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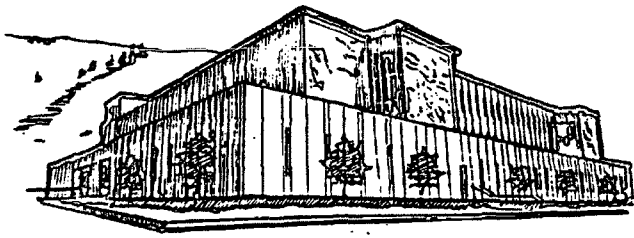
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University of  
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CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN  
NAYAR SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

by

Ravindranath Duggirala  
M.Sc., Andhra University, India, 1978

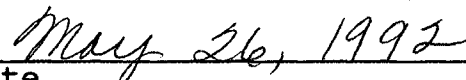
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1991

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Change and Continuity in Nayar Social Organization (325 pp.)  
Director: Frank B. Bessac *FBB*

The purpose of the present study is to elucidate the process of change and continuity in Nayar social organization, diachronically. To achieve this goal, this study, firstly, attempts to detail the nature of traditional Nayar caste (matrilineal) kinship, and marriage systems, and to exhibit the regional variations in kinship and marital patterns, paying attention to the differential and variable historical realities of different parts of Kerala - Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore. Secondly, in contrast to unidimensional theories, this study uses a multidimensional approach to explain change among Nayars, emphasizing the regional particularities of change. Even though the contributing variables are many, mainly economic, legal, and ideological factors are considered to be the principal components of change, where the economic factors seem to have initiated the preliminary processes of change among Nayars. Against the generally held notion that processes of modernization always endanger the existence of tradition, this study shows that the newly emerged patterns of family and marriage are synthetic spheres of "modern" and "tradition" which are not identical to the patterns that are found in the western nations, and have their own distinctive features. Finally, it concludes that the present day Nayar kin organization is a bilateral system, skewing towards patrilinearity.

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To the memory of (late) Professor Dee C. Taylor  
with respect and admiration

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
List of Tables.....	vi
List of Maps .....	ix
Chapter I:	
i: Introduction.....	1
ii: Habitat.....	14
iii: Theory and Methodology.....	17
a: Methodology.....	26
Chapter II:	
Historical Background of the Kerala Region and Nayars.....	30
Chapter III:	
Traditional Nayar Institutions.....	45
i: Caste System.....	45
ii: Kinship and Family Pattern.....	66
a: Marriage System.....	93
iii: Political and Economic Systems.....	138

Chapter IV:	Change and Continuity.....	164
	i: Traditional Period.....	172
	ii: Intermediate Period.....	176
	a: Causes and Social Consequences	
	of Change among the Nayers... 181	
	1: Education and	
	Occupational Diversity... 182	
	2: Shift from Subsistence	
	to Cash Economy..... 187	
	3: Trade and Commerce..... 187	
	4: Land, a Marketable	
	Commodity..... 191	
	5: Population Growth..... 196	
	6: Social Reform Movements	
	and Caste/Communal	
	Associations..... 201	
	b: Matriliney in Eclipse..... 216	
	1: Marriage Pattern	
	Before Legal Reforms..... 223	
	2: Legal Reforms and Their	
	Impact on the Nayar Joint	
	Family, Inheritance and	
	Marriage Patterns..... 226	

iii: Modern Period.....	231
a: Nayar Family in Flux.....	246
b: The Present Day Nayar Inheritance, Family and Marriage Systems.....	259
Chapter V: Conclusion.....	287
Appendix.....	308
Bibliography.....	310

## LIST OF TABLES

- Table 1: a) Literacy rates in Travancore, Cochin, and Madras Presidency by Sex, 1891  
b) Statistics of Male Literacy in Travancore (Percent) by Caste, 1875-1941
- Table 2: Nayers and Iravas by Various Occupations, 1921
- Table 3: Cropped Area and Distribution of Cash- and Food-Crops in Travancore, Malabar, and Cochin
- Table 4: Alienations and Acquisitions of Property by Nayers, Christians, Iravas, Shanars and Samantas in Travancore for 18 months prior to Makaram 1083 (about January 1908)
- Table 5: Population Growth and Its Determinants in India and Kerala (1901-1971)
- Table 6: Population and Occupied Area in Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar, 1921-1951
- Table 7: Kerala Students Resident in Madras, by Caste and Community, 1906-1970



Table 8: Representation of Different Communities in the Travancore Popular Assembly, 1922-31

Table 9: Suits involving Karanavans, Brought by Taravad Members, 1073-1082 M.E. (1897-8/1906-7)

Table 10: a) Communal Pattern of Voting in the Second General Elections in Kerala, 1957  
b) Distribution of Members Based on Their Caste/Community and Political Parties in 1957 Kerala Legislative Assembly (Selected Groups)

Table 11: Structure of Landowning by Caste, Household in Ramankara, South Kerala (i.e., A Village in Farmer 'Central Travancore' Region), 1971-75

Table 12: Distribution of Land Among 108 Randomly Selected Farmers in one Village in Kuttanad Taluk (i.e., in Farmer Central Travancore Region) by Caste and Amount of Land Owned, 1975

Table 13: Household Patterns in a Village in North Kerala (i.e., North Malabar Region), 1948

Table 14: Residence of Married Couples in a Village in Northern Kerala (i.e., North Malabar Region), 1948

Table 15: Household Composition in Angadi, a Village in South Malabar, 1959-1960

Table 16: Husband's Residence in Two South Malabar Villages, 1954-1955

Table 17: Incidence of Different Types of Nayar Households in Palakkara, a Village in Central Kerala (i.e., Cochin Region), 1949 and 1964

Table 18: Residence of Married Nayar Men in Palakkara, a Village in Central Kerala (i.e., Cochin Region), 1949 and 1964

Table 19: Household Types among Nayars in Ramankara, a Village in South Kerala (i.e., Central Travancore Region), 1971-1975

LIST OF MAPS

- MAP 1: Kerala, Showing the (Historic) Regions of Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore
- MAP 2: Kerala and Its Administrative Divisions, The Districts, 1981

## CHAPTER I

### I: i: INTRODUCTION

The sovereign of this city (i.e., Calicut) bears the title of sameri. When he dies it is his sister's son who succeeds him, and his inheritance belong to his son, or his brother, or any other of his relations. No one reaches the throne by means of the strong hand . . . The infidels are divided into a great number of classes . . . Amongst them there is a class of men, with whom it is the practice for one woman to have a great number of husbands, each of whom undertakes a special duty and fulfills it. The hours of the day and of the night are divided between them; each of them for a certain period takes up his abode in the house, and while he remains there no other is allowed to enter. The Sameri belongs to this sect.

(Abd-er-Razaak, a fifteenth century voyagers; Major, 1857, P. 17).

. . . Noblemen (or gentlemen, called Nayars, which are souldiers that doe onely weare and handle armes . . . , and alwaies bee readie at the Kings commaundement . . . wherever they goe, they must alwaies have their armes with them, (both) night and day. Not any of them are married, or may not marrie during their lives, but they may freely lie with the Nayars daughters, or with anyother that liketh them, what woman so ever they bee (yea), though they be a married women. Their heyers are their sisters sonnes, for they say, although they doubt of their fathers, yet they know their sisters are the mothers (of them). This much touching the Nayars and Gentlemen or soldiers.

(John Huyghen Van Linschoten, a sixteenth century voyager; Burnell, 1885, PP. 279-284).

Although exaggerated up to an extent, such comments, descriptions or reports about the Nayars of Kerala (India) by several voyagers, traders, explorers, missionaries, and 'alien' administrators are available since the fourteenth

century. These will help in understanding the traditional settings of Nayar social and cultural domains. Such writings, attracted the attention of the students of social structure to try to interpret the inherent meanings of Nayar institutions.

These early attempts encouraged scholars to proceed with further investigations of Nayar social system and of the processes of social change. The existing literature on 'Noble Nayars' is the result of investigations by modern anthropologists and social scientists in accordance with their respective theoretical orientations. Inspired by such studies and in order to clear up some 'misunderstandings', my thesis is an attempt to explicate the traditional life-ways and to examine the processes of change and continuity in Nayar social organization.

To start with, it is important to note that the attempts which have been made so far with regard to Nayars, are associated with four unique features: complex and rigid caste system of Kerala; presence of matrilineal institutions in Kerala; peculiar marriage customs of the Nayar, and their extraordinary military organization - which, of course are functionally related to their given political, social, economic, and religious circumstances. In this connection Fuller (1976:2) quotes that, ". . . what fascinated Kerala's visitors was not joint families themselves so much, but rather the marriage system with which the family organization was, of course, intimately linked."

One of the early accounts with accurate details has been by Duarte Barbosa, a Portuguese who stayed in Kerala and gained a considerable command of the Malayalam language (i.e., the native language of Kerala) in the sixteenth century. Some of his statements seem to be valid accounts of the then societal complexity and family organizations. He writes of the Nayars:

. . . there is another set of people called Nairs, who are the gentry, and have not other duty than to carry on war . . . They are very smart man, and much taken with their nobility . . . These people accompany their lords day and night . . . These are not married nor maintain women or children; their nephews the sons of their sisters are their heirs. The Nair women are all accustomed to do with themselves what they please with brahmans or Nairs, but not with other people of lower class under pain of death . . . When she is very pretty three or four Nairs join together and agree to maintain her . . . if she takes a dislike to any of them she dismisses him.

(Barbosa, 1865:124-133)

The above description, even though brief, outlines the main features of Nayar family and marriage systems and their traditional occupation (soldiering). As the reader can see, Nayar family and marriage systems functioned in a peculiar way, creating contradictions to some anthropological generalizations (Murdock, 1949; Fortes, 1969). In this connection Levi-Strauss (1971) noted that anthropologists once thought that the family, consisting of a more or less durable union, socially approved, of a man, a woman, and their children, is a universal phenomenon, present in each "type of society." But he pointed out, this definition excludes many

people like the Nayars. As Nayar men were warriors in the by-gone days, they often used to be away from home serving as mercenaries in the wars. Under such circumstances, the Nayar women were expected to take "significant others"; and children belonged exclusively to their mother's kin group or matrilineage.

In Kerala, the matrilineage is called "Marumakkattayam," which is a system of inheritance and descent through female line, where-in a man's legal heirs are the children of his sisters. The traditional family organization is termed 'taravad'. Taravad is a wide segment of kinship (matrilineal joint family), consisting of all matrilineal descendants of a common ancestress, thus comprising a set of sisters, their brothers, their children and their daughter's children. "Rarely the common ancestress of the entire taravad could be traced by going back a number of generations; and where the taravad had great depth and extension it, was even impossible" (Rao, 1957:74). According to Fuller (1976:2), "a taravad might have had twenty, thirty or even more members, all living together in one large house."

The property of the taravad was held jointly by all members of a particular matrilineage, and the ancestral property could not be divided. Every member of the group was entitled to maintenance and could not claim exclusive right to any share of that property as it was held communally. The oldest-male member of the group was entitled to be the trustee

of the property and was called 'Karanavan'. At his discretion the different family transactions were carried on. Succession to the headship of the family was through the criterion of 'seniority'. Even among the royal families (matrilineal) of Kerala, according to Trautmann (1981:418), ". . . succession to kingship passed exactly as did the office of Karanavan among the Nayars, namely, to the eldest surviving male."

However, it was the Nayar marriage system which compelled further academic discussions, and forced the alteration of the here-to-fore accepted universal definition of marriage. Different scholars viewed or interpreted the Nayar marriage system in different ways. (Rao, 1957; Dumont, 1964; Gough, 1971; Leach 1971). The crux of the problem lies in the symbolism of marriage as I shall discuss later on.

As revealed by the early commentators, there existed two forms of marriage among Nayars in by-gone days: 'talikettu kalyanam' and 'Sambandham'. According to the Nayar tradition, a pre-adolescent girl should go through a marriage ceremony (talikettu kalyanam), in which the ritual husband(s) had no further obligations to his/their bride(s), except tying the tali round her/their neck(s). Thurston (1909:313), whose source was Fawcett, writes that ". . . the details of this ceremony vary in different parts of Malabar, but the ceremony in some form is essential, and must be performed for every Nayar girl before she attains puberty."



For this purpose, among the commoner Nayars, tali-tiers called 'manavalan' or 'pillai', were chosen from 'enangers' who were friends or relatives of the family belonging to the same sub-caste or status group. In this connection Barbosa (1865:124-126) mentions that, after girls are, ". . . ten or twelve years old or more, their mothers perform a marriage ceremony for them in this manner. They advise the relations and friends that they may come to do honor to their daughters, and they beg some of their relations and friends to marry these daughters, and they do so . . . . the bride-groom leaves her, and goes away without touching her nor having more to say to her, on account of being her relation; and if he is not so, he may remain with her if he wishes it, but he is not bound to do so if he do not desire it." In this way 'talikettu kalyanam' is a pre-pubertal marriage ceremony which 'symbolically' resembles the marriage ceremony of other south Indian castes.

The second form of marriage performed after 'talikettu kalyanam', called 'Sambandham', was held soon after the girl's attainment of puberty. In reality, it is an alliance of consummation. Thus, the Nayar girls that had undergone the tali-ceremony were supposed to have lovers or visiting husbands from other related lineages (enanger) of their own sub-caste (lineage exogamy and sub-caste endogamy) or from upper Nayar sub castes or from patrilineal Nambudiri Brahmins (hypergamy). In general, hypergamy was practiced among the

upper strata, whereas "the Nayar retainers probably gave less than 10 percent of their women to men of higher caste" (Gough, 1961:321-322).

In royal families the practices of these marriages varied from those of the commoners. Here the ideology of hypergamy played a major role in regulating the marital alliances and was considered to be the only way for 'emulation'. In this way, different categories in the political hierarchy -royalty, feudal royalty, chiefs, village headmen and 'elite' Nayars had struggled to improve their 'prestige' through the process of hypergamy. The inner meaning of such an ideology was a belief that the higher castemen were 'pure' and 'sacred', so that women by having union with high castemen could produce children with 'purified blood' and 'raised prestige'. As against commoner Nayar enanger reciprocal relationships, elite groups practiced asymmetrical hypergamous relations in matters of 'tali' and 'Sambandham' ceremonies, such that the enanger of Kshathriyas were Nambudiri Brahmins; and the enanger of Samanthans were Nambudiri or Kshathriya; and the enanger of village headmen were often Samanthans and so on.

In case of the Nambudiri Brahmins, the highest-ranking caste in Kerala, in the past only eldest sons were permitted to marry while their tradition demanded the younger sons to continue living unmarried by having liaisons with Nayar women. Barbosa says about the Nambudiris:

They marry only once, and only the eldest brother has to be married, and of him is made a head of the

family like a sole heir by ential, and all others remain bachelors, and never marry. The eldest is the heir of all the property . . . their wives very well guarded . . . And if the wife commits adultery, the husband kills her with poison. These Youngmen who do not marry, nor can marry, sleep with the wives of the nobles, and these women hold it is a great honor because they are Brahmins, and no woman refuses them (1865:121-122).

This explains the basic features of Nambudiri family organization and marriage system. Unlike Nayar matrilineal joint families (taravads), Nambudiris lived in patrilineal joint families, called 'Illams', practiced strict primogeniture. These arrangements of the Nambudiris protected land holdings from fragmentation from generation to generation. To maintain their caste purity, women were secluded to avoid pollution. As remarked by Fuller, their lives were pathetic and the majority of Nambudiri women died unmarried.

Another aspect of the Nayars, which merits attention is their military organization as this played a considerable role in determining their family and marriage systems. The history of Kerala's polity and caste structure as well as Nayar military organization were so unique in Indian history, in a way exemplifying some of Plato's ideas in his Republic, such as - Men of wisdom should rule (Nambudiri Brahmins and Royal Nayars?); Strong warriors should fight (Warrior Nayars?); Good laborers should work (Serfdom?); women should have equal rights (Sexual?) with men (Polygamy versus polyandry?). Plato (428-347 BC) rightly cautioned as if he were talking about the

traditional Kerala society that ". . . when the cobbler . . . attempts to force his way into the class of warriors, or a warrior into that of (rulers) . . . for which he is unfitted . . . this meddling of one with another is the ruin of the state" (as quoted in Roselle, 1969:98).

The majority of the Nayars (but not all) spent their lives as warriors or in Plato's terms as "guardians" of the state. In this connection, Thurston (1909:285) quotes Logan that,

. . . in Johnston's relations of the most famous kingdom in the world (1611), there occurs the following quaintly written account of this 'protector guild'. It is strange to see how ready the souldiours of this country is at his weapons: they are all gentile men, and tearmed Naires. At seven years of age they are put to school to learn the use of their weapons, where to make them nimble and active, their sinnewes and joints are stretched by skilful fellows, and annointed with the oyle sesamus. By this annointing they become so light and nimble, that they will winde and turn their bodies as if they had no bones, casting them forward, backward, high and low, even to the astonishment of the beholders. Their continual delight is in their weapon, persuading themselves that no Nation goeth beyond them in Skill and Dexterity.

Such was the prowess of warrior Nayars in former days. Their military organization suited the then existing feudalistic political economy. Like the Daimyos in feudal Japan, the rulers maintained warriors to protect their self interests. These warriors strictly followed the native rules for waging war in accordance with "Kerala dharma." The Nayar gentry was hereditarily attached as fighting men to the great

feudal lords - Nambudiri Brahmins, royal, chiefly and other aristocratic Nayars. To maintain connections, the military organization was under a system known as the "Kalaris." Nayar families were attached to the heads of these Kalaris' to muster soldiers for training and mobilization. "Attached to the local feudal lords, they (i.e., Nayars) were, according to contemporary witnesses, arrogant, quick to pick-up quarrel and oppressive towards the lower classes" (Panikkar, 1960:12).

The caste system needs a brief introduction as it will be a constant theme in further discussions. Much has been written on this particular aspect of Indian social structure, generally agreed, as a system of relationships between different castes which are largely interdependent, both economically and ritually. In the caste hierarchy one can see how different castes are arranged in a rigid and accepted order of ranking. Such expressions can be seen in every phase of Indian life, indeed it is claimed that such a network of relationships has been the back-bone of Indian social structure.

Historically speaking, Kerala was relatively free from outside intervention until a late period. The repercussion of such an isolation was development of a highly complex, clearly articulated, and rigidly and hierarchically stratified caste system (cf Mencher, 1966:136). In this caste ladder, Nambudiri Brahmins occupied the Upper extreme, while the lower strata consisted of a submerged base of slave and untouchable

classes. Considering the Varna model as a pure Indian concept, the ruling classes and dominant castes of traditional Kerala were - Kshathriyas, Samanthans, Ambalavasis, 'elite' Nayars, and commoner Nayars (i.e., Nayar - nominally a Sudra Caste). The Nambudiri Brahmins, the Kshathriyas, the Ambalavasis, the Nayars and other castes of similar ritual status were considered as 'Savarnas' (high caste), whereas lower castes (avarna) that lay below commoner Nayars were those of occupationally oriented (Iravas, Shanars, etc.) and slave castes (Pulayas, Pariahs, Kuravas, etc.). In Kerala society, there also existed Muslim and Christian communities.

Due to its relative isolation from the rest of India in Pre-British days, Kerala preserved several features of early Hinduism with stringent and peculiar customs. The concept of pollution had taken an extreme form in Kerala. Pollution was not only transmitted on touch, but from a distance. Talking about conservative manners of the Nambudiri Brahmins, Thurston (1909:196) writes that, ". . . a Nayar should not come nearer than six paces to a Nambudiri, a man of the barber caste nearer than twelve paces, a Tiyan than thirty six, a Malayan than sixty four and a Pulaiyan than ninety-six."

Under these conditions, what was the place of Nayars in Kerala? Jeffrey (1976:14) quotes from U. Balakrishna Nair's, The Nairs: A Race of Hereditary Fighters, that ". . . the bulk of its (i.e., Kerala) inhabitants are Nairs . . . The Lords of the country . . . guardians of the public weal; they

wielded the distinctive privileges of the Kshathriya . . . These distinctive privileges . . . added to this close bond of union, . . . with the Nambudiri Brahmin . . . point to their unmistakable pre-eminence." The eye, the hand and the order - all depended on Nayars.

The Saga of Nayar "unmistakable pre-eminence" declined during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most of the changes in their social and cultural spheres occurred during British rule and in post-independence times. The warrior status of Nayars collapsed after the disbandment of Nayar armies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But, ". . . Travancore and Cochin did maintain Nayar brigades until 1947, but they were, of course, modelled on modern European armies" (Fuller, 1976:9).

Historical 'events' have had their own impact on Kerala society in general and on Nayar social organization, specifically; major social changes occurred during the period of the British Raj (i.e., direct rule in Malabar region and indirect rule on Travancore and Cochin principalities until 1947) and in the later period. Different factors can be listed as channels of social change: establishment of a centralized bureaucratic government; population growth; introduction of a cash economy; industrialization; urbanization; introduction and expansions of communications - rail, road and air; achievement oriented educational values; imported ideas of equality and moral values; and so on. In

brief, the traditional caste, kinship, family and marriage patterns of Nayers as a part of total Kerala society have undergone drastic changes. Such alterations provided 'new meanings' for the transformed institutions, which now depend on new organizing principles.

It would be a mistake to think that Nayers had similar institutions all over Kerala in the traditional period. According to the ethnographies the different regions showed variations. Likewise, the modes of changes also differed from region to region depending on specific conditions in relation to particular institutions. Taking these factors into consideration, the purpose of my thesis will be to examine diachronically how Nayar institutions varied from region to region, and to comprehend the processes of change and continuity depending on particularities.

This brief introduction sets the scene for analysis. A concise description of Kerala's habitat will be given in the following pages, followed by a review of pertinent theory and methodology. Chapter II provides the historical background of the Nayers, while Chapter III deals with a discussion of different traditional institutions - caste system; kinship, family and marriage patterns; polity; economy; and other activities. Chapter IV discusses the process of change and continuity, over time and conclusions of my study will be given in Chapter V.



I: ii: HABITAT

Kerala, the home land of Nayars, is a linguistically defined state in southern India, which is confined to the Malayalam speaking territories (i.,e. an area of 38,863 Sq. Km.) on the south west coast of India. In terms of physiography, according to Singh (1971:910), ". . . the west coast is a distinct strip of low land, interspersed by hills, rising in elevation from the sea level to 150 M and, at places to more than 300 M." Being the southern part of the western region, Kerala is bounded on the west by the Arabian sea and on the east by the high ranges of the western ghats covered with primeval forests, and extends in between Khasarghud (below the Chandragiri River) and Cape Comorin in a north to southward direction. The whole of the region lies in between  $8^{\circ}4'$  and  $20^{\circ}30'$  northern latitude and  $75^{\circ}3'$  and  $77^{\circ}37'$  eastern longitude (Rao, 1957).

In accordance with topography, the land can be divided longitudinally into three categories - a narrow alluvial coast land which extends a few miles from the sea; low lateritic plateaus and foot hills, covered with grass and scrub; and the high lands. The Kerala coastal region is 550 km long and 20 to 100 km wide (Singh, 1971:912). Along the coast one can see huge sand dunes along with a belt of palm trees, fringing lagoons, and backwaters. People living in the areas behind backwaters, mainly depend on rain water for cultivation. In between the coastal alluvial lands and the mountain ranges,

lies the central region of low lateritic plateaus and hills, constituting the main area of traditional village settlement that depends on rice-cultivation. Adjacent to this, lies the majestic sharp mountain ranges of the western ghats, which isolate Kerala from the eastern parts, with few ecologically significant 'gaps' for contact between east and west coast - Plaghat Pass; a narrow pass near Shencottah; and the area at the very tip of the Indian peninsula (Mencher, 1966:137).

With regard to climate, the region enjoys more or less uniform temperature throughout the year with a range of 70<sup>o</sup>F to 90<sup>o</sup>F. The mean humidity is as much as 70% of saturation at the lowest and 88% at the highest. Being within the monsoon area, Kerala receives one of the highest monsoons in the world. It is said that the south-west monsoon alone brings three-fourths of the total rainfall. As Singh (1971:913) says, a unique feature of Kerala coast is a double maxima of rain fall -a primary maximum in June-July and a secondary one in October-November. Annual rainfall in most areas is less than 50 inches, but places like Ernakulam and Malabar get about 120 inches and 116 inches respectively (Rao, 1957).

The year falls into three seasons - dry season (December-March); hot season (March-June) and wet season (June-December). Agricultural activities operate in accordance with the seasonal variations. Agriculture being the primary economy, nearly 50% of the population depends on "plough agriculture." In general, people raise two crops per annum -

first crop harvests in September (Kanni crop), while the second (Makaram crop) in January. Farmers go for a third crop where irrigation is plentiful.

Major irrigation projects implemented since 1947, increased the irrigated crop area, which now forms 12.71 percent of the total cropped area. Food crops like paddy, tapioca, and garden crops such as coconut, betel leaf, jack fruit, mango, and banana are commonly grown. Kerala is also blessed with an abundance of cash crops like cashewnut, cotton, oil seeds, sugar cane, rubber, tea, coffee, cocoa, pepper, ginger and cardamon. In addition to these, natural forests which constitute 24 percent of the area of the state, produce different varieties of timber - teak, blackwood, ebony, softwood and rosewood, which are in considerable demand as exports. (M.O.I & B, 1985).

Kerala has seen a great increase in its population in recent years. According to 1981 Census, Kerala's population was 25,453,680. (M.O.I & B, 1985). Approximately 60-65% of the population lives in rural areas. In terms of population growth, according to Singh, Kerala (Malabar coast) had shown extremely high rates of increase (120-300%) during the years 1901-1961 (1971:916). Kerala exhibits an average density of 655 persons per square kilometer, according to the 1981 census, which is the top-most density rate among the Indian states (M.O.I & B, 1985). To its credit, Kerala stands first in India with regards to literacy, having a literacy rate of

70.42 percent. By sex, 75.26 percent males and 65.73 percent females are literate. The national average literacy rate is 36.23 percent (M.O.I & B, 1985). For Nayars, I did not have recent population figures, nevertheless, as Fuller stated their estimated population in 1968 was around 2.9 million, or 14.5 percent of Kerala's total population (Fuller, 1975, P. 283).

I: iii: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Much has been written in anthropology on 'subjective and 'objective' understandings of a culture or a society: some emphasizing an actor's point of view, whereas others the view point of an outsider. In discussion on social change in India, Ross (1961) rightly cautions "western exaggerations" about change and eastern idiosyncracies with regard to "over emphasis on stability." In this connection, Srinivas (an Indian social anthropologist) says, "the sociologist who is engaged in the study of his own society is likely to be influenced by his social position, not only in his observations but also in the problem he selects for study," and he goes on to suggest that "since subjectivity is inescapable as well as serious, a continuous effort must be made to reduce it. This is best done by recognizing its existence and by exposing the student, from the very beginning of the academic career, to the culture and institutions of alien societies" (Srinivas, 1966:154).

I am myself a student from South India, a native Dravidian speaker although not from Kerala and not a Nayar. Still, I am studying my own society which poses problems of achieving sufficient distance and objectivity at the same time that it allows me insights not so readily available to an outsider.

I have relied on my own experience as a student in an alien country, the United States of America, to minimize my "inescapable subjectivity." As I have made extensive use of data collected by other social scientists/ethnographers, for the most part non-Indians, this should also act as a corrective for any biases I am not aware of in myself.

To study Indian society, traditional and present day, as Karve has said, ". . . Three things are absolutely necessary for the understanding of any cultural phenomenon in India. These are the configurations of the linguistic regions, the institution of caste and the family organization. Each of these three factors is ultimately bound up with the other and these together give meaning and supply basis to all other aspects of Indian culture" (Karve, 1968:1).

The Indian languages can broadly be divided into three linguistic regions: Indo-European; Dravidian; and Munda (ibid). Dravidian speakers are the Malayalam, the Kannada, the Tamil and the Telugu languages. It is generally said that the four Dravidian languages are interrelated and probably originated from the 'old' Tamil language. Although contested,

according to Kanakasabhai (1956), Malayalam had its origins in Tamil and had diverged as a spoken language between the ninth and the twelfth centuries. It has also been claimed that north India and south India, being linguistically distinct regions, each possess a certain homogeneity of culture (Karve, 1968).

Thus, says Karve that the kinship organization in terms of linguistic regions can be organized into three types: Indo-European; Dravidian, and Mundari. In what way is the Dravidian type distinct from that of the Indo-European block? The Dravidian kinship system has gained the attention of anthropologists since the days of Lewis Henry Morgan due to its distinct kinship terminology. Later, Rivers recognized the differentiation of the parallel and cross-cousins as the main feature of the Dravidian systems. Since then, a number of extensive studies have been carried out, and have provided a picture to show its peculiarities and the differences between Dravidian and Indo-European kinship systems, (e.g., Dumont, 1953; 1971; Karve, 1968; Trautman, 1974; 1981).

According to Dumont, the main features of Dravidian kinship are: classification according to generations; distinction of sex; distinction of two kinds of relatives inside certain generations; and distinction by age. He further stresses that the third feature is the most important: "the system embodies a sociological theory of marriage taken in the form of an institution following generations, and

supposes - as well as favors - the rule of marrying a cross-cousin as means of maintaining it" (Dumont, 1953:34-39). In reality, "South-Indian kinship is equal to kin (consanguinity) plus affinity" (Dumont, 1961:80-81). Thus, "the Dravidian system, consists at the cognitive level, of a set of kinship terms whose structure differs most strikingly from the Indo Aryan system in making a radical distinction between parallel and cross kinsmen, and merging consanguineous and affinal kin. Congruous with this, at the normative level, is a rule of cross-cousin marriage" (Trautman, 1974:62).

This way of over emphasis on 'alliance', on the other hand undermined and contradicted the descent theory propounded by anthropologists like Radcliff-Brown, Fortes and Evans-Pritchards, who have emphasized the role of descent in interpreting the kinship system. A further investigation into the empirical realities, rather revealed that both approaches are like two sides of the same coin; 'alliance' and 'descent' as empirical components of all kinship systems (Buchler and Selby, 1968; Fox, 1983).

How are these approaches relevant to the interpretation of the matrilineal Nayar kinship system which is so different from the remaining Indian kinship patterns? Another question that arises with regard to the Nayars is - whether or not to consider Nayars as part of the Dravidian kinship domain? I will treat alliance and descent in a synthetic way to explicate the Nayar social organization; and I will consider

the Nayar kinship system as a variant of Dravidian kinship domain based on the assumption that the variations within the Dravidian kinship domain are adjustments necessitated by cultural contact.

As I said elsewhere, Kerala was one of the regions in India which had practiced a rigid and highly complex caste system. In general, there have been controversial views on the Indian caste system in the anthropological literature. Dumont, Pocock, and Leach argue that the caste system should be studied only within in the context of Indian civilization. Dumont recognizes a holism in the caste system, and says that it has an orientation toward the welfare of all. For him truth lies in this holism: by Hindu ideals, all are cared for, the system exists for the benefit of all (Dumont, 1974).

In contrast, Bailey, Davis, Berreman, Barth and others perceive it as a system of rigid social differentiation, which is based on absolute inequality as the guiding principle in social relations (Davis, 1951). For functionalists, social inequality is a natural phenomenon and social stratification as a broad division of labor is necessary for any society in which one gets what he/she deserves. While conflict theory holds that the social stratification is centered around 'power' - a religious, political, social and economic power. With regard to India, I do not want to contradict Dumont's principles of hierarchy, purity, and pollution in a structural sense, which confirms the caste system as an underlying



principle for cultural uniformity. Nevertheless, I want to say that Dumont and his followers missed the point that such an ideology created by the so called aristocracy rather justified permanent supremacy over the 'have-nots' with sacred coatings in the name of beliefs, values and norms.

The ideal relativist states that the caste system is a network of interdependent and reciprocal relations in which every body is benefitted rather than one of exploitation. But, as Mencher pointed out, "it is hard to see it as being any more independent than any other stratification system." (1974:470). My approach to the traditional Kerala caste system will be a synthetic one, by drawing basic concepts from both functional and conflict theories. This is to say that in traditional Kerala (or in India), the caste system stood as a source for livelihood in a functional sense, but on the other hand it deprived social, political, economic and religious equality for certain classes in the name of "ascribed status," and also created a struggle for "power" even among the upper castes like the Nayars.

Another aspect that is associated with the caste system is the concept of 'dominance' or 'dominant caste'. Acquisition of dominance by a particular group in a village or territory depends on several factors - mainly economic, political and religious. Dumont refers to a caste as dominant when it has "eminent right over the land, . . . power to grant land to employ members of other castes . . . to build up a

large clientele . . . power of justice . . . the dominant castes are often entrusted with the arbitration of differences in other castes or between different castes, and they can exact penalties for unimportant offenses . . . monopoly of authority . . . the dominant caste is often a royal caste, a caste allied to royal castes . . . or a caste with similar characteristics (1974:162-163). More or less Nayers the maintained a position as a dominant caste in traditional Kerala caste hierarchy.

One of the purposes of this thesis is to interpret change in Nayar social organization. Nayers' 'unique' institutions initiated an active debate in modern anthropology and rather forced the alteration of some universal definitions. This society has changed within the last 150 or 200 years. Several attempts were made to study the changing patterns in their social organization: some emphasizing extrinsic factors while others stressed intrinsic factors as carriers of change, which led to confusion in understanding the real mechanisms of change.

Srinivas suggests that two processes of change are at work in India - Sanskritization and westernization. Sanskritization is the process by which a low Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently, twice-born (Brahmin, Kshathriya or Vaishya) caste (Srinivas, 1966). The concept of Sanskritization is valid when talking

about the traditional society, but I believe that it has limited explanatory power when applied to empirical realities of rapid and complex change, as it stresses positional change within the closed varna model as against structural change. With regard to the concept of westernization, there has been a consensus that modernization should be a preferred term instead of westernization (Ishwaran, 1970).

The caste system and the joint family of India are changing due to modernization. Following Nag (1980), the concept of modernization is employed here in a broad sense to designate a combination of the following processes: industrialization, urbanization, spread of education, emergence of secular values and beliefs, erosion of traditional customs, increase of transportation and communication facilities, improvement in health and nutrition, and cash economy. Nonetheless, the simple "traditional-modern" model is handicapped as an explanation because of an earlier conception that modernization would bring all societies to a level of cultural homogeneity by destroying native identities. In this connection, Ishwaran quotes that "the change from traditional order to the modern is neither automatic nor unilinear (Bendix). It also involves the possibility of a breakdown in the process of modernization (Eisenstadt). A crucial strategy in meeting the danger of such a breakdown is the institutionalization of change" (emphasis mine) (Ishwaran, 1970:6-7).

According to recent studies, caste has changed its traditional form based on sacred ideas such as purity, impurity, and pollution and content but is gradually gaining a re-integration on "secular-associational" grounds. (Rudolf and Rudolf, 1960; Kothari, 1970). There has also been a controversy with regard to the emerging patterns of family structures. One view says that the joint-family is "breaking-down," but the other group argues that the thesis of linear transformation of "structural types" is false. In his discussions on family, Ramakrishna Mukherjee quotes - "Desai has exposed the fallacy of inferring a rising incidence of nuclear structures from the number of persons in households or families, and has shown, additionally, that the co-resident and commensal kin groups may be nuclear but "joint-family" - wise integration is maintained among those units which are identified as components of a joint structure" (Mukherjee, 1975:1-64).

It has been assumed, that matrilineal societies being structurally unstable are more susceptible to change than patrilineal institutions. If so, what was the nature of change in Nayar traditional social organization? Through what channels have the 'readjustments' and "structural changes" occurred? Did the taravads break-down into modern nuclear families? Have the kinship relations ceased to function under the impact of modernity? What is the present 'form' and 'content' of Nayar family organization?; and finally, what is

the present position of Nayars in the caste-structure? This thesis will try to answer these questions.

I: iii: a: METHODOLOGY

The aim of this thesis is to reveal the factors involved in change and continuity in Nayar caste, kinship, family and marriage patterns and to elucidate the present Nayar institutional settings. Indeed Nayar social organization has been in flux for the last 150 or 200 years and several drastic changes occurred in its organization during the course of this time. Several attempts have been made to interpret the changing patterns: some stressing 'inside', whereas others emphasizing 'outside' factors as channels of change, which in turn created a sort of entanglement to understanding the realities of change. Given attention to regional differences among the Nayar institutions in traditional Kerala, and to the particularities of the process of change, the study of social change among Nayars requires a multi-dimensional approach.

To achieve this goal it is necessary to emphasize the cultural and social dimensions of the traditional Nayars; the way their behavior was transmitted from generation to generation, changed over time; the main factors that shattered their institutions; and the present state of their social settings. In brief, my study elucidates the processes of 'change' and 'continuity' over time, that is "diachronically."

To build the diachronic model, first, data has been collected from historical studies, quantitative social indicators and modern ethnographic studies. In addition to this, first hand information on the present Nayar community was collected mainly from two informants belonging to the Nayar caste in order to ascertain present conditions. Secondly, by examining the data some generalizations can be made concerning the regularities of change. However, as Vansina points out, the "Historical causality is most correctly described as a chain of related antecedents and consequents. The chain is endless but has to be cut if an analysis is to be made possible" (1973:170). Thus, to make it possible, I have divided my analysis into three periods - traditional (before 1800); intermediate (1800-1947) (i.e., In Travancore and Cochin principalities until 1956); modern (1947 to the present).

The methodology employed for this study of social change involved four phases. The first stage consisted of collecting the necessary material mainly from two informants from the Nayar caste residing in Montana. One is a male and the other a female, representing two villages (i.e., the names of villages are not reported here to assure privacy to the informants) of Pathanamthitta district, Kerala state (Fig. 2). The material was recorded from the informants through extensive open ended discussions, covering the topics which ranged from marriage system and family/kin organization to the

state level (caste) politics. Some additional information was also obtained through informal discussions with two non Nayar Keralites and two non Kerala Nayars in order to cross-check some of the information that was gathered from the two main informants and to gain insight into the immigrant Nayar familiar settings, respectively. I can not claim that my information about the present Nayar social organization is complete but I believe, that this first hand information is valid for my analysis. The information thus gathered has been cross-checked with the recent anthropological work to examine whether or not any changes occurred within this short period.

Secondly, I completed a bibliography that includes primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are those written by modern anthropologists with accurate research tools. Their independent regional studies, at different times, yielded a picture with which to examine the rapid and complex changes that occurred during the "intermediate" period and to identify the differences in the modes of change as well as in the channels of change. In addition to this, many journals, periodicals, and other academic materials were referred to in order to acquaint myself with different theories regarding Indian culture and society, as well as the general nature of social change in India.

The third phase of work involved examining detailed descriptions given by travellers, traders, missionaries, alien administrators, and historians. Although deficient in some

ways, these were helpful as supplements and corroboration of the primary sources. Since the days of Vasco-Da-gama (1498 A.D.), there has been a flow of descriptions about the traditional Kerala society and the peculiar institutions of the Nayars, given by the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the British. In fact, these writings are very helpful in looking into the historical events that influenced the socio, economic and political readjustments through cultural contact and to measure the readjustments in the eighteenth century. Martanda Varma, Hyder Ali, and TippuSultan have had their own devastating effects on Kerala society as well as on the Nayars. Without considering these historical incidents, it would be difficult to talk about the changing patterns. The final stage deals with a thorough analysis of the data.



## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE KERALA REGION AND THE NAYARS

I would more especially call attention to the central point of interest . . . in any description of historical accounts of the Malayali Race - the position, namely, which was occupied for centuries on centuries by the Nayar caste in the civil and military organization of the province, - a position so unique and so lasting that but for foreign intervention there seems no reason why it should not have continued to endure for centuries on centuries to come. Their functions in the body politic have been tersely described in their own traditions as the 'eye', the 'hand', and the 'order', and to the present day, we find them spread throughout the length and breadth of the land, but no longer - I could say, alas! Preventing the rights (of all classes) from being curtailed or suffered to fall into disuse.

(William, Logan (1887; in Jeffrey, 1976, P. VII).

The early history of Kerala is based mainly on legend and oral historical traditions of the Malayalis, which cannot be verified. Some historical records and direct allusions suggest the existence of the Nayars since early times. More reliable historical accounts have been available since the arrival of Europeans in comparatively recent times. In this way, knowledge of the history of Kerala before 1498 lacks reliable historical material.

Many traditions of Kerala are referred to as 'Keralopatti', a collection of floating traditions in Malayalam, which were written down some time in the latter half of the seventeenth century (Ayyar, 1938). These deal mainly with the creation of the land (i.e., Kerala) by Lord

Parasurama and the settlement of Brahmins as the early inhabitants; the rule of Perumals; and the achievements of Calicut kings, the Zamorin, respectively. It also attempts to justify the traditional social institutions of Kerala: the hold of high-caste Hindus on the land, the matrilineal system of the Nayers, their symbiotic relationships with the Nambudiris, and the Nayar's military role (Jeffrey, 1976).

According to the floating traditions, Parasurama, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, uprooted the Kshathriyas twenty one times to atone his sin, handed over the conquered land to the sages. The act of generous donation of land to the sages, displeased the Brahmins and made them banish Parasurama from the land. In distress, he approached the Gods, was granted some land to dwell on, the extent of land determined by an axe throw from Cape Comorin to Gokarnam. Thus, formed a new land (which was earlier a portion of the sea) in between the two places, bounded by the Arabian sea on the west and western ghats on the east. This reclaimed land was called 'Parasurama's Land'. The same land was also referred to as 'Kharmabhumi', a land in which salvation depended entirely on one's own deeds.

The story runs that Parasurama, to avoid his loneliness, brought Brahmins from the north, and located them on sixty-four gramams. He ordered them to have unique institutions like matrilineage, and to rule the territory. Accordingly, they ruled the land with austerity; but rejected the practice

of matrilineal inheritance excepting a group of Nambudiri Brahmins of Payyanur.

It is also said that Parasurama brought in some Sudras (i.e., Nayars) as the guardians of the territories, asked them to live with the rules of matrilineal inheritance, and to obey the rules prescribed by the Brahmins. But another theory contrasts this version and says that Nayars were the original inhabitants of the land, and were the Nagas of Hindu mythology. The contenders of the theory consider Nayar's 'Naga-Worship' (i.e., snake worship) as a dominant trait and argue that it has been transmitted from early times. One other version states that "the Nayar caste is the result of union between Nambuduris with Deva, Ganadharva and Rakshasa women introduced by Parasurama" (Thurston, 1909). A most acceptable explanation is that the word Nayar is derived from the Sanskrit Nayaka, a leader, and to be cognate with Naik, and Nayudu or Naidu (ibid). Likewise, many castes in Kerala have their own legends of origins. However, as stated by Mayer, "there is wider agreement that the lower castes, formerly slaves were the indigenous Dravidian inhabitants of this region" (1974:16).

It seems plausible that "the advent of Brahmins from the North - bringing Aryan culture and caste divisions - may be reckoned a comparatively recent event in the immense vista of Travancore (or Kerala), with its curious contrast between isolation from India on the east and its western maritime

contact with many lands" (Diver, 1971:212). Panikkar (1960) states that Kerala had maritime contacts with foreign lands in the earlier centuries of the first millennium B.C. and Kerala ports were frequented by merchant ships from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.

Although, Phoenicians were the first to trade through the Kerala ports, Jews, Syrians, Egyptians maintained extensive trade relations with Kerala. But the credit goes to the Romans for discovering a direct route to Kerala, which in turn facilitated extensive trade between the two nations. "The importance of Roman commerce was so great that the local money was, to a large extent, replaced by the Romans" (as quoted in Rao, 1956:12).

In the period around the first or second century A.D., Kerala, as a part of 'Chera' kingdom, was flourishing by virtue of its trade with Rome. Chera, together with 'Chola' and 'Pandya', formed a trio of South Indian Tamil Kingdoms, which became powerful probably through maritime contacts. It is said that the earliest name of 'Kerala seems to have been 'Sera' or 'Chera' which subsequently came to be changed to Kerala. But some local stories contradict this. According to Keralopatti, Brahmins to abate their internal conflicts, chose Keya perumal, as the first king of the land, hence the land was called 'Kerala' after him. Another version suggests that the name Kerala was derived from Narikelam (i.e., coconut), by the very fact of their abundance on the Malabar Coast since

early times. On the other hand, the existence of the term Kerala even before Anno Domini, comes from an Ashokan inscription, which mentioned Kerala Kings as Kerala putra (Rao, 1957).

"The three Tamil Kingdoms temporarily disintegrated in the late third century, probably as a result of a sharp decline in Roman trade" (Gough, 1961:303). The history of Kerala from the Chera period until the thirteenth century is poor. According to Keralopatti, the Perumals, as the legend goes, were the foreign kings, brought by the Brahmins, to govern Kerala for a period of 12 years before returning to their own homes. Perumals reigned in Kerala in succession from 216 A.D. until 825 A.D. (Ayyar, 1938), the only period in which Kerala was united in historic times. After their decline, the region was divided into rival petty kingdoms or chiefdoms under the control of Nayars and Kshathriyas, who owed little allegiance to any ruler.

Bhaskara Ravi Varman's inscription of 8th century A.D. reveals the monarchy in an advanced state of feudal disruption (Panikkar, 1960:2). Such a feudal polity could be understood by examining the grants to Jews and Syrian Christians, made by the ruling classes in the eighth century, which were firmly attested to by great feudatories and Nambudiri Brahmins. It seems that these petty political domains transformed into Nayar chiefdoms in the latter period, and existed until the 18th century. Panikkar says that, "in the period between the

9th and 12th centuries a feudal Kerala grew up making the tradition of unity no more than a distant and lingering memory" (ibid:6).

Discarding the legends, we are faced with two questions with regard to the Nayars - where did they come from?, and when did they arise to the level of ruling class? Sangam literature (i.e., the oldest literature of south India; 100-300 A.D.) mentions neither the Nayars nor their pre-eminence. Gough quotes from Sastri that "the basic features of Kerala's division of labor, caste system, and village organization, must have developed during or before the Chera period" (1961:303). Ayyar (1938) presumes that Nayars were the matrilineal hill tribes who had maintained alliances with the Chera rulers, reached the Kerala plains as invading barbarians after the collapse of Chera Kingdom, probably around the fourth century. One useful reference related to such a view is that of Pliny. His Natural History (77 A.D.), while discussing the races beyond the Indus, mentions - "Next come the Narae, who are shut in by the Capitalia range, the highest of the mountains of India" (Book VI.XXIII 72-74, 1940). If considering Capitalia range as western ghats and Nareae as Nayars, it is plausible to conclude that around the first century A.D. Nayars were inhabiting the western ghats.

The importance of the ports of Malabar around the 9th and 10th centuries can be noted from the accounts of Arabian travellers - Ibn Khurdadbeh (865-869 A.D.), Abu Zaid of Zirang

(916 A.D.), Ibn Hankal (1000 A.D.), (Panikkar, 1960:8-9). It is evident from their writings that a feudal order existed, and the Zamorin (i.e., the King of Calicut) through his good relations with Arab traders was gaining importance in pepper and spice trade. A good description of the Zamorin of Calicut and of other flourishing ports of Kerala, appears in Ibn Battuta's writings (circa 1347). He describes Calicut "as one of the finest ports in the world, frequented for the trade by the people of China, the Archipelago, the Maldives, Yemen, and the Persian Gulf" (Yule, 1916:24).

The emergence of pseudo states or the transformation of Nayar chiefdoms into small kingdoms occurred during the period of the thirteenth century and 1498 A.D. In the thirteenth century, "Two Nayar chiefdoms, the Kolathiri in the north and the Travancore in the south, expanded into small kingdoms" (Mencher, 1965). The later period was identified with a sharp decline in Chinese trade, while Arab trade gradually reached its maximum. As witnessed by Ibn Battuta, a third Nayar chiefdom was flourishing in the fourteenth century, centered around Calicut, under the rule of Zamorin. Through its trade with the Arabs, Calicut established ascendancy over the petty rulers in the region. Zamorin's relations with Arab traders became strong owing to his friendly attitude toward local Muslim communities (Mapplas). Such a policy strengthened his suzerainty and continued until the eighteenth century.

By the time Vasco Da gama reached Calicut in 1498, Kerala's political scene resembled that of feudal Japan. The nascent pseudo states (for example, Calicut and Cochin) were struggling to extend their sovereignty; while the 'Kaimils' and 'Kartuvas' like the 'Samurai' in feudal Japan were engaged in becoming de facto rulers of provincial territories, who owed allegiance sometimes to more than one sovereign. Under such circumstances, as Panikkar suggests, "with the power of the territorial magnates so well established and the authority of the religious organizations placed above political divisions, it was impossible to develop in Kerala a central government with all embracing authority, except by a process of slow evolution" (1960:26).

But the intruders - Portuguese, Dutch, French, Muslim Rajas, and British, did not permit such a slow political evolution in Kerala. Kerala's uncertain polity in association with its rulers' vested interests, rather encouraged the foreigners to exploit her. Taking advantage of the conflicts between Calicut and Cochin Kingdoms, Portuguese supported Cochin Raja in attacking the Zamorin of Calicut. Their aim was to destroy the Arabian monopoly in trade and to establish a right to trade with Kerala; with a considerable hold on some native rulers, their desire was to exploit the resources, and to propagate Christianity. Even though, they established the first European educational institutions and religious organizations, their administrative abilities were erratic and



corruptible. In this connection, Panikkar writes about the Portuguese, "Private gain was the only motive of the Governors, and corruption and intrigue became the chief characteristic of their government" (ibid:91). This kind of political blunder, in fact crumbled their foundations and caused their eclipse in the very beginnings of the seventeenth century.

The next people on the scene were the Dutch. Though arriving in 1595, they settled down to stay and strengthened their position in Kerala about 1660. In brief, their activities were the photocopies of the Portuguese. By the time they realized such activities cost them too much, the Dutch lost their hold on Kerala, their trade ruined, and their power collapsed. In later years, the French and the Danes also stepped on the soil of Kerala, but played very minor roles. Then came the British into the picture, who played a prominent role in Kerala until the days of Indian independence.

Throughout their stay, the British policy was to avoid local politics and to develop trade in association with the native rulers. Having known the drawbacks of their predecessors, their policies and campaigns were related to gradual acquisition of territorial power through a process of respect for the native customs and traditions. In total, the European nations checked the development of a centralized state in Kerala. However, Kerala's economy thrived during the

period and its product entered the world market. Introduction of a cash economy enhanced the trade, and the trading centers expanded into towns; at the same time introduction of gun powder added fuel to the already burning feudal anarchy, which in turn kept the country firmly segmented without the possibility to achieve unity.

Memorable events in Kerala's history occurred in the eighteenth century. This was the period in which the centuries old supremacy of the Nayers was questioned. The basic foundations of feudal order were severely damaged. Alas! that hegemony which looked so secure was finally broken.

Although a flourishing kingdom in early times in southern Kerala, Travancore or Venad remained as a small kingdom in later times until 1729 A.D., under the control of successive kings. The high-handed nobility in association with the sacerdotal power of the Brahmins undermined their suzerainty. The Nayar nobility became de facto rulers of the territories. A young prince from the suppressed royalty, Martanda Varma, acceded to the throne of Travancore in 1729. In Panikkar's words, "while he was fourteen he vowed like Philip August of France that he would re-establish royal power in the state and putdown the might of the nobles" (1960:233).

To fulfil his revanche, Martanda Varma destroyed the very roots of Nayar civil and military organizations, and oppressed priestly communities of the Nambudiri Brahmins. He laid foundations of a bureaucratic government, and raised special

armies by replacing the traditional Nayar warriors. Through a sequence of conquests and annexations he gained control over the whole of southern Kerala from Cape Comorin to the borders of Cochin. Undermining the native idea that the Nayar lords could not be punished in case of treason, Martanda Varma spared none in his political endeavors. The land owning rights of the feudal lords were curbed, and the control of the land by the state became legitimate. Through reforms, he made Travancore the most progressive state among the Kerala kingdoms. A stalwart ruler who introduced several new social, economic, and political concepts which were novel to Kerala, died in 1758. The later ruler of Travancore followed his predecessor's footsteps, of course with minor administrative changes.

The other parts of Kerala also experienced abrupt changes from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. The unstable political conditions in northern Kerala in combination with the age-old conflicts and political intrigues between Calicut and Cochin Rajas, provided a good climate for the Mysore Muslim King, Hyder Ali, to invade Malabar and Cochin. Having maintained neutral terms with the British, Hyder conquered the Malabar Coast in 1766, and continued his ruthless attacks on the rajas as well as on rebellious Nayars, until his death in 1782. To meet the undaunted Nayar resistance, Hyder tried to exterminate the Nayar population mercilessly. To weaken the

spirit of Nayars, orders were issued by him depriving them of all social privileges.

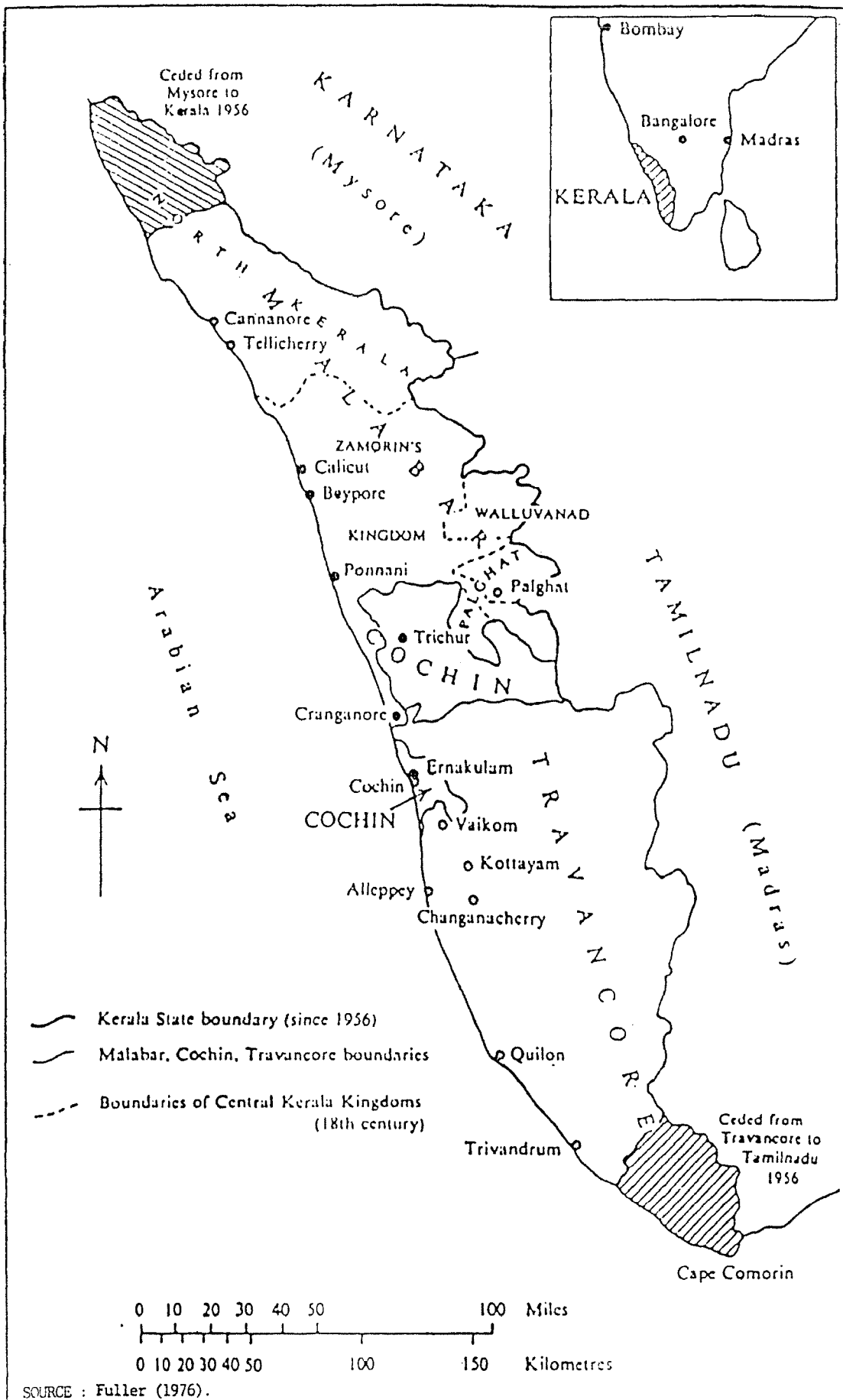
This sort of inhuman attack on Nayars continued by Tippu Sultan, Hyder Ali's son, after his succession to the throne in 1784. Though subjugating some areas, he failed to have overall control in the north and central parts of Kerala. Being a fanatical and superstitious Muslim, Tippu wanted to reform several institutions of Hindu Kerala. For him, the local marriage system, matrilineage, and the caste system were barbarous and uncivilized customs. "He prosecuted this aim (i.e., reform) vigorously, converting many thousands of Hindus by circumcising them and forcing them to eat beef. He was . . . particularly severe with the Nayars, though Brahmins, who had enjoyed safety of movement during Hyder's campaigns, were no longer thus respected" (Mayer, 1976:21).

His successive attempts to conquer Travancore failed, and finally resulted in his expulsion from Kerala in 1789 by the British, with whom Travancore had a treaty in the later period. Some significant changes he had brought into Kerala were - destruction of feudalism; a system of land taxation based on the actual produce of land; demolition of caste hierarchy to an extent. Panikkar stresses that the importance of the destruction of the political predominance of the Nairs at the end of the 18th century as "the most capital fact in the history of Malabar during the last 400 years." This process took place in Travancore and Cochin at an earlier

period . . . the results were the same as in Malabar. There it was the rajas, instead of the British, who instituted a civil service and a system of directed government" (as quoted in Mayer, 1976:22).

In 1792, the British took over the whole of Malabar and kept it under the rule of Madras presidency. Thus, by the end of the eighteenth century, Kerala was politically segmented into three parts - Malabar district in the north under the British regime; a small princely state of Cochin in the center, and a southern independent state of Travancore, which were placed under British supervision (Map. 1). "From the tenth decade of the 18th century to the fifth decade of the 20th century was a long spell of one continuous British rule under which the people, freed from the fear of the war, settled down to shape their destiny" (Rao, 1959:28). However, Kerala witnessed a series of violent outbreaks in the 19th century, which were known as "Moplah riots." These were the revolts against the caste Hindus by the Muslims in connection with land disputes.

Unlike the other foreigners, the British with their friendly attitude towards the natives influenced every aspect of life in Kerala. Such a reception by the Keralaites, in fact yielded socio, religious, economic and political changes. Introduction of educational institutions, systematic administration of justice, communications, social welfare measures, bureaucracy, capitalistic economy, elected councils,



MAP 1

Kerala, Showing the (Historic) Regions of Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore

and others by the British, have had their own impact on Kerala. Many of the changes in social institutions were brought in through a process of legislation - proclamations, acts and bills.

The land and people of India gained independence from the British in August, 1947. The Malabar district as a part of Madras state immediately acceded to the Indian Union in 1947; while Travancore and Cochin remained as principalities until 1949, which later formed United States of Travancore and Cochin on May 29th of 1949. A modern linguistic state of Kerala was formed in 1956, by merging the three distinct and historically significant parts of Kerala based on the fact that they had shared a common language and culture for centuries. Since then Kerala has been mostly ruled by unstable coalition governments, the main political opponents being the congress party (with its allies), and the communist parties (in alliance with other left-oriented political organizations). At present, Kerala is under the rule of a communist coalition government, which was elected to power in 1987.

## CHAPTER III

### TRADITIONAL NAYAR INSTITUTIONS

In order to understand the process of change and continuity among the Nayers, it is necessary to understand the fundamental social values of their traditional life-ways. The study of their traditional social system requires a consideration of the basic nature of social values of the traditional Indian society. In general, the period before British rule is referred to as traditional India, because of the fact that the active incorporation of new values has taken place in and after the British regime. My discussions on traditional Nayar social institutions are applicable to the past, and are confined to the period before 1800 A.D., which, however overlaps with the intermediate period (1800-1947 A.D.).

#### III: i: CASTE SYSTEM

Caste and kinship are the two basic organizing principles in the Indian social system. Much has been written on the caste system in Kerala (and in India, generally). Within the domain of anthropology, some scholars consider the caste system as a type of social stratification along with the other types - slavery, class, and estate, which are usually identified with state organized societies. In this connection, Harris states (1971:405-6):



Inequalities in the form of differential access to basic resources, asymmetrical redistribution of the producers surplus, lopsided work loads and consumption standards, present every state-level society with an unrelenting measure on the perfection of institutional structures that protect the ruling class from confrontation with coalitions of alienated commoners. These structures fall into two basic categories: 1) institutions that control the content of ideology; and 2) institutions that physically suppress the subversive, rebellious, and revolutionary actions of alienated individuals and groups.

Such an attempt by the ruling classes occurred in the Vedic period (1500-900 B.C.) in India. The origin of social orders is described in the Rig-Veda, according to which the total population was categorized into four classes (Varnas) - the Brahmins; the Kshathriyas; the Vaisyas; and the Shudras. The Brahmins formed the highest social order, the literate intelligentsia which gave India its priests, thinkers, law-givers, judges, and ministers of state. The Kshathriyas (rulers) were the second social order, the Indian counterpart to feudal nobility; from this class were recruited kings, vassals and warriors. The Vaisya formed the class of land-owners, merchants, and money-lenders; while the Shudras, originally those people conquered by the Aryans, were workers, artisans, or serfs (from Rigveda 10.90; C.F. de Bary, 1958). The Varna system excluded the so-called untouchables from its framework.

The later Dharma Sastras further justified such social differentiations in the name of "sacred law" (Dharma). The essence of dharma consisted in the functioning of the

organization of four classes (Varnas); or of its later complex development, namely the caste system (de Bary, 1958). The Varna system underwent changes in its structure and meanings and became a rigid caste system by the fixity of caste membership only in later years, possibly with the development of, and acceptance of the Hindu pollution complex of beliefs and with the Hindu belief in rebirth. Jati or caste as a concept gained its importance only among the 'Smrti' legal writers. The vaguely mentioned occupational groups in Vedas, later attained identities as castes in the Smrti literature (Tambaiah, 1973).

Having considered the religio-ethical codes of sacred Hindu literature, a group of modern anthropologists and sociologists studied Indian villages, emphasizing the structural and functional aspects (occupational specializations of castes) of the Hindu society. Such approaches viewed the Indian caste system *Sui generis* in its own way, and stressed that the web of relationships among castes should be considered as a network of idyllic mutuality (Wiser, 1958), and as a complex system of integration (Dumont, 1974). Leach further extends the argument by saying that "The caste system . . . is a system of labor division from which the element of competition among the workers has been largely excluded. Far more than an analysis which stressed hierarchy and exclusiveness of caste separation is the economic

interdependence which stems from the patterning of the division of labor which is of a quite special type" (1960:5).

Whatever may be the arguments, it is understood that the institution of the caste system is composed of certain universal Hindu ideas and it has been a key institution integrating the culture. In Kerala, like the other parts of India, castes are arranged in hierarchical order, from the highly purified castes to the highly polluted castes. The basis of such a hierarchy rests on the idea of incarnation and Karma, and the concepts of purity and pollution. Karma, a law of the universe, judges the good and bad deeds that a person does while he/she is alive and determines future fate by past actions. Thus, the highest castes in India are said to be in the upper strata because of their good behavior in a previous life; whereas position of the lowest castes is the result of their evil deeds in their past life. Some scholars viewed the reincarnation and Karma concepts as the backbone for an ideology of the caste system (Weber, 1958).

It is generally agreed that the ranking of castes is based on the concept of hierarchy. The means to evaluate hierarchal rankings are the elements of purity, impurity, and pollution (Stevenson, 1954; Beck, 1972; Dumont, 1974; Kolenda, 1978). In the caste hierarchy, the principles of purity, impurity, and pollution operate to keep the segments (i.e., castes) separate from one another, where in Brahmins are at the apex as a pure group; and polluting untouchable castes are

at the bottom; the rest of the castes are arranged under Brahmins in a sequence in accordance with their occupational specializations ranked by purity and pollution customs.

The justification for the supremacy of Brahmins is their ability to communicate with the gods for the total society's well being. As it is a basic need for the society, the lower castes absorb pollution for the Brahmin and for other upper castes (Dumont, 1974). Thus, purity is vitally linked to self control, and to a need for an agreed upon division of labor (Beck, 1972). In a village or a town, the matrix of the caste rankings could be grasped through the "attributional" and "interactional" approaches. "Attributional" ranking is defined as the alleged rank order which informants claim for their own and other castes; "interactional" ranks are the conclusions by the observer from actual symbolic interaction between persons (Yalman, 1969:128).

Whether or not a caste is pure or impure depends mainly on its occupation. Each caste is bounded by two other castes, one above and the other below in accordance with the respective comparative rankings of purity and impurity. Thus, the differences in degree of pollution creates closed segments, as each segment tries to preserve its own degree of purity from contamination by lower castes. It is, in turn, excluded as a contaminator by castes above (Dumont, 1974). Besides contact with lower castes, the other agents causing states of purity are contacts with death, birth, menstruation,

sexual intercourse, defecation, urination, bodily dirt, and food materials. In addition to the usual agents of pollution, according to Mencher, in Kerala, "people whose mere approach within certain well defined distances carried atmospheric pollution; . . . . Indeed, indirect 'pollution' of a high caste individual by an untouchable was carried to an extreme in Kerala where the shadow of cheruman (untouchable) would pollute a Nayar on the road" (1965:166). In this way, the concepts of purity and pollution are particularly elaborated and highly structured in Kerala.

With such religio-ethical impressions, the caste system in Kerala developed extreme rigidity and complexity due to its relative isolation from other parts of India in pre-British days; indeed, without a counterpart in the Indian subcontinent. It is said that Brahmins with vedic knowledge and caste structure migrated to Kerala at some time in the early years of Anno Domini. Since then Kerala's social system was so structured that none dared to question the Brahmin hegemony until the days of the secular state in modern India.

The most persistent feature of Kerala's social system is its organization into castes or Jathis, which are large scale descent groups. A caste may be defined as "a group in which membership is determined by birth and which is hierarchically graded with respect to other groups, has restrictions on commensality, is often associated with a traditional occupation, is endogamous or permits a limited kind of

hypergamy and which can be polluted by direct or indirect contact with a "lower group" in certain contexts" (ibid). Each caste may further be divided into sub-castes or Jathis. In general, castes are polysegmental, each segment characterized by its own functions, and identified by its own relative 'status'.

Regional differences are found in Kerala's caste composition and kinship organizations. Considering such variations, Gough (1961:305) divided Kerala conventionally into three regions: Central Kerala, comprises the British south Malabar region (formerly the kingdoms of Calicut, Walluvanad and Palghat) and Cochin state; north Kerala, the region to the north of Calicut and Kora River, which is coterminus with the former kingdoms of Nileswaram, Kolattunad, Kottayam, and Kodattunad (British north Malabar district); and south Kerala, is equivalent to the Travancore state (Fig. 1).

As elsewhere in India, Brahmins (i.e., Nambudiri Brahmins) are at the apex of the traditional Kerala caste hierarchy. According to 1968 census, Malayali Brahmins (0.05%) together with foreign Brahmins (1.2%) made up approximately 1.7 percent of the Kerala population (Fuller, 1976). Being the landed aristocracy and religious elite, traditionally they enjoyed highest prestige and status, enforced the moral and ritual laws. As remarked by Logan, "his person is holy; his directions are command; his movements are a procession; his meals nectar; he is the holiest of human

beings; the representative of God on earth" (as quoted in Mayer, 1974:26). Interestingly, their geographical distribution was not uniform throughout the traditional Kerala. Their population densities were relatively sparse in southern and northern Kerala; while central parts of Kerala maintained the greatest Nambudiri concentrations, where they had the greatest amount of economic and political power (in Mencher and Goldberg, 1967).

Depending on certain rights and privileges, they were divided into two categories - Ottullavar (entitled to study vedas) and Ottilattuvar (prohibited to study vedas). They were further divided into a number of mutually-ranked subdivisions with respective occupations such as ritual, philosophy, medicine, and land management (Rao, 1957; Mayer, 1974). The subdivisions were, and are divided into exogamous gotras, like other Brahmins in India. They are patrilineal (with an exception of one or two matrilineal local communities) and lived in large scale joint families (patrilineal and patrilocal) called Illams. They strictly practiced primogeniture rule to arrest the proliferation of lineage segments, hence no fragmentation of the landed property. Nambudiris maintained symbiotic relationships with Nayers in the name of (Sham) marriage alliances, which allowed them to sleep with Nayar women. But in the name of caste purity, "Brahmin women are never allowed to sleep with Nayar

men and if caught the most severe and sadistic measures are taken against them" (Yalman, 1963:41-42).

Ranking below the Nambudiris are the non-Malayali Brahmins and two other immigrant Brahmin groups from Tulu (Embrantiris) and Tamilnadu (Pattars). Most of them were engaged in clerical work, trade, temple maintenance, petty business, and were also employed as cooks in Nambudiri and royal families. "They sometimes got the status of Nambudiris where the latter were not found in good numbers" (Rao, 1957:20).

A group of (Pseudo?) Kshathriyas and some intermediary castes (Antharala Jathis) like the Samanthans and the Ambalavasis occupy the respective successive levels below the Brahmins in the social order. The minority population, traditionally the matrilineal Kshathriyas and Samanthans, constituted the ruling aristocracy, comprised various royal and chiefly lineages, owned huge portions of land. It is said that here were no real Kshathriya groups in Kerala after the disappearance of Perumals. It appears that in later years the wealthy and influential Nayars raised their status from the Shudra division, claimed the status of Kshathriya through a process of Sanskritization (Mayer, 1974; Fuller, 1976).

The Samanthans (ruling chiefs) are considered the dominant lineages of the highest subcastes of Nayars. Some of them, like the Zamorin of Calicut, were powerful kings. Both Kshathriyas and Samanthans were matrilineal; and most of them



observed a matrilocal family pattern. The Ambalavasis are a complex group of subcastes, mainly concerned with temple services with varied functions, for example the Chakiyars recited and interpreted the puranas, the Variyans swept the temples, the Pushpagans provided flowers for the shrines. Unlike the above high castes, they had three types of kinship patterns - some matrilineal, some patrilineal, and some combination of the two (Mencher, 1965). In the name of Sambandham unions, most of the above said castes have had sexual access to Nayar women; on the other hand the women of the ruling classes and chiefly lineages might take Brahmin husbands.

The largest proportions of the Hindu population in Kerala are represented by the Nayars and the Izhavas. Below the royalty and other ruling classes (although differentiated as Kshathriya and Samanthan subdivision, I follow Fuller (1975, 1976) in saying that these two subdivisions could be regarded as "supereminent" Nayar subdivisions which have occupied differential positions in the caste hierarchy owing to the factors of status emulation through the process of excessive Sanskritization came the various hierarchically placed subdivisions of Nayars, which however, varied from region to region. "Jatinirnayam" (a native version which explains the origin and persistence of Malayali castes in accordance with their traditional occupations) approximates the standard descriptions given by Menon, Iyer, Innes and Gough (Fuller

1975). Nayars constituted 2.9 million or 14.5 percent of Kerala's total population in 1968 (ibid). As stated by Miller, traditionally Nayars were responsible for maintaining the social and the moral code in each local community (1954:411). "To them belonged the duty of supervision (lit. Kan = the eye), the executive power (lit. Kei = the hand; as the emblem of power), and the giving of orders (lit. Kalpana = order, command)" (in Jeffrey, 1976:2).

The Nayar subdivisions can broadly be classified into three categories: high caste Nayars; intermediate caste Nayars; menial or low caste Nayars. The high caste Nayars included the warrior groups and other groups who served in different capacities for the sacred and secular aristocrats (ie. Nambudiris, Kshathriyas and Samanthans). Intermediate castes are those who performed various tasks for temples (copper working or making earthen ware); the low caste Nayars served other Nayars as washermen, barbers, and oil-mongers (Mencher, 1965:167). The latter two groups are more or less endogamous castes and do not dine together with high caste Nayars.

The existence of numerous subdivisions among Nayars created some theoretical problems in defining them as a single caste. They have been referred to as castes, sub-castes, status groups, and a population. Such discussions pose the question, whether or not to consider all the subdivisions under a single sociological type. If not, how should one

define them? After considering several possibilities, according to Fuller [1975:309]:

It (the Nayars) is a large, named social group (or, perhaps preferably, category) with a stable status, vis-a-vis other castes in Kerala. It is not however, a solidary group, . . . it is never likely to become one. It is internally divided into a number of different types of group. First, the few large groupings, to which the overwhelming majority of Nayars belong, also have stable status. (It would, of course, be foolish to repeat a mistake and conclude that the large divisions represent some sort of solidary blocks, obviously they do not). Second, there are (or rather were) many very small groups with unstable status; these were lineage - based groupings engaged in a status game at the highest levels of the caste. Third there were subdivisions consisting of either upwardly mobile groups or conglomerates of lineage - based groups, which had statuses less stable than the large subcastes, but more stable than the small, high ranking subdivision. Over time, this third type of subdivision would normally (though not inevitably) gain increasingly stable status.

Let us see the intricacies that led Fuller to propose such an exhaustive definition. Much has been written on the proliferation of sub-castes in Kerala. Interestingly, such processes were primarily confined to the matrilineal castes such as Nayars, Ambalavasis, and Samanthans. As evident from the literature, it mainly occurred in Malabar and Cochin states, where in the Nayar royal and chiefly matrilineal groups struggled for supremacy; the Nambudiris with higher population concentrations wielded considerable economic and indirect political power; and the symbiotic relationships between these two aristocratic classes existed in terms of hypergamous marriages. Such institutions also prevailed in other parts of Kerala owing to the factors of "imitation."

Mencher points out that, "this subcaste proliferation is probably correlated with hypergamous unions, and thus it is not surprising that this structural feature occurred with greatest frequency in the area where there was the greatest concentration of Nambudiri Brahmins" (1966:159). One other aspect that relates to the Nayar subdivisions is the institution of caste titles as Nayars' last names. A caste title labels a family's or a subdivision's social precedence depending on its occupational specialization. Most of the titles were conferred as marks of honor by kings and chiefs. Such honors entitled the recipients certain privileges (Ayyar, 1938). "Further, there was nothing to prevent Nayars awarding themselves these titles, as they certainly used to and perhaps still do" (as quoted in Fuller, 1975:286). Such distinctions among Nayar subdivisions rather suggest that a sort of caste system exists within the Nayar caste.

In reality, some locally dominant lineages or families in their thirst to raise their sacred-secular status through hypergamous marriages with the 'sacred' groups tend to seclude themselves from other members of their caste. These efforts in turn result in geographical and positional mobilities, hence 'fission'. "Thus ascent in the hierarchy was achieved, not by a regional caste but by a section of it, which subsequently fissioned out and shaped itself as a new caste" (in Mencher, 1966:159). Likewise, several dominant and competent Nayar families in Kerala, in their 'inclusive'

approaches to the higher levels of the social order happened to enter into hypergamous relationships and imitated the 'supreme' castes by changing their social and ritual behavior, in turn alienating themselves from the original stratum. In this puzzle of social or ritual precedence, according to Gough (1971:371), ". . . each of these aristocratic lineages tended to set itself up as a separate sub-caste, acknowledging ritual superiors and inferiors but acknowledging no peers." In this connection, Unni (in Mencher, 1966:159) notes:

In the process of mobility, sanskritizing of practices and rituals was not so important as altering social selections and expressing the achieved degree of mobility in behavior of corresponding symbolic value . . . once husbands came from higher castes or royal families, what was required was to curtail social relations with others of one's caste and pattern it on the principle of superordination - subordination as conspicuously as possibilities could permit . . . one procedure might be to assure a caste name of a higher caste in the same area (emphasis mine).

As one can see in the preceding pages, scholars viewed the origin and coexistence of the subdivisions of Nayars in different ways. Dumont (1964:98), in his reaction to such interpretations, pictures the issue from a totally different angle:

Are the Nayars, . . . a caste, and are their subdivisions really castes or sub-castes? . . . whether . . . is an old population which has adapted itself to Hindu influence by inner stratification and close combination with Hindu castes or whether a name endowed with prestige (Nayar: 'ruler') has been borrowed by lower levels of society and has become a term for most of the native population, it is clear that we have to do with populations, not with castes. . . . Among the Nayars an exogamous lineage or cluster of lineages

of a certain status cannot be called a sub-caste. . . . All these are actually status groups, and we can look at the population as being divided into status groups, which may be absolutely (or practically) endogamous at one end, and exogamous at the other.

Certainly, status groups (instead of sub-caste) is a preferred term to refer to the small groups (an exogamous lineage or cluster of lineages) of higher ranked Nayars; but any attempt to apply the same criterion to the remaining groups would be a false generalization. Here we are dealing with a dominant group whose traditional institutions happened to be in "limbo" due to several historical causalities. An insight into their social history explicates how their behavior was structured within the limits of caste rules and regulations in accordance with the traditional Varna codes. Nevertheless, it is also true that they lacked certain features of a 'true' caste. In my view, this has to be understood through the concept of sanskritization which played a major role in terms of caste mobility (upward) not only in Kerala but all over India in pre-British times. "Given that Nayars live in a caste society, they must evidently fit into the caste system at some level or another" (Fuller, 1975:291).

Extensive sanskritization (which is complex and multicausal) in certain pockets of Nayars caused structural ambiguity, resulting in numerous subdivisions or status groups. Such groups are involved in a ritual and social status game for upward mobility in the social milieu. As evident elsewhere in India, group mobility has been a

characteristic of the Indian caste system (Srinivas, 1970: Kuppuswamy, 1972); which, however depended on whether or not the lower caste's claims were acceptable to the "governing elite."

Sanskritization refers to a caste's positional change (low to high) in the Varna system. The claims by the lower castes for upward mobility should be legitimized by the religious elite. In circumstances like that, as evident from the history of India, several ethnic groups of low status in different places at different times depending on their relative social, economic, political, and (mainly) ritual prospects were lifted up, recruited as kings or rulers, kept under a wide umbrella of Kshathriya Varna. "The capacity of both ancient and medieval Indian society to ascribe to its actual rulers, frequently men of low social origins, a 'clean' or Kshathriya rank may afford one of the explanations for the durability and longevity of the unique Indian civilization" (in Srinivas, 1966:32).

A similar situation happened in Kerala, where some local Nayar rulers (nominally a Shudra caste) were afforded Kshathriya status. This kind of rank or status differentiation in association with the already existing fluid politico-economic system (feudal anarchy) rather created a competition between the rulers to expose their supremacy, hence rank or status disputes. In such struggles "Nayar chiefs also arose with mushroom rapidity. . . . Political and

social nobility among Nayar aristocrats was thus more marked in northern Kerala than the more stable central kingdoms. Indeed, a north Kerala proverb remarks that "When a high caste Nayar becomes ripe, he turns into a king" (Gough, 1961:386-387). The local rulers to handle the ruled even manipulated to promote or demote castes (in terms of rankings) inhabiting their kingdoms or chiefdoms (Srinivas, 1966).

In the turmoil of status raisings, hypergamy had become institutionalized at the upper levels, served as a compromise between the 'sacred' (Nambudiri Brahmins) and 'secular' (Nayar royalty) governing elites, in turn enhanced the purity of Nayars. Even among different sections of the same caste, hypergamy may occur, provided such sections are more or less clearly distinguishable (ibid). Emphasizing the aspects of purity in hypergamous ideology, Yalman notes that "the sexuality of men receives a generous carte blanche. But it always matters what the women do: (a) They may have sexual relations with 'superior' and 'pure' men, no harm comes to them in terms of purity, (b) They may have children from 'pure' men; or from men of their own caste" (1963:42).

Thus, different factors which are associated with 'emulation' rather kept the subdivisions of Nayar under an ongoing conflict, causing status uncertainty among the competing groups. Especially, such efforts of status raising occurred among the highest-ranking and most powerful or wealthy Nayars (Fuller, 1975). On the other hand, lowest



castes that are absorbed into the low-ranking Nayar sub-castes, have to face the same problem of unstable status; owing to the fact that status stabilization and recognition of a caste or subcaste in the caste hierarchy need a long period of time (Mencher, 1966). In between these two types of competing groups, exists more or less a stable group consisting of populous Nayar divisions. Fuller considers this middle group as the stable "core" of the system. Thus, the upper and lower borders of the 'core' are occupied by the higher and lower ranked subdivisions, which lack stable statuses (Fuller, 1975).

As the upper levels are subjected to changing political and economic environments, it would become difficult for a particular status group to keep up a stable status, hence chances of forming a sub-caste are meager. The lower caste's position in the hierarchy becomes uncertain immediately after status "alteration," but over time through a gradual process of achieved occupational identity, would tend to stabilize its status. Once it exhibits a specific identity in the social structure, it could be qualified as a sub-caste. The larger divisions (or sub-castes) that form the 'core' are said to have been in existence since the ninth century. "If this is true, then most of the members of these groups would certainly qualify as sub-castes though they might have originated as status groups" (Mencher, 1966:160).

Signifying such social realities, it could be possible to conclude that Nayers constitute a caste in wider terms, and they are a part of the caste structure of Kerala. Considering this, it is plausible to say that, broadly, the Nayar caste is a three tier intracaste system, wherein the middle layers possess the needed basic features of Jathi to constitute higher ranked sub-castes; lower subdivisions, though originating as unstable status groups would stabilize as low ranking Nayar sub-castes over time; while the groups at the higher levels are muddled with a complex of 'status raising' activities and would remain as 'status groups' with uncertain statuses.

All the castes so far mentioned are called 'Savarna' ('high', or 'clean', or 'pure') castes. Other castes that underlie savarnas are 'Avarnas' ('low', or 'unclean', or 'polluting'). Almost two-thirds of the Hindus in Kerala are members of the polluting castes (avarnas) (Miller, 1954). The rankings of these castes are based on the degree of pollution by distance. "For instance, a Makkuvan must keep 24 feet from a Nambudiri, a Izhava 32, a Cheruman 64, and a Nayadi 72" (in Rao, 1957:21).

The polluting castes can broadly be divided into two groups - "upper polluting castes" and "lower polluting castes" (or 'depressed', or 'downtrodden'). The constituents of the upper polluting castes are the patrilineal artisan castes (or Kammalas), for example, Ashari (Carpenter) Kallan (stone

carver), Kollan (blacksmith), Mushari (brass and copper smith, and Thattan (goldsmith); Izhavas (toddy tappers); and other castes such as astrologers, physicians, and launderers.

Izhavas are the high among upper polluting castes, and the largest single caste in the population of Kerala. Their estimated population in 1968 was 22.2 percent of the total population of Kerala (Fuller, 1976). Although their traditional occupation is toddy-tapping, most of them probably have been small tenant cultivators and agricultural laborers (Miller, 1954). They are called Tiyyans in north Malabar; Chavans in south Cochin and north Travancore; Thandans in south Malabar and north Cochin. In general, the Tiyyans of north Malabar and the Travancore Izhavas are matrilineal; the rest of Izhavas are patrilineal.

The Makkuvans and the Arayans are ranked below the astrologers, physicians, and launderers, whose traditional occupation has been fishing. The lowest strata of the caste hierarchy are occupied by the so-called untouchable castes namely the pulayas (Travancore and Cochin) or cherumans (Malabar), and the parayans. "The pulayas traditionally rank slightly above the parayans and, in Cochin, polluted Brahmins at 64 feet, whereas the distance for Parayans was 72 feet" (Fuller, 1976:35). Many of them were serfs or bonded laborers, tied to the land they worked. They were not allowed to use the public roads or places until the days of secular-

democracy. More or less all the depressed castes are patrilineal.

Nearly 40 percent of the population of Kerala (in 1968) constitutes non-Hindu communities namely Christians and Mappilas (Muslims). Christian concentrations are high in Travancore and Cochin and the Muslim's in the northern parts (Malabar). Both communities played considerable roles in the history of Kerala. It is said that the first Syrian Christian institution was founded by St. Thomas (A.D. 52). The latter day missionary activities influenced many suppressed communities, resulting in mass conversions. At present, Syrian Christians, Roman Catholics, and Protestant denominations are the main Christian groups. Christian communities in Kerala are patrilineal, and are associated with educational and commercial activities. Being a caste-less religious organization, Muslim religion was introduced in early periods, attracted mainly the lower castes. Muslims in coastal areas are fishermen, whereas their counterparts inland are small farmers and petty traders. Both the communities (non-Hindu) share some similarities with the caste Hindus. For example, Syrian Christians practice the Hindu custom of 'tali-tying'; Muslims retained the Hindu customs of inheritance (for example, Mappilas of north Malabar are matrilineal).

Each and every aspect of life, such as food, dress, denotation of houses of different castes mirrored the elements

of caste stratification. The intercaste relations are regulated and formalized by the basic codes of caste organization. For example, "until 1785 it was forbidden for women of the Chovans (Izhavas) and of those of the lower castes to wear any clothing above the loins" (in Rao, 1957:22). The traditional joint families are the sources to inculcate the caste rules that govern a caste's conduct and behavior in intercaste relations, which in turn help to maintain the traditional norms.

Such traditional norms or values have undergone drastic changes within the recent past through a process of "Indian pattern modernization." The basic religious beliefs and concomitants are still part of an individual's or a family's day to day activities, but in the outer world the early traditional norms that governed the intercaste relationships have been replaced by 'secularism' and 'socialistic democracy'. However, still castes live within their social and spatial limits in rural India, but the meanings of caste interrelationships and interactions (behavior) have altered through transformation of the traditional institutional form and content. A detailed note on social (caste) change and continuity will be given in the succeeding chapter.

### III: ii: KINSHIP AND FAMILY PATTERNS

Kerala is often referred to as an "extremely atypical Dravidian society." The unusual features of its caste system

and kinship organization make it the most divergent of all regions in India. Besides the extraordinary matrilineal institutions of Nayers, the patrilineal Namudiri Brahmins also have exotic social institutions without any equivalent in India. Making the region unique further, Syrian Christians and Mappilas (Muslims) exhibit a socio-cultural blending of their respective ideologies with some basic Hindu social values in their traditional institutions. "With such variety it is difficult to present one pattern of kinship for the people of Kerala and yet whatever the differences in family structure, they all use the Malayalam language and use a kinship terminology which differs but slightly from group to group" (Karve, 1968:291).

The castes in Kerala, can broadly be divided into three types based on the system of inheritance, the matrilineal castes (Marumakkattayam system of inheritance), for example, Kshathriyas, Ambalavasis, Samanthans, Nayers, Tiyyars (north Malabar), Mappilas (Muslims), (Calicut and north Malabar) and etc.; the patrilineal castes (Makkattayam system of inheritance), e.g., Nambudiris, foreign Brahmins, Kammalas, Izhavas (south Malabar, northern parts of Cochin and some parts of Travancore), Cherumas, Parayans, and so on; and groups of castes governed by a mixed (or doubtful) system of inheritance, for example, Pulayans, Izhavas (south of Quilon); Velans; Valans, some subdivisions of Ambalavasis and etc. (for other details, see Rao, 1957).

'Marumakkattayam' (Marumakan, sister's son; tayam, share or inheritance) and 'Makkattayam' (Makan, son) are the Malayalam equivalents of matrilineal and patrilineal descent systems respectively. Although their social structures accommodated symbiotic relationships, basically Nambudiris and Nayars differed in their traditional kinship patterns (i.e., organization and behavior) and in marriage system. For Nayars, marumakkattayam is the basic organizing principle, where as Nambudiris lay extreme emphasis on Makkattayam and on primogeniture. Such an extreme emphasis on marumakkattayam together with an 'ignorance of paternity' led the Nayars to form a . . . , ". . . classic case of the coming together of a system of residence and property, and matrilineal institutions" (Fox, 1983:101). On the other hand, Nambudiris, though a part of patrilineal domain of India, contradict some basic features of Indian traditional patriliney (Mencher and Goldberg 1967:87-106).

In this section, I will first present the matrilineal elements of traditional Nayar kinship. As the earlier studies were associated with the populous Nayar sub-divisions, my discussions will be relevant mainly to these groups. Secondly, I provide Nayar marriage rules and practices with an emphasis on Nayar and Nambudiri symbiotic relationships and the Nayar kinship pattern which will be viewed as a variant of the Dravidian kinship system in my discussions.

Nayars use the word 'taravad' to refer to a matrilineal descent group. In a taravad, all members are recruited based on the principle of "descent through the female line." Such descent is traced through a common ancestress. A traditional Nayar taravad consists of all matrilineally related kin comprising several married sisters, their brothers, their children, their mother and sisters, and others. As noted by Schneider, it may occasionally be, ". . . a lineage or clan which owns property, which assembles for legal, administrative, ceremonial or other purposes, and which has a head" (1961:4). In general, it is a segment of the descent group which constitutes the matrilineal joint family, a corporate descent group. Among Nayars, the word taravad is used for a clan, for a lineage, and for a matrilineal household unit.

In former days, the largest matrilineal unit among the Nayars was a clan, a taravad. Taravad is derived from the word 'tara', which means 'mound.' In its broader meaning it refers to a 'house' (i.e., ancestral) or to a 'neighborhood'. The members of a clan within a given neighborhood formed a lightly knitted social group with limited reciprocities. As expressed by Gough, such a group had strictly maintained clan exogamy, practiced 'ritual pollution' (1961:323-324). Clan exogamy was a traditional rule and sex relations within a neighborhood or clan were strictly prohibited. At the times of death or birth, the clansmen observed ritual pollution for



a period ranging from three to fifteen days. With the exception of these few relationships, the members of a clan were not obligated in any legal or economic transactions, hence a non-corporate group. Usually, the fissioning of a clan was allowed only by consensus of its members.

Usually, a neighborhood contained six to ten lineages, and each lineage was referred to as taravad. According to Gough, ". . . a lineage normally comprised some four to eight households, each a matrilineal segment of three to six generations depth including the youngest children and the common ancestress" (Ibid:325). Like in the clan, the members of a lineage maintained strict lineage exogamy and observed ritual pollution at a birth or a death. Besides these activities, the members of the related lineages were drawn into cooperative activities at the times of prepubertal marriage ceremonies of girls, funerals of their members, and other life-crisis ceremonies. The various linked lineages in such activities of ceremonial cooperation were called 'enangans'. Generally, these enanger relationships were maintained on a hereditary basis.

Although property as a rule could not be divided, the fissioning of a taravad was possible only through mutual consent of the members. Usually, a taravad tended to split off because of a totally unwieldy membership (for other details, see Mencher, 1965:169). The segments of the mother taravad were called 'tavazhis' (i.e., literally, tavazhi means

'motherline'). By definition, a tavazhi is the segment of a taravad, consisting of a group of matrilineally related individuals headed by a living ancestress. Through segmentation, each tavazhi receives an equal part of the ancestral property irrespective of its size. In reality, such a partition occurs for the sake of 'convenience' but not due to the individual claims by its members. After division, each tavazhi maintains its own property without any involvement with others. However, in matters other than property, they show a sort of common identity. Three structural principles thus involved in the taravad segmentary lineage system are matrilineal descent, a rule of lineage or subgroup exogamy, and the indivisibility of the property (Rao, 1957).

'Property group' is the general anthropological term used to refer to a group or a segment that collectively owns the property (Gough, 1961: Fuller, 1976). In the past, the members in this "joint-property owning unit" were the sisters, their brothers, their classificatory siblings, their children and their daughters' children with a common living ancestress. In this way, according to Gough, "its members were from birth equal co-partners in the buildings, land, movables, serfs, and all other property which had come to them from their matrilineal fore-bearers, or had been conferred on them by either feudal lords, or had been acquired by the efforts of individual members" (1961:334).

For proper distinction of persons from subunit to subunit within a matrilineage, Nayar men in the bygone days used to have a long name which included the clan name, lineage name, household name, personal name, and a caste title. For example, as reported by Gough (1961:325), the name, Thengi Parambil Padikkil Kirakkutt-Vellappil Govindan Nair denotes the above particulars: clan of the coconut garden, lineage of the gate house, household of the eastern garden, Govindan (personal name), Nair (caste title). But a group that continued to live on the ancestral lands would have a clan name instead of clan, lineage, and household distinctions. As stated by Fuller (1976), as well as according to my informants, the name of a man in the parental generation of the present day Nayars would include a clan name, an inherited name (usually the mother's brother's [Karanavan] name), a given personal name, and a caste or a subcaste title. For example, Ramavilasam (clan name), Parameswaran Pillai (Mother's brother's name), Krishnan (personal name), Nair (Caste title). The components of the name, in fact symbolizes the social status of an individual or a family in a given community, which is helpful mainly at the time of marriage alliances.

Usually, a number of clans or subclans of Nayars were, and are, spread throughout a territorial division. The reconstruction of a whole clan would be a difficult task. In Fuller's village Ramankara, different branches of the Vadakkil

clan could not provide a clear picture to allow him to reconstruct the genealogy; according to him, clansmen statements about, ". . . the relationships between the various subclans are vague and contradictory" (1976:55). Such a confusion lies in the fact that the members within a property owning group would remember the genealogical connections provided they have any relevance to the inheritance of property. In other ways, as stated by Gough, . . . , ". . . the order of segmentation was unimportant for the structure of interlineage relationships" (Gough, 1961:362). Traditionally, the clansmen met once a year on the occasion of annual taravad Sarpakkavu (Serpent grove) festival, which was the time for the related subclans to propitiate their common gods also.

As noted before, the property group was the basic matrilineal unit of the traditional Nayar social organization. Each property group maintained contacts with its related branches mainly in terms of non-corporate activities. Until recently, the property group and the household were usually congruent (Fuller, 1976). All the matrilineally related members, males and females, lived together in one house, descended from a common ancestress. Such a residence was called taravad, which was coterminous with a matrilineal joint family. The time depth of the property group varied slightly from region to region. In Cochin, according to Gough, "the property group among Nayar retainers was a segment of the lineage having a time depth of some three to six generations,

including the youngest members and the common ancestress" (1961:334). Mencher found a more or less similar picture in south Malabar, where, ". . . the normal household of all but the poorest Nayar retainer families was often considerably larger and had a time depth of six to eight generations" (1961:232).

This is to say that the members of a taravad were recruited from different successive generations who descended from a common ancestress matrilineally, lived together as a property group as well as a common household. Whereas in Travancore region, Fuller observed that the time depth of a group was rarely greater than four generations (1976:56). Whatever may be the size of a taravad, the conduct and behavior of the members were formalized and strongly regulated by the matrilineal ideology.

Traditionally, the residential patterns varied from region to region. Due to the impact of strong matrilineal institutions, the nuclear family gradually became more prominent only during and after the 19th century due to the factors of modernization. Owing to this fact, emergence of different residential patterns in different regions occurred in this period depending on local conditions. Thus, in south Malabar and Cochin, residence was either duolocal or uxorilocal (Gough, 1955-56, 1961, 1973; Mencher, 1962; Nakane, 1962); which means, the husbands visited their wives after supper, returning to their own taravads before breakfast. The

situation in north Malabar resembles Malinowski's Trobrianders; the residential pattern was avunculocal/virilocal, meaning the sons upon marriage returned to their ancestral houses, and the daughters after marriage left the natal houses to live with their husbands (Gough, 1955-56, 1961, 1973). For the majority of the Nayers in Travancore region, the residence was avunculocal or uxorilocal (Gough, 1973: Fuller, 1976).

In general, among the matrilineal groups the authority runs through men like in patrilineal groups, but unlike patrilineal societies group placement in matrilineal societies is through the female line. Such matrilineal groups, as remarked by Schneider, ". . . depend for their continuity and operation on retaining control over both males and females" (1961:8). In a traditional taravad the property belonged to every member of it on collective grounds irrespective of sex. The traditional family unit neither provided a role for the father nor gave him a status. The husband was a mere sexual companion, who impregnated the women on behalf of the men of the matrilineage (Fox, 1983). Thus, it was not father but the male members of the matrilineal group who had overall authority over the children of the family unit.

With such a structure, the traditional Nayar family organization contradicts Murdock's universal definition of the family. He defines family as, ". . . a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and

reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relation, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults," and he goes on to stress that the nuclear family or elementary family is a universal human social grouping that serves the four universal functions: sexual, economic, educational and reproduction (1949:1-3). Contradicting his statements, later studies revealed that these four functions are distributed among different status (Spiro, 1968); and among Nayars the traditional marital tie, ". . . did not involve co-residence, sexual exclusiveness, maintenance, or domestic services" (Gough, 1961:595).

Nevertheless, the emergence of a pseudo-elementary family occurred in the 19th century. During this time, as Mencher elucidated, ". . . emphasis was placed not on the establishment of a western type of elementary family unit, but on starting a new tavazhi where one's wife could be free of the older men and women of the taravad, particularly those in different lineages. The husband whose money helped to start this new tavazhi might co-reside with his wife and children all of the time, part of the time, or not at all, depending on his responsibilities in his own taravad" (1962:233-234). Such activities by the husbands before the 1930's, occurred late in the man's life, hence involvement of a husband in his wife's taravad was very limited. Excluding the role of a father or a husband, a typical taravad was composed of a woman, her

sisters, her brothers, her daughters and daughter's children, her sister's children, her classificatory sisters' and their children, and other related members through her dead ancestress.

In such a family setup, the overall authority used to be within the hands of the head of the family, called "Karanavan." Karanavan was the oldest male member of the matrilineal group, whose appointment to the headship was based on the criterion of seniority (i.e., age) regardless of his generation. Usually, the mother's eldest brother, or sometimes a nephew if there was no maternal uncle, took over the headship of a taravad. "At times, where there were no adult male members, the woman herself would be the head of the tavari, though this was contrary to custom" (Mencher, 1962:234).

It is evident from the anthropological literature that the mother's brother plays a significant role in matrilineal societies as well as in patrilineal or patrilateral societies (Malinowski, 1929; Radcliff-Brown, 1956; Schneider and Gough, 1961; Heusch, 1974; Bessac, 1982). In patrilineal or patrilateral societies the authoritative role of father is cross-checked by the maternal uncle as, "the mother's brother was responsible to see that foul play was not visited upon his sister by her parents-in-law and husband to insure that his nieces and nephews were well brought up" (Bessac, 1982:131). Contrary to this equalizing role, the mother's brother in



matrilineal societies tends to be a figure of respect and authority, suppressing the "father-right." This is due to the fact that the women and children in matrilineal societies are protected, controlled, and provisioned not by the father but by the men (especially oldest mother's brother) of the respective matrilineages.

Likewise, the Karanavan in a traditional Nayar taravad was a highly respected and authoritative figure. He maintained complete authority over his juniors; and, ". . . the relationships between a young man and woman and the Karanavan was one of great distance, respect, a kind of awe mingled with fear and at times a nonverbalized hostility" (Mencher, 1965:181). Two aspects that distinguished the members of a taravad were that of age and sex. The conduct and behavior of the members were prescribed and patterned in accordance with age and sex (a feature found among Dravidian speakers), resulting in clear distinctions between males and females, and between seniors and juniors.

In all societies which emphasize kinship, the juniors were expected to be obedient and subservient towards elders. In this complex of differentiations, being the head of the family, the Karanavan exercised absolute power over the members of taravad. For example, he punished the deviants; hence he received the highest respect and fear were due him. In some prominent taravads there used to be hereditary statuses of special dignity, called 'Sthanams'. These special

statuses were provided to the senior most-woman of the entire taravad, and to the next junior man to the Karanavan, allowing special privileges (Rao, 1957).

The Karanavan managed the entire movable and immovable property (mainly 'land', which symbolized socio-economic status) of the taravad. Though head of the family, he did not have any rights to sell or to divide the property without consent of the taravad members. Neither the Karanavan nor any other member of the taravad was permitted to claim any portion of the property because of the joint-ownership of the property by each and every members of the of the taravad. But Fuller says that, ". . . such jural democratic principles had little sway in the autocracy which was the taravad; if the Karanavan and perhaps the one or two other important men in the group decided on partition, then the nominal agreement of other junior members could be counted upon " (1976:59).

On the other hand, in former days, in some taravads, men were permitted (but occasionally) to acquire personal properties during their lifetimes. But these were subjected to the condition that such self-acquired properties should revert to the concerned mother taravads upon their death. At the turn of 19th century (and in early years of the present century), as examined by Gough and Mencher, in central Kerala, some men acquired their properties on the basis of personal abilities, and established new matrilineal joint families, which traced descent from their respective wives instead of

their mother taravads (Gough, 1952; Mencher, 1962). But in Travancore region, according to Fuller (1976), such activities by men did not occur as the opportunities for acquiring property were poor.

Traditionally, the internal management of a taravad was administered by the Karanavan. He was the manager of taravad economic activities such as cultivation, purchases, and so on; and distributor of food and other domestic materials to the members of taravad. He provided maintenance allowances to the members, the main item of a taravad's expenditure (Rao, 1957). The expenditure of annual festivals, and ceremonies associated with rites of passage was met by the Karanavan, and it was his responsibility to maintain the socio-economic status of every member of the taravad. Usually taravads had a common kitchen in which all members of the family messed together. But when, like in the north Malabar and Khasargood, the satellite family units of a main taravad were spread over a few villages, the junior members of the respective subunits were entrusted with the day-to-day management, and were expected to inform the Karanavan about every day expenditures. The main taravad supplied the needed food and other domestic materials to its subunits for a given period.

The Karanavan administered the 'jural' and 'moral' codes of the taravad. Inside the family he was a strict disciplinarian, and outside the family he was a dignitary on behalf of the family. He represented the taravad in the

'Karayogam' (the Nayar caste council) as head of the family. He acted as an arbitrator for internal disputes of the taravad; on the other hand, in the Karayogam, as described by Gough, " . . . a Karanavan acted on behalf of his property group in managing the Nayar temple, settling small disputes in his own and lower castes, and adjudicating in cases of offense against Nayar religious law" (1961:339). He was the middleman for land tenure transactions between the feudal lord and the economically dependent agriculture labor of the lower castes. In central Kerala, such an authority (jural and moral) of the Karanavan was endorsed by the local chiefs, ultimately the king (Gough, 1961:339-340).

With such a de jure authority, the Karanavan exercised extraordinary powers over his family members, enjoyed highly respected special status. According to some accounts, the Karanavans (but not all) took undue advantage on the basis of their superior powers. It was not uncommon that some Karanavans transferred some of their taravads' properties to their beloved wives and children, without proper knowledge of the junior members of the concerned taravads (Fuller, 1976). This kind of internal exploitation or unchecked power infringed on the traditional law, resulting in conflicts or misunderstandings between the Karanavan and other members of the family.

The power of the Karanavan over junior members and on the common property were restrained only after the introduction of

British law in the early decades of the present century. The new British law permitted the junior members to appeal to the courts against the Karanavans to contest mismanagement. If found guilty they could be removed from their posts. The new law demanded the Karanavans to maintain proper accounts of the transactions of the taravad as well as his personal income and expenditures. According to Gough, "Since 1933 in Malabar district and 1938 in Cochin, all Karanavans have been legally obliged to do this and to make available their accounts for inspection by junior members once a year, as provided in the Madras Marumakkattayam (Matriliny) Act, 1933 and the Cochin Nayar Act, 1938" (1961:341). Such legal changes were brought about in Travancore by the enactment of Nayar Regulation Act, in 1925 (Rao, 1957).

Traditionally a belief in the ancestral spirits among Nayars helped to maintain the proper functioning of judicial duties within a taravad. Unlike other parts of India, and more or less like the Chinese ancestor cult, Nayars worshipped the dead legal guardians (either a Karanavan or the eldest man of the taravad) in the shrines within the family courtyards. Nayars depart from traditional Chinese customs in three aspects: firstly, they worshiped only the male ancestors of familial significance such as Karanavans and other elder male members; secondly, ancestral spirits among Nayars are both benevolent and (mainly) malevolent; and, thirdly, propitiation

of Nayar lineage ghosts (i.e., the dead legal guardians) would accompany other deities of the taravad (Hsu, 1963).

A belief in the malevolence of ancestral spirits among Nayars has some relevance to the moral and jural domains of the taravad organization. In sociological terms, it is a tool to punish the deviants for offenses such as failure to propitiate lineage ghosts, neglect of property, inhospitality to guests, unnecessary expenditure of income, failure to meet the rules and obligations of the taravad by junior and senior members and etc. In this connection Gough reports (1958:449):

The ghosts vary in their severity and in the wrongs which they punish. A Karanavan who amassed much property is most likely to resent extravagance on the part of successors. Forbearers who died prematurely are more punitive than those who died peacefully in old age. All ghosts, however, are somewhat capricious: a small offense may provoke stern retribution, and misdemeanors on the part of one adult may result in the sickness of another or of a child of the property group. In particular, a forebear who was injured or insulted by his juniors during life or after his death may wreak vengeance on the taravad even down to the seventh or eighth generation.

Thus, before the introduction of British law, the lineage ghosts were the only sanctions against the excessive powers and misdoings of the Karanavan, which also structured the conduct and behavior of the remaining members of the taravad. Besides, status and rank differentiation between the Karanavan and other family members, the principle of age ranking further dominated the interpersonal relationships. In their traditional kinship domain, the relative rankings of age and

generation were counted, not how the taravad members were related.

The traditional Nayar kinship terminology contains few matrilineal terms because Nayars recognize very few relationships outside the matrilineage and its spouses (Trautman, 1981). Irrespective of the genealogical connections, Nayar kin terms cluster together only individuals of the same sex and generation. The mother's brothers are classed together as 'ammaman' or 'ammavan'. There is no distinction of elder or younger ammaman. Ego is expected to address every brother of the mother as ammaman, irrespective of his or their age. In the same manner, the term 'ammayi' is used for mother's brother's wives. The female kin of the mother's generation are distinguished either as younger mother (cheriyamma) or older mother (valiyamma). The prefixes Valiya - and Cheriya - distinguish the elder and younger sisters of ego's mother. This kind of distinction among senior generations, based on seniority, is a basic feature of most Dravidian systems (ibid:171). 'Amma' is the term used for mothers, which is common to all the Dravidian speaking peoples except the Tulu (Rao, 1957); while the term for father is 'achan'.

The general terms for grandfather and grandmother are 'muttachan' and 'muttachi' or 'mutassi' respectively, whereas the matrilineal male kin of the same generation (i.e., second ascending generation) are grouped together as (mutta) ammaman,

their wives, as ammayi. Prefix mut- indicates the next ascendant, which is common to all the Dravidian languages except Tulu (ibid). The siblings of ego are distinguished by relative age and sex, called 'jyesthan' (elder brother); 'anujan' (younger brother); 'jyesthatti' (elder sister); and 'anujatti' (younger sister). The qualifiers jyestha- and anuja- distinguish the elder and younger siblings of ego. In the first descending generation, son and daughter are called 'makan' and 'makal' respectively, while the grandchildren are classed together as 'perakutti'. (For more details on Nayar kinship terminology, see Rao, 1957; Gough, 1961, 1973; Trautman, 1981).

In this ladder of age rankings, in former days, persons of the same sex and of the same generation maintained more or less symmetrical interpersonal relationships, and every senior member expected a kind of subordination from the juniors. In this connection, Mencher says that, ". . . every individual in the taravad older than ego had the right to give him orders, to punish him and to criticize his behavior" (1965:181). Such a stress on age ranking mainly concerned the male members of the taravad. This kind of friction in interpersonal relations would further result in deep hostility and rivalry, causing all men to envy their seniors and fear the rivalry of their juniors (Gough, 1961; Mencher, 1965).

The changes that occurred in the 19th century and in the early decades of the present century, further caused stress



and strains in male to male relations in a taravad. The breakup of Nayar armies together with the impact of the modern economy, initially brought in two alterations in the traditional family setup. As the traditional soldiering activities diminished, Nayar men had to settle down in villages (or in their taravads) to look after day-to-day economic activities which concerned the taravads. This change in turn encouraged the concept of monogamous marriage as the men maintained more or less continuous relationships with their wives because there was no need for long absence from the home as in earlier days. Such an emphasis on permanency of ties caused changes in male roles along with the transformation of the traditional residential pattern. At this stage, the role of father (or of husband) was gaining importance, strengthening bonds between a man and his wife and children.

Such intrusions by the men other than the matrilineal kinsmen created internal contradictions in matters of 'role performance' within traditional matrilineal families. The role of father, or husband, tended to shatter the traditional authority of matrilineal kinsmen, mainly that of the mother's brother. Even among male members of the matrilineal unit, contradictions arose in authority, widening the gap between seniors and juniors, resulting in a search for new principles to resolve the problems. As Mencher expressed, ". . . it was at this point, particularly during the 19th century, that a

potentially rivalrous situation was sparked and increased the importance, though undoubtedly the fact that a man had complete authority over his juniors and was owed unquestioning loyalty and respect led to resentment on the part of the juniors" (1965:182).

In spite of the contradictions, until the enactments in the early decades of the present century, the matrilineal ideology controlled the conduct and behavior of the family members on its own terms. Among the male members, the relation between mother's brother (ammaman) and nephew (marumakkal) had played an important role. In ideal terms, mother's brother was the legal guardian, who had complete responsibility in bringing up his sister's children. He had special rights in and obligations to his sisters, and to their children. As illustrated by Levi Strauss, the relation between maternal uncle and nephew mirrored the relation between brother and sister (1963:42).

The nephews were taught jural and moral codes of the caste and taravad, by the Karanavan. It was the Karanavan's responsibility to train his nephews in matters such as agricultural work, obedience to elders, maintaining good contacts with related subunits, internal management of taravad and so on. As noted before, a junior was supposed to respect all his seniors. He should be obedient, subservient, and loyal to them. Such behavior was considered reciprocal for the services rendered by the Karanavans and other seniors.

According to the traditional rules of intercourse, a junior or a nephew would never sit or talk in the presence of his mother's brother. As Gough remarked, "the etiquette of behavior between a man and his mother's brother was formalized to the point of avoidance" (1961:349). Every movement of a man was checked by the Karanavan; if found disobedient, he had the right to beat his sister's children. Such harshness, would lead the men to develop conscious hatred towards elders, but the traditional norms masked such feelings. Though members had internal hostility, the concept of noble traditions of a taravad suppressed revolutionary ideas.

During the transitory period of institutionalization of the elemental family, the noble bond between a mother's brother and nephews gradually disappeared, and the authoritarian and disciplinary role of mother's brother was replaced by the father in later years. In this transitional period, ". . . sister's children thought him (the Karanavan) to be an enemy who, ignoring their lawful claims, favored his own children" (Rao, 1957:122). It is said that such rivalry could end in the murder of the mother's brother by sister's son. It is noted in the literature that Karanavans were hated and their position was not safe (Rao, 1957; Gough, 1961).

Though maintaining distance, children in childhood would be playful visitors to their great maternal uncles (i.e., mother's mother's brothers). Children also maintained comparatively close relationships with young karanavans within

the limits of taravad rules of intercourse. A man's relations with the kinswomen of the taravad was primarily an admixture of respect and love. Both traditionally and in the modern day, the care of the children and responsibility for their welfare have fallen to the mother. The mother-child bond is considered 'noble' and 'sacred', which involves indulgence and discipline. In former days, though treated equal, sons would be given priority over daughters. As the pride of the taravad passed through her son, the mother was responsible to make the children into "proper adults" through her teachings on how to follow the rules and obligations of the matrilineal unit, specially inculcating obedience to the authority of her brother. The mother-child relationship was a combination of warmth and restraint, since the mother happened to be the child's primary source of emotional solace and the primary disciplining agent (Mencher, 1963). A grownup child's manners and behavior was considered a reflection of how well his/her mother performed her duty. When her son became the Karanavan, respecting the tradition, the mother paid him due respect and owed him obedience under law.

The other female members of a taravad played a considerable role in socializing the children. The mother's sisters, their daughters, maid servants, and small boys might assist in caring for the basic needs of the children. Although, the women from the subunits of a taravad involved in petty-quarrels, they maintained cordial relations with the

children. Especially, mother's sisters and elder daughters would fulfill (but occasionally) the role of the mother. "If one of the mother's sisters had no children of her own, a child might be closer to her than to his mother" (Mencher, 1963:59).

Being the head of the taravad, the mother's mother maintained a little distance from the children. Her motivation was that the children should act according to the rules of the society in order to pass on the grace and dignity of the family in future generations. On the other hand, she was often the main story-teller, whom the children would prefer for entertainment. Besides child rearing activities, the kinswomen performed the daily duties of the household on a cooperative basis; while in the leisure hours they would meet and spend time gossiping. Unlike the men, the younger and older kinswomen had relatively freer relationships, in which the attitudes of the younger toward the elders was marked by respect.

The brother-sister relation had a significance in the traditional taravad organization, involving mutual obligations, duties, and claims. Traditionally, through him the authority transmitted, and through her the group placement occurred. As the structure of the kin bonds were linked to her, the men surrounding her should protect and treat her well. According to south Indian folklore, the female being at the center of familial relations, is essential for human

prosperity, but also dangerous if mistreated. In this connection, Beck reveals that, "when mistreated or angered, a woman can utterly destroy these men who linked to her and the entire structure of kinbonds they struggled to build" (1974:20). In brief, the south Indian kinship system is motivated by the role of women in the culture (Harts, 1974).

As the 'creative' and 'destructive' powers are inherent in women, the men related to her should pay attention to receive benefits from her 'natural energy'. Likewise, in a taravad, the men were concerned about the women in order to protect their powers. Thus, the brother was morally and jurally obligated to his sister, and her children, in turn sisters owed the brother domestic services, devotion, and obedience. In this web of reciprocities and responsibilities, the karanavan and other seniors members treated the young women as fine "flowers" (Gough, 1961). Women were allowed to have limited sexual relations with the prescribed enangan or hypergamous relations; should a woman go outside the group, the consequences were very dangerous (Harts, 1974). In this connection Gough (1961) states that if a women infringed the caste laws by having relations with the lower caste person, it was the Karanavan's duty to expel her from the taravad, and his right (very occasionally exercised) to put her to death by the sword. With his de facto authority over women, to protect the purity of taravad's kinswomen, the Karanavan arranged the

relations with their husbands; if found unsuitable he could reject their husbands.

Inside the taravad, utmost care was taken to maintain segregation of women from the men due to the "horror of incest." Societies like the Nayar, ". . . apparently succeed less well in internalizing sexual prohibitions. Consequently they cannot rely upon individual conscience for the enforcement of taboos, and are compelled to bulwark these with external precautionary safeguards such as avoidance rules" (Murdock, 1949:273). Everybody was well informed about how to avoid wrong relations in order to maintain discipline within the taravad. A typical house had separate rooms for the male and female members, and strict segregation of sexes was apparent. Usually, young women (or girls) were given freedom until their prepuberty ceremonies; and later, were prohibited to have any direct intercourse with the men of taravad.

The focal avoidance was between a man and his sister, which, by extension, could be applied to the Karanavans too. The brother-sister avoidance, a case of externalization of the fear of incest, had reached extreme form among Nayars owing to their peculiar marriage customs, and residential patterns, which rather determined the avoidance pattern (Aiyappan, 1975:202-203). In former days, sisters were not permitted to talk or to sit with their brothers because 'they might otherwise commit incest' (in Mencher, 1965). Though partly avoided, some brothers did maintain fair and warm relations

with their younger sisters, expecting obedience and loyalty from them.

The above pages have provided a basic understanding of the traditional elements of Nayar kinship and family patterns. Within in the last 150 or 200 years, this society underwent drastic changes through a process of modernization, causing structural changes. Many of their traditions were discontinued, while some of them have been continued with alterations. The succeeding chapter will focus on change and continuity in Nayar social organization.

III: ii: a: MARRIAGE SYSTEM

The traditional Nayar marriage system is one of the most unusual institutions that has been studied by anthropologists so far, which fascinated and remained as a unique piece of intercultural knowledge. It not only contradicted the universal nature of marriage but also posed problems in interpreting the pattern of kinship in India. With its extreme matrilineal ideology, the complex of Nayar kinship, family, and marriage patterns captured the anthropological imaginations since the days of classic anthropologists like Linton, McLennan, and Radcliff-Brown, and had been considered as a "special system" (Radcliff-Brown, 1965). Since then many scholars have attempted to explicate the 'meanings' of the 'Nayar marriage rites'; such functional, structural, symbolic, descent, and alliance theoretical approaches have



significantly aided our understanding of the 'Nayar marriage problem' (Gough, 1955, 1961, 1971; Yalman, 1963; Dumont, 1964, 1974; Leach, 1971, Mencher, 1965; Fuller, 1976; Trautmann, 1981; Moore, 1988).

To begin with, the traditional Nayar marriage rules and practices have now vanished, and my discussions about them here concern a part of the glorious history of noble Nayars. It is not my intention to solve any (theoretical) problems related to the traditional Nayar system of marriage, but to try to make the marriage rites understandable, which will be followed by brief concluding remarks. Three aspects have been studied thoroughly in dealing with the Nayar marriage problem: whether or not to bring it within to the folds of a universal definition of marriage, having cross-cultural validity; whether the tali rite, the sambandham union or the two together, constituted the Nayar marriage; and finally, whether or not to consider it as a variant of Dravidian kinship and marriage patterns.

To get some explanations for the problems raised above, three features of the traditional Nayar marriage complex need to be discussed: the definition of marriage (i.e., instead of one marriage, Nayars had two marriage like ceremonies, called talikettukalyanam and sambandham, which could be called 'marriage'), polyandry, and hypergamy. It is generally agreed that two forms of marriage existed among Nayars in the past, namely "Talikettukalyanam' (tali-tying ceremony) and

'Sambandham' union (the customary nuptial of man and woman). Though not a marriage rite, I will include 'Tirandukalyanam' (the first menstrual rite or puberty ceremony) in my discussion, as suggested by Moore (1988), to fulfill the total symbolic nature of the Nayar marriage.

Talikettukalyanam (or tali rite) was performed in every traditional Nayar taravad before a girl (or girls) attained puberty, a ceremony signifying a girl's "social maturity." Tirandukalyanam is the first menstrual rite, which was celebrated as a kind of announcement to the related taravads that the girl was physically mature, and was ready for marital alliance. The girls that had undergone the above ceremonies were allowed (or were free) to have sexual relations with the men of their own or of an appropriate higher caste, called 'Sambandham' unions.

As clear from the existing literature, the details of the ceremonies varied from region to region and variations were found according to subcaste and family status or prestige. Especially, the 'exotic' traditional institutions reached their "efflorescence" in central Kerala (south Malabar and Cochin) when compared to other regions owing to the historical particularities such as rigid "feudal" political-economic system, religio-ethical influence of the Nambudiri Brahmins with high population concentrations, and so on. This was the area where the features of the traditional marriage system reached their extreme. With consideration of such

differences, I will concentrate on the marriage rules and practices in central Kerala, mentioning the other regions to show the institutional variations.

#### THE TALIKETTUKALYANAM (OR TALI RITE):

In social structural terms, the tali rite and sambandham are important to understand the intricacies involved in the Nayar kinship and marriage systems. In general, the tali rite symbolically resembled the tali-tying ceremony of the south Indian castes, a leading element of the wedding rite, which indicates a woman's married status. It was a traditional compulsion among Nayars that every girl should undergo the tali rite before she attained puberty; failure to do so meant excommunication from her family or caste (Mencher, 1965). In practical terms, when a girl matured before the performance of tali rite, ". . . the girl's family would conceal the fact of her maturity until after the rite had been performed" (Gough, 1971:368).

In every taravad the tali rite ceremony would be conducted for its girls' once in ten or twelve years on a mass scale irrespective of their ages but before the attainment of puberty. In central Kerala, the occasion took place in the oldest house of the lineage, which meant all the related matrilineal segments would bring their girls to the original ancestral house (Gough, 1955). However, as noted by (Rao, 1957), girls that were undergoing tali rite should be from the

same generation, without choosing girls from two distinct generations. The village astrologer fixed the auspicious time for the ceremony after examining the horoscopes of bride and bridegroom; other details were worked out by the Karanavan as head of the family in consultation with other elder members of the matrilineage and relatives or friends of the linked lineages (enangans). The tali rite was a four day ceremony, and it usually involved, ". . . a large expenditure of money; in fact, the more elaborate the ceremony and the attendant festivities, the more it added to the taravad's prestige" (Mencher, 1965:171).

One important aspect involved in the tali rite was the criterion of choosing the tali tier; that is to say, who should tie the tali around the bride's neck? As the rule of lineage exogamy in matrilineal descent groups is important, the tali tier must be chosen from the related (enangan) lineages other than one's own lineage. Thus, in Cochin, south Malabar, and Travancore (some parts in the northern region) the "enangan system" prevailed to a greater extent, where in, "each lineage was linked by hereditary ties of ceremonial cooperation to two or three other lineages of the neighborhood," and such relations were 'reciprocal but not exclusive' (Gough, 1961:327). Within a given community or neighborhood the ceremonially linked lineages formed a network of reciprocities, offered to help each other in performing certain social and religious rites on "complimentary grounds,"

and played a major role at the prepubertal marriage rite. Two inherent factors involved in the 'enangan system' were equivalency of socio-ritual status among the linked lineages and equal ranks of the ritual bride and bridegroom. Thus, the ties between the enangan lineages among the commoner Nayars were that of symmetrical and isogamous, making the total system more or less endogamous.

Unlike the southern parts, in north Malabar, usually the tali was tied by a Brahmin or by a person from high ranking lineage (Gough, 1955, Rao, 1957). In this area, though the tali rite was performed, it did not attain an equivalent meaning as in central parts of Kerala because of its lesser importance in social structural terms. Among the north Malabar Nayars, traditionally the later Sambandham union was considered as ordinary marriage, which was "traditionally optionally monogamous or polygynous, unlike the central regions in Kerala" (Gough, 1965:9). The region of southern Travancore resembled north Malabar in this aspect. Whereas, in some areas of northern Travancore, the tali tying was usually done by some prescribed families, called "Macchampikkar families," whose social status were equal to that of the taravads in which the tali rite ceremonies were to be celebrated (Thurston, 1909:319). These were the ancient Nayar families appointed as tali tiers by royal visit (Fuller, 1976:111-112). Occasionally, in some parts of Kerala, among the poor families, a girl's mother, or mother's brother, or an

adult male member from a high caste acted as a tali tier, to symbolize the tali ceremony, while in some cases a sword symbolized the tali tier.

Upon choosing a tali tier, an auspicious time was fixed to start the four day tali ceremony, which featured different rituals filled with symbolism (for details, see, Thurston, 1909; Gough, 1955; Moore, 1988). Members from the enangan lineages and other related taravad were invited by the host taravad to grace the occasion. On the first day of the ceremony, the tali tiers arrived at the girls' taravad in a procession, were received by the host taravad's elderly women. The girl's brothers washed the tali tiers feet and were given seats in the loggia. When the auspicious time approached, the tali tier was directed by the priest to fasten the tali around the girl's neck. In this connection, Mencher reveals that, "whether one man married all the girls or a bridegroom appeared for each girl varied according to the region and subcaste" (1965:171). After the tali tying ceremony, all the guests were given a feast by the host taravad, in turn the Karanavan received gifts from friends and relatives.

On the same day, the girl and the tali tier were given a bedroom, secluded for about three days, during which the girl might be deflowered if she were old enough. In general, cohabitation would be impossible in the majority of cases because of the physiological immaturity of the girls (the brides were often very young, even infants). But Gough,

according to her sources, says that, "it (i.e., cohabitation) was not, however, forbidden, and appears formerly to have been required. It is clear that the rite was ritually if not actually a defloration ceremony, as indicated by the saying Talikettu amma a-yi (having had the tali rite, a girl becomes a (married) women)" (Gough, 1955:50).

The second and third days were occupied with the entertainments and feasts to the guests. On the fourth and final day of the ceremony, after completion of the necessary rituals, the bridegrooms were presented gifts by the Karanavan of the girls taravad for their ceremonial services. The proceedings of the fourth day ended with an elaborate feast; and the bridegrooms returned to their respective taravads, terminating the marriage without having any further obligation to their wives. In some areas of south Malabar, the last element of the four day ceremony was signified by tearing a cloth (i.e., a loin cloth previously worn by the girl during the cohabitation period) symbolizing dissolution of the marriage (Gough, 1955, 1971; Mencher, 1965). Unlike the other regions, in some areas, the girls wore the tali all the rest of their lives. On the other hand, " . . . it does not seem to have been at all important that the girl continued to wear her tali; and in some areas she removed it shortly after the ceremony" (in Fuller, 1976:103).

Whether visiting his ritual wife or not after the tali ceremony, the tali tier remained as a ritual husband

throughout his life in south Malabar and Cochin. Even he was considered as ritual father by the children irrespective of their physiological connections. If the children knew the ritual father, they called the man 'acchan' (a sanskrit word meaning 'a noble man' or a 'leader', or a 'lord') (Gough, 1955). In these areas, women observed death pollution for their tali tiers. "Death pollution was otherwise traditionally observed only for the matrilineal kin: not until recently was it observed for the sambandham lover and physiological father" (ibid:50). According to Gough, the children too suffered death pollution in Cochin state (ibid), but in south Malabar, Mencher's informants, ". . . stressed that the woman's children did not observe this death pollution" (1965:172).

The Kshathriyas, Samanthans, and aristocratic Nayars also practiced the tali rite ceremony, which differed slightly from that of the commoner Nayar. As against the commoner symmetrical and isogamous relationships, among the royal and aristocratic groups the relationships were asymmetrical and hypergamous. The enangan relationships among these supereminent groups used to be limited, where in a family or a lineage always accepted tali tiers from the relatively high ranked subdivision above it, and provided tali tiers to the subdivision below it.

As I noted before in discussing the caste system, all these supereminent groups were involved in this sacred and



secular status game. Every lower status group would attempt to improve or uplift its status in the social milieu by having enangan relationships with the comparatively upper status groups. Like the commoners such enangan relationships persisted across generations. In this muddle of status liftings from the ascribed to that of the achieved status, the institution of tali rite as a marriage played a prominent role among the high class Nayars.

The process could be understood in terms of 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' (Pocock, 1957). Inclusion means a family's or group's efforts or attempts to include itself with the next higher ranking group, excluding itself from the original social stratum. In this way, among the high caste Nayars, ". . . a girl's family tries to include itself with the higher-ranking tali tier or sambandham partner's family, while excluding itself from those ascribed lower status because they are refused as tali tiers or sambandham partners" (Fuller, 1976:115-116).

A family or lineage, among the royal and aristocratic groups, through its efforts (which depended on the social, economic, political and ritual status) of acquiring a tali tier from the upper circles, tended to raise its social position within a given region. Once it acquired a tali tier from the upper group, a family would set itself apart from its original 'peer' group, moved upward in the social hierarchy, showed superiority over its original strata, considering them

as inferiors. In this matrix of upward mobility through hypergamous relations, the women's families would always look for tali tiers from the comparatively high status groups; and the hypergamous relations of women with lower status or low caste men were completely restrained, otherwise the status of a woman's family could be at risk.

In this asymmetrical structure, the enangans of Kshathriya were Nambudiris, the enangans of Samanthans were Kshathriyas or Nambudiris, the enangans of village headmen were either district chiefs or samanthans. Thus, as stated by Fuller, "the families with highest status were those in which only Nambudiris Brahmins acted as tali tiers and only Nambudiris were accepted as Sambandham partners" (1976:116). In central Kerala, the Nambudiri was enangan only to the Cochin lineage (said to be a 'true' Kshathriya group). In Cochin lineage, the tali rite was performed separately for each girl before attaining puberty, where in the Nambudiri, ". . . must actually deflower the girl on the night of the ceremonies" (Gough, 1955:52). In Travancore, as quoted by Fuller, ". . . the talis of girls in the higher ranking Samanthan division - which included the Travancore royal family - were tied by Kshathriyas, while in the lower ranking division, the tali tiers were Aryupattars" (in Fuller, 1976:116). Among aristocratic Nayars (i.e., district chief and village headmen), usually the district chiefs tied tali to the girls of a village headmen (Gough, 1955).

## THE TIRANDUKALYANAM

Among the Nayars, the tirandukalyanam or tirandukuli signified a girl's first menstrual rite or puberty ceremony. Pubertal ceremonies for girls are commonly celebrated in several parts of south India. According to my own experience, it is performed as a "special occasion" among certain castes in Andhra Pradesh, emphasizing a girl's status transformation from childhood to womanhood. The ceremony is considered as a public announcement that the girl has passed her childhood and is ready for marital alliance. Soon after a girl undergoes the puberty ceremony, she is supposed to interact with others as an adult, knowing her social and physiological maturity. But among Nayars, the tali-rite (social maturity) and tirandukalyanam (physiological maturity) were celebrated separately, which together have a strong rite of passage quality, ". . . demarcating a permanent and irreversible transformation in the girl's status" (Moore, 1988:263).

Thurston, quoting Cochin census reports, states that, "the tirandukuli ceremony is practically a public declaration that a girl has reached the age of maturity" (1909:336). Traditionally, it was a four day ceremony, celebrated as a special occasion in a Nayar taravad. As said by Moore's informants, it was mainly aimed for good proposals (i.e., marriage alliances); if the ceremony was not held, ". . . it would be understood that the girl had some physical defects" (1988:263). Mainly, women from enangan lineages participated

in the ceremony, and the ceremony ended with a feast for neighbors and relatives.

#### THE SAMBANDHAM RELATIONSHIP

After the prepuberty and first menstrual rites, among the commoner Nayar, a woman became eligible (or was free) to enter into an alliance with a man of either her own subcaste or of a higher subdivision of village headman, or chief or royalty, or Nambudiri Brahmin. According to Gough, though questionable, such liaisons could also occur shortly before puberty (1971:368). Among commoners, the sambandham relationships were more or less isogamous and symmetrical. Occasionally, the commoners did provide women to the higher Nayar subdivisions. On the other hand, the sambandham unions among the Kshathriyas, Samanthans, and aristocratic Nayars were asymmetrical and hypergamous, where in, ". . . most of them married all their women upwards and their men downwards" (Gough, 1971:371).

The customs relating to sambandham (i.e., bandham means 'affinity') marriage varied regionally, but the principles underlying the ceremony were the same, that is, "alliance for consummation" (Rao, 1957:88). The local names of the ceremony also varied from region to region, but all denoted 'marriage'. Generally, it was known as sambandham, Vastradanam, or Pudavakodukkal (giving of cloth). It was called Pudavakodukkal or pudavakoda in north Travancore, while

Pudamuri (cutting the cloth) was a more popular term in north Malabar (Thurston, 1909: Rao, 1957).

Among the commoner Nayar, the sambandham proposal was first made in a girl's taravad by the elders, and was then conveyed to the bridegroom's taravad through relatives or friends; and the Karanavans of both sides consulted immediately after the proposal. In consultation with the village astrologer, after tallying the horoscopes of the bride and bridegroom, the auspicious day was fixed for the sambandham union. Unlike the tali rite, for a sambandham relationship, each girl was initiated individually. The ceremony was not celebrated with grandeur like the tali rite. Few friends and relatives were invited to bless the couple, and were given a sumptuous feast. After undergoing the necessary rituals (usually a man presented a marriage cloth to the woman in the presence of the family members), the couple were left alone in a room. The bridegroom left the house about daybreak next morning, leaving some money under his pillow, thus ending the inauguration of the sambandham union. A few days later, the man's taravad usually sent a gift of clothes to the woman.

After the sambandham ceremony, a woman remained in her taravad, having freedom to receive visiting husbands. Whether or not to recruit the ritual husband (of the tali rite) as sambandham partner depended on local customs; when accepted, the tali tier was not preferred over others (Fuller, 1976).

A woman was allowed to have a regular husband, a series of husbands, and, at times she, " . . . was free to receive casual visitors of appropriate subcaste who passed through her neighborhood in the course of military operations" (Gough, 1971:369). Thus, a woman could have a number of men as partners, and the same was true of men - a polyandrous and polygynous system. But, in north Malabar polyandry was not present as the traditional marriage was more or less monogamous. While in certain areas of Travancore, fraternal polyandry was practiced (Rao, 1957; Gough, 1965).

Nevertheless, as pointed out by Fuller, there were some restrictions on a woman's choice of sambandham partners such as rules relating to strict taravad or lineage exogamy, prohibition of close patrilineal relatives (in the majority of cases), prohibition of a man to have sambandham relationships with two women of the same household, and status based restrictions (a woman should have a sambandham union either with the men of her own subcaste [equals] or of an appropriate higher caste [superiors]) (1976:108). Sexual relations with lower castes were strictly forbidden; if they occurred, the women became outcasts from the taravad as well as from the caste.

A woman was given a special room in her taravad for receiving her visiting husband(s) at night. Usually, a regular husband started his relationship by giving small gifts, later he was customarily obligated to present small

gifts (such as a loin cloth, betel nut, some vegetables, hair-and bathing oil, etc.) to her on three main Malayali festivals - Onam, Visu, and Tiruvadira. Withdrawal of giving presents by a man to his partner indirectly indicated his intention to sever the relationship. It was a rule that a man should secure his partner's and her Karanavan's consent before he could involve in a sambandham union; if needed, " . . . either party to a union might terminate it (i.e., Sambandham) at anytime without formality" (Gough, 1971:369).

Excepting presenting (occasional) gifts by a man to his sambandham partner, the marital tie did not involve him in any obligations or responsibilities either to her or towards the rearing of the resulting children. On the other hand, " . . . a woman had no obligations to her husbands other than granting of sexual privileges" (Gough, 1961:360). It is said that, sometimes, Nayar husbands of the woman's own caste dined in her household, which was offered as a favor but not as an obligation; while some men did form emotional attachments to particular wives, and they usually maintained little contacts with their children during their 'nocturnal sojourns' (Gough, 1961, 1971; Fuller, 1976). It was the woman's taravad that provided all services to her and to her children. According to Gough, the children of a woman called all her current husbands by the sanskrit word 'acchan', meaning "lord"; whereas, all the taravads that were involved in sambandham relations to each other as wife providers and wife receivers

referred to each other as "bandukkal" (joined ones) (Gough, 1971: 369-370).

When a woman became pregnant, the tradition demanded her husband(s) to claim probable paternity. Usually, the claim was made by giving a piece of cloth and some vegetables to the low caste midwife who attended the woman in childbirth (ibid). Such a claim acted as a 'public certification' that the child had been fathered by a person of appropriate caste, which in turn legitimized the children, made them members of their mother's taravad. If no acknowledgements for paternity were given, it was presumed that the woman had had sexual relations with a man of lower caste or a non-Hindu which was against the taravad or caste law. The punishment for such a trespass could be either her expulsion from the family (or caste) or execution by her matrilineal kinsmen (Gough, 1961). Sometimes, the mother together with her child might be sold into slavery.

Among the royal and aristocratic Nayars, the formalities related to sambandham union were slightly different when compared to the commoner Nayar subdivisions. When a higher caste husband had relations with a lower subdivision woman, he presented gifts to his wife as did the commoner Nayar husband. But the rules of pollution restrained the upper caste husbands to dine with lower caste wives; even, "the husband was prohibited from touching his wife, her children, or her other kinsfolk during the daytime while he was in a state of ritual



purity" (Gough, 1971:371). As among the commoners, among the high caste Nayars, the husband paid delivery expenses at the birth of a child to his wife, claiming probable paternity.

As noted by Gough, among aristocratic lineages, "each office-bearing lineage had as its enanger one or two higher-ranking lineages from the range of those within which its women want to draw visiting husbands. Thus village headmen often had their district chiefs as enanger. A district chief's lineage might have the royal lineage, a conquered royal lineage, or a Nambudiri Brahmin family as enanger" (1961:377). Likewise, the Samanthan provided women to a Kshathriya (or a Nambudiri), but received women only from the lower aristocratic Nayars as sambandham partners. While among the royal families, the Nambudiri Brahmins (often the younger sons of the Nambudiris) who acted as sambandham partners were maintained by the royal palace. As stated by Rao, "The most important males of the royal family got their Samanthan or Nayar wives to the palace to live within separate houses. Each royal family usually had 3 to 6 samanthan or rich Nayar families amongst whom only it sought brides" (Rao, 1957:90). Thus, among the ruling classes (Kshathriya, Samanthan, and other Nayar aristocratic groups) the enangan relations were hypergamous, and were strongly asymmetrical with regard to sambandham unions.

The above discussed rules and practices of sambandham relations pertained to south Malabar, Cochin, and northern

Travancore. In northern Malabar and probably also in southern Travancore the tali rite (though practiced) was a relatively less important occasion, while the sambandham institution was considered as 'real or ordinary marriage' and was monogamous. In these parts, the Nayar taravad organization resembled that of the Trobriand social organization, where in the residential pattern was avunculocal even before the period of British rule (Gough, 1961). Upon puberty, a man moved to his matrilineal segment to join his matrilineal kinsmen who resided together with their respective wives, children, and other old matrilineal kinsfolk. Though raised in her father's taravad, a woman had rights to property in her mother's taravad. Women joined their husbands after sambandham marriage, making the residential pattern 'virilocal'. In northern Malabar, as stated by Fuller, ". . . the union (Sambandham) was with one man and intended to be stable, and the woman . . . lived with her partner" (1976:100).

So far, I have explained the traditional Nayar marriage rules and practices and showed the variations along the lines of region, caste, subcaste, wealth and status. How to explain the complexity of the Nayar marriage system? The marriage rites (tali rite and Sambandham) have been analyzed by several scholars from a variety of theoretical standpoints, which, through a combination, aided our understanding of the Nayar marriage complex.

First, to what extent is the Nayar marriage system compatible with a universal definition of marriage? In her attempts to understand the Nayar marriage and other ethnographic oddities in the context of a universal definition of marriage, Gough reconsiders the "Notes and Queries" marriage definition of 1951 (which says, 'Marriage is a union between a man and woman such that children born to the woman are recognized legitimate offspring of both parents' (in Gough, 1971:365), and suggests that, "marriage is a relationship established between a woman and one or more other persons, which provides that a child born to the woman under circumstances not prohibited by the rules of the relationship, is accorded full birth status rights common to normal members of his society or social stratum" (1971:375). The former parts of Gough's definition thus accommodates several types of marital ties such as monogamy, polyandry (both fraternal and non-fraternal), Nayar marriage (Gough views the tali rite as a group marriage), woman-marriage-to-a-woman and others, while the latter part deals with the concept of 'legitimization of children' (Malinowski, 1971).

Certainly Gough's suggestion has relevance to the Nayar marriage, but her consideration that the Nayar marriage was a 'clear case of group marriage' is unfortunate, and raises some immediate objections. It is true that the extreme matrilineal institutions among Nayars suppressed the existence of the nuclear family in favor of the consanguinal unit. In keeping

the matrilineal taravad intact, the Nayars solved the 'matrilineal problem' at the expense of marriage (or the elementary family) by forcing the husbands and wives to reside in their respective taravads. The result was that the husbands merely visited their wives. Such a weak marriage, as viewed by Trautmann, ". . . is functionally related to the strong matrilineal organization of rights in land and to the peculiar Nayar solution to the problem of residence and composition that this entails" (Trautmann, 1981:211).

In accordance with the 'dogmas' of matriliney, the Nayar have solved the marriage problem by splitting the institution of marriage into two subspecies - tali rite and sambandham union. There has been much speculation about the meanings of these curious rites, which I shall discuss in a minute. To derive a satisfactory explanation for these rites in terms of marriage, I think, two basic features one should see are that of the presence of 'affinal consent' in the tali rite and sambandham union and of the factor of 'paternity'. Without marriage, says Fortes, ". . . there are no affinal relations; and when there are no affinal relations in the case of a slave person, there can be no complimentary filiation (transmission of status-social, caste, or class, etc.) for the offspring of the marriage" (1970:114). Fortes, referring to Malinowski's 'Principle of legitimacy', also states that, ". . . legitimacy by birth, in matrilineal systems (such as the Nayar and Ashanti), generally depends on the recognition of jural

paternity" (1969:57-58). If paternity is not acknowledged, different societies have variable solutions to tackle the problem.

Let us see, how do the traditional Nayar marriage rites exhibit the 'Affinity' and 'Legitimacy'? In this connection, Gough provides a sociological explanation for the two rites as follows:

The tali-rite, as I see it, initiated for each individual Nayar girl a state of marriage to a collectivity of men of appropriate caste . . . . The rite ceremonially endowed the girl with sexual and procreative functions . . . . Rights in the woman's sexuality were received by her enangan as representative of the men of his subcaste as a whole . . . . They were also in fact extended to any man of higher subcaste who might favor her with his intentions . . . . (And finally) the tali rite by providing the woman with a ritual husband . . . also provided her children a ritual father . . . . The latter sambandham unions, . . . involved the claiming of sexual privileges by men all of whom were potential husbands by virtue of their membership in a subcaste . . . . Their (i.e., husbands) duties as members of their caste were to provide the woman and her lineage with children to acknowledge their potential biological paternity through birth payments which legitimized the woman's child (1971:374-375).

Gough's argument about the group marriage, as evident from the above statement has been discredited with a few fundamental objections (Fuller, 1976; Trautmann, 1981). In reality, among the commoner Nayars, a ritual bridegroom acted as a tali tier in the tali rite ceremony of his ceremonially related enangan (or bride's taravad) on behalf of his own (enangan) lineage alone and as a whole, but not as a representative of the caste group as a whole. Gough's

emphasis on 'collectivity of men' further creates confusion because a bride's (ritual and) sambandham partners were not only from the equal status enangan lineages but also from the higher strata. How then could the men from differential status represent a 'collectivity of men'? Thus, Gough's argument, as pointed out by Fuller, "runs directly counter to the principles of Indian status attribution in which, to use Dumont's term, the higher 'encompasses' the lower. The low cannot represent or symbolize an aristocratic Nayar, let alone a Nambudiri Brahmin" (1976:111).

One other objection concerns the concept of 'ritual husband'. As I noted before, in some parts of central Kerala, a woman (and her children) observed death pollution for her talitier; in general, death pollution was observed only for matrilineal kin. With an emphasis on this custom, Gough considers the tali tier as a sort of husband and views the observation of death pollution for him, ". . . as a mark of proof that she had once married in the correct manner" (1971:372). Gough further says that as the tali tier happened to be the ritual father, her children, ". . . acknowledged their debt to him by mourning at his death" (ibid:375). Leach and Dumont also stressed the observation of death pollution as an important feature to trace out the presence of a notion of affinity (or paternity) (Dumont, 1964, 1974; Leach, 1971). But in other parts of Kerala (in some areas of central Kerala too), as reported by Mencher (1965) and Fuller (1976), this

custom (i.e., children observing death pollution) did not exist. How far could it then be justifiable to make general statements which depend on some local facts? Such a view raises questions, whether or not the tali rite endowed the characteristics of paternity.

The latter sambandham union, says Gough, should be regarded as a form of marriage for two reasons: firstly, ". . . although plural unions were customary, mating was not promiscuous"; there were certain restrictions on a woman's choice of sambandham partners, and the plural unions were allowed only in accordance with the traditional (legitimate) taravad and caste rules. Secondly, ". . . the concept of legally established paternity was of fundamental significance in establishing a child as a member of his lineage or caste" (1971:374). In order to acknowledge jural paternity, among the Nayars, the delivery expenses were paid by one or more men of appropriate caste as a public certification. Unacknowledged paternity ended either with excommunication or execution of the woman (sometimes of her child) by her kinsmen or caste council.

Nevertheless, a sambandham union does not provide a proper explanation in terms of affinity, when considering that "marriage perpetuates affinity" or its reverse "affinity gives rise to marriage." The affinal relations that were created by the sambandham union were in fact transient, fragile, and unstable owing to the realities of polyandry and hypergamy.

Neither the partners nor their concerned families were involved in constant reciprocal activities because the sambandham relationships could be terminated at any time at the will of the two individuals involved. In circumstances like that, according to Trautmann (1981:210) "The marriage bond (sambandham) being thus reduced to its barest essentials, it follows that the affinity (bandham) that it created between the kin of a married couple was feeble in the extreme." This kind of reality led some scholars even to state that, ". . . the sambandham union had practically no affinal content" (Fuller, 1976:119). These doubts about the extent of affinity in sambandham unions poses the question that whether sambandham union can be considered as a marriage or not.

To clear the confusion, we have to bring back the tali rite into the picture to grasp a full meaning for Nayar marriage because it contained the fabric of affinity in the form of enangan relations (or cross cousin relation) in a structural sense. As I noted before, the enangan lineages among the Nayars in a locality maintained "hereditary ties of ceremonial cooperation," which were reciprocal and symmetrical. Each taravad was interlinked (basically depending on a cross-cousin classification) with more than one enangan lineage, forming a loosely knitted interlineage network of enangans within a given neighborhood. Thus, the interlineage enangan network among Nayars, says Gough, ". . . must be regarded as having a relationship of "perpetual



affinity," which carried the more formal functions of affinity and persisted through the making and breaking of individual sexual ties" (1971:370. Likewise, Dumont and Fuller also emphasize (with variable degrees) that the tali rite established a more affinal relationship than the sambandham union (as in Fuller, 1976).

The enangan relation could be considered as an 'alliance' (i.e., cross-cousin) relation. In his discussion of the 'regulation of marriage in south India', Dumont equates the affinal relationship with that of the marriage alliance and defines 'alliance' as 'extended and permanent affinity' (1974:112). He asserts that the underlying principle of affinal connections is that of the cross-cousin marriage which creates and regulates an 'alliance relationship' between the concerned marrying groups in accordance with the cross-cousin rule. The rule of cross cousin relationships, argues Dumont, ". . . causes marriage to be transmitted much as membership in the descent group is transmitted. With it, marriage acquires a diachronic dimension, it becomes an institution enduring from generation to generation, which I therefore call 'marriage alliance' or simply 'alliance'" (1971:184). In this same spirit, he applies the concept of 'alliance' to the Nayar, by arguing that the rule of cross cousin is present in the tali rite, and the 'affinity' between the enangan lineages should be understood as 'alliance' relationship as in other south Indian communities (as quoted in Fuller, 1976:113).

In attempting to bring the Nayar case closer to the traditional Indian (or south Indian) marital norms, Dumont (1964) argues that the matrimonial rites of Nayars have to be understood only in the context of the usual patrilineal ideals of India, of course as a 'special category' in contrast to them. He thus draws a fundamental distinction between primary and secondary marriages in India by considering the basic caste principles such as hierarchy and status. 'Primary marriage', according to Dumont, is a woman's first marriage, in which, "a woman must be married and can be married in the strict sense and with the full ritual only once" (1964:82). Usually, a primary marriage is celebrated with greater ceremony and pomp, symbolizing a family's prestige in the social milieu. "Once this marriage has been contracted, either it is indissoluble even by the death of the spouse (superior castes) or else the woman may, after her husband's death or even after divorce, contract another union, legitimate, but infinitely less prestigious, involving much less ritual expense, which we shall call secondary marriages" (Dumont, 1974:114). In general, primary marriages are less free, and are identified with less choice of partners and post marital behavior, while the secondary marriages are comparatively freer.

Dumont suggests that the tali rite and sambandham should be approximated with the primary and secondary marriages as elsewhere in India (1964:84-85). If considered so, two

questions, immediately arise: why then was the tali rite (unlike in other Indian communities) reduced to a mere 'ritual'?, and why did the sambandham union come to be the real conjugal union? For explanation, Dumont (1964) brings our attention to the practices of the 'Basavi', (i.e., a south Indian caste group's marriage practice) where a girl was given in marriage (i.e., primary marriage) to a God to become a temple servant; later she was allowed to have liaisons (i.e., secondary marriage) with other men, but her children belonged to her own patrilineal family (that is to her father's but not to her husband's). Since her primary marriage was to a God, the children from her secondary unions did not belong to the father, but returned to the family which dedicated her to the temple (in Yalman, 1963:38).

Likewise, as a reversal to the normal south Indian pattern, among the Nayars, the tali rite as a primary marriage was reduced to a 'mere' ritual practice; otherwise, the children of the woman would belong to the father in accordance with the general south Indian pattern ('primary-principle' marriage should be a "patrilineally" productive marriage). Thus, says Dumont, the sambandham union as a secondary marriage became a real thing in order to affiliate children to a woman's taravad (1964:85). The crux of the problem is that the children of the woman from the secondary unions would receive status from the tali tier by attaining recognition to paternity; because of that the ritual husband was the only one

whose death a woman would mourn (ibid). Thus, the existence of the two ceremonies allowed the Nayars to be legitimate within a south Indian system while at the same time perpetuating their matrilineal, matrilocal system.

Fuller differs from Dumont by arguing that the tali rite and sambandham union had different functions, but together constituted the Nayar marriage (1976:105). The two components of an ordinary Hindu marriage are the 'betrothal' and 'consummation', which are combined into a single marriage. Based on this fact, Fuller (1976) argues that the Nayar (unlike the other Hindu communities) separated the marriage into two spheres, each having a specific function. For him, the tali rite is a "first marriage" and the sambandham union a "second marriage." First marriage is primarily concerned with a girl's transformation of 'status', which recognizes a woman's right to enter a sambandham union to receive men of 'appropriate status' as sexual partners and to bear by such men legitimate children. While the second marriage is concerned with the 'status of sexual partners and the birth of legitimate children' (1976:106-110).

On the other hand, Yalman (1963) provides a structural explanation for the tali rite emphasizing its relationship with the pan-Indian caste principles such as 'hierarchy' and 'purity'. According to Yalman, the sexual purity of women is preferred to that of men in India because the purity of caste (or "caste blood") is believed to be transmitted through

women. The women are the objects that 'ensure' and 'preserve' the purity of a caste community, hence they should be protected from all states of impurity' or 'defilement'. In order to pass on the 'purity of caste blood' to the next generation, a woman has to have proper relations with a man of the appropriate caste. Thus, the domain of caste becomes 'bilateral' and 'endogamous' in nature, where in a child receives the 'ritual quality' from his/her parents, affiliating to both parents. Likewise, among the Nayar, states Yalman, ". . . the children can only be full members of the caste if both parents are either members, or acceptable as pure persons" (i.e., hypergamy) (1963:40).

To prevent premarital sexual freedom (otherwise 'defilement') in order to maintain caste purity, the 'prepuberty marriage' or 'a child marriage' had become institutionalized in historic India until its abolition in 1929. According to Kurian (1975:207), the institution of prepubertal marriage emerged as an established institution from about 200 B.C., which was first confined to Brahmins. In later years, it was adopted and practiced by Kshathriyas; and finally, as the castes started emulating the upper castes, this evil custom of child marriage reached even the lowest strata of society. In the name of caste purity, the child marriage functioned as a tool to avoid the 'risk of a girl's sexual offence'.

Centering the argument on this concept, Yalman (1963) suggests that the tali rite is a complete substitute marriage, and the tali tier should be considered as a "ritual impregnator," through whom the 'caste blood' passed on to the next generation. Indeed, says Yalman, ". . . the bond created by this 'mock' marriage (i.e., tali rite) was so important that in the past the woman and her children observed death pollution for the tali tier" (1936:46). In contrast to Yalman and others, Rao (1957) suggests that the tali rite should be understood as an 'age grade ceremony'.

With due consideration of the above discussed views, Moore (1988:254-273) tackles the problem with a symbolic approach. For Moore, all the three rituals - tali rite, tirandukalyanam, and sambandham are 'marriage-like rites' that have been filled with the elements of symbolism but with 'significant shifts in emphasis', signifying female 'fertility' and 'sexuality', which bring continuous 'purity', 'prosperity' and 'auspiciousness' for the well being of taravad as a "house-and-land unit." Undergoing the tali rite, a girl attains the status of 'amma', denoting womanhood, potential motherhood, and social honor. In continuity, Tirandukalyanam transforms her from the status of 'amma' to that of 'stri' (mature womanhood); and through the sambandham rite a girl finally reaches the state of "sexual womanliness."

On the other hand, in social structural terms, the three rites enhance (or project) taravad prestige in the social

milieu, celebrating variable types of social connections. In the tali rite, the affinal content is comparatively rich, whereas in Tirandukalyanam it is limited. Both tali rite and Tirandukalyanam are concerned with 'reaffirmation of old relationships rather than creation of new ones' by the woman's taravad while the sambandham union is concerned with 'reaffirmation of social connections by the groom's taravad as well as bride's, as long as the partnership is valid (Moore, 1988:269).

So far, I have reviewed some interpretation of Nayar marriage rites propounded by several scholars pertaining to commoner Nayars, in specific and the Nayars, in general. I will now turn to the institution of hypergamy among the 'supereminent' Nayar subdivisions. The hypergamous network of relationships mainly involved the Kshathriyas, Samanthans, aristocratic Nayars, and Nambudiri Brahmins. As I mentioned earlier the enangan relationships were asymmetrical, rather than reciprocal. In the name of caste 'purity' and 'status', all the ruling class subdivisions made hypergamy their ideology based on the caste associated principles of 'dominance' and 'power'. In this tussle for social mobility, 'each family acknowledged ritual superiors and inferiors', making the system dynamic. Thus, among these higher divisions, hypergamy created 'internal stratification' without completely ending endogamy (Mandelbaum, 1970).

This condition contradicts the bilaterality (or endogamy) of the caste principles, which I mentioned earlier. However, the same traditional Indian caste principles which demand caste endogamy do allow hypergamous marriage as 'valid' and 'pure' (though less prestigious for the higher caste man). The rules related to the institutions of 'hypergamy' and 'hypogamy' can be traced back to the Hindu Shastric texts (for example, Manu). In these religious texts, hypergamy is referred to as "anuloma" ('with the hair') [i.e., marriage or union between a superior caste man and an inferior caste woman, which is legitimate and religio-ethically approved], and the hypogamous marriage union is called "Pratiloma" ('against the hair') [i.e., Marriage or union between an inferior caste man and a superior caste woman, which is illegitimate and a disapproved union] (see, Tambaiah, 1973:191-229).

In anuloma marriage, a woman of the inferior caste (or status) takes a husband of higher caste (to receive 'pure' and 'sacred' blood) in order to provide her children the 'status' of their father as well as to bring 'Prestige' for her lineage (or family) through her sacred connection with the superior status affine (ibid:222). In addition to the ritual status, in north India, some castes did allow a child to inherit his/her father's caste status (Mandelbaum, 1970; Fox, 1971; Tambaiah, 1973).



Unlike the north Indian hypergamous pattern, among the Nayars, a woman's children belonged to her own caste as the marriage for the higher caste husband (i.e., Nambudiri) would be a concubinage. In this connection, Gough reveals that, ". . . from their (i.e., Nambudiri) point of view only marriage to a Nambudiri woman with vedic rites could be regarded as the marriage and that sambandham unions with the Nayar women were a kind of concubinage" (1971:371:372). Among Nambudiris, even tying the tali was considered as an act of defilement. According to Mencher and Goldberg, in central Kerala, ". . . Namboodiri who performed the ceremony was considered something like an outcaste. He was paid by the royal family, sometimes two or three thousand rupees" (1967:93-94).

Theoretically, thus the Nambudiri Brahmin was at a disadvantage because through the hypergamous union there had been loss of 'status' and 'prestige'. The hypergamy also contradicts the Hindu theory of purity by permitting a high caste man to have coitus with a low caste woman, which is a highly polluting act. Well versed in Hindu pollution theory, how is it that the Nambudiris were willing to have intercourse with lower caste women? Again, this can be understood from the Hindu religio-ethical concept of 'internal' and 'external' pollution (Stevenson, 1954). According to this theory, absorption of pollutants (impure food or other materials) into the body causes a state of internal pollution, whereas external pollution is caused by temporary contact with

polluting materials, which can be ritually cleaned or removed. This concept justifies that in sexual intercourse it is the women who may become internally polluted (as she receives the impure substance), whereas a man is polluted only externally. To avoid internal pollution, a Nambudiri man would never eat food prepared by his Nayar wife (Rao, 1957; Mencher and Goldberg, 1967).

Such a religious endorsement, permitted Nambudiri men to have sexual access to women from different subcastes of Nayars. As I mentioned before, according to the traditional Nambudiri patrilineal principles, only the eldest son was allowed to marry a Nambudiri woman with vedic rites, the younger men remained unmarried, and the property (i.e., land) transmitted in accordance with the strict rule of primogeniture. This situation in turn led the unmarried Nambudiri younger sons to establish liaisons (through sambandham unions) with women of the Nayars. Such a symbiotic relationship, in fact facilitated in keeping Nambudiris landed property unfragmented through generations as the property was transmitted only through the children of the oldest son, who by birth were legitimate Nambudiris. On the other hand, according to the traditional hypergamous rule of Kerala, the children of younger Nambudiri sons were Nayars, who lacked both Nambudiri caste status and a claim to Nambudiri property (just like their physiological fathers, the younger Nambudiri sons).

As stated by Dumont (1964), the hypergamous arrangement (or symbiotic relation) among the Kshathriya, Samanthan, aristocratic Nayar, (and Nambudiri caste), finds a close "formula" between maintenance of status, matrilineality, and the form of marriage. Among these supereminent Nayar groups (which were involved in an ongoing "status game" for upward social mobility), through hypergamy, a woman's son would achieve 'purity' and 'status', while her brother's son having been born to a lower status woman would be identified as a low status person. For example, Kshathriya would give his women only to Nambudiri, in turn taking women only from lower strata such as Samanthan, or other aristocratic Nayars, ". . . so that only their (Kshathriya) nephews were Kshathriyas, while their (physiological) sons were Nayars" (Dumont, 1964:85). Thus, hypergamy ascribed a woman's children their own caste status to perpetuate the matrilineage, and enhanced 'purity' and 'status' of the children in the social milieu. On the other hand, it helped Nambudiris in meeting their patrilineal principle of primogeniture, and satisfied their younger sons sexual needs (or desires).

In reality, such a network of Nayar-Nambudiri symbiotic relationships together with the Nambudiri practice that only the eldest son could marry had resulted in an excess of unmarried Nambudiri women. Even though polygyny (i.e., a Nambudiri was allowed to marry up to three wives) was practiced to solve the problem of the 'leftover' women up to

an extent, a larger number of Nambudiri women remained unmarried, and were forced to live in a pathetic condition of 'life-long and enforced celibacy' (Rao, 1957; as in Yalman, 1963). Both married and unmarried women were kept in strict seclusion. Nambudiris neither practiced a wide marriage nor tolerated a women's illegitimate liaison. In the name of caste purity, strict chastity was enforced, and any kind of adultery was dealt with severe punishments (Rao, 1957; Alexander, 1968; Fuller, 1976).

Trautmann (1981) views the institution of hypergamy from a different angle. For him, hypergamy is not only associated with the aspects of purity and status, but also, as a marriage unit; articulated with the traditional 'feudal' political territorial system. He views the feudal political relations as nothing but the relations of affinity, in addition to the enangan relationships. Trautman notes (1981:424):

For the ancient conquered lineages are very much as Nambudiri Brahmins vis-a-vis the ruling houses, namely, politically subjects, but of higher status; and it is with the intangible stuff of status that they enter into political alliance with the holders of power. Status is conferred by both Nambudiris and the lineages of conquered kings on the royal woman and their descent line through enangan relations and sambandham unions in exchange for political-territorial rights.

Like hypergamy, the institution of polyandry also served many functions. Gough (1952:81-105) suggests a probable connection between traditional economic role (i.e., military) of younger Nayar men and the marriage pattern by saying that the custom of polyandry might be the outcome preventing the

forming of permanent bonds with wife and children, thus, ". . . it seems evident that this institution, in which a man had no responsibilities to one wife and children, but could take a new wife wherever he happened to be, fitted the way of a militia" (as quoted in Mencher, 1965:176). However, as noticed by Mencher (1965), the younger men in fact stayed for about five months in the villages, spending time in their taravads, which weakens Gough's argument. Mencher, quoting Unni, reveals that polyandry played an important role in the traditional social organization by serving different functions, for example, it elevated the status of a woman's taravad through the alliances with high status friends, helped a widower find a wife easily, facilitated a woman in receiving different kinds of personal services from the husbands who had different occupations, and so on (see Mencher, 1965:175:176).

So far, I have explained the rules, practices, and functions of the traditional Nayar marriage rites, polyandry, and hypergamy, and discussed various interpretations propounded by several scholars from their respective theoretical orientation with regard to tali rite and sambandham union. Although some of the arguments are questionable, a further debate lies far beyond the limits of the present work. Paying attention to the reality that Nayar marriages existed in different forms, which varied according to region and subcaste, this is a weak argument if one tries to represent the traditional Nayar marriage system as an

institution 'identical' to the south Indian (or Indian) traditional marriage patterns, basing one's argument on some local traits or peculiarities, such as, the observation of death pollution by a woman and her children to her tali tier as a basic feature of (ritual) paternity.

In my view, the observation of death pollution by a woman has to be viewed as a mark of due respect to the tali tier for the services rendered in enabling her to have 'proper' relations in the later sambandham unions. A better understanding of the Nayar marriage may be possible by examining the native statements and their meanings; and by comparing the same with the marital features of other societies to observe the 'similarities' or 'resemblances' in order to grasp what the traditional Nayar marriage rites indicated or symbolized (Fuller, 1976:105).

As we have seen, 'affinity' and 'paternity' are the two universal aspects that are associated with the institution of marriage. In a Hindu marriage, both these features are expressed within one ordinary marriage. But among the traditional Nayar, the two aspects are categorically differentiated from each other and are identified with the respective parts of the marriage institution - the tali rite and the sambandham union. Mainly, the tali rite is associated with "perpetual affinity," while the sambandham union contains the feature of 'potential jural paternity'. To provide a total meaning, the traditional Nayar marriage should be

considered as a 'process," and the tali rite and sambandham union have to be understood as successive parts of this process. The aim of such a process is to assure the children membership in the matrilineage as well as in the Nayar caste.

In reality, in order to suit their traditional matrilineal organization, the tali rite and sambandham union are kept apart as two "subspecies" of marriage. Based on this fact, I suggest that the tali rite is the 'preliminary part' of the marriage process, and then call the sambandham union the 'secondary' (or final) part of the same, which together constitute the traditional Nayar marriage. My views coincide with Fuller's interpretations, with slight differences. Fuller argues that neither of these alone constitute marriage for the Nayar, which must comprise both. He calls tali rite a first marriage and sambandham union, a 'second marriage' (Fuller, 1976).

Usually, in other south Indian communities, a girl's transition from childhood to adulthood is signified by the puberty ceremony as a 'rite of passage' (in general, social maturity is expected to follow physiological maturity); later, she attains complete (sexual) womanhood through her marriage, thus achieving irreversible status transformation. A Hindu marriage is characterized by two separate components - the betrothal and consummation, both are included within one ordinary marriage. Whereas among the traditional Nayar, though the puberty ceremony (physiological maturity) is

recognized and celebrated separately, the tali rite has become more important as a rite of passage as well as a part of marriage (with features reminiscent of betrothal?) in a girl's life emphasizing her 'social maturity', which is celebrated ahead of the actual puberty (physiological) with grandeur signifying a taravad's prestige, status, and its social connections. This particular rite has been studied by anthropologists and is called by different terms such as a primary marriage, group marriage, mock marriage, first marriage, and age grade ceremony.

Let us see, what functions the tali rite has, how it resembles the other Indian societies, and why it should be considered as a preliminary part of marriage. By being a prepubertal ceremony, the tali rite resembles the institution of child marriage as found elsewhere in historic India. In the name of caste purity (which is definitely associated with social, economic, and political dominance and power), the child marriage was excessively practiced mainly among the upper castes in the past as a symbol of ritual superiority. The ideology of such marital restrictions/sexual privileges (as evident in the institutions of child marriage and hypergamous marriages) in the traditional Indian society is in order to distinguish upper circles of the caste hierarchy from the ritually and socially suppressed low castes (Tambaiah, 1973). To maintain its socio-ritual status in the caste hierarchy, the Nayar as a dominant caste had to be within the



limits of the moral (or ideological) principles of the caste that are set forth by the 'traditional Hindu legal ideologists'. At a caste level, thus the tali rite exhibits the elements of caste purity and ritual superiority. The celebration of the tali rite in the past was a declaration by a taravad to the Nayar castemen and other pure and superior persons that the girl safely transversed from childhood to adulthood (ritually) without any ritual (and social) drawbacks.

In association with caste purity, the 'horror of incest' among the traditional Nayar also preconditions the tali rite as a ritually required ceremony (to maintain strict lineage exogamy in a Nayar neighborhood as well as lineage purity in a girl's taravad without any defilement). In this connection, Gough states that the tali rite appears to reflect a marked horror of incest among the traditional Nayar, ". . . which makes it necessary for the natal kinsmen of a woman to renounce her rights in her mature sexuality before she in fact matures" (1955:64). The fear of incest together with strict observance of caste purity encourages a taravad to perform the tali rite ahead of the actual physiological maturity of a girl, in which the girl is ritually handed over to the rightful husband (i.e., tali tier) from appropriate enangan lineage (or a superior caste person) for a temporary period of four days to test and attest her purity.

Such a ritual validation in the tali rite confirms the purity and status of a girl and permits her transmission from status to status. Through this achieved personal status transformation, a girl becomes eligible to have proper and legitimate liaisons with her sambandham partners. In brief, as noted by Fuller, ". . . the tali rite recognized a woman's right to enter sambandham union" (1976:105).

On the other hand, the tali rite affirms and reaffirms the relations between the enangan lineages as a preliminary part of marriage. As I noted before, the enangans are equals to a girl's taravad in terms of status and rank and as well are cross cousins. The tali tying ceremony is an expression of enangan relation, which resembles the 'alliance' relations of the other south Indian communities based on the reality that they are hereditary and persistent across generations. Mainly this character of 'perpetual affinity' as a kind of alliance relationship makes the Nayar marriage system a variant of Dravidian patterns.

The tali rite thus concerns the sphere of affinity through which a taravad continues or enhances its prestige and status, the purity of the women, taravad, and caste as a whole, and finally the personal status transformation of a girl through which she gets a right to have sambandham relationships of equal rank and statuses to perpetuate her matrilineage with legitimate children. In this way, the tali rite sets the scene for the later part of the marriage process

by completing (or meeting) the preliminary requirements in accordance with the native traditional norms, thus constituting (only) the preliminary part of the marriage. After undergoing the transitory ceremony of Tirandukalyanam, a girl completes the phases of social and physiological maturity and finally enters the sambandham unions with full-fledged womanhood. This final part of the marriage process has to be considered as secondary (or ending) part of the Nayar marriage process. In this last part, a girl, meets the preconditions set forth in the tali rite by entering into legitimate sexual relations with the men of equal or high status in order to ascribe legitimate birth status to her children, justifying the bilateral nature of the caste system. As the jural paternity is the basic requirement in matrilineal systems, the sambandham partners pay delivery expenses to establish the children as members of their lineages or caste. Though debatable, I think that the sambandham union does contain some features of affinity as long as the relationship is continued, based on the fact that the Nayar men observed in limited obligations such as giving gifts on special occasions and taking responsibility to recognize the legitimacy of the children.

With a consideration of the above facts the Nayar marriage should be considered as a process wherein the women are given high priority in all the related and interconnected ceremonies due to the matrilineal emphasis on them. The

resultant subunits of the marriage process are the outcomes of a compromise between matrilineal and caste ideologies. Different aspects involved in the Nayar marriage process are the strategies of the traditional Nayar matrilineal organization to survive in a patrilineal milieu of the traditional Indian society, as well as to identify itself as a dominant group in the caste society by exhibiting the pan Indian associated caste principles of status, hierarchy, purity, bilaterality, hypergamy and legitimacy.

Such a peculiar marriage system underwent drastic changes in the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the present century. The changes were brought in by the British courts through a series of acts giving legal recognition to the sambandham union as a marriage. The credit should also go to the social reform movements led by the educated Nayar and the younger sons of the Nambudiris, who fought against the unusual marital and family institutions. During this period, the tali rite eventually disappeared, while the sambandham union gained significance. At present, the Nayar marriage is generally referred to by the terms 'Kalyanam' or 'vivaham', which is identical to that of neighboring societies in India. I will discuss the associated factors that caused changes in the traditional marriage system in the next chapter.

III: iii: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

An insight into the exceptionally complex political and economic domains of pre-British Kerala reveals that the systems of caste, kinship, marriage, and territorial segmentation are all-important in the traditional political and economic organizations. Until the introduction of successive alien administrative principles by Martanda Varma, Muslim rulers, and the British in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and early decades of the present century respectively, the traditional political and economic networks were dominated by feudal elements, identified with the weakest features of a state structure, and existed without a bureaucratic administrative setup.

Although Cochin, Travancore, and the Zamorin's territory (later on, the British Malabar) stood out as the three political divisions by 1763, traditionally Kerala was identified with (fluid) political segmentations partially correlating with its distinctive physical geographic features. The Western ghats provided a natural barrier between Kerala and its neighbors to the north and east, curtailing mobility in and out of Kerala. Even within Kerala, as noted by Lewandowski (1980:17), ". . . movement between the northern and southern portions of what is today Kerala state was also impeded by 30 rivers flowing from the mountains to the sea which segmented the land, and provided a basis for defining separate political territories . . . . Road networks were

never well developed prior to the eighteenth century, further discouraging internal movement in the region."

Throughout the medieval period, a number of independent, and doubtless rival, hereditary chieftains or kings asserted their control over local areas dominating the political scenario without a royal power in Kerala. As against the more centralized political systems in other parts of India, the kingship in traditional Kerala resembled that of the Bloch's (1965) feudal political organization, tending to be more "collective" and "impersonal" where different categories of political hierarchy such as royalty, feudatory royalty, chiefs, village headmen, and retainer Nayars were interlinked with each other through a loose system of vassalage, and exhibiting a 'Pyramidal' political structure. In this connection, Gough (1979:286) describes Kerala state as 'feudal entities' because, ". . . land was owned privately by gentry, noble, royal or priestly households or by temples, because serfdom and service tenures based on households characterized production relations in the countryside and because government was conducted through private lord-vassal relations which combined military, judicial, and economic rights and obligations."

As I noted earlier, on the other hand, the systems of marriage (i.e., hypergamy) and kinship (i.e., both consanguineal - taravad, a matrilineal joint family, and affinal - enangan, relationships) among the ruling classes

purported political insignia, and rather articulated the political system through 'status' exchange transactions as networks of political alliances (for details, see, Gough, 1961, 1979; Mencher, 1966; Trautmann, 1981). Within royal families, ("matrilateral") succession to kingship passed exactly as did the office of Karanavan (i.e., the oldest surviving male of a given matrilineal joint family) among the commoner Nayars, which in reality shortened the reign of a king when compared to that of primogeniture regimes elsewhere in India (see, Trautmann, 1981:418-419). Because the order of succession was strictly determined by the relative ages (but not by the generation rule) of would-be rulers from the pool of eligible princes (i.e., "the throne would pass from brother to brother in the order of their birth, and then to their sister's sons"), the average length of the reigns in Kerala tended to be shorter. As against the all-India average for regimes under primogeniture of 20.5 years, the all-Kerala mean length of the reign was 10.9 years (ibid).

In consideration of some of the above aspects, the pre-colonial socio-political organization of Kerala, in one way or other, could broadly be understood as a "primitive state," or a "hierarchical" society, and, or most aptly as a collection of "kin-feudations" (Service, 1963; Fried, 1967; Fox; 1971).

In spite of its isolation from the rest of the subcontinent due to the natural barriers, in the past, Kerala had historically been in contact with the outside world since

the earliest times through its pepper, spice, and tropical wood exports. During the course of its (trade) history, there originated major markets (or ports) for the exports along the coast of Kerala, which, in later years, transformed into the (present day) major cities of Kerala. Kerala has a long recorded history (especially from the period 1498 to 1792, a period of relentless struggle between the European and Middle Eastern powers, who formed shifting alliances with native kings for control of the spice and pepper trade. Although certain changes emerged in Kerala's economy during this period, they mainly pertained to the cosmopolitan royal cities as well as to the upper levels of the feudal aristocracy up to an extent. However, as noted by Gough (1961), the basic form of caste system, and the pyramidal nature of the political structure persisted with little change until after the Muslim invasions), but the discussion in this section does not go beyond the sixteenth century due to the limitations of the present work.

According to Gough (1979), in sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Kerala had some nine to dozen feudal estates of varying size; each of which was focused around a port. Kerala rulers primarily (encouraged and) depended on commerce (i.e., custom duties on imports and exports) because their other resources were so limited owing to the 'feudal theocracy'; and only secondarily on their traditional resources of revenue that came from their own demesne lands (i.e., "Janmam



holdings"), customs dues, succession fees in all Nayar and Nambudiri landlord families, gifts, fines, and escheat because there was no land survey and no regular land tax (Mencher, 1966; Gough, 1979; Dale, 1980). In addition, due to the fragmented nature of the socio-political fabric, traditional Kerala was identified with the lack of any communal development works. "The lack of necessity for constructing irrigation works and roads requiring public expenditure may be correlated with the fact that until the Mysorean invasions no land revenue was collected in Kerala" (Mencher, 1966:144).

The inability of the Kerala rulers to tax the agricultural land, their most valuable resource, was the repercussion of the then unique feudal socio-economic structure that existed in rural Kerala, which contrasts the Asiatic mode of production to be found elsewhere in India. Indeed, such an inability restricted their economic power. On the other hand, in terms of polity, as stated by Dale (1980:16), ". . . sovereignty of all Malayali rulers was severely limited by the necessity of having to act with and through the powerful military aristocracy of Kerala known as the Nayars, . . . As for the Nayars, they completely dominated the military system; members of this caste formed the peculiar kind of skirmishing infantry which comprised the basic military force of every Malayali state."

With such severe limitations on the political and economic spheres of Kerala kingdoms, their rulers had to

divert their attention towards commerce to stabilize the dwindling political and economic activities. For this, Kerala rulers mainly depended on foreign merchants because only a few indigenous non-Hindu Malayali castes (for example, the Mappilas, a muslim community in Malabar; the Syrian Christians in south Kerala, mainly in later years) played the economic role as merchants, in addition to a very few immigrant Hindu castes. In contrast, although few Hindus served in pseudo bureaucracies of the cosmopolitan royal capitals, the bulk of the indigenous Hindu castes was settled in the countryside.

In contradistinction to the royal capitals (or to the political and economic structure and functions at the level of a larger territory or kingdom), the core of the traditional social fabric of Kerala society was, and has been rural in nature. As Dale (1980:19) has described it, ". . . in pre-Portuguese times, as continued to be true in the nineteenth century, Malayali Hindus as a whole comprised an essentially rural society with the dominantly agrarian economic base." In general, among the agrarian societies, ". . . being the main source of subsistence, land is metamorphosed into a socio-economic reality" (Singh, 1988:12). Being the primary, scarce, productive resource, land becomes the main source of wealth, power, status, and prestige; "control of land means control of livelihood," "local power flows mainly from the land": in brief, "land is to rule" (Neale, 1969; Mandelbaum, 1970:208-209). To understand the political, economic, and

social structure at a local level, then one has to turn attention towards the (agrarian based) village organization in traditional Kerala.

As evident from the literature on village India, at the local level, the kingly functions were performed by a caste, called "dominant caste" (Srinivas, 1987). Being at the center of a complex religio-economic organization, the dominant caste permeate(s)d nearly every aspect of day to day life of the village (Raheja, 1988:517). In keeping the recent criticisms against Srinivas's initial definition of dominant caste (see, Nicholas, 1968; Oommen, 1970) as well as Dumont's view of dominant caste (see, Srinivas, 1987) in mind, I prefer the latter to the former to disclose the nature of dominance played by (most of the) Nayars in traditional Kerala. I also state that Dumont's concept of dominant caste would be useful only to explain the traditional realms but not the present day situations because of the limited applicability of his notion to the changing social realities of rural Kerala (or India).

Restating Dumont's notion of dominant caste (1974:162-163) - a caste is dominant when it has ". . . eminent right over the land, . . . power to grant land to employ members of other castes . . . to build up a large clientele . . . power of justice . . . the dominant castes are often entrusted with the arbitration of differences in other castes or between different castes, and they can exact penalties for unimportant offenses . . . monopoly of authority . . . the dominant caste

is often a royal caste, a caste allied to royal castes . . ."

I shall attempt to explain how the Nayers, being one of the land-holding castes, enjoyed unquestionable 'dominance' in traditional (rural) Kerala, and would attempt to show the initial factors that shook their 'secular pre-eminence', setting the initial stage of decline in their 'dominance', in the following pages.

One unique feature of rural Kerala is that the villages are loosely organized without caste clustering (i.e., with an exception of few lower castes, Muslims, and Syrian Christians; caste clustering is common in other south Indian states), exhibiting dispersed settlement patterns where the unit of settlement is the house but not the village (Mencher, 1966). In fact, what constitutes a village in traditional Kerala has become a question, and has been discussed very often by scholars. (Aiyappan, 1965; Mencher, 1966; Gough, 1979; Dale, 1980), some suggesting that ". . . the village is more of a administrative convenience than a spatially distinct reality" (Nossiter, 1988:40).

Although debatable, it can be said that the traditional villages in Kerala are non-nucleated in contrast to nucleated villages to be found elsewhere in south India (see, Miller, 1960; Mencher, 1966). Nossiter's (1988:40) recent statement that ". . . the rural concentration of population is not associated with the nucleated village. Patterns of settlement are ribbon, even cobweb-like," neatly corresponds to Ibn

Battuta's accurate description of dispersed settlement pattern of Kerala in 1342. Speaking of travelling by land through the length of Kerala, as quoted by Dale (1980:19-20), he wrote: "along this road, . . . no space is uncultivated. Every one has his own separate garden with his own house in the middle, surrounded by a wooden fence . . . It is the same throughout the entire journey of two months." It has been suggested that such diffusion of settlement was due to the environmental (the heavy rainfall in Kerala partly obviates the need for irrigation, while the rugged terrain makes irrigation more difficult; hence the lack of cooperative efforts for maintaining large irrigation projects) and, or historical (the development of feudalism) realities (Aiyappan, 1965; Nossiter, 1988).

In pre-British Kerala, the village (not in sense of the English word-village) was the 'desam', the territorial unit of the (Nayar) military system, which was often co-terminus with the Nayar micro-caste council of the Kuttam, called the tara. The tara was the assembly of Karanavar, where each Karanavan represented a (Nayar) matrilineal joint family, the taravad. At the village level, Nayars had the right of overseeing the village matters, which included law and order, and the maintenance of the village temple. Villages were grouped into nads (chiefdoms or districts) under higher chieftains, and these in turn often owed allegiance to most important rulers. The nad assembly was composed of the representatives of taras,

and exercised greater influence over the administration of the territory as the sole custodians of ancient rights and customs. The main goal of nad assembly was to check the authority of the monarchs. Thus, here existed structural cleavages between territorial units - villages, chiefdoms, kingdoms, where the basis of the territorial organization was mainly the nad (Baden-Powell, 1957; Miller, 1960).

In terms of caste hierarchy in a given territorial division, say at the level of *desam*, there was a correlation between the economic, political, and ritual authority and the status of a caste in social hierarchy. In general, high rank in the social hierarchy and its rewards " . . . are associated directly and instrumentally with control and exercise of economic and political power" (Berreman, 1976:299). Being the locally dominant castes, within the range of intercaste relationships, the Nambudiri Brahmans and the Nayars with their respective ritual and secular pre-eminence, completely dominated the economic, juridical, and social life of Kerala, in the past, resulting in structured superordinate and subordinate relationships between the interacting castes. The village organization (*desam*) throughout traditional Kerala existed mainly for the Nayars. According to Panikkar, as quoted by Mencher (1966:145), ". . . for the purpose of communal life, other castes are outside the village organization."

As stated by Dale (1980:20), the Nambudiri and Nayar preeminent position ". . . was primarily a function of their status as the two largest land holding castes in Kerala." Although the land belonged to the king, in theory, most of the land in a particular village was owned by a landlord family, that is patrilineal joint family - illam, in case of the Nambudiri Brahmins; and matrilineal joint family - taravad, in case of the Nayars. The landlords were mainly drawn from the castes/subcastes such as Nambudiri Brahmins, royal, chiefly, and other aristocratic Nayars. In some villages, the land formed part of the estate of some large (Brahman) temples, called sanketams. In this way, in traditional Kerala, villages were classifiable therefore as Brahman, temple, royal, chiefly, and Nayar headman's villages (Gough, 1961:308).

The landlord (joint) family in a village was called Janmi, who possessed janmam rights (Janmam = "birth"). Janmi's were traditionally both more or less than the (western styled) landlords. The janmam rights not only included absolute control over (tax-free) land, but also authority over the social and ceremonial affairs of the village. Nevertheless, as quoted by Gough (1961:314), ". . . the landlord might not sell his land without the consent of the king or of a chief, and sale was restricted to families of appropriate caste. He might not evict his tenants, village

servants, or serfs without their consent unless they committed grave crime."

A janmi was called desavazhi ("the holder of desam"), when he also controlled the affairs of the local temple. Being the head of the desam, desavazhi (who was appointed by the ruler) supervised the village social life under the guidance of 'tara kuttam' or 'kara-yogam'; sent his quota of Nayar militia in times of war; and collected no land revenue, but appointed assistants, usually Nayars, to assist him in maintaining 'law and order'. While the local headmen of the lower castes were responsible to desavazhi for the conduct of their castemen. In Nambudiri villages, there was no desavazhi at all, but Nayars controlled the local administration. With the consent of the ruler, all these janmam rights ". . . - to land, social and military authority, and religious supervision - could be bought and sold, for the deed transfers authority in the desam, temple management, and control of lands, gardens, slaves, and sites for houses" (Logan, as quoted by Dale, 1980:20).

Within the economic dimensions of the village, the principles of redistribution and reciprocity played a major role. The janmis (or landlords) created several types of "produce-sharing systems of land tenure" involving "households" of different castes as the units of interaction, where the village landlord and the Nayar tenants played the role of redistributive agents, ". . . collecting in goods



from the lower orders and redistributing them in customary shares" (Gough, 1961:314). The relationship between the janmis and Nayar tenants was less a contractual relationship. In the village, ". . . differential relationship to the land, especially the wet rice land, corresponded to the differential rank of castes" (Miller, 1954:412). Thus, in the traditional rural Kerala, as Miller continues to describe it: ". . . Nambudiris and chieftain castes tend to be landlords; the higher Nayar subcastes are either landlords or non-cultivating tenants ('customary Kanamdars'); the inferior Nayars and some Tiyyas are cultivating sub-tenants, either on permanent leases ('cultivating Kanamdars') or on annual leases (Verumpattamdars); the majority of upper polluting castes are land-less laborers; while the lower polluting castes were until recently serfs, tied to a particular block of land. . ."

Most of the Nayars, as the middlemen between the landlord families and the cultivating subtenants of the upper polluting castes, held their lands on 'Kanam' tenure as non-cultivating tenants (called, Kanakkarans or Kanamdars); and subleased the lands to the upper polluting castes because of their military commitments as vassals. According to Logan, as quoted by Gough (1961:315), the cultivating subtenant households (verumpattamdars) ". . . traditionally retained one-third of the net produce and surrendered the rest to their masters." On the other hand, periodically (about every twelve years), Nayars paid a lump sum in cash (i.e., during the

period 1500-1792, due to the European trade and ever increasing warfare, Nayar soldiers were paid in cash by the rulers; in turn, cash payments became a feature of the Kanam tenure) to the janmi and "annually they gave him rent in kind, interest on the deposit being set off against the rent" (Miller, 1954:412).

In contrast to their counterparts in other parts of Kerala, Nayar commoners in north Kerala, were not a regular militia. This was mainly due to the highly fragmented nature of north Kerala polity and the low economic (and trade) prosperity of the local rulers. As their military commitments were sporadic, most commoner Nayars were independent 'warrior-cultivators' instead of full-time warriors. In villages, headmen lineages possessed comparatively larger amounts of land, while commoner Nayars enjoyed the status of petty landlords. They did part of their own cultivation on their small estates, while subleased part of their land to polluting castes such as Tiyyas, as in central Kerala. In some areas of north Kerala, both the headmen lineages and those of the commoner Nayars belonged to a larger caste, called Nambiars, who together with aristocrat Nayars formed the majority of the janmis (Gough, 1961).

The fabric of interrelationships between the upper polluting castes or functioning castes (such as astrologers, artisans, washermen, barbers, and etc.) and higher castes, and, or within functioning castes, were hereditary (and

reciprocal) relationships, resembling the 'jajmani system' of north India. Each servant caste held a village right to perform the functioning services, called 'desam avakasam' (a "right" or "privilege"). The untouchable castes (or agrestic serfs) were the slaves of the dominant castes tied in a hereditary bondage, engaged in wet-rice-cultivation and other menial tasks. Each servant family was given a housesite and garden (by the landlord family through a hereditary right) in a different part of the village, while the lower polluting castes lived on the outskirts of the village in separate small hamlets. In accordance with the caste prohibitions, all the polluting castes lived away from the Nayar village boundaries, each having a separate and distinct social life (Gough, 1961).

In the social hierarchy of the village, ". . . juridical authority neatly coincided with political authority and economic power" (Miller, 1960:46). The law of the land was custom, which was duly endorsed by each caste's (unwritten) religious codes. Every caste maintained its own caste council to settle internal disputes. Larger civil disputes and grave crimes among the higher castes such as Nayars were referred to the courts of either chiefs or kings, if not settled at a neighborhood level. In case of the Nambudiri Brahmans, the kings had no judicial authority over them; they maintained their own caste councils to arbitrate disputes. But, low caste disputes, if not settled within themselves, were always brought to the higher castes in the social hierarchy for

adjudication. Referring to north Kerala (which was more or less true in other areas also), Miller (ibid) states that, ". . . within the village there was a constant tendency for disputes unsettled inside the caste to be referred upwards to a caste higher in the scale." However, the untouchable castes had no legal rights, and they ". . . came directly under the jurisdiction of their Nayar or Brahman masters, who had power of life and death over them" (Gough, 1961:319).

The complexities of political (or territorial) segmentation together with the caste prohibitions (which could be measured through inter-caste social distances) rather localized the internal organization of castes differentially in accordance with their socio-ritual ranks. The territorial segmentation enforced the vertical (functional) interdependence of all castes at the village level, and inhibited the development of horizontal intra-caste social networks over wider areas. With such a localized caste system there was little mobility for anyone but the higher castes, especially the Nambudiri and Pattar Brahmans whose social networks extended the length and breadth of Kerala. In this connection, Gough states (1961:319), "the higher the caste, the wider the field of social relations. Among the serfs and the higher polluting castes this was confined to a group of adjacent villages. Among temple servants, village headmen, and retainer Nayars (apart from their excursions in war), the

field of social relations was the chiefdom. Among chief and royalty it was the kingdom, and among Brahmins, Kerala."

Apart from the above aspects, the concept of dominance permeated every angle of socio-cultural lifeways in traditional Kerala. The complex of superiority mirrored in every interaction situation among the castes, exposing structural (social, physical, and psychological) distance between the higher castes and lower castes. Nobody was allowed to imitate the higher castes; and lower strata were prohibited (by social strictures imposed by higher castes) from wearing ornaments, dressing like the upper castes, attending traditional Malayali schools, entering into the higher caste temples, and so on. For example, the ezhuttupalli, a traditional Malayali school oriented towards Sanskrit, was the primary source of education for the Nayar children (especially for the boys; girls were not allowed to attend school after the talikettu ceremony of a taravad). Lower castes did not have access to such schools. Likewise, the Kalari (a local gymnasium, or an academy for military training), attached to the Bhagavathi temple was meant for the Nayars to train their youngsters as soldiers or warriors (Rao, 1957).

The religious activities of different castes at the time of major festivals in a village roughly correlated with the caste hierarchy. The Nambudiri Brahmans and royalty maintained the private temples, called "ambalams," which were

dedicated to the Sanskrit gods such as Shiva, Vishnu, Subrahmanya, and others, and were closed to Nayars and the lower castes (Gough, 1970). The Nayar tara (or neighborhood) jointly owned a temple, called Bhagavathi temple (kshetram). "Such Bhagavathi temples are found throughout Kerala, Bhagavathi being both the patron of Nayar soldiers and the guardian of village prosperity and laws" (ibid:135). In contrast to ambalams, kshetram would exhibit a combination of Brahman and non-Brahman elements.

Traditionally, the collective religious or cultural activities of the village were controlled or managed by the leading Nayar lineages, which were centered around the Bhagavathi temple (Aiyappan, 1965). At the annual festival of the Bhagavathi (goddess), each caste participated in a manner appropriate to its rank in the caste hierarchy, and ". . . often in such a way as to express the distinctive occupations or cultural forms of the participants" (Miller, 1954:413; for details, see, Gough, 1970).

The above pages, I believe, have depicted a glimpse of traditional political and economic organizations and other concomitant socio-cultural features, showing how the Nambudiri Brahmans and Nayars maintained dominance (differential, though) at the local levels; and how political (or territorial) fragmentation (together with ritual prohibitions and the localization of castes) inhibited spatial, social, and economic mobility in pre-colonial Kerala, resulting in the

pigeon holed nature of localized cultures throughout Kerala. Such a traditional scenario, nevertheless, started crumbling, due to the abrupt political changes that occurred in the eighteenth century, and to the latter day colonial insinuations in the nineteenth century, leading to profound changes in the social web of traditional Kerala society, signifying especially the decline of Nayar dominance and significant changes in their social organization.

A detailed study of such historical events is not necessary here, but the factors that shattered the Nayar military role, and the feudal aristocracy and the trends of land ownership transformations are worth mentioning. In the course of the eighteenth century, as described by Nossiter (1988:41), "as a result of marriages and wars the multiplicity of kingdoms and principalities was reduced to the three political entities, the princely states of Travancore, and Cochin, and the Malabar extension of the Madras presidency, which were to survive to the end of the Raj." During this period, Kerala polity had experienced dramatic, and varied changes in regional terms, shaking the foundations of Nambudiri and Nayar supremacy. The political endeavors of Martanda Varma, and the Mysorean (Muslim) rulers Haider Ali and Tippu Sultan, indeed had provided initial impetus for change in Kerala from the traditional to the intermediate period and, or modern period.

The rule of Martanda Varma ("the builder of modern Travancore") from 1729 to 1758 led to an expansion and strengthening of Travancore state in south Kerala, stretching from the borders of Cochin to Cape Comarin. The end results of Martanda Varma's reign were: subjugation of the feudal aristocracy, destruction of the very foundations of Nayar military organization, foundations of a bureaucratic government, and appropriation of land by the state. In 1795 Travancore entered into treaty relations with the East India Company (British); in 1805 accepted British suzerainty; and in 1809, the Nayar armies were demobilized (Fuller, 1976; Paulini, 1979; Nossiter, 1988).

In the 1810s, Colonel Munro, a British resident for Travancore and Cochin 'reorganized and centralized the administration and Police force' (Paulini, 1979;135). From 1814 onwards, it had become a regular feature for the Maharajas to recruit non-Malayali Brahmans as their chief ministers, and in the 1820s and 1830s Travancore was adopting the features of a modern state: codified law, British styled-courts and education (Nossiter, 1988). By the middle of the nineteenth century, the state became the main janmi by owning 80 percent of the cultivated land, and the whole of the waste land, while the remaining 20 percent of the cultivated land was within the hands of janmis - mainly Brahmans, Brahman temples, and the progeny of local rulers (Varghese, 1970; Oommen, 1985).



Further fundamental changes occurred during 1850s. Slavery was abolished (officially) in 1855. Under the guidance of the progressive chief minister (Dewan) T. Madhava Rao (1858-72), several changes occurred - restructuring of education, creation of public works department, strengthening of the cash economy, and 'enfranchisement of tenant - cultivators.' In 1888, Travancore became the first native state to inaugurate a sort of legislative council (Nossiter, 1988:45). However, it was the 'Pattam' proclamation in 1865, which made the land a free marketable commodity, a sign of capitalist economy, ending state landlordism in Travancore. It conferred full ownership rights on the Kanamdars (i.e., tenants) of government (or sircar) lands (Oommen, 1985). Such a new resource had variable impacts on the newly landowning castes such as the Nayars, Syrian Christians, and the Izhavas up to an extent, in later years.

The northern part of Kerala (called, Malabar region), like in the southern region, also experienced significant changes from the mid-eighteenth century onwards in its own way. The period from 1766-1792 was identified with the Mysorean invasions and Muslim rule in Malabar. Having brushed aside the traditional Nayar armies, Hyder Ali conquered the Malabar Coast in 1766, subjugating the Calicut and Cochin rajas together with other petty rulers. After his death in 1782, Tippu Sultan, Hyder Ali's son, succeeded to the throne in 1784, created chaos in northern Kerala through his radical

campaigns. His central aim was ". . . the entire conversion or extirpation of the whole races of rajas, Nayars, and other Hindus;" which forced a large number of Nambudiris, Nambiyars, and Nayars to flee south to take refuge in Travancore and Cochin (Dale, 1980:85). Such ruthless attacks on higher caste Hindus ended in 1792 after his miserable defeat by the British and their Hindu allies at the battle of Seringapatam. During the Mysorean rule, the Muslim community (Mappilas) experienced a rise in their socio-economic status, but were downgraded immediately after the British incorporated Malabar into British India because of the British policy as well as the northern rajas reprisals.

The Mysorean interlude in Kerala introduced some revolutionary and systematic changes in Malabar, which included: establishment of communication networks, attempts to centralize the politically fragmented region through destruction of the feudal order, weakening of Nayar military might, demolition of caste hierarchy to an extent, and especially introduction of a land revenue system based on actual productivity of land (which was alien to the native population) and attempts to settle land with Muslim and other low castes, who were the real cultivators (Paulini, 1979; Lewandowski, 1980, Dale, 1980). After annexation of Malabar in 1792, the British restored the order through profound changes. In exchange for their former sovereignty, the British paid political pensions to the rajas. For

administrative and revenue purposes, the former territorial divisions were replaced by the British, and the Malabar district was divided into taluks, firkas, amsams, and desams, which were supervised by the colonial representatives (Miller, 1960). British courts replaced the traditional modes of justice. Slavery was abolished. The Nayar armies were disbanded; and Nayar men who could not find a place either in British army, or in the local police force found themselves unemployed (Lewandowski, 1980).

However, in contrast to the Travancorean land policy, the British created a new 'land-tenure' and 'land revenue' policy, the jural norms of which led to . . . "a neat categorization of the agrarian population into landlords (janmi), tenants (Kanamdar and Verumpattamdar) and agricultural laborers" (Oommen, 1985:35). With a western notion of (capitalistic) individual land ownership, the British misinterpreted the traditional land system, and began ". . . to recognize the janmis as the sole owners of all landed properties in Malabar; thus defining the Kanam as mortgage and degrading the verumpattamdars to mere tenants-at-will. This concept was ruthlessly implemented by the administration (the newly created land revenue department) and the courts, which sided with the janmis in taking full advantage of their new rights by evicting disliked tenants" (Paulini, 1979:129). In addition, in Malabar, ". . . the extensive tracts of waste land were attributed to the nearest janmi; and potential

cultivators were further discouraged by the kinds of leases granted for bringing it under the hoe" (Nossiter, 1988:41). Such one-sided attitude of the British, and the eagerness of the janmis 'to fix rents on a competitive basis' to amass wealth instead of traditional land arrangements with the tenants thwacked the relations between janmis and tenants, resulting in Muslim insurrections in Malabar known as "Moplah outbreaks." Thirty-two such outbreaks occurred between the period 1826 and the Mappila Rebellion of 1921-2 (Dale, 1980).

As a result of this new land policy, the Nambudiri Brahmans in south Malabar, Nambiyars and some Nayar families in the north Malabar became janmies, forming a minority stronghold on the vast cultivated and uncultivated lands in Malabar. While most of the Kanamdars were Nayars, and verumpattamdars were mainly Tiyyas in north Malabar; and the bulk of verumpattamdars and a few of the Kanamdars were Mappilas, (Muslims) in south Malabar (Oommen, 1985).

Cochin, an area sandwiched between the Travancore state and the Malabar region, at the end of eighteenth century, accepted a treaty with the British and became a client state of the British in 1808-9. Although the situation in Cochin was closer to that in Travancore, the pace of administrative modernization was slower in Cochin. The state could subjugate the chieftains, but was less successful than its (Travancore) neighbor. The Nayar armies were disbanded in 1809. Slavery was abolished in 1854.

By the early nineteenth century, the state appropriated 40 per cent of the cultivated land and all of the waste land; the remaining 60 percent of land was held by the few thousand janmis, who were mainly temples, Nambudiris, and local chieftain families. While tenants were mainly Nayars and Syrian Christians. Although tenants had security of tenure on government lands, the unrestricted powers of janmis together with the excessive British demands on the Cochin treasury became burdensome for the peasants, (Oommen, 1985; Nossiter, 1988). In all three regions the agricultural laborers were the caste groups that occupied the lowest stratum in the social and ritual order.

On the other hand, the same way the warrior class was absorbed into the budding bureaucracies in the early years of modern Japan (see, Befu, 1971), the high status Nayar subcastes (Kurups, Panikkars, Nambiyars, and some influential Nayars) ". . . turned to new jobs that were created in the elaborate bureaucracy that was emerging" in north Malabar (Lewandowski, 1980). Likewise, in Cochin, influenced by western oriented education and capitalistic economy, Nayars were becoming 'white-collar' elite in occupational and administrative blocks. Thus, Fuller (1976:131) says, quoting the census of 1891, in Cochin: "No class of the community is availing itself to the benefits of modern education as the Nayars, who are fast becoming conspicuous in every literate walk of life. In every department of the state and in all

learned professions, they form a respectable majority." In Travancore, although dominated by the non-Malayali Brahmins for some time, Nayars occupied respectable positions in administrative organizations (Jeffrey, 1976).

Throughout the intermediate period (1800-1947), under the direct or indirect influences of the British, the traditional institutions were increasingly disturbed as new resources (such as education, cash economy, infrastructure, and so on) became available for all castes, and because structural distance between the castes was lessening due to the nascent equalization principles which generated 'competition' (ibid). Different castes responded in different and variable ways during this period to face the crisis or to exploit the new situations. Likewise, Nayars in various regions of Kerala were subjected to different situations, responded with different solutions in their respective ways, finally leading to the disintegration of the matrilineal joint family, the legalization of marriage and permanency of the conjugal bond, and the decline of dominance. However, the particulars of processes of change were different from region to region. A detailed discussion of such changes, and the present day socio-cultural life ways of Nayars will be the subject matter of the succeeding chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Change is inevitable. It occurs perpetually in all societies-change in social, political and economic structures or change in social, political and economic roles and relationships, change in basic norms, attitudes, values, world view, and so on. The anthropological literature is full of studies on such transforming societies, emphasizing particularly colonial and post-colonial influences on the world's so called 'traditional' societies. Of course, many of these present different theoretical perspectives. Nevertheless, ". . . change differs in volume, pace and quality from society to society, depending upon the factors that start off the process of change, and the prevailing general cultural circumstances in which the factors happen to operate" (Jha, 1978:3).

To understand the processes of change or to analyze change and continuity in a given community's social organization, one needs to examine both 'endogenous' and 'exogenous' factors operating within or upon a social system, emphasizing the uniqueness of its specific historical conditions in relation to its contemporary circumstances. The processes of change in a society begin at times as a result of either 'natural calamities' or 'man-made crises' (ibid). As it is visible in the literature, the latter has played a major

role in the world's societies, transforming one type of society into another, not supplanting the entire original system, in general but accommodating both old and new orders in a synthetic way in the resultant type through a process of adaptation to the changing environment for survival. However, adaptive strategies to situations of change differ from society to society, depending on the 'unique historical realities and processes', the typical external relations, and 'the determinative force of a social system in its own development'. In this connection, Hanson (1983:200-201) quotes from Sorokin, that:

The totality of the external circumstances is relevant, by mainly in the way of retarding or accelerating the unfolding of the immanent destiny; weakening or reinforcing some of the traits of the system; hindering or facilitating a realization of the immanent potentialities of the system; finally, in catastrophic changes, destroying the system; but these external circumstances cannot force the system to manifest what it potentially does not have; to become what it immanently cannot become; to do what it immanently is incapable of doing.

Thus, change, a built-in-dynamism, is inherent in every social system. The base for change in the Indian or Kerala society can be found in the very nature of its rigid hierarchical caste stratification, kin-stratification in upper castes such as Nayars, Rajputs and others in traditional India, and cultural pluralism (Berreman, 1976). Before the advent of the British, the 'protective' institutions of the Hindu sacred society engulfed the potentialities of contradictions and strains within the social system,



preserving 'stability' of its structure, while allowing certain groups or families (as in the case of aristocratic Nayars in traditional Kerala) to have social mobility in the form of status emulation through the processes of 'sanskritization'. The sources for mobility in the stable society lay mainly in political, economic and ecological-demographic systems (for details, see, Srinivas, 1966; 1989). In a discussion on how the system-straining changes get accelerated in such stable societies, Garner says:

As long as its economy is sound, its ruling class hegemonic, and its producing groups obedient, the society appears to be static, consensual, and viable. Indeed many class societies have remained stable (if not static) for centuries. As long as the population is rural and isolated, the technology primitive and slow changing, political participation limited to small elite, and the ideology conservative and apathy inducing, the ruling classes can maintain hegemony for long periods of time. . . . But when technology is dynamic, the society is eager to expand geographically, the members of the producing classes are brought into close contact with each other, the ideology emphasizes secularization and participation, and system-training changes appear more rapidly (1977:407).

Traditional Indian (or Kerala) society, which is often described as homogenous, sacred, harmonious, and functionally interdependent, holistic society with gemeinschaft aspects, indeed experienced far-reaching changes in its basic traditional institutions during the period of the British Raj. As said by Srinivas (1989:44), the British rule ". . . set forces in motion which altered fundamentally the overall character of society; Indian society ceased to be stationary

and become mobile, and the quantum of mobility increased as the years went by ." The most useful theoretical perspective for analyzing the processes of change not only in India but also the other traditional societies is labeled as 'modernization'. This occurs as a result of the introduction of modern knowledge and modern socio-political and economic institutions by the colonial rulers (Jha, 1978). Implicit in the concept of modernization is the idea of progress, an 'open-ended process of change'; a change that alters or improves one's situation (McElroy and Townsend, 1989:343).

Although multi-faceted in nature, the overall impact of modernization is the change in basic traditional institutions. In general, 'adaptive' response to such situations of change is predominant in Indian history, while resistance to change or 'militant neotraditionalism' could also be found very often in India (Eisenstadt, 1970). The nature of social change in Indian villages within the context of modernization is 'multifactored', 'multidimensional', and 'multimotivated' process, where the channels of change are 'multivariant' (Ishwaran, 1970). In contrast to the generally held notion that processes of modernization always endanger the existence of tradition, it has been found that the traditional and modern coexist, signifying the continuity between the traditional and modern patterns of change (Eisenstadt, 1970; Ishwaran, 1970; Chekki, 1974; Singh, 1975).

During the course of colonial rule, different caste groups in different localities responded selectively to situations of change; some facing the newly created problems or crises, in turn looking for proper adaptive solutions to survive in the social milieu, while others engaging in exploitation of the new opportunities. Even different regional populations of a single caste or similar groups reacted differently to situations of change in accordance with the local historical circumstances of particularities. Such a situation definitely occurred in the case of Nayers. Nayar communities, under the rubric of varied historical experiences of different parts of Kerala - Malabar, Cochin and Travancore, varied in the particulars of process of change from region to region as the reader should see in the forthcoming discussion.

Given the fact that Kerala has a deeper history despite some lacunae, a proper model to analyze the process of change and continuity in Nayar social organization should be diachronic in nature, denoting the interactions and interconnections between the variables such as time, space and social realities of the actors. In my view, an analysis of change in Nayar atypical institutions, cannot be fruitful if it were either treated as an isolated group from the remaining society or studied in a synchronic way. This is to say that any attempt to observe regularities of change in a local community has to be carried on within the context of the wider-society (Gough, 1975); through time, paying attention to

the local or internal particularities as well as their external relations with the broader sweeping changes, voluntary, involuntary and developmental, occurring in the surrounding environments, say at the level of an administrative division, a state, a nation, or an international level.

On the other hand, while studying social change in such a local community, one should also pay attention towards similarities and dissimilarities, through time, if any in its institutions, in order to uncover continuity in change. This could be demonstrated in two ways - change can be observed through time, historically, showing how each succeeding level developed from its preceding level; or, it could be understood by comparing the system at two or more selected points in time (Hanson, 1983). I would prefer the former approach to trace change and continuity among Nayars by examining how the structural patterns of its institutions transformed from the traditional period (before 1800) to the modern (1947 to the present) through the intermediate period (1800-1947; in Travancore and Cochin principalities until 1956) due to the causal or contributing factors and processes of modernization.

Before launching into further details, some things should be clarified. There is certain fluidity in regards to the exact beginning and ending of dates for the above said periodizations. The periods are convenient for the present analysis, which, however, roughly correlates with the

distinctive nature of the historical periods in Kerala society. The Nayar institutions described in the preceding chapter are as they were in the traditional period, some of which, however, would overlap with the intermediate period. Because it is not necessary to repeat the same in the present chapter, only few relevant aspects will be discussed, succinctly. Further, the concept of 'modernization' in its strictest sense will be applicable only to the intermediate period, the impact of which reached its highest peaks in the early decades of the present century. I shall provide indices or indicators of modernization wherever they are necessary. To explain the modern period, neither the notion of 'modernization' nor that of 'sanskritization' provide a meaningful model for reasons explained in later pages, hence I prefer to call the current processes of change 'Indianization of modernity' or 'Keralization of modernization', or 'Nayarization of modernization'.

Next, much of the present work is based upon ethnographic accounts and historical studies, in addition to the material I collected from informants to construct the diachronic model, hence, it lacks the descriptive richness of synchronic studies. That too, as the informants come from the two villages of Pathanamthitta (Map. 2), a newly created district of Kerala state, which belonged to the former central Travancore region, my discussion would be more relevant to the



MAP 2

Kerala and Its Administrative Divisions, The Districts, 1981

studies of southern Kerala, or Travancore area Nayar communities. On the other hand, as the data on regional variation are not complete, I shall attempt to describe only the major events of change that occurred in each Nayar community, pointing out how they basically varied from region to region. With regard to the current social or cultural patterns, a broader view of the Nayar community will be depicted, although there still exist considerable minor regional variations; and portray they will middle-class Nayar expressions, in specific, because the informants come from well-to-do and rural-cum-urban family environments. The wider implications of the changes that I discuss in this chapter will be provided in the next chapter, which contains my conclusions.

IV: i: TRADITIONAL PERIOD (before 1800):

As can be seen from the studies on village India (or Kerala), the model of change is generally based on the assumption of a "pre-colonial base line," or traditional stable or stationary society, or "zero point of change" (Cohn, 1968; Saberwal, 1979). With these assumptions, one often tends to examine different broadly categorized periods as mutually exclusive entities and indicating the British as the sole agents of social change or social conflict in India (or Kerala). However, recent studies have partially refuted such notions by exposing the 'rudimentary' nature of social

conflict inherent in certain pre-colonial historical realities, instead of considering them as mere 'accidents' or 'structural strains' in the history of pre-colonial Kerala (Dale, 1980).

The modern changes, no doubt, gained momentum due to the British initiations in Kerala society in the nineteenth and early decades of the present century. But, in my view, the effects of Martanda Varma and Mysorean rulers on Malayali society can not be underestimated. The historical knowledge, despite certain caveats due to its patchy nature, can be used to ascertain certain phenomena through logical deduction. Broadly speaking, the initial impetus for change in Kerala was partially provided by Martanda Varma and the Muslim rulers, which, indeed created a sort of preadaptive potential in certain respects to accommodate the revolutionary changes that were brought in by the British later.

As mentioned earlier, whatever the changes (i.e., such as improvements in commerce and trade, new war techniques, intrusion of cash transactions among the aristocratic groups and so on) that occurred before the second quarter or first half of the eighteenth century were mainly confined to the neo-cosmopolitan royal cities without penetrating the traditional structures in rural Kerala. In contrast, the stable social structures of Travancore [from 1729 to 1758] and of north Kerala [from 1766 to 1792] experienced painful pressures of new administrative rules under the reigns of



Martanda Varma and the Muslim rulers respectively; while Cochin felt the impact of both sides (see, Panikkar, 1960; Kareem, 1973). A single community that was primarily attacked by both regimes, was that of Nayers. In this connection, Panikkar states that:

This transformation marked the end of Nayar predominance in Kerala. From a privileged order which through its local chiefs controlled the affairs of Kerala, the Nayers of Travancore and Cochin become merely the chief community in these states. Their political power as a community was completely broken. In the territories of the Zamorins and Kolathiris their influence continued for a few more years. The invasion of Hyder Ali swept away much besides Nayar political power before it. And with the annexation of Kerala by the British - the treaty of Seringapatam, the policy with Martanda Varma had initiated in Travancore and Komu Achan followed in Cochin, was carried with relentless vigor. The second half of the 18th century thus witnessed the destruction of the political predominance by the Nayers and this is the most capital fact in the history of Kerala during the last 400 years (1960:309).

Thus, Martanda Varma and the Muslim rulers through political repressions, were mostly successful in destroying the feudal warring principalities on one hand, and the basic spirit of Nayar military organization, in the other. In addition, Tippu Sultan wanted to reform the agrarian caste relations and the Nayar traditional social institutions because they looked "barbaric" and "uncivilized" to this "foreign" mind. His attitude could be understood from one of his letters to a local administrative representative dated the 6th March 1789; Tippu states, as quoted by Panikkar (ibid),

. . . your tribute has been reduced to one third part. You must (therefore) apply yourselves,

diligently and faithfully to the promoting of cultivation; and paying your rents regularly to the Sircar, always attend obediently upon our aumils. Moreover, as among the tribe of Nayarmars, the woman has no fixed husbands, or the many fixed wife; but the whole, with the exception of mothers, sisters, and daughters, cohabit promiscuously together like the beasts; now this is not being (a) good (custom) it is fit that every man, taking to himself a wife, and keeping her in his house, do not suffer any other person (or strangers) to come before her.

By quoting this statement, I do not mean that Tippu changed the matrilineal custom of Nayars; but would like to bring to the notice of the reader that how such assaults could have humiliated the Nayars at a psychobehavioral level. Although debatable, according to Jeffrey (1976:181), Martanda Varma's impact was that there appeared a probable decrease in genealogical complexity of ideal Nayar taravads in Travancore in the latter half of the eighteenth century. In sum, without any exaggeration of the historical events, it could be deduced that the Nayar communities, in different regions, by the end of the traditional period, were severely crippled socially, economically, politically and psychologically, and would be looking for solutions in the forthcoming British rule to gain their old glory.

IV: ii: INTERMEDIATE PERIOD (1800-1947; Travancore and Cochin until 1956).

The justification to term the period between 1800-1947 as "intermediate" lies in the fact that the important changes in Nayar kinship, family, marriage patterns as well as further decline in dominance occurred gradually during this period due to the contributing factors and processes of modernization under the direct or indirect supervision of the British raj. Such changes are not period limited, but open-ended, exhibiting a continuous transition. The modern economic, political, educational and legal institutions precipitated significant changes not only among the Nayars but also in Kerala society, in total, thus widening the initial "cracks" caused by Martanda Varma and Mysorean rulers in the foundations of traditional society. Initial changes such as demobilization of Nayar armies by the British engendered incipient ruptures in the Nayar matrilineal fabric, which in association with the subsequent and accumulated alterations that were brought in later years attained new meanings and organization for the Nayar kinship, family and marriage spheres.

One major change that occurred at the turn of eighteenth century and in the early decade of the nineteenth century was the demobilization of Nayar armies. The Nayar armies were disbanded in 1792 immediately after annexation of Malabar region by the British. The British guided the principalities

of Travancore and Cochin to demobilize the Nayar armies in 1809. It would be interesting to examine the affects of eighteenth century assaults on Nayar military organization as well as the demobilization of Nayar armies by the British and their impact on Nayar matrilineal institutions, if any. It is often stated that the plural marriages - polyandry and polygyny were gradually dying out in early years of the nineteenth century as a result of the collapse of Nayar armies (Gough, 1958). Such statements suggest the relationship between the military organization of Nayars and their matrilineal kinship and marriage systems.

As can be seen from the historical studies of family, it was not uncommon for men in some of the warrior societies to stay away from home for longer periods of time because of their commitments to the warrior way of life, and having marital relations which were mainly "political alliances, not emotional ones"; whose ". . . wives lived in households with children whose paternity no one was to strict about" (Kelly, 1981:1-9). On the other hand, a corpus on matrilineal kinship exhibits that the weakest nature of the marital tie was the basic requirement for the origin and maintenance of the matrilineal societies (Schneider and Gough, 1961), where the husbands and their lineages acquired restrained (i.e., the degrees of restraining, however would vary from society to society in accordance with its socio-cultural, historical, economic and ecological circumstances) rights in "genetricem"

and rights in "uxorem." Nonetheless, the only matrilineal society in anthropological accounts, which had fulfilled the requirements of a "true" matriliney was that of the Nayars, distorting the universal definition of marriage as well as the universal definition of nuclear family. Because Nayars have had both a warrior way of life and true matrilineal institutions, one might deduce a functional fit between their military organization and the weakness of martial bonds. In this connection, Gough states:

The Nayars themselves appear to have recognized a connection between their occupation as a militia, and the custom of plural marriages by which men were prevented from forming permanent attachments to wife and children. . . . The extent to which the marriage institution was influenced by the military system is unclear. . . . Though it is not possible to establish a causal connection between the military organization and polyandrous and polygynous marriage, it seems evident that this institution, in which a man had no responsibilities to one wife and children, but could take a new wife wherever he happened to be, fitted the way of life of a militia (1951:77).

Fuller (1976:124) further extends the argument by saying that ". . . there was a fairly evident functional 'fit' between the Nayar's military role and their marriage system." But, as noted by Mencher (1965), among the military castes in other parts of India, marital union was clearly recognized unlike the Nayar 'symbolic marriage', in spite of the mens' extramarital maneuvers whenever they were away from home on military excursions. Then too, neither all of the Nayar men were engaged in warfare nor were on active service all the year. The two monsoon seasons (for about five months)

restricted the warrior mobility, and forced them to stay in their taravads, which time they used to improve their prowess through military training. Thus, indirectly, one can suspect that there could have been a possibility (at least) for some men to have some sort of semi-continuous relationship with women (i.e., their sambandham partners), if not permanent bonds. Thus, despite the fact that ". . . the Nayar military organization was not unsuited to the marriage pattern described above, it cannot be stated that their occupation as soldiers was by itself a main factor in the weakness of marital ties" (ibid:176).

Lacking concrete evidence, one can either look into other institutions that were associated with Nayar marriage customs or depend on legendary information. According to the Brahminical tradition, as quoted by Jeffrey (1976:XV), from Logan, whose source was 'Keralo-patti' ". . . He (i.e., Parasurama) bestowed on the Nayars the marumakkattayam or matrilineal system of family and inheritance, and decreed that Nayars should have no formal marriage and that their women should always be available to satisfy the desires of the Nambudiris," while, as the reader can recall, the extensive practice of 'hypergamy' among the ruling classes in historic Kerala, partially corroborates the latter part of the above legendary statement. Although the relationship between the Nayar military organization and the marriage pattern cannot be overruled, the religio-ethical manipulations steered by the

'sacred' and 'secular' intelligentsia should also be considered in the problem of Nayar marriage system and its relationship to the military organization.

Though tempted to state that the disbandment of Nayar armies should have been the major factor for the changes in matrimonial relations, lack of empirical evidence arrests such an argument. However, one cannot set aside the idea that ". . . the permanent return of the Nayarmen to their homes would have considerably promoted the formation of bonds with their sambandham partners, stronger than those existing when they were frequently away" (Fuller, 1976:124). Nayar communities, in different regions of Kerala, throughout the nineteenth century, were constantly undergoing cumulative changes in their matrilineal institutions, cracking the traditional fabric eventually as a result of various processes of modernization. During the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century the talikettukalyanam gradually died out, paving the way for sambandham union to be recognized as a stable marital bond that can be compared to that of the monogamous marriages found elsewhere in India.

Such changes have peaked during the period 1890s-1930s through a series of legal acts by the British courts, mainly as a result of reform movements, culminating in recognition of the sambandham union as a real marriage. The tali rite died out in Travancore at the turn of the twentieth century (Jeffrey, 1976; Fuller, 1976), in Cochin around 1930 (Gough,

1955), and in south Malabar a little later (Mencher, 1965). In contrast to other regions of Kerala, in north Malabar, the tali rite was "no more than an annotation ceremony," while the sambandham had been considered as real marriage even in earlier times (see, Gough, 1955:54-56). According to Moore, as mentioned by Fuller (1976), the formalization of sambandham union in other parts of Kerala during the nineteenth century might have been in accordance with the early steps taken by their north Kerala counterparts. On the other hand, Nambudiri women and the younger sons of the Nambudiris also revolted against their bondage to the custom resulting in the Madras Nambudiri Acts of 1933, which provided a right for every member to marry within their community (Rao, 1957:106-107).

IV: ii: a:        CAUSES AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF CHANGE AMONG  
THE NAYARS

Changes in the economic, technological, political and public administrative, health (in turn, leading to demographic changes) and educational spheres brought in by the British during the intermediate period created new structures of opportunity for the traditional populace of Kerala, where different castes, both within and between, responded to these new resources in differential and variable ways. In continuation of the initial cracks in the stable fabric in early decades of the nineteenth century, there occurred radical, cumulative and irreversible changes in (most of the)



Nayar matrilineal institutions during the period 1890s-1940s, especially in 1920s-30s. The changes that were occurring in this period at the broader levels in Kerala will be followed by a discussion on the social consequences of such changes in Nayar communities, signifying the differences between the modes of changes in Nayar institutions in accordance with the regional particularities.

IV: ii: a: 1: EDUCATION AND OCCUPATIONAL DIVERSITY

Two significant changes that took place in the nineteenth century were: introduction of western style(d) education, and creation of new professions and occupations. Missionary work or 'evangelism', being one of the principle components of colonialism (i.e., other components were - government and commerce, which were interrelated) (see, Saberwal, 1979:243), played a considerable role in bringing 'scientific value oriented education' to traditional Kerala society, although governmental support for missionaries declined in later years.

A small number of English schools were opened in the Malabar region in the second decade of the nineteenth century (Lewandowski, 1980). Similar steps were taken in Cochin and Travancore principalities in later years. Within few years, there was a mushrooming growth of vernacular schools. For example, in Travancore, there were 12 vernacular schools (Sircar-government and aided) with 855 students 1865-6; while in 1904-5, there 1,483 schools with 99,757 students (Jeffrey,

1976:80). However, due to the reluctance of the British to sponsor state-aided education in Malabar, Malabar region fell behind the princely states in terms of literacy (Lewandowski, 1980). As can be seen in Table 1A, Cochin was ahead of the Travancore state in literacy rate, while Malabar region followed Travancore. In terms of castes, Nayars were attempting to compete with the foreign Brahmins, leaving other castes in Travancore behind in the last quarter of nineteenth century and first-half of the present century (Table 1B).

One principle aspect of education is that it provides opportunity to compete for equally professional or occupational roles and status, triggering mobility of individuals, or groups with social, economic, political and legal implications in a society like the traditional India (or Kerala), in turn changing the socio-economic strata of individuals, if not the structural level in the ritual order of caste hierarchy. In their attempts to uplift the downtrodden (i.e., 'conversion' of lower Hindu caste groups into Christianity should also be given attention) and the Christian communities, missionaries had to struggle with the local governments as well as the higher castes in Kerala. In opposition to the missionary schools, as they were trying to upgrade the lower strata through education, government schools were opened only for the upper castes in Travancore (N.B. such a policy, however, had changed in early decades of the present

century). In this way, the education reforms that were introduced in Travancore in 1860s by Dewan Madhavo Rao, in

TABLE 1

A. LITERACY RATES IN TRAVANCORE, COCHIN AND MADRAS PRESIDENCY BY SEX, 1891

State or Province	PERCENTAGE	
	Males	Females
Travancore	19.11	2.69
Cochin	23.82	3.76
Madras	11.43	0.66

SOURCE: Lewandowski (1980), P. 29.

B. STATISTICS OF MALE LITERACY IN TRAVANCORE (PERCENT) BY CASTE, 1875-1941

CASTE	YEAR						
	1875	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
Brahmins (non-Malayali)	50.2	51.7	69.8	62.8	72.0	81.2	83.5
Nayars	21.3	37.0	30.6	46.1	61.2	61.8	73.4
Christians	12.4	21.3	28.4	29.8	43.5	46.0	73.8
Iravas	3.2	12.1	10.5	18.6	36.4	42.7	61.0
All Males	11.1	19.1	21.5	25.0	38.0	40.8	68.1

SOURCE: Jeffrey (1978), P. 142.

effect ". . . brought western-style education to other castes as the missionaries had brought it to Syrian and the low" (Jeffrey, 1976:81).

The emerging, or expanding bureaucracies in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore were in need of the educated because western education was a pre-requisite for bureaucratic employment (Lewandowski, 1980). In general, in India, during British rule, "elites and bureaucrats came from the upper castes" (Singh, 1975); which was true in Kerala also, thus strengthening the traditional powers in modern settings. As said by Jeffrey (1978:144), ". . . the government service was the preserve of caste-Hindus" - the non-Malayali Brahmins and the Nayars. Nambudiri Brahmins did not avail themselves of such opportunities because of their very late response to modern education when compared with other castes in Kerala. Despite the non-Malayali Brahmin dominance over the Nayars in nineteenth century bureaucratic structure in Kerala, Nayars were on an equal footing or even dominated them in later years (for details, see, Jeffrey, 1976).

The general trend among the high caste Hindus in Kerala during this time was to opt for public administrative and professional service, while other lower castes and Christian communities were pushed towards trade and commerce. Such a trend could be understood from Table 2, where the Nayar community (i.e., Travancore) was more prevalent than the Iravas, an upper polluting (or low) caste, in professional and

administrative services; while most of the Iravas were traders, and artisans. This general picture was more or less similar to the Malabar region for the elite Nayar groups

TABLE 2

NAYARS AND IRAVAS BY VARIOUS OCCUPATIONS, 1921

OCCUPATION	NAYARS	IRAVAS
Traders	15,449	42,438
Lawyers, doctors, teachers	10,568	2,326
Public administration	5,172	346
Artisans and other workers	13,966	77,456

SOURCE: Jeffrey (1978), P. 145. His source, Travancore Census, 1921.

(Lewandowski, 1980), where as in Cochin and south Malabar (ie.e central Kerala), where Nayars had traditionally done little cultivation, the Nayar community paid much attention to education and newer economic possibilities (see, Gough, 1961:644, 645), thus becoming " . . . more successful in the new, expanding employment sector, particularly in 'white-collar' jobs" (Fuller, 1976:131).

IV: ii: a: 2: SHIFT FROM SUBSISTENCE TO CASH ECONOMY

Another aspect of colonial rule was the introduction of capitalism into the indigenous economic structure through a process of market or cash economy; overwhelming the subsistence economy and other concomitant traditional inter- and intragroup relationships; and enticing the local economies into the wider world of the international economy (Saberwal, 1979; Mazrui, 1986). Market economy had made inroads into Kerala society, especially after the mid-nineteenth century. The development of transportation and communications through the structuring and restructuring of road ways under the supervision of the public works department, introduction of railways from 1860 on, the opening and utilization of Suez Canal since 1869, and other associated infrastructures made it possible for different regions in Kerala to create new economic niches, undermining the traditional subsistence economy and other intercaste-production relations.

IV: ii: a: 3: TRADE AND COMMERCE:

Two interrelated but distinct aspects of British economic endeavors were: commerce (and plantations) and land revenue. Instead of promoting urbanization and industrialization, the British strengthened the Kerala economy with export-orientation, thus bringing it into the world market through extensive exploitation of its cash crops such as coffee, rubber, tea, coconuts, pepper, cashew nuts, cardamon, and so

on (Gough, 1961; Lewandowski, 1980). As stated by Paulini (1979:197). ". . . the period from 1920 to 1950 was marked by a rapid commercialization and monetization of the states' economy." Although the production of food crops was considerable, as could be seen from Table 3, the commercialization of agriculture through cash crops was more or less gradually increasing in all three regions of Kerala-Travancore, Malabar and Cochin. This was especially noticeable in Travancore area.

As the land was becoming extensively converted to cash cropping, ". . . it was no longer possible to give castes hereditary rights in the produce. Since no governmental authority took over these forms of production, jemmies and kanakkar became capitalist entrepreneurs. They produced only partly for subsistence, rented out some land to sub-tenants, hired and dismissed laborers as they needed them, and paid their wages at market values, increasingly in cash" (Gough, 1961:643). Along with such changes, factories and small-scale industries provided wage work and urban occupations, attracting the socio-economically handicapped castes.

As most of the high caste Hindus such as Nayars preferred administrative and professional careers, many of the opportunities in trade and commerce attracted mainly the Syrian Christians, and Iravas or Tiyyas and Mappilas (Muslims). Certain Hindu pollution restrictions curtailed the

TABLE 3

CROPPED AREA AND DISTRIBUTION BY CASH- AND FOOD- CROPS IN  
TRAVANCORE, MALABAR, AND COCHIN

	YEAR	1920/21	1930/31	1940/41	1946/47
STATE/ CATEGORY	UNIT				
1. TRAVANCORE					
Total Cropped Area Under Cash-Crops	1000 acres	1,952	2,108	2,374	2,346
Cash-Crops	1000 acres	899	948	1,004	1,073
Cash-Crops	PERCENT	46	45	42	46
Food-Crops	PERCENT	54	55	58	54
2. MALABAR					
Total Cropped Area Under Cash-Crops	1000 acres	1,678	1,758	1,816	1,817
Cash-Crops	1000 acres	572	606	667	718
Cash-Crops	PERCENT	34	34	37	40
Food-Crops	PERCENT	66	66	63	60
3. COCHIN					
Total Cropped Area Under Cash-Crops	1000 acres	522	557	559	601
Cash-Crops	1000 acres	103	143	158	152
Cash-Crops	PERCENT	20	26	28	25
Food-Crops	PERCENT	80	74	72	75

SOURCE: Paulini (1979), PP. 197-198. Paulini's source, T.C. Varghese (1970), Agrarian change and economic consequences-land tenures in Kerala 1850-1960. Bombay, P. 109.



ability of educated Christians and low castes to join the public services. For example, in Travancore, such groups could not get jobs in public services - the combined organization of the Devaswom (i.e., temple) department and the land revenue department, because of the strictures of pollution rules until the year 1922, when both departments were separated from each other. Such circumstances forced some of the educated Syrians and low caste Hindus to leave the state, while encouraging others of the same groups to become small-scale capitalists through their 'trade' and 'commerce' activities (Jeffrey, 1978). Such options became more prevalent in Travancore because of the initiatives taken by the state to promote the monetization of the indigenous economy (see Table 3), which continued on an increased scale in later years, (Paulini, 1979). Indeed, such a shift from subsistence to cash economy made Travancore dependent on rice imports initially in 1870, and continuing from then on (Fuller, 1976).

Out of all communities, the Syrian Christians benefitted most in Travancore (and Cochin) by exploiting the new avenues of trade and commerce under the guidance of the British. The British encouraged the Syrian Christians to open plantations in the hilly areas, to develop cash-crops; while the reclamation of new lands from backwaters encouraged by the administration of Rama Rao in Travancore (1877-90), promoting a cash economy became a further boon for Syrians (Gough, 1975;

Paulini, 1979; Lewandowski, 1980). Thus, in 1900-1920s, Syrians were actively engaged in the export of rubber and cashew nuts (Jeffrey, 1978). In addition, Syrians developed a 'banking system' and industrial enterprises. Their economic status was substantially improved through such capitalist endeavors together with a few Iravas (in Travancore and Cochin), Tiyyas (in Malabar) and Muslims (both in south Malabar and Travancore). As a result, the Syrians became affluent, emerging as a middle class, and started investing their profits in land by purchasing lands from the Nayar and Nambudiri Brahmins whose joint family properties were in shambles due to various reasons which I shall discuss later on.

#### IV: ii: a: 4: LAND, A MARKETABLE COMMODITY

As the reader will recall, the traditional theocratic feudal land structures and the associated produce sharing relationships in rural Kerala received an initial blow due to the impacts of new land operational systems in the eighteenth century. In later years, the British, directly or indirectly, reshaped the 'land-man' and 'caste-caste' interrelationships by introducing the notion of 'fixed-cash' transactions and 'individualized land ownership'. The multifaceted capitalist orientations, not only brought in occupational diversity, the notion of private property and the marketability of produced goods and labor, but also the marketability of land, a change

from inalienable to freely alienable land, turning thus, land into cash.

The study of agrarianism in Kerala, since the beginnings of the colonial period, is an unending history of the complex land tenure systems, agrarian movements, royal edicts, tenancy acts and land reform statutes, (for details, see, Varghese, 1970; Oommen, 1975; Paulini, 1979; Oommen, 1985). A summary of changing land ownership in Kerala, within and between castes, through time, is necessary to understand the changes in Nayar traditional institutions.

As it is noted elsewhere, the jenmies, because of misinterpretation of the traditional law by the British in the first decade of the nineteenth century, became landlords outright in Malabar region. By 1861, the jenmies constituted two percent of the Malabar population, comprising mainly Nambudiris and a few upper class Nayars in south Malabar, and Nambiyars and some affluent Nayar families in north Malabar. The superior tenants (or intermediaries, called Kanomdars) were mainly Nayars and the inferior tenants (called, Verumpattomdars) were mainly Tiyyas in north Malabar, while the Moplas (i.e., Muslims) constituted the majority of inferior tenants in south Malabar. The state of the land tenure systems in Cochin and Travancore were different from those in the Malabar region. Around 1850, the state of Cochin owned nearly 40% of the land, whereas 60% of the land was

under the control of jenmies, mainly big temples, Nambudiris, and some Nayar chieftain families (Oommen, 1985).

In contrast to both Malabar and Cochin, 80% of the land was under the control of the state of Travancore in the 1850s; the remaining 20% were janman lands, owned by Nambudiris, Nayar chieftain families and temples (Paulini, 1979). In both Travancore and Cochin, the tenants were mainly Nayars, followed by Syrian Christians; while the lower tenants were mainly Iravas and other lower castes. Nevertheless, due to the remarkable and progressive land policies of the Travancore State, through the Pattam Proclamation in 1865, all the tenants on state lands became recognized as petty landlords, having full ownership rights that included the right to transfer property in land. In addition, another proclamation in 1866 together with the jenmi-kudiyam act of 1896 gave a further boost to the tenants on the 20% jenmam lands in Travancore which provided the 'Permanent occupancy right of kanam tenants and fixed rents and fees payable to the landlords' (cf *ibid*:137).

As can be discerned from the above description, most of the Nayars, in different regions, either as landlords/petty landlords or superior tenants, were still enjoying the socio-economic dominance, corresponding to their ritual and political supremacy in Kerala. The only difference from the traditional system was that the land passed into private ownership by joint families, the taravads, where it could be

bought or sold freely in a cash economy. Here, the interesting point would be to know how the Nayars, having been unacquainted with such an economy, reacted to the newly created circumstances because it is often said in the literature that the matrilineal groups, with their unwieldy group memberships, are more vulnerable to a cash economy. In this connection, Gough (1961:649), through a comparison of matrilineal to patrilineal systems, notes: ". . . matrilineal groups seem to be broadly hit as soon as their members enter the market system. . . . In matrilineality, by contrast, the elementary family is torn between the descent groups—that of the husband and that of the wife and children."

The monetary transactions, sales or mortgages, of land by Nayar taravads in north Kerala (north Malabar) and central Kerala (south Malabar and Cochin) became increasingly frequent in and after the second quarter of the nineteenth century (Gough, 1961:343-647, 1975:222-224; Mencher, 1962:231). A similar pattern was more visible in Travancore especially after the 1865 pattom proclamation (Fuller, 1976; Jeffrey, 1976). According to Gough (1961), the initial impact of the market economy on Nayars and other castes in north and central Kerala was variable. Some affluent Nayar families, through cash cropping and other trade oriented activities, were steadily acquiring lands, while many commoner Nayar families sold their small holdings to large capitalists, thus becoming salaried workers such as wage workers, teachers, cooks, petty

clerks, and so on (ibid; Aiyappan, 1965). Some families from other castes such as mapplias, and Tiyyas or Iravas who had profited from 'trade' used their income to invest in land sold by impoverished Nayar families. On the other hand, a considerable number of wealthier Nayars, from different subcastes-Nayars, Nambiyars and Menons of north Malabar, entered government services, and other professional occupations in order to maintain status in modern terms. This was particularly true in central Kerala (Gough, 1961; Lewandowski, 1980).

In contrast to north and central Kerala regions, Nayars were in a different situation in the Travancore area. Here, the Syrian Christians were gaining momentum to threaten the age old landholding supremacy of the Nayars, especially in central and northern Travancore. With ever increasing prosperity and wealth from trading coupled with their considerable land holdings, and banking techniques, the Syrian Christians, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, were increasing their holdings by buying lands, mainly from Nayars (Fuller 1976; Jeffrey, 1976). If so, a reasonable question would be, why were Nayars selling their lands? The 1865 Pattom Proclamation provided marketable land for both Nayars and Syrian Christians; but the two communities utilized such an opportunity in different ways. The Syrian Christians, through their capitalist endeavors, had constantly tried to accumulate wealth in order to increase their economic status,

whereas the newly marketable land provided cash for Nayar taravads to educate their younger males because white collar jobs came to be recognized as neo-status symbols, to celebrate lavish and prestige oriented ceremonies like 'talirite', and to resolve property oriented 'litigations' brought by younger members of some of the taravads against their respective Karanavar (Jeffrey, 1976; Lewandowski, 1980).

As Table 4 shows, in 1908, among the Travancore caste communities, the matrilineal Nayars and Samantas were the losers of property, while the patrilineal castes such as Syrian Christians, Iravas, Shanars were the beneficiaries of such deals. This does not necessarily mean that the Nayar community was in total eclipse economically, but does portend the threat being posed by other communities, particularly the Syrian Christians. As in other regions, there were an appreciable number of well educated Nayars that had respectable professional and administrative roles in Travancore including some that prospered in the trading sector. Nonetheless, in general, as Jeffrey (1976:202) has pointed out ". . . for Nayars, . . . the most concrete and alarming manifestation of Syrian prosperity was their acquisition of land"; which, indeed forced most of the impoverished Nayar families into pauperism in later years.

#### IV: ii: a: 5: POPULATION GROWTH

One other variable that needs attention to understand the

TABLE 4

ALIENATIONS AND ACQUISITIONS OF PROPERTY BY NAYARS, CHRISTIANS, IRAVAS, SHANARS AND SAMANTAS IN TRAVANCORE FOR 18 MONTHS PRIOR TO 1 MAKARAM 1083 (ABOUT 15 JANUARY 1908).

CATEGORY	SALES IN RUPEES	MORTGAGES IN RUPEES	TOTAL IN RUPEES	GAIN OR LOSS IN RUPEES
<b>NAYARS</b>				
-Buyers or mortgagees	12,20,264	76,40,804	88,61,068	
-Sellers or mortgagors	17,39,607	89,98,463	1,07,38,070	-18,77,002
<b>CHRISTIANS</b>				
-Buyers or mortgagees	22,44,641	80,07,137	98,51,778	
-Sellers or mortgagors	19,82,647	66,98,124	86,80,771	+11,71,007
<b>IRAVAS</b>				
-Buyers or mortgagees	11,71,197	42,31,665	53,92,862	
-Sellers or mortgagors	10,53,763	40,44,083	50,98,476	+ 2,94,386
<b>SHANARS</b>				
-Buyers or mortgagees	3,08,643	12,49,291	15,57,934	
-Sellers or mortgagors	3,03,261	11,71,664	14,74,925	+ 83,009
<b>SAMANTAS*</b>				
-Buyers or mortgagees	11,829	63,423	75,252	
-Sellers or mortgagors	17,298	94,605	1,11,903	- 36,651

\* Samantas were a matrilineal caste ranking between Nayars and Kshatriyas.

SOURCE: Jeffrey (1976), p. 248.



alterations in Nayar matrilineal joint family structure is population growth. As a result of modernization, many of the world's societies experienced accelerated population growth since the beginnings of the nineteenth century (Harrison et al, 1989). In a similar trend, as can be seen from Table 5, the rate of population growth in Kerala from 1901 onwards was greater than that of the national population growth, signifying an above-average decrease of the death rate in Kerala when compared to that of the national death rate from 1941 onwards. On the other hand, as the Table 6 depicts, the population increase was far higher in Travancore in comparison with the Malabar region, while Cochin occupied an intermediate position. In 1921, the population of Cochin occupied 96.8% of the total occupiable area, while Travancore reached such a stage by 1951, leaving Malabar region aside where unoccupied land was still available to accommodate the native population expansion (Table 6).

In general, the impact of population growth on traditional Nayar taravads was critical since the beginning of nineteenth century. In all three regions of Kerala-north, central and south, division of a taravad into tavazhis (i.e., segments of a matrilineage) became an acceptable mode of partition in response to the unwieldy nature of taravads (Rao, 1957; Gough, 1961; Mencher, 1962; Fuller, 1976). However, it should be remembered that such a partition was a matter of

TABLE 5

POPULATION GROWTH AND ITS DETERMINANTS IN INDIA AND KERALA (1901-1971)

YEAR	POPULATION (MILL.)		DECENNIAL GROWTH (P.C.)		BIRTHRATE (PER 1,000)		DEATH RATE (PER 1,000)	
	INDIA	KERALA	INDIA	KERALA	INDIA	KERALA	INDIA	KERALA
1901	238.34	6.40	-	-	45.8	-	44.4	-
1911	252.01	7.15	+ 5.73	+11.75	49.2	-	42.6	-
1921	251.24	7.90	- 0.30	+ 9.16	48.1	-	47.2	-
1931	278.87	9.51	+11.00	+21.85	46.4	-	36.3	-
1941	318.54	11.03	+14.23	+16.04	45.2	40.0	31.2	29.1
1951	360.95	13.55	+13.31	+22.82	39.9	39.8	27.4	22.3
1961	439.07	16.90	+21.64	+24.76	41.7	38.9	22.8	16.9
1971	547.95	21.35	+24.80	+26.29	38.9*	32.2*	17.3*	9.2*

\* Figures for 1970 are for rural population only.

SOURCE: Adapted from Paulini (1979), P. 582, whose sources were: K. Narayanan (1974), A Portrait of Population-Kerala. New Delhi, P. 170; Government of Kerala. State Planning Board, Economic Review Kerala-1974. Trivandrum, P. 35; and American Embassy (1977). Brief on Indian Agriculture (Stenciled). New Delhi, P. 56.

'convenience', which needed the consent of all the members of a given taravad.

In later years, the repercussion of population growth in Kerala, coupled with high literacy rates, the desire for higher education, comparatively high unemployment rates among the local educated population, increased spatial mobility. Communications and transportation systems, economic niches,

TABLE 6

POPULATION AND OCCUPIED AREA IN TRAVANCORE,  
COCHIN AND MALABAR, 1921-51

REGION/YEAR	POPULATION (1,000)	ANNUAL INCREASE IN POPULATION (%)	OCCUPIED AREA (1000 ACRES)	ANNUAL INCREASE OF OCCUPIED AREA (%)	OCCUPIED AS PERCENT OF TOTAL OCCUPIABLE AREA
1. TRAVANCORE					
1921	4,006		2,100		79.7
1951	7,529	2.9	2,585	0.8	98.1
2. COCHIN					
1921	979		502*		96.8+
1951	1,751	2.6	510	0.1	-
3. MALABAR					
1921	3,099		1,442		59.7
1951	4,758	1.8	1,914	1.1	73.0

\* Figure for 1917/18.

+ Figure for 1911.

SOURCE: Paulini (1979), P. 200, Paulini's source, T.C. Varghese (1970), Agrarian change and economic consequences-land tenures in Kerala 1850-1960. Bombay, PP. 123-125.

expanding trade, commerce, and urban economy, and land from scarcity, motivated different caste populations of Kerala to migrate to other parts of India or even abroad (Aiyappan, 1965; Paulini, 1979; Lewandowski, 1980).

Nayars had (or have) been the dominant group within the migration stream from Kerala since the last quarter of nineteenth century. Although the high class Nayars were the earlier migrants, lower class Nayars together with other caste groups joined the flow in later years. It can be seen Table 7 that the Nayars were the group who set the migration pattern seeking higher education in the neighboring state of Madras in the early decades of the present century. Many settled down in Madras city in different occupational levels starting from the dignified white collar jobs to the daily wage workers in accordance with their respective economic and educational levels (for details, see, Lewandowski, 1980). A similar pattern was followed by other groups in later years, especially, the Syrian Christians.

IV: ii: a: 6: SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENTS AND CASTE/COMMUNAL ASSOCIATIONS

The agrarian, social, and political movements in Kerala during the intermediate period, have been discussed in detail elsewhere (Jeffrey, 1976; 1978; Paulini, 1979; Oommen, 1985; Nossiter, 1988). In general, many of the mass movements in Kerala during the period 1850s-1940s were more or less the

TABLE 7

KERALA STUDENTS RESIDENT IN MADRAS BY CASTE AND COMMUNITY,  
1906-1970

YEARS	NAMBUDIRI BRAHMINS %	PATTAR BRAHMINS %	NAYARS %	TIYAS %	SCHEDULED CASTES %	SYRIAN CHRISTIANS %	MUSLIMS %	TOTAL %
1906-10	3	26	45	16	-	10	-	100
1911-20	5	27	53	11	2	2	-	100
1921-30	2	29	44	9	-	15	1	100
1931-40	1	33	40	9	1	15	1	100
1941-50	1	25	40	7	1	24	2	100
1951-60	-	21	38	6	4	29	2	100
1961-70	-	6	31	4	9	48	2	100

SOURCE: Adapted from Lewandowski (1980), P. 80. Author's source, Madras Christian College and Presidency College, General Register of Admissions and Withdrawals; Sample, Kerala Students Resident in Madras City, 1,480 cases.

byproducts of agrarian discontent and socio-economic antagonisms both within and between the groups, crosscutting the spheres of class, caste and community, in turn awakening social reform and other political movements. The intrusion of socialistic attitudes to abate the hierarchical social, economic, ritual and political structures took different expressions. In Malabar, it developed within the framework of 'freedom struggle' centering around the notion of 'agrarian rights' that questioned the neo-feudal land networks, while in Travancore and Cochin it mainly sprouted out within the context of social equality and a desire for responsible and democratic government (Paulini, 1979; Nossiter, 1988). Especially, in Travancore, ". . . most of the caste groups organized associations to bring about social reforms within the castes or to press for special benefits from the government or to fight against social disabilities, the exact nature of their program depended on the existential conditions of the these castes" (Oommen, 1985:69).

Given the fact that the populations in Malabar were British citizens under the Madras presidency, allowed them to take more of a interest in British policies. The state of Cochin, being in an intermediate position between the regions of Malabar and Travancore, received political impulses from both neighboring areas; and, through the administrative tactics of constitutional reforms, neutralized agitation for 'revolt' (Paulini, 1979:193-197). In contrast to both Malabar

and Cochin, Travancore, a state dedicated to the Hindu deity Padmanabha, was reluctant to alter the nature of 'orthodox Hinduism' in spite of its lead in the technical attributes of modernity, thus creating unrest not only among the lower castes which were prohibited even from passing close to the temple walls and denied jobs in the public administration together with the Christian and Muslim communities, but also among the Nayar community because of the non-Malayali Brahmin dominance at the higher levels of administration (Jeffrey, 1976:78).

The result of such counteractive mobilizations in search of equality, reform and responsible government was the proliferation of caste or communal associations in Travancore under the leadership of the respective caste or community's "Western-educated elite." For example, the Malayali Sabha was established in 1884, whose objective was ". . . the welfare of the Malayali community, by aiding the diffusion of western knowledge, by encouraging female education and by reforming the marriage system. . . . Although the sabha had a few non-Nayar members, . . . its social aims were peculiarly Nayar" (Jeffrey, 1976:158). Sir Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, Kerala's first caste association, was created in 1903 by the Izhavas whose initial aim was 'self-help', followed by the struggles for entry to temples and government service in the mid 1930s (Nossiter, 1988:50). The Sadhujana Paripalana Sangham was formed in 1907, a caste association of depressed

castes to fight for socio-economic equality (Oommen, 1985:62). The Nair Service Society (NSS) was founded by Mannath Padmanabhapillai and other educated Nayar elite in 1914 mainly with three aims: ". . . to liberate the Nairs from superstition and taboo; to establish a chain of educational and welfare organizations; and to defend and advance Nairs in the political arena" (Nossiter, 1988:50). The League for Equal Civil Rights was formed in 1918 under the leadership of Syrian Christians of various sects " . . . to agitate for the opening of all branches of the government service to Christians, Muslims, and Avarana Hindus, and the ending of untouchability" (Jeffrey, 1978:147).

Of all the groups, the most benefitted caste community in political and administrative terms was that of the Nayars. Besides their numerical dominance in the public services, Nayars could partly re-establish their past 'glory' in the political arena, not as in the traditional ways but through pseudo-democratic political channels. As shown in Table 8, Nayars secured the majority of seats in the (pseudo-democratic) Travancore popular assembly (i.e., legislative council), exhibiting political dominance over other communities by the early decades of the present century. Such a trend continued until the days of universal suffrage and socialistic democracy in the modern period.

Another aspect that helped the Nayar community, especially the educated elite, was that of "social reform"



TABLE 8

REPRESENTATION OF DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES IN THE  
TRAVANCORE POPULAR ASSEMBLY, 1922-31

YEARS	1922	1925	1928	1931
TOTAL NUMBER OF MEMBERS TO BE RETURNED BY OPEN ELECTION TO THE POPULAR ASSEMBLY	23	23	23	23
CHRISTIANS	7 (30)*	7 (30)	6 (26)	4 (17)
EZHAVAS	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
MUSLIMS	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (4)	0 (0)
NAIRS	12 (52)	13 (57)	14 (61)	15 (65)
OTHER CASTE HINDUS	4 (17)	3 (13)	2 (9)	3 (13)
BACKWARD COMMUNITIES	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (4)

\* Figures in brackets are rounded off percentages.

SOURCE: Paulini (1979), P. 180; Percentages have been added to the original table. Paulini's source, Government of Kerala. Regional Records Survey Committee, 1972, P. 336.

through propaganda. To understand this it is necessary to describe the existential conditions of the Nayar community in the intermediate period, including the newly emerging social problems and the Nayar responses to them. As becomes clear from earlier studies, the state of the Nayar community together with its burdensome matrilineal institutions entered a 'crisis' in the last few decades of the nineteenth century

(Rao, 1957; Gough, 1961; Fuller, 1976). In this connection, K. Parameswaran Pillai, a leading Nayar reformist of that time, says, as quoted by Rao (1957:134), ". . . the political, social, and economic conditions which gave rise to the particular system of enjoying property and land tenure have disappeared and other conditions based upon totally different aspects of life have been forced upon us that it has become positively disadvantageous to continue the old order of things."

If so, why did the "old order of things" become positively disadvantageous" for the Nayar community? What then were the forces acting upon it? These questions lead us to scrutinize the considerations put forth by the Nayars. These were: whether or not to recognize the sambandham union as a legal marriage; if considered as a legal marriage, could a man possess a right to revert his 'self-acquired' property to his wife and children contrary to the traditional custom?; how to resolve the newly emerging tensions between the matrilineal kin and the elementary family?; could the joint family property be partitioned on an individual basis in accordance with the demands of its members so as to avoid 'litigations'?; how to relegate the supreme power and authority of the partisan natured Karanavan?; and finally, a value oriented confrontation to disallow the Nambudiri relationships with Nayar women which had moral and economic implications. Secondly, what were the underlying causal

factors that led to the crisis among Nayar communities, in different regions, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century? and how did they resolve them?

As mentioned earlier, a considerable number of Nayars, in north and central Kerala, as a result of educational and newer economic niches, were progressing successfully in various occupations and professions (see, Gough, 1961; Mayer, 1974; Lewandowski; 1980). On the other hand, the cash economy brought in semi-class distinctions in addition to the already existent subcaste Nayar divisions in all three regions of Kerala. The general picture was that the wealthier the Nayar family, the higher the educational and job opportunities, while the majority of the poor who failed to succeed in either business/cultivation or education had opted for lower-income occupations. The result of such differential educational and economic opportunities was horizontal mobility among all categories of Nayars that were eligible for various kinds of employment both inside and outside of Kerala. Many of the younger Nayars that were away from their taravads seeking employment elsewhere considered their (self-acquired) incomes as personal properties, lived with children and wives, spent money purchasing houses and educating their children, and (some of them) even started bequeathing such property to wives and children, contradicting the traditional customary law that such properties should revert to their mother's taravads upon their death.

Thus, in central Kerala, according to Gough (1961:647), ". . . these circumstances greatly exacerbated the traditional tensions between the conjugal and paternal ties on the one hand, matrilineal ties on the other. Litigation over property between men of the taravad and bitter quarrels between the children and matrilineal heirs of men who died intestate thus became regular features of family life in the higher matrilineal castes." In addition, disputes within taravads also became prominent. The partition of taravads into tavazhis had become a regular feature during the nineteenth century. This affected primarily the impoverished Nayar taravads, diminishing the taravads' joint family oriented ideology. The familial transactions needed the Karanavan's consent even after partition. The Karanavan tended to favor his own tavazhi at the expense of other related tavazhis, and in his own tavazhi the acquisitions of junior members were at his disposal. The problem was who would benefit from a given taravad's resources in getting education for the best jobs amongst the competing tavazhis, resulting in a "revolt" by the related tavazhis other than that of the Karanavan's on one hand, and by junior members for their own rights to the property, on the other. As quoted by Lewandowski (1980:112), *Indulekha*, one of the prominent novels of that day, written in 1890 by O. Chandu Menon, a Malabar Nayar, reflects ". . . the Karanavan's (manager of the household) use of taravads funds

to maintain his closest matrilineal kin, as well as his own wife and children who belong to a different descent group."

In contrast to north and central Kerala, Nayers, in Travancore region, were faced with somewhat different problems. Three problems confronted the Nayar community at the turn of the nineteenth century in this region: land, litigation, and the caste conflict - on one hand, a competition with the Brahmins to gain political control, and a fear mainly due to the threat imposed by the economically prospering lower status communities such as the Syrian Christians. In connection with the latter aspect, Jeffrey states:

Yet between the Nayers and Brahmins there was only one source of contention: government preferment, an issue which affected only a small percentage of Nayers. Syrians, on the other hand, could be seen not only as challengers for posts under the sirkar, but as aggressive land holders, enterprising businessmen and ambitious educationists. They were unquestionably Travancorean, they were counted in lakhs, not in thousands, and they lived in close touch with ordinary Nayers who could see the aggrandizement of Syrians as much more serious threat to their own status and influence than the employment of a few thousand Brahmins in government service. What is said here of Syrians could increasingly be applied to Iravas (1976:205).

Nonetheless, Jeffrey (ibid:204) continued to say that ". . . Syrians had by no means supplanted Nayers as the economic power in the state." If so, why were the Nayar elite so dismayed at the circumstances despite their professional and occupational progress? After the 1865 land reforms, land became a marketable commodity; since then a majority of the

taravads were increasingly becoming obsessed by 'feuds' over money and land. As noted earlier (Table 4), the Nayar lands were gradually acquired by other castes such as the Syrian Christians and Iravas, whereas their money was eaten up in litigation due to the disputes between the Karanavan and his taravad members. As Table 9 illustrates, there were 4,869 such disputes within a span of 10 years, from 1897-8 to 1906-7. Such a situation of decaying taravads alerted the Nayar leaders to save the Nayar community from an economic collapse through reforming their matrilineal kinship system because it was felt that the economic progress of other communities was somehow or other related to their patrilineal norms.

Along with such factors, there was also some undeniable realization among the educated Nayar circles, in different parts of Kerala as well as in other parts of India, such as the Madras city where the migrant Nayar elite resided, for a change in marriage and family patterns which could partially be attributed to the diffusion of ideas from the West as well as from other non-Kerala Hindu communities (Fuller 1976: Lewandowski, 1980). For example, the students, in Travancore English medium schools, were urged by royal figures like Visakhram Tirunal to read Ruskin, Kinglake, Carlye, and Samuel Smiles. As Jeffrey (1976:150) says, ". . . it is reasonable to suggest that such studies helped to propagate an individualism which was incompatible with the 'communality' of

TABLE 9

SUITS INVOLVING KARANAVANS, BROUGHT BY TARAVAD MEMBERS,  
1073-1082 ME (1897-8/1907-7)

TYPE OF SUIT	NUMBER
1. Suits to cancel a Karanavan's alienations	4,365
2. Suits to remove a Karanavan	295
3. Suits to set aside decrees made against a Karanavan's alienations	142
4. Suits to set aside attachment of taravad property for a Karanavan's debts	67
	4,869

SOURCE: Jeffrey (1976), P. 249.

the old taravad." Likewise, the migrant Nayars in Madras ". . . were attempting to reconcile the ideology of egalitarianism emphasized in their college or professional education with traditional forms of family that prevented intercaste contact and reinforced a hierarchy in family relations" (Lewandowski, 1980:120-121). Thus, there arose a constant desire among some of the educated Nayars to adapt to Western life styles and, or to other (non-Kerala) Hindu commonalities.

Besides, Nayars were also influenced by the European missionaries such as Rev. A.F. Painter and Mateer who disparaged the Nayar marital relations. According to Mateer,

as quoted by Jeffrey (1976:151), ". . . educated Nayars were 'ashamed of the absence of real marriage, and that' the publicity . . . and the ridicule 'being given to their customs' naturally mortify them." On the other hand, ". . . Nayars became increasingly aware that seen in relation to the standards of Hinduism in the rest of India, their marriage customs appeared scandalous and comic" (ibid, 106). These new ideas from different corners penetrated the educated Nayar community, further strengthening their reforming zeal to urge legal changes in marriage and kinship patterns.

It is true, as remarked by Fuller (1976:131-132), that the Nayar reformist propaganda exaggerated the real situation reflecting the ". . . objective differences between the problems confronting Nayars in various regions of Kerala." In due course, nevertheless, despite the objections from some conservative groups that changes would damage the Nayar taravad structure, the educated and well settled Nayar pockets irrespective of the Nayar public opinion were able to convince various administrations in Kerala with the validity of their own ideas together with certain social realities to bring forth legal reforms in matrilineal and marriage customs. The lead was taken by individuals such as C. Sankaran Nair, a member of the Madras legislative council, who pleaded for Nayar unity by leaving subcaste and regional differences aside, by introducing a bill in 1890 to permit Nayars in Malabar region to register their sambandham, resembling that



of the monogamous marriage with its associated legal implications. Such attempts, however, met with immediate opposition from the conservative Nayars (Jeffrey, 1976:185). In 1891, the Malabar marriage commission was constituted by the Madras government to investigate the uncontrolled rights of the Karanavan in taravad affairs, and the legal aspects concerned with partition of the matrilineal joint family system and recognition of sambandham union as real marriage. After a careful scrutiny of the witnesses, the commission, to its surprise, was forced to admit that ". . . the legal reforms it was considering were 'not at present desired by a majority' . . . we also believe that the uninstructed majority will rapidly follow the lead of the enlightened classes, and that there need be no apprehensions that if the law be framed it will remain a dead letter" (G.O.M. 1891:34, as quoted in Fuller, 1976:133).

The commission's efforts resulted in the Malabar Marriage Act of 1896 which provided for the registration of sambandham union as marriage, where a person would bequeath half of his self-acquired property to his wife and children through a will or gift (Lewandowski, 1980). Despite the legal protection, the act was unpopular, and there were less than 100 registered marriages during the period 1896-1905, thus making the commission's suspicion true. In following the Malabar marriage commission's attempts, there were certain attempts in Travancore too. In 1896, Thanu Pillai, an influential Nayar

in the royal palace, introduced a bill similar to the Malabar Marriage Act in the Travancore legislative council, but in vain. Later, in 1899, the Travancore Wills Act was passed which provided the right to give half of one's self-acquired property to his wife and children; but "made no alteration to the law affecting marriage" (Jeffrey, 1976:190).

Despite little achievements, the 'fast-deteriorating', 'very deplorable' and 'diseased' taravad atmosphere further frustrated the Nayar leaders. In the 1900s, under the premises of the Kerala Nair Samajam, leading Nayar leaders from Malabar that resided in Madras such as M. Krishnan Nair and C. Sankaran Nair encouraged the Nayar brothers from Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore regions to be united, thus creating a sense of common Nayar identity to deal with the problems. In 1908, the Travancore government set up the Marumakkattayam Committee, which toured the state scrutinizing 1,021 witnesses; and submitted the following recommendations: "the recognition of the ceremony of sambandham as a legal marriage; the outlawing of polyandry and polygamy; divorce by mutual consent certified by a registered document; compelling Karanavans to keep careful accounts of their use of taravad assets; the grant to wives and children of a half share of the self-acquired property of a man dying intestate; and the right of any branch of a taravad descended from the same women to demand partition" (ibid:246). The commission's recommendation list, however, excluded the right for individual partition.

In congruence with some of the committee's recommendations, a legislation occurred in the form of the Travancore Nayar Regulation of 1913, which recognized sambandham as a legal marriage, and provided the wife and children of a Nayar dying intestate one half of his self-acquired property. The inability of the government to implement all of the committee's recommendations led to the continued unrest among the Nayar elite. The Nayar reformatory movement took a different turn when the Nayar Service Society (NSS) was formed by Mannath Padmanabha Pillai and others in 1914, which stressed on aspects such as 'social service', 'rural awakening', 'eradication of the unnecessary customs', and a thrust for 'radical reforms'. As a consequence, a new Nayar Act, a modified form of the earlier regulation, was promulgated in Travancore in 1925, permitting more or less unrestricted partition of the taravad properties. In the five years following the Act, there were as many as 32,903 taravad partitions (Rao, 1957:134). In Cochin, the Cochin Nayar Act of 1920 and the subsequent Modified Act of 1938 brought in changes more or less similar to that of the Travancore's. While the Madras government introduced the Madras Marumakkattayam Act of 1933, which followed similar lines.

IV: ii: b: MATRILINY IN ECLIPSE

The Nayar matriliney was nearly eclipsed by the end of the intermediate period, leaving only vestiges in some

matrilateral personal relationships. To recapitulate the nature of Nayar matrilineality that existed during the nineteenth century: The taravad, a matrilineal segment or a matrilineal joint family was the basic unit of Nayar social organization, comprising the matrilineally related kin-married sisters, their brothers, their children, their mother and sisters and sons who lived together under the umbrella of matrilineal or taravad ideology. In Cochin, at the turn of the eighteenth century, an ideal Nayar household (i.e., excluding the poorest Nayar families) had a time depth of some three to six generations (Mencher, 1962:232). The nature of household size in north Kerala was similar to that of the Cochin (Gough, 1961:390), while it was rarely greater than four generations in Travancore at the turn of the nineteenth century (Fuller, 1976:56).

In general, there was congruency between the 'joint household' and 'property group'. A taravad was governed by the oldest member of the joint family, called Karanavan. He administered the jural and moral codes of the taravad, and managed the entire movable and immovable property of the taravad. Although the property was non-divisible according to customary law, splitting of the taravad into tavazhis (branches) did occur frequently by the close of the nineteenth century, but only through the mutual consent of its members, for convenience, in order to limit the unwieldy membership of the taravad.

Nobody in the taravad had a right to the property, but each could claim support. The legally unrecognized sambandham unions between the wives and husbands involved no claims on each other's properties, and the children of such unions belonged to the wives' taravads and had no claims in their father's taravads. During the nineteenth century, however, there was increasingly a tendency among the male sambandham partners to form duolocal residence, where husbands visited their de facto wives at night, except for the Nayar groups in north Malabar where the residential pattern was somewhat different from other regions.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first two decades of the twentieth century, the pace of taravads partition accelerated in central Kerala (Gough, 1961:343-344, 1975:225; Mencher, 1962:231-234), in Travancore (Jeffrey, 1976:181-183) and in north Malabar (Gough, 1961:390-393), though the circumstances in which such changes occurred differed slightly from one region to other. The partition of a taravad was not along individual lines but between the tavazhis, the matrilineal segments of a taravad; each tavazhi was headed by a living ancestress receiving more or less an equal part of the ancestral property irrespective of its size. Usually, the mother taravad provided an adjacent site and other amenities for construction of the new house. Although, as stated by Fuller (1976:125), ". . . the household might not have divided at exactly the same time as the partition of

property was effected, it is almost certain that households split in such a way that they tended to remain congruent with property groups." Once the tavazhis took shape as the pseudo-independent matrilineal segments, however, there would be unforeseen inherent conflicts with regard to the duties and obligations of the branches and their mother taravad because of the function of the Karanavan as head of the taravad becomes incomplete (Nakane, 1962:18).

Population pressure was particularly severe for Nayar taravads, by the close of nineteenth century. Customarily, the order of succession to the Karanavanship was strictly determined by the relative ages of the older men within a taravad. Before the disbandment of Nayar armies, the oldest male member used to be the Karanavan, while others up to the age fifty would still be carrying arms. After the demobilization of Nayar armies, there occurred an accumulation of the older males who did not have much else to do, leading to a desire among such men to become Karanavans. This was probably a factor of taravad partitions in Cochin (Gough 1961:344), and in Travancore (Fuller, 1976:57).

The other factors, before the legal reforms, were: the ever increasing strength of sambandham unions, and 'litigations' within taravads owing to the changing nature of the economy, domineering and biased Karanavans, and conflicts about who should be provided an education or other economic assistance. In central Kerala, men started acquiring personal

property and used their earnings to establish new branch-property groups or sub matrilineal joint families, called 'tavazhi-taravads', which traced descent through the wives (Gough, 1975; Mencher, 1962). In turn, there was uxorilocal residence besides the more usual duolocal residence in central Kerala villages (Gough, 1961; Mencher, 1965; Nakane, 1962). The majority of the Nayar migrants who eventually settled down in Madras during the period 1870-1920 from south Malabar and Cochin state, followed a similar pattern, establishing a sort of neolocal residence (Lewandowski, 1980:58 and 114).

Such activities by the men created tensions between the matrilineal kin and the affinal folk because they undermined the customary law that the mens' self-acquired properties should revert to their mother's taravads on their deaths. In Travancore as stated by Fuller (1976:60-61), the problem of self-acquired property was not a significant factor, though the custom demanded an individuals' self-acquired property to be bequeathed to his mother taravad on his death. The residential pattern was mainly duolocal, where husbands visited their wives at night.

In contrast to central and south Kerala, the partition of taravads in norther Kerala (or north Malabar) occurred in a different way. Unlike the other regions, in north Kerala, despite the fact that there existed both talirite and sambandham union among the Nayars, the sambandham relationships more or less approximated the general Indian

pattern of marriage. The common residential pattern was avunculocal/virilocal; whereas some had duolocal and matrilineal arrangements. In this connection, Gough (1961:390) says that ". . . plural marriages for women were forbidden, and a man normally brought his wife to live with him or his matrilineal estate for the duration of the marriages." Such unions involved reciprocal duties and obligations between the partners, which included some sort of economic obligations too (ibid:390-400).

The property group was headed by the Karanavan. Among the commoner Nayars the property group and the avunculocal extended family were congruent. Unlike the other regions, the partition of taravads into daughter tavazhis occurred in a different way. As the reader will recall (Table 6), in Malabar region, the population density was comparatively low and there were vast tracts of uncultivated land. Due to the British land holding policy, jenmies became the owners of landed property; and the extensive tracts of uncultivated lands were distributed to the nearest jenmies (Nossiter, 1988). As the majority of the jenmies and petty jenmies were Nayars in north Malabar (Mayer, 1974), the utility of waste land together with the cultivated land became increasingly prominent in taravads' and tavazhis' economic activities. Junior male members of the taravads leased (uncultivated) lands from their own taravads, and some men even from their wives' taravads, making improvements to such lands. In this



way, men procured personal properties, transferred thus acquired properties to their wives; or improved their wives' lands, and established new branch property groups, called 'tavazhi-taravads' (Gough, 1961). Though tavazhi-taravads were rare among the commoner Nayars until the second half of the century, the marketable value of the land gave momentum to the frequent establishment of branch property groups. Some wealthier Nayar migrants from north Malabar region that had settled down in Madras with new professional or occupational responsibilities during the period 1870-1920 were also establishing branch property groups with neolocal residence (Lewandowski, 1980:58 and 114). Rarely, according to Gough (1961:392), would the transfer of improved jenman lands by Karanavans to their wives lead to disputes between the branches of a mother taravad.

The conflicts within taravads partially due to the abuse of power by the Karanavans in all three regions, resulted in litigations. Actually, partition per se was the major source of litigations (Fuller, 1976). On one hand, the taravad became ". . . the scene of endless dissension among aggressive mothers, lay about youths and scheming elders" (Jeffrey, 1976:181); on the other, the new economic changes resulted in unchecked rights of the Karanavans. It seems, the Karanavans, in all parts of Kerala, by the close of nineteenth century and before the legal reforms, misused their powers by favoring certain individuals in their taravads, especially their own

tavazhis at the expense of others, expropriating some of the common resources for their wives and children (Rao, 1957; Mencher, 1965; Jeffrey, 1976), (see, Table 9). Indeed, one of the targets of the Madras marriage commission was to investigate, and to curtail such powers of the Karanavans (cf. Lewandowski, 1980:113).

IV: ii: b: 1: MARRIAGE PATTERNS BEFORE THE LEGAL REFORMS

The nature and meaning of the traditional Nayar marriage process - talikettukalyanam and sambandham union, had changed gradually throughout the intermediate period until the marriage reforms were enacted in the Twentieth Century which made the sambandham union a legally recognized marriage. A minority of marriages still involved hypergamous relationships. In contrast to the traditional pattern, the talikettukalyanam became a mere prestige oriented ceremony. It had practically died out by the first or second decades of the present century as a result of the reformist pressure, especially the Nayar Service Society's radical campaigns to eradicate such 'embarrassing' ceremonies.

As the plural marriages were increasingly disappearing throughout the nineteenth century, there were deliberate attempts by the Nayar communities in north and central Kerala to arrange sambandham marriages in a monogamous way (Gough, 1961), which could be applicable to Travancore also. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, four factors contributed

the sambandham arrangements. The first two rules were (and are): the rule of lineage exogamy, and the rule of relative ages, that is to say, the husband must be older than his wife, a pan Indian Hindu phenomenon. The third and fourth factors were the principles of subcaste endogamy, and village endogamy, the former in accordance with the rules of ritual purity, and the latter due to the nature of 'localization' processes respectively (Gough, 1961; Fuller, 1976).

Traditionally, preferential marriages occurred between a set of matrilineages or taravads whose underlying component was a sort of 'cross-cousin' marriage. The Nayars did recognize paternity and affinity; the recognition of one affinal link by ego, in the milieu of matrilineages, could discriminate the 'we' taravads from 'you' taravads, and such distinctions were for the purpose of marital relationships only. In this way, ego could distinguish two sets of taravads within a village, one being a favorable set of taravads for alliance, while the other being avoided in accordance with the rule of lineage exogamy.

One other feature associated with the sambandham arrangement was the principle of 'equivalency of the socio-ritual' status of the taravads concerned. For example, as stated by Fuller (1976:78-79), in Travancore villages, people would bring up the matter of a taravad's prestige in ancestral terms, called 'Paramparyam' at the time of marriage arrangements. This was measured in terms of the prestige and

achievements of the past without any consideration of wealth. Besides such socio-ritual status or prestige considerations, the sambandham unions involved no economic obligations neither between the taravads of wife and husband nor between the spouses. The spouses lived on their respective taravad's resources, and husbands simply visited their wives at night. The only exception to this arrangement appears to be that of the Karanavan's. Sometimes, the Karanavan's wife came to live with him in his own matrilocal taravad because he would be busy with taravad affairs, a matter of convenience but not a rule (Rao, 1957:132). ". . . there is evidence that the Karanavans have always sought to transfer some of their taravad's property to their own wives and children" (Fuller, 1976:76).

Both in central and north Kerala, in nineteenth century, bilateral cross-cousin marriages gained prominence (Gough 1961:365-366 and 397), where matrilateral cross-cousin marriages took precedence over the patrilateral cross-cousins. Within the constraints of status and cross-cousin rule, in Cochin, south Malabar and Travancore, a small group of landed Nayar (ancient) taravads, encouraged intermarriage with one another (Nakane, 1962; Fuller, 1976; Lewandowski, 1980). In Travancore, such arrangements followed a rule that the right man (Muraccherukkan) should preferably marry his right woman (Murappennu) (for details, see, Fuller, 1976:76-78). Although Fuller argues through a set of analytical distinctions that

the right man-right woman rule should not be equated with a cross-cousin marriage system, I believe that this institution is not so different from the cross-cousin pattern practiced by the Nayar communities elsewhere in Kerala.

By the close of the nineteenth or in the first two decades of the twentieth centuries, self-acquired properties by the husbands or fathers were becoming common in north and central Kerala as well as among the Nayar migrants in Madras city, and south Kerala. During this period, at least among the educated Nayars that held prominent government jobs or other professions, economic factors were newly emerging in association with the age-old status factor as a criterion in marriage alliances. Thus, Gough (1961:366) says, in central Kerala, ". . . deliberately arranged patrilateral cross-cousin marriages may have become more popular in the late nineteenth century, as fathers became instrumental in maintaining and educating their sons." Whereas, some eminent Nayars from Malabar region that were settled in Madras, ". . . often brought their sister's sons to the city in preparation for a cross-cousin marriage to their daughters" (Lewandowski, 1980:108).

IV: ii: b: 2: LEGAL REFORMS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE NAYAR JOINT FAMILY, INHERITANCE AND MARRIAGE PATTERNS

The Nayar community, by the beginnings of the present century, was rife with internal contradictions leading to the

demise of matriliney. By 1947, says Gough (1961:647), ". . . very few descent groups remained which had not divided their property according to the provisions of these acts, or whose property was not in process of partition by the courts. Although the extent of its decline was by no means uniform, the matrilineal principle was universally regarded as obsolescent." The last four or five decades of the intermediate period, indeed constituted a 'critical' time block in the history of Nayar social organization, through which the Nayar community mutated, thus finally transforming the so called 'atypical' institutions into a new order.

Partitions, though without legal sanctions, were increasingly occurring, and such divisions often involved mortgaging and re-mortgaging taravad property (cf. Lewandowski, 1980:32). In the first or second decades of the present century, in Travancore, individual partitions, between siblings were occurring as against the hitherto conventional partitions between tavazhis (Fuller 1976:61-62). For example, if there were four siblings—two males and two females, the property would be divided into four parts; sometimes, the Karanavan tried to get a little more than his original share. Each male sibling was entitled to enjoy the fruits of his share only in his lifetime, which was called 'Jivanamsam', a 'life-share'. Upon his death, his share should revert to the taravad, particularly to his sisters and sister's children. In this way, a household's income depended on two sources: the

share of the husband and the share of his wife, which she inherited from her taravad. However, such arrangements were illegal. One aspect to be observed here is that there was a pseudo distinction between the property group and the household (see, Nakane, 1962:18).

The legal acts replaced such local de facto arrangements, thus untangling the Nayar problems. The initial step was taken by the Madras government by introducing the Malabar Marriage Act of 1896 in the Malabar region, though it was not popular for a few decades because only the educated elite appreciated its value. The central theorem of this act was that the wife and children should be maintained by the husband, if the marriage was registered with the authorities, and that half of his self-acquired property should be reverted to his wife and children, if he died intestate, while the other half would go to his mother taravad (Rao, 1957). The Cochin Nayar Act of 1920 and the Travancore Nayar Act of 1913, had similar provisions (Gough, 1975; Fuller 1976). These acts, however, failed to resolve the problem of dissolution of matriliney; and the Nayar leaders like K. Parameswaran Pillai pronounced that ". . . partition was the only panacea for putting an end to the class litigation which is the bane of Malabar taravads" (cf. Rao, 1957:134). The subsequent Nayar Acts - the Travancore Nayar Act of 1925; the Madras Marumakkattayam Act of 1933; and the Cochin Nayar Act of 1938 were the result of such popular pressure, which allowed

unconditional partition of the Nayar joint family property on individual terms.

The immediate effect of the legal changes was more apparent in Travancore than the other regions. Following the Travancore Nayar Act of 1925, there were 32,903 taravad partitions in Travancore region. Comparatively, the alienation of land was easier in Travancore than in other areas due to the governmental land policies; individual aspirations to divert this accumulated capital for some business or to liquidate debts, and there were potential groups such as Syrian Christians to buy lands from the frustrated Nayars (Fuller, 1976:135-137). In central Kerala, although some wealthy Nayars kept their properties unpartitioned until the 1940s or 50s or had the cases pending in courts, a majority of the Nayar community divided their properties either on individual basis or between groups of uterine sibilings (Gough, 1961:646; Nakane, 1962:19-20, Mencher, 1962:237). As a result of these acts, the affected people were the lower middle class or poor Nayar taravads in most parts of Kerala, who then experienced further deterioration in their economic positions.

Inheritance patterns appear to have varied slightly in different regions. For example, in Cochin, according to Gough (1975:243), after the 1938 act, the inheritance pattern became more or less bilateral because ". . . a man's personal property, whether self-acquired or acquired by individual



partition from his taravads, passed in equal shares, if he died intestate, to his mother, widows, sons and daughters. A woman's self-acquired or individual property went in equal shares to her sons and daughters. . . . A matrilineal bias remained, however, in that hitherto undivided ancestral property was still divided equally between members of the matrilineage only, and that the mother of a man still inherited one share of his personal property. Further, if a man or woman died after the death of a daughter, the daughter's uterine descendants inherited the daughter's share of any intestate property, whereas the descendants of a son had no such right." In Travancore, by 1940, the jivanamsam (i.e., life-share) of a husband went completely to his wife and children, contrasting the earlier arrangement that it should revert to his sisters and their children (Fuller, 1976:62). There is no room, nor need, to detail all types of minor variations in Nayar inheritance patterns by this time; in general, it had become a type of bilateral system, skewing towards matrilinearity in some respects.

Along with the changes in inheritance patterns, there were alterations in household structure and residential patterns also. After the legal reforms, the property group and the household became increasingly incongruent; and, the households now consisted of husbands, wives and their children. Duolocality and avunculocality gradually had given way to different residential patterns such as uxori-locality,

virilocality, and neolocality. At this time, many families favored 'cross-cousin' and other preferential marriage in order to keep the landed property intact; while the educated Nayers were trying to dismantle 'subcaste' and 'regional' barriers, both with little success.

IV: iii: MODERN PERIOD (after 1947)

India gained independence in 1947, and the Malabar region became a part of the Madras state. From 1947 to 1949, both Travancore and Cochin remained as independent states, but were merged into the state of Travancore-Cochin on July 1, 1949. However, the Keralite zeal for a common Malayalee (speaking) state led to a struggle, culminating in the formation of the Kerala state in 1956, thus ending the political boundaries that had separated different parts of Kerala historically. Since then, Kerala, by being one of the communist strongholds in India, has a complex history. In this section, I shall briefly discuss the nature of political and economic changes in Kerala after independence, and how Nayers - 'the eye', 'the hand' and 'the order' - reacted to such circumstances; secondly, I will detail the continuation of changes in Nayar social organization from the intermediate period to the present.

Since independence, the national government's ideological manifesto has rested on secularism, socialism and democracy - universal franchise and adult suffrage, while its economy has

incorporated the two opposing poles - both socialistic and capitalistic, a mixed economy (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1987). Kerala has been progressing, despite some hardships; and, is often called a 'model' state or 'progressive' state in the present day India owing to its achievements such as the high literacy rate, high health standards, progressive land reforms, unionized organizations at all levels, state's protection for wage labor, comparatively considerable tolerance between the major religious communities - Christian, Muslim and Hindu, and relatively less socio-economic discrimination between the castes when compared to other regions of India (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1987; Nossiter, 1988). On the other hand, it is also referred to as a 'problem' state because of the constant political instability which can be attributed to the political quarrels between the non-communist (central) governments and the various left-oriented state governments in Kerala. So far, Kerala has had 14 state governments - some communist and some non-communist, of which few survived full-five year terms; and, six times the central government has interfered with state polity to take care of the chaotic political conditions (Miller, 1988).

The first general elections based on universal franchise were conducted in Travancore in 1948. From 1948 to 1955, there were eight congress ministries in Travancore-Cochin state, indicating internal conflicts within the Congress Party mainly between the Nayars and Syrian Christians. These were

the result of communalism, regionalism and vested land interests of the landed elite, particularly Syrian Christians who opposed land reforms and land ceilings (Paulini, 1979). While the Communist Party, taking advantage of the predominantly agrarian economy which divided the land owners and their dependents and the conflicts within the Congress Party, attracted mainly the lower and lower-middle class peasantry and agricultural laborers. By the time the (united) Kerala state had general elections in 1957; the rigid and exploitative land tenure systems; other economic differentials between the haves and have nots; and the newly acquired constitutionally protected civil rights by the lower castes, gave resurgence to the agrarian mobilizations whose common slogan was based on the notion 'land for the tiller'. The political party that exploited the circumstances was the Communist Party, which became in 1957, as far as I know, the world's first democratically elected communist government.

In this way, Kerala entered into the fabric of "class" politics, submerging the caste and communal interests to an extent. However, the communist government remained in power from 1957 to 1959 only. Its aggressive land and educational reform policies threatened the interests of the landlords and other communal organizations or caste associations. As a result, it was dismissed by the central (congress) government, and the president's rule was imposed to control the chaos. From this period onwards, Kerala's polity has been a site of

changing unstable governments, of which few enjoyed the full-five year terms. Although Kerala appeared to become dependent on class politics in 1950s-60s, the present picture in Kerala, like in many other regions in India, shows the re-emergence of the caste factor with caste groups becoming re-integrated on "secular associational" grounds (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1960; Kothari, 1970; Nossiter, 1988).

Some of the acreage limitation acts that were proposed and subsequently implemented by various governments are relevant to the present problem. The Agrarian Relations Bill (ARB) of 1957 was first introduced by the Communist Party. In 1960, it was modified by the non-communist government, favoring the landed classes (Paulini, 1979). Later, in 1963, the Kerala land reforms act brought in further changes in land tenure systems, land reforms and land ceilings, which again favored the landed classes by raising the acreage limits. According to this bill, ". . . a family up to five members was allowed to retain 12 standard acres, which in some cases were equivalent to 24 acres of land. A special provision determined, that in no case the ceiling area should be less than 15 acres. The maximum extent permitted for a family with more than five members was fixed at 36 acres" (ibid:270). The communist-coalition government, in 1969, introduced further radical reforms, making the acreage ceiling units in Kerala the lowest in India.

According to this bill, (ibid:294),

. . . the ceiling was considerably reduced to five standard acres for an adult unmarried person, to ten standard acres for a family consisting of less than five members . . . in the case of a family of more than five, each additional member is allowed to retain one extra standard acre. The total holding of a family is however restricted to a maximum of 20 ordinary acres . . . tea, rubber, coffee, cocoa and cardamon plantations, lands held by industrial and commercial enterprises, lands of cooperative societies and of religious, charitable or educational institutions of a public nature continue to be exempted from the ceiling. Thus, there are sufficient possibilities to circumvent the ceiling provisions under the guise of exempted categories.

By 1970, the above act abolished land-lordism in Kerala, at least legally (Oommen, 1975).

It would be interesting to see how Nayars, one of the traditional dominant land-holding castes, have reacted to such new political and economic situations. As can be seen from Table 10A, in 1957, the Nayar community is disproportionately represented in the state assembly with 27.8% of the seats in relation to its population of 12.5% when compared to other castes. As Oommen said (1985:152-153) ". . . given the numerical weakness of multiplicity of castes . . . the category of 'other Hindus' none of the constituents were strong enough to assert themselves. The inevitability worked to the advantage of those who are numerically strong (Ezhavas, Christians) or traditionally privileged (Nairs) or the constitutionally protected (scheduled castes)." The next question would be with which political party do the Nayars

TABLE 10

A. COMMUNAL PATTERN OF VOTING IN THE SECOND  
GENERAL ELECTIONS IN KERALA, 1957

COMMUNITY	POPULATION		SEATS IN THE STATE LEGISLATURE	
	MILLION	%	NO.	%
BRAHMINS	*	*	4	3.2
NAIRS	1.7	12.5	35	27.8
EZHAVAS	3.6	26.4	32	25.3
SCHEDULED CASTE	1.3	9.6	15	11.9
OTHER HINDUS	1.7	12.5	2	1.6
CHRISTIANS	2.9	21.3	26	20.6
MUSLIMS	2.4	17.7	12	9.6
TOTAL	13.6	100.0	126	100.0

\* Negligible

affiliate? Table 10B shows that 66% of the Nayar legislatures were Communists (CPI); 17% belonged to the Congress; 11% represented PSP; and 6% were independents. In terms of community, the majority of Christians were in Congress, the majority of Nayers and Ezhavas were concentrated in the Communist Party; while the scheduled castes (i.e., ex-

TABLE 10

B. DISTRIBUTION OF MEMBERS BASED ON THEIR CASTE/COMMUNITY  
AND POLITICAL PARTIES IN 1957 KERALA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
(SELECTED GROUPS)

POLITICAL PARTIES						
COMMUNITY	CONGRESS	CPI	PSP	MUSLIM LEAGUE	INDEPENDENT	TOTAL
NAIRS	6(17)*	23(66)	4(11)	-	2(6)	35(100)
EZHAVAS	8(25)	21(66)	2(6)	-	2(3)	32(100)
SCHEDULED CASTES	6(40)	8(53)	-	1(7)	-	15(100)
CHRISTIANS	19(73)	4(15)	2(8)	-	1(4)	26(100)

\* Figures in brackets are rounded off percentages

SOURCE: Oommen (1985), PP. 153-154. His source, The Kerala Mail, August 23, 1959, P. 11.

untouchable castes) were affiliated with both CPI and Congress.

The dispersal of Nayers in different political organizations (which is true in present day Kerala), and especially their affiliation with the Communist Party (which was only true for a while; in later years, Nayers opted for several other left- and right-oriented parties, though considerable numbers still affiliate with various communist groups) in 1957 general elections in Kerala was more or less correlated with differences in income or intragroup



stratification among the Nayar community. Indeed, the latter day changes in the intermediate period such as the economic collapse in Travancore region pauperized many of the Nayars (Tharamangalam, 1981).

In this connection, Oommen (1985:149-50) says ". . . the smaller ex-landlords, particularly from among Nairs became disgruntled and frustrated, not only because they experienced a decline in income but also in their power and prestige which were based on their ownership, possession or control of land. While some of them reconciled to new situation and have started seizing new opportunities through education and white-collar employment, others entered politics to seize leadership opportunities, particularly in leftist parties and organizations."

The products of such political ingenuity are personalities like the late V.K. Krishna Menon, a nationally and internationally known political figure, who was India's minister of defense in Jawaharlal Nehru's (Congress) central cabinet, and Achutha Menon, a nationally known Communist leader, who was one of the chief ministers of Kerala. According to Oommen (*ibid*), between 1948-50 (including former Travancore-Cochin state), Kerala had 12 chief ministers, out of which seven were Nayars. In sum, the Nayar community, by being one of the numerically dominant and traditionally privileged castes in Kerala, and having representation in a good number of different political parties, has remained a

"decisive" (i.e., decisive, a word that was used by one of the informants in our discussions) force in Kerala's politics.

On the other hand, the Nayar Service Society (NSS), which was founded as a social service organization in 1914, an expression of caste/communal interest, remained powerful politically in the intermediate period, but has faced a setback in later decades because its policies (as a caste organization) have become unacceptable to some Nayars. In this connection, Fuller (1976:22) states that ". . . although it tries to articulate politically the interests of Nayars, it lacks strong support throughout Kerala - most of its strength is still in Travancore - and many Nayars are opposed to its policies." As a caste organization, it has been running a number of academic institutions, hostels, and other social welfare organizations throughout Kerala. Its branches are called Karayogams (but not in the traditional sense, where Karayogam referred to the Nayar neighborhood council).

According to my informants, the activities of Karayogams in villages or towns or even in cities include: establishment and maintenance of academic institutions, settling petty disputes, non-monetary welfare help at the time of marriages and other Nayar community festivals/ceremonies, assistance in tracing matrimonial alliances, maintenance of registers for marriage, birth and death records, and so on. Any member of the Nayar community in either a village or a town/city can have membership in a local Karayogam. In general, a new

Karayogam can start with a membership of 10 or more individuals. In villages, Nayars usually register their names as members, at least an individual representing a household; and an executive body is elected by the members.

After independence, there have been changes in the economic sphere of Kerala. Though considerable growth in urbanization and industrialization has occurred since independence, agriculture has remained the primary, tending towards cash cropping and export trade. In addition to the small scale industries that have been in existence since the British period, large scale industries have been established in various parts of Kerala (see, Lewandowski, 1980:96-97). For example, an occupational profile of a city indicates that ". . . the majority of those employed fall into the category of services (32 percent), with 23 percent in industry, 20 percent in trade and commerce and 16 percent in transport (cf. *ibid*). As is found elsewhere, the wage work and urban occupations attract not only urban settlers but also qualified villagers. In general, villagers tend to choose the near-by urban centers (Gough, 1970), while the majority of the people migrating out of Kerala are those classified as urban (Lewandowski, 1980:98). Increased population growth together with high rates of literacy and limited employment opportunities in Kerala are working together to increase migration from Kerala to other parts of India or even abroad. Nayars comprise a good proportion of these migrants. For

example, some of my informants' family members are residing in the Middle East, Africa, Europe and the North American continent.

In contrast to the urban centers, agriculture remains as a primary economy in villages, where land is the main economic resource. The occupational profile of a village reported by Hartmann et.al., (1989:229-300), comprising 329 households, has agriculture as the main occupation-33.7% of families. The households that have small plots of land cannot rely for subsistence on farming alone, but have to depend on subsidiary occupations. In this village, approximately 68% of the households depend on some sort of dairying; 21.3% of the families depend on agriculturally oriented wage labor; while 5.2% live off salaried jobs and commute every day to and from their place of work, and most of the remaining households depend on traditional occupations such as carpentry, blacksmithing, and so on.

Land in the villages is the basis of prestige, power and wealth; and the land owning castes usually exhibit 'dominance'. Given the fact that the traditional monopoly of land owning has changed over time, and land-holding has declined among the Nayars, especially in Travancore region, it is interesting to see who actually owns the land in the present day rural Kerala. For this purpose, let us look at two villages in Travancore region to observe the pattern of land-owning by caste. As Table 11 exhibits, in Ramankara,

TABLE 11

STRUCTURE OF LANDOWNING BY CASTE, HOUSEHOLD IN RAMANKARA\*,  
SOUTHERN KERALA (i.e., a village in former  
'Central Travancore' Region), 1971-75

CASTE	HOUSEHOLDS IN SAMPLE		LAND OWNED	
	NUMBER	PERCENT	ACRES	PERCENT
NAYARS	90	43.3	566	86.4
CHRISTIANS	27	12.9	56	8.5
IZHAVAS	37	17.8	24	3.7
OTHERS	54	26.0	9	1.4
ALL	208	100.0	655	100.0

\* Figures represent a sample of 208 households only, but not all of Ramankara households. Ramankara was a fictitious name of the village.

SOURCE: Fuller (1976), P. 30.

Nayars are dominant numerically among the land owning castes. Despite the fact that they have lost considerable land over time, Nayars still are the single largest group of landowners, owning 86.4% of the land in the village. Nevertheless, the majority of the Nayars in this village are not wealthy. Forty-three percent of the land is in the hands of only seven households. Fifty-nine percent of the households have members in different professions and occupations, though they depend partially on their land (Fuller, 1976:28-31). On the other

hand, in some villages, as can be seen from Table 12, the major proportion of land is owned by Syrian Christians, followed by Nayars. According to Tharamangalam (1981:36-37), Nayars lost a major portion of land to Syrian Christians within the recent past; despite their losses, Nayars ". . . are still a landowning caste and one second only to the Syrian Christians in power and wealth."

The expression of dominance by land owning castes, however, is not a photocopy of the traditional pattern. Although Nayars and Syrian Christians may exhibit power over their direct agricultural dependents, with the advent of democratic principles, constitutional protection for the weaker sections of society, safeguards for wages, and growing political consciousness among the villagers and political communication with their respective political representatives, the hereditary, and authoritarian relations and concomitant rules and obligations have been replaced by contractual monetary agreements.

This does not necessarily mean that the traditional obligations between the land owning castes and their dependents have been completely obliterated. The 'neo-patrimonial' relationships still exist in villages, depending on the cordial relationships, at least externally, between the families involved. The rural and political aspects of dominance have disappeared because of the implementation of democratic norms, universal franchise - the "vote power," at

TABLE 12

DISTRIBUTION OF LAND AMONG 108 RANDOMLY SELECTED  
FARMERS IN ONE VILLAGE IN KUTTANAD TALUK  
(i.e., in former central Travancore' region)  
BY CASTE AND AMOUNT OF LAND OWNED, 1975

AREA IN HECTARES*	NAIRS	CHRISTIANS	EZHAVAS	OTHERS	TOTAL
More than 12	-	6	-	-	6
6-12	1	2	-	-	3
4-6	1	-	-	-	1
2-4	2	10	-	-	12
1-2	6	28	8	-	42
4-1	12	2	4	-	18
Less than 0.4	2	16	4	4	26
TOTAL	24	64	16	4	108

\* 0.4 hectares = 1 acre

SOURCE: Tharamangalam (1981), P. 37.

the local levels in the form of the elected panchayaths. Such a local government includes various castes in accordance with the representative's respective political affiliations. However, where ". . . there is simultaneously a caste and class difference - most commonly between a high caste landlord

and a low caste laborer" (Fuller, 1976:45), traditional dominance prevails.

The interpersonal relationships between the castes have substantially changed, submerging the notion of pollution between superordinate and subordinate. In towns and cities it is no longer possible to practice the traditional norms of pollution, at least in public places and whatever is practiced is usually confined to households. In villages, the picture is more or less similar. Thus, Hartmann et al., (1989:224) says ". . . social relations are now generally governed by norms of social equality . . . In tea shops and hotels the (i.e., Nayers) may be seen sitting together with members of other castes and eating meals. They take food from Ezhavas in tea stalls owned by the latter. On formal occasions, such as marriages, the lower castes are also invited and served meals, though they are not allowed to sit with the Nairs and Syrian Christians." Though the above description is almost true, the inherent antagonisms may come to the surface even in some congenial circumstances. According to Fuller (1976:47-48), a high caste landlord's view about the laborers is that they are "dirty, lazy and spendthrift"; while a communist legislator's (i.e., a Nambudiri Brahmin by caste) comment is that ". . . in spite of the fact that he would never discriminate between persons of different castes in his behavior, and in spite of his total opposition to the caste system intellectually, he



could never prevent himself feeling strange and uncomfortable if a low-caste person came too close to him or touched him."

IV: iii: a: NAYAR FAMILY IN FLUX

It is generally assumed that joint or extended families under the impact of modernization, industrialization and urbanization break up into nuclear families. With regard to the Nayar family structure, Gough (1961:647) states that ". . . the elementary family was rapidly becoming the effective unit." However, in her later paper, Gough (1975:219) restates that ". . . the transition is, however, rather slow in Kerala." While, Fuller (1976:148) argues that ". . . among the Nayars, the nuclear family has emerged as one of the principle types of residential group cum economic unit, and is found widely, if not ubiquitously, throughout Kerala." On the other hand, there is also the suggestion that matriliney paves the way for either bilaterality or patriliney. Thus, says Gough (1975:243), referring to the Cochin Nayar Act of 1937, ". . . this law marked a significant shift toward bilaterality." Whereas, according to Mencher (1962:243), among the Nayars, ". . . there is no indication of a shift in the direction of the traditional patrilineal, patrilocal pattern found elsewhere in India. Furthermore, there is no indication of a sharp discontinuity with traditional forms nor an aping of the western form of the elementary family." In contrast to the above, Lewandowski (1980:113) finds a ". . .

shift from matrilineal to a patrilineal form of inheritance," among the Nayars. Recognizing the contradictory statements quoted above, I shall detail the changes in family, inheritance and marriage patterns, from the beginnings of the modern period to the present.

It should be recalled that, by the close of intermediate period, Nayar matriliney had almost been eclipsed, and the households and property groups were becoming incongruent. In some cases, the actual partition of the property succeeded the splitting of residential units of a taravad (see, Nakane, 1962; Fuller, 1976). In later years, the basic change of property division between individuals, however, caused the demise of the property owning group because ". . . no household depends on or controls property whose legal owner is not one of its members;" and, every household thus becomes "a production and consumption unit" (Fuller 1976:63). What has finally occurred in the modern period is the disintegration of joint families into the different types of family units. In the following pages, I review data from different regions of Kerala, that describe the newly emergent household types and residential patterns among the Nayar. The only cautionary note for a proper understanding of the material is that the data were collected at different times by different scholars, using slightly different analytical categories.

The data relating to household composition and residential patterns in a north Malabar (i.e., north Kerala)

village were collected by Gough in 1948 (1961:393-394), and her data is shown in Tables 13 and 14 respectively. As Table 13 depicts, of 42 households, 48% were composed of elementary families. But, Gough's (ibid:393) categorical definition that ". . . an elementary family with or within another relative of either husband or wife" fails to designate how many of them were actual nuclear families. Nonetheless, she states that 55% of the houses were constructed by individual men and given to their wives and children, while the remaining 45% of the houses were built in the traditional way by a group of matrilineally related men for the joint family. Twenty-nine percent of the households were of the traditional type avunculocal extended family units. The remainder of the families belonged to different types of households as detailed in Table 13.

With regard to the residential patterns, as can be seen on Table 14, of the 53 married couples, 49% of the families were nuclear in nature, residing neolocally. This is followed by the traditional pattern where 26% of the families resided either virilocally or avunculocally. While 15% of the married couples maintained duolocal residence; patrilocal (6%) and matrilocal (4%) constituted the remainder of the sample. The high proportion of nuclear families with neolocal residence can be attributed to the fact that, in the last decades of the intermediate period, there was already considerable proliferation of tavazhi-taravads as a result of the

TABLE 13

HOUSEHOLD PATTERNS IN A VILLAGE IN NORTH KERALA  
(i.e., North Malabar region), 1948

TYPE	NUMBER	PERCENT
'Traditional', avunculocal extended family with matrilineal kin	12	29
Elementary family (with or without another relative of either H or W)	20	48
Widow or divorcee with her unmarried children	6	14
Segment of a matrilineage, husbands visit their wives	3	7
Man and unmarried children	1	2
TOTAL	42	100

SOURCE: Adapted from Gough (1961), P. 393.

agricultural development and expansion in relation to the then advantageous land policies and provisions which favored the Nayar community in north Malabar region, particularly the youth who exploited the situation. In addition, virilocality, unlike in the other regions, had already become a common practice by this time in north Kerala.

In comparison to other regions, central Kerala (i.e., south Malabar and Cochin) has three specificities: it was this area where traditional Nayar institutions had reached

TABLE 14

RESIDENCE OF MARRIED COUPLES IN A VILLAGE IN NORTH KERALA  
(i.e., North Malabar region), 1948

RESIDENCE TYPE	NUMBER	PERCENT
'Traditional', wife lives in matrilineal house of husband (Some reside avunculocally)	14	26
Duolocal, husband visits with wife (in some cases, wife lives temporarily in her natal home)	8	15
Patrilocal	3	6
Matrilocal	2	4
Neolocal, house provided by husband	26	49
TOTAL	53	100

SOURCE: Adapted from Gough (1961), PP. 393-394.

their efflorescence; where Nayars had progressed occupationally and professionally much more in the intermediate period, in turn establishing tavazhi-taravads depending mainly on the notion of "self-acquired property" in the early decades of the twentieth century or even before; and where property divisions occurred considerably lately when compared to the Travancore region, specifically. The Nayar household composition in a south Malabar village was collected from two census blocks - tract 18 and tract 13 in 1959-60 by

Mencher (1962:237:240), and the particulars of the study are provided in Table 15. Tract 18 had more Nayar households (89) than tract 13 (52). As Table 15 shows, though the large taravads were partitioned into smaller units immediately after the 1933 Act in this area, the majority of the emergent household types were mainly one or the other type of matrilineal sub-segments in both tracts; while the nuclear type households constituted the minority, 32% in tract 18 and 29% in tract 13 respectively.

The data with regard to the residential types was collected by Unni, as reported in Fuller (1976:140), in two south Malabar villages in 1954-55. The particulars are given in Table 16. Of 165 married couples, the visiting husband category predominates other types, where 51% of husbands visited their wives regularly; while the second largest group of 19% couples lived neolocally. As noted earlier, the visiting husband custom had become a regular pattern in central Kerala in the last decades of the intermediate period. It seems, as depicted in Table 16, this custom was still prevalent in south Malabar villages, followed by the newly emerging neolocal and uxori-local residential types. During this time, however, the meaning of the visiting husband custom had changed from the preceding period; thus, Mencher (1962:24) says, ". . . apart from being a 'more wanted fellow,' the husband now also feels that it is 'in keeping with his

TABLE 15

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION IN ANGADI\*, A VILLAGE IN SOUTH MALABAR,  
1959-60

CENSUS TRACT				
Household Type	TRACT 18		TRACT 13	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Small Tavaris-3 generations or more	37	42	15	29
2-Generation Matrilineal Household	6	7	7	13
House belongs to wife (i.e., Nuclear)	15	17	6	12
Couple set up House (i.e., Nuclear)	13	15	9	17
3-Generation Tavari + Wife/child of male	3	3	10	19
Others	15	17	5	10
TOTAL	89	101	52	100

\* Angadi was the fictitious name of the village.

SOURCE: Mencher (1962), P. 240.

TABLE 16

HUSBANDS' RESIDENCE IN TWO SOUTH MALABAR VILLAGES,  
1954-55

RESIDENCE OF HUSBAND	NUMBER	PERCENT
Visits wife regularly	84	51
Visits wife annually, or at long intervals	12	7
Virilocal (Husband head of tavazhi)	12	7
Neolocal (Husband and wife living in town)	32	19
Uxorilocal: both partners' house in wife's village	8	5
Uxorilocal: wife's house (Husband manager)	10	6
Uxorilocal: wife's house (Husband not manager)	7	4
TOTAL	165	99

SOURCE: Fuller (1976), P. 140. His source, K. Raman Unni (1956). Visiting husbands in Malabar. J. of the M.S. University of Baroda, 5:37-56.

dignity' that he be the one to run things for his wife, and his children."

Gough's (1975) paper on the changing households and residential pattern in Cochin is based on data collected at two different times, in 1949 and 1964, eliciting the true



nature of change among the Nayers in a village within a span of 15 years. This work corroborates her earlier statement admitting that there was ". . . resilience of some kind of joint family, long after collapse of other feudal institutions and introduction of capitalist relations" (ibid:266). According to Table 17, there were 29% real nuclear families in 1949, while there were 32% in 1964. If sub-nuclear type is merged with the nuclear type, we find a change in the nuclear family frequency from 30% in 1949 to 50% in 1964, thus observing a reduction in other types from 70% in 1949 to 50% in 1964. In this way, the change in household composition in Cochin, was considerable but not rapid.

Two significant changes occurred in residence patterns from 1949 to 1964 (Table 18). Firstly, there was a sharp decline in the visiting husband custom (i.e., duolocality) from 49% in 1949 to 17% in 1964. Secondly, as duolocality declined, there was an increase in the frequency of uxorilocality, virilocality and neolocality in 1964. Gough (ibid:244-257) computed correlations to examine whether or not there was any association between the changing household structures and other variables such as age distribution of the population, population growth, stages in the development cycle of households, household income, household land-holdings, and individual occupation of the household members, in turn finding an association only ". . . between the involvement of wage work or other individual occupations, as opposed to

TABLE 17

INCIDENCE OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF NAYAR HOUSEHOLDS IN PALAKKARA,  
A VILLAGE IN CENTRAL KERALA (i.e., Cochin Region),  
1949 and 1964

TYPE	1949		1964	
	No. of Households	% of Households	No. of Households	% of Households
Sub-nuclear family (individual or part of a nuclear family)	1	1	16	18
Nuclear Family	19	29	29	32
Augmented nuclear family (a nuclear family + one other relative of Horw)	2	3	10	11
Joint family (often a segment of a matrilineage, with no married couples)	9	9	8	9
Joint family with one married couple	23	35	12	13
Stem-family (an older married couple + a son or daughter + the latter's spouse)	9	14	8	9
Linear family	5	8	7	8
Extended family	1	1	1	1
TOTAL	66	100	91	101

SOURCE: Gough (1975), P. 227.

TABLE 18

RESIDENCE OF MARRIED NAYARMEN IN PALAKKARA,  
A VILLAGE IN CENTRAL KERALA  
(i.e., Cochin Region), 1949 and 1964

PLACE OF RESIDENCE	1949		1964	
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
Own natal home	4	5	11	12
Wife's natal home	11	14	20	22
Wife's partitioned home	6	8	21	23
Own private home	10	13	16	18
Own and wife's natal homes (i.e., duolocal)	32	41	15	16
Own natal home and wife's partitioned home (i.e., duolocal)	6	8	1	1
House jointly owned with wife	9	12	7	8
TOTAL	78	101	91	100

SOURCE: Gough (1975), PP. 238-239.

family-farming or rent-receiving, and the trend towards living in a household built up around a single married couple or around a bereaved parent and his or her children" (ibid:257).

In general, the property divisions in Travancore region, immediately after the 1925 Act, occurred comparatively faster than those in the central Kerala region. Fuller (1976:64) provides the information on different types of households in a central Travancore village, which was collected by him much later (i.e., 1971-75) than the above discussed studies, thus giving an idea about the most recent conditions. The data justifies his statement that ". . . there can be no doubt that the norm today - both ideologically and statistically - is the nuclear family" (ibid:63). Of 91 households, following Kolenda's (1968:346-347) analytical categorization of household types, Fuller found 52.8% nuclear families in his sample, while 8.8% were variants of the joint family (Table 19). If the nuclear and variants of the nuclear type are combined together, as Fuller did, 90% of the households fall within some sort of nuclear structure. But, in my view, this probably fails to elicit the true social realities as I shall discuss later. About the residential types, I do not have the necessary figures for this village, but can quote from Fuller (ibid:65) that ". . . there is now a preference for virilocal marriage . . . but many older people still express preference for uxorilocal marriage." In sum, it could be presumed that,

TABLE 19

HOUSEHOLD TYPES AMONG NAYARS IN RAMANKARA+,  
A VILLAGE IN SOUTH KERALA  
(i.e., 'Central Travancore' Region), 1971-1975

TYPE*	No. of Households	% of Households
Nuclear Family	48	52.8
Supplemented Nuclear Family	23	25.2
Subnuclear Family	8	8.9
Single-Person Household	1	1.1
Supplemented Subnuclear Family	2	2.2
Supplemented Collateral Joint Family	1	1.1
Lineal Joint Family	6	6.6
Supplemented Lineal-Collateral Joint Family	1	1.1
Other	1	1.1
ALL	91	101.1

\* Classification in accordance with Kolenda (1968), PP. 346-347.

+ Ramankara was a fictitious name of the village.

SOURCE: Fuller (1976), P. 64.

by 1970s, in other parts of Kerala, the trend has been similar to that of the Travancore region with regard to the high

incidence of nuclear families and that there has been a tendency towards virilocality and neolocality, and uxorilocality, to some extent.

IV: iii: b: THE PRESENT DAY NAYAR INHERITANCE, FAMILY AND MARRIAGE PATTERNS

As my informants come from the central Travancore region, the material that will be presented in this section has relevance mainly to Fuller's (1976) study, and it can be viewed as a continuation of the processes described by him for this region because his information was also based on data collected from a central Travancore village. Despite the minor regional variations, the aspects that are going to be discussed here could plausibly apply to the Nayar community, in total.

As stated earlier, there existed slight variations in inheritance patterns from region to region which were mainly due to the differences between 'law' and 'fact'. By the 1960s, people were well aware of the law that "sons and daughters are equal," which could partially be ascribed to the effect of the all India Hindu Succession Act of 1965 (see, Gough, 1975:243-244). In spite of this national law, there remained a bias towards matriliney among the Nayars, which had legal support in Kerala state until 1975. Nonetheless, such favoring of matriliney had been curtailed by the Kerala Hindu Act of 1975, the impact of which the Nayar kinship system will

be discussed later on. In order to understand the present system, let us look at the inheritance system that prevailed in central Travancore region during the period 1941-1975, called by Fuller "the new order" (1976:63-70).

The property of a family has two components: 'family property' and 'individual property'. According to Fuller (1976:65) ". . . family property is that property inherited by a woman from any matrilineal relative" - mainly from her mother, and her other matrilineal relatives such as her brother, sister, or mother's brother. The partition of such a (landed) property "is strictly per capita between all living matrilineal descendants," which means, the property should be divided between the woman's children and her daughter's children, including the unborn child, if a daughter were pregnant. The division of family property required the consent of all the adult matrilineal descendants of the property holder. If a son or daughter were dead, the property of the deceased would again be divided equally between the remaining matrilineal descendants; however, in the former case (i.e., son) no share would go to his widow or children. Thus, in this kind of arrangement, daughters had an advantage - the more children they had the greater their share of the property.

In contrast, ". . . individual property is that property obtained by a woman by any means, other than the inheritance from a matrilineal relative, and the property of a man; how he

acquired it is of no consequence whatsoever" (Fuller, 1976:66). Unlike the family property, the alienability of individual property was completely at the discretion of the owner. In general, the property should be divided equally between all the children; if parents, for various reasons, failed to give a share to one of their children, the latter could not contest it legally, which was in contrast to the family property division where the heirs had legal protection.

The division of the property was related to several factors: self interest of the adult heirs - sons and daughters; amount of the property to be shared, for example, the smaller the parental landed property, the greater the chances for partition earlier in the developmental cycle of a given household because of the adult heirs needs for livelihood; and the development cycle of the household, and so on. The actual partition of the property would be done at the wish of the property holders; sometimes, a woman's decision could outweigh that of her husband's. One general principle to be found in all cases was that it should be divided between the heirs equally. A partition might be de facto or de jure. In the latter case, children would get legal titles to the land transferred from their parents at the time of division; if the heirs were adults, they could immediately inherit the property for their own uses. While in the former, the property would be divided by informal agreement between the parents and children that either the property should be



partitioned after every child in the family attained adulthood or it should not be done in practice until after the death of parents.

The fact that the daughters' children were also legal heirs to the parental property could cause tensions within a given household because of the conflicting interests between the sons and daughters. Such a rule, sometimes, provoked the sons to have earlier partition simply to avoid the problem of their sisters' future children; in reverse, the daughters preferred the partition to be delayed until they had borne all their children. Beside this, there was also 'conflict' between the sisters' interests. The elder daughters desired to have early partitions before their younger sisters gave birth to many a child which would limit their shares, while the latter wanted a delayed partition. In such circumstances, in general, sons would prefer to live virilocally so as to influence their parents, whereas, daughters, if they lived uxorilocally, had a similar advantage. It is not surprising then to find both virilocal or uxorilocal marriages with high frequency.

In addition to the above facts, there was (and is) a correlation between the time of partition and the developmental cycle of the domestic group or household. The beginning point of the cycle would be a married couple setting up its elementary family. Through time, children were born and brought up in the household, and their marriages were

arranged by their parents. The first married couple in a family would tend to stay with his/her parents and unmarried siblings, forming the domestic group; or the newly married couple might establish their own household, separately, but preferably living close to his/her parents. If the couple was employed, they had to live near their work. If the newly married couple continued to stay in the parental house, which was common within a few months or years after marriage, the household in total would form an economic unit. Upon the marriage of the second child, usually the first couple moved out, establishing its own household, while the second couple stayed with the parents. The process would be continued until the last child was married. At this stage, the last child tended to stay with the parents, mainly to look after them; after the deaths of parents, the last child inherited the parental house - a form of ultimogeniture. Because there had been a tendency towards virilocal marriage, it was becoming ". . . more and more common for the youngest son to inherit the house, but many people still express a preference for uxorilocal marriage . . . they intend their youngest daughter to inherit their house" (ibid):65). Although the above arrangement was becoming common, any child, irrespective of his/her siblings' relative ages, that stayed with the parents could inherit the house.

These were the circumstances that existed before 1975. Despite a combination of matrilineal and patrilineal features,

the continuation of the matrilineal bias disproves that the Nayar kinship system was being uprooted more and more by patrilineal features, closely approximating the other Hindu castes elsewhere in India. However, the Kerala Hindu Act of 1975 brought in new changes, which abolished the rights of daughters' children to be recognized as the legal heirs of their grandmother's land, thus making the Nayar inheritance system more or less similar to that of the other Hindu succession rules, at least in theory.

Today, according to my informants, the legal distinctions of 'family property' and 'individual property' described above no longer exist. Family property, as defined by the informants, is that property possessed by both partners through inheritance plus their life-time individual earnings other than the inherited properties. The parental property to be partitioned between the children is deemed as a 'common property' of the family, which should be equally divided between the family members, and which needed nobody's consent other than that of the parents. In general, the partition is done in such a way that each sibling gets an equal share, while the parents keep one of the total shares. For example, if x and y were the parents, a and b male siblings, and c and d female siblings, the total property will be divided into five shares, where a, b, c, and d will receive an equal share each, and the fifth-share will be retained by the parents x and y. According to theory, sometimes even in practice, the

parental share, after their deaths, should again be equally shared between the children a, b, c, and d. If one of the children stayed with the parents, to look after their welfare in old age, conventionally, the parental share should be inherited by him/her. Such a provision has to be included in the will, otherwise there the possibility exists for the siblings to demand equitable partition of the parental share.

The partition may be de facto or de jure; generally, it is at the discretion of the parents. Nowadays, there is a tendency towards de jure partition before the children's marriages or at least before the births of grandchildren to avoid customary conflicts between the siblings. If the particulars of property shares were not made in the will, the unwilled property, after the deaths of parents, will lead to conflicts because such a property needs to be divided equally between all descendants of the parents -- sons, daughters, sons' children, daughters' children, and even great grandchildren, if there were any, irrespective of the fact that who stayed with the parents or who helped in their old age. In order to avoid these problems, it has become customary, to make the partitions de jure.

The next question is how the day-to-day needs of the parents are met, especially in their old age. There are several ways to resolve the problem of old age security. As mentioned above, one of the children could stay with his/her parents. He/she will then inherit the house, or other

parental property, some times even the parent's share after their death. In recent years, virilocal marriage has become the regular pattern in villages, hence one of the sons usually tends to live with the parents. Sometimes, the rights over certain categories of the common family property such as gardens and etc., will be retained by the parents, arranging partition to 'Kalasesham' (i.e., after life-time), which means, parents will have the right to enjoy the proceeds of such a property until after their death; and, only upon their demise, such a property will be partitioned strictly in accordance with the will. In situations where the property has not been divided, the concept of 'Kalasesham' can also be applied. On certain occasions, parents may take care of the married children's property when they live far away from home, sending the proceeds of such property to them annually or whenever the need arises, and keeping some of it for their services.

If there were no children to stay with the parents because of the children's job commitments, parents can appoint somebody to look after the household work, paying the salary from either the common property, if the property were not partitioned, or from their own resources. It is also not uncommon for parents, to receive some financial assistance, if needed, from their children. Yet another way to get children's attention is the custom of 'isthadanam', where the parents, particularly the widowed mother, can give a portion

of their individually acquired property to either one of the children, by choice, as a 'self-desired gift', which nobody could question. However, such a property given as a 'gift' cannot be sold or wasted in any manner, and its fruits must be enjoyed by the beneficiary or should be passed on to his/her children as a gift again. In this way, because this property should be in the hands of parents, it is generally expected that the recipient will pay constant attention towards the parents. Besides these quibbles about property, as one of my informants stressed, it is the moral responsibility to meet one's parent's material wants at any cost because of parental care and help in planning life goals.

One other aspect to be discussed in relation to the inheritance pattern is that of the institution of "dowry." It has been stressed in the literature that ". . . the custom of giving dowries has not been taken over by Nayars" (Mencher, 1965:180); ". . . because both men and women own property and inherit from their parents, it would, say informants, be illogical to pay dowry, which is regarded as a daughter's share of the parental estate" (cf. Fuller, 1976:67). In recent years, according to my informants, it has become, logical to pay a dowry. This can be attributed either to diffusion of ideas from surrounding peoples such as the patrilineal Syrian Christians, where dowry is very important, or the Nayars are mimicking other Hindu castes. In spite of the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, dowry has become

institutionalized, though illegal, as a 'status' symbol in Indian society (for details, see, Srinivas, 1989), which is similar for the Nayars, especially among the well-to-do Nayar families.

Although Nayar dowry arrangements differ from those of the patrilineal castes in principle, their essence appears to be more or less similar. It is generally found that the amount of dowry to be given by a bride's family is related to the family status and wealth of the parties involved on one hand, and the bridegroom's educational, occupational or professional status, on the other. Depending on such factors, usually, the amount of dowry should be settled between the two families involved in the marital alliance. In this way, the poorer the families, the less the amounts involved, while the richer the families, the greater the dowry amounts.

Each daughter is entitled to an equal share from the parental property. Although it is deemed as a part of the dowry, in actuality, such a property will remain in her name after marriage, and she has the right to enjoy the benefits of it as well as to ensure that it can be inherited by her children, especially her daughters, at the time of the division of common property. Alienability of such property would be at her consent, but not that of her husband's, as long as the common property is held unpartitioned between the family members, which generally occurs in later stages of the household's developmental cycle. In a minority of the cases,

say my informants, the husband might, somehow or other, try to convince his wife to alienate the property for his own use.

In addition to their inherited shares, each daughter is given certain amounts of cash from the common property of the family as a portion of the dowry together with customary gifts such as jewelry, clothes and so on. As far as the "cash dowry" is concerned, the bridegroom's family will have the right to use it in whatever way they want to. It may be used for other daughter's marriages or could be invested in purchasing a plot of land or in constructing a new house for the newly married couple. Before its use for any purpose, the parents should have the consent of their son. Should the son want it to invest in business or to buy a car, the parents may not say no. In brief, what we have seen in such transactions is that there is a direct transfer of a part of the property in the form of cash dowry from a woman's family to a man's.

In consideration of the facts that the matrilineal relatives will not have a say, at least legally, in regard to woman's property after her marriage because it constituted a part of the dowry, though not alienable without her consent, that nobody can claim her property other than her sons and daughters, the cash dowry has directly changed hands from the woman's family to her husband's. This seems to refute Fuller's (1976:71) synchronic statement that ". . . there has been no transfer of property from women to men, nor from matrilineal descent groups to patrilineal descent groups. Nor



does the statement that matriliney has given way to patriliney either describe or explain anything of significance." As the reader will agree, after the 1975 Act, the inheritance pattern that was skewed towards matriliney in yesteryears has indeed changed, resulting in a bilateral system; however, because the dowry system is becoming gradually institutionalized, it appears that such a bilaterality is becoming skewed towards patrilinearity, thus tilting more and more towards the patrilineal caste norms to be found elsewhere in India. Some other features in this particular trend will be discussed in the following pages, making the point more clear.

Today, there is some sort of heterogeneity with regard to the inheritance of parent's personal names and caste titles among Nayars, which slightly differs from that of Fuller's (1976:54) descriptions. Traditionally, a man's name included a clan name, an inherited personal name, a given personal name and a caste title, where the inherited personal name used to be his eldest mother's brother's name and the caste title inherited matrilineally. Whereas a woman's name contained matrilineally inherited clan name, inherited mother's personal name and a given name. It seems, it is becoming common to discard clan name nowadays; and inheritance of the eldest mother's brother's personal name by a man had become uncommon 30 or 40 years ago.

At present, a man has three names: inherited father's personal name, a given name, and a caste title. For example,

a man's name like Parameswaran Raman Nair indicates that Parameswaran is the inherited father's personal name, Raman his given name, with Nair his caste title, which has been inherited from father but not matrilineally. He would generally be called Raman, but for official purposes his full name has to be used. A woman inherits her mother's personal name, even sometimes her father's caste title which was not a common practice in earlier days. One of my informants, for example, has inherited her mother's personal name and father's caste title. Thus, Ramani Saraswathi Nair, indicates her given name (Ramani), inherited mother's personal name (Saraswathi), and father's caste title Nair. Upon marriage, some women, mostly educated, would prefer to add their husband's caste title to their names.

The break-up of family or the partition of family has a close association with the developmental cycle of the household (Fuller, 1976). A household, for example, will start with a "root couple;" through time, their children's marriages are arranged in age order; as an exception, sometimes, younger daughter's marriage might precede that of the elder son's. A married child would establish his/her household separately; if it were a woman, she would move to her husband's place to live virilocally, or neolocally, which is becoming the common pattern, nowadays; while a married son would start his own family separately within a short period of time after his marriage, or would stay with his parents until

the next child in the family is married, particularly a son. This process continues till the last child is married; at this stage, for the reasons explained elsewhere, usually, the last son and his wife will stay with the parents. If there were no son available to live with the parents, a daughter may live with her parents together with her husband uxorilocally. Who, whether the younger child or the older, would stay with the parents is a matter of "convenience" without a strictly formalized pattern.

The actual partition of the property, in general, occurs in the early stages of the developmental cycle, say, at the time of the first child's marriage in the family. In some cases, the beneficiaries (sons and daughters) may receive the actual shares sometime after their marriages in accordance with the arrangements made between the children and parents. Seldom, if there were any legal disputes in relation to land or other property in the family, the actual possession of the inherited property by an individual might even take a number of years after his/her marriage. For example, one of my informant's mother has not yet received her share because of a family dispute, where the mother's eldest brother (i.e., the Karanavan) together with his wife appear to have been involved in some "manipulations." In certain circumstances, because a woman moves to her husband's place, the supervision of her immovable property (i.e., mainly land) is done by her brothers or other uterine relatives on some sort of lease basis, and

the proceeds of the property should be received by her regularly or annually, which is generally considered woman's income, hence she will have a say in spending of it in her household. Such arrangements are also common between parents and children, should they live far away from home because of their job or business commitments.

As Kolenda (1987:78) has pointed out, ". . . those with earlier break-up - when a married son establishes his own household separate from his father's within a few months or years after his marriage - correlate with low proportion of joint families" in certain regions of India, which is true in Kerala also, including the Nayars. As Fuller (1976) has shown, as well as my informants explained, that the general pattern to be seen among the Nayars is the "nuclearization" of households, over time. To explain this process in proverbial terms, informants have quoted a Malayali saying that "THUNI MARI POKAN DOORAM THAMASIKKANAM," the English translation is- "live at a distance where a visit necessitates grooming," or, in other words- "you should live far enough apart so one must change one's clothes in order to visit them."

On one hand, a sincere desire to live apart, hence the emergence of nuclear family type as a "dominant normative" system; whereas, on the other, a familial attitude between the "root couple" and their children's independent families in accordance with the Hindu socio-cultural behavioral patterns, a compromise between the "particularistic" or

"individualistic" and "universalistic" attitude. The statistical data corroborates the former aspect by showing increased frequency of the nuclear family type, a common feature to be found in some synchronic studies on Indian family structure. Having considered the importance of the developmental cycle and its relation to the time of break-up of Nayar families, and the complexity and heterogeneity of household types in various regions of Kerala, there arises a question whether to consider such alterations as true representations of structural change or to understand the independent family as simply a stage in the developmental cycle of the Nayar household.

Although Fuller (1976) fails to analyze this aspect fully, Gough (1975:249) does try to tackle the problem in turn providing a partial answer by stating that ". . . not all types of household can be passed through in a single developmental cycle, but all of them do represent possible developmental cycles" (emphasis mine). I, in spite of the actuality that the nuclear family is becoming the common pattern when studied synchronically, will suggest in the conclusion that a detailed analytical study of the "time-dimension" of the developmental cycle as well as the behavioral networks between the root couple and its branches, which exhibit a sort of jointness, should be carried out in order to discover the true nature of change in Nayar family structure.

There are other factors which are partially responsible for the early break-up of families among Nayars, either directly or indirectly. The Nayar family structure is subjected to radical changes because of spatial mobility; permanent settlement in some cases, by the families which migrated to urban centers becoming detached from their 'natal' homes; and the impact of cosmopolitan life-style on such units (see, Lewandowski, 1980). In villages, both internal and external pressures are the causes for early break-up of families. The tendency towards independent families, say informants, is simply to avoid internal tensions between the family members. Such tensions usually arise due to the inabilities of some adult members to meet certain expected economic responsibilities, and the imbalances in sharing the common resources, if the family is not partitioned. For example, an industrious son might complain to his parents that the other son is not providing equally to the common economic pool of the family, or, sometimes, the parental favoritism towards a particular child, for various reasons, can be a potential factor for disruption within the family, if the family lives jointly.

In certain circumstances, the tensions or misunderstandings between the women also initiates early partition of families - conflicts between mother-in-law and daughters-in-law, or between daughters-in-law and daughters, or among the daughters-in-law. Sometimes, relative age-

oriented conflicts in relation to authority and antagonism between the parents and married sons, or between the elder and younger brothers, and married sons, or between the elder and younger brothers, may also lead to family partitions. The increased dependence on a cash economy with limited land resources also leads to early break-up of families.

Yet, one other factor, neglected by some, is the effect of land reform and the governmental policies of land ceiling on the Nayar family structure. According to the 1969 Act, a family, which consists of less than five members, is allowed to possess 20 acres of land; if the family has more than five, each additional member can have two acres extra; an unmarried person can have 10 acres, while the total holdings of a family, are restricted to a maximum of 20 acres. If we have a family of 10 members (i.e., parents and four married sons) staying together, they can only have 20 acres of land because the total holding of a family is restricted to a maximum of 20 acres. On the other hand, if the family is partitioned into five nuclear units, the same family, though divided, can have 100 acres of land, in total, where each nuclear unit thus has 20 acres each strictly in accordance with the ceiling limits. Such a provision, indeed is advantageous for the entire family.

Having discussed the significance of the break-up of a Nayar family and the related "nuclearization" process, it will be interesting to examine the interpersonal relationships.

The traditional networks of extended family kin relations are increasingly reduced in recent years, leading to comparatively stronger bonds between the parents and their children, on one hand, and a sharply weakened collateral relationship, on the other. Today, the authority and responsibility in a family runs from father to children, and from husband to wife. As long as the family is unpartitioned or before the children's marriages, father unquestionably plays an authoritative role in the family. It is his responsibility to provide for the children until they are married. Even after the children's marriages, his authority is well recognized by the children, giving him due respect to the parents, though the children may not necessarily follow their advice.

Generally, mother would share some of the responsibilities with father in the household's maintenance, and plays a central role in the lives of sons and daughters through a process of structured socialization in their childhood. After their marriages, children, especially the daughters, continue to depend on their mother's guidelines, and receive other kinds of help. In this connection, Mencher's (1965:184) quote of Nayar women's views about their mothers is still valid today, when she states ". . . when my mother was alive it was easier to manage. She did everything for me. She used to help me at deliveries, take care of the small baby for me, and see things or I could not live too far from my mother, because how would I manage then. We



Malayalees are used to having such help. To live apart would be a hardship."

The aspects of age and sex play a major role in patterning various types of interpersonal relationships. The younger siblings are always expected to respect the older. An ego's behavior towards different categories of relatives is strictly patterned in accordance with the custom in due recognition of their ages and sex. In the present, as against the strong traditional matrilinearity, the kinship terminology indicate the behavior of ego towards patrilineal and matrilineal relatives though matrilineal bias can be found in certain cases, as in the way the kin terms are increasingly extended to all types of patrilineal relatives. As stated by Gough (1961:383-384), one can see the intrusion of lineality into the traditional generation system, which is to be seen in the first ascending generation. In the first descending generation, son and daughter are called 'makan' and 'makal' respectively, and these terms are extended to the children of ego's siblings of similar sex, while the children of ego's siblings of opposite sex are terminologically distinguished and called 'marumakan' (son-in-law) and 'marumakal' (daughter-in-law) respectively. I have provided the current Nayar kinship terminology in Appendix I, which shows some differences from the earlier works (Rao, 1957; Gough, 1961; Karve, 1968). The age distinctions are clearly visible in the way the prefixes are used.

Besides the strong behavioral interactions between parents and children, the grandparents, particularly the grandmothers, maintain cordial relations with their grandchildren. In general, grandparents encourage the grandchildren to respect tradition, though only a minority of the present generation pays attention to such instructions. When I asked one of my informants about his relationships with patri- and matrilineal relatives; and to whom does he feel close, he immediately replied - "both," signifying the importance of bilaterality in behavioral terms. In contrast, my female informant, although she prefers both categories of relatives, is definitely biased towards her mother's relatives. For her, next to her mother, mother's sisters are close and affectionate and mother's brothers, to an extent. According to my informants, an ego's behavior toward the lateral relatives in part depends on the kind of relationships his/her parents have with the them.

For the people that live away from their natal homes, Kerala's annual festivals such as Onam, Tiruvadira and Vishu encourage contacts between the city and countryside because many prefer to celebrate the festivals in a traditional manner in their parental households, while, in cities, for the Nayar migrants such festivals have become 'ethnic' symbols. Special occasions within a family such as marriages, irupathi ettu ceremony (i.e., 28 day ceremony)-when the thread is tied around the child's hip, and given a name, choroonne ceremony-

when the child is given food for the first time, usually 4 or 5 months after birth, are good times for close kin to exchange greetings and to talk about their families. In general, mother's brother should be an honored guest at the family's special occasions. Along with the increasingly reduced kin relations and obligations, there have also been changes in the extension of death pollution. In traditional days, it involved the decreased matrilineal group; but, today, it is confined mainly to a given household, and to some other closely related kin.

In sum, the traditional Nayar matrilineal joint family together with its peculiar inheritance pattern has undergone irreversible and revolutionary changes within the past 150 or 200 years, finally resulting in the present day Nayar household and inheritance system. In combination with the changes in family patterns, there have also been alterations in behavioral patterns; and the range of interpersonal kin relations with associated privileges and obligations has shrunk, limiting itself mainly to the household with limited and often personal choice extensions to the immediate consanguinions and affinal relatives.

The fate of the institution of arranged marriages in the changing Indian society has received special interest because of the theoretical treatise that ". . . arranged marriages are functional in the extended family system" only (Nimkoff, 1965:347). As against some predictions that the changes in

the extended family system would ultimately lead to a decline in the frequency of arranged marriages, arranged marriages have continued as a dominant pattern in modern India with insignificant alterations; marriage is considered not as a mere union of two individuals but is still understood as an alliance between the two families involved in the marriage. Likewise, among the Nayers, the majority of marriages are arranged by parents. In the following pages, the present day Nayar marriage system will be discussed.

In general, children's marriages are arranged by parents in order of age, though a younger sister's marriage might be arranged before that of her elder brother's, if the circumstances necessitate it. As has been the case traditionally, lineage exogamy and caste endogamy are the basic requirements for a marriage, although there is a possibility for a negligible minority to deviate from the traditional pattern with regard to caste endogamy; and the bridegroom should always be older than the bride. According to Kurian (as quoted in Rao and Rao, 1982:19-20), in a survey of 240 families in Kerala, a state which has the nation's highest literacy rate, 85% of the families preferred marriages within the same religion, 89% wanted to have alliances with individuals of similar economic background, and about 95% opted for caste endogamy. This study demonstrates the basic attitudes that are found in Kerala, today.

Despite the attempts in favor of inter Nayar subcaste marriages since the beginning of the present century by Nayar leaders, intra subcaste marriages are still preferred in villages. Nevertheless, such distinctions are often disrupted by certain families, mostly the educated, thus encouraging inter subcaste marriages, which was the case in one of my informant's family. In contrast to the earlier pattern of village endogamy, in the majority of the cases, village exogamy is preferred; usually, if possible, parents prefer to select mates for their children within a limited geographical distance (see also, Fuller, 1976). Several types of the preferred marriages, which I described earlier, have almost been eclipsed, though there is no prohibition against the 'cross-cousin' marriages; and, seldom, depending on the desires and conveniences of the families concerned, do cross-cousin marriages occur.

Today, say informants, the selection of a mate by parents depends on two factors: 'wealth' and 'education', which connotes two things: the former aspect denotes compatibility and, or comparability of "economic" status between the two families that are involved in an alliance within the constraints of family status, while the latter indicates mainly the educational qualification and occupational status of the bridegroom-to-be. When asked about the importance of family status in terms of ancestry or other associated features, the response from one of the informants was that the

primary factor in mate selection, however, would be economic in nature, thus down-playing ancestral prestige. The economic aspect includes the matters of (landed) property transfer from a girl's family to the boy's as well as the amount of dowry to be given from the former to the latter.

In accordance with the above described criteria, parents and other relatives, or sometimes even close friends may be involved in the mate search. In general, the marriage proposal should be initiated by the boy's family. Once a suitable match is found, there is a preliminary discussion between the families concerned; later, the boy comes to see the girl with his family or other relatives. Though custom does not allow the girl to talk to the boy at the first sight in the presence of the two families, sometimes, in educated families, they are allowed to exchange a few words in the presence of the parents and other relatives. In some cases, mostly among the educated families, both boy and girl are given some liberty by the parents to express their views about the proposal; if one disagrees with the proposal, parents try to convince him/her, or drop the proposal. Generally, children are expected to agree with their parent's decision; sometimes, they are compelled to say yes to the parents.

After agreement is reached between the families, the boy's family is invited by the girl's family to compare the horoscopes of the boy and girl; further proceedings are completely dependent on the compatibility of horoscopes.

Sometimes, mother's brother acts as spokesman of the father on such occasions, though the marriage is completely dependent on the father's decision. Following this, the wedding is announced, called "Kalyananistchayam," a Malayali equivalent of betrothal; before the wedding day, the parents of the bride and bridegroom send wedding invitations to their respective kith and kin.

The marriage is called "kalyanam" or "vivahma." It is celebrated at the bride's residence during the day at an auspicious hour with much grandeur. The present day Nayar marriage ceremony involves the following aspects: in the presence of the guests, the bridegroom ties the tali on the bride; sometimes, bridegroom's sister may tie the tali instead of the groom; bridegroom presents the sari, called 'Pudava' (i.e., in traditional days Pudava used to be a type of cloth); both bride and bridegroom have to circumambulate three times two auspicious objects - Nilavillaku (i.e., a special lamp) and Nirapara (i.e., a big measuring container filled full with grain or rice, on top of which the coconut flowers are arranged, symbolizing fertility and prosperity), after mutual garlanding, rings are exchanged or the bridegroom slips the ring on to the bride's finger. Later, the newly wedded couple are given blessings and presentations by their relatives and friends. The wedding concludes with a big feast. This procedure, as explains by the informants, is followed in Pattanamthitta district of Kerala; there may be minor

variations in the procedure from region to region. In general, unlike some other Hindu marriage ceremonies, Nayar marriage ritual takes not more than 20 or 30 minutes.

As is found elsewhere in India, a marriage is expected to be permanent, and the partners are expected to be faithful to each other; if circumstances lead to a divorce, it can be had legally. The present day post marital residential pattern of the couple is mainly virilocal or neolocal; sometimes, if a necessity arises, a couple could live uxorilocally.

In sum, following the legal acts, radical changes occurred in the systems of marriage and inheritance. The concepts of "conjugal family" and "individual property" have become increasingly significant. Though preferential marriages such as cross-cousin alliances and others became more common by the end of the intermediate period as well as in the first few decades of the modern period because of socio-economic factors, a strong emphasis on economic factors together with the latter day introduction of the dowry system has greatly reduced the importance of "status," making the variables "wealth" and "education" as the selecting criteria for marriage. The age old concept of subcaste endogamy also appears to be in decline as a result of the importance of "economic" factors in marriage alliances. In spite of the drastic changes in the sphere of family system, the institution of arranged marriage has remained stable,



emphasizing the 'alliance' between two families which is comparable to other Hindu caste norms in south India.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, an attempt has been made to detail the nature of traditional Nayar caste, kinship and marriage, and to show the regional variations in kinship and marital patterns, paying particular attention to the differential and variable historical realities of different parts of Kerala - Malabar, Cochin and Travancore; and to examine the nature of change and continuity, emphasizing the differences from region to region.

Given the fact that the Nayar communities in different regions have varied historical experiences and each community was subjected to change in different ways at different times by being a part of different political domains until the day of unification of Kerala, the internal specificities of a Nayar community in each region and its external regions with the respective wider society, from time to time, are given priority to uncover the processes of change among Nayar. This regional variation is stressed to show the processes of change among the Nayar.

It has become a practice in anthropological or sociological thought, at least in India (or Kerala), to construct models of change based on the assumption of a "pre-colonial base line," treating the factors whatever that had occurred in the period before the colonial rule as "historical

incidents" or mere "events" without weighing the hidden or rudimentary nature of social conflict in Pre-British India or Kerala (for such a criticism, see, Dale, 1980). It suggests in the preceding chapters that the so-called "structural strains" such as the impacts of Muslim rulers and Martanda Varma on the Nayar communities are the initial factors that motivated change. The overall affects of their merciless campaigns against the Nayar community generated ruptures in the traditional system both in northern and southern regions of Kerala, shaking the hitherto unquestioned Nayar economic and political dominance and socio-ritual privilege.

It would be fallacious to argue about social change in Nayar community without a due consideration of such unique historical realities. In this connection, I agree with Panikkar (1960:309) that ". . . the second half of the 18th century . . . witnessed the destruction of political dominance of the Nayars and this is the most capital fact in the history of Kerala." In addition to the fact that the major or regular patterns of socio-economic and political changes occurred gradually increasingly in the British era, the Muslim rulers and Martanda Varma indeed had provided initial impetus for change in north and southern Kerala (for a similar argument, see, Kareem, 1973).

On one hand, the Muslim rulers slightly loosened the foundations of the rigid caste system, put to shame the prowess of Nayar militia, introduced a sort of centralized

government and a new land revenue system partially disturbing the traditional produce sharing agricultural networks; and established an incipient infrastructure. While, on the other hand, Martanda Varma demobilized the Nayar armies, he established a bureaucratic system which was new to the then Kerala polity, appropriated the feudal lands to the State, thus weakening the traditional agricultural networks, and tried to establish the infrastructure. As noted earlier, there probably was a decline in the genealogical complexity of ideal Nayar taravads as a result of Martanda Varma's actions.

After annexation of Malabar, and after taking over the responsibilities of supervision of the princely states - Cochin and Travancore, the British followed Martanda Varma's lead by re-enforcing the disbandment of Nayar armies, and retained the Muslim ruler's policies of local government and revenue collection in Malabar in the transition period, though such policies were significantly altered in later years. A further discussion on changes in the eighteenth century is unnecessary; however, it should be realized that, by the time the British brought different parts of Kerala under their control, the populations in different parts of Kerala were already subjected to influences that were foreign to the indigenous populations; and the single community that passed through a stressful period of socio-psychological trauma was that of the Nayars because of the attacks on their traditional privileged position in each region.

In the intermediate period of the British rule (1800-1947), the nature and rate of change had substantially been increased cumulatively, culminating in drastic changes that were significantly different from the former incipient changes. Important economic changes such as the increased emphasis on cash cropping; capitalist agricultural development based on monetization of farming, and the newly emerging feature of land as a marketable commodity; increased educational standards leading to professional and occupational diversity; newly introduced system of land ownership and associated land tenure systems; growth of trade and commerce; and other technological developments resulting in further employment opportunities, have had their own impact on Kerala society, in general, and the Nayar community, specifically.

In addition, all parts of Kerala, in one way or another, experienced increased population growth especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This factor in combination with the above noted features as well as the increased infrastructure led to spatial and occupational mobility in and out of Kerala. Given these new opportunities, different castes responded to new situations in different ways. The net result of such changes, on one hand, was a desire by each and every caste to occupy the newly created positions on a "competitive" basis; while, on the other, increased alteration in traditional institutions of caste, kinship, marriage and interpersonal behavioral norms as a

result of such new processes of change continued into the present period. However, after India's independence from the British, the pace of modernization has taken a different path, differing from the British rule, because of the new democratic polity based on both socialistic and neo-capitalistic concepts that are intertwined with a predominantly agrarian base.

Some classical theoretical approaches have attempted to explain social change in such traditional societies as that of the Nayers through unilineal process of change, a transition from 'tradition' to 'modern' which is presumed to be applicable universally. The present study provides an opportunity either to refute or to attest such classical theories of social or family and kinship change. In addition, as the focus of the present study is on a matrilineal society, there would be a further interest for scholars of social change to examine the real nature and distinctive patterns of the disintegration of the Nayar matrilineal joint family, changes in inheritance pattern and marriage system, and dominant caste position. In order to examine the pathways of consequences, let us look at the causes of change in Nayar social organization.

It is not uncommon in anthropological or sociological fields to come across the "prime mover" or "unicausal" theories of change, which is true in case of the Nayers also. In her comments on modern disintegration of matrilineal societies, including the Nayers, Gough (1960:640-649) states

that ". . . The root cause of modern kinship change in these societies appears rather to be the gradual incorporation of the society in a unitary market system . . . in which all produced goods, but more particularly land and other natural resources, and human labor itself, became privately owned and potentially marketable commodities. . . . Patrilineal descent groups in agrarian societies, like matrilineal ones, lose their economic basis when land is constantly being bought and sold, individuals work chiefly for wages, production becomes vested in such groups as the factory or the plantation and ownership is by individuals or by joint stock companies. . . . Matrilineal groups seem to be badly hit as soon as their members enter the market system."

Gough's Marxian theoretical orientation appears in her later paper on central Kerala Nayars (1975:219), but with a slightly altered tone when she says that ". . . the modern transition to a capitalist socio-economy does bring with it a gradual decrease in the genealogical complexity of households and an increase in the proportion of nuclear and sub-nuclear dwelling group. The transition is, however, rather slow in Kerala (emphasis mine)." In contrast, after a critical evaluation of Gough's approach, Fuller (1976:149) argues that ". . . a critical aspect of the entire processes of change is ideological. A continuous weakening in the force of Nayar matrilineal ideology has had its converse in an increasingly strong ideology stressing affinal and paternal ties."

Both of the arguments, in my view, are partially valid; but any suggestion that leads to "unidimensional" explanations would be a falsification of the facts. A better understanding of the processes of change is possible only through proper arrangement of the time bounded socio-economic and political aspects. Two distinctive features that occurred in northern and southern parts of Kerala, in the eighteenth century, were that of the Muslim rulers and Martanda Varma's differential land policies and suppression of the Nayar military power. As it appears most likely, the Muslim ruler's motive was not to supplant the entire caste system or to destroy the land connected socio-economic power of Nayars and Nambudiris completely. Their targets were mainly to subdue the militant Nayar militia, and to extract "land revenue" through submission of the landed aristocracy to strengthen their own military might in order to facilitate further territorial expansion (see, Dale, 1980:78-79). In contrast, Martanda Varma, through subjugation of the Nayar community, not only disbanded the Nayar armies but also tried to humiliate the Nayar community economically by appropriating their lands. Thus, in both regions, in addition to the ideological suppression, Nayars experienced temporary disasters in political and economic spheres in the latter half to the eighteenth century because of the fact that traditionally land was tied to their social, economic, ritual and political dominance.



In the nineteenth century, the British, through a series of changes, provided the raw material for the Kerala populace, including the Nayers, to readapt to a system that was dependent on new principles. The demobilization of Nayar armies by the British had resulted in ending the traditionally privileged Nayar occupation; which, through time, caused a gradual decline in plural marriages; while, for the reasons that were explained elsewhere, the sambandham arrangements were increasingly becoming permanent relationships between the partners. On the other hand, the three regions of Kerala, in the nineteenth century, experienced divergent land policies at different times: in Malabar, owing to the new land policies of the British in the first decade of the nineteenth century, the jenmies, both big and small, though a minority, became landlords in the western sense thus having the right to sell or buy lands because land became a marketable commodity. Many of these jenmies were Nayers. In Cochin, around 1850s, the state owned 40% of land, while 60% of the land fell under the ownership of the jenmies. In Travancore, only after the Pattam Proclamation of 1865, land became marketable. In contrast to other regions, all the hitherto Sirkar (i.e., government) tenants became recognized as petty landlords having full ownership rights, again the majority of these were Nayers. In this way, the Nayar communities, in different regions, were exposed to variable land policies at different

times, indicating probable differences in economic developments.

Land entered the market system in Malabar region ahead of other regions. If one believes in Gough's (1961) argument that capitalist economy is the prime determinant of kinship change among Nayers, there should have been changes in Nayar kinship system much earlier in the Malabar region than in other areas. To the contrary, as the reader will recall, although the poorer Nayar families tended to disintegrate faster than the wealthier Nayar taravads due to the market economy in northern and central Kerala, the breakup of wealthier Nayar taravads in these areas was much slower than in Travancore despite the fact that the acquisition of individual property was also occurring increasingly on a considerable scale in the former regions. In Travancore, immediately after the 1865 Proclamation, Nayar taravads started disintegrating on a wider scale, resulting in shallower joint property holding units. That too, unlike the other regions, Syrian Christians, by virtue of their progress in trade and commerce, were eager to buy lands from the crumbling Nayar taravads. In later years, Nayers lost much of their lands to Syrian Christians. In this connection, Fuller (1976:146) questions Gough's theory by arguing that ". . . if the entry of land into the market was determinant, why did taravads in Malabar persist as joint property holders for so

much longer than those in Travancore, when land entered the market in Malabar seventy years before it did in Travancore?."

Though Fuller's query appears to be logical and quite appealing, it lacks power when the man-land relationship is understood within the framework of historical land policies. In Travancore, the complexity of Nayar taravads was probably already in slight decline even before the 1865 proclamation as a result of Martanda Varma's acts. In later years, contributing factors, such as population growth, land scarcity and the tendency towards increased monetization of farming, had variable effects in each region; such factors gained increased momentum in Travancore when compared to Malabar (see Tables 3 and 6). In addition, contrary to other regions, the newly affluent communities such as the Syrian Christians became potential buyers of Nayar and Nambudiri lands in Travancore, thus threatening the Nayar economically and socially. It thus becomes understandable why the breakdown of Nayar joint families was faster in Travancore than in Malabar. Even though it cannot be said that a market economy is the sole cause of change in the Nayar community, it is undisputable that the market economy in association with other contributing factors has strongly influenced the breakdown of matrilineal Nayar descent groups, resulting in the reduced size of Nayar taravads.

One undeniable aspect that significantly influenced the changes in Nayar family, kinship and marriage systems was a

desire among (educated) Nayars for the stabilization and proper recognition of (monogamous) marriage, and the desire for continued stronger paternal and affinal bonds, eventually replacing the ideology of matriliney. The disbandment of Nayar armies initially led to gradual strengthening of the sambandham relationships in early decades of the nineteenth century. In later years, differential and variable aspects contributed to the constancy of Nayar marital bonds, resembling other high Hindu castes elsewhere in India. Though it is debatable that self-acquired property by itself had directly distorted the Nayar kinship system (see, Fuller, 1976:146-147), it can be considered as one of the factors that led to changes in matrilineal structure and behavior. It is only in central Kerala or in northern Kerala, that the problem of self-acquired property had resulted in new marital relationships deviating from the matrilineal ideology, but the Nayar migrants, from different parts of Kerala, that eventually settled down in Madras also exhibited a similar pattern with more deviance. In her discussion on migrant Nayars in an urban setting, from 1870-1920, Lewandowski (1980:107-112) states that ". . . after obtaining their degrees, those Malayalees who chose to settle in Madras ordinarily established their own households. . . . Nayar community in Madras was large enough for marriage patterns to develop within the urban environment, and marriage partners began to be chosen both within the city, as well as the

district of birth . . . an emphasis on the career potential of the bridegroom extended the territorial distances over which marriages began to take place, across the traditional boundaries of Malabar, Travancore and Cochin . . . . It is important to emphasize that a traditional Nayar taravad could never be replicated in Madras."

Within Kerala, especially in Travancore, the Nayar reform movement attained significance to deal with two problems. On one hand, it was an attempt to complete or even to dominate the Non-Malayalee Brahmin supremacy through educational, political and administrative channels with a realization that the Brahmins were not superior in the secular realms; while, on the other, a Nayar fear, particularly in Travancore, that the lower status communities were threatening their economic base and their traditionally privileged position in the social system, led the educated Nayar elite to a misconception that ". . . both matriliney and joint families were a bar to economic progress" (Fuller, 1976:146); hence, in order to counteract the Syrian affluence or to avoid the Nayar economic downfall, it was felt that by adoption of patrilineal norms and nuclear family system would be a successful solution. In addition, diffusion of ideas from the missionaries, class-room teachings, and Nayar interactions with other high Hindu castes outside Kerala have had their own impact on the (educated) Nayar mind, leading to acceptance of some of the features of the Hindu patrilineal domain. However, it should be

remembered that the social reform preachings were heard by a minority of the Nayar, and that the later day legal reforms were the backbone of changes in Nayar traditional institutions, where the central core was the institutionalization of "individual" property.

One other classical presumption in anthropological literature is that the changing matrilineal societies would automatically transform into bilateral or patrilineal groups; and considerable efforts have been made to denounce the unilineality of type transformations. Now, it is clear that the transformation of societies does not follow prescribed universal patterns, and the resultant type indeed is dependent on factors such as the historical conditions through which a particular group/society has evolved, the prevailing general socio-cultural circumstances, and the unique capacity of a group or a society to readapt to new socio-cultural conditions after a phase of disaster. In this way, for example, Hart and Pilling (1960) showed that the patrilineal Tiwi transformed into a matrilineal society in site of the fact that the Tiwi were under strong influence from a superordinate society that had patrilineal emphasis. Considering our own example, into what type of organization does the Nayar matriliney fall?

Through time, a strong matrilineal organization, after implantation of various acts in the last decades of the intermediate period, has emerged as a bilateral system that was skewed towards matrilinearity. However, contrary to some

arguments (for example, Fuller, 1976), after the 1975 Act, at least legally, the vestige of matriliney (i.e., daughter's children's legal rights to their grandmother's property) had died out, and the Nayar inheritance pattern has remained as a strictly bilateral system with regards to inheritance of property. Despite the fact that there remains a slight behavioral bias toward immediate matrilineal relatives, as well as some petty monetary concessions for some children (for example, according to my informants, sometimes, the eldest daughter may get some additional property from her parents) in certain circumstances, the recent inclusion of dowry in Nayar marriage arrangements tilts the Nayar system towards a patrilateral bias. In addition, as far as a family is concerned, the authority and responsibility of the family members directly lie within the hands of a father or a husband. In day to day life, the patrilateral relatives are as important as the matrilateral ones. Even the inheritance of names, at least among men, follows a patrilineal pattern. In an attempt to look for similarities between the present day Nayar family patterns and others in India, I, being a non-Nayar from Andhra Pradesh state, (south India), have compared my own experiences with those of my Nayar informants, and it is my opinion that in some ways the Nayar familial patterns or behavioral norms are close to other south Indian patrilineal norms or attitudes; nevertheless, one main exception is that the male chauvinistic attitudes, in day to day family affairs,

to be found elsewhere in patrilineal Indian are severely limited among Nayers with a few exceptions because of the voice of women in the family management. For example, to quote from Kamala Das, a Nayar woman who was nominated for a Nobel Prize in Literature in 1984, ". . . it is very difficult for Nair women to believe that we need to be liberated. . . . We can't get very emotional or strident because we have never felt we were slaves. All the major decisions were ours" (cf. Miller, 1988). In brief, it can be said that the present day Nayar kin organization is a bilateral system, skewing partially towards patrilinearity.

The present study also provides an opportunity to check some classical propositions that the "new replaces the old," and that there is functional fit between the newly emerging conjugal or nuclear family and the processes of urbanization, industrialization and modernization. Indeed, there has been much debate about the validity of the above propositions, and the results of various studies on family change have remained contentious (for example, see, Nimkoff, 1965; Singer, 1968; Goode, 1971; Chekki, 1974; Channa, 1979; Rao and Rao, 1982; Kolenda, 1987). In this connection, Goode (1971:365-373) states that ". . . the alteration seems to be in the direction of some types of conjugal pattern - that is, toward fewer kinship ties with distant relatives and a greater emphasis on the 'nuclear' family unit of couple and children. . . . The most important characteristic of the ideal typical



construction of the conjugal family is the relative exclusion of a wide range of affinal and blood relatives from its every day affairs: there is no great extension of the kin network . . . 'neolocal' residence. . . lowers the frequency of social interaction with their kin"; while Parson's (1961:257) opinion is that ". . . there has been a historic trend to whittle down the size of the kinship unit in the general direction of isolating the nuclear family." Such views approximate the changes in Nayar social organization. However, it is not similar to the processes of change in family and marital patterns that are typical for western nations. It is true, the wider spheres of kin networks among Nayars have shrunk due to the affects of the processes of modernization; and the range of kin ties have become limited to a given family with preferential and limited extensions to the immediate consanguineal and affinal relatives. But, it is not true that the nuclear family has been isolated from the kinship domain as it is in the west; and the root couple (i.e., parents) and its branches (i.e., children) maintain constant social interaction irrespective of the type of residential patterns of the independent units.

The central core of the present day changing social groups or family units in India or Kerala is the synthesis of modern and traditional values; in reality, the resultant types are hybrids of both in accordance with the local or particular circumstances. Such processes, in my view, could broadly be

defined as extensive nativization of the modern knowledge or opportunities, and can be called Indianization of modernity at the national level; or Keralization of modernity at the state level; and, Nayarization of modernity at the caste level. Though the nuclear family has emerged as a common type among the Nayars, the interactions between the parents and the independent units of their children are familistically oriented, exhibiting constant and strong ongoing mutual aid between parents and their children. In addition, it is not uncommon to see value oriented reciprocal relationships between a family and its intimate kin - such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, parents-in-law, cousins and so on.

Given the fact that there persist family types other than that of nuclear, as suggested earlier, a better strategy to investigate the changes in family patterns would be to examine the time dimension of a given family's developmental cycle as well as the behavioral interactions between the family members particularly after the property division, instead of looking for structural types at a given time (for suggestions in these directions, see, Gould, 1968; Mukherjee, 1975). The typology fails to recognize the pattern of temporal rearrangements, and does not indicate the nature of behavioral content between the family units (i.e., between the root couple and related independent units). For example, according to my informants, due to the occupational mobility, both wife and husband live in distant places far away from Kerala. Their children live

with the paternal grandparents. At the husband's parental house in Kerala, his youngest brother together with his wife stay with the parents, while all of his sisters moved to their husband's places respectively. While, wife's father and brother live far away from home because of their jobs; her mother lives in Kerala with her remaining unmarried daughters. Given this complexity, a proper way to understand change in this particular family would be to study the time dimension of the developmental cycle of the family, thus avoiding the proliferation of synchronic structural types. In order to understand such phenomena among Nayars, a future study in this direction is needed.

The resilience of modified joint family types or non-nuclear family types among Nayars is attributed to several factors. Gough (1975:266-267) suggests that the lack of public services for the old, the unemployed, the disabled and orphaned young; and the complementarity of the assets between the younger and older individuals are the reasons for retention of semi-jointedness in families. Fuller (1976:148-149) states, because the majority of the Nayars live in an agrarian society, that ". . . geographical mobility is inevitably restricted by land inheritance; this means that kin are often bound to live in fairly close proximity to each other." In addition, I believe that indigenous values still have influence against the blowing winds of modernization; a further disruption in intra-familial relations is intertwined

with a decline in familism. As the native familistic value orientation is an off-shoot of the Hindu religio-ethical philosophy, the retention of familism is partially dependent on the resilience of Hindu moral codes. A true transformation, if any, of the joint family or its other related types into universal independent family type in future is positively correlated with an increased phase of modernization, and is negatively associated with the Hindu family moral or value system.

Another feature that has been the central core of Indian (or Nayar) kinship units is the institution of arranged marriage, an alliance between two families. As noted earlier, the choice of the male in the majority of the cases among Nayars is not individualistic; marriages, in general, are arranged by parents which is drastically different from the western ideas. The institution of marriage among Nayars (or other Indians) has remained as a channel of reciprocities between the two families involved in an alliance. As against the semi-isolation in the traditional days, the range of marriage in southern parts of India has widened due to modernization (Goody, 1990), which is the case among Nayars also. However, the geographic pattern of marriages would generally be leptokurtic in nature, where the majority of the marriages are restricted by geographical distance in addition to the wealth and status factors, due to the economic as well as familial factors. In a Kerala village, among the Nayars,

Fuller (1976:90) found a marked peak in the chart of marriage by distance at the 4-8 mile range. In general, according to my informants, parents prefer to select spouses from the villages/towns that are not too far from their village so that they could pay regular or occasional visits to see the welfare of their children. In this way, the newly emerged patterns are synthetic spheres of "modern" and "tradition" which are not identical to the patterns that are found in the western nations, and have their own distinctive features.

In conclusion, the processes of change and continuity in Nayar social organization have been studied diachronically to elicit the nature of alterations in traditional institutions. In contrast to unidimensional theories, the present study stresses a multidimensional approach in order to understand the processes of change among the Nayars, paying attention to the regional particularities of change. Even though the contributing variables for change are many, mainly economic, legal and ideological factors are the principle components of change, where the economic factors have initiated the preliminary processes of change among Nayars. In the present day, as it appears most likely the neo-capitalist attitudes of wealth are becoming the primary features in shaping the Nayar family organization or disorganization, and of marriage patterns. Despite the changes in social, political and economic spheres of the present day Kerala, vast class distinctions within the Nayar community, and varying degrees

of modernization within the Nayar caste, the Nayar community in total, has still remained as a privileged caste in Kerala, contributing its part not only to the development of Kerala but also to India, as a whole. It would be interesting to see how, in future, the complex interactions between multifaceted modernization and the Nayars as a caste will effect the present kinship, family and marriage systems as well as its traditionally privileged position in Kerala's social system.

APPENDIX 1

NAYAR KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY, TODAY: TERMS OF ADDRESS AND REFERENCE

SOME OF THE PREFIXES/QUALIFIERS AND THEIR MEANINGS:

Valia-	=	big (elder)
Kochu-	=	small (younger)
Kunja-	=	tiny (youngest)
Cheriy-/Chitti	=	small (younger)
Mut-	=	the next ascendant
Jyestha	=	elder
Anuja	=	younger

Achchan	Fa
Appuppan, Muthachan	FaFa, MoFa
Valiaappuppan	FaFaFa, MoFaFa
Valiachan	Fa (elder) Br, Mo (Elder) SiHu
Chittappan, Kochachan	Fa (younger) Br, Mo (younger) SiHu
Chittappan	FaSiHu
Ammavan	MoBr, HuFa, WiFa (i.e., prefixes are used to indicate age distinctions, for example, Mo (elder) Br- Valiammavan; Mo (younger) Br-Kochuammavan; Mo (youngest Br)- Kunjammavan)
Amma	Mo, HuMo (sometimes), Wi Mo (sometimes)
Ammumma, Muthachi	MoMo
Ammumma, Achamma	FaMo
Valia ammu	FaFaMo, MoFaMo
Apachi	FaSi
Ammavi or Ammayi	MoBrWi (i.e., prefixes are used to distinguish Mo (elder) BrWi and Mo (younger) BrWi, FaSi (sometimes), HuMo, WiMo)
Valiamma	Mo (older) Si, Fa (elder) BrWi
Peramma	Mo (elder) Si
Cheriamma, Chitta	Mo (younger) Si
Kunjamma, Chittamma	Mo (younger) Si, Fa (younger) BrWi

Chetan (add), Angala (ref)}	Br
Sahodaran (ref) }	(elder) Br, FaBr (elder)
Annan	So
Chetan	FaBr (elder) So, FaSi
	(elder) So, MoBr (elder)
	So, MoSi (elder) So
Anujan	(Younger) Br
Aniyan	(Younger) Br, FaBr
	(younger) So, FaSi
	(younger) So, MoBr
	(younger) So, MoSi
	(younger) So
Ettathi, oppol	(elder) Si
Chechi	(elder) Si, FaBr (elder)
	Da, FaSi (elder) Da, MoBr
	(elder) Da, MoSi (elder)
	Da
Aniyati	(Younger) Si, FaBr
	(younger) Da, FaSi
	(younger) Da, MoBr
	(younger) Da, MoSi
	(younger) Da
Makan (ref), Mon	So; SiSo (woman speaking)
Anindravan	BrSo (man speaking)
Marumakan }	BrSo (woman speaking),
(i.e., son-in-law) }	SiSo (man speaking-ref);
	DaHu
Makal or Magal (ref), Mol	Da, SiDa (woman speaking)
Magal or Makal	BrDa (man speaking)
Marumakal }	BrDa (woman speaking),
(i.e., daughter-in-law) }	SiDa (man speaking), SoWi
Kochu makan	SoSo
Cheru makan	SoSoSo, DaSo, DaSoSo
Kochumakal	DaDa
Cherumakal	DaDaDa, SoDa, SoSoDa
Bartavu (ref)	Hu
Bharya (ref)	Wi
Aliyan	WiBr
?	HuBr
Nattun	HuSi
Chettathi	(elder) BrWi
Madini	(younger) BrWi
Randan amma	StepMo (i.e., father's wife other than ego's mother)



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