Kerala Brahmins in Transition
A Study of a Nampūtiri Family

by

Marjatta Parpola

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PREFACE

I got my introduction to the Indian subcontinent in January-May 1971, when, together with our two daughters aged 5 and 2, I followed my Indologist husband Asko Parpola on his first field trip to that area. This experience made me radically change my future plans and I became a student of general ethnology and archaeology at the University of Helsinki. I started working in the ethnography section at the National Museum of Finland in 1974.

From 1971 to 1983, going to the field had to remain a dream for me for family and employment reasons. The support from the Academy of Finland for my husband’s project ‘Domestic rituals of the Jaiminiya Samaveda’ included a grant for me to assist him in the field-work and in the arrangement of the field material in 1983 and 1985. I continued field study in 1990, 1992, and 1995-96, not assisting in that project any more, but concentrating on my own research. The Nordic Institute of Asian Studies financed my return air ticket to Kerala in 1990. I direct my thanks to these two institutions. However, I have done most of my research at home and in the field as a hobby during my annual leave and other leisure time without any financial help. For that reason my work has repeatedly had to remain dormant for long periods of time.

I wish to thank my husband for leading me to India and to my subject, and for his invaluable advice in questions of Indology. Likewise my Indian informants for their patience, hospitality, and their laborious attempts to satisfy my curiosity. I thank Matti Sarmela and Jukka Siikala for advice given in their seminars. I also owe thanks to Otso Kantokorpi, Petteri Koskikallio, Anna-Maria Viljanen, and Kaj Öhrnberg for their help in theoretical or practical problems. I thank Henri Schildt for measuring Ravipuram and drawing its floor plan as well as the maps of Kerala, Michael Vollar for revising my English, and Juri Ahlfors, Päiviikki Parpola and Pekka Jussila for advice in problems concerning computer technology.

My hearty thanks go to Pauline Kolenda for reading the manuscript for this publication, and for giving me many helpful suggestions concerning Indian anthropology and style of presentation. I also thank Karen Armstrong for reading the manuscript for my licentiate’s dissertation and for giving valuable advice; Lea Shamgar-Handelman and Don Handelman for shaking off the dust from an early draft, and bringing it to active preparation by giving me useful suggestions; V. K. Ramachandran and Madhura Swaminathan for personal encouragement; and Valen-
tine Daniel, who looked at my field description in 1989, suggested some reading and assured me that the material could be used, apart from my museum work, for an independent study as well.

I know that I am not as deeply interested in a theoretical angle as my advisors might wish. None of these illustrious scholars are responsible for the shortcomings of the result.

Helsinki, in August 1999,

Marjatta Parpola

Note on orthography and transliteration

While speaking of pan-Indian matters, I have, as a rule, used the Sanskrit orthography for names of gods and other concepts, while the corresponding orthography of Malayalam, the language of Kerala, is used when speaking about specifically Kerala contexts. Generally, I have used the standard international transcription system in Indian terms and names. The English spelling is followed in geographical names, and Indian names and terms that have become current in English, and the names that Indian authors use of themselves. In citations the spelling chosen by the authors is often reproduced, but in other cases the international transcription is adopted for the sake of clarity.
CONTENTS

Preface v
Note on orthography and transliteration vi
List of figures xi

I. INTRODUCTION 2

1. AIMS OF THE PRESENT STUDY 3

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 9
   The Vedas and Hinduism 9
   Kerala and its Brahmins, the Nampūtiris 13
      Ancient times 13
      The Second Cōra Empire 14
      The mini-kingdoms and Nampūtiri power 15
      British rule 20
      The West and the nationalist movement in India 23
      Radical reforms in Kerala 26

3. METHODS AND FIELD-WORK 35
   Studying an ancient literate civilization 35
   Focus on the family and household 39
   Sources and field-work 40
      Sources 40
      The focus of my work 46
      Our way of life among the Nampūtiris 48
      Field methods 54

4. INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT PURITY, POLLUTION, AND RITUAL 57
   Hierarchy and power 57
   What is ritual? 68

II. ETHNOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS 70

5. PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL SETTING 71
   Settlement and cultivation in Kerala 71
   Panjal village 72
      The jātis 74
The Nampūtiri manas and their temples 85
Sphere of life of the Nampūtiris 91

6. THE TRADITIONAL BASIS OF POWER: THE LAND 93
   General development in Kerala 93
   Family land 95
      Ownership of cultivated land 96
      Cultivating the paddy 99
   Luck, loss, problems and new chances 110

7. DOMESTIC SPACE 113
   The house and compound as a microcosmos 113
   The Panjal Nampūtiri compound 117
      The space outdoors 117
      Buildings in the compound 122
      Rooms 129
      Fittings and furnishings 137
      Stages of life and cyclical activities 141
   Ownership of territory and privacy 142
   Other castes 143
   Will the microcosmic near-completeness last? 144

8. MEN OF THE FAMILY 147
   Categories of Nampūtiris 147
      Grāma and gotra 147
      Status groups 148
      Stages in the life of Brahmin males 152
   Six generations 160
      Ancestors 160
      IR and his generation 163
      IR’s children and their generation 168
      IR’s grandchildren and their generation 169
   Profits and losses 171

9. WOMEN OF THE FAMILY 175
   Purity of women 175
   Friends 178
   Unmarried girls 180
      Pre-puberty 180
      Tirantu-kalyānam or the rite of the first menstruation 181
   Education 189
13. Is Panjal a Nampūthiri village? 311
  Distance pollution 311
  Intercaste relations, dakṣiṇā and dāna 317
  Joint and separate cultural efforts of the castes 321
  Westernization and globalization 326
  Caste, class and political power 329

14. CONCLUSIONS 335

ABBREVIATIONS OF FREQUENTLY MENTIONED PERSONAL NAMES 347

EXPLANATORY LIST OF NATIVE TERMS AND NAMES 349

BIBLIOGRAPHY 393

APPENDICES 403
  1. Śaṅkara-Smṛti 1.12.4 in Sanskrit 403
  2. The Malayalam prose commentary on Śaṅkara-Smṛti 1.12.4 by Ti. Si. Paramēśvaran Mūssatavarkal 405
  3. An annotated English translation of Śaṅkara-Smṛti 1.12.4 by Asko Parpola 407
  4. Śaṅkara’s 64 rules quoted by Logan, with Fawcett’s minor changes and comments 411
  5. Examination of Śaṅkara’s 64 rules as translated and grouped by S. Venkitasubramonia Iyer 414
  6. Kerala customs according to Gundert 420

INDEX 427
LIST OF FIGURES

cover: Water-vessel *kiṇṭi* (drawn by Henri Schildt)
1. Map of Kerala 4
2.-3. Nampūtiri boys being taught Sāmavedic chant 10
4. The *agnicayana* ritual 12
5. Old Nampūtiri reading a newspaper 30
6. Nampūtiri studying his palm-leaf manuscripts 36
7. Winding the cotton string for a marriage badge 49
8. Caster family at work 59
9. Map of Panjāl village in the early 1960s 73
10. Village goldsmith at work 80
11. The Lakṣmi-Nārāyaṇa temple in Panjāl 86
12. Village scene with paddy fields and craftsmen's houses in Panjāl 86
13. Nampūtiri performing a *pūja* in the Ayyappan temple 89
14. Women worshipping the idol in the Ayyappan temple 89
15. Men with their teams of animals preparing the soil for planting 100
16. Tractor ploughing the fields 100
17. Labourer strengthening the paddy-field walls with mud 104
18. Women replanting seedlings 104
19. Women threshing paddy with rods 107
20. Rubber sheets drying 112
21. Nampūtiri house 118
22. Granite image of a cobra and granite snake temples 121
23.-24. Nampūtiri houses 124
25. Thatched house with palm-leaf walls 126
26.-28. Making of sun-burnt bricks, and a house built of them 128
29.-30. Plan of a Nampūtiri house: the ground floor 130
31. Meal in the old style 132
32. Television-watching 132
33. Preparing food on the floor 135
34. Modern kitchen and eating space 135
35. The *annaprāśana* rite 153
36.-37. The Muṇṭattukkāṭtu Māmaṅṇu kin group 162
38. Family photograph 163
39. Nampūtiri lady dressed in the traditional way 178
40. Nampūtiri bride and bridegroom 193
41. Nampūtiri with his two wives 210
42. Nampūtiri ladies performing a *nivēdyam* 218
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>Nampūtiri lady lighting the evening wicks</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>Informants and researchers</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>Starting the curds</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.</td>
<td>The <em>samāvartana</em> rite</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>Nampūtiri performing his morning ritual</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.</td>
<td>The holy tank of a Nampūtiri house</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.</td>
<td>Nampūtiri lady taking her bath in the tank</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.</td>
<td>Women’s hairstyles</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.</td>
<td>The loincloth of an Ādhyan lady</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52.</td>
<td>The loincloth of an Āsyan lady</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53.</td>
<td>Washerwoman waiting outside the verandah</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54.</td>
<td>Nampūtiri transacting with his family goldsmith</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55.</td>
<td>Districts of Kerala</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To Asko, Päivikki, Pekka and Mette