

# Ethnographic Description and Analysis

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## 5. PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL SETTING

In this chapter I shall give information about the geographical environment and social setting of the family, household and compound of IR, the centre and basis of my study.

### SETTLEMENT AND CULTIVATION IN KERALA

Kerala, which lies along the south-western shores of the Indian peninsula, is divided into three different ecological areas. A narrow alluvial coastal belt extends a few miles from the sea, characterized by broad yellow sands, lagoons and river mouths fringed by a belt of palm trees. This is the primary coconut producing land, with paddy fields as well. (Mayer 1952: 7; Mencher 1966a: 137; Menon 1979: 5; Paulini 1979: 89.)<sup>21</sup>

Further east come the low-lying lateritic hills, often only sparsely covered with grass and scrub. Sometimes the hills form an undulating plateau, but are mostly separated by valleys filled with paddy fields and palm gardens. The central region is the main area for rice cultivation. Paddy is mainly grown in the low-lying areas, but also on the lateritic hills on terraces. On the slopes, however, are mainly cultivated trees like rubber, cashew, areca-palm and fruit-trees, and garden crops like pepper, ginger, cardamom, tapioca, plantains, pineapple and vegetables. Most Nampūtiri settlements have been in the central region, the main area of traditional village settlement, precisely where conditions are ideal for paddy cultivation. (Mayer 1952: 7; Mencher 1966a: 137, 139; Menon 1979: 5; Paulini 1979: 89-91; Narayanan & Veluthat 1983: 261.)

Into the lateritic region project spurs of the steeper hills, those of the highlands, which continue eastwards to form the Western Ghats. The highlands used to be the territory of various tribal groups, and remnants of these still have their abode there. In modern times large tea, coffee, cardamom and rubber plantations have been established in the highland area.<sup>22</sup> (Mayer 1952: 7; Mencher 1966a: 137; Lemercinier 1984: 220.)

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<sup>21</sup> According to Franke and Chasin (1989: 4), in 1987 coconuts covered 28% of all Kerala's cultivated area, surpassing even rice, which covers 26%. According to Mencher (1966a: 136), however, land was always devoted to paddy cultivation in Kerala if at all possible.

<sup>22</sup> The Government of Travancore authorized planters to exploit mountain areas for plantations in 1855 (Lemercinier 1984: 205).

The pattern of settlement in the coastal region and the lateritic plateaus is dispersed. Lateritization is a process which, through the weathering of rocks under tropical conditions, leads to the rock becoming full of cavities. A single feature that has favoured a dispersed settlement pattern is that almost every household has been able to have its own well, as the water table is high and the brick-red lateritic soils are easy to bore and cut. Nucleated settlements are to be found in the more difficult regions where water is not so abundant or conditions are unfavourable to economic development, and a co-operative effort is needed for cultivation. (Mencher 1966a: 140-141; Paulini 1979: 92; Menon 1979: 17, 31-32.)

Although Kerala, with its 30 million people, is one of the most densely populated regions in the world, nobody there wishes to live too close to the neighbour, but seclusion is the rule (Franke & Chasin 1989: 4; Fawcett 1900: 43). Of all the people the Nampūtiris have chosen the most secluded sites. Typically it is difficult in Kerala to see where one village ends and another begins. They have no marked centre or main street with rows of houses side by side, which is common in other parts of India and among the Tamil-speaking population even in Kerala itself. Large houses set in their own compounds with lots of lush greenery hiding them to a great extent is characteristic of the villages. This kind of pattern is described by the early traveller Ibn Battuta in 1341, and there is little reason to question that this was the practice even earlier as far as the original inhabitants were concerned. (Mencher 1966a: 141-142.)

The thickest Nampūtiri concentration was in South Malabar and Cochin (Mencher 1966c: 186). The ancestral house of our host family is situated in the village of Panjal, Trichur district. This village<sup>23</sup> is situated in the northern part of the former Cochin state, a region which was dominated by well-to-do Nampūtiris, high ranking Nāyars, and large temples (Mencher 1977: 319). Some relatives of our host family who are still cultivating land live in the coastal region.

## PANJAL VILLAGE

Panjal village has more Nampūtiris (7.6%) and Śūdra Nāyars (44.1% in the Panjal sample of 1971/1987) than the Kerala average (Franke 1993: 72-73). The figures 1.8% and 16.7% given by Franke for the 1968 Kerala figures include, according to Fuller (1976: 37), all Brahmins, Ambalavasis etc. on the one hand and all Nāyars and chieftains of mixed origin on the other, so that the difference between the Kerala figures and Panjal figures would seem to be even greater.

<sup>23</sup> Franke (1993: 56) states that in 1975 a 12-day Vedic 'ritual of the fire altar' was performed by local priests at the request of foreign researchers who filmed the event in the village that he concentrates on. I study the same village.



According to the Census Report of 1991, the population of Panjal was 4939, the number of occupied houses 890, and the total area of the village 671.8 hectares. Panjal Panchayat encompasses in addition two other villages, Painkulam and Killimangalam. The total area of the Panjal Panchayat is 30.39 square kilometres, total population 20,727, and the number of occupied houses 3868. (Information obtained from the Panjal Panchayat office in 1995.)

### The *jātis*

The system of social categories in Kerala is considered incomplete in the sense that it does not follow the ideal system of the four *varṇas*. Śūdras are well represented, but the Brahmins are a very small minority, and the Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas are nearly absent. The traditional warriors, the Nāyars, are not counted as Kṣatriyas as elsewhere, only the royal families are. This leads to a situation where a small minority of high *varṇas* is opposed to a big majority of low *varṇas* and Untouchables, while the middle *varṇas* are almost non-existent. The role of the Vaiśyas as traders was to a great extent played by Jews, Muslims and Christians in pre-modern times. Hindu immigrants, especially from Tamil Nadu, and later, the toddy tapper caste, supposed to have come from Sri Lanka, should be mentioned as traders as well. (Cf., e.g., Paulini 1979: 95-96, 534; Damodaran 1995: 2.)

The Nampūtiris are the traditional dominant caste in Panjal. They still held 100% of all landlord rice land in 1971, and the Nāyars were the main tenant group.<sup>24</sup> With the house compound land the situation was similar. (Franke 1993: 135-136.) The Nāyars played a subordinate role here, although in some other parts of Kerala they had, with the control of land in their hands, economic and political power.

<sup>24</sup> Srinivas introduced the concept of 'dominant caste' in 1955. According to him, a caste may be said to be dominant when it preponderates numerically over the other castes, and when it also wields preponderant economic and political power (Srinivas 1955: 18). Later he and others have further elaborated the matter. Dumont (1972: 206) remarks that it is not necessary for a caste which is powerful in land to be itself numerous, because such a caste easily attracts a following. Fuller (1976: 28) has chosen to concentrate on the question who owns most of the land. Lemerancier (1984: 193) remarks that the very fact that the Nampūtiris had become the proprietors of the means of production ensured them a dominant social position, and gave them effective power. I will also leave the demand for numerical preponderance out. – A further elaboration of the concept by Dumont (1972: 207), accepted by Jeffrey (1976: xvi) in his study on the Travancore Nāyars, clears the matter considerably. According to that characterization, a dominant caste has a relatively eminent right over the land, power to grant land, and to employ members of other castes either in agricultural capacities or as specialists, to build up a large clientele, not to say an armed force, power of justice, and generally speaking, monopoly of authority. The dominant caste is often a royal caste, a caste allied to royal castes, or a caste with similar characteristics. Brahmins can be dominant just as they can be kings. To repeat what was said earlier, the dominant caste reproduces the royal function at the village level.

IR writes:

All other castes were someway or other dependants of the *manas*<sup>25</sup> or the temple. Also, it must be said, Nampūtiris needed their help. Vāriyār (Ambalavāsi), Nāyar, Viḷakkattala Nāyar, Veḷuttētattu Nāyar, Eḷuttaccan, Pappaṭa-c Ceṭṭi, Āśāri (carpenter), Kal-l Āśāri (builder of walls with stone), blacksmith, goldsmith, Maṇṇān. These were the castes in Panjal then. Then far away the Pulayans. (IR, I, pp. 54-56.)

IR is referring to the *jajmāni* system. NNA (pp. 6-10) says that at the time of his birth, a caste system, and division of labour according to that system, and a feudal system, were prevalent in Panjal, and wages for the labourers were in kind, i.e. paddy. A change began as late as 1935 in Panjal, when a teacher from outside the village moved in and, not being included in the system, had to start buying his rice in cash. The shop started stocking rice for him. (IR, I, p. 58.)

In Panjal there lived, besides Nampūtiris, the following groups according to the list for the map of Panjal village drawn by MS in 1962: Vāriyār, Kiriyaṭṭil Nāyar, Śūdra Nāyar, Vaṭṭēkkāṭṭū Nāyar, Ānturaṇ Nāyar, Paḷliccān Nāyar, Attikuriśśi Nāyar, Kuruppū, Eḷuttaccan, Veḷuttētattu Nāyar, Viḷakkattala, Pappaṭa-c Ceṭṭi, Nāyakkan, Telugu Ceṭṭi, Āśāri, Kal-l Āśāri, Karuvān, Taṭṭan, Taṇḍān/Īḷavan/Tīyar, Peru-maṇṇān, Pulayan (Kūḷān), Pulayan (Kaṇakkan), Pulayan (Vaḷḷōn), and the non-Hindus, the Travancore Catholics, and the Muslims.

There are a few more castes or *jātis* in the latter list compared to IR's list. IR first only mentions Nāyar without any definition, and then Viḷakkattala and Veḷuttētattu. According to Uṇṇi, there are four categories of Nāyars, namely Kiriyaṭṭil, Śūdra, Vaṭṭēkkāṭṭū and Attikuriśśi. When only the name Nāyar is used, it refers to all the higher Nāyar groups, because from the Nampūtiri point of the view there was no need to classify them. Only the Viḷakkattala and Veḷuttētattu Nāyars are considered to have a lower status, and they were not allowed to enter a Nampūtiri house, nor were they to touch other Nāyars either. (MS.) Nowadays, young Nāyars may not even be able to particularize their own sub-group any more. Also

<sup>25</sup> In Panjal the Nampūtiris usually do not use the word *illam* of a Nampūtiri patrilineal descent group or its abode; they say only *mana* in combination with the proper name. Referring to their own homes they may use the word *illam*. According to Fawcett (1900: 44), again, *mana* or (in plural) *manakkaḷ* is the name of the abode of the Nampūtirippāṭṭū (title of the higher ranking Āḍhyan group of Nampūtiris), and *illam* of the Nampūtiri (title of the Āsyan group). According to MS, Fawcett's information is incorrect. According to Aiyar (Thurston 1909, V: 173), *mana* is the reverential expression used by Śūdras and others. Fuller (1976: 51-53.), talking about the Nāyars, says that *taravāṭṭū* would be translated by anthropologists as 'matrilineal descent group', but usually, when used without qualifications refers to that segment of the descent group which constitutes or did constitute the matrilineal joint family, whose members owned property collectively and lived together in one house. The Nampūtiri joint families he calls *illams* (Fuller 1976: 2). Mencher (1962: 230; 1963: 55), when speaking of the Nāyars, defines a *taravāṭṭū* as the traditional Nāyar matrilineal, matrilocal household. When in Ravipuram the word *Taravāṭṭū* alone is used, it always refers to the ancestral house of the Muṭṭattukkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu Mana in Panjal and its inhabitants.

missing in IR's list are the Nāyakkan, Telugu Ceṭṭi and Taṇḍān groups in addition to the non-Hindu groups. According to NNA (p. 8), not only Pulayas and Maṅṅāns, but also Īlavans, carpenters, blacksmiths, and goldsmiths were Untouchables.

The Vāriyārs are a section of the Ambalavāsis, or temple servants, and according to Thurston (1909, VII: 322-329) their task is to sweep the floor of the temples and do various other services. An elderly Vāriyār woman, serving in the Ayyappan temple, cleaned inside the temple, washed ritual implements, brought flowers for the rituals, and helped the temple priest in other ways. Vāriyār families have also held hereditary positions as tutors in high caste houses (cf. Thurston 1909, VII: 322-323), and a Vāriyār taught NNA to read and write Malayalam (NNA, p. 32). Probably because the Vāriyārs are the only section of the Ambalavāsis living in the village, they also have to do the traditional tasks of the other sections. A younger Vāriyār woman did some stitching even for Nampūtiri women. The Ambalavāsis should probably be classified as low Brahmins, but my Nampūtiri informants have not thought of them as such. Still, a group of Ambalavāsis, the Nampiyārs, are even entitled to wear a sacred thread. According to Logan (1951: 130), they form a sort of intermediate class between the Nampūtiris and the Nāyars.

The Kiriyaṭṭil Nāyars are, according to Fawcett (1901: 188) and Thurston (1909, V: 297), the highest class of Nāyars, members of which were not obliged to serve the Brahmins and Kṣatriyas. Nowadays, however, they may be so impoverished that they have to forget their old status. Radha, IR's daughter (henceforth R), living in Palghat, had a Kiriyaṭṭil Nāyar woman as a house servant. She came early in the morning to clean and carry water, and after finishing her tasks, she went to some other households.

The Śūdra Nāyar women are the traditional female servants in the Nampūtiri houses (Fawcett 1901: 191). IR writes that there used to be one children's nurse in every *mana*, the same Nāyar woman all the time, and another Nāyar woman servant for other work. The latter changed every month, as three or four Nāyar houses took turns. There used to be a male Nāyar servant for cutting vegetables, bringing banana leaves, measuring rice etc., and in some *manas* a manager as well. (IR, I, p. 56.)

Although the need to keep a servant woman in the house has decreased in the past few years, as the Nampūtiris have started to buy electric machines, many Nampūtiri houses still have at least one regular female Śūdra Nāyar servant, and also several such helpers when harvesting or some other big job has to be done. Ravipuram's maid servant also recently did what the male servant used to do, and she is there on a regular basis although she is not a nurse, as there were for a long time no babies in the house. A woman for only looking after the children will not be hired there any more, although in well-to-do houses, like the one where Ajita is married, this is still done.

The role of the Nampūtiris as givers of food was still strong in IR's youth:

Nampūtiri women will have their meals after the children and Nampūtiris are fed. Women from nearby Nāyar houses who are not working as maid servants will come to the *manas* for food daily at noon, that is, when the Nampūtiri ladies finish their meals. They will be given rice and gruel. Those who are working in the *mana* will take food to their home for the other members of their family. In addition to that they were paid 6 *paras* of paddy every month. – Other castes also received paddy from *manas* as wages or as some rights. So actually there was nobody in Panjal who had to buy rice. (IR, I, p. 58.)

Now only the regular Nāyar servant Mukāmi (henceforth M) gets food to be taken home in addition to her wages in money and in kind (paddy). The hereditary ties between the Nampūtiri houses and, e.g., the female servants may be cut after this generation becomes unable to work. M's daughter, for instance, does not work for Ravipuram, but has a tea-shop together with her husband.

The Vaṭṭēkkāṭṭū Nāyars, according to some literary sources (Fawcett 1901: 188; Thurston 1909, V: 299ff.), are the lowest subdivision and a recent one. As we have seen, there were lower subdivisions of Nāyars. The occupation of Vaṭṭēkkāṭṭū Nāyars would be expressing gingili or coconut oil for the use of temples. According to the information of Parattippura Subrahmaṇyan Nampūtiri, husband of R (henceforth PS), they also cut wood for the funeral pyre. When the Ravipuram fields needed tilling it was a Vaṭṭēkkāṭṭū Nāyar who arranged the farm workers for the job. It was not necessary or customary, though, to employ a Vaṭṭēkkāṭṭū Nāyar for this: other houses employed other Nāyars.

The Ānturaṇ Nāyars were makers of earthenware articles for temples earlier (Thurston 1909, I: 47), and they still provided materials for the Vedic rituals at least in the 19th century (Staal 1983, I: 199). According to Uṇṇi, Ānturaṇs disappeared from Panjal, and a Kuṁbhāra living in Killimangalam continued making pottery for Panjal as well.

The Paḷḷiccān Nāyars were traditionally bearers of palanquins or hammock-like conveyances for the Brahmins and Malabar chieftains, and also worked as sword and shield carriers (Fawcett 1901: 188; Thurston 1909, V: 298-299). In the *tī-y-āṭṭam* ceremony performed at the Ayyappan temple of Panjal in 1983, the *veḷiccap-pāṭṭū* was a fierce-looking Paḷḷiccān Nāyar who, with a sword in his hand, destroyed the ceremonial decorations. Now his son continues in the same office.

According to PS, the Attikkuṛiśśi Nāyars help in ceremonies like the *caḷam*. The literary sources place them as officiating at the funerals of Nampūtiris and Nāyars (e.g. Thurston 1909, I: 62). An Attikkuṛiśśi Nāyar woman still provided coloured powders for ceremonial pictures of deities to be drawn on the ground (*kaḷam*) in Panjal in 1996.

About the Kuruppū it is written 'to massage' (misspelt message) in MS's map. In the old days the Kaḷari Kuruppūs were military instructors in the old royal families of Cochin and north Malabar (Iyer 1909-12, II: 19). Thurston (1909, IV: 181)



quotes *Gazetteer of the Malabar District* as saying that certain Kuruppūs combined two professions, shampooing or massage, and the construction of the leather shields of Malabar, both arts connected with the system of combined physical training and exercise in arms, the curriculum of the schools for martial arts (*kaḷari*). Similarly, the profession of bow-Kuruppūs was to make bows and arrows, and train the youths to use them. Later their task was to shampoo, make umbrellas, and provide bows and arrows for some Nāyar ceremonies. Some other Kuruppū groups were engaged in lacquer, wood and leather work. According to my informants (MS; PS), there are two different categories of Kuruppūs. In the festival of *uttaramēḷa*, festival of the *uttaram* star day of the *mīnaṃ* month, and on other occasions, the Kuruppūs make the picture of the deity with coloured powders. These Kuruppūs are counted as Nāyars. Those Kuruppūs, again, who do massage have a low status. They are not counted as Nāyars and they were not even allowed to enter temples.

Thurston (1909, II: 209) describes the Eluttaccans as schoolmasters, the name meaning 'teacher or master of writing'. PS says that they were writing teachers in earlier times, but that they nowadays take miscellaneous jobs. Fuller (1976: 40) does not mention either the Kuruppūs or the Eluttaccans among the Nāyar subdivisions, but the former are mentioned as a Nāyar class by Fawcett (1900: 187-188). Whether the Eluttaccans are also Nāyars I have not been able to find out, but their position in the list would point to that.

According to Fuller, the Viḷakkattalas and the Veḷuttēṭattus, though both called Nāyars, are not felt to be genuine Nāyars (Fuller 1976: 34-40). Quoting the *Travancore Census Report* of 1901, Thurston (1909, VII: 336) says that the Velakkattalavans or Vilakkattalavans, are the chieftains among barbers, and quoting the *Madras Census Report* of 1891, that the members of this caste shave Nāyars and higher castes in South Malabar. Persons in close contact with the Nampūtiris cannot easily be of a low caste. If the practitioners of these two trades have originally been of a lower caste, the pressure for their promotion in the social hierarchy must have been strong.

Thurston (1909, VII: 389) quotes the *Madras Census Report* of 1891, and gives as the occupation of the Veḷuttēṭattus the washerman of the Nāyars and higher castes in Malabar. Gundert writes:

Of the washermen, the higher (Velutteden *veluttedan*) have *toṭṭukkūḷi* (who touches them must bathe) the lower (Mannan) *tīṇṭikkūḷi* (pollute by coming near within a certain number of steps). A cloth washed by the Velutteden may be used by Brahm[in]s and idols, without first wetting and drying it, as foreign Br[ahmin]s do. (Gundert 21.)

MS confirms that this is correct. Even in the 1980s and the 1990s the washerman and washerwoman for Ravipuram were of this caste. During our field-work,

the Viḷakkattala barber had two barber's shops, one by the big road in Panjal, another in the so-called 'city' in the southeastern part of the village. He cut the hair of all castes. He worked in the former shop in the morning, and went to the latter shop in the evening. This barber's father used to come to Nampūtiri houses to cut men's hair, as he himself also did sometimes. The women of the same caste used to function as midwives for Nampūtiri ladies, but there was no need to cut their hair, as it was let to grow. The barber caste women no longer function as midwives, but in DA's deliveries they were still coming to help. In U's deliveries a Nāyar nurse, who had had professional training and who worked in a hospital, was helping. Nowadays ladies usually go to the hospital to deliver.

The Ceṭṭis are included among the Nāyar subdivisions by Fuller, but in Panjal neither the Pappaṭa-c Ceṭṭis nor the Telugu Ceṭṭis are counted as such. They are traditionally traders by occupation (Fuller 1976: 40; Thurston 1909, II: 92, quoting the *Madras Census Report 1901*). The members of the former group are makers of unbaked *pappaṭam* wafers, even for our host family. The Telugu Ceṭṭis, according to PS, are potters. Between these two groups are placed the Nāyakkans in the map. PS says that the Nāyakkans are stoneworkers for housebuilding.

Then follow the artisan *jātis*, the Kammāḷars, which are never counted as Nāyars in any connection. The Āsāris are carpenters, the Kal-l Āsāris or Pūli-y Āsāris masons, the Karuvāns blacksmiths, and the Taṭṭans goldsmiths. Members of these *jātis* mostly seem to stick to their traditional occupations. For example, men cementing and whitewashing the walls of Ravipuram were Pūli-y Āsāris. Muṭṭat-tukkāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Mana has its traditional Kammāḷar, and I also used his services in order to obtain some artifacts for the museum. There was some jealousy over my orders on the part of another goldsmith, and I eventually also placed a private order not only with the traditional goldsmith of my host family, but also with him. He was not, however, satisfied as I asked him to make a silver ring for me. He did it with contempt, as he considered working on silver beneath his dignity. It is not only the higher price of gold which makes it more prestigious, but also its higher ritual status (cf. Stevenson 1954: 51).

Members of the caste/*jāti* known as toddy tappers, called Taṇḍān, Īḷavan, Tīyar, have, according to Fuller (1976: 35), probably always been small farmers and agricultural labourers, and have later become traders as well. According to Mencher (1970: 345) they not only provide for toddy but also take part in many other ways in the preparations of the *tira* or *teyyāṭṭam* ritual performances in northern Kerala. Ramachandran (1995: 63) further illustrates the diversity of the Īḷavan occupations by adding those of Āyurvedists and astrologers (there were even men of learning in Sanskrit among this caste) and concludes that this diversity was to have important consequences for the Īḷavan social reform movement. This group forms 21% to



Fig. 10. The family goldsmith at his work in 1983. Photo MP.

27% of the population of Kerala and is the most important backbone of the communist parties (Paulini 1979: 97). In IR's granddaughter Savitri's house there was an Īlavan maid servant.

The Peru-manṇāns, a sub-group of the Maṇṇāns of Malabar, also called Vaṇṇāns, are washermen for the polluting groups, and for the higher castes when they are under some pollution. It is an old belief that certain kinds of pollution can only be removed by wearing clothes washed by the Maṇṇāns, called *mārru* (meaning freshly washed clothes to be changed with the polluted ones) though at other times the same people are polluting to higher castes. The women do the washing, and the men are said to be exorcists, devil-dancers and physicians, even tailors. (Fawcett 1901: 190; Thurston 1909, VII: 318, quoting the *Madras Census Report 1901* and the *Gazetteer of Malabar*.) Mencher (1970: 340, 345) mentions the Vaṇṇāns as enacting some *teyyams* in the *tira* performances and also providing ritually washed clothes in the northernmost parts of Kerala. The services of the Maṇṇān women (Maṇṇātti) are still or were recently somewhat used by the Nampūtiris and the Nāyars in Panjal in connection with the menstrual pollution and the puberty rites of the girls. On the 11th day after bathing male relatives of a deceased used to change clothes which had been washed by a Maṇṇātti. After IR's death (in 1989), how-

ever, this custom was not followed. The clothes were washed by M, the maid servant. (MS.)

The Pulayans or Cerumans are mostly landless labourers, who have even been agricultural serfs in former times (Thurston 1909, II: 45). The names Kūṭān and Kaṇakkan after the name Pulayan in the list probably refer to the process of hill-tribes and other groups being integrated into the caste system. In an area earlier belonging to Panjal there also live Pāṇans. According to Mayer (1952: 28), the Pāṇans' work was writing talismans and other charms and removing the evil eye from houses. According to Thurston (1909, VI: 29), Pāṇans are exorcists and devil-dancers, whose men also make umbrellas and whose women act as midwives. Some palm-leaf artifacts, which I purchased for the museum, were made by a Pāṇan from Killimangalam.

Some Nampūtiris said that the Paṛayans, who according to Fuller (1976: 35) are slightly below the Pulayans, are umbrella makers. According to Mayer (1952: 28), the Paṛayans practised the darkest kind of sorcery, usually connected with the death of enemies or of thieves. Sorcerers (*oṭṭiyan*), mostly Paṛayans, were feared at least in MS's youth in Panjal. They were thought to be able to change form, to appear for example as cows by using medicine which they had made from some uterine substance connected with a first-born child. Special care was taken lest they got hold of such substance. The Nampūtiris are not indifferent towards sorcery even today, and there are still practitioners of it in Panjal village itself.

According to NNA (p. 8), 95% of the villagers were Hindus at the time of his birth (in 1905). In the outskirts of the village there have been Muslims for a long time. For about 40-50 years there have also been Catholic Christians from the Travancore area. Some 20 years ago one Protestant family also moved into Panjal, but in the nearby village of Chelakkara there are many such families. (MS.)

According to Namboodiripad (1976: 35), the Muslims were not equated with the Untouchables, as their untouchability could not be assessed precisely, but they were in practical life bracketed with such lower communities as the Paṛayans or the Nāyāṭis. The Muslims in Kerala have remained poorer and less educated than other groups. The Syrian Christians, who have a very long history in Kerala, are in general well educated. For instance, they control a number of banks and they were pioneers in the printing business. In parts of central Kerala they became big landowners. The more recent Christian converts from the low castes have generally remained poor.

The number of Muslims in Kerala is more than 19% of the population, but in Panjal it is less than 13%. (Cf., e.g., Franke 1993: 73, 79-81.) The number of Christians in Kerala is more than 20%, but in Panjal there are less than ten households, which means that they have no statistical significance. (Cf., e.g., Franke 1993: 73, 81-82; Damodaran 1995: 8.) In Panjal, then, Christians and Muslims have

not held an important position, but that may change in the near future, if well-to-do outsiders move to live in this village. A Christian family has already bought the house and the rubber plantation which belonged to Kaippañcēri Mana until the 1980s.

From other villages visitors come to Panjal to sell their goods or to do their services. Cākyārs visit the village on special occasions. The Cākyārs are called half-Brahmins (Gundert 1872), a sub-sect of Nampūtiri Brahmins (NNA, p. 62), but sometimes also a class of the Ambalavāsis (Thurston 1909, II: 7). A discussion about the possible origin of the Cākyārs will follow in Chapter 9.

Early in the 20th century, a Cākyār used to come every year during a temple worship period (*tēvarassēva*) in the months of *mēṭam*, *iṭavam* and *mithunam* (April-May to June-July) to give a one-man performance (*kūttu*) of five or six days in the temple, illustrating Purāṇic stories with artistic and dramatic actions. The Panjal Nampūtiris remember with admiration the eloquence on stage of one famous performer called Rāman Cākyār, who died in 1984. Another Cākyār performed a *kūttu* in the Ravipuram compound in honour of the 60th wedding anniversary of IR and DA, this time only on one day in 1985. Occasionally, once in six years or so, several Cākyārs conducted a Sanskrit dance drama called *kūṭiyāṭṭam*. In almost all of these performances there used to be a jester, a very important educative character, who would make the audience laugh, weep and sometimes feel proud of itself. He imparted worldly knowledge, and reminded the Nampūtiris of their duty towards society. He also explained Sanskrit poetry and thus considerably increased the capacity of the audience to enjoy literature. (NNA, pp. 62-64; MS; cf. Nair 1979: 92-100; Pisharoty 1994: 100-113.)

Although not mentioned in IR's or MS's lists, the Śītikans played a part in Panjal life. The Cītikans (or Śītikans) are, according to Thurston (1909, VI: 390), recorded in the *Travancore Census Report* of 1901 as an occupational sub-division of the Mārāns. The Mārāns or Mārayāns should, according to the *Cochin Census Report* of 1901, be classed along the Nāyars, but are, owing to their close connection with services in temples, and the absence of free interdining or intermarriage with them, classed along with the Ambalavāsis. In more northern areas the Mārāns are drummers and temple servants, barbers for Nāyars and higher castes, and even family priests officiating at the funeral ceremonies of Nāyars. (Thurston 1909, V: 5-7.) According to Thurston (1909, V: 9), in the south where they are called Śītikans, their name refers to an occupation which relates to the funeral pile.

According to MS, in Panjal a Cītikān used to perform the ritual cutting of the hair (*caṭṭam*), to put a sesame seed (*tilam*) in the hands of male relatives who were making an oblation on the tenth day of the funeral ceremony, and also to make the bamboo bier for the dead body. The *caṭṭam* ceremony is not performed any more, and for the bier and the sesame seeds there may be other arrangements (see Ch. 8).

From a village near Shoranur came a group of Nampiyārs to perform different *kaḷam* ceremonies which included the drawing of a deity with coloured powders on the floor. We witnessed this for the first time in 1983, when a Nāyar woman sponsored a *tī-y-āṭṭam* ceremony in the Ayyappan temple. The Nampiyārs were the specialists who played the main part as musicians, provided the coconut palm decorations, and drew the figure of Ayyappan riding on a tiger on the floor, and in a dramatic performance portrayed Nandikeśvara, the main assistant of Śiva. The Nampiyārs (Nambiyassan) are said to be a division of the Ambalavāsis by Thurston (1909, V: 151), and the gurus of the fighting Nāyars, but he adds that some Nāyars are known by that title as well. According to Logan (1951: 131), the Nampiyārs were in some parts of the country very influential chieftains. Two of the Nampiyārs that we met were retired officers of the Indian Army.

Puḷḷuvan caste women earn some coins by going from house to house singing to the accompaniment of their stringed instruments with an earthenware sound box. Thurston (1909, VI: 226-229, also quoting the *Malabar Gazetteer*) tells about this custom and says that it is believed that this music is peculiarly pleasing to the serpent gods, who bless those for whose sake the music has been rendered. He says that the Puḷḷuvans of Malabar are astrologers, medicine men, priests and singers in snake groves. We saw an elaborate ceremony called *pāmpin tuḷḷal* performed twice in Killimangalam by Puḷḷuvans. In this ceremony they appeased snakes by music, dance, and elaborate and decorative figures of serpents made with coloured powders on the floor.

It is said that the Brahmins alone could learn astrology and practice it, because it belongs to the subsidiary sciences of the Veda, and that the Nampūtiris paid unusual attention to it. However, it is also said that in the early part of the 20th century there were very few among the Nampūtiris who were good astrologers, but that there were many among other castes. (Iyer 1909-12, II: 223-224.) The astrologer's skill is very highly esteemed, and MS confirms that there were many great Nampūtiri astrologers as well as Ambalavāsi and Nāyar astrologers, whom the Nampūtiris used to consult. There were also traditional astrologers among lower castes, but Nampūtiris consulted them very rarely. In Panjal there is no expert astrologer at the moment, so that help must be found elsewhere. (MS.)

There were two regular peddlers selling yam in 1983 and 1985, one Nāyar and one Muslim, but casual sellers also came. The Nāyāṭis, tribals who dwell on the hills, visited Panjal regularly on the twelfth day of every moon cycle partly to sell rope articles, but mainly to beg food and coins from the villagers. In 1995-96 they used to come quite often, but at more irregular times than before. As was told in Chapter 4, the Nāyāṭis used to be outside the caste system, but as they have had regular contacts with the village for a long time (how long it is impossible to say), they are included in the caste system at its lowest layer. *Imperial Gazetteer of India*

1908 describes the Nāyāṭis as a hill tribe (Francis 1908: 444), but Thurston (1909, V: 274) quotes them as the 'lowest caste among the Hindus'. Still, Hindu culture has a limited influence on their society.

According to Luiz (1962: 211), the high order of Hindus believe that to feed the Nāyāṭis on birthdays and anniversaries ensures long life and prosperity, and that the curse of a Nāyāṭi will have the contrary effect. According to Thurston (1909, V: 275), there was the belief that one could be turned into stone for not giving alms to them. The Nampūtiris, impoverished though they may be nowadays, are usually very particular to give a small contribution. Although the above beliefs are not currently on their minds, the importance of giving is still felt.

From the above discussion it is clear that not all people still living in Panjal follow the traditional occupation of their caste or group (not to mention those who have moved out), but quite a number of them do.

#### *Rules for non-Brahmins*

In Śāṅkara-Smṛti certain rules concern non-Brahmins. Those rules are AP 34, 52, 61-63, Fawcett 31, 51, 61-62, and the corresponding rules in L. K. Anantha Krishna Iyer's version of the set.

According to Sreekrishna Sarma, the rule prohibiting the Kṣatriyas from worshipping Śiva on the rosary (*rudrākṣa*) etc. (AP 34) means that the Brahmins can do it, but the Kṣatriyas are only allowed to use the distinctive phallus mark of Śiva (*liṅga*) as this god's idol. The other sets of translations have taken it to mean that the Kṣatriyas should avoid worshipping the *liṅga*. According to Kunjunni Raja (letter dated 31st March, 1991), who is a famous Sanskrit scholar and himself a Kṣatriya from Kerala, Śiva worship as such is not banned for the Kṣatriyas, and they can nowadays even wear a *rudrākṣa*.

Kunjunni Raja comments on the prohibition of non-Brahmins leading the life of a world-renouncing ascetic (AP 63) as follows:

Normally only Brahmins took to *saṃnyāsa* (cf. the story in Bhavabhūti's Uttara-rāmacarita on the untimely death of the son of a Brahmin because a Śūdra performed penance). But now others also take to *saṃnyāsa*; the Īlavans have their own *āśrama*.

MS remarked that there are four *maṭhaṃs* or monasteries in Kerala with only Brahmin, mainly Nampūtiri residents. Other monastic institutions are run by other castes.

The rules concerning the performance of a ceremony, the memorial meal for the ancestors (*śrāddha*), by the sister's sons and the inheritance received by them (AP 61-62) among the nobles etc., are part of their matrilineal system. Nowadays the system has left only a few traces, and inheritance is bilateral (Fuller 1976: 123). In a few ceremonies the mother's brother's role is still emphasized.

The Śūdras are prohibited from touching images of gods in the Śāṅkara-Smṛti (AP 52). As far as I could observe, this rule is still followed in private Nampūtiri houses.

### The Nampūtiri *manas* and their temples

NNA (p. 8) says that houses of different castes were marked for them in separate areas. IR writes in his memoirs:

Panjal temple, the field in front of it, Nampūtiri *manas* and other houses on both sides of the field, is the centre or heart of Panjal. In this area even now there are only high caste Hindus and carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths and Maṅṅāns. When I was a boy the houses on the north side of the Panchayat road were only two... And there were no houses to the south of Korattikkara Mana. On the side of the southern field there were five or six houses... (IR, II, pp. 36-38.)

In the loose settlement pattern of Kerala, what IR describes above is the traditional authority centre, called the centre of community life for Nampūtiris by NNA (p. 58). Its position has now partly passed to the Panchayat office on the paved bus road. The Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple used to be a meeting place for young Nampūtiri men too as late as the 1980s, as were, at different times of the day, the post office and the tea-shops near the Panchayat office, the cricket ground near the library and the school, the bridge over the rice fields on the paved road, and the so called 'city' where more tea-shops, stores and a kiosk are situated. The temple as an authority centre and meeting place was not available to all castes previously, and it lost its importance as a meeting place for young Nampūtiri men in the 1990s.

In the middle of the village running from east to west is a valley, which looks like a broad river bed. The valley has been turned into a rice field. Ravipuram is on the northern side of the valley. When viewed from Ravipuram's verandah from left to right there are on the opposite (southern) side of the fields the houses of three carpenter families, four blacksmith families, and six goldsmith families. On the northern side of the fields there are the houses of two carpenter families and one blacksmith family.

According to IR (II, pp. 20-22), it is believed that there were 40 Nampūtiri *manas* long ago in Panjal, and 10 of them were Māmaṅṅu Manas. Out of these 40, only 3 exist today. These three are Muṭṭattukkāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Mana, Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Mana and Vaikkākkara Mana. IR knew the names of four other Māmaṅṅu Manas, Kallattū, Kuḷaṅkara, Kunnattū and Antikkāṭṭū Māmaṅṅu Mana, because some plots are still known by these names. NNA (p. 16) calls the name Māmaṅṅu an additional pedigree, which is added as an age-old honorific name.





Fig. 11. The Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple in 1992. The three-storied *pattāyappura* was demolished in a fire in 1993, and reconstructed on two stories. Photo MP.

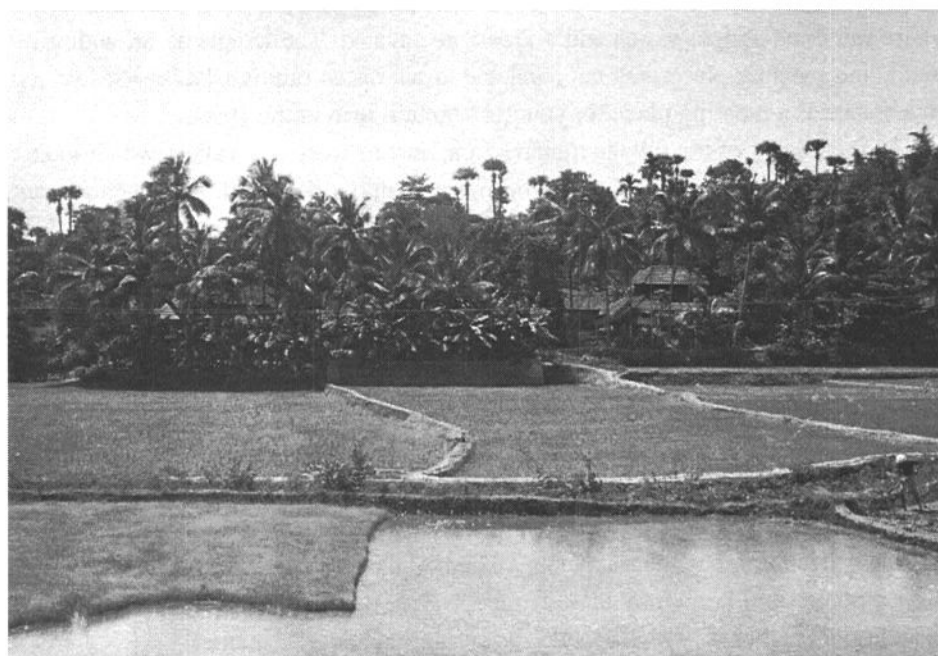


Fig. 12. Scene from the Ravipuram verandah in 1983. Photo MP.

At the time of IR's birth (in 1904), there were seven other *manas* in the village, which had come from elsewhere later: Māttūr from Netumpura (Cochin), Kaippañcēri from Poylam (Malabar), Korattikkara and Perumaññāṭṭu from Vanneri (Malabar), Bhaṭṭatiri from Killimangalam (Cochin), Pātirippiḷli from Venganellur (Cochin) and Tōṭṭattu from Vettathunad (Malabar). When the people of Malabar started to return from Travancore after the invasion of Tipu Sultan of Mysore, some families settled in Cochin instead of going back to their original villages. This is how Kaippañcēri, Perumaññāṭṭu, Pātirippiḷli (via Venganellur), and Tōṭṭattu Manas settled in Panjal. (IR, I, p. 46; II, pp. 22-24.) Around 1950 another household, Kuttuḷli Mana, moved to Panjal from Shukapuram proper.

The house presently owned by Korattikkara Mana originally belonged to Kun-nattū Māmaṇṇu Mana. Perumaññāṭṭu Mana possibly belonged to Kuḷaṅkara Mana. Pātirippiḷli Mana belonged to Karikad Mana. As there were not many Nampūtiri families in Venganellur, this *mana* had to call people from outside for every *pūja*. During the rainy season when the fields were flooded it was difficult to get anyone to come there. This gave an additional reason for Pātirippiḷli Mana to move to Panjal instead. Bhaṭṭatiri is a Nampūtiri whose hereditary occupation is to read and explain the Mahābhārata to other Nampūtiris in the temple. The original residence of the Panjal Bhaṭṭatiri family is in Killimangalam. After many generations of the Bhaṭṭatiris not actually reading the Mahābhārata in Panjal, the family moved back to Killimangalam. They sold their house in Panjal to Māttūr Mana. (MS; Uṇṇi.)

Muṭṭattukkāṭṭu, Nellikkāṭṭu, Korattikkara, Perumaññāṭṭu, and Tōṭṭattu are Sāmavedins of the Jaiminīya branch, Māttūr, Kaippañcēri, and Bhaṭṭatiri are Ṛgvedins of the Āśvalāyana branch, Vaikkākkara, Pātirippiḷli and Kuttuḷli are Ṛgvedins of the Kauṣītaki branch.

Kaippañcēri Mana and Bhaṭṭatiri Mana are not Viśiṣṭa Āsyan families, and therefore the members of these families are not recommended for *yāgas* or even for *śrāddha* rituals. Kaippañcēri is Āḍhyan (see Chapter 7), and does not perform *yāgas* for that reason, but why Bhaṭṭatiri, though Āsyan, does not is not known any more. IR told an example of what kind of reasons could cause a person to be forbidden to participate in *yāgas*: it happened to a Nampūtiri who crossed a river without wearing his undergarment (*kōṇakam*). (IR; Uṇṇi.)

According to NNA (p. 14), at the time of his birth (in 1905) his family was the fourth or fifth in the village as regards its financial position, but as regards knowledge of the Veda and the *śrauta* rituals and their observance in life, his family was the first or second. The other family with a superb sacred knowledge that he refers to is undoubtedly Muṭṭattukkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu Mana. Some competition, however discreet, between these two houses could still be observed during our field-work period.

The temple where Viṣṇu is worshipped in his Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa aspect was 'the second home for all Nampūtiris' (NNA, p. 58). The other deities in this temple are Śrī Bhagavatī and Mahā-Lakṣmī. It is not known when the great temple (*valiya ambalaṁ*), the buildings of the temple court (*curr'ambalaṁ*), and the gateway of the temple (*gōpuraṁ*) were built, but some Indian archaeologists are quoted by the villagers as having said that some parts are a thousand years old. It is known that the dining halls, kitchen, office building, and other constructions were built during the last 150 years. (IR, I, pp. 50-54; Uṇṇi.) In 1993 the three-storied part of the temple (*pattāyappura*), housing documents and metal vessels, was completely demolished in a fire. It was soon rebuilt, but all the valuable palm-leaf manuscripts were lost.

The temple belongs to seven *manas* whose right is called *ūrāṇma* or *ūrāyma*. These *manas* are the three oldest ones (Muṭṭattukkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu Mana, Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu Mana and Vaikkākkara Mana) and Māttūr, Kaippaṇcēri, Korāṭṭikkara, and Pātirippilḷi Mana. The latter four got the right at different times. Korāṭṭikkara Mana got ownership automatically, because it moved into the house which formerly belonged to Kunnattū Māmaṇṇu Mana. For some reason some *manas* objected to giving ownership to Perumaṇṇāṭṭu Mana. (Uṇṇi.)

As a result of the temple entry movement in Travancore, the Malabar and Cochin Nampūtiris considered those living in the polluted area as unsuitable for intermarriage (Uṇṇi). Still, measures corresponding to the Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 were taken in Malabar and Cochin in the 1940s (cf., e.g., Vaidyanathan 1981: 5-6). Since 1951 the Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple has been considered a public temple open to all Hindus, but the lower castes have ventured to use their right rather hesitantly. In 1985 I was told that only the three upper castes used to take a bath in the big temple tank. There were separate steps leading to the tank for Nampūtiri women and the women of Nāyar and lower castes. First the lower castes started to frequent the big tank and later to worship the god. Inside the temple there is a small pond for men. Until recently only the Nampūtiris used that pond. Just outside the temple walls near the side entrance there is a small pond originally meant for washing the temple utensils. Some lower caste women have started to take their bath there. MS emphasizes that now the Nampūtiris encourage all Hindus to bathe in the temple. (MS.)

As was customary, the Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple in Panjal got its income from the rent of its lands managed by the temple trust. Now the temple only owns the spot of land on which it stands. The government gives an annuity (c. INR 12,000) as compensation for the lands. The daily expenses are met from interest on fixed deposits, and from the rent of the hall and its utensils when they are needed for marriages and other ceremonies. Furthermore, there are donations, mostly from



Fig. 13. Vaikkakkara Citran Nampūtiri performing the *pūja* in a *tī-y-āṭṭam* ceremony in the Ayyappan Kāvū in 1983. Photo MP.



Fig. 14. Non-Brahmin women worshipping the idol in the Ayyappan Kāvū. Photo MP 1996.

Nampūtiri families in Panjal, for special feasts. A separate account of these is kept by the *kṣetra-saṃrakṣaṇa-samiti*, the temple preservation committee, which is not the same as the association of the owners, the *ūrāḷa-yōgaṃ* or *devasvaṃ*. The owners decide how the money is used. (MS.)

There are two other temples where Brahmins go in Panjal, the Kāṭṭil Kāvū and the Ayyappan Kāvū, and two temples referred to as Nāyar temples (*kōvil*) on the southern side of the village. The Kāṭṭil Kāvū, a small shrine, is a little to the south of the Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple on the other side of the fields, and the priest of the latter temple also acts as *pūjāri* there. Śiva and Subrahmaṇya are the main deities, but there are also other deities such as Bhagavatī, Gaṇapati and Sarasvatī. *Śivarātri* and *tai pūyam* are the main functions there. The Ayyappan Kāvū is to the west of the two other temples. DA's brother, Vaikkākkara Citran Nampūtiri, was the *pūjāri* there until the late 1980s. Many Malayāḷam films have been partly shot in this temple, and they have increased its income.

According to my informants, there is a misunderstanding over the status of these two latter temples in relation to the Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple in the account published by Staal (1983, II: 688). All these three temples are under one temple trust and the same ownership. (IR, I, pp. 52-54; MS.) But it is true that Ayyappan is considered to be an old Dravidian deity, and in that way closer to the Nāyars than to the Nampūtiris (cf., e.g., Lemercinier 1984: 174).

In these two temples, as in the Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple, the *śrī-kōvil*, where the main deity is seated, is only entered by the *pūjāri*, who is a Brahmin, as is the custom in Brahmin temples everywhere in India. All Hindus can pray in the *cur'ambalaṃ*, but in Kāṭṭil Kāvū there is only the *śrī-kōvil*. The two Nāyar temples in Panjal are Murukan/Subrahmaṇya temples. One of them is about 65 years old, the other one about 30. In Nāyar and lower caste temples the *pūjāri* is usually not a Brahmin, but especially nowadays some rich communities have been able to change the custom. (MS.) Recently, on the plea of the Paliyam Declaration stating that anyone can be considered a Brahmin if he or she undergoes certain rites and rituals, lower castes have become Nampūtiris in order to win social acceptance and to be able to get the job of a temple priest more easily (M. G. Radhakrishnan 1999: 26-27).

In addition there is a small Bhagavati temple near the 'city', where worship is performed only once a year, on the 1st of *makaraṃ*. This temple was on the land of Muṭṭattukkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu Mana, which also conducted the *pūja* in the temple. It still officially belongs to this *mana*, but it is now under the control of the former tenant, Kāḷattū Vēlukkuṭṭi Nāyar. Earlier the tenant was Koṇṭapurattū Nāyar, whose household was also associated with the Bhagavati temple. In former times Muṭṭattukkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu Mana had land in Chelakode (about 10 km east of Panjal) with a

Subrahmaṇya temple. The *mana* employed a Tamil Brahmin as a *pūjāri* in that temple, which is now managed by the local people. (MS.)

What about the temples of those three *manas* that do not have ownership of the Panjal temples? They have family temples in the places where they originally come from, i.e. Vanneri, Killimangalam, and Vettathunad. For reasons that are not known, the temple in Vanneri also belongs to Tōṭṭattu Mana, in addition to Perumaññāṭṭu Mana. (Uṇṇi.) Some Nampūtiri families here as elsewhere (cf., e.g., Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu Mana; Kainikkara Mana in Thuravoor, Travancore, where IR's son-in-law was the head; Payyappaḷli Mana in Malappuram district, the original *mana* of U; or Killimangalam Mana in Killimangalam) have private temples in their own compound. In Kainikkara Mana, for instance, the men performed two daily *pūjas* in the Viṣṇu temple and the ladies a morning *nivēdyaṃ* in the Bhagavati temple every day. In Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu Mana, they have been particularly careful to perform a *pūja* in their private Gaṇapati temple every day without interruption. In case of a pollution in the family, the help of some other Nampūtiri has been asked. (NNA, p. 74.)

### Sphere of life of the Nampūtiris

The world outside the village was to a great extent an unknown place for many Nampūtiris even in the 20th century (cf., e.g., Fawcett 1900: 33). The lack of roads for wheeled traffic was not the only reason for this as there were also ritual reasons for remaining in the village or its close vicinity. The Nampūtiri boys generally had to go to the temple daily up to their 13th birthday. If they started a journey after worship on a particular day, they needed to be able to reach the temple by the evening of the next day. (Namboodiripad 1976: 7-8; MS.) This was still so in IR's children's youth. The priest of the Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple waited for MS until late in the evening and did not close the temple doors until MS had returned to pray after a journey. Only during a pollution in the family (after a birth or death), the boys should not go to temple, and then they had a chance to travel. MS himself stopped going to the temple every day at the age of twelve because he had to go to school in another locality, so that in his time the modern demand for schooling won over the traditional demand to go to the temple. (MS.)

The head of the household in domestic matters had to perform his daily ritual at the domestic fire (*aupāsanaṃ*). He and his wife should not leave the village together, for if they did, the fire became invalid (NNA, p. 94). NNA followed this rule until he became a widower. As a widower he was freed from the domestic fire ritual, but in other respects he was a conscientious ritualist and traditionalist even in the 1990s. After he became a widower, NNA visited Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala, for the first time in his life at the age of 79 in 1984.

NNA must, however, be mentioned as an exception. Most Nampūtiris are eager travellers now if it is only financially possible. Muṭṭattukkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu Mana was really ahead of its time as far as vehicles are concerned. In the 1920s the family got a loan for buying a number of cars to start a business.<sup>26</sup> IR made several trips to distant parts of India. Still, for example Unṇi, an enterprising man though he is, never went further than Goa during our field-work period. Inside the state he travelled long distances almost every day. Road traffic started to develop in the 1960s and especially after the mid-1970s. There is a motorable road network which connects every town and village in Kerala, enabling, for instance, people living in villages and working in towns to commute to work. (Ramachandran 1995: 7.)

There is a recent case in Kerala in which a Nampūtiri priest of the Sree Val-labha temple in Tiruvalla, central Kerala, was punished by his superior, the *tantri* of the temple, because he had made a trip to London. The punishment consisted of the Nampūtiri not being allowed to conduct a *pūja* at the temple till he underwent a penance which included chanting the Gāyatrī mantra a thousand times and undergoing the reinstallation ceremony. A debate followed on whether the Vedas permit priests to cross the seas or not. The debate was soon between the Temple Advisory Committee and the Government-controlled Travancore Devasvaṃ Board and even the BJP. The Nampūtiri, also an acclaimed Malayalam poet and a former Professor of English, found sympathisers in the latter two, as he refused to bend, saying that he had committed no sin as he had gone to London to present a paper on the Vedas. The *tantri* was made to dilute his stand and cleanse the culprit just by sprinkling him with holy water. (M. G. Radhakrishnan 1997: 12.) This shows that, while the Vedas still play a part in Kerala politics, orthodoxy must give way to politics and the rules have to be bent accordingly.

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<sup>26</sup> A riot between the Christians and Hindus in Trichur, where the cars were kept in store, frightened the family and the cars were given on credit to prospective buyers. Most of the money was never received from the customers, and the whole business turned into a great loss.