The Nambudiris in general are regarded as the highest Brahmins and the ritual and religious heads of the castes of Malabar. They are wealthy landlords and the highest priestly castes who, as noted in the last chapter, head one or a few villages. The patrilineal Nambudiri family is known^{as} Illom both with reference to their family and the house. Illom is a form of joint

family characterised by the unique feature that only the eldest son of the family marries a Nambudiri woman and the younger ones form conjugal relations with the women of matrilineal castes. The matrilineal wives usually do not get viri (viri - with husband) local residence and their children belong to their family. The Nambudiri husband visits ^{his} matrilineal wife at her residence just as the visiting custom of husbands is observed by men of the matrilineal castes. This type of caste exogamy of the Nambudiris lead to many of their women to remain unmarried. This feature coupled with other factors⁴ have been reducing the Nambudiri population until recent decades. Another salient feature of the illom is that its property is impartible and the manager, the eldest male, cannot alienate property permanently in any manner,⁵ Under the

4. Irawati Karve in Kinship Organisation in India, Poona, (1953) p.258, refers to the marriage customs of the Nambudiris and states: "Because of this peculiar marriage custom the fertility potential of the community is not realised to its full value with the result that Nambudiris are the only community which showed a steady decline in numbers in the successive censuses of 1911 to 1941." In fact the Nambudiri population, it appears, has been declining through centuries. According to E.Kunjan Pillai 14th century can be estimated as the period when the Nambudiris developed the custom that only the eldest son could have Nambudiri wife or wives. Pillai also notes that this custom, the affiliation of children born of Nambudiri-Nair union to the Nair families, high sickness rate due to the custom of purdah, and out-casting of unmarried women on charges of immorality are some of the important factors which must have reduced the Nambudiri population by half in every two hundred years. - (Ilamkulam Kunjan Pillai, Some Problems of Kerala History, (in Malayalam) Part III, National Book Stall, (Kottayam, 1956), pp.86-100.

5. The impartibility and inalienability of Nambudiri Illom property and the right of the female to safeguard

restricted caste endogamy of the Nambudiris there is a possibility of an Illom becoming extinct. This is countered by the custom that the eldest Nambudiri who marries from his caste can have polygyny as a permitted form of marriage. However, it is in practice not common and is restricted to two and rarely three wives, and it is resorted to chiefly for reasons of barrenness or sickness of the first wife. Despite the possibility of polygyny if an illom has no progeny resort could be made to a form of marriage known as Sarvaswadhanam. This is the marriage of a daughter of the illom with a Nambudiri who is given permanent Uxori (with wife) local residence and is accepted as a member of her illom. The children born of this union perpetuate their mother's family as its members and legal descendants.

The Nambudiris have thus several characteristic institutions which favoured the retention of their wealth, reduced the possibility of increase and spread of population, and ensured continuity of their joint family. The consequence, in part, is that they are the best placed to maintain the top grading in wealth which coupled with their highest ritual rank gave them the highest social status in society. The Nambudiri population in the whole

interests regarding these have been briefly treated by K.M.Kapadia with reference to judicial decisions of law courts. See his Marriage and Family in India, Oxford University Press, (1958), pp.233-236.

of Kerala in the forties is estimated as about one per cent of the Hindu population,⁶ and in Malabar in 1931 they number about 24,000.

The Nambudiri castes mentioned in the table in the order of rank do not intermarry but interdine in the same hall providing caste-wise seating arrangements at dinner.

There are several castes of Nambudiris of which two to four are represented in about a dozen contiguous villages.⁷ Nambudiripads, also known as Adhyans, the highest in rank, who originally belonged to eight Illoms are scattered only in twenty-four Illoms in 1910, most of them located in South Malabar.⁸

The Nambudiri women observe strict seclusion and move out under a form of purdah, the body being covered with cloth and the head hidden off from sight by a leaf umbrella.

6. This and the other mention of percentages of population of other castes in this chapter are the estimates given by Eric Miller in his paper "Caste and Territory in Malabar" cited in the previous chapter.

7. A list of six Nambudiri castes is usually cited by informants. These are in the order of rank - Nambudiripad, Bhattatiripad, Nambudiri, Bhattatiri, Potti and Gramani, the last two being chiefly confined to Travancore. Thurston, in *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, (Madras, 1909), vol.V, p.162, mentions six castes of Nambudiris partly differing from this list. L.K.A.Iyer in his *Cochin Tribes and Castes* (Madras, 1912), vol.II, p.175, mentions six major divisions and several sub-divisions of Nambudiris.

8. This can be gathered from L.K.A.Iyer's account (ibid, p.174) in which 24 Adhyan families in 1910 are named.

A. Imbrandiri:-

They are Brahmin immigrants from South Canara widely scattered and staying near temples and Nambudiri houses as priests and cooks. Numerically they are much smaller than the Nambudiris. They are accepted as visiting husbands of matrilineal women of the castes of temple service and Nairs of the upper group. On the ritual scale they rank a shade higher than Moosads and Ilayads to be described.

B. Pattar Brahmins:-

They are designated also by the more popular and refined term Iyer and are immigrants from Tamil speaking areas. Census Reports record them as Tamil Brahmins who number 36289 in Malabar district in 1931 as against a total Hindu population of 2303756.⁹ They are chiefly concentrated in the border Taluk of Palghat and have a scatter confined mainly to towns, around Nambudiri illoms and temples. They are usually literate, often well educated and are not related to the agricultural economy as owners or tenants. They devote to a range of occupations such as managers of temples of wealth, of estates of Nambudiris, as dealers in a range goods, cooks of ritual purity, hotel keepers, musicians, money lenders, teachers, pleaders and government employees in several skilled jobs. The consequent spatial mobility limits, in practice, their otherwise possible joint family of three generations -

9. Census Report, Madras, 1931.

father, mother, married sons, their wives and children.

There are numerous divisions among them several of which may be regarded as castes under the generic term Pattar or Iyer. As among most other immigrant castes who maintain their traditional basic internal structure the Pattar Brahmins hardly need the ritual or ceremonial services of the indigenous castes. Although endogamous, Palghat and Walluvanad taluks provide rather infrequent instances of Pattars being accepted as visiting husbands of Nair women.

1(b) Ilayads and Moosads:-

Each of these castes is numerically very small and is regarded as degraded Nambudiris. Ilayads serve as priests for some of the rites of matrilineal castes of the upper group of Nairs and above. Moosads render semi-priestly services in some big temples and are often regarded as the highest of the temple service castes, and at the same time they are also recognised as quasi-Nambudiris.¹⁰

All Nambudiri castes (a) and (b) are literate but many of their women and the more idle men know only reading. Nambudiri men in good numbers are known for their lively knowledge and interest in Sanskrit. Some of them are

10. The Moosads though an allied caste are different from the Muttads of the Ponnani taluk and Cochin State. Muttads there have an honoured temple service allowing access close to the idol. Moosads in Malabar are two castes, Karuka Moosad and Kavil Moosad, the former serving as priests at some rites and the latter in temples. Moosu (alias Moosad) is still different and rank nearly equal to the Nambudiri. Moosus are originally the eight famous families of Nambudiri physicians who still keep up reputation in that profession.

specialists in astrology, ayurvedic medicine and the ancient Indian science of architecture. They devote to the study of these sciences rather as consultants than as professionals serving for pecuniary rewards.

Matrilineal Castes:-

General note:- All matrilineal castes have the joint family called "Taravad" which is a segment of a lineage. Its members have co-residence in one house and own property in common under the legal control of a guardian known as "Karanavan," the eldest male member. The lineage tends to comprise four to eight taravads and it is also referred to as taravad, but I shall confine the use of the term taravad to the dwelling group, the property owning group and refer to the larger social unit as lineage. In common usage according to context taravad also means the ancestral house of co-residence of all taravad members (the dwelling group). For convenience and clarity I shall use taravad house when the reference is to the common house of residence.

Marriage among the matrilineal castes is known as "Sambandham" which is characterised by (1) sexual rights of husband over wife but few economic obligations and absence of responsibility to maintain the wife and children (2) uxori-local residence and (3) easy divorce. Children of matrilineal women whether born through hypergamy with a patrilineal man or union with a matrilineal man belong to the mother's taravad. Uxori-local residence is not

permanent in that the husband visits the wife and stays with her only during the night. A taravad therefore consists of all children born to its female members and it has usually a depth of five to eight generations. Within a taravad are smaller units, the segments known as "Tavari" (a line of descent) which designates the group composed of a mother and her descendants, in all varying from two to four generations. At the death of the mother each of her daughters heads a tavari and there are as many more tavaris as the number of her daughters. When a taravad increases in numbers tavaris branch off to become separate taravads locating spatially as near to the parent taravad as possible.

Non-fraternal polyandry, as I have shown in my paper cited elsewhere, seems to have been confined to the Nair castes and traces of it can be recognised upto the thirties of this century.

In all matrilineal castes except the middle and lower groups of Nair castes both men and women know reading and writing. Even in traditional times it was a practice to train them in the three R's either at home or in the village school.

2. Ambalavasis:-

This term, meaning temple residents, designates a few castes serving in temples known as Ambalams which house Brahminic deities and are of a category higher than the Kavus, the temples of deities traditionally popular

among non-Brahmins. There are several castes of this category each with a wide scatter and a very small population.¹¹ Nambissan is a patrilineal caste preparing flower garlands for idols in some temples.¹² Chakkiars, a patrilineal caste recites with lively wits puranic stories often giving it a local colour with topical allusions. Chakkia Nambiar accompanies with his special drum and a woman of his caste (Nangiyar) beats time with a cymbal. Variyars are of two divisions, one serving temples as garland makers and the other as sweepers, but in some temples the same caste renders both services. Pisharodis are also garland makers but Variyars serve Siva temples and Pisharodis serve Vishnu temples. This distinction, although supported by tradition and some published accounts, does not seem to be strictly followed according to current information.¹³ The males of these two castes can interdine but I gather that by convention, as is still seen in many parts, each Ambalavasi caste

11. Some of these castes have a limited distribution. Thurston and Malabar Gazetteer, both already cited, give for some of the castes the corresponding names in North Malabar. An article "Pisharodi Rituals" by Rama Pisharodi in Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, vol.LVI, (1926) p.83 is also worthy of note in this connection.

12. In some parts Nambissan's roles are done by a caste of Nambiars. The former are seen more in the Cochin State and Ponnani taluk. L.K.A.Iyer (op. cit. p.133-137) describes four castes of Nambiars of which some families of Pushpagan Nambiars are titled as Nambissans. The Nambissan caste probably originated in that manner.

13. Thurston (op. cit. vol.II, p.325) states this distinction but my informants do not fully agree.

above Marar regards itself as superior. Interdining among them is only at occasions of public feasts at temples when only the males interdine and Brahmins serve the food. The Variyar and Pisharodi do not intermarry and each prefers Nambudiri or Imbrandiri husbands and Nair wives or to marry members of the same caste. Poduvals are of two divisions, Mala (garland) and Chenda (drumming instrument) Poduvals, the latter being the lower of the two. Each division can marry within itself but males of garland Poduvals can marry women of Sudra Nairs. Marar, the drummer, is the lowest of the Ambalavasis confining marriage relations chiefly to itself and sometimes seeking wives from Nair castes of the middle group. Kurup, perhaps a branch of the caste of Tiyyadi Nambiar who serves some wealthy Kavus, and the Kurup women known as Marumakalamma are both essential in the temple of the female deity, Bhagavati, at the annual performance of "Pattu" (singing songs of praise to the deity).

Published accounts differ in the number of castes included in the group of Ambalavasis. Sometimes Ambalavasis proper are distinguished from others such as Marar, Kurup and a few others who partly or wholly serve temples of the non-Brahmin deities (Kavus). This distinction is often supported by informants on the criterion that the Ambalavasis proper have twelve days of birth and death pollution while Nambudiris have ten and Marars and others have fifteen days. The matrilineal Ambalavasi castes

above Marar are often seen recorded as of equal rank, but my informants place Pisharodis as the highest. Poduval and Variyar appear to be the relatively numerous castes. Among them and the Pisharodis are seen the wealthy Ambalavasi taravads in this century.

Owing to the scatter of each of these castes often taravads of the same lineage stay far apart. Two taravads rendering the same service and belonging to different lineages seldom find employment in the same temple, the right of service being hereditary to a lineage. Castes above Marars are also employed or casually engaged in temples as musicians, store-keepers and assistants in the management. And they have also lands as kanam tenants of the temples of Nambudiris.

3(a) Samanthans:-

Samanthans is a generic term of reference for a few castes each very small in number, and each appears to have been originally a pre-British ruling matrilineage or a segment of it, of the category of small feudatory chieftains. Some of them claim to be Rajas (kings) but this title seems to be justified only for those who were independent rulers until the British conquest or were recognised as Rajas by the conqueror who subdued and made them feudatories.¹⁴

14. The historical fact which seemingly justify this claim is that the district heads and feudatories, as noted in ~~the~~ chapter I had independent right of administration over their territories and they had only the obligation to send a specified number of soldiers to the sovereign ruler when needed.

Samanthans prefer to be regarded as Kshatriyas on a par with the Rajas but it is doubtful if the few Rajas of Malabar have an undisputed rank of Kshatriya.¹⁵ The five Samanathan castes are in South Malabar and have a territorial concentration consistent with their ancestry as ruling lineages. Thus Vellodis are mainly confined to a part of Walluvanad taluk, the Eradis to Eranad taluk, Tirumulpads to Manjeri and Nilambur in the same taluk, Nedungadi to the former Nedunganad area of Walluvanad taluk and Kartavus to parts of Eranad and Walluvanad taluks.

Each Samanathan caste has even today a taravad occupying the ancestral ruling seat and owning by inheritance high wealth in ancestral estate, which is the impartible portion of the ruling house property descended to them. These ruling families, as noted in the first chapter, were graded by the Zamorins as district heads of different political rank, and in this century some of them have assumed the title Raja. (Such ruling families will in later contexts be referred to as Samanathan ruling houses or families.) The general opinion of my informants is that next to Nambudiris a very high percentage of very wealthy joint families exists among the Samanathan castes.

15. Some learned informants say that the Beypore royal family in South Malabar and the Cochin Royal family are perhaps the only two who deserve to be regarded as Kshatriyas.

Some taravads of vague chiefly ancestry and some wealthy retainers of Samanathan ruling houses appear to have been claiming the social status of Samanthans. The census figures of Samanathan castes are therefore not reliable, the 1891 census showing 1225 and the 1901 census 4351.¹⁶

The Raja families of Malabar appear to be of four categories - those who from very early times were autonomous and held the title, those who like the Zamorins conquered and ruled until the British period, those who like some Samanathan ruling families assumed the titles and those non-Samanathan Naduvaris or feudatories under Zamorins who were titled commanders of whom some have assumed the title Raja.¹⁷ The ancestral taravad houses, the seats of the Rajas of all categories and of the Samanathan ruling families are invariably known as Kovilakams.

Each Samanathan caste was, until some time in the past prior to this century, ϕ exogamous, a feature retained by Thirumulpads until more recent years. Inter-marriage between these castes is permitted but the ruling

17. In all, such categories of ruling families number from 12 to 18 in the whole of Malabar. Of these at least 8 to 12 appear to have been deserving the title Raja. It is well known that the Raja of Kollengode in Palghat taluk is by title Nambidi but has gradually come to be known as Raja. The ruling family of Tirumulpad in Nilambur is less popularly known as Rajas but the senior-most male of that family is perhaps always mentioned as Raja.

K.V.K.Iyer in his book, The Zamorins of Calicut, p.272, mentions the 20 feudatories.

families among them do not intermarry nor recognise each others rank as equal. Their women are exclusively hyper-gamous accepting only Nambudiri husbands and their men seek mates from the upper group of Nair castes. This practice, as far as possible is maintained by all Samanathan castes and it obtains in the whole of Kerala among ruling families, the Rajas of all the four categories mentioned. It is a feature of the 'royal model' from the early mediaeval period facilitated by the fact that Nambudiris could move freely irrespective of the hostile relations among political units of any kind. Of the Samanathan castes Tirumulpads can interdine with Nambudiris and in Cochin State they are regarded as nearly equal with Kshatriyas in rank. Such a right to interdine is also held by the senior-most male member of nearly all the ruling families of all categories.

2(b) Sthanis:-

The Sthanis, literally meaning the holders of high social status are lineages of title holding and very wealthy Nairs originally drawn from different castes of Nairs, chiefly from the Kiriyattil Nairs. I have not seen any account relating to Malabar castes or society treating the Sthanis as a separate group. They are neither included among the Samanthans nor among the Nairs but implicitly they are subsumed under the Nairs, sometimes with the passing remarks that they belong to the high caste of Kiriyattil Nairs, or that they head villages or districts with their retainers. Sthani is a locally well-known term and they deserve to be treated separately from the commoner Nairs to learn their

role as centres of power and authority in the rural social structure. Most of them were in pre-British times Naduvaris (district heads) and some were powerful Desavaris (village heads), but as noted in the previous chapter, they have come into existence from diverse sources. The historic context in which some of them originated and all of them in South Malabar were graded during Zamorin's rule has been broadly indicated in the first chapter. The rare instances of Sthans ranking below the castes of Nairs and holding titles awarded by the Zamorin or lower rulers are not included here in the term Sthanis. In this study, unless otherwise mentioned or is explicit from the context, the term Sthani used without qualifying words refers to such Sthanis who were originally drawn from Kiriyattil Nairs, the highest of the Nair castes.

Although exogamous each Sthani lineage is a ranked sub-division that branched off from commoner Nairs. In understanding intercaste relations each lineage in its own right can be treated as a caste group. Some of the Sthanis carry special ritual rights and privileges as a heritage from a remote past and some of them have these bestowed by the ruler who awarded the title. Their diverse origin, often differential rights and privileges, the history of pre-British political discord or mutual rivalry among several of them and the wealth amassed in course of time or maintained without loss, have all led to non-recognition of each other's taravad as equal in rank or social status. They recognise

ritual superiority of Samanthans and all Rajas and their women accept husbands from the families of Rajas and Samanthan ruling houses if Nambudiri husbands are not available. There is no intermarriage between Sthanis, and their men seek wives from the upper group of Nair castes.

The taravads of Sthanis and above have a greater generation depth than those of matrilineal castes below. As among the Rajas and other ruling families a Sthani taravad has an impartible property known as 'Sthanam Swathu' attached to the status of the senior-most male. He cannot alienate it but can enjoy the income and has to maintain the prestige of his status. Generally in a Sthani taravad there are in all three such statuses, the second and third senior males also getting estates of much smaller value for their lifetime. The Sthani taravads have vast estates in temples and cultivated lands and forests, all scattered in different parts, often in different taluks. A taravad therefore sometimes divides out into tavaris and stay near some of its distant estates without partitioning the property.¹⁸ This practice

18. Several of the Sthani taravads of the 27 District heads graded by the Zamorin as mentioned by K.V.K.Iyer (ibid, p.270) are known to my informants as divided in this manner by the beginning of this century or earlier. The Sthani Nair taravad of Trikkateri, a village between the first two focal villages in this study, are housed in four locations over 50 years back. In some Sthani taravads such divisions, and locations far apart, took place in the early 19th century, or still earlier. But in due course each tavaris thus located began to be recognised as a separate taravad owning all property under its control without raising the question of partition of its estates. The family of Kannanur Pata Nair, a commander of 500

obtained even earlier in the past among Rajas and Samanthan ruling families and this partly accounts for the scatter of very wealthy taravads of Samanthans, Rajas and Sthanis. Lower in the social scale Nair taravads of high wealth followed the same process until about the first decade of this century.

In Walluvanad taluk alone, as my informants enumerate, there are eight Sthani taravads located in twelve to fourteen places.¹⁹ Until about twenty years back, as far as I could ascertain, such Sthani taravads conducted the pompous status - succession ceremony called 'Ariyittu Varcha' by which, like the coronation of a ruler, the senior-most male succeeded the deceased head of a Sthani lineage. In Walluvanad taluk there are Sthanis originally of the caste of Nairs, of Variyar and Panicker known with the prefix Sthani.

The Mannadiars of Palghat taluk deserve to be included under the Sthanis considered here. They are perhaps the only matrilineal title holders with known ancestry as a patrilineal caste. They are a group of very wealthy taravads which developed as a caste branching off from ----- as graded by the Zamorin thus developed into three Sthani taravads of which one is the Trikkateri Sthani Nair mentioned here.

19. These Sthani taravads as known in terms of their locations are: Trikkateri Nair, Kavalappara Nair, Kutiravattam Nair, Tarakkal Variyar, Adakkaputtur Panicker, Nedunganad Nedungadi and Perur Nair.

immigrant patrilineal Tarakans several generations back, or they probably shared a common ancestry with Tarakans in the Tamil district of Madura. Mannadiar was originally a title and the caste today consists of a few lineages of which four to six are very wealthy taravads. Ranking on a par with the Sthanis and practising hypergamy in the same manner as Sthanis this caste has established its higher social status over the Nair castes.

The two groups mentioned here, the Samanthans and the Sthanis do not recognise the Ambalavasis as equal or above in rank. The male head of a Sthani family as well as a Samanthan ruling family has the privilege to inter-dine with Nambudiris, and mainly for this reason, the former does not recognise the Ambalavasis' claim of a higher rank than the Nairs. Both the Samanthans and Ambalavasis are treated in some published works under the common but pedantic term Antaralajatis (intermediary castes) and yet one finds it difficult to allot a reasonable place for Ambalavasis in the hierarchy.²⁰

Nair Castes:-

Separate census figures for 1931 for each of these castes are not available. The high caste Nairs, i.e., the Sthanis and the upper and middle group of Nair castes mentioned in the table, numbered 1,548,666 in Malabar

20. L.K.A.Iyer (op. cit. vol.II, p.147) treats Samanthans and Ambalavasis under the common term Antaralajatis (intermediary castes). He lists nine criteria on which Samanthans claim to rank just below Kshatriyas and above Ambalavasis.

in 1931. Of this the most numerous are Nairs of the upper group mentioned here and those not mentioned here but rank equally with this group and exist in other parts of Malabar, viz., Paricha Menon and some castes of Nambiar.

The majority of Nairs of the upper group are kanam tenants and non-cultivators. Nairs of the middle group, in large majority, are verumpattam tenants mostly under the upper group of Nair castes. Nairs of the low group have very small kanam or verumpattam holdings usually allotted by the village-head and cultivated by themselves.

4. Nair Castes: Upper Group:-

Of these castes Kiriya Nambiar, Kiriya Nair and Sudra Nair are native to the focal villages of this study and the few families of each of the rest are settlers in the last three decades.

Kiriya Nambiar and Kiriya Nair rank equally as the topmost of this group. Nambiar was originally a title of some Kiriya Nair taravads just as Nair itself was at a very remote period a title of men of military career, the high caste Nairs of later times. Both these castes²¹

21. The Chakkia Nambiar mentioned are different and are lower than Sudra Nairs. High ranking Nambiar are numerous in North Malabar, and as the Malabar Gazetteer states (op.cit., p.113) many of them claim to be Samanthans but are not so recognised. In the Cochin State are four castes of Nambiar, including Chakkia Nambiar, all belonging to the Ambalavasi castes. These are according to L.K.A.Iyer (op.cit., p.133) Pushpagan, Tiyyati, Chakkia and Chengazi, each suffixing Nambiar and commonly called only Nambiar. Some of these are very scantily dispersed in South Malabar.

are concentrated in, and in earlier times confined to, villages headed by Sthanis or by taravads of some of the Samanthan castes. Both are retainers of such heads but the Nambiars are relatively very few and do not appear to be essential as retainers. The two high ranking retainer castes of a Sthani-head in their relation to him are known as his 'Adukkalakkar' meaning kitchen-men. This refers to their main service to the Sthani taravad as cooks during the days when the taravad is under death pollution. Neither this service nor the term which refers to it appears to have been mentioned in any of the works on Malabar caste and society. Nairs under the district heads and Raja taravads are seen described in published works as Akathucharna (attached inside) and Purathucharna (attached outside) the latter ranking higher as armed retainers and the former as attending to partly menial or less honoured work. My informants do not believe that the term purathucharna had any currency with reference to Sthanis. However, as they speculate, it is possible that Kiriyattil Nairs, the adukkalakkar, were also until the Zamorin's conquest the armed retainers, but after that, only their less important duty as 'kitchen-men' continued and led them to be known in terms of that service. A few taravads of Charna Nairs exist in these villages as periodical domestic servants of Sthanis by right. They are known only as Charna (attached) Nairs and they rank much below Kiriyattils.

Kiriyam Nair caste appears to have had off-shoots of differential rank named Kakka (crow) Kiriyam, Patti (dog) Kiriyam, Manala Kiriyam and Panom Kiriyam. A few elderly informants have heard about these castes but could not state anything else except the names and remark that these are obsolete distinctions which existed in some places in Malabar and Cochin State. However, I could later hear about one taravad in Trikkateri which belongs to Manala Kiriyam and is lower than other Kiriyattils.

From what can be gleaned from published works the Nair castes of this group can be mentioned with reference to their origin and ~~a~~ distribution. Kiriyattil Nairs, the highest, can cook for all others and the Sthanis, and some chieftains were originally drawn from this caste. Ruling taravads of Samanthans, Rajas and some Naduvaris had armed retainers of Purathucharna Nairs and had household servants known as Akathucharna Nairs. The Purathucharnas under rulers of different levels of political power ranked differently. The Kiriyattils in general everywhere were on a level with the 10,000 armed retainers (Purathucharnas) under the Zamorin but such retainers under Walluvanad Raja ranked below those under the Zamorin and hence under the Kiriyattils. Menon and Panicker were titles given by the Zamorin and Walluvanad Rajas to some Kiriyattil and Purathucharna Nairs. The Paricha Menon was a title ranking highest bestowed by the Zamorin on the members of his private army drawn from Purathucharna Nairs. The taravads

of such Menons could use it for all members as a hereditary title. Menons in Ponnani taluk were in this manner title holders under the Raja of Cochin and those in Walluvanad were originally clerks under their Raja drawn from Kiriyattils and Purathucharna Nairs. In course of time Menon as a title was sometimes conferred by Rajas to some taravads.²²

Enquiries in my focal area (the focal villages and around) show that Menons are locally understood to be of three kinds: Paricha Menons, Kiriyam Menons of more or less equal rank who are descendents of Kiriyam Nairs who held the title Menon or assumed it as a suffix of prestige sometime in the past and Charna Menons who are descendents of either Purathucharna Nairs who held the title Menon or assumed it for prestige. From local sources I learn that Charna Nairs are possibly of two kinds: those who were "inside-attached" in places and those similarly related to Sthani taravads. The latter rank lower, and it is this caste which is mentioned in the caste-table and described in later contexts.

Sudra Nairs render²³ services of a ritual and ceremonial nature to their Nambudiri overlords and in this

22. A lineage of Charna Nairs which served Walluvanad Raja as his scribes got the title Pattola (silkish palm leaf for writing) Menon. I am also told that there were several divisions of Charna Nairs but the names are not remembered now.

23. In Cochin State the term Sudra Nair has a more popular usage. There is no caste of Kiriyam Nairs and the caste of equal rank there is known as Vellayma Sudras or

relationship they are known as 'Adiyar'. Nearly all Sudra Nair taravads of a Nambudiri headed village or villages are adiyar of that Nambudiri illom. The nature of their services which will be described later are in part regarded as less honourable by the Kiriyaattils who therefore claim a higher rank than the Sudras. The latter do not like to admit the claim but do not also flatly deny it. This is also borne out by the fact that Sudra men marrying Kiriyaattils are instances of the last fifteen years while the reverse began much earlier, perhaps in the first decade of this century.

There is a caste of Sudra Nairs called Eruma (she-buffalo) Sudras who are said to have no service relations with Nambudiris, or possibly in some parts, serve only degraded Nambudiris. Eruma Sudras appear to have been chiefly confined to Ponnani taluk and are said to rank below the Sudra Nairs. From the thirties of this century, I am told, are instances of Sudra Nair men in my focal area marrying women of the caste of Eruma Sudras.

The Nair Panicker of the upper group mentioned in the table are the descendents of Nairs who held the title Panicker under the pre-British Rajas. It appears that under the Zamorin Panickers were drawn from either the

Vellayma Nairs. The Illathu Sudras of Cochin who are retainers of Nambudiris correspond to the Sudras of Walluvanad taluk and the Charna Nairs (probably including both the Akathu and Purathu Charnas) attached to ruling families are known there as Swarupattil Sudras.

Akathucharna Nairs or other Nairs ranking lower. Several of the Panicker taravads are specifically known as Charna Panickers which is suggestive of their ancestry in the caste of Charna Nairs, possibly the Akathucharnas. Sudra Nairs regard all Panickers drawn from Kiriya Nairs who, as well as castes of Kiriya origin, alone are considered by Sudra Nairs as unquestionably superior to them in rank. Further, as far as I could ascertain, no Nair taravad has ever in the past assumed the caste name Panicker whereas several have successfully aspired to label themselves as Menons. It may be noted that males of all these castes affix to their names the caste name Nair, Menon, Nambiar etc., but the specific caste is mentioned or referred to only in contexts where it is essential.

5. Nair Castes: Middle Group:-

The Charna Nair is the one mentioned above, the "inside-attached" Nair retainers of the Sthanis rendering partly menial tasks at a few specified occasions. A few taravads of them, three to six, are dispersed in a group of villages headed by a Sthani as I find under the Trikkateri Sthani Nair and the Sthani Nair of Kavalappara.

The traditional occupations of the next four Nair castes, Vattekat, Pallichan, Ulladan and Anduran appear to have been nearly given up by them by about the beginning of this century or earlier. Since then their traditional services rapidly began to disappear or continue only for taravads or temples of high wealth and popularity. The Vattekat prepares sesame oil under conditions of ritual

purity and supplies to Nambudiris and Kiriyattil and Sudra Nairs at occasions of certain rites and to temples on festivals or holy days. The Pallichan is the bearer of palanquin for Sthanis, Rajas and Nambudiris and he is prescribed as inevitable to serve in that capacity at their ceremonial processions. He is their 'transport', the women and junior members of their family being carried in a conveyance called 'Manchal' and their children being transported on his shoulders. The traditionally assigned tasks of the Ulladans is not specific in different parts of South Malabar. They seem to have been confined to some taluks primarily having only to serve Sthanis as drummers at funeral and death rites. The Andurans make a crude pottery of a specified quality for certain rites in temples and for the use of Nambudiris, Sthanis and Kiriyam Nairs in performing funeral and some other rites. There is no consensus of opinion about the rank order of these castes but the order given here tend to be nearly agreed upon.

The Attikursis are funeral priests and purifiers after birth and death pollution for Nairs of the upper group and above. For Sthanis and castes above, they are not the exclusive ritual specialists at such occasions. Other Nairs of the middle group above the Attikursis get this kind of service from a small caste ranking below the latter and known as Valayanchira Nairs who were, possibly, in origin a section of the Attikursis.

The Chotha Nairs, the last ~~gr~~ of the group, also called Kolangara Nairs are priests in Kavus (temples of non-Brahminic deities such as Bhagavati and Aiyappan) and are usually seen distributed and staying at the rate of a taravad or two near such temples. In a strict sense, literally taken, they are a caste of temple service but are regarded as the lowest of the middle group of Nairs.

6. Nair Castes: Low Group:-

Of all Nair castes these are the most required by all castes above. Veluthedan (washerman) ranks higher than the Vilakkattiravan (barber) but both are said to pollute by touch the upper group of Nairs and above. Until about the close of the last century the Veluthedan did not serve castes below the upper group of Nairs. The barber men and women serve all higher castes, the women serving as midwives. Each of these castes is endogamous and they do not interdine.

Nair Castes: Intra-Caste Groups:-

Before proceeding to the next group of castes it is necessary to describe the intra-caste groupings among the Nairs. One I call the prestige group which as a localised group of significance appears to have escaped the notice of all investigators. The second is the "Enangar" group usually mentioned in literature on the Nairs. The third is the category of tenants who are mentioned in Chapter I, the verumpattam tenants (verumpattakkar or simply patta-kkar), who within a local caste may be regarded as more than a category, a group in a rather vague sense. This

group as an intra-caste category and the manner in which it affects social relations within a caste does not appear to have been recognised by other investigators. (The term group is used for these three, ~~ent~~ not in the strict sociological sense, but to mean that they are, each of them, more than a simple aggregate or a category).

Adiyar taravads of Sudra Nairs under a Nambudiri professes itself as having a reflected prestige primarily arising from the rank of the Nambudiri overlord. For this reason adiyar groups of different Nambudiris in different villages are of a differential level of prestige. The sense of prestige usually does not permit intermarriage between two adiyar groups of differential level belonging to the same caste (i.e. the caste of Sudra Nairs). Three adiyar groups differing in prestige level living within eight miles around the focal villages were brought to my notice by an elderly informant. It appears that Eruma Sudras in other taluks ranking lower than the Sudras of these villages are a caste that possibly emerged on the principle of adiyar-prestige group. Some informants state that they were once the retainers of Nambudiris who belonged to the ancient Pannigramam settlement. Adiyars of Nambudiripad regard themselves as higher in prestige than those of a Nambudiri. Sudra Nairs of a village know the distribution and location of taravads of the adiyar group to which they belong. They also know a number of taravads in a group of neighbouring villages who are

adiyars of other Nambudiri heads, but of the same prestige level. The latter are regarded as an outer circle from which marriage mates may rarely be chosen. Thus for each taravad the adiyar group to which it belongs and the outer circle constitute its prestige group, its "Koottakkar" (men of the same category) as the informants say. There are some informants who emphasise that there are only three groups of differential prestige among the Sudra Nairs: those who serve Nambudiripads (the highest), those who serve Nambudiris who can recite 'Vedas' and devote to religious instructions (the second) and those who serve Nambudiris who cannot recite vedas (the third). The adiyar group under an illom tends to be endogamous partly for the reason that even for marriages between adiyar groups of the same prestige level serving different Nambudiris the consent of the respective Nambudiri master is necessary.

Corresponding to the difference in adiyar prestige levels is the difference between the adukkalakkar (kitchen men) groups under different Sthanis. The relative rank of the Sthani taravad was often disputed either among their spokesmen or through the pretensions of each as superior to the other. This is augmented by the fact that it is not unusual for some Sthani taravads to be mutually unfriendly for generations. Consequently Kiriyattil retainers tended to form Sthani-wise prestige groups thus reflecting the lack of absence of recognition among Sthanis

of each other as equal. In this century there are instances of coercion to dissuade a taravad from committing into marriage relations crossing the prestige group. Historically, as noted in the first chapter, social relations of all categories of higher castes could not for political reasons cross the boundaries of the district or chiefdom in the interest of ensuring allegiance to the chieftain. The prestige group recognised here as having persisted into this century is only a modified form of the pre-British retainer group owing allegiance to its chieftain and priding on his political power, accomplishments and attributes.

Except for the hypergamy of women the adiyar as well as adukkalakkar group under each master tends to be endogamous. In either of these groups marriage outside one's group is restricted to groups of similar category and of the same prestige level. We can see that the principle on which the prestige groups arise is the same in essentials as that by which Menons under different Rajas did not rank equally. The same principle, among others, seems to regulate marriage among all upper Nair castes. It also seems to have influenced to restrict, though feebly and much less effectively, the field of selections of spouses among the rest of the Nair castes.

The Enangar Group:-

All matrilineal castes have the institution of linkage of lineages, a form of relationship between

lineages known as "Enangu." Each lineage of a caste in a village gives and receives cooperation and ceremonial services from five to ten lineages residing in the same village or in a few neighbouring villages. Enangu connotes the meaning of ties of cooperation chiefly of a ritual and ceremonial nature. Members of one's linked lineages are one's enangar who constitute the group of great importance next to one's own lineage. Between two enangar lineages the enangu (i.e. the relationship) is reciprocal but each is also linked to a different group of lineages of which some might be enangars to each other. For example in eight lineages A to H, A and B are enangar but A might be enangar to B, E, F, G; B to A, C, D, H; C to B, F; D to B, E, H; E to A, D, G; F to A, C, E; and G to A, E, F. A taravad needs enangar services at the time of post-natal ceremonies, pre-pubertal 'Tali' rite and celebrations of girls, puberty ceremony and feasting, termination of birth pollution and during funeral and death rites and the feasting that follows. A group of enangar lineages linked in this manner stay in one or more villages. Probably in the nineteenth century this group among the Sudra Nairs, for each taravad, tended to be within the adiyar group of one Nambudiri overlord. The Sthanis have a large number of retainer taravads of Kiriyaattil Nairs and they appear to have formed more than one group of linked lineages at any time in the past.

Except for the hypergamy of a few of its women a taravad tends to confine marriage relations to its

enangar taravads. Beyond this group, as noted, marriage is confined to the prestige group (adiyar/adukkalakkar).

Between two enangar taravads the obligations of ritual and neighbourly cooperation have to be discharged ~~are~~ irrespective of the existence of individual marriage ties. The obligations are discharged not because there is marriage relationship in force between them at a given time, but because they are primarily enangar to each other. The enangars of a taravad are also the guardians of its morality and a breach of customary law on the part of a taravad or an adult member of it would lead its enangar taravads to suspend cooperation until by common consent a redress is made to the latter's satisfaction.

For any taravad of Sudra Nairs and Kiriyattils in the villages of this study, according to my informants, the enangar group in the early part of this century must have tended to coincide with the adiyar/adukkalakkar group under its master, the village-head. The existence in the same village of such groups under overlords of differential rank is a feature that has appeared probably since the thirties of this century owing to inter-village migration caused by partition of taravads or needs to shift marital residence.

The enangar lineages among Nairs of the middle and lower groups are scattered in a few villages. The smaller the population of a caste in a village the more is the feature of scatter. The tendency to locate one's taravad

house nearer the 'masters' who receive the services leads to the enangar alliance among these castes to cut across villages. Despite this fact dependence on the master taravads ensures the vertical unity of Nair castes in a village.

Among the Sthanis the Kiriyattils who are the aduk-kalakkar do the ritual cooperation at death ceremonies. The tali rite for which an enangan is necessary is performed by men of Samanthan caste, and with preferred hypergamy of the Sthani women with Nambudiris there is no specified lineage of Samanthans from which husbands may be drawn. Enangu institutions among Sthanis with these features make them muchless bound by reciprocal obligations to other taravads than among the Nairs. A similar pattern exists among Samanthan ruling families and families of Rajas.

The enangu institution of Sthanis with the absence of reciprocity is significant. It appears to augment the superiority of such taravads as centres of power and authority since they have only to receive but not to give ritual service or cooperation to lower or higher castes or to other Sthani lineages.

As will be outlined later, some polluting castes, the Tandan, the artisan castes and the Cherumans, have their enangar institutions although not similar to that of the Nairs. Several of the other castes use the term enangu for neighbourly cooperation at marriage, death and feasts.

The Pattakkaran Group:-

Nair castes of the upper group are in large majority kanakkar (kanam tenants), and the middle group are verumpattakkar (verumpattam tenants). In a village, however, can be seen less wealthy taravads of the upper group as pattakkar under kanam tenants of the same caste or of another caste of the same group. Sometimes a taravad might be kanakkar under the janmi and pattakkar under another taravad of kanam tenants belonging to his own caste. To the extent a taravad is having verumpattam tenancy, i.e. it becomes pattakkar to another taravad, the former is regarded as a lowly and docile group in the grip of the latter. Verumpattam tenancy held under kanam tenants instead of directly under the janmi is not counted as a worthy or prestigious asset to the holder. A taravad does not credit with equality in social status another taravad of the same caste having exclusively such verumpattam holdings. The social distance between such taravads is more definitely perceivable particularly when one taravad becomes pattakkar of the other. Marriage relations between such taravads, even when one is enangar to the other, are as far as possible avoided. However, there is the rare and tolerated practice of a man of a kanakkar taravad finding a wife from its pattakkar taravad on the principle of hypergamy, but the reverse is strictly frowned upon. In some villages the pattakkar of the same caste form a vague group with more contacts and neighbourly cooperation among

themselves and with a marked awareness of their equality of social status.

Nair castes of the middle and low groups are not characterised by this feature. Among them it is seen only in the last three decades in which they have differentiated among themselves by acquiring kanam lands and other sources of wealth. Nairs are sensitive to the social distance entailed in kanakkar-pattakkar relationship and they want to maintain it without creating situations in which one would have to treat the other as equal. The kanakkar-pattakkar distinction cuts across the enangar as well as the retainer (adiyar/adukkalakkar) group and the prestige group. A taravad selects a spouse from its enangar group or outside of it; in the latter case it prefers to select from the retainer group of which it is a member, or alternatively from the outer circle, the prestige group; but the social distance characterising the lessor-lessee relationship, as mentioned, also governs the marital choice.

Patrilineal Castes:-

All patrilineal castes below except the four castes constituting the middle and low polluting groups have generally an extended family of three generations and rarely of four generations. Among the immigrant castes families over two generations exist only among the well-to-do. The middle and low polluting castes usually have the elementary family which is also a feature among the very poor of all these castes.

Upper polluting castes (i.e. groups 8, 9, 10 and 11) have fraternal polyandry which according to my field data persisted with a decreasing incidence until about 1940. All have an extended family but a family of husbands, wife (or wives) and children is also a common feature among the more poor sections. Brothers having two wives in common, though rare, are heard of and a few instances of younger brothers having separate wives after sharing one wife with the eldest brother for some years are also known.

From traditional times till the early decade of this century literates among the patrilineal castes below Nairs were only those whose occupation required them to know reading and writing. Such castes are the Ganisa Panicker and the Pulluvan, but among Muttans, Kadupottans, Tandans and Mannans the few who take to occupations of the literates know reading and writing.

All non-polyandrous castes practise monogamy. Of these castes, Tarakan, Muttan and Kallan Muppan do not have divorce or widow re-marriage. Among the rest of the monogamous castes divorce and widow re-marriage prevail with varying incidence. Divorce among polyandrous castes though permitted is rarely practised.

7. Tarakan, Muttan and Kadupottan:-

This group although placed in the series of indigenous castes, is not strictly so and in point of rank should be placed on a par or above the low group of Nairs.

Muttans are originally, about five centuries back, immigrants from Tamil districts spread over in Palghat

taluk and parts of Walluvanad taluk. Tarakan is either an off-shoot of them or co-immigrants with a common ancestry. Muttans of Palghat have become a distinct section and do not intermarry with the Muttans of other areas. The former are bilingual with Tamil as a household language and they are said to retain some alien traits marking them off as a caste of immigrants. Muttans of Walluvanad and Tarakans are now recognised as indigenous castes. In their spread all Muttans and Tarakans have a concentration in some villages and towns of Palghat and Walluvanad taluks. This is a feature of nearly all castes which in the folk memory are known as immigrants. It is a consequence of their being accepted by village-heads or higher rulers of the past and given residence sites in sparsely occupied areas.

Tarakans of Angadipuram in Walluvanad taluk are matrilineal, a conversion that slowly came about several generations back. About ten matrilineal taravads of Tarakans there have developed into a separate and wealthy matrilineal caste and they regard Muttans and other Tarakans as much inferior. They choose husbands from wealthy Samanthans and families of Rajas and their men marry Kiriyaattil women.

The Patrilineal Tarakans are petty agriculturists, betel leaf growers in on large scale, diaryists and casual assistants at feasts and festivals of the higher castes. Muttans are less known as agriculturists but are engaged

in money lending and gold dealing, both on a small scale. Wealthy Muttans have in the last few decades begun to assume the title 'Gupta' and suffix it to their names.²⁴ Tarakans of wealth have in recent years as well begun to be called Mannadiars.

Kadupottans are said to be immigrants with a Brahmin ancestry from the Chola Kingdom at a remote period. They have like the two former castes a tendency to nucleation rather than dispersal of their residence. A good number of them are teachers of the three R's (Eruthachans) in higher caste families and village schools. In this century they have gradually come to be called after this profession which is one of honour, and Kadupottans today like to be called Eruthachans, whatever calling they follow, for the term Kadupottan has come to be identified with a low social status. They are petty agriculturists, rarely keepers of tea shops, more often dependents on wealthy taravads and janmis serving them as rent collectors, messengers, assistants to managers and casual employees at various other jobs.

Each of these castes is endogamous and does not interdine among themselves or with higher castes. The Kadupottans even in their role as Eruthachans pollute the higher castes by touch. Each of these castes has an

24. Thurston (op.cit., vol.V, p.131) notes that according to 1901 Census of Madras both Muttan and Tarakan are trading castes but in 1891 Census both are recorded as allied castes.

appendage of a few families of ritual purifiers of birth and death pollution who serve a large territory, and are regarded as lower. All have in common the Ambittan, a Tamil immigrant caste of barbers to serve them, and Kongu Mannan of Tamil ancestry to serve as washerman. The polluting Mannans can also serve them as washermen and supply to their women the cloth for purificatory bath after menses.

C. Chetti:-

This is a Tamilian immigrant caste which is divided into a few castes with occupational specialisation. The three commonly met are the Pappada Chetti who makes pap-padams (wafers of rice and black gram), Mundu (cloth) Chetti who produces and hawks cloth of a coarse but popular quality and Enna (oil) Chetti who extracts and sells oil. Each of them is bilingual, stays clustered in a compact area and all are recognised as aliens not in constant need since all their goods are available at weekly markets. The Chettis in Kolappulli noted in the table include a few families of an allied immigrant Tamil caste known as Kaikkolans who have, in recent years, begun to assume the caste name Chetti.

8. Ganisa Panicker, Tandan Kurup, Tandan:-

Ganisa Panicker is a caste of specialists in astrology with a right to serve the higher castes. This caste has a distribution at the rate of one family for a couple or more villages. Traditionally the Ganisans more often

headed the Desam Kalari (gymnasium) teaching gymnastics and giving pre-military training to Nairs and commanding their respect as their preceptors. The more popular colloquial term for Ganisan is Kanisan but the latter are two castes in Ponmani taluk and Cochin State, one having astrology and the other engaged in lowly pursuits, chiefly umbrella making. Probably for this reason astrologer Panickers of Walluvanad designate themselves as Ganisans. Of the caste of this group the Ganisan is the least polluting by approach, for in his professional role he has access to places forbidden to the others. Ganisans are endogamous but their males may find wives from the lower caste of Kanisa Panicker who have, it appears, a scanty distribution in Walluvanad taluk. Their income is partly derived from lands gifted to them by village-heads in former times on verumpattam tenure.

Tandan Kurups, originally so titled as instructors in and keepers of gymnasium are regarded as a caste. They have income from gift lands and are seen in this century as music teachers and massage specialists serving the Nair castes. They prefer endogamy but for want of mates rarely seek wives from a caste of lower Kurups in distant places who are called Chaya Kurups after their profession of lacquering on wooden articles.

Tandans:-

This caste is commonly known as a regional variant of Tiyyans of North Malabar and Iravans and Chons (or Chovans)

of Cochin, Travancore and the coastal area of South Malabar.²⁵ All of them share the legend of their migration from Ceylon sometime in the remote past. The Tandans in South Malabar are numerous and widespread and in several places they outnumber the total of Nair castes. Tandans in Walluvanad are in general poor, are petty producers of garden crops and have virtually a near monopoly in tapping toddy (the palm sap) and jaggery making as a traditional occupation. They are also in small numbers verumpattam tenants, daily wage labourers of marked efficiency getting better paid than the lower polluting castes.

Tandan is also the title of the leader of the caste in a desam, and in his office, atleast traditionally, was vested the power of handling disputes of lower ranking castes.

Tandans have a section of Mannans as well as Ambitans as their barbers and a few families of lowly Tandans serve the rest in eight to ten villages as after-death pollution purifiers. The Tandans have localized lineages each with a depth of about six or more generations. Unlike the Nairs each lineage has only one enangar lineage and either of the two lineages so linked is not further linked to others. If a marriage between them takes place they cease to be enangar to each other.

25. For a comprehensive study of Iravas of Malabar, see A. Aiyappan, "Iravas and Culture Change", Bulletin, Madras Govt. Museum, 1944.

9. Mannan:-

Mannans, called Vannan or Velan in other parts supply 'Mattu' which is a cloth to be worn prior to purificatory bath after menses, and on certain days during birth and death pollution. The Mannans who serve Nairs and above and the Tandans are superior to those known as Choppan Mannans who may supply mattu to Tandans, but have to serve Ganisa Panicker and Tandan Kurup as suppliers of mattu and also serve all the three castes as barbers. A few families of Mannans serve both castes of Mannans as purifiers after death pollution. The Choppan Mannan also serves mattu to Kallan Muppans who in some places get the supply of mattu from the higher Mannans. The castes of Tarakan, Muttan and Kadupottan have the ritual practice of using mattu, and as far as I could ascertain, the Mannan who serves Nairs with mattu also supplies it to these three castes. I am also told that these three castes can accept mattu from the Choppan Mannans. Each Mannan caste is endogamous but the higher one tolerates accepting a bride from the lower for want of a suitable mate. Each caste of Mannans ranks below all the castes whom it serves as suppliers of mattu, and the Mannans themselves do not have any caste to supply mattu nor the castes below in the rank order except the Kammalans in some areas. The Mannans who supply mattu to Kammalans as is practised in Ponnani taluk are said to rank lower than the two mentioned. Among the Mannans at occasions such as birth and death

pollution and puberty, mattu is provided by the enangar family.

10. Kammalan Castes (Artisans):-

Of these castes Asari (carpenter) and Karuvan (iron-smith) seem to be the more evenly distributed and are the more needed in the village. Two or three families of Moosari (bell metal worker) and Tattan (goldsmith) serve several villages. The Asaris say that the Chakku Asari (wooden oil mill maker) is a lower caste of Asaris, very few in number, and with them the former originally known as Ambalasari (temple carpenters) do not intermarry or interdine. Such divisions do not exist among the other artisans. Each artisan caste is endogamous but all can interdine as Kammalans. They are also 'enangar' to each other, the term being understood as already noted, in the sense of formalised neighbourly cooperation. This feature of 'enangu' among them compensates for the fact that often families of the same caste are located apart in places of distance. Kammalans in common have their barbers and death pollution purifiers whom they call Kurups and regard as a separate and lower caste.

The Kallasari (masons) does not belong to the Kammalan group and in Walluvanad taluk it is an immigrant caste from neighbouring areas such as Ponnani and Cochin and have a thin population. Kallasari where he lives keeps enangu relations with other local Kammalans.

D. Kallan Muppan:-

This is a small caste of granite stone workers

staying compactly in a corner of a village and serving often a part of the taluk. They go far and wide and halt for days at distant places of work. Although now regarded as indigenous, they seem to have been Tamilian immigrants. They are endogamous and strictly monogamous and have little interdependence with castes of the locality in which they reside. Their barbers and pollution purifiers are a section of Tamil Chettis. In the scale of pollution they are not regarded as so polluting as the Kammalans.

Kollan:-

This is a very small caste of immigrant leather workers who are also known by their original caste name Chakkiliyans. Usually they serve the villagers through the weekly markets (fairs) and have little sustaining interdependence with other castes of the village.

E & F. Kurikkan and Kumbaran:-

Both are immigrants from Tamil and Telungu districts and are still bilingual. The former kept pack animals to transport goods but this as their calling hardly survived into this century. They are in the villages engaged for soil bunding and the like tasks of seasonal importance. Kumbaran (potter) seldom hawks his ware and usually sells through the weekly markets or sale spots. These two castes, each staying aloof in a corner of a village, has no ritual nor any sustained economic interdependence with other castes.

11. Pulluvan, Paravan, Panan:-

The Pulluvan with his veena (a crude fiddle) and the female of his caste Pulluvatti with her 'Kudam' (an

earthen ware stringed resonator) sings songs of propitiation for snakes or themes from Ramayana. Each of them separately goes round visiting houses of various castes of Kammalans and above and collecting alms for this service. They are also priestly instructors and propitiants at the snake propitiation ceremonies of Nairs. Staying clustered in the low caste areas of a village each family covers a number of villages once or twice a month. Priests for them are of their caste and they mutually serve as barbers. This caste has no divisions marked as high and low and appears to have little or no internal occupational differentiation.

Paravan is a very small endogamous caste of makers of chunam (quick lime) of quality for betel leaf chewing. They sell their product through weekly market or supplies to order. Paravan women serve as midwives to the upper group of polluting castes. They also serve higher castes by attending to complicated labour cases of cows in full pregnancy.

The more important occupation of the next caste, the Panan, is the making of leaf umbrella for all castes. The Panan and his wife have by right to sing songs at houses of Nairs and above at the harvest festival (Onam). He also serves in general as barber of some of the polluting castes above the Cherumans and the Panan women act as midwives for some of the polluting castes. Atleast a few Panans in a village specialise in exorcism and sorcery mainly to serve castes of Tandans and below. There are three or four castes

of Panans each endogamous, but they seem to be territorial castes with minor differences in occupations.

12. Cheruman:-

This is the most numerous of the polluting castes and it corresponds to the castes of Pulayans and Vettuvans in other parts. The Cherumans were until late in the last century agrarian serfs.²⁶ They are known after the name of the taravad of their masters - the 'x' taravad Cherumans, the 'y' taravad Cherumans and so on. The bulk of agricultural labour in the village economy is supplied by the Cherumans.

Cherumans mention four castes among them of which three exist in the focal villages ~~fer~~ of this study.²⁷ These are the Kanakkans, Koodans and Velluvans of which the Kanakkans are the highest although occupationally they have no differentiation. Each is endogamous except for the rare hypergamy of Kanakkan women with Koodan men. One to three patrilineages of Cherumans, each divided into eight to ten households, stay in a village and confine their marriages

26. Logan in his Malabar Manual (pp.148-151) gives an account of the slavery and slave trade chiefly of the Cherumans and Pulayas. He notes that slavery was by a proclamation abolished in 1792. The slave trade included sale, mortgage and shipping off of slaves to other countries. In spite of the proclamation, as Logan notes, traffic in slaves continued upto 1855, and the penalties for it came into force in 1862. My informants say that sale of Cherumans persisted, though as rare instances, into the close of the last century and I could hear from them of a few specific instances.

27. L.K.A.Iyer, (op.cit., vol.I, p.96) notes that in Malabar alone there are thirty-six sub-divisions of Pulayas. Of these five including the three castes mentioned here are Cherumans.

to a few villages. The spatial range of their marriage appears to be the same as the pre-British Nadu or Desam. Cherumans under taravads of high social status enjoy a sense of reflected prestige. However, this feature does not appear to influence except very feebly, their choice of marriage mates. The prestige enjoyed is expressed in display such as a sumptuous feast at marriage and other life crises.

Each Cheruman lineage has one enangar lineage in the same or in a neighbouring village. Marriage is not permitted between them but they have mutual and formalised cooperation at life crises and feasts.

13. Parayan, Nayadi, Malayan:-

Parayan and Nayadi of the low group of polluting castes stay far removed from the area of other polluting castes of the village. Each has a more or less nucleated settlement which is exogamous. Their settlements are usually in isolated wastelands and often perched on the slopes of a hill, the Nayadis and Malayans having locations higher up than the Parayans. Each caste is strictly endogamous and the first two serve a large number of villages by hereditary right.

The Parayan removes the carcass of dead animals, makes and supplies bamboo mats and containers of a wide range made of bamboo. The Nayadi supplies fibre ropes and some forest herbs, and begs at regular intervals for his claim of a feed which the higher castes are supposed to

be religiously enjoined to give particularly on holy days. Malayans stay in small and often temporary settlements on hill slopes and supply forest produce such as honey and some herbs either to order or on their long itinerary covering a number of villages. Their products find market more regularly through Moslem middlemen who are petty shop keepers.

Mappilas:-

They are the Moslems of Malabar numbering 1,163,453 in 1931. They have a marked concentration in Ernad and Walluvanad taluks. Conversion to Islam was started in about the ninth century A.D. by Arab traders who settled on the coast but it increased in strides from about the fourteenth century especially following the Mysorian Moslem invasion of 1766. Mappilas particularly in South Malabar are in majority converts from the polluting castes. They have elementary family as a common feature but the wealthy tend to remain as joint families upto four generations. In parts of Ponnani taluk and North Malabar Mappilas are matrilineal and in other areas they are patrilineal and tend to stay clustered or have a lineal dispersal along public roads. The wealthy among them owning kanam lands or having trade interests are very few and far between in Walluvanad. The rest are engaged in a wide range of miscellaneous occupations which keep them on a subsistence level. They have caste-like divisions which will be briefly considered in a later context.

Distribution of Polluting Castes:-

As noted in the previous chapter polluting castes stay rather clustered but according to the degree of pollution each caste occupies a different sector of the village. The Cherumans do not show clustering as much as other castes. It is possible to discern that until late into the last century more than a lineage of most of the polluting castes did not stay in one village or a sector of it which is often named. This fact emerges from what my informants can recall. They also state that in olden times *desam*-differences (*Desa Bhedam*) counted in restricting the spatial range of lineage exogamy, marriage for a lineage being confined to a few villages. The Cherumans in the village of Karattukursi even today do not marry from the contiguous Eliappatta which is today a named sector of the village Cherpallcherry. The reason is unknown except that it was not the practice. If pre-British *desam* boundaries are followed up for this area it is fully probable that for all polluting castes the usually large *desam* of those times was the boundary for marriages. Eric Miller, as noted in the previous chapter, has mentioned this feature and my data lend itself to an interpretation that tends to corroborate his findings.

The caste-table particularly with reference to Nair castes enables us to see that the traditional caste composition of Sthani and Nambudiri headed villages differs in some respects and it persists today. Sudra Nairs predominate in the two Nambudiri-headed villages and Kiriyattil Nairs

outnumber others in the Sthani-headed village. Cherumans in the table show as high or more number of households but they have an average of about six persons per household while Sudras and Kiriyaattils have an average of about ten heads per household. Nairs of the middle group are, most of them, primarily meant for Sthanis and hence their figures are relatively high for Kolappulli. Of the polluting castes the Tandans' services assigned to them as a right were only to the families of non-Nambudiri village-heads and their high caste retainers. The figures for Tandans do not reflect this clearly since he seeks for and is allowed residence in the low caste areas of villages to pursue his more paying occupation of preparing toddy.

Castes and Centres of Power:-

Of the castes below Nairs, some are of the category of complementary castes mentioned in the previous chapter. The number of them in Kolappulli is relatively large and they serve a large number of villages either directly or indirectly through a weekly market located three miles away at Vaniyankulam. Some of them are not essentially complementary for the services they can render are not much specialised or not essentially needed even when it is specialised. Thus the Kaikkolan, Kurup and Kadupottan are of this category but although they have no specialisation in a field of popular needs they are known as efficient in the few miscellaneous jobs as already

noted. Within Kolappulli and the neighbouring villages, the complementary castes get hired more often for miscellaneous jobs on daily wages. The table shows the various degrees of requirement of the complementary castes as regards their main occupation but it does not convey the actual degree of employment they get in miscellaneous fields. The table provides an estimate of how many of the non-resident castes are required occasionally as essentially or partly complementary castes in ~~su~~ each of the villages. Some castes, it may be noted, are only optionally complementary in that they are sought for only if they are residents in the neighbourhood of a village.

All castes below the upper group of Nair castes in each of the three villages come under the power of a few taravads of Sudra/Kiriyattil Nairs. This power accrues from the extent to which such taravads represent the 'head' of the village by owning most of the lands under him on kanam tenure and the ties through land tenure with lower castes as obtain by kanam-verumpattam relationship or kanakkar-cultivators relationship, and the rank of the caste of the taravads in the hierarchy of local castes. In addition, as will be seen later, the foundations of the power of such taravads, in part, span several villages and lie in their relations with the centres of power or of power and authority in other villages.

For this reason a village without complementary castes can, if necessary, command over them indirectly through their 'master families' of the power group 'presiding' over them in their village of residence. Thus the complementary castes although not a part of the "we group" mentioned in the previous chapter, the group consisting of Nairs, their 'masters' or 'heads' and the avakasam castes, are integrated into the rural society and have their roles in the totality of social structure of the village.

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