

11. FOOD, DRINK AND STIMULANTS

In 1942-43 there was a food crisis in Kerala which in Ramachandran's opinion can be characterized as a famine. A mass action and government response led to the establishment of a public food distribution system, which survived the war. The first Communist Government of Kerala negotiated the supply of foodgrain to Kerala with the Government of India, but during the period of the president's rule food all but ceased to come into the state, thus leading to a sharp rise in food prices. The pressure of a people's protest movement contributed to the expansion of the rationing system in 1964. This expansion continued in the 1980s, and now the state has the best public distribution system in India. (Franke & Chasin 1989: 30; Ramachandran 1995: 33-36.)

This system comprises ration shops procuring rice, wheat, sugar, cooking oil, and kerosene. The so-called Maveli stores sell an even broader range of products including pulses and vegetables. Both types of shop offer special additional goods during festivals. Some stores are cooperatives, others are private enterprises that receive a fixed profit on their operations. Kerosene is limited according to whether the household has an electrical connection, and access to controlled prices for rice depends on the amount of rice land owned. Households with less than 0.5 acre of land can buy a full portion of rice at a subsidized price for 12 months, households with 2-crop rice land of more than 0.5 acre can buy a full ration for 4 months of the year. No rice ration is available for households owning more than 2 acres of rice land. (Franke & Chasin 1989: 29-32; Franke 1993: 201; Ramachandran 1995: 36-37.)

Nutrition studies in Kerala have produced contradictory findings. The average calorie intake has been estimated by the CDS (Centre for Development Studies in Trivandrum) to be very close to the Indian minimum standard of 2200 calories, which would suggest that substantial numbers of people would fall below it. Additional data support the view, however, that the food intake situation in Kerala is among the best in India, and the nutrition debate remains unresolved. (Franke 1993: 207-209.)

Not only the food consumption situation but also the nutritional outcomes have been studied. Attempts to solve the apparent paradox of comparatively low intake and high nutrition have drawn attention to the influence of superior sanitary conditions and health services enjoyed in Kerala. The explanation would be that the nutrients are better utilized because of the positive interaction between health

care and nutrition. According to Ramachandran, the very data on consumption are problem-ridden as well. The studies do not, for instance, capture the consumption of cereal substitutes, like tapioca, and meals taken outside the household may not be adequately recorded. The data may hide some important features of the composition of diets, and they ignore intrahousehold inequalities in distribution. (Franke 1993: 208; Ramachandran 1995: 31-33.)

In Panjal village, Nampūtiris, Nāyars, and the high-income but low land-owning Maṅṅāns appear to be calorie sufficient, while Īlavans seem to remain below both in February and July. Muslims appear to remain below the minimum in the dry season, but increase to 102% of the CDS minimum calorie intake in July as labour opportunities increase. Both Īlavans and Muslims have a heavy percentage of rural labourers. Pulayans average 7% above the minimum in February, but drop to the minimum in July. (Franke 1993: 214.)

Calorie intake, then, both in the dry season and in July, looks like being very close to the CDS minimum of 2200 calories in Panjal, while many households appear to remain below the minimum even after the addition of school and nursery lunches. Without these and the ration shops, many Panjal households would probably suffer great deprivation. Work shortage is, as has been pointed out before, the main reason for the lean times. (Franke 1993: 214, 221.)

RAW MATERIALS AND RECIPES

Rice and tapioca are the dietary staples in Kerala. Panjal residents eat mostly rice and a little tapioca. Coconuts are abundantly used in Kerala too, but in Panjal their proportion is less than the all-Kerala average. (Cf., e.g., Mayer 1952: 42; Paulini 1979: 112; Franke 1993: 210 and 149, note 2.)

As will be remembered from Chapter 6, Ravipuram is able to get all the paddy that is needed for the family from its own fields. Before the agrarian reforms some tenants brought bananas as rent for the *ōṇam* festival. Vendors used to bring vegetables for sale to the house itself as recently as the 1980s, but nowadays most of the vegetables are bought from a shop. Some coconuts, mangoes and papaws are grown in the compound, as are tamarinds, Indian gooseberries, black peppers and curry-leaf trees. Indian gooseberries are also sold to some dealers who come to take them straight from the tree. Putiya-pura produces all the coconuts which are needed in the household, but plenty of them have to be bought in Ravipuram in addition to the homegrown ones. Firewood for cooking is bought from casual sellers and weighed on the verandah. Firewood cost more than INR 60 per 100 kg in 1983.

A small quantity of zebu cow's milk was brought twice a day from the family goldsmith's house until the mid-1980s. Later the same house supplied it only in the morning, and a Nāyar house brought it twice a day. Since 1992 it has been bought

from the newly-established cooperative of producers. Milk cost INR 4-4.50 per litre in 1983 and 1985, INR 5-6 per litre in 1990, and INR 9 per litre in 1994. Immediately after arriving the milk was boiled. Some of it was used with coffee and tea, but also milk powder was used for this purpose. The rest of the milk was mixed with buttermilk or curds and left to stand for half a day. The result is curds (*tayir*), which can be eaten with the meals. More often butter was churned from curds, and the buttermilk (*mōrū*) which was left over was consumed with the meals.

Coffee, often blended with chicory (one of the blends used in Ravipuram contained 53% coffee and 47% chicory) was made of instant powder, adding the powder to boiling water and letting it boil a few seconds more. Milk, in the ratio of 1 part milk to 6 parts water, and two spoonfuls per cup of sugar were added. Coffee or tea, also with milk and sugar, was served around 7.30 and 10.30 a.m., 3.30 p.m. and before sunset as well, each time usually without any pastry.

The breakfast was served around 8 o'clock. *Iḍḍali* and *dōśa*, considered the best breakfast dishes in South India, are originally from Tamil Nadu, which has a food system with minor differences very similar to that of Kerala. The only important difference is the more abundant use of coconut in Kerala. (Cf. Mencher 1966a: 136.) *Iḍḍali* and *dōśa* are made of rather similar batter fermented overnight, but in a different way. *Iḍḍalis* are cakes boiled in steam, and *dōśas* are flat pancakes. R and Ammini in Palghat gave me the following recipes. For both batters they used three parts of rice and one part of black gram (*ulunnū*) and salt, but in the *dōśa* batter two thirds of the rice was parboiled and one third was raw rice for softness, and in addition they used fenugreek seeds as spice. In Putiya-pura they were more traditional and used only parboiled rice, putting more black gram in *iḍḍali* than *dōśa*. Black gram is twice as expensive as rice.

Many Nampūtiri families had a Nāyar servant who did the wet grinding of black gram (split and husked) and rice on the previous evening after the ingredients had been washed and soaked. M, however, had so many other duties that she could not regularly do the grinding. That is why *iḍḍali* and *dōśa* were rare delicacies in Ravipuram in the 1980s, even though the boys sometimes helped in the grinding work. In 1992 the delicacies had come back to the diet, because the electric grinder did the hardest part of the work. *Iḍḍali* and *dōśa* can be eaten with coconut chutney, a curry (*sāmbhār*), chillies and other spices mixed with coconut oil. In restaurants coconut chutney can usually be had only in the morning.

Another type of rice flour cake, steamed in hollow bamboo stems or metal tubes (*puṭṭū*), was typical in Nāyar houses, but was sometimes also prepared in Ravipuram. The usual dish, considered to be a substitute for a proper breakfast in this family, was *uppu-māvū*, made of coarsely ground wheat or rice (*rava*), eaten with sugar, bananas (when they could afford them), and even pickles and *pappaṭam*



Fig. 45. DA mixing milk with buttermilk for making curds in 1983. Her clothes, washed by the Veļuttēṭattu Nāyar, are kept separately in the *kalavara* waiting to be worn. Photo MP.

wafers. In his old days IR often had for breakfast only rice-gruel, i.e. water in which rice has been boiled (*kaññi*). He tells in his memoirs that in his childhood Nampūtiri children were given for their breakfast rice with ghee and *pappaṭams*, and some more rice with buttermilk (IR, I, p. 62; II, p. 12). They sometimes also consumed small mangoes put in salt and even a fried curry (*uppēri*). Quite recently some people have started eating corn flakes for breakfast.

Plenty of rice was served at lunch. The grain was washed in a metal vessel in such a way that the small chips of stone remained on the bottom. Then rice was put into almost boiling water and left to boil for half-an-hour before pouring out the remaining water from the kettle. Several dishes were served with rice every day. Vegetables or fruit boiled in salted water and fried after straining them (*uppēri*) was made of one or two varieties of the season: plantains with peels, small or large yam or leaves of yam, bitter gourd, snake gourd, beans, Chinese potatoes, unripe jackfruit or jackfruit seeds, cabbage, egg plant, green gram, or leaves of the drumstick tree or Indian horse radish tree etc. *Uppēri* is referred to as a dry dish.

Curry, usually called *kūṭṭān*, meaning something to be eaten along with rice, contains more liquid. It was made of plantain, yam, cucumber, gourd, mango, pumpkin, papaw, pods and leaves of the drumstick tree, jackfruit, potato, tapioca, okra, coconut, onion, to enumerate the most common vegetables and fruit. Such spices are used as chillies, coriander, turmeric, black pepper, black mustard seed, onion, fenugreek or Chinese anise (*uluva*), leaf of the curry-leaf tree (*karivēppila*; *Bergera konigii*). Asafoetida (*kāyaṃ*) is added both for flavour and to prevent flatulence. Special kinds of curries are *kālan* made with yam, buttermilk, banana and coconut, *ōlan* with beans, *puḷiñci* with tamarind and ginger, *erīśśēri* with roasted coconut, *sāmbhār* with tamarind, *aviyal* consisting of many mixed vegetables, *mulakuṣyaṃ* with lentils and vegetables or fruit, *dāl* with mainly lentils, and *kūṭṭu-kari* characterized as a mixed curry.

At lunch a pickle was also served, the name *uppiliṭṭatū* meaning 'put into salt'. For this pickle is used mango, Indian gooseberry, sour limefruit etc. Bread wafers made of pulses (*pappaṭaṃ*) were supplied regularly by families of the Pappata Ceṭṭi caste. The wafers were roasted on glowing embers without fat, or deep-fried in hot oil. Thus they expand and become crisp. Cooking oil had become so expensive that oil-fried wafers were considered a special treat. Towards the end of the meal buttermilk or curd was served with rice. For drink they had water boiled with ginger and cumin seed, or buttermilk. The evening meal, served around 8 p.m., used to be a freshly cooked meal, very similar to the meal served at lunch time, but without tamarind. Sometimes the ladies of the house just heated up what was left from lunch.

Sweets and fresh fruit were served only on special occasions. It is probable, however, that the chillies even in cooked food contain enough vitamin C. Fried banana chips were sometimes served with the meals or as a special separate treat. After celebrations in the temple DA brought home a sweet called *pāyasaṃ*, a semi-liquid rice preparation cooked with milk, coconut, sugar and spices. The ingredients were given in advance to the priest, who did the cooking. I noted down a way to make *pāyasaṃ* in a wedding in Kidangoor: wet-ground rice is spread on pieces of banana leaf. The leaves are rolled, tied and steamed or boiled. The contents are broken, mixed with sugar and milk and boiled. Sometimes *pāyasaṃ* is made of rice powder.

U brought home cane jaggery from the Guruvayur temple every month in 1983 and 1985. This was used, among other things, in preparing small rice flour cakes called *appaṃ*, which are cooked with ghee. Sweet rolls called *aṭa* were made of wet-ground rice or rice flower mixed with water, spread on pieces of banana leaves and filled with a mixture where jaggery, sugar and ghee had been melted together in a frying pan (*uruḷi*), and grated coconut and perhaps banana had been added. The

leaves were folded and steamed. Once or twice on our visits to other houses we were given *jalebīs*, crisp-fried and syrup-coated spiral-shaped cakes.

Several lunch dishes with rice were given in celebrations, especially in weddings, on a big piece of banana leaf. These included different kinds of wet and dry curries, pickles, banana and bread wafers, buttermilk or curds and *pāyasaṃ*. *Appaṃ* was part of the ceremony, and *aṭa* was given separately.

RULES RELATED TO EATING AND DRINKING

Kerala customs according to Gundert (17) include avoiding fish and meat for food by the Nampūtiris. Even Fawcett (1900: 47) remarks that flesh is strictly forbidden. According to Gundert, Nampūtiris may, however, eat some fat bit of the sheep boiled in ghee in sacrificing (*yāga*). But according to Śaṅkara's rules, even the yearly sacrifice of an animal is forbidden for those who desire liberation from existence (*mokṣa*) (AP 57). This was affirmed by MS. In this restriction can be seen the idea of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) taking precedence over the Vedic thinking. But as was pointed out by S. V. Iyer (1977: 50), this is not a total prohibition of the performance of a sacrifice, but only of the performance every year and by those who desire liberation. Anyway, according to Don Handelman (orally), food habits are even slower to change than rituals, which are, indeed, very slow.

In Ravipuram and other orthodox *manas* exclusively lacto-vegetarian food was normally eaten. Some old men in the village said that the only, and unpleasant, experience of their taking meat had been in goat sacrifices. Goat's meat was cooked in mud vessels, and with ghee added to it, it was offered in the fire with mantras. A bit of the remains of the sacrifice was consumed by the participants. NNA (p. 140) thought that it may be for this reason that *yāgas* were performed outside the house, and after the sacrifice all the implements were burned and destroyed as unfit for household use.

Other Nampūtiris like MS told about trying out of curiosity non-vegetarian food in a restaurant, but disliking it, and never trying it again. Not even on his tour to Europe did MS take non-vegetarian food, and while he was in Finland he appreciated my cooking food which was familiar to him. For all Nampūtiri women that I interviewed even the thought of eating meat or fish was sickening, and none of them admitted ever having tasted animal food except milk products.

There is change on the way. Muṭṭattukkāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Nīlakaṅṅhan Nampūtiri from Putiya-pura and his son Uṅṅi, who had been working in Cochin, sometimes ate non-vegetarian food in restaurants. IR's son Ravi and his wife Sarōjini from Panjal as well, and their children used to live in Goa, one of the major Christian enclaves in India. I was told that their daughter Lata, born in 1965, learnt from their neighbour to cook non-vegetarian food, especially chicken, and she, as well as her

father and brothers enjoyed it. But in neither of these two families would the housewife have cooked or eaten non-vegetarian food.

A Kerala rule of Śaṅkara (AP 49) discourages the taking of intoxicating drinks. Fawcett (1900: 47) quite categorically says that liquor is strictly forbidden for the Nampūtiris. Stevenson (1954: 55) suggests that the polluting character of alcohol might rest not upon its intrinsic impurity, but upon the connection between its consumption and the loss of mental control, since the latter is one of the paths to spiritual release, and any threat to it is a spiritual as well as a social threat.

The consequence of taking alcohol used to be outcasting, as the rule referred to recommends, and liquor, indeed, is consumed by the lower castes. A Kerala rule according to Gundert (17) says that although a Brahmin must not drink what intoxicates, those who serve Pārvati in her nightfeasts may do it without fear. According to MS, this probably refers to others than Brahmins, and he has no remembrance of them taking part in left-hand Tantric feasts for the Goddess in Kerala. For Brahmins the only intoxicant (or is it just a stimulant?) which is allowed is the *soma* during a *yāga*.

Although alcohol is not openly consumed by Nampūtiris, many young and even middle-aged men drink alcohol secretly, i.e. no Nampūtiri woman, traditionally behaving man or child should see it. If suspected of taking alcohol, young men are angrily questioned and reproached by their parents. Usually the boys do not admit to having committed the crime but explain the smell on their breath as coming from chewing *pān* and eating oranges etc. Their explanations are not believed, but the consequences are usually not serious. Of course there is no official caste system any more, and therefore no possibility of outcasting an offender, but there are usually no other serious consequences either.

One Śaṅkara's rule (AP 54) says that one should not perform a marriage etc. without first offering sacrificial food to the deities. Furthermore, food presented as an offering to a deity should not be presented as an offering to another deity (AP 53). These rules are followed. Food offered to a god (*naivēdyam*) can be eaten by Nampūtiris, except *brahmacārins* and those observing *dīkṣa*. (MS.) There is, however, an exception. A Śaṅkara's rule of conduct (AP 17) says that the Brahmins worshipping the highest Viṣṇu should avoid eating the food offering to Śiva. According to MS it was the tradition in temples to give the food offering made to Śiva to an Ambalavāsi to eat. The Nampūtiris did not eat it, although they ate and still eat the *naivēdyam* (rice, *pāyasam*, jaggery, coconut) after offerings in their homes.

As to why this is so S. V. Iyer refers to Śiva's association with the cemetery, or the belief that the evil spirits of Śiva partake of the food offering to him. A 12th century text describing the lives of South Indian Śaiva saints mentions the sacrifice of goats, cows, buffaloes and even fish (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1977: 362). This

may be the reason why the Nampūtiris were not allowed to partake of the *nai-vēdyam* offered to Śiva in temples. Of course Śiva is not the only god who likes or used to like blood offerings, but he is one of the two high gods worshipped by the Nampūtiris, and for that reason, should be mentioned in this connection.

A revealing event took place in 1983 showing how holy a place the family kitchen still was to DA and her generation. All members of the family had left for a wedding except Rv. I was told by him that the housemaid would be receiving and boiling the milk twice a day. From this I concluded that even the rule forbidding lower castes to go and cook in the Nampūtiri kitchen would have been unanimously relaxed. But I was wrong. It raised a small scandal among the wedding guests and caused U to be severely admonished by DA when, on arriving later, I unthinkingly made fun of her letting this happen. U claimed to have given permission very reluctantly.

All Nampūtiri males who have gone through their *upanayana* should perform a ceremony of sipping water each time they eat rice. Few Nampūtiris nowadays do this except in certain more festive rituals. A lady, usually the mother, grandmother or wife of the Nampūtiri, assists in the ceremony. With both her hands she holds a *kiṅṭi* with water. Into the man's right hand the lady pours water, which he sprinkles around the banana leaf and the rice heap. He touches the rice after this. Water will be poured again into his hand, and he sips it once.

When he sprinkles water, he utters the mantra (TB 2,1,11,1): 'O truth! I sprinkle you all around with order' (*satyaṃ tva rtena pariṣiñcāmi*). Before sipping water he utters the mantra (TĀ 10,69): 'You are the immortal bedsheet [of the breath of life]' (*amṛtopastaraṇam asi*). After that he takes five times a few grains of rice into his mouth, thereby offering them to his five inner breaths, to which the accompanying mantras (TĀ 10,69) are addressed: *prāṇāya svāhā; apānāya svāhā; vyānāya svāhā; udānāya svāhā; samānāya svāhā*.⁴⁵ After the Nampūtiri has finished his meal, some water will again be poured into his hand. He recites the mantra (TĀ 10,69): 'You are the immortal cover [of the breath of life]' (*amṛtāpi-dhānam asi*), and sips the water.

There were restrictions in the number of daily meals for widows and for others on certain days, periods or rituals. In the sources from the beginning of the 20th century it is said that widows should only take one meal a day but this as a general rule is probably a misunderstanding. In IR's youth widows should only take lunch with rice, no other meal, in the month of *vṛścikaṃ* (that month and the first 11 days of the following month *dhanu* are called the *maṇḍalaṃ* period), during a *dikṣa* last-

⁴⁵ This is the proper order of these mantras, as recorded in TĀ 10,69. Srisa Chandra Vidyarnava (1918: 164), whose description of the Brahmanical way of eating the food differs also in some other details, transposes *samānāya svāhā* and *vyānāya svāhā*.

ing the whole year every month on the day preceeding a particular day when a *māsaṃ* was performed, and once a year on the day preceeding a *śrāddha*.

The two latter cases concerned all close relatives, and the Malayalam name (*orikkal ūṇū*) which is used of these days means '(having) meal once (only)'. Generally during the *dikṣa* lasting one year only two meals a day were had, lunch and supper, no breakfast. Not even water was allowed in between. Some people, however, used to break the rule. On the *aṣṭami* days women, and on the *ekādaśi* days men as well as women, should have no rice. In addition widows were expected to have only one rice meal on the day of the full and new moon. (IR, I, pp. 174-176; MS.)

Even these rules were not strictly followed any more. DA did not have rice on the *ekādaśi*, while the others in the family relaxed the rule. All close relatives of IR (wife, sons etc.) had only one rice meal on the day preceeding the *śrāddha*, but as the *dikṣa* continuing one year was not observed any more, the partial fasting preceeding the day of the *māsaṃ* had fallen out of use as well as the restriction of two meals for the rest of the time. Most of the time DA had the normal number of meals every day. (MS.)

The rule of Śaṅkara (AP 18) forbidding the partaking of ghee and vegetable curries given with the plain hand and not the ladle seems to be a practical one. S. V. Iyer (1977: 45) refers to the food being classed as defiled by handling (*kriyāduṣṭa*), and says that the prohibition extends to all food, including rice, in other places. According to Nampūtirippāṭṭi (1963, Chapter 15), boiled rice has a special pollution (*varrū*). MS's explanation that only *pappaṭaṃ* wafers and fried dry *uppēri* can be given with the hand again brings in, besides practical considerations, also the purifying effect of frying in ghee and even oil.

In Śaṅkara's rules it is said that you must not cook your food before you bathe (AP 5). DA followed this rule while she was still living in the Taravāṭṭi, but not in Ravipuram. As was said in Chapter 10, menstruating women did not cook and they ate outside the dining room or in the corner of the room in Ravipuram, because they were not allowed to bathe during the first three days. Bathing before consuming the morning and evening meals used to be the norm, but was not absolutely necessary any more. IR and DA asked us whether we had taken our bath so that we could have our breakfast and evening meal, but after IR's death nobody mentioned the matter.

Two other rules of Śaṅkara say that one should avoid water which has stood over one night (AP 6) and that one should avoid (eating) food [i.e. rice] [of the preceding day] that has stayed overnight and curries of that kind (AP 15). Kerala customs according to Gundert (19) include avoiding old rice as unclean. In Panjal the Nampūtiris (even in the very orthodox Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Mana) used water

which had stood overnight, that being possible according to them because all pots had a lid, so that nowadays at least the matter is a practical one.

Boiled rice which has stood overnight in water is nowadays even considered good for the health. Rāman of the *Taravāṭṭu* for one liked to eat rice from the previous day. Earlier the leftover rice was given to the Nāyar servants, now only part of it, because the rest is used by the family itself. Even nowadays leftover curries are distributed to the servants as 'curries which have been cooked the previous day have a bad smell and nobody will eat them'. If the curry smells too bad the Nāyar servants give it to the cattle. Yet other Śaṅkara's rules say that one should eat after having made [i.e. rolled the rice] into a morsel-ball (AP 21) and that one should eat in such a way that there will be no leftovers (AP 22). These rules were followed as a natural daily habit, the ultimate reason being the polluting effect of saliva, as was suggested in the previous chapter.

The Malayalam commentary on the rule (AP 8) saying that one should avoid using leftover water standing in a vessel may not be on the right track when it refers to water that has been used for a necessary act like purification after voiding excrement, rinsing the mouth etc. S. V. Iyer (1977: 45) thinks that drinking water is meant. Fawcett interprets the rule (8) to mean that the remainder of water taken for one purpose must not be used for another ceremony. MS assured us that water used in rituals is meant. He agreed that not only the rest of the water is poured away, but the vessel is washed ritually with ashes before using it for another ritual. This rule, then, is parallel to rule AP 53 in which sacrificial food is discussed.

Rice and vegetables are usually grown and harvested by lower castes. Preparatory tasks before cooking, like washing, peeling and chopping the vegetables is done by the Nāyar servants outside the kitchen-side porch. After that vegetables are carried to the kitchen and cooked by the Nampūtiri ladies. The reason for this division of labour has been explained by Mary Douglas in the following way. The work performed by each caste says something about the relative purity of the caste. When a man uses an object it becomes part of him, and in the case of food the appropriation is very close. Food is produced by the combined efforts of many castes. Through cooking, food can be considered to be collectively predigested and that is why cooking is seen as the symbolic separation of food from impure contacts. Cooking has to be done by pure hands. (Douglas 1966: 126-127.)

Particles of inferior 'coded-substance'⁴⁶, according to Marriott and Inden (1977), may be transferred with boiled food, raw uncooked food, or with drinking water. Fire purifies what has been polluted, so that vegetables, after being boiled in water, are pure for high castes to consume if the person who has done the cooking is of a high caste and in a pure state. 'Coded-substance' is less easily transferred

⁴⁶ On the term 'coded-substance', see Chapter 4.

through food cooked in clarified butter, so that a higher-caste individual might take food cooked in ghee from a lower person. (Kolenda 1978: 73.)

According to Fawcett (1900: 48) Nampūtiri men would accept food prepared even by a Tamil Brahmin (Tamil Brahmins are numerous in the Palghat area of Kerala, and originally come from the Tamil country in the east) or a Tulu Brahmin (originally coming from the Tulu area to the north), and he says that cooks in large houses actually used to be Tamil Brahmins. According to the same source Nampūtiri ladies were more scrupulous about the cooking of their food, and would not touch any food prepared by anyone who represented a lower caste than their own. IR writes in his memoirs about Nampūtiri men:

There [in *Vaṭakkāñcēri Mana*] we had coffee prepared by a Tamil Brahmin. There is a minor pollution... when there is any contact with Tamil Brahmins. (IR, I, p. 98.)

As married ladies used to eat, in certain ritual situations, the food left on their husband's plate or plantain leaf, there must have been arrangements for only Nampūtiris cooking for married men on those occasions. This problem only arose in places where there were really large Nampūtiri houses. In Panjal the men often ate in the temple in earlier times, or, more recently, in their homes, where only the Nampūtiri ladies did the cooking. In big celebrations like marriages which we were invited to, the cooks were Nampūtiri men. Retired school teachers and others could get some extra income by travelling from house to house to do this honoured job as well as serving the food to the guests.

The parboiling of paddy, although not a process by which food is directly prepared for eating, is also considered a polluting one as it is done by representatives of lower castes. This is so, as was explained in Chapter 10, because water is a potentially polluting agent, acting as a conductor conferring to the food the degree of purity of the person handling it. As the parboiling is invariably done by the servants of the house, parboiled rice is not considered pure enough for Vedic rituals. As noted before, it plays a part in some women's rites.

Not only eating food cooked by lower castes, but also eating when sitting in the same row with them or seen by them while eating, was and sometimes still is considered polluting. Also contact with lower castes at other than meal-times used to restrict the taking of meals. IR writes that while he was leading construction work and had to be with carpenters, he could not eat anything during the daytime as he became polluted (IR, I, p. 92). For more than forty years this kind of restriction has been ignored in Ravipuram.

As most of the time we were counted as Nampūtiris in Ravipuram and some other places, we could eat with the Nampūtiris, and I was even offered the opportunity of cooking Finnish food for the family as long as it was vegetarian. Rv and Rm were invited together with AP and myself to eat food in the house of the Ambalavāsi woman, who was a close friend to DA, on her daughter's birthday.

The brothers took their meals together with us, sitting in the same row. When we had finished, the Ambalavāsi women had their meals separately. Rv and Rm also accepted some snacks in the house of Ravipuram's housemaid, and even MS has taken part in a feast in another Nāyar house.

IR and DA would never have gone to Nāyar houses to have meals there, but DA had visited an Ambalavāsi house, and might have taken coffee there. Nowadays when Nampūtiri marriages are celebrated in the temple, other castes may be invited. All castes may eat in the same room, even in the same row, but traditional Nampūtiris do not look towards the lower castes, which also keep a distance from them. Considerations of pollution as such are not, then, the reason for their behaviour, rather it is a demonstration of power (cf. Dumont 1972: 122).

Rules concerning food taboos and cleanliness were, according to Kerala customs recorded by Gundert (61), eased in times of journeying, warfare, conflagrations, and holy feasts. In these circumstances, for instance, everything unknown, all bazaar articles, fruit touched by birds, alms, running waters and standing rain water, honey and every vessel were clean articles. In cases of endangered life it was no sin to eat another's rice, drink his *kaññi* or take his water. As an example can be taken a Brahmin's wife in sudden birth-pains suffering hunger and thirst (Gundert 51). In such a situation a Śūdra woman was allowed to come near her, touch her and bring her rice and water till her purification was over. Nāyar servants helped a lady in childbed even in Muṭṭattukkāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Mana.

As can be expected, rules for cooking and eating were kept more strictly by the old couple, but even they relaxed the standard a little when they were travelling. IR's parents' generation did not travel much and consequently did not face the same problems. When travelling, IR and DA tried to find a Brahmin restaurant, but when no such place was available, they did not hesitate to eat in a place run and visited by other castes. Some thirty years ago they would not have done that. Even at home they sometimes tasted snacks brought by us from the local coffee and tea houses, even though the snacks were not cooked in butter. Kerala customs according to Gundert (19) say that the Nampūtiris did not buy and eat ghee etc. at the bazaar but they could eat bread, cakes and also *pappaṭam*, *appam*, *aṭa* and round cakes fried in oil, made of pulses (*vaṭa*) from the shops and pickles in the Nāyar houses. Ghee and pickles are made and *pappaṭam* fried at home, but bread, cakes, oil and jaggery can, indeed, be bought in the shops. It is not a custom, however, to get pickles from Nāyar houses.

If religious beliefs bring restrictions for eating and drinking, religious feasts and domestic rituals also provide a reason for having a culinary treat from time to time. In the past they gave an opportunity for the male members of the caste to eat well almost every day in normal conditions, i.e. provided that they were not under any special restrictions. Every year there were at least 400 feasts in the Panjal

Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple, e.g. on the birthdays of every eldest son whose *upanayana* had already been celebrated. (IR, I, pp. 46-48.)

The feasts were of two kinds: ordinary *namaskāraṃs*, when rice, one *kūṭṭān*, one *uppēri*, one *uppiliṭṭatū*, buttermilk and salt were served, and special *namaskāraṃs*, when two or more *kūṭṭāns*, *uppēris* and *uppiliṭṭatūs* and in addition *pappaṭaṃs* and *pāyasaṃ* were served. The former were only for men and *brahmacārins*, the latter also for boys before their *upanayana* and girls before their puberty. (IR, I, pp. 46-48.) Women and lower castes were kept outside these treats. Only one big celebration in the month of *tulāṃ* was joined by lower castes in the temple dining hall. In that connection Nampūtiri ladies were also served festival food in a nearby *mana*. (MS.)

IR relished the memory of a *trisandha* of Sāmavedins in the Panjal temple early in his lifetime:

For 9 months big feasts morning and evening. There were at least 200 Nampūtiris and children to be fed. For the feast in the morning there will be *kālan*, *ōlan*, fried *uppēri*, *uppiliṭṭatū*, *pappaṭaṃ* and a sweet *pāyasaṃ* made with coconut milk. In the evening *eriśśēri*, *ōlan*, fried *uppēri*, *uppiliṭṭatū*, and *prathamān* (sweet *pāyasaṃ* liquid). I have heard it told that about 30,000 rupees were spent for this *trisandha*. (IR, II, p. 52.)

There was a danger that food would become too important in the temple celebrations. Progressive Nampūtiri youngsters boycotted them for moral reasons for some time (MS). About the annual special *pūja* given by Pakarāvūr Mana in the Panjal temple IR writes:

We had planned only an ordinary meal for the guests. We thought that if we had big feasts with many dishes, many people would come and stay mainly for the feasts and the Vedic programme would lose prominence. (IR, II, p. 224.)

Even before the land reforms it became difficult to get enough foodstuffs for the temple festivals from the tenants, and the feasts started to decline. Nowadays, since the temples as the centre of social as well as religious life have lost much of their meaning, men do not have their special daily treats there, but eat with their families in their homes. The feasts go mainly with the domestic rituals, which are enjoyed by all members of the caste. Since 1960-70, marriages have been celebrated in the temples with women also present (MS).

RULES CONCERNING PARTICULAR CONSUMABLES

According to IR, forbidden foodstuffs for Nampūtiris at all times used to be onions, palmyra fruit and palmyra jaggery, papaw and horse-gram. Fawcett mentions in addition to palmyra fruit and jaggery the gourd (*cura-k-kāy*). According to him the forbidden foodstuffs during the *dīkṣa* and *brahmacarya* period were, among

others, pods of drumstick tree, milk, chillies, gram, dhal, and particular delicacies the *pappaṭaṃ* wafers. (Fawcett 1900: 48, 53.) Further according to my informants, salt was avoided after the death of a relative and during a *dīkṣa*, as were green chillies, ghee, white sugar and milk. Also tobacco was mentioned. Ash pumpkin and lady's fingers or okra could not be eaten in a *śrāddha* (IR, I, p. 174; II, pp. 66-68, 258.) Nampūtirippāṭu (1963, Chapter 7) adds milk, fenugreek, and asafoetida which, according to my informants, are to be avoided also by a *brahmacārin*, while onions and horse-gram are to be avoided by the Nampūtiris at all times. The *yajamāna* and his wife could not have rice food during a *yāga*, but they could consume fruits, milk, cooked green gram, sweet-root etc. (NNA, p. 148).

The boys whose *upanayana* ceremony had not yet been performed and the boys who, after their *upanayana* ceremony, had not yet begun to study the Veda, were in IR's youth served a rice breakfast. After the *upanayana* ceremony, for three days, until the *danḍu-cāral*, food with salt was prohibited. IR remembered it as a bitter experience, when he, at the age of seven, could not partake in a delicious meal during a temple feast because of this restriction. A *brahmacārin* did not have an early meal, and after supper he should take nothing, not even water. Foodstuffs to be avoided were, among others, pods of drumstick tree, fenugreek, kidney bean, asafoetida, onion, horse-radish, horse-gram, black gram, tapioca, papaw, and delicacies to be avoided were the *pappaṭaṃ* wafers. Nampūtiris in general started to eat horse-gram some 60 years ago, but for the *brahmacārin* the restriction was still valid some 40 years ago (IR, I, p. 92; II, pp. 66-68; NNA, p. 40; MS).

During the ten days' pollution after IR's death in 1989, when the whole family was gathered in Ravipuram, their restricted diet during that time consisted of boiled rice, buttermilk, bananas, puffed rice and mango curry. Salt was not eaten. (MS.) In the first Nampūtiri *śrāddha* meal that we were ever invited to, and which took place in Nellikkāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Mana in 1992, they served *eriśśēri*, *ōlan* and *puḷiśśēri*, and a special *pāyasam*. *Pappaṭaṃ* wafers were served with the comment by Akkitirippāṭu's grandson that they should not be, because they were made of black gram. Green gram was not banned. As to what exactly was allowed and what banned young people did not really know. According to MS, *pappaṭaṃ* wafers are not allowed in the *piṇḍa* feast on the 11th day, but they are allowed in the *sapiṇḍi-karaṇa* ceremony on the 12th day, and the restriction has nothing to do with the later *śrāddha* meals.

The Nampūtiris used to be considered almost gods, and therefore it would be logical that foodstuffs and dishes which cannot be offered to gods would be avoided by the Nampūtiris at least on certain occasions. Onion and garlic, because of their bad smell, are not added to food offerings. According to Uṇṇi, onion is also associated with meat. Many Nampūtiris, even U, have started eating onions, while

others, like MS, have not been able to take a fancy to these vegetables which they had to avoid earlier.

Gourds, squashes and pods of drumstick tree have a low status in India, and are rarely offered to gods, especially raw. The curious shape of the pods of drumstick tree may be the reason for its degradation. The reason for avoiding pumpkins may be explained by the fact that human or animal sacrifice may be substituted for in rituals by a pumpkin. A pumpkin symbolizes a human head also when hung in front of a newly built house to appease evil spirits. Pulses are not generally mentioned as food improper for the gods, but split pulse is usually avoided in temples for the same reason as parboiled rice: splitting presupposes contact with water. Horse-gram is used as fodder, and probably not considered fit for humans for that reason. (Cf. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1977: 360, 363, 367-368.)

Papaw is unfit for the gods (and pregnant women) because it is 'passion-raising' and because it is a relatively new fruit in India. Four hundred years, it has been found out, are often needed for fruits and vegetables to become ritually acceptable. (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1977: 366, 370, 372-373.) Tapioca is a very new root in Kerala. IR said that it was grown in Travancore earlier than in Cochin. He tasted it in Kidangoor for the first time, but his father forbade him to eat it.

Chillies are not indigenous spices in India either, and therefore ritually not quite acceptable. Also the daily food of Brahmins generally contains less chillies than the food of non-Brahmins. What is strange is that green chillies, and not the more commonly avoided red chillies were mentioned by IR as a spice forbidden in *dikṣa*. Green chillies may be used in Śaiva temples but not in Vaiṣṇava temples. (Cf. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1977: 370.)

In Kerala salt is considered impure, because it is counted as a stimulant, and because only sea salt is used. This, of course, is mediated by water, a potentially polluting agent and in contact with low castes who prepare it. The admixture of salt in food offerings is forbidden in Kerala temples, except in one in which the custom can be explained by the sanctuary's connection with Tamil Nadu. Offerings of pure salt, however, are made to minor deities as a cure for, in particular, skin disease. (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1977: 371-372.) In Mannārśāla Mana, which has the largest snake grove in Kerala, small packages of salt are offered to snakes.

According to Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi (1977: 361), refined white sugar is not acceptable because it may have been refined with bone. But palm jaggery, palm sugar, and the palmyra palm itself were not acceptable for the Nampūtiris either. IR explains the impurity of jaggery (*vellam*) by the fact that it is made in a factory, and calcium chloride is mixed in it (IR, II, p. 258). The reason why not only palmyra sugar, but also palmyra fruits are forbidden may be the association of this fruit with the alcoholic drink toddy, which is the fermented sap from the fleshy floral axis of the palmyra palms.

Oil is not used in offerings for higher gods (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1977: 369), because it is purchased in the market and not home-made like ghee (IR). *Pappaṭam* wafers, avoided in some connections, are both very salty and, in addition, often immersed in boiling oil. Ghee and milk, on the other hand, are considered very good and pure foodstuffs and it is probably because a person in *dikṣa* and a *brahmacārin* are supposed to lead an ascetic life that they are forbidden these delicacies.

Ghee is used in rituals, first of all in offerings to gods, but in many other contexts as well. A few examples. A pregnant wife was given every day five grams of new butter, which had been wrapped in a piece of plantain leaf tied with two blades of *darbha* grass, and held in the hand by the prospective father and another Nampūtiri while chanting mantras, all this for good progeny. A preparation of raw rice (*pacc' ari* or *uṅakkal ari*) and ghee is made for fire offerings in the *somayāga* and *atirātra* sacrifices, but this is also given to pregnant ladies to consume, because it is believed to cause the noble birth of worthy children. (NNA, pp. 26, 214.)

Ghee and a paste made of the root of *vayampū* (*Acorus calamus*) were given to a baby boy every day up to the day of his *upanayana*, with the accompaniment of a mantra, to strengthen the baby's vocal cords so that his pronunciation would be clear and vivid, something which is important for a chanting Brahmin. At the start of his education, a boy was made to write with his finger all the Malayalam letters in raw rice (*pacc' ari* or *uṅakkal ari*) in a bronze vessel. The rice, boiled and mixed with ghee, was given to the boy to eat. (NNA, pp. 30, 32.)

According to Śaṅkara's rules the milk and ghee of the buffalo cow is forbidden as sacrificial food offered to the gods and the dead (AP 19, 20). In the *śrāddha* it is not allowed even today, according to MS, but the prohibition to use it in offerings to gods is valid only in temples, not necessarily in households. This is one instance where the fear of the forefathers seems to be greater than the awe felt towards the gods. Both cow's milk and goat's milk are offered in fire in the great *atirātra* ritual (NNA, p. 194). The oppressed castes were not permitted to keep milch cattle in Kerala (Ramachandran 1995: 61), which clearly demonstrates the high status of the zebu cow's milk, especially.

A Kerala rule according to Śaṅkara says that, when polluted, one should avoid betel-chewing etc. (AP 23). Under a death pollution men and women of Muṭṭattuk-kāṭṭu Māmaṅṅu Mana still observe this rule, and in this case the ladies are more particular about the prohibition than the men. Otherwise, according to MS, this rule concerns only men. Under other pollutions, like during their menstruation, the women are allowed this luxury.

Thurston (1909, V: 195) says that betel is taboo except in the married state, but no such generalization was familiar to my informants. What is meant here is probably that widows are not supposed to chew *pān*, and that custom was still followed. DA stopped enjoying this stimulant after her husband's death. On the other hand,

pān-chewing is emphasized in ceremonies which are particularly important for women and meant to contribute to the happiness of the marriage. This is the case when married ladies, whose husbands are still alive, chew *pān* three times daily, or when they do it in their *tiruvātira* celebration.

IR tells in his memoirs that for the members of the organization of Nampūtiri boys, founded in Panjal in 1916, *pān*, snuff and other such stimulants were strictly forbidden (IR, I, pp. 154-156, 202; II, pp. 118-120). Especially *pān* with tobacco was avoided. Tobacco has been known in India only since the 17th century (Watt 1889-93, V: 361). Some 90 years ago chewing tobacco became a habit among men, then followed snuff, and last of the three, smoking became common. IR and his younger brother Subrahmanyān never used to smoke or chew tobacco, or take snuff, but Puruṣōttaman even smoked. Surprisingly, NNA also chewed tobacco. (MS.) Both areca nut and betel vine grow in Kerala and are easily available. Tobacco is most commonly smoked in a *bīḍi*, a small cigarette with tobacco wrapped in some leaf, for instance Coromandel ebony (*kendu*; *Diospyros melanoxylon*). It is acceptable that even a Nampūtiri, like IR's granddaughter's husband Nilayaññōṭṭi Satīśan Nampūtiri, is the proprietor of a *bīḍi* factory.

Elder Nampūtiris used to chew tobacco in the open, but younger Nampūtiris would do it secretly without letting the elders see it (IR, II, pp. 118-120). The situation is very similar even nowadays especially as far as smoking is concerned. Young boys are very clever in hiding the *bīḍi* in their palms whenever someone who is not supposed to see them smoking is approaching. Men, whatever their age, do not smoke in the presence of their elders, although their smoking is not a secret. I never saw a woman smoke in Kerala, whether of high or of low caste. My informants said that only prostitutes smoke publicly.

Tea and coffee used to be objected to although the *śāstras* neither prohibit nor permit their consumption (Fawcett 1900: 48). Because they are relatively new in India they are not mentioned at all in the old rules, but for the same reason they were felt to be improper among this high caste, and they are definitely not offered to the gods. There is, however, no mention in IR's memoirs of any religious disapproval of these stimulants, and at least nowadays they are enjoyed freely and openly in plenty. IR started to drink coffee when he was 25, in the year 1100 M.E. (1924), and at about the same time coffee was included even in the temple feasts in Panjal. IR changed to tea in 1943 for health reasons. (IR, I, pp. 92-94; II, p. 54.)

WOMEN AND OLD MEN ARE CONSERVATIVE IN THEIR DIET

There may be easier ways of preparing food, and it may be consumed sitting not on the floor but at table, but the regular diet itself has not changed very much in Nampūtiri homes. The most conspicuous feature of the home and temple diet is that it is

strictly lacto-vegetarian. This is so because nearly all women and most old men are more traditional in their food habits than some young and middle-aged men. The latter are experimenting with forbidden foodstuffs like chicken and alcohol outside their homes, but they are still in the minority.

Conservative Nampūtiris still demonstrate their power by not eating with lower castes, and if they have to do so, for instance in some temple festivals, do not look at them. Young men are not particular about whom they eat and drink with. Although we were treated like equals at meals, it would not be possible to see Nāyar servants having their meals together with the family in the homes. Both women and low castes have gained more rights and can nowadays partake in temple festivals. What was said about relaxing distance pollution rules goes with eating habits.

Special ritual food taboos are still followed in many cases, but there are fewer restrictions and more hesitation about what exactly is forbidden in certain ritual situations as the old people pass away and their knowledge with them. The kitchen is still a protected area, but allowances are made more often for practical reasons.