

7. DOMESTIC SPACE

THE HOUSE AND COMPOUND AS A MICROCOSMOS

To begin with, I shall discuss the Indian attitude towards buildings, and sacral buildings in particular. For a more general background I draw attention to the indigenous thought that various substances are but manifestations or permutations of a unitary, primordial substance. Physical phenomena and human moral qualities can further be seen as of one genre, while *karma* is not only 'doing' but also 'making' of something substantial. There is a struggle in the universe eventually to gain a state of ultimate, perfect, and unlimited equilibrium of substances, the merging of the individual soul with the universal soul. But people's actions constantly aim at restoring a substantial equilibrium between substances in contexts limited, for instance, by time, space, and place. (Marriott 1990: 2, 6ff.; Daniel 1984: 3, 7.)

Valentine Daniel says that, according to the Tamil way of thinking, houses are persons, and yet they are also nonpersons (Daniel 1984: 108).

It has become apparent that to the Tamil villager, a house is a living being that is conceived in a sexual act, grows, is born, has a horoscope, goes through a formative period comparable to childhood, matures, and attains a stable nature ...interacts in predictable ways with its human occupants and with neighboring houses, and ultimately dies when it is abandoned (Daniel 1984: 149).

The Vedic fire altar is a symbol of the universe. The cyclical time represented by the year is built into it and is its substance. This is indicated by the number of layers (five) which equals the number of the seasons, and by the number of certain bricks which equals the number of the days in a year. The symbolism of the Vedic fire altar is continued in the plan of Hindu temples and dwellings. *Vāstu-śāstra*, the traditional science of architecture, forms a late auxiliary part of the Veda. By nature it is applied astrology. (Kramrisch 1946: 10, 35, 50, 69, 71ff.)

An ancient idea in the Veda is that the universe is in the shape of a man. The world was created through an original sacrifice where cosmos, or this Cosmic Man, the *Puruṣa*, was cut into pieces like the sacrificed human or animal victim of a Vedic ritual. Out of his mind the moon was born, out of his eye the sun, out of his mouth Indra and Agni, out of his breath the wind. Similarly the four *varṇas*, as will be remembered, have their origins in his mouth, arms, thighs and feet respectively. (RS 10,90.) Every sacrifice is a repetition of the archetypal sacrifice which was at the

same time the creation of the world. Likewise man should build a temple or a house in the likeness of the world, which is God's residence. Vedic rites introduce and accompany the building. (Kramrisch 1946: 12, 15, 68.)

In the *vāstu-puruṣa-maṇḍala*, the plan or diagram of the building, a communication is established between man (*puruṣa*) and Puruṣa, the Essence of all things. *Vāstu* is the site where bodily existence abides. In bodily existence Puruṣa becomes the Form. The building is the substantial form of Puruṣa and the *maṇḍala* is his ritual diagrammatic form. Puruṣa himself has no substance. (Kramrisch 1946: 7.)

In a Tamil Nadu village, where Valentine Daniel was doing field-work, an optional *vāstu-puruṣa-pūjā* was performed before the placing of the corner post or cornerstone of a house, an act understood as conceiving the house. According to Daniel, the ordinary villagers were quite ignorant who *Vāstu Puruṣa* was. For them the purpose of the rite was to divine how the future house will affect the health and productivity of its owners, especially their fertility and their financial fortunes. (Daniel 1984: 117, 120.)

Although the earth is round, it is known as a square, when it is thought of as fixed and subject to the laws of the sky and ruled over by time. The four cardinal points fixed the mobile and floating earth, and as a symbol of this it is depicted as four-cornered. The square is the archetype of order. (Kramrisch 1946: 29, 42.) A complete traditional high caste house of Kerala was, according to the manuals, a four-sided structure centered on an atrium. Each of the four sides of the atrium was oriented squarely to one of the four directions, and any room or building standing beside the open space in the middle was given a directional name. (Moore 1990: 169-171.)

The creation is not only known as the initial dismemberment of the Cosmic Man, but also as his descent or falling off from the Supreme Principle and coming to earth. Falling down to earth gave Puruṣa a two-fold nature: that of a god and that of an anti-god or demon, Asura. The Puruṣa built into the fire altar, resurrected, faces upwards towards heaven and light, but in the rites of installation he is with his face down as a symbol of his fall. Still remaining with his face downwards he carries and protects the buildings and gives them their right orientation. In Malayalam building manuals Puruṣa is shown facing upwards, but this, according to Melinda A. Moore, is a misunderstanding. (Kramrisch 1946: 73, 78, 83; Moore 1990: 181-182.)

The position of Puruṣa or the Foundation Man is significant, because his right arm is pure and his left arm impure, and they occupy opposite corners of the house according to whether he faces up or down. Moore remarks that people's activities seemed to be patterned according to properties attributed to the houses themselves. The disposition of Puruṣa's limbs and organs, his head in the northeast corner of the house, his feet in the southwest corner, his right arm in the southeast and left

arm in the northwest, suggest some contrasting properties and differentiated uses of the parts of the house. (Moore 1990: 169, 176, 182.)

Puruṣa's navel and waist are conceptually the architectural middle place of the building. The man's mouth is a suitable place for food to be cooked, i.e. for the kitchen. The most favoured bedrooms are usually, according to Moore, where his genitals are, in the southwest. Daniel came across the belief in Tamil Nadu that this corner, on the contrary, is deemed inauspicious for conception. The southwest corner of the site, the place where the corner post is placed in a hole is, as was mentioned before, considered the place where the house is conceived. To conceive a child where a house is conceived would, according to a local guru, invite evil. The fact remains that it was the place of conception at least of the house. (Moore 1990: 177, 181; Daniel 1984: 119-120.)

The pure right arm of Vāstu Puruṣa is in the southeast, where the guests are greeted and which is also a more open part of the house, and especially favoured by men. His impure left arm is where the women used to be secluded during their menstruation and childbed. Also defecation should be done only in the northwestern corner of the house. In opposition to southeast, northwest is considered particularly the women's side and a closed area. (Moore 1990: 176ff., 185.)

The different daily and periodic uses of the house are further suggested by another mythological-astrological fact. The third dimension in the sacred architecture, including the houses of the upper castes, is important because of the descent of the sacred power to the earth along the vertical axis. The vertical dimension is established by a collection of Vedic deities, all with astral functions, sitting on the Foundation Man. Each of the 45 deities sits in its particular square fitted in the diagram. In addition, there are a number of 'homeless' gods and demonesses at the outer corners and sides. (Kramrisch 1946: 4; Moore 1990: 179.)

Brahmā is seated in the open middle place of the house, where the light comes in, and over the navel of the Foundation Man. Brahmā is the first of the gods and the original power of the universe, and his presence suggests some sacred uses for the atrium. It is used in many rituals, for instance ones that establish or reconfirm a relationship between the house and a person not born in it, like the bride or a servant. The east and southeast are further emphasized as the directions of light and openness through the presence of the corresponding gods linked with fire, the sun and light. The northwest is occupied by menacing gods which are suggestive of use by persons undergoing disorganizing processes like birth and menstruation. Gods of formative, life-sustaining nature govern the southwestern corner and are able to protect fertility and nourishment. The use of the southern side of both the compound and the buildings is suggested by the god of death and divinities associated with the ancestors. The dead body is moved from north to south, and the south of

the compound is used as the cremation ground, as well as in the death anniversary observances. (Kramrisch 1946: 92-93; Moore 1990: 178, 182ff.)

To the present residents of the houses many of the gods and their possible causal connections remain remote. Only the guardians of the eight directions and their location are well known. According to some later sources, these directional deities are Indra, who is connected with the sunrise in the east²⁸, Agni or fire in the southeast, Yama, the god of death, in the south, Nirṛti, the goddess of chaos and ruin in the southwest, Varuṇa, the god of waters, in the west, Vāyu or wind in the northwest, Kubera, the god of wealth, or Soma, a lunar and ritual elixir, in the north, and Īśāna 'the Lord', i.e. Śiva in the northeast. (Moore 1990: 185.) According to earlier sources, the sun god is in the southwest and the moon in the northeast (cf., e.g., Hopkins 1915: 149). This fluctuation may make, for instance, the placing of the bedrooms and the granary in the southwestern corner, which later sources give as the abode of the goddess of destruction, more understandable.

Thus the Foundation Man and the gods sitting on him, especially those of the eight directions, establish the general orientation of the house and suggest some uses for its different areas (Moore 1990: 186).

The diametric and diagonal relationships of the loci of the divine presences seem to be in some way important. For instance, some houses facilitate communication from the southwest to the northeast corner of the house by holes through the walls, but there does not seem to be a unanimous and settled interpretation of these relationships. The height of a house in relation to the height of the temple is of paramount importance in Tamil Nadu. This does not seem to be discussed in Kerala building manuals. On the other hand, attention is paid to the house's lateral and frontal placement vis-à-vis temples, the slope of the compound, and the quadrant within the compound on which the house is built. (Daniel 1984: 138; Moore 1990: 186-187.)

Sloping, not level land, is recommended for housebuilding. The direction of the slope is not unimportant. A slope from southwest to northeast will give the best consequences, and a slope from south to north and west to east will yield positive consequences as well. The recommendation to build a house in front and to the right of a temple with a beneficent deity and to the rear and left side of a temple with a malign icon can be explained with the diagonal line of important influence from the southwest to the northeast corner of a temple facing the east. The assumption of an underlining line of good influence from the southwest to the northeast is also important in choosing the quadrant on the compound on which to build the house. That is why the northeast and southwest quadrants, called the section of human be-

²⁸ Indra is not directly the sun god. In a few passages he is identified with Sūrya, it is true, but usually he is identified as the destroyer of the demon of darkness, the thundercloud, and thus creating light and the universe. (See, e.g., Gonda 1960: 55; Macdonell 1897: 57.)

ings and the section of gods respectively, are recommended. The other two, the section of Yama and the section of Asura, are to be avoided. (Moore 1990: 187, 189.)

Moore uses a three-dimensional cube, developed by Marriott (1990: 6ff.), as a metaphor for Hindu sets of categories which are probably felt to be concentric domains. It is a larger conceptual framework in which she assembles most of the different manuals' spatial formulations and relates them to the patterns of household activity and patterns of Hindu cosmology. She uses the cube in finding correspondences where the cube's constituents are in harmony with the house plan and its activity patterns, and feels that the cube permits many more distinctions than does a unidimensional contrast of 'pure and impure'. The cube also presents points of dialectics, in which activity patterns are seen opposing the constituents. She takes as an example outdoor bathing, which can be a chilling activity in the early morning, and takes place on the sunny side of the house. The daily rite of lighting the wicks also starts from the dark northern parts of the house and illuminates them from the shrine lamp and from the eyes of the lamp's viewers, who are expected to look northward at these times. (Moore 1990: 191ff.)

The middle place, the atrium, extends somewhat into the earth. It is open to five directions, on four sides to the other rooms, and on the fifth to the sky. Brahmā, whose location corresponds to the middle place, represents the Brahman, the universal undifferentiated soul. The atrium is an axis between earth and ether, an axis of this microcosm. The house in Moore's research itself becomes a model for the Hindu macrocosm. (Kramrisch 1946: 89; Moore 1990: 182-183, 199-200.)

THE PANJAL NAMPŪTIRI COMPOUND

A recent phenomenon in Panjal is that Nampūtiri houses can be sold to other castes. The *taravāṭṭu* of Kaippaṅcēri Mana, for instance, was sold to a Telugu Ceṭṭi, who demolished it. Also Nampūtiris buy houses which have been built by other castes, and these houses and compounds have characteristics of their own. In the following I will mostly concentrate on houses planned by Nampūtiris themselves.

The space outdoors

A typical site for a Nampūtiri house is the slope of a hill or the bank of a river. Because people have not been willing to use the level, low-lying paddy land for house sites these are normally found in the undulating or high ground around the fields. The higher castes used to build their houses near the paddy fields in places with a pleasant view and cool breezes, and a good position for watching the agri-



Fig. 21. Ravipuram in 1983. Photo MP.

cultural work. The house sites were still on fertile land enabling the growing of garden crops. The hilly areas were left for other castes. (Cf. Iyer 1909-12, II: 178; Mencher 1966a: 139, 146.)

As will be remembered, from the ideological point of view the slope from southwest to northeast would yield the best consequences for a dwelling house, and a slope from south to north and from west to east would still yield positive consequences. According to MS, the slope should be either to the east or to the north, the latter being prescribed for Brahmins. The ancestral compound of Muṭṭattukkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu Mana, however, is on the northern side of the field with a slope to the south. Nobody knows how this happened, but practical reasons have obviously weighed more in the choice so that the rule has been overlooked. It is possible that the problem has been anticipated by performing some ritual in order to avoid evil consequences before building. Moore tells of a case in Tamil Nadu where the tank and shrine had been built in the northwest corner of the compound. By ritually establishing a 'namesake boundary' to the west of the house the problem had been eradicated. (Moore 1990: 176.)

The Nampūtiris mostly still live in their traditional style, each house being surrounded by a compound, and not in houses built street by street, as is the custom in many other parts of India, including the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu. The

Kerala compounds are divided by hedges, steps and entrances, so that the houses do not touch each other, as was the custom (25) according to Gundert. This kind of village planning together with the great amount of rain makes the villages lush and green. Although the dwelling houses may be relatively close to each other in the partitioned households the dense vegetation gives them privacy. (For the habitation of the Nampūtiris at the beginning of the 20th century see the following descriptions: Fawcett 1900: 43ff.; Thurston 1909, V: 172ff.; Iyer 1909-12, II: 177-179.)

The first partition of a Nampūtiri *mana* in Panjal was that of Vaikkākkara Mana in 1110 M.E. (1935). After the partitions of Muṭṭattukkāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Mana in 1941 and again in 1952/53, Rāman and Vāsudēvan shared the old Tarāvāṭṭu, and Putiya-pura was built for Nārāyaṅan and Nīlakaṅṅhan in 1128 M.E. (1953). IR built Ravipuram for his wife and children in 1941. Puruṣōttaman got a patch of land west of Ravipuram which had such big trees that he could build his house of his own timber. He also got another patch of land near the village cricket ground, where the next generation built a house in 1993, and let it to a bank. Subrahmaṅyan got his share in cash and settled in Cherpu. (IR, III, pp. 33, 37; MS; Uṅṅi.)

The partition of the family property of Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Mana took place in 1949. NNA with family and his father and mother formed a single branch, and continued to live in the old house. His father's second wife and all his paternal uncles and brothers with their families formed another branch and got two other buildings in the compound. (NNA, pp. 170-172.)

In the partition of Ravipuram IR's daughters will have no part, as their dowries are considered to be their share of the family property. Still, the daughters will come to the legal office and sign the document. There was no official partition by 1998, only an understanding on dividing the compound. The main building would belong to MS, the *patṭāyappura* to Ravi, the former cowhouse to Hari. Nīlakaṅṅhan's and Kṛṣṅan's shares would be building sites between the main building and the *patṭāyappura*. The courtyard around each building, if new ones are going to be built, will not be spacious any more, but the family members say that they feel happy if there is a lot of life and family contact in their joint compound. (MS.)

According to Fawcett (1900: 44-45), there should be a fig tree (*udumbara*; *Ficus glomerata*) near the house, and a bael fruit tree (*bilva*; *Aegle marmelos*) and a kind of basil (*tuḷasi*; *Ocimum sanctum*) in the compound. The fig tree *udumbara* grows near the original Tarāvāṭṭu, not Ravipuram. There is a tiny *bilva*, sacred to Śiva, growing near the tank, and several *tuḷasi* plants, connected with Viṣṅu, in several spots in the compound. In 1989 a *tuḷasi* was planted in the open space in the middle of the house as well. The leaves of the two latter plants are in frequent use in domestic *pūjas*, and the Nampūtiris could readily tell where there are such plants growing in the compound, but only the Nāyar maid servant remembered the *udum-*

bara. The wood of this tree is used for certain Vedic ritual implements, which are nowadays only rarely manufactured.

A jasmine (*mulla*) is ritually important for the women (see the *kuṭi-veppu* ceremony in Chapter 9) and they put its fragrant decorative flowers into their hair. DA planted a jasmine in the open courtyard during the customary house entering ceremony (*gṛha-praveśa*) when the family moved to live in Ravipuram. At this time the spot was outside the house. (MS; Uṇṇi.) Holy *darbha* and *kuśa* grass, which are very important in Vedic ceremonies, do not grow in the Ravipuram compound, but do grow in the atrium and near the tank of Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu Mana.

Furthermore there are many kinds of useful trees and plants in the Ravipuram compound, such as mango, jackfruit, tamarind, Indian gooseberry, teak, neem or margosa, and coconut trees, and some canes. A few papaw trees are sometimes planted. The black pepper climbs up the trunk of the jackfruit tree, but banana plants, like many vegetables so common in other (also Nampūtiri) compounds, are planted only on special occasions.

Traditional granite images of cobras and a granite snake temple (*citrakūṭakallū*) are seen through a northern door-opening and worshipped daily from there, but it is on the compound of Putiya-pura. There is a serpent grove also near the original Taravāṭṭu, as in the compounds of other houses, e.g. Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu Mana. The serpent groves are not found only in Nampūtiri compounds. They are also to be found near the houses of two Nāyar servants (one regular and one occasional) of Ravipuram. Serpent-worship was adopted from the Dravidian groups which were living in Kerala before the arrival of the Nampūtiris (Lemerancier 1984: 150). The Kallattū temple in the Taravāṭṭu even includes two stones representing Kuṭṭi-c-Cāttan, a divinity whose worship is very popular among lower castes.

In earlier times, when many Nampūtiri *manas* were huge, there could be more than one tank in the compound for bathing, washing and kitchen purposes. We saw three tanks in the largest of Kerala's Nampūtiri houses, Pūmuḷḷi Mana, in Peringode village, Palghat district, and two tanks in Ālvāncēri Mana, the house of the Tampurākkaḷ, spiritual leader of Nampūtiris in ancient times, in Athavanad village, Malappuram district.²⁹ Usually only one tank is the rule in any middle-sized house. Some smaller Nampūtiri houses have no tank at all nowadays. Citran Vaikkākkara Nampūtiri's house is one such, but this house did belong earlier to a Nāyar family. Ravipuram has a tank of its own, a wide pit dug in the laterite ground on the northeast side of the house. Even before Ravipuram was built a smaller tank existed on the spot. This bathing tank, as it should, enables the residents to greet the rising sun.

²⁹ According to Nagam Aiya (1906: 249), the lordly Brahmins of the illustrious house of Ālvāncēri are the most important of the Brahmins of Kerala. According to Iyer (1909-12, II: 173), in former times there were two illustrious families of Tampurākkaḷs, of which only the Ālvāncēri remained.



Fig. 22. Granite image of a cobra and granite snake temples (*citrakūṭakkallū*) in the compound of Putiya-pura. Photo MP 1983.

The Kerala customs according to Gundert (22) state that wells and tanks are elsewhere common to all castes, except the Parayen, but in Kerala each caste has its own. In Panjal there are village wells for all castes, but the Nampūtiris use their own. According to MS, temple tanks and tanks in Nampūtiri *manas* could be used by Nāyars as well, but not by lower castes. Public temple tanks are open for all castes nowadays. In the Ravipuram compound there are several wells. One is attached to the main building, another to the upper house. There is a well up the hill, which was not used for a long time except by doves sleeping on the inner walls. In 1993 it was repaired by Ravi for the use of his family. One well is attached to the southern outer wall of the compound which outsiders can use without entering the yard.

According to early 20th century sources, between the gate and the building there was a raised footpath of mud, sometimes even paved with bricks or a spacious courtyard hardened with mud or cowdung (Fawcett 1900: 44; Iyer 1909-12, II: 178). Raised footpaths are not a typical feature in the courtyards in Panjal, but belong to the paddy fields. The courtyard of many houses is, however, plastered with cowdung by Nāyar servants especially in December before the *tiruvātira* celebration. The plastering is held to have a purifying effect in addition to its hardening function.

Ravipuram's courtyard has a large bird-shaped brick pavement. It is the lowest layer of a fire altar for an *atirātra* ritual performed near the Taravāṭi by Rāman Akkittiri, IR's great-grandfather in 1019 M.E. (1844) and moved here by IR. (IR, I, p. 2; MS.) The altar makes the ground even and firm in the middle part, so that no plastering is necessary. However, before IR's and DA's 60th wedding anniversary, when the courtyard had to serve as an auditorium for hundreds of watchers of a *kathakali* performance, some pits were filled with mud from the field.

According to Śaṅkara's rules (AP 42) the corpse of a man should be burnt on his own ground. This is still done in Panjal.

Buildings in the compound

There are three rather big buildings in the Ravipuram compound: the main building, another dwelling house and an old barn. The other dwelling house (*pattāyappura*) is situated up the hill, originally built for the unmarried male members of the family and for the guests, the latter function also mentioned by Fawcett (1900: 44). IR constructed this building, 'a cultural club of young Nampūtiris', as early as 1103-04 M.E. (1928-29) (IR, I, p. 92). The building served as a hostel for Nampūtiri school boys and, later, girls coming from outside the village in the 1930s, and as a dining place for boys in the 1930s and 1940s. (MS.)

The upper house was not lately occupied by the young men, as there is enough room in the main building for the few remaining members of the family. The second floor of the upper building was used as a place for visitors in the 1980s and early 1990s. While we were in Panjal, we could use both its rooms for sleeping and keeping our personal property. In the 1980s the corresponding building in Nellikāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Mana was still occupied by young boys who had already had their *upanayana* performed, bachelors, and NNA, a widower.

Downstairs the rooms were hired out in the 1980s and until 1990 for a 'carka school' for young girls, a school where the girls could earn some money by spinning cotton by means of rather sophisticated handturned spinning machines. There were no Nampūtiri girls in the school, the Nāyar caste was the highest represented. Fawcett has the rule (29, corresponding to AP 32, where weaving is mentioned) that Brahmins should not spin cotton. Uṅṅi informed me that it is not forbidden for Brahmin girls to spin at home, and IR had actually bought 3-4 spinning wheels of the kind which are well-known from Mahatma Gandhi's campaigns. I never saw any Nampūtiri spin, and I doubt whether they even owned spinning wheels before Gandhi's influence. S. V. Iyer (1977: 49) suggests that the prohibition concerns not weaving but spinning which the priest in Tamil country does for making the *yajñopavīta*. This seems probable.

In 1990-92 the *pattāyappura* was let out to the Rubber Board, to house a training class for tapping, and to act as a hostel for the students. When IR's son Ravi moved in with his family after retiring from his job in 1993, he used one third of his savings for renovating it. The two open verandahs got walls and became part of the interior, and a new entrance was made on the western side. One of the stairways to the upper floor was removed, and a new kitchen was built.

In the barn on the western side of the compound, mainly rice straw was stored. An old small cowhouse³⁰ used to stand near the barn. In 1990 the timber from the cowhouse was used to repair the barn, which was turned into a plastic bottle workshop. There is no shed for storing straw any more, which means that the straw has to be sold before the monsoon rains arrive. (MS.)

There are no such palatial structures in Panjal as Ālvāncēri Mana or Pūmuḷli Mana used to be. The times when the latter house fed hundreds of servants and other people every day have also gone by. When we visited Pūmuḷli Mana in the 1980s, the atmosphere there was very nostalgic with the few family members roaming around in the almost empty house talking about the days which seemed golden to them. In many cases the Nampūtiris have moved to live in smaller houses after the partition of the joint families, and the large houses have often been demolished in the process. Pūmuḷli Mana is one of them now. Even the Tampurākkaḷ has had to demolish and sell some parts of his house complex in order to pay for the maintenance of others.

According to Moore, houses of the older type ceased to be built around 1940. According to the information that she received, high caste houses in Kerala should preferably face the east, and this direction could also be well justified by cosmological considerations as the east is the direction of sunrise, and a symbol of birth and creation. West would be the second preference and north the third, but south would never be acceptable. (Moore 1990: 170, 173-174.) Early 20th century sources also tell that a Nampūtiri house faced the east, and that at a distance from it, on the eastern side of the courtyard, there was a gate-house with a room and sometimes two, if it had two stories. The entrance to the compound was over a step ladder. (Fawcett 1900: 43-44; Thurston 1909, II: 174; Iyer 1909-12, II: 178.)

³⁰ According to Fawcett (1900: 50), the cow, buffalo, dog and cat are the animals ordinarily kept in domestication by the Nampūtiris. Some Nampūtiri *manas* still keep zebu cows, but according to my informants, not buffaloes, the milk, ghee etc. of which, should, according to Śankara's rules (AP 19-20), be abandoned in food offerings to the gods and the dead. Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Mana keeps zebu cows. Watchdogs and cats for catching mice and rats are kept in some houses, but otherwise my experience is that the Nampūtiris are indifferent or even hostile to dogs and most semi-wild or wild animals. Stray dogs and cats are treated harshly. My looking after a puppy whose mother had been killed was either considered funny or watched with disgust. I have experiences concerning animals which are too painful for me to discuss.



Fig. 23. Nellikāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Mana: the main building. Photo MP 1983.



Fig. 24. The Taravāṭṭu dismantled. Photo MP 1983.

Ravipuram's gates are step ladders on the western and southern side of the compound, and one of them had a porch-like roof construction (*paṭippura*) above it, but no house. That has been dismantled now as it had fallen into decay. Māttūr Mana and Puruṣōttaman's house, for instance, had a roofed porch. According to IR, there were only five traditionally-built Nampūtiri houses in Panjal in the 1980s. They belonged to Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu, Perumaññāṭṭū, Tōṭṭattu, Kaippaṇcēri and Māttūr Manas. All these houses face the west, that is, the verandah and main entrance are on the western side, as Nampūtirippāṭṭū (1963, Chapter 2) says it should be. This is the case with the Taravāṭṭū and Pātirippillī Mana as well, and, according to Henri Schildt (orally), almost invariably with Travancore Nampūtiri houses, too. In Malabar and among the Nampūtiris who moved from Malabar to Travancore during Tipu Sultan's time the houses would face the east. The reason for this difference is not known. Ravipuram faces the south, the forbidden direction, but the entrance to the verandah in front of the main entrance is from the west. In this way the dangerous direction has partly been avoided.

The traditional Nampūtiri houses north of the river Periyar used to have a multistoried structure (*mālika*) either in the southern portion (*tekkini*) or in the western portion (*paṭiññārri*), or in both portions. South of the river they used to have square buildings with a central court without a multistoried structure. (Nampūtirippāṭṭū 1963, Chapter 2.) The multistoried structure is in Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu Mana and Perumaññāṭṭū Mana in the east-west direction, and they are of the so-called *tekkini mālika* type. All others are of the *paṭiññārri mālika* type, i.e. the multistoried structure is in the north-south direction. In a *paṭiññārri mālika mana* Uṇṇi says that there is a *tekkini*, in the *tekkini mālika mana a paṭiññārri*. By this he refers to a two- or three-foot high platform used for various functions like the marriage ceremony.

The square central part (*nālukeṭṭu*) of a Nampūtiri manor, which housed many idols and the holy fire or fires, was considered and treated more or less as a temple, and much care was taken to ward off any pollution. After a long journey nobody entered this central place without taking a bath in the tank. Persons under some pollution did not enter it and dirty and polluted clothes were not allowed to be taken in. (NNA, p. 174.)

As the households have become smaller, the ground plan and orientation of the house have partly changed. The same can be said about the whole compound. The initial stage of Ravipuram's main building was completed in six months in 1116 M.E. (1941). It grew when there was need for more room. The *pūmukhaṃ*, *vaṭakani* and *keṭṭil* are later additions. When MS married, there was a second floor as well, ready to accommodate his family. Ravipuram's main building is still like a part of a traditional house, though with rooms only on the northern, eastern and western sides, and only an open verandah on the southern side. Therefore there is no *tekkini*



Fig. 25. The walls of a low-caste family's thatched house are made of palm leaf. Photo MP 1990.

(‘room on the southern side’). On other sides some rooms are missing as well. There is no *paṭiññārri* (‘room on the western side’), *kilakkini* (‘room on the eastern side’) or *toṭṭiya* (‘cradle room’)³¹. In some new Nampūtiri houses, like Vaikkākkara Citran Nampūtiri’s house, there is no open courtyard inside the construction at all.

The *śrīlākaṃ*, a room specially reserved for prayer, *pūja* and meditation, always found in traditionally-built Nampūtiri houses, is missing in Ravipuram as well. In Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Mana it is placed in the usual manner on a straight line with the gate so that the ritual lights are visible from there. (NNA, p. 66.) IR’s and DA’s bedroom was a substitute for the *śrīlākaṃ*.

Ravipuram is considerably smaller than the Taravāṭṭu, but the latter became smaller, too, when parts of it were taken for the construction of Putiya-pura after the second partition in 1953. Those parts were the *tekkini* and *kilakkini*. Building materials for Ravipuram, including the carved pillars of the verandah, came from another source. The Muṭṭattukkāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu family had lent some money to a Nāyar house in Panjal. As compensation for the loan the family got one building from that house, and used it as building material. In 1992 parts of the Taravāṭṭu were reconstructed.

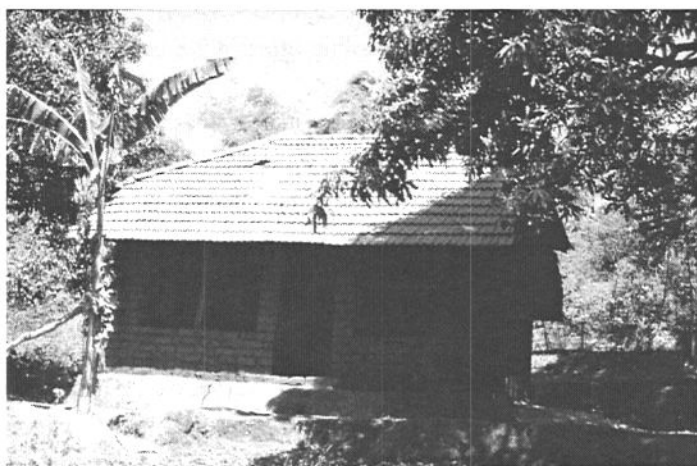
³¹ *Toṭṭiya* or *toṭṭiyara*, ‘cradle room’, is said to refer to the babies’ cloth cradle, which was suspended from a rope there.

N. Subramani Aiyar (quoted by Thurston 1909, V: 174) writes that the whole Nampūtiri house is built of wood, but Fawcett (1900: 44) says that the house is, as a rule, erected with blocks of laterite cemented with mud, rarely mortar. L. K. Anantha Krishna Iyer (1909-12, II: 179) agrees with the latter. I mainly saw Nampūtiri houses made of laterite. When this rock is not yet exposed to the atmosphere, it is soft, but hardens on exposure (Menon 1979: 32). Up the hill in Ravipuram compound there is a wide ditch dug when blocks of laterite were cut out for construction. This was done with hand tools. Burnt mud bricks may also be used. To a large extent the houses are whitewashed with ground shells mixed with liquid. Blocks of laterite are also used for building the walls surrounding the compound, but the upper part is of bamboo.

The walls of the lower castes' houses are usually made, if not of palm leaf, of bricks made by removing the soil with a hoe, mixing it with water, shaping the mixture in a wooden frame, and letting it dry in the sun. The material may be obtained from one's own fields or one can make an arrangement to get it from somebody else's land. Sun-burnt bricks as building material are naturally not as hard and durable as burnt bricks or laterite. IR's opinion in 1985 was that cement had been used in this part of Kerala about one hundred years, and whitewashing about fifty years. I observed reparation work being done in Ravipuram in 1985. For cementing the main building a mixture was made with one part of cement and five parts of sand. The holes in the barn house wall were filled with ordinary mud from the field when some rice straw had first been burnt on the spot.

Some blue colour was added to the whitewashing, and following the latest fashion, the lower part of the walls was painted with a black glossy varnish called 'japan' in the latter half of the 1980s. The whitewashing mixture that was left over was used for painting the lower parts of mango and rubber trees and coconut palms. It is said to have a fertilizing and insect repelling effect. The blue shade in the white is said to reflect more light and have a cooling effect, thus being especially useful for rubber trees as their bark is very thin.

The doorways and windows are framed with wood (teak in Ravipuram), and wood carvings as decorations are common, a feature which both Fawcett (1900: 44) and L. K. Anantha Krishna Iyer (1909-12, II: 179) mention. The door which leads to the granary has in some other Nampūtiri houses a decorative wooden doorstep also said to be used as a rice offering altar. The windows even inside the house have iron bars and heavy shutters. The doors which lead to the dining space and kitchen have big chinks, as the main function of these doors is to keep stray dogs and cats away, not to give intimacy or safety. Monkeys also used to haunt the village earlier, but at least by the 1980s they had disappeared. In some Nampūtiri houses like the Taravāṭṭu a few window shutters can be turned down to be used as beds.



Figs. 26.-28. Making sun-burnt bricks, and a house built of them. Photos MP 1990.

Different parts of the house are under a separate roof. Aiyar, at the beginning of the 20th century, says (in Thurston 1909, V: 174) that all Nampūtiri houses until recently used to be thatched as protection against the heat of the tropical sun, which a tiled roof would only aggravate. Fawcett (1900: 44) remarks that though the house properly speaking should be thatched, it was in his time very often tiled. L. K. Anantha Krishna Iyer (1909-12, II: 179) as early as 1912 says that the houses were at that time tiled, though at one time thatched. According to Mayer (1952: 47), formerly in Malabar no low-caste house was allowed to have a tiled roof. It seems, then, that the change started towards the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and spread very rapidly. It is also probable that there were local differences.

The roofs of Ravipuram, even those of the barn and the cowhouse, were decked with big tiles made in Shoranur or some other center, as the stamp on them revealed. The small tiles, always used in several layers, originally covered the temple and the Tarāvāṭṭu. They make the roofs good hiding places for scorpions, and make repairing difficult and costly, as a lot of wood is needed for it. They are still seen in some houses at least in Tamil Nadu, but, for as long as IR had observed construction work, they had not been used in Kerala any more. According to *Kerala District Gazetteer: Trichur* (1962), p. 316, the tile industry has grown from a humble beginning early in the 20th century into the most important industry in the district. Other castes still have houses decked with palm leaves or hay. The first Nāyar house to get a tiled roof in Panjal was Muttanñēl Tarāvāṭṭu. This took place about 1915.

In traditional houses there is above the cooking hearth an opening for the smoke to escape. On the roof there are either special convex tiles on top of this opening or a few tiles in one or two rows slightly shifted to form a small shelter on it. In more modern Nampūtiri houses there is a chimney. On the other hand the use of cooking gas produces less smoke. Ravipuram only has a gap all around between the walls and the roof, but Putiya-pura had a chimney constructed in 1990.

Rooms

The plan of the ground floor of Ravipuram in 1992 can be seen in figures 29-30. I will now give the transcription of the names of the rooms as given by Rv, possible corrections of spelling mistakes, and translations of the words mainly following H. Gundert's *Malayalam and English Dictionary* (1872). Some more information is to be found in the glossary.

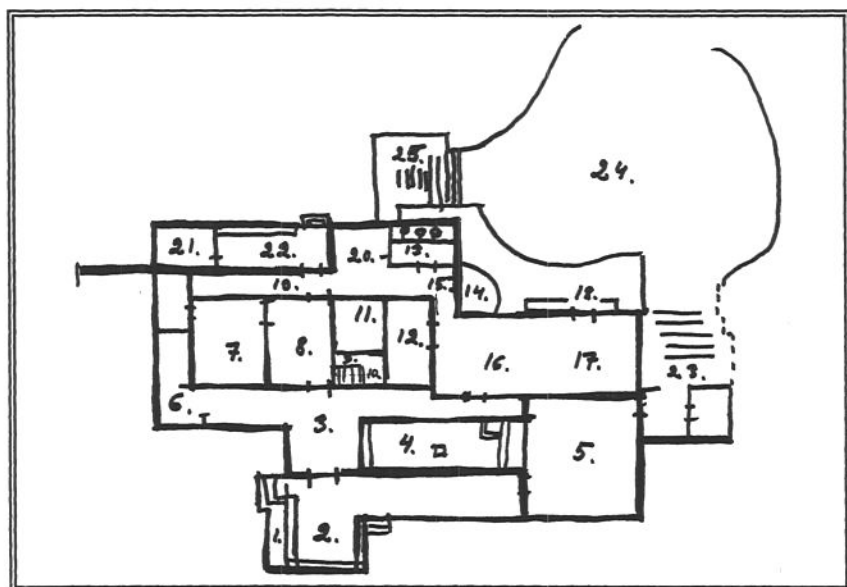


Fig. 29. A rough ground-floor plan of Ravipuram sketched by MP in 1985, with additions in 1992. The numbers of the different parts of the house used in the text correspond to the numbers in this sketch.

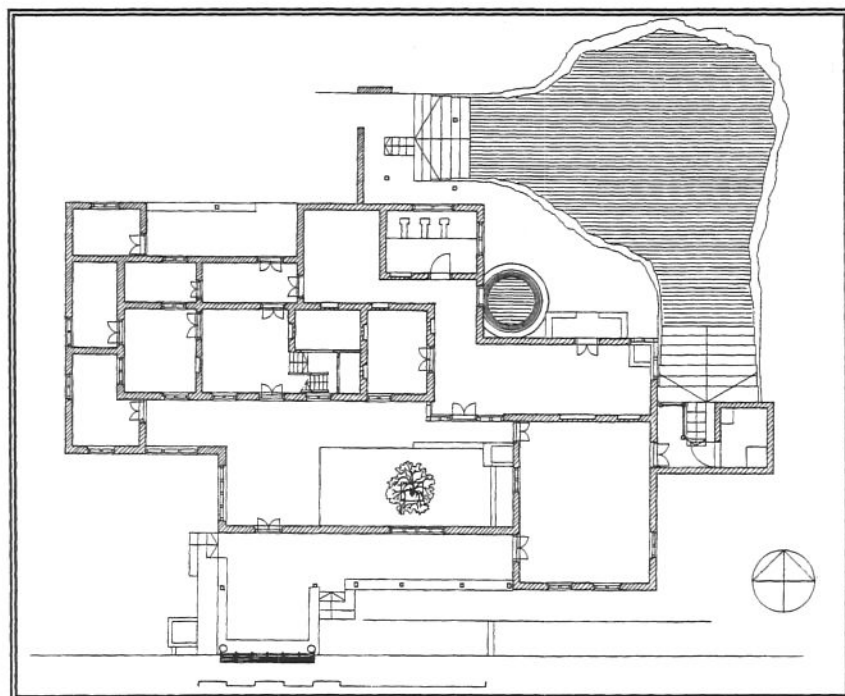


Fig. 30. The Ravipuram floor plan: the ground floor. Henri Schildt, a professional architect, drew the floor plan at my request in 1998.

1. *irayam* 'verandah' (*ira* 'eaves of the house'; *irayakam* 'inside')
2. *pūmukham* 'a verandah or bower to enjoy the sea-breeze & solitude'
3. *akatte pūmukham* 'inside verandah within the house'
4. *naṭumurram* 'courtyard, chiefly of *nālukeṭṭu* (*naṭu* 'centre'); hence it means 'central courtyard'
5. *keṭṭil*; *keṭṭu* 'construction, building'
6. *tālvara* 'declivity' (also 'valley'; cf. *tālvaram* 'a verandah lower than the house', 'a slope')
7. *ara* 'room', 'well secured room', 'magazine', 'treasury'
8. *purattaḷam* 'any room-like place of a house fully open on one side, facing the outer yard (*puram*)'
9. *maccū* 'a boarded ceiling', 'apartment secured with stones to keep valuables', 'upper storey'
10. *kōṇi* 'ladder', 'stairs'
11. *pattāyam* 'a large chest for keeping rice, paddy, treasure'
12. *kalavara* 'storehouse', 'pantry' (*kalam* 'pot', 'vessel'; *ara* 'room')
13. *aṭukkaḷa* 'kitchen' (*aṭuka* 'to cook')
14. *kiṇar* 'well'
15. *koṭṭattaḷam* 'place to hold water, to wash rice etc.', 'stone floor of a bath' (*koṭṭa* 'bucket')
16. *ūṇam taḷam* 'eating hall'
17. *vaṭakkaṇi* = *vaṭakkini* 'a room on the north side'
18. *keṭṭile vaṭakku puram* can be translated 'open porch north of the *keṭṭil*'
19. *iṭānāli* 'passage between two rooms' (*iṭa* 'place between')
20. *pātram kamuttunna sṭhalam* 'place for overturning vessels' (*kamuttuka* 'to overspread', 'to upset')
21. *Mukāmiyute murī* Mugami's room
22. *vaṭakku puram* (*puram* 'the outside', 'the wall of a house', 'a side'); can be translated 'northern open porch'
23. *keṭṭile kuḷam* (*keṭṭil*, see number 5; *kuḷam*, see number 24)
24. *kuḷam* 'tank', 'pond'
25. *vaṭakku puratte kuḷam* can be translated 'tank on the northern side'

The *irayam* (1) is the step outside the low porch wall. Footwear was left on the *irayam* before entering the house. The *pūmukham* (2), the verandah, is an important cool outer room where the Nampūtiris and especially their male guests sit talking, reading and drinking coffee or tea, or just relax. According to Nampūtirippāṭū (1963, Chapter 12), in former times the girls who had attained puberty were to leave at the northern and eastern sides of the house, and not use the *pūmukham*. They could not even pick up a mango that fell from the tree on that side. The male members of our host family also used the *pūmukham* like a captain's bridge for overlooking the activities in their fields. Vegetables and firewood purchased for the family were weighed on the verandah, and there was a hook in the ceiling for the scales to be hung from. The scales were also used as a swing for children. At night the verandah was a sleeping space for guests and, occasionally, the younger male members of the family.³²

³² Many rituals were performed during our visit on the verandah, but it was only because there was more light there for the filming.



Fig. 31. IR having his meal with a Nampūtiri visitor in the *akatte pūmukhaṃ*. He is sitting on his 'grandfather *palakam*'. Photo MP 1983.



Fig. 32. A novel use for the *akatte pūmukhaṃ*. U watching television in 1992. Photo MP.

The *akatte pūmukhaṃ* (3) is another room where people used to sit and talk. Casual Nampūtiri and Ambalavāsi lady visitors in particular sat during their short stops on the bench placed on the edge of the open courtyard. In the 1980s food was sometimes served on the floor of this room, especially for visitors who were not intimate friends or close relatives. The only time I saw IR sitting on the floor and eating was when he joined an elderly Nampūtiri guest for his meal here. Also when there were exceptionally many people for a meal, at least part of them had to eat in the *akatte pūmukhaṃ*.³³

The paddy which was carried out in the sunshine to dry was usually brought onto the floor of this space at night. The round grinding stones were placed on the edge of the courtyard, but they were later removed to the storeroom for cooking vessels, and they fell into misuse in 1994, when an electric grinder was purchased for the house. In the 1990s the *akatte pūmukhaṃ* had become the television room, and so there was no place for eating there any more. The time spent on the verandah had become shorter, and the attraction of the *akatte pūmukhaṃ* had increased. The use of the two spaces described above is very much in accord with Moore's description of the use of the covered porch and the reception area in upper-caste Kerala houses (Moore 1990: 174).

As was mentioned earlier, the *naṭumuraṃ* (4), the open space in the middle of the house, had a jasmine plant (*mulla*) and the sacred basil (*tulasī*) in a square stone stand in its middle. Every evening DA placed some burning wicks around it as a part of her daily ritual. Some other ceremonies took place here as well during our visit. A heap of coconuts was sometimes stored in one corner, but the most common everyday use of the space took place at the gutter, where before the meals hands were washed and after the meals the mouth and the plates as well as the hands were rinsed. The central holy ritual aspect belonging to the open space, the seat of Brahmā, was present also in Ravipuram and other Nampūtiri houses that I saw. Rinsing one's mouth and hands after the meal at its edge was also a kind of ritual, and did not diminish its sacredness.

The *keṭṭil* (5) is the room where IR and DA had their beds. IR spent most of his time in this room, sitting or lying, and also taking his meals on his bed. The writing table, the radio, and a safe also told of the importance of this room, as did the idols. After the old couple's death this became MS's and U's bedroom.

The *tālyara* (6) is just a corridor and casual storing place for paddy and other things. Clothes were dried both there and at the edge of the *naṭumuraṃ*. In the *ara* (7), the 'well secured room', children had been born and ladies had spent their weeks of confinement and days of menstrual pollution. Earlier it was also a place

³³ Some rituals took place in the *akatte pūmukhaṃ* during our visit for the same reason as was the case with the verandah.

where the servants could sleep. The northwest side of the house is suitable for women in a polluting state according to the building manuals. Later there was a bed on which one of the ladies or the boys took rest by daytime. I was allowed to sleep in this room when, occasionally, I would have had to spend the night alone in the upper house, which IR would not allow. This room became MS's and U's bedroom after Rv's marriage. It became a visitors' room again, when MS and U moved to sleep in the *keṭṭil*.

The *purattaḷam* (8) was used as a thoroughfare, and it also had an inbuilt shelf where soap etc. were kept. Its floor was casually used for the laundry, which was waiting to be taken by the washerman. The *maccū* (9) is the space where the stairs (*kōṇi* 10), leading to the second floor begin. From there one can also open the shutters of the paddy bin (*pattāyam*) (11). The room situated in the core of the house, the *purattaḷam*, where the paddy bin is kept, is in many houses at the same time the safe for ritual vessels and other valuables.

The *kalavaṛa* (12), the pantry, was first and foremost the store room for keeping jars containing foodstuffs, but it also housed the ritual vessels when they were not in use, and had a number of colour prints of deities in front of which DA lit wicks at nightfall. DA's ritually purified clothes were also hung in the *kalavaṛa* lest they come into contact with something impure before use in the temple or rituals. The *kalavaṛa* belonged to DA more than to anybody else. The *aṛa*, *maccū* and *kalavaṛa* alike are secure places and do not open to the outside of the house.

The *aṭukkaḷa* (13) is a small smoky kitchen now on the northern side, originally, when the eastern rooms were still missing, more clearly in the northeastern corner, as it should be according to old sources. The *koṭṭattaḷam* (15) is the space in front of the opening in the wall through which the water was pulled from the well (*kiṇar*) (14) outside the wall. It is close to the kitchen in the traditional way. (Cf., e.g., Iyer 1909-12, II: 179; Nampūtirippāṭṭi 1963, Chapter 2.) Big kettles and buckets as well as spouted vessels (*kiṇṭi*) were filled with water and kept in front of the kitchen well opening. Rice was rinsed here daily as were some dishes.

In the room that consisted of the *ūṇam taḷam* (16) and the *vaṭakkaṇi* = *vaṭakkini* (17), the daily meals were taken, but also partly prepared. The *vaṭakkini* was the ritual place proper which was used both by IR and DA. We saw them perform the *sarasvatī pūja* and the *śivarātri pūja* here. Paddy was sometimes temporarily stored and dried here in the 1980s, and some food preparations requiring a lot of space and time, like making the pickles, were done on the floor. In 1990 there was also a gas cooker as a novelty here, and after Rv's marriage an electric grinder and mixer, which means that many tasks which had solely been done in the kitchen, were shifted here. The ritual use of the floor of this space has become restricted, but e.g. IR's *śrāddha* is yearly performed here. A door opens to



Figs. 33-34. From the floor to the table. DA and U in 1983, U and Sāvitrī in 1992. Photos MP.

the north of the house to a stone step, *keṭṭile vaṭakku puram* (18). This step was counted as part of the ritual space. DA used it daily for lighting the wicks in honour of the stone cobras standing in the compound of Putiya-pura.

The *iṭanāli* (19), 'the passage' is truly just a corridor, and the *pātram kamut-tunna sthalam* (20), as the name reveals, a place for overturning vessels, i.e. a store-room for cooking vessels, where they were kept upside down. The rectangular grinding stones were also kept and used here.

Mukāmiyuṭe murī (21) is so called because M used to parboil paddy there. 'Mugami's room' is a flimsy shack with a mud floor. The room can only be entered from outside. The *vaṭakku puram* (22) is the northern open verandah with two stone mortars sunk in the floor. This was the space where M prepared the vegetables, i.e. peeled and cut them before they were taken into the kitchen to be cooked and fried by the Nampūtiri ladies. Only once did I see the mortars used and that was for pounding very fine rice powder with wooden pestles for making *aṭa* for IR's and DA's 60th wedding anniversary. The porch where food was prepared and the space where parboiling of rice took place, are in their traditional places (cf. Moore 1990: 175).

In the main building upstairs there are two bedrooms in the middle part of the house. The one on the western side was for MS and his wife U, well in accordance

with the cosmological pattern. In 1992 the newly married couple Rv and Sāvītri moved into this room. The other was first used by the sons, later by Rm, and since 1996, the latter's wife, too. When Rm returned to Saudi Arabia, his wife used this room at least on week-ends, as she stayed in her paternal home as well. Even in IR's youth and earlier, married couples had private bedrooms, but as normally only the eldest son married, there were at the most three couples living in the house at the same time, each of a different generation, and three such bedrooms were enough even in a large dwelling house.

Downstairs there are two latrines, one under the eastern bath shed, the other near the rest room. A third latrine is a separate building in the northwest corner of the kitchen yard, and the upper building has its own. Upstairs there is in addition a urinating place (*ōvara*) with a protruding chute. Earlier, before the water latrine was built in January 1975 in consideration of the needs of the members of the *agni-cayana* documentation team, there was a ladies' toilet without any shed on the slope beginning from the kitchen court yard. As the Nampūtiri men used to spend their time in the temple or the verandah, there was nobody from whose eyes the ladies would have had to hide themselves. In Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Mana the traditional latrine was used occasionally also by the men, because the house was too far from the Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple. (MS.) In 1992 running water made it easy to turn the latrines in the Ravipuram main building into bathrooms as well.

The *keṭṭile kuḷam* (23) is a covered shed and stairs leading to the tank, *kuḷam* (24). The tank is in the northeast as expected. This can be entered through the *keṭṭil* (5). The tank can also be entered from the kitchen yard through the *vatakkupuratte kuḷam* (25), the shed and stairs which are mainly used by the younger generation and the women. The northern entrance was earlier the only one, used by the ladies only, as the men took their baths in the temple tank. Later, after the *keṭṭil* was built, the eastern entrance was also added. (MS.) Kitchen utensils and eating vessels were washed at the northern entrance by M, as were some clothes by her, U, and later others. M could also take a bath here. We were allowed to use either side of the pond, but usually we used the kitchen side. There is no strict division here, but in some other *manas* there is. An example is Kainikkara Mana, where a wall separates the women's bathing place from that of the men.

The tank swarms with fish and frogs, and the latter attract snakes to the pond. There are also a few turtles (*āma*), which come to eat the remnants of food from the vessels which have been left to soak on the steps. The longer the dry season proceeds, the fewer fish can be seen. In Kainikkara Mana the fish were big and so bold that they never left the stairs under the surface before the bather's foot touched them. The Nampūtiris are vegetarians and so do not catch them or let others kill them. On the contrary, the fish are fed with husked raw rice for instance in the Ayyappan temple tank in Panjal. Although the Nampūtiris cannot readily give the

reason for this, it is known that in many parts of India fish are considered sacred and are protected and fed with balls of flour. Sometimes they are held to represent ancestors. (Crooke 1896, II: 253-254.) Fish, of course, is the first *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.

Concerning the construction of a new outhouse in his compound, after the partition of the family property in 1949, NNA (p. 176) says that the building was started on an auspicious day. According to MS the total measurement of the Ravipuram main building and of the rooms is in accordance with the rules of the building manuals. Although IR was conscious of the rules and regulations and the cosmological concepts in the compound and building work, he used to say that first of all the plan should be practical in the given situation and to the owners' taste. In support of his opinion he used to recite a Sanskrit verse to that effect. However, whenever possible without unreasonable difficulty, as the house and compound bear evidence, he followed the cosmological rules. (MS.)

Fittings and furnishings

Something about the fittings, furnishings, and household utensils was said in connection with the foregoing description of the different uses of the rooms. More details of my observations will follow.

Some foodstuffs were kept on the floor, but they had to be hidden in strong tight containers. Only paddy was left lying on the floor at night when it was time to dry it. By day it was carried out into the sunshine on special bamboo mats. On the other hand, things were hoisted up high, supported by ropes hanging from the ceiling joists, as a precaution against vermin. There were also a few cupboards, shelves and niches on the wall, where some pots and pans were kept as well as some valuables, cosmetics and even idols. The stainless steel dishes were earlier left on the floor after being rinsed, but later they were kept on a side table. Households did not normally own any Western type crockery. Uṇṇi and Jayaśrī got some coffee cups as wedding presents, but they remained oddities which were kept stored, not in normal use.

In 1900 Fawcett (1900: 45) wrote that the chair was making its way into Nam-pūtiri houses. It still was in Panjal and among IR's relatives outside Panjal in 1985, as the low seat, the *āma-p-palakaṃ*, was the commonest seat used when preparing food and eating, and the only one used in domestic rituals. Fawcett said too that there were always a few skins of the spotted deer on the floor for sitting on. This is not so any more. In Ravipuram they had one on the wall, and they said that it was only used in rituals, and even then not for sitting on. I never saw it in use.

The size of the *āma-p-palakaṃ* was relatively standardized, but some meant for children were very small. To emphasize the status of some persons their seats

were extra large. That was the case with the so-called grandfather *palakaṃ* in Ravi-puram, and especially with the gigantic seat in Ālvāñcēri Mana, the home of the Tampurākkaḷ. The height of the wooden seat is 3-5 cm, so that it is a good exercise to sit down and get up again several times every day. Even many aged Nampūtiris, both male and female, get up very easily, sometimes even without taking support with their hands on the floor. When sitting on a *palakaṃ*, the feet are allowed to touch the floor or ground even in rituals, in contrast to the custom in Tamil Nadu. When beginning the meal or otherwise using the *palakaṃ*, the Nampūtiris take hold of the neck part of the seat with their left hand, and place the head of the turtle on the left when they sit down. When they have finished with the seat they lean it against the wall.

The name of the wooden seat *āma-p-palakaṃ* (Skt. *kūrmāsana*) which is commonly simply called *palakaṃ*, 'piece of board', refers to its turtle shape. The tail is marked, if at all, as a pointed end on the seat, and the legs sometimes with protruding dents on the border of the flat seat or in the oval ring at the bottom. There are also oval seats with no resemblance to a turtle. Nowadays the *āma-p-palakaṃ* is thus usually very stylized, but there are seats with a more expressive head with eyes and even teeth marked on them. The Nampūtiris are familiar with live turtles, so that the teeth must be a deliberate distortion. The seat is used with a mind to the myth where Viṣṇu in his turtle *avatāra* gave firm support to mount Mandara used as the stick, when the gods and demons churned the milk ocean. As a mythological animal, the turtle does not have to look naturalistic, as is commonly demonstrated in Indian art.

The *āma-p-palakaṃ* is said to be used only by the Nampūtiri *jāti*, but in 1994 AP saw that, after the *sapiṇḍī-karaṇa* ritual of NNA's brother in Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu Mana, the deceased's son, counted as a Kṣatriya after his mother, sat on an *āma-p-palakaṃ*, but his daughter and granddaughter sat on the floor instead. Earlier these relatives would not have been allowed to enter the house at all, and, in spite of this incidence, the *āma-p-palakaṃ* is still a typically Nampūtiri seat. At home the Kṣatriyas have ordinary rectangular *palakaṃs*.

A radical change took place in the 1990s, when food began to be prepared on and consumed at the table with long benches and chairs around, and the *palakaṃ* rare in other than ritual situations. On festive occasions when many people gather to take their meals, long mats made of *kōra* or Cyperus grass (cf. *Census of India 1961*, VII A: 148, 225) are used for sitting. Broader mats made of *kōra* grass or of screw-pine leaves (*Pandanus tectorius*) are also spread in festivities for guests to sit or lie on by day time and sleep on at night. A person in *dikṣa*, performing ceremonies in a state of mourning because of the death of a near relative, is also ordered to sleep on the floor (cf., e.g., Iyer 1909-12, II: 269). Nowadays, however, even he is afforded luxury and can sleep in a bed (Uṇṇi). A mat is actually not a humble

seat. The finest screw-pine and *kōra* grass mats were considered to be seats of honour, better than wooden seats. The privilege of sitting on a grass mat had sometimes to be obtained from the ruler of the state (Thurston 1909, V: 322).

The low walls of the porch and the open courtyard in the middle of the house had been used for sitting for a long time past, and there were benches placed in rooms where people gathered to talk. In addition Ravipuram had some chairs with a European influence. One of them was a bulky wooden resting chair with broad arms and a backward leaning back. The shape resembles that of the 'classic verandah chairs' or the 'planter's long-sleevers' described as verandah furniture in the *Army and Navy Stores Catalogue 1905-1910* (in C. Allen 1977: 5, 60-61). The other type of chair is armless, with a vertical back. These chairs were made by the local carpenter. Factory-made chairs have become common nowadays.

The frame and legs of the string cots are made of heavy wooden planks and have a coir network in the middle. There was only one string cot in Ravipuram, and it had been taken down from the ceiling joists only when needed by a woman in childbed. Other beds, made of wooden planks all over, and modern lightweight folding beds are common for the permanent Nampūtiri residents of the house. Beds are naturally also used for sitting on.

Although there are writing desks in Nampūtiri houses, for example a solid one in IR's room, tables for preliminary preparation of food were practically non-existent in Panjal even in the beginning of the 1980s. All the cutting and grinding was usually done sitting or squatting on the floor. While the grinding stones remained at the place where they were used, other kitchen utensils, like the coconut graters and big kettles, were lifted to lean on the wall. Some vessels are so huge that they are bigger than many a piece of furniture. Identical shapes are repeated in smaller, even tiny vessels.

In IR's room there was a strong iron chest of drawers, referred to as his safe, where money, bank books, old palm-leaf manuscripts and photo albums were kept. Nampūtiri women kept their personal property in carefully made wooden trunks with metal mountings. These they brought from their paternal homes. U got her trunk after her grandmother, who had brought it with her to Payyappaḷi Mana. A modern steel almirah became more highly appreciated by Nampūtiri ladies in the 1980s. Two such almirahs appeared in Ravipuram during our stay. The first one was bought with the money that U got when she sold her trunk to the National Museum of Finland and the second one was left behind by American social anthropologists in their furnished quarters in the *pattāyappura*.

Wooden caskets with lots of winding metal mountings were used for keeping jewellery, mirrors and other small and valuable things. The name used in Panjal of this casket, which may be made of jackfruit tree, teak or rosewood, is *kūmpampetti* 'pointed box'. This refers to the hipped lid, which has this shape in order to make it

impossible to keep the box upside down or put heavy things on top of it. When travelling, Nampūtiri ladies used to place this inside a box (*murukkumpeṭṭi*) made of lightweight wood, together with their dresses. The lid of this box is convex but boxes with a flat lid were not uncommon in households either. Ladies sometimes had a wooden box called *kuri-p-peṭṭi* with two depressions for keeping make-up substances (*kajjalam* and *karuttu cāntū*) and a slot in the middle for a mirror.

The stove made of laterite and some cement is like a bench which has round holes in the middle and a channel leading to each hole from the front, where long firewood can be pushed in while it burns from the other end. Usually women had to bend down considerably to be able to cook. In more modern households outside the village the stove was higher, and had a cooker as well. In IR's son Nīlakaṇṭhan's house in Ernakulam, for instance, bath water for the head of the family was heated on the traditional hearth in the morning, and the breakfast was cooked on the gas cooker. As was mentioned above, even Ravipuram got a gas cooker by 1990, on which most of the cooking began to be done. Big amounts of rice were still cooked on the old stove. Paddy began to be parboiled in the kitchen the year round. The pressure cooker was not used for boiling rice after the first attempt failed, but it was used for warming up cooked rice and for cooking other foodstuffs on the gas stove. (MS.)

Electric gadgets which have long been in Ravipuram are the radio and the fan in the *keṭṭil*. An electric doorbell fixed to the main entrance door was a novelty in 1985. An electric mixer and electric grinders were novelties in 1992. The wooden pulley, which was fixed in the opening on the wall by means of which water was lifted from the well, was replaced by a pump by 1990. This pump brought drinking water directly to the room. The rattling of the wooden drum, such a typical sound in Panjal earlier, was gradually replaced more and more by the humming of the electric motor. Running water became available in Ravipuram at the edge of the middle place, outside the verandah entrance, in the men's side of the tank, and in the inside and outside toilets in 1992. This water was first gathered in a cistern on the roof by means of a pump.

The idols of gods and goddesses became part of the decoration to a larger extent than they probably used to be. The small domestic idols made of metal were kept in the *pūja* room or corner (those of Ravipuram had been moved to the temple), but colourful paper prints and calendars decorated the walls. Large images painted with bright colours and maybe even equipped with electric lights could stand for instance on the writing table. All the same, these new kinds of idols were worshipped as were the metal idols. Photographs of ancestors and family members and of some important functions had long been a common decoration on the walls or tables. Other things decorating the walls in some houses were different printed texts containing invocations to deities, like 'Nārāyaṇa', or moral advice.

Two new features in the interior decor which also had a considerable influence on the life style and thinking of the Nampūtiris, as well as the use of time and space in the house, were the television and video sets. The first Nāyar house to get a tiled roof in Panjal was also the first to get a television set in the village, even before the television network reached there in 1984. The television set was brought there by a son-in-law, who had been working in Dubai. The first Nampūtiri house, Muṭṭattuk-kāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Puruṣōttaman's, got a television set in Panjal in 1988. Four more houses got one the following year, and again a few more during the following years. Ravipuram had a black-and-white television set since December 1990. In 1997 the family purchased a colour television set that could be used connected to a video set, which Rm brought with him from Saudi Arabia. Ravipuram, Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Mana and several other houses got a telephone connection in 1997 and AP dialled a direct call to Ravipuram for the first time in October the same year.

Stages of life and cyclical activities

The different domestic rituals and rites of passage of the Nampūtiris were performed within the compound assisted mainly by members of their own caste, with some help from others. Such Vedic rites were for instance the naming ceremony, the first feeding of solid food, the initiation, the bath after the period of studentship, the marriage and the funeral, and the different ancestor rituals after that. There were also non-Vedic rites like the girls' puberty rite.

Even after IR's death, MS presumed that the tradition of performing at least the most important rituals would continue for many more years. We witnessed or had reports of many such rituals taking place in Nampūtiri private homes in the 1980s. In the 1990s, the initiation (*upanayana*) and the bath after the period of studentship (*samāvartana*) had ceased to be generally performed at the normal age. They had become a formality to be performed quickly as an initial part of the wedding ceremony. Also the girls' traditional puberty rite had practically vanished. For instance, the first feeding of solid food and the funeral and ancestor rituals did take place within the compounds even in the 1990s. Marriages mostly did too, but alternatively they could be celebrated in the temple.

The residents had special areas of the compound and house in different life stages. The place of birth was in the northwestern corner of the main building. The same area was the place of ladies of fertile age during their menstruation. Children stayed mainly in the women's quarters. After initiation the boys moved to be more with the men who were teaching them. In some cases the boys had to go to another Nampūtiri house for their education. Initiated boys who had completed their period of studentship moved to live in a separate building, where bachelors and widowers had their abode. Unmarried girls remained in the women's quarters hidden from the

eyes of men. Married couples spent the night in their private bedrooms. A dead body was brought to the southern parts of the compound to the area connected with deities of death and ancestors.

Nowadays, babies are usually born in hospitals, boys are not separated from the women's quarters and girls after puberty from the men's living areas, and, in the case of Ravipuram, the bachelors and widowers of the house no longer move to a separate house. Married couples of fertile age still live in their proper bedrooms and the deceased still have their resting place in the southern side of the compound.

Daily and annual routines like the handling of the harvested paddy twice a year are cyclical activities which are linked to the courtyard and the house. So are rituals which are connected with agriculture as well as other seasonal rites, like the married women's ritual between December 15 and January 15 in the constellation of *tiruvātira* (Ma.) or *ādrā* (Skt.). Many cyclical activities and seasonal rites happened in their traditional places in the 1980s. Some activities had ceased altogether and some had moved to other places in the 1990s.

Ownership of territory and privacy

Ownership of territory can be defined as space within the dwelling recognized by the family as belonging to an individual member or to a category of members, and would include the capacity of the members to control space, and to exclude it, at least in part, from the domain of others (Shamgar-Handelman & Belkin 1984: 124).

Ownership of territory by certain categories of members was more strongly developed in a Nampūtiri household than ownership by individual members. The men's side and the women's side were to a large extent differentiated. Personal belongings were kept in boxes, which for their part were kept mostly in a space shared by several members.

Privacy in relation to sleeping was almost non-existent earlier. Married couples had a private bedroom, territory only shared by the two of them, but not individually. Bathing was mostly arranged separately for men and women, but an individual was not able to perform the act of bathing without the intrusion of another member of the same sex. Even defecating was not necessarily a private act, but at least it took place among one's own gender group.

More Nampūtiris get married than earlier, and in that capacity may get a shared private bedroom with their spouses. As long as the members slept on mats which were rolled up every morning, the bed did not give a permanent territorial ownership. All family members may have a bed of their own nowadays, and as the families are not as big as earlier, it is sometimes possible for a room to be occupied by just one member. Personal belongings may also be kept in that same room.

Earlier spouses used to meet only at night, and lived with their own gender group for the rest of the time. Nowadays husband and wife can meet in their bedroom, and have privacy, also by daytime. On the other hand, Indian houses not built for the Nampūtiris do not necessarily have bedrooms, so that married couples, who live in such houses, sometimes have to share sleeping areas with their children. In that case the wife may have to find excuses, like a headache, for going to sleep in the attic for example, where the husband can slip unnoticed.

Bathing is still a somewhat public act when it takes place in the tank or the river. Recently some Nampūtiris have built a separate shower room, which can be locked. An example is Putiya-pura after Uṇṇi started to renovate it, and Ravipuram since 1992. Within the last decades separate water toilets, separate rooms or small huts with walls, a roof and a door which can be latched, have become common in Nampūtiri houses. These are the areas where individual privacy has become a rule.

As the ownership of territory has become slightly stronger for the individual, the ownership of territory by a category of members has lost its strictness. Men and women can more often be seen visiting each others' sides of the building and bathing places, and men sometimes step into the kitchen, even to do some household work.

Other castes

As was pointed out, among the Brahmins of India the Nampūtiris used to be the most conservative. In the society in which they had influence, the caste system was more rigid than in any other part of India. According to Mencher (1966a: 155) the lack of a complex organization of village functions, i.e. a loose village structure, also necessitated a rigid set of rules for intercaste behaviour.

According to Śaṅkara's rules one should perform submersion in a bath if one happens to be near to people of the lowest class (*antya-ja*, AP 10). In Fawcett's translation (10) 'people of the lowest class' is replaced by the word *Caṇḍāla*; Thurston (1909, II: 15) gives the information that *caṇḍāla* is used as a generic term referring to many low castes. NNA (p. 8) says that at the time of his birth his village was a synonym for orthodox customs, and untouchables were not allowed to come near to caste Hindus. In case a member of these groups came near a Brahmin, the latter had to take a dip in the tank before performing any religious rites or even drinking a glass of water. Kerala customs according to Gundert (63) contain much more specific details and give exact distances at which different castes had to keep from the Nampūtiris.

But how could one know when the high and the low had come an exact number of feet or paces from each other? According to MS, Ve. Ti. Bhattatiripad, in his drama *From Kitchen to Stage*, has a scene in which a Brahmin, on his way to

the temple, meets a Pulayan, and being in doubt whether he has become polluted or not, actually starts to measure the distance with his feet. But this is a comedy. Mencher (1966a: 154) says that the layout of the higher-caste house compound made it possible to elaborate on the rules. She claims that the distances relate to places like the gate, courtyard, or the first step on the verandah, not distances in terms of feet.

Also this is well in accordance with the idea of the compound as a microcosm. Here the different parts of the compound and the buildings make it possible for the residents to relate themselves to people of other social categories, and to remind everybody of the divine sanction of the social system. The fact alone that the Nampūtiris live surrounded by a large compound makes it easy for them to isolate themselves from other castes and also in this way emphasize their extremely high position in the hierarchy.

Mencher points out that the situational flexibility of these rules, i. e. loosening them in exceptional circumstances, made it possible for them to persist. She also remarks that the abundance of water in Kerala and the fact that each household had its own pond made it convenient for a Nampūtiri to bathe for removing pollution. Here, she views the matter as an extreme development of a structural idea in a context which allows it to develop, i.e. ritual purity can achieve maximal expression when there is no ecological barrier to its doing so. (Mencher 1966a: 154-155.)

WILL THE MICROCOSMIC NEAR-COMPLETENESS LAST?

Mostly summing up what has been said above, I shall try to answer the question: Will the microcosmic near-completeness last? The Nampūtiri compound used to be an organized and in many respects self-supplying unit, an almost complete 'microcosmos'. This was so in IR's youth still. The Kerala upper-caste homes and their compounds contained areas not only for daily activities and activities in the annual round of life, but for entire life passages from conception through the numerous stages in the life cycle to cremation and beyond. For relating the residents to people of other castes there were arrangements in the compound and the dwelling house.

As seen above, the compound has many outward characteristics testified to in early 20th century sources, each house having its own wells and tanks, and being surrounded by a compound, and having ritually important and food producing trees and plants enumerated in the early sources. What was lacking, like some fruits and vegetables as well as cloth and household objects, used to be brought right to the compound by different vendors. The cultivating work on the paddy fields outside the compound was done by lower castes, but the harvest too was brought to the compound. This is still so.

Although many fruits and vegetables are still grown in the yard and goods are brought to the compound by outsiders, it is necessary to go to the village shops or the town to fetch others. Even the craftsmen do not always deliver their products to the houses. When a person in Panjal, for instance, needs the help of a metal caster, he may go to the caster family's shop in Shoranur or to its home in a nearby village.

The traditional dwelling houses and their interior decoration have many features described in early 20th century sources. The total measurement of the buildings and of the rooms, the location of the kitchen and many other rooms follow Vedic and classical Hindu ideology. IR followed the rules whenever possible, but not slavishly. Some Western innovations have changed the use of space and time in the house.

Unmarried mature females could not earlier leave the compound at all, and male members did not often have to do so, because some or all of their education and many rituals could take place there as well, or in the Nampūtiri village temple, which was an extension of the compound. Most Nampūtiri houses had and still have a separate private temple or a ritual room as well. The compound often has a serpent grove, and is still the cremation ground for family members. Rites of passage and other rituals still take place in the compound, but some of them are neglected.

The completeness of the microcosmos of Muṭṭattukkāṭṭu Māmaṇṇu Mana began to slip when IR's younger brother started going to high school in Trichur in the 1920s. Girls going to school was the next step towards the 1940s. The partition of property and other social changes accelerated the decomposition of the microcosm by making it necessary to look for mundane jobs outside the village. A fairly recent feature further lessening the microcosmic character of the compound is ladies giving birth to their children in hospitals.

A detailed discussion in Chapter 13 will show that, although still followed to some extent, the distance pollution rules, too, have gradually started to be overlooked at least by strangers, and, to some extent, educated lower castes. When Nampūtiris move outside their villages to areas with different housing arrangements, their customs concerning the domestic space change more radically than in their native places towards a more general Indian style.

