

CHAPTER IV

INTER-CASTE RELATIONSPART-I

The pattern of intercaste relations hinging on the agricultural economy and the nature of relations obtaining among castes and other groups in other major fields of interdependence and social intercourse are presented as Part-I of this chapter. A note on the spatial distribution of castes will be followed by descriptions of the following with occasional critical accounts as the context needs: (1) land tenure, ownership and the hierarchy (2) relations pertaining to agricultural labour (3) relations based on non-agricultural caste-ascribed roles and services, and ties of cooperation (4) interdining (5) pollution by contact and approach (6) hypergamy. The present tense used throughout this chapter refers to conditions in the first decade of this century. Information pertaining to castes or groups which are not in the focal villages is presented here to the extent it could be gathered from these villages, particularly from the first two villages where I could more frequently meet some well-informed people who were having contacts with other parts of South Malabar.

The spatial distribution of castes as noted in Chapter II is characterised by occupation of specific areas of the village consistent with the rank of each caste. The clustering or a marked tendency to nucleation, as can be gathered from the last chapter, is among nearly all the castes below Nairs. The number of households crowding in a compact area vary with the occupation of a caste and its population in the village. The clustering, dispersal and spatial gap in distribution are perpetuated by two important factors. First, the gap in rank of castes and need to keep spatial segregation reflecting the structural distance between castes; second, the castes which tend to cluster have comparatively small households, and each family has the need of neighbourly controls by older generations of the same caste. This need is expressed by them as the more important one when they are questioned on the subject. Control over the conduct of adolescents and a sure check against the possibility of moral misconduct of women, both ensured by a spatially close neighbourhood-group make for the urge to continue crowding in a patch of land despite the availability of residence sites for dispersal. The upper group of Nair castes who own nearly all the village lands under kanam tenure regard it morally obligatory on their part to keep residences of polluting castes confined to areas which are little or not desirable as residence sites for all the higher castes. In some villages there is a strict

restriction that a numerically large polluting caste or Moslems cannot reside beyond certain sectors defined by firm boundaries. In Munnurkode, (see the map) the Tandans and Moslems cannot build a house beyond the boundary of the canal. A similar restriction on Moslems exists in Kolappulli and in Panamanna (three miles from Munnurkode). In villages where there is no clearly understood restriction, convention defines, although vaguely, the boundaries for the various castes, and the possible areas where they can spread with an increase in population.

The kanam tenant who is the immediate owner of the spot of residence and the tiny patch of garden land of the polluting caste family can use economic sanctions against any non-conformity on the part of the latter to abide by the conventions, set restrictions or the higher castes' dictates in general. This appears to be the more important force behind the enduring pattern of spatial segregation and distribution of the polluting castes.

The relationship between this spatial pattern and social structure in Malabar villages deserves a detailed study. What is mentioned here may be regarded as a broad indication of the lines to be explored with profit. As Levi Strauss states "There is an obvious relationship between the social structure and spatial structure of settlement, villages or camps". And he also points out that in the cases of some groups "spatial configurations seem

to be almost a projective representation of the social structure."¹

(1) Land tenure, ownership and the hierarchy:-

As pointed out in chapter II wealth in land or rights over land is correlated with the hierarchy. This fact has also been recognised in the published studies on Malabar villages. Eric Miller in his article on a North Kerala Village says "within the village, caste rank was - and still is - correlated with relationship to the land, especially paddy land."² McKim Marriott considering the traditional caste ranking in Kerala notes ".... but this hierarchy of ritual interaction appears to be very closely correlated with the order of the castes in wealth and power."³ Mandlebaum, with reference to current conditions in India's villages in general observes "caste structure has close ties with village economics.....caste ranking and economic status were, and for many villages still are, closely linked."⁴ A.C.Mayer in his book, Land and Society in Malabar, deals with conditions in this century but does not seem to be impressed with the correlation of caste rank with wealth in rights over land.

1. Levi Strauss, "Social Structure" in Anthropology Today, Kroeber and Others, Chicago (1953), p.533.

2. Eric Miller, "A North Kerala Village" in India's Villages, M.N.Srinivas and Others, (1955), p.41.

3. McKim Marriott, "Caste ranking and community structure in five regions in India and Pakistan" in Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute, vol.XIX-1958, p.58.

4. David G.Mandlebaum, "Social Organisation and Social Change" in India's Villages, op.cit., p.15.

However, such a relationship is given a diffused recognition as is implicit in this study.⁵ M.S.A.Rao in his book on social change in Malabar touches on this land-caste hierarchy relationship but does not work it out further. He mentions "generally higher castes had greater monopoly over land and to this extent it may be said that the system of the land holding reflected the hierarchy of the caste system."⁶

From the preceding chapter it can be seen that the nature of interest in land vary with the different groups of castes. The differences in the wealth scale of each castes as regards land rights have also been pointed out. In the caste-table groups 1-a and 3 are janmis (the ultimate owners), group 2, traditionally having little interest in land are generally small scale kanam tenants, and in group 4 is concentrated the kanam rights of lands in a village. Where the lands are janmam property of temples the management of it is in the hands of a family usually belonging to the groups of castes 1-a and 3. The large majority of verumpattam tenancy in a village is distributed among the fifth group, but if they are not present in sufficient numbers the seventh and eighth groups in order of preference are the verumpattam tenants. Thus

5. A.C.Mayer, Land and Society in Malabar, Oxford University Press, 1952.

6. M.S.A.Rao, Social Change in Malabar, Popular Book Depot, (Bombay, 1957), p.38.

we see that the picture of differential land rights emerging is the same as outlined in chapter II. The Nambudiris, Samanthans and Sthanis are the janmis and among them are the village-heads, the term 'head' being understood in the sense of centres of power and authority, both being chiefly concomitants of the status of janmi if he owns nearly, if not all, the village lands. The Nairs of the upper group are the kanam tenants, of the middle group the verumpattam tenants, a status sometimes allowed too to the Tandan of the upper group of polluting castes or to the other castes of nearly equal rank. Among the Nairs of the upper groups the less wealthy families are sometimes sub-kanam tenants and the poor are often verumpattam tenants. The large majority of this group in the three villages are kanam tenants of whom very few have sub-kanam tenants under them. The poor among this groups in these villages are verumpattam tenants under the well-to-do kanam tenants of the same group. Sub-kanam tenancy is also held, though less frequently, by Nairs of the middle group. The low group of Nairs have very small holdings of kanam or verumpattam lands / usually obtained from the village-head.

Verumpattam is of two kinds; assignment by verbal order of the kanam tenants or by executing a deed. Verumpattam assigned directly by janmi is of the latter type and it is often held by Nairs of the upper group who regard it as next in preference to kanam tenure in its

prestige value. The verbal verumpattam (Vakkal - by word - pattam) assignment is made by the one who holds verumpattan directly under the janmi or by the kanam tenant (kanakkaran). Such verumpattakkar (the holders of this tenure) are usually among the very poor of Nairs and among the polluting castes of Tandans or Cherumans. In the case of this category of tenants the more common practice is to bind them by the obligation to bring the harvested bundles of stalk to the kanam owner's compound, thresh it there and measure out the rent to him. This ensures timely payment of rent in full without any possibility of default. Of the hierarchy of categories of tenants the verbal verumpattam tenants are the lowest and among them those bound by the obligation mentioned here are still lower. *This They* may, however, within a village, not sink to be so low when verumpattakkar of the other two categories are absent as is ~~an~~ mainly the case in Munnurkode. Thus the relative prestige of the tenant accruing from his rights over land tends to depend upon what categories of tenants exist in his village, and the extent of land he holds.

The rates of rent for different kinds of tenure have been noted in the first chapter. There are variations in the rent payable to the kanakkaran within the same village. This does not entirely depend upon the quality of land but partly on the descretion of the taravad of kanam tenants. Some wealthy taravads have fixed a very low rent and are the more popular and much aspired for to be the

kanam masters, prospective tenants awaiting an opportunity to get their lands on lease. Taravads in any village appear to fall into one of the three categories - those who have leased lands on normal pattam (land rent), those who have abnormal pattam and those who have a liberal pattam, the last being the most profitable to the sub-tenant. Sometimes the same taravad has lands falling in all the three categories of pattam partly reflecting prudence, avarice or generosity of the karanavans of the past. There is, in general, marked difference in the share (michavaram) to be paid to the janmi. When the janmi leases directly on verumpattam the michavaram is smaller, often contrastingly, than when a kanakkaran sublets on verumpattam. Such fluctuations in rent as mentioned here and traceable to the individuality of the taravad of the kanam owner or to the janmi has a bearing on the relationships between categories of tenants. It keeps tenants to aspire for more profitable leases and to look out for or even create opportunities to grab such leases. As well, the janmi or kanakkaran can also lease for higher rent by evicting his tenant for a small reason, the very possibility of which is the potential threat keeping him docile in other fields of relationship.

The number of households of the main Nair castes in the three villages mentioned in the caste table when reduced approximately into the number of taravads classified into different categories of tenants as existed in the

beginning of this century is as follows: In Munnurkode two of the 61 Sudra Nair households are immigrants. Of the rest, 59 are adiyar of the Nambudiri illom and are of sixteen taravads, the segments of seven lineages some of which have segments in other villages. Of the 16 taravads 9 are entirely kanam tenants, about one third of the land of each of the remaining five is held under verumpattam (five from the janmi and one from a kanam taravad) and one taravad at about $1/3$ kanam and $2/3$ verumpattam partly under the janmi and partly under another taravad of the same caste. Of Nairs of the middle group in the village only one had kanam land and the rest have verumpattam lands. In Karattukursi the 47 households of Sudra Nairs are adiyar of its Nambudiri head staying in the contiguous village. They are, in the corresponding period, 9 taravads belonging to three lineages. Of the nine taravads five have entirely kanam land, two have both kanam and verumpattam, but the latter held under kanam taravad, and two have only verumpattam held under kanam taravads. In Kolappulli the ascertained figures are more approximate - the 120 Kiriya Nair households and the 25 Kiriya Nambiar households, during the same period, are of 32 taravads belonging to 11 lineages. Of these taravads 22 are entirely kanam holders under the Sthani head, five hold both tenures and at least two have more of verumpattam than kanam, and three have nearly all verumpattam lands chiefly held under kanam taravads.

The incidence of mixed tenure (both kanam and verumpattam) held by the same taravad of Nairs of the upper group appears to have been hardly incipient prior to the fifties of the last century. My informants tend to believe that the incidence, if it existed prior to that, was too infrequent to merit mention. This possibility is supported, as will be seen later in this chapter, by what the Cheruman tied labourers say about their past ties with Nairs of this group. Traditionally taravads of these Nair castes did not sublet the kanam lands in the village of their residence but cultivated directly by serf labour of the Cheruman. Kanam lands owned by them in distant villages were sublet to lower Nair castes or to castes still lower. Such distant villages had little or no population of the upper groups of Nair castes and were more or less of the category of feeder villages mentioned in the second chapter. Malabar's population has doubled in the last hundred years and the Nairs, ("the kanam castes") have been spreading to such less populous and predominantly lower caste feeder villages converting them into increasingly multicaste villages headed by their power. Further, the kanam taravads turning poor for several reasons had to go for the much less valued verumpattam tenure when that was available. A detailed study of these processes can explain the diversity in the incidence of different tenures in a village in this century.

The janmi-kanakkaran/verumpattakkaran relationship involves not only the payment of rent but of other defined items as well as a specified mode of payment. The rent has to be paid in kind as paddy (or money in lieu if the janmi agrees) which has to be well processed by drying and sifting and carried to the janmi's house or storage centres specified in the deed of lease and measured out - all at the tenant's cost. In addition are a few sundry payments of very small quantities of paddy for oil, milk and for the annual temple festivals. The list of items on which payments of this kind are demanded in deeds of lease varies but in their origin such items appear to have been payments in kind later commuted into remittances of paddy. Payments made for temple festivals are not spent for it although in its origin it was meant to be used for that purpose. The non-polluting castes of the village contribute for the temple festival separately and such contributions are for Kavus, the temples of the second order, each having a few villages of patrons. Each tenant taravad under a Nambudiri janmi has to give an annual feast to the latter either at his house or at a nearby temple, whichever is more convenient and mutually agreed upon. The temple feast is attended only by Nambudiri males, and after the feast they have to formally declare that they are pleased with the sumptuous feast, and they invariably do so. This feast known as 'Varam' is sometimes commuted into small payments in paddy, particularly when the tenant

taravad has only small holdings and it is rather extortionate to demand a full feast at their expense. Derived from this feasting of Nambudiris is the satisfaction of having fed honoured Brahmins. When a taravad faces a series of misfortunes and an astrologer is consulted he might point out to ensure that this feasting (varam) is regularly done even when a default through lack of means to conduct it may be tolerated by the Nambudiri janmi. Some taravads have temple lands (as in the case of two in Karattukursi) originally given on kanam by the Nambudiri village head who owned the temple, with an understanding that the taravad should conduct varam every month at the temple.

There are again unspecified and conventional payments to the janmi. At Onam, the annual festival of the first harvest period in August-September, the tenants send to the janmi a head load of bananas, and often choice vegetables of the season, varying in quantity with his economic status. Further, at occasions of marriage or any important feasts in the janmi's family, such items are usually delivered to him or he conveys to send specific goods such as ~~ma~~ milk and curd and the tenant zestfully complies with the needs.

The janmi-heads of Karattukursi and Kolappulli have their own troupe of artists for Kathakali (the currently more famous Malabar dance drama). The artists were originally recruited from Nair servants in permanent

employ and trained to form a troupe. Each well-to-do taravad of kanam tenants is made to engage the troupe in turn on payment for a night's performance at the taravad house. Taravads which cannot afford to discharge the obligation, and are not too poor, have to pay for it jointly in groups of two or three, staging the show at the janmi's house, and thus contribute their share to maintain the troupe for as many days as possible at the expense of the tenants. (This practice in Karattukursi continued into the twenties of this century but in Kolappulli it disappeared earlier). The Kathakali-mania among janmis, as informants put it, was always on the increase but the very wealthy janmis in other places did not tax the resources of the tenants so regularly and committingly for the entertainment and patronage of Kathakali. However, as seen in the case of Munnurkode the Nambudiri-head organises Kathakali at his residence for a few days and at the end of each night's play the audience are exhorted to contribute towards the expense. The Nair tenants have to rise to the situations and make voluntary payments according to the wealth of their taravad, and such payments are loudly announced to the audience. Commitments of this category on the part of tenants with a sanction of tradition, often attributable to the coercion by janmis, some time in the past, are not very uncommon in South Malabar. For Sthani janmis, for the expensive succession ceremony (coronation) following the death of the senior-most male

member, all tenants send, as best as they can afford, sizeable quantities of raw rice, bananas and vegetables. Tenants who profess to be the leaders of the village, the families of power, have to excel others in customary payments or services of the kinds mentioned.

The janmi on his part feasts the tenants, one or two being invited from each tenant taravad at feasts in his family. At such feasts tenants of acknowledged high social status in the village, even among the tenants who belong to the same caste, are specially recognised of their importance by seating arrangement and the order of serving.

Apart from the regularised payments, a tenant taravad offers to the janmi at times, almost every year, the best fruits and vegetables of size and quality or of rare strains. A tenant going to see the janmi to get a favour or even to convey an important information offers bananas and sugar to him which as the saying goes is "Nilathuvechu Mukhathu Nokkuka" - place some offering on the floor and then look at the face -. Such offerings and periodical gifts on a smaller scale are a feature of the relationship between families of marked difference in economic status belonging to the same caste or between master-dependent families at lower levels in the hierarchy.

The interpersonal behaviour of the tenant with the janmi is one of high respect. This is not entirely incumbent on the higher rank of the janmi's caste. A Nair tenant, for instance, stands before the janmi at a

distance silently with a markedly docile expression on his face, dressed in a loin cloth and removing from his shoulders the second piece of cloth and tugging it under his arms. He speaks slowly and in a meek tone employing terms of respect in his speech and using the special vocabulary meant for talking to Nambudiris or Sthanis as the case may be. The distance kept and the nature of the vocabulary used are a matter of caste rank, but the fact of his posing in full attention in this manner is the mode of respect for the master on whom one is dependent. This mode of respect in behaviour is not necessarily ~~paid~~ paid to a poor Nambudiri whose attribute is only his caste rank. The respectful behaviour of this kind is characteristic of master-dependent relations between castes and within the same caste at lower levels in the hierarchy and it has its near parallel in the relationships of respect between kin of some categories among nearly all the non-polluting castes. The distinction pointed out here between behaviour incumbent on caste rank and on economic status will further be considered in a later context.

The kanakkaran-pattakkaran relationship, based on tenant-sub-tenant status per se of each, mirrors the same pattern. The tenant's obligation to the janmi, as noted, regarding the quality of rent paid and the mode of payment repeats here. There are generally no sundry additional payments except when the kanakkaran taravad is in charge of the annual festival of a deity. The pattakkaran

delivers bahanas and vegetables at occasions of feasts and in addition at Onam, Vishu and Tiruvatira, a third festival important for Nair women. He also sends to the kanakkaran fruits and some share of the yield of summer vegetables grown by irrigation. In such payments a head-load is the maximum, and the minimum varies on the nature of the item, as for instance, to send less than a full bunch of large plantains (25 to 50 in a bunch) is rather insulting to the prestige of the receiver. The pattakkaran, if he is in the neighbourhood, is in frequent personal contact with the kanakkar taravad. He is expected to be usually at the beck and call of his kanam master and has often to render free miscellaneous services to the master expecting no more reward for it than a usual meal.

The pattakkar of a taravad are invited and fed at occasions of marriage and death feasts and at one of the four Onam days, the harvest festival. When their number is large the poor among them belonging to the polluting castes are given raw rice in lieu of a meal during the Onam period. The poor but honest and pleasing pattakkaran gets from his kanam master advances of loan or assistance in kind or cash to conduct feasts or to tide over contingencies.

The high rent of verumpattam lands and the very nature of that tenure as terminable after a year but continued at the kanakkaran's descretion make for the glaring

dependency of the pattakkaran on the former. When the verumpattam is held by verbal order or sanction from kanakkaran the insecurity is obviously more marked. The conventional pattern of relationship between the pattakkaran and kanakkaran as mentioned here has to be understood against this background. Thus the former can be seen to be in perpetual relationship of informal servitude under the latter. By this fact the verumpattam tenure under a kanakkaran carries little or no prestige whatever be the caste of the holder of that tenure.

Traditionally caste rank was more clearly correlated with the categories of tenure so that in a village Nairs of the upper group were all kanam tenants and the middle group were sub-tenants. Conditions during the last hundred years or more have changed and have led to Nairs of the same caste in one village becoming tenants as well as sub-tenants. It is also to be noted that homogeneity in wealth among taravads/families within a local caste, particularly the Nair/castes of the upper group, seems to have existed to a considerable extent upto the late pre-British period.

The feature of existence of tenants and sub-tenants within the same caste in a village upsets the otherwise natural sense of equality among them. The problem is significant when one taravad is a sub-tenant exclusively to another one. In such a case the former can sublet further on verbal verumpattam and maintain a little prestige as a

master pattakkaran. Generally, even a poor taravad of the Nairs of the upper group as is seen in picturing the pattern in the beginning of this century, does not hold all its lands on verumpattam, but struggles to maintain atleast some land on kanam tenure. However there is no sense of equality between a kanakkaran taravad and its pattakkaran taravad of the same caste and the latter tacitly adjusts to the situation of his lowly prestige by being humble, meek and if necessary servile to the master taravad. Further considerations of this entails the problem of vertical mobility of taravads and I shall therefore defer it to the next chapter. Suffice it to recall here from the last chapter that the kanakkaran-pattakkaran groups cut across enangar group and the prestige group in a few contiguous villages.

The lower prestige of verumpattam, though its intrinsic feature, can be compensated by a total higher wealth and material resources of its holder, or as noted already, by sub-infeudation so that he has another pattakkaran under him. It has also to be noted that a kanam taravad, atleast in this century, by the very virtue of its kanam holdings carry full kanam-prestige if it directly cultivates its lands partly by the labour of its male and female members, although exclusive self-help without paid labour is not considered prestigious. However the middle and low group of Nair castes enjoy kanam prestige fully even if they cultivate by self labour. Some taravads of

this group have kanam lands leased by the janmi in recognition of the need of their regular services to castes of the upper group of Nairs and above or to temples.

The pattakkar as dependents enjoy a reflected prestige if the kanam master's taravad is of high social status or if its fortunes in wealth show any impressive rise. Consequently, such reflected prestige is one important element making up the social status of pattakkar in their local castes. The pattakkar when outside their own villages, if opportunity or need arises, introduce themselves to higher caste taravads in terms of the name of the taravad of their kanam master.

(2) Relations pertaining to agricultural labour:-

In the field of relations pertaining to agricultural labour only a few of the polluting castes come into the picture. The bulk of labour is of Cherumans and next to them the Tandans, but during the rush of seasonal work the labour of poor Nairs of any of the Nair castes is hired. As well, all castes described in the last chapter as casual agricultural labourers are also hired when needed.

The kinds of agricultural work done are mainly fencing the field, cleaning the field, ploughing and breaking the clods, digging, manuring, weeding, sowing and transplanting the paddy seedlings, watering, harvesting, threshing, transporting paddy, winnowing and sifting it, preparing paddy hay, garden work and cutting wood.

Normally the supply of labour required is ensured

by the practice of keeping in permanent employ a few Cheruman families. They are known as taravad Cherumans or kana-Cherumans since they have been 'tied' to the taravad or the master's family for generations. Traditionally they were tied to the land rather than to the master in the sense that when land changed ownership they came under the new master along with the land. In all the three villages, for a few taravads of kanakkar, the tied Cherumans are in verumpattam relationship of the type noted in which they are tenants by word and have to do all post-harvest work in the compound of the taravad house of the master. Such tenancy is not popularly recognised as verumpattam although virtually it is the lowest of the category of tenures. The Tandans are less frequently tenants of this type and there is no caste limitation in granting this form of lease. Sub-tenants of this category are particularly at the beck and call of their master tenants.

The tied Cherumans receive several periodical free allowances in kind in addition to the wages for their work. At Vishu, the new year day, each family of them gets one 'para' of paddy and in the month of Karkkadakam (August-September), the "month of heavy rains and hungry stomachs" as it is known, they are given a small allowance of paddy for there is little scope for them to be engaged in work during the month. At Onam each family gets a 'para' of paddy and a cloth for each member. There is further payment for annual thatching of their huts, for

birth, marriage, sickness and death in their families. At Vishu and Onam the tied Cherumans as well as others who occasionally serve as supplementary workers offer to their master vegetables and fruits of the season as they can afford.

Traditionally all Cherumans appear to have a marked concentration in villages to which the Nairs of the upper group were confined. In such villages the Cherumans were working directly under kanam taravads more as labourers than as verbal verumpattakkar, the incidence of the latter tenure being the less the more remote the past. This is a probability that can be gathered from the information conveyed by Nair and Cheruman informants. It is also noteworthy that even the wealthy kanam taravads of Nairs, in the past, devoted themselves to agricultural work, their women too contributing to out-door farm work. The less wealthy Nairs used to turn out seasonal work in time by cooperative labour among them. Such factors eliminated any problem of deficiency of local labour and were also adjustments between the local demand and supply of Cheruman labour, and thus they contributed to village self-sufficiency in seasonal labour. In Munnurkode, seasonal cooperative work among middle group of Nairs characterises agricultural activities in the early decades of this century.

Cherumans under wealthy taravads, as noted in the last chapter, enjoy the prestige of their ties with their

masters of affluence. The tie of relationship with the master taravaḍ is most valued by the Cherumans. The sense of economic security they enjoy and the ancestral ties with the masters make up the important strands of this relationship. The tied Cheruman, when his master does not need him, is free to serve others. The Cherumans as a whole regard all Nairs as their masters and they are the highest authorities to settle any internal dispute among their local Cherumans. A Cheruman who has no means to celebrate his marriage can get his marriage recognised by the master and it is thenceforward valid. The procedure is that the prospective couple demand from the Nair master their wage in paddy to be measured out into one container in social recognition of their marriage from that day. This finalises the marriage that has been pending for want of means. Three cases of this kind of marriage came to my notice of which one master who gave such recognition was a Moslem verumpattam tenant of locally high social status.

All castes below Nairs, except for very rare instances of individual families, stay on patches of land held under kurikkanam or kudiyririppu, the two kinds of tenure noted in the first chapter. Such tenures are held under the kanam ownership of Nairs of the upper group and their right of eviction may be exercised if the tenant residents frequently displease them in any manner. To evict such an erring tenant and deprive him of his house

is the last resort and is even regarded as a sin. Instances of such eviction are therefore very rare but the threat of it is an economic sanction to keep the tenants dissuaded from any non-conformist activity. Very often the verumpattam tenants of these castes have paddy lands on lease from one kanam owner and residence sites on kudi-yirippu tenure from another kanam owner. This brings them under the power of two different higher caste families particularly when the tenant has grown valuable trees in the tiny fenced garden land around his house. The Panan and Cheruman have hardly any garden compound and are not ordered to quit their huts unless, as rarely happens, they become notorious for habitual theft or sorcery and public opinion favours a harsh treatment of them.

Labour of the Tandans is used for agricultural work when there is deficiency of Cheruman labour as often happens in the rush of seasonal work. Or, in some villages, or sectors of the same village, Tandans considerably outnumber Cherumans and are a sure source of labour of better quality. Polluting castes other than Cherumans and Tandans are usually less preferred but may be employed for supplementary labour in times of need. Castes below Panans are not acquainted with agricultural work and are too polluting and hence do not get accepted even for casual labour. At any time in the year, once the tied Cherumans are given work, a taravad prefers Tandan males in the neighbourhood for any substantial work on the garden lands.

In the matter of wages, sex, caste and tied relationships count. Females of any caste get a quarter less than males, and Tandans are paid a quarter or over more than the Cherumans. Tied or permanent Cherumans draw a quarter less than the other Cherumans. There is also sex-wise division of labour in agricultural operations; hoeing, ploughing, lifting water for irrigation and the daily washing of cattle being exclusively the task of males of any caste. Payment is in kind, usually paddy and rarely 'Chamai', a less preferred cereal. The measuring cans used by the masters or the way the wages are deftly measured out almost invariably amount to under payments. Several Taravads keep two measuring cans of the same unit, one as standard and the other to measure out wages, the latter being about $1/4$ to $1/6$ less than the standard measure. At the completion of the second seasonal crop of the year the tied Cherumans and others of different castes, if any, who have served for days in farms are given a sumptuous feast.

Families of several castes rendering work in connection with agriculture, bound by the institution of avakasam, get paid twice annually but it is done by distribution of bundles of reaped unthreshed ears of paddy at the harvest spot. The carpenter, ironsmith and Panan (umbrella maker) in order, are paid, but the quantity only tends to approximate to a locally standard rate of one bundle for one para seed area. (A bundle yields about $3/10$ of a para of paddy.)

(3) Relations in the field of non-agricultural services:-

We now turn to relations between castes based on non-agricultural caste-ascribed roles and services and ties of cooperation. This field of relations can be classified as (a) services exclusively to centres of power and authority (village heads), (b) services to the upper group of Nair castes and above and services of the hereditary specialist to the various castes or to the village community in general and (c) ties of cooperation. Services of all castes below Nairs require to be considered only with varying degree of details assigning importance to their more significant service or specialisation. Such castes whose services as outlined in the last chapter are regarded as adequate are not further considered here.

Of the Brahmin castes the Ilayad, Nambudiri Priest and Imbrandiri serve the high non-Brahmin castes. Ilayad is the priest for death anniversary for Sthani and Samanthan castes and he can be 'Oni' to them (i.e. the ritual cook and recipient of a ritual feed at the feast) at such occasions. He similarly serves as cook for Nairs of the upper group who invite him but does not accept to be their oni in the full sense for he abstains from eating at their hands. Imbrandiri and the Nambudiri priest serve the Nairs as priests of choice to propitiate snakes which are to be highly revered by Brahminic rites, and this is done only among Sthanis, Samanthans and some wealthy Nairs.

Of the non-Brahmin high castes the Kiriyaattil Nairs alone are said to have a relatively good mastery of the culinary art, perhaps in line with their tradition as 'Kitchen men' of their Sthani overlords. The Kiriyaattil men of the less wealthy taravad, on invitation, serve as cooks at feasts of Nair castes of the same group, a practice reported ^{as} by more popular in earlier periods.

Of the upper group of Nair castes, the Kiriyaattils and Sudras have ritual services to the head of the focal villages, the others being only immigrants. These immigrant castes in areas of their concentration have analogous services as retainers to their village heads. The Kiriyaattils (both Nairs and Nambiaras) the adukkalakkar (kitchen men) send from each taravad atleast one man to the Sthani-head's house to cook during the fourteen days of death pollution of his taravad. The rice for ritual offering to the spirit of the deceased on all the fourteen days is separately prepared by a male of one Kiriyaam lineage which holds that hereditary right. A woman of that lineage has to prepare the ritual spot for offering the rice. The women of other Kiriyaattil taravads perform purificatory cleaning of the floor of the whole house on all the pollution days by smearing the floor with a solution of cow-dung. They have also to attend to such cleaning during the pre-pubertal ritual marriage (tali kettu) of the girls of the Sthani taravad, and annually at the days of the death anniversary of all the deceased members. The

adukkalakkar of Trikkateri Sthani Nair are of two divisions, one of the Sthani-head proper who "reigns" with his Sthanam property and one of the female head (Netyaramma) of the taravad, the latter division being thus the adukkalakkar of the taravad as a whole. Those of the Sthani-head (the Muppil Nair as he is called) are residents around his separate residence two miles away and are smaller in number. Their roles of the kind noted here are confined to the occasion of Muppil Nair's death. This distinction does not exist for the head of Kolappulli (the Kavalappara Muppil Nair) perhaps because in that Sthani taravad, members are very few (less than ten) and all wealth is owned as Sthanam property. The Trikkateri Sthani taravad has 118 adukkalakkar taravads residing in several villages and Kavalappara Sthani taravad has 999 taravads distributed in several villages of which Kolappulli is one village. It is probable that these are rather legendary numbers for nobody could confirm the truth about it.⁷ All adukkalakkar members serving the Sthani eat their meals from his house for the duration of their stay. During the days of death pollution each adukkalakkar taravad sends to the Sthani-head about one 'para' of beaten rice (Avil). The formal permission of the Sthani-head is

7. I am told that under Kavalappara Muppil Nair, the one to complete a thousand is the deity Antimahakalan whose temple is in Kolappulli and in two more neighbouring villages. He is revered as one tutelary deity helping the Muppil Nair. In Trikkateri, however, the informants seemed to believe more in the authenticity of 118 as the old number of adukkalakkar taravads scattered in a number of villages.

invariably sought to conduct the tali kettu ceremony of girls in all adukkalakkar taravads. For this ceremony each taravad gets from the Sthani fourteen 'Fanams' (about Rs.3/-) as a matter of right and a token of approval.

Of all Nairs the Kiriya Nair can cook for any of the other Nair castes and in practice any wealthy family of a lower Nair hires the service of poor Kiriya Nairs to cook at feasts so that Nairs of any of the castes can be invited and fed with food cooked and served by men of highest ritual purity among the Nairs.

In the relation of Sudra Nairs to their Nambudiri-head the roles of women are predominant. Sudra adiyar women attend on the Nambudiri women in menstruation and bathe them after the period. The adiyar women have also to clean the polluted vessels used during the period. The ritual procedure in bathing a maiden and a married woman differs.⁸ During confinements the Nair women are post-natal attendants of Nambudiri women for ten days of birth pollution. Such attendant woman is the recipient of

8. For unmarried girls the procedure of ritual purificatory bath is elaborate. I am told "the Nair woman attending her at the bathing ghat meant for such pollution-bathing takes seven 'kora' leaves and in each keeps a little turmeric and 'vaka' powder (a cleansing powder made of the bark of the vaka tree). The Nambudiri girl with mattu as a loin cloth sits at the bathing ghat. The Nair woman holds the leaf with its contents over the girl's head and pours on it three times water taken in a copper can. This is repeated with two more leaves and the girl then makes a plunge bath. The course is again repeated with three more leaves, using nine cans of water for each leaf. The girl then takes a plunge bath, takes the leaf, discards mattu and dresses in her own cloth, moves to the next bathing ghat, pours water over her head with the leaf and takes a plunge bath. This removes her menstrual pollution.

gifts of cash given by female Nambudiri relatives who come to see the child on receiving the news of child birth. The news is conveyed by a Sudra Nair woman who as well gets gifts from those to whom the happy information is carried. During death pollution the adiyar women go to the illom and have to make every day purificatory cleaning of the house floor with cow dung. At marriage in the illom, Nair women with oil wick-lights line up in the centre of the hall. At child birth and the occasion of a death the Nairs have to organise general tasks regarding ceremonies or feasting. At marriage of a member of the illom each of the men present from the adiyar taravads gets two loin cloths and each woman gets one cloth as customary gifts. At the rice giving ceremony of the child of the illom each representative of a taravad, usually females, gets a cloth, some oil, paddy and raw rice and a token gift of money. A few taravads supply the ritual grass required for all rites in the illom. For each ritual service paddy and raw rice are given to the Nairs and as occasion merits they get served with a feasty meal. The Sudra Nairs' services do not require many members to render the task simultaneously. Nambudiri illoms being small households, a single or a few taravads serve as attendants and they are usually the less wealthy of the families of local Sudra Nairs. However, even the wealthy adiyar taravad does not miss an opportunity atleast once in a way to emphasise its identity as adiyar by

representing itself to receive a petty customary gift, the right of adiyars. For instance after child birth pollution a couple of ounces of oil is distributed by a Nambudiri woman to each adiyar woman who comes there. An old informant told me "even when our taravad of sixteen members had an annual receipt of rent of 8,000 paras of paddy (from kanam lands) my mother used to go to receive the couple of ounces of oil poured into her hair). For tali kettu, as among the adukkalakkar, the adiyar have to get the formal permission of the Nambudiri head and to contract any marriage outside the adiyar group his permission is as well required.

The adiyar and adukkalakkar form the large majority of kanam tenants of the village head, and in the traditional economy, it is probable that they exclusively held that status. Hence informants do not find it easy to differentiate between the categories of behaviour of adiyar/adukkalakkar based on kanam tenure from those based on retainer relationships. The above description helps to differentiate these and is useful in latter considerations of how secular criteria can interplay with or affect ritual roles.

The middle group of Nair castes with reference to their main intercaste services have come to our attention in the last chapter. A few of them who have more roles ascribed than what has been outlined will be mentioned here.

The Charna Nairs are attached for indoor service in Sthani taravads. Their services are: the women attend on Sthani women during the pollution days of menstruation and child birth as adiyar women serve the Nambudiri women, purificatory cleaning of the house floor is done by cow dung on ritually important days; they remove at feasts the dinner leaves of Kiriyaattil Nairs and Sthanis; the men have to hold lights before Sthani men in formal processions or some ceremonial occasions.

The Ulladan Nairs of this group serve the Sthanis as ritual drummers on a specially shaped drum (Chakkatundam) at occasions of tali kettu and puberty ceremony of girls, at the end of death pollution and for the 'coronation' ceremony of the Sthanis. In Nambudiri headed villages, it appears, that they have no role traditionally assigned, but in Munnurkode their women remove dinner leaves of Sudra Nairs at feasts in Nambudiri houses or in wealthy Sudra Nair taravads.

Attikursi, the birth and death pollution purifier, serves the Nairs of the upper group and the non-Brahmins above and the Nambudiris, and instructs those non-Brahmins as funeral priests during death rites. The procedural details which he instructs are different for Nairs of the upper group and those above, the latter being of a quasi-Nambudiri type, and the payments to him too vary accordingly.⁹ The Attikursi has no priestly roles in

9. Generally from Nairs of the upper group the Attikursi gets about four paras of paddy for the whole service after a death, and for birth purification it is one fifth

the Nambudiri house but during the death pollution of an illom an Attikursi male and female have to stay there to attend to the manual work in arranging for rituals. The female has also to wash vessels and Sudra Nair women of the adiyar group have to take them and hand over to the kitchen leaving them inverted at the kitchen door. A matrilineage being bound by observance of birth and death pollution at occasions of birth or death in one taravad the Attikursi has to go round and purify members of all taravads of the lineage by sprinkling water when they bathe. For Nambudiris, Sthanis and Kiriya Nairs the Attikursi has also to do ritual cutting off of hair at certain rites. For Nairs of the middle group (except the Attikursi) his services are done by a lower caste known as Valayanchira Nairs.

Of the Nairs of the low group Veluthedan (washer-man) serves only the Nairs of the upper group and above. He usually washes twice for the Nairs and thrice to the Sthanis and Nambudiris every month. During the religious days of "Vaishakha" he has to give daily washings to the Nambudiris. In some very wealthy illoms atleast a few elderly Nambudiris want clothes daily washed by Veluthedan. What he has washed is acceptable for Nambudiris to wear except for specially ritual occasions when they have to use wet clothes. Clothes delivered by Veluthedan, if -----
of a para. In addition, from each taravad of the same lineage who have pollution, he gets one fifth of a para for sprinkling purificatory water.

doubted of ritual purity, can be got purified by himself for use at ritual occasions and it is done by him by sprinkling water in which a pinch of $\frac{1}{2}$ cow dung ashes are dissolved. Unused and washed clothes brought back after a travel are regarded as unclean and the Veluthedan is sent for to get a sprinkle of water by his hands on such clothes to remove any 'charge' of pollution on them. All castes whom he serves need him at times for this kind of purification. The Veluthedan also washes the clothes for the idol of the deities of the Kavus to wear, and for their oracles to dress in form. He has to wash such clothes three days in a week and daily during festival and holy periods. The frequency of his service to Kavus depends on their wealth and popularity, but usually he has more of service in the Kavus of the goddess Bhagavati.

The Vilakkatira (barber) men and women serve all higher castes. The men are barbers and do hair cutting and shaving and in addition serve Nairs of the upper group except Kiriyattils to cut hair atleast symbolically at the termination of death pollution. The barber woman is midwife for all these castes and also serves as barber the women of Nambudiris, of the upper group of Nair castes and of the matrilineal castes above to shave off the under arm and public hair.¹⁰ As midwife she has to be

10. Fawcett in his book on Nairs written in the beginning of this century notes that Nair women do this by themselves. In my focal area this service of the barber woman continues even today among the very elderly women of Nairs and above. Castes below this group of Nairs do not seem to have had the service done by anybody.

post-natal attendant for five to ten days during which she gets gifts of cash from visitors who come to see the child. As adiyar women serve the Nambudiris she has to be the messenger to convey the news of child birth to the baby's father's taravad and she gets her claim of the gift for this service.

Both castes of the low group are the most essential avakasakkar (rightful men of service) to the higher castes and they receive gifts of cloth at Onam and rice and food at other festivals and feasts. The barber woman has a right to receive at all birthdays in her master taravads/families the bulky feastly meal ritually served before a lighted lamp.

All Nairs serving the higher castes get paid for their service but the few taravads of the middle and low group of Nairs in a village who serve by hereditary right have also kanam or verumpattam lands on a nominal rent held directly under the village head and originally meant to keep them on a subsistence level. The washerman and barber who are in regular frequent need get periodically paid from the joint resources of each family of their masters.

Of the eighth group of castes Ganisa Panicker (the astrologer) is the most important. He serves higher castes at birth to make horoscope of the child, at tali kettu to declare the auspicious moment, and at Vishu, the new year day, to submit to each family his note of forecast

regarding agricultural yield and rainfall. It appears that in Sthani-headed villages the Ganisa Panicker's presence at tali-kettu is regarded as essential. He has to speak out at the auspicious moment that the tali-kettu be carried out. This service among Sudra Nairs under Nambudiris is done by Tattan (the goldsmith). Soon after a death in a family the matrilineal castes have to get from the Panicker the astrological period of death calculated and scribed on a cadjan leaf. During the death pollution he has to prescribe the suitable day for the rite of plucking out the palm leaf hoisted on the cremation spot. The Panicker, thus, as he often claims, is one whose services are required from the cradle to the grave. Nambudiris recognise Panicker as an avakasam caste and pay him the gifts of raw rice and bananas at Onam and Vishu, but in practice, they consult Nambudiris well versed in astrology even for the routine needs. The Ganisa Panicker also holds the right to initiate the child into learning the three R's but this right, perhaps traditionally confined to Sthani-headed villages, is seldom recognised in this century and is eclipsed by the popular practice of employing Eruthachans as initiators and teachers. The Panicker is often required for predictions and diagnosis of the causes of maladies and calamities, but for such services, he has no avakasam, and such fields of astrology are open to the more competent to ply their trade and prosper. For the Ganisa Panicker, as in Trikkateri,

(a Sthani-headed village) who also holds the traditional status of head of the gymnasium, the Kiriyaattil Nairs have to conduct marriage. A few Nairs accompany the bridegroom holding symbolic swords and shields and the bride is received by them on behalf of the Panicker, later to be handed over to him on return to his house. The bride's relatives hand over the bride saying "Look Nairs of desam, here is the bride and here the bride-wealth." At the feast following it the Nairs of the bride's village cook and for the feast on return to the groom's residence the Nairs who accompanied serve as cooks.¹¹

The Tandan Kurup as instructor of the Nairs in the gymnasium (kalari) holds the vestigial right to get his customary payments at occasions of tali ceremony of girls of Nairs of the upper group. The Kiriyaam Nairs, as in the case of the Ganisa Panicker who is the kalari instructor, have to lead the party for his marriage flourishing swords and shields and have also to cook for the marriage feast.

The Tandan, as noted, as far as my data show, have no service to Nair retainers of a Nambudiri-head. In a Sthani village the Tandan of the desam is also a title

11. Since the Nairs cook the food in a separate place they can eat although some do not do so. I am not sure if this practice of Nairs conducting the marriage of the males of the gymnasium head's family exists in all villages under the Sthanis. In Trikkateri it lingered into the first decade of this century. It is probable that the military Nairs traditionally undertook to do this for their trainer's family although the custom does not seem to have been recorded anywhere.

vested in a lineage. He has to organise labour at occasions of death feast in a Sthani house or in Nair taravads to cut wood, to carry vessels for mass feasting and has also to do other sundry manual work at such occasions. He is also to handle disputes of lower polluting castes in the *desam* and refer such disputes upwards if unsettled at his level. For the castes of Ganisa Panicker, Tandan Kurup and Kammalans, the Tandan of the *desam* has to lead the marriage party of the bridegroom.

The Mannan is on a par with the barber and washerman, an important *avakasam* caste. Mannan women serve all Nairs and above except the immigrant castes to wash polluted clothes used during menstruation and confinement, and to give *mattu* (as noted, the change of cloth) for women in periods to wear on the fourth day and purify themselves by a plungebath. *Mattu* is supplied to a few more castes as noted in the last chapter to remove birth and menstrual pollution. For the Nair washerman (*Veluthedan*) clothes for use at occasions of ritual purity have to be washed by the *Mannatti* (female). She also washes clothes periodically at long intervals, for the middle group of Nairs. The *mattu* she offers is, as often mentioned in descriptive accounts of Nairs, not in itself a purificatory cloth. It aids to purify for it is essential to wear it before the final plunge bath which removes the menstrual pollution. At puberty a girl has to wear *mattu* supplied by the Mannan male prior to her purificatory bath. Afterwards during

her periods she uses the mattu supplied by the Mannatti (female). Mattu is also essential to terminate pollution following child birth and death, and for the latter, both males and females, or atleast the senior-most of each sex of the household, has also to wear mattu for the purificatory bath. For birth and death pollution the Mannatti has to give several mattus at different occasions and get paid at each time in addition to her right of food and other items. She has to wash all clothes used during such periods of ritual pollution.¹² She is further periodically paid for her monthly services. The Mannan renders several non-avakasam services and receives piece-meal wages. Atleast one family of Mannans in a village has usually one member who is a specialist in the treatment of diseases of children by herbal and magical methods. He also practises protective, preventive and curative magic for sleeplessness, nightmares and other maladies

 12. During birth pollution the Mannatti provides four mattus for each of the five baths on different days. One mattu is for the infant to lie on after bath, three for the mother, of which one she wears prior to the bath, one after that, and one for her to spread on the mat to lie on. The mother and child have to bathe using the mattu in this manner on the 4th, 7th, 10th, 15th and 28th day after birth. The Mannatti is paid 2 'Narayams' (a narayam is one-tenth of a para) of paddy for each of the four times and half a narayam rice and one narayam paddy and a meal on the fifth time, that is, on the 28th day after which alone the mother is purified enough to enter the kitchen. In poor taravads mattu is used for bathing on the 15th and the 28th day and the mattu for wealthy taravads for birth pollution of women includes two pieces, one as an under wear cloth and one as an upper loin cloth.

and in this capacity serves all non-Brahmin castes above him, and rarely the Brahmins as well. The Mannan is also a professional in hand sewing but the traditional Malabar dresses need little sewing and the Mannan's tailoring work is mainly for making beds and masks and dresses for folk dances. Among the non-polluting castes the Mannan is called upon to conduct burial of the dead body of those deceased by small-pox and cholera, both being in folk belief, most dreaded diseases contracted through divine curses and the patients being nursed only under extreme segregation. During the festival period of the deity of the local kavu the Mannan performs a dance with ghost mask going around each house of the non-polluting castes and receiving alms for it. On the final festival day this round of visits culminates in a long and tiring dance at the temple. This is counted as an obligation which he has to discharge for the welfare of the villagers. The Panan and Parayan of the lower polluting castes also do this but with more grotesque masks, and each of these castes separately visits the houses for performance. During the festival in the local kavus two Mannans disguising as a married couple and with facial make-up go around dancing, staging a brief dance in all houses of the non-polluting castes and collect paddy for giving the entertainment. This dance also culminates in the kavu on the festival day.

Of the Kammalans (artisans) the carpenter serves all castes although the polluting castes hardly need his services except for the maintenance of agricultural implements. The carpenter and ironsmith emphasise their avakasm in relation to Nairs of the upper group and the indigenous castes above. It is to them that they offer an item of their product such as a laddle or a knife as a gift at Onam and receive from them raw rice at the new year and Onam days. The village carpenters, a few families of a lineage, settled in one village have exclusive rights to receive gifts of cloth at various stages in the construction of a house in a group of neighbouring villages. The carpenter is also the architect planning every detail of the house according to a partly indigenous system of knowledge of house building in which several mystical or apparently irrational ideas influence the plan of the house. The lavish uses of timber in building and his responsibilities to execute the work with technical perfection, lest misfortune befalls the residents, makes him the leading specialist with avakasm service to in the construction of the house.

The ironsmith's services are much less needed since carpentry has techniques so well developed that in house building even the doors and windows are installed with wooden hinges and there is very little scope for the work of an ironsmith. His services are largely confined to the making and maintenance of some agricultural

implements and some of the household equipments for cooking and to supply iron bangles as a protective ornament for children.

The Moosari (the bell-metal worker) and Tattan (goldsmith) are craftsmen with a limited field of customers. The Moosaris are few and far between and their products, the costly heavy bell-metal utensils and lamps of high craftsmanship are made to order. His customers are, except rarely, the Nairs of the upper group and above, who can afford to buy his wares and own them beyond the limit of routine requirements as a type of cherished possession with a high display value. The Moosari's wealthy customer families get a small gift of his product and he is rewarded in recognition of the gesture of respect expressed by the gift. The goldsmith's customers are similarly restricted, but his golden pellet (tali) is an essential ornament for tali rite of girls of nearly all castes above the Cherumans. Nairs and castes above them have to get their tali from the village goldsmith, and at the rice giving ceremony of infants, their ear boring and supply of ornaments for ear are his services. Beyond this he supplies to order and finds enough customers among the high castes within his areas of avakasam.

The Kallasari (the stone mason) is recognised as a Kammalan caste in some parts of the taluk and the Kammalans recognise him as an enangar caste in areas where

he has been living for long. This caste is apparently an immigrant one into Walluvanad taluk from areas such as Ponnani and Cochin. Masonry work with laterite bricks has become popular in this taluk only in recent decades and it is done by Mannans who are primarily trained in the local craft of building houses with processed mud. Laterite masonry work or granite walls seem to have been originally confined to temples and Nambudiri houses in this area.

Of the eleventh group of castes the Pulluvan's periodical song, as noted in the preceding chapter, are essential for the welfare of families lest the snakes are believed to be annoyed. He is specially employed for the ceremony of snake propitiation among non-Brahmin castes above his level. The ceremony is usually done at the prescription of the astrologer who traces misfortunes or illness such as leprosy, some of the cutaneous diseases and barrenness of women to the wrath of snakes who therefore require to be propitiated.

The Panan, in addition to the services noted already, has to visit houses of all castes of Nairs and Nambudiris between midnight and day-break in the month of Karkadakam (in July-August) and sing songs to the rhythm of a drum and cymbal. His party wakes up the inmates by the break of his songs which are partly to eulogise the latter, and the name of each adult member of the house is pieced up into his songs infallibly from

his memory. This service is believed to drive away the evil spirits, if any, lodged in the house and he gets paid for it. The Panan offers an umbrella to each taravad at Onam and at Vishu and if needed carries the message of death to related taravads distantly located. To the Tandans he has to supply an umbrella for burial rites after death and one at marriage for the bridegroom to hold.

The Cheruman's services in ^{the} field of agricultural work have been noted. But, in Kolappulli the Cherumans have to conduct ceremonial mourning at the death of a member of their master's taravad. This custom, it appears, was in the last phase of its disappearance in the early years of this century. All Cherumans of a Nair lineage are called to assemble and cry over the demise of the member. The Cheruman males first cry loudly, and then jointly with their females they enact a second ceremonial crying. In the same village the news of death in a taravad is communicated to all relatives by the respective tied Cherumans.

The Parayan of the thirteenth group is the exclusive specialist in bamboo work. His bamboo mats, containers and sieves are essential in post-harvest processing of paddy and for domestic uses. He removes ^{and} the skins dead cattle and markets the skin which is normally his claim unless Moslems compete to get it on payment to the owner of the animal. The non-polluting castes have an ambivalent

attitude towards the Parayan for they dread his power to inflict illness and even death by an advanced form of black magic known as 'oti' for which he is notorious.¹³

The Nayadi of this group of castes supplies, as noted, a few jungle products, fibres and fibre-made articles, but his name is synonymous with persistent begging in his usual amplified and pleading roar. He knows the birthdays of each member of the households of non-polluting castes and he never fails to appear at a conveniently distant site on such birthdays and shout for his feed until he gets it. In addition, he has to be given alms on all auspicious days in the year in the form of food, clothes and leaf umbrellas and continued default in giving it is sometimes

13. In nearly all literature on Malabar castes the 'oti' of the Parayan finds mention. I find the villagers speaking very realistically about it even today although its incidence is reportedly too narrow to attract any notice. But Parayans are accused of it and sporadic incidents of beating them for alleged performance of black magic causing sickness are heard of until about four years back. The astrologer sometimes traces the cause of some illness to the Parayan's cult of magical charging of one's body with evil spirit. L.K.A.Iyer in his *Cochin Tribes and Castes* gives a lengthy account of the cult, the severe discipline required to practise it and the queer medicine (oil extracted by destroying human foetus) used for efficacy in its advanced form. Perhaps the most recent account of a foreigner who is impressed by the reality of the fright of 'oti' is Beryle De Zote who (in *A study of dance in South India*, Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1953, pp.77, 95) writes of the enticement by the Otiyan (the one who practises it, usually the Parayan) "I must not leave the wicked cult of Odi without mentioning that it is indeed an art, requiring an austere and painful discipline worth of any Christian saint or ascetic it is dying out because people are becoming sceptical and witchcraft cannot work on incredulity...."

astrologically diagnosed as the cause of some illness. The remedy in such cases is to feed a few Nayadis lavishly and please them in addition with gifts of cloth.

The foregoing account relates to the more important services and occupations of the castes. In addition, several castes have miscellaneous supplementary occupations as means for a living or to acquire more income for spending on feasts, ornaments, utensils, household equipment and the like.

Of the middle group of Nair castes all except Attikursi and Chotha Nair who are usually fully engaged in their ritual services, often find domestic services at higher caste households. Also, dependence through land tenure has this feature as a normal concomitant. The low group of Nairs can hardly find leisure from their ascribed callings. It is below their level that there is more scope for supplementary occupations. The variety of occupations of immigrant castes have been mentioned and through those they develop local ties of patron-client relationship. The Tandans as noted, though toddy tappers, do several kinds of agricultural tasks and generally women of all upper polluting castes get periodically engaged in harvesting and threshing, pounding paddy and making mats and brooms for local supply. In addition, atleast a few males of these castes in a village are curers of cattle disease, brokers in cattle trade (particularly the Tandans), exorcists, and specialists in protective magic.

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The payments received by various castes for services and offerings, as noted, vary in quantity as well as in kind. Some principles appear to guide the variation regarding items and the quantity given. Purely secular services have conventional local rates of payment in paddy depending as noted on the sex, and in some cases on the caste, for some of the castes like Tandans and Kurikkans are more efficient in labour on garden lands. But ritual services and formal offerings of goods at festivals are remunerated according to a few considerations. These generally are the caste rank of the giver, the importance of the ritual service, the wealth of the receiving family, the frequency of the service or of offerings of items and the feature of restricted rendering of services or goods of quality to a few selected families. The variations in items of remunerations are paddy, raw rice, money, cloth and oil and rarely all raw items for a full meal. Of these items, uncooked rice and new cloth are superior to others and often a combination of these items make up the remuneration. A few examples bear out such aspects of payment. The astrologer for his unsought but routine services gets raw rice, but gets money and a meal for reviewing a horoscope, and raw rice, vegetables and oil are not simply given but despatched to his house for his service during death pollution. The carpenter for his gifts offered at Onam and Vishu gets a meal or raw rice in lieu and a gift of cloth from wealthy families. The ironsmith, for his

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gifts, usually gets paddy for he is in the prestige scale lower than the carpenter although the rank of artisan castes as a group is the same. The bell-metal worker is regarded as more honourable and he appears with gifts at Onam only before wealthy households. He is invariably given raw rice for he is the artisan to make utensils and lamps for daily use of priests in temples. The payments to Mannan for the puberty rite include one narayam paddy and five to six narayams of raw rice. A Panan gladly accepts even an old torn cloth when he offers his umbrella as a gift. A Tandan grumbles if he is given the inferior grain 'Chamai' as his wage for agricultural work but a Cheruman is expected to regard it as a normal alternative to paddy wages during the season of Chamai in the rotation of crops. A Mannan mask dancer is worthy to be honoured by giving a pound or two of raw rice but a the Panan and Parayan mask dancers get paddy and that too often of a lowest quality. A Pulluvan is normally paid paddy on his round of visits but if hired for snake propitiation he is the priest of choice and has to be paid rice, cloth and money. (An elaborate study of differential payments as regards kind, quantity, ritual importance of service, caste rank and the like is likely to reveal that different castes, to the extent they have achieved adjustments to monetised sectors of the economy, have not done so with uniform ease, and the adjustment is probably still not complete).

The castes, as noted in the second chapter, are of two categories, avakasakkar and non-avakasakkar - those who render specialised service by hereditary right and those who do not. Avakasam usually relates to one kind or category of service for which one caste is the exclusive specialist or assignee to render it by hereditary right. Avakasakkar get gifts at Onam and Vishu, have security of service and are bound to render services to their masters who are also bound to accede atleast to the minimum of their right to serve. As noted in the second chapter it is only in the interest of having services of better quality that their importance is relegated to the minimum level. Another feature of avakasam, it may be ^{re}called from the second chapter, is that services are rendered at the door of the receiver thus involving a pronounced sense of dependency on him. Traditionally, it appears, avakasam connoted the meaning of services which are ritual or which have atleast ritual overtones. Even when an avakasam caste supplies goods produced by it and not having any ritual significance per se, there are several occasions when such goods are used with ritual importance. Further, their occupations or services are according to legendary sanctions or prescriptions traced back either to Parasurama or Shri Sankara. Avakasam thus implies a right to give, and on the part of receiver, a right to receive. An avakasam giver may suspend his service to a family which has erred too seriously by a breach of important caste norms and has sunk too low in the public

esteem. Or, as a negative sanction against an erring family, the village head or a few families of the power group can deprive it of an important avakasam service as will be described later.

From the point of view of any caste those castes who render important services mainly for it from traditional times are its avakasakkar. Those who serve a good number of castes of the village are desam (village) avakasakkar. Today, very often, informants find it difficult to tell apart the avakasam castes from others. This is because the dependence of some immigrant castes has become time-honoured on the principle of avakasam relationship. The Nairs of the upper group, for instance, when closely questioned would say that their avakasakkar are the Attikursi, Veluthedan, Vilakkatira, Ganisa Panicker, Mannan and three of the artisan castes - carpenter, iron-smith and goldsmith. A few families of each of these castes locally representing their castes serve all Nairs of the upper group. The Pulluvan, Panan, Parayan and Nayadi are, for the same Nair castes, the desam avakasakkar. The Cherumans, only a few families of them serving one master family almost exclusively, do not get counted as an avakasam caste although such families periodically get more than avakasam benefits. For some wealthy families there are families of other castes such as Kadupottan, Tarakan, Tandan and Chetti (all in origin immigrant castes) getting avakasam benefits for their miscellaneous but

regular services. Avakasam is thus an institution that does not yield to a simple definition and it appears to have grown in its scope when viewed in a historical perspective. In effect it has, among other things, instituted vertical interdependence among castes including immigrants. Immigrant castes (as distinct from indigenous) within or around a village develop avakasam ties with a few selected wealthy households in one or a few villages and with families of the village heads. Similarly complementary castes who are not immigrants also find their way into avakasam relationship with a few master families. (It may be recalled that according to the definition given in the second chapter all complementary castes are not immigrants). Land on kanam or verumpattam, but on rent free basis or allotted on a nominal rent, is usually owned by the avakasakkar of the upper group of Nairs since they are avakasakkar to the village heads. In addition, families of immigrant castes in avakasam relationship with wealthy taravad or village heads also own patches of such lands.

The services of the temple castes and other castes which serve temples atleast annually are important, for those are indirectly for the village as a whole. The wealthy families among the Nairs, and the village heads, have a sense of responsibility though not well defined, to ensure that such services do not get neglected through lack of care and concern on the part of the well-to-do

people. The services of the temple castes (Ambalavasis) are, as noted, to ambalams, the temples of the higher order with vedic, or more broadly, sanskritic deities. (See diagrams III & IV.) The non-Brahmin castes do not invariably count ambalams as important for the village, and they assign great importance to kavus, to the temples of Bhagavati, the more ancient and truly indigenous deity as they regard her. Each village has its religious affiliation to a few kavus, usually one to three, each varying in the importance of the deity. The boundary of tattakam (the area of jurisdiction of a kavu) cuts across the village, and the same village has usually tattakams of two or three kavus. A village is thus bound to all such deities for all the benefits they can bestow. The ambalams on the other hand are looked upon by Nairs as the manifestation of an alien system of religious beliefs which are always finding their way through the thicket of the indigenous system shared by the large majority of castes.

One distinction in the general character of annual festival at ambalams and kavus bespeaks the villagers' sense of attachment to the latter. At ambalams all performances including entertainments such as of the Chakkial caste, recitations of religious verses and story telling and the like are done by specialists, most of them belonging to castes above Nairs. In kavus the majority of performances are staged by Nairs and castes below. The

majority of the villagers thus enjoy the sense of participation and the zest of making the festival a success. There is competition between residents of different villages, and in some cases, of sectors of the same village, to excel the others in staging such performances. These in short are the mask dances, the dances of the males and females of several of the polluting castes, the artful disguise as some of the grotesque characters of the epic, Ramayana, the annual play with life-size bullocks and horses made of cloth and hay carried and run about by teams of men with marked agility, and the frantic team play of men with frightening make-up using carbon suit. All non-Brahmin castes within the tattakam of a kavu, including immigrants, can be represented in one or other of these performances and there is no limit to the number of people who can participate. However, it may be recalled from the second chapter that the participation at the kavu cannot be regarded as an undiluted expression of village unity.

The services of Ambalavasis to ambalams as temple castes have been mentioned. Their occasional services to kavus on auspicious days are very limited since the services to the kavus are usually done by the non-Brahmin priest's family and a few families of Nairs of the middle group residing near the kavus. Other aspects making up the vertical unity of castes as seen reflected in the services and festivals inspite of the dichotomy between ambalams and kavus will be considered later.

Within a caste and between castes as well, are ties of cooperation. A local caste group serves any family within it to conduct feasts at occasions of marriage and death and offer any help required for burial or cremation of the dead body. Among the Nairs those castes ranking equally or below (except the washerman and the barber) also come forward to help at such occasions, and those higher may loan vessels or gifts of goods in assistance, or send their tied workmen to attend to suitable tasks. Except for the tasks on the day of death in a family there is usually invitation to local residents of the non-polluting castes to come and see the feast through with necessary help. In farm work Nairs of the middle group in a sector of a village cooperate and finish each other's paddy planting in the rush of seasonal work to benefit by the economy of pooling of labour and implements and to enjoy neighbourly cooperation and quick turn out of work which is otherwise monotonous. This is cited by informants as a regular feature of Munnurkode until the thirties when Cherumans were very few and the Nairs of the middle group had small verumpattam holdings. In general, it is often done among the less wealthy tenant farmers of any caste. Cooperation often extends among families of a caste or between castes even at lower levels, in having jointly worked up fences, common guarding of crops against thieves and cattle. This is a common feature in modan (the inferior hill slope paddy) cultivation

which is repeated every three years. Production of some seasonal crops like ginger, turmeric and summer vegetables is often done exclusively on cooperation among a few families, two to four, of the same or different castes in the neighbourhood. Enangar lineages or families of the same lineage join in cooperation but the spirit to do so is not subsumed under kinship. Physical neighbourhood and informal relations are equally or more important than kinship in bringing families into such joint undertaking. Often, it is individuals of different families who join to produce seasonal crops for earning personal income and their respective family hardly interferes in the choice of their partnerships. In such partnerships or cooperative undertakings caste distinctions and economic status of the parties do dictate the degree of intimacy in interpersonal relations or behaviour. Castes below Cherumans or above Nairs do not come within the fold of such cooperative efforts. More commonly, castes which cooperate in order of frequency at intercaste levels are Nair castes among themselves, Nair-Tandan, Nair-Kadupottan/Tarakan, Nair-Cheruman. However this order varies according to the caste composition and spatial distribution of castes in the village.

(4) Interdining:-

Interdining is here used to cover an elaborate pattern of behaviour among the various groups in respect of eating and drinking at inter-group levels. The

elaboration reflects the hierarchical order of castes or groups of castes, the distinction between groups within a caste, the existence of differential social status of families and even members within families. Between castes restrictions on feeding are based on several criteria; the caste of the cook, caste of the one who serves, place of cooking, sex of the one who eats, place of eating, observance of caste order in serving when different castes are served at a dinner, all are considerations governing the acceptability of food. Food cooked or handled by a higher caste is acceptable but at the middle ranges in the hierarchy the rank order is often disputed. Within a vaguely limited range of social distance between castes raw food such as bananas is acceptable when handled by a lower caste.

How far interdining between castes/groups of castes is permitted has been broadly pointed out in the last chapter. How the criteria mentioned are seen to operate among the non-polluting castes and the general restrictions on interdining among the polluting castes will be considered here. Some of the very small castes not in the focal villages and about whom relevant data are hence too meagre are omitted in this context.

Before proceeding further castes which are vegetarian in food habits may be distinguished from those which are non-vegetarian. Nairs of all the three groups and all castes below are non-vegetarians although the

majority of them do not regularly eat non-vegetarian food. All castes above Nairs are vegetarians except the Sthani males to whom non-vegetarian food is not forbidden although it cannot be cooked in the kitchen of their taravad house. All Nair castes and all castes below can drink liquor but Nairs of the upper group, except for occasions of certain rites, generally regard it as a tolerated vice.

Imbrandiris or Pattar Brahmins are usually permanent cooks at Nambudiri illoms but Nambudiri women cannot eat the food cooked by them and hence cook for themselves, or get cooked by a Nambudiri. The need for Nambudiripads to dine with Nambudiris very frequently and with Samanthans or Sthanis as well, the necessity of feeding retainers in large numbers every day, the non-availability of Nambudiri cooks for large scale cooking, the mastery of Imbrandiris and Pattars over the culinary art, have all led to the employment of a lower caste cook in Nambudiri houses. Nambudiri males can eat at the residence of Nairs of the upper group and above provided the food is cooked in a separate building by an appropriate caste or by the Nambudiris themselves after ritually purifying the place. The need to do so arises sometimes by the hypergamy of the females of these castes with the Nambudiris, and some times some of the castes still lower, of the middle group, have marriage relations with Nambudiris and have therefore to be affinal hosts to provide food for the visiting Nambudiri husband. Under marriage relations, in the

kitchen of the Pisharodi (a temple caste), however, the Nambudiri husband can cook and eat after the place is purified with cow dung. It is doubtful if a Nambudiripad can do so but it appears that regional variations exist, often dictated by the exigencies of situations following marriage relations. This is evident from the fact that informants fail to speak of the detailed norms of behaviour in such contexts of varying nature and convey information about practices with reference to specific and known cases. When they speak of norms (connoted by such words as Maryada, Acharam, Nadavadi) they also refer to behaviour which is strictly not according to the norms, nor against it, thus revealing the 'flexible fringes' of norms.

Among the rest of the Brahmins (A, B & 1 (b) both males and females of each caste can accept food from the higher castes. The males of all these Brahmin castes interdine in the same interior of a Nambudiri house but seating arrangements cannot be in one unbroken line, and are meant to reflect the rank order given in the caste table. (See diagram No.1 of an illom regarding the access allowed to the few castes in frequent association with the illom and the places where such castes are permitted to sit for dining.) Of the Samanthan caste of Tirumulpad, and the Sthanis, the senior-most male of the taravad can dine along with Nambudiris at the latter's residence.

In the context of dining the term denoting sitting

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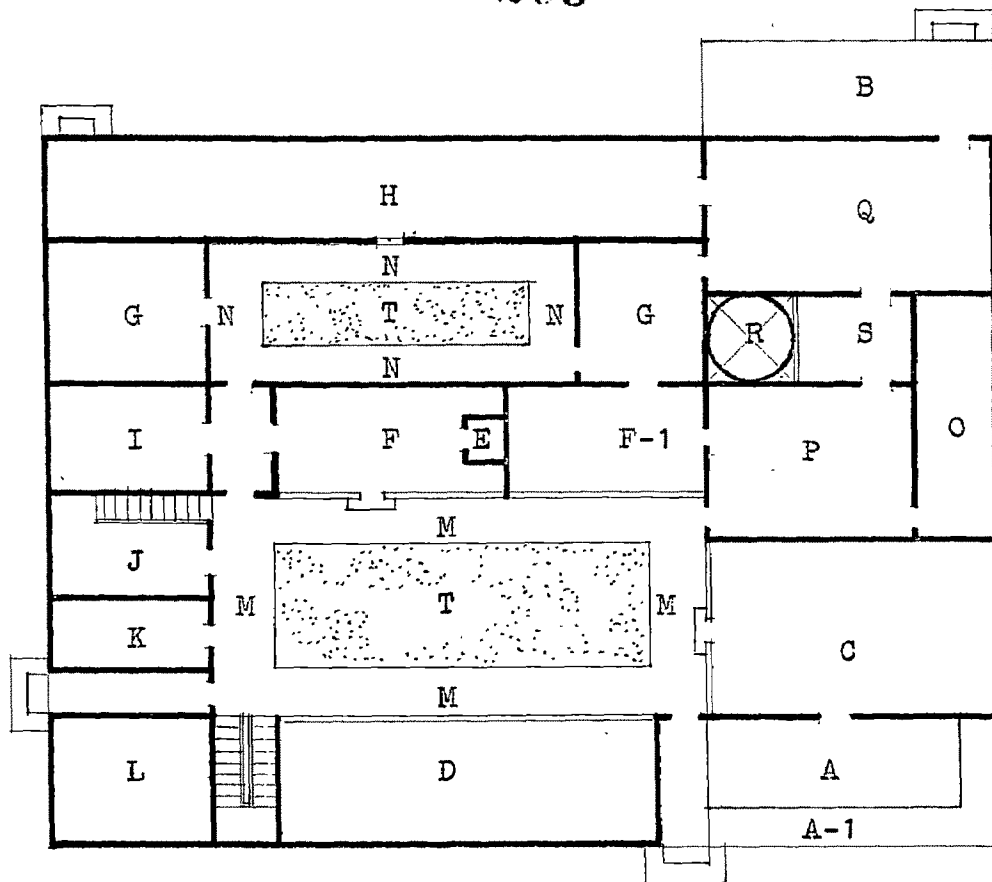


Diagram I.

Diagram of the house of a Nambudiripad, a Village head.
(Scale: approximately, 1 inch = 35 feet.)

(In the houses of the Nambudiri castes, only the western wing and the southern wing have upstairs. The above house with two open roofless quadrangles is an 'eight-wing-joint' ('ettukettu'). Even less commodious houses have to be a 'four-wing-joint' ('nalukettu') with an open quadrangle. Nair houses have the same plan with all four wings having upstairs, and among them houses vary in size from a 'four-wing' to a 'sixteen-wing'-joint type. The sixteen-wing type has four open quadrangles, but houses of such size are rare.)

A, males' portico; A-1, lower level portico; B, females' portico; C, eastern hall open on western side - males' dining hall; D, southern hall open on northern side - for dining, ritual song performance to Bhagavati (God-
dess); E, Bhagavati temple in hall F; F-1, hall open on southern side for males to do rites; F, same as F-1 but for females to do rites; G, room for females for use during menstruation and child-birth for the whole

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period of pollution; H, dining hall for females; I, sitting and bed room for elderly females; J, K, store rooms; L, sitting room for store keeper and assistants to the manager; M, N, open roofed verandah; O, kitchen (male cooks), P, adjoining kitchen hall used also for dining; Q, kitchen for female members of the family; R, well, roofless; S, water-drawing room; T, open roofless quadrangle more than plynth deep.

Note: Of castes below Brahmins, Nair women of Adiyar taravads can step into 'T', can go into kitchen after the family members have dined. In all other places except F, F-1, E, Sudra Nair women can go, but men can go only if asked to do so. At feasts serving food according to caste rank of invitees is facilitated by the differential height of halls and open areas. M is lower than C & D. If Ambalavasis are served food in C, Sudra Nairs are seated at M or D, but priority in serving is given to Ambalavasis. Nairs of the middle group are allotted seats in places like A-1, or in additional temporary sheds. There is also a permanent dining hall building close to the main building with corridors to accommodate castes according to rank. (See my account of allotting seats in different Pantis.)

The bathing pool of this Nambudiri house is approximately of the same length as the house, about 200 feet and three-fourth of it in width. It has six built up ghats, each meant for different groups - Nair servants of the house, males, females, Nambudiri women, Nambudiri and Imbrandiri men, Nairs of the upper and middle group of castes, Pattar Brahmin females. Each group can bathe unseen by the others; the importance is not so much in bathing unseen (except in the case of Nambudiri women) as in avoiding any splashing of particles of water between the individuals of different castes while bathing. In other Nambudiri houses a minimum of three ghats facilitate bathing of different groups in turn.

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along for dining is "Panti" meaning sitting along to dine with others in the same place or in different places in the same house at the same time. At a feast those who can interdine in this manner are referred to as "Pantikkar", or more clearly described as those who have meals in the same panti. The emphasise in the connotation of the word is on serving at one stretch at the same time whether seating is in the same or different rooms.

The data that I could gather on interdining among Samanthans are in part contradictory. Each of these castes traditionally did not recognise ritual superiority of the other and males among them interdine when the cook is of the caste of Pattar Brahmins and above. However, Tirumulpad is generally recognised as ritually superior enough to cook for other Samanthans. Samanthans do not interdine with any of the lower castes except the head of a Sthani taravad as noted, nor with the temple service castes who are higher than Samanthans only in relation to the temple. On the basis of panti the temple castes do not have parity with any of the groups of castes and at feasts when invited and Brahmins cook they often claim priority in service over Nair invitees.

Between Sthani taravads only males interdine when the cook as well as bearer is a Tirumulpad or Nedungadi of the Samanthan castes, or a Pattar Brahmin or above. Samanthans and Sthanis cannot be pantikkar with any of the Nair castes, nor do they eat at the latter's house

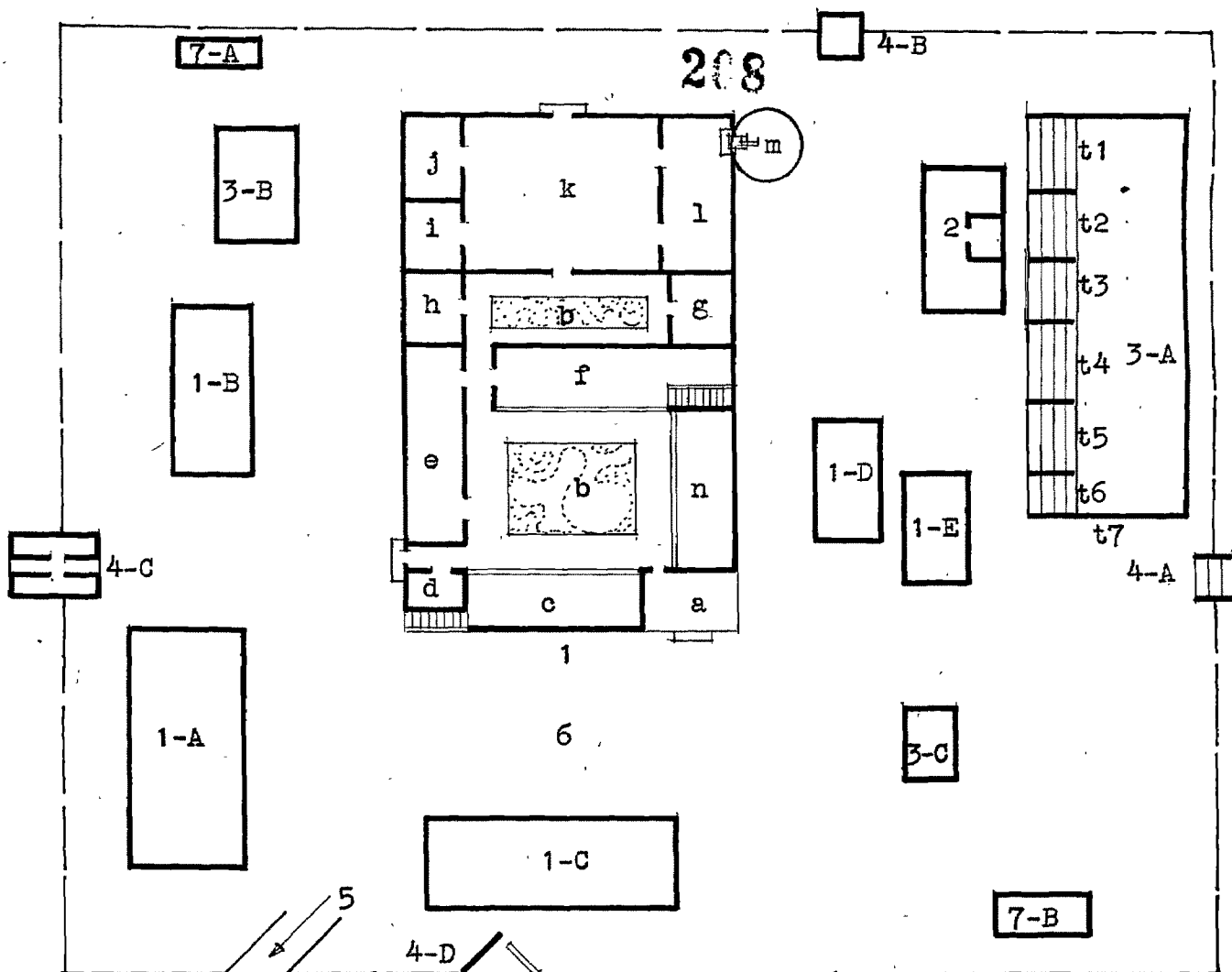


Diagram II

The Sthani Nair house at Trikkateri (not drawn to scale; slightly bigger than the Nambudiri house).

1. main building, the taravad house; 1-A to 1-E are out-houses for males to stay with their wives; also women with uxori-local husbands may stay there, but each house is for one couple; 2. a building ('madham') with a temple inside, the halls inside the building being meant for Nambudiri husbands for dining; 3-A to 3-C. bathing pools; 4-A to 4-D. gate houses one of which is a two storey building used as the office of the employed manager; 5. the way to the corner of the compound where grave yard is located; 6. a front-yard where entertainments such as kathakali are conducted; 7-A, 7-B. latrines. In the taravad house 1, a. is a portico; b, the two open quadrangles, roofless and more than plynth deep and around these are verandahs lower in level than the surrounding halls; c, a hall open at northern side for males to dine; d, a common-purpose room, often used as a store; e, sacred ancestor worship room; f, a hall with southern side open for males to relax or to dine; g, store room; h, a general-purpose room; i, room for treatment, chiefly for women in sickness; j, room for women to use during pollution period of child-birth and menstruation; k, general dining hall chiefly for women and young males; l, kitchen; m, well; n, a hall like f, used for the same purpose. In the large bathing pool 3-A, are 7 bathing ghats, of which t-1 is for Ambalavasis, t-2 for Sthani males, t-3 for Nambudiris, t-4 for Sthani women, t-5 for other Nair women, t-6 for other Nair men and t-7 for bathing elephants. In t-5 and t-6 castes of Nair washermen and barbers are not allowed.

except when there is separate arrangements with cooks of appropriate castes for them. The order of sitting for dining in a Sthani house is facilitated by the differential heights and degrees of privacy of corridors, halls and enclosures meant chiefly for dining. (See diagram II.) The more secluded and interior places are used at a feast for the dining of females of the taravad, wives of the taravad and Ambalavasi and Kiriya women in the order of priority. A corresponding order of priority is accorded to the male members and invitees. Although the Kiriya Nairs as adukkalakkar cook for Sthanis during pollution of the latter, food cooked by them at other times is not acceptable to Sthanis. A Sthani does not eat at the house of a Kiriya Nair or any of the Nairs of the middle group, not to speak of those lower, unless food is cooked and served there in a separate place by a cook of appropriate caste. Occasions for Sthanis to dine at houses of castes below them or at the houses of Ambalavasis are only very remotely probable. There are Sthanis originally drawn from castes below Kiriya Nairs. As far as I could gather Nairs who by caste rank superior to them can be fed by such Sthani taravads only under appropriate conditions of the requisite feeding-purity, that is, with food cooked by a superior caste like Kiriya Nair and served in a separate building.

Among the groups of Nair castes, Kiriya Nambiar

and Kiriya Nairs can cook and serve food both for males and females of all other castes. Males of upper group of castes can be pantikkar at a feast in one of their houses provided (1) food is cooked and served by one of the upper group (2) seating arrangements even in the same hall are not in one unbroken line, each line or sector being allotted to one caste. At a feast in a Sthani house however the Kiriya Nairs, being their adukkalakkar, alone are seated in the interior main dining places after Sthani males have dined, and other lower Nairs invited are served on the corridors or in temporary dining sheds. In such instances of castes dining in the same pantl the precedence in serving food always follows the rank order. At a feast in a Nambudiri house Kiriya Nairs happen to be seldom invited and all Nairs of the upper group can be fed in the same pantl with caste-wise seating arrangements. Of this group of Nair castes all women can eat at a Kiriya Nair/Nambudiri house/Samanthans house in the same pantl but they do not interdine with the rest of the Nair caste women either at a common feast in a higher caste house or at each other's houses. Women of each caste of the upper group with the exception in relation to Kiriya Nairs also do not dine at each other's house.

There is no unanimous opinion regarding food restrictions between the temple castes and Nairs of the upper group. Some of them uphold that there is mutual avoidance of food with the temple castes. All Nairs, males and

females, can accept food cooked and served by a Fisharodi or can eat at his house but not vice-versa. Sudra Nair males can eat food cooked and served by a Variyar or a Poduval but not Chenda Poduval. However, it is significant that Sudra Nairs everywhere do not eat at a public feast at the hands of a Variyar but may accept food from his house, and at the same time, may claim to be equal to Variyar in the matter of dining at a common feast. At a feast in Karattukursi conducted by a Nambudiri about forty years back a Variyar served a side dish (pappadam) to Sudra Nairs and the latter getting annoyed at it rose up in protest to walk out. The situation was then tactically handled by the managers of the Nambudiri's estates who appeased the Nairs by approving the annoyance as reasonable. I was told that such an incident would not happen in a Sthani headed village, for the temple castes expect Nambudiri village heads to support their superiority over Nairs in contexts of disputes of this nature. When dependent castes are fed at a feast at a Nambudiri's house the Ambalavasis get *panti* priority over Nairs or the former are served with food before the Nairs are served. Between Marars and Sudra Nairs usually there is reciprocal non-recognition of each other as equal or superior in the matter of acceptance of food.

Among the Nairs of the middle group each caste does not accept food cooked and served by any other; yet, all can be *pantikkar* at a feast at a higher caste house and

sit separately, caste-wise, and food is served in the order of precedence in which matter the order given in the table of castes is the more widely accepted.

The following table shows restrictions on acceptance of food among Nairs and castes below. The table combines immigrant and indigenous castes and shows the social range of interdining permitted both for males and females. The castes listed by numerals in the third column are such castes from whom food cooked and served by them can be accepted.

TABLE 4

Restrictions on intercaste acceptance of food among castes of Nairs and below.

S.No.	Castes.	Male and/or female, i.e. M. and/or F.	The serial No. or name of castes at the hands of whom cooked food can be accepted.
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1.	Kiriyam Nair	M	2
2.	Sudra Nair	M & F ..	1
2(a)	Charna Menon & Charna Panicker	M & F .. M	1 2
3.	Charna Nair	M & F .. M ..	1. 2, 2(a)
4.	Vattekat Nair	M & F .. M ..	1, 2 2(a)
5.	Pallichan Nair	M & F ..	1, 2 & 2(a)
6.	Ulladan Nair	-do-	-do-
7.	Anduran Nair	-do-	1, 2, 2(a) & 3

S.No.	Castes	Male and/or female, i.e. M. and/or F.	The serial No. or name of castes at the hands of whom cooked food can be accepted.
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
8.	Attikursi Nair	M & F	1, 2, 2(a) & 3
9.	Chotha Nair	-do-	-do-
10.	Veluthedan Nair	-do-	-do-
11.	Vilakkatira Nair	-do-	1 to 6 (inclusive)
12.	Tarakan	-do-	1, 2, 2(a) & 3*
13.	Muttan		
14.	Kadupottan		
15.	Ganisa Panicker	M & F	1 to 9 (inclusive)
16.	Tandan Kurup	M	12, 13 & 14
17.	Tandan	M & F	1 to 5 (inclusive)
18.	Mannan	M & F	1 to 14 (inclusive) and 17
19.	Asari	Dine mutually among them and M & F	1 to 17 (inclusive) except 8.
20.	Moosari		
21.	Tattan		
22.	Karuvan		
23.	Kallan Muppan	M & F	1 to 7 (inclusive) and 12
24.	Pulluvan	M & F	1 to 9 (inclusive) except 8; and 12, 13, 14 & 17.
25.	Paravan	M & F	All castes above (but uncertain)
26.	Panan	M & F	All castes above
27.	Cheruman	M & F	All castes above except 26
28.	Parayan	M & F	All castes above except some castes of the Cheruman group.

*M. & F. of 12 and 13 can have reciprocal dining and M of 12 and 13 can dine at the hands of 14. 14 does not dine at the hands of 12 and 13.

(Table contd.)

S.No.	Castes	Male and/or female, i.e. M. and/or F.	The serial No. or name of castes at the hands of whom cooked food can be accepted.
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
29. Nayadi*		M & F	All castes above except 26, 27 & 28 and Kollan.
30. Malayan		M & F	Uncertain, but eat at the hands of the majority of castes above Pulluvans.

* It is reported that traditionally the Nayadis did not eat at the hands of Ulladan Nairs.

Note:- Kollan, Kurikkan and Kumbaran mentioned in Table No.3 are clearly immigrant castes and have no uniform practice of a selective interdining with higher castes. Hence information about them is conflicting and uncertain.

The Chetti, mentioned in Table 3, is in fact a group of castes and all eat at the hands of all Nair castes and above except Attikursi, Chothe, Veluthedan and Vilakkatira; some of the Chetti castes also accept food from Tarakan, Muttan and Kadupottan.

The disputes between castes or complaints regarding dining arrangements at a feast are of several categories: (1) whether they can sit in the same panti, (2) whether in the same panti they can sit in the same row seen by each other (3) in the case of (2) whether seating can be in an unbroken line (4) in the case of (2) and (3) in the order of serving, whether deliberately priority in serving is given to one of the two or more castes who have often in such contexts disputes regarding equality in ritual rank and (5) whether any caste's claim to be served by an

an appropriate caste has been overlooked or ignored in the rush of the feast. Traditionally such disputes are at a minimum for caste composition of Nambudiri and Sthani-headed villages were such that castes served their respective heads and the upper group of Nairs in this relationship rank order was evident. Marriage was confined within the spheres indicated and at a large scale feast co-villagers, relatives and dependents would not consist of a mixture of castes of Nambudiri and Sthani-headed villages. Again, where caste composition has been for historical reasons, a mixture of the castes of the two kinds of villages, for over a century or more, disputes have been resolved and rank order locally evolved by the interference of the village head or families of power at times of disputes. And in the beginning of this century the practice at large scale feasts is not to occasion disputes but to serve simultaneously the castes which are likely to protest for differential treatment. It is here that the intelligence of those who as elders supervise the organisation and service at large scale feasts play ingeniously. Not only the various castes but the categories of groups of differential social status as we have noted within a caste are all to be accommodated and fed. In the case of castes such as Sthanis and Kiriyaattils among whom men may marry downwards from Sudra Nairs, or Pisharodis who may marry Sudra Nair women, or Nambudiris who marry from the few Nair

castes, the wives (and their taravad members) at a feast in their husbands' house have feast-precedence over women of their own castes. Except among the Nambudiris the status of wives is "Ammayi" a kinship term denoting mother's brother's wife. Ammayis are assigned an importance at several occasions and at feasts recognition of their affinal status over their caste members is essential. Again, at a feast invitees from families of considerably high social status are to be regarded differentially from their caste members and further still, individuals of importance who usually exist in such families are also to be particularly cared for. Such families or individuals are to be guided, though such guidance is unsolicited, to sit in convenient and central or prominent places for dinner. Any oversight in respecting them by differential treatment will be followed by complaints by their spokesmen looming large after the feast. Thus, in all, at a feast among the Nairs of the upper group, for instance, the groups or categories to be differentiated are the different castes, one's own enangar group, one's prestige group (adukkalkkar/adiyar), one's pattakkar group, one's tied servants and dependents, one's avakasakkar and one's affinal relatives. All have to be served without occasioning disputes or complaints of the categories enumerated.

The order of panti in a Sudra Nair taravad house, for instance, is as follows. All Sudra Nair women sit

in the first pantî, the women of the Nair castes of the middle group sit in the second pantî, men of Sudra Nair caste and men of other castes of the same group, if any, in the third pantî, men of Nairs of the middle group in the fourth pantî, upper polluting castes in the fifth pantî and the rest in the sixth. Of the upper polluting castes precedence in serving and seating are, in order, Tandan and Mannan, Asari, Moosari, Karuvan. Tandans are sometimes said to have claimed seats in the same pantî with Nairs of the low group but such claims get hardly recognised. In serving the polluting castes, again, avakasakkar, pattakkar and tied servants and in addition those who have made gift offerings of vegetables and the like prior to the feast in token of their occasional dependency are all to be specially attended to giving them lavishly and seating them apart from others.

Among the polluting castes rules of interdining have been pointed out in the last chapter and noted in the preceding table. One distinguishing feature among them is that generally between any two castes, if males of one can eat at the hands of the other, females too can do so. Why then is the distinction among Nairs of the upper group? Traditionally the caste composition of the *desam* and the services of each caste to the village head *Sthani*/*Nambudiri* are such that each Nair caste acknowledged its superiors and inferiors but not peers and there was no need to do so. As ritual cooks

and the seminal caste of the Sthanis the superiority of Kiriya Nairs was also recognised. Passage of time threw into the same village or neighbouring villages a sprinkle of castes like Charna Menon and Nair Panicker, who held nearly the same grade of allegiance and affiliations to Samanthans or Rajas. Expanding economy and fluctuating social status of taravads brought the need and wider scope for social intercourse between taravads of all castes of Nairs of this group as neighbours, co-villagers and owners of land; in short, the exigencies of the situation brought them into closer social life. Each native caste did not recognise the intruder as equal nor as definitely lower ^{for} ~~than~~ each of such intruders in their ancestral areas is at the top of Nair castes and the attitude of non recognition is reciprocal. At feasts, invitations to such immigrants are a need and males began to interdine as a matter of social accommodation, the females keeping aloof as a token of disputed parity in rank. Further, Sudra Nair women at ritual occasions have access to certain interior parts of the Nambudiri's house where others are forbidden, and the Sudra's caste rank itself is Nambudiri based and hence locally claimed as superior to all other Nair castes except the Kiriya. And women of all upper group of Nair castes accept husbands from an equal or if available a higher caste or group, chiefly from the caste of Nambudiris. To dine at the hands of or with others of locally

questionable equality tells upon their prestige and it is therefore avoided. Similarly Sthani and Samanthan women accept husbands from higher castes chiefly from Nambudiris, and do not therefore like equality to be symbolised in commensal relations except with equals or superiors. The numerous answers and opinions of my informants permit me to explain out in this manner the feature of female restrictions on interdining. The limited data on the history of the villages which I could collect also favour such an explanation. Among the polluting castes all have a wider distribution and were serving both kinds of villages, Sthani and Nambudiri-headed. Their rank order, hence, has wider acceptance and it obviates the need of an accommodation under conditions of the spreading of their population into less populous areas.

(5) Pollution by contact and approach:-

My data pertaining to pollution are here considered to see (i) how elaborately the idea of pollution governs contact and approach at inter-group levels (ii) what general principles enter into such rules of contact and approach. The question of caste ranking associated with the search for such principles will be treated in a latter context in the next chapter. For the present it is assumed, as hitherto, that castes or groups of them have hierarchical ranking as given in the table on the basis of which intercaste relations have so far been described. It is also to be recalled that

ritual status of a caste in the hierarchy is mentioned as caste rank and the relative evaluation of a non-caste group or an individual on ritual considerations is expressed by the term ritual status. A caste or prestige group is aware of a certain degree of purity it bears corresponding to its ritual status in the local hierarchy. By an unqualified use of the term purity I shall mean this ritual purity, and the state of purity of an individual when doing a rite, or propitiating a deity, I shall designate devotional purity. Except among Nambudiri Brahmins castes of equal purity have equal ritual status (caste rank).

In the treatment of my data here I use some of the terms employed by Stevenson in his essay "Status Evaluation in the Hindu Caste System".¹⁴ As he notes, permanent purity or pollution I regard as an attribute of a group or object. By involuntary pollution I shall mean the pollution at birth, death and menses. Ritual status, as he notes, derives from behaviour patterns linked with mystical beliefs, mainly those concerned with purity and pollution.

The idea of pollution as conceived by the local people includes various degrees of pollution and purity. For each group of castes there are castes or groups which either pollute them by touch or approach or lack an equal

14. H.N.C.Stevenson, "Status Evaluation in the Hindu Caste System", Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, vol.84, parts 1 and 11, pp.45-6.

degree of purity. The difference in degrees of purity is important since it affects several aspects of behaviour between castes which have no contact pollution between them. A polluting caste (by which, reference is to castes which pollute also by approach) imparts pollution, by touch or approach, to higher caste individuals, their houses, bathing pools, dress, utensils and other articles of use. The practices pertaining to pollution of inanimate objects have an enormous variety and will be considered later, and for brevity will only be stated in terms of some principles which appear to govern them.

Pollution and purity can be regarded as in a continuum in which varying degrees of each exist. The foci of attention, to judge the degree of each, can be taken as the individual and the kitchen. The kitchen is a sacred place of a certain degree of purity, and between two groups, perfect equality in purity is explicit at the level of behaviour if each has entry into the kitchen of the other. Castes which mutually permit cooking for females of each other are on the same degree of purity. The women of such castes of equal purity can sit in ^{one} ~~the~~ unbroken line and dine from the house of any one of them. Among the Nambudiri Brahmins (group 1.a) however, the criteria of dining and kitchen ~~dne~~ entry denote equality of purity but not equality of ritual status, a point which will be considered later.

The local words to convey ideas of pollution and purity are respectively 'Ayittam' and 'Sudham'. The polluting castes ^{as} ~~are~~ already classified in the table, are known as 'Ayittakkar' (polluters). But among them, those who have an ancestry of immigration such as the Kallan Muppan are, in terms of ideas of pollution, known as those whose touch necessitates bathing (tottal kuli ullavar) as distinct from the other polluters who are sometimes specifically mentioned as those whose approach necessitates bathing (tindi kuli ullavar). Purity (sudham) is again mentioned with implications of grading such as death or birth pollution-purity, (pula sudham), kitchen purity, temple purity and the like. Among castes which have only contact pollution the state of pollution is preferably expressed by the term purity with reference to the caste which has polluted by contact. Thus a Sudra Nair may say when touched by a Nair barber (Vilakkattira) 'I am in Vilakkattira sudham.' The word ayittam in the context of intercaste relations tends to be confined in use with reference to castes who bear approach pollution.

One under devotional purity cannot be touched even by one's own family members if the latter have not, by bathing, qualified for such physical contact. Similarly, one under involuntary pollution imparts pollution by touch to other members of the same caste/group. Therefore these two categories of purity and pollution do not

require to be considered here while looking into contact and approach behaviour at intercaste levels. The Nambudiris have a wide range of degrees of devotional purity, the pre-requisite for several of which is not only bathing, but abstinence from certain food or similar observances. In all such instances one's own caste or family members who are not in a similar devotional purity are not to be touched.

All non-Brahmin castes of the non-polluting groups pollute the Nambudiri by touch. Sthanis and Samanthans have no contact pollution with Nairs of the upper group, and Ambalavasis in general outside the temples are touchable by the same group of Nairs. Nairs of the lower groups pollute the higher castes by touch, although in this century, upper group of Nairs regard several of them as non-polluting by touch. Castes between whom there is no contact pollution in some cases differ in their degree of ritual purity. The one of higher purity does not permit one of lower purity to enter the kitchen, as for instance, between some castes of the upper group and between some of the middle group of Nair castes.

Regarding approach pollution in Malabar there is a scale of distance at which different polluting castes have to keep away from the higher castes. In nearly all literature on Malabar castes this distance is mentioned but the writers often give varying scales for different groups of castes. My informants as well differ in giving

the distances in feet but all speak with ease about the distance in terms of different castes. Thus when a Nair speaks "Tandan padu" it means the distance at which a Tandan has to keep aloof from him and 'Cheruma padu' refers to the distance of pollution for the Cherumans. In actual practice the topography and spatial distribution of high caste houses do not permit the highly polluting castes as the Parayan and Nayadi to approach even at the allowed distance without polluting houses or bathing pools on their way. They usually have therefore to keep away farther than their respective approach distance. Often, in the local jargon, one hears of distance being expressed in terms of the distance of approach pollution as for example "...plant those trees about two 'Cheruma padu' apart", or, "his house is only one Nayadi padu away".

The scale of approach pollution, in brief, for the various castes is approximately as follows. Groups 8, 9, 10 and 11 have to keep 15 to 18 feet away from all Nair castes, more than double of it from Nambudiris and nearly that distance from the groups between Nambudiris and Nairs. Group 12 keep 35 feet from Nairs and double of it from Nambudiris and group 13 keeps over 80 to 100 feet from Nairs and over half more than that from higher castes. The upper polluting castes (8 to 11) also keep about 10 feet away from the middle polluting group and over 30 feet from the low polluting geu group. The

immigrant castes below Nairs also keep a correspondingly shorter distance from castes below.

The Nayadis and Parayans who live in huts closely clustered and far removed from the high castes regard that their settlements are polluted by the entry of castes towards whom they keep a considerable approach-distance. No specific instance of such pollution was known but I was told that the higher castes could enter after purifying their feet with cow dung and that resort to such a practice was not unknown. It may be noted that the entry pollutes the settlement and the deities and spirits there and not the resident members. This, as I gather, appears to be due to the belief on the part of these polluting castes that the castes of the top of the hierarchy have deities and modes of worship which represent a different or a variant system of ritual and belief.

In temples the limits up to which various groups of castes can approach correspond to the distance of approach pollution of each group. The temple diagrams and the accompanying notes summarise my data pertaining to the access allowed to various castes in temples. On the day of annual festival at the temple the rules of pollution are considerably ignored and even the temple is regarded as polluted but polluting castes confine movements to the sector meant for them in the temple premises.¹⁵

15. There are temples (kavus) few and far between in Malabar where on the festival day all rules of pollution are ignored and in addition obscene songs are sung. The

The degree of pollution which the immigrant castes can impart is vague. There is a certain degree of permanent pollution attributed to them particularly because they do not everywhere maintain a uniform degree of distance avoidance with the polluting castes with whom nearly everywhere they are in more close association. Castes D, E, F are of this category and group 7 with immigrant ancestry is to be regarded as on the whole superior to low group of Nairs and some of the Nairs of the upper group as regards the degree of pollution which they carry.

An individual polluted by touch or approach purifies himself by a plunge bath in a bathing pool. Among Nairs and above, a bathing pool or a house if polluted, which almost never happens, the purificatory water supplied by a Nambudiri or an Imbrandiri priest has to be sprinkled over it. Bathing pools can be regarded as forming a hierarchy in a broad sense - the temple pools not accessible to polluting castes, Nambudiri house pools not accessible to polluting castes and low group of Nairs, pools in the compound of Nair houses not accessible to polluting castes, or public pools of the same restriction, public pools of upper polluting castes and those of middle polluting castes. One cannot purify by bathing at a lower 'ranking' pool.

 Bhagavati temple at Cranganore has its 'Bharanā' festival featuring this in its highest tempo.

There are elaborate ideas about conductivity of pollution through material things. Water except of running streams and rivers have a high conductivity probably because it is a purifying agent and is for internal consumption. A Cheruman by approach about ten feet near any part of a bathing pool not only pollutes the pool but also the individuals bathing at that time irrespective of the distance between the Cheruman and those who bathe. Other material things are not polluted by approach but by touch and they form a category of items such as utensils, dress, some edible things and the like.

There appears to be some principles governing what items are polluted and what kinds of services are in themselves not polluting. One principle is that the product of specialization of a caste, whether goods or services, do not get polluted if it is not used by the producers or delivered through a caste ranking considerably lower than the producer. The wooden household articles of the carpenter, the product of the bell-metal worker, the leaf mats of some of the upper group of polluting castes, the body cleansing tree bark processed and supplied by the most polluting Nayadi, the bamboo containers and mats of the equally polluting Parayan are examples of 'oven-fresh' articles accepted by higher castes and used without purifying them in any manner. The Parayan skins dead buffaloes and removes carcasses of cattle but his bamboo-

work containers are used by nearly all non-polluting castes at feasts to carry cooked rice in large quantities and serve. The crude palm jaggery which is made by a process involving boiling is the product of Tandans but nearly all high castes use it for it is regarded as a product processed out from nature by specialists rather than prepared by cooking. The services of various castes described are examples of the degree of purity attributed to services. We have noted how the purity of laundered but unused clothes of a Nambudiri brought back after a journey is restored by the Nair washerman by sprinkling water on it. A used bell-metal lamp offered by a devotee as a gift to a temple is acceptable if it is polished by the bell-metal worker. Under this principle a carpenter with his main 'key chistle' and a measuring rod has access to interior of houses or some places normally 'out of bounds' to him. Edible oils suspected as polluted by a lower caste is pure enough for use if a Moslem, or in some places a Christian, is made to touch its container, for they are in many parts producers and marketeers of oil. Clothes which are new and unwashed do not conduct or are not susceptible to pollution, even involuntary pollution as of menses.

Another principle is that the products of nature such as grains and other edible things for use are not polluted when handled by castes who can participate in their production for the higher castes. Castes below

Cherumans are therefore not qualified to handle such products meant for the use of higher castes. Products consumable as raw are not to be handled by castes ranking several steps lower than the recognised producers or suppliers. Thus betel leaf is not to be carried by a Cheruman, and some higher castes like Nambudiris or Sthanis do not regard even Tandans as qualified to fetch it for their use. Tarakan can supply butter-milk in bulk for feasts of Nairs and above but it cannot be carried by Tandans or even barbers and washermen of the Nair castes. Nambudiris accept Tarakan's butter-milk after a Variyar (temple caste) is made to touch it and make it thereby pure. Animals are not polluted by any caste seemingly because they come under the category of products of nature.

Linked to the above principle and developed rather conversely is the attitude of non-polluting castes towards certain fruits used by polluting castes. The fruits Pappayya, Jamrook and Jambu,¹⁶ much liked in nearly all other parts of India are neglected ones and are eaten at times by the polluting castes. Apparently for this reason they are graded as low type of fruits which find no place in the higher castes' dietary.

The fact that, as noted above, the Variyar can purify the Tarakan's butter-milk for the use of Nambudiris appear to be governed by another principle. It is

16. The Malayalam names of the fruits are: Koppakka or Karuvathun kaya (Pappayya), Perakka (Jamrook), Nhara Param (Jambu).

that mild degrees^{of} pollution affecting an object can be removed if a caste which can handle it without imparting pollution is made to touch or handle it. The ritual purity of an individual, his attribute by birth, has a diffusive quality in a mild form and purity in such contexts overcomes pollution. The Sthanis can accept Tarakan's butter-milk if a Variyar takes it and pours out into a vessel supplied by them. At their large-scale feasts, I am told, that this commodity is accepted if a Variyar makes the Tarakan pour it and out in the close presence of the former. Sudra Nairs can slice vegetables for a feast at a Nambudiri illom but its final washing is done by a Pattar Brahmin. A Christian can walk into some parts of a Nair's house if asked to do so for any work provided he is accompanied by a carpenter who with his chistle in hand is permitted access to such parts.

There is yet another principle discernible. An individual of^a polluting caste is less polluting in his role of rendering a specialised service which carry a tradition of association with the Nambudiri intelligentsia. The very knowledge of such professions is in its advanced^d form a sanskritic heritage and a legitimate field for Nambudiris to specialize if they so desire. The astrologer (Ganāsa Panicker) has approach pollution but has access upto the main portico of a Nair house to supply or review a horoscope or to serve in similar

specific roles. Similarly, as noted, a carpenter with his tools has access to the interior of houses and even certain parts of the temple, otherwise 'out of bounds' to him. Astrology and architecture are specialisms which in their advanced form are legendarily attributed to Nambudiris, and there are Nambudiris as reputed masters of these available for consultation as experts. A parallel instance under a similar though not identical principle is the access allowed to "Poosari" (a priest of Tandan caste in the temple of the deity Subramanya) when he is sought for the "Andiyuttu" ceremony. The ceremony is in preparation for a trip to go to the famous temple of Subramanya outside Malabar at Palani. The poosari in this role is allowed into the portico and is also touchable since he is the local representative of that deity whom all non-Brahmins down to the artisan castes have included as essentially figuring in their pantheon of Gods.

From a consideration of the first principle and the intercaste services already described, it emerges that the specialists of goods and services are generally lower in rank than the receivers for whom those are chiefly meant for. This is true even in the case of services which are ritual including the priestly ones or which have ritual significance. The temples of the second order as noted (the kavus) are meant for the non-Brahmins castes, and among them, chiefly for the

non-polluting castes. The original priests in such temples are of the caste of Chotha Nairs who rank much below the upper group of Nair castes. The Nairs of the upper group do not accept food from Chotha Nair and at the kavus they cannot even accept sandal paste directly from him. It is only in the past fifty years that Chotha Nairs are getting replaced by Brahmin priests, a process which is still not complete. The temple castes of ambalams are lower than the Brahmins and even of Samanthans and Sthanis and some of them, as noted, are lower than the upper group of Nairs. The Imbrandiri priests are not of equal ritual purity with Nambudiris and rank lower. There are sometimes Nambudiri priests and they are of equal purity with Nambudiripads (on the criteria of kitchen entry, cooking and dining). But they rank lower since Nambudiripads are recognised as the highest of that group of castes chiefly for reasons of their practices of devotional purity of a higher order entailing rituals of a superior type. Brahmin priests (including Imbrandiris) are higher in rank even for Samanthans not because they are priests but because Brahmins are higher. The Brahmin temples (ambalams) are historically the creation of Nambudiris and later the non-Brahmin rulers of all categories when the supermacy of Nambudiris as custodians of a higher cultural tradition was recognised. The Nambudiri's ritual rank is comparatively so high that in some contexts the high rank compensates

the involuntary pollution to which a Nambudiri is subjected. A Nambudiri under birth pollution in his illom can visit his Nair wife but a Nair cannot visit his wife when under such pollution. A Nambudiri under birth or death pollution can bathe in the bathing pool of a temple but a Nair is forbidden to do so.

For each caste throughout the hierarchy the involuntary pollution purifiers or those associated with services during such pollution, are lower in rank, often several steps below. The services of Nairs to their village heads, and the rank of the funeral priests exemplify this fact. Thus, services ritual and priestly are throughout the hierarchy essentially supplied by a lower ranking caste except rarely when members of one's own caste render such services or optionally those are acceptable and available from a higher caste. For several of the polluting castes priests for their own traditional deities are of their own caste. Among them in cases of receiving services during involuntary pollution it is always a lower caste or a lower section of the same caste which serves.

Kathleen Gough notes that in some cases the Nairs recognise the anomaly of being purified by a lower caste after death pollution and employ in addition an Ilayad (low ranking Nambudiri) to purify them and instruct in the final rites of the spirit!¹⁷ From my enquiries I find

17. Kathleen Gough, "Female Initiation Rites on the Malabar Coast", Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, vol.85, parts 1 and 11, January-December, 1955, p.73.

that Ilayad is employed just in emulation of what some very wealthy Nairs and Sthanis do for sanskritising their rituals. In the same village I heard of families of Kiriya Nairs who bring Ilayad for the job and families of Kiriya Nairs who do not. As we have noted, it is not only for the Nairs but even for the Nambudiripads at the apex that the priest or supplier of ritual services ranks lower.

The fact that ritual and even priestly services in temples can be received from lower castes appears to explain why some lower castes can take to some of the honoured professions and serve the higher castes. Teaching in the village school or at home, astrology, and traditionally, instruction in gymnasium, are examples. Nairs were the teachers known as "Eruthachans" (literally, writing fathers) but the caste with immigrant ancestry, the Kadupottans who by touch pollute Nairs slowly took to the profession in schools or taravad houses of Nairs as attached tutors. They proved to be even more efficient in keeping up the proverbial and stern method of teaching by torture. Children learn at their feet and have to bathe before dining or entering kitchen to clear off contact pollution. A good number of elementary schools in Malabar owe their origin to such Eruthachans (a term which is synonymous with Kadupottan in the last few decades in many places) and many a school is even today managed and staffed by them.

(6) Hypergamy:-

Inspite of restrictions on interdining and the highly restrictive norms governing contact and approach hypergamy is an institution characterising intercaste relations mainly at the higher reaches of the hierarchy. A certain degree of integration between castes and other groups is thus achieved, and in addition, families of the power group have a promising avenue in hypergamy to achieve power, prestige and wealth, often to a considerable extent. Hypergamy thus contributes to the existence of families of power, the real core group in the social structure of the village.

Hypergamy is of two kinds, that between castes and between prestige groups of the same caste. Both these kinds are mainly confined to the upper group at of Nair castes and above. Hypergamy can again be divided into two types, that between patrilineal and matrilineal women and between matrilineal men and matrilineal women. Castes which are hypergamous have been mentioned in the description of castes and other groups. The more significant aspects of hypergamy in the field of inter-caste relations are considered below.

Nambudiri Brahmins (1.a) marry from matrilineal castes of upper group of Nairs and above, and very rarely from the middle group of Nairs. Immigrant Brahmins (A,B) can marry from matrilineal temple castes and Nairs of the upper group but its incidence is much less than the

female hypergamy of Nairs with Nambudiris. Of the temple service castes Nambissan can marry Variyar and Poduval women of the same group and from Sudra Nairs of the upper group of Nair castes. There is considerable difference in opinion about the limits of the hypergamy of Nair women with temple castes. It is however clear that Pisharodis can marry women of upper group of Nair castes, and Variyars are accepted as husbands in some families of Sudra Nairs. Samanthans and Sthanis can marry women from any of the upper group of Nair castes and rare instances of their marriage with women of the middle group of Nairs are also not unknown. Samanthans of ruling families who wear the sacred thread (a symbol of kshatriya rank) can marry Sthani women but the latter regard them as only next in preference to Nambudiris, and I am doubtful if Sthanis who, by caste, rank above Kiriya Nairs have ever taken husbands from Samanthans except the thread-wearing Tirumulpads of ruling houses. I am told that even Kiriya Nairs, until about the end of last century did not accept husbands from the Samanthan castes such as Nedungadi and Kartavu. Nair castes of the upper group do not marry from below but within it are hypergamous marriages of males of Kiriya Nair and Kiriya Nambiar castes with Sudra Nair women. Kiriya Menons, (not mentioned in the list) perhaps originally confined to places outside Walluvanad taluk, can also marry Sudra Nair women. There is, as far as I could learn, no marriage

between the castes of Kiriya Nair and Kiriya Menon for each regards itself as superior, and the few cases of such marriages reported to me are instances of recent decades. Nair castes of the middle group are not hypergamous among them, but as noted, are rare instances of higher caste men finding wives among them. Such instances are generally from the point of view of higher castes tolerated rather than approved alliances. The low group of Nair castes have no hypergamy with any caste and the higher castes hardly regard them as Nairs. Among patrilineal castes below, there is no hypergamy except the few instances noted while enumerating those castes. (The problem of how polyandry could exist among several of them without being associated with hypergamy or infanticide or any institutionalized method of adjusting sex ratio of adults to facilitate polyandry is worthy of investigation.)

Among the patrilineal castes the practice of hypergamy sometimes modifies marital residence. The Ganisa Panicker can marry a woman of the caste of Kanisa Panicker which ranks lower, but in such unions the wife cannot enter the husband's kitchen or sit along with the women of his family for dining. If her house is nearby her husband visits her rather than allowing her a virilocal residence. Among the Mannans very rare instances are reported of Mannan men finding wives among the Choppan Mannans, but in all such cases of unions, as among the Nairs and other high castes the lower ranking wife is not

permitted into the kitchen of the husband's house nor treated on a parity with the members of his family in the matter of interdining. Among the Cherumans the Kanakkan, the highest of the three mentioned in the last chapter, can marry a woman of the lower ranking caste of Kudan Cherumans but in such cases the wife is not allowed virilocal residence and the husband has to visit her at her house or in a separate house which he has provided for her. The visiting Cheruman husband is polluted by contact with his wife and has to bathe before he enters his house on return.

Hypergamy between groups within a caste exists more often at inter-village levels for such groups have a village-wise distribution. The prestige-groups mentioned did not originally practise it but by the close of last century rare instances began to appear. The Kiriya Nairs under Kavalappara Sthani Nair regard themselves as superior to those under Trikkateri Sthani Nair and I gather that a male from the former group met with resistance in his marriage alliance with a family under the latter. The marriage was then effected on the strength of a writ from the Kavalappara Sthani Nair that the two families were permitted to be affinals by hypergamy. Yet the son by this marriage met with objection against his participation in the funeral rites of his father. The adiyar group under a Nambudiripad can have alliance with adiyar women under a Nambudiri although instances are rare.

In such prestige-group hypergamy the wife's family being lower there is no possibility of her family being recognised as enanger, while a non-enanger family of the same group can be got recognised as enanger under the consent of the village head. This appears to have been the reason why prestige-group hypergamy being only incipient in the beginning of this century. Accepting a husband from a taravad of questionable equality creates embarrassing situations as is revealed in the two cases in Munnurkode in the first decade of this century. In one case at the tali kettu ceremony of a girl of a Sudra Nair taravad the girl's father was not permitted by her enangars to discharge the formality of offering a cloth to her ceremonially. The enangar's protest against allowing him to do so was strong because the father belonged to a lower prestige-group. The enangars threatened to stage a walk out and mar the celebrations; the father yielded and allowed an enangan of the taravad to represent him in giving the cloth. In another case, on the occasion of a grand feast there was a similar threat from the enangar and many invitees to keep a woman's husband of a lower prestige-group out of the dining hall where food was served to them. Informants are not concurrent in their opinion of the clear basis of lower prestige of the husbands in both these cases. In one case the husband's family is adiyar under a Nambudiri but in the other case the husband's family is adiyar under a Nambudiripad who

according to the informants is not so high as the Nambudiripad-head of Munnurkode. In the case of kanakkar-pattakkar groups (the tenant categories) within a caste, the kanakkar taravad almost never accepts a husband from its pattakkar taravad unless the conditions already noted while describing these groups compensate for the low economic status of the pattakkar taravad. Marriage with a woman of one's pattakkar taravad is however permitted although instances of the kind are very few. In this kind of hypergamy there are also chances for the wife's taravad to benefit by acquiring more of verumpattam lands from or through the husband's taravad.

In accepting hypergamous husbands matrilineal castes have degrees of preference. Sthani and Samanthan families of high wealth prefer Nambudiripads to Nambudiris, and in the order of preference, Sthanis would place the Samanthans as the third. Nairs prefer any of these almost equally, but once the alliance takes place, those individuals or taravads who could get husbands of the highest of the three castes regard it as a superior asset over others who could not achieve such an alliance. In actual intercaste relations, however, what is more important is to have alliance with the village head's family, when, as in my focal villages, that family is the highest of all other castes in the respective village. Next to it, what is more important is to get husbands from higher caste families who own vast janmam lands in

the neighbouring villages. Therefore the Nairs usually accept husbands from any of the three castes while the Sthanis and the wealthy Samanthans keep their girls waiting for alliance with Nambudiris. It has to be noted that in all cases of caste-hypergamy mentioned here the caste of the husband is usually the more wealthy and his family is equally or more powerful in the same or another area. This is chiefly due to the correlation of caste rank with wealth in lands and the characteristic features of the system of land ownership and tenure.

In some villages the fact that Sthanis choose husbands only from Nambudiris or Samanthans contribute to the conservation of their power and prestige over Nair castes of the village. This can be understood in situations, as for instance, where the Sthani-head belongs originally to a Nair caste of the middle group. In and around such a village, as the information from my fourth village (to be described) shows, the Nairs of the upper group are kanam tenants under the Sthani (or somebody else) or are under the sway of his power or both. In such a situation if husbands from the higher caste Nairs are accepted by the Sthani women it would nearly amount to taking husbands from a lower group which is at an undisputedly lower level of prestige. It would also adversely affect the prestige and degree of independence with which the Sthani 'reigns' over the people of the village with

a sense of justice least affected by kin obligations. A certain degree of kin obligations is unavoidable, since in addition to consanguineal links, there are affinal connections arising as among all Sthanis from the practice of males finding wives among their parent caste, or castes lower, within or outside the village. (My data are too meagre to judge how far such kin obligations affect the sense of impartial justice of the Sthanis over the 'ruled').

How hypergamy is significant in improving economic status of the wife's family, its social status in general, and how motivations of prestige and economic benefits perpetuate it will be considered in the next chapter. Suffice it to note here that through hypergamy wealth can filter down across caste to a certain extent and the families of the wives can either create fresh power and influence or enhance it by hypergamy.

On the part of Sthanis, and Samanathan ruling houses as well as wealthy Samanathan taravads, the tendency to accept only Nambudiri husbands or very rarely men of Raja families as and when opportunity presents, has obviated considerably the possibility of any inter-marriage among them. In consequence they could not develop any horizontal links by marriage which would lead them to form a separate caste scattered in families far apart. Instead, each of such families remain heading a few villages and almost virtually ruling over them recognising only superiors

and inferiors but not any family or caste as equals. In this manner, they remain favourably disposed to be at the apex heading villages and maintaining interest in vertical interdependence in matters including marriage in which alone they seek upwards for Nambudiri husbands.

In my focal villages and the villages around, the incidence of Nair women having husbands from higher castes is very limited. The very small population of the higher castes from whom hypergamous alliance is welcomed, and the visiting custom of husbands which is one factor restricting spatial range, account for this small incidence. In the first decade of this century in Munnurkode among the Nairs are three Nambudiri husbands, in Karattukursi are one Nambudiri and two Imbrandiri husbands and in Kolappulli about four Nambudiri and two Pisharodi husbands. The Trikkateri Sthani Nair taravad itself provides the instance of all husbands taken from Nambudiri and Tirumulpad (Samanthan) castes.

Marital residence in hypergamy deserves mention here. The visiting custom has modifications when (i) the husband is a wealthy higher caste man (ii) the husband is the karanavan of his taravad. In the first case the wife gets virilocal residence more or less permanently for her lifetime in a separate house in the compound of the husband's residence. In the second case the wife stays for months on end in her husband's house as Ammayi (the mother's brother's wife) a privilege usually allowed to

the karanavan's wife. A variation in the first case is that when the wife's family is wealthy the husband is offered uxori-local residence to stay as long as he likes in a separate house in her taravad compound. This can happen even when the husband is not very wealthy, but a Sthani, Samanthan or Nambudiri, and the wife's family can afford to offer such a provision the very existence of which becomes a symbol of prestige for her taravad as a whole. Uxori-local housing of a higher caste husband is expensive for it requires the service of a cook of appropriate caste, separate bathing ghat at the taravad's bathing pool in addition to a suitable residence with attached well. Sthani Nairs and Samanthans employ Pattar Brahmins as taravad cooks and keep their kitchen 'Brahmin pure' so that food can be cooked there, carried out and served by the cooks to the higher caste husbands in separate dining halls of requisite ritual purity. Wives on viri-local residence with a higher caste husband present little difficulty for they keep off the kitchen and other tabooed areas.

On the part of Sthani and Samanthan ruling taravads the formalities of effecting marriage for their males reflect their superior power and social status. Since wives come from lower castes the bride has to go to the groom's house and the ceremony is conducted there. This is in contradistinction to what obtains among the Nairs even in the case of marriage with Nambudiris. The ideal

for Sthanis and Samanthan ruling families appears to be that neither women nor men move out for marital life except that the women might initially go out to contract the marriage. The husbands, mostly Nambudiris or members of the Raja ruling families get uxori-local residence and wives get viri-local residence, and the ideal is as far as possible maintained. There are however, infrequent instances of very wealthy husbands giving personal estates and regal houses for Sthani and Samanthan wives for exclusive occupation and possession. This possibility is also anticipated by the fact that the Sthani or Samanthan woman, as bride, can go to the house of the bridegroom if the latter desires such a procedure to contract the marriage. Some Sthani families have always sent their women for marriage in this manner regardless of any need to do so and they count it as a custom incumbent on their social status.

We have so far found in this chapter a few features which characterise the social structure. These are: interdependence between groups in a bewildering variety of ways, established and elaborate patterns of expressions of caste-differentiation and certain factors which maintain stability and balance of the structure. These three features, which are broadly speaking only two - differentiation and integration - will be seen in the next part of this chapter as further characterising the structure in a few more fields of intergroup relations.

It may be noted that by examining at the outset of this chapter the relations embedded in the field of land tenure and ownership there is no implication that economic factors determine the pattern of the regional caste system. The organising principles of the regional caste system are religious, but it is so only in its broad framework. To understand the structure intimately it is advantageous to see the local situation against the structure of economic relations. Further, from the latter part of the last century, with increase of population, many of the non-polluting castes did not as a whole pursue their traditional occupations but relegated them in each locality to one or two poor families of each. Yet, the force that sustained the stratification and maintained the intercaste relations on the traditional model was that emanating from the structure of economic relations.

3. Cherumis doing post harvest work. A Nair karanavan (in front) supervises.

4. Post harvest work.



3



5. Boiling paddy for making par boiled rice.
The Cherumis work under the supervision of a
Nair boy (left).

6. Expensive bell-metal vessels of Nairs.



5



6

7. A river scene - Valapad.

8. Bell-metal vessels, lamp stands and spit cans arranged under the cot. This is the usual way of displaying vessels possessed as individual property, distinct from the taravad's possessions.



CHAPTER IV
INTER-CASTE RELATIONS
PART-II

The elaborate nature of social stratification and other aspects of social differentiation is seen impressively reflected in some fields of linguistic behaviour. There are at the same time factors, not hitherto considered or examined in details, which operate as integrative forces on the social structure. These two will be treated in this part of the chapter under the following sub-heads: (1) rank differences reflected in intercaste speech, "conduct speech" (2) the dominant caste, i.e. the power groups (3) some areas of communal relations (4) integration between castes in the field of religious worship (5) the problem of ranking of castes and the need to distinguish secular status from ritual status, and (6) the Moslems of the villages and their roles in the social structure.

(1) Rank differences reflected in intercaste speech:-

As part of the elaborate norms of intercaste behaviour are those pertaining to differences in vocabulary used between castes or groups of castes. Using appropriate

words commensurate with the relatively low rank of the speaker is an essential feature of intercaste behaviour. Wilful omission to use it is an insult to the higher castes and it therefore never occurs. Caste-wise variation in dialect in general is identified with the castes and it has very little importance in intercaste speech viewed as a field of behaviour reflecting rank. The relation between dialectic variation and the stratified structure is itself a field of research of considerable promise in India which seems to have so far been hardly explored.¹ My data pertain to intercaste restrictions in speech and some caste-wise variations in vocabulary. Although limited in range the data permit drawing a few tentative inferences bearing on intercaste relations as attempted below.

The speech towards higher castes is known as "Acharam Parayal" (talking as per prescribed conduct).

In general it is employed in full between castes differing

1. The scope of study in this field is evident from a recent paper, "Dialectic Differences and Social Stratification in a North Indian Village" by J.J.Gumpez (American Anthropologist, vol.60, No.4, August, 1958). He notes dialect differences of three types and a 'prestige dialect' which is used by a high caste and regarded as the model. Further, he notes that (i) in linguistic differences lexical variants occur between individual castes and phonological differences correlate with larger groupings (ii) linguistic differences have no correlation with degree of work contacts except in intercaste neighbourhoods. The situation in Malabar, it may be noted, does not permit any levelling of differences; instead, it perpetuates differences inspite of any degree of work contacts for the differences are so clearly identified with each group of castes.

widely in rank and all polluting castes use it towards higher castes. Castes ranking closely confine the use of such words to terms of address as well as to a minimum of contexts. In the vocabulary of Nairs and castes below are words of such 'conduct speech' used towards any of the higher castes, (except immigrant castes and Ambalavasis) and words used only towards certain higher castes. Broadly speaking, the 'conduct speech' of Nairs and below tend to conform to some categories. (a) In expressions of one category one vocabulary is used within one's group and another towards higher castes or while speaking about them. In words of this type often the speaker, and the one spoken to, use the same word for intra-caste speech. (b) In another category of expressions words vary caste-wise and they are used both in inter-caste and intra-caste speech. (c) A third category exists in which one word is used to refer to actions, individuals or things that belong to higher castes, another word when those belong to the speaker but used only while speaking to a higher caste, and a third word to denote it while speaking to one's own group of castes. This third word is often the same as that current among the higher castes. A corollary of the custom of conduct speech is that a range of vocabulary prevalent among higher castes are forbidden to be used by the lower. This has two consequences - (i) the free social emulation of higher groups

in the field of speech is not possible and (ii) each caste by the use of 'conduct speech' keeps itself self-conscious of its lowly rank even in matters of speech. There are again variations in pronunciation which broadly fall into three - that of Nambudiris, of non-Brahmins above polluting castes and of middle and low group of polluting castes. Imitation of pronunciation characterising a higher group of castes, or of words exclusively used by them, is censured by remarks and thus discouraged. Use of a considerably sanskritised vocabulary in speech is tolerated when devoid of the characteristic pronunciation of higher castes. Among non-polluting castes the conduct speech is obligatory on the part of the retainers of Sthanis and Nambudiris and all castes dependent on them in some way or other while speaking to their masters. However, in practice it is expected from non-dependents as well, even if they belong to areas outside the coercive power of the masters.

Omitting the immigrant castes the relevant data can now be considered ⁱⁿ an illustration of the main points drawn above. The Sthanis address Nambudiripads as Nambudiripads and ruling house Samanthans as "Tampurans" (protectors). In very few contexts have the Sthanis to use 'conduct speech' towards Nambudiris and hardly do they use words thoroughly transformed as the lower castes employ in constant use. Castes of Nairs and below and

temple castes address any wealthy Nambudiri, particularly their village head, as Tampuran but a Nambudiri priest in a temple is addressed only as Nambudiri, and they all address Sthanis "Angunnu" (an honourific thou) or "Yajaman" (master). The conduct speech of categories (a) and (c) different from that of intra-caste speech is of vocabulary denoting movable things in frequent use, actions such as speaking, eating, bathing, and to categories of persons. Caste-wise variant vocabulary used as such in intercaste speech pertains usually to non-transferable items such as house and relatives. The distinction into three categories, it may be noted, is not absolute, but it is seen that more words exist in the first and third category. The 'conduct speech' therefore appears to have evolved covering chiefly such items or actions which usually come into speech towards or about higher castes.

Again, it appears ~~in~~ that in 'conduct speech' vocabulary is coined according to some principles. One is that the connotation of a word is expressed in a circumlocutory manner; second, a prefix of respect is added to the word; third, a prefix or suffix is used with the word implying thereby an inferior quality to the thing meant by that word; and fourth, and relatively rare, is the replacement of the word by another.

A few of the words often used are given in the following table as when Sudra Nairs and castes lower speak to Nambudiri castes. There are minor variations and

omissions when Kiriya Nairs or others of upper group of Nairs speak to Sthanis or Nambudiris. Nearly all these words are employed when polluting castes speak to all the higher castes.

Table 5

'Conduct Speech' Vocabulary

Note:- Words marked (P) are used almost exclusively by polluting castes when they speak to higher castes. In the remarks column are marked the categories of 'conduct speech' (a) to (c) under which a word can be classified. Explanation of '*' mark is given in the same column. Column (1) gives terms in folk language of the Nambudiris. In column (3) words in brackets denote that the action or object meant is with reference to the higher castes; words without brackets closely below denote them with reference to the speaker. Additional notes regarding column (4) are given at the end of the table.

(1) Word	(2) English meaning	(3) Conduct speech voca- bulary	(4) What (3) means approxi- mately	(5) Remarks
Nalikeram	Coconut	Tenga Tenginmel Kaya (P)	That which grows on co- conut tree.	(a)
Pukayila	Tobacco	Netti Kaykkunnatu	The bitter thing.	(a)
Vettila	Betel leaf	Paruttila	The over- ripe leaf	(a)
Moru	Butter milk	Veluttatu	The white thing	
Nellu	Paddy	Karikkady	(no meaning)	(a) Kari means coal.
Ari	Raw rice	Kallari	Stony rice	(a)

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Word	English meaning	Conduct speech vocabulary	What (3) means approximately	Remarks
Panam	Money or silver coin	Chembu Kasu	Copper coin	(a)
Akattullor or Attenmar	Wife	(Akayinnu) *Kettiyol(P)	Interior; one tied with	(b) *Terms vary according to caste of speaker.
Illom	House or family group	(Mana) Kuppadu	The spot of refuse	(c) and also (b) with reference to speaker when polluting castes speak.
Unni	A pet term for child; -boy.	(Unni Tampuran) Chekkan		(a)
Varuka	Come	(Erunnalluka) Vidakolluka		(c)
Kulikkuka	To bathe	(Neeraduka) Nanayuka		(c)
Unu	Meal	(Amritettu) Akaram		(c)
Eruttu	Letter or writing	(Tiru eruttu) Eruttu		(c)

Note:- For Illom the word Mana is used when it refers to the house of Nambudiripads and Illom when it is the house of Nambudiris. For Unni the word in column (3), Chekkan, is regarded as a less refined term for a boy. For the next word Varuka, the bracketted word connotes the meaning of royal procession or movement; the word 'Vidakolluka' means to take leave of. The bracketted word 'Neeraduka' for bathe means to wallow in water and for it 'Nanayuka' means to get wet. For meals the bracketted word 'Amritettu' means divine food and the word 'Akaram' is a corrupted form of the sanskrit Aharam. For writing the prefix 'tiru' of the bracketted word means by implicit connotation 'regal'.

In direct terms of address the speaker in the case of Nairs and below is Adiyar and the higher caste man addressed is 'Tampuran' if a Nambudiri, and Muttaru (elderly Nair) if a Nair. The house of a Nambudiri is 'Illom', of a Nambudiripad is 'Mana', of the immigrant Imbrandiris and Pattars is 'Madham', of a Nair is 'Veedu', of upper polluting castes is 'Pura' or 'Kudi', of Panan and Cheruman below is 'Chala'. For Sthanis the words for house vary according to their original political status and for Samanthan ruling families and Raja families the house is 'Kovilakam'.

Polluting castes are addressed by higher castes by name without suffixing the caste name, the exceptions being astrologer Panickers, or those who have titles such as Kurup. Nairs of the upper group address the middle group by name without suffixing caste name but if the individual addressed to is much older than the speaker, Nair is added. The low group of Nair castes are addressed without caste name or any suffix irrespective of the factor of age. Similarly Sthanis and Nambudiris and very wealthy Samanthan families address Nairs of the upper group within the area of power by name disregarding any contrast in age.

Nambudiris are more in contact with Sudra Nairs and the latter have different words to refer to or address different categories of members of the Nambudiri illom.

The word for unmarried daughter of an illom is 'Unnikidavu', the daughter who has been married out is 'Malathrunnu', a wife (of Nambudiri caste only) who has no children is 'Kunchatrunnu', and when she becomes a mother is 'Ammyathrunnu'. The boys of pre-marital age of the celibate period (Brahmachari) are called Kunchunni. Nairs refer to the Sthanis mainly by the terms 'Netyar' and 'Angunnu' or 'Yajaman' as suffixes to the names of females and males respectively. Similarly the senior-most male of the Sthani taravad is referred to as 'Muppinnu' or 'Muppil Yajaman' and when polluting castes address or refer about Nair castes elderly men are 'Muttaru', younger male members are 'Ilaru' and all females are 'Ampidichiaru'.

An examination of the kinship terminology of the various castes show that some of the principles of 'conduct speech' modify kinship terms of reference while speaking to higher castes. The need to observe such principles also limits the possibility of a caste to borrow terms from a higher or a lower caste when other conditions favour or create the need for borrowing.

Iravati Karve in her study of kinship terminology of the whole Malayalam speaking area notes in comparison to other linguistic regions that the "Malayalam terminology contains very few kinship terms."² She states:

2. Iravati Karve, Kinship Organization in India, (Poona, 1953), p.255.

"Whatever the differences in family structure they all ... use a kinship terminology which differs but slightly from group to group. These differences are more in the nature of dialectical differences."

I am of opinion that such differences are not insignificant when seen in the light of social stratification of the area. The terms which are examined below pertain to my focal area and can conveniently be classified into three - those of the Nambudiris, of the matrilineal castes and the polluting patrilineal castes - based on the similarity of terms used among groups of castes. The immigrant castes are not considered here nor the Samanthans and Sthanis who have hardly any variation in the terminology. The elementary terms and other terms in frequent use are given in the following table.

Table 6

Kinship Terms: Caste-wise Variation

Note:- Abbreviations and symbols used:

Mo: mother; Fa: father; Br: brother; Si: sister;

Da: daughter; Wi: wife; Hu: husband; So: son;

A: term of address; H: term of reference while speaking to higher castes with reference to speakers' kin; I.D: indirectly described; MS: man speaking;

WS: woman speaking; R: term of reference.

Explanation of the mark '*' is given in the corresponding remarks column.

	Nambudiris	Matrilineal. castes	Patrilineal. castes	Remarks

Ascendants				
(Male)				

Fa	A Acha	Acha	Acha	
	R Achan	Achan	Achan or Tanta	
	H	Tanta	Tanta	Tanta means very old man

		Nambudiris	Matrilineal castes	Patrilineal castes	Remarks
Mo	A	Amme	Amme	Amme	
	R	Amma	Amma	Amma or Talla	Talla means very old woman
	H	-	Talla	Talla	
FaBr Younger	A	Aphan	*	Cheriyachan)	Cheriyachan means small.
	R	"	-	"	
	H	-	*	I.D.	Valiya - big.
Elder	A	Valiyacha	"	Valiyacha	*sometimes used as
	R	Valiyachan	"	Valiyachan	patri-castes
	H	-	"	I.D.	below.
MoBr	A	Ammaman	Ammame	Ammamo	
	R	Ammaman	Ammaman	Ammama	
	H	-	Ammama	Ammama	
<u>Ascendants (Female)</u>					
Mo	A	Amme	Amme	Amma	
	R	Amma	Amma	Amma	
	H	-	Talla	Talla	Talla means very old woman
MoSi Younger	A	Chittassi	Cheriyamme	Cheriyamme	
	R	"	Cheriyamma	Cheriyamma	
	H	-	"	"	
Elder	A	Perassi	Valiyamme	Valiyammo	
	R	"	Valiyamma	Valiyamma	
	H	-	"	"	
FaSi Younger	A	Chittassi	No term	Ammayi	
	R	"	-	"	
	H	-	-	"	
Elder	A	Perassi	No term	Ammayi	
	R	"	-	"	
	H	-	-	"	
<u>Collaterals (Male)</u>					
Br (WS)					
Elder	A	Attan	Atta	Chetto	
	R	Attan	Attan	Chettan	
	H	-	Angala	Angala or Chettan	Angala is com- mon to both elder and younger

		Nambudiris	Matrilineal castes	Patrilineal castes	Remarks
<hr/>					
Br(WS)					
Younger	A	-	-	-	
	R	Aniyan	Aniyan	Angala or Aniyan	
	H	-	Angala	Angala or Aniyan	
Br(MS)					
Elder	A	Attan	Atta	Chetto	
	R	Attan	Attan	Chettan	
	H	-	Attan	Chettan	
Younger	A	-	-	-	
	R	Aniyan	Aniyan	Aniyan	
	H	-	Aniyan*	Aniyan*	*Chekkan is often added.
Female					
Si(MS)					
Elder	A	Oppol	Adatti	Chedathi	
	R	"	Adatti or	Chedathi or	
	H	-	Pengal " "*	Pengal " "*	* Pengal is more com- monly used.
Younger	A	-	-	-	
	R	Aniyatti	Aniyatti or	Aniyatti or	
	H	-	"Pengal " "*	"Pengal " "*	* Pengal is more com- monly used.
Si(WS)					
Elder	A	Adatti	Adatti	Chedathi	
	R	"	"	"	
	H	-	"*	"*	* Sometimes I.D. when H involves a highly respectable person.
Si(WS)					
Younger	A	-	-	-	
	R	Aniyatti	Aniyatti	Aniyatti	
	H	-	Aniyatti*	Aniyatti*	* Sometimes I.D. as mentioned above.
<hr/>					
Descendants					
SiSo(MS)	A	Marumakan	Marumakan	Marumakan	
	R	"	"	"	
	H	-	"*	"*	* Often a suf- fix added

		Nambudiris	Matrilineal castes	Patrilineal castes	Remarks
<u>Affines</u>					
WiBr	A	-	-	Aliyan	
	R	-	-	"	
	H	-	-	"	
FaBrWi	A	Attenmaru	Nil	(Valiyamma	*For elder and younger brother's wife.
	R	"	"	(or	
	H	-	"	(Cheriyamma*	
MoBrWi	A	Ammayi	Ammayi	Ammayi	
	R	"	"	"	
	H	-	"	"	
HuSi	*	Nil	Nil	Nattun	*See comments below.

While speaking to a higher group of castes with reference to the speaker's kin a few principles are followed in expressing the relationship. (1) If the speaker's term is current among the higher group the same term is not used and a suffix which makes the term less graceful or non-euphonic is added, or, a handy term of such a type is used in lieu. Tanta and Talla are used according to contexts to refer to one's father and mother respectively, but these terms are also suffixed for reference about secondary or tertiary relationship for which the higher groups use the same term as the speaker. Two other terms of this category are 'Chekkan' and 'Pennu' (boy and girl respectively) which according to contexts mean one's son or daughter and are also used as suffix to describe other relatives much younger than the speaker. 'Kutti' (a young one) is also used according to the age of the speaker as a suffix to the 'conduct speech kinship term'.

Thus are developed compound terms such as Valiyachan Tanta for Fa(elder)Br and Marumakan Chekkan for SiSo(MS) and Ammayi Pennu for MoBrWi. Another procedure when the speaker's term is current among the higher group is to describe it as for example 'he is the one born above my father' meaning thereby Fa(elder)Br. However, when the speaker's term is common among the speaker's group and the higher group an exemption can often be seen in that the speaker does not add a suffix if the relative referred to is older than him/her. In some cases this is also due to the fact that a suffix makes the compound term rather uncouth. (2) When the speaker's term of reference or address is not existing among higher castes the term is employed without modification. Angala (WS) and Pengal (MS) for Br and Sr respectively are such generic terms. These are not used among Nambudiris but among the other two groups, and Nairs can therefore use it towards Nambudiris, but castes below add a suffix to it while speaking to Nairs. Aliyan for SiHu and WiBr exist among patrilineal castes below Nairs and they can use the term without modification. For these castes a similar term is Nattun for HuSi which too can be spoken as such to higher castes. Although terms such as Aliyan, Angala and Nattun can be used as such towards higher castes the speaker often adds a suitable suffix as Chekkan or Kutti and the like, professing to be most humble in speech towards the master.

In this context another fact emerges from my data on kinship terms among the three groups of castes given in the table. When a term of reference exists only among a lower group the higher group does not like to use it except in a sense of humour, even when such a term is wanting in the terminology of the latter. Aliyan for WiBr and Nattun for HuSi are such terms. For Nairs affinal relatives are not important and WiBr or SiHu are not traditionally important. In recent decades SiHu has become an important kin but it is even today amusing if among elderly people, or in a serious talk, the term Aliyan is employed. Nambudiris do not use the term at all and regard Angala and Pengal as equally out of place for them to accommodate even today.

It appears that in areas where Nambudiris are few and not village heads or landlords Nairs use certain terms which are current among Nambudiris. This is a probability that I can gather from my limited data. In parts of Ponnani taluk, as far as I have visited the area, Nairs use the term Oppol for elder sister (MS) and Oppa for elder (WS) both for address and for reference. These terms in my focal area are confined to Nambudiris, and Nairs do not attempt to imitate it except in some families and in recent years for different reasons as will be seen in a later chapter.

Murdock, while considering the relationship between kinship terminology and behaviour and in concluding his

chapter on analysis of kinship, points out the need to study causal factors outside the kinship complex affecting relationship as well as terminology.³ Such factors, as he notes, when they influence the one can in turn influence the other, or both terminology and relationships may also be simultaneously affected in which case the other would in due course make adaptations. He gives priority to change or modification in behaviour which brings adjustment in terminology. In the Malabar situation as envisaged here, owing to the nature of the stratified community structure, the adaptation of terminology to modifications in relationships has to work within strict limitations. For Nairs and Nambudiris certain relatives have become more important since the early part of this century or earlier. Yet, when handy elementary terms are wanting for them and such terms exist in the village community they are not borrowed for they are either more prestigious, or less so, according to the rank of the caste which constantly handles them. Perassi, Chittassi, Aphan, Aliyan, Nattun, Pengal, Angala are examples of this category.

(2) The dominant caste:-

The centres of power and authority and the families of the power group mentioned in the second chapter are regarded here as convenient to be brought under the concept of dominant caste. The use of this as a concept in the study of Indian village community has emerged from

3. G.P.Murdock, Social Structure, (New York, 1949), p.107.

the studies of Prof. Srinivas. According to him the elements which make for dominance of a caste in one or a group of neighbouring villages are the high numerical strength of the caste, its high economic and political power, the number of persons having western non-traditional education and their occupations. Further, the degree and number of these elements characterising a caste determine the level of local dominance it can achieve. As he states "the study of the locally dominant caste and the kind of dominance it enjoys is essential for the understanding of rural society in India."⁴ Srinivas has, by using the concept, shown how the dominant caste maintains the vertical unity of the village through the authority of its elders. Dumont and Pockock in their estimate of the importance of this concept recognise it as useful. They also notice that the loyalty of castes is not focussed on the village but on the dominant caste within it.⁵ A.C.Mayer in his study of dominant caste in a region of Central India recognises the importance of the concept in the analysis of the caste system and its significance for the study of economic and social changes. In the light of his study he observes that the concept is a descriptive one and "it is a necessary concept, though it may be unsatisfactory from the

4. M.N.Srinivas, "The Dominant Caste in Rampura", American Anthropologist, vol.61, No.1, February, 1959, p.13.

5. Louis Dumont and D.F.Pockock, (ed.), Contributions to Indian Sociology, No.1, (The Hague, Paris, 1957), p.29.

point of view of analysis (for one cannot analyse 'dominance' as a whole but must deal with each sphere of power in turn)."⁶

In my focal villages I regard the centres of power and authority, the two Nambudiri illoms and the Sthani taravad, each the head of one of the three villages, as dominant. But their dominance can be distinguished from that of the families of the power group, the few taravads of Nairs in each of the villages. The dominance of the former can be termed as potential and of the latter as active, for the Nairs have closer and more frequent interaction with the rest and are to refer disputes of themselves and lower castes upwards only if they are not settled at their level. The villagers do know of the power and authority of the 'head', the Nambudiri illom or the Sthani taravad, but in actual experience it is the few leading Nair taravads who are the pivot of the village structure. The village heads too recognise this fact for they constantly regard such taravads as the leaders of all castes of the village. The Pramanis of whom mention has been made in the first chapter, who have an important part in handling disputes, usually belong to this group of taravads.

The factors which constitute the high social

6. A.C.Mayer, "The Dominant Caste in a Region of Central India", South Western Journal of Anthropology, vol.14, No.4, 1958, p.421.

status of such taravads and the process by which it is achieved are several. The wealth basis of their power has been considered and the rest of the factors making up the high social status will be dealt with in the next chapter. It may be recalled here that, in short, the attributes which make up the power of such families have been pointed out in the second chapter. The vertical dependence of various castes on Nairs of the upper group, (the masters owning kanam tenure) particularly the kanakkaran-pattakkaran relationship, the status of the janmi (who is also the village head) in the economy and the correlation of caste rank with wealth in land, particularly with the statuses of janmi and kanakkaran, all create the favourable conditions in which dominance can operate. It operates from two levels, of the janmi and of the wealthy kanakkar taravads, although the former is potential in form with only occasional overt expressions.

Dominance as I recognise it operates in several directions or on different facets, One is in the maintenance of the norms of intercaste behaviour any infringement of it being rendered almost impossible through the power of the dominant group who can prescribe retributions as the highest authority. There is no village panjayat, even traditionally, and the Pramanis are called upon to handle jointly only disputes of some complexity and significance. And when the Pramanis handle a case, karavans of some of the taravads of the power

group are also made to participate. Norms of intercaste behaviour are not necessarily complied with by all to the utmost degree as a concomitant of vertical unity and local hierarchy. The degree to which all comply to the norms vary, very often from village to village or region to region. A polluting caste member, for instance, may be indifferent to conform to standards of intercaste behaviour with a poor family of a higher caste. There may be theft, wilful pollution by approach, sorcery, black magic, threats of inflicting injuries and the like at intercaste levels. The incidence of these is the minimum in villages with powerful taravads for their power to control and maintain peace and order in every nook and corner of the village is a threat to individuals to refrain from anti-social behaviour. One often hears "Such cases are too often in that village, for are there taravads of 'weight' or some 'he' men among the Nairs there?". There are instances, often quoted by informants, of police inspectors trailing culprits or coming to investigate complicated cases withdrawing from the scene leaving the situation to powerful karanavans of the village to handle.

The need to maintain norms of intercaste behaviour is more significant when the norms are considerably elaborate and the behaviour consequently showing a wide variety. That the norms are so can be seen from different contexts in this chapter. In the sphere of social

disabilities (so called in much of the literature on caste system) there is considerable elaboration partly to emphasise caste distinctions by diacritical symbols and behaviour. The elaboration itself is seemingly, in part, the result of cumulative imposition of rules of behaviour by dominant groups or village heads in the past as can be seen from the regional variations in it and from the instances of such impositions in the past recalled by my informants.

This leads to another facet of dominance which the villagers understand as progressive subjection. Dominance can thus be viewed as a process and is in a sense cumulative as social processes, such as accommodation is, in some contexts. For, in its operation, it involves in some measure subjection or maintenance of the status-quo of subjection already attained. In either case there are elements in it which make for progressive subjection, particularly under conditions in which economic sanctions, as obtains in the region are an important instrument enabling a family or a group to be dominant. Progressive subjection is not synonymous with dominance but a facet of it which is experienced atleast by some of the dominated castes or families of each of such castes. And progressive subjection, or in its milder form progressive control, experienced by the same caste in different villages differs in degree. This accounts considerably

for the different degrees of dominance experienced by the same caste in different villages.

The general considerations made here on dominance are derived from field data and will be substantiated with instances and interpretations.

Several factors contribute to the power of the Sthanis. Their tradition as local rulers, their caste rank, large wealth in farm lands, forests and wastes, alliances with Nambudiris and Samanthans and the recognition of their superiority by the British administrators have all placed them well to be dominant. Almost similar factors as can be seen hitherto qualify the Nambudiris to dominate. In the case of Nambudiris the caste rank itself has historically helped them to achieve wealth and power while for the Sthanis the political or partly political titles and accompanying wealth placed them as village heads under British rule. There are Sthanis who were originally lower than Sudra Nairs of the upper group in rank and therefore even as Sthanis, by caste rank, they are lower. Sudra Nair women would not dine with the women of such Sthanis nor serve them in any ritual capacity. My information about villages headed by such Sthanis is limited but it permits me to state that in such villages the Nairs in majority belong to the caste of such Sthanis or rank lower. The well-known Sthani taravads of Kutiravattattu Nair and Adakkaputtur Panicker in Walluvanad taluk and of Mannarghat Nair in Palghat taluk are examples

of Sthanis of this category. The village head of my fourth village (an area to be considered later) has his origin from Pallichan Nair, and in the same taluk, the famous Sthani Panicker near Guruvayur, by caste, rank below the upper group of Nair castes.

In the case of Nambudiris the very fact of being a Nambudiri has in some cases led to some families of them being bestowed with wealth in land, as I gather from specific cases cited by informants. There is a saying that a Sudra cannot have land under janmam ownership and in this saying the term Sudra seemingly refers to the fourth 'Varna' (Sudra) since Kiriya Nairs are also said to be included in this category of Sudras who cannot have janmam lands. There is a less popular saying that one 'won't be able to digest the property of illom.' This means that one should not seek for or receive land in gift from Nambudiris and this saying is quoted when one asks why a particular Nambudiri's Nair wife could not manage to get some fortune in janmam lands from him. It is probable that traditionally, as informants think, no property of value was to be received from a Nambudiri since such wealth belonged to his illom. Several elderly informants state that Sudra Nairs who happen to get janmam lands through some sources transferred such ownership to Nambudiris and remained only as sub-tenants (kanakkar). But only three cases in the focal area could be cited to me and these must have occurred a little before the close of

last century. In one of these cases there is a document of such a transfer in 1870 by the famous taravad Kirakepat in the village of Kiroor near Munnurkode. Another case illustrates that temples, the ambalams, as distinct from the kavus, should have only Nambudiris as uralans (trustee and manager). The temple in Trikkateri was originally under Trikkateri Sthani Nair and once two Nambudiri mendicants came there and, as is usual in such temples, found warm hospitality for them. But they learnt that the temple belonged to Sthani Nairs and regretted that they could not accept the food served. The Sthani Nair knowing this transferred the rights over the temple to two Nambudiris who happened to be there, and one of them later became very wealthy through the temple property. Thus wealth in temple lands and the accompanying power which together make up the status of a village head, or a head of a part of a village in this century (upto the last decade) has one basic contributing factor in the case of the Nambudiris. A Nambudiri without lands is not by himself powerful except to the extent he can profess to be so through the help of his kinsmen who command power. We have already noted elsewhere the institutional safeguards against the fragmentation of property of Nambudiris. These safeguards kept the kanam tenants under them having allegiance focussed on the same illom as their masters for generations. It is also relevant to recall from the

previous chapter how the Sthanis with their characteristic restricted enangar relations and their hypergamy are favourably placed to be dominant over the dependent castes.

What are generally called social disabilities in literature on caste system refer to a category of limitations in a variety of behaviour observed by the polluting or servant castes. The ban on the use of higher caste wells, of sectors of the village, or certain lanes, proscriptions on making houses of tiled roof and the like are called social disabilities. When caste system basically rests on a system of religious beliefs, legitimised through scriptural sanctions, several of the so-called disabilities are behavioural concomitants of that basic system of beliefs. Behaviour limitations governed by ideas of purity and pollution are therefore to be distinguished from those governed or basically influenced by secular considerations. An absolute distinction is not always possible since ritual and secular factors often overlap particularly at the base of negative prescriptions on behaviour. Very often the answers of informants show that why a particular prescription exists is more, if not entirely, due to secular considerations than ritual ones. Within such secular factors are a vestigial heritage of what high political status and authority could in the past impose as patterns of behaviour exemplifying superordination-subordination. Numerous are the privileges

enjoyed by village and district heads and the limits placed on the styles of life of the ruled.⁷ Many of these continued under British rule and into this century, for, as noted in the I Chapter, the power of the janmi as the ultimate owner of land was an important asset to the former village heads although they were deprived of their formal political power and authority. Informants in Sthani villages who never owned any allegiance to Nambudiris speak of the numerous proscriptions they had to comply with under a sense of compelling obligation to Sthanis. As they state, those under Nambudiris have to face restrictions and proscriptions which are all similar but not in all cases identical. However, even elderly informants cannot distinguish between what are imposed by Nambudiris and what by Sthanis. It is probable that historically Nambudiris followed the royal model of such impositions as existed under village heads (Desavaris) and Naduvaris (district heads). Dependence of lower castes on them through land tenure and retainer services gave the Nambudiris adequate power and control over village residents to enforce norms of behaviour on the royal model.

7. Books on Malabar history including Logan's Malabar Manual mention the privileges enjoyed by chieftains and their monopoly over rare things in the chieftdom. Cows with an abnormal number of dugs, buffaloes with white tips to their toe nails and the like are also included in the monopoly. See for instance T.K.Gopala Panicker, Malabar and its Folk, (Madras, 1900), p.95.

Before proceeding further it is necessary to consider the nature of dominance as the villagers, the dominated, view it. To express the idea of dominance they speak of the "Adhikara Sakti" (commanding right and power) of the Sthanis, Nambudiris and temple managers derived from the janmam ownership of lands. In referring to such centres of power they use the term of coverage janmi and speak of the dominance of janmis rather than of three different kinds of centres. The instances given by informants as illustration of dominance are numerous and can be categorised as those constantly exercised and those incidentally arising according to the situation. In the latter can be seen the maintenance of norms by the working of power, and as well, the prescription of norms in some unprecedented situations. As indicated, disabilities such as restricted access to certain areas and ban on the use of common high caste bathing pools do not fall within the area of interest here.

In the following enumeration of restrictions, proscriptions and prescriptions relevant remarks or special conditions, if any, in which the statement is applicable, are given in brackets.

1. House cannot be tile-roofed, and an upper storey is not allowed to the gate house, if any.
2. A gate house cannot be added (only for polluting castes).

3. For felling teak and jackfruit trees the permission of the janmi is necessary. These are trees of regal prestige and for felling them the janmi gives permission only after the formal offering to him of money or ghee or such items. The Banyan tree which has divine associations cannot be felled.
4. When women of janmi households are pregnant no tenant under him can cut any milk exuding trees. (It is probable that this is only under Nambudiris and too narrowly localised a rule).
5. The leaf umbrella cannot be held high up over head, nor can its handle be too long, especially while walking within sight of master families much higher in rank.
6. Women should not cover their breasts, even unwittingly especially when a member of a master family of higher caste is in sight.
7. Women after bath in a common village or temple tank should leave their hair without tidying or tying up while going back home when they are likely to be seen by higher castes.
8. Permission of the Sthani or Nambudiri head as the case may be is necessary for tali-kettu marriage ceremony of Nairs of the upper and middle group.
9. For puberty celebration of girls the party accompanying the girl to the public low caste bathing pool, on return after the ceremonial bathing of the girls, sing songs loudly. For this noisy procession permission of the nearest Sthani or Nambudiri is necessary. (applicable to upper polluting castes. The rest of them do not have a celebration of this kind. It is also applicable to Nairs residing near the residence of a Nambudiri or Sthani).
10. Polluting castes should not wear well-whitened clothes even when they have to go on visits as guests. Females of upper polluting castes are, however, at liberty to do it. Under this restriction Tandan males sometimes carry with them to and fro a well laundered and handily folded white loin cloth without using while on a visit to attend a feast at their relatives' house. (This practice lingered until a decade ago.)

11. Nair women, if they have not got their nose pierced for the nose ornament, cannot enter into the interior unroofed ritual spot (Nadimittam) of Nambudiri's house. But Nair women under Kavalappara Sthani Nair cannot pierce their nose if they were at any time to get access into the Sthani's house premises.
12. For grand-scale feasts, to prepare the famous sweetened dish (Paladai), Nairs are expected to seek permission of their Nambudiri head, if any. Green banana chips for feasts of Sthanis and Nambudiris should be cut crosssectionally to get a round shape, but for other castes, the chips of slightly elliptical shape by slanted cutting is the prescribed form.
13. Polluting castes speak vaguely of the proscription which existed sometime that they cannot use the palm tree cords for fence work around their compound while the higher castes could use it. It is doubtful if this was ever uniformly observed even within a desam.
14. Conduct speech, as described, is essential.
15. Offerings of vegetables and fruits made to master caste families of importance must be attractive and of good quality and must be according to the social status of the receiver. Sthanis and Nambudiris for instance are given only one of the numerous kinds of plantains 'puvan param', and of the cucumber family, only the long gourd of golden colour, 'vellarikka' es is the offering that befits. Similarly, if in any context raw rice is to be given to the master castes, it should be whitened split rice and not the rice grain in full shape which is regarded as rather crude.

The villagers are constantly subjected to such rules of behaviour and they do not regard these as an expression of active dominance for they are followed as a matter of training. But there are occasions when the awareness of being dominated emerges when there is need of facing or soliciting the interference of the masters to the displeasure of the parties concerned. Such interference

arises when any slight disregard is made towards norms to suit the existing conditions and needs. Over sixty years back in Karattukursi, for the first time in that village, one Nair house was tile-roofed and the reaction of the Nambudiri head was communicated to the Nair taravad in words of protest. Atlast a post-facto sanction was given to it since the work was half way. As noted in the second chapter territorial limitations in marriage had a political significance in pre-British times but its continuance into this century is attributable to the coercive power of village heads. Nairs under Trikkateri Sthani Nair, as noted, are a lower adukkalakkar prestige group than those under Kavalappara Sthani Nair and yet the permission of the latter Sthani was required even for prestige group hypergamy. Further examples in this context are the need for the permission of the village head to enlarge the enangar group and the resources of the village head to bring avakasam families from outside when they are locally scarce. It is also relevant to recall here the instance cited regarding the protest of Nairs when a Variyar served a side-dish at a feast in a Nambudiri house. I am told that Nambudiris like to recognise ritual superiority of Variyars over Nairs when opportunity arises but the latter do not concede to it. Over 50 years back in Trikkateri an astrologer Panicker of the village reviewed the horoscope of

a Poduval (temple caste) and the Sthani Nair near by, knowing this, made the Panicker to return the remuneration since he was not expected to serve temple castes. This instance appears to show the lack of integration of temple castes into the community since they are of questionable rank with no firm tradition as participants in Sthani headed villages. The imposition to contribute to maintain Kathakali troupe at the instance of the village head is another pertinent example of how dominance can manifest. Some informants state that a Nambudiri, if felt attracted to a Nair woman of one of his tenant taravads could ask her husband "to vacate the place for him and cease relations with her permanently." This seems to have been more probable at an earlier period but atleast one case came to my notice in which the husband is a poor Nair with hardly any local importance.⁸ Any slight neglect on the part of the dependent Nairs in

 8. Nambudiris, atleast in this century, do not appear to have ventured into an alliance when members of the prospective Nair wife's taravad are not solicitous about it. However, Nairs say that "if a Nambudiri is round the corner it is unworthy to press forward a proposal for marriage."

T.K.Gopala Panicker (ibid., p.97) writing in 1900 notes the "powers of oppression and domination of the chieftain". By the term chieftain he appears to be referring to the Sthanis in general and of Ponnani taluk in particular. He writes, (presumably with reference to the latter half of 19th century unless otherwise specified) "The Nairs of any part of the country could not do anything in furtherance of a marriage settlement except under the authority and sanction of the particular chieftain who held sway over that locality. This is still retained in a visibly weakened form Even in the memory of the present generation, there have been instances in which

adhering to the rules of pollution, even involuntary pollution, leads to the displeasure of the village head or his family. In consequence, the defaulter gets a warning directive or a caustic remark in person or is made to pay a fine to the temple. Sudra Nair women of adiyar taravads, for instance, cannot miss a bath at different stages during their confinement when they are under birth pollution. If gossip passes the news of it to the Nambudiri women any remark from them is a black disgrace to the defaulter.

Disputes among Nairs of the upper group unsettled at their level are referred to the village head. The disputes pertain to any breach of caste norms, cheating or distrustful dealings in money transactions, sale of land, wilful damage to crops by diverting water courses, withholding of water at higher level lands in times of drought ignoring the interest of lower level farms,

party quarrels by residents of sectors of the village

marriages of whatever description have been controlled by such chieftains; and this right has been carried rather too far in some of the interior parts where the chieftains' authority has been perversely exercised in the practising of polyandry. A wife, living with her husband in the genial comforts of married life within such a locality, may be the object of attraction and desire by another man who, on his petitioning the chieftain with proper presents to allow him to be an extra husband to the said wife, gets from the chieftain a duly written social writ, which once for all decides the question; in other words, the chieftain's authority is exercised in the enforcement of polyandry. This obtained currency even a generation ago. But now I am not prepared to insist on the continued existence of the practice."

during competitive display of performance at temples, cases of inflicting injury to cattle and encroachment into one another's land by increasingly fencing away by bits at the boundaries every year. In large measure, such cases are usually settled at the hands of taravads of power who resent giving any opportunity for a case to be referred upwards. The authority of the village head in handling such cases is personalized in the sense that he need not consult others to take decisions unless he wants to do so for reasons of strategy and tactics. Rarely, an approval over decisions taken at the level of Nairs may be sought from the village head or janmi, as the case may be, if there is possibility that the aggrieved party is not feeling satisfied and might appeal upwards.

The power and authority of the village head depends considerably on his own right to evict his kanam tenants. As noted, the evil of 'melcharthu' (leasing for higher rent) is a constant threat to the tenants who therefore remain docile. The deed is renewed every twelve years and any village head or a petty janmi, if irate over his tenant can lease it to another at the expiry of the period. Informants cite case after case, most of them from hearsay and scattered over a wide area, to establish that the janmi might be provoked to resort to eviction for any slender reason. Further, the janmi might do so for his own benefit, to oblige his favourites, or

an affinal kin, and might be watching for an opportunity to make ~~a~~ up an apparently reasonable case for eviction. Much of the lands of Cherpalcherry, contiguous to Karattukursi, belong to the temple (kavu) of the former village and the hereditary trustee and manager of the temple's estates is a Samanthan family. Each new trustee succeeding to the office earned wealth by super-lease and some tenants in that village say that even to dress well was an offence that would provoke him to evict the tenant. The fear of the janmi's reigning hand is vividly nurtured in the minds of the tenants through the realisation that above all he can make or mar one's fortunes in land. As an apparently exaggerated case I am told that the village head of Karattukursi ordered eviction when displeased for the reason that a Nair tenant invitee at a feast in his house wanted 'chukkuvellam', the boiled drinking water seasoned with ginger. This is a common drink sipped at meal time even among well-to-do Nairs but the Nambudiri belittled it as a snobbish demand not justified at a Nambudiri house. (My probe into the case revealed that the incident was not likely to be authentic). In my focal villages, in all, there are five instances of eviction and super-lease in the twenties of this century but in all these the tenant is not deprived of all his lands. A reference to the accounts given in the first chapter can show that the scare of eviction has been widespread in Malabar.

Another source of power of village heads is in the feeble sense of obligation to assist each other if needed. Among Nambudiris this sense is often too pronounced particularly through kinship. The Nambudiri head of Munnurkode, towards the close of last century, sank into heavy debts and was precariously nearing a hopeless financial crash. It is well known that an immensely wealthy Nambudiri illom six miles away which has distant ties of agnatic kinship gave a timely helping hand and restored the illom of Munnurkode to its former economic status. The marriage alliance between Nambudiris and Sthanis also leads to create a sense of obligation between affinal families. But between Sthanis there is no affinal link and sometimes there would hardly be any amity between them, one regarding the other as competing for more reputation and public esteem. This happens between large janmis as well, and the consequence is that the tenants and other dependents under the power of each are also expected to be at discord or not to mind, if necessary, to resort to militant actions between them. Even the complementary castes under the power of one janmi would be incited to suspend cooperation or service at important occasions to the other. The village Cherpalcherry offers an instance of two Nair janmis continually racing to establish relative superiority and encouraging all the dependents including tenants not to do anything out of tune with the competitive aspirations

of their masters. Another instance shows how, in an insignificant matter, help between janmis save their prestige. A Sthani Panicker family heads a major part of a village contiguous to Munnurkode. His elephant keeper, a hardy expert at his job, and as is usual an inevitable servant of rare skill, was displeased with the treatment he obtained from the master. To retaliate, one day he chained the elephant to a tree as usual and deserted the master. For some days a trained man was not available to graze or handle the elephant but on request the Nambudiri head of Karattukursi managed to send one and save the prestige of the Sthani Panicker.

In some villages there is an additional source of power for the Sthanis or some janmis excepting Nambudiris. A member of the Sthani head's family may be the official village head (Adhikari) of a few villages forming an amsam. He is also authorised to try petty offences, a role incumbent on his office, and this fact enhances the power and authority of the Sthani family since the jurisdiction of the Adhikari brings under some amount of control people who do not depend on the Sthani's estates. The office of Adhikari is hereditarily given to one taravad, and as in the case of Trikkateri Sthani Nair, it is held within the same taravad for generations.

As regards the unpleasant potentiality of the village head to dominate, there is, however, an obverse side of the picture. This is the influence of the

tradition that well behaved tenants should be reciprocated with all fair dealing. How far a janmi would do so depends on his individuality and there are instances of ideal janmis including village heads who resent to trouble tenants except for reasons which are violently provoking. A further continuity from the past can be seen in the patronage of art, chiefly the creative activities of music and kathakali, by the janmis, those enjoying it being largely the non-polluting castes. Further, advanced studies of sanskrit, astrology and ayurvedic medicine and the science of architecture (takshasastra) are either pursued by Nambudiris or patronage of these is extended by rewarding the professionals lavishly even when they belong to the lower castes. Many of the wealthy Nambudiris maintain the tradition of feeding every day as many people as might come to their house at noon at the time of meals. In some villages most of the Nairs staying half a mile around the Nambudiri-head's house present themselves for the feed nearly on all days. The managers of the establishment get a severe reprimand if the head learns that on any day all who came at the time of meals could not, for some reason, be served with food. There are Nambudiri families particularly reputed for this feature, but viewed from a different perspective, the generosity embodied in such practices also augments the potentiality to command or dominate.

The village heads or jannmis are a few in any area and they reside far apart. Their dominance is not so active in the sense that it is not frequently repeated in actions and is confined to occasions as mentioned. Their dominance can be active only over a few Nair taravads living in close neighbourhood supplying to them various services, and are bound to solicit frequent masterly interference or guidance from any member of their family. For the majority of Nairs and lower castes a few important taravads form the centre of local power and active dominance - the families of the power group mentioned in chapter II. It is therefore proper to look upon the dominance of the village head as of a potential kind under which a few taravads dominate on the spot. Three taravads in Munnurkode, two in Karattukursi and five in Kolappulli are recognised as powerful and capable of controlling the rest of the population. A combination of a few of the following criteria qualify a taravad to be in the power group: (a) extensive wealth in kanam lands in several villages (b) healthy and frequent contact with the village head leading to the possibility of securing any help from him when needed (c) marital alliance with Nambudiris or Sthanis (d) individual reputation of the karanavan as a learned and well-informed man with integrity and soundness of judgment (e) existence of other male members noted for qualities as in (d),

(f) women having visiting husbands of local importance belonging to wealthy taravads (g) existence of members specialised in an enlightened occupation such as astrology, sanskrit and medicine (h) one or a few members having government jobs, even as low paying a job as of the accountant of the official village head adhikari (i) having a few enangar taravads which have several of the qualities mentioned here. (A man having qualities of leadership and ability to arbitrate disputes known by the term 'Pramani' may be the karanavan himself or any other member of a taravad. A Pramani may also belong to a taravad which is not wealthy or which does not have many of the qualities enumerated here.)

The power group handles disputes among Nairs and those on which lower castes have appealed for a decision. Petty quarrels and disputes are handled by any one taravad of the group but the heads or important members of the whole group of taravads meet to adjudicate the more important cases. Pramanis, if any, outside the power group, or of lower castes if disputants belong to them are invited to participate.

In local parlance there is no ^{word} ~~ward~~ for the power group as such, but the constituent taravads are referred to by qualifying phrases such as 'ennapettavar' (worthy to be counted), 'sthitium nilayum ullavar' (those with social status and standing), 'saktiyullavar' (the powerful)

or 'chollum padiyum ullavar' (those who can dictate and command compliance). Usually the taravads of the power group have nearly all lands of the village under kanam tenure and can easily evict the tenants under them without the knowledge of the janmi. Lower castes who are not sub-tenants of farm lands have their residence spot and a tiny patch of garden on kudiyiruppu sub-tenure. Eviction from residence is held out as a threat but not inflicted except as a punishment for a serious offence. Eviction of sub-tenancy of verumpattam is often to oblige a favoured party rather than to injure a sub-tenant, but the sub-tenant is always in dread of a possible eviction. Two other important sources of power of such taravads are the hold on the village head achieved by stages, and affinal relations with Nambudiris, Sthanis or taravads of power group in other villages.

Disputes of the kind mentioned in the context of the dominance of the village head are handled by the power group and efforts are made to settle it at that level so that the village head is impressed with the local eminence of the group. At times a dispute is directly carried to the village head but in such instances the parties are directed by him to get the matter settled at the hands of one or a few of the taravads of the power group.

One punishment which a powerful taravad or the power group as a whole can inflict on the accused is to

suspend the services of the barber woman for post-natal attendance during birth pollution and of the Mannatti in supplying mattu (cloth for bathing after menses). "Ittum mattum mudakkuka" is the handy expression conveying the inflicting of this severe negative sanction. However, in actual practice it is very rarely employed except for cases such as intimacy on the part of a woman with a lower caste man. Further, the withdrawal of such services is for a few days, depending on the seriousness of the offence, but although an individual is the victim of such punishment the injury is to the prestige of her taravad. Other punishments given are payment of fine to the village deity, craving pardon in public, or adequate compensation for the loss if any. Disputes relating to land or property usually involve a compensation or more often a commanding directive to settle by fair dealing.

Each taravad of the power group can independently demonstrate its power or impose its will on others with hardly any interference from other taravads of the group. This is possible particularly because one is the master of one's own dependents and the latter hardly raise protest against what their master dictates. In Munnurkode are two families of Cherumans whose master ordered that their daughters should not after marriage be sent out for virilocal residence as is customary among Cherumans. Instead, their husbands were made to visit them after the

custom of Nairs so that the labour of the Cheruman girls would not be lost to the master's taravad. In Karattukursi one taravad conserved its Cheruman labour by a similar imposition and in both villages the Cheruman girls had only visiting husbands for years although the husbands later shifted to permanent residence near their wives' houses.⁹ Several cases were cited to me to show that women and adolescents of a taravad of power demanded recognition of their superiority by others of lower social status by the latter's strict conformance with the elaborate norms of behaviour which reflect respect. In one case a woman of a powerful taravad in Munnurkode was addressed, in a belittling tone of equality, by her age mate belonging to another taravad of the same caste. The mode of respect demands suffixing Amma to the name the omission of which enraged her. The offender hardly confessed it as a mistake and the enraged woman with a sense of injured prestige directly reported the matter to the women of the family of the Nambudiri head of the village. The offender was sent for and was made to pay a fine of four annas to the temple, a case which occurred in the first decade of this century. The complainant's daughter recalled the incident with a triumphant sense

9. Informants say that they have heard of such rare instances in which years after marriage either the wife joins the husband or the husband joins her for permanent marital residence usually in a separate hut built by them.

and told me "after that she could not dare to look squarely at the face of my mother."

If a Nambudiri of the village head's family or of wealth is a visiting husband the female kin of his wife's taravad may at occasions speak in beaming pride about it. If they quarrel with women of ~~a~~ other taravads by an exchange of sharp remarks a threat is extended by saying "Do you know who is coming and going at our taravad?" which means "we have a Nambudiri visiting husband of weight, and you should therefore be aware of our resources of power."

Any action on the part of anybody which even implicitly challenges the superiority of a taravad is not tolerated. How such actions get retaliated depends on the individuality of the karanavans and the social status of the offender. Karanavans of power also do not allow any misconduct on the part of anybody in the ~~ni~~ neighbourhood or any indifference to the norms of conduct. Scores of cases are on the lips of informants to illustrate how karanavans of power exact fear, respect and obedience. It is done often by humiliating punishments for minor offences, and tortuous handling of the offender ~~if~~ public opinion is likely to favour it. For instance, a Cheruman fished from a pool meant for higher castes' bathing and he was made to eat one raw fish on the spot. In another case a Tandan cut down a couple of palm leaves from a palm tree in the waste lands belonging to a poor taravad of

Nairs. He used it for thatching his house but when the case was reported to a nearby taravad of power the karavan made the Tandan to dismantle the thatch-work and place back thrice the number of leaves under that tree. In another case a few Parayans were accused of black magic and another karavan having kanam rights over the Parayans' area of residence pulled out a few Parayans from their huts, severely beat them and set fire to one of the huts, Karanavans with physical prowess, learning, knowledge of black magic (to challenge those who want to injure by magical means), tactics, managerial ability and competency to meet out justice even by resorting to unfair means if necessary, are well known or heard about by informants. Such karanavans too often figure in the anecdotes and accounts of hearsay which all well-informed people of any caste can easily narrate.

A standardized pattern of active dominance as regards prescriptions for offences are limited and new situations might call for a new way of dominating action. However, most of the cases show that dominance brought about the maintenance of the elaborate norms of conduct. In Munnurkode at the occasion of a feast in a Sudra Nair taravad of limited means the Ulladan Nairs resented to remove the dinner leaves of the invitees belonging to the caste of the former. The matter was later reported to the karavan of a nearby taravad of power but he kept silence over the incident until after four years when he

was approached by the Ulladan Nairs to borrow large vessels for feasting at a death ceremony. The karanavan recalled the incident and refused the vessels and the Ulladan Nairs had to resort to the unpleasant alternative of getting large vessels from a wealthy family of Moslems in the same village.

One factor which inspires karanavans of wealthy taravads to exert power over others and maintain it as an accomplishment appears to rest in the local ideal of "Saktan" which literally means "the mighty man". One who can demonstrate his superior power over others and possess several of the qualities mentioned above coupled with moral calibre and integrity of character is held in high esteem and respect, and he is accordingly called a Saktan. The use of the term has been mainly confined to refer to some Samanthans, Sthanis and Nambudiris but mighty karanavans are also designated by the qualifying term Saktan. Incidents demonstrating the power of a Saktan Nambudiri, a Saktan Muppil Nair (Sthani) are often exciting themes of talk when invitees relax after a feast and enjoy anecdotes, gossip and stories of familiar locale.

Progressive subjection as a facet of dominance can be located in some of the actions of both the centres of power and the taravads of the power group. Actions adversely affecting the economic interests of the dominated are regarded by the villagers as having cumulative

force and effect on them. They say "we are under their 'chavittu' or 'kaladi' which means respectively 'a kick of the leg' or 'under foot'. The sub-tenant under a kanam tenant feels it more precisely for he has to give to his kanam master a part of anything he produces on land in addition to the annual rent of paddy. The master's permission is necessary to cut anything even from the wild growth on his waste lands and any displeasure to him brings forth a warning and scolding in a roaring voice or a penalty in some form or other. Memories of cases of eviction in the past warn him to be watchful of the master's move in matters of land tenure and agree to pay a higher rent if that is demanded. As noted in the first chapter, evictions began in the close of the last century, and the increase of population and pressure on land brought more hands to strive for lands on lease. Therefore the actions of masters which strike at the means of subsistence, the economic and productive activities, are from the vantage point of the sub-tenants a frustrating experience and a matter of progressive subjection. There are instances, not infrequent, of kanam masters raising rent frequently, changing their tenants in the interest of better returns and not minding their hardship to remit the rent in full during years when harvests fail for reasons beyond their control.

From the foregoing treatment of the dominant groups their significance from the point of view of community structure is to maintain the pattern of superordination-subordination and keep the traditional norms of inter-group behaviour the least affected by external forces. With instances from different villages we have seen how a Sthani head, a Nambudiri head or a temple trustee can dominate as centre of power and authority and how janmis of wealth and taravads of power play roles in keeping up the rather traditional pattern of relationships between groups. The pattern can be called traditional since from literature on Malabar castes it can be found that basically the pattern is the same during the pre-British period.

(3) Some areas of communal relations:-

This concept as used here refers to the interacting of members of different castes in groups frequently formed for common and immediate purposes. The caste, sex and age composition of such groups vary but there is considerable informality in the interaction in such groups. The areas of relations considered here to reveal an important phase of intercaste relations are those identified as the door-yard group of gossip, the bathing pool group, the temple visit group, the market going group, the work contact relations, recreation group and the neighbourhood. In spite of the approach pollution between castes such areas of intercaste relations are a regular

feature in primary group life in the day-cycle, week-cycle and seasonal cycle of the peoples' life. These areas of relations in their own way serve for communication and also disseminate selectively new ideas, beliefs and practices and thereby make their contribution to social change and balance. Considerable intercaste contact and communication are possible through the area of social interaction within such groups.

The higher castes have hardly any need to move out of their compounds of residence for their daily requirements. From this point of view, their taravad houses, particularly those of castes of Nairs of the upper group and above, are considerably self-contained and in a sense self-sufficient. Garden crops grow within the house compound, well is adjacent to the kitchen in an almost built-in pattern of construction, bathing pool is at a corner of the house compound, an important deity for frequent worship and the snake grove for periodical worship exist in nearly every garden surrounding the house, cereals, pulses and vegetables are supplied by the tenants at the door, goods and services are delivered home by the various lower castes and (for Nair women) husbands visit them at their house. The members therefore find their home and the garden compound a world in itself and do not face experiences of the primary group life of the kind that obtains in nucleated villages.

Against this background the groups of the kinds mentioned are worthy of note particularly in view of the approach pollution which leads to a more pronounced segregation of castes. The Nairs of the middle and low group have generally less impressive distance between residences and are less self-contained, particularly in receiving goods and services and in the provision of bathing pool. They have to depend more often on the bathing pool of the temples or other pools meant for public use of non-polluting castes. The polluting castes, as can be recalled, live in close neighbourhoods in contrast to the scatter of higher caste residences, and they are the least self-contained.

The door-yard group comprises of females and can be usually seen at the houses of the families of master castes who are wealthy in kanam or janmam lands. In the houses of these castes the men are on their active engagements outside or sit and talk with visitors and servants in the front verandah. The women with their customary respectful avoidance of elderly male kin gather at the back door near the kitchen during slack hours. They engage themselves either doing some sedentary work such as slicing vegetables or attending to personal care of combing their hair and keeping chic or idling out the time. Such occasions repeat thrice a day and facilitate dependants and lower caste women of the village to join for talks ranging

over almost everything. The group might consist of lower castes down to Cherumans who can enter into the compound. All norms of intercaste behaviour are strictly observed and the master-servant pattern of respect and understanding as between tenants and sub-tenants are reflected in behaviour. Boys and girls and young and elderly women, all take part in conversation, and at times, adult males of lower castes are also present for a short duration. Although the communication is with ease and rapture a sense of formality and limits controls its scope. The age, caste and master-servant relations restrict what talks are likely to be entertained without being discouraged by elderly women of the taravad present on the spot. There is often taravad-wise variation in this, the taravads with elderly women of integrity not allowing news mongering or gossip about respectful persons, or silencing members whose themes of talk are proper to be held only between intimate persons or those of the same sex, age and social status.

The bathing pool group is more regularly a seasonal feature than otherwise and is usually for two months in summer when privately owned bathing pools fail. The very wealthy Nair taravads, Sthanis and Nambudiris however have extensive bathing pools of perpetual utility with separate provision for castes of neighbourhood to bathe throughout the year. (see diagram No.II). In all such pools bathing ghats are separate for men and women, and the groups

divided sex-wise consist of castes of Nairs of the middle group and above. The habit of daily enjoying a plunge bath and the attraction of chatting with an assortment of known people draw men and women for a leisurely evening bath. Men sit and chat near the pool, often dispersed into smaller groups according to age, but women usually engage in washing clothes and a leisurely bathing. Often the gathering outstrips bathing accommodation and there are more and more sub-groups chit-chatting and waiting their turn. Communication is much less under restraint here as intimacy can govern the choice of topics and no individual dominates the scene. Those contemplating marriage often make use of such occasions to sort out prospective brides, for here men and women come close, half nude, and women in such situations welcome an appraisal of their beauty with a view to matrimony. (The Nambudiri women, however, are an exception for they have purdah and have to use bathing ghats roofed as hide-outs). Behaviour of respect between master and servant as well as respectful avoidance and restrictions on behaviour with kin, as in the case of one's elderly maternal uncle, are all observed as best as the spatial provision permits. There are usually two to four bathing pools in a village where such gathering takes place in summer, and at one or two private pools, those in the neighbourhood form groups throughout the year. The scope

of communicability and the content of communication in this group is more than what obtains in other groups, the more so among women who have few occasions of social intercourse outside the gate of their house. Among women there is a mild sense of achievement if one gathers the maximum of news in the village and beyond through such available channels of communication. The news include trivial and serious matters such as (within the higher castes) which girl or woman in the neighbourhood is in her periods, who is pregnant, who is on the way to a quarrel with her husband, who is alleged of adultery in that area in general, how fortunes of other taravads or other women in the village are fluctuating and what exciting incidents have taken place in known areas. For men, bathing pool group is one for important talk as well as for leisurely gossip, and for all, it is also an occasion to get introduced to guests and new marriage relatives of the village.

The temple worship groups form on auspicious days when visits to the different temples are desirable. The caste composition here is the same as in the bathing pool groups but it usually comprises of female and young boys. The groups form only when the temple is a little distant, and a group forms from each higher caste sector of the village, forms the neighbours calling on each other to gather and walk up. The group has its identity until it merges with such other groups or with the larger gathering

at the temple. The very devotional predisposition of the group limits the range of subjects on which communication can take place.

The market groups consist of both masters and servants proceeding to the weekly market a few miles away. Often such a group consists chiefly of a group of castes such as the Nairs of a sector of the village, the Tandans and Cherumans from other sectors, each journeying in separate groups. Nair women do not join but women of polluting castes, particularly of the Cherumans join the respective group. The rules of pollution are ignored and there is considerable freedom of expression and communication since elderly or important members of wealthy taravads do not go to the market.

The recreation groups which form with some frequency exist among the Nairs of the middle group and above. Among them young Nair men may organise parties for hunting wild pig and small game. Polluting castes are represented by a few skilled hunters and assistants and the game is shared among all participants. Other recreation groups are of adolescent boys playing a few kinds of outdoor games during the month of Onam festival, and after the second harvest when extensive areas are available for the games. Here again, there is free mixing between participants of castes above Cherumans. Other recreation groups of the type with multi-caste participants

are confined to occasions of play or pastime at the festival days of Tiruvatira (December) and Vishu (April). At Onam and Tiruvatira women of several taravads in a sector of the village gather in one of the important taravads, usually that of the power group, and entertain themselves in dance. It is only the children of well-to-do taravads who have the leisure to form daily play groups within or around their residential area. In such play groups there may also be a sprinkling of children of the upper polluting castes in the neighbourhood. In all recreation groups caste of the participant does not by rule limit the extent of participation but children of dependent and lower castes tend to bestow leadership in games to the children of their masters.

The area of activities of recreation in social life is much wider than what is covered here when it comprises of the allied field of entertainments of more or less annual frequency. At such occasions of large gatherings of people a feature relevant to be noted here is that entertainments which require intelligent or specially trained appreciation and refined tastes are either not open to polluting castes or do not find any audience among them. There is for instance kathakali which creates the least interest among polluting castes even in places where they can witness it from afar. 'Chakkial Kuthu' which is probably the earliest known

histrionic art of Kerala, allied in a manner to kathakali, is not open to women and polluting castes.¹⁰ The play 'Pankali' staged by the polluting caste of Panans annually has audience often including males of Nair castes but the usual colour of its mild obscenity or appeal through crude expressions fades when elderly members of master families venture rather sportively, as they seldom do, to witness it.¹¹

 10. The Art Journal 'Marg' (vol.XI, December, 1957) gives a balanced and short account of kathakali and chakkial kuthu. However, some of the social implications of chakkial kuthu do not seem to have been studied by anybody. For instance, chakkial kuthu is performed in temples and although Nambudiris can see it and they are more often the target of the Chakkial's lively wit, it cannot be staged in a Nambudiri house. Polluting castes and women are forbidden to see it. The fact of excluding polluting castes seem to have had a political significance in the past in that Chakkial's remarks are often a correcting directive against the autocratic power of village heads of all descriptions, as well as the higher political authorities.

I cite an instance relying on what was reported to me by informants to show how strictly women are disliked among the audience. Over five years back in South Malabar a few women of a wealthy royal family with modernised outlook presented themselves in fashionable dress to witness Chakkial Kuthu. The Chakkial on the stage appeared to be pale and blank at the presence of the women, but he soon gathered up his bearing and tactically switched on to the description of the phenomenally huge and precious bell-metal vessel used at a feast. He resourcefully selected a few words of pun and also some words of onomatopoeic connotation to describe the vessel, and in effect it was also an anatomic description of a woman of alluring figure and sex appeal. Immediately the women disappeared from the scene.

11. Nambudiris cannot witness the Panan's Pankali not because of the latter's pollutability but seemingly due to the crude dialectic variations in their speech and the tint of obscenity which sometimes characterises the play.

How far folk art in Kerala, in all its variety, entail multi-caste participation and supplement the sense of social interdependence and cohesion is a field worthy of investigation.

Relationships between families of different castes by contact during work is another area of communal relations. In spite of the social distance between castes there is considerable familiarity arising through work contacts. In seasonal agricultural work Nairs of the middle group, both men and women, and those of the less well-to-do families of the Nairs of the upper group closely mix with lower castes except those below Cherumans. In each sector of the village are such work parties which might often consist of the Nair masters and their servants. Nair taravads of wealth have, as well, a few Tandan or Cheruman labourers almost daily engaged in garden work around the taravad house and attending to casual and sundry needs of labour. Such labourers have respectful avoidance and silence towards the elderly males but they are at informal ease in talking to the women folk. As servants in almost regular employ they work with a sense of responsibility and know many a detail about every member of the taravad. They also keep a caretaker's watch over the children of the taravad and inculcate in them caste-consciousness in behaviour if the characteristic child-like indifference leads to its neglect. Children often learn from their correctives the conduct speech of

command or address over lower castes. Child-care in taravads is seldom assigned to any one domestic servant. The domestic servants often include an impoverished kin or individuals of dependent families of 'touchable' lower castes, and all servants in general play an important role in shaping the attitude and behaviour of children to be consistent with their caste and social status of their taravad. There is usually considerable informality in speech and behaviour between young men or adolescent boys of a master's taravad and elderly men of a dependent taravad, a feature that hardly obtains between members of taravads of the same lineage or of the same social status. Consequently such dependents, as servants or pattakkar are often entertaining friends and also educators of the boys of the master's taravad in matters which cannot find a place in formal curricular teaching. For example, ways and instances of tolerant cheating to get wealth, the scope of black-magic in different fields of activity, knowledge about sex, abhorrence against sexual interest crossing into polluting castes are all aspects of knowledge which can be cumulatively acquired from such sources.

The freedom and confidence with which Nair women command over males of polluting castes have a basis in the contrasting pattern of marital residence of the two. Nair women are throughout their life in their natal house

and habitat, and the polluting castes above Cherumans have fraternal polyandry by which males do not disperse but live all through under the sway of the same master taravad. The men of polyandrous service castes around are too well known to the women of a taravad where as the visiting husbands of such women do not enjoy, if necessity arises, such an overbearing confidence in commanding over the same men. Nair women, however, on the other hand, take much time to know through and through the wife of a few brothers of such castes and develop understanding with her. Castes still lower have no polyandry but their virilocal residence favours to create the same feature in relations with Nair women.

Inspite of the dispersal of residences multi-caste neighbourhood relations exist and it has more importance in the relationships between women. A Malayalam saying which conveys this importance is that "the enemy in the neighbourhood is more consoling than a relative afar" for the spatial distance between relatives may render instantaneous help in distress almost out of reach. Neighbourhood people are always known too well by contacts, and knowledge about each other through work parties and through other areas of communal relations tone up a further sense of mutual obligation. Women of Nair castes who can personally afford lend money to lower caste women in the neighbourhoods, vessels for feasts on loan are

supplied to castes above Cherumans and items such as agricultural implements are too often lent to any of the castes around. Neighbourly help is not governed by considerations of service relations, but often for loans of money, women take security of a vessel or an ornament and charge a small interest. Money lending in small sums is too recurring a demand from the needy for there is no caste devoted to it in the village economy. Manifest neighbourliness in the sense of frequent overt activities exemplifying neighbourly relations may not be impressive in the village. But there is always λ latent neighbourliness which generates from a genuine urge to help neighbours across caste boundaries in times of need.¹²

The areas of social relations considered here have an important relevance in understanding how modern influences work and affect individual groups and inter-group relations. This aspect will be treated in the a lat~~x~~er chapter, but it is instructive to note in the present context that such relations as considered have an important bearing on the mobility of ideas and beliefs up and down the hierarchy at any level. The Nairs can emulate the Nambudiris as far as is practicable in the context of the social structure, by absorbing beliefs

12. The distinction between the two kinds of neighbourliness is that drawn by Peter Mann in his article "The Concept of Neighbourliness" in *American Journal of Sociology*, vol.60, No.2, September, 1954, p.164.

and practices, but the same Nair is also under structurally favourable conditions to accept several things from the lower castes. The Nairs' patronage of the Subramanya temple of the Tandans, the knowledge of curative and even malevolent magic among several of the touchable castes, the knowledge of quack medicine and secret lore of recipes for illness, abortion, snake-bite and the like are all instances of how suggestibility and communicability spread these upwards from polluting castes. In many a known instance a secret knowledge is held confined to the higher caste individual or taravad which receives it without imparting it horizontally to others of the same caste, and in each case, receivers get it afresh from intimate lower caste sources. It is frequently seen that even without any modern influence a patient of any of the higher castes accepts treatment of a reputed Ayurvedic physician, but with the connivance of a few members of his family, makes concealed efforts to follow simultaneously a few magical or herbal prescriptions of a Tandan or Mannan in the neighbourhood.

(4) Religious worship:-

In the religious worship of the various castes can be seen behaviour reflecting a certain degree of vertical integration between castes, a process which still continues. This is to a considerable extent due to the possibilities of social contacts, communication and suggestibility characterising the hierarchical structure.

In the light of data from my focal villages the temples can be regarded as of three kinds, locally so recognised, as primarily commanding affiliations from three groups of castes. These are the ambalams housing deities of vedic Hinduism (the Brahminic deities), the kavus with non-Brahminic deities who are of prime importance to Nairs and the "Kovils" of the upper polluting castes, chiefly of Tandans and the immigrant castes of Chettis having the deity Subramanya. Again there are snake groves in the compound of residence of many a family of castes of the upper polluting group and above. The matrilineal castes have a further focus of worship in their dead ancestors whose ghosts are supposed to be accommodated in a room in the taravad house. There are several minor deities and devils worshipped by each group or groups of polluting castes but they are not very significant in this context of pointing out an avenue of intercaste ties with a few illustrations.

The main Brahmin Gods are Vishnu, His different anthropomorphic manifestations and Shiva. The non-Brahmin Gods are Bhagavati (alias Kali) and Aiyappan or his manifestations. Subramanya is a God more popular in Tamil districts outside Malabar but in my focal area he is a God particularly of a few specific castes as mentioned and Tandans regard him as an established immigrant God accepted or brought by them from very early times.

Bhagavati is the Goddess of war, small-pox and

soil and Aiyappan, the God of forests, hills and wild animals. Both the deities are indigenous to Malabar since their crude or refined manifestations in some form or other are seen in all nooks and corners revered by all non-Brahmin castes and in a very limited manner by Brahmins. The Vettakkaran, a variant of Aiyappan, is particularly worshipped by Sthanis and Samanthans especially those in the more hilly parts of Malabar. All Brahmin deities are vegetarians, Subramanya is as well a vegetarian God, and non-Brahmin deities except Subramanya are non-vegetarians.

The Ambalams have Brahmin priests in Nambudiris and Imbrandiris but the priestly office of the kavus, traditionally the domain of a caste of Nairs of the middle group (Chotha or Kulangara Nairs) has been getting filled by an Imbrandiri, a Pattar or a Nambudiri. And in consequence, by the beginning of this century, every third or fourth kavu in a group of neighbouring villages has a Brahmin priest, a feature observable with more frequency today. Alternatively, an Imbrandiri or a Nambudiri displaces the non-Brahmin priest of the kavu during the a few days of annual festival after the formal initiation of activities of the period, a practice which has slowly covered all kavus with non-Brahmin priests.¹³

13. Dr.C.A.Menon, in his book "Kali Worship in Kerala" (University of Madras, 1953) pp.21-7, mentions the Brahminisation of priestly offices in Kavus all over Malabar.

In my area, in and around the first two villages, Mangottu kavu and Arangottu kavu have Imbrandiri priests, Paryanam-patta kavu, Kali kavu and Kirur kavu have Chotha Nairs, and Cherampatta kavu has a Pattar priest. In the third village in the kavus of Bhagavati and Vettekkaran the priests are Nambudiris. In kavus where Brahmins are priests, and as well in kavus during the short period of Brahmin priesthood, there is no sacrifice of fowls or goats and the "Pooja" (worship) is known as "Uttama Pooja" (refined and superior worship). During the festival period animal sacrifice is forbidden in the whole area of tattakam (the area of official divine care of the deity) even to propitiate any of the lower deities by any caste. But on the final festival day, in several of the kavus, animal sacrifice is permitted at a distant spot around it even when a Brahmin is the priest. All kavus, whether there is animal sacrifice or not, are believed as polluted on the final festival day and there is a purificatory ritual (sudhi kalasam) to restore the kavu and its deity to the state of normal purity.

Nambudiris do not go and worship at the kavu except irregularly when the kavu is held under their management and priesthood, whereas all non-polluting castes frequent ambalams. But it is significant that in each Nambudiri house is a sacred room housing a Bhagavati who is patronised by all members of the illom by regular worship. The Nambudiris regard that this deity is a higher manifestation

of Kali or Bhagavati of the numerous kavus, and is known as Durga, but her oracle belongs to the caste of Variyar, a non-Brahmin temple caste. The oracle gets possessed by the deity and through him the Bhagavati communicates to the members of the illom the degree of satisfaction she gets by worship or a directive in a situation of distress. Such communications are not a feature of worship at ambalams nor are there oracles. To offer propitiatory songs to the Bhagavati the Kurup (a specialist of the rank of the middle group of Nairs) serves at the illom preparing, as he does at Bhagavati kavus, the esoteric diagram of ritual meanings on the floor with saffron and other powders of various colours. Thus we see that the specialists connected with the maintenance of the 'Nambudiris' Bhagavati' are chiefly or often exclusively non-Brahmins. Nambudiris in the focal area also occasionally visit and worship the Bhagavati at Tirumandhamkunnu in the same taluk and that Bhagavati is possibly Durga and is widely recognised as of greater power presiding over all Kalis of a wider area (presumably the pre-British Nadu). The performance of 'Chakkial Kuthu' at any kavu can however be attended by Nambudiris although their caste has forbidden getting it staged at their house.

The urayma (combined trusteeship and management) of several kavus and nearly all ambalams is hereditarily held by Nambudiri illoms. Several kavus have at known times in the past, after the middle of last century

passed into Nambudiri urayma and there are a few kavus as in the village of Kolappulli, held under the combined urayma of two or three illoms, or of one or two illoms and a Sthani taravad.

Most of the kavus and ambalams have considerable wealth in paddy lands under janmam ownership. The kanam tenants of ambalams of Shiva and Vishnu are bound by contract to conduct in turn a feasting (varam) of Nambudiris annually at the respective ambalams. Those of the kavus of Durga Bhagavati have also to do it, but those of other kavus are, in a good number of cases, bound to conduct a less luxurious feasting called 'uttu' chiefly meant for non-Nambudiri Brahmins. Thus the feasting of Nambudiris and other Brahmins at ambalams is initially an arrangement made by the Nambudiris themselves as informants say "we feast them because we are paid for it since it is a part of the rent." However the need for doing it is built into the belief system since any wealthy individual of non-polluting castes often offers to conduct it in addition to what is bound by contract, and as noted, defaults in conducting due feasts might be pointed out by the astrologer as a cause of maladies in a taravad. On the other hand, as has been mentioned, Nambudiris regard it a religious obligation to feed any body who drops in at the time of meals at noon, particularly Brahmins or residents around. The fact that varam

and uttu are chiefly a contractual obligation, atleast initially, also emerges from an instance which I recorded. In Mangottu kavu, two miles from Munnurkode, an efficient Nair manager took charge about four decades back. Seeking new means of meeting the increasing expenditure he ordered the tenants to remit the varam expense in paddy in lieu of conducting the feast. There was some protest from the elderly tenants but his will could work probably because the trustees of the temple were not Nambudiris. In the case of some temples under the urayma of Sthanis the tenants are similarly bound by contractual obligations to conduct feast for a few days, usually seven, during the festival period, for the males of the Sthani taravad and all the Brahmin visitors.

The matrilineal castes below Ambalavasis have their ancestor worship which is purely an affair of the taravad but very rarely are occasions when special worship is offered to the ancestors as directed by an Ilayad, a degraded caste of Nambudiris. In the matter of snake worship the priests for Nambudiris are from among themselves but for the rest of the castes in general the polluting caste of Pulluvans officiate as priests. However, among Nairs there are snakes of superior as well as ordinary divinity and the former require to be propitiated through a Nambudiri priest, particularly when an astrologer prescribes to do so even in the case of the less divine snakes. The polluting caste of Tandans

propitiate snakes through the lower Pulluvans but sometimes divination may suggest the need to treat snakes more respectfully and a Tandan priest ranking equal by caste is brought to officiate as a priest.

The Subramanya kovils, usually of Tandans, Chettis, Kallan Muppans and Mannans are not visited by middle and low polluting castes but are patronised by Nair castes of the three groups and the Sthanis. The Nairs, particularly women, visit the kovil on certain days important for that deity, and also eat a dose of the sacred sweet preparation (panchamrita) prepared by the priest. The Tandan priest, Poosari, as noted elsewhere, is above pollution, atleast in relation to Nairs. There are ambalams, few and far between in South Malabar under Nambudiri priesthood where Subramanya, though popular, is housed as one of the few minor deities, and Nambudiris may visit such temples on days important for the worship of Subramanya. Mariyamma, the Goddess of the Chettis, gets periodical patronage from several higher castes for she is recognised as powerful to cure small-pox and even eradicate it from the village ^{if} properly propitiated. The Chetti with a handy idol of the Goddess makes his annual round of visits even to Nambudiri illoms in a few villages around her temple and gets contributions to conduct her annual festival on a grand scale.

There are some deities of the polluting castes known as Mundiyan and Karimkutty who are rather of a crude

disposition and are likely to create cattle disease or even accidental injury to human beings if they feel neglected. Nairs have often to please them if the astrologer advises and if they are not annually propitiated through a Tandan who can handle them and are offered their favourite dish of chicken. Gods and godlings of the polluting castes are usually located unhoused in the open under a milk exuding tree such as Pala, Kalli and Alari. Some of these trees are also the favourite abode of Bhagavati (Kali) in her invisible forms and it is presumably for these reasons that, as noted elsewhere, such trees cannot be cut by anybody in the neighbourhood of an illom particularly when Nambudiri women are pregnant.

It may be noted that in the case of extension of patronage to deities of lower castes the deities are either immigrants such as Subramanyan and Mariyamma or they are located in the house or compound of residence of the higher castes. The Bhagavati is housed by the Nambudiri in his residence and often a location is seen allotted in the garden around a Nair house as the abode of Mundiyan or Karimkutty and lower castes are hired to propitiate them for specific benefits.

Deities are for general welfare but some have the powers of bestowing special benefits on the devotee or curing a particular disease. One's relatives and acquaintances must have developed faith in the efficacy of worshipping certain deities of a lower caste. Therefore,

choice of deities far and near for worship at different times in a year is, apart from one's own discretion, often made at the bidding of the astrologer or some relative or acquaintance. But choices operate within the limits outlined in the few foregoing paragraphs.

Every village, except those mentioned in the second chapter as feeder villages, has deities of all categories located chiefly within it, or a wider area comprising one or two of the contiguous villages. Each village is also a tattakam (literally a roofed interior) area of an important Bhagavati, a group of several neighbouring villages making the total tattakam of such a deity. Tattakam areas of several such deities are under the divine care of a higher Bhagavati, a pattern which had territorial and political significance in pre-British times. Under this pattern, naturally, all villages have tattakams of one Bhagavati within it or nearby and of another higher and more powerful Bhagavati distantly located. Often, possibly due to the redrawing of pre-British village boundaries, different sectors of a village are within the tattakam of different Bhagavatis. For each village the tattakam-Bhagavati reigning over it is the official village deity. It is to her that offerings of several castes are bound to be made during the days of annual festival at her kavu.

The annual festival of the official deity lasting

a few days represents the unity of castes, and differences of social status of important Nair taravads of the village within the total 'tattakam' area. The participation by Nambudiris is limited to their contribution towards expenses and the payments they make to the polluting castes who, as noted beforehand, go around to all houses performing their mask dances. The programme of the festival day consists of the staging of individual celebrations of castes or groups of castes from each village within the tattakam area. The individual celebration, 'vela' is the procession in which the chief leading items are the bullock-play and mask dances. The bullock-play is a crude and hilarious dance of youngmen carrying a bullock of life-size made of hay and cloth, and it is a feature of the vela of each of the castes who participates. Nairs of all castes combine and form one vela and there is a separate vela for each of the polluting castes of Tandans, Mannans, Panans, Cherumans and Parayans. The precedence in staging and the places of access of various castes at the temple premises reflect the order of ranks of these castes. Another feature of the festival period reveals recognition of differential importance of various taravads of the upper group of Nair castes. When the festival period is formally inaugurated a few days prior to the festival day of celebrations, each day is open for a taravad to conduct the devotional singing of songs of invocation by

a specialist. This not inexpensive offering is permitted by the temple management giving an order of priority according to the social status of the taravad, the Sthanis, those historically connected with the temple, the very wealthy and wealthy in order, being given their turn on each day. The taravads of the power group usually get their turn within the first few days after the inauguration of the period.

The festivals of the ambalams are characterised by little participation by the polluting castes, and the celebrations are more in the hands of specialists, but patronage is extended by all non-polluting castes with full fervour.

In the village of Munnurkode the Bhagavati of the village is two miles away, but there is one temple of Shiva and one of Vettekkaran and one kovil of Subramanya. In Karattukursi there is one of the village Bhagavati, one of Vishnu and one kovil of Subramanya. In Kolappulli there is one temple of Shiva and Bhagavati combined, one of Vettekkaran, one of Vishnu and one of Shiva. The Subramanyan kovil which is within easy reach of the villagers is in the contiguous village of Karakkad.

Broadly speaking, the influence of Nambudiris on others to make them patronise Brahminic Gods and priests has worked with much success. This is chiefly due to the recognition of Nambudiris as ritual and religious superiors

in the hierarchy and partly due to their power generating from the high economic status they enjoy. Yet there are occasions which illustrate the limits of their success. In the village of Kolappulli is a temple which is in origin of the deity Bhagavati and under the urayma of three taravads. Some time in the past the deity Shiva was installed as an apparently more important God and a Nambudiri priest came to into regular service. Shiva is the janmi of the temple and the temple has an annual income of 800 paras of paddy (today worth about Rs.3000/-) in addition to the cash and other valuable offerings made by devotees. The temple is popularly known as ambalam (and not kavu) and yet all informants assert that even today it is the Bhagavati of the temple who is more popular and powerful. There are several such other temples in South Malabar where a vedic deity has been made to be presiding in an imposing building but the temple is equally or more reputed and popular for the more early installed non-vedic deity residing in an inconspicuous part in the premises. In some of such instances a myth rationalises why a vedic deity found an apparently prominent place over the more native ones. We have also seen how the Nambudiris have accepted the indigenous Bhagavati and how Nair patronises the Tandan priest. It is also pertinent to note that astrology often guides to venerate or please deities of the higher and lower castes, and the same astrology as a specialised

branch of knowledge is recognised as traditionally brought into Malabar by the Nambudiris.¹⁴

We can thus see that in religious worship there are, as a whole and at various levels in the hierarchy, intercaste links at the levels of temple trusteeship and management, priesthood, choice of deities, and activities associated with worship. We have also pointed out how far festivals and other activities associated with worship reflect the unity and diversity characterising the social structure.

(5) The ranking of castes:-

The problem of caste ranking is here considered to deal with certain factors which have to be recognised as important in the ranking of castes in Malabar.

Marriott in his recent comparative study of caste ranking and community structure in five different regions of India and Pakistan states with reference to the pre-British period:

"Caste ranking is more elaborate in Kerala than in any other" of the five regions and "services are required to be more intricately differentiated and graduated by caste rank in Kerala than anywhere else in rural India."¹⁵

14. From my sketchy information on the subject it appears that advanced astrology of Nambudiris has at the hands of astrologer Panickers merged with some indigenous system of divination and prescription of remedial measures for misfortunes.

15. McKim Marriott, "Caste Ranking and Community Structure ..." Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute, vol.XIX, 1958, pp.56-8.

He further notes the unilinear ladder-like elaboration of caste ranking of Hindu villages in Kerala and shows the correlation of it with four presumed necessary conditions for elaborate caste ranking. My data permit an attempt to enlighten further that several factors in combination are significant in determining the elaborate caste ranking in a group of neighbouring villages.

Marriott in a more recent article distinguishes between two kinds of theories of caste ranking, the attributional and the interactional. The former theory refers to the view that:

"a caste's rank is determined by its behaviour or attributes. A caste is said to be considered high if its characteristic way of life is judged to be high and pure, or low if its way of life is judged to be low and polluted."

By the latter theory he means that "castes are ranked according to the structure of interaction among them."¹⁶

One important deficiency of attributional theory is, as he notes, that "it has so far given no explanation as to how a large number of discriminations of rank can be made among castes which possess similar corporate attributes."

Regarding Kerala, on the basis of my material, I find it difficult to agree with his statement of a possibility that "south Indian caste may be more attributional while north Indian ranking may be more interactional." I slant

16. McKim Marriott, "Interactional and Attributional Theories of Caste Ranking", *Man in India*, vol.39, No.2, April-June, 1959, p.93.

towards committing that in Malabar what is important between the level of Brahmins and Sthanis on the one hand and the low group of polluting castes on the other is also a few interactional factors. In its details the interpretation of my data can be regarded as applicable to the early decades of this century and back into a major part of the 19th century. At the levels of blocks of castes such as Brahmins, non-Brahmins, upper and lower polluting castes the attributional principle seem to have worked. There are broadly the ranking principles of all India spread such as valuations of occupations and food and services governed largely by ideas of purity and impurity. The interactional factors which contribute to determine rank as can be gathered from my material are the focus of interest here. Marriott, it may also be noted here, recognises the possibility that interactional and attributional factors "may be understood better as two aspects of the same thing..." Shifting attention to interactional factors, as I find in this context, helps to understand (i) the vague ranking of immigrant castes (ii) to recognise later the fact of mobility of groups being related in part to nearly the same set of interactional factors and (iii) to understand the slight differential ranking of the same caste in different areas.

The superiority of Nambudiris is not only in religious and ritual contexts but in a sense it also over-rides

the superiority of non-Nambudiri village heads. Among Sthanis and ruling families the succession to the office of the head of the family is done by a coronation ceremony in which Nambudiris of a few specific illoms have to ascribe the status of the 'head', a practice which as noted elsewhere has taken place in this century as well. After this ritual of ascription the 'head' who comes to the office has 'Panti-Bhojan' (interdining) with the Nambudiris, a life long privilege held by that individual. He has thus a fake ritual status of Nambudiris,¹⁷ which is essential for continuing the traditional (but legally unrecognised) status of any 'ruler'. In the case of Trikkateri Sthani Nair the right to do the ritual is held by Porayannur Nambudiri illom. For the Kavalappara Sthani Nair there are three other illoms hereditarily accredited with the same right, and for that Sthani-head,

17. The head of the Kollengode Raja family, in Palghat taluk, has the right to supply a grass to all Nambudiris who want to perform the sacrificial ritual of 'Yaga'. The Raja head is therefore ranking as the highest among the ruling families in South Malabar and his Brahminic rank symbolised in this way makes him qualified not to show subordination to anybody and he has to avoid bending his body in the form of bowing down before any thing. At ceremonial bathing he is not to bend down for the purificatory plunge bath; instead, he has to walk erect into deeper parts of the pool until his whole body is immersed under water. At ceremonial occasions he cannot walk except over places spread over with white cloth and black coarse shawl. Birth or death pollution in his family does not affect him nor his death impart pollution to his family members, for he is above his natal ritual status.

in addition, when he is in 'stately' procession to his tutelary deity, the Ariyankavil Bhagavati, a few Nambudiris armed with weapons have to lead in front. There are a few families whose heads have no privilege of interdining with Nambudiris probably due to their lowly caste rank during their pre-Sthani career. Such Sthanis, for instance the Mannarghat Sthani family in Palghat taluk, are said to rank relatively low by caste but I am not certain if in the case of all such Sthanis there is a Brahminising ceremony. It is also relevant to note here that Sthani women prefer Nambudiris to Samanthans as their husbands and among the former generally, a less wealthy Nambudiripad is more preferable than a more wealthy Nambudiri for the higher the caste rank of the husband the more the prestige of women who belong to immensely wealthy taravads. The Nambudiris' role to ascribe a Brahminic ritual status shows that the important centres of power and authority need to be Brahminised where such authority and power are not held by Nambudiris or deities who own land.

In dealing with the question of rank, as noted beforehand, the essentially component groups of a Sthani headed village, and as well, such groups of a Nambudiri headed village, show considerable consensus of opinion regarding relative ranks among themselves. It is when a mixture of groups of the two kinds of villages is evaluated

that rank is often disputed. It is instructive to note here that Kiriya Nairs from traditional times are accredited as ranking above all other Nairs and they do not give ritual service to Sthanis who are by caste below their level. In the villages headed by such Sthanis as far as I could ascertain, the essentially component groups in the structure of ritual service relations are castes below Kiriya Nairs.

In recognising interactional factors which enter into the ranking of castes the rank of the Sthani family (ranking above Kiriya Nairs as in my focal area) and the rank of Nambudiripads can be taken as the top ranks and they form the apex groups.

One interactional factor is the degree of association of service of a caste with food and the person (body) and interior of the house of the apex groups. This shows why Kiriya Nairs and Charnas are most important to Sthanis and Sudra Nairs to Nambudiris. The connection or association with the person here involves long duration as in this case the attendance on women during menses, child birth and presence at occasions of marriage make up a total duration longer than any other castes cover during such services. It may be argued that these castes are accepted for such services because they are high and not vice versa. It can be true about Kiriya Nairs but not about the other two and it is a fact that

in North Malabar the services of Sudra Nairs to Nambudiris as found in the South is regarded as much self-demeaning and not worthy for any Nair who claims a high rank. A second factor is the rank of the apex groups and the degree of exclusiveness of service to these groups even when service is generally considered as menial. This factor often operates in combination with the first. The Sudra Nairs and Charna Nairs are instances, the latter's claim for superiority over Pallichans and Ulladans being exclusiveness in services to Sthanis. Further, in fact Charna Nairs serve Sthanis in almost similar roles as Sudras serve Nambudiris but the rank of the Nambudiris become the basis on which Sudras can be superior to Charna Nairs. The instances of adiyar prestige groups under Nambudiris show that the rank of the apex group served is significant in determining the rank of the exclusive ritual service dependents. The Ulladans in my fourth village (to be described) have specific ritual roles to the Sthani head there who originally belonged to Pallichan caste and those Ulladans definitely rank higher than the Ulladans in my focal villages. Also, as we find, the lower ranking castes serve several castes including the apex groups. Some immigrant castes like Tarakans render a variety of services to several castes and the rank of such castes is rather vague. Tarakans serve Nambudiris as well, and have no divorce or widow remarriage, the features which Nambudiris value

high. Yet Nambudiris do not like to regard them in any context as higher than the middle group of Nairs. A third factor is the consensus in evaluation of the ritual value of the service of the caste. This is not strictly restating the problem of ranking itself. The question is who evaluates and whose opinion carries weight. Sometimes the opinion of the apex groups may differ from the general evaluation by others and the tendency in such cases is to regard as worthy of recognition the valuation by apex groups as the basis on which a caste in question claims its rank. Some of the temple castes have in different places questionable superiority over Sudra and Kiriya Nairs. The Nambudiri head would place Variyars, for instance, above Sudra Nairs but the latter do not fully recognise it for the Variyars in addition to respectable service also attend to menial work in temples. The Kiriya Nairs, the highest, also do not enjoy superiority of rank above any possibility of reproach. Sudra Nairs in a mood of gossip or sportive ridicule would refer to the Kiriya Nairs as "Kolli Untikal" which means feeders of fire wood, with reference to their role of cooking for their Sthani-heads at ritual occasions. At lower levels in the hierarchy it is the opinion of families of the power group which tends to stay. As noted the Tandans are reported to have rarely projected a claim to be placed in the same "panti" of

Nair washerman and barber at feasts among some Nair castes. The claim hardly ripens into a sustained dispute owing to the dictatorial interference of Nairs of the power group. For feasts at Nair taravads it is a recurring bother to allot seats to castes below Nairs recognised as immigrant castes or castes with a more remote immigrant ancestry. Castes such as Chettis, Kaduppottans and Tarakans are any time likely to be accommodated in the wrong panti for serving them food or guided to sit for dining in close proximity with castes whom they think as lower. When this happens they grumble out their annoyance referring to precedents of better treatment at a more popular taravad or at the house of the village head at occasions of feasts; if unheeded, they might walk out in protest and mar the grace of the feast. A fourth factor is the rank of the castes, long since established on attributional criteria, whom a caste is obliged to serve. This factor helps to understand why some of the immigrant castes are placed low and how some castes of the same name with the same skilled occupation, or one slightly different, do not have the same rank. A carpenter caste (Asari) is known as Chakkasari, the crude oil-press maker, and he serves mainly the low castes who extract oil. This caste is therefore lower than the Asaris not only for the reason of crudeness of their work but also the rank of their masters. The immigrant oil-extracting Chettis have two castes, one who only makes oil and

another who goes hawking it to the door of any customer in need, and the hawker caste ranks lower, one of the reasons being that it serves even the polluting caste of Tandans often at their door.

In our search for interactional factors, we can also see that at certain levels in the hierarchy, some castes continue to place, in some contexts, greater emphasis on attributional factors. An examination of the restrictions on interdining summarised in Table 4 in the previous part of this chapter reveals this feature. For instance, it can be seen that there are a few polluting castes and immigrant castes which do not accept food from Nair castes such as the washerman, barber and the purifier after death pollution, inspite of the fact that some of these castes serve only Nairs of the upper group and above. Thus, as the table shows, for some castes below Nairs there are a few higher castes from whom they cannot accept food because by attributional criteria they are not pure enough although they have been accepted as ranking higher.

The four factors mentioned here as interactional have, in the ultimate analysis, relationship with attributional factors. However, viewing them with accent on interactional aspects also leads us to recognise a continuity in more recent decades in that secular status of a group is in part dependent upon the operation of these factors in a modified form. This feature of continuity

can be considered in a later chapter.

Secular status and ritual status:-

Allied to the problem of ranking is the need to recognise secular status as distinct from ritual status.

Stevenson who first brought out emphasis on this distinction¹⁸ states:

"The first point to note is that there are two kinds of status - secular status and ritual status - each derived from different sources and socially manifested in different ways. The secular status of individuals within groups, and sometimes even of the groups themselves, is variable and may be determined by such criteria as occupation, skill, education, wealth, land ownership, public office and even marriage customs."

The need for this distinction has not since then been unquestioned for Dumont and Pockock examining the distinction conclude:

"there is one hierarchy and there can, therefore, be only one kind of status"

but in a foot note they add:¹⁹

"Only when we are dealing with the confrontation of modern Indian society with the traditional caste system might it seem profitable to speak of secular values in contradistinction to religious ones."

In my opinion the distinction is useful to understand the social structure of rural Malabar throughout the British period and possibly even earlier. The full argument in support of this statement, however, cannot be brought within the confines of this study.

18. H.N.C.Stevenson, "Status Evaluation", op.cit., pp.45-6.

19. Louis Dumont and D.Pockock, op.cit., No.II, p.54.

The importance of recognising this distinction emerges from several contexts in this chapter where social status differentiation within a caste is evident and where sources of power of the village heads and taravads have been pointed out. In dominance at intercaste levels as well as in relations between families of the same caste, secular status as seen hitherto has a basic importance the nature of which will become further illuminated in the next chapter.

(6) The Moslems:-

Before concluding this chapter a brief note on the role of Moslems in the economy and their relationships with the hierarchy of castes is informative to our knowledge of social structure of the villages. The Moslems known as Mappilas live compactly in a sector of the village or lineally dispersed as noted in the second chapter. The Moslems in my focal area are generally poor the majority of them being comparable in wealth and means of livelihood to the caste of Tandans. They are patrilineal in the major part of South Malabar; their residence is virilocal and they have elementary family except the few wealthy who live in families of the joint type of three and rarely of four generations.

The Moslems have caste-like groups and families of power and prestige among them. An important basis on which families fall into caste-like groups is their caste rank prior to conversion into Islam. Among the Moslems of the focal villages is a hierarchy of three

groups of which the lowest one has a pre-Moslem rank of the polluting castes of Cherumans or below and the highest corresponding to the upper group of Nair castes. The marked tendency is for these groups to remain endogamous and there is no intermarriage between the lowest and the rest. Within the first two groups marriage is further regulated by considerations of the pre-Moslem social status of families. The difference in the social status of these groups can be seen reflected in the seating arrangements for prayer at the mosque and at feasts. In addition, families of power and prestige who usually belong to the first two groups are allotted special seats at the mosque and at all important occasions. A section of the third group, the lowest of all, is formed of the barbers who serve all Moslems, the men as barbers and women as midwives. This tiny section can be regarded as a fourth group scattered widely and remaining at the bottom of the hierarchy.

The relations between Moslems and Hindus are, in the field of occupations, some customary service and employment. A negligible number of families of Moslems in the three villages are verumpattam tenants under Nairs. The rest of them are engaged in a wide range of occupations serving a much wider area than the service castes of Hindus. An important feature of the occupations of the Moslems is that most of their occupations from the

point of view of the needs of the Hindu castes and the village economy in general ^{are} ~~and~~ complementary to, rather competitive against, the roles of the Hindu castes. Occupations which are predominantly a field of Moslems are petty trade in household provisions not locally produced, bullock cart transport, fishing from streams and public low caste pools, quarrying and cutting out laterite blocks for masonry work, sinking wells by blasting rocks, sawing timber, tailoring, construction of crude granite block parapets along boundaries of compounds and for terracing slopes for cultivation, cattle trade, purchasing seasonal garden crops at the producer's door for trading, hawking sundry town-made articles, and the making and maintenance of public roads. Of the Hindu castes the Tandans, however, seek their way to a few of these occupations and find Moslems as competitors. Usually, in manual labour, Moslems out-do all castes and are therefore employed by Hindus in any project that require a plentiful supply of labour within a short time.

Nairs in general keep off a social distance from Moslems, and at taravad houses do not allow them access close to the building, nor allow the high caste bathing pools to be touched by them. The sense of subordination of Moslems is not directed towards any caste but to the wealthy families of the power group and to the village heads or other janmis. This feature of their limited

concern for the castes of various ranks is implied in the saying which means "a dog or a Moslem won't budge off from the way" (to allow one an easy passage). There are in my focal area a few Moslem families which are regarded as highly aristocratic owing to their pre-Moslem caste rank. These families do not eat at the hands of any of the Nair castes.

Some of the polluting castes have customary service relations with the Moslems. The Mannans are frequently in need at Moslem families for remedial magic and herbal cures for sickness. The Panan is their appropriate messenger to carry messages of birth and death to relatives. The Moslem woman goes to her natal house for confinement and her husband has to send through a Panan, or alternatively a Cheruman, the oil and cloth for her use during confinement. The Panan is also the prescribed servant for removing dinner leaves after a feast. The Panan and Parayan are not allowed access to the Moslem's house but the Cheruman can enter anywhere inside the house. He can also help the Moslems half-way in cooking food but when an eatable is cooked he cannot touch it and hence cannot remove it from the oven. Other service castes of the polluting groups work for Moslems on payment and regular dependent labourers of wealthy Moslems get paid as are the tied labourers under the Nairs.

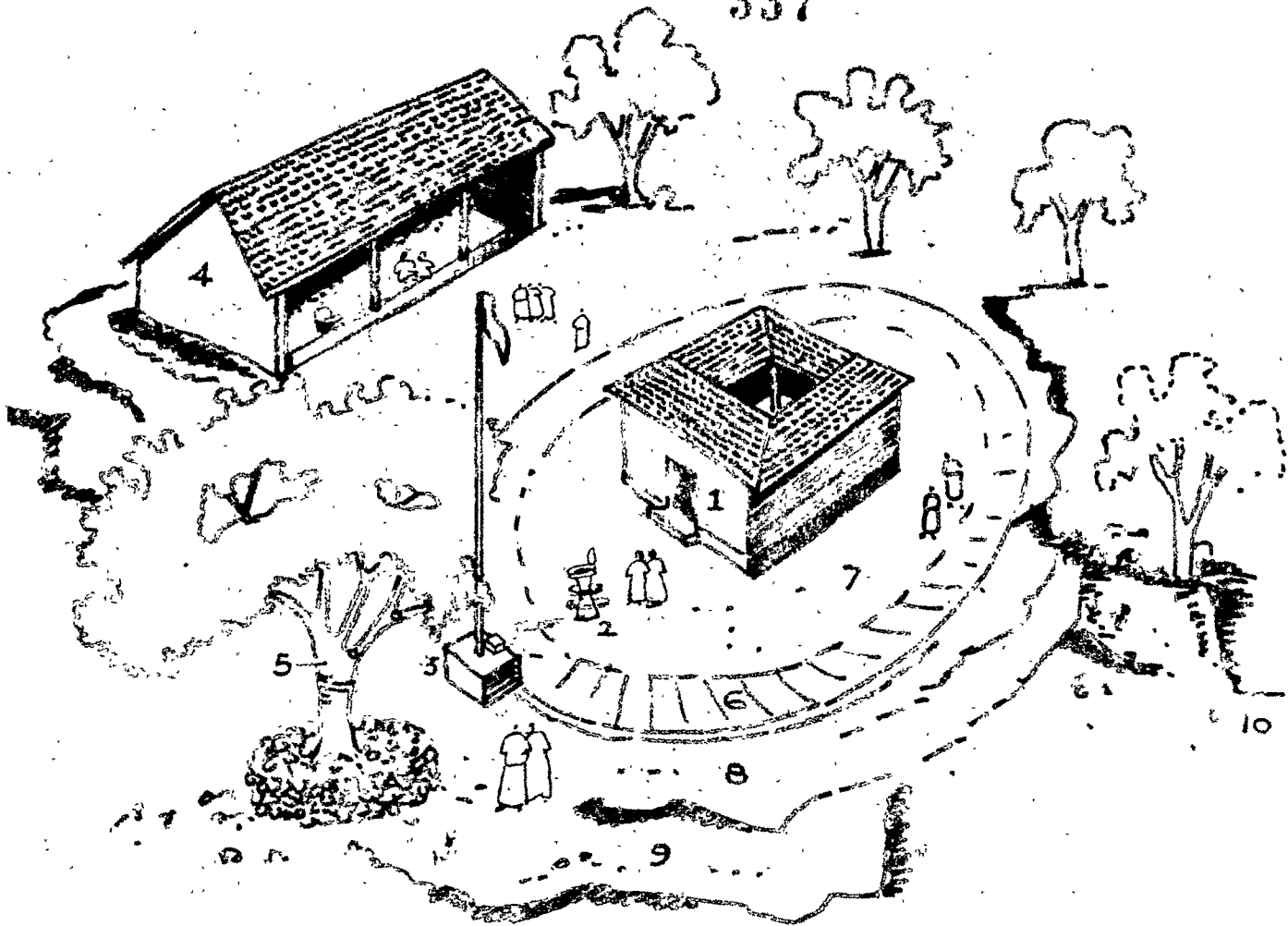


Diagram No.III

A Bhagavati Temple: (Bhagavati Kavu)

1. The enclosure with idol at the roofless centre.
2. Oil lamp (usually of granite).
3. Flag post.
4. "Koothu Madan": a hall for dramatic performance with the front-yard as auditorium.
5. Banyan tree - a limit upto which polluting castes can approach.
6. Stone paved pathway. Nair castes of the low group do not have access beyond this.
7. Nairs of the middle group and have access to this area. ^{above}
- 8, 9, 10.- of differential elevations, upper, middle and low polluting castes (except Nayadi and Malayan) in the same order, use these areas, or areas of corresponding different nearness to the temple for worship or for staging performances on festival days. The Nayadi and Malayan of low polluting castes have no access anywhere near the places marked.

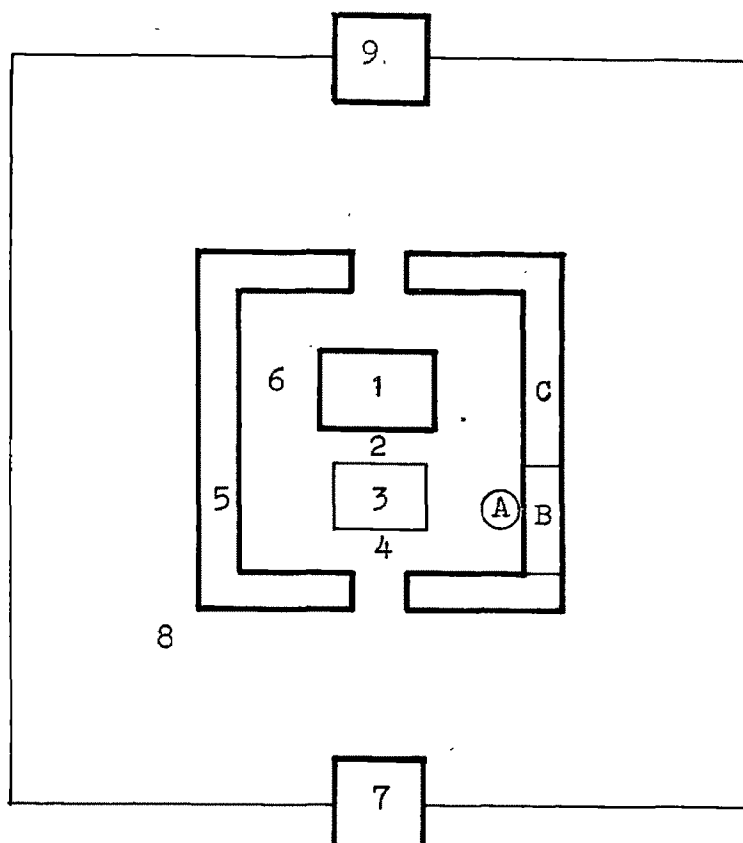


Diagram IV.

Diagram of a temple (Ambalam) as distinct from Kavuv.
(Not drawn to scale)

1. 'Shrikovil' (the 'Vimana' where the idol is located); 2. The spot where Nambudiri women stand and pray; 3. 'Mandapam' (roofed open platform); Nambudiri males can enter there for prayer; 4. the spot for Ambalavasis, Sthanis, Samanthans, Rajas, Moosad, and Elayad, or castes of that level; 5. the 'Nalambalam': the narrow roofed structure on four sides enclosing the Shrikovil; 6. open area for circumambulation for devotees who have access into the enclosure, i.e. those who are permitted at 2, 3 & 4; 7. 'Gopura': gate tower; 8. outer enclosure with high walls on all sides for circumambulation; 9. Gopura at the back of the Shrikovil; A. well; B. 'Tadapalli': the place for cooking food offerings; C. a hall for Ambalavasi castes to make flower garlands.

Note:- The low group of Nair castes have access only upto the gate tower. Castes below them keep farther away according to the scale of pollution. (Traditionally, and in rare cases of temples upto the early decades of this century, even Nairs of the upper group had to confine to the area 8, and may go nearly upto 4.) Drumming and playing the other accompanying instruments ('Timila', 'Idakka', 'Pani', 'Chengalam') within 6 can be done only by Ambalavasi castes. Drumming by Sudra Nairs and some of the Nair castes of the middle group and the playing of the instruments 'Kombu', 'Koralu' and 'Ilattalam', usually specialised by these castes can be done in the area 8 when the priest comes out with an idol for circumambulation in that area.

9. A Nair house of a rather modern type. The building at the right is meant for men.

10. Nair women, a Cherumi girl with leaf umbrella.

11. Bathing pool of a Nambudiri house.

12. A group of Cherumis.

13. Bathing pool of a Nair house.

14. A tandan woman.



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15. Shri Rama temple, Triprayar (Valapad).
16. The Bullock play of Parayans.
17. A Cheruman's modern burial spot, a new trend to imitate some higher castes.
18. At Valapad, Nairs cooking for a Cheruman's feast - quite a recent practice.
19. A Pulluvan with his 'Veena'.



15



18



16



19



17

20. The Cherumans are feasted at a Nair's house at the end of the season's agricultural work. A Panan girl sits apart, behind, at a higher level, for she is higher.

21. A Cheruman group at Karattukursi.



20



21

20. The Cherumans are feasted at a Nair's house at the end of the season's agricultural work. A Panan girl sits apart, behind, at a higher level, for she is higher.

21. A Cheruman group at Karattukursi.