

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

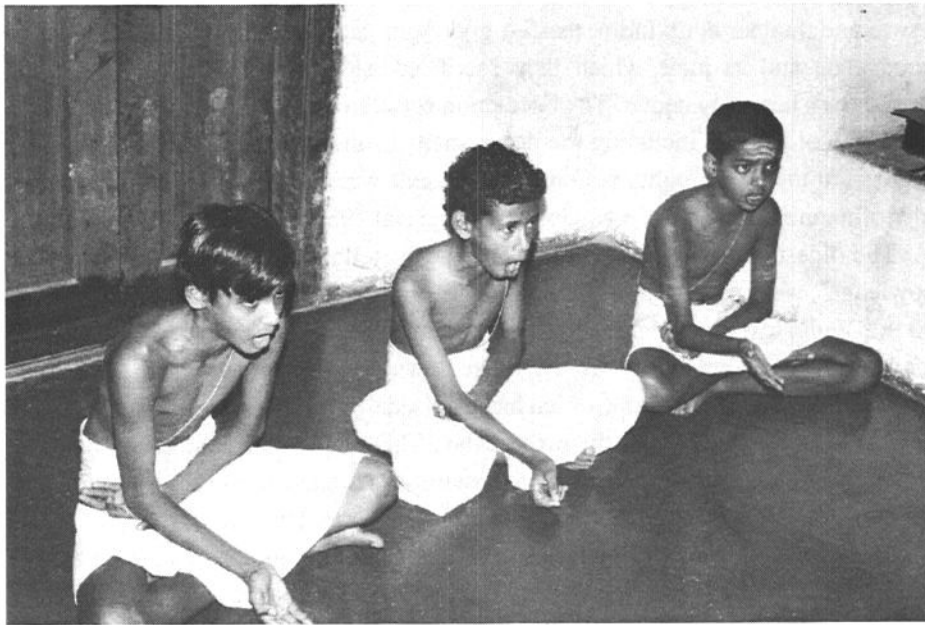
THE VEDAS AND HINDUISM

As this study concerns Brahmins who have carried on their ancient traditions until the present time, and who represent unique orthodoxness even among their own social segment, it is necessary to briefly introduce the Vedic texts and ritual practices created by the Brahmins in the past. The present Brahmins are, of course, Hindus, and therefore I will also give a brief characterization of Hinduism and some deities which frequently come up in village life in Kerala. The *varṇas*, the caste system and castes/subcastes (*jāti*), will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

According to the prevalent opinion, more than 3000 years ago, horse, cattle and sheep raising pastoralists started arriving on the Indian subcontinent from the steppes of eastern Europe and Central Asia. They spoke an early form of Sanskrit, which belongs to the Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family. These newcomers worshipped powers of nature described in anthropomorphic terms, like the war and thunder deity Indra, the fire god Agni, and Soma, personified *soma*, a sacred plant and its juice which they sacrificed and drank in their rituals, also referred to as heavenly nectar. The interaction between these nomads and the earlier inhabitants of India – including the descendants of the urban Indus Civilization – gave rise to the Vedic culture. Central to its cult was the sacrifice, on which the order of nature rested. (Cf., e.g., Gonda 1960; Staal 1983, I: 1; Erdosy 1995.)

The oldest surviving textual body of Indian religions, the Veda or '(sacred) knowledge', was composed by Brahmins, the priestly class, between around 1400-400 BC. Vedic texts include poems, hymns, prayers, and descriptions of myths and rites. Before the Vedic texts were written down many centuries later, they were memorized as an oral tradition, which has lived side by side with written texts over a period of 3000 years up to the present day. This is possible thanks to complex memorizing methods and a training that starts at an early age. (Cf., e.g., Gonda 1960; 1975; 1977; A. Parpola 1985: 6-7 and orally; Staal 1983, I: 1.)

There are collections of early basic texts, so called *Samhitās* belonging to the four branches of the Veda: the *R̥gveda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Yajurveda*, and *Atharvaveda*. *Brāhmaṇa*-texts are elaborate interpretations of the ritual and the *Samhitā* collections. *Āraṇyakas* and the oldest *Upaniṣads* are esoteric texts complementing the *Brāhmaṇas*. The Brahmins belong by birth to families which should master the tradition of one of the four branches of the Veda. The *Atharvaveda* has practically



Figs. 2.-3. Nampūtiri boys being taught Sāmavedic chant in Panjal in 1985. The head and hand postures and movements accompany musical phrases and have the function of controlling and maintaining the correctness of oral tradition. Photo AP.

died out except in Orissa, and of the remaining three the Sāmaveda is the rarest branch. (Renou 1947; Gonda 1975; 1977.)

The very elaborate and complex *śrauta* rituals, described in the older Vedic texts and systematically in the younger Śrauta-Sūtras, demand joint efforts of priests representing the different Vedas. Ṛgvedic hymns are recited, songs of the Sāmaveda chanted, and Yajurvedic formulae muttered in *śrauta* sacrifices. (Cf., e.g., Renou 1957; Gonda 1960; Staal 1983, I: 1.)

Solemn Vedic *śrauta* rituals were rather common only until about 500 BC. Domestic *gṛhya* rituals of the Vedic tradition – on the whole described only in the Gṛhya-Sūtras which belong to the youngest layer of the Vedic texts – have been preserved among the Brahmins until today, but the *śrauta* rites became rarer and rarer especially in the northern parts of the Indian subcontinent. (Staal 1983, I: 2.) The logician Udayana declared in the 11th century that they were no longer performed (Renou 1960: 21, note 4). Fortunately for Indian studies this was not true. Some *śrauta* rites have survived here and there even to the present day, mainly in south India. Two major sacrifices (along with minor *śrauta* rituals which are discussed in Chapter 8), the *agniṣṭoma*, which lasts 5 days, and the *agnicayana*, which lasts 12 days and one night, have been performed by the Nampūtiris, the Brahmins of Kerala, until present times. The *agnicayana*, first described around 1000 BC, is one of the most elaborate sacrifices in the world. (Cf., e.g., Kashikar & Parpola 1983; Staal 1983, I: 2.)

Hinduism, a term coined in the 19th century by scholars and administrators, comprises several religions and sects. The Vedas can be considered the ultimate authority for the Hindus. The Vedic cult was to a large extent materially oriented, but the later hymns of the Ṛgveda already speculate on the mysteries of the universe. Vedic religion was transformed into classical Hinduism around 400 BC. Around this same time Buddhism and Jainism, which denied the authority of the Vedas, came into being. Renunciation, at least at a later stage in life, became a general ideal. (Cf., e.g., Smith 1989; Sontheimer & Kulke 1991.) Many works of classical Hinduism date from the ensuing 800-year period. Among them are the Laws of Manu, which regulate the cosmic and social order, *dharma*. Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa, the national epics of India, and the Purāṇas, or ‘ancient stories’, are partially known to all Hindus. Even illiterates learn them, for instance, from storytellers, bards, or theatrical performances. (Cf., e.g., Brockington 1981.)

Cyclically recurring creation and destruction is an essential aspect of the Hindu world view. All beings, even gods, are believed to move from one body to another in succeeding rebirths. At death, one’s good and bad deeds, *karma*, are weighed, and their balance determines the quality of the next rebirth. Ultimate release from the cycle of rebirth is the goal. Sophisticated philosophical analyses, such as thoughts

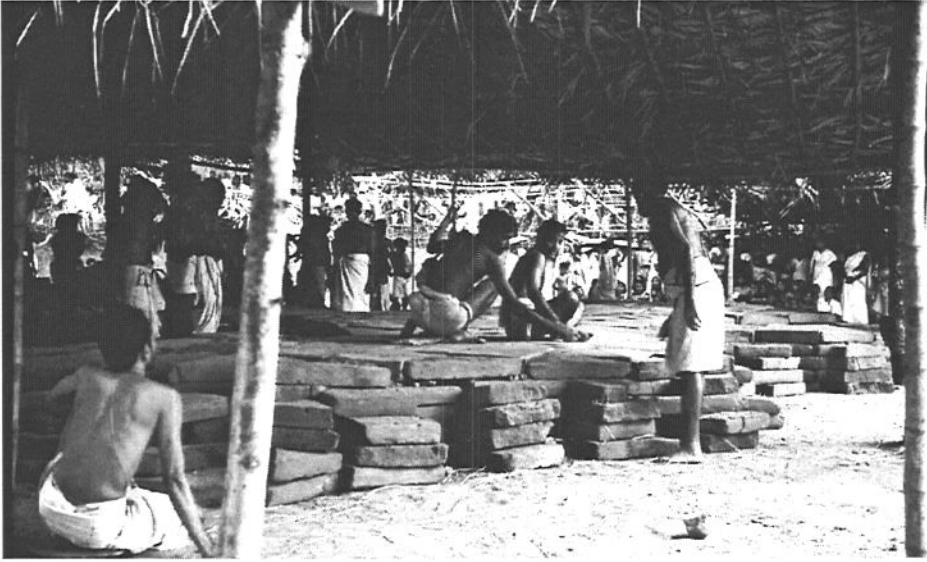


Fig. 4. The *agnicayana* ritual was performed in Panjal as late as 1975. Photo AP.

about Brahman, the Ultimate Reality or the Universal Soul, and its identity with each individual soul have little to do with the polytheistic folk religion with its colourful cults of myriads of deities. In addition to the approaches to salvation by the path of duty, *karma-mārga*, and the path of knowledge, *jñāna-mārga*, there is a third path. This is the *bhakti-mārga*, through the belief in and devotion to a personal saviour. (Cf., e.g., Brockington 1981.)

The Hindu god of creation, Brahmā, is a successor of the Vedic god Prajāpati. Viṣṇu is a god of Ṛgvedic origin, who in Hinduism is the maintainer and preserver of the universe. Kṛṣṇa, an incarnation of Viṣṇu, teaches duty, knowledge and devotion in the Gospel of Hinduism', the Bhagavad-Gītā. Kṛṣṇa is also worshipped as a charming child-god, a pastoral deity, and a divine lover. Śiva represents destruction and austerity. In the Veda, Śiva is a euphemistic epithet for the dangerous god Rudra. Gaṇeśa, one of the most popular deities in India, is the elephant-headed god of wisdom and overcomer of obstacles. (Cf., e.g., Brockington 1981.) The special deities of certain temples have individual properties. The gods that are particularly adored in Kerala for curing illness are Lord Kṛṣṇa at Guruvayur and Lord Śiva at Vaikom (cf., e.g., Namboodiripad 1976: 5).

Many native gods and goddesses of the Dravidian-speaking south India were integrated into the Hindu pantheon through the process of Sanskritization. Thus Murukan, an old Dravidian god, was identified with Śiva's son Skanda or

Subrahmaṇya. Ayyappan is a popular god of Kerala, integrated into the pantheon as the son of Śiva and (the female form of) Viṣṇu. (Cf., e.g., Clothey 1978; Kjaerholm 1986.)

Bhagavatī and Devī both mean 'goddess', but usually denote the goddess of a particular place. In Kerala Bhagavatī commonly refers to Durgā or Kālī (Caldwell 1996: 219). Kālī, the goddess of war and destruction, is the terrible aspect of Durgā, the goddess of victory. Doling out good fortune and prosperity is, according to Namboodiripad (1976: 5), the prerogative of Durgā. Both Durgā and Kālī are also considered to be consorts of Śiva. Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning and fine arts, was first considered to be the consort of Brahmā, but later she was regarded as Viṣṇu's wife. Lakṣmī (or Śrī), also Viṣṇu's consort, and Pārvatī, another aspect of Śiva's consort, seem to be in constant competition in Kerala.

KERALA AND ITS BRAHMINS, THE NAMPŪTIRIS

Before the British East India Company came to Kerala, cultural change is supposed to have been slow. A rapid change started during the British administration, and after Indian independence cultural change in Kerala has been dramatic, as the state has experimented with radical reform as a development strategy. Although the reforms have their roots in the nationalist movement and the caste improvement movements which started during the period of foreign rule, I will discuss them in connection with the period of independence. Before that chapter I will discuss the ideological background of the nationalist movement in India.

Ancient times

It has been debated whether the Nampūtiris were immigrants, or whether they were local people who adopted the north Indian Vedic culture. It is reasonable to suppose, with Namboodiripad (1984: 36), that small groups of Brahmins may have arrived from the north and brought the culture of the north Indian Brahmins to the area, but that all or the majority of the Nampūtiris may not necessarily be their descendants. It is not known for certain when the first Brahmin immigrants arrived in Kerala, but many facts suggest that this happened before the Christian era (A. Parpola 1984: 463-464).

In any case, Brahmins played an important role in the Sangam poems, the most ancient literature of south India, written in Old Tamil. (Nagaswamy 1965; Zvelebil 1974: 9; Narayanan & Veluthat 1983: 256). Some Brahmins, because of their wider knowledge, became royal councillors, ambassadors and ministers (Lemerçinier 1984: 67). It is generally agreed that Malayalam, the language of Kerala, is very

closely related to Tamil, though it is debated whether it has branched off from Proto-Tamil-Malayalam, Old Tamil (c. 100 BC to 550 AD) or Early Middle Tamil (c. 550 to 700 AD) (Ramaswami Ayyar 1936; Chandra Sekhar 1953; Govindankutty 1972; Andronov 1996). In any case, Malayalam emerges as an independent language by the 8th century AD.

In Sangam times Kerala had a number of lineage societies of hunters, gatherers, and early cultivators, with the dominance of kinship in the system of social relations. Each clan had its own religious system. One clan, the Eyinars, from which the Cēra dynasty of Old Tamil speakers is presumed to have arisen, collected wild pepper to be exported by north Indian merchants. (Lemercurier 1984: 13-40.)

The commercial pole of the international trade in India shifted from the north to the south after the discovery of the mechanisms of the monsoon by the Greeks. This is believed to have taken place in about 50 AD, but may have happened as early as the 2nd century BC, as indicated by recent excavations at Arikamedu. It was now possible to cross the ocean directly. The Western demand for pepper is presumed to have made the Cēra clan develop into the monarchy whose jurisdiction extended from the western parts of Tamil Nadu over the greater part of Kerala. The transition from the dominant system of kinship to the system of political power took place. Resident groups of Jews and Christians are thought to have played an intermediary role between the Roman buyers and the native producers. (Lemercurier 1984: 48-51, 64-65; Walker 1968: 514.)

Scholarly opinion about the location of the ancient capital of the First Cēra Empire (c. 100-500) has long vacillated between Tiru Vancikkalam on the west coast of Kerala and Karur in the Tiruchirappalli district of Tamil Nadu. Copious recent finds of coins at Karur suggest that this place continued to function as the Cēra capital up to the 7th century. (Paulini 1979: 123; Nagaswamy 1995: 3-7; Karttunen 1995.)

The Second Cēra Empire

Written sources on Kerala become more abundant by the 9th century. From this period onwards a new dominant system, the religious system, gradually developed. It becomes clear that rulers called Perumāḷs of the Kulaśekhara dynasty presided over a kingdom, the Second Cēra Empire (c. 800-1102), which to a great extent corresponds geographically to the present-day state of Kerala. The period is referred to as the Golden age of Kerala. The merchant economy underwent expansion after the Chinese and the Arabs entered into it. (Paulini 1979: 123; Narayanan & Veluthat 1983: 259; Lemercurier 1984: 83, 127, 129.)

During the feudal organization of the Kulaśekhara dynasty, the collective right to the soil belonged to the basic groups, and only part of the harvest was given to

local rulers in exchange for the protection of the groups which provided the surplus. The Nampūtiris supported Hinduism and the rulers, these being great patrons of temples, which were controlled by the Brahmins. It became a custom to grant, as royal donations, the surplus produced by groups living on the temple lands to religious institutions, but this did not yet imply the transfer of landed property. The *janmam* was not an allodium, but implied a right in a fixed share of the produce of the soil. The Nampūtiri influence was still limited mainly to what Lemercinier calls the cultural plane. (Paulini 1979: 123-124; Narayanan & Veluthat 1983: 259; Lemercinier 1984: 105, 129, 132-133; P. Radhakrishnan 1989: 27.)

The mini-kingdoms and Nampūtiri power

In south India there were three main lines of kings, Cōḷa, Cēra, and Pāṇḍya. During the 12th century the Cēra dynasty disappeared from the political scene. It was especially the war between the Cōḷas and Cēras that caused the annihilation of the structures of the Cēra kingdom and the centralized state in Kerala. The king was formerly considered the universal protector of the different autonomous provinces. When his capital was destroyed, the symbolic support of the monarchy collapsed. This led to the development of numerous local chieftaincies, which were fighting each other. (Lemercinier 1984: 83, 128, 131; Leela Devi 1986: 106, 109, 110.)

The provincial rulers and the leaders of the army sections became heads of mini-kingdoms. Because the rulers of Cochin and Travancore, two out of the total of 43 kingdoms, had a special status in relation to the other rulers as chiefs of the eldest branch of the various Kṣatriya sub-castes, they had a certain right of suzerainty over the others. (Lemercinier 1984: 196.)

Richard W. Franke (1993: 20) suggests that easy access to water in Kerala may have offered the possibility of more local and small-scale political development in contrast to places where scarcity of water compelled people to settle in compact villages and to construct large irrigation facilities, which presupposes political centralization. Roads for wheeled traffic were still practically nonexistent in the beginning of the 20th century, and travel took place mainly by foot. Because of the lack of necessity to construct irrigation works, public roads etc. in Kerala, no land revenue was collected until the Mysorean invasion in the mid-18th century. Even the rulers got their income from rents of their farms, import and export duties and other fees and gifts. The political organization can be characterized as loose and feudalistic, permitting considerable local autonomy. (Mencher 1966a: 144; 1966c: 184.)

Because the Nampūtiris, dispersed over the whole territory, were active during the last decades of the war, they got real power after the conflict was over. As the ideal of *ahimsā*, non-violence, has been the code for Brahmins since the last centu-

ries BC⁴, their active involvement in military operations had to be reconciled by creating a suitable explanation in Kēraḷōlpatti, the mythical history of the Nampūtiris. According to Kēraḷōlpatti, Paraśu-Rāma, an incarnation of Viṣṇu and the creator of the land of Kerala, personally intervened, and organized an army of Brahmins to save the country. Those who had actively fought in the war, and their descendants, however, lost their right to recite the Vedas and to offer sacrifices. (Logan 1951: 222ff.; Lemercinier 1984: 131-132, 184.)

The function of the royal land gifts had at first been to provide the material basis for the temples in view of their services for the population. As managers of the surplus apportioned to a deity, the Nampūtiris first became responsible for the temple lands, and later established themselves as landed proprietors with hereditary rights. As the Brahmanic doctrine did not recognize the right of the highest caste to appropriate land (*brahmasvam*) or to hold political power, the Paraśu-Rāma myth was made to sanction these as well (Logan 1951: 222ff.; Lemercinier 1984: 135, 149, 185-187.)

The climatic conditions of Kerala are favourable to agriculture, and the majority of the population still lives from it and allied activities (Paulini 1979: 91, 100; a detailed account of the agrarian arrangements in Kerala will be found in Chapter 6).

The land has provided almost the sole source of wealth, and the most important method of investment and saving. Small wonder, then, that the upper castes made control of the land their prerogative, and that the prestige of this control was among the most important incentives in the society. (Mayer 1952: 2.)

Historians see in this epoch the final success of Brahmanization. The formal political power remained with the local authorities, but the Nampūtiris controlled the superstructure covering the political units. Although the Kṣatriya families still owned certain lands, the greater part of the landed property passed to Nampūtiri landlords, who thus became owners of the means of production. It was their privileged position that enabled them to impose on Kerala a model of social organization, the ideology of which constituted an essential part of their Brahmin religious system. This social formation persisted almost unaltered until the 19th century and British colonization. (Lemercinier 1984: 127-128, 131-132, 169.)

The Brahmins partially imposed on Kerala the social division based on the four social categories called the *varṇas* (see Chapter 4). The hierarchical caste system is claimed to have achieved its greatest elaboration and rigidity in Kerala. Not only

⁴ The Laws of Manu (10,81-84) make this concession to Brahmins that if they cannot subsist by their own occupations, they may live according to the law applicable to the Kṣatriyas or, if they cannot maintain themselves by that either, even according to the law applicable to the Vaiśyas. But even in the latter case they were to avoid the pursuit of agriculture, because it injures the earth and the beings living in the earth. (The different social categories in India will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5.)

were there 'untouchables' but also 'unseeables' in the area. (Fuller 1976: 11; Paulini 1979: 98; Franke & Chasin 1989: 75; Jeffrey 1992: xi.) The Nāyars, the warriors, were counted as Śūdras, and only the 'super-eminent' Nāyars, i.e. the rulers, were counted as Kṣatriyas. (Fuller 1976: 34; Paulini 1979: 95, 123; Franke & Chasin 1989: 72; see chapters 4 and 5).

Some scholars think that when Nampūtiri influence began to rise significantly from the 12th century onwards, the matrilineal polyandrous system was imposed on the Kṣatriyas, and the Ambalavāsi and Nāyar groups. The system would first have emerged in Central Kerala where Nampūtiri power was strongest, and spread elsewhere in the 13th and 14th centuries. Many early European travellers have reported on the peculiar arrangement in the marriage system of the Nāyar caste. (Pillai 1970, Chapter 20; Fuller 1976: 1ff., 34, 121.)

There is, however, a radically deviating opinion on the development of the marriage system in Kerala, based on evolutionary theories. For example Friedrich Engels, influenced by Lewis Henry Morgan's theory of social evolution, presupposed the evolutionary primacy of matriarchy. These evolutionists associated matriarchy and patriarchy with matriliney and patriliney (Morgan 1877; Engels 1884). The claim that there was a shift from mother-right to father-right in prehistory fell out of favour in the early 20th century, but is found attractive again by radical feminists.

Influenced by Engels, E. M. S. Namboodiripad suggested that all the castes from the Nampūtiris to the Nāyars were once of the same caste and that there was free intermarriage among them. According to him, they were all first following a type of group marriage, but some of them later began to impose restrictions on the freedom of marriage and to make the transition from mother-right to father-right. Those who imposed the maximum amount of restrictions on the freedom of marriage and the sharpest break from mother-right to father-right became the highest caste. Namboodiripad further states that the matriarchal system was far more widespread in Kerala than the patriarchal system and that the type of group marriage described by Engels was universal among the more backward castes. (Namboodiripad 1984: 31-35.)

I will not discuss the possible development of the marriage system in general. However, it seems plausible to me that matriliney, a system as widespread as it was among many castes in Kerala, already existed there in the 12th century and that the Nampūtiris only started to take advantage of it when their influence began to rise, as it well suited their needs. The patrilineal system, which most of the Nampūtiris followed, would have been a legacy from north India.⁵

⁵ The system of inheritance among the Kṣatriyas was not totally matrilineal in Travancore and Cochin. On the death of the Mahārāja, his younger brother succeeded him, but if he had no brother, his sister's son succeeded him. (Ramachandran 1995: 64.)

Among the Nampūtiris only the eldest son would normally marry so that the family property could be kept intact. The younger brothers and also the Nampūtiris who had married a Nampūtiri woman or women were allowed to have liaisons with women of the matrilineal Kṣatriya, Nāyar, and Ambalavāsi groups. The younger brothers were economically dependent on the head of the family. A married Nampūtiri woman was called *Antarjanaṃ*, 'a person who keeps inside the house'. (Cf., e.g., Fawcett 1900: 40; Mencher & Goldberg 1967: 89-90.)

The Nampūtiri landlords did not cultivate their fields themselves. Tenants leased the land from the owners and usually leased it further to other tenants, who cultivated the lands alone or together with field labourers. (Paulini 1979: 124; Narayanan & Veluthat 1983: 259; Lemercinier 1984: 83; Franke & Chasin 1989: 55.) The Nampūtiris were high priests, who did not enter into any ordinary pursuits of livelihood, nor did they participate in the life crisis ceremonies of lower castes. They could participate in the coronation ceremonies of the rulers, but participation in the royal death ceremonies brought Nampūtiris the contempt of their own community. Only the poorest of them would consent to become temple priests. (Logan 1951: 121; Fawcett 1900: 33-35, 49; Iyer 1909-12, II: 277; Mencher 1966c: 187-188; Paulini 1979: 96.)

It was in parts of south Malabar and Cochin that the Nampūtiris had the most direct political control. The ecclesiastical heads of two temple boards dominated parts of Trichur, which has the densest Nampūtiri concentration. In other cases the Nampūtiris could exercise indirect power and put different kinds of pressure on the chiefs as the highest spiritual authorities of the area. They could also function as neutral messengers and communicators in the whole territory, thus contributing to the preservation of the system. (Mencher 1966c: 186-187.)

The end product of a long process of structural transformation was thus the dominance of the religious system as well as the dissociation between economic and political power. But as the Brahmin ideology gave importance to villages, the political structure of the kingdom lost some of its importance. The role of the political agents was reduced to that of a semi-military, semi-administrative authority, responsible only for maintaining order. (Lemercinier 1984: 169, 193.)

Abbé Dubois⁶, who lived at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, writing about slavery, comments:

This state of bondage is at its worst along the coast of Malabar, as are several other customs peculiar to the country. The reason is that Malabar, owing to its position, has generally escaped the invasions and revolutions which have so often devastated the rest of India, and has thus managed to preserve unaltered many ancient institutions, which in other parts have fallen into disuse.

⁶ Actually, it is probable that this opinion belongs to Nicolas Jacques Desvaulx (1745-1823), born in Chandernagor. Abbé Dubois' famous publication appears to be mostly a plagiarism of an unpublished manuscript by Desvaulx from 1776. (Murr 1977.)

Of these the two most remarkable are proprietary rights and slavery. These two systems are apparently inseparable one from the other: and, indeed, one may well say, *no land without lord*. All the Pariahs born in the country are serfs for life, from father to son, and are part and parcel of the land on which they are born. (Dubois 1906: 56.)

Land was owned by temples, individuals or families, or by the state, not by the village as a unit. Even the footpaths passing through the lands were owned by the landlords. (Mencher 1966a: 142ff.) In pre-British times, however, there was no ownership of land in the modern sense. One can talk about birthright, corporate unity or joint proprietorship. (P. Radhakrishnan 1989: 26.) A village was dominated by a high Nāyar, a ruling Kṣatriya or a Nampūtiri family. The loose feudalistic type of political organization together with the system of primogeniture allowed power and wealth to be consolidated in individual families. (Mencher 1966c: 184).

It is, then, not actually the village but the house which was the unit of settlement, and a household could be considered a meaningful political unit. Upper caste houses especially were built in such a way that they could even be used as fortresses. Peace and order were maintained on the basis of large individual Nāyar houses, which often maintained their own *kaḷari*, a school of martial arts. Authority relations in Kerala were between individual houses and the people who served them. As the lower castes had no land of their own, they were usually identified by the name of the manor house for which they worked. (Mencher 1966a: 142ff.)

It is typical of Indian society in general that it is organized into thousands of micro-communities which are large-scale descent groups, like castes and tribes. Because exogamy within families, and even clans, required that the groups should establish social interrelationships among themselves on a level higher than the village, it was necessary to have a regional caste organization. There were councils on various levels within a caste for the enforcement of rules, for meting out justice in disputes, and for social planning. (Kolenda 1978: 6, 11; Lemercinier 1984: 169.) According to Mayer (1952: 17), the administration of Malabar was traditionally carried out by village councils formed by heads of families, and representatives from the councils sat in a sort of parliament which had powers of sanction on their king. This amounted to a constitutional monarchy.

As landlords in the Cochin princely state, the Nampūtiris, and in some villages other higher castes, had power not only over their cultivators, but more generally in their villages. The Christians, Muslims and lower castes played no part in the village organization. (Mencher 1966a: 144-145.) Even law was largely in the hands of the landlords. A small landlord could bring a case to the village council presided over by the largest landed proprietor. (Lemercinier 1984: 169.)

The regional Nampūtiri council was responsible for the social control of the members of the Nampūtiri caste, and tried all serious offences. 'Ex-communication'

had later to be submitted to approval by the local ruler. In the larger kingdoms, a special political court, presided over by the ruler, was responsible for ruling on disputes within the caste. The highest caste council of the Nampūtiris was that dealing with questions of the greatest gravity affecting the whole caste. Its president was Āḷvāñcēri Tampurākkaḷ, the religious head of the Nampūtiris. All the functions in these councils were hereditary. (Lemercinier 1984: 169-170.)

On the level of the kingdom, there existed two Nāyar assemblies. One of them discussed important political decisions and was convened by the ruler. A popular assembly met in urgent cases when the ruler was judged to be guilty of tyranny or of outrageous violation of the laws. All the principal tenants of the Nampūtiris were called to these assemblies. (Lemercinier 1984: 170.) Such assemblies are not familiar to my informant Muṭṭattukkāṭṭu Subrahmaṇyan Nampūtiri (henceforth MS), but he knows that a Mahārāja of Cochin had had to resign on account of some immorality about a hundred years ago.

British rule

Outside influence started a process of change in Kerala which obviously was to be faster and more radical than during the preceding 500 years.

In the 16th century, the rulers of the coastal kingdoms involved in foreign transactions (Calicut, Cochin, and Venad, i. e. the future kingdom of Travancore) acquired political importance on account of their value with regard to spices, and for their natural harbours. Vasco da Gama landed in Calicut in 1498. As the Arabs prevented the Portuguese from getting a foothold there and the kingdom refused to surrender the monopoly in the pepper trade to them, they entered into an alliance with the ruler of Cochin. The Dutch allied themselves with the ruler of Calicut and conquered the Portuguese factories by 1662. (Fuller 1976: 17; Paulini 1979: 124-125; Lemercinier 1984: 193, 195-196; Namboodiripad 1984: 51-53.)

The first British ships arrived off Calicut as early as 1615. The British East India Company gained free access to Portuguese ports in 1634-35, and the exporting of pepper could begin. The British settlers had to leave when the Dutch became masters of Cochin in 1663. At first the British relied for protection on the native chieftains in whose territories they were settled, for instance in Travancore and Calicut, but gradually they were given permission to erect forts of their own. Since the early 18th century, the British started to consolidate the political power of the important states by helping them in conquering the small kingdoms. The rulers were encouraged to raise a personal army in opposition to the traditional Nāyar army. The territory of Travancore was consolidated under a single kingdom by Martanda Varma (1729-58), who suppressed the forces of Nāyar chieftains. (Logan 1951:

335, 338-339, 341; Paulini 1979: 125; Lemercinier 1984: 197; Fuller 1976: 18; Ramachandran 1995: 74.)

Also the Muslim kingdom of Mysore was pursuing an expansionist policy. Its powerful sovereign Haidar Ali started attacking Malabar in 1765, and his son Tipu Sultan (the ruler of Mysore in 1782-99) continued his father's attempts. Malabar was completely conquered and annexed in 1784. The direct intervention of the British forces drove out Tipu Sultan from the territory, and Malabar was formally annexed to the British Empire in 1792. (Fuller 1976: 18-19; Lemercinier 1984: 198.)⁷

The rulers of Cochin and Travancore signed agreements with the East India Company in 1791 and 1795 respectively. These kingdoms became protected or vassal states of the East India Company, and from 1858 onwards, of the British Crown. In reality, the British Government had already been acting through the Company since the 1790s. The hereditary character of administrative functions disappeared, with the exception of the rulers of the states, and the Nāyars too lost their power. The Cochin armies were demobilised in 1809. The local groups could retain a certain degree of autonomy as the administrative and legislative power remained in the hands of the local agents of Travancore and Cochin. But although the British authority had no direct power, it is said that every decision was subject to the preliminary approbation of the British Resident. (Fuller 1976: 124; Lemercinier 1984: 195-200, 232.)

Namboodiripad (1984: 60ff.) has characterized the transition that took place in Kerala as that from a militarist-feudal to a colonial-feudal state. The British colonial agent's political practice was based on bourgeois liberalism and capitalism in accordance with 19th century European ideology. This practice affected especially the structures of the economic and political systems of Kerala and gave rise to tensions in other systems such as education, religion, and kinship and social relations. According to Lemercinier, the economic system became dominant, since it assumed the social relations of production, while the other systems of social relations, those of kinship, politics and religion, acquired a certain autonomy. (Lemercinier 1984: 194-195, 229.)

In Travancore, Cochin and Malabar there were marked differences in state policy in the 19th century until the formation of Kerala. Firstly, Travancore and Cochin differed from Malabar in pushing far ahead, for instance, in modern admin-

⁷ Haidar Ali and his son Tipu Sultan built up the military might of Mysore with a vigour which was unparalleled elsewhere in India and their kingdom posed a significant threat to British military power in the subcontinent. The British considered themselves to be the liberators of the Hindus from Tipu's Muslim oppression. (Tillotson 1990: 152-153, 158-159.) What a notable adversary Tipu Sultan was considered to be is illustrated by the fact that he remained a source of inspiration in British literature and the visual arts long after his ultimate defeat and death after the storming of the Fortress of Seringapatam in 1799 (B. Allen 1990: 34-35).

istrative reforms and in the growth of trade. But, compared to Cochin, Travancore was a still more powerful and authoritarian state with a more interventionist regime and a stronger development of capitalism in agriculture, and of trade and commerce. But Malabar was the birthplace of the left movement and, as such, played an important role in Kerala's history of development. (Ramachandran 1995: 6, 114-116.)

In the first phase the British imposed a levy on surpluses through a general taxation system. The taxation in money necessitated an increase in the production and the organization of trading centres, and a new group, that of middlemen, appeared in the field of rural economy. While they sought to obtain raw materials for their industries, the British developed a capitalist-type agriculture with plantations of rubber, tea, and coffee. Land became scarce and an article of commerce. (Lemerancier 1984: 219, 224-226.)

Sacred rights, landed power and marital relations are said to have had no place in the governmental methods of the British. Appointment to administrative positions no longer depended, so it is claimed, on belonging to a certain caste, but on competence. According to Lemerancier (1984: 200), in reality members of the lower castes were not appointed to administrative positions, since the earlier models dominated thought and action. The Nampūtiris could retain their spiritual supremacy and, although gradual land reforms and other developments from the early 19th century onwards stripped the Nampūtiris of a considerable part of their traditional wealth, they could still continue to dominate economic and social life. (Mencher 1966c: 190.)

Dubois (1906: 58-59), or probably rather Desvaulx, praises the humane manner of the Malabar land owners (not actually mentioning the Nampūtiris), and the remarkable submissiveness of their serfs (Ceruman). A Tamil Brahmin opinion from 1875 concerning the Nampūtiris and their tenants in an official document of Travancore is quoted in many sources:

His tenants, all of them peaceful and contented on account of his unexacting nature, his genial manners, and considerate treatment, bow down to him not simply as a lord, but as their royal liege and benefactor, their suzerain master, their household deity, their very God on earth; and pay their customary homage, with a good will and happy face generation after generation. His person is holy; his directions are commands; his movements are processions; his meal is nectar. He is the holiest of human beings. He is the representative of God on earth...Such is the popular estimation in which he is held. (*Report on the Census of Travancore, 1874-1875*: 191; quoted from Fuller 1976: 11.)

Let me repeat the motto of this book, the statement made by F. Fawcett (1900: 85) about the Nampūtiris at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries:

Long may they be what they are, the only undisturbed vestiges of Vedic Brahmanism.

While the non-Malayali Brahmins and the Nāyars did not hesitate to take to modern education, the reaction of the Nampūtiris was at first isolation (Mencher 1966b: 20-21; Jeffrey 1976: 148). Fawcett (1900: 33) writes about the situation at the beginning of the 20th century:

It is by no means easy to obtain information which is accurate respecting that exclusive caste of Brahmans of the Malabar coast known as Nambutiris. Unlike the Brahmans of the remainder of the [Madras] Presidency, who so largely absorb all appointments under Government worth having, who engage in trade and in, one may say, every profitable profession and business, including the stage, the Nambutiris hold almost entirely aloof from what the poet Gray calls: 'the busy world's ignoble strife,' and more than any class of Brahmans retain their sacerdotal position, which is of course the highest.

It was the non-Malayali Brahmins and other Hindus who also held the majority of the middle and upper level administrative posts in Travancore in 1891. Also some lower castes or non-Hindus entered more easily into the process of change. Among these were the Syrian Christians and the Īlavan caste. The Nāyars, deprived of their age-old military occupations, were numerous enough and capable of taking up, without delay, new economic activities necessary in the monetary system. (Lemerclinier 1984: 222-223, 226-227.)

The West and the nationalist movement in India

I will discuss Orientalism, Occidentalism and the nationalist movement of India as an ideological background for the ensuing period of independence and also for modernization/Westernization, a topic to be dealt with in some later chapters.

In Western Orientalism, the East is seen as romantic and fabulous, wild and irrational, lascivious and cruel, instinctive and animal, in great need of Western tutelage, whereas the West is seen as rational, orderly and civilized. This ambivalent attitude towards the Orient characterized Asian women as desire personified, passionate and savage, or idle and sentimentalized, love-objects available, waiting to be tamed and taken, as such alluring. (Cf., e.g., Said 1978; Kabbani 1986: 18, 22, 26, 78; Tønnesson 1994: 17; Kantokorpi 1994: 45-46.) In British picturesque treatment of the 19th century we can see exotic beauties reminding us of the idealized oдалиques of the Orientalist painters (Tillotson 1990: 151).

Towards India in particular there were two main types of attitude in Europe in the 19th century. One was well in accord with the modernization of the West. India was disdained because of its lack of stress on the values of rational thought and individualism. Another line of thought, most vehemently supported in German romanticism, admired India's mysticism, ancient philosophy and its Sanskrit litera-

ture. Indian values were described as 'spiritual' and European values as 'materialistic'. (Thapar 1966: 15-16.) The way for the latter attitude was paved by British civil servants working under the East India Company in the 18th and early 19th century, like William Jones and Henry Thomas Colebrooke, who had literary and linguistic interests, became great Oriental scholars, and made the classical traditions of India accessible to Europeans. (Cf., e.g., Marshall, Bayly & Allen 1990: 214-215; Allen & Marshall 1990: 215.)

Not only was the political condition of India preceding the British conquest characterized by the supporters of the former view as a state of anarchy, lawlessness and despotism, but the social custom of the subcontinent was also seen as degenerate and barbaric, totally sanctioned by religious tradition. The 'abyss of female degradation' as a root cause of India's alleged moral degradation became a central issue in the debate between the British officials and Indian public figures. Instituting orderly and rational procedures of governance was seen to justify colonial rule. (Chatterjee 1989: 622.) The suppression of thuggee, or strangling and robbery of wayfarers, the outlawing of the practice of suttee or a widow's voluntary self-immolation on her husband's funeral pyre⁸, the introduction of rail transport, and the building of irrigation canals were singled out as improvements effected by the British (Singha & Bayly 1990: 227).

The presence of European Christians in India started to have an effect on the indigenous religions as well. The Bengali Raja Ram Mohan Roy began to preach monotheism and condemned image worship within Hinduism, claiming that the Vedas were a 'purer' statement of an original monotheistic Hinduism. The Brahma Samaj founded by him in 1828 is in a sense the first Western-style voluntary association founded in India by Indians. The debates between Ram Mohan Roy's followers and orthodox Hindus and British missionaries has done more than anything else to create a public with social and political awareness in early 19th century India. (Bayly 1990a: 135, 1990b: 229-230.)

Some Indian historians see the Mutiny of 1857-59 as a full-blown nationalist movement uniting all classes, though all historians agree that the Rebellion had several causes. Among the Muslims, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who had worked as a judge in the Company's service, was convinced of the need to revive the community through the disciplined introduction of Western ideas and teaching methods. But the British regarded the political aims of the Muslims with suspicion and Sir William Wilson Hunter attempted to show that Muslims had been the leaders of the Rebellion, and that the natural allies of the British were the new Hindu middle classes. Many Indian Muslims held aloof from the rising tide of Indian nationalism,

⁸ Lord William Bentinck's government passed the anti-suttee regulation in 1827 (cf., e.g., Baird 1993: 252), and gave orders for the suppression of the thugs, which was carried out by W. H. Sleeman (cf., e.g., Sleeman 1844).

but there was a rapprochement between them and the British later in the 19th century. (Bayly 1990c; 1990d; 1990e: 230-231.)

The dichotomy in values referred to above was taken up by the nationalist movement in India. It wanted, for its part, to be selective in what was adopted from the West. The nationalist movement did not accept Western culture without starting to dissect and analyse it and call into question its supremacy. This is exactly what modern Occidentalism is propagating: liberating the East from the mythical domination of the West, and desanctifying its gods. (Chatterjee 1989: 625; Tønnesson 1994: 17.)

The nationalist movement did not totally condemn Western materialism, but divided the domain of culture into two spheres, material and spiritual. The dichotomy was extended to several analogous pairs: Western/Eastern, outer/inner, world/home, men/women. In the material domain the West was superior, and it was necessary to learn from it, but in the spiritual domain the East was superior and had to be protected and strengthened. The West was represented by the outer world, the East by the inner world. The social space was likewise separated into the world and the home, and the former was the men's world, the latter the women's world. (Chatterjee 1989: 623-625.)

As a consequence of this, Western women in particular were targets of criticism: they were vain, masculine, immoral and artificial. Westernization especially of Bengali women was much feared, and this theme was taken up in almost every form of written, oral and visual communication. The Indian woman was and should be natural and modest, spirituality in human shape, a goddess, avoiding forms of behaviour which prevail in animal nature. (Chatterjee 1989: 625-626.) This is quite the opposite to the image of Asian women in Orientalism. It is interesting that one of the main targets of British criticism of Indian customs, the practice of suttee, is still seen as an honourable reflection of the country's glorious traditions and virtue of its women by some Indian publicists of today (Bayly 1990a: 136). When the suttee question was taken up in the Parliament in 1987, with the exception of the Communists, members of all political parties paid obeisance to it (Baird 1993: 251-252).

The spheres of women, home and private life have likewise been separated from and opposed to the spheres of men, society and public life in Western scholarly thinking and discourse. However, the aspect of spirituality connected with Indian women, which gives positive weight to the private pole, has often been lacking in Western connotations.

Radical reforms in Kerala

Kerala is said to have experienced a social collapse which was more complete than anywhere else in India. In the following the reforms which partly had their roots in the caste improvement and nationalist movements of the British period, but continued or erupted during the period of Indian independence, will be discussed. In fact, external pressures relating to economy and ideology had begun to tear old Kerala apart from the 1860s, and the 'mentality' of the Malayalis underwent a rapid change from servile to politically conscious between the 1920s and the 1950s. It is, however, justified to deal with these radical reforms here, because good health and demographic transition have been achieved within a single generation, after the formation of Kerala state. (Cf., e.g., Jeffrey 1992: 1-9; Ramachandran 1995: 18.)

The following is a short summary of political development after British rule came to an end with Indian independence in 1947. A single state of Kerala uniting the Malayalam-speaking areas was created in 1956, and the political history of this state has been a complicated one. In 1957, Kerala hit the headlines when its voters elected a Communist majority to the first Legislative Assembly of the state. The Communist government began to carry out land reform and other radical reforms. (Namboodiripad 1984: 1; Franke & Chasin 1989: 7.)

After right-wing agitation, India's central government dismissed the Communist government in 1959, and Kerala came under presidential rule. The state was then ruled by a series of conservative coalitions until 1967, when a Communist-led coalition was voted into power. In the 1970s the state was governed by a coalition of the pro-Moscow Communist party and several conservative parties. From 1980 a leftist coalition ruled until 1982, when it was replaced by a conservative coalition, to be replaced by a leftist coalition in 1987, to be replaced by the conservatives again in 1991. (Franke & Chasin 1989: 7-8; Franke 1993: 282.) As Robin Jeffrey (1992: 12) puts it, though Kerala has many political parties, since 1970 these have clustered into two broad coalitions to give the appearance of a two-party system.

The Kerala reforms will now be investigated with regard to the caste system, land-ownership, education, public health care and social security measures, the social position of women, marriage systems, and the occupations of the Brahmins.

As early as the 19th century, there had been spontaneous protests by Untouchables against caste discrimination. Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru (1856-1928), an Īḷava yogi and spiritualist, started to break the religious monopoly of the Brahmins by establishing temples for the Untouchables throughout Kerala, installing in them idols of such high deities as Śiva and Subrahmaṇya. Only in the 20th century have castes begun to organize into larger-scale regional associations. In 1903 the Īḷava Social Reform Movement, the Śrī Nārāyaṇa Dharma Paripālana Yōgam (S.N.D.P.), was established with a three-phased programme: an ideological fight against social evils,

the eradication of meaningless and decaying traditions and blind beliefs within the Īḷavan community, and the gaining of strength through organization, cultural freedom through education and prosperity through industry. Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru not only had followers amongst his own caste members, but also among other sections of the Untouchables. (Kolenda 1978: 43; Franke & Chasin 1989: 50; Gopinathan 1998.)

The Īḷavan movement had followers. The most well-known caste-based movements in Kerala were further those among the Pulayans, the Nāyars and the Nampūtiris. These all were active in the movements for social reform and changes in social practices, such as untouchability. They also tried to reform internal caste rules, and to alter inheritance rules and rules of family organization. In the beginning of the 20th century the caste improvement associations forced the higher castes to grant the lower castes some government jobs and access to education. Certain roads and other public places were also opened to low castes. (Franke & Chasin 1989: 50, 76-78; Ramachandran 1995: 100; Gopinathan 1998.)

The temple entry (*kṣētra-pravēśanaṃ*) movement in the 1920s and 1930s focused on getting the right to enter public temples for all Hindus. Keeping devotees of the depressed classes out of the sacred places had dramatically symbolized the concept of pollution. The movement started in Travancore in 1924 with the famous *satyāgraha* when Mahatma Gandhi himself participated in a demonstration of passive resistance at the Śiva temple in Vaikom. The Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 was a victory to the movement. Similar measures followed in Malabar and Cochin in the 1940s. Every Hindu is now entitled to see the idol (have *darśana* of Bhagavān) from outside the sanctum sanctorum (*garbha-gṛha* or *śrī-kōvil*) of every public temple. (Namboodiripad 1976: 69; Menon 1979: 73-74; Vaidyanathan 1981: 5-6; 1982: 21-22; Franke & Chasin 1989: 78-79; Gopinathan 1998.)

The caste improvement organizations brought the Kerala peasants into the fold of the anti-imperialist national movement in the 1920s and into the class organization of the peasantry in the 1930s and 1940s. The low-caste people became more and more united with the radical left and the workers' movement. Some high-caste radicals demonstrated their anti-discrimination struggle by associating and eating together with low-caste comrades. At this historical juncture revolutionary movements were producing optimism about the possibilities of radical change. (Namboodiripad 1984: 96; Franke & Chasin 1989: 79-80; Franke 1993: 15.)

The different stages of caste reform movements have thus won basic dignity and recognition for the Untouchables. They have achieved almost free entry to temples for all Hindus, greater access to education, scholarships, high positions in political parties, and even high administrative offices for low castes too. Members of the former untouchable groups are, however, still found mostly in the lowest-

paid occupations. (Franke & Chasin 1989: 81-83.) The Constitution of independent India was adopted on the 26th of November 1949, and came into effect on the 26th of January 1950. No discrimination on the ground of race, religion, creed or sex has legal sanction in the republic, and untouchability is abolished in law.

There are many historical reasons for the Kerala success. The factors which led to the destruction of traditional caste regulations are, according to Paulini (1979: 98-99), the forcible conversion to Islam of an important part of the population by Tipu Sultan, the impact of British rule, the Christian mission, and the activities of the first Communist government. The development of capitalism and the pauperization of sections of the higher castes also weakened the rigidity of the caste system. According to Franke, literacy in Kerala is mostly the product of the land reform, trade union, and Communist movements (Franke 1993: 225).

In fact the favourable factors are more numerous and can be arranged under three headings: ecology, history, and people's movements. The distinction between rural and urban areas is less sharp than in other parts of India. Access to water and good land and equal regional distribution of resources and population lower the cost of delivery of education, health care, and other public services. Due to international trade since ancient times part of the population had learnt to respond easily to outside influences. British plantations and rural industrial enterprises produced a large rural proletariat with their ties cut from their traditional masters. Kerala also had some remarkable and committed organizers and leaders in people's movements. (Franke & Chasin 1989: 22-27; Franke 1993: 15; Ramachandran 1995: 6.)

Landlordism dominated social and economic arrangements in Kerala and land reform correspondingly not only helped to transform agrarian relations, but also facilitated social change. Especially in Travancore land reforms were introduced in the 19th century, but the first Communist ministry of the Kerala state represented a turning point in 1957. The radical land reform of 1969 eventually ordered a rice levy on the owners of the largest lands, to be redistributed through 'fair price' shops, reduction of the ceiling on the size of land-holdings, and excess land to be redistributed to the landless, and the abolition of tenancy in rice fields and house-compound lands. The rice levy and the ceiling on land-holdings have not been effective, but the abolition of tenancy has. The 'land to the tiller' reform is widely regarded as one of the best implemented in south Asia. When talking about the achievements of the Communist policy in Kerala one has to notice that they do not include production cooperatives or collectives or other post-capitalist forms of agrarian production organization. (Paulini 1979: 291-296; Franke & Chasin 1989: 54; Ramachandran 1995: 69, 86, 92-93.)

It has been argued that the 16th to the 18th centuries were a period of growth in literacy in Kerala. It is probable, however, that literacy did not then go much beyond the Brahmins and aristocratic Nāyars, Christian and Muslim traders, and

Īlavan Ayurvedic practitioners and astrologers. The Nāyar servants probably could not read (cf., e.g., Nampūtirippāṭṭu 1963, Chapter 6). Women of all castes and men of the lower strata of society would have had the most limited education. While the Vedic schools were meant for the Brahmins, traditional education for Nāyar youngsters was given in schools of martial arts. (Ramachandran 1995: 49-50, 55.) Primary education started at an early age under a relative or friend, or a private teacher. The first step in learning was reciting the single and combined letters in the Malayalam alphabet, then learning to write. The next stage would be reciting and noting down songs and verses, religious and didactic. (Wood 1985: 6-7.)

Later, missionaries trying to convert people to Christianity established schools and were successful in instructing and converting lower castes. Protestant missionaries were the pioneers of modern school education. In the beginning of the 19th century a Travancore ruler decreed universal education, but there was actually very little state activity before the second half of the century. Instruction in missionary schools was in English, in government schools either in English or Malayalam. (Jeffrey 1976: 81-83; Franke & Chasin 1989: 48-49; Ramachandran 1995: 50, 53-54.)

Even before the 1860s, when attention began to be focused on education for girls, many matrilineal families permitted their girls to go to schools. But in fact, by the early 20th century girls, as well as low castes, were still largely left outside the school system. In Travancore, lower grade education in Malayalam was mandated in 1908, and in 1911-12 caste restrictions in government schools were formally abolished. In Cochin, free education in Malayalam was mandated in 1908. The caste improvement associations started to lead the way, and literacy became an important component in their strategy. Village libraries were established. (Paulini 1979: 140-141; Franke & Chasin 1989: 49-51; Jeffrey 1992: 55.)

Kerala's low-caste population surpasses India's urban population in literacy. In 1981 general literacy in Kerala was 70%, female literacy 66%, and scheduled caste literacy 56% against corresponding national rates of 36%, 25% and 21%. There was a literacy campaign arranged by the government in Kerala in 1991. The teachers were voluntary workers and the pupils were mainly elderly people, who could attend the courses in the evenings after their jobs. Kerala has the reputation of having achieved full literacy. Kerala's achievements are unique, and it has the highest newspaper reading rate in India, as well as a substantial Malayalam magazine and book publishing industry. Despite its achievements even Kerala has no compulsory education law. (Franke & Chasin 1989: 12, 48, 50-51; Franke 1993: 234; Franke & Chasin 1994: 14; Mathew 1995: 203; Ramachandran 1995: 60.)

An advanced public health system further improves the position of low castes and women. The sex ratio of about 1040 women for every 1000 men indicates the absence of systematic bias against the survival of girls and women. A low birth



Fig. 5. Old and young read newspapers in Kerala. NNA outside his pattāyappura in 1983. Photo MP.

rate and infant mortality rate (17 boys and 16 girls die per 1000 live births), and women's high life expectancy (74 years) are other indicators of women's high social status. Kerala men also have a relatively high life expectancy (69 years). (Mathew 1995: 203; Ramachandran 1995: 18-19, 40.)

Public health efforts center on a better level of nourishment and housing, sanitation, water and vaccination programmes. Much of the best land in Kerala is used for cash crops, which makes the state a food-deficit area. Grain, whether Kerala-grown or imported, is distributed through private markets and a network of government programmes such as school and nursery lunches, special feeding centres, and ration or 'fair price' shops. The evidence on nutrition is somewhat contradictory, but the most plausible conclusion is that Kerala provides nutrition to its population perhaps slightly better than the rest of India, despite Kerala's lower income per capita. In addition, Kerala's people may get more benefit from the foods because of the state's better health conditions and health care. (Franke & Chasin 1989: 28-36.)

Kerala has two advantages in sanitation: easy access to water⁹, and a dispersed rural settlement pattern, in which transmission of infectious diseases is a less serious problem. New houses have been built or old houses improved for a large portion of Kerala's poor families. Water tanks have been disinfected and safe latrines constructed, but progress has been slow. Safe drinking water has become accessible for more people, but in this respect Kerala is not a model state. Preventive immunization and vaccination, however, have been very successful. Medical treatment and health facilities for both urban and rural areas of Kerala are the best in any Indian state. (Franke & Chasin 1989: 37-43; Ramachandran 1995: 123.)

There are social security measures in Kerala, mainly contributory welfare funds, that cover most sections of rural workers. There are also measures for assisting the destitute, the physically handicapped and the unemployed, mostly pension schemes. The majority of these schemes were begun in the 1980s, and their effectiveness is still to be assessed. (Ramachandran 1995: 122.)

In Travancore, where the splitting of families was already well under way, the Nāyar Service Society succeeded in bringing about legislation permitting the breaking-up of the Nāyar joint families. The second Nāyar Act of 1925 allowed almost unrestricted partition of joint-family property. Although legislation in the 1930s allowed the Nāyars of Malabar and Cochin to follow the example of Travancore, development was considerably slower there. (Fuller 1976: 21, 135.) Seeing the growing success of other groups, such as the Syrian Christians and the Nāyars, resulting from the partition of their estates and education, even for girls, the Nampūtiri youngsters also started a reform movement. The area of most rapid change was Trichur district. (Mencher 1966b: 20-21.)

At the same time, the Nāyar Service Society worked against the old marriage system of Kerala, according to which Nampūtiri Brahmins could have Nāyar women as their 'wives' or concubines. Those Nampūtiris who were against the old system started to campaign through the Nampūtiri Welfare Association founded in 1908 for the right of all Nampūtiris to marry within their own caste (Staal 1983, I: 168-169). However, according to Namboodiripad (1976: 21-22), whose mother's first cousin Kuroor Damodaran Namboodiripad was a vital force behind the Nampūtiri movement, the question of changing the mode of life of Nampūtiri women was not considered by the social reformers in the early stages of the movement. The Travancore Nāyar Act of 1925 prohibited polygamy in southern Kerala (cf., e.g., Menon 1979: 91), and the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 made monogamy the only marriage system among all Hindus in India.

⁹ Prolonged droughts in the 1980s, however, suggest that Kerala's once-abundant water supply may be threatened by human destructiveness, which has caused erosion in the Ghats (Franke & Chasin 1989: 39-40).

A general development in India has been for Brahmins to acquire ordinary mundane jobs in order to be able to maintain themselves and their families. André Béteille mentions, with reference to a village in Tamil Nadu, that there is a certain continuity with the past in the choice of new occupations by the Brahmins. He cites examples of clerks and school teachers, and says that no Brahmin in that village has taken any really manual work. (Béteille 1965: 64.) This is true of south India in general. Richard W. Franke and Barbara H. Chasin (1989: 58) mention the occupations of school teachers, government administrators and medium-sized landowners as typical for the Brahmins.

Kerala is not a rich state. Although it is perhaps not legitimate to make a comparison between one state within a country and separate countries, Franke and Chasin have estimated that if Kerala were a separate country, it would be the ninth poorest in the world. The results of Kerala's experiment in the use of radical reform as a development strategy can be said to have brought to the state some of the third world's highest levels of health, education, and social justice. These policies, however, have not been able to solve Kerala's high levels of unemployment and underemployment, nor have they managed to speed up production and productivity that would bring about full employment. Kerala has the highest incidence of unemployment in both rural and urban areas among Indian states. (Cf. Franke & Chasin 1989: 1-2, 10; Ramachandran 1995: 13.)

Jeffrey has given some hints as to why Kerala does not attract industry and investment. Not only does it lack such raw materials as coal, iron and oil, but also its social reforms have given it a false reputation as a problem state, where investors are more likely to face the danger of restive labour than elsewhere in India. Jeffrey also points out that although oil money from the Gulf countries kept hope alive in Kerala in the 1970s and 1980s, it also inflated the price of land and labour in Kerala and spread some undesirable practices and unproductive expenditure there. Very little money sent home from the Gulf was invested in commercial ventures. (Jeffrey 1992: 217-220.)

Kerala has focused educational expenditure on the primary levels, spreading basic literacy at the cost of higher education. (Franke 1993: 226.) On the other hand, unemployment is particularly high among educated people (Ramachandran 1995: 13). According to Namboodiripad, what Kerala needs now is the recasting of the education system to include vocational training, rather than merely aiming at passing examinations which lead to unemployment. Education should be oriented towards enabling a sizeable portion of the young men and women who go out of the state and even out of the country for jobs to live in their own villages and be engaged in useful avocations there. (Namboodiripad 1995: 218-219, 223.)

V. K. Ramachandran (1995: 17) thinks that public intervention is necessary for transformation in the spheres of production and employment. He says that there is

general scholarly consensus that state-supported infrastructural investment is crucial for industrial and agricultural growth in the state. He draws attention to the potential for the expansion of skilled employment, and the opportunities for growth based on mixed cultivation of diverse crops that require skilled crop management and involve new forms of production organization.

E. M. S. Namboodiripad believed in democratic decentralization. Industrialization should commence by providing help to the Panchayats, municipalities and the district councils to start small scale and medium industries based on local resources, supplemented by whatever the state and central government can do by way of building larger and modern industries. A balanced approach to environmental questions should be adopted. Private capital, both Indian and foreign, is needed, but the approach to private capital should be political, based on democracy. According to him, Kerala's resources of the civil society, non-governmental, non-political and non-communal organisations and the state should be pooled. (Namboodiripad 1995: 221-224.)

