

CHAPTER V  
CASTE AND MOBILITY

We have now identified the individuals and groups which constitute the pivot of the rural social structure. This chapter aims, in part to supplement our understanding of the process by which they become qualified to be dominant, and discharge the roles leading to the maintenance of the structure least affected by disintegrating forces of change. Even before modern forces of social change such as educational, industrial and ideological appeared there was a form of competitive acquisitive life on the part of the individual and the group to improve social status. The nature of the society in its current dynamic aspects under the impact of modern forces can be intelligible if the process of efforts with its historic tradition to improve social status or to maintain it without loss is investigated. Further, a knowledge of the pattern of social relations associated with or emerging from this process adds, in some measure, a diachronic dimension to our grasp of the social structure hitherto acquired. It can also help us to locate several of the former internal factors which continue to this day with varying intensity and characterise the structure of

today which one is, likely to explain rather incorrectly, almost entirely in terms of external factors which were influencing the village during the last few decades.

I shall deal with this process under the concept of social mobility and with the data collected within the limitations of my resources and of the field conditions one confronts today. There is always scope for employing rigorous techniques to collect quantitative data as are available today and supplement my findings with a more substantial investigation and analysis.

What I present in this chapter is an endeavour to show (1) how the 'key groups' of pivotal position in the structure are inevitably associated with the process of mobility (2) that the villagers have their own ideas about social mobility (3) that there was within the intra-caste groups, the enangar group and the lineage among Nairs, differentiation, as is partly borne out from the last chapter, in secular status and in a sense in ritual status, (4) that inspite of the apparently rigid structural limitations of choices of roles for individuals and groups, mobility has been possible. Since one of the aims of this chapter is to recognise the possibilities for mobility within the social structure of the region rather than any particular village, data from outside the focal villages and at times from other taluks and from published sources will also be used.

In examining the process of mobility I shall deal with the mobility of castes, families, individuals and deities separately pointing out the inter-connections between these. The relevance of focussing attention on the mobility of these will also be mentioned in the appropriate context.

In this chapter I shall use an unqualified past tense to refer to conditions from the close of the last century upto about the beginning of the forties, and in contexts where the time sense is not explicit or needs precise delimitation, mention will be made of the period under reference. My field information on mobility pertain, to what has been taking place until the fifties of this century from as far back as informants could recall from their own experience or from what they had heard about.

Since Sorokin's pioneer work on social mobility, it has been recognised that the use of the terms vertical and horizontal mobility has undergone little modification.<sup>1</sup> However, there is today a rapidly accumulating literature of high scientific value on the subject and mobility has been recognised as a complex multi-dimensional concept.<sup>2</sup>

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1. P.A.Sorokin, *Social Mobility*, Harper, (New York, 1927). See also, C.F.Westoff and P.C.Sagi, "The Concept of Social Mobility" in *American Sociological Review*, vol.25, No.3, June, 1960.

2. Westoff and Sagi, (*ibid.*, p.375) have illustrated that social mobility is "a multi-dimensional concept consisting of an indeterminate but considerable number of components."

For convenience in this chapter I shall use mobility as synonymous with vertical mobility, and in contexts where its direction is not explicit I shall specify it as upward or downward mobility.

In proceeding further I shall continue the broad distinction raised in the last chapter between secular status and ritual status. And to facilitate description from the point of view of how the villagers evaluate certain situations and factors I shall regard ritual prestige, ritual status and rank (which as so far used means caste rank) as in a continuum. Ritual prestige arising from several factors, by accretion, leads to ritual status, and rank is achievable, though in rare instances by an established recognition of high ritual status over a long period of time. Similarly, secular prestige is a mild degree of secular status, the latter having only degrees of intensity but not passing over into a third category. Social status as hitherto conceived refers to an individual's or a group's total grading or evaluation assigned by the people based on the total consideration of caste rank, secular status, and ritual status, if any, over caste rank.

#### Mobility of castes

Students of Indian castes have today recognised the need of focussing attention on understanding regional caste systems instead of an all India caste system. There is also general agreement on the historic fact of a certain

degree of mobility of castes in the regional hierarchy. How far this mobility has been contributory towards maintenance of the regional system in balance still appears to be a field of good scope for study. Broadly speaking, the aspirations and efforts of a local caste group, or a section of it, to rise high in ritual status and go up in the hierarchy, has to work within the local structural limitation. But the very fact of this phenomenon shows the strength of the hierarchical principle, fake claims to higher ranks being foiled by public opinion. Too often, as the Malabar situation shows, the ascent in hierarchy was not achieved by a regional caste but a section of it, which consequently fissioned out and shaped itself as a new caste. This process again made the regional system more complex with more groups and more strands of relations between them and consequently made it more enduring than in its former state. In general terms it can be stated that mobility of castes or sections of them was a sustaining rather than disrupting influence on the regional caste system.<sup>3</sup>

To improve the ritual status of a caste to any

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3. What David Mandlebaum notes in such a context is relevant here. In his review of two recent works on caste (Caste and Kinship in Central India by A.C.Mayer, 1960 and Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and N.W.Pakistan, E.R.Leach, ed., 1960) he states "a descent group can change its position in the hierarchy over a period of time; this process 'preserves rather than disturbs' the prevailing theme of social hierarchy - an outcome which is also noted for caste mobility in India and Ceylon although the process runs counter to village theory". - American Anthropologist, October, 1960, p.891.

perceptible degree worthy of popular recognition, it took the efforts of generations of its members.<sup>4</sup> But at any given time, the section of a local caste group if not the whole group, which enhanced its secular status was also, as a matter of course, on the way to higher ritual status emulating behaviour consistent with castes of higher rank. Such a group played significant roles in maintaining norms of intercaste relations either as component parts of the dominant groups or as leaders of its own local caste. To be qualified to discharge the significant roles and to be locally counted as an important group what was necessary in the career of mobility of the group was the rise in secular rather than ritual status. This fact is partly borne out by our considerations about the power groups in the villages and it will further become revealed in the course of this chapter.

The mobility of castes in Malabar can now be examined within the limits bearing on the foregoing observations.

Several published works on Malabar castes provide us with some information on the mobility of castes but in most of the cases it is unclear if the group that moved up achieved an established higher ritual status (rank). If we examine the instances of movement of

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4. In addition to the fact of ritual status mobility, recognised in published works on regional caste, Stevenson shows its possibility by a theoretical analysis of ritual status. - See his "Status Evaluation in the Hindu Caste System", Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, vol.84, parts I and II, pp.45-52.

castes in the social scale seen in the accounts of individual castes written by Thurston, L.K.A.Iyer and Innes<sup>5</sup> in the first decade of this century a few facts emerge. These facts are of basic importance in understanding the dynamics involved in the mobility of castes and they also, in part, enlighten us on the criteria of caste ranking briefly treated in the last chapter. An exhaustive study of this as an isolated topic from published sources is therefore worthy of study but I confine to enumerating below a few facts observed in the specified sources. (1) In the course of geographical spread the section of a caste that moved far away and could get accepted to render a slightly higher service to the Nairs of the upper group or castes above became higher in rank.<sup>6</sup>

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 5. The works of the authors under reference here are Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of South India*, (Madras, 1909), L.K.A.Iyer, *The Cochin Tribes and Castes*, vol. I & II, (Madras, 1909, 1912) and C.A.Innes, *Madras District Gazetteer-Malabar- vol.I*, (Madras, 1905). Illustrative cases from these will be cited in the subsequent foot notes. In these works on castes the origin of several castes in Malabar and Cochin State can be seen as attributable to upward or downward mobility of segments of some castes. The groups of Ambalavasis and Samanthan castes are examples and for some of these the origin involving mobility is clothed in legends. The fact of origin by mobility at a very remote past is not considered here.

6. Thurston (*ibid.*, vol.V, pp.5-6) notes that Maran or Marayan in North Malabar served as priests at funeral ceremonies of Nairs and have to do shaving in this connection but in South Malabar they, "honourifically called Maran, pose as temple servants..... In Nambudiri areas in south Malabar they do only Ambalavasi work....." He further points out that in course of time they were honoured by the fact of Nambudiri males finding wives among them. According to Thurston, Cochin census of 1901 states that Marans should be classed with Nairs. My informants say that in parts of Palghat taluk the

(2) Conversely, the section which in the same region or elsewhere had for long served lower castes got differentiated as lower in rank.<sup>7</sup> (3) On the strength of royal edicts obtained from pre-British rulers a local caste group or a caste in a wider region could enjoy privileges

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barber's razor (Katti) is even today known as Maran Katti. See L.K.A.Iyer (ibid. vol.II, p.145) for the observation that there are again two divisions among Marans, and both, for the reasons he specifies, do not deserve to be classified as Ambalavasis. The immigrant castes of Muttans and Tarakans are among other instances relevant to our attention here. Thurston (vol.V, p.131) notes: (a) "a Muttan may become a Tarakan and then a Nair" (b) some census returns of 1911 show males as Tarakans and females as Chettichi. (It may be noted that females of Tarakans are during the last few decades called Tarakatti and of Chettis Chettichi). My information from Mullasserri in Ponnani taluk shows that Tarakan girls of that area may rarely be given to wealthy Muttans, although by caste the latter are lower, but once a girl is given she is under no circumstances accepted back into her natal group. It is doubtful if what Thurston says is with reference to a compact group of Muttans in any area or about individual families of high wealth. Presumably the latter alone was possible in the beginning of this century. Regarding the immigration of Muttans from the Tamil area, (Chola Desa, of mediaeval history), their seeking protection under the Zamorin, and their consequently getting settled in the Walluvanad area under the jurisdiction of Eralpad (the second of the five Sthanam holders of Zamorin's family), see K.V.K.Iyer, The Zamorins of Calicut, (Calicut, 1938), p.50.

For further illustrations see (a) Vattekkadan Nairs (Thurston, vol.VII, p.330) beginning to adopt the "honorary affix Nairs" by the close of last century (b) Chem-bottis, the copper workers (Innes, ibid, p.121) originally of the Kammalan castes rising to be above the level of polluting castes by virtue of their initial professional service at the inner parts of shrines. (c) Karuka Musad (Innes, p.110) as sections of Ambalavasi castes in some places.

7. For example see the instance of two sections of Marar cited in foot note 6 above. Again, the caste of Ilayad (degraded Nambudiris) is another case in point. See Thurston (ibid., vol.II, p.206). A section of Ilayads who served the Sudra Nairs became superior to



leading to an enhancement of their ritual or secular status, or both.<sup>8</sup> (4) Census reports from 1901 to 1931 reveal efforts on the part of several castes to get enumerated either as a higher caste or in terms of a label in contradistinction to another caste of questionable equality having the same name.<sup>9</sup>

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those who served the Nairs of other castes. In his article "Castes in Travancore" in the Anthropological Society of Bombay, Jubilee Volume, 1937, pp.236-260, L.A.Krishna Iyer notes that in the old Malayalam work dealing with the determination of castes (Jati Nirnayam) there are ten 'Pathitha Jatis' i.e. fallen castes.

8. According to T.K.Gopal Panicker (Malabar and its Folk, Madras, 1900, p.230) the Tirumulpads of the Samanthan group were "given social elevation by a special social edict of the Raja of Cochin" by authorising them to dine with Nambudiris. K.V.Krishna Iyer (op.cit., p.96) records that the Kadupottans were originally immigrant Brahmins who reached Calicut in A.D.1447 in an impoverished condition. The Ampati Kovilakam Valiya Tampuratti (the senior most female of a segment of the Zamorin's lineage) took pity on them, gave them asylum and ordered them to earn livelihood as school teachers. However as will be seen later in the text of this chapter, this royal accord does not seem to have had validity all over Malabar. Thurston (op.cit., vol.V, p.283) observes that, of the immigrant caste of Chettis some families who rendered meritorious services were raised by Rajas and Chieftains to be Nairs.

9. Instances of this kind are numerous. The phenomenal increase in the census figures for Samanthans has been noted in the first part of the last chapter. Regarding the census enumeration of Muttans see foot note 6 above. L.A.Krishna Iyer (op.cit., 1937, p.256) records the efforts of artisan castes in Travancore to be reckoned in 1931 census under the generic term 'Viswakarma'. He also notes that the barber caste of Nairs (Vilakkattira) did not care to use the suffix Nair until 1931 but by the spread of the lower Tamilian Ambittan caste of barbers the former began to face the disgrace of being referred to as Ambittans. Hence they claimed to be recorded in all documents as Vilakkattira Nairs. According to Thurston (ibid., vol.V, p.283) Chettis of Coimbatore who settled in Palghat and Walluvanad "within living memory" have developed into Nairs, and in census schedules are instances of the males of

The efforts seen in census reports to get recorded as a higher caste, does not mean that the caste in question achieved local recognition of its claim. My enquiry regarding the past social status of Tarakans, Kadupottans, Muttans and Chettis in the 1920's reveals that they had in many parts got recorded in deeds of land transfer and in census channels as a higher caste or by a more glorifying name but only the wealthy families among them would be locally accorded public recognition of the professed labels. This statement bears validity about several such castes in my focal area down to this day.

Recognition of the historical fact of mobility of castes is either implied or explicitly stated in some recent research papers based partly on field material. The few statements of Eric Miller cited in the last chapter in the context of the problem of elaborate caste ranking in Kerala are relevant to be recalled here. Miller has also noted (i) the more autonomous nature of pre-British *desam* or a small group of *desams* in North Malabar (north of Kora river "a particularly sharp cultural and political boundary between north Malabar and the south") where the authority of the Zamorin never penetrated and was never unified under any single ruler

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 a house affixing the term Nair to their names while the names of females end in Chettichi (that is, instead of Amma which is the appropriate suffix for names of females of the Nair castes). My field information on this point will be mentioned later.

(ii) the related and partly consequent phenomenon in the north of fewer Nair sub-groups in contrast to the south.<sup>10</sup> This fact has also been observed by Kathleen Gough who has, in contrast to the south, noted that in North Malabar with its absence of a centralised Government and a standing Militia", though there are endogamous sub-castes of servant Nairs, the high caste of Nairs were not divided into sub-castes on the basis of Governmental functions and allegiance to Rajas and to Nambudiris..... Kinship here has an efflorescence at the expense of sub-caste differentiation".<sup>11</sup> In a more recent paper Kathleen Gough has observed another point which has also come to my notice as a general remark from informants who have some knowledge of the past of several taravads. Referring to the lineages of village headmen, whom I have included in the term Sthanis, and of higher rulers she notes "...each of these aristocratic lineages tended to set itself up as a separate sub-caste, acknowledging ritual superiors but no peers. In the course of time following the

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10. Eric J. Miller, "Caste and Territory in Malabar" in *American Anthropologist*, vol. 56, No. 3, June, 1954, p. 416.

11. See her "Changing Kinship Usages in the Setting of Political and Economic Change Among the Nayars of Malabar" in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 82, 1952.

I doubt if Eric Miller (*ibid.*) and Kathleen Gough are right to the extent they attribute sub-caste differentiation to the absence of centralised Govt. in North Malabar. Under political unity one expects less fission or differentiation and more of uniformity. In the south although there was a united kingdom under the Zamorin there was little or no interference from him into the internal

vicissitudes of political fortunes, such lineages could rise or fall in the ritual hierarchy."<sup>12</sup>

My field data on the mobility of castes, both immigrant and indigenous, show that (i) when several families of a local caste group became wealthy and featured the correlated practices valued as high, or followed enlightened occupations, the whole group in that area tended to be regarded as having achieved some mobility. Conversely, if a very large number of families got impoverished the whole group sank low in public recognition as a locally insignificant one of lower social status, particularly so, when all families stayed closely in a compact area (ii) it was always families which were mobile in this manner and not a whole local caste group achieving mobility as a corporate body (iii) in the recognition of achievement of mobility in several of the cases there was a kind of reflected prestige as an asset contributing to the recognition (iv) sections of patrilineal castes which changed over to be matrilineal and uxori-

local were more successful in either achieving mobility,  
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social or political affairs of the village or district and in addition, in the south, the Nambudiris and their freedom to rule over the tenants and their retainers was another relevant fact. These seem to account for differentiation within the high caste Nairs. In the north, the differentiation that is less is possibly due to factors other than the absence of a centralised rule.

12. "The Nayars and the Definition of Marriage", in the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, vol.89, part I, January-June, 1959, p.27.

or maintaining the achieved degree of it. The relevant cases are cited below in elucidation of these findings which will also become more revealing at a later stage when we consider the problem of mobility of families.

Before we turn to the illustrative cases it helps to avoid repetition if we note at this stage what basic qualifications on the part of a section of a local caste led to the recognition of its enhancement in ritual status over its original caste rank. First was the relegating of the traditional occupation to be <sup>done</sup>~~borne~~ by one or a few of the poor families so that the rest had no association with it and could devote to some open enlightened occupation; second, the increasing if not exclusive practice of having Nambudiris or other higher caste husbands (applicable to matrilineal and uxori-local castes); third, having higher caste cooks in frequent if not permanent service; and fourth, modelling certain rites and ceremonies after those of the Nambudiris and having services of higher caste priests wherever possible, and an impressive pursuit of devotional activities (prayers, religious worship etc.) with an extending patronage of deities of vedic Hinduism located far and wide. These qualifications, it may be noted, were chiefly attainable by wealth but they belonged to the category of facts of some degree of ritual superiority. Therefore in elucidating my observations mobility in secular status, a precedent condition, is as far as practicable

kept separate for treatment at a later stage.

The following cases and brief interpretations cover the four <sup>findings</sup> formulated above.

There are villages in each taluk where one or another of the Ambalavasi castes as a whole was judged as not merely wealthy but having a ritual status a shade higher. This was because many a family of the 7 caste was wealthy in kanam or rarely janmam lands, and was getting Nambudiri or Samanthan husbands. The temple service was done in most of such cases by one poor taravad or often by one tavarai of it, and efforts were consistently made by many a wealthy family to achieve the qualifications mentioned above. The Pallichans of the middle group of Nair castes, in my third village were poor and too often served Kiriyam Nairs to remove dinner leaves at feasts, but in my fourth village (to be described) they were of sharp contrast in wealth and have been accorded a higher ritual status for the kind of reasons mentioned here. Ulladan Nairs in the first village were poor, and as noted in the last chapter, contrasted with the same caste in other areas. The Muttans of parts of Walluvanad and Palghat taluks had become wealthy and had come to be known as Guptans, a term that all their families in other places acquiring wealth today are claiming as a label duly deserved them.<sup>13</sup> Wealthy sections

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13. Muttans and Tarakans, prior to their immigration were trading castes in and around Madura in the Tamil areas and they probably belonged to the category of

of Tarakans in the same are have, from about the twenties of this century, been affixing 'Mannadiar' to their names which originally stood for a small group in Palghat taluk to be presently mentioned. Muttans of Palghat appear to have been always well-to-do owing to their concentration in Palghat with trading facilities. They differentiated themselves in due course from the Muttans of Walluvanad and the two sections have not intermarried except for the few cases in recent years. Kadupottans of my third village have been poor and hence lower than the Kadupottans in the surrounding areas who were, for decades prior to 1950, known as Eruthachans. The Chettis of wealth in and around the third village began to be known as Pillai although I found in the village register of food grain rations (1949) that the women of this caste continued to be recorded as Chettichi. At the same time the immigrant Kaikkolans of the same village, who are a caste lower than Chettis got entries in the same register with the suffix Chetti to their names. In the third village and in the nearby town of Shoranur are Chettis who have since the thirties achieved some financial mobility and have been known and entered in official records as Mudaliars. The latter is a caste of generally well-to-do traders from Tamil areas nearly well settled -----  
 castes coming within the fold of the Vaisya varna. There the term Guptan as a suffix meant a royal ancestry.

under trade interests chiefly in the towns of Palghat taluk. I am told that Mudaliars with perpetual interests in such towns and seeking to identify themselves with the local social structure have designated themselves as Pillai, a caste name which has been locally more pleasing with little sense of an immigrant background of questionable ritual purity. Further, Pillai is also a high caste of Nairs in Travancore and the term therefore covers castes ranging widely in social status and rank. Of these castes the Muttans of Palghat and Chettis and Kaikkolans are bilingual with Tamil as their household language, and the Chettis in general, as an external trait, continue their Tamilian dress which mark them out, particularly their women, from the native population. All these castes were also not essentially component groups of a Sthani or Nambudiri-headed village. The labels which they assumed are either names of castes of higher rank in other areas or such names carry a sense of ritual toning from the point of view of the villagers. It is only very vaguely that they are recognised as having an enhancement in ritual status for even the very wealthy families of them have not had marital relations with higher castes. The rise in the secular status of all these castes probably qualified by a vague recognition of their ensuing ritual status was considerably prominent in areas south of Walluvanad taluk as is



revealed well by the manner in which L.K.A.Iyer treats them in his accounts written in 1912.<sup>14</sup> The several callings open to them to be pursued with little structural limitations and the consequently large clientele for their services account for the easy mobility of nearly all these castes. This statement in the light of my data is rather hypothetical and require to be verified by specific investigations among these castes. It is also fully probable that in different areas in the same taluk varying historic conditions favoured them to make a good start with kanam lands or with trade in some items. There are even today villages in my focal area where they still remain very poor as complementary castes under the grip of the power group in one or a few neighbouring villages. In such villages unless a substantial number of families elevated themselves they continue to be regarded as low. The immigrant complementary castes in feeder villages mentioned in the second chapter are of this category. Although several illustrious families of a local caste could lead to the mobility as noted here, in actual intercaste relations the individual social status of the family of such a caste was the guiding factor.

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14. L.K.A.Iyer (op.cit., vol.II, p.104). He groups Kadupottans, Tarakans and Chaliyans (to be described) with the Nair castes of barber and washerman, all under a common label "The low caste Sudras" and of these castes he describes Kadupottans first for the reason(?) that they were striving "to rise higher in the social scale".

The respect for a poor or less mobile family depended on how much sense of security it enjoyed from its relations with the more advanced families of the same caste or other families of the local power group.

Usually, however, the families of a local caste which achieved mobility in secular status had control over the remaining section of it. This fact is significant from the point of view of internal solidarity of the caste and its intercaste relations for the control kept it refrained from doing anything disgracing to the prestige of the local caste as a whole.

A study of the process of improvement in ritual status by slow but definite degrees shows the importance of interactional factors in the determination of ritual status. The polluting Pulluvans (of the 11th group of castes) were lower than Tandans and until the forties of this century barbering for them was done either by themselves or by Panans. Pulluvans of Panamanna say that in the last few decades they got the services from Choppan Mannans, the barbers clinging as a lower appendage to the caste of Tandans. For this reason, the Pulluvans regard themselves as honoured, particularly so, since the Choppan Mannans are at times barbers of the younger generation of high caste Nairs. Comparable to this is the service of the Nair washerman, during the same period, to the Nairs of the middle group in my first

two villages. Until about the forties the Nair washerman (Veluthedan) would not serve castes below Sudra Nairs but he could not give up his profession and was too well convinced that he had no prospect of getting reckoned on a par with Nairs of the middle group. These instances show that when attributional criteria too firmly fixed the rank, mobility in ritual status was possibly downward rather than upward.

In varying degrees, in most of the cases, reflected prestige was enjoyed by the section of a caste which had advanced. The fact of becoming a kanam tenant of a Nambudiri or Sthani of power and repute, of having social relations of respect and friendliness with such centres of power or of rendering specified services to them could be a reasonable matter for a family to profess or claim higher prestige even when such assets did not bring about any material prosperity. One often hears remarks of the following kind from informants: "You know some forty years back those Kadupottans became kanam tenants of that temple and that Nambudiri and several of them either teachers or managers of the affairs of the leading taravads in that area. Since then you can't refer about them except as Eruthachans, and they began to be tolerated even if they encroached beyond the prescribed limits in temples."

The fourth point noted that change to matriliney was conducive to mobility, is one on which informants

generally agree. Matriliney in South Malabar with its uxorilocality (visiting custom) and hypergamy is readily cited by them as a basic and even <sup>causal</sup> ~~casual~~ factor in the upward mobility of families of several castes. The instances of change into matriliney and associated mobility are cited below and an attempt can then be made to draw some conclusions in common with the mobility of patrilineal castes. The small group of Tarakans of high wealth in Angadipuram, noted in the third chapter, had husbands from Nambudiris or Samanthang ruling families and the Tarakan males married Kiriya Nair women. I have noted one case of a Tarakan of this group over three decades back chosen as a husband in a Sthani family which by caste belonged to the middle group of Nairs. It is said that these Tarakans were once patrilineal, pursued trade in some goods and earned wealth in land. Their change to matriliney and uxorilocality brought royal marital alliance with the family of Vellattiri Raja and thereby new channels for the flow of wealth into the hands of their women. Their affiliations with centres of immense wealth, power and authority initially gave them a higher ritual status (probably under formal recognition by that Raja) over Nairs. Another instance is of the small caste of matrilineal Mannadiars in Palghat taluk whose mobility has been pointed out in the chapter on castes. Their established superiority over Nair castes and their probable common ancestry with Tarakans

led to patrilineal Tarakans, as noted, affixing Mannadiar to their names.<sup>15</sup> It is not clear if the matrilineal Mannadiars were wealthy prior to their conversion to matriliney but my information tends to show that much of increase in their wealth and ritual status is attributable to their matriliney and the associated marital residence. The Mannadiars in this century, by caste, rank even above the Sthanis who originally belonged to Kiriya Nairs, for the latter have been preferring to get Mannadiar husbands almost as much as they were solicitous of having husbands from Samanthan ruling families. As Sthanis, women of wealthy Mannadiar taravads affixed to their names 'Netyar' while men continued to be known only as Mannadiar since the term per se connoted a rank higher than other Sthanis. (The possible derivative Mannadichi for their women would be debasing to them since such suffixes for women derived from the caste name are used by lower castes, as for example, for females Chetti becomes Chettichi, Cheruman

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15. The Tarakans of Angadipuram and the Mannadiars do not intermarry. My information from a few sources in Palghat taluk shows that (a) both Mannadiars and the Tarakans were Chettis presumably of a high rank in Madura (b) the very wealthy Mannadiars are distributed at the following places: Nalleppulli (in Cochin State) Pudurseri, Tenkursi, Kuttanur, Pookkod and Peringottukursi in Palghat taluk (c) several of their families continued until recent decades one of their marriage rites of pre-matrilineal times at the occasion of tali-ketty ceremony. This rite was the ritual installing of a decorated mud pot with turmeric and flowers near the hearth in the kitchen (d) their women are remembered to have continued until recent times the wearing of a yellow thread around the neck, a practice reminiscent of the caste of their seminal origin.

becomes Cherumi and Varasyar is used for Variyar women). The immigrant caste of Chaliyans who are still weavers of a coarse cloth is another instance of a caste which has in some places evolved into matriliney. In a corner of Kolakkad contiguous to Munnurkode about twenty patrilineal families of them live and they have long since become natives in language and dress. But in some parts of Ponnani taluk including a location in Valapad close to my fourth village they are matrilineal and are recognised almost as Nairs ranking above the Nair castes of barber and washerman. I am told that they share a remote ancestry with the patrilineal Chaliyans of Walluvanad, but they gave up weaving since they entered Valapad and began to serve high caste Nairs as out-door assistants at feasts. Their women were rarely accepted as wives of Nairs of the middle group, and by the forties of this century, they began affixing 'Nair' to their names.<sup>16</sup> I gather that all patrilineal Chaliyans are regarded as definitely lower than the matrilineal groups. Other rare instances of Malabar castes having matriliney by

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16. The caste of Chaliyans in Cochin (see foot note 14) according to L.K.A.Iyer (op.cit., vol.II, p.117) have inheritance in the male line but he also records that they have the custom of the husband visiting the wife. They are described as weavers who might have entered into Malabar soon after 11th century. Iyer quotes Duarte Barbosa who notes (i) Nairs could be visiting husbands of Chaliyan women (ii) for that reason the Chaliyans are "very fine men in figures..." (iii) they have matriliney. Thurston (op.cit., vol.II, p.11) records that they are matrilineal and patrilineal in different areas and the matrilineals probably were the earlier immigrants.

conversion are seen in the literature on Malabar castes. I have no information about these castes<sup>17</sup> but it is probable that a detailed study of all these cases may reveal in matriliney and uxorilocality a pre-condition that was conducive to mobility.

A few facts of importance emerge as a general conclusion from the instances of mobility of castes so far considered. (i) The potentiality for mobility of castes and the larger number of local groups (castes) formed in the course of centuries by differentiation, within a group of a few villages, can be best understood if seen against the background of matriliney and uxorilocality (visiting custom). (ii) In the improvement of

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17. Travancore Census Report, vol.I, 1901, p.269 gives a short account about the small caste of Kurukkal grouped with the category of castes rendering temple service in South Travancore. As the Report records this caste was once patrilineal and matriliney was enforced on them by a few powerful families of Pottis (a caste ranking closely below Nambudiris) in 1792 A.D. Thurston (ibid., vol.V, p.311) points out (i) they were once known by labels connoting lower rank, i.e., Madamutali and Pandaram (ii) after conversion as a matrilineal temple caste their females began to get Brahmin husbands and their males began to marry women of the temple caste of Marans. Probably the Yogi Kurukkal of North Malabar ranking nearly equal to high caste Nairs mentioned in Malabar District Gazetteer (op. cit., p.123) is a section of this Kurukkal in their spread to the north.

K.V.K.Iyer (op.cit., p.269) refers to the few matrilineal families of Malapuram Paranambi who were once title holding patrilineal Brahmins under the Zamorin. The Zamorin, he notes, ordered them "according to the tradition preserved in the family (of Zamorin's) to adopt Marumakkattayam system (matriliney) thinking that virtues and talents were transmitted to the offspring more easily through the mother than through the father". A search through all published sources is likely to reveal the existence of more small castes which accepted matriliney

ritual status of a group the basic requirement was interactional, that is alteration in the 'core' bonds of social relations with other castes. And logically we are led to realise that (iii) Sanskritization to understand the situation here has to be employed with caution.<sup>18</sup> It was not the giving up of non-vegetarian food and habits of drinking liquor, or stopping widow-remarriage and divorce or sanskritizing rituals which formed the basic qualification, the prime force, that raised the ritual status of a caste. The Tarakans and Kallan Muppans never had widow remarriage or divorce and yet it was only the matrilineal Tarakans and Mannadiars who could achieve a high degree of mobility. And for all that I could gather, these two as matrilineal groups, atleast theoretically, could permit divorce and re-marriage, and investigation may reveal that they had actually practised it. All Nairs, both men and women, were always non-vegetarians by caste and the men could drink liquor. Nair wives of -----  
for my informants vaguely recall to have heard about more of such castes in different parts of Kerala. In the instances of castes mentioned here conversion helped them to be qualified to accept husbands from higher patrilineal or matrilineal castes.

18. For the concept of sanskritization see M.N.Srinivas, Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India, (Oxford, 1952), p.30 and his paper "A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization" in the Far Eastern Quarterly (now, Journal of Asian Studies) vol. XV, No.4, August, 1956, pp.481-496.



Nambudiris were an exception, but in addition, often many or all of her taravad kin would follow the Nambudiri ideal of vegetarianism and taboo on liquor and the taravad as a whole could thus achieve a higher ritual prestige. But the point of concern here is to note that a taravad raised its ritual prestige in this manner after a Nambudiri became a husband there and (usually) not vice versa. Widow re-marriage and divorce in such a taravad could however continue, except for wives of Nambudiris. The ways of enhancing ritual status of a family will be considered later but we may for the present note that a substantial rise in secular status was an important basic condition to open up chances of alliance with Nambudiris which in turn considerably contributed to rise in ritual status. Sanskritization added to it a veneer of ritual prestige. (iv) The process of mobility appears to have had its direction to reach one of the two goals, (a) to scale over a higher caste in ritual status and gain a higher rank in due course, and if not (b) to remain in relation to a higher caste in a state of reciprocal non-recognition of each other's ritual superiority, the manifestation of it being obviously on the part of each to avoid commensality, hypergamy or inter-marriage. The castes of Marar cited in this chapter from published accounts and Ilayad, Variyar and Charna Menon are instances to be recalled here with a few

additional observations which I shall make in illustration of the statement. I learn that Marar and Sudra Nair reciprocally avoided such relations until recent decades. The Ilayad until the thirties is reported as having eaten at the houses of Sudra Nairs, possibly cooking for himself, but found it insecure for his ritual status and continued that bond of relationship only with very wealthy Nairs who had Brahmin cooks and Nambudiri husbands. The Sudra Nairs are not unanimous in placing Variyars as above or equal with them in the ritual scale with reference to any time in the past. The Charna Menons in my area are quoted by informants as a case of thwarted ambition to step over Sudra Nairs as there was no compromise between them on the point of relative superiority of either. It is also worthy of note that the recognition of a caste as higher by merely giving a higher caste name would not locally elevate it in the ritual scale in the reality of day to day life. What was required was to acquire by slow degrees marriage relations with higher castes and exclude relations with those of equal level. The Pottis of Travancore who had also spread into Cochin State were renamed as Nambudiris over fifty years back by the Nambudiri reformist body, the Yogakshema Sabha. Yet the label could do little to qualify them as equals with the Nambudiris for purposes of intermarriage.

As we see, in all instances of mobility of a section of a caste the process <sup>which</sup> ~~with~~ D.F.Pockock has named inclusion-exclusion has worked but in a slightly different manner. By this process, in the context of caste hierarchy in Gujarat, he refers to the efforts made by a group to imitate a higher group "both in secular matters and Brahminic ~~sa~~ custom" and thus tend to be included in the higher level, at the same time followed by its corollary of exclusion from a group of lower level.<sup>19</sup>

In the mobility of castes we saw that the more important factor to be achieved to rise high in the hierarchy was marriage relations with Nambudiris or other higher castes. Rise in secular status had necessarily to be qualified by hypergamy if a caste was to be credited with a definitely higher social status. Matriliney and the visiting custom of husbands particularly facilitated a high caste to accept a wife from a caste several steps lower in the hierarchy, and thus a section of the caste of Palli-  
chan or Vattekkadan Nair could raise its local social status. By the visiting custom a woman's hypergamy created little or no contacts for her with the members of her husband's family. And this feature of the hypergamy of the matrilineal castes also became attractive to the patrilineal and virilocal castes for imitation if they were driven by circumstances to marry a woman of a lower caste of slight difference in rank. I found

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19. D.F.Pockock, "Inclusion and Exclusion; A process in the caste system of Gujarat", South Western Journal of Anthropology, vol.13, No.1, 1957.

two instances as noted in the last chapter to gather that between endogamous castes of this type female hypergamy with visiting custom could rarely take place for it permitted the continuance of the normal sense of repudiation towards a lower caste and at the same time enhanced the prestige of the latter. The Ganisa Panicker of the upper polluting castes, if for want of mates married a Kanisa Panicker woman, he had to be a visiting husband. Similarly, the Ganisa Panicker caste has a tiny lower group, an appendage, exclusively serving them to purify after death pollution and a Ganisa Panicker could have a wife from this lower group provided he only visited her at her house. I was told by the Ganisa Panicker of Trikkateri, a man in his seventies, that such instances had rarely taken place in the southern taluks of South Malabar. Another instance is of the middle polluting caste of Cherumans among whom the Kanakkan Cheruman could be a visiting husband of a woman of the caste of Kudan Cheruman and I noted one past case of such an alliance in Karattukursi and one in a neighbouring village.

What we have considered so far enable us to make the following generalizations, which are also valid upto this day, regarding the mobility of castes in relation to the rural social structure. These are (i) the very aspirations behind mobility are elements of significance in the social structure (ii) mobility of a section of a

caste leading to fission and subsequent development as a higher group resulted in the emergence of more of distinct groups and this has tended to make the structure more complex (iii) the section which achieved mobility and thus qualified the whole group as higher than before has also been controlling the whole group.

#### Mobility of individuals and families

The mobility of individuals and families is too closely inter-connected but I shall deal with each separately as far as possible, and as well, the mobility in secular status and ritual status will also be treated separately. The mobility of families and individuals was invariably and too often reciprocally connected with the mobility of castes. The few aspects of mobility considered here are (i) recognition of the fact of mobility at any time as seen in a few published sources (ii) a distinction between mobility in ritual status and secular status as revealed in specific cases of families, and the very process of achieving mobility in ritual status (iii) the means of enhancing wealth and the avenues for achieving other assets of secular prestige (iv) the expressions of mobility achieved.

(i) Recognition of the fact of mobility or of the possibility of it in the past as seen in a few published sources:

We have noted in chapter I that the distinction

between Naduvvari and Desavari was so feeble that the former could at any time swell up as the latter. The titles given by the Zamorin, as stated in the same chapter, to members of various castes and creeds also show the historic fact of the large number of families who received royal awards in recognition of their merits and their consequent rise in secular status. We have also noted in the last chapter how some Sthanis and higher rulers held an ascribed ritual status of Nambudiris, a consequence of the power of the sovereign to bestow such rights and privileges. For instance, the high ritual status of the Raja of Kollengode, noted in the last chapter, originally emanated from the authority of the Zamorin.<sup>20</sup> There are instances, as will be seen later, which tell us that even under British rule some families could raise their ritual prestige, if not ritual status, under the authority of the village head who could bestow

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20. The time-honoured designation of this Raja as ruler of Venganat was Venganat Nampidi. Regarding the rise of this royal family see K.V.Krishna Iyer, "The Venganat Nampidis", Bulletin of the Rama Varma Research Institute, Trichur, (in English) vol.X, part II, 1942. The Zamorin granted to this Raja the right to give 'Soma' (the moon plant) and 'Karinchali' to the Nambudiris of Malabar for conducting the periodical elaborate 'Yaga'. It is significant that even the Zamorin who raised the ritual prestige of this Raja is recognised by some informants as a shade lower by caste. This is probably because the Zamorin emerged into royal power from a caste of lower rank. I was also told that only the Zamorin who succeeded to be the King, the senior-most of the family, alone was discredited as lower in ritual status.

some titles connected with certain rights in temples. Thus secular power, in this case the political power, could raise the ritual status of individuals or families even close to the level of the Nambudiris.

The possibility for pursuing open occupations, not restricted by one's caste rank, inspite of the institution of avakasam, has been noted in the first chapter. The practice for a period far remote into the past was that the permission of the village head (Desavari) was necessary to stop a traditional occupation but it was not to be sought to start a new occupation within the range of those conventionally open to a caste. Scholars of Kerala history have noted that advanced education was possible even for upper polluting castes during the pre-British period through the medium of sanskrit, and for such branches of knowledge as astrology, even in Tamil. As Kunchunni Raja notes, the janmi system of socio-economic relations was characterised by encouragement of several of the low castes to make achievements in art and literature.<sup>21</sup> In her paper on the cults of the dead among the Nairs, Kathleen Gough observes that the ghost of Karanavans who "amassed much property is most likely

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21. Dr. Kunchunni Raja in his article "Janmis of Ancient Kerala" (in Malayalam) in the Mathrubhumi Weekly, vol.XXXVI, No.9, May, 1958, presents a substantial consideration which helps us to know how the janmis encouraged art, literature, medicine, astrology and the science of architecture to be spread down to several castes.

to resent extravagance on the part of his successors.<sup>22</sup>

The fact that the institution of ancestor worship carried this feature shows that the possibility did exist for amassing wealth and a negative sanction of a supernatural kind worked against extravagance on the part of the successors. My enquiries show that the Karanavan of this merit was specially worshipped particularly because he could achieve much wealth by the help of some 'Istadevatas' (favourite angelic entities or deities) whom he could propitiate and exhort with success to fulfil his wishes. This success was also, in the case of some deities, attributed to the esoteric knowledge of the Karanavan to handle them to his advantage.<sup>23</sup>

There was again the astrologer who would account for the rise and fall of individuals and families in two ways, for there is not only an astrology for the individual but also for the family as a whole. In the prognosis of the future of a family, he also calculated, how far important

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22. Kathleen Gough, "Cults of the Dead Among the Nayars", *Journal of American Folklore*, vol.71, No.281, July-September, 1958.

23. There is for instance the Hanuman, an epic character worshipped as an additional deity in some Malabar temples. He is supposed to become one's favourite bestowing great benefits if he was 'controlled' by valiant devotional efforts. Kuttichathan, more or less of the category of devils, could as well be made favourite. Sometimes the ghost of an ancestor of phenomenal physical strength and general power could be 'mobilised' by persistent efforts to serve one's commendable ambitions.



individuals of a family, the elderly members, were in terms of their birth stars astrologically favourable for the good fortune (chiefly of wealth) of the family, whether a taravad or an illom. The emphasis as can be gleaned from the astrologer's findings and relevant to our attention is that fluctuating fortunes of individuals and families were unavoidable and people had to accept this fact as normal.<sup>24</sup> Among historic factors which were favourably predisposed for mobility of families can be located the political unity of South Malabar achieved in the 15th century under the Zamorin. Under him rulers of all categories including Desavaris and others to whom he gave titles were not to be afraid of any loss of wealth or secular status through political vicissitudes. The factors which worked for the loss or gain of wealth in the case of such centres of power were chiefly internal, the limited external factors such as coastal trade and Mysorean invasions affecting only very few.<sup>25</sup> And as families in the top layer of local

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24. The Hindu system of astrology known all over India as Jyotisha Sastram is used by specialists in Malabar who have mastered it by painstaking efforts. An elementary knowledge of it was essential to all Nambudiris. An account of Jyotisha Sastram as practised among them and by other specialists is given by L.K.A.Iyer (op.cit., vol.II, pp.217-223). I find that, of the four sections of the system of astrology, the two which have been most popular among Nairs in general have been 'Phalita' i.e. in which predictions are given based upon planetary movements and 'Prasnas' meant for clearing of doubts and prescriptions of remedial measures. A specific study of this aspect may show that this high popularity of these branches of knowledge reflected the social anxiety

hierarchies these centres of power could remain relatively stable in their secular status allowing the dependent groups or families to fluctuate in their fortunes partly according to the relations that could be maintained with them.

(ii) A distinction between mobility in ritual status and secular status:

This distinction was discernible particularly among the Nairs of the upper and middle groups. Families within a local caste sometimes differed in ritual status, a feature that existed chiefly among the upper group of Nairs. A reference to the caste of a highly wealthy family is often made by informants with mention of qualifications which made it eligible to be regarded as on a level distinctly higher than other families of the same caste. Such qualifications pertain to (a) the caste of the husbands (b) the caste of the cooks (c) the caste of the priests often called for services (d) number of women

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of Nairs as local careerists in the competitive social environment. Again, how the sanskritic Hindu system of astrology was adopted by local specialists to be applicable to matrilineal social structure will also be a rewarding field for study.

25. Coastal trade through duties brought an income to the village heads close to the coast but a part of it went to the Zamorin. In the interior the very wealthy, usually the Sthanis and above who owned much of forest wealth, had an important source of income from trade. The Mysorean invasion affected the strength of population rather than the wealth of individual families. Perhaps per-capita wealth in many a taravad might have increased after the invasion owing to the toll of lives in battle.

noted for their constant religious pursuits of a devotional nature (e) the degree of vegetarianism (f) the kind of deity, if any, located in the premises of the house. Below the Sthanis only the very wealthy could afford to score high in an assessment based on such criteria, a feature of the royal model down to the level of Sthanis. However, there were also the less wealthy who had an enhanced ritual prestige for having some of these, and the well-to-do families therefore varied in the level of their ritual status. But it may be noted that such differences, except in the case of very wealthy, did not affect the day to day behaviour at inter-family levels within a local caste. For instance, at feasts or any important occasions differential treatment on the basis of differences in ritual status would not be made unless it was accompanied by a high difference in secular status. As well, within a lineage, segments (taravads) sometimes differed in ritual status but only contrasting difference in secular status, as will be borne out later, got reflected in behaviour at inter-taravad levels. These aspects show that respect for high difference in secular status found institutionalised expression within a caste.

For any of the Nair castes the ritual status mobility based on the few criteria, as noted, made their caste rank more or less insignificant in several fields

of inter-caste relations. When husbands, cooks and priests were available from higher castes it was easier to have social relations with families of those castes. However, families of different castes irrespective of the degree of mobility achieved in secular status and ritual status were remembered and mentioned about in relevant contexts in terms of their caste rank. Thus we find even Sthanis who by caste, in folk memory, always remained low at the level of the middle group of Nairs particularly because their caste rank always limited the scope of operation of choices in marriage. Instances of such Sthanis are the Mannarkat Nair, the Olavanat Panicker (near Guruvayur) and Blahayil Nair (in Valapad, the head of my fourth village), each having a very high secular status and considerable rise in ritual status and yet not being accepted as husbands, until recent decades, for Kiriya or Sudra Nair women. And among rulers (the royal families) the original caste rank, particularly for purposes of marriage, was a base line of reference even when royal power enjoyed for centuries blurred the ancient lowly rank of the ruler. The women of the Zamorin's lineage, as noted in the first chapter, rarely married men of other royal lineages who were politically under Zamorin but the reverse was not possible for the Zamorin was lower by rank than other politically lower ruling families such as of Beypore.

There were, however, rare instances to show that the high mobility in secular status and the almost simultaneously achieved enhancement in ritual status could blur the low caste rank of a family. In its extreme form this blurring can be seen in the practice of hypogamy among Nairs in the<sup>a</sup> part of Ponnani taluk partly within and outside of my fourth village. In that area there were rare instances of Pallichan Nairs marrying Nair women of higher castes who, by rank, correspond to the level of Sudra Nairs of my focal area. There is perhaps nowhere else an instance of this type of marriage in Malabar, for published works<sup>26</sup> make an allusion to it only in the southern parts of Malabar without specifying the spot, and as far as I could ascertain, in the south, it could not be located anywhere else. Further, my short period of work in the fourth village brought some data which corroborated the information on female hypogamy mentioned by my Walluvanad informants. In that area, families of some Nair castes of the middle group had ~~and~~ high secular status and considerably enhanced ritual status, and had titles such as 'Kaymal' given by the powerful Sthani-head who also belonged to the same group of Nairs. Families of some Nair castes belonging to the

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26. L.K.A.Iyer (op.cit., vol.II, p.20) in a short foot note refers to hypogamy in "the extreme south of south Malabar". T.K.Gopal Panicker (op.cit., p.18) makes a brief reference to this practice in the south of Ponnani taluk.

upper group but of contrastingly low secular status rarely accepted husbands from such title holding families of the castes of Ulladan and Pallichan Nairs of the middle group.<sup>27</sup> In such marriage alliances the families of both spouses felt superiority over the other and neither the husband nor the wife would eat at the house of the other.

In addition to the five criteria contributing to a rise in ritual status there were rare instances of ritual status ascribed by a Sthani family and valued in specific contexts. In my second village, as will be pointed out later, the Sthani-head assigned titles to two taravads giving special rights in temples. I am told, similar titles, in other parts of South Malabar were assigned <sup>by</sup> Sthani-heads, who by caste ranked within the middle group of Nairs, to Nairs of higher castes. We call such statuses ritual because the roles assigned with them pertain to ritual or semi-ritual services or rights and privileges, or the roles assigned have ritual overtones.

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27. Some old informants of Walluvanad remember of this practice "in the south" (as they say) in terms of a humorous saying with reference to the problem of interdining in the context of such a marital alliance. The saying means "father, you keep aloof, let me serve Kanchi (watery rice gruel) to mother". When the father is by caste lower the daughter finds it an act of ritual impurity to feed her mother in close proximity of the father. To credit mother with a higher purity and to think of a situation for the father to refrain from polluting her food is amusing to informants who have been accustomed only to female hypergamy.

The rank of some Sthani families shows that mobility in ritual status worked within limits. Any amount of mobility in ritual status over one's caste rank could not raise the ritual status to be on an undisputed parity with the rank of a higher caste. In actual contexts of relations, however, this did not matter and therefore informants, except a few, could hardly remember the caste rank of several of the Sthani families. The secular status of a Sthani was expressed in terms of (i) whether he was originally both a Desavari and a Commandant under the Zamorin (ii) whether he had any title or special rights and privileges given by the Zamorin or carried over from the pre-Zamorin period (iii) the number of his 'kalams' (houses located in charge of a manager or a member of his family in distant places to facilitate management of extensive property scattered over distant areas) (iv) the total 'michavaram' (income in paddy received as the small share due to the janmi) (v) the total land revenue he paid to the Govt. (vi) area of forests owned and usually expressed in terms on money income from forest produce (vii) the temples held under his urayma (management but amounting to virtual ownership). All these, except the first two, were also indices on which the secular status of jammis of any caste was broadly assessed. The dependents and spokesmen of Sthanis and jammis of high opulence usually exaggerate the figures in respect of these indices and the grading

they make is therefore not credible.<sup>28</sup> There is, however, more consensus of opinion among the informants regarding the original caste rank of the Sthanis. The Mannarkat Nair is said to belong to one of the high Nair castes of the middle group and some place him as one of the low castes of the upper group of Nairs. The Blahayil Nair, the head of my fourth village, as noted, is more definitely spoken about as Pallichan by caste, and the Olavanat Panicker as one of the low castes of the upper group of Nairs, or, he could possibly be placed at the top of the middle group. The Kutiravattattu Nair is located somewhere at the bottom of the upper group of Nairs but he is also one of the few instances of high ranking (by caste) Sthanis or pre-British autonomous chieftains who lost their original caste rank through some unwittingly committed act of misdeameanour or a moral misconduct.<sup>29</sup>

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 28. According to my informants of the focal villages the income of a few Sthani taravads and Nambudiri illoms until about the forties as annual 'michavaram' alone (rent due to the janmi) is as follows: Trikkateri Sthani Nair - 60,000 paras of paddy, Mannarghat Sthani Nair - 8,000 paras (and 2 lakhs of rupees from forests), Kavalappara Sthani Nair - over a lakh of paras, Kadambatta Nambudiri illom - 50,000 paras (the head of Karattukursi), and Mappat illom (the head of Munnurkode) 60,000 paras. (one para costs about Rs.3/- today).

29. The Kutiravattam Sthani taravad is said to have belonged to Kiriya Nair caste and a story about its downfall from that rank runs as follows. One woman of the taravad was the wife of a member of the Zamorin's family and was having virilocal residence in his place. A female member of that royal family while bathing in company with that wife wanted her to prepare some 'tali' (a herbal hair shampoo) and she immediately obeyed as though she was a servant at the beck and call of the



Until about the thirties of this century at the houses of the low ranking Sthanis, males of Kiriyam and Sudra Nair castes (and perhaps some other castes of the upper group) dined because such Sthanis and had Brahmins or other cooks of appropriate rank and suitable feeding arrangements could be made. Their women, however, refrained from doing it thus displaying the superiority in rank, a fact still recalled by some informants as an illustration of the low rank of some of the Sthanis of the category mentioned.

(iii) The means of enhancing wealth and the avenues of achieving other assets of secular prestige:

Although a clear distinction between mobility of individuals and of families in secular status is not possible it is profitable to treat these separately as far as is practicable. It also helps us to recognise the tradition that has shaped the contemporary bilateral ----- women of her husband's family. Her husband learning this sent her back to her taravad consoling that she would find her natal taravad raised to a regal standard of living. It was fulfilled and the wealth of that Sthani taravad is attributed to this incident.

A royal family in Palghat taluk holding the title Achan is similarly said to have fallen from ritual heights. The story retained in folk memory about its fall is as follows: Within the boundaries of the Raja of Cochin was a spot in Palghat taluk, an outpost with a residence for royal members to stay during their periodical tours. One prince of the royal family during a brief stay found himself lost in a carnal desire for sex gratification with a tribal woman he met in the vicinity. His secretary knowing this got a woman of appropriate caste to disguise like the tribal woman and offer herself to the prince. Although his desire was fulfilled the prince could not ignore the sting of his conscience that

attitude of the individual to help his consanguineal kin along with his efforts to lavish care on his conjugal kin.

Mobility in this field in my focal area was chiefly confined to Nairs of the middle group and above. In the joint families of these castes, theoretically, the interests of the individual was supposed to be completely merged with those of the family but it was only the male head who implemented this ideal. The rest of the male members sought for income and prestige primarily for enriching themselves without in any manner injuring the interests of the joint family. Among the Nambudiris avenues to explore for individual income were very narrow in scope. The family head made periodical allowances or met demands for personal needs. To practise the permitted prestigious occupations for the sake of money was not honourable. Regular services as a priest was taken up by those who had to resort to it as an important means of livelihood and it did not therefore bring about an accumulation of wealth. However, the younger members of an illom of average wealth (from the Nambudiri standards) usually got enough of resources to bequeath to their

matrilineal wives and children to whom the basic means of

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followed the sexual contact, which he believed, was with an outcaste. The secretary disclosed the truth but the prince declared himself as having lost his caste. Thus developed the Achan taravad, and I learn that Sudra Nairs until the twenties regarded them as of much lower ritual status not even drinking water at their hands or from their house.

livelihood was usually assured by their taravads. Younger Nambudiris under whose care distantly located estates were managed also amassed personal wealth from those sources without forfeiting the joint family from the minimum income due from it under normal conditions. A similar process worked among the Sthanis among whom there was specified periodical allotment to several senior members, and in the case of some Sthani taravads, to all married males of the taravad. Nambudiris could enhance their prestige by mastering the few branches of knowledge, astrology, ayurvedic medicine and the advanced science of architecture and there were Nambudiris, though very limited in number, reputed for their proficiency in these fields of learning. Such pursuits on their part were an extension of their interest in learning sanskrit and were motivated more by a genuine desire to learn such specialisms and remain as consultants for the less proficient than by any attraction to earn as professionals. At lower levels in the hierarchy it may be recalled from the second chapter that individuals making their mark in their avakasam services could earn reputé and get an ever increasing clientele. The more important of these occupations were those of the upper polluting castes, carpentry, astrology, bell-metal work and jewellery making. Families much reputed in these could, among their respective castes, achieve a substantial rise in secular status.

It was among the Nairs that several avenues were open for individuals to earn personal wealth and prestige. Their role in the productive economy being chiefly that of non-cultivating intermediary tenants, the Nairs of the upper group were in a particularly advantageous position. The occupations which were open to Nairs and castes below with broad caste-wise limitations can be enumerated in an appropriate order of prestige grading, in groups, as the villagers place them in their relative estimation. Within each group the order of enumeration of occupations given here has no special significance, since, in local estimation, they do not form a hierarchy and the relative grading of each is influenced by a complex of variables.

1. Govt. jobs, jobs in foreign countries like Burma, management of the affairs of very wealthy families and temples, able handling of local disputes between families (Nattu Karyasthan, i.e., man of local affairs)
2. astrology, ayurvedic medicine, children's therapy.
3. teaching, secular services of a junior cadre in temples and very wealthy families, chiefly that of rent collector. Kathakali and other folk drama of the same category.
4. massage (physiotherapy), curative magic, treating cattle disease.
5. drumming and playing on instruments at temple festivals.
6. sorcery and exorcism.

Broadly speaking the groups of occupations form a hierarchy with a few features worthy of note. These are (1) the groups in the same order decrease in their

scope as avenues of earning wealth (ii) the hierarchy here roughly corresponds to the hierarchy of groups of castes (iii) consequent on (i) and (ii) once a certain degree of mobility in secular status was achieved it was necessary for the individual to give up the less prestigious occupation, if ever he practised it, or, social expectation did not favour his pursuit of it as a profession for earning. Although open occupations could be placed in this order the prestige of the individual pursuing each of these varied according his eminence in the field and the partly consequent patronage he received from families of high social status, or, his prestige depended on the social status of the family itself, if any, which kept him in regular employ. Of the six categories of occupations the second, fourth and sixth, and of these particularly the sixth, were open to upper polluting castes. Among them men of competence in astrology and medicine with high hereditary reputation for generations were not infrequently seen. Specialization in the fifth group of occupations tended to be confined to Nairs of the middle group and to poor Sudra Nairs of the upper group. (see the temple diagram regarding the limits of access of such castes to serve). Nairs of the upper and middle groups were predominant in the first and second groups of occupations except the less paying of the temple occupations which were pursued more often by some of the Ambalavasi castes.

A few observations on each of the six groups of occupations will be enlightening to realise the scope of these as sources of assets of secular prestige. The occupations of the first group were, in general, important sources of income although direct income accruing from most of them were not substantial. The local Govt. jobs, though small in salary, permitted acquiring wealth by handling transactions of land, or by acquiring land very cheaply from families which were on the decline. This was more so because such occupations were held by taravads of some local influence, a basic qualification required to discharge the duties efficiently. In Kolappulli, in about 1910, at the partition of a wealthy taravad, the right to hold the post of Menon (which is the designation of the accountant of the local official village head, Adhikari) was a matter of disputed claim among its tavaris. The tavaris which staked a claim to retain it had to surrender some kanam land to other tavaris thereby compensating them with an annual income of the rent of 75 paras of paddy (more than one third of the annual basic salary of a Menon today). All Govt. jobs whether local or outside were regarded as an important source to tap income through corrupt practices and also to benefit by being in contact with those well placed in power and authority. A Govt. job was looked upon as a potential source to benefit in three ways: income by salary, income

through corruption and benefits by rewarding contacts often commuted into material wealth. Nairs, chiefly of the upper group, in low paid Govt. jobs who could amass wealth both for their natal taravad and for their children were not rare within any group of four or five villages. Such employees could also easily safeguard the interests of their taravads against any exploitation by the wealthy or arrogant and could as well help their taravads out of any financial crisis. Nearly all these benefits, and sometimes more, were attached to the office of the karyasthan (literally, man handling affairs) but much of his opportunities depended on the level of wealth of his master. There were karyasthans of varying grades of importance from those of a wealthy janmi down to those who managed the property of a tavarai belonging to a well-to-do taravad. Pattar Brahmins (Iyers) tended to dominate the occupational field of chief karyasthans of Nambudiris but at the same time Pattar karyasthans were also, in general, reputed as skilful exploiters to enrich themselves at the expense of Nambudiri families they served. It usually required much skill to work one's way up to occupy the office of the chief karyasthan of a janmi of high wealth. The karyasthan earned a good name particularly if he amassed wealth without injuring the interests of his master's family. The "Nattu karyasthan" (the one open to engagement for anybody on piece-meal jobs)

was usually more or less synonymous with the term Pramani as noted in the second chapter. It was through him that many a family got disputes sued and carried through a court of law or often claims on property settled at the level of the power group. It was generally a job that opened up several chances to increase the wealth, income and prestige to oneself and one's taravad. A taravad revelled in a sense of pride if one of its members was a nattu karyasthan of some eminence. Jobs in Burma were a sure means of higher income and in the three villages, in all, in the first decade of this century, there were about eight Nairs of the upper group on their career in Burma.<sup>30</sup> By the forties a few taravads substantially swelled up in riches from M Burmese sources with more men leaving for Burma, since the twenties, almost every year.

Of the second category of occupations astrology and medicine, continued in the same family for generations, account for the prosperity of six taravads in the focal villages during the past fifty years.

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30. Emigration into Burma for jobs appear to have been confined to Nairs, and until the forties, the personal wealth amassed by the emigrants often in the form of land acquired in the native village periodically, was a matter of prestige to their taravads. After that when those employees returned for a retired life such wealth was one of the factors which prompted them to partition from their taravads and run separate establishments for coresidence with their wives and children and to make a marked shift of emphasis in favour of attitudes of bilateral kinship.



Of the occupations of the third category teaching was a particularly honoured one either as an attached home tutor or as a common teacher running a school for a village or a sector of it. In some villages as in Kollappulli the Sthani-head granted the title Eruthachan to the individual who qualified himself for the job and applied for recognition. In my three villages there were Eruthachans belonging to the castes of Sudra Nair, Variyar and Kadupottan and there was also an Ilayad as home tutor in a Nambudiri illom. In addition, some Nair taravads engaged instructors to train girls in singing and dancing for performance at annual festivals of Onam and Tiruvattira. As home tutor in Nair taravads the Eruthachan's job included the training of boys and girls to read the epic Ramayana and to recite evening prayers.

The remaining categories of occupations from the point of view of prestige and as avenues of income do not require any special mention here. Kathakali, however, was within itself a field of occupational mobility. New recruits would start as sundry assistants in the troupe but the skilful could pick up the art and shine in due course. There were instances of poor errand boys serving Nambudiri illoms being 'spotted' by Nambudiris as promising and put on their career as Kathakali artists. Sorcery and exorcism were looked upon with an ambivalent attitude as vocations one could practise only as a means for

livelihood. Among Nairs, those who were adepts in it would be respected if they made a very judicious use of the knowledge.

One important source of income for the individual not included in these categories was production of seasonal garden crops carried out on taravad lands lying unused. The more enterprising could organise this on cooperation with age-mates of other taravads, often on a large scale, and earn a steady periodical income. Another avenue of income was the lending of money on interest, sometimes carried out on an organised scale with long term commitments under the name 'Kuri' (chit fund).<sup>31</sup> This was also often done by the wealthy taravads as a corporate enterprise, but the pitfalls of the scheme sometimes made it the main cause of financial downfall of a taravad. When parties who joined the scheme failed to be honest and indulged in malpractices inherent in it the taravad which organised it ran the risk of a heavy loss. I found four cases of taravads two of which rose to financial stability and two thrived but later collapsed.

As pointed out already, it is not the potentiality per se, of any of these occupations that led to much of financial mobility. I have on record brief case histories

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31. For the organisation of systems of credit such as the chit fund in South India and in particular in Kerala where a caste of money lenders was absent in the rural economy, see Dr.V.Krishnan, Indigenous Banking in South India, Bombay State Cooperative Union, (Bombay, 1959), pp.132, 179.

of forty families and individuals in the three villages who achieved mobility in the past eighty years. A few facts of relevance emerging from these cases regarding the financial mobility are as follows. (1) True to the local spirit embedded in the ideal of 'getting ahead' individuals, either a few years before or soon after their marriage launched themselves into a career of acquiring wealth. (2) The occupations mentioned except those of astrology and medicine in the hands of experts were in themselves only a very minor source of income in relation to what one could earn from other local sources in one's life time. (3) The income from land wealth was frequently converted into land wealth or lent on high interest on mortgages of land or promissory notes, a pursuit in itself for many who would sweep over a wide area for prospective clients, to be victimised later by depriving them of all their property. (4) Maximum advantage was made of contacts possible through one's occupation, to benefit by (a) advantageous marital alliance (b) to acquire land at cheapest cost grabbing opportunities for it at the right time (c) to get waste lands on nominal cost or get it leased for permanent garden crops so that after some years the cost of land was too insignificant when set against the claim for the worth of improvements (d) to get kanam or verumpattam lands on super lease (Melcharthu) (e) to get timely aids in a

variety of ways when local disputes relating to money and land <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ thereby likely to weigh in one's favour. (5)

There <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ a more or less constant practice of greed and avarice often expressed in deliberate fencing-in of contiguous neglected areas under the ownership of others.

(Encroachment into forests and wastelands in this manner has been too common). (6) Sympathy and support of those

of power and wealth was achieved by frequent and unsolicited contacts with them, by the process locally known

as "seva" which means an informal devotional and

glaringly submissive relationship with those in power

imposing on them free service in a variety of ways and

sending to them frequent offerings of gifts of the

season.

It is noteworthy in this context that these ways of 'getting ahead' were based on the judicious use, and sometimes timely abuse, of categories of relationship coming in one's way or brought into being by manipulation. These categories of relationships, in general, existed back into centuries, perhaps throughout the British period and earlier. Their importance in achieving mobility appears to have increased with increase in population from the close of the last century and the consequent scarcity of land which could easily be brought under cultivation. The higher value on Govt. jobs was also, naturally, an extension of the desire to create a network of relationships through which power and wealth could be achieved.

The mobility of families existed chiefly among the Nair castes. The material on it can be considered first with reference to the sources of increasing wealth and power and then in respect of the ways of acquiring other assets contributing to secular status.

The achievement of wealth and power on the part of a taravad can be looked upon at two levels, that of the taravad as a corporate body and of the tavari units within it. Until the late thirties the karanavan usually identified himself with the interests of his taravad and enjoyed pride if he could improve the economic status of his taravad. If he made substantial help to his wife and children it was not usually at the expense of his taravad or adverse to its prospects. And karanavans who earned both for their own taravads and for their wives and children were much praised.

To acquire the management (urayma) of a temple was an important and rare achievement. Although urayma, until recent decades, meant trusteeship and management, it amounted to unquestioned right to govern the property of the temple. For fear of the deity the taravad that managed (the "Uralan") would not indulge in malpractices with the temple lands, but the power over the tenants and the prestige of being uralan were the attractions to aspire for temple management and achieve it even by resort to unfair means. The instances of acquiring urayma which

I have on record must have happened sometime in the last century. The Mangot Kavu near Munnurkode was originally an insignificant temple under the Nambudiri-head of my second village, Karattukursi. The Tarakans who had a concentration at Mangot got its urayma transferred to seven of their families by offering a certain amount to the Nambudiri as a gift who probably thought it wise to grant the transfer since the temple was distant and the Tarakans around were locally powerful. The urayma of the Trippatta temple in my third village, Kolappulli, under approval from its Sthani-head, for some unascertainable reason in the remote past came into the hands of three Kiriya Nair taravads. The Sthani-head also accorded one of them the title 'Achan' and the other two 'Choraru', both titles being relevant only in relation to the temple. In the village contiguous to Kolappulli the Kayiliyattu Kavu was originally under a Nair taravad and in the middle of the last century when that taravad began to lose its wealth and power the Sthani-head of Kolappulli is said to have grabbed it from them giving them as a vestigial right the priority in offering propitiatory songs to the deity during the festival days. (In this procedure we can find the historic practice of the monarch repeating at the village level if we recall from the first chapter the capture of Nedunganad by the Zamorin depriving the local chieftain of all political power except his right of

urayma over the Cherpalcherry temple 'Aiyappan kavu'.<sup>32</sup> The temple of Vishnu on the border of Kolappulli was always under a Pisharodi taravad whose local importance and sense of economic security derived from the fact of being its uralan. The transfer of urayma of the temple at Trikkateri to a Nambudiri illom and the subsequent fortune of that illom have been noted. Similarly, the Bhagavati kavu of Karattukursi was at a remote past under a Nair taravad but, for reasons lost in obscurity, it passed into the hands of two illoms of Nambudiripads one of which is the village head of Karattukursi. Some very old informants could recall as a matter of vague memory that a particular Nambudiri illom in one of my focal villages had gradually brought under its legal ownership much of the property of a temple which is even today managed by that very illom.

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32. The urayma of the Cherpalcherry kavu was held by two taravads whose descendants came to be known as Kartavu, as a separate caste. Some informants maintain that the caste of Kartavu (literally, author or guardian) in this place developed out of these taravads and they did not originally form a branch of the same caste in other taluks. One of the taravads held the title 'Nedungetiri' and the other 'Nambyatiri' each holding urayma of the temple for alternate periods. The temple income from lands in those days (perhaps upto the latter part of the last century) was 36,000 paras of paddy and the uralan taravads were virtually reigning over the area. Consequently the two taravad houses began to be known as 'kovilakams' (the term for a palace). As descendants of the two taravads the caste of Kartavu in the area developed into two divisions with factional dispositions towards one another.

The foregoing instances show that within my third village itself the local importance and power of four taravads were chiefly derived from the urayma of temples. When each of the other instances cited is reviewed in the light of my field notes it is convincingly clear to me that the acquiring of urayma or retaining it without lapse in the same taravad or illom was always contributory and in some cases a basic asset to the local power and secular prestige of its possessors. Worthy of particular mention in this context is the taravad of the Trikkateri Sthani Nair which had urayma of six temples.

After 1945 temples with an annual income of over 250 paras of paddy from lands were one after another taken over by the State Religious Endowment Board and two third of the number of temples mentioned here passed into the management of the Board.

There were several other and more common ways through which a taravad acquired wealth and power. My case histories of the mobility of taravads show that until about the thirties (i) the karanavan of a taravad acquired wealth for it (ii) the most mobile of the taravads acquired wealth resorting to several unfair means which would not provoke ill feeling among members of one's own village (iii) often the area of operation to earn wealth extended to distant places twenty to thirty miles away (iv) the job of karyasthan or influence over him was too often a pre-requisite as already noted, to



tap important sources to enrich one's taravad (v) much of the increase in wealth was achieved prior to the twenties of this century and the dates of important strides in it could be placed to any time back into the fifties of the last century (vi) the wealth of some taravads is attributable to the bequeathing of property to it by the husband of its founding female member at an earlier time when it was a tavarī of another taravad. In my case studies among taravads which achieved a very high degree of mobility there is one in Munnurkode, two are in Kola-pulli and one in the nearby village Panamanna.

The specific ways of achieving mobility enumerated below are revealed from my observations pertaining to all taravads which had until the thirties acquired some degree of mobility. In one case the karanavan was virtually the manager of his wife's taravad where she was the only heir and since she had either no children (or more probably no importance was given to her children as the more deserving), documents were altered in such a way that after her death the major part of property lapsed into her husband's taravad. Another case is <sup>of</sup> ~~out~~ outwitting a Nambudiri by slow stages and managing to get all his wealth by necessary manipulation of documents. That Nambudiri illom became heirless and extinct but the karanavan who did it and his taravad itself continued to harbour a sense of guilt. Presumably at the suggestion of an

astrologer, that taravad, even today, makes expiatory offering of "gurudi" (water mixed with turmeric and lime) annually at the spot where that illom stood. Exploiting the weakness of inefficiency of wealthy janmis who miserably failed to manage their own property was not uncommon and occurred in various degrees. In one case which is illustrative of the high degree of such exploitation a karanavan got into friendly relations with a janmi twenty miles away. In course of time, that janmi, a Sthani Nair, with little integrity and a weakness for drinking liquor was victimised and large areas of his lands of janmam rights came to be passed into the ownership of the karanavan. Though more probable to have occurred with some frequency but not revealed in more than two cases were instances of deliberate cheating of a different kind. Until about the early part of this century the less powerful taravads were in the practice of depositing their documents of cadjan leaves with the powerful karanavans of the same or a nearby village. In such cases the women and younger members of the owner's taravad hardly knew the details of the landed property, particularly of the scattered dry lands which did not fetch regular annual returns. In course of time the karanavan who kept the documents either did some forgery with it thus transferring parts of the land into his ownership or exacted consent of the owner to alter the

documents to that effect. Advancing loans of money to a needy taravad on a high interest of 14 to 16 per cent and to remain unconcerned about its default in paying interest until the debt swelled up, and the debtor's land could be had for the mere asking in liquidation of the debt, was a frequent deal in the history of rise and fall of taravads. Another way of extending landed property was to ask the labourers or verumpattam tenants to encroach and till the fallow neighbouring land of a meek and powerless owner. If protest came from the owner he would be told that it was unwittingly done by the workers through ignorance and want of firm boundaries, and he would be compensated after harvest. Later he would be persuaded to surrender the land on a nominal price since only an expensive outlay which he would not afford could make the land yielding. Such encroachments do not seem to have happened between parties of the same village between whom glaring exploitation might brew up rupture of relations in other fields. Informants commonly state that in the last century and earlier there were ways for Nairs to 'capture' janmam lands, particularly, uncultivated areas, and such lands were gifted by them as janmam to the nearest Nambudiri, true to the Nair belief of their caste-based disqualification to own janmam property. Such lands were then held by the same donors on kanam tenure on a nominal rent, and if informants are correct, this

in part accounts for the very low rent of kanam lands held by some taravads. An equally well-known possibility accounting for the high wealth of some taravads was the accidental discovery of treasures while excavating for a well or a bathing pool or while quarrying for terracing up slopes. The wealth of two taravads in the three villages and of several families in the focal area are attributed to such treasures (Nidhi). It is also probable, as some informants argue, that such explanations to account for the high financial resources of a taravad were local fabrications to justify the fabulous mobility achieved by them in the remote past resorting as often to gross unfair means. Another possibility in the beginning of this century was to get boundaries fixed in one's favour during the Govt. project of survey and settlement in the first decade of this century. Karanavans with some local power could manage to do it and gain much at the boundaries of their wastelands and hill slopes. Nearly all taravads which possessed substantial areas of such lands are said to have further gained in this manner.

The ways of acquiring wealth mentioned in the case of individual mobility were also the ways open to a taravad when the karanavan was determined to earn. The karanavan bent on earning wealth for his taravad by constant practice of prudence in expenditure and at times

intolerable stinginess is a proverbial figure in the folk knowledge. Scores of stories relating to such practices of karanavans of the past and their clumsy efforts to conceal miserly habits at important public occasions are cited by informants as humorous episodes. Such stories reveal in general the fervour with which the karanavan identified himself with the interest of his taravad. It is probably for this reason that since the thirties when partition of taravads began to be common the karanavan, by common consent, was often given two shares inspite of the fact of his legal right to get only one share. The minimum that was expected of a karanavan was to manage the taravad property without any progressive decline. If he proved grossly inefficient the junior members could organise the opinion of elderly women against him, depose him and promote the next senior male to his office. This would happen very rarely and only one instance of this kind in Munnurkode that took place at the close of the last century came to my notice. Cross-cousin marriage, which Nairs practised both ways within hypergamous limitations, seem to have been perpetuated partly due to the facts of mobility mentioned here. The karanavan or the junior married males with their earnings or corporate wealth of taravad could, by cross-cousin marriage, ensure for their daughters and sons advantageous matches that would gain from the mobility achieved by the taravad of

either or both parties of the union.<sup>33</sup>

Until 1932 melcharthu (super lease) to the same tenant or to others to get higher rents was not uncommon. Nearly all taravads which made substantial gains in wealth is said to have indulged in this practice in varying degrees. And since 1930, it became a matter of local prestige to raise tall claims in property disputes and win it by resort to a court of law. But local opinion does not endorse this as a sure means of earning wealth for the reason that if there were taravads which gained by it there were others who lost heavily through their misplaced enthusiasm to fight through a court of law for prestige or to win ambitious claims. It may be remembered that the efforts to acquire land has to be appreciated against the background of the characteristic agricultural economy, the system of land tenure and the structure of relationships among the categories of tenants. It was

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 33. The hypergamous limitation mentioned here is that a man born through female hypergamy cannot marry his father's sister's daughter since she belongs to the father's caste which is higher.

A local proverb cited in support of the preference for cross-cousin marriage refers to the satisfaction of a fisherman who fishes from a small pond. It means that the fish will be in the net if it leaves the pond and if it escapes from the net it has to be in the pond. Strictly speaking the full relevance of this proverb is in situations where a man with his private earning has helped much for his taravad and for his wife and children and is always eager to ensure the prosperity of both. In such a situation if his son married his sister's daughter, or even a classificatory niece, and indulged in practices at the expense of either taravad, the other one was fully likely to benefit since he was normally not likely to have any interest to help relatives beyond the two taravads.

not only the differential intrinsic value of the different kinds of lands that prompted one to pounce upon double or single crop paddy lands at the first opportunity, but the power and superiority over tenants that would follow the acquisition of such lands. Atleast rarely, there were instances of acquiring kanam lands to bring some verumpattam tenant revengefully under one's control.

The differential financial status of tavaris was chiefly attributable to the wealth given in different forms by husbands. Until about the beginning of this century, however, cases of giving wealth in land to wives were limited to the less well-to-do wives of Nambudiris. Nambudiri wives in Sthani Nair taravads would not accept lands for it infringed the norms of morality if illom lands which were to be regarded as a divine property were accepted. They did, however, accumulate amounts of money and jewels and thereby earned fortunes. Nair wives and children of men of Sthani taravads earned enough to develop into taravads of considerable financial status as is particularly revealed from instances of mobility of the wives of the Trikkateri Sthani Nair taravad. The same Sthani taravad offers the instance of a profitable practice of enriching its tavaris. After about 1880 the taravad's janmam lands in the same and neighbouring villages were at different times given to different tavaris on kanam tenure and they leased it on verumpattam to Nairs

and a few Tandans. This practice of getting kanam rights to 'recoil' on the tavaris of the same taravad is said to have been an innovation of the taravad head to ensure additional sources of income for tavaris and probably to keep off lower castes from opportunities for mobility through kanam tenure. (However, in the forties of this century some tavaris over-indulged in the advantageous situation, became constant defaulters in paying kanam rent, and the taravad had to get involved into bitter law suits against them to recover the arrears.) Nair wives of Nambudiris benefited by accumulation of gifts received, by money, jewels and vessels, and above all, by getting kanam lands whenever the husband could pass on lands to her at the occasion of renewal of kanam tenure every twelve years. In such transfers of land, to justify the action, the rent would sometimes be slightly raised, but I have also noted instances where the original lessee rising up to the situation gave an enhanced price for it to the Nambudiri's wife and got it reverted into his kanam ownership at the renewed rate of rent. The husband of a Nair woman was not bound to feed her or enrich her but there was always a standard of living which the husband was under a moral obligation to ensure for his wife. This obligation was particularly felt by Nambudiris when the wife's taravad found it difficult to make ends meet. In such situations assistance to the Nair wife was too willingly done by the Nambudiri husband under ready



consent from his illom and usually the benefits from lands given to the wife were enjoyed by the whole taravad if its means to live were inadequate. It may be remembered that Nambudiris in a good number of cases in any group of villages, chose their Nair wives more for their attraction than for other considerations, as exemplified by three instances in my focal villages. In two of these cases the tavarī of the wives, in the twenties, developed into separate wealthy taravads. Nair husbands other than karanavans earned separately to acquire wealth for their wives and children, and the karanavan could as well pass to his wife a part of the property earned by his specific efforts, unless his right to do so was challenged by the junior members. Even traditionally the Nair kinship system was characterised by the conflict between a man's desire to help his taravad kin and his concern to ensure the welfare of his wife and children. The wife (Ammayi Amma) particularly of the karanavan, if he did much to help his taravad, would by stages tap the wealth or other resources he could easily manage to turn into her favour or possession. Many a karanavan was accused of succumbing to the dictates of his wife to the detriment of his taravad, the common expression in such contexts being that he had fallen into the Ammayi Amma's "Talayina Mantram" (the pillow-whisper) during the intimacies of the bed room. "Ammayi-poru" which refers to

the silent conflicts she could create among tavaris of her husband's taravad and pilot the affairs of the whole of that family to her advantage is proverbial.<sup>34</sup> Any Nair husband belonging to a wealthy taravad could also manage to help the taravad of his wife if the latter lived with inadequate means. The manner of help was chiefly to manage to lease to that taravad lands on verumpattam at a low rent, if necessary reclaiming it back from another tenant. As a general observation it can be stated that instances of tavaris which ~~rev~~ received wealth from a husband of a higher caste or of a more wealthy taravad and later developed into separate taravads are numerous in my focal area, and more so, outside in the same and other taluks of South Malabar. Until about the twenties of this century, mainly for two reasons, partition of taravads did sometimes take place although to a much less extent than in the subsequent period. A taravad would grow unwieldly in size or it would bring about strategical advantages if a section of it parted

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34. Ammayi Panchatantram by Karattu Achutha Menon, The Mangalodayam Press, (Trichur, 1912) gives a graphic description of the conflicts that an Ammayi makes during her long ~~uxorilocal~~ <sup>uxorilocal</sup> residence with her husband who is a karanavan. Malayalam fiction does make use of the theme of a selfish and competent Ammayi working in furtherance of her own interests but this publication exclusively devoted to this theme is informative on Nair kinship and will also be enlightening to those who sift fiction for social history.

and located at a distant spot where it owned extensive lands. In either case the more common practice was to divide property not necessarily on the principle of equal share for all irrespective of generation and age. An arbitrary division adequate for the segments would be made, and often the segment that moved out to govern its distantly located assets later began to be recognised as its legitimate owner. Sometimes the large bulk of such distantly located assets, if not the whole, was originally property bequeathed by a very wealthy husband, a practice that happened even long before the Malabar Wills Act of 1898 permitting such transmission of property was passed. The act in such cases only obviated the remote possibility of a claim on the property after decades from the maternal kin of the deceased husband.<sup>35</sup>

We can thus see that tavaris within a taravad could considerably differ in their individual level of wealth acquired in different forms ranging from land to vessels and other household items of daily utility. All forms of

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35. Innes in the District Gazetteer (op. cit., p.366-367) notes that registration of documents in Malabar was inaugurated in 1799 and the Malabar Wills Act of 1898, soon after it came into force, began to be availed of by the people. The Act placed on a sound basis testamentary deposition of self-acquired property by individuals under matrilineal law of inheritance. And in 1901-1902 the documents registered in respect of transmission of such property (presumably to one's own wife and children) were, as Innes notes, more than double those registered three years before. Innes also notes that the Malabar Marriage Act of 1896 "for the registration of Sambandham (Nair marriage) is on the other hand almost a dead letter" because the Act of 1898 provided for passing property legally to one's wife and children and it was therefore not essential to register one's marriage for this purpose.

wealth owned by each tavarī were locally known to other taravads for even the bronze vessels accumulated were stored for display tastefully arranged under the cots in the rooms of the tavarī members.

For the less wealthy or poor taravads most of which belonged to the Nairs of the middle geu group the main aspiration was to climb through the hierarchy of categories of tenure mentioned in the last chapter and to culminate in the maximum of ownership of kanam lands. Most of the ways of mobility open to individuals of these castes as mentioned were the ways of mobility for their taravads as well.

The very nature of the numerous ways of achieving wealth at the expense of others account chiefly for the possibility of downward mobility of some taravads. The misfortune of a taravad which faced it was in many an instance attributable to the inefficiency of the karanavan manifested in glaring instances of his passivity against the advances of other taravads. At the same time, in many cases, public opinion in course of time also recognised the helpless situation of karanavans to wriggle out of the sphere of power of the taravads which made such advances to victimise. Apart from these factors there were also possibilities of losing wealth if karanavans were not foresighted to balance their budgets on long term planning and curtail expenses on items of prestige.

Too often, the destructive sense of competitive display governed commitments on such items of expenditure and a karanavan was always under obligation to uphold the honour of his taravad. Of the expensive feasts of the one at 'Kettu Kalyanam' (the tali tying ceremony of girls) was the most exacting to a taravad of average means and next, the feast at death ceremonies. Taravads which lost through these and borrowed to meet the renewal fee of kanam lands later to find themselves heavily yoked under the creditor's hands were not uncommon.<sup>36</sup> Another and seemingly no less important fact was the slow absorption of certain prestige values from the Sthanis and Nambudiris, as exemplified in the cumulative hatred towards several kinds of work on the part of women. Until about the twenties, the more markedly since then, the women of well-to-do taravads were showing a progressive decline in their contribution to household tasks and some categories of farm work during the harvest seasons, a tendency that started from about the middle of the last century. The Nambudiris and Sthanis placed a high value on freedom

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36. The tali ceremony involved heavy expenditure, in all, during the four days of its duration. Regarding the large scale feasting, gruesome details to be attended to, differential treatment to be given to guests according to their social status, formalities to be observed in inviting important people, the paraphernalia of display value, each an expensive item, see the article in Malayalam, "Marriages of Nairs" by K.N.Damodaran Nair in Malayala Rajyam Annual issue, (1125 Malayalam era - i.e. 1949-50).

from manual labour both for their men and women, and the initiators of this trend among the Nairs were particularly the Nair wives of these higher caste husbands. I have heard elderly Nair women enviously narrating the career of mobility of Nair wives of Nambudiris: "Oh, I remember the days when she fried herself in the sun threshing and processing paddy, and when she became the wife of that Nambudiri she wanted a maid to wash her clothes, to do this and that, as though she was an invalid, and she walked always with her lips constantly reddened by betel chewing, her gait and bearing changed when she moved in the public eye..... you know, the regal way; and the other women of her taravad did not lag behind, but professed as they could afford." The influence of hypergamous contacts diffused in this manner to Nair women of some means, and karanavans had great difficulty to adjust themselves to move with the spirit of emulation that had slipped beyond their control. For one hears of scores of instances of karanavans trying to control, often in vain, the periodical allotments for items of taravad expenditure too strictly so that the women would feel coaxed to shed the spirit of emulation - (in local parlance, to make them shed their bangles as the karanavans would remark in such contexts). There is no doubt that in my focal area the slow waning of the sense of dignity of labour on the part of wealthy Nair women cannot be

traced to any initial influence that emanated from the model of the wives of those well-placed in Govt. jobs. Until about the thirties such employees were few and far between, too inadequate in number and concentration to initiate or spread such a negative attitude.

The progressively destructive force of expenditure on items of prestige and the absence of intrinsically rewarding roles in the productive economy also account for the varying degree of downward mobility experienced by Sthani and Nambudiri families. In the case of Nambudiri illoms the institutional safeguards against loss of property (noted in the last chapter) could not always remain adequate to keep off the inherent evil of downfall through pursuits of prestige. The heavy dowry, expenses on kathakali, lavish feasting of masses of dependents including tenants, exploitation by the karyasthans are all cited as the usual causes for the downfall of illoms. Among the Sthanis, increase in the size of taravad, expenses on kathakali and feasts, increasing commitments to provide for uxori-local husbands whose guests and servants too had often to be fed, ever increasing payments to avakasam families who served, following the increase in the size of the taravad, inability to exact rent without arrears from defaulting tenants (partly attributable to susceptibility of the karyasthan to corruption) were all causes for decline of wealth of the taravad.

In addition, however, the Sthani families were probably the first to lose heavily through unduly prolonged law suits, often between themselves, recourse to the court of law being initially made more for prestige than for other considerations. Possibly, this was due to the tradition for a Sthani family not to recognise anybody as equal or higher in secular matters except the higher ruler, who, under the British rule, was the Govt. itself, represented by the court of law.

Among castes below Nairs, until about the middle of the forties there was hardly any significant intra-caste differentiation in secular status except among the Tandans and the immigrant castes of Tarakans and Kadupottans. In villages of their concentration the very few families who owned verumpattam tenure and held important service relations with Nair families of the power group had a definitely higher secular status. And as noted, the several open occupations for which these castes had ample time to devote also raised the economic status of a few families. An important consequence of it was that within each of these local caste groups there emerged its own leader group judged as prosperous from the local standards of the time and recognised as 'Pramanis' (people of note) by the taravads of the power group.

We now turn to the ways of enhancing secular status through means other than wealth. These were broadly of



three kinds - (i) maintenance of public recognition of honorific titles and designations pertaining to certain traditional offices (ii) the negative procedure of giving up certain categories of relationships which could not be graceful or consistent with the enhanced secular status and (iii) abandoning traditional occupations relegating them to the less fortunate families that lagged behind. The second and third ways were either an expression of or contribution to the achievement of rise in secular status.

The incumbents of traditional offices such as of the Kalari (gymnasium for physical training) instructor held the designation Kurup and the title to property and privileges attached to it. Such offices being hereditary the taravad entitled to hold it continued to enjoy the income from land although the significance of the office disappeared. To maintain public recognition of the vestigial prestige of such taravads they had to continue refraining from the occupations of their caste and retain the designation as an honorific title. In my first village an Attikursi Nair taravad still holds this title although it partitioned into four households in the forties. They did not serve at purifying birth and death pollution although two of these households turned to be too poor to refrain from serving in that capacity.<sup>37</sup>

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37. Nearly all pre-British desams had a Kalari in each with the instructor belonging to the middle group of

Another Attikursi taravad of the same lineage gave up its ritual service over fifty years back when a member of it became Menon (the designation of the office holder who works as village revenue accountant). In the third village a family of Tandan Kurups, originally the keepers of gymnasium, continue to keep up their prestige, and they are more or less a caste group with such Kurups in other parts of South Malabar. Among Tandans the family which held the title Tandan did not work for the palm sap (toddy) and continued to keep its claim to get specially served and paid at feasts in wealthy Nair taravads.

Traditional occupation could be given up in two ways; the village head could honour a particular family by either authorising to do so in recognition of some meritorious service, or a family which became wealthy could relegate the occupation to a poor one that segmented out in the past from a common natal group so that the services to the community as a whole would not suffer. When a village head authorised it there was usually a grant of land to keep up a certain level of living inspite of the suspension of services. In the village Cherpalcherry there was an instance of a Nair barber taravad which built -----  
Nair castes and the castes of Tandan and Ganisa Panicker. These caste limitations are what I gather from my data and might possibly vary in other areas. The instructors for members of royal families seem to have been drawn from higher Nair castes. All instructors held the title Kurup or Panicker.

up a stable fortune in this manner. Voluntary withdrawal from the caste-ascribed roles was practised by many a family which came on a firm footing heading to prosperity. Such withdrawals in some instances took place as far back in the sixties of the last century and there are therefore taravads which never in their life practised the traditional occupation. Two Poduval taravads (temple caste) in Trikkateri, one Charna Nair and one Attikursi taravad in the same village, and one Pisharodi taravad in Kolappulli are instances of this process. The Pallichans, Vattekkat and Anduran Nairs of the middle group do not appear to have continued their services even upto the fifties of last century, and certainly not after that, except in a vestigial manner by some poor taravads. The reasons were the limited need of their services, the increase in their population, the recognition of some immigrant castes as qualified to do their work, secular status mobility under verumpattam tenure and the demeaning nature of their traditional occupations identified with a very low secular status. The Sudra Nairs whose superior rank was based on services to Nambudiris found prestige in being locally known as adiyar of an illom. But, from the middle of the last century or much earlier, only the poor taravads among them rendered the menial tasks the others keeping up only such honourable behaviour which also symbolised the adiyar relationship

with the illom.

A taravad which achieved a substantial degree of mobility gradually curtailed its relations with the less fortunate ones that lagged behind. As far as my Nair data show this process of exclusion was permitted by tradition for it could work within a lineage or within an enangar group and we do not find within the structure of a local caste group any sanction or mechanism to curb such a tendency. A Nair taravad could exclude its poor enangar taravad not only by regarding it as disqualified to supply husbands but also by assigning it only such ritual tasks which were less honoured and were therefore meant for the less wealthy. For instance, only a poor enangan would be invited as "ooni" (the appropriate ritual cook at death pollution and at death anniversaries, "Sradham", who would also be feasted and formally remunerated) since the status of ooni carried only a low prestige. It is also instructive to note that one's less wealthy enangar taravads did not resent if one's taravad accepted husbands from castes of undisputedly higher rank or from more wealthy taravads outside the enangar group but within the same caste and prestige group preferably within the same village. In Munnurkode, in the twenties, when a Sudra Nair taravad accepted a Kiriya Nair husband enangar taravads murmured out the protest "let us see how they will manage all their enangar needs by Kiriya

taravads" which means an implied threat that they would organise and withhold future cooperation as enangars. Within a lineage between taravads of considerable contrast in the level of wealth the poor one, genealogically not very close, slowly found itself excluded by the wealthy even in the observance of ritual pollution. First the wealthy taravad would cease to observe birth pollution of the poor one and in due course would ignore its death pollution as well. Data from my second village provide three instances of taravads excluded in this manner and as far as I could ascertain the trend is more than a century old.

In the process of mobility sanskritizing of practices and rituals was not so important as altering social relations and expressing the achieved degree of mobility in behaviour of corresponding symbolic value. The history of Sthani taravads and of some Nair taravads which became very wealthy janmis in the southern parts of Walluvanad taluk by the close of last century reveals this fact. Once husbands came from higher castes or royal families what was required was to curtail social relations with others of one's own caste and pattern it on the principle of superordination-subordination as conspicuously as possibilities could permit. This patterning incorporated all behaviour with which expressed difference in social status on the lines, for instance, of the relationship as noted

between a wealthy kanam tenant and his sub-tenant of the same caste. It may also be recalled that several categories of behaviour, for example, avoidance of commensality reflecting social status differences, were similar to those existing between castes close in the hierarchy but of established differential rank.

Mobility achieved by a family got due recognition from others in several ways. A reference to this has been made in the last chapter in the contexts of order of service at feasts and priority accorded in certain offerings at temples. There were other ways some of which were partly initiated by the very family that wanted to be honoured by symbols in recognition of its higher secular status. One procedure was to assume a caste name of a higher caste in the same area or the name of a caste known as higher and existing in other areas. My information tends to show that the latter was the more common practice until about two decades ago. 'Menon' for instance became an attractive caste name since the Paricha Menons under the Zamorin and the Menons under Walluvanad Raja could, by historic circumstances, achieve much secular mobility in addition to their high caste rank, and identify the term with an almost regal style of living. Nairs of my focal villages refer to the improved styles of life of a Nair family as the "Menon way" (Menon 'taram' or Menon 'mattu') and by this they mean the Paricha Menons of Calicut taluk whose model in course of time was also

emulated by Charna Menons as best as they could afford. For this reason, since about the twenties, some Nair families in my focal area began to be known as Menons. In a taravad of Kiriya Nairs close to Kolappulli the Nair men who went to Burma and earned personal wealth began to be known as Menons, the rest only remaining as Nairs. In the same area, prior to the twenties, a Sudra Nair taravad which attained high popularity and wealth through marriage alliance and acquisition of janmam lands began to be exclusively known as Menons and recorded so in all documents. The public lost in a sense of awe at the spectacular rise of that taravad began to address and refer about its male members as 'Angunnu' (the honourific thou) a term specially meant for Sthanis. By the same process an illom of Bhattatiripads in the same locality emerged as Nambudiripads during the forties. In another instance, initially at his own desire, an Imbrandiri of substantial means near Ottapalam began to be known outside his village as Nambudiripad. In a law suit against him in the thirties, at the court of law, the advocate of the aggrieved party addressed him as Imbrandiri and he retorted "it was over 36 years back when my janmam land was first leased (charthu) that I was recorded in the deed as Imbrandiri, in the second deed of renewal after 12 years I was recorded as Nambudiri, and in the p recent deed after another 12 years I am Nambudiripad, and the

present law suit is about that..." All such instances show that locally one's caste would be known, but in a wider circle it was desirable to be known by symbols such as a higher caste name under the conditions of increasing need of relations beyond the village. Further, as I was told, time can blur the memory of the snobbish transition to a higher caste name and the future generation would be thankful for passing down to them a label of higher value.

Recognition of mobility achieved came forth from various important sources, from avakasam castes to the deities of the temples (kavus). An avakasam caste always made discretionary treatment befitting the social status of its master's taravad at any given time. The Mannatti, for instance, gave two pieces of clothes as mattu to wealthy Nair women and would also be called upon to serve more frequently during birth pollution while the poor kept her services curtailed to the essentially minimum. Sometimes the frequency of her services varied for different women in the same taravad, for, the karanavan's allotments were often for the minimum of her services and some of the women who had resources to spend would call her more frequently at their expense. The distinction made by avakasam castes worked among the 'upper polluting castes as well, but not further below. The carpenter, for instance, would offer a 'karcha' (an offering) of his product to a family of Tandans of some secular status and



receive the formal reward for it but would not respect others by such an offering. In the temple of Bhagavati during the 'pattu' (offering propitiatory songs through ritual specialists) season of forty-one days prior to the festival each taravad in turn conducted the pattu. Each day, at the end of the offering, the oracle in his fully possessed mood communicated to the representative of the respective taravad on the spot what the goddess felt about the ceremony conducted. In doing so the very wealthy taravad was addressed by the oracle as 'Taravattukar' (in the sense of an aristocratic family) while the others were addressed as 'Lokar' (the common public), a practice that continues in some kavus down to this day. This distinction made by the deity's mouthpiece, the oracle, is significant since it is made in spite of the fact that the professional woman specialist (Marumakalamma) hired for the purpose of singing a volley of songs to the deity ended her peroration by exhorting "those who offer 1001 measures (of grain) and those who offer 50 measures ... all be accepted and (thou) live in comfort." Those who could follow the clumsy musical note of this propitiant told me that by her exhortation she meant that all were equal before the deity, and by implication therefore, the deity should not feel more pleased with the wealthy. In the light of this it may not be unreasonable to state that the indigenous deities of

Malabar, as seen from the oracle's behaviour, reflected a remote tradition for considerable heterogeneity of wealth within a local caste.

The scope for expression of mobility in general depended on the caste of the taravad. The tendency at any given time was to adorn oneself with possessions and styles of life of a higher caste. Thus for instance for a taravad of Attikursi or Vattekkat Nairs to get clothes washed by a Nair washerman was a matter of prestige since he would not traditionally serve castes of the middle group of Nairs. However, emulation of the higher caste was by cautious steps for local expectation down to this day was that the old should continue with a veneer of the new without glaring contrasts and inconsistencies. This principle covered social relations as well, of marriage and mate selection and other fields of interaction within and between all kinds of groups mentioned in the third chapter. (However, in social relations during the last decade, as will be seen later, the principle has lost much of its intensity and families accepting the new with a veneer of the old became more common).

Within a taravad, among tavaris, there were several ways of expressing as well as getting recognition of the degree of social status of each. Offering propitiatory songs to the village Bhagavati could be done even by each tavari, if it so desired, on a scale of expenditure based on its resources. In addition, arranging to

feast (varam) Nambudiris at the nearest temple once in a year or two, conducting propitiatory songs at temples (kavus) far and near, celebrating birthdays of children on a sumptuous scale by supplementing from one's own resources of the taravad's limited grants for it, were some of the ways by which a tavari could display the relatively high level of its resources. Rather, these were the social expectations <sup>So</sup> ~~to~~ that such preferred ways of expenditure had to be adopted if a tavari desired to have public esteem. Further, at some public occasions organised by any one taravad tavari-wise contribution of money or grain would be made and public respect secured for substantial aids given. At the Aiyappan pattu (songs of propitiation for the deity Aiyappan), an expensive undertaking, organised by one taravad anticipating contributions from different taravads and tavaris of several taravads in addition, each tavari attending it as invitee got an opportunity to hear its qualifications and praises shouted out in public. Two or three men who made every effort to learn as all about the secular assets of each tavari sang several couplets of songs about the real assets of each and induced it to contribute the highest amount possible, a scene of considerable humour and enjoyment for the audience. The Nair women particularly enjoyed it, for, the oral publicity from the singers of the potentiality of a tavari to contribute came forth ~~then~~ naming the tavari, as usual,

after its female head who was usually present on the spot.

The taravads of upper group of Nair castes in each of the three villages mentioned in part I of the last chapter can be broadly graded according to their secular status as tabulated below. In arriving at such a classification I depend on the consensus of opinion among informants which is based chiefly on recollections of wealth in land in the first decade of this century. Accordingly they are classified here into four categories differing in secular status.

Table 7

	<u>Munnurkode</u>	<u>Karattukursi</u>	<u>Kolappulli</u>
Total taravads	16	9	32
Very high .. ..	2	1	4
High .. .. .	5	4	16
Middle .. ..	7	2	8
Low .. .. .	2	2	4

How external factors affected the village in a significant manner will be considered in the next chapter. It is however, desirable to note here that until about the beginning of the thirties, the main period covered by our study of mobility, external factors were not altogether absent. From what has been pointed out about the importance of Govt. servants we are likely to over-estimate the value of Govt. jobs in general in the focal villages. The fact was that power and contact through Govt. jobs were one of the several sets of factors helping for mobility. In fact the small jobs of the official village head (Adhikari)

and his accountant (Menon) were promising means for mobility than a college graduate's job in a town. Contrary to what one might expect, all graduates and other less educated men employed in towns, with rare exceptions, until the forties brought less wealth and prosperity to their taravads than those who remained in the village and made the best use of local opportunities, a fact true to a considerable measure even upto this day. In fact until about the forties the three villages, in all, had only five graduates (B.A.s), all Nairs of the upper group employed in towns and they all practically remained as 'ornaments' adding to the prestige of their taravads. The less educated man serving in nearby townships as a lawyer's clerk or a lower grade teacher was the more dynamic and valuable member of the taravad. The first graduate of Munnurkode, perhaps an exceptional case, turned to be a near recluse and resigned his Govt. job in the thirties probably because, as I was told, he found the urban life too worldly and competitive. He died in conditions of chill penury apparently because his education incapacitated him to do any manual labour when his taravad became very poor. The first graduate of Karattukursi who died in the forties lived on a scale of pay of Rs.60 to 120 as a high school teacher and his taravad received ~~a~~ little or no assistance from him. The second graduate of the same village retired from Govt. job in

1956 on a pension of Rs.70 and was hardly of any help to his taravad throughout his career. Conditions of those belonging to Kolappulli and employed in Govt. jobs in towns until the middle of thirties remained similar except that by the beginning of thirties three taravads benefitted from money remittances from members employed in Burma. Men who went to Burma, in all about fifteen in the three villages until the thirties, earned well and since 1930 opened up ways for others to follow them for prospective jobs in Burma. The earnings of these men however mainly turned to the benefit of their wives and children after the middle thirties when partition of taravads or earning wealth in land for one's own children began to be a common endeavour. It can however be stated that the few who were employed in distant towns or Burma or in a secure Govt. service outside their village helped their taravad and their wives and children against possibilities for downward mobility. In the figures given classifying taravads into categories of different social status the contribution of those who had college education or jobs in distant towns was almost negligible except that their assets were a matter of secular prestige to their taravads. Among the Nambudiris or among the polluting castes, and all immigrant castes in the three villages, there was nobody employed outside the village by any public body or in Govt. service.

Mobility of deities

My data reveal that it is possible to detect a form of mobility which deities primarily belonging to the non-Brahmin castes have undergone up to the present decade. This mobility is a concomitant of the fact that deities as noted in the last chapter broadly form a hierarchy and the devotees have a highly complex stratified social structure. My material on this feature of the "career" of deities is too limited to make an elaborate consideration of it which I recognised midway in the writing up of my data. However, within the consequent limits, I find it possible and as well relevant here to point out the nature of this mobility which I regard as a fruitful field of scope for further enquiry. Unless specified otherwise, the following considerations pertain to the past fifty to seventy years and only to the deities of the non-Brahmin castes enshrined in temples known as kavus.

The importance of shrines whether or not they house the same deity can be traced to have been due to three factors - the social importance of it, social estimation of its divine importance, and its ritual status, if we understand each of these in a specific sense. Social importance corresponds to the secular status of a family and derives from wealth, sense of financial security and conventional scales of expenditure on daily routine or for festivals and other periodical activities. Ritual

status here is an interactional one corresponding to that of families within a caste and it is based on a combination of factors such as caste of the owner (uralan), caste of the priest, castes of others who serve, (and in part) the caste of the majority of people who visit it throughout the year. Divine importance accrues from power of the deity as conceived by the people often validated or augmented by stories or anecdotes which are hardly suspected as incredible by the faithful. The total importance of a shrine depends on its total multi-caste popularity throughout the year which is a consequence of the three factors existing in a high degree.

Enhancement of any one of the factors contributed to mobility and the shrine became the more esteemed and revered for that specific reason. Two of the factors making up secular status, the scale of daily expenditure and income from devotees increased reciprocally with the popularity of a shrine. But secular status, ritual status and divine importance do not in all cases seem to have reciprocally influenced each other except in a very limited manner. However, to understand the process of mobility it is relevant to keep these factors separate and follow how each could get enhanced.

The annual income from its lands was always an asset indicating the secular status of a shrine or its deity (both being synonymous in such contexts). But owing



to the differential divine importance and the area under its divine jurisdiction a less wealthy deity could be more popular. The Bhagavati of my second village annually gets from her lands 500 paras of paddy but has six pre-British desams as her divine area (tattakam) each with a large population of Nairs. She is more popular than the male deity Antimahakalan in the neighbouring village Kotakursi who gets about 1000 paras annually but has no defined area nor villages around with plenty of Nair population. The Mangot kavu near my first village is located in an area of Tarakan concentration and inspite of its tattakam of a few villages multi-caste patronage throughout the year has not been impressive except in quite recent years with the spread of Nair castes into its vicinity. Income through offerings of masses of devotees could enable a deity to acquire and maintain an elephant if its basic resources were inadequate to afford it. I was told by some elderly men that in the kavus "in olden times there were no elephants, no bullock play, at festivals. Such items were later innovations by pre-British Naduvaris or still later by Sthanis who owned the kavus." Financial security for a deity was afforded by the secular status of its uralan and rarely the same uralan would have control over the lands of more than one deity, when several temples were held under his urayma. In such instances income of the more wealthy deity could be used in part to budget

against deficits for essential expenditure of the less wealthy deity. The Trikkateri Sthani Nair thus met the need of three deities, from the annual income of paddy worth about Rs.4000 today, of a fourth deity, all four being under his management. Further, the personal wealth of an uralan and his sense of prestige extended a sense of security to the deity since he would personally, or by borrowing in the name of the deity, meet unforeseen expenditure involved in the running of the shrine. Thus, until the religious endowment board took over the temples getting more than an income of 250 paras of paddy from lands, several deities had some time or other undergone an upward or downward mobility, more possibly the former, based on the change of urayma. It was usually a Sthani Nair or Nambudiri who took over the urayma of a shrine from an uralan of lower caste or level of wealth as has been noted elsewhere in the case of a temple near Kōla-ppulli. From what has been noted in the context of importance of urayma contributing to secular status of families it is now observable that the uralan and the deity reciprocally benefitted by secular prestige derived from that relationship. Again, some shrines of Durga (the deity recognised as a higher manifestation of the more common Bhagavati, Bhadrakali) conducted the feasting varam to Nambudiris and when it was on a grand scale Nambudiris from very wealthy illoms would be present, a

practice seen in the case of ambalams, the temples of the higher order, as well. For this reason the shrine got an additional prestige during the varam days when the visitors increased to have the pleasure of the sight of illustrious higher caste guests. Similarly the Oottu, a feasting of a lower grade with less of devotional songs and more of gifts to Brahmins, could be conducted at any shrine and the more it existed annually the higher the popularity (secular status) of the shrine.

In the matter of ritual status the shrine with Brahmin priest, Nambudiri uralan and some ambalavasi castes to serve commanded more reverence based per se on these assets. Nair women with their fervour to respect anything which had a 'touch' of the Nambudiri regarded it almost essential to patronise temples which had "uttama pooja" (the worship and propitiation by a Brahmin priest). It may be recalled that when a Brahmin (usually Imbrandiri) takes over the priestly office of a kavu he replaces the priest of a low caste of Nairs (Chotha Nair) who ranks very low among the castes of Nairs of the middle group. Nairs of the upper group and even some Nairs of the middle group do not accept directly into their hands the sandal paste which the Chotha Nair priest distributes by dropping but allow it to fall on the floor and collect it from there. Therefore the ritual prestige of the kavu when a Brahmin priest takes over is regarded as definitely enhanced.

Although Ambalavasi castes were not essential in the shrines they could be employed if available or if the deity could afford it. C.A.Menon notes, presumably on the basis of information from Walluvanad taluk, that in "shrines where a Nambudiri is the priest the Ambalavasi women have to stage the ritual lining up with lighted trays (talam) on the festival day", although I doubt if this was essential in all such shrines.<sup>38</sup> For Nair women, in general, the larger the number of higher caste women who patronised a shrine by frequent visits, the more it was desirable to turn to it for it also gave them an opportunity to contact them. And often one could hear<sup>of</sup> the glories of a shrine (ritual status as we defined it) in terms of the names of castes who regularly visited it. The kovils of Subramanya with priests of upper polluting castes did not usually have any substantial property yielding a regular dependable income and therefore had hardly any difference in secular status. But the divine importance, ritual prestige and total popularity of kovils varied by the working of the same process as among the 'Nair deities'.

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38. C.A.Menon, *Kali Worship in Kerala*, Madras University, (1943), p.53. Though not in the context of mobility of deities as considered here he also provides instances of kavus in Walluvanad taluk where Nairs continue as priests and also kavus where there are Brahmin priests conducting *uttama pooja* (superior worship) for six months and Nairs conducting '*Adhama pooja*' (inferior worship with offerings of animal sacrifice and the use of toddy) for six months.

In serpent worship there were instances of the same cobra getting elevated to a higher ritual status with an Ilayad or a Nambudiri replacing the untouchable Pulluvan who served as priest or priestly instructor to 'Nair Cobras'. The sale or transfer of land could not be done without the cobra deity passing along with it to the new owner.<sup>39</sup> He would care to ensure the best priestly handling of it often at an astrologer's advice and would hire the higher propitiant available to serve periodically at the snake grove. The superior cobra worthy of such regard could be identified by its bodily marks and size but in practice, more often, it was the owner's endeavour that elevated it to be superior known as 'Uttama Sarppam' as distinct from the ordinary serpent deity. The abode of such a superior snake deity is also maintained free from approach pollution of lower castes nearly on a distance scale observed by Nambudiris. Serpent worship was not observed by all Nambudiri illoms but the most qualified priests to handle serpent deities in Malabar have always been Nambudiris particularly a few illoms who still continue to be the highest specialists in healing snake bites. It always added to the ritual prestige of a family to say that its serpent deity was

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39. Only a few Nambudiri illoms in Kerala appear to have been regarded as qualified to move the location of a serpent grove or shrine if its owner desired to do so. These illoms are Pambum Mekkat, Kolapram and Amedamangalam, and probably there are a few more. These and a few other illoms are hereditary specialists in healing snake bite.

uttama sarppam and Nairs seem to have been particularly instrumental in upgrading serpent deities setting a model for the upper polluting castes to follow.

Among the supernatural entities of the order of demons 'Kuttichathan', an imp, although popular among the Nairs, was sometimes patronised by some Nambudiris. Pictured in folk imagination as a mischievous boy this imp was despised and as well loved for his harassing and helping powers. In the premises of a few temples in Malabar under Nambudiri priesthood Kuttichathan has his abode as a godling and offerings were made to him by various castes including Nambudiris. It appears that for this reason he became less undesirable with a certain degree of divine prestige, and to seek control over him through a course of rigorous discipline seems to have therefore been a commendable pursuit if one dared to do it.

Regarding the divine importance of a deity, keeping the mythological and cosmological explanations out of consideration here, little more than what has been noted can be pointed out. One index of a deity's divine power is said to be that the really powerful deity's oracle when possessed could perform his inevitable terrific strokes with his sword on his scalp and forehead without any bleeding. But I have also heard that the power or divine accomplishment of the individual oracle to induce possession more deeply, accounted for this phenomenon.

However, stories with perfect local colour illustrating the strength of a deity to bestow welfare and health in life crises, or heal certain maladies, fulfil certain categories of wishes, impart general welfare and promote good fortune are often cited to account for the kind of divine importance ascribed to that deity.

The total popularity of a temple, however, is above conjecture, attributable to all the three factors, variations in them presenting mobility. In my focal area the Aiyappan kavu of Cherpalcherry down to this day, with its income of about 4000 paras of paddy from lands, its elephant, Brahmin priest, servants of Ambalavasi castes, varam feast, expensive establishment of servants in general, its uralan holding the title granted by the Zamorin and its devotees from all wealthy non-Brahmin families commanded a very high popularity and patronage from the public at large. It has been outstandingly superior to any of the kavus and ambalams in my focal area although due to the differential nature of the divine importance of deities no devotee would make it an exclusive focus of worship.

x                      x                      x                      x

We now recapitulate the more important of the facts and observations contained in the foregoing account of caste and mobility. Among the non-polluting castes homogeneity in social status within a caste in a locality was a broad and over-all one. There was intra-caste

differentiation in secular status and ritual status even at the intra-family level of tavaris. The differentiation within a local caste worked on it as a cohesive rather than disruptive force. In spite of the apparently tight-knit nature of the social structure, the picture that one might gather from the foregoing chapters, opportunities for mobility existed. The very nature of efforts to achieve mobility created a silent competitive acquisitive pattern of life among the non-polluting castes, particularly among the matrilineal castes. Considering mobility of castes we found that sections of some castes over a long period achieved mobility in ritual status and the few instances of their recognition as higher castes were (with rare exceptions) locally not unqualified ones. From the genetic history of some castes, from the field data and published material we noted that immigrant castes which changed over to matriliney could be more easily mobile and could maintain ritual status or the caste rank they achieved. We have further pointed out that since the late pre-British period what counted within the broad middle range of the regional caste system to make for substantial mobility over one's caste rank was not the implementation of the basic values of the sanskritic tradition, but the achievement of sustained and valued relations with the higher castes or other groups.

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